

CHAPTER 5

The Explanation of the Vows

V. CHAPTER FIVE: EXPLANATION OF THE VOWS

We have now finished explaining the skillful means that are used in entering the first ground and the dharmas that are used in its purification. It is because of his vows that the bodhisattva gains entry into all of the grounds. It is also due to completely developing the meritorious qualities associated with the [above-discussed dharmas beginning with] “the power of faith becoming ever more superior” that one is able to securely abide on one’s ground. We shall now proceed with a differentiating discussion of these vows:

A. THE FIRST BODHISATTVA VOW

I vow to make offerings to, supply the needs of,
and extend reverence to all buddhas.

I vow that in every case I shall protect and uphold
the Dharma of all buddhas.

This [“making of offerings”] is what that constitutes the bodhisattva’s first vow.⁶⁵ During the interim period between the time when one first brings forth the resolve up until the time one gains *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*, one should make offerings to, supply the needs of, and extend reverence to all buddhas.

“Making offerings” refers to offerings of flowers, incense, strings of jewels, banners, canopies, lamplight, the erecting of stupas with shrines, and so forth. “Supplying needs,” refers to providing them with robes, bedding, and necessities. “Reverence” refers to honoring them, treating them as important, making full reverential bows to them, welcoming them on arrival, seeing them off when leaving, placing the palms together, and serving them personally.

Then again, [it may be explained that] “making offerings” refers to using the dharmas of the Small Vehicle to teach beings, “supplying needs” refers to using the dharmas of the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle to teach beings, and “extending reverence” refers to using the dharmas of the Great Vehicle to teach beings.

These constitute the bases of the first vow.

B. THE SECOND BODHISATTVA VOW

As for [the second vow], “protecting and upholding the Dharma of all buddhas,” the bodhisattva has this thought, “I should guard and

protect the Dharma of all past, future, and present buddhas of the ten directions."⁶⁶

Question: All buddhas of the past have already entered nirvāṇa and their Dharma has subsequently also become extinct. The buddhas of the future have not yet come forth and their Dharma does not yet even exist. They have not yet even initiated their turning of the wheel of Dharma, how much the less have they brought forth any other dharma. How then could one succeed in protecting it? That which one might rightly be able to protect is the Dharma of the buddhas of the present, this because all of those buddhas are still present.

Response: The Dharma of all buddhas of the past, future and present is in every case of a single substance and of a single character. Hence, if one protects the Dharma of a single buddha, then this constitutes protection of the Dharma of all buddhas of the three periods of time. This is as stated in a sutra that reads, "The Buddha informed the bhikshus: 'The Dharma of Vipāśyin Buddha—the leaving of the home life, the taking on of the moral precepts, the wearing of the robes, the holding of the bowl, the *dhyāna* absorptions, the wisdom, the proclamation of Dharma, and their transformative teaching—it is all the same as mine.'" Thus the challenge you have posed is invalid. This [protection of the Dharma] is what constitutes the second of the vows.

Next, we have the following:

C. THE THIRD BODHISATTVA VOW

From that time when all buddhas depart from the Tuṣita Heaven
and come back to abide in the world,
on forward to the conclusion of their teaching
and their eternal entry into the realm [of nirvāṇa] without residue,
including when they abide in the womb, take birth,
leave the home life, proceed to the *bodhimaṇḍa*,
conquer Māra, achieve buddhahood,
and begin turning the wheel of the sublime Dharma—

From the time when I respectfully welcome them
and on through to the other occasions throughout their lives,
I vow that in all cases I shall completely
devote my mind to making offerings to them.⁶⁷

This refers to that entire time beginning with the buddhas' withdrawal from the Tuṣita Heaven and descent into the world on up to their entry into the nirvāṇa without residue. During that entire interval, commencing with their entry into the womb, I shall arrange grand presentations of offerings to them, including as well those times when they are born, leave the home life, proceed to the *bodhimaṇḍa*, conquer Māra,

the king of the demons, realize buddhahood, and turn the wheel of Dharma. I shall respectfully serve the Tathāgatas at these times.

As for “and on through to the other occasions throughout their lives,” this refers to when they manifest great spiritual powers, abide in great assemblies of humans and devas, and engage in the extensive liberation of beings. [He vows]: “On such occasions, I shall make offerings to them of flowers, incense, banners, canopies, music, songs, verses, and praises. I shall leave behind the home life, take on the Dharma, and cultivate its practice in accordance with the way it has been taught. And I shall make offerings to the Buddhas of the foremost sorts of offering gifts.” This is what constitutes the third vow.

D. THE FOURTH BODHISATTVA VOW

Next, we have the following:

I vow to engage in the transformative teaching of beings,
causing them all to enter the paths.⁶⁸

“Teaching” refers here to the teaching of good dharmas. “Transformation” refers to influencing them to abandon evil dharmas. [One resolves]: “Using these two types of dharmas I shall cause an incalculable number of *asaṃkhyeyas* of beings to abide in the paths of *śrāvaka* disciples and *pratyekabuddhas*.” This is what constitutes the fourth of the vows.

E. THE FIFTH BODHISATTVA VOW

Next, we have the following:

I vow to enable all beings’
complete realization of the Buddha’s bodhi
even where there are those tending toward *śrāvaka*-disciple
or *pratyekabuddha* paths—⁶⁹

In instances where these persons cultivating the paths of the *śrāvaka* disciples and the *pratyekabuddhas* have not yet entered the [right and fixed] Dharma position,⁷⁰ I shall teach and transform them, inducing them to instead proceed toward the path to buddhahood. Where there are those who have not taken up the paths of *śrāvaka* disciples or *pratyekabuddhas*, I shall teach and transform them in a manner that influences them to proceed toward the unsurpassable path to buddhahood. In instances where others have already begun to proceed toward the unsurpassable path to buddhahood, I shall reveal [aspects of Dharma], instruct, benefit, and delight them,⁷¹ thereby causing their meritorious qualities to progressively increase. The fifth vow consists of adopting these means in the teaching and transforming of all beings.

F. THE SIXTH BODHISATTVA VOW

Next, we have the following:

Through resolute faith, I vow
to cause all dharmas to enter [a state of] uniform equality.⁷²

“All dharmas” is a general reference to all dharmas whatsoever, including:

Dharmas conducing to liberation and dharmas not conducing to liberation;

Dharmas subsumed within the limbs of enlightenment and dharmas not subsumed within the limbs of enlightenment;

Dharmas constituting provisions assisting the path and dharmas not constituting provisions assisting the path;

Dharmas subsumed within the paths of the Āryas and dharmas not subsumed within the paths of the Āryas;

Dharmas that should be cultivated and dharmas that should not be cultivated;

Dharmas to which one should draw near and dharmas to which one should not draw near;

Dharmas one should bring forth and dharmas one should not bring forth;

Dharmas that are produced and dharmas that are unproduced;

Dharmas of the present and dharmas not of the present;

Dharmas that are the product of causes and conditions and dharmas that are not the product of causes and conditions;

Dharmas constituting causes and conditions and dharmas not constituting causes and conditions;

Dharmas produced through meditative contemplation and dharmas not produced through meditative contemplation;

Dharmas that are coarse and dharmas that are subtle;

