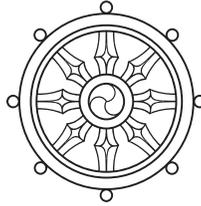


NĀGĀRJUNA'S
TREATISE ON THE TEN GROUNDS

To refrain from doing any manner of evil,
to respectfully perform all varieties of good,
and to purify one's own mind—
This is the teaching of all buddhas.

The Ekottara Āgama Sūtra
(T02 n.125 p.551a 13–14)



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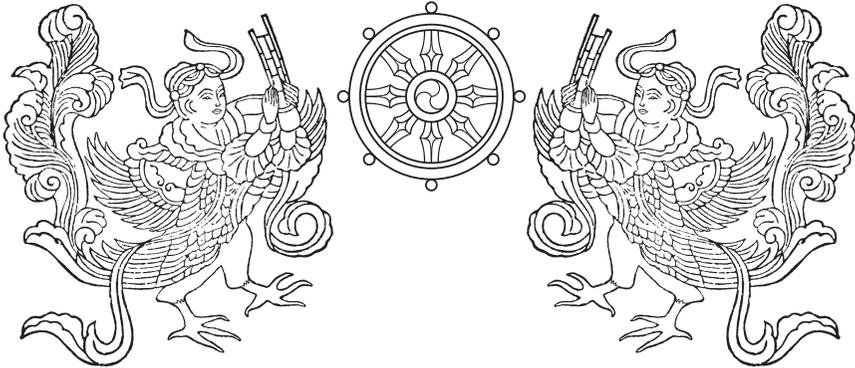
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**NĀGĀRJUNA'S TREATISE
ON THE TEN BODHISATTVA GROUNDS**

The Daśabhūmika Vibhāṣā

As Translated into Chinese
By Tripiṭaka Master Kumārajīva
(c 410 CE)

Annotated English Translation by Bhikshu Dharmamitra



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DEDICATION

Dedicated to the memory of the selfless and marvelous life of the Venerable Dhyāna Master Hsuan Hua, the Guiyang Ch'an Patriarch and the very personification of the bodhisattva's six perfections.

DHYĀNA MASTER HSUAN HUA

宣化禪師

1918–1995

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OUTLINING IN THIS WORK

The thirty-five chapter titles in this work are from the Taisho Chinese text. All other outline headings originate with the translator. Buddhist canonical texts are often so structurally dense that they are best navigated with the aid of at least a simple outline structure such as I have supplied here.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya
BB	Buddhabhadra (T278)
BCSD	Hirakawa's <i>Buddhist Chinese-Sanskrit Dictionary</i>
BDK	Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai English Tripiṭaka
BHSD	Edgerton's <i>Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary</i>
BR	Bodhiruci (T1522)
CBETA	Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association's edition of the Taisho edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon.
CDB	<i>The Connected Discourses of the Buddha</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i>
DR	Dharmarakṣa (T278)
DSBC	Digital Sanskrit Buddhist Canon's digitized edition of <i>Daśabhūmikāsūtram</i> , edited by P. L. Vaidya.
EA	<i>Ekottara Āgama</i>
KB	Kumārajīva and Buddhayaśas (T286)
KJ	Kumārajīva
MDPL	<i>Materials for a Dictionary of the Prajñāpāramitā Literature</i>
MLDB	<i>The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima nikāya</i>
Mppu	<i>Mahāprajñāpāramitā upadeśa</i>
MW	Monier Williams' <i>A Sanskrit-English Dictionary</i>
N	Nāgārjuna
NDB	<i>Numerical Discourses of the Buddha</i>
PTS	Pali Text Society
SA	Śiṅśānanda (T279)
SD	Śīladharma (T287)
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya
SYM	The Song, Yuan, Ming, Gong editions of the Chinese Buddhist canon.
SZPPS	<i>Shizhu piposha lun</i>
T	Taisho Chinese Buddhist Canon via CBETA (Version 2004. ed.) Taipei)
VB	Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

As the latest in my series of translations of bodhisattva path texts important in the history of Classic Indian and Chinese Mahāyana Buddhism, I present here my English translation of Tripiṭaka Master Kumārajīva's rendering from Sanskrit of Nāgārjuna's *Treatise on the Ten Grounds* (*Daśabhūmika-vibhāṣā*).¹ This is a text devoted to explaining in great detail the aspects of practice involved in ascending through the ten "grounds," "planes," or "levels" of bodhisattva path cultivation that are described in the *Ten Grounds Sutra* (*Daśabhūmika-sūtra*) and in the nearly identical "Ten Grounds" chapter of the *Flower Adornment Sutra* (*Avataṃsaka-sūtra*). (In order to encourage and facilitate deeper study of this topic, I have translated both of these closely related texts which are available under separate cover from Kalavinka Press.)

