

THE ESSENTIALS
of
BUDDHIST MEDITATION

Tiantai Master Zhiyi's Classic Meditation Manual:

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

English Translation by Bhikshu Dharmamitra

CHAPTER NINE

Treatment of Disorders

9. SECTION NINE: TREATMENT OF DISORDERS

Once the practitioner has established his resolve to cultivating the Path, disorders associated with the four great elements may manifest. Based on one's present application of the contemplative mind, the breath may be caused to provoke the activation of latent disorders. Sometimes it happens that one is unable to skillfully and appropriately adjust the three factors of body, mind and breath. Due to interferences between the inward and the outward circumstances, pathological troubles may develop.

Now, as for the dharma of sitting in dhyāna absorption, if one is able to skillfully apply the mind, then the four hundred and four kinds of disorders will naturally be cured. If, however, one fails in the correct placement of the mind, then the four hundred and four kinds of disorders may arise on that very account.

For these reasons, whether one is engaged in practice oneself, or whether one is teaching others, one must become skilled in recognizing the causes of disorders. One must know well the methods for employing the inward mind during sitting meditation to treat disorders. If someday one activates a disorder, it may not simply be a matter of developing an obstruction to practice of the Path. It may be that one has to even contemplate the loss of this one great life.

Now, there are two concepts involved in the explanation of the treatment of disorders. First, one explains the signs which arise when disorders manifest. Secondly, one explains the methods employed in the treatment of disorders.

a. [SIGNS OF DISORDERS]

First, the explanation of the signs which arise when disorders manifest. Although there are many different species of disorders which may manifest, when set forth in brief, they do not go beyond two categories, as follows.

1) [SIGNS RELATED TO THE FOUR GREAT ELEMENTS]

The first are signs of disorders related to the increase or decrease in the four great elements.

a) [EARTH-RELATED SIGNS]

If the great element of earth increases [relative to the other elements], then there may be swelling, obstruction, submersion, or heaviness, and the body may become emaciated. One hundred and one maladies of this sort may arise.

b) [WATER-RELATED SIGNS]

If the great element of water increases [relative to the other elements], then there may occur production of the thick or the thin disease-related fluids, edema, and the failure of food and drink to digest properly. Abdominal pain, diarrhea, and any of one hundred and one different types of related maladies may arise.

c) [FIRE-RELATED SIGNS]

If the great element of fire increases [relative to the other elements], then there may be strong fever in which steaming heat alternates with coldness. The joints may all become painful. The respiration, urination, and defecation may not occur with normal ease and any of one hundred and one different types of related maladies may arise.

d) [WIND-RELATED SIGNS]

If the great element of wind increases [relative to the other elements], then the body may feel as if empty and suspended. There may occur quaking and tremors and the experience of intense pain. The lungs may feel as if pressed down or else may feel distended and urgent in their functioning. There may occur nausea and eructation or an intense urgency to the breathing. Any of one hundred and one different types of such related maladies may arise.

e) [SUMMARY STATEMENT ON ELEMENT-RELATED SIGNS]

Hence a scripture states, "When a single great element is out of adjustment, any of one hundred and one disorders may arise. When the four great elements are out of adjustment, any of four hundred and four disorders may be simultaneously activated."¹

When the disorders associated with the four great elements manifest, each of them possesses a characteristic appearance. One should be watchful for them when one is sitting in meditation and even during one's dreams.

2) [SIGNS RELATED TO THE FIVE CORE ORGANS]

Second, the signs which occur when the five core organs develop maladies.

a) [HEART-RELATED SIGNS]

In a case where a malady develops from a cause associated with the heart, the body may become either cold or hot and there may be headaches or, on account of the heart's serving as the ruler of the mouth, there may be such symptoms as dryness of the mouth.

b) [LUNG-RELATED SIGNS]

In the case where a malady has developed from a cause associated with the lungs, the body may become edematous, the four limbs may become aggravatingly painful, the heart may become depressed, or, on account of the lungs' serving as the ruler of the nose, there may be such symptoms as nasal congestion.

c) [LIVER-RELATED SIGNS]

In the case where a malady has developed from a cause associated with the liver, there are usually no joyful thoughts. One may be distressed, worried, or unhappy. One may have melancholic thoughts or anger. The head may ache or, on account of the liver serving as the ruler of the eyes, there may occur such symptoms as dimness, blurriness, or dullness of the eyes.

