

THE ESSENTIALS
of
BUDDHIST MEDITATION

Tiantai Master Zhiyi's Classic Meditation Manual:

*The Essentials for Practicing
Calming-and-Insight & Dhyāna Meditation*

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CHAPTER EIGHT

Recognizing the Work of Demons

8. SECTION EIGHT: RECOGNIZING THE WORK OF DEMONS

a. [FOUR CATEGORIES OF DEMONS]

In Sanskrit, the term is “*māra*.” In our language (lit. “the language of the Qin State”), it is rendered as “killer.” They plunder the practitioner’s merit wealth and slay the wisdom life of the practitioner. Hence, as for that which is referred to as “the work of demons,” just as the Buddha takes as his work the use of merit and wisdom to liberate beings that they might enter *nirvāṇa*, the demons take as their work the continual destruction of beings’ roots of goodness that they might be caused to flow along and turn about in the realms of cyclic births and deaths.

If one is able to establish the mind in the right path, it therefore becomes a case of “where the path is lofty, one knows then that the demons will flourish.” Hence it is still necessary to be skillful in the recognition of the work of demons.

There are only four categories: First, the affliction demons; second, the demons of the [five] aggregates, [twelve] sense bases, and [eighteen] sense realms; third, the death demons; and fourth, the ghost-and-spirit demons.

1) [THREE CATEGORIES AS COMMON MENTAL PHENOMENA]

Three of them are normal worldly phenomena as well as products of a given individual’s mind. One must get rid of them by rectifying one’s own mind, thus exorcising them. We will not describe them in detail just now.

2) [GHOST-AND-SPIRIT DEMONS]

As for the signs of the ghost-and-spirit demons, these are matters which must be understood. We shall now discuss them briefly. There are three categories of ghost-and-spirit demons: [First, the sprites, goblins, and creatures of the twelve horary time periods; second, “*duiti*” demons; and third, demon-generated afflictions].

a) [SPRITES, GOBLINS, AND CREATURES OF THE TWELVE HORARY TIME PERIODS]

As for the first, the sprites, goblins, and creatures of the twelve

horary time periods, they transform into all sorts of different shapes and forms, perhaps taking on the form of a young girl or an old person, or even appearing in fearsome physical forms not limited to any single type. They aggravate and deceive the practitioner. All of these sprites and goblins desire to afflict practitioners. Each of them comes at a time corresponding to its appointed hour. It is necessary to become skillful in distinguishing and recognizing them.

If they come during the *yin* time period (3:00–5:00 A.M.), they are certainly tigers or other such creatures.

If they come during the *mao* period (5:00–7:00 A.M.), they are certainly rabbits, deer, and so forth.

If they come during the *chen* period (7:00–9:00 A.M.), they are certainly dragons, turtles, and so forth.

If they come during the *si* time period (9:00–11:00 A.M.), they are certainly snakes, pythons, and so forth.

If they come during the *wu* period (11:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M.), they are certainly horses, mules, camels, and so forth.

If they come during the *wei* time period (1:00–3:00 p.m), they are certainly sheep, and so forth.

If they come during the *shen* time period (3:00–5:00 P.M.), they are certainly monkeys, baboons, and so forth.

If they come during the *you* time period (5:00–7:00 P.M.), they are certainly chickens, crows, and so forth.

If they come during the *xu* time period (7:00–9:00 P.M.), they are certainly dogs, wolves, and so forth.

If they come during the *hai* time period (9:00–11:00 P.M.), they are certainly pigs and such.

If they come during the *zi* time period (11:00 p.m. to 1:00 A.M.), they are certainly rats and such.

If they come during the *chou* time period (1:00–3:00 A.M.), they are certainly oxen and such.

If the practitioner observes that they always come at this particular time, he may then know which creature goblin it is. He should then declare its name to scold and rebuke it, whereupon it should retreat and disappear.

b) [DUITI GHOSTS]

Second, the *duiti* ghosts. They too generate all sorts of aggravating contacts which they inflict upon practitioners. Sometimes they manifest like insects or scorpions which attack a person's head or face, producing a drilling and piercing sensation attended by intense

bright light. Sometimes they strike or constrict a person's sides or perhaps suddenly clutch a person in their embrace, or sometimes they speak, make noises, howl, and even appear in the forms of beasts, not limiting themselves to a single form of appearance.

