

Sūtra on the Concentration of Sitting Meditation (坐禪三昧經 *Zuochan sanmei jing*, T15 no. 614)

Introduction

Kumārajīva (334-413) was a Buddhist monk who was born in Kucha, an important oasis town along the northern course of the Silk Road. Kucha at that time was a center of Sarvāstivāda Buddhism. Kumārajīva was educated in the Sarvāstivāda tradition, studying for a time in Kashmir, a stronghold of Sarvāstivāda Buddhism before converting to Mahāyana and becoming an expert in the Madhyamaka teachings of Nāgārjuna. After a rather colorful life that included being held as a virtual prisoner by a warlord for many years (during which time he learned Chinese), he finally arrived in the Chinese capital of Chang'an in 401 where, with the support of the Emperor Yao Xing he undertook a massive translation project that reshaped nascent Chinese Buddhism, providing it with accurate and readable translations of a large number of important Buddhist sūtras and treatises, including such texts as the Lotus Sūtra and such treatises as the massive Mahāprajñāpāramitā Upadeśa, a virtual encyclopedia of Mahāyāna Buddhism attributed to Nāgārjuna. One of his first translations, however, at the request of his Chinese disciple Sengrui, was the current text, the Sūtra on the Concentration of Sitting Meditation (Chan) (坐禪三昧經 *Zuochan sanmei jing*, T15 no. 614). Sengrui himself described the occasion of its composition:

The practice of chan is the first gate in the path leading to the Way, the route which leads to nirvāṇa. Formerly in this land [of China] the [Scripture on the Stages of] Cultivation, the large and small versions of the [Scripture of the] Twelve Gates, and the larger and smaller Ānāpāna [Scriptures] were translated. Though these texts do indeed pertain to this matter [of chan practice], they are not comprehensive, and furthermore [despite the presence of such texts] there have been no [masters] from whom one can receive instructions. A proper course for those studying [chan] has thus been wanting. The master Kumārajīva came to Chang'an from Guzang on the twentieth day of the twelfth month of the Xinchou year [February ninth 402], and on the twenty-sixth day of that month I [Sengrui] received from him instructions for chan practice. Only having been blessed with this edifying instruction did I know that study [of chan] has a prescribed standard, and that its teachings have a prescribed arrangement. As said in the Sūraṅgama-sūtra, though one studies the Way in the mountains, without a master one will never succeed. Thereupon I was fortunate enough to obtain these three fascicles [from Kumārajīva], compiled from the chan manuals (禪要) of various masters.¹

¹ *Records of the Canon*, T.2145: 55.65a20–27, translated by Eric Matthew Greene, *Meditation, Repentance, and Visionary Experience in Early Medieval Chinese Buddhism*. PhD dissertation,

In his discussion of this text, Eric Matthew Greene describes it as a kind of “greatest-hits of Indian meditation literature.”² Kumārajīva drew for the most part of prominent masters from northwestern India, where he himself received his early training. The first fascicle, from which the selections below are taken, focuses on mainstream Buddhist practices that presumably were current in the fourth century in northern India. The second fascicle (not included below) focuses on Mahāyāna Buddhism, but as far as actual practice is concerned, adds little new to what is presented in the first.

Buddhist meditation is presented in this text in terms of what in China later became known as the “Five Gates of Chan,” *chan* not in the later sectarian sense (the later Zen school) but *chan* as a term referring more broadly to a variety of meditative practices. Five practices in particular are described and correlated with different personality types: 1. the meditation on impurities for those beset by lust; 2. the meditation on friendliness, for those beset by anger; 3. the meditation on dependent arising for those beset by ignorance; 4. the meditation on the breath for those beset by discursive thoughts, and 5. the meditation on the body of the Buddha as a kind of “all-purpose” meditation. All of these methods were well known in the Indian tradition at the time. What is striking about Kumārajīva’s presentation, however, is that he substitutes the meditation on the Buddha for the more traditional meditation on the elements (*dhātu*), which is thus omitted. The meditation on the elements was described as a meditation for those beset with pride.

The following translation is taken from *The Sutra on the Concentration of Sitting Meditation*, translated by Nobuyoshi Yamabe and Fumihiko Sueki (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2009). It consists of the introduction and the discussion of the first and fifth of the five methods just mentioned, namely the meditation on the impure and the meditation on the breath. These two sections have been selected because these two meditations in particular came to be known as the two doors of mindfulness in the Sarvāstivādin tradition, and continued to be grouped together as such in China. In the *Abhidharmakośabhaṣya* VI.9ab meditation on the loathsome (*aśubha*) and mindfulness of the breath (*ānāpānasmṛti*, 息念) are said to be the entrances (*avatāra*) to cultivation (*bhāvanā*). I have omitted some portions of the text to shorten the reading a bit and make it more appropriate for this sutra study. I have noted any changes that I have made in italics enclosed in brackets. Words in italics enclosed in parentheses are interlinear comments found in the original Chinese text. Passages identified as coming from Aśvaghōṣa’s *Saundarananda* (“Handome Nanda) noted with the abbreviation SauN.

University of California, Berkeley, 2012, p. 15.

² *ibid.*, p. 41.

