

**The Ten Levels of the Bodhisattva**

The ten levels of the Bodhisattva (Ten Bodhisattva Bhūmi) are the stages to the path of enlightenment. Each stage represents a level of attainment and serves as a basis for the next level. Each level marks a definite advancement in one’s training that is accompanied by progressively greater power.

*There are Five Paths on which a Bodhisattva develops in s* *uccession. The levels are subcategories of the Five Paths:*

**The path of accumulation or equipment (Sambharamarga)**:

The aspiring Bodhisattva possess a strong desire of developing Bodhicitta. When Bodhicitta is fully developed, the Bodhisattva has completely obtained Sambharamarga.

**The path of training (Prayogamarga):**

The Bodhisattva meditates on emptiness until it becomes clear to them, once it does, the Bodhisattva has obtained Prayogamarga.

**The path of seeing (Darshanamarga):**

After deep meditation, the Bodhisattva feels that their mind and emptiness are one and realizes the emptiness of reality. At the stage the Bodhisattva does not create new karma, but still has old karma that gets eradicated with their increasing powers.

**The path of intense contemplation/meditation (Bhavanamarga):**

At this stage, the Bodhisattva has purified themselves of past karma and defilements and accumulates wisdom.

**The path of freedom/no more learning (Vimuktimarga):**

This stage the Bodhisattva has completely purified themselves.

*The Ten Bhumis of Buddhism*

**1. Pramudita-bhumi (Joyful Land)**

The bodhisattva begins the journey joyful with the thought of enlightenment. He has taken bodhisattva vows, the most basic of which is "May I attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings." Even at this early stage, he recognizes the emptiness of phenomena. In this stage, the bodhisattva cultivates Dana Paramita, the perfection of giving or generosity in which it is recognized there are no givers and no receivers.



**2. Vimala-bhumi (Land of Purity)**

The bodhisattva cultivates Sila Paramita, the perfection of morality, which culminates in selfless compassion for all beings. He is purified of immoral conduct and dispositions.

**3. Prabhakari-bhumi (Luminous or Radiant Land)**

The bodhisattva is now purified of the Three Poisons.

He cultivates Ksanti Paramita, which is the perfection of patience or forbearance, Now he knows that he can bear all burdens and hardships to finish the journey. He achieves the four absorptions or dhyanas.

**4. Archismati-bhumi (The Brilliant or Blazing Land)**

Remaining false conceptions are burned away, and good qualities are pursued. This level may also be associated with Virya Paramita, the perfection of energy.

**5. Sudurjaya-bhumi (The Land That Is Difficult to Conquer)**

Now the bodhisattva goes deeper into meditation, as this land is associated with Dhyana Paramita, the perfection of meditation. He pierces through the darkness of ignorance. Now he understands the Four Noble Truths and the Two Truths. As he develops himself, the bodhisattva devotes himself to the welfare of others.

**6. Abhimukhi-bhumi (The Land Looking Forward to Wisdom)**

This land is associated with Prajna Paramita, the perfection of wisdom. He sees that all phenomena are without self-essence and understand the nature of Dependent Origination -- the way all phenomena arise and cease.

**7. Durangama-bhumi (The Far-Reaching Land)**

The bodhisattva acquires the power of upaya, or skillful means to help others realize enlightenment. At this point, the bodhisattva has become a transcendent bodhisattva who can manifest in the world in whatever form is most needed.

**8. Achala-bhumi (The Immovable Land)**

The bodhisattva can no longer be disturbed because Buddha-hood is within sight. From here he can no longer fall back to earlier stages of development.

**9. Sadhumati-bhumi (the land of good thoughts)**

The bodhisattva understands all dharmas and is able to teach others.

**10. Dharmamegha-bhumi (The Land of Dharma Clouds)**

Buddha-hood is confirmed, and he enters Tushita Heaven. Tushita Heaven is the heaven of contended gods, where there are Buddhas who will be reborn only one more time. Maitreya is said to live there also.

*The Ten Bhūmis (Stages of a Bodhisattva):*

The joyous (Pramudita): Pramudita is attained in the Darshanamarga stage (path of seeing). It is attained with the direct perception of emptiness into reality. The bodhisattva works at the perfection of generosity (the first of the Six Perfections) and develops the ability to give away everything without regret and with no thought of praise or reward for themselves. All phenomena are viewed as empty and are subject to decay, suffering, and death, and so bodhisattvas lose all attachment to them. First level bodhisattvas directly understand that persons do not exist in and of themselves (by way of their own nature). Due to this, they overcome the false idea that the five aggregates constitute a truly existent person. The bodhisattvas train in ethics in order to cleanse their minds of negativity.

