

The Bequeathed Teachings Sutra

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The Bequeathed Teachings Sutra

THE BEQUEATHED TEACHINGS SUTRA

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The Bequeathed Teachings Sutra



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Welcome to our Bequeathed Teachings Sutra Dharma Assembly!

My teacher, Great Master Xuan Hua, first patriarch of the Orthodox Buddhism in America, founder of the Dharma Realm Buddhist association and the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, said that speaking Dharma to an audience of one person is quite well justified. Furthermore, we also take the time to translate it to the various languages so as to allow the listeners to be exposed to the Mahayana principles.

I'd like to express my gratitude to those at the Dharma Realm Buddhist association who did such a superb job translating Great Master's Xuan Hua's teachings from Chinese into English. Their works are the far, the best and most accurate translations of Mahayana texts. Their translations are the basis of my initial Mahayana studies. Herein, I will make minor changes in the translation so as to more accurately convey my understandings of the original Chinese sacred texts.

This sutra was translated under the reign of Emperor Yáo Xing 姚興 (344-413 A.D.). The emperor was a great Dharma protector of Buddhism.

The complete name of the sutra is “The Buddha speaks of the Bequeathed Teachings sutra”. It's more commonly known as the Bequeathed Teachings sutra.

According to the Tian Tai tradition, we can take an overview of the sutra through the five profound meanings:

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Tian Tai five profound meanings:

1. Title: refers to a person (the Buddha) and Dharma (Bequeathed Teachings)

2. Substance: summary of the Buddha's a lifetime of Provisional & Actual teachings.

3. Doctrine: **All of you Bhikshus, after my Nirvana, you should reverence and honor the Pratimoksha.... not different from my actual presence in the world and From now on all of my disciples must continuously practice. Then the Thus Come One's Dharma body will always be present and indestructible.**

4. Use: utilize the mind to control the five sense organs; being mindful of the Noble Truths; single-mindedly cultivate until obtain liberation.

5. Period: Lotus/Nirvana teaching period.

Buddha is Sanskrit for enlightened being.

Enlightenment has three kinds:

1. Inherent enlightenment: initially, we're ignorant; our fundamental (Buddha) nature is still covered up.

2. Initial enlightenment: after learning Mahayana from a teacher, cultivate and begin to awaken to the principles.

3. Ultimate enlightenment: finally attain wisdom of the Buddha's.

“Bequeathed” means to leave behind, to give inheritance to the subsequent generation.

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“Teachings”: the Buddha's final instructions for his followers before he enters Nirvana.

This sutra was translated from Sanskrit into Chinese by a very famous Indian monk called Tripitaka Master Kumarajiva.

Dharma Master means a left home person, sramana in Sanskrit. He/she vigorously cultivates the three non-outflow studies (precepts, samadhi and wisdom) and works to eradicate the three poisons (greed, hatred and stupidity).

Tripitaka means Three Stores: the three major stores of Buddhism, the Vinaya Store, the Sutra Store and the Shastra Store.

The Vinaya Store contains the study of rules of morality and regulations. The Sutra Store holds all the Buddha's sermons, thus all the Buddhist principles. It is the study of samadhi. And the Shastra Store contains the commentaries by the Buddha's enlightened disciples to help us study wisdom.

Ven. Kumarajiva was thoroughly versed in all three stores and thus was called Tripitaka Dharma Master. We too can be called Tripitaka Master if we understand all three Stores of the Buddhist cannon.

Kumarajiva means “pure youth 童壽” and “long life (lofty virtues)”. This Indian monk was invited Chinese emperors to oversee the translation of the Buddhist cannon from Sanskrit into Chinese. He was responsible of the translation of many important Buddhist teachings. And thus his contribution to Chinese Buddhism is second only to Great Master Xuán Zàng. His translations are highly admired be-

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cause of the accuracy and superior literary styles. For example, when we explain the Lotus sutra in the future, it'll be based on his remarkable translation work: you'll get to further appreciate his tremendous skills.

Sutra is the general name for all the Buddha's discourses. It is the main record for teaching us how to develop samadhi. Samadhi means concentration power. We all have tremendous inner strength which can be systematically developed as samadhi power. Each sutra was spoken by the Buddha to elaborate on the various aspects of that samadhi. Therefore, each sutra is its own peculiar importance in the Buddhist canon, recording the appropriate Dharma doors (method of practice). Once we have samadhi power, then our inherent wisdom naturally unfolds. When transcendental wisdom is unfolded, we can obtain liberation.

Sutra is a Sanskrit term. It was translated because it contains multiple meanings. Let's go over several:

Sutra means “string together”: in a much adorned fashion the principles expounded by the Buddha. The more you investigate sutras, the more you'll appreciate how beautifully they are put together (even though the Buddha never used notes or actually had to prepare for his lectures).

Another meaning is “gathering in” those whose roots have matured. What does it mean? The Buddha simply knew based on the listeners' capacity, what to speak of. Amazingly, some of them got enlightened simply by listening to his sermons!

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Sutra also means “constant”. It does not change with time or space. What Shakyamuni Buddha expounded was the same as the doctrines preached by Buddhas in the past and future. Furthermore, Buddhist principles propagated in all the worlds throughout the Dharma Realm (universe) are all the same. Why? Buddhism is the study of the universal truth (the truth of the universe); there is but one truth not two.

Sutra also means “method” of practice. To cultivate, one must learn a method of practice. To successfully cultivate, one must apply the appropriate methods at the right time. Just like when one studies martial arts, one must learn a method of practice, and one can't arbitrarily go about it and hope to become a great fighter.

Sutra also means “bubbly spring”: the Buddhist principles well forth from the sutra endlessly like water from a spring.

Another meaning of sutra is “carpenter's plumb line”. Just like the skilled carpenter, you'd need to use a plumb line to ensure that things are square and round. Sutras provide such aids to assist us in clearly discerning right from wrong, good from evil, proper from deviant etc.

This sutra was the last one spoken by Shakyamuni Buddha just before he entered Nirvana. It could be considered to be the Buddha's final will.

Just all other sutras spoken by the Buddha, this sutra also have the six realizations:

1. Faith: Dharma actually taught by the Buddha.
2. Hearing: heard from the Buddha's disciples own ears.

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3. Time: spoken at midnight.
4. Speaker: Dharma host is the Buddha himself.
5. Place: between the twin Sala tree
6. Audience: to his disciples.

At first glance, this sutra appears to be very simplistic. It however contains very profound Buddhist principles. As part of the training of our left-home people, we're often encouraged to memorize this sutra and recite it every day. It's a real shame that it is rarely explained. This is why I've decided to take the time to explain it so as to provide some insights into this sutra, to help cultivators build a more stable and solid foundation for their practice. This sutra, in addition to the principles expounded herein, is an invaluable manual for the serious Buddhist practitioner.

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A1 Sutra preface

Sutra text:

When Shakyamuni Buddha first turned the Dharma Wheel, he crossed over the Venerable Ajnata-Kaundinya.

Sutra commentary:

Sutras are typically organized into three sections: introduction, text proper and circulation.

This preface section serves as the introduction to the sutra.

Shakya is Sanskrit for “capable and humane 能仁”: replete with kindness and compassion (Mundane Truth).

Muni means “tranquil and silent 寂默”: thus thus unmoving; replete with Prajna Wisdom (Truth of Emptiness).

Shakyamuni Buddha is the teaching host of our Saha world.

When Shakyamuni Buddha first turned the Dharma Wheel. After obtaining the Way, Shakyamuni Buddha spoke Dharma for his five former attendants who were cultivating in the Deer Park, India. That was the first time that he turned the Dharma Wheel. He taught the Four Noble Truths: the four wonderfully profound Truths.

Briefly, they are: 1. Suffering, 2. Accumulation, 3. Extinction, 4. the Way.

Living beings do not realize that they are immersed in the sea of Sufferings. There are three kinds of sufferings: suffer-

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ing within suffering (e.g. already extremely poor, then contract cancer), suffering of decay (suffering resulting from experiencing losses: like formerly was very rich, then lost it all) and Formation suffering (from the formation skandha: the mind continually runs without any means of stopping it or controlling it).

Furthermore, sufferings have the tendency to Accumulate. For example, you are cheated on by your spouse, become so dejected that you cannot eat properly, sleep well, or concentrate at work. Then you are fired because of your performance and your friends avoid you like the plague because they're afraid you'll ask them for a loan. The Chinese have a saying: disasters never come single-handedly, the equivalent of our saying: when it rains, it pours!

The Buddha is most compassionate, after giving the bad news; he then immediately gives us the good news.

All sufferings can be eradicated (Extinction). It can be obtained by walking the path (the Way) which leads to ending all sufferings and experiencing only bliss.

“Turn the Dharma Wheel” is Buddhist jargon for the Buddha speaking the Dharma. He can “turn” living beings' afflicted mind. This “Wheel” can go anywhere and is unstoppable. It can subdue the externalists' dharmas and destroy all living beings' afflictions.

The Buddha has three turnings of the Dharma Wheel:

1. First turning: this is Suffering, its nature is oppressive; this is Accumulation, it attracts and accrues (afflictions accu-

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mulate); this is Extinction, it can be certified to (state of no more suffering, only bliss); this is the Way, it can be cultivated. (此是苦，逼迫性。此是集，招感性。此是滅，可證性。此是道，可修性。)

2. Second turning: this is Suffering, you should know (recognize it); this is Accumulation, you should sever (all afflictions); this is Extinction, you should certify to (realize it); this is the Way, you should cultivate it. (此是苦，汝應知；此是集，汝應斷；此是滅，汝應證；此是道，汝應修。)

3. Third turning: this is Suffering, I already know, I don't need to know again; this is Accumulation, I already severed, no need to sever it again; this is Extinction, I already certified to, no need to certify to it again; this is the Way, I already cultivated it, no need to cultivate it again. (此是苦，我已知，不須更知；此是集，我已斷，不須更斷；此是滅，我已證，不須更證；此是道，我已修，不須更修。)

He crossed over the Venerable Ajnata-Kaundinya. To “*cross over*” means to help someone obtain liberation: cross the sea of sufferings to the other shore. When the Buddha explained the concept of “guest dusts”, “*Ven. Ajnata-Kaundinya*”, one of his former five attendants, certified to first stage Arhatship. When Shakyamuni Buddha finished his very first sermon, Ven. Ajnata-Kaundinya obtained fourth stage Arhatship. He was thus “crossed over”. The Small Vehicle (Hinayana) considers the 4th fruition of Arhatship as sagehood. In contrast, the Big Vehicle (Mahayana) only considers First Ground and higher attainments to be sagehood. The Fourth stage Arhat is still very far away from First

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Ground!

Ven. Ajnata-Kaundinya was the first one to be crossed over: attain Arhatship. This arises from prior causes and conditions. When the Buddha was still in the causal ground (planting causes to attain Buddhahood), he encountered Ajnata-Kaundinya and vowed to cross him over when he has the chance.

Sutra text:

The very last time he spoke the Dharma, he crossed over the Venerable Subhadhra. All of those whom he should have crossed over had already been crossed over. He lay between the Twin Sala trees and was about to enter Nirvana. At this time, in the middle period of the night, all was quiet, without any sound. Then for the sake of all of his disciples he spoke on the essentials of the Dharma.

Sutra commentary:

The very last time he spoke the Dharma, he crossed over the Venerable Subhadhra. Subhadhra means “Good & worthy 善賢” is an eighty-year old man. Long ago, he was a good cutter and thanks to reciting the Buddha's name that he escaped harm. Now, he decided to leave the home life since he has no one to turn to. The Buddha's disciples denied his application but the Buddha accepted him when he came back to the temple. The Buddha explained Dharma to Ven. Subhadhra and he certified to Arhatship.

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All of those whom he should have crossed over had already been crossed over. Buddhas appear in the world only when causes and conditions ripen. When they do, the Buddhas then manifest as Buddhas to teach them. Those with blessings can then meet with him, listen to his sermons, practice and obtain liberation. At this point, all these types of people have been crossed over by Shakyamuni Buddha. His work is thus done: he's free to move on.

He lay between the Twin Sala trees. This tree has one root system but gives forth two trunks. Above, their combined foliage is joined. They symbolize the Provisional and Actual Teachings. **Middle period of the night** symbolizes the Middle Way. **All was quiet** symbolizes samadhi: when you listen to sutra lectures, do you enter samadhi? If you have skills, you can. **At this time**, the forest was entirely **without any sound**, probably because even the animals and forest beings want to express veneration and gratitude to the World-Honored-One.

At that time, the Buddha **was about to enter Nirvana**: return to his roots. Nirvana has four characteristics: purity, true self, permanence and bliss. It's also the place of return for us to be near the Buddhas.

Before taking his leave, he was still much attached to **all of his disciples**, therefore for their sake (to benefit all believers in the Buddha, including us during this Dharma Ending Age), spoke **on the essentials of the Dharma**. In other words, this sutra contains the critical last instructions from Shakyamuni Buddha to guide us in our cultivation. When

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running into difficulties during your practice, and you don't know who to turn to, you can certainly turn to this sutra and other Buddhist sutras. You will very likely find answers to your problems. When I first started, he read all the available 200 English books that were translations of Great Master Xuan Hua's teachings from Chinese. I did not understand much. However, when I had problems and happened to read his books, I often found answers to my problems. It happened consistently. I later told more people and my own disciples to do the same: they too obtain similar responses. Sages' teachings are timeless!

In brief, time was short! The Buddha was about to enter Nirvana. He wants to give us the Dharma essentials to neatly tie up a lifetime's worth of teachings.

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A2 Text Proper

Herein begins the principal teachings of the sutra. “Proper” refers to proper doctrines that are right, without flaws and can thus be believed.

B1 Explaining the essentials of Worldly dharmas

The Buddha starts by skillfully bring up worldly dharmas: start with the seemingly familiar. He actually is using the opportunity to correct erroneous views.

C1 Dealing with and controlling deviant karmas dharmas essentials

How to avoid creating deviant karmas.

D1 Upholding Precepts

Sutra text:

All of you Bhikshus, after my Nirvana, you should revere and honor the Pratimoksha. It is like finding a light in darkness, or like a poor person obtaining a treasure. You should know that it is your great teacher, and is not different from my actual presence in the world.

Sutra commentary:

When the Buddha addresses the **Bhikshus**, he's referring to the four-fold assembly consisting of Bhikshus, Bhikshunis,

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laymen and lay women. He's in fact addressing all of us cultivators of the Way. He only refers "Bhikshus" who are the leaders of the Assembly, to actually address all of us.

The Buddha chose the Bhikshus as his target audience because:

1. They maintain transcending images.
2. They represent Mahayana's Provisional Dharma (through the Two Vehicles)
3. Bhikshus are leaders of the Assembly. Henceforth, the Buddha is teachings the teachers.

This sutra is the very last final instructions of the Buddha to us. Its importance therefore cannot be overemphasized. Clearly, the sequential order of the various instructions denotes their relative importance.

What is the very first Dharma he teaches? No, it's not the big names such as the Great Compassion mantra, or the king of mantras: the Shurangama mantra. Nor is it a secret/tantric Dharma. It's not Pure Land, or Chan meditation. It is to uphold precepts. In other words, in order to cultivate, one must first maintain precepts.

In this Dharma ending age, very few teachers teach about precepts, maybe because very few people are interested in learning about precepts. People often ask me about my specialty, is it Chan or Pure Land? Presently, the tantric Dharma is quite popular in Asian communities. In contrast, fewer and fewer places are teaching and investigating precepts or the

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Vinaya. One often hears of the three non-outflow studies in Mahayana: precepts, samadhi and wisdom. People often advocate practicing samadhi/Chan or the study of wisdom such as investigating sutras or shastras. However, very few bring up the study of precepts. As a result, today's cultivators lack a good foundation. The proof is right here in this sutra: the Buddha already knew and thus reminded us to the importance of cultivating precepts. Unfortunately, in today's climate, monks and nuns prefer to go to universities to learn about Buddhism. I recently met a Bhikshuni who earned a PhD from a world renowned American university, especially in Buddhist studies. She spent six years earning her degree and confided with me that she was very disappointed with the education because "it felt far short of her expectations". As far as I know, precepts are not taught at that many universities if any at all. We're further and further from the roots!

According to the Chinese tradition, left-home people are required to only study precepts during the first five years. When I was novice monk (shami), I was required to study precepts even though I would much rather meditate or recite mantras to prepare for a "career" as a monk. Upholding precepts is of utmost importance in Mahayana: if one does not understand and recite precepts (twice a month), then how does one understand where one erred? Upholding precepts helps us work on our Way virtues.

When Great Master Xuan Hua was still in the world, he used to go to Taiwan to propagate the Dharma. He waited until he became quite famous in the United States before con-

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sidering going to Taiwan because he did not want people to think that he's greedy for Taiwanese donations. The Taiwanese are very big supporters and have traditionally provided major financial support to Buddhism throughout the world. When Great Master Xuan Hua first arrived in Taiwan, not that many people knew about him. Those who drew near him did so because of word-of-mouth referral from friends and acquaintances. There was one man who patiently looked after my teacher for the first few years he came to Taiwan. He would greet our teacher at the airport, arrange for a place to stay, drove him around and made offerings to him. Finally he requested the great master to teach him a special dharma, the best dharma to help him obtain great spiritual powers like my teacher. Master Xuan Hua obliged and taught him the six principles: “no fighting, no greed, no seeking, no selfishness, no self-benefit and no lying”. They are the equivalent of the Five Precepts for the laity. The Taiwanese gentleman complained that he was hoping for a more advanced Dharma. Master Xuan Hua looked at him in the eyes and said: there is no higher Dharma than the six principles. There is no higher Dharma than the Precepts. Please remember that Master Xuan Hua is a sage, he would not deceive us at all.

The Buddha said: **after my Nirvana, you should revere and honor the Pratimoksha.** “Pratimoksha” is the Sanskrit name for precepts, it means “pure Dharma 淨法 ”: this Dharma can help us attain purity. It also means “Pure liberation 淨解脫”: obtain liberation through purity. In other words, precepts can help us end sufferings and obtain bliss.

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Let's think about it: do you know of any worldly dharma that is guaranteed to bring us true happiness and joy?

For instance, to pursue fame, does that make us happy? If it does, then why celebrities usually end up unhappy, have broken families and addictions?

Furthermore, rich people lack self-mastery: they are constantly worried about kidnapping. The husband of one of my disciples is a bodyguard for a lady who is very rich after divorcing from her husband who made a fortune during the dot.com era. She's always surrounded by a security detail 24/7. So are her children. She's certainly much better off than most of us financially. However, it's not as care-free and at ease as our less well-off lot.

Why should you honor and revere the Pratimoksha? Because it brings great benefits to you and your loved one, **like finding a light in darkness** now you see clearly (try getting for a day with your eyes closed!), **or like a poor person obtaining a treasure**, you truly are well off!

You should know that it is your great teacher, someone who can enlighten you. By the way, in this day and age, people tend to look at teachers as employees: we pay tuition and fees and they're obligated to teach us. That is acceptable for worldly dharmas but will not do for transcendental dharmas. World-transcending dharmas are not for sale, cannot be bought. In order to learn these, you'll have to pass through many tests of your diligence and sincerity. Only then you're deemed to be worthy Dharma vessels and be taught.

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Remember to treat the Precepts as **not different from my actual presence in the world**. To uphold precepts is to obey the Buddha and to draw nearer to him. When he was in the world he could be sought for advice, now that he's no longer with us, consult with the Precepts and use them as a road map for your cultivation.

D2 Explaining the expedient distancing from the Pure Precepts.

Sutra text:

Those who uphold the pure precepts should not buy, sell or trade. You should not covet fields or buildings, or keep servants or raise animals.

You should stay far away from all kinds of agriculture and wealth as you would avoid a pit of fire. You should not cut down grass or trees, plow fields or dig the earth. Nor may you compound medicines, prophesize good and evil, observe the constellations, cast horoscopes by the waxing and waning of the moon, or compute astrological fortunes. All of these activities are improper.

Regulate your body, eat at the appropriate time and by live in purity.

You should not participate in worldly affairs or act as an envoy, nor should you become involved with magical spells and elixirs of immortality, or with cultivating connections with high ranking people, being affectionate towards them and condescending towards the lowly.

With an upright mind and proper mindfulness you should seek to cross over. Do not conceal your faults or put on a special appearance to delude the multitudes. Know the limits and be content with the four kinds of offerings. When you receive offerings, do not store them up.

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Sutra commentary:

One cannot make excuses for breaking precepts, claiming that it's simply an expedient. One should never distance oneself from the pure precepts: should not break precepts.

Those who uphold the pure precepts: a requisite for cultivators: uphold precepts, the more purely the better.

A few years ago, I was having lunch at a large Taiwanese temple in the Los Angeles area. I was eating by myself when a Caucasian gentleman sat down on the seat facing me and started talking to me. He was in his late twenties. He was in his way to his Japanese master's temple located two hours away from where we ate. He proudly claimed that he's been practicing Zen for over ten years. I said: you've been at it for so long and yet you've developed no samadhi power at all, how come? He wondered: what is samadhi power? I replied that meditation is the Buddhist methodology to develop concentration power, a very good methodology indeed. If you don't even know what level you're at, how can you know how to make progress? I was intrigued about a smart young man who would engage in spiritual pursuits in the blind for so long, especially when he's also a PhD candidate at the University of Irvine.

He inquired about samadhi and asked for permission to come to my temple to investigate the nine samadhis in Buddhism. Two months later, he finally made it to our weekend classes, held on Saturdays and Sundays. In the morning we recite the Buddha's name (probably considered to be an “infe-

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rior” Dharma to the meditation people) in the morning, we then explain sutras for two hours in the afternoon. After two months of practice with us, he certified to second Dhyana. He patiently drove for half an hour each way from Irvine to our temple in Rosemead, California where I explained the Earth Store sutra. He tried locating the samadhi information on the Chinese cannon but could not find. That's why he showed up to learn about samadhis. As soon as I finished the eight samadhi: the samadhi of neither thought nor non-thought, he vanished.

I knew that he was possessed by a ghost of manic depression that caused him a lot of grief for quite at least several years.

