

THE ESSENTIALS
of
BUDDHIST MEDITATION

Tiantai Master Zhiyi's Classic Meditation Manual:

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

English Translation by Bhikshu Dharmamitra

CHAPTER FIVE

Utilizing Skillful Means

5. SECTION FIVE: IMPLEMENTATION OF SKILLFUL MEANS

Now, as for cultivating calming-and-insight, it is necessary to employ various skillful means as entryways into the Dharma. There are five of these dharmas, as follows.

a. [ZEAL]

The first is zeal (*chanda*). One possesses the zeal to separate from all of the world's erroneous thinking and inverted views. This is because one nurtures the zeal to achieve success in all of the Dharma-access methods associated with dhyāna and wisdom.

This idea may also be referred to by such terms as "being determined to," "aspiring to," "having a fondness for," and "taking pleasure in." This is because such a person is determined towards, aspires to, is fond of, and takes pleasure in all of the profound Dharma-access methods. These are the bases of "zeal." This is as indicated by the Buddha when he said, "Zeal is at the root of all good dharmas."¹

b. [VIGOR]

The second is vigor (*vīrya*). One is solid in his observance of the moral prohibitions and in getting rid of the five hindrances. In this, one remains focused and precise, and does not neglect the practice even in the early or later watches of the night. This is analogous to when one employs a friction drill to start a fire. So long as it has not become hot, one must refrain from resting. This is what is meant by vigor as it applies to the good dharmas of the Path.

c. [MINDFULNESS]

The third is mindfulness (*smṛti*). One remains continuously mindful that the world is deceptive and deserves to be deemed base whereas dhyāna absorption is honorable and worthy to be regarded as noble. If one gains dhyāna absorption, one immediately becomes able to perfectly generate the wisdom free of outflow-impurities, all of the the superknowledges, the aspects of the Path, and the powers. One becomes able to achieve the equal and right enlightenment

and to engage extensively in the spiritual liberation of beings. This is worthy of being regarded as noble. These considerations define what is meant here by “mindfulness.”

d. [DISCERNMENT]

The fourth is discernment (*saṃprajñāna*). One makes a critical comparison between worldly happiness and the happiness associated with dhyāna absorption and wisdom, judging the achievements against the losses and the worthless against the valuable. How so? As for the happiness of the world, the happiness is but little, whereas its suffering is extensive. It is false, deceptive, and unreal. This amounts to a loss and to involvement in what is worthless.

As for the happiness which accompanies dhyāna absorption and wisdom, it is free of outflow-impurities, unconditioned, serene, and carefree. One eternally transcends cyclic births and deaths and remains forever free from suffering. This amounts to an achievement and to the realization of what is valuable. Analyses such as these form the basis of discernment.

e. [SINGLE-MINDEDNESS]

The fifth is the practice of single-mindedness (*citta-eka-agra*). Through making clear distinctions, one perceives with clarity that it is fitting to regard the world as vexing and loathsome. One recognizes well that the meritorious qualities of meditative absorption and wisdom are worthy to be deemed honorable and noble. At such a time, one should make a single-minded decision to cultivate calming-and insight, making one’s mind like *vajra* so that the heavenly demons and the non-Buddhists will be unable to interfere with or destroy [one’s practice]. One’s determination should be such that, even if one’s efforts come up empty and nothing whatsoever is gained, one will still persevere to the end and not turn back or change one’s resolve. This is what is meant by single-mindedness.

This [utilization of five skillful-means dharmas] is analogous to [essential factors involved in] a person’s travels. It is first necessary to know the signs of the open or obstructed road. Afterwards, one decides to proceed single-mindedly along the road and then advances accordingly. Hence we speak here of discernment and single-mindedness. One of the sutras states, “Were it not for wisdom, one would not course in dhyāna. Were it not for dhyāna, one would not exercise wisdom.”² This is the essential idea here.