

# THE SIX DHARMA GATES TO THE SUBLIME

六妙法門

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## CHAPTER SIX

### The Six Gates in Terms of Identities and Differences

#### VI. SIX GATES CULTIVATION IN ACCORDANCE WITH IDENTITIES AND DIFFERENCES

##### A. THE RATIONALE BEHIND THIS ANALYTIC DISCUSSION

As for the reason for speaking of the six gates to the sublime according to identities and differences, common people, non-Buddhists, Two-Vehicles practitioners, and bodhisattvas each generally do contemplate the one single dharma of “counting” of the breath. However, the wisdom through which they understand matters is not identical. They are therefore distinctly different as regards the issue of realization of nirvāṇa. This is also the case as regards the practices of “following,” “stabilization,” “contemplation,” “turning,” and “purification.” How is this the case?

##### B. SPECIFIC CASES

###### 1. DEVIANT PRACTITIONERS

When a practitioner who is a common person of dull faculties takes up the practice of counting the breaths, he knows only to go from “one” on up to “ten” in order to cause the mind to become stabilized. He looks to this out of a desire to enter dhyāna and experience all manner of pleasurable effects from it. Because this amounts to covetousness in pursuit of [desirable aspects of] cyclic existence, it constitutes the generation of demon karma from within the practice of counting the breaths.

###### 2. NON-BUDDHISTS

Then again, take for example those non-Buddhists of sharp faculties whose “view-associated” thought is fierce and abundant. On account of the causes and conditions associated with “views,” precisely when they are engaged in the practice of counting the breaths, they are not only training the mind to count the breaths, going from “one” on up to “ten,” desiring to thereby achieve dhyāna stabilization. They are also able to engage in discriminations whereby they determine with respect to the present moment whether the breath exists or does not exist, whether it is both existent and non-existent, or whether it is neither existent nor non-existent.

They determine with respect to past breaths whether they are past or are not past, whether they are both past and yet not past,

and whether they are neither past nor not past. They determine with respect to future breaths whether they are limited or limitless, whether they are both limited and limitless, and whether they are neither limited nor limitless. They determine whether the breaths in the present are permanent or whether they are impermanent, whether they are both permanent and impermanent, and whether they are neither permanent nor impermanent.

This [obsession with their own views] also extends to the sphere of “thought” in the same way. Thus, whatsoever their mind succeeds in perceiving is therefore deemed by them to be genuine. They are of the opinion that whatsoever is claimed by others is all false discourse. These persons do not completely understand the characteristics of the breath. They follow along with false views and generate discriminations accordingly.

This just amounts to frivolous discourse concerned with the counting of the breaths. It is a case of being burned by the fire of the *tetralemma* and is an arena for the generation of afflictions. During the long night [of time], such individuals remain covetously attached to erroneous views and engage in all manner of erroneous actions. They cut off and destroy their roots of goodness and fail to encounter the unproduced.<sup>1</sup> [552b] It is because their minds course outside of the sphere of the noumenal reality that they are referred to as “outside” traditions (*tirthika*).

### 3. COMMONALITIES BETWEEN DEVIANT PRACTITIONERS AND NON-BUDDHISTS

Although people of the above two types differ as regards dullness and sharpness of faculties, there really is no practical distinction as regards [their both being trapped in] the cycle of birth and death within the three realms.

### 4. THE HEARERS USE OF BREATH MEDITATION IN CULTIVATING THE TRUTHS

Next, what are the characteristic features of the Hearers’ counting of the breaths? Because the practitioner desires to depart rapidly from the three realms and thus engages in a personal quest for nirvāṇa, he cultivates the counting of the breaths in order to train his mind. At that time, while he is engaged in the practice of counting of the breaths, he does not depart from an orthodox contemplation of the four truths. How is it that, even when engaged in counting the breaths, he contemplates the four truths?

