

**PART TWO:**

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

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

**With Explanatory Notes by the Translator**



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066 – Dharmas Are “Empty” of Inherent Existence, Hence Signless, Hence Wishless

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Because they have no self-existent nature, phenomena are empty. If already empty, how could one establish any characteristic signs? Since all characteristic signs are themselves in a state of cessation, What could there be in them that the wise might wish for?

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**AV** Because dharmas are produced from a mere conjunction of conditions, they have no inherent nature of their own and hence are described as “empty” of inherent existence.

Because dharmas are empty of inherent existence, the mind refrains from imputing any particular qualities to them. Hence we speak of their being “signless.”

In the absence of any intrinsic qualities, there is no basis for the mind’s finding in dharmas anything worthy of generating aspirations about them. Hence we speak of their being “wishless.”

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**TN** The stock translation “wishlessness” (*apraṇihita*) may seem mildly confusing at first glance. It simply means that, once one realizes the true character of any and all phenomena, i.e. that they are devoid of any genuine intrinsic nature of their own, one realizes that they are devoid of any genuine means through which to provoke the mind into aspirations on their behalf. In short, “emptiness” and “signlessness” provoke the question to which one immediately realizes there is no sensible answer: “If there’s no *there* to be found there, why would you want to go there?”

Understanding of emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness may be facilitated by contemplating dharmas from several standpoints: a) as mere temporary conjunctions of subsidiary conditions (per Bhikshu Vaśitva); b) as involving only “names” with no genuinely-existent substrates; and c) as merely micro-momentary products of a process of serial chronological production, this last standpoint being best aided through meditation on “the twelve links of conditioned co-production” (*pratītya-samutpāda*).

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067 – As These Tend Toward Nirvāṇa, Focus on the Causes Leading to Buddhahood

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When cultivating the mindful awareness of these,  
One draws close to those paths leading into nirvāṇa.  
Do not bear in mind anything not resulting in a buddha’s body  
And, in that matter, one must not allow any negligence.

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**AV** When one cultivates these three gates to liberation, because one's level of realization leads one close to entering nirvāṇa, one must exert control through artful use of skillful means to avoid it.

**TN** The point in this *śloka* is that, in cultivating the three gates to liberation, if one fails to remain focused on the Mahāyāna quest for the utmost, right, and perfect enlightenment of a buddha, one will proceed on through these three gates right into the nirvāṇa realized by the arhat or pratyekabuddha with the tragic result that one forever loses the Bodhisattva Path.

One can only become a buddha through completing the cultivation of the bodhisattva's six perfections and myriad practices. It is because there is absolutely no room for deviation in aiming one's determination accordingly that Nāgārjuna finishes the *śloka* with two imperative warnings, lest we lose the Bodhisattva Path:

- 1) "Do not bear in mind anything not resulting in a buddha's body."
- 2) "And, in that matter, one must not allow any negligence."

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**o68 – Resolve to Abstain from Nirvāṇa; Rather Ripen the Perfection of Wisdom**

"In this matter of nirvāṇa,  
I must not immediately invoke its realization."  
One should initiate this sort of resolve,  
For one must succeed in ripening the perfection of wisdom.

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**AV** One generates just this sort of thought: "I shall bring about the benefit and liberation of all beings. Although I shall cultivate the three gates to liberation, it shall be with the exclusive aim of ripening my practice of the perfection of wisdom. Hence I must refrain from opting for the ultimate realization of emptiness, signlessness, wishlessness, and nirvāṇa."

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**o69 – The Great Bodhisattva Is Like the Skillful Archer Keeping His Arrows Aloft**

Just as an archer might shoot his arrows upwards,  
Causing each in succession to strike the one before,  
Each holding up the other so none are allowed to fall—  
Just so it is with the great bodhisattva.

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**AV** This is analogous to a hypothetical instance wherein a well-trained archer might release his arrows into the sky in succession,

continuously releasing them so that each succeeding arrow supports the one before and none are allowed to fall.

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**070 – Even in Realizing Emptiness, the Mind's Arrows Never Fall to Nirvāṇa's Ground**

Into the emptiness of the gates to liberation,  
He skillfully releases the arrows of the mind.  
Through artful skillful means, arrows are continuously held aloft,  
So none are allowed to fall back down into nirvāṇa.

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**AV** The bodhisattva, like a great archer, releases arrows of mind into the emptiness of the three gates, also using skillful means arrows of compassion. He continues to release them into the emptiness of the three realms, causing them to remain suspended and hence unable to fall down into the city of nirvāṇa.

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**071 – One Makes the Altruistic Vow and Thenceforth Accords Therewith**

“I shall not forsake beings,  
But rather shall continue on for the sake of benefiting beings.”  
One first initiates this very sort of intention,  
And thenceforth ensures that his practice corresponds thereto.

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**AV** The bodhisattva reflects: “Through ripening my cultivation of the three gates to liberation, I could seize nirvāṇa as if it already lay in my hand. However, because common people are as helpless as nursing infants, they cannot make their own way to the city of nirvāṇa. Hence it is not right that I abandon them and enter nirvāṇa alone. Therefore, I'll avail myself of vigor and remain to benefit beings whilst also facilitating their future nirvāṇa.”

First, one makes this resolve. Then, one ensures that one's subsequent actions accord with it. Were one to fail in this, practice of the three gates to liberation would instead lead to the solitary nirvāṇa of *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddhas*, this because such practice would not be guided by skillful means.

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**072 – Beings Abide in Attachment, Cherishing Inverted Views Caused by Delusion**

There are beings who have become inured to attachment  
Throughout time's long night and in present actions as well.  
Their coursing in inverted views regarding characteristic signs  
Is in every case due to confusion wrought by delusion.

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**AV** Throughout cyclic existence, beings are attached through delusion to the four inverted views, imagining permanence, bliss, purity, and self where none of those can be found. Among the aggregates, sense realms, and sense bases, falsely reckon the existence of a self, appurtenances of a self, and supposedly apprehensible dharmas. Having carried on this way throughout time's long night, they continue on even now.

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**073 – Speak Dharma to Eliminate Attachments to Marks and Inverted Views**

For those attached to marks and holding inverted views,  
 One explains the Dharma so such errors might be eliminated.  
 One first generates this very sort of resolve,  
 And thenceforth ensures that his practice corresponds thereto.

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**AV** Due to delusion, beings impute existence of self and appurtenances of self, generate erroneous discriminations, seize upon their aspects, and develop the four inverted views.

One resolves: "I shall explain Dharma so they may eliminate such errors." One then proceeds accordingly, even while coursing in the three gates to liberation. Were one to stray from this approach while cultivating the three gates to liberation, one would become bound for direct entry into nirvāṇa.

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**074 – Bodhisattvas Help Beings, yet Perceive No Beings, and in This Are Inconceivable**

The bodhisattva benefits beings  
 And yet does not perceive the existence of any being.  
 This in itself is the most difficult of all endeavors  
 And is such a rarity as to be inconceivable.

