

PART TWO:

**A Selective Abridgement of
*THE BODHISAM̐BHĀRA ŚĀSTRA COMMENTARY***

**Composed by the Early Indian Bhikshu Vaṣitva
(circa 300–500 CE?)**

With Explanatory Notes by the Translator

A Selective Abridgement of
THE BODHISAMBHĀRA ŚĀSTRA COMMENTARY

A Detailed Summary of Bhikshu Vaśitva's Commentary on
Ārya Nāgārjuna's *Bodhisambhāra Śāstra*

001 – The Homage to All Buddhas and the Declaration of Intent

Now, in the presence of all the Buddhas,
With palms pressed together, I bow down my head in reverence.
I shall explain here in accordance with the teachings
The provisions essential for the bodhi of the Buddhas.

AV “In the presence of all the Buddhas” refers to all Buddhas of the past, present, and future.

“Buddha” refers specifically to those who have awakened from the sleep of ignorance. This does not however include arhats, pratyekabuddhas, or bodhisattvas, this on account of the dharmas exclusive to buddhas which not even these classes of very advanced practitioners possess.

“In accordance with the teachings” indicates this has already been explained in all sorts of ways in the sutras and that now, too, this shall be explained in accordance with those teachings.

“Bodhi” is the term employed to reference the wisdom of all-knowledge.

“Provisions” is a reference to: that which preserves, that which raises and nurtures, that which forms the causal basis for bodhi, and that which represents the complete adequacy of the essential component parts of bodhi.

TN On the most elementary level, one may think of “provisions” simply as the prerequisite conditions essential to the realization of the highest enlightenment. In brief, there are two provisions to which all other provisions are reducible, namely merit and wisdom. In the absence of complete repletion in merit and wisdom, realization of buddhahood is impossible.

002 – The Impossibility of Completely Describing the Provisions

How would one be able to describe without omission
 All of the provisions for the realization of bodhi?
 This could only be accomplished by the Buddhas themselves,
 For they, exclusively, have realized the boundless enlightenment.

AV “Boundless enlightenment” is a reference to a buddha’s unimpeded knowledge of all of the boundlessly-many meanings that need be known (for a buddha to do the work of the buddha). The buddha’s awakening transcends the “bounds” imposed by such views as those clinging to sense pleasures or useless varieties of asceticism, to annihilationism or eternalism, or to existence as inherently real or unreal.

003 – Since a Buddha’s Qualities are Boundless, So Too Are the Provisions

The boundless meritorious qualities of a buddha’s body
 Are rooted in the provisions essential to enlightenment.
 Therefore the provisions for enlightenment
 Themselves have no bounds.

AV There are multiple connotations of the term “meritorious qualities” as it is used here. These include:

- 1) Praiseworthiness.
- 2) Repeated involvement in the meritorious action at the root of the quality.
- 3) Durability associated with sound bases underlying the creation of the qualities.
- 4) Dependence upon noble bases such as the six perfections.

In the body of a buddha, these meritorious qualities are “boundless.” Since they are boundless, the provisions causing them must be boundless as well.

As for provisions being “rooted in the provisions essential to enlightenment,” this is because the provisions involved in the acquisition of bodhi comprise the very root of the boundlessly many meritorious qualities associated with a buddha’s body.

It is especially on account of the fact that the body of a buddha is possessed of boundlessly many meritorious qualities that it is essential to employ the development of boundlessly many meritorious qualities in perfecting that buddha body [for one’s own future

buddhahood]. Thus it is that the provisions themselves have no delimiting boundaries at all.

TN Implicit in Nāgārjuna's raising of the topic of "the boundless meritorious qualities of a buddha's body" is a reference to a buddha body's thirty-two marks and eighty subsidiary characteristics. These physical characteristics are collectively emblematic of the vast range of previous-life causal practices perfected by a buddha. They are also representative of any buddha's present-moment possession of the fully-developed qualities linked to the six perfections.

The term "boundless" may seem counter-intuitive in describing what we would ordinarily think of as visually finite physical features. But the physical features of a buddha are not even delimited by visual finitude, at least when they are observed with the fully developed five spiritual eyes. Take for instance the infinitely-extending "summit" mark issuing from a buddha's crown. Even resorting to all his skills as the foremost among the Buddha's disciples in psychic power, Mahāmaudgalyāyana was still unable to find the end of its upward extension.

Another example is found in Ānanda's observation of the Buddha's "sunrise samādhi" which he was only able to perceive through the Buddha's "lending" him psychic powers he had not yet developed on his own. Ānanda discovered that the Buddha is constantly issuing transformation bodies from all of the pores of his body. Such "boundlessness," both in terms of antecedent practices and in terms of miraculous manifestations is characteristic of other physical features of a buddha's body as well.

004 – Reverence to Buddhas and to Bodhisattvas, Those Also Worthy of Offerings

I shall then explain but a lesser portion of them.

I render reverence to the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas.

It is all such bodhisattvas as these

To whom one should next make offerings, after the Buddhas.

AV As for "explaining but a lesser portion," because the provisions are boundless and one's wisdom is limited, one can describe them only incompletely.

As for rendering reverence to bodhisattvas, there are seven levels of bodhisattvas:

- 1) Those who have generated the initial resolve.

- 2) Those who have taken up right cultivation.
- 3) Those realizing the unproduced-dharmas patience.
- 4) Those at the level of "anointing of the crown."
- 5) Those abiding at the level of "one remaining life."
- 6) Those at the level of their very last birth;
- 7) Those who have approached the site of enlightenment.

All of these bodhisattvas are worthy of reverence and offerings next in sequence after the Buddhas. This is because even the initial-resolve bodhisattva possesses the profound mind, vast in its scope, by which he embodies the capacity to completely implement the teachings of the Buddhas. All buddhas emerge from among just such bodhisattvas. This ability to carry on the lineage of the Buddhas makes such bodhisattvas superior in their capacities to all other disciples of the Buddha.

These bodhisattvas desire to influence all beings to achieve the cessation of all sufferings. It is not the case that they are motivated by the desire to bring but a lesser fraction of beings to enlightenment. Because this profound mind is so vast in the scope of its greatness, all beings should in every case be moved to offer them reverential respect.

005 – The Primary Provision: Prajñāpāramitā, Mother of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas

Since it is the mother of the Bodhisattvas,

It is also the mother of the Buddhas:

The prajñāpāramitā

Is the foremost among the provisions for enlightenment.

AV "It is because the perfection of prajñā is the mother of all bodhisattvas that it is foremost among the provisions for the acquisition of bodhi."

The perfection of prajñā is foremost among the provisions in just the same way as the eye faculty is most supreme among the body's sense faculties and the head is most supreme among the main parts of the body. Among all of the perfections, the perfection of prajñā is supreme.

The perfection of prajñā is "foremost" in the sense that it is the primary priority in correct practice of the other provisions. Its essentiality here is comparable to the primary role of faith in the larger sphere of all Buddhist practice. For example, giving cannot qualify as "the perfection of giving" without the presence of prajñā.

So too with the other perfections. The supremacy of the perfection of wisdom is also based on the greatness of the fruits it engenders.

The perfection of wisdom is said to be “the mother of the bodhisattvas” because it has the ability to give birth to them. It is this *prajñā* wisdom mediated by skillful means which brings about the birth of the bodhisattva, causing him to seek the unsurpassed bodhi of a buddha over the lesser-scope enlightenment of the Śrāvaka-disciples and the Pratyekabuddhas. It is through its causing the birth of a buddha body that the perfection of wisdom qualifies as “the mother of the Bodhisattvas.”

It is also because of its inherent placement within the correct practice of the other five perfections, because of its similarity to maternally-generated assessments for the benefit of a child, because of its involvement in the decision making necessary to the maturing of a bodhisattva, and because of its path-generating abilities activated in recitation of sutras that the perfection of wisdom is said to be “the mother of the Bodhisattvas.”

It is because the perfection of *prajñā* gives birth to and reveals unimpeded wisdom and because all buddhas are reliant upon unimpeded wisdom to extinguish the afflictions that the *prajñāpāramitā* is therefore also known as the mother of the Buddhas.

The *prajñāpāramitā* is known as such because it lies even beyond the sphere of the Hearer-disciples and the Pratyekabuddhas, because there is nothing beyond it worth knowing, because it enables perfection in all things, because nothing anywhere is capable of vanquishing it, and because it is uniformly equal in its manifestations throughout time and space. These causal bases are as set forth in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sutra*.

006 – *Prajñā* Includes the Remaining Five Perfections and Their Retinue

Because giving, moral virtue, patience, vigor, meditation,
And the others following from these five
All arise from the perfection of wisdom,
They are included within the *pāramitās*.

TN Bhikshu Vaśitva's commentary recommends that one understand “the others following from these five” as referring to the four additional perfections (skillful means, vows, powers, and knowledges). When these nine are added to their source (*prajñā*), this produces the “ten perfections” found in the Mahāyāna canon.

In his full-length commentary, Bhikshu Vaśitva now departs on a detailed tour of each of these “ten perfections.” I’ve condensed those explanations and included them below so as to make them more readily accessible to the reader.

For a complete discussion of the perfections which demonstrates a refinement and brilliance beyond even Bhikshu Vaśitva’s extended discussion, see my translation under separate cover: *Nāgārjuna on the Six Perfections*, a complete translation of sixteen consecutive chapters on this topic from Nāgārjuna’s *Exegesis on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*.

Condensed Bhikshu Vaśitva Discussion of the Six Perfections

The Discussion of the Perfection of Giving

Sequencing Rationale and Valid Intended Effects of Giving

AV We treat the perfection of giving herein as the second of the bodhi provisions because prajñā is the primary priority in practice and because the bodhisattva practices giving to enable acquisition of bodhi.

Through this practice, one facilitates both physical and mental happiness in other beings. It is not that one gives to visit yet more suffering on other beings.

Categories of Giving

Giving is of two basic kinds: the giving of material wealth and the giving of Dharma. Material wealth is itself of two types: sentient and insentient.

Sentient giving is in turn of types, personal and extrapersonal. Giving of one’s limbs or entire body is “personal” whereas giving up of one’s sons, daughters, wives, consorts, or other beings is “extrapersonal.”

Insentient giving is of two types, consumable and nonconsumable, with anything taken internally as food or drink being the former, and most everything else being the latter.

Now, useful Dharma giving is itself of two kinds, mundane and supramundane, the former being that leading to favorable rebirth, the latter leading to transcendence of cyclic existence.

The giving of material wealth and the giving of Dharma each involve two subtypes: “involving attachment” and “free of attachment,” the former being that done for one’s own worldly priorities

and the latter being that done either to benefit all beings or to facilitate acquisition of unimpeded wisdom.

Additional sorts of giving include “the giving of fearlessness” and other types subsumed under “the giving of material wealth.” The karmic rewards and secondary effects of those two types of giving (material wealth and Dharma) are comprehensively explained in the Great Vehicle scriptures.

Bhikshu Vaśitva's Stanzas on Giving

Bhikshu Vaśitva then presents a dozen stanzas describing the giving of material wealth, personal and extrapersonal giving, giving of that which is and is not sentient, and the giving of fearlessness. Those stanzas conclude with stanzas focusing on right motivation and giving as done by bodhisattvas. He finishes those stanzas with three implicit points:

- 1) When giving, reflect on recipients as “fields of merit,” and as “belonging to one's own retinue of those who are good.”
- 2) When giving, one dedicates the karmic rewards to the pureland rebirth and future buddhahood of self and others.
- 3) It is the bodhisattva's giving which is dedicated to acquisition of the body of a buddha and which is worthy to be known as “the perfection of giving.”

Bhikshu Vaśitva then concludes his discussion of the perfection of giving with eight stanzas devoted to describing critical distinctions between false and genuine benefactors, noting at the very beginning the prime importance of giving without coveting karmic rewards, with compassion, and without attachment to any of the three factors involved in giving (benefactor, gift, recipient).

False Benefactors

Those benefactors who are attached to the fact that they give or what they have given or who do so with an eye to karmic or social rewards from their giving are described by Bhikshu Vaśitva as not benefactors at all, but “mere businessmen engaged in buying and selling.”

