

Part Two:

EXHORTATION
to
RESOLVE ON BUDDHAHOOD

By the Dhyāna Master & Pureland Patriarch
Śramaṇa Sheng'an Shixian (1686–1734 CE)

Exhortation to Resolve on Buddhahood

By Śramaṇa Sheng'an Shixian
of Hangzhou's Brahma Heaven Monastery

I. THE INTRODUCTORY SECTION

A. FIRST, THE MIND'S VOWS AS THE ROOT OF CULTIVATION.

This unworthy, foolish, and lowly common monk, Shixian, weeping tears of blood, bows down and makes this deeply felt proclamation to the present Great Assembly¹ as well as to the rest of this world's men and women of pure faith. I only pray that, extending kindness and compassion, they will briefly listen and reflect [upon this].

I have heard that among the essential gateway methods for entering the Path, generating the [bodhi] resolve is paramount. Among the critically urgent responsibilities involved in cultivation, the establishment of vows is foremost.

Once vows have been established, then beings may be brought across to liberation. When the resolution has been brought forth, then the path to buddhahood may be perfected. If one only fails to generate this expansively great resolve and establish solid vows, then, even if one courses on through kalpas as numerous as dust motes, one will still continue to abide in cyclic existence. Even though one may possess some achievement in cultivation, it is all only futilely-endured suffering.

Hence the *Floral Adornment Sutra* states: "If through forgetting it, one loses the bodhi resolve² while cultivating all manner of wholesome dharmas, these amount to demonic karmic actions."³ If this is the case for merely "forgetting" it, how much the more would it be so where one has not yet even generated it. Thus, one should realize that if he aspires to study the vehicle of the Tathāgata,⁴ it is essential to first become equipped with the generation of the bodhisattva vow.⁵ This is not something which can be delayed.

B. "RIDDANCE" AND "IMPLEMENTATION" IN GENERATING BODHI RESOLVE

1. BRINGING UP THE CATEGORIES AND ENUMERATING THEIR NAMES

As for the distinctions involved in the mind's aspirations, their characteristic features are numerous. If one failed to point them out and explain them, how could one proceed to develop them? Now, for the sake of the Great Assembly, we shall speak of them in summary fashion. The characteristic features are eightfold, as follows: They are the so-called deviant or correct, genuine or false, great or small, and one-sided or perfect.

2. DISTINGUISHING THEIR CHARACTERISTICS BASED ON THEIR NAMES

a. NOTING THEIR NAMES

What then does one mean by “deviant or correct, genuine or false, great or small, and one-sided or perfect”?

b. DISTINGUISHING THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

There exists in the world a class of practitioner pursuing cultivation with singular directness, but does not investigate his own mind and merely possesses an awareness of external matters. In some cases, he may seek for personal profit and offerings. In some cases, he may be fond of fame. In some cases, he may covet the desire-based pleasures of the present age. And in some cases, he may look with hopefulness to karmic rewards in the future. When one generates a resolve of this sort, this is what qualifies as “deviant.”

It may be [on the other hand] that one does not seek for profit or fame and does not covet desire-based pleasures or karmic rewards. Rather one’s efforts are solely for the sake of transcending cyclic birth-and-death⁶ and realizing bodhi. When one generates a resolve of this sort, this is what qualifies as “correct.”

As regards those above, one should seek in every mind-moment to search out the Path of the Buddha. As regards those below, one should strive in every thought to transform beings through teaching them. On hearing of the far-reaching and distant length of the Buddha Path, one should not retreat in timidity. On observing that beings are difficult to bring across to liberation, one should not allow oneself to become weary with disgust.

This is just as when one ascends a ten-thousand-meter mountain. One must be determined then to climb up to its very summit. And it is just as when one erects a nine-level stupa.⁷ In doing so, one must certainly complete it through creating its crowning story. When one generates resolve of this sort, this is what qualifies as “genuine.”

