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# The Ocean of Dharma

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*Dharmasamudra*

ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་མདོ་ཚུལ་གྱི་མཚོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ།

*theg pa chen po'i mdo chos rgya mtsho zhes bya ba*

The Mahāyāna Sūtra “The Ocean of Dharma”

*Dharmasamudranāmamahāyānasūtra*

· Toh 255 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 66 (mdo sde, za), folios 71.a–74.a



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## SUMMARY

s.

s.1 At Mount Potalaka, on an island in the ocean, the bodhisattva Lord of the World asks the Buddha what it means to successfully take full ordination as a monk. The Buddha answers that it is only by transcending various forms of dualism that one truly takes full ordination. When the bodhisattva Maitreya asks for clarification of what the Buddha has said, the Lord of the World offers a discourse on the ultimate truth. This discourse wins the Buddha's approval, and the Buddha in turn further elaborates on the ultimate nature of phenomena.

ac.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ac.1 Translated, edited, and finalized by the Subhashita Translation Group. The translation was produced by Lowell Cook who also wrote the introduction. Benjamin Ewing checked the translation against the Tibetan and edited the text.

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

i.

## INTRODUCTION

i.1

*The Ocean of Dharma* is one of the few sūtras to take place on Mount Potalaka, the abode of Avalokiteśvara who is featured in this sūtra under his epithet of Lord of the World. This mythical mountain is said to be found on an island to the south of the Indian subcontinent. It is also identified by some as being in the Pothigai Hills in Tamil Nadu.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, it appears that this sūtra takes its title from this island's location in the ocean.<sup>2</sup>

i.2

It is here, the sūtra tells us, that the Buddha grants the Lord of the World the opportunity to query any teaching he likes, at which the latter inquires as to the true meaning of ordination as a monk. The Buddha's answer emphasizes that true ordination is not an external transformation, like shaving one's head and donning saffron robes, but rather an internal transformation. Specifically, what is required is not just severing attachment to the life of a householder, but also acceptance of the teachings on emptiness. These are particularly associated with the Perfection of Wisdom teachings regarding the transcendence of all dualistic perception or apprehending of objects. It is only when a monk has fully given rise to such nonattachment, extending even to the objects of perception, that he becomes a worthy recipient of offerings.

i.3

The Buddha's teaching is further elaborated when the bodhisattva Maitreya inquires as to the Buddha's intent. This prompts the Lord of the World to give a further discourse that acts as a commentary on the Buddha's statements. He describes the profound nonduality of the ultimate truth which is beyond reifying perception. The Buddha then gives his approval to the Lord of the World's teaching, but he specifies that these profound teachings are not suitable for anyone who has broken their vows or is full of pride. Indeed, while seventeen thousand monks gain immense benefits through these teachings, there are also five hundred monks, described as "those prone to apprehending", who stand up and depart the scene.

- i.4 Stating the benefits associated with a given discourse usually signals its conclusion. Here, however, the sūtra continues with a further section in which the Buddha elaborates on the appropriate audience for the sūtra's teachings before demonstrating to Maitreya the dream-like nature of reality. The sūtra concludes with many bodhisattvas describing the benefits that reciting the sūtra brings both to a physical location and to an individual.
- i.5 *The Ocean of Dharma* is thus among just a few Mahāyāna discourses in the Kangyur whose theme is how being an authentic monk is not a question of keeping outward rules but of realizing the teachings on emptiness. Other sūtras that share this central concern are *The Buddha's Collected Teachings Repudiating Those Who Violate the Discipline* (Toh 220)<sup>3</sup> and *The Chapter of Firm Resolve* (Toh 224).
- i.6 Some uncertainty surrounds the history of this sūtra's translation into Tibetan. The colophon found in most Kangyurs states that it was "translated from Chinese" and that it was "established according to the new terminology." This suggests that an early translation was revised in the early ninth century CE to conform with the standardization of translation terminology introduced by the decree of the Tibetan emperor at that time.<sup>4</sup> However, no translators are named and no corresponding Chinese (or Sanskrit) texts have been identified.<sup>5</sup> There is, however, a different sūtra in the Chinese canon bearing the identical title *The Ocean of Dharma* (Taishō 34, *Fai hai jing* 法海經)<sup>6</sup> with which this one is not to be confused.
- i.7 A text with the title *Noble Ocean of Dharma* is listed in the Denkarma catalog of translated texts compiled in the early ninth century.<sup>7</sup> This may refer to the present text, as suggested by Herrmann-Pfandt.<sup>8</sup> However, it is also possible that this entry refers to the dhāraṇī text of the same name and same length that is listed in the other extant imperial-era catalog, the Phangthangma, namely *The Noble Dhāraṇī Ocean of Dharma*,<sup>9</sup> a text which is found in the Tantra section of the Kangyur (Toh 654). If the two listings do indeed refer to the same text, then our present text would not be found in the imperial catalogs at all. However, when Butön listed a text called *The Ocean of Dharma* in his *History*, it is clear that he was referring to the present text (Toh 255).<sup>10</sup>
- i.8 The language of the sūtra is in places unusual, and though most versions of the colophon indicate that it may have been revised to conform with the ninth-century royal language decrees, there remain indications that it had been translated in a rather literal style from Chinese. In the title, for instance, one would expect a connective particle *kyi* between *chos* and *rgya mtsho*, yet this is omitted, perhaps in order to parallel the assumed Chinese title of \**fai hai* 法海. Similarly, individuals' titles are given after their names as per Chinese syntax, rather than preceding them as they would according to



