

THE SIX DHARMA GATES TO THE SUBLIME

六妙法門

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CHAPTER ONE

The Six Gates in Relation to the Dhyāna Absorptions

I. THE SIX GATES IN RELATION TO THE DHYĀNA ABSORPTIONS

There are six associated concepts here, as follows:

A. COUNTING

First, “counting” as a gate to the sublime: Through relying on counting the breaths, the practitioner gains the ability to manifest the four dhyānas, the four immeasurable minds, and the four formless absorptions. Upon reaching the very last one, the one known as the “neither perception nor non-perception” absorption, so long as he remains aware that [this absorption] does not qualify as nirvāṇa, this person will definitely be able to gain realization in the paths of the Three Vehicles.

How might this be so? This absorption exists on account of a conjunction of the aggregates, the sense realms, and the sense bases. It is false, deceptive, and unreal. Although one remains free of the coarse afflictions [in this absorption], still, one has nonetheless developed ten types of subtle afflictions. If, having realized this, one analyzes the situation so that one does not continue to abide therein and does not become attached to it, one’s mind will succeed in gaining liberation and one will straightaway gain realization of the nirvāṇa associated with the Three Vehicles.

This concept is illustrated by the case of Subhadra: The Buddha taught him to sever the delusions inherent in the station of neither perception nor non-perception. Consequently he gained the realization of the fruit of arhatship. As for the ability of “counting” to serve as a “gate to the sublime,” the conceptual basis for it resides in this.

B. FOLLOWING

Second, “following” as a gate to the sublime: On account of following the breath, the practitioner becomes able to manifest the sixteen superior phenomena, namely:

1. Awareness that the breath is entering.
2. Awareness that the breath is exiting.

3. Awareness that the breath is long or short.
4. Awareness that the breath permeates the body.
5. Relinquishing all physical actions.
6. The mental experience of joy.
7. The mental experience of bliss.
8. The experiencing of all mental actions.
9. The mental production of joy.
10. The mental development of concentration.
11. The mental generation of liberation.
12. The contemplation of impermanence.
13. The contemplation of dispersion.
14. The contemplation of abandonment of desire.
15. The contemplation of cessation.
16. The contemplation of renunciation.

What is meant here by “the contemplation of renunciation”? This contemplation demolishes the delusions inherent in the station of neither perception nor non-perception. How is this the case? When the common person cultivates the station of neither perception nor non-perception, he looks upon the stations “possessed of thought”¹ as being like a boil or as being like an open wound, looks upon the station devoid of thought as being like stupidity, and looks upon the station of neither perception nor non-perception as the foremost sublime absorption. After he has had this thought, he then relinquishes both having thought and not having thought. This then is the basis of [the station of] “neither perception nor non-perception.” One should realize therefore that [the station of] “neither perception nor non-perception” inherently involves the concept of a two-fold relinquishment.

Now, as for the analysis employed in contemplative practice by the disciples of the Buddha, the concept is as discussed above. Therefore they engage in a deep contemplation, exercise renunciation, and refrain from becoming attached to the station of neither perception nor non-perception. Consequently, they are able to achieve realization of nirvāṇa. As for the ability of “following” to serve as a gate to the sublime, the conceptual basis abides in this.

C. STABILIZATION

Third, “stabilization” (*sthānam*) as a gate to the sublime: On account of stabilizing the mind, the practitioner then generates in sequence

the “five-wheel” dhyānas,² as follows:

First, there is the samādhi of the wheel of earth. This is just the “preliminary ground” (*anāgāmya*).

Second, there is the samādhi of the wheel of water. This is just the bringing forth of roots of goodness associated with the various types of dhyāna absorptions.

Third, there is the samādhi of the wheel of empty space. This is just where [any of] five classes of “provisional-teaching” practitioners may awaken to [dharma based in] causes and conditions as devoid of any inherent nature and as comparable to empty space.³

Fourth, there is the gold-dust (lit. “gold-sand”) samādhi. This is just the liberation from both view and thought [delusions]. One comes to possess herein right wisdom⁴ devoid of any attachment and analogous in character to gold dust.

Fifth, there is the vajra-wheel samādhi. This is just the ninth station on the irresistible path (*ānantāryamārga*). It is able to cut off the fetters of the three realms so that they are eternally put to an end and leave no residue. [549c] One realizes here the knowledge of destruction (*kṣaya-jñāna*), realizes the knowledge of non-production (*anutpāda-jñāna*), and enters nirvāṇa.

As for the ability of “stabilization” to serve as a gate to the sublime, the conceptual basis for it abides in this.

D. CONTEMPLATION

Fourth, “contemplation” (*upalakṣaṇā*) as a gate to the sublime: On account of cultivating contemplation, the practitioner is then able to bring forth the nine reflections, the eight recollections, the ten reflections, the eight liberations, the eight bases of ascendancy (*abhibhāvāyatana*), the ten universal bases (*kṛtsnāyatana*), the nine sequential absorptions, the lion-sport samādhi, the “over-leaping” samādhi, the “practice” dhyānas, the fourteen transformational minds, the three clarities, the six superknowledges, and also the eight liberations (*sic*).⁵ One achieves the cessation of feeling and perception and then enters nirvāṇa. As for the ability of “contemplation” to serve as a gate to the sublime, the conceptual basis for it abides in this.

E. TURNING

Fifth, “turning” (*vivartanā*) as a gate to the sublime:⁶ In a case where the practitioner employs wisdom in his practice, he engages in a skillful reductive analysis whereby he turns back to the root and returns to the source. At this time he generates emptiness,

signlessness,⁷ and wishlessness, the thirty-seven wings, the four truths, the twelve causes and conditions, and the correct contemplation characteristic of the Middle Way. On account of this, he succeeds in gaining entry into nirvāṇa. As for the ability of “turning” to serve as a gate to the sublime, the conceptual basis for it abides in this.

F. PURIFICATION

Sixth, “purification” (*pariśuddhiḥ*) as a gate to the sublime: In a case where the practitioner is able to realize the fundamental purity of all dharmas, he then gains the realization of the dhyāna of [cognition of] the fundamental nature. On account of gaining this dhyāna, Two-Vehicles practitioners experience an absorption-based realization of nirvāṇa. In the case of a bodhisattva, he enters the “iron-wheel” position and embodies the mind-states inhering in the stations comprised by the ten faiths.

In a case where one continues to cultivate without stopping, he subsequently generates the nine kinds of great dhyāna, namely: the dhyāna of [cognition of] the fundamental nature, the all-encompassing dhyāna, the difficult-to-access dhyāna, the universal-gateway dhyāna, the good-person dhyāna, the dhyāna of all practices, the dhyāna which dispenses with affliction, the dhyāna of bliss in this world and other worlds, and the dhyāna of purity.

Through relying on these dhyānas, the bodhisattvas realize the fruit of the great bodhi. They have realized it before, they realize it now, and they will realize it in the future. As for the ability of “purification” to serve as a gate to the sublime, the conceptual basis for it abides in this.