

Treatise on the Supreme Vehicle

By Hung Yen (Jap. Hongren), the 5th Patriarch

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1. In aiming for the enlightenment of sages to understand the true source, if the essential issue of cultivating the mind is not kept pure, there is no way for any practice to yield realization. If any good friends copy this text, be careful not to omit anything, lest you cause people of later times to err.

2. The basic essence of cultivating enlightenment should be discerned: it is the inherently complete and pure mind, in which there is no false discrimination, and body and mind are fundamentally pure, unborn, and undying. This is the basic teacher; this is better than invoking the Buddhas of the ten directions.

3. Question: How do we know that the inherent mind is fundamentally pure?

Answer: According to The Ten Stages Scripture, there is an indestructible Buddha-nature in the bodies of living beings, like the orb of the sun, its body luminous, round and full, vast and boundless; but because it is covered by the dark clouds of the five clusters, it cannot shine, like a lamp hidden inside a pitcher.

When there are clouds and fog everywhere, the world is dark, but that does not mean the sun has decomposed. Why is there no light? The light is never destroyed, it is just enshrouded by clouds and fog. The pure mind of all living beings is like this, merely covered up by the dark clouds of obsession with objects, arbitrary thoughts, psychological afflictions, and views and opinions. If you can just keep the mind still so that errant thoughts do not arise, the reality of nirvana will

naturally appear. This is how we know the inherent mind is originally pure.

4. Question: How do we know the inherent mind is fundamentally unborn and undying?

Answer: The Scripture Spoken by Vimalakirti says that suchness has no birth and suchness has no death. Suchness is true thusness, the Buddha-nature that is inherently pure. Purity is the source of mind; true thusness is always there and does not arise from conditions.

The scripture also says that all ordinary beings are Thus, and all sages and saints are also Thus. "All ordinary beings", refers to us; "all sages and saints" refers to the Buddhas.

Although their names and appearances differ, the objective nature of true thusness in their bodies is the same. Being unborn and undying, it is called Thus. That is how we know the inherent mind is fundamentally unborn and undying.

5. Question: Why call the inherent mind the basic teacher?

Answer: This true mind is natural and does not come from outside. It is not confined to cultivation in past, present, or future. The dearest and most intimate thing there could be is to preserve the mind yourself. If you know the mind, you will reach transcendence by preserving it. If you are confused about the mind and ignore it, you will fall into miserable states. Thus we know that the Buddhas of all times consider the inherent mind to be the basic teacher. Therefore a treatise says, "Preserve the mind with perfect clarity so that errant thoughts do not arise, and this is birthlessness.

6. Question: What does it mean to say that the inherent mind is better than invoking other Buddhas?

Answer: Even if you constantly invoke other Buddhas, you will not escape birth and death; but if you preserve your own basic mind, you will arrive at transcendence. The Diamond Cutter Scripture says that anyone who views Buddha in terms of form or seeks Buddha through sound is traveling an aberrant path and cannot see the real Buddha. Therefore it

is said that preserving the true mind is better than invoking other Buddhas.

The word "better", nevertheless, is only used to encourage people. In reality, the essence of the ultimate realization is equal, without duality.

7. Question: Since the true essence of Buddhas and ordinary beings is the same, why do Buddhas experience infinite happiness and unhindered freedom, without birth or death, while we ordinary beings fall into birth and death and suffer all sorts of pains?

Answer: The Buddhas of the ten directions realized the true nature of things and spontaneously perceive the source of mind; errant imagining does not arise, accurate awareness is not lost. The egoistic, possessive attitude disappears, so they are not subject to birth and death, they are ultimately tranquil; so obviously all happiness naturally comes to them.

Ordinary people lose sight of the nature of reality and do not know the basis of mind. Arbitrarily fixating on all sorts of objects, they do not cultivate awareness; therefore love and

hatred arise. Because of love and hatred, the vessel of mind cracks and leaks. Because the vessel of mind cracks and leaks, there is birth and death. Because there is birth and death, all miseries naturally appear.

The Mind King Scripture says that true thusness, the Buddha-nature, is submerged in the ocean of cognition, perception, and sense, bobbing up and down in birth and death, unable to escape. Effort should be made to preserve the basic true mind, so that arbitrary thoughts do not arise, egoistic and possessive attitudes vanish, and you spontaneously realize

equality and unity with the Buddhas.

