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Brahmā's Question

Brahmaparipṛcchā

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'phags pa tshangs pas zhus pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra “Brahmā’s Question”

Āryabrahmaparipṛcchānāmamahāyānasūtra

· Toh 158 ·

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SUMMARY

- s.1 In the middle of the night, while the Buddha Śākyamuni is immersed in meditation, Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world, appears before him and asks him how bodhisattvas can quickly achieve full awakening. In response, the Buddha gives a teaching on mindfulness of the body. The following morning, when Brahmā has departed, the Buddha relays his teaching to the monks.

ac.

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i.

INTRODUCTION

i.1

In the middle of the night at Kūṭāgāraśālā, the monastery in the great forest grove near Vaiśālī, the Buddha is seated cross-legged, engaged in a progression of the four concentrations—proceeding through them forward and then backward—at the end of which he enters a meditative absorption which makes his whole body radiant. Far away in the brahmā heavens of the form realm, the great god Brahmā sees the Buddha’s radiance and leaves his heaven in order to ask him a question. Arriving there in an instant, he politely rouses the Buddha from his absorption with gentle verses of praise and then proceeds to ask his question. The arrival of Brahmā is especially noteworthy, considering that according to Buddhist literature, it was Brahmā who first beseeched the reluctant Buddha to teach, just after the latter had gained awakening.

i.2

Brahmā’s question on this occasion is simple: how many dharmas, or qualities, do bodhisattvas need in order to quickly reach the complete awakening of a buddha? The Bhagavān’s reply is surprising: one needs only one dharma and that dharma is mindfulness of the body.

i.3

Mindfulness of the body is the first of the four applications of mindfulness recognized throughout Buddhist literature—mindfulness concerning the body, mindfulness concerning feelings, mindfulness concerning the mind, and mindfulness concerning the nature of phenomena. In this discourse, it is the first of these that takes precedence, though mindfulness concerning the mind and mindfulness concerning phenomena are also addressed sequentially.

i.4

First, he speaks of mindfulness of the body in terms of being present and aware in undertaking daily activities like sitting, walking, lying down, and so on. He then explains mindfulness in terms of reflection on the transience and essencelessness of the physical body, which is prone to disease and illness, and will ultimately be reduced to something disgusting. Such

reflection loosens attachment to the physical body, and being without attachment to the physical body and its trappings means living a materially simple life.

i.5 This leads to a presentation of mindfulness in terms of avoiding unvirtuous or unwholesome activities. In particular, these are the first three precepts: not killing, not taking what is not given, and avoiding lust. This section on maintaining a strict discipline is, however, softened by the proviso that the body also needs to be nurtured, since without a body a bodhisattva is unable to make use of the opportunities that this life affords.

i.6 The Buddha then explains how the six perfections may be used as antidotes to counter the mind's natural tendencies toward negative mental states. The tendency to miserliness is countered by generosity, the tendency toward immorality by discipline, the tendency toward ill will by forbearance, the tendency toward indolence by effort, the tendency to distraction by concentration, and the tendency to incorrect understanding by wisdom. Particular attention is paid to the final two. The instruction on concentration, for example, includes a condensed account of how bodhisattvas use meditation focused on an object to stabilize the mind, and once it is stable, proceed to looking for the mind, and to objectless meditative equipoise. A further contemplation is offered in which one examines letters and words as a way of seeing the "hollowness" of phenomena, and through this, of experiencing all conditioned phenomena as dreamlike. In the scheme of the four applications of mindfulness, these reflections would correspond to the third and fourth applications of mindfulness concerning the mind and phenomena, respectively.

i.7 The instruction concerning wisdom also includes a contemplation in which the elements that make up our bodies—earth, water, fire, and wind—are analyzed as being the same as the elements that are external to our bodies, as a way of reducing attachment to our own physicality.

i.8 The Buddha then summarizes the teachings he has given to Brahmā in a short series of verses. These verses recapitulate three of the four applications of mindfulness that have already been covered: mindfulness concerning the body, concerning the mind, and concerning phenomena. The text does not seem to reference the application of mindfulness concerning feelings.

i.9 The next morning, when the Buddha recounts his encounter with Brahmā to the assembly of monks, Ānanda requests that he repeat the teaching for them, which he does. When Ānanda asks for the name of the discourse, the Buddha gives three possible names: *Brahmā's Question*, *The Teaching on the Applications of Mindfulness*, and *The Teaching on Heedfulness*.

- i.10 *Brahmā's Question* was translated into Tibetan by the Indian preceptor Jinamitra and the Tibetan translator Bandé Yeshé Dé in the late eighth or the early ninth century. The translation is attested in both of the extant early ninth-century imperial catalogs of translated texts—the Phangthangma and the Denkarma.¹ The Sanskrit original seems to have been lost. The sūtra does not appear to have been translated into Chinese and is not included in the Chinese Buddhist canon. A Mongolian translation from Tibetan is found in the Mongolian Kangyur. An English translation by Peter Skilling is included in his anthology of translations, *Questioning the Buddha*, published in 2021. No modern academic treatments have been identified.
- i.11 The sūtra does not appear to have been widely cited in canonical commentarial works. Although there are numerous references in Tengyur works to “The Sūtra of Brahmā’s Questions” (Tib. *tshangs pas zhus pa'i mdo*), including in Śāntideva’s *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, these citations do not appear to relate to the present text. Some of the citations refer to other Kangyur texts with similar titles, such as *The Questions of Brahmadata* (Toh 159),² or *The Questions of Brahmaviśeṣacintin* (Toh 160),³ while others may be either misattributions or may relate to alternative pre-canonical versions of the current text that are no longer extant.
- i.12 The central topic of the sutra, the applications of mindfulness, is treated in a number of Kangyur texts in terms that have considerable overlap with the present text, such as, for example, parts of the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras.⁴ There are also a number of Pali suttas that address the subject of mindfulness of the body.⁵
- i.13 This English translation was made from the Tibetan text as found in the Degé Kangyur, in consultation with the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*), the Stok Palace Kangyur, and Peter Skilling’s English translation.

**The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra
Brahmā's Question**

1.

The Translation

[F.1.b]

1.1 Homage to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas!

1.2 Thus did I hear at one time. The Bhagavān was staying at Kūṭāgāraśālā in the great forest grove near Vaiśālī together with a great assembly of twelve thousand monks and a great many bodhisattva mahāsattvas.

1.3 In the middle of the night, the Bhagavān sat awake in a cross-legged position, settled in mindfulness. He entered the first meditative concentration, wherein joy and happiness arise from engaging in thought and scrutiny while in seclusion.⁶ Emerging from that, the Bhagavān entered the second meditative concentration, wherein joy and happiness arise from meditative absorption that involves no thought or scrutiny. [F.2.a] Emerging from that, the Bhagavān entered the third meditative concentration, wherein there is no attachment to joy, and one rests comfortably with mindfulness and equanimity. Emerging from that, the Bhagavān entered the fourth meditative concentration, wherein happiness is relinquished, and with suffering already having been relinquished, notions of mental comfort and mental discomfort subside and disappear, and there is only mindfulness and equanimity in which there is neither suffering nor happiness.⁷

1.4 Then the Bhagavān emerged from the fourth concentration and entered the third concentration; he emerged from the third concentration and entered the second concentration; he emerged from the second concentration and entered the first concentration. And when he had emerged from the first concentration, he entered the meditative absorption called *displaying physical forms to beings in accordance with disciples' capacities*. As soon as he entered the meditative absorption *displaying physical forms to beings in accordance with disciples' capacities*, the Bhagavān immediately radiated light, clear and bright.