#### a. THE TRUTH OF SUFFERING

The practitioner knows that the breath depends upon the body and that the body depends upon the mind. Taken together, these three

phenomena are referred to as the [five] aggregates, the sense realms, and the sense bases. The aggregates, sense realms, and sense bases are themselves synonymous with suffering.

b. THE TRUTH OF ACCUMULATION

If a person becomes covetously attached to the dharmas of the aggregates, sense realms, and sense bases or goes so far as to pursue view-ridden thoughts devoted to making discriminations among dharmas of the aggregates, sense realms, and sense bases, it is precisely that which serves as the basis of “accumulation.”

c. THE TRUTH OF CESSATION

If one is able to penetrate through to an understanding of the true nature of the breath, then one is able to realize suffering itself is unproduced. Thus the the four classes of feeling<sup>2</sup> do not arise. Since [categorical bases of] the four practice-aspects [of the truth of suffering]<sup>3</sup> are [realized as] not produced, then the dull agents,<sup>4</sup> the sharp agents,<sup>5</sup> and all of the affliction-related fetters (*saṃyojana*) remain quiescent and do not arise. Thus it is that we refer to “cessation.”

d. THE TRUTH OF THE PATH

That right wisdom which knows [the truth of] suffering is able to penetrate through to the noumenal reality without any obstruction. Thus it is that we refer to “the Path.”

e. SUMMATION ON HEARER PRACTICE

If there is someone who is able in this fashion to practice counting of the breaths and who is thus able to gain a penetrative understanding of the four truths—one should be aware that this individual will most definitely achieve realization of the path of the Hearers. Then, having reached its end, he does not engage in the creation of anything new beyond that.<sup>6</sup>

5. THE PRATYEKABUDDHAS

Next, how is it that, while engaged in the practice of counting the breaths, one enters the path of those “awakened through conditions” (*pratyekabuddha*)?

a. THE PRATYEKABUDDHA’S BREATH-BASED TWELVE-LINKS MEDITATION

[In such a case], the practitioner seeks sovereignly initiated wisdom, takes pleasure in solitude, esteems stillness, and becomes profoundly aware of the causes and conditions associated with dharmas. At precisely the time in which he is engaged in the counting of the breaths, he concurrently knows that this very thought

which is engaged in counting the breaths is just the “becoming” component [of the twelve-fold chain of causality].

[He realizes that] “becoming” is conditioned by “grasping,” that “grasping” is conditioned by “craving,” that “craving” is conditioned by “feeling,” that “feeling” is conditioned by “contact,” that “contact” is conditioned by “the six sense bases,” that “the six sense bases” are conditioned by “name-and-form,” that “name-and-form” is conditioned by “consciousness,” that “consciousness” is conditioned by “karmic formative factors” (*saṃskāra*) and that such “formative factors” are conditioned by “ignorance.”

He continues to contemplate the “becoming” constituted by this breath-associated thought. It is identified as wholesome conditioned karmic activity possessed of wholesome causes and conditions definitely capable of bringing forth “feeling” during future human and celestial rebirths. [He realizes that], because it constitutes a cause and a condition for “feeling,” it will definitely entail the existence of aging, death, worry, lamentation, and suffering-laden afflictions.

[He realizes that] the causes and conditions of the three periods of time involve boundless coursing in births and deaths continuing on in a ceaseless cycle. [He also realizes that] there is fundamentally no birth whatsoever nor is there any death whatsoever. They are [realized to be] simply a creation of mental activity arising from unwholesome thought.

If he realizes that, at root, the essential nature of “ignorance” itself is nonexistent and that it is produced through a conjunction of causes and conditions associated with erroneous perception, then [he will also realize that], because it has no [inherent] existence at all, it is only referred to as “ignorance” on the basis of false names.

[He then realizes that], if this is the case even for [the link of] “ignorance”—if not even it can be gotten at— then one should realize as well that “karmic action” and all of the other dharmas [making up the chain of] causes and conditions are in every case devoid of any fundamental basis. Since [he realizes that] there is no [intrinsic] existence on the part of “karmic activity” or any of the other causes and conditions, [he then wonders], “How could there be any reality to this present counting of the breaths?”

