

CHAPTER 2

Entering the First Ground

II. CHAPTER TWO: ENTERING THE FIRST GROUND

A. Q: WHAT ARE THE TEN GROUNDS?

Question: These words you have spoken have awakened my mind and I have been extremely pleased by them. If you were to now explain the ten grounds, there would certainly be many who would benefit. What are the ten grounds?

B. A: THE TEN GROUNDS TAUGHT BY ALL BUDDHAS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

Response:

The dharma of the ten grounds contained herein has been, is now, and shall continue to be explained by the buddhas of the past, the future, and the present for the sake of all buddhas' sons,

The first ground is known as the Ground of Joyfulness.
The second is known as the Ground of Stainlessness.
The third is known as the Ground of Shining Light.
The fourth is known as the Ground of Blazing Brilliance.

The fifth is known as the Difficult-to-Conquer Ground.
The sixth is known as the Ground of Direct Presence.
The seventh is known as the Far-Reaching Ground.
The eighth is known as the Ground of Immovability.

The ninth is known as the Ground of Excellent Intelligence.
The tenth is known as the Ground of the Dharma Cloud.
In analyzing the aspects of the ten grounds,
we shall next present extensive explanations.²⁰

"Herein" refers to the sphere of the meaning set forth in the Great Vehicle. "Ten" is simply a term of enumeration. "Grounds" refers to the various stations on which a bodhisattva resides in accordance with his roots of goodness.

"Buddhas" refers to all *tathāgatas* of the ten directions and three periods of time. "Explaining" refers to instruction and explication. As for "buddhas' sons," the true sons of all buddhas are the bodhisattvas. It is for this reason that the bodhisattvas are referred to as "buddhas' sons."

It is because all buddhas of the past, the future and the present explain these ten grounds that the text says, "has been, is now, and shall continue to be explained."

As the bodhisattva on the first ground begins to gain the flavor of good dharmas, his mind abounds in joyfulness. It is for this reason that it is referred to as "the Ground of Joyfulness" (*pramudita*).

On the second ground, as one cultivates the path of the ten good karmic deeds, one leaves behind all stains. It is for this reason that it is referred to as "the Ground of Stainlessness" (*vimala*).

On the third ground, as one engages in vastly comprehensive learning and speaks Dharma for beings, one becomes able to provide radiant illumination. It is for this reason that it is referred to as "the Ground of Shining Light" (*prabhākara*).

On the fourth ground, one's giving, moral virtue, and extensive learning so increase that one's awe-inspiring qualities blaze forth abundantly. It is for this reason that it is referred to as "the Ground of Blazing Brilliance" (*arciṣmati*).

On the fifth ground, the power of one's meritorious qualities becomes so completely full that none of the *māras* are able to bring about one's ruin. It is for this reason that it is referred to as "the Difficult-to-Conquer Ground" (*sudurjaya*).

On the sixth ground, the issue of obstruction by *māras* has come to an end and all path dharmas of the bodhisattva have manifest directly before him. It is for this reason that it is referred to as "the Ground of Direct Presence" (*abhimukha*).

On the seventh ground, one has gone far beyond the three realms and has gained close proximity to the station in which one becomes a Dharma king. It is for this reason that it is referred to as "the Far-Reaching Ground" (*dūraṅgama*).

On the eighth ground, one's vows cannot be moved even by devas, by Māra, by Brahmā, by any *śramaṇa*, or by any brahmin. It is for this reason that it is referred to as "the Ground of Immovability" (*acala*).

On the ninth ground, one's wisdom becomes ever more radiant, supple, and superior. It is for this reason that it is referred to as "the Ground of Excellent Intelligence" (*sādhumati*).

On the tenth ground, the bodhisattva becomes able to simultaneously rain down the Dharma rain in countless worlds throughout the ten directions just as when, after the kalpa-ending blaze, there then falls a great universally drenching rain. It is for this reason that it is referred to as "the Dharma Cloud Ground" (*dharmamegha*).

C. Q: HOW DOES ONE ENTER AND CULTIVATE THE FIRST GROUND?

Question: Now that we have heard the names of the ten grounds, how does one enter the first ground, gain the characteristic features of that ground, and carry forth cultivation of that ground?

D. A: FIVE STANZAS ON FIRST GROUND CULTIVATION

Response:²¹

Having densely planted one's roots of goodness,
 having thoroughly practiced the practices,
 having well accumulated all the provisions,
 having thoroughly made offerings to all buddhas,
 having become protected by the good spiritual friend,
 having completely developed the resolute intentions,
 having become compassionately mindful of beings,
 and having resolute faith in the unsurpassable Dharma—

Once one has become completely equipped with these eight dharmas,
 at one's own behest, one should bring forth the vow, saying,
 "After I have achieved my own liberation,
 I shall return and liberate other beings."

For the sake of gaining the ten powers,
 one enters the congregation of those at the stage of certainty.²²
 Then one is born into the family of the Tathāgatas
 that is free of any transgressions or faults.

