

The Treatise on Discourses about Giving Rise to the Bodhicitta: The Bodhicittotpādasūtra' Śāstra of Vasubandhu

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The Bodhicittotpādasūtra Śāstra is a relatively short treatise written, according to the attribution of the Chinese translator, by the 4th-century CE yogācāra scholar Vasubandhu.^[1] It does not survive in its original language, which was presumably Sanskrit, the language of Vasubandhu's other works surviving in their original form. These include his Abhidharmakośa and bhāṣya, as well as other treatises dealing with the doctrines of the Yogācāra school of Buddhist philosophy.

As the title indicates, this is a treatise (śāstra, literally, a '[text] which instructs') that deals with the creation of the bodhicitta, the Bodhisattva resolve to bring all to Awakening. The two terms at the end of the title – sūtra and śāstra – suggest that this should be considered a treatise that deals with a discourse (sūtra) on this subject or perhaps that organises the significant teachings on this matter from a number of discourses. We should note that Nanjio records a simpler title for this text, Bodhicittotpādana Śāstra, 'Treatise on giving rise to the bodhicitta', i.e. minus the term sūtra.

In its present form the work has 12 sections:

1. adhyeṣa^otpāda giving rise to motivation
2. bodhicittotpāda giving rise to the bodhicitta
3. praṇidhāna vows
4. dānapāramitā perfection of generosity
5. Śīlapāramitā perfection of ethical conduct
6. kṣāntipāramitā perfection of forbearance
7. vīryapāramitā perfection of energy
8. dhyānapāramitā perfection of meditative attainment
9. prajñāpāramitā perfection of understanding
10. tathatādharmamukha introduction to the teaching about reality
11. Śūnyālakṣaṇa definition of emptiness

12. puṇyaparigraha acquisition of merit

As we can see from this list the core of the work is an exposition of the perfections (pāramitā), a format familiar from other treatises on the Bodhisattva path.

The present translation has been made from the translation into Sanskrit by Bhadanta Śānti Bhikṣu, lecturer in ‘Cheena bhavana’ at Visva-Bharati at the time of translating in 1949, and later, in 1977, winner of the Sahitya Academy Award for his Buddhist poetical work in Sanskrit, the Buddhavijayakāvya. Śānti Bhikṣu made his translation from the Chinese version by the influential translator of Buddhist works into Chinese, Kumārajīva (334-413CE).^[2] Therefore what we have before us now is the product of an alarming number of transitions from one language medium to another. In particular we should note that Kumārajīva’s translation is a ‘sense translation’, i.e. not literal, in that he apparently made no attempt to communicate the Sanskrit syntax and style of the original, and as a result his work is of little help to anyone wishing to reconstruct the source language. This probably goes some way to explaining the peculiarities of Śānti Bhikṣu’s Sanskrit text, which is composed in what we might describe as a modern Sanskrit and is not a likely representation of the words that Vasubandhu wrote. In particular we note that he occasionally eschews the obvious Buddhist idiom or terminology. Furthermore, and particularly disconcerting for those familiar with classical Sanskrit, is his inconsistent deviation from the usual Sanskrit word order and syntax. The text as printed also contains a number of typographical errors, which we can sometimes correct with some confidence, but at other times we merely hazard a guess at Śānti Bhikṣu’s intention, since traditional Sanskrit idiom is not relevant in providing us with plausible patterns in the case of the text as it stands. As a result, any value of what we present here lies in the general purport of the text rather than in any close analysis of the individual words. It would be unfair not to mention that Śānti Bhikṣu himself discusses these linguistic problems in some detail in his introduction and eschews any claim to ‘reconstruction’. He was thus making available a reading text to Sanskrit readers, and it is our intention to perform a similar service for English readers now. We hope that this may be of interest or use to readers until such time as a more faithful rendering directly from the Chinese is produced. Indeed, the original stimulus for the present effort arose from a request in 1999 from Dharmacari Ratnaguna for access to an English translation. As to the peculiarities of our own translation, we bring the reader’s attention to our treatment of bodhicitta and citta. Literally ‘awakening mind’ and ‘mind’ respectively, these two terms are used to refer to the bodhisattva’s vow to save all beings and attendant altered mindset, which encompasses all the virtues and aspirations of the Mahāyāna path. We have left bodhicitta untranslated, but where citta is used as an abbreviation of the former we have rendered it as ‘resolve’. Note that citta can mean ‘mind’ or ‘thought’ more broadly and does occur with that sense in this text.

