७। ।से ह्या प हेर्गी सर्

The Sūtra on Impermanence (1)

Anityatāsūtra

mi rtag pa nyid kyi mdo

 \cdot Toh 309 \cdot Degé Kangyur, vol 72 (mdo sde, sa), folios 155.a–155.b



Translated by the Sakya Pandita Translation Group (International Buddhist Academy Division)

under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha

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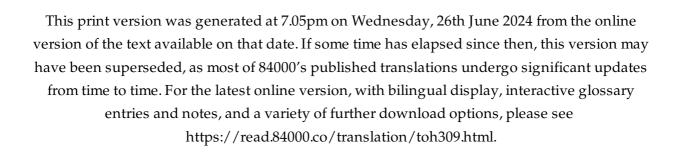
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co.

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SUMMARY

s.1 In this brief sūtra, the Buddha reminds his followers of one of the principal characteristics of saṃsāric existence: the reality of impermanence. The four things cherished most in this world, the Buddha says—namely, good health, youth, prosperity, and life—are all impermanent. He closes his teaching with a verse, asking how beings, afflicted as they are by impermanence, can take delight in anything desirable, and indirectly urging his disciples to practice the path of liberation.

s.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ac.1 Translation by the Sakya Pandita Translation Group (International Buddhist Academy Division, Kathmandu). This sūtra was translated from the Tibetan into English by Christian Bernert and edited by Vivian Paganuzzi.

This translation has been completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.

ac.

INTRODUCTION

i.

i.1 This sūtra highlights one of the most fundamental teachings of the impermanence Buddha—recognizing the (anityatā) of conditioned phenomena. The fact that such phenomena are impermanent (anitya) is listed as the first of the three principal characteristics of existence, the other two being the suffering, or unsatisfactoriness, of phenomena (duḥkha), and their no-self, or lack of an inherent substance (anātman). It is the clear understanding of the reality of these facts of life that can bring about a profound and essential change in a person's worldview, marking the point of entry to the path to liberation. Impermanence is also one of the four seals of the Buddha's teaching (comprising these three characteristics of existence and a fourth principle, that nirvāṇa is peace), often described as summarizing or epitomizing the Buddhadharma, and more particularly as the criteria that together enable the variety of Buddhist philosophical views to be distinguished from non-Buddhist ones.²

· Sūtras on impermanence ·

The Tibetan canon contains two sūtras with the title *Sūtra on Impermanence* (*mi rtag pa nyid kyi mdo*), both found in the same section of the Kangyur (mdo sde, Toh 309 and 310³). The sūtra translated here is the first, the shorter of the two. Sūtras with equivalent titles are also found in other Buddhist canons, but their contents differ substantially from the one translated here. The Chinese Tripiṭaka, for instance, contains two sūtras so entitled (Taishō nos. 801 and 759), and in the Samyutta Nikāya of the Pāli canon, the collection of discourses grouped by themes, there are a number of different texts with the title *Sutta on Impermanence* (P. *Aniccasutta*).⁴

· Note on the translation ·

i.3 The content of this sūtra is rather straightforward and its interpretation does not pose any major difficulties. One particular term, however, did present a problem of translation: the Tibetan *dben pa*, which commonly translates the Sanskrit *viveka/vivikta* and is usually related to concepts of isolation and seclusion. Here it seems to refer more specifically to the act of picking something out, separating it from other things and thus singling it out from them as special.

The Sūtra on Im	permanence (1	1)

The Translation

[F.155.a]

1.

- 1.1 Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas!
- 1.2 Thus did I hear at one time. The Bhagavān was dwelling in Śrāvastī, in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍada's Park, along with a large monastic assembly. The Bhagavān addressed the monks as follows:
- "Monks, four things are appealing, singled out, considered valuable, pleasant, and highly appreciated by everyone. What are those four?
- "Monks, good health is appealing, singled out, considered valuable, pleasant, and highly appreciated by everyone. Good health, however, ends with sickness. Monks, sickness is neither appealing, nor is it singled out, considered valuable, pleasant, or highly appreciated by anyone.
- "Monks, youth is appealing, singled out, considered valuable, pleasant, and highly appreciated by everyone. Youth, however, ends with the aging of the body. Monks, the aging of the body is neither appealing, nor is it singled out, considered valuable, pleasant, or highly appreciated by anyone.
- "Monks, prosperity is appealing, singled out, considered valuable, pleasant, and highly appreciated by everyone. Prosperity, however, ends with its decline. Monks, the decline of prosperity is neither appealing, nor is it singled out, considered valuable, pleasant, or highly appreciated by anyone. [F.155.b]
- "Monks, life is appealing, singled out, considered valuable, pleasant, and highly appreciated by everyone. Life, however, ends in death. Monks, death is neither appealing, nor is it singled out, considered valuable, pleasant, or highly appreciated by anyone."
- 1.8 Thus spoke the Bhagavān, the Sugata, and having spoken the Teacher added these words:

1.9 "Good health is impermanent,

Youth does not last.

