

༄༅། །ཤེས་ལྷན་ཉི་མའི་སྒྲིབ་པོ།

The Sūryagarbha Perfection of Wisdom

Sūryagarbhaprajñāpāramitā

འཕགས་པ་ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་པ་རོལ་དུ་ཕྱིན་པ་ཉིམ་འཛིན་སྤང་པོ་བྲེག་པ་ཚེན་པོའི་མདོ།

'phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa nyi ma'i snying po theg pa chen po'i mdo

The Noble Great Vehicle Sūtra “The Sūryagarbha Perfection of Wisdom”

Āryaprajñāpāramitāsūryagarbhamahāyānasūtra



Toh 26

Degé Kangyur, vol. 34 (shes rab sna tshog, ka), folios 175.b–176.b

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co.

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SUMMARY

- s.1 *The Sūryagarbha Perfection of Wisdom* is a condensed prajñāpāramitā sūtra in the form of a dialogue between the Buddha and the bodhisattva Sūryaprabhāsa, who asks the Buddha how bodhisattvas skilled in means should train themselves in the perfection of wisdom. In response, the Buddha explains that a bodhisattva should train in a meditative stability called *the sun* or *the sun skilled in means*, elaborating upon the qualities of this meditative stability using the analogy of the sun in terms of seven qualities. He then further describes the training of the bodhisattva in the perfection of wisdom as training concerning the true nature of all phenomena, which is characterized in familiar terms found in the long prajñāpāramitā sūtras. It is also described in terms of the various designations for ultimate truth. Finally, the Buddha enumerates the characteristics of the one who trains in the perfection of wisdom, ending with a verse of instruction.

ac.

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i.

INTRODUCTION

i.1

The Sūryagarbha Perfection of Wisdom is a condensed prajñāpāramitā sūtra in the form of a dialogue between the Buddha and the bodhisattva Sūryaprabhāsa, who asks the Buddha how bodhisattvas skilled in means should train themselves in the perfection of wisdom. In response, the Buddha explains that a bodhisattva should train in a meditative stability called *the sun* or *the sun skilled in means*. When Sūryaprabhāsa asks how this meditative stability should be cultivated, the Buddha elaborates upon the qualities of the meditative stability using the analogy of the sun in terms of seven of its qualities. He then further describes the training of the bodhisattva in the perfection of wisdom as training with respect to the true nature of all phenomena. This is characterized in familiar terms found in the long prajñāpāramitā sūtras, such as the lack of inherent existence, signlessness, the absence of contamination, and emptiness. It is also described in terms of the various designations for ultimate truth, such as reality (*dharmatā*), the realm of phenomena (*dharmadhātu*), the real nature (*tathatā*), the very limit of reality (*bhūtakoṭi*), and so forth. Finally, the Buddha enumerates the characteristics of the one who trains in the perfection of wisdom, ending with a verse of instruction.

i.2

The Sūryagarbha Perfection of Wisdom is one of five short prajñāpāramitā sūtras that are each named for the bodhisattva who is the Buddha's interlocutor. Curiously in the case of the present sūtra, the bodhisattva who is the Buddha's interlocutor is not actually named Sūryagarbha, but rather Sūryaprabhāsa (Tib. *nyi ma rab tu snang ba*). It may be the case that the sūtra is named for the bodhisattva Sūryagarbha known as one of the bodhisattvas present in the assembly in each of the long prajñāpāramitā sūtras—*The Perfection of Wisdom in One Hundred Thousand Lines* (Toh 8), *The Perfection of Wisdom in Twenty-Five Thousand Lines* (Toh 9),¹ *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eighteen Thousand Lines* (Toh 10),² and *The Perfection of Wisdom in Ten Thousand Lines* (Toh 11).³ The discrepancy presents something of a mystery, and the

fact that the meditative stability that the Buddha teaches is also called *the sun* (Skt. *sūrya*, Tib. *nyi ma*) begs the question as to whether the title of the sūtra might refer to the meditative stability as well as to the sūtra's interlocutor.

i.3 *The Sūryagarbha Perfection of Wisdom* has no colophon, and it is not found in either of the Tibetan imperial catalogs. There is no surviving Sanskrit witness, and it does not appear that the sūtra was ever translated into Chinese and included in the Chinese canon. There also do not appear to be any references to or citations of the sūtra in the commentarial literature of India or Tibet. Unfortunately, then, there is nothing that can be said about the sūtra's provenance or about its transmission and translation in Tibet. It was translated into English with the other condensed prajñāpāramitā sūtras by Edward Conze, who assumes that it dates from the "Tantric period," after 750 CE.⁴ A contemporary translation into Chinese was published by the Kumarajiva Project in 2020.⁵ The present translation is based on the version found in the Degé Kangyur, with reference to the variants recorded in the Comparative Edition (Tib. *dpe bsdur ma*) and to the version found in the Stok Palace Kangyur.

