

། ཚེས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་མཚན་གྱི་མདོ།

The Sūtra of Dharmaketu

Dharmaketusūtra

འཕགས་པ་ཚོས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་མཚན་གྱི་མདོ་ཐེག་པ་ཚེན་པོ་འོ།

'phags pa chos kyi rgyal mtshan gyi mdo theg pa chen po'o

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra of Dharmaketu

Āryadharmaketumahāyānasūtra

· Toh 254 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 66 (mdo sde, za), folios 70.b–71.a



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co.

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SUMMARY

s.1 While the Buddha Śākyamuni is staying in Śrāvastī, a bodhisattva named Dharmaketu asks him what qualities a bodhisattva must possess in order to reach awakening quickly. In response, the Buddha enumerates the ten most important qualities for bodhisattvas to cultivate.

ac.

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ac.1 This text was translated and introduced by Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Damcho and team. Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Damcho translated the text and Norbu Samphel reviewed the translation.

ac.2 The translation was completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha. George FitzHerbert edited the translation and the introduction, and Dawn Collins copyedited the text. André Rodrigues was in charge of the digital publication process.

INTRODUCTION

i.

i.1 *The Sūtra of Dharmaketu*, also known as *Dharmaketu's Question*,¹ is among the shortest sūtras in the Kangyur.² While the Buddha Śākyamuni is staying at Prince Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍada's park in Śrāvastī, a bodhisattva named Dharmaketu asks him what qualities a bodhisattva requires to achieve full awakening. In his response, the Buddha enumerates ten key qualities that must be cultivated.

i.2 As noted by Peter Skilling,³ three of these qualities—bodhicitta, never forsaking spiritual mentors, and dwelling in seclusion—overlap with those also enjoined in *The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra on the Four Factors (Caturdharmaka-sūtra, Toh 251, 1.4–1.8)*. An additional three qualities—meditative concentration, ethical conduct, and joyous effort—are among the six perfections that constitute the core of the bodhisattva path. The remaining four factors are faith, compassion, being learned in the Buddha's teachings, and seeking out the oral instructions of masters.

i.3 No Sanskrit version of this sūtra is to our knowledge extant, and it does not appear to have been translated into Chinese. The translators of the text into Tibetan are unknown since none of the Tibetan versions carry a colophon. It is not listed in the Phangthangma or Denkarma catalogs of Tibetan imperial period translations, nor in Chomden Rikpai Raltri's survey of translated texts compiled in the late thirteenth century. It is, however, listed in Butön Rinchen Drup's catalog compiled in 1322.⁴ The sūtra is preserved in both the Tshalpa and Thempangma lineage Kangyurs, although under slightly different titles.⁵

i.4 A recent English translation, based on the Peking Kangyur edition, has been published by Peter Skilling (2021). As noted by Skilling in his introduction, the bodhisattva Dharmaketu does not play a prominent role in Buddhist literature, although he is mentioned as a member of the audience in a number of discourses.⁶

i.5 This translation is based on the Tibetan as found in the Degé Kangyur, in consultation with the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*) and the Stok Palace Kangyur. Where alternative readings have been preferred over the Degé version, that has been recorded in the notes.

**The Noble Mahāyāna
Sūtra of Dharmaketu**

1.

The Translation

[F.70.b]

1.1 Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas.

1.2 Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was staying in Śrāvastī, in Prince Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍada's park. At that time, a bodhisattva named Dharmaketu who was present in his retinue rose from his seat and addressed this question to the Blessed One: "Blessed One, which are the qualities that bodhisattvas must possess to become unsurpassed, perfect, and completely awakened buddhas quickly?"

1.3 The Blessed One replied, "Noble child, there are ten qualities that bodhisattvas should possess to become unsurpassed, perfect, and completely awakened buddhas quickly. What are those ten? They are as follows:

1.4 "The bodhisattvas have faith.

They have bodhicitta.

They do not forsake their spiritual mentors.

They dwell in seclusion and abandon worldly distractions. [F.71.a]

They seek out the oral instructions of gurus and preceptors.⁷

They have compassion.

They are learned in many teachings.

They have meditative concentration.

They have ethical conduct.

Through unparalleled joyous effort, they accomplish every one of their aims."

1.5 The Blessed One spoke these words, and the bodhisattva Dharmaketu⁸ and all those in that retinue praised what the Blessed One had said.

1.6 *This concludes the noble "Sūtra of Dharmaketu."*

n.

