

# The Concept of Bodhisatta\*

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## Introduction

In Buddhism, before a person becomes a Buddha, he has to go through the stage of being and practicing as a *bodhi-satta* (P,<sup>1</sup> *bodhi-sattva*, Skt). *Bodhi* of *bodhisatta* means enlightenment, and *satta*, a living or being.

Most non-scholars of Buddhism have a common misunderstanding that the teachings of Theravāda and non-Theravāda Buddhism, especially Mahāyāna, are essentially different. In fact, however, both teachings are based on that of the Buddha. For instance, in comparing the Noble Eight-fold Path (*ariya-aṭṭhangika-magga*) of the Four Noble Truths (*cattāri ariyasaccāni*), the heart of the Buddha's teaching, and the Six Perfections (*śad-pāramita*, Skt), a practice required of bodhisattvas in Mahāyāna Buddhism in order to attain Buddhahood, it becomes apparent that Theravāda and Mahāyāna have a lot in common with each other.

The Four Noble Truths consist of the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering, and the truth of the way to the extinction of suffering. The fourth of these Truths is the

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<sup>1</sup> Buddhist terms that adopt Pali spelling are indicated with 'P'. Sanskrit variations are indicated with 'Skt'.

Noble Eight-fold Path. It is also known as the “Middle Path” (*majjhimā Patipadā*) because it avoids two extremes: one is the search for happiness through the pleasures of the senses, a common and unprofitable practice, and the other is the search for happiness through self-mortification in different forms of asceticism, again a painful and unprofitable practice. Having himself first tried these two extremes, and having found them to be useless, the Buddha discovered through personal experience the Middle Path. It is composed of eight categories or divisions: namely, <1> Right Understanding (*sammā-dīṭṭhi*), <2> Right Thought (*sammā-saṅkappa*), <3> Right Speech (*sammā-vācā*), <4> Right Action (*Sammā-kammanta*), <5> Right Livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*), <6> Right Effort (*sammā-vāyāma*), <7> Right Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*), and <8> Right Concentration (*sammā-Samādhi*).

The Six Perfections, or the six practices required of Mahāyāna bodhisattvas in order to attain Buddhahood, include ① Almsgiving (*dāna-pāramita*, Skt), which includes material almsgiving, almsgiving of the Law, and almsgiving of fearlessness (removing fear and giving relief); ② Obeying and practicing the precepts (*sīla-pāramita*, Skt); ③ Forbearance (*kṣānti pāramita*, Skt), or to endure patiently and continue one’s Buddhist practice under all circumstances and hardships; ④ Assiduousness (*vīrya-pāramita*, Skt); ⑤ Meditation (*dhyāna-pāramita*, Skt); and ⑥ Wisdom (*prajña-pāramita*, Skt), which enables one to perceive the true nature of all things.

The correspondence between the Noble Eight-fold Path and the Six Perfections can be seen as follows:

<1> Right Understanding and <2> Right Thought	————	⑥ Wisdom
<3> Right Speech, <4> Right Action and		
<5> Right Livelihood	————	② Practicing the precepts
<6> Right Effort	————	④ Assiduousness
<7> Right Mindfulness and <8> Right Concentration	————	⑤ Meditation

The Six Perfections not only encompass all the practices of the Noble Eight-fold Path, but also add two practices, ① Almsgiving and ③

Forbearance, both of which have social dimensions.<sup>2</sup> They are characteristic of the Mahāyāna concern for altruistic practice. The Noble Eight-fold Path, on the other hand, includes only practices for self-perfection, which are considered insufficient for altruistic practice.<sup>3</sup>

### The vow of Sakyamuni Bodhisatta in His Lifetime

The story of Sakyamuni as a Bodhisatta starts from the prophecy given by the *Dīpaṅkara Buddha* (Fixed Light Buddha, also known as Burning Torch Buddha). He is called *Sakyamuni Bodhisatta* at the time when he is said to have followed the way of a *bodhisatta* in his previous life.

According to the Sutta of the Buddha's Marvelous Deeds in Previous Lifetime, *Sumedha* (P, the name of Sakyamuni at that time) happened to hear that a Buddha named Dipaṅkara Buddha, was present in the world. Delighted at this news, Sumedha set out for the country where the Buddha lived. At last he reached the village where Dipaṅkara Buddha was meeting with five hundred religious practitioners and was expounding His teaching to them. They were delighted to receive this teaching, and each gave the Buddha one silver coin upon His departure from the village. Sumedha then traveled on to a city that was decorated as though for festivity and was told that the Buddha would soon arrive there.

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<sup>2</sup> Pali Buddhism compiled its own list of Ten Perfections (*dasa-parāmi*) which consists of almsgiving (*dāna-pārami*), following the precepts [morality] (*sīla-pārami*), release from the world of delusion (*nekkhamma-pārami*), wisdom (*pañña-pārami*), assiduousness (*viriya-pārami*), forbearance (*khanti-pārami*), truth (*sacca-pārami*), determination (*adhiṭṭhāna-pārami*), benevolence (*mettā-pārami*), and equanimity (*upekkhā-pārami*). As can be seen, the practices with social dimensions – ① almsgiving and ③ forbearance – are included in the list.

<sup>3</sup> When the bodhisattva first resolves to follow the Buddhist practice, he or she takes the four universal vows. They are (1) to save innumerable living beings, (2) to eradicate countless earthly desires, (3) to master immeasurable Buddhist teachings, and (4) to attain supreme enlightenment. The first vow is concerned with altruistic practice. The bodhisattva's primary concern is to bring others to enlightenment even if his or her own practice remains unperfected.

In the street, Sumedha passed a woman named Gopī who was carrying seven lotus blossoms. So eager was he to make an offering to the Buddha that he offered her five hundred silver coins in exchange for just five blossoms. Upon learning that Sumedha wanted these five blossoms as an offering to the Buddha, Gopī was deeply moved and asked Sumedha to make her his wife in their next existence. She then gave him her remaining two lotus blossoms. When Dipaṅkara Buddha reached the city, the king and his ministers all bowed and reverently strewed flowers on the ground before the Buddha as an offering. The five lotus blossoms offered by Sumedha, however, remained floated in the air, while the other two offered by Gopī came to rest on the Buddha's shoulders. Sumedha spread his deerskin cloak and his own hair over marshy ground for the Buddha to walk upon. According to *Buddhavansā*, right before he received the prophecy from Dipaṅkara Buddha, Sumedha had the following thought:

Should I so wish, having burnt up all the defilements and being newly ordained in the Order, I could enter Ramma city. But having burnt up my defilements while I am unknown is not a function for one attaining nibbana. Suppose now that I, like Dipaṅkara, Him of the Ten Powers, having attained the utmost full Self-Awakening, embarking in the ship of Dhamma and pulling out the populace from the sea of samsāra, afterwards should attain parinibbāna myself. This would be suitable in me. (*Sutta of the Buddha's Marvelous Deeds in Previous Lifetime*, emphasis added.)

As indicated in the underlined part, Sumedha vowed to first relieve people in the world from sufferings, then to attain Buddhahood. This point is remarkable because the practice for the sake of others is put before rather than after his attainment of Buddhahood, while it is generally believed that one needs to relieve one's suffering before helping others.

To return to the story, Dipaṅkara Buddha then perceived the sincere faith (a vow of 'seeking enlightenment above' and 'transforming sentient beings below') of Sumedha and Gopī, and predicted that Sumedha would, in the distant future, attain enlightenment as Sakyamuni Buddha. Gopī would

be reborn as *Yasodharā*, the wife of Sakyamuni before he renounced secular life, and the mother of *Rāhula*. Yasodhara converted to following Sakyamuni Buddha's teaching and became a Buddhist nun. The thirteenth chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* (on "Encouraging Devotion") states that she will become a Buddha named 'Endowed with a Thousand Glowing Marks Thus Come One'.

Sakyamuni Bodhisatta is said to have practiced as a bodhisatta, lifetime after lifetime for countless *kappas* (P; kalpa, Skt) before he attained Buddhahood. There are two major views concerning that duration of the bodhisatta's practice prior to attaining Buddhahood that pertain to Sakyamuni's case in point. General traditions except Pāli Buddhism believe that it takes a bodhisatta three *asaṅkheyas* and one hundred great *kappas* to perfect the practice, while Pāli Buddhism holds that a bodhisatta needs four *asaṅkheyas* and one hundred thousand *kappas* to perfect the task. The details of the duration, however, were described differently elsewhere. For instance, some suttas mention ninety or ninety-one *kappas*, rather than a hundred major *kappas*, while a commentary on the *Jataka*, *Nidānakathā*, indicates four *asaṅkheyas* and one hundred thousand *kappas*.

According to *Mahā-vastu* of *Lokuttaravāda* in *Mahāsaṅghika*, Sakyamuni Bodhisatta served over four billion Buddhas, and the text of *Sabbatthivāda* of *Theravāda* says that while Sakyamuni practiced as a bodhisatta, he served seventy-five thousand Buddhas in the first *asaṅkheyya* *kappa* of practice, seventy-six thousand in the second, seventy-seven thousand in the third, and six in the final major *kappas*.

