

Secrets of Cultivating the Mind

By Korean Zen Master Chinul

*** ‘Secrets of Cultivating the Mind’ was translated by Dr. Thomas Cleary who is a prolific author and one of the foremost translators of Asian philosophy and spiritual teachings. He has translated numerous works in Buddhist, Taoist, and I Ching studies. He received a PhD in East Asian Languages and civilizations from Harvard University.**

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The triple world with its irritating vexations is like a house afire; who could bear to stay there long, willingly suffering perpetual torment?

If you want to avoid going around in circles, nothing compares to seeking Buddhahood. If you want to seek Buddhahood, Buddha is mind. Need mind be sought afar? It is not apart from the body.

The material body is temporal, having birth and death. The real mind is like space, unending and unchanging. Thus it is said, “When the physical body decays and dissolves back into fire and air, one thing remains aware, encompassing the universe.”

Unfortunately, people today have been confused for a long time. They do not know that their own mind is the real Buddha. They do not know that their own essence is the real Dharma. Wishing to seek the Dharma, they attribute it to remote sages; wishing to seek Buddhahood, they do not observe their own mind.

If you say that there is Buddha outside of mind, and there is Dharma outside of essence, and want to seek the Way of Buddhahood while clinging tightly to these feelings, even if you spend ages burning your body, branding your arms, breaking your bones and taking out the marrow, wounding yourself and copying scriptures in your own blood, sitting for long periods of time without sitting down, eating only once a day, reading the whole canon and cultivating various austere practices, it will be like steaming sand to produce cooked rice; it will only increase your own fatigue.

Just know your own mind and you will grasp countless teachings and infinite subtle meanings without even seeking. That is why the World Honored One said, “Observing all sentient beings, I see they are fully endowed with the knowledge and virtues of Buddhas.” He also said, “All living beings, and all sorts of illusory events, are all born

in the completely awake subtle mind of those who realize suchness.”

So we know that there is no Buddhahood to attain apart from this mind. The Realized Ones of the past were just people who understood the mind, and the saints and sages of the present are people who cultivate the mind, students of the future should rely on this principle.

People who practice the Way should not seek externally. The essence of mind has no defilement; it is originally complete and perfect of itself. Just detach from illusory objects and it is enlightened to suchness as is.

Question: If Buddha-nature is presently in our bodies, it is not apart from ordinary people. Then why do we not perceive Buddha-nature now?

Answer: It is in your body, but you do not perceive it yourself. At all times you know when you are hungry, you know when you are thirsty, you know when you are cold, you know when you are hot; sometimes you get angry, sometimes you are joyful – ultimately, what is it that does all this?

Now then, the material body is a compound of four elements: earth, water, fire, and air. Their substance is insentient; how can they perceive or cognize? That which can perceive and cognize has to be your Buddha-nature.

This is why Linji said, “The four gross elements cannot expound the Teaching or listen to the Teaching. Space cannot expound the Teaching or listen to the Teaching. Only the solitary light clearly before you, that which has no form, can expound the Teaching or listen to the Teaching.”

What he called that which has no form is the stamp of the truth of all Buddhas, and it is your original mind. So the Buddha-nature is presently in your body; what need is there to seek outside? If you do not believe it, let me mention some stories of how ancient sages entered the Way, to enable you to clear up your doubts. You should believe with clear understanding of truth.

In ancient times a king asked a Buddhist saint, “What is Buddhahood?”

The saint said, “Seeing essence is Buddhahood.”

The king asked, “Do you see essence?”

The saint said, “I see the essence of enlightenment.”

The king asked, “Where is essence?”

The saint said, “Essence is in function.”

The king asked, “What function is this, that it is not now visible?”

The saint said, “It is now functioning, it is just that you yourself do not see it.”

The king asked, “Does it exist in me?”

The saint said, “Whenever you act, that is it. When you are inactive, the essence is

again hard to see.”

The king asked, “When it is to be employed, in how many places does it appear?”

The saint said, “When it appears, there must be eight places.”

The king said “Please explain those eight manifestations.”

The saint said, “In the womb, it is called the body. In society, it is called the person. In the eyes, it is called seeing. In the ears, it is called hearing. In the nose, it distinguishes scents. In the tongue, it takes. In the hands, it grabs and holds. In the feet, it walks and runs. It manifests all over, including everything; countless worlds are collected in a single atom. Perceptives know this is the Buddha-nature the essence of enlightenment. Those who do not know call it the soul.”