Prosperity is impermanent,

And life, too, does not last.

How can beings, afflicted as they are by impermanence,

Take delight in desirable things like these?"

1.10 When the Bhagavān had thus spoken, the monks rejoiced and praised his words.

1.11 This completes "The Sūtra on Impermanence."

Colophon

c.1 Translated and edited by the Indian preceptor Surendrabodhi and the principal editor-translator, Bandé Zhang Yeshé Dé. It was then also reviewed and finalized in accordance with current language reforms.

c.

NOTES
see The Three Basic Facts of Existence (The Wheel, Publication no. 186, p. 187) (details in bibliography).
see, for example, The Questions of the Nāga King Sāgara (Toh 155 (UT22084-058-002.html)).
see DiSimone, Charles and Choi, Jin Kyoung. trans., The Sūtra on Impermanence (2) (https://read.84000.co/translation/toh310.html), Toh 310.
For instance Samyutta Nikaya 22.45 and 46, and Samyutta Nikaya 36.9.

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g.

- · Types of attestation for names and terms of the corresponding · source language
- AS Attested in source text

 This term is attested in a manuscript used as a source for this translation.
- AO Attested in other text

 This term is attested in other manuscripts with a parallel or similar context.
- AD Attested in dictionary

 This term is attested in dictionaries matching Tibetan to the corresponding language.
- AA Approximate attestation

 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 Reconstruction from Tibetan phonetic rendering

 This term is a reconstruction based on the Tibetan phonetic rendering of the term.
- RS Reconstruction from Tibetan semantic rendering
 This term is a reconstruction based on the semantics of the Tibetan translation.
- SU Source unspecified

 This term has been supplied from an unspecified source, which most often is a widely trusted dictionary.

g.1 four seals of the Buddha's teaching

bka' rtags kyi phyag rgya bzhi · bkar btags bzhi · chos kyi sdom bzhi

caturdharmoddāna

All conditioned phenomena are impermanent; all defilements are suffering; all phenomena are without self; nirvāṇa is peace.

g.2 impermanence

mi rtag pa nyid

श्रेन्यायन्त्री

anityatā

g.3 impermanent

mi rtag pa

श्रु.स्याःग

anitya

g.4 Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍada's Park

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

jetavanam anāthapiṇḍadasyārāmaḥ ^{AO}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

One of the first Buddhist monasteries, located in a park outside Śrāvastī, the capital of the ancient kingdom of Kośala in northern India. This park was originally owned by Prince Jeta, hence the name Jetavana, meaning Jeta's grove. The wealthy merchant Anāthapindada, 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 Anāthapindada covered the entire property with gold coins. Anāthapindada agreed, and managed to cover all of the park except the entrance, hence the name Anāthapindadasyārāma, meaning Anāthapiṇḍada's park. The place is usually referred to in the sūtras as "Jetavana, Anāthapindada's park," and according to the Sanghabhedavastu the Buddha used Prince Jeta's name in first place because that was Prince Jeta's own unspoken wish while Anāthapindada 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.5 no-self

bdag med

ন্ব্ৰা:ম্ব্ৰ

anātman

g.6 singled out

dben pa

न्नेद्रया

viveka · vivikta

g.7 suffering

sdug bsngal

সুবা'বসুথা

duḥkha

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The first of the four truths of the noble ones. The term "suffering" includes all essentially unsatisfactory experiences of life in cyclic existence, whether physical or mental. These comprise (1) the suffering of suffering, i.e., the physical sensations and mental experiences that are self-evident as suffering and toward which spontaneous feelings of aversion arise; (2) the suffering of change, i.e., all experiences that are normally recognized as pleasant and desirable, but which are nonetheless suffering in that persistent indulgence in these always results in changing attitudes of dissatisfaction and boredom; and (3) the suffering of the pervasive conditioning underlying the round of birth, aging, and death.

g.8 three principal characteristics of existence

bkar btags gsum

বশ্বস্বাঝ্যা

Impermanence, suffering, and no-self. They are called in Pāli *tilakkhaṇa*, the "three characteristics," a term that has no direct equivalent in the Sanskrit or Tibetan literature; in Tibetan, these three factors are usually called the "three seals of the Buddha's teaching" in parallel to the "four seals of the Buddha's teaching," q.v.