

Chapter Six: Bringing Forth Great Vows — *The Infinite Life Sutra*

Bhikṣu Dharmākara then said, “May the Lokanātha* listen to and examine my vows with great compassion.”

(*Skt., lokanātha or lokajyeṣṭha. It is one of the ten epithets of all Buddhas, usually translated as Bhagavan or World Honored One.)

“When I realize the supreme bodhi and attain perfect enlightenment, the Buddha land that I shall accomplish will be replete with boundless, inconceivable merits, virtues, and adornments; there will be no realm of hells, hungry ghosts, animals, and neither flying, wriggling creatures nor the like. All beings, including those in the Yamaraja realms and three evil paths, who are born into my Buddha land and are edified by my Dharma, will all attain Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi* and never again fall into the evil paths. Only having fulfilled such vows, will I become a Buddha; otherwise, I will not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.”

(*The Supreme Perfect Enlightenment)

1st Vow: The Land is free from evil paths.

2nd Vow: The inhabitants will never again fall into evil paths.

“When I become a Buddha, I will help all beings of the worlds in ten directions to come to my land and they will all obtain a body of pure gold tinged with violet and “thirty-two laksana* of a great personage.”** Their semblance will be majestic, pure, and identical. If there are differences of good or bad in their countenance or physique, I will not acquire Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.”

(*Skt. laksana, distinctive bodily trait)

**Skt.mahā-puruṣa-lakṣaṇa, thirty-two laksana of a great personage)

3rd Vow: The inhabitants will all obtain a golden body.

4th Vow: They will obtain the thirty-two laksana of a great personage.

5th Vow: All will be identical in physique.

"When I become a Buddha, all beings born into my land will naturally know all the good and evil deeds they did in the boundless kalpas of their past. They will clearly see, hear, and know thoroughly the evolution of all the events in their past, present, and future in ten directions. If such vows are not realized, I will not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi."

6th Vow: All will have the supernal power of knowing past lives.

7th Vow: All will have the supernal power of celestial eyes.

8th Vow: All will have the supernal power of celestial ears.

"When I become a Buddha, all beings born into my land will obtain the supernal wisdom power of reading others' minds. If they cannot utterly know the mind of living beings in hundreds of thousands of billions of nayutas of Buddha lands, I will not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi."

9th Vow: All will have the supernal power of reading others' minds.

"When I become a Buddha, living beings born into my land will all obtain the supernal power of unimpeded and perfect* bodily function. In the moment of one thought, if they are unable to travel and tour hundreds of thousands of billions of nayutas** of Buddha lands to make offerings to all Buddhas, I will not obtain Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi."

(*Pāramitā is a Sanskrit word, it is usually translated as "perfection." In Mahayana Buddhism practice, there are six paramitas that ferry one beyond the sea of mortality to nirvana; these practices are:

1. Dāna - giving, generosity, including the bestowing of the truth on others.
2. Sīla - upholding precepts, maintaining moral rectitude.
3. Kṣānti - patience or forbearance under insult. But the deeper meaning of kṣānti is sometimes taken for "recognition", which implies recognizing the phenomenal of "neither arising nor ceasing", an inclination towards the ultimate truth.
4. Vīrya - effort in one focus, zeal.
5. Dhyāna - meditation, contemplation.
6. Prajñā - a supra-world wisdom, the power to discern *reality* and *truth*.)

(**Skt. Nayutas: an Indian numerical unit, referring to a vast number of something. Billions, trillions, incalculable)

10th Vow: All will have supernal powers of unimpeded bodily function.

11th Vow: All will have the ability of making offerings to all Buddhas.

"When I become a Buddha, all living beings born into my land will keep away from the mind of discrimination, and all the roots of their six senses will dwell in quietude. If they are not resolute to achieve samyak-saṃbodhi as well as realize the great nirvana, I will not acquire Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi."

12th Vow: All will absolutely accomplish Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.

"When I become a Buddha, the infinite brightness of my light will illuminate all ten directions. It will surpass the lights of all other Buddhas and surpass the brightness of the sun and moon by thousands of trillions of times. Any sentient being, seeing my light shine on his body, will be serene, blissful, and further give rise to a compassionate heart to do good deeds and seek to be born into my land. If such vows are not realized, I will not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi."

13th Vow: The light will be infinitely bright.

14th Vow: All will be serene and blissful when the light shines on them.

"When I become a Buddha, my lifespan will be infinite. There will be innumerable srāvakas* and celestial beings in my land, their lifespans will also be infinite. If all beings in the trichiliocosm** attain pratyekabuddha***, and together they count these srāvakas and celestial beings for a period of hundreds and thousands of kalpas; and if, they will know the number of these srāvakas and celestial beings, I will not acquire Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi."

(*Srāvakas are the disciples of the Buddha who aspire to attain individual liberation or nirvāṇa. Their final goal is to become an arhat..)

(**Trichiliocosm, a Sanskrit word, is a unit world cubed. In Buddhist cosmology, the center of a unit world is Mount Sumeru. A unit world is believed to be a galaxy. Therefore, a trichiliocosm is a billion galaxies.)