- 1.5 Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world, dwelling in the brahmā abodes, saw the Bhagavān shining with great radiance, clear and bright, beautifully adorned with the thirty-two marks of a great being. When he saw this, he disappeared from the brahmā world [F.2.b] and he appeared in the great forest, bathing it and everything in it in light, and he was seated before the Bhagavān, very close to him.
- 1.6 Then Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world, thought to himself, “It is difficult to approach and difficult to understand buddha bhagavāns. Since the Bhagavān is immersed in meditative absorption, it would not be appropriate for me to rouse him from his meditation by making a noise like clearing my throat or saying something. Instead, I should politely request the Bhagavān to emerge from his meditation by addressing him in verse.” Assuring himself that this was the case, Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world, draped his upper robe over one shoulder, and with his palms joined, he bowed towards the Bhagavān and, with his head still bowed, he urged the Bhagavān to emerge from his meditation with the following verses:
- 1.7 “Lord, unsullied, unblemished, and immaculate,
You are justly worshipped by gods, by the best of humans,
By gandharvas, nāgas, and asuras as well,
Worshipped in order to heal sentient beings.
- 1.8 “Sage, Most Excellent of Humans, engaged in concentration,
You are as unshakable as a mountain,
As unfathomable as an ocean,
And imperturbable, even by hordes of māras.
- 1.9 “Sage, Holy One, engaged in concentration,
You are without material concern, without marks,
Without distinctions, without reliance,⁸
Without location, and without appearance.
- 1.10 “Your concentration is the perfection of concentration;
It is beyond the scope of discursive thought,
Beyond the scope of childlike beings,
And it transcends the mind and mental factors.
- 1.11 “Lord whose speech is like the roar of a lion,
Sage whose voice reverberates like thunder,
Hero with the grace of the moon,
Homage to you, O jewel for sentient beings.”

- 1.12 Thereupon, becoming aware of these verses of invocation uttered by Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world, [F.3.a] the Bhagavān emerged from his meditative absorption while remaining cross-legged. Once he had emerged, the Bhagavān cleared his throat to summon Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world. When Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world, saw that the Bhagavān had emerged from his absorption while remaining cross-legged, he approached the Bhagavān, circumambulated him three times, bowed his head at the feet of the Bhagavān, and sat down to one side.
- 1.13 Once seated, Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world, said to the Bhagavān, “Were the Bhagavān to grant me a moment, I would like to request a teaching from the tathāgata, arhat, truly complete Buddha, regarding a certain point.” The Bhagavān replied to Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world, “Brahmā, the Tathāgata always has time to grant you a teaching. Brahmā, you may ask the Tathāgata whatever you like, and I will oblige with a teaching that will delight you.”
- 1.14 Granted the opportunity by the Bhagavān, Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world, asked the Bhagavān, “Bhagavān, do bodhisattva mahāsattvas require many dharmas to quickly reach the unsurpassable, truly complete awakening of buddhahood?” The Bhagavān replied to Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world, “Brahmā, if bodhisattva mahāsattvas have just one dharma, they will quickly reach the unsurpassable, truly complete awakening of buddhahood. [F.3.b] What is that one dharma? It is mindfulness that observes the body. Brahmā, how do bodhisattvas mindfully observe the body? Brahmā, it is like this; when bodhisattvas think ‘I am going,’ they are mindful that they are going and recognize what they are doing exactly. When they come back, they are mindful that they are coming back, and they recognize what they are doing exactly. When they lie down, stand, walk, or sit, they are mindful that they are lying down, standing, walking, or sitting, and they recognize what they are doing exactly.
- 1.15 “Sitting alone in seclusion, absorbed inwardly, with a peaceful mind, they reflect on the body as follows: ‘Alas, the body is unstable, impermanent, and inherently weak. It is without essence, in constant flux, subject to disintegration, subject to destruction, dependently originated, like an illusion, and like a dewdrop. It is unstable and impure, maculated with pus, eventually overcome by wind and sun, at the end reduced to dust, and ultimately repulsive. It is vulnerable to many diseases, full of malignancy, beset by headaches, and is by its nature ruined by illness. This stinking, oozing pile of bones needs so much attentive care!’
- 1.16 “By being mindful, bodhisattvas analyze these faults of the body exactly as they are. In this way they are not attached to the body, they do not desire the body, and they do not grasp the body as theirs. Because they do not esteem the body, they are not attached to life, they do not desire life, and

they do not grasp life as theirs. Without esteeming the body or life, they are content with the bare necessities when it comes to monastic robes, food, bedding, seating, medicines, and basic goods. [F.4.a] Every activity undertaken by those engaged in the spiritual life—even those that are beneficial or virtuous—are seen as empty, yet they do not grow weary and they do not despair, and their minds are not burdened with melancholy.

1.17 “When they go before preceptors or teachers, they are mindful and think, ‘To meet a preceptor is rare. To meet a teacher is rare. If I were to go there, and they were to mention or make me recall some wrong or unwholesome deed that I have committed, that would be bad.’

1.18 “That consideration is the cause, condition, and foundation for observing the precepts with respect, with scrupulousness, with wholesome deeds, with quiet composure, and with great thoroughness. Observing the precepts with respect, with scrupulousness, with wholesome deeds, with quiet composure, and with great thoroughness, they are able to go before preceptors and teachers without any anxiety or timidity. They are fearless and do not even show their burgeoning excitement. Why? Because they are respectful, deferential, and cautious, like a bride from a good family. Because they are cautious, they avoid each and every kind of fault and misdeed of the body.

1.19 “Brahmā, what are the faults and misdeeds of the body for bodhisattvas? Brahmā, killing is a fault and a misdeed of the body for bodhisattvas. Brahmā, for bodhisattvas taking what is not given and unchaste conduct are faults and misdeeds of the body. Brahmā, how do bodhisattvas renounce killing? [F.4.b] Brahmā, bodhisattvas do not kill living creatures under the sway of attachment, nor do they kill under the sway of hatred or delusion. They hold other sentient beings and other people dear, just as they hold themselves and those they love dear. They do not themselves kill other sentient beings or other people, nor do they cause others to kill, nor do they rejoice in any act of killing done by others. They do not themselves cut beings, nor do they cause others to cut them, nor do they rejoice in any cutting done by others. They do not themselves strike, nor do they cause others to strike, nor do they rejoice when others strike.

1.20 “How do they renounce taking what is not given? Brahmā, bodhisattvas have no desire for the worldly possessions of beings, such as gold, jewels, pearls, beryl, conch shells, crystal, coral, gold dust, silver, and so on, or for clothing, adornments of various kinds, cattle, grain, stores, or for any kind of pleasing thing. Since they do not even give them a thought, they do not steal or take them. They do not steal, nor do they cause others to steal, nor do they

rejoice in the act of stealing. Whether they are in a city or a remote place, they do not take anything, not even a blade of grass, that has not been given to them.

1.21 “How do they renounce unchaste conduct? Brahmā, bodhisattvas always protect the doors of their sense faculties. They are thoroughly restrained. They only go to suitable places. They are mindful to be well guarded. They are mindful to always be guarded. And with such mindfulness, their minds are safeguarded. [F.5.a] They have control over their bodies and their speech. Being mindful to visit only suitable places, they develop the outlook that it would be preferable to take burning hot sand in their cupped hands and pour it into their own eyes than to look at a beautiful local woman with lust. Why? Because they have the thought that looking at a beautiful local woman in such a way will lead to their ruin and downfall, and to being miserable for a long time.

