

The Bloodstream Treatise *by* Bodhidharma

Seeing the true nature of mind



Interpretation by
Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro Rinpoché

Translated by Lorraine Wu Chen

The Bloodstream Treatise
by Bodhidharma

Books by Khenpo Tsultrim Lodrö

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The Right View

Daily Inspirations from Khenpo Tsultrim Lodrö

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Contents

About the Author	007
Translator's Note	011
INTRODUCTION	013
THE BLOODSTREAM TREATISE ROOT TEXT	021
INTERPRETATION OF THE TEXT	039
I. There is No Buddha beyond the Mind	041
II. How to See the Real Buddha	073
III. Issues to Note in Practice	195
IV. The Essence and Function of the Mind	275
Concluding Remarks	307
Epilogue	309

About the Author

Venerable Khenpo Tsultrim Lodrö Rinpoche, a native of Draggo (Ch: Luhuo) County in Sichuan Province, is Vice Principal of Sethar Larung Five Sciences Buddhist Institute (Larung Gar), also a renowned contemporary Nyingma teacher of Tibetan Buddhism and a strong advocate of Tibetan culture.

At the age of twenty-two (1984), he received ordination at Larung Gar, becoming a disciple of the great contemporary spiritual master, H.H. Khenchen Jigme Phuntsok. Over more than two decades, he applied himself diligently to the studies of both the Buddhist sutric and tantric scriptures and assimilated all content without difficulty. After years of effort and consecutive levels of strict examinations, he was personally awarded the Khenpo degree by H.H. Khenchen Jigme Phuntsok. The results of his practice also were verified face-to-face three times by his root teacher. From 1991 to 2013, Khenrinpoche held the appointed position of Dean of Education at Larung Gar, responsible for the training of a large cohort of outstanding monastic students capable of carrying on the lineage and spreading the Buddhadharma.

In addition, Khenrinpoche has long dedicated efforts to promote the ideas of non-killing, life release of living beings, vegetarianism, environmental protection, and the importance of

education. His charitable endeavors include the establishment of libraries, nursing homes, and schools in the Tibetan regions. With a view to protecting and advancing the Tibetan spoken and written language, in 2005 Khenrinpoche invited language experts and scholars from Tibetan regions across five provinces to come together in compiling Chinese-Tibetan-English Dictionary of New Daily Vocabulary, while he himself assumed the role of the project's chief editor. The team has so far successfully published Chinese-Tibetan-English Dictionary of New Daily Vocabulary, Chinese-Tibetan-English Visual Dictionary of New Daily Vocabulary, and the Dictionary of Traditional Tibetan Words with Illustrations.

In recent years, Khenrinpoche has been invited to give lectures in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Canada, the USA, the UK, Australia and New Zealand, etc. His presentation is crisp and well organized, preferring to explain the profound in simple terms. Khenrinpoche is also good at referring to scientific examples and elucidating abstruse Buddhist doctrines using language that people today are familiar with, which is greatly appreciated by Buddhist followers and intellectuals alike.

Moreover, Khenrinpoche was invited as well for talks and scholarly discussions at prestigious academic institutions such as Harvard, Oxford, Stanford, UC Berkeley, Columbia, George Washington University, the University of Virginia, Toronto, Auckland, Sydney, and Melbourne, as well as at companies like Google, together with experts and scholars in the fields of science, philosophy, and psychology, discussing the mystery of life and the mind based on scientific and Buddhist principles.

Despite being an influential Buddhist master, Khenrinpoche is very modest and keeps a low profile, rarely draws attention to his own merit and spiritual attainment, instead focusing solely on the propagation of Dharma and ways to benefit sentient beings. His words and actions exemplify the ideal of a Mahayana practitioner, a real admirable teacher who braves all difficulties to uphold the beacon of true Dharma in this degenerate age. Khenrinpoche once wrote in his blog on Weibo, “My lama once told me that the only purpose and the value of our lives is to cultivate and to give love. I will not forget this in my whole life, hopefully nor in all future lives.”

Khenrinpoche diligently applies himself to writing when any spare moment presents itself on his continuous journey to spread the Dharma. Among all of his publications, the Luminous Wisdom series is acclaimed as a masterpiece of Buddhism which can stand the test of time. Its contents encompass both theory and practice, with rigorous sequencing, and seamlessly integrate both sutra and tantra. The series is practical and appropriate, and the style of the language is concise, powerful, incisive, and thorough, meeting the psychological needs of a contemporary readership. As a result, it has become widely accepted and immensely popular. For the broad population of Buddhist students and practitioners, it provides a clear beacon to illuminate the way to liberation.

Publications to date:

Tibetan:

Khenpo Tsultrim Lodrö's Complete Collection - Four Volumes; Rain in Time; Contemporary Beats of the Dharma Drum; Conversations Between Eastern and Western Cultures

Chinese:

Luminous Wisdom Series 1-10; Exhortations; An Illuminating Insight into Mind (in Chinese/English); The Truth of Life; Buddhism – Superstition or Wisdom? Decipher the Mysterious Codes of Tibetan Buddhism; Unveil the Mysteries of Tibetan Buddhism; When Heart Sutra Meets Quantum Physics; Comprehending the Book Called Life; Deconstruct Vajrayana Buddhism; Four Treatises by Bodhidharma; Practice Paramita in Everyday Life

English:

The Right View; Are You Ready for Happiness? – Don't Let the Paper Tiger Scare You Off; The Handbook for Life's Journey; Daily Inspiration from Khenpo Tsultrim Lodrö; The Four Seals of Dharma; Collected Notes 2012-2018; Gateway to the Vajrayana Path; The Logic of Emptiness; The Bloodstream Treatise by Bodhidharma

Translator's Note

The *Bloodstream Treatise* is one of four treatises by Bodhidharma, the First Patriarch of Chan Buddhism. Concise in words and profound in meaning, it belongs to the highest doctrinal tradition in Buddhism, along with Mahamudra and Dzogchen. Its core concept throughout is the nature of mind. Our nature is the mind, the mind is the buddha, the buddha is the path, and the path is Chan. Seeing our buddha nature is enlightenment.

The word Chan is one that is hard for ordinary people to understand. Beginners may not fully grasp the connotation of the *Bloodstream Treatise*, but just listening and studying it has merit. In the opening statement, Bodhidharma proclaims: “All appearances in the three realms arise from the mind and return to the mind. The buddhas before and after teach mind to mind without establishing words.” Our mind is the basis of all phenomena – this is the fundamental principle of the pith-instruction school in Mahayana Buddhism. Everything that appears in the three realms is a mere projection of the mind, that is, it arises and ceases in the mind. Because Chan Buddhism has always advocated communicating from mind to mind without relying on words, there is not much in the way of books and documents. The words that were eventually established due to various considerations are just to point people in a direction. The true meaning cannot be expressed in words. So, what is

“mind”? What is its nature? When we understand the nature of mind, we will also comprehend the essence of all things.

The root text in this book, written in the language of more than 1,500 years ago, is the version edited by Shi Zong Jing of Hua Yen Temple in Yuzhou (in present day Chongqing, China). Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro Rinpoche goes to great length to explain the root text, verse by verse. The translation of this book would not have been possible without the depth and extent of his interpretation of its true meaning. People who are familiar with Khenrinpoche’s style will recognize the same sense of urgency and purpose in his teachings. As always, he brings great clarity to a difficult topic and explains the profound in simple terms so that it can be readily understood.

The importance of translating and elucidating this treatise cannot be overemphasized. I am most grateful for the opportunity to participate in the effort. A special thanks to Dekyi Drolma for her valuable comments and meticulous review of the translation, and to Thinley Chodron for her very helpful suggestions on the publication of the book.

It is my sincere hope that all who read this English edition gain insight into the true nature of reality and, with this understanding, find genuine happiness and peace of mind.

Lorraine Wu Chen

*Taipei, Taiwan
September 2025*

THE BLOODSTREAM TREATISE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Since Buddhism was introduced to China more than 1,900 years ago, its teachings have been transmitted generation to generation. Why has Buddhism endured so long in China? The reason is that throughout its history many scholars and sages discovered a transcendent wisdom in Buddhism that people urgently need. This wisdom is not only beneficial to oneself and others but also helpful in every lifetime; it cannot be replaced by any worldly wealth, power, or fame. Therefore, countless people have worked hard to spread and pass down these ideas at all costs. Especially those who went to India in the early days to study and translate Buddhist scriptures; due to the difficult conditions, many even sacrificed their lives in the process.

Prajnaparamita comprises the highest level of wisdom in Buddhism. The *Platform Sutra* and the *Bloodstream Treatise* discuss this direct wisdom, but it is not unique to Chan Buddhism. All schools of Buddhism expound Prajnaparamita at their highest level, for example, Dzogchen and Mahamudra in tantra, the final practice in Tang tantra in Chinese Buddhism, and the most advanced practices of other sects. At the ultimate level, all teachings are the same.

If we can learn and assimilate this kind of wisdom, we

can fully eliminate our afflictions, gain liberation, and achieve self-benefit and altruism. If we cannot reach this state of realization, we can at least apply this wisdom to our life and lead a happier and more meaningful life.

About Bodhidharma, the First Patriarch

The First Patriarch is known as Bodhidharma in Chinese Buddhism; his full name in Tibetan Buddhism is Bodhidharmatara. Bodhidharma is the founder of Chan Buddhism in China. Movies, books, and stories about him can be seen everywhere; anyone who is Chinese basically knows this figure. In Tibetan Buddhism, there are some relevant records about him but no mention of his treatises.

As the most important figure in Chan Buddhism, Bodhidharma left behind few works, only the pamphlets we see before us. Because Chan Buddhism has always advocated communicating from mind to mind without establishing words, there is not much in the way of books and documents. But these few pamphlets contain very profound wisdom. Although this is the language and writing from more than 1,500 years ago, people today can basically understand it. I believe that everyone will gain something from studying it. If you have also learned Dzogchen and Mahamudra, your understanding of these Chan books will be even deeper and more comprehensive.

About the title and version of the treatise

There are many ways to name Buddhist scriptures. Some are named after the person who preached the Dharma at that

time, some are named after the place where the Dharma was preached, and some are named after the content or metaphor of the Buddhist scriptures. The title of this treatise is a metaphor to help people understand the connotation of the book.

Naming this book the *Bloodstream Treatise* underscores its importance. Just like the human body, if any part is deprived of blood and oxygen, the cells in that place will die and the person also will not survive – the importance of blood to the human body is self-evident. Similarly, what Bodhidharma talks about in this pamphlet of less than twenty pages is the essence of Buddhism. Even though there are few words, it is as indispensable as the blood of the human body. Any Buddhist scripture that lacks the essential points in the *Bloodstream Treatise* is certain to pale into insignificance.

There are multiple versions of the *Bloodstream Treatise*; the wording is slightly different, but there is not much difference in content. The version in this text was edited by the monk Shi Zong Jing of Hua Yen Temple in Yuzhou (in present day Chongqing, China).

The Bloodstream Treatise belongs to the pith-instruction school

There are two ways of propagating Buddhism: one is the pith-instruction school and the other is the theoretical school.

The theoretical group's interpretation of Buddhism is very comprehensive and accurate. It not only analyzes, studies, expands, and summarizes the scriptures word for word, but also clearly explains the subsequent content of the texts.

For example, there is a term in Buddhism called “viewpoint,” which is forming one's own perspective. This means that when elaborating on Buddhist scriptures, you must first establish your own standpoint; if someone raises doubts, you should try to address and resolve these questions by referencing various Buddhist teachings and theories, and by using rigorous logic for reasoning and analysis. The theoretical school excels in this area, as both the written expression and method of explanation are extremely standardized and orderly.

The pith-instruction school is different. It does not focus much on observing or discussing external phenomena. In the *Abhidharma-samuccaya* and the *Abhidharmakosa*, the material structure of this world is explained very thoroughly – the entire universe and even a particle of dust are all analyzed in detail. Especially in certain aspects of the microscopic world, they have always been ahead of modern physics. But the pith-instruction school believes that there is no need to pay attention to these. Because it views the structure of these substances, from as large as the entire universe to as small as a particle or dust, merely as projections of the mind. By understanding your own mind, you will comprehend everything; the study and analysis of the external material world are thus unnecessary.

Therefore, when explaining the Buddhist scriptures, the pith-instruction school does not cite too many teachings and proofs, nor does it use overly complex thought processes or logical reasoning. Instead, it directly conveys the main essence of the Buddhist scriptures in an easy-to-understand, simple, and clear way. Moreover, it avoids discussing grand theories to ensure the content can be fully integrated into actual practice. This very down-to-earth way of teaching is the pith-instruction

school, also known as the practice school. For example, the way the *Platform Sutra* explains "meditative absorption" and "sitting meditation" belongs to the pith-instruction school, which is extremely helpful to practitioners.

Bodhidharma composed a total of four treatises, known as the *Four Treatises by Bodhidharma*, all of which belong to the pith-instruction school. Although there is not much text, at least two to three pages, but no more than twenty pages at most, it condenses the essence of all Buddhist scriptures.

THE BLOODSTREAM TREATISE
ROOT TEXT

Yuzhou Hwa Yen Temple

The Bloodstream Treatise

Root Text Yuzhou Hwa Yen Temple

All appearances in the three realms arise from the mind and return to the mind. The buddhas before and after teach mind to mind without establishing words.

Question: "If words are not established, what is mind?"

Answer: "You ask me, that is your mind; I answer you, that is my mind. If I have no mind, how can I answer you? If you have no mind, how can you ask me? That which asks is your mind. Since the beginningless great kalpa, everything you have done, at any time or place, that is your fundamental innate mind, that is your buddha nature. In essence, this mind is the buddha. Except for this mind, there is no other buddha to be found. To search for enlightenment or nirvana beyond this mind is wrong."

Your self-nature is real. It is neither cause nor effect. The Dharma is the mind, the nature of mind is enlightenment, and the nature of mind is nirvana. If you say, "The buddha and enlightenment are somewhere beyond the mind," it is not so. Looking for the buddha or enlightenment outside is like grasping at empty space. Space has a name, but it has no form; it cannot be obtained or discarded, nor can it be held. If you look for a buddha outside this mind, you will never find it. The buddha is your

mind's work, so why look for a buddha outside? The buddhas before and after only speak of this mind. The mind is the buddha, and the buddha is the mind; beyond the mind there is no buddha, and beyond the buddha there is no mind. If you say, "There is a buddha outside the mind," where is this buddha? Since there is no buddha outside the mind, why hold on to one? Misleading one another, you cannot know your real mind; captivated by external, insentient things, you cannot be free. If you do not believe this, it is useless to deceive yourself.

The buddha is not at fault. Sentient beings are confused and unaware that their own mind is the buddha. If they knew their own mind is the buddha, they would not seek the buddha outside the mind. Buddhas do not save buddhas. If you use your mind to search for a buddha, you do not know the buddha. When you only look outside for a buddha, you do not know your own mind is the buddha. Do not use the buddha to pay homage to a buddha, or use your mind to invoke a buddha. Buddhas do not recite sutras, observe precepts, or violate precepts; buddhas do not keep or break anything, and buddhas do not perform good or evil deeds. To find the buddha, you must see your nature; whoever sees his nature is a buddha. If you do not see your nature, there is no benefit in chanting the buddha's name, reciting sutras, fasting, or observing precepts. Reciting the buddha's name results in good karma, reciting sutras results in wisdom, observing the precepts results in rebirth in heaven, making offerings results in blessings, but you will never find the buddha.

If you do not understand on your own, you must consult a good teacher to get to the root of cyclic existence. A person who does not see his nature cannot be called a good teacher. Even if he can expound the twelve divisions of the scriptures, he will remain in the cycle of birth and death, and suffer in the three realms with no hope of escape. In the past, a monk named Sunakshatra was able to recite the twelve divisions of the scriptures, yet he could not escape rebirth because he did not see his nature.

If such was the case with Sunakshatra, people nowadays who teach three or five sutras and sastras and think it is the Dharma are fools. Unless you recognize your own mind, reciting a lot of prose is useless.

If you want to find the buddha, you just need to see your nature. Your nature is the buddha, and the buddha is a free person — there is nothing the buddha needs to do. If you do not see your nature and run around all day looking elsewhere for the buddha, you will not obtain anything. In fact, there is nothing to obtain. To understand this, you must consult a good teacher and strive hard to realize the true nature of things. Life and death are important. Do not live your life in vain. There is no benefit in self-deception. Even if you have mountains of jewels and as many family members as the grains of sand in the Ganges, you see them when you open your eyes, but do you still see them when you close your eyes? You should know then that all compounded things are like a dream or illusion. If you do not find a teacher soon, you will live your life in vain. Although you have buddha nature, you will never know it without the help of a teacher. It is extremely rare for one to attain enlightenment without a teacher. If a person attains realization of the buddha due to the concomitance of karmic conditions, that person need not consult a teacher. He is born with an awareness that surpasses anything that can be taught. But unless you are so blessed, you must study hard and obtain realization through the teachings.

If a person understands the Dharma on his own, he naturally does not need to study with a teacher because he already knows. People who do not have this innate awareness and think they can obtain realization without study are deluded souls who cannot distinguish white from black. Falsely proclaiming the Buddha's edict, they deride the Buddha and subvert the Dharma. They preach as if they were bringing rain; theirs are the words of demons, not of buddhas. The teacher is the demon king, and the disciples are his entourage; deluded people who follow their command descend

into the sea of life and death without realizing it. But people who do not see their nature falsely claim to be buddhas; they are great transgressors who deceive sentient beings into entering the realm of demons. Unless they see their nature, their preaching of the twelve divisions of the scriptures is nothing more than the words of demons; the followers of demons are not disciples of Buddhism. If they cannot distinguish white from black, how can they avert life and death?

If you see your nature, you are a buddha; if you do not see your nature, you are a mortal. If you can obtain your buddha nature outside your mortal nature, where is it? Our mortal nature is our buddha nature. There is no buddha outside of this nature, the buddha is our nature. Apart from this nature there is no buddha, and apart from the buddha there is no nature.

Question: "If I do not see my nature, can I still attain enlightenment by invoking the buddhas, reciting sutras, making offering, observing precepts, practicing diligence, and doing good deeds?" Answer: "No."

"Why not?" Answer: "If there is anything to be attained, it is conditioned dharma, it is cause and effect, it is retribution, it is samsara. So long as you are subject to birth and death, you will never attain enlightenment. To become a buddha, you must see your nature. Unless you see your nature, you are an outsider espousing cause and effect, etc. The buddhas do not practice teachings given by outsiders. A buddha is free of karma, free of cause and effect. But to say he has anything to attain is to slander the buddha. What can possibly be attained? Even clinging to a mind, a power, an understanding, and a view, the buddha does not allow. A buddha neither upholds nor violates the precepts, his mind is essentially empty, it is neither pure nor impure. There is nothing to cultivate and nothing to realize, no cause and effect. The buddha does not observe precepts, the buddha does not do good or evil, the buddha is not diligent or

lazy, the buddha is one who does nothing. But if you cling to the thought of seeing the buddha, it is not allowed. The buddha is not a buddha, so do not try to interpret it as a buddha. If you do not understand this, you will never know your fundamental innate mind. People who do not see their nature and imitate the buddha by practicing thoughtlessness and inaction all the time are transgressors and fools that fall into blank emptiness; they are as dazed as drunks, and they cannot tell good from evil. If you practice not doing anything, you must first see your nature, then abandon all conceptualizations. Unless you see your nature, attaining buddhahood is impossible. Some people refute the existence of cause and effect and commit bad karma without hesitation. They falsely claim that since everything is empty, committing evil is not wrong. These people will descend into the darkness of avici hell and never come out. A wise person should not hold such a view."

Question: "If our every action at any time is the fundamental innate mind, why do we not see it when we die?" Answer: "The fundamental innate mind is always present, but you just don't see it."

"If the mind is present, why can't it be seen?"

"Have you ever had a dream?" "Yes, I have."

"When you dream, is that you?" "Yes, it is me."

"Are your words, actions, and movements different from you?" "No, they are not."

"If there is no difference, then this body is your dharmakaya, and this dharmakaya is your fundamental innate mind. This mind since beginningless kalpas has never varied. It has never experienced birth and death, it neither arises nor ceases, neither increases nor decreases, it is neither pure nor impure, neither good nor evil, it neither comes nor goes. It

is not right or wrong. It is not male or female. It appears not as a monk or layman, an elder or a novice, a sage or a mortal, a buddha or a sentient being. It neither cultivates nor seeks realization, is not touched by cause and effect, and has no strength or form. It is just like space. You cannot possess or discard it. It cannot be hindered by mountains, rivers, or stone walls; it can come and go with ease; it can penetrate the mountain of five skandhas and cross the river of samsara. This dharmakaya cannot be bound by any karma. This mind is subtle and difficult to see, it is different from the sensual mind, everyone wants to see this mind. Beings whose thoughts and actions are carried out within the clarity of this mind are as numerous as the grains of sand in the Ganges, but if you ask them, no one can explain it. They are like wooden figures; they always use it, so why don't they know it?"

The Buddha said, "All sentient beings are deluded. They fall into the river of samsara because of their deeds. They want to escape but cannot because they do not see their nature." If sentient beings were not confused, why would they not answer, why would they not know their mind? The sages are not mistaken; deluded people do not know their own mind. Indeed, it is difficult to know, only the buddha understands this mind; humans, gods, and other sentient beings do not. If this mind is enlightened, it is called dharma nature, it is called liberation. Not bound by life and death, nor restrained by anything, it is called the Dharmakaya Buddha; it is also known as the Inconceivable, the Sacred Body, the Immortal, the Great Sage. Although the names are different, the essence is one.

The sages vary in kind, but never leave their own mind. The mind's capacity is unlimited, its applications are endless; the eyes seeing forms, the ears hearing sounds, the nose smelling fragrance, the tongue knowing taste, every movement is your mind. At every moment, when there are only words without attachment, it is your mind. Therefore, it is said: "The tathagata's universe is endless, and so is his wisdom." The mind perceives

infinite forms. That it can distinguish all things and their every movement is the mind's wisdom. The mind has no form and its wisdom has no limit. Therefore, it is said: "The tathagata's universe is endless, and so is his wisdom." A form body composed of the four elements is unsatisfactory, it is subject to birth and death; the real body, the dharmakaya, exists without abiding anywhere, it never changes.

Therefore, the sutras say: "Sentient beings should know that buddha nature inherently exists." The Venerable Mahakashyapa realized just this true nature – the true nature is our mind, our mind is the true nature, this is the same mind as all the buddhas. The buddhas before and after only transmit this mind; apart from this mind, no buddha can be obtained. Deluded people do not know that their own mind is the buddha, they search outside and are busy all day long; reciting the buddha's name and worshipping the buddha, where is the buddha? Do not cling to this illusion, just know your mind, there is no other buddha beyond the mind.

The sutras say: "All appearances are false." They also say: "Wherever you are, there is a buddha." Your mind is the buddha, do not use a buddha to worship a buddha. Even if a buddha or bodhisattva appears before you, there is no need to pay homage. This mind of ours is empty and without form; those who hold on to appearances are devils; they fall into the wrong path. If illusions arise from the mind, there is no need to bow. Those who worship do not know, and those who know do not worship; to worship is to be possessed by the devil. I say this because I am afraid practitioners do not understand it. The true nature of all the buddhas and tathagatas is without form, this we must remember. If something unusual appears, do not pay attention to it, do not fear, do not doubt; your mind is basically pure, how can there be forms? Even if you see devas, dragons, yakshas, ghosts, or divine beings, do not pay homage or harbor fear; your mind is inherently empty, all appearances are illusions, do not cling to these appearances. If you envision a buddha, a dharma, or a bodhisattva and

bow to them, you descend into the world of mortals. If you want to be enlightened directly, you will succeed just by staying free of attachment. I have nothing more to add. Therefore, the sutras say: "All appearances are false." Having no fixed reality or form, they are impermanent. If you do not cling to appearances, you are of one mind with the buddha. Therefore, the sutras say: "Being free from all appearances is the buddha."

Question: "Why can't we pay homage to the buddhas and bodhisattvas?" Answer: "The demons, mara, and asuras possess the power of manifestation and can appear as bodhisattvas. All kinds of transformation are those of heretics, not the buddha. The buddha is your own mind, so do not misdirect your reverence."

Buddha is a Sanskrit term for enlightenment. The enlightened one abides in a state of awakening; embracing living beings of all kinds, raising the brows, blinking the eyes, and moving the hands and feet are all his awakened nature. Our nature is the mind, the mind is the buddha, the buddha is the path, and the path is Chan. But the word Chan is one that is hard for ordinary people and sages to understand. Seeing your nature directly is Chan. Unless you see your nature, it is not Chan. Even if you can explain thousands of sutras and treatises, unless you see your true nature, your words are those of an ordinary person, not a buddha. The supreme path is profound, impossible to put in words; the scriptures cannot explain it. But you can apprehend the truth if you see your true nature, even without knowing a word. A person who sees his nature is a buddha; the buddha's body is intrinsically pure and free of impurities. All words spoken by the buddha or sages are a function of the mind. This mind is inherently empty. A buddha cannot be found in famous sayings or anywhere in the twelve divisions of the scriptures. The path is basically perfect. It does not need to be created or perfected. The path has no form or sound. It is subtle and hard to see. Just like a person drinking water knows how hot or cold it is, but cannot tell others. That which only the

tathagata can know, all other beings are unaware. Ordinary people are not wise enough, so they have attachments. Not knowing their mind is basically empty, they cling to appearances and all phenomena; they are thus outsiders. If you know that everything arises from the mind, you should not have any attachment; with attachment, you are unaware. If you see your true nature, the entire twelve divisions of the scriptures become senseless words. Its thousands of sutras and treatises are just for knowing the mind; if you have achieved this goal through words, what use are the teachings thereafter? The ultimate truth is beyond words; the scriptures are just words, not the path. The path is wordless. Words are delusions.

If in a dream at night you see castles, palaces, elephants and horses, forests, or lakeside pavilions, do not give rise to even a single thought of attachment or joy. These are all places of rebirth, so be careful. At the time of death, do not cling to appearances; without attachment, you are free from obstructions. Just a moment of doubt or suspicion, and you will be possessed by demons. The dharmakaya is inherently pure and impassible, but due to confusion, you are not aware of it, you suffer retributions in vain. Therefore, with any yearning for or attachment to your possessions as death approaches, freedom cannot be attained. Once you awaken to your true nature, you will no longer be tainted by habits.

When a sage returns to the mundane world and appears in any of myriad forms as a sentient being, he is at ease in any circumstance, good or bad, unrestrained by karma. Having long attained enlightenment, a sage possesses great might and virtue, he can transform all kinds of karma, heaven and hell can do nothing to him. Ordinary people are confused, but sages know everything inside and out. If you have any doubt, do not act; once you act, you will wander into life and death, and regret having no refuge. Poverty and hardship all arise from deluded thinking. If you understand the mind, you should encourage and inspire one another, but do without doing; this way you will see things from a tathagata's perspective.

When you are new on the path, your mind is often uncertain. You are likely to see strange scenes in your dreams, but do not doubt that they all arise from your own mind and nowhere else. If in a dream you see a light brighter than the sun, it means your remaining habits will come to an end, and the nature of reality will be uncovered. Such an occurrence is the cause of enlightenment. But only you know it, do not tell others. If in a quiet garden, while walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, you see a light, whether bright or dim, do not tell anyone about it, do not cling to it; it is the clear light of your own nature. If in the stillness of night, while walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, you see a light, like daylight, do not be surprised; the nature of your mind is about to reveal itself. Or if in a night dream you see the stars and the moon clearly, it means your karmic hindrances will soon be eliminated; but do not tell others. If the dream is murky, like you are wandering in darkness, it means your mind is clouded by afflictions; this too only you know.

Once you perceive your true nature, there is no need to read scriptures or invoke the buddhas; learning too much is useless, it will only dim your mind. The teachings are there only to point out the nature of mind; if you see your mind already, why study the teachings? To become a sage, you must put an end to evil karma, cultivate your mind, and accept what life brings. Excessive anger will lead you away from the path, bringing only harm. In life and death, sages come and go as they please, appearing and disappearing at will, unrestrained by karma. They have already cut through delusions and evil influences. Sentient beings only need to see their true nature to instantly eradicate their residual habits; with a clear mind, they must directly grasp the truth, right in the moment. If you really want to realize the path, do not cling to anything. Once you put an end to evil karma and cultivate your mind, all remaining habitual tendencies will naturally dissipate. Clarity will arise without much effort. Outsiders who fail to grasp the Buddha's intent exert themselves tirelessly; they violate his true

meaning, and drive around chanting the buddha's name and reciting sutras all day long, they remain confused about their own nature and cannot avoid rebirth. The buddha is an idle person. He does not busily pursue fame and fortune. What use are these things afterwards? But people who do not see their nature read scriptures, invoke buddhas, and study diligently; they practice day and night, and meditate for long periods of time without lying down. They study widely and think it is the Dharma; these people are all slanderers of the Dharma.

The buddhas before and after only talk about seeing your nature. All composite phenomena are impermanent. If you do not see your nature and falsely claim, "I have attained the highest perfect enlightenment," you are a great liar. Among the Buddha's ten great disciples, Ananda was foremost in listening, but he did not really know the buddha, he relied only on extensive learning. Outsiders in the two vehicles do not know the buddha; they cultivate realization through practice only, and cannot transcend cause and effect. That is the karma of sentient beings, they cannot avoid birth and death, they violate the Buddha's will and slander him. Killing them is not a sin. The sutras say: "Icchantikas do not believe in cause and effect, so killing them would not be wrong." A person who has faith is at the level of the buddha. If you are not enlightened, do not casually slander the goodness of others, there is no benefit in self-deception. Good and evil are apparent, and cause and effect are clear. Heaven and hell are right in front of your eyes, but fools do not believe it and fall into the darkness of hell; they are not aware of it, and they do not believe it because of their serious karma. This is akin to a blind person who has no way of knowing there is light on the road; even if told, he cannot believe it, so how can he discern sunlight? The same goes for fools. They end up in the lower realms or among the poor and despised, unable to live or die. Despite their suffering, if you ask them, they say, "I am as happy as the beings in heaven." Thus, sentient beings perceive cyclic existence to be joyful, they do not know and

are unaware. Such fools cannot develop faith because of their serious karma; they are not free. People who realize that their mind is the buddha no longer need to shave their head, these people in white clothes (laymen) are buddhas too. If they do not see their nature and shave their head, they are still outsiders.

Question: "How can a layman who is married become a buddha if he does not abandon lust?" Answer: "I do not talk about lust, only about seeing its nature. You do not see its nature. Once you recognize its nature, lust is basically empty, you need not cut it off, your delight in it ends, any residual habits cannot harm you. Why? Because the nature of afflictions is essentially pure. Although you dwell in this five-aggregate body, its nature is pure and cannot be polluted. The dharmakaya has no sensation, no hunger or thirst, no cold or heat, no disease, no love, no dependents; no pain or pleasure, no good or evil, no short or long, no strength or weakness, there is nothing to obtain. It is only due to the existence of this physical body that there is hunger, thirst, cold and heat, miasma diseases, and other symptoms; once you stop clinging to it, you can do whatever you want. If you gain great freedom in life and death, you can transform everything through unobstructed spiritual powers, and you can be at ease wherever you are. If there is any doubt in your mind, you will never penetrate or see things as they really are. It is best to do nothing, otherwise you will transmigrate indefinitely in samsara. If a chandala sees his nature, even he can become a buddha."

Question: "How can a chandala become a buddha if he slaughters animals and creates karma?" Answer: "I only talk about seeing the nature of mind, not about creating karma. Whatever his transgressions, he is no longer restrained by karma. Since beginningless time, beings have fallen into hell, created karma, and transmigrated in cyclic existence due to ignorance of their nature. After enlightenment, they cease creating karma. If a person does not see his nature, invoking the buddhas will not free him

from retribution, let alone killing a living being. If he sees his nature, all doubts instantly disappear, even slaughtering animals cannot affect him."

The twenty-seven patriarchs in India only transmitted the heart seal. Now that I have come to this land, I only teach the sudden enlightenment of the Mahayana, that is, this mind is the buddha. I do not talk about precepts, charity, diligence, or ascetic practices such as entering water and fire, boarding a wheel of swords, eating just one meal a day, or sitting for a long time without lying down. These are all heretical practices. Once your mind awakens to its spiritually aware nature, it is the mind of all buddhas. The buddhas before and after only talk about transmitting the mind, they teach nothing else. Even an ordinary person who is illiterate is a buddha if he understands this teaching. If you do not recognize your own awakened nature, even if you exert yourself to the point of breaking your body into a mote of dust, you will never find the buddha.

The buddha is also known as the dharmakaya and the fundamental innate mind. This mind has no form, no cause and effect, no tendons, no bones; it is empty like space and cannot be held. It is unobstructed, it does not look outside for the buddha. Only the tathagata understands this mind, all other living beings are confused and cannot understand it. This mind is inseparable from the body of four elements; without this mind, you cannot move. The body itself, being insentient, is like grass and rubble. If the body has no feelings, why can it move? It is the mind that moves; even language and actions, perception and awareness are movements of the mind. All movements are the mind's motion. Motion is its function. There is no mind apart from motion, and there is no motion apart from the mind. Motion is not the mind, and the mind is not motion. There is basically no mind in motion, and there is basically no motion in mind. Motion is not separate from the mind, and the mind is not separate from motion. There is no mind for motion to exist apart from, and no motion for mind to exist apart from. Motion is the mind's function, and its function is the mind's

motion. To move is to use the mind, and to use is to move the mind. But in essence, there is neither motion nor function. The essence of function is emptiness, and emptiness is inherently without motion. Motion and function both return to the same mind. The mind is essentially free of movement.

Therefore, the sutras say: "Move without moving, come and go without coming and going, see without seeing, laugh without laughing, hear without hearing, know without knowing, rejoice without rejoicing, walk without walking, abide without abiding." Therefore, the sutras say: "The essence of mind can neither be expressed nor conceived; seeing, hearing, and perceiving are inherently empty." Even anger, joy, pain, and itching cannot be found if you examine and look for them; in that sense we are not unlike wooden figures. Therefore, the sutras say: "Evil deeds result in painful retributions, and good deeds result in good retributions; anger takes you to hell and happiness takes you to heaven." But if you know that anger and joy are empty in nature, and do not hold on to them, you will be free from all karma. If you do not see your nature, teaching the Dharma is baseless and speaking about it is endless. Briefly distinguishing good from evil is possible, but it barely covers a thing or two about the Dharma.

Verse:

*The mind, mind, mind is hard to find,
When vast, it pervades the Dharma realm,
When narrow, it cannot hold a needle.
I seek the mind, not the buddha outside,
I know the three realms are empty of substance.
To seek the buddha, seek the mind alone,
For this very mind is the buddha.*

*I seek the mind, the mind is ever present,
 It cannot be obtained, let the mind know itself.
 Buddha nature is not found outside,
 To look beyond the mind is wrong.*

Verse:

*I originally came to this land
 To teach the Dharma and save people from confusion.
 A single flower will blossom into five petals,
 Its fruit will naturally ripen.*

Thus concludes the *Bloodstream Treatise*.

INTERPRETATION OF THE TEXT

Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro

I. There is no buddha beyond the mind

All appearances in the three realms arise from the mind and return to the mind. The buddhas before and after teach mind to mind without establishing words.

All appearances in the three realms arise from the mind and return to the mind. These words are very profound in meaning. Buddhism often speaks of the three realms of existence and the six realms of rebirth. The world that we can perceive with our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body belongs to the six realms of rebirth; it can be divided into three levels – the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm, that is, the three realms of existence. The reason there are three realms is that the human mind exists on three different levels.

The first is the desire realm.

Prior to practicing meditation and acquiring meditation skills, the mind is often restless and irritable; greed, anger, ignorance, and other defilements are strong emotions that afflict us. In the world projected by such a mind, all kinds of atrocities like war, plague, famine, hell, and hungry ghosts will appear. Among the different realms, the human realm and the god realm are relatively better, but there is still suffering, especially the suffering of birth, old age, illness, and death. In short, because

the mind exists at the very coarse level, the world projected by this state of mind is turbulent and unsatisfactory.

The second is the form realm.

When the mind is more tranquil, we can enter the four stages of meditative absorption (dhyanas). The four dhyanas are a state of relative calm; the world projected by the mind in this state is also very subtle. Although there is matter, this matter is extremely fine like energy. The world thus constructed is the form realm; it is thousands of times larger in area than the desire realm, but our senses cannot feel it at all.

For example, in the universe, the various substances we can see only account for 4% of the total. What is the other 96%? It is dark matter and dark energy. Although these are also substances, they are simply invisible to our senses. It should not come as a surprise that the invisible is many times greater than the visible.

The form realm still belongs to the material world. This world also has different levels of life, and reincarnation, but there are no wars, plagues, famines, etc. Because it is a world projected by a tranquil mind, it is a relatively peaceful state.

The third is the formless realm.

All living beings in the formless realm also have bodies, but the substances that make up their bodies are so minute they cannot be seen by ordinary people. Nor can they feel each other.

Beings in the formless realm are always in meditative

concentration from birth to death. They dwell in just one state of mind – they only feel inner peace until their life in meditative concentration comes to an end. It is a very different world from ours.

Buddhism believes that in this multi-dimensional space where different worlds overlap, each life perceives things in a way that is entirely different from how others perceive them. For example, sunlight contains various types of light such as ultraviolet, infrared, gamma rays, X-rays, and visible light, but the human eye can only see visible light; the rest are invisible. Similarly, although the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm all exist, we can only see one of them – the realm of desire.

Why is it called the realm of desire? Because relatively speaking, the desires of sentient beings in this realm are very strong, hence the name “desire.” Among the six realms of rebirth, the realms of hell, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, and asuras all belong to the desire realm, while the form realm and formless realm are included in the god realm. The god realm is divided into three types: the heaven of desire, the heaven of form, and the heaven of formlessness. The other five realms of rebirth have no such division.

Why are there six realms of rebirth? The answer lies within our own mind. The mind has different functions of which greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt are the five most prominent. Because the defilements are different, the realms that manifest are different. For example, when anger develops to a certain extent and is strong enough, it will create a terrible world before our eyes – the hell realm. Hell is the world

projected by hatred. Or for example, you have money but are reluctant to part with it, when this stinginess reaches a certain level, the world you create will be the realm of hungry ghosts. There is a corresponding effect for each cause in the six realms: hatred is the cause, and the effect is hell; stinginess is the cause, and the effect is hungry ghosts. The rest can be deduced in the same way.

Even if we have thousands of defilements, the emotions that appear frequently and are most harmful to us and others are anger, stinginess, jealousy, and so on. When their power reaches a certain level, a world will manifest before us. For instance, when our stress level at work is very high, we will have nightmares of all kinds; if we encounter terrifying things during the day, similar scenes will appear in our dreams. There is a causal relationship between these phenomena and the mind.

The theoretical school also believes that the three realms of existence and six realms of rebirth are projections of one's own mind, but they mainly analyze and conduct research on the projected phenomena themselves, then tell us what the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm are like, what the human realm, the god realm, and hell are like – much like a biologist describing a certain animal, all the answers are sought outside. For example, the *Abhidharma-samuccaya* specifically studies the material structure of animals and plants.

The pith-instruction school asserts that phenomena, whether in the form realm or the desire realm, are simply images that arise and cease in the mind; it is useless to say too much, its essence can be summed up in just a few words – "All return to the Mind." The key to all problems lies in the mind. So long as

we solve our inner problems and thoroughly see our own mind, we will understand the world. Therefore, it is not necessary to look outside, the answer can be found within. This is the difference between the two schools.

Buddhism teaches two paths. The first is the path of theory, which is suitable for monks who need to spread the Dharma and benefit living beings, or lay people who want to study Buddhism professionally. In Tibetan Buddhism, for instance, most students are required to first join the theoretical school at an early age, then switch to the pith-instruction school at a certain time and practice separately. By taking the two paths this way, they can not only master the theory but also attain realization of their own, which is extremely helpful in spreading the Dharma and benefiting living beings.

The second is the path of pith-instruction. Certain people (including some monks), who are not very interested in theory but like to practice, followed this path when they were young. Most lay practitioners do not have time to listen to and reflect on a lot of theories, but they have a special need for powerful remedies to cope with all the anxieties that arise in worldly life. Hence, for many, this is the path that is more likely to succeed.

If you are interested in Buddhist doctrine and have plenty of time, you can first study for three to five years, then practice; otherwise, you can follow the path of pith-instruction directly. We need to understand these two different paths and make a choice based on our actual situation.

The Patriarch Bodhidharma and Master Hui Neng were proponents of the pith-instruction school. Although Bodhidharma once said we should learn widely, in fact this need

not be the case. From the *Platform Sutra*, we can see that Master Hui Neng was indeed illiterate, but it did not affect his profound understanding of Buddhism at all. From the outset, he did not rely on concepts and instead followed a route that took him all the way to the highest level of realization.

Bodhidharma opened the chapter by saying: “All appearances in the three realms arise from the mind and return to the mind.” “All appearances in the three realms” allude to where the three realms of existence originated, how the six realms of rebirth began, and how they developed. “Arise from the mind and return to the mind” means the three realms and the six realms are mere projections of the mind which in the end dissolve back into our mind. The expression “All in One” has the same meaning – all things eventually return to “One,” which is our mind. This is the fundamental principle of the pith-instruction school of Mahayana Buddhism.

So, what is “mind”? What is its nature? When we understand the nature of mind, we will also understand the essence of all things. As for the various images projected in the mind, the pith-instruction school is uninterested; whatever appears is fine. In the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, it is said: “The mind is like a master painter, able to paint the entire world; all five aggregates are born and created by it.” Because all living beings have karma which is inconceivable, the images projected are also inconceivable. In any case, our mind is the basis of all things – this is the key point we need to grasp. Why is the pith-instruction practice so fast and easy? It puts aside complex theories and cuts straight to the point in the most concise way, so it is easy to understand and master; at least in theory it is easy for people to understand.

Many people raise questions about the origin of the three realms of existence: how did it appear, what is its source, etc.? If the answer is that everything is a projection of our inner mind, is not the inner mind just consciousness? Then how did the first consciousness arise? These answers cannot be found in sutra, only in tantra. Tantric Buddhism describes in detail how the first thought of each living being in samsara is formed, what kind of development process it follows, and how it finally evolves into the consciousness we have today.

Now some of the world's renowned physicists and popular science book authors have begun to think about it: does the universe exist when we do not look at it? It may seem strange for scientists to ask such a question. However, with the development and advancement of science and technology, many breakthrough research results are getting closer and closer to the nature of matter, so it is not surprising that such questions are raised. As we know, Buddhism already has the answer.

In sum, there is substantial material on the subject of “arising,” but because the focus of our discussion is different, we shall not elaborate on it at this time.

The buddhas before and after teach mind to mind.

The "buddhas before" refers to the buddhas before Sakyamuni Buddha; the "buddhas after" refers to future buddhas, such as Maitreya Bodhisattva. Their teachings are transmitted from “mind to mind.”

Each religion in the world has its own symbol. For example, the symbol of Christianity is the cross, and the symbol of Buddhism is the wheel of Dharma. This image is likened

to the wheels of ancient Indian bullock carts and horse-drawn carriages. Why does Buddhism use this as a symbol? As we all know, the wheel can turn, and "turning" means copying one person's heart to another, otherwise referred to here as "mind to mind." From Sakyamuni Buddha and Bodhidharma to the lineage teachers and Chan masters that followed, the Dharma never stopped "turning"; it was passed down from generation to generation, like a wheel that keeps turning, thus the name "wheel of Dharma."

So, what exactly is this thing that needs to be turned? The words passed down orally are not the most important; what is truly important are precepts, concentration, and wisdom. From the *Platform Sutra*, we know that the precepts that ordinary people understand are not killing, not stealing, etc.; concentration is the four dhyanas; and wisdom is the wisdom of hearing, contemplation, and practice. However, at the highest level of Buddhism, precepts, concentration, and wisdom are one entity; although three different words are used to express it, in fact, all three are the nature of mind. That which is to be propagated is not these words but the inner wisdom. This inner wisdom needs to be transmitted, and this is what "mind to mind" means.

In addition, the "mind" here should be understood as the nature of mind. "Mind" is interpreted in many ways: sometimes it refers to the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind consciousnesses, called the six or eight consciousnesses, primarily to our worldly emotions and sensory feelings; sometimes it refers to the nature of mind. For example, in *Finding Rest in the Nature of the Mind* by Longchenpa, "nature" is added to the word "mind" in the title of the book, which means

it is not the mind but the nature of mind that one should rest in. In general, once the word "nature" is added to "mind," it refers to the nature of mind, that is, buddha nature; if "nature" is not added, it mainly refers to superficial phenomena of the mind, such as emotions, thoughts, etc. Nonetheless, sometimes even when the word is not added, it should be understood as the nature of mind. This is the case in "mind to mind" here.

Of course, the nature of mind need not be transmitted since it is inherent in each of us. But even if it already exists, we still need to realize it; moreover, the wisdom of this realization needs to be passed down from generation to generation. This wisdom is not the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind, nor alaya consciousness. It is close to the nature of mind.

Without establishing words. Words are not important to the buddhas.

