

**NĀGĀRJUNA'S TREATISE  
ON THE TEN BODHISATTVA GROUNDS**

*The Daśabhūmika Vibhāṣā*

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# CHAPTER 1

## The Introduction

### I. CHAPTER ONE: THE INTRODUCTION

#### A. VERSES DECLARING THE THREE REFUGES AND THE TREATISE'S INTENT

I bow down in reverence to all buddhas,  
to their unsurpassable great path,  
to those in the bodhisattva sangha  
who, equipped with solid resolve, abide on the ten grounds,  
to the *śrāvaka* disciples, to the *pratyekabuddhas*,  
and to those free of a self and anything belonging to a self.  
I shall now explain the meaning of the ten grounds,  
doing so in accordance with the utterances of the Buddha.

#### 1. Q: WHY EXPLAIN THE TEN GROUNDS?

**Question:** You are now about to explain the meaning of the bodhisattva's ten grounds. What are the reasons for this explanation?

#### 2. A: THE PLIGHT OF BEINGS AND THE AVAILABILITY OF SAVIORS

**Response:** The dangers and difficulties of the six rebirth destinies of the hells, animals, hungry ghosts, humans, devas, and *asuras* are terrifying and induce great fearfulness. In the churning whirlpool currents of the great sea of *saṃsāra*, the beings therein swirl about, going forth and coming back in accordance with their karma. This is what forms that sea's towering waves. Their tears, milk, flowing sweat, pus, and blood form its masses of noxious spume.

Their leprous sores, emaciation, regurgitated blood, and urinary disorders, their ascendant-energy febrile diseases, their carbuncles and flowing abscesses, their vomiting and bloating—all of these different sorts of diseases are that sea's *rākṣasas*.

Their worries, anguish, and bitter afflictions form its waters. Their being beset with troubles, weeping and wailing in grief—these are the sounds made by the churning of its waves. All of their feelings of bitterness and affliction—these are its boiling and burning mountain.<sup>1</sup> Death is that cliff bank on the shore beyond which no one can climb.

The winds of their karma associated with the contaminants and connected to the fetters and afflictions pound and blow at them unpredictably. They are cheated and deceived by the four inverted views.<sup>2</sup> Their delusions and ignorance create a great black darkness.

Throughout the course of beginningless time, these common people, under the sway of their affections, have always moved along in the midst of this. So it is that they come and go in this fashion in the great sea of *saṃsāra* without ever reaching the far shore.

But there may be those who, having reached it, are also able to rescue and bring across an incalculable number of beings. It is due to these causes and conditions that we now set forth an explanation of the ten grounds of the bodhisattva.

3. Q: CAN NON-BODHISATTVAS ALSO TRANSCEND SAṂSĀRA?

**Question:** Is it the case that, if a person is unable to cultivate the ten grounds of the bodhisattva, he will not succeed in crossing beyond the great sea of *saṃsāra*?

4. A: YES, BUT THE GREAT VEHICLE REQUIRES THE TEN GROUNDS

**Response:** Someone cultivating the vehicles of the *śrāvaka* disciples or the *pratyekabuddhas* can cross beyond the great sea of *saṃsāra*. If, however, someone aspires to use the unsurpassable Great Vehicle to cross beyond the great sea of *saṃsāra*, this person certainly must perfect the cultivation of the ten grounds.

5. Q: HOW LONG FOR TWO VEHICLES TO ACHIEVE TRANSCENDENCE?

**Question:** In the case of those cultivating the vehicle of the *śrāvaka* disciples or the *pratyekabuddhas*, how long must they pursue their practice before they succeed in crossing beyond the great sea of *saṃsāra*?

6. A: TWO VEHICLES ARE RAPID; BODHISATTVAS REQUIRE MANY LIVES

**Response:** In the case of those who cultivate the vehicle of the *śrāvaka* disciples, some may succeed in crossing beyond it in as little as a single lifetime. Some will require two lifetimes and yet others may require an even greater number of lifetimes. This is a matter dependent upon the relative sharpness or dullness of one's faculties. It is also a matter dependent upon the causes and conditions of one's cultivation in earlier lifetimes.

In the case of those cultivating the vehicle of the *pratyekabuddhas*, some will require seven lifetimes to succeed in crossing beyond whereas others will require eight lifetimes.

In the case of those who cultivate the Great Vehicle, some may require a number of great kalpas as numerous as the sands of a single Ganges River, and some may require a number of great kalpas as numerous as the sands in two, three, or four Ganges Rivers, and so forth until we come to those requiring kalpas as numerous as the sands contained in ten, one hundred, one thousand, ten thousand, or a *koṭi* of Ganges Rivers. They may require an even longer period of time than that.

