

PART TWO:

**THE BODHISAṂBHĀRA TREATISE
COMMENTARY**

The Early Indian Commentary On

**Ārya Nāgārjuna's
Treatise on the Provisions for Enlightenment
(*Bodhisambhāra Śāstra*)**

**Composed by Bhikshu Vaṣitva
(circa 300–500 CE)**

He has succeeded in developing such knowledges as these with respect to the various sorts of bodies [described in the passages above.

Additionally, he has succeeded in gaining sovereign mastery of the lifespan (*āyur-vaśitā*), sovereign mastery of the mind (*citta-vaśitā*), sovereign mastery of equipage (*pariṣkāra-vaśitā*), sovereign mastery of karmic actions (*karma-vaśitā*), sovereign mastery of vows (*praṇidhāna-vaśitā*), sovereign mastery of faith and understanding (*adhimukti-vaśitā*), sovereign mastery of spiritual powers (*rddhi-vaśitā*), sovereign mastery of the knowledges (*jñāna-vaśitā*), sovereign mastery of rebirths (*upapatti-vaśitā*), and sovereign mastery of Dharma (*dharma-vaśitā*).

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

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

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

These six pāramitās

Encompass the provisions essential for bodhi,

They are comparable in this to empty space

Which entirely envelopes all things.

COMMENTARY:

The six pāramitās as explained above comprehensively subsume the provisions for bodhi. This is analogous to the way in which, in empty space, all things possessed of or devoid of consciousness which travel about and abide in it are all contained within it. Thus all of the other sorts of provisions such as the “learning” provision are contained within the six pāramitās. One should realize that they all share this same common feature [of being subsumed therein]. [In this respect], they are no different.

AN ALTERNATIVE SCHEMA: THE FOUR MERIT BASES INCLUDE ALL PROVISIONS

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

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

COMMENTARY:

Additionally, there is a treatise master who sets forth the idea that all provisions requisite for bodhi are included within “the truth basis” (*satya*), “the relinquishment basis” (*tyāga*), “the cessation basis” (*upaśama*), and “the wisdom basis” (*prajñā*).

As for “truth,” it is characterized by refraining from falseness and deception. Truth then is just moral virtue. Hence “the truth [basis]” is [identifiable with] the pāramitā of *śīla*.

As for “relinquishment,” it is just “giving.” Hence “the relinquishment basis” is [identifiable with] the pāramitā of *dāna*.

As for “cessation,” it is just an absence of turbidity in the mind. If the mind is not turbid, then it is such as matters connected with affections and antipathies are unable to move. Hence “the cessation basis” is integral to both the pāramitā of *kṣānti* (the perfection of patience) and the pāramitā of *dhyāna* (the perfection of meditative discipline).

“The wisdom basis” is [identifiable with] the pāramitā of *prajñā* (the perfection of wisdom).

The pāramitā of *vīrya* (the perfection of vigor) pervasively permeates all of these “bases,” for if there were to be an absence of vigor, then there would be no accomplishment of anything at all. Hence the pāramitā of *vīrya* is that which brings all endeavors to completion.

It is for these sorts of reasons that all of the provisions [may be described as being] entirely subsumed within “the four bases” (*adhiṣṭhāna*).⁴⁴

Question: According to the statements in the Sūtras, it is on account of the kindness (*maitrī*) provision that one gains a mind free of any obstructiveness and it is on account of the relinquishment (*tyāga*) provision that one succeeds in cutting off detestation and affection. What in all of this differentiates “kindness” from “compassion”?

Response: (As below...)

THE FOUR IMMEASURABLES AS ESSENTIAL ATTRIBUTES OF THE BODHISATTVA**009 – The Great Compassion and the Great Kindness**

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

COMMENTARY:

When one enters the perilous path of cyclic births and deaths, one falls into the destinies of the hell-dwellers, animals, and hungry ghosts and abides in the net of wrong and perverse views. Covered over by the canopy of a thickly-grown forest of delusions, one courses along on an erroneous track which is not the Path and abides in a darkness [so deep it is] like that of the blind. One sees a means of escape in what is not in fact a means of escape. One instead is seized and held by the insurgents of aging, sickness, death, worry, lamentation, and bitter affliction. One then enters the thickly-grown forest of demonic intentions.

As for these who have departed so far from the intentions of the Buddhas, the bodhisattva feels for them such great compassion that it pierces his body, goes on through his skin, through his flesh, into his sinews, and penetrates even into the very marrow of his bones. Thus he is able to become for all beings one in whom they can take refuge. He causes those beings to be able to pass on through just such a dangerous, difficult, and terrible road as this which traverses the vast wilderness of cyclic births and deaths. He then establishes them in the city of all-knowledge where they abide within the palace of fearlessness.

This is comparable to the circumstance of an elder whose single blessed son has become afflicted with the suffering of some sickness. The love felt for his son penetrates his skin and flesh and enters the very marrow of his bones. He is only able to think, "Oh when will it be that he will be able to recover from his illness?!" Compassion (*karuṇa*), too, is just like this. It is such as one feels only for those beings who are caught in suffering. As for kindness (*maitrī*), it is a feeling which, when it arises, extends universally to all beings.

