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## The Sūtra on Timings for the Gaṇḍī

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*Gaṇḍīsamayasūtra*

*gaN DI'i dus kyi mdo*

· Toh 299 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 71 (mdo sde, sha), folios 303.b–304.b

TRANSLATED INTO TIBETAN BY

· Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna · Gewai Lodrö ·



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co.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- ti. Title
- im. Imprint
- co. Contents
- s. Summary
- ac. Acknowledgements
- i. Introduction
- tr. The Translation
  - 1. The Sūtra on the Timings for the Gaṇḍī
- c. Colophon
- ap. Appendix
- n. Notes
- b. Bibliography
  - Tibetan
  - Translations and Other Sources
- g. Glossary

s.

## SUMMARY

s.1 In this short text, the Buddha instructs monks on the correct timings for sounding the *gaṇḍī* during each of the twelve months of the year. The timings are given based on the use of a solar clock.

ac.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ac.1 This publication was completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.

ac.2 The text was translated, edited, and introduced by the 84000 translation team. Lowell Cook produced the translation and wrote the introduction. George FitzHerbert edited the translation and the introduction, and Dawn Collins copyedited the text. Martina Cotter was in charge of the digital publication process.

## INTRODUCTION

i.

i.1 *The Sūtra on the Timings for the Gaṇḍī* is a short instruction given by the Buddha concerning the specific times at which the gaṇḍī is to be struck, depending on the month. The gaṇḍī is a long wooden beam<sup>1</sup> that is ritually struck, in a variety of methods, on certain occasions in order to call monks to assemblies or meals, to alert them to gatherings, or to herald the beginning of a rite.<sup>2</sup>

i.2 Whereas the sūtra immediately preceding this in the Degé Kangyur, *The Gaṇḍī Sūtra*<sup>3</sup> describes the construction, consecration, benefits, and symbolism of the gaṇḍī—the sound of which is said to quell conflict and symbolize the Perfection of Wisdom—the present sūtra is concerned exclusively with the times at which the gaṇḍī should be struck during the various seasons and months of the year. Two times are given per month, and the times indicated are before noon. The timings given in this sūtra may relate to the bi-monthly gatherings for the *poṣadha* or Restoration Rite held on the new moon and full moon of every month, at which monastics reaffirm their commitments.<sup>4</sup> However this remains a conjecture since the gaṇḍī may be used on a variety of ritual occasions, and *The Sūtra on the Timings for the Gaṇḍī* does not specify what event the timings prescribed in the text relate to.

i.3 In ancient and medieval India, two principal methods for telling time were in use, namely the shadow clock (Skt. *chāyāpramāṇa*, Tib. *grib tshod*) and the water clock (Skt. *nāḍikā*, Tib. *chu tshod*). The timings prescribed in this sūtra relate to the former. We know that this method of determining time was widely used in the Buddhist monasteries of India during the seventh century CE, since it is described in some detail by the Tang-era Chinese monk Yijing (義淨 635–713 CE), who spent time at Nālandā monastery and gave an account of his experiences in *An Account of Buddhism Sent from the South Seas* (Taishō 2125, *Nanhai ji gui nei fa chuan* 南海寄歸內法傳).<sup>5</sup>



- i.4 As described by Yijing, telling time based on shadow length was premised on the use of a long L-shaped stick or cane. The shorter, vertical length of the stick that casts the shadow was known as the “man” (Skt. *puruṣa*, Tib. *skyes bu*). This vertical portion corresponds to the gnomon of a sundial. The shadow cast by this “man” was measured along the longer horizontal portion of the stick. When the shadow was equal in length to its height, that measurement was also called one “man.” Not unlike how a sundial works, the length of the shadow cast by the gnomon was used to indicate the seasonal hour, a unit of time that varied between seasons.<sup>6</sup>
- i.5 In this eleventh-century Tibetan translation of *The Sūtra on the Timings for the Gaṇḍī*, the units of measurement for the shadow are given in “feet” (Skt. *pada/pāda*, Tib. *rkang pa*) and “fingerbreadths” (Skt. *aṅgula*, Tib. *sor*). Typically in ancient and medieval India, twelve or fourteen fingerbreadths were equal to one foot.<sup>7</sup> In *The Sūtra on the Timings for the Gaṇḍī* it is uncertain how many “feet” correspond to one “man.” Since the Sanskrit term *pāda* can also mean “a quarter,” it is possible that here four feet correspond to one man. All of these measurements would be scaled down in ratio according to the size of the gnomon or “man” in use. Yijing states that the gnomons he witnessed in use in India were four fingerbreadths in height.
- i.6 In *The Sūtra on the Timings for the Gaṇḍī*, the Buddha gives a schedule of twenty-four bi-monthly readings which vary over the course of twelve months and four seasons<sup>8</sup> to cover the entire year. In each case, he gives two shadow length readings which denote the times when the gaṇḍī is to be struck and when it is not. With a few exceptions, these readings are two feet apart. Since the length of the shadow shortens from the first reading to the second, we can infer that these times are in the morning, when the shadows cast by the sun progressively decrease. Hence, for each time of year, the Buddha provides a range from the earliest time at which the gaṇḍī may be struck until the time it may no longer be struck.
- i.7 While the use of the gaṇḍī was widespread in India and continues to be used by monastic communities today, this sūtra does not appear to have survived in any Indic language.
- i.8 The sūtra’s colophon states that it was translated into Tibetan by the Tibetan monk Gewai Lodrö (11th CE) and the Indian preceptor Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna, more widely known as Atiśa Dīpaṃkara (982–1054), the great revitalizer of Buddhism in Tibet after the period of fragmentation. Atiśa and Gewai Lodrö worked closely together to translate a number of works. There is no mention of the sūtra in the catalogs of scriptures translated during the Imperial Period (629–841 CE), which suggests that Atiśa and Gewai Lodrö’s translation was the first time it was translated into Tibetan. Based on the

