

# AVATAMSAKA SUTRA

## Chapter 40:

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Translated by the Buddhist Text Translation Society.

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### **On Entering the Inconceivable state of Liberation through the Practices and Vows of the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra[1]**

At that time, having praised the exalted merits and virtues of the Thus Come One,[2] the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra addressed the Bodhisattvas, along with Sudhana,[3] as follows:

"Good men, even if all the Buddhas of the ten directions were to speak continuously, for as many eons[4] as there are fine motes of dust in an ineffably ineffable number of Buddha lands, the virtues and merits of the Thus Come One could never be fully described.

"Those wishing to achieve these merits and virtues should cultivate ten vast and great practices and vows. What are these ten?

*First, Pay homage and respect to all Buddhas.*

*Second, Praise the Thus Come Ones.*

*Third, Make abundant offerings.*

*Fourth, Repent misdeeds and evil karma.*

*Fifth, Rejoice at others' merits and virtues.*

*Sixth, Request the Buddhas to turn the Dharma wheel.*

*Seventh, Request the Buddhas to remain in the world.*

*Eighth, Follow the teachings of the Buddhas at all times.*

*Ninth, Accommodate and benefit all living beings.*

*Tenth, Transfer all merits and virtues universally."*

[The explanation of the first to eighth vows is omitted here. What follows is the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra's exposition of the ninth and tenth vows.]

[Ninth

Vow]

"Sudhana, *to accommodate and benefit all living beings* is explained like this: throughout the oceans of worlds in the ten directions exhausting the Dharma Realm and the realm of empty space, there are many different kinds of living beings. That is to say, there are those born from eggs, the womb-born, the transformationally born, as well as those who live and rely on earth, water, fire, and air for their existence. There are beings dwelling in space, and those who are born in and live in plants and trees. This includes all the many species and races with their diverse bodies, shapes, appearances, lifespans, families, names, and natures. This includes their many varieties of knowledge and views, their various desires and pleasures, their thoughts and deeds, and their many different deportments, clothing and diets.

"It includes beings who dwell in different villages, towns, cities and palaces, as well as gods, dragons, and others of the eight divisions, humans and non-humans alike. Also there are footless beings, beings with two feet, four feet, and many feet, with form and without form, with thought and without thought, and not entirely with thought and not entirely without thought. I will accord with and take care of all these many kinds of beings, providing all manner of services and offerings for them. I will treat them with the same respect I show my own parents, teachers, elders, Arhats, and even the Thus Come Ones. I will serve them all equally without difference.

"I will be a good doctor for the sick and suffering. I will lead those who have lost their way to the right road. I will be a bright light for those in the dark night, and cause the poor and destitute to uncover hidden treasures. The Bodhisattva impartially benefits all living beings in this manner.

"Why is this? If a Bodhisattva accords with living beings, then he accords with and makes offerings to all Buddhas. If he can honor and serve living beings, then he honors and serves the Thus Come Ones. If he makes living beings happy, he is making all Thus Come Ones happy. Why is this? It is because all Buddhas, Thus Come Ones, take the Mind of Great

Compassion as their substance. Because of living beings, they develop Great Compassion. From Great Compassion the Bodhi Mind is born; and because of the Bodhi Mind, they accomplish Supreme, Perfect Enlightenment.

"It is like a great regal tree growing in the rocks and sand of barren wilderness. When the roots get water, the branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits will all flourish. The regal bodhi-tree growing in the wilderness of Birth and Death is the same. All living beings are its roots; all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are its flowers and fruits. By benefitting all beings with the water of Great Compassion, one can realize the flowers and fruits of the Buddhas' and Bodhisattvas' wisdom.

"Why is this? It is because by benefitting living beings with the water of Great Compassion, the Bodhisattvas can attain Supreme, Perfect Enlightenment. Therefore, Bodhi belongs to living beings. Without living beings, no Bodhisattva could achieve Supreme, Perfect Enlightenment.

"Good man, you should understand these principles in this way: When the mind is impartial towards all living beings, one can accomplish full and perfect Great Compassion. By using the Mind of Great Compassion to accord with living beings, one perfects the making of offerings to the Thus Come Ones. In this way the Bodhisattva constantly accords with living beings.

"Even when the realm of empty space is exhausted, the realms of living beings are exhausted, the karma of living beings is exhausted, and the afflictions of living beings are exhausted, I will still accord endlessly, continuously in thought after thought without cease. My body, mouth, and mind never weary of these deeds.