Moreover, it is on account of kindness that one develops a mind free of any obstruction in relating to beings. It is on account of compassion that one experiences no weariness or disgust as one works within the sphere of cyclic births and deaths.

Then again, kindness is generated with respect to those persons who are good whereas compassion is generated even for people not inclined toward goodness.

Furthermore, because the kindness of the bodhisattva grows ever greater, he does not cherish any attachment to his own happiness. This then culminates in the generation of “the great kindness” (*mahā-maitrī*). Because one’s compassion grows ever greater, one may then give up even his own limbs and even his own life. This then culminates in the generation of “the great compassion” (*mahā-karuṇā*).⁴⁵

010 – The Great Sympathetic Joy

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

COMMENTARY:

As for “If one brings to mind the qualities of a buddha,” what are those “qualities of a buddha”? [One experiences sympathetic joy on account of the following qualities]:

- 1 – Because all buddhas, the Bhagavāns, have worked to accumulate roots of goodness across the course of countless hundreds of thousands of *koṭīs* of kalpas.
- 2 – Because of their being unprotective of the risks to their own physical, verbal, and mental karma.
- 3 – Because of their severing doubts regarding the five categories of things which should be known.
- 4 – Because of their remaining free of any error in the four kinds of responses to challenging questions.
- 5 – Because of their teaching of the thirty-seven dharmas assisting realization of bodhi.
- 6 – Because of their awakening to the causes and conditions comprising the twelve-fold chain of conditioned arising.
- 7 – Because of their presenting instruction through the nine categories of teaching text.
- 8 – Because of their perfection in the four modes of abiding and sustaining [the Dharma].
- 9 – Because of their having realized the four immeasurables.
- 10 – Because of their having perfected the six pāramitās.

- 11 – Because of their having explained the ten bodhisattva grounds.
- 12 – Because of their having completely established the five-fold world-transcending Sangha (monks, nuns, novice monks, novice nuns, probationary novice nuns).
- 13 – Because of their perfection of the dharmas possessed by buddhas, including the four fearlessnesses, the ten powers, and the eighteen dharmas exclusive to buddhas.
- 14 – Because of their possession of the boundless state of mind.
- 15 – Because of their sovereign mastery in the transformation of their own minds.
- 16 – Because of their methods for remaining free of weariness [in teaching beings].
- 17 – Because of their having realized the *vajra*-like samādhi.
- 18 – Because of their being free of falseness in explaining the Dharma.
- 19 – Because of their Dharma's invulnerability to refutation.
- 20 – Because of their serving as guides for beings in the world.
- 21 – Because of their possessing the "summit" mark atop the head, the peak of which none can view.
- 22 – Because of their being such as none can equal.
- 23 – Because of their being such as none can overcome.
- 24 – Because of their possessing the inconceivable Dharma.
- 25 – Because of their having developed the great kindness, great compassion, great sympathetic joy, and great equanimity.
- 26 – Because of their possession of the hundred-fold marks of merit.
- 27 – Because of their possession of countless roots of goodness.
- 28 – Because of their possession of boundlessly-expansive meritorious qualities.
- 29 – Because of their possession of incalculably vast merit.
- 30 – Because of their possession of countless meritorious qualities.
- 31 – Because of their possession of meritorious qualities [so subtle and numerous that they] surpass one's ability to distinguish them.
- 32 – Because of their possession of rarely-encountered meritorious qualities.
- 33 – Because of their possession of meritorious qualities not held in common [with any other class of beings].

Qualities such as these are what is intended [when the text says]:
 “If one brings to mind the qualities of a buddha.”

For the sake of teaching beings, the Buddhas manifest various sorts of spiritual transformations. Adapting to whichever beings are amenable to being brought across to liberation, they accord with the type of body possessed by such beings, appropriately adjusting their size, height, and build, according with distinctions in the forms possessed by those beings, and adapting as well to their language and to the various levels of karmic purity possessed by those beings.

The Buddhas, the Bhagavāns, employ all sorts of rare spiritual superknowledges to accord with the activities of beings and to accord with the types of beliefs and desires they possess. Thus they employ many different types of spiritual transformations, manifesting distinctly different sorts of skillful means in efforts to teach those beings.

In a case where, on hearing of these matters, one is moved to feel such admiration and joy that one experiences karmic purification as this occurs, this becomes what may be described as “the great sympathetic joy.” In this, it is the welling up of mental feelings which is referred to as “admiration.” When that sensation of admiration pervades the entire body, it becomes what is referred to as “joy.” When through the mind of joyfulness, one experiences happiness, this is what is referred to as the process of “becoming” [purified].

When one experiences such happiness on calling to mind the great superknowledges possessed by those who have achieved the right enlightenment, one’s mind then becomes free of turbidity. It is this which is referred to as “purification.” When one’s mind becomes “purified,” it is pervaded by the mental sensation of joyfulness. This is what is meant when one refers to “the great sympathetic joy.”