Only after that may they completely fulfil the cultivation of the bodhisattva's ten grounds and then realize buddhahood. This too is a matter dependent on the relative sharpness or dullness of one's faculties. This too depends on the causes and conditions of one's previous-life cultivation.

7. Q: IS THERE ANY DIFFERENCE IN THE QUALITY OF LIBERATION?

**Question:** The *śrāvaka* disciples, the *pratyekabuddhas*, and the buddhas all succeed in reaching the far shore [of liberation from *saṃsāra*]. Are there or are there not any differences in the liberation they each achieve?

8. A: NIRVĀṆA DOES NOT DIFFER; LEVELS OF AWAKENING ARE VERY DIFFERENT

**Response:** This matter requires differentiation: As regards the achievement of liberation from the afflictions, there are no differences. It is on the basis of this achievement that one enters the nirvāṇa without residue. In this respect as well, there are no differences. This is because [nirvāṇa] has no distinguishing characteristics.

It is only with respect to the matters of a buddha's degree of liberation from the obstacles to extremely deep *dhyāna* absorption and his degree of liberation from the obstacles to [the knowledge of] all dharmas that there exist distinguishing factors relative to the *śrāvaka* disciples and the *pratyekabuddhas*. The degree of difference in these is so extensive that no amount of description could ever come to the end of it. No accurate comparison can be made even by resort to analogy.

9. Q: IF NIRVĀṆA IS IDENTICAL, WHY NOT QUICKLY DEPART?

**Question:** That which all Three Vehicles take as the object of training is the nirvāṇa without residue. If there are no distinctions in the nirvāṇa without residue, what use could there be for us in going and coming in *saṃsāra* for great kalpas as numerous as the Ganges' sands, fulfilling the ten grounds' practices? That would not be nearly as good as using the vehicles of the *śrāvaka* disciples and the *pratyekabuddhas* to put a swift end to all suffering.

10. A: THIS IS A WEAK AND INFERIOR STATEMENT DEVOID OF COMPASSION

**Response:** This sort of statement is weak and inferior. It is not the beneficial discourse of someone possessed of the great compassion.

a. WITHOUT BODHISATTVAS, HOW COULD THE TWO VEHICLES EXIST?

Suppose all bodhisattvas emulated your small-mindedness so devoid of kindly or compassionate intent and thereby became unable to energetically and assiduously cultivate the ten grounds. In such a case, how could any *śrāvaka* disciple or *pratyekabuddha* aspirant ever attain liberation?

## b. THIS WOULD PUT AN END TO THE THREE VEHICLES AND THE THREE JEWELS

What's more, in such a case, there could not even be any differentiation into the Three Vehicles. How is this the case? All *śrāvaka* disciples and *pratyekabuddhas* come forth in direct reliance upon a buddha. If no buddhas existed, then, on what basis could they come forth? If there was no cultivation of the ten grounds, how could there be any buddhas? If there were no buddhas, there would also be no Dharma and no Sangha. Therefore your statement advocates complete severance of the lineage of the Three Jewels. These are not the wise words of a great man, and they are not such as could survive critical examination. Why [do I say this]?

## 1) THE FOUR TYPES OF PEOPLE

There are four types of people in the world. The first benefits himself, the second benefits others, the third benefits both, and the fourth benefits no one. Among these, those who benefit both are able to cultivate kindness and compassion and benefit others. These are renowned as superior people.<sup>3</sup> As has been stated:

People of the world are so deserving of pity:  
They always turn away from what otherwise benefits them,  
and, even as they single-mindedly seek wealth and happiness,  
they fall on down into the net of false views.

Always haunted by the fear of death,  
they flow along, turning about in the six rebirth destinies.  
It is those greatly compassionate bodhisattvas  
who, by their ability to rescue them, are rare.<sup>4</sup>

Beings, when confronted by the arrival of death,  
have no one able to rescue or protect them  
from their immersion in deep darkness  
wherein they are entangled in the net of afflictions.

If there are those able to bring forth and implement  
the greatly compassionate resolve,  
because they shoulder the burden of beings' welfare,  
they undertake a heavy responsibility to act on their behalf.

In a case where someone brings forth the resolute determination  
to undergo alone all manner of suffering through their diligence  
only to then take the fruits of peace and security gained  
and share them as a gift to be bestowed on everyone—

These are the most supreme sorts of persons  
that are praised by all buddhas.

They are also those who, rare indeed,  
are great treasuries of meritorious qualities.