Tibetan syntax. Thus, in literal translation, the text reads “Maitreya bodhisattva” instead of “bodhisattva Maitreya.” The text is also unusual for a sūtra in not starting with a translator's homage.

i.9 Two features of the sūtra might suggest a relationship with the texts of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* family—its setting on Mount Potalaka, and the recurring vocative used by Lord of the World in addressing Maitreya, rendered in this translation as “O heir of the victorious ones” (*kye rgyal ba'i sras*). Neither feature, however, is unique to that genre, and furthermore the focus on what qualifies monks to receive offerings would seem far from the *Buddhāvataṃsaka*'s principal themes.

i.10 The sūtra does not appear to have been quoted widely in the Tibetan tradition, nor has it been studied or translated into any Western language. With no Sanskrit or Chinese parallel available, the present translation is based on the edition preserved in the Degé Kangyur with reference to variant readings preserved in the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*), the Stok Palace Kangyur, and the Shelkar manuscript.

**The Mahāyāna Sūtra  
The Ocean of Dharma**

1.

## The Translation

[F.71.a]

1.1 Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was staying at Mount Potalaka, on an island in the ocean, surrounded and attended to by a large gathering of heirs of the victorious ones, who had attained irreversibility.

1.2 The Blessed One addressed the bodhisattva great being Lord of the World, “Wise one, you may ask about any Dharma teaching you like.”

1.3 <sup>11</sup>Lord of the World, who was liberated through unobscured love, then asked the Blessed One, “Honorable one, how do youthful ones attain victory over Māra?”

1.4 “The moment you engender the mind of awakening, you will examine desire and will not rely on it. You will be free and without pride. You will possess insight, be skilled in means, and be inspired by emptiness. You will relinquish existence and nonexistence, and for countless lives, considering it to be unreal, will remain in saṃsāra.”<sup>12</sup>

1.5 “How does one go forth into the well-taught Dharma and Vinaya and take full ordination correctly?”

1.6 “To go forth is to transcend the phenomena of different kinds of beings,<sup>13</sup> to transcend the thoughts, mind, and mental consciousnesses that depend on and engage in the bases of suffering; and to hear the teachings on nonduality. [F.71.b] A being of any different kind who goes forth in this way has truly gone forth. When someone has gone forth, yet has let their discipline, conduct, livelihood, view, and motivation deteriorate, it is pointless for them to shave their heads and beards. They are bound by disturbances and hence are led by such disturbances to the lower realms.

1.7 “I have granted permission for donations from the faithful to be used by those who are coherent and liberated:<sup>14</sup> that is, monks who while not discarding their perseverance do not discard form, sensation, perception, formation, or consciousness, but examine the five aggregates individually and together and view them as by nature impermanent, as suffering, as

empty, and as without self. Yet even these views they always cultivate without apprehending them, and taking the elements and the sense sources strictly as non-existent manifestations.<sup>15</sup> What they repudiate as being insubstantial, infected, painful, faulty, antagonizing, and of a deceptive nature, they do that too without any apprehending in their approach, and in that way with their bodies give up craving the body, loving the body, believing there is a self in the body, and clinging to the body. Monks like this have gone forth into the well-taught Dharma and Vinaya, and have faithfully taken full ordination correctly and completely. Such monks are worthy recipients of donations from the whole world along with its gods.”

1.8 The bodhisattva Maitreya then asked the bodhisattva Lord of the World, “What did the Blessed One mean when he taught, ‘Those who have transcended the phenomena of the different kinds of beings and have attained the phenomena beyond the world have gone forth into the well-taught Dharma and Vinaya and have correctly taken full ordination?’”

