

Secrets on Cultivating the Mind

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The triple world is blazing in defilement as if it were a house on fire. How can you bear to tarry here and complacently undergo such long suffering? If you wish to avoid wandering in samsara there is no better way than to seek Buddhahood. If you want to become a Buddha, understand that Buddha is the mind. How can you search for the mind in the far distance? It is not outside the body. The Physical body is a phantom, for it is subject to birth and death; the true mind is like space, for it neither ends nor changes. Therefore it is said, “These hundred bones will crumble and return to fire and wind. But One Thing is eternally numinous and covers heaven and earth.”

It is tragic. People have been deluded for so long. They do not recognize that their own minds are the true Buddhas. They want to search for the dharma, yet they still look far away for holy ones. They want to search for the Buddha, yet they will not observe their own minds. If they aspire to the path of Buddhahood while obstinately holding to their feeling that the Buddha is outside the mind or the dharma is outside the nature, then, even though they pass through kalapas as numerous as dust motes, burning their bodies, charring their arms, crushing their bones and exposing their marrow, or else write sutra with their own blood, never lying down to sleep, eating only one offering a day at the hour of the Hare [5 to 7 Am] , or even studying through the entire *tripitaka* and cultivating all sorts of ascetic practices, it is like trying to make rice by boiling sand—it will only add to their tribulation. If they would only understand their own minds, then, without searching, approaches to dharma as numerous as the sands of the Ganges and uncountable sublime meanings would all be understood. As the World Honored One said, “I see that all sentient beings everywhere are endowed with a *tathagata*’s wisdom and virtue.” He also said, “All the illusory guises in which sentient beings appear take shape in the sublime mind of the *tathagata*’s complete enlightenment.” Consequently, you should know that outside this mind there is no Buddhahood which can be attained. All the Buddhas of the past were merely persons who understood their minds. All the sages and saints of the present are likewise merely persons who have cultivated their minds. All future meditations should rely on this dharma as well.

I hope that you who cultivate the path will never search outside. The nature of the mind is unstained; it is originally whole and complete in itself. If you will only leave behind false conditioning, you will be “Such” like the Buddha.

Question; If you say that the Buddha-nature exists in the body right now, then, since it is in the body, it is not separate from us ordinary men. So why can we not see this Buddha-nature now?

Please explain this further to enlighten us on this point.

Chinul; It is in your body, but you do not see it. Ultimately, what is that thing which during the twelve periods of the day knows hunger and thirst, cold and heat, anger and joy? This physical body is synthesis of our conditions: earth, water, fire, and wind. Since matter is passive and insentient how can it see, hear, sense, and know? That which is able to see, hear, sense and know is perforce you Buddha-nature. For this reason, Lin-chi said, "The four great elements do not know how to expound dharma or listen to dharma. It is only that formless thing before your eyes, clear and bright of itself, which knows how to expound dharma or listen to dharma." This "formless thing" is the dharma-seal of all the Buddha; it is your original mind. Since this Buddha-nature exists in your body right now, why do you vainly search for it outside?

In case you cannot accept this, I will mention some of the events surrounding a few of the ancient saints' entrance onto the path. These should allow you to resolve your doubts. Listen carefully and try to believe.

Once long ago, a king who believed in a heterodox doctrine asked the Venerable Bharati:

"What is the Buddha?"

The venerable answered, "Seeing nature is Buddha."

The king asked, "Has the master seen the nature yet, or not?"

The venerable answered, "Yes, I have seen the Buddha-nature."

"Where is the Buddha-nature?"

"This nature is present during the performance of actions."

"During what performance of action? I can't see it now."

"It appears in this present performance of action; your majesty just doesn't see it."

"But do I have it too, or not?"

"If your majesty performs actions, there are none in which it is not person. If your majesty were not acting, its essence would be very difficult to see."

"But when one acts, at how many places does it appear?"

"It appears in eight different places."

"In the womb it is called a fetus. In being born it is called a person. In the eyes it is called seeing and in the ears it is called hearing. In the nose it smells, in the tongue it talks, in the hands it grasps, and in the feet it runs. When it is expanded, it contains worlds as numerous as grains of sand. When it is compressed, it exists within one minute particle of dust. Those who have recognized it know that it is the Buddha-nature; those who have not call it soul or spirit."

As the king listened, his mind opened into awakening.

In another case, a monk asked the master Kuei-tsung:

“What is the Buddha?”

The master answered, “I will tell you, but I’m afraid you won’t believe me.”

“How could I dare not believe the sincere words of the master?”

The master said, “It’s you!”

“How can you prove it?”

“If there is one eyelash in your eye, flowers in the sky will fall everywhere.”

The monk heard this and understood.”

