

༄༅། །འདུ་ཤེས་བརྒྱ་གཅིག་བསྟན་པ།

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## Teaching the Eleven Thoughts

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*Samjñānaikadaśanirdeśa*

འཕགས་པ་འདུ་ཤེས་བརྒྱ་གཅིག་བསྟན་པའི་མདོ།

*'phags pa 'du shes bcu gcig bstan pa'i mdo*

The Noble Sūtra “Teaching the Eleven Thoughts”

*Āryasaṃjñānaikadaśanirdeśasūtra*



Toh 311  
Degé Kangyur, vol. 72 (mdo sde, sa), folios 157.a–157.b

Translated by Nathaniel Rich and the Sakya Pandita Translation Group  
under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha

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co.

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## SUMMARY

- s.1 *Teaching the Eleven Thoughts* takes place just before the Buddha attains parinirvāṇa, when he bequeaths his final testament to the assembled monks in the form of a brief discourse on eleven thoughts toward which the mind should be directed at the moment of death. He exhorts his listeners to develop nonattachment, love, freedom from resentment, a sense of moral responsibility, a proper perspective on virtue and vice, courage in the face of the next life, a perception of impermanence and the lack of self, and the knowledge that nirvāṇa is peace.

ac.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- ac.1 Translated, introduced and annotated by Nathaniel Rich, in consultation with a draft translation by Khenpo Kalsang Gyaltzen and Chodrungma Kunga Chodron of the Sakya Pandita Translation Group. Edited and finalized by members of the 84000 translation team.
- ac.2 The translation was completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.

i.

## INTRODUCTION

i.1

This brief sūtra takes place just before the Buddha attains parinirvāṇa, when he imparts his “final testament” (Tib. *zhal chems*) to those gathered around him. This consists of a brief instruction on eleven “thoughts” (Skt. *saṃjñāna/saṃjñā*; Tib. ‘*du shes*)<sup>1</sup> that should be cultivated by one who is on the verge of death: nonattachment, love, freedom from resentment, a sense of moral responsibility, a perspective on virtue and vice appropriate to the moment of death, courage in the face of the next life, a perception of impermanence and the lack of self, and the knowledge that nirvāṇa is peace.

i.2

There is no known Sanskrit version of this sūtra, and the Chinese canon does not include a translation.<sup>2</sup> Because it has no colophon, we have no information concerning its translation from Sanskrit into Tibetan. It does appear that the sūtra had a complex transmissional history in Tibet. Versions of *Teaching the Eleven Thoughts* are found in both the Tshalpa (*tshal pa*) and Thempangma (*them spangs ma*) Kangyurs, but there is also a nearly identical sūtra called *Teaching the Ten Thoughts* (‘*du shes bcu bstan pa*) that is not found in the Tshalpa Kangyurs but is found in the Thempangma Kangyurs (Stok, Ulaanbaatar, and Shey, as well as the Bhutan Kangyurs that appear to be in the Thempangma line). *Teaching the Ten Thoughts* is also found in the Hemis Kangyur, in the Lhasa and Narthang Kangyurs, and in the Lang mdo and the Namgyal collections.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, a sūtra called *Teaching the Ten Thoughts* is found in three Dunhuang manuscripts,<sup>4</sup> but in each case the actual text is a version of *Teaching the Eleven Thoughts*. *Teaching the Ten Thoughts* is distinguished from *Teaching the Eleven Thoughts* by its slightly more elaborate descriptions of the individual thoughts. As examples, we might compare the wording of the first two items in the two sūtras. In the present sūtra, the first two items are the thoughts of “nonattachment to this life” and “love for all beings”; in *Teaching the Ten Thoughts*, the first two items are the thoughts of nonattachment to “the domain (*spyod yul*) of this life” and of both love and compassion for all beings. The difference in number between the two sūtras



is due to the fact that *Teaching the Ten Thoughts* has a single thought related to moral discipline, “the thought of acknowledging all faults and corruptions of moral discipline and undertaking the entirety of moral discipline,” whereas the present sūtra divides this thought into two—“the thought of acknowledging all faulty moral discipline” and “the thought of undertaking the entirety of moral discipline.” Apart from this, there are interesting variants and overlaps in spelling, word choice, and so forth that, while they do not substantially alter the meaning, suggest that there were multiple lines of translation, transmission, and/or editorial intervention that resulted in the different versions of the two nearly identical sūtras that are available to us today.

