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# An Analytical Study of *Upāyakauśalya* (Skillful Means) with Special Reference to *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*

A Research Project submitted to

Pali and Buddhist Studies, Savitribai Phule Pune University

*In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the award of the degree of*

**M.A. Buddhist Studies**

**BY**

Nguyen Thi Kim Anh

*Under The Guidance of*

**Ms. Pranali Prakash Waingankar**

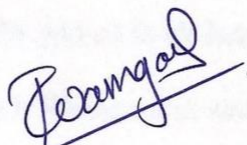


Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies,  
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Academic Year: 2022–2023

## Certificate of the Guide

CERTIFIED that the work incorporated in the Research Project/dissertation An Analytical Study of *Upāyakauśalya* (Skillful Means) with Special Reference to *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* submitted by Nguyen Thi Kim Anh was carried out by the candidate under my guidance. Such material has been obtained from other sources has been duly acknowledged in the Research Project/dissertation.

Date: 22/05/2023

  
(Research Guide)

## Declaration by the Candidate

I declare that the Research Project/dissertation entitled An Analytical Study of *Upāyakaśalya* (Skillful Means) with Special Reference to *Saddharmapūṇḍarīkasūtra* submitted by me for the degree of M.A. Buddhist Studies, of the Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies, Savitribai Phule Pune University is the record of work carried out by me during the period from January 2023 to May 2023 under the guidance of Ms. Pranali Prakash Waingankar and has not formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship, titles in this or any other University or other institution of Higher learning.

I further declare that the material obtained from other sources has been duly acknowledged in the Research Project/dissertation.

Date: 22/05/2023

Signature of the Candidate

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## Abbreviations

AN	<i>Aṅguttara Nikāya</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i>
MKŚ	<i>Madhyamakaśāstra</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i>
Pg	Page Number
SDP	<i>Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra</i>
SN	<i>Samyutta Nikāya</i>
Vbh-a	<i>Aṭṭhasālinī Aṭṭhakathā</i>
VCP	<i>Vajracchedikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra</i>
VKN	<i>Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra</i>

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Background of *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*

*Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* (SDP) is one of the critical *sūtras* of *Vaipulyasūtras*,<sup>1</sup> which is a series of books of nine *sūtras* (*navadharmas*)<sup>2</sup> composed in different eras. The Sanskrit text was edited in St. Petersburg in 1908 in the Bibliotheca Buddhica series by the joint editors, the Dutch scholar Kern and the Japanese Professor Bunyio Nanjio. Regarding the age of *sūtra*, G. K. Nariman (1923: 91) opines that if the first Chinese translation was between 265 and 316 A.D., then the SDP should have been composed in 200 A.D. The language of the SDP is Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit and it was translated into French by Burnouf in 1852, into English by Kern in 1884, and many other languages, i.e., Tibetan, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, etc. It comprises 28 chapters, which convey many profound thoughts about Mahāyāna Buddhism, such as the thought of one vehicle, all beings having the potential to become Buddhas, and the nature of Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

<sup>1</sup> Rober E. Buswell Jr., and Donald S Lopez Jr. (2014: 3075–76): A term that appears in the title of a number of Mahāyāna *Sūtras* meant to indicate their profundity, comprehensiveness, and stereotypically great length. Such *Sūtras* will typically offer a more comprehensive overview of Buddhist thought and practice than shorter *Sūtras* that may have a single or more circumscribed message. The term is used to name one of the nine (*navāṅga*) or twelve categories (*dvādaśāṅga*) of Buddhist scripture according to their structure or literary style. As one of the nine categories of scriptures organized by type or style, *vaipulya* corresponds to the Pāli category of *vedalla* (Skt. *vaidalya*), which refers to such catechetical texts as the *Sakkapañhasuttanta* or *Sammādiṭṭhisutta*. In the twelve types of scripture used in Mahāyāna classifications, the *vaipulyasūtras* are listed as the eleventh category and especially refer to scriptures of massive size. Mahāyāna *Sūtras* included in the *vaipulya* category include many of the seminal works of the tradition, including the *prajñāpāramitā sūtra*, the *ratnakūṭasūtra* collection, and the *prajñāpāramitāsūtras*, the *ratnakūṭasūtra* collection, and the *avatamsakasūtra*.

<sup>2</sup> Rober E. Buswell Jr., and Donald S Lopez Jr. (2014: 1885): The notion of a collection of nine books seems to have originated in the Newar community, although the nine *Sūtras* are all of Indian origin. The nine are the (1) *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (2) *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (3) *Lalitavistara* (4) *Laṅkāvatāra* (5) *Suvarṇaprabhāsa* (6) *Gaṇḍavyūha* (7) *Tathāgataguhyaka* or *Tathāgataguṇajñāna* (8) *Samādhirāja*, (9) *Daśabhūmīśvara*.

The SDP is a profound and complex text that emphasizes the universality and equality of all beings, regardless of their social status, gender, or spiritual development. It teaches that all beings have the potential to attain Buddhahood and that the Buddha's teachings are tailored to meet the needs and capacities of each individual. Moreover, it has profoundly impacted Buddhist thought and practice, inspiring countless practitioners to seek enlightenment and work for the benefit of all beings. It has also been the subject of extensive commentary and interpretation throughout the centuries, with various scholars of Buddhism such as Michael Pye, Edward Conze, Asaf Federman, and Damien Keown interpreting its teachings uniquely. The *sutra* also contains a number of parables, including famous parables such as the burning house, the medicinal herbs, the lost son, the treasure in the garment, the phantom city, and a skilled physician, which illustrate the Buddha's skillful means in teaching the Dharma to beings of different capacities.

The main aim of doctrine is to show Buddha vehicle<sup>3</sup> to all sentient beings through various ways of the Buddha. The Buddha recognizes that even though sentient beings have different levels, they can attain the highest knowledge of the Buddha and have the capacity to achieve Buddhahood. In the *nirvāṇasūtra*, Mark L. Blum (2013: xv) asserts that everyone has the potential for liberation, for realizing *nirvāṇa* and Buddhahood. This declaration causes all living beings to have confidence in themselves and strive to practice to be enlightened as the Buddha. However, the knowledge of Buddhas is very profound, difficult to see, difficult to penetrate, and challenging to be understood. Chapter two of the SDP (Vaidya 1960: 22) states that the Buddha's knowledge is profound, difficult to understand, hard to comprehend, and difficult for all *Śrāvakas* and *Pratyekabuddhas*, only the Buddhas can fully know the essential aspects of all dharmas, such as the aspects of the characteristic, nature,

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<sup>3</sup>Gakkai, Soka (2002: 938–39): Also, single vehicle, one vehicle of Buddhahood, or supreme vehicle. The teaching that leads all people to Buddhahood. It is taught in the Flower *Sūtra* and other Mahāyāna *Sūtras*, but the Lotus Sutra greatly emphasizes it. The Buddha's teaching is compared to a vehicle (Skt. *yāna*) that carries one to a particular state of enlightenment.



substance, potential, function, cause, condition, effect, and unity of their character.<sup>4</sup> Why do only the Buddhas thoroughly understand the self-nature of all dharmas? The reason is that the Buddhas' wisdom is extensive, profound, immeasurable, and unhindered. They possess deep and endless power, fearlessness, and meditation. They have perfected this profound and unprecedented dharma and their intention to adapt. Therefore, it isn't easy to understand their explanations of what is appropriate.

Furthermore, another reason is that the Buddhas honored and worshiped the immeasurable hundreds of thousands of myriads of koṭis of Buddhas and have practiced religious courses during many hundred thousand myriads of millions of Buddhas, were powerful, wandered far, possessed by wonderful and marvellous characters; maintained by things that are difficult to understand, and they have understood laws which are difficult to comprehend perfectly practiced countless dharmas of all Buddhas (Vaidya 1960: 22).<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, to cause sentient beings to understand this profound dharma, the Buddha used various skillful means to lead them to attain the highest knowledge. All the Tathāgatas have obtained the highest perfection, vision, and understanding by excellent skillful means. Through various methods, they expound discourse endowed with beautiful properties, such as the attainment of concentration, deliverance from reflection, enlightenment, the strength of faculties, independent conditions, powers,

<sup>4</sup> *durḍṣaṃ duranubodhaṃ buddhajñānaṃ tathāgatairarhadbhiḥ samyaksambuddhaiḥ pratibuddham, durvijñeyam sarvaśrāvakaḥ sarvabhūtaḥ sarvadharmān api tathāgata eva jānāti, yān dharmāṃstathāgato jānāti ye ca te dharmāḥ, yallakṣaṇāśca te dharmāḥ, yatsvabhāvāśca te dharmāḥ, ye ca yathā ca yādṛśās ca yallakṣaṇāśca yatsvabhāvāśca te dharmā.*

<sup>5</sup> *bahubuddhakoṭīnāyutaśatasahasraparyupāsītāvino hi śāriputra tathāgatā arhantaḥ samyaksambuddhā bahubuddhakoṭīnāyutaśatasahasracīrṇacaritāvino'nuttarāyāṃ samyaksambodhau dūrānugatāḥ kṛtavīryā āścaryādbhutadharmasamanvāgatā durvijñeyadharmasamanvāgatā durvijñeyadharmānujñātāvinaḥ*

(H.Ken.2002:30: Because the Tathāgatas have worshipped many hundred thousand myriads of kotis of Buddhas; because they have fulfilled their course for supreme, complete enlightenment, during many hundred thousand myriads of kotis of eons; because they have wandered far, displaying energy and possessed of remarkable properties; possessed of properties challenging to understand; because they have found out things difficult to understand.)

vision, and knowledge<sup>6</sup> (Vaidya 1960: 22). We can see that when the Buddha wants to give dharma, he always thinks about the abilities of his disciples to provide proper dharma. Because the sentient beings have a different level of intelligence, some can understand the truth immediately; some are not able to understand the truth immediately; they need to more detailed explanation; some can understand the truth by explaining step and step, and some cannot attain the path and fruit in this life.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, because of compassion, the Blessed One used various means to expound his dhamma. Without skillful means, sentient beings can't comprehend Buddha's teaching well. So skillful means is considered one of the necessary tools to teach sentient beings and help them to attain one vehicle.

Additionally, skillful means are not only the Buddha's instrument but also the bodhisattva's device to help sentient beings free from their suffering by doing wholesome deeds. The bodhisattvas use means for two aims: the aspiration for the Buddhahood and dedicating the store of merit to fulfill the qualities of the

<sup>6</sup> *svapratyayān dharmān prakāśayanti*

*vividhopāyakaūsalyajñānadarśanahetukāraṇanirdeśanārambaṇaniruktiprajñaptibhistairupāyakaūsalyaistasmimstas  
miṃṣṭāgnān sattvān pramocayitum, mahopāyakaūsalyajñānadarśanaparamapāramitāprāptiḥ śāriputra tathāgatā  
arhantaḥ samyaksambuddhāḥ|*

*asaṅgāpratihatājñānadarśanabalavaiśāradyāveṇikendriyabalabodhyaṅgadhyanavimokṣasamādhisamāpattiyadbhuta  
dharmaśamanvāgatāvividhadharmasamprakāśakāḥ* (H.Ken 1884: They explain the laws that have their causes in themselves by means of skillfulness, by the display of knowledge, by arguments, reasons, fundamental ideas, interpretations, and suggestions. By a variety of skillfulness they can release creatures attached to one point or another. The Tathāgatas, Alahant, a Fully Perfect One Śāriputra, have acquired the highest perfection in skillfulness and the display of knowledge; they are endowed with wonderful properties, such as the display of free and unchecked knowledge; the powers; the absence of hesitation; the independent conditions; the strength of the organs; the constituents of Bodhi; the contemplations; emancipations; meditations; the degrees of concentration of mind.)

<sup>7</sup> *“yassa puggalassa saha udāhaṭavelāya dhammābhisamayo hoti, ayaṃ vuccati puggalo ugghaṭitaññū. yassa puggalassa samkhittena bhāsitaṃ vitthārena atthe vibhajiyamāne dhammābhisamayo hoti, ayaṃ vuccati puggalo vipaṅcītaññū. yassa puggalassa uddesato paripucchato yoniso manasikaroto kalyāṇamitte sevato bhajato payirupāsato anupubbena dhammābhisamayo hoti, ayaṃ vuccati puggalo neyyo. yassa puggalassa bahumpi suṇato bahumpi bhaṇato bahumpi dhārayato bahumpi vācayato na tāya jātiyā dhammābhisamayo hoti, ayaṃ vuccati puggalo padaparamo”* (MN-a. 4. 6).