These stories I have just told about the saints of old entering the path are clear and simple; they do not strain the powers of comprehension. If you gain some faith and understanding from these two *kongan*, you will walk hand in hand with the saints of old.

Question; You talked about seeing the nature. But when there is true seeing of the nature, the person becomes an enlightened saint and should be able to perform magic and miracles-he would be different from other people. How is it, then, that among those who cultivate the mind nowadays, not one can display these spiritual powers and transformation bodies?

Chinul; You should not utter absurdities lightly; to be unable to differentiate the perverse from the noble is to be deluded and confused. Nowadays, you people who are training on the path chat about truth with your mouth, but in your minds you only shrink from it and end up falling into the error of underestimating yourselves by thinking that you do not share in the Buddha nature. This is all that you are doubting. You talk about truth but do not distinguish the root from the branches. This is called wrong view; it is not called cultivation. You are not only deceiving yourselves; you are deceiving others too. How can you not be on your guard against this?

Now, there many approaches to the path, but essentially they are included in the twofold approach of sudden awakening and gradual cultivation. Although sudden awakening sudden cultivation has been advocated, this is the entrance for people of the highest faculties. If you were to probe their pasts, you would see that their cultivation has been based for many lives on the insights gained in a previous awakening. Now, in his life, after gradual permeation, these people hear the dharma and awaken; in one instant their practice is brought to a sudden awakening sudden cultivation is also the result of an initial awakening and is subsequent cultivation. Consequently, this twofold approach of sudden awakening and gradual cultivation is the track followed by thousands of saints. Hence, of all the saints of old, there were none who did not first have an awakening, subsequently cultivate it, and finally, because of their cultivation, gain realization.

The so-called magic and miracles you mentioned manifest because of the gradual permeation of cultivation based on an initial awakening; it should not be said that they appear

simultaneous with that wakening. As it is said in the *sutras*, “The noumenon is awakened to suddenly, and is forged in accordance with this awakening. Phenomena cannot be removed suddenly; they are brought to an end step by step.” For this reason, Kuei-feng, in a profound explanation of the meaning of initial awakening subsequent cultivation, said,

Although we know that a frozen pond is entirely water, the sun’s heat is necessary to melt it. Although we awaken to the fact that an ordinary man is Buddha, the power of dharma is necessary to make it permeate our cultivation. When that pond has melted, the water flows freely and can be used for irrigation and cleaning. When falsity is extinguished, the mind will be numinous and dynamic and then its function of penetrating brightness will manifest.

These quotations should make it clear that the ability to perform magic and miracles in the phenomenal sphere cannot be perfected in a day: it will manifest only after gradual permeation.

Moreover, in the case of accomplished men, phenomenal spiritual powers are like an eerie apparition; they are only a minor concern of the saints. Although they might perform them, they do not give them undue emphasis. Nowadays, deluded and ignorant people wrongly assume that in the one moment of awakening, incalculable sublime functions, as well as magic and miracles, manifest in tandem. This is the sort of understanding I was referring to when I said that you did not know the proper sequence of practice and did not distinguish the root from the branches. To seek the path to Buddhahood while not knowing the proper sequence of practice of the root and the branches is like trying to put a square peg into a round hole. Can this be anything but a grave mistake? Because such people do not know of any expedients, they hesitate as if they were facing a steep precipice and end up backsliding. Also, many have broken their ties with the spiritual family of the Buddha in this manner. Since they neither understand for themselves nor believe that others have had an understanding-awakening, when they see someone without spiritual powers they act insolently, ridiculing the sages and insulting the saints. This is really quite pitiful!

Question; You have said that this twofold approach of sudden awakening gradual cultivation is the rack followed by thousands of saints. But if awakening is really sudden awakening, what need is there for gradual cultivation? And if cultivation means gradual cultivation, how can you speak of sudden awakening? We hope that you will expound further on these two ideas of sudden and gradual and resolve our remaining doubts.

Chinul: First let us take sudden awakening. When the ordinary man is deluded, he assumes that the four great elements are his body and the false thoughts are his mind. He does not know that his own nature is the true dharma-body; He does not know that his own numinous

awareness is the true Buddha. He looks for the Buddha outside his mind. While he is thus wandering aimlessly, the entrance to the road might by chance be pointed out by a wise advisor. If in one thought he then follows back the light [of his mind to its source] and sees his own original nature, he will discover that the ground of this nature is innately free of defilement, and that he himself is originally endowed with the non-outflow wisdom-nature which is not a hair's breadth different from that of all the Buddhas. Hence it is called sudden awakening.

Next let us consider gradual cultivation. Although he has awakened to the fact that his original nature is no different from that of the Buddhas, the beginningless habit-energies are extremely difficult to remove suddenly and so he must continue to cultivate while relying on this awakening. Through this gradual permeation, his endeavors reach completion, He constantly nurtures the sacred embryo, and after a long time he becomes a saint. Hence it is called gradual cultivation.