On hearing this, the mind of the king was opened up to understanding.

Also, a monk asked Master Guizong, “What is Budha?” Guizong said, “If I tell you right now, I’m afraid you won’t believe it.”

The monk said, “If you speak truly, how dare I not believe?”

Guizong said, “When there is a single obstruction in the eye, there is a shower of flowers in the sky.”

That monk attained insight at these words.

These stories I have quoted about the circumstances of ancient sages’ entry into the Way are clear and simple. They certainly save energy. If you gain true understanding by these stories, then you walk hand in hand with the ancient sages.

Question: You speak of seeing essence. Those who have really seen essence are then sages. As such, they should be different from other people, manifesting spiritual powers and miracles. Why is there not a single practitioner today manifesting spiritual powers and miracles?

Answer: You shouldn’t be too quick to speak wild words. Those who do not distinguish the false from the true confused and deluded people. Students of the Way today talk about truth, but in their hearts they get bored and fall back into the error of being indiscriminate – these are the ones you doubt. To study the Way without knowing what goes before and what comes later, to speak of principle without distinguishing root and branch, is called false opinion, not cultivation of learning. You not only cause yourself to go wrong, you also cause others to go wrong. Should you not be careful?

There are many avenues of entry into the Way, but essentially they all fall within the two categories of sudden enlightenment and gradual practice. Even though we speak of sudden enlightenment and immediate practice, this is how those of the very highest faculties and potential gain entry; and if you look into their past, they have already practiced gradual cultivation based on sudden enlightenment for many lifetimes, so that

in the present life they realize enlightenment immediately upon hearing the truth, suddenly finished all at once. In reality, these people are also included in the category of those who are first enlightened and then practice.

So these two aspects, sudden and gradual, are the guidelines followed by all sages. Sages since time immemorial have all first awakened and then cultivated practice, attaining experiential proof based on practice. So-called spiritual powers and miracles are manifested by the gradual cultivation of practice based on enlightenment, it is not that they appear immediately upon enlightenment. As scripture says, “The abstract principle is understood all of a sudden; concrete matters are cleared up by means of this understanding. They are not cleared away all at once but worked through in an orderly manner.”

This is why Guifeng said, in a profound explanation of the meaning of first awakening and then cultivating practice, “Consciousness is an ice pond: though it is all water, it needs the energy of the sun to melt. When ordinary people are awakened, they are buddhas; but they rely on the power of the Dharma for cultivation. When ice melts, then water flows and moistens; only then can it perform its irrigating function. When delusion is ended, then the mind is open and penetrating, responsively manifesting the function of the light of spiritual powers.”

So factual spiritual powers and miracles cannot be accomplished in one day; they appear after gradual cultivation. And what is more, from the point of view of those who have arrived, concrete supernatural powers are still apparitional affairs, and they are minor things to sages; even if they manifest, it is not right to want to use them.

Confused and ignorant people today imagine that countless subtle functions, spiritual powers, and miracles will immediately appear upon an instantaneous awakening. If you entertain this understanding, this means you do not know what comes first and what follows afterward, and cannot distinguish the root from the branches. If you try to seek enlightenment without knowing what comes first and what follows afterward, what is basic and what is derivative, that is like trying to put a square peg in a round hole. Is it not a big mistake?

Since you do not know expedient technique, you imagine you are facing a sheer precipice, and thus lose interest. Many are those who cut off their potential for enlightenment in this way. Since they themselves have not attained enlightenment, they do not believe that others have realized any enlightenment. Seeing those without spiritual powers, they become contemptuous and make the sages and saints out to be cheaters and deceivers. This is pitiful indeed.

Question: You say that the two categories of sudden enlightenment and gradual

practice are guidelines followed by all sages. If enlightenment is sudden enlightenment. What is the need for gradual practice? If practice is gradual practice, why speak of sudden enlightenment? Please explain the meaning of sudden and gradual further, to eliminate remaining doubts.

Answer: As for sudden enlightenment, as long as ordinary people are deluded, they think their bodies are material conglomerates and their minds are random thoughts. They do not know that inherent essence is the true body of reality. They do not know that their own open awareness is the real Buddha. Seeking Buddha outside of mind, they run randomly from one impulse to another.