d) [SPLEEN-RELATED SIGNS]

In a case where a malady develops from a cause associated with the spleen, a traveling wind may afflict the body and the face and there may be irritating itching and pain throughout the body. On account of the spleen serving as the ruler of the tongue, there may occur such symptoms as a seeming loss of flavor in food and drink.²

e) [KIDNEY-RELATED SIGNS]

In the case where a malady has developed from a cause associated with the kidneys, the throat may be inclined towards feeling choked or obstructed, the abdomen may become distended and, on account of the kidneys serving as the ruler of the ears, there may occur such symptoms as deafness.

f) [SUMMARY STATEMENT ON ORGAN-RELATED SIGNS]

The disorders produced from the five *core* organs are of many different sorts. Each of them presents its own particular signs. One should investigate them when sitting in meditation and even during one's dreams. One may thus be able to understand them.

3) [SUMMARY STATEMENTS ON DISEASE ETIOLOGY]

The causality involved in pathological maladies associated with the four great elements and the five core organs is not limited to

a single type. The symptoms are of many different varieties. They cannot be completely described herein. If the practitioner wishes to cultivate the Dharma entryway of calming-and-insight, it may happen that maladies arise. One should become skillful in recognizing their causal bases. These two categories of disorder may both be activated through either internal or external causes.

In a case where there has been injury from external cold, wind, or heat, and it happens also that one's food and drink are not digesting properly so that the disorder has appeared in both of these [element and organ] locations, one should know then that this is an instance of pathological activity instigated by external causes.

In a case where there has been incorrect adjustment in application of the mind, contradictory and unorthodox contemplative practice, or perhaps misunderstanding of appropriateness in the give-and-take required when meditative absorption dharmas manifest, and when it happens consequently that disorders have developed in both of these [element and organ] locations, this is a case of pathological signs instigated by internal causes.

Additionally, there are three different categories of causal bases for becoming afflicted with disorders: The first consists of excesses and deficiencies in the four great elements and five *core* organs as discussed earlier. The second consists of disorders brought on through the actions of ghosts and spirits. The third consists of disorders brought on as a result of karmic retribution.

Disorders such as these are very easily cured if they are treated immediately when first contracted. If they go on for a long time, however, then the pathology becomes established. If the body becomes emaciated and the disorder becomes anchored in place, then, in proceeding with the treatment of it, it may be difficult to bring about a cure.

b. [TREATING DISORDERS]

Second, explaining the methods for treating the disorders. Having deeply understood the origins of a disorder's arising and manifestations, one should implement a method for treating it. The methods employed in the treatment of disorders are of many types. To bring up those which are essential, they do not go beyond the two skillful means of calming and insight.

1) [TREATMENT THROUGH CALMING]

How does one use calming to treat symptoms of a disorder?

a) [AT THE SITE OF THE DISORDER]

There are masters who say that if one simply establishes the mind in calming at the site of the disorder, one will immediately be able to cure the disorder. Why is this? The mind is the ruler of this [life's] span of karmic-effect retributions. This [healing effect] is comparable to that circumstance wherein, whenever a king goes somewhere, the bands of rebels suddenly scatter.

b) [AT THE UDĀNA OR DANTIAN]

Next, there are masters who say that one inch below the navel is a location known as the *udāna*. This refers to what we know [in Chinese culture] as the "*dantian*."³ If one is able to bring the mind to a halt and preserve its point of focus at this location such that it does not become scattered, then after one has done this for a long time, in most cases, there will be that which is remedied.

c) [BENEATH THE FEET]

There are other masters who say that if one constantly anchors the mind's point of attention beneath the feet without regard to whether one is walking, standing, or lying down to sleep, one will be able to cure disorders. Why is this? This is because it is on account of non-regulation of the four great elements that most illnesses occur. This is brought about by the mind's consciousness becoming anchored in a higher position, thus causing the four great elements to become unregulated. If one anchors the mind below, then the four great elements will naturally become appropriately adjusted and the various disorders will be gotten rid of.

d) [QUIESCENT ABIDING IN CALMING WHILE REALIZING EMPTINESS]

There are masters who state that one need only realize that all dharmas are empty and that nothing whatsoever exists. If one refrains from seizing upon the symptoms of illness while quiescently abiding in calming, then a cure will be brought about in most cases. Why is this? This is because the mind's reflective intellection pumps up the four great elements and instigates the arising of disorders.