This process can be compared to the maturation of a child. From the day of its birth, a baby is endowed with all the sense organs just like everyone else, but its strength is not yet fully developed. It is only after many months and years that it will finally become an adult.

Question: Through what expedients is it possible to trace back the radiance of one's sense-faculties in one thought and awaken to the self-nature?

Chinul: The self-nature is just your own mind. What other expedients do you need? If you ask for expedients to seek understanding, you are like a person who, because he does not see his own eyes, assumes that he has no eyes and decides to find some way to see. But since he does have eyes, how else is he supposed to see? IF he realizes that in fact he has never lost his eyes, this is the same as seeing his eyes, and no longer would he waste his time trying to find a way to see. How then could he have any thoughts that he could not see? Your own numinous awareness is exactly the same. Since you seek some other way to understand, you will never understand. Simply by knowing that there is no other way to understand, you are seeing the nature.

Question: When the superior man hears dharma, he understands easily. Average and inferior men, however, are not without doubt and confusion. Could you describe some expedients so that the deluded too can enter into enlightenment?

Chinul: The path is not related to knowing or not knowing. You should get rid of the mind which clings to its delusion and looks forward to enlightenment, and listen to me.

Since all dharmas are like dreams or phantoms, deluded thoughts are originally calm and the sense-spheres are originally void. At the point where all dharmas are void, the numinous awareness is not obscured. That is to say, this mind of void and calm, numinous awareness is your original face. It is also the dharma-seal transmitted without a break by all the Buddhas of

the three time periods, the successive generations of patriarchs, and the wise advisors of this world. If you awaken to this mind, then this is truly what is called not following the rungs of a ladder: you climb straight to the stage of your doubts will be instantly resolved and you will become the teacher of men and gods. Endowed with compassion and wisdom and complete in the twofold benefit, you will be worthy of receiving the offerings of men and gods. Day after day you can use ten thousand taels of gold without incurring debt. If you can do this, you will be a truly great man who has indeed finished the tasks of this life.

Question: In our case, what is this mind of void and calm, numinous awareness?

Chinul: What has just asked me this question is precisely your mind of void and calm, numinous awareness. Why not trace back its radiance rather than search for it outside? For your benefit I will now point straight to your original mind so that you can awaken to it. Clear your minds and listen to my words.

From morning to evening, throughout the twelve periods of the day, during all your actions and activities- whether seeing, hearing, laughing, talking, whether angry or happy, whether doing good or evil-ultimately who is it that is able to perform all these actions? Speak! If you say that it is the physical body which is acting, then at the moment when a man's life comes to an end, even though the body has not yet decayed, how is it that the eyes cannot see, the ears cannot hear, the nose cannot smell, the tongue cannot talk, the body cannot move, the hands cannot grasp, and the feet cannot run? You should know that what is capable of seeing, hearing, moving, and acting has to be your original mind; it is not your physical body are by nature void; they are like images in a mirror or the moon's reflection in water. How can they be clear and constantly aware, always bright and never obscured and, upon activation, be able to put into operation sublime functions as numerous as the sands of the Ganges? For this reason it is said, "Drawing water and carrying firewood are spiritual powers and sublime function."

There are many points at which to enter the noumenon. I will indicate one approach which will allow you to return to the source.

Chinul: Do you hear the sounds of that crow cawing and that magpie calling and that magpie calling?

Student: Yes

Chinul: Trace them back and listen to your hearing-nature. Do you hear any sounds?

Student: At that place, sounds, and discriminations do not obtain.

Chinul: Marvelous! Marvelous! This is Avalokitesvara's method for entering the noumenon.

Let me ask you again. You said that sounds and discriminations do not obtain at that place. But since they do not obtain, isn't the hearing-nature just empty space at such a time?

Student: Originally it is not empty. It is always bright and never obscured.

Chinul: What is this essence which is not empty?

Student: As it has no former shape, words cannot describe it.

This is the life force of all the Buddhas and patriarchs-have no further doubts about that. Since it has no former shape, how can it be large or small? Since it cannot be large or small, how can it have limitations? Since it has no limitations, it cannot have inside or outside. Since there is no inside or outside, there is no far or near. As there is no far or near, there is no here or there. As there is no here or there, there is no coming or going. As there is no coming or going, there is no birth or death. As there is no birth or death, there is no past or present. As there is no past or present, there is no delusion or awakening. As there is no delusion or awakening, there is no ordinary man or saint. As there is no ordinary man or saint, there is no purity or impurity. Since there is no impurity or purity, there is no right or wrong. Since there is no right or wrong, names and words do not apply to it. Since none of these concepts apply, all sense-bases and sense-objects, all deluded thoughts, even forms and shapes and names and words are all inapplicable. Hence how can it be anything but originally void and calm and originally no-thing?