If a real teacher points out a way of entry for you, and for a single instant you turn your attention around, you see your own original essence. This essence originally has no afflictions; uncontaminated wisdom is inherently complete in it. Then you are no different from the Buddhas; thus it is called sudden enlightenment.

As for gradual practice, having suddenly realized fundamental essence, no different from Buddha, beginningless mental habits are hard to get rid of all at once. Therefore one cultivates practice based on enlightenment, gradually cultivating the attainment to perfection, nurturing the embryo of sagehood to maturity. Eventually, after a long time, one becomes a sage; therefore it is called gradual practice. It is like an infant, which has all the normal faculties at birth, but as yet undeveloped; only with the passage of years does it become an adult.

Question: By what expedient means can we turn our minds around instantly to realize our inherent essence?

Answer: It is just your own mind; what further expedient means would you apply? If you apply expedient means to go on to seek intellectual understanding, this is like wanting to see your own eyes because you think you have no eyes if you cannot see them. Since they are your own eyes, how can you see them? As long as you have not lost them, that is called seeing eyes. If you have not lost them, that is called seeing eyes. If you have no more desire to see, does that mean you imagine you are not seeing? So it is also with one's own open awareness. Since it is one's own mind, how can one yet seek to see it? If you seek understanding, then you do not understand; this is seeing essence.

Question: The most superior people easily understand upon hearing; middling and lesser people are not without doubt. Please give further explanations of means to enable confused people to gain direction and access.

Answer: The Way is not in the province of knowing or not knowing. Get rid of the mind that uses confusion to anticipate enlightenment, and listen to what I say. All thinks

are like dreams, like illusions or magical effects; therefore errant thoughts are basically silent, while material objects are basically empty. The emptiness of all things is not obscure to open awareness; so this mind with open awareness of silence and emptiness is your original countenance. It is also the seal of Dharma esoterically transmitted by the Buddhas of past, present, and future, the Zen Masters of successive generations, and all genuine teachers in the world.

If you realize this mind, this is really what is called ascending directly to the stage of Buddhahood without climbing up the steps. Your every footstep transcends the triple world; returning home, you put an end to doubt all at once. Then you are a teacher of the human and the celestial. With compassion and wisdom supporting each other, you fulfill both self-help and help for others. Worthy of human and celestial support, you are able to use ten thousand ounces of gold in a day. If you are like this, a great person in the real sense, your task in life is done.

Question: In terms of my present state, what is the mind of open awareness of silence and emptiness?

Answer: What enables you to ask me this question is your mind of open awareness of emptiness and silence; why do you still seek outside instead of looking within? I will now point directly to the original mind in you, to enable you to awaken; you should clear your mind to listen to what I say.

Throughout the twenty-four hours of the day, you operate and act in all sorts of ways, seeing and hearing, laughing and talking, raging and rejoicing, affirming and denying: now tell me, ultimately who is it that can operate and act in this way?

If you say it is the physical body operating, then why is it that when people's lives have just ended and their bodies have not yet decomposed at all, their eyes cannot see, their ears cannot hear, their noses cannot smell, their tongues cannot talk, their bodies do not move, their hands do not grip, their feet do not step? So we know that what can see, hear, and act must be your basic mind, not your physical body.

Indeed, the gross elements of this physical body are inherently empty, like images in a mirror, like the moon reflected in water, like images in a mirror, like the moon reflected in water; how can they be capable of perfectly clear and constant awareness, thoroughly lucid, sensitive and effective, with countless subtle functions? Thus it is said, "Spiritual powers and subtle functions – drawing water and hauling wood."

But there are many ways of access to the principle. I will point out one entryway, by which you can return to the source. Do you hear the cawing of the crows and the chattering of the jays?

[Student's response:] I hear them.

Now turn around and listen to your hearing essence; are there still so many sounds in it?

[Student's response:] When I get here, all sounds and all discriminations are ungraspable.

Marvelous, marvelous! This is the Sound Seer's gateway into the principle. Now let me ask you further: You say that when you get here all sounds and all discriminations are totally ungraspable. Since they cannot be grasped, does that not mean there is empty space at such a time?

[Student's response:] Originally not empty, it is clearly not obscure.