There is a saying commonly heard in the world:  
 “May this family never produce a bad son,”  
 one only able to benefit himself  
 while remaining unable to bestow benefit on others.

If, however, they produce a son who is good,  
 one well able to bring benefit to others—  
 This one is for them like the moon when full,  
 for he casts shining brightness upon his entire family.

There are people possessing all manner of merit  
 who avail themselves of all different sorts of causes and conditions  
 to then bestow on others benefit that is as vast as a great ocean  
 and that is also as expansive as the great earth itself.

There is nothing whatever that they seek from the world.  
 Rather they abide in it only out of kindness and pity.  
 The birth of such persons is precious indeed  
 and the lives that they lead are the most superior of all.

## 2) THE IMMENSE SUPERIORITY OF ONE WHO PERFECTS THE TEN GROUNDS

So it is that, although there are no distinctions as regards the liberation from afflictions achieved by *śrāvaka* disciples, by *pratyekabuddhas*, and by buddhas, there are nonetheless still huge distinctions associated with the buddhas’ perfect fulfillment of the bodhisattva’s ten grounds, with the liberation of countless beings, and with the bestowal of benefit on so many as they abide so long in *saṃsāra*.

### 11. Q: I AM CONVINCED, SO PLEASE CONTINUE TO EXPLAIN THE VERSES

**Question:** The Buddha does indeed possess the great compassion. For the sake of his disciples, you have set forth all manner of praises. This kindness and pity for beings is truly as you have described. You have used different sorts of reasons and considerations to make clear the distinctions, to invoke awakening, and to lead beings forth. When those aspiring to practice kindness and compassion hear this, their minds are purified. I have become deeply pleased by this. Please do explain those earlier verses set forth in preparing to explain the ten grounds’ meaning.

### B. NĀGĀRJUNA CONTINUES EXPLAINING HIS INTRODUCTORY VERSES:

#### **Response:**

[I bow down in reverence to all buddhas,  
 to their unsurpassable great path,  
 to those in the bodhisattva sangha  
 who, equipped with solid resolve, abide on the ten grounds, ...]<sup>5</sup>

“Reverence” refers here to the reverently respectful mind. “Bow down” refers to bending down the body and touching someone’s feet. “All buddhas” refers to the buddhas of the ten directions and the three periods of time.

“Their unsurpassably great path” refers to the knowing, seeing, and penetrating comprehension in accordance with reality of all dharmas without exception. It is because there are none superior to it that it is said to be “unsurpassable.” It is because it is cultivated by great men that it is said to be “the great path.”

As for “the bodhisattva sangha,” it is by virtue of generating the resolve to practice the unsurpassable path that one is described as a “bodhisattva.”

1. Q: IS GENERATING THE RESOLVE SUFFICIENT TO BECOME A BODHISATTVA?

**Question:** Does one only need to bring forth this resolve to then become a bodhisattva?

2. A: OF COURSE NOT, BUT PERHAPS YES.

**Response:** How could it be that, by merely generating this resolve, one thereby becomes a bodhisattva? If a person brings forth this resolve, he definitely must be able to accomplish the cultivation of the unsurpassable path. Only then might one qualify as a bodhisattva.

Then again, it may in fact be that the mere production of the resolve also qualifies one as a bodhisattva. How might that be? Apart from that initial generation of this resolve, there could be no realization of the unsurpassable path. This accords with the statement in the large edition of the *Sutra*<sup>6</sup> that declares that one who has but newly brought forth this resolve thereby qualifies as a bodhisattva.

This is comparable to the case of a bhikshu who, even though he has not yet realized the path, is nonetheless referred to as “a man of the path.” This “nominal” bodhisattva then engages in a gradual cultivation whereby he transforms this into a genuinely realized dharma. Later on, in the explanation of the “Ground of Joyfulness,” we shall set forth a comprehensive explanation of the characteristics of a bodhisattva who truly qualifies as such.

Now, as for “Sangha,” all bodhisattvas of the past, future, and present from the stage of the initial generation of the resolve on through to the path of the vajra unimpeded liberation<sup>7</sup> all qualify as members of the “Sangha.”

“Solid resolve” refers to having a resolve comparable to Sumeru, the king of mountains. As such, it cannot be hindered and cannot be destroyed. It is also comparable to the great earth which cannot be moved at all.

“Abiding on the ten grounds” refers to “the Ground of Joyfulness” and the other grounds. These will be extensively discussed later on.

3. Q: WHY ONLY PRAISE THE BODHISATTVA’S SOLID RESOLVE?

**Question:** If bodhisattvas possess additional especially superior meritorious qualities, why do you only praise “the solid resolve”?

