Six Gates to The Sublime

The Six Dharma Gates to the Sublime

A Classic Meditation Manual
On Traditional Indian Buddhist Meditation

By the Great Tiantai Meditation Master & Exegete
Śramaṇa Zhiyi (Chih-i)
(538–597 CE)

Translation by Bhikshu Dharmamitra

Kalavinka Press
Seattle, Washington
WWW.KALAVINKAPRESS.ORG
# General Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citation and Romanization Protocols</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the Chinese Text</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directory to Chapter Subsections</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Translator’s Introduction</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Translation</strong>: <em>The Six Dharma Gates to the Sublime</em></td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhyāna Master Zhiyi’s Preface</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch. 1: The Six Gates in Relation to the Dhyāna Absorptions</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch. 2: The Six Gates in Terms of Sequential Development</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch. 3: The Six Gates in Accordance with Suitability</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch. 4: The Six Gates as Means of Counteraction</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch. 5: The Six Gates in Terms of Mutual Inclusion</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch. 6: The Six Gates in Terms of Identities and Differences</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch. 7: The Six Gates in Accordance with Reversed Orientation</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch. 8: The Six Gates According to Contemplation of Mind</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch. 9: The Six Gates According to the Perfect Contemplation</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch. 10: The Six Gates According to Signs of Realization</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Endnotes</strong></td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>About the Translator</strong></td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DIRECTORY TO CHAPTER SUBSECTIONS

Ch. 1: The Six Gates in Relation to the Dhyāna Absorptions  29
I. The Six Gates in Relation to the Dhyāna Absorptions  29
   A. Counting  29
   B. Following  29
   C. Stabilization  31
   D. Contemplation  33
   E. Turning  33
   F. Purification  35

Ch. 2: The Six Gates in Terms of Sequential Development  37
II. Six Gates Cultivation in Terms of Sequential Development  37
   A. Counting  37
      1. Cultivation  37
      2. Realization  37
   B. Following  39
      1. Cultivation  39
      2. Realization  39
   C. Stabilization  39
      1. Cultivation  39
      2. Realization  39
   D. Contemplation  41
      1. Cultivation  41
      2. Realization  41
   E. Turning  43
      1. Cultivation  43
      2. Realization  45
   F. Purification  47
      1. Cultivation  47
      2. Realization  47
         a. Semblance Realization of Purification  47
         b. Genuine Realization of Purification  47
   G. Alternative Categorizations  49

Ch. 3: The Six Gates in Accordance with Suitability  51
III. Six Gates Cultivation in Accordance with Suitability  51
   A. On the Need for Skillfulness  51
   B. General Principles  51
      1. On the Correct Process  51
         a. On Realizing what is Actually Suitable  51
         b. On Ensuring that Choices are Actually Beneficial  53
C. Specifics of Cultivation 53
   1. Recognizing what Constitutes Evidence of Realization 53
   2. Recognizing Absence of Progress; Adopting Appropriate Strategies 53
D. Summary Statement on Suitability 59

Ch. 4: The Six Gates as Means of Counteraction 61
IV. Six Gates Cultivation as Means of Counteraction 61
   A. General Clarification: Cultivation Is Primarily of Remediation 61
   B. Specific Countermeasures: Addressing the Three Obstacles 61
      1. Counteracting Retribution-Related Obstacles: Specific Strategies 63
         a. “Counting” to Counteract Uncontrolled Ideation 63
         b. “Following” to Counteract Dullness, Scatteredness, Drowsiness 63
         c. Stabilization to Counteract Urgency, Coarseness, and Rumination 65
      2. Counteracting Affliction-related Obstacles: Specific Strategies 65
         a. Desire 65
         b. Hatred 65
         c. Delusive Ignorance 67
      3. Counteracting Karmic Obstacles: Specific Strategies 67
         a. Counteracting Defiled Thought Involving Mental Turbidity 67
         b. Counteracting Desire-Related Defiled Thought 67
         c. Counteracting Abhorrent Mind States 69
   C. General Summation 69
      1. Regarding Sudden Arising of Obstacles 69
      2. Benefits of Correct Implementation 69

Ch. 5: The Six Gates in Terms of Mutual Inclusion 71
V. Six Gates Cultivation in Terms of Mutual Inclusion 71
   A. Mutual Inclusiveness of the Very Substance 71
   B. Mutual Inclusiveness Where Skillfulness Brings Superior Progress 73
   C. General Summation 77