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**AV** The bodhisattva's conceiving the idea of a "being" is in itself the most difficult and inconceivable endeavor, like painting in empty space. At the level of ultimate truth, "beings" don't even exist. The bodhisattva doesn't perceive beings as genuinely existent entities, yet he nonetheless proceeds with vigor in his attempts to bestow the ultimate benefit and happiness on beings. With the sole exception of the great compassion, where could there be any other endeavor so difficult as this?

075 – Though Realizing Definite Stage and Gates to Liberation, One Avoids Nirvāṇa

Although one may have entered “the right and definite position,”  
 And one’s practice may accord with the gates to liberation,  
 Because one has not yet fulfilled one’s original vows,  
 One refrains from proceeding to the realization of nirvāṇa.

**AV** We should reflect upon the situation of a bodhisattva who has reached “the right and definite position.” This right and definite position is reached through reliance on thirty-two dharmas. One might well wonder whether, having already reached that stage, whether a bodhisattva coursing in the gates to liberation might not just go ahead and opt for the individual-liberation nirvāṇa rather than fulfil his original vows and proceed on to buddhahood. The Buddha declared in the sutras that this was impossible.

**TN** As for “the right and definite position” (*samyaktva-niyāma*), for the bodhisattva, this is typically held to coincide with the eighth bodhisattva ground, “the ground of unshakability” (*acala bhūmi*) wherein the bodhisattva has reached the stage of definite irreversibility in his path to buddhahood.

For a *śrāvaka* or pratyekabuddha, this “right and definite position” coincides with the Path of Seeing wherein the emptiness of all phenomena is perceived directly. From the standpoint of this treatise, once this position is reached, a *śrāvaka* practitioner is definitely bound for final nirvāṇa as an arhat and will definitely not be able to switch over to the Bodhisattva Path.

The rationale for Ārya Nāgārjuna’s strong and repeated emphasis in this treatise on avoiding the nirvāṇa of the Śrāvaka Vehicle arhat is that, were the bodhisattva to allow himself to enter it through failing to maintain the skillful means and altruistic vow which would ordinarily prevent him from doing so, this would bring about an irreversible fall from the Bodhisattva Path from which someone aspiring to buddhahood cannot ever under any circumstances recover.

Even in spite of the teachings offered in the *Lotus Sutra* (which Nāgārjuna will discuss later), that is the position of this treatise. This entire issue is dealt with at much greater length in the ensuing *ślokas* of this treatise wherein Nāgārjuna offers the view that the *Lotus Sutra* circumstance was a special one specific to certain individuals which cannot be generalized to the general population

of Buddhist practitioners who might otherwise feel that, even after arhatship, buddhahood might somehow be possible.

Now, even though Bhikshu Vaśitva cites a passage from the Sutras wherein the Buddha states that it is impossible that a bodhisattva who has already reached the right and definite position might stop short of complete buddhahood, opting instead for a solitary-liberation nirvāṇa, we should realize that this inability to stop short of buddhahood only becomes true once the “right and definite position” is reached. Up until that event has occurred coincident with the eighth bodhisattva ground, the bodhisattva is still vulnerable to being turned back to the individual-liberation nirvāṇa.

The “thirty-two dharmas of a bodhisattva” as set forth by Ārya Nāgārjuna's *Daśabhūmika Vibhāṣā* (T26.1521.93c-4a) are as follows:

- 1) With a profound mind, he seeks every form of happiness for all beings;
- 2) He is able to enter into the wisdom of the Buddhas;
- 3) Through his own investigations, he knows whether or not he is capable of becoming a buddha;
- 4) He does not course in detestation of others;
- 5) His mind intent on pursuing the Path is solid;
- 6) He does not resort to and rely on the feigning of close affections;
- 7) He constantly serves as a close friend to beings even up to the point of entering nirvāṇa;
- 8) Whether personally close or at a distance, his mind remains the same;
- 9) He does not retreat from good endeavors he has assented to;
- 10) He does not cut off his kindness for all beings;
- 11) He does not cut off his compassion for all beings;
- 12) In his constant pursuit of right Dharma, his mind remains unwearied and does not shrink away from it;
- 13) He is diligent and never sated in his generation of the mind of vigor;
- 14) He is possessed of extensive learning and is comprehending of concepts;
- 15) He is constantly aware of his own faults;
- 16) He does not deride others for their shortcomings;
- 17) In all matters he observes or hears, he remains constant in his cultivation of the bodhi mind;



- 18) In giving, he seeks no reward;
- 19) His observance of the moral-virtue precepts is not done with a motivation to achieve rebirth in any particular place at all (i.e. he does not do so for the sake of celestial rebirth);
- 20) He exercises patience toward all beings, remaining free of hatefulness or obstructiveness;
- 21) He is able to diligently and vigorously cultivate the practice of all roots of goodness;
- 22) He does not allow himself to take a [celestial] rebirth corresponding to the formless samādhis;
- 23) His wisdom is inclusive of skillful means;
- 24) His skillful means are inclusive of the four means of attraction (giving; pleasing words; beneficial actions; joint endeavors);
- 25) He does not have two different capacities for kindness and sympathy for those who observe moral precepts and those who break moral precepts;
- 26) He is single-minded in his listening to Dharma;
- 27) He is single-minded when dwelling in an *araṇya* (a secluded meditation retreat);
- 28) He does not find pleasure in any of the many different and varying sorts of worldly circumstances;
- 29) He does not covet or retain any attachment for the Small Vehicle;
- 30) He perceives that the benefit brought about by the Great Vehicle is in fact great;
- 31) He departs far from bad [spiritual] friends (i.e. bad gurus);
- 32) He draws close to good [spiritual] friends (i.e. good gurus).

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**076 – Prior to Definite Stage, As One Fulfills Vows, Skillful Means Restrain Nirvāṇa**

Where one has not yet reached “the definite position,”  
 One holds himself back through the power of skillful means.  
 Because one has not yet fulfilled his original vows,  
 In this case too, he refrains from realization of nirvāṇa.

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**AV** Prior to entering the right and definite position, the initial-resolve bodhisattva continues to hold himself back through skillful means as he cultivates the three gates to liberation and proceeds with fulfillment of his original vows. Hence he too refrains from realization of nirvāṇa.

**077 – One Rejects Yet Faces Cyclic Existence, Has Faith in but Abstains From Nirvāṇa**

Though one abides in the ultimate renunciation for cyclic existence,  
He nonetheless confronts cyclic existence directly.  
Though one maintains faith and happiness in nirvāṇa,  
He nonetheless turns his back on realization of nirvāṇa.

**AV** Through the three types of blazing vigor, one develops renunciation for cyclic existence, yet restrains the tendency to avoid cyclic existence by contemplating beings as one's own children.