In Tibetan Buddhism, prior to Longchenpa, much of Dzogchen was passed down orally, thus some parts were not written down. Later, the master worried that over time it would be increasingly difficult to ensure the teachings were transmitted correctly, so he formed a written text. There were also individual Dzogchen practices that were passed down orally up until a hundred years ago. Fortunately, some masters at the time believed these precious teachings might gradually be lost if they continued to be taught this way. Even if the teachings were not lost, they might be mixed with too many other things, so they were eventually compiled into documents that could be passed down to future generations.

This is true of Dzogchen, as well as Chan. In the history of

Buddhism, why did such an important figure like Bodhidharma leave behind so few works? It is because Chan Buddhism advocates "teaching mind to mind without establishing words." Although words were eventually established due to various considerations, they were just to point people in a direction. The true meaning cannot be expressed in words.

The above are statements narrated by Bodhidharma himself, the discourse that follows is in the form of questions and answers.

Question: If words are not established, what is mind? Answer: You ask me, that is your mind; I answer you, that is my mind.

Question: If words are not established, what is mind?

If words are not established or defined, how are the teachings transmitted mind to mind? Also, what is mind?

Answer: You ask me, that is your mind. Bodhidharma replied, "The mind that is asking the question, is that not your mind? If you do not have a mind, you cannot ask questions."

In Buddhist logic, what is language and words? Most people think words are the characters we see in books, and language is the sound we hear spoken by someone. But this is not the case. For example, if we hear a dialect from a certain part of the world, we can hear the sound but may not understand its meaning. If sound could communicate, there would be no need to learn languages or words; hearing would suffice. Clearly, communication between people depends on more than just sound.

The same goes for words. For example, people with

normal eyesight can see the text in a book, but if they do not understand the language, they cannot grasp the content. Why is this? Because what we really want to see is not the words, but the content behind the words. Therefore, despite seeing the book very clearly, there is no way of knowing what is said inside.

Then, what exactly is language? Language is not about sound, but the concepts that the sound brings to us. For instance, when I talk about "buddha statues," an abstract concept of buddha statues will appear in everyone's mind; when I talk about "sutras," the concept of sutras will emerge. This concept is what we call language.

As for written characters, they fall into two main systems globally: phonetic and ideographic. Ideographic characters, especially those depicting people or animals in ancient times, are essentially pictorial symbols. For example, when we see the word "人," we know this is a human being and the concept of a human being arises in our mind. Through this word, we can understand something. If the concept of a human being did not exist in our mind, seeing this symbol would not convey any meaning.

In short, because language and words are not sounds and symbols, sound and text alone cannot ensure communication. What can be passed down to future generations are the concepts in our mind – the deeper essence of language and words. Therefore, it is not language and words that the Buddha wanted to transmit; provided that the content can be passed down, any language and words can be used.

In fact, what the Buddha really wanted to propagate is

wisdom, so Chan Buddhism "does not establish words." Not only Chan, all Buddhist scriptures that talk about ultimate reality, such as Dzogchen or Mahamudra, do not establish words. Why is that? Because words can no longer be of much help at this point, at least the true meaning cannot be directly conveyed by way of language.

Therefore, "You ask me, that is your mind." When asking a question, it is not the sound that is asking; when writing a note, it is not the text on the note that is asking. What or who exactly is doing the asking? It is our mind that is asking. The same goes for answering – the sound does not actually answer any questions. It is neither sound nor text that asks or answers, it is the mind.

I answer you, that is my mind. When I answer you, it is my mind that answers. I merely make use of sounds and words. Just as in writing, I need a pen to write; without it, the hand cannot write. But the pen is just a tool, it is in fact the hand that writes. Similarly, when I answer questions, it is my mind that replies; when you ask questions, it is your mind that inquires.

If I have no mind, how can I answer you? If you have no mind, how can you ask me? That which asks is your mind. Since the beginningless great kalpa, everything you have done, at any time or place, that is your fundamental innate mind, that is your buddha nature.

If I have no mind, how can I answer you? If I have no mind and I am just matter, like a robot, how can I answer you?

If you have no mind, how can you ask me? If you have

no mind and you are just like a stone or a brick, how can you ask me questions?

That which asks is your mind. It is your mind that asked me a question.

Since the beginningless great kalpa. "Kalpa" is a Buddhist unit of time. A great kalpa is an extremely long period of time, let alone since beginningless time. Although the earth is 4.5 billion years old, this is as short as ten-thousandth of a second in 24 hours in the cycle of rebirth. Therefore, Buddhism uses the expression "beginningless great kalpa" instead of numbers such as 4.5 billion years or 8 billion years.

Everything you have done, at any time or place, that is your fundamental innate mind. From beginningless time to the present, the main operator of all our actions, such as speaking, doing things, walking, doing good deeds, committing crimes, etc., at any time and in any place, is our own mind.

So, what is the true essence of mind? **That is your buddha nature.** The nature of mind is the buddha. Furthermore, it is buddha nature.

In essence, this mind is the buddha.

In essence, this mind is the buddha. Our mind is the buddha, and the buddha is our mind.

The so-called "buddha" refers to the three bodies of the buddha – dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, and nirmanakaya. The *Platform Sutra* makes it very clear that the nature of mind is buddha-nature (tathagatagarbha); it contains the three kayas that

are inseparable aspects of the enlightened mind. Therefore, "this mind is the buddha" – the nature of our mind is no other than the buddha.

Although you are a buddha yourself, if you want to play the role of a buddha in your life, the prerequisite is to understand and realize that the nature of mind is the buddha. Most importantly, you must attain realization to be able to personally experience the nature of mind.

In the third turning of the wheel of Dharma, the Buddha began to teach that the nature of mind is the buddha, which many sects also expounded. However, it is only in Dzogchen, and in others to varying extent, that this teaching in practice and conduct is fully actualized. Regarding this question, you can refer to the *Parable of a Black Snake*, which explains very clearly the different viewpoints of each sect from Madhyamaka to Dzogchen, as well as their respective practice processes. From this you can also see the nature of mind is indeed the buddha.

Why is the *Bloodstream Treatise* as important as blood is to the human body? Because it proclaims: "This mind is the buddha." How the mind is the buddha will be further explained later.

Except for this mind, there is no other buddha to be found. To search for enlightenment or nirvana beyond this mind is wrong.

Except for this mind, there is no other buddha to be found. Apart from this mind, there is no other buddha. If you think that there is another buddha that can be found, that is impossible.

This statement must be understood correctly. Everyone knows that when the mind is in an agitated state, it is greed, anger, and ignorance; when it is in a relatively good state, it is primarily boring and discursive thoughts. Can this possibly be the buddha? If this is the buddha, are we not the buddha now? Why would we still need to study and practice Buddhism? This is a big misconception; it is not the case. Explained theoretically, what it means is that there is no buddha outside the nature of mind. The word "nature" must be added. In actual practice, another word can also be added, which is "enlightenment." For an enlightened person, especially a person in an advanced state of realization, the mind is the buddha, and there is no buddha except the mind. By adding "nature" or "enlightenment," this statement can be correctly interpreted.

Although the nature of mind is the buddha, what we see is often not the nature, but the various anxieties and emotions on its surface, such as greed, anger, ignorance, random thoughts, etc. Therefore, prior to enlightenment, even though the nature of mind is the buddha, it will not bring its function as a buddha fully into play; after enlightenment, there is only the buddha in our own state of realization, since all afflictions have been eradicated. There is "no other buddha to be found."

To search for enlightenment or nirvana beyond this mind is wrong. If you look for enlightenment (bodhi) or nirvana everywhere outside your own mind, in essence that is wrong.

Your self-nature is real. It is neither cause nor effect. The Dharma is the mind, the nature of mind is enlightenment, and the nature of mind is nirvana.

Your self-nature is real. The nature of our mind is real.

On the surface, this seems to conflict with the Prajnaparamita sutras such as the *Diamond Sutra*, the *Heart Sutra*, and the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra*. As stated in the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra*, all things, including nirvana, are illusory, dreamlike, and empty, with no real existence. Now that it is said the self-nature of mind is real, how should we understand the "contradiction" between the two?

This question is indeed important. What does "real" mean here? Simply put, before enlightenment, the greed, anger, ignorance, and all kinds of afflictions in our mind are very real; but once we achieve enlightenment, all the afflictions disappear without a trace. What exists at that time? It is the clear and luminous nature of mind.

For example, after ice melts, what remains is water. Ice is not the essence of water, but a phenomenon formed by the environment, temperature, and other factors. Therefore, solid ice is an illusion, while liquid water is real. Similarly, there are many negative emotions in our mind now; just like water turning into ice, the afflictions are only formed under certain conditions. If the essence of our mind can be restored, then these afflictions and the world projected by them will cease to exist. What is left in the end is the original purity and clarity of the mind. This is the real part, that is, its "original face." Because afflictions are illusions and the nature of mind is real, the word "real" is used.

Both Chan treatises and the classics in the three turnings of the wheel of Dharma use the word "real" extensively, which is

not inconsistent with prajna. The Prajnaparamita sutras of the second turning of the wheel of Dharma do not talk about what is left in the end, but directly observe things in the moment. After analyzing them one by one, it is found that whether they are pure or impure, nirvana or samsara, they are all empty. This is the Madhyamaka approach. The third turning of the wheel of Dharma examines what is left in the end. That which exists at the very end is its true face.

Take water as an example again, water evaporates into a gas when it is above 100°C, and condenses into a solid when it is below 0°C; but no matter how it changes, what remains in the end is liquid. Clearly, the nature of water is neither solid nor gas, but liquid, because it will eventually appear in its true form. Similarly, our mind is sometimes good and sometimes evil, but whether it is good or evil, what remains in the end is clarity. Therefore, we believe that the nature of the mind is neither good nor evil, but clarity – what is left in the end is called "reality." Is "reality" empty or not? Of course it is also empty. This is called the union of clarity and emptiness. For this reason, it does not conflict in any way with the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra*, *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, and Madhyamaka.

Once you understand the concept of "self-nature of mind is real," you will not be confused if you encounter a similar situation in the future. This is not only important to understand theoretically but also extremely important in actual practice.

It is neither cause nor effect. The nature of mind is far away from cause and effect.

The Dharma is the mind. The Dharma is the mind itself, or in other words, the essence of the mind is the Dharma.

The nature of mind is enlightenment, and the nature of mind is nirvana. The nature of our mind is bodhi, which is the same as saying the nature of mind is buddha and clarity. This is called natural nirvana.

There are two kinds of nirvana: one is natural nirvana; the other is man-made nirvana. The so-called natural nirvana means that the nature of the mind is always clear or luminous. It is natural and has nothing to do with artificial learning, thinking, and cultivation; therefore, it is called natural nirvana. The so-called man-made nirvana means that the ultimate state of nirvana is reached through listening, thinking, and practice, followed by complete enlightenment. Because it is achieved through hard work, it is considered man-made or fabricated. One can also say our practice is to attain natural and original nirvana through man-made nirvana. In Dzogchen, the man-made realization is called child luminosity, and the natural part is called mother luminosity.

If you say the buddha and enlightenment are somewhere beyond the mind, it is not so. Looking for the buddha or enlightenment outside is like grasping at empty space. Space has a name, but it has no form; it cannot be obtained or discarded, nor can it be held. If you look for a buddha outside this mind, you will never find it.

If you say the buddha and enlightenment are somewhere beyond the mind, it is not so. If you think there are other buddhas and enlightenment besides the mind, that is a mistake.

Looking for the buddha or enlightenment outside is like grasping at empty space. May I ask, where are the buddhas and bodhisattvas? The *Diamond Sutra* makes it very clear that more than 2,500 years ago, Sakyamuni Buddha, as well as Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, etc., all manifested from the dharmakaya of the buddha with the intent to save sentient beings. They were the nirmanakaya of the buddha, not the real buddha. Looking for a buddha outside is like trying to hold empty space in your hand.

Space has a name, but it has no form. The so-called empty space has a name but no reality. For example, the word "table" has a corresponding object; but behind the word "empty space," is there a substantial object? No, it is just a name.

It cannot be obtained or discarded, nor can it be held. Because empty space does not exist, it cannot be held or put down. It is impossible to grasp with your hand.

If you look for a buddha outside this mind, you will never find it. Just like you cannot hold empty space in your hand, if you look for a buddha outside your mind, you will not find it.

Of course, we cannot completely deny that activities such as going on a pilgrimage and worshiping the buddha are useful for accumulating merit and repenting our wrongdoings. However, if you want to see the real buddha, you need to work hard at purifying your own inner mind. When you see the dharmakaya of the buddha, you then see the real buddha.

The buddha is your mind's work, so why look for a buddha outside?

The buddhas before and after only speak of this mind. The mind is the buddha, and the buddha is the mind; beyond the mind there is no buddha, and beyond the buddha there is no mind.

The buddha is your mind's work, so why look for a buddha outside? The buddha is one's own mind anyway. Through practice, one can see the buddha. Why look for the buddha outside this mind?

The buddhas before and after only speak of this mind. Buddhas of the past and future all say that one's own mind is the Dharma, the Buddha, and the Sangha. Therefore, the Three Jewels are also one's own mind – **the mind is the buddha, and the buddha is the mind; beyond the mind there is no buddha, and beyond the buddha there is no mind.**

If you say there is a buddha outside the mind, where is this buddha? Since there is no buddha outside the mind, why hold on to one? Misleading one another, you cannot know your real mind; captivated by external, insentient things, you cannot be free. If you do not believe this, it is useless to deceive yourself.

If you say there is a buddha outside the mind, where is this buddha? If you say that there is a buddha outside your mind, where is he?

Since there is no buddha outside the mind, why hold on to one? Since there is no buddha outside the mind, why are you attached to the notion that apart from your own mind, there is another buddha that exists outside?

Misleading one another. Deception and confusion alternate continuously; defilement and suffering arise one after

another. You not only live this way, but also pass these on to other beings – this is how sentient beings in the six realms deceive one another.

You cannot know your real mind; captivated by external, insentient things. If you do not know that the true nature of mind is the buddha, you will not be able to realize its true nature. Not only that, you will also be controlled by external things like clay and wooden buddha statues, and even things in life such as houses and tables. For example, many people pursue luxury cars, villas, designer clothes, bags, etc. In modern terms, they eventually become materialists and money worshipers. On the surface, they appear to be human beings that are controlled by material things; in fact, they are controlled by their own desires.

You cannot be free. As a result, you have no freedom at all. These things keep you busy the whole day long; afraid of losing what you have, your life is bound by these possessions. People like this not only cannot achieve enlightenment and liberation, they are also unable to live a moderately happy and stable life in the secular world, that is, they have no freedom.

If you do not believe this, it is useless to deceive yourself. If you still do not believe what has been said, then there is nothing that can be done. There is no point in deceiving yourself.

The buddha is not at fault. Sentient beings are confused and unaware that their own mind is the buddha. If they knew their own mind is the buddha, they would not seek the buddha outside the mind.

However, do we not have the buddha in our mind? Why does the buddha not tell us? Is this the fault of the buddha?

The buddha is not at fault. Although the nature of mind is the buddha, the mind cannot tell us that the buddha is in our mind.

Sentient beings are confused and unaware that their own mind is the buddha. Because we do not understand the nature of our own mind, we ultimately come to this result.

The *Bloodstream Treatise* emphasizes from beginning to end that there is no other buddha except one's own mind. The nature of mind is the buddha. This is its core concept. In fact, if we clearly understand the statement "This mind is the buddha," we will not need to say too much more, since everything else revolves around this principle.

The same concept is expressed in not only the *Bloodstream Treatise*, but also the quotations and poems of all the great Chan masters, in Maitreya's *Uttaratantra-sastra* (*The Sublime Continuum of the Mahayana*), Nagarjuna's *In Praise of Dharmadhatu*, as well as the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra*, etc. in the third turning of the wheel of Dharma, and even in all esoteric teachings such as Dzogchen. To a certain extent, the treatises beyond the third turning of the wheel of Dharma all talk about buddha nature. However, the commentaries, no matter how extensive, still cannot in the end tell us what buddha nature is truly like. On key issues, the terms clarity, buddha nature, and emptiness are commonly used, but to really understand them is not easy.

Before enlightenment, it is difficult to see how "the nature

of mind is the buddha," "this mind is the buddha," "beyond the mind, there is no buddha, and beyond the buddha, there is no mind." Such a reality seems so distant. We can only understand buddha nature in a general and abstract way, but not specifically. No matter how much we talk about it or how much we learn – even if we study every Mahayana and tantric text in the third turning of the wheel of Dharma – the result will still be the same.

With some level of realization, we begin to understand: "Oh! Buddha nature is probably like this, clarity is like this, the nature of mind should be like this, then the ultimate buddha state should also be like this..." In other words, it is only from the moment of enlightenment that we can truly comprehend the meaning of words such as the nature of mind, clarity, and buddha nature. Although this feeling has just begun and it is an early stage of realization, it is still a kind of enlightenment. Through this enlightened wisdom, we can basically experience what the state of the buddha is like.

We are not able to see the physical body of Sakyamuni Buddha because the Buddha has already entered parinirvana. But if we attain enlightenment, we can see the dharmakaya of the buddha – the dharmakaya of all the buddhas in the past, present, and future is the same. Therefore, if we now realize the nature of our mind, it is the equivalent of meeting all the buddhas of the three times and ten directions.

If they knew their own mind is the buddha, they would not seek the buddha outside the mind. If you know that the nature of your mind is the buddha, you should not look for a buddha outside your mind. The buddha is in your mind, what

else are you looking for? The key is not to look for a buddha outside the mind, but to understand that the nature of your own mind is the buddha.

What is "looking for a buddha outside"? Most people believe that our current mind is occupied by all kinds of emotions and countless thoughts; these are all afflictions which bring us no benefit. To attain buddhahood is to eradicate all such defilements, then recreate the state of a buddha. This is what it means to look for a buddha outside the mind. Theravada Buddhism and a vast majority of Mahayana sutras hold this view.

Why "the vast majority"? This is because the sutras that clearly mention buddha nature, such as the *Vimalakirti Sutra* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sutra*, add up to no more than twenty plus books. The second turning of the wheel of Dharma mainly talks about emptiness; although it occasionally mentions buddha nature and clarity, it does not emphasize it. Most other Buddhist scriptures elaborate on the six worldly paramitas, such as giving, observing the precepts, forbearing, etc. In other words, the real core content can only be found in the third turning of the wheel of Dharma, and not all Buddhist scriptures in the third turning talk about buddha nature. Only a small number of them touch on this content.

The main point of this part of the Buddhist scriptures is: afflictions are in and of themselves the wisdom of the buddha, but we have not discovered it. There is no need to look for the buddha outside the mind because the mind is the buddha, and the buddha is the mind. According to Mipham Rinpoche, the Tibetan master renowned for his wisdom, these sutras – despite

their appearance in the third turning of the wheel of Dharma – are neither sutra nor tantra, but somewhere in between; in other words, they are both sutra and tantra. Though not as clear and profound as the Dzogchen teachings, they are more profound than other Mahayana scriptures.

Mahayana Buddhism generally regards emotions such as anger and hatred to be very bad and harmful to the individual, family, and society. However, if we realize the nature of the mind, we will find that the essence of these emotions or afflictions is in fact the five wisdoms of the Buddha – sutras generally talk about the three bodies and four wisdoms, and tantras mostly talk about the four bodies and five wisdoms, which are all the same.

Before enlightenment, the five poisons are the afflictions that cause us to commit wrongdoing and descend into hell. Once enlightened, the five poisons become the five wisdoms of the buddha; the external images they project are the Five Buddhas – internally called the five wisdoms, on the outside called the Five Buddhas. In tantra, especially Dzogchen in the Nyingma tradition, the totality of these five kinds of wisdom is Samantabhadraraja Tathagata, also known as the Sixth Buddha.

With some level of realization, we will connect deeply with every saying in the Chan scriptures. But before enlightenment, a statement like "affliction is bodhi, samsara is nirvana" can be confusing. How can affliction be bodhi? How can cyclic existence be nirvana? Have I already attained buddhahood? If I am already a buddha, why should I still practice Buddhism? There are many such questions. But after enlightenment, these problems will all disappear. For example, if we can achieve

enlightenment in the very moment our anger arises, then this anger is not anger, but the wisdom of the buddha. Why is that? Because there is no difference between the anger in that moment and the wisdom of the buddha; they possess the same merits, hence affliction is bodhi.

After enlightenment, you can even bring this state of realization to the bardo state in the future. All bardo practices are based on this foundation. However, if you cannot achieve enlightenment in your lifetime, how can you achieve enlightenment after death? You are just deceiving yourself! At that time, many of the bardo practices will not be useful at all; better to pray to Amitabha instead.

Everyone must practice diligently. If you can attain buddhahood or the first bodhisattva bhumi, that is certainly very good. Otherwise, you should at least strive to have some personal experience in "the mind is the buddha, and the buddha is the mind" in your lifetime. This experience is called enlightenment. It may not be at a high level, but it can be regarded as a preliminary realization. We must seize any chance in life to achieve this goal, otherwise everything is just empty talk.

Buddhas do not save buddhas. If you use your mind to search for a buddha, you do not know the buddha. When you only look outside for a buddha, you do not know your own mind is the buddha.

Buddhas do not save buddhas. The nature of mind is the buddha. Since it is a buddha, it naturally does not need other buddhas to save it.

If you use your mind to search for a buddha, you do

not know the buddha. If we use our current mind to look for the buddha outside this mind, this is a sign that we have not yet understood the nature of our own mind.

When you only look outside for a buddha, you do not know your own mind is the buddha. People who only seek the buddha from outside and do not know how to look for the buddha within are those who do not know the nature of their own mind.

Do not use the buddha to pay homage to a buddha, or use your mind to invoke a buddha.

Do not use the buddha to pay homage to a buddha. If one realizes that the nature of mind is the buddha, then the buddha does not need to pay homage to a buddha.

To pay homage to a buddha is to prostrate, that is, to kowtow. Practicing the five preliminaries involves prostrating one hundred thousand times. This is a way for us to express our respect to the buddha. It is an act of obeisance. The prostration in the state of the buddha is knowing that the nature of one's mind is originally a buddha. It is an unsurpassed, sacred act of obeisance. No other prostrations are required.

Do not use your mind to invoke a buddha. Because the nature of our mind is the buddha. So, if we think there is another buddha outside our mind, such as the buddhas in Pure Land and other worlds, it is wrong to use our mind to recite the name of this buddha.

There must be no misunderstanding here. The assertions above apply specifically to the state of enlightenment. It

does not mean that we do not need to worship the buddha and recite the buddha's name in our current practice. Such an understanding would be completely wrong! At this stage, worshiping the buddha and chanting the buddha's name are ways to practice. When one reaches the highest state of realization, there is no practice to speak of.

Buddhas do not recite sutras, observe precepts, or violate precepts; buddhas do not keep or break anything, and buddhas do not perform good or evil deeds.

Buddhas do not recite sutras, observe precepts, or violate precepts. The buddha here refers to the dharmakaya of the buddha, which is the nature of our mind. Of course, the dharmakaya does not recite sutras, observe precepts, or violate precepts.

Buddhas do not keep or break anything, and buddhas do not perform good or evil deeds. The buddha will not uphold or violate the precepts, nor will the buddha commit good or evil deeds.

To find the buddha, you must see your nature; whoever sees his nature is a buddha.

To find the buddha, you must see your nature. If you want to find the buddha, you must realize your mind and see your nature, that is, achieve enlightenment. Only then can you find the buddha.

Whoever sees his nature is a buddha. Seeing one's nature is enlightenment. It is often said in Chan treatises that whoever sees his nature is a buddha; one becomes a buddha

after completely seeing the nature of one's own mind. This statement is not wrong, but enlightenment cannot be equated with buddhahood. Seeing one's nature is only the beginning of a progressive path toward buddhahood. There is still a long way to go after realizing the first level, the second level, the third level; it is not until the eleventh level that one becomes a buddha. The bodhisattva of the tenth level is not yet a buddha because there is still one final obstacle that prevents him from fully seeing the true nature of mind. He becomes a buddha when this last obstacle is removed. Hence, the saying "whoever sees his nature is a buddha" is always true. Although one does not become a buddha as soon as one sees one's nature, it will certainly be faster than before.

If you do not see your nature, there is no benefit in chanting the buddha's name, reciting sutras, fasting, or observing precepts.

If you do not see your nature, there is no benefit in chanting the buddha's name, reciting sutras, fasting, or observing precepts. The reason is, without enlightenment, you cannot become a buddha just by reciting sutras and observing precepts.

Emperor Wu of Liang was a very devout Buddhist who strongly supported the cause of Buddhism. When Bodhidharma first came to China and was summoned to the court, the emperor recounted all his good deeds, such as building many temples, observing fasts, taking precepts, etc., and asked what merits these would bring him. Bodhidharma replied, "there is no merit."

Bodhidharma certainly did not refute the cause and effect

of good and evil. What he meant to say was that, from the perspective of enlightenment, building temples, observing fasts, and taking precepts are all worldly merits which have nothing to do with the state of enlightenment, so they cannot be said to be meritorious. However, this does not mean there is no merit in fasting, reciting sutras, etc. It is just that from the standpoint of a higher level of realization, the conclusions drawn are naturally different. There can be no misunderstanding here.

At this time, we must distinguish between ultimate truth and conventional truth. The ultimate truth is the state of enlightenment. In this state, there is no causal relationship; therefore, it can be said that these worldly good deeds have no merit or benefit. But from the perspective of conventional truth, fasting, reciting sutras, etc. certainly have merit! For this reason, ultimate truth and conventional truth must be separated.

There are two types of conventional truth and ultimate truth. One is the conventional truth and ultimate truth expounded in the second turning of the Dharma wheel; the ultimate truth is emptiness, that is, "nothing fundamentally exists" (this is a very famous line in the *Platform Sutra*). The other is the conventional truth and ultimate truth expounded in the third turning of the Dharma wheel; here the ultimate truth is "buddha nature is always pure," meaning the nature of mind is clarity (this is the Dunhuang version of the *Platform Sutra*).

Whether it is "nothing fundamentally exists" or "buddha nature is always pure," from the perspective of ultimate truth, there is no cause and effect, good or evil, nor is there any merit in fasting, reciting sutras, etc. These things do not exist at that level. So, when do they appear? Cause and effect, good and

evil, etc. only materialize at the level of conventional truth. This distinction must be made.

Ultimate truth and conventional truth are like a key to the Buddhist scriptures. If we do not know how to distinguish between the two truths, then we will never understand the true meaning of the Buddhist scriptures. For example, one moment it says that cause and effect is true, and the next moment it says that these things do not exist, all of which can be quite puzzling. Therefore, studying the Dharma on a regular basis is very important in dispelling any confusion over their true meaning.

Although many people are Buddhists, they may not have received the teachings in a systematic way, and thus cannot discern the two truths. A hundred years earlier, it was difficult to popularize Buddhist concepts; people were largely persuaded to do good deeds such as reciting the buddha's name, fasting, and accumulating merit. The teachings on the Four Noble Truths, the Two Truths, emptiness, and clarity could only be learned by a small number of professionals.

Nowadays, with cultural literacy at a high level, it is not difficult to learn Buddhism. So long as there is interest and willingness to invest a little time and energy, anyone can understand the principles the Buddha taught. It is just that many people have not come upon the teachings; therefore, they do not know what Buddhism is, and still believe it is superstition. So, everyone must study hard!

What follows is an explanation of why reciting the buddha's name, chanting sutras, and observing precepts are of little use.

Reciting the buddha's name results in good karma, reciting sutras results in wisdom, observing the precepts results in rebirth in heaven, making offerings results in blessings, but you will never find the buddha.

Reciting the buddha's name results in good karma.

Reciting the buddha's name can lead to good retributions, such as taking rebirth in the Pure Land, or getting help in secular life, such as good health, longevity, and elimination of disasters.

Reciting sutras results in wisdom. Reciting sutras can make you wise.

Observing the precepts results in rebirth in heaven.

The reward of keeping the precepts is to become a heavenly being in the next life.

Making offerings results in blessings. The result of giving is to become rich in the next life.

But you will never find the buddha. Although good results can be attained in the world, it is impossible to find the buddha this way.

Bodhidharma did not disclaim the cause and effect of good and evil. He admitted that "reciting the buddha's name results in good karma," "reciting sutras results in wisdom," and "observing the precepts results in rebirth in heaven." Through these methods, you can be rewarded in the secular world. But it is a delusion to think you can become a buddha this way!

II. How to see the real buddha

There are many manifestations of the buddha in the six realms of rebirth. For example, in hell, the buddha appears in the form of beings in hell. In the animal realm, he appears in the form of animals; these forms may look the same as other animals, but their inner state of realization is completely different. The same is true in the human realm; to facilitate communication with ordinary people, the buddha appears in a human form to save human beings. However, these manifestations of the buddha according to the needs of different sentient beings are not the real buddha. What is the real buddha? It is the dharmakaya of the buddha, which is the true nature of our own mind. When we realize the nature of mind, we also see the real buddha.

Compared to things that can never be seen or experienced, it is easier to accept and explore the nature of our own mind. If we are asked to believe in a certain god or mysterious being, not everyone can do so. If you believe in these mysterious figures, it is not a problem at all; but if you do not believe in them, you can never prove whether they truly exist. This then becomes mysticism – something that cannot be logically proven or personally experienced, and can only be supported by faith. Many people, especially young people, may find this difficult to accept.

What is expounded in Chan, Dzogchen, and Mahamudra can also seem mysterious on the surface, but it is in fact our own mind. It allows us to see the true nature of our mind in a direct way, to catch a glimpse of its original face. This straightforward approach is called pointing out one's mind, and is relatively easy. Of course, from another perspective, it is also quite challenging because our thinking, exploration, and observation are often confined to the level of consciousness, which is not easy to break through. Nonetheless, if we put in a little effort and use the right method, we can fully experience the nature of mind.

1. Rely on good teachers and never enter the path of evil

If you do not understand on your own, you must consult a good teacher to get to the root of cyclic existence.

If you do not understand on your own, you must consult a good teacher. If you do not understand buddha nature, you must look for a good teacher and rely on the guru. This is very important!

To get to the root of cyclic existence. The cycle of life and death is rooted in ignorance. We gain the wisdom of enlightenment by relying on good teachers, and then use this wisdom to cut through ignorance; in so doing, we eradicate the root of cyclic existence.

So, what is a good teacher? What kind of teacher should we look for?

A person who does not see his nature cannot be called a good teacher.

A person who does not see his nature cannot be

called a good teacher. This sentence is very important. This is what Chan Buddhism requires of a guru, or what is deemed the standard for a good teacher. We rely on the guru for enlightenment. If the guru himself is not enlightened, what is the use of relying on him? You can only recite the buddha's name, recite sutras, etc., but you cannot hope for enlightenment, so you must find a good teacher who has attained enlightenment.

Even if he can expound the twelve divisions of the scriptures, he will remain in the cycle of birth and death, and suffer in the three realms with no hope of escape.

Even if he can expound the twelve divisions of the scriptures, he will remain in the cycle of birth and death. If the good teacher you are looking for, or even yourself, has not attained enlightenment but can discourse the twelve divisions of the scriptures eloquently, memorizing it backwards and forwards, it is no more than intellectual chatter. It cannot truly eliminate the cause of cyclic existence, so reincarnation in the cycle of life and death is still unavoidable.

And suffer in the three realms with no hope of escape. In the end, he will still suffer in the three realms of existence with no hope of attaining liberation.

In the past, a monk named Sunakshatra was able to recite the twelve divisions of the scriptures, yet he could not escape rebirth because he did not see his nature. If such was the case with Sunakshatra, people nowadays who teach three or five sutras or sastras and think it is the Dharma are fools.

In the past, a monk named Sunakshatra was able

to recite the twelve divisions of the scriptures. The *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* says: In the past when the Buddha was alive, a monk called Sunakshatra was proficient in the twelve divisions of the scriptures, yet he could not escape rebirth.

Why? **Because he did not see his nature.** The main reason being he was not enlightened – even though Sunakshatra was an exceptional scholar, he failed to realize the true meaning behind the words.

If such was the case with Sunakshatra, people nowadays who teach three or five sutras or sastras and think it is the Dharma are fools. Even a person as accomplished as Sunakshatra cannot escape reincarnation, let alone those who only preach three or five sutras. Those who think they understand the Dharma are ignorant people!

Unless you recognize your own mind, reciting a lot of prose is useless.

The so-called prose are books that are inessential and have little to do with understanding the mind and seeing its nature. If you cannot recognize the nature of mind, it is useless to read books that cannot help you reach that objective.

From another perspective, there are many books in Buddhism on reasoning and logic – are they prose? Certainly not. As previously mentioned, there are different standards for different levels. Everyone should be clear on this.

If you want to find the buddha, you just need to see your nature. Your nature is the buddha, and the buddha is a free person – there is nothing the buddha needs to do.

If you want to find the buddha, you just need to see your nature. If you want to find the buddha and know where the buddha is, you must attain enlightenment and see your nature.

Your nature is the buddha, and the buddha is a free person. The nature of mind is the dharmakaya; the nirmanakaya is a human being, not a god, but he is supreme among humans. Why is he supreme among men? Because the buddha is a completely free person. He has cut through ignorance and all defilements, and is entirely at ease in any situation—he has eliminated in essence all the things that hold people captive and keep them from being free.

There is nothing the buddha needs to do. There is nothing that remains to be done.

This has the same meaning as the path of no more learning in the Buddhist scriptures. The path of no more learning is the last of the five paths; "no more learning" means there is nothing left to learn. Prior to that, there are many things we want to achieve, such as accumulating merit, eliminating defilements, and realizing the nature of mind; when we get to the path of no more learning, everything that needs to be done has already been completed, and there is nothing left to do. From the perspective of benefiting the self, the buddha has reached the highest level with no room for improvement, so nothing remains to be done; but from the perspective of benefiting others, the buddha is of course very busy.

However, here we are talking about the dharmakaya. The dharmakaya of the buddha is not a human being; there is

basically nothing for it to do, not in the past, present, or future. From the standpoint of self-interest, the dharmakaya does not do anything; from the standpoint of altruism, the dharmakaya still has nothing to do – the dharmakaya benefits sentient beings through the sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya, rather than directly by itself. This is what "doing nothing" means.

If you do not see your nature and run around all day looking elsewhere for the buddha, you will not obtain anything.

If you do not see your nature and run around all day looking elsewhere for the buddha. Before enlightenment, we are occupied with virtuous practices every day, sometimes chanting the buddha's name, sometimes releasing lives, and sometimes doing other things. If you search for the buddha in this way, **you will not obtain anything.**

From the perspective of enlightenment, these practices can only indirectly enable us to achieve enlightenment, so they are not the most important. Of course, if there is no enlightenment, we cannot say they are useless.

Remember! Bodhidharma was referring to the highest state of realization. We should regard it as a high standard that cannot be implemented in our daily life now. Why? What Bodhidharma said is still difficult for us to achieve; however, if upon listening to these words, we just give up on what we can do and have been doing – practicing the four and five preliminaries, cultivating renunciation and bodhicitta, even reciting the buddha's name, how are we any different from those who do not learn Buddhism at all?

It is easy for us to fall into this state: we want to be

enlightened but cannot realize it; we do not do what we can do; we fail to achieve high results or cannot accept low results, ultimately gaining nothing. Therefore, let us be very clear on this point – we must proceed step by step and gradually approach the state that Bodhidharma attained.

In fact, there is nothing to obtain. To understand this, you must consult a good teacher and strive hard to realize the true nature of things.

In fact, there is nothing to obtain. Ultimately, there is nothing to obtain, and there is nothing to realize, such as becoming a buddha or not. **To understand this,** to realize and understand the nature of all dharmas, **you must consult a good teacher.** You need to rely on good teachers and your guru.

Since you have nothing to gain, why should you seek out good teachers? From the perspective of ultimate truth, there is indeed nothing that can be achieved, but from the perspective of conventional or relative truth, it is possible to practice and become a buddha, so you still need to work hard. In other words, in conventional truth, you need to work hard on your practice, but in ultimate truth, there is nothing there for you to work at. Although it sounds a bit mysterious, if you have studied Madhyamaka before, you will think this view is as it should be, not contradictory.

Whenever emptiness and buddha-nature are mentioned in study and practice, we must refer to the two truths – they are the key to resolving these difficult questions and dispelling any confusion. Between "nothing" in ultimate truth and "being" in conventional truth, which one is right and which one is wrong?

Take drug abuse as an example. Drug addicts will see many strange and incredible sights while taking drugs. These scenes seem very real to them, so they are sometimes happy and sometimes frightened. However, if there is a person nearby who does not take drugs, this person will not be able to see these things at all. To him, these things naturally do not exist. Therefore, we cannot generalize whether the scenes seen by drug addicts are real or not. Before becoming a buddha, there will always be only relative right and wrong, but no absolute right and wrong.

Or for example, all sentient beings in the six realms of samsara see things on earth differently. Human beings see this place as the earth, which has existed for 4.5 billion years and which will evolve in various ways in the future; heavenly beings perceive this place to be as beautiful as heaven; the hell beings see the earth as a scene in hell. Which of these is correct? If you are a sentient being in hell, then hell is right and everything else is wrong; if you are a human being, then the earth is right. Until you become a buddha, there is no absolute right or wrong in anything. At the highest state of realization, the distinction between ultimate truth and conventional truth disappears; only then can we say this is the absolute truth.

There are various phenomena in the cycle of life and death that do not actually exist. What we see now is not the absolute truth. When we eliminate an illusion, we have one iota less of affliction; when we gradually eliminate all our defilements and illusions, we become a buddha. Therefore, existence or non-existence, the presence or absence of merit, etc. are all discussed from different levels of view and cannot be generalized. Only in the state of the buddha is there a final answer. However,

the Buddha did not give us any answers – in fact, there are no answers in the state of the buddha. In other words, not having an answer is the ultimate and true answer.

In short, although nothing can be obtained from the perspective of ultimate truth, there is much to obtain in life from the perspective of conventional truth; the two are not contradictory. It is precisely because of our emphasis on “seeking” in the conventional realm that we can finally reach the ultimate realm of “non-seeking,” that is, we can arrive at non-seeking through seeking.

Although these concise teachings by Bodhidharma do not contain many words, they cover everything that needs to be said, including some doubtful points, which are explained very well. Many Buddhists who do not understand Chan have this question at the beginning: Chan places emphasis on non-attachment and letting go, so why do we still need to recite the buddha’s name and release lives? Did not Bodhidharma say that there is no merit in these things, so why do we still engage in these practices? I have met many people who study Chan Buddhism, including some well-known Chan masters abroad. They say that people who study Chan do not believe in cause and effect or rebirth, nor do they worship or pay homage to the buddhas in the shrines. Why is that? Because “buddhas do not pay homage to buddhas” – I am a buddha myself, how can I pay homage to myself! It seems they have made their point supported by scriptural teachings and logical reasoning, but it is precisely these teachings and logical reasoning that have led them astray. This is not only very dangerous, but also a huge misunderstanding of Chan!

The same problem is also evident in Dzogchen. This is not the fault of Dzogchen and Chan Buddhism, but the misunderstanding of those who study Dzogchen and Chan Buddhism. They are people who seem to understand but in fact do not understand, or who do not understand Chan but think they are practicing Chan. Apart from not realizing the state of Chan, they have moreover abandoned virtuous activities, such as chanting the buddha's name and releasing lives, and ended up with nothing!

What does letting go mean? When you are truly enlightened, it is called letting go. But this does not mean that you should not do these things now. Thus, we say to those who think this way –“ultimately there is nothing to obtain, but to understand this, you must consult a good teacher.”

You must strive hard. You must not only request the teachings, but also strive hard.

What is striving hard? I believe everyone is familiar with the story of Master Hui Ke who severed his arm in front of Bodhidharma in his relentless pursuit of the Dharma. This is a testament to his determination. There are many components to striving hard, such as completing the four preliminaries, the five basic practices, etc. It is not just asking the teachers to transmit the teachings. If understood in this way, do we become enlightened after the teachings are transmitted? No, we do not. So, what should we do? We must stay diligent, not by asking for more teachings (this may help improve our knowledge but it does little for enlightenment) but by perfecting the basic practices ourselves. This is the true meaning of striving hard.

Since "there is nothing to obtain," why do we still need to work so hard at our practice? Isn't this attachment, and does it not contradict the Chan teaching of "letting go"? As mentioned before, this is a misinterpretation of Chan. It is very clear here that there is nothing to gain in the end, but if you cannot comprehend this point, you must rely on a good teacher and strive hard in the process.

To realize the true nature of things. "To realize" is to be enlightened. Only after striving hard in this way can your mind realize the nature of all dharmas.

Life and death are important. Do not live your life in vain. There is no benefit in self-deception.

Life and death are important. For every being, the biggest issue is life and death. In the face of life and death, other things are not worth mentioning at all. Whether you believe in Buddhism or not, and whether you believe in reincarnation or not, everyone will have to face death and rebirth. This is the natural law of life; it does not depend on human will.

Although there are many important things and events in life, such as cars, houses, savings, children's education, relationships, and marriage, these are not as important as the issue of life and death. Steve Jobs wrote in his autobiography that when he encountered difficult situations, he would think of the impermanence of life and not see them as problems any more. We can all believe a person like Steve Jobs endured great pressure in life, but in the face of death, these things were simply insignificant.

Do not live your life in vain. Do not come up empty-handed.

If we fail in all other aspects of life but have an opportunity to learn Buddhism, we should be very grateful. Because human birth endowed with freedom and advantages is rare, and this opportunity is very precious. Everyone must cherish it.

In Tibetan Buddhism, one of the four preliminaries that is specifically practiced is precious human body. However, this treatise does not discuss it in a substantial way. Bodhidharma only mentioned "do not live your life in vain," not the practice itself.

There is no benefit in self-deception. It is useless to deceive yourself.

Many people think that everything will be fine in the future, so they muddle along without making any preparations – this is a kind of blind confidence, called superstition. Who can be certain that the future will be good? It is useless to deceive yourself and others. You must face reality and take precautions to be prepared.

Even if you have mountains of jewels and as many family members as the grains of sand in the Ganges, you see them when you open your eyes, but do you still see them when you close your eyes?

Even if you have mountains of jewels and as many family members as the grains of sand in the Ganges. Even if you have gold, silver, and jewels piled up like a mountain, and as many family members around you as the grains of sand in the Ganges River, **you see them when you open your eyes,**

but do you still see them when you close your eyes? This means when death comes, do you still have anything to do with the things that people in this world particularly yearn for, like wealth, family, fame, and power? No, not at all.

What really matters then? Although we have changed our bodies and identities one after another in successive lifetimes, some things have always followed us: negative or evil deeds such as killing, stealing, adultery, and delusion; positive or good deeds such as listening, contemplating, and practicing the Dharma. These are closely related to us whether we open or close our eyes.

If you are blessed in this life, you might think that you are great and do not need to do anything – I am already very good now, why should I still learn Buddhism? Why should I go to the Western Paradise? If you have such thoughts, it means that you are very ignorant; this is called self-deception. Having a good day today does not mean it will be the same tomorrow; the future is even harder to predict. This is why “deceiving yourself is useless.”

You should know then that all compounded things are like a dream or illusion. If you do not find a teacher soon, you will live your life in vain.

You should know then that all compounded things. In Buddhism, all things that arise from causes and conditions are called "compounded phenomena." All compounded phenomena are unreliable. Whether it is wealth, family members, reputation, or status, these will all disappear when the causes and conditions are no longer present. For example, we

are healthy today, but who knows what will happen tomorrow or next month? We are living well now, but what about next month or next year? We have no control over our health and life, let alone other things outside of us!

Are like a dream or illusion. All compounded phenomena are like a dream or illusion. Just like dreaming about being promoted or getting rich, everything in the dream disappears as soon as you wake up. Therefore, if you really want to get rich, do not overly accumulate external wealth, but cultivate inner wealth. Relatively speaking, this is more reliable.

If you do not find a teacher soon, you will live your life in vain. If you do not rush to find a good teacher, you will miss all the opportunities and let this life go to waste.

Although we cannot ignore some things in work and life, in general, even if we ignore them, they will not lead to serious consequences. But if we overlook the significance of life and death, the consequences can be very serious!

There are two components to human life – the spiritual and the material. Our survival depends on material things; we would never deny the value of material things, but they cannot solve all our problems. In addition to material goods, people also need spiritual wealth. It would be naive, immature, and extremely foolish to think that material things can solve all our problems in life and that nothing else is needed.

When material needs are not met, we feel pain; when spiritual needs are not met, we feel even more pain. Surely, everyone has experienced the suffering of spiritual emptiness, impatience, and stress. Let us not live this life in vain.

Bodhidharma made it very clear here that although nothing can be achieved in ultimate reality, effort is still needed in conventional reality! Therefore, if we come across one or two Chan sayings like "letting go" and "non-attachment," we should not confuse the two truths as one thing, and falsely claim that releasing lives, chanting the buddha's name, and other good practices are all attachments which we should forego. In fact, this statement itself goes against the teachings of the Chan masters and is a huge misunderstanding. It is closely related to our actual practice, and must be clearly understood by everyone.

Although you have buddha nature, you will never know it without the help of a teacher. It is extremely rare for one to attain enlightenment without a teacher.

Although you have buddha nature, you will never know it without the help of a teacher. Although buddha nature already exists in everyone's mind, without the teaching and guidance of good teachers, we will never know that there is a buddha in our mind. Therefore, we must rely on good teachers.