[Tenth

Vow]

"Moreover, good man, *to transfer all merits and virtues universally* is explained like this: all the merits and virtues, from the first vow, to pay homage and respect, up to and including the vow to accommodate and benefit living beings, I universally transfer to all living beings throughout

the Dharmna Realm and to the limits of empty space. I vow that all living beings will be constantly peaceful and happy without sickness or suffering. I vow that no one will succeed in doing any evil, but that all will quickly perfect their cultivation of good karma. I vow to shut the door to evil destinies and open the right paths of humans, gods and that of Nirvana. I will stand in for beings and receive all the extremely severe fruits of suffering which they bring about with their evil karma. I will liberate all these beings and ultimately bring them to accomplish unsurpassed Bodhi. The Bodhisattva cultivates transference in this way.

"Even when the realm of empty space is exhausted, the realms of living beings are exhausted, the karma of living beings is exhausted, and the afflictions of living beings are exhausted, I will still transfer all merits and virtues endlessly, continuously, in thought after thought without cease. My body, mouth and mind never weary of these deeds.

"Good man, these are the Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas' Ten Great Vows in their entirety. If all Bodhisattvas can follow and abide by these Great Vows, then they will be able to bring all living beings to maturity. They will be able to accord with the path of Supreme, Perfect Enlightenment and complete Samantabhadra's ocean of conduct and vows. Therefore, good man, you should know the meaning of this"....

"Further, when a person is on the verge of death, at the last instant of life, when all his faculties scatter and he departs from his relatives, when all power and status are lost and nothing survives, when his prime minister, great officials, his inner court and outer cities, his elephants, horses, carts, and treasuries of precious jewels can no longer accompany him, these Great Vows alone will stay with him. At all times they will guide him forward, and in a single instant he will be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. Arriving there, he will see Amitabha Buddha, the Bodhisattva Manjusri, the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, the Bodhisattva who contemplates at Ease[Avalokitesvara], the Bodhisattva Maitreya, and others. The appearance of these Bodhisattvas will be magnificent and their merits and virtues complete. Together they will surround him.

"This person will see himself born from a lotus flower and will receive a prediction of Buddhahood. Thereafter, he will pass through an immeasurable, incalculable number of eons and, with his power of wisdom, he will accord with the minds of living beings in order to benefit them everywhere throughout the ineffably ineffable worlds in the ten directions.

"Before long he will sit in a Bodhimandala[5], subdue the demonic armies, accomplish Supreme, Perfect Enlightenment, and turn the wonderful Dharma wheel. He will cause living beings in worlds as numerous as the fine motes of dust in Buddha lands to develop the Bodhi Mind.[6] According with their inclinations and basic natures, he will teach, transform, and bring them to maturity. To the exhaustion of the oceans of future eons, he will greatly benefit all living beings"...

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At that time, the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Samantabhadra, wishing to restate his meaning, contemplated everywhere in the ten directions and spoke in verse.

*1 - Before the Lions Among Men[7] throughout the worlds of the ten directions,*

*In the past, in the present, and also in the future,  
with body, mouth, and mind entirely pure,  
I bow before them all, omitting none.*

*With the awesome spiritual power of Samantabhadra's vows,  
I appear at the same time before every Thus Come One,  
And in transformed bodies as numerous as motes of dust in all lands,  
Bow to Buddhas as numerous as motes of dust in all lands.*

*In every mote of dust are Buddhas as numerous as motes of dust,  
Each dwelling amid a host of Bodhisattvas.  
Throughout motes of dust in endless Dharma Realms it is the same:  
I deeply believe they all are filled with Buddhas.*

2 - with oceans of sound I everywhere let fall  
Words and phrases, wonderful and endless,  
Which now and through all the eons of the future,  
Praise the wide, deep sea of the Buddhas' merits and virtues.

3 - Flower garlands supreme and wonderful,  
Music, perfumes, parasols, and canopies,  
And other decorations rich and rare,  
I offer up to every Thus Come One.

Fine clothing, superior incense,  
Powdered and burning incense, lamps and candles,  
Each one heaped as high as mount Sumeru,  
I offer completely to all Tathagatas.

With a vast, great, supremely liberated mind,  
I believe in all Buddhas of the three periods of time;  
With the strength of Samantabhadra's conduct and vows,  
I make offerings to all Thus Come Ones everywhere.

