

# 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 FOUR

### The Six Gates as Means of Counteraction

#### IV. SIX GATES CULTIVATION AS MEANS OF COUNTERACTION

##### A. GENERAL CLARIFICATION: CULTIVATION CONSISTS PRIMARILY OF REMEDIATION

As the practitioner of the Three Vehicles cultivates the Path and converges with the truth, in every case, this is an exercise in getting rid of obstacles and manifesting the noumenal [reality].<sup>1</sup> There is nothing whatsoever which is being “created” in this endeavor. How is this the case?

For Two-Vehicles practitioners,<sup>2</sup> once they have gotten rid of the delusions corresponding to the four dwelling stations (*āvāsa-bhūmi*),<sup>3</sup> this qualifies as realization of “the fruit of [the path of] the Ārya.”<sup>4</sup> They do not have any additional dharma above and beyond that.

Because the great bodhisattva eminences utterly destroy the obstacle of “dust-and-sand” delusions, they manifest the noumenal [reality] of bodhi. They, too, do not cultivate anything aside from this.

Thus one may realize through extrapolation that, if one is merely able to skillfully employ the six gates as countermeasures in the destruction of inward and outward obstacles, it is just this very activity which constitutes cultivation of the Path. It is just this very thing which constitutes realization of the Path. There is no other “Path” aside from this.

##### B. SPECIFIC COUNTERMEASURES: ADDRESSING THE THREE OBSTACLES

How is it that one puts these six gates to effective use as countermeasures? The practitioner should recognize the appropriate medicine based on a knowledge of the particular disease. How does one know the nature of the disease? It is just the so-called “three obstacles” (*āvaraṇa*).

The first are the “retribution-related obstacles” (*vipāka-āvaraṇa*). They are just the unfortunate occurrences of this very life and the scatteredness and confusion associated with coarse agitation. They constitute obstacles with respect to the sense realms and the sense bases.

The second are the “affliction-related obstacles” (*kleśa-āvaraṇa*). They are just all such afflictions as are associated with the three poisons,<sup>5</sup> the ten agents,<sup>6</sup> and so forth.

The third are the “karma-related obstacles” (*karma-āvaraṇa*). They are just [the effects of] the bad karma obstructing the path which has arisen from past and present [causes]. During that period when one has still not undergone the associated retribution, they are able to obstruct [realization of] the path of the Āryas.

When the practitioner is sitting in dhyāna meditation, if these three obstacles manifest, he should skillfully recognize their characteristics and use these Dharma gates to counteract and get rid of them. How is it that, as one is sitting, one is aware of the characteristics of the arising of retribution-related obstacles, and how is it that one should engage in such endeavors as are involved in counteracting them?

1. COUNTERACTING RETRIBUTION-RELATED OBSTACLES: SPECIFIC STRATEGIES
  - a. “COUNTING” TO COUNTERACT UNCONTROLLED IDEATION

When discrimination-making initial ideation (*vitarka*) and mental discursion (*vicāra*)<sup>7</sup> manifest ceaseless scattered movement and manipulation of the objective sphere—it is then that we speak of the arising of retribution-related obstacles.

When the mental floating and moving about is obvious and acute, and when it is engaged in manipulations of the objective sphere—when the mind scatters vertically and laterally like a monkey in a tree—when this is so extreme that it is difficult to control or keep track of it—it is then that the practitioner should employ the gate of “counting,” thus training the mind to count the breaths. One should realize that, in such a situation, it is precisely this which qualifies as the genuinely counteractive technique. [551b] Hence the Buddha stated that, for those in whom primary ideation and mental discursion are abundant, one should teach them to count the breaths.

- b. “FOLLOWING” TO COUNTERACT DULLNESS, SCATTEREDNESS, AND DROWSINESS

Second, when one is sitting in dhyāna meditation, there may be times when one’s mind is both dull and scattered. “Dullness” is marked by the non-recalling mind. “Dimness,” [which may be an associated factor], is marked by drowsiness. “Scatteredness” is marked by the “floating,” “skipping-over,” and “running off” of one’s thoughts.

When these circumstances present themselves, the practitioner should employ the gate of “following,” skillfully training the

mind to follow the breath as one clearly illuminates the entering and exiting of one's respiration. The mind thus comes to abide in dependence upon the breath as an objective condition [and it follows that] there is no further division or scattering of the mental attention. As [the mind] "illuminates" the going out and coming in of the breath, this counters mind states involving non-recall, dullness, and drowsiness. As it abides in dependence upon the breath, one counters the mind's primary ideation, mental discursion, and manipulation of the objective sphere.

#### c. STABILIZATION TO COUNTERACT URGENCY, COARSENESS, AND RUMINATION

Third, if while one is sitting in dhyāna meditation, one becomes aware of an urgency in body and mind manifesting as coarseness of the breath together with a scatteredness and continuous flowing on of thought, the practitioner should then employ the gate of "stabilization" to relax the body, "release" the breath, and control the thought so that it becomes focused in stillness. One thus brings all recollection and rumination to a halt. This is the appropriate counteractive technique in such cases.