A *kappa* is an extremely long period of time in ancient Indian cosmology. There are various views on the length of a *kappa*. According to *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, a *kappa* is longer than the time required to wear away a cube of rock forty *Ri* long (one *Ri* being about 450 meters) on each side, by brushing it with a piece of cloth once every hundred years. *The Great Perfection of Wisdom* also defines a *kalpa* as being longer than the time needed to remove all the mustard seeds that fill a city with an area of forty square *Ri*, if one takes away one seed every hundred years.

*Asankheyya* is a numerical unit of ancient India used to indicate an exceedingly large number. One source has it equal to 10 to the power of 59, while another describes it as 10 to the power of 51, or as 10 to the power of 140, and another text says that one hundred major kappas multiplied by an *asankheyya* is an *asaṅkheyya* kappa.

During these long periods, Sakyamuni Bodhisatva served numerous Buddhas and practiced bodhisattva austerities. The *Jātaka* depicts many scenes in which Sakyamuni Bodhisattva treated all living things equally without discrimination, and in which he is often referred to “as the *Bodhisatta*.” The Pāli commentary contains a collection of 547 stories. These stories depict the good acts carried out by Sakyamuni in previous lifetimes that enabled him to be reborn as the Buddha in India.

The belief that one’s good deeds enable one to be reborn as a Buddha can be found in ‘The Treasure-store Discourse’ (*Nidhikanḍasutta*) of The Minor Reading (*Khuddakapāṭha*) in Khuddaka-nikāya, which expresses the success of those who have made merit. Some examples are given below:

*Yassa dānena sīlena, saññamena damena ca; Nidhī sunihito hoti, itthiya purisassa vā.* (Nidhikanḍasutta 4)

(But when a woman or a man shall have with gifts; / Shall have with gifts or virtuousness; / Or with refraining or constraint, / A store or merit well laid by.)

*Asādhāraṇai aññesāñ acorāharaṇo nidhi; Kayirātha dhīro puññāni, yo nidhi anugāmiko.* (Nidhikanḍasutta 9)

(No other have a share in it, / And robbers cannot steal this store; / So let the steadfast merit make, / The store that is their followers.)

*Esa devamanussānai sabbakāmadado nidhi; Yañ yad evābhipatthanti, sabbañ etena labbhati.* (Nidhikanḍasutta 10)

(This is a store that can satisfy. / every desire of gods and men; / No matter what they aspire to have / All that they get by merit’s grace.)

*Mānussikā ca sampatti [devaloke ca yā rati; Yā ca nibbānasampatti: sabban labbhati] (Nidhikāṇḍasutta 13)*

(And every human excellence, / [Any delight in a godly world, / Even existence's excellence: / All that is got by merit's grace.]

*Paṭisambhidā vimokkhā ca [yā ca sāvakapāramī; Paccekabodhi buddhabhūmi: sabban etena labbhati (Nidhikāṇḍasutta 15)*

(Discriminations, liberations, [Perfection of disciples [savaka] too, And enlightenment of Cause-awakened one, state of enlightenment of Buddha, All that is got by merit's grace].

*Paramatthajotikā* by *Buddhaghosa* states that the excellence of merit that consists in giving, virtue, etc. was mentioned in the *Treasure-Store*. Loving-kindness is helpful to that excellence of merit, since when loving-kindness is practiced towards creatures, it becomes very fruitful and capable of bringing and advancing the practice right up to the plane of Enlightenment. In addition, the Loving-Kindness Discourse (*Metta-Sutta*) is placed next to the *Treasure-Store Discourse*. It seems that there is a thread of connection between the teaching of the Loving-Kindness Discourse and the practice of the Bodhisatta. (The Loving Kindness Discourse is adopted in the *Sutta-Nipāta*).

One who practices towards Buddhahood is a Bodhisatta. During the era of primitive Buddhism, there was only one – Sakyamuni Bodhisatta.

### **Transition in the conception of the Bodhisatta**

About a century after Sakyamuni's death, the Buddhist Order (*saṅgha*) was formed as a result of the first split due to controversies over the interpretation of doctrines and monastic regulations. A progressive group, the *Mahāsaṅghika* (Great Assembly), challenged the formalized traditionalism of the conservatives, known as the *Theravāda* (Those Supporting the Teaching of the Elders).

As Buddhism spread throughout India, communication among local Orders and among groups weakened, and a spirit of independence developed. Two or three hundred years later, Buddhism was divided into

eighteen (or twenty) schools. The sectarianism following the first schism is termed *Abhidhamma* Buddhism. Each school developed an *Abhidhamma-piṭaka*, a compendium of doctrinal commentary, which was also included in its canon. With the completion of the *Abhidamma-piṭakas*, the three divisions of the canon, or *Ti-piṭaka* (Three Baskets), were complete. The *Sutta* and *Vinaya-piṭaka*, dating to the period of primitive Buddhism, are on the whole fairly similar from school to school, but the *Abhidhamma-piṭakas*, having been completed independently, offer the clearest exposition of differences among the schools.

*Theravāda* Buddhism had been taught by the past seven Buddhas in the *Mahāpadāna Sutta* of *Dīgha-nikāya*, the past twenty-five and twenty-eight Buddhas in the *Buddhavaisa* of *Khuddaka-nikāya*.

Some schools of *Mahāsaṅghika*, however, insisted that there are innumerable Buddhas of the present and future in addition to the Buddhas of the Past. Furthermore, there are many worlds other than this world. The one in which Sakyamuni Buddha appeared exists in the ten directions and Buddhas can appear simultaneously in all of them.

During the *Abhidhamma* era, the *Mahāsaṅghika* expounded the innumerable Buddhas of the ten directions and three existences, and called anyone in practice for attainment of Buddhahood as the bodhisatta. As a result, the concept of the bodhisatta became more generalized.

The ten directions are the eight directions of the compass – north, south, east, west, northwest, northeast, southeast, and southwest – including above and below. The scriptures refer to the existence of Buddha lands in all directions throughout the universe, each with its own Buddha. The expression “the Buddhas of the ten directions” in the *sūtras* (Skt) indicates these Buddhas. The ten directions often appear with the three existences – past, present, and future. The phrase “the Buddhas of the ten directions and three existences” thus refers to all Buddhas throughout space and time.

*Mahāsaṅghika* allowed for the existence of many bodhisattvas, accompanying the innumerable Buddhas. That is, because there are many bodhisattvas who aspire to attain enlightenment and Buddhahood, so many

Buddhas are able to appear. The concept of the bodhisattva was broadened to include any being (*sattva*), monk (*nun*), or layperson, who aspires to attain enlightenment (*bodhi*). A bodhisattva is a Buddha-to-be, one who walks the path of enlightenment.

As time passed, each school tended towards monastic lifestyle that was increasingly reclusive, devoting themselves to the practice of precepts and the writing of doctrinal exegesis. This tendency, paradoxically, called for the Buddha's original spirit of working among the people for their salvation. This is the Mahāyana movement that arose around the end of the first century B.C.E.<sup>4</sup>

Mahāyana indicates that a teaching that can serve as a vehicle to carry a great number of people to the level of enlightenment equals that of the Buddha.

The Mahāyāna movement may have originated with the popular practice of *stūpa* (Skt) worship – revering the relics of the Buddha – that spread throughout India during the reign of King Asoka. In any event, it seems to have arisen at least in part as a popular reform movement involving laypersons as well as clergy.

Mahāyāna combines self-perfection with the enlightenment of others. Karmic retribution, that is, to attain perfection (Buddhahood) oneself and thus win release from *samsāra* (P, Skt), the cycle of birth and death, is worth nothing for the Bodhisattva, unless others are guided to enlightenment and liberated as well.

*Samsāra*, or transmigration or rebirth, refers to the cycle of birth and death that ordinary people undergo in the world of illusion and suffering. In India, the theory of transmigration first appeared in Upaniṣad philosophy

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<sup>4</sup> The point of note, however, is that *Sāvaka* seek only their own enlightenment and takes no thought for the world around them, but that some of them, through perfecting themselves by means of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, must be considered ready to act for the sake of others. They should not be thought of as self-righteous people striving merely for their own welfare but as individuals who teach others and guide them.

before the rise of Buddhism in the eighth or seventh century B.C.E. Buddhism holds that ordinary people undergo unendless cycle of birth and death within the threefold world (the worlds of desire, form, and formlessness) and among the six paths (the realm of hell, hungry spirits, animals, *asūras*, human beings, and heavenly beings). This repeated cycle of birth and death in the realms of illusions and suffering is referred to as “transmigration in the six paths.” Unenlightened beings are born into one of the six paths in accordance with their actions in their previous existence. When the present life is over, they are reborn in the same or another of the six paths, repeating this process so long as they fail to free themselves from it. The Buddhist concept of emancipation (*vimokkha*, P) means liberation from this repeated cycle of birth and death in the realms of illusion and suffering.