Nevertheless, at that point where all dharma s are empty, the numinous awareness is not obscured. It is not the same as insentience, for its nature is spiritually deft. This is your pure mind-essence of void and calm, numinous awareness. This pure, void, and calm mind is that mind of outstanding purity and brilliance of all the Buddhas of the three time periods; it is that enlightened nature which is the original source of all sentient beings. One who awakens to it and safeguards that awakening will then abide in the unitary, "such" and unmoving liberation. One who is deluded and turns his back on it passes between the six destinies, wandering in samsara for vast numbers of kalpas. As it is said, "One who is confused about the one mind and passes between the six destinies, goes and takes action. But one who awakens to the *dharmadhātu* and returns to the one mind, arrives and is still." Although there is this distinction between delusion and awakening, in their basic source they are one. As it is said, "The word, 'dharma' means the mind of the sentient being. "But as there is neither more of this void and calm mind in the saint, nor less of it in the ordinary man, it is also said, "In the wisdom of the saint it is no brighter; hidden in the mind of the ordinary man it is no darker." Since there is neither more of it in the saint nor less of it in the ordinary man, how are the Buddhas and patriarchs any different from other men? The only thing that makes them different is that they can protect their minds and thought-nothing more.

If you believe me to the point where you can suddenly extinguish your doubt, show the will of a great man and give rise to authentic vision and understanding, if you know its taste for yourself, arrive at the stage of self-affirmation and gain understanding of your true nature, then

this is the understanding-awakening achieved by those who have cultivated the mind. Since no further steps are involved, it is called sudden. Therefore it is said, “When in the cause of faith one meshes without the slightest degree of error with all the qualities of the fruition of Buddhahood, faith is achieved.”

Question: Once the noumenon is awakened to, no further steps are involved. Why then do you posit subsequent cultivation, gradual permeation, and gradual perfection?

Chinul: Earlier the meaning of gradual cultivation subsequent to awakening was fully explained. But since your feeling of doubt persists, it seems that I will have to explain it again. Clear your minds and listen carefully!

For innumerable kalpas without beginning, up to the present time, ordinary men have passed between the five destinies, coming and going between birth and death. They obstinately cling to “self” and, over a long period of time, their natures have become thoroughly permeated by false thoughts, inverted views, ignorance, and the habit-energies. Although, coming into this life, they might suddenly awaken to the fact that their self-nature is originally void and calm and no different from that of the Buddhas, these old habits are difficult to eliminate completely. Consequently, when they come into contact with either favorable or adverse objects, then anger and happiness or propriety or impropriety blaze forth: their adventitious defilements are no different from before. If they do not increase their efforts and apply their power through the help of *prajna*, how will they ever be able to counteract ignorance and reach the place of great rest and repose? As it is said, “Although the person who has suddenly awakened is the same as the Buddhas, the habit-energies which have built up over many lives are deep rooted. The wind ceases, but the waves still surge; the noumenon manifests, but thoughts still invade,” Son Master Ta-hui Tsung- kao said:

Often gifted people can break through this affair and achieve sudden awakening without expending a lot of strength. Then they relax and do not try to counteract the habit-energies and deluded thoughts. Finally, after the passage of many days and months, they simply wander on as before and are unable to avoid samsara.

So how could you neglect subsequent cultivation simply because of one moment of awakening? After awakening, you must be constantly on your guard. If deluded thoughts suddenly appear, do not follow after them reduce them and reduce them again until you reach the unconditioned. Then and only then will your practice reach completion. This is the practice of herding the ox which all wise advisors in the world have practiced after awakening.

Nevertheless, although you must cultivate further, you have already awakened suddenly to the fact that deluded thoughts are originally void and the mind-nature is originally pure. Thus

you eliminate evil, but you eliminate without actually eliminating anything; you cultivate the wholesome, but you cultivate without really cultivating anything either. This is true cultivation and true elimination. For this reason it is said, "Although one prepares to cultivate the manifold supplementary practices, thoughtlessness is the origin of them all." Kuer-feung summed up the distinction between the the ideas of initial awakening and subsequent cultivation when he said:

He has the sudden awakening to the fact that his nature is originally free of defilement and he is originally in full possession of the non-outflow wisdom-nature which is no different from that of the Buddhas. To cultivate while relying on this awakening is called supreme vehicle Son, or the pure Son of the *tathagas*. If thought-moment and he continues to develop his training, then naturally he will gradually attain to hundreds of thousands of *samadhis*. This is the Son which has been transmitted successively in the school of Bodhidharma."

Hence sudden awakening and gradual cultivation are like the two wheels of a cart: neither one can be missing.