Although those dedicated to the lesser-scope vehicles of liberation also possess this concept of sympathetic joy within their doctrines, [what we are speaking of here] is not held in common with them. It is this concept discussed here which alone which is worthy to be known as “the great sympathetic joy.”

Question: Should the bodhisattva exercise equanimity with respect to beings, or not?

Response: (As below...)

011 – The Great Equanimity

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

COMMENTARY:

The bodhisattva, *mahāsattva*, is constantly motivated by the intention to bring benefit and happiness to beings. In cases where, afflicted by covetousness, hatefulness, and delusion, they go forth on the road of miserliness, precept-breaking, hostility, indolence, mental scatteredness, and intelligence devoted to the pursuit of evil—in cases where they go down the road of such aberrant behaviors as these—one should still refrain from forsaking such beings. One should always persist in speaking to them about the cultivation of giving and the cultivation of moral virtue. In accordance with one's abilities, one should strive to draw them in. Thus one should not forsake them.

SUBSIDIARY ASPECTS OF THE PROVISIONS**SKILLFUL MEANS AS ESSENTIAL STRATAGEMS FOR THE TEACHING OF BEINGS**

012 – The Role of Skillful Means

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

COMMENTARY:

Even from the very beginning, this bodhisattva who has entered the Great Vehicle should accomplish whatever he is able to do as he interacts with beings, resorting to whichever expedients are consistent with the earlier commentary on the skillful means *pāramitā*. He should be energetically diligent in employing all manner of skillful-means techniques to instruct beings and establish them in this Great Vehicle.

Question: Why is it that the bodhisattva [first] resorts only to the Great Vehicle in instructing beings and does not instead choose to offer instruction in the doctrines of the Śrāvaka-disciple and Pratyekabuddha vehicles?

Response: (As below...)

A BODHISATTVA'S VARYING TEACHINGS ADDRESSING VARYING CAPACITIES

013 – The Superior Merit Arising from Teaching the Great Vehicle

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

COMMENTARY:

Even were one to instruct a Ganges' sands number of beings so that they gained the fruit of arhatship, still, this merit derived from teaching the Great Vehicle is supreme over that generated in teachings associated with the vehicles of the Śrāvaka-disciples and the others. This is because the karmic seeds thereby set down are inexhaustible. All of these karmic seeds are able in turn to redound to the benefit of yet other beings, thus constituting expedients by which they too generate the mind resolved on realizing bodhi.

Also, it is because the former involves the production of *śrāvaka*-disciples and pratyekabuddhas that this latter sort of merit is superior to that. As for this merit being supreme, this is because the Great Vehicle is in fact superior to the vehicles of the Śrāvaka-disciples and the Pratyekabuddhas. It is also because the mind resolved on bodhi possesses immeasurably fine and innumerable many meritorious qualities. It is also because it is solely on account of the Great Vehicle that one is able to prevent the lineage of the Three Jewels from being cut off entirely [during the Dharma-ending age].

It is for these reasons that, if one desires to gain a great measure of merit, one should resort to the Great Vehicle in instructing beings and should refrain from resorting to the teachings of the other vehicles.

Question: How could it be that all of the Mahāsattvas would resort only to the Great Vehicle in instructing beings and would somehow never employ the vehicles of the Śrāvaka-disciples and the Pratyekabuddhas in doing so?

Response: (As below...)

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

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

COMMENTARY:

In the case of beings possessing only middling or inferior levels of resolve, they have relinquished any endeavors devoted to the benefit of others and are deficient in the great compassion. Thus they are such as are not amenable to the use of Great Vehicle doctrines in teaching them. Then and only then does one resort to the vehicles of the Śrāvaka-disciples and the Pratyekabuddhas, employing those teachings then to instruct such beings and bring them across to liberation.

Question: In the event that one encounters beings who cannot be taught through resort to any of the Three Vehicles, should one then utterly forsake them or not?

Response: (As below...)

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

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

COMMENTARY:

In an instance where one encounters beings who delight in the sphere of cyclic births and deaths, who detest and abhor [a life devoted to] liberation, and who therefore are not amenable to accepting the teachings of the Śrāvaka, Pratyekabuddha, or Great Vehicles, one should employ teaching techniques by which they will be established in the four practices of Brahmā associated with the vehicle of Brahmā.

If these beings are such as cannot be taught even by resort to the vehicle associated with Brahmā, one should employ teachings which may establish them in the path of the ten types of good karma associated with the celestial [rebirth] vehicle or, [if even that is untenable], in merit-generating endeavors such as giving and so forth. [In any case], one should refrain from just forsaking them entirely.

Question: If there be beings who delight in worldly pleasures and who have no strength by which they are able to act in accordance with the three merit-generating circumstances, what should one do on encountering such people?⁴⁶

Response: (As below...)

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

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

COMMENTARY:

Where there are beings who exclusively dedicate themselves to seeking desire-based pleasures, who do not contemplate the import of ensuing lifetimes, who are bound for the realms of the hell-dwellers, hungry ghosts, or animals, and whom one cannot subject to instruction bringing rebirth in the heavens or spiritual liberation, still, one should feel pity for their child-like level of wisdom. One should then adapt to whatever is appropriate for them and employ present-life priorities to draw them in. In accordance with one's own powers and abilities, one uses giving and so forth to draw them in. One should have pity on them and not forsake them.

