

**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 SEVEN

### Manifestations of Roots of Goodness

#### 7. SECTION SEVEN: MANIFESTATIONS OF ROOTS OF GOODNESS

If the practitioner is able in this manner to skillfully cultivate calming-and-insight, going from the [insight] contemplation of the conventional into the [insight] contemplation of emptiness, as he sits in meditation, his body and mind will manifest as bright and pure.<sup>1</sup> At such time, there may occur the development and manifestation of many different sorts of roots of goodness (*kuśala-mūla*). One must recognize and be aware of them.

Now, we shall briefly explain the signs associated with the manifestation of roots of goodness. This involves two different categories, as follows.

##### a. [OUTWARD ROOTS OF GOODNESS]

First, the signs associated with the manifestation of “outward” roots of goodness: This refers to the development and manifestation of roots of goodness associated with giving, upholding moral precepts, filial dutifulness to parents, veneration of seniors, making offerings to the Triple Jewel, listening to and studying the teachings, and so forth. These are outward matters.<sup>2</sup>

If one is not engaged in correct cultivation, it may happen that there is a mutual spilling over and admixture with demonic states of mind. We will not now analyze these matters in detail.<sup>3</sup>

##### b. [INWARD ROOTS OF GOODNESS]

Second, the signs of the manifestation of “inward” roots of goodness. This refers to the development and manifestation of roots of goodness related to the Dharma gateways associated with the dhyāna absorptions. There are three concepts to be considered here.

##### 1) [SIGNS OF MANIFESTATION OF ROOTS OF GOODNESS]

The first, the explanation of the signs of the manifestation of roots of goodness. This involves five different categories, as follows.

##### a) [SIGNS RELATED TO PATHWAYS OF THE BREATH]

First, the signs related to the manifestation of roots of goodness

linked to the pathways of the breath. On account of the practitioner's skillful cultivation of calming-and-insight, the body and mind become regulated correctly and false thinking comes to a halt. Because of this, one becomes aware that one's mind gradually enters into meditative absorption. These phenomena manifest in desire realm absorptions and the "preliminary-ground" (*anāgamyā*).<sup>4</sup>

The body and mind seem as if they have disappeared and are experienced as empty and quiescent. The mind associated with meditative absorption becomes peaceful and stable. In the midst of this meditative absorption, one does not perceive any appearance whatsoever of a body or a mind. Then, afterwards, one may continue on through one or two sitting sessions, and so forth until we come to one day, two days, one month, or two months. In attempting to take up with [cultivation focused on] the breath, one may find it to be imperceptible. It may be that this circumstance does not recede and is not lost.

Then, in the midst of meditative absorption, one may suddenly become aware of the body and mind moving and provoking the manifestation of eight tactile sensations, namely the awareness of physical pain, itching, coldness, heat, lightness, heaviness, roughness, smoothness, and so forth.

At that time when there is the manifestation of these dharmas of tactile sensation, the body and mind are peaceful and stabilized. There is an empty and subtle blissfulness. One's happiness and pleasure are pure and indescribable even by simile. These are signs of the manifestation of roots of goodness characterized by the basic dhyāna absorption's awareness of the pathways of breath.

It may be that, in the preliminary ground of the desire realm, the practitioner suddenly becomes aware of the exiting and entry of the breath, of its relative duration, and of its pervading the entire body, coursing emptily through all of one's hair pores. One then immediately sees with the mind's eye the thirty-six categories of physical components contained within the body just as when, upon opening up a pantry, one sees all of the sesame seeds, beans, and so forth. The mind is both profoundly startled and delighted. One becomes quiescent, peaceful, and happy. These are signs of the manifestation of roots of goodness corresponding to the special ascendant practices associated with the breath.<sup>5</sup>

b) [SIGNS RELATED TO CONTEMPLATION OF IMPURITY]

Second, the signs of the manifestation of roots of goodness related to

the contemplation of impurity. When the practitioner is immersed in the meditative absorption of the desire realm's preliminary ground, his body and mind become empty and still in the midst of this meditative absorption, [whereupon he may experience the following signs]: He may suddenly observe an appearance of the physical death of some other man or woman and then, following upon that death, the corpse's bloating and rotting, the presence of worms, and the flowing forth of pus. He may then observe the whitened bones scattered about. His mind may become affected by sorrow and delight and he may then experience revulsion and abhorrence for that which he had previously loved. These are signs indicating the manifestation of roots of goodness related to the nine reflections.<sup>6</sup>

Then again, it may happen that, in the midst of quiescent meditative absorption, one may suddenly observe the impure things inside of the body, someone else's body as bloated and scattered, or his own body as a white skeleton from the head to foot, with every one of the bones held in position by the others. After having seen this phenomenon, the mind of absorption may become peaceful and stable. One may experience a startling awakening to a realization of impermanence. One may then develop revulsion and abhorrence for the five objects of desire, and may then desist from attachment to either oneself or other persons. These are signs of the manifestation of roots of goodness related to the [eight] liberations.<sup>7</sup>