Genuine Benefactors

The genuine benefactor is like the great monsoon cloud bringing rain to every place equally. He gives “with heartfelt sympathy,”

reflecting on recipients “as if they were his own fathers and mothers,” while “not retaining in his mind those things which are given, the recipients of the gifts, or the one who does the giving” and while “finding constant happiness in the act of giving.” He concludes by stating that the benefactor who gives for the sake of realizing bodhi will succeed in the swift realization of buddhahood.

The Discussion of the Perfection of Moral Virtue

Śīla (moral virtue) has multiple connotations having to do with its functions and effects on the practitioner, these in terms of: habituation, basic nature, coolness, security, quiescence, cessation, stateliness, purity, primacy, and praiseworthiness.

Moral Virtue as Defined by the Ten Good Karmic Deeds

The moral precepts restrain the ten bad karmic actions of body, mouth and mind. (Killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, slanderous speech, harsh speech, frivolous-or-lewd speech, covetousness, hatefulness, wrong views.) Depending on the degree of departure from those standards one becomes vulnerable to descent into the three wretched destinies (hells, animals, *preta* ghosts).

Moral Virtue Generating Enhanced Rebirth Circumstances

Now, so long as coursing in the ten good acts is disconnected from factors generating enlightenment (such as the resolve to follow one of the Buddhist spiritual liberation paths joined to the three trainings: moral virtue, meditation, transcendent wisdom), it generates, depending on degree, various levels of rebirth in human and celestial realms.

Moral Virtue Generating Transcendence of Cyclic Existence

Where linked to enlightenment-generating factors, constant, habitual, and often-repeated coursing in the ten good karmic actions done at the superior level of moral precept practice results in acquisition of stations on the paths of the Śrāvaka-disciples or the Bodhisattvas.

Bodhisattva Precepts

Observance of the bodhisattva moral precept codes has positive effects extending endlessly on in to the future. One should learn more about this matter.

“Continuous” Versus “Discontinuous” Moral Precepts

“Continuous” (lit “same when transplanted”) moral precepts are those which carry forward from one life to the next, with consequences of that momentum playing out in terms of one’s tendency towards moral virtue, in terms of the quality of rebirth circumstances encountered, in terms of the karmic rewards one spontaneously falls heir to, in terms of the tendency to take up or not take up an individual-liberation path as opposed to a universal-liberation path, in terms of the purelands with which one retains a relationship, and in terms of one’s tendency to progress towards right and universal enlightenment.

“Discontinuous” moral virtue is that in which these lifetime-to-lifetime effects do not occur.

“Effortful” Versus “Effortless” Moral Precepts

“Effortful” moral virtue is the circumstance where one must self-monitor intentionality and action to remain in accordance with what is morally correct, whereas “effortless” moral virtue is that wherein one’s level of realization has become such that one may act spontaneously without fear of erring.

A Nine-Fold Classification of Moral Precepts

There are yet another nine kinds of moral precepts, as follows:

- 1) The moral precepts for the common person.
- 2) The moral precepts of the non-Buddhists who have gained the five spiritual powers.
- 3) The moral precepts of humans.
- 4) The moral precepts of the desire-realm gods.
- 5) The moral precepts of the form-realm gods.
- 6) The moral precepts of the formless-realm gods.
- 7) The moral precepts of Śrāvaka-disciples, both those still in training and those beyond training.
- 8) The moral precepts of the Pratyekabuddhas.
- 9) The moral precepts of the Bodhisattvas.

(Bhikshu Vaśitva then notes the specific conditions under which the first eight categories of moral precepts terminate, while pointing out that it is only the moral virtue of bodhisattva vows which continue on endlessly from one life to the next.)

It is because the moral-precepts of the Bodhisattvas are dedicated to the realization of the awakening of a buddha that they are said to define "the perfection of moral virtue."

Bhikshu Vaśitva's Verses on the Perfection of Moral Virtue

Bhikshu Vaśitva concludes with a dozen verses in praise of the perfection of moral virtue specifically as they relate to practice in and advancement along the Bodhisattva Path.

The Discussion of the Perfection of Patience

As intended herein, the patience (*kṣānti*) refers to the ability of one's resolve to endure all manner of suffering and bliss, both physical and mental, without feeling either elevated or depressed, and without the mind being clouded by any defilement-induced turbidity. This is a brief description of what is meant by *kṣānti*.

Relying on the interpretation of Bhikshu Vaśitva, one speaks of three types of patience based on the means through which it is sustained: body, mind, or Dharma.

Patience Sustained by the Body

Here, pain is inflicted by either sentient or insentient entities or circumstances, yet one doesn't dwell on it, but rather simply endures the experience peacefully. Examples include:

The pain of hunger from inability to gain sustenance.

Mosquitoes, snakes, tigers, lions, bears, or other two-legged or four-legged beings.

People seeking to cut off hands, feet, ears, nose, head, eyes, or limbs.

Wind, sun, cold, heat, rain, hail, or physical blows.

Any of the various diseases.

Patience Sustained by the Mind

Here, one undergoes challenges mental challenges and yet the mind remains unmoved, neither elevated nor cast down, free of turbid mentation, and free of confusion. Examples include:

Torment, cursing, vilification, denunciation, slander, defamation, deception, and other forms of unenjoyable speech.

The eight worldly dharmas: gain, loss, esteem, disesteem, blame, praise, suffering, and happiness.

One realizes an ability to cease all latent traces of hatefulness, doesn't entertain murderous, injurious, enmity-driven, contentious, or accusatory thoughts, feels protective of both self and others, feels kindness and compassion for others, abides in delight, and courses in equanimity.

Patience Sustained by Dharma

One remains unmoved even in the most challenging cases of physical and mental abuse by resort to a reality-based reflection refuting any reality to the factors involved. One finds no reality in the words and word-borne meanings involved in vilification, finds no reality to a physical body's ability (being mere form) to inflict harm, finds no reality to a mind's ability (being entirely formless) to inflict harm, and finds no reality to a person (being but a mere composite of the five aggregates) supposedly undergoing harm.

Thus one realizes there is no genuine inherent existence to any personal or extrapersonal entity or phenomenon involved in any such circumstances. Thus one abides in the unproduced-dharmas patience which, even in the midst of phenomena, realizes the unreality of all phenomena.

Verses on the Perfection of Patience

Bhikshu Vaśitva then presents ten stanzas on patience, attributed to "an Ārya." The stanzas embody all of the principles set forth in Bhikshu Vaśitva's commentary. (One might be tempted to suppose that "an Ārya" is a reference to Ārya Nāgārjuna but for the fact that Bhikshu Vaśitva's three-part typology of emptiness does not seem to be typical in Nāgārjuna's writings.)

The Discussion of the Perfection of Vigor

Vigor is heroically energetic strength in both the substance and manifest aspects [of one's resolve] and in the performance of karmic works.

The pāramitā of vigor is characterized by the good physical, verbal, and mental karma pursued by bodhisattvas from the time they bring forth their initial resolve on through till that time when they finally reach buddhahood, all of them being carried out in conformance with the factors conducing to enlightenment. It is vigor beyond the sphere of that pursued by common folk, *śrāvakas*, or *pratyekabuddhas*.

Three Types of Vigor

We refer here to three fundamental categories of vigor: physical, verbal, and mental. Specifically, these actions are:

- 1) Conducive to the generation of karmic blessings.
- 2) Beneficial to both self and other.

The Bodhisattvas' Thirty-Two Types of Vigor

- 1) Vigor in preventing the severance of the lineage of the Three Jewels.
- 2) Vigor in ripening countless beings.
- 3) Vigor in drawing in and adopting countless beings entrapped in cyclic existence.
- 4) Vigor in making countless offerings to support and serve [the Three Jewels].
- 5) Vigor in accumulating an immeasurable stock of roots of goodness.
- 6) Vigor in generating an immeasurable reserve of vigor.
- 7) Vigor in presenting skillful explanations [of Dharma] delightful to beings.
- 8) Vigor in establishing all beings in secure circumstances.
- 9) Vigor in adapting to the various endeavors of beings.
- 10) Vigor in coursing in equanimity in the midst of beings.
- 11) Vigor in taking on all aspects of the training in moral virtue.
- 12) Vigor in developing one's power of patience to the point of abiding in mental pliancy.
- 13) Vigor in acquisition of *dhyānas*, *samādhis*, and *samāpattis*.
- 14) Vigor in perfecting wisdom free of attachment.
- 15) Vigor in perfecting "the four types of *brahmacarya*" [otherwise known as "the four immeasurable minds"].
- 16) Vigor in generating the five spiritual powers.
- 17) Vigor in creating one's own buddhaland based on the qualities present in all other buddhalands.
- 18) Vigor in subduing all demons.
- 19) Vigor in subduing in accordance with Dharma all of the non-Buddhist dialecticians.
- 20) Vigor in perfecting the ten powers, the fearlessnesses, and the other dharmas exclusive to buddhas.
- 21) Vigor in enhancing the quality of one's physical, verbal, and mental karma.
- 22) Vigor in completing all endeavors one has begun.

- 23) Vigor in wreaking destruction on all of one's afflictions.
- 24) Vigor in escorting beyond [the sea of suffering] all who have not yet gone beyond it.
- 25) Vigor in causing those not liberated to gain liberation.
- 26) Vigor in reviving those not yet revived.
- 27) Vigor in enabling nirvāṇa for those not reaching nirvāṇa.
- 28) Vigor in accumulating the provisions which generate the [buddha body's] hundred-fold signs of meritorious qualities (*śata-puṇya-lakṣaṇa*).
- 29) Vigor in gathering in and integrating all buddha dharmas.
- 30) Vigor in roaming to the boundlessly many buddhalands.
- 31) Vigor in seeing the immeasurably many buddhas.
- 32) Vigor in making all such types of vigor issue forth from the great compassion.

The ability to personify such vigor is rooted in transcendent body, mouth, and mind karma, in remaining free of grasping or forsaking, in invulnerability to elation or depression, and in realization that phenomena are not produced at all. Perfection of these dharmas is key to cultivation of the pāramitā of vigor.

Nāgārjuna's Verses on the Perfection of Vigor

Bhikṣu Vaśitva presents nine stanzas on vigor, attributed to "the Ārya." Aspects covered include:

- 1) All other perfections depend on this perfection of vigor.
- 2) Vigor is the basis for acquisition of a buddha's body.
- 3) Vigor is supreme among all skillful means.
- 4) Even skills, wealth, and happiness depend on vigor.
- 5) Vigor is the essential element in the supremacy of buddhas.

The Discussion of the Perfection of Dhyāna Meditation

The Four Dhyānas

There are four dhyānas, as below:

- 1) Possessed of primary ideation (*vitarka*), possessed of mental discursion (*vicāra*), and possessed of that joy (*prīti*) and that bliss (*sukha*) that are generated through abandonment, one courses in the first dhyāna.
- 2) Free of primary ideation, free of mental discursion, and possessed of that joy (*prīti*) and that bliss (*sukha*) that are generated through concentration, one courses in the second dhyāna.

3) Having abandoned joy, possessed of equanimity with respect to karmic formative factors (*saṃskāra-upekṣā*), possessed of mindfulness (*smṛti*), possessed of wise awareness (*saṃprajanya*), and experiencing blissful sensation (*sukha-vedanā*), one courses in the third dhyāna.

4) Having extinguished both suffering and bliss, abiding in equanimity, possessed of purified mindfulness, and experiencing sensations as neither suffering nor blissful, one courses in the fourth dhyāna.

When with respect to these four dhyānas, one has abandoned [the goal of using them as means to gain] realization of the grounds of the Śrāvaka-disciples and the Pratyekabuddhas and has instead dedicated one's efforts in them toward the ground of buddhahood, this qualifies as [practice directed toward] dhyāna pāramitā.