Question: If a bodhisattva encounters these child-like beings for whom no skillful means may succeed in drawing them in and instructing them, what should he do with such people?

Response: (As below...)

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

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

COMMENTARY:

If a bodhisattva finds he has no skillful means whatsoever by which he is able to draw in and instruct those pitiable beings who delight in the evils of karmic transgressions, that bodhisattva should initiate a reflection through which he regards them as if they were his own sons. He should implement the great kindness and compassion. There is no Path-concordant principle by which one may rationalize abandoning them.

Question: It has already been explained that one should find it essential to attract beings [to the Path]. It is not yet clear, however, by which skillful means one might succeed in drawing them in.

Response: (As below...)

THE FOUR MEANS OF ATTRACTION AS ESSENTIAL BODHISATTVA METHODS**018 – The Means of Attraction**

Drawing them in through giving, through explaining Dharma,
 Through listening to them discuss the Dharma,
 Or through endeavors beneficial to them—
 These are skillful means through which to attract them.⁴⁷

COMMENTARY:

For the sake of drawing in beings, bodhisattvas:
 May employ giving as a skillful means to attract them,
 May accept gifts bestowed by them,
 May explain Dharma for them,
 May listen to them speak about the Dharma,
 May carry out actions which benefit them,
 May speak to them in a way which they find pleasing,
 May undertake joint endeavors together with them,
 May explain specialized fields of learning for them,
 May teach them special skills,
 May appear among them pursuing a particular livelihood,
 May cure them when they are sick, or
 May rescue them from perilous difficulties.

It is endeavors of these sorts which qualify as skillful means for the attraction of beings. One should resort to these various sorts of skillful means to draw beings [into the Path]. One should not abandon them.

Question: What are the benefits accomplished through having successfully used such means of attraction to draw beings [into the Path]?

Response: (As below...)

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

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

COMMENTARY:

In this matter of the bodhisattva's vowing to benefit the world, he reflects in this manner: "Whatever endeavors might redound

to the benefit of the world—in every case, those are endeavors I should carry out.” Having made this vow, in those endeavors done for beings, one should not allow oneself to yield to weariness. Nor should one allow oneself to fall into negligence.

One should also reflect thus: “When one benefits the world one is thereby just benefiting oneself as well.” Hence, when the bodhisattva is involved in endeavors aimed at benefiting beings and making them happy, he should refrain from abandoning them.

Question: It has already been explained that the bodhisattva should constantly strive for the benefit and happiness of beings and that in doing so, he should refrain from courting in equanimity [where “equanimity” is synonymous with “indifference” or “renunciation” or “abandonment”]. However, as regards dharmas [as aspects of existence], should one practice equanimity with respect to them, or not?

Response: (As below...)

MORE ON EQUANIMITY AS PRACTICED BY THE BODHISATTVA

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

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

COMMENTARY:

As for “the Dharma realm,” it is identical with the sphere of conditioned arising. Hence, as has been stated before: “Whether or not the Tathāgata came forth [into the world], the very nature of this Dharma realm (*dharmatā*) would nonetheless constantly abide. It is [the very essence of] the so-called ‘conditioned arising.’”

Again, as has also been stated before, [the Buddha stated]: “Ānanda, conditioned arising is extremely profound. Moreover, its apprehension is a matter of extreme profundity as well.”

Thus the bodhisattva who enters [the mind-state cognizing] this extremely profound Dharma realm thereby brings about the cessation of all such duality-based extremes as “existence,” “non-existence,” and so forth. Once one develops the associated facilitating wisdom, one immediately cuts off all mind-moving frivolous discourse and mental discrimination. Thus one abandons all seizing on any aspects [of objective phenomena].

In all those circumstances where the intellectual mind consciousness would ordinarily be active, it ceases to be active, even to the point that it is no longer active in the midst of practices focused on buddhahood, in the midst of bodhi practices, in the midst of bodhisattva practices, or in the realization of nirvāṇa.⁴⁸

When this occurs, [mental discriminations] no longer serve any function. In the midst of dharmas, one realizes a mind state marked by stillness within stillness, a mind state devoid of mental discriminations. This is the equanimity conforming to ultimate truth (*paramārtha*).

Having already discussed the transcendent form of equanimity, I shall now explain equanimity in the sphere of the mundane.

021 – Equanimity as Remaining Unimpeded by the Eight Worldly Dharmas

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

COMMENTARY:

One retains no attachment to concerns over the receipt of beneficial gains, fame, praise, or happiness. Nor is one inclined to retreat or find any obstacle in the opposite conditions involving loss, ill repute, disparagement, or suffering.⁴⁹ One relinquishes both fondness and loathing. One abides in the midst of such conditions and yet remains free of any further mental discriminations. This is what is meant by the second type, equanimity amidst the mundane.

Question: If a bodhisattva were [to allow himself] to abide in ultimate-truth equanimity in the midst of dharmas, given the need to be as urgently energetic in pursuing bodhi as someone whose turban has caught fire, how could such diligent practice even be possible?