4. A: IT IS ESSENTIAL FOR SUCCESS AND THOSE WITHOUT IT WOULD TURN BACK

**Response:** It is due to the meritorious qualities of a solid resolve that the bodhisattva is able to accomplish his great works and refrain from falling down into the Two Vehicles’ paths.

a. WHY, ABSENT SOLID RESOLVE, ONE ABANDONS THE BODHISATTVA PATH

1) FEAR OF CONTINUED EXISTENCE IN SAṂSĀRA

As for one who possesses only a weak resolve, he becomes terrified of *saṃsāra* and then thinks to himself, “Why should I dwell for so long in the midst of *saṃsāra*, enduring all sorts of bitter affliction? That would not be nearly so good as to quickly avail myself of the vehicles of the *śrāvaka* disciples and the *pratyekabuddhas* whereby I might swiftly bring about the cessation of suffering.”

2) FEAR OF THE HELLS

So, too, when one who possesses only a weak resolve sees or merely hears of:

The Living Hells (*saṃjīva naraka*);<sup>8</sup>  
 The Black Line Hells (*kālasūtra naraka*);  
 The Unification Hells (*saṃghāta naraka*);  
 The Screaming Hells (*raurava naraka*);  
 The Great Screaming Hells (*mahāraurava naraka*);  
 The Burning Hells (*tāpana naraka*);  
 The Great Burning Hells (*pratāpana naraka*);  
 Or the Great Non-intermittent Hells (*āvici naraka*)—<sup>9</sup>

Or the subsidiary hells, including:

The Flaming Embers Hells (*kukūla naraka*);  
 The Boiling Excrement Hells (*kuṇapa naraka*);  
 The Burning Forest Hells (*ādīptaavana naraka*);  
 The Sword Tree Hells (*asipattravana naraka*);  
 The Road of Knives Hells (*kṣuramārga naraka*);  
 The Copper Pillar Hells (*tāmraśtambha naraka*);  
 The Piercing Thorns Hells (*ayaḥśalmalīvana*);  
 Or the Brine River Hells (*khārodakā nādi naraka*)—

Or the instruments of punishment therein, such as the hatchets, battle-axes, daggers, lances, spears, halberds, bows and arrows, iron

scrapers, hammers, cudgels, javelins, spikes, short swords, iron nets,<sup>10</sup> iron pestles, or iron wheels—

Or the use of such instruments of punishment to subject one's body to hacking, chopping, slicing, piercing, beating, striking, flaying, splitting open, tying up, shackling, roasting, boiling, interrogating with beatings, grinding up, pounding to a pulp—

Or the foxes, dogs, tigers, wolves, lions, and fearsome beasts struggling forth, gnashing at, pouncing on, and gulping down [the flesh of] one's body—

Or having one's flesh pecked at and devoured by the iron-beaked crows, owls, hawks, and vultures—

Or being hotly pursued by fearsome ghosts that force one to climb up sword trees and scramble up and run down flaming mountains, having one's neck run over by flaming iron carriages, being pursued and beaten with hot iron staves, being nailed down with a thousand nails, being cut apart and scraped out with knives, being plunged into darkness in a place with furiously dancing flames and stench, being placed onto a hot iron sheet that scorches the body as one is subjected to the slicing off of one's flesh, having one's skin completely peeled off and then used to tie up one's hands and feet, being thrown into a cauldron of water leaping in a raging boil, having one's body stewed as one is beaten with iron bats until one's head is broken and one's eye's pop out, being run through with an iron spit and plunged into flames where one's entire body is burned by flames as one's blood flows out and spills onto the ground—

Or being immersed in a flowing river of excrement or being driven along, running down a road of horrors where one is sliced and pierced by its knives, swords, and iron thorns, having daggers spontaneously rain down as if in a storm of flying blades that slice away the limbs of one's body, having a horrible flooding river of bitter salt, painful stench and filth swallow up one's body, having one's flesh entirely rot away and its flesh fall off, leaving only a skeleton that the hell minions drag along, kicking it, stamping it, beating it, and striking at it—

There are countless such intensely painful torments wherein one's lifespan is extremely long even as one seeks to die and yet remains unable to do so.

If one possessed of only a weak resolve were to see or merely hear of such experiences as these, how could he not be so stricken with terror that he would seek to be saved by the vehicles of the *śrāvaka* disciples and the *pratyekabuddhas*?