Buddhahood. In the *Upāyakaṣālyasūtra* (Mark Tatz 2001: 24), the Buddha taught Bodhisattva Jñānottara about the skillful means of a bodhisattva that a bodhisattva who is skilled in means when he acts as giving a single piece of food to living beings is for the fulfillment of Buddhahood and dedicates the store of merit to completion of the qualities of Buddhahood. According to Soka Gakkai (2002: 352), the purpose of teaching skillful means is to open the door of Buddha's wisdom to all living beings, to show the Buddha's wisdom to living beings, to cause living beings to awaken to Buddha's knowledge, and induce living beings to enter the path of Buddha's wisdom. Moreover, skillful means is a concept that emphasizes that practitioners can attain enlightenment using their own methods and techniques, depending on the situation. This means that even if the techniques, views, etc., are not "truth" in the best sense, it can be a valuable exercise to do or keep the view. That is, it can likewise bring practitioners closer to true enlightenment. Therefore, the practice of the skill to which it relates, the ability to adapt its message to an audience, is of great importance in the Pāli canon.<sup>8</sup>

#### Rational of Research and Its Importance

The idea of the SDP is fundamental to Mahāyāna Buddhism and is arguably one of the most popular. It mentions several essential teachings, such as the one vehicle and Buddha nature. Additionally, the SDP represents a sectarian harmony, wishing to bring all the dharma doors and the vehicles (*yāna*) to one source. The *Śravaka*, *Pratyekabuddha*, and *Bodhisattva* vehicles are the only means leading to the Buddha vehicle. So, there are no contradictions but only temporary means in the path of practice. To research the skillful means that the Buddha used in the SDP is one of the titles worthies of studying. Therefore, this research wants to focus on skillful means in the SDP because it is a significant concept in Mahāyāna *sūtras*, such as the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra* (VKN), *Madhyamakāśāstra* (MKŚ), and

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<sup>8</sup> Richard F. Gombrich (1997: 17): It is true that the term “*upāyakaṣālyā*,” translated as 'skill in means, is post-canonical, but the exercise of skill to which it refers, the ability to adapt one's message to the audience, is of enormous importance in the Pāli Canon."

*Vajracchedikāprajñāpāramitā* (VCP). Throughout, we can see that the Buddha used various skillful means to expound his dhamma to different audiences in many different ways, depending on the context, and their capacities, leading them to attain enlightenment and deliverance. Notably, in the SDP, skillful means are covered the entire text. The Buddha utilized skillful means through vivid examples, such as the firehouse, the lost son, the magical city, etc., to assist sentient beings in understanding one vehicle.

The research project will examine and study various skillful means through different examples that the Buddha implied in the *sūtra*. Even though *upāyakauśalya* was mentioned in many articles and books, such as *Skillful Means: A Concept in Mahāyāna Buddhism* by Michale Pye, *Skillful Means: The Heart of Buddhist Compassion* by John W. Schroeder, *The Skill in Means (upāyakauśalya) Sūtra*, translated by Mark Tatz, *On Skillful Means in the SDP of Yasutomo Nishi*, and *Literal Means and Hidden Meanings: A New Analysis of Skillful Means*, etc. Authors of those works and articles also clearly analyzed and explained the meaning of skillful means in various aspects. However, no work explores skillful means in the SDP in detail and compares it with other Mahāyāna *sūtras*. Therefore, this dissertation will examine deeper and more detailed skillful means and compare them with different texts.

Moreover, this research will analyze skillful means in various examples in the SDP and also through compassion (*karuṇā*) and wisdom (*prajñā*). Therefore, understanding the devices of the Buddha is one of the essential things to comprehend the Buddha's teachings. Without knowing the Buddha's implications, one cannot penetrate the compassion and wisdom of the Buddha. This is an exciting topic that the researcher wants to investigate.

### Objectives of Research

This research project focuses on skillful means in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*. The objectives of the current study are:

- First, to examine various aspects of skillful means that the Buddha utilized.
- To provide a comprehensive review of the Buddha's devices.

- To understand one vehicle that the Buddha implied through using skillful means in the SDP.
- To prove that the Buddha utilized skillful means only for the welfare of sentient beings.
- To demonstrate that skillful means that Buddha used only provisional devices to attain the final goal.
- To point out that all sentient beings can obtain Buddhahood.

### Nature and Scope of Research

Skillful means is a central term in Buddhist literature, where it refers to methods skilfully employed by Buddhas and bodhisattvas to assist sentient beings toward enlightenment. Therefore, the nature of this research is to characterize problems relating to skillful means that the Buddha used in the SDP. In the same way, this research will point out new thoughts for a reader about skillful means by the methods of analyzing and comparing through various examples in the SDP.

This study exclusively delves into the realm of skillful means as presented in the SDP, wherein the Buddha eloquently expounds on the reasons behind employing skillful means to convey his profound dhamma. Furthermore, this dissertation thoroughly explores the application of skillful means, tracing its development from early Buddhist *Suttas*, namely: *Saṅgītisutta*, *Kalamasutta*, *Upālisutta*, *Alagaddūpamasutta*, and so forth up to the Mahāyāna *sūtras*. By investigating the evolution of skillful means in alignment with the concepts presented in early Buddhist and Mahāyāna *sūtra*, this research aims to shed light on its transformative progression.

### Research Method and Steps in Research

#### Research Methodology

When selecting this topic, the researcher looked for many different sources concerning this research. Having collected various data, the researcher will do the textual study and utilize the analysis and comparative methods for this research project.

- Analysis method: Based on sources, analyze how the Buddha used skillful means in his teaching.

- Comparative method: Compare with early Buddhist texts to find similarities and dissimilarities.

#### Steps in Research

- Study the term *upāyākauśalya*
- Study and analysis of the various references of the term *upāyākauśalya* in different Buddhist texts
- Comparative study of the skillful means used by the Buddha in the early Buddhist texts and Mahāyāna *sūtras*.
- Explain why the Buddha used skillful means to expound his dhamma.
- Analysis and explain examples in the SDP to demonstrate the skillful means of the Buddha.
- Study the compassion (*karuṇā*) and wisdom (*prajñā*) of the Buddha by his skillful means.

To sum up, skillful means are used to guide people and bring them to enlightenment. The highly valued concept of means in Mahayana Buddhism, especially in the SDP, is embodied in the second chapter, "appropriate means." Because the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have cleverly devised the means to bring people to salvation, according to the Lotus Sutra, the three vehicles of *Śrāvaka*, *Pratyekabuddha*, and *Bodhisattva* are temporary teachings and means designed to lead people to one. The chariot of the Buddha, or the dharma, leads people to Buddhahood. The teachings that directly reveal the truth of enlightenment are called true teachings. In contrast, teachings explained according to people's ability and as a temporary means to bring people to the truth are called timely or provisional teachings.

#### Literature Review

The concept of *upāyākauśalya* (skillful means), has been a prominent theme explored by both Mahāyāna authors and Western scholars. Numerous books and articles have been written on this topic, some of which are highlighted below:

Literal Means and Hidden Meanings: A New Analysis of Skillful Means by Asaf Federman

In this article, Federman examines the literal and hidden meanings of skillful means by analyzing how the Buddha employed various devices in early Buddhist *sūtras* and Mahāyāna *sūtras*. The author explains that the Buddha used practical tools like rafts, drops, and pieces of dry grass to help sentient beings overcome attachment, representing the literal meaning. Furthermore, the author explores the profound implications underlying the means used by the Buddha in Mahāyāna *sūtras*, particularly in relation to the path leading to the ultimate vehicle. Federman illustrates this through vivid examples found in the SDP and other Mahāyāna *sūtras*.

Truth, Deception, and Skillful Means in the Lotus Sūtra by John Schroeder

Schroeder's article delves into the central teaching of skillful means within the Mahāyāna *sūtras*, focusing specifically on the problematic relationship between truth, deception, and skillful means as presented in the SDP. The author explores the thoughts of Mahāyāna luminaries like Nāgārjuna, Vasubandhu, and Vimālakīrti regarding the interplay between skillful means, wisdom, and Buddhist practice.

The Concept of Upāya (方便) in Mahāyāna Buddhist Philosophy. Japanese Journal of Religious Studies by Matsunaga, Daigan, and Alicia Matsunaga.

This article emphasizes the inseparability of the concept of skillful means from the notion of the Buddha, as it is through skillful means that the Buddha effectively communicates with unenlightened beings. The authors also trace the theoretical foundation of skillful means as a crucial aspect of enlightenment in Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakārikā* philosophy, which significantly influenced Mahāyāna Buddhism.

*Upāya*: Skill Means by Piya Tan

Tan explores the skillful means employed by the Buddha during his discourses, encompassing aspects such as the Buddha's great compassion, monasticism, the historical context, and the early audience. The author categorizes skillful means based on their manifestations through body, speech, and mind. Additionally, Tan discusses

the Mahāyāna perspectives on skillful means found in the SDP and explores the views of notable Mahāyāna scholars like Peter N Gregory, Edward Conze, and Michael Pye.

#### Skillful Means: A Concept in Mahayana Buddhism by Michael Pye

Pye's book provides an interpretation of skillful means from various perspectives, including skillful Buddhist means, the terminological challenges associated with skillful means, and the initial teachings, stories, and mythology related to skillful means in the SDP. The author also examines skillful means in the *Vimalakīrtinideśa* and pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism.

These works collectively highlight the expression of skillful means through both literal and hidden meanings, which aim to guide unenlightened beings toward the ultimate goal. They emphasize the compassionate nature of the Buddha and illustrate skillful means through stories involving the Buddha, his disciples, and Bodhisattvas. Notably, no existing literature specifically addresses the topic of skillful means in the SDP. Hence, this dissertation intends to explore this aspect



## Chapter 2: An Overview of *Upāyakauśalya* (Skillful Means)

The Buddha employs the term skillful means in early Buddhism, but it is understood in the narrow sense of parallels or abandoning attachment to attain nirvana. However, this concept will be more comprehensively utilized and understood in Mahāyāna *sūtras*. To be more obvious, this chapter will interpret the idea of skillful means through three main points: Analysis of the meaning of the term *upāyakauśalya*, the classification of skills and their meanings, and the early and late usage of skillful means.

### Analysis of the Meaning of the Term *Upāyakauśalya*

*Upāyakauśalya* is a central term in Buddhist hermeneutics, theology, and ethics, particularly in the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition; the skillful means is not only used by Buddhas but also used by bodhisattvas to help sentient beings attain enlightenment. Although this term is commonly used in Mahāyāna Buddhism, it is also employed by the Buddha many times in early Buddhism. Richard F. Gombrich (2006: 17) argued that the Buddha's skillful means tend to be considered a feature of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Although the term *upayakauśalya* is translated as skillful means in the Mahāyāna Buddhism, but it is also employed and found in the Pāli Canon as well. However, the exercise of skill to which it refers, the ability to adapt one's message to the audience, is of enormous importance in the Pāli Canon.

The Buddha always teaches the doctrine in many different ways because sentient beings have different abilities and levels to understand dharma. In addition, the Buddhas recognized the need to respond to the world from various philosophical and religious perspectives appropriate for his disciples and context. Therefore, the Buddha skillfully established his teaching to benefit the unenlightened sentient beings, and they should recognize the dharma are merely a means to attain the highest knowledge, not an end in itself, like a raft abandoned on the shore by a man who has crossed a stream and no longer requires it (MN 22.130). In Theravāda Buddhism, *upāyakauśalya* often refers to techniques used by teachers for their students. However, the Buddha is noted

as a teacher who guides living beings, adapts his message to the abilities of his audience, and encourages them to spread his teachings in many methods.

The term *upāyakauśalya*<sup>9</sup> (Pāli: *upāyakosalla*) is divided into *upāya* and *kauśalya*. It has two meanings: a narrow meaning and a broad meaning.

a) In the narrow sense: "*upāya*" refers to method or approach, and "*kauśalya*" means convenience or suitability. Skillful means refer to the method or approach that is convenient and suitable for achieving a purpose or desire.

b) In the broad sense: In the doctrines describing the profound and marvelous realm of the Buddha's enlightenment, true realization can only be known through direct experience. Moreover, all modes of presentation, including language and form, and even the birth of the Buddha himself, are considered skillful means. In a broader sense, all the actions of the Buddha, from his birth in the Lumbini Grove to his enlightenment are considered skillful means.

According to dictionaries, the terminology of *upāyakauśalya* has various meanings. R. L. Turner (2008: 108), *upāya* means stratagem and means, T.W. Rhys Davids and William Stede (2007: 149), *upāya* is way and expedient, and Monier Williams (2005: 215), *upāya* means expedient, method, and stratagem. *kauśalya* or *kuśala* means appropriate, fitting, profitable, salutary, healthy, well, skillful, expert, and expedient (Macdonell 1954: 71). So *upāyakauśalya* is called skillful means, skill in means, skill in devices, it also has the meaning "skill in expedients" (Edgerton 2004: 146). Like Sanskrit words, the Chinese translation of *upāyakauśalya* is *fangbian shanqiao*, *fang* means method, mode, and plan, and *bian* means convenient or expedient method. So *fangbian shanqiao* means convenient to the place, or situation, suited to the condition, opportune, appropriate (William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous 154: 2005). *Fangbian shanqiao* is also pronounced in Japanese as *hōbenzengyō* (Giles 1892: 194). Michael Pye (1978: 14) opines that the words *fang-bian* and *hōben* look the same in pronunciation and written form, but it does not mean that they are entirely the same in

<sup>9</sup> Franklin Edgerton (2004: 146): There are two forms: *upāyakuśala* (also see Mv.i.133. 14) or *upāyakauśalya*.

language history. Andrew K. Whitehead (2014: 127) states that the Japanese term *hōben* is derived from two Chinese divisions (fang-bian): *hō* and *ben*. *Hō* is translated as method, means, or, in certain specific Buddhist texts, as dharma. *Ben* is translated as expediency, use, function, or skillful. Besides, *hōben* is translated in various meanings such as skill in means, skillful means, expediency in means, expedient means, dharma function, dharma use, etc.

The terminology of *upāyakauśalya* emphasizes the connection between the unenlightened state of sentient beings and Buddhism's ultimate purpose, intention, and meaning; it interprets the definition of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Therefore, skillful means are not used only to convey the Buddha's teachings but are the device of bodhisattvas to help sentient beings reach nirvana (Pye 1978: 15).