Four months later, he frantically tried to reach me because he was seriously affected. He made an appointment with me at the temple. He said that he's been hiding his Japanese teacher's temple because that's where he felt most secure. Also, he recently hooked up with a Korean girl-friend who kept him grounded. I did not dare tell him that his attacks were probably motivated by the female ghost's jealousy toward his Korean girlfriend.

Ultimately, there was not much I could do for him because of his attitude. He was more interested in picking my brains than learning the Proper Dharma. If you fail to show proper deference and etiquette, don't be surprised that you're not taught much. This happens to be a serious problem with Westerners: they lack the proper respect and appreciation for the Orthodox Dharma. They're used to thinking that things of

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value must be paid for. That's certainly not incorrect. However, how do you pay for transcendental Dharmas? You can't pay for them with worldly things like money. That's why truly transcendental dharmas are free of charge and must be paid for with sincerity and hard work. You can learn them because of your faith and earnest desire to obtain liberation. They cannot be obtained commercially. Left-home people, who uphold precepts, simply do not **buy, sell or trade**: engage in commerce because it's against the Way.

For a great many left home people, a successful “career” should be accompanied with building a big temple. There was a very senior monk (Hé Shàng) who was sick all his life. He went from doctor to doctor to fight for his life. He managed to survive into his seventies. He thus wanted to build a big temple in the United States. I asked him: what are your wishes? He said that he'd like to cap his “career” by building a five-million dollar temple. He'd need five years to complete it. Upon which, he'd turn it over to his young disciples and then “retire” to a small thatch hut to recite the Buddha's name while waiting to be reborn to the Western Bliss Pure Land. I couldn't help but wonder: what made him think that he could survive for another five stressful years? If his ultimate goal was to obtain rebirth to the Western Bliss Pure Land, what assurance did he have that in building the temple, he'd have a better chance for rebirth (where does it say in the Pure Land annals that building a temple ensures one's rebirth to the Pure Land)? Besides, what made him think that his young disciples would be able to take good care of the big temple (they

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certainly never were exposed to the big temple construction and management)?

Left-home people have to be careful not to violate the Buddha's instructions: they **should not covet fields or buildings**, they are all externals. Once one comes into the possession of assets, one tends to be pulled into management and financial matters: that might bring about the end of cultivation!

When Great Master Xuan Hua was alive, he would not allow people to do his laundry. He could wait until the wee hours of the morning, when everyone else was asleep, to go do his laundry. We should also follow his example and avoid relying on **servants**. Lay people also tend to create mouth karmas from scolding servants. Cultivators should not **raise animals**. That could be the cause for killing karmas: e.g. raising dogs involves killing karmas because they have to be fed with meat.

You should stay far away from all kinds of agriculture and wealth as you would avoid a pit of fire. You should not cut down grass or trees, plow fields or dig the earth.

Left-home people should distance themselves from **all kinds of agriculture**. First of all, planting activities can cause harm to living beings. For instance, **plowing** can result in violently harming living beings that dwell underneath. Furthermore, planting and farming activities are quite time-consuming and tiring, leaving very little left for cultivation. And also, one most likely will have to contend with the various bugs and parasites that are drawn to the crop, usually

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causing their demise or hunger. Left home disciples of the Buddha cannot **cut trees** because that might harm small living beings who reside there. Moreover, trees are inhabited by spirits. Spirits who are blessed can dwell in larger trees. Those who are not blessed, end up residing in **grasses**. To cut down trees or mow grasses result in the destruction of their habitats and thus harm our compassionate nature.

The Buddha told his disciples to avoid creating offenses and avoid killing karmas.

During the time of Shakyamuni Buddha, a monk wanted to trim the branches of a tree in the temple. He did not realize that that big tree was the residence of a spirit's family. Spirits too have families like us humans. The spirit's son happened to be playing by hanging on the branch when the bhikshu decided to cut it off. The boy spirit fell down and broke his arm. He screamed in great pain. The ghost father came running, saw his son and lost his temper. He wanted to beat up on the monk for injuring his son. The father spirit suddenly remembered that the monk was the Buddha's disciple. Fearing that he'd offend the Buddha, the father spirit instead went in front of the Buddha to file a complaint. The Buddha listened sympathetically and agreed with the spirit. This led the World-Honored-One to decree that from then on, left-home people may not cut trees or grass.

Why are left-home disciples of the Buddha prohibited from **digging the earth**? It's not uncommon for earthworms to be present underneath. Digging the earth can cause them harm. That would be against the way of compassion. We

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cultivate in order to end sufferings. How can we possibly obtain our objective while causing other living beings to suffer?

Cultivators should also distance themselves from **wealth**, in order to avoid nurturing the greedy mind. I saw an article that reported that a certain monk in Hong-Kong made a fortune from investing in the stock market with the proceeds from the offerings from the faithful. I can't help but frown at that because that would be indulging in making profits just like lay people, hardly appropriate for left home people who should be devoting time and effort toward spiritual matters.

We should avoid such worldly pursuits as if avoiding a **pit of fire**. Let's face it: a cultivator who makes money on the stock market is usually at the expense of someone else. Such behavior rather lacks in compassion.

Nor may you compound medicines, prophesize good and evil, observe the constellations, cast horoscopes by the waxing and waning of the moon, or compute astrological fortunes. All of these activities are improper.

Cultivators should not **compound medicines**. Those who have this skill usually have gongfu. They utilize their gongfu toward earning a livelihood. Some are very good at it and thus can make a lot of money and forget to cultivate. True cultivators should refrain from the temptations of using their spiritual skills to benefit themselves. Another more subtle reason is we consider that to be meddling into worldly affairs: it creates more problems than it can solve.

Similarly, cultivators should not **prophesize good and**

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evil (these are not fixed and can be transformed; at a subtle level, harboring this kind of discrimination tends to make one condemn and reject the evil beings instead of trying to help them), **observe the constellations, cast horoscopes by the waxing and waning of the moon, or compute astrological fortunes. All of these activities are improper.** Cultivators eventually develop some spiritual penetrations. Typically, these are not to be used for the afore-mentioned activities because they can lead to abuses. Mahayana cultivators are not allowed to exhibit spiritual powers except for specific circumstances. We stress opening our wisdom instead of developing spiritual powers. Why? To have them makes it very tempting to use them. One can thus make a big name for oneself and get a lot of offerings. That invariably seems to lead to nurturing the greedy mind, making it very difficult to let go and attain liberation.

Regulate your body, eat at the appropriate time and by live in purity. The Buddha has taught us the eating Dharma. “*eat at the appropriate time*” refers to the fact that monks and nuns are not to eat after noon. “*Regulate your body*” means that left-home people should not be overly concerned with taking care of one's body like lay people. In particular, they should be frugal with respect to all material things: that's how to regulate the body. Cultivators should endeavor to rid themselves of the three poisons (greed, anger and stupidity) to purify their mind, and “*live in purity*”. The Buddha will further elaborate on the eating Dharma in a later section.

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Cultivators **should not participate in worldly affairs or act as an envoy**. These activities have detrimental effects on cultivation. To engage in worldly is create a lot fo afflictions. Once afflicted, it's very difficult to enter samadhi. Worldly affairs refer to wordly pursuits that cause fighting and destruction. As to acting as an envoy between countries, that can cause a lot of people to be hurt by war and battles. A lot of gains and losses are involved, contrary to the mind of equanimity and compassion.

Nor should you become involved with magical spells and elixirs of immortality, or with cultivating connections with high ranking people, being affectionate towards them and condescending towards the lowly. Some cultivators like exhibit their spiritual skills. Once samadhi power is developed, cultivators will eventually have spiritual penetrations. For example, many will open their heavenly eye, enabling them to see the yang and yin realms. They can see the heavens or can hear what the gods talk about with their heavenly ears. The externalists also have many powerful mantras (also known as tantras). They can help control ghosts and spirits. I had a disciple who was a long-time follower of some well-known Chinese externalist sects. She was quite skilled in QiGong and had excellent people skills. They chose her to be their instructors. After cultivating with me, she decided to defect and take refuge with the Trile Jewel. She felt that our Chan Dharma is far superior to their Dharmas. Their grand-master had attained the 7th samadhi and had tremendous spiritual powers. He was

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pretty upset with her defection and decided to use his spiritual powers to teach me a lesson for stealing his disciple. So he attacked me from China and managed to injure me while I was asleep at night. Luckily, I recovered and understood how to neutralize his attacks. Please remember, when you have spiritual powers, do not use them to vent your anger no matter how well-justified it may appear to be. The Mahayana cultivator only uses spiritual penetrations to help others, not to benefit himself/herself!

“**Magical spell**”: a famous example is alchemy. These people can turn lead into gold. It's actually gold but after 500 years, it reverts back to lead. Those who drink “**elixirs of immortality**” to live up to 10,000 years. The Buddha forbids his disciples from using these dharmas because they bring people to dead-ends: making the users even more attached to their falsely united bodies.

In the psat, Maitreya Bodhisattva was a co-cultivator with Shakyamuni Buddha. Maitreya was fond of rubbing elbows with **high ranking people**, the rich and powerful. Whereas Shakyamuni preferred to cultivate ascetic practices. As a result, Maitreya Bodhisattva lags behind the Buddha: he still has not accomplished Buddhahood while Shakyamuni Buddha became a Buddha long time ago. Even the Sixth Patriarch declined to draw near emperors in spite of their personal requests to hear his Dharma.

With an upright mind and proper mindfulness you should seek to cross over. Do not conceal your faults or put on a special appearance to delude the multitudes.

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Know the limits and be content with the four kinds of offerings. When you receive offerings, do not store them up.

With an upright mind, keep your mind proper, pay attention to your comportment. Maintain **proper mindfulness**: reduce your false-thinking, remember why you cultivate: to **seek to cross over**: to transcend the triple realm, to escape the revolving Wheel and obtain bliss.

Do not conceal your faults because they won't get corrected. You'll then know about them, think about them until they are resolved. People conceal their faults because they are afraid to lose or get hurt. They conceal them because they are incapable of confronting their weaknesses. Problems rarely go away by themselves. Worse yet, if we don't fix our faults, we'll continue to make mistakes and create offenses.

Put on a special appearance to delude the multitudes. Do not adopt unusual behavior or comportment in order to impress people. For example, some left-home people go to great lengths to appear special or superior, hoping to get more offerings. That is considered deviant livelihood in Buddhism.

If you really are wealthy, then you'd prefer not show off and draw attention to yourself. If you have gongfu, you'd naturally try to blend in and not draw attention to yourself. Otherwise you'll draw attention and cause jealousy. If you still reveal your gongfu, that would indicate that your level is still pretty low. Though a top-notch martial artist can knock you down with a feather, he/she rarely reveals his/her strength

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or skill. Furthermore, enlightened sanghans do not need your offerings: they rarely reveal their real identity. I used to teach my lay disciples to bow to left-home people. One of my early Caucasian disciple would rarely bow to left-home people. However, whenever I showed up at a temple, she'd come over to bow to me in front of everyone. He thought that it would please me. It would have pleased me a lot more if she had bowed to all the sanghans, even if they had lower gongfu than her.

Westerners don't understand the Dharma of giving yet. Therefore, left-home people do not necessarily have to accept offerings unless they are in accord with the Dharma. The Hinayana people are very clear about this: they understand that to accept offerings will deplete blessings and may even make one indebted to the donors. If you get into debt, you'll have to pay back with interest. Thus, **know the limits and be content with the four kinds of offerings**. Limit the amount of offerings you receive. The four kinds of offerings are: 1. food and drink 2. clothes 3. shelter and 4. medicine. These are the four kinds of offerings that can be made to left-home people to assist them in their cultivation. Cultivators should take care to accept only enough. In fact learn to **be content** with the minimum. Actually, it's even better to accept a little bit less. By the way, contentment is the secret of happiness. To be content brings happiness: happiness comes from the mind, not from externals.

When you receive offerings, do not store them up. Storing feeds the greedy mind. It causes a lot of afflictions.

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For example, storing things naturally causes one to worry that they will get spoiled or stolen. Cultivation is like going on a journey: the less we carry, the farther we can get. Learn to get by and make do with the minimal.

Above are just some aspects of the Precepts that the Buddha taught us.

Again, in terms of mind karmas, the Buddha suggested that we do the following six:

1. Upright mind keep a wholesome mind, think positive. Do not look at other's faults. Look only at your own faults.

2. Proper mindfulness remember only proper things, not deviant ones. There are four proper mindfulness Dharmas that can bring liberation: a) resolve to cultivate in order to save living beings, b) resolve to recite the Buddha's name, c) be mindful of the Four stations of mindfulness, and d) Have no self.

a) Cultivate to save living beings. Let's not forget: the Mahayana cultivator chooses to cultivate in order to help others, not to make a fortune or obtain personal gains.

b) Reciting the Buddha's name. Bind our mind to the Buddha's name and drop everything else.

c) Four stations of mindfulness. The mind is impermanent. It originated from impermanence therefore its substance is also impermanent> What is generally perceived to be happiness is actually suffering: that joy creates attachment and yearnings. Unfulfilled yearnings produce (future) sufferings.

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d) Dharmas have no self. No self means that it does not exist by itself. It depends on conditions (other factors) for its existence. They came into being (produced) from conditions. All that are produced must be extinguished. Everything in this world will eventually return to emptiness, everything is false.

3. Concealing one's faults: only allows defilements to accrue in our mind.

If you wish to have control over your mind, then you should consider practicing Chan. Practicing Chan can help develop samadhi power. When we reach the ninth samadhi level called the Patience of Non-production of Dharmas. That is the level of a 4th stage Arhat. At hsi point, you don't see a single dharma produced. For example, when scolded, they feel as if they're drinking sweet dew. The inhabitants of the six Desire Realm heavens like to drink sweet dew because it quenches their thirst and hunger.

It's important to be able to exert control our of mind. Ordinary people have no way of stopping their continuous thinking process. That creates waste: of mental energy. Instead of focusing on the task at hand, their mind can't help but wander. Fourth stage Arhats are able to stop their mind at will.

4. Put up facades to delude the multitudes. Intentionally put on airs so as to try to impress others, making them think that we're special. For example, some left-home people might walk differently than normal people, adopt stern looks or frequently shout at others. The Buddha calls such tactics

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“deviant livelihood”: using deviant dharmas to make ends meet.

5. Know the limits: practice moderation, be thrifty. Do not overuse our blessings. Our training program emphasizes unrelentingly trying to create blessings and thriftiness. Once our blessings are exhausted, we'll have to return to lay life.

6. Do not hoard offerings: if you resolve your mind to cultivate, then you should stop the worldly habit of hoarding, of keeping score. Don't be greedy for offerings. The more offerings you receive, the more afflictions you'll have. Cultivation is simplification, is deduction: to let go. The Way is the way of poverty: the poorer you are, the easier it is to cultivate.

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D3 Precepts can produce all merit and virtues

Sutra text:

This is a general explanation of the characteristics of upholding the precepts. The precepts are the root of proper liberation; therefore they are called the Pratimoksha (lit. the root of liberation). By relying on these precepts, you will give rise to all samadhis, and reach the wisdom of the cessation of suffering.

Sutra commentary:

Precepts can produce all merit and virtue: in this section, the Buddha explains that the precepts can produce all sorts of merit and virtues.

How does one create merit and virtues with Mahayana? By practicing the six paramitas: giving, precepts, patience, vigor, samadhi and wisdom. Upholding precepts is the second paramita and can also produce all other merit and virtues.

Maintaining precepts means:

Not being greedy: that is giving,

Can be patient: e.g. Being insulted and not use coarse language in retaliation,

Overtime can more strictly uphold precepts: that is vigor.

Produce samadhi

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(Once samadhi obtained, Prajna) wisdom unfolds.

Bhikshus have 250 precepts, bhikshunis have over 300. Herewith, the Buddha will only give **a general explanation of the characteristics of upholding the precepts.** “Characteristic” or “mark” is that which can be seen or perceived. Why does the Buddha proclaim the characteristics or marks of the precepts? To create the opportunity and conditions for the sangha to jointly cultivate precepts and help correct each other when they perceive the individual shortcomings.

Precepts are “do no evil and do all good”: even the smallest evil should not be committed thinking that it's inconsequential; alternatively, make sure to do the slightest good even though it appears to not matter much.

The precepts are the root of proper liberation, precepts are the root source of liberation (from the Triple Realm; the cessation of sufferings). Proper here has two connotations: 1. Right 正 : as opposed to incorrect, deviant; e.g. The externalists incorrectly assume that rebirth to the heaven is liberation 2. Appropriate 順: that is in accord with the time and place (conditions); e.g. Consistent with the cultivator's abilities and circumstances (different types of precepts for different types of cultivators).

Therefore they are called the Pratimoksha (lit. the root of liberation). Precepts are the basis for liberation.

Cultivators, cultivating precepts is wonderful beyond words! Take the time to investigate this Dharma door: it is

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fascinating and intellectually stimulating. If you don't keep precepts, you'll never be able to obtain the Way. Unfortunately, in the Dharma ending age, very few understand the utmost importance of the precepts. That's why it is so difficult to make it. People have a hard time in their practices because they fail to build a solid foundation for their practice through precepts. In particular, the left-home people are guides. Without the roadmap provided by the precepts, they will definitely guide their charges into trouble. When selecting a guide, please make sure to choose one who has a record of success, not necessarily because he/she is famous.

Let me restate it: precepts are the necessary roadmap for our cultivation. It shows direction, and most importantly where the pitfalls are. If you did not know where the ravines and sand traps are, you most certainly get into trouble and may not be able to extricate yourselves.

Therefore when you cultivate, you need to follow a guide who understands precepts.

By relying on these precepts, you will give rise to all samadhis, keeping precepts will automatically help you produce proper samadhi. One may wonder: the externalists do not maintain the Buddhist precepts, and yet they can produce tremendous samadhi power and incredible spiritual powers. What makes you think that they don't keep precepts? They too emphasize virtuous behaviors, they also preach rules of morality and propriety. So what's the difference? Superior precepts produce superior samadhis. Deviant precepts produce deviant samadhis. Precepts that are proper (right and

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appropriate) will unfold transcendental “**wisdom**”. There are many types of wisdom. Buddhism advocates the development of the kind of wisdom that causes **sufferings** to cease/end. The closer you are to Buddhahood, the less suffering and the more bliss you will experience.

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D4 Exhortation: the benefits of upholding precepts

Sutra text:

For this reason, Bhikshus, you should uphold the pure precepts and not allow them to be broken. If a person is able to uphold the pure precepts, he will, as a result, be able to have good dharmas. If one is without the pure precepts no good merit and virtue can arise. Therefore you should know that the precepts are the dwelling place for the foremost and secure merit and virtue.

Sutra commentary:

Exhortation: the benefits of upholding precepts. Explaining and urging cultivators to uphold precepts, or else they will lose many benefits.

The Buddha says, therefore **you should uphold the pure precepts and not allow them to be broken.** To violate precepts is to cause breakage, this is out of ignorance. Because you don't know, you continue to make mistakes and hurt yourself. Now that you know about precepts, you become aware of the consequences involved in infractions: you will fall to the lower realms to undergo severe punishments. If you fear falling to the lower realms, then you will exercise more self-restraint and thus gradually purify yourself.

Precepts are also called “stopping evil 止惡””: systematically stop all kinds of evil doings. If you do no evil,

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then you are **able to have good dharmas**, only goodness remains and will continue to increase.

Maintaining precepts is like making gold. You must use high temperature to burn off all the impurities and thus produce pure gold. You need the proper methodology to obtain high temperatures. Similarly, you need clever methodologies to get rid of all the impurities and defilements in your mind.

Merit and virtue has inner and outer components. “Merit” is the outer, visible, observable part. For example, one can create merit by doing volunteer work at a soup kitchen to help feed the poor. Virtue is inside, not meant to be seen. Observable virtue is phony, designed to cheat others.

Good merit and virtue is produced from doing good, from helping others. Goodness is produced by doing, not by talking about it.

Are there evil merit and virtues? Of course, there are. These folks do good (create merit and virtue) for their own sake, not for others'. The harm they produce ultimately is far more than the good they generate. For example, those math experts who created the credit swaps financial instruments are not really intent on making the financial markets become more liquid, they are really after obtaining financial rewards for themselves only. This is a major drawback of the free market system. They can create countless offenses.

Why does merit and virtue require a **foremost and secure dwelling place**? We are not talking about living beings here; we're talking about merit and virtue. Why does it need a safe dwelling place?

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Long ago, the Buddha was promenading by the sea shore. A beggar boy was enamored with the Buddha's most adorned appearance. He therefore scooped up some sand and molded it into a sand cake and offered it to the Buddha. The Buddha accepted his offering and asked: "What do you wish?" The beggar boy said: "I want to become very rich and powerful so that no one would ever dare slight me again".

Later, thanks to the merit and virtue from the act of offering a sand cake to the Buddha, that beggar boy was born into a royal family in India. He later became King Asoka. He conquered the world and killed countless people.

Fortunately, he later was converted to Buddhism and became a big Dharma protector. He escaped falling to the hells.

IF you generate merit and virtue and do not put them to good use, they can cause a lot of grief! For instance, the Chinese understand that practicing giving generates a lot of blessings. One can thus obtain wealth and honor. One thus has the tendency to enjoy one's blessings and not cultivate. Having fun inevitably leads to the creation of many offenses. When the blessings run out, one will certainly fall.

Secure has two aspects: 1. safe 安: no danger 2. stable 穩: predictable. There is no danger because precepts bring about safely. It's stable because keeping precepts will inexorably bring us to sagehood.

Foremost: of all the secure places where we can deposit our merit and virtue.

In brief, the Buddha makes five exhortations:

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1. Purely maintain precepts: is the basis for cultivation. Keeping precepts lessens afflictions.

2. Do not violate precepts: especially, do not lose your precept substance. Precepts are the lifeline from your master. To violate precepts is tantamount to severing that lifeline.

3. Obtain good dharmas: to do good is to help others, a very important tool to generate blessings.

4. Without the pure precepts: commit evil, no merit and virtue here.

5. Secure dwelling place for merit and virtue: you're on the right tracks, will quickly reach sagehood.

Great Master Xuan Hua said:

“Good people do not blame others, to blame others is evil
善人不怨人，怨人是惡人，

Rich people do not take advantage of others, only poor people would do so

富人不佔便宜，佔便宜是窮人，

Worthy people do not lose their temper, only stupid ones would.