One immediately turns away from the worldly path
 and enters the supreme path that goes beyond the world.
 It is because of this that one gains the first ground.
 This ground is referred to as "the Ground of Joyfulness."

1. THE MEANING OF "ROOTS OF GOODNESS"

"Plants one's roots of goodness densely" refers to cultivating and accumulating all forms of meritorious qualities, doing so in a manner that accords with Dharma. This is what is meant by "dense planting of roots of goodness."

"Roots of goodness" refers to not being influenced by greed, not being influenced by hatred, and not being influenced by delusion. It is because all good dharmas are born from these three factors that one is then able to speak of "roots of goodness." So too, all forms of bad dharmas are born from greed, hatred, and delusion. It is because of this that these three are known as "roots of evil."

a. ABHIDHARMA CATEGORIES OF "ROOTS OF GOODNESS"

In the Abhidharma, these are distinguished in various ways whereby they are categorized as connected with the desire realm, as connected

with the form realm, as connected with the formless realm, or as having no specific connection, the result being that, taken together, there are twelve such categories. Additionally, they are categorized as being "associated with the mind," or as "not associated with the mind," thus yielding a total of twenty-four categories. Of these [twelve roots of goodness], the roots of goodness free of the contaminants are cultivated and attained in the acquisition of *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*, whereas the other nine [roots of goodness] are cultivated and accumulated on the bodhisattva grounds.

Additionally, when one has not yet brought forth the resolve, one engages in cultivating and accumulating them over a long period of time. In some cases, three of these categories may be present in a single thought. In some cases, six of these categories may be present in a single thought. In some cases, nine of these categories may be present in a single thought. And in some cases, twelve of these categories may be present in a single thought.

In some cases, one collects only those associated with the mind while not collecting those unassociated with the mind. In some cases, one collects those unassociated with the mind while not accumulating those associated with the mind. In some cases, one collects those associated with the mind as well as those unassociated with the mind. In some cases, one accumulates neither those associated with the mind nor those unassociated with the mind. All such analytic distinctions regarding roots of goodness are such as one will find extensively discussed in the Abhidharma.

b. THE MEANING OF "ROOTS OF GOODNESS" THAT IS RELEVANT HERE

The roots of goodness that are relevant here are those that are planted as one strives to realize the unsurpassable path for the sake of beings. All good dharmas that one cultivates may be referred to as "roots of goodness." It is because they are able to produce the wisdom of all-knowledge that they are referred to as "roots of goodness."

2. THE MEANING OF "PRACTICING THE PRACTICES"

In "practicing the practices," "thorough practice" refers to that which is characterized by purity. "The practices" refers to the upholding of the moral precepts. One remains pure in upholding the moral precepts while practicing in accordance with the correct sequence. It is when this upholding of the moral precepts is combined with seven dharmas that it qualifies as "thorough practice."

a. SEVEN DHARMAS ESSENTIAL TO "THOROUGH PRACTICE"

Which factors constitute these seven? They are as follows:

First, a sense of shame;
 Second, a dread of blame;
 Third, extensive learning;
 Fourth, vigor;
 Fifth, mindfulness;
 Sixth, wisdom;
 And seventh, pure livelihood characterized by pure physical and verbal actions.

As one implements these seven dharmas, one remains perfect in upholding all of the moral precepts. It is this that qualifies as “thorough practice of the practices.”

b. THE IMPORTANCE OF DHYĀNA TO IMPLEMENTING THE PRACTICES

Additionally, it is explained in the scriptures that the *dhyānas* constitute the stations in which one implements the practices. Hence it is the realization of the *dhyānas* that constitutes the thorough practice of the practices. In this treatise, we do not assert that it is definitely required that one use the *dhyānas* in the generation of the resolve. Why is this? When the Buddha was abiding in the world, countless beings brought forth the resolve but did not necessarily possess the *dhyānas* when they did so. Moreover, the practice of the laity’s householders also qualifies as thorough practice.”²³

3. THE MEANING OF “ACCUMULATING THE PROVISIONS”

As for “having well accumulated all the provisions,” this refers to the [other] factors mentioned in the above verse, namely:

a. “PROVISIONS” INCLUDES THE TOPICS REFERENCED EARLIER

Densely planting roots of goodness;
 Thoroughly practicing the practices;
 Making many offerings to the Buddhas;
 Being protected by the good spiritual friend;
 Completely developing the resolute intentions;²⁴
 Being compassionately mindful of beings;
 And having resolute faith in the supreme Dharma.

These are what constitute the “provisions.”

b. “PROVISIONS” ALSO INCLUDES THE PRACTICE OF 22 GOOD DHARMAS

Also, the fundamental practice of the good dharmas—these must certainly have been cultivated. These also constitute “provisions.” Specifically, these include:

Giving;
 Patience;

A straightforward character;
 A mind that refrains from flattery;
 Dwelling harmoniously with others;
 Happiness free of resentment;
 Being, by nature, utterly committed [to the practice];
 Not concealing one's faults;
 Not cherishing one-sided attachments;
 Not being perversely cruel;
 Not being contentious;
 Not being presumptuous;
 Not being negligent;
 Doing away with arrogance;
 Remaining free of affectation;
 Not praising oneself;
 Being able to endure things as they are;
 Possessing a decisive mind;
 Being able to courageously accept whatever comes;
 Not abandoning or changing teachers;
 Finding satisfaction with but few desires;
 And being fond of solitude.