Also, one may fall into the Hells of Cold and Ice:

The Arbuda Hells;  
 The Nirarbuda Hells;  
 The Aṭaṭa Hells;  
 The Hahava Hells;  
 The Huhuva Hells;  
 The Blue Lotus Blossom Hells;  
 The White Lotus Blossom Hells;  
 The Hells of Varicolored Lotuses;  
 The Red Lotus Blossom Hells;  
 Or the Vermillion Lotus Blossom Hells.

One resides in these places of deep darkness and immense terror. One is born therein as retribution for slandering worthies and *āryas*.

These hells may take the form of a building, of a mountain peak, or of a river port hillside where one is blown by a harsh and horribly cold wind that makes a fierce, frightening, and mournful sound that blasts at the bodies [of the hell-dwellers] as if rolling through [fields of] dry grass. The flesh of the body then falls away like leaves dropping in the winter. The cold peels open one's wounds and both pus and blood come flowing forth. The filth and stench of the body are difficult to bear. The cold wind cuts one open as one experiences excruciating pain and bitter anguish. There is only one's lamentation, grief, weeping, and wailing. There are no other thoughts. Though one screams and wails, one is stranded alone without anyone to rely on. These punishments are all experienced because one has slandered worthies and *āryas*.

When one who possesses only a weak resolve sees or merely hears of these matters, how could he not become stricken with fear, seeking then to avail himself of the vehicles of the *śrāvaka* disciples and the *pratyekabuddhas*?

### 3) FEAR OF REBIRTH IN THE ANIMAL REALM

Also, among the animals, there are those such as boars, dogs, jackals, cats, foxes, gibbons, rats, monkeys, apes, tigers, wolves, lions, rhinoceroses, leopards, bears, elephants, horses, oxen, sheep, centipedes, venomous snakes, vipers, scorpions, tortoises, fish, turtles, dragons, snails, clams, crows, magpies, owls, hawks, and pigeons. All manner of birds and beasts such as these assail and kill each other.

Moreover, the snares, nets, predation, butchery, and slicing that are found there are not of a single sort. If born there, one is restrained with a halter, one has reins threaded through one's nose and strapped around one's head, one bears burdens, one is subjected to beating with cudgels and staves, and one is afflicted with hooks that pierce one's

skin and flesh, causing it to split open and hurt unendurably. One is also immersed in smoke, burned by fire, and caused to endure agonizing pain of a myriad sorts. On dying, one's skin is peeled away, and one's flesh is devoured. One encounters therein countless such sorts of excruciating pain.

When one who possesses only a weak resolve hears of or sees these matters, how could he not become stricken with fear, seeking then to avail himself of the vehicles of the *śrāvaka* disciples and the *pratyekabuddhas*?

#### 4) FEAR OF REBIRTH IN THE HUNGRY GHOST REALM

Also, among the needle-throated hungry ghosts, there are those such as the fiery-mouthed hungry ghosts, the blazing-goiter hungry ghosts, the vomit-eating hungry ghosts, the rinsings-eating hungry ghosts, the pus-eating hungry ghosts, the excrement-eating hungry ghosts, the *bhūta* ghosts,<sup>11</sup> the *kumbhāṇḍa* ghosts, the *yakṣa* ghosts, the *rākṣasa* ghosts, the *piśaca* ghosts, the *pūtana* ghosts, the *kaṭa-pūtana* ghosts, and all other such ghosts. They have disheveled beards and hair, long nails, and large noses. Their bodies contain a multitude of insects, and are characterized by dreadful stench and filth. They are pierced by numerous sorts of torments and are constantly afflicted by the misery of miserliness, jealousy, hunger and thirst.

They are unable to acquire any food. Even when they do succeed in finding it, they are unable to even swallow it. They always seek after impurities such as pus, blood, excrement, urine, snot, spittle, and rinsings. Those that are strong attempt to steal these things by force, yet, even then, still cannot eat them. They are naked, have no clothes, and hence experience doubly intense cold and heat. A vicious wind blows on their bodies, spins them around, and afflicts them with bitter pain. Mosquitoes, horseflies, and poisonous insects bite them and feast upon their bodies. Their bellies are filled only with sensations of constantly burning hunger that roasts them like blazing flames.

When one who possesses only a weak resolve sees or merely hears of these matters, how could he not become stricken with fear, seeking then to avail himself of the vehicles of the *śrāvaka* disciples and the *pratyekabuddhas*?

#### 5) FEAR OF REBIRTH IN THE HUMAN REALM

Moreover, among humans, there are the sufferings of separation from those one loves, encounters with those one detests, the sufferings of aging, sickness, and death, and the sufferings of the poverty-stricken in pursuit of whatever they seek, as well as the countless many other such sufferings.