Freeing oneself from transmigration in the six paths was considered the goal of Buddhist practice. The causes for such transmigration were ignorance of the true nature of life and selfish craving. Liberation from them required awakening to the truth and eliminating selfish craving, and was considered to lead to the attainment of Nibbān (*Nirvāna*, Skt) or emancipation. Abhidhamma Buddhism considered it the condition of the highest enlightenment.

Mahāyāna Buddhism developed the idea of the Bodhisattva even further. *Bodhisattva* came to refer to anyone who aspires to enlightenment and Buddhahood and carries out altruistic practice. Mahāyāna practitioners used it to refer to themselves, thus expressing the conviction that they would one day attain Buddhahood. Mahāyāna sets forth the ideal of bodhisattva who seeks enlightenment both for self and others, even postponing one’s entry into *nirvāna* in order to lead others to that goal. The predominant characteristic of a bodhisattva is, therefore, compassion.

Mahāyāna bodhisattvas take four great vows when he or she first resolves to embark upon the Buddhist practice. The four great vows of Mahayana Buddhism seem to connect with primitive Buddhism. The four universal vows are expounded in the “Great Concentration and Insight”,

one of T'ien-t'ai's<sup>5</sup> three major works that combines the four universal vows with the Four Noble Truths.

According to page 304 of the *Japanese-English Buddhist Dictionary* (佛教辭典, 1999), the four universal vows of bodhisattva-hood combine with the Four Noble Truths of primitive Buddhism as follows: “In regard to the four great vows of bodhisattva-hood, two kinds are known. One is as follows: ‘However innumerable sentient beings are, I vow to save them; however inexhaustible the passions are, I vow to extinguish them; however limitless the *dharmas* are, I vow to study them; however infinite the Buddha-truth is, I vow to attain it.’” The above four are, respectively, combined with the four items of the four noble truths. The other runs: “I will save those who are yet to be saved; I will make those who are frightened feel secure; I will help enlighten those who are yet to attain enlightenment; I will cause those who are not in *nirvāṇa* to be in *nirvāṇa*.”

In short, the four Universal vows are (1) to save innumerable living beings (衆生無辺請願度 in Chinese), (2) to eradicate countless earthly desires (煩惱無量請願度), (3) to master immeasurable Buddhist teachings (法門無尽請願度), and (4) to attain supreme enlightenment (仏道無上請願度)

### Sakyamuni Bodhisatta in this lifetime

The stories of the Sakyamuni Bodhisatta in this lifetime are depicted in the “*Nālaka*” (*Nālakasutta*, P) at the time of birth, and in “Going-forth” at the time he renounced his dwelling, and in “Striving” (*Padhānasutta*) at the time of his battle against the devil of “The Great Chapter” (*Mahāvagga*) in *The Group of Discourses* (*Sutta-Nipāta*).

In the “*Nālaka*”, it is described that the seer *Asita* saw in their resting place a very joyful group of the thirty gods and asked them, “Why is the group of devas exceedingly happy?”, “having seen what marvel are the

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<sup>5</sup> T'ien-t'ai (538-597) = 天台; pinyin Tiantai; Japanese Tendai, also known as Chih-i, is the founder and the great teacher of the T'ient'ai school of Buddhism in China.

gods delighted?” and so on. The gods replied, “The *Bodhisatta*, excellent jewel, incomparable, has been born in the world of men for their benefit and happiness. Therefore, we are exultant and exceedingly happy.”<sup>6</sup>

Having heard that utterance, the seer *Asita* descended quickly from heaven and went to King *Suddhodana*’s dwelling. Having sat down, he said this to the *Sakyans*: “Where is the young prince? I too wish to see him.” Then to the one called *Asita* the *Sakyans* showed the child, the young prince.

The seer *Asita*, with joyful mind, cheerfully took hold of him. *Asita* uttered: “This one, unsurpassed, is supreme among two-legged men.” Then remembering his own impending departure, he was unhappy, and shed tears. Seeing the seer *Asita* wailing, the *Shakayans* said that “surely there will not be any obstacle to the young prince?”

The seer *Asita* said: “This young prince will reach the highest point of awakening. Seeing what is supremely purified, having sympathy for the benefit of the great majority, he will turn the wheel of the doctrine. His holy living will be famed far and wide. But not much of my life here remains, and there will be death for me before then. I shall not hear the doctrine of the peerless one; therefore I am afflicted, overwhelmed by disaster, miserable.” He took pity on his nephew named *Nālaka* and urged him towards the doctrine of the peerless one. “When you hear from another the words “Buddha” or “awakening”, go there, ask about his doctrine, and practice the holy life in the presence of that Blessed One.”

The following passage is concerned with *Sakyamuni*’s going-forth:

Seeing that this dwelling was constricted and polluted and that going-forth offered an open-air life, He went forth. Having gone forth, He avoided evil deeds with the body, abandoned bad conduct in word, and purified His mode of living. He went to *Rājagaha* and betook himself to *Giribbaja*<sup>7</sup> of the *Magadhans* for alms, being endowed with the excellent

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<sup>6</sup> In this part, the word “Bodhisatta” is used.

<sup>7</sup> a name for Rajagaha.

marks. Standing in the palace, King *Bimbisāra* (the king of *Magadha*) saw Him endowed with the marks and said this: “Look at this one; He is handsome, large, pure, and endowed with good demeanour, and he looks ahead a yoke’s length only. With downturned eyes, possessing mindfulness, this one is not as though from a lowly family. Let the royal messengers run out to find where the *bhikkhu* will go.”

Those royal messengers followed behind Him wondering, “Where will the *bhikkhu* go? Where will His dwelling be?”

Going on an uninterrupted begging round, with sense-doors guarded, well-restrained, He quickly filled his bowl, being attentive and mindful. The sage, having made his alms-round and left the city, betook Himself to *Pandava*<sup>8</sup>, thinking “Here will be my dwelling.” Having seen him go to his dwelling, the messengers then sat down, but one messenger came back and informed the king. “That *bhikkhu*, great king, is seated on the Eastern side of *Pandava*, like a tiger or bull, like a lion in a mountain cave.”

Hearing the messenger’s report, King *Bimbisāra* went hurrying in the state vehicle to Mount *Pandava*. The king took the vehicle as far as the ground would allow him, then descended from the vehicle and went up to Him on foot. Having sat down, the king exchanged the customary friendly greeting and said: “You are young and tender, in your first youth, a stripling, endowed with good complexion and statue, like a khattiya of good birth, making beautiful the van of the army, at the head of a group of elephant. I shall give you objects of enjoyment; enjoy them. But tell me Your birth, when asked.”

Sakyamuni said, “Strait on (in that direction) there is a people, King, living on the flank of *Himavat*, endowed with wealth and energy, belonging to one who is indigenous among the *Kosalans*. They are *Adicca* (the sun) by clan, *Sakya* by birth. From that family I went forth, King, not desiring sensuous pleasures. Having seen the peril in sensual pleasures, having

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<sup>8</sup> the name of a mountain near Rajagaha.

seen going-forth as safety, I shall go in order to strive. In that my mind delights.”<sup>9</sup>

It is worth noticing that Sakyamuni Bodhisatta went straight to Magadha, the most powerful state, the center of a new culture and the most advanced technology as well as the most productive place.

The following is Sakyamuni’s retrospection of the battle against the devil (*Māra*, P, Skt) that tried to hinder His enlightenment. It is titled “Striving” (*Padhānasuttai*). The devil (*Māra*) is a personification of evil and, generally, means killing, death, pestilence or obstacle. The devil is described as the great evil enemy of Sakyamuni and His teaching. When Sakyamuni entered into meditation under the *Bodhi* tree, the devil attempted to prevent Him from attaining enlightenment but failed.<sup>10</sup> Here, we can read the temptation by the devil with the words of flattery and blandishment.

“While I was meditating for the attainment of rest-from-exertion, with myself intent upon striving, near the river Nerañjarā, having made a great effort, Namuci (the name of Māra) approached me, uttering compassionate words: ‘You are thin, of bad complexion; death is near you. There are one thousand parts of death; only one part of you is life. Live, sir, life is better. If you live, you will perform merits. Much merit will be heaped up by you practicing the holy life and sacrificing the aggihutta [sacrifice]. What do you want with striving? The road to striving is hard to travel, hard to perform, hard to achieve.’” Saying these verses Māra stood near the Buddha.

The blessed One said this to that Māra: “Kinsman of the negligent, evil one, you have come here for your own purpose. I do not have even the

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<sup>9</sup> The expression “with down-turned eyes, possessing mindfulness” means the mindful protection of any living thing in one’s path. That “He quickly filled his bowl” proves sakyamuni gained devotion from the general public. “Adicca (the sun) by clan” shows the vestige of ‘sun-worship’. In India during the middle ages, some royal households called themselves descendants from the sun and some from the moon.