Once one's practice accords with all such dharmas, one can then gradually perfect the especially supreme meritorious qualities. It is because these dharmas have not yet become solidly established that they are referred to as "fundamental" practices.²⁵ If one departs from these dharmas, one cannot advance to realization of the superior and sublime qualities. It is because of this that the combination of these fundamental practices and the above eight dharmas constitute the first ground's "provisions."

4. THE MEANING OF "THOROUGHLY MAKING OFFERINGS TO ALL BUDDHAS"

Now, as for "thoroughly making offerings to all buddhas," this is just like the practice of those bodhisattvas who, in life after life, always make many offerings to all buddhas, doing so in accordance with the Dharma.

Offerings are of two types. The first involves listening well to the Great Vehicle's right Dharma, no matter whether that presentation is extensive or abridged. The second involves such matters as making offerings of the four requisites while providing respectful and reverential service. It is the complete implementation of these two dharmas in making offerings to the Buddhas that qualifies as "thoroughly making offerings to all buddhas."

5. THE MEANING OF “PROTECTED BY THE GOOD SPIRITUAL FRIEND”

As for “good spiritual friend,” although the bodhisattva has four different types of good spiritual friends, the type that is being referred to here is the one who is able to teach him to enter into the Great Vehicle and to perfect the *pāramitās* while also being able to cause him to dwell on the ten grounds. This refers then specifically to those buddhas, bodhisattvas, and even *śrāvaka* disciples who are able to instruct, benefit, and inspire him with joy in the Great Vehicle Dharma while also preventing him from retreating from it.

“Protecting” refers to [the good spiritual friend’s] ability to always maintain kindness and sympathy as he instructs and influences one to increase his roots of goodness. It is precisely this that is meant by “protection.”

6. THE MEANING OF “COMPLETE DEVELOPMENT OF RESOLUTE INTENTIONS”

“Complete development of resolute intentions” refers to being deeply delighted in the Buddha Vehicle, the unsurpassable Great Vehicle, the vehicle of all-knowledge. This is what is meant by “completely developing the resolute intentions.”

a. Q: COMPARED TO SCRIPTURE, ISN’T THIS A DEFICIENT EXPLANATION?

Question: In the “Unity Chapter,”²⁶ Akṣayamati Bodhisattva tells Śāriputra:

Every instance of a bodhisattva’s production of an intention is a “resolute intention.” In proceeding from one ground to another ground, it is known as “the advancing mind.” In the increasing of meritorious qualities, it is known as “the excelling mind.” In the realization of unsurpassable endeavors, it is known as “the mind of utmost supremacy.” In its assimilation of superior dharmas, it is known as “the superior mind.”

In its direct manifestation of the acquisition of dharmas of the buddhas, it is known as “the mind of direct manifestation.” In its accumulation of beneficial dharmas, it is known as “the mind that engages with conditions.” In its penetrating understanding of all dharmas, it is known as “the mind that achieves liberation.” In its tireless fulfillment of vows, it is known as “the resolute mind.” In its fulfillment of vows, it is known as “the joyful mind.”

In its independent achievement of endeavors, it is known as “the unaccompanied mind.” In its abandonment of any signs of corruption, it is known as “the well-trained mind.” In its freedom from all forms of evil, it is known as “the mind of goodness.” In its separating far from evil people, it is known as “the unmixed mind.”

In its making a gift even of one’s head, it is known as “the mind that relinquishes what is difficult to relinquish.” In its rescuing of

persons who have broken precepts, it is known as “the mind that supports those who find difficulty in the precepts.” In its enduring of evil inflicted by inferior beings, it is known as “the mind that is patient with what is difficult.” In its ability to forego the realization of nirvāṇa, it is known as “the mind that remains vigorous even when difficult.” In its refraining from coveting [states encountered in] *dhyāna*, it is known as “the mind that cultivates *dhyāna* concentration even when it is difficult.”

In its insatiable development of the roots of goodness that aid acquisition of the path, it is known as “the mind that maintains wisdom even when it is difficult.” In its ability to bring all endeavors to completion, it is known as “the mind that completes all practices.” In its skillfulness in carrying on wisdom-based reflection, it is known as the mind that abandons pride, extreme pride, and pride in oneself.”

In its not cherishing any sort of reward, it is known as “the mind that serves as a field of merit for all beings.” In its contemplation of the profound dharmas of the Buddhas, it is known as “the fearless mind.” In its refraining from obstructionism, it is known as “the mind that increases meritorious qualities.” In its constant production of vigor, it is known as “the inexhaustible mind.” In its ability to shoulder even heavy burdens, it is known as “the undiscouraged mind.”