## 6) FEAR OF REBIRTH IN THE DEVA OR ASURA REALMS

In addition, there are also the sufferings encountered by the devas and the *asuras* when they must fall back again [from their bliss-filled celestial existences].

When one who possesses only a weak resolve observes these sufferings, how then could he not become stricken with fear, seeking then to avail himself of the vehicles of the *śrāvaka* disciples and the *pratyekabuddhas*?

## b. THE CONTRASTING RESPONSE OF ONE WITH SOLID RESOLVE

## 1) THE BODHISATTVA'S VOW

When a person with a solid resolve observes all the sufferings and afflictions endured by those in the hells, among animals, and among the hungry ghosts, devas, humans, and *asuras*, he brings forth the mind of great compassion and has no fear. He makes this vow, saying, "All of these beings have deeply entered into such a deteriorated and afflicted state. They have no one to rescue or protect them and have no place of refuge. If I myself am to realize nirvāṇa, I must also bring about the liberation of beings such as these."

## 2) THE BODHISATTVA'S COMPASSION, VIGOR, AND SUCCESS

Relying on the mind of great compassion, he is assiduous in his practice of vigor and, before long, achieves what he has vowed to do. It is for this reason that I state that, among all the meritorious qualities of a bodhisattva, solid resolve is foremost.

## 3) EIGHT BODHISATTVA DHARMAS

Additionally, the bodhisattva possesses eight dharmas through which he is able to accumulate all meritorious qualities:

- The first is the great compassion;
- The second is the solid resolve;
- The third is wisdom;
- The fourth is skillful means;
- The fifth is non-negligence;
- The sixth is diligently applied vigor;
- The seventh is constantly focused mindfulness;
- And the eighth is the good spiritual guide.

Knowing this, one who has only initially generated the resolve therefore swiftly takes up these eight dharmas, doing so with the same urgency as felt by someone whose turban has caught fire. Having done so, he should then cultivate all the other types of meritorious qualities.

## C. NĀGĀRJUNA CONTINUES TO EXPLAIN HIS INTRODUCTORY VERSES

[I also bow down] to the *śrāvaka* disciples, to the *pratyekabuddhas*, and to those free of a self and anything belonging to a self. I shall now explain the meaning of the ten grounds, doing so in accordance with the utterances of the Buddha.]<sup>12</sup>

Additionally, it is in reliance on these same eight dharmas that there come to be the four pairs and eight classes of practitioners within the *śrāvaka*-disciple sangha, namely the practitioners on the verge of stream entry, those who have already become stream enterers, and so forth.<sup>13</sup>

As for “the *pratyekabuddhas*, and those free of a self and anything belonging to a self,” even when there are neither buddhas nor the Dharma of a buddha currently extant in the world, there are still some who achieve enlightenment that are referred to as “*pratyekabuddhas*.”<sup>14</sup> Because all worthies and *āryas* have transcended the covetous attachment to a self and anything belonging to a self, they are referred to as “those free of a self and anything belonging to a self.”

As for “I shall now explain the meaning of the ten grounds in accordance with the utterances of the Buddha,” the ten grounds are set forth in proper sequence in the scriptures. Now, we shall accord with that sequence in providing a complete explanation of them.

## 1. Q: THIS IS JUST AS IN SCRIPTURE. WHY BE REDUNDANT? FOR FAME, ETC.?

**Question:** Your explanations are no different from those contained in the scriptures. Since the meaning of the scriptures is already complete, what need do we have of your additional explanation? Is this not presented simply to display your own abilities and seek fame and benefit?

## 2. A: THIS TREATISE IS NOT COMPOSED FOR SELF-SERVING REASONS

**Response:**

It is not for the sake of making a personal display of literary adornments, nor is it due to coveting profit or support that I now compose this treatise.

## 3. Q: IF NOT, THEN WHY?

**Question:** If it is not for such reasons as these, why do you compose this treatise?

## 4. A: OUT OF KINDNESS AND COMPASSION AND FOR NO OTHER REASON

**Response:**

It is because I wish, through kindness and compassion, to liberally benefit beings. It is not due to any other cause or condition that I now compose this treatise.

One observes that beings endure suffering in the six destinies of rebirth while having no one to rescue or protect them. It is from a wish to bring about the liberation of such beings that one summons the power of wisdom to compose a treatise such as this. It is not for the sake of displaying one's own wisdom power, nor is it due to coveting either fame or profit. Nor is there any sort of intention involving jealousy, arrogance, or the seeking of offerings.

5. Q: WHY JUST REPEAT WHAT SCRIPTURE ALREADY EXPLAINS?

**Question:** This matter of kindly pity in benefiting beings has already been discussed in the scriptures. What need is there to explain it yet again, thus needlessly subjecting yourself to wearisome hardship?