We should note that Vasubandhu is generally assigned to the early 4th century of the common era, while Kumārajīva lived in the late 4th and early 5th century. There is thus a relatively short period between composition and initial translation.

The content largely speaks for itself, but it is perhaps worth pointing out that Vasubandhu's approach to giving rise to the bodhicitta contrasts somewhat with that taken by Śāntideva (8th century CE) in the first four chapters of his *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. Where the latter employs the ritual format of *anuttara-pūjā* for this purpose, Vasubandhu recommends a process of ordered reflection (section 2) that issues in a series of exhaustive vows (section 3). Thereafter both authors lead the reader into an account of the perfections that constitutes the body of both treatises. While Vasubandhu appears to dwell more on the doctrinal essence of Understanding (*prajñā*), extending his discussion to fill three sections (although we should also note the great length of the other's chapter nine on Understanding), like Śāntideva he concludes his treatise with a section that deals with the merit accrued from pursuit of this path.

Here we have chosen the first three chapters for translation. This is because they constitute the distinctive unit of reflection on the resolve and vows undertaken by the bodhisattva, mentioned above, before the perfections are dealt with in detail from chapter four onwards.

The Translation

Chapter 1: 'Giving rise to Motivation'

'I pay homage to the infinite Buddhas of the past, present and future, whose wisdom is as unshakeable as the sky, the greatly compassionate protectors of the world.'[\[3\]](#)

1. There is a greatly extended, unsurpassed collection of aspects of the true teaching that is practised

by the bodhisattvas who are great beings. Namely: (1) They request instruction so as to awaken fully to the unsurpassed Awakening; (2) They urge beings to give rise to the profound extensive Resolve (citta); (3) They make firm the perfect vow; (4) They renounce their body and wealth; they curb greed and selfishness; (5) They practise the five groups beginning with morality;^[4] they discipline those who are at fault; (6) They develop the utmost forbearance in order to curb the basis of hatred; (7) They generate effort and energy in order to establish beings [on the path]; (8) They achieve the meditative absorptions in order to understand the minds of beings; (9) They develop understanding (prajñā) in order to put an end to ignorance; (10) They enter the gateway to reality in order to abandon attachment; (11) They reveal the practice of emptiness, which is free from characteristics and deeply profound; (12) They praise merit in order to ensure the continued germination of the seeds for Buddhahood. Having thus categorised the initial unmeasurable strategies (upāya) as pure gateways accompanied by the qualities of Awakening, for all those who desire the unsurpassed wholesome states, I shall explain them in order to bring about full and perfect Awakening.

2. O Sons of the Buddhas, those sons of the Buddhas who take up what was said by the Buddha and teach the Teaching for the benefit of beings should first praise the qualities of the Buddhas. It is hearing these qualities which will inspire beings to give rise to the Resolve to seek Buddha-Understanding. The seed of Buddhahood continues to be germinated as a result of giving rise to the Resolve. If monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen recollect the Buddha, and recollect the Teaching and furthermore recollect that the Tathāgatas endured the hardship of their endeavour to seek the Teaching at the time of their setting out on the path of the bodhisattva for an incalculable aeon, and if recollecting this they teach the Teaching for the sake of bodhisattvas, even if they teach only a single verse, then on hearing that teaching the bodhisattvas delight in the beneficial Teaching, they cultivate the roots of wholesome states, practise the Teaching of the Buddha, and obtain the perfect unsurpassed and full Awakening.

3. In order to interrupt the unending births, deaths and suffering of innumerable beings, the bodhisattvas who are great beings desire to have innumerable bodies and minds. They practise energy. They give rise to the profound great vow. They pursue the great strategy (upāya). They give rise to great benevolence and great compassion. They seek the great Understanding that is characterised by an invisible uṣṇīṣa.^[5]

4. Seeking such great Buddha-qualities as this, it should be understood that these qualities are unfathomable and without limit. Because of the immeasurable nature of these qualities, the positive consequences of their meritorious actions are also immeasurable. The Blessed One has said: If

bodhisattvas give rise to the initial bodhicitta, the positive consequence of that meritorious act of theirs, even if it is only weak and lasts but an instant, cannot be expressed even in a hundred thousand krores of world ages, how much less would one day, one month, one year, or even a hundred years be insufficient to express the positive consequence of the good act of that Resolve (citta) once it is acted upon. Why is that? Because of the infinite nature of the conduct of the bodhisattva in order to establish all beings in the patient acceptance that dharmas do not arise, and to cause them to awaken to the unsurpassed perfect and full Awakening.