Table 1: The Meaning of Skillful Means According to Dictionaries

Sources	<i>Upāya</i>	<i>Kauśalya or kuśala</i>	<i>Upāyakauśalya</i>
R. L. Turner (2008)	stratagem, means (pg. 108)	right, proper, competent, clever, healthy, prosperous, well-being (pg.173)	does not mention
T.W. Rhys Davids and William (2007)	way, expedient (pg. 149)	clever, skillful, expert, good, right, meritorious (pg. 223)	clever in resource (pg.149)
Monier Williams (2005)	coming near, approach, arrival, a mean, or expedient, way, stratagem, craft, artifice (pg. 215)	welfare, well-being, prosperity (pg. 318)	skill in the choice of means (pg.1322)

Jeffrey Hopkins (2015)	Tib. <i>Thabs</i> : method, efficacious, <sup>10</sup> means, and techniques (pg. 295)	Tib. <i>mkhas</i> : wise, skilled, proficient (pg.59)	Tib. <i>Thabs la mkhas pa</i> : Skill in means Skill in method (pg.297)
Macdonell (1954: 71)	Approach, means, expedient, stratagem, device, craft (pg. 54)	cause due to welfare, skill, experience (pg.71)	does not mention
Rober E. Buswell Jr (2014: 3057)	stratagem, method <sup>11</sup> (pg. 3056)	Does not mention separately	skillful means, skill-in-means, or expedient means <sup>12</sup> (3057)
Franklin Edgerton (2004)	means (pg.146)	welfare (pg.196)	skill in expedients, able management, diplomacy (pg.146)
William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous (2005)	<i>fang</i> : method, mode, plan (pg.154)	<i>bian</i> : convenient or expedient method (pg.154)	<i>fangbian</i> <sup>13</sup> <i>shanqiao</i> convenient to the place, or situation, suited to the

<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey Hopkins, *Tibetan Sanskrit Dictionary*, 2015, 295: *ngo bo nyid sku thobs pa'i thabs*: an efficacious means of attaining a Nature Truth

<sup>11</sup> (1) as a synonym for “skillful means” (*upāyakaśālyā*) (2) as a general term for the activities necessary for the attainment of Buddhahood (3) as one of the two essential components of the path, along with “wisdom” (*prajñā*). In this latter sense, method refers to a bodhisattva's actions on behalf of all sentient beings, and (4) In Buddhist Tantra, the superiority of the esoteric path of the *vajrayāna* over the exoteric path in bringing about buddhahood is often attributed to the superior stratagems or methods set forth in the Tantras, compared to those found in the *Sūtras*.

<sup>12</sup> A term used to refer to the extraordinary pedagogical skills of the buddhas and advanced bodhisattvas; indeed, *upāyakaśālyā* is listed as one of the ten perfections (*pāramitā*) mastered on the bodhisattva path.

<sup>13</sup> Micael Pye (1978: 17): *Kumārajīva* translated *fanbian* li (power of skillful means). This term lies between ‘skill in means’ which he had before him, and ‘power of means’ which seems a little too vague. If ‘skillful means’ is acceptable for Kumārajīva *fang-pien*, then ‘power of skillful means’ follows naturally for *fang-pien-li*. But it should always be remembered that including the ‘skillful’ component depends on understanding Kumārajīva’s terms in their overall Buddhist context from the Sanskrit texts to contemporary Japanese explanations, rather than translating it as if it were just a miscellaneous Chinese word.

			condition, opportune, appropriate (pg.154)
Andrew K. Whitehead (2014: 127)	<i>hō</i> : method, means	<i>ben</i> : expediency, use, function, or skillful	<i>Hōbenzengyō</i> skill in means, skillful means, expediency in means, expedient means, dharma function, dharma use.

### Classification of Skills and Their Meanings

Although the term skillful means is widely utilized in Mahāyāna Buddhism, it is also found in many *sūtras* in the Pāli canon, in which the Buddha mentioned different kinds of skillful means. This can be seen in the *Saṅgīti Sutta*.<sup>14</sup>

*Āyākosalla*: Skill in growth

*Apāyākosalla*: Skill in decline

*Upāyākosalla*: Skill in means

The *Vibhaṅga* and its commentary (*Sammohavinodanī*) give more details below:

*Āyākosalla* (skill in improvement): It brings to mind that unwholesome states that have not occurred do not cause them to happen, and unwholesome states that have occurred, abandon them, and wholesome states have not arisen; cause them to appear, the wholesome states have occurred; develop them. This is called the skill in growth.<sup>15</sup>

*Apāyākosalla* (skill in decline): It brings to mind that wholesome states have not arisen, do not cause them to appear, and wholesome states that have occurred abandon

<sup>14</sup> DN. 33.10. *Tīṇi kosallāni - āyākosallaṃ, apāyākosallaṃ, upāyākosallaṃ.*

<sup>15</sup> Vbh-a.3. 771.

*Tattha katamaṃ āyākosallaṃ? “ime dhamme manasikaroto anuppannā ceva akusalā dhammā na uppajjanti, uppannā ca akusalā dhammā pahīyanti. ime vā panime dhamme manasikaroto anuppannā ceva kusalā dhammā uppajjanti, uppannā ca kusalā dhammā bhiyyobhāvāya vepullāya bhāvanāya pāripūriyā saṃvattanti”ti — idaṃ vuccati “āyākosallaṃ.”*

them. Unwholesome states have not arisen, cause them to happen, and wholesome states have arisen; develop them. This is called skill in decline.<sup>16</sup>

*Upāyakosalla* (skill in means): All the wisdom in the standards (*upāya*) is a skill in means.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, the Dictionary of Buddhism of Soka Gakkai (2002: 1366) defines the term “*upāyakauśalya*” in the term of “expedient means,” which is interpreted by T’ien-t’ai (538–597) in the words and phrases of the Lotus Sutra.

- a) Adaptations of the Law expedient means (*hōyū-hōben*): The teaching is taught according to the people's abilities.
- b) Expedient means that it can lead one in (*nōtsū-hōben*): It shows the teachings the Buddha preached as a gateway to the actual teachings.
- c) Secret and excellent expedient means (*himyō-hōben*):<sup>18</sup> The doctrine expresses the truth. From the Lotus Sutra's point of view, all basic teachings are contained in the sutra as partial truths.

Therefore, in contrast to his first two means, the third category is not only a means of leading people to the truth but also the truth itself.

<sup>16</sup> Vbh-a. 3. 771.

*Tattha katamaṃ āyakosallaṃ? “ime dhamme manasikaroto anuppannā ceva akusalā dhammā na uppajjanti, uppannā ca akusalā dhammā pahīyanti. ime vā panime dhamme manasikaroto anuppannā ceva kusalā dhammā uppajjanti, uppannā ca kusalā dhammā bhīyyobhāvāya vepullāya bhāvanāya pāripūriyā saṃvattanti”ti — idaṃ vuccati “āyakosallaṃ”*

<sup>17</sup> Vbh-a. 3. 771. *Sabbāpi tatrūpāyā paññā upāyakosallaṃ.*

<sup>18</sup> Soka Gakkai (2002: 1366): This expedient means indicates that the Buddha concealed, or kept secret, the truth for the first forty-two years of his preaching life, expounding it only in the Lotus Sutra. When viewed from the standpoint of the Lotus Sutra, however, all the provisional teachings are included in the sutra as partial explanations of the truth. This inclusion is termed “wonderful” (*myō*). Unlike the first two expedient means, the third category is not only a means that leads people to the truth but also the truth itself.

**Table 2: Summary - Categories of Skills and Their Meanings**

Categories of Skillful means	Its Meaning
<i>Āyākosalla</i>	Skill in growth
<i>Apāyākosalla</i>	Skill in decline
<i>Upāyākosalla</i>	Skill in means
<i>Hōyū-hōben</i>	Adaptations of the law expedient means
<i>Hōtsū-hōben</i>	Expedient means that it can lead one in
<i>Himyō-hōben</i>	Secret and excellent expedient means

## Early and Later Usage of Skillful Means

### Skillful Means in Early Buddhist Usage

#### 2.3.1.1 *The Request of Brahmā Sahampati as Skillful Means*

After enlightenment, the Blessed One didn't want to deliver what he enlightened because the dharma that he realized is profound and deep; it is tough to comprehend. But after the request of Brahmā Sahampati and observing the nature of living beings, seeing that although some people did not have enough wisdom to understand the dharma, some who could receive it, such as lotus flowers in a pond, some are blue lotuses, red lotuses, white lotuses, and a few red and blue and white lotuses are born in the water, grow in the water, do not rise above the water but thrive while altogether immersed; a few blue or red or white lotuses are born in the water, grow in the water and reach the surface of the water; a few blue or red or white lotuses are born in the water, increase in the water, and stand rising out of the water, undefiled by the water.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> MN. 26. 6. *Pāsārāsuttam*:

*Seyyathāpi nāma uppaliniyaṃ vā paduminiyaṃ vā puṇḍarīkiniyaṃ vā appekaccāni uppalāni vā padumāni vā puṇḍarīkāni vā udake jātāni udake saṃvaddhāni udakānuggatāni antonimuggaposīni, appekaccāni uppalāni vā padumāni vā puṇḍarīkāni vā udake jātāni udake saṃvaddhāni udakānuggatāni samodakam thitāni, appekaccāni uppalāni vā p*

Having seen this, the Buddha accepted the request of Brahmā Sahampati by saying the verse as follows:

Open are the doors to the deathless

For those who would hear! Give up the troublesome and ancestor worship

Perceiving the trouble, Oh Brahmā, I did not speak

The refined, sublime Dharma among humans.<sup>20</sup>

The fact that the Buddha did not desire to preach his dharma after attaining enlightenment and waited for Brahma Sahampati's request is considered a skillful means in the initial time of teaching dharma. That request implies that this society needed the dharma to reach its benefits. Hence, the dharma will be preached to those who are hungry. When the Buddha decided to turn the wheel of dharma to the world, it needed skillful means to make this dharma be understood in all various levels of society. Moreover, He enforced this action as a skillful means to imply that sentient beings worship Brahmin; they also could worship the Buddha, and on account of this, Brahma can produce their enlightened mind.

#### *The Buddha as a Skillful Teacher*

In early Buddhism, the Buddha was regarded as the ultimate skillful teacher who used various methods to help his students to achieve enlightenment. The Buddha's teachings are based on the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the Three Universal Truths, which he presented in different ways to suit the capacities and interests of his listeners. The Buddha also used a variety of teaching methods, such as sermons, debates, dialogues, and stories. He often taught through stories or parables, which conveyed profound and subtle teachings in a simple and accessible way. Numerous

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*adumāni vā puṇḍarīkāni vā udake jātāni udake saṃvaḍḍhāni udakaṃ accuggamma ʔhitāni anupalittāni udakena; evameva kho ahaṃ, bhikkhave, buddhacakkhunā lokaṃ volokento addasaṃ satte apparajakkhe mahārajakkhe, tikkhin driye mudindriye, svākāre dvākāre, suviññāpaye duiññāpaye, appekacce paralokavajjabhayadassāvīne viharante, appekacce na paralokavajjabhayadassāvīne viharante.*

<sup>20</sup> MN. 26. 6. *Pāsārāsī Sutta: Atha khvāhaṃ, bhikkhave, brahmānaṃ sahapatiṃ gāthāya paccabhāsiṃ: apārutā tesāṃ amatassa dvārā, ye sotavanto pamuñcantu saddhaṃ, vihiṃsasaññī paḡuṇaṃ na bhāsiṃ, dhammaṃ paṇītaṃ manujesu brahme’’ti.*



examples in the Pali Canon illustrate the Buddha's skillful means as a teacher. Here are a few examples:

1. The *Kalamasutta* (AN 3. 65): In this sutta, the Buddha teaches the people of the town of Kesaputta, who are confused by the conflicting teachings of different religious teachers. Instead of providing a definitive answer, the Buddha encourages them to rely on their own experience and reason to determine what is true and wholesome.
2. The *Upālisutta* (AN 10. 99): In this sutta, the Buddha debates with a wandering ascetic named Upāli, who holds different views on the nature of the self and the path to liberation. The Buddha skillfully refutes Upali's arguments by using logical reasoning and experiential evidence.
3. The *Cūḷamāluṅkyasutta* (MN 63. 427): In this sutta, the Buddha teaches the monk *Māluṅkyaputta*, who was plagued by doubts and perplexities regarding various metaphysical questions. The Buddha advises him to focus on mindfulness and mental cultivation rather than getting caught up in speculative theories and concepts.
4. The *Mahāsaccakasutta* (MN 36. 237): In this sutta, the Buddha recounts his own experience of seeking enlightenment and overcoming various obstacles, including doubts, fear, and temptation. He demonstrates his mastery of skillful means by using his example to inspire and guide his listeners.
5. The *Nandasutta* (AN 8.9): In this sutta, the Buddha used skillful means to pursue Nanda to become a monk by utilizing his superpower to bring venerable Nanda to heaven to see the damsels. Having seen damsels, he tried to practice possessing them and finally became an Arhat.<sup>21</sup>
6. The *Gopakamoggallānasutta* (MN 108. 7):<sup>22</sup> In this sutta, Moggallana confides in the Buddha that he is struggling with his meditation practice and cannot achieve deep concentration due to various mental hindrances, such as restlessness, doubt,

<sup>21</sup> It also can be seen in the canto fifth of *Saundarananda* of Aśvaghosa.