Moreover, as for the meaning of “the resolute intentions,” this refers to [the mind of] one who remains equally mindful of beings and brings forth an all-encompassing kindness for all of them. He makes offerings to those who are worthy and good, is compassionately mindful of evil people, and esteems and reveres teachers and elders.

He rescues those who have no one to rescue them. He serves as a refuge for those who have no refuge. He serves as an island for those who have no island. He serves as the ultimate resort for those who have no last resort. He is able to serve as a companion for those who have no companions.

Even in the midst of those who are devious, he practices the straight mind. Even when among those people who have become corrupted, he practices genuine and correct thought. Even when among those who engage in flattery, his mind is free of flattery.

Among those who are ungrateful, he practices gratitude. Among those who are unaware of how to act, he practices the correct way of acting. Among those who are unbeneficial, he is able to act in a beneficial manner.

Among those beings inclined toward deviance, he practices right action. Among arrogant people, he remains free of arrogant behavior. Among those who do not accord with instructions, he does not become resentful or angry. Even among beings who have committed offenses, he always strives to protect them. Even amidst all of the transgressions committed by beings, he refrains from focusing on their faults.

He makes offerings to those who serve as fields of merit, accords with their instructions, and finds no difficulty in accepting their transformative teaching. When dwelling in a forest hermitage,²⁷ he is single-mindedly vigorous. He does not seek benefits or offerings and does not indulge any stinging attachment to his own body or life.

Moreover, because his mind is inwardly pure, he is free of deceptiveness. Because he practices good verbal karma, he does not praise himself. Because he is readily satisfied, he does not act in an intimidating fashion. Because his mind is free of defilement, he behaves gently and harmoniously. Because he accumulates roots of goodness, he is able to enter the realm of *saṃsāra*. Because he acts for the sake of all beings, he patiently endures all forms of suffering.

The bodhisattva possesses an inexhaustible number of such characteristics associated with resolute intentions.²⁸

Now, however, you only present a simple explanation of the characteristics of resolute intentions. How is this not a deficient explanation?

b. Q: NO. EACH GROUND INVOLVES SPECIFIC RESOLUTE INTENTIONS

Response: No, this is not a deficient presentation. Akṣayamati provides in a single place a comprehensive description of all of the characteristics of the resolute intentions. However, here, we are concerned with their distribution as they occur on the various grounds.

This *Ten Grounds Sutra* provides specific explanations of the characteristics of the resolute intentions as they occur on each succeeding ground. Thus the bodhisattva in every case gains realizations of aspects of the resolute intentions in accordance with the particular ground upon which he abides. The meaning of the resolute intentions is defined according to each particular ground.

Now, on the first ground, we describe two types of resolute intention: The first is the one involved in bringing forth great vows. The second is the one involved in dwelling at the stage of certainty.

Therefore one should realize that it is by according with their respective locations on each of the ten grounds that one presents a thorough explanation of [these various aspects of what constitutes] “the resolute intentions”. Thus the circumstantial basis of your challenge, “How is this not a deficient presentation?” is incorrect.

7. THE MEANING OF "COMPASSIONATE MINDFULNESS OF BEINGS"

Now, as for "having become compassionately mindful of beings," it is on the basis of having completely developed compassion that one is referred to as "compassionate." What then is meant by "compassion"? This refers to a feeling of commiseration and pity for beings that also seeks to rescue them from the sufferings associated with their difficulties.

8. THE MEANING OF "RESOLUTE FAITH IN THE UNSURPASSABLE DHARMA"

When it states that "one has resolute faith in supreme dharmas," this means that, with respect to the dharmas of the Buddha, one's power of faith has become completely penetrating.

9. THE MEANING OF "BRINGING FORTH THE VOW"

As for making the vow in which one resolves, "After I have achieved my own liberation, I shall [return and] liberate beings," this vow is the very origin of all buddhas' Dharma.²⁹ If one abandons this vow, then one cannot succeed in achieving the realization [of buddhahood]. It is for this reason that one brings forth this vow.

a. Q: WHY DO YOU SAY, "AFTER I HAVE ACHIEVED LIBERATION"?

Question: Why do you not say, "I shall bring about the liberation of beings," but rather say instead, "After I have achieved my own liberation, I shall then [return and] bring about the liberation of beings"?

b. A: IF ONE IS NOT ALREADY LIBERATED, ONE CANNOT LIBERATE OTHERS

Response: If one has as not yet achieved one's own liberation, one cannot liberate others. This is just as when one has himself sunken down into the mud. How then could he then be able to rescue and extricate anyone else? This is also just as when one has been carried away by floodwaters and is thus incapable of rescuing others from drowning. It is for this reason that it says, "After I have achieved my own liberation, I shall then [return and] liberate others." This is as described in the following verse:

If a person liberates himself from what is fearsome,
 he can then liberate those who take refuge in him.
 If one has not become liberated from doubt and regret,
 how could he liberate those taking refuge in him?
 If a person has not yet become good himself,
 he remains unable to influence others to become good.
 If one has not reached quiescent cessation himself,
 how then could he cause others to reach that quiescence?³⁰

Therefore one first becomes thoroughly quiescent oneself and then later takes up the transformative teaching of others. This is also just as described in a verse from the *Dharmapada*:

If one is able to establish himself
in the station of what is good,
afterward, one is able to establish other people
in that same benefit that one has gained himself.³¹

It is commonly the case that beings first benefit themselves and only afterward are able to benefit others. And why is this? This is as described in the following verse:

If one accomplishes one's own self-benefit,
only then is one able to benefit others.
If one forsakes oneself wishing to benefit others,
one fails to be beneficial and later feels distress and regret.