5. The offspring of the Buddhas, the bodhisattvas, are the source of the initial bodhicitta. It is like the great ocean which, when it arises in the beginning, is understood to be a mine producing wishfulfilling gems, jewels and pearls of lesser, middling and the highest value right up to those that are invaluable, because of the origin from the ocean of these jewels. So it is for the arisings of the Resolve (citta) of the bodhisattva. When the initial Resolve arises it should be understood that it is the mine of the origin of meditative absorption and Understanding of all wholesome qualities of gods and men, 'srāvakas, pratyekabuddhas and bodhisattvas.

6. Furthermore, when the great three-thousandfold world system arises, it should be understood that it supports all the beings there, as many as are in the twenty- five realms; it is the refuge and the abode of all such beings. It is the same for the arisings of the Resolve (citta) of the bodhisattva. When it arises it is the refuge of all the innumerable beings. In the six realms of existence and the four forms of birth, those who have correct views or false views, those who practise wholesome or who practise unwholesome deeds, those who keep pure conduct and those who commit the four grievous pārājika offences,^[6] those who honour the three jewels and those who find fault with the true Teaching, those who are blemished, who are non-Buddhists, wandering holy men and brahmin priests, those of the warrior, brahmin, merchant and servant castes, it supports all of them. It is the refuge for them all. It is the dwelling for them all.

7. Again, prizing benevolence and compassion, the bodhisattva gives rise to the Resolve. The benevolence of the bodhisattva is without limit and immeasurable. Therefore the arising of the Resolve is as without limit as the realm of beings. That is to say: as there is nothing that is left unencompassed by space, so it is with the creation of the Resolve of the bodhisattva. Among all beings not one is left unencompassed. Just as the realm of beings is immeasurable, without limit and inexhaustible, even so is the bodhisattva's giving rise to the Resolve immeasurable, without limit and inexhaustible. Because of the inexhaustible nature of space, beings are inexhaustible; because of the inexhaustible nature of beings, the bodhisattva's creation of the Resolve is also like the realm of beings.

8. I have briefly reviewed the teaching of the Buddha that there is no limit to the realm of beings, but (the Buddha) has also said the following: In the eastern direction there are incalculable Buddha realms equal in number to the thousands of krores of sand grains in the Ganges river. Likewise in each one of the southern, western and northern directions, in the four intermediate directions, above and below, there are incalculable Buddha realms equal in number to the thousands of krores of sand grains in the Ganges river. Were they all to be ground down into dust, they would create a vast number of grains of dust visible to the naked eye. As many beings as there are filling the incalculable great three thousand world systems equal in number to the hundred thousand krores of sand grains in the Ganges river, all of them placed together would make up a single grain of that dust. As many beings as there are filling two times the incalculable great three thousand world systems equal in number to the hundred thousand krores of sand grains in the Ganges river, all of them placed together would make two grains of the dust! Looking at it the other way round, as many grains of dust of the element earth as there are in the incalculable Buddha realms equal in number to the thousands of krores of sand grains in the Ganges river in each one of the ten directions would reach a limit, but there is no limit like that to the realm of beings. That is to say: a certain person might, having divided a single hair a hundred times, take from the water of the ocean a tiny speck of water on a single filament of hair; what I have taught in the sphere of beings is as small as that and what I have not taught is like the water of the great ocean. If the Buddha explained his personal achievement for an immeasurable, limitless, incalculable aeon, he would not finish. The giving rise to the Resolve each time encompasses beings even of such number. How then, O Sons of the Buddha, could there be a limit to the bodhicitta?

9. If the bodhisattvas, on hearing such a teaching of this kind, do not feel alarmed, do not become frightened, do not experience fear, do not turn away, do not break down, it should be understood that they will firmly create the bodhicitta. If all the immeasurable Buddhas were to praise their qualities for an immeasurable incalculable aeon, they still would not finish. Why is that? They do not finish because of the unlimited nature of the bodhicitta. In this way one should explain the preliminary immeasurable benefits so that beings might hear about, practise and give rise to the bodhicitta.