The Sixteen Types of Bodhisattva Dhyāna Pāramitā

There are sixteen types of perfection in dhyāna meditation specific to bodhisattvas and not emphasized in the meditative discipline of the Śrāvakas and the Pratyekabuddhas. Their primary aspects are as follows:

- 1) Not seizing on anything as real, cultivated to perfect the dhyāna of the Tathāgatas.
- 2) Refraining from attachment to delectably blissful meditation states, cultivated to avoid attachment to one's own bliss.
- 3) Implementation of the great compassion to change objective circumstances, cultivated to manifest skillful means capable of halting beings' afflictions.
- 4) Reversing the direction of samādhi's focus, cultivated to change objective circumstances in the desire realm.
- 5) Generation of spiritual powers, cultivated to maintain awareness of the mental activity of beings.
- 6) Development of the mind's capacities, cultivated to perfect the mind's sovereign mastery of wisdom.
- 7) Development of all *samāpattis*, cultivated to achieve supreme transcendence of the form and formless realms.
- 8) Abiding in quiescent stillness within quiescent stillness, cultivated to achieve supreme transcendence going beyond the *samāpattis* of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas.
- 9) Abiding in immovability, cultivated to reach the most ultimate limit.

10) Employing antidotes to abandon evil, cultivated to destroy the ability of habitual karmic propensities to continue on into the future.

11) Entering wisdom, cultivated to transcend all mundane realms.

12) Adaptation to beings' mental actions, cultivated to facilitate the liberation of beings.

13) Preventing interruption of the Three Jewels lineage, cultivated to ensure the never-ending continuance of the dhyānas originating with the Tathāgatas.

14) Invulnerability to retreating or falling, cultivated through constant immersion in samādhi.

15) Sovereign mastery in all dharmas, cultivated to achieve perfect consummation of all of one's karmic works.

16) Analytic deconstruction of entities, [cultivated to counter baseless imputations of intrinsic existence].

The Thirty-Two Types of Purity Forming the Bases of Dhyāna

In addition, there are the thirty-two types of purity serving as the bases for development of the sixteen kinds of dhyāna and hence for progress on the path to buddhahood:

- 1) Purity in thought.
- 2) Purity in wisdom.
- 3) Purity in [the nature of] one's inclinations.
- 4) Purity inhering in possessing a sense of shame.
- 5) Purity in the aspirations sustaining the mind.
- 6) Purity associated with dedication [of merit] to bodhi.
- 7) Purity in one's faculties.
- 8) Purity associated with freedom from dependencies.
- 9) Purity associated with not seizing upon anything as real.
- 10) Purity associated with the generation and implementation of spiritual powers.
- 11) Purity in exercising the capacities of the mind.
- 12) Purity associated with physical renunciation.
- 13) Purity associated with inward stillness.
- 14) Purity associated with refraining from external activity.
- 15) Purity in one's views regarding perceptual apprehensibility.
- 16) Purity through realization of the nonexistence of any being.
- 17) Purity through realization of the nonexistence of any life.
- 18) Purity through realization of the nonexistence of persons.

19) Purity associated with having nowhere in the three realms in which one abides.

20) Purity associated with the methods comprised by the factors conducive to enlightenment.

21) Purity associated with the illumination through which one abandons the obscurations.

22) Purity associated with entry into wisdom.

23) Purity associated with having no inconsistencies regarding karmic cause-and-effect.

24) Purity associated with bringing patience to one's contemplations on karma.

25) Purity inherent in realizing the wisdom fathoming all aspects of the womb [from which buddhahood is born].

26) Purity associated with the preliminary expedient means used to attract [beings onto the Path].

27) Purity associated with avoiding obstructiveness within any site dedicated to the realization of bodhi.

28) Purity associated with refraining from attachment to [dharma of] the Śrāvaka-disciples and the Pratyekabuddhas.

29) Purity associated with the radiance generated when peacefully abiding in dhyāna.

30) Purity inhering in the freedom from mental scatteredness associated with the samādhis of the Buddha.

31) Purity associated with contemplating the behavior of one's own mind.

32) Purity associated with speaking Dharma well-suited to beings based on awareness of the karmic origins of each and every one of them.

Bhikshu Vaśitva's Concluding Verse on Dhyāna Pāramitā and the Powers

Bhikshu Vaśitva concludes this discussion with eight stanzas in which he:

1) Notes that the sixteen types of dhyāna pāramitā correspond to the perfection of dhyāna meditation when they are cultivated for the sake of realizing bodhi.

2) Notes that the wise use the powers in service of ensuring invulnerability to retreating from or falling away from the Path.

3) Describes the bodhisattva's use of heavenly eye, heavenly ear, knowledge of others' thoughts, knowledge of past lives and abodes, and mastery of spiritual power to travel to countless buddhalands.

4) Notes that the wise, realizing that the scattered mind is the root of all afflictions, extensively cultivate the dhyāna absorptions.

The Discussion of the Perfection of Wisdom

Having already extensively discussed the perfection of wisdom earlier in the commentary, Bhikshu Vaśitva simply reiterates here that it is foremost among all provisions essential to bodhi and that it subsumes all of the other perfections. He then defines the perfection of wisdom as “that single thought-moment of comprehensive wisdom through which the Buddha, the Bhagavān, awakened to the nature of all dharmas as he sat beneath the Bodhi Tree.”

Bhikshu Vaśitva then provides a list of twenty aspects associated with the perfection of wisdom:

It is unimpeded because it is independent of the body.

It is boundless because it is as vast as empty space.

It is equal to the unequaled because, in it, no dharma is perceptually apprehensible.

It is characterized by renunciation because of the ultimate emptiness [of all phenomena].

It is unconquerable because nothing whatsoever can be gotten at in it.

It is completely devoid of any sentence-based propositions because designations themselves are nonexistent entities.

It is devoid of any aggregation [of subsidiary components] because it transcends all coming hither and going thither.

It is free of any cause because it abandons [the concept of] any creative agent.

It is unproduced because production itself cannot be established as existing.

It involves no going anywhere because it has abandoned coursing in cyclic existence.

It is free of any disintegration because it transcends beginnings and endings.

It is stainless because it cannot even be grasped.

It is free of any frivolous discoursing because it has abandoned all frivolous discoursing.

It is unshakable because it is identical with the very substance of the entire Dharma realm.

It involves no arising because it does not engage in any discriminations.

It is immeasurable because it has transcended all modes of measurement.

It is free of any points of dependence because dependency itself does not exist.

It is free of defilement because it does not even come forth into existence.

It is unfathomable because it has no confining boundaries.

It is spontaneous through knowing the nature of all dharmas.

Additionally, it is marked by eighty kinds of wisdom derived from learning, thirty-two kinds of accessibility through right meditation, and freedom from sixteen kinds of delusion.

This treatment of the aspects of *prajñāpāramitā* is limited in its extent. Were one were to attempt to explain them completely, one would find they are limitless.

The Discussion of the Perfection of Skillful Means

The Eight Varieties of Skillful Means

The *pāramitā* of skillful means is comprised of eight categories:

- 1) Skillful means related to the [five] aggregates.
- 2) Skillful means related to the [eighteen] sense realms.
- 3) Skillful means related to the [six] sense bases.
- 4) Skillful means related to the [four] truths.
- 5) Skillful means related to conditioned arising.
- 6) Skillful means related to the three periods of time.
- 7) Skillful means related to the vehicles [for liberation].
- 8) Skillful means related to dharmas.

The Scope of What Should Be Explained Herein

The applications of skillful means in these spheres are boundlessly many. The great eminences have explained in detail what is appropriate according to rebirth destiny and applicable cultivation modes as one simultaneously augments one's own goodness and works to train beings. We describe below but a tiny drop of what is mentioned in the Sutras on this topic.

Skillful Means as Whatever Increases Goodness and Stems from Altruism

If a person's karma involves past or present goodness and one is able to cause its increase, doing so not for self-serving purposes, but rather to benefit of others, this qualifies as skillful means.

The Six Perfections as Skillful Means

One may use giving to facilitate fulfillment of the perfections, may use moral virtue to draw in beings, may use patience to enhance one's karma and assist acquisition of bodhi, may resort to vigor to generate energetic progress, may cultivate meditation to prevent loss of the dhyāna absorptions, or may cultivate wisdom to relinquish attachment to the unconditioned. In such cases, each of the perfections qualifies as a valid skillful means.

The Four Immeasurable Minds as Skillful Means

One may cultivate kindness to become a refuge and protector for beings, may devote oneself to compassion so as to avoid forsaking those trapped in cyclic existence, may cultivate sympathetic joy to endure unenjoyable circumstances, or may train in equanimity as the means to develop every manner of goodness.

The Spiritual Powers as Skillful Means

One uses the heavenly eye to facilitate acquisition of the buddha eye, uses the heavenly ear to perfect the hearing capacities of a buddha, uses knowledge of others' thoughts to know the faculties of beings, uses past-life recall to gain unimpeded knowledge of the three periods of time, uses sovereign mastery of spiritual powers to gain the Tathāgatas' sovereign mastery of spiritual powers, and uses access to beings' thoughts to understand their actions.

Seemingly Paradoxical Skillful Means of Bodhisattvas in Cyclic Existence

Having already achieved liberation, one may turn and enter cyclic existence yet again, having become free of defilement, may become exposed to defilement, having thrown down all burdens, may voluntarily take up burdens, having reached the limitless, may manifest as limited, and, having reached supremacy, may nonetheless manifest as possessing merely inferior capacities.

Having gained realizations equivalent to nirvāṇa, one may drop back into cyclic existence and, though coursing in this realization of nirvāṇa, one abstains from entering final cessation.

Though one may find it necessary to manifest practice associated with the four types of demon-related influences [involving afflictions, the aggregates, death, and sixth desire heaven deities], one continues to entirely transcend every form of demonic influence. Though realizing wisdom utterly fathoming the four truths,

and though coursing in contemplation of the unproduced, one abstains from entering the point of no return leading to *śrāvaka*-vehicle nirvāṇa.

Though cultivating the Path in the very midst of cyclic existence's vexing boisterousness, one refrains from actions rooted in latent afflictions. Though coursing in renunciation, one refrains from practice precipitating complete cessation of body and mind. Though one abides in the midst of the three realms, one nonetheless refrains from practice dominated by worldly truth.

Though one's practice is rooted in emptiness, one focuses on the quest for buddhahood. Though one courses in the unconditioned, one avoids opting for realization of the unconditioned. Though one develops the six spiritual powers, one refrains from ending all outflow impurities. Though one manifests the refined comportment of *śrāvaka*-disciples and pratyekabuddhas, one does not relinquish delight and zeal for the dharmas of a buddha.

Such are the practices involved in the perfection of skillful means utilized by bodhisattvas in their teaching of beings.

(Bhikshu Vaśitva's full-length commentary concludes with thirteen stanzas describing in rich detail the skillful-means practices of the great bodhisattvas. They are omitted here due to space considerations.)

The Discussion of the Perfection of Vows

All bodhisattvas establish themselves from the very outset in the ten great vows, namely:

(Bhikshu Vaśitva does not make even one original statement in this section, preferring instead to simply quote the *Avataṃsaka Sutra* on the ten bodhisattva vows. That being the case, I've set that aside in favor of simply translating and inserting below Nāgārjuna's much clearer and much more concise distillation of these vows in stanzas from his *Ten Grounds Vibhāṣā*.)

- [1] One vows to make offerings to, supply the needs of,
And extend reverence to all buddhas.
- [2] One vows that in all cases one will protect and uphold
The Dharma of all buddhas.
- [3] From that time when all Buddhas depart the Tuṣita Heaven
And come back to abide in the world,
On forward to the end of their teaching and transforming
And eternal entry into the realm of [the nirvāṇa] without residue,

Including when they abide in the womb, on up to their birth,
 On to their leaving lay life, proceeding to the site of enlightenment,
 Their conquering the demons, realizing the path to buddhahood,
 And their first turning of the wheel of the sublime Dharma—

I will respectfully welcome all Thus Come Ones,
 And throughout that entire time—
 I vow that in all cases I shall
 Be entirely devoted to making offerings to them.

[4] I vow to teach and transform beings,
 Causing them all to enter the paths.

[5] I vow to influence all beings
 To perfect the bodhi of the Buddhas,

[Including] where they incline toward the Śrāvaka-disciple
 Or Pratyekabuddha paths.

[6] I vow that, through faith and understanding,
 I shall realize the uniform equality of all dharmas.

[7] I vow that, in order to purify the buddhalands,
 I shall extinguish all of the various forms of evil.

[8] Where all are engaged in the practice of a single endeavor,
 One vows that there will be no enmity or struggling.