<sup>22</sup> MN 108. 83. *Bhavaṃ gotamo anekapariyāyena jhānakathaṃ kathesi.*

and worry. The Buddha then employs a variety of skillful means to help Moggallana overcome these obstacles and progress on the path of liberation.

These suttas demonstrate that skillful means, characterized by adaptability and tailored guidance, are not exclusive to the Mahāyāna tradition. The Buddha skillfully employs different approaches and teachings to meet the diverse needs of individuals, emphasizing personal experience, logical reasoning, mindfulness, and the cultivation of wholesome qualities on the path to liberation.

#### *Skillful Means as Just a Name*

The term skillful means appears many times in the Pāli canon, such as in the *Saṅgītisutta* (DN 33), the venerable Sāriputta gave this discourse; he mentioned the decline of the nude of the Nigantha sect. It was caused by a quarrel between the disciples after the death of the master of this sect. He preached dharma to help the monks as a basis for their practice, skillful reading and recitation, and practicemedicine to cause the dharma last long. In this discourse, the term skillful means just a concept, such as skill in improvement, talent in decline, and skill in means.

Furthermore, The term skillful means is also found in the *Adhigamasutta*.<sup>23</sup> The Buddha advised that a monk should develop six skills to acquire wholesome qualities that he still needs to reach to strengthen wholesome qualities that have already been obtained. They are: (1) a bhikkhu is skilled in gain, (2) skilled in loss, (3) skilled in means; (4) he generates a desire for the achievement of wholesome qualities not yet achieved; (5) he guards wholesome qualities already achieved; (6) he fulfills his tasks through persistent effort. As mentioned above, the skillful means here is not explicitly explained, but it provides us with the concept of skillful means that the Buddha employed in the early stage.

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<sup>23</sup> SN 6. 79.

*Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu āyakusalo ca hoti, apāyakusalo ca hoti, upāyakusalo ca hoti, anadhigatānaṃ kusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ, adhigamāya chandaṃ janeti, adhigate kusale dhamme ārakkhati, sātaccakiriyāya sampādeti.*

*Skillful Means Just a Boatman*

In early usage, skillful means is known as an instrument to help many people cross over the river. It is said to be like an oar and rudder in rough water. This is mentioned in the *Nāvā sutta* (SN 22. 101)<sup>24</sup> as follows:

“As one who does on a strong boat embarks,  
furnished with oars and rudder complete,  
as skilled in the means, with wisdom as well,  
that one can take so many others across.”

The exciting thing in this verse is the metaphor with the boat as an expedient means. The boatman is known as one who skillfully uses the device to help others cross over by using the oar and rudder as the Buddha assists sentient beings with his skill teaching. Here, however, the passage only mentions the function of the means; it has yet to be elucidated or developed in terms of the philosophies or methods of practice.

Another instance is found in the *Alagaddūpamasutta* (MN 22. 130), in which the Buddha used the parable of a raft. A man who comes to a river and sees a great stream of water desires to cross over that other side safely, but there is no bridge or boat, then he takes branches and a raft to pass over another side. When he reached another shore, he should leave it behind to proceed. Likewise, the Buddha states that dharma is only for passing over, not for grasping; practitioners should eliminate the mental object and wrong views by understanding the raft parable.<sup>25</sup>

Through the two examples above, we understand that the meaning of skillful means in the Pāli cannon is used in the narrower and loose pedagogical sense. The dharma is

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<sup>24</sup> *yathāpi nāvaṃ daḷhamāruhitvā, piyen’ arittena samaṅgibhūto, so tāraye tattha bahūpi aññe, tatrūpāyaññū kusalo mutīmā.*

<sup>25</sup> Rahula (1974: 11): The Buddha makes a similar remark regarding “dependent origination” as follows: “O, Bhikkhu, even this view, which is so pure and so clear, if you cling to it, then you fondle, if you treasure it, if you are attached to it, then you do not understand that the teaching is similar to a raft, which is for crossing over, and not for getting hold of it.”

just a provisional device helping people overcome the shore; it is not a perfect way to lead people to the end. This is what John Hick (1991: 141–142) called the “narrow sense of *upāya*”:

“In its narrower meaning, it presupposes that a teacher knows some truth which is to be communicated to others so that they may come to see it for themselves, and the skillful means are the devices the teacher uses to do this. Thus, in the Pāli scriptures, the Buddha constantly uses parables and asks skilfully leading questions.”

We recognize that the term skillful means has been present in the *suttas* of the Pāli canon, heard and practiced by the Buddha’s disciples. The Buddha is noted as a teacher who skillfully utilized various methods to deliver his dharma to sentient beings. Because of this method, many non-Buddhists entered religious life. It is one of Buddha’s successes in subduing Orthodox at that time.

### 2.3. 2 Skillful Means in Mahāyāna’s Usage

#### *Skillful Means and Three Vehicles*

In the SDP, the dharma is considered an expert means that the Buddha applied to convey the concept of three vehicles leading to Buddhahood. First, the Buddha wants to show all sentient beings that they are also full of knowledge and potential enlightenment like the Buddha or to prove the dharma and discipline of the Buddha without any distinction; it is always equal to all, just like the rain pours down spontaneously and pervasively. Therefore, the Buddha utilized various means to deliver this thought to all beings because its meaning is profound; sentient beings cannot understand. If he expounded dharma in person, ordinary people would not understand what Buddha wanted to imply. Therefore, to make it easily understood, the Buddha illustrated it through vivid parables, such as the example of a burning house (chapter 3), the poor son and wealthy father (chapter 4), medicinal herbs (chapter 5), phantom city (chapter 7), a treasure in Garment (chapter 8), and a skilled physician (chapter 16). Therefore, here we see that dharma is noted as the capable device that the Buddha used to convey his message to the audients. Keown (1998: 202) says, "In the development of the concept is found in the SDP, which crystallizes and makes explicit

the notion of skillful means understood as a methodology for the transmission of the dharma.”

#### *Skillful Means and Bodhisattva's Practice*

The VKN attempt to explain an alternative way of practicing Buddhism to monastic life. In other words, the householder Vimalakīrti points out a way of practicing Buddhism in a householder's life that is both unbounded and restricted in its scope. For example, Vimalakīrti visits brothels, drinks, gambling, and dens and converses with harem girls, but his mind does not indulge in that sensual pleasure. Although he is a layman, having a wife, and son, he can practice dharma and attain the highest knowledge in this very life. In addition, this sūtra illustrates that to be fulfilled using skillful means, a bodhisattva has to combine with compassion and wisdom because skillful means are devoid of compassion and wisdom; the actions of the bodhisattva become bondage.

#### *Skillful Means and Perfection of Wisdom*

In the VCP the skillful means of bodhisattvas are to realize the perfection of knowledge (*prajñāpāramitā*), to attain enlightenment, and to assist sentient beings to be free from suffering in the cycle of *saṃsāra*. If a bodhisattva donates, it must be directed towards seeking wisdom for enlightenment and sharing its merits with sentient beings and by skillful means, when the bodhisattva performs an act of generosity, they also serve the remaining *pāramitās* to fulfill their perfection of wisdom (Pye 1978: 108–109). Besides, the *sūtra* also emphasizes the Buddha's unique ability to respond to suffering with appropriate words, gestures, and teachings, using various medicinal aids to reduce immeasurable suffering. Therefore, the Buddha is known as a physician who can cure multiple diseases worldwide with wisdom, compassion, and the skills of the means.

*Skillful Means and Normative Ethics*

In the *Upāyakaṣālyasūtra*, the concept of skillful means is understood in the sense of virtuous dedication from virtuous deeds such as giving donations for the benefit of all sentient beings and ultimate enlightenment. The sutras also explain how unwholesome acts, such as sexual misconduct, become virtues when skillfully performed by bodhisattvas. A bodhisattva who is good at means to drive sentient beings to hell and born in the world of Brahmā. This *sūtra* also narrates a story of a young woman who fell in love with the Buddha and would kill herself if the Buddha didn't accept her. Out of compassion, the Buddha broke his vow of religious life and had a sexual act with her (Tatz 1904: 34). Another story in the same *sūtra* tells that in the previous life, the Buddha murdered a man to prevent him from killing 500 others. This demonstrates that for the benefit of all sentient beings, a bodhisattva can break his moral conduct to save them free from suffering. Furthermore, the *sūtra* also discussed cases of the Buddha appearing to suffer from afflictions (headaches, backaches, being impaled by thorns, etc.) previously attributed to his previous vices.

Throughout, we see that the term skillful means is employed in Mahāyāna *sūtras* in the broader sense; it is not limited to a loose pedagogical sense in which the Buddha used skill in means only to deliver his message most appropriately, but should not be attached when the goal is reached.

However, according to the Mahāyāna's view, the Buddha utilizes skill in means as a provisional method in the specific condition of unenlightened beings. The skillful means is used in Mahāyāna *sūtras* as a motivation or physician; although that means can be deceit or a white lie, it does not harm anyone; it just motivates sentient beings free from their attachment to sensual pleasure to get actual welfare through various means of the Buddha. Therefore, skillful means in the Mahāyāna *sūtras* has become widely used and has been charged with a unique and novel meaning; as John Hick (1991: 142) states: "In its broader sense, however, the concept expresses a profound insight, excitingly illuminating or deeply disturbing according to one's presuppositions, into the nature of Buddhism, and perhaps also into the nature of religion generally."

This can be seen as a remarkable similarity between the means in the Pāli canon and the Mahāyāna *sūtras*. From the preceding, it can be concluded that the term skillful means appeared in the Pāli canon even though not as widely and systematically developed as in the Mahāyāna *sūtras*, it already covers the core points of this thought, such as the three types of skillful means mentioned above.

Table 3: Skillful Means are Mentioned in Pāli Suttas and Mahāyāna *sūtras*

Sūtras	Contents
Pāli Canon	
<i>Sanḅītisutta</i> (DN 33.10)	Three kinds of skillful means
<i>Kalamasutta</i> (AN 3.65)	The Buddha encourages the people of Kesaputta city to rely on their own experience
<i>Upālisutta</i> (AN 10.99)	The Buddha debates with a wandering ascetic Upāli
<i>Cūḷamālunkyasutta</i> (MN 63.427)	The Buddha teaches mindfulness and mental cultivation to the monk <i>Malunkyaputta</i> .
<i>Mahāsaccakasutta</i> (MN 36. 237)	The Buddha uses his example to inspire and guide his listeners.
<i>Nandasutta</i> (AN 8.9)	The Buddha used skillful means to pursue Nanda to become a monk.
<i>Gopakamoggallānasutta</i> (MN 108.7)	The Buddha uses skillful means to help Moggallana attain meditation.
<i>Adhigamasutta</i> (AN 6.79)	Six skills to acquire wholesome qualities
<i>Nāvāsutta</i> (SN 22.101)	Parable of boatman
<i>Alagaddūpamasutta</i> (MN 22.130)	Parable of a raft
<i>Pāsarāsisutta</i> (MN. 26. 6)	Parable of the lotus-pond
Mahāyāna <i>sūtras</i>	
<i>Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra</i>	Emphasized three vehicles to realize the Buddhahood.
<i>Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra</i>	Emphasized the bodhisattva's practice in the householder's life, in compassion, and wisdom.
<i>Vajracchedikaprajñāpāramitāsūtra</i>	Emphasizes the importance of transcending attachments and conceptual thinking to reach ultimate liberation.
<i>Upāyakauśalyasūtra</i>	Emphasize a vital aspect of the bodhisattva's practice, and normative ethics.

### Chapter 3: The Usage of *Upāyakauśalya* Through Parables

The skillful means used by the Buddha and bodhisattvas in the Mahāyāna texts is considered an incredible instrument in preaching the Buddha doctrine. Like, the SDP Buddha used skillful means through vivid examples.

This chapter will analyze skillful means through various parables such as the burning house, the poor son and his wealthy father, medical herbs, a treasure in the garment, a phantom city, and a skilled physician.

#### Burning House and Medicinal Herbs

One of the main points of the SDP is three vehicles;<sup>26</sup> the Buddha employed parables to illustrate the doctrine of three vehicles to all sentient beings. The burning house and medicinal herbs are the parables that best describe the concept of the three vehicles.<sup>27</sup> Chapter 3 (Kern 2002: 60) describes a wealthy man with many properties, treasures, and his beloved sons. His house had only one door and was burning, while his children indulged in games inside the firehouse and didn't recognize anything. To rescue his sons from that unsafe place, the man used many ways to draw his sons out. Then he lured his children with nice and attractive carts, such as bullocks, goat, and deer carts. Hearing so, children came out of that dangerous place. However, he gave them only a bullock cart<sup>28</sup> when escaping from that firehouse safely.

<sup>26</sup> Soka Gakkai (2002: 939): The Lotus Sutra teaches that these three vehicles are not ends in themselves but means to lead people to the one vehicle, which unifies and refines the three vehicle teachings.

<sup>27</sup> 1) *Śrāvakayāna* (the vehicle of the disciple): The vehicle of disciples indicates the teachings that lead the listener to attain the state of arhat by awakening them to the four noble truths 2) *Pratyekabuddhayāna* (vehicle of the Solitary Buddhas): It indicates the teachings that lead practitioners to obtain insight into the causal relationship through the dependent origination (*pratityasamuppāda*) or by observing the changes of all phenomena in the natural world 3) *Bodhisattvayāna* (vehicle of the Bodhisattvas): The bodhisattva vehicle leads bodhisattvas to near-perfect enlightenment and perfect enlightenment through the practice of the six perfections.

