

THE ESSENTIALS
of
BUDDHIST MEDITATION

Tiantai Master Zhiyi's Classic Meditation Manual:

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

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CHAPTER ONE

Fulfillment of the Prerequisite Conditions

B. THE ACTUAL EXPOSITION OF THE TEN SECTIONS

1. SECTION ONE: FULFILLMENT OF THE FIVE CONDITIONS

a. OBSERVING PRECEPTS PURELY

1) GENERALLY CLARIFYING ESSENTIALS OF PRECEPT OBSERVANCE

Now, one who has resolved to begin practice and who desires to cultivate calming-and-insight must first fulfill five conditions related to outward circumstances. The first is the requirement that one maintain purity in practice of the moral precepts. This is as stated in a sutra: “It is in dependence upon and because of these moral precepts that one succeeds in developing the dhyāna absorptions as well as the wisdom which puts an end to suffering. Therefore the bhikshu should be pure in upholding the precepts.”¹

2) SPECIFIC EXPLANATION OF FEATURES OF THREE PRECEPT-OBSERVANCE LEVELS

a) SUPERIOR LEVEL OF PRECEPT OBSERVANCE

In this regard, there are three classes of practitioners according to differences in the upholding of precepts.

The first is as follows: Prior to becoming a disciple of the Buddha [this practitioner] did not commit any of the five relentless (*ānantarya*) transgressions.² Later he encountered a good master who taught him to accept the Three Refuges and the five precepts, whereby he became a disciple of the Buddha. If he succeeded in leaving the home life, he first took on the ten precepts of the *śrāmaṇera* and then later received the complete precepts, thereby becoming a bhikshu or, [in the case of a woman], a bhikshuni. From the time of first taking precepts, he has been pure in guarding and upholding them and thus has been entirely free of transgressions.

In the upholding of the precepts, this person is of the superior grade. One should understand that in cultivating calming-and-insight, such a person will certainly achieve realization in those dharmas of the Buddha. Such a person may be likened to a robe which is perfectly clean and which thus will easily absorb the appropriate dye.

b) MIDDLING LEVEL OF PRECEPT OBSERVANCE

In the case of the second, after having received the precepts, although there have been no transgressions of the major precepts, still there has been much damage done to the minor prohibitions. If for the sake of cultivating meditative absorption, such a person is able forthwith to carry out repentance in a manner prescribed by Dharma, he too may qualify as one whose upholding of the precepts is pure and he, too shall be able to develop meditative absorption and wisdom. Such an individual may be compared to a robe which, although once soiled, has nonetheless been entirely cleaned such that dye will take in this case as well.

c) INFERIOR LEVEL OF PRECEPT OBSERVANCE

i) REPENTANCE ACCORDING TO METHODS OF THE GREAT VEHICLE

(1) CLARIFICATION OF REPENTANCE OPTIONS IN GREAT AND LESSER VEHICLES

In the case of the third, having received the precepts, one was unable to guard and uphold the precepts with a firm mind and thus there has been much transgression of both minor and major prohibitions. According to the approach of the Lesser Vehicle, there is no method whereby one may repent and be purified of transgressions against the four major monastic prohibitions. If, however, one resorts to the approach of the teachings of the Great Vehicle, there is still a means whereby these [karmic transgressions] may be extinguished.

(2) CITATION OF EVIDENCE THAT ONE WHO REPENTS BECOMES A HEALTHY PERSON

Accordingly, a sutra notes: "Within the Buddha's Dharma, there are two types of healthy people: those who have committed no evil deeds whatsoever and those who, having committed them, have been able to repent of them."³

(3) REPENTANCE ACCORDING TO GREAT VEHICLE METHODS

(a) IMPLEMENTATION RELYING ON TEN REPENTANCE-ASSISTING DHARMAS

Now, as for one seeking to repent, he must fulfill ten dharmas which assist the success of repentance:

First, develop a clear understanding and belief in cause-and-effect;

Second, give rise to profound fearfulness [of retribution];

Third, bring forth a deep sense of shame and dread of blame;⁴

Fourth, seek out a method to extinguish offenses. This refers to the methods of practice explained in the Great Vehicle sutras. One should cultivate them in accord with the Dharma;

Fifth, reveal and confess prior offenses;

Sixth, cut off the thought of continuing [the offenses];

Seventh, resolve to protect the Dharma;
 Eighth, make the great vow to liberate beings;
 Ninth, be ever mindful of all Buddhas of the ten directions;
 Tenth, contemplate the nature of offenses as being unproduced.