Response: (As below...)

INDISPENSABILITY OF DILIGENCE AND VIGOR FOR A BODHISATTVA

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

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

COMMENTARY:

Although one should abide in this sort of equanimity in the midst of dharmas, the bodhisattva still continues to engage in resolute cultivation as intensely energetic as someone whose turban has caught fire. So long as the bodhisattva has not yet achieved irreversibility in his quest for bodhi, he should be diligent in the practices through which realization of bodhi is gained.

One should be aware of five circumstances related to bodhisattva “irreversibility” in pursuit of bodhi. What are the five? They are as described in such sutras as the *Accumulation of Blossoms Sutra*:

1 – [Irreversibility] based on hearing the names of those bodhisattvas or buddhas, the Bhagavāns, who are equipped with the great vows. This is the first of the causal circumstances.⁵⁰

2 – [Irreversibility] based on vowing to be reborn in the buddhalands of those buddhas, the Bhagavāns. This is the second of the causal circumstances.⁵¹

3 – [Irreversibility] based on accepting, bearing in mind, or discoursing on such profound sutras as the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*. This is the third of the causal circumstances.

4 – [Irreversibility] based on cultivating such samādhis as are associated with [the sixth bodhisattva ground], “the ground of direct presence” (*abhimukha-bhūmi*), or on cultivating sympathetic joy in someone else’s realization of such samādhis. This is the fourth of the causal circumstances.

These four circumstances are described as constituting the irreversibility of bodhisattvas who have not yet realized the patienties.

5 – When these bodhisattvas come to abide on [the eighth bodhisattva ground], “the ground of immovability” (*acala-bhūmi*), they succeeded in realizing the “unproduced-dharmas patience” (*anutpattika-dharma-kṣānti*). This is what is described as constituting “ultimate and definite irreversibility.” This is the fifth of the causal circumstances.⁵²

Question: The bodhisattva can gain irreversibility through any of those [first] four causal circumstances, and yet you claim that one should pursue diligent practice with the energetic intensity of someone whose turban has caught fire. This being the case, how could one be able to succeed [in maintaining that level of energetic diligence given that irreversibility has already been so easily achieved]?

Response: (As below...)

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

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

COMMENTARY:

Although the bodhisattva may succeed in reaching irreversibility through any of the [first] four causal circumstances [described above], he should still continue on with vigor, refraining from resting, this because he previously uttered these words: "I shall cause all beings to gain realization of nirvāṇa." Because he has taken on such a heavy burden, he continues on with unremitting vigor during the interim.

Question: Why is it that, during the interim, one continues on with vigor, not allowing himself to rest?

Response: (As below...)

THE DANGERS TO A BODHISATTVA OF NEGLIGENCE: SPIRITUAL DEATH**024 – Prior to Compassion and Patience, the Bodhisattva Life Remains Imperiled**

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

COMMENTARY:

No matter which of the [first] four causal circumstances the bodhisattva avails himself of, he will succeed in gaining irreversibility. However, so long as he has not yet generated the great compassion and so long as he has not yet realized the unproduced-dharmas patience, during the interim period, he remains subject to the power of his karma. As for the arising of this "death," it would arise on account of entering into a state of negligence. It is for this reason that the bodhisattva should become so diligent in his practice aimed at realization of the unproduced-dharmas patience that he acts with the urgency of one whose turban has caught fire. Thus it is that he exerts himself with unresting vigor during the interim.⁵³

Question: What additional sort of "death" is this to which the bodhisattva remains subject?

Response: (As below...)

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

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

COMMENTARY:

No matter which of the above four circumstances is relied upon, one may succeed through that means in gaining “irreversibility.” However, so long as this bodhisattva does not yet possess the great compassion and realization of the patiences, he has not yet succeeded in moving beyond *śrāvaka* and pratyekabuddha stations.

Thus it could occur that he might lose the resolve to realize bodhi through the powerful influence of bad friends, through terror of the sufferings inherent in cyclic births and deaths, through taking births in an intervening period [when Dharma is not present in the world], or through hatred of bodhisattvas or slander of right Dharma during the deterioration of the kalpa.

Having subsequently generated resolve focused on *śrāvaka*-disciple or pratyekabuddha stations, he could gain the liberation of either the Śrāvaka-disciples or the Pratyekabuddhas. That would amount to the severance of the roots of bodhisattvahood, namely, the great compassion. It is for this reason that the Bodhisattvas and the Buddhas, the Bhagavāns, have identified such an occurrence as constituting the death of all understanding and awareness.⁵⁴

Question: It is appropriate here to contemplate this question: Would the bodhisattva be more frightened by the prospect of dwelling in the hell-realms or instead by the prospect of falling down onto the grounds of the Śrāvaka-disciples and Pratyekabuddhas?

Response: (As below...)

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

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

COMMENTARY:

If the bodhisattva were confronted with the prospect of abiding in the hell-realms amidst their countless hundreds of thousands of

sufferings, he would not find this more frightening than the prospect of falling down onto the grounds of the Śrāvaka-disciples and Pratyekabuddhas.

Question: Why is this the case?