Taking refuge is one of five preliminary practices. This is not unique to Tibetan Buddhism, as all Buddhist sages say this.

It is extremely rare for one to attain enlightenment without a teacher. Is there such a person who can achieve enlightenment on his own without the help of a guru? Basically, there is none; and if there is, it is probably no more than one or two out of ten thousand people. Even among eminent monks of all ages, such self-taught people are very rare, let alone ordinary people!

If a person attains realization of the buddha due to the

concomitance of karmic conditions, that person need not consult a teacher. He is born with an awareness that surpasses anything that can be taught.

If a person attains realization of the buddha due to the concomitance of karmic conditions. With an exemplary practice in the previous life and a ripening of causes and conditions in this life, a person can attain realization of the buddha, even without the help of a guru.

What are "karmic conditions"? It means listening, contemplating, and practicing the Dharma in a real and systematic way. If we are not sincere in our practice in this life, the necessary conditions will not conjoin in our next life. Therefore, it is extremely important to create these causes and conditions. Whether we can continue to practice in the next life depends on the practice we build in this life.

That person does not need to consult a teacher. This kind of person does not need a teacher.

He is born with an awareness. Such a person is already enlightened when he is born. He brings this realization with him from his previous life, rather than learning it in this life, so he is "born with an awareness."

How can a person be enlightened as soon as he is born? This comes from hearing, contemplating, and practicing the Dharma in the previous life. As mentioned before, when we are alive, we can see material things such as houses, cars, jewels, nice clothes, etc.; when we die, we do not see them anymore. But our current practice will accompany us in the next life, whether we are alive or dead. If the causes and conditions are

exemplary, and they converge in the future, we may be able to achieve enlightenment without a guru.

That surpasses anything that can be taught. This awareness is superior to what ordinary people can learn in this life. For this kind of self-taught person, the wisdom accumulated over lifetimes is far greater than that of the average person who has but a few decades in a lifetime to study.

But unless you are so blessed, you must study hard and obtain realization through the teachings.

But unless you are so blessed, you must study hard. If you do not recognize your buddha nature, you must practice honestly, one step at a time. You must study hard. You cannot choose to learn or not learn at whim.

And obtain realization through the teachings. Why should we study diligently? To attain enlightenment, ordinary people like us need to rely on good teachers to guide and educate us.

Whether it is Indian Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, or Chinese Buddhism, there are essentially two methods of enlightenment in Mahayana Buddhism:

One kind does not require learning at all. The conditions for enlightenment are present at birth – just like the trust fund babies who are born with a silver spoon in their mouths, the difference being this inner wealth does not come from one's parents, but from oneself in the previous life. Thus, by relying on a very simple method, even as simple as hearing a verse from a scripture, we can achieve enlightenment in this lifetime.

Master Hui Neng is a very typical example. He was illiterate and made a living by chopping firewood every day. Yet, it is precisely this uneducated and extremely ordinary person who, upon hearing the *Diamond Sutra*, experienced a feeling of incomparable shock and enlightenment. Others among highly educated intellectuals did not experience any feeling at all, no matter how many times they listened to it or whether it was recited by others or by themselves. Why are there such differences between people? The difference is in whether they were able to store any wisdom gained from their practice in the past.

The other kind does not have this innate awareness. Everything depends on one's own effort in this life, which can also lead step by step to enlightenment. Although we do not have wealthy parents in this life, the wealth created in this life can be inherited in the next life; we have the same opportunity in the future to be a trust fund baby! In other words, even a person of ordinary capacity can achieve enlightenment through hard study and devout practice!

All of us are familiar with the story of Milarepa who relied on his master and studied hard. Although we cannot do what the Venerable One did, we can at least engender one ten-thousandth, one thousandth, or one percent of his effort. Why? We are not "born with awareness," so we need to study diligently under the guidance of good teachers!

Bodhidharma spoke mostly about the ultimate state of realization, and very little about everyday effort. But in this treatise, he repeatedly exhorted followers to live a useful life and to seize the opportunities that come along! Since he placed

such emphasis on it, this is clearly a very important matter that we must keep in mind!

If a person understands the Dharma on his own, he naturally does not need to study with a teacher because he already knows. People who do not have this innate awareness and think they can obtain realization without study are deluded souls who cannot distinguish white from black. Falsely proclaiming the Buddha's edict, they deride the Buddha and subvert the Dharma.

If a person understands the Dharma on his own, he naturally does not need to study with a teacher because he already knows. He is enlightened on his own.

People who do not have this innate awareness and think they can obtain realization without study are deluded souls who cannot distinguish white from black. "Deluded souls" refer to ordinary people; here "white" refers to ultimate truth, and "black" refers to conventional truth. Ordinary people are different from individuals who have strong foundation and superior capacities in their previous lives. If ordinary people do not learn, they basically cannot tell the difference between ultimate truth and conventional truth.

Falsely proclaiming the Buddha's edict. "Buddha's edict" refers to the teachings of the Buddha. "Deluded people" are not enlightened and do not understand the true meaning of the teachings. They falsely claim they have already attained enlightenment and are proficient in the Dharma; spreading nonsense, they deceive themselves and others.

They deride the Buddha and subvert the Dharma. The result is to slander and misinterpret the Dharma.

Therefore, if you have not learned it well and have not attained enlightenment, do not speak nonsense.

They preach as if they were bringing rain; theirs are the words of demons, not of buddhas. The teacher is the demon king, and the disciples are his entourage; deluded people who follow their command descend into the sea of life and death without realizing it.

They preach as if they were bringing rain. People who speak nonsense like this propagate the Dharma as freely as rainfall, but the content of what they say is wrong. For example, the Buddhist scriptures say that the nature of mind is the buddha and afflictions are wisdom. But these people say, "although the Buddha said that the nature of mind is the buddha, this is impossible," or "afflictions cannot be wisdom, I know this is not the original intention of the Buddha, the Buddha had other meanings."

There are people like that in the history of Buddhism who extrapolated the most profound concepts of the Buddhist scriptures in their own way, then misled others by giving them the wrong explanation.

Theirs are the words of demons, not of buddhas. No matter how pleasant the words are to the ear, they are a complete misunderstanding of the Buddhist scriptures; they are all the words of demons, not the teachings of Buddhism.

Do not misunderstand "demons" as devils. All actions, words, and matter that create obstacles to liberation and to our practice are called demons.

The teacher is the demon king, and the disciples are

his entourage. The "good teacher" in this case is the demon king, and the disciples his entourage.

Deluded people who follow their command descend into the sea of life and death without realizing it. A wise person will not follow such an evil master, but an unwise person will find himself under his control. These people who do not know the consequences of their action sink into the misery of rebirth without realizing it. Just like some people who believe in supernatural powers, these followers are numerous and very stubborn. Even if the Buddha himself told them that this was wrong, they would not be able to make the correction right away.

But people who do not see their nature falsely claim to be buddhas; they are great transgressors who deceive sentient beings into entering the realm of demons.

But people who do not see their nature falsely claim to be buddhas. These people who have not attained enlightenment falsely claim to be buddhas.

They are great transgressors. People like that are great sinners. Why? Because they deliberately misinterpret the Dharma, and in particular change the most profound essence of Buddhism into their own set of rhetoric. This is called discrediting the dharmakaya of the buddha—such a transgression is inconceivable.

Other transgressions such as destroying a temple, a clay buddha statue, or a sutra are also severe, but these have little to do with the dharmakaya, so they are not as serious as the former.

Who deceive sentient beings into entering the realm of demons. They deceive all sentient beings and lead them into the world of demons.

Unless they see their nature, their preaching of the twelve divisions of the scriptures is nothing more than the words of demons; the followers of demons are not disciples of Buddhism. If they cannot distinguish white from black, how can they avert life and death?

Unless they see their nature, their preaching of the twelve divisions of the scriptures is nothing more than the words of demons. If they are not enlightened and deliberately misinterpret the most profound content of the sutras, then no matter how well they do or speak on the surface, a grave mistake has already been made. They speak the words of demons.

The followers of demons are not disciples of Buddhism. The people who follow them are the entourage of demons, not disciples of Buddhism.

If they cannot distinguish white from black, how can they avert life and death? If they cannot even distinguish between the ultimate truth and the conventional truth, how can they escape from life and death?

It is thus essential to find a qualified teacher. If you follow the wrong person, the slightest mistake can lead to a huge error and you will never be able to look back! In the search for a guru, Tibetan Buddhism specifically mentions how to observe the guru before becoming a disciple. This is very important.

Not just in Tibetan Buddhism, Bodhidharma was also very clear on this point. He said a "good teacher" like that is

the Devil, the followers are his entourage, they are all demons! Such harsh words are enough to show that the consequences are extremely serious.

In short, if you cannot achieve enlightenment by yourself, you must rely on a good teacher, but you must carefully observe this teacher. You cannot be a follower casually, otherwise the consequences will be extremely serious. Tantra has very strict requirements in terms of the standards of the guru and the conduct of disciples. Although there are few words in this text, the content is completely consistent with the outer and inner preliminaries, except that the latter elaborates more fully on the topic.

2. To see the buddha, you must see your nature, do not fall into "blank emptiness"

If you see your nature, you are a buddha; if you do not see your nature, you are a mortal.

If the true nature of mind is realized, all living beings become buddhas; if it cannot be realized, they still appear as living beings, even though they are buddhas in essence. Simply put, the enlightened is the buddha, and the deluded is the living being. The difference between living beings and the buddha lies in this and nothing else.

For those who are not yet enlightened, concepts such as "seeing one's nature is the buddha" and "afflictions are bodhi" are too profound, and sometimes difficult to believe and accept; but for those who have some realization, they are quite natural. As previously mentioned, in the moment we become

enlightened, we can roughly understand what the state of the buddha is like, what the state of clarity that is mentioned in the sutras really means, how the buddha spontaneously undertakes the deliverance of sentient beings, and so on. When we are still at the intellectual stage of listening and contemplating the Dharma, it is indeed difficult to apprehend what these statements truly mean.

This is not the case with emptiness, which is relatively easy to understand. The Buddha said that all things are like an illusion, like a dream. This can be established through the methods of reasoning in Madhyamaka. But buddha nature is a little different. It is not only emptiness, but also clarity or luminosity. What exactly is clarity? Unless you have some level of realization, clarity is just clarity, no matter how many words you use to explain it. To fully understand its meaning, you must attain enlightenment; only then will it become clear.

We have heard the word "enlightenment" countless times. Specifically, enlightenment is understanding the nature of one's own mind directly. What does "directly" mean? First, it is not to infer through logic, let alone speculate; second, it is not to listen to others, but to experience it ourselves. If you believe the nature of mind is emptiness and clarity solely because the Buddha, Nagarjuna, Bodhidharma, or your root guru said so, this is not enlightenment. Although that is indeed what they said, the ultimate confirmation must come from yourself. If you lack personal experience and rely entirely on the words of the Buddha and your teacher, you are still left with nothing in the end. Regardless of how well the ideas are conveyed or how deep and broad the understanding is, in fact it remains at the level of words and does not qualify as enlightenment.

In Chan Buddhism, there is also a saying: "A person drinking water knows whether it is cold or warm." If you take a sip of water and know its temperature, do you still need to prove it is cold or warm? No, it is not necessary. Do you still need to say "Why is this water warm? Because so-and-so said it is warm water"? No, it is not necessary, because you have already experienced it. This experience is called enlightenment.

To understand this, let us examine the spiritual and material aspects of a human being. The material side is mainly composed of thousands of cells. Do we know which cell among these is "I"? No cell can possibly be "I." We cannot find a so-called "self" that exists in any of these cells. This is explained very clearly in Buddhism.

What about the spiritual side? Although we have many emotions every day, emotions are only the surface phenomena of the mind, not its essence. For example, a table that we can see with our eyes and touch with our hands is merely its surface, not its true nature (essence). Likewise, the emotions we feel, such as happiness at one moment and sadness at another, are not their true nature. We need to get past the layers of emotion to the deepest level to see its essence. When we discover or feel this essence very clearly, it is called enlightenment.

Therefore, when we feel intense anger, we can pause and look at the nature of this anger. What exactly is anger? All our lives, we have never seriously reflected on this question, nor have we felt there is a need to think about it. However, it is imperative to do so now. Once we understand it and see its essence, this anger transforms into the wisdom of the buddha.

Although the word "transformation" is used, it is in fact

not accurate, because the essence of anger is basically the wisdom of the buddha. It is just that in the past we only saw its appearance and never understood its essence. Once we realize there is more to anger than meets the eye, we penetrate the surface and proceed to see its true face.

Buddhist scriptures often talk about "eliminating defilements" or "transforming defilements" for ease of understanding. If more precise and direct terminology were used initially, it would confuse people, so words such as "change" and "transformation" were used instead. In fact, it is neither transformation nor elimination of defilements but seeing their true nature.

When we see the nature of anger, we realize that its essence is very different from its appearance. On the surface, anger can cause us a lot of pain, even to the point of cursing, hitting, and killing others. However, once we see its true nature, the negative power of anger immediately disappears and another kind of power takes over.

What is the other force? It is a very positive force. Tantra makes it very clear that certain functions of the consciousness are always at work, whether as a person or a buddha. However, how these functions are applied – whether to harmful or beneficial ends – depends on the individual's state of mind. Before enlightenment or any realization, we create karma because of it; after enlightenment, we use it to benefit sentient beings.

Take desire, for example. As ordinary beings, we suffer when our desires cannot be satisfied; to fulfil our selfish desires,

we deceive, steal, and so forth. After desire is transformed and purified, its essence is in fact a power of acceptance and accommodation. Without this function, the buddha cannot embrace and save sentient beings. As ordinary people, we accept only those people and things that we like. When we become a buddha, this same function is used to accept and free all sentient beings.

Similarly, when we are ordinary people, arrogance, jealousy, and other feelings of rejection or exclusion are negative. After becoming a buddha, the buddha's wisdom also has the power to exclude; it is a power to automatically eradicate the afflictions that harm and do not benefit sentient beings.

In short, the five mental functions are always present whether it is now and after becoming a buddha. In ordinary beings, they are called the five poisons; in buddhas, they are called the five wisdoms. This transformation is a process of continuous dedication and effort. In Buddhism, it is called practice. In a word, if you are enlightened, all problems are resolved; if you are confused, all problems arise. Hence, this treatise repeatedly emphasizes the principle "seeing one's nature is the buddha." Once you see your nature, nothing more is needed.

These principles are explicated brilliantly. Although the content is somewhat repetitive, important things need to be repeated. This is intentional. If they are said over and over, everyone will remember them. However, since this discussion focuses exclusively on this from beginning to end, there is no need to explain every line the same way. Tantric teachings like Dzogchen or the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* also espouse the same

content, but the depth and level of detail are to some extent different. You will know it when you study these in the future.

If you can obtain your buddha nature outside your mortal nature, where is it?

If sentient beings leave behind the true nature of their mind, there will be no buddha nature to be obtained. If we always think that the buddha is outside, that there is an external buddha, then where is it?

Many people will say that there is Amitabha Buddha in the Western Paradise, and there are many different buddhas in other lands, and so on. But we can be certain Bodhidharma would tell us that these are images of the buddha, not the real buddha. The difference between the two is like a real person and a photo of him. Are not Amitabha Buddha and Sakyamuni Buddha just like human beings in having an appearance? The *Diamond Sutra* makes it very clear that anything we can see and express in words is not the real buddha.

If Amitabha and Sakyamuni Buddha are not buddhas, then what is a buddha? The dharmakaya is the real buddha. Where is the dharmakaya? If you are looking for a dharmakaya's pure land outside, you will not find it, because the dharmakaya is in your mind, and the nature of your mind is the buddha.

To elucidate this principle, Bodhidharma asked repeatedly, "If you think the buddha is outside, where is the buddha"?

Our mortal nature is our buddha nature. There is no buddha outside of this nature, the buddha is our nature. Apart from this nature there is no buddha, and apart from the buddha there is no nature.

Our mortal nature is our buddha nature. The nature of all living beings is buddha nature.

There is no buddha outside of this nature, the buddha is our nature. Buddha nature is also the nature of our mind.

Apart from this nature there is no buddha, and apart from the buddha there is no nature. The logic is the same.

Question: If I do not see my nature, can I still attain enlightenment by invoking the buddhas, reciting sutras, making offerings, observing precepts, practicing diligence, and doing good deeds? Answer: No.

What follows is a Q&A.

Question: If I do not see my nature, can I still attain enlightenment by invoking the buddhas, reciting sutras, making offerings, observing precepts, practicing diligence, and doing good deeds? If you cannot see the nature of mind, can you still become a buddha by practicing good deeds such as working as a volunteer, building roads and bridges, etc.?
Answer: No. You cannot.

Why not? Answer: If there is anything to be attained, it is conditioned dharma, it is cause and effect, it is retribution, it is samsara. So long as you are subject to birth and death, you will never attain enlightenment.

Why not? Why can't we achieve buddhahood?

Answer: If there is anything to be attained, it is conditioned dharma. The word "dharma" refers to all things; "attain" refers to the attachment in our mind to things. For instance, if there is a thought of upholding the precepts, this

thought is an attachment, a delusion. It means that even if you are attached to something as small as a mote of dust, it is not the buddha. Why? Because delusional thoughts and their objects are all conditioned dharma; there is none in the dharmakaya.

Regarding conditioned and unconditioned dharma, Buddhism explains it this way: things created by causes and conditions are conditioned dharma; things that cannot be created by causes and conditions are unconditioned dharma. An object of attachment arises from causes and conditions, it is cause and effect; everything in the category of cause and effect belongs to conditioned dharma. Things that are conditioned are all illusory, unreal, and impermanent; they are all unreliable, hence they are not the buddha.

There is nothing in the buddha, above or below, within or outside, that is conditioned dharma. The opposite is true for an ordinary person; from head to toe, from inside to outside, everything is conditioned. Why? Because every emotion we have and every cell in our body arises from causes and conditions.

The buddha is not a product of causes and conditions, but an eternally existing nature. The buddha mentioned here is the dharmakaya; of course, the dharmakaya is without form – there is no so-called head or feet, inside or outside; this is said only to facilitate our understanding. If we think that Sakyamuni Buddha is the buddha, then from the standpoint of ordinary people, isn't he just an enlightened person? As a human being, he is certainly classified as conditioned dharma.

Consequently, in all schools of Buddhism from Hinayana

on, it is wisdom, that is, the state of the buddha or the state of enlightenment, that one takes refuge in, not the body of Sakyamuni Buddha. Because the body of Sakyamuni Buddha is also an ordinary body produced by a father and mother – it itself is unreliable. Except for great compassion and great wisdom, we do not take refuge in any other worldly matter.

It is cause and effect, it is retribution, it is samsara. If there is cause and effect, there must be retribution, this is the law of samsara. But how can the buddha be subject to the law of samsara?

So long as you are subject to life and death, you will never attain enlightenment. If we cannot escape the suffering of life and death, when will we achieve buddhahood?

At all times, the buddha that Bodhidharma talks about is the dharmakaya of the buddha. The dharmakaya does not have causes and conditions. Therefore, anyone with attachment is not a buddha.

To become a buddha, you must see your nature. Unless you see your nature, you are an outsider espousing cause and effect, etc. The buddhas do not practice teachings given by outsiders.

To become a buddha, you must see your nature. To become a buddha, you must attain enlightenment, understand your mind, and see your nature.

Unless you see your nature, you are an outsider espousing cause and effect, etc. If you cannot realize your mind and see your nature, all that you say about the suffering of samsara, the impermanence of life, good begets good, evil

begets evil, and so forth are heretical.

Are you saying this is not Buddhism? No, we are not saying that. What is “outside” and “inside” is relative, there is no absolute boundary. We usually think that anyone who takes refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha is a Buddhist, and anything else is a heretic. But here we are not making this kind of distinction. When Bodhidharma talks about what is inside, it is the highest state of Chan. People in this state of realization are the insiders; people who do not understand this state are outsiders. On that basis, Hinayana Buddhism is also on the outside, as is most of Mahayana Buddhism, except for some scriptures that expound on buddha nature.

The buddhas do not practice teachings given by outsiders. The buddhas do not practice the words of outsiders! How could they possibly!

A buddha is free of karma, free of cause and effect. But to say he has anything to attain is to slander the buddha. What can possibly be attained?

A buddha is free of karma, free of cause and effect. The buddha has neither karma nor good or evil retributions.

The manifestation of the nirmanakaya of a buddha is certainly due to cause and effect. The cause is the learning and practicing of the Dharma in the past, the result is its subsequent attainment. For example, the thirty-two signs and eighty attributes of the buddha each has its own cause; the nirmanakaya inside and outside is replete with the workings of karma. Of course, this is also a conventional saying. The dharmakaya is different; it is free of cause and effect.

But to say he has anything to attain is to slander the buddha. The word "but" here should be understood as "so long as." It means that so long as there is a thing or object of attachment, such as thinking that the buddha has cause and effect, this is slandering the buddha. Why? Because the buddha is free of cause and effect. If it is said that the buddha is a product of causes and conditions, in effect it also denotes the buddha is illusory and transitional – this is denigrating the buddha!

Of course, from the perspective of the nirmanakaya, the question of slandering the buddha does not exist. Sakyamuni Buddha came into this world and eventually passed away; this is impermanence. The slandering of the buddha here refers specifically to the dharmakaya rather than the nirmanakaya. The two should be treated separately.

What can possibly be attained? If we slander the buddha this way, what can possibly be achieved?

Even clinging to a mind, a power, an understanding, and a view, the buddha does not allow.

Even clinging to a mind, a power, an understanding, and a view. What are these things we are attached to? Firstly, what is “a mind”? If we are attached to a certain mind, for instance, bodhicitta or renunciation, and think the buddha also has such a mind, this is attachment to “a mind.” If we think the buddha has the power to deliver sentient beings from suffering and believe this power exists, this is attachment to “a power.” There are two ways to interpret “an understanding”: one is liberation, as for example, the buddha is already liberated; the other is understanding, that is, the buddha’s understanding and

cognition of this world. If we are attached to seeing the nature or essence of mind as enlightenment, this is attachment to “a view.”

So long as we have some attachment to "a mind, a power, an understanding, and a view," for example, we think that the buddha has a mind, a view, and a power that we can express in words, or believe that the buddha has a mind, a view, and a power that we can cling to, these are all wrong. The dharmakaya does not have any of these. They are all mistaken conceptualizations.

The buddha does not allow. These are not allowed. Why is that? Because they are all our attachments. We think that the buddha has a mind, power, understanding, and view, but in fact the buddha is far removed from all these. Although only four attributes are mentioned here, it is not just these four. Any attachment that we may have to the dharmakaya is inconsistent with reality.

The dharmakaya is indeed an inconceivable state. As mentioned before, if we achieve enlightenment one day, we can roughly understand what the dharmakaya of the buddha is like! But before that, there is basically no way to describe its essence. Therefore, whether it is a mind, power, understanding, or view, they are all attachments that do not align with the truth.

A buddha neither upholds nor violates the precepts, his mind is essentially empty, it is neither pure nor impure.

A buddha neither upholds nor violates the precepts. A buddha will not keep or break the precepts.

His mind is essentially empty. The nature of his mind is basically empty.

Everyone should note that these texts by Bodhidharma, as well as the *Platform Sutra* and many scriptures in the third turning of the wheel of Dharma, mainly discuss buddha nature and clarity, while seldom addressing emptiness. Why is this? Because the Buddha expounded on emptiness extensively when he turned the wheel of Dharma the second time. Just like after finishing primary school, you enter middle school and study its curriculum without revisiting primary school material. Similarly, during the third turning, the teachings of the second turning were not reiterated – not as a denial but because they were already well covered. This progression can be discerned in these scriptures.

Here we only talk about this one principle "the nature of mind is basically empty," but it is very important. If we regard buddha nature as a real, tangible entity that is not empty but truly existent, it would be completely indistinguishable from the teachings of Brahmanism in India, except that the wording is sometimes different.

In the time of the Buddha, there were many different religions in India, with numerous and diverse views. Some of these religions were very similar to Buddhism, but the most crucial difference was that they all believed there is ultimately a true "self." This "self" is the essence of all things in the universe; the word "inconceivable" is also used to describe it. Many of the views of various religions in India today are very different from those in the time of the Buddha. For example, in Hinduism, which still exists today, the "self" is taught to be

the secular self. Nevertheless, followers still hold on to the belief that the "self" is real and not empty; moreover, they cling to this "self." Because they have not severed this attachment, Buddhism believes that they cannot achieve liberation.

Buddhism completely breaks down this "self." Buddhism believes that there is no such "self" at all, and that everything is empty. This is where they are different. Therefore, although words such as buddha nature, tathagatagarbha, and clarity sound glorious, if you have an attachment to this in your mind, you become what Bodhidharma called a heretic!

"The nature of mind is basically empty." The nature of mind is buddha nature, the dharmakaya; the dharmakaya is also empty. Does the dharmakaya exist or not? In our everyday language, this is all duality: if it exists, it cannot possibly not exist; if it does not exist, it cannot possibly exist. Only by transcending this duality and fundamentally overturning the concepts of yes and no, and right and wrong, can we see the dharmakaya. It is difficult to express in words now, but we will know it when we enter its original state through practice.

In the initial stage of realization, such as when enlightenment has just been achieved, the state of enlightenment is relatively vague. Although it is vague, we can essentially experience what buddha nature is like! At that time, words will no longer be needed, as we can completely understand and accept it. But for now, without the slightest idea what it is, we can only rely on these words.

Although Buddhism uses the term "inconceivable" to describe this state, it does not posit the existence of a so-

called "inconceivable" thing. If it does not exist, why say it is inconceivable? This is to counter people's obsession with "conceivable." However, if you are now attached to the word "inconceivable," I will immediately deny it and say that the word "inconceivable" does not exist. So, what is it really? You would need to truly experience it yourself.

These very profound concepts are indeed difficult to express in everyday language. It is hard enough to define the deepest structure of matter, such as certain discoveries in quantum mechanics, let alone the state of the buddha. So, do not think that things cannot exist if they are inexpressible. Under what circumstances and to what end was the human language created? If you think about it, you will know its scope of application.

Simply put, the dharmakaya is a union of emptiness and clarity. Of course, it is not really a composite, but described this way to facilitate our understanding. It would be unrealistic to say nothing. Expressed in words, the dharmakaya is a union of emptiness and clarity, so it is both emptiness and clarity. If it is both, isn't that a contradiction? No, it is not. Consider the concept of "wave-particle duality" in physics: the smallest structure of matter is a granular substance, called a particle, that also spreads across space in the form of a wave, which is not matter at all. To say it is both a wave and particle may seem contradictory, but in fact it is not. There are many such things in the world.

Everyone must remember such sayings as "the nature of mind is basically empty." We should always bear in mind the words of Master Hui Neng – "originally there is nothing."

When combined with "buddha nature is inherently pure" in the Dunhuang version of the *Platform Sutra*, this is a perfect dharmakaya, called Dzogchen or "Great Perfection." Why is it called "great"? As explained before, the term "great" in Dzogchen and Mahamudra does not mean that they are bigger and others are smaller. All duality is within the scope of human thinking. For example, perfection is produced relative to imperfection, and its opposite is imperfection and defects, so it is also a product of cause and effect. To transcend duality, we add the word "great" in front of it. However, if we are always obsessed with words, adding the word "great" is not the solution to the problem – what is great and not great are relative, it is still duality.

In that case, however many times the word "great" is added, the problem still exists.

Here, "the nature of mind is basically empty" is none other than "originally there is nothing," which Hui Neng expounded; "nothing can be obtained" mentioned earlier also has the same meaning. Therefore, the teachings of the Buddha in the third turning of the wheel of Dharma are not inconsistent with the teachings in the second turning. We must know that the nature of mind is also emptiness.

It is neither pure nor impure. If "pure" means no contamination, no afflictions, then "impure" would mean there is contamination. This is how we all think: if it is not clean, it is unclean; if it is not unclean, it is clean. Opposing elements cannot have a third party. This is a basic concept in logical reasoning: there is no third party in any contradiction or duality.

For example, left and right are either left or right, just like the left hand and right hand, there is nothing in between. Some people would say, is there not a body in the middle? The body can also be divided into left and right, in the end only a very small particle is left in the middle; this particle can further be divided into left and right, one half belonging to the right and the other half belonging to the left. Our usual way of thinking is like this: if it is not right, it must be left; if it is not up, it must be down. However, when all duality is transcended, logic no longer applies. The nature of our mind is not pure or impure in the conventional sense; it is a state said to be "neither pure nor impure."

Ordinarily, we say that the nature of mind is pure. Master Hui Neng also stated that "buddha nature is inherently pure." So why do we say here that it is not pure? Are Hui Neng and Bodhidharma in contradiction? No. Here pure and impure are relative and dualistic, just like left and right. Hui Neng's "buddha nature is inherently pure" refers to a transcendent state beyond worldly notions of purity and impurity. Since there are no mundane afflictions in this state, the word "purity" is temporarily used to help us understand it. This purity is not the duality of purity and impurity, it is just that the word "great" is not added in front of it. By understanding this distinction, all Buddhist scriptures can be understood clearly without contradiction.

There is nothing to cultivate and nothing to realize, no cause and effect. A buddha does not observe precepts, a buddha does not do good or evil, a buddha is not diligent or lazy, a buddha is one who does nothing.

There is nothing to cultivate and nothing to realize, no cause and effect. All things are inherently pure, so what can be cultivated or realized? In other words, the dharmakaya is basically enlightened and wise, so there is no need to practice or realize anything.

A buddha does not observe precepts, a buddha does not do good or evil. The precepts, good, and evil here must be understood as secular concepts, and this buddha must be understood as the dharmakaya. It is impossible for the dharmakaya of the buddha to observe precepts, since the disparity between the dharmakaya and upholding or breaking the precepts in the secular world is huge.

A buddha is not diligent or lazy, a buddha is one who does nothing. There is nothing for the buddha to do now.

But if you cling to the thought of seeing the buddha, it is not allowed. The buddha is not a buddha, so do not try to interpret it as a buddha. If you do not understand this, you will never know your fundamental innate mind.

But if you cling to the thought of seeing the buddha, it is not allowed. So long as there is attachment, it is impossible to see the buddha.

The buddha is not attached to anything, such as purity or impurity. The buddha and emptiness are one and the same. All things that we think about are attachments; for example, we think that the buddha is pure, so we become attached to purity. To cut through these attachments, we can only pronounce that the buddha is not anything. This is a very common and important saying in Buddhist scriptures.

The buddha is not a buddha. How should we understand this? Not only can we not label the buddha, thinking that the buddha is pure, untainted, etc., we cannot even label him "buddha" because all labels are wrong; they are all created by our consciousness. When you achieve enlightenment, you will know what the buddha is. Before you achieve enlightenment, you must not even cling to the word "buddha."

Do not try to interpret it as a buddha. "Interpretation" means cognition. Our current understanding of the buddha is also wrong. The buddha in our mind is in fact our own concept and attachment. However, by correcting this misunderstanding and then practicing step by step, we will eventually be able to see the real buddha.

If you do not understand this, you will never know your fundamental innate mind. If we do not understand this, we will not be able to understand the nature of our own mind at any time or place.

People who do not see their nature and imitate the buddha by practicing thoughtlessness and inaction all the time are transgressors and fools that fall into blank emptiness; they are as dazed as drunks, and they cannot tell good from evil. If you practice not doing anything, you must first see your nature, then abandon all conceptualizations. Unless you see your nature, attaining buddhahood is impossible.

People who do not see their nature. What will happen if we do not see our nature?

And imitate the buddha by practicing thoughtlessness and inaction all the time. The phrase "thoughtlessness and

inaction" is a very important one and must be remembered. In particular, the word "inaction" frequently appears in Chan, Dzogchen, and Mahamudra. In Tibetan Buddhism, how to understand "inaction" is disputed. It is essential that we know its true meaning.

"Imitate" means to copy. As mentioned before, the buddha has no karma, he does nothing. If we want to learn from the buddha and be a person who does nothing, of course that is not a problem, but there must be a process. If we do nothing now, we are **transgressors and fools**.

Why is that? Because as mentioned before, "If we do not see our nature," that is, if we are not yet enlightened, we are transgressors and fools to follow the example of the buddha by doing nothing. This is not to infer we should always be doing something. After enlightenment, we can do nothing, but before enlightenment, what is the consequence of inaction? The result is to **fall into blank emptiness**. This state of mind is mentioned repeatedly in the *Platform Sutra*, and can be interpreted as "not thinking about anything at all" – a saying in the text which means being thoughtless, letting go of all thoughts, and having a very peaceful mind.

In blank "emptiness" and in "emptiness" being the nature of mind, the same word is used but its meaning is entirely different. Emptiness being the nature of mind means that the mind's nature is empty like space. Blank emptiness refers to the often-heard expression "the brain is a blank," as when answering a superior's question or taking an exam, the mind suddenly goes blank and cannot think of anything. The former is the state of an enlightened person, that is, the dharmakaya of the buddha;

the dharmakaya is indeed virtuous, but it is not virtuous in the usual sense of good and evil, but virtuous in a very special way. The latter is likened to a short-circuited brain, unable to remember anything; in this state, there is no thought of good or evil.

What is it like to descend into blank emptiness? It means we are **as dazed as drunks and cannot tell good from evil**. Our mind is groggy like a drunken person, and we cannot tell what is good and what is bad. This is particularly important. There is a lot of analysis and research on this in Dzogchen and Mahamudra in Tibetan Buddhism; there are also many related written records which clearly analyze this state of mind.

More than a thousand years ago, despite the great inconvenience in transportation, there were in-depth exchanges between Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism. At that time, a Chan master named Moheyan went to Tibet to propagate Chan ideas. The view he spread was close to blank emptiness – just do nothing. Under his influence, even the water and flower offerings to the buddha statue at Samye Temple, the first monastery of Tibetan Buddhism, were discontinued. This was a very controversial issue, which only came to a resolution when Kamalasila was specially invited from India to preside over the debate.

In fact, the true intent of Chan Buddhism is not this. Perhaps Moheyan did not fully grasp the words of Bodhidharma and Hui Neng; or perhaps he was the perfect example of an enlightened Chan master, except his mode of expression during the dissemination process was questionable. We cannot judge his state of realization; masters of Tibetan Buddhism also have

different evaluations of Moheyan. In any case, this incident did happen in history. Chan practitioners must pay attention to this kind of emptiness.

There are three types of blank emptiness: the first is the blank emptiness of view; the second is the blank emptiness of practice; the third is the blank emptiness of behavior. In the *Platform Sutra*, most of the criticism is directed at the blank emptiness of practice; the *Bloodstream Treatise* talks about the blank emptiness of behavior and view; Mipham Rinpoche also has a special commentary on this topic in *Beacon of Certainty*.

First, what is blank emptiness in terms of view? The so-called view refers to our understanding of the truth or buddha nature, that is, our point of view. Some people think that after completely eradicating all defilements, nothing is left, the buddha no longer exists. But if there is nothing at all, how did Shakyamuni Buddha save sentient beings? They believe that the power of his aspirations before becoming a buddha really made a difference and were brought into full play. Although everything comes to an end after becoming a buddha and there is nothing left, the buddha's ability to save sentient beings is not interrupted. Because the Buddha perfected all his merits and virtues during his past practice, the activities of freeing sentient beings continue spontaneously. Even though he is gone, these activities still exist. To say there is no buddha is the blank emptiness of view.

This view is incorrect. It is merely the understanding of some individuals in Mahayana Buddhism. Do not think that emptiness means nothing, this view completely conflicts with the teachings in the third turning of the wheel of Dharma;

buddha nature cannot be established this way, we must not enter this kind of emptiness. This is not only important for theoretical study but also for actual practice.

Second, what is blank emptiness during practice? It is just doing nothing. From the standpoint of Buddhism, inaction is a neutral word that is not meant to be derogatory. However, if we interpret the word incorrectly, it conveys the wrong meaning.

There are two types of inaction. The first is when one has truly realized the nature of mind; in this state, nothing needs to be done, this is the correct form of inaction. The other is when one has not yet attained enlightenment; in meditation, we let go of all thoughts and do not cling to anything, thinking that all problems will be solved when the mind is calm – this kind of emptiness is the blank emptiness of practice, namely the saying mentioned in the *Platform Sutra*. We must avoid this path.

If not thinking about anything while meditating is "inaction," what about not having thoughts when we are in a daze, in a coma, or in deep sleep, or even when animals are hibernating? Can all that be meditation? No. Not only is it not meditation, it is also very dangerous. If you indulge in such meditation, you may fall into the animal realm in your next life. If your blessings are relatively great, you can be reborn in the form and formless realms, but you still cannot transcend samsara. Why does this happen? Because this kind of meditation is likened to a daze; although there are no thoughts on the surface, in fact attachment is always there, but it is hidden in the meditation and does not appear as thoughts. If attachment is not eradicated, it is impossible to transcend cyclic existence. Therefore, we must be particularly careful about such

inaction and not confuse these two types of inaction.

The *Platform Sutra* and the *Bloodstream Treatise* are very well known in Chinese Buddhism and are recognized as classics around the world. So long as this version is correct, no one will disclaim it. Students of Mahayana Buddhism, especially those who study Chinese Buddhism, have even less reason to refute it. Of course, if you choose to deny it, you will need to provide evidence and logic to make your argument. Not believing or accepting, and denying are two different things.

So, why is a person who "practices thoughtlessness and inaction a transgressor and a fool"? Doing nothing is basically not a sin, the buddha indeed does nothing. However, if nothing has been realized, all attachments have not been resolved, and you do nothing at this time, you might as well invoke the buddhas, kowtow, or recite sutras. If you overlook even these opportunities and remain indifferent to everything, how are you different from an animal in hibernation? Animals hibernate for several months without attaining enlightenment. How can we achieve enlightenment if we practice two or three hours of blank emptiness every day? Not possible. What a waste of time! If you think this is what Buddhism means by emptiness, you are deceiving yourself and others. If you propagate this view, you are compounding the mistake; the consequences are even more serious. To mislead others and sever their path to wisdom, that is the real transgressor!

Can we ever accept not doing anything? As I have just said, "inaction" is a neutral word, which can be understood in both positive and negative ways. In many Buddhist scriptures, the word "inaction" often appears, so of course we can accept it.

So, when is it acceptable? What are the prerequisites?

If you practice not doing anything, you must first see your nature. If you want to practice not doing anything, the prerequisite is that you must attain enlightenment. After enlightenment, you can experience the emptiness of all things, and practice meditation in a state of emptiness. This kind of inaction is right, there is really nothing to do at this point. But when you have not yet attained enlightenment, you must not cling or become attached to this inaction.

Many of Lama Tsongkhapa's treatises have criticized the word "inaction." Why? Because some people who are not yet enlightened have read Buddhist scriptures that talk about "inaction" and think it means not thinking about anything. This is a misunderstanding which Tsongkhapa went to great extent to point out.

In Tibetan Buddhism, "inaction" is a very controversial word, but after much controversy and debate, a consensus was finally reached – the word "inaction" itself is fine, the key is how it is understood. If you think "inaction" in the Buddhist scriptures means letting go of all thoughts and thinking about nothing, this understanding is wrong. After enlightenment, you will find nothing truly exists, so naturally there is nothing to do; to abide in a state where nothing truly exists is the correct understanding of "inaction." This conclusion coincides with the view taken by Bodhidharma and Hui Neng.

Correctly grasping the meaning of "inaction" will not only help everyone understand Buddhist scriptures, but also benefit our actual practice. I have said many times before that when we meditate, we sometimes feel better and our mind becomes

very tranquil, which is seemingly consistent with the inaction and clarity described in the Buddhist scriptures. But in fact, this is not enlightenment at all, it is just a calm mind. This misunderstanding can be dangerous for those who have not given ample time to listening and reflecting, or have insufficient knowledge of Buddhism. If you fall into such misunderstanding, you will never achieve enlightenment, because you will always think this is enlightenment. No matter how others persuade you, you will feel they do not understand that your own state is enlightenment. Many such things have happened in the history of Buddhism, so everyone must develop the acuity to distinguish between inaction in true enlightenment and inaction in blank emptiness. This is particularly important.

In addition, although the text says "if you practice not doing anything," in reality, it is not a choice you can make; rather, it is a practice that you must undertake in the end. However, the prerequisite is to attain enlightenment. Only after enlightenment can you do nothing; prior to enlightenment, it is wrong and futile to do nothing.

Then abandon all conceptualizations. "Conceptualizations" refer to thoughts arising from causes and conditions, that is, all kinds of thoughts. After attaining enlightenment, you then try to calm these thoughts; when the thoughts subside, you can in the end reach the state of inaction. There must be such a process.

Unless you see your nature, attaining buddhahood is impossible. If you cannot attain enlightenment, it is impossible to become a buddha.

So, does it mean that we cannot practice not doing anything

before we are enlightened? No. You can also cultivate this practice when you are not yet enlightened; the inaction at this time is called calm abiding. Calm abiding is also a basic practice for enlightenment. It can temporarily be used as a step to reach the next level. If you remain in this state indefinitely, however, it becomes meaningless as you will end up "descending into blank emptiness, as dazed as a drunk." In other words, you can use it as a transition, but it would be a grave mistake to equate it with the ultimate state of emptiness and clarity mentioned in Buddhist scriptures. It is a distinction we must make. This is blank emptiness during practice.

Third, what is blank emptiness in terms of behavior? It is doing nothing; it is giving up on all such activities as offering alms to others, observing the precepts, cultivating patience, and so on. I once visited several Chan temples abroad and met a Chan master who said that he does not pay reverence to the buddhas himself, nor accept the notion of past and present lives; he only acknowledges the practice just mentioned of not thinking about anything, and believes all else is an attachment. Are we not supposed to let go of all attachments? Why are we bringing these attachments back again? Such a belief is extremely dangerous. Of course, it is only a problem for the very few, nor is it representative of other Chan masters. What follows is this kind of emptiness.

Some people refute the existence of cause and effect and commit bad karma without hesitation. They falsely claim that since everything is empty, committing evil is not wrong. These people will descend into the darkness of avici hell and never come out. A wise person should not hold such a view.

Some people refute the existence of cause and effect.

There are two types of people who deny the existence of cause and effect. First, atheists who believe that good and evil, cause and effect, do not exist, so they deny it; their view has nothing to do with emptiness. Second, people who misinterpret the true meaning of emptiness; since all dharmas are empty, how can good beget good, evil beget evil? Are not cause and effect also empty? If the buddhas do not observe precepts or do anything, should we not also follow in their footsteps by not doing anything? This refutation of cause and effect is a mistaken view.

Regarding this point, I have made it very clear before. Any sect that emphasizes the ultimate state, especially Dzogchen, Mahamudra, and Chan, will inevitably refute the existence of cause and effect, because there is no good or evil, cause and effect, etc. in the state of the buddha. However, the absence of cause and effect in the buddha's state does not mean that there is no cause and effect in our world; these are completely different things. Just as in a dream and in real life, the horrific scenes we see in our dream no longer exist when we wake up. Be that as it may, if we go back to the dream, the horrifying things still exist and affect us; the fear, desire, etc. we experience in the dream are no less than our real feelings in everyday life. Therefore, when describing dreams, one cannot say that these things do not exist. It is useless to deny everything in dreams from the perspective of real life, because these are two different worlds that need to be treated separately.

From the perspective of buddha nature or emptiness, cause and effect can be denied without hesitation. Because there is no good and evil in the state of the buddha, we can essentially deny cause and effect and boldly say that there is no cause and effect

at all when describing the state of the buddha. Some people believe that "cause and effect exist, but the essence of cause and effect does not exist." In fact, there is no need for this. If cause and effect does not exist, it means that its essence does not exist. For instance, when we describe and judge a dream from the standpoint of real life, we should completely deny everything in the dream; at this time, there is no need to say, "All phenomena in the dream exist, but their essence does not exist." We should say, "From the perspective of real life, everything in the dream does not exist; from the perspective of the dreamer, everything exists." To confuse the two would be problematic.

This is explained very clearly in Tantric Buddhism. Wherever your level of realization, when you return to real life, you must still respect the law of cause and effect, because these are two different worlds. Unenlightened people only have a theoretical understanding of the state of the buddha, but cannot experience it. When they completely enter that state one day, good and evil, cause and effect, etc. will truly cease to exist.

If you have not yet attained enlightenment, refuting cause and effect will lead to **committing bad karma without hesitation**, to killing, stealing, committing adultery, lying, and doing anything at will. Why? Did not the Buddha say there is no cause and effect? If so, I can do whatever I want.

They falsely claim that since everything is empty, committing evil is not wrong. To defend their actions, they will also quote scriptures to prove that they are right. Since everything is empty, what point is there in observing precepts, invoking the buddha, and doing good deeds? Of course there is no fault in doing evil, everything is empty!

These people will descend into the darkness of avici hell and never come out. If you commit evil in this way, you will certainly fall into the lower realms. There will be a time to escape, but it will be slow and extremely long, so it is said that there will never be a time to escape.

A wise person should not hold such a view. If you are a wise person, you should not have such an opinion. The word "view" appears here, even though this narrative is on behavior; it is indicative of the connection between our behavior and viewpoint, hence the three aspects of blank emptiness— view, practice, and behavior – should all be included.