<sup>28</sup> Kern (2002:75): This car is made of seven precious substances, provided with benches, hung with a multitude of small bells, lofty, adorned with rare and beautiful jewels, embellished with jewel wreaths, decorated with garlands of



In this *sūtra*, the rich man represents Buddha, the burning house is seen as a metaphor for the world of suffering and ignorance, the children represent sentient beings caught up in worldly desires and attachments, and three chariots represent three vehicles. Out of the three chariots, the goat car represents *Śrāvakayāna*, the deer car represents *Pratyekabuddhayāna*, and the bullock car represents *Bodhisattvayāna*. Finally, the children came out from the firehouse, implying that sentient beings, based on the guidance of the three chariots, were free from the three realms to enter into *nirvāṇa*.

As mentioned above, the Buddha, like the father, uses skillful means to motivate and inspire beings to leave the world of suffering and attain liberation. The promise of the rare and valuable carts represents the Buddha's teachings, designed to appeal to beings of different capacities and help them attain liberation. The Buddha used the symbol of three chariots to demonstrate three vehicles as a provisional means to achieve one vehicle. Because he recognizes that the minds of sentient beings are still poor, it is not possible to immediately speak of the one vehicle, like the wealthy householder who lured his children out of the firehouse with three kinds of various chariots.

Another important thing that needs to be discussed is that the wealthy householder is the paradigm for the Buddha, and the Buddha is just the mind. This implies that the Buddha's mind and the mind of sentient beings are not different, so all sentient beings have sufficient possibilities and conditions to reach the final fruition of Buddhahood. Still, because of ignorance, they have to wander in the cycle of the *saṃsāra*.

Another parable discusses medicinal herbs mentioned in Chapter 5 (Kern 2002: 118). The story narrates a remarkable universality, including mountains and hills, caves and fields, trees, and medicinal herbs with many green trees and colors. When there is heavy rain, it pours down to cover the entire plants and universe without expecting anything in return. All medicinal herbs, even the ones with tiny roots, branches, stems, and leaves; the ones with medium roots, medium components, and medium stems; as well as the medicinal herbs with extensive roots, large branches, large trunks, and large leaves, depending on their properties, are fully absorbed. Heavy rain assists them in

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flowers, carpeted with cotton mattresses and woolen coverlets, covered with white cloth and silk, having on both sides rosy cushions, yoked with white, very fair and fleet bullocks, led by a multitude of men.

sprouting, blooming, and bearing fruit. However, even if all the plants observe and grow in the same soil and rain, they are still different; some are very tall, some are very short, some are very large, and some are very small.

Here, medicinal herbs adumbrate the nature of beings in the three vehicles. Three types of grass, such as small grass represents *Śrāvākayāna*, medium grass represents *Pratyekabuddhayāna*, and enormous grass represents *Bodhisattvayāna*. Growing from the same soil and absorbing the same rain does not mean that plants and trees are the same. Similarly, the Buddha's teaching is like a significant rain delivered to all sentient beings without distinction. However, because the nature of sentient beings is not the same, their understanding of dharma is different. Therefore, the Buddha used skillful means of the three vehicles to lead sentient beings to one vehicle.

Furthermore, although they are different types, they all can absorb their own characteristics. This confirms that sentient beings with a deep faith in the Buddha's teachings give up their inferiority complex that hinders their progress and will progress in their spiritual life. With a strong belief in oneself, in enlightenment, and Buddhahood, they will indeed have good results.

#### [Lost Son, Treasure in Garment, and Phantom City](#)

In the SDP, three narratives mention the treasure, that is to say, the story of a son who has not recognized himself, the phantom city, and a gem in the garment.

Firstly, chapter 4 (Kern 2002: 99) describes the story of a son who left his old father and wandered here and there for many years. The old father looked forward to seeing his son again to entrust his inheritance. One day, suddenly, the son returned in front of his father's house without knowing. He saw that the older man had many luxurious treasures, like a king. He panicked and ran away, but the older man recognized this child was his son and sent two servants to chase him. The son was arrested, felt very scared, and fainted on the ground. Seeing this issue, the old father ordered his servants to sprinkle water on his face to wake him up and then let him go. No sooner, he sent two cripples to where he lived to ask them to collect dung; hearing the double price, he immediately accepted it. Seeing the hardness of his son, the old father felt very pity, then he changed into luxurious clothes, wore rough clothes, and picked up feces in his

hand to approach him. He encouraged his son to try hard work, and he would pay more money. The son was delighted but still thought he was a poor worker. Not long after that, the old father got ill, entrusted him with all properties, and allowed him to use all furniture in the house. The son was pleasant and took his duty but remained in the old place.

In this parable, we can see that the son who left home and his father represent sentient beings wandering in the cycles of *saṃsāra*; the father represents the Buddha's compassion towards sentient beings. The son, who gets scared of the luxuries of the father and faints on the ground, implies that the Buddha shows Buddhavehicle to all sentient beings, but they don't believe in this and only trust in a small vehicle. Pouring water on him to be aware implies that *Śrāvakas* return to their peaceful meditative state. The older man changing into the dirty garment and then into luxurious garments to be close to his son represents that Buddha is comparable to living beings through transformation and embodiment, which helps the sentient understand the suffering of birth, old age, sickness, etc., and death in *saṃsāra*. The father encourages his son just like the Buddha addresses sentient beings to practice dharma diligently. The father entrusts the inheritance to his son like the Buddha, showing his dharma's treasure for sentient beings. However, they don't believe it is true. Therefore, the Buddha used many skillful means to make them feel in their origins.

Michael Pye (1978: 41) says that the sutra shows us that the father used his skill to approach his son thrice.

1. He recognized his son but kept his distance from him
2. He gives his son smaller jobs but pays him a high salary
3. He tries to approach his son to gain his confidence

Secondly, another story in chapter 8 (Kern 2002: 201) discusses a man who went to his friend's house, got drunk, and fell asleep there. His friend had to go out for business, so he bound a priceless gem in his garment. The man slept and knew nothing about it. When he got up, he wandered to another country and worked hard to serve himself food and cloth. However, the man earned only a sufficient amount. Later, when the old friend met him again, he was amazed to see him in poverty and wretchedness.

He told his poor friend that he had bound a jewel in his garment but was still impoverished.<sup>29</sup>

Here, the poor man represents sentient beings because of delusion; they don't realize valuable treasure. The good friend represents the Buddha, and the priceless treasure represents the seed of Buddhahood. Having a little self-sufficiency symbolizes accepting the small fruit of the arhat. The Buddha utilized the example of a poor and stupid man as a skillful means to illustrate that when he was a Bodhisattva, he introduced the supreme path to sentient beings and inspired them to develop Buddha's wisdom, but sentient beings have forgotten it. When attaining the knowledge of arhat, they consider it as the state of *nirvāṇa*, just like a person who earns little and sufficient money. Throughout, we realize all sentient beings have Buddhahood and awakening, but because of ignorance and weak mindfulness, they don't recognize treasures in themselves but look for them here and there.

Thirdly, chapter 7 (Kern 2002: 181) mentions the story of the phantom city; the story narrates about a group of people going on a perilous road long, around 500 yojanas, in a desolate and terrifying place; they wanted to cross that road to the "place of precious jewels." A knowledgeable guide who knows well about where the perilous path opened and where it closed led the group of people across this road; however, through only halfway, they felt tired and lazy and wished to return. Knowing this, the guide utilized his magic power to generate a large city in the middle of the path and told everyone to enter and rest there. They were delighted, thought they had escaped the dangerous way, could rest safely, and reached their destination. But when their tiredness disappeared,

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<sup>29</sup> Burton Watson (1993: 151): The friend said, 'How absurd, old fellow! Why should you have to do all this for the sake of food and clothing? In the past, I wanted to make certain you could live with ease and satisfy the five desires, so on such a day, month, and year, I took a priceless jewel and sewed it in the lining of your robe. It must still be there now. But you did not know about it, and you fretted and wore yourself out trying to make a living. What nonsense! Now you must take the jewel and exchange it for goods. Then you can always have whatever you wish and never experience poverty or want.'

the guide did not want them to enjoy this place; he made that large town disappear and told everyone to go ahead; the area preserved treasure nearby, and they carried on their journey.

Here, the guide represents the Buddha, a group of people looking for treasures representing *Śravaka* and *Pratyekabuddhas* who are practicing under the guidance of the Buddha; phantom city shows the state of the *nirvāṇa* of the two vehicles. The place where the treasure is stored represents Buddhahood. The 500 yojanas represent the Buddha, who has completely eradicated five aggregates to attain Buddhahood.

All living beings have the same nature: laziness, weariness, fear, and weakness. It is only resolved when one faces life's dangers; however, they are often discouraged and want to give up. Knowing their mind, the Buddha used devices to help them enjoy temporary happiness, so they could have the spirit to overcome their difficulties. Likewise, that group of people enjoy the city's soothing rest and continue their journey. Here, the Buddha used the phantom city to demonstrate that three vehicles are just conditional devices to lead sentient beings to one vehicle, and Buddhahood is the final place practitioners towards. However, beings do not believe in their potential enlightenment, so they wander around to seek the truth. Therefore, the Blessed One relied on their resolution and morality to lead them to ultimate liberation; he used the means to show the teachings of the four noble truths through each stage to avoid unfavorable reactions due to the psychological fatigue of disciples. The Blessed One opened the first path out of greed, hatred, and delusion out of *samsāra* with the four noble fruits. Later, with the sharp mind of his disciples, the Blessed One taught the way to Buddha's knowledge.

### A Skilled Physician

Chapter 16 (Kern 2002: 304) describes a story of a skilled physician who was well-trained in remedies and had many children. Once, he went to another country for his business while his children stayed at home and drank the poison. When the father returned and saw his children were poisoned, he immediately mixed remedies for his children to drink. While some took medicine and recovered, some were mindless and didn't recognize the suitable treatment, so they refused it. Thus, the father devised a

means to convene them to take medicines by saying, "I am old; young me of good family, decrepit, advanced in years, and my term of life is near at hand; but be not sorry, young men of good family, do not feel dejected; here have I prepared a great remedy for you; if you want it, you may take it." (Kern 2002: 305). After that, he went to another country and sent messengers back to tell them he was dead in another country. When the children heard that, they immediately drank it, and their illness was recovered. Knowing his children took medicine and recovered, he returned home and was reunited with his family.

Throughout, we see that the example of the physician stands for the Buddha, and children take the poison, implying ignorance of craving. The children who refuse to take medicine are expressed as sentient beings too deeply immersed in the five senses. Nevertheless, they are willing to take medication, standing for sentient beings who want to listen and practice the Dharma to be free from ignorance and craving. The father left home to go to another country stands for the Buddha's means to teach nirvana, and remedy represents means.

The Buddha employed the example of the physician with his young children to describe the Buddha and sentient beings. The Buddha saw that sentient beings were craving ignorance, so he used innumerable means to assist sentient beings out of the dangers of the five sensual pleasures. Therefore, he declared that he entered *nirvāṇa*, but he still exists everywhere. Here, we cannot argue that the Buddha is lying; it is just a way of preaching and transforming.

#### Deception Leading to The Truth as a Skillful Means

The above parables contain thoughts of truth, deception, and skillful means that must be discussed here. Firstly, in the story of a burning house, a wealthy father lured his children to escape from a burning house by offering three kinds of beautiful chariots. But finally, he broke his promise and gave them only one giant chariot. This might be a subject of discussion and debate among philosophers and scholars. They could opine that the father in the story committed falsehood or told a lie. Does he not tell lies to his children? We should understand that any action we perform for the benefit of others,

even though that action seems guilty of lying, is not actual falsehood.<sup>30</sup> Back to the story, the father deceives his children with precious vehicles as a motivation for his children to escape the dangerous place. Because of his compassion, he cannot witness the children in danger while they are falling off playing without any knowledge of the fire. Therefore, we cannot declare that the father committed a falsehood in this situation. Here, his deceit is considered a motivation to help his children to reach a safe place. Therefore, Keown (1998: 191) argues that “The motivation is surely justified, while there is not any doubt, according to this story, that the father intended to lie.” This *sūtra* illustrates that when the motivation is done for the welfare of others under consideration, it will bring a good result and in such a situation, what seems to be lying is not lying.

Similarly, in a physician's parable, the father wants to save his children from poisons and lies to his children about his death in another country. This is not considered a falsehood because this falsehood does not harm his children. But on account of his love, he has used such a device. Without his skill, his children would be died by poisons, so this is noted as a white lie, not a falsehood. Here, the Buddha did not accept that the father was lying because his remedy, his skillful means, did not make sense as a proposition or in the concept of truth. Therefore, natural medicine is not the issue fathers give their children before leaving home.

On the contrary, the drug is the lie he tells them. Because the children were too crazy and refused to take medicine, the father devised a more radical and effective medicine that had nothing to do with herbs, plants, or poisons. This more radical drug was a lie about his death, and it was so effective that it brought children to awareness. The critical point is that lie is presented as a medical practice rather than a proposition, meaning it should be understood differently from an affirmative proposition. Unlike propositions, drug claims are generally not made in truth categories. Drugs are either effective or ineffective, good or bad, curative or harmful, but are never right or wrong.

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<sup>30</sup> According to Buddhism, falsehood includes all false statements and some facts. Straightforward lies against the precept and common behaviors such as self-inflation, exaggeration, lying by omission, pretending to know, and even forms of humour such as sarcasm can hurt people. Gossip, whether true or not, is considered a false statement.

Good medicine cures disease, while bad medicine does the opposite. Even drugs that aggravate illness are not fake but harmful and inappropriate drugs.