Fascicle One

It is difficult to encounter a guide who [is willing to] teach and a listener who delights in listening [to the teaching]. That which mature people enjoy listening to but petty people dislike hearing [is the teaching].

To be pitied are sentient beings who fall onto the craggy pathways of old age and death. Uncultivated people enslaved by [the bonds of] obligation and love do not feel fear in awful places due to their ignorance.

Whether large or small, in this world no element is permanent. Nothing abides for a long time. Things appear only temporarily like lightning.

[The text here expands on this theme of life's impermanence and the importance of practice. In the interest of keeping this reading to a manageable length I have omitted it. It is followed by a section dealing with the teacher's assessment of the qualities of the student, in order prescribe the appropriate mediation practice, complete with length characterizations of each character type. Again in the interest of brevity I have omitted this section. This takes us directly to the first method of meditation, the meditation on the loathsome meant for people who are particularly susceptible to the first of the "three poisons," namely greed/desire/lust.]

First: The Method of Curing Lust

A practitioner who has much lust practices the meditation on the impurities. From the feet to the hair, [the whole body] is filled with impurities. (1) Head hair, (2) body hair, (3) nails, (4) teeth, (5) thin skin, (6) thick skin, (7) blood, (8) flesh, (9) tendons, (10) vessels, (11) bones, (12) marrow, (13) liver, (14) lungs, (15) heart, (16) spleen, (17) kidney, (18) stomach, (19) large intestine, (20) small intestine, (21) feces, (22) urine, (23) nasal mucus, (24) saliva, (25) sweat, (26) tears, (27) dirt, (28) dust, (29) pus, (30) brain, (31) placenta, (32) gallbladder, (33) water, (34) thin skin, (35) fat, and (36) meninges. These sorts of impurities are in the body.

Further, the meditation on the impurities consists of [the following nine stages: namely] the visualization of (1) blue pus, (2) swelling, (3) bursting, (4) shedding blood, (5) besmearing [of the blood], (6) stinking pus, (7) being devoured [by scavengers] but not completely consumed, (8) scattering of the bones, and (9) scorched [bones]. [Together,] this is called "the meditation on the impurities."

Further, a lustful person has seven types of attachments; namely attachment to (1) pleasant colors, (2) beautiful appearances, (3) deportment, (4) voices, (5) smoothness of touch, (6) people, or (7) all of these.

(1) If one is attached to pleasant colors, one should practice the meditation on blue pus. [The meditation on] yellowish or reddish impure colors will also [serve for the same purpose]. (2) If one is attached to beautiful appearances, one should practice the meditation on a swelling body and scattering bones. (3) If one is attached to deportment, one should practice the meditation on the bones of a recently dead person smeared with blood. (4) If one is attached to voices, one should practice the meditation on [someone who is] dying with his throat being choked. (5) If one is attached to smoothness of touch, one should practice the visualization of bones and the meditation on the disease of dry skin. (6) If one is attached to people, one should practice [these] six meditations. (7) If one is attached to all of these, one should practice all of these meditations. At times one does various meditations in turn. This is called the meditation on the impurities.

Question: If the body is impure and like a stinking corpse, how does one develop attachment to it? If one is attached to a pure body, one should also be attached to a stinking and rotten body. If one is not attached to a stinking body, one should not be attached to a pure body; for the two (i.e., pure and impure) bodies are equal.

Answer: If one seeks for the two as substantial [elements], either purity [nor impurity] is perceivable. People's minds are deluded and covered up with perverted views. Thus one considers the impure to be pure. If the perverted mind is destroyed, one attains the meditation on the reality of [all] elements. Then one knows that the impure is unreal and false.

Further, a corpse has no heat, no life, no consciousness, and no sense faculties. [When] one clearly knows this, one's mind is not attached [to it]. Because the body has heat, life, consciousness, and unimpaired sense faculties, one's mind is delusively attached to it. Also, when one's mind is attached to [a pleasant] appearance, one considers it to be pure. When the attachment ceases, one knows it to have been impure. If the [body] were indeed pure, it should be always pure. This, however, is not the case. It is like a dog that eats excrement and thinks it is pure, but a human being sees it and thinks it is extremely filthy.

Inside and outside the body, there is nothing pure anywhere. If one is attached to the external [appearance] of the body, [consider that] thin skin covers up the whole body and barely [conceals impurities], like [the skin of] a mango, but that [the body is] still impure. How much more so the thirty-six items inside the body?

Further, if one considers the causes and conditions for the body, they are all impure. [The body] arises from a combination of impure semen and "blood" of the parents. Once a body is formed, it constantly discharges impurities. Clothing and bedding are also foul-smelling and impure. How much more so a place where someone is dead.

From these reasons, one should know that inside and outside the body, whether alive or dead, everything is impure. (*What follows until the beginning of the second method is the text of a sutra*)

Also, there are three classes of meditation: introductory, intermediate, and advanced practice.

If [the practitioner] is at the introductory level, [the master] should teach that person as follows: "Create an image of broken skin. Remove impurities and visualize a man of red bones. Fix your mind and meditate, without letting your mind be distracted by other objects. If your mind is distracted, you should concentrate it and return it [to the original objects of meditation]."

