

Dhyāna Pāramitā

VIII. CHAPTER 8: THE PERFECTION OF DHYĀNA MEDITATION

A. THREE KINDS OF BENEFIT AND PATH ADORNMENT FROM DHYĀNA

How does the bodhisattva go about cultivating dhyāna absorption? If dhyāna absorption is cultivated for the sake of bringing about self-benefit, benefit of others, and the combined benefit of both, one then becomes able to adorn the path to bodhi.

1. RIGHT MOTIVATION IN THE PRACTICE OF DHYĀNA

In his cultivation of dhyāna absorption, the bodhisattva is motivated by a wish to so train and discipline beings that they are caused to abandon suffering and affliction.

One who cultivates dhyāna absorption skillfully focuses his mind and does not allow any distracted thoughts to interfere through the introduction of what is false. When walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, one's mindfulness remains anchored directly before one. Both upwards and downwards, one contemplates [the skeleton], tracing from the top of the skull on down through the spine, tracing from the upper arm bones on through the elbows [and so forth], tracing from the chest on through the rib bones, and tracing from the pelvic bones on through the shin bones, the anklebones, [and so forth]. And counting the breaths, one cultivates *ānāpāna*. This is what qualifies as the mind of meditative absorption as initially cultivated by the bodhisattva.

2. SELF-BENEFIT

On account of cultivating dhyāna absorption, one does not indulge the many sorts of evil thought, but rather always experiences blissfulness. This is what is meant by "self-benefit."

3. BENEFIT OF OTHERS

One teaches and transforms beings, causing them to cultivate right mindfulness. This is what is meant by "benefit of others."

4. COMBINED BENEFIT

On the basis of that pure samādhi which one has cultivated, that which abandons evil ideation (*vitarka*) and mental discursion (*vicāra*), one teaches beings, thus causing them to gain benefit identical to one's own. This is what is meant by "combined benefit."

5. ADORNING THE PATH OF BODHI THROUGH DHYĀNA

On account of cultivating dhyāna absorption, one gains realization of the eight liberations and so forth until we come to the *śūraṅgama* and *vajra samādhis*. This is what is meant by “adorning the path to bodhi.”

B. THE THREE DHARMAS FROM WHICH DHYĀNA ABSORPTION ARISES

Dhyāna absorption arises from three dharmas. What are those three? They are:

First, it arises from learning-derived wisdom (*śruta-maya*).

Second, it arises from deliberation-derived wisdom (*cinta-maya*).

Third, it arises from meditation-derived wisdom (*bhāvanā-maya*).

These three dharmas gradually produce all of the samādhis.

1. LEARNING-DERIVED WISDOM

What is meant by “learning-derived wisdom” (*śruta-maya*)? In accordance with whatsoever dharma one has heard, one’s mind always relates to it with fondness and happiness. One additionally thinks, “Such dharmas of the Buddha as the uninterrupted path (*ānantarya-mārga*) and the path of liberation (*vimukti-mārga*) must be perfected on the basis of abundant learning.” Having had this thought, whenever the opportunity arises to seek out the Dharma, one increases the intensity of his vigor so that, day and night, he always delights in tirelessly listening to the Dharma. This is what is meant by “learning-derived wisdom.”

2. DELIBERATION-DERIVED WISDOM

What then is meant by “deliberation-derived wisdom” (*cinta-maya*)? One ponders and analytically contemplates all conditioned dharmas in accordance with their true character. This refers to [contemplating]: “They are impermanent, conduce to suffering, are empty, are devoid of self, are impure, are produced and cease in each successive thought-moment (*kṣaṇa-kṣaṇa-utpanna-niruddha*), and are bound to undergo ruination before long. Beings are bound up in worry, lamentation, suffering, affliction, detestation and affection. [Their existence] is solely a matter of being burned up by the fire of covetousness, hatred, and delusion while increasing the great accumulation of suffering to be undergone in later existences. [Conditioned dharmas] have no reality-based nature and are analogous to a magically-conjured illusion or a supernatural transformation.”

Having made such observations as these, one straightaway generates renunciation for all conditioned dharmas and, with ever increasing intensity, diligently proceeds to pursue the wisdom of the Buddha. One deliberates further and realizes that the wisdom of the Tathāgata is inconceivable, ineffable, and incalculable, is possessed of great power, is unconquerable, is able to transport one to the great city of fearlessness and safety, is not such as can be turned back, and is able to rescue countless suffering and afflicted beings.

One develops such knowledge and vision regarding the immeasurable wisdom of the Buddha, perceives that conditioned dharmas are freighted with an incalculable amount of suffering and affliction, and resolves then to advance, seeking to [cultivate according to] the unsurpassed Great Vehicle. This is what is meant by “deliberation-derived wisdom.”