<sup>10</sup> In addition, the devil also tried to induce the Buddha to abandon His intention to preach, but this part will not be discussed here.

slightest need of merit, but mara ought to speak to those who have need of merits. There is faith, and energy, and wisdom is found in me. Why do you ask me about life even though my self is intent upon striving?"

Further, "This wind would dry up even the streams of the rivers; and why should my blood not be dried up when myself is intent upon striving? When my blood is being dried up, then the bile and phlegm are dried up. When the flesh wastes away, the mind becomes clearer, and all the more my mindfulness and wisdom and concentration stand firm. While I dwell thus, having reached the highest sensation, my mind has no regard for sensual pleasure. See a being's pure state."<sup>11</sup>

Revealing the original form of the Māra, Sakyamuni says, "Sensual pleasures are your first army; discontent is your second; your third is hunger and thirst; the fourth is called craving. Sloth and torpor are your fifth; the sixth is called fear; your seventh is doubt; hypocrisy and obstinacy are your eighth. Gain, renown, honour, and whatever fame is falsely received, and whoever both extols himself and disparages others, that is your army, Namuci. That is the striking force of *kaiha* (black, that is, black devil. It refers to the devil Namuci). One who is not a hero cannot conquer it, but having conquered it one obtains happiness."

This passage contains very important teachings. When we see through temptations by the devil, we can easily defeat the devil in our own mind. We are able to understand that the most powerful enemy is not outside, but inside ourselves.

Sakyamuni says, "Should I wear *muñja* grass? Death in battle is better for me than I should be conquered and live. Plunged into this battle some ascetics and *brahmans* are not seen, and they do not know the road by which those with good vows go. Seeing the army arrayed all round, and Māra with his elephant, I shall go forth to battle. May he not move me from my place! That army of yours which the world together with the devas cannot overcome, that army of yours I shall break with wisdom, as if

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<sup>11</sup> This should be our determination when we wish to accomplish some purpose.

breaking an unfired pot with a stone. Having brought my thoughts under control, and making my mindfulness well-established, I shall wander from kingdom to kingdom, training many disciples. They, vigilant, and with selves intent, performers of my teaching, will go despite you, where having gone they will grieve.”<sup>12</sup>

The devil said, “For seven years I have followed the Blessed one step by step. I have not obtained an opportunity against the fully-awakened one who possesses mindfulness. A bird circled a stone which looked like fat, thinking ‘Perhaps we shall find something soft here; perhaps there may be [something] sweet.’ Not obtaining [anything] sweet, the bird went away from there. Like a crow attacking a rock and becoming despondent, we attacking Gotama and becoming despondent, will go away.” The *vīṇa* (P, Skt, a kind of musical instrument) fell from the armpit of the one overcome by grief. This discouraged the *yakkha* (here referring to the devil) who disappeared from that very spot.

According to *Sutta-Nipāta*, Sakyamuni’s practice of continual striving and struggle against temptation lasted seven years. According to the biographical story of the Buddha, Sakyamuni can be said to have become a Buddha by defeating the devil’s temptation.

### **Fifty-two stages of Bodhisattva practice in Mahāyāna Buddhism**

*Bodhisattva Practice Jeweled Necklace Sutra* (Skt) focuses on the process by which a Bodhisattva becomes a Buddha and sets forth fifty-two stages of Bodhisattva practice in Mahāyāna Buddhism. These practices include ten stages of faith, ten stages of security, ten stages of practice, ten stages of devotion, ten stages of development, the stage of near-perfect enlightenment, and the stage of perfect enlightenment. It may be useful to consider the details of each of these stages in order to fully appreciate the practice of the Bodhisattva of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

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<sup>12</sup> The first part of underlined text means, in Pali Buddhism, a sign of no surrender. In the second underlined part, Sakyamuni, before attaining enlightenment, declares to propagate Buddhism from country to country.

The ten stages of faith are arousing (1) pure faith, (2) ever-mindfullness, (3) assiduousness, (4) concentration, (5) wisdom, (6) following the precepts, (7) directing previously acquired good fortune towards attaining enlightenment, (8) guarding the mind against earthly desires, (9) discarding attachments, and (10) making efforts to fulfill one's vows.<sup>13</sup>

The ten stages of security are (11) arousing the aspiration for buddhahood, (12) contemplating the non-substantiality of things, (13) performing all possible good deeds, (14) clearly understanding that because phenomena exist only in relationship to other phenomena, they have no permanent and unchangeable substance of their own, (15) applying all good deeds as a means to developing one's perception of the non-substantiality of things, (16) perfecting the wisdom to perceive the non-substantiality of things, (17) never retrogressing from the realization of the truth of the non-substantiality of things, (18) never harboring false views or losing the aspiration for enlightenment, (19) deeply understanding the Buddha's teachings to the point where one is assured of attaining Buddhahood in the future, and (20) obtaining the wisdom to perceive that because all things are without substance, there is nothing that is actually born or dies.

In the ten stages of practice mentioned below, one devotes oneself to altruistic deeds.

The ten stages of practice are (21) the stage of joyful service in which one awakens to the nonsubstantiality of all things and phenomena and causes others to rejoice by offering them all of one's possessions, (22) the stage of beneficial practice in which one always instructs and benefits others, (23) the stage of never offending in which one engages in the practice of forbearance and frees oneself from anger, not offending others (it is also called the practice of never resenting), (24) the stage of limitless assiduousness, in which one continues earnest practice in order to lead others to enlightenment, no matter what hardships are involved, (25) the stage of nonconfusion in which one is not hindered by illusion or ignorance, (26) the stage of appearance in the Buddha land in which one is

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<sup>13</sup> There are differing descriptions of the content and order of the ten stages of faith.

always born, (27) the stage of non-attachment in which one perceives all things and phenomena as non-substantial and frees oneself from attachment to them, (28) the stage of attaining perfection in cultivating virtues, which is difficult to accomplish (it is also called the stage of praising in which one praises and promotes the *pāramitas* [Skt], or Bodhisattva practices for perfection among the people), (29) the stages of being a model in the preaching of the Law in which one's practice of preaching and protecting the Law becomes a model for all others, (30) the stage of realizing the truth in which one is awakened to the truth of the Middle Way.

In the following ten stages of devotion, one directs one's blessings toward other people:

The ten stages of devotion are (31) the stage of saving all people and freeing oneself from the characteristics of a common mortal (in this stage while practicing the six paramitas among the beings of the six paths, one makes efforts to save all of them and at the same time liberates oneself from the characteristics of a common mortal), (32) the stage of indestructibility in which with indestructible faith in the three treasures of Buddhism, one penetrates the true nature of all phenomena, realizing their non-substantiality, (33) the stage of impartial devotion to all Buddhas, in which one practices, in successive lives, under all the Buddhas of the three existence (in this stage, one increases all kinds of good roots and transfers their benefit to all beings impartially), (34) the stage of transferring one's benefits to all lands (in this stage, one transfers one's benefits to the Buddhas in all lands, serving and making offerings to them and to all other beings), (35) the stage of obtaining limitless blessing, in which one directs all of one's good fortune to the practice of Buddhism, thereby obtaining limitless good fortune and benefit, (36) the stage of impartial benefit, in which one benefits all beings equally, (37) the stage of observing the nature of all people, in which one perceives the coexistence of good and evil inherent in people's lives, (38) the stage of realizing the true aspect of all phenomena, one transfers the benefits one obtains through the realization to others, (39) the stage of freedom from all attachment – here, one perceives all phenomena from the standpoints of both difference and equality and frees oneself from all attachments, thereafter leading others to emancipation, (40) the stage of

perceiving all phenomena with infinite wisdom. At this level, one regards all phenomena as manifestations of the Middle Way and, while performing a variety of meritorious acts, uses the resultant benefits for the sake of others.

Moreover, the ten stages of development are the stages through which the practitioner conquers progressively deeper levels of darkness and advances in Buddhist practice. Though the system of the fifty-two stages of Bodhisattva practice is set forth in the *Jeweled Necklace Sutra*, there are several different sets of “ten stages of development” listed in different scriptures. The *Ten Stage Sutra* lists them as follows:

(41) The stage of joy, in which one rejoices at realizing a partial aspect of the truth, (42) the stage of freedom from defilement, in which one is free from all defilement, (43) the stage of the emission of light, in which one radiates the light of wisdom, (44) the stage of glowing wisdom, in which the flame of wisdom burns away earthly desires, (45) the stage of overcoming final illusion, in which one surmounts the illusion of darkness, or ignorance of the Middle Way.

