



THE SKILLFUL  
CLEAR KNOWING WISDOM





THE SKILLFUL CLEAR  
KNOWING WISDOM

ZEN MASTER THÍCH TUỆ HẢI

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*“Thus once we arrive here, it must be said that there are no Buddhas and there are no sentient beings; there is no realm, no sphere, no difference, no hierarchy, no progressiveness, no distance, no near, no far, no past, no present, no future, no time and no space. How utterly strange! We must use the term “none.” None, none, completely none whatsoever, yet, everything somehow still appears in a certain moment, but it is an endless moment that occurs! Even though it is “a moment,” it is “endless,” as it is no longer a minuscule moment of time interval! Everywhere and anywhere is infinite and endless – there is nothing that is not infinite, not endless!”*

*Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải*

Breathing in  
perfect *merit* and *wisdom*

Breathing out  
full of *love*

## ‡ Clearly discerning the seeing, the hearing and the clear awareness

Today, we will talk about the adept, skillful clear knowing wisdom. Thus, is there a difference between this "*skillful clear knowing wisdom*" and the so-called "*clear awareness*" which we have always talked about in the past? Is it possible for us to distinctively identify "*seeing*" versus the "*clear awareness*" that is aware of this seeing? Those of us who have been practicing meditation for a long time need to be able to answer these questions with clarity.

Now, for example, I am listening, and you are also listening. If a sound appears, we will both hear it, whether it is a big sound or a small sound, to the left or the right, or in front of us or behind us. Right at that moment, what is the difference between "*hearing*" and the "*awareness*" that is aware of this hearing? Can we transparently discriminate between these two? For a truly adept practitioner, one must thoroughly recognize this "*clear awareness*" when the sense faculties come into contact with the objects. Here, we must speak with truthfulness and cannot simply shoot into the air! Even now, when we in fact are listening, are we aware of it? Are we aware that we are listening or do we simply listen without awareness? Are we aware that we are

hearing, or do we only hear and there is nothing else beyond this hearing?

‡ **Enough wisdom to realize that you are the "hearer" who hears the sound that is being heard**

Now let's get back to reality. For example, we are currently sitting here listening. There is the echo of my words. There are rustling sounds, cicadas chirping, fans turning, and murmuring sounds all around. We can hear all the sounds that appear. And in fact, if we cover our ears, would we still be able to hear all those sounds? Of course not, right? However, if our ears are not covered, they can still hear normally, which means the senses are hearing the sense objects – hereby, external sounds are considered outer phenomena – the sense objects, and we need to clearly distinguish them as such. That means now we have *the hearer* and *that which is being heard*. Everyone knows this at the very least. However, while we listen, do we have enough wisdom to realize that we are *the one who hears the sound that is being heard*? Can we distinguish this clearly enough? If it's clear to you then say, yes, I can distinguish it clearly; if it's not, then, just say no. We are practitioners so we have to answer this question with utmost clarity. I am hearing the sound, so do I clearly realize that I am *"the one who is hearing the sound"* and *"the sound is what is being heard by me"*? This is something we must be very clear about, because otherwise we will be blind in our practice for the rest of our lives. If you want to have wisdom, you have to be



very clear about this, meaning you need to identify “*you yourself*” as the one (the subject) who is clearly hearing the sound (the object) or not.

‡ **Discerning between hearing and what is being heard, seeing and what is being seen, knowing and what is being cognized, and immediately having that which is not fixated**

Currently, for example, I'm hearing the sound of the cicadas. It is not just one sound but many sounds; I am also hearing the sound of my talking to you and the soft whispering sound of the fan. Thus, can you discern that there is 1) the hearing and 2) that which is being heard? You need to be clear about this. That's why here it's called the “*skillful clear knowing wisdom.*”

We must be skilled at recognizing it. When we are alert enough to realize that “*I am hearing*” (hearer) and that there is “*a sound that is being heard by me,*” then, what do we have? Right then, we have “*that which is not fixated*”! If we can hear like that, we will never be attached or fixated to sound, and that is the very first step. In this first step, I clearly see that “*I*” and the “*sound*” are two things. The sound is “*what I hear,*” and I am “*that which hears.*” If we cannot recognize this, we cannot really say that we are cultivating. Some people told me that they have entered *samadhi*, yet they had no idea when I asked them about these things. If you cannot distinguish these two, then you cannot possibly go deeper into your practice. Many retreatants have come up to talk to me, and I just told them to

please discern between "*hearing*" and "*what is being heard*", "*seeing*" and "*what is being seen*," "*knowing*" and "*what is being cognized*." If we are not clear about this, then our practice will be messy; it will be ambiguous, confusing, and unclear. If it is unclear, then it is impossible for us to progress any deeper. Right at the beginning, if we are not being unambiguous about this, if we cannot precisely discern the two, then our practice efforts will be obscured. Being unclear or obscured is a simple way to describe it, but in truth, it is considered impossible to truly practice, so we need to have absolutely no ambiguity about this.

‡ **No longer being "*that which is being heard*," you will automatically be free from all types of sound**

So now if I ask again, are you capable of distinguishing between "*that which is hearing*" and "*that which is being heard*"? It means we must by all means be able to discern them, and to be absolutely clear, unambiguous, and precise about their distinctiveness. If we say we are entering the practice, then this is the very first step. However, if we are not clear about this, we cannot go deeper into our practice. If you wonder how come you are making no progress in your practice, it is because right from the start, you were not precisely clear on this point. This is considered the initial effort, and you can take this as a practice test. During this week, you can cultivate your practice and write to me on a piece of paper. You can write as much or as little

as you want, but you must describe the difference between “*that which hears*” and “*that which is being heard.*” If we simply answer that hearing is knowing sound, then that is too easy to say. Thus, you need to discern very clearly throughout the time when you are actually listening, just like now. In fact, it is not that we are just now listening, but that we are listening almost 24 hours a day; that, in fact, is something worth talking about. Therefore, if we can discern between “*that which hears*” and “*that which is being heard,*” then we are no longer being “*that which is being heard,*” and we will automatically be free from all types of sound, and we will never again be entangled in his life. We will be so happy! Because once we are no longer fixated to sound, then, and whether it is good speech, bad speech, right speech, wrong speech, kind speech, unkind speech, more speech, less speech, and whatever and however people say such speech to us, then we simply cannot “*fixate*” to any of it ever again! That’s already one step out of the entanglement. So here it is very well said; it is the “*skillful clear knowing wisdom.*”

‡ **The initial step: How “*awareness*” clearly cognizes when the six sense faculties come into contact with the six sense objects**

This is the elementary step to enter the Buddhist practice. Buddhism is so easy, and it's not difficult to practice it, isn't it? What is very clear in this present moment is that we are distinctly aware of sound. If so,

we must be able to explain in clear terms how *this perpetual awareness* cognizes sound; for example, how a sound appears, how this awareness cognizes this sound, then how another sound appears, and how it again clearly perceives the second sound, etc. We need to see and to know with clarity how all these things take place. Not only knowing them – that is not enough, but we must also *see with clarity where exactly the sound appears*. For example, if there is suddenly a "pop" behind me, I immediately know this sound with swiftness. If there is a "pop" on the left, on the right or in the front, I immediately know it with clarity, too. Not only will I know that it appeared, but I also knew precisely which direction, and even the position, it is in. We have always had this discerning ability, and now we just need to ascertain it.

For now, we can sit in calmness for about an hour in our own place, and begin to let our mind be empty, not attached to anything. Then we can begin to listen to the crickets and the insects chirping, the creaking sounds, the wind blowing, etc. As we listen, we can hear all of those sounds very accurately and very clearly, and we simultaneously know exactly where the sounds come from. We can describe shortly on a piece of paper where and how we hear all these sounds. This is, after all, not a great practice of exertion, but it must be clearly and skillfully cognized. The simple thing is that we are skillfully aware of everything. That is the first step. This means that if we now can skillfully hear sounds or skillfully see shapes – in general, where the

six senses come into contact with the six senses – then it means we recognize everything with our skilled clear awareness.

But now we have to go to the next level of *clear awareness*, which is something else. Let us thus enter the second step in our practice.

Initially, we talk about *that which cognizes* form and *that which cognizes* sound, and together with this, there is “*the awareness*” which cognizes 1) *the perpetual hearing* and 2) *what is being heard*, as well as 1) *the perpetual seeing* and 2) *what is being seen*. This is the very first step, and we must discern these two before we can proceed to the next step. If you are practicing well, then it is easy to pass this first entrance door. Now comes the second entrance door.

‡ **The second step: There is another "awareness" that cognizes "that which is aware" of sound and "that which is aware" of form - are these two "awarenesses" the same one or two different things?**

In order to pass the second door, we must first be in absorption and quiescent enough to clearly see two things: 1) “*that which is hearing sound*” and 2) “*that which is aware*” of the hearing of sound, the seeing of form, the smelling of scents, the touching, and the thoughts – are these awarenesses the same or different, and how? First, we must ascertain whether they are the same or different, whether they are one or two. For example, regarding the awareness of sound and

awareness of form, are they one or two? If they are one, then we must explain how they are one; however, if they are two things, then, we also must explain how it is so.

For example, here, we can have a counter-argument, and we can say that the ears can hear sound, but the eyes cannot hear. Therefore, there must be something different there, which means that the ears can perceive sound but the eyes cannot. Moving forward, we can say that there is *also something else* that is aware of the awareness of sound and of form. There is definitely *something else* that cognizes these two other awarenesses. That means that there is an aloft “I” (self) that is aware that I am hearing and that I am seeing. Thus, the awareness of the ears and the eyes is being cognized by this specific "I" (self).

So does this “I” exist in the hearing, the seeing, the smelling or the tasting? You will have to discern whether the “I” of the hearing is the same or different from that of the eyes. Is it two (different) or one and the same? If it is one and the same, then how come the ears cannot see but only hear? If it is one and the same, then how come the eyes cannot hear but only see? We must learn to counter-argue, ask questions and write down the answers on paper. Playing such a game can also be quite fun. Once you discover clearly what they are, you will be able to live freely without any fixation or attachment to anything that appears in front of you. However, if we cannot penetrate to see through these

things, we won't be able to achieve much of anything throughout our whole life of practice. Here we are discussing the five sense faculties, sense faculties, and if you are not thoroughly familiar with the six sense faculties, then how can you talk about going beyond or transcending the sense faculties? And this is, indeed, the story of the "*skillful clear knowing wisdom*"!