The Noble Great Vehicle Sūtra
The Sūryagarbha Perfection of Wisdom

1.

The Translation

[F.175.b]

1.1 Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas!

Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was residing in a sacred grove⁶ in the country of Magadha together with a large saṅgha of monks and an immeasurable, incalculable number of bodhisattvas who had gathered from infinite buddhafiends.

1.2 Then the bodhisattva great being named Sūryaprabhāsa, who was in the assembly, got up from his seat, went to the Blessed One, and said to him, “Blessed One, I have come to the Tathāgata to ask a question. Blessed One, I request your permission to ask it.”

1.3 The Blessed One replied, “Ask me whatever you wish, and I will answer.”

The bodhisattva Sūryaprabhāsa then asked the Blessed One, “How, Blessed One, should a bodhisattva who is skilled in means train in the perfection of wisdom?” [F.176.a]

“Son of a good family,” replied the Blessed One, “there is a meditative stability that is skilled in means called *the sun*. Bodhisattvas should train in it.”

1.4 “How should they train in it?” he asked the Blessed One.

“Son of a good family,” replied the Blessed One, “the meditative stability *the sun skilled in means*⁷ has seven aspects. What are they? First, just as the sun ripens a sprout, the bodhisattva’s sun-like meditative stability ripens the sprout of awakening in sentient beings. Second, just as the sun never diminishes or dissipates, the compassion of the bodhisattva’s meditative stability acts equally for all sentient beings.⁸ Third, just as the sun burns dust, the bodhisattva’s wisdom of insight burns the dust of the defilements. Fourth, just as the sun melts ice, the bodhisattva’s meditative stability, the antidote endowed with gnosis, melts the ice-like defilements. Fifth, just as the sun dispels darkness, the bodhisattva’s discriminating gnosis⁹ dispels

- the darkness of grasped objects and grasping subjects. Sixth, just as the sun revolves around the four continents, the bodhisattva's perfect activity liberates from the four torrents of suffering. Seventh, just as the sun warms everything equally, the means that is the bodhisattva's perfect conduct, which gladdens all sentient beings, is like that act of warming.
- 1.5 "Furthermore, son of a good family, bodhisattvas should train in the perfection of wisdom. They should train in the fact that all phenomena are without inherent existence, are signless, are totally devoid of all signs, are nonentities, are devoid of all entities, are that which is uncontaminated, are that which is devoid of all contamination, and are empty in their essential nature.
- 1.6 "Son of a good family, bodhisattvas should train in the meaning of reality, the realm of phenomena, the real nature, the very limit of reality, the unmistakable real nature, the one and only real nature, the truth, and thusness." [F.176.b]
- 1.7 Then the Blessed One said to the bodhisattva Sūryaprabhāsa, "Son of a good family, bodhisattvas should also train in the fact that all phenomena are without conditioning¹⁰ and without arising. Son of a good family, they should train in the fact that all phenomena are naturally pure. They should know that all phenomena, such as form and so on, are naturally empty; they should know that they are void in their essential nature.
- 1.8 "Son of a good family, someone who takes up the Perfection of Wisdom sūtra will purify karmic obscurations, the accumulation of merit will arise, they will come to possess an immeasurable accumulation of wisdom, and they will come to possess mindfulness, ethical discipline, and meditative stability. Son of a good family, bodhisattvas should also train in the perfection of wisdom."
- 1.9 At that point, the Blessed One recited this verse:
- 1.10 "Exertion in erudition and the holy Dharma,¹¹
Having loving kindness for all sentient beings,
Possessing the armor of perseverance,
Devotion to the purposes of self and others,
Exertion in cultivating meditative concentration and stability,
Being without perceptions of self and sentient beings,
Practicing like the previous children of the victors—
The wise unmistakably train thus."
- 1.11 After the Blessed One had spoken, the bodhisattva Sūryaprabhāsa, and the world with its gods and humans, rejoiced and praised what the Blessed One had said.
- 1.12 *This concludes the noble Great Vehicle sūtra "The Sūryagarbha Perfection of Wisdom."*

n.