Bodhidharma once said, “Do not live your life in vain, you must strive hard.” If all dharma is empty, why strive for it? This is to say although nothing in essence exists, everything at the conventional level exists, so you must strive hard.

The above points are extremely important whether it is practicing Dzogchen, Mahamudra, or Chan. Everyone must keep them in mind!

3. Buddha nature is always present but cannot be seen by a confused mind

Question: If our every action at any time is the fundamental innate mind, why do we not see it when we die? Answer: The fundamental innate mind is always present, but you just don't see it.

A disciple asked: If our every action at any time is the fundamental innate mind. Our actions refer to all our doings, including physical activities, mental activities, etc. undertaken

at any time in the past, present, and future. The fundamental innate mind here should be understood as the nature of mind, or buddha nature.

This is a question that a disciple asked his master: Since our buddha nature and luminous mind never leave us when we are walking, standing, sitting, and lying or eating, drinking, and playing, **why do we not see it when we die?** Why is it we still cannot see the true nature of our own mind?

There are many such metaphors in Buddhist scriptures. For example, if a lamp is placed in a pot, no light can be seen from the outside, but if the pot is smashed one day, the light will shine outward. Therefore, the questioner believed that since buddha nature is inside our own body and cannot be seen now, it will self-manifest when we die and the body disappears. We should be able to see it then! Why do we still not see it?

The master replied: The fundamental innate mind is always present, but you just don't see it. His master replied: In fact, your buddha nature is always present. If you do not see it, that does not imply it doesn't exist.

If the mind is present, why can't it be seen? Have you ever had a dream? Yes, I have. When you dream, is it you? Yes, it is me. Are your words, actions, and movements different from you? No, they are not.

The disciple further asked: If the mind is present, why can't it be seen? Since the luminous clarity and buddha nature of the mind is always present, why can't it be seen?

So, his master used a metaphor to answer this question.

The master said: Have you ever had a dream? Answer: Yes, I have.

The master asked: When you dream, is that you? The master asked: When you are lying in bed and dreaming, is the person in the dream you or someone else?

Answer: Yes, it is me. The disciple replied: Of course it is me. For example, when we play ball in a dream, although our real body is lying on the bed, we basically do not know this and think it is our body playing ball. The disciple also believed so, thus he answered "It's me."

He asked again: Are your words, actions, and movements different from you? The master asked again: When you speak, do things, and move in your dream, are these different from you? **Answer: No, they are not.**

This is from the dreamer's perspective. Of course, the self in the dream and the self in real life are not the same person. It is just that the person in the dream is never aware there is another body lying on the bed, and believes throughout that the body that is talking, doing, and moving in the dream is his own body, that the actions are his own actions.

If there is no difference, then this body is your dharmakaya, and this dharmakaya is your fundamental innate mind.

What does this sentence mean? Firstly, the master used the metaphor of dreams to let his disciple understand that buddha nature always exists, but we may not be aware of it; even if we do not know of its existence, it is not different from us, it is our innate mind. In other words, our buddha nature has never

left us, it is now the same as us, but we simply cannot see it ourselves. Just like when dreaming, although the real body is lying on the bed, the person in the dream does not know it.

This body lying on the bed is like buddha nature, and our various emotions and events in life are like the person in a dream. Although the person in the dream is never separate from the body lying on the bed, he does not know it in the dream. Similarly, although we all have buddha nature, in real life we do not recognize it. Therefore, just as the person in the dream is not different from the body lying on the bed, our current emotions as well as greed, anger, ignorance, and defilements are also not different from buddha nature.

If there is no difference, then this body is your dharmakaya. Since this body and the body in the dream are one, then this body is the dharmakaya. Which body does "this body" here refer to? The body in the dream cannot be the dharmakaya, so it must refer to the body lying on the bed.

However, the dharmakaya cannot be a physical body, so why is this body said to be the dharmakaya? It should be understood this way: although we have the dharmakaya in our minds, we cannot see it, just like we cannot feel the physical body lying on the bed when we are dreaming. This is a metaphorical way of saying that the physical body is the dharmakaya. If you understand it this way, it will make sense. Not only is there no contradiction in content, but the logic is also very clear.

This dharmakaya is your fundamental innate mind. This dharmakaya, which has been in existence all along, is your innate mind. Therefore, do not think that the dharmakaya and your innate mind are two unrelated things.

In sum, this dharmakaya has always been in our minds since time immemorial. It is none other than the nature of our mind, our buddha nature. Although the dharmakaya is no different from ourselves, we cannot see it, just like we cannot in the dream see the body lying on the bed. Why are we not able to see it? It is ignorance.

This mind since beginningless kalpas has never varied. It has never experienced birth and death, it neither arises nor ceases, neither increases nor decreases, it is neither pure nor impure, neither good nor evil, it neither comes nor goes.

This mind since beginningless great kalpas has never varied. "This mind" refers to buddha nature, the nature of mind and clarity. It appears not because we learn Buddhism; rather, it has been inseparable from us since beginningless time.

It has never experienced birth and death, it neither arises nor ceases. The nature of mind has never lived or died. It has no birth or death, it neither begins nor ends.

Neither increases nor decreases, it is neither pure nor impure. On the surface, all living beings in the six realms of rebirth are stained and afflicted; only after becoming a buddha, the mind is purified. But in fact, the essence of the mind is neither pure nor impure; it does not increase due to merit or decrease due to wrongdoing.

There is a metaphor in the Buddhist scriptures. Although the blue sky is always blue, we cannot see it from the ground up if there are clouds; after the clouds are dispersed by the wind, we can see the blue sky again. When the clouds gather and disperse, the blue sky disappears and appears accordingly. The

fact is the blue sky does not change at all; the changes are all at the cloud level. Likewise, increase and decrease, arising and ceasing, etc. all exist at the secular level; the essence of mind is none of these.

Neither good nor evil, it neither comes nor goes. It is often said that "people's hearts are inherently good," but at the deepest level, the true nature of mind is neither good nor evil. As mentioned before, all dualistic concepts of good and evil, increase and decrease, pure and impure, etc. are relative; where there is good there is evil, where there is a beginning there is an end – these concepts are created in our consciousness, not in the nature of mind. There is no coming or going anywhere.

Before enlightenment, we can only express this theoretically, but it cannot be clearly explained no matter what we do, so everyone must practice. Even if we do not attain a high level of realization after practice, so long as we have a slight understanding and awareness of the nature of mind, we can basically be sure the nature of mind is neither pure nor impure, neither arising nor ceasing! This answer does not come from books, nor from our teachers or spiritual friends, but is found deep within our own mind. It is the final and absolute answer!

Going forward, we will never waver. Why? Because we have experienced it ourselves. For instance, if we taste candy and it is sweet, we will not be swayed no matter how many people say it is not sweet. Such is the case also with enlightenment. Although a strong command of the theory can lead to very good insights, theory can falter at any time, while enlightenment will not. Therefore, everyone must achieve enlightenment. Only after enlightenment do we truly know.

So, what use is there in realizing the true nature of the mind? The benefits are substantial – liberation from the endless cycle of rebirth and, at the very least, freedom from all kinds of suffering in real life.

First, why does enlightenment bring us liberation? Just like when there are no lights in the house and everything is dark, the moment the lights are turned on, darkness will disappear. Similarly, when we enter the state of enlightenment, our mind will be like a lamp that is lit up because there is an absence of a self and worldly afflictions in that state; the differences between you, me, and others that were previously established in the darkness, as well as defilements such as greed, anger, ignorance, and pride have all been swept away.

In addition to achieving liberation, we can easily resolve all kinds of suffering in real life, such as stress, competition, unrequited love, divorce, bankruptcy, etc. A lot of pain that people experience in the modern world is mental. Although there are also external objective factors that exist, the suffering need not be so painful if we can change our mindset. For example, when confronted with the same situation, some people panic, some people are calm, and some people may be very happy – different people have different reactions depending on how they approach a situation. If you realize the nature of mind, at least many of the troubles and pain caused by trivial matters in life can be resolved immediately. Of course, without any realization, this will always be empty talk and will not be of much help.

However, even without enlightenment, these theories and concepts are still useful to us, because many problems in

life arise from our own mistaken concepts. Therefore, when something happens in the outside world, instead of sticking to the rules, we should try to look at it from a new perspective. The result may be completely different. For example, when we cannot get over a problem, the more we think about it, the more painful it becomes; once we change our thinking, the knot in the heart may untie, and the pressure may no longer exist.

In short, if we only want to pursue happiness, joy, tranquility, and freedom in real life, all of this can be attained after enlightenment; if our pursuit transcends these, we hope to be able to escape from the six realms in samsara and gain liberation, then help even more people escape from the cycle of life and death and attain fruition, these aspirations can also be realized after enlightenment.

Some people may think, if everyone is liberated and enlightened, what will happen to this society? Who is left to take up work? There is no need to worry like this. People with inner realization can still engage in all kinds of activities without affecting the normal progress of life and work at all. Among people engaged in various walks of life are also many incarnations of buddhas and bodhisattvas. Legitimate professions will not be disrupted because of this, but things like killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, delusion, and war in the world will decrease – since these people have all become enlightened. Therefore, realizing the nature of mind is of great significance to our lives and liberation. We must all strive for enlightenment.

The specific methods for attaining enlightenment are elucidated in a section in the *Platform Sutra*; they are also

explained very clearly and fully in Dzogchen and Mahamudra. These are methods we can all use. This is true wealth. We cannot bring our material possessions with us when we die, but this wealth can follow us life after life. This is significant.

In addition, I would like to remind everyone that whether it is the *Bloodstream Treatise*, the *Platform Sutra*, or other scriptures, all elucidate the methods of becoming a buddha. If we only learn the theory without mastering the methods, we will be at a loss when problems arise in our life. Such knowledge, whether it is Buddhism or worldly knowledge, is empty and flashy. Therefore, in the process of studying the Buddhist principles, we must reflect on how to apply them to practice and daily life, and how to use them to benefit not just ourselves but others when problems such as birth, old age, illness, and death arise. If we do not consider these practical issues and only concentrate on learning the theory, we will never finish learning it all; even if we do, it will have no practical significance. Hence, everyone must put effort into meditating and practicing. This is very important.

It is not right or wrong. It is not male or female. It appears not as a monk or layman, an elder or a novice, a sage or a mortal, a buddha or a sentient being. It neither cultivates nor seeks realization, is not touched by cause and effect, and has no strength or form.

It is not right or wrong. It is not male or female. The distinction between right and wrong, between male and female, does not exist.

It appears not as a monk or layman, an elder or a

novice. The concept of monastics, laity, old and young also does not exist.

Not a sage or a mortal. There is no difference between sages and ordinary people.

Not a buddha or a sentient being. On the level of the nature of mind, there is no distinction between buddha and sentient beings.

The significance of the buddha is realization and enlightenment. Ordinary people in the world go from ignorance to later comprehending the truth of all dharmas; from the secular standpoint, this is enlightenment. From the perspective of the nature of mind, there is no distinction between buddha and sentient beings, since there is no difference between enlightenment and non-enlightenment.

It neither cultivates nor seeks realization. The nature of the mind is always pure. There is nothing to cultivate and nothing to realize.

People may ask: sometimes it is said that one must make a firm resolution to attain realization, and sometimes it is said that there is no realization, no buddha, nothing. How does one reconcile this seeming contradiction?

A clear distinction needs to be made here. As far as the state of the buddha or the nature of all dharmas is concerned, there is indeed no buddha, sentient beings, good and evil, cause and effect, practice, and realization. But from the standpoint of ordinary people, all such phenomena exist; cause and effect, good and evil, cultivation, and realization are certainly an

integral part of the process whereby one gradually steps into the state of the buddha. Therefore, we must develop renunciation and bodhicitta and strive for realization. These two concepts – conventional truth and ultimate truth – are very important in Mahayana Buddhism, and must be clear to everyone.

It is not touched by cause and effect. As mentioned before, when talking about the state of the buddha, you can essentially deny cause and effect and boldly say "there is no cause and effect." There is no need to say "cause and effect exists, but the essence of cause and effect does not exist." Because cause and effect are a product of ignorance, it is no other than our illusion. The buddha has completely eradicated ignorance, so its product naturally does not exist either.

No strength. The body and physical strength do not exist.

No form. There is no appearance either.

The nature of mind is none of these. So, what is the nature of mind like?

It is just like space. You cannot possess or discard it. It cannot be hindered by mountains, rivers, or stone walls; it can come and go with ease; it can penetrate the mountain of five skandhas and cross the river of samsara. This dharmakaya cannot be bound by any karma.

It is just like space. The nature of mind is like space, there is nothing of substance that exists. This phrase is very important.

It has been explained in the *Bloodstream Treatise* and the

Platform Sutra what true enlightenment is. Whether it is using Dzogchen, Mahamudra, or Chan methods, the final goal is to experience the true nature of mind. What does it mean to truly experience? First, it cannot be obtained by logical reasoning or observation; second, it cannot be obtained by knowledge borrowed from books.

If someone asks, “Why is the nature of the mind empty like space?” We would say it is because the Buddha and Nagarjuna said so. This answer actually does not contain any opinions of our own. They are the view in Buddhist scriptures and Nagarjuna's works, which we are just repeating. The Buddhist scriptures were propagated by the Buddha. We have merely perused and looked over the Buddhist scriptures, this is not called enlightenment.

Although we can understand certain truths through logical reasoning, and claim to have something of our own, this is still an understanding at the intellectual level, not a personal experience. For example, we know what water is and what chemical components it is made of, but if we have never had water to drink ourselves, we would never know its true taste.

Let's say there are two people: one does not know the composition of water, but knows what water tastes like; the other does not know the taste of water, but through various methods, has a clear understanding of water molecules, atoms, and even more subtle things. What is the difference between the two? The person who does not know what water tastes like can only talk about it at the conceptual level; if you elaborate on emptiness and buddha nature the same way, this is not called enlightenment. The other person cannot say how water is

composed, but he knows what water tastes like – just like Master Hui Neng, who may not have been proficient in many Buddhist theories but understood the essence of the Buddhist scriptures, this is called enlightenment.

If one day, like drinking water personally, we experience the nature of mind to be empty "like space," this is none other than enlightenment. Although easy to say, it is not simple to do. If it were, we would all be enlightened. On the other hand, it is not that difficult either, since it is not something mysterious or complicated. If asked to believe in or comprehend something that cannot be seen or heard at all, we naturally cannot do so. But here we are talking about our own mind, it is precisely what it is. As soon as we see that the nature of mind is likened to space, we need not confirm this with anyone. We can be certain that we have attained enlightenment, at least preliminary enlightenment.

Of what use is preliminary enlightenment? At this stage, many of our original concepts will change. We will no longer cling to things; our lives will be less stressful. Concurrently, we will not be governed by excessive emotional fluctuations, fears, and other afflictions. However, we need to advance along the path to be able to attain liberation. If we continue to practice on this basis, we will thoroughly understand birth, aging, illness, and death, even without any fear, and become more compassionate at the same time. Compassion is not necessarily related to attachment, but afflictions like anger, desire, etc. are rooted in attachment.

Enlightenment is very interesting. It looks inward, not outward; it simplifies, rather than complicate things. Hence,

we say it is not that difficult to achieve. You only need to look at your own mind, nothing else. If our blessings are great enough, we can really see that the nature of mind is empty like space. What if we cannot see it? Then training is needed. For example, when we dream, we do not know that our body is in fact lying on the bed; but with a little training, the self in the dream will know this body here is not me, that my real body is lying on the bed. This training is called dream yoga.

Dream Yoga is a unique practice in Tibetan Buddhism that belongs to Highest Yoga Tantra. The tantra contained in Chinese and Japanese Buddhism is called Outer Tantra in Tibetan Buddhism; at a deeper level is Inner Tantra, to which Dzogchen, Mahamudra, and Kalachakra all belong. Many people assume there are no inner tantras in Chinese Buddhism. In fact, there are many tantras, or books, in the Tripitaka of Chinese Buddhism that fall in this category. However, during translation, they were not given the name of the corresponding tantra, but were translated as Buddhist scriptures instead. Although we find many scriptures of this kind in Chinese Buddhism, they are not necessarily used in practice, since the lineage is now lost.

We need training of this kind to achieve enlightenment. Buddhism never comments on ghosts and gods, nor does it worship any ghost or god; it only talks about Dharma protectors, if at all. The emphasis in Buddhism is on human experience; the so-called practice means experience and realization, which are the experiences of living people. If we can put in some effort, realization is not that difficult. Its only criterion is to see the nature of mind "like space." If fully implemented, this is none other than enlightenment.

You cannot possess or discard it. Since the nature of mind is empty like space, it cannot be held or discarded.

It cannot be hindered by mountains, rivers, or stone walls. Nothing, including mountains, rivers, and earth, can stand in its way.

Because everything in the outside world is a projection of our mind, there can be no obstacles. Just like a rainbow, although it looks beautiful, it is in fact not outside; the rainbow is created by our eyes since there is no color in the air and water of a rainbow, and colors only appear because of eyes. It lacks substance and does not take up any space, so there is no obstruction of any kind. If we stretch out our hands, can we touch the rainbow? Will it get in the way of my hands? Impossible! Similarly, everything in the universe, mountains, rivers, and the earth is a projection of our own mind. When we fully understand the nature of our own mind, nothing will hinder us – because there is no attachment in the mind, everything can be seen clearly.

It can come and go with ease. The comings and goings are smooth and free. Because there is no attachment to this world, everything flows freely and is unobstructed.

It can penetrate the mountain of five skandhas and cross the river of samsara. The "five skandhas" or five aggregates are the life structure of all living beings; "penetrate" means to see through or understand thoroughly. After seeing the nature of the five aggregates with enlightened wisdom, one can cross the river of life and death.

This dharmakaya cannot be bound by any karma. The

dharmakaya will not be constrained or restricted by the law of cause and effect.

This mind is subtle and difficult to see, it is different from the sensual mind, everyone wants to see this mind. Beings whose thoughts and actions are carried out within the clarity of this mind are as numerous as the grains of sand in the Ganges, but if you ask them, no one can explain it. They are like wooden figures; they always use it, so why don't they know it?

Everyone should note that this "mind" sometimes refers to our consciousness, and sometimes to the nature of mind, to buddha nature. It must be viewed in context.

This mind is subtle and difficult to see. "This mind" refers to the true nature of mind, the buddha nature. It has never left anyone, not even people who commit evil. Although on the surface there is good and evil, there is no such distinction at the deepest level or the basic nature of mind; all is clarity. "It's subtle and difficult to see." Even though the nature of all minds is thus, it is not easy to discover. You will attain enlightenment if you find it.

It is different from the sensual mind. The nature of mind is different from our worldly mind, our consciousness. The worldly mind has all kinds of emotions and afflictions; when we look inside, we know precisely what we are thinking, whether we are happy or troubled. But the nature of the mind is different. It is very subtle, and hard to observe.

Everyone wants to see this mind. All practitioners are eager to see the true nature of their own mind.

Beings whose thoughts and actions are carried out within the clarity of this mind are as numerous as the grains of sand in the Ganges. All movements of living beings – whether they are physical activities such as those of the hands, feet, mouth, etc., or mental activities such as those of the mental consciousness – take place within the basic clarity of mind. Such beings are as numerous as the grains of sand in the Ganges in India.

In fact, all the words and deeds of sentient beings in the six realms of samsara, whether they are good deeds to benefit sentient beings, or evil deeds such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, telling lies, etc., have never left the nature of mind – this is true even of the actions of beings suffering in hell and the hungry ghost realm. The nature of mind is always like this, but because of one's own ignorance, its clarity is temporarily obscured.

Although the actions of living beings, such as walking, standing, sitting, lying down, and eating, drinking, and playing are all carried out within this clarity, how will they answer if you ask them, "Do you know what the nature of your mind is?"

But if you ask them, no one can explain it. Even if you ask as many sentient beings as there are grains of sand in the Ganges, no one can answer. They will say "I don't know" or say nothing; in short, you will not get an answer.

What do they look like at this moment? **Like wooden figures**, speechless and unable to answer. On a worldly level, people are very smart and can easily respond to questions. But when it comes to the nature of their mind, even someone like Einstein, who is highly intelligent, does not know what it is.

They always use it. Why don't they know it? People "use" their mind every day; all their thoughts and movements never leave the clarity and nature of mind. That being the case, why are they unable to answer? Because they do not know their own nature.

The Buddha said, "All sentient beings are deluded. They fall into the river of samsara because of their deeds. They want to escape but cannot because they do not see their nature." If sentient beings were not confused, why would they not answer, why would they not know their mind? The sages are not mistaken; deluded people do not know their own mind.

The Buddha said all sentient beings are deluded. The Buddha said that all troubled sentient beings are confused – this confusion comes from ignorance.

Because of their deeds, they fall into the river of samsara. Although people know a lot of things, among the seven billion people in the world, except for a few enlightened people, no one understands the nature of mind, so they cannot escape from the cycle of life and death. Moreover, now that people have mastered a wealth of knowledge and technology, they have also committed more transgressions, making liberation even more elusive.

They want to escape but cannot because they do not see their nature. Although they long for liberation, they are still bound to cyclic existence. Why? It is because they cannot see the true nature of their own mind, they have not attained realization.

If sentient beings were not confused, why would they

not answer? If sentient beings are not deluded, why is it that no one can answer when asked about the nature of mind?

Why would they not know their own mind? Our actions and conduct, movements involving hands and feet, etc. are all carried out within the clarity of the mind, so why is it we still do not know our own mind? Because we are not enlightened, we cannot experience it; in the same way, any action in the dream is inseparable from the body lying on the bed, but the dreamer cannot experience it.

The sages are not mistaken. So, what the Buddha said is correct, **deluded people do not know their own mind.** Everyone has ignorance. If you are not enlightened, you will not be able to discover the nature of your own mind.

Indeed, it is difficult to know, only the buddha understands this mind; humans, gods, and other sentient beings do not.

Indeed, it is difficult to know. Clearly, the nature of mind is not that easy to understand.

Only the buddha understands this mind. In this world, only the buddha fully understands this truth.

Humans, gods, and other sentient beings do not. Except for the buddha, humans, gods, and other sentient beings in the six paths of reincarnation do not know the nature of their mind.

Of course, each of us will eventually become a buddha, and will one day understand the nature of our own mind.

If this mind is enlightened, it is called dharma nature, it is called

liberation. Not bound by life and death, nor restrained by anything, it is called the Dharmakaya Buddha; it is also known as the Inconceivable, the Sacred Body, the Immortal, the Great Sage. Although the names are different, the essence is one.

If this mind is enlightened, it is called dharma nature, it is called liberation. If we one day achieve enlightenment and use this enlightened wisdom to completely understand the nature of mind, the nature of this mind is called dharma nature, it is also called liberation.

Not bound by life and death, nor restrained by anything. At that time, we gain absolute freedom from the cycle of life and death – life and death cannot restrict us, nothing can affect or hinder this wisdom. This is absolute freedom of a kind!

It is called the Dharmakaya Buddha. Because this mind has achieved complete enlightenment, it is called the Dharmakaya Buddha, much like the Samantabhadra Tathagata in Dzogchen. At this moment, one truly becomes a buddha, is completely liberated, and free from all defilements!

In the secular world, if we have external freedom of every kind but have not resolved our inner problems, we still cannot gain freedom in our hearts. Only after enlightenment can you gain true freedom!

Also known as the Inconceivable. This state is incredible.

Also known as the Sacred Body. The "sacred" is the buddha. At this moment, it becomes the buddha's true body.

Also known as the Immortal. There is no death at this moment.

Also known as the Great Sage. The Great Sage here does not refer to God, but to the buddha.

Although the names are different, the essence is one. When we achieve enlightenment, we can say that we have seen the true nature of phenomena, have attained liberation, or have transcended life and death. Although the explanations are different, their essence is one, which is the realization of the nature of our own mind. This cannot be expressed in words and can only be described using metaphors – for instance, it is "like space." After you achieve enlightenment through your own practice, all problems are resolved. This is true liberation.

Do not think liberation means that a person leaves and never comes back, that everyone vanishes and the world becomes empty in the end. That is not the case. This world will still be around, but what will it look like? Suppose we have ten thousand illiterate people at the start; if they all go to school, the illiterate will decline in number as people graduate; eventually, everyone will graduate, and all ten thousand people will be literate. In other words, there will still be people, but no illiterates. Similarly, there will always be sentient beings in the six realms of cyclic existence, but those who wage wars, plunder resources, and connive against others will no longer exist – because they have all become buddhas and bodhisattvas! Although this sounds very idealistic, it is completely achievable if we all practice.

However, not everyone will practice – that we can be

sure. What is important is that we practice ourselves, become liberated, and then come back to liberate one, two, ten, or a hundred people...as many lives as we can. Although our actual abilities are limited, we must still aspire to save all sentient beings; we cannot think, "I will only save some, and not care about others."

Shakyamuni Buddha also vowed to save all sentient beings at the beginning; even though there are still countless people left to be freed, the Buddha's activities to save sentient beings never stop; liberation is only a matter of time. Just like after sunset, although the sun cannot be seen here, other places will still be illuminated by the sun. Similarly, the focus of the buddhas' activities may sometimes be here, and sometimes elsewhere; although we do not see the buddhas all the time, we can always feel these activities exist. Hence, all sentient beings will eventually attain buddhahood!

Of course, this is a very distant future. Now we must first attain realization ourselves, then do our best to save all sentient beings.

The sages vary in kind, but never leave their own mind.

Their "own mind" here refers not to consciousness, but to the nature of mind, that is, buddha nature and clarity. This sentence can be understood in two ways:

First, the word "vary" pertains to various classifications. There are different classifications of sages, such as buddhas and bodhisattvas in Mahayana Buddhism, shravakas and pratyekabuddhas in Theravada Buddhism. Although the state

of realization of shravakas and pratyekabuddhas is not as profound and broad as that of buddhas and bodhisattvas, they are classified as sages because, at a minimum, they have realized selflessness.

All sages are not separate from their own enlightened mind. Although the inner essence of all living beings is buddha nature, they are still ordinary people if they are not enlightened. Only after enlightenment can they be called sages.

Second, the word "vary" pertains to various thoughts. All thoughts that arise in sages are not separate from their enlightened wisdom, which is the nature of mind.

Some people may wonder, do sages also have thoughts? Of course they do. The bodhisattvas below the eighth level all engage in mental activity, but the thousands of thoughts in the mind of a sage are never separate from the wisdom of enlightenment, so there are no afflictions, and karma is not created.

The mind's capacity is unlimited, its applications are endless; the eyes seeing forms, the ears hearing sounds, the nose smelling fragrance, the tongue knowing taste, every movement is your mind.

The mind's capacity is unlimited. After enlightenment, the mind is limitless and can accommodate everything.

The *Platform Sutra* says that before enlightenment even the most broad-minded people cannot be very accommodating because of their attachment. When the mind clings to oneself and others, inside and outside, or high and low, it can never reach a state of equality. For instance, when we think that we

are better than others, we will develop arrogance; when we are jealous, we will be unhappy when others are the same as or better than us.

To cite an example, when we do not know the salary of our colleagues in the same department, we are content with the generous compensation we receive; but if we learn that our salary is lower than all our colleagues, we will immediately be unhappy, even if our salary has not been reduced at all. Why is that? We cannot accommodate or rejoice in the happiness and success of others, especially when they are better off than us. The reason is because we have too many attachments.

Sometimes this can also happen between friends. Originally, we hope that our friends can live a good life, but if one day the other person is really living a good life, or has surpassed us, it can be hard to bear. In fact, we do not lose anything when others live a better life; we can likewise live well, so why can't we accommodate the good in others? This is also because of our attachment.

The Buddhist scriptures make it very clear that if there is the slightest bit of attachment in the heart, it will affect us negatively at any time like a cancer, and cause great discomfort. Within the rules of the game in this world, the above is considered a normal psychological phenomenon, but in fact it is not normal. It is not that it does not conform to the views of a certain person, a certain religion, or a certain school of thought, but that this kind of thinking leads to suffering and discontent – even if it does not bring us any harm, it can still leave us emotionally drained. I believe everyone can connect deeply with this feeling.

With attachment, no matter how hard we try, we cannot really open our hearts. Ordinary people often destroy their own happiness because they cannot tolerate the trivial things in their lives; the powerful in the world have brought about many tragedies in human history because they too have not been able to accommodate different values.

However, if one day we take the opportunity to go deep into the mind and clearly see its nature, our hearts will be completely opened. The mind at this time is as boundless as the sky and can accommodate everything – this is the mind of the buddhas and bodhisattvas! After enlightenment, the mind is in a state of great equality; because the mind is limitless, it can accommodate everyone. If someone is superior to us, we can try to catch up or surpass him, but we will certainly not suffer because of it.

When we can truly accommodate everything, what is there in life to be unhappy about? Only if we cannot satisfy our basic need for food and clothing, which can cause physical pain and in turn affect our mental wellbeing. In general, we all have food, drink, and shelter, and enjoy good living conditions. If under these circumstances we are still troubled by afflictions, it is because we have not yet attained enlightenment, we are not broad-minded enough. When our hearts are open, these troubles will not appear at all.

Clearly, a closed mind is the main reason for our unhappiness. Before enlightenment, we cannot be accommodating because of attachment. So, everyone should work hard to achieve enlightenment.

Its applications are endless. After enlightenment, the

functions of the mind are limitless. Our mind can grow and develop endlessly, and finally reach the state of the buddha without limitation. If you cultivate your mind, the applications in life, work, benefitting others, etc. are inexhaustible.

People usually place more value on material things. The reason we attach great importance to material things, and not so much to the spirit, is because when we obtain something, we can use it at any time, and the effect is quick and obvious. But in fact, the mind also has a very broad function. It is only that we do not understand its function; moreover, we are not clear on how to train the mind and what role it can play after training. In addition, the biggest mistake we make is to blame all psychological problems on material goods and to think the latter can solve all our troubles.

If we value spirituality as much as material things in our lives and work, the applications of the mind in many areas are endless. For example, in terms of health, modern medicine has proven that 76% of human diseases are related to emotions. Although early Western medicine considered this to be pure nonsense, many scientific experiments later confirmed this. Now, Western medicine generally recognizes the role of emotions – positive emotions will have a positive impact on the body, and negative emotions will have a negative impact. This is the application of the mind in terms of health.

Not only that, the mind directly affects our happiness and satisfaction; more importantly, it can help a person find meaning in his or her existence. People derive their true sense of existence from altruism, from their contribution to humanity, society, and all living beings. It all starts from our own mind.

We must first have compassion; only then can we act in a way that is beneficial to others.

We must never ignore the function of the mind. A person's happiness, especially the meaning of life, cannot be realized by relying just on material things. While we will never deny the value and role of material things, the mind is even more important; moreover, its applications are endless.

Specifically, how are the applications endless?

The eyes seeing forms, the ears hearing sounds, the nose smelling fragrance, the tongue knowing taste, every movement is your mind. The external world recognized by the five senses, as well as all movements such as walking, sitting, and reclining, are your mind. They are all in a state of enlightenment and wisdom.

Before enlightenment, when our eyes see something, there are usually three kinds of outcome: the first is greed, when we see something that we like; the second is aversion, when we see something that we dislike; the third is ignorance, when we see something that we neither like nor dislike – in this state there is barely any reaction at all, nor is there analysis or judgment, we actually do not know what the object is. People who have not yet attained enlightenment experience these three states of mind when they see things.

For people who have achieved enlightenment, although their senses are also functioning – seeing things, hearing sounds, etc., their minds are free of greed, anger, and ignorance, and are completely in a state of wisdom. This is called "self-liberation of the six senses" in Dzogchen or Tantric Buddhism.

At every moment, when there are only words without attachment, it is your mind.

The "mind" should be understood as "one's enlightened mind," instead of one's own mind. This sentence means when an enlightened person speaks, he only has words and no attachment.

When ordinary people speak, they are in fact expressing their own emotions, as there are often a lot of emotions behind their words; when enlightened people speak, they only have words without attachment. For example, when the Buddha was turning the wheel of Dharma, he spoke like an ordinary person, but without emotions or discriminating thoughts.

Therefore, it is said: "The tathagata's universe is endless, and so is his wisdom."

The tathagata's universe is endless. The world the buddha sees is endless.

Ordinary people develop an attachment to objects they see, so their vision is limited and they cannot see things in other dimensions or spaces at the same time. In addition, our eyes can only see but not hear; the buddha's eyes can not only see but also hear and smell. The buddha's sense organs possess such functions, so "the tathagata's universe is endless."

So is his wisdom. At the same time, the buddha's wisdom is also limitless.

The mind perceives infinite forms. That it can distinguish all things and their every movement is the mind's wisdom.

The mind perceives infinite forms. This "mind" is the enlightened mind. From a secular perspective, the buddha can see and hear what we cannot, since his senses are not limited; moreover, he can see matter in different dimensions and spaces at the same time – the same goes for other senses such as ears. From the standpoint of ultimate truth, the buddha perceives that all matter is empty; there is no limitation of any kind in emptiness, hence there are "infinite" forms.

Its ability to distinguish all things. On the one hand, the buddha fully realizes the emptiness of all things; on the other hand, the buddha "can distinguish all things." This not only means the ability to clearly distinguish colors, sizes, etc., but also the capacity to see a complete universe in an atom, an electron, the smallest particle, or even more subtle matter! As stated in *Practices and Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva*, "In the tiny end of a hair, the sublime realm of the three times appears," the buddha can see a complete world in the tip of a strand of hair. What an incredible state of mind this is!

The sensory experiences of ordinary people are basically illusions. We cannot possibly imagine how the entire universe can exist in an electron. In our eyes, big and small are always the opposite of each other. The buddha cuts through this dualism; in his eyes, there is no distinction between big and small – big is small, small is big, the entire universe is a particle, and a particle is also a universe. Hence, the buddha can not only see everything we see, but also things we can never see.

When the Buddha was alive, there were many heretics in India who were highly accomplished in meditative concentration. Their eyes could penetrate the deep structure of

matter like a microscope; however, there were still many things that were beyond their scope because they had not yet attained enlightenment. And what they could not see, the arhats could; what the arhats could not see, the bodhisattvas could; what the bodhisattvas could not see, the buddhas could – the higher the state of realization, the bigger the universe. In other words, when cultivating wisdom, the deeper our understanding of the nature of matter or the mind, the bigger the world we can see.

Ordinary people can only make judgments based on their own senses. Even if scientists have various instruments, they must still rely on the naked eye in the end. Because the senses have their limitation, we can never rely on them to understand true reality. The Buddha transcended this limitation, using neither senses nor instruments but wisdom to observe the world. Hence, the mind "can distinguish all things."

And their every movement is the mind's wisdom. For an enlightened person, all movements such as walking, standing, sitting, and reclining are carried out in wisdom.

The actions and speech of ordinary people are based on discriminating thoughts, but the buddha operates all of this in wisdom. However, even though we are ordinary people now, we may become enlightened sometime in the future. By then, all walking, standing, sitting, reclining, as well as sleeping, can likewise proceed in wisdom.

The mind has no form and its wisdom has no limit. Therefore, it is said: "The tathagata's universe is endless, and so is his wisdom."

So, what is the mind really like?

The mind has no form. The mind has no color or shape.

Is formlessness the same as emptiness? No. There are many things that have no form, such as oxygen; although we cannot see its color and shape, it has its own function in the world, so formlessness is not equal to emptiness. Our mind is not only formless, but also empty, like space.

Its wisdom has no limit. When the buddhas or enlightened people speak and do things, their mind is in a formless state, and their wisdom is also endless.

The tathagata's universe is endless, and so is his wisdom. Therefore, it is said that the world the buddha sees is endless, and so is his wisdom.

A form body composed of the four elements is unsatisfactory, it is subject to birth and death; the real body, the dharmakaya, exists without abiding anywhere, it never changes.

A form body composed of the four elements is unsatisfactory. The physical body, which is composed of the four elements or energies of earth, water, wind, and fire, produces numerous afflictions.

Why are there so many afflictions? **It is subject to birth and death.** Because our physical body is subject to birth and death, also to aging and illness during the process. This suffering is the cause of our afflictions.

The dharmakaya exists without abiding anywhere. The nature of mind is different. It is the eternal dharmakaya, the real body. Because it is empty, it does not reside anywhere.

It never changes. The dharmakaya is eternal and does not change. What changes is only our physical body.

All our afflictions and suffering such as birth, old age, illness, and death are caused by changes in superficial forms. If we enter our inner essence, the dharmakaya, we will find that it has not actually changed at all, so naturally there is nothing to worry about. Therefore, learning Buddhism is to elevate one's level in all areas. With practice, these afflictions and pains can be eradicated.

Nowadays, we are fragile physically, but even more so psychologically. We cannot even endure the slightest criticism. In fact, words are the easiest to tolerate. Why? When the physical body suffers a blow, ordinary people except for highly realized practitioners will feel pain; however, when abusive or vicious remarks are directed at us, it will not impact us if we simply adjust our mindset – the pressure wave from the sound can shake the eardrums, but it cannot disturb our hearts at all! Nonetheless, ordinary people are accustomed to working in coordination with others; thus, the sound not only vibrates the eardrums, but also our hearts, which leads to pain.

We have always taken for granted that it is the other person's words that make us unhappy, but after logical analysis, we will find that the other person is only part of the reason; if we ourselves do not go along with what others do or say, or cooperate, we cannot be affected. *Entering the Way of the Bodhisattva* makes it very clear that everything arises due to causes and conditions – this is known as "dependent origination." Therefore, do not think that suffering is caused by others; it is largely of our own doing. It is difficult to control

what people say; the simplest and best way is to control how we interact with others. All emotional pain can be solved in this way.

Buddhism teaches us how to eliminate pain, not by relying on the blessing of gods and ghosts, but by relying on our own strength. Where does this power come from? It comes from wisdom. The reason we cannot control our emotions and pain is: firstly, we do not understand the process and causes of pain; secondly, although we understand it, we have not trained our mind. If we recognize all this through wisdom, and invest some time in our practice, these psychological problems can be easily solved.

In addition to illness, many people in the modern age suffer from psychological pain. Sometimes the mental anguish that illness brings is even worse than the physical pain, causing the condition to worsen. In fact, physical and psychological pain can be treated separately. When a patient's mental health is strong, it will inevitably boost the therapeutic effect of drugs, and facilitate a faster recovery. These principles that Buddhism has long made very clear, the scientific community now also accepts.

It is Buddhism that has the most complete study on spiritual issues. A fundamental concept is that our mind, like matter, has its own internal structure and changing laws. Scientific research in the mind has been a gradual process; until now, psychology still knows very little about it; it has not even clarified what consciousness is, let alone its structure and laws. A lot of helplessness and pain in life is precisely because people are ignorant about consciousness.

The reality we must acknowledge is that there is significant room to further elevate our consciousness. For example, from the point of view of knowledge, comprehensive qualities and other aspects, people who have never received higher education and those who have received higher education operate on completely different levels of consciousness. If people can accept more advanced teachings and better methods, they can continue to raise their consciousness; moreover, there is no limit to their potential.

Ultimately, to what extent can consciousness be elevated? To the level of a bodhisattva or even a buddha. To be precise, when our compassion and wisdom reach the unsurpassed state, this is the buddha. If we put in the corresponding effort in this area, we will surely reap huge rewards.

Therefore, the sutras say: "Sentient beings should know that buddha nature inherently exists." The Venerable Mahakashyapa realized just this true nature – the true nature is our mind, our mind is the true nature, this is the same mind as all the buddhas.

Sentient beings should know that buddha nature inherently exists. Everyone should know that buddha nature is something they always have.

The Venerable Mahakashyapa realized just this true nature – the true nature is our mind, and our mind is the true nature. The true nature is our mind, and our mind is in fact the true nature. This true nature is exactly what the great disciple of the Buddha, the Venerable Mahakashyapa, realized. This nature has the same meaning as buddha nature, tathagatagarbha, and clarity.

This is the same mind as all the buddhas. If we realize our true nature, then our mind is the same as the mind of all the buddhas. Our mind is the buddha mind.

The buddhas before and after only transmit this mind; apart from this mind, no buddha can be obtained.

The buddhas before and after only transmit this mind. Buddhas of the past, present, and future only transmit this mind. Especially Chan Buddhism which does not establish words, but teaches mind to mind. What is conveyed is the true nature of mind, its clarity.

As mentioned before, the symbol of Buddhism is the Dharma wheel, which looks like the wheel of a vehicle. The wheel can rotate, symbolizing the passing of the Dharma from generation to generation, like the wheel of a vehicle that is constantly turning. What is passed down from generation to generation? Certainly not greed, anger, and delusion, but the essence of greed, anger, and delusion, which is the wisdom of enlightenment.

Some people will question: if you say everyone inherently possesses buddha nature, what is there to teach? This can be explained with a metaphor: an oil lamp is complete with a wick and oil, but when it is not lit, there is no light; lighting each oil lamp is called passing the light on to future generations. What does the Dharma teach? It teaches wisdom and clarity, it is the buddha “transmitting this mind.”

Apart from this mind, no buddha can be obtained. Other than this mind of wisdom, this luminous mind, there is no other buddha to be attained.

Deluded people do not know that their own mind is the buddha, they search outside and are busy all day long; reciting the buddha's name and worshipping the buddha, where is the buddha? Do not cling to this illusion, just know your mind, there is no other buddha beyond the mind.

Deluded people do not know that their own mind is the buddha. We are referred to as deluded beings, because everything we see is inverted or upside down. For example, the various colors we see do not actually exist at all; the real substance that makes up the table in front of us is a composite of atoms, molecules, and electrons, but these we cannot see. In other words, we cannot see what really exists, but we can see what does not exist. It is not only our vision, but also the other senses, hence sentient beings are said to be deluded. This is not the buddha insulting us, it is just the truth.

They search outside and are busy all day long. Not knowing our own mind is the buddha, we always think that the buddha is outside. Hence, we are busy all day long, constantly looking outside.

Reciting the buddha's name and worshipping the buddha, where is the buddha? Many people chant and worship the buddha every day, thinking that the buddha is in the Main Hall of the monastery. You would be wrong to think so! The buddha statues in the Main Hall are made of clay, metal, and other materials, and are not the real buddha.

Do not cling to this illusion. "This illusion" refers to the perception that the buddha is outside. We should not hold or cling to such a view.

Just know your mind, there is no other buddha beyond the mind. When you know your own mind, you will realize your mind is the buddha. Apart from the mind, there is no so-called buddha at all.

4. All appearances are false

The sutras say: "All appearances are false." They also say: "Wherever you are, there is a buddha." Your mind is the buddha, do not use a buddha to worship a buddha.

All appearances are false. What is "appearance"? In daily life, all things we can see, hear, and have contact with are called appearances; all appearances are false and unreal.

As mentioned before, the colors and shapes we see do not actually exist; they are false appearances. Scientists explain that colors, shapes, etc. are images that appear in the brain. Buddhism believes that these are all illusions produced in our mind. Both mean the same thing.

Wherever you are, there is a buddha. Wherever people are, there is a buddha. Why? Since the mind is where the person is, the nature of mind and buddha nature are also there. Do not look for a buddha outside; the real buddha is in your own mind.

Your mind is the buddha, so you should not worship a buddha. Your own mind is the buddha, so do not use a buddha to worship a buddha. It is meaningless. Moreover, the buddha inside is the dharmakaya buddha, a buddha in the true sense; the buddha outside is just the image of a buddha.

Take note that the discussion here is on the essence of mind. In our everyday life, the mind operates at the superficial level – when we feel the slightest physical discomfort or hear a few bad words from others, we will know then whether we are a buddha. I have also talked about the fault of denying causation before; this is particularly important.

These insights in Chan Buddhism are very profound and must be understood correctly, otherwise problems can easily arise. For example, from the perspective of enlightenment, there is indeed nothing to pay homage to, our own mind is the buddha; but some people may think in this case the buddha does not exist. Originally, I was very happy thinking that I am a buddha, but then I heard that the buddha no longer exists. What should I do? Problems such as this will arise.

Or for instance, some people think that Chan practitioners do not need to prostrate and pay respect to the buddha statues. This is not right. Although everyone knows that a buddha statue is not the real buddha, just as a photo is not the real person, the buddha statue that has been consecrated in a tantric ceremony has a special power, which is the blessing of the buddha. Even buddha statues that have not been consecrated contain blessings and energy, which stem from the power and vows of buddhas and bodhisattvas who have practiced over many lifetimes. This is why we pray to the buddhas and bodhisattvas for help.

Although we do not need to rely on external buddhas to realize the inherent emptiness and clarity of the mind, as a Buddhist, we should still treat buddha images and Buddhist scriptures with reverence. Moreover, people who practice

Chan need to accumulate blessings, so they also need to make offerings to and worship the buddha. This may not be necessary if your spiritual practice has reached a very high level and you can complete offerings and worship in meditative concentration. However, even a bodhisattva like Nagarjuna, who is almost the equivalent of a buddha, paid respect to the buddha statues, and worshiped the buddha, let alone ordinary people like us who practice meditation!

Some views of Chan Buddhism are concise and profound; few words are used, so sometimes they are easy to misinterpret. The reason Chan asserts there is no need to worship the external buddha is because we have an attachment to the external buddha, and we worship and make offerings to the buddha with attachment. From the perspective of Chan, such attachment is wrong. But for the unenlightened who cannot let go of their attachments, these methods will help in gradually reaching the state of non-attachment; to attain this state, a process is required. Therefore, we must clearly make this distinction.