1.22 “With physical observation of the body like this, they maintain proper mindfulness toward food, drink, lodging, bedding, and seating. They make use of these things, but they do not relish them and they are not attached to them. If they find themselves really relishing them, then they should reflect like this: ‘That which appears to be pleasurable turns out to be the opposite—suffering. There is no conditioned entity in the three realms that can really bring happiness. Why? Because that which is conditioned is impermanent. How can those who are intelligent by nature find happiness in impermanent things?’

1.23 “Brahmā, if bodhisattvas are thoroughly engaged in practice and become oppressed by the sadness that ‘there is only suffering and no happiness,’ they should counter that affliction with the consideration that since this body requires regulation and development, it needs bribery for success.⁹ This body cannot be sustained with only painful exertion. It must be sustained with happy exertion. With a stable body through this life, one can achieve virtuous qualities.¹⁰ By analogy, a merchant who seeks profit may hire a thousand porters and compensate them well. He does not do so in order to enrich the porters with adornments, or in order to make them happy, but rather to have the loads carried. Similarly, when bodhisattvas eat food, they do not eat in order to beautify the body or to please the body, [F.5.b] but rather in order to be able to do those virtuous activities that require a body and that lead to liberation.

1.24 “Brahmā, if bodhisattvas are not able to understand the mind with the antidotes taught by the Tathāgata, then they should reflect as follows: ‘that which we call “the mind” is difficult to perfect. It grasps inappropriately. It is drawn toward saṃsāra and not toward that which is virtuous. It is drawn toward society and not toward seclusion. It is drawn toward pleasure and

not toward suffering. It is drawn toward the joy of speaking and not toward the view of reality. It is drawn toward the impure and not toward the pure. It is hard to control, it is hard to catch, for it is baseless, void, hollow, momentary, and arises from combinations of causes and conditions. Who among those who are intelligent by nature would let themselves be led astray by the mind, which has such a nature?' They think in this way and, by developing awareness of the mind like this, they make effort to tame the mind.

1.25 "In order to tame the tendency toward miserliness, they practice giving. Even giving a single mouthful of food, just a berry, a bean,¹¹ or a grain of sesame, is enough, so long as it is offered to anyone, and not just to those whom one already holds dear or with whom one is already acquainted.¹²

1.26 "In order to tame the tendency toward immoral conduct, they guard their discipline and do not commit misdeeds of body, speech, or mind. They do not get mixed up with or stained by such faults. Also, those with moral discipline do not praise themselves or disparage others.

1.27 "In order to tame the tendency toward ill will, they cultivate forbearance. When they enter cities or towns, they take no notice of the abuse they receive. Even if they are struck, beaten, threatened, overpowered, and insulted, [F.6.a] they think nothing of it. Even if they are harangued by local people, saying, 'Oh these śrāmaṇas with shaved heads are bad! Oh, these śrāmaṇas with ugly shaved heads are bad!'¹³—they think nothing of it. Even when they are slandered with false accusations, they accept it with forbearance and remain focused on what they have to do. And those with forbearance do not praise themselves or disparage others.

1.28 "In order to tame the tendency toward indolence, to attain those qualities oriented toward awakening that have not yet been attained, to develop those that have already been attained, to mature those that have been developed, to master those that have been matured, and to refine those that have been mastered, they apply effort. When acting for the sake of beings, they do not grow weary, they do not despair, and they do not lose heart. Whether it is to benefit an outcaste or a king, they will always go the distance for them, without prejudice. Whether bodhisattvas are offered some base, second-rate object by a miserable and destitute person, or a supremely wonderful gift by a prosperous and wealthy person, bodhisattvas have compassion. They praise them respectfully, encourage and reassure them, and accept the second-rate object. Why? Because it is not an easy thing for a miserable person to give a gift.

1.29 "In order to tame the tendency toward distraction, they develop stable meditative concentration. How do they practice concentration? Brahmā, first of all, bodhisattvas control their body well. Physically, they live in seclusion

and avoid physical contact. [F.6.b] They give up excessive attachment to the body. When the body is lethargic or agitated, they are aware of it. They know what agrees with their body, what sustains it, and what makes it strong. Likewise, they control their speech well. They speak little and their answers are short. What they do say is meaningful and reasonable. They abandon any delight in frivolous talk. Likewise, they also control the mind well. They renounce all unwholesome thoughts.

1.30 “By purifying the three places¹⁴ in this way, they strive to make blue, yellow, red, and white visible forms disappear, not grasping at them as characteristics and not grasping at them as evidence.¹⁵ They do not grasp onto the characteristics of adornments and clothing or take them as indications of some object. They do not grasp onto the characteristics of various visible forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangible objects, or take them as indications. They do not grasp onto the characteristics of men, women, boys, and girls, nor take them as indications.

1.31 “They stay alone in seclusion, settle inwardly, and strive to make the mind stable. Whether taking repulsion as the object of meditation, loving-kindness as the object, or compassion as the object, any despondency that may arise is focused on in the same way, without any physical tension, and the flow of the in breath and the out breath is maintained without interruption so that the wind element is not disturbed. Their minds do not veer off and get distracted. Whether walking, lying, standing, or sitting, they stay with the object and they keep their mind focused on it.

1.32 “Brahmā, once bodhisattvas have achieved stability of mind when focused on an object, they enter meditative equipoise on the mind, in which even the mind is not apprehended as an object by the mind. [F.7.a] The one who is in meditative equipoise is not apprehended and the purpose of meditative equipoise is not apprehended. They think to themselves, ‘Alas! Foolish ordinary people are fixated on worthless, hollow things.’ This is called the special insight of bodhisattvas. With such insight, they neither engage with mental afflictions nor produce them anew. This is called the calm abiding of bodhisattvas.

1.33 “Brahmā, moreover, when bodhisattvas staying in seclusion are settled inwardly, they contemplate the names and letters they have heard and think about what is actually signified by words. When they examine words in this way, they see that letters are worthless and hollow. Having seen that letters are worthless and hollow, they see that names are worthless and hollow. They see that what is signified by a name is also worthless and hollow. They see that any forms that may appear are worthless and hollow. By seeing them as worthless and hollow, they correctly understand them. Because they

correctly understand them, conditioned phenomena come to appear as dreamlike. Having examined phenomena in this way, they rest with their minds firmly established in great compassion toward sentient beings.

1.34 “In order to tame the tendency toward erroneous understanding, they cultivate wisdom. How do they cultivate it? They take as unerring all sūtras—whether expounded by means of relative truth or expounded by means of ultimate truth—that have been clearly and lucidly expressed.¹⁶ They reflect unerringly on what they have understood from the Dharma that has been unerringly taught therein. They apply themselves with effort to the yoga of meditation. With the strength of gnosis and wisdom in particular, they do not apprehend sentient beings, [F.7.b] they do not apprehend life, they do not apprehend hollowness, they do not apprehend people, they do not apprehend persons, they do not apprehend humankind, and they do not apprehend humanity.

1.35 “Nevertheless, they do not fall into the view of nihilism about everything. They carefully study imputed designations. With correct wisdom, they analyze the inner earth element and the outer earth element¹⁷ as being one. With correct wisdom, they likewise analyze the inner water element, fire element, wind element, and their outer counterparts, as being one. They see both kinds of elements as worthless and hollow. They see them as inanimate, essenceless, and as emptiness. Because they see them as such, just as they are not attached to the external elements, they are also not attached to the internal elements.

1.36 “With wisdom, they analyze visual consciousness and physical forms as being one. With wisdom, they analyze auditory consciousness and sounds, olfactory consciousness and smells, gustatory consciousness and tastes, and tactile consciousness and tangible objects as being one.