If one puts the mind to rest in harmony and happiness, the various disorders will then be cured. Hence the *Vimalakīrti Sutra* states, "What is it that constitutes the origin of disease? It is the so-called 'manipulation of conditions.' ... How does one cut off the manipulation of conditions? It is through what is known as 'the mind's non-apprehension [of the inherent existence of any phenomena].'"⁴

e) [SUMMARY STATEMENT ON “CALMING” AS A MEANS OF TREATMENT]

All such sorts of explanations promoting the use of calming to treat disease symptoms are not of just one single type. Hence one should realize that one is able to treat a multitude of disorders through skillful cultivation of the dharma of calming.

2) [TREATMENT THROUGH VARIOUS {INSIGHT} CONTEMPLATION TECHNIQUES]

Next, the explanation of using [insight-based] contemplations to treat disorders.

a) [EMPLOYING SIX TYPES OF BREATH]

There are masters who state that one need only engage in contemplation utilizing the mind’s visualizing thought while also employing six kinds of subtle energetic breath (*qi = prāṇa*) to treat disorders. This is just a case of [insight] contemplation being able to treat disorders. What are the six kinds of breath? The first is blowing (*chui*). The second is exhaling (*hu*). The third is mirthful tittering (*xi*). The fourth is puffing (*he*). The fifth is drawn-out breathing (*xu*). The sixth is normal breathing (*si*).⁵ These six kinds of breathing are all created within the lips and mouth and are a skillful means employed by the envisioning mind as one turns to the side, utilizing them in a soft and subtle manner. A verse states:

The heart belongs to “*he*,” the kidneys to “*chui*,”
 The spleen to “*hu*,” and the lungs to “*si*”—the sages all know this.
 When the liver heats up, the “*xu*” word comes forth.
 Wherever the Triple Warmer is blocked, one need only intone “*xi*.”

b) [EMPLOYING TWELVE TYPES OF RESPIRATION]

There are masters who say that if one is skillful in using visualizing contemplations in implementing twelve different kinds of respiration, one is able to treat a multitude of maladies. The first is “ascending” respiration. The second is “descending” respiration. The third is “filling” respiration. The fourth is “burning” respiration. The fifth is “extended” respiration. The sixth is “demolishing” respiration. The seventh is “warming” respiration. The eighth is “cooling” respiration. The ninth is “forceful” respiration. The tenth is “retaining” respiration. The eleventh is “harmonizing” respiration. The twelfth is “restoring” respiration.

All twelve of these types of respiration arise from the visualizing mind. We now briefly explain the counteractive features of the twelve types of respiration:

- “Ascending” respiration counteracts sinking and heaviness.
- “Descending” respiration counteracts symptoms of feeling as if empty and “suspended.”
- “Filling” respiration counteracts emaciation.
- “Burning” respiration counteracts distention.
- “Extended” respiration counteracts injury through wasting away.
- “Demolishing” respiration counteracts increasing fullness.
- “Warming” respiration counteracts coldness.
- “Cooling” respiration counteracts heat.
- “Forceful” respiration counteracts non-opening obstructions.
- “Retaining” respiration counteracts shaking.
- “Harmonizing” respiration counteracts four-element deterioration.
- “Restoring” respiration fortifies four-element deterioration.

If one is skillful in using these kinds of respiration, one may be able to treat all of the many varieties of maladies. If one extrapolates from this, one will be able to comprehend the techniques.

c) [THROUGH VISUALIZING CONTEMPLATIONS]

There are masters who say that, if one is skillful in employing visualizing contemplations in the sphere of conventional [reality], one will be able to treat a multitude of disorders. For instance, if a person is afflicted with coldness, one may visualize the fire energy arising within the body and then be able to counteract the coldness. This accords with the *Samyukta Āgama Sutra's* extensive discussion of seventy-two esoteric therapeutic techniques.

d) [THROUGH REALIZATION OF UNFINDABILITY]

There are masters who say that one need only employ calming and insight to carry out investigative analyses within the body so as to realize that the disorders of the four great elements cannot be apprehended as existing and the disorders of the mind cannot be found either. Thus the multitude of disorders will then be cured of themselves. There are all sorts of explanations such as these whereby one employs [insight-based] contemplations to treat disorders. Their implementations differ. However, if one well realizes their meanings, one may in every case be able to treat disorders.