The stainless (Vimala): The bodhisattvas perfect ethics and overcome all tendencies towards engagement in negative actions. Their control becomes so complete that even in dreams they have no immoral thoughts. According to Nagarjuna:

The second is called the Stainless Because all ten [virtuous] actions Of body, speech, and mind are stainless And they naturally abide in those [deeds of ethics]. Through the maturation of those [good qualities] The perfection of ethics becomes supreme. They become Universal Monarchs helping beings,

Masters of the glorious four continents and of the seven precious objects.

The light maker/the luminous (Prabhakari): Bodhisattvas on this level cultivate the perfection of patience. Trainees on the third level overcome all tendencies toward anger, and never react with hatred (or even annoyance) to any harmful acts or words. Rather, their equanimity remains constant, and all sentient beings are viewed with love and compassion. All anger and resentment rebound on the person who generates them, and they do nothing to eliminate harms that one has already experienced. They are counterproductive in that they destroy one’s peace of mind and lead to unfavorable future situations. There is nothing to be gained through anger and resentment, revenge does nothing to change the past, and so the bodhisattva avoids them. Moreover, one’s present suffering is only a result of one’s own past misdeeds; so one’s enemy is only an agent of the inevitable fruition of karma.

The radiant (Arcismati): On this level, the bodhisattvas cultivate the perfection of effort and eliminate afflictions. bodhisattvas on this level burn up the afflictive obstructions and the obstructions to omniscience with the radiance of their wisdom. They enter into progressively deeper meditative absorptions and attain a powerful mental pliancy as a result. This eliminates laziness and increases their ability to practice meditation for extended periods of time.

The very hard to conquer/Difficult to cultivate (Sudurjaya): The fifth level is “difficult” because it involves practices that are so difficult and require a great deal of effort to perfect. It is also called the “Difficult to Overcome” because when one has completed the training of this level one has profound wisdom and insight that are difficult to surpass or undermine. According to Nagarjuna:

The fifth is called the Extremely Difficult to Overcome

Since all evil ones find it extremely hard to conquer him;

He becomes skilled in knowing the subtle

Meanings of the noble truths and so forth.

Bodhisattvas on this level cultivate the perfection of samadhi. They develop strong powers of meditative stabilization and overcome tendencies toward distraction. They achieve mental one-pointedness and they perfect calm abiding. They also fully penetrate the meanings of the four noble truths and the two truths (conventional truths and ultimate truths) and perceive all phenomena as empty, transient and prone to suffering.

The turning towards/The manifest (Abhimukhi): On this level, the bodhisattva clearly perceives the workings of dependent arising and directly understands “signlessness.” Signlessness refers to the fact that phenomena seem to possess their apparent qualities by way of their own nature, but when one examines this appearance one realizes that all qualities are merely mentally imputed and not a part of the nature of the objects they appear to characterize.As a result of these understandings, bodhisattvas manifest meditative wisdom and avoid attachment to either cyclic existence or nirvana. Having overcome all attachments, bodhisattvas on this level can attain nirvana, but because of the force of the mind of awakening they decide to remain in the world in order to benefit other sentient beings. They cultivate the Perfection of Wisdom, through which they perceive all phenomena as lacking inherent existence, as being like dreams, illusions, reflections, or magically created objects. All notions of “I” and “other” are transcended, along with conceptions of “inherent existence” and “inherent nonexistence.” These sixth-level bodhisattvas abide in contemplation of suchness, with minds that are undisturbed by false ideas.

The far going/Gone afar (Durangama): Bodhisattvas on the seventh level develop the ability to contemplate signlessness uninterruptedly and enter into advanced meditative absorptions for extended periods of time, thus passing beyond both the mundane and supramundane paths of śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas (Hearers and solitary realizers). For this reason, this level is called the “Gone Afar.” According to Nagarjuna:

The seventh is the Gone Afar because

The number of his qualities has increased,

Moment by moment he can enter

The equipoise of cessation.

On this level bodhisattvas perfect their skill in means of meditation and practice, which is their ability to cleverly adapt their teaching tactics to the individual proclivities and needs of their audiences. They also develop the ability to know the thoughts of others and in every moment are able to practice all the perfections. All thoughts and actions are free from afflictions and they constantly act spontaneously and effectively for the benefit of others.

