

THE SIX DHARMA GATES TO THE SUBLIME

六妙法門

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CHAPTER SEVEN

The Six Gates in Accordance with Reversed Orientation

VII. SIX GATES CULTIVATION IN ACCORDANCE WITH REVERSE-ORIENTED PRACTICE

A. THE EXCLUSIVE NATURE OF THIS PRACTICE

In the case of the previously-described [modes of cultivating] the six gates to the sublime, they are all “common-practice” approaches. This is because they are [potentially] held in common with common persons and Two-Vehicles practitioners. Now, as for this cultivation of the six gates to the sublime carried out in the “reversed” orientation, it is such as is practiced by the bodhisattvas alone. It is not a practice held in common even with the Hearers or the Pratyekabuddhas, how much the less with common people.

How is this the case? In the case of the immediately preceding sixth chapter, “the six gates to the sublime according to identities and differences,” in the discussion of that contemplation, it was with reference to going from the contemplation of the conventional into the contemplation of emptiness. It involved gaining comprehensive-knowledge (*sarvajñatā*) as perceived with the wisdom eye. “Comprehensive knowledge as perceived with the wisdom eye” is a dharma held in common by Two-Vehicles practitioners and bodhisattvas.

Now, however, we are explaining cultivation of the six gates to the sublime carried out in the “reversed” orientation which involves emerging from the contemplation of emptiness into the contemplation of the conventional. This is just the knowledge of all modes (*sarva-ākāra-jñatā*) as perceived with the Dharma eye. The knowledge of all modes as perceived with the Dharma eye is not shared in common with the Hearers and the Pratyekabuddhas.

B. SPECIFICS OF THIS EXCLUSIVELY-BODHISATTVIC PRACTICE

1. THIS PRACTICE IN RELATION TO MINDFULNESS OF THE BREATH

How is it that the bodhisattva, even while engaged in the path of counting the breaths, cultivates emerging from the contemplation of emptiness into the contemplation of the conventional, brings forth the “reversed” orientation, and generates the meritorious-quality characteristics of all of the [bodhisattva] practices?¹

a. THE PARADOX OF EMPTINESS AND GENERATION OF THE BODHISATTV A VOW

As for what is referred to as “the bodhisattva practice,” even at that very time in which one is engaged in the counting of the breaths, one should generate the great vow and abide in compassionate regard for beings. Even though one realizes that beings are ultimately empty of inherent existence, still, one wishes to bring beings to perfection and purify the buddhalands, carrying on with this practice to the very exhaustion of future time. [553a]

b. THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE BREATH WITH EMPTINESS

After one has made this vow, one should immediately and completely understand that those very breaths which are being counted are not produced and not destroyed. Their nature is emptiness and quiescence. Whatsoever is breath is just emptiness.

This is not a case of emptiness arrived at in the aftermath of the breath’s destruction. Rather, it is that the very nature of the breath is that it is inherently empty. The very breath itself is identical to emptiness. The very emptiness itself is identical with the breath. Apart from the emptiness, there is no breath. Apart from the breath, there is no emptiness. This is the case with all other dharmas in precisely the same way.

c. THE REALIZATION OF THE ILLUSORY NATURE OF THE BREATH

Because the breath is empty of inherent existence, it is neither genuine nor false. It is neither worldly nor supramundane. One seeks to find the breath, is unable to apprehend either breath or non-breath, and yet still is able to perfect the mindfulness of the breath. That mindfulness of the breath which one perfects is like a dream, like an illusory conjuration, like an echo, and like a [supernatural] transformation. Although there is no genuine phenomenon which can be apprehended, still one engages in the making of distinctions with regard to the phenomena created through conjuration and [supernatural] transformation.