Although Dharmarakṣa was the first one to translate this text into Chinese, his 265 CE translation of this treatise has been lost.² The edition of Nāgārjuna's *Treatise on the Ten Grounds* that I have translated here is the only one that exists in any language, namely the 17-fascicle *Shizu piposha lun* (十住毘婆沙論) or *Daśabhūmika-vibhāṣā* that is preserved in the Taisho edition of the Buddhist canon (T no. 1521). It was translated from Sanskrit into English by Tripiṭaka Master Kumārajīva as dictated to him from memory by Tripiṭaka Master Buddhayaśas sometime between the latter's arrival in Chang'an in 408 and his return to Kashmir four years later.

Although, having studied it closely, I find this 35-chapter treatise to be beautifully and awesomely complete in itself as a close description of the principles and practices necessary for entering and mastering the first two of the ten bodhisattva grounds, it is probable that this text as translated by Kumārajīva was originally part of a much larger work. Fortunately, the edition that we have is, in and of itself, a wonderfully thorough training manual for moving from the life of a common unenlightened person to that of an irreversible bodhisattva well along on the path to buddhahood.

A Brief Description of the Treatise Contents

As noted above, this text consists of 35 chapters³ in 17 fascicles that describe in great detail the principles and practices involved in

entering the bodhisattva path and in perfecting in correct sequence the practices of the first and second grounds, "The Ground of Joyfulness," and "The Ground of Stainlessness."

Chapter 1, "The Introduction," discusses the author's motivations and aims in composing this treatise. Chapter 2 through 27 explain the first ground's practices. Chapter 28 through 35 explain the second ground's practices.

Chapter 2, "Entering the First Ground" through Chapter 17, "On Entering the Temple," focus on the practice methods of the lay bodhisattva. Chapter 18, "The Jointly Shared Practices," through Chapter 27, "Summarizing the Practice [of the First Ground]," focus more on the bodhisattva practices that are common to both the lay bodhisattva and the monastic bodhisattva. Chapter 28, "Distinctions in Courses of Karmic Action on the Second Ground," through Chapter 35," focus somewhat more strongly on the practices of the monastic bodhisattva or very advanced lay practitioner.

A Condensed Description of Each Chapter's Contents⁴

To give the reader a quick idea of the general content of each of the chapters, I present immediately below only the briefest of general descriptions. For a much more detailed outline of the contents of each chapter, I refer the reader to my 18-page "Directory to Chapter Subsections" which follows immediately after the "General Table of Contents.

1) The Introduction: This chapter consists of a general discussion of the whole treatise, a description of Nāgārjuna's motives in writing the treatise, and a close explanation of the "refuge" verse that opens the treatise.

2) Entering the First Ground: This chapter lists the names and meanings each of the ten grounds, explains how one enters the first ground, and discusses why this ground is called "The Ground of Joyfulness."

3) The Characteristics of the Ground: This chapter describes the character of the first-ground bodhisattva, focusing in particular on this bodhisattva's distinctive features. It also explains why his mind is for the most part joyful and explains the nature of his fearlessness.

4) Purification of the Ground: This chapter describes 27 dharmas involved in purifying the first ground.

5) The Explanation of the Vows: This chapter describes the bodhisattva's ten great vows in great detail.

6) On Producing the Bodhi Resolve: This chapter describes and explains the seven causes and conditions involved in generating the resolve to achieve the utmost, right, and perfect enlightenment.

7) On Training the Mind: This chapter describes the many different sorts of causes and conditions that might cause the bodhisattva to lose his resolve to reach the enlightenment of a buddha.