1.9 “There are other people who may have gone forth and taken full ordination, yet are still confused. Just as a bat<sup>16</sup> is neither a rat nor a bird, these people are neither householders nor renunciants. [F.72.a] Understand the position of these foolish people to be so. But, wise one, the phenomena of different kinds of beings are like illusions and, as such, cannot be transcended. The phenomena of different kinds of beings are imperfect and, as such, are difficult to transcend. The realms of beings<sup>17</sup> do not exist outside, do not exist inside, and are not to be apprehended in either. Thus, what is an entity of the realms of beings is an entity of the phenomena of different kinds of beings. That is difficult to transcend, and it is in this respect, O heir of the victorious ones, that the Blessed One has taught that someone who has transcended the phenomena of different kinds of beings and attained the phenomena beyond the world has gone forth in the well-taught Dharma and Vinaya, has correctly taken full ordination, and is a worthy recipient of offerings who may use what is donated by the faithful.

1.10 “O heir of the victorious ones, if there is no solid basis, what could there be to attain? If the phenomena beyond the world could be attained, they could be observed. The true nature of the thus-gone, worthy, perfect buddhas cannot be observed, and it is from this perspective that the Blessed One taught that someone who has transcended the phenomena of the different realms of beings and attained the phenomena beyond the world is a genuine monk and a worthy recipient of offerings who may use what is donated by the faithful.”

1.11 The bodhisattva Maitreya asked the bodhisattva Lord of the World, “What did the Blessed One mean when he taught that a monk who while not discarding his perseverance does not discard form, does not discard

sensation, perception, formation, or consciousness, is a monk who has gone forth; he is a monk who has fully gone forth into the well-taught Dharma and Vinaya and, as such, is a worthy recipient of offerings who may use what is donated by the faithful?”

1.12 The bodhisattva Lord of the World answered, “O heir of the victorious ones, what the Blessed One meant was the true nature. As the realm of phenomena does not exist outside, does not exist inside, [F.72.b] and is not to be apprehended in either, to identify it as being without sickness, identify it as unborn, and identify it as not arising are not designations to be made. For the sameness of the realm of phenomena accords with the realm of beings being the same, and the sameness of the realm of beings accords with the realm of phenomena being the same. The sameness of the realm of beings and the sameness of the realm of phenomena are thus not two things and cannot be separated. Since they are not two things and cannot be separated, there is nothing to be discarded and nothing not to be discarded. Since there is nothing to be discarded and nothing not to be discarded, it is not possible to transcend or attain anything.

1.13 “That is what the Blessed One meant by a monk who is not to be designated not engaging in identifying things. The monk without any labels transcends labels. For him, even using a formulation to point things out is not right. He does not come, does not go, does not stay, does not sit, and even while sleeping is without concepts.

1.14 “Being at peace and bringing to peace are the criteria for monks who have no apprehending. The ways they behave are criteria, too. The behavior of monks who have all sorts of mistaken concepts is not a criterion.<sup>18</sup> That is what the Blessed One meant by the former kind of monk being a worthy recipient of offerings who may use what is donated by the faithful.”

1.15 The Blessed One then gave the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara his approval: “Wise one, you have taught in accordance with my meaning. Excellent, excellent indeed! To go forth into the well-taught Dharma and Vinaya is the seal of the true and unsurpassed Dharma. Do not teach this in the presence of those who have let their discipline deteriorate, who are untamed, and who are full of pride. However, if there are such people who aim to rid themselves of their arrogance, they may use their insight to see this seal of Dharma just as it is and realize the body that is not apprehended. If they do so they will quickly attain the mental body. With this mental body, they will ripen countless beings to awakening.”

1.16 As this Dharma discourse was being delivered, [F.73.a] the minds of seven thousand monks were liberated from the defilements into the birthless state. Ten thousand bodhisattvas attained acceptance that phenomena are unborn.

However, five hundred monks who were prone to apprehending did not practice or apply this Dharma discourse. Lacking faith in it, they rose from their seats and departed.

1.17 The Blessed One said, “Since what I have intended and said in these teachings is the antidote for all worldly beings’<sup>19</sup> lack of trust, this Dharma discourse is not in accordance with those who apprehend things. It is not in contradiction with those who rely on the nonexistence of things. Know that this Dharma discourse of mine may be taught by those under the guidance of a spiritual guide, those who find inspiration in profound teachings, those who are dissatisfied with saṃsāra, those who are content with austerity, those who delight in isolated places, and those who have accrued roots of virtue with buddhas of the past.

1.18 “O heir of the victorious ones, consider the following analogy. Although a person may mistakenly dream in their sleep that they are speaking in front of a crowd of people and teaching the Dharma, they are not actually heard by anyone in the world. O heir of the victorious ones, what do you think, would the existence of those crowds not contradict that person’s teaching the buddhadharma?”

1.19 Maitreya answered, “Dreams are not real; they are simply delusion.<sup>20</sup> So how could he ever have taught the Dharma to crowds of people?”<sup>21</sup>

1.20 “O heir of the victorious ones, all phenomena are similar to dreams in the very same way, for they are not real. While they arise, they arise without existing. Although relatively they exist as mere delusion, ultimately they do not exist. Even when the meditation that through noble insight makes this manifest in the mind just as it is, the meditator does not apprehend it. For him it exists only in the manner that phenomena do—they are imputed and the activity of dependent power, not something that exists.