Dharmas associated with feeling and dharmas not associated with feeling;

Inward dharmas and outward dharmas;

Dharmas belonging to the inward sense bases and dharmas not belonging to inward sense bases;

Dharmas belonging to outward sense bases and dharmas not belonging to outward sense bases;

Dharmas subsumed within the five aggregates and dharmas not subsumed within the five aggregates;

Dharmas subsumed within the five appropriated aggregates and dharmas not subsumed within the five appropriated aggregates;

- Dharmas subsumed by the four truths and dharmas not subsumed by the four truths;
- Dharmas assisting the world and dharmas not assisting the world;
- Dharmas dependent on covetousness and dharmas dependent on transcendence;
- Dharmas associated with inverted views and dharmas not associated with inverted views;
- Dharmas associated with transformations and dharmas not associated with transformations;
- Dharmas associated with regret and dharmas not associated with regret;
- Dharmas that are great and dharmas that are small;
- Dharmas based in the feeling aggregate and dharmas not based in the feeling aggregate;
- Dharmas subject to severance and dharmas not subject to severance;
- Dharmas associated with knowledge and vision and dharmas not associated with knowledge and vision;
- Dharmas associated with the contaminants and dharmas not associated with the contaminants;
- Dharmas involving the bonds and dharmas free of the bonds;
- Dharmas characterized by purity and dharmas devoid of purity;
- Dharmas that are surpassable and dharmas that are unsurpassable;
- Dharmas involving initial ideation (*vitarka*) and dharmas not involving initial ideation;
- Dharmas involving mental discursion (*vicāra*) and dharmas not involving mental discursion;
- Dharmas in which one can delight and dharmas in which one cannot delight;
- Dharmas that are associated [with the mind] and dharmas not associated [with the mind];
- Dharmas involving the making of discriminations and dharmas not involving the making of discriminations;
- Dharmas associated with formative factors (*saṃskāra*) and dharmas not associated with formative factors;
- Dharmas involving conditions and dharmas not involving conditions;
- Dharmas involving sequence and dharmas devoid of sequence;
- Dharmas that are visible and dharmas that are not visible;
- Dharmas that may be opposed [as objective conditions] and dharmas that cannot be opposed [as objective conditions];
- Dharmas that are visible and opposable [as objective conditions] and dharmas that are invisible and not opposable;

- Dharmas possessing characteristic signs and dharmas that are signless;
- Dharmas that can be implemented in practice and dharmas that cannot be implemented in practice;
- Dharmas that are conditioned and dharmas that are unconditioned;
- Dharmas that are dangerous and dharmas that are not dangerous;
- Dharmas possessed of a foundation and dharmas not possessed of any foundation;
- Dharmas conducive to transcendence and dharmas not conducive to transcendence;
- Dharmas associated with beings and dharmas not associated with beings;
- Dharmas of one who is suffering and dharmas of one who is not suffering;
- Dharmas associated with the afflictions and dharmas not associated with the afflictions;
- Dharmas associated with existence and dharmas not associated with existence;
- Dharmas that are contrary and dharmas that are not contrary;
- Dharmas associated with the karmic result of happiness and dharmas not associated with the karmic result of happiness;
- Dharmas associated with the karmic result of suffering and dharmas not associated with the karmic result of suffering;
- Dharmas produced through recollection and dharmas not produced through recollection;
- Practice dharmas in which knowledge is foremost and practice dharmas in which knowledge is not foremost;
- Practice dharmas in which faith is foremost and practice dharmas in which faith is not foremost;
- Practice dharmas in which meditative contemplation is foremost and practice dharmas in which meditative contemplation is not foremost;
- Practice dharmas in which vows are foremost and practice dharmas in which vows are not foremost;
- Form dharmas and dharmas not associated with form;
- Teaching dharmas and non-teaching dharmas;
- Dharmas associated with transformationally created phenomena and dharmas unassociated with transformationally created phenomena;
- Dharmas associated with roaming wherever one wishes and dharmas unassociated with roaming wherever one wishes;
- Dharmas rooted in zeal and dharmas not rooted in zeal;

- Dharmas in which the cause is goodness and dharmas in which the cause is not goodness;
- Dharmas in which the cause is roots of goodness and dharmas in which the cause is not roots of goodness;
- Dharmas that are fixed and dharmas that are unfixed;
- Dharmas associated with the physical body and dharmas not associated with the physical body;
- Dharmas associated with speech and dharmas not associated with speech;
- Dharmas associated with the mind faculty and dharmas not associated with the mind faculty;
- Dharmas arising through contact with opposable objects and dharmas not arising through contact with opposable objects;
- Dharmas arising through mind faculty contact and dharmas not arising through mind faculty contact;
- Evil dharmas and dharmas that are not evil;
- Good dharmas and dharmas that are not good;
- Dharmas that are able to initiate production and dharmas that are not able to initiate production;
- Dharmas destroyed in each successive mind-moment and dharmas not destroyed in each successive mind-moment;
- Dharmas that are accumulated and dharmas that are not accumulated;
- Dharmas associated with the factors conducing to clear understanding⁷³ and dharmas not associated with the factors conducing to clear understanding;
- Dharmas that are causal and dharmas that are not causal;
- Dharmas associated with conditions and dharmas not associated with conditions;
- Dharmas associated with causes and conditions and dharmas not associated with causes and conditions;
- Dharmas produced through causes and dharmas not produced through causes;
- Dharmas that are caused and dharmas that are not caused;
- Dharmas associated with singular identity and dharmas associated with difference;
- Dharmas associated with cessation and dharmas unassociated with cessation;
- Dharmas associated with restraint of the sense faculties and dharmas not associated with restraint of the sense faculties;
- Dharmas occurring in conjunction with the mind and dharmas not occurring in conjunction with the mind;

Mind dharmas and dharmas that are not mind;
 Dharmas associated with the mind and dharmas unassociated with
 the mind;
 The five dharmas associated with contact and dharmas that are not
 the five dharmas associated with contact;
 Sixteen dharmas the acquisition of which is held in common and
 dharmas unassociated with the sixteen dharmas the acquisition
 of which is held in common;
 Subtle dharmas and coarse dharmas;
 Dharmas associated with dedication of merit and dharmas not asso-
 ciated with dedication of merit;
 Good dharmas and dharmas that are not good;
 Neutral dharmas;
 Dharmas severed on the path of seeing the truths;
 Dharmas severed on the path of meditation;
 Dharmas that are not severed;
 Dharmas of those still in training;
 Dharmas of those already beyond training;
 Dharmas neither of those still in training nor of those beyond train-
 ing;
 And all of the other incalculably many thousands of myriads of
 types of dharmas.

In every case one causes all of these dharmas to enter into the gates of emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness so that they are realized to be uniformly equal and beyond duality. This is accomplished through the power of resolute faith. This is the sixth of the vows.

G. THE SEVENTH BODHISATTVA VOW

Next, we have the following:

Having vowed to purify the buddhalands,
 I shall therefore extinguish all the various forms of evil.⁷⁴

1. AN EXHAUSTIVE LIST OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EVIL AND IMPURITY

“[The various forms of evil]” refers to killing beings, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, divisive speech, harsh speech, frivolous or lewd speech, greed, anger, wrong livelihood, consumption of intoxicants, and so forth. Wherever evils of these sorts are present, it is these places that are referred to as “impure.”