8. Question: If the Buddha-nature that is truly Thus is one and the same, then when one is deluded, everyone should be deluded, and when one is enlightened, everyone should be enlightened. Why is it that when Buddhas awaken to this nature, the ignorance and confusion of ordinary people remain the same?

Answer: From here on, we enter the domain of the inconceivable, beyond the reach of ordinary people. Enlightenment is realized by knowing mind; confusion happens because of losing touch with nature. If conditions meet, they meet; no fixed statement can be made. Just trust in the truth and preserve your inherently basic mind.

This is why The Scripture Spoken by Vimalakirti says that there is neither selfhood nor otherness, that reality has never been born and does not presently perish. This is realizing the dualistic extremism of identification and alienation, thus entering into non-discriminatory knowledge. If you understand this point, then preserving the mind is foremost among the essentials of the teachings on practical knowledge. This practice of preserving the mind is the basis of nirvana, the essential doorway into enlightenment, the source of all the scriptures, and the progenitor of the Buddhas of all times.

9. Question: How do we know that preserving the fundamental true mind is the basis of nirvana?

Answer: The essence of nirvana is tranquil, uncontrived bliss. Realize your own mind is the true mind, and errant imagining ceases. When errant imagining ceases, you are accurately aware. By virtue of accurate awareness, dispassionately perceptive knowledge arises. By dispassionately perceptive knowledge, one finds out the nature of reality. By finding out the nature of reality, one attains nirvana. This is how we know that preserving the fundamental true mind is the basis of

nirvana.

10. Question: How do we know that preserving the fundamental true mind is the essential doorway into enlightenment?

Answer: "Even if you draw a figure of a Buddha with your finger, or perform countless virtuous deeds..."-teachings like this are just Buddha's instructions for ignorant people to create causes for better future states, and even for seeing Buddha. As for those who wish to attain Buddhahood quickly on their own, they should preserve the basic true mind. The Buddhas of past, present, and future are infinite, but not one of them attained Buddhahood without preserving the basic true mind. Therefore a scripture says that if you keep the mind on one point, there is nothing that cannot be accomplished. This is how we know that preserving the basic true mind is the essential doorway into enlightenment.

11. Question: How do we know that preserving the basic true mind is the source of all the scriptures?

Answer: In the scriptures, the Buddha explains all the causes and conditions, results and consequences, of all sins and virtues, drawing up even the mountains, rivers, earth, grasses, trees, and other beings for countless parables, similes, metaphors, on occasion manifesting countless varieties of spiritual powers and emanations. This is all because Buddha teaches people who lack insight but have all sorts of desires and innumerable different mentalities.

On this account, the Buddha uses means suited to individual mentalities in order to lead people into universal truth. Once we know that the Buddha-nature in all beings is as pure as the sun behind the clouds, if we just preserve the basic true mind with perfect clarity, the clouds of errant thoughts will come to an end, and the sun of insight will emerge; what is the need or so much more study of knowledge of the pains of birth and death, of all sorts of doctrines and principles, and of the affairs of past, present, and future? It is like wiping the dust off a mirror; the clarity appears spontaneously when the dust is all gone.

Thus whatever is learned in the present unenlightened mind is worthless. If you can maintain accurate awareness clearly, what you learn in the uncontrived mind is true learning.

But even though I call it real learning, ultimately there is nothing learned. Why? Because both the self and nirvana are empty; there is no more two, not even one. Thus there is nothing learned; but even though phenomena are essentially empty, it is necessary to preserve the basic true mind with perfect clarity, because then delusive thoughts do not arise, and egoism and possessiveness disappear. The Nirvana Scripture says, "Those who know the Buddha does not preach anything are called fully learned." This is how we know that preserving the basic true mind is the source of all scriptures.

12. Question: Why is maintaining awareness of the mind the patriarch of all the Buddhas past, present, and future?

Answer: All the Buddhas of the past, present, and future are generated within one's own consciousness. When you do not generate false thoughts, the Buddhas are generated within your consciousness. When your illusions of personal possession have been extinguished,

the Buddhas are generated within your consciousness. You will only achieve buddhahood by maintaining awareness of the True Mind. Therefore, maintaining awareness of the mind is the patriarch of all the Buddhas of past, present, and future.

If one were to expand upon the four previous topics, how could one ever explain them completely? My only desire is that you discern the fundamental mind for yourselves. Therefore, I sincerely tell you: Make effort! Make effort!