Some people do not realize that the nature of good and evil is void; they sit rigidly without moving and, like a rock crushing grass, repress both body and mind. To regard this as cultivation of the mind is a great delusion. For this reason it is said, "*Sravaka* cut off delusion thought after thought, but the thought which does this cutting is a brigand." If they could see that killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and lying all arise from the nature, then their arising would be the same as their nonarising. At their source they are calm; why must they be cut off? As it is said, "Do not fear the arising of thoughts: only be concerned lest your awareness of them be tardy." It is also said, "If we are aware of a thought at the moment it arises, then through that awareness it will vanish."

In the case of a person who has had awakening, although he still has adventitious defilement, these have all been purified into cream. If he merely reflects on the fact that confusion is without basis, then all the flowers in the sky of this triple world are like smoke swirling in the wind and the six phantom sense-objects are like ice melting in hot water. If thought-moment after thought-moment he continues to train in this manner, does not neglect to maintain his training, and keeps *samadhi* and *prajna* equally balanced, then lust and hatred will naturally fade away and compassion and wisdom will naturally increase in brightness; unwholesome actions will naturally cease and meritorious practices will naturally multiply. When defilements are exhausted, birth and death cease. When the subtle streams of defilements are exhausted, birth and death cease. When the subtle streams of defilement are forever cut off, the great wisdom of complete enlightenment exists brilliantly of itself. Then he will be able to manifest billions of transformation-

bodies in all the worlds of the ten directions following this inspiration and responding to the faculties of sentient beings. Like the moon in the nine empyrean which reflects in ten thousand pools of water, there is no limit to his responsiveness. He will be able to ferry across all sentient beings with whom he has affinities. He will be happy and free of worry. Such a person is called a Great Enlightened World Honored One.

Question: In the approach of subsequent cultivation, we really do not yet understand the meaning of maintaining *samadhi* and *prajna* equally. Could you expound on this point in detail, so that we can free ourselves of our delusion? Please lead us through the entrance to liberation.

Chinul: Suppose we consider these two dharmas and their attributes. Of the thousands of approaches to enter the noumenon there are none which do not involve *samadhi* and *prajna*. Taking only the essential outline into account, from the standpoint of the self-nature they are characterized as essence and function-what I have called the void and the calm, numinous awareness. *Samadhi* is the essence; *prajna* is the function. Since *Prajna* is the functioning of the essence, it is not separate from *Samadhi*. Since *Samadhi* is the essence of the function, it is not separate from *prajna*. Since in *Samadhi* there is *prajna*, *Samadhi* is calm yet constantly aware. Since in *prajna* there is *Samadhi*, *prajna* is aware yet constantly calm. As Ts'ao-ch'i [the Sixth Patriarch Hui-neng] said, "The mind-ground which is without disturbance of the self-nature." If you have this sort of understanding, you can be calm and aware naturally in all situations. When enveloping and reflecting-the characteristics of *Samadhi* and *prajna* respectively-are not two, this is the sudden school's cultivation of *Samadhi* and *prajna* as a pair.

The practice of *Samadhi* and *prajna* intended for those of inferior faculties in the gradual school initially controls the thinking processes with calmness and subsequently controls dullness with alertness; finally, these initial and subsequent counteracting techniques subdue both the dull and the agitated mind in order to enter into stillness. Although this approach also holds that alertness and calmness should be maintained equally, its practice cannot avoid cling to stillness. Hence how will it allow those who would understand the matter of birth and death never to leave the fundamental calm and fundamental awareness and cultivate *Samadhi* and *prajna* as a pair naturally in all situations? As Ts'ao-ch'i said, "The practice of self-awakening has nothing to do with arguing. If you argue about first and last, you are deluded."

For an accomplished man, maintaining *Samadhi* and *prajna* equally does not involve endeavor, for he is always spontaneous and unconcerned about time or place. When seeing forms or hearing sounds, he is "just so." When wearing clothes or eating food, he is "just so." When defecating or urinating, he is "just so." When talking with people, he is "just so." At all times, whether speaking or keeping silent, whether joyful or angry, he is "just so." Like an empty boat riding on the waves which follows the crests and troughs, or like a torrent flowing

through the mountains which follows the bends and straights, in his mind he is without intellection. Today, he is at peace naturally in all conditions without destruction or hindrance. Tomorrow, in all situations, he is naturally at peace. He follows all conditions without destruction or hindrance. His character is straightforward and without deception. His seeing and hearing return to normal and there are no sense-objects to come in contact with [which could cause new defilement to arise?] Why should he have to bother with efforts at effacement? Since he has not a single thought which creates passion, he need not make an effort to forget all conditioning.