What is the substance that is not empty?

[Student's response:] It has no form; there is no way to express it in words.

This is the life of the Buddhas and Zen masters; do not doubt anymore. Since it has no form, could it have size? Since it has no size, could it have bounds? Because it has no bounds, it has no far or near. With no far or near, there is no going or coming. Because there is no going or coming, there is no birth or death. Having no birth or death, it has no past or present. With no past or present, there is no delusion or enlightenment. There being no delusion or enlightenment, there is no ordinary or holy. Since there is nothing ordinary or holy, there is no pollution or purity. Because there is no pollution or purity, there is no judgment of right and wrong. With no judgment of right and wrong, all terms and statements are ungraspable. Once there are no such subjective states and false ideas, then all sorts of appearances and all sorts of labels are ungraspable. Is this not original empty silence, original nothingness?

However, in the state where all things are empty, open awareness is not obscured; this is not the same as being insentient. The release of your own spirit is the pure substance of your mind, with open awareness of empty silence. And this pure, open, tranquil mind is the supremely pure luminous mind of the Buddhas of past, present, and future. It is also the essence of awareness that is the root source of all living beings.

Those who realize this and keep to it sit in one suchness and are immutably liberated. Those who stray from this and turn away from it traverse the six courses and go round and round for eternity. Therefore it is said that straying from the One Mind to traverse the six courses is "departure," or "disturbance," while awakening to the realm of reality and returning to the One Mind is "arrival," or "tranquility."

Even though there is a difference between whether one strays from it or realizes it, nevertheless the basic source is one. That is why it is said that the Dharma refers to the minds of the living beings. This open, silent mind is not more in sages or less in ordinary people. Thus it is said that in sages it is knowledge that is nevertheless nor

flashy, and while it is hidden in the ordinary mind, yet it is not dimmed.

Since it is not more in sages or less in ordinary people, how could the Buddhas and Zen masters be different from other people? What makes them different from other people is simply that they are able to guard their own minds and thoughts. If you can trust completely, your feelings of doubt will stop all at once, allowing a healthy will to emerge, so that you can discover real true vision and understanding, personally tasting its flavor, so that you naturally arrive at the stage of spontaneous acknowledgment.

This is the understanding of someone who is going to cultivate the mind; there are no more stages or steps, so it is called sudden. It is like the saying that real faith is attained only when there is conformity to perfect Buddhahood in the basis of your faith.

Question: If there are no more stages after having realized this principle, why the need for subsequent practice, gradual cultivation, and gradual perfection?

Answer: I have already explained the meaning of gradual practice after enlightenment, but seeing that your doubts have not yet been resolved, I will explain it again. You should purify your mind so as to listen truly and hear accurately.

Ordinary people have been revolving in circles since time immemorial, being born and dying in five courses of existence. Because of clinging fixedly to self-images, false ideas, and misperceptions, the habits of illusion eventually become second nature to them. Even if they suddenly awaken in this life and realize that their essential nature is fundamentally empty and silent, no different from the Buddhas, nevertheless past habits are difficult to remove all at once.

Therefore they rage and rejoice as they encounter irritating and pleasing situations; judgments of right and wrong arise and pass away in profusion, and afflictions caused by outside influences are no different from before. If they do not make use of the power within transcendent insight, how can they quell ignorance and reach the state of great rest and tranquility? As it is said, "When suddenly awakened, although you are the same as Buddha, the energy of many lifetimes of habits is deep seated. Though the wind stops, the waves still billow; though noumenon is manifest, thoughts still invade."

Master Gao also said, "Time and again those who have sharp faculties awaken without much effort, then they become complacent and neglect further cultivation. Eventually they drift back into their former confusion, unable to escape revolving in circular routines." So how can we neglect subsequent cultivation because of a single awakening?

Therefore, after awakening it is necessary to always observe and examine yourself. When errant thoughts suddenly arise, do not go along with them at all; reduce them, reduce them, until you reach the point of noncontrivance, which alone is the ultimate

end. This is the ox-herding practice carried out by all illuminates after their enlightenment. Even though there is subsequent cultivation, they have already realized sudden enlightenment.

Errant thoughts are fundamentally empty; the essence of mind is fundamentally pure. To stop evil over and over without any stopping, and cultivate goodness over and over without any cultivating, is true stopping and cultivation. Therefore it is said that even as you fully cultivate myriad practices, only no thought is to be considered a basis.