It is for this reason that [the preceding verse] reads, "After I have achieved my own liberation, I shall [return and] liberate beings."

c. Q: FOR WHAT SORT OF BENEFIT AND WITH WHAT SORT OF RESOLVE?

Question: It is in order to acquire what sort of benefit is it that one becomes able to accomplish this endeavor and enter the stage of certainty? Also, with what sort of resolve does one become able to bring forth this vow?

d. A: TO GAIN THE TEN POWERS AND ENTER THE STAGE OF CERTAINTY

Response: It is in order to acquire a buddha's ten powers that one becomes able to accomplish this endeavor and it is in order to enter the stage of certainty that one becomes able to bring forth this vow.

1) Q: WHAT ARE THE TEN POWERS?

Question: What then are the ten powers of a buddha?

2) A: THEY ARE AS FOLLOWS

Response: [As for the ten powers, they are as follows]:³²

The Buddha possesses a completely penetrating comprehension of the causes and effects involved in all dharmas. This is the first power.

He knows in accordance with reality the past, future, and present stations wherein one creates karma and undergoes retribution as the effect. This is the second power.

He knows in accordance with reality the characteristic aspects of all *dhyāna* absorptions and *samādhis*, their distinctions, their defilement and purity, and their entry and emergence. This is the third power.

He knows in accordance with reality the relative sharpness or dullness of all faculties possessed by beings. This is the fourth power.

He knows in accordance with reality the differences among beings inclinations. This is the fifth power.

He knows in accordance with reality all the world's many different sorts of realms.³³ This is the sixth power.

He knows in accordance with reality the paths that lead to all destinations. This is the seventh power.

He knows in accordance with reality all the circumstances of previous lives. This is the eighth power.

He knows in accordance with reality all circumstances involved in all births and deaths. This is the ninth power.

He knows in accordance with reality the matter of the cessation of the contaminants. This is the tenth power.

3) TO GAIN THE POWERS, ONE MAKES THE VOW AND BECOMES IRREVERSIBLE

For the sake of acquiring ten powers of the buddha such as these, one brings forth the vow with great resolve and then directly enters the group of those who have reached the stage of certainty.

a) Q: DOES EVERYONE THEN REACH THE STAGE OF CERTAINTY?

Question: Is it generally so of everyone that, once they first bring forth the resolve, they then possess such a characteristic?

b) A: SOME DO; SOME DO NOT

Response: There may be some people who claim that when one first brings forth the resolve, one then possesses such a characteristic. However, this is not actually the case. And why is this? This is a situation in which one should make distinctions. One should not set forth a fixed answer to this. Why? It should not be the case that, when all bodhisattvas first bring forth the resolve, they all then enter the stage of certainty.

In some cases, on first bringing forth the resolve, one *does* immediately enter the stage of certainty. In some cases, however, one gradually cultivates meritorious qualities. Take for example Śākyamuni Buddha. When he first brought forth the resolve, he did not immediately enter the stage of certainty. Rather, it was only after he had accumulated meritorious qualities and encountered Burning Lamp Buddha that he then entered the stage of certainty. Therefore, if you were to assert that all bodhisattvas directly enter the stage of certainty upon first generating the resolve, that would be an erroneous theory.

4) Q: IF SOME DO NOT, WHY CLAIM CERTAINTY RELIES ON RESOLVE?

Question: If it is an erroneous theory, why do you claim that it is in reliance upon this resolve that one enters the stage of certainty?

5) A: BECAUSE THIS IS TRUE OF SOME BODHISATTVAS

Response: There are in fact bodhisattvas who, on first generating the resolve, then immediately gain entry into the stage of certainty. In such a case, it *is* in reliance upon this resolve that they become able to gain the first ground. It is on account of this particular category of persons that it is said that, on first generating the resolve, one may then immediately enter the stage of certainty.

a) Q: WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THIS INITIAL RESOLVE?