Generally, the Middle Way or Path is the way that transcends polar extremes. It also indicates the true nature of all things, which cannot be defined by the absolutes of existence or nonexistence. It transcends the extremes of polar and opposing views, in other words, all duality. However, interpretations of this concept vary considerably from one text or school to another. The three major interpretations of the Middle Way or Path are as follows:

(1) According to Theravada teachings, it is the way leading to the Cessation of *Dukkha*. It avoids two extremes: one extreme being the search for happiness through the pleasures of the senses, which is low, common, unprofitable, and way of the ordinary people, and the other being the search for happiness through self-mortification in different forms of asceticism, which is painful, unworthy, and unprofitable. Having tried these two extremes and found them to be useless, the Buddha discovered through personal experience the Middle Path which gives vision and knowledge

leading to calm, insight, enlightenment, Nirvāṇa (Skt). This Middle Path is generally referred to as the Noble Eightfold Path (Rāhula, 1974).

(2) According to *Nagarjuna's Treatise on the Middle Way*, the true nature of all things is that they are neither born nor die and cannot be defined by either of the two extremes of existence or nonexistence. This true nature of things is non-substantiality, also referred to as the Middle Way. The *Treatise on the Middle Way* begins thus: "Neither birth nor extinction, neither cessation nor permanence, neither uniformity nor diversity, neither coming nor going..." This passage is termed the eight negations or the middle path of the eight negations and is intended to clarify the concept of the Middle Way.

(3) In T'ien-t'ai's doctrine of the three truths, the truths of the Middle Way means that the true nature of all things is neither nonsubstantiality nor temporary existence but exhibits the characteristics of both.

The ten stages of development continue as follows: (46) The stage of the sign of supreme wisdom, in which the supreme wisdom begins to appear, (47) the stage of progression, in which one rises above the paths of the two vehicles *Śrāvaka* (Skt, voice-hearers) and *Pratyekabuddha* (Skt, cause-awakened), (48) the stage of the all-penetrating wisdom, in which one dwells firmly in the truth of the Middle Way and cannot be perturbed by anything, (49) the stage of the all-penetrating wisdom, in which one preaches the Law freely and without restriction, and (50) the stage of the *Dharma* (Skt) cloud, in which one benefits all sentient beings with the *Dharma* or Law, just as a cloud sends down rain impartially upon all things.

(51) The stage of near-perfect enlightenment. It is the highest stage of Bodhisattva.

(52) The stage of perfect enlightenment. It is the unsurpassed enlightenment of a Buddha.

In reference to (52), the stage of perfect enlightenment, the plane of enlightenment (*Buddhabhūmi*) in the *Khuddakathā*, it is explained that the plane of enlightenment (*buddhabhūmi* in the *Khuddakathā*) establishes

supremacy over all creatures. In the *Pali-English Dictionary* (Davis and Stede, 1972: 490), *buddhabhūmi* is translated as “the ground of Buddhahood”.

The virtues of a Buddha are described as follows:

A Buddha is distinguished by extraordinary virtues. A large number of virtues are essential to a Buddha. They are the Eighteen Unique Virtues (or the Eighteen Unshared Properties), i.e. ① the Ten Powers, ② the Four kinds of Fearlessness, ③ the Three Types of Equanimity (Tranquility), ④ Great Compassion (or Great Pity). ⑤ the Ten Epithets (Ten honorable titles) of a Buddha that can be used when referring to a Buddha. The details of these virtues are as follows:

① The Ten Powers (*dasa-bala*): In the Great Commentary on the *Abhidhamma* and other treatises, they include (1) the power of knowing what is true and what is not; (2) the power of knowing karmic causality at work in the lives of all beings throughout past, present, and future; (3) the power of knowing all stages of concentration, emancipation, and meditation; (4) the power of knowing the conditions of life of all people; (5) the power of judging all people’s level of understanding; (6) the power of discerning the superiority or inferiority of all people’s actions; (7) the power of knowing the effects of all people’s action; (8) the power of remembering past lifetimes; (9) the power of knowing when each person will be born and will die, and in what realm that person will be reborn; (10) the power of eradicating all illusions.<sup>14</sup>

② The Four Kind of Fearlessness (*cattāri-vesarajjāni*): They are four types of confidence possessed by Buddhas – (1) fearlessness in declaring oneself to be enlightened to the truth of all phenomena, (2) fearlessness in proclaiming oneself to have extinguished all desires and illusions, (3) fearlessness in proclaiming oneself to have elucidated the obstacles to Buddhist practice and enlightenment, and (4) fearlessness in declaring oneself to have clarified the way of liberation from the world of suffering, and thus the way of attaining emancipation.

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<sup>14</sup> Some explanations of the ten powers give a different order or differ slightly in content.

③ The Three Types Equanimity (Tranquility): (1) A Buddha does not rejoice in the veneration of believers, (2) he does not grieve over others' lack of belief; (3) he neither rejoices in nor grieves over others' belief or slander.

④ Great Compassion (*mahā-karuna*): It is altruistic action that seeks to relieve living beings from their sufferings, and give ease and delight to them. A Buddha is revered as one who shares in the torments of all living beings and strives to release all beings from suffering and lead them to happiness. The *Compassionate White Lotus Flower Sutra* says that Sakyamuni, out of His immeasurable compassion, was born not in a pure land but in the troubled *saha* world to save the people. Therefore, He is compared to the most beautiful of all flowers, the white lotus flower, described in the sutra as a symbol of great compassion, and the other Buddhas in their respective pure lands are compared to lesser flowers. Both the Sanskrit text and its Tibetan translation are also extant.

⑤ Ten epithets (or Ten honorable titles) of a Buddha: They are expressions of such qualities as power, wisdom, virtue, and compassion. They include:

(1) Thus Come One (*tathāgata*, P and Skt): One who has come from the world of truth. A Buddha embodies the fundamental truth of all phenomena and grasps the law of causality that permeats past, present, and future.

(2) Worthy of Offerings (*arahant*): One who has come is qualified to receive offering from human and heavenly beings. The original meaning of *arahant* is “worthy of respect or veneration.” By offering such a one clothing, food, and accomodation, the donor can expect the merit of donation to return a hundredfold. One epithet of an *arahant* is “field for planting merit” (*puñña-khetta*). Just as seeds planted in such a field give high yields, that which is given the *arahant* will return, multiplied, as a great harvest of merit. It is in this sense that *arahant* is used as an epithet of a Buddha.

Other terms used to describe an *arahant* are *asekha* who has no more to learn, and *khīṇāsava* who has extinguished all delusions. *Arahant* has also been translated as “killer of bandits,” that is, one who has vanquished the

bandit of delusion. In addition, the sixteen arahants are important disciples of Sakyamuni, named *Pindolabharadvāja*, *Kanakavatsa*, *Kanakaparidhvaja*, *Subinda*, *Nakula*, *Bhadra*, *Kālika*, *Vajraputra*, *Śvapāka*, *Panthaka*, *Rāhula*, *Nāgasena*, *Āngada*, *Vanavāsi*, *Ajita*, and *Cūlapanthaka*. They were designated by Sakyamuni Buddha to protect His teaching for the benefit of the people after His death (法住記 *Hōjū-ki*: The Record of Ensuring the Abiding of the Law). The five hundred *arahants* are the five hundred monks said to have attended the First Council at *Rājagaha* after the Buddha's death. This usage of *arahant* should not be confused with that of arahant of a Buddha.

(3) Right and Universal knowledge (*sammā-sambuddha*): One with a correct and perfect understanding of all phenomena, or “one who is perfectly enlightened.” This is used to distinguish a Buddha's enlightenment from that of a *savaka* (voice-hearer) or a *pacceka-buddha* (self-awakened one). It is frequently prefixed by the word *anuttara* (P, Skt), or supreme. Thus a Buddha's enlightenment is often referred to as *anuttara-sammā-sambodhi*.

(4) Perfect Clarity and Conduct (*vijjācārāna-sampanna*): One who understands eternity, or the past, present, and future existences, and who is a perfect performer of good deeds. Buddhist theory is rational, ethical, and religious, and is the basis of the practice of the Buddhist faith. All theory is related to practice. Both theory and practice are perfectly integrated in the person of a Buddha.

(5) Well Attained (*sugata*): also Well Gone – One who has gone over to the world of enlightenment: A Buddha is called Well Attained for four reasons: he treads the holy way of goodness and purity, He can attain immortal *nirvāṇa* (Skt. *amata-nibbāna*, P), He is able to achieve supreme enlightenment through mastery of the perfections, and His words are always appropriate to the occasion.

(6) Understanding the World (*lokavidū*): One who understands all secular and religious affairs by grasping the law of cause and effect. The world (*loka*, P, Skt) refers both to the “vessel (or) receptacle world” (*bhājanaloka*) and to the world of sentient beings (*sattaloka*). In this case, the World (*loka*) refers to the world of sentient beings or to sentient beings themselves. Having complete understanding of the thought, character, and capabilities of all beings, a Buddha helps sentient beings achieve release

from delusion by teaching them appropriate means and by knowing the nature of their suffering, its cause, the possibility of its eradication, and the means of bringing sentient beings to happiness. By understanding the world, a Buddha is able to teach sentient beings.