4 - For all the evil deeds I have done in the past,  
Created by my body, mouth, and mind,  
From beginningless greed, anger, and delusion,  
I now know shame and repent them all.

5 - I rejoice in the merits and virtues  
Of all beings in the ten directions,  
The Learners and Those-Past-Study in the Two Vehicles,[8]  
And all Thus Come Ones and Bodhisattvas.

6 - Before the Lamps of the Worlds[9] of the ten directions,  
who have just accomplished Supreme Bodhi,  
I now request and beseech them all  
To turn the foremost, wondrous Dharma wheel.

7 - If there are Buddhas who wish for Nirvana,  
I request with deep sincerity

*That they dwell in the world for a long time  
To bring benefits and bliss to every being.*

*I worship those with blessings, praise them and make offerings;  
I request that the Buddhas remain in the world and turn the Dharma  
wheel;*

*The good roots gained from following and rejoicing in merit and virtue  
and from repentance and reform,  
I transfer to living beings and the Buddha Way.*

*8 - I study with the Buddhas and practice  
The perfect conduct of Samantabhadra;  
I make offerings to all the Thus Come Ones of the past  
And to all present Buddhas throughout the ten directions.*

*All future Teachers of Gods and Men  
Whose aspirations and vows have been completed,  
I will follow in study throughout the three periods of time  
And quickly attain Great Bodhi.*

*In all lands of the ten directions,  
Vast, great, pure, and wonderfully adorned,  
All Tathagatas sit beneath regal Bodhi trees,  
While assemblies circumambulate them.*

*I vow that every being in all directions  
Will be peaceful, happy, and without worry.  
May they obtain the proper Dharma's profound aid,  
And may all their afflictions be wiped away, without exception*

*While striving to attain Bodhi,  
I will gain the knowledge of past lives in all destinies.  
I will always leave home-life and cultivate pure precepts,  
Without outflows,[10] never broken, and without stain.*

*Be they gods, dragons, yakshas, or kumbhandas,  
Humans, non-human, and the rest,*

*In the many languages of all such living beings,  
With every sound I will speak the Dharma.*

*I will cultivate the pure paramitas with vigor,  
And never abandon the Bodhi Mind.*

*I will banish all obstructions and defilements,  
And fulfill all wondrous practices.*

*From all delusions, karma, and demon-states,  
Amid all worldly paths, I will be freed,  
As the lotus does not touch the water,  
As sun and moon do not stop in space.*

*9 - Ending the sufferings of the paths of evil,  
And to everyone equally bringing joy,  
May I for eons like the motes of dust in all lands  
Ever benefit all in the ten directions.*

*Always in accord with living beings,  
Cultivating through all future eons  
The vast conduct of Samantabhadra,  
The unsurpassed Great Bodhi will I perfect.*

*May all who cultivate with me  
Assemble with me in one place,  
Our karmas of body, mouth, and mind the same,  
As we cultivate and study all practices and vows.*

*With all advisors good and wise who aid me  
By explaining Samantabhadra's deeds,  
I vow always to congregate together:  
May they never be displeased with me.*

*I vow always to meet Thus Come Ones face to face  
And the hosts of disciples who gather around them.  
I will raise offerings which are vast and great,  
Untiring to the end of future eons.*

*I will hold high the subtly wondrous Buddhadharmā  
And illuminate all the practices of Bodhi;  
I will be ultimately pure in Samantabhadra's way,  
Practicing until the end of time.*

*Inexhaustible blessings and wisdom  
I cultivate throughout all worlds;  
By concentration, wisdom, skillful means, and liberation,  
I will gain an endless store of merits and virtues.*

*In one mote of dust are lands as numerous as motes of dust;  
In each land are incalculable numbers of Buddhas.  
In every place where Buddhas dwell I see the host assembled,  
Endlessly proclaiming all the practices of Bodhi.*

*In ten directions everywhere, throughout the sea of lands,  
Every hair-tip encompasses oceans of past, present and future.[11]  
So, too, there is a sea of Buddhas, a sea of Buddha lands;  
Pervading them all I cultivate for seas of endless time.*

*The speech of all Tathagatas is pure;  
Each word contains an ocean of sounds.  
According with what beings like to hear,  
The Buddhas' sea of eloquence flows forth.*

