

The following translation of Zhiyi's "Six Dharma Gates to the Sublime" 六妙法門 is by Bhikshu Dharmamitra, in his *The Six Dharma Gates to the Sublime: A Classic Meditation Manual on Traditional Indian Buddhist Meditation* (Seattle, Washington: Kalavinka Press, 2009).

Chapter Two: The Six Gates in Terms of Sequential Development

The sequential occurrence wherein each gives rise to another serves as a sequence of steps leading to one's entry into the Path. If one skillfully cultivates these six dharmas while within the desire realm, then, upon perfecting the purified mind associated with the sixth [gate], not only will one directly generate the non-outflow state common to the Three Vehicles, one will additionally succeed in perfecting all of the dhyāna samādhis.

A. Counting

This process has certain inherent differences relative to the preceding section. How is this the case? Take for example "counting." Here we distinguish two categories: The first consists in the "cultivation" of counting, whereas the second involves the "realization" of counting.

1. Cultivation

As for the cultivation of counting, the practitioner regulates and harmonizes the breath so that it is neither too rough nor too subtle. One proceeds in an unhurried fashion, slowly counting, going from "one" on up to "ten." One focuses the mind on the counting and does not allow it to run off and become scattered. This is what is meant by the "cultivation" of counting.

2. Realization

As for the realization of counting, the mind imbued with awareness exercises control from "one" on up to "ten." Without having to put forth any particular effort, the mind abides in the objective conditions associated with the breath.

When one becomes aware that the breath has become insubstantial and faint, the mind becomes gradually more subtle along with it. One subsequently becomes concerned that counting has become a coarse activity. One's state of mind is such that one does not wish to engage in counting. At just such time, the practitioner should let loose of the counting and then proceed to cultivate "following."

B. Following

"Following" is itself of two different sorts: The first is the cultivation of following whereas the second is the realization of following.

1. Cultivation

As for the cultivation of following, one relinquishes the previous dharma of counting. One then relies single-mindedly on following the coming in and going out of the breath. One focuses the mind, taking the breath as an object. One becomes aware of the coming in and going out of the breath. The mind abides in the objective conditions associated with the breath, remaining free of any distraction or scattering of one's point of attention. This is what is meant by cultivating following.

2. Realization

As for the realization of following, since the mind has become fine and subtle, it becomes peaceful, still, and free of any disorderliness. One becomes aware of the breath, as now long, as now short, as now pervading the body, as now coming in, and as now going out. The mind and the breath carry on in a state of mutual

interdependence. The deliberations of the mind become tranquil and fixed in a state of stillness. Next, one becomes aware of following as a coarse activity. The mind becomes averse to it and wishes to relinquish it. This is analogous to when a person has become exhausted and desires to sleep, thus causing him to be disinclined to deal with his many tasks. At this time, the practitioner should relinquish following and then cultivate stabilization.

C. Stabilization

“Stabilization” is itself of two different sorts: The first is the cultivation of stabilization. The second is the realization of stabilization.

1. Cultivation

As for the cultivation of stabilization, one puts to rest all thought taking anything as an objective condition. One does not engage in either counting or following. One fixes his mind and makes it still. This is what is meant by the cultivation of stabilization.

2. Realization

As for the realization of stabilization, one becomes aware of the body and mind seeming to vanish entirely as he then enters into meditative absorption.

One does not observe any inward or outward appearances. The dharma of absorption embraces the mind as it remains continuously unmoving. At this time, the practitioner reflects thus: “Although this samādhi is unconditioned, quiescent, secure, and blissful, nonetheless, it is devoid of any skillful means associated with wisdom. Thus it remains unable to bring about the destruction of [the cycle of] births and deaths.”

One then has another thought: “This absorption belongs entirely to the sphere of causes and conditions. Its existence depends entirely on the conjunction of those causes and conditions associated with the aggregates, sense realms, and sense bases. It is false, deceptive, and not reflective of reality. I am not now exercising any perceptive acuity or any form of conscious awareness. I must bring illuminating intelligence to bear here.” Having reflected thus, one then immediately becomes free of any attachment to “stabilization” and subsequently engages in the analysis associated with contemplation.

