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The Four Stanzas

Caturgāthā

tshigs su bcad pa bzhi pa

· Toh 324 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 72 (mdo sde, sa), folios 204.a–204.b



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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 Four Stanzas
- n. Notes
- b. Bibliography
 - Source Texts
 - Related Texts
 - Other References and Translations
- g. Glossary

s.

SUMMARY

s.1 *The Four Stanzas* consists of six verses in total. It is a praise to the Buddha, to the places associated with his presence, and to stūpas. The praise itself comprises the first four verses, hence the text's title. The last two verses explain the origin of the text and the benefits that accrue from its recitation.

ac.

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ac.1 This text was translated by the Pema Yeshé Dé Translation Team. Giuliano Proença translated the text from Tibetan into English and prepared the introduction, the glossary, and the notes.

ac.2 The translation was completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha. Andreas Doctor 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 Four Stanzas* consists of six verses¹ and is a praise to the Buddha, to the places associated with his presence, and to stūpas. The praise itself comprises the first four verses, hence the text's title. The last two verses explain the origin of the text and the benefits that accrue from its recitation.

i.2 The Sanskrit text of *The Four Stanzas* is extant in several manuscripts from Nepal. Gergely Hidas edited one of these manuscripts as part of his edition of two dhāraṇī collections.² Kazuo Kano has also published a critical edition of the Sanskrit text of *The Four Stanzas*,³ together with a Japanese translation. The initial stanza in the extant Sanskrit versions differs from the Tibetan translation found in *The Four Stanzas*, but the Tibetan translation of the first verse in Jetāri's *Bodhicittotpādasamādānavidhi* (Toh 3968) aligns perfectly with the Sanskrit. The earliest quotation of *The Four Stanzas* can be found in the Tibetan translation of Bhāviveka's *Tarkajvālā* (Toh 3856), composed during the sixth century.⁴ This was followed by several quotations in other works.⁵

i.3 Kano concludes that *The Four Stanzas* was part of a set of five texts used for recitation in India,⁶ which also included *The Dhāraṇī of the Six Gates* (Toh 141, 526, 916),⁷ *The Two Stanza Dhāraṇī* (Toh 143, 611, 918),⁸ *The Single Stanza* (Toh 323),⁹ and *The Prayer of Good Conduct* (Toh 1095, 4377).¹⁰ Initially, these five texts circulated individually. However, they had become popular in India as a set by the time of Advayavajra or Ratnākaraśānti (eleventh century) and were later incorporated into the dhāraṇī collections of Nepal.

i.4 *The Four Stanzas* is found in the Sūtra section in all Kangyurs of the Tshalpa, Thempangma, and mixed lines, as well as in independent Kangyurs such as the Phukdrak manuscript and the Langdo collection. It is also included in some collections from Western Tibet.¹¹ It is not known who translated *The Four Stanzas* into Tibetan, for neither the colophons nor Tibetan historical works mention the translators.¹²

- i.5 The Tibetan scholar Tāranātha (1575–1634) composed a commentary on *The Four Stanzas* as well as sequential commentaries on three of the other five texts in the above-mentioned set,¹³ corroborating Kano’s view that these texts were seen as related.¹⁴ The importance of *The Four Stanzas* and the other texts in the set for recitation is evident, for in Tibet they are included in extracts from sūtra and tantra (*gces btus*), collected liturgical texts (*chos spyod*), collections of mantras and dhāraṇīs for recitation, and collections of sādhanas. They are also sometimes mentioned as texts for recitation in preliminary practices.
- i.6 This English translation is based on the Degé print and on Kano’s Sanskrit edition, in consultation with the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*), as well as the Phukdrak and the Stok Palace manuscripts. The most significant variants are mentioned in the notes.

The Four Stanzas

1. The Translation

[F.204.a]

- 1.1 Homage to the Three Jewels!
- 1.2 I pay homage to all victorious ones,
Those celebrated perfect buddhas,
And to their bodies
That possess the thirty-two supreme marks.¹⁵
- 1.3 Where the perfect buddhas were born,
Where they reached awakening,
Where they turned the wheel of peace, [F.204.b]
Where they passed into parinirvāṇa, free from defilement,
- 1.4 Where those sugatas¹⁶ sat,
Where they walked and stood,
And where they slept like lions—
To all those places I bow.
- 1.5 I also bow to all stūpas,
With and without relics,
Above, in between, below,
And in the cardinal and intermediate directions.
- 1.6 These stanzas were uttered
By the victorious one Difficult to Follow,¹⁷
The best of humans,
Who dwells in the northeastern direction.¹⁸
- 1.7 Those who praise the tathāgatas
With these four stanzas
Will not go to the lower realms

For a thousand lifetimes.¹⁹

1.8 *Thus ends "The Four Stanzas."*

n.