If [the practitioner] is at the intermediate level, [the master] should teach him as follows: "Remove the skin and flesh in your imagination. Meditate on the skull exhaustively, without letting your mind be distracted by other objects. If your mind is distracted, you should concentrate it and return it [to the original object of meditation]."

If [the practitioner] is at the advanced level, [the master] should teach him as follows: "[First, mentally] remove the skin and flesh [and reveal] the heart of 'one inch' in the body, and [then] fix your mind to five spots: head, forehead, the area between the brows, the tip of the nose, and the heart. Put your mind on these five spots and meditate on the bones without letting your mind be distracted by other objects. If your mind is distracted, you should concentrate it and return it [to the original objects of meditation]."

One should always mindfully observe the mind, and if the mind is distracted, one should control it. If the mind is exhausted, it will be fixed on the objects of mindfulness. It will abandon other objects and stay [there]. It is just like a monkey that becomes quiet only after it has been tied to a pole for a long time. The object is like a pillar, mindfulness like ropes and chains, and the mind is compared to a monkey. It is also like a nursemaid, who always watches the baby without letting it fall. A practitioner should watch his mind in the same way; he should control the mind step by step and fix it on the object of meditation.

If one's mind is fixed for a long time, it conforms to the state of meditation. If one attains meditation, there are three signs: (1) The body becomes comfortable, soft, and light; (2) white bones emit rays of light like white jade; (3) the mind becomes tranquil. This is called the meditation on the pure. At that time, one obtains the mind [belonging to] the realm of form (*rūpadhātu*). These are called the first signs of meditation practice.

If one obtains the mind [belonging to] the realm of form, the mind conforms to the state of meditation, which is an attribute of the realm of form. The mind attains this attribute, but the body rests in the realm of desire (*kāmadhātu*). The four gross elements become soft and comfortable to the fullest extent. The complexion is pure, shining, and agreeable. Namely, one attains the joy and comfort [belonging to the first stage of meditation].

The second [sign] is that, during the aforementioned meditation on the bones, when one visualizes the image of white bones, rays of light illuminate universally and turn everything into pure white.

The third [sign] is that the mind is fixed on one spot, which is called pure meditation. Since one removes the flesh and observes the bones, [this meditation] is called pure meditation.

These three signs can be perceived by oneself but not by others.

Among the aforementioned three levels of practitioners, an elementary practitioner refers to someone who has not yet made a resolve [to practice Buddhist meditation]; an intermediate practitioner refers to someone who has practiced for three or four lifetimes; an advanced practitioner is someone who has practiced for one hundred years with his own body.

Fourth: The Method of Curing Discursive Thoughts

If discursive thoughts are predominant, one should practice the method of the concentration on [mindful] inhalation and exhalation. (*Saundarananda* of Aśvaghoṣa, 15.64) There are three levels of practitioners: introductory, intermediate, and advanced.

If [the practitioner] is at the introductory level, [the master] should teach him in the following way: "Concentrate on mindfully counting inhalations and exhalations. Whether the breathing is long or short, count it from one to ten."

If [the practitioner] is at the intermediate level, [the master] should teach him as follows: "Following the breath coming in and out, you should count [your breaths] from one to ten. Your mindfulness and your breathing should be kept together, and your mind should be fixed on one point."

If [the practitioner] is at the advanced level, [the master] should teach him as follows: "Counting the breath, following the breath, fixing the mind on one point, contemplation, shifting, and purification. The concentration on [mindful] inhalation and exhalation have these six methods and sixteen aspects."

"What is the method of counting the breath? [The practitioner is] single-mindedly aware of inhalations. When an inhalation is over, you should count it as 'one.' When an exhalation is over, you should count it as 'two.' If you count the number when the inhalation or exhalation is not over, it is miscounting. If you count from two to nine and then miscount, you have to start over from one. This is just like an accountant who gets two by adding one and one, gets four by adding two and two, and then gets nine by adding three and three."

Question: Why should one count [the breath]?

Answer: [Counting the breath] allows one to realize impermanence easily, allows one to sever discursive thoughts, and allows one to attain single-mindedness.

Although body and mind arise and cease and are impermanent, since they continue in similar forms, their impermanence is hard to perceive. [By contrast,] inhalation and exhalation arise and cease [palpably] and their impermanence is easy to realize. Also, by fixing the mind on counting, one can sever discursive thoughts. Discursive thoughts include thoughts of lust, anger, harm, relatives, lands, and immortality.

One who wishes to purify one's mind and enter the correct path should first remove the three types of coarse thoughts, and then the three types of subtle thoughts. After removing the six types of thoughts, one will attain all pure elements. (SauN 15.67) It is just like a gold miner who first removes coarse pebbles, then fine sand, and finally gets refined gold dust. (SauN 15.66)

Question: What are the coarse diseases, and what are the subtle diseases?

Answer: Thoughts of lust, anger, and harm; these three are called coarse diseases. Thoughts of relatives, land, and immortality; these three are called subtle diseases. After removing these thoughts, one attains all pure elements.

Question: One who has not attained awakening has not severed binding defilements. These six types of thoughts are powerful and disturb people at will. How can one sever them?