I base my teaching on the Lotus Sutra in which the Buddha says: "I have presented you with a great cart and a treasure of valuables, including bright jewels and wondrous medicines. Even so, you do not take them. What extreme suffering! Alas, alas!" If you can cease generating false thoughts and the illusion of personal possessions, then all the various types of merit will become perfect and complete. Do not try to search outside yourself, which only leads to the suffering of samsara.

Maintain the same state of mind in every moment of thought, in every phase of mental activity. Do not enjoy the present while planting seeds of future suffering; by doing so you only deceive yourself and others and cannot escape from the realm of birth and death. Make effort! Make effort! Although it may seem futile now, your present efforts constitute the causes for your future enlightenment. Do not let time pass in vain while only wasting energy.

If you are just beginning to practice sitting meditation, then do so according to the Sutra of the Contemplation of Amitabha: Sit properly with the body erect, closing the eyes and mouth. Look straight ahead with the mind, visualizing a sun at an appropriate distance away. Maintain this image continuously without stopping. Regulate your breath so that it does not sound alternately coarse and fine, as this can make you sick.

If you sit in meditation at night, you may experience all kinds of good and bad psychological states; enter into any of the blue, yellow, red, and white samadhis; witness your own body producing light; observe the physical characteristics of the Tathagata; or experience various other transformations. When you perceive such things, concentrate the mind and do not become attached to them. They are all non-substantial manifestations of false thinking.

The sutra says: "All the countries of the ten directions are non-substantial, like space." Also, "The triple realm is an empty apparition that is solely the creation of the individual mind." Do not worry if you cannot achieve concentration and do not experience the various psychological states. Just constantly maintain clear awareness of the True Mind in all your actions.

If you can stop generating false thoughts and the illusion of personal possessions, then you will realize that all the myriad dharmas are nothing other than manifestations of your own mind. The Buddhas only preach extensively using numerous verbal teachings and metaphors because the mental tendencies of sentient beings differ, necessitating a variety of teachings. In actuality, the mind is the basic subject of the eighty-four thousand doctrines, the ranking of the three vehicles, and the definitions of the seventy-two stages of sages and wise men.

To be able to discern one's own inherent mind and improve the ability to maintain awareness of it with every moment of thought is equivalent to constantly making pious offerings to the entire Buddhist canon and to all the Buddhas in the ten directions of space, who are as

numerous as the sands of the River Ganges. It is equivalent to constantly turning the wheel of the Dharma with every moment of thought.

13. Question: What is meant by 'indifference'?

Answer: When people who concentrate their minds focus on outward objects, and their coarse mentalities stop for a time because of this, they inwardly refine their true mind; when the mind is not yet clear and pure, and they examine it constantly in whatsoever act they are engaging in, and are still unable to perceive the mind source independently, this is called an indifferent mind.

This is still a contaminated mind which as yet does not escape the great sickness of birth and death. As for those who don't preserve the true mind at all, they sink into the bitter sea of birth and death. When will they ever escape? How pitiful! Work, work!

The sutras say that if people's true sincerity doesn't arise from within themselves, even if they meet countless Buddhas of the past, present and future, they can do nothing. The Sutras also say that when people know the mind, they liberate themselves; Buddhas cannot liberate people. If Buddha could liberate people, why have people like ourselves not attained enlightenment despite the fact that there have been innumerable Buddhas in the past? It is because true sincerity does not come from within that people sink in the bitter sea. Work, work! With diligence see the fundamental mind; don't allow for random pollution. The past is not your concern; we can never catch up with what has gone by. I urge all those who have been able to hear, at this present time, this subtle teaching to comprehend these words: realize that perceiving mind is the greatest path.

If you are not willing to practice with great sincerity in the quest for enlightenment and the experience of infinite freedom and happiness [it brings], and rather start making a lot of clamor following after worldly things, searching after honor and profit with greed, you will fall into a vast hell and suffer all sorts of pain. What can you do about it? How will you cope? What will you do?

Work, work! Wear crummy clothes, eat plain food, and preserve your fundamental, true mind with perfect clarity. Appear stupid and inarticulate. This will conserve all energy, and is very effective. This how very earnest people are.

