

THE SIX DHARMA GATES TO THE SUBLIME

六妙法門

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CHAPTER TEN

The Six Gates According to the Signs of Realization

I. SIX GATES CULTIVATION ACCORDING TO THE SIGNS OF REALIZATION

The previous nine categories of the six gates to the sublime have all been concerned with the characteristic features of cultivating the causes. Their meanings have implications with regard to the realization of the fruits. This has not yet been completely explained. Now, however, we shall proceed with making distinctions regarding the characteristic features of realization associated with the six gates to the sublime.

When taking up this topic as it relates to the six gates, there are four categories involved. The first is sequential realization. The second is interrelated realization. The third is reverse-oriented realization. The fourth is perfect-and-sudden realization.

A. FIRST, SEQUENTIAL REALIZATION

What is meant by “sequential” realization? This is as already briefly discussed in the [first] chapter, “The Six Gates in Correlation with the Dhyānas” and also in the next chapter, “The Six Gates to the Sublime in Accordance with Sequential Development.” If one deliberates with attention to the subtle details, one will realize for himself what is involved in the characteristic features of sequential realization. Hence we will not now take up a separate discussion of the matter.

B. SECOND, INTERRELATED REALIZATION

1. RELEVANT CONCEPTS

As for the second, “interrelated realization,” this refers to the characteristic features of [cultivation and] realization discussed in four of the previous chapters on the gates to the sublime, in particular the third which is devoted to suitability and appropriateness, the fourth which is devoted to counteraction, the fifth which is devoted to mutual inclusiveness, and the sixth, [in its subsection] devoted to contemplations in the sphere of “identities.”

How is this [concept applicable here]? The skillful means taken up in the cultivation of these four categories within the gates to the sublime involve no fixed sequence, hence the realizations are also not fixed in their respective relationships with each other.

2. INTER-RELATED REALIZATIONS LINKED TO "COUNTING"

a. REALIZATIONS WITHIN THE SPHERE OF "COUNTING"

Take for example those times when the practitioner is engaged in counting the breaths and then, as he generates the sixteen kinds of sensations and such,¹ there then manifest the various dharmas associated with the obscure realizations, submergence, non-recollection, and defilement.² These sorts of dhyāna meditation states are signs substantially linked to the process of bringing the counting of the breaths to realization. However, it is not a fixed matter [precisely what will manifest] just now [as one cultivates the counting of the breaths].

b. REALIZATION OF "FOLLOWING" WHILE "COUNTING"

[For example], there are some practitioners who, even while counting the breaths, observe it emptily moving through the pores of the body or who, with penetrating vision, directly view the thirty-six parts of their body. One should realize that this is a case of achieving realization of the gateway of "following" even while engaged in counting the breaths.

c. REALIZATION OF "STABILIZATION" WHILE "COUNTING"

Additionally, there are also those practitioners who, even while counting the breaths, gain realization of an empty and still absorption through which they become aware of the body and mind as quiescent and in which nothing whatsoever is taken as an objective condition or borne in mind. When one enters this absorption, although there are differences in the depth of it, in every case, it is characterized by emptiness and stillness. One should realize that this is a case of realizing a dhyāna absorption associated with the gateway of "stabilization" even while engaged in counting the breaths. [554c]

d. REALIZATION OF "CONTEMPLATION" WHILE "COUNTING"

Then again, there are also those practitioners who, even while counting the breaths, see [images of] their own and others' corpses, the signs of impurity, the swollen and distended corpse, the rotting and deteriorating corpse, and the others on through to the white skeleton which radiates light,³ and so forth, with the mind of absorption remaining peaceful and stable. One should know that this is an instance of realizing dhyāna associated with the gateway of "contemplation" even while engaged in counting the breaths.

e. REALIZATION OF “TURNING” WHILE “COUNTING”

Then again, there are also those practitioners who, even while engaged in counting the breaths, generate the wisdom associated with emptiness and signlessness, with the thirty-seven wings of enlightenment, with the four truths, with the twelve causes and conditions, and other such clever and wise skillful means. The mind of deliberation and awareness arises and engages in the deconstructing analysis of dharmas. In doing so, one turns back towards the origin and returns to the source. One should realize that this is an instance of realizing dhyāna associated with the gateway of “turning,” even while engaged in counting the breaths.

f. REALIZATION OF “PURIFICATION” WHILE “COUNTING”

Then again, there may be some instances where a practitioner, even while engaged in counting the breaths, experiences the body and mind abiding in a state of stillness. He does not apprehend any dharma, falseness and defilement do not arise, and discriminations do not occur. Even though the mind remains in a state of stillness, he possesses clear awareness of the characteristics of dharmas and has nothing upon which he relies. One should realize that this is an instance of realizing dhyāna associated with the gateway of “purification” even while engaged in counting the breaths.