Moreover, in the other story of father and son, the father was pleased to meet his son after many years; he wanted to give his son all properties that he possessed, but his son's will was inferior. Therefore, the father used various means to acquaint his son with the fortune. Finally, when the son's will was strong, he declared before everyone that this was his son and that he had the right to use all his property. In this story, we also cannot argue that the father deceived his son; but he can be seen performing an excellent action to encourage and abandon the shyness and weakness of his son. This is noted as a skillful means of the father.

Likewise, the Buddha lured all sentient beings to release the dangers of sensual pleasure of three realms through three vehicles. The Buddha would have claimed only one vehicle when they matured in the dharma. It means that all Buddha teachings are just means; they are not the end. Only Buddhahood is the final goal. However, sentient beings do not have sufficient knowledge to believe that they have the nature of Buddhahood as the Buddha. Therefore, the Buddha points out three vehicles as a motivation to lead them to reach one vehicle. In this case, we cannot say the Buddha committed a falsehood because whatever he spoke, whether wrong or right, is just for the welfare of sentient beings. This is also defined by the Buddha at the end of *sūtra* when he asked venerable Śāriputra as follows:

“Now, Śāriputra, what is your opinion? Has that man made himself guilty of a falsehood by first holding out to his children the prospect of three vehicles and afterward giving them the greatest vehicles only, the most magnificent ones? Venerable Śāriputra answered, “By no means, Lord; by no means, Sugata. That is not sufficient, O Lord, to qualify the man as a speaker of falsehood since it only was a skillful device to persuade his children to go out of the burning house and save their lives. Besides recovering their bodies, O Lord, they have received all those toys. If that man, O Lord had given no single cart, even then, he would not have been a speaker of falsehood, for he had previously been meditating on saving the little boys from a great mass of pain by some able device. Therefore, even in this case, O Lord, the man would not have been guilty of falsehood and far less now that he, considering his having



plenty of treasures and prompted by no other motive but the love of his children, gives to all, to coax them, vehicles of one kind, and those the greatest vehicles. Therefore, that man, the Lord, is not guilty of falsehood.” (Kern 2002: 75–76).

Moreover, we can say that all actions are based on great compassion as a skillful means; even if it is considered a lie, it is just a white lie. The Buddha says, "One whose great pity and great compassion are constant and unflagging, who is endowed with expedient means and the perfection of wisdom,<sup>31</sup> and which is free of any falsehood” (Waston 1993: 58). As Damien Keown (2002: 369) also argues, “ I think we must understand the text as claiming not that there was no falsehood in these and other cases, but that the falsehood was justifiable.” He also agrees that the true meaning of parables is implied in what the Buddha is trying to say. They rationalize their statements and justify any transgression by appealing to good motivations. Richard Garner (1994:154) also appropriates skillful means that the Buddha used the parables by arguing that “The SDP praises deceit, falsehoods, and noble lies as essential to the Buddha’s teaching method.” Michael Pye (1978: 30) also argues, "Any discrepancy between skillful means and falsehood is justified by the fulfillment of the old man’s intention to bring them out flames.” So that is why the skillful means of the Buddha is considered a temporary means to help sentient beings to attain their final goal. Hence, it cannot be called falsehood.

With the phantom city story, we can get more information about the status of skillful means related to truth. What the Buddha preached before is both true and not accurate. Teaching Nirvana to *Śrāvaka* and *Pratyekabuddha* was not simple lies or tricks. It was like setting up a phantom camp in the middle of the final objective. The rest of his two nirvanas are preached to provide a place of rest (Burton Watson 1993: 142). This story's necessity illustrates that those who heard the *sūtra* understood that the two paths were

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<sup>31</sup>The perfection of knowledge (*prajñāpāramitā*) is a central concept in Mahāyāna Buddhism. It is generally associated with ideas such as emptiness (*śūnyatā*), lack of essence (*niḥsvabhava*), the illusory (*māyā*) nature of things, how all phenomena are characterized by "non-arising" (*anutpāda*).

nothing else but only pure trickery.<sup>32</sup> The story thus explains the relationship between the new and old doctrines.

To sum up, parables revealed five standard features of skillful means used by the Buddha in the SDP (Federman 2009: 133).

1. There is a difference between what we know and what others know; the gap between the Buddha and us is understanding the truth.
2. We, who are readers, have the same point of view as the Buddha.
3. Living beings suffer from blindness to the situation, ignorance of some sort, fear, or a limited view. Due to this, the known good person cannot reveal the truth as a whole and is forced to use skillful means.
4. The Buddha used skillful means with his compassion and wisdom; he understands clearly the situation and the limits of others.
5. Finally, by the end of the story, the truth is revealed, together with a full justification for the trickery involved.

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<sup>32</sup> Asaf Federman (2009: note 38): The term *upāya* means a way to achieve a goal, but it may also carry a slightly negative meaning when it is rendered as a 'trick' or a way to win the enemy.

Table 3: Summary - Skillful Means Through Parables

Parables	Compared Features	Comparative Features	Skillful Means	Implication
Burning House	Buddha	rich man	three carts	three vehicles as a provisional means to achieve one vehicle.
	sentient beings	children		
	three realms	firehouse		
	<i>Śrāvakayāna</i>	goat cart		
	<i>Pratyekabuddhayāna</i>	deer cart		
	<i>Bodhisattvayāna</i>	bullock cart		
Medicine Herbs	<i>Śrāvakayāna</i>	small grass	three different types of grass	three vehicles
	<i>Pratyekabuddhayāna</i>	medium grass	heavy rain	the Buddha's teaching
	<i>Bodhisattvayāna</i>	large grass		
	sentient beings	medicine herbs		
The Lost Son	sentients beings	the lost son	two men of servants	inferior wiliness of <i>Śrāvaka</i> and <i>Pratyekabuddha</i>
	Buddha	the old father	the old father transforms a poor man	the Buddha's transformation for sentient being.
	weakness of sentient beings	the son ran away and fainted		
	<i>Śrāvaka</i> returns the peaceful stage	make him awake		
	the Buddha encourages sentient beings	The father encourages his son		
	dharma treasure	father's properties		

Treasure in Garment	ignorance of sentient beings	poor man	treasure in garment	sentient beings inherently have Buddhahood.
	Buddha	good friend		
	inferior wiliness of Śravakayāna	self- sufficiency		
Phantom City	Buddha	guide	a large city in the middle path	the Buddha teaches <i>Śrāvaka</i> and <i>Pratyekabuddha</i> to lead to one vehicle
	sentient beings want to give up their vow	the group of people wants to abandon their journey		
A Skilled Physician	Buddha	physician	the deceptive death of father	Buddha declared entetering into nirvana
	ignorance and craving	poison		
	listen and practice dharma	take medicine		
	refuse to take medicine	enjoy sensual pleasure		
	nirvana	another country		

## Chapter 4: The Various Aspects of *Upāyakaśālyā* in Mahāyāna *Sūtras*

This chapter will interpret the relationship between skillful means applied in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* (SDP) with other aspects of the Mahāyāna *sūtras*. Especially, skillful means and compassion, skillful means and wisdom, skillful means and emptiness, and skillful means and six perfections. These concepts will give the reader a clearer understanding of the different applications of *skillful means*.

### Skillful Means and Compassion (*Kāruṇā*)

In Mahāyāna *sūtras*, skillful means and compassion are often presented as complementary and inseparable. The bodhisattva, a being who aspires to attain enlightenment for all sentient beings, is said to manifest skillful means out of their compassion.

As described in the previous parts, the SDP is the doctrine of one vehicle, which can only be attained by Buddhas, *Śrāvaka*, and *Pratyekabuddha* who have entirely purified their senses and destroyed all intoxications. To make sentient beings understand this doctrine and reach Buddhahood, the Buddha used innumerable devices and metaphors through the stories of three vehicles, a lost son, a phantom city, and a skilled physician. Although these parables are somewhat deceptive, they are for the welfare of all sentient beings, as mentioned in the *sūtra*:

"Shariputra, the Buddhas of the past used countless expedient means, various causes, conditions, and words of simile and parable to expound the doctrines for the sake of living beings. These doctrines are all for the sake of the one Buddha vehicle. By listening to the doctrines of the Buddhas, these living beings can eventually attain wisdom embracing all species." (Waston 1993: 31)

From this, we can see that compassion of the Buddha is expressed in each parable. On account of the different grades of sentient beings, the Buddha shows compassion in various ways to suit his audience, the environment, and the capabilities of sentient beings. Such love can be seen covered in the entire *sūtra*, but most predominantly in the three parables of a burning house, the lost son, and a skilled physician. These three

stories describe the father's unconditional love for his children when facing dangerous situations. Likewise, Buddha is like a spiritual father who always thinks about the benefits of sentient beings and finds a way to assist them in liberating them from the sufferings of *samsāra*. Therefore, the Buddha always tries to discover relatable teaching methods to draw sentient beings out of their ignorance and craving. Likewise, in the SDP, the Buddha also brings out the potential enlightenment in each person by encouraging them through different devices, such as the prophecy of their future Buddhahood, which is mentioned in chapters six,<sup>33</sup> seven,<sup>34</sup> and nine.<sup>35</sup>

These illustrate that the Buddha used his skillful means due to his compassion for sentient beings. The Buddha's compassion is expressed through a father's action where he deceits his children by lying but for the welfare of his children to lead them out of a dangerous place.

Moreover, the Buddha used various skillful speeches to liberate sentient beings from their ignorance and craving. However, compared with the VKN, the purpose of applying the skillful means with the compassion of the Buddha and bodhisattvas is entirely different. In the VKN, in which the householder Vimalakīrti displayed his body's illness to attract the citizens of Vaiśālī; throughout, he shows the impermanence of the physical body, which is just like a foam, like a bubble, like a mirage, like a dream, and like an echo. The householder Vimalakīrti desires to demonstrate that his sickness is not a physical sickness; it implies that the sickness of ignorance and cravings for existence will last as long as the sickness of all sentient beings. Therefore, his sickness would be free when the illness of all sentient beings appears. The reason is that, for bodhisattvas, the world consists only of sentient beings, and sickness is inherent in sentient beings; if all sentient beings are free from sickness, the bodhisattva will also have no sickness. Just like, when a merchant's only son fell ill, his father and

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<sup>33</sup> Chapter 6 (Kern 2002: 142–152): The Buddha prophesies the future Buddhahood of Śrāvakas Mahākāśyapa, Mahāmaudgalyāyana, Subhūti, and so forth.

<sup>34</sup> Chapter 8 (Kern 2002: 191–204): The Buddha prophesies future Buddhahood to twelve hundred disciples who had walked out before confess that they were ignorant in the past and attached to the inferior nirvaṇa but now they are overjoyed since they have faith in their future Buddhahood.

<sup>35</sup> Chapter 9 (Kern 2002: 205–212): The Buddha predicts the learners and adepts about their future Buddhahood.

mother became sick because of their son's illness and the parents recovered as the illness of their only son recovered. Similarly, the bodhisattva loves all sentient beings as if each were his only child. He was sick when they were sick and was healthy when they were healthy because the bodhisattva's illness arises from great compassion (Thurman 1976: 42).<sup>36</sup>

Here, skillful means imply that the bodhisattva wants to fulfill their (sentient beings) perfection of wisdom. Therefore, he should nourish love-kindness to all beings and consider them part of his own body without distinguishing relatives or non-relatives. Besides, the householder Vimalakīrti also wants to preach about the dharma body of the Buddha to all citizens of Vaisālī because the dharma body is permanent, unborn, persistent, and unchangeable in any condition. The dharma body cannot get sick, is free from illness of the physical body, and has the dharma body as Tathāgata. Seeing this, they will try to practice getting the dharma body as the Buddha. It is said that the householder Vimalakīrti is very skillful in applying the devices to help sentient beings understand the Buddha's teaching more quickly. Therefore, skillful means and compassion always combine; if anyone is lacking, the Buddha and bodhisattvas will not fulfill their path.

Moreover, the SDP and the VKN have relatively many occurrences of the term skillful means. For example, in the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha plays the role of a skilled physician to cure different diseases of all sentient beings; he always reflects various degrees of proper dharma in different ways for sentient beings, just as the rich man lures his children with the promise of beautiful toys to save them from a burning house (Kern 1989: 94).

While the teaching of Vimalakīrti refers to a way of life in which the bodhisattva follows the Buddha's path. These two sutras also reflect the intellectual and popular aspects of Mahāyāna Buddhism. For instance, the SDP pays more attention to the role

<sup>36</sup>Pradeep Gokhale (2018: 50), chapter 4: *vimalakīrti āha: yāvacciram upādāya Mañjuśrīḥ avidyā bhavatrṣṇā ca tāvacciram upādāya mamaīṣa vyādhiḥ / yadā ca sarvasatvā vigatavyādhayo bhaviṣyanti tadā mama vyādhiḥ praśrabdho bhaviṣyati / tat kasmād dhetoḥ / satvādhiṣṭhāno hi mañjuśrīḥ bodhisatvasya saṃsāraḥ / saṃsāraṇiśritaś ca vyādhiḥ / yadā sarvasatvā vigatavyādhayo bhaviṣyanti tadā bodhisatvo 'rogo bhaviṣyati.*

of the Buddha and how to understand his appearance, teachings, and nirvana correctly. However, the VKN deals with disputes between the householder Vimalakīrti and the Buddha's disciples. The perfection of the insight *sūtra* is primarily concerned with bodhisattvas and practicing their defining qualities (Pye 1978: 102).