Ch. 6: The Six Gates in Terms of Identities and Differences 79
VI. Six Gates Cultivation in Accordance with Identities and Differences 79
   A. The Rationale Behind This Analytic Discussion 79
   B. Specific Cases 79
      1. Deviant Practitioners 79
      2. Non-Buddhists 79
      3. Commonalities Between Deviant Practitioners and Non-Buddhists 81
   4. The Hearer’s Use of Breath Meditation in Cultivating the Truths 81
      a. The Truth of Suffering 81
      b. The Truth of Accumulation 83
      c. The Truth of Cessation 83
      d. The Truth of the Path 83
      e. Summation on Hearer Practice 83

All Rights Reserved. Please do not alter files or post elsewhere on the Internet.
5. **The Pratyekabuddhas**  
   a. **The Pratyekabuddha’s Breath-Based Twelve-Links Meditation**  
   b. **The Consequences of the Pratyekabuddha’s Cultivation**  

6. **The Bodhisattvas**  
   a. **The Bodhisattva’s Breath-Based Meditation**  
   b. **The Consequences of the Bodhisattva’s Breath-Based Cultivation**  

C. **Summation of the Identities and Differences Discussion**  

Ch. 7: **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**  

B. **Specifics of this Exclusively-Bodhisattvic Practice**  

1. **This Practice in Relation to Mindfulness of the Breath**  
   a. **The Paradox of Emptiness and Generation of the Bodhisattva Vow**  
   b. **The Identification of the Breath with Emptiness**  
   c. **The Realization of the Illusory Nature of the Breath**  
   d. **Breath-Based Practice in Relation to Causality**  
      1) **The Role of Breath in Compelling Cyclic Existence**  
      2) **The Role of Breath in Conquest of the Supramundane**  
   e. **Breath-Based Practice in Relation to the Four Truths**  
   f. **Breath-Based Practice in Relation to the Twelve-Fold Causality**  
   g. **Breath-Based Practice in Relation to the Six Perfections**  
      1) **Breath’s Transcendent Nature in Relation to the Perfections**  
         a) **Breath-Based Practice in Relation to the Perfection of Giving**  
            i) **The Role of the Breath in Engendering Covetousness**  
            ii) **The Four Types of Covetousness**  
            iii) **Four Classes of Perfection of Giving**  
               (1) **The Wealth-Relinquishing Perfection of Giving**  
               (2) **The Body-Relinquishing Perfection of Giving**  
               (3) **The Life-Sacrificing Perfection of Giving**  
               (4) **The Dharma-Relinquishing Perfection of Giving**  
         b) **Summation Regarding the Perfection of Giving**  
      2) **Summation Regarding the Other Perfections**  
      3) **Summation of the Six Gates and Contemplation of Mind**  

B. **Summation Regarding Cultivation of the “Reversed” Orientation**  

Ch. 8: **The Six Gates According to Contemplation of Mind**  

VIII. **Six Gates Cultivation According to Contemplation of Mind**  

A. **Clarification of “Contemplation of Mind’s” Meaning**  

1. **Contemplation of Mind and the Gateway of “Counting”**  
2. **Contemplation of Mind and the Gateway of “Following”**  
3. **Contemplation of Mind and the Gateway of “Stabilization”**  
4. **Contemplation of Mind and the Gateway of “Contemplation”**  
5. **Contemplation of Mind and the Gateway of “Turning”**  
6. **Contemplation of Mind and the Gateway of “Purification”**  

B. **Summation of the Six Gates and Contemplation of Mind**
The Six Gates to the Sublime

Ch. 9: The Six Gates According to the Perfect Contemplation 115
IX. Six Gates Cultivation According to the Perfect Contemplation 115
   A. “Counting” in Accordance with the Perfect Contemplation 115
   B. The Similar character of the Other Five Gates 115
   C. The Relationship of Such Practitioners to the Tathāgata 117
   D. The Impending Realizations of Such Practitioners 117