But hindrances are formidable and habits are deeply ingrained. Contemplation is weak and the mind drifts. The power of ignorance is great, but the power of weak and the mind drifts. The power of ignorance is great, but the power of *prajna* is small. He still cannot avoid being alternately unmoved and upset when he comes in contacts with wholesome and unwholesome sense-objects. When the mind is not tranquil and content, he cannot but work both at forgetting all conditioning and at effacement. As it is said, "When the six sense-bases absorb the sense-spheres and the mind no longer responds to the environment, this is called *Samadhi*. When the mind and the sense-spheres are both void and the mirror of the mind shines without obscuration, this is called *prajna*." Even though this is the relative approach to *Samadhi* and *prajna* which adapts to signs as practiced by those of inferior faculties in the gradual school, it cannot be neglected as a counteractive technique. If restlessness and agitation are blazing forth, then first, through *Samadhi*, use the noumenon to absorb the distraction. For when the mind does not respond to the environment it will be in conformity with original calmness. If dullness and torpor are especially heavy, use *prajna* to investigate *dharmas* critically and contemplate their voidness, and allow the mirror of the mind to shine without disturbance in conformity with the original awareness. Control distracting thoughts with *Samadhi*. Control blankness with *prajna*.

When both activity and stillness disappear, the effort to counteract them is no longer necessary. Then, even though there is contact with sense-objects, thought after thoughts returns to the source; regardless of the conditions he meets, every mental state is in conformity with the path. Naturally *Samadhi* and *prajna* are cultivated as a pair in all situations until finally the student becomes a person with no concerns. When this so, one is truly maintaining *Samadhi* and *prajna* equally. One has clearly seen the Buddha-nature.

Question: According to your assessment, these are two types of *Samadhi* and *prajna* which are maintained equally during cultivation after awakening: first, the *samadhi* and *prajna* of the self-nature; second, the relative *samdhi* and *prajna* which adapts to signs.

The self-nature type means to be calm yet aware in all circumstances. Since the person who has awakened to the self-nature is always spontaneous and free from attachment to objects, why does he need to trouble with effacing the defilements? Since there is not even one thought which

creates passion, there is no need to make vain efforts at forgetting all conditioning. Your assessment was that this approach is the sudden school's equal maintenance of *samadhi* and *prajna* which never leaves the self-nature.

The relative type which follows signs means either to absorb distraction by according with the noumenon or to investigate dharmas critically and contemplate their voidness. One controls both dullness and agitation and thereby enters the unconditioned. But your assessment was that this practice is for those of inferior faculties in the gradual school. We are not yet free of doubts about the *samadhi* and *prajna* of these two different approaches. Would you say that one should first rely on the self-nature type and then, after cultivating *samadhi* and *prajna* concurrently, make further use of the countermeasures or the relative approach? Or should one first rely on the relative type so that after controlling dullness and agitation, he can enter into the self-nature type? If, after initially using the *samadhi* and *prajna* of the self-nature, he is able to remain calm and aware naturally in all situations, thus rendering the counteractive measures unnecessary, why would he subsequently have to apply the relative type of *samadhi* and *prajna*? It is like a piece of white jade: if it is engraved, its natural quality will be destroyed. On the other hand, after the initial application of the relative type of *samadhi* and *prajna*, if the work of counteraction is brought to a close and he then progresses to the self-nature type, this would be merely gradual development prior to awakening as practiced by those of inferior faculties in the gradual school. Then how would you be able to say that the sudden school's approach of initial awakening and subsequent cultivation makes use of the effortless effort?

If these two types can both be practiced in the one time that has no past or future [via sudden awakening/sudden cultivation], there would have to be a difference between the respective suddenness and gradualness of these two types of *samadhi* and *prajna*-so how could they both be cultivated at once? The sudden school adept relies on the self-nature type and eschews effort by remaining natural in all situations. Students of inferior capacity in the gradual school tend toward the relative type and exert themselves applying countermeasures. The suddenness and gradualness of these two types of practices are not identical; their respective superiority and inferiority is obvious. So, in the approach of initial awakening and subsequent cultivation, why is it explained that there are two ways to maintain *samadhi* and *prajna* equally? Could you help us to understand this and eliminate our doubts?

Chinul: The explanation is obvious. Your doubts only come from your-selves! If you try to understand by merely following the words, you will, on the contrary, only give rise to doubt and confusion. It is best to forget the words; do not bother with detailed scrutiny of them. Now let us go on to my assessment of the cultivation of these two types of practice.

Cultivation of the *samadhi* and *prajna* of the self-nature involves the use of the sudden school's effortless effort in which both are put into practice and both are calmed; oneself

cultivates the self-nature, and oneself completes the path to Buddhahood. Cultivation of the relative *samadhi* and *prajna* which adapts to sign involves the use of the counteractive measures which are cultivated prior to awakening by those of inferior faculties in the gradual school. Thought-moment after thought-moment, confusion is eliminated; it is a practice which clings to stillness. These two types are different: one is sudden and the other gradual; they should not be combined haphazardly.