(i) REVEALING DURATION OF REPENTANCE DHARMA

If one is able to completely carry out these ten dharmas, one should then proceed to adorn the site for cultivating the path, bathe one's body, clothe oneself in clean robes, burn incense and scatter flowers. Then, in front of the Triple Jewel, one should carry on the practice of repentance in accord with the Dharma, doing so for one week or three weeks, or perhaps for one month or three months, or perhaps even continuing on for years during which one repents single-mindedly of the grave offenses involved in transgressing the prohibitions. One should stop only when one has succeeded in extinguishing them.

(ii) REVEALING SIGNS INDICATING EXTINGUISHING OF OFFENSES

How is one to recognize the signs that grave offenses have been extinguished?

It may be that, as the practitioner carries out sincere repentance in this fashion, he experiences his body and mind becoming light and pleasant, and also experiences a fine and auspicious dream.

It may be that he sees all manner of magical, auspicious, and rare signs. It may be that he becomes aware of his wholesome thoughts opening forth and developing. Or, while seated in meditation, he may become aware of his body as like a cloud or a shadow, and then, from this point on, he may gradually achieve realization of the mental states characteristic of the *dhyānas*.

It may be that he experiences the powerful and sudden arising of awakened thought whereby he is well able to recognize the marks of dharmas and is able to understand the meaning and connotation of whichever sutra he encounters, realizing from this Dharma bliss and a mind no longer beset by worry or regretfulness. All manner of causes and conditions such as these should be recognized as signs indicating that the path-obstructing offenses resulting from breaking the precepts have been extinguished.

(iii) CLARIFICATION: POST-REPENTANCE PRECEPT OBSERVANCE CONSTITUTES PURITY

If, from this point on, one firmly upholds the restrictive prohibitions, this too qualifies as purity in *śīla* (moral virtue). Such a practitioner

may be able to cultivate dhyāna absorption. He may be likened to a torn and deeply soiled robe which one has been able to patch and wash clean enough that it becomes capable of being dyed.

- (b) REPENTANCE ACCORDING TO THE GREAT VEHICLE'S SIGNLESSNESS PRINCIPLE
- (i) EXPLANATION PROPER.

If a person has transgressed against one of the major prohibitions, it is to be feared that this may obstruct acquisition of dhyāna absorption. Even though he may not be able to rely upon cultivating practice methods set forth in the Sutras, still, he may simply bring forth an intense sense of shame and dread of blame, go before the Triple Jewel, confess his former offenses, and cut off any thought of continuing them. He may then take up the practice of continuously engaging in seated meditation with his body erect, contemplating the nature of offenses as empty, and remaining mindful of the Buddhas of the ten directions.

Whenever he emerges from dhyāna, he must, with sincere mind, burn incense, bow in reverence, repent, and then recite the precepts and recite the Great Vehicle sutras as well. The grave offenses which obstruct the path should naturally and gradually become extinguished. On account of this, his *śīla* becomes pure and thus dhyāna absorption may develop.

- (ii) CITATION OF EVIDENCE

Accordingly, the *Sutra on the Marvelous and Superior Meditative Absorption* states, "If, after a person has transgressed against a major precept, his mind becomes beset by fearfulness and he thus wishes to extinguish it, there is no other means aside from dhyāna absorption which can be successful in extinguishing it.

"In a deserted and quiet place, this person should focus his mind and engage in the practice of continuously sitting in meditation while also proceeding to recite the Great Vehicle sutras. All of the grave offenses will be entirely extinguished and each of the dhyāna absorptions will naturally manifest."⁵

- b. ENSURING ADEQUACY OF CLOTHING AND FOOD
- 1) CLOTHING
- a) SUPERIOR-ROOTS CLOTHING

As for the second, the requirement that clothing and food be adequate, there are three approaches with regard to clothing: The first is as exemplified by the Great Master of the Snowy Mountains⁶ who happened to obtain a single cloak adequate to cover up his body

and took that to be adequate because he never encountered people and additionally had perfected the ability to endure the elements.

b) MIDDLING-ROOTS SUSTENANCE

The second category is that exemplified by Mahākāśyapa who, because he always cultivated the *dhūta* practices,⁷ wore only a single three-part rag robe and accumulated no other clothing.

c) INFERIOR-ROOTS CLOTHING

The third category relates to countries where the weather is often cold and to individuals whose endurance abilities are not yet perfected. In these cases the Thus Come One also permitted the accumulation of a hundred and one other things aside from the three-part robe. However it was necessary to purify them verbally,⁸ to refrain from being excessive, and to be satisfied with the appropriate amount. Were one to allow oneself to overindulge by being acquisitive and desirous of accumulating things, then the mind would become disrupted and they would become an obstacle to the Path. [463b]

2) SUSTENANCE

a) SUPERIOR-ROOTS SUSTENANCE

Next, as for the categories relating to food, there are four, the first of which is that exemplified by the superior man and great master who, having entirely severed relations with the world, dwells deep in the mountains, eating the native herbs and fruits according to the season, thus supplying the requirements of the body.

b) MIDDLING-ROOTS SUSTENANCE

As for the second, he always cultivates the *dhūta* practice of accepting only food which has been obtained on the alms round. Through the practice of accepting only alms food, one is able to curb four types of wrong livelihood. One relies exclusively upon right livelihood to maintain life because he is thereby able to bring forth the path of the Āryas.