One should recognize them immediately, single-mindedly close the eyes to block them from view, and then scold them, saying, for example, such words as these: "I now recognize you. You are a *krtya* demon¹ from Jambudvīpa, one who feasts on fires and foul-smelling smoke² and one who seeks to plunder ordination careers. You are under the sway of deviant views and thus delight in destroying the ranks of the precept-holders. I am now one who upholds the precepts and am one who will never fear you."

If one is a monastic, he should recite the precept texts. If one is a householder, he should recite the three refuges, the five precepts, and so forth. The ghost will then be driven off, being forced to crawl away. All sorts of other such appearances which present difficulties and which aggravate people as well as other techniques for cutting them off and getting rid of them are all as extensively described in the sutras on dhyāna meditation.

c) [DEMON-GENERATED AFFLICTIONS]

Third, afflictions inflicted by demons. Typically, these demons create by transformation three types of phenomenal states within the sphere of the five sense objects, states which they bring forth to demolish the wholesome mind:

In the case of the first type, one which involves the creation of disagreeable phenomena, these appear as fearsome manifestations of the five sense objects which cause a person to be filled with terror.

In the case of the second type, one which involves the creation of agreeable phenomena, these appear as desirable manifestations of the five sense objects which cause a person to become mentally attached.

In the case of the third type, one which involves phenomena that are neither agreeable nor disagreeable, these appear as neutral manifestations of the five sense objects which distract and confuse the practitioner.

On account of such activities as these, the demons are also referred to as "killers," are also referred to as "floral arrows," and are also referred to as "the five arrows." This is on account of their penetrating a person through the five sense faculties.

Within [the mental and physical phenomena of] “name-and-form,”³ they create all sorts of objective states which deceive and confuse the practitioner. In cases where they create agreeable objective states, they may manifest in the form of parents, siblings, buddhas, attractive men or women, or as other desirable phenomena which cause a person to become mentally attached.

In cases where they create disagreeable objective states, they may manifest in the forms of tigers, wolves, lions, or *rākṣasas*, or may manifest in all sorts of other fearsome appearances by means of which they come forth to terrorize the practitioner.

In cases where they create objective states that are neither disagreeable nor agreeable, they may manifest ordinary phenomena which they employ to distract and confuse the mind of the practitioner, thus causing the loss of *dhyāna* absorption. Hence they are referred to as “demons.”

They may also create all sorts of fine or terrible sounds, or may create all sorts of fragrant or stinking smells, or may create all sorts of fine or terrible tastes, or may create all sorts of anguishing or blissful objective states which they bring forth to inflict upon a person’s body. These are all the work of demons. Their signs are multifarious. We will not now describe them all.

To bring up and speak of that which is essential, wherever there is the creation of all sorts of phenomena among the five sense objects which aggravate and confuse a person, causing the loss of good dharmas and the arising of afflictions, these are all activities of the demon armies. They are able to employ them to destroy the normal standard for the Buddha’s Dharma and to cause the arising of all sorts of path-blocking dharmas such as desire, worry, anger, sleepiness, and so forth. This is as described in a verse from a sutra:

Desire is the foremost of your armies.
Worry is the second.
Hunger and thirst make up the third army.
Craving is the fourth.

Sleepiness is the fifth of your armies.
Fearfulness is the sixth.
Doubt and remorse make up the seventh army.
Anger is the eighth.

Offering and empty praises are the ninth.
Pridefulness and arrogance are the tenth.

Numerous armies such as these
Subdue and bury the monastic.

I use the power of dhyāna and wisdom
To smash all of these armies of yours,
And after realizing the Path of buddhahood,
Bring all beings across to liberation.⁴

b. [DRIVING DEMONS AWAY]

Once the practitioner has recognized the work of demons, he should immediately drive them away. There are two methods for driving them away, as follows.

1) [THROUGH CALMING]

The first method involves using calming to drive them off. Whenever one observes any of the external evil demon states, knowing that they are false and deceptive, one refrains from becoming either worried or fearful. Neither does one grasp at them or [actively] reject them or commit the error of indulging in making any calculations or mental discriminations with regard to them. By putting the mind to rest and causing it to abide in quiescence, they should naturally disappear on their own accord.

2) [THROUGH INSIGHT]

The second involves using insight to drive them off. If one observes any of the different kinds of demon states similar to those discussed above and one then finds that, even though one employs calming, they nonetheless do not go away, one should then immediately turn back one's attention and contemplate the observing mind. One does not then perceive that it abides in any location. What then is it that could be afflicted by them?