NOTES

- n.1 The alternative title of the sūtra, as found in Kangyurs of the Thempangma line such as the Stok Palace Kangyur, is (following the Tibetan) *The Mahāyāna Sūtra “Dharmaketu’s Question”* (*‘phag pa chos kyi rgyal mtshan gyis zhus pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po’i mdo*) or (following the Sanskrit) *The Mahāyāna Sūtra “Dharmaketudhvaja’s Question”* (*Āryadharmaketudhvajapariṣcchānāmamahāyāna-sūtra*). These titles are also found, with only minor orthographic variation, in the Narthang and Lhasa Kangyurs. Peter Skilling notes that *dhvaja* in the Sanskrit title is a “pleonastic” insertion (Skilling 2021, p. 208).
- n.2 The nineteenth century scholar Henri Léon Feer cited this sūtra in his refutation of an assertion by Andre Vassilivič Vassilieff that the early Buddhist sūtras found in the Pali Canon were distinguished by their brevity and simplicity in contrast to the Mahāyāna sūtras. See Feer 1866, p. 277.
- n.3 Skilling 2021, p. 209.
- n.4 Butön, *chos ‘byung*, fol. 152.a.
- n.5 See note 1 above.
- n.6 Notably, in *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti* (Toh 176 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh176.html>)), *The Stem Array* (Toh 44–45 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh44-45.html>)), and *Determining the Vinaya: Upāli’s Questions* (Toh 68 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh68.html>)). In the present sūtra, the bodhisattva’s name Dharmaketu (or Dharmaketudhvaja) is translated into Tibetan as *chos kyi rgyal mtshan*, “Victory Banner of the Dharma,” while in these other canonical translations it was translated as *chos kyi tog*, “Apex of the Dharma,” or *chos kyi dpal*, “Glory of the Dharma.”

- n.7 This follows the Stok Palace Kangyur reading *bla ma dang mkhan po'i gdams ngag yongs su btsal ba*. The Degé and other Kangyurs of the Tshalpa line read differently as “bestow the oral instructions of teachers and preceptors” (*bla ma dang mkhan po'i gdams ngag yongs su stsal ba*). The difference hinges on the spelling of two homophonous verbs in Tibetan. While *btsal ba* (as found in the Stok version) means “seek out” or “look for,” *stsal ba* (as found in the Degé) means “give” or “bestow.” Peter Skilling likewise favors “seek out.” In a note, he offers a reconstruction of the Sanskrit that this could potentially translate, **guru-upādhyāya-upadeśa-paryeṣti / paryeṣana*. See Skilling 2021, p. 538, n. 436. It is also notable that this is the only text in the Kangyur to use the phrase *bla ma dang mkhan po*.
- n.8 The Lithang, Kangxi, Narthang, and Choné Kangyur witnesses here have the epithet “compassionate” (Tib. *snying rje dang*) before the bodhisattva’s name.

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 blessed one

bcom ldan 'das

བཙེམ་ལྷན་འདས།

bhagavān^{AD}

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.2 bodhicitta

byang chub kyi sems

བྱང་ལྷན་གྱི་སེམས།

bodhicitta^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

In the general Mahāyāna teachings the mind of awakening (*bodhicitta*) is the intention to attain the complete awakening of a perfect buddha for the sake of all beings. On the level of absolute truth, the mind of awakening is the realization of the awakened state itself.

In this text:

In this sūtra, the second of the ten factors that lead to awakening.

g.3 bodhisattva

byang chub sems dpa'

བྱང་ལྷན་སེམས་དཔལ།

bodhisattva^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

A being who is dedicated to the cultivation and fulfilment of the altruistic intention to attain perfect buddhahood, traversing the ten bodhisattva levels (*daśabhūmi*, *sa bcu*). Bodhisattvas purposely opt to remain within cyclic existence in order to liberate all sentient beings, instead of simply seeking personal freedom from suffering. In terms of the view, they realize both the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of phenomena.

g.4 buddha

sangs rgyas

སངས་རྒྱས།

buddha^{AD}

The Indic term *buddha* is used in Buddhism as an epithet for fully awakened beings in general and, more specifically, often refers to the historical buddha, Siddhārtha Gautama, also known as the Buddha Śākyamuni. The term *buddha* is the past participle of the Sanskrit root *budh*, meaning “to awaken,” “to understand,” or “to become aware.”

g.5 Butön Rinchen Drup

bu ston rin chen grub

བུ་སྟོན་རིན་ཆེན་གྲུབ།

—

A master of the Sakya school who lived from 1290–1364 CE. He was an influential scholar, historian, compiler, and cataloger of the canon. His compilation of lists of translated works contributed to the emergence of the Kangyur and Tengyur collections.