3. SUMMATION ON INTER-RELATED REALIZATION SPECIFIC TO THE SIX GATES

This then has been a summary discussion of interrelated generation of the signs of dhyāna associated with the six gates even while engaged in counting the breaths. The actual sequence of what comes before and what comes later is unfixed. It is not necessarily the case that all instances will accord with this present description.

In the case of the other [five gates] of following, stabilization, contemplation, turning, and purification, in each and every case the signs of interrelated realization of dhyāna accord with this [example case above].

4. THE TWO BASES UNDERLYING INTERRELATED REALIZATION

The bases for these instances of interrelated realizations of dhyāna are two-fold, as follows:

a. FIRST, JOINT CULTIVATION OF DIFFERENT PRACTICES

In the case of the first, it may be that, because one is engaged in inter-related cultivation of particular sorts of dhyāna meditations, the generation [of realizations] occurs then in a correspondingly interrelated manner as well. The relevant concepts accord with the

characteristic features of Six-Gates practice treated in the four previously-mentioned [Chapters Three through Six which discussed suitability, counteraction, mutual-inclusion, and “identities”].⁴

b. SECOND, PREVIOUS-LIFE CAUSAL FACTORS

Second, it may be on account of the development of roots of goodness associated with past life karmic conditions that there occur interrelated manifestations arising in an unfixed manner. The meaning of this corresponds to the extensive discussion in the [*Essentials for Practicing Calming-and-Insight and*] *Dhyāna Meditation*, in the section devoted to distinguishing manifestations of roots of goodness from manifestations of roots of unwholesome karma as one utilizes inwardly-focused skillful means.⁵

C. THIRD, REVERSE-ORIENTED REALIZATION

As for the third category, what are the signs of realization in reverse-oriented cultivation of the six gates to the sublime? These depend for their generation directly on pursuit of the [reverse-oriented] cultivation discussed in the seventh chapter.

1. THE TWO CATEGORIES OF REVERSE-ORIENTED REALIZATION SIGNS

As for the so-called “signs of realization,” they are of two types:

First, those occurring upon realization of the comprehension associated with reverse-oriented cultivation.

Second, those occurring upon realization of the practices associated with reverse-oriented cultivation.

a. SIGNS OF REALIZATION IN REVERSE-ORIENTED COMPREHENSION

What are the signs generated upon realizing the comprehension associated with reverse-oriented cultivation? Even while engaged in the counting of the breaths, on account of clever and wise cultivation of reverse-oriented practice, at that very time, the practitioner may achieve realization of deep levels of dhyāna absorption or, alternately, may achieve realization⁶ of shallow levels of dhyāna absorption.

While in the midst of these absorptions, as if achieving a sudden breaking through, there occurs the opening up and generation of that awakened consciousness associated with reverse-oriented practice wherein one’s comprehension of the truth becomes unobstructed. With no reliance upon thoughts in the mind, one carries forward with reverse-oriented practice while abiding in a state of awakened comprehension of the gateways to Dharma.

Comprehension associated with reverse-oriented practice is of two types:

First, the reverse-oriented practice comprehension which understands general characteristics.

Second, [the reverse-oriented practice comprehension which understands] specific characteristics.

Comprehension of general characteristics is, in turn, also of two types: First, comprehension of the general characteristics of that which is true. Second, comprehension of the general characteristics of that which is mundane.

Comprehension of specific characteristics is, in turn, also of two types: First, comprehension of the specific characteristics of that which is true. Second, comprehension of the specific characteristics of that which is mundane.