One develops faith and happiness in nirvāṇa, seeing it as a home offering shelter, yet turns away from entering nirvāṇa in order to perfect the wisdom of all-knowledge.

Renunciation for cyclic existence enables faith and happiness in relation to nirvāṇa. Failure to confront cyclic existence directly and failure to turn away from nirvāṇa make one bound to enter nirvāṇa when cultivating the gates to liberation.

**TN** "Three types of blazing vigor" is probably intended as reference to vigor exercised in physical, verbal, and mental karma.

**078 – Dread But Don't End Afflictions; Block Them to Gather Good Karma**

One should dread the afflictions,  
But should not end the afflictions.  
To gather the manifold forms of goodness, one should  
Use blocking methods to fend off afflictions.

**AV** Because they cause cyclic existence, one should dread the negative effect of afflictions while still not ending them entirely, for if one cuts them off, one can't accumulate the provisions for bodhi. Hence the use of blocking methods. By continuing on in cyclic existence, accumulating the roots of goodness, one is able to fulfill one's original vows and eventually reach buddhahood.

**TN** Although one doesn't entirely end the afflictions, one must still remain vigilant in consistent use of affliction-neutralizing techniques. Failure on this point leads to a massive accumulation of bad karma instead of the accumulation of roots of goodness essential to bodhi.

**079 – A Bodhisattva Is Better Served by Afflictions than by Nirvāṇa**

For the bodhisattva, afflictions accord with his nature.  
 He is not one who takes nirvāṇa as his very nature.  
 It is not the case that the burning up of the afflictions  
 Allows one to generate the seed of bodhi.

**AV** Nirvāṇa functions as the very nature of the Śrāvaka-Vehicle ārya, for it is by pursuing it that they gain the fruits of that path.

The Buddhas don't take nirvāṇa as their nature, but rather use afflictions in the path to buddhahood, this because the mind resolved on bodhi only arises in the presence of the afflictions.

Two-Vehicles practitioners burn the seed of the bodhi mind and instead establish their resolve independent of the ability to course further in cyclic existence. Because afflictions serve realization of buddhahood, they are integral to it. It is to gain a buddha's body that bodhisattvas refrain from completely abandoning afflictions.

**Question:** If ending afflictions absolutely prevents buddhahood, why were arhats given predictions in the *Lotus Sutra*?

**Response:** (See next *śloka*.)

**080 – Predictions Such as in the Lotus Sutra Were Situation-Specific Expedients**

As for the predictions bestowed on those other beings,  
 These predictions involved specific causal circumstances.  
 They were solely a function of the Buddha's artfulness  
 In taking the perfection of skillful means "to the far shore."

**AV** The causal bases for those (*Lotus Sutra*) predictions, including which beings were being assisted, are known only by the Buddha because:

- 1) They represent the most extreme expression of the Buddha's training methods.
- 2) They involve circumstances not shared by any other beings.
- 3) They involve beings who have eliminated the essential bases for generating the resolve to become a buddha, this by virtue of having already achieved irreversibility in the arhat path.

This circumstance is described in the Suttas as summed up in the following *śloka*.

**TN** This *śloka* is referring to the predictions of eventual buddhahood bestowed on arhats in the *Lotus Sutra*. The reason for mentioning

these in this treatise is because, with the exception of such special cases, it is generally held that, once a practitioner on the individual-liberation arhat-vehicle path reaches that vehicle's "right and definite position," (*samyaktva niyāma*), he thereby passes beyond any further ability to turn away from arhatship and proceed toward buddhahood on the Bodhisattva Path. Absent this explanation, one might think that no difficulties are posed for the realization of buddhahood by coursing in the mind-states of the Śrāvaka-vehicle and Pratyekabuddha-vehicle paths.

The reader may find it useful at this point to refer back to Bhikshu Vaśitva's commentary on *śloka* number thirty-two where the issue of predictions is considered in some detail. It includes comments on just this very sort of prediction, which is one of five types. Of the five types, this one is referred to as a "secretly-intentioned and specially-spoken prediction."

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**o81 – Analogies for Incompatibility of Two-Vehicles Irreversibility and Buddhahood**

Similes for their plight reference "empty space," "lotus flowers," "Precipitous cliffs," and "a deep abyss."

Their realms bar it. Analogies cite "non-virility" and "*kācamaṇi*,"  
With an additional comparison made to "burnt seeds."

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**AV** Just as one cannot grow seeds in the midst of empty space, so too one can't achieve buddhahood in the unconditioned. Just as one cannot grow lotus blossoms in the high plains, so too the Śrāvaka-disciples and the Pratyekabuddhas who have entered the unconditioned's "right and definite position" cannot produce the dharmas of buddhahood.

As for "precipitous cliffs," there are two along the path to the city of the wisdom of all-knowledge, the one overhanging the ground of the Śrāvaka-disciples and the other overhanging the ground of the Pratyekabuddhas. If *śrāvaka*-disciples and pratyekabuddhas possessed all-knowledge, [their grounds] would not be like precipitous cliffs for the bodhisattva.

Now, as for the "deep abyss," a well-trained mountain climber can enter a deep abyss and abide there safely whereas someone bereft of such training would die in that deep abyss.

So too, because the bodhisattva is well-cultivated in the practice of the unconditioned, he does not plummet on down into the unconditioned. However, the Śrāvaka-disciples and others have

not developed comparable skillfulness as they practice immersion in the unconditioned and hence they plummet on down into the unconditioned.

As for the statement: "Their realms [bar it]," the Śrāvaka-disciples are so tied up in the conditioned that they have no ability to course in the conditioned. Hence they can't generate the mind resolved on bodhi.

As for the comparison to "non-virility," just as an impotent man no longer finds any satisfaction in the sphere of the five desires, so too, those *śrāvaka*-disciples equipped with the dharma of the unconditioned find no further satisfaction in the advantages associated with buddhahood.

As for the comparison to "*kācamāṇi*" (common quartz crystals), just as nobody in the heavens or the world can transform quartz into *vaidūrya* gems, so too, even though *śrāvaka*-disciples are equipped with moral-precept training, ascetic practices, *samādhis* and such, they will still never be able to gain the enlightenment of a buddha.

As for the "burnt seed" simile, just as a burnt seed can never sprout even though planted in soil, watered, and warmed by the sun, so too the Śrāvaka-disciples, having burned up the seeds of the afflictions, can never be born again anywhere in any realm of existence.

Based on such citations from the sutras, one should realize that, once a *śrāvaka*-disciple gains the dharmas of the unconditioned, he will no longer have any ability to aspire to buddhahood.