Chapter 2: 'Giving rise to the Bodhicitta'

1. How does a bodhisattva give rise to the bodhicitta, and through what causes does one meet with

Awakening? If a bodhisattva mixes with spiritual friends, worships the Buddhas, accumulates wholesome roots (kusalamūla), seeks excellent teachings, is always of gentle disposition, puts up with the painful things that befall him, is benevolent, compassionate and is not devious, has a disposition that is equable, delights in the Mahāyāna with faith, and seeks the understanding possessed by Buddhas; if a person has these ten qualities that person gives rise to the unsurpassed perfect and full bodhicitta.

2. Furthermore, there are four causes through which one gives rise to the bodhicitta in order to attain the unsurpassed Awakening. What are the four?

The first is that one gives rise to the bodhicitta while reflecting on the Buddhas.

The second is that one gives rise to the bodhicitta while examining the dangers of the body.

The third is that one gives rise to the bodhicitta while feeling pity for beings.

The fourth is that one gives rise to the bodhicitta while seeking the highest attainment.

3. Furthermore, reflection on the Buddhas is of five kinds:

The first is that one reflects, 'I shall give rise to the bodhicitta on the basis that: just as all the Buddhas of the ten directions, past, present and future, at the beginning of giving rise to the bodhicitta have the defilements as their essence, just like me now, but at the end become perfect full Buddhas, unsurpassed lords.'

The second is that one reflects, 'I shall give rise to the bodhicitta on the basis that: each of the Buddhas of the three times individually made great effort in order to gain the unsurpassed Awakening. If Awakening is a thing that can be obtained, then I too can obtain it.'

The third is that one reflects, 'I shall give rise to the bodhicitta on the basis that: all the Buddhas of the three times give rise to great Understanding, establish the excellent Resolve within the primordial obscuration of the mind (āvaraṇa), and, notching up difficult tasks, lift themselves up and transcend the three realms. I also can lift myself up in the same way.'

The fourth is that one reflects, 'I shall give rise to the bodhicitta on the basis that: all the Buddhas of the three times, being leaders of the world go to the further shore from the great ocean of birth, old age, death and defilements. I too as a human being could go forth to the further shore.'

The fifth is that one reflects, 'I shall give rise to the bodhicitta on the basis that: all the Buddhas of the three times gave rise to great energy, have given up themselves, their life and their wealth while seeking omniscience. I too now can emulate the Buddhas.'

4. Furthermore, examining the dangers of the body in order to give rise to the bodhicitta is of five kinds:

The first is that one examines oneself thinking that in this body both the five aggregates and the four great elements perform immeasurable impure actions, so one should wish to abandon it.

The second is that one examines oneself thinking that since in this body there are nine orifices from which flow evil smelling and foul impurities, so one should form revulsion for it.

The third is that one examines oneself thinking that since in this body the immeasurable defilements of greed, hatred and delusion burn up wholesome thought, one should wish to extinguish it.

The fourth is that one examines oneself thinking that since this body moment by moment arises and ceases like a foam of bubbles such that its qualities should be renounced, one should wish to renounce it.

The fifth is that one examines oneself thinking that this body, because veiled by ignorance, continually performs unwholesome actions, wanders around in the six realms of existence and has no profit.

5. Furthermore, seeking the highest attainment in order to give rise to the bodhicitta is of five kinds:

The first is that one seizes on it because one sees the Tathāgatas' resplendent, spotless attainment of

genuine marks and signs, meeting with which people are freed from defilements.

The second is that one seizes on it because one sees the Tathāgatas' body of dharmas (dharmakāya) [7] that is permanent, stable, pure and blameless.

The third is that one seizes on it because one sees the Tathāgatas' completely pure groups of qualities (dharmas) consisting of ethical conduct, meditation, understanding, liberation, and knowledge and vision of liberation.

The fourth is that one seizes on it because one sees the Tathāgatas' ten powers, four grounds for confidence, great compassion and three bases of mindfulness.

The fifth is that one seizes on it because one sees the Tathāgatas' omniscience and pity towards beings, such that, enveloping those who err with benevolence and compassion, one guides everyone to the real Path.

