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## The Father and Mother Sūtra

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*Pitṛmāṭṛsūtra*

*pha ma'i mdo*

· Toh 315 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 72 (mdo sde, sa), folios 169.a–169.b



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co.

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## SUMMARY

s.

- s.1 This short discourse was taught to an audience of monks in Jetavana in Śrāvastī. In it, the Buddha explains, by means of similes, the importance of venerating and attending to one's father and mother. The Buddha concludes by stating that those who venerate their father and mother are wise, for in this life they will not be disparaged, and in the next life they will be reborn in the higher realms.

ac.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ac.1 This sūtra was translated from Tibetan into English by Khenpo Kalsang Gyaltzen and Chodrungma Kunga Chodron. It was then edited and introduced by the 84000 editorial team.

The translation was completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.

i.

## INTRODUCTION

i.1

In this brief sūtra, the Buddha proclaims the importance of respect for and service to one's parents. By making use of similes to explain to the assembly of monks how exalted a child's service to their father and mother is, he proclaims one's parents worthy of gifts and tender care. The Buddha concludes the sūtra by stating that those who venerate their father and mother are wise, for in this life they will not be disparaged, and after death they will be reborn in the higher realms.

i.2

There is no known Sanskrit version of this sūtra, and it survives only in Tibetan canonical translations. Since there is no colophon at the end of the sūtra, and as the text is not included in any of the early Tibetan inventories of translations produced during the eighth and ninth centuries, we also have no information concerning its original translation from Sanskrit into Tibetan.

i.3

The Chinese canon does not contain this sūtra,<sup>1</sup> though there are other popular sūtras in the Chinese canon that teach the importance of respecting and serving one's parents and ancestors. Two such sūtras are *yu lan pen jing* (盂蘭盆經, Taishō 685)<sup>2</sup> and *bao'en feng pen jing* (報恩奉盆經, Taishō 686). As the textual basis for the "Ghost Festival" (*yu lan pen*), these two sūtras both describe the efforts of Maudgalyāyana, one of the two main disciples of the Buddha, to save his mother, who had been reborn in one of the lower realms. Though these two sūtras were almost certainly originally composed in China, a similar narrative of Maudgalyāyana locating his mother after her death in order to assist her is also found in *The Chapter on Medicines* in the *Vinayavastu* (Toh 1-6, 2.326–2.337), which was composed in India. That account begins with Maudgalyāyana recalling a discourse of the Buddha about repaying the kindness of one's parents.<sup>3</sup> However, the contents of these sūtras in the Chinese canon and *The Chapter on Medicines* are quite different from that of this particular sūtra, which makes it a valuable addition to the Buddhist literature on what is often called "filial piety."



i.4        This translation into English is based on the version in the Degé Kangyur, with reference to the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*) and the Stok Palace manuscript. There were no variants that would alter the English translation.

## **The Father and Mother Sūtra**

1.

## The Translation

[F.169.a]

1.1 Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas!

Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was dwelling with a saṅgha of hearers in Śrāvastī, in the Jetavana, Anāthapiṇḍada's Park. At that time, the Blessed One proclaimed:

1.2 “Monks, those householders who properly venerate and attend to both their father and mother dwell with Brahmā. Why is that? Monks, from the perspective of the family, the father and mother of a child of noble family are like Brahmā.

1.3 “Monks, those householders who properly venerate, honor, and attend to both their father and mother [F.169.b] dwell with teachers. Why is that? Monks, from the perspective of the family, the father and mother of a child of noble family are like teachers.

1.4 “Monks, those householders who properly venerate, honor, and attend to both their father and mother dwell with those worthy of receiving offerings. Why is that? Monks, from the perspective of the family, the father and mother of a child of noble family are those worthy of receiving offerings.

1.5 “Monks, those householders who properly venerate, honor, and attend to both their father and mother dwell with humans. Why is that? Monks, from the perspective of the family, the father and mother of a child of noble family are like humans.

1.6 “Monks, those householders who properly venerate, honor, and attend to both their father and mother dwell with gods. Monks, from the perspective of the family, the father and mother of a child of noble family are like gods.”

1.7 That is what the Blessed One proclaimed. The Well-Gone One having said that, the Teacher proclaimed this, too:

“Father and mother—both are Brahmā

And, likewise, one's first teachers.  
Worthy of their children's every gift,  
They are humans and they are gods.