(***Pratyekabuddha, meaning solitary realizer, or self-enlightened one, etc.)

15th Vow: All will have an infinite lifespan.

16th Vow: The number of the srāvaka in the Land will be countless.

"When I become a Buddha, if all Buddhas in countless Buddha lands of ten directions do not praise my name and proclaim the merits and virtues of my land, I will not acquire Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi."

17th Vow: Praises from all Buddhas.

"When I become a Buddha, all beings in ten directions, upon hearing my name, will believe and rejoice with utmost sincerity. They will wholeheartedly transfer the merits of all their good roots and aspire to be born to my land. Even within only ten recitations of my name, if they are not born into my land, I will not acquire Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi, except for those who have committed the "Five Heinous Sins"* and slandered the "true Dharma."**

(*Five Heinous Sins: killing father, harming mother, killing an arhat, making a Buddha bleed, and disharmonizing the concord of a Sangha. Skt., pañcānantarya)

(**Skt. *sad-dharma*; the teaching of reality, the true teaching, the Buddha's teaching)

18th Vow: One will definitely be born into the Land within ten recitations.

"When I become a Buddha, all beings in ten directions, upon hearing my name, will bring forth their bodhicitta*, cultivate all kinds of merits and virtues, practice the six paramitas respectfully, and uphold them firmly without regression. They will further transfer the merits of their good roots, wishing to be born into my land, and they will single-mindedly recite my name unceasingly day and night. At the end of their lives I, together with an assembly of bodhisattvas, will manifest before them to welcome them. In an instant, they will be born into my land and become avaivartika** bodhisattvas.

(*Skt. an aspiration to realize bodhi wisdom)

(**non-retrogression)

If such vows are not realized, I will not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi."

19th Vow: One will bring forth bodhicitta upon hearing Amitabha's name.

20th Vow: At the end of one's life, Amitabha will come to escort him.

"When I become a Buddha, all beings in ten directions, upon hearing my name, will set their minds on my land, bring forth their bodhicitta, firmly uphold it without regression, plant the roots of all virtues, transfer their merits with utmost sincerity, and

aspire to be born into my land; none of them will fail. If someone committed evil faults in the past, upon hearing my name, he will spontaneously repent those faults, practice Dao, do good deeds, uphold sutras and precepts, and aspire to be born to my land. When his life comes to an end, he will not fall into the three evil paths but instantly be born into my land. If such vows are not realized, I will not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.”

21st Vow: One will obtain rebirth after his repentance.

“When I become a Buddha, there will be no females in my land. If a woman, upon hearing my name, obtains pure faith and brings forth bodhicitta, she will detest her female body and wish to be born to my land. At the end of her life, she will transform into a man and be born into my land. All kinds of beings in all worlds of ten directions, through transformation, will be born into the lotus flowers of the seven jeweled pond. If such vows are not realized, I will not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.”

22nd Vow: No females in the Land.

23rd Vow: She will detest her female body and transform into a man.

24th Vow: All will be born through transformation in lotus flowers.

"When I become a Buddha, all beings in ten directions, upon hearing my name, will rejoice and give rise to faith. They will worship and seek refuge in me. Moreover, they will cultivate the bodhisattva-conduct with a pure mind; all human and celestial beings will respect them. If they hear my name, they will be born into respectable and honorable families after this life ends. All their sense organs will be complete without any deficiency. And they will constantly cultivate the supreme-sacred-conduct*.

(Skt. brahma-caryā, a religious practice of purifying the mind, including "cutting off lustful desire," to ensure a rebirth in the Maha-brahma or beyond form-realm)

If such vows cannot be accomplished, I will not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.”

25th Vow: Veneration from human and celestial beings.

26th Vow: One will obtain fortune upon hearing Amitabha's name.

27th Vow: Constant cultivation of the supreme-sacred-conduct.

"When I become a Buddha, there will be no unwholesome names in my land.

All beings who are born into my land will have the same mind, dwelling on “the firm determination for ultimate enlightenment.”* They will eternally depart from afflictions and have a pure and cool mind. The bliss they receive is like that of bhikṣus who have “extinguished all defilements.”**

(*Skt. niyata-rāṣi or samyaktva-niyata, referring to extinction of defilements, a state of no more affliction arises.)

(**Skt. āsrava-kṣaya, kṣina-āsrava)

If they give rise to greedy thoughts concerning their bodies, I will not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.”

28th Vow: The Land is free from all unwholesomeness.

29th Vow: All will dwell on the firm determination for ultimate enlightenment.

30th Vow: Their bliss is like that of bhikṣus who have extinguished all defilements.

31st Vow: They no longer give rise to greedy thoughts concerning their bodies.

“When I become a Buddha, all beings who are born into my land will have immeasurable good roots and acquire a “Vajra-Nārāyaṇa body”* with adamant power. Brilliant light will shine around their bodies and heads. They will accomplish all the wisdom, possess the ability of boundless eloquent oration, and be skillful in speaking the esoterism and essence of all Dharma. When they proclaim sutras to practice Dao, their voices will be like a bell tolling. If such vows are not realized, I will not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.”