NOTES

- n.1 Padmakara Translation Group (2023), trans., *The Perfection of Wisdom in Twenty-five Thousand Lines* (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh9.html>), Toh 9 (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha).
- n.2 Sparham, Gareth. trans., *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eighteen Thousand Lines* (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh10.html>), Toh 10 (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, 2022).
- n.3 Padmakara Translation Group (2018), trans., *The Transcendent Perfection of Wisdom in Ten Thousand Lines* (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh11.html>), Toh 11 (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha).
- n.4 Conze 1973, p. iv.
- n.5 https://www.ymfz.org/library/kangyur_translated/toh0026/
(https://www.ymfz.org/library/kangyur_translated/toh0026/)
- n.6 Tib. *chos kyi dgon pa*.
- n.7 Tib. *thabs mkhas pa'i nyi ma'i ting nge 'dzin*. Note that above the Tib. is slightly different: *thabs mkhas pa'i ting nge 'dzin nyi ma*.
- n.8 Translation tentative. The English translation follows the Phukdrak and Stok Palace versions in reading *dgrol* in place of *bkol*, resulting in *nyi ma dbri dgrol med pa ltar byang chub sems dpa'i ting nge 'dzin gyi thugs rje ni sems can thams cad la snyoms par mdzad do*. The Degé has *dbri bkol med pa*.
- n.9 Tib. *so sor kun tu rtog pa'i ye shes*.
- n.10 Tib. *mngon par 'du bya ba med pa*.
- n.11 Tib. *mang thos dam pa'i chos la brtson*.

b.

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Toh 10). 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, 2022.

GLOSSARY

· Types of attestation for Sanskrit names and terms ·

AS	<i>Attested in source text</i> This term is attested in the Sanskrit manuscript used as a source for this translation.
AO	<i>Attested in other text</i> This term is attested in other Sanskrit manuscripts of the Kangyur or Tengyur.
AD	<i>Attested in dictionary</i> This term is attested in Tibetan-Sanskrit dictionaries.
AA	<i>Approximate attestation</i> The attestation of this name is approximate. It is based on other names where Tibetan-Sanskrit relationship 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 accumulation

tshogs

ཚོགས།

sambhāra^{AD}

This term denotes the two accumulations of merit and wisdom that are gathered by bodhisattvas on the path to buddhahood.

g.2 blessed one

bcom ldan 'das

བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས།

bhagavān ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

In Buddhist literature, 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.3 bodhisattva

byang chub sems dpa'

བྱང་ལྷན་སེམས་དཔའ།

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 five bodhisattva paths and ten bodhisattva levels. 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 the two aspects of selflessness, with respect to afflicted mental states and the nature of all phenomena.

g.4 buddhfield

sangs rgyas kyi zhing

སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་ཞིང་།

buddhakṣetra ^{AD}

This term denotes the operational field of a specific buddha, spontaneously arising as a result of his altruistic aspirations.

g.5 defilements

nyon mongs pa

ཉོན་མོངས་པ།

kleśa ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The essentially pure nature of mind is obscured and afflicted by various psychological defilements, which destroy the mind’s peace and composure and lead to unwholesome deeds of body, speech, and mind, acting as causes for continued existence in saṃsāra. Included among them are the primary afflictions of desire (*rāga*), anger (*dveṣa*), and ignorance (*avidyā*). It is said that there are eighty-four thousand of these negative mental qualities, for which the eighty-four thousand categories of the Buddha’s teachings serve as the antidote.

Kleśa is also commonly translated as “negative emotions,” “disturbing emotions,” and so on. The Pāli *kilesa*, Middle Indic *kileśa*, and Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit *kleśa* all primarily mean “stain” or “defilement.” The translation “affliction” is a secondary development that derives from the more general (non-Buddhist) classical understanding of √*kliś* (“to harm,” “to afflict”). Both meanings are noted by Buddhist commentators.

g.6 ethical discipline

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 (*triśikṣā*) and one of the six perfections of a bodhisattva. Often rendered as “ethics,” “discipline,” and “morality.”

g.7 four continents

gling bzhi

གླིང་བཞི།

caturdvīpa ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

According to traditional Buddhist cosmology, our universe consists of a central mountain, known as Mount Meru or Sumeru, surrounded by four island continents (*dvīpa*), one in each of the four cardinal directions. The *Abhidharmakośa* explains that each of these island continents has a specific shape and is flanked by two smaller subcontinents of similar shape. To the south of Mount Meru is Jambudvīpa, corresponding either to the Indian subcontinent itself or to the known world. It is triangular in shape, and at its center is the place where the buddhas attain awakening. The humans who inhabit Jambudvīpa have a lifespan of one hundred years. To the east is Videha, a semicircular continent inhabited by humans who have a lifespan of two hundred fifty years and are twice as tall as the humans who inhabit Jambudvīpa. To the north is Uttarakuru, a square continent whose inhabitants have a lifespan of a thousand years. To the west is Godānīya, circular in shape, where the lifespan is five hundred years.