Question: What is the nature of these bodhisattvas' initial resolve and Śākyamuni Buddha's initial generation of the resolve?

b) A: THE INITIAL RESOLVE IS CHARACTERIZED BY THESE 41 ASPECTS

Response:

- This resolve is not admixed with any of the afflictions;
- This resolve is continuous and does not wish for any other vehicle;
- This resolve is solid and cannot be overcome by any non-Buddhist;
- This resolve cannot be destroyed by any of the many sorts of *māras*;
- This resolve is always able to accumulate roots of goodness;
- This resolve is able to know the impermanence of all conditioned things;
- This resolve, even while remaining unmoving, is able to accumulate the dharmas of a buddha;
- This resolve is free of the hindrances and abandons all wrong actions;
- This resolve is established in stability because it is unshakable;
- This resolve is peerless because it remains free of contradictions;
- This resolve is like vajra because it possesses a penetrating comprehension of all dharmas;
- This resolve is inexhaustible because it accumulates an inexhaustible amount of merit;
- This resolve regards others equally because it sees all beings as equal;
- This resolve remains free of "high" or "low" due to making no discriminations;
- This resolve is pure because, by nature, it is free of defilement;
- This resolve is stainless because its intelligence is characterized by radiant illumination;
- This resolve remains free of defilement because it never relinquishes its resolute intentions;
- This resolve is vast because its kindness is as expansive as empty space;
- This resolve is magnanimous because it takes in all beings;
- This resolve is unobstructed because it has arrived at unimpeded wisdom;

- This resolve is universal in its reach because it never cuts off its great compassion;
- This resolve is never cut off because it is able to practice correct dedication of merit;
- This resolve is that toward which the multitude proceeds because it is praised by the wise;
- This resolve is a fit object of admiring regard because even adherents of the Small Vehicle look up to it;
- This resolve is difficult to observe, because no being is able to see it;
- This resolve is difficult to destroy because it has been able to skillfully enter the Dharma of the Buddha;
- This resolve serves as a dwelling because it is the place in which all sources of happiness abide;
- This resolve is adorned because it possesses the provision of merit;
- This resolve is skillfully selective because it possesses the provision of wisdom;
- This resolve is completely generous because it takes giving as one of the provisions;³⁴
- This resolve is attended by great vows because it possesses the provision of moral virtue;
- This resolve is difficult to hinder because it possesses the provision of patience;
- This resolve is difficult to overcome because it possesses the provision of vigor;
- This resolve is quiescent because it possesses the provision of *dhyāna* absorption;
- This resolve is harmless because it possesses the provision of wisdom;
- This resolve remains unimpeded by hatred because its mind of kindness is deeply seated;³⁵
- This resolve is deeply rooted because its mind of compassion is fully established;
- This resolve abides in happiness because its mind of sympathetic joy is fully established;
- This resolve is unmoved by either pain or pleasure because its mind of equanimity is fully established;
- This resolve is the object of protective mindfulness because of the spiritual power of the Buddhas;
- This resolve remains continuous because the lineage of the Three Jewels remains unsevered.

Countless meritorious qualities such as these adorn the initial resolve of those who abide in the stage of certainty. This is as extensively described in the Akṣayamati Chapter.³⁶

i) THE MEANING OF “NOT ADMIXED WITH AFFLICTIONS”

“This resolve is not admixed with any of the afflictions” refers to the resolve not being conjoined with any of the two hundred and ninety-four afflictions cut off on the path of seeing the truths (*darśana-mārga*) and on the path of meditation (*bhāvana-mārga*). Hence it is said that “it is not admixed.”

ii) THE MEANING OF “CONTINUOUS, NOT WISHING FOR OTHER VEHICLES”

As for “this resolve is continuous and does not wish for any other vehicle,” as it continues forth from the initial production of the resolve, it does not wish for the vehicles of the *śrāvaka* disciples or the *pratyekabuddhas*. It is because one remains motivated solely by the goal of reaching *anuttarasamyakṣambodhi* that it is referred to as “continuous” and as “not wishing for any other vehicle.”

One should understand this forty-statement discussion in this manner.

(1) Q: DOESN'T “PERMANENCE” OF RESOLVE CONTRADICT DHARMA?

Question: You are asserting that this resolve is permanently enduring. However, all conditioned dharmas are impermanent. This is as explained in the *Seals of the Dharma Sutra* wherein it states that the practitioner is to contemplate the world as empty, as devoid of anything that is permanent, and as containing nothing not subject to destruction. How then does this matter not involve a contradiction?

(2) A: YOU MISUNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Response: You pose this challenge because you fail to grasp the correct principle of this concept. It is not the case that any claim is being made herein for “permanency” of resolve. Although we spoke of constancy here, this was merely a reference to the fact that one who has initially generated the resolve and reached the stage of certainty is definitely “always able to accumulate roots of goodness.” It is because one does not rest and does not desist from doing this that we refer here to such constancy.

10. THE MEANING OF “BIRTH IN THE FAMILY OF THE TATHĀGATAS”

a. THE MEANING OF “TATHĀGATA”

[Returning again to the verses],³⁷ as for “being born into the family of the Tathāgatas,” “the family of the Tathāgatas” is the family of the Buddhas. In “the Tathāgatas,” (lit. “the Thus Come Ones”), the “Thus”

(*tathatā*) is a reference to reality whereas the "Come" (*gata*) is a reference to the ultimate point that is reached. It is because they have arrived at genuine reality that they are referred to as "Thus Come Ones."