The Bodhisattvas are truly wonderful. They tell us to do things that seem very commonplace, but if we are doubtful about these matters, we may not be able to see through it for the rest of our lives. If this is not clear to us, then it would be impossible to be clear about anything else in our practice. Why? Because seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching happen almost 24/7 in our lives. These are things that happen on an on-going basis, not things that happen in the clouds. Now we cannot talk as if we live in the clouds anymore, but we have to discuss things that happen to us in a continuity, which means we have to be aware of these things clearly and skillfully.

‡ **When sense faculties are not fixated to objects, that's liberation!**

For example, let's say we close our eyes and we don't care to see anything. Of course, when we close our eyes, we cannot see clearly, but on the other hand, we cannot "*close*" our ears, except when we use something to cover them with. When we close our eyes to allow our mind to calm down, our ears can still hear, and we can still itch, we can still feel hot and cold, and

we can still be aware of other smells. Should we then try to block our nostrils, too? Well, whichever sense faculties we can close, then we should close them, but the one we can use in order to hear the clearest, then we should rely on it to cognize everything. To cultivate means *to explore anything that is related to ourselves*, and this discovery is, indeed, very interesting.

For example, just now, we said that everyone can hear. We can hear all the sounds, but suddenly let's say they stop and there is no more sound. When there is no more sound, we are in the middle of *hearing "no sound."* And in the middle of hearing not a single sound echoing around, you can gently ask this question: "I've heard all the sounds, I've heard everything, but now where are all of these sounds?" "

And if these sounds are no longer fixated to the hearing sense faculty, then what conclusion will you reach? It is rather easy; we can conclude that ***"the sense faculty and the perceived object are not fixated to each other."*** Isn't it right? ***When sense faculties are not fixated to objects, that's liberation!*** Through this, we simply realize such a laughable logical truth! Although it's laughable, it is the truth, which is that the sense faculties (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind) have ***never been fixated to their objects***, yet we have ignored this logic for a long time. When we are heedful about this, however, we can see that the sense faculties and the objects clearly have never been fixated to one another.



‡ In the usual sense, seeing is fixated, hearing is fixated, and this idea has been habituated in our mind.

Let's say we ask ourselves what "*being fixated to something*" means. A clever person may answer as follows: "When I heard something just now, it already got stuck in my mind, because now I can describe the sound that I just heard. To be able to describe this sound afterward means that it already existed in the mind, and if it remains in the mind, then that is being fixated. Even though it doesn't adhere to my sense faculties outwardly, it sticks to my conscious mind. Now when someone says something wonderful, I remember it. When someone says a bad word, I also remember it, and so that means consciously, I am being fixated, isn't it?" If we were somewhat clever, we would respond like that, and the truth is that everything *does* become fixated just like that. It means that once a sound, whether we pay attention to it or not, passes through our hearing sense; it is already stuck in our conceptual mind. Don't say that you heard it but you don't remember it. For example, we listened and heard every single word in a sentence, yet when we try to remember it, we cannot remember it, and so we thought that we are not attached to it, but in reality, we have already habituated it. We must recognize this. Given this situation, although we really want to remember it, we can't; yet, at another time, when we sit alone feeling empty, each and every tiny detail would appear. Herein, we acknowledge that *to see is to fixate*,

and to hear is to fixate [*seeing is fixation, hearing is fixation*].

Next, the sensual objects which we have seen or heard in the past now begin to arise in our conscious mind. When we were sitting quietly alone, we recalled what happened this morning. Someone told a funny story and laughed so happily, so when we remembered it, we also laughed a little. Perhaps we wouldn't laugh as heartily as in the morning, but I can guarantee you that we would still feel humored. Or let's say, this morning someone cursed us or spoke harshly of us, and that made us a little sad, so now when we remember it, we would still feel somewhat sad. This means that there are *feelings that occur when the senses come into contact with the objects*. When senses come into contact with objects, there will be feelings or emotions, either love or hate, that manifest. When there are feelings or emotions involved, the fixation becomes much deeper. However, even if we listen to an ordinary word, and truly don't pay any attention to it, when we sit down to meditate at night, this word can still resurface. If there is a sad feeling associated with it, a sense of unhappiness will ripple. If there is a happy feeling associated with it, a sense of happiness will ripple without a tint of unhappiness. And then there are sounds which we don't have any feeling for, and yet, they still appear. What does that mean? It means that something can appear whether we feel happy or pay attention to it, and something else can also appear whether we are unhappy or pay no attention to it.

Therefore, we can conclude that seeing and hearing can both be fixated.

But what does this fixation create? For example, the second time a fun thing re-appears in our mind, it continues to give us a sense of happiness, so we want it to appear again. Naturally, because we have this want, it will continue to appear in our mind again and again. Now if a sad incident happened, we deliberately do not want it to re-appear. If so, would it be exhausted? It is the same as the fun incident; if we want to keep it, then of course, it will continue to remain. On the contrary, what will happen if we want to drive something away, suppress it or eliminate it? It means that it *continues to be habituated in our conscious mind, too*. And then, that which we never paid attention to also appears again, and then disappears. Therefore, herein, we need to use the term the “*skillful clear awareness*,” and we need to directly and masterfully know everything with clarity.

‡ **While we are aware of everything with skillfulness and clarity, “*skillful*” means to thoroughly, skillfully penetrate all issues without any attitude**

There are sad and happy *karmic* thoughts that appear very clearly. But there are also thoughts without related *karma* (that is, the perceived objects do not become love or hate) that also appear. So when these three facets (love, hate and neutral) appear, we are aware of them with clarity, and thus, here we use the coined term “*the skillful clear awareness*.” That means when a

thought vividly appears, whether it is love, hate, or neither love nor hate (neutrality), we must be aware of it with clarity. Moreover, when we say we are aware of everything with skillfulness and clarity, what does the word "*skillfulness*" (skilled) mean? It means *we shall have no impact or influence whatsoever on the love, hate, or neither-love-nor-hate when it manifests!* When it appears, clearly be aware of it, clearly see it, clearly know it, and let it be this pure awareness only. Here, I am talking about cultivation, so please listen carefully.

Thus, *the clear awareness is what is presently present.* First, we must confirm that we have this awareness. Let's just accept it as such. This is the first step – the very beginning, so you have to accept this bare fact, first and foremost. What arises, clearly be aware it; what appears, clearly be aware of it. Anything that appears, whether many, few, sparse, dense, coarse or subtle – simply be aware of them with pure clarity. That's called "*skillful*" or "*skillful.*" "*Skillfulness*" or "*skillfulness*" means when we are cultivating, we are neither here nor there, neither take nor leave, grasp nor release; we do not give rise to any intention, neither holding on to nor repelling. If we still exude those behaviors, then that is not being skillful. An skillful, adept person is someone who understands every problem without having any attitude towards it. So herein, we have taken a small step in what is called the skillful clear awareness.

‡ **At first, the "on-going awareness" that we habituate is also a form of conceptual mind**

At first, we have the right to *habituate this adeptness or skillful awareness*. Let's just use the term "*to habituate*" for now, because at first, we don't clearly know what this is, but gradually we will see without ambiguity that this "*on-going awareness*" is clearly present right here. We must by all means recognize that there is a clear awareness that is being present right here. This awareness is brightly clear, and unclouded; therefore, there is nothing that appears that it does not see. Slowly we will recognize this awareness. It cognizes each and every single thought that appears in our mind. But then, you may also say that there are times when thoughts appear, yet this awareness does not recognize them, and then these thoughts are carried rapidly along. Isn't it so?

This is because in the beginning, we actually still cultivate this kind of awareness. And because it is the kind of awareness that we habituate or acquire, it fluctuates, and is not so long lasting or durable. Even if we are skilled at it and try our best to maintain this habit, thoughts can still be carried. When an initial thought arises, we are aware of it; then the second and third thought arise and we are also aware of them; yet, when the fourth thought arises, we may become unaware of it, and we immediately get carried away.

After a while, there appears to be someone who gets startled, thinking, "Oh my, I have forgotten to cultivate

all this time, and now I must practice again, I have to wake up and be mindful again. Alright then, now I am mindful again. When a thought arises, I am aware of it, and the next thought arises, I am also aware of it. Whatever arises, I am aware of it... and then something else arises; however, this time, I get totally carried away by this thought for a long time!” Well, for all this time, you have been practicing like that, right? When things like this happen to you during your practice, you think that you have failed, that you have been unmindful and that you continue to chase after the deluded thoughts, isn’t it? So then, the person who is clearly aware of thoughts according to this habituated pattern is actually the awareness itself. Therefore, we know when it remembers to be aware, and we know when it forgets, too. If we can now stop making it the main character, then we can transcend it. However, if we keep focusing on it, then it is the same as making our thoughts the main focus, nothing more, nothing less. *This habituation of the clear awareness is also a form of conceptual mind!*

‡ **Sense faculties and sense objects are not one and the same, and they cannot possibly be fixated to one another**

However, in the beginning, since we have not truly cultivated anything much, we, therefore, hold on to this clear awareness. After we hold on to it for a while, we still see that it is actually ineffective. We see that many times, this awareness seems to naturally doze off, and

allow for thoughts to happen, and then, it chases after these thoughts. It means, therefore, that we are lacking mindfulness and alertness, and we think we are not being aware. However, in reality, when thoughts occur, and we have enough skillfulness, we would clearly see that *thoughts and awareness are two different things*. Like what we have been discussed thus far about sense faculties and sense objects, we must be able to discern these two as well. Obviously, sense faculties (sense bases) and sense objects are different. They are definitely not one, and we must affirm this. *Sense faculties and sense objects are not the same thing at all, and they cannot possibly be fixated to one another!* Sense object is *that which is being cognized*, and sense faculty is *that which cognizes*. Furthermore, *the cognizer and the cognized are absolutely not fixated to each other whatsoever!* We need to be alert enough to see this far, and to see this far at least once is to have the skillful clear awareness. After we cultivate and reach this stage, we clearly recognize that *sense faculties (sense bases) and sense objects are never fixated*. There's no way that sense faculties and sense objects can adhere to each other! So then, can the *mind faculty* adhere to the *mind's object*?

Now let us say we close our eyes and pretend that we don't hear, see, smell, taste, or touch, and the only thing left is to be aware of the thoughts that arise. *Everything now is simply thoughts and we ourselves are the ones who are solely facing those thoughts*. It means right now, when *sense objects* emerge in our *mind*, our *mind*

*faculty* is clearly aware of *them*. So the mind faculty is something that appears very clearly now, and then what else will you see? Can you discern whether the *awareness of the mind faculty* and *the awareness of the sound* are the same or different?