1.21 “It is in this way that this teaching is not in accordance with worldly people. Phenomena are taken as the ultimate truth by those who apprehend them, [F.73.b] but the noble ones do not apprehend them.<sup>22</sup> Childish beings cling to phenomena out of ignorance and thereby end up experiencing the afflictions of suffering in the hell realms and as hungry ghosts.

1.22 “How this Dharma discourse is, that is apprehended. How it is apprehended, so are all phenomena. Because the sameness of all phenomena throughout the three times is not apprehended, what is apprehended is understood. What is understood is attained. What is attained is awakening. What is awakening is suchness. What is suchness is the limit of reality. What is the limit of reality is emptiness. What is emptiness is signlessness. What is signlessness is wishlessness. What is wishlessness is the ultimate. What is the ultimate is the realm of phenomena. What is the realm of phenomena is the extent of nonduality. What is the extent of nonduality is the achievement

of the middle way. What is the achievement of the middle way is the completely perfect Buddha's dharma body, which is permanent, perpetual, and unchanging—that is to say, it is neither permanent nor impermanent, neither imputed nor not imputed, and not the one who imputes. What is not imputed is neither worldly nor transcendent. What is neither worldly nor transcendent is ineffable. What is ineffable does not exist even in the slightest. What does not exist even in the slightest is the field of merit for beings. What is the field of merit for beings is the Teacher. What is the Teacher is the unconceived. What is the unconceived is the absence of apprehending. What is the absence of apprehending is unchanging presence. What is unchanging presence is the precious, wish-fulfilling jewel, which fulfills all the wishes of beings to be tamed in accordance with their inclinations."

1.23 Then the many bodhisattvas present spoke in unison: "Any place in which this Dharma discourse is recited will be like vajra. [F.74.a] Since the buddhas and bodhisattvas will be present there, understand that any being there will swiftly gain the higher perceptions and sharp faculties. Whoever explains, memorizes, reads aloud, masters, chants, or properly contemplates this Dharma discourse will not fall prey to Māra."

1.24 When the Blessed One had elucidated his intent, bodhisattvas such as Lord of the World, Maitreya, and others, as well as hearers, and the entire world with its gods and humans, asuras, and gandharvas all rejoiced in what the Blessed One had taught.

1.25 *This completes The Mahāyāna Sūtra "The Ocean of Dharma."*

c.

## Colophon

c.1 Translated from Chinese and established according to the new terminology.<sup>23</sup>



ab.

## ABBREVIATIONS

*C* Choné

*D* Degé

*H* Lhasa (Zhol)

*J* Lithang

*K* Kangxi

*N* Narthang

*S* Stok Palace MS

*Y* Peking Yonglé

*Z* Shey

n.

## NOTES

- n.1 See Buswell 2014, p. 652.
- n.2 Mount Potalaka is the setting for the Avalokiteśvara chapter in *The Stem Array* (*Gaṇḍavyūha*, ch. 45 of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka*, Toh 44), 30.1. It is also the setting of *The Sūtra on the Samādhi in which the Buddhas of the Present All Stand Before One* (*Pratyutpannabuddhasaṃmukhāvasthitasamādhisūtra*, Toh 133). In both these texts, the Tibetan for Mount Potalaka is *ri gru 'dzin* rather than the transliterated form used in the present text. As far as we are aware these are the only sūtras set in this location, although it also figures in tantras and dhāraṇī texts related to Avalokiteśvara.
- n.3 *The Buddha's Collected Teachings Repudiating Those Who Violate the Discipline* (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh220.html>), (*Buddhapiṭakaduḥśīlanigraha*, Toh 220).
- n.4 On the other hand, the colophon in some Kangyurs states the opposite: that it was not established according to the new terminology (see n.23). On the royal decree in the early ninth century to standardize the terminology used in translations of Buddhist texts, according to which many older translations from Chinese, in particular, were re-edited, see R. A. Stein (trans. McKeown) 2010.
- n.5 Silk 2019, p. 239.
- n.6 法海經 (Taishō 34, CBETA ([https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/en/T0034\\_001](https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/en/T0034_001))).
- n.7 Denkarma, folio 299.b: *'phags pa chos kyi rgya mtsho*. It is worth observing that, unlike this listing, the title of the present sūtra has no *'phags pa* prefix and does not include the connective *kyi*. It is also worth observing that the Denkarma listing is not found in the section of the catalog for texts translated from Chinese.