(7) Unexcelled Worth (*anuttara*, P, Skt): One who stands supreme among all living beings. No one can compare with him in the practice of morality, concentration, and wisdom, or in His emancipation and His perfect knowledge of the state of emancipation.

(8) Trainer of people (*purisadama-sārathi*): One who trains and leads all people to faith and to enlightenment. He guides people according to their individual condition, at times using gentleness, at times strictness, and at times a combination of the two.

(9) Teacher of heavenly and human beings (*satthā devamanussānañ*): One who can teach and educate all human and heavenly beings.

(10) Buddha, World-honored One (*bhagavat*): An awakened one, endowed with perfect wisdom and virtue, who wins the respect of all people.

Let us mention here the importance of faith. In the ten stages of faith and ten stages of security mentioned above, one aims at personal development. From this view, generally, faith is regarded as the practice for beginners. The reason is that faith is cited first because it is the starting point for all Buddhist practice.

Faith is a basic attitude emphasized in both primitive Buddhism and *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. It constitutes the first of the five roots, or the five elements of practice conducive to enlightenment – faith, exertion, memory, meditation, and wisdom – and five powers, which are the five attributes obtained by the practice of the five roots.

*Theragāthā* (the elders' verses) mentions that *Sāriputta* believed in the Buddha and the teaching of the Buddha and was able to reach the goal as follows:

The blessed one, the Buddha, the one with vision, taught the doctrine to another; while the doctrine was being taught, being desirous of it I turned an attentive ear.

My listening was not in vain; I am released without *āsavas* (to eradicate illusion and earthly desire). Not for knowledge of former habitation, nor even for the deva-eye, nor for supernormal power of knowledge of passing away and rebirth, nor for purity of the ear-element was there any resolve of mine.<sup>15</sup>

The latter part of the “Simile and Parable” (third) chapter in the *Lotus Sūtra* (Skt) emphasizes the importance of faith, pointing out that even *Śāriputra* (Skt), known as foremost in wisdom, could “gain entrance through faith alone” and not through his own wisdom or understanding, as follows:

“Even you, *Śāriputra* (Skt), in the case of this *sūtra* (Skt), were able to gain entrance through faith alone. How much more so, than the other voice-hearers. / Those other voice-hearers – it is because they have faith in the Buddha’s word that they can comply with this *sūtra*, not because of any wisdom of their own.” (emphasis added)

The phrase “gaining entrance through faith alone” mentioned above became a famous Buddhist term in the *Lotus Sutra*.

The term “substituting faith for wisdom” means the principle that faith is the true cause for gaining supreme wisdom and that faith alone leads to enlightenment. In general, Buddhism describes supreme wisdom as the cause of enlightenment. The *Buddha-avatainsaka-nāma-mahāvaiipūlyasutra*<sup>16</sup> (Skt) says, “Faith is the basis of the way and the mother of blessings.” The *Mahā-parinirvāṇa* (Skt) of Mahāyāna says, “Although there are innumerable practices that lead to enlightenment, if one teaches faith, then that includes all those practice.” The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom attributed to *Nāgarjuna* reads, “The great ocean of Buddhism can be entered through faith.”

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<sup>15</sup> In this description, the power to be anywhere at will is missing from chal-abhiñña (six transcendental powers). It is thinkable that, at that period, the system of six transcendental powers was not introduced yet.

<sup>16</sup> also known as the *Avatainsaka Sutra* = *Flower Garland Sutra*

The faith mentioned above means *Śraddhā* in Sanskrit, and another Sanskrit word for faith is *Adhimukti*, which means faith based on understanding. It also means to first take faith in the Buddha's teaching and then to understand it. *Adhimukti* is the Sanskrit title of the “belief and Understanding” (fourth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra translated by Kumārajīva (Skt). The “Distinctions in Benefits” (seventeenth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra says, “*Ajita*<sup>17</sup> (Skt), if there are living beings who, on hearing that the lifespan of the Buddha is of such long duration, are able to believe and understand it even for a moment, the benefits they gain thereby will be without limit or measure.” (emphasis added)

In addition, in Mahāyāna Buddhism, as faith is the most fundamental for the attainment of Buddhahood, it gives rise to practice and study, and practice and study in turn serve to deepen faith. Nichiren great sage (1222-1282 in Japan) states, “Be sure to strengthen your faith, and receive the protection of Śākyamuni (Skt), Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions. Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study. Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism. You must not only persevere yourself; you must also teach others. Both practice and study arise from faith. Teach others to the best of your ability, even if it is only a single sentence or phrase.”

## **Six stages of practice**

The six stages in the practice of the Lotus Sutra were formulated by T'ien-t'ai in *Great Concentration and Insight*. They are as follows:

(1) The stage of being a Buddha in theory. At this stage one has not yet heard the correct teaching and is ignorant of Buddhism. Nevertheless, a single moment of life is in itself identical to the truth of the matrix of the Thus Come One; in other words, one is a potential Buddha.

(2) The stage of hearing the name and words of truth. At this stage through the spoken or written word one comes to an intellectual

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<sup>17</sup> another name for *Bodhisattva Maitreya* (Skt)

understanding that one has the Buddha nature and that all phenomena are manifestations of the Buddhist Law. This may take place through reading or hearing the words of the sutras.

(3) The stage of perception and action. Here one perceives the truth (of the Buddha nature) within oneself through practice. The truth and wisdom to perceive are in accord with each other, and one's words match one's actions.

(4) The stage of resemblance to enlightenment. At this stage, one eliminates the first two or three categories of illusion and attains purification of the six sense organs. Having advanced this far, one's wisdom resembles that of a Buddha. In terms of the fifty-two stages of practice, this stage corresponds to the first stages, the ten stages of faith.

(5) The stage of progressive awakening. This is the stage at which one eradicates all illusions except fundamental darkness and awakens progressively to the truth of one's Buddha nature. In terms of the fifty-two stages, it corresponds to the eleventh (the first stage of security) through the fifty-first (the stage of near-perfect enlightenment).

(6) The stage of ultimate enlightenment or the highest stage of practice. At this stage, one finally eliminates fundamental darkness and fully manifests the Buddha nature. This corresponds to the stage of perfect enlightenment, the last of the fifty-two stages.

T'ien-t'ai taught that all people at whatever stage of practice are equally endowed with the potential for Buddhahood. In this way he prevented his disciples from falling into the error of self-deprecation or becoming discouraged.

On the other hand, possessing Buddha nature is not the same as attaining Buddhahood. T'ien-t'ai therefore divided practice into six progressive stages to prevent his disciples from falling into the error of arrogance and thus relaxing in their effort. In the *Great Concentration and Insight*, he states: "if one lacks faith, one will object that it pertains to the lofty realm of the sages, something far beyond the capacity of one's own wisdom to understand. If one lacks wisdom, one will become puffed up with arrogance and will claim to be the equal of the Buddha."

## Bodhisattvas in the *Lotus Sutra*

Some important Bodhisattvas in the *Lotus Sutra* include the following:

**Mañjuśrī** (Skt): The Bodhisattva appears in the sutra as the leader of the bodhisattva and is regarded as symbolic of the perfection of wisdom. In the introduction of the *Lotus Sutra*, Mañjuśrī answered Bodhisattva Maitreya's question why two categories of six auspicious happenings occurred during the time the Buddha entered into *Samādhi* (P, Skt). These are the six auspicious happenings occurring in this world and those occurring in other worlds.

The six auspicious happenings in this world are as follows: (1) the Buddha preaches the Immeasurable Meaning of Sutra, an introductory teaching to the *Lotus Sutra*; (2) He enters a profound meditation called the samadhi of the origin of immeasurable meanings; (3) four kinds of exquisite flowers rain down from the heavens; (4) the earth trembles in six different ways; (5) seeing these portents, the whole assembly rejoice and, placing their palms together, single-mindedly behold the Buddha; and (6) the Buddha emits a beam of light from the tuft of white hair between His eyebrows, illuminating eighteen thousand worlds to the east.

The six auspicious happenings occurring in other worlds are: (1) the light emitted by the Buddha reaches as high as the Akanishtha Heaven and as deep as the Avichi hell, so that the living beings of the six paths in all the illuminated worlds are clearly visible to those at the assembly of the sutra; (2) the Buddhas present in other worlds can be seen; (3) the preaching of these Buddhas can be heard; (4) the four kinds of believers – monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen – who have carried out Buddhist practices and attained the way can be seen; (5) bodhisattva practicing the bodhisattva way can be seen; and (6) it can be seen that, after the Buddha has entered nirvana, towers adorned with the seven kinds of treasures are built to house the Buddhas' relics.

