

'Stabilized Dwelling'

Translated from Original Text in Vietnamese

Dear Beloved Friends and Students,

To delve deeper into the philosophy and teachings of the first gate of meditation, I kindly ask you to read the elaboration on the meaning of focused and An Trụ (stabilized dwelling) as follows:

When we first begin the practice of meditation, we are often taught to concentrate our thoughts, avoid distractions, and focus on a single object.

This is indeed correct.

After practicing for a while, we will realize that concentration (focus) is not about thoughts or thinking, but rather a focus of consciousness. The scope of concentration is broader than the focus of thoughts.

For example, when we practice "focus on the heart center," at first, we must intentionally direct our attention to the heart center, avoiding any other thoughts. Gradually, we feel as if our consciousness is "adhering" to the heart center to the extent of "sticking" to it. At that point, thoughts, images, and sounds in our mind no longer obstruct the consciousness from "adhering" or sticking to the heart center.

When reflecting on the experiences of past Zen Masters, they often used the term "stabilized dwelling" (安住 - *an trụ*) to describe the state when consciousness adheres to an object in meditation. "To Dwell" implies staying on, sitting on, or being stationed at a certain place. "Stabilized dwelling" suggests being stationed there lightly

and peacefully. Translating it rigidly into English, it would be "peacefully dwell on."

Thus, the definitions of "concentration" (專注 - *concentration*) and "focus" (專注 - *focus*) have remained consistent from Theravāda, to Mahāyāna, and even Vajrayāna traditions.

However, the difference lies in *where* the culmination of concentration and focus leads to.

According to the Mahāyāna Zen lineage passed down by Patriarch Huineng, the ultimate goal is to stabilize the mind in the True Nature. The method for focusing the consciousness often involves a *hua tou* (a meditative question) or a *kong an*.

Certain Zen schools use methods like focusing on the breath, on specific points of the body, or on abstract themes to ultimately stabilize the mind in one or more states of the Four Dhyānas (*First Dhyāna, Second Dhyāna, Third Dhyāna, Fourth Dhyāna*).

In the Huayan School (*Hoa Nghiêm Tông*), the method involves focusing and concentrating on the seed of light (*quang minh*). This seed of light gradually grows and transforms into infinite light. Through focused effort and visualization, the consciousness adheres to this seed, eventually transforming into infinite radiant light.

To conclude, we need to have a clear understanding as follows:

- When first practicing meditation, we must focus on one object, avoiding distractions, scattered thoughts, or tangential emotions.

- After practicing for some time, we will realize that "focus is a function of consciousness, not merely the concentration of thoughts."
- The Patriarchs distinguish between "the act of focusing" and "the object of focus." The ability to focus is called the "active principle" (*năng*), and the object of focus is the "passive principle" (*sở*). The analysis and understanding of the "active-passive pair" have been a primary theme in Zen for over a thousand years.
- When consciousness focuses on an object to the point of utmost concentration, the culmination is the union of the mind and object as one, a non-dual state. "The active is not separate from the passive, and the passive is not separate from the active." *The active is the passive, and the passive is the active.*
- In Huayan meditation, the object of focus is the seed of light. The seed is the cause. When sufficient "focused energy" is applied, the seed transforms into infinite radiant light. At this point, our consciousness becomes the object of meditation (*active becomes passive*), meaning consciousness transforms into infinite radiant light.
- The ability to maintain focused consciousness to eventually become "the object of focus" is called "stabilized dwelling" (*an trụ*). "Stabilized dwelling" is both the culmination of focused practice and the process of directing consciousness toward an object.
- To simplify and help recognize the state of "stabilized dwelling," I describe it as "adhering to" or "sticking to" the object.
- We should begin practicing by focusing on breathing at the heart center. Over time, we can "adhere" the seed of VA to the heart

center (or the seeds of A, RA). Next, maintain focus, causing the consciousness to "stick to" the seed, continuously and seamlessly. Keep up daily practice until the seed transforms into infinite light.

Thank you for your patience in reading and following this wondrous path of the Huayan tradition.

With love,
Thầy