- n.8 Herrmann-Pfandt 2008, p. 114.
- n.9 Phangthangma 2003, p. 25: *'phags pa chos kyi rgya mtsho'i gzungs*. This clearly refers to *The Noble Dhāraṇī "Ocean of Dharma"* (*'phags pa chos kyi rgya mtsho zhes bya ba'i gzungs, Āryadharmasāgaranāmadhāraṇī*, Toh 654), a text with no overlap with the current sūtra. The colophon to Toh 654 states that it was translated by Surendrabodhi, Prajñāvarman, and Bandé Yeshé Dé, clearly indicating an imperial-era translation.
- n.10 Butön, *chos 'byung* (fol. 152.a): *chos kyi rgya mtsho*. It is clear that Butön was referring to this text here as it is listed alongside the texts that precede and follow it (Toh 254 and Toh 256) in Tshalpa-line Kangyurs and its colophon states it is "translated from Chinese."
- n.11 Many Kangyurs appear to have a missing passage here, as the Buddha's invitation to Lord of the World to question him runs without a break (S and Z), with the word *ces* inserted but no punctuation (C), or with punctuation (J, K, N), straight into the second phrase of his answer starting *'dod pa la rtog cing...* ("you will understand desire"), thus omitting Lord of the World's question entirely. Only D, H, and U include the question and the beginning of the answer.
- n.12 Translation tentative. D: *yang dag pa ma yin pa la brtags pas [var. pa] grangs med par yang 'khor bar 'gyur*. Another interpretation would take *pa* (from S and Z) instead of *pas* and read this as *brtags pa yid la 'khor* or *sems la 'khor*, "think," and hence translate "countless thoughts examining the unreal will occur."
- n.13 Tib. *'gro ba tha dad pa'i chos rnam*s. This unusual turn of phrase, which is unique to this text in the entire Kangyur, appears to refer to the experiences of saṃsāra in general.
- n.14 Tib. *rigs pas grol ba ste*. Although on the face of it this could be read as "liberated by reasoning," in this context it is likely a reference to the pair of qualities often found as the defining criteria of proper members of the saṅgha, expressed most commonly in later literature as "knowledge and freedom" (*rig pa dang grol ba*). Here, in place of *rig pa*, we find *rigs pa*, as is also the case in some chapters of another sūtra on similar themes, *The Buddha's Collected Teachings Repudiating Those Who Violate the Discipline* (Toh 220); in both texts the sense of *rigs pa* seems to be more broadly "connectedness" or "coherence" rather than "reasoning" or "logic." On the alternative pairs of terms *rigs pa dang grol ba*, *rigs pa dang grol ba*, and *ldan pa dang grol ba*, see *The Buddha's Collected Teachings Repudiating Those Who Violate the Discipline* (Toh 220), [n.1](#).

- n.15 Translation tentative. D and S: *khams dang / skye mched kyi lha rnam ma yin pa spro ba dam par byed pas*. C, J, K, Y, and N: *skye mched rnam*.
- n.16 Following S, *pha wang* (bat) instead of D, *pha bong* (boulder).
- n.17 Tib. *sems can kyi khams*. The translation of this section remains tentative. In the underlying Sanskrit, there appears to have been play between the parallel Sanskrit terms *sattvadhātu* and *dharmadhātu*, which is lost in the Tibetan translations of those terms as *sems can gyi khams* and *chos dbyings*, respectively.
- n.18 Translation tentative. D and other Kangyurs read: *zhi ba dang nye bar zhi ba rnam mi dmigs pa'i dge slong la brtags pa ste/spyod pa rnam kyang brtags pa'o/log pa la rnam pa mang du rtog pa'i dge slong spyod pa ni ma brtags pa'o*. S and Z read: *zhi ba dang nye bar zhi ba'i rnam mi dmigs pa'i dge slong la brtags pa ste/spyod pa'i rnam kyang brtags pa'o/log pa la rnam pa mang du rtog pa'i dge slong spyod pa ni ma brtags pa'o*.
- n.19 Reading *'jigs rten pa thams cad*, as attested elsewhere in the sūtra, instead of *'jig rten thams cad*.
- n.20 Reading *zhig* from K and Y instead of *zhing*.
- n.21 Reading *'gro ba* instead of *ngan 'gro*, based on context.
- n.22 Translation tentative. Tib. *chos 'di dag la dmigs pa rnam kyis ni don dam par 'dzin gyi 'phags pa'i rnam ni mi dmigs so*.
- n.23 S and Z, along with other peripheral Kangyurs of the Themphangma line, read the opposite: “not established according to the new terminology” (*skad gsar chad kyis gtan la ma phab pa'o*). C, N, J, and K do not have this colophon at all.