Response: (As below...)

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

It is not the case that falling into the hell realms

Would create an ultimate obstacle to bodhi.

If one fell onto the grounds of the Śrāvakas or Pratyekabuddhas,

That would create an ultimate obstacle.

COMMENTARY:

In the event that one were to fall into the hell realms (lit. “*niraya*”), this would still not present an ultimate obstacle to the right-enlightenment Path. During that time when one abides in the hell realms, it *does* present a *temporary* obstacle to the acquisition of bodhi which endures only until one's evil karma has been exhausted.

However, in the event that the bodhisattva falls down onto the grounds of the Śrāvaka-disciples and Pratyekabuddhas, that then *does* result in [the bodhi of a buddha] *never* being able to manifest. Thus the Śrāvaka-disciple and Pratyekabuddha grounds do constitute an obstacle to realizing the right enlightenment.

It is on account of the implications of this that, when faced with the prospect of falling into the hell realms, the bodhisattva does not become as frightened as he would at the prospect of falling down onto the grounds of the Śrāvaka-disciples and Pratyekabuddhas.

Question: What is the nature of his fearfulness?

Response: (As below...)

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

Just as is said of one who loves long life

That he is frightened at the prospect of being beheaded,

So too the grounds of the Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas

Should provoke in one this very sort of fear.

COMMENTARY:

The Buddha, the Bhagavān, spoke in this way in the sutras. Just as a person fond of living becomes frightened at the prospect of beheading, given that the bodhisattva aspires to the unsurpassed

form of bodhi, he too should experience just such fearfulness at the prospect of entering the grounds of the Śrāvaka-disciples or Pratyekabuddhas. It is for this reason that, although he might be faced with entering the hell realms, the bodhisattva would not become as frightened at that prospect as he would become fearful at the prospect of falling down onto the grounds of the Śrāvaka-disciples or Pratyekabuddhas.

Question: The dharmas obstructing the bodhisattva who has not yet realized the unproduced-dharmas patience have now already been described. How then does this bodhisattva succeed in realizing the unproduced-dharmas patience?

Response: (As below...)

THE BODHISATTVA'S UNPRODUCED-DHARMAS PATIENCE AND IRREVERSIBILITY

029 – The Tetralemma-Transcending Contemplation of Dharmas

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

COMMENTARY:

When the bodhisattva contemplates the sphere of conditioned arising, he reflects, “Wherever dharmas arising from [the coming together] of conditions are held to ‘exist,’ that ‘existence’ is based solely on conceptual consensus. Therefore, whatever is ‘produced’ cannot be validly established as having any inherent existence. Because its inherent existence cannot be validly established, then the process of ‘production’ is itself devoid of inherent existence.

“If there is no intrinsic reality to the process of production, then ‘destruction’ is itself but a matter of [interdependent] dual concepts.

“As with ‘production’ and ‘destruction,’ simultaneous affirmation and negation is also devoid of any substantial existence. So too with the concepts of nonproduction and nondestruction which themselves are based on dual concepts devoid of any substantial existence.

“In those cases which involve the dual concepts of production and destruction as with ‘both production and nonproduction,’ and ‘both destruction and nondestruction,’—those too are devoid of any real existence, this because they involve a simultaneity of opposing concepts.

“So too it is in the case of the concept of being ‘empty [of inherent existence],’ for wherever [one might posit that] there is some supposed ‘existence,’ that is a case devoid of any intrinsic substantiality. Those concepts of ‘non-emptiness’ as well as ‘both emptiness and non-emptiness’ are just the same in this respect.”

Question: If one reflected in this manner, concluding that, “because they are merely products of conditions, all dharmas are devoid of any inherent existence,” how could one persist in this reflection? [Persisting in the contemplation would necessitate the conclusion that], “Not even the dharma of conditioned co-production exists.”

Response: (As below...)

030 – Unshakable Contemplation in the Unproduced-Dharmas Patience

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

COMMENTARY:

When this bodhisattva contemplates conditioned co-production in accordance with reality, he succeeds in abandoning the view that any dharma possesses any intrinsic substance of its own. Through abandoning the view imputing intrinsically-existent substantiality, one straightaway cuts off any seizing on an intrinsically-existent substantiality in any dharma.

Once one succeeds in cutting off [the view] imputing intrinsic substantiality to dharmas,⁵⁵ one then reflects, “It is not the case that there are no inward-related or outward-related dharmas. However, there is no intrinsically existent substantiality associated with those dharmas. Although the dharmas produced through conditioned-coproduction do exist, that “existence” abides only in the manner of a bundled sheaf of reeds, a magical conjuration, or a mere dream. Wherever dharmas are produced from conditions, no intrinsic substantiality is actually ‘produced.’”

Once one has carried out this contemplation, one becomes such as no *śramaṇa* or brahman is able to move and yet one refrains from seizing on [this level of] realization. Because one takes pleasure in contemplating the dharma of non-production and because one severs all mental discriminations, this is described as the

“unproduced-dharmas patience.” Having gained this realization, this bodhisattva immediately comes to abide on the “unmoving” bodhisattva ground (*acala bhūmi*).

