

༄༅། །གསུམ་ལ་སྐྱབས་སུ་འགོ་བ།

Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels

Triśaraṇagamana

འཕགས་པ་གསུམ་ལ་སྐྱབས་སུ་འགོ་བ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་མདོ།

'phags pa gsum la skyabs su 'gro ba zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo

The Noble Great Vehicle Sūtra “Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels”

Āryatrisaraṇagamananāmamahāyānasūtra

· Toh 225 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 63 (mdo sde, dza), folios 174.a–175.a

TRANSLATED INTO TIBETAN BY

· Sarvajñādeva · Paltsek ·



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co.

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SUMMARY

- s.1 In *Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels*, the venerable Śāriputra wonders how much merit accrues to someone who takes refuge in the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha. He therefore seeks out the Buddha Śākyamuni and requests a teaching on this topic. The Buddha proceeds to describe how even vast offerings, performed in miraculous ways, would not constitute a fraction of the merit gained by someone who takes refuge in the Three Jewels.

ac.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ac.1 This text was translated by the Dharmachakra Translation Committee under the guidance of Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche. Benjamin Collet-Cassart translated the text from Tibetan. Andreas Doctor compared the draft translation with the original Tibetan, edited the text, and wrote the introduction.

The translation was completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.

i.

INTRODUCTION

i.1

*Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels*¹ unfolds in the Jeta's Grove at Śrāvastī, where the Buddha Śākyamuni is residing with a large gathering of monks. The sūtra begins as the venerable Śāriputra, who is practicing meditation alone in the forest, wonders how much merit is obtained by those who take refuge in the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha. After finishing his meditation practice, Śāriputra goes before the Buddha Śākyamuni and requests the Buddha to teach on that topic. In his answer, the Buddha presents an analogy that is meant to describe the enormous merit that such devotees obtain. Even if someone could magically erect a stūpa the size of the entire world and make vast, miraculous offerings to it for eons on end, the merit gained thereby would not constitute even a fraction of the merit gained by those who take refuge in the Three Jewels. After the Buddha has delivered this teaching, the earth quakes, lightning strikes, and the gods in the heavens play divine music to celebrate the teaching. Finally, the Buddha instructs Ānanda to remember the teaching so that he can pass it on to others.

i.2

Very little is known about the history of this text in India. The Sanskrit version of this sūtra is no longer extant, and it seems to have never been translated into Chinese. Hence, the only witness of this sūtra available today is the Tibetan translation included in the Kangyur. The colophon of the Tibetan translation states that it was produced by the Indian paṇḍita Sarvajñādeva and the Tibetan translator-editor Paltsek, thus locating its translation in the late eighth or early ninth century. This dating is also confirmed by the text's inclusion in the Denkarma (*lhan/ldan dkar ma*) catalog of the early ninth century CE.² The text has previously been translated into English by Kenneth Liberman with the assistance of Jampa Losel in 1988, and most recently, there is another English translation by Peter Skilling, along with some helpful notes, found in his 2021 anthology *Questioning the*

*Buddha: A Selection of Twenty-Five Sutras.*³ The translation presented here was made primarily based on the Degé edition, in consultation with the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*) and the Stok Palace manuscript edition.

The Noble Great Vehicle Sūtra
Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels

1.

The Translation

[F.174.a]

1.1 Homage to the Three Jewels!

1.2 Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was residing in Śrāvastī, in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍada's park, together with a great saṅgha of 1,250 monks.

1.3 At that time, while the venerable Śāradvatīputra was alone in the forest, this thought arose in his mind: "I should go before the Teacher so that I can ask the Well-Gone One, the Dharma Lord, this question: 'How much merit is accumulated by faithful noble sons or noble daughters who take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha of monks?'"