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 acceptance that phenomena are unborn

*mi skye ba'i chos la bzod pa*

མི་སྐྱེ་བའི་ཚོས་ལ་བཟོད་པ།

*anutpattikadharmakṣānti*<sup>AD</sup>

An attainment of effortless insight into emptiness and the lack of birth of phenomena. This attainment only occurs on the bodhisattva levels, variously said to occur on the first and eighth bodhisattva levels.

g.2 asura

*lha ma yin*

ལྷ་མ་ཡིན།

*asura*

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.3 Avalokiteśvara

*spyan ras gzigs dbang po*

སྤྱན་རས་གཟིགས་དབང་པོ།

*avalokiteśvara* <sup>AD</sup>

觀自在 · 觀世音

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

One of the “eight close sons of the Buddha,” he is also known as the bodhisattva who embodies compassion. In certain tantras, he is also the lord of the three families, where he embodies the compassion of the buddhas. In Tibet, he attained great significance as a special protector of Tibet, and in China, in female form, as Guanyin, the most important bodhisattva in all of East Asia.

g.4 bases of suffering

*gnas ngan len*

གནས་ངན་ལེན།

*dauṣṭhulya* <sup>AD</sup>

A term that includes all the many factors, whether associated with body, speech, or mind, that underlie present or future suffering, including karma and the afflictions, the various kinds of obscuration, and the aggregates themselves.



g.5 Blessed One

*bcom ldan 'das*

བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས།

*bhagavān* <sup>AD</sup>

出有壞 · 薄伽梵 · 世尊

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

In Buddhist literature, 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.6 Dharma and Vinaya

*chos dang 'dul ba*

ཚོས་དང་འདུལ་བ།

*dharmavinaya* <sup>AD</sup>

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.7 dharma body

*chos kyi sku*

ཚོས་ཀྱི་སྐུ།

*dharmakāya* <sup>AD</sup>

In its earliest use it meant that though the corporeal body of the Buddha had perished, his “body of the Dharma” continued. It also referred to the Buddha’s realization of reality, to his qualities as a whole, or to his teachings as embodying him. It later came to be synonymous with enlightenment or buddhahood, a “body” that can only be “seen” by a buddha.

g.8 disturbances

*rnyog pa*

ལྷོག་པ།

—

In different sūtras, the term *rnyog pa* refers to different sets of problems that beset those on the path. A possible referent here is the set of four (“four kinds of stain”) found in *Cultivating Trust in the Great Vehicle* (Toh 144, 1.2) namely, anger (*khong khro*), lack of trust (*yid mi ches*), hatred (*sdang ba*), and doubt (*the tshom*).

g.9 elements

*kham*s

ཁམས།

*dhātu* <sup>AD</sup>

The constituents of experience. One way of describing experience and the world is in terms of eighteen elements: eye, form, and eye consciousness; ear, sound, and ear consciousness; nose, odor, and nose consciousness; tongue, taste, and tongue consciousness; body, touch, and body consciousness; and mind, mental objects, and mind consciousness.

g.10 emptiness

*stong pa nyid*

སྟོང་པ་ནིད།

*śūnyatā* <sup>AD</sup>

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

Emptiness denotes the ultimate nature of reality, the total absence of inherent existence and self-identity with respect to all phenomena.

According to this view, all things and events are devoid of any independent, intrinsic reality that constitutes their essence. Nothing can be said to exist independent of the complex network of factors that gives rise to its origination, nor are phenomena independent of the cognitive processes and mental constructs that make up the conventional framework within which their identity and existence are posited. When all levels of conceptualization dissolve and when all forms of dichotomizing tendencies are quelled through deliberate meditative deconstruction of conceptual elaborations, the ultimate nature of reality will finally become manifest. It is the first of the three gateways to liberation.

g.11 full ordination

*bsnyen par rdzogs pa*

བསྟེན་པར་རྫོགས་པ།

*upasampadā*<sup>AD</sup>

The ceremony of full or higher ordination by which a male or female novice is confirmed as a fully ordained member of the order of monks or nuns (see Buswell and Lopez 2014, s.v. “*upasampadā*”).

g.12 **gandharva**

*dri za gandharva*

དྷི་ཐ་གཞན་རྒྱ་མཚོ་

*gandharva*

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.13 **heir of the victorious ones**

*rgyal ba'i sras*

རྒྱལ་བའི་སྲས།

*jinaputra*<sup>AD</sup>

佛子

An epithet for bodhisattvas.

g.14 **higher perceptions**

*mngon par shes pa*

མངོན་པར་ཤེས་པ།

*abhijñā*<sup>AD</sup>

When not a general reference to extraordinary knowledge and power, this often refers to a set of six specific abilities: divine sight, divine hearing, knowing how to manifest miracles, remembering previous lives, knowing the minds of others, and knowing that all defects have been eliminated. Sometimes listed as five, without the sixth.

g.15 **hungry ghost**

*yi dags*

ཡི་དགས།

*preta*<sup>AD</sup>

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

One of the five or six classes of sentient beings, into which beings are born as the karmic fruition of past miserliness. As the term in Sanskrit means “the departed,” they are analogous to the ancestral spirits of Vedic tradition, the *pitṛs*, who starve without the offerings of descendants. It is also commonly translated as “hungry ghost” or “starving spirit,” as in the Chinese 餓鬼 *e gui*.