The bodhisattva’s complete understanding of the breath is just like this. Although there is no [inherently-existent] nature of the breath which can be discovered, still, he perfects the mindfulness of the breath as he proceeds from “one” on up to “ten,” with complete and utter distinctness and clarity. With profound depth of mind, he distinguishes the characteristics of that very breath which, in nature, is like a mere conjuration.

d. BREATH-BASED PRACTICE IN RELATION TO CAUSALITY

1) THE ROLE OF BREATH IN COMPELLING CYCLIC EXISTENCE

It is on account of the existence of the breath, itself devoid of any [inherently-existent] nature and like a mere conjuration, that there come to exist the worldly and supramundane dharmas which are themselves devoid of any [inherently-existent] nature. How is this the case? It is on account of the inverted views associated with delusive ignorance (*avidyā*) and the failure to realize that the nature of the breath is emptiness, that one falsely reckons that the breath actually exists.

One consequently generates attachment to persons and dharmas and engages in practices rooted in affection and views. It is on account of this that we have what one refers to as “the world.” It is on account of [reckoning] that the breath exists that one then comes to have the aggregates, the sense realms, the sense bases, and the other resultant effects associated with undergoing worldly suffering and happiness.

One should realize that, although the breath is empty, it is still able to bring about the accomplishment of every form of cause-and-effect within the sphere of worldly good and evil as well as the phenomena of birth and death within the twenty-five stations of existence.

2) THE ROLE OF BREATH IN CONQUEST OF THE SUPRAMUNDANE

Additionally, although no signs of the supramundane exist in that emptiness characterizing the breath’s features, it is still not the case that one does not use the breath as a causal basis in distinguishing supramundane dharmas.

How is this so? It is on account of failing to realize that the characteristic features of the breath are empty that one becomes deluded, fails to abide in complete understanding, and thus then engages in the creation of worldly karmic deeds. It is on account of realizing that the breath is empty and devoid of anything whatsoever that one consequently becomes free of delusion and the false attachment to all forms of fetters and afflictions. [One realizes that] there is no basis for their arising. This [realization] constitutes a causal basis for transcending the world.

It is on account of the cessation of their causes that one succeeds in separating from the twenty-five stations of existence and other such subsequent-lifetime resultant effects. It is this which qualifies as the supramundane resultant effect. When one is able to go

beyond the cause-and-effect dharmas linked to the world's inverted views, it is this which qualifies as supramundane Dharma.

Cause-and-effect still exists within the domain of the supramundane genuine right Dharma. As for the cause, it is the awareness of the emptiness of the breath as realized by right wisdom which constitutes the supramundane cause. It is the cessation of the false reckoning of the existence of persons and a self, the cessation of delusion and inverted views, and also the cessation of resultant effects characterized by suffering which [collectively] constitute the supramundane resultant effects.

Thus one realizes that the bodhisattva contemplates the breath as non-breath. Although he is unable to apprehend [any dharma which ultimately qualifies as] either "worldly" or "supramundane," still, he is able to make distinctions with regard to both the worldly and the supramundane.

e. BREATH-BASED PRACTICE IN RELATION TO THE FOUR TRUTHS

Additionally, when the bodhisattva contemplates the nature of the breath as empty, he does not apprehend the four truths, and yet he still penetratingly understands the four truths. How is this the case?

Worldly resultant effects such as described above are identical with the truth of suffering. Causes of that which is worldly are identical with the truth of accumulation. Supramundane resultant effects are identical with the truth of cessation. The causes for the transcendence of the world are identical with the truth of the Path.

Thus the thought utilized in the contemplation of the breath does not perceive [the ultimately real existence of] the four truths and yet is able to utterly and completely make distinctions with regard to the four truths. [553b] Thus it is that, for the sake of those beings who are Hearer-path practitioners, he broadly proclaims such distinctions.

f. BREATH-BASED PRACTICE IN RELATION TO THE TWELVE-FOLD CAUSALITY

Additionally, the bodhisattva, even in the midst of his complete understanding of the emptiness of the breath, does not engender any perception of [the ultimate existence of] the twelve causes and conditions. Still, he penetratingly understands the twelve causes and conditions.