賢人不生氣，生氣的人是愚人”。

If you are truly good, you will not notice others' evil. You're most likely more concerned with discovering your own flaws.

If you are really wealthy, you won't take advantage of

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others. You only do because you feel that you have enough yet.

Worthy people would never lose their temper. Contrary to stupid people, they don't lose their cool and can forgive.

In the next sections, we examine into greater details the essential methods for eliminating sufferings.

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C2 Countering, controlling and stopping suffering Dharma essentials

Countermeasures to control and end sufferings.

D1 Sense organs, desire and laxness countermeasures

Dharmas to regulate the sense organs, reign in desires and avoid laxness.

E1 Sense organs and laxness countermeasures

Sutra text:

All of you Bhikshus, if you are already able to abide by the precepts, you should restrain the five roots, not be lax and not allowing them to enter the five desires as they please.

It is like a person tending cattle who carries a staff while watching them, not allowing them to run loose and trample others' sprouting grains. If you let your five sense organs run loose, not only will the five desires become boundless, they will be uncontrollable.

Sutra commentary:

This section deals with how to restrain the mind.

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All of you cultivators, **if you are already able to abide by the precepts**: if you can take refuge with the Triple Jewel, receive the Five Precepts (of lay people), the Ten Precepts (of novice monks and nuns), Bhikshu Precepts, Bhikshuni Precepts, or Bodhisattva Precepts, then you can safely dwell and rely on the precepts.

To take refuge with the Triple Jewel is no easy matter. I met a gentleman at a temple in Irvine. His wife is a devout catholic. He has very high “regard” for his wife and therefore can manage to sneak to the temple every now and then, never mind about taking refuge!

Moreover, many Buddhist disciples do not dare receive the Five Precepts because they think that they would then no longer be able to eat meat. This is not the case. The Five Precepts only prohibit the taking of lives, not meat-eating. In fact, the Buddha allows his left-home disciples to eat “pure meat”.

Remember that, thanks to upholding precepts, you can restrain **the five roots, not allowing them to enter the five desires as they please**.

The five roots are the five organs: 1. Eye root 2. Ear root 3. Nose root 4. Tongue root and 5. Body root. They are the five sense organs that enable us to be in touch with the outside world.

They are called roots because they are the roots of all of sufferings as well as the roots for our liberation.

The five roots are in contact with the five dusts: 1. Form

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(has shape, solidity) 2. Sound 3. Fragrance 4. Flavor and 5. Touch objects.

The five roots can be considered to be the bases for the sixth root: the mind. Based on the data brought in by the other five roots, the mind root provides recognition and discernment. For example, the eyes perceive a person with dark skin, at this point it's like the case of a camera: his image appears in our mind. The mind then goes to work and determines that he's Indian.

Our sense organs are constantly running to the outside world collecting stimuli: running with the five dusts. Our eyes see an Indian person, our nose tries to pick up a curry smell, our mouth start salivating thinking about the flavor, our ears meanwhile tries to recognize which region he comes from based on his accent, etc.

Our five roots continually seek out the five dusts. That's often referred in Buddhism as running outside, running after the externals, seeking out the five dusts. That's why not long after we wake up, we need to eat so as to fuel up to run outside. That's why the Buddha admonishes us to learn to **restrain the five roots**.

Not be lax: means 1. Exercise restraint and 2. Not let loose. To restraint ourselves and not allow our sense organs to have a field day chasing after externals. The Buddha refers to this as a monkey mind.

Why not allow the mind to run outside? Because it will **enter the five desires** at will. Ordinary people consider this

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to be natural, to enjoy life's excitements. Little do they know that they can get trapped and cannot extricate themselves!

The “**five desires**” are the five kinds of things that people want: 1. Fame (the proverbial fifteen minutes of fame) 2. Wealth (possessions, money) 3. Sleep (rest and sleep) 4. Food and drink 5. Sex (form).

Cultivators have a real hard time going these five passes:

1. Fame: aspire to be known as a “true cultivator”, have a large following, skillful lecturer, etc.

2. Wealth: have a large temple to accommodate their disciples, nice and luxurious car to host the V.I.P.’s, lots of money to propagate the Dharma

3. Sleep: cultivate a little and become afraid of being overexerted. When I was at a temple, people would be very courteous toward each other this way: after doing the morning ceremony (which lasts for an hour), we'd politely tell each other to retire to our rooms to get some rest. Speak a little of the Dharma would require a lot of rest before and after. This is contrary to the vigor paramita.

4. Food and drinks: the Vietnamese Buddhist disciples love to offer tasty food. When I was a novice monk at my Chinese Master's temple, there was an elderly woman was appointed herself to be my personal cook. Her legs were often in pain from her diabetes. However, every few days, she would get on the bus to come to temple to make sure that I have enough food to eat. At lunch, she's mix my own personal vegetarian fish sauce.

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5. Sex: It's not only the act. It's also the accessories: like to wear nice clothes, like to look at handsome men or women.

Higher level cultivators have to deal with more subtle desires for the five dusts.

Then the Buddha uses an analogy to clarify his intent.

It is like a person tending cattle who carries a staff while watching them. When tending to cattle, one holds a “*staff*”, ready to spring to action, while keeping an eye on them. The cattle herder symbolizes cultivators, “cattle” represent the hard to keep under control five roots, “holding the staff” is to keep precepts, “watching” means constantly vigilant and “sprouting grains” symbolizes the merit and virtues accrued from past cultivations.

Not allowing them to run loose- restrain them and not allow them to: scatter, go anywhere they please, do as they please, get lost, get preyed on.

To tend to cattle requires full attention to the cattle. Cultivation is just like that, one cannot allow our five sense organs to spring loose, running to the outside.

Without properly restraining the cattle, it can **trample others' sprouting grains**. Cattle have tremendous destructive power. Similarly, our five roots can inflict serious damage to us as well as to others.

If you let your five sense organs run loose, not only will the five desires become boundless. The five desires usually run amok. For example, young people like to indulge

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in sensual desires; the chemically dependent always thinks that it's the last drink. **They will be uncontrollable** we have no self-control.

Worldly people like to control others, like to be the others' boss. Cultivators like to be their own boss. Who's the wiser one, who's better off?

Sutra text:

They are like a violent horse unrestrained by reins that drags a person along so that he falls into a pit. If you are robbed or injured you will suffer for a single life, but the injury from the plundering done by the five sense organs brings misfortunes which extend for many lives. Because their harm is extremely heavy, it is impermissible to be careless.

For this reason wise people restrain the five sense organs and do not go along with them. They restrain them like thieves who are not allowed to run loose. If you let them run loose for a while, before long you will observe their destruction.

Sutra commentary:

The five roots are like **are like a violent horse**, violent horses like to harm the other horses; they need to be restrained **by reins**. Otherwise, they can drag people along down a **pit**. “*Pit*” represents danger. The biggest dangers liv-

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ing beings face are the three evil paths: hell, animal and hungry ghost realms. Wild horses can be useful to mankind if trained and restrained by reins, otherwise they can drag us into harm's way.

Instinctively, we all know how to use reins. The Buddha reminds here: how come we're not reining in our own sense organs?

Letting our five roots run amok is very damaging!

The Buddha next uses the analogy of robbers.

If you are robbed or injured you will suffer for a single life, the five sense organs are frequently called “robbers”. To get robbed only affects us this lifetime. However, to allow our five roots to be unrestrained is to create offenses. That carries highly undesirable consequences **which extend for many lives**.

There was a man who was a tightwad. He devoted his entire life to hoarding wealth. There was no evil he would not commit for the sake of profit. By his death, he accrued three barrels' worth of gold which he buried in his backyard. Because he was attached to his pots of gold, he was reborn as a poisonous snake which lived in the backyard so as to guard his gold. When his own son went to the backyard, the poisonous would try to attack him. The son therefore killed his own father/poisonous snake. The father immediately was reborn as a poisonous snake living in the backyard to guard his gold. Father and son thus mutually try to harm each other time and time again.

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In the Buddhist Vinaya (rules of morality), the Buddha clearly describes how breaking the particular precepts will result in how long one has to fall the specific hells to under the retributions. **Because their harm is extremely heavy, it is impermissible to be careless.** The sutra in 42 sections has an analogy: self-indulgence is like licking honey off a sharp blade; within the pleasures there are major dangers.

For this reason wise people, those who know better, **restrain the five sense organs and do not go along with them,** they don't run outside to immerse in the five dusts. **They restrain them like thieves who are not allowed to run loose:** they understand that they must not indulge in the five desires lest they will get into trouble.

If restraining the five roots is that critical, where in the world's education can we find training programs to control our sense organs?

It makes no sense to chase after the five desires. If you insist on letting **them run loose for a while,** it won't be long before **you will observe their destruction:** to indulge is like chasing our own shadow, it's rather futile and a real waste of time.

In our youth, we follow our hormones, thinking that self-indulgence brings happiness. As we grow older, hopefully, we become not as impressed by such pleasures. My generation keeps score through externals such as wealth and possessions. We love to make money, drive around in expensive cars, live on luxurious homes and wear fancy designer clothes.

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We spend our entire lifetime slaving for profit. As we get older, most of us have serious illnesses because of a lifetime of abusing and neglecting our own body. If that is success, then how come the next generations refuse to follow our footsteps? One cannot claim that it's because the next generation is lazy and impatient. Could it be that they see how unhappy and less human we've become?

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E2 Desire and laxness sufferings countermeasures

Sutra text:

Since the five sense organs have the mind as their ruler, you should restrain the mind well. Your mind is more dangerous than an extremely poisonous snake, a savage beast or a hateful robber. A great fire rushing upon you is still not a satisfactory analogy for it. It is like a person carrying a container of honey who, as he moves along in haste, only pays attention to the honey, and does not notice a deep pit. It is like a mad elephant without a barb, or a monkey in a tree jumping about, which are both difficult to restrain. You should hasten to control it and not allow it to run loose. Those who allow their minds to wander freely lose the good situation of being a human being. By restraining it in one place there is no affair which cannot be completed. For this reason, Bhikshus, you should vigorously subdue your mind.

Sutra commentary:

Desire and laxness sufferings countermeasures. How to deal with desires and laxness. They really are sufferings.

How not to be lax?

the five sense organs have the mind as their ruler. The boss of the five roots is the sixth root: mind king. It's our own conscious mind: that “thinking mind” of ours.

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To restrain the five roots, **you should restrain the mind well**. The key word here is “*well* 善”. You may know that it's the mind king that is the real culprit, but you probably didn't know that you must learn to skillfully restrain it (“well”). How can one skillfully do it? One can do it by trial and error and better yet, one can find a good knowing adviser to learn from him/her. That is if you prefer not to have to re-invent the wheel.

If you don't know how to skilfully rein in your mind, you most likely don't realize that it **is more dangerous than an extremely poisonous snake** (you'll be dead if bitten; symbolizing greed), **a savage beast** (can inflict serious damage to us, inflict of pain and sufferings; symbolizing anger) **or a hateful robber** (cruel, ruthless, will not let go of us, likes to rob us blind; symbolizing stupidity).

A great fire rushing upon you is still not a satisfactory analogy for it. In Southern California, we have annual fire disasters in the summer. This is due to lack of water, and strong winds. If you happen to be stuck in such forest fires, you could easily lose your life because the fire comes running at you from all directions. And yet such lightning fast dangers can't compare against the speedy dangers arising from our mind.

Why so?

It is like a person carrying a container of honey who, as he moves along in haste, only pays attention to the honey, and does not notice a deep pit. It's like our carrying

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a pot of “*honey*”, symbolizing things that we're very attached to, while moving “*along in haste*” busy with making ends meet, “*pays only attention to the honey*”, we're distracted by our passions, and therefore forget to pay attention to the road, “*does not notice a deep pit*” we're not aware of the dangers that surround us.

In china, there was a man who specializes in robbing gold. He prefers to do it during the day time. Eventually, he was caught and interrogated: asked why he does not steal at night when there are less people around. His reply: he could only gold and nothing else.

The unrestrained mind is also **like a mad elephant** (can no longer listen to reason, perhaps due to excessive greed) **without a barb** (unrestrained by the precepts), **or a monkey** (very independent) **in a tree jumping about** (or like a fish finding water: very excited). Both are **difficult to restrain**. They are simply blinded by passion.

You should hasten to control it and not allow it to run loose. Now that you know, quickly learn to skillfully rein in your mind.

Those who allow their minds to wander freely (they indulge in the five desires) **lose the good situation of being a human being:** this body is very hard to come by, we should take advantage and cultivate. The human realm is very conducive to cultivation; let's not pass up on this opportunity! Notice on how eloquently and gently the Buddha puts it.

Following is a very famous quote from this sutra:

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By restraining it in one place there is no affair which cannot be completed.

制心一處，無事不成

Almost all meditation practitioners know of this quote.

Restrain (place; this requires a lot of efforts) **it** (the mind; the sixth root; that busy bee mind) **one** (not two; don't allow it to change subjects) **place** (physical location): be able to tie our mind to one thing; **no** (nothing but nothing) **affair** (any undertaking) **cannot be completed** (cannot be accomplished): there is nothings that we can't do.

Please take the time to ponder about the meaning of this phrase: success comes from being able to concentrate the mind on the task at hand, on being able to be single-minded.

In brief, all of you cultivators **should vigorously subdue your mind**. In order to subdue our mind, we need to practice vigorously. This requires 24/7 efforts in learning to subdue our own mind, not to try to subdue others' mind!

If you succeed in subduing your six roots, then you can certify to first stage Arhatship. You thus have wrestled back a little bit of control: you can enter the flow of the sages, will no longer fall and will inexorably ascend! I highly recommend that you all should shoot for this as soon as possible.

D2 Over eating suffering countermeasure

Sutra text:

All of you Bhikshus, you should receive various kinds of food and drink as if you were taking medicine. Whether they be good or bad, do not take more or less of them, but use them to cure hunger and thirst and to maintain the body. Bhikshus should be the same way as bees gathering from flowers, only taking the pollen without harming their form or scent; receive peoples' offerings to put an end to distress, but do not seek to obtain too much and spoil their good hearts. Be like a wise man, who having estimated the load that suits the strength of his ox, does not exceed that amount and exhaust its strength.

Sutra commentary:

Over eating suffering countermeasure. Greed for food is a form of suffering. In this section, the Buddha teaches us about moderation in eating.

All of you Bhikshus, you should receive various kinds of food and drink as if you were taking medicine. Cultivators who accept food & drink offerings (referring to left-home people), should look at them as medicine (to heal their body). Just like taking medicine, we should take only enough. Taking too much is not effective and can cause problems.

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Whether they be good or bad, do not take more or less of them: refrain from taking more because they taste good, take less of the not as tasty food. This is training the mind of equanimity.

Food and drinks are but medicine **to cure hunger and thirst and to maintain the body**. Left home people are supposed to perform the five contemplations while eating. One such contemplation is: “this food is like good medicine, for preventing the body from wasting away”. This the proper eating Dharma for cultivators.

There is a Chinese saying:

The three minds not ended, even water is difficult to digest. If the five contemplations are understood, even gold can be digested.

三心不了水難消，五觀若明金也化

The three minds are the mind that thinks of the past, present and future. It is the false-thinking mind. If one has such a mind, one will have digestion problems.

The five contemplations are:

1. Consider the amount of work involved in bringing the food to where it's eaten (the donors really have to toil to make this food offering).

2. Consider whether or not one's virtuous conduct is adequate to accept the offering. What did we do to deserve this honor?

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3. Guard the mind against transgressions, of which greed is the principal cause. We all know we're supposed not to be greedy. How about being not greedy for food, can we do it every day?

4. Properly taken, food is like medicine to keep the body from wasting away. We should take it as if it's medicine and not pay so much attention to flavors.

5. This food is accepted only in order to accomplish the Way. If such is your purpose, then it's OK to accept the food offerings.

If you clearly understand and live by the above-mentioned five contemplations, then you can even digest gold.

I remember Dharma Master Heng Sure telling me that one of his major worries is the eating habits of the left-home people, perhaps because the eating pleasures are quite difficult to deal with.

For serious cultivators, eating habits represent real dangers, even more so than sexual attraction. It's because left-home people observe the separation of monk and nuns, male and female. If they keep the distance, there tend to be fewer problems. In contrast, the dangers from eating are more insidious. If you eat improperly, the yin and yang will be out of balance and cause sexual desires to increase unbeknownst to you.

Professors and lawyers are such examples. Their profession requires them to engage in excessive mental processing. Therefore, their system is out of whack: the yin and yang are out of balance. Therefore their sexual desires rise and need to

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be addressed one way or another.

Eating too much and at the wrong times can create similar dangers. However these dangers are indirectly generated and are therefore very difficult to perceive and address. Therefore, cultivators are more prone to breaking precepts when they don't know to eat properly.

When I was training at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, we ate one meal a day and did not eat after noon. Initially, there were hunger pangs. However because of our precepts, we chose to do so and were therefore forced to find a way to manage and deal with it. If you really try, you can do it too.

Why does the Buddha only allow left-home people to eat breakfast and lunch, but no dinners? Living beings have different eating habits: gods eat in the morning, animals eat in the afternoon and ghosts eat in the evening. To eat in the morning would be to plant the causes for the gods' realm. The Buddha therefore decreed that left-home people only eat one meal a day at noon in order to plant the causes for Buddhahood. He also allows us to eat breakfast as well, should we be concerned about our weight and appearance. The Buddha is most compassionate; he never forces us to do anything. We can all pick the dharma doors that are most appropriate for us to cultivate.

There was a great Arhat who came to the Meng mountain in China. It was in the evening and he saw a lot of hungry ghosts who were suffering from thirst and hunger. He therefore came up with a Dharma to help them. That was later called the Meng mountain offering. It is part of our evening

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ceremony at the Buddhist temples. We're instructed to religiously execute every evening so as to feed the hungry ghosts of the area. The less afflicted those hungry ghosts are, the less likely they are to cause trouble for others.

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D3 Laziness and sleepiness suffering countermeasures

Sutra text:

All of you Bhikshus, during the day, with a vigorous mind, cultivate the good dharmas and don't allow the opportunity to be lost. Do not allow the first and last periods of the night to be wasted, and during the middle period of the night, chant Sutras to eradicate the urge to rest. Do not let the causes and conditions of sleep cause your life to pass in vain, so that you don't obtain anything at all.

Sutra commentary:

Laziness and sleep are two forms of sufferings. Let's see what the Buddha teaches how to deal with them.

Excessive eating and sleepiness come hand in hand. When you eat too much, you will feel sleepy. Food and sleep are two of the five desires. They join forces to obstruct your development of samadhi and wisdom.

Why do we feel sleepy? There are three reasons: 1. Food (excessive eating) 2. Time/habit (habitual sleep time period) 3. Mind (tired or lazy). These are three major obstructions to our cultivation. Our mind is easily scattered when we sleep. That's why we tend to have dreams and nightmares. One method to deal with sleepiness is to sit sleep. It helps us have a lighter sleep, enabling to get adequate rest and wake up re-

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freshed. It also gives more protection when we sleep.

When we consume more food than our body really needs, that excess becomes poison. Our body therefore needs to deal with it, diverting our energy for the task, sapping our strength and thus making us sleepy.

Another reason for feeling sleepy is the force of habit. Our body is accustomed to shut down at such time of the day.

The third reason for sleepiness is our mental state. How so? Our mind likes to indulge in pleasures. Sleep is a very important pleasure. Ordinary people do not like to sit sleep because it would deprive them of the pleasure from resting their back against the bed. It is so pleasant that the mind demands it. At first, it's very difficult, like hell on earth. However, over time, after many many failed attempts, everyone can eventually succeed. Those with significant levels of gongfu do not need to sleep as much because they do a lot less mental processing, thus reducing the need to shut down to body through sleep to affect repairs.

Someone asked me how to deal with her life-long insomnia. You have insomnia because you mind does not stop working even though you are supposed to be sleeping. I taught her an expedient to deal with it. If she can't sleep at night, she should get up and sit in full-lotus. Continue to sit even though the legs hurt. Let them hurt until she becomes exhausted and will naturally fall asleep. She tried it several times and reported to me that it helped have a clearer mind during the day. However, she did not like having to endure the leg pains. She was hoping that I would chase the insomnia

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ghost away for her. It's amazing how people want you to fix their problems for them when they are perfectly capable of doing it themselves! I of course ignored her unspoken request.

Laziness and sleepiness are afflictions. They are suffering because they make us waste time and lose the opportunity to make progress.

All of you Bhikshus, during the day, with a vigorous mind, cultivate the good dharmas and don't allow the opportunity to be lost. To be vigorous is to cultivate a little more than the last time, not be lazy. During the day, one should strive to practice all the good dharmas so as not to waste our time. This is the countermeasure for dealing with the first source of sleepiness: from food and drinks.

Do not allow the first and last periods of the night to be wasted. The first period of the night is when it first becomes dark, whereas the last period of the night is when there begins to be light. Do not allow to be wasted either. **And during the middle period of the night, chant Sutras to eradicate the urge to rest.** If you wish to resist the urge to sleep in the middle periods of the night, then you can recite sutras. You can draw on the sutra's (magical) power to fight sleepiness. This describes the countermeasure for the second source of sleepiness: from time/habit.

Do not let the causes and conditions of sleep cause your life to pass in vain, so that you don't obtain anything at all. Value the great opportunity to obtain a human body to cultivate. Once this human body is lost, it is very difficult to get it again.

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The remaining text of the section deals with sleepiness arising from the mind (third cause for sleepiness). 1. **You should be constantly mindful ... rouse yourself to awaken:** countermeasure through contemplation 2. **With the hook of the precepts... no different from the birds and beasts:** countermeasure with precepts.

Sutra text:

You should be constantly mindful of the fire of impermanence which burns up all the worlds. Seek to quickly cross yourself over and do not sleep. The robber afflictions are always ready to kill you even more than your enemies. How can you sleep? How can you not rouse yourself to awaken?

Sutra commentary:

You should be constantly mindful, always be aware of **the fire of impermanence which burns up all the worlds**. “*Fire*” evokes urgency. “*Impermanence*” refers to the inexorable destruction and deterioration of all things. Each world system goes through four cycles: formation (“genesis”), dwelling (already formed), change (beginning to decline) and emptiness (completely destroyed). Therefore, the world we live is being burned by the fire of impermanence. Better hurry up before it's too late. All worlds once formed will eventually be destroyed (return to emptiness).