8) On the Avaivartika: This chapter describes the characteristics of the bodhisattva who has fallen into ruination and the characteristics of the bodhisattva who has become irreversible on the path to buddhahood.

9) On the Easy Practice: This chapter describes using the path of "the easy practice," mindfulness of the buddhas, to succeed in reaching the ground of the *avaivartika* or "irreversible" bodhisattva.

10) Getting Rid of Karma: This chapter describes the methods for purifying past bad karma, specifically referencing repentance, entreating, rejoicing in others' merit, and dedication of merit.

11) Distinctions with Regard to Merit: This chapter discusses the merit and karmic rewards of repentance, entreating, rejoicing, and transference of merit and also explains how repentance results in less severe retribution from grave karmic offenses.

12) Distinctions with Regard to Giving: This chapter discusses the karmic rewards of giving and also explains what constitutes pure giving and impure giving.

13) Distinctions with Regard to the Giving of Dharma: This chapter explains the superiority of Dharma giving over material giving and discusses the qualifications of someone who teaches the Dharma.

14) The Characteristics of the Refuges: This chapter discusses how one takes refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha as well as how one practices mindfulness of the Buddha, mindfulness of the Dharma, and mindfulness of the Sangha.

15) The Five Moral Precepts: This chapter explains the practices beneficial to self and beneficial to others while also explaining the dharma of the five lay precepts.

16) On Realizing the Faults of the Householder's Life: This chapter details for the lay bodhisattva the faults of the household life,

thereby encouraging the layperson to consider the advantages of becoming a monastic. It also describes the practice of the six perfections.

17) On Entering the Temple: This chapter describes the practices adopted by the layperson on entering the grounds of stupas and temples, explains how to take and maintain the eight abstinence precepts, and compares the lay practice with monastic practice.

18) The Jointly Shared Practices: This chapter describes the practices common to both lay and monastic bodhisattvas while also describing a buddha's 32 major marks and the karmic causes that bring them about.

19) The Four-fold Dharmas: This chapter explains how wisdom is the origin of the 32 marks while also setting forth many fourfold lists that explain how wisdom is acquired, how wisdom is lost, how one's roots of goodness are devoured, how one's roots of goodness increase, and so forth.

20) Mindfulness of the Buddhas: This chapter describes the method for acquiring the *pratyutpanna* samādhi wherein one is allowed to see the Buddhas. It explains that one should cultivate mindfulness and contemplation of the Buddhas' form bodies in reliance upon their 32 major marks and 80 subsidiary characteristics.

21) Forty Dharmas Exclusive to Buddhas (Part 1): This chapter lists 40 dharmas exclusive to buddhas and discusses the first nine of those 40 dharmas that serve as the basis for practicing mindfulness of all buddhas' Dharma body.

22) Forty Dharmas Exclusive to Buddhas (Part 2) – Challenges to the Reality of Omniscience: This entire chapter is devoted to refuting the various challenges to the claim that buddhas are omniscient.

23) Forty Dharmas Exclusive to Buddhas (Part 3): This chapter begins by explaining the tenth of the exclusive dharmas, that of "thorough knowing of matters that are unfixed," continues by explaining the rest of the 40 exclusive dharmas, and then ends by introducing an additional 44 exclusive dharmas.

24) Verses Offered in Praise: This chapter explains that one is to use the 40 dharmas exclusive to the Buddhas in one's practice of mindfulness of the Buddha and then presents praise verses to be used as a means for successfully entering the mindfulness-of-the-Buddha samādhi.

25) Teachings to Aid the Mindfulness-of-the-Buddha Samādhi:

This chapter sets forth the method for acquiring the *pratyutpanna samādhi* while also describing the karmic rewards derived from this samādhi.

26) The Analogy Chapter: This chapter sets forth the analogy of the great guide leading fellow travelers across treacherous terrain to a great city while also describing in greater detail the knowledge essential to deeply understanding and practicing the bodhisattva path.

27) A Summarizing Discussion of the Bodhisattva Practices: This chapter presents a general explanation of all the dharmas practiced by the bodhisattva along with a discussion of the differences between the practitioner who is a bodhisattva in name only and the practitioner who truly is a genuine bodhisattva.