#### Skillful Means and Wisdom (*Prajñā*)

The Buddha is known as a skilled teacher because he always employs skillful means with the combination of both wisdom and compassion. Therefore, he successfully expounded dharma and assisted many people in realizing the ultimate truth. His knowledge is profound, so he can see different phases of sentient being to give dharma and never teach dharma without knowing their levels. This is one of the other points in using skillful means of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas. The Buddha is seen to have fulfilled their perfection of wisdom so that bodhisattvas are very well versed while they are fulfilling their perfection. This means they have to achieve skillful means with wisdom; without wisdom, they cannot help sentient beings free from their suffering in *samsāra*.

The VKN expresses a similar argument against those who preach Buddhist doctrine without contemplating the capacity of sentient beings. Such is considered "bad medicine"; because it assumes that problems are universal for everyone, and so are the "medicines" to cure them. But the VKN mentions that "it is not a secure refuge," which implies that one should not expound dharma without examining the spiritual faculties of living beings. For instance, when the Buddha asked the disciple Pūrṇa to visit the householder Vimalakīrti and inquire about his illness, he didn't dare to see him because he remembered when he was teaching the dharma to some young monks in the great forest; the householder Vimalakīrti came and advised him to first contemplate on the minds of the young monks, and then teach them the dharma. (Thurman 1986: 28).<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Pradeep Gokhale (2018: 29–30), chapter 3: *pūrṇo 'py āha: nāhaṃ bhagavan utsahe tasya satpuruṣasya glānapariṣṭhako gantum / tat kasmād dhetoḥ / abhijānāmy ahaṃ bhagavan: ekasmin samaye vanasyānyatamasmin pṛthivīpradeśa ādikarmikāṇāṃ bhikṣūṇāṃ dharmāṃ deśayāmi*.



Similarly, in Chapter 4 of the VKN, the householder Vimalakīrit illustrates the relation between skillful means and wisdom in the sense of bondage, such as a bodhisattva must use skillful means to do good deeds for the benefit of all beings. For that, he needs to combine skillful means and wisdom because skillful means without wisdom is bondage, and knowledge with skillful means is delivered.

"Wisdom not acquired through skillful means is bondage, and wisdom acquired through skillful means is deliverance. Likewise, skillful means not developed through knowledge are bondage, and skillful means achieved through understanding are deliverance"<sup>38</sup> (Lamotte 1994: 127).

What does it mean that wisdom without skillful means is bondage? It is to say that a bodhisattva cannot comprehend and abide in emptiness, guide beings, and transform sentient beings unless he has the skillful means to support himself. So, the wisdom which is not supported by skillful means is bondage.

The VKN illustrates that when a Bodhisattva subdues himself by the practice of emptiness, sinlessness, and desirelessness but abstains from adorning his body with the primary and secondary physical marks from illustrating his Buddha-field and from helping ripen beings. This wisdom is not acquired through skillful means, it is bondage (Lamotte 1994: 127).

And what does it mean that skillful means with wisdom is delivered? This means that if a Bodhisattva has skillful means as a purpose, his understanding of emptiness does not dwell in one-sided realization. Furthermore, he will be able to direct all existences and transform sentient beings, so skillful means supported by wisdom is deliverance.

The VKN explains that when a Bodhisattva rejects, false views, the invasion of the passion residual tendencies, affection, and aversion, and transfers to perfect

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<sup>38</sup> Pradeep Gokhale (2018: 54), chapter 4: *Anupāyasamgrhītā prajñā bandhaḥ, upāyasamgrhītā prajñā mokṣaḥ / prajñāyāsamgrhītā upāyo bandhanam, prajñāsamgrhītā upāyo mokṣaḥ.*

enlightenment the good roots that he has cultivated without producing pride. This skillful means acquired through wisdom is deliverance (Lamotte 1994: 127).

We understand that wisdom is essential to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in benefitting sentient beings. Without wisdom, bodhisattvas will grasp what they are doing; they will not attain the higher stage. Therefore, wisdom is considered a great mother and skillful means is known as the father. In the Master of Wisdom, Christian Lindtner (1986: 127) states, "Wisdom is the mother of Bodhisattva, skillful means is their father, and compassion is their daughter."

Throughout, we understand specific differences in using skillful means of the SDP and the VKN *that* the skillful means in the SDP are utilized by the Buddhas who mastered skillful means from countless lives, so they are very measured in skill and means. The Buddha used skillful means to lead sentient beings to attain Buddhahood. However, skillful means in the VKN is of the bodhisattvas practicing the Buddha's teachings to fulfill the Buddha's attributes. Therefore, their skillful means need to combine with wisdom. They cannot obtain the perfection of wisdom or the highest knowledge without wisdom.

#### Skillful Means and Emptiness (*Śūnyatā*)

The SDP emphasizes the paths to attain Buddhahood, claiming that the Buddha's teachings are nothing more than a skillful means and refusing to separate the content of the Buddha's teachings from his teaching style. The Buddha uses skillful means as a convenient means of deception to lead sentient beings to the ultimate truth, Buddhahood. After reaching the final destination, practitioners must give up their attachment to all dharmas because they are only the devices, not the end. However, practitioners misunderstood skillful means as the final gold, which led them to grasp expedience and give up their main purpose. Therefore, the Buddha emphasizes that all devices used in the Lotus sutra are only temporary devices to lure sentient beings to become free from their attachment to dharmas. This concept is also found in the *Vajracchedikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* (VCP). The Buddha advised a bodhisattva who

would want to fulfill the perfection of wisdom that he should not attach to the idea of doctrine and non-doctrine because if he has the perception of doctrine and non-doctrine as genuinely existing, he will be connected to a self, a being, a life, and a person.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, the Buddha defines "Those who recognize dharma just like a boat; by them, dharma should be abandoned."<sup>40</sup> This statement points out that the Buddha's teaching is a mere device to attain Buddhahood, nothing to be grasped. If someone has already crossed the river and still clings to the raft, thinking it helped them cross, they would also be considered foolish and unaware of the proper use of the raft.

Throughout, we can see that the Buddha instructs us to relinquish three dharmas: the self, the dharma, and emptiness. Initially, he teaches that the self is empty to prevent attachment to it. Subsequently, he emphasizes that dharmas are also empty to avoid fixation on them. Finally, he teaches that emptiness is open to prevent adherence to it. However, the term dharma in this context refers not to the perception of dharma but to the Buddha's teachings. "No dharma" does not denote the absence of such perception but rather refers to worldly matters such as wealth and fame (Pine 1995: 157).

Asaṅga says, "Not by clinging but by adapting, we realize all dharmas. Like rafts we leave behind, their hidden meaning is the same." Thus bodhisattvas consider the usefulness of spiritual teachings in helping them to cross the sea of suffering without becoming attached to them. Vasubandhu comments, "If they lead to higher realization, we should treat dharmas like we would a raft until we reach the shore. This is their 'hidden meaning.' The same raft is used and also abandoned. So likewise, other dharmas and truths that do not lead to realization must be abandoned" (Pine 1995: 158).

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<sup>39</sup> Pema Tenzin (1994: 163), Paragraph 6: *sacet subhūte teṣāṃ bodhisattvānāṃ mahāsattvānāṃ dharmasamjñā pravarteta, sa eva teṣāṃ ātmagrāho bhavet, sattvagrāho jīvagrāhaḥ pudgalagrāho bhavet | saced adharmasamjñā pravarteta, sa eva teṣāṃātmagrāho bhavet, sattvagrāho jīvagrāhaḥ pudgalagrāha iti.*

<sup>40</sup> Pema Tenzin (1994: 164), Paragraph 6: *kolopamaṃ dharma paryāyamājānadbhidharmā eva prahātavyāḥ prāgevādharmā iti*

Similarly, in chapter 7, the Buddha also emphasizes that there is neither dharma that Tathāgata has realized as perfect enlightenment nor the dharma that Tathāgata taught. Because whatever dharma has been recognized and preached by Tathāgata is incomprehensible and indescribable and can be considered neither dharma nor no dharma.<sup>41</sup>

The dharma here denotes the highest enlightenment; only the wise can realize the true nature of things because the true nature cannot be expressed in words or said as a name. The highest enlightenment cannot be found anywhere else. One can see only when the mind contains neither subject nor object. The full enlightenment achieved and taught by the Buddha is beyond the scope of concepts or words, and it is not a dharma or any dharma; trying to get it would be like taking space. And trying to express it would be like describing the space. Besides, all dharmas are created for the benefit of sentient beings and have their reality. Furthermore, enlightenment has no form and cannot be grasped. All dharmas are empty and cannot be taught. Thus, they have no distinct reality (Pine 1995: 168).

Regarding the emptiness, in chapter 3 of the VKN, when venerable Mahākātyāyana taught dharma to the white clothes, the householder Vimalakīrti gave him advice that it is not the way to teach the dharma to the householders because dharma should not be taught according to reality. Dharma is beyond living beings because it is devoid of the dust of living beings. It is not self because it is devoid of the dust of desire. It is not life because it is devoid of birth and death. It is without personality because it dispenses with past origins and future destinies. The Dharma is peace and pacification because it is devoid of desire. It does not become an object because it is free of words and

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<sup>41</sup> Pema Tenzin (1994: 173), Chapter 7: *yo asau tathāgatena dharmāḥ abhisambuddho deśito vā, agrāhyaḥ so anabhilapyah | na sa dharmo nādharmāḥ.*

letters; it is inexpressible and transcends all movement of the mind. The dharma is omnipresent because it is like infinite space.<sup>42</sup>

The concept of emptiness also played an essential role in the development of the MKŚ. Nāgārjuna's main goal was to promote the empty doctrine in order to establish a middle school by denying the interpretation of *Abhidharmika*, the teaching of dharma. Nāgārjuna then began to preach the doctrine of emptiness, dispelling traditional dogmatic beliefs in his masterful method (*upāyakauśalya*). He started by establishing the secret teachings of the Buddha. However, this method is different from Nāgārjuna's view; Nāgārjuna wanted to dispel attachment and wrong views of orthodox or opponents about the existence of things, so he tried using various methods to expound the doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) through the principle of the middle way. Here, emptiness does not mean that there is nothing but goes beyond existence and non-existence, back and forth, expressed through eight negations: neither cessation nor arising; neither annihilation nor eternality; neither singularity nor diversity; and neither coming in nor going out.<sup>43</sup>

Besides, in the MKŚ, Nāgārjuna clearly states that the doctrine of *śūnyatā* itself is also known as dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*): “Whatever arises dependently is explained as empty. Thus, dependent attribution is the middle way. Since there is nothing that is not dependently existent, for that reason, there is nothing. Therefore, whatsoever that is not empty” (Rinchen 2006: 19).

<sup>42</sup> Pradeep Gokhale (2018: 24–25), Chapter 3: *ekasmin samaye vaiśālyāṃ mahānagaryām anyatamasmin vīthīmukhe gr̥hapatibhyo dharmam deśayāmi / tatra māṃ vimalakīrtir licchavir upasaṃkrāmyaivam āha: na bhadantamaudgalyāyana gr̥hibhyo 'vadātavasanebhya evaṃ dharmo deśayitavyo yathā bhadanto deśayati / api tu tathā bhadantamaudgalyāyana dharmo deśayitavyo yathaiva sa dharmah / dharmo hi bhadantamaudgalyāyana asatvaḥ satvarajovigataḥ, nairātmyo rāgarajovigataḥ, nirjīvo jāticyutivigataḥ, niṣpudgalaḥ pūrvāntāparāntaparcchinnaḥ, śānta upasāntalakṣaṇaḥ, virāgo 'nārambaṇagatikaḥ, anakṣaraḥ sarvavākyacchedaḥ, anudāhāraḥ sarvornivigataḥ, sarvatrānugata ākāśamasadr̥śaḥ.*

<sup>43</sup> MKŚ. 20. 1 : *anirodhamanutpādamanucchedamaśāśvata, anekārthamanānārthamanāgamamanirgama.*

Furthermore, in chapter 15 of the MKŚ, Nāgārjuna argues that the ultimate reality of emptiness is not a nihilistic or pessimistic view of the world but rather a liberating and empowering one. Because if one holds the existence and non-existence of phenomena as "it exists," it is an eternalist view; "it does not exist" is an annihilationist idea.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, Nāgārjuna emphasizes that emptiness should be understood in four aspects: empty, non-empty, both, or neither, and these should not be declared. It is expressed only for the purpose of communication (Kalupahana 1986: 307). By understanding the interconnectedness and interdependence of all phenomena, we can move beyond the limitations of our dualistic thinking and embrace a more holistic and integrated view of the world. This is a skillful means to help beings move towards greater compassion, wisdom, and enlightenment.

Overall, Nāgārjuna's teachings on emptiness in the MKŚ are a profound example of skillful means in Buddhism. By using the concept of emptiness to overcome attachment, dualistic thinking, and extreme views, Nāgārjuna provided a transformative path toward liberation and enlightenment for all beings. It can be understood as a skillful means that Nāgārjuna wants to encompass directly to advance sentient beings without using the metaphorical method such as the SDP. Important parallels can already be seen between the SDP and Nāgārjuna. Just as the SDP maintains that all the Buddha's teachings are mere means and refuses to separate the content of the Buddha's teachings from its teaching style, the Nāgārjuna is the teaching of the Buddha claiming the empty and empty of emptiness exactly this emptiness. Even though the expressions and methods are different, the purpose is the same.