[9] One vows to practice the Bodhisattva Path
 And to set to turning that irreversible wheel,
 Thus causing the removal of all afflictions
 And fulfilling success in entering the state of purified faith.

[10] One vows that, in all worlds,
 One shall manifest the realization of bodhi.
 All such bodhisattvas as these
 Take the ten great vows as foremost.

In their immense vastness, they are comparable to empty space
 And exhaust even the bounds of the future.
 They entirely include all of the other incalculably many vows
 And exhaust as well one's ability to describe them all in detail.

Great vows such as these ten characterized by great zeal and great manifestations in the world comprise the foremost class of vows. After one has fulfilled these ten great vows, one establishes *asamkhyeyas* of hundreds of thousands of other bodhisattva vows. Thus one comes to abide on the bodhisattva's "ground of joyfulness" (*pramudita-bhūmi*). This exemplifies what is meant by the perfection of vows.

The Discussion of the Perfection of Powers

Generally speaking, the Bodhisattvas possess seven kinds of powers, as follows:

- 1) The power produced through karmic reward.
- 2) The power of the supernatural powers.
- 3) The power of faith.
- 4) The power of vigor.
- 5) The power of mindfulness.
- 6) The power of the samādhis.
- 7) The power of prajñā.

The Power Produced Through Karmic Reward

This refers to the inconceivable and ineffable power deriving from the altruistic deeds done across the course of countless eons of coursing in the bodhisattva path.

The Power of the Supernatural Powers

This refers to a broad range of spiritual powers employed by bodhisattvas once they have successfully cultivated to refinement the four bases of spiritual power (zeal, vigor, single-mindedness, imaginative reflective thought).

Once developed, the bodhisattva is able to manifest among other beings in whatever form might most readily advance those beings along the path to liberation from karma-bound suffering in cyclic existence. Thus, they may manifest in the form of Śakra, Brahmā, a world-protector, a universal monarch, or in some other such physical form. If it be appropriate that they appear in yet another type of physical form, even to the point of manifesting in the physical form of an animal, this for the sake of training beings, then they manifest in just such a physical form.

The spiritual powers of the bodhisattvas include the ability to perform whatever miraculous feats might suit their altruistic purposes. Thus, if there be an arrogant being of overweening pride, one who is prone to hateful rages and who is cruel, evil, and self-important, then the bodhisattvas are able to employ their spiritual powers as the circumstance requires, thus being able to successfully speak Dharma for them, thus training and subduing them, causing them thereby to abandon their arrogance, overweening pride, hateful rages, cruelty, evil, and such.

In this manner, if they have some manifestation of spiritual power which they have invoked, then no matter what they have invoked, whether it be a lesser, middling, or superior sort of dharma, having already succeeded in invoking it, it becomes such as no person is able to disturb or cause to disappear. This is to say then that even if it were Śakra, Brahmā, a demon, or someone from another world system possessed of identical dharmas, aside from a buddha, one of the Bhagavāns, there is no being whatsoever anywhere among all of the classes of beings that would be able to disturb that manifestation of spiritual powers or cause it to disappear.

In their exercise of the power of spiritual powers, they invoke them with sovereign mastery at the highest level. They go beyond the afflictions produced through the influence of demons and enter into that very state of mind possessed by the Buddhas themselves. They employ such powers in the awakening of beings and in the accumulation of the provisions for the acquisition of bodhi, bringing to bear the roots of goodness accumulated across the course of previous lives. These powers are such as the demons and the demonically-influenced celestial beings are unable to impede. This is what constitutes “the power of the supernatural powers” possessed by the Bodhisattvas.

The Power of Faith

As for “the power of faith,” they possess such faith and understanding in the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, and the Bodhisattva Conduct as can never be obstructed or damaged.

The Power of Vigor

As for “the power of vigor,” in an instance where the bodhisattva invokes his practice of vigor, in whichever of those good dharmas to which it is applied, he succeeds in gaining in just such circumstances the power of enduring solidity of practice. No matter which practice he has undertaken, no god or person is able to shake him in that practice, damage that practice, or cause him to cease that practice.

The Power of Mindfulness

As for “the power of mindfulness,” in whichever of those various dharmas his mind has become established, no extraneous afflictive circumstance is able to cause him to become scattered. Through the

sustaining power of mindfulness, he is able to break all afflictions. Thus none of those afflictions are able to break or cause the deterioration of the bodhisattva's mindfulness.

The Power of the Samādhis

As for "the power of samādhi," even in the midst of vexing boisterousness, he continues to course in renunciation of worldly matters. Thus extraneous noise or conversations do not impede his coursing in the first dhyāna, ideation and discursion do not impede his coursing in the second dhyāna, blissful states do not impede his coursing in the third dhyāna, and his ripening of beings and acquisition of Path-related dharmas do not impede his coursing in the fourth dhyāna. Evil opposing states encountered in the practice of the dhyānas remain unable to damage or undermine his practice and, though he courses in the dhyānas, he nonetheless refrains from taking rebirth in those celestial realms corresponding to the dhyānas.

The Power of Prajñā

As for "the power of prajñā," this refers to wisdom which remains undamaged even in the midst of all manner of worldly and world-transcending dharmas. In life after life, he is so able to remain wisely guided by prajñā that he need not resort to the teachings of a guru.

All sorts of livelihoods, all of the arts and skills, all of the abilities in the higher clarities, and even the world's most supreme, most difficult, and most difficult to endure abilities—the bodhisattva has them all manifest for him as abilities he is free to exercise. In the case of those world-transcending dharmas with which one rescues and liberates beings in the world, once the bodhisattva's wisdom has entered into them, they become such as no group of gods, men, or *asuras* can overturn or interfere with.

This has been only a summary treatment of the powers in which the bodhisattva develops sovereign mastery. A complete discussion would be endless.

The Discussion of the Perfection of Knowledges

The bodhisattva develops a deep understanding not just of the world-transcending skills, but also of the skills useful in the world. Thus he understands classics, philosophical treatises, printing,

mathematics, medicine, exorcism, the means to counter poisonings inflicted through black magic, and so forth.

He has a skillful command of humor and satire as means to delight beings, making them more amenable to Dharma teaching.

He knows how to establish public works, including correct city planning, water projects, parks, gardens, orchards, and forestry.

He is familiar with metallurgy, precious gems, and so forth.

He understands astronomy, constellations, eclipses, seismology, augury through dreams, and physiognomy.

He understands the points of practice associated with the moral precepts, the meditative absorptions, the spiritual powers, the four immeasurables, and the formless realm stations.

He understands the arising and destruction of worlds and the role that individual and group karma play therein.

He also understands the most minute particles, how they join in compounds, how they disperse, and even how many of them there are in any particular sphere.

He understands the arising and destruction of the desire realm, form realm, and formless realm.

He knows in great detail the distinctions in the form and formless bodies of the various classes of beings on each of the paths.

He knows the matters associated with the establishment of the Buddhas, the Dharma, and the Ārya Sangha

Additionally, he has succeeded in gaining sovereign mastery of the lifespan, mind, equipage, karmic actions, vows, faith and understanding, spiritual powers, knowledges, rebirths, and Dharma.

Having gained ten such types of sovereign mastery, he then becomes one possessed of inconceivable and ineffable knowledges, becomes one possessed of immeasurably many knowledges, and becomes one possessed of the knowledges whereby he remains invulnerable to retreating from the path to buddhahood. Knowledges of these sorts involve eighty-four thousand practice-related aspects. It is this which constitutes the pāramitā of the knowledges known by the bodhisattva.

We have presented in this fashion a categorized explanation of the pāramitā of the knowledges. If one wished to expound on the matter completely, it would be only the Buddha, the Bhagavān, who would be qualified to present that explanation.

007 – The Six Perfections, Like Space, Comprehensively Subsume Bodhi's Provisions

These six pāramitās
 Encompass the provisions essential for bodhi,
 They are comparable in this to empty space
 Which entirely envelopes all things.

AV These six perfections completely contain all of the various sorts of requisites for realization of bodhi in just the same way that empty space contains all conscious and unconscious phenomena abiding within it.

008 – Another Exegete's Opinion: The Four Merit Bases Subsume All Provisions

There is also the idea proposed by another master
 That, as for the provisions for enlightenment,
 Truth, relinquishment, cessation, and wisdom—
 These four bases subsume them all.

AV "Truth" here is identifiable with the perfection of moral virtue, "relinquishment" with the perfection of giving, "cessation" with the perfections of patience and meditation, and "wisdom" with the perfection of prajñā. The perfection of vigor is present in all of these bases, for without it, nothing at all would be accomplished.

TN The four "bases" (*adhiṣṭhāna*) consist of "truth" (*satya*), "relinquishment" (*tyāga*), "cessation" (*upaśama*), and "wisdom" (*prajñā*).

Nāgārjuna speaks highly of these four bases in a number of his works, most notably in the *Ratnāvalī*, in his treatise on the ten bodhisattva grounds, and in his *Exegesis on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*. The four bases are also found in the Pali Canon, for example in the *Dhātuvibhanga Sutta* within the *Majjhima Nikāya*.

009 – The Great Compassion and the Great Kindness

The great compassion penetrates to the marrow of one's bones.
 Thus one serves as a refuge for every being.
 With a feeling as strong as a father's regard for his only son,
 One's kindness extends universally to all beings.

TN This *śloka* and the two which follow are devoted primarily to the four immeasurable minds consisting of kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity.

AV The bodhisattva observes the pathetic plight of beings trapped in the forest of delusions and bound to undergo endless suffering. Observing this, the bodhisattva is so pierced by the pangs of the great compassion that those feelings penetrate even to his very bones. He is motivated thereby to serve as a refuge for beings, striving to lead them out of the wilderness of cyclic existence into the city of enlightenment.

The feelings of the bodhisattva for beings are like that of a father whose only son has fallen seriously ill. It is through kindness that one frees oneself from any inclination to be obstructive of other beings' aspirations and it is through compassion that one remains free of weariness or disgust while working in the sphere of cyclic existence for the weal of beings.

Kindness is generated toward the good whereas compassion is felt even for those who show no goodness. As the bodhisattva's kindness grows ever greater, he becomes detached from any concerns over his own happiness, hence "the great kindness." As his compassion grows ever greater, he becomes willing to sacrifice everything for others, hence "the great compassion."

010 – The Great Sympathetic Joy

If one brings to mind the qualities of a buddha
 Or hears of a buddha's spiritual transformations,
 One becomes purified through one's admiration and joyfulness.
 This is what is meant by the great sympathetic joy.

AV As for "qualities of a buddha," Bhikshu Vaśitva lists thirty-three which should inspire admiration and joy in those who contemplate them. He then follows by explaining the Buddhas' use of "spiritual transformations" in adapting to the different sorts of beings and in formulating skillful means to teach them. Bhikshu Vaśitva then describes how admiration generates sympathetic joy and how sympathetic joy brings about an absence of turbidity in the mind corresponding to karmic purification while then noting in conclusion that, although lesser-scope vehicles include the concept of "sympathetic joy," they do not share the level of development spoken of here which, being in a class by itself, is alone in qualifying as "the great sympathetic joy."

011 – The Great Equanimity

In his relations with beings, the bodhisattva
Should not allow himself to forsake them.
As befits the abilities determined by his powers,
He should always strive to draw them in.

AV The bodhisattva, *mahāsattva*, remains motivated to benefit beings and make them happy. Thus, even where they behave abysmally, one should refrain from forsaking them. Rather, one should persist in encouraging them to cultivate giving and moral virtue. In accordance with one's abilities, one should strive to draw them in [to the Path].

012 – The Role of Skillful Means

From the very beginning, the bodhisattva
Should accord with the power of his abilities
And use skillful means to instruct beings,
Causing them to enter the Great Vehicle.

AV As he interacts with beings, consistent with the earlier explanation of the perfection of skillful means, the bodhisattva should energetically employ expedients causing beings to enter the Great Vehicle. Bhikshu Vaśitva then introduces the next *śloka* with a hypothetical challenging question: Why does the bodhisattva initially use only Great Vehicle teachings in this endeavor?