i.3 The list of *saṃjñā* enumerated in these two sūtras appears to be unique in the Kangyur, but there are several other sets of ten *saṃjñā* that at least partially overlap with the set of eleven found here. These include those found in the *Girimānanda Sutta* (Aṅguttara Nikāya 10.60) of the Pali canon, a version of which was translated into Tibetan in the fourteenth century by Tharpa Lotsawa and Ānandaśrī of Lankā (*The Sūtra of Giriyānanda, ri'i kun dga' bo'i mdo*, Toh 38), in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* (Toh 119), and in the *Arthavīstaradharmaparyāya* (Toh 318). To illustrate, *The Sūtra of Giriyānanda* enumerates ten *saṃjñā* to be taught to the monk for whom the sūtra is named, who is suffering from a severe illness. Those ten are those of impermanence, the lack of self, impurity (*mi gtsang ba*), impediments (*bar du gcod pa*), abandoning, being without desire (*'dod chags*), cessation, not delighting in any world, impermanence in all conditioning (*'du byed*), and mindfulness of in- and out-breathing. By contrast, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* presents a list of ten *saṃjñā* that consists of impermanence, suffering, the lack of self, abandoning food (*kha zas spong ba*), nonattachment to any world, death, the many faults of wrongdoing (*nyes pa'i skyon mang ba*), abandoning, cessation, and the lack of craving (*sred pa med pa*). The *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* prefaces its presentation of this list by saying that a bodhisattva great being, monk, nun, layman, or laywoman who endeavors in these ten will attain nirvāṇa.

i.4 The present translation is based on the version of the sūtra found in the Degé Kangyur, with reference to the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*) and the Stok Palace Kangyur. The Stok Palace Kangyur version of *Teaching the Ten Thoughts*<sup>5</sup> was also consulted for comparison, and a translation of that text has been included as an appendix.

**The Noble Sūtra**  
**Teaching the Eleven Thoughts**

1.

## The Translation

[F.157.a]

1.1 Homage to the Three Jewels.

Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was dwelling in the Grove of Twin Sal Trees, in the city of Kuśinagarī in the country of the Mallas.<sup>6</sup>

1.2 At the time of his parinirvāṇa, he spoke to the bhikṣus: “Bhikṣus, at the time of death you should bring to mind<sup>7</sup> eleven thoughts. What are the eleven? You should bring to mind the thought of nonattachment to this life, [F.157.b] the thought of love for all beings, the thought of giving up all resentments, the thought of acknowledging all faulty moral discipline, the thought of undertaking the entirety of moral discipline, the thought that even great harms that have been caused are insignificant,<sup>8</sup> the thought that small acts of virtue are significant, the thought of a lack of fright with respect to the next world, the thought that everything conditioned is impermanent, the thought that all phenomena lack a self, and the thought that nirvāṇa is peace.”

1.3 When the Blessed One had spoken thus, the bhikṣus rejoiced and praised what the Blessed One had said.

1.4 *This completes “Teaching the Eleven Thoughts,” the Blessed One’s final testament.*

ap.

Appendix

## APPENDIX ONE

ap1.

· Teaching the Ten Thoughts ·

ap1.1 Homage to the Three Jewels.

Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was dwelling in the Grove of Twin Sal Trees, in the city of Kuśinagarī in the country of the Mallas.

ap1.2

When he intended to attain parinirvāṇa, the Blessed One spoke to the fourfold assembly: “Bhikṣus,<sup>9</sup> at the moment of death, you should cultivate ten thoughts. What are the ten? You should establish the thought of nonattachment to the domain of this life, the thought of love and compassion for all beings, the thought of giving up and abandoning all resentments, the thought of acknowledging all faults and corruptions of moral discipline and undertaking the entirety of moral discipline, the thought that great harms caused by oneself and others are insignificant,<sup>10</sup> the thought that there is significant fruit and benefit in the small acts of virtue committed by oneself and others, the thought of fearlessness and a lack of fright in moving on to the next world, the thought that conditioning is impermanent, the thought that all phenomena lack a self, and the thought that nirvāṇa is bliss and peace.”

ap1.3

When the Blessed One had spoken thus, the bhikṣus rejoiced and praised what the Blessed One had said.

ap1.4

*This completes “The Sūtra Teaching the Ten Thoughts”*

n.

