

Training in Wisdom 8: The Bhumis & the Paths

For Bodhisattvas, the 8-fold path is supplemented with a path of 5 phases. Most practitioners remain on the first path for a long time:

1. The Path of Accumulation:

Merit is gained from various practices, devotions and virtuous deeds. Wisdom is gained through study, hearing, and contemplating the Dharma. One metaphor used is that of a long journey, and this first phase is known as ‘the path of equipment with merit’. To make a successful journey, preparations need to be thorough and the necessary supplies gathered.

“Arising from the power of the inner Buddha Nature and from an ocean of faith comes the heartfelt decision to set out toward the complete and perfect enlightenment of the Buddha for the sake of benefitting all sentient beings” (Mipham)

2. The Path of Linking, “Prayoga Marga”, Yoga Path:

Here the practice gets more intense. The goal of this path is to achieve full understanding and realization of emptiness, of the dharmata, the essence of all phenomena. Full practice of the 37 Wings of Enlightenment is one of the means. Definite separation, definite release from samsara is the result. The 5 powers of Faith, Diligence Mindfulness Concentration, and Wisdom manifest.

2a. Heat. The goal, the 3rd Path, the Path of Seeing, is likened to a blazing fire. The heat of practice increases during the 4 stages of Linking until the path is seen in its entirety.

2b Summits. Here aspiration for the realization of emptiness reaches a peak. The things of life begin to seem like a dream.

2c. Patience. Here we repeat the process of warming and summits. Getting ever closer to the blazing fire of Realization. We are no longer afraid, and our mind no longer shrinks away.

2d Supreme Mundane Dharmas. The threshold of the experience of true reality. The last vestiges of the tainted paths of samsara are dealt with.

3. The Path of Seeing.

The leap is made to full cognition of the entire path. Direct experience of emptiness. One is no longer a worldling, but an Arya, a Noble One. Here the genuine Bodhisattva path begins with the first Bhumi. The Four Truths are fully understood for the first time.

4. The Path of Meditation, of Cultivation (bhavana marga). All that has been cognized is now put into practice and refined. The remaining 9 Bodhisattva Bhumis are realized.

5. The Path of No More Learning.

Shravakas on this path attain Arhatship; Bodhisattvas on this path attain annutara.samyak.sam.bodhi, the full and complete enlightenment of a Buddha.

The Bhumis can be long stages. The Basis is what has already been achieved. The Path consists of efforts to perfect the Bhumis and their associated Paramitas. The result is the full perfection of each Paramita.

The First Bodhisattva Bhumi, the 'Joyous':

This is reached at the moment of the arising of the Path of Seeing. Dana Paramita, 'Generosity' is perfected, there being no remaining notion of gift, giver or receiver.

The Second Bodhisattva Bhumi , the 'Stainless':

This is the initial Bhumi on the Path of Meditation. Shila Paramita, 'Conduct' is perfected. At this level, there are no faults of behavior whatsoever.

The Third Bodhisattva Bhumi, the 'Luminous':

A copper colored glow is seen, due to the fact that Primordial Wisdom shines through the phenomena perceived. Gradually streams of rainbow light can appear. Here Kshanti Paramita , 'Patience' is perfected.

The Fourth Bhumi, the 'Radiant': the copper colored light gains an extraordinary intensity.

Here Virya Paramita, 'Vigor', 'Diligence' is perfected

The Fifth Bhumi, 'Difficult to Overcome': At this point, it is difficult to purify the veils that obscure the nature of mind. It is difficult to incite the practitioner's effort towards serious discipline and practice. Here Dhyana Paramita, 'Meditative Concentration' is perfected.

The Sixth Bhumi, 'Directly Manifest': The ability to directly see the nature of samsara is gained. Samsara and Nirvana are seen to be one and the same with not the slightest difference. Here Prajna Paramita, 'Wisdom' reaches perfection.

The Seventh Bhumi, Durangama, 'Far Going': The conceptual elaboration consisting of the perception of characteristics is completely abandoned. The bodhisattva on this level goes beyond such obscuration. Upaya Paramita, 'Expedient Means' is achieved.

The Eighth Bhumi is Acala, 'Immovable'. The bodhisattva is neither shaken by the concept that thoughts are present, nor shaken by the concept that no thoughts are present. One abides in the view of 'no characteristics' "alakshana". Here Pranidhana Paramita 'Vow', 'Wishing prayer' is perfected.

The Ninth Bhumi is "Sadhu.mati" 'Good Wisdom':

The capacity of seeing all phenomena that are objects of knowledge, as well as their true state is gained. Here “Bala Paramita”, the ‘Perfection of Power’ is achieved.

The Tenth Bhumi is ‘Dharma cloud’. A Bodhisattva on this level conveys the sacred Dharma to beings in a way that is spontaneous and free from any deliberate effort. One is able to teach the Dharma to all equally, just as a rain cloud pours down rain in a drought. The difference between this stage and the full enlightenment of a Buddha is negligible. Here Jnana Paramita, ‘Cognition’, ‘Omniscience’ is perfected.

These ten Bhumis can be used by any practitioner to set the pattern to proceed through the full Bhumis in the future. The ten Paramitas are worked with from the beginning of the Bodhisattva Path.

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