3. MEDITATION-DERIVED WISDOM

What is meant by “meditation-derived wisdom” (*bhāvanā-maya*)? All [meditation practice occurring] from the initial meditative contemplation of the skeleton on through to *anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi* falls into the category of “meditation-derived wisdom.”

Leaving behind desire and unwholesome dharmas, still retaining “ideation” (*vitarka*) and “mental discursion” (*vicāra*), and experiencing the “joy” (*prīti*) and “bliss” (*prasrabdhi-sukha*) born of abandonment, one enters the first dhyāna.¹⁸

One then causes the cessation of ideation and mental discursion, abides in “inward purity” (*adhyātma-saṃprasāda*), and “focuses the mind in a single place” (*citta-eka-agratā*). Free of ideation and mental discursion, and experiencing the “joy” and “bliss” born of concentration, one enters the second dhyāna.

On account of leaving behind joy (*prīti*), one experiences “equanimity in the sphere of the formative-factors aggregate” (*saṃskāra-upekṣa*), one’s mind abides in “mindfulness” (*smṛti*), one is established in “discerning knowing” (*saṃprajñāna*), and one experiences “physically-based bliss” (*sukhā-vedanā*) of the sort which āryas are able to acquire while still maintaining equanimity towards it.¹⁹ In a state of “meditative stabilization” (*sthiti*, or *samādhi*) (lit. “constant mindfulness”) and experiencing feeling-based bliss, one enters the third dhyāna.

On account of having cut off suffering and having cut off bliss—this on the basis of having earlier caused the cessation of distress and joy—abiding in “a state wherein one feels neither suffering nor

bliss," coursing in "[pure] equanimity" (*upekṣa-pari-śuddhi*), and possessed of "mindfulness which is pure," one enters the fourth dhyāna.

On account of transcending [perception of] all aspects of physical forms, on account of causing cessation of [any perception of] duality-based characteristics (as with the subject-object duality of sense faculties versus sense objects), and on account of refraining from bearing in mind any marks of differentiation, one then comes to know the state of boundless space and straightaway enters the station of the [boundless] space formless absorption.

Having transcended all aspects of empty space, one comes to know the state of boundless consciousness and straightaway enters the station of the [boundless] consciousness formless absorption.

Having transcended all aspects of consciousness, one then comes to know the state of nothing whatsoever and straightaway enters into the formless-realm absorption known as the station of nothing whatsoever.

Having transcended the station of nothing whatsoever, one then comes to know the state of neither perception nor non-perception and then, having experienced peace and security therein, one straightaway enters the formless realm's station of neither perception nor non-perception.

Through merely acquiescing in these dharmas associated with one's practice [of these meditation states] while refraining all the while from indulging any attachment to the bliss associated with them, one [continues] to seek realization of the most supreme form of right enlightenment found in the unsurpassed vehicle.

[The above instances] exemplify what is meant by "meditation-derived wisdom" (*bhāvanā-maya*).

4. SUMMATION ON THE THREE TYPES OF WISDOM FROM DHYĀNA

Through learning-derived wisdom, deliberation-derived wisdom, and meditation-derived wisdom, the bodhisattva cultivates intense diligence in focusing the mind. He then becomes able to equip himself with the samādhis associated with the spiritual penetrations and clarities and proceeds to perfect dhyāna *pāramitā*.

C. TEN MEDITATION DHARMAS NOT IN COMMON WITH THE TWO VEHICLES

Furthermore, in the bodhisattva's cultivation of meditative absorption, there are an additional ten Dharma practices which are not held in common with either the Hearer disciples or the Pratyekabuddhas. What are those ten? They are:

- First, in the cultivation of meditative absorption, he remains free of [attachment to] a self, this through perfecting the dhyāna absorptions of the Tathāgata.
- Second, in the cultivation of meditative absorption, he refrains from indulging any enjoyment of the delectability [of their associated blisses] and refrains from becoming attached to them, this on account of renouncing and abandoning defiled thought and on account of refraining from seeking his own pleasure.
- Third, in the cultivation of meditative absorption, he engages in the work necessary to develop the spiritual penetrations, this for the sake of knowing the mental activity of beings.
- Fourth, in the cultivation of meditative absorption done for the sake of knowing the manifold varieties of [beings'] thoughts, it is undertaken for the purpose of bringing all beings across to liberation.
- Fifth, in the cultivation of meditative absorption, he practices the great compassion, this for the sake of severing the affliction-based fetters of all beings.
- Sixth, in cultivating meditative absorption, he develops a skillful understanding of how to enter and exit the dhyāna samādhis, this because he transcends the three realms.
- Seventh, in cultivating meditative absorption, he always abides in a state of sovereign independence, this because he perfects all good dharmas.
- Eighth, in cultivating meditative absorption, his mind abides in a state of quiescent cessation, this because [his practice] is supreme over the dhyāna samādhis of the Two Vehicles.
- Ninth, in cultivating meditative absorption, he constantly enters a state governed by wisdom, this because he has transcended all worlds and has reached the "other shore" [of perfection].
- Tenth, in cultivating meditative absorption, he is able to bring about the flourishing of right Dharma, this because he inherits and carries on the lineage of the Three Jewels, insuring that it will not be cut off.