Even if a buddha or bodhisattva suddenly appears before you, there is no need to pay homage. This mind of ours is empty and without form; those who hold on to appearances are devils; they fall into the wrong path.

The following content is very important for practitioners and is emphasized again and again in tantra. Everyone should pay special attention to it.

Even if a buddha or bodhisattva suddenly appears before you. "Appear before" means to be present in front of us. When we are in meditation, or even in daily life, we

may suddenly see buddhas, bodhisattvas, deities, ghosts, gods, Dharma protectors, etc. before us. These are not visualizations, but actual appearances. What should we do at this time?

There is no need to pay homage. Whether it is the Buddha's mandala, Amitabha Buddha, or Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, do not show reverence or awe. There is nothing to do, just keep meditating. This is very important.

The great master Gampopa was a very outstanding disciple of Milarepa. He studied under him for thirteen months. When he was meditating one day, he saw Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva everywhere in the sky; moreover, there was a moon wheel on the top of each deity's head. So, he went to Milarepa for an explanation and was told that this is neither a merit nor a fault, it is a phenomenon caused by the workings of the vital points within the energy channels; it does not matter whether it is good or bad, it can be ignored.

Another time, Gampopa saw images of hell while meditating and felt very uncomfortable and frightened. The next day, he consulted Milarepa again. Milarepa said that these images appeared because a certain posture of the body is incorrect during meditation, which causes the vital points within the energy channels to operate abnormally; this is neither merit nor fault, just let it fend for itself and leave it alone.

Later, Gampopa also saw many mandalas of the deity. Milarepa still said these are nothing to worry about. Sure enough, these phenomena eventually disappeared on their own.

Practitioners will encounter many such situations, both good and bad. There is, for instance, the true story of a

modern-day practitioner of kusali chod.

The kusali chod or cutting through method is a special practice in Tibetan Buddhism. The practitioners go to sacred mountains or places where ordinary people dare not offend, and intentionally incur the wrath of the mundane spirits there; when the ghosts and gods are angered, thunder, strong winds, and other terrifying signs appear immediately. In the face of fear, people have a heightened sense of self; the cutting through method is used at this moment to bring out the ego that is not usually obvious, then rely on the wisdom of emptiness to cut through it. Everyone knows the *Diamond Sutra* – the wisdom of Prajnaparamita is like a sword that can eradicate self-attachment.

This practitioner had a recurring problem whenever he meditated; something like a balloon or an animal's stomach would fall from the ceiling each time. He hated it so much that he wanted to stab it. One day, he took out a knife and was about to make a move when suddenly he had doubts, so he decided to consult his master first. The master told him not to rush but to put a mark on it and see. He did as he was told; when he looked the next day, the mark unexpectedly appeared on his stomach! If he had stabbed it with a knife at that time, he would have been in a lot of trouble.

Another practitioner was Master Xuyun, who at one time was practicing in Zhongnan Mountain. Perhaps because of the harsh conditions there, one morning when meditating in the hut, he thought of eating noodles; a female donor then brought him a bucket of noodles in the afternoon. Xuyun usually abstained from food after midday, but because of his craving for noodles, he thought about it for a long time and accepted

the offering. While making offerings to the buddha and reciting mantras before taking food, Xuyun became suspicious when the woman suddenly ran away; when he came back, he discovered that there were no noodles at all in the bucket, only caterpillars!

These are all real situations that practitioners encountered. We need not worry since neither good nor bad situations are likely to occur at our current stage of practice. Nonetheless, we should still know the method in advance and be prepared, in the event this kind of situation turns up in the future.

In short, if something extraordinary suddenly appears in front of us during meditation, we are overjoyed, thinking it confirms the state of our spiritual realization, and become attached to it, then we are under the spell of demons! These so-called demons are obstacles to spiritual practice. The best way at this moment is to ignore all appearances and continue to meditate.

This mind of ours is empty and without form. Our mind is empty, so there can be no Amitabha or Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva. These phenomena are all illusory and can be ignored. We do not have anything to fear even if images of hell and devils appear; the nature of mind is clarity, so these things cannot really exist. If we hold on to this belief, there will be no obstacles. This is the only way to solve the problem.

As Milarepa said, due to the operation of the inner energy channels of the human body, the senses will produce certain phenomena. Just as in a dream, these phenomena seem to be outside, but in fact they are not. For example, sometimes certain things that appear in front of you can be seen even

if you close your eyes; this fully shows that they do not exist in the outside world. So where are they? Tantra has a clear explanation for this. These phenomena are in fact in our central channel and can be perceived through the eye consciousness. Therefore, if they appear to be external buddhas or demons, we need not pay attention to them.

Such manifestations will occur unexpectedly not only during meditation, but also in the bardo stage after death; many buddhas and various terrifying phenomena can be seen, and various terrifying sounds can be heard. The person in the bardo thinks that these sounds and phenomena are external; in fact, they all occur in his or her mind. This is the exact experience of someone suffering from tinnitus.

At this time, people who have never engaged in practice will really be frightened, but practitioners understand that all these are phenomena of the mind which they can deal with calmly. "My mind is empty, and it is without form." If this thought comes up when you are in the bardo, that would be excellent!

Dzogchen talks about many bardo practices, of which there are two key points: first, everything is a phenomenon of the mind; second, the mind is inherently emptiness and clear light. Understand these two points, and all horrifying phenomena will disappear immediately. These concise treatises of Bodhidharma are basically not simple or ordinary exoteric treatises in sutra; they contain a lot of esoteric content.

Those who hold on to appearances are devils. If you think that this is the emergence of the Three Saints of the West or the tantric mandala, and you become attached to it, this is the demon, that is, an obstacle to spiritual practice.

Some phenomena are neither good nor bad; if we do not cling to them, they will not have any impact on our practice. But if we develop even a trace of attachment to them and think that we have reached a certain level of realization, they will immediately become an obstacle to our practice. This is exactly what tantra teaches.

They fall into the wrong path. When practicing emptiness, these attachments are to be discarded.

If illusions arise from the mind, there is no need to bow. Those who worship do not know, and those who know do not worship; to worship is to be possessed by the devil. I say this because I am afraid practitioners do not understand it.

If illusions arise from the mind, there is no need to bow. These phenomena are all illusions born of the mind; since they are illusions, there is no need to bow.

For example, when we meditate and the Three Saints of the West appear in front of us, this is in fact our illusion. If so, why worship an illusion? At this time, do not leave the state of meditative concentration, but continue to practice emptiness. Gampopa once saw the thousand buddhas of the bhadra kalpa while meditating, and reported this to Milarepa the next day. Milarepa gave him the same answer: this is a projection of the vital points of your own inner energy; it is neither good nor bad, so remain undistracted and do not become attached to it! Therefore, if we see the Three Saints of the West while meditating, it would be wrong to immediately stand up and bow.

Those who worship do not know. At this time, a person who does not know that this is an illusion will immediately

get up and bow. **Those who know do not worship.** A person who knows that this is an illusion will naturally not pay reverence.

To worship is to be possessed by the devil. If you regard these illusions as the real Three Saints of the West to worship, you will be possessed by demons. Because after developing attachment, they become obstacles to the practice.

I say this because I am afraid practitioners do not understand it. The above sentences are extremely important. Bodhidharma was worried that later practitioners would not understand it, so he specially emphasized and explained these principles as clearly as possible.

As for various situations that arise during meditation, tantra provides many solutions. Among them, there is an excellent method that covers everything, which Bodhidharma taught: whether you see heaven or hell, good or bad, do not dwell on it; know that everything is an illusion of the mind; simply continue to meditate, with the mind calm and undistracted in emptiness. This is the unsurpassed way.

As mentioned before, these phenomena are inherently not a problem, but if you develop an attachment to them, they become obstacles. For example, when practicing kusali chod, so long as the practitioner ignores the terrifying phenomena that appear, no harm is done; but with only a little attachment and a bit of fear, one can immediately fall ill and may even die. Just like a mobile phone signal: if the recipient does not respond, the signal has no effect at all; only when the recipient picks up will the ringtone sound. In the same way, it is our attachment to these phenomena that gives them power.

My fellow practitioners often ask how they should deal with different kinds of sensations that come up during meditation. Actually, most of these are our own illusions and hallucinations, and there is no need to pay attention to them. The human body is very intricate; sometimes certain drugs can also affect the nervous system, resulting in various strange phenomena. Therefore, whether we are meditating or dreaming, we should take all these phenomena in stride. Even if they are the actual blessings of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, we should continue to practice unperturbed, because the true nature of mind is the dharmakaya, the ultimate buddha among the three kayas.

As Buddhists, we must not be superstitious. When some people see rainbows, iridescent clouds, or similar natural phenomena, they immediately associate them with the auspicious signs of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. They prostrate with excitement, and even burst into tears. This kind of fervor is inappropriate. We must remain calm and rational, and approach everything with wisdom.

For example, the so-called “buddha's light” that everyone sees is also a natural phenomenon. Even if we are not at a sacred site, a rainbow will appear when there is fog all around and the sun shines behind us. This rainbow may well be an actual blessing of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, but it is still just a natural phenomenon which we need not worship blindly.

Of course, the buddhas and bodhisattvas will appear in various forms, but please do not hastily label ambiguous phenomena as their manifestations. Otherwise, people will think that the followers of Buddhism are a group of superstitious people, which leaves a poor impression. In fact, Buddhism

is a religion that places utmost emphasis on reason and true principles. Therefore, Buddhist practitioners should not pay too much attention to these external phenomena. As stated in the scriptures, the buddha is basically in our own mind.

In sum, if various feelings arise during practice in the future, just ignore them. Simply continue to practice emptiness, and everything will be fine. Bodhidharma's advice on this matter is profoundly important. If you encounter such situations in the future, you need not ask around as the answer is already very clearly stated here. Be sure to remember this.

The true nature of all the buddhas and tathagatas is without form, this we must remember.

The true nature of all buddhas and tathagatas is without form. This sentence means that the true body of all buddhas and tathagatas is the dharmakaya and clear light, which is free of all form.

As we all know, in Tibetan Buddhism, a mandala is dedicated to the buddha; enshrined in the mandala are all kinds of wrathful and peaceful deities, male and female. In addition, the mandala is classified as either fully revealed truth or partially revealed truth. The so-called "partially revealed truth" means that it is not real or ultimate. All the mandalas we see and visualize using the generation stage method belong to this category; they are not ultimate. What is the real mandala of the buddha? It is the nature of our mind, that is, the dharmakaya; it has no appearance, color, or image, only this is the mandala of fully revealed truth.

It can thus be seen the teachings in tantra are not different

from that expounded in the *Platform Sutra* and the *Bloodstream Treatise*. Moreover, these practical tips are difficult to find in ordinary scriptures and are very important for practitioners.

This we must remember. Therefore, you must pay attention to these words mentioned before.

If something unusual appears, do not pay attention to it, do not fear, do not doubt; your mind is basically pure, how can there be forms?

If something unusual appears, do not pay attention to it. When practicing, so long as there are special appearances, such as the hell realm that Gampopa saw, the buddha, the mandala of a deity, as well as many strange things and changes in nature like solar and lunar eclipses, do not pay attention to them. If we just continue to practice, these problems will not affect us at all.

Do not fear. Do not be afraid either. For example, when we see hell or various changes in nature, we may think it is inauspicious and worry that something bad will happen. This is unnecessary.

Do not doubt. Do not question whether it is a deity that you see or if it is a sign that your practice has reached a certain level. It is none of these.

Your mind is basically pure, how can there be forms? The only thing you need to know is that your mind is basically pure and free of forms. All appearances are illusions.

Even if you see devas, dragons, yakshas, ghosts, or divine beings, do not pay homage or harbor fear; your mind is inherently empty, all

appearances are illusions, do not cling to these appearances. If you envision a buddha, a dharma, or a bodhisattva and bow to them, you descend into the world of mortals.

Even if you see devas, dragons, yakshas, ghosts, or divine beings. If you see devas, dragons, ghosts, yakshas (an ugly, man-eating ghost, brave and violent, later converted by the Buddha to become a Dharma protector, also designated as one of eight classes of demi-gods and semi-devils); or if you see King Indra, King Brahma, buddhas and bodhisattvas, **do not pay homage**; there is no need to pay reverence even to the buddha; **do not be afraid** when you see horrific scenes such as hell. Because **your mind is inherently empty, and all appearances are illusions.** This is a principle Bodhidharma repeated many times.

Do not cling to these appearances. So long as you do not hold on to these appearances, it is not a problem. **If you envision a buddha, a dharma, or a bodhisattva and bow to them,** that is, if you have an attachment to the buddha, you see the mandala of a buddha as the real buddha, then start to cry, prostrate, and burn incense...what will happen? **You descend into the world of mortals.**

If you want to be enlightened directly, you will succeed just by staying free of attachment. I have nothing more to add. Therefore, the sutras say: "All appearances are false." Having no fixed reality or form, they are impermanent. If you do not cling to appearances, you are of one mind with the buddha. Therefore, the sutras say: "Being free from all appearances is the buddha."

If you want to be enlightened directly. If you want to

attain realization directly, **you will succeed just by staying free of attachment. I have nothing more to add.** So long as you do not cling to any form, there is nothing more to say.

The sutras say: All appearances are false. Having no fixed reality or form, they are impermanent. The Buddhist scriptures say that all appearances are illusory and unreal, so whether it is a mandala or a ghost, they are uncertain and everchanging, and do not truly exist on their own.

If you do not cling to appearances, you are of one mind with the buddha. So long as you do not hold on to any form, you are in line with the buddha's will.

The sutras say: Being free from all appearances is the buddha. Therefore, the Buddhist scriptures say that a person who is free from all appearances is called a buddha.

Question: Why shouldn't we pay homage to the buddhas and bodhisattvas? Answer: The demons, mara, and asuras possess the power of manifestation and can appear as bodhisattvas. All kinds of transformations are those of heretics, not the buddha. The buddha is your own mind, so do not misdirect your reverence."

Question: Why shouldn't we pay homage to the buddhas and bodhisattvas? Some people may ask, since they have seen the buddhas and bodhisattvas with their own eyes, why can't they pay homage to them?

Answer: The demons, mara, and asuras possess the power of manifestation and can appear as bodhisattvas. All kinds of transformations are those of heretics, not the buddha. Because what we see may not be the buddha

or bodhisattva, but the demon, mara, or asura instead, their intention being to hinder the practice of practitioners by allowing them to be happy when they see good phenomena and fearful when they see bad phenomena. In the end, these become obstacles to spiritual practice.

The buddha is your own mind, so do not misdirect your reverence. The real buddha is the nature of your mind, so know what you are paying homage to.

However, if we have truly realized the deity through practice, we may also see the real buddha and bodhisattva; at this time, if we treat them as demons and monsters, it will be an obstacle to our realization. Nonetheless, even if we see the real buddha, bodhisattva and mandala, we must know that these are projections of the dharmakaya in our own mind. The dharmakaya is the real buddha. No matter how supreme the buddha is, he cannot transcend the nature of mind.

To sum up, if you suddenly see buddhas and bodhisattvas during meditation, there are three possibilities:

First, due to the operation of the inner energy channels and vital points, some buddhas and bodhisattvas appear, as in a dream. This situation neither helps nor hinders practice, just leave it as is.

Second, to interfere with and hinder the practice of practitioners, Mara and asuras deliberately transform into various images or mandalas of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, causing practitioners to become attached and overjoyed, and subsequently develop arrogance. This ultimately becomes an obstacle to practice.

Third, you see the real buddha and bodhisattva, or mandala of the buddha.

No matter what situation arises, remain undistracted; do not cling to the appearance or become fearful, and do not bow or worship the buddha. The best way is to continue to dwell in the empty and clear light nature of mind.

Milarepa also said: "Clinging to demons as the devil results in harm, recognizing their presence as the mind brings liberation, and realizing they are emptiness cuts through the self. Before you realize the nature of mind, demons in the form of male or female rakshasas are still demons, creating obstacles and causing harm; if you realize they are the deity, all siddhis arise from within." If you cling to the devil as a devil, you will encounter difficulties; if you see the devil as an illusion of the mind or emptiness, you will be liberated.

This content in the *Bloodstream Treatise* generally does not appear in the scriptures in sutra. Please remember it is of great value to those who practice it!

5. The path is wordless, seeing one's nature is Chan

Buddha is a Sanskrit term for enlightenment.

The word "buddha" in Chinese is a foreign term derived from the ancient Indian Sanskrit word "**buddha**." Foreign words are typically translated into Chinese either phonetically or semantically; the phonetic transliteration into Chinese is "fo tuo," and the semantic translation is "awakened nature." The awakened nature, that is, realization of the true nature of mind,

can also be called enlightenment or the enlightened one.

Next, we will explain "awakened" and "nature" respectively.

The enlightened one abides in a state of awakening; embracing living beings of all kinds, raising the brows, blinking the eyes, and moving the hands and feet are all his awakened nature.

The enlightened one abides in a state of awakening.

The term "awakening" denotes the awakening of the mind. The buddha is an enlightened being, who has awakened to the true nature of mind – buddha nature. The mind's awareness of its own nature is "awakening." What is the "enlightened one"? He is one who is awakened.

The above pertains to the essence of mind. The following explores the state of "awakening."

Embracing living beings of all kinds, raising the brows, blinking the eyes, and moving the hands and feet are all his awakened nature. A buddha always abides in a state of awakening, but he can at the same time freely engage in various undertakings to save sentient beings.

Embracing living beings of all kinds – The living beings here refer mainly to human beings, but also to animals, plants, and other species. This sentence means that the buddha embraces and accepts all living beings with varying abilities. The buddha accomplishes this by expounding different teachings and methods to suit their individual capacities. The reason this is possible is that the buddha is an awakened being who possesses great wisdom. He fully understands the inherent capacity of each sentient being, which allows him to provide the

corresponding methods.

The buddha is an enlightened being who can "embrace living beings of all kinds." Others who want to do the same need to possess supernatural powers, which is one of the prerequisites for truly benefiting sentient beings. Among the many types of supernatural powers, the power that clearly "understands the mind of others" is the best to have. When saving sentient beings, you must know what the other person needs, what he is thinking, and which of his afflictions are most serious; you can then teach the person according to his aptitude, also know all the changes in the future and what impact the teaching will have on him. Although Buddhism does not pursue supernatural powers, they can be valuable tools for aiding sentient beings.

For those without such powers, it is important to understand the general background, cultural context, and needs of those they wish to help, like what they are thinking, what kind of pain they usually face, and what different types of people – women, men, young and old – worry most about. This allows for more effective and targeted assistance. If you speak or act without this understanding, the outcome may be counterproductive, leading to misunderstandings or even discouragement. Therefore, when the Buddha turned the wheel of Dharma, he paid special attention to understanding the afflictions and capacity of those who followed his teachings.

Raising the brows, blinking the eyes, moving the hands and feet are all his awakened nature – "Blinking" refers to actions such as blinking and rolling the eyes; "movement of hands and feet" refers to activities such as walking, talking, and eating. Sometimes

the buddha sweeps the floor or goes for alms; sometimes he expounds different teachings to suit individual needs. But no matter what he does, the buddha's mind always dwells in a state of emptiness and wisdom, never leaving it for an instant.

Ordinary practitioners cannot be in a state of awakening or enlightenment twenty-four hours a day. Even if we have moments of insight, our daily lives and meditative states are often distinctly separate. However, this divide diminishes with practice over time, and almost disappears at the eighth level. From the eighth level on, the enlightened state can be fully applied to daily life; the distinction disappears entirely upon buddhahood – the buddha is always in enlightenment and can accomplish everything at the same time.

In sum, only the buddha can be called the enlightened one. Although other people have attained different levels of enlightenment, they cannot be called the enlightened one; they are referred to as bodhisattvas, sravakas, or other.

Our nature is the mind, the mind is the buddha, the buddha is the path, and the path is Chan.

The following explains the "nature" in "awakened nature."

The word "nature" refers to the nature of mind. What did the buddha awaken to? The buddha realized the nature of our mind, and the nature of our mind is what the buddha awakened to. The "mind" here also refers to the nature of mind.

Our nature is the mind, the mind is the buddha, the buddha is the path, and the path is Chan means that the enlightened nature of the buddha is the nature of mind, and the

nature of mind is the buddha; the buddha is the ultimate path, and the ultimate path is the highest state of Chan.

In Buddhism, there are five paths and ten grounds. The last of the five paths is the path of no more learning – when you have completed your practice and have nothing more to learn, you are already a buddha. The state of the buddha is, on the one hand, the highest state of Chan; on the other hand, it is the wisdom of the buddha. Therefore, the ultimate path is the ultimate Chan; the highest state of Chan is the state of the buddha. Below the path of no more learning, there is the path of seeing (for bodhisattvas at the first level) and the path of meditation (for bodhisattvas at the remaining nine levels). Although the path of seeing and that of meditation are not as high as the state of the buddha, they are still the path, they are also Chan. Therefore, Chan is the path, and the path is Chan.

But the word Chan is one that is hard for ordinary people and sages to understand.

The word "Chan" has a very rich meaning, its content extremely profound. Ordinary people cannot realize it, nor can all sages.

It is understandable that ordinary people cannot achieve enlightenment, but why not saints? The ultimate teaching in Chan is on the nature of mind, clear light, and buddha nature; only the saints of Mahayana Buddhism can attain this state. Other saints, such as arhats and pratyekabuddhas of Theravada Buddhism, have not realized the nature of mind.

Therefore, do not simply view Chan as meditating and cultivating tranquility, without thinking about anything. In fact,

Chan already encompasses all the states of the bodhisattvas from the first to the tenth level, and the buddhas as well. It is thus clear that Chan is indeed unfathomable!

Seeing your nature directly is Chan. Unless you see your nature, it is not Chan.

What exactly is Chan? There is a broad and narrow definition.

The broad definition comprises not only the content discussed here but also other Chan practices such as the four dhyanas and eight samadhis. The four dhyanas and eight samadhis are not advanced meditation practices. They can be realized by ordinary people and are also practiced by heretics.

The heretics I am talking about here are different from the heretics mentioned by Bodhidharma. Bodhidharma defined heretics, these so-called outsiders, as followers of Buddhism who are not highly accomplished practitioners or have not realized the very profound state of Chan, such as arhats and pratyekabuddhas; the heretics I refer to who practice the four dhyanas and eight samadhis are not converts to Buddhism. In general, we call those who take refuge in the Three Jewels of Buddhism as canonical practitioners, and those who do not take refuge as heretics or non-Buddhists. During the time of Sakyamuni Buddha, there were many such heretics in India; they also practiced the four dhyanas and eight samadhis.

The narrow definition pertains just to the realization of Chan, the kind that is expounded in the *Bloodstream Treatise*.

Seeing your nature directly is Chan. Directly seeing

the true nature of mind – seeing the true nature clearly and possessing the wisdom of enlightenment is called Chan. **Unless you see your nature, it is not Chan.** If you do not attain enlightenment, it cannot be called Chan. Therefore, true Chan is extremely profound!

Even if you can explain thousands of sutras and treatises, unless you see your true nature, your words are those of an ordinary person, not a buddha's.

Even if you are proficient in the entire canon and all the principles in the thousands of sutras and treatises, if you have not realized the nature of mind, you are just an ordinary person – no matter how knowledgeable, you are still a mortal, because you have not yet truly realized the Dharma.

The supreme path is profound, impossible to put in words; the scriptures cannot explain it.

The supreme path is profound, impossible to put in words. The supreme path refers to the state of the buddha; this state is so profound that it cannot possibly be expressed in words. It is difficult to achieve enlightenment by just listening and contemplating. You must experience and realize it yourself.

The scriptures cannot explain it. All Buddhist scriptures and teachings that rely on human language cannot capture or explain the true meaning of buddha nature.

But you can apprehend the truth if you see your own nature, even without knowing a word.

So long as you see the true nature of mind, not knowing a

word is not a problem. For example, the Sixth Patriarch, Hui Neng, was illiterate but that did not prevent him from attaining realization. Therefore, cultural sophistication, or the lack of, is not directly related to enlightenment.

Of course, learning the Buddhist principles can be very beneficial if you are highly educated. Through listening and contemplation, you can deepen your understanding of the scriptures and practice more successfully. However, it is helpful only at the intellectual level; it has an indirect but not a direct effect on enlightenment.

A person who sees his nature is a buddha; the buddha's body is intrinsically pure and undefiled.

A person who sees his nature is a buddha. Once you understand your mind thoroughly and see your nature, you become a buddha. When you are free of obstacles and you completely see the nature of your mind, you are certainly a buddha.

Only the buddha can see the true nature of mind completely. Even the bodhisattvas at the eighth level and above have obstacles that obscure the nature of mind, because they have not yet eradicated the last bit of defilement and attachment. One can clearly see the true nature of mind and become a buddha when all afflictions and attachments are thoroughly eliminated.

There is nothing wrong with the statement "someone who sees his nature is a buddha," but sometimes our understanding is biased. If we equate enlightenment with becoming a buddha, it is wrong! Enlightenment does not mean seeing the true

nature of mind completely. Maybe you only see a part of it, which means you are about to become a buddha. Therefore, we must understand "seeing one's nature" as thoroughly seeing the nature of one's own mind to avoid misunderstandings.

The buddha's body is intrinsically pure and undefiled. The "buddha's body," the essence of the buddha, is in fact the nature of mind. The nature of mind is basically pure and free from any defilements. Afflictions are caused by our misapprehension of the nature of mind; they do not exist in essence. We only understand this intellectually now, but when we achieve enlightenment in the future, we will find that all defilements exist only on the surface of the mind but not in essence! In the words of Chan, the buddha's essence is free of defilements and attachment, so it is intrinsically pure.

All words spoken by the buddha or sages are a function of the mind. This mind is inherently empty. A buddha cannot be found in famous sayings or anywhere in the twelve divisions of the scriptures.

All words spoken by the buddha or sages are a function of the mind. Two words are mentioned here: function and mind. "Function" refers to the workings of the wisdom of the sage, the wisdom to think and judge. What is the essence of function? It is wisdom itself. Therefore, the essence of the function of wisdom is wisdom itself. "Mind" in this case refers not to the nature of mind, but to wisdom. We are talking about the function that wisdom can play. All words are functions produced from the wisdom of the sage.

Which sages are we talking about? Although the buddha

will also transmit the Dharma on the surface, in fact the buddha only has wisdom, no consciousness. The bodhisattvas at the eighth level and above have almost no consciousness, their thinking and judgment are all completed through wisdom and meditation. The bodhisattvas at the seventh level and below do have consciousness, and will sometimes use this consciousness to discuss their views and propagate the Dharma.

"All words spoken by sages are the function of the mind" means all language and words arise from the wisdom or consciousness of the sages.

This mind is inherently empty. This wisdom or consciousness that functions, its essence is emptiness. Therefore, the nature of mind is both emptiness and buddha nature.

A buddha cannot be found in famous sayings or anywhere in the twelve divisions of the scriptures. "Famous sayings" refers to all languages, including all kinds of names, vocabulary, etc. The "twelve divisions of the scriptures" refers to the entirety of the Buddhist scriptures, which can be divided into twelve parts. This statement means that all names and vocabulary cannot express the state of the buddha, because language has its limitations; it can only tell us roughly what the nature of mind or clarity is, but never in a very clear or precise way. Therefore, we cannot possibly attain the state of the buddha just by studying the twelve divisions of the scriptures.

In fact, many things in daily life cannot be expressed in words. In the early days of mankind, there was no language, let alone writing. Later, in groups living together, a consensus on some things was formed, which over time slowly evolved into

language. For example, what is "sweet"? Sweetness is a taste, but the word "sweet" can never directly express this taste. To understand this taste, you must taste it yourself. After everyone has tasted sweetness, they have a common understanding; the word "sweet" is then used to express it. If someone has never tasted it, they will not understand what others are talking about – this is due to the limitations in language.

So, language itself is based on a misunderstanding, but this misunderstanding is necessary so that people can communicate. Take “sweet” as an example again, the word “sweet” has no actual relationship with the taste itself. The first group of humans who created language chose to use "sweet" to describe this taste, thereby establishing a consensus: when the word "sweet" is said, everyone knows what it refers to. In fact, this is a wrong feeling, but it is what we need; without it, people will have a hard time communicating.

It is thus evident that not only transcendent concepts such as emptiness and clarity, but also certain things in daily life are difficult to directly express clearly. The secular concepts are a little better, such as the word "sweet." Firstly, everyone agrees on this word, and secondly, everyone has eaten sweets, so this word can clearly express sweetness. However, words such as emptiness, clarity, and buddha nature are completely foreign to those who have not yet realized enlightenment. Even if we use more words to describe them, it is still confusing and incomprehensible. Just like people who have never eaten sweets, they will be confused on hearing the word "sweet."

Therefore, the Buddhist scriptures repeatedly point out that the Dharma cannot be expressed in words. No matter

how many Buddhist scriptures we learn, we must experience and realize it ourselves, otherwise it will be very difficult to understand the true connotation of Buddhism.

The path is basically perfect. It does not need to be created or perfected.

The "path" refers to buddha nature. The nature of everyone's mind is buddha nature. Because buddha nature already exists and is perfect, this "path" does not need to be perfected.

Does this mean we do not need to practice? No, it does not. The meaning here is that since the "path" is the eternally existing buddha nature, there is no need to create it through practice, but to understand and realize its existence. The purpose of our listening, contemplating, and practicing is not to create a new path, but to discover and experience the original path.

The path has no form or sound. It is subtle and hard to see.

The path has no form or sound. "Sound and color," that is, sound and matter, generally refers to the outside material world. The "path" has nothing to do with the material world. In other words, the world we understand through our senses has nothing to do with the path, because the path is the nature of our fundamental innate mind. Therefore, the nature of mind is extremely **subtle and hard to see**.

How can the existence of the "path" be established? If you want to prove it, the only way is to realize it yourself. You will then discover: Oh, this is the nature of mind! No explanation is

needed, nor is logic or basis necessary. But for those who have not yet attained enlightenment, it is indeed difficult to prove. Not all truths can be communicated clearly. This depends on two conditions: to whom it is expressed and how it is expressed.

If the other party is not yet enlightened, any basis or evidence is futile; it can never be explained clearly. Just like trying to prove that honey is sweet to a person who has never tasted sweets, you will get nowhere with any amount of reasoning because the other person lacks the actual experience. Of course, this also depends on the other person; if he has never eaten honey but has tasted other sweets, you can by way of the appropriate expressions bring his understanding a step further.

Just like a person drinking water knows how hot or cold it is, but cannot tell others.

Just like a person drinking water knows how hot or cold it is. This statement is very important. It is like a person drinking water, he knows very well whether the water is cold or hot without being told by others. At that moment, no theoretical support is needed.

If someone has never had the experience of drinking cold or hot water, trying to use words to explain what is cold or hot water is impossible. Even if all the words and languages in the world are used, it is difficult to truly understand because he has no concept of cold or hot. But if this person has tried similar drinks, you can explain it to him step by step, which may help him understand it better.

Where are we now? We have only heard about emptiness,

buddha nature, and clarity, but have not experienced it; no matter how many words the master uses, it is difficult to understand. Therefore, it is particularly important to find a way to experience it yourself.

But cannot tell others. You cannot tell others about emptiness and other profound topics. You cannot say it even if you want to.

Perhaps some people will think that, at the most critical moment, you are avoiding the issue by claiming it cannot be expressed in words. Certainly not! Human language is indeed unable to express key issues such as the nature of mind, of which the reasons we have already discussed. In sum, there are two points.

Firstly, it is hard to convey without actual experience. This is true not only for buddha nature and clarity, but also for certain things in daily life, such as the feeling of pain. If I want to tell people around me about my headache, it is useless no matter how I describe it, if they have never had a headache before. They will not understand it at all.

It is thus clear that language has considerable limitations. If people want to communicate, they must first have the same experience; next, they need to establish a consensus and use a certain term to express something that everyone knows. For example, when we say "sky," we all know that it refers to the void above our heads; when we say "earth," we know that it refers to the land under our feet. But there is no actual relationship between the two, it is just an artificial agreement. When we learn a foreign language, it is equivalent to participating in an agreement with foreigners. In short,

language without shared experience and agreement is ineffective. Therefore, regarding emptiness and the nature of mind, we can only "not tell others." People who have not experienced it cannot convey it; enlightened people are also incapable of describing the state of enlightenment to those who are not yet enlightened.

Secondly, language itself is created to satisfy our needs in life and is of little use beyond daily matters. Therefore, the true connotation of Buddhism cannot be directly expressed in words. "Like a person drinking water, he knows how hot or cold it is," it must be realized by oneself.

That which only the tathagata can know, all other beings are unaware. Ordinary people are not wise enough, so they have attachments. Not knowing their mind is basically empty, they cling to appearances and all phenomena; they are thus outsiders.

That which only the tathagata can know, all other beings are unaware. Only the buddha can fully understand the nature of mind; humans and heavenly beings do not understand it. Of course, this does not mean that the bodhisattvas from the first to the tenth level do not comprehend the nature of mind; they have already realized it, but not fully or perfectly like the buddha.

Ordinary people are not wise enough, so they have attachments. Why are ordinary people not enlightened? Their wisdom is not deep enough, so they have attachments.

Not knowing their mind is basically empty, they cling to appearances and all phenomena; they are thus outsiders. Ordinary people have not yet realized that the true

nature of their mind is empty. They are attached to all kinds of appearances and things, so they are "outsiders." The outsiders here should be understood as people who have not achieved enlightenment. This is how Bodhidharma and some Buddhist scriptures define it.

If you know that everything arises from the mind, you should not have any attachment; with attachment, you are unaware.

If you understand that everything comes from your mind – that the external world does not really exist but is merely a projection of your mind – you should not develop attachment to external things. If such attachment arises, it means you still do not understand this principle.

There is an interesting phenomenon going on now. Some open-minded scientists have begun to question whether the universe exists when humans are not observing it. This is surprisingly an issue under study in scientific materialism! Isn't the universe always there? If external matter exists objectively, what difference does it make whether we see it or not? Certainly, scientists would not be investigating this issue without reason or basis.

Buddhism has always maintained that the outside world is created by our mind, and that we live in the world we create. The movie "The Matrix" vividly illustrates this principle. If you take a good look, you will know what is going on. The humans in the film live in a virtual world created by computer programs, but they are completely unaware and believe it is the real world.

In fact, the world we are in now is just the same. From birth, we firmly believe that the colors and shapes we see are

real. But the Buddha told us very early on these do not exist at all. Not only the Buddha, now scientists are also saying the same thing. If these things that my eyes see are not real, what are they? According to the Buddha and scientists, they are merely images in your brain, just your illusion! If that is the case, isn't it possible the entire world, not just colors and shapes, is an image in the brain? The answer is yes. But matter cannot possibly be in part real and in part an illusion. Thus, some scientists and philosophers have started a discussion on whether the universe exists when we are not observing it.

At this point, the Buddha would say: I said more than 2,500 years ago that this world is created by our mind. But do not worry. If you choose to remain in this world you have created, you can live safely and happily life after life, the premise being you do not commit evil deeds – you do not create bad karma. However, if you seek liberation from the cycle of life and death, that is also possible. Once you transcend, you can step out of the world you have created.

If you see your true nature, the entire twelve divisions of the scriptures become senseless words. Its thousands of sutras and treatises are just for knowing the mind; if you have achieved this goal through words, what use are the teachings thereafter?

If you see your true nature, the entire twelve divisions of the scriptures become senseless words. "Senseless words" refers to boring and useless words. If you see the true nature of your own mind, the twelve divisions of the scriptures are useless. In fact, the Buddhist scriptures are all contained in these twelve divisions; there are no other scriptures.

Its thousands of sutras and treatises are just for

knowing the mind; if you have achieved this goal through words, what use are the teachings thereafter? The "teachings" refer mainly to the Buddhist scriptures and treatises (the contents expounded by the Buddha himself are called sutras; the commentaries by Nagarjuna Bodhisattva, Maitreya Bodhisattva, etc. are known as treatises). The only purpose of these sutras and treatises is to let us understand our own mind. If you attain great enlightenment and understand your mind through words, you have achieved this goal. There is no use for these sutras and treatises thereafter.

The Buddhist scriptures often compare language and characters to bridges or boats; they are needed when we cross a river, but are no longer necessary after we cross the river and reach our destination. Similarly, all Buddhist sutras and treatises are only for us to understand the nature of our own mind. When we achieve enlightenment one day, these sutras and treatises lose their function. This is the reason Bodhidharma always refused to acknowledge the twelve divisions of the scriptures.

Therefore, you need to know at what level one is speaking from. For beginners, Buddhist scriptures and treatises are useful; reading, reciting, copying, and making offerings to Buddhist scriptures are meritorious deeds. But in the eyes of Bodhidharma, these activities are not meritorious at all. For this reason, Emperor Wu of Liang and he parted on bad terms. Bodhidharma would say that Buddhist scriptures are idle texts, and those who are not enlightened are heretics. There is only one thing he recognized – enlightenment! So long as you are enlightened, anything is possible. If you are not enlightened, you have nothing in common with Bodhidharma.

The ultimate truth is beyond words; the scriptures are just words, not the path. The path is wordless. Words are delusions.

The ultimate truth is beyond words. The ultimate and highest state of truth cannot be expressed. It is beyond the reach of words.

The scriptures are just words, not the path. Whether it is Buddhist scriptures or treatises, they are all made up of language and texts. They are not the path at all.

The path is wordless. Words are delusions. The path itself has no language and does not fall within the domain of words or speech. It cannot be expressed through language or text. Our ability to communicate in daily life is based on illusions; without these illusions, communication would not be possible. Hence, all speech is deluded thinking. Such delusions are of no use in understanding the path, because no language or words can adequately convey the essence of the path.

III. Issues to note in practice

1. *Do not cling to joy, sorrow, success, or failure*

Next, Bodhidharma talked about several very important issues that practitioners must pay attention to. These topics are not closely related, so they are introduced separately.

If in a dream at night you see castles, palaces, elephants and horses, forests, or lakeside pavilions, do not give rise to even a single thought of attachment or joy. These are all places of rebirth, so be careful.

If in a dream at night you see castles, palaces, elephants and horses, forests, or lakeside pavilions, do not give rise to even a single thought of attachment or joy. Do not become attached to beautiful scenes.

Why? Because **these are all places of rebirth**. “Rebirth” is reincarnation.

You must know that dreams and the bardo share many similarities in essence and phenomena. The so-called bardo is the transitional period between the end of the previous life and the beginning of the next life. If we cling to dreams, such as having attachment to and desire for the scenery and characters in the dreams, we will also have attachment when we enter the

bardo. At that time, a person with great blessings will see very pleasant and beautiful scenes; any attachment to this will bind the person to cyclic existence, cause rebirth, and destroy the chance of liberation in the bardo.

Therefore, **you must be careful**, you must watch out! Be sure not to cling to things in a dream!

But how easy is it to stay unattached? Our mind is clear during the day and we can still distinguish between good and bad, and right and wrong; but when we dream at night, our mind is confused and we crave beautiful things. No matter how many times Bodhidharma pointed this out, there is still nothing we can do. In tantra, dream yoga is a practice that can help us avoid attachment in dreams.

The special thing about dreams is that they are very similar to the bardo. This is part of the rationale behind dream yoga. If you possess the ability to change your life, you can easily transform its course during the bardo. So long as you master certain methods and techniques, you can choose to return to a specific realm of rebirth during the bardo, or be reborn in the Western Pure Land and attain liberation there. Tantra utilizes this principle by simulating the bardo through dream practices; these methods will come in handy when you enter the bardo. Bardo cannot be simulated in real life because the gap between the two is quite large.

Bodhidharma exhorted us not to delight in the beautiful scenes in dreams. The implication is that those who have bad fortune or have created a lot of bad karma will not see beautiful scenes such as pavilions and palaces in the bardo, but horrific things instead. He also said not to fear the terrifying

phenomena that appear in nightmares. But to truly succeed, you must practice dream yoga; only then can you cope with ease in the bardo.

At the time of death, do not cling to appearances; without attachment, you are free from obstructions. Just a moment of doubt or suspicion, and you will be possessed by demons.

At the time of death, do not cling to appearances. Do not obsess with "appearances" when you are approaching death.

What are "appearances"? Firstly, they include all our assets – our house, car, bank cards, clothes, etc. The scriptures say that when we are alive, our property belongs to us; if we make offerings or give to those in need, we can create corresponding merits. After we die, no matter how much property we possessed during our lifetime, it is no longer ours. At this time, our family may use the money to do good deeds for us. Although this is very helpful, it cannot compare with the merit we can create ourselves. Therefore, it is best to properly handle all our belongings by giving as much as possible before we die. Secondly, "appearance" refers not only to our own property, but also to all things. At the time of death, we cannot be attached to anything. To achieve this, we must realize emptiness.

Without attachment, you are free from obstructions. "Obstruction" here refers to attachment. At the time of death, all attachments are to be given up. How is this accomplished? The enlightened person should abide in emptiness and take rebirth in this state.

Theravada Buddhism believes that it is impossible to die in emptiness like this, but Mahayana Buddhism such as tantra

believes that it is entirely possible. If your consciousness is clear, you can directly rest in the state of enlightenment; if your consciousness is clouded, you must have someone by your side to remind you to abide in emptiness.

Just a moment of doubt or suspicion, and you will be possessed by demons. The "suspicion" here refers to doubts about emptiness, as well as to defilements such as greed, anger, and ignorance. The moment of death is extremely critical. If you have the slightest bit of doubt, and suddenly have this kind of thought, you will be possessed by demons, which is very dangerous!

Ordinarily, many people pay homage to the buddha, but when it comes to important moments such as facing buddha statues or meeting their guru, they often have bad thoughts that pop up uncontrollably, and are deeply troubled by it. Everyone must keep this in mind. People who have experienced similar situations may also have these thoughts at the time of death. There are many reasons for this phenomenon. You should supplicate to the buddhas and bodhisattvas regularly, recite Guru Rinpoche's mantra frequently, and pray for his help to remove obstacles.

In sum, at the critical time of death, you must do your utmost to avoid two kinds of obstacles: one is attachment; the other is doubt.

The dharmakaya is inherently pure and impassible, but due to delusion, you are not aware of it, you suffer retributions in vain. Therefore, with any yearning for or attachment to your possessions as death approaches, freedom cannot be attained.

The dharmakaya is inherently pure and impassible, but due to delusion. The dharmakaya is intrinsically pure and impassible; it is only due to ignorance that various attachments arise. It is not the dharmakaya itself that has attachment, but sentient beings that have ignorance.

You are not aware of it, and you suffer retributions in vain. Because sentient beings are unaware and unknowing of the delusion, they suffer retributions in vain, and continue to transmigrate in cyclic existence.

Therefore, with any yearning for or attachment to your possessions as death approaches, there is no freedom to be attained. Hence, if you are still sentimentally attached to your family, property, and human life at the time of death, you will not be able to achieve liberation. You will perpetuate in the cycle of rebirth.

Bodhidharma continued to talk about the problem of attachment as death approaches. The solution is very simple – you must eliminate all obstacles by not having attachments of any kind. Although this method is good, the prerequisite is that you already possess the wisdom of enlightenment. To an awakened person, enlightened wisdom is omnipotent. It is so because this wisdom can be used in dreams, it can be used at the time of death, it can be used at any time!

However, for those who are not enlightened, it is difficult to achieve, so other methods are needed. We need to learn the practice of the bardo before death. This practice is mentioned in tantras such as the Six Bardos and Dzogchen, and it involves many aspects such as how to face death and what to do when dying. Everyone will face death sooner or later. If we can

prepare in advance, we will be able to go safely when the time comes.

Once you awaken to your true nature, you will no longer be tainted by habits.

"Habit" refers to defilements and habitual tendencies. If you realize the nature of mind while you are still alive, and stay in the enlightened state when you are dying, you will not be afflicted by negative emotions or habitual tendencies, and you will be able to pass away smoothly.

Powa is the unsurpassed practice in tantra that teaches how to face death through the wisdom of enlightenment. This method that is used at the time of death has four categories, namely dharmakaya powa, sambhogakaya powa, nirmanakaya powa, and the powa of ordinary people. Among them, the highest level is the dharmakaya powa; through this method, practitioners can pass directly from the state of enlightenment. This is the best powa practice for an enlightened person, none other is required. The method that Bodhidharma mentioned is in fact the dharmakaya powa.

Chan Buddhism is extremely special, its methods very high-end. It is suited to people who are highly accomplished like Master Hui Neng, or those with superior abilities. If you are that kind of person, all problems can be solved through Chan methods. But for ordinary people like us – the "heretics" in the words of Bodhidharma, no matter how good these methods are, they cannot help us for the moment. If there is no other way, we are then helpless.

Fortunately, Buddhism also provides other methods, like

tantra that has four kinds of powa. Those who cannot use the dharmakaya powa now can try the sambhogakaya powa or the nirmanakaya powa; at least they can practice the powa for ordinary people – that which is explained in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. Tantra is called the vehicle of skillful means precisely because it offers many methods to suit practitioners of different capacities. People at any level can enter this path that starts with understanding precious human birth and culminates in the advanced practices in Chan, Dzogchen, and Mahamudra.

When a sage returns to the mundane world and appears in any of myriad forms as a sentient being, he is at ease in any circumstance, good or bad, unrestrained by karma.