Additionally, where a land includes the wretched destinies of the hells, animals, hungry ghosts, and such, these too are deemed to be “impure.” Then again, it is also the case that “impurity” refers to circumstances in which beings have become covered over by such qualities as the following:

Absence of faith;
 Indolence;
 Mental scatteredness;
 Stupidity;
 Flattery;
 Deviousness;
 Miserliness;
 Jealousy;
 Rage;
 Enmity;
 Gravely erroneous views;
 Pride;
 Arrogance;
 Pride based on estimations of greatness;
 Pride based on the view of a self;
 Deviancy-based pride;
 Feigning uniqueness;
 Manipulation of feelings of close relationship;
 Inducement through instigation;
 Manipulation through praising and blaming;
 Seeking to gain benefits based on one's benefits;⁷⁵
 Esteeming worldly pleasures;
 Negligence;
 Absence of self-restraint;
 Abundant desires;
 Evil desires;
 Deviant types of desire;
 Sexual misconduct;
 Failing to acknowledge [indebtedness to] one's father or mother,
 śramaṇas, or brahmins;
 Failing to practice patience;
 Breaking with the awesome deportment [required by the monastic
 moral code];
 Making oneself difficult to remonstrate with;
 Indulging in erroneous forms of initial ideation and secondary men-
 tal discursion;
 Sensual desire;
 Ill will;
 [Lethargy and] sleepiness;
 Agitated excitedness;
 Or doubtfulness.⁷⁶

Yet again, "impurity" is present in circumstances where there are manifestations such as the following:

Vicious birds and beasts;
 An abundance of hostile bandits;
 An absence of water or other things to drink;
 Hunger;
 Famine;
 Disasters;
 Pestilence;
 Terror wrought by humans;
 Terror wrought by non-humans;
 Rebellion from within [the state];
 Pillaging invaders from beyond [the borders];
 Excessive rains;
 Drought;
 Distress associated with [societal] decline;
 Or all of the various sorts of suffering and affliction typical of the ending of minor kalpas.

Then again, "impurity" is also present in circumstances where beings are beset by manifestations such as:

A short lifespan;
 A horribly ugly physical body;
 Weakness;
 An abundance of every sort of worry and suffering;
 Insufficient courage or ability;
 An abundance of sickness;
 Inferior charismatic power;
 A small retinue;
 An evil retinue;
 A retinue that is easily brought to ruin;
 Small residences;
 Or weak-willed, base, and deviant mendicants.

Also, "impurity" is present wherever there manifest among the householders or renunciates any of the wrong views and wrong practices exemplified by the following:

Seng-qu-yu-jia-you-lou-jia kings;
Na-bo-luo-ta-pi-qu-na-ping-sha kings;
Na-ji-liao rishis;⁷⁷
 Elephant rishis;

Those [whose path is merely] celibacy;
 Those whose practice is that of “the superior disciple”;
 The sheep herders;
 The “great-mind” practitioners;
 The “patient ones”;
 The *qiao-tan-mo-jiu-lan-to-mo* “live ones”;
 The “deliverers”;
 The “swimmers”;
 The *po-luo-sha-jia-na-po-luo-duo-she* practitioners;
 The “robe-wearers”;
 The “robeless ones”;
 Those wearing leather robes;
 Those who dress in skins;
 Those who dress in grass;
 Those who dress in the lower robe;
 Those who dress in horned-owl feathers;
 Those who dress in tree bark;
 Those who wash three times;
 The “adapters”;
 Those who serve the king of the Brahma Heaven;
 Those who serve the *kumāra* virgins;
 Those who serve the *piśācī* ghosts;
 Those who serve the golden-winged *garuḍa* bird;
 Those who serve the *gandharvas*;
 Those who serve King Yāma;
 Those who serve Vaiśravaṇa;
 Those who serve the *guhya-pāda* vajra spirits;
 Those who serve the *bhūta* spirits;
 Those who serve the dragons;
 The naked *śramaṇas*;⁷⁸
 The white-robed *śramaṇas*;⁷⁹
 The dyed-robe *śramaṇas*;
 The Maskarī Gośālīputra *śramaṇas*;⁸⁰
 The followers of Piluochizi;⁸¹
 The followers of Jiazhanyannizi;⁸²
 The followers of Saqizhezi;⁸³
 Those practicing cow morality;
 Those practicing deer morality;
 Those practicing dog morality;
 Those practicing horse morality;

Those practicing elephant morality;
 Those whose morality consists in begging;
 Those whose morality is that of the *kumāra* virgins;
 Those whose morality is that of devas;
 Those whose practice is the "superior" precepts;
 Those whose moral code is defined by indulgence of sexual desire;
 Those whose moral code is remaining pristinely immaculate;
 Those who practice the "fire" morality;
 Those who declare nirvāṇa to derive from the extinction of visually-perceived forms;
 Those who declare nirvāṇa to derive from the extinction of sounds;
 Those who declare nirvāṇa to derive from the extinction of smells;
 Those who declare nirvāṇa to derive from the extinction of tastes;
 Those who declare nirvāṇa to derive from the extinction of touchables;
 Those who declare nirvāṇa to derive from the extinction of initial ideation and mental discursion;
 Those who declare nirvāṇa to derive from the extinction of joy;
 Those who declare nirvāṇa to derive from the extinction of pain and pleasure;⁸⁴
 Those who wear the water-robe headdress;
 Those whose practice is rooted in purity of water;
 Those whose practice is rooted in purity of food;
 Those whose practice is rooted in purity of caste;
 Those who carry about the mortar and pestle;
 Those who are breakers of rocks;
 Those who delight in bathing;
 Those who float and then sink;
 Those who abide out on the open ground;
 Those who lie down on sharp thorns;
 Those of a worldly nature;
 Those who are "the Great Ones";
 Those whose practice is rooted in the self;
 Those who posit identity with forms;
 Those who posit identity with sounds;
 Those who posit identity with smells;
 Those who posit identity with tastes;
 Those who posit identity with touchables;
 The earth-realizers;
 The water-realizers;
 The fire-realizers;

The wind realizers;
 The space realizers;
 The unity realizers;
 The transformation realizers;
 The eye-faculty realizers;
 The ear-faculty realizers;
 The nose-faculty realizers;
 The tongue-faculty realizers;
 The physical-body realizers;
 The mind faculty realizers;
 The spirit realizers.

All such instances of the many different sorts of wrong views and wrong practices on the part of householders and renunciates qualify as “impure.”