Then again, when the mind is immersed in meditative absorption, one may observe everything as utterly impure, maintaining this perception whether it be with regard to one's own body, the bodies of others, flying birds, crawling beasts, clothing, drink, food, dwellings, mountains, or forests. These are signs indicating the manifestation of roots of goodness related to [past-life contemplation of] the great [all-encompassing] impurity.

c) [SIGNS RELATED TO THE MIND OF LOVING-KINDNESS]

Third, the signs of the manifestation of roots of goodness related to the mind of loving-kindness (*maitrī*). If, on account of cultivating calming-and-insight, the practitioner succeeds in entering the meditative absorption of the desire realm's preliminary ground (*anāgāmya*), while he is immersed in this meditative absorption, he may suddenly bring forth a mind characterized by a lovingly-kind mindfulness of other beings wherein there appear to him signs indicating that persons with whom he has close affinities gain

happiness. He may then immediately develop deep meditative absorption wherein his own mind manifests a pure and blissful happiness indescribable even by simile.

Identical experiences may occur [for the practitioner] in relation to people towards whom he possesses only middling affinities, in relation to people who have been his adversaries and, ultimately, even in relation to all of the beings within the five rebirth destinies throughout the ten directions. When he arises from meditative absorption, his mind abides in blissful happiness, so much so that, no matter whom he sees, his countenance remains constantly harmonious. These are signs of the manifestation of roots of goodness related to the mind of loving-kindness. The signs of the manifestation of the mind of compassion (*karuṇa*), the mind of sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and the mind of equanimity (*upekṣā*) may all be understood through comparison to this.<sup>8</sup>

d) [SIGNS RELATED TO CONTEMPLATION OF CAUSES AND CONDITIONS]

Fourth, the signs of the manifestation of roots of goodness related to the contemplation of causes and conditions. It may be that, on account of cultivating calming-and-insight, the practitioner gains the desire realm's preliminary-ground meditative absorption in which the body and mind abide in stillness. He may then suddenly experience the arising of an awakened mind wherein, in pursuing deliberation upon the causes and conditions of ignorance, karmic formative factors (*saṃskāras*), and so forth as they play out in the three periods of time, he does not perceive the [inherent] existence of either others or a self.<sup>9</sup>

[The practitioner may] then immediately transcend [views positing] annihilationism and eternalism, demolish all attachments and views, and gain the peace and security of meditative absorption. Understanding and wisdom may manifest, Dharma joy may come forth in his mind, and his thought may remain free of concerns associated with worldly matters.

As for the distinctions involved in one's experiences in relation to the five aggregates, the twelve sense bases, and the eighteen sense realms, they may be of a character similar to the above. These are signs of the manifestation of roots of goodness related to the contemplation of causes and conditions.

e) [SIGNS RELATED TO MINDFULNESS OF THE BUDDHA]

Fifth, the signs of the manifestation of roots of goodness related to

mindfulness of the Buddha. It may be that, on account of cultivating calming-and-insight, the practitioner gains the desire realm's preliminary-ground meditative absorption wherein his body and mind become empty and still. It may be that he then immediately calls to mind the inconceivable and ineffable meritorious qualities and major and minor characteristics of the Buddha, including all of the ten powers, the fearlessnesses, the dharmas exclusive to the Buddha, the samādhis, the liberations, and other such dharmas, including also the inconceivable and indescribable superknowledges and transformations, and including also the unimpeded eloquences and vast benefits to beings which are themselves so inconceivable and indescribable.

When [the practitioner] engages in such thought, he then manifests a mind imbued with admiring reverence. Samādhi develops in him. Thus his body and mind become blissful, pure, peaceful, and secure, and he becomes free of any unwholesome characteristics.

When he arises from dhyāna absorption, his body abides in a state of lightness and easefulness (*praśrabhi*).<sup>10</sup> He realizes for himself that [the Buddha's] meritorious qualities are lofty and impressive and that they are fit to be the object of a person's admiring reverence. These are signs of the manifestation of roots of goodness related to the mindfulness-of-the-Buddha samādhi.

f) [SIGNS RELATED TO OTHER ROOTS OF GOODNESS]

Furthermore, in the event that the practitioner gains clarity and purity of body and mind on account of cultivating calming-and-insight, he may then experience the manifestation of signs associated with the reflections on impermanence, suffering, emptiness, non-self, impurity, renunciability of the world, impurity of food, death, abandonment, or cessation, or he may experience signs associated with the recollections of the Buddha, of the Dharma, of the Sangha, of the precepts, of relinquishing, or of the heavens.<sup>11</sup>

[The practitioner] may experience the manifestation of signs associated with any of the Dharma entryways, including the stations of mindfulness, the right efforts, the foundations of psychic power, the roots, the powers, the limbs of enlightenment, or the [eight-fold] path,<sup>12</sup> or may experience signs associated with emptiness, signlessness, wishlessness,<sup>13</sup> the six perfections, any of the [other] pāramitās,<sup>14</sup> the superknowledges and transformations, and so forth. Ideally, these should all be analyzed extensively herein.