All parties must come to an end? Why indulge in meaningless pursuits? **Seek to quickly cross yourself over and**

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do not sleep. Instead of indulging in sleep, we should also work hard to escape revolving in the Wheel or reincarnation.

How can you sleep when the **robber afflictions are always ready to kill you even more than your enemies** . Unlike us, our afflictions do not rest; they are intent on taking our life as soon as possible. They want to ruin us and destroy our wisdom life. They are even worse than our **enemies**.

Now that you know, **how can you not rouse yourself to awaken?** Can you ignore them and continue to indulge in sleeping?

Sutra text:

With the hook of the precepts you should quickly remove the poisonous snake afflictions that are sleeping in your heart, not unlike a poisonous snake present in your room. When the sleeping snake is gone, then you can sleep at ease. Those who sleep even though it hasn't yet gone, are without shame. The clothing of shame, among all adornments, is the very best. Shame can be compared to an iron barb which can restrain people from doing evil. Therefore you should always have a sense of shame, and not be without it even for a moment, for if you have no sense of shame you will lose all of your merit and virtue. Those who have shame have good dharmas; one without it is no different from the birds and beasts.

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Sutra commentary:

To tolerate **afflictions** is like to allow a poisonous snake to sleep in our **room**, while it's asleep, things seem to be OK but after it wakes up there is no guarantee. As long as we have afflictions, then it's no different than having a somnolent poisonous snake present in our room. We cannot underestimate the great dangers of ignoring afflictions!

Therefore **with the hook of the precepts you should quickly remove** the poisonous snake of afflictions. **When the sleeping snake is gone, then you can sleep at ease:** after the poisonous that is sleeping inside your heart is gone, then can you afford to rest.

Those who sleep even though it hasn't yet gone, if afflictions are not yet gone and yet you indulge in sleep and laziness, then you **are without shame**. Here “*shame*” has two components: 1. to be ashamed: recognize that we are in the wrong and feel ashamed on the inside 2. Act ashamed: not conceal your faults, instead acknowledge them and act accordingly. **The clothing of shame, among all adornments, is the very best**, to know shame is to adorn our wisdom life with virtues, there is nothing more adorned than that.

Furthermore, **shame can be compared to an iron barb which can restrain people from doing evil**, to know shame is like to know how to use an iron barb to refrain from committing evil and creating offenses. **Therefore you should always have a sense of shame, and not be without it even for a moment**: constantly return the light within, spot your

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own faults, do not waste time looking at others' faults!

For if you have no sense of shame you will lose all of your merit and virtue. Shame is an important virtue in cultivation. As long as you still have faults, you should know shame. Wise people and virtuous cultivators often publicly acknowledge your own faults, make public apologies and do not conceal their faults or weaknesses. **Those who have shame have good dharmas:** they are good people, they can be trusted and relied upon. **one without it is no different from the birds and beasts.** “*Birds and beasts*” carries two meanings: 1. Birds with feathers and large animals 2. Savages, unfamiliar with protocols and etiquette. You are born into the animal realm for having planted the seeds of stupidity. Those without shame lack clarity of mind and do not know how to conduct themselves appropriately.

In summary, the Buddha reminds us to ever be vigorous in our cultivation. We should rest and sleep as long as we still have afflictions. If you still indulge in sleep, then you should practice the dharma of shame so as to have blessings to continue to cultivate.

What are afflictions then?

C3 Handling and eradicating afflictions dharma essentials

D1 Handling anger affliction obstructions

Sutra text:

All of you Bhikshus, if a person dismembered you piece by piece your mind should be self-contained. Do not allow yourself to become angry. Moreover, you should guard your mouth and not give rise to evil speech. If you allow yourself to have thoughts of anger, you will only hinder your own Way, and lose the merit and virtue you have gained. Patience is a virtue which neither upholding the precepts nor the ascetic practices are able to compare with. One who is able to practice patience can be called a great person who has strength.

Sutra commentary:

Anger can be manifest or unrevealed. It is one of the three poisons. This great affliction poses tremendous obstructions to cultivation of the Way. Cultivators must learn how to handle the fire of anger. The Buddha says that to deal with it, we should use the dharma of patience to transform the angry and vengeful mind.

Cultivators must undergo many tests. **If a person dismembered you piece by piece**, whether they're justified or not, they just decided to come and inflict serious pains and

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sufferings, come and torture you **your mind should be self-contained**. Can you remain in samadhi like Shakyamuni Buddha did when he was slowly dismembered by king Kalinga? **Do not allow yourself to become angry**, especially when you are not at fault. This is to cultivate the mind karma. Furthermore, **should guard your mouth and not give rise to evil speech**, do not curse, use harsh words to vent your frustrations. This is cultivating the mouth karma.

Long ago, Shakyamuni Buddha was still on the causal ground (planting the causes for accomplishing Buddhahood). He was an old immortal cultivating the patience paramita in the mountains. King Kalinga led a hunting party to that mountain. The king spitefully chopped up the patience immortal's body into pieces. He even lopped off his ears and nose while claiming that the immortal was feigning he was not angry. At that time, the future Shakyamuni Buddha's samadhi power was so remarkable that under the great pains of torture, he did not even give rise to a single thought of anger toward the cruel king.

The king would sever a piece of the immortal's body, and then ask him whether or not he's angry at the king. Each time, the immortal replied in the negative, the king would say that he did not believe it; the immortal had to be lying and proceeded to cut off another piece of the immortal's body. And yet, the immortal remained calm and cool the whole time. That is true gongfu. Some wonder why the immortal did not use his spiritual powers to punish the king, teach him a lesson so that he'd refrain from harming others. Wouldn't that be

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failing the patience paramita? It's about enduring what cannot be endured.

If you allow yourself to have thoughts of anger, yes it's normal to want to vent it; it would feel so good! **you will only** (read: “immediately”, “inevitably”) **hinder** (some of the meanings get lost in the translation here; “hinder” does not also denote “harm”: the disadvantages are quite obvious and evident, hinder is more “subtle”) **your own Way** (your own cultivation), **and lose the merit and virtue you have gained** (those many blessings for cultivation that you've taken so long to accrue, most of them go down the drain).

Patience is a virtue which neither upholding the precepts nor the ascetic practices (all 12 of them) are able to compare with.

Why is patience is a higher level Dharma than Precepts and the ascetic practices?

Ascetic practices consist of 12 very rigorous Dharmas such eating one meal a day, sit sleeping, stay underneath trees no longer than nights, etc. Each one involves having to let go of a set of attachments. All in all, they are still limited to 12. In contrast, patience paramita involves taking on countless Dharmas and therefore is much harder to practice.

As to Precepts, they are the second paramita. Patience is the third one, a bit higher level. Upholding precepts does not necessarily lead to patience. For example, one can hold the precept of not stealing but one may still has a big temper, that is lack of patience. On the other hand, those who

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perfected the patience paramita can easily hold precepts.

In general, the prior paramitas pave the way to practice the subsequent paramitas. Therefore, the subsequent paramitas are more advanced.

One who is able to practice patience can be called a great person (a hero) who has strength. Great men who are patient are endowed with great strength that enables them to help others. They are strong because they cannot be easily defeated: no matter how much they are beaten or attacked, they endure it and don't give up. Strength is in being to take the punishment.

Why is anger dangerous to our health?

Sutra text:

If you are unable to happily and patiently endure the poison of malicious abuse, as if drinking sweet dew, you cannot be called a wise person who has entered the Way. Why is this? The harm from anger ruins all good dharmas and destroys one's good reputation. People of the present and of the future will not even wish to see this person. You should know that an angry heart is worse than a fierce fire. You should always guard against it, and not allow it to enter you, for of the thieves which rob one's merit and virtue, none surpasses anger. Anger may be excusable in lay people who indulge in desires, and in people who do not cultivate the Way, who are without the means to restrain themselves, but for people who have left the home-life, who cultivate the Way and are without

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desires, harboring anger is impermissible. Within a clear, cool cloud, there should not be a sudden blazing clash of thunder.

Sutra commentary:

It's not easy to accumulate merit and virtue but all the forest of merit and virtue can be burned down by the fire of anger in no time. Toward the end of the world, there will be a fire calamity that destroys our world up to and including the first Dhyana heavens. The Dharma to control anger is the patience paramita.

There are three kinds of patience: 1. patience when scolded; 2. patience when thirsty, hungry, cold and hot; 3. patience with cultivation.

1. Scolding is a test for cultivators. If you can pass the test, you are then able to nurture your Dharma body to increase your transcendental wisdom. We all have two kinds of bodies: flesh body and Dharma body. Our flesh body needs to be fed and taken care of for one lifetime. The Dharma body is our wisdom life which bridges one lifetime to another. If we nurture our Dharma body, then lifetime after lifetime we're able to benefit from it. Whereas when we nurture our flesh body, it's only for one lifetime.

2. Patience when thirsty, hungry, cold and hot is a Dharma to train our mind through our body. We should not be too attached to externals and to the demands of our flesh body. Why is it crucial for cultivators to be patient? It's because if

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they patiently wait long enough, they will ultimately meet with good knowing advisers who can teach them how to make rapidly make progress in their cultivation. Such good knowing advisers often put you to the test to see how much patience you really have. People fail in their cultivation not because they are not capable, but usually it's because they lack patience and give up half way. Good teachers are the ones who help build up your patience.

When I was teaching Chan in San Jose, there were a few people who already reached Third Dhyana. One of them is an externalist. After a few weeks of classes, I informed him of his level and told him that he has been stuck there for quite some time. If he wanted to make progress, he'd have to rebuild his foundation. I then taught him the fundamentals of Buddhist meditation. I asked him to sit in full-lotus for over an hour every day. I promised to help train him if he can keep up with my demands. After a short while, he made to Fourth Dhyana. What happened? He passed the trest of patience. Try to teach old hands how to cultivate: most of them would instead try to teach you how to do it since they've been at it a lot longer than you have! He's one of the rare few who managed to free himself. Amongst that class, there were several people who were in Second Dhyana and Third Dhyanas. Unfortunatelt they did not make the cut and dropped out.

Confucius said:

Kill your body to obtain humaneness, sacrifice your life to live by the principles.

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殺身成仁

捨生取義

Meaning be willing to forsake your body to help accomplish others. One should be overly attached to pampering our own body in the cultivation process. We should be willing to pay the price with our body in order to help others.

Furthermore, one should also be able to sacrifice one's own life in order to live by the principles. Those who do not cultivate are primarily concerned with this one lifetime. Cultivators tend to have a much farther perspective: they believe in reincarnation, in the law of cause and effect. Shakyamuni Buddha used to sacrifice his own life to live by the principles. He was once a young prince, third in line to the throne. He and his two older brothers were riding their horses in the mountains when they encountered a tigress with her cubs. It was winter time and the tigress was starving: it did not have the strength to go hunting to feed herself and her cubs. The young prince asked his older brothers about sacrificing oneself for the sake of the principles. After they explained that to him, the young prince returned to the tigress and threw himself down the ravine. Since he landed not that close to the tigress, the young prince mustered all the strength he had left to drag his dying body closer so that the tigress can eat him. That's how the young prince lived: sacrificing himself to help save a tigress and her three cubs. I guess that for those of us who are still struggling with this concept, it's OK. Keep it up and in time you can do that too.

If you are unable to happily and patiently endure the

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poison of malicious abuse. To be abused is bad enough, but “*malicious abuse*” is not easy to deal with. You know they want to afflict us on purpose and will not give up until they succeed. When the mind can be this mean, it creates “*poison*” that harms both parties. Those who are going through divorce would most likely have to undergo this. How many can endure it “*happily and patiently*”?

If you lack in samadhi power, then you won't be able to consider it **as if drinking sweet dew**, as evil abuse cools you down, quenches all your thirst and nourishes your body, and therefore **cannot be called a wise person who has entered the Way**. “*entering the Way*” means that you have a little bit of gongfu and are no longer turned by the harsh treatment: you could be considered to be a “*wise person*”.

Isn't it wonderful? The buddha just taught us how to deal with being scolded: learn to endure it without getting afflicted. Doing so is tantamount to benefitting oneself. Every time you get scolded, it's like drinking sweet dew, therefore if you knew better, you'd be enduring happily and patiently (don't wish for it to stop).

The harm from anger ruins all good dharmas. All the good you've created so far would be of no avail. And it's virtually impossible to create new good. **And destroys one's good reputation: one lifetime's worth of hard work to build one's reputation, can be ruined in one instant.**

People of the present and of the future will not even wish to see this person. Have you ever seen the face of an

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angry person? It's not that pleasant to look at! Angry people only bring unpleasantness to our lives, who would want to have them around?

You should know that an angry heart is worse than a fierce fire. An angry mind is bent on destruction, it's even worse than a fierce fire.

You should always guard against it, it's not your friend, it's your enemy **and not allow it to enter you.** Do not allow yourself to get angry. If you do get angry, resolve it quickly: do not allow it to fester, put out all the embers quickly before loving on.

For of the thieves which rob one's merit and virtue, none surpasses anger. Of all the affliction thieves who can inflict the most damages to our merit and virtue, anger is the worst. You cannot underestimate its danger. There is a saying:

“One thought of anger can burn up a thousand years forest of merit and virtue”.

Anger may be excusable in lay people who indulge in desires, and in people who do not cultivate the Way, who are without the means to restrain themselves. You are a “lay person” because there still are a lot of “*desires*” that have yet to be fulfilled. **A little further outside,** those “*who do not cultivate*”, have no Dharmas to control themselves. For these two types of folks, having a temper is understandable. Worldly people have two kinds of dangers: 1. They don't know that anger is to harm oneself and harming others 2. once angry, they have no means to recover because their mind

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is clouded.

But for people who have left the home-life, who cultivate the Way and are without desires, harboring anger is impermissible. There is a double standard here. Left home people are those who chose to disengage from worldly pursuits, to engage in transcendental practices that are characterized as “*without desires*”. **The buddha categorically states here that left-home people must not harbor even a trace of anger in their heart.** There are no exceptions here!

Within a clear, cool cloud, there should not be a sudden blazing clash of thunder. The mind of cultivators should be like those beautiful, white clouds that float in the azure blue sky. Their mind should be peaceful and cool. They cannot possibly give rise to thoughts of anger which is like a “*sudden blazing clash of thunder*”. Thunder only comes with dark clouds. The mind of cultivators should not have any seeds for creating anger. Anger poses a threat to others' well being and wreaks destruction upon them. That is not compatible with a mind for the Way.

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D2 Avoiding the arrogance affliction

Sutra text:

All of you Bhikshus, you should rub your heads for you have relinquished fine adornments, you wear the garments of a Buddhist monk, and you carry the alms bowl to use in begging for your livelihood; look at yourself in this way. If thoughts of arrogance arise you should quickly destroy them, because the increase of arrogance is not appropriate even among the customs of lay people, how much the less for a person who has left the home-life and entered the Way. For the sake of liberation, you should humble yourself and practice begging for food.

Sutra commentary:

Living beings in the Dharma ending age have the tendency to be arrogant, that is well predicted in Buddhist sutras.

The previous section deals with anger: foremost among afflictions. This section helps us handle the second kind of affliction: arrogance.

To avoid arrogance, one simply must learn to be humble.

Left home people, **should rub your heads**, we've already forsaken our hair, **for you have relinquished fine adornments**, we no longer seek to adorn ourselves, please do not give us Rolex, gold pendants, silk hats, etc.; we no longer wish to draw attention to ourselves, that's why the Buddha

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decreed that we should **wear the garments of a Buddhist monk**, we use allowable colors to dye our sashes: they are not too bright and different from normal clothes (we do adopt a look that is different from lay people, i.e. We should not wear normal clothes such as jeans, t-shirts when we go out), **carry the alms bowl** (always accompany us everywhere we go) **to use in begging for your livelihood**, we cannot cook for ourselves. However, Mahayana temples use an expedient, we no longer go outside on alms rounds and therefore only stay indoors to cultivate, therefore we do cook for each other. It's quite effective especially in the Western countries where people do not understand the alms rounds Dharma. Furthermore, it saves a lot of time and minimizes outflows associated with contact with the outside.

Look at yourself in this way remind yourself that you are a beggar.

If thoughts of arrogance arise you should quickly destroy them. Even left-home are prone to thoughts of arrogance even though they are basically beggars. You are arrogant when 1. you think you're better, 2. you're equal, and 3. you're inferior. For example, left-home people get proud for reciting the Buddha's name better than others, or better at explaining sutras. If you still compare yourself against others, you still have a mark of a self.

If thoughts of arrogance arise, you should quickly destroy them. If you are aware of such thoughts, immediately wield your Vajra sword and nip it at the bud.

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Because the increase of arrogance is not appropriate even among the customs of lay people. When you were a lay person, you already knew that arrogance is inappropriate, **how much the less for a person who has left the home-life and entered the Way.** You left the home life, severed love to entger the Way, why do you still keep the worldly habit of arrogance?

If you really wish to obtain **liberation**, wishing to end birth and death, **you should humble yourself** (you should always have a humble attitude) **and practice begging for food**, to beg for food to nourish your body daily is to remind yourself that you are dependent on the generosity of others for your livelihood, how can you possible entertain any thought that you're special?

This section is not only for left-home people, it also applies to lay people as well. Lay people should also practice humility, not draw attention to themselves, use moderation and avoid excesses. They should not be so obsessive at pampering their body. If they still pursue fame and chase after externals, they would find it very hard to obtain liberation.

In brief, cultivators can use the following Dharmas to avoid arrogance: 1. hair 2. adornment 3. plain clothes 4. alms bowl 5. beg for food, do not hoard.

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D3 Avoiding the affliction of flattery

Sutra text:

All of you Bhikshus, a mind of flattery is contradictory to the Way. Therefore you should have a straightforward disposition of mind. You should know that flattery is only deceit, so for people who have entered the Way, it has no use. For this reason, all of you should have an upright mind, and take a straightforward disposition as your basis.

Sutra commentary:

When I went to Taiwan to learn Chinese and the precepts, I saw some left home people who would address lay people as “bodhisattvas”. It sounded good but those words are misleading. The fact is that those sanghans are not themselves bodhisattvas, how can they possibly recognize others as bodhisattvas? Everyone can't help but feel that those words were untrue and are designed to flatter. I hope that sanghans should not ever feel the pressure to do so, we don't need to stoop that low in order to cultivate.

Before entering Nirvana, the Buddha preached about worldly dharmas and transcendental dharmas.

Worldly dharmas have three: dealing with deviant karmas, end suffering and sever afflictions. To avoid deviant karmas: keep precepts and stay away from deviancy. To end suffering: avoid laxness and indulging the five roots, avoid overeating, and avoid oversleeping. To sever afflictions: avoid anger and

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avoid flattery.

Transcendental dharmas include: reducing desires, contentment, seclusion, vigor, mindfulness, samadhi, wisdom, and not having idle discussions.

Why the worldly dharmas? They are part of cultivation. If we are in the world and fail to understand worldly dharmas, then we can't possibly comprehend transcendental ones. The world we live in is called the triple realm: desire realm, form realm, and formless realm.

The desire realm is where we humans are. It includes animals, ghosts and spirits and the hells. Above the earth, there are six levels of heavens: the first one being the heaven of the Four Heavenly Kings, the Christian god dwells at the second heaven, and the heavenly demons are at the sixth heaven. The heavenly demons have tremendous spiritual powers and should be feared. Their powers are the result of blessings, not from cultivation.

The form realm includes the heavens of the first dhyana until the heavens of the fourth dhyana. Those inhabitants are free from sexual desires. Unlike them we inhabitants of the desire realm chase after desires in our daily life. We feel happy when our desires are fulfilled.

The formless realm includes the heavens of the fifth samadhi to the eighth samadhi. The highest level of attainment of worldly dharmas is the eighth samadhi. They have no ways of making further progress unless they use Buddhist Dharmas. For example, one such method is to learn the

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Dharma of an Arhat: the ninth samadhi is that of an Arhat.

When you cultivate, first dhyana is an important milestone. After that, first stage Arhatship is quite significant: it frees you from the dusts. Their wisdom is inconceivable as compared to that of the eight samadhi. To make it to this fruition is quite arduous.

In this Dharma ending age, we advocate the parallel practice of Chan (meditation) and Pure Land: we utilize Chan practice methodologies to quickly develop samadhi and combine it with the Buddha recitation method to plant the seeds for rebirth to Amitabha's Pure Land, sort of an insurance policy just in case we fail to obtain liberation this lifetime. We should be mindful that to obtain a human body is most difficult, once lost, one never knows when one can get it back again. Now that we are here and have the chance to encounter Mahayana, we need to take advantage of the opportunity to cultivate in order to obtain liberation. Alifetime is of such short duration. It's marked more by sufferings than pleasures. In order to earn a livelihood, living beings tend to create more offenses than goodness. That's why when we change bodies, most of all will ultimately lose our human bodies and fall to the lower realms to undergo retribution for our past offenses. Let's try our best not to fall!

Cultivation has its own kind of happiness. One such pleasure is the lack of afflictions. It's not something that money can buy. Even the richest man on this earth cannot afford to pay for a flight to the first dhyana heaven: the technology is not available yet. Besides, the amount of

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money involved would be tremendous because the first dhyana heaven is much further away than the space shuttle can take us. It takes a lot of blessings to get there. These blessings come from prior accruals. How to accrue blessings? The best way would be to cultivate. There are 84,000 different dharma doors (methods of practice) in Buddhism. We can always find one that's most appropriate for us. The Buddhas and bodhisattvas unimously proclaimed that in the Dharma ending age, the best dharma door is the Buddha's name recitation. It's also known as the Pure Land school of practice. The objective is to recite the Buddha's name to the point of "one mind unconfused". At that time, you can be guaranteed to obtain rebirth at death time to Amitabha's Western Bliss Pure Land. Once reborn, we no longer have to worry about revolving in the reincarnation wheel because we can attain Buddhahood in one lifetime in his Buddha Land. It's that simple: obtain rebirth and you've got it made. This is why the Pure Land school is by far the most popular method of practice in Asia.