Ignorant worldly folk who don't understand this principle will go through many hardships in ignorance to carry out apparent good on a large scale. They wish to be liberated, but return again to birth & death. Those who maintain perfectly clear right mindfulness and save others to, however, are most powerful Bodhisattvas.

I am clearly saying to you all that preserving the mind is the main thing to do; if you don't make any efforts to preserve the mind, you are very, very foolish. By rejecting the here & now, you will suffer misery all your life; by hoping for the future, you suffer misfortune for myriad kalpas. If I indulge you, I don't know what else there is to say. The one who remains unmoved by the gusts of the eight winds is the real Jewel-Mountain. One who knows the results just does and says with skillfulness, like water, adapting to all circumstances, giving out antidotes in accord with illnesses; one who can perform all this and not bring about false thoughts, so that egotism and the desire to possess die out, has truly gone beyond the world.

When the Buddha was still living, there was no end to his praise of this; I tell you about it now to encourage you diligently. If you don't bring to mind vain thoughts and are empty of egotism and the desire to possess, then you have gone beyond the world.

14. Question: What is the disappearing of egotism and the desire to possess?

Answer: When you have any desire to surpass other people, or any thoughts of your own ability, this is egotism and the desire to possess. These are an illness compared with nirvana. Thus, the Nirvana Sutra says, "Space contains all things yet does not hold the thought it can contain all things." That's a metaphor for the disappearing of egotism and the desire to possess, from which you can go on to indestructible concentration.

15. Question: Adepts who seek the true, everlasting peace, but who only care about impermanent, base, worldly virtues and don't care about the true, everlasting, subtle virtues of Absolute Truth haven't seen the principle, and only want to arouse the mind to focus on doctrines which are thought about; as soon as conscious awareness arises, it is polluted. But if one just wants to forget about the mind, this is the darkness of ignorance; it isn't in accord with the true principle either. And if one only wants to neither to stop the mind or focus on principles, this is to incorrectly grasp emptiness, and living like a beast instead of a human. When this happens, if one doesn't have any methods of concentration / insight and can't understand how to clearly see the Buddha-nature, the adept only gets befuddled - how is one to go beyond this and arrive at total nirvana? Please point out the true mind.

16. Answer: You only need to have total confidence and effective determination. Gently quiet your mind, and I will teach you once again.

You should make your own mind & body uncluttered and serene, unentangled in any objects whatsoever. Sit straight, rightly aware, and fine-tune your breath so it is well adjusted. Examine your mind to see it as neither inside nor outside nor in between. Watch it calmly, carefully and objectively; when you master this, you clearly see that the mind's consciousness moves in a flow, like a water-current or like heat waves rising without end.

When you have seen this consciousness, you find it is neither out nor in: without hurry, objectively & calmly observe it. When you master this, then melt and flux over and over, empty yet solid, profoundly stable, and then the flowing consciousness will disappear.

Those who get this consciousness to disappear will then destroy the obstructing confusions of the Bodhisattvas of the ten stages. Once this consciousness is gone, then the mind is open and still, quiet, serene and calm, perfectly pure, and enormously stable.

I can't speak about it any further. If you want to attain it, take up the chapter in the Nirvana Sutra on the indestructible body, and the chapter in the Vimalakirti sutra on seeing the Immovable Buddha: contemplate and reflect on them without hurry, search them carefully and read them thoroughly. If you are totally familiar with these sutras and can actually maintain this mind in whatever you are doing - even in the face of the five desires and eight winds - then your pure conduct will be set firmly and your task will be complete; in the end you will no longer be subjected to a body that is born and dies.

The five desires are for images, tones, aromas, tastes and tangibles. The eight winds are gain and loss, praise and blame, honor and insult, pain and pleasure. This is where adepts polish and refine the Buddha-nature; it's no wonder that they do not attain freedom in this

body. A sutra says, "If there is no place for a Buddha to abide in the world, Bodhisattvas cannot actually function."

If you desire to be free of this conditioned body, do not discriminate between the sharpness of dullness of your faculties in the past; the best require a single moment, and the worst take countless eons.

If you've got the strength and time to develop a altruistic roots of virtues according to people's natures so as to help your own self as well as others, adorning a Buddha-land, you must comprehend the Four Reliances and find out what reality actually is like. If you rely on clinging to the letter, you will miss the true source.

For monks learning to study the Path as renunciants, the fact is that "home-leaving" means leaving the fetters of birth & death: that's real "home-leaving".

