

# THE SIX DHARMA GATES TO THE SUBLIME

六妙法門

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Six Gates in Terms of Mutual Inclusion

#### V. SIX GATES CULTIVATION IN TERMS OF MUTUAL INCLUSION

Now, as for the mutual inclusiveness of the six gates to the sublime, to speak of it in near terms, there are two categories. When the concept is carried further, this involves many pathways. Precisely what are the two types?

As for the first of these categories, it is the mutual inclusiveness of the very substance of the six gates. In the case of the second, it is that mutual inclusiveness whereby skillful cultivation of the six gates generates superior progress.

#### A. MUTUAL INCLUSIVENESS OF THE VERY SUBSTANCE

So what precisely is meant by “mutual inclusiveness of the very substance”? When the practitioner is cultivating the six gates, during the course of his “counting” of a single breath he is carrying on as well an inherent inclusion of the other five dharmas of following, stabilization, contemplation, turning, and purification.

How is this the case? Take for instance when the practitioner is skillfully training the mind to count the breaths. The very substance [of that practice] is the gate of “counting.” Because the mind depends upon following the breath to perform the practice of counting, that very practice also includes the gate of “following.” Because one puts to rest all grasping at [extraneous] objective conditions and controls the mind so that it abides in the practice of counting, that very practice includes the gate of “stabilization.”<sup>1</sup>

Because one is engaged in the process of distinguishing and remaining aware of both that dharma of mental counting and also the [character of the] breath, doing so in a manner characterized by complete clarity, that very practice includes the gate of contemplation as well.

In a case where the mind moves and becomes scattered as it proceeds to grasp at objects of the five types of desire, [one subsequently realizes that] all such phenomena are false and deceptive. The mind then no longer acquiesces in attachment to those objective conditions. Because the mind then “turns back,” returning

again to the counting of the breaths, that [very practice of counting] includes the gate of “turning” as well.

When one is engaged in focusing on the counting of the breaths, one remains free of the five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) or any of the defilements associated with the coarse afflictions. Both the body and mind then come to abide in a state of quiescence. Thus that [very practice of counting] is itself also inclusive of the gate of “purification.”

One should realize that within that very practice of counting the breaths, there exist [all of] the six gates. Each and every one of the practices of following, stabilization, contemplation, turning, and purification is inclusive of the six gates. This being the case, there are then six times six, that is to say thirty-six gates to the sublime.

In the case of the topics previously taken up, although their particular implementations differ, still, they all embody the present concept. If we failed to make these distinctions, the practitioner would remain unaware of them. This then is a brief explanation of how the six gates to the sublime, in their very substance, are so mutually inclusive that all six characteristics are embodied within each one of them.

#### B. MUTUAL INCLUSIVENESS WHERE SKILLFULNESS GENERATES SUPERIOR PROGRESS

Next, what are the characteristic features of that mutual inclusiveness whereby skillful cultivation of the six gates to the sublime generates superior progress?

At the beginning, when the practitioner is training the mind to count the breaths from “one” up to “ten” such that the mind does not split off and become scattered, this constitutes the gate of “counting.” Precisely when one is engaged in this practice of counting, the quiescent mind is engaged in a skillful way. Having remained aware of the breath’s initial entry, its internal route of travel, and the location to which it reaches, this continues on as, even after the breath has entered, the mind remains entirely aware as it goes back on out again.

It is through relying on “following,” that one remains undistracted and thus becomes able to accomplish the perfection of the dharma of “counting,” going from “one” on up to “ten.” In doing this, even while engaged in the practice of “counting,” one achieves the perfection of the gate of “following.”

Additionally, at precisely that time when the practitioner is engaged in the counting of the breaths, the subtle mind is engaged

in a skillful manner. It controls the mind so that it takes as its object the practice of “counting” as well as the breath itself. It does not allow either subtle primary ideation (*vitarka*) or mental discursion (*vicāra*) to succeed in arising. Thus not even a *kṣāṇa* of variant thought or discrimination is permitted to arise. This being the case, one is then able, even while engaged in “counting,” to accomplish the perfection of the gate of “stabilization.”

Additionally, at just that time that the practitioner is engaged in counting the breaths, he perfects the skillful means of discerning wisdom (*saṃprajñāna*)<sup>2</sup> in mindfulness of the breath. He utilizes the mind of quiescent reflection to illuminate the arising and cessation of the breath. He simultaneously becomes aware of the constituents of his body even at the *kṣāṇa*-after-*kṣāṇa* [micro-moment] level of thought. He becomes aware that the aggregates, sense bases, and sense realms are all just like clouds and just like shadows, while also realizing that they are empty and devoid of any inherently existent nature of their own. [552a]

Thus [the practitioner] finds he is unable to apprehend [any objective evidence of] either a “person” or a “dharma.” At this time, even while engaged in the practice of counting the breaths, he perfects the gate of “contemplation” through employing discerning wisdom to his mindfulness of the breath.

Moreover, at just that time when the practitioner is engaged in counting the breaths, it is not that he only accomplishes that perfection of contemplative wisdom which recognizes presently manifest dharmas as false. Rather, utilizing excellent skillfulness, he also becomes entirely aware that this very mind engaged in contemplative illumination is itself devoid of any inherently existent nature and is false, deceptive, and unreal. He then abandons thought devoted to carrying on knowing awareness [of the objective sphere]. In doing this, even while engaged in counting the breaths, he perfects the gate of “turning.”

Additionally, at just that time when the practitioner is engaged in counting the breaths, it is not that he merely fails to apprehend any objective sphere which is contemplated or any subjective agent which is able to contemplate. Additionally, by employing wisdom-based skillful means, he is also unable to conclude that contemplator and contemplated are [definitively] non-existent either. This is because the fundamentally pure nature of dharmas is like empty space and cannot be made the object of discriminating analysis.

At this time, the mind of the practitioner is [realized to be] identical to the very nature of dharmas. It is quiescent and does not move. In this then, even while engaged in counting the breaths, one perfects the gate of “purification.”

#### C. GENERAL SUMMATION

One thus employs the other five gates as adornments to the practice of counting the breaths. In every case, “following,” “stabilization,” “contemplation,” “turning,” and “purification” are all also just like this. However, we shall not now take up those separate discussions. In this case then, there are six times six, or thirty-six permutations which may be collectively referred to as “the thirty-six gates to the sublime.”

One should realize that, if the practitioner is able to employ excellent skillfulness in the cultivation and practice of the six gates to the sublime, he will certainly succeed in realizing many types of deep dhyāna absorption and wisdom and will enter into that nirvāṇa which is common to all Three Vehicles.