The worst obstructions to cultivation are afflictions. They arise from the three poisons: greed, anger and stupidity. Cultivators are not supposed to get angry. Especially those who have gongfu, they may not harbor anger: it's so very destructive! Those teachers with wisdom would never teach advanced skills to their pupils who are prone to getting angry. Good teachers teach wisdom, teach goodness, teach about beauty, and virtues in order to help others, not to harm others. That's why teachers give a battery of tests of patience to their

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pupils before they decide to teach them.

Low level cultivators should pay attention to greed: do not be greedy. As you progress, learn to rein in your sense organs. Higher level cultivators have to learn to face their attachment to form. Passing such tests will bring them to first stage arhatship.

Fourth stage Arhats have rid themselves of the self: that is liberation from oneself, you're on the right path and in the right direction.

The lack of a self means that one no longer feels the need for flattery so as to benefit oneself.

Flattery has two components: 1. speaking untrue, flattering words and 2. having a mind that is crooked, not straight-forward.

All of you Bhikshus, a mind of flattery is contradictory to the Way. We cultivate to get to the truth. In order to get closer to it, one must start with getting rid of falseness in our heart. **Therefore you should have a straightforward disposition of mind.** The stright mind is the Way place, the place of cultivation. Therefore, if you invest the time and efforts to come to the Way place, you should be straight-forward while you're there. Left home people residing at Way places should not engage in flattery. They should refrain from engaing in mutual flattery. In particular, they should not flatter the lay people, hoping to get more offerings.

You should know that flattery is only deceit, an untrue act, so for people who have entered the Way, it has no use,

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cultivators should not do untruthful things. **so for people who have entered the Way, it has no use**, we should keep our mind upright and proper: hide nothing, honest about our shortcomings and limitations and humble about our abilities **and take a straightforward disposition as your basis**, be direct, be straight-forward toward everyone.

Cultivators should pay attention to this. As they enter the Way, they need to keep a straight mind. Otherwise, as they make progress, the higher they reach, the more difficult it is to undo the crooked mind (after all, that's what they used to get there; how can one argue with success?). Even lay people should also be honest and direct in their dealings: it builds trust.

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B2 Transcendental Dharmas dharma essentials

Transcendental dharmas include: reducing desires, contentment, seclusion, vigor, mindfulness, samadhi, wisdom, and not engaging in idle discussions or sophistry.

C1 Non-seeking merit and virtue

Sutra text:

All of you Bhikshus, you should know that people with many desires, because they have much seeking for advantage, have much suffering. People who reduce their desires, who are without seeking or longing are without this trouble. Straight-away reduce your desires and in addition cultivate accordingly. One who reduces his desires is more able to produce all merit and virtue. People who reduce their desires, do not flatter in order to get what they want from others. Moreover they are not dragged along by their sense organs. People who reduce their desires have, as a consequence, a mind which is peaceful, without worry or fear. In meeting with states they are always satisfied and never discontent. One who reduces his desires has Nirvana. This is known as reducing desires.

Sutra commentary:

Herein begins the first of the pair “reducing desires &

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contentment”. Reducing desires is just non-seeking.

To accomplish the Way, one must reduce one's desires.

Worldly people engage in the pursuit of the things they want. Obtain one and you'd like to have two. For example, pay off your car and you'd like to buy an SUV to haul the boat to the lake on the weekend. Pay off the boat and you'd like to get an RV to go on camping trips. We like to have and aspire to buy that. Isn't living just indulging after one's dsires?

In contrast, cultivators seek to obtain liberation, they need to be nimble and fast on their feet to avoid obstructions that arise during their journeys. That's why they need to not allow themselves to be preoccupied with desires for externals. It would make them scattered. In particular, once you have some gongfu, it's like traveling at higher speed: you can afford no distraction lest you risk getting derailed.

The Buddha said: **people with many desires**, those who indulge in their desires **because they have much seeking for advantage**, usually are motivated by obtaining benefits, **have much suffering**. We go to school to receive training to make profits, we spend our lifetime pursuing making profits, we welcome profits and we admire those who make a lot of profits. As a result, we “*have much suffering*” in the name of profits we ruin our body, break our family and neglect our loved ones. Just like the Universal Worthy's verse: “what's so great about it?”

In contrast, **people who reduce their desires**, they consciously prefer to be non-seeking, **who are without**

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seeking or longing are without this trouble: they are free from the constant sense of unfulfillment that plague ordinary people. Some may be thinking: I got it, I will no longer seek outside, I will no longer take advantage of others. Good indeed! Let me ask you then, should you desire not to be taken advantage of? If you do not owe them then they can't take advantage of you: even that desire not to be taken advantage of, you should also not want it.

Therefore, you should **straight-away reduce your desires and in addition cultivate accordingly**, once you understand, you must immediately put into practice: that is cultivation. “*Accordingly*”, hold up a magnifying glass to all your actions to see whether or not they are motivated by desires. **One who reduces his desires is more able to produce all merit and virtue**, to be non-seeking is to create all sorts of merit and virtue. Why? Because you retain clarity of mind, you can exercise self-restraint and not create offenses: not to harm others and the world is to create merit and virtue.

People who reduce their desires, do not flatter in order to get what they want from others. A direct consequence of non-seeking is that one is less prone to flattering others, hoping to get to their good side. People free from desires are such that if they're loved it's OK, if they are hated that too is OK: they do not seek to be popular nor do they avoid becoming unpopular. **Moreover they are not dragged along by their sense organs**, their distinctive competence is that they are not confused by their six roots, not allowing them to

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run outside seeking for the six dusts: these superior cultivators are constantly “returning the light to illuminate themselves”.

People who reduce their desires have, as a consequence, invariably a mind which is peaceful, without worry or fear, their mind is at ease at all times, they have no worry or fear. When confronted **with states**, in any situation, at all times and places **they are always satisfied and never discontent**, thoughts of desires never arise: that is true self-mastery.

One who reduces his desires has Nirvana, those who practice non-seeking, are on the path toward attaining “*Nirvana*”.

This is known as reducing desires, that's how to practice non-seeking. This sutra is truly a priceless manual for cultivation!

The Bodhisattvas' practice can be described as:

- *Mind and state both at peace and undefiled; substance is true* 心境坦白質真

- *Not pulled nor bound by roots and dusts* 不為根塵牽累

“*Mind and state*”: at all times, the mind when confronted with states is at “*peace and undefiled*”, they are totally unaffected by externals, they enter the mud and yet remains undefiled by it. Their “*substance*”, their nature, their character is truthful. Bodhisattvas enter the mud to draw near

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living beings because living beings do not understand that they should draw near Bodhisattvas. Perhaps Bodhisattvas notice how living beings are so busy and so preoccupied with their toys that these enlightened beings too would like to have a better understanding of living beings' passions.

Unlike living beings, when the Bodhisattvas enter the defiled worlds, they do not get confused. The world is made up by “*dusts*”-meaning: 1. Literally: physically made up of motes of dusts (tiny dust particles that accumulate) 2. How the world is perceived by the sense organs: the six dusts. When Bodhisattvas come into contact with the dusts, their six “*roots*” are not pulled outside and their mind is not “*bound*” by external stimuli. “*Pulled*” besides meaning being led, it also has the connotations of being forcefully yanked around, or being obstructed. “*Bound*” implies being obstructed/prevented from progressing, but also has other connotations: 1. Constrained (no self-control), 2. Negatively affect others (e.g. you in turn bind the others), 3. Loss (defeated) and 4. Moved: false thought arises (inadequate samadhi power).

They seek to cross over 度脫 living beings and liberate them from pain and sufferings 痛苦. They follow their vast vows and try to help living beings cross the sea of sufferings to the other shore of peace and bliss. They take living beings worries and difficulties/peace and bliss 憂患/安樂 as their own.

The Dharma of non-seeking enables them to save their blessings so that they can have more to give to living beings. They understand the nature of living beings' sufferings and

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therefore apply themselves to help living beings obtain happiness. As long as living beings are suffering and in difficulties then the Bodhisattvas cannot enjoy themselves. When living beings experience bliss and happiness, the Bodhisattvas also feel happier. This is no different than how parents feel about their children.

Living beings are greedy for self-benefits, do not understand they should practice non-seeking. Sound-hearers reduce their desires, are not greedy for themselves, are not greedy to help living beings but are still greedy for their own liberation. Bodhisattvas practice non-seeking, are not greedy for themselves and are greedy only for living beings.

What is your mode of operation?

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C2 Contentment merit and virtue

The Buddha next elaborates on the second component of the pair: know contentment. The previous component: “non-seeking/reducing desires” is not to go seeking outside. “Contentment” is to be satisfied an internal component of merit and virtue.

Sutra text:

All of you Bhikshus, if you wish to be free from all suffering and difficulty, you should contemplate contentment. The dharma of contentment is the dwelling of blessings, bliss, and peace. People who are content, although they might sleep on the ground are peaceful and happy. Those who are not content, although they might abide in the heavens, are still dissatisfied. Those who are not content, even if they are rich, they are poor. Those who are content, although they might be poor, they are rich. Those who are discontent are always dragged along by the five desires, and are pitied by those who are content. This is known as contentment.

Sutra commentary:

Yán Huì, a disciple of Confucius, says:

One bamboo “bowl”, one gourd “cup”,

一簞食，一瓢飲，

Dwelling in rejected alleys, others cannot endure his

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hardships, He nevertheless would not alter his bliss

在陋巷，人不堪其憂，回也不改其樂。

Yán Huì is a great man. Confucius explains one thing and he can understand ten. Since he is a very wise man, he knows contentment. He passed away when he was in his thirties, perhaps because he felt he lived long enough.

When he was alive, he was very poor. He could not afford to buy a bowl, so he took a section of bamboo and split it in half and used it as his bowl to eat with. Notice that he was content with just one such bamboo bowl, does not have two. Similarly, for cup, he would use one gourd. He led a simple life, content with the bare minimum.

When it's time to sleep, he'd find a back alley which by rejected by most, perhaps because it's too narrow or dirty, (to avoid having to contend with others; he wouldn't even claim a spot). He's even less possessions than a third world peasant or Western homeless person! When other people become aware of his conditions, they could not stand his hardships and dire poverty. However, if you ask him, he felt very happy and would not change a thing: no greed, no seeking, it's not because he's so obtuse that he deserves to be that destitute, nor is it because he lacks skills, talent or the intelligence to support himself. In fact, wise people simply do not waste time and energy on pursuing meaningless activities like us mortals.

The Buddha says: **all of you Bhikshus**, all bhikshus, bhikshunis, shamis, shamini, shikshamanas, upsasakas (lay

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men) and upasikas (lay women), **if you wish to be free from all suffering and difficulty**, suffering refers to bodily sufferings while difficulty refers to the mind's afflictions, **you should contemplate contentment**.

When Shakyamuni Buddha speaks Dharma, he's very concise: there is not a single extra word nor is it deficient by a single word. Most people who look at the original Chinese text, do not notice the character 觀 which means “*contemplate*”. If you are aware that you are suffering and in difficulty, then you can use the contentment Dharma to address it. How do we use it? By “contemplating” contentment.

What is the contemplation Dharma? This word is frequently mentioned in Buddhist texts, heavily quoted by cultivators and yet few really understand its meaning. I myself was perplexed about it. It was rather embarrassing because it's quite frequently mentioned in meditation texts. I'm only beginning to have some clues. Allow me to share them with you. Contemplation does not mean that you take the time and think about it (i.e. rack your brains about what it can possibly mean). You should not absolutely try to understand its meaning through mental processing! That's right, you heard me: do not demand to understand. To wish to comprehend is OK, to insist on understanding is useless! This is what differentiates those who accomplished the contemplation Dharma from those who still don't get it.

The best way to practice contemplations is to cross your legs, preferably in full-lotus if you can, and concentrate, affix your mind on the topic “contentment”, do not engage in men-

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tal deduction deliberation, just fix your mind on that word. Those who practiced that Chan technique the “hua tou” would understand what I mean. If you don't, look for a good knowing adviser and ask for help.

The dharma of contentment is the dwelling of blessings, bliss, and peace. If you want to rich and honored, have bliss and be safe and peaceful, then you go there to get it. If you know where it is, you will certainly obtain it. Such gentle words he used to tell us what to do! I know quite a few people who are very well read on Buddhism. Ask them a question and they can give you a long discourse on the subject. Should you encounter these types of folks, ask them how to obtain “*blessings, bliss, and peace*”. They'll probably give you many quotes, among which this very section in the sutra: the Buddha says that we should know contentment. Anyone who can read could also give you the same answer. You should inquire to the very end: do you have contentment? Knowing about the concepts is not the same as experiencing it, as putting it into practice. You must know where it is before we all can follow you to get to the same “*dwelling*”, place where we can collect the treasures.

There is a Chinese saying: “*Those who are content are always blissful; those who are patient are at peace* 知足常樂，能忍自安”. Being satisfied with what one has brings happiness; to be able to endure anything (whether good or bad) is to be constantly at peace (with oneself and with the world).

How do you know they know the “dwelling of blessings,

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bliss and peace”?

People who are content, although they might sleep on the ground are peaceful and happy, even though they lack the basic amenities (how many of us would not mind sleeping on the ground?) They don't mind at all. Or should they be slighted, looked down upon, they aren't at afflicted. In contrast, **those who are not content, although they might abide in the heavens, are still dissatisfied**. In the heavens, you get to enjoy your blessings. Want to eat? No problem: the most delicious heavenly food appears in the right amount. You don't even have to do the dishes to take out the garbage (arguably two common complaints for men). Want to travel? No problem, you immediately fly there: no need to drive to the airport, stand in those long security scan lines and be cooped up in narrow airplane seats for hours. Want to dress up for a party? No problem: the most delicate and exquisite clothes spontaneously appear for your use, no need to drive to the shopping center and fret having to hear your husband complaining about your spending habits. Imagine, life can be that great, and yet one would still be “dissatisfied”! Why? You're dissatisfied because you still have unfulfilled desires; you still feel that you don't have enough: this is the nature of the self. If you don't have it, then you day dream about day and night. Once you obtained it, you are quickly bored or want more. You don't have, you're dissatisfied; you manage to get it, you're still dissatisfied. Why then indulge in desires?

Did you know?

Those who are not content, even if they are rich, they

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are poor. Compared to the “have not’s”, they are quite rich, and yet they personally feel that they still lack so much: if they could just make a few more billions, they'd be satisfied. **Those who are content, although they might be poor, they are rich:** they feel they have plenty already, they are no longer greedy. The truly wealthy people are no longer greedy because they understand that they became rich from not being greedy, being frugal and moderate in their spending habits.

Those who are discontent are always dragged along by the five desires, and are pitied by those who are content. The five desires are:

1. Sex: e.g. like to look at nice-looking people.
2. Wealth: e.g. make lots of money to be financially independent, afford luxuries.
3. Fame: e.g. want others to respect and admire you.
4. Sleep: rest to have stamina and be healthy. Usually paired with
5. Food: e.g. indulge in good food, overeating.

Those fore-mentioned five desires “drag us along” and yet we feel that's most natural. For example, most of us like fine food. That desire, liking is natural; however the danger is in not knowing that we're pulled along. Once you've tasted those delicacies, then you crave for more of the same. Furthermore, if you eat a lot of cheese, butter and dairy products, your sexual desires increase and multiply. To satisfy one desire usually subjects us to being needled by another desire. It's like living in a stupor, that's why we “*are pitied by those*”

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who are content". They pity us because they went through it and now can experience the bliss of self-mastery from the Dharma of contentment. It's pitiful because we mistake suffering for happiness, we refuse to believe their words, and if we do believe them then we refuse to find a way out: this is what the Buddha refers as "accumulation": suffering piling up on each other endlessly.

There is a saying:

Destitute left-home disciples of the Buddha, call themselves poor; in actuality their body is poor but the Way is not

窮釋子，口稱貧，實是身貧道不貧。

Because they are poor, they wear rag clothes; in actuality their mind for the Way contains a priceless gem.

貧則身常披縷褐，道則心藏無價珍。

Left home disciples of the Buddha adopt the Buddha's last name: Shakya. They are supposed to be poor. In fact, they are very poor indeed.

In the old days, when left home people refer to themselves; they'd say "this poor monk/nun", meaning I'm practicing the Way of the poor. This used to be a status symbol: your poverty! Nowadays, left home people tend to keep score with the size of their temples and bank accounts.

Actually, their body may be poor: they live in poverty, but their mind for the Way it not at all poor: their mind is indeed very rich with wisdom and goodness. Left home people chose to live with the least possible material things so as to

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preserve their spiritual blessings. Material possessions cause attachments. Spiritual blessings lead to liberation.

Because of their poor living standards, left-home people used to collect discarded cloths, perhaps from garbage dumps. They then thoroughly washed them, pieced them together and then dyed them with some left-home people colors. That's how they made their monks' clothes.

If you know how to cultivate the Way, your mind actually contains a priceless gem: something that ordinary people cannot afford.

In summary, the Dharma of contentment can help free us from the bonds of attachments (能 解脫 煩惱的纏縛), obtain safe and secure place of abode (得到 安穩的 處所), and prevent us from being harassed and confused by the five desires (不被 五欲 擾亂).

C3 Seclusion merit and virtue

Sutra text:

All of you Bhikshus, seek quietude, the Unconditioned, peace and bliss. You should be apart from confusion and disturbances, and dwell alone in seclusion. People who dwell in quietude are revered by the heavenly ruler Shakra and all the gods. For this reason you should renounce your own group and other groups, and dwell alone in seclusion in order to contemplate the basis for the cessation of suffering. If you delight in crowds, you will undergo a lot of affliction. It is like when a flock of birds gathers in a great tree, it is in danger of withering and collapsing. One who is bound and attached to the world drowns in a multitude of suffering, like an old elephant sunk in mud, who is unable to get himself out. This is known as seclusion.

Sutra commentary:

Seclusion is to keep a great distance between you and the noise, excitement and commotions. That is to create merit and virtue. On the other hand, not seeking seclusion and run after excitement and noise would tend to lead us to create offenses.

The Buddha says: all of you cultivators, should seek quietude, the Unconditioned, peace and bliss. “*Quietude*” means isolated, no people around; it also means lack of noise, no movement; it could be explained that in order to enter

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(more easily) samadhi, one's mind should have no one and should not move. And you should also seek the “*Unconditioned*”: is usually explained as dependent on other (external conditions). I tend to simplify and explain it as “Un” not, “conditioned”: action, the conscious mind ceases to function. That's obtaining liberation, the state of the fourth stage Arhat and higher. “*And*” you should also seek “*peace and bliss*”; “*peace*”: a state of light ease when meditating; “*bliss*”: refers to meditation bliss, not the typical “happiness” that ordinary seek. This is the state of cultivators: they experience a light ease, feel at peace and enjoy the bliss from Dhyana/samadhi. This bliss can be better than the sensual pleasures (that's why we like to cultivate!).

You should be apart from confusion and disturbances, and dwell alone in seclusion. Cultivators seek to quiet their mind. That's why they should distance themselves from agitation, go to decuded places where they won't be disturbed, making it easier to enter samadhi. Seclusion means segregating from worldly pursuits and concentrating on cultivation.

The Chan school advocates cultivating in secluded areas such high montains or deep valleys. In these place, there is no TV, you don't have to asnwer the phone and have fewer noises to contend with.

It's much said than done. Those high-level cultivators such as the patriarchs who attained the Way thanks to practicing in seclusion, did so because they have a lot of blessings. It takes a lot blessings to be able to locate a

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secuded place. For example, a Chan practitioner went up to the mountains to cultivate. He ran accross a stone cave which was perfect for cultivation. Unfortunately, it was already occupied by a tiger. The Chan monk decided to stay at the cave, he therefore informed the tiger of his wish. The tiger quietly moved out without putting up any resistance. That's from prior blessings.

Cultivators who **dwel in quietude**, are often **revered by the heavenly ruler Shakra and all the gods**. They are revered for their virtues of the Way. Gods often act as their Dharma protectors, come to pay their respects and make offerings.

For this reason you should renounce your own group and other groups, forsake engaging with the others, severing your depency on the others. You should learn to get by by yourself, **and dwell alone in seclusion**, so that no one can disturb you, so that you can single-mindedly apply efforts to develop samadhi power. What Dharma door should you use? **Contemplate the basis for the cessation of suffering**, how to end suffering. To end it, you must first recognize it, determine where it came from and how it subists: that's "*the basis*" for suffering. To get to the bottm of it, you must "*contemplate*": meditate. Once you see suffering, contemplate how to end it. DO it long enough and you'll naturally develop samadhi power. With samadhi power, your wisdom unfolds and you'll understand how to end suffering.

Before leaving, the Buddha reiterates: we must culitvate before we can open our wisdom and attain liberation.

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If you delight in crowds, you will undergo a lot of affliction, to join any assembly, one must shoulder the members' afflictions and difficulties. When people go to the theatres, they dump their afflictions on the theatre. When people go to religious institutions, we'd better gear up to help bear their burden. Perhaps, that's why catholic priests favor getting training in psychology and communications. The Buddhists prefer to go into seclusion to develop their gongfu and build up their wisdom, before they are ready to re-engage with the assembly.

It is like when a flock of birds gathers in a great tree, it is in danger of withering and collapsing. The “*great tree*” represents the cultivator who chooses to make himself/herself available to help others; “*the flock of birds*” represents living beings who are tired of flying and therefore gather in great numbers to take shelter in the big tree. No matter how big the tree is, it can be “*in danger of of withering and collapsing*”: analogy for the fact that we're eventually stretched to the limit and can ultimately get into trouble.

One who is bound and attached to the world (worldly people in other words) **drowns in a multitude of suffering**, it's very easy to spot them: they are paddling like crazy, bobbing up and down. My students often have this complaint: some days it's very easy to sit in meditation, some other days it's just so trying: one can't sit still even for a brief moment. That's because they are still bound by suffering. They are supposed to reserve that time slot to single-mindedly devote to their Chan practice. However, the moment they sit down,

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their mind is still at work, worrying about the impending deadlines. It's **like an old elephant sunk in mud**, it's like a decrepit elephant: it may be pretty smart and wise, but its body no longer serves it well and unfortunately it finds itself stuck in the mud, the elephant's kryptonite. The elephant is thus **unable to get himself out**, all of its might proves ineffectice in extricating the animal from the death trap. The more it struggles, the deeper it sinks. Similarly, living beings are mired in afflictions (symbolized by mud). They do not have the strength nor tools to extricate themselves. Since they can't, they have to endlessly revolve in the wheel of reincarnation.