It may be that one has created karmic offenses and yet does not repent of them and it may be that one has committed transgressions and yet fails to do away with them. It may be that one is inwardly turbid while outwardly acting as if clear. It may be that one acts industriously at the beginning and yet becomes indolent in the end. It may be that, even though one possesses fine thoughts, they are for the most part admixed with concerns about reputation and wealth. And it may be that, even though one has taken up wholesome dharmas, one remains defiled by offense-laden karma. When one generates a resolve of this sort, this is what qualifies as “false.”

One resolves: "When the realm of sentient beings has come to an end, only then shall my vows come to an end. When the path to the realization of bodhi has become perfected, only then shall my vows be perfected." When one generates a resolve of this sort, this is what qualifies as "great."

It may be that one contemplates the three realms as like a prison, looks upon cyclic birth-and-death as like an enemy, aspires only to achieve one's own personal liberation, and does not desire to bring other people across to liberation. If one generates a resolve of this sort, this is what qualifies as "small."

It may be that one perceives that beings and the Buddha's Path exist outside of one's own mind and that, guided by this perception, one aspires to bring those beings across to liberation and perfect that path. In a circumstance of this sort, one remains unable to forget one's own meritorious service and remains unable to extinguish [attachment to] one's own knowledge and views. If one generates a resolve of this sort, this is what qualifies as "one-sided."

It may be that, realizing one's own nature is identical to that of beings, one aspires to bring them across to liberation. It may be that, realizing one's own nature corresponds to the Buddha Path, one consequently aspires to perfect it. [It may be that] one does not perceive even a single dharma existing apart from the mind. [And it may be that] one employs a mind cognizing emptiness to generate vows rooted in emptiness, to implement practices grounded in emptiness, and to realize the fruits of cognizing emptiness—all of this while remaining free of the view that there is any characteristic feature of emptiness which can be apprehended at all. If one generates a resolve of this sort, this is what qualifies as "perfect."

3. POINTING OUT AND DESCRIBING RIDDANCE AND IMPLEMENTATION

When one understands these eight types of distinctions, one then understands how to carry on "analytic reflection." When one understands how to carry on analytic reflection, one understands how to carry out "riddance and implementation." When one understands how to carry out riddance and implementation, one becomes able to [correctly] generate the [bodhi] resolve.

What is meant by "analytic reflection"? It refers to [an on-going analysis of and reflection upon] this resolve which we generate [whereby we recognize] whether it is deviant, whether it is correct, whether it is genuine, whether it is false, whether it is great, whether it is small, whether it is one-sided, or whether it is perfect.

What is meant by “riddance and implementation”? It refers to ridding oneself of the deviant, ridding oneself of the false, ridding oneself of the small, and ridding oneself of the one-sided while simultaneously implementing the correct, implementing the genuine, implementing the great, and implementing the perfect.

When one generates a resolve of this sort, one then succeeds in carrying forth with what qualifies as the genuine and correct generation of the bodhi resolve.

II. THE DOCTRINAL SECTION PROPER

A. PRAISING QUALITIES AND EXPLAINING CAUSAL BASES

This bodhi resolve is the king among all forms of goodness. It is certainly the case that there are causal bases upon which one then becomes able to generate it.

B. NOTING THE NUMBER AND LISTING THE NAMES

Now, when we speak of causal bases, generally speaking, there are ten categories.

Of what do these ten consist?

The first is mindfulness of the extreme kindness of the Buddha.

The second is mindfulness of the kindness of one’s parents.

The third is mindfulness of the kindness of teachers and seniors.

The fourth is mindfulness of the kindness of benefactors.

The fifth is mindfulness of the kindness of beings.

The sixth is mindfulness of the sufferings in cyclic birth-and-death.

The seventh is reverence for one’s own spiritual mind.

The eighth is repentance of one’s karmic obstacles.

The ninth is the aspiration to gain rebirth in the Pureland.

The tenth is mindful concern that right Dharma long endure.

C. NEXT, SUBSTANTIATION OF THE BASES

1. MINDFULNESS OF THE EXTREME KINDNESS OF THE BUDDHA

What is intended by “mindfulness of the extreme kindness of the Buddha”? This is in reference to when our Shākyamuni Tathāgata himself initially generated the [bodhi] resolve. It was for our sakes that he coursed in the Bodhisattva Path, passing through a countless number of kalpas undergoing in full measure every sort of suffering.