## NOTES

- n.1 The word *saṃjñā* (Pali *saññā*) has a broad range of meaning. It is often rendered “perception,” in the sense of a mode of perceiving rather than of an object of perception, but the word occurs in contexts in which it is better rendered by “discernment,” “recognition,” “consciousness,” “awareness,” “conception,” “idea,” or “notion.” In the entry on *saṃjñā* in his *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit* dictionary, Franklin Edgerton nicely captures the sense most relevant to the present sūtra: “purposeful thought about.” It is in that sense that “thought” is intended here, as an active and intentional process of thought.
- n.2 Ui et al. 1934, no. 315.
- n.3 [Resources for Kanjur and Tanjur Studies \(http://www.rkts.org/cat.php?id=890&typ=1\)](http://www.rkts.org/cat.php?id=890&typ=1), Universität Wien, accessed June 3, 2022.
- n.4 [IOL Tib J 311 \(http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo\\_loader.a4d?pm=IOL%20Tib%20J%20311;img=1\)](http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo_loader.a4d?pm=IOL%20Tib%20J%20311;img=1), [IOL Tib J 89 \(http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo\\_loader.a4d?pm=IOL%20Tib%20J%2089;img=1\)](http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo_loader.a4d?pm=IOL%20Tib%20J%2089), and [PT 45 \(http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo\\_loader.a4d?pm=Pelliot%20tibétain%2045;img=1\)](http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo_loader.a4d?pm=Pelliot%20tibétain%2045;img=1). Accessed through *The International Dunhuang Project: The Silk Road Online*.
- n.5 Tib. *'du shes bcu bstan pa'i mdo*, Skt. *Daśasaṃjñānirdeśasūtra*. This is the Sanskrit title as it is given in the Tibetan. Presumably this ought to be *Daśasaṃjñānirdeśasūtra*.
- n.6 Degé and Stok read *ku sha'i grong khyer na gyad kyi nye 'khor shing sA la zung gi tshal na bzhugs te*. We have adopted the reading in *Teaching the Ten Thoughts* (Stok), which is more straightforward: *ku sha'i grong khyer gyad kyi nyen kor shing sA la zung gi tshal na bzhugs*.

- n.7 Tib. *mngon du bya*. Interestingly, there are variant readings of the verb here. In the Stok version of *Teaching the Ten Thoughts*, the verb is *mngon du bsgom par bya* (“cultivate”) at the beginning of the list and *mngon par bsgrub par bya* (“establish”) at the end of the list. In the Dunhuang manuscript PT 45 ([http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo\\_loader.a4d?pm=Pelliot%20tibétain%2045;img=1](http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo_loader.a4d?pm=Pelliot%20tibétain%2045;img=1)), the verb is *mngon du dran par bya* (“be mindful of”).
- n.8 Tib. *nyes pa chen po byas pa dag la yang yang ba'i 'du shes*. Presumably this refers to previous harms to oneself caused by others.
- n.9 Note that the audience is said to consist of the “fourfold assembly”—monks, nuns, lay men, and lay women—but the vocative here is *bhikṣu*, the word for “monk.” This would appear to be an instance of *bhikṣu* in the vocative used inclusively to refer both to men and women. On this usage, see Collett and Bhikkhu Anālayo 2014.
- n.10 The presence here of “oneself” as well as “others” is difficult to understand, since it would appear to make light either of harms that one has caused to others, or, reading *nyes pa* as “faults” or “offenses,” of misdeeds that would be expected to bear fruit as suffering in the future. Perhaps the inclusion of “oneself and others” here, considering its inclusion in the following item, was a mistake of the translators or later editors.

b.

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## 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 bhikṣu

*dge slong*

དགེ་སློང་།

*bhikṣu*

This term refers specifically to a monk who has received ordination, the highest level of monastic initiation available in the Buddhist tradition. The Sanskrit term literally means “beggar” or “mendicant,” referring to the fact that Buddhist monks and nuns—like other ascetics of the time—subsisted on alms begged from the laity.

g.2 blessed one

*bcom ldan 'das*

བཙེམ་ལྷན་འདས།

*bhagavat*

*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 Grove of Twin Sal Trees

*shing sA la zung gi tshal*

ཤིང་སྐལ་ལུང་གི་ཚལ།

*yamakaśālavana*

The grove in or near Kuśinagarī where the Buddha attained parinirvāṇa, it is named for the two sal trees between which the Buddha lay.

g.4 Kuśinagarī

*ku sha'i grong khyer*

ཀུ་ཤའི་གྲོང་ཁྱེར།

*kuśinagarī*

The city in or near which the Buddha attained parinirvāṇa.

g.5 Mallas

*gyad*

གྱད།

*malla*

The name of a tribe or clan in ancient northern India.

g.6 **nirvāṇa**

*mya ngan las 'das pa*

མྱ་ངན་ལས་འདས་པ།

*nirvāṇa*

The “extinguishing” of suffering; the state of freedom from the suffering of saṃsāra.

g.7 **parinirvāṇa**

*yongs su mya ngan las 'da' ba*

ཡོངས་སུ་མྱ་ངན་ལས་འདས་པ།

*parinirvāṇa*

The final stage of passing into nirvāṇa, which occurs when an arhat or buddha passes away.

g.8 **Saṃsāra**

*'khor ba*

འཁོར་བ།

*saṃsāra*

*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.