

Buddhas and Sentient Beings' Liberation

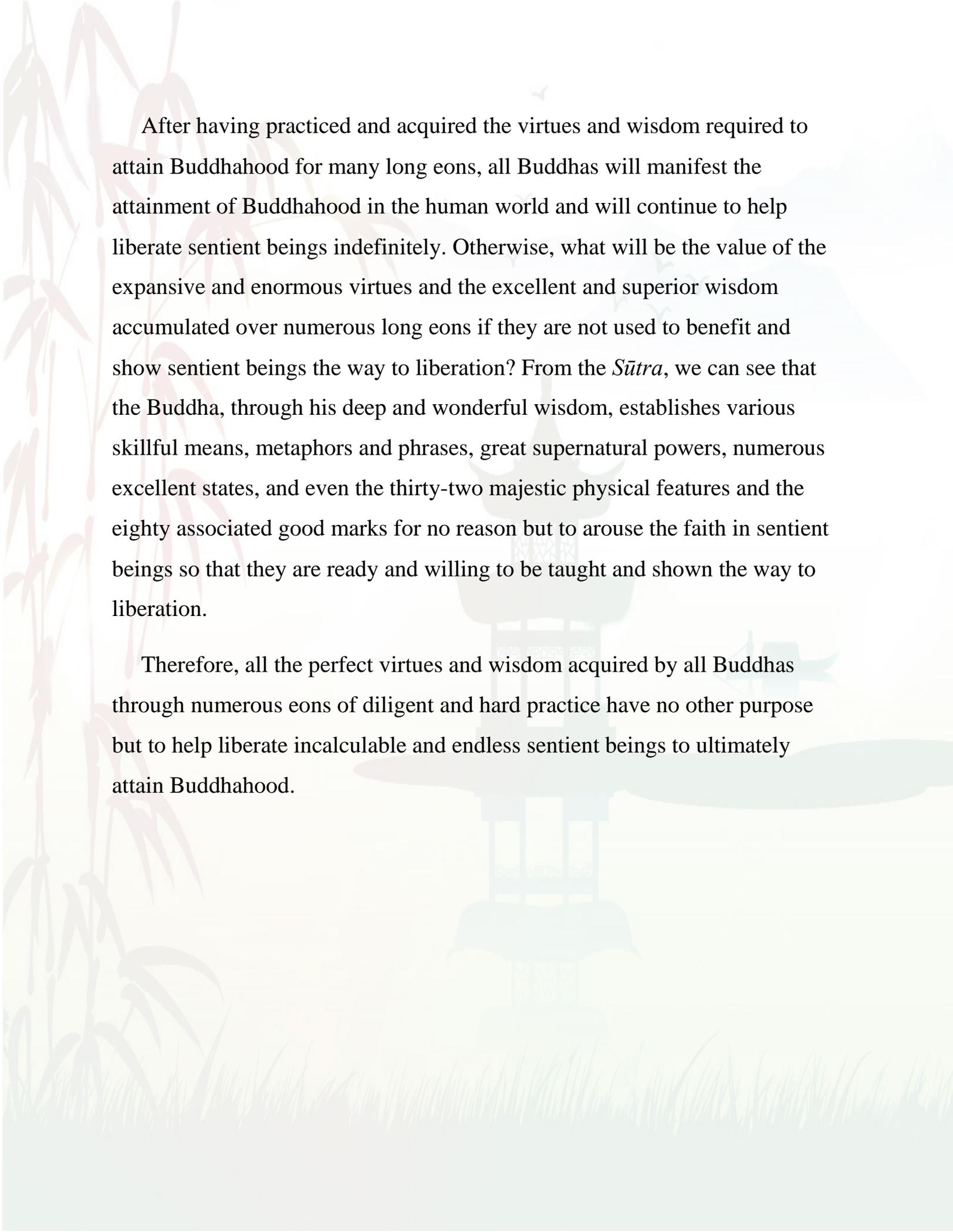
Why do Buddhas want to show sentient beings the way to liberation? This is due to the great vows of all Buddhas. In the *Lotus Sutra*, Buddha Śākyamuni said to the disciple Venerable Śāriputra, “Śāriputra, you should know that I have made the fundamental vow to enable all sentient beings to be no different than me.” Buddha Śākyamuni made the vow to teach and guide all sentient beings to attain Buddhahood. All Buddhas are different from the arhats and pratyekabuddhas in the Two Lesser Vehicles who fear rebirths, hate suffering, and are hence anxious to enter nirvana and refuse to turn to the Mahāyāna (the Great Vehicle). All Buddhas started initially in the Causal Ground as resolved bodhisattvas. After three incalculable eons of practicing the difficult practices, enduring the difficult endurances, and practicing diligently, they eventually achieved the ultimate Buddhahood. This is all due to the great vows that they made.