*All Tathagatas of the three periods of time  
Forever turn the wonderful Dharma wheel,  
With these inexhaustible seas of words and languages.  
I understand all with my deep wisdom.*

*I can penetrate the future  
And exhaust all eons in a single thought.  
In a single thought I completely enter  
All eons of the three periods of time.[12]*

*In one thought I see all Lions of Men  
Of the past, present, and future;[13]*

*I constantly fathom the Buddhas' states,  
Their magical liberations and their awesome strength.*

*On the tip of an extremely fine hair,  
Appear jewelled lands of past, present and future;  
Lands on hair-tips as numerous as dust motes in all lands of the ten  
directions,  
I deeply enter, adorn, and purify.*

*All Lamps of the Future that light the world,  
Complete the Way, turn the Dharma wheel, and rescue living beings,  
As they perfect the Buddhas' work and manifest Nirvana,  
I draw near and attend to each one and obtain:*

*The spiritual power to go everywhere swiftly;  
The power to enter the Mahayana universally through the Universal  
Door;*

*The power of wisdom and conduct to cultivate merits and virtues  
universally;*

*The subtle spiritual power to shield all with Great Compassion;*

*The power to purify and adorn [all] with supreme blessings everywhere;*

*The power of wisdom which is unattached and independent;*

*The awesome spiritual powers and the powers of concentration, wisdom,  
and skill-in-means;*

*The power of universally accumulating Bodhi;*

*The power of good karma which purifies all things;*

*The power to eradicate all afflictions;*

*The power to subdue all demons;*

*The power to perfect Samantabhadra's conduct.*

*The sea of lands I everywhere adorn and purify,  
And I liberate all living beings, without exception.*

*With skill I make selections from among the sea of Dharmas[14]  
And enter deeply into the wisdom sea.*

*I cultivate the ocean of practices to purity,  
Perfect and complete a sea of vows.  
I draw near to a sea of Buddhas and make offerings,  
And cultivate without fatigue for a sea of time.*

*To all Tathagatas of the three periods of time,  
With Bodhi, conduct, and vows most supreme,  
I completely offer up my perfect cultivation;  
With Samantabhadra's practices, I awaken to Bodhi.*

*Each Tathagata has an elder disciple  
Named Samantabhadra, Honored One.  
I now transfer all good roots, and I vow  
To perform deeds of wisdom identical to his.*

*I vow that my body, mouth, and mind will be forever pure  
And that all practices and lands will be also.  
I vow in every way to be identical  
To the wisdom of Samantabhadra.*

*I will wholly purify Samantabhadra's conduct,  
And the great vows of Manjusri as well.  
All their deeds I will fulfill, leaving nothing undone.  
Till the end of the future I will never tire.*

*Infinite and measureless is my cultivation;  
Boundless merit and virtue I obtain.  
Amid limitless practices I will dwell in peace,  
And penetrate the strength of spiritual powers.*

*10 - Manjusri has wisdom, courage and bravery;  
Samantabhadra's conduct and wisdom are the same.  
I now transfer all good roots  
In order to follow them in practice and in study.*

*In the three periods of time, all Buddhas praise  
Such vows as these, lofty and great.*

*I now transfer all good roots, wishing to perfect  
The supreme practices of Samantabhadra.*

*I vow that when my life approaches its end,  
All obstructions will be swept away;  
I will see Amitabha Buddha,  
And be born in his land of Ultimate Bliss and Peace[15]*

*When reborn in the Western Land,  
I will perfect and completely fulfill,  
Without exception, these Great Vows,  
To delight and benefit all beings.*

*The Assembly of Amitabha Buddha is completely pure;  
When from a matchless lotus I am born,  
I will behold the Tathagata's Measureless light as He appears before me  
To bestow a prediction of Bodhi.*

*Receiving a prediction from the Thus Come One,  
I will take countless appearances and forms,  
And with wisdom power vast and great, pervade ten directions  
To benefit all the realms of living beings.*

*Realms of worlds in empty space might reach an end,  
And living beings, karma and afflictions be extinguished;  
But they will never be exhausted,  
And neither will my vows.*

*With myriad jewels in boundless lands in all directions,  
I make decorations and offerings to the Thus Come Ones.  
For eons as numerous as the motes of dust in all lands, I bring  
The foremost peace and joy to gods and humans.*

*Yet, if anyone believes in these Great Vows,  
As they pass by the ear but a single time,  
And in search of Bodhi thirstily craves these vows,  
The merits and virtues gained will Surpass these offerings.*