**Question:** How should the bodhisattva equipped with the powers cultivate in the midst of beings?

**Response:** (See next *śloka*.)

**TN** Nāgārjuna's treatise assumes one is already familiar with the sutras in which these comparisons are made. Hence the *śloka* he provides here is an extremely terse mnemonic intended primarily to remind the reader of the standard sutra-based analogies involved. Since such prior knowledge cannot be assumed for modern-day Dharma students (either East or West), I go ahead and write out the meaning of the *śloka* in full as follows:

The ability of an irreversible *śrāvaka*-disciple or pratyekabuddha to nourish the seed of buddhahood in their unconditioned state would be like trying to plant seeds in empty space or like trying to grow lotuses on the high plains.

For the bodhisattva, to fall into the paths of *śrāvaka*-disciples or pratyekabuddhas would be like falling over a precipitous cliff to one's death. For the irreversible *śrāvaka*-disciple or pratyekabuddha to aspire to coursing in the Bodhisattva Path would be like someone not trained in mountain climbing to think they could enter and leave deep mountain crevasses or abysses at will rather than be bound to die therein as would certainly be the case.

The realms coursed in by irreversible *śrāvaka*-disciples or pratyekabuddhas, by their very nature, bar any possibility of begetting the dharmas of buddhahood just as an impotent man would be altogether incapable of gaining satisfaction or begetting a child in the sphere of the five desires and just as nobody can possibly transform common quartz into *vaiḍūrya* gems,

Another analogy compares such a prospect to that of being able to cause a burnt seed to germinate and produce growth.

Nāgārjuna's intent here is not to disparage Two-Vehicles practitioners or the paths they have chosen. Rather it is an attempt to warn those contemplating or already confirmed in the Bodhisattva Path that cultivation of the Two-Vehicles path will lead to a point of no return making it impossible to proceed with the Bodhisattva Path, hence the importance of using skillful means when cultivating techniques such as the three gates to liberation lest one fall away from the Bodhisattva Path.

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**o82 – To Benefit the World, Bring Forth and Treatises, Skills, Sciences, Trades**

All of the treatises as well as the specialized skills,  
The occult and mundane sciences, and the various trades—  
Because they bring benefit to the world,  
One brings them forth and establishes them.

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**AV** “Treatises” refers to those on printing, mathematics, metallurgy, medicine, exorcism for ghost-possession, and rescue of poisoning victims. It also refers to treatises on public works, agriculture, horticulture, medicinal herbs, forests, and so forth. And it also includes those devoted to gemology, astronomy, interpretation of dreams, and physiognomy.

Everything beneficial to the world is lost during the deterioration of each kalpa. As the kalpa develops again, these things must be brought forth and established again among people. “Specialized

skills” include working with wood, iron, clay, copper, and such. They include all occult and mundane sciences including exorcisms, dealing with insanity, poisoning, digestive afflictions, and so forth. They also include carving, painting, embroidery, weaving, and such, including all of the different sorts of trades. One brings forth and establishes whatever brings benefit and happiness to the world.

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**o83 – Adapting to Various Beings, Per One’s Vows, One Takes Birth Among Them**

Adapting to beings amenable to instruction,  
To their worlds, rebirth destinies, and birth circumstances,  
As befits one’s reflections, one goes directly to them,  
And, through power of vows, takes birth among them.

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**AV** Wherever there are beings amenable to instruction, *mahāsattvas* take rebirth among them, adapting to the worlds they inhabit, their particular rebirth destinies, circumstances, physical appearance, and karmic retribution. Relying on the immeasurable minds they generate a resolve propelling them into precisely those situations, this out of a wish to instruct beings in the Path.

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**o84 – In the Midst of Evil, Don the Armor and Don’t Yield to Either Loathing or Fear**

In the midst of all sorts of circumstances rife with evil,  
And when among beings prone to guileful flattery and deceit,  
One should don one’s sturdy armor.  
One must not yield to either loathing or fear.

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**AV** When subjected to physical or verbal abuse, guileful flattery, or deceit, one might verge on the conviction that teaching beings is hopeless. One should not be slow to don one’s armor. Additionally, one must not be overcome by loathing for cyclic existence or by fearfulness at the length of the Path.

One reflects, “It is not for beings free of these faults that I must strap on this armor, but rather it is precisely for dealing with just such beings.”

**Question:** The cultivation of the bodhisattvas with powers is complete. How should the bodhisattva with no powers proceed?

**Response:** (As below...)

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**TN** “Armor” may be understood to refer to all of those bodhisattva practices protecting one from generating mental afflictions or bad

karmic deeds, in particular: patience (*kṣānti*), so as not to become hateful; moral virtue (*śīla*), so as not to fall into the error of reacting negatively; meditative discipline (*dhyāna*), so as to remain entirely unmoved; equanimity (*upekṣā*), so as to have no special affection for the virtuous or enmity for the evil; wisdom (*prajñā*), so as to realize others' evil toward one is just recompense for one's countless bad karmic deeds in the past, so as to realize that there are ultimately no inherently-existent beings or evil deeds to which one might react, and so as to realize that there is no inherently-existent self which might be the victim of others' evil actions; compassion (*karuṇa*), so as to implement the antidote to hatefulness recommended by the Buddha; and vigor (*vīrya*), so as to not grow weary of the length and difficulty of the Bodhisattva Path.

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085 – Maintain Pure Intentions, Eschew Guile, Confess Wrongs, Conceal Good Deeds

One equips oneself with supremely pure intentions,  
Does not resort to guileful flattery or deception,  
Reveals the wrongs of his karmic offenses,  
And conceals his many good deeds.

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**AV** “Supremely pure intentions,” is a reference to a superior class of motivation and goodness.

(After simply clarifying through restatement the meanings of the straightforward concepts in this *śloka*, Bhikshu Vaśitva continues with a quote he attributes to the Buddha.) The Bhagavān stated, “Guileful flattery is incompatible with bodhi and deception is incompatible with bodhi.”

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086 – Purify Three Karmas, Observe Moral Codes, Allow No Omissions or Slackening

One purifies the karma of body and mouth  
And also purifies the karma of the mind.  
Cultivating observance of all passages in the moral-code training.  
One must not allow any omissions or diminishment in this.

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**AV** To accord with correct cultivation, these bodhisattvas first ensure that the karma of the body, mouth, and mind are made pure and consistent with the path of the ten good karmic deeds regulating killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, ruinous speech, harsh speech, frivolous and lewd speech, divisive speech, covetousness, hatefulness, and erroneous views.



One should also accord with all of the statements contained within moral codes key to liberation, avoiding any instances of deliberate infractions. Where there are deficits in cultivation of the precepts, one becomes unable to still the mind and develop concentration in one's meditation.

**IN** Particular attention must be paid to Bhikshu Vaśitva's concluding note about deviations from the precepts making it entire impossible to still the mind in meditation. Under such a circumstance, the thoughts will not settle down enough to allow achievement of the one-pointed concentration upon which success in meditation is entirely dependent.

087 – Focus on the Object, Still Thoughts in Solitude, Eliminate Obstructive Thoughts

One establishes himself in right mindfulness,  
Focuses on the object condition, and stills his thought in solitude.  
Having put mindfulness to use as a guard,  
The mind becomes free of any obstructive thoughts.