The four great vows that all bodhisattvas make when they take refuge in the Three Jewels— “Countless are the sentient beings whom I vow to help liberate! Endless are the defilements that I vow to eradicate! Immeasurable are the Dharma-doors that I vow to master! Unsurpassable is the Buddha’s Way that I vow to attain!”— are the common vows of all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and are the ultimate vows for Bodhisattvas taking the path to Buddhahood. Among these ultimate vows, “countless are the sentient beings

whom I vow to help liberate” is the primary vow to help liberate the incalculable and endless number of sentient beings.

When Bodhisattvas are about to enter the First Ground, they all need to courageously take the ten inexhaustible vows in front of the Buddha. Based on the compassionate mind of their superior intent, Bodhisattvas who complete the Tenth Dedication can enter the First Ground.

The ten inexhaustible vows are all about showing sentient beings the way to liberation. They are special and superior great vows. These ten inexhaustible vows pervade the dharma realm, reach throughout all of space and extend to eternity. All of space is endless, so the dharma realm is endless and the ten inexhaustible vows are hence endless. Eternity is endless so the ten inexhaustible vows are endless, which is why they are called the ten inexhaustible vows. Even extending to the limitless future, the ten inexhaustible vows will not be discarded by Buddhas even when they attain Buddhahood and are thus called the great vows. Bodhisattvas in the First Ground will be able to gradually approach and attain Buddhahood after having made the ten inexhaustible vows; hence, they are called the great vows. If the ten inexhaustible vows have not been made, Bodhisattvas will not be able to practice the Ten Grounds and Buddhahood will never be attained. If the ten inexhaustible vows were made based not on the mind of great compassion but on the selfish mind of self-realization that is not pure and not the pure superior intent as mentioned in the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* (*Scripture on the Explication of Underlying Meaning*), the ultimate Buddhahood will never be attained due to the impure intent.

The background features a faint, light-colored illustration of a traditional East Asian pagoda with multiple tiers and a pointed roof. To the left, there are stylized bamboo stalks with long, narrow leaves. A small bird is depicted in flight near the top center of the pagoda. The overall aesthetic is serene and traditional, with a soft, ethereal quality.

After having practiced and acquired the virtues and wisdom required to attain Buddhahood for many long eons, all Buddhas will manifest the attainment of Buddhahood in the human world and will continue to help liberate sentient beings indefinitely. Otherwise, what will be the value of the expansive and enormous virtues and the excellent and superior wisdom accumulated over numerous long eons if they are not used to benefit and show sentient beings the way to liberation? From the *Sūtra*, we can see that the Buddha, through his deep and wonderful wisdom, establishes various skillful means, metaphors and phrases, great supernatural powers, numerous excellent states, and even the thirty-two majestic physical features and the eighty associated good marks for no reason but to arouse the faith in sentient beings so that they are ready and willing to be taught and shown the way to liberation.

Therefore, all the perfect virtues and wisdom acquired by all Buddhas through numerous eons of diligent and hard practice have no other purpose but to help liberate incalculable and endless sentient beings to ultimately attain Buddhahood.