Meditative absorption of these sorts is not such as is held in common with the Hearer disciples or the Pratyekabuddhas.

D. ADDITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF BODHISATTVA MEDITATION PRACTICE

Additionally, one cultivates and accumulates all of the dharmas of dhyāna absorption for the sake of knowing the afflicted thoughts of beings. One thus assists the development of the mind of stabilization and causes this dhyāna absorption to abide with a mind of uniformly equal regard for all. This is what is meant by meditative absorption.

If one gains meditative absorptions such as these, then this is equal to [the realization of] emptiness, signlessness, wishlessness, and effortlessness. If one has achieved the equal of emptiness, signlessness, wishlessness, and effortlessness, then one achieves uniformly equal regard for all beings. If one achieves uniformly equal regard for all beings, then one achieves the state wherein all dharmas are beheld with uniformly equal regard. When one has entered a state characterized by uniformly equal regard of this sort, then this is what is meant by meditative absorption.

Furthermore, although the bodhisattva adapts to the world as he carries on his practice, still, he does not admix it with the mundane. He relinquishes the eight worldly dharmas and brings about the cessation of the fetters. He departs far from clamorous boisterousness and takes pleasure in abiding in a place of solitude. The bodhisattva cultivates the practice of dhyāna absorption in a manner such as this. His mind becomes established in a state of stabilization and he abandons worldly endeavors.

E. FOUR ADDITIONAL DISTINCTIVE FACTORS IN BODHISATTVA MEDITATION

Also, in cultivating meditative absorption, the bodhisattva does so for the sake of equipping himself with the spiritual penetrations, knowing awareness, skillful means, and wisdom. What is meant by “spiritual penetrations”? What is meant by “knowing awareness”?

1. SPIRITUAL PENETRATIONS

Whether it be in the sphere of seeing [even distant] characteristics of form, whether it be in the sphere of the hearing [even distant] sounds, whether it be in knowing others' thoughts, whether it be in the sphere of remembering [lifetimes already in] the past, or whether it be in the sphere of the ability to go anywhere in any buddha world, these are all subsumed in what is meant by “spiritual penetrations.”

2. KNOWING AWARENESS

Where one knows that forms are identical with the nature of dharmas, where one completely understands the [nature of] sound and the actions of the mind, where one [perceives] the quiescent cessation

of both nature and phenomenal characteristics, where one regards the three periods of time with uniformly equal regard, and where one knows the buddhalands as characterized by being identical to empty space and yet refrains from opting for the final realization of complete cessation, this corresponds to “knowing awareness.”

3. SKILLFUL MEANS

What then is meant by “skillful means”? And what is meant by “wisdom”? Where, when entering dhyāna absorption, one brings forth the great kindness and compassion, refrains from forsaking one’s vows, keeps one’s mind as solid as *vajra*, contemplates all of the buddha worlds, and carries on with the adornment of the *bodhimaṇḍala*, this corresponds to “skillful means.”

4. WISDOM

Where one’s mind abides in eternal quiescence and remains free of [the concepts of] “self” and “beings,” where one remains undistracted in one’s meditation on the fundamental nature of all dharmas, where one perceives all buddha worlds as identical to empty space, and where one contemplates that whatsoever one adorns is identical to quiescent cessation,²⁰ this corresponds to “wisdom.”

F. SUMMATION ON THE BODHISATTVA’S DISTINCTIVE MEDITATION PRACTICE

This is what is meant by the bodhisattva’s being distinctly different on the basis of his exercise of spiritual penetrations, knowing awareness, skillful means, and wisdom while cultivating dhyāna absorption. Through complete practice of these four matters, one succeeds in drawing close to *anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi*.

G. THE ESSENCE OF THE BODHISATTVA’S PERFECTION OF DHYĀNA MEDITATION

When the bodhisattva, *mahāsattva* cultivates dhyāna absorption, he remains free of any extraneous or evil thoughts. It is by resort to the dharma of remaining unmoving that one then perfects dhyāna *pāramitā*.