28) Distinctions in the Second Ground's Courses of Karmic Action: This chapter begins by introducing ten types of resolute intentions that should be adopted by the first-ground bodhisattva wishing to reach the second ground. It continues then with detailed explanations of each of the ten courses of good karmic action and the ten courses of bad karmic action.

29) Distinctions Pertaining to Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas: This chapter begins by asserting that the ten courses of good karmic action enable the practitioner to access the ground of a *śrāvaka*-disciple, the ground of a *pratyekabuddha*, and the ground of a buddha. It then describes which sorts of beings may reach the grounds of *śrāvaka*-disciples and *pratyekabuddhas* by relying upon the practice of the ten courses of good karmic action.

30) Distinctions Pertaining to the Great Vehicle: This chapter describes which sorts of beings may reach the ground of a buddha through cultivation of the ten courses of good karmic action. It also asserts that a bodhisattva's cultivation of the ten courses of good karmic action is superior to such cultivation as undertaken by adherents of the *śrāvaka*-disciple and *pratyekabuddha* vehicles.

31) Guarding the Moral Precepts: This chapter describes the general and specific karmic rewards resulting from cultivating the ten courses of good karmic action. It then presents sixty-five aspects of the perfection of moral virtue in accordance with *The Jeweled Summit Sutra*.

32) An Explanation of the Dhūta Austerities: This chapter describes the correct practice of the twelve *dhūta* austerities, their benefits, and the conditions under which they may be set aside.

33) Aids to Gaining the Fruits of Śīla: This chapter describes the dharmas that enable purification of one's practice of moral virtue. It also describes four types of monks of which the first three are worthy of censure and the fourth is to be emulated.

34) In Praise of the Moral Precepts: This chapter begins by asserting that, "The bodhisattva who purifies his observance of the moral precepts in this manner is able to gather together all sorts of meritorious qualities and derive all manner of benefits." It then proceeds to quote Akṣayamati Bodhisattva's extensive praise of the moral precepts.

35) The Karmic Rewards of the Moral Precepts: This chapter describes the second-ground bodhisattva's manifestation as a wheel-turning king who instructs beings in the practice of the ten course of good karmic action.

On the Completeness and Ultimacy of This Treatise

Although this treatise primarily focuses its discussions on how to understand the principles, how to develop the qualities, and how to master the skills required to reach the first two of the bodhisattva grounds, its utility is not limited to accomplishing that already very amazing, beautiful, and daunting feat. In fact, the range of the discussions in this text are so broad and deep that they apply to the entire path to buddhahood. Indeed, if one were to deeply study this text together with the Ten Grounds Sutra,⁵ one would then already possess a very complete map of how to proceed all the way to the perfect enlightenment of a buddha.

So many other additional aspects of knowledge, wisdom, powers, skills, and qualities are mastered on these first two grounds that I think it would be fair to say that most of us would need to cultivate the bodhisattva path for many hundreds of lifetimes before we could move beyond the teachings presented in this wonderful treatise by Nāgārjuna.

As noted in Chapter 29, this treatise does indeed provide all of the teachings a practitioner would need to reach all the way to buddhahood: "These ten courses of good karmic action enable the practitioner to reach the grounds of the *śrāvaka* disciples, also enable

him to reach the ground of the *pratyekabuddhas*, and also enable him to reach the ground of the Buddhas.”

In the very next chapter, Chapter 30, Nāgārjuna answers the question, “Which sorts of beings can the ten courses of good karmic action also cause to reach the ground of buddhahood?”, doing so by setting forth the following verse distinguishing these bodhisattvas from practitioners attracted to the individual-liberation paths idealizing arhats and *pratyekabuddhas*:

The way they practice the ten courses of good karmic action is superior to that of the two other classes of practitioners, for they engage in measureless extraordinary cultivation superior to that of anyone else in the world.

They bring forth vows that are both solid and good, perfect the great compassion that cannot be impeded, adeptly take on the practice of skillful means, and patiently endure every sort of pain and anguish.

They do not abandon any being, deeply cherish the wisdom of the Buddhas, and delight in those who completely and thoroughly practice the Buddhas’ powers and sovereign masteries.

They are able to refute all ideas involving wrong views and accept and protect the Buddhas’ right Dharma.

They are valiant, able to endure, and vigorous, and are possessed of solid resolve in teaching beings.