6. A: SOME BEINGS REQUIRE OR DELIGHT IN MORE THOROUGH EXPLANATIONS

**Response:**

There are those who, on merely encountering a scripture of Buddha, reach a penetrating knowledge of the supreme meaning.

There are others who, only on receiving a well-presented explanation, then gain a comprehension of its genuine meaning.

There are those persons possessed of sharp faculties and deep wisdom who, on hearing the profound scriptures spoken by the Buddha, are immediately able to reach a penetrating comprehension of the supreme meaning. The so-called "profound scriptures," refers to those describing the ten bodhisattva grounds. "The supreme meaning" is just the meaning of the ten grounds as understood in accordance with reality.

There are those treatise-authoring masters possessed of kind and compassionate minds who, in accordance with the utterances of the Buddha, compose treatises in explanation of them that are graced by well-adorned phrases and sentences. There are those persons who, because of these, are then able to gain a penetrating comprehension of the meaning of the ten grounds. This is as described here:

There are people who are fond of literary finery  
in which there are adornments of passages and sentences.

There are those who are fond of verses in praise,  
and there are those who are fond of the various sorts of sentences.

There are those who are fond of analogies  
and others who understand through causes and conditions.

In each case, their preferences differ.

Hence I adapt explanations to each and thus do not forsake them.

The "passages and sentences" above refer to those in which there is adornment of the meaning contained in the sentences but in which there are no poetic verse lines.

“Verses” refers to descriptive paraphrasing of the import of the sentence passage’s meaning wherein the lines are based on a four-fold, five-fold, or seven-fold word-count, or on some other similar schema. The verse construction is basically of two types. In the case of the first, it is a verse-form comprised of four-line stanzas referred to as a *gāthā*. In the case of the second, it is a verse-form comprised of six-line stanzas referred to as a *geya*.

“The various sorts of sentences” refers to the phraseology used in making direct statements. As for “analogies,” because people may not understand an especially profound concept, one uses comparative statements to cause them to comprehend. In some cases analogies are factually-based, and in other cases they are artificially contrived. As for “causes and conditions,” these involve tracing causal origins.

So it is that one adapts to individual preferences “and thereby does not forsake them.”

7. Q: HOW ARE OTHERS’ UNIQUE PREDILECTIONS ANY OF YOUR BUSINESS?

**Question:** Beings do delight in different things, but what business is that of yours?

8. A: BECAUSE I HAVE RESOLVED NOT TO ABANDON ANYONE

**Response:** Because I have brought forth the resolve determined to pursue the unsurpassable path, I avoid forsaking anyone at all. Thus I endeavor to benefit them by using whatever powers I may possess. In some cases, this is done by giving material things and in other cases, it is done with Dharma. This is as described here:

If there be a person possessed of great wisdom  
who is able to hear a scripture like this,  
one need not explain it for him yet again,  
for he will then fathom the meaning of the ten grounds.

This is to say that, if there be a person possessed of merit and sharp faculties, then, simply by hearing the *Ten Grounds Sutra*, he will immediately comprehend its meaning and thus will have no need of additional explanations. It is not for people of this sort that I compose this treatise.

9. Q: WHAT ARE THE QUALITIES OF SUCH A GOOD PERSON?

**Question:** What is it that defines such a good person?

10. A: IMMEDIATE DHARMA UNDERSTANDING; ALSO, 10 QUALITIES, AS BELOW:

**Response:** It is one who, on merely hearing the words of the Buddha, is immediately able to spontaneously comprehend them. He is like a grown man able to drink down even intensely bitter medicine when, for little children, one must mix it together with honey.

As for the “good person,” generally speaking, there are ten dhar-  
mas that qualify one as such. What are the ten? They are:

- First, faith;
- Second, vigor;
- Third, mindfulness;
- Fourth, concentration;
- Fifth, good physical actions;
- Sixth, good verbal actions;
- Seventh, good mental actions;
- Eighth, an absence of greed;
- Ninth, an absence of hatred;
- And tenth, an absence of delusion.

11. A VIBHĀSĀ HELPS THOSE WHO FIND SUTRAS HARD TO FATHOM

As I was explaining:

When people take the text of the scriptures  
to be difficult to study and recite,  
if one but creates a *vibhāṣā*<sup>15</sup> for them,  
this will provide great benefit to people such as these.

If a person with dull faculties is inclined toward indolence and arro-  
gance, because he finds the text of the scriptures to be difficult, he  
may be unable to study and recite them. By “difficult,” we refer to the  
texts being lengthy, difficult to recite, difficult to expound upon, and  
difficult to master.