1.37 “Regarding the earth element, they recognize its solidity but also recognize its wetness, heat, and insubstantiality. Regarding the water element, they recognize its wetness but also recognize its solidity, heat, and insubstantiality. Regarding the fire element, they recognize its heat but also recognize its solidity, wetness, and insubstantiality. Regarding the wind element, they recognize its motility and they also recognize its buoyant motility. Regarding the space element, they recognize its insubstantiality and they recognize that it pervades everything. They recognize the consciousness element as being like an illusion; [F.8.a] they recognize it to be both mistaken and not mistaken. They recognize the visual consciousness as emptiness and visible forms as impermanence. They recognize the auditory consciousness as emptiness and sounds as impermanence. They recognize the olfactory consciousness as emptiness and smells as impermanence. They

recognize the gustatory consciousness as emptiness and tastes as impermanence. They recognize the tactile consciousness as emptiness and tangible objects as impermanence.

1.38 “Learned in wisdom, they have the wisdom that fully realizes and the wisdom that is sharp. They recognize those dharmas that are nonvirtuous and they recognize those dharmas that are virtuous. They recognize the dharmas that bring hearers their attainment. They recognize the dharmas that bring solitary realizers their attainment. They recognize the dharmas that bring bodhisattvas their attainment. They recognize the dharmas that bring buddhas their attainment.

1.39 “They recognize how the weak, middling, and strong ripening of nonvirtuous dharmas leads to rebirth as ghosts, animals, and hell beings. They recognize the weak, middling, and strong feelings of beings who are reborn in those realms. They recognize how the weak, middling, and strong ripening of virtuous dharmas leads to rebirth among gods or humans. And they recognize how the karmic fruits for those reborn there may be weak, middling, and strong.

1.40 “They recognize the dharmas that bring hearers their full attainment: actualizing the fruit of stream-entry, actualizing the fruit of being a once-returned, actualizing the fruit of being a non-returned, and actualizing the fruit of arhatship. [F.8.b] They recognize both liberation through wisdom and the twofold liberation.¹⁸ They recognize the dharmas that bring solitary realizers their full attainment. They recognize their karmic fruits and their peace. They recognize the dharmas that bring bodhisattvas their full attainment: they recognize the path of accumulation and the path of gnosis. Knowing them, they endeavor to progress on the path of accumulation and the path of gnosis.

1.41 They recognize the dharmas that bring the full attainment of buddhahood: great miraculous manifestation, great power, holiness, excellence, preeminence, and greatness, which are not shared by any hearer, solitary realizer, and bodhisattva, not to mention other sentient beings.

1.42 “In this way, they view all phenomena in accordance with the Dharma and properly maintain mindfulness, free from all sinful dharmas, and fully replete with virtuous dharmas. They commit no bodily harm, they are not thrown off by consciousness, they are not thrown off by mind, for they understand the complex of causes and fruits of dharmas just as they are.

1.43 “By analogy, virtuous dharmas spread like ocean waves. But unlike ocean waves that come in only to recede again, for bodhisattvas, those dharmas do not recede. Rather the virtuous dharmas grow like the waxing moon. But unlike how the waning moon recedes, for bodhisattvas, those dharmas do not recede. The virtuous dharmas grow like a raging torrent in the

summertime. But unlike a torrent [F.9.a] that recedes when the summer is over, for bodhisattvas, those dharmas do not recede. Brahmā, bodhisattvas who train in this way will soon completely awaken to unsurpassable, truly complete buddhahood.”

1.44 Thereupon, the Bhagavān spoke these verses:

1.45 “When you recognize the faults of the body,
You won’t rely¹⁹ on the faults that the body has;
When you are mindful of the body,
You will obtain a state of faultless peace.

1.46 “When you don’t recognize the faults of the body,
You won’t be aware of the faults the body has;
When you are not mindful of the body,
You will find suffering hard to bear.

1.47 “When you recognize the faults of the mind,
You won’t rely on the faults that the mind has;
When you are mindful of the mind,
You will obtain a state of faultless peace.

1.48 “When you do not recognize the faults of the mind,
You won’t be aware of the faults the mind has;
When you are not mindful of the mind,
You will find suffering hard to bear.

1.49 “One who relies on virtuous dharmas,
Will not rely on nonvirtuous dharmas;
One who is skilled in the dharmas
Will obtain a state of faultless peace.

1.50 “One who does not rely on virtuous dharmas,
Will rely on nonvirtuous dharmas;
One who is not skilled in the dharmas
Will find suffering hard to bear.”

1.51 Then, Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world, conjured divine mandārava flowers and scattered them over the Bhagavān. Having strewn the flowers, he was delighted and rejoiced in what the Bhagavān had said. He circumambulated the Bhagavān three times and then departed from the Bhagavān’s presence.

1.52 After that, aware that dawn was breaking, the Bhagavān took a seat that had been prepared for him amongst the assembly of monks. Once seated, the Bhagavān said to the monks, “Monks, [F.9.b] last night in the middle of the night, not yet asleep, I was sitting alone in seclusion absorbed inwardly,

when Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world, came before me, bathing this great forest and everything in it with light. He praised me, he circumambulated me three times, and he sat down to one side. Once seated, Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world, said to me, 'Were the Bhagavān to grant me a moment, I would like to request a teaching from the tathāgata, arhat, truly complete Buddha, regarding a certain point.' Monks, this was his request, and I replied to Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world, 'Brahmā, the Tathāgata always has time to grant you a teaching. Brahmā, ask the Tathāgata whatever you like, and I will oblige with a teaching that will delight you.' Granted this opportunity, Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world, asked me, 'Bhagavān, do bodhisattva mahāsattvas require many dharmas to quickly reach the unsurpassable, truly complete awakening of buddhahood?' I replied to Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world, 'Brahmā, if bodhisattva mahāsattvas have just one dharma, they will quickly reach the unsurpassable, truly complete awakening of buddhahood. What is that one dharma? It is mindfulness that observes the body.' Then, monks, I taught Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world, the causes, practices, and results of mindfully observing the body."

1.53 Then, Venerable Ānanda said to the Bhagavān, "Wonderful, wonderful! [F.10.a] Please tell us what the Bhagavān taught to Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world, for the benefit of many beings, for the happiness of many beings, for the benefit, health, and happiness of gods and humans! When new monks, who have only recently gone forth in the Dharma and Vinaya and have not held it for long, or good people who have only recently entered the Mahāyāna, listen to it, they will be delighted, will gain faith, and will maintain their effort in adhering to their training." Then the Bhagavān explained to the monks the explanation he had given to Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world.

1.54 Afterward, Venerable Ānanda said to the Bhagavān, "The Bhagavān has spoken well. The Sugata has spoken well. Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world, also spoke well when he came before the Bhagavān to request such a discourse and asked him to teach. Bhagavān, even if Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world, possessed no root of virtue before, just by the root of virtue generated by requesting this discourse, he will quickly awaken to unsurpassable, truly complete awakening. Why? Because, Bhagavān, no hearer or solitary realizer is capable of realizing the limit and the end of this root of virtue. Why? Because, Bhagavān, Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world, asked this question for the common benefit of all sentient beings."

1.55 "Yes, Ānanda, it is as you say," said the Bhagavān. Then Venerable Ānanda asked the Bhagavān, "Bhagavān, what is the name of this Dharma discourse? [F.10.b] How should we remember it?" The Bhagavān replied,

“You may remember it, Ānanda, as *Brahmā’s Question*. You may remember it as *The Teaching on the Applications of Mindfulness*. You may remember it as *The Teaching on Heedfulness*.”