Then again, “impurity” is involved wherever the lands are characterized by the following:

Precipitous terrain;
 Abysses;
 Steep coastlines;
 Dense thickets;
 Brambles and thorns;
 Many sorts of obstacles;
 Lands characterized by dustiness, dirtiness, muddiness, flooding, or quicksand pits;
 Fearsome mountains with precipitous terrain and peaks;
 Twisting defiles;
 Deep obstructing inlets;
 Rows of mountain peaks obstructing travel;
 Towering cliffs;
 Places that are difficult to ascend;
 Saline waters;
 Parched sands;
 Terrains marked by stones, rubble, and rocks;
 The various fruits characterized by merely weak flavor and deficient appearance and fragrance;
 Unbeneficial herbs and plants possessing only scant and feeble potency;
 A relative rarity of marvelous forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and touchables;

Only rare encounters with parks and groves, viewing towers, freely running streams, bathing ponds, small mountains and buttes to ascend for distant views, or other enjoyable places;
 Provinces, counties, and villages that are not in favorable proximity to each other;
 Lands full of desolate hills;
 Scant populations;
 Cities of inferior character where one frequently encounters poverty-stricken people bereft of merit;
 Cities of inferior character;
 Very few representatives of governing officialdom, magistrates, high ministers, members of the nobility, leaders among the merchant and professional classes, artists, craftsmen, and scholars;
 Or extreme difficulties in coming by clothing, bedding, medicines, and conveniences providing enhancement of one's physical existence, and, in instances where they are obtainable, they are not particularly fine.

Places such as these qualify as impure. As a general statement, "impurity" is of two types. Those of the first type arise due to the beings' own causes and conditions. Those of the second type arise due to the causes and conditions of the karma of their actions.

In the case of those that arise due to beings' own causes and conditions, this is because of beings' faults and evils.

As regards that type of impurity that arises due to the causes and conditions of the karma of their karmic actions, these originate with the transgressions and evils of karmic actions. These two matters were already discussed earlier on.

Where one transforms these two types of circumstances, then there are beings with meritorious qualities and karmic actions that are meritorious. These two types of meritorious qualities constitute the bases for lands being referred to as "pure."

One should realize that this purifying of the lands is associated with the causes and conditions of bodhisattvas' original vows. Because the bodhisattvas are able to implement immense vigor many ways, what they vow to bring about is itself so measurelessly vast as to be impossible to fully describe. Consequently we shall now only provide a summary description explaining the main points of the matter. As for the remaining aspects, one should be able to understand them as of essentially the same sort.

2. A DESCRIPTION OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PURE LANDS

As for a general description of the characteristics of pure lands, they include:

A bodhisattva who has thoroughly realized *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*;
 The complete presence of the dharmas associated with a buddha's
 meritorious qualities and powers;
 The complete presence of the Dharma;
 The complete presence of *śrāvaka* disciples;
 The completeness of the bodhi tree;
 A world that is adorned;
 Beings that are well endowed with good fortune;
 The abundant presence of beings capable of achieving liberation;
 The gathering of an immense congregation;
 And completeness in the powers of a buddha.

“Thorough realization of bodhi” refers to the presence of ten enhancing factors:

First, the abandonment of asceticism.
 Second, the absence of weak thoughts of renunciation.
 Third, the rapid achievement of realization.
 Fourth, the absence of anything sought from non-Buddhist gurus.
 Fifth, the complete presence of bodhisattvas.
 Sixth, the absence of demon adversaries.
 Seventh, the absence of any of the entangling difficulties.
 Eighth, the presence of immense deva congregations.
 Ninth, the complete presence of rarely encountered phenomena.
 And tenth, its occurrence at the perfect time.

“Abandonment of ascetic practices” means that, when the bodhisattva leaves the home life for the sake of realizing *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*, he does not undertake ascetic practices.⁸⁵ In particular, this refers to practices such as going four days, six days, eight days, a half month, or even a month during which one eats as little as a single sesame seed, a single rice grain, or a single piece of fruit, drinks only water, or only ingests subtle energy. He does not resort to ascetic practices of this sort in striving to reach enlightenment. He sits peacefully in the *bodhimaṇḍa* and thereby realizes buddhahood.

“Absence of weak thoughts of renunciation” means that, when a bodhisattva is able to bring forth even a minor thought of renunciation, he immediately abandons the home life.

“Rapid achievement of realization” means that, once the bodhisattva has left the home life, he soon reaches *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*.

“Refraining from seeking anything from non-Buddhist gurus” means that, once the bodhisattva has left behind the home life, even if there is a great non-Buddhist guru, one who has become very famous,

still, he does not go to consult him, inquiring "What dharma is it that you proclaim? What topics do you discuss? What is it that you set forth as beneficial?" Nor does he wander off in any of the four directions searching out [such gurus].

"The complete presence of bodhisattvas" means that, when the bodhisattva is on the verge of realizing buddhahood, all of the bodhisattvas throughout the great trichiliocosm as well as the bodhisattvas from other regions—they each take up offerings and they all come and surround him. Then, having waited until that buddha has realized buddhahood and emanated great radiance, they each present their offerings. They have heard the Dharma from the buddhas, have all become irreversible on the path, and have reached the stage of having but one life remaining prior to realizing buddhahood.

"Absence of demon adversaries" means that, when that bodhisattva is about to achieve buddhahood, there are no armies of Māra able to come forth and destroy him.

As for there being "the absence of any entangling difficulties," when the bodhisattva is about to attain the realization of buddhahood, there is not even the most infinitesimally minor degree of affliction that enters his mind.⁸⁶

As for there being "immense congregations that convene," when the bodhisattva is about to gain buddhahood, the devas from the Heaven of the Four Heavenly Kings, the devas from the Trāyastriṃśā Heaven, and the devas from the Yāma Heaven, the Tuṣita Heaven, the Nirmāṇarati Heaven, the Paranirmita Vaśavartin Heaven, the Brahma Heaven, and the others up to and including the Akaniṣṭha Heaven—these, together with the dragons, the spirits, the *yakṣas*, the *gandharvas*, the *asuras*, the *garuḍas*, the *kinmaras*, the *mahoraḡas*, and all of the other sorts of spirits from all of the immeasurably many worlds throughout the ten directions—each of them takes up the most superior and marvelous of offerings and comes forth to make offerings to the bodhisattva. It is this that constitutes the convening of an immense congregation.

Then again, the *śrāvaka* disciples explain that, when all the devas abiding in ten world systems come forth, it is this that constitutes an immense congregation of devas.

As for there being "the complete presence of rarely encountered phenomena,"⁸⁷ when the Bodhisattva realizes buddhahood, rarely encountered phenomena occur: The earth moves and shakes in six ways; throughout the worlds of the ten directions' countless great trichiliocosms, all of the Māras' palaces deteriorate and no longer shine forth with radiance; the countless Sumeru mountains shake; the

measurelessly vast seas are all roiled; throughout all worlds, the blossoms bloom out of season; a rain of powdered sandalwood incense descends; and there is a rain of the most renowned celestial flower blossoms.

As for “it occurs at a perfect time,” this refers to a time when there is no pestilence, famine, war, or fleeing refugees. It is free of torrential rains and flooding. There are never any disasters. All the kings and other [authorities] govern in accordance with the Dharma. The people are at peace and their lives are long. There are no enemy insurgents, terrible birds and beasts, poisonous insects, or ghosts and spirits that harass and harm beings.

As for [complete presence of the dharmas associated with] “a buddha’s meritorious qualities and powers,” the awesome powers, meritorious qualities, wisdom, and immeasurably many profound dharmas of the buddhas of the past, the future, and the present are the same and no different. There are only [distinctions] in accordance with the causes and conditions of each buddha’s original vows. Thus, in some cases, he may possess an immeasurably long lifespan. In other cases, if one but sees him, one immediately gains the stage of certainty. Or it may be that, upon hearing his name, one also becomes able in that way to gain the stage of certainty. Or it may be that when women see him, they are able to immediately gain the body of a man. Or it may be that on hearing his name, they are immediately able to transform that woman’s body. It may be as well that, upon hearing his name, they are immediately able to go off to rebirth [in accordance with their wishes].