Whenever we have created karma, the Buddha has felt anguished pity for us and set forth skillful expedients to teach us. Even so, we have been so foolish that we have failed to realize that we should have faith in and accept such teaching.

Whenever we have fallen into the hells, the Buddha again ached with compassion and wished to take on such sufferings for us. However, our karma has been so heavy that he was unable to rescue and extricate us from such difficulties.

When we regained rebirth in the human realm, the Buddha employed skillful means to influence us to plant roots of goodness and then, in life-after-life, followed along after us, his mindfulness never abandoning us for even a moment.

When the Buddha first came into the world, we were still sunken in misery. Now that we have regained the human body, the Buddha has already passed into cessation. What karmic transgressions have we committed to be born in the Dharma-ending age? What merit have we created to be able to leave the home life? What karmic obstacles have we generated to be unable to personally view his golden body? What good fortune indeed that we now personally encounter his *śarīra*.⁸

And so one reflects in this fashion: "Had we failed to plant roots of goodness, how could we have succeeded in hearing the Dharma of the Buddha? Had we not heard the Dharma of the Buddha, how could we even be aware of constantly receiving these kindnesses of the Buddha?"

These kindnesses and these meritorious qualities are difficult to describe even by comparing them to a mountain. If we were to fail to generate the vast and magnificent resolve, course in the Bodhisattva Path, establish the Dharma of the Buddha, and rescue beings by bringing them across to liberation, then, even were we to crush our own body and splinter our own bones, how could we be able to repay this?

This is the first of the causal bases for generation of the bodhi resolve.

2. MINDFULNESS OF THE KINDNESS OF ONE'S PARENTS

What then is intended by "mindfulness of the kindness of one's parents"? One reflects, "What heartache I feel recalling the intense labors of my parents in giving birth to me—for ten months and three years, carrying me in the womb and nursing me, 'placing me into the dry and getting rid of the wet,'⁹ 'swallowing the bitter and

giving up the sweet,' so that I then succeeded in becoming a man. They pointed out to me with hopefulness how I might carry on the family's good name and the tradition of making offerings and paying reverence to its spirits."

Now, since we have already left the home life, we are, through exaggeration, called "Sons of the Buddha" and are, although unworthy of the name, referred to as "*śramaṇas*."¹⁰ It is on this account that we do not carry out the offerings of delicacies to [the family spirits] and do not lend any assistance by paying reverence or sweeping at their grave sites. While they are still alive, we are unable to provide for their nourishment. Once they have died, we are unable to guide forth their spirits. Thus, as regards the world, we greatly diminish its resources. As regards that which lies beyond the world, we provide no genuine benefit there, either. If thus we are failures with respect to both of these paths, then such heavy karmic offenses would be difficult to escape.

When we reflect in this manner, [we see that] it is only through constantly coursing in the Buddha's Path throughout thousands of births across hundreds of kalpas spanning the ten directions and the three periods of time that we will be able to universally bring beings across to liberation. If we do this, then it will not be solely one's own father and mother from a single lifetime [who shall benefit]. Rather, one's fathers and mothers from life-after-life shall all be the recipients of extrication and rescue. And it shall not be but a single person's fathers and mothers, but rather the fathers and mothers of everyone who will all be able to leap over [the abyss] and ascend. This is the second of the causal bases for generation of the bodhi resolve.

3. MINDFULNESS OF THE KINDNESS OF TEACHERS AND SENIORS

What then is intended by "mindfulness of the kindness of teachers and seniors"? One reflects, "Although my father and mother were able to give birth to and raise up my physical body, still, if it were not for my worldly teachers and seniors, I would not understand propriety or righteousness. If it were not for my transcendental teachers and seniors, I would not understand the Dharma of the Buddha. If I failed to have an awareness of ceremonial propriety and righteousness, then I would be identical to other classes of beings.¹¹ If I failed to understand the Dharma of the Buddha, then what distinction would there be between me and the common person?"