In making a general distinction between the meanings of attaining enlightenment first and then cultivating it afterward, Guifeng said, “You suddenly realize this essence is originally free from afflictions; the essence of uncontaminated knowledge is inherently complete, no different from Buddha. To cultivate practice based on this is called the Zen of the highest vehicle, and it is also called the pure Zen of those who realize suchness. If you can cultivate its practice moment to moment, in a gradual manner you will naturally attain hundreds and thousands of spiritual states. This is the Zen that has been transmitted in the school of Bodhidharma.” Thus sudden enlightenment and gradual cultivation are like the two wheels of a chariot, it will not work if one is missing.

Some people, not knowing the essential emptiness of good and evil, think practical cultivation of mind means to sit rigidly immobile, subduing body and mind, like a rock placed on top of grass. This is ludicrous. That is why it is said that followers cut off confusion in every state of mind, yet the mind that does the cutting off is a brigand.

Just clearly observe that killing, stealing, rapine, and falsehood arise from nature, arising without any arising, and they will immediately be annulled. Then what further need to stop them is there? That is why it is said that we should not fear the arising of thoughts, just fear being slow to notice. It is also said, “When thoughts arise, immediately notice them, once you become aware of them, they are no longer there.”

Thus in the experience of enlightened people, even if there are afflictions associated with the external world, all of them produce the most subtle and refined flavor. Just be aware that confusion has no basis, that the illusory triple world is like smoke swirling in the wind, that the phantasmagoric six sense fields are like hot water melting ice.

If you can practice this moment to moment, not neglecting to be attentive, seeing to it that concentration and insight are equally sustained, then love and hate will naturally lighten and thin out, while compassion and wisdom will naturally increase in clarity, sinful deeds will naturally end, while meritorious actions will naturally progress.

When afflictions are ended, then birth and death stop. If subtle flowings are

permanently ended, the great knowledge of complete awareness alone remains, radiantly clear. Then you manifest millions of emanation bodies in the lands of the ten directions, responding to potential as sensed, like the moon appearing in the highest skies with its reflection distributed through myriad waters, functioning adaptively to liberate boundless beings with affinity, joyful and happy, without sorrow. This is called great enlightenment, honored by the world.

Question: The meaning of equally sustaining concentration and insight in the process of gradual cultivation is not really clear yet. Please explain further, with detailed instruction to break through confusion and lead us into the door of liberation.

Answer: If we set up principles for entry into inner truth, there may be a thousand methods, but all of them are within the categories of concentration and insight. To sum up their essentials, they are just the substance and function of our own essential nature. These are the aforementioned empty silence and open awareness.

Concentration is the substance, insight is the function. Being function identical to substance, insight is not apart from concentration, being substance identical to function, concentration is not apart from insight. As Caoqi said, “The ground of mind has no confusion, it is inherently stable, the mind of ground has no folly, it is inherently wise.”

If you awaken like this, then the detachment and illumination of silence and awareness are not two. This is the sudden way, in which one cultivates both concentration and insight together as a pair.

If we speak of first using profound silence to quell conditioned thinking and then using alert awareness to quell oblivion, there initial and subsequent remedies balanced and harmonized to lead into tranquility, this is considered the gradual way. This is the practice of those of inferior potentials, although they say alertness and silence are equally maintained, nevertheless they hold to tranquility as a practice. How could they be considered people who have completed their work, who are never apart from fundamental silence and fundamental awareness, naturally practicing simultaneous cultivation of both? As Caoqi said, “Spontaneous enlightenment and cultivation of practice are not inquietude, if you are a quietist from beginning to end, you are confused.”

Thus for adepts the principle of equally maintaining concentration and insight is not a matter of effort, it is spontaneous and effortless, with no ore particular time frame. When seeing and hearing, they are just so, when dressing and eating, they are just so, when defecating and urinating, they are just so, when conversing with people, they are just so, whatever they are doing, walking, standing, sitting, reclining, speaking,

silent, rejoicing, raging, at all times and in everything they are thus, like empty boats riding the waves, going along with the high and the low, like a river winding through the mountains, curving at curves and straight at straits, without minding any state of mind, buoyantly going along with nature today, going along with nature buoyantly tomorrow, adapting to all circumstances without inhibition or impediment, neither stopping nor fostering good or evil, simple and straightforward, without artificiality, perception normal.