In some cases, he has measureless radiance that, when beings encounter it, they leave behind all impeding hindrances. In some cases, due to encountering such light, beings immediately enter the stage of certainty. It may also happen that, on encountering such light, they extinguish all suffering and afflictions.

As for the possession of “an immeasurably long lifespan,” it may be that his lifespan extends in its duration to immeasurably many kalpas beyond counting, extending for a kalpa, a hundred kalpas, a thousand kalpas, a myriad kalpas, a *koṭi* of kalpas, or even a hundred thousand myriads of *koṭis* of *nayutas* of *asaṃkhyeyas* of kalpas. He may abide for such a long time in order to benefit beings and because of his pity for beings.

Although all buddhas possess the power to extend their lifespans for an immeasurably long time, due to differences in their original vows, there are those who do dwell in the world for a long time and those who do not dwell in the world for a long time.

As for “being able to gain the stage of certainty on seeing [a buddha],” there are beings who, upon seeing a buddha, become immediately able to dwell on the ground of the *avaivartika's* [irreversibility] with respect to the attainment of *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*. How is this the case? It is because, when these beings see the body of a buddha, their minds are filled with great delight, joy, and pure happiness. Their minds immediately become focused and acquire a bodhisattva samādhi of this sort. Due to the power of this samādhi, they achieve a penetrating understanding of the true character of all dharmas. They then become able to immediately enter the ground of certainty with respect to the attainment of *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*. Due to their resolute intentions that have persisted during the long night [of previous lifetimes], beings of this sort have planted those roots of goodness whereby, upon seeing a buddha, they enter the stage of certainty.

This is because they have taken the mind of great compassion as foremost, because their goodness is sublime and pure, because they have sought to achieve a penetrating understanding of all the dharmas of a buddha, because they have sought to liberate all beings, and because the time has arrived for the perfection of these roots of goodness that they therefore succeed in meeting this buddha. Additionally, it is due to the particular causes and conditions of that buddha's original vows. It is because of the coming together of these two factors that this circumstance is then able to occur.

As for “entering the stage of certainty upon hearing the name of a buddha,” a buddha may have made an original vow, declaring, “If there be anyone who so much as hears my name, then he shall immediately enter the stage of certainty.” Hence, just as with the case of seeing a buddha, so too it is in this case of hearing a buddha's name.

As for a woman “being able to transform the woman's body as a result of having seen a buddha,” if there be someone who single-mindedly wishes to change away from her female form and who has herself developed a profound renunciation for the troubles it involves, and who, based on the power of resolute faith has vowed to seek instead the physical form of a male—when a woman of this sort succeeds in seeing such a buddha, she immediately transforms and leaves behind the female body.

In the event that a woman does not have karmic causal conditions of this sort and also has not yet exhausted the karma that brings about birth in a female body, she will remain unable to encounter a buddha of this sort.

As for a woman “being able to transform and leave behind the female form upon hearing the name” of a given buddha, the causal

conditions for this are just as explained with regard to achieving this by seeing a buddha.

As for “being enabled to go forth to rebirth” upon hearing the name of a buddha, if a person is possessed of much power arising from his resolute faith, if his roots of goodness have become completely developed, and if his karmic obstacles have already become exhausted, where this corresponds to the causes and conditions of the original vows of buddhas, when such a person hears the name of one of these buddhas, he will then be able to go forth to rebirth [in accordance with his wishes].

As for “measureless light,” the illumination from the light of all buddhas is such that the distance it reaches accords with their wishes. The “measureless light” we speak of here is the illumination that they always emanate. Their always-emanated illumination is not limited to any given number of *yojanas* of distance whereby one might say of it that it extends universally in the eastern direction a given number of hundreds of thousands of myriads of *koṭis* of *yojanas*. It is not even amenable to calculation. This applies as well to its reach to the south, west, north, the four midpoints, the zenith, and the nadir. One may only know of it that it is measureless and no one knows its bounds.

As for “becoming able to get rid of all hindrances due to encountering this light,” this is an effect brought about by the power of the original vows made by buddhas. Sensual desire, ill will, lethargy-and-sleepiness, excitedness-and-regretfulness, and doubtfulness—one gets rid of these hindrances.

When beings encounter such light, they immediately become able to abide in mindfulness of the Buddha. Due to this mindfulness of the Buddha, they then become mindful of the Dharma. Due to becoming mindful of the Dharma, they then become able to rid themselves of these hindrances.

When it is said that the contact of such illumination with the body brings about “the extinguishing of suffering and affliction,” this refers to instances in which beings who have descended into the hell realms, animal realms, hungry ghost realms, and other non-human realms undergo the manifold sufferings and afflictions characteristic of these realms. Due to the power produced by a buddha’s original vows and spiritual superknowledges, when that buddha’s light touches their bodies, they immediately become able to abandon such sufferings.

As for there being “the complete presence of the Dharma,” there is the complete presence of the Dharma of all buddhas. There is no such thing as [there being buddhas who] completely possess it as opposed to those who do not completely possess it. Because all buddhas are

identical as regards the Dharma that they proclaim, the Dharma of each of them is therefore perfectly complete. It is solely a function of the causal conditions specific to their original vows that there are differences whereby their Dharma may remain for a long time or not remain for a long time. That's all.

What is meant by "the complete presence of the Dharma"? [When it is completely present], the Dharma includes:

- Concise explanations;
- Extensive explanations;
- Explanations that are both concise and extensive;
- Complete presence of the Śrāvaka Disciple Vehicle;
- Complete presence of the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle;
- Complete presence of the Great Vehicle;
- Protection by the power of the spiritual superknowledges;
- Prevention of ruination by non-Buddhist traditions;
- Invulnerability to destruction by *māras*;
- And long endurance in the world.

In "concise explanations" one uses but a few words and phrases that embrace an abundance of meanings. When those with sharp faculties hear it, they immediately become awakened.

In "extensive explanations," for the sake of those with dull faculties or those who delight in making distinctions, one presents a lengthy explanation of all of the causes and conditions associated with a single matter or single meaning.

In "explanations that are both concise and extensive," one both uses single statements to comprehensively include a wide range of meanings and also uses many different explanations to spread forth [the nuances of] a single meaning.

As for "complete presence of the Śrāvaka Disciple Vehicle, complete presence of the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle, and complete presence of the Great Vehicle," these are matters that shall be extensively discussed later on.

"Protection by the power of the spiritual superknowledges" refers to the use of the Buddha's spiritual powers in providing his protective mindfulness of this Dharma and it also refers to its being sealed with the seal of the Buddhas.

"The seal of the Buddhas" refers to [the Dharma's] association with the four great causal factors and its abandonment of the four black causes.

"Prevention of ruination by non-Buddhist traditions" refers to [the Dharma's countering of] all the deviant views of non-Buddhist

śramaṇas, brahmins, and treatise masters by presenting [correct] teachings on arising, passing away, enjoyment, danger, and escape.⁸⁸

Additionally, it refers to instigating awareness of all forms of goodness and explaining the causes and conditions that could bring about their ruination.