Ch. 10: The Six Gates According to Signs of Realization 119
X. Six Gates Cultivation According to the Signs of Realization 119
   A. First, Sequential Realization 119
   B. Second, Interrelated Realization 119
      1. Relevant Concepts 119
      2. Inter-related Realizations Linked to “Counting” 121
         a. Realizations within the Sphere of “Counting” 121
         b. Realization of “Following” While “Counting” 121
         c. Realization of “Stabilization” While “Counting” 121
         d. Realization of “Contemplation” While “Counting” 121
         e. Realization of “Turning” While “Counting” 123
         f. Realization of “Purification” While “Counting” 123
      3. Summation on Inter-related Realization Specific to the Six Gates 123
      4. The Two Bases Underlying Interrelated Realization 123
         a. First, Conjoint Cultivation of Different Practices 123
         b. Second, Previous-Life Causal Factors 125
   C. Third, Reverse-Oriented Realization 125
      1. The Two Categories of Reverse-Oriented Realization Signs 125
         a. Signs of Realization in Reverse-Oriented Comprehension 125
         b. Signs Generated on Realization of Reverse-Oriented Practices 127
   D. Fourth, Perfect Realization 129
      1. Realization Related to Comprehension 129
      2. All-Encompassing Realization 129
         a. Semblances of Perfect Realization Associated with the Six Gates 131
            1) Semblances Associated with “Counting” 131
            2) Semblances Associated with “Following” 131
            3) Semblances Associated with “Stabilization” 131
            4) Semblances Associated with “Contemplation” 131
            5) Semblances Associated with “Turning” 131
            6) Semblances Associated with “Purification” 133
         b. Genuinely Perfect Realization 133
            1) Specific Correspondences 133
            2) General Correspondences 135
               a) Initial-Level Perfect Realization 135
                  i) Initial-Level Perfect Realization of “Counting” 135
                  ii) Initial-Level Perfect Realization of “Following” 135
                  iii) Initial-Level Perfect Realization of “Stabilization” 135
                  iv) Initial-Level Perfect Realization of “Contemplation” 135
| v) Initial-Level Perfect Realization of “Turning” | 135 |
| vi) Initial-Level Perfect Realization of “Purification” | 137 |
| b) Intermediate-Level Perfect Realization | 137 |
| c) Ultimate-Level Perfect Realization | 137 |
| i) Corroborating Scriptural Citations | 139 |
Introduction

The Nature of the Text and the Rationale for Translating It

*The Six Dharma Gates to the Sublime* is a 1500-year-old Buddhist meditation manual devoted to explaining the practice of calming-and-insight meditation according to a classic Indian Buddhist formula known as “the six gates.” Although the actual content of this meditation practice formula is not confined to either Southern or Northern traditions, it is presented herein from a distinctly mahāyānistic standpoint assuming and encouraging bodhisattva path practice and the resolve to realize buddhahood.

Although I had long been aware of the existence of this text, I had never taken the time to study it closely and reflect upon its contents until I happened to be driving up the Oregon coast in the summer of 2001. I recall pulling over at an ocean overlook north of Newport, slowly reading it, and then deciding then and there to translate it. Consequently, I did just that, stopping at a rest stop and translating day-and-night for a few days, taking occasional brief breaks to stare out at the ocean or walk on the beach. Having finished the first draft, I then drove on back to Seattle with what I considered to be the perfect companion volume to my early-nineties translation of Master Zhiyi’s *Essentials for Practicing Calming-and-Insight and Dhyāna Meditation*. Indeed, these two short calming-and-insight meditation works by Master Zhiyi are closely related in content, so much so that the original-language editions are often bound together into a single volume to facilitate simultaneous study and reference.

I recall feeling at the time that this work could serve the Western Dharma community as an important resource for better understanding what is contained within the purview of “calming-and-insight” (śamatha-vipaśyanā) meditation practice. It seems particularly useful to release both of these meditation translations at this time when English-language meditation instruction is still generally not so very broad in its scope, and not so very deep in its profundity. In fact, as of this writing, it seems more the norm than the exception that Western Buddhists do not necessarily even understand or believe in the fact of reincarnation, and beyond that, are often more predisposed to use meditation practice as a means to pleasurably
adapt to karma-bound worldly existence than to use it as a means to transcend domination by mundane priorities. My hope in publishing these meditation manual translations is that at least some small sector of serious Western Dharma practitioners will have yet more textual bases for realizing the greater aims of Buddhist meditation which indeed do go beyond the mere allaying of the angsts of day-to-day afflictions in the present lifetime.