D. Contemplation

“Contemplation” is itself of two different sorts. The first is the cultivation of contemplation. The second is the realization of contemplation.

1. Cultivation

As for the cultivation of contemplation, in the midst of the mind immersed in absorption, one employs wisdom to make distinctions. One contemplates the fine and subtle features of the breath as it goes forth and comes in. It is like a wind in the midst of space. The skin, the flesh, the sinews, the bones, the thirty-six categories of things [making up the body]—are all just as devoid of substantiality as the [coreless] plantain. Even the consciousness of one’s mind is impermanent. It does not abide even for a *kṣāṇa*. Neither oneself nor anyone else exists. The dharmas of the body, feeling, and the mind are all devoid of any inherently existent nature. One is unable to ultimately apprehend [the existence of] any person or any dharma. On what then could meditative absorption [possibly] depend? This is what is meant by the cultivation of contemplation.

2. Realization

As for the realization of contemplation, when one is contemplating in this manner, one becomes aware of the breath entering, exiting, and pervading [the entire body, extending even] to all of the hair pores. The mind’s eye opens with clarity and one thoroughly sees the thirty-six things [composing the body] as well all of the organisms therein, the inward and outward impurity, and the changes occurring even in every *kṣāṇa*. The mind

becomes both saddened and delighted. One gains realization of the four stations of mindfulness and destroys the four inverted views. This is what is meant by the “realization” of contemplation.

Once the characteristic features of contemplation have developed, the mind takes the domain that is contemplated as an objective condition and proceeds then to make distinctions and deconstructing analyses with regard to it. One consequently becomes aware that [allowing] the onward-flowing movement of thought does not amount to a reality-based path. At such a time, one should then relinquish the process of contemplation and proceed instead to cultivate “turning.”

E. Turning

“Turning” is itself of two different sorts. The first is the cultivation of turning. The second is the realization of turning.

1. Cultivation

As for the cultivation of turning, once one has realized that contemplation itself arises from the mind and once one has also understood that, if one continues to follow along with analysis of the objective sphere, this does not by itself directly bring about convergence with the original source, one should then turn back the direction of one’s contemplation so that one now contemplates that very mind that is engaged in contemplation.

As for this mind which engages in contemplation, from what does it arise? Is it generated by contemplative thought or is it generated by something other than contemplative thought? If it is the case that it is generated by contemplative thought, then it should also be the case that there was a pre-existing contemplation process already underway. But in the present situation, this is certainly not the case. Why not? Because there was not yet anything in the midst of the three [immediately preceding] dharmas of “counting,” “following,” “stabilization,” and so forth that was identifiable with this [process of] “contemplation.”

If it is the case that [contemplative thought] arose from a mind not involved in contemplation, is it the case that the mind not involved in contemplation generated it when [that non-contemplating thought] had already ceased or instead produced it when [that non-contemplating thought] had not yet ceased? If it is the case that it produced it when [that non-contemplating thought] had not ceased, then this would be a case of two thoughts existing simultaneously.

If [one were to posit that] it was generated by a dharma which had already ceased to exist, [one should realize that], once an extinct dharma has already disappeared, it is no longer able to generate any contemplative [thought process].

If one were to claim that it was generated from that which had ceased and yet not ceased, or if one were to go so far as to claim that it was generated from that which had neither ceased nor not ceased, in all such cases, those [antecedent causes] cannot ultimately be apprehended. One should therefore realize that the contemplative mind itself was originally unproduced. Because it was unproduced, it does not exist. Because it does not exist, it is just “empty” [of any inherent existence]. Because it is empty [of any inherent existence], there is no mind engaged in the process of contemplation.