**AV** Having achieved purity through observance of the moral precepts, one cuts off the five hindrances, and carries on one's cultivation in a pure, isolated location far from the multitude with but little noise, disturbance, mosquitoes, snakes, tigers, thieves, and so forth. It should not be too cold or hot. One does not set up a sleeping cot, but may stand, engage in meditative walking, or may sit in the lotus posture.

One may keep returning one's focus of mindful attention to the tip of the nose or to the forehead, establishing it there. After one has skillfully focused on the single chosen object, if agitated movement arises in the mind, one uses mindfulness to guard the door of the mind, and using this technique to protect the mind, one abandons insurgent thoughts otherwise bound to obstruct the mind.

**TN** The "five hindrances" (*nīvaraṇa* or *āvaraṇa*) to which Bhikshu Vaśitva refers are: "desire" (*kāma-chanda*); "ill will" (*vyāpāda*); "lethargy and sleepiness" (*styāna-middha*); "excitedness and regretfulness" (*auddhatya-kaukr̥tya*); and "[afflicted] doubt" (*vicikitsā*).

On the question of why "lethargy-and-sleepiness" is a dual-component hindrance, Vasubandhu indicates (in Chapter Five of his *Abhidharmakośa Bhāṣyam*) that it is because both "lethargy" and

“sleepiness” are nourished by the same five factors (bad omens seen in dreams [*tandri*]; unhappiness [*arati*]; physical exhaustion [*viṅṅmbhikā*]; uneven consumption of food [*bhakte'samatā*]; mental depression [*cetaso līnatva*]), are starved by the same single factor (illuminated perception [*āloka-samjñā*]), and are productive of the same result of mental languor. (See Pruden, *Abhidharmakośa Bhāṣyam* [851–2]).

On the question of why “excitedness-and-regretfulness” is a dual-component hindrance, Vasubandhu indicates that it is because both “excitedness” and “regretfulness” are nourished by the same four factors (ideation regarding relatives, land, immortals, previous pleasures and the associated companions), are starved by the same single factor (calmness), and are productive of the same result of mental agitation. (See Pruden, *Abhidharmakośa Bhāṣyam* [852]).

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**088 – When Discriminating Thoughts Arise, Abandon the Bad, Cultivate the Good**

When discriminating thoughts arise,  
 One should realize which are good and which are unwholesome,  
 Should forsake any which are not good,  
 And extensively cultivate those which are good.

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**AV** Bring awareness to bear on any discriminating thought which might arise, abandoning the bad rather than allowing them to increase. Cultivate only those which are good, not allowing any scattered thought. This process is analogous to taking care not to obstruct a lantern's air source when lighting it and setting it out to illuminate a room.

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**089 – When Scattered, Reestablish Focus, Return to the Object, Enforce Stillness**

If the mind trained on the object becomes scattered,  
 One should focus one's mindful awareness,  
 Return it to that object,  
 And, whenever movement occurs, immediately cause it to halt.

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**AV** When cultivating meditative concentration, one keeps the mind focused, not allowing scattering. If the mind departs from the object, one should immediately invoke awareness to prevent straying, and return the mind to its focus directly on the object.

This is analogous to using a rope to tie a monkey to a post. One uses the rope of mindfulness to tie the monkey of the mind securely

to the post of the object of meditation, doing so in a way that it can only continuously wind itself ever more closely to that post of the meditation object.

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**090 – Refrain from Laxity and Wrong Attachment as They Prevent Concentration**

One should refrain from laxity and from wrong attachment  
Cultivated with intensity,  
For they make it impossible to maintain concentration.  
One should therefore remain constant in one's cultivation.

---

**AV** “Laxity” refers to desisting from stringency in one's efforts. “Wrong attachment” refers to a type of grasping which is unwholesome. Development of meditative absorption entails restraint from both of these. Such departures from correct practice make it impossible to abide in meditative absorption.

**TN** Many unwholesome meditation mind states may arise when cultivating meditative discipline, some arising from karmic propensities rooted in the past, some having to do with unskillfulness in the present, and some having to do with exogenous factors. (See my translation of the Sui Dynasty Dhyāna Master Zhiyi's *Essentials of Buddhist Meditation* for a reasonably comprehensive discussion of these issues.)

If one allows oneself to become involved in these mind states, one may experience proliferation and intensification of afflictions. Examples of this vulnerability include attachment to powerful psychic phenomena and attachment to intensely blissful sensual pleasures arising in meditation as the subtle energies manifest in meditation. Averting any attention to these phenomena (even more so “cultivating them with intensity”) tends to magnify the afflicted-attachment and distraction-invoking aspects and tends to make them more chronically present. This inevitably kills concentration, thereby straightaway defeating the right-Dharma rationale behind one's taking up the cultivation of meditation in the first place.

It is for this reason that the 25,000-line *Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* and Nāgārjuna himself state, “It is on account of remaining unattached to the delectable flavor of meditative states that one becomes able to achieve the perfection of dhyāna meditation.” (See my translation *Nāgārjuna on the Six Perfections*, at the very beginning of the chapters devoted to the perfection of dhyāna meditation.)

**091 – Even Two-Vehicles' Men Focused on Self-Benefit Insist on Vigor in Meditation**

Even were one to take up the vehicle of the Śrāvakas  
 Or the vehicle of the Pratyekabuddhas,  
 And hence practice solely for one's own benefit,  
 One would still not relinquish the enduring practice of vigor.

**AV** Even those dedicated solely to their own self-benefit and nirvāṇa find it necessary to strive both day and night, never relinquishing enduring and solid vigor as the goad to pursue diligent cultivation of meditation.

**TN** Nāgārjuna warns in the most emphatic terms that any sort of meaningful progress in meditation is entirely dependent upon nearly heroic levels of vigor, this in the "Perfection of Vigor" section of his *Exegesis on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra (Mahāprajñāpāramitā Upadeśa)*. He also makes a point of clarifying therein that this is precisely why "vigor" is listed immediately before "meditation" in the standard Mahāyāna ordering of the six perfections. (See my complete translation: *Nāgārjuna on the Six Perfections*.)

**092 – How Much the Less Might a Bodhisattva Fail to Generate Infinite Vigor**

How much the less could it be that a great man  
 Committed to liberate both himself and all others  
 Might somehow fail to generate  
 A measure of vigor a thousand *koṭīs* times greater?

**AV** Given that the bodhisattva has committed himself to liberating all beings, how could he not generate vigor infinitely more robust than Two-Vehicles practitioners? That he would inevitably do so flows from vowing to devote as much effort to liberating others from cyclic existence as he devotes to liberating himself.

**093 – Don't Pursue Other Practice Half-Time or Conjoint Practice of Other Paths**

As for cultivating some other practice half the time  
 Or simultaneously practicing some other path,  
 One should not do this when cultivating meditative concentration.  
 One should rather focus exclusively on a single objective condition.