The Relationship of This Text to Other Zhiyi Meditation Texts

*The Six Gates to the Sublime* is one of four “calming-and-insight” meditation texts written by the illustrious Tiantai meditation master and exegete, Master Zhiyi (538–597 ce): In his preface to *Essentials for Practicing Calming-and-Insight and Dhyāna Meditation*, the Song Dynasty monk Yuanzhao describes the four meditation texts written by that famous meditation master:

There are four “calming-and-insight” texts in the Tiantai tradition:

The first, known as the “perfect and sudden” (*The Great Calming and Contemplation*) was presented in the form of lectures by the Great Master at Yuquan (“Jade Spring”) Monastery in Jingzhou Prefecture. Zhang’an (章安) transcribed it in ten fascicles.

The second, known as the “gradual and sequential,” was lectured at Waguan (“Tiled House”) Monastery. Disciple Fashen (法慎) transcribed it. Originally comprising thirty fascicles, Zhang’an edited it into ten fascicles. It is what is known today as *The Dhyāna Pāramitā*.

The third, known as the “unfixed,” is the one which the Chen Dynasty Chief State Secretary (尚書令), Maoxi (毛喜), requested the Great Master to issue. It consists of a single fascicle known today as *The Six Gates to the Sublime*.

The fourth, known as *The Smaller Calming-and-Insight* [or *The Essentials for Practicing Calming-and-Insight and Dhyāna Meditation*]... was brought forth by the Great Master for his elder brother, Chenzhen. Truly, it is a condensation of the large edition and a presentation of the very crux of the means for entering the Path. (T46.1915.462a)

The Potential Usefulness of This Text for Western Buddhism

Of those four meditation texts described above, this present volume is the third, whereas my previously-translated *The Essentials for Practicing Calming-and-Insight and Dhyāna Meditation* is the fourth. Of the two texts, *The Essentials* is marvelously complete, describing
virtually anything one would need to know to practice meditation correctly while also dealing effectively with any problems which might arise. Yuanzhao’s judgment that it is in effect a condensation of Master Zhiyi’s encyclopedically-complete Great Calming-and-Contemplation is indicative of its comprehensiveness.

This Six Gates text, however, greatly expands the breadth of our view and the depth of our understanding of what is actually involved in carrying on a mature “calming-and-insight” meditation practice. These qualities make it especially useful to the meditator who finds that his practice is “stuck” and does not show any particular advancement beyond the development of a light easefulness helpful in damping down the intensity of day-to-day mental afflictions. It is in this sense that the present text may be especially useful as an adjunct meditation text complementing its companion volume, The Essentials for Practicing Calming-and-Insight and Dhyāna Meditation.

Both of these texts, being relatively short and straightforward, are particularly well suited for Western Dharma practitioners devoted to serious cultivation of Buddhist meditation.

Textual History of Six-Gates “Calming-and-Insight” Practice

The “six gates” are: counting, following, stabilization, contemplation, turning, and purification. The “sublime” (>praṇīta) of The Six Gates to the Sublime is a deliberate reference to the third of the four practice-aspects of the third of the four truths of the ārya, the truth of cessation (nīrodha). (See note 11, page 143.)

Master Zhiyi attributes the historical basis for six-gates calming-and-insight meditation to Shakyamuni Buddha’s reliance upon this method as he sat beneath the bodhi tree and gained the utmost, right, and perfect enlightenment in Sixth Century BCE India. To support this conclusion, he cites the detailed testimony to that effect in the Origins Sutra on the Prince’s Auspicious Response (太子瑞應本起經 / T02.185.476c), a sutra translated from Sanskrit into Chinese by Zhiqian between 223 and 253 CE, quoting that scripture as follows:

He directed his thought inwardly to ānāpāna (meditation on the breath): first, counting (gaṇanā); second, following (anugamaḥ); third, stabilization (sthānam), fourth, contemplation (upalakṣaṇā); fifth, turning (vivartana); and sixth, purification (pariśuddhiḥ). (These parenthetically-included Sanskrit antecedents for the six gates are as recorded in De la Valleé Poussin’s translation of L’Abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu.)
Further testimony for the early Indian history of this formula for engaging calming-and-insight practice is found in numerous locations in the Canon, for instance:

1) This same six-component formula is explained in precisely the same order in the *Abhidharma Vibhaśā* of Kātyāyaniputra, an author dating to roughly 200 BCE (阿毘曇毘婆沙 / T28.1546.105b29–6a01).