Answer: If the mind is averted from the world, correct observation can suppress binding defilements, though it cannot uproot them. When one attains undefiled awakening later, one can uproot binding defilements. What is correct observation?

One sees that, for a lustful person, seeking for something is painful; attaining and guarding something is also painful; losing something and regretting it is also greatly painful. Even if the mind obtains the desired object, the mind is not satisfied, which is painful. (SauN 15.9)

Desire is impermanent, vain, and conducive to distress. Everyone has such [desire]; one should realize and abandon it. If a poisonous snake enters one's chamber, and if one does not remove it immediately, one will certainly be harmed. (SauN 15.8)

Unstable, unreal, and valueless is the perverted pleasure of various desires (SauN 15.11). As an arhat with six supernatural powers taught his lustful disciple in the following way: "You should not break the precepts [but maintain] them in purity. Nor should you stay with a woman in the same chamber. Poisonous snakes of binding desires fill the chamber of your mind; entangling attachment will never leave.

"[Even though] you know that the precepts on bodily conduct should not be broken, your mind constantly stays with the fire of lust. You are a practitioner who has left your family and is seeking awakening. How could you indulge your mind so much?

"Your parents gave birth to you, cherished you, and brought you up, and your relatives had both favor and affection for you. All of them cried and tried to dissuade you [from leaving the family]. You could even abandon and disregard [such great affection].

"Nevertheless your mind always entertains lustful thoughts; it wishes to play with them without aversion. It always enjoys being with the fire of lust; [the mind] rejoices in the pleasure of attachment and does not leave it even for a moment."

Thus one should fault lustful thoughts in various ways. These sorts of correct observations remove lustful thoughts.

Question: How does one eliminate thoughts of anger?

Answer: Since [the time] one was born from within the womb, [life] has always been painful. In this [painful life], people should not develop anger and harmful thoughts.

If you entertain anger and harmful thoughts, friendliness and compassion disappear. Friendliness and compassion on the one hand and anger and harmful thoughts on the other are not comparable. If you cherish friendliness and compassion, anger and harmful thoughts disappear, like brightness and darkness that cannot occupy the same place. (SauN 15.12-13)

If you keep the pure precepts but entertain anger, you destroy the benefit of the Dharma by yourself. It is just like elephants that smear their bodies with mud after bathing in water. (SauN 15.14)

People always have old age, disease, and death, and [experience] hundreds of thousands of sufferings [as if beaten with] various whips and rods. How can a good person, while keeping sentient beings in mind, add [his] anger and harmful thoughts to their suffering? (SauN 15.15)

If you give rise to anger and wish to harm someone, before reaching that person [the anger] will burn yourself. (SauN 15.16)

For these reasons, you should always apply your mind to practicing friendliness and compassion. Do not let anger, harmful thoughts, and evil intentions arise in your mind. (SauN 15.17)

If one always mindfully practices the good elements, one's mind always emulates the thoughts of the Buddha. (SauN 15.18)

For these reasons, one should not pay any regard to evil; [instead] one should always reflect on good elements and gladden one's mind. Then one will attain happiness in this life as well as in the next; one will further attain the eternal happiness of awakening, which is nirvana. (SauN 15.19)

If evil thoughts are accumulated in one's mind, one loses one's own benefits and harms others. (SauN 15.20)

That is why people say that the evil is detrimental to both oneself and others, because it effaces the pure minds of other people. (SauN 15.21)

It is just like a practitioner in the wilderness who raises his hands, cries, and says, "A thief robbed me!"

Someone asks, "Who robs you?"

[The practitioner] replies, "Thieves of possessions I do not fear. I do not collect possessions or seek worldly benefits. What thieves of possessions can rob me? I, however, do collect roots of merit and Dharma jewels. Discursive thoughts, like thieves, come to me and destroy my benefits. Thieves of possessions can be avoided, because there are many storehouses. When, on the other hand, thieves of merit come, there is no way to avoid them."

One should fault anger in these various ways. These sorts of various correct observations remove thoughts of anger.

Question: How does one eliminate thoughts of harming others?

Answer: Hundreds of thousands of types of diseases constantly visit in turn and torment sentient beings. Death, like an enemy, catches people and always tries to kill them. Thus beings are plunged into boundless suffering.

How can a good person cause beings additional harm [by] slandering and plotting to hurt them mercilessly? [If he does such a thing,] the harm will not reach the intended person but return to himself. If a layman gives rise to harmful thoughts, that might be admissible.

This is a worldly practice and becomes a cause for bad karma, but [a layman] does not claim that he cultivates good. If a practitioner who has left his family and is seeking pure awakening gives rise to anger and entertains envious mind,

He lights a violent fire in cool clouds. Know that the evil sin of this act is extremely serious. If a practitioner in the wilderness gives rise to envy, there is an arhat who can read other people's minds.

[The arhat] gives [that practitioner] instructions and bitterly reprimands him, saying: "How foolish you are! Envy naturally destroys your roots of merit. If you seek alms, you should by yourself collect roots of merit and adorn yourself [with them].

"If you do not keep the precepts, nor [practice] meditation or [engage in] much learning, and if you destroy your Dharma body by falsely wearing a dyed robe, you are just an evil beggar. How can you seek alms and benefit yourself?