013 – The Superior Merit Arising from Teaching the Great Vehicle

Even if one taught beings as numerous as the Ganges' sands
So that they were caused to gain the fruit of arhatship,
Still, by instructing but a single person to enter the Great Vehicle,
One would generate merit superior to that.

AV The merit arising from teaching the Great Vehicle is supreme because the karmic seeds planted thereby are inexhaustible in their secondary effects, this because they redound to the benefit of yet other beings, thus constituting expedients inspiring their resolve to gain the highest enlightenment. Additionally, the mind resolved on bodhi possesses innumerable fine qualities. Moreover, it is solely via the Great Vehicle that the lineage of the Three Jewels is not severed completely [during the Dharma-ending age].

Bhikshu Vaśitva introduces the next *śloka* with a theoretical challenging question: “How could it be that *mahāsattvas* would teach only the Great Vehicle, never using Two-Vehicles teachings?”

014 – The Two Vehicles Are Taught Only to Those of Lesser Abilities

Instructing through resort to the Śrāvaka Vehicle
Or through resort to the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle
Is undertaken where, on account of lesser abilities,
Beings are unable to accept instruction in the Great Vehicle.

AV Beings of lesser resolve have forsaken the benefit of others and hence are deficient in the great compassion. Consequently one can't use the Great Vehicle to teach them. Only then does one resort to Two-Vehicles teachings to teach liberation.

Bhikshu Vaśitva introduces the next *śloka* with a question: Does one just abandon those not amenable to any of the Three-Vehicles teachings?

015 – Teach Meritorious Deeds to Those Incapable of the Three Vehicles

Where even when relying on Śrāvaka or Pratyekabuddha Vehicles
In addition to the Great Vehicle teachings,
There are those who still cannot accept any such instruction,
One should strive to establish them in merit-creating situations.

AV For those delighting in cyclic existence and abhorring a life devoted to achieving spiritual liberation, one should establish them in practices associated with “the four abodes of Brahmā” (*brahma-vihāra*).

Where not even this is possible, one establishes them in the path of the ten types of good karma, or if that is not tenable, in merit-generating endeavors such as giving.

Bhikshu Vaśitva introduces the next *śloka* with a question: What should one do for beings delighting in worldly pleasures devoid of any strength to adopt merit-generating practices?

TN When Bhikshu Vaśitva speaks of “the four abodes of Brahmā,” consisting of kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, one should note per Nāgārjuna's explanation in his *Exegesis on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, that lesser-level practice of these contemplations is as contemplations pure and simple, for they do

not genuinely involve or even aspire to involve practices devoted to liberating other beings. This is equally true of Hearer-vehicle practice and the practice of worldlings aspiring to achieve rebirth in celestial realms. In Hearer-vehicle practice, these contemplations are undertaken solely to condition the mind in a way whereby it is not prone to generate the bad karma arising from afflictions felt for other beings.

The Mahāyāna approach to these four practices differs completely. They are known in the Mahāyāna context as “the four immeasurable minds” (*apramāṇa-citta*). Therein, the bodhisattva practitioner definitely *does* aspire to liberate beings through cultivation of these four immeasurables and in fact relies upon them as foundational contemplations enabling his endless efforts on behalf of other beings.

Bhikshu Vaśīṭva's recommendation of these practices here arises from the knowledge that beings who take them on will generate less bad karma and will therefore be less likely to plunge so efficiently into the lower realms as those beings who do not adopt such salutary states of mind. Hence we see in that a certain kinship with the Hearer-vehicle cultivation rationale. Additionally, since many worldlings do in fact aspire to the bliss of the heavens, this stratagem may be more readily adopted by those viewing practices directed at liberation as too difficult or beyond their powers of faith.

016 – Benefit and Slowly Draw in Those Unfit for Liberation or Celestial Rebirth

If there be persons unable to accept
Instruction conducing either to the heavens or to liberation,
Favor them through bestowing present-life benefits.
Then, as befits one's powers, one should draw them in.

AV For beings who are exclusively dedicated to desire-based pleasures, who are ignorant of retribution in future lifetimes, who are bound for the three wretched rebirth destinies, and who are unable to take on teachings conducing to either liberation or the heavens, one should still feel pity for them, instead using giving and other skillful means appealing to their present-life priorities, this so they might slowly be attracted to the Path.

017 – One Generates Kindness and Compassion for Those One Cannot Assist

Where, with regard to particular beings, a bodhisattva
 Has no conditions through which to instruct them,
 He should draw forth the great kindness and compassion
 And should refrain from abandoning them.

AV When encountering beings delighting in karmic transgressions, the bodhisattva should look upon them as he would his own sons and still draw on the great kindness and compassion, realizing there is no rationale condoned by the Path justifying their abandonment.

018 – The Means of Attraction

Drawing them in through giving, through explaining Dharma,
 Through listening to them discuss the Dharma,
 Or through endeavors beneficial to them—
 These are skillful means through which to attract them.

AV As means to attract beings to the Path, the bodhisattva may give gifts, accept gifts, explain Dharma, listen to Dharma, engage in beneficial actions, speak in a pleasing manner, take up joint endeavors, explain specialized fields of learning, teach special skills, manifest as engaged in the same livelihood, cure the sick, or rescue those in perilous straits.

TN One might wonder how “listening to them discuss the Dharma” makes sense where the individuals involved clearly don’t well understand the Dharma. This allows the bodhisattva: a) to precisely evaluate the conceptual errors the speaker has developed regarding the Dharma; b) to engage amicably with the speaker on the main topic of concern; and c) to indicate personal respect and concern for the speaker, no matter how skewed their views might be. This helps provide a foundation for friendship based on Dharma.

019 – The Need for Tirelessness, Vows, Realization that Other-Benefit is Self-Benefit

In that which is done for the benefit of beings,
 Do not succumb to either weariness or negligence.
 Bring forth vows for the sake of realizing bodhi.
 Benefiting the world is just benefiting self.

AV The bodhisattva vows: “Whatever endeavors might benefit the world—that is precisely what I should do,” and, having made this vow, he must not fall into weariness or negligence. Rather, he should reflect: “When one benefits the world, one is thereby just benefiting oneself as well.” Thus the bodhisattva should avoid abandoning beings.

020 – Entering the Dharma Realm, Discriminations Cease, Equanimity Ensues

Entering the extremely profound Dharma-realm,
 One extinguishes mental discriminations.
 As they are devoid of any useful function,
 In all contexts, one naturally abides in equanimity.

AV The “Dharma realm” is synonymous with the very nature of the entire sphere of conditioned arising which is itself extremely profound and accurately apprehensible only through extremely profound levels of awareness.

The bodhisattva entering the mind-state cognizing this extremely profound Dharma realm thereby extinguishes all such duality-based extremes as “existence,” “non-existence,” and so forth. One severs all mind-moving frivolous discourse and mental discriminations, thus one abandons all seizing on any aspects of objective phenomena.

Where the intellectual mind consciousness would ordinarily be active, it ceases to be active. When this occurs, [mental discriminations] no longer serve any function. In the midst of dharmas, one realizes a mind state marked by stillness within stillness, a mind state devoid of mental discriminations. This is the “equanimity conforming to ultimate truth (*paramārtha*).”

021 – Equanimity as Remaining Unimpeded by the Eight Worldly Dharmas

Personal gain, reputation, praise, and happiness—
 One refrains from attachment to any of these four points.
 Nor do their opposites present any sort of obstacle.
 This is the sort of conduct comprising equanimity.

AV One retains no attachment to concerns over the receipt of beneficial gains, fame, praise, or happiness. Nor is one inclined to retreat or find any obstacle in the opposite conditions involving loss, ill repute, disparagement, or suffering. One relinquishes both

fondness and loathing. One abides in the midst of such conditions and yet remains free of any mental discriminations. This is what is meant by the second type: “equanimity amidst of the mundane.”

TN Nāgārjuna references “the eight worldly dharmas,” also known as “the eight winds.” These eight dharmas are: gain and loss; disgrace and esteem; praise and blame; suffering and happiness.

022 – The Need for Diligence So Long as Irreversibility Hasn't Been Gained

So long as he has not yet gained irreversibility,
In the bodhisattva's striving for bodhi,
He should be as intensely diligent in practice
As someone whose turban has caught on fire.

AV Although the bodhisattva abides in transcendent equanimity eschewing mental discriminations, he is nonetheless intensely vigorous in his practice aimed at achieving “irreversibility” in the quest for the enlightenment of a buddha.

As noted in sutras such as the *Accumulation of Blossoms Sutra*, there are basically five circumstances conferring either a relative or ultimate “irreversibility” preventing one from falling away from the path to buddhahood:

- 1) Hearing the names of buddhas or bodhisattvas equipped with great vows;
- 2) Making the vow to take rebirth in a buddha's pureland;
- 3) Accepting, bearing in mind, or discoursing on profound sutras such as those dedicated to the perfection of wisdom;
- 4) Cultivating samādhis associated with the “direct presence” bodhisattva ground (*abhimukha-bhūmi*) or cultivating sympathetic joy in someone else's realization of such samādhis; and
- 5) Realization of the “unproduced-dharmas patience” (*anutpattika-dharma-kṣānti*) bringing residence on the “unmoving” bodhisattva ground (*acala-bhūmi*), the eighth bodhisattva ground. Only this fifth type constitutes the “ultimate and definite irreversibility” ensuring future buddhahood.

Bhikshu Vaṣitva's discussion of this *śloka* concludes with a question as to how the practitioner could feel compelled to intensely vigorous practice, given the relative ease with which one would have already set up one or more of the first four circumstances producing relative irreversibility.

023 – Bodhisattvas' Ceaseless Vigor in Seeking Bodhi Is Due to Heavy Responsibility

Thus it is that those bodhisattvas,
 When striving for the realization of bodhi,
 Should not rest in their practice of vigor,
 For they have shouldered such a heavy burden.

AV The bodhisattva continues on with vigor primarily because of the heavy burden implicit in his bodhisattva vow to deliver all beings to spiritual liberation. The next *śloka* is introduced with a question as to why a bodhisattva can't allow himself to rest during the interim.

024 – Prior to Compassion and Patience, the Bodhisattva Life Remains Imperiled

Until one develops the great compassion and the patiences,
 Even though he may have gained irreversibility,
 The bodhisattva is still subject to a form of "dying"
 Occurring through the arising of negligence.

AV So long as the bodhisattva hasn't yet developed the great compassion or realized the unproduced-dharmas patience, even when having already gained the relative irreversibility conferred by any of the first four circumstances mentioned above, he is still vulnerable to the power of his karma and to the destructive power of negligence. Were negligence allowed to arise, it could precipitate the "death" of the bodhisattva life. Hence the need for unremitting and intense vigor.

The next *śloka* is introduced with a question as to what precisely is meant by this "death" to which a bodhisattva is vulnerable.

TN There are two issues deserving amplification here: 1) "patiences"; 2) "irreversibility."

1) On "patiences": The whole topic of the various types of "patiences" realized in Buddhist cultivation is not nearly so simple as one might suspect, this because there are multiple types of patience associated with the sixteen mental states of comprehension involved in developing the Path of Seeing. (See Chapter Six of Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣyam* for a tour of the topic.)

Additionally, in explaining the bodhisattva practices, Nāgārjuna speaks in place after place and at great length on two types of patience: 1) patience with respect to beings; and 2) patience with

respect to dharmas. (See Chapter Three of my translation titled *Nāgārjuna on the Six Perfections*.)

Moreover, Bhikshu Vaśitva himself speaks of three basic kinds of patience, this based on three bases of patience found in the body, in the mind, and in the Dharma.

That said, Bhikshu Vaśitva indicates that, in this context, "patiences" refers specifically to the "unproduced dharmas patience" (*anutpattika-dharma-kṣānti*). As an aid to making sense of the topic, "patience" of this sort may be provisionally understood as that type of deeply patient "acquiescence" which one may develop toward coursing in cyclic existence. This can only really come about once one has gained the direct perception of the emptiness of all dharmas. This cognition of emptiness has the ability to engender a continuous perception that, surface appearances aside, all dharmas are, in their most essential nirvāṇa-like nature, neither produced nor destroyed. It is this level of cognition and acquiescence which, when linked to the great compassion, figures most strongly in the bodhisattva's ability to continue on endlessly and selflessly, working for the liberation of other beings.