(*Vajra-Nārāyaṇa body: a body that is as strong as diamond-like metal and its strength is as enormous as the deity of Narayana)

32nd Vow: All will have a Vajra-Nārāyaṇa body.

33rd Vow: All will have luminous light around their bodies and heads, and will obtain wisdom of eloquence.

34th Vow: All will be skillful in speaking the essence of all Dharma.

“When I become a Buddha, all beings born into my land will ultimately attain “the position of Buddha-successor-in-one-life,”* Except those who, with their original vow of

liberating all beings, will wear the armor of great vows to edify all beings to bring forth faith, cultivate bodhi-conducts, and practice the Way of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva. Even if they are born into other worlds, they will forever be free from evil paths. They either love to speak Dharma, love to listen to Dharma, or may manifest “the supernal power of bodily function”^{***}; they can practice them all to perfection in accord with their wishes. If such vows are not realized, I will not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.”

(*Skt., eka-jāti-pratibaddhā)

(**Skt., ṛddhi-pāda)

35th Vow: All will reach the position of Buddha-Successor-in-One-Life.

36th Vow: All can edify others as they wish.

“When I become a Buddha, for those who are born into my land, their food, clothing, and various articles for offerings will appear as soon as they give rise to thoughts, and all their wishes will be satiated. All Buddhas in ten directions will receive their offerings in accord with their thoughts. If such vows are not realized, I will not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.”

37th Vow: Clothing and food will appear as one wishes.

38th Vow: All Buddhas will receive offerings in accord with their thoughts.

“When I become a Buddha, the myriad things in my land will be solemn, pure, brilliant, and beautiful. They will be unique in shapes and colors which will be exquisite and wondrous to the extreme, and unable to be described and measured. If those living beings who obtained celestial eyes can distinguish their shape, color, brightness, appearance, name, number, or even just expound them in general, I will not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.”

39th Vow: The Land is limitlessly adorned.

“When I become a Buddha, there will be boundless colorful trees in my land, their height can be hundreds and thousands of yojanas* or so. And the trees in the bodhimanda** will be four million li*** in height. All the bodhisattvas, even those with the smallest amount of good roots, can also perceive this. Those who wish to see the adornment of all Buddhas’ Pure Lands can see images among the trees, as clear as

one's face is seen in a bright mirror. If such vows are not realized, I will not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.”

(*Skt. in Indian measure of distance, either seven or nine miles, about the distance of one day's travel for an emperor)

(**Bodhimaṇḍa, a Sanskrit word referring to a place where enlightenment is achieved, religious practice is carried out, the Buddha is worshiped, or the precepts are given.)

(***a unit of distance equal to half a kilometer in China)

40th Vow: The Land has countless various colored trees.

41st Vow: The trees will manifest all Buddha Lands.

"When I become a Buddha, the Buddha land in which I dwell will be limitlessly vast, majestic, pure, and brilliant, glowing as a clear mirror. Its light will thoroughly illuminate immeasurably inconceivable Buddha worlds in ten directions. Living beings who see the light will give rise to a rare mind. If it is not like this, I will not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.”

42nd Vow: The light shines throughout ten directions.

"When I become a Buddha, from the horizon up to the vast void of cosmos, all the palaces, towers, pavilions, ponds, streams, flowers, trees, and the myriad things in my land will all be composed of immeasurable treasured fragrances. The fragrances will universally permeate all worlds in ten directions. Those living beings, upon smelling the fragrances, will cultivate Buddha-conduct. If it is not like this, I will not acquire Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.”

43rd Vow: Treasured fragrances permeate pervasively.

"When I become a Buddha, all **the assemblies of the** bodhisattvas in all Buddha lands in ten directions, upon hearing my name, will instantly attain the Samadhi of Purity, Emancipation, and Universal Equality. They will uphold all profound dharanis*, dwell in samadhi, until they attain Buddhahood. In their samadhi, they will constantly make offerings to innumerable, boundless Buddhas without losing their power of samadhi. If it is not like this, I will not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.

(*the power of total retention)

44th Vow: All will obtain the Samadhi of Universal Equality.

45th Vow: All will be able to make offerings to all Buddhas in their samadhi.

"When I become a Buddha, all bodhisattvas in other worlds, upon hearing my name, will attain the Dharma of being free from "the chain of birth"* and obtain dharanis. They will be pure, blissful, and dwell in the Dharma of Equality. In cultivating bodhisattva-conduct, they will be replete with the roots of all virtues. If they are unable to instantly attain the first, second, and third stages of kṣānti** as well as realize the state of non-retrogression*** in all Buddha-Dharmas, I will not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi."

(*Skt., nyāma)

(**Skt. a positive acceptance of or a willing inclination towards the ultimate truth)

(**Skt., avavartika or avinivartanīya)

46th Vow: All will attain dharani.

47th Vow: Upon hearing Amitabha's name, all will attain kṣānti.

48th Vow: All will instantly realize the state of non-retrogression.