When right mindfulness is totally present and cultivation of the path is successful, even if your limbs are cut off, so long as you don't lose your right mindfulness at the time of death, you will instantly attain Buddhahood.

I have written the foregoing treatise simply by taking the sense of sutras according to faith; in truth, I don't know by perfectly complete experience. If there is anything opposed to the Buddha's principles, I will willingly repent and get rid of it; whatsoever is in accord with the Buddha's path, however, I donate to all beings, hoping they all will get to know the fundamental mind and attain enlightenment at once. May those who listen to this work become Buddhas in the future; I hope you will save my followers first.

17. Question: From start to finish, everything in this treatise reveals that the intrinsic mind is the Way; does it belong to the category of actualization or practice?

Answer: The heart of this treatise is to show the One Vehicle. Its main intent is to guide the ignorant so that they may free themselves from birth & death. Only then can they save others. Speaking only of helping oneself and of helping others is characteristic of the practice-category; whosoever practices in harmony with the text will be the first to attain Buddhahood. If I am lying to you, in the future I will fall into 18 hells. I promise to heaven and earth: if I am untruthful, let me be eaten by tigers and wolves life after life.

Treatise on the Essentials of Cultivating the Mind
Hung-jen (early 8th century)

Question: Why is maintaining awareness of the mind the fundamental basis of nirvana?

Answer: The essence of what is called nirvana is serene extinction. It is unconditioned and pleasant. When one's mind is True, false thoughts cease. When false thoughts cease, the result is correct mindfulness. Having correct mindfulness leads to the generation of the wisdom of serene illumination, which in turn means that one achieves total comprehension of the Dharma Nature. By comprehending the Dharma Nature, one achieves nirvana. Therefore, maintaining awareness of the mind is the fundamental basis of nirvana.

Question: Why is maintaining awareness of the mind the essential gateway for entering the

path?

Answer: The Buddha teaches that even actions as seemingly trivial as raising the fingers of a single hand to draw an image of the Buddha can create merit as great as the sands of the River Ganges. However, this is just his way of enticing foolish sentient beings to create superior karmic conditions whereby they will see the Buddha and become enlightened in the future. If you wish to achieve buddhahood quickly in your own body, maintain awareness of the True Mind.

The Buddhas of the past, present, and future are incalculable and infinite in number, and every single one of them achieved buddhahood by maintaining awareness of the True Mind. Therefore, the sutra says: "When one fixes the mind in a single location, there is nothing it cannot accomplish." Therefore, maintaining awareness of the True mind is the essential gateway for entering the path.

Question: Why is maintaining the True Mind the basic principle of the entire Buddhist canon?

Answer: Throughout the canon, the Tathagata preaches extensively about all types of transgression and good fortune, causes and conditions, and rewards and retributions. He also draws upon all the various things of this world, mountains, rivers, the earth, plants, trees, etc. to make innumerable metaphors. He also manifests innumerable supernormal powers and various kinds of transformations. All these are just the Buddha's way of teaching foolish sentient beings. Since they have various kinds of desires and a myriad of psychological differences, the Tathagata draws them into permanent bliss according to their mental tendencies.

Understand clearly that the Buddha Nature embodied within sentient beings is inherently pure, like a sun underlaid by clouds. By just distinctly maintaining awareness of the True Mind, the clouds of false thoughts will go away, and the sun of wisdom will appear. Why make any further study of knowledge based on the senses, which only leads to the suffering of samsara?

All concepts, as well as affairs of the three periods of time, should be understood according to the metaphor of polishing a mirror: When the dust is gone the Nature naturally becomes manifest. That which is learned by the ignorant mind is completely useless. True learning is that which is learned by the inactive or unconditioned, wu wei mind, which never ceases correct mindfulness. Although this is called "true learning," ultimately there is nothing to be learned. Why is this?

Because the self and nirvana are both nonsubstantial, they are neither different nor the same. Therefore, the essential principle of the words "nothing to be learned" is true.

One must maintain clear awareness of the True Mind without generating false thoughts or the illusion of personal possession. Therefore, the Nirvana Sutra says: "To understand that the Buddha does not actually preach the Dharma is called having sufficiently listened to the Buddha's preaching." Therefore, maintaining awareness of the True Mind is the basic principle of the entire canon.

Question: Why is maintaining awareness of the mind the patriarch of all the Buddhas past, present, and future?