"Sentient beings are always harmed by hundreds of thousands of sufferings, such as hunger, thirst, cold, and heat. Their bodily and mental agonies are endless. How can a good person do additional harm to them?

"Doing so is just like piercing ailing wounds with a needle. It is also like a prisoner who is on trial but has not yet been sentenced. His body is entangled in pain and agonies accumulate [in him]. How can a friendly and compassionate [person] aggravate his agonies?"

Thus one should fault thoughts of harming others in various ways. These sorts of various correct observations remove thoughts of harming others.

Question: How does one eliminate thoughts of relatives?

Answer: [The practitioner] should reflect in the following way. Beings in samsara are drawn by their own karma through the world-systems. Who are relatives, and who are not? Merely owing to one's ignorance, one erroneously develops attachment and believes someone to be one's relative. (SauN 15.31) Strangers in the past have become relatives, and strangers [in this life] will become relatives in the future. Relatives in this life were strangers in the past. (SauN 15.32) It is just like birds that flock together on one tree in the evening but fly away [from each other] the [next] morning according to their respective conditions. (SauN 15.33) Families and relatives are the same way. (SauN 15.34) Born in this world, individual people have separate minds. They become relatives because conditions meet, and they become distant because conditions disperse. There are no stable causes, conditions, fruits, or retribution that keep people together. It is just like a lump of dry sand grasped in the hand. Conditioned by grasping, it stays together; but conditioned by releasing, it is scattered. (SauN 15.35) Parents bring up children [thinking that they] will be rewarded in their old age. Children should repay [their parents later] because they have been embraced and brought up [by them]. (SauN 15.36) If [relatives] comply with one's mind, they become close, but if they are against one's mind, they become enemies. (SauN 15.37) There are relatives who do more harm than good, and there are strangers who do great service and no harm. People develop affection due to causes and conditions, and the affection is severed due to causes and conditions. (SauN 15.38) Just like painters who paint women and are attached to their own [paintings], one develops one's own attachments and is attached to external objects. (SauN 15.39) What can the relatives in your past lives do for you in this life? You also cannot benefit your relatives in the past, nor can they benefit you. Neither [you nor your former relatives] can benefit each other. (SauN 15.40) In vain one regards others as relatives or strangers. In these world-systems, [in fact the distinction between relatives and strangers] is indefinite, and there is no [clear] boundary [between them]. (SauN 15.41) As an arhat teaches a novice disciple who has attachment for his relatives, saying: "You are like a foul person who vomits up food and wants to eat it again. You have already left your family. How can you still be attached to it? Your tonsured head and dyed robe are marks of deliverance. Attached to your relatives, you cannot attain deliverance and, on the contrary, are bound by the attachment. The triple world is impermanent, ever changing, and indeterminate. Whether [someone is] a relative or a stranger, [that distinction is only temporary]. Even if some people are relatives now, they will cease to be so in the long run. In this way the sentient beings in the ten directions transmigrate. Relatives are indeterminate, and they are not [eternally] your relatives. "When a person is about to die, he has no mind or consciousness. He looks straight ahead and does not turn [his eyes]. His breathing stops, and the life expires. It is just like falling into a dark hole. At that time, where are the relatives and family members?

"When a person is newly born, strangers in the past life have been forcibly gathered to become relatives. When he dies, again they cease to be relatives."

Thus contemplating, one should not be attached to relatives.

When a child dies, parents in the three realms cry at the same time. The parents, wife, and children in heaven consider those in the human realm to be false. The parents among *nāgas* consider those in the human realm to be false.

These sorts of various correct observations remove thoughts of relatives.

Question: How does one eliminate thoughts of lands?

Answer: If a practitioner thinks that a land is prosperous, peaceful, and is inhabited by many good people, he is constantly drawn, as by a rope, by thoughts of lands that lead people to the place of transgressors. (SauN 15.42) Realizing that one's own mind is in such a state, if one is a wise person, one should not be attached to [thoughts of lands]. Why? It is because lands are [always] burned by [people's] various faults. (SauN 15.43) Because seasons change, and because there are famines that exhaust [people's] bodies, there is no land whatsoever that is constantly peaceful. (SauN 15.44) In addition, there is no land that is free from the suffering of old age, disease, and death. (SauN 15.46) Leaving the bodily suffering of this place, one will encounter [other] bodily suffering at another place. Any land one goes to, one will not be freed from suffering. (SauN 15.47) Even if there is a land that is peaceful and prosperous, if there are binding agonies that cause suffering in one's mind, it is not a good land. (SauN 15.48) If a land could remove evil, if it could attenuate binding defilements, and if it could free the mind from agonies, [that land] would be called a good land. All sentient beings have two sorts of suffering: bodily and mental suffering. [Since] constantly there are agonies, [we know that] there is no land where these two sorts of suffering do not exist. (SauN 15.49)

In addition, there are lands that are extremely cold, lands that are extremely hot, lands that are stricken with famine, lands that are plagued with diseases, lands that have many thieves, and lands that are not ruled properly. One should not be attached to these sorts of evils of lands in one's mind. (SauN 15.45)

These sorts of various correct observations remove thoughts of lands.