The unshakeable/The Immovable (Acala): The eighth level is called the “Immovable” because bodhisattvas overcome all afflictions regarding signs and their minds are always completely absorbed in the dharma. At this stage, the bodhisattva has attained realization equivalent to a Theravada Arhat. At this level, a bodhisattva has achieved nirvana. According to Nargarjuna:

The eighth is the Immovable, the youthful stage,

Through nonconceptuality he is immovable;

And the spheres of his body, speech and mind’s

Activities are inconceivable.

Because they are fully acquainted with signlessness, their minds are not moved by ideas of signs. Eighth Bhumi bodhisattvas are said to be “irreversible,” because there is no longer any possibility that they might waver on the path or backslide. They are destined for full buddhahood and there are no longer any inclinations to seek a personal nirvana. They cultivate the “perfection of aspiration,” which means that they undertake to fulfill various vows, due to which they accumulate the causes of further virtues. Although they resolve to work for the benefit of others and they pervade the universe with feelings of friendliness toward all sentient beings, these bodhisattvas have transcended any tendency to misunderstand anatta.

Their understanding of emptiness is so complete that it overturns innate delusions, and reality appears in a completely new light. They enter into meditation on emptiness with little effort. Bodhisattvas on this level are compared to people who have awakened from dreams, and all their perceptions are influenced by this new awareness. They attain the meditative state called “forbearance regarding non-arisen phenomena,” due to which they no longer think in terms of inherent causes or inherent causelessness. They also develop the ability to manifest in various forms in order to instruct others. Compassion and skillful means are automatic and spontaneous. There is no need to plan or contemplate how best to benefit others, since bodhisattvas on the eighth level automatically react correctly to every situation.

The good mind/The good intelligence (Sadhumati): From this point on, bodhisattvas move quickly toward awakening. Before this stage, progress was comparatively slow, like that of a boat being towed through a harbour. On the eighth through tenth stage, however, bodhisattvas make huge strides toward buddhahood, like a ship that reaches the ocean and unfurls its sails. On the ninth level, they fully understand the three vehicles: hearers, solitary realizers, and bodhisattvas – and perfect the ability to teach the doctrine. According to the Sutra Explaining the Thought:

Because of attaining faultlessness and very extensive intelligence in terms of mastery of teaching the doctrine in all aspects, the ninth level is called the “Good Intelligence.”

Ninth level bodhisattvas also acquire the “four analytical knowledges”: of fundamental concepts, meaning, grammar, and exposition. Due to this, they develop wondrous eloquence and skill in presenting doctrinal teachings. Their intelligence surpasses that of all humans and gods, and they comprehend all names, words, meanings, and languages. They can understand any question from any being. They also have the ability to answer them with a single sound, which is understood by each being according to its capacities. On this level they also cultivate the perfection of virya, which means that because of the strength of their mastery of the four analytical knowledges and their meditation they are able to develop paramitas energetically and to practice them continually without becoming fatigued

The cloud of Dharma (Dharmamegha): This level is the level immediately before Buddhahood in which the last traces of afflictions are taken away. Like a cloud that pours rain on the earth, these bodhisattvas spread the dharma in all directions and each sentient being absorbs what it needs in order to grow spiritually. Thus Nargarjuna states that:

The tenth is the Cloud of Dharma because

The rain of excellent doctrine falls,

The Bodhisattva is consecrated

With light by the Buddhas.

At this stage bodhisattvas enter into progressively deeper meditative absorptions and develop limitless powers with respect to magical formulas. They cultivate the perfection of exalted wisdom, which enables them to increase their exalted wisdom. This in turn strengthens the other perfections. As a result they become established in the joy of the doctrine.

They acquire perfect bodies and their minds are cleansed of the subtlest traces of the afflictions. They manifest in limitless forms for the benefit of others and transcend the ordinary laws of time and space. They are able to place entire world systems in a single pore without diminishing them or increasing the size of the pore. When they do this, the beings inhabiting the worlds feel no discomfort and only those who are advanced bodhisattvas even notice.

Bodhisattvas on this level receive a form of empowerment from innumerable buddhas. This is called “great rays of light,” because the radiance of these bodhisattvas shines in all directions. This empowerment helps them in removing the remaining obstructions to omniscience and gives them added confidence and strength. At the final moment of this stage they enter into a meditative state called the “vajralike meditative stabilization,” in which the subtlest remaining obstacles to buddhahood are overcome. When they arise from this concentration, they arise as Buddhas!