We must be unambiguous about how the mind faculty is clearly aware of the mind's objects; that is, it is aware of each thought that is arising – we no longer talk about emotions, such as sadness, love, anger, hate, but *now each thought that arises is to be recognized*. We must recognize each and every thought that appears; a thought appears, we recognize; another thought appears, we recognize and so on. That's all we need, and there is no need to do anything further. Don't think that you have to practice better than this, and this is already enough. When a thought appears, it should be clearly recognized, and we don't have worry about it being deluded or not. We just need to simply be aware that of the appearance of those delusive thoughts.

‡ **The mind faculty is inherently quiet, empty, clear and not assimilated with the thought; however, it still affirms that there is still an "I" who is aware of this thought**

So this present on-going awareness is very quiet, empty, and clear. Even so, is that the same as the *skillful clear awareness* yet? Not quite yet, because it is inherently like that, and not because we have made it pure. It is inherently empty and it is also inherently



aware. Yet, it is still just *the mind faculty*, nothing more, nothing less! It's not because we have practiced so well that we get such results! We need to realize that our mind faculty has always been like that, meaning it simply exists in order to cognize mind's objects. But due to the fact that this mind faculty still affirms that there is a "self" involved, so even if we abide in this awareness, *it is still our "self" who is aware of that thought.*

Therefore, it is like this... thought – self, thought – self, thought – self... Can you clearly see this? In the past, every time a thought arose, it could be a sad, loving or hateful thought... When I remember sad things, then "I" am sad. But if we stand firmly on the ground of the mind faculty, then no matter how many sad thoughts appear, *we will not assimilate with them and not become sadness itself.* We remain *the cognizer, not the cognized.* So then what will happen to sadness, anger, and hatred in the mind at that time? They automatically no longer have any effect on us!

‡ **The mind faculty is not the true original mind because it is still attached to a self and is one of the six sense faculties**

If you can stand firmly right here [being *the cognizer* and not *the cognized*], then “being sad” and “being happy” will not truly happen, because sadness is what is known, happiness is what is known; all thoughts are what is known, whether they are delusive thoughts, false thoughts, or thoughts about the past, the present,

or the future. All of that is what is known. However, this is purely the mind faculty (mind faculty), as it is very pure, radiant and clear. These attributes of the mind faculty have been as such from time immemorial until now, but they are definitely not our original mind or our true nature of the mind!

When there is still a *self*, then this mind faculty will still be present, because it is one of the six sense faculties. When self-grasping is established, there are these six senses or six sense faculties, but nothing is as important as the mind faculty. Seeing becomes a concept and this concept is also seen by the mind faculty. Although what is being heard right now is not a thought, the ear base hears it all; when the ear base hears, it means *that which cognizes sound* is currently recognizing sound. That is the ear's function, to recognize sound. Then, there is also the eye's function to recognize form. These two effects and functions are different. When we compare them with the mind faculty, we realize that in the beginning during the day, the eye base sees outer forms, but at night, these forms appear again in our conceptual mind. Therefore, the *mind faculty* continues to cognize this appearance within that consciousness.

Now no matter the kind of form – whether yellow or white, blue or red, beautiful or ugly, more or less, big or small – they can all appear very clearly to us. When all of those outer appearances emerge very clearly in our mind, they become thoughts or mental arisings.

Previously, those forms were seen by our eyes, but now they become thoughts. Previously, the sound was heard by our ears, but now it also becomes an idea in the mind. This is what in the Mind Only school calls the “*mental imageries imputed from form appearances,*” or the “*purely imputative mental impressions*” that we can see in our mind. When we sit still in quiescence, we can see them and cognize them clearly, so therefore, we call it the “*skillful clear awareness.*”

‡ **Mind is different from the mind faculty - the normal, ordinary activity of the mind faculty is to always clearly cognize mind’s object (*dharma*)**

In short, if we don't try to be attentive, our mind can function very normally. Here, I call it the normal, ordinary functioning of the mind, which means it is always clearly aware of the *dharma*. The *dharma* or the mind’s object includes our deluded thoughts, concepts, grasping, sadness, anger and hatred.... Whatever appears, the mind faculty always recognizes it without ambiguity. It is simply a very “*normal*” activity of the senses and sense objects, and up to this point, we have not “*cultivated*” anything! Don’t think that you are cultivating something here! Even practitioners have made mistakes, thinking that they have to give rise to an intention, and must do this and do that as a practitioner. Yet, to exert effort (or to interfere) means they have not let their mind faculty and its objects function normally.

It is like a lamp that has electricity; when you turn on the switch, the light comes on itself. Yet if there is no electricity, it cannot light itself up. As another example, if a fan has electricity, it rotates; if there is no electricity, it cannot rotate. That means there is something that causes it to rotate, which is electricity. So what is that affects our mind so that we can see and we can hear? It is thanks to *the mind itself!* But *mind is different from the mind faculty!*

There are many people who mistakenly think that their *mental arisings* are the *mind*. For example, when we see something, right then and there appear *mind – the conceptual mind*. The discriminating eye consciousness appears in our seeing, so it distinguishes this color from that specific color. But having eye consciousness involved to this point is already something rather complicated – so when we study Buddhism, we must study carefully to be able to clearly distinguish these things.

Eye consciousness is what compares different shapes and colors, so it distinguishes one color from another. Now when we look at a flower, for example, we automatically see that this flower is different from that other flower. Even though we haven't done anything yet, to us, the colors are already different, and the shapes are also different. As soon as you see a flower, you can automatically see the difference without having time to actually do anything. That is eye consciousness. But can this eye consciousness distin-

guish between different sounds? Certainly not! It is our ear consciousness that can distinguish one sound from another. When we study Buddhism and go deeper into these issues, we may find it very confusing, because we haven't paid attention to it until now.

‡ **"Awareness" is the important thing, while that which compares and discriminates is but "the cognized"**

Thus, in seeing, there is not only the eye faculty and physical objects but also the eye consciousness. In hearing, there is not only the ear faculty and the sense of hearing, but also the ear consciousness. They have different functions, because the eye consciousness itself cannot distinguish one smell from another, and the ear consciousness itself cannot distinguish one form from another. We can ask ourselves why we have functions like this, knowing that science cannot invent these things for us.

So when we see a form, whether we distinguish it or not, are we clearly aware of that which we know at that moment? Yes, we are! That is it! *This awareness*, after all, is what is so significant, because when compared with awareness, *that which compares and discriminates* (the comparer) is simply *that which is being seen* (the seen). So when we hear the sound, we are *the hearer*, the sound that appears is *what is heard*, and then there is *that which discriminates and compares the differences* between those sounds, e.g.,

the sound that appeared previously was louder, clearer or better, etc.

Therefore, what is *that which discriminates*? That is the ear consciousness! It is the discriminating consciousness in the ear! When we peel things off layer by layer, we will see everything clearly. If we meditate and don't understand these things, then it is impossible to cultivate during practice. Meditative practitioners must know these basic things. We have to separate each thing very clearly, layer by layer, so that we can recognize “*who we are*” or “*what we are.*”

As we said earlier, there are sense, object, and consciousness - all three appear [simultaneously]. When there are six senses, there are eighteen *dhatu*s which comprise of six senses, six sense objects, and six consciousnesses. If we only talk about the senses and objects alone, then there are twelve so-called entry points, but if we talk about the sense organs, objects, and consciousnesses together, then there are eighteen elements according to the common usage of the term.

‡ **Whether we pay attention to it or not, our hearing and seeing still “*distinguishes everything minutely*”**

In fact, right now we are sitting here and we are hearing. Whether we pay attention to it or not, “*this current on-going hearing*” is distinguishing between one, two, three or four sounds, or between ten or one hundred sounds. This hearing can recognize that all those sounds are *completely different*. Let's test it

again! We are sitting here, hearing all sorts of sounds that vibrate. Even if it is just the the cicadas chirping, the sound which appears first is still different from the sound which follows. The intensity of the vibrations of, and the sound waves emitted from, these two sounds are totally different even if we do not pay any attention to them, being inattentive and relaxed. Let's just relax – we can relax but at the same time, we should hear everything, have clarity about everything

I'm listening here to so many types of sounds and so many vibrations; even if it's just a cicada chirping, the one that vibrates before and the one that follows is still different. The intensity of each sound's vibration is completely different and the sound waves emitted by each sound are also completely different , even though I am not paying attention, I am relaxed and not paying attention. Just relax, but hear everything, be aware of everything, and distinguish everything.

If you pay attention to the sounds distinctively, you can only hear one thing, but if you don't pay attention to them individually, you can hear all sounds – everything! This is the reality that is taking place, the genuine occurrence that is happening right in this very momentness of vivid presence. Therefore, *that which is hearing* is simply a genuine thing, and I am just describing what's really happening to you. Here, we are not even talking about the inherent nature or appearance of the objects around us, or anything else on the outskirts for that matter. It means that when we

are sitting here, we can *ubiquitously recognize* whichever sound that appears. Therefore, due to the fact that we have ears, we can cognize sound and have this hearing awareness. If we cover our ears, we won't be able to hear sound anymore. This is to show us that [currently when we have not yet transcended the form aggregate] hearing is based on the hearing faculties so it can hear everything.

‡ **Sense faculties and consciousnesses are on the same side in order to "*distinguish*" sense objects, and all three, sense faculties, sense objects, and consciousnesses, are simply a kind of form**

This means that firstly, we had no choice but to rely on our ears or hearing faculties in order to recognize the "*differences*" of sound. There is "*what is heard*," and "*that which distinguishes what is heard*." However, does "*that which distinguishes what is heard*" also discriminate "*that which is hearing*" (*the hearer*)?

Currently when we see form, we immediately see *all the differences* of all those forms; this is called *that which discriminates* which is the eye consciousness – it is the discriminating function of the eye consciousness. The eye consciousness is now distinguishing all the different forms, but does this eye consciousness also discriminate *seeing (the seer)*, or it only distinguish *what is seen (the seen)*? The answer is that it *only distinguishes what is seen!* Why? Because the conceptual mind is ours! The sense faculty is ours and consciousness also is ours per se. If we look at things



from this view, there are two “*selves*” that appear, which are sense faculty and the consciousness. The same with “*hearing*” – in “*hearing*” there is the “*hearing faculty*” and the discriminating “*hearing consciousness*,” and thus, the sense faculty and the consciousness are on the same side in order to distinguish the objects.