They are sometimes said to reside in the realm of Yama, but are also frequently described as roaming charnel grounds and other inhospitable or frightening places along with piśācas and other such beings. They are particularly known to suffer from great hunger and thirst and the inability to acquire sustenance.

g.16 insight

*shes rab*

ཤེས་རབ།

*prajñā*<sup>AD</sup>

Insight, also often rendered as wisdom, refers to the profound understanding of the emptiness of all phenomena. It is the sixth of the six perfections. It is often paired with skillful means. Together, they are considered the two indispensable aspects of the bodhisattva path.

g.17 irreversibility

*mi ldog pa*

མི་ལྷོག་པ།

*avaiṣartika*<sup>AD</sup>

A stage on the bodhisattva path where the practitioner will never turn back, or be turned back, from progress toward the full awakening of a buddha.

g.18 limit of reality

*yang dag pa'i mtha'*

ཡང་དག་པའི་མཐའ།

*bhūtakoti*

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

This term has three meanings: (1) the ultimate nature, (2) the experience of the ultimate nature, and (3) the quiescent state of a worthy one (*arhat*) to be avoided by bodhisattvas.

g.19 Lord of the World

*'jig rten gyi dbang po*

འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱི་དབང་པོ།

*lokeśvara* <sup>AD</sup>

In this text, an epithet for Avalokiteśvara.

g.20 Mahāyāna

*theg pa chen po*

ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོ།

*mahāyāna*

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

When the Buddhist teachings are classified according to their power to lead beings to an awakened state, a distinction is made between the teachings of the Lesser Vehicle (Hīnayāna), which emphasizes the individual's own freedom from cyclic existence as the primary motivation and goal, and those of the Great Vehicle (Mahāyāna), which emphasizes altruism and has the liberation of all sentient beings as the principal objective. As the term "Great Vehicle" implies, the path followed by bodhisattvas is analogous to a large carriage that can transport a vast number of people to liberation, as compared to a smaller vehicle for the individual practitioner.

g.21 Maitreya

*byams pa*

བྱམས་པ།

*maitreya* <sup>AD</sup>

彌勒 · 慈氏

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The bodhisattva Maitreya is an important figure in many Buddhist traditions, where he is unanimously regarded as the buddha of the future era. He is said to currently reside in the heaven of Tuṣita, as Śākyamuni's regent, where he awaits the proper time to take his final rebirth and become the fifth buddha in the Fortunate Eon, reestablishing the Dharma in this world after the teachings of the current buddha have disappeared. Within the Mahāyāna sūtras, Maitreya is elevated to the same status as other central bodhisattvas such as Mañjuśrī and Avalokiteśvara, and his name appears frequently in

sūtras, either as the Buddha’s interlocutor or as a teacher of the Dharma. *Maitreya* literally means “Loving One.” He is also known as Ajita, meaning “Invincible.”

For more information on Maitreya, see, for example, the introduction to *Maitreya’s Setting Out* (Toh 198).

g.22 Māra

*bdud*

བློ་སྤྱོད།

*māra*<sup>AD</sup>

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.23 mind of awakening

*byang chub kyi sems*

བློ་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་སེམས།

*bodhicitta*<sup>AD</sup>

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.

g.24 Mount Potalaka

*po ta la ka'i ri*

པོ་ཏ་ལ་ཀའི་རི།

*potalaka* <sup>AD</sup>

補陀洛伽山 · 普陀洛迦山

Mount Potalaka is the abode of Avalokiteśvara, believed to be an island off the coast of India. The *locus classicus* for Mount Potalaka is the final chapter of the Buddhāvataṃsaka, the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*. It has also been identified as Pothigai Malai or Potityil, in the Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu. In Tibet and China, Potalaka was believed to be an island. In Tibet it is usually referred to by the shortened form Potala.

g.25 Perfection of Wisdom

*shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa*

ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་པ་རོལ་ཏུ་ཕྱིན་པ།

*prajñāpāramitā*

The collection of discourses on the Perfection of Wisdom.