2) On "irreversibility": It has so far remained unclear in the Bhikshu Vaśitva commentary that, although this "irreversibility" associated with the first four causal circumstances does constitute a virtual guarantee that enlightenment will be gained sooner or later, still, that particular "enlightenment" which awaits the practitioner might not in fact be the enlightenment of a buddha. It could end up being the individual-liberation result gained by those who do not cultivate the altruistic path of the bodhisattva.

How could this occur? If the bodhisattva falls into negligence, he risks a precipitous plunge back down into the Hearer or Pratyekabuddha practice modes where the population of beings liberated may be but very few. Hence the reference to the terminal nature of such a downfall, one by which it is metaphorically compared to a tragic death. Certainly not all deaths are "tragic," but those involving being cut off in the flower of a promising youth may justifiably be seen as such. Here we have the prospect of a beginning bodhisattva full of promise and great aspirations losing his grip and plummeting to his death while still only "young" in the practices, thus leaving countless beings bereft of the benefits of his unrealized buddhahood. Hence the appropriateness of the metaphor.

025 – Falling onto the Śrāvaka or Pratyekabuddha Grounds is Fatal for a Bodhisattva

The grounds of the Śrāvakas or the Pratyekabuddhas,
 If entered, constitute “death” for him
 Because he would thereby sever the roots
 Of the bodhisattva’s understanding and awareness.

AV Even if possessed of “relative” irreversibility, the bodhisattva resolve of one who has not yet gained unproduced-dharmas patience could still succumb to bad friends, to terror over the sufferings involved in cyclic births and deaths, to rebirth in unfortunate circumstances between buddhas, or to hatred of bodhisattvas or slander of right Dharma during the deterioration of the kalpa. The consequence of this might well be diversion onto the paths of the Hearer-disciples or the Pratyekabuddhas. This would involve severance of the roots of bodhisattvahood through the ending pursuit of the great compassion. Hence the identification of such a circumstance with the “death” of an individual practitioner’s coursing in the Bodhisattva Path.

The next *śloka* is introduced with a question as to whether a bodhisattva would be more struck with fear by the prospect of falling into the hells or instead by the prospect of falling down onto the grounds occupied by the Hearer-disciples and the Pratyekabuddhas.

026 – The Bodhisattva Fears the Two-Vehicles’ Grounds More Than the Hells

At the prospect of falling into the hell-realms,
 The bodhisattva would not be struck with fright.
 The grounds of the Śrāvakas and the Pratyekabuddhas
 Do provoke great terror in him.

AV “If the bodhisattva were confronted with the prospect of abiding in the hell-realms amidst their countless hundreds of thousands of sufferings, he would not find this more frightening than the prospect of falling down onto the grounds of the Hearer-disciples and Pratyekabuddhas.”

027 – Whereas Hells Don't Block Buddhahood, Two Vehicles' Grounds Do

It is not the case that falling into the hell realms
 Would create an ultimate obstacle to bodhi.
 If one fell onto the grounds of the Śrāvakas or Pratyekabuddhas,
 That would create an ultimate obstacle.

AV Although falling into the hells does create an obstacle, it is only temporary. Entering the paths of the Two Vehicles, however, does create a permanent obstacle making the bodhi of a buddha entirely inaccessible. Hence the bodhisattva would be more frightened at this latter possibility than by the prospect of falling into the hells.

IN The point at which, having entered a Two-Vehicles' path, one can no longer turn back from the nirvāṇa of the arhat or pratyekabuddha is called "the right and fixed position" (*samyaktva niyāma*), a stage on the individual-liberation path synonymous with attainment of the path of seeing, a stage from which one not already invested with the confirmed resolve to achieve buddhahood cannot readily switch over to cultivation of the bodhisattva vehicle path to complete buddhahood. Nāgārjuna points out elsewhere in this treatise that the arhats given predictions of buddhahood (in the *Lotus Sutra*) were special cases, this most likely because they were bodhisattvas manifesting in the guise of arhats. Having noted this, bodhisattva practitioners not of that special class should indeed fear the prospect of falling away from Mahāyāna *bodhicitta* as being infinitely more hazardous than the prospect of falling into the hells.

028 – The Bodhisattva Should Fear Two-Vehicles Grounds Like the Gallows

Just as is said of one who loves long life
 That he is frightened at the prospect of being beheaded,
 So too the grounds of the Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas
 Should provoke in one this very sort of fear.

AV Bhikshu Vaśitva attributes this teaching to the Buddha himself and then introduces the following *śloka* as facilitating understanding of the means for developing the unproduced-dharmas patience.

029 – The Tetralemma-Transcending Contemplation of Dharmas

As for “not produced and not destroyed,”
 And “neither unproduced nor undestroyed,”
 One denies assertions of “both” and “neither.”
 So too in cases involving “emptiness” and “non-emptiness.”

AV The commentator provides a tour of all tetralemma propositions, showing how all of them are refutable and none of them reflect reality.

TN The “tetralemma” is simply the four basic logical propositions: “X”; “not-X”; “both X and not-X”; and “neither X nor not-X.” Even the most subtle logical formulations fall short in their attempts to describe ultimate reality, which is after all beyond the range of both mental conception and verbal description. Nāgārjuna states elsewhere (in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Upadeśa*) that ultimate reality is a great conflagration that cannot be touched by the “hands” of the tetralemma. Implicit in this is the recognition that ultimate truth is only approachable via the direct experience of the emptiness of all dharmas. This is in turn only possible through a non-conceptual awareness abandoning all mental discriminations developed through the combination of deep meditative stillness and wisdom-generating contemplation (*śamatha-vipaśyanā*).

030 – Unshakable Contemplation in the Unproduced-Dharmas Patience

No matter which “existent” dharma one encounters,
 One persists therein in the contemplation, remaining unmoving.
 That is the “unproduced-dharmas patience.”
 It is based on the severance of all mental discriminations.

AV The bodhisattva contemplates phenomena in accordance with reality, thus abandoning the view that any dharma possesses any intrinsic existence of its own. Dharmas, being mere aggregations of conditions, “exist” only in the manner of a bundled sheaf of reeds, a magical conjuration, or a mere dream. This realization, synonymous with the “unproduced-dharmas patience,” makes one’s reality-based contemplation of dharmas unshakably solid and allows one to abide on the “unmoving” bodhisattva ground (*acala bhūmi*).

031 – The Prediction and Irreversibility Come with Unproduced-Dharmas Patience

Once one gains this patience,
 One immediately receives the prediction:
 “You will definitely become a buddha.”
 It is then that one achieves “irreversibility.”

AV Immediately on gaining unproduced-dharmas patience, all buddhas appear and bestow a specific prediction of buddhahood. This constitutes “irreversibility.”

Next *śloka* is then introduced via this question: Why are the first seven stages of bodhisattvas, all certainly progressing toward *sambodhi*, not recognized as “irreversible”? Why is only this eighth-stage bodhisattva declared to be “irreversible”?

032 – Only This “Stage of Immovability” Guarantees Definite “Irreversibility”

Those bodhisattvas already dwelling at “the stage of immovability”
 Have gained irreversible wisdom cognizing all dharmas’ reality.
 As their wisdom cannot be turned back by Two-vehicles adherents,
 It is only at this point that they are designated as “irreversible.”

AV The wisdom referred to here in fact alludes to all of the five world-transcendent root faculties consisting of faith, [vigor, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom]. Although bodhisattvas beneath this stage can be caused to turn back and retreat from their aspiration to gain buddhahood, not so with these eighth-stage “definitely irreversible” bodhisattvas.

Regarding the “predictions of buddhahood” mentioned in the previous *śloka*, there are basically four kinds (which Bhikshu Vaśitva discusses):

- 1) Predictions bestowed prior to generating *bodhicitta*;
- 2) Predictions bestowed upon generating *bodhicitta*;
- 3) “Concealed” predictions; and
- 4) “Direct presence” predictions wherein the Buddhas bestow

the prediction of buddhahood in the direct presence of the recipient. This is the type bestowed on this eighth-stage bodhisattva when he gains unproduced-dharmas patience and abides on the “unmoving” eighth bodhisattva stage characterized by ultimate irreversibility.

There is in addition a fifth category of “secretly-intentioned and specially-spoken” predictions such as figure in the *Lotus Sutra*

wherein the Buddha apparently bestowed predictions on beings manifesting as arhats. The real meaning behind such predictions is known only to the Buddhas.

033 – No Negligence Can Be Indulged Prior to the “Direct Presence” Ground

Until the bodhisattva has gained
 The solid samādhis
 On the ground of all Buddhas’ “direct presence,”
 He should not allow any negligence to arise.

AV Until these samādhis are gained, the bodhisattva is still vulnerable to falling into the wretched destinies and is still vulnerable to being reborn in “the eight difficulties.”

As for “samādhi,” this refers to abiding in a uniformly even [and profoundly deep] mind state [achieved through the practice of meditation]. More specifically, this refers to three types of samādhis:

- 1) Those involving mental transformation of form-based objective conditions.
- 2) Those involving mental transformation of Dharma-related objective conditions.
- 3) Those involving no mental transformation of any objective conditions whatsoever.

The first is the meditative terrain accessible to the newly-resolved bodhisattva. The second is that achievable by those who have entered the bodhisattva practices. The third is the domain of the bodhisattva who has realized the unproduced-dharmas patience.

TN The ground of “direct presence” (*abhimukha-bhūmi*) is the sixth of the ten bodhisattva grounds. The “eight difficulties” refers to eight terribly unfortunate rebirth circumstances wherein one has little hope of being able to cultivate the Path. This refers to the following types of unfortunate rebirth:

- 1) In the hell realms.
- 2) In the hungry-ghost realms.
- 3) In the animal realms.
- 4) On the most blissful continent.
- 5) In the long-life heavens.
- 6) In the condition of being deaf, mute, or blind.
- 7) Possessing worldliness-obsessed eloquence and intelligence.
- 8) At a time either before or after a buddha’s Dharma reign.

034 – Samādhis Are a Bodhisattva's Father, Compassion and Patience Are Mother

The solid samādhis

On the ground of all Buddhas' "direct presence"

Serve for the bodhisattva as his father,

Whereas the great compassion and patiences serve as his mother.

AV Because these samādhis focus on the qualities of the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas, they are said to serve as the father of the bodhisattva.

Because the great compassion prevents weariness with cyclic existence and prevents falling over the precipice down to the motivation-level of individual-liberation paths, it is said to serve as the mother of the bodhisattva.

Because the patiences prevent disgust with cyclic existence and the evil beings therein, it too is said to serve as the mother of the bodhisattvas.

035 – Wisdom as Mother and Means as Father is Due to Giving Birth and Support

As for the perfection of wisdom being his mother

And skillful means being his father,

It is because the one gives him birth and the other supports him

That they are said to be the bodhisattva's father and mother.

AV This is an additional verse reflecting a different approach to explaining the spiritual parentage of the bodhisattva. The dharmas of the bodhisattva are born forth from the perfection of wisdom, hence its designation as the bodhisattva's mother. Skillful means sustain the bodhisattva on the Path, preventing him from falling down a treacherous precipice onto the grounds of the Hearer-disciples and the Pratyekabuddhas. Hence it may be said to be the bodhisattva's father.

036 – Only Merit Greater Than a Hundred Sumerus Would Be Adequate for Bodhi

With but a lesser accumulation of merit

One remains unable to realize bodhi.

Only by collecting merit more massive than a hundred Sumerus

Can one succeed in achieving that realization.

AV "Bodhi" refers to the realization of a level of wisdom corresponding in its extensiveness to omniscience. Such knowledge is as

infinitely vast as space itself and as such, it requires an accumulation of merit greater than the mass of a hundred Mt. Sumerus for its realization.

TN Bhikshu Vaśitva introduces the next *śloka* with a challenger's question insisting that, were this assertion actually true, given the incredible quantity of requisite merit, not even one single person would ever become capable of realizing bodhi. The methods for accumulating such a staggeringly great measure of merit are then explained in the *ślokas* which follow.