Question: How does one eliminate thoughts of immortality?

Answer: [The master] should teach the practitioner as follows: If one is born in a good family, if one belongs to an eminent clan, or if one's talents and skills are superior to those of others, one should not pay any regards to them. Why?

When death visits all people, it comes regardless of one's age, status, talents, or power. This body constitutes the causes and conditions of all [forms of] distress and agony. Anyone who feels at peace by thinking that one is young and has a long lifespan is foolish. (SauN 15.54-55) Why? This [body] as the cause for distress and agony is based on the four gross elements. The material elements composed of the

four gross elements do not harmonize with each other, like four poisonous snakes. Who can be peaceful? (SauN 15.56) Breathing out, one expects to breathe in, but there is no assurance of this. (SauN 15.57) Further, when one goes to bed, one expects to wake up without fail; this matter is also hard to rely on. (SauN 15.58) From the [moment of] conception until old age, fatal accidents always come to seek moments of death [for beings]. [Even if these accidents] say: "You will never die," who can put faith in this? [Fatal accidents] are like murderers who draw out swords and fit arrows, constantly seeking to kill people without mercy. (SauN 15.59) To the people who are born in this world, nothing is stronger than the power of death. Nothing wins over the strong power of death. Even the most distinguished person of the past could not escape from death. In the present also, there is no wise person who can win over death. (SauN 15.60) Neither gentle entreaty nor cunning deception can help one evade death. Nor can keeping precepts or diligence turn away death. (SauN 15.61) For these reasons, you should know that [the fate of] human beings is always precarious and cannot be relied upon. Do not [erroneously] believe in permanence and think that your life will last long. Death, as a murderer, always takes people away; it does not wait for old age to kill people. (SauN 15.62)

As an arhat teaches a disciple who is troubled by various thoughts by saying: "Why do you not understand [the significance of] leaving the world and entering religious life? Why do you generate these thoughts? Some people die before birth. Some people die when being born. [There are also people who die] while being nursed, in the weaning period, during childhood, in the prime of life, and in old age. All stages of life are mixed with the realm of death. It is just like a blossom of a tree that sometimes falls when in bloom, sometimes when its fruit has ripened, sometimes when [the fruit] is still immature. Therefore, know that one should make effort and diligently seek for peaceful awakening. Since you are in the company of a powerful murderer, [your life is] unreliable. This murderer skillfully hides himself like a tiger. Thus the murderer of death always seeks to kill people. Everything in the world is empty like a bubble. How could one say that one will wait until the right time and enter religious life? Who could testify that you will definitely [live until you] become old and can practice the path? It is just like a big tree on a cliff, which is being blown by heavy winds above and whose foundation is eroded by big waves below. Who could trust that this tree will remain long? Human life is exactly the same; it is unreliable even for a short period. Father is like a grain; mother like a good field; causes, conditions, transgressions, and merits in the past are like rainfall. Sentient beings are like grains, and samsara is like harvesting.

"Various deities and human kings have wisdom and virtue. For example, Heavenly King [Indra] assists deities, defeats the army of combative demons (*asuras*), and enjoys various pleasures, highest honor, and great light. [Even he] will [eventually] fall back to darkness. Therefore, do not rely on life and say, 'I will do this today. I will do that later.'"

These types of various correct observations remove thoughts of immortality.

Thus one first removes the coarse thoughts and then the subtle thoughts. The mind is purified, and one attains correct awakening. All binding defilements are exhausted, by which one attains a peaceful abode. This is called the fruit of entering religious life. The mind becomes free, and the threefold karma (i.e., bodily, verbal, and mental actions) becomes ultimately pure; thus one will not be reborn again. One will read various sutras and become learned.

At that time, one will attain rewards. When one thus attains rewards, they are not empty. One defeats the army of demon kings and attains a reputation of the greatest bravery. If one is driven by defilements within the world, one is not called strong. If one can defeat the rogues of defilements, and if one puts off the fire of the three poisons, one will attain cool pleasure, be purified, and sleep peacefully in the woods of nirvana. Pure winds of various types of meditation, moral faculties, powers, and the seven elements of awakening arise in the four [directions]. One will reflect on the sentient beings sunk in the sea of the three poisons. If one has such excellent powers of virtues, one is called strong.

Thus if one's mind is distracted in these ways, one should mindfully inhale and exhale, learn the six methods [of meditation], and sever the [six kinds of] thoughts. For this reason, one should mindfully count the breath.

Question: If one can also sever thoughts by the other four types of meditations such as [the meditation on] the impurities and calling the Buddha to mind, why does one only count the breath?

Answer: It is because [the objects of] the other meditations are slow and hard to lose, but [the object of] counting the breath is quick and easy to turn away. To illustrate, when one releases cattle, since they are hard to lose, keeping them is an easy business. When one releases monkeys, however, since they are easy to lose, keeping them is a difficult task. The matter is the same here. When counting the breath, the mind cannot think of other things even for a moment. Once the mind thinks of other things, it will lose the number. For this reason, when one first [attempts to] sever thoughts, one should count the breath.