When a sage returns to the mundane world. How does a sage go from the sacred to the mundane? It must be the intention of the buddhas and bodhisattvas to appear as sentient beings, for example, as ordinary people to save living beings.

And appears in any of myriad forms. "Myriad" refers to all kinds of sentient beings in the six realms of cyclic existence. The sages are all enlightened people, of the same type; while sentient beings are of different types from hell to heaven. This sentence means that buddhas or bodhisattvas manifest in the form of humans, animals, and so forth to save all living beings.

As a sentient being. Here we are referring to the external image or appearance of the buddha as a sentient being, not to the state of the buddha which itself can never regress or be transformed.

Why would a buddha manifest as an animal? When the buddha wants to help animals, he needs to assume the

same identity, so that they can have a common language and communicate with each other. Thus, in other religions and in all walks of life, there must be incarnations of buddhas and bodhisattvas. Even a butcher, which is considered low-level by worldly standards, may be an incarnation of the buddha.

He is at ease in any circumstance, good or bad. The circumstance is "favorable" when the sage is a buddha or bodhisattva; it is "adverse" when the sage transforms into an animal or a lower-level human being. In fact, regardless of good or bad times, the sage's mind is always free and happy, without any pain or trouble.

Therefore, after we become a buddha, whether the circumstances outside are favorable or not, our mind will always be free and at ease. This is true happiness, so Buddhism uses the word "great bliss" to describe this state.

Unrestrained by karma. As mentioned before, the sage cannot be restrained by karma at all.

Having long attained enlightenment, a sage possesses great might and virtue, he can transform all kinds of karma, heaven and hell can do nothing to him.

Having long attained enlightenment, a sage possesses great might and virtue. A sage who has reached the eighth bodhisattva level has over time acquired great prestige and virtue.

He can transform all kinds of karma. "All kinds of karma" refers to all types of karma, including good karma, as well as bad karma such as the ten unwholesome deeds and five

heinous sins. Any kind of karma is transformed by the sage into a method to save sentient beings. In other words, on the surface, the sage seems to be creating karma, but in fact he has transformed it and is not creating karma at all.

Heaven and hell can do nothing to him. To a saint who is free and at ease, there is no temptation in heaven, and no fear in hell. Nothing affects him.

Ordinary people are confused, but sages know everything inside and out. If you have any doubt, do not act; once you act, you wander into life and death, and regret having no refuge.

Ordinary people are confused, but sages know everything inside and out. Ordinary people have not yet attained enlightenment, so they are ignorant and cannot see things clearly like sages.

If you have any doubt, do not act. "Doubt" refers to attachment, and doubt about emptiness is also a kind of attachment. If you cling or are attached to things, you cannot say something like "good and evil karma does not exist."

Ordinary people have attachments to all things and cannot be like sages who seem to be creating karma but are in fact saving sentient beings. Since they cannot do as sages do, they should strive to commit good and stop evil, and be mindful of the law of cause and effect in all decisions they make in life. This is the safe way to go.

Once you act, you wander into life and death. If an ordinary person commits transgressions such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and lying, the result will inevitably be to

"wander in life and death," because he has not yet realized emptiness.

And regret having no refuge. It is useless to regret at that time. There is no salvation.

Poverty and hardship all arise from deluded thinking.

People often cannot help but confront poverty and hardship in life. This is in fact all created by deluded thinking. On the one hand, poverty is linked to our stinginess in the past and reluctance to give to others; on the other hand, it can be understood as a mindset, since a greedy person is always poor if he is never satisfied with the wealth he has.

The content here expounded by Bodhidharma is very profound, but it also touches on how we should live. Buddhists do not necessarily have to live in poverty, but in principle they should try to be content with less desire. This is in line with the low-carbon simple life that is both environmentally friendly and energy-saving and is now strongly advocated; it also leads to a more relaxed life. Not only Buddhists, but all people should take contentment with less desire as an important principle in life. If you are insatiable, no matter how much material wealth you have, you can never satisfy your infinitely expanding desires, nor can you achieve happiness in the end.

If you understand the mind, you should encourage and inspire one another, but do without doing; this way you will see things from a tathagata's perspective.

If you understand the mind, you should encourage and inspire one another. In Buddhism, followers are all equal,

without hierarchical distinctions; they are encouraged to interact often and help each other. If a person encounters material or spiritual challenges, everyone should actively lend a helping hand.

Nowadays, the happiness index among people is generally low; many people are unhappy, of which one reason is interpersonal problems. Poor interpersonal relationships can cause all kinds of troubles, while good relationships bring much joy. Therefore, Buddhism often highlights the importance of having good spiritual friends and fellow practitioners, in particular Tantric Buddhism which pays special attention to friends on the vajra path.

Each of us who study Buddhism should have at least two or three reliable and close friends in the Buddhist group. Regularly sharing thoughts and helping one another can bring about a sense of security and belonging. Friends are like rechargers, replenishing energy and cheering us up when we are vulnerable and in need.

Of course, we can also have good friends who are not Buddhists, such as materialists, atheists, and even followers of other religions like Christianity, Islam, and Taoism. But Buddhist practitioners share a unique view on many areas, especially major issues such as life and death. For example, when faced with hardships like birth, old age, illness, and death, or when one's consciousness is unclear at the end of life, spiritual friends can provide vital support. With the help of Buddhist principles and methods that both parties can easily accept, the outcome is certain to be better.

It is like crossing a strong river current without a bridge or boat. At this moment, a person crossing the river alone can

easily be knocked down by the water, but holding hands with others allows him to cross safely. Similarly, it is often difficult to walk alone in the sea of samsara, so we need to help each other get through it smoothly.

Everyone encounters ups and downs of one kind or another in life, hence we should pay more attention to friends on the same path around us. If we find someone in trouble or depressed, we should take the initiative to care and counsel him. People who are in trouble often feel at a loss and even find it difficult to extricate themselves; other people who are free from such troubles are fully capable of helping. If we ignore the person, his problems may get worse, even developing to the point of self-harm. Once a person suffers from excessive greed, anger, and delusion, he is likely to become irrational and lose his judgment.

We often speak of saving all sentient beings, but this should start with helping the people around us. Concrete actions are necessary, just talking without taking any action is useless. If we are indifferent to fellow practitioners around us who need help, how can we talk about saving sentient beings?

Everyone must reflect often and apply what they have learned to their daily lives, so that families can be more amicable, society more harmonious, and all mankind and even all sentient beings happier and safer. In this regard, there is a lot that Buddhists can do. Buddhism teaches that human life is rare because human beings have the capacity to develop critical thinking, have different choices, and can do many meaningful things. Although heavenly beings enjoy better material conditions, they have few choices and can only do so much.

Therefore, we must cherish this precious human birth.

When we practice together, care for and encourage each other, and become good spiritual companions, life is truly meaningful. Unity among fellow practitioners is also what Shakyamuni Buddha required of the Buddhist community and every disciple. This is especially vital for monastic communities, where monks and nuns, lacking familial support, rely on mutual care. Nowadays, many lay people who live alone, such as singles and elderly individuals, are also in great need of help. It is clear that "encouraging and inspiring one another" is imperative. Everyone must remember this!

But do without doing, this way you will see things from a tathagata's perspective. If you do without doing, you begin to enter the state of the tathagata, and the wisdom of the buddha.

The meaning of "do without doing" is profound. In essence, everything is emptiness. "Do without doing" means doing something after realizing emptiness. At this point, we realize that all things are illusory, that we are in a state of threefold wheel of essential emptiness; therefore, whatever we do whether it is exhorting each other or practicing meditation, we do not become attached to it or ask for anything in return. But before this realization, everything is real to us, we develop attachments, and act with expectations of return.

Bodhidharma's teachings are sometimes profound, and sometimes simple and down-to-earth. No matter what, they are very meaningful. It is difficult for us to "do without doing" at this stage, so it is a goal. But "encouraging and inspiring one

another" is something we can do now and at any time, so we must act on it.

When you are new on the path, your mind is often uncertain.

Those who are new on the path are beginners. What is the difference between a beginner and non-beginner?

Regarding beginners, there are two interpretations, narrow and broad. In a broad sense, beginners are people who have just learned Buddhism. In a narrow sense, an example is this: if there is a deadly poison, non-beginners will be fine after taking it; they can resolve the harm caused by the poison simply by relying on their own spiritual practice – anyone who has not reached this level is a beginner.

This passage mainly refers to beginners in a broad sense, that is, Buddhists who have just studied the Dharma for one or two years and whose faith, renunciation, and bodhicitta are not yet stable. With this group, anything can affect their beliefs; their practice may be shaken at any time.

Some beginners who encountered problems at home, such as sickness or trouble at work, after entering the path would question whether their circumstances were related to learning Buddhism, practicing meditation, and reciting mantras. Thus frightened, they would be afraid to stay on the path. This is a typical example of "a newcomer whose mind is uncertain."

You are likely to see strange scenes in your dreams, but do not doubt that they all arise from your own mind and nowhere else.

You are likely to see strange scenes in your dreams.

If you frequently dream about phenomena that are unusual or strange, it is indicative of something special.

Most of our dreams have no meaning, and it is normal to occasionally dream of strange things; but if we have the same dream repeatedly, it may have a special meaning. Specifically, two kinds of situation are possible:

One is related to the past. Some traces of our past life are brought into this life, resulting in frequent dreams of the same place or the same thing. There are countless such phenomena and they have occurred in many places. Foreign scientists have participated in this investigation and found that it is related to the person's past life experience. How do they know this? One is through hypnosis; the other is by locating, for instance, the building that the person often dreams about.

The second is related to the future. There are examples of people who before passing had recurring dreams of unusual scenes one or two years in advance.

If a beginner sees strange things in his dreams, he may be frightened and lose faith. What then? **Do not doubt.** There is no need to doubt, no need for attachment or fear.

They all arise from your own mind and nowhere else. Because all dreams come from our own mind, not from outside.

Why can we ignore that which comes from our mind? As mentioned before, our mind is empty; you just need to practice emptiness, and not worry about other things. This is what Bodhidharma taught from the perspective of emptiness. From the perspective of secular life, some dreams contain special

meanings; we can make certain adjustments or prepare for the present based on the problems foreseen in the dreams. This content is discussed further in tantra.

Next, the passage lists several scenes that may appear in dreams and their predicted meanings.

If in a dream you see a light brighter than the sun, it means your remaining habits will come to an end, and the nature of reality will be uncovered. Such an occurrence is the cause of enlightenment. But only you know it, do not tell others.

If in a dream you see a light brighter than the sun. In your dream, the whole world is bright, even brighter than the light from the sun. This "brightness" does not refer to the clear light nature of mind (the nature of mind is originally pure, so it is called clear light), but to sunlight.

What does it mean if you often dream of such strong light? **Your remaining habits will come to an end, and the nature of reality will be uncovered. Such an occurrence is the cause of enlightenment.** Your remaining habitual tendencies and afflictions will soon be eliminated, and the nature of reality will appear before you. Having such a dream is a sign that you are about to become enlightened.

This is a good phenomenon, but do not cling to it, otherwise you will develop arrogance and turn a good thing into an obstacle. Some Buddhist treatises also introduce the meaning of special dreams. For example, after practicing Vajrasattva and repenting, you dream of sun and moon discs – the sun and moon in the sky, which symbolizes the purification of your wrongdoings. By studying these treatises, one can understand

the meaning of dreams.

But only you know it, do not tell others. It is wrong to go around flaunting the dreams you have.

Many fellow practitioners often ask such questions, which are clearly explained by Bodhidharma here. We should not obsess with the various things we dream about, nor tell others about it; this way it will run its own course. If you obsess with the dream and spread it around, the originally good omen will turn into an obstacle to spiritual practice, and the originally meaningless dream will also become an obstacle. In the end, it is certain to lead to adverse consequences such as illness and trouble at work.

If in a quiet garden, while walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, you see a light, whether bright or dim, do not tell anyone about it, do not cling to it; it is the clear light of your own nature.

Another situation is seeing a light when you are alone in a quiet place – not dreaming at night but during the day. This light may be red or yellow like the morning glow, or it may be blue like the blue sky or the sea.

What does this mean? According to Buddhist scriptures, when a diligent practitioner sees a light which is like the dawn, it means that he will soon achieve enlightenment – just like the dawn in the east means that the sun is about to rise.

Although the body structure of more than seven billion people in the world is basically the same, there are still differences in certain details. Some people are more prone to hallucinations. At this time, do not think that you are about to

achieve enlightenment, nor rule out the possibility that the light signifies something meaningful. No matter what, remember not to develop attachment to it.

If in the stillness of night, while walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, you see a light, like daylight, do not be surprised; the nature of your mind is about to reveal itself.

If in the stillness of night, while walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, you see a light, like daylight. When it is quiet at night, when a person is walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, he can see light in the darkness that is just like daylight.

In Tibetan Buddhism, there is a practice called dark retreat, which is to practice in a room without a trace of light. After about twenty-four hours, various lights will appear before us, some shining like stars, and some as beautiful as a rainbow. In fact, these are not external scenes. Scientists have said that the colors we see are all images in our brain, and that there are no colors at all in the physical world. Similarly, the strange lights that practitioners see during a retreat may appear to be external things, but are in fact a phenomenon that manifests from the central channel within the body.

After people take certain medicine or drugs, strange sights will also appear in front of their eyes, which look completely real, making it difficult to tell whether they are genuine or fake. In fact, these phenomena are all hallucinations caused by the stimulation of human nerves. If even plants and medicine can play tricks on our senses, how reliable are our eyes, ears, etc.? Once these senses change even a little bit, the whole world changes accordingly. Thus, we really do not know what

the world is like. In this regard, the Buddhist view is that the external world does not exist objectively – all appearances are just projections of our mind.

Sometimes the sights we see are not precursors to enlightenment, but simply products of our meditation. A typical example is the story of Gampopa mentioned earlier. At a retreat, he saw a lot of strange phenomena. In response, his master Milarepa explained that his meditation belt was too tight (when meditating, practitioners wear a belt from the shoulder to below the knees); this led him to assume an incorrect meditation posture which then affected the flow of air in the body, and caused various sights to appear. After Gampopa loosened the meditation belt, everything was fine; the scenes in front of him also disappeared.

The *Lankavatara Sutra* says: "When practitioners obsess with various appearances, like the sun, the moon, the lotus-shaped light, and fire burning in empty space, they are heretics on the path." People who practice meditative concentration sometimes see the sun, the moon, the lotus-shaped light, and flame-like patterns in the void. If they develop an attachment to these phenomena, they all become outsiders, or heretics.

This kind of phenomenon is sometimes interpreted as the work of ghosts and gods. In fact, in most cases, it has nothing to do with ghosts and gods, but one's own illusion. When such a situation occurs, there is no need to fear, no need to make wild guesses, and no need to cling to anything. Even if it is an auspicious phenomenon, there is no need to be complacent. The only solution, also the best, is to let it run its course.

Do not be surprised, the nature of mind is about to

reveal itself. Do not be surprised. This kind of light indicates that the nature of your mind is about to appear – you are about to achieve enlightenment.

Or if in a night dream you see the stars and the moon clearly, it means your karmic hindrances will soon be eliminated; but do not tell others.

Or if in a night dream you see the stars and the moon clearly, it means your karmic hindrances will soon be eliminated. When we dream at night, seeing the moon and the stars, clearly and distinctly, is an indication that our inner troubles and karmic hindrances will come to an end. By practicing repentance, the causes and conditions that created various karma in the past such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and lying will soon be eliminated, and the above-mentioned signs will appear.

But do not tell others. You also cannot tell others. When encountering such auspicious phenomena, we often like to show off. We know very well that we cannot say anything, but it is hard to control ourselves. At this time, you must hold back and not reveal anything.

If the dream is murky, like you are wandering in darkness, it means your mind is clouded by afflictions; this too only you know.

If in your dream you seem to be walking in darkness, it means that your troubles and karmic hindrances are more serious. Just know it yourself, there is no need to tell anyone. This is different from the previous auspicious sign. It is also okay if you want to talk about it, but you may not want to, since others cannot help you in any case.

Understand that there are differences between people. Among people who do not practice, the vast majority see only the ordinary real world, but a few people can see mysterious things such as ghosts and gods (of course, some images are just their own illusion). Because Buddhist practitioners pay special attention to their mind, certain changes and adjustments will take place in the mind which may then cause a chain of reactions, such as seeing various kinds of light, seeing buddhas, bodhisattvas, or scenes like hell which Gampopa saw.

Whether you see heaven or hell, do not focus on it. Know that this may be a phenomenon that comes about when you correct your mindset or cultivate the practice of the subtle winds, channels, and vital essence (people who undertake this esoteric practice are more prone to seeing things); it is not real. People do not look on dreams as real; similarly, we can think of these phenomena as dreams and not pay attention to them. In this way, whether the phenomenon is good or bad, it will not affect your practice or interfere with your daily life. On the contrary, if you are attached to it, it will hinder your practice and even cause harm to your body.

Of course, not all practitioners encounter this kind of phenomenon. As mentioned earlier, although our body structure is roughly the same, some people are extremely sensitive due to differences in sensory details or past life habits. For example, a person said he happened to see ghosts and gods in a certain place, but others who were there did not see anything. People who are not very sensitive can only perceive the three-dimensional world they live in, whereas people who are sensitive can easily come across beings or objects in other spaces and dimensions. The latter is not the result of spiritual

practice, since most of them have never engaged in practice; they are just intuitive and sensitive. This intuition has nothing to do with emptiness. It simply allows them to experience things that are special or about to happen. For those who have never had such an experience, it may seem a bit abnormal. But Bodhidharma said there is no need to make a fuss, as this is a normal reaction.

All in all, these are things that we may encounter in life which we need not worry about at all. So long as we ignore it, it will not have any impact on us. This is very important for practitioners to know.

2. The core of spiritual practice is to understand the nature of mind

Once you perceive your true nature, there is no need to read scriptures or invoke the buddhas; learning too much is useless, it will only dim your mind.

It is said here that there is no use in learning widely, but the *Platform Sutra* points out the importance of having a broad knowledge of things. We often come across such seeming contradiction, but it is not contradictory. Why? Because the conclusions are drawn from different angles.

For those who have not yet attained enlightenment, it is useful to learn widely. Studying the sutras and commentaries cannot directly help us achieve enlightenment, but it can indirectly help us. First understand the concept of emptiness, which can overturn many attachments at the gross level; then further meditate on this basis, and through in-depth analysis,

gain deeper understanding and wisdom. From this perspective, it is very useful to learn widely; this is the principle expounded in the *Platform Sutra*.

Those who are enlightened no longer need to study extensively, since they have already seen their true nature. As stated in the *Bloodstream Treatise*, "If you see your true nature, there is no need to read scriptures or recite the buddha's name. Learning too much is useless."

Please note this statement must be interpreted correctly! The Buddhist scriptures say that even the third-level bodhisattvas travel across the entire universe to seek Dharma teachings from buddhas in other worlds. The bodhisattvas at this level have already attained enlightenment, but have not yet reached the highest ground and still need to learn. In fact, all bodhisattvas from the first to the tenth level need to learn. There are many such records in the Buddhist scriptures: a certain buddha in the East went to a certain buddha in the West to listen to the Dharma, and a buddha in one Pure Land went to a buddha in another Pure Land to hear the Dharma. The buddha has already reached the highest state of realization and need not study; such manifestations are merely to apprise us of the importance of listening to the Dharma. Therefore, it is wrong to simply assume that studying Buddhism after enlightenment is unnecessary and that the scriptures are useless.

In addition, Bodhidharma also said that some people only study one or two Buddhist scriptures and think they understand all the teachings. This is simply impossible! The Buddhist canon is extensive. Many of the expressions are moreover hidden within words and need to be explained by

other scriptures. Therefore, it is difficult to comprehend the Buddhist scriptures directly. If we expound the Dharma after studying just one or two sutras, we will likely misguide others; a comprehensive understanding of Buddhism is essential.

But how can people fully understand Buddhism when they are busy all day long, and life is short and fleeting? The method is to directly study the main treatises by Nagarjuna, Asanga, and others. These treatises were compiled after the great masters were proficient in all the scriptures as well as 84,000 teachings and extracted their essence. The entire content of the Prajnaparamita sutras, for instance, is condensed in the *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, which is less than twenty pages; this is the wisdom that the bodhisattvas possess. Thus, studying the sastras is said to be the best shortcut to attaining a quick and comprehensive understanding of Buddhism.

Once you perceive your true nature, there is no need to read scriptures or invoke the buddhas. After enlightenment, you should seize the opportunity at hand and continue to practice emptiness; at this time practicing emptiness is much more important than reading scriptures. For example, if you can only arrange one hour a day to study the Dharma, it would be a mistake to spend most of your time reading scriptures and chanting the buddha's name; it is better to meditate and practice emptiness – this already contains the essence of the scriptures. However, do not think that invoking the buddhas and reading the sutras are unnecessary after attaining enlightenment. These are still needed! But if you only have one choice to make, you must choose to cultivate emptiness!

Learning too much is useless. The same goes for this

verse. If there are only two hours a day to study Buddhism, should an enlightened person practice the emptiness he has realized, or simply listen to and reflect on it? Of course, the former! At this point, theory is not the most important thing. It would be a waste to allocate time from the two hours to study theory when all of it should be used for meditation. This is how this verse ought to be understood.

But everyone must not think that simply cultivating emptiness is enough. The buddhas of the ten directions awakened the eighth-level bodhisattvas from their meditation and prevented them from meditating all the time. Why? Apart from meditating, there is still the unfinished work of accumulating merit. The bodhisattvas at the eighth level can abide in emptiness for a long time, but their accumulation of merit is not yet perfect, and they still need to go out to complete this task. Therefore, we must concurrently practice emptiness and accumulate merit. Only through the cultivation of merit and wisdom can one become a buddha. Both are essential.

It would be wrong to think that chanting the buddha's name, worshiping buddha statues, offering water and flowers are not required in Chan Buddhism. Bodhisattvas at the eighth level still need to accumulate merit, let alone ordinary people! We need to know at what level our practice is. If we understand some issues incorrectly, it may not necessarily have any impact on our actual practice; but if we understand these key issues incorrectly, it will certainly affect our practice. Everyone must keep this in mind!

It will only dim your mind. When we learn too many things, we become more and more confused and lose our

direction. Why is that? Because we return to the mundane. Instead of staying in a state of realization, we spend precious time gaining a lot of knowledge, which only adds to our confusion. Therefore, we must know what the primary and secondary tasks are after enlightenment.

The teachings are there only to point out the nature of mind; if you see your mind already, why study the teachings?

The teachings are there only to point out the nature of mind. The Buddha devised many teaching methods and turned the Dharma wheel three times, with just one goal which is to point out the nature of mind.

If you see your mind already, why study the teachings?

If you have already achieved this goal, that is, you recognize the nature of mind, there is no need to read the scriptures anymore. Because you have already experienced the content expressed in the words.

Just like if you have never tasted honey, you can understand the taste of honey by reading a book; after tasting it, you no longer need to read a book to understand it. This is the principle Bodhidharma wanted to convey. However, we have not yet experienced the incredible power of meditative concentration, or the various supernatural powers of the buddha, so we need to elevate ourselves through learning. Enlightenment is very important, but we must also listen and reflect, and not go to extremes.

To become a sage, you must put an end to evil karma, cultivate your mind, and accept what life brings.

To become a sage, you must put an end to evil karma and cultivate your mind. To go from a mortal to a sage, that is, from being unenlightened to being enlightened, what do we need to do in the process? Firstly, we must put an end to our evil karma by repenting our various wrongdoings and obstacles; secondly, we must nurture our mind by cultivating renunciation and bodhicitta.

There are many ways to eliminate evil karma through repentance, the most sacred of which is the Vajrasattva practice; to nurture the mind, the four preliminary practices cultivate renunciation, the five preliminary practices strengthen our faith in taking refuge and engender bodhicitta. Although no specific practice is mentioned here, and such terms as the four preliminaries and five preliminaries are not used in Chan Buddhism, Bodhidharma expressed it very clearly: if you want to "transcend from the ordinary to the sacred" and gain enlightenment, you must complete the four and five preliminaries, the purpose of which is to "eliminate your evil karma and cultivate your mind." Therefore, anyone who seeks enlightenment must fulfill this prerequisite. Regarding this point, Chan and Tibetan Buddhism not only do not contradict but also complement each other.

Ordinary people like us, who are not of the same capacity as Master Hui Neng, have even greater need to "eliminate our evil karma and cultivate our mind." If we do not practice the four and five preliminaries, we can be certain that enlightenment is unattainable. Why? The enlightenment attained in Chan Buddhism is said to be the highest state of realization, its practice methods are extremely special. We currently lack the capacity to practice Chan; the only way for us to enhance our

capabilities is by eliminating evil karma and cultivating the mind. Thus, the four and five preliminaries are indispensable practices on the path!

Accept what life brings. People often talk about accepting, or going along with, one's circumstances in life. If we follow our own causes and conditions, without exacting demands or comparing ourselves to others, this is called "accepting what life brings."

If you are well blessed and have huge material wealth without having to exert special effort, you can certainly enjoy a life of luxury; that is living in accord with your circumstances. In this case, there is no need to intentionally live a hard life and become an ascetic; otherwise, it is also a form of attachment. For example, a person originally in good financial condition chooses to live in poverty because he feels that Buddhists should not enjoy a wealthy life. This is completely unnecessary.

People have different ways of living. We should choose the one that suits our own conditions, and live accordingly. If our economic situation is difficult, we should accept it calmly and live a simpler life; there is no need to envy others. In fact, a simple life is not necessarily bad. We may be able to do what we really like, even live more at ease.

In the article "A Buddhist's Mode of Life" in *The Luminous Wisdom Series*, it is said that Buddhists should not fall into either of two extremes. They should neither deliberately live a luxurious life nor deliberately choose a hard life. The Buddha once said in the *Vinaya Sutra* that if you own a building that has up to five hundred rooms without having to spend too much time and energy, you can enjoy it by yourself – not only

as a layperson, but also as a monastic. You need not question whether it is appropriate to live in such a luxurious house, then consciously change to a smaller house. However, you must try to use all the rooms, some for meditation, some for reading ... otherwise it is a waste. Another example is if you own an expensive piece of clothing worth ten thousand US dollars; whether you are a layperson or a monk, you can wear it if you are at ease with whatever circumstances life brings.

Excessive anger will lead you away from the path, bringing only harm.

Excessive anger will lead you away from the path. If you complain every day, for example, you feel that your life is not as good as others, so you complain about your parents, colleagues, and even society, what will happen? Your practice will gradually regress, and your capacity and disposition will also change – you will move further and further from the Dharma. How can you engage in spiritual practice when you complain about everything and everyone all day long? This is especially true in Mahayana Buddhism.

Bringing only harm. There is no use in deceiving yourself.

In life and death, sages come and go as they please, appearing and disappearing at will, unrestrained by karma.

The "sage" here refers to the buddha or bodhisattva from the first to tenth level. Are all enlightened people called sages? Not necessarily, there are many levels of enlightenment. Only those who are first level bodhisattvas and up can be called sages; those who have achieved enlightenment below the first

level are still ordinary people. Therefore, ordinary people can also have enlightenment; their realization is called preliminary enlightenment.

Of what use is the enlightenment of ordinary people? First, you can completely control your various defilements, such as anger, anxiety, and depression; second, you can gradually control your physical sensations, such as reducing pain and discomfort when you are sick. Relatively speaking, it is easier to resolve mental pain; to eliminate physical pain requires some effort. In any case, the enlightenment of ordinary people is still very meaningful.

Sages come and go in life and death as they please. As ordinary people, we cannot freely come and go in life and death because we have not yet reached that level and do not have the ability. We have no choice over where we are born and where we are reborn after death. It all depends on our karma.

After we obtain preliminary enlightenment and possess a certain amount of spiritual power, we no longer rely entirely on karma; our vows can play a substantial role. At that time, whether we wish to be reborn in the Western Pure Land, or in poverty-stricken and war-torn areas such as Africa and the Middle East to help more sentient beings, our aspiration can be fulfilled.

When we reach the first bodhisattva level, the karmic restrictions disappear and everything will be determined by the power of vows; we can be reborn wherever we want to save sentient beings. In general, bodhisattvas will not reincarnate in the formless realm because the sentient beings there cannot see or communicate with each other, so it is difficult to help them.

Most bodhisattvas will choose to be reborn in the desire realm where we are, because the desire realm contains both pain and happiness, and people can communicate with each other; the conditions for saving sentient beings are very mature.

Bodhisattvas at the third level and above no longer need the power of vows, but rely entirely on the power of meditation to reincarnate. The buddha has no real reincarnation and is completely at ease; he can manifest whatever is required to save sentient beings. The only thing he cannot do is to put an end to the karma of sentient beings. It has been more than 2,500 years since Shakyamuni Buddha entered parinirvana; during this period, no such buddha has appeared again because of our karmic restrictions. The buddha does not come to this world just by thinking about it; the buddha will only appear when we have the corresponding merit. How "the sage can freely come and go in life and death" is thus explained.

Appearing and disappearing at will. A sage is "sometimes hidden and sometimes revealed." Just like more than 2,500 years ago, Sakyamuni Buddha came to save sentient beings as a buddha; this method which is apparent to all is called "appearing." Now the buddha is also saving sentient beings, but in a more hidden way, manifesting perhaps as a Christian or Muslim, maybe as a cleaner, even as a slaughterhouse worker or sex worker; this method is called "hiding." "Appearing and disappearing at will" means that the buddha is perfectly at ease, he can appear when he wants to and hide when he wants to; he can appear when he needs to be visible and hide when he needs to be hidden.

Unrestrained by karma. As mentioned before, the

buddha himself has no karma, so he cannot be restrained or controlled by karma. If we talk about control, it is in fact the karma of sentient beings that determines whether a buddha can appear.

They have already cut through delusions and evil influences. Sentient beings only need to see their true nature to instantly eradicate their residual habits; with a clear mind, they must directly grasp the truth, right in the moment.

They have already cut through delusions and evil influences. The sage has already defeated all evil spirits.

Sentient beings only need to see their true nature to instantly eradicate residual habits. Once sentient beings see the true nature of mind, their remaining karma and habitual tendencies will quickly come to an end.

With a clear mind, they must directly grasp the truth, right in the moment. The mind of the sage is always clear; there is no ignorance because the sage has already achieved enlightenment. We can also achieve this state if we realize the nature of mind right now.

If you really want to realize the path, do not cling to anything. Once you put an end to evil karma and cultivate your mind, all remaining habitual tendencies will naturally dissipate. Clarity will arise without much effort.

What can be done to achieve enlightenment right now? **If you really want to realize the path, do not cling to anything.** If you really want to understand and realize the path, you must not cling to anything. On the contrary, if there is attachment,

enlightenment cannot be achieved.

In fact, non-attachment and enlightenment are causally related. Which of the two comes first, which comes last? Of course, enlightenment comes first, then non-attachment. It is only after attaining enlightenment that we can achieve non-attachment, not the other way around. The original text seems to imply: you must first eradicate your attachments if you want to achieve enlightenment. But, in fact, this cannot be done; it is just a form of expression. If you have already severed your attachments, you no longer need to attain enlightenment.

Once you put an end to evil karma and cultivate your mind. This has been mentioned before.

All remaining habitual tendencies will naturally dissipate. At this time, all remaining habitual tendencies can also be eradicated.

Bodhisattvas at the first level have already cut off many afflictions, but still have some afflictions left. From the first ground to the tenth ground, every time you advance to a new level or attain a new realization, some of your afflictions will also be eradicated. This is equivalent to dividing the process of enlightenment or the process of eliminating defilements into ten stages. Although it is said that "all remaining habitual tendencies will naturally dissipate," in fact, the elimination of defilements is not accomplished instantly, but achieved gradually.

Clarity will arise without much effort. You need not pretend to work hard. Eliminating defilements is dependent not on hard work, but on enlightenment.

If there is no enlightenment, no matter how hard you work, it will be in vain. If you attain enlightenment, your defilements can be eradicated instantly; there is no need to work at all. Just like turning on the light in a dark room, the moment the light is on, the darkness naturally ceases to exist. There is no need to eradicate it, because the birth of light and the disappearance of darkness happen at the same time.

Outsiders who fail to grasp the Buddha's intent exert themselves tirelessly; they violate his true meaning, and run around chanting the buddha's name and reciting sutras all day long, they remain confused about their own nature and cannot avoid rebirth.

Outsiders who fail to grasp the Buddha's intent exert themselves tirelessly. The "outsiders" here still refer to people who have not yet attained enlightenment. They do not understand the essence of the teachings or know that the buddha is in their own mind, so they especially like to practice hard.

In the realm of Bodhidharma, the four and five preliminary practices that outsiders take up are useless. However, as ordinary people, our capacity is not yet mature, so we can only adopt these outsiders' practices first. After our capacity matures, we can use the methods prescribed by Bodhidharma; in the end, everyone will reach the same state of realization. So, there is in fact no contradiction.

What Bodhidharma really meant here is that outsiders do not understand that the buddha is in their own mind, so they look for the buddha outside and try to obtain the buddha's fruition from outside. Such desperate efforts are in vain and run counter to buddhahood. The purpose of practicing the

four and five preliminaries is precisely to obtain the buddha in our mind, to gain enlightenment. This is completely consistent with the Buddha's intention. Bodhidharma would not deny this type of practice.

They violate his true meaning. The practice of outsiders goes against the will of the Buddha. The true meaning of Buddhism is to look for the buddha within. Looking outside for the buddha is obviously against the Buddha's will, so no matter how much effort we put into it, it will be useless.

And run around chanting the buddha's name and reciting sutras all day long. Bodhidharma particularly looked down upon practitioners who only know how to invoke the buddhas, recite sutras, etc.

When he first arrived in China and met with Emperor Wu of Liang, they disagreed from the very beginning on the teachings and could not communicate. Although what Bodhidharma said was accurate, his overly straightforward exposition was unacceptable, let alone comprehensible, to Emperor Wu and many people in the Buddhist community at that time.

They remain confused about their own nature and cannot avoid rebirth. If you chant the buddha's name and supplicate in search for the buddha outside, you are only confusing yourself. In the end, you still cannot avoid the cycle of birth and death.

The buddha is an idle person. He does not busily pursue fame and fortune. What use are these things afterwards?

The buddha is an idle person. The buddha has already done all the things he needs to do – he has realized the ultimate state that needs to be realized, eradicated the defilements that need to be eradicated. Therefore, the buddha has nothing left to do.

He does not busily pursue fame and fortune. What use are these things afterwards? "Afterwards" refers to the next life. What use is fame and fortune in the next life? It is all in vain.

But people who do not see their nature read scriptures, invoke buddhas, and study diligently; they practice day and night, and meditate for long periods of time without lying down. They study widely and think it is the Dharma; these people are all slanderers of the Dharma.

But people who do not see their nature. These are people who have not seen the nature of mind, that is, who have not yet attained enlightenment.

Read scriptures, invoke buddhas, and study diligently; practice day and night, and meditate for long periods of time without lying down. There is a saying in the past called "six periods" – the day and night are divided into three periods each, a total of six periods. To practice six periods is to practice day and night. People who have not yet attained enlightenment chant sutras, invoke buddhas, study diligently, practice day and night, meditate for long periods of time without lying down ... all of these are useless. They are still outsiders.

They study widely and think it is the Dharma; these people are all slanderers of the Dharma. They think that

this is learning the Dharma, but it is not. They in fact denigrate the Dharma.

That is troubling, isn't it? Someone might practice diligently and study extensively for many years, thinking he is a true follower of the Buddha, only to end up slandering the Dharma! This is because Buddhism is not about these things at all. So, what is Buddhism? It consists of two parts: teachings and realization. Teachings refer to language and texts, but they are not the true Dharma, as explained already; realization encompasses precepts, concentration, and wisdom – all of which are forms of enlightened wisdom. True wisdom has no attachments, no buddha to recite, and no sutra to expound. Practices like chanting the buddha's name, reciting sutras, etc. all involve attachment; they search outside for the buddha. If you say this is the Dharma, it is tantamount to slandering the Dharma.

In Chinese Buddhism, the Chan and Pure Land schools also differ somewhat on this matter. Some interpret Bodhidharma's teachings as implying that practices like invoking the buddhas and reciting sutras are pointless and should not be undertaken. In fact, this is a matter of interpretation. The two paths are not contradictory at all. You can recite the buddha's name and meditate; you can even recite Amitabha Buddha's name upon entering meditative concentration. This is the so-called method of reciting with one-pointed, spotless mind, a highly advanced form of recitation that is also a Chan practice. Master Xu Yun and other eminent monks just practiced this way.

Thus, a person can take up Chan and Pure Land simultaneously – a practice known as dual cultivation of Chan

and Pure Land. Not only is there no conflict between the two, such an approach can be even more beneficial. Why? Because if you are not accomplished in the Chan practice, you can still rely on reciting the buddha's name to attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land. Conversely, if you are accomplished in the Chan practice, chanting the buddha's name will not hinder you – it can actually enhance your state of realization. From this perspective, integrating Chan and Pure Land is a highly meaningful approach.

In this case, why did Bodhidharma use such harsh words? The teaching Bodhidharma transmitted is the method of non-action, also known as sudden enlightenment. This approach, which is considered very special, was rare in Chinese Buddhism at that time. Bodhidharma once said that his main purpose in coming to the East was to teach the method of sudden enlightenment. To draw attention to this practice, he often used harsh words.

Bodhidharma certainly knew that the sudden enlightenment method is in no way inconsistent with Pure Land or other methods. In fact, he would also compromise, as in the latter part of the *Bloodstream Treatise* where he talked about the need to follow the law of karma and not transcend cause and effect. But to promote such an amazing and little-known method, he had to use uncommon language to shock some people into taking notice and listening to it. On the contrary, if he had only used common or ordinary expressions, people might have dismissed it as nothing new and not attached importance to it.

Taking this into consideration, Bodhidharma's blunt remarks to Emperor Wu of Liang, claiming that the emperor's

virtuous deeds had no merit, were intended to let everyone from the emperor down to the common people know about this new method of enlightenment. This is my personal understanding.

Although there are similar words in some Buddhist scriptures, Bodhidharma was exceptionally bold to speak so directly! Sometimes he spoke more strongly, sometimes more softly, depending on the capacity of the audience at the time. No matter how it was expressed, its core idea remained the same. In the final analysis, the only thing Bodhidharma meant to say is that you must realize the nature of your mind. Once you realize the nature of mind, just abide in that state, for all six perfections are included within it. Not only Bodhidharma, most Prajnaparamita sutras also say this, so we must understand it correctly.

The buddhas before and after only talk about seeing your nature.

Seeing your nature is realizing emptiness, or realizing the nature of mind, realizing its true face. This phrase means that the buddhas of the past, present, and future will propagate various dharmas to correspond with the different capacities of sentient beings, but there is one principle they will expound again and again, and that is emptiness.

This is because, although various methods are needed to guide sentient beings, there is only one way to ultimate liberation – enlightenment. Regardless of whether they are animals or gods, no matter what their capacities are, the fundamental cause of reincarnation is the same, namely ignorance and self-grasping. Therefore, if you want to be liberated, you need to eradicate ignorance; to eradicate ignorance, you must realize

emptiness. This is the only path to liberation.

All composite phenomena are impermanent. If you do not see your nature and falsely claim, "I have attained the highest perfect enlightenment," you are a great liar.

The phrase **all composite phenomena are impermanent** suddenly shows up here, which can be understood to mean that everything is fleeting. The opportunity for enlightenment is very rare, so we must strive to achieve it as soon as possible.

If you do not see your nature and falsely claim to have attained the highest perfect enlightenment, you are a great liar. The highest perfect enlightenment is called Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi. If you know that you are not enlightened but say "I am enlightened," "I have realized the state of the sages," "I have realized the nature of mind," it is a serious deception; you are a great transgressor.

This kind of lying is much more serious than lying in daily life. When a person falsely claims that he has attained enlightenment, he often has other hidden purposes. If someone follows him to learn Buddhism, that person will inevitably go astray, unable to find the correct path to liberation.

Therefore, you cannot say to others "I am enlightened," and you cannot reveal your own state of realization. Bodhidharma's other treatises and Chan classics such as the *Platform Sutra* have all mentioned this; Dzogchen, Mahamudra, and other tantric methods also have the same requirement. Even if you really have some level of realization, your practice will stagnate if you propagate it everywhere. If you are not enlightened but claim you have already attained enlightenment, you are a big sinner.

Therefore, the outcome is just one of two kinds: either your realization will stagnate, or you become a big sinner. Thus, you must never reveal your own state of realization. You cannot directly say, nor indirectly disseminate this information.

Among the Buddha's ten great disciples, Ananda was foremost in listening, but he did not really know the buddha, he relied only on extensive learning.

Among the Buddha's ten great disciples, Ananda was foremost in listening. The Buddha had ten famous disciples, each with his own strengths. Among them, Ananda was foremost in listening. Ananda was always at the Buddha's side as his attendant, and basically heard all the Dharma taught by the Buddha; the other disciples were not always there with the Buddha, and thus did not hear everything.

Although Ananda was known as the most knowledgeable of the disciples, he failed to achieve enlightenment during the time of the Buddha (this is the realization in Hinayana Buddhism that human beings have no self-existence). In the summer of the second year after the Buddha passed away, the great disciples congregated with the purpose of putting the Buddhist teachings that everyone had heard into words. The participants were required to be arhats. Because Ananda was not qualified to participate, the great bhikkhu Kashyapa thought of a way to motivate him by intentionally accusing him of eight major crimes. Ananda had followed the Buddha for decades; now that the Buddha had passed away, he was accused without reason and felt very sad. He learned from the pain, worked hard at his practice, quickly achieved arahant status, and successfully participated in the Buddhist sutra assembly.

In addition, the Sarvastivada teachings in Hinayana Buddhism mention a koan that is recorded in the *Vinaya Sutra*. During the Buddha's time, there was a monk named Udayin who never attained enlightenment despite being a monastic for a long time; he would chase after money and sensual pleasures, and often got into trouble. One time, he was taken to the king's court after causing substantial trouble again. The king and queen were both Buddhists and felt very embarrassed and disappointed with him. Later, the queen called him to her side and taught him a lesson: "All the people who took up vows with you have become arhats, but you are causing problems around the Buddha every day!" The monk felt deeply ashamed, made up his mind to practice well, and soon obtained arhathood.

These examples show that pain is not necessarily a bad thing for practitioners. If pain can be turned into an incentive to practice on the path, it is in fact a good thing.

He did not really know the buddha, he relied only on extensive learning. The "buddha" here refers to the dharmakaya of the buddha, which is the nature of one's own mind. Ananda studied and listened a lot but did not attain enlightenment. He followed Sakyamuni Buddha for many years and knew the Buddha very well, but only the external buddha – the nirmanakaya of the buddha. He did not know the buddha in his own mind– the dharmakaya of the buddha.

Outsiders in the two vehicles do not know the buddha, they cultivate realization through practice only, and cannot transcend cause and effect. That is the karma of sentient beings, they cannot avoid birth and death, they violate the Buddha's will and slander him. Killing them is not a sin.

Outsiders in the two vehicles do not know the buddha. The "two vehicles" generally refer to Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism, but here it refers to the sravakas and pratyekabuddhas in Hinayana Buddhism; or alternatively to all Hinayana Buddhists, and to Mahayana Buddhists who seek the buddha outside their mind. From the perspective of Bodhidharma and some Buddhist scriptures, people who seek the buddha outside their mind do not recognize the dharmakaya in their mind, so they are called outsiders.

They cultivate realization through practice only. Outsiders only know how to practice enlightenment frequently and repeatedly, which means they only know how to recite many sutras and practice a lot; they do not know that the nature of their own mind is the buddha.

Of course it is right to practice repeatedly, but it is their concept that is problematic. They believe the nature of mind is not the buddha, the buddha is external, and you can become a buddha through practice; living beings are also not the buddha now; the defilements that afflict living beings are not bodhi. From the perspective of the third turning of the Dharma wheel, that is, Dzogchen, Mahamudra, and Chan, this view is wrong.

They cannot transcend cause and effect. This view that outsiders have does not transcend the scope of cause and effect. Practicing now is the cause, and becoming a buddha in the future is the effect. This kind of understanding remains at the level of good and evil, of cause and effect. What is cause and effect? It is conditioned and impermanent. So, their understanding still belongs to the category of conditioned dharma, and is incorrect.

That is the karma of sentient beings. With cause and effect, of course there is karma. Karma can be good or evil. If you practice hard now and become a buddha in the future, it is good karma.

They cannot avoid birth and death. There is no escape from the cycle of life and death.

Here we need to pay attention to a detail. It is said above that "outsiders in the two vehicles" are not immune to life and death. Does this mean that followers of the Hinayana vehicle cannot escape reincarnation? If so, can the status of arahant be achieved in Hinayana Buddhism? To say it cannot be achieved is a defamation. Although practitioners of Hinayana Buddhism cannot become buddhas, they can certainly attain arahant status. Does an arhat transcend the cycle of birth and death? An arhat is precisely someone who has transcended birth and death. So, what did Bodhidharma mean when he said outsiders cannot avoid birth and death?

According to Buddhist scriptures, there are two types of life and death. One is life and death at a gross level, that is, the life and death experienced by sentient beings in the six realms, which is caused by karma; the other is life and death at a subtle level, which refers to the life and death of arhats and bodhisattvas from the first to tenth ground.

