

## The Establishment of Vows

### III. CHAPTER 3: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF VOWS

#### A. INTRODUCTION TO THE BODHISATVA'S ESTABLISHMENT OF VOWS

How does the bodhisattva go about setting out towards bodhi? Through which karmic practices does one bring about the complete realization of bodhi? The bodhisattva who has generated the resolve [to gain bodhi] and who abides on "the ground of dry wisdom"<sup>11</sup> should first solidly set forth right vows through which he will draw in all of the incalculably many beings, [proclaiming], "I seek to realize the unsurpassed bodhi and to rescue and liberate everyone without exception so that every one of them is caused to reach all the way to the nirvāṇa without residue."

#### B. THE TEN GREAT VOWS

Therefore, in the initial generation of the resolve, it is the great compassion which is foremost. It is on account of the mind of compassion that one becomes able to generate ten ever more superior great right vows. What are those ten? They are:

1. "Regarding those roots of goodness I have planted in previous lives and in this present body, I pray that all of these roots of goodness may be bestowed upon all of the boundlessly many beings and dedicated to the unsurpassed bodhi. May it be that these vows of mine shall grow in each succeeding thought-moment, shall be produced again in each successive lifetime, shall always be bound to my mind, shall never be forgotten, and shall be guarded and retained by *dhāraṇīs*."
2. "Having already dedicated these roots of goodness to bodhi, I pray that on account of these roots of goodness, no matter where I may be reborn, I shall always be able to make offerings to all buddhas and shall definitely never be reborn in a land where there is no buddha."
3. "Having already succeeded in being reborn in the lands of the Buddhas, I pray that I shall always be able to draw personally close to them, shall follow along and serve them in every way (lit. "left-and-right"), shall remain as close to them as a shadow to its form, and shall never become

distantly separated from the Buddhas even for the briefest of moments (lit. *kṣaṇa*)."

4. "Having already succeeded in drawing personally close to the Buddhas, I pray that they will then speak Dharma for my sake in accordance with whatsoever is appropriate for me. May I then straightaway perfect the bodhisattva's five superknowledges."
5. "Having already perfected the bodhisattva's five superknowledges, I pray that I shall thereupon be able to reach a penetrating understanding of worldly truth together with its widespread artificial designations, that I shall also then completely comprehend, in accordance with its genuine nature, the foremost ultimate truth, and that I will gain right-Dharma wisdom."
6. "Having already realized the right-Dharma wisdom, I pray that, free of any thoughts of aversion, I shall then explain it for the sake of beings, instructing them in the teachings, benefiting them, delighting them, and causing them all to develop an understanding of it."
7. "Having already become able to create an understanding [of right Dharma] in beings, I pray that, availing myself of the spiritual power of the Buddhas, I shall be able to go to all worlds without exception everywhere throughout the ten directions, making offerings to the Buddhas, listening to and accepting right Dharma, and extensively drawing in beings [to the Dharma]."
8. "Having already received right Dharma in the abodes of the Buddhas, I pray that I shall thereupon be able to turn the wheel of the pure Dharma in accordance with it. May it then be that all beings of the ten directions' worlds who hear me proclaim the Dharma or who merely hear my name shall then straightaway succeed in abandoning all afflictions and in generating the bodhi resolve."
9. "Having already become able to cause all beings to generate the bodhi resolve, I pray that I may constantly follow along with them, protecting them, ridding them of whatever is unbeneficial, bestowing on them countless sorts of happiness, relinquishing my life and wealth for their sakes, drawing in beings, and taking on the burden of right Dharma."

10. "Having already become able to take on the burden of right Dharma, I pray that, even though I shall then practice in accordance with right Dharma, my mind shall nonetheless have nothing whatsoever which it practices. May it be that, in this, I shall conform with the way that the bodhisattvas themselves practice right Dharma and yet have nothing whatsoever which they either practice or do not practice."

For the sake of carrying on the transformative teaching of beings, one never relinquishes right vows. This is what is meant by the ten great right vows of the bodhisattva who has brought forth the resolve [to realize unsurpassed bodhi].

These ten great vows extend everywhere to all realms of beings and subsume all vows as numerous as the Ganges' sands. [Hence one reflects thus:] "If beings were to come to an end, then and only then would my vows then come to an end. However, beings are truly endless. Therefore these great vows of mine shall also never come to an end."

#### C. THE SIX PĀRAMITĀS AND RELATED PRACTICES AS CAUSES OF BODHI

Additionally, giving serves as a cause of bodhi because it draws in all beings.

Upholding the moral precepts is a cause of bodhi because it leads to the perfection of the many sorts of goodness and brings about the fulfillment of one's original vows.

Patience serves as a cause of bodhi because it brings about the perfection of the thirty-two major marks and eighty subsidiary characteristics.

Vigor is a cause of bodhi because it brings about the growth of the practice of goodness and brings about the diligent teaching and transforming of all beings.