When one contemplates in this manner, they should soon disappear. If they are slow to respond and thus fail to go away, one should rectify one's own mind and refrain from generating thoughts of terror. One should not even fear for the loss of one's own physical life. One should rectify one's thought so that it does not move. One should recognize that the suchness (*tathatā*) of the demon realm is just the suchness of the buddha realm and [should thus recognize also] that if the suchness of the demon realm and the suchness of the buddha realm are a single suchness, there cannot be two [different] suchnesses.

If one reaches a complete comprehension in this manner, [one will understand that] there is nothing in the demon realm to be

relinquished and nothing in the buddha realm to be seized upon. Of its own accord, the Dharma of the Buddha should then naturally manifest before one, whereupon the demon state should naturally dissolve and disappear.

3) [WHEN DEMON STATES WON'T ABATE]

a) [LIMITS OF A DEMON'S POWERS]

Additionally, if one observes that a demon state does not disappear, one need not give rise to distress. If one observes that it does disappear, one must not become joyful, either. Why is this? We have not yet observed a case of a person sitting in dhyāna absorption who has observed the demon transform into a tiger or a wolf which has then actually come forth and eaten the person. Nor have we yet observed a case of a demon transforming into a man or woman which has actually come forth and acted as a husband or a wife.

b) [COMPLICIT ROLE OF DEMON-STATE "VICTIMS"]

It is through taking on [an indulging] role in a demon's illusory transformations that a foolish person, failing to completely understand, allows his mind to become alarmed or allows it to generate desire-based attachment. Because of this, the mind becomes chaotic, one loses meditative absorption, and one may behave insanely.

One causes one's own calamity. In every case, it is a matter of the practitioner bringing on a calamity through the absence of wisdom. It is not a case of something actually brought about by the demon.

c) [ADDITIONAL TECHNIQUES FOR DRIVING OFF DEMONIC STATES]

i) [RECTIFICATION OF ONE'S OWN MIND]

If demon states occur which aggravate and disturb the practitioner and which don't go away even after months and years have passed, one must simply make one's own mind upright so that the rectitude of one's own thoughts remains solid. One should [be so determined to maintain mental rectitude that he would] not even shrink from risking his own life [to secure that end].⁶ One must not be filled with distress or fearfulness.

ii) [MANTRAS, REPENTANCES, PRECEPT-RECITATION, RECTITUDE, THE GOOD GURU]

One should recite the demon-countering incantations found within the Great Vehicle *vaipulya*⁵ sutras. One should recite them silently and abide in mindfulness of the Triple Jewel. Even when one has emerged from dhyāna absorption, one should still recite the incantations as a self-protective measure. One should perform repentances,

should maintain a sense of shame and a dread of blame, and should also recite one's *pratimokṣa* codes.⁷

That which is deviant is unable to interfere with whatsoever is orthodox. After a time, it will fade away on its own accord. The work of demons is of many different sorts. A complete discussion of it would be endless. One must be skillful in recognizing it.

Hence the novice practitioner must draw near to a good and knowledgeable spiritual guide specifically because difficult situations such as these may arise.

d) [SUMMARY STATEMENT ON NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF DEMONS]

These demons may enter into a person's mind thus becoming able to cause the practitioner's mind and spirit to become crazy and disturbed, thus producing swings alternating between joy and depression. On account of this, a calamity could occur which might even lead to one's death. At times, they may cause one to gain deviant forms of *dhyāna* absorption, wisdom, spiritual powers, or *dhāraṇīs*, or they may even cause one to speak Dharma and engage in teaching and conversion of a sort which influences everyone to believe in and submit to him. In the end, one may do damage to other people's wholesome, world-transcending endeavors and one may even engage in activities destructive of right Dharma.

The various strange phenomena of this sort are not of a single type. If one were to describe all of them, they would be endlessly many. We now only briefly explain their essential features for the sake of preventing the practitioner from erroneously indulging mind states arising during *dhyāna* meditation.

e) [SUMMARY STATEMENT ON DEMONS AND DRIVING THEM OFF]

To speak of it in a way which grasps what is essential, if one desires to drive away the deviant and return to the orthodox, one should contemplate the true character of dharmas. If one skillfully cultivates calming and insight, there is no deviant phenomenon which will not be demolished. Hence the [*Mahāprajñāpāramitā*] *Upadeśa* states: "Aside from the true character of dharmas, everything else is demonic phenomena."⁸ This is as described in a verse:

If one makes discriminations and engages in reflective intellection,
This then is just the net of Māra.

If one remains unmoving and does not indulge discriminations,
This then is the seal of the Dharma.⁹