As for “invulnerability to destruction by *māras*,” because the Buddhas possess a measureless and boundless number of meritorious qualities, wisdom, skillful means, and the powers of the spiritual superknowledges, even though *māras* are themselves possessed of powers, they still cannot destroy [the Dharma].

It is also because of the powers possessed by the bodhisattvas that the *māras* cannot destroy [the Dharma].

As for the Dharma’s “long endurance,” it may even be for so long as an entire kalpa or somewhat less than an entire kalpa, and in fact it may even extend for even longer to a hundred kalpas, a thousand kalpas, a myriad kalpas, ten myriads of kalpas, a hundred myriads of kalpas, a thousand myriads of kalpas, a myriad myriads of kalpas, for an immeasurable number of thousands of myriads of *koṭis* of *nayutas* of *asamkhyeyas* of kalpas, and so forth on up to a measureless and boundless number of kalpas during which it continues to endure.

As for “the complete presence of the Śrāvaka Disciple [Vehicle],” all buddhas are attended by a perfectly complete *śrāvaka*-disciple sangha. The fact that there are a lesser or greater number of distinctions between one instance and another instance is solely a reflection of the original vows of each respective buddha.

What then is it that is meant here by “complete presence”? This is to say that the Tathāgata’s *śrāvaka*-disciple congregation is perfectly complete as regards observance of the moral prohibitions and accomplishment in the *dhyāna* absorptions, wisdom, liberation, and the knowledge and vision of liberation. They are identical in their equality, are pure, and are all possessed of sharp faculties. They benefit the bodhisattvas and are possessed of physical forms that are dignified and pure.

“Completeness in the observance of the moral prohibitions,” means that they have abandoned any killing of beings, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, divisive speech, harsh speech, frivolous or lewd speech, consumption of intoxicants, wrong livelihood, and all of the other sorts of evil dharmas. Moreover, they have abandoned whatever is restricted by the *vinaya* and they are also able to completely develop their observance of the moral precepts so that is free of the contaminants.

As for “completeness in the *dhyāna* absorptions,” this refers to such accomplishments as acquisition of the four *dhyānas*, the four

immeasurable minds, the four formless absorptions, the eight liberations (*aṣṭā vimokṣa*),⁸⁹ [otherwise known as] the eight abandonments, the eight bases of mastery (*abhibhvāyatana*), and the ten universal meditation bases (*daśa kṛtsnāyatana*)⁹⁰ as well as the acquisition of the *dhyāna* absorptions free of the contaminants.

“Completeness in wisdom” refers to bringing the four types of wisdom to completion: that which arises through extensive learning; that which arises through meditative reflection; that which arises through cultivation and accumulation; and that which arises as the result of the karmic causes and conditions of previous lives.

“Completeness in liberation” refers to having gained liberation from all afflictions. Additionally, it refers to becoming liberated from all the hindrances.

In “completeness in the knowledge and vision of liberation,” “knowledge” refers to the cognitive awareness of phenomena whereas “vision” refers to a complete understanding of those matters. Thus, in one’s liberation, one gains a complete and utter knowledge and vision that is entirely free of doubts. Then again, one may also explain that “knowledge” refers to the knowledge of the destruction [of the contaminants], whereas “vision” refers to the seeing of the four truths.

As for “identical in their equality,” all those who attain the fruit of a stream enterer are entirely equal. So too, all those [who attain the higher fruits of the path] on up to arhatship are just the same.

“Purity” refers to having completely developed the three types of purity, namely purity in physical actions, purity in verbal actions, and purity in mental actions.

“Sharp wisdom,”⁹¹ means that, when one merely hears a few words, one is able to gain a vast understanding through which one penetrates a meaning’s import. Thus one is able to provide extensive presentations of concise [teachings], is able to provide concise presentations of extensive [teachings], and in an instance where the principle is subtle and obscure, one is able to render it easily understandable.

As for “benefiting the bodhisattvas,” they remain mindful of the bodhisattvas, including even those who have only initially produced the resolve, and have no slighting arrogance toward them, this because they have a deep affection and respect for them. They always provide instruction in [the distinctions] between good and bad and explain for them the causes and conditions of the Buddha path’s skillful means.

As for their having “physical forms that are dignified and pure,” this means their bodies have an especially fine presence and their appearance is complete with the major marks and secondary characteristic signs. Consequently, those who observe them are filled with

delight in the same way as when they behold a *pratyekabuddha*. Thus, in their walking forth, their advancing, stopping, sitting, lying down, sleeping, awakening, partaking of food and drink, bathing, donning the robe, and holding the bowl, their awesome deportment accords with the correct sequence and remains free of any defects or omissions. Thus, when a person observes this, his mind is then purified.

As for “completeness of the bodhi tree,” the rest of all the great trees there such as the *sala* tree, the *tāla* tree, the *tiluojia* tree, the *duo-moluo* tree, the *poqiuluo* tree, the *campaka* tree, the *aśoka* tree, the *suohejialuo* tree, the *fennamo* tree, the *namo* tree, the *nāga* tree, the *śirīṣa* tree, the *niequtuo* tree, the *āśvattha*, the *bolecha* tree, the *udumbara* tree, and so forth—no matter which of these great trees we speak of, when growing out on level land, they are tall, broad, perfect in the growth of their roots, trunk, branches, and leaves, and are perfect in their luster and luxuriant fullness. The coloration of their blossoms is fresh, bright, and free of any defects from damage.

His [bodhi] tree rises to a height of fifty *yojanas*. It is perfectly erect and level. It is lustrously smooth and free of any contorted branches. Its bark is fine and soft and its coloration is white, fresh, and clean. It has no thorns and is free of any internal decay. Additionally, it is not hollow and is free of any injury or gnawing by insects. Its roots are deep in their penetration, solid, and orderly in their interwoven plaiting. Its flowers gracefully adorn it, just as when one is graced by a floral garland and gemstone necklace.

Its branches and leaves are luxuriant and full in their growth and are comparable to a circular pavilion in their shape. It is orderly and sequential in the way that it spreads out and, in its gracefulness, it is more distinctive than anything made by man. Its leaves are green and fresh and comparable in color to jewels. Its branches are free of any distorting crisscrossing, yellowness caused by withering, or dried-out leaves, and it has no insects such as moths,⁹² mosquitoes, midges, horseflies, or ants.

The ground below is pure and spread with golden sands. It emanates all manner of illumination and sends forth shining brightness all around. Sandalwood-scented waters are sprinkled over its grounds that are themselves level, soft, cool, and pleasing. Fine powders of ox-head sandalwood are spread over it. The devas always rain down *māṅḍārava* flowers. The fragrance of burning aloe wood incense wafts all about. Five-colored celestial banners are suspended at intermittent intervals. A subtle breeze gently moves them, causing them to ripple and flutter in response to it. Birds and animals quietly roam about off to the sides, making no sounds.

To its left and right, devas are always sprinkling down flowers of the many marvelous and varied colors that naturally intersperse as they descend like strands of jewels like the golden flower garlands worn on the bodies of the dragons. A jeweled net hangs down from the larger branches on all four sides. The many sorts of jewels adorn it, making it appear like a purple-golden mountain. It stands there in awe-inspiring grandeur, distinctive and sublime, like Indra's canopy.