**AV** One should rather devote oneself solely to skillfully focusing on a single object as one practices a single type of meditative

concentration. The mind then focuses on whichever single objective phenomenon one has chosen. Thus one must refrain from directing it toward any other circumstance.

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**094 – Covet Neither Body nor Life as the Body is Bound for Destruction**

One must not indulge any covetousness regarding the body  
 And must not cherish even one's own life.  
 Even were one to allow any protectiveness toward this body,  
 It is but a dharma bound in the end to rot away.

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**AV** One should reflect on the body as a mere collection of skin, flesh, blood, sinews, bones, marrow, and so forth, all of which, even were it to last a hundred years, is finally bound to rot. One should reflect on one's life as bound to come to an end.

Still, one must not indulge any laxness, but rather should strive vigorously to achieve through cultivation of the Path whatever might be possible while endowed with health and strength.

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**095 – Never Coveting Offerings, Reverence, or Fame, Strive Urgently to Fulfill Vows**

One must never develop a covetous attachment  
 To offerings, reverence from others, or fame.  
 Rather one should strive diligently to fulfill one's vows,  
 Acting with the urgency of one whose turban has caught fire.

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**AV** One proceeds in this as when traveling through the wilds, intent on progressing, not obsessing on physical incidentals or life concerns. Were someone to make an offering, express reverence, or bandy one's name about, one wouldn't dally over any of that. Now, intent on fulfilling vows, one pursues swift and diligent practice with the urgency of one whose turban has caught fire.

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**096 – Resolutely Seize Victory, Not Waiting till Later as Survival Isn't Guaranteed**

Acting resolutely and immediately, pull forth the supreme benefit.  
 In this, one cannot wait for tomorrow.  
 Tomorrow is too distant a time,  
 For how can one ensure survival even for the blink of an eye?

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**AV** When practicing as intensely as if one's turban had caught fire, tomorrow is seen as too distant. Where some action will provide the most supreme benefit [to progress on the Path], one proceeds

with resolve and immediacy, reflecting, "How can one guarantee survival even for the blink of an eye. I must not put this off till tomorrow."

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**097 – Established in Right Livelihood, Be Mindful and Free of Preferences in Eating**

Having established oneself in right livelihood,  
When eating, it is as if consuming the flesh of a cherished son.  
One must not indulge in either affection for or disapproval of  
Whatever food one has taken for the meal.

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**AV** The bhikshu devoted to meditation obtains his alms meal in accordance with Dharma and entertains toward it neither any relishing nor any disdain, but rather maintains mindfulness of it as solely a means to preserve his life. The text alludes to the story of the couple traveling in the wilderness forced to eat the flesh of a son who had just died, this to illustrate the correct attitude toward taking meals when preserving one's focus on the meditation.

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**098 – Review One's Monastic Deeds and Accordance with the Ten Dharmas Sutra**

For what purpose has one left the home life?  
Have I finished what is to be done or not?  
Reflect now on whether or not one is doing the work,  
Doing so as described in the *Ten Dharmas Sutra*.

---

**AV** One should carry out analytic contemplation on these topics:

- 1) "For what purpose did I take up the practice of the monastic? Was it to achieve the goals of a monk or not?"
- 2) "If to achieve the goals of a monk, have I accomplished them, not yet accomplished them, or am I just now accomplishing them?"
- 3) "If one has not yet begun to accomplish them or is just now accomplishing them, then vigor should be brought to the work."
- 4) "Having left the householder's life, then I should qualify as no longer being of that sort. I should in fact be duly carrying forth this different life."
- 5) "Have I succeeded or not in adhering to the moral precepts in a manner beyond reproach? Would someone well-versed in these matters approve or disapprove my performance on this account?"
- 6) "I have already taken up a different appearance from those toward whom I have had affectionate relationships and hence no longer share the same basis for carrying on my life. Still, I am bound

to undergo the fruits of my karmic actions and exist in an intimate relationship with my karma.”

7) “How do I pass my days and nights? Do I or do I not delight in cultivating realization of emptiness and quiescence?”

8) “Have I or have I not come into the possession of the dharmas of a superior man?”

9) “Have I or have I not been able to succeed in gaining the superior knowledge and vision of the Āryas?”

10) “When interviewed in the future by another man who has adopted these pure practices, will I or will I not have reason to be ashamed?”

This monk who herein devotes himself to cultivation of meditative concentration should reflect repeatedly on the ten dharmas.

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**099 – Contemplate Impermanence and Non-self, Abandoning Demonic Karma**

Contemplate conditioned phenomena as impermanent,  
As devoid of self, and as devoid of anything belonging to a self.  
One must become aware of and withdraw from  
All forms of demonic karmic activity.

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**AV** “Conditioned phenomena” are those existing through the coming together of causes and conditions. Having such bases, they are therefore impermanent and devoid of anything belonging to a self. Being impermanent, they are marked by suffering. Being marked by suffering and the inability to exert any independence in their own development, they are therefore devoid of self.

“Demonic karma” is that through which one experiences displeasure, mental scatteredness or confusion, laxness, or obstacles in relation to the quest for bodhi and sutras teaching the six perfections. Whether the circumstances are self-generated or generated by some other source, it is essential to become aware of any such demonic karmic activity and withdraw from it. Then, having abandoned it, one must ensure that there is no basis for its being able to continue on independently of one’s own active involvement in it.

**TN** Dhyāna Master Zhiyi devotes an entire chapter to the issue of demons, demonic karma, how they manifest, and how their influences may be countered in his *Essentials for Practicing Calming-and-Insight and Dhyāna Meditation*. I have translated that entire work and am publishing it as *The Essentials of Buddhist Meditation*.

**100 – Generate Vigor in the Thirty-Seven Wings of Enlightenment**

Generate energetic diligence in order to cultivate  
 The roots, powers, limbs of enlightenment,  
 Bases of spiritual powers, right severances, the Path,  
 And the four stations of mindfulness.

**AV** The “five roots” are: faith, vigor, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom.

The “five powers” are those very same five roots once fully developed.

The “seven limbs of enlightenment” consist of: mindfulness, dharma-selectivity, vigor, joy, light easefulness, concentration, and equanimity.

The “four bases of spiritual power” are: zeal, vigor, single-mindedness, and contemplative thought, this when they are brought to bear in meditative concentration.

The “four bases of right severance” involve: not allowing not-yet-arisen evil and unwholesome dharmas to come into existence, cutting off already-arisen evil and unwholesome dharmas, causing not-yet-arisen good dharmas to arise, causing already-arisen good dharmas to continue abiding, developing zeal, generating diligence, focusing the mind, and bringing forth vows.

The “four bases of right severance” are: developing zeal, generating diligence, focusing the mind, and bringing forth vows.

The “eight-fold path of the Āryas” consists of: right views, right mental discriminations, right speech, right karmic action, right livelihood, right effort in one’s actions, right mindfulness, and right meditative concentration.