There are also two types of dependent origination. Due to ignorance, a person is reincarnated from this life to the next, then grows old and dies. This complete cycle contains twelve links, each link is a branch of dependent origination. This is the dependent origination with ignorance and afflictions that we usually talk about, also the dependent origination that all

sentient beings experience repeatedly.

But at the first bodhisattva level, this kind of life and death disappears. Between the first level and buddhahood, there is another type of dependent origination. The driving force behind this dependent origination is not ignorance, but compassion. Although there is still some ignorance left, its power is too small to allow the bodhisattva to create karma, so he will not reincarnate due to karma. However, the bodhisattva is not a buddha yet, so there is still life and death at a subtle level; this kind of life and death comes to a complete end only at the eleventh level, that is, when he attains buddhahood.

The phrase "cannot avoid birth and death" refers to this kind of life and death. Although the arhat has transcended life and death at the gross level, the subtle aspects of life and death still exist.

They violate the Buddha's will. They go against the Buddha's intent, specifically his thoughts and purpose in the third turning of the wheel of Dharma. The Buddha said in the third turning of the wheel of Dharma: Sentient beings are buddhas, and afflictions are bodhi. This is what the Buddha ultimately wanted to convey.

The "outsiders in the two vehicles" do not understand this view. They believe that in attaining the buddha's fruition, there is cause and effect; if you practice hard now, you will become a buddha in the future. This runs counter to the view "you are a buddha even if you don't practice" and "you are a buddha now." What does "I am a buddha now" mean? In essence, all sentient beings are now buddhas, but there is no use in being a buddha if you are not enlightened. Why? Just like nightmares do not

exist in essence, but for various reasons, people still dream. In the same way, we are buddhas in essence, without reincarnation and pain. But due to ignorance, we have illusory sensations such as pain; we regard these illusions as truly existent – it is thus that the real world is formed in front of us.

They are slanderers. These outsiders are people who slander the Buddha. How do they slander the Buddha? If you think that through practice you eventually become a buddha – practice is the cause and becoming a buddha is the effect – then the buddha is a product within the category of cause and effect, which is equivalent to saying that the buddha is impermanent. This is slandering the Buddha. The buddha is not a product of cause and effect, nor is it impermanent.

Killing them is not a sin. This sentence cannot be understood to mean that there is no sin in killing such people. That would be completely wrong! The objects "killed" here are the outsiders, that is, arhats, pratyekabuddhas, and certain followers of Mahayana Buddhism. How can it not be sinful to kill these people?

What does that mean? As Bodhidharma repeatedly pointed out, all living beings are buddhas; therefore, to understand the buddha as impermanent and as cause and effect is a slander against the Buddha and is an extremely serious mistake. How serious is it? Even if someone comes to kill this man, he is not guilty; the man deserves such a punishment. Bodhidharma expressed it this way to emphasize the seriousness of the mistake. It does not mean that killing this person is not a sin.

The sutras say: "Icchantikas do not believe in cause and effect, so killing them would not be wrong."

Bodhidharma then quoted Buddhist scriptures to substantiate his point of view.

Ichchantikas do not have faith in cause and effect. An "icchantika" is a person who is cut off from his roots, that is, a person who temporarily does not accept cause and effect and has no concept of good and evil and cause and effect. Some people are extremely selfish, do not know how to think of others, and only consider themselves. For the sake of their own happiness, they do not hesitate to trample on other people's feelings and commit all kinds of evil. Such people are icchantikas.

Killing them would not be wrong. As in the previous sentence, this expression must not be understood to mean that killing an icchantika is not a sin. People who do not believe in cause and effect and reincarnation will kill, steal, commit adultery, tell lies, and even start wars at will, resulting in the death of thousands of people. The transgressions of such people are very serious; even killing them would not be wrong.

Additionally, there is another interpretation, which is explained below through a koan recorded in Buddhist scriptures. In ancient India, many merchants would take ships to areas that are now Indonesia and the Philippines to collect precious jewels. In the past, navigation technology was not as advanced as it is today. There were no positioning, navigation, and other equipment, and the ships made of wood relied entirely on wind power to sail. The chance of success in finding treasures was very low. But once successful, the merchant would make a fortune, and his whole family would never have to worry about having the means to live for the rest of their lives. Many people

were thus willing to take the risk.

Once, five hundred merchants sailed out to sea on a large ship to collect treasures. On the way back after successfully retrieving the treasure, there was an evil man who coveted the treasures in the ship and planned to take them for himself; to this end, he planned to poison and kill everyone else. At this time, a merchant found out about his plan. This merchant thought about it and finally decided: I will kill the evil man to save the lives of these people so that they may return to their families; in addition, if the evil man really kills someone, he will surely descend into hell; after I kill him, I will be the one to go to hell, but I would rather go to hell myself if everyone can be saved. After thinking like this, he resolutely killed the evil man.

On the surface, murder is certainly sinful, but this time it was an act of saving living beings. Firstly, the merchant had no selfish motives and was purely trying to save others; secondly, he was willing to give of himself and bear the consequences even though he knew he would descend into hell. Although he killed someone, he not only did not commit any sin, but also attained great merit.

There have been many icchantikas in history who acted recklessly, especially those who held power and thus caused great harm. For the sake of their own power or wealth, they did not hesitate to start wars and kill innocent people indiscriminately. Everyone is witness to the tragic history of World War I and World War II. If a person knows that a certain evil person will start a war and thousands of people will lose their lives, he kills the evil person who does not believe in cause and effect to save the lives of countless people, is he guilty? No. One thing to

note here is that if there is the slightest bit of selfishness mixed in, that is, the person is in fact trying to achieve personal gain under the guise of punishing evildoers, there is no doubt that he is guilty no matter what kind of person he kills.

As for "icchantikas do not have faith in cause and effect, so killing them would not be wrong," the two interpretations above are all possible, but the first explanation is more appropriate. That is, the seriousness of the transgression of a person who does not believe in cause and effect is such that killing him would not be wrong.

In Buddhism, the scriptures are distinguished by those that are definitive and others that require further interpretation. What can be understood directly according to the literal meaning is definitive, and what cannot be understood directly is provisional. The reason the Buddha made this distinction was to take into consideration the capacities of the listeners at that time and teach them the corresponding Dharma. For Buddhist scriptures that are provisional, we cannot rely entirely on the literal meaning; we should read through the words to understand the meaning they really want to express.

A person who has faith is at the level of the buddha. If you are not enlightened, do not casually slander the goodness of others, there is no benefit in self-deception.

A person who has faith is at the level of the buddha. If you have faith in the view that "the nature of mind is the buddha" and "all living beings are buddhas," even though you are not a buddha yet, you are already at the buddha level – which means you will become a buddha soon. There are many such records in tantra.

If you are not enlightened, do not casually slander the goodness of others. If you do not see the nature of your mind, you should not arbitrarily or casually slander kind people, because at this time you are not qualified to talk about other people's state of realization.

There is no benefit in self-deception. There is no benefit in actions that only deceive oneself.

The meaning here is that before enlightenment, one is not clear at all what a high level of attainment is, so do not judge who is at a high level and who is at a low level, who is right and who is wrong; you are qualified to comment on other people's state of realization only after you are enlightened.

Good and evil are apparent, and cause and effect are clear. Heaven and hell are right in front of your eyes, but fools do not believe it and fall into the darkness of hell; they are not aware of it, and they do not believe it because of their serious karma.

Good and evil are apparent, and cause and effect are clear. "Good and evil are apparent" – this is what we usually call infallible karma. It is a transgression to slander others when we are not yet enlightened. Cause and effect are clear and will never be confused; good and evil karma and its retributions are also clear. Good will never turn into evil, and evil will never turn into good. Therefore, we must follow the law of cause and effect in this mundane world.

Heaven and hell are right in front of you. For those who do good deeds, the heaven where the gods reside is right before them. A person who recites Amitabha devoutly may live in the Saha world but experience the Pure Land as if it is right in

front of him. A person who commits sins, although he is living well now and has power, fame, and money, is in fact already in hell.

From here we can easily see that although Bodhidharma often said that there is no cause and effect, no good and evil, we should not think that people who learn Chan can ignore cause and effect. If we interpret it literally, it would be a grave mistake, it would also go against the original intent of Chan Buddhism.

The reason Chan Buddhism rarely discusses good and evil or cause and effect is because other Buddhist scriptures have extensively covered it. Just as universities do not repeat elementary school courses, as those were taught and learned earlier. Although no longer taught in universities, they are a fundamental part of our education. In the same way, the teachings on good and evil and cause and effect were thoroughly explained during the first turning of the wheel of Dharma, and there is no need to repeat it in Chan Buddhism. The propagation and emphasis of Chan on sudden enlightenment, its highest teaching, does not mean that it denies cause and effect. Otherwise, we would not come across expressions like "good and evil are apparent, cause and effect are clear, heaven and hell are right in front of you." We should have a general understanding of the way the Buddha taught the Dharma, which is akin to modern educational systems. The first, second, and third turnings of the wheel of Dharma are equivalent to primary school, middle school, and higher education. The third turning of the wheel of Dharma places special emphasis on buddha nature and tathagatagarbha, but this does not negate the existence of cause and effect.

The same point is also made in the *Platform Sutra*. There is no good and evil or cause and effect in the state of enlightenment, but they exist in real life, that is, in the world of senses.

It is likened to waking up from a nightmare, realizing that you are dreaming, secretly rejoicing, and then going back to sleep, only to have the nightmare again. During the few minutes of waking up, everything in the dream disappears, but this is not to say that it will not reappear after falling asleep. If we continue to dream, the nightmare will come back. Conversely, if we can always stay awake, it will completely disappear. Therefore, it depends on which world we are in. In the sensory world – conventional truth, suffering such as birth, old age, illness, death, war, and hunger inevitably arises due to actions like killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and deceit. But in the state of realization – ultimate truth, all suffering dissolves.

But where is this world that is free of pain? Through listening and contemplating, we learn that it is the nature of our mind, but we only know it conceptually. We must make every effort to open the door to ultimate truth and enter it. Opening means attaining enlightenment; after attaining enlightenment, we can enter and abide in this state through continued meditation.

There is no contradiction between these two worlds, just as there is no contradiction between dreams and reality. From the standpoint of reality, you are lying in bed sleeping; from the standpoint of the dream, you may be fleeing for your life in terror. These two worlds do not really interfere with each other. How can someone come after you when you are clearly lying in bed? Yet, at this moment, in the dream you are indeed in danger.

Dreams are no less real than real life, but once you wake up, everything in the dream vanishes like smoke. It can be said that dreams are like conventional truth and reality is like ultimate truth. The only difference is that dreams are unstable, appearing and disappearing at times; real life is relatively stable and does not change easily. Other than that, there is no fundamental difference between the two worlds.

All in all, when we have not yet achieved enlightenment or a high level of enlightenment, we must be careful in observing cause and effect. When are we most prone to violating cause and effect? At the beginner stage, which includes a long period of time after initial awakening. During this stage, cause and effect have a substantial impact on us.

Previously, we defined what a beginner is. For example, if a poison is taken by ordinary people, it will kill them immediately; but if a practitioner takes the poison, he will not suffer any harm just by relying on the power of his own practice. When you reach this level, you have surpassed the beginner stage and have started to transcend cause and effect. At this point, cause and effect may not have much impact on you.

However, the power of cause and effect is far more powerful than poison. Although you may be immune to the poison, you will still be affected somewhat by cause and effect.

After just listening to a few Chan koans or reading a few Chan scriptures, you think, "As long as I am unattached, anything goes." That would be a big mistake. It completely distorts the meaning of "non-attachment"! Do not forget what Bodhidharma said: "Good and evil are apparent, and cause and effect are clear; heaven and hell are right before our eyes."

But fools do not believe it and fall into the darkness of hell. People who lack wisdom do not believe that afflictions are bodhi and all living beings are buddhas. Therefore, they willfully slander these teachings and commit grave misdeeds. The result is to fall into the darkness of hell.

They are not aware of it, and they do not believe it because of their serious karma. They are not aware, and do not know what effect their actions now will bring in the future. Due to deep karmic obstacles, they do not believe in cause and effect, let alone these profound states of realization. They never believed in cause and effect in the past, neither now nor will they in the future.

This is akin to a blind person who has no way of knowing there is light on the road; even if told, he cannot believe it, so how can he discern sunlight? The same goes for fools.

A blind person has no way of knowing there is light on the road. It is like a blind man who does not believe that there is light on the road because he does not know what light is.

Even if told, he cannot believe it. Even if someone describes to him what light looks like, he does not believe it because there is no light in his world.

So how can he discern sunlight? So how can we explain it to him clearly? There is no way. Because he has never seen light, others cannot prove the existence of light to him. Even if it is explained clearly, he will not believe it.

The same goes for fools. The same is true of people who lack wisdom. No matter how you tell them the nature of mind

is the buddha, they will never believe it.

They end up in the lower realms or among the poor and despised, unable to live or die. Despite their suffering, if you ask them, they say, "I am as happy as the beings in heaven." Thus, sentient beings perceive cyclic existence to be joyful, they do not know and are unaware. Such fools cannot develop faith because of their serious karma; they are not free.

They end up in the lower realms or among the poor and despised, unable to live or die. If you do not believe that the nature of mind is the buddha and you slander and create karma, or if you commit countless transgressions before enlightenment, the consequences are certain to be extremely sad: you will live in misery, and descend into the lower realms after death; even if you return as a human, you will still be impoverished, in poor health, and of inferior rank.

Despite their suffering, if you ask them, they say that they are as happy as the gods. Although they suffer in cyclic existence, when someone asks, they will still answer: "I am very happy now, as happy as the beings in heaven."

In Bodhidharma's time, some people who were poor and lowly might have answered this way. It is not necessarily the case now; even the rich, powerful, or prestigious may not be able to say such a thing, because people are generally under great pressure and depressed.

Therefore, all sentient beings perceive cyclic existence to be joyful, they are unaware. All sentient beings regard samsara as a place of happiness and joy; they are full of nostalgia and are reluctant to leave it. Because of their

attachment to samsara, they do not know and are unaware they perpetuate in an endless cycle of birth and death.

Many times, we are indeed this way. Although we are not happy at this moment, we think that tomorrow will be better; although we are facing ups and downs today, we firmly believe that we will be happy in the future. We always carry expectations for the future. This kind of expectation and desire drives us to work hard and chase after things regardless of consequences. Unknowingly, life comes to an end, and we have nothing to show for it. This is how reincarnation is.

Such fools cannot develop faith because of their serious karma; they are not free. Such a person is not free due to his serious karma. No matter how painful samsara is, he still refuses to leave and suffers from tossing and turning.

People who realize that their mind is the buddha no longer need to shave their head, these people in white clothes (laymen) are buddhas too. If they do not see their nature and shave their head, they are still outsiders.

People who realize that their mind is the buddha no longer need to shave their head, these people in white clothes (laymen) are buddhas too. If you realize that the nature of your mind is the buddha, you do not have to be a monk. Lay people can also become buddhas. Not shaving your beard and hair means you are a lay person.

During the Buddha's time, most lay people in India wore white clothes; therefore, in India, Sri Lanka and other places, white clothes refer to lay people.

If they do not see their nature and shave their head, they are still outsiders. If you have not gained enlightenment, you are still an outsider even if you appear to be a regular monk with your head shaved.

Ordination alone does not solve all problems. Among monks, there are many who have not yet attained enlightenment; among lay practitioners, there are also many who have attained it. Taking monastic vows does not ensure you can achieve enlightenment; being a lay person does not mean you cannot achieve enlightenment. Enlightenment is not determined by whether you are ordained or not. Of course, monastics are not tied down by a lot of worldly affairs; relatively speaking, they have fewer negative emotions and more time at their disposal. They can invest more time in listening, contemplating, and practicing, so the probability of attaining enlightenment is higher.

Among the 84,000 Dharma doors taught by the Buddha, only the monastic precepts cannot be upheld by lay people (adopting them would make them a monastic). All other Dharma essentials, sutra and tantra, the greater or lesser vehicles, the precepts, concentration, and wisdom are shared by both lay people and monastics. Everyone can practice the Dharma; it is not the proprietary right of monastics. Therefore, lay people can also aspire to achieving enlightenment if they work hard; upon realization, they can fully attain buddhahood.

Regarding enlightenment, I have discussed it extensively and will continue to do so. What exactly is it that we realize? What do we consider to be enlightenment? There is a very important verse in Bodhidharma's *Treatise on Realizing the*

Nature of Mind – "Knowing the mind is empty is called seeing the buddha." These words must be clearly understood!

"Knowing the mind is empty" is to know that the nature of our mind is empty. There are different levels of "knowing." Firstly, it is not derived from listening and reflection – it is not because the Buddhist scriptures say that the nature of mind is empty that we know this to be the case. Secondly, it is not derived from the various methods of reasoning in Madhyamaka. Excluding the above, what then is the correct meaning? It is allowing the mind to rest and observe itself.

To observe means to let the mind experience itself. This is something only the mind can do; external objects cannot. A table, for instance, cannot experience itself because it is an inanimate object; our eyes can see other things, but not itself; the sensory organs basically have no self-awareness. The mind can look outwards and perceive the world outside; it can look inwards and perceive its own essence. Self-reflection is a special function of the mind.

"Knowing the mind is empty" is not about looking outwards at the world, but letting the mind perceive itself and realize, when it has calmed down, that it abides completely in a state of emptiness. In fact, this is possible not only when the mind is calm, but also when it is moving. For example, if you are not mindful when you are talking, doing things, or when you are emotional, your emotions will continue to develop. But if you know how to observe the mind, you can by way of your emotions directly see its essence, which is empty like space. Reaching this state is enlightenment.

Therefore, "knowing the mind is empty is called seeing

the buddha" can also be described as realization or awakening. Whether it is Dzogchen, Mahamudra, or Chan Buddhism, the standard for enlightenment is the same. When I was lecturing on the *Platform Sutra*, I said that because tantra has many restrictions and cannot be taught easily, many people do not have the chance to listen to some of its content. I said at the time that teaching the Dharma in this way was "taking advantage of a loophole." On the one hand, I was joking, but on the other hand, it is indeed so. There are no requirements in Chan Buddhism such as empowerments, so I can give these teachings to the extent appropriate.

Whether we have renunciation and bodhicitta ourselves is very clear to us; we need not ask others. The only thing requiring confirmation from a teacher is whether we have achieved enlightenment. In fact, that may not be necessary either if you already "know that the mind is empty," you truly feel that the nature of mind is as empty as space – its essence is unmoving not only when the mind is calm but also when it is in motion. If you do not have this feeling, you are not enlightened yet.

Sometimes when we are very calm inside, certain feelings will arise that have never been experienced before, but this is not enlightenment. It is nothing, not even worth talking about. When a person's mind settles down, he will have various perceptions. For instance, anger will not feel the same as arrogance, arrogance will not feel the same as jealousy, and so on; each emotion will have a different experience. Likewise, when the mind is at rest and all emotions have left, another kind of feeling is sure to arise. These are all feelings that have not yet transcended the level of consciousness. We can enter the

state of enlightenment only after transcending all feelings and realizing that the nature of mind is emptiness. At that point, we need not ask anything, just continue to practice.

Everyone longs for enlightenment. The more we yearn for it, the more mysterious it becomes; the more mysterious it is, the more we want to understand it. Practitioners keep talking about it, and rumors abound, but they do not truly know what enlightenment is. So, let me take this opportunity to explain.

Regarding enlightenment, the literature in Chan explains it very well and in just a few words – "knowing the mind is empty is called seeing the buddha." No matter how many Buddhist scriptures there are or how thick the treatises are, this is the basis on which everything is developed. Ultimately, they return to these few words.

Before enlightenment, we burn incense, worship the buddha, and perform various meritorious deeds, but these deeds do not eradicate our ignorance or affect the essence of cyclic existence in any way. The result is nothing more than to allow us to enjoy temporary rewards in the human and celestial realms. After enlightenment, a radical transformation takes place. Even at the early stage of enlightenment, this slight experience of emptiness is potent enough to severely weaken the essence of samsara, making it impossible for samsara to continue for too long. This is the key reason why all the buddhas before and after teach emptiness.

Question: How can a layman who is married become a buddha if he does not abandon lust? Answer: I do not talk about lust, only about seeing its nature. You do not see its nature. Once you

recognize its nature, lust is basically empty, you need not cut it off, your delight in it ends, any residual habits cannot harm you."

Question: How can a layman who is married become a buddha if he does not abandon lust? How can a lay person become a buddha if he or she has a spouse and gives in to lust?

Answer: I do not talk about lust, only about seeing its nature. Bodhidharma answered: "I don't talk about any of the afflictions, only about seeing their nature."

The reason I say this is because so long as you can see the nature of things, all afflictions such as lust, jealousy, greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt will not be a problem. For example, when lust or anger arises, if you see that the nature of lust or anger is the wisdom of the buddha, then lust is no longer lust, and anger is no longer anger; they are all the wisdom of the buddha.

Ordinarily when we meditate, we hope to be as calm as possible without too many distracting thoughts; this is true from the perspective of meditation. But after enlightenment, there is no difference between having a calm mind and having distracting thoughts. Even if there are many discursive thoughts, so long as you see the true nature of the discursive thoughts in the moment, they are no longer delusions but wisdom instead. The same is true when the mind is calm. Once you see the true nature of peace, peace is no longer peace but wisdom. Therefore, Bodhidharma said you have nothing to fear, so long as you see their nature. If you can penetrate all the afflictions and see their true nature, then no matter how serious the afflictions are, their nature is the wisdom of the buddha.

At this point, there is still some content that remains to be understood; when you receive an initiation and listen to Dzogchen in the future, you will be able to hear it. That is the only difference between Chan and Dzogchen. Dzogchen is more in-depth in some details, and rich in methods. Of course, Chan methods are also exceptional, but there are not as many in number compared to Dzogchen and Mahamudra. The reason tantra is called the expedient vehicle is because it provides many ways to achieve enlightenment.

You do not see its nature. Once you recognize its nature, lust is basically empty. How should we understand "lust is basically empty"? Is lust basically empty? Yes, but just knowing that it is empty is useless, all phenomena are emptiness. Since killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and delusion are emptiness, can we kill or steal? Certainly not! The meaning of this sentence is: when lust arises, if you can instantly feel and see that its nature is emptiness, then it is not lust. Everyone must understand that just knowing that it is emptiness itself is not helpful. You must actualize it.

You need not cut it off. When facing afflictions such as lust and anger, Hinayana, Mahayana, and tantra have different remedies. Hinayana Buddhism advocates the elimination of all afflictions; defilements must be eradicated before enlightenment can be achieved. Mahayana, in general, also requires the elimination of afflictions; additionally, there is another method, which is to use bodhicitta and enlightened wisdom to transform afflictions into the wisdom of the buddha. The third turning of the wheel of Dharma, especially tantra, differs from the first two; it does not rely on elimination, or to be precise, it does not rely on either eradication or transformation. So long as

you recognize the nature of afflictions, that is, realize its nature, afflictions are inherently wisdom rather than defilements; there is no need to cut them off or transform them. Thus, after "you need not cut it off," you can also add "you need not transform it."

We have always believed that afflictions need to be eliminated, and we often talk about getting rid of them. In fact, we only need to understand the nature of afflictions. Before we are enlightened, we are afraid of afflictions; once anger, jealousy and other negative emotions arise, they bring not only unhappiness at the time, but also a series of negative consequences later. The situation is completely different after enlightenment. We will personally experience the nature of afflictions at that time: Oh, so this is what afflictions are like! Since this is the case, of course there is no need to eliminate it. What is there to eliminate?

Your delight in it ends. After enlightenment, you no longer cling to or are attached to it.

Any residual habits cannot harm you. After enlightenment, some habitual tendencies remain, but they can no longer harm us. Enlightened people understand the nature of afflictions. Therefore, afflictions will no longer cause us to commit transgressions such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and delusion. They have already lost this ability.

Why? Because the nature of afflictions is essentially pure. Although you dwell in this five-aggregate body, its nature is pure and cannot be polluted. The dharmakaya has no sensation, no hunger or thirst, no cold or heat, no disease, no love, no dependents; no pain or pleasure, no good or evil, no short or long, no strength or weakness,

there is nothing to obtain. It is only due to the existence of this physical body that there is hunger, thirst, cold and heat, miasma diseases, and other symptoms; once you stop clinging to it, you can do whatever you want.

Why? Because the nature of afflictions is essentially pure. Why is that? Because this person has already realized that the nature of afflictions is essentially pure. As mentioned before, we cannot just say that afflictions are basically pure, as this will not help; we must experience it ourselves. Now that we have already realized that defilements are basically pure, why is it necessary to get rid of them?

Although you dwell in this five-aggregate body, its nature is pure and cannot be polluted. People abide in the five aggregates, but their intrinsic nature is pure. The last of the five aggregates is consciousness, which is mind; the nature of mind is pure and unpolluted.

The dharmakaya has no sensation, no hunger or thirst, no cold or heat, no disease, no love, no dependents; no pain or pleasure, no good or evil, no short or long, no strength or weakness, there is nothing to obtain. All these dualistic concepts do not exist within the nature of mind.

If they do not exist in the nature of the mind, why do they exist in real life? **It is only due to the existence of this physical body that there is hunger, thirst, cold and heat, miasma diseases, and other symptoms.**

Clinging leads to ignorance, and ignorance causes the physical body to appear – a body composed of matter. When we cling to this body, we develop an attachment to the self,

giving rise to a series of afflictions, such as "hunger, thirst, cold and heat, miasma diseases, and other symptoms." It is evident that these phenomena appear because of attachment, but do not really exist.

Chan Buddhism speaks of essence and appearance, which are in fact the two truths, ultimate and conventional, taught in Madhyamaka. Essence is the intrinsic nature or true face of the mind. From the perspective of essence, or ultimate truth, the nature of mind is pure and untainted, so such phenomena as hunger, thirst, cold and heat, and miasma diseases do not exist. Appearance refers to the world perceived through the senses. From the perspective of appearance, or conventional truth, hunger, thirst, cold and heat, good and evil all exist.

As mentioned earlier, ultimate truth and conventional truth can be compared with the real world and the dream world, respectively. When a person is in the real world, the things in dreams do not exist; but when a person enters a dream, everything in the dream feels real. Although dreams do not exist in the real world, it does not mean that they do not exist in dreams. Because the dreamer does not know that everything in front of him is a dream, he treats the dream as real; in his mind, the dream is a reality. Therefore, if we live in a dream world, the real world becomes irrelevant and has no effect on us. The same is true for ultimate truth and conventional truth. We must understand that these are different conclusions drawn from two perspectives, otherwise many concepts will be confusing.

"No hunger, no thirst, no cold or heat, no disease, no love, no dependents, no pain or pleasure, no good or bad, no short or long, no strength or weakness, there is nothing to obtain."

All of these do not exist from the perspective of essence, that is, ultimate truth, or the intrinsic nature of mind. The same is true when looking at the material world from the standpoint of physics: in the macroscopic world, there are buddha statues, tables, human bodies, buildings, and so on; but in the microscopic world, when looking at the deeper structure of matter, there are only atoms, electrons, elementary particles, even energy – there are no statues, tables, or buildings.

In fact, whether it is the external material world or the internal spiritual world, dreams or reality, their rules are the same. From the perspective of essence or ultimate truth, nothing truly exists; from the perspective of appearance or conventional truth, everything exists.

There is a topic in Madhyamaka that is the subject of debate. If things do not exist in ultimate truth, do they necessarily not exist? If things exist in conventional truth, do they really exist? Scholars have had many heated debates about this, and their conclusion is: What does not exist in ultimate truth does not mean that it does not exist in conventional truth; what exists in conventional truth does not mean that it exists in ultimate truth – we need to observe the two truths separately. In the same way, everything in a dream does not exist in the real world, but once a person returns to the dream, everything in the dream exists. Therefore, if something does not exist in the real world, it can only be said that it does not exist in reality; that is not to say that it does not exist in a dream. If something exists in a dream, it can only be said that it exists in the dream; that is not to say that it exists in the real world.

Thus, it depends on which world you are in. If you are in

the real world, so long as you do not fall asleep or dream, you will naturally not be affected by things in a dream. Similarly, after awakening, you can enter a state that is "inherently pure and undefiled" and remain there for a long time. The good and evil or causes and effects in the world will not affect you. If you have not yet awakened, you will not be able to enter this pure state (essence or ultimate truth); you can only remain in the secular world (appearance or conventional truth), where you will certainly be affected by morality and causality.

The *Bloodstream Treatise* mentions the word "fool" several times. What is a fool? A fool is someone who knows that the world of dreams is different from the real world, but does not realize there is another world, an ultimate world, that is even more real.

In the mind of ordinary people, the real world is only the sensory-perceived reality of the present moment; the unreal world consists of illusions, such as hallucinations caused by illness, mirages, as well as dreams. Ordinary people only know these two worlds, one true and the other false; they are unaware of a higher truth, that of ultimate reality. Even the most intelligent and capable people in this world do not know that from the standpoint of ultimate reality, the actual world we live in is akin to a dream, a mirage.

If we have nightmares every night, one solution is not to sleep and remain in the real world. Similarly, if we want to avoid the pain and suffering of birth, old age, illness, and death in the real world, we need to enter the ultimate world – the nature of mind. If we can enter that world and stay for a definite amount of time, we will discover that afflictions such as birth, old age,

illness, and death do not exist there. This is the best way to transcend suffering.

The dream yoga practice in tantra can bring the state of enlightened meditative absorption during the day into dreams, so that a person can still practice after falling asleep. Such a practitioner can remain in the truly real world almost twenty-four hours a day. Birth, aging, illness, and death in the conventional world can no longer affect him, because he is already part of another world.

Now we need to make a choice:

The first option is to stay in the current conventional world, which ordinary people regard as the real world. There is morality and causality here, so we should strive to do good and refrain from evil, and carefully navigate cause and effect. This way, we can enjoy the blessings of humans and heavenly beings in this life and the next, but the basic suffering of birth, old age, illness, and death remains unresolved.

The second option is to move from the current conventional world to one that is more real – the nature of mind. Everything that happens in the conventional world, such as birth, old age, illness, death, and all kinds of afflictions will no longer affect you, because you have already left, just like emigrating to another country and becoming a citizen of that country. In this ultimate reality, all afflictions are eliminated and there is no more suffering.

The latter option is also the principle by which Buddhist practice can lead to liberation. As for which is better, the result speaks for itself.

Once you stop clinging to it, you can do whatever you want. Once you realize the nature of mind, nothing you do will create karma. What about killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and deceit? An enlightened person cannot possibly commit these karmic transgressions, unlike ordinary people who will kill out of anger, and commit adultery or steal out of desire. The reason is that he has no attachments. Even if he kills, steals, or commits adultery on the surface, since he has no attachment at all, there is no cause, and hence no evil karma. Therefore, nothing can restrain him; he has broken through all constraints and limitations. This is true freedom.

If you gain great freedom from life and death, you can transform everything through unobstructed spiritual powers, and you can be at ease wherever you are.

If you gain great freedom from life and death, you can transform everything through unobstructed spiritual powers. If you are free from the cycle of life and death, you can overcome any situation you encounter, whether success or failure, whether happiness or suffering, by transforming via the practice everything into the spiritual power of the sages. The "spiritual power" here refers not to the supernatural or extraordinary powers that we usually speak of. It is a state of omniscience, an ability to understand everything clearly.

You can be at ease wherever you are. After you cut off attachment and discriminating thoughts, you can be at ease wherever you are, in heaven or in hell, it's all the same.

If there is any doubt in your mind, you will never penetrate or see things as they really are. It is best to do nothing, otherwise you will transmigrate indefinitely in samsara. If a chandala sees his nature,

even he can become a buddha.

If there is any doubt in your mind, you will never penetrate or see things as they really are. It is best to do nothing, otherwise you will transmigrate indefinitely in samsara. If you still have doubts about the nature of mind, moreover you are sure that you have not yet fully understood everything in the world, and you still have attachments, it is best not to do anything that goes against cause and effect. This is to say you cannot commit transgressions, otherwise you will forever be bound to the cycle of birth and death, unable to attain liberation.

"Doubt" here refers to doubts about the nature of the mind, which means that the nature of the mind has not yet been realized; "penetration" refers to unobstructed access and having no attachment; "cannot penetrate all things" means not being able to see through worldly things such as fame and fortune, and having attachment to them.

Conversely, as mentioned before, "once you stop clinging to things, you can do whatever you want." If a person has no attachments and is certain that he has seen through everything, including himself, then he is already not restrained in any way. In essence, he has transcended the constraints of precepts and non-precepts, broken through all fetters, and is unrestricted in his behavior. The most important oath in tantra is the oath to reflect on emptiness that is the nature of all dharmas. Keeping this oath signifies that the person has thoroughly understood the nature of all things, that is, he has completely realized emptiness. For such a person, abiding in the state of emptiness is the tantric precept he must uphold; there are no other precepts beyond this. However, to save all sentient beings, he will still

live and work like us on the surface, just like when Sakyamuni Buddha was born in human form, he also had to eat, drink, sleep, get sick, and take medicine. The Buddha showed that these actions that conform to the secular world were taken to protect our virtuous roots so that he could then guide us all to liberation. This is what happens after complete enlightenment.

But before enlightenment, "it is best to do nothing." Rather than saying that it is best to do nothing, it is better to say that you must not do anything that goes against cause and effect! Otherwise, you will transmigrate in samsara indefinitely. Thus, we must follow the law of cause and effect, refrain from evil, and do good.

If a chandala sees his nature, even he can become a buddha. In India, the caste system has existed since ancient times. Chandala is the lowest class among all castes. Most of them kill livestock as their profession. Born into such a family, one can only engage in menial jobs such as slaughtering animals throughout his life. Even so, if a chandala is enlightened, he can also become a buddha.

Question: How can a chandala become a buddha if he slaughters animals and creates karma? Answer: I only talk about seeing the nature of mind, not about creating karma. Whatever his transgressions, he is no longer restrained by karma. Since beginningless time, beings have fallen into hell, created karma, and transmigrated in cyclic existence due to ignorance of their nature. After enlightenment, they cease creating karma. If a person does not see his nature, invoking the buddhas will not free him from retribution, let alone killing a living being. If he sees his nature, all doubts will instantly disappear, even slaughtering animals cannot affect him.

Question: How can a chandala become a buddha if he slaughters animals and creates karma? If a chandala has killed countless animals and created a lot of bad karma in his life, how can he become a buddha?

Answer: I only talk about seeing the nature of mind, not about creating karma. It is indeed difficult for a chandala to become enlightened, but if he is enlightened, he too can become a buddha. Can a chandala become enlightened? It is entirely possible. As the saying goes, "Put down the butcher's knife and you will become a buddha immediately." If he puts down the butcher's knife, repents sincerely, then study Buddhism and practice, it is entirely possible he can achieve enlightenment in this life.

Buddhism is very open-minded. At the beginning, the Buddha's sangha brought together people from all walks of life in India, many of whom came from the lowest level; these people were often ridiculed by heretics, or followers of Hinduism, who at that time were brahmins of noble birth (even now, many people at the lowest level in India yearn for Buddhism, but are still subject to restrictions of varying kinds). The Buddha taught that gender and race are not important, but wisdom, compassion, and practice are important. Master Hui Neng once made a similar point, "Although people are from north and south, buddha nature is without north and south." This is a view that Theravada Buddhism at the time already held. Mahayana Buddhism is even more open and believes that everyone, including chandalas, homosexuals, and sex workers, can learn Buddhism, achieve enlightenment, and become a buddha. It is recorded in the Buddhist scriptures that, regardless of gender, race, or class, as long as one can realize

the nature of mind, one will possess great wisdom; with great wisdom, anyone can become a buddha.

Therefore, Bodhidharma said: "I only talk about seeing the nature of mind, not about creating karma." I only talk about whether you can achieve enlightenment, not about karma. Once you are enlightened and see your true nature, no matter how big or numerous your past transgressions are, such as the ten unwholesome sins or the five heinous sins, they will be purified instantly.

The problem is that it is very difficult to achieve enlightenment if your karmic obstacles are too serious. Are there methods? Generating bodhicitta can not only accumulate huge merits, but also purify countless transgressions. In addition, there are many methods in tantra, such as the sacred Vajrasattva repentance practice that purifies all transgressions like killing, stealing, adultery, delusion, and the five heinous sins. Finally, enlightenment can be achieved by continuing to practice. For people like chandalas, tantra is the preferred path.

Whatever his transgressions. For example, if one person works hard to achieve enlightenment, and the other person does not want to achieve enlightenment or be liberated at all, then even if both people have committed transgressions such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, delusion, and so forth, the severity of the karmic obstacle will be different. In addition, once the former becomes enlightened, even the most serious transgressions can be immediately purified. From this perspective, their karma is also different.

He is no longer restrained by karma. After enlightenment, he will no longer be affected by karma.

To be exact, karma will still be created during the initial stage of enlightenment. Because the strength and wisdom of enlightenment at this stage is relatively weak, sometimes you will not be able to control your defilements. When you continue to practice and reach a certain level of realization, you will not create new karma, only past karma remains. After attaining the first bodhisattva level, you will stop creating karma altogether.

Several basic conditions are necessary before karma can be created. When a practitioner reaches a higher state of enlightenment, most of these conditions are no longer met, so on the surface it seems that karma has been created, but in fact it has not. Therefore, once you become enlightened and continue to practice on this basis, everything can easily be resolved – your past karma will be purified no matter how serious it is, moreover new karma will not be created; even if transgressions are committed, the severity of the karma is not the same as that for unenlightened people. Hence, it is said that "all karma cannot restrain him." There is also such a record in *Abhidharmakosa* in Theravada Buddhism.

Since beginningless time, due to ignorance of their nature. Since beginningless time, we have experienced countless reincarnations of life and death, precisely because we are not enlightened and have not been able to see our nature.

Beings have fallen into hell, created karma, and transmigrated in cyclic existence. Because there is no enlightenment, we create all kinds of karma: if we create good karma, we will take rebirth as human beings, devas, and asuras; if we create bad karma, we will fall into the hell, hungry ghost, and animal realms. There are many reasons for creating karma,

the most fundamental reason being the lack of enlightenment. If you are not enlightened, you will have attachments, and if you have attachments, you will create karma and transmigrate indefinitely in cyclic existence.

After enlightenment, they cease creating karma. After you become enlightened, you will never create karma again.

Bodhidharma's writings are very concise and do not elaborate on the level of enlightenment required to avoid creating karma. If you want to understand it in depth and detail, you need to refer to other Buddhist scriptures. As I said before, in fact, you will still create karma when you first become enlightened. Only when you reach a certain level of enlightenment can you stop creating karma.

If a person does not see his nature, invoking the buddhas will not free him from retribution. A person who is not enlightened cannot avoid the retribution of cause and effect by reciting the buddha's name. Here, "reciting the name of the buddha" is used to represent actions such as kowtowing, burning incense, and participating in various Dharma gatherings. These alone cannot free him from cyclic existence.

Some people may question: Can unenlightened people be reborn in the Western Pure Land by chanting the buddha's name? After death, can they avoid the retribution of good and evil? The answer to both questions is yes. People who take rebirth in the Western Pure Land by invoking the buddhas can all become first-level bodhisattvas, and avoid retribution. It is their enlightenment after rebirth, not the recitation of the buddha's name, that frees them from the consequences of cause and effect.

Let alone killing a living being. How can a person who kills a living being escape retribution, if he cannot even do so by reciting the buddha's name? The answer is as before: I only talk about achieving enlightenment, not about whether to kill. So long as you achieve enlightenment, you can purify your past karma; after you reach a certain level of enlightenment, you will no longer kill. Even if you kill, it is out of compassion to save others, so it is not a transgression in and of itself.

If he sees his nature, all doubts instantly disappear. Once you are enlightened, all doubts about your original purity and true nature disappear instantly. The reason we are skeptical now just shows that we have not yet attained enlightenment and do not understand the true nature of reality.

Although the word "instant elimination" is used, your doubts can only be partly eliminated during the initial enlightenment, not all at once. Just like when you drink water, you know whether the water is cold or hot, in the moment of enlightenment, you clearly see the nature of your mind which can eliminate some of your doubts; other more deep-rooted doubts and afflictions can only be gradually dispelled as your practice improves.

Even slaughtering animals cannot affect him. Even if a person has created a lot of bad karma from slaughtering animals, he is no longer restrained by karma if he is already enlightened. Because he has realized the essence of cause and effect and transcended cause and effect, any karmic consequences of killing, stealing, committing adultery, or lying cannot affect him.

The twenty-seven patriarchs in India only transmitted the heart seal.

Before Chan Buddhism was established in China, there were twenty-seven patriarchs in India. Bodhidharma was the twenty-eighth patriarch. "Seal" literally means seal, such as the current official seal or the seal of past emperors; once the seal is affixed, no one can override it.

"Heart Seal" is a term synonymous with Mahamudra. What is its significance? One explanation is that the state after realizing the nature of mind is like the emperor's seal; all afflictions and thoughts are created and destroyed in this state, none can transcend the nature of mind. Another explanation is that before enlightenment, the mind of any sentient being, including the most ignorant beings in hell, is not separate from its intrinsic clarity; the clarity of the mind is like the emperor's seal, encompassing every thought of all sentient beings, no single thought can break through it.

In short, "heart seal" is the state of enlightenment. It is this state of enlightenment, or nature of mind, that the twenty-seven patriarchs of India passed down from generation to generation.

Now that I have come to this land, I only teach the sudden enlightenment of the Mahayana, that is, this mind is the buddha. I do not talk about precepts, charity, diligence, or ascetic practices such as entering water and fire, boarding a wheel of swords, eating just one meal a day, or sitting for a long time without lying down. These are all heretical practices.

I am here now only to teach the sudden enlightenment of the Mahayana, that is, this mind is the buddha. Bodhidharma said, "The main purpose of my coming to China is to propagate the most advanced teaching of Mahayana Buddhism – this mind is the buddha."

I do not talk about precepts, charity, diligence, or ascetic practices. The six paramitas such as upholding precepts, giving, and diligence are not discussed.

"Not talking about" does not mean to deny. As mentioned before, Chan Buddhism also requires observing precepts, giving alms, etc. The reason they are not mentioned is because these have been discussed a lot in Hinayana and other Mahayana schools, and need not be repeated. In fact, Bodhidharma also talked about the six perfections in other texts.

Entering water and fire, boarding a wheel of swords, eating just one meal a day, or sitting for a long time without lying down are all heretical practices. "Entering fire" is a heretical ascetic method in which people jump into a fire pit and burn to death; "sword" refers to a sharp knife. This sentence means deliberately jumping into water and fire; stepping on or grabbing the blade of a knife and sleeping on a wooden board covered with iron nails, causing the body to bleed; eating only one meal a day in the morning or at noon; and sitting for a long time without sleeping. These are all heretical practices.

Heretics hope to use these methods to achieve their goal of ascending to heaven. They believe that human rebirth is caused by the body and mind, thus destroying either one can remove its cause. For this reason, heretics practice asceticism and even commit suicide, a behavior that is still observed today. According to Buddhism, the reliance on asceticism is a mistaken view, because the root of rebirth lies not in the physical body but in the mind. So long as there is wisdom and compassion in your mind, you can easily solve all problems, including liberation

from samsara; otherwise, no matter how hard your body is punished, you will come up empty-handed like drawing water from a bamboo basket.

The so-called ascetics in Buddhism are at most people who lack food and clothing and live a difficult life while practicing in seclusion. These practitioners live a hard life not on purpose but because of material constraints; moreover, they choose to spend most of their time on practice rather than expending too much energy on material things. Apart from this, there are no other ascetic practices in Buddhism.

Although the Eight Precepts Retreat in Buddhism also limits a person to one meal a day, it is different in essence from the practice observed by heretics. The retreat is conducted over just a few days, its purpose is to save more time for meditation practice, not to deliberately pursue a hard life.

Once your mind awakens to its spiritually aware nature, it is the mind of all buddhas. The buddhas before and after only talk about transmitting the mind, they teach nothing else. Even an ordinary person who is illiterate is a buddha if he understands this teaching. If you do not recognize your own awakened nature, even if you exert yourself to the point of breaking your body into a mote of dust, you will never find the buddha.

Once your mind awakens to its spiritually aware nature, it is the mind of all buddhas. "Spiritual awareness" refers to the awakening of the mind, that is, the mind awakens to its own nature. After enlightenment, if you can abide in the intrinsic nature of mind at any time, whether talking or doing things, walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, this is the buddha-mind.

The buddhas before and after only talk about transmitting the mind, they teach nothing else. The buddhas before and after only talk about transmitting the mind, they do not talk about ascetic practices such as entering water or fire.

The "mind" here refers to enlightenment, which is wisdom. The buddhas before and after only transmit wisdom, and with wisdom one can solve all problems. On the contrary, practicing asceticism blindly and superstitiously is an act of ignorance that lacks wisdom, it is a wrong view that heretics hold. Buddhism only talks about wisdom; so long as the result in the end is enlightenment, the process and methods are not important.