Therefore, while we are seeing, there is already a *discriminating* activity right then and there. Now on the contrary, with our current ability, we implicitly ascertain that the *hearing* is ours (here, we say ‘implicitly’ because we don't actually see it), and the *discriminating activity*, too, is ours. It means right here we are being latent and can't yet see its real face.

However when we see an appearance or form, we must be able to see them as “*the seen*.” This is the first step. Why? Because when we see an outer form, it is also a form that manifests in our mind – in short, it is simply *the seen*. And *that which sees* is yet another form of our sense faculty, just like how we see the lamp is lighted and the fan is turning. However, when we can see both the lamp and the light of the lamp, it means we can see two things. The light of the lamp illuminates everything, and so do our eyes, which is the one that illuminates the form. So here, we have to see this “*seeing*” (*that which sees*). *It is simply because sense objects are form, sense faculties are form and and consciousnesses, too, are also form!*

‡ The “*differences*” appear as thoughts and become the conceptual mind once they are affirmed

Earlier we only discussed two things: sense faculty and sense object. Now we will talk about all three: sense faculty, sense object, and consciousness. Consciousness is something that is easy to comprehend. When we look at this flower, we see all the differences appearing before us, but can we also see *that which sees the differences (the comparer)*? Can we cognize it? Yes, we can! We know it well, so when the differences appear, we cognize them. When we look more closely, we can see that the differences become different thoughts and different judgments that put a stamp on a specific form. Each thought and each judgment becomes a comparison; for example, this color is not the same as that color, this one is bigger than that one, this flower has more petals, this flower is whiter, this flower is bluer, and this flower is more yellow....

When all the differences have *not yet* appeared so clearly – where there is only a “*general difference*” per se, and we stop right there – then that is only the eye consciousness. However, once we begin to question the precise differences of any object, and *there is an assertion that quietly appears behind our cognition to confirm those differences, then it becomes the conceptual mind!*

Do we have enough wisdom to clearly distinguish and clarify this specific point in case? Isn't that troublesome enough? Herein, let's not say that practicing is easy. If

we want to develop the kind of wisdom to fully see our self and to know everything about our self, that is "*adept, skillful knowing*," then we must learn to skillfully distinguish what is happening so that we can know everything about ourselves. What if we don't clearly know what is going on in a single seeing like this, then what? Then Buddha was right in telling us that we are ignorant. However, we should not be sullen when we hear of such. The truth is that sentient beings like us are oblivious, because if we cannot even see clearly the very thing that happens in front of our eyes, then who else is there to be ignorant?

When we see a flower, there are three things involved: the first is the sense faculty (the eyes), the second is the object itself (the flower), and the third is consciousness – here it is simply the eye consciousness. Well, now, it is the *conceptual mind's* turn to come into play. Now we see that "this flower is *more beautiful than* the other flower." Earlier, we simply said that it was "*different*," but now it is "*beautiful*." You see, now this one has already become "*more beautiful than*" the other one. And why is it more beautiful? There you go; comparative arguments begin to arise. For example, "it's more beautiful; it's fresher; it's brighter; it's softer...." Whatever is "*better*" [or "*worse*"], it all comes from our personal reasoning. If this flower is beautiful now, then why is it so? It is because we must have seen an unbeautiful flower in the past, or we saw something that was not as good.

So right here, we use two different *data* from our memory so that we can compare how beautiful or how uglier this flower is in comparison to the one that we saw the other day. At the same time, there is also another flower next to it so we can compare. Although this rival flower is not attached to any memory, it will not accept that it is uglier than the other flower so easily. There are so many reasons to back up our assertion that the flower we chose to be beautiful is really beautiful: it is not beautiful just because we ourselves have affirmed its beauty in the past, but because its beauty was also acknowledged by our Teacher, and by knowledgeable people, intellectual people, and other aesthetic people who knew how to take delight in it. Therefore, we also recognize it as beautiful now. All of that arrived from conclusions that were reached in the past! As for the other flower sitting next to it, it has never been recognized by anyone, and because it has no past history of being recognized by anyone, we do not see it as beautiful either.

‡ **Activity of the conceptual mind – all discriminating activity of the conceptual mind comes from memory and emotional habituation**

So where does beauty and ugliness come from? *They emerge from our memory.* For example, why does beauty appear? Because we have good feelings towards this specific object from the past and now *we habituate these feelings into the new object.* And what if we don't like something? It is because we didn't like it in the

past, so now no matter what anyone says, we still don't find it beautiful. However, seeing that it is not beautiful does not mean that we reject it, but it means we will also continue to habituate it. We habituate at both ends of like and dislike. So, when we first saw something in the first place where the conceptual mind was not yet involved, did we already make comparison at that time? Yes, we did! Because at that time, there was already the *eye consciousness* involved. Although eye consciousness is not yet a very deep habituation, it is still one. As for deep habituation, it means the conceptual mind is involved, where there are both sides of love and hate, acceptance and rejection, or like and dislike. In the beginning, the initial discrimination of the objects has not yet reached love or hate and like or dislike. Nevertheless, it is still the *discrimination* of the *eye consciousness*. Similarly, the *discriminating consciousness* of our ears, tongue and nose faculties are like that, and we must see this clearly.

Now let's talk about the depth of thoughts. Some thoughts are happening in our mind and we are a little happy, and then some other thoughts appear in our mind and we are somewhat sad or a little annoyed and irritated. That means when a thought occurs, it brings with it some feelings. For example, when we suddenly remember of someone, we feel our heart flutter. It suddenly vibrates and we think, "Oh, this is so strange!" If so, then we need to recollect our memory, and surely, we must have met this person before, said a few words to each other and developed some feelings.

That must have been the case in order for us to have these special feelings now when we remember that person. Otherwise if heaven only allows us to meet this person once (without any prior feelings), then we probably will not have such feelings afterward.

Or, it could be the case that we met someone only once in this lifetime, but we feel so intimate. This means we have encountered this person previously in this lifetime, but we just cannot remember where. Or, it could be that we now remember we have met this person somewhere in the past, from one of our past lifetimes. However, we do not have the capability to recall past lives. Another example is when we meet someone, we develop intense dislike, yet when we remember another person, we really want to be close and intimate, or when another person appears, we feel rather normal.

Thus, love or hate, and neither love nor hate appears. So firstly, the mind faculty recognizes the *dharma* or appearing object. However, if there is no conceptual mind's involvement, will it turn into love and hate? No, it won't! Although we feel neither love nor hate, the thought still appears. Initially, the *mind faculty still clearly recognizes each and every thought that appears, but thoughts that are related to love or hate happen due to the interference of the conceptual thinking mind*. We need to see this matter without ambiguity in our mind. When the conceptual mind launches into it, we will then see, oh, how beautiful this

image is, and then the conceptual mind will begin to pull out all sorts of beautiful things for us to see; things that are so pretty and so likeable come along and a bunch of other thoughts flow out. It means that our conceptual mind is pulling out the memory. When conceptuality appears and gets involved, it pulls out things from the past to compare and contrast, to figure out whether this belongs to love or hate, or like or dislike, etc. It simply means that *the conceptual mind is being active*.

‡ **"Cultivation" means not letting your conceptual mind be operative so as not to habituate karma of the mind**

So now, for our purpose, what is cultivation? What do we do when we cultivate? Simply, it means we *don't let the conceptual mind operate!* Currently, we can only suppress the conceptual mind and there is nothing else we can do. When we see something, we automatically discriminate the differences of the forms and shapes – *discrimination happens automatically*. This is a very normal, ordinary activity of sense faculty, sense object and consciousness – in this case, the eye consciousness. This is absolutely normal, and any discriminating activity is the physical body's normal function. What is unusual is the emergence or involvement of the discriminating conceptual mind. It is just like in the story of the Monkey King, Sun Wukong [the fictional character of the 16<sup>th</sup> Chinese novel, *Journey to the West*], when a loud noise erupted

and Sun Wukong emerged from nowhere, and thus, numerous stories began to manifest continuously. Only when this Monkey King came into play that things began to evolve, and while we don't know where he came from, he is truly so very disruptive. However, let's say if we just see as seeing, having *a basic sense of distinction* but not yet developing any mental arising or conscious thinking, then it is simply the working of our eye consciousness which is not at all a problem! Problems have not yet arisen because it is not yet love or hate, which means *it has not yet habituated any karma in the mind. Mental karma carries love or hate, whereas mere thoughts have no love or hate involved.* We must clearly distinguish this. We don't know what the scriptures say, but we need to talk very practically about the happenings here – that is, if a thought carries emotions, it becomes karma, whereas it is not considered karma if there is no emotion involved. Therefore, although a thought appears, it cannot affect us, making us feel uneasy. But if it follows love or hate, then what will happen to us? We will feel anxious or fretful.

‡ ***"Seeing is seeing" at the level of "precise distinction without discrimination" is completely natural and faultless***

Now, if we practice well, we can simply remain alert so that when our object comes into contact with a sense faculty (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body or mind), we clearly see that there is also the sense consciousness



appearing; however, it is not yet conceptuality. That is absolutely fine. *Seeing is seeing*. If seeing is simply seeing, then *what* is this seeing related to, and how can we see *that*? If we have our sense faculties and sense consciousnesses, then it means we have *our very own presence in this vast universe*. And from the immense impact of mind itself, it emerges into the form or characteristic sign of an organ (in this case, the eyes), and the function of the eyes is seeing. At the same time, the sense affects the deep source of the mind, and this has the function of "*precise distinction*" - here we use the word "*precise distinction*" but not yet "*discrimination*." Precise distinction means it is able to clearly distinguish the differences of the *dharmas* or the sensory objects in general. This hasn't yet fallen to the level of discrimination (or comparison). Therefore, this precise distinction has not yet become a concept of love and hate, nor fallen into the comparative and discriminatory level of the conceptual mind. We should remember that only when we begin to "*discriminate*" [compare and contrast] that it becomes conceptuality. On the other hand, to simply "*distinguish*" the differences of the objects means we are only at the outer layer of the conceptual mind and this "*precise distinction*" is completely faultless.