1.56 When the Bhagavān had finished speaking, Venerable Ānanda, the monks, the bodhisattvas, the entire retinue, and the entire world with its gods, humans, asuras, and gandharvas, rejoiced and praised what the Bhagavān had said.

1.57 *This concludes The Noble Mahāyānasūtra “Brahmā’s Question.”*

c.

Colophon

c.1 Translated, edited, and finalized by the Indian preceptor Jinamitra and the chief editor and translator Bandé Yeshé Dé.

n.

NOTES

- n.1 Phangthangma, p. 15 no. 12; Denkarma F.299.a; Herrmann-Pfandt 2008, pp. 101–2.
- n.2 *The Questions of Brahmadata* (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh159.html>) (translated 2020).
- n.3 *The Questions of Brahmaviśeṣacintin* (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh160.html>) (translated 2021).
- n.4 See, for example, *The Perfection of Wisdom in Twenty-Five Thousand Lines* Toh 9, 9.1 .
- n.5 See *Majjhima Nikāya* no. 119. There is also a series of suttas on mindfulness of the body in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*.
- n.6 Here the Tibetan for the first concentration is slightly different from the classic formulation as found in the *Mahāvīyutpatti* and elsewhere. The present text reads *rtog pa dang bcas pa/ dpyod pa dang bcas pa'i ting nge 'dzin las skyes pa* “[joy] arising from meditative absorption with thought and scrutiny,” whereas the *Mahāvīyutpatti* reads *rtog pa dang bcas pa dpyad pa dang bcas pa dben pa las skyes pa* “arising from thought and scrutiny while in seclusion.” Note that here “in seclusion” does not refer to seclusion in the sense of being in a secluded place while practicing, but rather to being mentally secluded, as it were, from the objects of the senses. In the *Mahāvīyutpatti* it is only the second concentration, not the first, that mentions “absorption.” Since the *Mahāvīyutpatti* is an authoritative source, we have emended the translation here to conform with the first concentration as found there, as does Skilling (2021) in his translation. For the equivalent Sanskrit consult the *Mahāvīyutpatti* with sGra sbyor bam po gñis pa (<https://www2.hf.uio.no/polyglotta/index.php?>

[page=fulltext&view=fulltext&vid=263&cid=336150&mid=483933](#)) online at Bibliotecha Polyglotta (see Bibliography).

- n.7 For an elaboration of the four concentrations as found in the Perfection of Wisdom literature, see, for example, *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eighteen Thousand Lines* (Toh 10, [16.54](#)).
- n.8 Following Narthang and Stok Palace *brten pa*. Degé here reads *brtan pa*, “stability,” which doesn’t fit the context.
- n.9 Tib. *gsug gis bsgrub dgos pa ste*. See Skilling 2021, p. 562 n. 800.
- n.10 The translation of this passage is tentative. Tib. *lus 'di ni sdug bsngal rtsom pas gzung bar mi nus kyi/ bde ba rtsom pas gzung ba bya ba yin te/ bdag gis lus brtan zhing 'tsho ba 'dis dge ba'i chos rnams bsgrub par bya'o*
- n.11 Tib. *rgya shug tsam mam/ mon sran gre'u tsam*. On the possible referents of these terms see Skilling 2021, p. 562 n. 803 and n. 804.
- n.12 Following the Narthang and Stok among others, *'dris pa rnams la ma yin no*. The Degé reads *'dris pa rnams la yin no*.
- n.13 As noted by Skilling, *śrāmaṇas* were often considered inauspicious in ancient Indian society, as reflected in the term *muṇḍaka śrāmaṇa*. See Skilling 2021, p. 562 n. 805.
- n.14 Tib. *gnas gsum*. This is likely a reference to the head, throat, and heart, which represent the body, speech, and mind, respectively.
- n.15 Tib. *de dag la mtshan mar mi 'dzin mngon rtags su mi 'dzin to*. This phrase is repeated in the following sentences, where we have translated it as “not grasping onto characteristics or taking them as indications [of some object].” Peter Skilling translates it as “he does not grasp at the features, he does not grasp at the details.” Skilling 2021, pp. 363–4.
- n.16 The implication being that they were taught by the Buddha himself. See Skilling 2021, p. 563 n. 817.
- n.17 Tib. *zin pa'i sa'i khams dang/ ma zin pa'i sa'i khams*. As noted by Skilling (2021, p. 563 n. 821), the Tib. *zin pa* and *ma zin pa* (lit. “held” and “not held”) here translate the Sanskrit *upātta* and *anupātta*, respectively, terms with which the elements are classified as “appropriated,” in the sense of being part of a person’s body, or “unappropriated” in the sense of belonging to any other matter. Hence our translation, following Skilling, as “inner” and “outer” elements, respectively.

- n.18 The twofold liberation (Skt. *ubhayatobhāgavimuktaḥ*, Tib. *gnyis ka'i cha las rnam par grol ba*) refers to being liberated through both wisdom (*prajñā*, *shes rab*) and meditative concentration (*dhyāna*, *bsam gtan*), whereas being liberated through wisdom alone lacks the perfection of *dhyāna*. See Buswell and Lopez 2014, p. 931. For references to further discussion, see Skilling 2021, p. 563 n. 825.
- n.19 We read here *lus yod skyon rnams mi sten to*, following the Beijing and Stok Palace editions, instead of *lus yod skyon rnams mi ston to*, as found in the Degé.

b.

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GLOSSARY

· Types of attestation for names and terms of the corresponding ·
source language

AS	<i>Attested in source text</i> This term is attested in a manuscript used as a source for this translation.
AO	<i>Attested in other text</i> This term is attested in other manuscripts with a parallel or similar context.
AD	<i>Attested in dictionary</i> This term is attested in dictionaries matching Tibetan to the corresponding language.
AA	<i>Approximate attestation</i> The attestation of this name is approximate. It is based on other names where the relationship between the Tibetan and source language is attested in dictionaries or other manuscripts.
RP	<i>Reconstruction from Tibetan phonetic rendering</i> This term is a reconstruction based on the Tibetan phonetic rendering of the term.
RS	<i>Reconstruction from Tibetan semantic rendering</i> This term is a reconstruction based on the semantics of the Tibetan translation.
SU	<i>Source unspecified</i> This term has been supplied from an unspecified source, which most often is a widely trusted dictionary.

g.1 Ānanda

kun dga' bo

ཀུན་དགའ་བོ།

ānanda^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

A major śrāvaka disciple and personal attendant of the Buddha Śākyamuni during the last twenty-five years of his life. He was a cousin of the Buddha (according to the *Mahāvastu*, he was a son of Śuklodana, one of the brothers of King Śuddhodana, which means he was a brother of Devadatta; other sources say he was a son of Amṛtodana, another brother of King Śuddhodana, which means he would have been a brother of Aniruddha).