Even when relating only to the dharma of a single general characteristic, one's reverse-oriented practice comprehension is able to extend to all dharmas. The circumstance is the same with regard to specific characteristics.

b. SIGNS GENERATED ON REALIZATION OF REVERSE-ORIENTED PRACTICES

What are the signs of realizing the practices associated with reverse-oriented cultivation? The practitioner's actions accord with his comprehension. His mind does not contradict what he says. His mind and his mouth are in mutual accord. The gateways to Dharma manifest right before him. His mind and actions are solid and resolute, spontaneously progressing in a manner which brings increasing development. He does not [have any need to] resort to the power of thought. Every form of meritorious quality naturally arises in him. Every form of unwholesomeness naturally ceases in him.

The situation in regard to both general characteristics and specific characteristics is as described above. Differences exist only as adaptations corresponding [to particular circumstances]. [555a] These occur on account of specific differences in the way objective circumstances manifest when entering the various Dharma gateways.

Now we shall set forth herein only a summary description of [the signs of realization] linked to reverse-oriented practice. Just as the one gateway of counting may completely embody two categories of reverse-oriented realization, so too may this occur in relation to the other gateways of following, stabilization, contemplation, turning, and purification.

As for whatever is incompletely described in this brief explanation, one may skillfully deliberate upon it for himself, taking up the ideas and engaging in an extensive matching to all of the entryways into the Dharma.

The realization of reverse-oriented practice of the six gates to the sublime is essentially identical to realizing entry into the “turning-around” *dhāraṇī* gateway. This brings with it unobstructed eloquence in speech, the clever and wise implementation of skillful means, the blocking off of evil actions and prevention of their arising, and the upholding of all meritorious qualities so that they are prevented from slipping away. Whensoever one gains command of this gateway to Dharma, he will before long definitely enter into “the station of [irreversible] bodhisattvahood” and will succeed in perfecting *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*.

D. FOURTH, PERFECT REALIZATION

As for the fourth, what is meant by “perfect realization” of the six gates to the sublime? The cause for it lies in the practitioner’s taking as skillful means two of the [ten approaches to cultivating] the six gates to the sublime: number eight, “contemplation of the mind,” and number nine, the “perfect contemplation.” When these contemplations are perfected, one then generates perfect realization.

1. REALIZATION RELATED TO COMPREHENSION

This realization is of two types: The first is “realization related to comprehension.” This is characterized by unobstructed skillfulness in the implementation of wisdom, the arising of which does not depend on thought processes in the mind. It is because one naturally and perfectly realizes knowing awareness of the Dharma realm that it is referred to as “realization related to comprehension.”

2. ALL-ENCOMPASSING REALIZATION

The second type is “all-encompassing realization.” Sublime wisdom opens forth and manifests with brightly-shining clarity, clearly illuminating the Dharma realm, manifesting unobstructedly penetrative understanding.

The characteristics of this [second type of] realization are of two kinds: The first kind involves those signs which by their very nature are a semblance of realization. These are of the sort contained in the *Lotus Sutra* where it explains the signs of purification of the six sense faculties.

The second kind consists of those which by their nature are signs of genuine realization. These are of the sort contained in the *Floral Adornment Sutra* where it explains the signs of perfectly complete merit and wisdom when first generating the [bodhi] mind.

a. SEMBLANCES OF PERFECT REALIZATION ASSOCIATED WITH THE SIX GATES

What is meant by a semblance of perfect realization as it applies to the six gates to the sublime?

1) SEMBLANCES ASSOCIATED WITH "COUNTING"

This is as exemplified by the *Lotus Sutra's* description with respect to purification of the eye faculty of the ability to count in a single moment the sum of all such dharmas as the physical forms and minds of all common persons and āryas throughout the ten directions. Thus it is that we may speak of [a semblance of perfect realization within] the gateway of counting.

2) SEMBLANCES ASSOCIATED WITH "FOLLOWING"

All form dharmas accord with the eye faculty. The eye does not react against any form dharma. There is mutual accord and harmony between them. It is on account of this that we may speak of [a semblance of perfect realization within] the gateway of following.

3) SEMBLANCES ASSOCIATED WITH "STABILIZATION"

It is on account of the eye faculty and its corresponding consciousness remaining still and unmoving even when engaged in seeing that we may speak of [a semblance of perfect realization within] the gateway of stabilization.

4) SEMBLANCES ASSOCIATED WITH "CONTEMPLATION"

One views all buddhalands in a manner not reliant on dual characteristics, doing so in a way which involves unobstructedly penetrating comprehension. One skillfully and cleverly makes distinctions while utterly illuminating the very nature of dharmas. Thus it is that we may speak of [a semblance of perfect realization within] the gateway of contemplation.