6. Furthermore, pity for beings in order to give rise to the bodhicitta is of five kinds:

The first is that one sees beings attached to ignorance.

The second is that one sees beings preoccupied by various sufferings.

The third is that one sees beings accumulating unwholesome actions.

The fourth is that one sees beings engaged in increasingly bad conduct.

The fifth is that one sees beings not engaged in the perfect Teaching.

7. Furthermore, attachment to ignorance is of four kinds:

The first is that one sees beings being led astray by delusion and desire experiencing great calamities and sufferings.

The second is that one sees beings having no faith in the result of causes [8] performing impure

actions.

The third is that one sees beings rejecting the perfect Teaching and having faith in a false path.

The fourth is that one sees beings sinking in the river of the defilements and floundering in the 'four floods'.[\[9\]](#)

8. Furthermore, preoccupation by various sufferings is of four kinds:

The first is that one sees beings in fear of birth, old age, sickness and death yet not seeking liberation, but rather performing further actions.

The second is that one sees beings suffering from grief, lamentation and depression, whose actions are never exhausted.

The third is that one sees beings attached to what is unhelpful being stupefied by the suffering that arises from separation from what they love.

The fourth is that one sees beings suffering from association with what is disliked, yet constantly, even though their impatience for separation from that is extremely strong, they have created what is disliked.

9. Furthermore, accumulating unwholesome [actions] is of four kinds:

The first is that one sees beings who out of desire for sensual pleasures perform impure actions.

The second is that one sees beings who, although they know that it is the nature of sensual pleasures to give rise to suffering, do not reject sensual pleasures.

The third is that one sees beings who, although they desire happiness, turn their faces from the words that describe ethical conduct.

The fourth is that one sees beings who, although they are horrified by suffering, uninterruptedly

conduct themselves so as to produce suffering.

10. Furthermore, being engaged in increasingly bad conduct is of four kinds:

The first is that one sees beings offending against important moral conduct, behaving without heed even in danger.

The second is that one sees beings performing the five actions that have an instant result and are infinitely bad and, because they are enveloped in perfidy, they fail to feel shame or fear of blame.

[\[10\]](#)

The third is that one sees beings criticising the true teaching of the extensive Mahāyāna discourses, seized by foolishness while puffed up with passion and pride.

The fourth is that one sees beings who, although they are endowed with intelligence, destroy their basis for wholesome action and, moreover, since they are filled with pride they show no regret.

11. Furthermore, not engaging in the perfect Teaching is of four kinds:

The first is that one sees beings who, born in the eight unfortunate existences, fail to hear the true Teaching and do not know to practise what is wholesome.

The second is that one sees beings who do hear the true Teaching taught in a period when a Buddha has arisen, yet do not take it up.

The third is that one sees beings taking up non-Buddhist instructions, performing religious activities that exhaust them, always going further from liberation.

The fourth is that one sees beings who treat the meditative concentration known as neither perception nor non-perception as if it were nirvāṇa when they attain it, and when their wholesome results are again at an end, they fall into the three bad realms of existence.[\[11\]](#)

12. A bodhisattva sees beings performing actions in ignorance, for a long time experiencing

sufferings, rejecting the true teaching, forgetting the path of renunciation. On account of these things the bodhisattva gives rise to great benevolence and compassion, and seeks the unsurpassed perfect Awakening as if his hat were on fire, thinking, 'I will extricate all beings who are tormented by the defilements without exception.' In brief, I have said that they are children of the Buddha. A bodhisattva engaged in the initial activities creates the Resolve along with its causes. If this were related at length there would be no measure to it nor any end.

Chapter 3: 'Vows'

1. How does a bodhisattva give rise to Awakening? Through what course of conduct does one perfect Awakening? A bodhisattva who has given rise to the Resolve, who has mastered the spiritual stage of 'Vision of Purity', in the beginning firmly gives rise to the perfect vow to include all immeasurable beings. 'I seek the unsurpassed Awakening in order save others without exception and in order to cause them to attain 'Nirvāṇa without remainder'.' Therefore, starting from giving rise to the Resolve, with compassionate mind as a result of his great compassion, he gives rise to the ten supreme perfect vows.