The “four stations of mindfulness” are: the body, the [six categories of] feelings [associated with the six sense faculties], the thoughts, and dharmas as phenomena.

One should generate intensely energetic diligence in the cultivation and practice of these thirty-seven factors assisting the realization of bodhi.

**TN** In his listing of the thirty-seven wings of enlightenment, one may notice that Bhikshu Vaśitva lists not thirty-seven, but rather a total of forty-one components. However, this is merely because “the four bases of right severance” has developed in Buddhist doctrine as an alternative list to “the four right efforts.” Bhikshu Vaśitva



simply lists all eight of these list components, but places them all here under the “four bases of right severance.”

It is interesting to note that such a confirmed Mahāyānist as Nāgārjuna points to the thirty-seven wings of bodhi as fundamental and essential components of Buddhist practice. Although this should be obvious, some latter-day advocates of the Great-Vehicle path have tended at times to diminish their importance, championing the various iterations of the perfections in their stead, almost as if the perfections and the thirty-seven wings were mutually exclusive practice modes.

Nāgārjuna comments on this issue in his commentary on the 25,000-line *Sutra on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, pointing out that, absent competence in the thirty-seven wings of bodhi, there is no way that a bodhisattva would be able to endure on the Mahāyāna path for countless lifetimes without falling away, back into the karma-bound sufferings of cyclic existence.

See my translation of this extensive discussion entitled *Nāgārjuna on the Thirty-Seven Wings of Enlightenment*. Here is a brief selection from that text:

Furthermore, where is it said that the thirty-seven wings are only dharmas of the Śrāvaka-disciples and the Pratyekabuddhas and are not the path of the Bodhisattvas? Within this very *Prajñāpāramitā [Sutra]*, in the chapter entitled “The Mahāyāna,” the Buddha discussed the four stations of mindfulness and so forth until we come to the eight-fold path of the Āryas. Nor is it stated anywhere within the three repositories of the Mahāyāna canon that the thirty-seven wings are solely dharmas of the Small Vehicle.

It was on account of his great compassion that the Buddha proclaimed the thirty-seven-winged path to nirvāṇa. It is in correspondence to the vows of beings and the causes and conditions of beings that each of them then takes up his [own particular] path. Those persons who seek that of the Śrāvaka-disciples gain the path of the Śrāvaka-disciples. Those persons who plant the good roots of the Pratyekabuddha gain the path of the Pratyekabuddha. Those who seek the path of the Buddha gain the path of the Buddha. This corresponds to one’s original vows, to the acuity or dullness of one’s faculties, and to the possession or non-possession of the great compassion.

**101 – Focus Analytic Contemplation on the Mind as Source of Good and Root of Evil**

The mind may serve as a source for the repeated generation  
 Of good deeds bestowing benefit and happiness  
 Or it may instead serve as the root of all sorts of evil and turbidity.  
 One should make it the focus of skillful analytic contemplation.

**AV** If subdued, guarded, and restrained, the mind creates benefit and happiness for others. If not, it becomes the root of evil and turbid actions benefiting no one.

On realizing this, one should subject the mind to analytic contemplation through which one observes its marks of production and destruction, its unfindability inwardly, outwardly, or in between, its unfindability in the past, future, or present, its coming from nowhere and going nowhere, its failure to abide even for the briefest moment, and its similarity to a magically-conjured illusion. One carries on these analytic contemplations to enhance the quality of one's practice.

**102 – Contemplate With Great Concern Daily Increase and Decrease of Good Dharmas**

"From one day to the next, what increase has occurred  
 In my cultivation of good dharmas?"  
 "Also, what diminishment has occurred in this?"  
 Those should be the contemplations of utmost concern.

**AV** The Buddha himself instructed us to carry out this contemplation, specifically regarding those good dharmas able to give birth to bodhi including giving and the rest [of the perfections]. One should always focus detailed contemplation on these matters each and every day, bringing this matter up time and time again.

**IN** Bhikshu Vaśitva quotes the Buddha as stipulating the contemplation topic as focusing on "giving and the rest." Because "giving" is the first in the standard order of the six perfections, we should infer the other five as being integral to the contemplation. Hence, we should contemplate: "To what extent have giving, moral virtue, patience, vigor, meditative concentration, and wisdom increased? To what extent has my practice of the six perfections deteriorated?"

**103 – Never Indulge Thoughts of Stinginess or Jealousy over Others' Good Fortune**

Whenever one observes someone else experiencing an increase  
 In offerings, reverences, or reputation,  
 Even the most subtle thoughts of stinginess and jealously  
 Should never be indulged.

**AV** One should avoid any tendency to feel a sense of stinginess or jealousy while contemplating thus: "I too could tend to delight in receiving offerings, robes, food-and-drink, bedding, medicines, and such. I too could tend to delight in expressions of reverence by laity and monastics. And I too could tend to delight in having perfected dharmas which others find praiseworthy."

**TN** Bhikshu Vaṣitva is suggesting here that, rather than being averse to someone else's gaining such things, one should instead cultivate a form of concurring sympathetic joy whereby one delights in another's good fortune and also feels a sympathetic personal identity with their being mentally moved by such things, this in spite of the fact that the ideal practitioner of the Path would remain entirely immune to feeling any particular pleasure or displeasure regarding the presence or absence of such incidentals.

**104 – Ignore Sense Realms as if Dull, Blind, Deaf, and Mute, Yet Roar the Lion's Roar**

One should not cherish any aspect of the objective realms,  
 But rather should act as if dull-witted, blind, mute, and deaf.  
 Still, when timely, respond by roaring the lion's roar,  
 Frightening off the non-Buddhist deer.

**AV** When observing others receiving an increase in offerings, reverence, and reputation, one should not cherish any aspect of the sense realms, but rather carries on a type of practice wherein one acts as if dull-witted, blind, mute, and deaf.

Where one possesses the ability, one should still use right Dharma to dispel others' delusions. When the time is right for rectifying someone's attachments to wrong view, one should "frighten off the deer of the non-Buddhist traditions" by roaring "the lion's roar," thus preserving the dominance of correct teachings.

**TN** Bhikshu Vaṣitva notes that the treatise transitions here from explaining cultivation of the mind to explaining cultivation of the

marks [of a buddha's body]. That discussion takes place across the course of the next eight *ślokas*.

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**105 – Welcome, Escort, and Revere the Venerable, Assisting All Dharma Endeavors**

In welcoming them on arrival and escorting them off as they go,  
One should be reverential toward those worthy of veneration.  
In all endeavors associated with the Dharma,  
One should follow along, participate, and contribute assistance.

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**AV** Through respect displayed by offering flowers or garlands on hearing Dharma explained, by repairing *caityas*, and by doing other Dharma works, one gains [a buddha-body's] mark of the wheel on the hands and feet, a sign foretelling a large retinue.

