

# THE SIX DHARMA GATES TO THE SUBLIME

六妙法門

By Śramaṇa Zhiyi (Chih-i)  
From Tiantai Mountain's Dhyāna Cultivation Monastery

天台山修禪寺沙門智顓述

English Translation by Bhikshu Dharmamitra

比丘恆授法友英譯



## CHAPTER THREE

### The Six Gates in Accordance with Suitability

#### III. SIX GATES CULTIVATION IN ACCORDANCE WITH SUITABILITY

##### A. ON THE NEED FOR SKILLFULNESS

Now the practitioner wishes to gain the realization of deep dhyāna absorption and wisdom which extend all the way to the true character of phenomena and to nirvāṇa. Thus, as one who is at the initial stage of study strives to stabilize the mind, he must be proficient in his skillfulness. How is it that he is proficient in skillfulness? It should be that, with respect to the dharmas of the six gates to the sublime, one is entirely knowledgeable and entirely aware.

##### B. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

In the training and subduing of one's own mind, one may employ in constant use whatsoever serves to facilitate [the training of] the mind. Why is this? If the mind is not well-facilitated [by the methods employed], then the process of cultivation and correction will remain ineffective. Therefore, when one first engages in sitting [meditation], one should recognize [the correct method for] regulating the mind. [550c]

##### 1. ON THE CORRECT PROCESS

After having trained in "counting," one should next train in "following." Additionally, one should move along to the study of "stabilization,"<sup>1</sup> "contemplation," "turning," and so forth. In each endeavor, one should spend several days.

Having completed this course of training, one should once again proceed with an additional course whereby one starts with "counting" and "following" and proceeds on along through to "turning" and "purification," establishing the mind in this manner of cultivation and practice by once again spending several days with each separate endeavor. One should proceed in this manner through several complete courses.

##### a. ON REALIZING WHAT IS ACTUALLY SUITABLE

The practitioner should then naturally know what the mind finds to be suitable. If the mind finds "counting" to be suitable, then one

should avail oneself of the dharma of “counting” in establishing the mind in calmness. This would also be the case with any of the methods on up to and including “purification.” One accords with what is found to be suitable and thus proceeds with using that.

b. ON ENSURING THAT CHOICES ARE ACTUALLY BENEFICIAL

One should not, in any case, neglect any steps in proper sequence. As one proceeds in this manner with establishing the mind in calmness, once one has become aware that the body has become calm, that the breath has become well-regulated, that the mind has become quiescent and has developed clarity, and that, from beginning-to-end, one remains peaceful and stable, then one should primarily employ this particular method. There will certainly be profound benefit from this.

If it is the case that there is some associated problem involving the generation of scatteredness, darkness, or obstruction of the mind, then one should once again accord with what is suitable and then change to the use of one of the other gates.

It is the establishment in tranquility which qualifies as good here. One may take that as an enduring standard.

This then concludes a summary clarification of how the beginning student applies proficiency in skillfulness to establishing the mind in the six gates to the sublime. Through this, one may know the major import of employing what is suitable in applying the mind.

C. SPECIFICS OF CULTIVATION

1. RECOGNIZING WHAT CONSTITUTES EVIDENCE OF REALIZATION

Moreover, if the practitioner’s mind remains stable, it will certainly be the case that there will be realizations. So what is it that constitutes “realization”? This refers to the gaining of the so-called “physical support” as well as “coarse abiding,” “subtle abiding,” the desire-realm preliminary ground (*anāgamya*), the first dhyāna, and all sorts of other dhyāna absorptions.

2. RECOGNIZING ABSENCE OF PROGRESS; ADOPTING APPROPRIATE STRATEGIES

Once one has already achieved the absorptions, if the mind simply abides in them and does not advance, then, according to the depth of the absorption, one should cultivate further development of the six gates to the sublime. What is meant by “when absorption is shallow and there is no advancement, one proceeds to cultivate the six gates to the sublime in order to cause advancement”?

Take for example when the practitioner first achieves the dharma of “physical support” as well as the dharmas of “coarse abiding” and “subtle abiding.” If one passes through days or months in this way and yet does not progress beyond this circumstance, one should then employ a subtle mind in the cultivation of “counting.”

If one does not advance through “counting,” then one should next cultivate “following.” If one does not advance through “following,” one should subtly still (lit. “freeze”) the mind in the cultivation of “stabilization.” If one does not advance through “stabilization,” then, in the midst of absorption, one should engage in “contemplation” of the dharmas of the aggregates, the sense bases, and the sense realms.