Answer: All the Buddhas of the past, present, and future are generated within one's own consciousness. When you do not generate false thoughts, the Buddhas are generated within your consciousness. When your illusions of personal possession have been extinguished, the Buddhas are generated within your consciousness. You will only achieve buddhahood by maintaining awareness of the True Mind. Therefore, maintaining awareness of the mind is the patriarch of all the Buddhas of past, present, and future.

If one were to expand upon the four previous topics, how could one ever explain them completely? My only desire is that you discern the fundamental mind for yourselves. Therefore, I sincerely tell you: Make effort! Make effort!

I base my teaching on the Lotus Sutra in which the Buddha says: "I have presented you with a great cart and a treasure of valuables, including bright jewels and wondrous medicines. Even so, you do not take them. What extreme suffering! Alas, alas!" If you can cease generating false thoughts and the illusion of personal possessions, then all the various types of merit will become perfect and complete. Do not try to search outside yourself, which only leads to the suffering of samsara.

Maintain the same state of mind in every moment of thought, in every phase of mental activity. Do not enjoy the present while planting seeds of future suffering; by doing so you only deceive yourself and others and cannot escape from the realm of birth and death. Make effort! Make effort! Although it may seem futile now, your present efforts constitute the causes for your future enlightenment. Do not let time pass in vain while only wasting energy.

If you are just beginning to practice sitting meditation, then do so according to the Sutra of the Contemplation of Amitabha: Sit properly with the body erect, closing the eyes and mouth. Look straight ahead with the mind, visualizing a sun at an appropriate distance away. Maintain this image continuously without stopping. Regulate your breath so that it does not sound alternately coarse and fine, as this can make you sick.

If you sit in meditation at night, you may experience all kinds of good and bad psychological states; enter into any of the blue, yellow, red, and white samadhis; witness your own body producing light; observe the physical characteristics of the Tathagata; or experience various other transformations. When you perceive such things, concentrate the mind and do not become attached to them. They are all non-substantial manifestations of false thinking.

The sutra says: "All the countries of the ten directions are non-substantial, like space." Also, "The triple realm is an empty apparition that is solely the creation of the individual mind." Do not worry if you cannot achieve concentration and do not experience the various psychological states. Just constantly maintain clear awareness of the True Mind in all your actions.

If you can stop generating false thoughts and the illusion of personal possessions, then you will realize that all the myriad dharmas are nothing other than manifestations of your own mind. The Buddhas only preach extensively using numerous verbal teachings and metaphors because the mental tendencies of sentient beings differ, necessitating a variety of teachings. In actuality, the mind is the basic subject of the eighty-four thousand doctrines, the ranking of the three vehicles, and the definitions of the seventy-two stages of sages and wise men.

To be able to discern one's own inherent mind and improve the ability to maintain awareness

of it with every moment of thought is equivalent to constantly making pious offerings to the entire Buddhist canon and to all the Buddhas in the ten directions of space, who are as numerous as the sands of the River Ganges. It is equivalent to constantly turning the wheel of the Dharma with every moment of thought.

~Hung-jen (early 8th century)

Taken from "The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism"
by John R. McRae 1986



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Daman Hongren – Essentials of Cultivating the Mind

compiled by Satyavayu of Touching Earth Sangha

<http://touchingearth.info/dregs/>

The essence of cultivating the Way is to discern that one's own body-mind awareness is inherently pure, not subject to birth or death, and without division. Perfect and complete in its self-nature, present awareness is the fundamental teacher. Focusing on it exclusively is superior to reflecting on the awakened ones of the ten directions.

How do you know that one's own awareness is inherently pure?...To use the bright sun as a metaphor: even if the clouds and mists of the world were to arise together in all directions so that the world became dark, still, how could the sun ever be extinguished?... The sun's light is not destroyed, but merely deflected by the clouds and mists. The pure mind possessed by all sentient beings is like this – simply covered by the layered clouds of discriminative thinking, false ideas, and ascriptive views. If you just distinctly maintain awareness of present clear mind and don't manufacture false thoughts, then the reality-sun of nirvana will be naturally manifested. That is how you can experience that your own mind is inherently pure.