1.4 At dusk the venerable Śāriputra emerged from his meditative seclusion and went to see the Blessed One. When he arrived, he bowed his head to the Blessed One's feet and sat to one side. While seated to the side, the venerable Śāriputra asked the Blessed One, "Honored One, while I was staying alone in the forest in meditative seclusion, this thought arose in my mind: 'How much merit is accumulated by faithful noble sons or noble daughters who take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha of monks?'"

1.5 The Blessed One replied to the venerable Śāriputra, "Śāriputra, you have asked this question in order to benefit and bring happiness to many beings. Out of love for the world, you seek to help a vast number of beings, [F.174.b] gods and humans alike, by accomplishing their welfare and happiness. That is excellent, excellent! Śāriputra, as you have thought to come and question the Thus-Gone One about this matter, I will reply with an analogy to make you understand.

1.6 "Imagine that someone endowed with magical powers were to transfer into another world all the beings that live in Jambudvīpa—the land of Jambudvīpa and its subcontinents, which measure seven thousand leagues

across and lengthwise. Having made the ground even like the palm of a hand, that person would then build a stūpa made of the seven precious gems—gold, silver, beryl, crystal, red coral, emerald, and white coral. It would be the size of Jambudvīpa, and its summit would reach the Brahmā realms. That person would then worship that stūpa with offerings of divine incense, divine flowers, divine garlands, and divine parasols, banners, and flags. This person endowed with these magical powers would then pour all the water of the four great oceans into another world system and replace it with four oceans filled with maruka oil.⁴ He would then place a wick the size of Mount Sumeru into the oceans so that for many eons this oil lamp would continuously burn.

1.7 “Śāriputra, tell me, would that person accumulate a lot of merit on that basis?”

“Blessed One, yes, a lot! Well-Gone One, yes, a lot! This is beyond all the hearers and solitary buddhas. Blessed One, this is the domain of the thus-gone ones. Well-Gone One, this is the domain of the thus-gone ones.”

1.8 “Śāriputra, that amount of merit would not match even a hundredth, [F.175.a] a thousandth, or even a hundred thousandth of the merit created by a noble son or noble daughter who takes refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha. This difference could not be illustrated by any numbers, examples, or calculations.”

1.9 When this Dharma teaching was given, the whole great trichiliocosm began to quiver, tremble, quake, wobble, rock, sway, vibrate, shudder, and reel. Great lightning flashes struck, and the gods caused the sound of drums to be heard.

1.10 The venerable Ānanda asked the Blessed One, “Blessed One, what is the name of this Dharma teaching? How should it be remembered?”

1.11 The Blessed One replied, “Ānanda, you should remember this Dharma teaching as *Accomplishing Limitless Gateways*.⁵ This is how you should see its meaning, and this is how you should remember it.”

1.12 When the Blessed One had spoken, the venerable Śāriputra and the other monks praised the Blessed One’s words.

1.13 *This concludes the noble Great Vehicle sūtra “Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels.”*

c.

Colophon

c.1 This was translated, edited, and finalized by the Indian upādhyāya Sarvajñādeva and the translator-editor Bandé Paltsek.

n.

NOTES

- n.1 Although the title in the Degé version only reads *Taking Refuge in the Three*, we have added *Jewels* based on the title as it appears in the Stok Palace manuscript. This is also clearly the subject and meaning of the text.
- n.2 The Denkarma catalog is dated to ca. 812 CE. See Denkarma, folio 301.a.3. See also Herrmann-Pfandt (2008), p. 162, no. 298.
- n.3 Skilling (2021), pp. 189–98.
- n.4 Tibetan: *ma ru ka'i til mar*.
- n.5 Translated based on Choné, Lithang, Kangxi, Yongle, and Narthang: *sgo mtha' yas pa*. Degé and Stok: *sgo mtha' yas pas*.