How is this the case? [The bodhisattva realizes that] the nature of past breaths is emptiness and the absence of any existent entity. [He

realizes that it is because] one has falsely perceived the existence of the breath that one has thus generated all manner of inverted views and discriminations and brought forth all manner of afflictions. Thus it is that we refer to this as “delusive ignorance.”²

Where one has ignorance serving as a cause and a condition, one consequently has karmic formative factors (*saṃskāra*), consciousness, name-and-form, the six sense bases, contact, sensation, craving, grasping, becoming, birth, aging, sickness, and death, along with misery, lamentation, suffering, affliction, and so forth. This continues on in an unceasing cycle. All of these factors arise on account of not completely understanding that the breath is like empty space and is devoid of any [inherently] existent entity whatsoever.

If one realizes that the breath is empty and quiescent, then one smashes ignorance. Because one destroys ignorance, then the twelve causes and conditions are all consequently entirely destroyed.

In this fashion, the bodhisattva completely understands the breath as non-breath and, although he does not apprehend [any ultimate existence of] the twelve causes and conditions, he is still able to completely and utterly understand them. Possessing a penetrating understanding of the twelve causes and conditions, he then broadly proclaims distinctions regarding them for the sake of practitioners seeking to realize the Pratyekabuddha-Vehicle path.

g. BREATH-BASED PRACTICE IN RELATION TO THE SIX PERFECTIONS

1) BREATH’S TRANSCENDENT NATURE IN RELATION TO THE PERFECTIONS

Additionally, the bodhisattva completely understands that the breath is devoid of any [inherently existent] nature. At this time, he does not perceive even any existence of the breath, how much the less does he perceive within the pathways of the breath either the dharmas of the six obstructive conditions³ (*ṣaḍ-vipakṣa*) or the dharmas of the six perfections.

a) BREATH-BASED PRACTICE IN RELATION TO THE PERFECTION OF GIVING

i) THE ROLE OF THE BREATH IN ENGENDERING COVETOUSNESS

Although he does not perceive in the nature of the breath either the obstructive conditions or the dharmas of the six perfections, still, he possesses a complete and utterly penetrative understanding of the six obstructive conditions and the six perfections. How is this the case? At that very time when the practitioner is engaged in the counting of the breaths, he immediately and naturally understands completely that if, in the midst of that which is non-breath,

he nonetheless perceives the [the inherent existence of] breath, this will definitely lead to the establishment of the obstructing dharmas of covetousness.

ii) THE FOUR TYPES OF COVETOUSNESS

There are four categories of covetousness:

The first is covetous cherishing of material forms of wealth. One perceives the existence of a self in the midst of the breath. It is for the sake of the self that one then generates covetousness.

The second is covetousness with respect to the body. This arises because one generates the view of a physical body in the midst of the breath.

The third is covetousness with respect to a lifespan. This arises because, in the midst of the breath, one fails to abide in complete understanding and so reckons that there exists a lifespan.

The fourth is covetousness with respect to the Dharma.⁴ This develops because, in the midst of the breath, one fails to abide in complete understanding. One then generates views. Consequently there then arise thoughts attached to Dharma.

iii) FOUR CLASSES OF PERFECTION OF GIVING

In order to demolish the evil dharmas associated with the obstructive condition of covetousness, the practitioner cultivates four types of *dāna pāramitā*:

(1) THE WEALTH-RELINQUISHING PERFECTION OF GIVING

In the case of the first, one realizes that the breath is empty, that it is non-self, and that apart from the breath, there is no self, either. Having failed to discover any self at all, [one contemplates], “Just what is it then which is supplied and provided for by all of this stored-up material wealth?” At this time, the covetous mind (the mind inclined towards convenience)⁵ immediately and naturally ceases. One then relinquishes even precious treasures just as if one were ridding oneself of snot or spittle.

One should realize that achieving an utterly penetrative understanding of the nature of the breath is the very basis of the wealth-giving form of *dāna pāramitā*.

(2) THE BODY-RELINQUISHING PERFECTION OF GIVING

Additionally, the bodhisattva realizes that there is no [inherently-existent] nature in the body, that the breath and all of the other related dharmas do not constitute a body, and that apart from the

breath and other such dharmas, there is no separately existing body, either. At this time, one realizes that the body is really just a non-body.