How do you know that one's own awareness is inherently not subject to birth and death? The Vimalakirti Sutra says: "Suchness is without birth, suchness is without death." The term "suchness" refers to the nature of awakened presence, the mind which is the source of all phenomena... Suchness is fundamentally, originally existent, not conditionally produced. The sutra also says, "ordinary beings all embody suchness; sages and wise ones also embody suchness." Although the names and characteristics of ordinary and awakened beings are

different, the essential reality of suchness embodied in each is identical and is not subject to birth or death... This is how it is realized that one's own mind is inherently not subject to birth and death.

Why is the mind the fundamental teacher? The true mind exists of itself and does not come from outside. As a teacher, it does not even require any tuition fee!... If you discern the “suchness” of the mind and maintain awareness of it, you reach the shore of nirvana... By clearly maintaining awareness of the mind, the false mind (of attachment to ideas) is not activated and you reach the birthless. Therefore we understand that the mind is the fundamental teacher.

Why is focusing on your own mind superior to reflecting on the awakened ones of the ten directions? You cannot transcend birth and death by constantly imagining awakened beings divorced from yourself, but you reach the shore of nirvana by maintaining awareness of your own fundamental mind. The Buddha says in the Diamond Sutra, “Anyone who views me in terms of form and seeks me by sound is practicing a mistaken path and is unable to see the one who is ‘thus-come.’” Therefore we realize that maintaining awareness of (your own) true mind is superior to reflecting on awakened ones divorced from oneself. (But this word “superior” is only used for encouragement in the context of practice – In reality, the essence of the ultimate fruit of awakening is harmoniously inclusive and without opposing dualities)... If you can maintain awareness of the true mind without generating false thoughts or the illusion of personal possession, then you will automatically be equal to the Awakened Ones.

The nature of true presence is the core of both ordinary beings and awakened ones just the same. Why, then, are awakened ones liberated, while ordinary beings are deluded? At this point we enter the inconceivable which cannot be understood by the ordinary mind. You awaken by discerning the true mind, you become deluded by losing awareness of this true nature. If the conditions (for awakening) come together, then they come together – it cannot be definitively explained. Simply commit to your conviction of the ultimate truth, and maintain awareness of your own true mind. Do this constantly with focused energy, without fabricating false thoughts or the illusion of personal possession. Awakening then manifests of itself.

If you ask a lot of questions, the number of conceptual terms will simply become greater and greater. If you want to understand the essential point of the Awakened Way – then know that maintaining awareness of mind is the fundamental basis of nirvana, the essential gateway for entering the path, the basic principle of all the scriptures, and the teacher of all the awakened ones of the past, present, and future...

The essence of what is called nirvana is serene dissolution... When one's mind focuses on the true, false thoughts dissolve. When false thoughts cease, correct mindfulness arises, generating the wisdom of serene illumination, or the total comprehension of reality-nature, which is also called the experience of nirvana.

All concepts, and all affairs of past, present, and future, should be seen as dust on a mirror – when the dust is gone, true nature naturally becomes clearly visible. That which is learned by the deluded mind is completely useless. True learning is what is learned by the unconditioned mind, which never ceases perfect awareness. Although we can call this “true learning,” ultimately there is nothing to be learned. Why? Because “self” and “liberation” are both insubstantial, they are neither different nor the same. Thus, the essential principle of “nothing to be learned” is evident.

All the Awakened Ones of the past, present, and future are born within your own consciousness. When you do not give birth to false thoughts, when your illusions of personal possession have been relinquished, the awakened one is born within your own consciousness. You can only experience awakening by maintaining awareness of true mind.

My only desire is that you discern this fundamental mind for yourself. Therefore, I employ you: Make effort! Make effort! All the myriad scriptures and treatises say nothing other than that maintaining the true mind is the essential way to awakening... Do not try to search outside of yourself – this only leads to the suffering of continued conventional patterns. Just maintain the same mind of awareness in every moment of thought, and in all phases of mental activity.

When you sit...you may experience all kinds of good and bad psychological states...when you perceive such things, concentrate the mind and do not become attached to them. They are all insubstantial manifestations of deluded thinking. A scripture says, “The triple realm is an empty apparition that is solely the creation of the individual mind.” Do not worry if you cannot achieve special concentration or do not experience the various states of meditative absorption – just constantly maintain clear awareness of the present mind in all your actions.

If you stop generating delusive ideas and the illusion of personal possession, the you will realize that all the myriad phenomena are nothing other than manifestations of your own mind. The awakened sages only preach with extensive and verbal teachings because the mental tendencies of sentient beings differ, and require a variety of responses. In actuality, the (present) mind is the basic subject of all the myriad teachings and philosophies.