Then there is not a single atom to make into an object, so why bother to work to clear anything away? Without a single thought producing feelings, there is no need for the power to forget mental objects.

However, those whose obstructions are thick, whose habits are heavy, whose vision is lowly, and whose mind is unstable, those in whom ignorance is powerful and insight is weak, those who cannot avoid being altered by disturbance and quietude in dealing with good and bad situations, whose minds are not peaceful, cannot do without the work of forgetting mental objects and clearing up the mind.

As it is said, when the six sense faculties are in a controlled state so that the mind does not go along with objects, that is called concentration, when mind and environment are both empty and radiant awareness is free from confusion, that is called insight.

Although this is a formal approach, a gradual approach to concentration and insight, something practiced by those of inferior potential, nevertheless it cannot be omitted in the context of remedial teachings and practices.

If there is a lot of excitement, you first use concentration to conform to noumenon and rein in the scattered mind, by not going along with mental objects, you merge with original silence.

If there is a lot of oblivion, then next you use insight to analyze things and contemplate emptiness, when consciousness is free from confusion, you merge with original awareness.

You quell random imagination by concentration, and quell insensibility by insight. When disturbance and quietude are both forgotten, curative work is done. Then when dealing with things, each passing thought returns to source, encountering situations each state of mind merges with the Way.

Only when you spontaneously practice both together are you considered free. If you are like this, you can truly be called one who maintains concentration and insight equally, and clearly sees Buddha-nature.

Question: According to the distinctions you have made, there are two meanings to equal maintenance of concentration and insight in the process of cultivation in the

aftermath of enlightenment. One of them involves spontaneous concentration and insight, the other involves formal concentration and insight.

In reference to spontaneous concentration and insight, you have said that naturally occurring silent awareness is originally uncontrived and there is not a single atom to make into an object, so why bother to work to clear anything away? Without a single thought producing feelings, there is no need for the power to forget mental objects.

In describing formal concentration and insight, you have spoken of conforming to principle, concentration the scattered mind, analyzing phenomena, contemplation emptiness, balancing and turning the mind to eliminate oblivion and distraction, so as to lead into noncontrivance. In making the distinction, you say that this is the gradual approach, which is practiced by those of lesser potential.

I am not without doubt about the two approaches to concentration and insight. If you say that they are to be practiced by one and the same individual, does that mean that one first relies on the dual practice of spontaneous concentration and insight, then after that also applies the curative work of formal concentration and insight? Or is it that one first relies on the formal approach to balance and tune out oblivion and distraction, and then after that enters thereby into spontaneous concentration and insight?

If we first rely on spontaneous concentration and insight until their curative effect is achieved, and then proceed to spontaneous concentration and insight, then this is the same as the gradual cultivation practiced prior to enlightenment in the gradual approach by those of inferior faculties, how could it be called a sudden approach, which is to first awaken and then cultivate practice afterward, using effortless effort?

If they are simultaneous, with neither preceding the other, yet the two kinds of concentration and insight, sudden and gradual, are different, how could they be practiced at once? Thus the individual taking the sudden approach relies on the spontaneous way, effortlessly going along with the flow, those of lesser potential taking the gradual approach follow the formal way, exerting effort at curative measures. The potentialities for which the two approaches are suited, the sudden and the gradual, are not the same, it is clear that one is superior to the other. How can initial enlightenment and subsequent practice both be analyzed into two types? Please give us a comprehensive explanation to enable us to put an end to doubt.

Answer: The analysis is perfectly clear, you are producing your own subjective doubts. Pursuing the words and creating interpretations, you create more and more doubt and confusion. When you get the meaning, you forget the words and do not bother to press the issue. But let me address the individually distinct modes of practice

within the two approaches.

To practice spontaneous concentration and insight is the sudden approach, using effortless effort, both operative yet both tranquil, spontaneously cultivation intrinsic essence, naturally fulfilling the Way of Buddhas. To practice formal concentration and insight is the gradual approach taken before enlightenment by those of lesser potential, using curative work, striving to direct each thought toward cutting off confusion and grasping quietude.