What then is it that constitutes "genuine reality"? It is what is referred to as "nirvāṇa." It is because it involves no falseness or deceptiveness that this is referred to as "according with reality." This is as explained in the sutra where the Buddha tells a bhikṣu, "The foremost among the truths of the Āryas is free of deceptiveness. This is nirvāṇa."³⁸

Additionally, "Thus" is a reference to being characterized by indestructibility. It is a reference to the so-called "true character of dharmas." "Come" is a reference to wisdom. One is referred to as a "Thus Come One" because, having arrived in the realm of the true character of dharmas, one possesses a penetrating comprehension of its meaning.

Also, it is emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness that qualify as being "thus." When the Buddhas "come," they have arrived at these three gates of liberation while also then being able to cause beings to reach these gates. They are therefore referred to as "the Thus Come Ones."

Furthermore, "thus" is a reference to the four truths. It is because they see the four truths in all their modes that they are referred to as "the Thus Come Ones."

Moreover, "thus" refers to the six *pāramitās*, namely: giving, moral virtue, patience, vigor, *dhyāna* concentration, and wisdom. It is because they utilize these six dharmas to "come" and arrive at the ground of buddhahood that they are referred to as "the Thus Come Ones."

Additionally, it is in reference to their possession of the four bases of meritorious qualities consisting of truth, relinquishment, quiescence, and wisdom that they are referred to as "the Thus Come Ones." It is because they utilize these four dharmas to "come" and arrive at the ground of buddhahood that they are referred to as "the Thus Come Ones."

Also, all of the dharmas of a buddha are synonymous with "suchness" [and hence are "thus"]. It is because this suchness "comes forth" and extends to all buddhas that they are referred to as "the Thus Come Ones."

Then again, all of the bodhisattva grounds including the grounds of "Joyfulness," "Stainlessness," "Shining Light," "Blazing Brilliance," "Difficult-to-Conquer," "Direct Presence," "Far-Reaching," "Immovability," "Excellent Intelligence," and "Dharma Cloud" are synonymous with "suchness" (*tathatā*). It is because the bodhisattvas

“come” and arrive at *anuttarasamyaksambodhi* by way of these ten grounds that they are therefore known as “Thus Come Ones” (*tathāgata*).

Additionally, it is because they “come forth” by the eightfold path of the Āryas that accords with reality that they are referred to as “Thus Come Ones.”

Also, it is because they “come forth” and arrive at buddhahood on the two “feet” of provisional means and wisdom that they are referred to as the “Thus Come Ones.”

And it is because they went forth in “suchness,” never to return again that they are referred to as “Thus Come Ones.”

b. THE MEANING OF “THE FAMILY OF THE TATHĀGATAS”

“Tathāgatas” is a reference to all buddhas throughout the ten directions and the three periods of time. It is the family consisting of all of these buddhas that is referred to as the “the family of the Tathāgatas.” It is because these bodhisattvas now travel along the path of the Tathāgatas and do so continuously and unceasingly that one speaks of their “birth into the family of the Tathāgatas.”

Furthermore, it is because these bodhisattvas are certainly bound to become *tathāgatas* that one refers to their “birth into the family of the Tathāgatas.” This is just as when someone possessed of the marks of a wheel-turning king is born into the family of a wheel-turning king. This person will certainly become a wheel-turning king. So too it is in the case of these bodhisattvas who, in this same way, are born into the family of the Tathāgatas. It is because they have brought forth this resolve that they will certainly become *tathāgatas*. This is what is meant by “birth into the family of the Tathāgatas.”

Now, as for “the family of the Tathāgatas,” there are those who assert that this is a reference to the four bases of meritorious qualities, namely truth, relinquishment, quiescence, and wisdom. It is because all of *tathāgatas* are born from these factors that they are collectively referred to as “the family of the Tathāgatas.”

Then again, there are those who assert that it is based on *prajñāpāramitā* and skillful means that this is known as “the family of the Tathāgatas.” This accords with the *Sutra on the Factors Assisting the Path* wherein it states:

The perfection of wisdom is the peerless mother
and it is skillful means that serves as the father.
It is due to the act of begetting that one is known as a father,
and due to raising and nourishing that one is known as a mother.

Throughout the world, it is the father and mother that are taken as the basis of the family. It is because these two factors are analogous to a father and mother that they are referred to as the "family."

There are also those persons who claim that goodness and wisdom are what constitute the family of the Buddhas. It is from these two dharmas that the Buddhas are born. This being the case, these two then constitute the very root of all good dharmas.

This accords with a statement in the scriptures that states, "When these two are practiced to completion, one becomes able to realize right Dharma. Goodness is the father and wisdom is the mother. It is with the coming together of these two that one then refers to 'the family of the Buddhas.'" This is as explained in the following verse:

A bodhisattva takes the dharma of goodness as his father
and takes wisdom as his mother.
Every single one of the Tathāgatas
is in every case born from these two.