2. What are the ten?

(1) I vow that, whatever wholesome root was cultivated by me in a previous birth and in this one with this body, may I give that up for all beings without limit. And may I turn them all towards unsurpassed Awakening. May this vow of mine grow moment by moment, and in every birth may it always be produced in association with the Resolve, may it never be forgotten and may it be protected by dhāraṇī.

(2) I vow that, having turned them toward the great Awakening, through this wholesome root may I always worship all Buddhas in all births and abodes, and may I never be born in places which are not Buddhafields.

(3) I vow that, having been reborn in Buddhafields, having approached the Buddhas, may I attend the Buddhas as a shadow follows the body. May I not even for a moment be distant from the Buddhas.

(4) I vow that, having approached the Buddhas, may I perfect the five higher knowledges of a bodhisattva as a result of the dharma taught by them for my benefit whenever I desire.

(5) I vow that, having perfected the five higher knowledges of a bodhisattva, having realised that conventional truth is produced by relative cognitive input and having understood that ultimate truth has as its inherent nature reality, may I attain perfect knowledge of the Dharma.

(6) I vow that, having attained perfect knowledge of the Dharma, with my Resolve unexhausted may I teach all beings in order to reveal the benefits of advice and to bring them all to Awakening.

(7) I vow that, having brought all beings to Awakening, through the power of the Buddhas may I go to worship Buddhas, to hear the true Dharma and to include all beings in the world realms in the ten directions without exception.

(8) I vow that, having received the true Dharma in the Buddhafields, may I set in motion the completely pure wheel of the Dharma.[\[12\]](#) On hearing my teaching, having heard my name, may all the beings in the world realms in the ten directions abandon all defilements, and may they give rise to the bodhicitta.

(9) I vow that, having caused the bodhicitta to arise in all beings, in order to provide permanent protection may I remove want, may I offer immeasurable pleasures, may I give up life and wealth, so that I may support beings and propagate the true Dharma.

(10) I vow that, having propagated the true Dharma, and having also practised the true Dharma, may I not practise the Dharma with my mind, just as Bodhisattvas even though they have practised the Dharma, have both not practised the Dharma nor have they not not practised the Dharma. In order to guide beings may I not abandon the perfect vow.

These are the ten perfect vows of bodhisattvas who have given rise to the Resolve. These ten great vows encompass all the vows, equal in number to the sand grains in the river Ganges, through all the realms of beings. And if there were fulfilment of beings there would be fulfilment of my vows as well. And as long as there is not fulfilment of beings, there is not fulfilment of my vows either.

3. Moreover, generosity is the cause of Awakening because it favours all beings. Good conduct is

the cause of Awakening because, through the acquisition of what is wholesome, it fulfils what was vowed at the outset. Forbearance is the cause of Awakening because it leads one to attain fully the thirty-two characteristics and the eighty minor marks (of a Great Person). Energy is the cause of Awakening because with effort it brings beings to maturity through increase in wholesome conduct. Higher meditative attainment is the cause of Awakening because it awakens beings in mind and conduct through the perfect self-restraint of bodhisattvas. Understanding is the cause of Awakening because it brings about the realisation of the characteristics of the nature of things (dharmas) without exception. In brief it is taught that these six perfections are the complete cause of Awakening. The four Divine Abodes (brāhmavihāra), the thirty-seven factors of Awakening, the thousandfold wholesome conducts are auxiliary contributors to fulfilment. If the bodhisattva practises the six perfections, following that, he pursues conduct that gradually leads to the unsurpassed full and perfect Awakening.

4. Offspring of the Buddha, those seeking Awakening should not become heedless. Through heedless conduct the basis of what is wholesome is destroyed. The bodhisattva subdues his six faculties. If he does not become heedless he is able to practise the six perfections. The bodhisattva who has given rise to the Resolve establishes steadfastness, and establishes his vow firmly. Having established what was vowed he never becomes heedless, he does not become lazy, and he does not procrastinate. Why is that? Having mastered what he vowed, he acquires five things. The first is that he makes his mind firm. The second is that he transcends the defilements. The third is that through analytical reflection he restrains the heedless mind. The fourth is that he cuts through the five hindrances. The fifth is that he practises vigorously the six perfections. And this is the reason that, when the qualities which consist of the mastery of the powers of forbearance, understanding or merit are explained by the blessed Tathāgatas great in wisdom, the Blessed One praises the power of the vow as the highest.