Mañjuśrī said that after Sakyamuni arises from His samādhi He would preach “the Lotus of the Wonderful Law”. From Mañjuśrī's own experience,

they include ① the last Sun Moon Bright Buddha among twenty thousand same named Buddhas in the past preached the Lotus of the Wonderful Law after the same auspicious portent as this, and ② at that time Mañjuśrī heard the *Lotus Sutra* as a bodhisattva named Wonderfully Bright who had eight hundred disciples, and ③ after the Buddha entered *nirvāna* of no reminder and had passed away, the Bodhisattva Wonderfully Bright taught the eight sons of the Buddha Sun Moon Bright, whose father had not yet left family life, had eight princely sons, and dignity and virtue came easily to eight sons, and each presided over a four continent realm. When these princes heard that their father had left family life and had gained anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, they all cast aside their princely positions and followed their father by leaving family life. ④ The eight sons all were able to achieve the Buddha way. The last to become a Buddha was one named Burning Torch. ⑤ Among the eight hundred disciples of wonderfully Bright was one named Seeker of Fame. He was greedy for gain and support, and though he read and recited numerous sutras, he could not understand them but for the most part forgot them. Bodhisattva Seeker of Fame was Maitreya. In addition, the Burning Torch Buddha is the first Buddha of twenty-five Buddhas of the past and is very famous as the Buddha who predicted enlightenment in the future (the prophecy of future) to Sakyamuni Buddha.

In the “Devadatta” (twelfth) chapter, the eight-year-old daughter of *Sāgara* (Skt) – one of the eight great dragon kings – conceived the desire for enlightenment when she heard Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva preach the *Lotus Sutra* in the dragon king’s palace. When Mañjuśrī asserted that she is capable of quickly attaining the Buddha wisdom, Bodhisattva Widom Accumulated challenges him, saying that even Śākyamuni (Skt) attained enlightenment only after fulfilling the bodhisatta practice for many kalpas and that she cannot become a Buddha so easily.

Before Widom Accumulated has even finished stating his disbelief, the dragon girl herself suddenly appears in front of the assembly and praises Śākyamuni Buddha by reciting these verses of praise. The last two stanzas of these verses are as follows:

And having heard His teachings, I have attained *bodhi* (P and Skt) – the Buddha alone can bear witness to this. / I unfold the doctrines of the Great Vehicle to rescue living beings from suffering.

Śāriputra voices doubt after hearing the dragon girl's determination (last two verses).

There are two reasons for Śāriputra's disbelief. In the first place, Śāriputra, like Wisdom Accumulated, has the false notion that the Buddha's enlightenment can only be attained by carrying out painful practices over an extremely long period of time. The second reason relates to the “five obstacles” that a woman cannot become a Brahma, a Śakra (Skt), a devil king, a wheel-turning king, or a Buddha.

At that moment, she offers a jewel to the Buddha. The Buddha immediately accepted it. The dragon girl said to Wisdom Accumulated and Śāriputra, “I presented the precious jewel and the World-Honored One accepted it – was that not quickly done?” They replied, “Very quickly!” The girl said, “Employ your supernatural powers and watch me attain Buddhahood. It will be even quicker than that!”

She then transforms herself into a male and instantaneously perfects the bodhisatta practice. She then appears in a land to the south called Spotless World and manifests the state of Buddhahood without changing her dragon form. With the thirty-two features and eighty characteristics of a Buddha, she preaches the *Lotus Sutra* to all living there.

The dragon girl's enlightenment has important implications. First, it refutes the idea of the time that women could never attain enlightenment, including the commonly held view of the doctrine of the five obstacles. Second, it reveals that the power of the *Lotus Sutra* enables all people equally to attain Buddhahood in their present form, without undergoing kalpas of austere practices.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, in this chapter, the attainment of Buddhahood by evil persons, that is, the principle that even evil persons have the potential for enlightenment, is expounded through the story between Śākyamuni and Devadatta. Śākyamuni reveals that He, in some past existence, learned the *Lotus Sutra* from a seer named Asita and that this seer was the present Devadatta.

In the “Peaceful Practice” (fourteen) chapter, Mañjuśrī asks Śākyamuni Buddha how bodhisatta should practice Buddhism in the evil age after Śākyamuni Buddha’s death. The Buddha expounds four rules or peaceful practices to be observed.

In “The Bodhisatta Wonderful Sound” (twenty-fourth) chapter, appearing last in the *Lotus Sutra* for Mañjuśrī and being called Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva prince of Dharma with a Superb Title, Mañjuśrī said to the Buddha: “What good roots has this bodhisattva planted, what benefits has he cultivated, that he can exercise such great transcendental powers as this? What samādhi does he carry out? I beg you to explain for us the name of this samādhi, for we too would like to apply ourselves diligently to its practice.” Mañjuśrī burns with inquiring mind. The sincere attitude of Mañjuśrī may be regarded as one of the classic examples.

Sutras depict Mañjuśrī as one of the two bodhisattvas who attended to Śākyamuni Buddha, the other being Samantabhadra (Skt, Universal Worthy). Mañjuśrī is generally shown in Buddhist art riding a lion at the Buddha’s left, and presents the virtues of wisdom and enlightenment. In *Surangama-Samādhi Sutra* (Skt, The Heroic Valour Samādhi Sutra), Mañjuśrī appears as a Buddha of the past.<sup>19</sup>

***Samantabhadra (Bodhisattva Universal Worthy):*** This Bodhisattva is regarded as symbolic of the virtue of truth and practice. In various sutras, he is depicted as one of the two leading bodhisattva who attended to Śākyamuni Buddha, the other being Mañjuśrī. He is usually shown on the Buddha’s right riding a white elephant with six tusks. In the “Universal Worth” (twenty-eighth) chapter, he vows to protect the *Lotus Sutra* and its votaries, saying to the Buddha: “In the evil and corrupt age of the last five-hundred-year period, if there is someone who accepts and upholds this sutra, I will guard and protect him, free him from decline and harm, see that he attains peace and tranquillity that no one can spy out and take advantage

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<sup>19</sup> The name Manchuria is said to derive from Mañjuśrī. It is a mountainous region forming the northeastern portion of China, now comprising the provinces of Juirin, Lianing, and Heilongjiang

of his shortcomings.” In this chapter, he also takes a vow before the Buddha, saying: “I now therefore employ my transcendental powers to guard and protect this *sutra*. And after the Thus Come One has entered extinction, I will cause it to be widely propagated throughout Jambudvipa and will see that it never comes to an end.”

***Bodhisatta Bhaisajyarāja (Medicine King):*** In “The Teacher of the Law” (tenth) chapter, Śākyamuni Buddha addressed Bodhisattva Medicine King and, through him, the eighty thousand Bodhisattvas. Bodhisattva Medicine King was in attendance of the great Assembly of the Lotus Sutra of Wonderful Law since the “introduction” (first) chapter. The teachings indicate the characteristic of the Bodhisattva in the *Lotus Sutra*. They are as follows:

<Five kinds of practice and practitioners’ vow and mission are described.>

<The importance of “for a moment thinking of the *Lotus Sutra* with joy” is stressed.>

<These persons (who read and recite the *Lotus Sutra*) in a latter-day existence are certain to attain Buddhahood.>

<These persons (the same mentioned above) are the great bodhisattvas who, while capable of being born into pure lands if they so desired, choose to be born into impure worlds so that they can expound the sutra to help the suffering. This is called the principle of “deliberately creating the appropriate karma.”>

<These persons (the same) are the envoys of the Thus Come One.>

<It is suggested that the identity of the teacher of the Law transcends distinctions between clerics and lay people.>

<The *Lotus Sutra* is the most difficult to believe and understand. Hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound.>

<The three rules of preaching are robe, seat, and room after the Buddha’s death.>

It is preached that “The ‘Thus Come One’s room’ is the state of mind that shows great pity and compassion toward all living beings. The ‘Thus Come One’s robe’ is the mind that is gentle and forbearing. The ‘Thus Come One’s seat’ is the emptiness of all phenomena.”

**Bodhisattva Maitreya:** This Bodhisattva is predicted to succeed Śākyamuni as a future Buddha. The Sanskrit word Maitreya means friendly, benevolent, affectionate, or amicable. Also he is known as *Ajita*, meaning invincible. He is said to have been reborn in the Tusita Heaven and to reside in the inner court of this heaven, where he now teaches the heavenly beings. According to the advent of *Maitreya Sutra*, he is to reappear in the world 5,670 million years after Śākyamuni's death, attain Buddhahood, and save the people in Śākyamuni's stead. For this reason, he is also sometimes called *Maitreya Buddha*. In the "Emerging from the Earth" (fifteenth) chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, each of the Buddhas, who were emanations of Śākyamuni Buddha and had arrived from immeasurable thousands, ten thousands, millions of lands in other directions, spoke to his attendants, saying: "There is a bodhisattva and mahāsattva named Maitreya who has received a prophecy from Śākyamuni Buddha that he will be the next hereafter to become a Buddha." In the *Lotus Sutra*, Maitreya is a person who asks the question to Śāriputra in the Introduction (first) chapter. Also, he asks the important questions to the Buddha and is addressed by the Buddha in the "Emerging from the Earth" (fifteenth) chapter. In this chapter, the Buddha praises the question of Maitreya in the "Emerging from the Earth" (fifteenth) chapter, saying "Excellent, excellent, *Ajita*, that you should question the Buddha about the great affair."