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**106 – Liberate Beings and Cultivate Special Skills, Training Self and Teaching Others**

One rescues and liberates beings bound to be killed.  
One's goodness increases and never decreases.  
One well cultivates karmic works involving the sciences and skills,  
Training in them oneself while also teaching them to others.

---

**AV** Through rescuing those bound to be killed, one gains [the buddha body's] marks of long fingers, heels which are level and upright, and an especially erect body, signs foretelling future enjoyment of a long lifespan.

Through ever increasing good dharmas and not allowing them to decrease, one becomes bound to gain the [buddha-body's] marks of having high ankle bones shaped like shells and body hairs directed in the superior direction, signs foretelling the future possession of undiminishing Dharma.

Through cultivating knowledge of the sciences and specialized skills, studying them oneself and teaching them to others, one becomes bound to gain [a buddha-body's] mark of having calves like those of an *aiṇeya*, [the black antelope], a sign foretelling the future ability to swiftly attract others [to the Dharma].

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**107 – Firmly Adopt Good Dharmas and Cultivate the Four Means of Attraction**

Adopt all of the supremely good dharmas,  
Through persistent and solid practice.  
Cultivate the four means of attraction,  
Making gifts of robes and food and drink.

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**AV** Through devoted practice of good dharmas, one gains the buddha-body's mark of solidly planted feet, a sign foretelling the future ability to carry out one's chosen work.

Through cultivating the four means of attraction (giving, pleasing speech, beneficial actions, and joint endeavors), one gains the buddha-body's mark of webbed junctions at the roots of the fingers and toes, another sign foretelling the future ability to swiftly attract others to Dharma.

Through giving fine food, drink, and clothing, one gains a buddha-body's marks of soft hands and feet and the seven prominences, both of which are signs foretelling inevitability of future possession of those endowments in accordance with one's wishes.

**TN** As noted in the commentary, the four means of attraction (*catvāri-saṃgraha-vastūni*) are: giving (*dāna-saṃgraha*), pleasing discourse (*priya-vādita-saṃgraha*), beneficial actions (*artha-caryā-saṃgraha*), and accompaniment of others in joint endeavors (*samānārthatā-saṃgraha*). These are four essential altruistic stratagems through which the bodhisattva successfully influences beings to more readily accept and cultivate Dharma where they might not otherwise be well disposed to do so.

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**108 – Be Generous to Almsmen, Unite Kin and Clan, Give Dwellings and Possessions**

Do not turn away from those begging for alms.

Facilitate the uniting of close relatives.

Prevent estrangement between those of the same clan.

Make gifts of dwellings and of material possessions as well.

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**AV** Through generosity to almsmen in a manner befitting one's resources, one gains a buddha-body's mark of straight and round arms and thighs, a sign foretelling future possession of the ability to freely subdue whomever must be subdued.

Bringing together relatives, retinue, and friends, preventing estrangement, and reconciling the already estranged, one gains a buddha-body's mark of genital ensheathing, a sign foretelling the future possession of many [Dharma] sons.

Through giving dwellings, possessions, fine bedding, robes, halls, temple buildings, and such, one gains a buddha-body's marks of a gold-colored appearance and smooth skin, signs foretelling future endowment with fine possessions and dwellings.

**109 – Provide for Parents, Relatives, and Friends Appropriately and Deferentially**

As for one's father, mother, relatives, and friends,  
 Provide them circumstances befitting their station.  
 Wherever one has given them such a suitable situation,  
 Treat them as supreme and independent sovereigns.

**AV** Through providing appropriate circumstances for *upādhyāyas*, *ācāryas*, parents, brothers, and others and then treating them with great deference, one gains a buddha-body's marks of a single hair in each hair pore and the white-hair mid-brow mark, signs foretelling future peerlessness.

**110 – Servants Are Addressed with Kindness, Adopted, Esteemed, and Cared For**

Although there may be yet others who are servants,  
 One speaks to them with goodness and, in effect, adopts them.  
 One should accord them the highest esteem  
 And provide them with medicines and treatment for all illnesses.

**AV** Through providing retainers with medicines, treatment for all illnesses, rest, assistance with needs, and food and drink, one gains a buddha-body's marks of having the area of the back between the shoulders even and of having the most superior sense of taste, signs foretelling a future with but little illness.

**111 – Be Foremost in Good Karma, Sublime and Right in Speech, and Generous to All**

Be the first to act, taking the lead in good karmic deeds,  
 Speaking with smooth and sublime words,  
 Being skillful in discourse guided by right intention,  
 And having no one above or below to whom gifts are not given.

**AV** "Being the first to act, taking the lead in good karmic deeds" refers to the giving of gardens, groves, meeting halls, wells, ponds, food and drink, flowers and garlands, bridges, Sangha dwellings, walking areas, and so forth, encouraging others on the one hand and personally pushing ahead with these works on the other.

Through giving going beyond the contributions of others, one gains a buddha body's marks of a round girth like the *nyagrodha* tree and the prominence on the crown of the head, both of which are signs foretelling future overlordship.

Through "speaking with smooth and sublime words" that are

truthful and agreeable, one gains a buddha body's marks of a broad and long tongue and a voice imbued with the "brahman sound," both of which are signs foretelling future possession of the voice perfect in speech graced by two groups of five special qualities.

Through "being skillful in discourse guided by right intention," one gains a buddha body's mark of having lion-like jaws, a sign foretelling the future inevitability that one will speak with pleasing words.

Through comporting oneself in accordance with the Dharma while also comporting oneself in a way which is uniformly equal in the treatment of others one gains a buddha-body's marks of uniformly even teeth and teeth which are smooth, both of which are signs foretelling future leadership of a following of those who are both good and pure.

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**112 – Avoid Harm or Disapproval; Regard Others with Kindness and as Good Friends**

Avoid any harm to the retinue of others.

Instead regard beings with the eye of kindness.

Neither may one course in disapproving thoughts.

Instead treat everyone as a good relative or friend.

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**AV** Maintain a mind that holds beings dear, teaches them with kindness, draws them in, and accepts them. Through regarding them with an eye free of covetousness, hatefulness, or delusion, one gains a buddha-body's marks of possessing blue eyes and having eyelashes like the king of bulls, signs foretelling the future ability to regard all with the eye of kindness.

Having explained the causes for the thirty-two marks, we now explain the various other sorts of bodhisattva practices.

**DN** Bhikshu Vaśitva makes no comment on Nāgārjuna's instruction to "avoid any harm to the retinue of others." This may well refer to attempting to draw into one's own following the disciples of some other teacher of Dharma, perhaps based on jealousy, perhaps based on arrogance, or perhaps based on either well-founded or baseless disapproval of some aspect of that Dharma teacher's abilities. In any case, chipping away at the respect others hold for some other ethically pure teacher of Dharma would not represent the highest expression of the Bodhisattva Path. Hence the warning to avoid it.