Ānanda, having always been in the Buddha's presence, is said to have memorized all the teachings he heard and is celebrated for having recited all the Buddha's teachings by memory at the first council of the Buddhist saṅgha, thus preserving the teachings after the Buddha's parinirvāṇa. The phrase "Thus did I hear at one time," found at the beginning of the sūtras, usually stands for his recitation of the teachings. He became a patriarch after the passing of Mahākāśyapa.

g.2 arhat

dgra bcom pa

དགའ་བཙེམ་པ།

arhat

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

According to Buddhist tradition, one who is worthy of worship (*pūjām arhati*), or one who has conquered the enemies, the mental afflictions (*kleśa-ari-hata-vat*), and reached liberation from the cycle of rebirth and suffering. It is the fourth and highest of the four fruits attainable by śrāvakas. Also used as an epithet of the Buddha.

g.3 asura

lha min

ལྷ་མིན།

asura^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

A type of nonhuman being whose precise status is subject to different views, but is included as one of the six classes of beings in the sixfold classification of realms of rebirth. In the Buddhist context, asuras are powerful beings said to be dominated by envy, ambition, and hostility. They are also known in the pre-Buddhist and pre-Vedic mythologies of India and Iran, and feature prominently in Vedic and post-Vedic Brahmanical mythology, as well as in the Buddhist tradition. In these traditions, asuras are often described as being engaged in interminable conflict with the devas (gods).

g.4 Bandé Yeshé Dé

ye shes sdes

ཡེ་ཤེས་སྡེ་ས།

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Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

Yeshé Dé (late eighth to early ninth century) was the most prolific translator of sūtras into Tibetan. Altogether he is credited with the translation of more than one hundred sixty sūtra translations and more than one hundred additional translations, mostly on tantric topics. In spite of Yeshé Dé's great importance for the propagation of Buddhism in Tibet during the imperial era, only a few biographical details about this figure are known. Later sources describe him as a student of the Indian teacher Padmasambhava, and he is also credited with teaching both sūtra and tantra widely to students of his own. He was also known as Nanam Yeshé Dé, from the Nanam (*sna nam*) clan.

g.5 beautiful local woman

yul gyi bzang mo

ཡུལ་གྱི་བཟང་མོ།

janapadakalyāṇī^{AD}

A beautiful woman of the country, or a “local beauty.”

g.6 Bhagavān

bcom ldan 'das

བཅོམ་ལྡན་འདས།

bhagavat

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

In Buddhist literature, this is an epithet applied to buddhas, most often to Śākyamuni. The Sanskrit term generally means “possessing fortune,” but in specifically Buddhist contexts it implies that a buddha is in possession of six auspicious qualities (*bhaga*) associated with complete awakening. The Tibetan term—where *bcom* is said to refer to “subduing” the four māras, *ldan* to “possessing” the great qualities of buddhahood, and *'das* to “going beyond” saṃsāra and nirvāṇa—possibly reflects the commentarial tradition where the Sanskrit *bhagavat* is interpreted, in addition, as “one who destroys the four māras.” This is achieved either by reading *bhagavat* as *bhagnavat* (“one who broke”), or by tracing the word *bhaga* to the root $\sqrt{bhañj}$ (“to break”).

g.7 Brahmā

tshangs pa

ཚངས་པ།

brahman ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

A high-ranking deity presiding over a divine world; he is also considered to be the lord of the Sahā world (our universe). Though not considered a creator god in Buddhism, Brahmā occupies an important place as one of two gods (the other being Indra/Śakra) said to have first exhorted the Buddha Śākyamuni to teach the Dharma. The particular heavens found in the form realm over which Brahmā rules are often some of the most sought-after realms of higher rebirth in Buddhist literature. Since there are many universes or world systems, there are also multiple Brahmās presiding over them. His most frequent epithets are “Lord of the Sahā World” (*sahāṃpati*) and Great Brahmā (*mahābrahman*).

g.8 brahmā abodes

tshangs pa'i gnas

ཚངས་པའི་གནས།

brahmavihāra

Here refers to the brahmā heavens of the form realm, in which brahmā deities and the supreme deity, Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world, abide. Elsewhere the four brahmā abodes, or the “four immeasurables,” refer to the practices of limitless love, compassion, joy, and equanimity, which lead to rebirth in the brahmā realms.

g.9 Brahmā, lord of the Sahā world

mi mjed kyi bdag po tshangs pa

མི་མཇེད་ཀྱི་བདག་པོ་ཚངས་པ།

brahmā sahāṃpatiḥ ^{AD}

An epithet of the deity Brahmā, who presides over our Sahā world. Though not considered a creator god in Buddhism, Brahmā occupies an important place as one of two gods (the other being Indra/Śakra) said to have first exhorted the Buddha Śākyamuni to teach the Dharma. The particular heavens of the form realm over which Brahmā rules are among the most sought-after realms of higher rebirth in Buddhist literature. Sahā is the name of the particular world system or trichiliocosm, in which our four-continent world is located. It is also the buddhafiield of the Buddha Śākyamuni. Since there are many universes or world systems, there are also multiple supreme Brahmās presiding over them.

g.10 Brahmā world

tshangs pa'i 'jig rten

ཚངས་པའི་འཇིག་རྟེན།

brahmaloka

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

A collective name for the first three heavens of the form realm, which correspond to the first concentration (*dhyāna*): Brahmakāyika, Brahmāpurohita, and Mahābrahmā (also called Brahmāpārṣadya). These are ruled over by the god Brahmā. According to some sources, it can also be a general reference to all the heavens in the form realm and formless realm. (*Provisional 84000 definition. New definition forthcoming.*)

g.11 calm abiding

zhi gnas

ཞི་གནས།

śamatha ^{AD}

One of the basic forms of Buddhist meditation, which focuses on calming the mind. Often presented as part of a pair of meditation techniques, the other technique being “higher insight.”

g.12 concentration

bsam gtan

བསམ་གཏན།

dhyāna ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

Dhyāna is defined as one-pointed abiding in an undistracted state of mind, free from afflicted mental states. Four states of *dhyāna* are identified as being conducive to birth within the form realm. In the context of the Mahāyāna, it is the fifth of the six perfections. It is commonly translated as “concentration,” “meditative concentration,” and so on.

g.13 Dharma and Vinaya

chos 'dul ba

ཚོས་འདུལ་བ།

dharmavinaya ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

An early term used to denote the Buddha’s teaching. “Dharma” refers to the sūtras and “Vinaya” to the rules of discipline.

g.14 discipline

tshul khrims

ཚུལ་ཁྲིམས།

śīla ^{AD}

In the sūtras, this often refers to the observance of the five basic precepts, or for monastics, to the observance of monastic vows. However, it also refers to ethically disciplined behavior in general. Second of the six perfections, and the antidote to the mind's tendency toward laxness of discipline.

g.15 effort

brtson 'grus

བརྩོན་འགུས།

vīrya ^{AD}

Joyful persistence, even in the face of adversity. Fourth of the six perfections, and the antidote to the mind's tendency toward indolence.

g.16 forbearance

bzod pa

བཟོད་པ།

kṣānti ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

A term meaning acceptance, forbearance, or patience. As the third of the six perfections, patience is classified into three kinds: the capacity to tolerate abuse from sentient beings, to tolerate the hardships of the path to buddhahood, and to tolerate the profound nature of reality. As a term referring to a bodhisattva's realization, *dharmakṣānti* (*chos la bzod pa*) can refer to the ways one becomes "receptive" to the nature of Dharma, and it can be an abbreviation of *anutpattikadharmakṣānti*, "forbearance for the unborn nature, or nonproduction, of dharmas."

g.17 four applications of mindfulness

dran pa nye bar gzhag pa bzhi

དྲན་པ་ཉེ་བར་གཞག་པ་བཞི།

catuḥsmṛtyupasthāna ^{AD}

The four applications of mindfulness are (1) the application of mindfulness which observes the physical body; (2) the application of mindfulness which observes feelings; (3) the application of mindfulness which observes the mind; and (4) the application of mindfulness which observes phenomena.

g.18 four concentrations

bsam gtan bzhi

བསམ་གཏན་བཞི།

caturdhyāna^{AD}

Four progressive levels of concentration that culminate in pure meditative absorption. The Sanskrit and Tibetan terms used for the four concentrations are included in the *Mahāvīyutpatti*. They are also enumerated in the *Perfection of Wisdom* literature. They are sometimes framed as part of the nine serial absorptions.