dates recorded in Atiśa's biographies, we can say with some certainty that this sūtra was likely translated sometime between 1040, when Atiśa first arrived in Tibet, and 1054, the year of his passing.

i.9 The present translation is based on the version found in the Degé Kangyur, in consultation with the variant readings recorded in the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*) and the Stok Palace Manuscript Kangyur.

## **The Sūtra on the Timings for the Gaṇḍī**

1.

## The Translation

[F.303.b]

1.1 Homage to the blessed Youthful Mañjuśrī.

1.2 Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was staying in the Bamboo Grove, in the Kalandakanivāpa near Rājagṛha. The Blessed One called forth the monks and delivered the following teaching.

“Monks, I will explain the times of the year to you. Listen well.

1.3 “Monks, in the first half of the first winter month, seven feet is the time for the gaṇḍī; a fingerbreadth less than four and a half feet is not. In the second half of that month, eight feet is the time for the gaṇḍī; a fingerbreadth less than six feet is not. In the first half of the middle winter month, nine feet is the time for the gaṇḍī; a fingerbreadth less than seven feet is not. In the second half of that month, ten feet is the time for the gaṇḍī; a fingerbreadth less than eight feet is not. In the first half of the last winter month, eleven feet is the time for the gaṇḍī; a fingerbreadth less than nine feet is not. [F.304.a] In the second half of that month, twelve feet is the time for the gaṇḍī; a fingerbreadth less than ten feet is not.

1.4 “In the first half of the first month of spring, eleven feet is the time for the gaṇḍī; a fingerbreadth less than nine feet is not. In the second half of that month, ten feet is the time for the gaṇḍī; a fingerbreadth less than eight feet is not. In the first half of the middle month of spring, nine feet is the time for the gaṇḍī; a fingerbreadth less than seven feet is not. In the second half of that month, eight feet is the time for the gaṇḍī; a fingerbreadth less than six feet is not. During the first half of the last month of spring, seven feet is the time for the gaṇḍī; a fingerbreadth less than five feet is not. In the second half of that month, six feet is the time for the gaṇḍī; a fingerbreadth less than four feet is not.

- 1.5        “In the first half of the first month of summer, six feet is the time for the gaṇḍī; a fingerbreadth less than four feet is not. In the second half of that month, five feet is the time for the gaṇḍī; a fingerbreadth less than three feet is not. In the first half of the middle month of summer, four feet is the time for the gaṇḍī; a fingerbreadth less than three feet is not. In the second half of that month, four feet is the time for the gaṇḍī; a fingerbreadth less than two feet is not. In the first half of the last summer month, three feet is the time for the gaṇḍī; a fingerbreadth less than two feet is not.
- 1.6        “In the first half of the first month of fall, three feet is the time for the gaṇḍī; a fingerbreadth less than two and a half feet is not. In the second half of that month, two feet is the time for the gaṇḍī; a fingerbreadth less than half a foot is not.<sup>9</sup> In the first half of the middle month of fall, four feet is the time for the gaṇḍī; a fingerbreadth less than two feet is not. In the second half of that month, four feet is the time for the gaṇḍī; [F.304.b] a fingerbreadth less than two feet is not. In the first half of the last month of fall, five feet is the time for the gaṇḍī; a fingerbreadth less than three feet is not. In the second half of that month, six feet is the time for the gaṇḍī; a fingerbreadth less than four feet is not.”
- 1.7        After the Blessed One spoke these words, the monks rejoiced and praised what the Blessed One had taught.
- 1.8        *This completes “The Sūtra on the Timings for the Gaṇḍī.”*

c.