Make effort and remain humble. It is rare to get a chance to hear this essential teaching. Of those that hear it, very few are able to practice it... With great care keep your self clam, moderate your sensory activity, and attentively view the mind that is the source of all phenomena. Allow it to shine distinctly and clearly at all times, without letting yourself fall into mental blankness.

What is mental blankness? People who practice special concentration exercises can inhibit the true mind by being dependent on particular sensory activities, dulled states of mind, or restricted breathing...Although they may practice constantly, they cannot experience true clarity; they cannot reveal the mind which is the source of all phenomena. This is called blankness.

One can have success with minimal exertion by merely donning tattered robes, eating simple food, and clearly maintaining awareness of the present mind. Deluded people of the world do not understand this truth and put themselves through great anguish in their ignorance. Hoping to achieve liberation, they cultivate a broad range of superficial practices to gain merit – only to fall into the inevitable discontent of habitual cyclic existence.

(So just) make your body and mind perfectly empty and peaceful, without any discriminative thinking at all. Sit properly with the body erect. Regulate the breath and concentrate the mind so it is not within you, not outside of you, and not in any location in between. Do this carefully but naturally. View your own consciousness tranquilly and attentively, so you can see how it is always moving, like flowing water or a glittering mirage. After you have perceived this consciousness, simply continue to observe it gently and naturally, without getting fixed anywhere inside or outside of yourself. Do this calmly and attentively until its fluctuations dissolve into peaceful stability. This flowing consciousness will disappear like a gust of wind.

When this consciousness disappears, all illusions disappear along with it...one's own mind becomes peacefully stable, and pure. I cannot describe it any further.

Anyone who can keep this mind in sight during all activities and in the face of the desires for forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and touch, and in the midst of the winds of success and failure, criticism and praise, honor and abuse, suffering and pleasure, has established a pure practice (brahmacarya), and will never again be born into the realm of birth and death.

My disciples have recorded this treatise from my oral teachings so that readers might intuitively resonate with the words and perceive the meaning behind them... I want everyone to discern their fundamental mind and experience awakening at once.

The basic principle of this teaching is the the manifestation of the one vehicle. It's ultimate intention is to lead the deluded to liberation, allowing them to become free from the realm of birth and death themselves, and to help others to cross over to the other shore of nirvana. But this treatise only speaks of the benefit to oneself, it does not elaborate on how to benefit others. It should be understood as a gate of direct practice. Anyone who practices according to these instructions will realize awakening immediately.

From the Xiu Xin Yao Lun (c.700) written by members of the "East Mountain School" (Hongren's students) as a summary of Master Hongren's teaching. Based on a translation by John R. McRae.

A monk asked Master Hongren, "Why don't we study the way of awakening in cities where there are many people, instead of at places deep in the mountains?"

Hongren answered, "The timbers needed to make a great building originally came from secluded mountain valleys. They can't be grown where many people are congregated. Since they are far from crowds of people, they can't be chopped down or harmed by axes, and are able to grow into great trees, which later can be used to make central beams and pillars. So in studying the teaching, one should find refuge for the spirit in remote mountain valleys, escaping far from the troubles of the dusty world. People should nourish their nature in deep mountains, keeping away from worldly affairs for a long time. When not always confronting common affairs the mind will naturally become at ease. Studying Zen in this way is like planting a tree, with the result that later it can bear fruit."

During this era the great teacher Hongren only sat peacefully in an upright position and did not compile writings. He taught Zen orally to his personal disciples, quietly passing on the teaching to many others.

From The Record of the Lankavatara Masters (Lengqie Shizi Ji, before 750), based on a translation by Andy Ferguson.

Upon Master 大鑿道信 Dayi Daoxin's (580-651) death, he was succeeded by his most important disciple, Daman Hongren, a native of the region who had been with Daoxin from

the beginning. Master Hongren continued Daoxin's work of establishing a monastic community focused exclusively on the study and practice of Zen. As the reputation of the master and community spread, the population greatly increased and Hongren started another center nine miles east at Fengmaoshan, which also came to be known as "East Mountain" (Dongshan). His community was known as the "East Mountain School" and out of this group came many prominent masters who spread the Zen movement throughout China including Masters Shenxiu, Hui'an, and Huineng