When one has already attained the method of counting, one should practice the method of following [the breath] and sever thoughts. When inhalation is completed, one should follow it without counting "two." It is just like a creditor who follows a debtor and does not let him go. Think as follows: "This inhaled air goes out again, but it is not the same thing. Exhaled air comes in again, but it is not the same thing." At that time, one will know that inhalation and exhalation are different. For what reason? Exhalation is warm, but inhalation is cool.

Question: [Is it not that] inhalation and exhalation are one [continuous] breath, because the exhaled air enters again? It is just like water that is warm in one's mouth but becomes cool when spit out; a cool thing gets warm again, and a warm thing further gets cool.

Answer: This is not the case. Because the inner mind moves, breath goes out. Once it has gone out, it ceases to exist. [Because] the nostrils draw in the external air, breath comes in. Once it has come in, it ceases to exist. There is no air that is about to move out, nor is there air that is about to move in.

Furthermore, [one should consider the cases of] young people, adults, and old people. In the case of young people, inhalation is longer. In the case of adults, inhalation and exhalation are of the same [length]. In the case of old people, exhalation is longer. Therefore, [inhalation and exhalation] cannot be one breath.

Also, wind arises near the navel and appears to keep going. Breath goes out of the mouth and nose. Once it goes out, it ceases, just like the wind in bellows that ceases when the bellows are opened. If [the air] is drawn in by means of the mouth and nose, wind enters [the body]; this [wind] arises anew based on causes and conditions. It is just like a fan that produces wind when it meets with various conditions.

At that time, one knows that inhalation and exhalation depend on causes and conditions and are delusive and unreal; they are impermanent [and not free from] arising and ceasing. One should contemplate in the following way: exhalation is drawn in by the mouth and nose as causes and conditions. The causes and conditions of inhalation are brought about by the movement of mind. A deluded person, however, does not know this and thinks that it is his own breath.

Breath is none other than wind, which is not different from external wind. Earth, water, fire, and space are also in the same way. Because these five gross elements come together as causes and conditions, consciousness arises. Therefore, even consciousness is not one's own possession. The five aggregates, the twelve realms of cognition, and the eighteen constituent elements are also in the same way. Knowing this, one follows the breath coming in and going out. For this reason, [this method] is called "following [the breath]."

When one has mastered the method of following, one should practice the method of fixing. The fixing method is to fix the mind to the gates of wind (i.e., the nostrils) and be mindful of inhalation and exhalation, after the mind of counting and following is completed.

Question: For what reason does one fix [one's mind]?

Answer: It is because one [needs to] sever various discursive thoughts, because one [should not] let the mind be distracted, because the mind is unfixed and preoccupied when one counts and follows the breath, because when one fixes [the mind] the mind becomes restful and freed from preoccupations, and because the mind rests at one point. Being mindful of inhalation and exhalation is just like a gatekeeper

who stays by the gate and who watches the people going in and out. In the same way, the fixed mind knows that when the breath goes out, it goes from the navel to the heart, chest, throat, and then reaches the mouth and nose. [The fixed mind further knows] that when the breath comes in, it comes from the mouth and nose to the throat, chest, heart, and then reaches the navel. That way one fixes the mind to one spot, and this [method] is called "fixing."

Then, while one practices the method of fixing the mind, one should dwell in [the method of] "contemplation." The five aggregates, which arise and cease when one inhales, are different from those, which also arise and cease when one exhales. Thus, when the mind is disturbed, one should remove the disturbance immediately. One should contemplate single-mindedly and make one's contemplation more intense. This is called the "contemplation" method.

One dispenses with abiding at the gates of wind (i.e., the nostrils) and gives up the method of coarse contemplation. When one gives up the method of coarse contemplation, one knows the impermanence of the breath. This is called the "shifting" contemplation. One contemplates the impermanence of the five aggregates and also reflects on the impermanence of inhalation and exhalation. One sees that the initial breath does not come from anywhere and observes that the subsequent breath also leaves no trace. They come into being because [their] causes and conditions meet, and they cease to exist because [their] causes and conditions disperse. This is called the method of "shifting" contemplation, which removes the five obstacles [of meditation] and various defilements.

Though one attained calming and contemplation before, they were compounded with defilements and impure mind. Now in this pure method, the mind only attains purity [without any defilements mixed in]. Furthermore, the previous contemplation was a practice similar to non-Buddhist teachings of mindful inhalation and exhalation. The present one is a practice close to undefiled wisdom, and, though [still] defiled, it is a good path. This is called "purification."

Next, first one observes part of the application of mindfulness to the body; gradually [one observes] all the applications of mindfulness to the body. Then one practices the application of mindfulness to sensation and to the mind. In these [three types of applications of mindfulness, the practice is] impure and far from undefiled wisdom. So, being mindful of inhalation and exhalation, one observes their sixteen aspects. Thus one attains the stages of "heat," "summit," "recognition," "supremacy in the mundane realm," and further "recognition of the elements of suffering" up to the "awareness of extinction [of all defilements]" of an accomplished practitioner who has nothing [more] to learn. This is called "purification."

Among the sixteen methods, (1) the first practice of inhalation [includes] the six fold practice of inhalation and exhalation (i.e., counting, following, fixing, contemplation, shifting, and purification).

(2) So does the practice of exhalation.