2) The identically named and listed formula is also discussed at yet greater length in the *Mahā-vibhaśā* of Vasumitra, an author dating to roughly 50 BCE (阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論 / T27.1545.134c26–5b20).

3) The formula is also treated in the early Fourth Century CE by Vasubandhu in his *Abhidharma-kośa-bhāṣyam*. (See the Leo Pruden translation, pp. 922–3.)

4) Pruden refers us in turn to two Pali scripture locations: *Dīgha*, ii.291; *Majjhima*, i.425 (p. 1049, note 89).

5) Finally, Buddhagosa’s later Pali-tradition commentary preserves the same list in an only slightly altered version, the sole differences being that one additional element is interpolated (“touching”), whilst “reviewing” is tacked on at the end as an eighth member of the list (*Path of Purification*, VIII: 189-225, p. 300-309). So we can see that Buddhagosa in fact presents us with a modified version of the same list. Not too surprising, as he is the latest of these authors.

As a consequence of reviewing the above, it should be clear to the reader that we deal here with a calming-and-insight meditation-instruction formula traditional in the very earliest period of Indian Buddhism. Hence there is no historical basis for concluding that, because the author is Chinese, the content is somehow typical of the priorities of Sino-Buddhist meditation traditions. That said, a seriously-engaged meditation practice linked to careful study of both *The Essentials for Practicing Calming-and-Insight* and *Dhyāna Meditation* and *The Six Gates to the Sublime* will lead one to the inescapable conclusion that Ch’ān is just a radical and sudden approach to perfecting all of the aspects of calming-and-insight practice described in those texts. In short, in terms of aims, essence, and results, the two approaches to awakening are, in the final analysis, not different at all.

**The Doctrinal Content of this Text**

As any student of Indian Buddhist meditation will certainly know, the essence of meditation practice lies in balanced development of the two fundamental endeavors of achieving the deep and wakeful
mental stillness of “calming” (śamatha) on the one hand and the wisdom realizations of analytic “insight” contemplation (vipaśyanā) on the other. The “six gates” (counting, following, stabilization, contemplation, turning, and purification) constitute a practice formula for achieving precisely those ends.

The manner in which these six techniques are actually employed in one’s meditation practice is not fixed. It may indeed be the case that one takes up these six practice techniques in a strictly serial sequence, beginning with the “counting” of the breaths as in standard ānāpāna breath-meditation practice and progressing on toward “purification.” However, where circumstances call for a less straightforward application of the techniques, they may instead be appropriately applied as required at each of the various levels of meditative absorption, may be employed as precisely tailored responses to the exigencies of individual circumstances, or may be employed as counteractive antidotes to specific hindrances interfering with meditative progress.

The text goes on to describe further permutations of the different ways in which the six techniques may be understood and may be applied. A slow and reflective reading of the text will allow the deeper meaning of the six gates to become more directly perceptible to the individual practitioner. The reader is encouraged to give particularly close attention to the implications of the later chapters starting with the “reversed” practice which turns back its focus on the emptiness of all phenomena to treat the implications involved in bodhisattva practice of the Path. Following on that chapter, we have the equally fascinating and useful chapters on “contemplation of mind,” “perfect contemplation,” and “signs of realization.”

**In Summation**

As noted above, I first produced a preliminary draft of this translation in 2001. Owing to the importance of the work, I have allowed various copyrighted provisional drafts to be posted on Kalavinka websites since then. Because the present version of the translation is immensely improved in accuracy over previous versions, it should in all cases be preferred as the definitive edition. It gives me great pleasure to be able to introduce such a potentially beneficial meditation text into the world of Western Buddhism, not least because confusion about right meditation practice is still so very widespread.
I would like to express particular gratitude to those who have reviewed the Chinese and English of the text, pointing out problems in earlier drafts of this work.

Due to the terseness of the language and the abstruseness of the concepts and practices treated, it is inevitable that there will be room for further refinement of aspects of this translation. I hope that any specialists or practitioners encountering such infelicities will favor me with recommendations for improvement, forwarding them via the Kalavinka Press website.

I especially hope that Buddhist practitioners may find this text useful in development of meditation practice and in advancement on the Path.

Bhikshu Dharmamitra
Seattle, January 2nd, 2008