If one does not advance through “contemplation,” then one should engage in “turning,” turning back yet again to investigation of the source of the mind. If one does not advance through “turning,” then one should quiescently embody the realization of “purification.” If, in utilizing these six dharmas, one inclines towards a single one of the dharmas, provided that it brings enhanced progression, one should immediately proceed with skillfully cultivating it.

Having gradually advanced and entered into deep dhyāna absorption, one then passes beyond the mind state associated with “counting.” Once the characteristic features of [the mind state associated with] “counting” have receded, one advances into the development of dhyāna associated with “following.”

However, if it happens that, when one is in this absorption, the associated mind state does not develop progressively, one should then engage in skillful cultivation of the five dharmas of following, stabilization, contemplation, turning, purification, and so forth. The absorption then advances and gradually deepens.

Once the state associated with “following” has been traversed, it will then be as if one has generated the dhyāna associated with “stabilization.” However, if one’s dhyāna does not progress at that point, one should then engage in skillful cultivation of the four dharmas of stabilization, contemplation, turning, purification, and so forth.

The absorption associated with stabilization then progresses and gradually deepens. The mind associated with “contemplation” then opens forth and develops.

Now, although one possesses this dharma of “stabilization,” one nonetheless realizes that it is something produced solely from

conditions and, as such, it is devoid of any inherently-existent nature. Once the characteristic features of “stabilization” have already receded, if the dhyāna associated with “contemplation” does not progress, then one should engage in yet more skillful cultivation of the three dharmas of contemplation, turning, purification, and so forth.

Once this contemplation-based dhyāna has progressed, even having already progressed, it may seem then as if it has receded. It then transforms in a way that one enters into deep meditative absorption. At that point, one’s wise understanding develops. One then abides in a state wherein one is aware only of all of the dharmic characteristics of his own mind.

One should then realize that this “contemplation” itself is false, deceptive, and unreal and that it, too, belongs to the sphere of false mental impressions. It is comparable to one’s perceptions while in a dream state. Once one has realized this, one no longer simply accepts it.<sup>2</sup> One instead engages in “turning” through which one reverses the direction of one’s focus to illuminate the very source of the mind itself. [551a]

After the dhyāna associated with “turning” has persisted for a long while, if one once again finds that there is no further progression, one should apply even greater skillfulness in turning around one’s contemplations to focus on the very source of one’s mind, even to the point where one embodies a realization of the purity of that stillness one has encountered.

Once this turning-based dhyāna has progressed—even having already progressed, it may seem as if it has receded. One then proceeds to manifest the dhyāna associated with “purification.” In this dhyāna, “conceptual contemplations have already been gotten rid of and the dharmas of words and speech have already perished. The immeasurable multitude of offenses are gotten rid of and the purified mind remains eternally unified.”<sup>3</sup> This is what is meant by the dhyāna of “purification.”

If, however, one does not experience a progression of “purification,” one should bring particular skillfulness to one’s banishment of the defiled mind. One comes to embody a realization of the quiescence and emptiness of genuine reality. One’s mind becomes like empty space and has nothing whatsoever upon which it relies.

At this time, one’s purification-based dhyāna becomes gradually ever more deep and quiescent. Then, suddenly, and as if breaking

through, there manifests brilliant clarity and the generation of the genuine state of being “beyond outflow-impurities.” One thereby achieves realization of the path of the Three Vehicles.

D. SUMMARY STATEMENT ON SUITABILITY

This then is a summary discussion of the six gates to the sublime wherein one utilizes whatsoever is suitable, increases the merit and wisdom associated with the dhyānas, and then finally gains entry into nirvāṇa.

Additionally, if the practitioner encounters the arising of inward or outward obstacles during the midst of this and so desires to get rid of them, in this case as well, he should select a corresponding method from among the six gates. He should try each one of the gates, one after the other, utilizing them to get rid of such obstacles. If, through employing a given method, he brings about a cure, then that very measure constitutes precisely the appropriate medicine.

In countering dhyāna-related obstacles as well as demon-linked phenomena and pathological disorders occurring in dhyāna, resorting to skillful use of the six gates will succeed in bringing about a cure in every case.

One may find it difficult to perceive the meaning implicit in the preceding discussion. If the practitioner utilizes these gateways to Dharma, he should deduce their import by engaging in skillful deliberative reflection upon them. One must not simply practice them in an error-ridden manner.