g.19 gandharva

dri za

དྲི་ཟ།

gandharva^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

A class of generally benevolent nonhuman beings who inhabit the skies, sometimes said to inhabit fantastic cities in the clouds, and more specifically to dwell on the eastern slopes of Mount Meru, where they are ruled by the Great King Dhṛtarāṣṭra. They are most renowned as celestial musicians who serve the gods. In the Abhidharma, the term is also used to refer to the mental body assumed by sentient beings during the intermediate state between death and rebirth. Gandharvas are said to live on fragrances (*gandha*) in the desire realm, hence the Tibetan translation *dri za*, meaning “scent eater.”

g.20 giving

sbyin pa

སྤྱིན་པ།

dāna^{AD}

Giving or generosity is the first of the six perfections, and the antidote to the mind’s tendency toward meanness or miserliness (Skt. *mātsarya*, Tib. *ser sna can*).

g.21 hearer

nyan thos

ཉན་ཐོས།

śrāvaka

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The Sanskrit term *śrāvaka*, and the Tibetan *nyan thos*, both derived from the verb “to hear,” are usually defined as “those who *hear* the teaching from the Buddha and *make it heard* to others.” Primarily this refers to those disciples of the Buddha who aspire to attain the state of an arhat seeking their own liberation and nirvāṇa. They are the practitioners of the first turning of the wheel of the Dharma on the four noble truths, who realize the suffering inherent in saṃsāra and focus on understanding that there is no independent self. By conquering afflicted mental states (*kleśa*), they liberate themselves, attaining first the stage of stream enterers at the path of seeing, followed by the stage of once-returners who will be reborn only one more time, and then the stage of non-returners who will no longer be reborn into the desire realm. The final goal is to become an arhat. These four stages are also known as the “four results of spiritual practice.”

g.22 Jinamitra

dzi na mi tra

ཇོ་ན་མི་ཏྲ།

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Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

Jinamitra was invited to Tibet during the reign of King Tri Songdetsen (*khri srong lde btsan*, r. 742–98 CE) and was involved with the translation of nearly two hundred texts, continuing into the reign of King Ralpachen (*ral pa can*, r. 815–38 CE). He was one of the small group of paṇḍitas responsible for the *Mahāvīyūtpatti* Sanskrit–Tibetan dictionary.

g.23 killing

srog gcod pa

སྲོག་གཅོད་པ།

prāṇātipāta^{AD}

Not killing is the first of the five basic precepts.

g.24 Kūṭāgāraśālā

khang pa brtsegs pa'i gnas

ཁང་པ་བརྗེན་པའི་གནས།

kūṭāgāraśālā^{AD}

An important early monastery outside the city of Vaiśālī where the Buddha often stayed. The name Kūṭāgāraśālā means “hall with an upper chamber.” It refers to a temple with one ground-floor room and at least one additional upper room within the structure.

g.25 liberation through wisdom

shes rab kyi rnam par grol ba

ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་རྣམ་པར་གྲོལ་བ།

prajñāvimukti ^{AD}

Liberation involving only wisdom, instead of both meditative absorption and wisdom.

g.26 mahāsattva

sems dpa' chen po

སེམས་དཔའ་ཆེན་པོ།

mahāsattva

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The term can be understood to mean “great courageous one” or “great hero,” or (from the Sanskrit) simply “great being,” and is almost always found as an epithet of “bodhisattva.” The qualification “great” in this term, according to the majority of canonical definitions, focuses on the generic greatness common to all bodhisattvas, i.e., the greatness implicit in the bodhisattva vow itself in terms of outlook, aspiration, number of beings to be benefited, potential or eventual accomplishments, and so forth. In this sense the *mahā-* (“great”) is close in its connotations to the *mahā-* in “Mahāyāna.” While individual bodhisattvas described as *mahāsattva* may in many cases also be “great” in terms of their level of realization, this is largely coincidental, and in the canonical texts the epithet is not restricted to bodhisattvas at any particular point in their career. Indeed, in a few cases even bodhisattvas whose path has taken a wrong direction are still described as *bodhisattva mahāsattva*.

Later commentarial writings do nevertheless define the term—variably—in terms of bodhisattvas having attained a particular level (*bhūmi*) or realization. The most common qualifying criteria mentioned are attaining the path of seeing, attaining irreversibility (according to its various definitions), or attaining the seventh *bhūmi*.

g.27 mandārava flowers

me tog man dA ra ba

མེ་ཏོག་མན་དུ་རབ།

mandārapuṣpa ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

One of the five trees of Indra’s paradise, its heavenly flowers often rain down in salutation of the buddhas and bodhisattvas and are said to be very bright and aromatic, gladdening the hearts of those who see them. In our world, it is a tree native to India, *Erythrina indica* or *Erythrina variegata*, commonly known as the Indian coral tree, mandarava tree, flame tree, and tiger’s claw. In the early spring, before its leaves grow, the tree is fully covered in large flowers, which are rich in nectar and attract many birds. Although the most widespread coral tree has red crimson flowers, the color of the blossoms is not usually mentioned in the sūtras themselves, and it may refer to some other kinds, like the rarer *Erythrina indica alba*, which boasts white flowers.

g.28 māra

bdud

མ་རྩེ།

māra^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

Māra, literally “death” or “maker of death,” is the name of the deva who tried to prevent the Buddha from achieving awakening, the name given to the class of beings he leads, and also an impersonal term for the destructive forces that keep beings imprisoned in saṃsāra:

(1) As a deva, Māra is said to be the principal deity in the Heaven of Making Use of Others’ Emanations (*paranirmitavaśavartin*), the highest paradise in the desire realm. He famously attempted to prevent the Buddha’s awakening under the Bodhi tree—see *The Play in Full* (Toh 95), 21.1—and later sought many times to thwart the Buddha’s activity. In the sūtras, he often also creates obstacles to the progress of śrāvakas and bodhisattvas. (2) The devas ruled over by Māra are collectively called *mārakāyika* or *mārakāyikadevatā*, the “deities of Māra’s family or class.” In general, these māras too do not wish any being to escape from saṃsāra, but can also change their ways and even end up developing faith in the Buddha, as exemplified by Sārthavāha; see *The Play in Full* (Toh 95), 21.14 and 21.43. (3) The term māra can also be understood as personifying four defects that prevent awakening, called (i) the divine māra (*devaputramāra*), which is the distraction of pleasures; (ii) the māra of Death (*mṛtyumāra*), which is having one’s life interrupted; (iii) the māra of the aggregates (*skandhamāra*), which is identifying with the five aggregates; and (iv) the māra of the afflictions (*kleśamāra*), which is being under the sway of the negative emotions of desire, hatred, and ignorance.

g.29 mental factors

sems byung

སེམས་བྱུང་།

caitta ^{AD}

A term used often in Abhidharma literature, which refers to phenomena that arise in the mind, or mental states.

g.30 mindfulness that observes the body

lus kyi rjes su song ba'i dran pa

ལུས་ཀྱི་རྗེས་སུ་སོང་བའི་དྲན་པ།

kāyagatānusmṛti

One of the four applications of mindfulness. In this text, mindfulness of the body is the single quality that ensures quick progression toward the full awakening of a buddha.

g.31 nāga

klu

ལྷ།

nāga ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

A class of nonhuman beings who live in subterranean aquatic environments, where they guard wealth and sometimes also teachings. Nāgas are associated with serpents and have a snakelike appearance. In Buddhist art and in written accounts, they are regularly portrayed as half human and half snake, and they are also said to have the ability to change into human form. Some nāgas are Dharma protectors, but they can also bring retribution if they are disturbed. They may likewise fight one another, wage war, and destroy the lands of others by causing lightning, hail, and flooding.

g.32 non-returner

phyir mi 'ong ba

ཕྱིར་སི་འོང་བ།

anāgamin

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The third of the four attainments of śrāvakas, this term refers to a person who will no longer take rebirth in the desire realm (*kāmadhātu*), but either be reborn in the Pure Abodes (*śuddhāvāsa*) or reach the state of an arhat in their current lifetime. (*Provisional 84000 definition. New definition forthcoming.*)

g.33 once-returner

lan cig phyir 'ong ba

ལན་ཅིག་ཕྱིར་འོང་བ།

sakṛdāgāmin

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

One who has achieved the second of the four levels of attainment on the śrāvaka path and who will attain liberation after only one more birth.