g.8 four torrents of suffering

sdug bsngal gyi chu bo bzhi

ལྷུག་བསྐྱེད་ཀྱི་རྒྱུ་བཞེད།

caturrogha^{AD} · *caturaugha*^{AD}

Either birth, old age, sickness, and death, or desire (*'dod pa*), existence (*srid pa*), ignorance (*ma rig pa*), and wrong views (*log par lta ba*).

g.9 inherent existence

rang bzhin

རང་བཞིན།

svabhāva^{AD}

This term denotes the ontological status of phenomena, according to which they are attributed with existence in their own right, inherently, in and of themselves, objectively, and independent of any other phenomena such as our conception and labeling. The absence of such an ontological reality is defined as the true nature of reality, emptiness.

g.10 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.11 Magadha

ma ga dhA

མ་ག་ཏྲ།

magadha ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

An ancient Indian kingdom that lay to the south of the Ganges River in what today is the state of Bihar. Magadha was the largest of the sixteen “great states” (*mahājanapada*) that flourished between the sixth and third centuries BCE in northern India. During the life of the Buddha Śākyamuni, it was ruled by King Bimbisāra and was home to many of the most important Buddhist sites, including Bodh Gayā, Nālandā, and Rājagṛha. Its capital was initially Rājagṛha but was later moved to Pāṭaliputra (modern-day Patna) sometime after the reign of Bimbisāra's son, Ajātaśatru.

g.12 meditative 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 meditative stability

ting nge 'dzin

ཉིང་ངེ་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 *sgra sbyor bam po gnyis pa* commentary on the *Mahāvīyūtpatti* 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.

g.14 mindfulness

dran pa

སྒོམ་པ།

smṛti ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

This is the faculty that enables the mind to maintain its attention on a referent object, counteracting the arising of forgetfulness, which is a great obstacle to meditative stability. The root *smṛ* may mean “to recollect” but also simply “to think of.” Broadly speaking, *smṛti*, commonly translated as “mindfulness,” means to bring something to mind, not necessarily something experienced in a distant past but also something that is experienced in the present, such as the position of one’s body or the breath.

Together with alertness (*samprajāna*, *shes bzhin*), it is one of the two indispensable factors for the development of calm abiding (*śamatha*, *zhi gnas*).

g.15 obscuration

sgrib pa

སྒྲིབ་པ།

āvaraṇa ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The obscurations to liberation and omniscience. They are generally categorized as two types: affective obscurations (*kleśāvaraṇa*), the arising of afflictive emotions; and cognitive obscurations (*jñeyāvaraṇa*), those caused by misapprehension and incorrect understanding about the nature of reality.

The term is used also as a reference to a set five hindrances on the path: longing for sense pleasures (Skt. *kāmacchanda*), malice (Skt. *vyāpāda*), sloth and torpor (Skt. *styānamiddha*), excitement and remorse (Skt. *auddhatyakaukrtya*), and doubt (Skt. *vicikitsā*).

g.16 real nature

de bzhin nyid

དེ་བཞིན་ཉིད།

tathatā ^{AD}

g.17 reality

chos nyid

ཚོས་ཉིད།

dharmatā ^{AD}

The quality or condition of things as they really are, which cannot be conveyed in conceptual, dualistic terms. Throughout Buddhist discourse this term is used both in regard to the specific relative characteristics of phenomena, such as the heat of fire and the moisture of water, and in terms of their common ultimate characteristic, emptiness.

g.18 realm of phenomena

chos kyi dbyings

ཚོས་ཀྱི་དབྱིངས།

dharmadhātu ^{AD}

g.19 signlessness

mtshan ma med pa

མཚན་མ་མེད་པ།

animitta ^{AD}

g.20 skilled in means

thabs mkhas pa

ཐབས་མཁས་པ།

upāyakuśala ^{AD}

The concept of skillful means is central to the understanding of the Buddha's enlightened deeds and the many scriptures that are revealed contingent to the needs, interests, and mental dispositions of specific types of individuals. 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, to form a union of wisdom and means.

g.21 Sūryaprabhāsa

nyi ma ra btu snang ba

ཉིམ་ར་བཏུ་སྤྲང་བ།

sūryaprabhāsa ^{AD}

The bodhisattva who is the primary interlocutor in this text.

g.22 tathāgata

de bzhin gshegs pa

དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ།

tathāgata ^{AD}

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 also often used as a specific epithet of the Buddha Śākyamuni.

g.23 uncontaminated

zag pa med pa

ཟག་པ་མེད་པ།

anāsrava ^{AD}

Literally, “to flow” or “to ooze.” Mental defilements or contaminations that “flow out” toward the objects of cyclic existence, binding us to them.

g.24 very limit of reality

yang dag pa'i mtha'

ཡང་དག་པའི་མཐའ།

bhūtakoti ^{AD}

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.