3) [SUMMARY DISCUSSION ON THE TREATMENT OF DISORDERS]

a) [GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS]

One should understand that if one realizes well the meanings inherent in the two techniques of calming and insight, there is no disorder which will not be cured thereby. However, the faculties and

potential of people of the present age are shallow and dull. When they carry out these envisioning contemplations, they often fail to succeed. Thus these techniques do not circulate widely in the world. As an additional point, one must not go beyond these techniques to pursue the study of energy-manipulation skills or diets requiring desisting from cereal grains. It is feared that one will then develop heterodox views. Mineral and herbal medicines can be useful in the treatment of disease. Hence they may be consumed as well.

If it is a case of a disorder caused by ghosts, one should employ an intensely resolute mind in the application of mantras, using them as a means to assist the treatment. If it is a case of a disorder brought on by karmic retribution, then it is essential to cultivate merit and repentances. The malady will then disappear. In the case of these two⁶ types of treatment methods, where a practitioner has had particularly good success with a specific approach, he may practice it himself and also extend its benefits to others as well. How much the more might this be acceptable where one has succeeded in reaching a complete and penetrating realization.

However, if one has no real knowledge of any of this, then when disorders arise, one will not have any means to treat it. Then, not only would this amount to neglectfulness in one's own cultivation of right Dharma, but one fears it might also be a case of someone's very life being in danger. [Under such circumstances], how could one then resort to one's own practice experience as a basis for offering instruction to others?

Therefore, one who wishes to cultivate calming-and-insight must well understand the treatment techniques based in one's own mind. Those techniques are not limited to a single approach. The realization of the concept is something particular to each person. How then could one be able to transmit such matters solely through writing?

b) [TEN ESSENTIAL FACTORS IN TREATMENT OF DISORDERS]

Furthermore, when one applies one's mind to the treatment of disorders while engaged in sitting meditation, it is still essential to also include ten dharmas of which there are none which fail to provide benefit. The ten dharmas are:

1. Faith;
2. Utilization;
3. Diligence;

4. Staying constantly focused on the objective condition;
5. Distinguishing the causality of the disorder;
6. Skillful means;
7. Long-enduring practice;
8. Understanding selection and relinquishing;
9. Maintaining and guarding [precept observance]; and
10. Recognizing how to block the arising of obstacles.

What is meant by “faith”? This refers to having faith that this technique is certainly capable of curing the particular disorder.

What is meant by “utilization”? This refers to constant utilization no matter what the circumstances may be at the time.

What is meant by “diligence”? This refers to utilization of the technique in a focused, intense, and unceasing manner wherein one takes the achievement of a cure as the measure of accomplishment.

What is meant by “staying focused on the objective condition”? This refers to maintaining a refined mental focus abiding in constant reliance on the particular [treatment] method while not allowing any change in the object of one’s attention.

What is meant by “distinguishing the causality of the disorder”? This is as discussed above.

What is meant by “skillful means”? This refers to being skillful and not failing in appropriateness as one perfects subtle energetic meditation work, application of mind, and development of visualizations.

What is meant by “long-enduring practice”? This means that, should one employ a particular technique and yet not gain immediate benefit from it, one nonetheless ignores the passage of days or months, continuing nonetheless to be constant and unailing in carrying on with the practice.

What is meant by “understanding selection and relinquishment”? This means that, where one becomes aware of benefits in a given technique, one is then diligent, whereas, where one discovers harmfulness in a given technique, one immediately relinquishes it. One is extremely subtle in applying the mind to the task of making adjustments and implementing treatment methods.

What is meant by “maintaining and guarding [precept observance]”? This means that one is skillful in recognizing how different objective conditions carry the potential to involve one in transgressions [against the moral precepts].

What is meant by avoiding obstacles? This means that, should one realize some benefits in one's practice, one does not broadcast [such accomplishments] to others, whereas, so long as one hasn't encountered any harm in [a particular treatment technique], one refrains from generating doubts or slanders toward it.

If one relies upon these ten dharmas in the application of treatment methods, one will definitely find them to be efficacious and will not have undertaken them in vain.