## Colophon

c.1 Translated by the Indian preceptor Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna and the translator monk Gewai Lodrö.

ap.

Appendix

## APPENDIX

**Time of Year: First month of winter (1st half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 7*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: 4.5*

**Time of Year: First month of winter (2nd half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 8*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: 6*

**Time of Year: Second month of winter (1st half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 9*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: 7*

**Time of Year: Second month of winter (2nd half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 10*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: 8*

**Time of Year: Third month of winter (1st half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 11*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: 9*

**Time of Year: Third month of winter (2nd half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 12*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: 10*

**Time of Year: First month of spring (1st half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 11*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: 9*

**Time of Year: First month of spring (2nd half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 10*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: 8*

**Time of Year: Second month of spring (1st half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 9*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: 7*

**Time of Year: Second month of spring (2nd half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 8*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: 6*

**Time of Year: Third month of spring (1st half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 7*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: 5*

**Time of Year: Third month of spring (2nd half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 6*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: 4*

**Time of Year: First month of summer (1st half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 6*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: 4*

**Time of Year: First month of summer (2nd half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 5*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: 3*

**Time of Year: Second month of summer (1st half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 4*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: 3*

**Time of Year: Second month of summer (2nd half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 4*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: 2*

**Time of Year: Third month of summer (1st half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 3*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: 2*

**Time of Year: Third month of summer (2nd half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 3*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: 2*

**Time of Year: First month of fall (1st half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 3*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: 2.5*

**Time of Year: First month of fall (2nd half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 2 [3.5?]*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: .5 [2.5?]*

**Time of Year: Second month of fall (1st half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 4*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: 2*



**Time of Year: Second month of fall (2nd half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 4*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: 2*

**Time of Year: Third month of fall (1st half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 5*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: 3*

**Time of Year: Third month of fall (2nd half)**

*Time for gaṇḍī: 6*

*Not time for gaṇḍī: 4*

n.

## NOTES

- n.1 For historical and ethnographical details concerning the gaṇḍī and its wide-ranging usage in Buddhist monasteries, see Helffer 1983, Hu-von Hinüber 1991, and Sobkovyak 2015. In The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary, the term gaṇḍī is defined as "a shaft or stalk, used as a bar." The related Sanskrit term *gaṇḍī* is defined in the Monier-Williams dictionary as "the trunk of a tree from the root to the beginning of the branches." For a discussion of the various definitions and etymologies of the term, see Sobkovyak 2015, p. 689.
- n.2 The *Poṣadhavastu* of the *Vinayavastu* classifies five different types or uses of the gaṇḍī: the gaṇḍī to summon the saṅgha, the gaṇḍī for formal acts, for the dead, for meditation, and for danger. Different methods of striking the gaṇḍī are used in these different contexts. See *The Chapter on the Restoration Rite*. See also Sobkovyak 2015, pp. 690–708.
- n.3 *The Gaṇḍī Sūtra* (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh298.html>), Toh 298.
- n.4 For a description of the ritual of striking the gaṇḍī that begins the *poṣadha* restoration rite, as observed in 2011 at Gandantegchenlin monastery in Ulan Bator, see Sobkovyak 2015, pp. 724-16.
- n.5 Takakasu (trans.) 1896, pp. 100–101. Taishō 2125, (CBETA ([https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/en/T2125\\_001](https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/en/T2125_001))).
- n.6 For discussions of the systems of recording time in ancient India based on a wide variety of Sanskrit texts, see Ôhashi 1993, Ôhashi 1994, and Hayashi 2017.
- n.7 In Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* 2.20.10, for example, fourteen *aṅgula* are said to make one *pada*. See Olivelle (trans.) 2013, p. 146.

- n.8 It is notable that the year is divided here into four seasons of three months each, rather than the five or six seasons more commonly found in Indian treatises. For example, Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* 2.20.54–60 describes six seasons of two months each. See Olivelle (trans.) 2013, p. 147.
- n.9 The readings for the second half of the first month of fall are inconsistent. In all the other readings, there is an incremental change every two weeks, as the shadows get longer as the days get shorter. It seems likely the correct measurements here should be three and a half feet and two and a half feet respectively.