Thus it is that a sutra states: “If one controls the mind so that it abides in a single place, there is no endeavor which may not be accomplished.”<sup>15</sup>

2) [DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN TRUE AND FALSE]

Second, the section on “distinguishing between the true and the false,” consists itself of two parts.

a) [SIGNS OF FALSE DHYĀNA ABSORPTIONS]

The first part is “describing the signs of the manifestation of false dhyāna absorptions.”

When the practitioner experiences the manifestation of dhyāna absorptions such as discussed above, it may be that, on account of the dharmas which have become manifest, [he experiences the following]: It may be that the body manifests agitated movement. At times the body may feel heavy, as if something was pressing down and smashing it. At times the body may feel light, as if it was about to fly. At times it might feel as if it were tied up. At times it may feel as if one were twisting around, being suspended while roasted. Or at times it may feel as if one were being subjected to boiling or cold. At times one may experience intensely strong heat.

Or perhaps one might see all sorts of strange mental states. At times one’s mind may become dark and covered over. Sometimes one may generate all sorts of evil ideations. Sometimes one may bring to mind external scatteredness and confusion associated with miscellaneous wholesome endeavors. Sometimes one may experience delight or agitated movement. Sometimes one may become worried or preoccupied with sad thoughts. Sometimes one may experience unwholesome tactile sensations causing the hairs on the body to stand on end. Sometimes one may become so intensely happy that one acts confused or inebriated. All sorts of abnormal dharmas such as these, when manifesting together with dhyāna absorption, amount to instances of aberrant falseness.

If one becomes affectionately attached to these deviant meditative absorptions, then one accords with the dharmas of the ninety-five kinds of ghosts and spirits. One then becomes increasingly inclined towards mental derangement associated with the loss of one’s mind [of correct resolve]. Sometimes the ghosts, spirits, and other such beings become aware that a person has become mentally attached to their dharmas. Consequently they then immediately increase the intensity of the power [associated with those dharmas] such



that one then manifests all sorts of aberrant meditative absorptions and aberrant forms of intelligence, eloquence, and spiritual powers through which one might then fall into influencing people of the world through deception.

When the common foolish person observes this, he is of the opinion that one has gained the fruit of coursing along the Path. They all believe in and submit to such a person even though his mind is possessed by inverted views, even though he exclusively practices the dharmas of ghosts, and even though he deceives and confuses the inhabitants of the world.

When such a person's life comes to an end, he will remain forever unable to encounter the Buddha and will fall back down into the path of the ghosts and spirits. If he has mostly engaged in the practice of evil dharmas when sitting in meditation, he will immediately fall into the hells.

If, when the practitioner cultivates calming-and-insight, he achieves dhyāna absorptions like these which are possessed of these signs of falseness, he should then immediately get rid of them. How does one get rid of them? If one becomes aware of the presence of falseness and deception, he should establish himself in correctness of mind and desist from accepting or becoming attached to them. They should then diminish and disappear. If one implements correct contemplation to demolish them, they should then immediately disappear.

b) [SIGNS OF TRUE, CORRECT DHYĀNA ABSORPTION]

Second, "articulating the signs of the manifestation of true and correct dhyāna absorption." [This refers to] when the practitioner is engaged in sitting meditation and there manifest dhyāna absorptions wherein there are none of the above-described abnormal dharmas. When each and every dhyāna absorption manifests, one immediately becomes aware of its relationship to meditative absorption.

One experiences emptiness, brightness, and purity. Inwardly, one's mind is delighted. One feels tranquil and blissful. There are no situations wherein one is covered over by the hindrances. The mind of goodness comes forth and manifests.

One's faith and reverence increase and grow. One's mirror of wisdom becomes clear and bright. The body and mind become supple and pliant. One experiences a subtle and marvelous empti-

ness and quiescence. One develops a revulsion for and abhorrence of the world. There is nothing [which one feels needs] to be done and one remains free of desires. One remains sovereignly independent in one's ability to emerge from and enter into [meditative absorption].

These are the signs of the manifestation of correct dhyāna absorptions. This is just as when working with evil people, one constantly encounters mutual aggravation, whereas when working together with good people, one eventually observes their fine points. It is much the same in distinguishing the deviant and the correct, the two types of signs manifesting in cultivating dhyāna absorption.

c) [INCREASING GROWTH OF ROOTS OF GOODNESS]

Third, "clarifying the use of calming-and-insight to increase the growth of roots of goodness." When one is sitting [in meditation] and roots of goodness manifest, one should employ the two dharmas of calming and insight to cultivate them and cause them to increase and advance. If it is appropriate to employ calming, then one uses calming to cultivate them. If it is appropriate to employ insight, then one uses [insight] contemplation to cultivate them. One does this in a manner which accords with the previous discussions. This has been a summary explanation of the major ideas [related to this topic].