Where there are those who are fond of such things as adorned  
phrases, refinement achieved through a variety of expressions, analog-  
ies, and verses—it is in order to benefit just such people as these that  
I compose this treatise. Thus your earlier statement that the scriptures  
of the Buddha alone are sufficient to provide benefit to beings—this  
along with your questioning the need for additional explanations—  
such statements as those are incorrect. As I have stated:

12. SUCH EXPLANATION OF DHARMA IS AN OFFERING TO THE BUDDHA

The reflections made in composing this treatise  
have involved the deep-seated generation of a mind of goodness.  
Through illuminating these dharmas,  
one makes an incomparably fine offering to the Buddha.

Because, when composing this treatise, the reflections and analy-  
ses have been accompanied by abundant mindfulness of the Three  
Jewels and the bodhisattva sangha while also bearing in mind giving,  
moral virtue, patience, vigor, *dhyāna* concentration, and wisdom, this

deep-seated generation of a mind of goodness then becomes a form of self-benefit.

Because I have expounded and elucidated this right Dharma, this also qualifies as an incomparably fine offering to the Buddhas. This is what constitutes the benefiting of others. As has been stated:

13. BY EXPLAINING DHARMA ONE LIGHTS THE DHARMA LAMP

In explaining the Dharma, one lights the lamp of Dharma and erects thereby the banner of the Dharma.

This banner serves for worthies and *āryas* as the emblematic seal of the sublime Dharma.

14. THIS LEADS TO ACCUMULATING THE FOUR BASES OF MERITORIOUS QUALITIES

As I now compose this treatise, truth and relinquishment as well as quiescence and wisdom, these four bases of meritorious qualities, are thereby naturally cultivated and accumulated.<sup>16</sup>

Now, in composing this treatise, these four kinds of meritorious qualities are naturally cultivated and accumulated. It is for this reason that the mind remains free of weariness in carrying out this endeavor.

a. TRUTH

As for "truth," everything that is true and genuine qualifies as "truth." Among all of those things that are genuine, the words of the Buddha are what is truly genuine. This is because they are not subject to change and ruination. As I present an explanation of this Dharma of the Buddha, this constitutes the accumulation of the "truth" basis.

b. RELINQUISHMENT

"Relinquishment," refers to giving. Giving is of two sorts, namely the giving of Dharma and the giving of material wealth. Among the two kinds of giving, it is the giving of Dharma that is supreme. This is illustrated by the statement of the Buddha to the bhikshus wherein he said, "First, one should engage in the giving of Dharma. Second, one should engage in the giving of material wealth. Of the two kinds of giving, it is the giving of Dharma that is supreme." So it is that, when I engage in the giving of Dharma, this constitutes the accumulation of the "relinquishment" basis.

c. QUIESCENCE

When I explain the meaning of the ten grounds,<sup>17</sup> there is no accumulation of evil karma by body, mouth, or mind. Additionally, there is no arising of thoughts characterized by covetousness, anger, delusion, or any of the other fetters. Because these sorts of karmic offenses

are blocked off, this constitutes the accumulation of the “quiescence” basis.<sup>18</sup>

d. WISDOM

When one explains the Dharma for others, then one gains great wisdom as the karmic result. This act of explaining the Dharma constitutes the accumulation of the “wisdom” basis.

It is in this manner that, in composing such a treatise as this, one accumulates the bases for these four meritorious qualities. Additionally, as I have stated:

15. NĀGĀRJUNA’S FINAL STATEMENT OF INTENT

As I explain this treatise on the ten grounds,  
one’s mind becomes purified.

Due to a profound zeal to develop this sort of mind,  
one remains intensely diligent and free of weariness.

If anyone hears, accepts, and upholds this  
so that his mind becomes possessed of purity,  
I, too, find deep delight in this,

and thus single-mindedly proceed with composing this treatise.

The meaning of these two stanzas has already been made clear. Hence it is unnecessary to discuss it again. It is solely for the sake of purifying one’s own mind as well as the minds of others that this explanation of the meaning of the ten grounds is undertaken. When this pure mind reaches the point that it should reach, one gains a great karmic reward. This accords with the Buddha’s words to Kālodāyin when he said, “Do not feel animosity toward Ānanda. In fact, if Ānanda had not received my prediction that he would attain arhatship after my nirvāṇa, because of this pure mind karma of his, he would have instead been bound for seven successive rebirths as the king of the Paranirmita Vaśavartin Heaven.”<sup>19</sup> This is as extensively described in the scriptures.

### The End of Chapter One