The practices of these two approaches, sudden and gradual, are individually different and not to be mixed up. When we also discuss formal curative practices within the process of gradual cultivation after enlightenment, this does not include everything that is practiced by those whose potentialities require a gradual approach. It is just a matter of temporarily taking expedient ways.

And why is this? Because among those who are suited to the sudden approach, there are also those whose potentials are superior and those whose potentials are inferior. Thus their practice cannot be judged by the same standard.

As for those whose afflictions are slight, who are light and easy in body and mind, who are detached from good in the midst of good and detached from evil in the midst of evil, who are unmoved by the eight winds and calmly accept the three kinds of sensations, they rely on spontaneous concentration and insight, which they cultivate simultaneously without effort, naturally real and uncontrived, always in meditation whether active or still, and fulfill the design of nature. Why should they pursue formal practices for curative purposes? When there is no illness, one does not seek medicine.

As for those who, in spite of having first realized sudden awakening, have deep afflictions and rigid mental habits, who give rise to feelings toward objects thought after thought, who create confrontations with situations in every state of mind, who are thereby befuddled and confused, killing and obscuring the normalcy of their silent awareness, it is appropriate for them to make provisional use of formal concentration and insight, not neglecting curative measures, balancing and turning their minds to eliminate oblivion and distraction, thereby to enter into noncontrivance. Even though they make temporary use of curative practices to tune out their habit energies, because they have already attained sudden realization of the fundamental purity of the essence of mind and the fundamental emptiness of afflictions, therefore they do not fall into the affected practice of those with inferior potentialities who take the gradual approach.

Why is this? When practice is cultivated before awakening, then even if you work unremittingly, cultivating practice every moment, you will conceive of one doubt after another as you go along and will be as yet unable to attain nonobstruction. It will be like

having something stuck in your chest, signs of uneasiness will always be present. If curative practices are developed to maturity over a long period of time, then body and mind seem lightened and eased of acquired pollution, but even though you are light and easy, as long as you have not cut through the root of doubt, curative practices are like stones placed on grass, you have still not attained freedom in the realm of birth and death. That is why it is said that when practice is before enlightenment, it is not real practice.

As for people who have realized enlightenment, even though they may have expedient techniques as curative measures, they never have a thought of doubt and do not fall into affected habits, over a period of time they naturally attain perfect accord. The naturally real subtle essence is spontaneously silently aware, focusing on all objects with each passing thought while annihilating all afflictions in each passing state of mind. This is not distinct from fulfilling supreme enlightenment by equal maintenance of spontaneous concentration and insight. So even though formal concentration and insight are practiced by those with potential suited for the gradual approach, for people who have realized enlightenment they can be said to transmute iron into gold.

If you know this, then how can you entertain doubts based on dualistic view, just because the two approaches to concentration and insight have an order of precedence? I hope that people who study the Way will examine and savor these words, and stop entertaining doubts and inhibiting themselves. If they have a strong will to seek supreme enlightenment, what other recourse do they have if they reject this?

Do not cling to the letter, just comprehend the meaning, referring each point to your own self, so as to merge with the original source. Then the knowledge that has no teacher will spontaneously appear, the pattern of natural reality will be perfectly clear, unobscured, and you will attain the body of wisdom, attaining enlightenment without depending on anyone else.

However, even though this sublime teaching is for everyone, unless they have already planted seeds of wisdom and have the faculties and capacity for the Great Vehicle, they cannot conceive a thought of genuine faith. And not only will they not believe in it, from time to time there are even those who slander and revile it, calling uninterrupted hell upon themselves.

Even if you do not believe or accept the teaching, once it passes by your ears it temporarily forms connection. The merit of this, the virtue of this, cannot be measured. As it says in *The Secret of Mind Alone*, “If you hear but do not believe, that still forms a cause of Buddhahood, if you study but do not attain, that still increase the blessings of humans and celestials, not losing the true foundation of Buddhahood. How much the

more infinite are the merit and virtue of those who hear and believe, study and attain, preserve intact and do not forget? How can their merit and virtue be measured?”