Although the approach involving cultivation after awakening does discuss the counteractive measures of the relative approach which adapts to signs, it does not employ the practices of those of inferior faculties in the gradual school in their entirety. It uses its expedients, but only as a temporary measure. And why is this? In the sudden school too there are those whose faculties are superior and those whose faculties are inferior; their “baggage” [their backgrounds and abilities] cannot be weighed according to the same standard.

If a person's defilements are weak and insipid, and his body and mind are light and at ease; if in the good he leaves the good and in the bad he leaves the bad; if he is unmoving in the eight worldly winds; if the three types of feeling are calmed-then he can rely on the *samadhi* and *prajna* of the self-nature and cultivate then concurrently in all situations naturally. He is impeccable and passive; whether in action or at rest he is always absorbed in Son and perfects the natural noumenon. What need is there for him to borrow the relative approach's counteractive measures? If one is not sick, there is no need to look for medicine.

On the other hand, even though a person might initially have had a sudden awakening, if the defilements are engrossing and the habit energies deeply engrained; if the mind becomes passionate whenever it is in contact with sense objects; if he is always involved in confrontations with the situations he meets; if he is always beset by dullness and agitation; or if he loses the constancy of calmness and awareness-then he should borrow the relative *samadhi* and *prajna* which adapts to signs and not forget the counteractive measures which control both dullness and agitation. Thereby he will enter the unconditioned: this is what is proper here. But even though he borrows the countermeasures in order to bring the habit-energies under temporary control, he has had a sudden awakening to the fact that the mind-nature is fundamentally pure and the defilements fundamentally empty. Hence he does not fall into the corrupt practice of those of inferior faculties in the gradual school. And why is this? Although during cultivation prior to awakening a person following the gradual approach does not forget to be diligent and thought-moment after thought-moment permeates his cultivation, he still gives rise to doubts everywhere and cannot free himself from obstacles. It is as if he had something stuck in his chest: he is always uncomfortable. After many days and months, as the work of counteraction matures, the adventitious defilements of body and mind might then appear to weaken. Although they seem lighter, the root of doubt is not yet severed. He is like a rock which

is crushing grass: he still cannot be self-reliant in the realm of birth and death. Therefore, it is said, “Cultivation prior to awakening is not true cultivation.”

In the case of a man who has awakened, although he employs expedients, moment to moment he is free of doubts and does not become polluted. After many days and months he naturally conforms with the impeccable, sublime nature. Naturally he is calm and aware in all situations. Moment by moment, as he becomes involved in sensory experience in all the sense-realms, thought after thought he always severs defilements, for he never leaves the self-nature. By maintaining *samadhi* and *prajna* equally, he perfects supreme *bodhi* and is no longer any different from those of superior faculties mentioned previously. Thus, although the relative *samadhi* and *prajna* is a practice for those of inferior faculties in the gradual school, for the man who has had an awakening it can be said that “iron has been transmuted into gold.”

If you understand this, how can you have such doubts- doubts like the discriminative view that a sequence or progression is involved in the practice of these two types of *samadhi* and *prajna*? I hope that all cultivators of the path will study these words carefully; extinguish your doubts or you will end up backsliding. If you have the will of a great man and seek supreme *bodhi*, what will you do if you discard this approach? Do not grasp at the words, but try to understand the meaning directly. Stay focused on the definitive teaching, return to yourselves, and merge with the original guiding principle. Then the wisdom which cannot be obtained from any master will naturally manifest. The impeccable noumenon will be clear and unobscured. The perfection of the wisdom body does not come from any other awakening. And yet, although this sublime truth applies to everyone, unless the omniscient wisdom of *prajna*-the basis of the Mahayana-is started early, you will not be able to produce right faith in a single thought. And how can this merely result in a lack of faith? You will also end up slandering the three treasures and will finally invite punishment in the Interminable Hell. This happens frequently! But even though you are not yet able to accept this truth in faith, if it passes through your ears just once and you feel affinity with it for even a moment, the merit will be incalculable. As it says in *Secret on Mind-Only*, “Hearing the dharma but not believing is still cause for the fruition of the seed of Buddhahood. Training on the Buddhist path but not completing it is still merit surpassing that of men and gods.” But he who does not lose the right cause for the attainment of Buddhahood and who, moreover, listens and believes, trains and completes his training, and guards his achievement without forgetting it, how can his merit be calculated?

