

## THE BODHISATTVA PATH

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- A. One hears the Dharma.
- B. Inspired by the Dharma, one performs good deeds and accepts the grace of others (e.g., teachers, bodhisattvas), thus benefitting from their merit and building one's own merit.
- C. One develops the "**thought of enlightenment**" (bodhicitta), which
  - 1. cancels previous bad karma
  - 2. stimulates the development of merit
  - 3. ensures good rebirths.
- D. One takes the **bodhisattva vows**, which become a driving force -- a personal destiny that leads one higher and higher.
- E. One practices the **six perfections (the paramitas)**:
  - 1. dana - "giving, generosity": includes self-sacrifice, transfer of one's own merit to others (just as one received from others in "B")
  - 2. shila - "morality": avoiding ten forms of misbehavior (just as in Theravada)
  - 3. kshanti - "patience": (1) not becoming disturbed or agitated by anyone or anything; (2) having faith in difficult doctrines (such as shunyata, "emptiness"); (3) practicing forgiveness
  - 4. virya - "vigor": similar to "Right Effort" (in the Eightfold Path)
  - 5. dhyana - "meditation"
  - 6. **prajna** - "wisdom": having a full experiential awareness of the essential truths of reality (e.g., shunyata, "emptiness")

NOTE: At this stage (Prajna-paramita, "the Perfection of Wisdom"), the bodhisattva could, if he/she chose to do so, leave samsara and enter nirvana. But out of compassion for others, he/she continues to work in this world...

Stages one through six of the bodhisattva path (practicing the six paramitas, as in "E" above) constitute the practices of ordinary bodhisattvas, e.g., humans like us who are trying to perfect ourselves in hopes of nirvana. But, once one has freed oneself from the attachments that bind one in samsara, there are four additional stages, which constitute the practices of "cosmic bodhisattvas" (such as Avalokitesvara and Manjushri):

- 7. durangama - "going far": practicing the ten perfections, i.e., the six mentioned above and four more:
  - a. **upaya** - "expedient means, contrivances, devices," i.e., any method used to help others progress along the path. For instance, one might describe the Pure Land (sukhavati) as though it is a material place where jewels hang from trees, in order to arouse the listener's interest. The successful bodhisattva is said to practice "**skill in means**" (upaya-kaushalya), continually

leading others toward perfection. Ultimately, of course, all presentations of the Dharma -- in words or symbols -- merely constitute upaya, expediencies.

b. pranidhana - (steadfastness in one's ) "vow"

c. bala - "strength" (in practicing the perfections)

d. jnana - "knowledge" (that one's practices are correct and effective)

8. acala - "immovable": the ability to achieve one's goals spontaneously, by pure will

9. sadhumati - "good intelligence": apparently, a higher order of prajna- paramita

10. dharmamegha - "clouds of Dharma": total perfection, like that of theTathagata, bathed (as it were) in clouds of wisdom and virtue