This is an effect brought about as a result of the Bodhisattva's hundreds of thousands of myriads of *koṭis* of *asaṃkhyeyas* of kalpas of cultivating and accumulating meritorious qualities deriving from the practice of goodness. The many different sorts of marvelous jewels have been used to create the appearance of the king of lions. On the crowns of four lions, there rests a broad and grand jeweled platform cushioned with celestial tapestries. The devas from the Heaven of the Four Heavenly Kings, the Trāyastriṃśa heaven, the Yāma Heaven, the Tuṣita Heaven, the Nirmāṇarati Heaven, the Paranirmita Vaśavartin Heaven, the Brahma Heaven, and so forth all the way up to the Akaniṣṭha Heaven—all of them appear riding along in their palaces composed of the many sorts of precious jewels consisting of such jewels as lapis lazuli, *musāra-galva*, carnelian, *mahānīla* sapphires, *indranīla* sapphires, vajra, and *sphaṭika*. They emanate an incomparable colored light that illuminates even to a great distance. They all assemble at the bejeweled tree, circumambulating it and presenting offerings.

Additionally, in accordance with their original vows, all of the congregations of bodhisattvas from the countless worlds throughout the ten directions, having prepared in abundance all of the various sorts of offerings, rain down the many sorts of precious gifts, including flowers, incense, banners, canopies, the many different sorts of music, and other such offerings. This is what is meant by "completeness of the bodhi tree."

As for "a world that is adorned," the bodhisattvas contemplate the most marvelous among all the pure lands throughout the ten directions and then make a great vow, "The land that I acquire through the cultivation of meritorious qualities shall even be superior to these. It shall be foremost and incomparable."

As for "the beings being well-endowed with good fortune,"⁹³ the beings there are fine in appearance, free of any sort of physical afflictions or calamities, and are not troubled by aging and sickness. Their lifespans extend for a measureless number of *asaṃkhyeyas* of kalpas. In all cases, they are born there transformationally. Their bodies are free of the many sorts of defilement. They are possessed of the thirty-two major marks. They radiate measureless light. Their afflictions are

merely subtle and slight and they are easily taught and led across to liberation.

As for being “complete in those capable of achieving liberation,” during but a single sitting in which he teaches the Dharma, beings as numerous as the sands of the Ganges all simultaneously attain liberation. [This may be contrasted with the circumstance of] other buddhas for whom, in a single instance of proclaiming Dharma, they bring one or two people across to liberation. These beings have all planted roots of goodness in previous lives. Their fetters are but slight and scant, so much so that, when hearing an explanation, they awaken immediately.

As for “the gathering of an immense congregation,” there are buddhas whose great assemblies fill up an area one *yojana* across, or in some cases, ten *yojanas*, or in some cases a hundred thousand myriads of *kotīs* of *yojanas*, or in some cases, they fill the worlds of an entire great trichiliocosm.

As for the “immense congregation” referred to here, it is one equal in scope to world systems as numerous as the sands in all the Ganges rivers throughout the ten directions. This is what constitutes a “an immense congregation.” Moreover, the people in his assembly are only those who have accumulated merit. Also included in the congregations are all the devas, the beings in the eight divisions [of ghosts and spirits], and the bodhisattvas from the first through the tenth grounds. They have all come together there, with the sole exception of the buddhas themselves.

“Completeness in the powers of a buddha,” refers to the forty dharmas exclusive to the buddhas that all buddhas practice. For each and every one of these dharmas, the places in which they have been practiced are all measurelessly and boundlessly many. This is the seventh vow.

H. THE EIGHTH BODHISATTVA VOW

Next, we have:

When joining together with others in doing any single endeavor,
I vow that there will be no enmity or contentiousness.⁹⁴

In all merit-generating deeds a bodhisattva does, whether it be through the practice of giving, upholding moral precepts, patience, vigor, *dhyāna* meditation, or wisdom, whether it be through the four bases of meritorious qualities consisting of truth, relinquishment, quiescence, and wisdom, or whether it be through other endeavors in which, due to one’s great vows, one pursues the attainment of buddhahood, one should make this vow: “In circumstances where others join with me in practicing the six *pāramitās* or the four bases of meritorious qualities,

doing so with the aim of attaining buddhahood, I vow that I shall not create enmity or contention with others over the causes and conditions involved in such creation of merit." Why? The wise say that, among those jointly carrying out a single endeavor, the signs of enmity may develop. So, too, these sorts of circumstances appear in the world even now. It is in order to do away with such transgressions as these that one brings forth this great vow. This is the eighth vow.

I. THE NINTH BODHISATTVA VOW

Next, we have:

I vow to practice the bodhisattva path
and set turning the irreversible wheel,
thereby enabling the dispelling of all afflictions
and the entry into faith that is pure.⁹⁵

"The wheel" is a reference to the wheel of Dharma. That it is "irreversible" signifies that there is no one who is able to interfere [with its continuing to turn]. The bodhisattva should bring forth a vow such as this: "I shall practice the path just as it has been taught and will certainly set turning the irreversible wheel of Dharma. I shall turn this wheel of Dharma to dispel beings' afflictions born of the three poisons, to cause them to turn away from *samsāra* and enter the domain of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, and to cause them to accomplish their own purification through [the teaching of] suffering, origination, cessation, and the path." This is the ninth vow.

J. THE TENTH BODHISATTVA VOW

Next, we have:

I vow that, in all worlds,
I shall manifest the realization of bodhi.⁹⁶

In whichever worlds that are appropriate as places for the appearance of the works of a buddha, one manifests the realization of *anuttarasamyaksambodhi* in all of them, doing so for the sake of bringing peace and happiness to all beings and for the sake of leading all beings to nirvāṇa. It is due to the greatness of *anuttarasamyaksambodhi* that its attainment is the only one [of a buddha's deeds] that is mentioned here. As for all the other deeds including entering the womb, taking birth, growing up in the home, leaving behind the home life, taking on the moral precepts, taking up the practice of austerities, conquering Māra's demon hordes, accepting the entreaties of the Brahma Heaven King, turning the wheel of Dharma, assembling an immense congregation, liberating beings on a vast scale, displaying great spiritual powers, and manifesting the great passing into final nirvāṇa, one should accomplish all such deeds as these in this same way.

One knows from this that, where one possesses immeasurable powers such as these whereby one is capable of benefiting an incalculable and boundless number of beings, one should not merely manifest the realization of buddhahood in but a single land. There are those who state that, within a single buddha's domain consisting of the four continents, it is the entirety of the continent of Jambudvīpa that constitutes that single buddha's buddha land and anything beyond that is a matter comprehensible only to a buddha. However, this is not actually the case. This is the tenth vow.

K. THE INFINITELY VAST SCOPE AND DURATION OF THE TEN BODHISATTVA VOWS

Next, we have:

For all such bodhisattvas as these,
 it is the ten great vows that are foremost.
 They are as vast as empty space
 and exhaust even the bounds of the future.
 This extends to all of their other measurelessly many vows
 as well as to their distinguishing and explanation of each of them.