Therefore, when we practice, does it mean we close our eyes so that we do not see anything? Of course, we can still see; this seeing is faultless if we see everything *in a "natural" way*. This seeing is natural, absolutely natural. This is a matter of natural simplicity. Only

when the conceptual mind races in to become involved do we “lose this naturalness.” We must be clear with this point, so that in real life, we know whether we are being “natural” or “unnatural.” If we see everything in a natural way, there's no problem. However, seeing that “there is a problem” means we lose our naturalness. What is the reason for “seeing problems”? It is because our conceptual mind digs out memories, and then compares them with the present in order to love or to hate. This is truly unnatural, ungainly, and without any noble cause, but we cannot block it in time, so it causes chaos. It has magical powers that can change all kinds of things; on the other hand, we are alone [fighting a losing battle]. But if we are constantly aware on an on-going basis, then this constant awareness “prevents” conceptuality from jumping in to make all sorts of comparison and contrast. The conceptual mind at this point is quite pleasant and easy to please, yet we don't allow it to have a break! But let me tell you, right at the time of seeing, where the precise distinction already shows up and there are fully the trio of sense faculty, sense object and consciousness, it is very challenging to bring its workings to a stoppage, unless we close our eyes so that we can no longer see. Even so, if our sense faculty and eye consciousness are still active, when we close our eyes and see darkness, then it is exactly our eye consciousness that distinguishes this darkness.

‡ **The monkey discriminating mind disturbs our mind and we merge with this mind**

If currently there is no sense object, what would happen to the conceptual mind? It will turn indiscriminately to *the objects*, which are *the thoughts that we have already seen* – these are the things that we have seen, heard, and smelled, and they are now starting to appear again. The conceptual mind begins to dive in and it finds that it's really a lot of fun to mess around here. It means that the monkey mind cannot stay still – it rambles, if not in the eyes then in the ears, if not in the ears then in the nose and the body, because it does not stir up the body, then how can it mess up the mind? So the conceptual mind begins to stir up confusion in our minds – remembering this woman and being angry at her; remembering that man and being mad at him; remembering another sister and being upset at this sister – which means we are upset at everything all over, and then we become sad and mad, and cry and cry. So what does that mean? *It is the conceptual mind that is disturbing our mind.*

If we become conscious of the happenings now, what will we see? We see that our sad and happy thoughts are being *clearly cognized*; in actuality, we are cognizing them with no ambiguity, and *there is not a single thought that we don't clearly know*. But the problem here is that we are being carried away by the force of conceptuality, and in the end, the “I” becomes sadness itself! Even though at first, we were awake and we did not let the conscious mind participate – so when thoughts appeared, we were aware of them, thought by thought, and then, when these thoughts came to a

stoppage, we also knew. After a while, we lost control, and then conceptuality appeared, and then, we – our self – became “Oh my, I’m so sad!” It means we are no longer *that which cognizes sadness* but we become *sadness*. Suddenly, we become *sadness*, and no longer *that which is being sad*. When we are the sadness and the happiness, then that means we have *already merged with the conceptual mind!* The conceptual mind always deceives us in this way, not just for an hour but for the whole day, not just for the whole day but the whole year, not just for the whole year but for our whole life, and not just for our whole life but for countless lifetimes.

‡ **Let the monkey discriminating mind go learn the Buddha Dharma and aim at becoming a Buddha**

Therefore, the conceptual mind is the important thing we need to pay attention to. Things become good or bad because of this conceptual mind. To be either a Buddha or a demon king is also because of this conceptual mind! Thus, we have to minimize its activities, educate, and sensitize it. From ancient times until now, we have only habituated in love or hate, in being sad or happy, and in material things and physical desires. Now we must *let the monkey mind go learn the Buddha Dharma and aim at becoming Buddha*. When the time comes when our conceptual mind already aspires to become Buddha, *the conceptual mind itself will naturally dismiss* anything that is unrelated to this

goal! Conceptual mind is learning the Buddha Dharma, and Buddha Dharma is conceptual mind!

Therefore, the Monkey King had to go see Subhuti, because had he not met Subhuti, it wouldn't have been a good thing for the Tang Monk to go on a pilgrimage in quest of the Scriptures. The Monkey King had to set out on an adventure in order to learn Buddhism properly, encounter a famous master, attain enlightenment, return, and immediately live a different life thereafter. Prior to all of this, he was just a monkey king who fought, ate, drank, and grabbed fruits for fun. However, after learning Buddhism, meeting Subhuti, and going to the West to request for the Sutras, he changed his life's direction. That means we, too, must find a way to guide and start training our conceptual mind in another direction, making a new, completely different turn. As long as we change our intention, and transform our conceptual mind, everything will lead to a new direction. This is an extremely difficult matter at this crossroads, but instead of allowing our conceptual mind to mess around as in the past, we now have enough strength to let our mind guide conceptuality in a totally different direction.

‡ **When the mind faculty locks the door of the memory storehouse, the discriminating mind has no data to compare and differentiate**

However, if we want to reach a different direction while living in our own space, we must return to our original sense faculties. The mind faculty, in this case,

has more internal power than the discriminating mind. When the mind faculty was influenced and stimulated by the discriminating mind, it opened the storehouse door and took out the memories. However, if the storehouse door is now locked, the mind faculty would tell the discriminating mind: “No matter how much you, thinking mind, push me, I won't retrieve anything from the memory storehouse anymore – the door is now locked, period! Do you want to compare beauty and ugliness? What do you use to compare them with? Tell me, if there is no more memory, what can you compare them to?” So it is just like that! If the mind faculty is firm, it will fight with the conscious mind and forewarn it that it would not open the door to the storehouse to allow memories flood out anymore. So then, the mind faculty would say to the conscious mind, “If you are so confident about it, then how can you compare and differentiate something and make it beautiful now? Why don't you tell me?” If it goes on like that, then, the conscious mind would absolutely have no data to compare and contrast, which is the same as shutting down the data doors.

Thus, the mind faculty must be very quiescent and calm so as not to be disturbed by the discriminating mind. The mind faculty would think, “For a long time, I just relaxed, allowing the thinking mind to trigger me, and I just scooped up the data and handed over whatever the thinking mind wanted. But now I'm determined to close the door and just sleep; whatever you want to say, I won't provide you any more data!”

Then, the conscious mind will be confused and very uncomfortable; although it still wants to compare something, it is now over because there is nothing else to compare to. “If there's nothing to compare it to,” the discriminating mind would think, “I'll just go to sleep, I'm tired now!”

‡ **“Cultivate” means closing the door of the mind faculty to not provide data to the conceptual mind**

With that in mind, what does “cultivate” mean? It means *closing the door of the mind faculty to not provide data to the conceptual mind!* It may sound like a joke, but this is the truth. If we have enough strength to not be affected by the conceptual mind, there will be no data for the conceptual mind to compare and differentiate. When the conceptual mind stirs up, it wants to take out memories [from the storehouse] to compare, yet now if the conceptual mind stirs up but there is no data at all because the mind faculty has closed the door and gone to sleep or gone on a trip already. It is now impossible to find and get the key to open the storehouse to search for any more memories! Days, month and years pass by just like that, and, the conceptual mind would be so sad that it would just drop dead! Then, it would tell the mind faculty, “Okay, okay, if you see, hear, smell, or taste something.... The heck with it, I’m already tired and have fallen asleep already!” Because conceptuality cannot find the mind faculty anymore, where can it get data from in order to

compare and differentiate? Therefore, everything ends here if the door to the mind faculty is locked.

If the mind faculty cannot lock the door, leaving loopholes for the conceptuality to poke in to get the data out, then this is considered a loss! However, such a loss is only a beginning; once the conceptual mind is able to retrieve old memories to compare and differentiate, it will mess around for a while and will force the mind faculty to merge with sadness, happiness, anger, and hatred, and we would become sadness, love, and hate. We would be totally assimilated, becoming one with the outer conditions, and we would lose self-control completely.

‡ **"Cultivation practice" is to let thoughts appear naturally right in the storehouse of the mind faculty without influencing them – which means to inhibit the activity of the discriminating conceptual mind**

Now that we talk about our "*cultivation practice*" (Viet. *công phu*) again, what should we do? Earlier, we distinguished that there are three sides: love, hate and neither love nor hate. When these three factions appear, what should we do? Well, we'd just simply let love, hate and neither love nor hate appear very naturally without influencing them. "*Without influencing them*" hereby means to inhibit the activity of conceptual mind, and not just having no impact on them in an ordinary sense. It means when the mind faculty appears with its normal, ordinary activity, the mind faculty's



brave ability is to clearly know all *dharmas* or mind's objects without impacting or influencing them at all.

This should be called a *brave ability*, and not simply something casual. We must let the mind function according to its ability, and lock the door to prevent the conceptual mind from messing around to get the key and retrieve the data. The mind faculty indicates clear knowing and nothing but clear knowing; however, clear knowing is not the conceptual mind! If there is the conceptual mind involved, problems will follow, but if conceptuality is not involved, then there is absolutely no problem. For example, now when a thought arises, it starts with the word "*Mrs.*," then the word "*Hai*" (a name), then this name, and that name... and so on as our memories come into play.

When thoughts appear, memories seemingly appear, but it is as if the two of them still remain by themselves inside their own house talking to each other, not letting the elaborating mind see them. If so, just close the door of the mind faculty then! It means if thoughts appear in the treasury of the mind faculty without being exposed to the thinking mind, that is great; only when the thinking mind discovers these thoughts and pulls them out [along with other memories], then something terrible will happen. Overall, it means that when thoughts appear, just let them continue to appear without a need to do anything! Just remain unmoved, and the conceptual mind will not recognize these thoughts. Only when the mind faculty is moved is the

discriminating mind able to stir up problems. For example, at such a moment, the conceptual mind will think, “Oh, since this guy (the mind faculty) is awake right now and is moving, I should take the key, unlock the door and take out some memories to play with, but if he is so quiet and asleep, then forget it, I will go to sleep, too.” Our conceptual mind is intelligent, active and agile, but it is also easy to train. Only when the conceptual mind is agitated does it stir up the mind faculty. When the conceptual mind is not agitated, the mind faculty cannot be agitated. Now, if the conceptual mind is agitated but the mind faculty is not agitated, then we can consider ourselves successful!

Therefore, we must clearly see, recognize and distinguish sense faculties and objects right from the very beginning. That way, when sense objects appear, sense faculties will clearly cognize. Objects appear, sense faculties clearly recognize, and on and on. . . . That is, sense faculties are always present right here to clearly know all the objects that appear. And that’s it; that is all that is needed! If so, then there is no fault, no damage and no harm done. After a long time, sense objects and faculties appear as they are naturally appearing, and sense faculties clearly cognize as they are naturally cognizing all appearances, without any impact from us whatsoever! Up to this point, we have not “done” anything yet in our cultivation practice, although in reality, our internal force is restraining the conceptual mind from being active. It may look simple, but it is truly our inner strength that causes the con-

ceptual mind to lose more and more of its capacity. When sense faculties appear, they appear; when objects appear, they, too, appear. Objects are *the cognized*, sense faculties, *the cognizer*. Simply let the *cognized* and the *cognizer* appear on their own. In the end, we will be absolutely clear and can distinguish without ambiguity *the cognized* and *the cognizer* on and on.