1.8 "Therefore, they are worthy of prostration.  
They are to be massaged<sup>4</sup> and bathed, their feet anointed.  
The wise should also serve them with food and drink,  
With clothing, bedding, and cushions.

1.9 "Those who serve their father and mother  
Are, for that reason, wise.  
In this life they will not be disparaged,  
And at death they will go to the higher realms."

1.10 The Blessed One having proclaimed thus, the monks rejoiced and praised  
what the Blessed One had said.

1.11 *This completes "The Father and Mother Sūtra."*

n.

## NOTES

n.1 Ui et al. 1934, entry number 315.

n.2 This sūtra is also known in English as the *Ullambana Sūtra*.

n.3 This discourse has further parallels in the collections of *The Numerical Discourses* in both Pāli and in Chinese translation, as well as elsewhere in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*. For references, see note 105 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh1-6.html#UT22084-001-006-719>) in *The Chapter on Medicines*.

n.4 Translation tentative. The Tibetan is *dril ba*.

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 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.2 Brahmā

*tshangs pa*

ཚངས་པ།

*brahmā*

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

A high-ranking deity presiding over a divine world; he is also considered to be the lord of the *Sahā* world (our universe). Though not considered a creator god in Buddhism, Brahmā occupies an important place as one of two gods (the other being Indra/Śakra) said to have first exhorted the Buddha Śākyamuni to teach the Dharma. The particular heavens found in the form realm over which Brahmā rules are often some of the most sought-after realms of higher rebirth in Buddhist literature. Since there are many universes or world systems, there are also multiple Brahmās presiding over them. His most frequent epithets are “Lord of the *Sahā* World” (*Sahāṃpati*) and Great Brahmā (*Mahābrahmā*).

g.3 hearer

*nyan thos*

ཉན་ཐོས།

*śrāvaka*

This term, based on the verb “to hear,” means disciple, and it originally referred to those direct disciples of the Buddha Śākyamuni who had actually heard the Buddha’s teachings. It is also used to refer to those who aspired to the state of an arhat, in contrast to the bodhisattvas. More generally, it refers to those who were followers of the non-Mahāyāna traditions of Buddhism.

g.4 Jetavana, Anāthapiṇḍada’s Park

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



ཐུལ་བུ་ཐུལ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཚལ་མགོན་མེད་ཟས་སྤྱོན་གྱི་ཀུན་དགའ་ར་བ།

*jetavanam anāthapiṇḍadasyārāmaḥ*<sup>AO</sup>

*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 Anāthapiṇḍada, 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 Anāthapiṇḍada covered the entire property with gold coins. Anāthapiṇḍada agreed, and managed to cover all of the park except the entrance, hence the name Anāthapiṇḍadasyārāma, meaning Anāthapiṇḍada’s park. The place is usually referred to in the sūtras as “Jetavana, Anāthapiṇḍada’s park,” and according to the *Saṅghabhedavastu* the Buddha used Prince Jeta’s name in first place because that was Prince Jeta’s own unspoken wish while Anāthapiṇḍada 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 monk

*dge slong*

དགེ་སྤོང་།

*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,” which refers to the fact that Buddhist monks and nuns—like other ascetics of the time—subsisted on alms begged from the laity.

g.6 Śrāvastī

*mnyan du yod pa*

མཉམ་ཏུ་ཡོད་པ།

*śrāvastī*

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

During the life of the Buddha, Śrāvastī was the capital city of the powerful kingdom of Kośala, ruled by King Prasenajit, who became a follower and patron of the Buddha. It was also the hometown of Anāthapiṇḍada, the wealthy patron who first invited the Buddha there, and then offered him a park known as Jetavana, Prince Jeta's Grove, which became one of the first Buddhist monasteries. The Buddha is said to have spent about twenty-five rainy seasons with his disciples in Śrāvastī, thus it is named as the setting of numerous events and teachings. It is located in present-day Uttar Pradesh in northern India.

g.7 well-gone one

*bde bar gshegs pa*

བདེ་བར་གཤེགས་པ།

*sugata*

An epithet applied to buddhas, often interpreted to mean “one gone to bliss.” In Sanskrit the prefix *su-* (Tib. *bde bar*) is adverbial, and that *gata* denotes a state of being rather than literal motion, hence the current rendering of “well-gone one,” that is, “one who has fared well.”