If there is no contemplative mind, how could there be an objective sphere which serves as the object of contemplation? This perishing of both the objective sphere and the faculty of knowing is the essential factor in turning back to the source. This is the characteristic feature of the cultivation of turning.

2. Realization

As for the characteristic feature of the realization of turning, the wisdom of the mind opens forth and develops in a way no longer requiring one to bring to bear additional skillful effort. It carries on in a way allowing one to naturally be able to invoke analyses, turn back towards the origin, and return to the source. This is what is meant by the realization of turning.

The practitioner should realize that, if he desires to retreat into [a circumstance involving] an absence of both objective sphere and knowing faculty utterly apart from an objective sphere and a knowing faculty, he would thereby fail to leave behind being tethered to [the duality inherent in] an objective sphere and a knowing

faculty. This is because, in such a case, one would still simply be coursing along in the sphere of duality-based extremes. At just such a time, one should then relinquish the gateway of turning and establish the mind in the path of purification.

F. Purification

“Purification” itself is of two sorts. The first is the cultivation of purification. The second is the realization of purification.

1. Cultivation

As for the cultivation of purification, through realizing the purity of the form [aggregate], one refrains from generating false thoughts about it and does not course in discriminations regarding it. “The same is true with respect to [the aggregates of] feeling, perception, formative factors (*saṃskāras*), and consciousness.” One puts to rest the defilement of false thinking. This constitutes the cultivation of purification. One also puts to rest the defilement of coursing in discriminations. This too qualifies as the cultivation of purification. One puts to rest the defilement of grasping at a self as well. This is also what is intended by “the cultivation of purification.”

To state what is essential: If one is able to bring it about that his mind conforms to its fundamental purity, this qualifies as the cultivation of purification. If one does not ultimately apprehend any subjective entity which is able to cultivate, any objective sphere which is cultivated, or anything which qualifies as either “pure” or “impure,” this qualifies as the cultivation of purification.

2. Realization

As for the realization of purification, when one is cultivating in this manner, one experiences a sudden penetration through to a circumstance wherein the mind accords with wisdom. Unimpeded skillful means continuously manifest and, abiding in the “direct experiencing” of *samādhi*, the mind remains free of any dependence on anything at all.

a. Semblance Realization of Purification

This realization of purification is of two sorts: The first is a semblance of realization. This refers to the generation of a semblance of the wisdom of the non-outflow path gained through implementation of the five categories of skillful means.

b. Genuine Realization of Purification

The second is genuine realization. This refers to the generation of true non-outflow wisdom as it occurs in such circumstances as the achievement of the dharma-knowledge-of-suffering patience (*duḥkhe dharmajñānakṣānti*) on up to the ninth station of the irresistible path (*ānantāryamārga*). [Under these circumstances], the defilement characteristic of the three realms is brought to an end. Hence this is referred to as the “realization” of purification.

G. Alternative Categorizations

Then again, [one might also explain that] it is on the basis of contemplating the emptiness of beings that one defines “contemplation,” that it is on the basis of contemplating the emptiness of dharmas associated with reality that one defines “turning,” and that it is on the basis of contemplating uniform emptiness that one defines “purification.”

Then again, [one might also explain that] it is correspondence with the *samādhi* of emptiness which defines “contemplation,” that it is correspondence with the *samādhi* of signlessness that defines

“turning,” and that it is correspondence with the *samādhi* of wishlessness which defines “purification.”

Then again, [one might also explain that] all outwardly-directed contemplations qualify as “contemplation,” that all inwardly-directed contemplations qualify as “turning,” and that all contemplations which are neither inwardly nor outwardly directed qualify as “purification.” Hence Śreṇika, the Brahmācārin, stated, “It is not by virtue of an inwardly-directed contemplation that one gains this wisdom. It is not by virtue of an outwardly-directed contemplation that one gains this wisdom. It is not by virtue of a contemplation which is both inwardly-directed and outwardly-directed that one gains this wisdom. Nor is it the case that one gains this wisdom in the absence of any contemplation whatsoever.”