**Bodhisattvas of the Earth:** An innumerable host of Bodhisattvas emerge from beneath the earth. They are called 'Bodhisattvas of the Earth' and are described in the "Emerging from the Earth" (fifteenth) chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*. In this chapter, countless Bodhisattvas from other worlds ask for permission to propagate the *Sutra* in the *Saha* world after the Buddha's death, but Śākyamuni refuses, saying that Bodhisattvas who will carry out that task already exist in the *Saha* world. At that time, the earth trembles and splits open. And a host of Bodhisattvas emerge from within it. Their bodies are golden and they possess the thirty-two features that characterize a Buddha.

Bodhisattva Maitreya, on behalf of the assembly who were surprised, made the inquiry to the Buddha. At that time, The Buddha praised the question of Bodhisattva Maitreya, saying "Excellent, excellent....", as

mentioned above. The Buddha replies that they, Bodhisattvas of the Earth, are His original disciples whom He has been teaching since long ago. Bodhisattva Maitreya again asks how, in the mere forty-odd years since His awakening, Śākyamuni Buddha has managed to teach so many countless Bodhisattvas. He beseeches Śākyamuni Buddha to explain further, especially for the sake of people in the future who may wonder about this point. The “Emerging from the Earth” chapter ends here. To answer Maitreya’s question, Śākyamuni reveals in the next chapter, “The Life Span of the Thus Come One” (sixteenth) chapter, that in reality countless *kalpas* have passed since he first attained enlightenment.

In the “Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One” (twenty-first) chapter, Śākyamuni transfers the essence of the *Lotus Sutra* to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, entrusting them with the mission of propagating it after his death, specifically in the latter day of the Law.

**Bodhisattva Never Disparaging:** In the “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” (twentieth) chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, Śākyamuni Buddha illustrates the story of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. The chapter describes this bodhisattva as having lived in the Middle Day of the Law after the death of a Buddha named Awesome Sound Kings (Bhīṣma-garjita-svara-rāja Buddha, Skt). According to this chapter, this Buddha appeared in the remote past and expounded the four noble truths for persons seeking to become voice-hearers, the teaching of the twelve-linked chain of causation for persons seeking to become pratyeka-buddhas (pacceka-buddha, P), and the teaching of the Six Paramitas for Bodhisattvas, so that they could gain their respective benefits. After the death of this Buddha, Buddhas bearing the same name, Awesome Sound King, appeared one after another, numbering “Twenty thousand million” in all.

Bodhisattva Never Disparaging appeared during the Middle Day of the Law after the original Awesome Sound King Buddha. He bowed to any and all people he happened to meet, showing respect for their inherent Buddha nature. Never Disparaging venerated all people, repeating the phrase “I have profound reverence for you. I would never dare treat you with disparagement or arrogance. Why? Because you are all practicing the

Bodhisattva and are certain to attain Buddhahood.” Arrogant and conceited, however, they ridiculed, vilified, stoned and beat the Bodhisattva with staves.

Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, however, persevered in his practice and achieved purification of his six senses through the benefit of the *Lotus Sutra*. When arrogant people who had treated Bodhisattva Never Disparaging with ridicule and contempt heard his preaching and saw that he had purified his senses, they all took faith in him and became his followers. But due to their past offenses of treating him with animosity, they did not encounter a Buddha, hear of the law, or see the community of monks for two hundred million kalpas. For a thousand kalpas, they underwent great suffering in the Avichi (Skt. Avici, P) hell. After they had finished paying for their offenses, they again encountered Bodhisattva Never Disparaging and received instruction from him to attain supreme perfect enlightenment.

This story illustrates the principle of attaining enlightenment through a reverse relationship, or the connection established with the correct teaching through rejecting or slandering it.

Śākyamuni Buddha identifies Bodhisattva Never Disparaging as himself in a past existence and reveals that those who disparaged him are present in the assembly of the *Lotus Sutra*. Śākyamuni Buddha further states that these people are now at the stage of practice where they will never regress in their pursuit of supreme perfect enlightenment. He then urges that the *Lotus Sutra* be single-mindedly embraced and propagated after His death.

The reason why the arrogant and conceited ridiculed, vilified, stoned and beat the Bodhisattva with staves is shown in the Bodhisattva Never Disparaging’s teaching, “you are all practicing the Bodhisattva and are certain to attain Buddhahood.” In the chapter, those who gave way to anger, their minds lacking in purity, spoke ill of him and cursed him, saying, ‘This ignorant monk – where does he come from, presuming to declare that he does not disparage us and bestow on us a prediction that we will attain Buddhahood? We have no use for such vain and irresponsible predictions!’ They could not understand their own Buddha-nature.

Buddha-nature (*Buddhatva*, Skt and *Buddhatta*, P) is the internal cause or potential for attaining Buddhahood. Mahayana Buddhism generally holds that all people possess the innate Buddha, though its existence is obscured by illusion and evil karma. The history of Buddhism has witnessed doctrinal arguments concerning the Buddha nature, especially with regard to whether all people possess it.

Buddha-nature is also explained in the Pali-canonical. Innately pure mind or innate purity of one's essential nature (*Pakatiparisuddhacitta*, P) and buddha-nature (*buddhatta*, P) or the Matrix of the Thus Come One (*Tathāgata-gabbha*, P) is the theme in this part.

In Chapter VI, "The One of the Book of the Gradual Sayings" (More-numbered Sutta, *Anguttara-Nikāya*) Vol. I, § The 1-10, the finger-snap says the following:

Thus have I heard: on a certain occasion the Exalted One was staying near *Savatthi*, at *Jeta* Grove, in *Anathapindika*'s Park. Then the Exalted One addressed the monks.

'This mind, monks, is luminous (pabhassara, P), but it is defiled by taints that come from without (āgantukehi upakkilesehi, P). But this the uneducated manyfolk understands not as it really is. Wherefore for the uneducated manyfolk there is no cultivation of the mind, I declare.'

'That mind, monks, is luminous, but it is cleansed (vippamutta, P) of taints that come from without. This the educated Ariyan disciple understands as it really is. Wherefore for the educated Ariyan disciple there is cultivation of the mind, I declare.' (emphases added)

In chapter 5 On Flowers, The Middle Fifty, Kindred Sayings on Elements, The Khanda Book (*Khandha-vagga*) of The Book of the Kindred Sayings (Grouped Suttas, *Saiyutta-Nikāya*), § 100 (8), The Leash (ii) says and gives concrete details as follows:

At *Sāvatthi*. . . . Then the Exalted One said—:

'Incalculable, brethren, is this round of rebirth. No beginning is made known of being wrapt in ignorance, fettered by craving, who run on, who fare on the round rebirth.'

Wherefore, brethren, again and again must one regard one's own mind thus: "For a long, long time this mind has been tainted by lust, by hatred, by illusion." By a tainted mind (cittasamkilesa, P), brethren, beings are tainted. By purity of mind (cittavodāna, P) beings are made pure.

Brethren, have ye (P) ever seen a picture which they call "a show-piece?"

'Yes, Lord.'

'Well, brethren, this so-called show-piece is thought out by mind. Wherefore, brethren, mind is even more diverse than that show-piece.

Wherefore, brethren, again and again must one regard one's own mind thus: "For a long time this mind must have been tainted by lust, by hatred, by illusion." By a tainted mind (cittasamkilesa, P), brethren, beings are tainted. By purity of mind (cittavodāna, P) beings are made pure.'

These sentences of Anguttara-Nikāya and Sanyutta-Nikāya, especially the underlined parts, are quoted as the source for the aspiration to enlightenment (*bodhicitta*, P) and the buddha-nature (*buddhatta*, P) or *tathāgatā* embryo (*tathāgata-gabbha*, P) – that is, the potential for attaining buddhahood inherent in all sentient beings – as the source of this aspiration in Mahayana-Buddhism.

Lastly, the following are the phrases of the Group of Discourses (Sutta-Nipāta) from "1.8. Loving-kindness" and the *Lotus Sutra* from "the Life Span of the Thus Come One" (sixteenth) chapter:

(From "1.8. Loving-kindness" of the Group of Discourses (Sutta-Nipāta)

145. .... Let all creatures indeed be happy (and) secure; let them be happy-minded.
146. Whatever living creatures there are, moving or still without exception, whichever are long or large, or middle-sized or short, small or great,
147. Whichever are seen or unseen, whichever live far or near, whether they already exist or are going to be, let all creatures be happy-minded.

From “the Life Span of the Thus Come One” (sixteenth) chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*:

At all times I think to myself:

How can I cause living beings to gain entry into the unsurpassed way, and quickly acquire the body of a Buddha?

These are the messages of greatest value from the Buddha to all people. All people should set their mind’s eyes toward the Buddha for their own and others’ happiness.

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