When we think back to past routine actions, who knows for how many thousands of aeons we have gone by way of darkness into uninterrupted hell, experiencing all sorts of misery of who knows how many kinds. So if we want to seek the Buddh Way, unless we meet good friends we will be forever sunk in darkness, unconsciously doing evil deeds. Sometimes we may reflect of this and unconsciously heave a sigh of lament. How can we relax and take it easy, when it means experiencing the same troubles all over again? And who knows who may ever again enable us to find this path of cultivation realization open and unobscured? This can be called a blind tortoise finding a piece of driftwood, a minute seed hitting a needle.

Wheat is more felicitous than the Way? If we get bored and backslide now, or if we get lazy and are always looking back, the minute we lose our lives we will fall back into evil dispositions and suffer all sorts of pains, then even if we wish to hear a single line of Buddhist teaching, believe and understand it, accept and hold it, in order to escape from the agony, how could that be possible?

When you are on the brink of destruction, it is useless to have regrets. I pray that people who practice the Way will not become heedless and not cling to greed and sensuality but will strive as diligently as if they were saving their heads from burning, not forgetting to notice that impermanence is swift, the body is like the morning dew, life is like the setting sunlight. Although we are here today, tomorrow cannot be guaranteed. Keep this in mind! Keep this in mind!

Even if you temporarily rely on mundane created goodness, you can still escape from the miserable routines of the worst states of being and attain exceptional rewards in higher states of being, experiencing all sorts of bliss. How much the more of this most profound teaching of the supreme vehicle, the merit and virtue produced just by momentarily conceiving faith in it are such that no simile can convey the slightest amount thereof.

As scripture says, “If someone fills the worlds of a billion world galaxy with precious substances and gives them as offerings to the living beings of those worlds, causing them all to be fulfilled, and also teaches all the living beings of those worlds to attain the four realizations, the merit of that would be measureless and boundless but would not be equal to the merit and virtue attained by thinking about this Teaching correctly for even the time it takes to eat a meal.”

So we know that this teaching of ours is most noble, most valuable, beyond comparison to any merit or virtue. Therefore scripture says, “A moment of pure

consciousness is the site of enlightenment, it is better than building countless jewel shrines. The jewel shrines will eventually crumble into dust, whereas an instant of pure consciousness attains true awakening.”

I pray that people who practice the Way will study and savor these words, keeping them earnestly in mind. If you do not liberate yourself in this lifetime, then in what lifetime will you liberate yourself? If you do not cultivate practice now, you will miss out for myriad aeons, but if you do cultivate practice now, even if it is difficult, it will gradually become easier, until the work progresses of itself.

How unfortunate it is that people today are starving, and yet when they encounter a royal fest, they do not have the sense to partake of it. They are sick, and yet when they meet a master physician, they do not have the sense to take the medicine prescribed. “I cannot do anything for those who do not ask themselves what to do.”

Furthermore, constructed worldly affairs have forms that can be seen and effects that can be tested. When people attain one thing, it is regarded as wonderful. This mind source of ours has no perceptible shape or visible form, there is no way to talk about it, no way to think about it. Therefore demons and outsiders have no opening to slander it, while the gods cannot adequately praise it. So how can ordinary people with shallow perception describe it?

What a pity! How can a frog in a well know wide the ocean is? How can a jackal roar the lion’s roar? So we know that people in this age of derelict religion, who when they hear this teaching marvel at it, believe and understand it, accept and hold it, have already worked for many sages and planted roots of goodness over countless aeons, hey are hose of highest potential, who have formed a profound affinity with the true basis of wisdom.

Therefore *The Diamond Scripture* says, “Those who are capable of engendering faith in these statements obviously have already planted roots of goodness in the company of infinite Buddhas.” It also says, “This is expounded for those who set out on the Great Vehicle, it is expounded for those who set out on the Supreme Vehicle.”

I pray that those who seek the Way will not be timid and weak but courageous and bold. The good causes of past aeons cannot yet be known, if you do not believe in excellence and are willing to be wretched, you will conceive ideas of difficulty and obstruction. If you do not cultivate this teaching now, even if you have good roots from former lifetimes, you are cutting them off now. Therefore you are in ever deeper difficulty, becoming even more alienated.

Now you have already arrived at the abode of the treasure, you should not go back empty-handed. Once you lose the human body, you cannot get it back even in ten

thousand aeons, please make sure to be prudent with it! Could anyone with wisdom who knew where the treasure is paradoxically fail to seek it, instead spending and eternity lamenting poverty? If you want to get some treasure, let go of the skin bag.