‡ **"Skillful" (or "adept") is to always see that all three (senses, objects, consciousness) exist in their normal, ordinary communication, and all three are present in only "a single "awareness."**

Therefore, at first, we only distinguish that the object is *the cognized*, and the sense faculty as *the cognizer* or *cognizing*. Then over time, we become a little clearer; we see *the cognizing* sitting here, and *the cognized* sitting over there, and we can distinguish the two with clarity. At this time, we see very clearly that the sense faculty and the sense object are two separate things that appear in *our skillfully clear and discriminating awareness*. Reaching this point in our practice is "skillful" (or "adept.") Actually, you are already very adept, skillful and subtle to clearly discover all three – sense faculty, sense object, and consciousness – in a *single* seeing or hearing. Finally, it comes to a point when you would always cognize the existence of all three (sense, object, consciousness) in their normal, ordinary communication. If that is the case, what conclusion can we reach here? It means that sense,

object and consciousness are all present ubiquitously in “*a single awareness.*”

‡ **The six functions in “*awareness*” all come from the “*source of mind*” (*the ground*) and when the mind is not connected to the conceptual mind, everything will return to being normal**

In a single “*awareness*” there are up to six functions, just like a fan having six control buttons. Press any button and it spins; however, when we press one of the buttons, it causes the fan to spin differently than the other buttons. Yet, these six functions of a fan all come from a single power source. That is like our “*source of mind.*” The source of our mind is what exists *beyond* our sense faculties and sense objects. That means we must see clearly – utterly clearly – that the sense faculties, objects and consciousnesses all appear ubiquitously in one single “*awareness.*” Until the day when we can see with utmost clarity that *sense faculties, objects and consciousnesses all exist in the vivid presence in each and every single minuscule mental moment at all times*, they will have no other activity beside that.

If the conceptual mind no longer functions, it is considered completely dissipated. That means gradually, little by little, the sense faculties, objects, and consciousness no longer have any contact with our conceptual mind; they don't like to play around with the conceptual mind anymore because they find this mind very messy. Right then and there, our sense

faculties automatically stop communicating with our discriminating mind. Gradually, sense faculties stop exchanging communication with the discriminating mind altogether as they only like being in the current place – *in the vivid presence* – and do not like anything else anymore. They are simply the pure existence of sense faculties, objects and consciousness in the vivid presence and so on. It means that at that time, our mind no longer connects with conceptuality, and gradually, our thinking mind almost fades away because it no longer has any data to operate on. Our discriminating mind is not invited to play with the trio of sense faculty, object and consciousness anymore; our thinking mind has to live alone by itself all day, and after becoming desperately sad, it bites its tongue and is gone!

In a place where the sense faculties and objects are present without the conceptual mind's involvement, everything is very peaceful with no disturbances or abnormalities. All is back to normality. It is normal because there is no mind' discriminating activity, and it continues to be normal to that extent. In an ordinary sense, seeing is simply like that, hearing is simply like that, and smelling is simply like that, because the discriminating mind does not interfere. If we have enough inner strength to make the conceptual mind stop being active in a single instance of seeing, hearing, or cognizing, such a thing can be considered as us beginning the process of becoming completely

quiescent. Only when the discriminating mind is involved do issues start to arise.

‡ **Normal functioning at the normal level when not disturbed by the conceptual mind**

Therefore, we would see this to be normal. This is a *normal, ordinary operation*. Just let the activity happen normally, as it is happening very normally, and we don't have anything other than this ordinary activity. When there is the discriminating mind's involvement, things become "*different*," but without this conceptual mind, everything is absolutely normal! It is *inherently* normal, utterly normal, and we must let this normality happen on its own course! Don't disturb it! If any unusual disturbance occurs, what should we do? Just stop it! Isn't it simple? In the end, our cultivation practice can be so simple, right? So easy to apply, not so difficult at all!

Thus, when we are at the normal, ordinary level (at a level completely different from how we used to operate in the past) – ordinary seeing, ordinary hearing, ordinary smelling, ordinary tasting, and ordinary touching – if we do not pull out old memories for consciousness to compare and differentiate, then everything becomes normal. This allows us to see that this is the normal life we all have, when we return to being ordinary people, without being driven crazy by our disturbing mind.

‡ **The internal force and inherent ability of a normal person is "naturally meditative" – inherently pure and inherently in meditative absorption**

When we return to being natural and *normal* again, we would be extremely alert, lucid, quiet, and peaceful, and we can abide in this ordinary simplicity for a while to gain the internal strength of *a normal person*. That means we can restore our inherent human capacity. The reason we are abnormal is because we are disturbed by our comparisons and discriminations, causing us to lose all of our internal strength and energy. Now when we return to being natural and normal again, our cultivation power will become so vigorous. Suddenly, when we wake up, we would be radiant, naturally at peace, and naturally meditative. I use the term "*naturally meditative*" when the conceptual mind does not disturb. We are "*inherently pure and inherently in meditative absorption!*" Meditation does not necessarily come from cultivation practice; don't mistakenly think so. Just stop playing and messing around with the discriminating conceptual mind! Once the conceptual mind goes to sleep, everything will be over [it can no longer bring us problems]; if need be, we can even just poison the conceptual mind to death, and then we will be a peace.

When we become natural, normal people again, *whatever appears will appear as it is*. The sense faculty appears intact, and the sense object also appears intact. *The mind faculty appears as it is*, but there is no

discriminative mind in existence. The eye faculty, ear faculty, nose faculty, etc. appear as they are, and they appear as they appear in a very ordinary way without any impact. When everything in this life becomes normal again, we will become normal people. So I hope everyone returns to being normal people! Don't stay abnormal anymore!

Coming to this point means we are returning to being normal, ordinary people, and there is nothing much more to talk about here; however, reaching here is truly amazing. It means we do not cultivate, practice, exert effort or do anything for that matter, but all we need to do is to *clearly distinguish the sense faculty, sense object and consciousness from beginning to end!* Thus, when we can *precisely and minutely distinguish* all three – sense faculty, object, and consciousness – and have already become *normal, ordinary people*, it is then that we can talk about the *extraordinary* things.

‡ **There is "someone" who can clearly see all three sense, object, and consciousness appearing at the same time**

When sense, object and consciousness appear, that is very normal. But now, let us try to be a little better than ordinary people and we will have "someone" who can cognize simultaneously all three of sense, object, and sense consciousness. After living such a normal, ordinary life for a while to wake up spiritually and become clear-minded, we will gain some internal strength and some wisdom. Thereafter, we will see that



*at every moment, we always clearly cognize all three sense faculty, object and consciousness appear at the same time. We will always cognize all three simultaneously as such!*

You can now clearly see what we have discussed and distinguished thus far. For example, let's say we now close our eyes and listen. When sound appears, we hear it. Therefore, we have to be able to distinguish that "*there is a sound that is being heard*" by us and that we are "*hearing.*" Then, we recognize that this sound is not the same as the other sound, or the previous sound is not the same as the latter. It means we have the distinction in the ear consciousness, and that all three sense faculty, object and ear consciousness are being present right here. Within one hearing, all three are present, and we have to see very clearly that all three exist within one single hearing right here. If we want to be an extraordinary person, we must be able *to cognize all three simultaneously at the same time.* Gradually, we will become extraordinary, but in the beginning, we have to be normal, ordinary people first.

Up until now we have been talking about how to become an ordinary person; having done so, we can gradually discuss how to become extraordinary. However, we must be able to cognize those three "*ordinary*" beings (sense, object and consciousness) first and foremost, because they are *mental objects*. We must *cognize clearly and distinctly without mistake anything that appears in each and every minuscule*

*mental moment that is happening in this very vivid presence.* Can you reach this point? We must get here first and be clear about it; don't wait until later to do something about it! If you wait until later to do something about it then you would ruin it. Right here and now, we must clearly see it because this is what is happening right in *this very vivid presence*. The sense faculties are clearly appearing to make contact with the sense objects, and consciousness, too, is appearing without ambiguity. All three are appearing clearly and simultaneously, and this is truly a challenge for all humanity!

If we humans can fathom this, we will surely know who we are! Yet, right now, if we cannot see this, then we don't even know who we are genuinely. When sense, object, and consciousness all appear, how difficult it is for us to discern clearly and distinctly. If we cannot do so, yet we are saying we understand this and that, and this and that, then we are telling a lie, not the truth. Now, let's be honest. Can we cognize all of this yet? Only then can we tell "*who we are.*" If we don't know this yet, then we will be forever clouded, and never be able to open our eyes of wisdom.

‡ **Hearing is hearing, seeing is seeing; it is self-seeing and self-hearing – being an "ordinary person" who is seeing, hearing and existing solely in the vivid presence which is the radiant knowing**

If we are not able to do that yet, then at least we have to become *normal, ordinary people*, correct? Ordinary

people see what they are seeing, and they hear what they are hearing. Hearing is hearing, period, nor is hearing “*just*” hearing either. Seeing is seeing, period, and it is also not seeing “*as*” seeing or “*as*” anything for that matter. There is no need to say “I cultivate meditation” here. We don’t cultivate anything here, we simply see and it is just seeing. When we say *we see something, it means we are present in that very seeing*, not because of what happened before or what will happen after. There is no such reason; rather, it is “*self-seeing*.” There is no reason attached to my seeing. When there is a sound, it is “*self-hearing*.” *Seeing and hearing right in the very vivid presence means existing right in the very vivid presence* and nowhere else. We need to arrive here at the very least, so that we can become normal people and refrain from being abnormal. We are very normal, therefore, there is not a single sound which we do not clearly cognize. We are very normal, therefore, there is not a single form which we do not clearly cognize, and we *simply clearly cognize, being in that very clarity without appending or deducting anything*. We don’t have time to append or deduct anything! Right now, consciousness has already fallen asleep. Consciousness cannot get any data to compare, thus, we cannot append or deduct anything here. If we do not mess around with consciousness for a while, we will arrive at this point because we have already bid farewell to consciousness and it already left for Tây Thiên.