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

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 Brahmā realms

tshangs pa'i 'jig rten

ཚངས་པའི་འཇིག་རྟེན།

brahmāloka

The heaven of Brahmā, usually located just above the desire realm (*kāmadhātu*) as one of the first levels of the form realm (*rūpadhātu*) and equated with the state that one achieves in the first meditative absorption (*dhyāna*).

g.3 great trichiliocosm

stong gsum gyi stong chen po'i 'jig rten gyi khams

སྟོང་གསུམ་གྱི་སྟོང་ཚེན་པོའི་འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱི་ཁམས།

trisāhasramahāsāhasralokadhātu

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The largest universe described in Buddhist cosmology. This term, in Abhidharma cosmology, refers to 1,000³ world systems, i.e., 1,000 "dichiliocosms" or "two thousand great thousand world realms" (*dvisāhasramahāsāhasralokadhātu*), which are in turn made up of 1,000 first-order world systems, each with its own Mount Sumeru, continents, sun and moon, etc.

g.4 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.5 Jambudvīpa

'dzam bu'i gling

འཛམ་བུ་རྒྱ་ལྗོངས།

jambudvīpa

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The name of the southern continent in Buddhist cosmology, which can signify either the known human world, or more specifically the Indian subcontinent, literally “the *jambu* island/continent.” Jambu is the name used for a range of plum-like fruits from trees belonging to the genus *Szygium*, particularly *Szygium jambos* and *Szygium cumini*, and it has commonly been rendered “rose apple,” although “black plum” may be a less misleading term. Among various explanations given for the continent being so named, one (in the *Abhidharmakośa*) is that a jambu tree grows in its northern mountains beside Lake Anavatapta, mythically considered the source of the four great rivers of India, and that the continent is therefore named from the tree or the fruit. Jambudvīpa has the Vajrāsana at its center and is the only continent upon which buddhas attain awakening.

g.6 Jeta’s Grove

rgyal bu rgyal byed kyi tshal

རྒྱལ་བུ་རྒྱལ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཚལ།

jetavana

See “Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍada’s Park.”

g.7 Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍada’s Park

rgyal bu rgyal byed kyi tshal mgon med zas sbyin gyi kun dga' ra ba

ཐུལ་བུ་ཐུལ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཚལ་མགོན་མེད་ཟས་སྤྱོན་གྱི་ཀུན་དགའ་ར་བ།

jetavanam anāthapiṇḍadasyārāmaḥ^{AO}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

One of the first Buddhist monasteries, located in a park outside Śrāvastī, the capital of the ancient kingdom of Kośala in northern India. This park was originally owned by Prince Jeta, hence the name Jetavana, meaning Jeta’s grove. The wealthy merchant Anāthapiṇḍada, wishing to offer it to the Buddha, sought to buy it from him, but the prince, not wishing to sell, said he would only do so if Anāthapiṇḍada covered the entire property with gold coins. Anāthapiṇḍada agreed, and managed to cover all of the park except the entrance, hence the name Anāthapiṇḍadasyārāma, meaning Anāthapiṇḍada’s park. The place is usually referred to in the sūtras as “Jetavana, Anāthapiṇḍada’s park,” and according to the *Saṅghabhedavastu* the Buddha used Prince Jeta’s name in first place because that was Prince Jeta’s own unspoken wish while Anāthapiṇḍada was offering the park. Inspired by the occasion and the Buddha’s use of his name, Prince Jeta then offered the rest of the property and had an entrance gate built. The Buddha specifically instructed those who recite the sūtras to use Prince Jeta’s name in first place to commemorate the mutual effort of both benefactors.