g.6 Chomden Rikpai Raltri

bcom ldan rig pa'i ral gri

བཅོམ་ལྷན་རིག་པའི་རལ་གྲི།

—

A Tibetan scholar of the early Kadam school who lived from 1227–1305 CE. He composed a history of Buddhism in India and Tibet in 1261 and compiled a survey of Buddhist texts that had been translated into Tibetan. Toward the end of his life he played a key role in the compilation of what is considered the first full Kangyur, known as the old Narthang Manuscript Kangyur, which is no longer extant.

g.7 compassion

snying rje

སྙིང་རྗེ།

—

In this sūtra, the sixth of the ten factors that lead to awakening.

g.8 Dharmaketu

chos kyi rgyal mtshan

ཚོས་གྱི་རྒྱལ་མཚན།

dharmaketu^{AD} · *dharmaketudhvaja*^{AD}

Lit. “Victory Banner of the Dharma.” The name of the bodhisattva whose question prompts the Buddha’s teaching in Toh 254.

g.9 do not forsake their spiritual mentors

dge ba'i bshes gnyen yongs su mi gtang ba

དགེ་བའི་བཤེས་གཉེན་ཡོངས་སུ་མི་གཏང་བ།

—

In this sūtra, the third of the ten factors that lead to awakening.

g.10 dwell in seclusion and abandon worldly distractions

dgon par bsten cing 'du 'dzi spang ba

དགོན་པར་བསྟན་ཅིང་འདུ་འཛི་སྤང་བ།

—

In this sūtra, the fourth of the ten factors that lead to awakening. In Sanskrit, *aranya* refers to “forest” or “wilderness,” as environments suitable for the practice of meditation. The Tibetan term *dgon pa*, while retaining the core meaning of “remote place,” has also come to be the main word used for “monastery.”

g.11 ethical conduct

tshul khrims

ཚུལ་ཁྲིམས།

śīla^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

Morally virtuous or disciplined conduct and the abandonment of morally undisciplined conduct of body, speech, and mind. In a general sense, moral discipline is the cause for rebirth in higher, more favorable states, but it is also foundational to Buddhist practice as one of the three trainings (*trīśikṣā*) and one of the six perfections of a bodhisattva. Often rendered as “ethics,” “discipline,” and “morality.”

In this text:

In this sūtra, the ninth of the ten factors that lead to awakening.

g.12 faith

dad pa

དད་པ།

—

In this sūtra, the first of the ten factors that lead to awakening.

g.13 joyous effort

brtson 'grus

བརྩོན་འགུམ།

vīrya ^{AD}

In this sūtra, the tenth of the ten factors that lead to awakening. Often translated as “diligence” or “perseverance,” it involves taking delight in virtue and enthusiasm for engaging in virtuous deeds. It is listed among the five faculties (*indriya*), eleven virtuous mental factors, and as the fourth of the six perfections of a bodhisattva.

g.14 learned in many teachings

mang du thos pa

མང་དུ་སློབ་པ།

—

In this sūtra, the seventh of the ten factors that lead to awakening.

g.15 meditative concentration

ting nge 'dzin

ཉིང་ལེ་འཛིན།

samādhi ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

In a general sense, *samādhi* can describe a number of different meditative states. In the Mahāyāna literature, in particular in the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras, we find extensive lists of different samādhis, numbering over one hundred.

In a more restricted sense, and when understood as a mental state, *samādhi* is defined as the one-pointedness of the mind (*cittaikāgratā*), the ability to remain on the same object over long periods of time. The *Draḥor Bamponyipa* (*sgra sbyor bam po gnyis pa*) commentary on the *Mahāvīryūtpatti* explains the term *samādhi* as referring to the instrument through which mind and mental states “get collected,” i.e., it is by the force of samādhi that the continuum of mind and mental states becomes collected on a single point of reference without getting distracted.

In this text:

In this sūtra, the eighth of the ten factors that lead to awakening.

g.16 Prince Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍada's park

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

རྒྱལ་བུ་རྒྱལ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཚལ་མགོན་མེད་ཟས་སྦྱིན་གྱི་ཀུན་དགའ་ར་བ།

jetavanam anāthapiṇḍadasyārāmaḥ^{AD}

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 Anāthapiṇḍadasyārāmaḥ, meaning Anāthapiṇḍada’s park. The place is usually referred to in the sūtras as “Jetavana, Anāthapiṇḍada’s park,” and according to the *Samghabhedavastu* 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.17 seek out the oral instructions of gurus and preceptors

bla ma dang mkhan po'i gdams ngag yongs su btsal ba

སྐྱེ་མ་དང་མཁན་པོའི་གདམས་ངག་ཡོངས་སུ་བཅུལ་བ།

—

In this sūtra, the fifth of the ten factors that lead to awakening. See [n.7](#) to the translation.

g.18 Śrāvastī

mnyan yod

སམྱེས་ཡོད།

śrāvastī^{AD}

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.