This is known as seclusion. Such is the Dharma of seclusion.

Sanghans who are new to cultivation, are reluctant to go into seclusion because they are accustomed to the tumult. Furthermore, they are worried about being to secure food and drinks to sustain themselves. Buddhist sutras would prove those worries and fears to be unfounded. We can still get dharma protectors in secluded places.

The Asians are fond of the Zen gardens— this Japanese concept is quite popular because it offers us a break from the hustle and bustle of daily living, a place of retreat where we can reset and restore our balance. If you find yourself unable to go to selcuded mountains and far away ravines, you can prepare fro it by setting up your own Zen garden. For example, set up an altar with Buddha and Bodhisattva images. The Dharma protectors would immediately come to guard

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the images. The area around the altar would be an excellent place for your daily practice.

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C4 Vigor merit and virtue

Sutra text:

All of you Bhikshus, if you are vigorous no affair will be difficult for you; for this reason all of you should always be vigorous. It is like a small stream flowing for a long time which is able to bore through stone. If, on the other hand, the mind of one who cultivates frequently becomes lax and often inclined to give up, it is like trying to make a fire by friction but resting before there is any heat; though one wants to make a fire, the fire is difficult to obtain. This is known as vigor.

Sutra commentary:

Vigor is made of two sides:

1. You are not vigorous because you feel tired and wish to stop and rest; or you are simply fed up: you cultivated for several months and are not enlightened yet. This is the negation side

2. On the straight up definition side, vigor has two aspects: 1. “*pure 精*” homogenous, not mixed up by different components; 2. “*progress 進*” progress forward, get closer.

Cultivators need to perfect this vigor paramita because it brings us quicker to the fruitions. When tired, we should still continue to cultivate instead of resting: to take a break is tantamount to being vanquished by obstructions. Cultivation is to figure out ways to overcome obstructions so as to move

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ever closer to our goals. That's why cultivators should rely on the vigor dharma door.

The Buddha says: **All of you Bhikshus**, all of you cultivators. **if you are vigorous no affair will be difficult for you.**

I reiterate, vigor has two aspects: 1. unchanging 2. progress. If you lack vigor, then initially, you are enthused and work very hard; afterwards you experience setbacks or are distracted and therefore do not work as hard any more. For instance, my students usually meditate for an hour each day. At times, they are just too busy during the day. By the time they get home and take care of the household chores, they simply are exhausted and yet have to sit and meditate for an hour. If they sit slittle less, that's lack of vigor. Tired or not, busy or not, they still sit for an hour without fail: that is vigor.

I have a dsiciple who was a devout catholic. She has terminal cancer and was told that she had one year left. She decided to join our assembly, initially out of enjoyment of the Buddhadharma and later, she took it more seriously because she found out that she could learn to prolong her life. Within a year, she progressed from zero samadhi to eighth: the samadhi of neither thought nor non-thought. How was it possible? She was very vigorous in her practice: she would meditate for two hour every day. On the weekend, she would often accompany me to go out of town to propagate the Dharma: that would around 20 hours non-stop. Although she was in her late sixties, she managed to overcome her age and diseases. She single-mindedly practiced with great vigor. As

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a result, her gongfu grew by leaps and bounds. One year after she began her Buddhist practice, her doctor informed her that her cancer was in remission. She used to have to take a handful of pills every day, some of which would have to be taken until the end of her days. After giving her a thorough examination, her doctor declared that she no longer have to take any medication. She humorously recounted the story to me: her doctor scratched his head and with a rather perplexed look said that he had no clues as to why the drastic change occurred. This is an example of what the Buddha said: “*if you are vigorous no affair will be difficult for you*”.

The Vietnamese have a saying: “*if you keep on filing the block of steel, one day it will become a needle*”. No matter how big the block of steel, if you keep on working on it, it will eventually become as small as a needle. I often remind my students: failure occurs because you quit. If you don't quit, that's vigor: eventually you'll get to your end destination.

for this reason all of you should always be vigorous. The word “always” is rather important. It tends to get lost in the translation, “always vigorous” is for double emphasis: vigorously vigorous!

The Buddha next uses an analogy. **It is like a small stream flowing for a long time which is able to bore through stone.** The smallest amount of water, even like drops of water, if it does not stop flowing or falling, it can bore through stone: every one knows this.

If, on the other hand, the mind of one who cultivates

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frequently becomes lax, perhaps out of boredom or impatience **and often inclined to give up**, abandons it before it's completed. This is a common habit for worldly people: they start all undertakings with great fanfare and enthusiasm, as time goes on, the glamor wears out and they quickly lose interest and turn their attention on other projects that are more visible!

When I taught Chan, I urged my pupils to practice vigorously to as to quickly enter samadhi. In this Dharma ending age, very few people have the blessings to cultivate. If you have affinities with the Dharma, you should understand the importance of the development of samadhi power. Samadhi brings on “Chan bliss”: it is very wonderful indeed. This is why we cultivate: it feels fantastic. After a hard day's work, instead of relaxing in front of the TV or enjoy some play time, try meditation: it's quite worthwhile and inconceivably beneficial!

If you stop half way, **it is like trying to make a fire by friction but resting before there is any heat; though one wants to make a fire, the fire is difficult to obtain**. Back then, people used to rub sticks together to make fire. They gather fire starting materials, bore a small hole on a large wood branch, take a smaller stick, sharpen its tip and insert it into the small hole of the large branch. Start rubbing the small stick between cupped hand to generate heat and sparks. One has to keep rubbing until there are sparks otherwise there is no fire.

This is known as vigor. This is the Dharma of vigor.

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Don't rest when tired. Although you've been cultivating for some time and could not see any concrete result or response: you still continue to cultivate and don't lose enthusiasm. Be less enamored with personal comfort, not be overly obsessed with profits, do not demand results. Success/benefit/result is inherently in not stopping. Please keep this in mind.

The ancients had a saying:

Cultivation is like rowing against the current, if one does not progress one invariably regresses;

學如逆水行舟，不進則退；

It's also like a horse in full gallop in the plains, it's very easy to go fast but very hard to slow down.

如平原走馬，易放難收

To cultivate is like trying to row a boat upstream. The inertia is already hard to deal with. Add on top of that, we're going against the current. The boat is an analogy of our karmic obstructions, the current represents external obstructions: both can be overwhelming.

If we don't make progress, our own weight and the force of the current invariably push us backward. If we stop trying, we are bound to regress!

Cultivation is also like a horse riding full speed on flat and unobstructed grounds. Under the circumstances, it's easy to go into full gallop. However, once at full speed, it's quite difficult to retain control or tell the horse to slow down.

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The boat going upstream refers to the difficulties arising from obstructions: it requires constant hard work to keep making progress. The horse in full gallop refers to the difficulties associated with indulging in desires: they need to be reined in lest one loses control.

In either case, one must always be vigorous to overcome external obstructions and internal passions.

C5 Mindfulness merit and virtue

Sutra text:

All of you Bhikshus, seeking for a Good Knowing Adviser, or for a benevolent Dharma protector, does not compare with mindfulness. If you do not neglect mindfulness, the thieves of afflictions have no way of entering you. For this reason all of you should constantly collect the thoughts in your mind. If you lose mindfulness you will lose all merit and virtue. If your power of mindfulness is firm and strong, though you enter among the thieves of the five desires, they cannot harm you. It is like entering a battle wearing armor, thus there is nothing to fear. This is known as mindfulness.

Sutra commentary:

Mindfulness is also known as “*Not losing your thoughts* 不忘念”. “Lose” besides meaning to suffer losses, it also carries two other connotations: 1. not forget; 2. drop.

Therefore “*Not losing your thoughts*” means:

1. Not forget the current thought.
2. Not lose that thought.
3. Not drop it (hang on firmly to it).

Hinayana meditation techniques are very well received in the West. They promote mindfulness. Many of them train mindfulness through various breath counting techniques.

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Mindfulness is equivalent to not losing your thoughts.

Are these approaches consistent?

This Dharma emphasizes defense. When fighting, one must be able to defend oneself in order to hope to be victorious.

Just like during the samourai era in Japna. When two factions engage in war, those who are better in defense tend to be victorious more often.

It's the same in martial arts. When I was a lay person, I used to learn martial arts from a Korean instructor. He was an eighth degree black belt in Kuksool: a combination of Chinese gongfu, Aikido, Judo và Taikwondo. Before immigrating to the United States, he was a body guard for the former Shah of Iran. Since he hung that eighth degree banner, he was often challenged by the other martial arts instructor. Quite often, he said that he'd stand still in defense long enough without moving and his challengers would concede. If you seek to strike first, you tend to expose yourself, that's why martial art grand masters rarely make the first move.

Back to Buddhism.

Mindfulness comes from “proper thoughts 正念”: the absence of deviant thoughts. Deviancy is defined as not believing the law of cause and effects. If you don't understand the true principles, in the future improper thoughts abound when you meditate. When you meditate, what is (proper) mindfulness?

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Mindfulness during meditation is not to be apart from one thought. What thought? It's what we are at concentrating on: be it our breathing, the Buddha's name, the Bodhisattva's name, spiritual mantra, a koan, etc. Once started, you: 1. do not stop thinking about that thought 2. do not lose that thought and 3. do not drop it. Why not? Because you realize that it's of primordial importance.

The lack of deviant thoughts is not to create offenses. To be mindful is to create limitless merit and virtue. It's because that you're not mindful that deviant thoughts can enter you.

The Buddha says: **All of you Bhikshus** cultivators of the Way, **seeking for a Good Knowing Adviser** often understand the importance of seeking for a bright eyes teacher.

This is one of the first important lessons that I learned from Great Master Xuan Hua. If you want to learn Mahayana, you must seek a good and competent teacher.

Why? Just like worldly people, I used to believe in reading up on things. I did not understand that book research cannot be a substitute for a good knowing adviser because:

1. Literary research only provides general information on the topic. It's like one is sick and decides to open a medical dictionary to research how to go about healing oneself. This is less than optimal! I'm sure that if you were seriously ill, you'd be immediately looking for a competent specialist! Similarly, if you want to earn a diploma, you need a teacher to certify you.

2. Cultivation is to learn about transcendental Dharmas.

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You're better off learning worldly dharmas from a teacher, how much the more it is the case for transcendental dharmas! After leaving the home-life, the Chinese have the tradition of studying for five years under one's own master. Afterwards, we're encouraged to go and seek out instructions from good knowing advisers. For example, the Sixth Patriarch heard of the Fifth Patriarch, he therefore traveled great distances to come learn from him: he thus certified and taught how to cultivate.

3. I've encountered many bookworms. They are quite well read on the Buddhist philosophy. They enjoyed learning about Buddhism from the books. Some have been at it for decades. Therefore, they mistakingly think that they understand Buddhism. Some would come to our classes and asked me questions about the teachings of the Patriarchs. They know all the jargon, but have no clue as to what it really means. For example, every one knows that we meditate in order to “see our nature and become a Buddha”. But how many understand what “see” means and that “nature” what does it look like? The words: they know, what the words mean: they have no clues. The real danger here is that although they know a little bit, they are actually quite ignorant and yet they think they know it all! I can assure you that if you are that conceited, no good knowing adviser would bother to teach you: you'll be stuck with your ignorance for quite some time!

Why did I bring it up? That was my personal experience. When I first got my start in cultivation, I was quite arrogant

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because I thought I was well educated and pretty smart: we eventually can figure it all out by ourselves, right? As a result, I met so many competent good knowing advisers and yet none would bother to teach me. To be in the dark and quite content with one's ignorance is pretty pitiful. I hope that you will not commit the same mistakes.

In general, good knowing advisers can recognize where where we are stuck at. If they decide to help us, it is incredibly invaluable. They are special individuals with wonderful wisdom. Therefore we should ask ourselves: what did we do to deserve their time? Why should they bother with us? That's why the Buddha used the word “*seek*”. We'll elaborate more on the concept of good knowing advisers in the future.

It suffices for now to remind you that when you see a good knowing adviser, you should “*seek*” his/her instructions: this shows that you understand the importance of a **benevolent Dharma protector** in cultivation. Good knowing advisers who agree to help your cultivation, will give many good (“*benevolent*”) things to us. They will invisibly protect and assist us (act as our “*Dharma protector*”).

Good knowing advisers help us by showing the way. Once you know the way, you should walk the walk. You cannot be overly dependent on your teacher. Their instructions are the means to show us the right direction and safe road. We should get started. The further we get, the more we understand the instructions. While on the journey, we should be mindful of our teacher's instructions: that is “not

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losing thoughts” , always remember the instructions.

Now “seeking for a good knowing adviser and a benevolent Dharma protector” **does not compare with mindfulness** seems to be contradictory: first we stress the importance of seeking for a good knowing adviser, then we say that it's actually not as important as mindfulness. Do we need a teacher or not?

Let me explain.

The best way to cultivate is to seek for a good knowing adviser. Once he/she agrees to help you, you must follow the instructions. In particular, do not forget the instructions. What is implied here is: even though you are so blessed that you have a good knowing adviser, you should not become overly dependent on your good knowing adviser, you should always be mindful of his/her teachings: rely on the Dharma (teachings), not on the person (teacher's help). In that way, the Buddha can enter Nirvana without worries. His own disciples are beginning to become overly dependent on him, therefore they need to learn to shift their reliance on his instructions and not his personal presence.

If you do not neglect mindfulness, if you can maintain mindfulness **the thieves of afflictions have no way of entering you.** “*Afflictions*” are born from attachments. Attachments are those things that we cannot let go like our spouse, children, house, car etc. We can do without them. On top of it, we are also worried about losing them: that is afflictions. Afflictions are usually called “*thieves*” because

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they love to rob us blind. Our most precious possession is our wisdom life; these thieves especially enjoy ruining it. Is that true? If it weren't, then why is your hair turning grey? Why are you deficient in yang Qi, thus lack stamina? Why are you getting sick?

If you can preserve mindfulness, then “*the thieves of afflictions have no way of entering you*”. “No way” means cannot possibly; “entering you”: means invade you, come inside. The concept here is the thieves of afflictions invade us from the outside. They are observing us, waiting for the opportunity to come inside, just like thieves who know that we are wealthy and therefore watch us night and day, waiting for the chance to come in to rob us. If you are aware of such thieves, then lock up your doors and windows: the bad elements have no way of entering your premises. Similarly, preserving our mindfulness serves as our real defense against afflictions.

For this reason all of you should constantly collect the thoughts in your mind. “*Collect*” is to gather: pull it, tie it up, guard it, manage it and not allow it to err. Collect what? Collect all “*thoughts*”. In the “*Mind*”? It represents inside (as opposed to outside). Afflictions come in from the outside, because the owners are not home: our thoughts are scurrying outside instead of manning the house. The first step of cultivation is to learn to differentiate inside versus outside. Collect your thoughts inside your mind means not to run outside after externals: that is self-defense.

On the other hand, **if you lose mindfulness you will lose**

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all merit and virtue: you will lose your family jewels.

If your power of mindfulness is firm and strong. “*Power of mindfulness*” refers to the strength of your mental thoughts. Can thoughts have strength? Have you ever been the object of a person's ire? Should you come near them, don't you feel uneasy and breathing is rather difficult? That is the power of thoughts of anger. “*Firm and strong*”: firm means stable, difficult to move; strong means powerful, difficult to oppose. In other words, if you manage to maintain mindfulness long enough, your mindfulness becomes firmer and stronger.

At that time, **though you enter among the thieves of the five desires, they cannot harm you.** “*Enter among*”: deliberately enter their camp. One of the worst kinds of afflictions are the “*five desires*”. The Buddha is suggesting that we should be careful not to engage until we have some gongfu: we could be in the midst of their forces and yet they have no way of harming us. This is the Dharma for Bodhisattvas.

It is like entering a battle wearing armor, thus there is nothing to fear. The Bodhisattvas don the armor of mindfulness before entering the battle, and really have nothing to fear.

This is known as mindfulness. This is the Dharma door of mindfulness.

This is how Confucius defines (proper) mindfulness:

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Restrain oneself to be in accord with etiquette

克己復禮

Meaning: exercise self-restraint, bring oneself back to proper etiquette, be in accord with society's rules and regulations like:

If it's not proper, don't look

非禮勿視，

Meaning: if it's not in accord with the rules, do not look at it. Do not look at improper things.

If it's not proper, don't listen

非禮勿聽，

Meaning: if it's not in accord with the rules, do not listen to it. Do not listen to improper things.

If it's not proper, don't say it

非禮勿言，

Meaning: if it's not in accord with the rules, do not say it. Do not say improper things.

If it's not proper, don't move

非禮勿動。

Meaning: “move” here refers to the mind moving. If it's not in accord with the rules, do not think about it. Do not think about improper things.

It can extrapolated to mean: guard all the six roots. Do

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not use them to seek out improper dusts.

In brief, mindfulness is the mark of upholding precepts.
Upholding precepts is the foundation of mindfulness.
Precepts are self-defense, are our armor.

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C6 Samadhi merit and virtue

Sutra text:

All of you Bhikshus, if you collect your mind, it will be in samadhi. Because the mind is concentrated, the production and destruction of the dharmas marks of the world can be known. For this reason, all of you should constantly and vigorously cultivate samadhi. If you attain samadhi your mind will not be scattered. It is like a household that uses its water sparingly and is able to regulate its irrigation ditches. One who cultivates samadhi is also the same way; for the sake of the water of wisdom he well cultivates Chan samadhi so it doesn't leak away. This is known as samadhi.

Sutra commentary:

Samadhi is also called Dhyana concentration, referring to concentration power of the mind. It is easier said than done. As soon as we want to concentrate our thoughts on something, false thoughts invariably arise in a flurry, without any to control them. That's why we need to undergo training to develop concentration power.

Samadhi is Sanskrit for “*thought cultivation* 思惟修”: wrestle with your thoughts and bring them under control. Another meaning is “*Stillness contemplation* 靜慮”: still our thoughts/ mind.

The Desire Realm we inhabit is considered to be devoid

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of samadhi/dhyana power.

Dhyana has four: First Dhyana, Second Dhyana, Third Dhyana and Fourth Dhyana. These heavens make up the Form Realm.

Concentration levels higher than Dhyanas are called samadhis.

Samadhis consist of the fifth samadhi, sixth, seventh and eighth samadhis. These heavens are called Formless Realm.

Combined together, these levels of concentration are called eight samadhis. They form the Triple Realm (Desire Realm, Form Realm and Formless Realm). They are however still subject to reincarnation. Buddhist meditation practices aim to help us attain the ninth samadhi: that of the Fourth Stage Arhat who is free from birth and death.

What is it like to enter samadhi? Chan books offer a ton of explanations on meditation but cannot possibly explain them all. It's because there are limitless states and words cannot possibly describe them all. In general, when you are in samadhi, your mind blanks out. Some report that they see that their legs disappeared. One feels wonderful indeed. That feeling cannot be described: for example you have to eat cheesecake to know the taste. Words cannot possibly describe it.

The importance of samadhi power cannot be over-emphasized. When the mind is concentrated, it can pierce through the fog of ignorance. Therefore, samadhi leads to wisdom. Conversely, wisdom cannot manifest without sa-

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madhi power. Each type of samadhi has its own characteristics. For example, First Dhyana is different from Second Dhyana. In turn Second Dhyana is quite different from Third. The higher your level of samadhi, the clearer you can see, the more you can comprehend. For example, those who are in the first floor cannot see as far as those on the higher level floors. The higher you rise, the less obstructed is your vision. No substitution is possible here because we must cultivate for ourselves. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas cannot cultivate for us.

When you cultivate, knowing where you are is very helpful in your practice. A good teacher can spot where you are and give the appropriate instructions to help you make progress. The fact of the matter is that when you are still in elementary school, it makes no sense to bring up algebra because the students cannot grasp it.

The Buddha says: all of you cultivators, **all of you Bhikshus, if you collect your mind**. If you want to develop samadhi power, you must first learn to “*collect your mind*”. “Collect” is to gather in: bring it inside, tie it inside, do not let it out. It's called “return the light within”: introspect, look at oneself instead of looking outside (at the dusts).

It is against all of our natural instincts. Initially, it's quite difficult to do because we're so used to look outside: the ears hear sound and immediately run outside looking for it; the nose smells fragrance and immediately turns toward it etc. That's why we need to undergo training to undo all these habits. It would be best to practice under the guidance of a competent teacher. Especially if you practice meditation, it is im-

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perative to look for a teacher. If you can find one, you'll progress a lot faster and thereby make cultivation more interesting and rewarding.

If you can collect your mind, after a while, you'll have good news: you'll experience interesting states. You'll eventually enter samadhi: **it will be in samadhi**.

Conversely speaking, when your mind is in samadhi, it's collected, it's gathered in.

Because the mind is concentrated, the production and destruction of the dharmas marks of the world can be known. There are a lot of terms here that we'll need to explain.

When in samadhi: *“because the mind is concentrated, ... can be known”*. *“Known”* is to understand or to realize.

There is a “seeing” component in knowing: that's because one has spiritual penetrations that one is able to see more (than normal people). For example, after one opens one's heavenly eye, one can clearly see those gorgeous goddesses in the heavens.

There is also a “penetrating” aspect to knowing. This is not worldly knowledge based on deductive reasoning like in mathematics. This knowing does not come from conscious reasoning. It is spontaneous like when our instinct tells us someone dislikes us. It is “penetration” or “realization” that does not come from the thinking mind.

“World”: goes through four phases: 1. Formation (coming

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into being) 成 2. Dwelling 住 3. Decline 壞 4. Emptiness 空. One increase 增 and one decrease 減 makes one kalpa 劫. During the increase phase, human lifespan starts from 10 years, increases by one year every 100 years, up to a maximum of 80,000; body height increases from 1 zhi, increasing every 100 years by one inch. Then the decrease phase begins: lifespan and height decreases every 100 years by respectively one year and one inch, back to the minimum. One such increase and decrease is therefore around 16,000 years.

1,000 kalpas is called “small kalpa”. 20 small kalpas make up one “middle kalpa”. 4 middle kalpas make one “great kalpa”. Each world goes through each phase: “formation”: 1 middle kalpa, “dwelling”: 1 middle kalpa, “decline”: 1 middle kalpa and “emptiness”: 1 middle kalpa.

Each world evolves from emptiness to formation, dwelling and decline: that is “*production and destruction*”.