(3) Single-mindedly one is mindful of inhalation and exhalation [and knows] whether they are long or short. For example, a person running in terror, climbing a mountain, carrying a heavy load, or being upset; in such situations, the breath becomes short. When in times of peril one attains a great relief and joy, acquires profit, or is released from jail, in such cases the breath becomes long. All breaths are classified into two categories: long and short. For this reason it is said: "The breath is long," "The breath is short." Thus [observing the length of the breath], one also practices the six fold practice of inhalation and exhalation.

(4) Being mindful of the breath pervading the body, one is still mindful of the breaths going out and coming in. One thoroughly observes the exhalations and inhalations within one's body. One perceives the breath pervading the body and filling all pores, down to those on the toes, just like water soaking into sand. When the breath goes out, one perceives the breath pervading all pores, from those on the feet to those on the head, also like water soaking into sand. Just like the air that fills bellows, whether it is going out or coming in, the wind blowing in and out through the mouth and nose [fills the body]. One observes the whole body that the wind fills, like holes of a lotus root [filled with water] and a fishing net [soaked in water]. Further, it is not that the mind only observes the breath coming in and going out through the mouth and nose. [The mind] sees the breath coming in and going out through all pores and the nine apertures [of the body]. Thus one knows that the breath pervades the body.

(5) Eliminating various [unfavorable] physical functions, one is again mindful of inhalation and exhalation. When one first practices [mindful] breathing, if one feels laziness, sleepiness, and heaviness in one's body, one should eliminate them all.

(6) The body becomes light, soft, and fitting for meditation; thus the mind experiences joy. Again by being mindful of inhalation and exhalation, one eliminates laziness, sleepiness, and heaviness of mind. The mind becomes light, soft, and fitting for meditation; thus the mind experiences joy.

Having completed the application of mindfulness to breathing, next one practices the application of mindfulness to sensation. [Namely,] having attained the application of mindfulness to the body, now one further attains the application of mindfulness to sensation; thus one truly experiences joy. Further, having understood the reality of the body, one now wishes to know the reality of the mind and mental functions. For this reason, one experiences joy.

(7) By being mindful of inhalation and exhalation, one experiences comfort. By being mindful of inhalation and exhalation, joy increases; it is called comfort.

Alternatively, the first pleasure that arises in the mind is called joy. The subsequent joy that fills the body is called comfort. Also, the comfortable sensations in the first and second stages of meditation are called joy. The comfortable sensations in the third stage of meditation are called comfort.

(8) When one experiences various mental phenomena, one should also be mindful of inhalation and exhalation. Various types of mind arise and cease: polluted mind, unpolluted mind, distracted mind, concentrated mind, righteous mind, and evil mind. Such aspects of mind are called mental phenomena. When the mind experiences joy, one should still be mindful of inhalation and exhalation.

(9) The joy experienced before arose spontaneously and was not aroused intentionally. Because one is mindful of one's own mind, one is gladdened.

Question: For what reason does one arouse joy intentionally?

Answer: It is because one wishes to cure two types of mind: distracted and concentrated. By putting the mind in such a state [of joy], one can be liberated from defilements. For this reason, one applies one's mindfulness to the elements, and the mind arouses joy.

If the mind is not gladdened [spontaneously], one should diligently gladden the mind.

(10) When the mind is concentrated, one should also be mindful of inhalation and exhalation. If the mind is unsettled, one should forcibly settle it. As is stated in a sutra: "When the mind is settled, that is wisdom. When the mind is scattered, that is not wisdom."

(11) When the mind is emancipated, one should also be mindful of inhalation and exhalation. If the mind is not emancipated [spontaneously], one should forcibly emancipate it. It is just like a sheep that has many cockleburs stuck to it, which one [is trying to] pull out of its wool one by one. Releasing the mind from binding defilements is done in the same way.

This is called emancipation by means of the application of mindfulness to the mind.

(12) Observing impermanence, one should also be mindful of inhalation and exhalation. One observes that the elements are impermanent; they arise and cease; they are empty and without self; when they arise, the elements arise in emptiness, and when they cease, they cease in emptiness; in these [elements] there is no male, no female, no person, no agent, and no recipient. This is the observation in conformity with impermanence.

(13) Observing the emergence and dispersal of conditioned elements, one is mindful of inhalation and exhalation. This is called "emergence and dispersal." [When] conditioned elements emerge in the world, they gather because causes and conditions met in the past, and they disperse because those causes and conditions cease. Such observation is called the observation of emergence and dispersal.

(14) Observing release from binding desires, one is mindful of inhalation and exhalation. [When] the mind is released from its binding defilements, it will be the supreme element. This is the observation in conformity with the release from desires.

(15) Observing extinction, one is mindful of inhalation and exhalation. The suffering of binding defilements is exhausted wherever one is situated, and the spot [of

one's present residence] becomes peaceful. This is the observation in conformity with extinction.

(16) Observing abandonment, one is also mindful of inhalation and exhalation. Abandonment of lust, defilements, the five aggregates consisting of physical and mental [elements], and the conditioned elements: this is the supreme serenity. Such observation is in conformity with the application of mindfulness to the elements.

These are called the sixteen methods.