Even an ordinary person who is illiterate is also a buddha if he understands this teaching. If a person understands this teaching, that is, he has realized the nature of mind, then even an ordinary person who is illiterate can also become a buddha, like the Sixth Patriarch Hui Neng. It is evident that enlightenment is not directly related to one's educational and cultural level. Of course, an educated person can better understand the Buddhist scriptures, and listening and thinking deeply can provide some indirect help to enlightenment.

If you do not recognize your own awakened nature, even if you exert yourself to the point of breaking your body into a mote of dust, you will never find the buddha. If you cannot realize the nature of your mind, even if you push your body to its breaking point, you will still not find the buddha. This is a metaphor for your degree of effort. We must first find the right direction, then strive hard to achieve results. If the direction is wrong, no matter how hard we work, it will be in vain!

IV. The essence and function of the mind

The buddha is also known as the dharmakaya and the fundamental innate mind. This mind has no form, no cause and effect, no tendons, no bones; it is empty like space and cannot be held. It is unobstructed, it does not look outside for the buddha. Only the tathagata understands this mind, all other living beings are confused and cannot understand it.

The buddha is also called the dharmakaya and the fundamental innate mind. The "fundamental innate mind" is the nature of mind. The buddha is also known as the dharmakaya and the fundamental innate mind. The three names are different, but the meaning is the same, all of which are the nature of mind. The "buddha" here refers to the dharmakaya, not the sambhogakaya or nirmanakaya of the buddha.

There are two interpretations on the three bodies of the buddha. One is from the perspective of the nature of mind: the three parts of the nature of mind are referred to as dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, and nirmanakaya; apart from this, the three bodies of the buddha do not exist. This point is clearly made in the *Platform Sutra*. Another explanation is that the nature of mind is the dharmakaya; the buddhas like Amitabha, the Medicine Buddha, and Vajrasattva are the sambhogakaya,

which only the bodhisattvas from the first level up can see; the buddhas like Sakyamuni, who are visible to everyone, are the nirmanakaya.

This mind has no form, no cause and effect, no tendons, no bones. The "mind" is often mentioned in the *Platform Sutra* and the four treatises of Bodhidharma. Sometimes it should be understood as consciousness or alaya consciousness, and sometimes it must be understood as the nature of mind, tathagatagarbha, and buddha nature. Here, we are referring to the latter. In fact, the two explanations are not contradictory, because the essence of consciousness is the tathagatagarbha.

This sentence means that the nature of mind has no color, shape, height, length, no cause and effect, no muscles, bones, or other substances.

So, what does the nature of mind look like? **It is empty like space and cannot be held.** The true nature of mind is difficult to describe directly and is often compared to the void. This analogy is found in many Prajnaparamita sutras.

Space refers to the sky, but not its blue color, which is caused by the scattering of sunlight. The color itself is light, not space. The void has no color or shape, but it exists. If empty space did not exist, we would not be able to move or breathe. The nature of mind is the same – it has no color, shape, or appearance of any kind.

To be enlightened, we must at the very least realize the nature of mind, or see the essence of every thought directly. When a thought arises and we reflect upon it, the thought is

as insubstantial as empty space; it is like a water screen movie, where countless water droplets and light create vivid images of people, buildings, and scenes. However, these images, including the screen, do not actually exist.

Before enlightenment, we feel that our thoughts and emotions are very real. After enlightenment, they are still thoughts and emotions, but we can see they are empty in essence. When you realize this personally, it is enlightenment. If conditions permit, you can seek confirmation from your guru. If you cannot find a master, you can confirm it yourself.

As I have said before, renunciation and bodhicitta are clearly explained and defined in the Buddhist scriptures. I have also talked about it a lot in other books. Whether or not you have renunciation and bodhicitta, you only need to ask yourself, not the master. The enlightened mind is also explained very clearly, especially in the *Platform Sutra* and the *Bloodstream Treatise*. What is enlightenment? A theoretical understanding of enlightenment through listening and reflection is not enlightenment, it is just an understanding; the conclusions obtained by logical reasoning are also not enlightenment. When you directly realize that the nature of your mind is empty like space, only then is it called enlightenment – at least a preliminary enlightenment.

This preliminary enlightenment is at a lower level than that obtained in Dzogchen, but it is nonetheless very meaningful. At this stage, you cannot immediately let go of all your afflictions. You need to train for a certain time to strengthen your enlightenment. In so doing, you can slowly control negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, and sadness; you can ultimately eliminate any fear of birth, old age, sickness, and death, and

attain the state that Bodhidharma mentioned many times in which "all karma cannot restrain you."

Everyone must complete four objectives in life: first, we must pledge unwavering faith in the Three Jewels, otherwise we cannot enter the Buddhist gate; second, we must develop firm renunciation, otherwise we cannot take the path to liberation; third, we must cultivate indomitable bodhicitta, otherwise we cannot embark on the Mahayana vehicle; fourth, we must attain enlightenment. Along with enlightenment, we can possess prestige and wealth in this world, if we are so blessed; they are not contradictory. Whether these four goals can be achieved depends entirely on our own effort.

If these four goals are achieved, we will be able to end this journey in life with our hands full, with satisfaction and gratitude, and with no regrets of any kind. We are not accomplished enough in our practice to know where we will take rebirth, but wherever we end up in our next life, we can actively and naturally restore the refuge, renunciation, bodhicitta, and realization obtained in this life. Such a practice is full of hope! Therefore, we must seize the opportunity to practice in this life. We should at the same time achieve a balance between practice and everyday life by also fulfilling our responsibilities to our family and society.

One other point: after enlightenment, do not announce it everywhere! Both Chan and Dzogchen teach that you can speak about teachings, but not the realization itself. If it is said, your practice may stagnate for some time, three years, five years or even longer. A practitioner must maintain a low profile. On the surface, he should live as ordinary people do, while upholding

the precepts; in private, he should practice quietly with diligence.

It is unobstructed. "Obstacle" refers to the obstructive nature of physical objects, just like the hand cannot pass through a table because the table is an obstacle. Before enlightenment, there are all kinds of attachments that bind us. These attachments that we cannot cut through are the cause of afflictions, so it is said with attachments there are obstacles. After enlightenment, the mind is without attachment – it is as vast and unimpeded as space.

It does not look outside for the buddha. Unlike heretics who look for the buddha outside the mind.

Only the tathagata understands this mind, all other living beings are confused and cannot understand it. Only the buddha completely understands the nature of mind; all other beings are deluded. Of course, one does not become a buddha immediately after attaining enlightenment. Preliminary enlightenment is not full enlightenment. One achieves the resultant state only after complete enlightenment.

This mind is inseparable from the body of four elements; without this mind, you cannot move. The body itself, being insentient, is like grass and rubble. If the body has no feelings, why can it move?

This mind is inseparable from the body of four elements. On the surface, the nature of mind is not separate from the body composed of earth, water, wind, and fire.

The "mind" here still refers to buddha nature, the mind of clear light. With this mind of clear light, a consciousness exists that can think and judge. The first moment of consciousness

arises within buddha nature; when one becomes a buddha, the last moment of consciousness also disappears within buddha nature. Therefore, each of our thoughts comes from dharmadhatu, that is, the nature of mind and ultimately disappears therein. It has never left dharmadhatu for a moment.

Without this mind, you cannot move; the body itself, being insentient, is like grass and rubble. The nature of mind is buddha nature, the tathagatagarbha; on the surface, buddha nature appears as the eight consciousnesses, such as alaya consciousness, mental consciousness, eye consciousness, and ear consciousness. Without buddha nature and the eight consciousnesses, the body composed of the four elements is like a corpse, unable to move, like a stone with no awareness.

It is the nature or essence of mind that we want to find, not the phenomenon that manifests on the surface as emotion. We can feel our emotions any time of the day except during deep sleep; they are always there, even in dreams. For example, anyone can see that a table is rectangular or round, but this is not the essence of the table; a microscope must be used, since the eye cannot see it. Similarly, when we look at our mind, we can find various emotions and their changes, but these are not the essence of mind. The essence of mind is at the deepest part of emotion. If you observe the composition of emotion in depth, where it comes from, what its deepest level is, you will discover that its essence is "empty like space and cannot be held, it is unobstructed." When you experience this feeling personally, it is enlightenment.

If the body has no feelings, why can it move? The body itself is just a substance with no feelings. Why can it move?

We need the mind to be involved when speaking, walking, and doing things. The mind in this instance is not buddha nature but consciousness. But consciousness has a lot to do with buddha nature, since the essence of consciousness is buddha nature. Without buddha nature, there is no consciousness; without consciousness, the human body is just a pile of substances, unable to speak or do things.

It is the mind that moves; even language and actions, perception and awareness are movements of the mind.

It is the mind that moves. What happens when a thought arises?

For example, I want to say "a cup of coffee." First, the mental consciousness produces an abstract image which is the content to be expressed; then, the flow of winds in the body changes accordingly, which in turn affects the brain; the brain triggers vibrations in the vocal cords, which spread through the air and form the four words "a cup of coffee"; finally, when the other party hears the sound, the corresponding content also arises in his mind. In this way, I expressed it, and the other person understood it.

If the concept of a cup of coffee does not appear in the other person's mind after I say "a cup of coffee," then we cannot communicate. This is what happens between people who do not understand each other's language. They can hear sounds, but they cannot transmit thoughts. Clearly, sound is just a carrier; communication is mainly dependent on the mind, that is, consciousness.

Both Tantric and Tibetan medicine believe that the brain

plays a major role in our understanding of the world. The brain has 500 special channels ("500" refers to a large number, not a specific number). These channels control the various organs of the human body, and the organs understand the outside world through the brain. This principle is elaborated in tantra. Simply put, thoughts first arise in the mind, which cause the winds in the channels to flow; the winds act as a driving force that brings about changes in a certain part of the brain; finally, the brain allows the eyes, ears, and other organs to sense the world outside.

Even language and actions. The word "even" refers to a process that involves the generation of thoughts, the flow of winds, the changes in the brain, and the perception of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and other organs. Once the mind is in motion, this process takes place, then actions such as speaking, doing things, and walking are produced.

Perception and awareness. Motion includes the awareness of the senses such as seeing and hearing.

These are all movements of the mind. These all originate from the activities of the mind. If the mind moves, the brain and other organs will move, and people can talk and do things; if the mind does not move, they cannot feel the outside world. Without the mind, all the functions of the organs would instantly disappear, and the body would immediately become a pile of matter – a corpse.

The "mind" here refers to the nature of mind. What we see, hear, and speak is not the nature of mind, but the appearance of mind, that is, consciousness. But consciousness is closely related to the nature of mind, its essence is buddha

nature. Therefore, it can also be said that the generation of thoughts is the movement of buddha nature. To be precise, buddha nature does not move, but in general, these are the function of buddha nature – with buddha nature, thoughts are generated; with thoughts, one can perceive the world outside.

All movements are the mind's motion. Motion is its function. There is no mind apart from motion, and there is no motion apart from the mind. Motion is not the mind, and the mind is not motion. There is basically no mind in motion, and there is basically no motion in mind. Motion is not separate from the mind, and the mind is not separate from motion. There is no mind for motion to exist apart from, and no motion for mind to exist apart from. Motion is the mind's function, and its function is the mind's motion. To move is to use the mind, and to use is to move the mind. But in essence, there is neither motion nor function. The essence of function is emptiness, and emptiness is inherently without motion. Motion and function both return to the same mind. The mind is basically free of movement.

This passage is very important. Before explaining it sentence by sentence, we need to first understand the main idea expressed here, as well as the meaning of several keywords.

Bodhidharma elucidated on a fundamental principle: from the standpoint of the sensory world, that is, conventional truth, all speech, movement, and activities are real; but from the standpoint of the essence of mind, we have never said or done anything. The same is true for the world we live in. What seems very real to us basically does not exist.

Observing reality from these two perspectives is a very important method in Mahayana Buddhism. For example, there

is a scene in the movie "The Matrix" where the male protagonist sees all kinds of people and objects on the street, all of which appear the same as in real life. But while he is looking, these things do not really exist. Everything is a computer program.

Appearance and emptiness exist at the same time without contradiction; in Mahayana Buddhism, there is "no difference between appearance and emptiness." "Appearance" refers to all kinds of phenomena. Everything that we see, hear, and feel about people, animals, plants, mountains, rivers, and land, as large as the universe, as small as a particle of dust, these all exist in our senses. From this perspective, there is good and evil, cause and effect, heaven and hell, real life, you, me, and others. "Emptiness" is the empty nature of reality, the essence of all phenomena. From this perspective, all the above-mentioned phenomena do not exist. The above is the main idea expressed in this passage.

There are three important points or keywords that appear repeatedly in the passage: mind, function, and motion. To avoid any confusion, we need to understand their basic meaning and causal relationship.

"Mind" here refers to the mind of clear light, which is buddha nature, tathagatagarbha, and the nature of mind; it is not our consciousness. If the mind is said to be consciousness, this would also be a valid explanation but on a very superficial level, so it cannot be understood in this way.

"Function" literally means its use. It cannot be established alone. Who exactly is playing a role here? It is consciousness. Therefore, "function" refers to the consciousness of ordinary people, which includes alaya consciousness, manas

consciousness (self-grasping), etc.

"Motion" means movement. Buddha nature does not move because it has no cause and effect, it is not impermanent. What moves directly is consciousness. The essence of consciousness is buddha nature, so it is sometimes also said that buddha nature is moving.

Once you are familiar with these terms, the following will be easy to understand.

All movements are the mind's motion. When the mind moves, its function starts.

The so-called "function" refers to the process from birth to disappearance of consciousness – from the beginning when it has not yet played a role, to when it starts to play a role, produces effects, and finally disappears.

What is "mind's motion"? People can see, hear, speak, and do things because their mind is moving; if their mind is not moving, none of this can happen. In fact, the mind's motion is its function, that is, consciousness is at work.

Motion is its function. "Motion" refers to the movement of consciousness, that is, the arising of thoughts; "its" refers to the "mind" mentioned above, which is buddha nature, clear light, and tathagatagarbha. This sentence means that arousing thoughts is the function of buddha nature.

The following uses several metaphors to illustrate the relationship between mind, function, and motion.

The first metaphor. Compare the "mind," or buddha

nature, to the sea, and "motion," or consciousness, to the waves on the sea surface. Who is "moving"? Not the sea, but the waves. But waves are part of the sea, so we can either say "the sea doesn't move, the waves move" or "the sea is moving." Both versions are possible, but the former is more accurate.

This metaphor helps us understand that all seeing, hearing, and awareness are surface phenomena, just like waves on the surface of the sea. The so-called "motion is its function" means that these superficial phenomena that are produced are the function of the nature of mind.

The second metaphor. The strings on the guzheng make no sound when they are at rest, but they make sounds when they vibrate; but it is just the strings that are vibrating, there is nothing apart from this so-called vibration. The so-called vibration is just a movement of the strings. Is it the strings or the vibrations that really make the sound? It is both. Without the strings or the vibrations, it is impossible to make a sound.

"Mind" – buddha nature, or the mind of clear light, is like the strings of the guzheng; the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, consciousness, and their movements are like the vibration of the strings, which is "motion" and "function" at the same time. The effect produced by the vibration of the string is function; the specific action is vibration.

The function of the string is to vibrate, and it is the vibration that produces sound. Without vibration, there would be no sound, and without the string, there would be no vibration, so the source is the string. In the same way, our current consciousness and all seeing, hearing, and awareness are the function of buddha nature; they all originate from

buddha nature, the mind of clear light. Once the mind begins to function (in other words, after the mind begins to move), just like a string vibrating and making a sound, consciousness and seeing, hearing, and perception are born. This is the meaning of the expression "motion is its function."

On the other hand, when we speak, do things, or get angry, these are not happening in essence. Just like the sound produced by the strings, the vibration of the strings causes the surrounding air to generate pressure waves; the waves are transmitted into the ears and vibrate the eardrums, thereby producing sound. The strings themselves have no sound. Just like in the first metaphor, when the waves on the sea are rough, only the water on the surface is moving; most of the water below remains calm. Similarly, no matter how sad or angry we are, at this moment, the nature of mind does not have these negative emotions. It remains unmoved and uncontaminated.

There is no mind apart from motion. "Motion" refers to consciousness; "mind" refers to buddha nature, the mind of clear light. Apart from consciousness, there is no buddha nature. Why? Because buddha nature is the essence of consciousness. Without consciousness, how can there be essence? Consciousness is certainly inseparable from its essential buddha nature. We can analyze and talk about them separately, but in fact they are not two, but one thing.

Bodhidharma elaborated on this in *Treatise on Realizing the Nature of Mind* by using the metaphor of ice and water. When the temperature drops below zero, water condenses into ice, but the essence of ice is water; when the temperature rises, ice melts into water again, its essence never changes. In the statement above, "motion" is consciousness, which is like ice; "mind"

is buddha nature, the mind of clear light, which is like water. When water freezes, there is no water except ice; water exists in the form of ice, the two forms are different but the essence is the same. Therefore, it can be said that there is no water except ice, and "no mind apart from motion" – there is no buddha nature apart from consciousness.

The statement "affliction is bodhi" has the same meaning. Defilements such as hatred, jealousy, and arrogance are like ice. When the mind is filled with these troubling emotions, the essence of mind is clear light, just as the essence of ice is never separate from water, but we ourselves cannot feel it. This very profound concept is easier to understand through the metaphor of ice and water.

In essence, there is only buddha nature and nothing else. Buddha nature itself has many functions, but in the sensual world of ordinary people, buddha nature has become something else – desire, anger, and jealousy. Because of our ignorance, we do not see the essence, only mistaken appearances; like looking at the world through colored glasses, we do not see its true color. However, even as these emotions arise, their essence is always wisdom and clear light.

Every winter in Harbin's Ice and Snow World, a variety of ice sculptures are displayed. They look exactly like the real thing, but their essence is always water. Likewise, when our heart turns to hatred, its essence is always clear light. Unfortunately, ordinary people cannot see the essence and can only feel the anger on the surface. The purpose of practice is to train us through various methods to directly see the essence of afflictions when they arise.

There is no motion apart from the mind. Apart from buddha nature and the mind of clear light, there is no movement of consciousness. Borrowing the previous metaphor, it can be understood as "no waves apart from the sea." Human consciousness will take on different forms. Sometimes it appears as good thoughts such as bodhicitta, compassion, and renunciation; sometimes it appears as afflictions such as desire, hatred, and jealousy. Whether good or evil, its essence is always clear light.

Simply put, "motion" means movement; specifically, consciousness is moving, and "motion" refers to consciousness. "There is no mind apart from motion, and there is no motion apart from the mind" – there is no mind of clear light beyond consciousness, and there is no consciousness beyond the mind of clear light. Is that to say clear light is consciousness and consciousness is clear light? Yes. The same can be said for affliction is bodhi, and samsara is nirvana.

Motion is not the mind, and the mind is not motion. When water turns into ice, although the essence of the ice is water, its form is not water. Water is a liquid and ice is a solid; liquids and solids are not the same. From this standpoint, we can say that affliction is not bodhi, and bodhi is not affliction.

Although the essence of mind is buddha nature, ordinary people always see its negative manifestation such as hatred, jealousy, and arrogance, not its pure nature. Like two sides of a coin, they can only see one side but not the other.

In the ultimate sense, ultimate truth and conventional truth do not exist. The reason for this division is that ordinary people

cannot see the true face of the mind, only its appearance – phenomenon of mind. Furthermore, even when we talk about the inseparability of appearance and emptiness, phenomena and emptiness are not the same and must be observed separately. If no distinction is made, it is often difficult to make sense of it. For example, from the perspective of phenomenon, drinking water can quench thirst. If we do not differentiate between the two truths and simply look at emptiness, water is naturally inseparable from emptiness, can emptiness be used to quench thirst? There is nothing in emptiness, how can it quench your thirst? But after the two truths are separated, one part is phenomenon, and the other part is emptiness; that which can satisfy hunger and thirst is phenomenon, not emptiness.

From this perspective, it can be said that "motion is not the mind, and the mind is not motion." Ice is not water, and water is not ice. Although the form is different, the essence is the same.

"Motion" and "mind" are essentially indistinguishable and are completely integrated, but from the perspective of an ordinary person, they are two things; at this time, we cannot talk about phenomena and emptiness as one. Emptiness and phenomena are divided for the unenlightened, but in fact there is no such distinction. The reason why Bodhidharma sometimes said that the two are not one, and sometimes said they are one, is to let us understand this principle.

There is basically no mind in motion, and there is basically no motion in the mind. From the standpoint of emptiness, there is basically no mind in motion, and no motion in the mind. "Mind" – buddha nature, the mind of

clear light, does not move, otherwise buddha nature becomes impermanent. That which is impermanent is not buddha nature, because buddha nature is eternal and unchanging.

Motion is not separate from the mind. "Motion" refers to the eight consciousnesses, mainly the sixth consciousness, whose essence is inseparable from buddha nature, the mind of clear light. This sentence has the same meaning as "form is not other than emptiness," which is equivalent to ice never leaving water and waves never leaving the sea. The mind is not separate from motion. For unenlightened people, although there are eight consciousnesses, their essence is buddha nature, so the mind of clear light always exists. After becoming a buddha, the eight consciousnesses disappear, leaving only buddha nature. There are several verses in the *Heart Sutra* that express the same meaning, specifically the familiar saying "form is emptiness, emptiness is form; form is not other than emptiness, emptiness is not other than form."

There is no mind for motion to exist apart from. "Motion" has no "mind" that can leave it. **There is no motion for mind to exist apart from.** "Mind" has no "motion" that can leave it. It is so because they are essentially one and the same.

Motion is the mind's function, and its function is the mind's motion. The eight consciousnesses are the function of buddha nature, and this function is the movement of buddha nature, the mind of clear light. To be precise, the mind of clear light does not move, but since the essence of consciousness is the mind of clear light, consciousness can move, so it can also be said that the mind of clear light can move.

To move is to use the mind, and to use is to move the mind. The movement of the eight consciousnesses is the function of buddha nature, and this function is the movement of buddha nature. This sentence has the same meaning as the previous sentence, but is expressed in a different form.

But in essence, there is neither motion nor function. "Motion" and "function" are both superficial phenomena. In essence, there is neither movement nor function.

The reason there is "neither motion nor function" is that **the essence of function is emptiness.** "Function" – consciousness, its essence is emptiness, so it is immovable, that is, it has "no motion and no function." But in the ordinary world, there is movement and function.

Emptiness is inherently without motion. Emptiness is not impermanent, so it has neither motion nor function. This is from the standpoint of emptiness.

Motion and function both return to the same mind. Regardless of movement or function, the essence of both is the mind of clear light; they ultimately return to the mind of clear light. This is from the standpoint of phenomena.

Just as there is a conventional world and the dream world, our inner spirit also has two worlds, one real and one false. These two worlds are inseparable: one is the essential buddha nature, the mind of clear light, and the other is its appearance or illusion.

Every phenomenon has this duality. A table, for instance, is a phenomenon but what is its essence? We can analyze it layer

by layer: the essence of the table is molecules, the essence of molecules is atoms, the essence of atoms is nuclei and electrons; the essence of fundamental particles is even smaller matter. Buddhism believes that the essence of all matter ultimately returns to the human consciousness. All large and small objects in the outside world, including fundamental particles, are images projected from our mind.

In this regard, current scientific findings and Buddhism are very close, but scientists are still looking for something more specific and basic. The Buddhist point of view is that fundamental particles do not exist; only relative fundamental particles exist. This is because the so-called fundamental particles are composed of even smaller particles; eventually everything dissolves into energy; energy is also seen as a projection of our innate mind. In short, the physical world, like a dream, is an illusion created by consciousness. This is the ultimate answer in Buddhism.

As we all know, matter has both a macroscopic and microscopic world. The external objects visible to the naked eye in the macroscopic world are far from their true essence. On this point, there is no dispute between Buddhism and science. In fact, the same is true for consciousness. The various emotions we feel, like matter that we see in the macroscopic world such as tables, bricks, and buildings, are not their true face but surface phenomena.

The true nature of consciousness is like the microscopic world of matter. Matter can eventually be decomposed into energy, while the fundamental nature of consciousness is the mind of clear light (this term in Buddhism has nothing to do

with light as described in physics). From this we can say that consciousness also has both a macroscopic and microscopic world; the macroscopic is not its essence, but the microscopic is.

The microscopic world of matter can be revealed through a microscope. To this end, scientists have developed different types of microscopes, particle colliders and other instruments to decompose matter and uncover its basic composition. The microscopic world of consciousness can only be perceived through the power of meditation and the wisdom of enlightenment. Buddhists meditate to find the essence of their innate mind. Once you see your true face, you will instantly understand that all thoughts and ideas are mistaken and illusory appearances. You can immediately eliminate the many afflictions caused by them – this is the goal in Buddhism.

Whether it is motion or function, the essence of both is the mind – "motion and function return to the same mind." What is the mind like? **The mind is basically free of movement.** The essence of the mind has no function and no movement.

In fact, "mind," "function," and "motion" exist at the same time and cannot be separated. People are naturally inclined to focus only on "motion" and "function," not the "mind," which is the source of endless afflictions. Now, we need to look at the "mind" through Buddhist practice, not its "motion" and "function."

When our afflictions arise, for example, when we are furious and want to hit or curse someone, the "mind" in the moment – the essence of the anger – is still pure and clear. At this time, if we can see this "mind," the anger will immediately turn into the wisdom of the buddha. This is called transforming affliction

into the path. In fact, there is no actual transformation, because the "mind" is always pure; it does not go from being impure to pure. The tantric saying "affliction is bodhi" is precisely the transformation of affliction into the path to liberation. Bodhidharma used the three words "mind," "function," and "motion" repeatedly to convey this meaning.

We must first understand this concept, then learn the method – how to sidestep "motion" and "function" and directly observe the "mind." This is called the practice of observing the mind. If you can truly focus on the mind alone, your afflictions instantly disappear and the wisdom of the buddha arises right then.

People who have some realization in Dzogchen or Mahamudra also have anger and other negative emotions, but they will immediately observe the nature of mind. On seeing the true nature of mind, a calmness arises instantly just like when cold water is poured into boiling water; anger disappears without a trace and cannot be found even if one tries to find it. Those with realization eliminate afflictions by observing the mind, which is the best way to address them.

If you feel sad or at a loss because of emotional setbacks, the death of family and relatives, or career difficulties, and cannot yet apply the method of observing the mind, you must remember to generate bodhicitta and renunciation, or at least the thought of impermanence, to overcome difficult situations. I hope everyone can select one or two verses from Dzogchen and Mahamudra works, such as the *Ganges Mahamudra* and the *Treasury of Dharmadhatu*, or *Collection of Precious Virtues of the Mother of the Buddhas of Prajnaparamita*, and memorize them.

Whenever you feel angry, depressed, or anxious, recite the verse, think about its meaning, then take a moment to calm down. This can quickly resolve negative emotions.

Without a certain level of realization from your practice, your negative emotions will of course come back after a few minutes, but their power will be greatly weakened. It is indeed not easy to become a buddha, but it is not difficult to placate your emotions if you find the right method and put in a little effort.

At present, mental health issues are a serious problem. Regardless of wealth or status, people are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with their lives and are less happy. The reason is nothing other than their own endless and infinitely expanding desires. This is a difficult problem, but it can be solved through Buddhist methods.

We must apply all the teachings to real life. When we encounter afflictions and can use the appropriate methods to deal with them, our practice is successful. If, after much study and practice, we are still helpless when afflictions arise, this kind of listening, contemplating, and practicing is undoubtedly a failure.

Buddhist methods are truly effective. They are not about illusory things such as ghosts and gods, but about a person's real experience and feelings; moreover, these methods have already been tested by countless practitioners. If we can truly apply what we learn, everyone can gain the same tangible results.

The significance of studying and practicing Buddhism is to resolve our afflictions through Buddhist methods, and

to share these methods with those around us so that they can also eliminate their afflictions. This is benefitting oneself and others. Many people think that helping others requires material things. While material assistance is indeed crucial for some, for most people today, spiritual support is even more important. Attaining buddhahood allows us to benefit all living beings absolutely. Although we lack this ability now, we can also help to a certain extent.

To achieve this goal, we must practice diligently and transform what we have learned into our own experience. If you only have an intellectual understanding but no personal experience, you will not be able to put it to use when needed. Moreover, your words will be pale and unconvincing when you explain it to others.

Therefore, the sutras say: "Move without moving, come and go without coming and going, see without seeing, laugh without laughing, hear without hearing, know without knowing, rejoice without rejoicing, walk without walking, abide without abiding."

Bodhidharma then quoted a Buddhist scripture. **The sutras say: Move without moving.** On the surface, consciousness is moving, and all the senses are moving – seeing, hearing, and perceiving the outside world – but in essence there is no movement or perception. The previous content can be summed up in this sentence.

From the standpoint of conventional reality, this statement sounds contradictory and hollow. But, with a little bit of realization, we can experience what it is like to "move without moving." When we "move," such as when we are particularly depressed, anxious, or angry, we discover through meditation

that these things basically do not exist. Since they do not exist, what is the anxiety or anger for? All emotions disappear in an instant.

Some people want to rely on others to get through life and solve all their problems for them. Though possible, this is fundamentally difficult; even if we find such support, how long can we rely on it? Things are unpredictable, and others may not be able to handle everything. The closest and most reliable people in our lives are our parents; they will try their best to help unconditionally, but they do not necessarily know how to help, especially inner mental issues, which are difficult for others to share.

Therefore, instead of relying on others, it is better to rely on oneself. The best way is to cultivate bodhicitta and renunciation and to hold the view of emptiness. Before enlightenment, when you feel lonely, anxious, or sad, it will certainly be helpful to have someone by your side, but it is far better to meditate by yourself: think about bodhicitta and renunciation, even contemplate on the preliminaries such as the suffering of samsara and the impermanence of life. Afflictions can quickly be dispelled this way, but of course it would be better if you attained enlightenment.

If you have these inner strengths, you can put them to use at any time. In this way, so long as your fundamental needs are met, no matter what environment you are in, you can live a happy and comfortable life. Not only that, you will also be able to benefit all living beings, both yourself and others. The prerequisite for all this is practice – we should seize every opportunity to practice before we encounter problems. This is most critical.

Come and go without coming and going. We are busy all day long, coming and going, but in essence these are all illusions, like dreams, that do not really happen.

See without seeing means seeing many things every day, but never actually seeing them.

The following analogy goes like this: **Laugh without laughing, hear without hearing, know without knowing, rejoice without rejoicing, walk without walking, abide without abiding.** Joy, anger, sorrow, walking, standing, sitting, and lying down are just like the feelings and emotions in dreams. If you know how to see their true nature, they do not exist. The above is what the Buddhist scriptures tell us.

People work hard all day long and concurrently produce emotions of all kinds. If you do not know how to see the nature of mind, then all of this is real and cannot be said to have never happened. But if you know how to look at the nature of mind, then everything is just a phenomenon – the "motion" and "function" mentioned above never happen at that level, because the nature of mind is always pure.

Therefore, the sutras say: "The essence of mind can neither be expressed nor conceived; seeing, hearing, and perceiving are inherently empty." Even anger, joy, pain, and itching cannot be found if you examine and look for them; in that sense we are not unlike wooden figures.

Therefore, the sutras say: The essence of mind can neither be expressed nor conceived. "Mind" here refers to the consciousness we use in our daily lives. The Buddhist scriptures tell us that the essence of the path or the true face of

the mind cannot be expressed in words, nor can it be conceived with consciousness, because the latter is bound by ignorance and does not have the wisdom of enlightenment. The phrase "inconceivable and inexpressible" often appears in Buddhist scriptures. We cannot describe or conceive the true face of mind. Only by looking at it with wisdom can we experience it.

Seeing, hearing, and perceiving are inherently empty. Everything we see, hear, and perceive are superficial phenomena and only exist at the mundane level. At the essential level, they have never been produced and do not exist, so they are empty.

Even anger, joy, pain, and itching cannot be found if you examine and look for them; in that sense we are not unlike wooden figures. These feelings, such as anger and joy caused by inner consciousness, pain and itching caused by our body, so long as you use wisdom to investigate and observe, you will discover none of these things can be found. In essence, they have never been born and do not exist—they are all illusions. From this perspective, we are nothing more than wooden beings with no feelings.

Therefore, the sutras say: "Evil deeds result in painful retributions, and good deeds result in good retributions; anger takes you to hell and happiness takes you to heaven." But if you know that anger and joy are empty in nature, and do not hold on to them, you will be free from all karma.

Therefore, the sutras say: Evil deeds result in painful retributions, and good deeds result in good retributions; anger takes you to hell and happiness takes you to heaven. From a secular perspective, evil begets evil, good begets good. Anger can cause people to descend into hell, and compassion

can cause people to be reborn in the human realm or the celestial realm. In the secular world, these causal relationships are entirely true.

But if you know that anger and joy are empty in nature, and do not hold on to them, you will be free from all karma. If you understand that the nature of hatred and compassion is emptiness, then as long as you do not hold on to it, you will not create karma. Only with attachment can we create karma. With no attachment after realizing emptiness, how can we create karma?

In Chan Buddhism, it is often said that so long as you are not attached, you can do anything. This statement must be understood correctly. Some people commit bad deeds and claim, "I am not attached." Is this non-attachment? Of course not! If you go to the hospital and get an injection, you will know if you have attachment. If you are even afraid of injections, why talk about anything else? Using non-attachment as an excuse is a complete mistake.

The prerequisite for non-attachment is, in fact, to realize emptiness and profoundly feel there is nothing to be attached to. Reaching this state is true non-attachment and true letting go.

If you do not see your nature, teaching the Dharma is baseless and speaking about it is endless. Briefly distinguishing good from evil is possible, but it barely covers a thing or two about the Dharma.

If you do not see your nature, teaching the Dharma is baseless and speaking about it is endless. Without enlightenment, there is no basis for propagating prajna,

Madhyamaka and other Buddhist teachings. It would be no more than a collection of theories, which are endless. It is useless to say a lot when you have not attained realization and cannot grasp the core concepts of the Dharma.

Some of the principles in Madhyamaka and Abhidharma correspond to those in ancient and modern philosophy. Conceptualizations of this kind are even more common now, but they are not as profound as in Buddhism. Therefore, expounding the sutras without any realization is merely philosophical extrapolation at best. It is impossible to convey the true essence of Buddhism.

Briefly distinguishing good from evil is possible, but it barely covers a thing or two about the Dharma. It is difficult to talk about emptiness when you have not yet attained enlightenment. At most, you can briefly talk about what is evil and what is good. For example, not believing in cause and effect is wrong, believing in cause and effect is right. These teachings on good and evil, and cause and effect, account for only a tiny fraction of the Dharma, perhaps less than one-thousandth or one-ten-thousandth of its entirety. The real core of Buddhism is buddha nature – clear light and emptiness. Before attaining enlightenment, we cannot transmit this essence at all, and can only relate to it at a very superficial level.

Verse:

*The mind, mind, mind is hard to find,
When vast, it pervades the Dharma realm,
When narrow, it cannot hold a needle.*

*I seek the mind, not the buddha outside,
 I know the three realms are empty of substance.
 To seek the buddha, seek the mind alone,
 For this very mind is the buddha.*

*I seek the mind, the mind is ever present,
 It cannot be obtained, let the mind know itself.
 Buddha nature is not found outside,
 To look beyond the mind is wrong.*

The song goes like this: **The mind, mind, mind is hard to find.** Why are there three "minds"? My personal understanding is that they represent the past mind, present mind, and future mind, respectively. This sentence means that no matter which mind we have, it is difficult to discern its essence and grasp it. Because the human mind is ever changing, invisible and intangible, and not as easy to control as external matter, it is difficult to define.

When vast, it pervades the Dharma realm. "Vast" refers to the state of enlightenment. When the mind is enlightened, it fully merges with the Dharma realm. "Pervading the Dharma realm" means that the Dharma realm and the nature of mind are inseparable. The Dharma realm is not just emptiness, it is both emptiness and clear light; the clear light aspect is the nature of mind. After enlightenment, the mind and the Dharma realm are one; the clear light nature of mind is as vast as the Dharma realm is vast, it is as boundless as the Dharma realm is boundless. At that point, the mind can embrace everything. Even if we are beaten, scolded, ridiculed, or slandered by others,

we can forgive and not be affected.

When narrow, it cannot hold a needle. “Narrow” refers to the unenlightened state. Before enlightenment, our mind is extremely narrow, so narrow that it has no room even for a needle. All unenlightened people naturally haggle over everything, and become furious when someone says something that is disagreeable or looks at them in a strange way. Why does he say that to me? Why does he look at me like this? Even the most trivial of things is difficult for them to accept.

Indeed, the "mind" is difficult to define. When enlightened, it is as open and broad as the Dharma realm; when unenlightened, it cannot even accommodate a needle. Thus, it is said: "the mind, mind, mind is hard to find."

I seek the mind, not the buddha outside. Bodhidharma said: I seek my own mind, not the buddha outside. This means that I only look inward to realize my own mind; my own mind is the buddha.

I know the three realms are empty of substance. I know that the desire realm, form realm, and formless realm, that is, the entire world is empty of substance – everything is emptiness. There is no external buddha, so I do not look for the buddha outside.

To seek the buddha, seek the mind alone, for this very mind is the buddha. To find the buddha, I only need my own mind, because the essence of our mind – past mind, present mind, and future mind – is the buddha.

I seek the mind; the mind is ever present. The mind

that I seek, what does it look like? This mind (buddha nature) of the three times always abides in its own state without any change. In fact, I need not "seek the mind," only discover its true nature, because it is ever present. This is the main point of the third turning of the wheel of Dharma.

It cannot be obtained, let the mind know itself. The reference here is to emptiness as expounded in the second turning of the wheel of Dharma. It means that the mind we seek cannot be obtained, it is empty. "Let the mind know itself" means allowing the mind to recognize its emptiness, that is, awakening.

These two phrases encompass the essence of the teachings on buddha nature in the third turning, and on emptiness in the second turning of the wheel of Dharma. The clear light aspect of buddha nature is always present; the nature of mind that we seek is fundamentally empty like space, like the Dharma realm. We only need to let the mind perceive and realize its nature.

Buddha nature is not found outside, to look beyond the mind is wrong. Buddha nature is discovered from within one's own mind; when a person thinks of looking for the buddha outside the mind, a transgression is committed. Bodhidharma called such a person an outsider.

Verse:

I originally came to this land

To teach the Dharma and save people from confusion.

A single flower will blossom into five petals,

Its fruit will naturally ripen.

This stanza at the end also appears in the *Platform Sutra*.

I originally came to this land to teach the Dharma and save people from confusion. Why did the First Patriarch Bodhidharma come to China? It was not to hold a Dharma meeting or to beg for alms, but to spread the Mahayana teachings on sudden enlightenment and save deluded beings.

A single flower will blossom into five petals. There are two interpretations of this phrase. In the first, the "single flower" refers to Chan Buddhism, the sudden enlightenment method that Bodhidharma preached; the "five petals" symbolize the five schools that Chan Buddhism later evolved into: Guiyang, Linji, Caodong, Fayen, and Yunmen. In the second, the "single flower" refers to Bodhidharma himself; the "five petals" refer to the five Chan masters from the Second Patriarch, Hui Ke, to the Sixth Patriarch, Hui Neng.

Its fruit will naturally ripen. Whether it is the five schools of Chan Buddhism or the five founders, they will continue to carry forward the teachings of Bodhidharma, allowing thousands of people to realize the nature of mind and eventually become buddhas.

This completes the interpretation of the *Bloodstream Treatise*.

Concluding Remarks

As one of four treatises by Bodhidharma, the *Bloodstream Treatise* is concise in words and profound in meaning. Its depth exceeds that of many sutras and is close or comparable to Dzogchen and Mahamudra. My interpretation of the *Bloodstream Treatise* is based on the teachings in Dzogchen, Mahamudra, and the third turning of the wheel of Dharma, so any deviation in meaning should be slight. After studying the *Bloodstream Treatise*, the *Platform Sutra*, and other such content, you will at least have a certain understanding of enlightenment, which is sure to be helpful on the path to awakening in the future. Following this, you can find very specific and systematic methods in Dzogchen, Mahamudra and other esoteric practices to achieve a more comprehensive approach.

The core concept throughout the *Bloodstream Treatise* is the nature of mind, which is also the main theme expounded in the third turning of the wheel of Dharma. Whether you are a practitioner or not, it is essential to understand the nature of your mind. For ordinary people, the most important things in this life are health, happiness, and wealth. The first two are closely related to one's own mind and consciousness. For those who yearn for liberation, realizing the true nature of mind holds even greater significance, because it is the only way to achieve

liberation. Therefore, everyone must study hard, practice, and apply these teachings in daily life and work.

What constitutes working hard? The first is to listen, contemplate, and practice while trying to accumulate merit as much as possible; the second is to work hard to repent and purify karma; the third is to practice guru yoga and supplicate to the guru. All in all, we should try our best to create various conditions for enlightenment, which will naturally occur when the causes and conditions ripen. We may not be able to attain worldly success during our lifetime, but if we dedicate ourselves to spiritual practice, we will certainly achieve something! At that point, we can live not only a blessed and happy life, but a meaningful one as well!

Everyone has a chance to be enlightened, so please seize the opportunity!

Epilogue

Although the *Bloodstream Treatise* has few words, the content is very rich and profound. It belongs to the highest doctrinal tradition in Buddhism. How to apply its principles is critical; detailed instructions on this are already given in the Chan classic, the *Platform Sutra*. More specific and systematic methods can be found in tantric practices such as Dzogchen and Mahamudra. These practices provide targeted approaches for people of different capacities and in different stages, through which enlightenment can be achieved.

Beginners may not fully grasp the connotation of the *Bloodstream Treatise*, but just listening and studying it has merit. Moreover, it can sow the seeds of wisdom in our alaya consciousness, which will surely sprout one day. Nonetheless, we should still practice hard and not stagnate at the level of listening and contemplating. An opportunity such as this is rare and precious. The purpose of listening and contemplating is to prepare for practice. If we wait to practice, then no matter how much we learn, it will not be of use to liberation.

From a worldly perspective, the pursuit of higher education and income certainly has its value. But what needs to be understood is that Buddhism observes the world through higher wisdom and a broader perspective, yielding insights and results

that greatly impact and change our lives. A small part of this change comes from listening and contemplating, but most of it stems from practicing. Therefore, we must engage in meditation and actual practice, so that we can truly apply the wisdom of the Dharma to our lives, and to serving our society and country.

Of course, you need not practice Buddhism, and you can believe in other religions. That is your personal freedom. But if you choose Buddhism, you must learn it. There are three key components to learning the Dharma: compassion, wisdom, and ability. Corresponding to these are the three patron bodhisattvas of Buddhism, or saviors who protect all sentient beings.

The first is Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva who symbolizes the compassion of the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions and three times. This is what we must first learn.

The second is Manjusri Bodhisattva who symbolizes the wisdom of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Without wisdom, in particular transcendent wisdom, it is impossible to overturn the incorrect views that are innate in human beings, let alone eradicate the afflictions rooted in these mistaken views. Burning incense, worshipping the buddha, building bridges and roads, and engaging in charity activities are all commendable and are expected of Buddhists, but these cannot eliminate our ignorance. The only thing that can eliminate ignorance is wisdom. This is the second thing we must learn.

The third is Vajrapani Bodhisattva who symbolizes the power of the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions and three times. When we have mastered a lot of knowledge and developed compassion, how can we use them to their full

potential? It requires certain abilities. Many Buddhists, despite having some wisdom and compassion, often lack the ability to apply these essentials to life and work. Therefore, we need to train in this ability.

All in all, Buddhism considers wisdom, compassion, and ability to be crucial and indispensable. In fact, these should be an integral part of any kind of education, not just Buddhism. If an educational system focuses solely on wisdom and knowledge without teaching compassion or practical abilities, then the people it trains will certainly lack love and practical skills. What use is extensive knowledge in this case? For Buddhists, learning wisdom, compassion, and ability is equivalent to grasping the core of the 84,000 Dharma doors. If you learn these three things in this life, you can live a very meaningful life.

We all encounter setbacks and challenges in life, which are beyond our control. But if we have compassion, wisdom, and ability in our hearts, when setbacks and ups and downs come, we can deal with them calmly, and we can even help others face difficulties. At that point, the common expression "May all sentient beings be free from suffering and attain happiness" will no longer be empty talk, we can truly benefit oneself and others. It is my hope that everyone will practice diligently, remain steadfast, and constantly refine their skills!

Tsultrim Lodro

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The Bloodstream Treatise is one of four treatises by Bodhidharma, the First Patriarch of Chan Buddhism. Concise in words and profound in meaning, it belongs to the highest doctrinal tradition in Buddhism, along with Mahamudra and Dzogchen. Its core concept throughout is the nature of mind. Our nature is the mind, the mind is the buddha, the buddha is the path, and the path is Chan. Seeing our buddha nature is enlightenment.

Khenpo Tsultrim Lodrö of Larung Five Sciences Buddhist Institute in Serthar, Gartz Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in China is a scholar, an educator, an accomplished Buddhist practitioner, and an avid advocate of the preservation of Tibetan culture. He is known for his emphasis on the teaching of bodhicitta, the essence of Mahayana Buddhism and the foundation of all his activities. In lectures, he always covers both theory and method to enable us to practice in a complete and correct manner; with precise, direct, pith instructions derived from his own experience, he not only points out the right course for us but also puts up road signs to keep us from being sidetracked. For this reason, his teachings are unique and valuable.