#### 2. COUNTERACTING AFFLICTION-RELATED OBSTACLES: SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

Next, how is it that affliction-related obstacles are generated and how is it that one should counteract them? Afflictions (*kleśa*) are of three primary types:

##### a. DESIRE

In the case of the first, when one is sitting in dhyāna meditation, it may be that the affliction of desire arises. At such a time, the practitioner should resort to the gate of "contemplation of mind," employing the nine reflections on the unlovely,<sup>8</sup> the initial contemplations involved in the [eight] liberations,<sup>9</sup> the [first] two of the [eight] bases of ascendancy,<sup>10</sup> and any other of the methods for realization of "impurity."<sup>11</sup> These are the appropriate counteractive techniques in such circumstances.

##### b. HATRED

In the case of the second, when one is sitting in dhyāna meditation, it may be that the affliction of hatred arises. At such a time, the practitioner should resort to the gate of "contemplation of mind," engaging in the contemplations of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity, and so forth. These are the appropriate counteractive techniques in such circumstances.

### c. DELUSIVE IGNORANCE

In the case of the third, when one is sitting in dhyāna, it may be that the affliction of delusion arises along with its erroneous views. At such a time, the practitioner should employ the gate of “turning,” turning back his attention to illuminate the twelve causes and conditions, the three emptinesses,<sup>12</sup> and the [thirty-seven] wings of enlightenment, engaging in analysis directed at the very source of his own mind, and returning in refuge to its fundamental nature. This is the appropriate counteractive technique to for use in such circumstances.

### 3. COUNTERACTING KARMIC OBSTACLES: SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

Then again, just how is it that one goes about counteracting the karma obstructing the Path? Karma arises in three ways. The means for counteracting it are also threefold:

#### a. COUNTERACTING DEFILED THOUGHT INVOLVING MENTAL TURBIDITY

In the case of the first, when one is sitting in dhyāna meditation, it may be that there suddenly arise defiled thoughts accompanied by mental turbidity, dimness, and the loss through such confusion of one’s meditative mind state. One should then realize that this is a circumstance involving the arising of obstacles originating from one’s previous black and murky karmic actions.

At such a time, the practitioner should resort to an approach associated with the gate of “purification,” specifically using as a counteractive technique mindfulness of the pure light issuing from the thirty-two marks of [a buddha’s] transformation body (*nirmāṇa-kāya*) wherein “purity associated with the provisional”<sup>13</sup> manifests. This is the appropriate counteractive technique in such circumstances.

#### b. COUNTERACTING DESIRE-RELATED DEFILED THOUGHT

In the case of the second, when one is sitting in dhyāna meditation, it may be that there suddenly arise unwholesome thoughts wherein one deliberates on ideas associated with sensual desire and wherein there is no unwholesome karma which one would not commit. It is likely in this case as well that this is a circumstance generated by the karma of past transgressions.

At such a time, the practitioner should resort to an approach associated with the gate of “purification,” specifically using as a counteractive technique mindfulness of a reward-body (*sambogha-kāya*) buddha’s qualities of: the knowledge of all modes (*sarva-ākāra-jñatā*),

“perfect purity,”<sup>14</sup> permanence, and bliss. This is the appropriate counteractive technique in such circumstances.

### C. COUNTERACTING ABHORRENT MIND STATES

In the case of the third, when one is sitting in dhyāna meditation, signs may appear which are linked to all manner of abhorrent states of mind which, in the extreme case, may even involve [visions of] subjection to physical and mental coercion. One should realize that such signs are all a product of obstacles generated by unwholesome karmic actions committed in past and present lives.

At such a time, the practitioner should resort to an approach associated with the gate of “purification,” specifically using as a counteractive technique mindfulness of the Dharma-body (*dharmakāya*) [buddha’s] “fundamental purity,”<sup>15</sup> [focusing] on its being neither-produced-nor-destroyed and on its possessing a fundamental nature characterized by purity. This is the appropriate counteractive technique in such circumstances.

### C. GENERAL SUMMATION

This has been a general explanation of the aspects involved in employing the six gates as counteractive methods to cut off and eliminate the three obstacles. An extensive explanation would not differ from a treatment of the fifteen kinds of obstacles.<sup>16</sup>

#### 1. REGARDING SUDDEN ARISING OF OBSTACLES

Additionally, suppose that the practitioner has been sitting in dhyāna meditation in a circumstance wherein there have already manifested all other sorts of deep dhyāna absorptions, wisdom, and liberations, but then all sorts of obstacles arise. In such a case, one should then skillfully select and employ the appropriate counteractive techniques from among the six gates.

#### 2. BENEFITS OF CORRECT IMPLEMENTATION

Once both the coarse and subtle obstructive dharmas have already been eliminated the true suchness and the true character of phenomena will then naturally manifest. [551c] The three clarities (*vidyā*)<sup>17</sup> and the six superknowledges (*abhijñā*) will be spontaneously generated. The ten powers, four fearlessnesses, meritorious qualities, practices, and vows of all buddhas and bodhisattvas will all naturally appear before one. All of these phenomena will come into being without any deliberate effort being made to cause their manifestation. Hence the *Sutra* states, “I see as well all of the Tathāgatas naturally realizing the path of buddhahood.”<sup>18</sup>