Consequently one immediately demolishes the attachment fundamental to any covetousness with respect to the body. Since one is no longer covetous with respect to the body, one then becomes able to employ the body in the role of a slave or servant. By doing so, one accords with Dharma in the performance of giving to whomsoever one encounters.

One should realize that in completely understanding the breath as non-breath one then immediately becomes able to completely perfect the body-relinquishing form of *dāna pāramitā*.

(3) THE LIFE-SACRIFICING PERFECTION OF GIVING

Additionally, if the practitioner is able to completely understand that the nature of the breath is emptiness, he does not perceive the breath as identical with a lifespan. Nor does he perceive that there exists any lifespan apart from the breath, either. Having been unable to discover [any ultimate existence of] a lifespan, he demolishes the thought which assumes the existence of a lifespan characterized by any [inherently-existent] nature. [553c] At this time, one immediately becomes able to relinquish one's life as a gift to furnish the needs of beings and is able to do so with a mind free of fearfulness.

One should realize that, in achieving a completely penetrative understanding of the emptiness of the breath, one immediately becomes able to perfect the life-relinquishing form of *dāna pāramitā*.

(4) THE DHARMA-RELINQUISHING PERFECTION OF GIVING

Additionally, if the practitioner achieves a penetrating understanding of the emptiness of the breath, he then no longer perceives [the inherent existence of] the aggregates, the sense bases, the sense realms, or any other such dharmas, nor does he perceive [the inherent existence of] the characteristics of any of the various sorts of worldly or supramundane dharmas, either.

[The practitioner] does have that which he proclaims in order to refute the various sorts of baseless imputations clung to by beings [which lead them to] deludedly seize upon dharmas and course along in cyclic existence within the six destinies. However, in actuality, there is nothing proclaimed and nothing explained, for the hearer of it has nothing heard and nothing gained thereby. At this

time, although one practices the giving of Dharma, one does not possess any attachment to the giving of Dharma. There is no [calculated] kindness towards others and yet one nonetheless provides benefit to everyone.

This is analogous to the great earth, empty space, and the sun and moon which provide benefit to the world and yet are free of any intentional regard for creatures and which do not seek anything in return for their kindnesses. Just so is the bodhisattva who gains a penetrating understanding of the emptiness of breath and then benefits beings through *dāna* pāramitā in the form of uniformly-offered Dharma giving.

b) SUMMATION REGARDING THE PERFECTION OF GIVING

One should realize that in the bodhisattva's understanding that the nature of the breath is emptiness, he does not apprehend either covetousness or the perfections and yet he is able to completely and utterly understand and make distinctions with regard to covetousness and the perfections.

2) SUMMATION REGARDING THE OTHER PERFECTIONS

Because it cannot be apprehended at all, he realizes the nature of the breath is emptiness. Hence his perfection of the other pāramitās of *śīla*, *kṣānti*, *vīrya*, *dhyāna*, and *prajñā* is just the same [as with the perfection of giving]. [Ideally], one should engage herein in an expansive demonstration of the implications of the "reversed" orientation in relation to the characteristic features of all of the pāramitās, opening up, explaining, and making distinctions for those sons and daughters of good family who seek to course along in the path to buddhahood.

C. SUMMATION REGARDING CULTIVATION OF THE "REVERSED" ORIENTATION

This has been a summary explanation, carried out within the gateway of counting the breaths, of the bodhisattva's practice of unobstructed skillful means as he cultivates the *dhāraṇī* of the "reversed" orientation. In the case of a bodhisattva who enters this gateway, if one were merely to discuss his training of the mind as he counts the breaths, even using up an entire kalpa, one would still not come to the end of [such a discussion]. How much the less would one be able to come to the end of the implications of the reversed orientation in making distinctions with regard to all of the different types of *dhyāna*, wisdom, spiritual superknowledges, the four types of eloquence, the powers, the fearlessnesses, the practices and vows

on all of the grounds, the knowledge of all modes, and all of the meritorious qualities as they relate to following, stabilization, contemplation, turning, and purification.