The verses state:

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

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

COMMENTARY:

On account of having gained this unproduced-dharmas patience, immediately at the time of realization, neither before nor after, the Buddhas manifest directly before one and make the prediction that one will become a buddha, stating: “In a future life, at this particular time, in this particular world, and in this particular kalpa, you will become the Tathāgata known as such-and-such, endowed with right and universal knowledge.” For the bodhisattva, this qualifies as the achievement of irreversibility.

Question: All of those bodhisattvas on the first through the seventh grounds are definitely progressing toward *sambodhi*. Why then are they not declared to be “irreversible”? Why does one instead only describe the [eighth-stage] bodhisattva dwelling on the “unmoving ground” (*acala bhūmi*) as “irreversible”?

Response: (As below...)

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

Those bodhisattvas already dwelling at “the stage of immovability” Have gained irreversible wisdom cognizing all dharmas’ reality. As their wisdom cannot be turned back by Two-vehicles adherents, It is only at this point that they are designated as “irreversible.”⁵⁶

COMMENTARY:

This alludes to all of the roots of world-transcending goodness [possessed by those bodhisattvas], including faith and the rest.⁵⁷ (The five root-faculties are: faith, vigor, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom.) The Śrāvaka-disciples, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas on up through the seventh ground are unable to obstruct [these bodhisattvas] and cause them to turn back in retreat.⁵⁸

It is for this reason that, [from this point on, these bodhisattvas] are designated as “irreversible.” It is not the case that those [previous] other seven⁵⁹ levels of bodhisattvas are “irreversible” in their quest for *saṃbodhi* as they course along in the midst of dharmas.

We have already discussed the causal circumstances involved in irreversibility. There is herein the additional factor of gaining the especially supreme form of prediction [of buddhahood]. In the Great Vehicle, one speaks of four types of predictions, namely:

- 1 – Predictions bestowed prior to generating the resolve to realize bodhi;
- 2 – Predictions bestowed simultaneously with the generation of the resolve to realize bodhi;
- 3 – Predictions the bestowal of which remain concealed; and
- 4 – Predictions the bestowal of which involve “direct presence.”

These are the four kinds of predictions. Among these, as for “predictions bestowed prior to generating the resolve to realize bodhi,” this refers to cases involving individuals with sharp faculties and especially superior faith. When the Buddhas, the Bhagavāns, observe them with the unimpeded buddha eye, they may then bestow on them a prediction [of future buddhahood].

As for “predictions bestowed simultaneously with the generation of the resolve to realize bodhi,” this occurs in instances where someone has completely ripened their roots of goodness, has planted the seeds of bodhi, and has already carried out cultivation to such a degree that their faculties are fiercely sharp and they have developed especially superior forms of practice. Because they wish only to liberate all beings, immediately upon generating the resolve, they then enter the state of irreversibility wherein they become free of any dharmas conducive to falling away and leave behind the eight difficulties.⁶⁰ It may be that this person then hears the bestowal of his own prediction [of buddhahood].

There are cases where someone has not yet become vigorous in cultivating the six perfections and, so long as he fails to hear [a prediction of his future buddhahood], he will continue to develop a greater level of vigor in such practice. In order to prevent such a person from hearing [a prediction] while still wishing to cause others to hear that person's prediction so that their doubts might be cut off, the Buddha may employ his awesome spiritual powers to bestow a “concealed prediction” [of buddhahood].

In an instance where a bodhisattva has ripened the world-transcendent five root-faculties, has realized the unproduced-dharmas patience, and has come to abide on the bodhisattva ground of immovability (*acala bhūmi*), he may immediately receive the “direct presence” type of prediction.

These are the four kinds of predictions. Because those bodhisattvas who have realized the unproduced-dharmas patience have already become definite [in their irreversibility], the Buddhas, the Bhagavāns, manifest directly before them and bestow on them this [latter type of] prediction of buddhahood.

There is yet another [prediction type], the prediction arising based on “secret intention.” It may be regarded as a fifth type of prediction. It is such as is found in the *Lotus Sutra*, wherein it states:

We all experience sympathetic joy
On hearing the Great Rishi’s secretly-intentioned words.
As exemplified in the prediction given to that ārya,
The fearless Śāriputra.

We, too, should be able
To become buddhas, unsurpassed in the world,
And should also have resort to the secretly-intentioned words
Devoted to the unsurpassed right enlightenment.

What is the meaning implicit in the utterance of these “specially-spoken” predictions? There are treatise masters stating that they are set forth to cause those in the Śrāvaka Vehicle not yet established in the “definite [position]” to generate the mind resolved on bodhi.

There are others supposing that this is done for the sake of solidifying the determination of newly-resolved beginning bodhisattvas who, frightened at the prospect of cyclic existence’s sufferings, may be tempted to opt for the cessation of the Śrāvaka-disciple’s nirvāṇa.

Then again, [some suppose that] similarly-named bodhisattvas from other buddhalands were in attendance at the [Dharma] assembly when the time came for bestowing predictions and the Buddha then bestowed these predictions on them, [but not actually on any of the Buddha’s arhat disciples].