Dhyāna absorption is a cause of bodhi because, resorting to it, the bodhisattva skillfully trains and disciplines himself while also becoming able to perceive all of the mental actions of beings.

Wisdom is a cause of bodhi because, resorting to it, one becomes able to perfectly know the nature and characteristics of all of the dharmas.

To sum up the essentials, the six *pāramitās* constitute the correct causes for the realization of bodhi. The four immeasurable minds, the thirty-seven wings of enlightenment, and all of the myriad good practices all work cooperatively together in assisting its perfect realization.

If the bodhisattva cultivates and accumulates [skill in the practice of] the six *pāramitās*, as befits the practices he has taken up, he gradually succeeds in drawing near to *anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi*.

#### D. THE IMPORTANCE OF REFRAINING FROM NEGLIGENCE

Sons of the Buddha, whosoever seeks to realize bodhi should refrain from negligence. Negligent practice is able to destroy one's roots of goodness. If a bodhisattva controls and disciplines the six sense faculties and remains free of negligence in this, such a person will be able to cultivate the six *pāramitās*.

#### E. MAKING DEFINITELY-RESOLVED VOWS AS SUPPORTING FIVE ENDEAVORS

When the bodhisattva generates the resolve, he first establishes definite vows set forth with ultimate sincerity. A person who establishes such vows never allows himself to become negligent, indolent, or relaxed in his practice. Why not? This is because the establishment of definite vows supports five types of actions:

First, it is able to make one's resolve solid. Second, it is able to control and subdue the afflictions. Third, it is able to deflect one from falling into negligence. Fourth, it is able to destroy the five hindrances. And fifth, it is able to bring about the diligent cultivation of the six *pāramitās*.

#### F. THE BUDDHA'S OWN PRAISE OF THE UNSURPASSED POWER OF VOWS

This accords with the Buddha's own praise [of vows]:

The Tathāgata, the greatly wise Bhagavān,  
Proclaimed what brings about realization of meritorious qualities:  
In the power held by patience, wisdom, or meritorious karma,  
It is the power of vows which is most superior [in its influence].

#### G. ESTABLISHING SIX RESOLUTIONS IN SUPPORT OF THE SIX PERFECTIONS

In what manner does one go about establishing vows? [One invokes one's resolve as follows, thinking]:

"In instances where some person comes making all sorts of demands, I shall then give to him whatever I possess, even to the point that I will refrain from generating a single thought influenced by miserliness.

"Were I to generate an evil thought in reaction to this circumstance even for the momentary duration of a finger snap and yet still seek a pure karmic reward from the causes and conditions associated with such giving, I would then straightaway be cheating all of the countless and boundlessly many *asaṃkhyeyas* of present-

era buddhas throughout the worlds of the ten directions and would thereby be ensuring that I shall definitely not be able to realize *anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi* in the future.

“In upholding the moral precepts, I establish pure-minded vows to remain free of deviation or regret, even where adherence to the precepts might cause me to lose my life.

“In instances where I may be cultivating patience, even where I might be attacked, injured, or even sliced apart, I shall constantly generate lovingly-kind vows free of any sort of interference by hatefulness.

“In instances where I cultivate vigor, even where I might encounter circumstances involving cold, heat, royal minions, bandits, floods, fires, lions, tigers, wolves, drought, or famine, I must nonetheless solidify and strengthen my resolve so that there is no retreat or sinking away of vows.

“In instances where I cultivate dhyāna absorption, even where I am disturbed by external circumstances threatening to make it impossible to focus the mind, it is essential to bind the mind to the objective sphere, vowing to refrain from bringing forth even briefly any sort of distracted thought which is contrary to Dharma.

“In instances where I cultivate the accumulation of wisdom, I contemplate all dharmas in accordance with their true nature, continuing to adaptively uphold and maintain this contemplation even in the midst of that which is good, that which is not good, that which is conditioned, that which is unconditioned, that which is in the sphere of births and deaths, and that which is identical to nirvāṇa, never bringing forth any duality based views in any of those circumstances.

“In instances where my mind might fall prey to the hindrances of regret or anger, were I to retreat and sink into such distracted thought that, even for the duration of a finger snap, I brought forth duality-based views through which I might [instead] seek pure karmic rewards arising from moral virtue, patience, vigor, dhyāna meditation, or wisdom, I would thereby cheat all of the countless and boundlessly many *asaṃkhyeyas* of present-era buddhas throughout the ten-directions’ worlds and would thereby definitely fail to realize *anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi* in the future.”

#### H. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TEN VOWS AND SIX RESOLUTIONS TO BODHI

The bodhisattva employs the ten great vows to maintain his practice of right Dharma and resorts to the six great pledges to control

the mind's tendency to drift into negligence. In doing so, he will definitely be able to diligently cultivate the six *pāramitās* and will definitely succeed in realizing *anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi*.