If we consider our actions in our past wanderings in *samsara*, we have no way of knowing for how many thousands of kalpas we have fallen into the darkness or entered the Interminable Hell and endured all kinds of suffering. Nor can we know how many times we have aspired to the path to Buddhahood but, because we did not meet with wise advisors, remained submerged in the sea of birth and death for long kalpas, dark and unenlightened, performing all sorts of evil

actions. Though we may reflect on this once in a while, we cannot imagine the duration of our misery. How can we relax and suffer again the same calamities as before? Furthermore, what allowed us to be born this time as human beings-the guiding spirits of all the ten thousand things-who are clear about the right road of cultivation? Truly, a human birth is as difficult to ensure as “a blind turtle putting its head through a hole in a piece of wood floating on the ocean” or “a mustard seed falling onto the point of a needle.” How can we possibly express how fortunate we are?

Whenever we become discouraged or indolent, we should always look to the future. In one instant we might happen to lose our lives and fall back into the evil bourns where we would have to undergo unspeakable suffering and pain. At that time, although we might want to hear one phrase of the Buddha-dharma, and would be willing to receive and keep it with faithful devotion to ease our misfortune, how would we ever encounter it there? On the point of death, remorse is no use whatsoever. I hope that all of you who are cultivation the path will not be heedless and will not indulge in greed and lust. Do not forget to reflect upon this as if you were trying to save your head from burning. Death is fast closing in. The body is like the morning dew. Life is like the twilight in the west. Although we are alive today, there is no assurance about tomorrow. Bear this in mind! You must bear this in mind!

By relying on worldly conditioned, wholesome actions we will avoid the suffering of *samasara* in the three evil bourns. We will obtain the favorable karmic reward of rebirth among gods or men where we will receive abundant joy and happiness. But if we give rise to faith in this most profound approach to dharma of the supreme vehicle for only a moment, no metaphor can describe even the smallest portion of the merit we will achieve. As it is said in the sutras:

If one takes all the seven jewels in all the world systems of this trichiliocosm and offers them to all the sentient beings of those worlds until they are completely satisfied; or, furthermore, if one instructs all the sentient beings of those worlds and causes them to realize the four fruitions, the merit so gained will be immeasurable and boundless. But it is not as great as the merit gained from the first recollection of this dharma for the period of one meal.

Therefore, we should know that our approach to dharma is the holiest and most precious of all; its merit is incomparable. As the sutras say:

One thought of purity of mind is a *bodhismanda*,
And is better than building seven-jeweled stupas as numerous as the sands of the Ganges.
Those jeweled stupas will finally be reduced to dust,
But one thought of purity of mind produces right enlightenment.

I hope that all of you who are cultivation the path will study these words carefully and keep them always in mind. If this body is not ferried across to the other shore in this lifetime, then for which life are you going to wait? If you do not cultivate now, you will go off in the wrong direction for ten thousand kalpas. But if you practice assiduously now, practices which are difficult to cultivate will gradually become easier until, finally, meritorious practice will advance of itself.

Alas! When starving people are given princely delicacies nowadays, they do not even know enough to put them in their mouths. When they are sick they meet the king of doctors but do not even know enough to take the medicine. If no one says, "What shall I do? What shall I do?" then what shall I do for him?

Although the character of mundane, conditioned activities can be seen and its effect experienced, if a person succeeds in one affair, everyone praises the rarity of it. The source of our minds has neither shape to be observed nor form to be seen; the way of words and speech is cut off there. Since the activities of mind are ended, *maras* and heretics have no way to revile us. Even the praises of Indra, Brahma, and all the gods will not reach it; so how can the mind be fathomed by the shallow understanding of ordinary men? How pitiful! How can a frog in a well know the vastness of the sea? How can a fox roar like a lion?

Hence we know that in this degenerate dharma age, a person who is able to hear this approach to dharma, realize its rarity, and receive and keep it with faithful devotion has for innumerable kalpas served all the saints, planted all the roots of goodness, and fully formed the right cause of *prajna*-he has the most proficiency. As the *Diamond Sutra* says, "If there is a son who can have faith in these words, it should be known that this man has planted all the roots of goodness in front of incalculable numbers of Buddhas." It also says. "This is spoken in order to produce the great vehicle; this is spoken in order to produce the supreme vehicle." I hope that those of you who are aspiring to the path will not be cowardly. You must display your ardor. Good causes made in past kalpas cannot be known. If you do not believe in your superiority and, complacently resigning yourself to being inferior, you decide that you will not practice not because it is too difficult, then even though you might have good roots from past lives, you sever them now. The difficulty will keep growing and you will move farther from the goal. Since you have now arrived at the treasure house, how can you return empty-handed? Once you lose a human body, for then thousand kalpas it will be difficult to recover. Be careful. Knowing that there is a treasure house, how can a wise person turn back and not look for it-and yet continue to resent bitterly his destitution and poverty? If you want the treasure you must throw away this skin-bag.