“Vows” is a reference to what the mind wishes for and what it is determined to definitely achieve. “Ten” is a reference to the existence of ten such gateways.

“They are as vast as empty space” refers to the fact that the regions taken as the objective focus of the vows are equal in their extensiveness to all of empty space. The scope of the vows is so very vast as this.

“Exhausting even the bounds of the future” means that the length of time during which these vows shall abide will exhaust the bounds of the future births and deaths of all beings.

There are others who claim that *anuttarasamyaksaṃbodhi* itself is what sets the bounds of future births and deaths. Or they may assert that, when buddhas enter the nirvāṇa without residue, it is this that constitutes the bounds of future births and death. Or they may say that, although the bodhisattva's vows may be endless, in fact, they end with the realization of buddhahood.

All of the great bodhisattvas throughout the worlds of the ten directions have made these vows. “All of their other measurelessly many vows” refers to the fact that, because all bodhisattvas perfect measurelessly many rare meritorious qualities, one could never exhaustively describe all the vows that they have made.

Next, we have:

As the bodhisattva makes ten great vows such as these,
 [he does so in ways by which] they are ultimately enduring.

These ten great vows have ten ways in which they are caused to be ultimately enduring.

Question: What then are those ten ways?

Response:

They are made until the end of realms of beings, of realms of worlds, of realms of empty space, of the Dharma realm, of the realm of nirvāṇa, of the realms in which buddhas are born, of the realms of all buddhas' knowledge—⁹⁷

Until the end of anything taken as an object of mind, the end of the knowledge associated with buddhas' range of actions, and of the permutations of their knowledge of worldly dharmas.

These are the ten ways they are ultimately enduring. [Hence these vows are made]:

First, until the end of the realms of beings;

Second, until the end of the realms of worlds;

Third, until the end of the realms of empty space;

Fourth, until the end of the Dharma realm;

Fifth, until the end of the realm of nirvāṇa;

Sixth, until the end of the realms in which buddhas are born;

Seventh, until the end of the realms of all buddhas' knowledge;

Eighth, until the end of everything that can be taken as an object of mind;

Ninth, until the end of the knowledge associated with all buddhas' range of actions;⁹⁸

And tenth, until the end of the permutations of their knowledge of worldly dharmas.

These are the ten ways they are ultimately enduring.

Question: You speak of an ultimate "end." What is it that constitutes an ultimate "end"? You should distinguish what is meant by this.

Response:

If the realms of beings were to come to an end, only then would my vows also come to an end.

Just as it is with the ending of beings and the other things, so too it is with the ending of these vows.

The meaning of "end" then is that there is no end, hence my roots of goodness are endless.

As for "if the realms of beings were to come to an end," this is to say: "If all beings became entirely extinct, my vows should then also cease." Thus, if even the realms of the world were to come to an end,

if even the realms of empty space were to come to an end, if even the Dharma realm were to come to an end, if even the realm of nirvāṇa were to come to an end, if even the realms in which buddhas are born were to come to an end, if even the realms of all buddhas⁹⁹ knowledge were to come to an end, if even the realms of conditions taken by all beings as objects of mind were to come to an end, if even the realms of the knowledge that fathoms the Buddha's Dharma were to come to an end, and if even the permutations of worlds, permutations of dharmas, and permutations of knowledge were to come to an end, then and only then would my ten vows finally come to an end.

However, as a matter of fact, these ten phenomena consisting of "the realms of beings" and so forth will never come to an end. Hence my merit and roots of goodness will never come to an end and will never cease.

As for the meaning of "will not cease," it refers to never ceasing even after a period of time that is immeasurable, boundless, inconceivable, and beyond calculation. It is because, throughout the ten directions, worlds of the sort that exist in this great trichilocosm are measurelessly, boundlessly, and incalculably numerous that worlds are said to be boundless. It is because the beings within all of these worlds' three realms of existence and six rebirth destinies are boundlessly numerous that the realms of beings are said to be boundlessly many.

It is because the realms of the two types of empty space both within and beyond all these worlds are boundless that we refer here to the boundlessness of the realms of empty space.

It is because of the boundlessness of the conditioned dharmas contained within all these worlds' desire realms, form realms, formless realms, and uncontaminated realms that we refer here to the boundlessness of the Dharma realm.

Even if all beings attained nirvāṇa, still the realm of nirvāṇa would neither increase nor decrease. Therefore the realm of nirvāṇa is boundless.

Because the buddhas of the past throughout the ten directions were immeasurably and boundlessly many, because the buddhas of the present throughout the ten directions are immeasurably and boundlessly many, and because the buddhas of the future throughout the ten directions will be immeasurably and boundlessly many, the realms into which buddhas are born are therefore boundlessly many.

Because the buddhas' knowledge is measurelessly vast, indescribable, immeasurable, unequalled, equal to the unequalled, unrivaled, and incomparable, therefore the realms of all buddhas' knowledge are also measureless and boundless. This is just as stated by the Buddha

when he told Ānanda, "The knowledge possessed by these *śrāvaka* disciples and by all buddhas is measureless." Therefore the realms of the knowledge possessed by the Buddhas are measureless and boundless.

The mind states produced by each and every one of all beings throughout the past were measurelessly and boundlessly many. All of these mind states had corresponding objective conditions serving as the bases of their arising. So too shall this be so of the mind states produced by the beings of the future. So too, the mind states produced by all the beings of the present era are measurelessly and boundlessly many. In every case, they have corresponding objective conditions that serve as the bases of their arising. Therefore the objective conditions taken as the object of those mind states are themselves also measurelessly and boundlessly many.

As for the powers of all buddhas, briefly speaking, they are manifested in the forty dharmas exclusive [to buddhas]. As for these forty exclusive dharmas, the range of implementation of each and every one of these dharmas is measureless and boundless. Because their range of implementation is measureless and boundless, so too then, their corresponding knowledge is also measureless and boundless. It is for this reason that it is stated here that the knowledge associated with the range of all buddhas' actions is itself measureless and boundless.

As for the permutations of worlds, the permutations of dharmas, and the permutations of wisdom, this "permutation" is a designation used to refer to the fact that each of these dharmas has transformational permutations.

As for the reference here to "worlds," worlds are of two types, namely the world that consists of lands and the world that consists of beings themselves. We speak here of the world of beings wherein all buddhas as well as all bodhisattvas guide beings by using the power of a measureless and boundless number of skillful means.

"Permutations of dharmas" refers to the use of measurelessly and boundlessly voluminous roots of goodness and merit in gathering together and acquiring all dharmas of a buddha.

As for "permutations of knowledge," one uses an incalculable number of good dharmas associated with the six *pāramitās* and ten grounds to gather together and acquire the knowledge of a buddha. Hence the permutations of knowledge are boundless. Because these three factors [of worlds, dharmas, and knowledge] are the same in their involvement of transformational permutations, they are therefore gathered together in a single pledge.

Because each and every [one of the ten great] vows of this bodhisattva is firm and solid, he establishes [for each of them] these ten pledges

of endless duration, declaring those vows to be as spatially vast as empty space and as long-enduring as the bounds of future time. It is in this way that, using these condensed discussions and extensive discussions, we come to the end of this explanation of these ten vows' ultimately enduring duration.