037 – Through Skillful Means, a Minor Deed Generates Great Merit

Although one may perform but a minor meritorious deed,
 Even in this, one possesses a skillful means:
 Taking the sphere of "all beings" as the object,
 One should generate a mental transformation of the conditions.

AV By using the skillful means of mentally dedicating the merit from even a minor good deed to the goal of bringing about the bodhi of all beings, the bodhisattva is able to make that small amount of merit infinite in scope. Thus, even though the enlightenment he wishes to achieve is so vast, he will still be enabled by this skillful means to generate the massive amount of merit required for realization of buddhahood.

038 – How Could One Measure the Merit of Such Universally-Dedicated Deeds?

Where one reflects: "May whatever actions I undertake
 Always be done for the welfare of beings,"
 Who could measure the merit of he
 Whose mental actions are of this sort?

AV Who aside from the Buddhas could be able to gauge the merit of anyone dedicating the merit from his own good deeds to the liberation of all beings, doing so through perfection of the great compassion and through the implementation of excellent skillful means? Bhikshu Vaśitva introduces the next *śloka* with a question: "How might this merit become even more incalculably vast?"

039 – When Free of Attachments, When Not Coveting Even the Heavens—

Where one isn't constrained by fondness for relatives, retinue,
 Body, life, or wealth,
 Where one isn't held back by desiring pleasure in Ísvara's heavens,
 Brahma-world heavens, or any other heavens,

040 – Not Coveting Nirvāṇa, Yet Caring for Others, Who Could Gauge Such Merit?

Where one isn't constrained even by coveting nirvāṇa,
 Where one's actions are done for the sake of other beings,
 And where in all this, one thinks only of the welfare of beings,
 Who then could measure the vastness of his merit?

AV The bodhisattva thinks, “How shall I be able to influence these beings, these child-like common people blinded by the cataracts of ignorance? How shall I be able to cause them to gain liberation from the prison of the three realms so that they become established in the constant bliss of nirvāṇa's city of fearlessness?”

When this bodhisattva carries out these endeavors bestowing benefit and happiness, acting with such kindness toward beings, who could measure the extent of his merit?

TN The “three realms” (proceeding from coarsest to most refined) are: the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm. They correspond to thirty-one planes of cyclic existence, as follows:

The “desire realm” is comprised of the five lowest levels of rebirth consisting of the hells, animals, ghost realms (*preta*), humans, the demi-gods or “titans” (*asura*); and the six coarsest levels of celestial rebirth known as “the six desire heavens.” (The lowest three desire-realm rebirth destinies consisting of hells, animals, and ghost realms comprise what are referred to as “the three wretched destinies” (*durgati*)).

The “form realm” is comprised of sixteen levels of intermediate celestial rebirth corresponding to the meditation states encountered in the four dhyānas.

The “formless realm” is comprised of the four most refined levels of celestial rebirth corresponding to the four formless meditation states.

041 – Rescuing and Protecting the Vulnerable, Who Could Measure Such Merit?

When for those of the world without refuge or protection,
He rescues and protects them from their bitter afflictions—
When he raises forth such thoughts and actions as these,
Who could possibly measure his merit?

AV The bodhisattva, instigated by the great compassion, reflects thus: “Beings have no one to rescue or protect them. They wander throughout the six rebirth destinies, plunging into the fires of the three types of suffering. Having no place of refuge, they chase about hither and thither. In all of their physical and mental sicknesses, they are constantly beset by bitter afflictions. I shall be a refuge for them, rescuing them from physical and mental sufferings.”

TN The “six rebirth destinies” cited by Bhikshu Vaśitva are: celestials, demigods (*asura*), humans, animals, ghosts (*preta*), hells (*niraya*).

The “three types of suffering” are:

- 1) The suffering of suffering (*duḥkha-duḥkhatā*).
- 2) The suffering inherent in conditioned existence, i.e. that associated with the karmic formative factors (*saṃskāra-duḥkhatā*).
- 3) The suffering wrought by change, i.e. through deterioration of states not recognized as subject to suffering (*pariṇāma-duḥkhatā*).

042 – So It Is in a Moment Aligned with Wisdom. If Longer, Who Could Gauge It?

It would be so even in according with the perfection of wisdom
For only the moment of tugging forth a stream of cow’s milk.
If one acted thus for a month or for many more months,
Who could possibly measure his merit?

AV This prajñāpāramitā is able to give birth to all buddhas and bodhisattvas and perfect all dharmas of buddhas and bodhisattvas. Hence the immense merit from even a moment’s alignment therewith. Where it continues on, who could possibly measure his accumulation of merit?

043 – Recitation and Teaching of Profound Sutras Creates Massive Merit

Where one recites to himself or teaches to others
Those profound sutras praised by the Buddhas—
Also, where one interprets and explains them for others—
These are the bases of an accumulation of merit.

AV “Profound sutras” are those teaching emptiness, transcendence of the world, and causality. The Dharma is synonymous with the body of the Tathāgata, hence where one recites, teaches, or explains these profound sutras out of a selfless motivation to keep the Tathāgata’s body from disappearing from the world, the merit generated thereby is so vast as to defy measurement.

044 – Through Inspiring Bodhi Resolve, Superior Merit and Eighth Stage Are Assured

Through influencing countless beings
 To generate the bodhi resolve,
 One’s treasury of merit increases yet more
 And one becomes bound to gain “the ground of immovability.”

AV This bodhisattva, using the four means of attraction, first draws in beings and then, when they are ready, teaches them in a manner inspiring them to seek the highest enlightenment.

It is in the nature of this bodhisattva’s ability to cause others to resolve on enlightenment that it inevitably creates for him an inexhaustible reserve of merit, inevitably causes his own unshakable resolve to be renewed in life after life, and inevitably causes him to eventually reach “the ground of immovability,” [the eighth of the ten bodhisattva grounds].

045 – Turning the Dharma Wheel and Stilling Heterodoxies Makes a Merit Treasury

Where one follows in turning what the Buddha turned,
 The wheel of the supreme Dharma,
 Thus clearing away all of the “noxious thorns,”
 This creates the bodhisattva’s treasury of merit.

AV One follows the example of the Buddha in turning the wheel of Dharma, particularly in three ways directly related to profound sutras teaching emptiness:

- 1) One preserves these sutras, preventing their disappearance.
- 2) One provides analytic explanations of these teachings for those with the capacity to fathom and retain their import.
- 3) One cultivates the Path in accordance with their Dharma.

Outside of the Dharma communities, “noxious thorns” is a reference to the erroneous views held by non-Buddhists and to the actions of demons and denizens of the desire realm’s sovereign independence heavens.

Within the Dharma communities, “noxious thorns” refers to unorthodox members of the four-fold assembly promoting non-Dharma as Dharma, promoting wrong behavior as consistent with the moral codes, and promoting teachings not taught by the Guru to have been taught by the Guru. Through means consistent with Dharma (as through debate and insistence on adherence to the moral codes), such individuals should be vanquished so that their arrogance is shattered, their views are demolished, and right Dharma is allowed to flourish.

These actions all serve as means for the bodhisattva to establish a treasury of merit.

046 – Where One Is Willing to Suffer the Hells for Beings, Bodhi Is at Hand

Where, to benefit beings and make them happy,
One would endure even the sufferings of the great hells,
How much the more the other lesser sufferings,
It is as if bodhi lay in the palm of one's own right hand.

AV This refers to the bodhisattva who dons the armor [of patience], works to bring benefit and happiness to beings, generates intensely diligent resolve, and is willing to suffer for eons in the great *avīci* hells to liberate beings. One should realize that, for a bodhisattva of this sort, it is as if bodhi already lay in the palm of his hand.

047 – Where Actions Are Selfless, Altruistic, and Compassionate, Bodhi Is at Hand

Where whatever one does, it is not for one's self,
But solely to benefit beings and make them happy—
Because this all arises from the great compassion,
It is as if bodhi lay in the palm of one's own right hand.

AV The bodhisattva's actions all arise from compassion, are selflessly motivated, and are intended to bring benefit, happiness, and nirvāṇa to beings. For such compassionate beings, it is as if bodhi has already arrived in the palm of the hand.

048 – Where Wisdom, Vigor, and Giving Are Transcendent, Bodhi Is at Hand

Where wisdom is such that one abandons frivolous discourse,
Where vigor is such that one abandons indolence,
And where giving is such that one abandons miserliness,
It is as if bodhi lay in the palm of one's own right hand.

AV These perfections are described here in reference to those possessing the wisdom associated with that patience in which no phenomenon's intrinsic existence is deemed apprehensible.

Such wisdom realizes the singular character of the Path, such vigor refuses to set aside the yoke [of the bodhisattva practices], and such giving has gotten rid of all covetousness.

TN This *śloka* and the next collectively describe all six perfections as they occur in fully-developed bodhisattva practice.

049 – Where Meditation, Moral Virtue, and Patience Are Perfected, Bodhi Is at Hand

Where meditation is such that one is free of reliances or ideation,
Where morality is such that its practice is perfect and unmixed,
And where patience is such that one realizes non-production,
It is as if bodhi lay in the palm of one's own right hand.

AV This bodhisattva's meditation doesn't rely on anything in the three realms, is quiescently still, and is devoid of any contemplative ideation. His observance of *śīla* is perfect, free of defilements, dedicated to bodhi and invulnerable to deterioration. He has so well perfected *prajñāpāramitā* that he abides in the unproduced-dharmas patience even in the midst of dharmas produced through the conjunction of conditions.

Due to the supremacy of the foundations, such bodhisattvas become non-retreating in their practice.

The above discussion describes the seasoned bodhisattva. But the question now arises: How should the beginning bodhisattva proceed in accumulating the merit essential for bodhi?

050 – One Confesses All Bad Deeds in the Presence of All Buddhas

In the abodes of all who have gained the right enlightenment,
Now abiding throughout the ten directions,
I appear there in the presence of them all,
And completely lay forth all my unwholesome deeds.

AV One reflects: "I go before all buddhas everywhere and confess all of my past and present-life karmic transgressions, including all those done by others at my behest, including all those not done by me but nonetheless joyfully approved of by me, including all those arising through desire, hatefulness, or delusion, and including all

those committed through body, mouth, or mind. I confess them all, conceal none, and vow to cease them forever.”

051 – One Entreats the Buddhas to Turn the Dharma Wheel

Where there are buddhas who have realized bodhi
 In those realms throughout the ten directions,
 But they have not yet proclaimed the Dharma,
 I entreat them to turn the Dharma wheel.

AV This is done out of pity for beings in the world, is done for the sake of the members of the Great Assembly, and is done with the wish that benefit and happiness will be bestowed on both gods and men.

052 – One Beseches the Buddhas to Remain in the World

Wherever there are those possessing the right enlightenment
 Abiding in the present era in the ten directions' realms,
 But now on the verge of relinquishing their lives and actions,
 I bow down my head in reverence, beseeching them to remain.

AV One reflects: “Wherever there are buddhas anywhere in the ten directions who have already gained the right enlightenment, turned the Dharma wheel, established right Dharma, instructed beings, and liberated beings—when they are on the verge of relinquishing their lives and their Dharma activities in favor of the final nirvāṇa, I shall go there and bow down my head in reverence, beseeching them to remain for a long time, benefiting and bringing happiness to the multitudes.”

053 – All Merit Created by Beings Through Giving on Through to Meditation—

Wherever there may be any beings
 Who, by acts of body, mouth, or mind,
 Have created any merit through giving, moral virtue,
 And so forth, including through cultivation of meditation—

054 – Whether Created by Āryas or Common People, I Rejoice in It All

No matter whether they be āryas or common persons—
 And no matter whether its creation is past, present, or future—
 I am moved to rejoice
 In all of that accumulated merit.

AV One reflects: “I rejoice in all merit created by any being in the past, present, or future, no matter whether via body, mouth, or mind, and no matter whether that being be an ārya or a common person.” Only such entirely comprehensive rejoicing should be regarded as [genuine] rejoicing.

IN Two topics deserve attention here:

1) It is clear from the wording and syntax of the *śloka* phrases I translate as “...through giving, moral virtue, / And so forth, including through cultivation of meditation—” that Nāgārjuna is referring to the “three bases of meritorious activity” (*punya-kriyā-vastu*) encountered in both the Theravada and Mahāyāna canons. Specifically, they are giving, moral virtue, and meditation (*dāna, śīla, bhāvanā*).