There are yet others who claim that the *pratyutpanna samādhi*³⁹ and the great compassion constitute the family of the Buddhas and that it is from these two dharmas that all *tathāgatas* are born. Of these two, it is the *pratyutpanna samādhi* that serves as the father and the great compassion that serves as the mother.

Then again, one may say that the *pratyutpanna samādhi* serves as the father whereas it is the unproduced-dharmas patience that serves as the mother. This accords with a verse from the *Bodhisambhāra [Śāstra]* that states:

It is the *pratyutpanna samādhi* that serves as father.
Great compassion and the unproduced [patience] serve as mother.
Every single one of the Tathāgatas
is born from these two dharmas.⁴⁰

c. THE MEANING OF "HAVING NO TRANSGRESSIONS OR FAULTS," ETC.

[Returning to the "grounds-entry" verse], as for "the family [of the Tathāgatas] having no transgressions or faults,"⁴¹ this is because that family is pure. "Purity" here refers to the six *pāramitās*, the four bases of meritorious qualities,⁴² skillful means, *prajñāpāramitā*, goodness, wisdom, the *pratyutpanna samādhi*, the great compassion, and all of the forms of patient acquiescence. It is because all of these dharmas are themselves pure and "free of any transgressions or faults" that one then refers to the "family" itself as "pure." It is because these bodhisattvas take these dharmas as the basis of their "family" that they qualify as being "free of any transgressions or faults."

They turn away from transgressions and faults. As for their “turning away from the worldly path and entering the supreme world-transcending path,” this reference to “the worldly path” is just a reference to that very path in which common people course. “Turning away” refers to “desisting.” As for the path of the common person, it is unable to ultimately take one to nirvāṇa, for one is bound therein to always come and go in *saṃsāra*. This is what is meant by “the path of the common person.”

As for “world-transcendence,” it is by virtue of the fact that, in reliance upon this path, one then succeeds in escaping from the three realms that it is therefore referred to as “the supreme world-transcending path.”⁴³

As for [that path being described in the verse as] “supreme,” it is because it is sublime that one refers to it as supreme. As for “entering” [the supreme path], it is because one engages in right practice of the path that reference is made to “entering.” It is in reliance upon this resolve that one enters the first ground, the ground referred to as “the Ground of Joyfulness.”

d. Q: WHY IS THE FIRST GROUND SAID TO BE “JOYFUL”?

Question: Why is it that the first ground is said to be characterized by “joyfulness”?

e. A: BECAUSE OF THE IMMENSE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FIRST GROUND

Response:

It is just as with one who gains the first fruit
and who is then ultimately bound to reach nirvāṇa.
When the bodhisattva gains this ground,
his mind is always abundantly joyful.

He then naturally succeeds in extending
the lineage of all the Buddhas, the Tathāgatas.
It is for this reason that a person such as this
acquires the designation as “one who is worthy and good.”

As for its being “just as with one who gains the first fruit,” this means that it is just as when someone gains the path of a stream-enterer.⁴⁴ He succeeds thereby in completely shutting the gates leading to the three wretched destinies.⁴⁵ He has seen the Dharma, entered the Dharma, and gained the Dharma. He abides unshakably in the dharma of stability and is ultimately bound to reach nirvāṇa. Because he has severed the dharmas that are severed at the point of seeing the truths, his mind is filled with immense joyfulness, [for he realizes then that], even if he were to fall asleep or become indolent, he could not stray into some twenty-ninth realm of existence.⁴⁶

[This first ground bodhisattva's circumstance] is also analogous to that of someone who has sliced a single hair into a hundred parts and then used but a single one of those hair segments to draw forth two or three drops from the great ocean's waters. [He realizes that] the suffering already brought to an end at this point is comparable to all of the waters of the great ocean, whereas what has not yet been brought to an end is comparable only to those two or three drops. [Because he realizes this], his mind is filled with great joyfulness.

After the bodhisattva has thus gained the first ground, he is then known as one who has been "born into the family of the Tathāgatas." At this point, he becomes one worthy of offerings and reverence from all devas, dragons, *yakṣas*, *gandharvas*, *asuras*, *garuḍas*, *kinnaras*, *mahoragas*, deva kings, Brahmā, kings, *śramaṇas*, the brahmins, all *śrāvaka* disciples, *pratyekabuddhas*, and others. Why? It is because his family is one that is free of any transgressions or faults.

He then "turns away from the worldly path and enters the world-transcending path." He then only delights in revering the Buddhas, in establishing himself in the four bases of meritorious qualities, and in gaining the flavor of the six *pāramitās*. Because he has prevented the severance of the lineage of all buddhas, his mind is filled with great joyfulness.

The entire quantity of this bodhisattva's remaining suffering is comparable to but two or three drops of water. Then, although there might remain a hundred thousand *koṭis* of kalpas before he gains *anuttarasamyaksaṃbodhi*, still, his remaining suffering is only like two or three drops of water when compared to that great ocean of suffering that he has already successfully brought to an end, namely that suffering that he has endured throughout beginningless lifetimes in *saṃsāra*. It is for these reasons that this ground is known as "the Ground of Joyfulness."