‡ **The first extraordinary step: all eighteen elements can be clearly cognized by our “self,” meaning this “self” has already “gone beyond” the level of the conceptual mind**

Thus, we will live a normal life, and at the very least, we will abide in this natural, ordinary state for a long while. If we remain there for a long time, *peace, joy, and wisdom will open up and connect with everything without obstruction.* And then we can immerse more deeply into our own seeing and hearing, and we will cognize with utmost clarity the seeing and the seen, as well as the hearing and the heard – they appear clearly in all of our eye, ear, nose, tongue and body faculties, as well as in our mind faculty. Eighteen elements (6 internal sense faculties, i.e. 6 sense organs; 6 external sense faculties, i.e. 6 sense objects; and 6 consciousnesses) all appear, and for once, we will clearly cognize all eighteen elements simultaneously. If there is ever a time when *all eighteen elements are clearly seen by our “self” so to speak, then it means this “self” is “beyond” all of them.*

At first, within the ordinary sphere of ordinary sense faculties and ordinary sense objects, if we can clearly see the ordinary, then that means we are no longer ordinary people. Right here, we do not know yet who we are, but we are simply no longer ordinary as we used to be. No matter the manner in which sense faculties, sense objects and sense consciousnesses appear, we clearly know them all. Whichever sense

faculty appears, we would immediately know it as it is appearing. We would clearly know how each sense faculty meets with its sense object, and then when the six consciousnesses appear, we would immediately and clearly cognize how the eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness and body consciousness operate discriminatingly. Once we fully and directly cognize all eighteen elements, we are taking a step “*beyond*” them. But that is not all, for here comes the second extraordinary step.

‡ **The second extraordinary step: transcending senses, objects and consciousnesses – even when senses and consciousnesses are not operative, all outer phenomena are nevertheless clearly recognized**

Now when we can clearly and fully cognize all of these eighteen elements at once, this “*clear knowing*” is *pervading*. Knowing all of one's senses, sense objects, and consciousnesses at once means that one is already “*beyond*” the level of the conceptual mind. Once above and beyond the conceptual mind's level, it only takes one more step to “*transcend*” completely. That is because the sense faculties can go on cognizing nakedly without anything else being attached, and gradually, they will lose their substance. Thereafter, sense faculties just cognize for the sake of cognizing, and gradually, they will become like the conceptual mind and will doze off. This means the six sense faculties are no longer operative, yet there is still the

“*clear knowing*” ability that cognizes form, sound, smell, taste, touch and *dharma*.

This is, indeed, the second extraordinary step. We must be extraordinary to surpass mundane worldlings and reach sainthood! What does it mean? It means that although the sense faculties no longer operate, all objects are still being clearly recognized; *nevertheless, this “clear knowing” is no longer the sense faculties!* It is not the eye, so the eye consciousness is exhausted; it is not the ear, so the ear consciousness is exhausted; it is not the nose, so the nose consciousness is exhausted, etc. Therefore, the sense faculties and their consciousnesses have automatically fallen asleep, and now what fully manifest are the outer phenomena. The outer phenomena include form, sound, smell, taste. However, if those faculties are already exhausted, then the body faculty and the sensory body contact will also exhaust. If the body faculty is exhausted, then there is only the flickering, dying consciousness that is being present. Thus, all colors, sounds, and tastes will *solely and purely manifest in one clear seeing*. So then, where are we now? If we no longer use our sense faculties, it means we are already “*beyond*”! Here, we are not talking about attaining sainthood or anything, but we are simply talking about *going beyond the sense faculties, sense objects, and consciousnesses*.

‡ **The “*I know*” (self-knowing) level of the mind faculty is different from the essential original mind**

So it is clear that right here, there is a clear knowing of everything but it is still at a limited level because *the conceptual mind is not utterly exhausted or completely dead yet!* While clearly and directly knowing form, sound, smell, and taste, firstly, this clear knowing is not yet “*blazingly luminous,*” and secondly, it is not yet “*all-pervasive*” because [what is left of] the conceptual mind is still there, as well as [what is left of] the mind faculty. Since the mind faculty is still there, it makes it impossible for us to be “*all-pervasive,*” although it is very pure, immaculate, quiet, calm, clear and highly discerning. So here, we must see the difference between the mind faculty and the essential original mind.

This means that, here, the mind faculty and the concept mind are not yet utterly exhausted or completely dead, and there is thus this pure, quiescent “*clear knowing*” that appears. This “*clear knowing*” will see that there is still the presence of mind faculty, which is quiet, still and pure. On the other hand, when it comes to speak of the “*skillful clear knowing,*” we must talk about *going beyond this stage* so that it can match its original meaning as taught by the Buddha. At that time, this “*clear knowing*” will self-manifest fully and completely, as there is nothing else besides it. Knowing is simply knowing, brilliantly faultless without any confusion. That means all shapes, sounds, smells, tastes, and even the subtlest ripples in the mind can be clearly and directly cognized *all at once in synchrony*. We would clearly see that the outer phenomena and

ripples in the mind are beneath us; it is, indeed, a strange thing that our “*self*” is somehow above them, and all sense objects are beneath us. Our “*self*” and the sense objects are *completely non-fixated, completely separate from each other!* We have not even talked about transcendence here, but now we will come to *the truth of being non-fixated*. It is not that we have to practice diligently or to cultivate something in order to be liberated, but that we gradually see this truth. This truth is been recognized by us, step by step, and reaching *this level is that of liberation!*

Therefore, if we are now at the level of pure “*knowing*,” then all sounds, shapes, and all thoughts of sadness, anger, and hatred will be at the level of “*the known*.” However, when this level of “*knowing*” manifests, there is still an “*I*” or a “*self*” present, which means we are still “*knowing*” at the level of the mind faculty.

‡ **If we no longer abide in the “*I know*” level, our mind faculty will completely fade away and our “*self*” utterly exhausted**

However, if the *mind faculty* drops itself, and no longer cling to the “*I know*” state of being, then the mind faculty will begin to completely fade away. When the *mind faculty is completely extinguished*, then all forms and sounds immediately *blaze brightly throughout this space!*



Priorly, at the lower stage, we were clearly aware that this thing is different from that thing, or this is different from that; we know everywhere and know it all, whether far or near, big or small, more or less, but we were only capable of knowing each object individually. When there is still "*individuality*," it means there is still an ego of self! This is the answer for us. Currently, all forms with myriad differences are exactly like what they were before, aren't they? If they still exist as before, then it means that our grasping '*self*' is not yet purely exhausted, and we still haven't dropped down the mind faculty. Only when the mind faculty drops itself altogether and completely can the "*self*" be utterly exhausted! If the conceptual mind is utterly exhausted, it is still not complete; only when the mind faculty is utterly exhausted will it be perfectly complete.

‡ **It is not yet "*realizing our true Nature*" when there is still a "*self*" somewhere in this clear awareness**

So now there is only this empty, quiescent, clear knowing that is continuously present here. It is not lost. It is ever aware clearly and distinctively, empty, still, pure and all-pervading. *It knows all of the differences but it has not yet reached the realm of equality!* This is where fixation has completely ended. At the deepest, most subtle level of the mind faculty, there is no fixation, no adhesion! Actually, from immemorial time until now, we have always been inherently and naturally non-fixated. We must have been startled to

find out that it is our natural state to not be fixated to anything, except to this “*self*” which is the last survivor of the mind faculty. Until the very end, we realize that even though the empty, quiescent pervasiveness is truly pure, it is still the abode of the “*self*” — *this “self” is still being preserved somewhere although we do not truly know where exactly.*

We are now very pure, empty, quiescent, and ever aware with utmost clarity – there is nothing that we do not know in this state. Thus, this is called the “*skillful clear knowing.*” Knowing without fixation or attachment, knowing without any thought arising, and knowing with clear discernment minutely. It is truly incredible to see our mind faculty [with all those capabilities] when we reach here. However, if we only study and understand this stage vaguely, once we reach this point, we will continue to mistakenly believe that we have “*realized our true Nature,*” whereas in reality we still hobble in the mind faculty, not yet transcending it!

Here, the mind faculty continues to be pure, clearly cognizing, empty, serene and all-pervading. It continues to distinguish everything minutely although it does not give rise to any thought – it is in a state of non-thought, simply because the conceptual mind has stopped being active. It means *our mind faculty clearly cognizes whatever happens with the outer phenomena, and here, we must know that we are not yet liberated because there is still a “self” somewhere in this clear*

awareness! No matter what we do, there is still “*the known*” and our “*self*” who is aware, and we cannot seem to get out of this mode. Although it is “*all-pervading knowing*,” there is still “*that which is being known*” and our “*self*” as “*the knower*” who is being aware. There seems to be no other way around. Herein, we might end up spending billions of lifetimes in this state of being if we do not have a realized master to guide us. Everyone thinks that when they reach this stage, they are already “*enlightened*” because they have become so unobstructed; they can preach the Dharma like rains of leaves and flowers pouring down without end.

‡ **Knock down “*self-grasping*” and everything will no longer be “*the known*”**

However, if we have a genuine master with great ability to guide us, or if we have gathered enough roots of virtues, merits and conducive conditions, once we reach this point, we will discover the “*self*” – that “*self-grasping*” guy is sitting right there on the rooftop like a toad! This “*self*” has been jamming everything up until now, so know that I would have to knock you down so that you will be under the sleeping spell forever! Right then and there, all forms, sounds and everything else for that matter *will no longer be “the known”!*

In summary, it means that in the past, at the beginning, we cognized everything *based on our sense faculties*, then we went *beyond the sense faculties* to cognize the

outer phenomena, and we remain in this state for a rather long time before we can reach the final stage. Therefore, for those of you who are diligently cultivating your practice, you need to pay close attention to this matter – it simply means that if you have not yet come this far, then it is impossible to talk about meditation in depth. Once you reach this final stage, meaning once *the individuality or separateness of self-grasping has fainted to death*, all forms and all differences (the outer phenomena) *retain the same originalness* as before, yet it is now *impossible to say that one thing can be smaller than the other!*

‡ **The realm of equality: there is no longer anything "different" and no longer a separate "self" to cognize things - each existence is the pure existing reality pervading the vast *dharmadhatu* without any "self"**

For example, all different colors herein *appear with distinctions, yet they are no longer different. And they are no longer the same as before, because now each existence fills up this vast phenomenal world. There are countless, illimitable existences in the dharmadhatu, but none of them shield any of them whatsoever.* At that time, we will find it so miraculously strange; I can guarantee you that when you first fall into this state of being, you would be utterly astonished at first. For example, if there are a million sticks standing up in a row one after another, we can only see the first stick. As far as all those sticks

hidden behind are concerned, we would have to tilt our head back and forth in order to see them. And for those sticks that are further away, the further they are, the smaller and dimmer they become to our perception. However, there is no longer a need for us to tilt our head back and forth to see them; even though there are billions of billions of sticks arranged in the same straight line and very, very far away from us, we would still see everything clearly and exactly the same, as if there is only one single view that exists in the nearest distance. Nothing can shield nothing.