5) SEMBLANCES ASSOCIATED WITH "TURNING"

One turns back [the focus of one's meditation] and, while still attending to the objective realms of the eye faculty, one is also able to penetratingly perceive the objective realms of the ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind, perceiving them all with utter and unobstructed clarity. [These six objective realms] are not perceived as

characterized by either singularity or difference. Thus it is that we may speak of [a semblance of perfect realization within] the gateway of “turning.”

Additionally, even while perceiving the objective realm of one’s own eye faculty, one turns back one’s contemplation so that it extends to [also include] appearances arising in the objective visual realms of the common persons and āryas throughout the ten directions. It is based on this [phenomenon] that this also qualifies as [a semblance of perfect realization within] the gateway of turning.

6) SEMBLANCES ASSOCIATED WITH “PURIFICATION”

Although one possesses a complete and utterly penetrating perception of such phenomena, still, one does not generate erroneous thoughts or engage in making discriminations.⁷ One realizes that the fundamental nature is an eternally pure dharma invulnerable to any sort of defilement. One refrains from abiding in dependence on it or becoming attached to it. One refrains from generating affection for dharmas. Thus it is that we may speak of [a semblance of perfect realization within] the gateway of purification.

This then has been a brief description of the achievement of semblances of perfect realization of the six gates to the sublime as they may occur within the realm of the purified eye faculty. The situation is very much the same in respect to the other five sense faculties. An extensive discussion would accord with the *Lotus Sutra*’s explanation of the topic.

b. GENUINELY PERFECT REALIZATION

What then is meant by genuinely perfect realization of the six gates to the sublime? It is of two types. The first consists of specific correspondences. [555b] The second consists of general correspondences.

1) SPECIFIC CORRESPONDENCES

As for [the first], the specific correspondences, they are as follows: The ten dwellings constitute [genuinely perfect realization of] the gateway of counting. The ten conducts constitute [genuinely perfect realization of] the gateway of following. The ten transferences constitute [genuinely perfect realization of] the gateway of stabilization. The ten grounds constitute [genuinely perfect realization of] the gateway of contemplation. Equal enlightenment constitutes [genuinely perfect realization of] the gateway of turning. Sublime enlightenment constitutes [genuinely perfect realization of] the gateway of purification.

2) GENERAL CORRESPONDENCES

As for the second, the general correspondences, there are three levels of realization in this regard, as follows: First, initial-level realization. Second, intermediate-level realization. Third, ultimate-level realization.

a) INITIAL-LEVEL PERFECT REALIZATION

i) INITIAL-LEVEL PERFECT REALIZATION OF "COUNTING"

As for initial-level realization, this involves a bodhisattva who enters the gateway of the "a" syllable, also known as "the dwelling of initial generation of [bodhi] resolve." He then realizes the wisdom linked to unproduced-dharmas patience. At that time, he is able, even in but a single thought, to enumerate all of the mental actions coursed in by all buddhas, bodhisattvas, hearers, and pratyekabuddhas⁸ throughout world systems as numerous as an ineffable⁹ number of tiny dustmotes. He is also able to count the incalculable number of associated entryways to Dharma therein. It is on the basis of this that we may speak of [the initial level of genuinely perfect realization of] the gateway of counting.

ii) INITIAL-LEVEL PERFECT REALIZATION OF "FOLLOWING"

One is able in the space of but a single thought of the mind to acquiesce in all phenomenal karma occurring throughout the Dharma realm. Thus it is that we may speak of [the initial level of genuinely perfect realization] of the gateway of following.

iii) INITIAL-LEVEL PERFECT REALIZATION OF "STABILIZATION"

One is able in the space of but a single thought of the mind to enter into a hundred thousand samādhis or even into all samādhis. One thereby halts and puts utterly to rest all falseness and residual karmic propensities. Thus it is that we may speak of [the initial level of genuinely perfect realization] of the gateway of stabilization.

iv) INITIAL-LEVEL PERFECT REALIZATION OF "CONTEMPLATION"

One is able in the space of but a single thought of the mind to become entirely aware of the characteristic features of all dharmas and to perfect all manner of contemplation-related forms of wisdom. Thus it is that we may speak of [the initial level of genuinely perfect realization] of the gateway of contemplation.