5. How does one establish the vow in practice? If someone comes begging in many different forms then I continue to give for as long as I do not give rise to a selfish thought even for a moment.^[13] If, giving rise to an impure thought even for a moment, even for the blinking of an eye, I still seek an auspicious outcome on account of that giving, then I deceive an immeasurable, unlimited, incalculable number of Lord Tathāgatas in the ten directions in the present – and in the future too, I certainly could not perfect the unsurpassed, complete Awakening. If I maintain my good conduct even to the extent of giving up myself, my life, then I shall establish a completely pure mind: I vow that I will not turn back, I will feel no regret. If I practise forbearance, then even if, attacked by another person, I am divided up, chopped up limb by limb, I will give rise constantly to benevolence: I vow that I will not practise hatred. If I practise energy, then on coming up against

freezing cold, heat, kings, robbers, water, fire, lions, tigers, wolves, and deserts devoid of water, I will make my mind resolute: I vow that I will not turn back. If I cultivate higher meditative attainment, then even if I am afflicted by external things, even if my mind is confused, I will pursue mindfulness on the object of meditation. Never, not even for a moment, will I give rise to distracted perception that does not relate to the Teaching. If I develop Understanding, then seeing all dharmas in accordance with reality, I will accept it. I will not give rise to a dualist view regarding wholesome and unwholesome acts and mental states, regarding compounded and uncompounded things, regarding birth, death, and nirvāṇa. If for even the blinking of an eye, even for a moment, I feel regret, feel hatred, start turning back, have a distracted perception, give rise to a dualist view, and still seek the auspicious outcome from good conduct, forbearance, energy, meditative attainment and Understanding, then I deceive an immeasurable, unlimited, incalculable number of Lord Tathāgatas in the ten directions in the present. And in the future too, I could never perfect the unsurpassed full and complete Awakening.

6. The bodhisattva undertakes the path of the true Dharma through these ten great vows. With six great vows, he subdues the heedless mind. Vigorously he practises energy. He practises the six perfections. He perfects the unsurpassed full and complete Awakening.

Notes

[1]. Nanjio records an attribution to Maitreya; Bunyiu Nanjio, A Catalogue of The Chinese Translation of The Buddhist Tripiṭaka; The Sacred Canon of the Buddhists in China and Japan, originally published Oxford 1883, reprinted Delhi 1989.

[2]. 'Fa Fu T'i Hsin Ching Lun: Bodhicittotpāda-suytra-Śāstra of Vasubandhu', Visva-Bharati Annals 2 1949, pp.185-243.

[3]. This verse of homage is translated by Śānti Bhikṣu some three times, in prose, anuṣṭubh and triṣṭubh verse.

[4]. i.e. the five pure skandha: sīlā, samādhi, prajñā, vimukti, and vimuktijñānadarśana. See W. Rahula, Abhidharmasamuccaya – The Compendium of the higher teaching (philosophy) by Asaṅga Asian Humanities Press, Fremont 2001, p.175, and chapter 2 section 5, number 3 below.

[5]. The uṣṇīṣa, the protuberance on the Buddha's head that symbolises Understanding, is apparently not visible on bodhisattvas.

[6]. The four pārājika offences are the most significant monastic rules which govern both monks and nuns, committing which means that one should be expelled from the Sangha. They are: engaging in sexual relations with the opposite sex (human or animal), stealing above a certain value, killing and inducing killing, and claiming magical powers one does not possess.

[7]. dharmakāya is the collection of the teachings as well as the Buddha's qualities.

[8]. i.e. in the doctrine of causality that is central to Buddhist teaching.

[9]. These are the four āsavas, 'influxes': desire, becoming, false views and ignorance.

[10]. These five actions are killing father or mother, killing an arhat, intentionally spilling the blood of a Buddha or creating a schism in the sangha.

[11]. These are the realms of animals, hungry ghosts and hell beings.

[12]. This is an idiom for beginning to teach the Dharma as a Buddha.

[13]. The notion of someone begging in many forms is perhaps a reference to the Vessantarajātaka, the story of Gautama Buddha's last rebirth before the lifetime of his enlightenment, in which he exemplifies the perfection of generosity. In that story, the god Indra disguises himself in different forms in order to test the generosity of the bodhisattva.