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<sup>44</sup> MKŚ. 15.10: *Svabhāvaparokṣā*: "asīti śāśvatagrāho nāstīti yuccheda darśanam, tasmād astitvanāstitve nāsrīyeta vicaksanaḥ.

### Skillful Means and Six Perfections (*Pāramitās*)

In the VCP and the VKN also mention skillful means with six perfections. These practices cultivate the qualities necessary for a bodhisattva to help others attain enlightenment. These are:

1. Perfection of generosity (*dānapāramitā*): giving freely and generously without expecting anything in return.
2. Perfection of ethics or morality (*śīlapāramitā*): living a moral and ethical life, avoiding harmful actions.
3. Perfection of patience (*kṣāntipāramitā*): the practice of enduring suffering, difficulties, and challenges without losing one's composure or getting angry.
4. Perfection of diligence or effort (*vīryapāramitā*): the practice of sustained effort towards achieving one's goals, especially on the path to enlightenment.
5. Perfection of concentration or meditation (*dhyānapāramitā*): cultivating mental focus and concentration through meditation.
6. Perfection of wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*): developing knowledge and insight into the true nature of reality, including the impermanence and interdependence of all phenomena.

Among six perfections, the first four perfections belong to skillful means, and the concentration and wisdom perfection belongs to wisdom (Wangchen 2009: 137).

These six perfections are also called the domain of a bodhisattva; as the VKN points out, "The domain of the six super-knowledge's, wherein defilements are not exhausted, such is the domain of the bodhisattva" (Thurman 1976: 48).

In the *Sūtra* on Ten Stages (*Daśabhūmikasūtra*),<sup>45</sup> (Cleary 1993: 695–811), four more *pāramitās* are listed:

<sup>45</sup> Wikipedia: *Daśabhūmikasūtra* is an early, influential Mahayana Buddhist scripture. The sutra also appears as the 26th chapter of the Avatamsakasūtra. Modern Buddhist studies scholars generally hold that these Mahayana *sūtras*

7. Perfection of skillful means (*upāya pāramitā*)
8. Perfection of resolution (*pranidhāna pāramitā*)
9. Perfection of spiritual power (*bala pāramitā*)
10. Perfection of wisdom (*jñāna pāramitā*)

These ten perfections form a comprehensive set of practices essential for attaining enlightenment and benefiting others. They are also seen as a way of integrating a spiritual practice into daily life and cultivating virtues that are beneficial for oneself and others.

Among ten perfections, the perfection of skillful means (*upāyapāramitā*) refers to the ability to use different methods and techniques to help sentient beings achieve enlightenment. Therefore, it is considered a crucial aspect of the bodhisattva path, emphasizing the altruistic intention to benefit others. Furthermore, it is based on the understanding that different beings have various levels of understanding. Therefore, a bodhisattva needs to adapt to each individual's situation and use different approaches to help them overcome obstacles and spiritually develop.

The perfection of skillful means (*upāyapāramitā*) refers to the ground of bodhisattva (*bodhisattvabhūmi*), in which bodhisattvas try to fulfill the Buddha's attributes by helping sentient beings become free from their suffering. They are rebirth in *samsāra* due to compassion and wisdom. Here, skillful means is described in the ground of Bodhisattva with two aspects. Firstly, Bodhisattvas strive to attain all the qualities of a Buddha and train themselves to see all sentient beings rebirth in *samsāra* through compassion and wisdom, where they know the ultimate nature of phenomena and don't abandon sentient beings in *samsāra*, with desires to achieve the Buddha's knowledge and stimulate their enthusiasm for the highest enlightenment. Secondly, to ripen all sentient beings, bodhisattvas developed the ability to teach sentient beings how to

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began appearing between the 1st century BCE and the 1st century CE. They continued being composed, compiled, and edited until the decline of Buddhism in India.



transform small actions into great virtue; enabling them to accomplish great merits without difficulty; removing anger in those who don't like the Buddha's teaching; encouraging them to enter into the Buddha's knowledge, to mature the minds of those who have entered the dharma, and to lead sentient beings to maturity of liberation (Lama and Chodron 2014: 522–523).

Moreover, according to *sūtra* on ten stages (*Daśabhūmikasūtra*), we can find the perfection of wisdom of bodhisattvas. The Buddha demonstrates that when bodhisattvas reach the seventh ground, they are better at perfecting their skillful means to enter and rise from absorption subtly. Moreover, they can do it quickly, leading to sharp intellect, increased capability, and agility. Their meditative skill is like a seasoned cyclist who doesn't stagger no matter how fast they run.

On the seventh ground, the bodhisattvas exceed the arhats of the actual vehicles with their wisdom powers because they can come back and forth, meditating on emptiness in every short moment. This is extremely difficult because the balance of emptiness, mind, and emptiness is one taste. However, bodhisattvas can quickly move back and forth between knowing the ultimate truth and the conventional truth (Thomas Cleary 1993: 695–811).

To sum up, in the SDP, the dharma is used as a skillful means to lead sentient beings to Buddhahood. In contrast, the skillful means in *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra*, *Vajracchedikāpraññāpāramitāsūtra*, *Madhyamakāśāstra*, and *Daśabhūmikasūtra* are the means of bodhisattvas. Therefore, skillful means in those Mahāyāna *sūtras* are considered conditions for a bodhisattva to assist sentient beings and to complete their perfection before attaining enlightenment.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

The analytical study of skillful means in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* reveals the depth and complexity of the Buddha's teachings. Through this study, the researcher has examined various aspects of skillful means that the Buddha utilized to convey his teachings to his disciples effectively. These aspects include the use of parables, expedient means, inclusive language, and emphasis on the universality of his teachings. Besides, this study also provides a comprehensive review of the Buddha's devices by demonstrating the concept of skillful means in the aspects of the Pāli canon and Mahāyāna *Sūtras*. Another interesting thing emphasized in this study is that the three vehicles are not the ultimate goal but rather a means to lead people toward one vehicle. This is proved in chapter two of SDP that Buddhas use only one vehicle to teach the doctrines to living beings, but divide it into three vehicles through the power of expedient means. This chapter emphasizes that there is only one vehicle in all Buddha lands, and the Buddha's ultimate goal is to guide all beings to Buddhahood.

Furthermore, this dissertation also shows that the Buddha utilized skillful means only for the welfare of sentient beings. He utilizes skillful means as a provisional means to lead sentient beings to the attainment of Buddhahood but does not consider it as an ultimate device. This emphasizes the importance of understanding the nature of reality and the role of skillful means in achieving that understanding. The Buddha's teachings are not fixed, but flexible and capable of adapting to the changing needs of sentient beings.

In addition, this dissertation explores the development of the concept of skillful means in both the Pāli Canon and selected Mahāyāna *Sūtras*. In the Pāli Canon, skillful means are not widely used compared to the Mahāyāna *Sūtras*. It is used in a more limited sense, such as referring to skillful means in growth, decline, and general strategies. The metaphor of a boatman assisting people in crossing to other shores is also employed, symbolizing the need to let go of attachment to attain *nirvāṇa*. In this

context, skillful means are associated with the idea of being free from attachment. The Buddha himself is considered a skillful teacher in the Pāli Canon, utilizing various pedagogical methods such as similes, parables, and gradual instruction to convey profound truths in an accessible manner. The goal is to guide individuals toward the cessation of suffering and the realization of Nirvana. Thus, in the Pāli Canon, skillful means primarily involve tailoring teachings to suit the capacities, dispositions, and understanding of individual practitioners.

In contrast, Mahāyāna Buddhism interprets the concept of skillful means in a broader sense compared to early Buddhism. This expanded understanding is evident in early Mahāyāna sūtras such as the *Upāyakauśalyasūtra*, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*, the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra*, and the *Vajracchedikaprajñāpāramitāsūtra*. It is important to note that the ultimate goal in Mahāyāna Buddhism emphasizes the significance of skillful means in achieving Buddhahood, while the Pāli Canon or early Buddhism focuses on skillful means for attaining Nirvana. In Mahāyāna teachings, skillful means are not only seen as provisional devices but as integral aspects of the path to enlightenment. They emphasize the compassionate nature of the Buddha's teachings and the crucial role of skillful means in helping sentient beings attain Buddhahood. The concept of skillful means is further developed in conjunction with compassion, wisdom, emptiness, and the goal of attaining Buddhahood in the Mahāyāna *Sūtras*.

The concept of skillful means also expands to encompass the role of the Bodhisattva in Mahāyāna teachings. The Bodhisattva ideal is closely connected to skillful means, as Bodhisattvas work tirelessly for the welfare of all sentient beings. In contrast, the Pāli Canon emphasizes individual liberation and the attainment of Nibbana as the ultimate goal. Therefore, the Bodhisattva ideal and the concept of expedient means are distinctive to Mahāyāna teachings, highlighting the significance of compassion and the ultimate aim of assisting sentient beings in attaining enlightenment.

Another interesting aspect of the term skillful means is found in the expression "dharma as a raft to cross a river." This phrase appears in both the Pāli Canon (*Alagaddūpama Sutta*) and the Mahāyāna *Sūtra* (*Vajracchedikaprajñāpāramitāsūtra*), illustrating a clear difference in their ultimate purposes. The Pāli Canon emphasizes

the practical nature of the dharma as a temporary means, while the VCP underscores the ultimate emptiness of all phenomena, including the dharma itself.

Furthermore, the SDP represents a significant advancement in the skillful application of the Buddha's methods. In this *Sūtra*, the dharma itself becomes the means, or rather, the sublime teachings of the *Sūtra* aim to facilitate the audience's comprehension of its essence and guide them towards attaining Buddhahood. The Buddha employs skillful means, often portrayed as expedient devices, to assist sentient beings in transcending the perilous allure of sensual pleasures and embracing the path of the one vehicle. Metaphorical illustrations, such as a burning house, a lost child, a jewel in a pocket, and a skilled physician are employed to exemplify this transformative process. In addition, the SDP highlights a significant aspect wherein the Buddha employs skillful means, even resorting to falsehoods, to assist sentient beings in attaining supreme wisdom. Despite these means being perceived as deceitful, the Buddha clarifies that they should not be considered as such. This is because the Buddha's intention stems from compassion, aiming to guide sentient beings beyond the perils of sensual pleasures and towards the ultimate goal. Hence, these means are not considered lies but compassionate strategies.

Another development of skillful means is evident in the VKN. This *sūtra* underscores the significance of a bodhisattva employing skillful means in conjunction with compassion and wisdom to aid sentient beings in their liberation from suffering and attainment of Buddhahood. It emphasizes that skillful means, devoid of wisdom, can lead to bondage. Furthermore, the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* also emphasizes the vital role of lay practitioners as skillful means. In Nāgārjuna's *Madhyamakaśāstra*, the term skillful means is utilized in relation to "emptiness," describing the Middle Way that transcends eternalism and nihilism. Similarly, in the VCP, the Buddha employs skillful means, also in connection with "emptiness," to guide sentient beings towards attaining perfect wisdom. This wisdom surpasses all dualities and unveils the ultimate nature of reality. These developments in the concept of skillful means can be observed within the Mahāyāna Sūtras.

To sum up, the analytical study of skillful means in the SDP offers valuable insights into the Buddha's teachings and provides a roadmap for those seeking to attain enlightenment. The Buddha's skillful means continue to be relevant and applicable today, offering a path to liberation and happiness for all sentient beings. Throughout this research, the researcher expects that readers will gain a deeper understanding of the complexity and universality of skillful means in the Buddhist teachings, not only in the Lotus Sūtra but also in other important Mahāyana texts such as the VKN, the MKŚ, and the VCP. By exploring the various aspects of skillful means used by the Buddha to convey his teachings effectively, readers will see the importance of adapting teachings to suit the needs and understanding of different individuals and groups.

The study of skillful means also highlights the Buddha's ultimate goal of leading all sentient beings to enlightenment. Readers will understand that the temporary nature of skillful means is necessary to help living beings approach the profound dharma of the Buddha.

\* Limitations of this dissertation

While the analytical study of skillful means according to the Lotus Sūtra offers valuable insights into the Buddha's teachings, there are some limitations to this research that should be acknowledged.

Firstly, this dissertation mainly focuses on the SDP and its interpretation of skillful means and also pointed out its relation with the Pāli canon and other Mahāyāna texts, but has not analyzed their views on skillful means deeply.

Secondly, although this dissertation mainly relies on primary sources of Pāli Canon and Mahāyāna Sūtras, and secondary sources regarding the subject of research. Still, some aspects concerning the title that this research cannot cover all.

Thirdly, this dissertation has not discussed the particular aspects of skillful means, which can be applied in propagating dharma and religious life.

\* Suggestions for further research

Further research could extend the meaning of skillful means which is mentioned in the Pāli canon and various Mahāyāna *Sūtras*. It also will focus on the theoretical aspects

of skillful means, and further research could explore its practical application in daily life. Besides, it will examine how skillful means can be applied in contemporary society to promote compassion and understanding among people of different cultures and backgrounds. Moreover, future research can also explore the application of skillful means in modern contexts, such as education, healthcare, and leadership. By addressing these limitations and expanding the scope of research, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of skillful means and their relevance in contemporary society. While this research has shed light on the concept of skillful means in the SDP, a more comprehensive study that incorporates primary sources, examines different Mahāyāna *Sūtras*, and explores the practical application of skillful means would be a valuable contribution to the field of Buddhist studies. This study also encourages readers to apply the concept of skillful means in other research fields, such as philosophy and psychology, to gain a more objective view of *upāyakaśalya*.

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