They do not covet or become attached to their own happiness or to living a measurelessly long life.

They are supreme in all their endeavors and free of fault in all the works they do.

They possess every kind of purity and come forth through the practice of all the supreme bases.⁶

The courses of good karmic action enable these persons to reach the ground of the Bhagavats who possess the ten powers.

A close perusal of the above verses should bolster the practitioner’s confidence in the completeness and ultimacy of the teachings presented in this treatise.

In Summation

I first happened on this text many years ago when searching the Buddhist canon for the most important bodhisattva path texts to translate into English. I immediately fell in love with it and started translating it back in 2004, but had to take a break from it for a few

years due to health reasons and also because I was preoccupied with fourteen other bodhisattva path manuscripts I published as the first ten Kalavinka Press volumes in 2009.

I finally finished a first draft translation of this treatise in late spring of 2011 which I did not finish revising until early 2018, this because I was deeply involved in creating a translation of the Ten Grounds Sutra (now available) and the Avataṃsaka Sutra (which, though long since completed, is still being revised and edited).

I have always felt that Nāgārjuna's *Treatise on the Ten Grounds* is one of the most important and most inspiring bodhisattva path texts in the Buddhist canon and one that simply *must* be translated into English as soon as possible. Hence it gives me great pleasure to finally be able to bring forth this translation for the perusal of English-speaking Dharma students and practitioners devoted to the deep study of the bodhisattva path.

Although, aided by the critical comments of a group of Dharma friends and colleagues, I have given this translation my best effort and the greatest care to ensure accuracy, I am aware that there may still be room for refinements here and there. To that end, I invite constructive comments by email via the Kalavinka.org website. That said, I remain very confident that this book will suffice to advance the western reader's understanding of right practice of the bodhisattva path as taught by Ārya Nāgārjuna.

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Seattle

April 23, 2019

Introduction Endnotes

1. Although it is common to see the Sanskrit title of this work reconstructed in English academic articles as “*Daśabhūmika-vibhāṣā-śāstra*,” this based on its Chinese title as *Shizhu piposha lun* (十住毘婆沙論), “Ten Grounds Vibhāṣā Treatise,” Hirakawa reconstructs this title as simply “*Daśabhūmika-vibhāṣā*,” probably because he recognized that the *lun* (論) or “treatise” in the Chinese title was only ever intended by Kumārajīva and other translators to notify the Chinese reader that a *vibhāṣā* is a kind of treatise. That is to say, he most likely did *not* intend it as a translation of the Sanskrit word *śāstra*.
2. In an article on Nāgārjuna, Joseph Walser writes: “Of two things we can be fairly certain. First, according to two sixth-century catalogues of Buddhist texts translated into Chinese, Dharmarakṣa translated a work called the *Treatise Commentary on the Sūtra of Ten Stages* (the *Daśabhūmika-vibhāṣa-śāstra*) in 265 CE that he ascribes to Nāgārjuna.” (Powers, p. 498)
3. Although the Taisho edition of this text restarts the chapter numbering after Chapter 27 by designating Chapter 28 as “Chapter One,” I instead follow the chapter numbering of the SYMG editions, all of which number this treatise as consisting of a series of 35 continuously numbered chapters. The apparent rationale for the Taisho edition’s restarting the numbering at Chapter 28 is to call the reader’s attention to the fact that the first 27 chapters are at least nominally devoted to explaining the first ground whereas the final 8 chapters constitute a new section consisting of N’s explanation of the second ground. In any case, the reader should be aware that headings of these sorts for the most part originate with the Chinese translation team, not with the Indian text.
4. This condensed description of each chapter borrows from and expands upon a very similar Chinese language narration found as part of “A Simplified Introduction to the *Daśabhūmika Vibhāṣā*” (十住毘婆沙論簡介) by the Chinese Buddhist monk Hou Guan of the Fuyan Buddhist Studies Institute (福嚴佛學院, 釋厚觀, 09/18/2001). As of this writing (July, 2018), the document can be found at this URL:
http://www.fuyan.org.tw/main_edu/1521-00c.doc
5. My complete translation of the Ten Grounds Sutra is available from Kalavinka Press.
6. These “four bases of meritorious qualities” are truth, relinquishing, quiescence, and wisdom.