*With bad advisors forever left behind,  
From paths of evil he departs for eternity,  
Soon to see the Buddha of Limitless Light  
And perfect Samantabhadra's Supreme Vows.*

*Easily obtaining the blessings of long life,  
Assured of a noble rebirth in the human realm,  
Before long he will perfect and complete  
The practices of Samantabhadra.*

*In the past, owing to a lack of wisdom power,  
The five offenses of extreme evil he has committed;  
In one thought they can all be wiped away by reciting  
The Great Vows of Samantabhadra.*

*His clan, race, and color, marks and characteristics  
With his wisdom are all perfected and complete;  
Demons and externalists will have no way to harm,  
And he will be a field of merits in the Three Realms.[16]*

*To the regal Bodhi tree he will quickly go,  
And seated there subdue hordes of demons.  
Supremely and perfectly enlightened, he will turn the Dharma wheel,  
To benefit the host of living beings.*

*If anyone can read, recite, receive, and hold high  
Samantabhadra's Vows and proclaim them,  
His reward only the Buddhas will know,  
And he will obtain Bodhi's highest path.*

*If anyone recites Samantabhadra's Vows,  
I will speak of a portion of his good roots:  
In one single thought he can fulfill  
The pure vows of sentient beings.*

*The supreme and endless blessings from Samantabhadra's conduct  
I now universally transfer.*

*May every living being, drowning and adrift,  
Soon return to the Land of Limitless Light!*

When the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Samantabhadra finished speaking these pure verses on the Great Vows of Samantabhadra before the Thus Come One, the youth Sudhana was overwhelmed with boundless joy. All the Bodhisattvas were extremely happy as well, and the Thus Come One applauded saying, 'Good indeed, good indeed!'

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### **Notes:**

[1] Sometimes translated as "Universal Worthy."

[2] In Sanskrit, "Tathagata," i.e., Buddha Sakyamuni or the Buddhas in general.

[3] The main protagonist in the next-to-last and longest chapter of the Avatamsaka Sutra. Seeking Enlightenment, he visited and studied with fifty-three spiritual advisors and became the equal of the Buddha in one lifetime. When he was born, myriad treasures suddenly appeared in his father's home. Thus the name "Sudhana" or "Good Wealth." Sometimes translated as "Good Wealth."

[4] May also be translated as "era." In Sanskrit, "kalpa."

[5] Bodhimandala: literally, seat or site of Enlightenment. By extension, a temple or place of retreat.

[6] Bodhi Mind, (Bodhicitta, Great Mind). The spirit of Enlightenment, the aspiration to achieve it, the Mind set on Enlightenment. It involves two parallel aspects: i) the determination to achieve Buddhahood and ii) the aspiration to rescue all sentient beings.

[7] Lions Among Men: i.e., Buddhas.

[8] Learners and Those-Past-Study in the Two Vehicles. This is a reference to the Arhats (Those-Past-Study) and the three levels of sagehood

*immediately below them (learners). The term "Two Vehicles" refers to the Theravada tradition as opposed to the Mahayana.*

*[9]Lamps of the Worlds, Lamps of the Future: metaphors or the Buddhas.*

*[10]Without outflows: i.e., unconditioned (transcendental). Anything free of the three marks of greed, anger and delusion.*

*[11]This stanza expresses a key concept of the Avatamsaka school: the complete interpenetration of time and space.*

*[12]In Buddhism, time is a relative concept; it can be long or short, depending on the state of mind.*

*[13]All the Buddhas are present in one thought. As the sixth Patriarch said, "An enlightened thought makes one a Buddha" (Platform Sutra, ch. 2).*

*[14]Dharma(s). a) The teachings of the Buddhas; b)things, events,phenomena, everything; c)duty, law, doctrine.When capitalized, it refers to the teachings of the Buddha.*

*[15]This stanza and the following one are well-known in Pure Land. They are incorporated into the daily liturgy and recited over and over.*

*[16]Fields of merits: Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Arhats and all sentient beings, whether friends or foes, are fields of merits for the cultivator because they provide him with an opportunity to cultivate merits and virtues. For example, needy people provide the opportunity for the cultivator to practice charity. Thus, they are a field of merits for him. As this text states, "Bodhi belongs to living beings.Without living beings, no Bodhisattva could achieve Supreme,Perfect Enlightenment."*