2) The important Mahāyāna concept I translate here as “rejoicing in the creation of merit” (*punya-anumodana*) may seem opaque until one digests all implications of the idea. First, one’s deep appreciation and rejoicing extends to include all forms of goodness which ever have been or ever will be done, from the least significant to the most sublime, and from that done by the lowest creatures on up to that done by the Mahāsattvas and the Buddhas.

Finally, this “accordant rejoicing” has the additional secondary implication that not only does one feel so deeply appreciative of others’ meritorious actions that one feels complete approval and delight in it, but one also feels inspired to follow along in doing such good deeds oneself.

055 – I Dedicate All Merit to All Beings That They Might Realize Bodhi

If all of the merit I have created
 Could be formed into a single ball,
 I would bestow it on all beings through dedicating it
 To causing them to gain the right enlightenment.

AV I dedicate all merit to bodhi with the intention of causing all beings to realize the highest enlightenment, including in this dedication all merit ever created by me across the course of cyclic existence in my interactions with the Three Jewels and with other persons, including even all merit created from generosity to animals, from taking the Three Refuges, from repentance of transgressions, from requesting the Buddhas to turn the Dharma wheel, from

beseeking the Buddhas to remain in the world, and from rejoicing in the merit created by others.

056 – To Repent, Entreat, Beseech, Rejoice, and Dedicate Accords with Buddhas' Acts

As for these actions I undertake in repenting transgressions,
In entreating and beseeking, in rejoicing in others' merit,
And so on, including in dedicating all merit to realizing bodhi—
One should realize they accord with all buddhas' own practices.

AV Repentance of transgressions, entreating buddhas to turn the Dharma wheel, beseeking buddhas to stay in the world, rejoicing in others' good deeds, and dedicating one's merit to the goal that oneself and all beings will realize the highest enlightenment—these actions are precisely those undertaken by all buddhas of the past, present, and future while still on the Bodhisattva Path. Consequently one now takes up these very same practices as well.

057 – To Repent, Entreat, Beseech, Rejoice, and Dedicate Accords with Their Teachings

These acts of confession and repentance of my bad karmic deeds,
Of entreating the Buddhas, of rejoicing in others' merit,
And so on, including dedicating all merit to realizing bodhi—
These all accord with teachings set forth by the Victorious One.

AV Because all of these acts conform to the practices coursed in by all of the Buddhas themselves and because they accord with the teachings as presented by the Buddha himself, one now adopts just such practices oneself.

058 – Thrice Daily, Thrice Nightly, Kneeling with Shoulder Bared, Palms Together

Kneeling down with the right knee touching the ground
And the upper robe arranged to bare one shoulder,
Three times each day and three times each night,
Press the palms together and proceed in this manner.

AV With clean body and robes and freshly-washed hands and feet, arrange the robe neatly with the right shoulder bared. Kneel with the right knee touching the ground and palms pressed together. Abandon discursive thought and focus the mind.

Then, having done this before a buddha stupa, buddha image, or visualized image of the Buddha, proceed to perform the above-

described acts [of repentance and so forth]. One engages in this practice three times each day and three times each night.

TN Even though Ārya Nāgārjuna's instructions happen to specifically reference a monastic's robes in the performance of this practice, there would be no reason to infer that it is not equally recommended as an essential practice for the laity as well. The details regarding arrangement of robes are only intended to indicate the need to maintain an attitude of deep sincerity, reverence, and focus as one carries out this daily practice.

059 – Merit From But a Single Instance of This Would Be Incalculably Immense

The merit created in even a single instance of doing this,
If manifest in material form, would be so immense
That even a Ganges' sands of great chiliocosms
Would still be unable to contain it.

AV The Buddha described the accumulation of merit from this sort of practice in these terms. Thus, although one might be only a beginning bodhisattva, due to the power inherent in such an act of merit dedication, one still creates a huge measure of merit. Consequently, because one draws upon such an accumulation of merit, one gradually becomes able with the assistance of such practices to achieve the realization of bodhi.

060 – Revere and Cherish Minor Bodhisattvas As One Respects Guru and Parents

Having brought forth the initial resolve,
In relations with minor bodhisattvas,
One should bring forth for them veneration and cherishing
Comparable to that felt for the Guru and parents.

AV Having thus taken those other initial-resolve bodhisattvas as the first object of concern, these beginning bodhisattvas should then also raise forth just such thoughts of ultimate veneration and cherishing respectfulness toward all other bodhisattvas as well

Were one to act in a manner varying from this, one's very own person could become destined for destruction along with all of one's previously-established roots of goodness. This is just as stated in the scriptures by the Bhagavān himself when he stated, "I see no other single dharma so effective in obstructing a bodhisattva and

completely destroying all of his roots of goodness as the act of generating hateful thoughts toward other bodhisattvas.”

TN Nāgārjuna's rationale for focusing on beginning bodhisattvas as the primary object of concern in this *śloka* probably has to do with the fact that it would be easiest for another novice bodhisattva's critical eye to find fault with them, thus most easily stumbling thereby into an unwitting, but nonetheless “fatal” karmic mistake.

061 – Don't Discuss a Bodhisattva's Faults; Utter Only Truth-Based Praise

Although a bodhisattva may have committed transgressions,
 One should still not speak about them,
 How much the less so where there is no truth to the matter.
 One should utter praises only where they are grounded in truth.

AV If one becomes involved in creating a bad reputation for a Mahāyāna practitioner by revealing his karmic transgressions to others, one thereby destroys one's own accumulated good karma and makes it personally impossible to develop the practice of pure dharmas. The care one must adopt in such matters is comparable to that observed in avoiding even mentioning the crimes of a king.

A story from the Sūtras describes a monk erring in this regard as having suffered the karmic retribution of seventy kalpas in the hells followed by sixty thousand lifetimes of poverty, blindness, muteness, and horrible physical appearance.

Therefore, to protect one's own roots of karmic goodness, one's own karmic future, and the ability of others to develop faith in the Mahāyāna, one must refrain from spreading rumors about those who have taken up the Bodhisattva Path. Then again, one should only proclaim the good qualities of such individuals where one knows such statements are true.

062 – To Prevent Retreat from Bodhi, Show the Way, Promote Vigor, Inspire Delight

Where someone has vowed to become a buddha
 And one wishes to prevent his retreat from that resolve,
 Reveal the way with such clarity he brims with intense vigor,
 And cause him to be filled with delight.

AV Where someone who has already vowed to become a buddha is tempted to adopt *śrāvaka*-disciple practices and pursue rapid

realization of that path's nirvāṇa, use many and varied analogies to make the qualities of buddhahood manifestly clear to him. Through skillful descriptions, cause him to be fired with vigor. To promote swift success, describe the qualities attending the right enlightenment, including the spiritual powers, this to inspire delight in practice. These are appropriate means for preventing retreat from bodhisattva resolve.

063 – Don't Claim Buddhas Didn't Utter the Profound Sutras; Retribution is Severe

Where one hasn't yet understood extremely profound scriptures,
 One must not claim they were not spoken by a buddha.
 If one makes statements of this sort,
 One suffers the most bitter and horrible of karmic retributions.

AV "Extremely profound scriptures," refers to teachings on emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness, teachings refuting extreme views such as annihilationism and eternalism, teachings demolishing the inherent existence of self, others, beings, or a life, and teachings revealing a buddha's powers and qualities.

If, based on one's own delusions, one slanders scriptures spoken by buddhas, the karmic retribution is bound to be horrible.

064 – Not Even the "Non-intermittent Offenses" Can Compare to These Two Offenses

If the karmic offenses generating "non-intermittent" retributions
 Were all put together to form a single ball
 And were compared to one formed from the above two offenses,
 They would not amount to even the smallest fraction thereof.

AV In the *Irreversible Wheel Sutra*, the Buddha compares these types of karmic offenses (per the following paraphrase):

Suppose one took all of the bad karma associated with all karmic transgressions generating the "non-intermittent" (*avīci* hell) retributions and formed them together into a single ball. Then suppose one compared the size of that ball with one formed to represent the mass of bad karma arising from just two karmic offenses:

- 1) Claiming the profound sutras weren't spoken by buddhas.
- 2) Causing someone already resolved on gaining buddhahood to retreat from that resolve.

Having made that comparison, we would find that the former would not equal even a tiny fraction of the latter.

Due to the especially potent negative character of these karmic offenses and due to the necessity to guard one's own person and one's roots of karmic goodness, one must not commit either of these two types of karmic offenses.

TN Two topics require clarification here: a) "non-intermittent retribution"; and b) reconciliation of the "two offenses" specifically noted by Nāgārjuna in his own *śloka* text with the two offenses described in Bhikshu Vaśitva's sutra citation.

The "five non-intermittent retributions" associated with the most extremely grave karmic offenses are:

- 1) No intervening rebirths prior to direct descent into the hells.
- 2) Non-intermittent continuity of hell punishments.
- 3) Non-intermittency of that period of time wherein punishments are undergone.
- 4) Non-intermittency of lifespan during karmic punishments (i.e. no temporary "escapes" via death).
- 5) Non-intermittency of the space occupied by one's body as it undergoes karmic punishments. (i.e., whatever the size of the particular hell, one's body is of commensurate size, undergoing excruciating tortures on every square inch of its entire expanse.

On the matter of reconciling the "two offenses" specifically noted by Nāgārjuna in his own *śloka* text with the two offenses described in Bhikshu Vaśitva's sutra citation, first note that Nāgārjuna refers directly to:

a) "Although a bodhisattva may have committed transgressions, one should still not speak about them, how much the less so where there is no truth to the matter."

b) "Where one hasn't yet understood extremely profound scriptures, one must not claim they were not spoken by a buddha."

Bhikshu Vaśitva on the other hand seems to agree completely on the second ("claiming profound sutras weren't spoken by buddhas"), while seeming to vary somewhat on the first, implying via the sutra citation that this refers to "Causing someone already resolved on bodhi to retreat from that resolve."

A closer look at Nāgārjuna's treatise text reveals that any apparent difference here is insubstantial and that the two discussions may be reconciled as follows:

"Causing someone already resolved on bodhi to retreat from that resolve" is more-or-less "implicit" in each of Nāgārjuna's

immediately preceding four *ślokas*, this because, were we to fail at the concerns in any of the four *ślokas*, it could very likely cause someone formerly resolved on buddhahood to abandon the entire endeavor. The logic is as follows:

1) Where one fails to be kind and respectful toward a newly-resolved bodhisattva, we may discourage him, thus causing him to retreat from his resolve (*śloka* 60).

2) Where one either broadcasts the karmic errors or falsely claims the virtues of followers of the Bodhisattva Path, this may cause one formerly resolved on buddhahood to retreat from his resolve (*śloka* 61).

3) Where we fail to assist discouraged practitioners with inspiring teachings about the nature of the Bodhisattva Path and the unique qualities of buddhas, this may cause one formerly resolved on buddhahood to retreat from his resolve (*śloka* 62).

4) Where we claim profound sutras describing the Bodhisattva Path weren't spoken by buddhas, this too may cause one formerly resolved on buddhahood to retreat from his resolve (*śloka* 63).

Although one easily appreciates the validity of Bhikshu Vaśitva's interpretation and the inherent identity of the principles discussed in both texts, I suspect Ārya Nāgārjuna deliberately stressed the two offenses so clearly articulated in his own treatise text and that these two were the ones he intended to reference in *śloka* 63.

065 – One Should Cultivate the Three Gates to Liberation

One should skillfully cultivate

The three gates to liberation:

The first is emptiness, the next is signlessness,

And the third is wishlessness.

AV Because the bodhisattva practices the perfection of wisdom, he should cultivate these three gates to liberation. One employs “emptiness” to refute views, employs “signlessness” to eliminate any tendency to seize on mental discriminations or manipulations., and employs “wishlessness” to transcend all three realms of existence.

IN “The three gates to liberation,” also known as “the three samādhis,” are discussed at great length by Ārya Nāgārjuna in his *Mahāprajñāparamitā Upadeśa*. For a complete translation, see the appropriate chapter in my forthcoming *Nāgārjuna on Emptiness*.