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 Bamboo Grove

*'od ma'i tshal*

འོད་མའི་ཚལ།

*veṇuvana*

The bamboo grove near Rājagṛha where the Buddha regularly stayed and gave teachings. It was situated on land donated by King Bimbisāra of Magadha and, as such, was the first of several landholdings donated to the Buddhist community during the time of the Buddha.

g.2 Blessed One

*bcom ldan 'das*

བཙེམ་ལྷན་འདས།

*bhagavān*

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 √*bhañj* (“to break”).

g.3 Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna

*dI paM ka ra shrI dz+nyA na*

དྲི་པཎ་ཀ་ར་ཤེ་རྫོ་ནཱ།

*dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna*

The Indian master Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna (982–1054) is renowned in the history of Tibetan Buddhism for coming to Tibet and revitalizing Buddhism there during the middle of the eleventh century. Also known as Atiśa.

g.4 fingerbreadth

*sor*

སོར།

*aṅgula*<sup>AD</sup>

A unit of measurement based on the breadth of a finger.

g.5 foot

*rkang pa*

རྐང་པ།

*pada*<sup>AD</sup> · *pāda*<sup>AD</sup>

A unit of measurement based on the foot, or a toe-to-heel step.

g.6 **gaṇḍī**

*gaN DI*

གཎ་ཇི།

*gaṇḍī*<sup>AD</sup>

A percussion instrument made from a wooden beam drawn from specific trees to particular proportions. It has been widely used in Buddhist monasteries to signal timed events like the assembling of monastics.

g.7 **Gewai Lodrö**

*dge ba'i blo gros*

དགེ་བའི་བློ་གྲོས།

—

A Tibetan translator who lived in the eleventh century, during the second spread of Buddhism (*phyi dar*) in Tibet. He was a close collaborator of Atiśa with whom he translated around eleven works and about twelve of Atiśa's writings.

g.8 **Kalandakanivāpa**

*bya ka lan da ka'i gnas*

བྱ་ཀ་ལན་དཀའི་གནས།

*kalandakanivāpa*

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

A place where the Buddha often resided, within the Bamboo Park (Veṇuvana) outside Rajagrha that had been donated to him. The name is said to have arisen when, one day, King Bimbisāra fell asleep after a romantic liaison in the Bamboo Park. While the king rested, his consort wandered off. A snake (the reincarnation of the park's previous owner, who still resented the king's acquisition of the park) approached with malign intentions. Through the king's tremendous merit, a gathering of *kalandaka*—crows or other birds according to Tibetan renderings, but some Sanskrit and Pali sources suggest flying squirrels—miraculously appeared and began squawking. Their clamor alerted the king's consort to the danger, who rushed back and hacked the snake to pieces, thereby saving the king's life. King Bimbisāra then named the spot Kalandakanivāpa ("Kalandakas' Feeding Ground"), sometimes (though not in the *Vinayavastu*) given as Kalandakanivāsa ("Kalandakas' Abode") in their honor. The story is told in



the *Samghabhedavastu* (Toh 1, ch.17, Degé Kangyur vol.4, folio 77.b et seq.). For more details and other origin stories, see the 84000 Knowledge Base article [Veṇuvana and Kalandakanivāpa](#).

g.9 Rājagṛha

*rgyal po'i khab*

རྒྱལ་པོའི་ཁབ།

*rājagṛha*

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The ancient capital of Magadha prior to its relocation to Pāṭaliputra during the Mauryan dynasty, Rājagṛha is one of the most important locations in Buddhist history. The literature tells us that the Buddha and his saṅgha spent a considerable amount of time in residence in and around Rājagṛha—in nearby places, such as the Vulture Peak Mountain (Gṛdhrakūṭaparvata), a major site of the Mahāyāna sūtras, and the Bamboo Grove (Veṇuvana)—enjoying the patronage of King Bimbisāra and then of his son King Ajātaśatru. Rājagṛha is also remembered as the location where the first Buddhist monastic council was held after the Buddha Śākyamuni passed into parinirvāṇa. Now known as Rajgir and located in the modern Indian state of Bihar.

g.10 youthful Mañjuśrī

*'jam dpal gzhon nur gyur pa*

འཇམ་དཔལ་གཞོན་ནུ་རྒྱུ་པ།

*mañjuśrīkumārabhūta*

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

Mañjuśrī is one of the “eight close sons of the Buddha” and a bodhisattva who embodies wisdom. He is a major figure in the Mahāyāna sūtras, appearing often as an interlocutor of the Buddha. In his most well-known iconographic form, he is portrayed bearing the sword of wisdom in his right hand and a volume of the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* in his left. To his name, Mañjuśrī, meaning “Gentle and Glorious One,” is often added the epithet Kumārabhūta, “having a youthful form.” He is also called Mañjughoṣa, Mañjusvara, and Pañcaśikha.