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The sixth of the six perfections, it refers to the profound understanding of the emptiness of all phenomena, the realization of ultimate reality. It is often personified as a female deity, worshiped as the “Mother of All Buddhas” (*sarvajīnamātā*).

g.26 realm of phenomena

*chos kyi dbyings*

ཚོས་ཀྱི་དབྱིངས།

*dharmadhātu* <sup>AD</sup>

Refers to the entirety of phenomena as synonymous with emptiness or the ultimate nature of all things.

g.27 saṃsāra

*'khor ba*

འཁོར་བ།

*saṃsāra* <sup>AD</sup>

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

A state of involuntary existence conditioned by afflicted mental states and the imprint of past actions, characterized by suffering in a cycle of life, death, and rebirth. On its reversal, the contrasting state of nirvāṇa is attained, free from suffering and the processes of rebirth.

g.28 sense sources

*skye mched*

སྐྱེ་མཚན།

*āyatana* <sup>AD</sup>

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

These can be listed as twelve or as six sense sources (sometimes also called sense fields, bases of cognition, or simply āyatanas).

In the context of epistemology, it is one way of describing experience and the world in terms of twelve sense sources, which can be divided into inner and outer sense sources, namely: (1–2) eye and form, (3–4) ear and sound, (5–6) nose and odor, (7–8) tongue and taste, (9–10) body and touch, (11–12) mind and mental phenomena.

In the context of the twelve links of dependent origination, only six sense sources are mentioned, and they are the inner sense sources (identical to the six faculties) of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.

g.29 signlessness

*mtshan ma med pa*

མཚན་མ་མེད་པ།

*animitta* <sup>AD</sup>

The ultimate absence of marks and signs in perceived objects. One of the three gateways to liberation; the other two are emptiness and wishlessness.

g.30 skilled in means

*thabs la mkhas pa*

ཐབས་ལ་མཁས་པ།

*upāya* <sup>AD</sup>

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The concept of skillful or expedient means is central to the understanding of the Buddha's enlightened deeds and the many scriptures that are revealed contingent on the needs, interests, and mental dispositions of specific types



of individuals. It is, therefore, equated with compassion and the form body of the buddhas, the rūpakāya.

According to the Great Vehicle, training in skillful means collectively denotes the first five of the six perfections when integrated with wisdom, the sixth perfection. It is therefore paired with wisdom (*prajñā*), forming the two indispensable aspects of the path. It is also the seventh of the ten perfections. (*Provisional 84000 definition. New definition forthcoming.*)

g.31 the faithful

*dad pa*

དད་པ།

—

The laity who make offerings to the ordained saṅgha.

g.32 to go forth

*rab tu 'byung ba*

རབ་ཏུ་འབྱུང་བ།

*pravrajati*

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The Sanskrit *pravrajyā* literally means “going forth,” with the sense of leaving the life of a householder and embracing the life of a renunciant. When the term is applied more technically, it refers to the act of becoming a male novice (*śrāmaṇera*; *dge tshul*) or female novice (*śrāmaṇerikā*; *dge tshul ma*), this being a first stage leading to full ordination.

g.33 true nature

*chos nyid*

ཚོས་ཉིད།

*dharmatā*<sup>AD</sup>

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The real nature, true quality, or condition of things. Throughout Buddhist discourse this term is used in two distinct ways. In one, it designates the relative nature that is either the essential characteristic of a specific phenomenon, such as the heat of fire and the moisture of water, or the defining feature of a specific term or category. The other very important and widespread way it is used is to designate the ultimate nature of all phenomena, which cannot be conveyed in conceptual, dualistic terms and is often synonymous with emptiness or the absence of intrinsic existence.

g.34 vajra

*rdo rje*

རྡོ་རྗེ།

*vajra* <sup>AD</sup>

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

This term generally indicates indestructibility and stability. In the sūtras, *vajra* most often refers to the hardest possible physical substance, said to have divine origins. In some scriptures, it is also the name of the all-powerful weapon of Indra, which in turn is crafted from vajra material. In the tantras, the vajra is sometimes a scepter-like ritual implement, but the term can also take on other esoteric meanings.

g.35 wishlessness

*smon pa med pa*

སྲོན་པ་མེད་པ།

*apraṇihita* <sup>AD</sup>

The ultimate absence of any wish, desire, or aspiration, even those directed towards buddhahood. One of the three gateways to liberation; the other two are emptiness and signlessness.

g.36 worthy recipient of offerings

*mchod gnas · sbyin gnas*

མཚོད་གནས། · སྲིན་གནས།

*dakṣiṇīya* <sup>AD</sup>

A person considered worthy of veneration with material offerings. In the context of Tibetan Buddhist history, this is the term often translated as “priest” when paired with the term “patron” (Tib. *sbyin bdag* / *yon bdag*, Skt. *dānapati*) in the compound phrase “priest-patron relationship.”

g.37 youthful ones

*gzhon nur gyur pa*

གཞོན་ནུ་རྒྱུ་པ།

—

An epithet for bodhisattvas.