v) INITIAL-LEVEL PERFECT REALIZATION OF "TURNING"

One is able in the space of but a single thought of the mind to penetratingly understand all dharmas to a degree whereby they become

completely and utterly distinct and clear. One is also able to employ spiritual superknowledges to turn back, employing transformations, to engage in subduing and training beings. One turns back towards the origin and returns to the source. Thus it is that we may speak of [the initial level of genuinely perfect realization] of the gateway of turning.

vi) INITIAL-LEVEL PERFECT REALIZATION OF "PURIFICATION"

One is able in the space of but a single thought of the mind to perfect the works as described above and yet maintain a mind free of defilement or attachment. This is because one is not defiled or sullied by any dharma. One remains able to engage in purification of the buddhalands while causing beings to enter the pure path of the Three Vehicles. Thus it is that we may speak of [the initial level of genuinely perfect realization] of the gateway of purification.

When the bodhisattva at the point of initial resolve enters this gateway to dharma, as declared in the sutras, he may also be referred to then as a buddha. He has already realized the right wisdom of prajñā. He has heard the [Dharma] treasury of the Tathāgatas. He manifests the genuine Dharma body. He perfectly embodies the foremost *śūraṅgama* [samādhi]. He clearly perceives the nature of buddhahood. He abides in the great nirvāṇa. He enters into the lotus samādhi's inconceivable and ineffable realm of realization of the singular reality.

When this is extensively explained, it is as made clear in the *Floral Adornment (Avataṃsaka) Sutra*. This is the realization of the six gates to the sublime which is inconceivable, ineffable, and genuine, precisely as it occurs at the level of the first ground (*bhūmi*).

b) INTERMEDIATE-LEVEL PERFECT REALIZATION

As for the intermediate level of [genuine] realization, the other nine dwellings, the ten conducts, the ten transferences, the ten grounds, and the ground of equal enlightenment all qualify as subsumed within the intermediate level of that realization of the six gates to the sublime which is inconceivable, ineffable, and genuine.

c) ULTIMATE-LEVEL PERFECT REALIZATION

What is it that is meant by the ultimate level of perfect realization of the six gates to the sublime? The bodhisattva at the latter stages of mind [awakening] enters into the gateway of the "cha" syllable and realizes the wisdom corresponding to unified mindfulness. Sublime enlightenment manifests before him. He achieves

exhaustive illumination of the entire Dharma realm. He gains the most ultimate form of penetrative realization of these six sorts of Dharma gateways along with a universally replete utilization of them free of any deficiency. It is precisely this which constitutes the ultimately perfect realization of the six gates to the sublime.

The analysis of the characteristic features of realization linked to the Dharma gateways consisting in counting, following, stabilization, contemplation, turning and purification involve ideas which are not different than those described above. It is merely that there are special distinctions associated with perfect ultimacy.

i) CORROBORATING SCRIPTURAL CITATIONS

Thus it is that the *Necklace Sutra* states, “As for the patience-related practices engaged in by the three levels of worthies and the ten levels of āryas—only the Buddha, that one person, is able to reach all the way to their very source.”¹⁰

The *Lotus Sutra* says, “It is only one buddha together with another buddha who is able to exhaustively describe the true character of dharmas.”¹¹

This relates to the cultivation of the Path set forth by the teachings. [555c] Statements of this sort base their discourse in the noumenal reality. The perfectly penetrating understanding of the Dharma realm and the realization of Dharma gateways achieved by buddhas and bodhisattvas—from start to finish, these are not two separate matters. Thus it is that the longer-edition [*Mahā-prajñā-pāramitā*] *Sutra* states, “At the beginning, it is the ‘a’ syllable. At the end it is the ‘cha’ syllable. There is [ultimately] no difference as regards their meanings.”¹²

The *Nirvāṇa Sutra* states, “The generation of the resolve and the ultimate [realization]—the two are not different. Of these two mind states, the former mind state is the more difficult [to develop].”¹³

The *Floral Adornment Sutra* states, “Beginning from the very first ground, there is complete embodiment of the meritorious qualities of all of the grounds.”¹⁴

The *Lotus Sutra* states, “Thus it is that the origin and the end point are ultimately equal.”¹⁵

The End of this Single-Fascicle Text: *The Six Dharma Gates to the Sublime.*