As for the types of wrong livelihood, they are: first, obtaining sustenance through inferiorly-directed endeavors; second, obtaining sustenance through upwardly-directed endeavors; third, obtaining sustenance through endeavors directed at the midpoints; and fourth, obtaining sustenance through endeavors focused on the directions. The characteristics of inappropriate livelihood are as explained by Śāriputra to Śūcimukhī.⁹

c) INFERIOR-ROOTS SUSTENANCE

The third involves residing in an *araṇya* (hermitage) where a *dānapati* brings offerings of food. The fourth is where one lives among the Sangha and eats pure food. Where one has the advantage of sustenance arrangements such as these, then this is what is meant by achieving adequacy in food and clothing. Why is this? If one does not have circumstances such as these, the mind will not be at peace and thus this will act as an obstacle to the Path.

c. [OBTAINING EASEFUL AND QUIET DWELLING]

The third [among the five prerequisite conditions] requires that one find an easeful and quiet dwelling place. One who is in a state of ease is not working at doing manifold tasks and so this is what we mean when we stipulate “easeful.” A “quiet” place is one in which there is no commotion whatsoever. There are three types of places where one may be able to cultivate *dhyāna* absorption.

1) [REMOTE DWELLING]

The first is deep in the mountains in a place cut off from people.

2) [ARAṆYA DWELLING]

The second is an *araṇya* dedicated to *dhūta* practices no closer than a mile or so (lit. “three or four *li*”) from a village.¹⁰ In such a case, the noise of cattle will be cut off and there will be no commotion.

3) [SAṄGHĀRĀMA DWELLING]

The third is within the confines of a pure *saṅghārāma* (monastic dwelling) far from the residences of laypeople. All of these circumstances may serve as “easeful and quiet dwelling places.”

d. [PUTTING RESPONSIBILITIES TO REST]

The fourth [of the five prerequisite conditions] is that one put all responsibilities to rest. This involves four specific ideas:

1) [CESSATION OF LIVELIHOOD]

First, one must put to rest responsibilities relating to making a living and must not engage in endeavors associated with ordinary conditioned existence.

2) [CESSATION OF RELATIONSHIPS]

Second, one must put to rest all interpersonal responsibilities. One must not seek out ordinary people, friends, relatives, or acquaintances. One must cut off all endeavors involving interactions with other people.

3) [CESSATION OF ACTIVITIES]

Third, one must put to rest all responsibilities relating to arts or crafts and must not pursue any activities involving skilled worldly trades, art, medicine, occult mantra-related activities, physiognomy, writing, accounting, making calculations, and other such matters.

4) [CESSATION OF STUDY]

Fourth, one must put to rest all responsibilities relating to learning. One must put aside reading, reciting, listening, studying, and so forth. This is what is meant by putting all responsibilities to rest. Why is this necessary? If one is involved in many responsibilities, then matters related to cultivating the Path will deteriorate. The mind will become disturbed and difficult to focus.

e. [DRAWING NEAR TO GOOD SPIRITUAL FRIENDS]

The fifth [of the five prerequisite conditions] requires that one draw near to good spiritual friends. Good spiritual friends are of three types:

1) [EXTERNALLY-PROTECTIVE GOOD SPIRITUAL FRIENDS]

The first is the “externally-protective” good spiritual friend who provides necessary provisions, makes offerings, and is well able to take care of the practitioner’s needs, doing so in a fashion which precludes any mutual disturbance.

2) [IDENTICAL-PRACTICE GOOD SPIRITUAL FRIENDS]

The second is the “identical-practice” good spiritual friend together with whom one cultivates a single path. Each provides the other with encouragement and inspiration while refraining from mutual bother or disturbance.

3) [INSTRUCTIVE GOOD SPIRITUAL FRIENDS]

The third is the “instructive” good spiritual friend who instructs and delights the practitioner with teachings about the internal and external skillful means associated with the Dharma entryway of dhyāna absorption. This is the conclusion of the summary clarification of the five kinds of necessary prerequisites.