Various commentators make these sorts of discriminating judgments regarding such “specially-spoken” predictions. The real meaning behind these circumstances is such as only the Buddhas, the Bhagavāns, are able to know.

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

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

COMMENTARY:

As for the samādhi involving “the direct presence of all Buddhas,” this is referring to that samādhi in which all Buddhas of the present era manifest directly in one’s presence as one abides [on the ground of “direct presence”] (*abhimukha-bhūmi*).⁶¹ “Samādhi,” is a designation referring to abiding in a uniformly even [and profoundly deep] mind state.

During that period when the bodhisattva has not yet gained these samādhis, he should not allow himself to become negligent. This is because, so long as he has not gained these samādhis, the bodhisattva is still vulnerable to falling into the wretched destinies and has still not transcended vulnerability to the [eight] difficult [rebirth] circumstances. Therefore, in order to be able to gain these samādhis, one must not indulge any negligence. Once one gains these samādhis, he is liberated from all such fearsome circumstances.

These samādhis are of three kinds, namely:

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

Where, through mindfulness of the Buddha, one [employs visualizations to] mentally manipulate objective conditions involving the shape, appearance, major marks, or minor characteristics adorning the Tathāgata’s body, this is a samādhi involving “mental transformation of form-based objective conditions.”

Beyond this, where, through mindfulness of the Buddha, one [employs visualization to] mentally manipulate objective conditions associated with the ten names [of a buddha], the ten powers possessed by [a buddha’s] body, the fearlessnesses, the dharmas exclusive to a buddha, or any of the other immeasurably many qualities

of a form-body buddha, this is a samādhi involving “mental transformation of Dharma-related objective conditions.”

Beyond this, where one does not mentally manipulate form-based conditions, does not mentally manipulate Dharma-related conditions, does not engage in any intellect-directed mindfulness-of-the-Buddha, does not apprehend any [conditioned dharmas] at all, and abandons even the samādhis focused on the emptiness of signs, this is what is meant by a samādhi “involving no mental transformation of any objective conditions whatsoever.”

Among these, the newly-resolved bodhisattva gains samādhis involving the mental transformation of form-based objective conditions. One who has already entered the [bodhisattva] practices gains samādhis involving the mental transformation of Dharma-related objective conditions. Those who have gained the unproduced-dharmas patience have gone beyond all mental transformation of objective conditions. It is these last who have reached the “definite” state [of bodhisattva irreversibility], this by virtue of their sovereign mastery [of the bodhisattva practices].⁶²

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

The solid samādhis

On the ground of all Buddhas’ “direct presence”

Serve for the bodhisattva as his father,

Whereas the great compassion and patiences serve as his mother.

COMMENTARY:

Because these previously-described three types of samādhis manifesting on the ground of the Buddhas’ “direct presence” focus on the qualities of the Bodhisattvas as well as the qualities of the Buddhas, they are said to serve as the bodhisattva’s father.

As for the great compassion, because it prevents one from becoming weary while coursing in cyclic births and deaths, and also because it protects one from falling down the treacherous precipice onto the grounds of the Śrāvaka-disciples and the Pratyekabuddhas, it is said to serve as the bodhisattva’s mother.

As for the patiences, even in the midst of the sufferings of cyclic existence and the evil beings therein, the bodhisattva who has gained the patiences does not become disgusted with cyclic existence and does not forsake either beings or bodhi. Because, availing himself of them, he does not become disgusted, these patiences

also serve as the bodhisattva's mother. There is yet another verse explaining the matter thus:

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

As for the perfection of wisdom being his mother
 And skillful means being his father,
 It is because the one gives him birth and the other supports him
 That they are said to be the bodhisattva's father and mother.

COMMENTARY:

It is because the *prajñāpāramitā* gives birth to all of the dharmas of a bodhisattva that the Buddha declared the *prajñāpāramitā* to be the mother of the bodhisattva. After the bodhisattva dharmas have been born from the *prajñāpāramitā*, they are sustained by skillful means. Thus [the bodhisattva] is prevented from wandering over the treacherous embankment plunging on down to the grounds of the Śrāvaka-disciples and the Pratyekabuddhas. It is because these [skillful means] sustain [him in his progress toward] bodhi that one asserts that skillful means serve as the father of the bodhisattva.

Question: How much merit is required to enable the bodhisattva's acquisition of bodhi?

Response: (As below...)

MERIT AS INDISPENSABLE TO A BODHISATVA'S FUTURE BUDDHAHOOD

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

With but a lesser accumulation of merit
 One remains unable to realize bodhi.
 Only by collecting merit more massive than a hundred Sumerus
 Can one succeed in achieving that realization.

COMMENTARY:

As for "bodhi," this refers to the realization of wisdom corresponding [in its breadth and depth] to all-knowledge. That knowledge is commensurate with all that should be known.⁶³ "What should be known" is in turn commensurate with empty space. Because empty space is infinite, what should be known is also infinite. Were one to resort to only a finite amount of merit, that would be inadequate for the realization of infinite knowledge. It is for this reason that a lesser accumulation of merit cannot enable the realization of bodhi.