The fact that we now possess a rather coarse awareness of

ceremonial propriety and righteousness and now possess a general understanding of the Buddha's Dharma, wear the *kāṣāya* robe¹² and are personally imbued with the codes of moral restraint—these emblems of extremely weighty kindnesses were all gained from our teachers and seniors. If we were now to strive for the achievement of lesser sorts of fruits of the Path,¹³ we would only be able to accomplish our own self benefit. But if we now, for the sake of the priorities of the Great Vehicle, make a universal vow to benefit others, then the two classes of teachers and seniors—both the worldly and the transcendental—will all receive benefits from this. This is the third of the causal bases for generation of the bodhi resolve.

4. MINDFULNESS OF THE KINDNESS OF BENEFACTORS

What then is intended by “mindfulness of the kindness of benefactors”? One reflects, “That which I rely on for daily use is certainly not something which comes from me. The two mealtimes of gruel and of rice, the clothing appropriate to the four seasons, the necessities for treating illness—everything used by the body or consumed as sustenance—these are all produced through the work of others and then brought forth for me to use.

“As for those benefactors, they must exhaust their strength in personally cultivating the fields and even then find it difficult to make a living to feed the family. As for me, I sit here in peace and receive food from others, perhaps even then not finding it agreeable.

“As for those benefactors, though they may be ceaselessly busy at sewing [for others], they may still be in difficult straits themselves. As for me, I am well-clothed and even have more than I need. I should know to be sparing [in the use of donations].

“As for those benefactors, they live where ‘the gates are made of rushes and the windows are made of grass,’¹⁴ enduring disturbances and troubles for their entire lives. As for myself, I abide in vast halls and vacant courtyards, wandering in leisure to the very end of each year. For me to take the fruits of their labors as a contribution to my own reclusive life—is this a matter which makes the mind feel at ease? For me to take the benefits which they have earned as the basis for my own personal convenience—is this a circumstance which accords with principle?

“Were I to fail to carry forth the simultaneous exercise of compassion and wisdom while also accumulating the two ‘adornments’ of merit and wisdom¹⁵—if the *dāna*-providing¹⁶ faithful thus remained unable to absorb [the benefits from their] kindnesses and

beings thus could not receive [appropriate reward for their] generosity—then there would be a measure of repayment of indebtedness remaining due even on each grain of rice and on each inch of thread [which I've been given]. As a result, the retribution for evil deeds will become a difficult consequence to escape." This is the fourth of the causal bases for generation of the bodhi resolve.

5. MINDFULNESS OF THE KINDNESS OF BEINGS

What then is intended by "mindfulness of the kindness of beings"? One reflects, "From far off kalpas ago on forward to the present, other beings and I have served each other as fathers and mothers in lifetime after lifetime." In this there have been kindnesses they have proffered to us. Although now separated from those lives and hence so confused that we do not recognize each other, when we reflect on this principle, how can we fail to reciprocate?

How can one know that those beings who now wear fur and carry horns are not one's children from the past? How can one know that those who are now but wriggling worms, larvae, and flying insects were not previously my father? It is commonly seen that, for those who separate from their parents when still young, once grown, they forget their faces entirely. How much the more so would this be the case for those with whom I possess that condition of their having being a previous-life relative. This being the case, then it is difficult to remember whether they were named "Zhang" or named "Wang."

As for those [relatives], who [among us] would be aware of their screams down in the hells or their turning about in the realm of the hungry ghosts, undergoing such suffering and pain? As for their hunger and desolation—how would they be able to present an appeal [to us]? Although I do not now see or hear them, they are certainly longing to be saved and seeking to be rescued.

Were it not for the Sutras, one would be unable to reveal this state of affairs. Were it not for the Buddha, one would be unable to utter this description. Those others, possessed as they are of erroneous views—how could they be qualified to even know of this? Thus it is that, when a bodhisattva observes crickets and ants, he realizes that each of them was his father or his mother sometime in the past. He realizes that each of them shall become buddhas in the future. He constantly ponders how to benefit them and he continues to bear in mind the responsibility of repaying their kindnesses. This is the fifth of the causal bases for generation of the bodhi resolve.