#### b. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE PRATYEKABUDDHA’S CULTIVATION

At this time, [having carried out the preceding contemplation], the practitioner experiences a profound realization that the counting of the breaths belongs to the sphere of causes and conditions and

that it is empty and devoid of any inherently existent nature of its own. Thus he does not take it on or become attached to it. He does not hold it in his thought and does not engage in making discriminations with regard to it. His mind becomes like empty space, quiescent, and unmoving. Then, suddenly and expansively, the mind free of outflows is generated and he thereby achieves realization of the path of those who are awakened through [the contemplation of] conditions.

#### 6. THE BODHISATTVAS

Then again, what are the characteristic features of the bodhisattva's counting of the breaths? It is on account of seeking all-knowledge (*sarvajñatā*), the wisdom of the Buddha, spontaneous wisdom, the wisdom arising without reliance on a teacher, and the knowledge, vision, powers, and fearlessnesses of the Tathāgatas, that the practitioner abides in compassionate mindfulness bent on establishing innumerable beings in happiness.

##### a. THE BODHISATTVA'S BREATH-BASED MEDITATION

Based on this, he proceeds with cultivating the counting of the breaths. [552c] He wishes, on account of this Dharma entryway, to enter the knowledge of all modes (*sarva-ākāra-jñatā*). Why is this? As stated in the scriptures, *ānāpāna* (meditation on the breath) is the initial gateway for entry into the path which has been utilized by all buddhas of three periods of time. Therefore, the bodhisattva who has newly brought forth the [bodhi] resolve and who wishes to seek the path of buddhahood should first train his mind in the counting of the breaths.

##### b. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE BODHISATTVA'S BREATH-BASED CULTIVATION

At just that time when one is engaged in the counting of the breaths, he realizes that the breath is non-breath and is like a magical conjuration. [He realizes] therefore that it is not the case that the breath is [solely in the sphere of] birth-and-death nor is it the case that it is [solely in the domain of] *nirvāṇa*.

At that very time, in the midst of the breath, he is unable to apprehend a birth-and-death which might be cut off. Nor does he apprehend a *nirvāṇa* into which one might enter. Hence he does not abide [any longer] in birth-and death. Since he has become free of the bondage of the twenty-five stations of existence, he does not opt for the realization of *nirvāṇa* and so does not fall down onto the grounds of the Hearers and the Pratyekabuddhas.

Employing the uniform great wisdom—this is just the mind which is free of both grasping and rejecting—he enters the Middle Way [through meditation on] the breath. This refers to perceiving the nature of buddhahood, realizing the unproduced-dharmas patience, and abiding in the permanence, bliss, self, and purity of nirvāṇa.

Thus it is that the *Sutra* states, “This is analogous to the great flood which is able to inundate and wash away everything with the sole exception of the willow which remains on account of its flexibility. The great flood of birth-and-death is just the same in this regard. It is able to submerge and drown all common persons with the sole exception of the bodhisattva who abides in the great *parinirvāṇa* of the Great Vehicle. This is on account of the pliancy of his mind.”<sup>7</sup>

It is these factors which characterize the practitioner of the Great Vehicle who, even in the midst of the counting of the breaths, gains entry into the bodhisattva position (*bodhisattvaniyāma*).<sup>8</sup>

#### C. SUMMATION OF THE IDENTITIES AND DIFFERENCES DISCUSSION

This then has been a brief explanation of the characteristic features marking the points of identity and difference between the common person and the ārya, and between the Great Vehicle and the Lesser Vehicle. Although the factor of counting the breaths is common to all of them, it is necessary to understand the characteristics which distinguish them.

One should also realize that, although counting the breaths is a shared practice cultivated by all [of these practitioners], still, each category corresponds to a different grade of resultant retribution. In just this same way, there are points of identity and difference among common persons, the Āryas, the Great Vehicle, and the Lesser Vehicle as regards each and every one of the other gates to the sublime: following, stabilization, contemplation, turning, and purification.