“*Dharmas marks*”: “dharmas” refers to anything, everything in this universe; “mark” refers to that which can be observed, perceived. “Dharma mark” refers to the manifestation of everything in the world. In other words, all dharmas can also be observed to go through creation and destruction cycles.

In brief, because one is in samadhi, one can perceive the impermanence of the world. This is the beginning of wisdom. Because one realizes the impermanence of the world, one becomes less attached.

For this reason, all of you should constantly and

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vigorously cultivate samadhi. That's why you should always relentlessly cultivate all sorts of samadhis. The Hinayana practitioners stop at the ninth samadhi. The Mahayana Bodhisattvas practice countless samadhis.

If you attain samadhi, when you enter samadhi **your mind will not be scattered,** you will lose your mindfulness.

The Buddha then uses analogies to reinforce his points: **It is like a household that uses its water sparingly,** these people do not waste their water. Water is the basis for life. In the developed world, water is plentiful and therefore is taken often for granted. The rest of humanity lacks clean water for their daily use. For example, when traveling to developing countries, one is often advised to use boiled water or spring water for better hygiene. In order to preserve their scarce water resources, these folks are **able to regulate** their **irrigation ditches,** what is implied here is the ability to “skillfully” manage their scarce resources.

One who cultivates samadhi is also the same way, cultivators are that way too **for the sake of the water of wisdom he well cultivates Chan samadhi so it doesn't leak away.** Water is an analogy for our wisdom: it is critical to our wisdom life. Those who really appreciate it would not allow the system to have “leaks”. In other words, Chan samadhi preserves wisdom.

This is known as samadhi. You all should thus follow the above instructions to cultivate Chan samadhi. It'll help unfold wisdom.

C7 Wisdom merit and virtue

Sutra text:

All of you Bhikshus, if you have wisdom, you will be without greed or attachment. Always examine yourselves, and do not allow yourselves to have faults, for it is in this way that you will be able to obtain liberation within my Dharma. If one is not like this, he is neither a person of the Way, nor a layperson; there is no name for him. One with true wisdom is a secure boat for crossing over the ocean of old age, sickness, and death. He is also like a great bright lamp in the darkness of ignorance, a good medicine for all kinds of illnesses, and a sharp axe for cutting down the tree of afflictions. For this reason all of you should increasingly benefit yourselves by acquiring hearing, contemplating, and cultivating wisdom. Even though a person only has flesh eyes, if he has illuminating wisdom, he has clear understanding. This is known as wisdom.

Sutra commentary:

What is (transcendental) wisdom? It helps us connect with the truth. What is the truth? How many truths are there? Truth is the true principles. There is only one truth, not two or three. Mahayana provides us with the means and tools to unfold our wisdom. First, one must listen to the Dharma to hear about the truth (“hearing” wisdom). One then contemplates what was heard until one understands it (“contemplat-

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ing” wisdom). One continues to cultivate until one certifies to ultimate wisdom (“cultivating” wisdom).

Arhats of the Small Vehicle (Hinayana) are greedy for the bliss of Nirvana because it brings about the cessation of all afflictions. Their contemplative wisdom enables them to be no longer attached to this world and all the pleasures it can bring them. However, if they enter Nirvana (called “Nirvana with residues”; not that of the Buddha's yet) they will be stuck without recourse.

Those with wisdom are not greedy and have no attachments. Great Master Xuan Hua says that wise people “return the light within to self-illuminate”. That is, they constantly examine themselves. Western culture prizes observational and analytical skills because they enable us to understand and effectively deal with the outside world. In Buddhism, we feel that it's not “(transcendental) wisdom”, it's merely “experience” or “common sense” or “knowledge” or “smarts”. If one constantly looks outside, one can be easily misled by mirages, shadows and pretenses. Most of us fail to realize that everything comes into being from the union of external factors (“conditions”). The Chinese keep on saying “everything, but everything is false”. Therefore, instead of looking to the outside, one is better off looking inside to catch where one began to go wrong and got misled at the first place: that's wisdom.

To return the light to illuminate within enables one to discover one's own faults so that one can make corrections and not walk down the wrong path again. To be able to correct

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oneself is to sever one's own afflictions. This is called “contemplative wisdom”. Then one can learn Dharmas to help end others' afflictions. Contemplative wisdom leads to cultivation wisdom or Prajna wisdom: one can see one's own Buddha nature.

The best way to learn Mahayana is to find a good knowing adviser. This wise person can teach you to obtain samadhi power. Do not be misled into believing that, like all other worldly dharmas, one can also learn Mahayana on one's own. If you had the blessings, you'd have encountered the Buddha and would be transmitted the most appropriate Dharma to practice. Unfortunately, the Buddha has already entered Nirvana. Therefore, your next best bet is to seek a good knowing adviser. The Chinese clearly understands this. This is an indication of the depth of that culture. It is pretty wise because it can save a lot of time and grief. These wise teachers already know the way and therefore lead us along until we can see the light ourselves. That's why they are called “bright eyes” teachers: they can see very clearly, even in the midst of profound darkness.

The Buddhas are all-knowing and all-seeing. In contrast, all good knowing advisers have their own limitations. They can see only so much. They can lead us only so far. However, you should not have to worry. Good and wise teachers are aware of their limitations. They would not hesitate to refer us to the next good ones when the time comes. That's why they are called good knowing advisers in the first place: they have our best interest at heart.

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Cultivation is the development of samadhi power so as to enable one to see emptiness: to see the truth of emptiness. That is liberation. It liberates us from what still binds us and bogs us down: all those attachments! To be free from attachments is to have wisdom.

The Buddha says, **all of you Bhikshus, if you have wisdom, you will be without greed or attachment.** Wise people are no longer confused. They are no longer greedy for externals and attached to nonsense. They can see the true nature of things and therefore can put it down.

We are still attached to externals because we can't see them as empty yet. What is emptiness? It is explained in the Buddhist books as being intrinsically created by conditions: e.g. our body is intrinsically empty because it is "falsely" created by the temporary union of the four great elements. The four great elements are: 1. Earth elements (making up our bones, flesh, skin, etc.), 2. Fire element (our body temperature, 3. Water elements (our blood, marrow, tears) and 4. Wind element (our breath). When conditions come to an end (our life is supposed to end), our body breaks apart and returns to the elements. That's also called impermanence. That's why our body is inherently empty. It came from emptiness and will eventually return to emptiness.

If you understand the above, then you can be considered to have a little bit of wisdom. You are no longer overly preoccupied with catering to your body and have fewer attachments: you no longer demand tasty meals, nice clothes, luxurious homes and prestige automobiles.

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Moreover, people with wisdom **always examine** themselves: they look inside, at themselves instead of looking at others' faults. They **do not allow** themselves to have faults. They rid themselves of their own faults. To have faults is to make mistakes. Wise people do not make mistakes because they work hard at eliminating their personal flaws. What is implied here is the ability to spot one's own fault: 1. One knows right from wrong and 2. One commits to doing only the right thing and eliminating the wrong. That is to not allow oneself to have flaws.

In other words, to have wisdom is to be constantly aware, to continually do introspection.

When you return the light to self-illumine, ask yourself: am I a good person or a bad person? Mencius says: to be human is to be loyal, dependable and put what was learned into practice. We should be loyal to our bosses, our relatives, friends, benefactors etc. Furthermore, we need to be dependable when dealing with others. And we should repay our teachers' kindness by putting their teachings into practice.

For it is in this way that you will be able to obtain liberation within my Dharma. If you constantly examine yourself, if you always do not allow yourself to have faults, then you will certainly obtain liberation: end birth and death, sever afflictions and obtain peace and bliss. The Buddha taught many different “*Dharmas*”: the Four Noble Truths (Arhat Dharma), the 12 conditioned links (PratyekaBuddha Dharma), ten paramitas (Bodhisattva Dharmas), etc.

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If one is not like this, if you fail to self-examine, if insist on harboring faults, you are neither **neither a person of the Way, nor a layperson**, you are no cultivator of Buddhism; in fact, **there is no name for** you. Notice how insulting the Buddha can be without being insulting: he call such individuals “no individual”, they are not humans. They do not know how to be a human being: they are bound to fall to the lower realms.

One with true (transcendental) **wisdom is a secure boat for crossing over the ocean of old age, sickness, and death**, such wise people can act as a sturdy and dependable boat. This refers to people who are already liberated and chose to come back to act as a rescue boat for others: the Bodhisattvas. They can help ferry living beings across the sea of sufferings: sufferings of birth, aging, sickness and death. Safely bring living beings to the other shore of Nirvana. If you want to help others, you must be able to shoulder their burden: take on their sufferings. Bodhisattvas are often referred to as choosing not to enter Nirvana to enjoy peace and bliss. Instead, they elect to go back into the world to act as boats of kindness and compassion 慈航 to help living beings “cross over the sea of birth and death”. “Old age, sickness and death represent all the living beings' sufferings: they already forgot about the suffering of birth; they however still have to face the suffering of old age (body becomes more and more decrepit), sickness (body no longer functions like normal) and finally the most dreadful of them all: death.

Moreover, those who are truly wise are **like a great**

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bright lamp in the darkness of ignorance. “*Ignorance*” means that because we didn't know better, that's why we make mistakes; we then cover up so as to avoid getting into trouble; when queried, we'd tell lies. We keep on piling offenses; we increasingly lose clarity of mind. It's no different from being in the “dark”. Thus wisdom can act as a bright lamp that can brighten the dark corners of our mind and chase away our ignorance.

Wisdom is also like **a good medicine for all kinds of illnesses.** “*Good*” refers to its healing powers, “*medicine*”: it can cure all sorts of “*illnesses*”. Sicknesses are retributions for past offenses. Only wisdom can provide antidotes to remedy the situation.

Wisdom is also like **a sharp axe for cutting down the tree of afflictions.** “*Afflictions*” cause us discomfort, irritable, uneasy etc. “*Tree*” symbolizes the growth and multiplication of afflictions. The Vietnamese have a phrase: “angry at the fish, chop at the cutting board”: once afflicted with the fish, we can't help but become afflicted at the cutting board. My disciple has a three year old son. He's already reached Second Dhyana! He's very sensitive: when his dad comes home from work upset, the boy would avoid him like the plague. There you have: you get afflicted and you bring your afflictions to infect others around you like a never-ending chemical reaction. If you have it, you can wield the “*sharp ax*” of wisdom to chop down and mutilate all the trees of afflictions.

For this reason all of you should increasingly benefit yourselves by acquiring hearing, contemplating, and

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cultivating wisdom. Buddhism advocates unfolding wisdom to end suffering. How do you acquire wisdom? You start by acquiring “*hearing* 聞 wisdom”: listen to the Dharma, hit the books. Once exposed to the principles, you then cultivate “contemplative 思 wisdom”: you contemplate those principles. You have to practice the contemplation dharmas; you can't simply think or ponder about them (like the academicians do): recite the Buddha's name, do Chan etc. Finally, to acquire in “cultivation 修 wisdom”: open you Prajna wisdom. To acquire those three types of wisdom is to benefit oneself. The more wisdom you can acquire, the more benefit you can obtain.

Even though a person only has flesh eyes, he has no significant spiritual penetrations yet **if he has illuminating wisdom,** if he uses his wisdom to self-illuminate **he has clear understanding,** he can be called a bright eyed adviser. Bright-eyed is analogy for the ability to clearly see through things, to clearly discern all things, to be able to pierce through the dark veil of ignorance. These people are competent good knowing advisers.

This is known as wisdom. That's Buddhist wisdom.

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C8 Ultimate merit and virtue (no idle discussions)

Sutra text:

All of you Bhikshus, if you have all sorts of idle discussions, your mind will be scattered, and even though you have left the home-life, you will not attain liberation. For this reason, Bhikshus, you should quickly renounce and distance yourself from having a scattered mind and idle discussions. If you wish to be one who attains the bliss of still Extinction, you only need to be skillfully eliminate the peril of idle discussions. This is known as not having idle discussions.

Sutra commentary:

Ultimate refers to the very last kind of merit and virtue that can be cultivated, or it could be explained as the very last transcendental Dharma for the section: it's not having idle discussions.

Idle discussions are conversations about others' right and wrong, to speak of meaningless things. This goes against the true principles, preventing us from increasing and drawing near the good Dharmas. It's more commonly known as gossiping: a total waste of time. Idle discussions include tattle tale, gossip, talking about trivialities, spreading rumors, telling jokes, discussing worldly affairs etc.

According to the Buddhist shastras: idle discussions can create meaningless thinking and discernment. Therefore, to

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engage in idle discussions cannot increase the slightest good dharma, nor can it decrease any evil dharma.

The Middle Shastra classifies idle discussion into love idle discussions, and view idle discussions. Love idle discussions: toward all dharmas give rise to love and attachments. View idle discussions: toward all dharmas formulate judgment and understanding (見論為於一切法作決定解). Dull rooted people tend to engage in love idle discussions, sharp rooted people in view idle discussions. Lay people initiate love idle discussion, left-home people initiate view idle discussions. Heavenly demons start love idle discussion, externalists view start idle discussions. Ordinary people have a propensity for idle discussions, the Two Vehicles, for view idle discussions.

Furthermore, there are three kinds of idle discussions: 1. greed and love (arises because of greed and desire) 2. Conceit (arises from arrogance) 3. Views (arise from the various prejudices).

Also, there are two kinds of idle discussions: 1. Idle discussions arising from the True Principles (creating work from where there is no need to do anything) 2. Idle discussions arising from worldly affairs.

The Buddha immediately gets to the point: **All of you Bhikshus all of you cultivators, if you have all sorts of idle discussions, your mind will be scattered.** To engage in idle discussions has a definite outcome: “*your mind will be scattered*”, your mind spins. That is a total waste of time and

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energy!

and even though you have left the home-life, you will not attain liberation. Even though you “*left the home life*”, but you still have not left those worldly habits behind. If you keep it up, “*you will not attain liberation*”: you will never be able to end suffering.

Therefore **you should quickly renounce and distance yourself from having a scattered mind and idle discussions.** The action advocated by the Buddha is two-fold:

1. Stop having idle discussions and do not allow your mind to be scattered (renounce)
2. Distance yourself from those who engage in idle discussions and who are scattered (distance).

If you wish to be one who attains the bliss of still Extinction if you want to attain the bliss of Nirvana, also called “*still Extinction*”; “still”: quiet and without movement; “*Extinction*”: everything has vanished, absolutely nothing on the screen), **you only need to be skillfully eliminate the peril of idle discussions.** “*Peril*”: it is more dangerous than you think. Idle discussions bring on bad things. That's why you need to “*skillfully eliminate*” idle discussions: in yourself and distancing from those who engage in such activities e.g. without generating their ire. Cultivation requires flexibility, to accord with conditions, knowing when to advance or when to retreat.

This is known as not having idle discussions. Do not engage in idle discussion or sophistry. Cultivators should talk less: that would be more in accord with the Way. The Way

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does not depend on words or talk. The state of enlightenment cannot be expressed with words. There isn't even a thought of enlightenment, how much the less trying to describe it or explain it.

Notice how succinct the Buddha deliberately is here when he talked about idle discussions.

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A3 Propagation

This is the third and final section of the sutra: the propagation or circulation section. Propagation has two aspects: 1. like water, it should be propagated everywhere that gravity can take it 2. Penetrate and permeate through. Like water, the principles are propagated universally to benefit all living beings. Therefore, we should provide explanations to the texts, translate and print, disseminate, discuss, cultivate accordingly etc.

This propagation section is longer than the typical sutras: perhaps it's because the Buddha is getting emotional and is not quite ready to leave yet.

Another reason for the length for this section is these are the very last instructions from the Buddha before he takes his leave. Maybe he's pointing the last deficiencies that he still perceives in cultivators. Let's pay close attention to his last instructions.

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B1 Exhortation to cultivate

Sutra text:

All of you Bhikshus, with respect to all merit and virtue, you should always be single-minded. Relinquish all laxness as you would leave a hateful thief. That which the greatly compassionate World Honored One has explained for your benefit is already finished; all of you need only to practice it diligently. Whether you are in the mountains, in a desolate marsh, beneath a tree, or in a peaceful place or still dwelling, be mindful of the Dharma you have received and do not allow it to be forgotten. You should always exhort yourselves and practice vigorously. You don't want to reach the time of death and be filled with remorse because of a life spent in vain. I am like a good doctor who understands illnesses and prescribes medicine. Whether it is taken or not is not the doctor is not to blame. Moreover I am like a skillful guide who points out a good path. If those who hear of it do not walk down it, it is not the guide's fault.

Sutra commentary:

The best way to help propagate Buddhism is to cultivate according to the Buddha's instructions. That is the spirit of Mahayana: act as a role model. Westerners tend to have different criteria. American parents usually insist that their children: do as they say, not as they do.

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All of you Bhikshus, with respect to all merit and virtue, you should always be single-minded. These are the fundamental aspects of cultivation:

1. You plant blessings “**merit and virtue**” within Mahayana field of blessings. Just like when you want to start a business, we need start-up capital. Cultivation is just the same, one needs a lot of Mahayana blessings. Take the lead from the Chinese. Go to the temple and plant blessings. To create merit and virtue is to practice giving. If you have money donate money. If you have time donate your labor.

2. Try to create affinities with Mahayana cultivators. That means provide assistance to them, act as their Dharma protectors. Just like our neighborhoods are safe and secure thanks largely to the soldiers, policemen, fire fighters etc. Cultivators also need protection. For instance, in order to be able to sit in meditation for extended periods of time, we need the eight-fold division to quietly surround and protect us; otherwise it would feel like a chicken about to hatch eggs. Therefore, before you start to cultivate, it's a very good idea to help others cultivate. That way, when your time comes, others will come and help you cultivate.

3. Often create merit with the Triple Jewel. The bigger the contributions the more blessings you can generate. Please remember that cultivating Mahayana Dharmas requires a ton of blessings. When your blessings are abundant, you can progress very quickly, when you run out of blessings you'll have a real hard time overcoming obstructions. For example, if you have blessings, the moment you hear of Mahayana

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principles, you immediately bring forth the faith. Otherwise, you could be repeatedly exposed to Mahayana principles and can't bring forth the faith due to inadequate blessings. Even Buddhas and Bodhisattvas can't help you unless you believe. You can't take advantage of Mahayana if you have no Mahayana blessings.

Cultivators who wish to make progress should always “*single-minded*”-ly create and preserve (not waste) blessings.

Relinquish all laxness as you would leave a hateful thief. “*Laxness*”, was explained in prior section, an example of laxness would be the young people's indulgence in emotional pursuits, indulging their sense organs. Ordinary people like laxness, considering it to be their good friend. In contrast, cultivators know better: they should regard laxness as “*a hateful thief*” specializing in trying to pilfer us and inflict damage to our Buddha nature. This habit of laxness is quite deeply engrained in us: we mistakenly call it relaxation. It lowers our guard. Therefore, you should “*relinquish*” laxness habits as if you need to keep distance between you and a hateful thief.

That which the greatly compassionate World Honored One has explained for your benefit is already finished. The Buddha appeared in the world for the sake of benefitting living beings. The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas would never do anything to harm us.

They are “*greatly compassionate*”. Compassion is to understand living beings' suffering and wishing to help them uproot their suffering. Wise people naturally develop this

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character trait: they pity those who are less fortunate than them and wish to help improve their lot. Sages of the Two Vehicles (Sound Hearers and PratyekaBuddhas) are compassionate but are not greatly compassionate. Only Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have great compassion: they look at living beings as being of the same substance as them. That's what is referred as: “great compassion: of one substance”: we all have the Buddha nature, thus are of the same substance.

“*World Honored One*” is one of the ten designations of the Buddhas. It means that in this world, there is no one who is more honored than the Buddha.

Wishing to help living beings end their sufferings, the Buddhas compassionately appear in the world to teach and transform us, bringing us great benefits. Shakyamuni Buddha himself spent 50 years teaching the Dharma, held over 300 Dharma Assemblies; now his work is finished.

All of you need only to practice it diligently. The transcendental Dharmas have been transmitted, now it's up to you to vigorously cultivate them.

To cultivate, you should choose an appropriate location: **in the mountains, in a desolate marsh** (far away from the commotions, noises and disruptions), **beneath a tree** (one of the twelve ascetic practices: stay underneath trees, not exceeding three days in a row), **in a peaceful place** (no pressure to do anything), **still dwelling** (quiet rooms), **be mindful of the Dharma you have received and do not allow it to be forgotten** should often recite the precepts, study sutras and

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contemplate their meanings, commit the Dharma to memory.

You should always exhort yourselves : the sooner you accomplishes the Way, the better off you are, **and practice vigorously** apply yourself, don't let time pass in vain: **you don't want to reach the time of death and be filled with remorse because of a life spent in vain.** This human body is very difficult to obtain, the BuddhaDharma is very difficult to encounter. Now that you've got the chance, give it your all so that you experience no regret in the future.

The Buddha then gives two analogies: He's like 1. A great physician 2. Competent guide.

I am like a good doctor who understands illnesses and prescribes medicine. I know how to cure your multitudes of illnesses. I recognize what is ailing you and accordingly prescribed medications. **Whether it is taken or not is not the doctor is not to blame.** Even if I give you the best medicine there is, and if you're unwilling to take, it's not my fault. I taught you how to end suffering and if you're not willing to follow my instructions, there is nothing that I can do for you.

Moreover I am like a skillful guide who points out a good path: I'm also like a competent guide who knows the road. **If those who hear of it do not walk down it, it is not the guide's fault.** Great master Xuan Hua used to say: the teacher can lead you to the door; you'll have to cross it yourself.

B2 Clearing up all doubts

Sutra text:

All of you Bhikshus, if you have doubt about suffering and the other Four Truths, you may quickly ask about them now. Do not harbor doubts and fail to clear them up.

At that time the World Honored One repeated this three times, yet no one asked him a question. And why was this? Because the assembly did not harbor any doubts.

At that time Venerable Aniruddha contemplated the minds of the assembly and said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, the moon can become hot and the sun can become cold, but the Four Truths proclaimed by the Buddha cannot be otherwise. The Truth of Suffering taught by the Buddha is actually suffering, and cannot become bliss. Accumulation is truly the cause of it, besides which there is no other cause. If one is to extinguish suffering, the cause of suffering must be extinguished, because if the cause is extinguished then the effect is extinguished. The Way leading to the extinction of suffering is truly the real Way, besides which there is no other Way. World Honored One, all of these Bhikshus are certain and have no doubts about the Four Truths.