Furthermore, in the past when we went beyond the sense faculties to cognize things, those objects were already brilliant at a certain level, but the *brilliance* and *all-pervasiveness* of *all things* did not appear. Now, once we leave the final point of “*self-grasping*,” everything, absolutely everything, becomes *blazingly luminous*, *blazingly radiant* and *all-pervasive*. While these things still *maintain their original position (their originality)*, they are no longer different from each other, not the least bit different like they were before. Everything equally appears but *no longer “different.”* *When we say no longer “different,” it means that there is no longer an individual, separate “self” to cognize all these things. Everything now is the existing presence where there is no longer a separate “self” hidden anywhere in all these existences!* We can no longer find an individual, separate “*self*” like before. All these things now exist as the existing reality where there is no more “*self*,” yet, everything emerges

clearly, vividly, and all-pervasive and they is the same as the other. Even if we did want this one to be different from that one, it would be impossible – there cannot be any difference even if it is a grain of sand and a high mountain. To the naked eye, it is clear that a grain of sand and a mountain are so different, in weight, in volume and in estimation, and so on. However, in the realm of equality, no matter how we would want to compare or estimate, it is impossible for them to be any “*different*” once we have stepped out of “*self-grasping*” into the realm of equality. This is, indeed, the distinction between mundane worldlings and the Holy Saints!

‡ **The realms of equality, of past, present and future, appear newly fresh in the vivid presence in an endless moment**

Once we get here, the realms of past, present, and future will also appear as we have previously mentioned. However, the state of “*equality*” will first emerge and will greatly surprise us, but all these so-called surprises will in turn disappear! Everything will be utterly different from all of our views, understandings, self-attainments or self-accomplishments from the past until now, and because of that, what is of old, including ourselves and our surprises, will *automatically disappear*. Our old “*self*” will be completely gone – there is no more “*self*,” and our existence is now something that is utterly, utterly, utterly new and fresh. It emerges as completely, freshly

new – everything is completely freshly new. Well, it is just like something hundreds of billions of lifetimes ago just “*freshly*” happens. Even if it is billions of eons ago, it also appears *freshly new in this vivid presence*, so it is impossible to talk about this realm.

In the mundane world, if we were to tell this to people, they will think that we are crazy. However, once we get to this state of being, it is absolutely clear that *things that happened billions and billions of lives ago within our cycle of life and death are also something that “freshly exists in the vivid presence.”* And that is something incredibly strange! Moreover, all the connections that lead us to billions and billions of lifetimes later are also “*newly and freshly present here.*” Everything appears as it appears without time and without space – absolutely everything appears throughout, without impediments and unobstructedly just like that. It is impossible to calculate time and space in this sphere of equality, because everything appears fully and completely as “*one single location.*” *Although it is “one single location,” it is also the whole entirety of the pervading dharmadhatu in the vivid presence!* There is no way there can be any difference or differentiation among everything in this realm. That is utterly miraculously strange!

Thus once we arrive here, it must be said that there *are no Buddhas and there are no sentient beings*; there is no realm, no sphere, no difference, no hierarchy, no progressiveness, no distance, no near, no far, no past,

no present, no future, no time and no space. How utterly strange! We must use the term “*none*.” *None, none, completely none whatsoever, yet, everything somehow still appears in a certain moment, but it is an endless moment that occurs!* Even though it is “*a moment*,” it is “*endless*,” as it is no longer a minuscule moment of time interval! *Everywhere and anywhere is infinite and endless – there is nothing that is not infinite, not endless!*

This is the *final transcendence*, and when we reach this point, this is called the “*Skillful Clear Knowing Wisdom*.”



## ABOUT ZEN MASTER THÍCH TUỆ HẢI

Senior Venerable Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải whose Dharma name means “*Ocean of Wisdom*” (birth name: Đinh Kim Nga, also known as *Vô Trụ Thiền Sư* or *Hiển Hiện Như Nhiên Thiền Sư*) was born in 1968 in Long Thới Village, Chợ Lách District, Bến Tre Province. Master Tuệ Hải came from a landowner



family and was the youngest of seven children. The land on which he was born was thought to be sacred, because during the war, bombings and gunfire never reached it. Thus, many people in nearby areas would escape to his family’s land in search of sanctuary.

One day, following an upheaval Master Tuệ Hải’s father gave up his career, and his family found themselves in very difficult circumstances. As two of his older brothers took to heart the meaning of impermanence, they decided to become *bhikkhus*. Thereafter, his older sister also became a *bhikkhuni*.

Since his childhood, Master Tuệ Hải has been very filial toward his parents. At the age of six, he already knew how to cook a meal, and in order to support his family, he would follow his mother to help her sell things at the market. At night, he would come back home to take care of his father with much love and devotion, always serving and following his father's wishes without even the slightest thought of objection. Master Tuệ Hải said, "I was raised over very difficult circumstances ever since I was a young child; therefore, I was equipped with a strong determination to overcome arduous, challenging life situations until this very day."

His mother, on the other hand, was a peaceful, wondrous woman who was full of loving-kindness and free from discord. Master Tuệ Hải used to say: "It would be difficult to find another woman throughout this world with as wonderful qualities as my mother." His mother spent her entire life devoting to her family, and in 1993, she became an ordained nun, learning and practicing the Dharma at the Tuệ Không Monastery.

Accompanied by great roots of virtues planted in the Buddha-Dharma, Master Tuệ Hải, at the age of seven, became deeply moved the very first time he saw the statue of Buddha Shakyamuni. He stood immobile and entered meditative absorption in front of the statue for close to eight hours during which he was completely aware of everything that took place around him. Many people witnessed this and they did

not dare to disturb Master Tuệ Hải until he left the meditative state himself.

In 1985, Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải fell severely ill and began to research and study the macrobiotic diet method of Sir G. Oshawa. He followed the nutritional macrobiotic diet for just twenty-one days and reached the so-called Diet #7 empirical experience. It was the state of perfect complimentary yin-yang balance just as Sir G. Oshawa had indicated. All illnesses, therefore, disappeared, and throughout those seven days and nights, Master Tuệ Hải remained in a tranquil state of emptiness of body and mind with boundless bliss and happiness.

In that very same year, while still a young student, Master Tuệ Hải was listening to his teacher give a lecture on the subject of *"All things are set in motion in space"* during which he suddenly realized the principle of impermanence, and therefore, began to build the determination to become ordained. It was not until the beginning of 1986 that Tuệ Hải left his household for Thường Chiếu Zen Monastery where he would begin his volunteer work and Dharma studies to prepare for his ordination.

On December 8, 1986, which fell on the anniversary of the Buddha's Great Enlightenment, Master Tuệ Hải officially received ordination from the Grand Master Thích Thanh Từ and was given the Dharma name Tuệ Hải (*Ocean of Wisdom*). When living with the other monks in the monastery, he was assigned to toil the land and to grow vegetables; however, his aspiration to gain liberation from the mundane world, to

resolutely transcend life-and-death and to merge with the absolute truth, continued to be his burning desire. As months and years passed by, the yearning in his heart grew more intensively, until one day, on July 7, 1997, as he listened to his Root Teacher, the Great Master Thích Thanh Từ, explain Nāgārjuna's Middle Way (*Mādhyamika-Shastra*), he heard the following comment, "*the emptiness of sensation is Nirvāṇa*," and at that very moment, immediately severed all kinds of past and present conventional knowledge. With his mind and body empty and clear, he thoroughly and lucidly realized that all conditions and object-appearances were no longer the same physical form aggregate as he had always known.

Since then, Master Tuệ Hải fathomed the sublime teachings and no longer had any doubts regarding the words of the Buddha; he has fully comprehended the perfect truth, and from an understanding that transcends all conventions, life has become nonchalant and leisurely calm. At that very moment, he appreciatively composed a verse depicting this living force within him:

*From now on, to leisurely live in happiness,  
Each condition brightly lucid and non-mistaken  
Non-mistaken, unconfused, unerring,  
Simply radiant, just like that – how is it possible to  
express it fully!*

On December 12, 1994, Master Thích Tuệ Hải followed the command of his Root Teacher, the Grand Master Thích Thanh Từ, who appointed him to become the Abbot of Long Hương Temple in Nhơn

Trạch District, Đồng Nai Province, where he presently resides. Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải has taught extensively on Mahāyāna Zen, the true nature of the mind, and on various major *Sūtras*, especially the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra (Flower Ornament Sūtra)* and its vast and profound view, similar to the pure view of Vajrayana that all *dharmas* are equanimous, non-discriminatory, and are actually Buddhas. In all of his teachings, Master Tuệ Hải always tries to point out the singleness and true essence of all traditions, whether it is Theravāda, Mahāyāna, Pureland, Zen or Vajrayana. His greatest aspiration is for all the diverse traditions of Buddhism to have a unified view in accordance with the realized and liberated view as taught by Buddha: *“Hundreds of rivers together flow to the vast sea; as the sea has a single salty taste, my Dharma, too, has only a single taste of liberation.”*

Aside from propagating the Dharma to benefit beings, Master Tuệ Hải is also a physician of traditional medicine and macrobiotics who has cured many severe illnesses, and has advised everyone to develop a healthy balance of body and mind in order to unlock one’s inner wisdom, to understand the natural order of the uni-erse, and to gain limitless freedom, absolute impartiality, and endless bliss and happiness.

In 2009 and 2012, Zen Master Tuệ Hải traveled extensively and taught in over forty states in the USA, as well as Europe and Australia. Thereafter, he chose to remain in Vietnam to oversee the long-term construction of the new Long Hương Temple, as well as to provide weekly teachings and spiritual guidance to

local Buddhist communities and the newly established ordained sangha at his Temple. Currently, Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải remains a Senior Standing Committee Member of the Educational Committee of the Central Buddhist Congregation in Vietnam.

*Web: [www.ekayanazen.com](http://www.ekayanazen.com)*

*Youtube : [www.youtube.com/@ekayanazen](http://www.youtube.com/@ekayanazen)*

*Facebook: [www.facebook.com/ekayanazen](http://www.facebook.com/ekayanazen)*



*Gone*

*Gone*

*Gone Beyond*

*Gone Utterly Freely Beyond*

*Perfectly Awakened*

*Svāhā*

*Essence of Prajñāpāramitā*