Anāthapiṇḍada built residences for the monks, to house them during the monsoon season, thus creating the first Buddhist monastery. It was one of the Buddha’s main residences, where he spent around nineteen rainy season retreats, and it was therefore the setting for many of the Buddha’s discourses and events. According to the travel accounts of Chinese monks, it was still in use as a Buddhist monastery in the early fifth century CE, but by the sixth century it had been reduced to ruins.

g.8 meditative seclusion

nang du yang dag ’jog

ནང་དུ་ཡང་དག་འཛོག་

pratisaṃlayana

This term can mean both physical seclusion and a meditative state of withdrawal.

g.9 Mount Sumeru

ri rab

རི་རབ།

sumeru

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

According to ancient Buddhist cosmology, this is the great mountain forming the axis of the universe. At its summit is Sudarśana, home of Śakra and his thirty-two gods, and on its flanks live the asuras. The mount has four sides facing the cardinal directions, each of which is made of a different precious stone. Surrounding it are several mountain ranges and the great ocean where the four principal island continents lie: in the south, Jambudvīpa (our world); in the west, Godāniya; in the north, Uttarakuru; and in the east, Pūrvavideha. Above it are the abodes of the desire realm gods. It is variously referred to as Meru, Mount Meru, Sumeru, and Mount Sumeru.

g.10 Paltsek

dpal brtsegs

དཔལ་བརྟེན་གསལ།

—

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

Paltsek (eighth to early ninth century), from the village of Kawa north of Lhasa, was one of Tibet's preeminent translators. He was one of the first seven Tibetans to be ordained by Śāntarakṣita and is counted as one of Guru Rinpoché's twenty-five close disciples. In a famous verse by Ngok Lotsawa Loden Sherab, Kawa Paltsek is named along with Chokro Lui Gyaltzen and Zhang (or Nanam) Yeshé Dé as part of a group of translators whose skills were surpassed only by Vairotsana.

He translated works from a wide variety of genres, including sūtra, śāstra, vinaya, and tantra, and was an author himself. Paltsek was also one of the most important editors of the early period, one of nine translators installed by Tri Songdetsen (r. 755–797/800) to supervise the translation of the Tripiṭaka and help catalog translated works for the first two of three imperial catalogs, the Denkarma (*Idan kar ma*) and the Samyé Chimpuma (*bsam yas mchims phu ma*). In the colophons of his works, he is often known as Paltsek Rakṣita (*rak+Shi ta*).

g.11 Śāradvatīputra

sha ra dwa ti'i bu

ཤ་ར་དྲ་ཌི་བུ།

śāradvatīputra

Along with Maudgalyāyana, Śāradvatīputra (also known as Śāriputra) was one of the two main disciples of the Buddha. He was renowned for his pure discipline and was praised by the Buddha as being foremost in terms of insight.

g.12 Śāriputra

shA ri'i bu

ཤ་རི་བུ།

śāriputra

The same as Śāradvatīputra.

g.13 Sarvajñādeva

sarba dz+nyA de ba

སེའུ་རྣམ་ཤེས་པ།

sarvajñādeva

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

According to traditional accounts, the Kashmiri preceptor Sarvajñādeva was among the “one hundred” paṇḍitas invited by Trisong Detsen (r. 755–797/800) to assist with the translation of the Buddhist scriptures into Tibetan. Sarvajñādeva assisted in the translation of more than twenty-three works, including numerous sūtras and the first translations of Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and Nāgārjuna’s *Suhṛllekha*. Much of this work was likely carried out in the first years of the ninth century and may have continued into the reign of Ralpachen (*ral pa can*), who ascended the throne in 815 and died in 838 or 841 CE.

g.14 solitary buddha

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” (*khadḡaviṣāṇakalpa*) for their preference for staying in solitude or as “congregators” (*vargacārin*) when their preference is to stay among peers.

g.15 Śrāvastī

mnyan yod

མཉན་ཡོད།

śrāvastī

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

During the life of the Buddha, Śrāvastī was the capital city of the powerful kingdom of Kośala, ruled by King Prasenajit, who became a follower and patron of the Buddha. It was also the hometown of Anāthapiṇḍada, the wealthy patron who first invited the Buddha there, and then offered him a park known as Jetavana, Prince Jeta's Grove, which became one of the first Buddhist monasteries. The Buddha is said to have spent about twenty-five rainy seasons with his disciples in Śrāvastī, thus it is named as the setting of numerous events and teachings. It is located in present-day Uttar Pradesh in northern India.