Sutra commentary:

Clearing up all doubts. Before the Buddha leaves, he

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wants to make sure that his disciples have the chance to ask questions about his teachings so as to ensure that they have no lingering doubts.

All of you Bhikshus, if you have doubts about suffering and the other Four Truths. The Four Noble Truths are the basis for Mahayana. The se four Truths are : 1. suffering, 2. Accumulation, 3. Extinction, 4. The Way.

1. Suffering: The reality of our existence is that we are immersed in suffering. We all gather here in the Saha world to undergo the retribution for the offenses we created in the past.

For instance, we killed someone in a prior life. Now, he/she became a sickness ghost that spreads diseases and came to make a claim on our life. We suffer from the disease taking a physical toll on our body, the mental stress from the distress caused to our loved ones, the mental frustrations from our illness etc.

Another example, children are generally creditors while parents are debtors. Therefore, the parents have to repay by having to labor to rear the children. When they grow up, the children leave the family: that could be considered that the debt has been repaid.

2. The reason for suffering is Accumulation. It can be understood as desires or attachments.

Sufferings have a way of accumulating, making it more acute.

For example, we are greedy for flavors and therefore

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overeat, requiring us to take antacids. We thus are dependent on chemicals to sustain our gluttony, which makes us become overweight and develop diabetes at an early age. Suffering piles up.

3. Originally in Sanksrit, it was the Way and Extinction: the Way leading to Extinction, the cessation of suffering. However, when it was translated into Chinese, it was switched to make it sound better.

Extinction is the absence of suffering. This the fruition of liberation from the Triple Realm. It is simply Nirvana: there is nomore suffering and only bliss, forever.

4. The Way: the path one can take to obtain Extinction. Walking the path will ultimately bring us to liberation and the cessation of all sufferings.

The Way is the cause whereas Extinction is the effect.

Those who realize the reality of sufferings are more inclined to cultivate.

By the way, the Buddha asks his disciples to ask questions about all “*other*” teachings.

You may quickly ask about them now. Do not harbor doubts and fail to clear them up. If you still have anything that you are unclear about, make sure to quickly ask, for I'm about to leave. What else can I do for you before we part company?

At that time the World Honored One repeated this three times, yet no one asked him a question. And why

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was this? Because the assembly did not harbor any doubts. The Buddha repeated his question three times, based on the karmavachana Dharma. Formal protocol calls for repeating the request three times to express respect and sincerity. That is also called “according to the Dharma 如法”. The person being solicited is then required to answer accordingly.

The Buddha repeated his question three times but no one said anything because none of them has any doubt about the principles.

At that time Venerable Aniruddha contemplated the minds of the assembly and said to the Buddha. Ven. Aniruddha is foremost in the Heavenly Eye and can see into the mind of those present in the Assembly. He reaffirmed that no one had any doubt.

World Honored One, the moon can become hot and the sun can become cold, but the Four Truths proclaimed by the Buddha cannot be otherwise. Ven. Aniruddha said: one can use spiritual powers to turn the sun cold or make the moon become hot. However, there is no way of altering the Four Noble Truths. The truth cannot be changed. True principles transcend time and space.

That holy monk then elaborated further.

The Truth of Suffering taught by the Buddha is actually suffering, and cannot become bliss: what the Buddha describes as suffering cannot be called bliss (or anything else for that matter).

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Accumulation is truly the cause of it, besides which there is no other cause. Moreover, according to the truth of Accumulation, Accumulation is the cause for sufferings: there is no other possible cause.

If one is to extinguish suffering, the cause of suffering must be extinguished. To eliminate suffering, one must eliminate its cause: Accumulation. **Because if the cause is extinguished then the effect is extinguished.** If there is no fire, there can no smoke.

The Way leading to the extinction of suffering is truly the real Way, besides which there is no other Way. In order to end suffering and attain bliss, we must cultivate the Way. It is the only possible option we have. In other words, you could try the other paths, but you'll simply be wasting your time. The Buddha has many disciples who used to be advanced cultivators of the external paths. They themselves only obtained liberation through the Way.

World Honored One, all of these Bhikshus are certain and have no doubts about the Four Truths. I'm satisfied that the Bhikshus have no doubts whatsoever about your teachings.

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B3 Severing doubt

Severing doubt: removing all possible doubts.

Doubts are major obstructions to cultivation. That's why before the World Honored One takes his leave, he wants to make sure to resolve all doubts in his disciples' mind.

This is what good knowing advisers are supposed to do. They help their students overcome obstructions to their cultivation. Good knowing advisers have the capacity to recognize (“know”) where you are stuck, know how to resolve it (“adviser”) and skilfully guide you through the process (“good”).

Harboring doubts makes it difficult to enter samadhi.

To be free of doubts firms up the faith, enabling us to vigorously press forward. Mahayana relies on deep faith to facilitate its propagation to everywhere.

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C1 Revealing remaining doubt

Sutra text:

"When those in this assembly who have not yet done what should be done, see the Buddha cross over to Extinction, they will certainly feel sorrow. Those who have newly entered the Dharma and heard what the Buddha taught, will all cross over. They have seen the Way, like a flash of lightning in the night. But those who have already done what was to be done who have already crossed over the ocean of suffering, will only have this thought: 'Why has the World Honored One crossed over to Nirvana so soon?'"

Sutra commentary:

Revealing remaining doubt. Although his disciples have no explicit doubts, they still have seeds for doubts. He's helping make those surface.

"When those in this Great assembly (of the seven-fold disciples) who have not yet done what should be done, see the Buddha cross over to Extinction, they will certainly feel sorrow. *"What should be done"*: meaning should end birth and death. *"Who have not yet done what should be done"* are those who have not obtained liberation. They still have a lot of afflictions. Seeing the Buddha about to leave, they can't help but *"feel sorrow"*: they are quite saddened.

Arhats have four levels: first stage, second stage, third

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stage and fourth stage.

First fruition Arhats have broken through the 88 view delusions. View delusions means when faced with a state/object, one gives rise to desire or love. First stage Arhats are not affected by externals. For example they are impervious to the cold or heat. They are also called those who have “entered the flow”: the river of sagehood. They have clarity of mind and know the direction toward liberation: they are marching toward it. That's why I urge my disciples to shoot for this important milestone of cultivation. Once attained, one is no longer afraid of missteps. It's a kind of insurance: one will never retreat or fall into the lower realms.

Second stage Arhatship is even more difficult to reach. Third stage Arhats have transcended the Desire realm: it's quite an accomplishment. Fourth stage Arhats have ended all afflictions in the Desire Realm, Form Realm and Formless Realm. They have put an end to the self.

Mahayana has different goals of cultivation than those of the externalist paths. Externalists cultivate hoping to obtain long life or be born to the heavens. In contrast, Mahayana cultivators hope to obtain liberation. Only those who have broken the delusions of this world would know which way to go.

Many people could cultivate their entire lifetime and yet never enter samadhi. One must obtain samadhi before wisdom can unfold. Those who have wisdom can see their own attachments. Therefore if you wish to end your afflictions, you must develop samadhi power. Is your samadhi

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power increasing? If it's not, then you are probably on the wrong path. Academicians are well read but they lack depth because they failed to develop samadhi power. They have “litterary wisdom” but have no means to penetrate further. This is a rather common mistake in cultivation in the Dharma ending age. Cultivation is meant for attaining liberation, not to increase knowledge. Similarly, we must both listen to the Dharma (therefore acquiring “literary wisdom”) and practice samadhi. That's why all Mahayana patriarchs teach Chan because they understand that Chan is a major tool for the development of samadhi power.

There are many dharma doors to certify to the fruition. For example, keeping precepts is the basis for the rapid development of samadhi power. Sutras have their own inherent power. Those who good roots have matured can listen to the teachings and get enlightened. The Buddha's first five disciples all attained Arhatship by merely listening to his first sermon. For the rest of us mortals, listening to sutras will at least give us “literary wisdom”. The purpose of cultivation is to uncover our deficiencies so as to take corrective actions. For example, you understand that getting angry is rather stupid and therefore seeks to understand what triggers it. If you can understand its root source, you can then more easily uproot it. Thus we able to all the afflictions that arise from anger.

Those who have newly entered the Dharma and heard what the Buddha taught, will all cross over. Although they have not yet obtained liberation, they will certainly be liberated in the future.

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They have seen the Way, like a flash of lightning in the night. They know somethings we don't: the safe path to emancipation.

First stage to third stage Arhats are called “those who still have to study”. Fourth stage Arhats are called “those without study”. They've emptied the self. For example, your legs hurt when you sit in meditation. If you sit long enough, they'll stop hurting and eventually become empty. It's not that you'll lose your legs. It's only that you realize that they are intrinsically empty and are no longer bound by them. What is this emptiness? It's our inherent nature.

But those who have already done what was to be done who have already crossed over the ocean of suffering, this refers to the fourth stage Arhats and higher: they've already obtained life's highest goal of liberation from birth and death. They have “*crossed over the sea of suffering*”, and no longer have to revolve in the wheel of reincarnation: they don't have to come back to the human realm. First stage Arhats have to come back to the human realm seven times before they certify to Fourth stage Arhatship. Second stage Arhats only have to come back to the human realm once before attaining the fourth fruition. Third stage Arhats do not have to come back to the human realm at all. Only Fourth stage Arhats have put an end to birth and death.

These fourth stage Arhats **will only have this thought: 'Why has the World Honored One crossed over to Nirvana so soon?'** Why is he in such a hurry to leave us?

Although first stage through third stage Arhats have ended

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view and thought delusions in the Desire realm, they have not yet ended afflictions. In contrast, fourth stage Arhats are not afflicted by the Buddha's impending departure, they simply don't understand why he's taking his leave now.

C2 Ending those doubts

Sutra text:

Aniruddha spoke these words. Everyone in the assembly had penetrated the meaning of the Four Holy Truths. The World Honored One wished all in that great assembly to be firm, so with a mind of great compassion he spoke again for their sake.

"All of you Bhikshus do not be grieved or distressed. If I were to live in the world for a kalpa, my association with you would still come to an end. A meeting without a separation can never be. The Dharma for benefitting oneself and others is complete. If I were to live longer it would be of no further benefit. All of those who could be crossed over, whether in the heavens above or among humans, have already crossed over, and all of those who have not yet crossed over have already created the causes and conditions for crossing over.

From now on all of my disciples must continuously practice. Then the Thus Come One's Dharma body will always be present and indestructible.

Sutra commentary:

Ending those doubts. The Buddha compassionately puts an end to those doubts.

Aniruddha spoke these words. After ven. Aniruddha uttered those above words.

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Aniruddha is Snaskrit for “not poor”. He made an offering of food to a PreatyekaBuddha and thus obtained of not being poor for 91 hundred million kalpas. This lifetime, his blessings enabled him to leave the home-life under the Buddha. Unfortunately, he would habitually doze off when listening to the Buddha's sermons. After the Buddha scolded him, he became remorseful and stayed up for several days and nights to cultivate. As a result, he became blind. The Buddha took pity and taught him the Vajra Illumination samadhi that enabled him to open his Heavenly Eye: he can see the entire the great thousand world like looking at the palm of his hand.

Everyone in the assembly had penetrated the meaning of the Four Holy Truths. They have all thoroughly “*penetrated*” the Four Noble Truths.

But The World Honored One wished all in that great assembly to be firm, he compassionately wishes to strengthen their faith. While the World Honored One was still around, they can easily bring forth the faith. Once he's gone, it's not uncommon for their faith to have some wavering. Therefore, with a mind of great compassion he spoke again for their sake, he's about to give them a few more tips.

"All of you Bhikshus do not be grieved or distressed. You should not be sad or afflicted.

If I were to live in the world for a kalpa, my association with you would still come to an end. If I were to stay on for an entire kalpa, I still eventually have to go.

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When conditions mature, we can gather to cultivate together. When they end, we then have to part company. Our meetings must come to an end.

The Dharma for benefitting oneself and others is complete. I came here to transmit two kinds of Dharmas: 1. self benefit 2. benefit others. “*Self benefitting*” Dharmas are the Store teachings: the Dharma spoken during the Agama period. This Dharma can help certify to Arhatship and Conditioned Enlightened Ones. “*Benefitting others*” Dharmas are those teachings for the Bodhisattvas: helping living beings to obtain liberation. I have thoroughly explained those two Dharmas.

If I were to live longer it would be of no further benefit. The Buddhas are quite busy and will not outlive their usefulness. When their work is done, they move on because staying on is “*of no further benefit*”.

Disciples naturally are attached to their teachers. That's why all teachers have to take their leave to as to avoid over dependency from their followers' part.

All of those who could be crossed over, whether in the heavens above or among humans, have already crossed over. I came to this world to cross over those of the Three Vehicles (Arhats, Enlightened to Conditioned and Bodhisattvas). I even went to the heavens to cross them all.

And all of those who have not yet crossed over have already created the causes and conditions for crossing over: they planted the seeds to be liberated in the future. For

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example, countless many of them will obtain liberation when Maitreya Buddha appears in the world.

From now on all of my disciples must continuously practice, you should now practice all the Dharmas I taught you. You should mutually encourage and rectify each other.

As long as there are cultivators of the Buddhist Dharma, **then the Thus Come One's Dharma body will always be present and indestructible**: his Dharma is still present in this world. The BuddhaDharma is the Buddha's Dharma Body. As long as people practice Buddhism, then it's the same as having the Buddha present in the world.

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C3 Reiterating the marks of conditioned dharmas and impermanence

Sutra text:

You should know therefore, that everything in the world is impermanent. Meetings necessarily have separations, so do not harbor grief. Every appearance in the world is like this, so you should be vigorous and seek for an early liberation. Destroy the darkness of delusion with the brightness of wisdom. The world is truly dangerous and unstable, without any durability.

My present attainment of Nirvana is like being rid of a malignant sickness. The body is a false name, drowning in the great ocean of birth, sickness, old age and death. How can one who is wise not be happy when he gets rid of it, like killing a hateful thief?

Sutra commentary:

Reiterating the marks conditioned dharmas and impermanence. The Buddha for their sake, explains again about conditioned dharmas and impermanence in order to give them a final exhortation to cultivate.

You should know therefore, that everything in the world is impermanent: nothing in this world lasts forever. What is produced must be destroyed.

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Meetings necessarily have separations. Conditions brought together to cultivate the BuddhaDharma, now they've run their course and we therefore must part company. **So do not harbor grief.** There is no need to grieve my death.

Every appearance in the world is like this, all the phenomena of the world is thus characterized. All the worlds cycle through the four phases of: formation, dwelling, decline and emptiness. At a smaller scale, all other things of the world also go through: production, growth, decline and destruction. They all eventually return to emptiness.

The Vajra sutra says:

All conditioned dharmas are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a reflection,

一切有為法，如夢幻泡影，

All things that arise from conditions are just like a dream (unreal), an illusion (made up by men), a bubble (short-lived, very fragile), and a reflection (untrue).

Like dew, or just a lightning flash: you should contemplate like this.

如露亦如電，應作如是觀。

Like dew (vanish with the sun), or like a lightning flash (very short-lived): you should use the contemplation dharma to look at them like that

While you still have the opportunity **you should be vigorous and seek for an early liberation.** Work hard and quickly put an end to sufferings.

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Destroy the darkness of delusion with the brightness of wisdom. Strive to unfold your transcendental “*wisdom*”, which is like a bright torch that can illuminate all the darkness arising from ignorance and delusions. Ignorance is very damaging: it envelops everything in darkness, preventing us from seeing clearly. It's like moving about at home in the dark, sooner or later you're bound to bump into sharp corners, trip down the stairs or break something of value.

The world is truly dangerous and unstable, without any durability. In the Dharma Flower sutra, the Buddha explains that under his Buddha Eye, he sees living beings of our world are like children who are so engrossed with their toys that they fail to even notice that their house is on fire!

My present attainment of Nirvana is like being rid of a malignant sickness. My entering Stillness is analogous to being able to get rid of a serious illness. I suffered plenty inside this body of mine for a good 80 years already. Our body is a fertile field for illnesses to multiply and are the means for our past creditors to come and make a claim against us.

The body is a false name, this body comes from the false union of the four great elements, **drowning in the great ocean of birth, sickness, old age and death.** It has been the cause for our bobbing up and down in the ocean of birth and death since beginningless time. As long as we are still attached to our body, we'll have to continue to perish in the “*great ocean*” of sufferings. The Buddha clearly points out to us that we are enduring the suffering of “*old age*”: it inexorably grows weaker by the years, it is more and more

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riddled with “*sicknesses*” . When we are “born”, we tend to scream because that very contact with the air was extremely painful. Ultimately, we'll have to meet with that terrible end: “*death*”. A very rich tycoon said: you can't use all your fortune to buy an extra moment of life. Did you get it? This is a man who had a glorious life, having mastered his destiny and obtained anything he wanted. Ultimately, he too has to face the inevitable: the face of death; let me tell you, it's frightening because we simply don't know how much longer we have!

How can one who is wise not be happy when he gets rid of it, like killing a hateful thief? If you truly have wisdom, then you'll understand that to be rid of the body is like eliminating an extremely mean robber who has evil designs for you. Instead of grieving, you should be “*happy*” for me!

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B4 Final instructions

Sutra text:

All of you Bhikshus, you should always singlemindedly and diligently seek the way out of all the moving and unmoving dharmas of the world, for they are all decaying, destructible, insecure appearances. All of you, stop; there is nothing more to say. Time is passing away, and I wish to cross over to Nirvana. These are my very last instructions.

Sutra commentary:

Final instructions. Below are the Buddha's last words to us.

All of you Bhikshus, do you realize that before going, I'm still concerned about you. **you should always singlemindedly**, did you finally notice? Mahayana emphasizes single-mindedness, not proper mindfulness 正念. Mindfulness is the major meditation Dharma for the Hinayana. They still don't understand that single-mindedness leads to mindfulness. Conversely, proper mindfulness does not necessarily lead to single-mindedness. When you select a cultivation path, you should have the "Dharma selecting eye": to be able to recognize which method of practice is proper and can bring concrete results. Do not be fooled by appearances or marks (many put on Mahayana clothes but only teach Hinayana dharmas), reputation (the general population do not necessarily know any better).

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Diligently seek the way out. “*Diligently*” means to practice the vigor paramita; “*seek*”: out a good knowing adviser, who can transmit to you “*the way out*”: a Dharma for escaping the Triple Realm”.

Such is the attitude of superior root people. When they listen to worldly dharmas such as smiling, admiring the sunset, smelling the roses and tricks to intensify their sensual pleasures etc. they are the least interested. Why? Perhaps because deep down in the mind, they realize that to undertake those practices only creates more attachments. When you are on the right path, you should have fewer attachments and hence, afflictions.

How can we then recognize worldly dharmas? **all the moving and unmoving dharmas of the world.** They are of two types: “*moving*” and “*unmoving*”.

What are “moving dharmas”? They advocate chasing after externals. This is the Dharma for the Desire Realm: they don't teach about samadhi because they still have no control over their mind. Their mind still moves. When it does, then the body also moves. They take pleasure in movement. For example, go to the bookstore and you'll find a great number of meditation books that supposedly teach about mindfulness but if you look closely, they actually advocate meditating in order to increase sensual pleasures. They teach people to meditate so as to help them have more pleasure out of life: in watching the sunrise, savoring tea, using shakras to intensify sensual pleasures etc. They are the moving dharmas: practice them and you are guaranteed to be bound to the Desire Realm.

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What about “unmoving dharmas”? Those are the Dharmas of the Form and Formless Realms. They develop samadhi power and therefore their mind is unmoving. When the mind is unmoving, the body does not like to move either. Dhyana consists of four levels: first through fourth. Even though they developed concentration power, they are still bound by the form cage, which is very hard to escape from! If they make it out of that cage, then they graduate to the Formless Realm which also has four levels: Limitless emptiness (5th samadhi), Limitless consciousness (6th samadhi), Nothing what so ever (7th samadhi), and Neither thought nor non-thought (8th samadhi).

Those two types of moving and unmoving dharmas are still not ultimate because they do not liberate us from suffering. Why? Because they all have **decaying, destructible, insecure appearances**.

Please make a note of this. Worldly dharmas have three characteristics:

1. “*Decaying*”: falling apart. Is there anything that does not deteriorate? To pursue them would be to go after the transient and impermanent, like that ephemeral beauty.

2. “*Destructible*”: they will disappear, won't be around, and will be gone without a trace. Is there anything that does not return to emptiness? To pursue fame and profit, can you take them with you at death time?

3. “*Insecure*”: they tend to add more afflictions. You feel insecure because you still have attachments. If you can't see

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through it, can't put it down then you still worry, still have to experience the ups and down of like and dislike, love and hate etc. The BuddhaDharma is precisely the anti-dote for those dharmas.

If you can see all phenomena like that, then you are beginning to have the “Dharma selecting eye”! I hope that you make a note of this so that we don't let the Buddha down.

All of you, stop, such is the Buddha's secret wish: that we know how to “*stop*”. “Stop”? He means stop thinking! If you can stop your mad mind then you'll see that: **there is nothing more to say**. Continue to do Chan and you'll quickly see what the Buddha means! His teachings are so profound that you need to dig very deep before you can fully understand!

Time is passing away the conditions are expiring, **I wish to cross over to Nirvana**: I want to enter Still Extinction. That is the last thing I want to do for all of you, not because I want to go into retirement, kick back and enjoy myself. He wants to make an example for those who have already attained liberation. As to those who have not attained liberation, he uses this psychological tool: if you really love me, then let me be because I really want to go, don't get emotional about it.

When my Chinese teacher wanted to take his leave, he was 78 years old. After spending his lifetime taking on others' illnesses and sufferings, he was very sick and he was in great pain night and day. When he announced that he wanted to go, his disciples got emotional and requested him to extend his stay in the Saha world. A good number of his disciples understood that for him to stay on would mean that he had to contin-

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ue to suffer great pains; they therefore offered to alleviate his sufferings. Some would use incense to burn their body on his behalf. He thus chose to stay on for a few months longer.

These are my very last instructions. My work is completed. I already taught all that be taught to this world already.