(Provisional 84000 definition. New definition forthcoming.)

g.34 outcaste

gdol pa

གདོལ་པ།

caṇḍāla^{AD}

A member of the lower social classes that are outside the four castes.

g.35 path of accumulation

tshogs kyi lam

ཚོགས་ཀྱི་ལམ།

sambhāramārga^{AD}

g.36 path of gnosis

ye shes kyi lam

ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ལམ།

jñānamārga^{AD}

g.37 Sahā world

mi mjed

མི་མཛེད།

sahā

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The name for our world system, the universe of a thousand million worlds, or trichiliocosm, in which the four-continent world is located. Each trichiliocosm is ruled by a god Brahmā; thus, in this context, he bears the title of Sahāmpati, Lord of Sahā. The world system of Sahā, or Sahālokadhātu, is also described as the buddhafiield of the Buddha Śākyamuni where he teaches the Dharma to beings.

The name Sahā possibly derives from the Sanskrit *√sah*, “to bear, endure, or withstand.” It is often interpreted as alluding to the inhabitants of this world being able to endure the suffering they encounter. The Tibetan translation,

mi mjed, follows along the same lines. It literally means “not painful,” in the sense that beings here are able to bear the suffering they experience.

g.38 Śikṣāsamuccaya

bslab pa kun las btus pa

བསྐྱེས་པ་ཀུན་ལས་བཏུས་པ།

śikṣāsamuccaya

The “Compendium of Training” (Toh 3940) is an eighth-century work in which Śāntideva collects and comments upon citations from the Mahāyāna sūtras. In total, ninety-seven texts are cited, sometimes quite extensively, making this the only available source for the original Sanskrit of many sūtras.

g.39 solitary realizer

rang sangs rgyas

རང་སངས་རྒྱས།

pratyekabuddha

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

Literally, “buddha for oneself” or “solitary realizer.” Someone who, in his or her last life, attains awakening entirely through their own contemplation, without relying on a teacher. Unlike the awakening of a fully realized buddha (*samyaksambuddha*), the accomplishment of a pratyekabuddha is not regarded as final or ultimate. They attain realization of the nature of dependent origination, the selflessness of the person, and a partial realization of the selflessness of phenomena, by observing the suchness of all that arises through interdependence. This is the result of progress in previous lives but, unlike a buddha, they do not have the necessary merit, compassion or motivation to teach others. They are named as “rhinoceros-like” (*khadgaviṣāṇakalpa*) for their preference for staying in solitude or as “congregators” (*vargacārin*) when their preference is to stay among peers.

g.40 special insight

lhag mthong

ལྷག་མཐོང་།

vipaśyanā^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

An important form of Buddhist meditation focusing on developing insight into the nature of phenomena. Often presented as part of a pair of meditation techniques, the other being śamatha, “calm abiding”.

g.41 stream-entry

rgyun du zhugs pa

རྒྱུན་དུ་ལྷན་པ།

srotaāpanna

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

One who has achieved the first level of attainment on the path of the śrāvakas, and who has entered the “stream” of practice that leads to nirvāṇa. (Provisional 84000 definition. New definition forthcoming.)

g.42 sugata

bde bar gshegs pa

བདེ་བར་གཤེགས་པ།

sugata

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

One of the standard epithets of the buddhas. A recurrent explanation offers three different meanings for *su-* that are meant to show the special qualities of “accomplishment of one’s own purpose” (*svārthasampad*) for a complete buddha. Thus, the Sugata is “well” gone, as in the expression *su-rūpa* (“having a good form”); he is gone “in a way that he shall not come back,” as in the expression *su-naṣṭa-jvara* (“a fever that has utterly gone”); and he has gone “without any remainder” as in the expression *su-pūrṇa-ghaṭa* (“a pot that is completely full”). According to Buddhaghōṣa, the term means that the way the Buddha went (Skt. *gata*) is good (Skt. *su*) and where he went (Skt. *gata*) is good (Skt. *su*).

g.43 taking what is not given

ma byin par len pa

མ་བྱིན་པར་ལེན་པ།

adattādāna^{AD}

Not taking what is not given, or not stealing, is the second of the five basic precepts.

g.44 tathāgata

de bzhin gshegs pa

དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ།

tathāgata

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

A frequently used synonym for *buddha*. According to different explanations, it can be read as *tathā-gata*, literally meaning “one who has thus gone,” or as *tathā-āgata*, “one who has thus come.” *Gata*, though literally meaning “gone,” is a past passive participle used to describe a state or condition of existence. *Tatha(tā)*, often rendered as “suchness” or “thusness,” is the quality or condition of things as they really are, which cannot be conveyed in conceptual, dualistic terms. Therefore, this epithet is interpreted in different ways, but in general it implies one who has departed in the wake of the buddhas of the past, or one who has manifested the supreme awakening dependent on the reality that does not abide in the two extremes of existence and quiescence. It is also often used as a specific epithet of the Buddha Śākyamuni.

g.45 thirty-two marks of a great being

skyes bu chen po'i mtshan sum cu rtsa gnyis

སྐྱེས་བུ་ཚེན་པོའི་མཚན་སུམ་རུཅུ་གཉིས།

dvātriṃśanmahāpuruṣalakṣaṇāni

g.46 three realms

khams gsum pa

ཁམས་གསུམ་པ།

traidhātuka

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The three realms that contain all the various kinds of existence in saṃsāra: the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm.

g.47 twofold liberation

gnyis ka'i cha las rnam par grol ba

གཉིས་ཀའི་ཚལས་རྣམ་པར་གྲོལ་བ།

ubhayatobhāgavimukti^{AD}

Being liberated by means of wisdom, (*prajñā*, *shes rab*) and the meditative concentration (*dhyāna*, *bsam gtan*).

g.48 unchaste conduct

mi tshangs par spyod pa

མི་ཚངས་པར་སྦྱོད་པ།

—

The opposite of “pure conduct,” which, in the context of Buddhist monasticism, normally indicates celibacy. Here the context indicates that “unchaste conduct” stands in for the more common formulation of the third basic precept as “sexual misconduct.”

g.49 Vaiśālī

yangs pa · yangs pa can

ཡངས་པ། · ཡངས་པ་ཅན།

vaiśālī

The ancient capital of the Licchavi state. The Buddha visited this city several times during his lifetime.

g.50 wisdom

shes rab

ཤེས་རབ།

prajñā^{AD}

The sixth of the six perfections, it refers to the profound understanding of the emptiness of all phenomena, the realization of ultimate reality.

g.51 yoga

rnal 'byor

རྣམ་འབྲེས།

yoga^{AD}

A term used to refer to a wide range of spiritual practices. It literally means “union” and indicates full immersion in a practice.