NOTES

- n.1 The Yongle, Lithang, Kangxi, Narthang, and Choné Kangyurs omit one stanza.
- n.2 Cambridge manuscript Add.1680.8 (fragmentary, in palm leaf, ca. twelfth/thirteenth century). See Hidas 2021, p. 32.
- n.3 His sources are four manuscripts from Nepal, three on paper (one from 1792), and one palm leaf manuscript: Matsunami no. 419 (A.D.1792 = samvat 912), no. 202 (date unknown), NGMPP A131/9, and Asiatic Society of Bengal no. 9987. See Kano 2011, pp. 61–65.
- n.4 Bhāviveka was also called Bhāvaviveka and Bhavya. He flourished ca. 500–570.
- n.5 The text is also cited in Prajñākaramati's *Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā* (Toh 3872), Vitakarman's *Mudrācaturāṭīkāratnahṛdayanāma* (Toh 2259), Rāmapāla's *Sekanirdeśapañjikā* (Toh 2253), and Kṛṣṇa Paṇḍita's *Kṛṣṇayamāritantra-rājāprekṣaṇapathapradīpanāmaṭīkā* (Toh 1920).
- n.6 Kano concludes this by studying the sūtras listed in Ratnākaraśānti's *Muktāvalī* (Toh 1189), Kāṇha's *Yogaratnamālā* (Toh 1183), and Advayavajra's *Kudṛṣṭinirghātana*, as well as by analyzing the structure of the Tibetan canonical collections, the Nepali collections of dhāraṇīs, and several Tibetan commentaries.
- n.7 [Saṅmukhīdhāraṇī](http://read.84000.co/translation/toh141.html) (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh141.html>), Toh 141, 526, 916.
- n.8 [Gāthādvayadhāraṇī](http://read.84000.co/translation/toh143.html) (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh143.html>), Toh 143, 611, 918.
- n.9 [Ekagāthā](http://read.84000.co/translation/toh323.html) (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh323.html>), Toh 323.

- n.10 *Bhadracaryāprañidhāna* (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh1095.html>), Toh 1095, 4377.
- n.11 The Gondhla, Egoo, Stagrimo, Stongde, Bardan, and Reruk collections.
- n.12 *The Four Stanzas* is not listed in the imperial catalogs, but it is included in Butön's *History of Buddhism*. See Butön Rinchen Drup (bu ston rin chen grub), folio 161.b.
- n.13 *The Dhāraṇī of the Six Gates* (Toh 141, 526, 916), *The Two Stanza Dhāraṇī* (Toh 143, 611, 918), and *The Single Stanza* (Toh 323). See Jonang Jetsün Tāranātha (jo nang rje btsun tA ra nA tha), pp. 709–54.
- n.14 In the Phukdrak Kangyur, and in the Bardan, Stagrimo, and Stongde collections, *The Single Stanza*, *The Four Stanzas*, and *The Two Stanza Dhāraṇī* also appear in sequence. In the Bardan collection, *The Prayer of Good Conduct* comes before *The Single Stanza*, so that the four texts are grouped together.
- n.15 Kano's Sanskrit edition reads *sarvabuddhān namasyāmi jinān apratipudgalān/ śarīrāṇi ca sarveṣāṃ saṃbuddhānāṇi yaśasvinām*: "I pay homage to all buddhas, the matchless victorious ones, and to the relics [or bodies] of all celebrated perfect buddhas." This matches exactly the quotation of this stanza in the Tibetan translation of Jetāri's *Bodhicittotpādasamādānavidhi* (Toh 3968): *rgyal ba gang zag bla na med pa yi/ /sangs rgyas rnam ni thams cad dang/ /rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas grags ldan pa/ /kun gyi sku la phyag 'tshal lo*.
- n.16 Kano's Sanskrit edition reads *tathāgatāḥ*.
- n.17 The Tibetan in most witnesses reads *bsten dka'* ("Difficult to Follow"), except for Lhasa, which reads *bstan dka'* ("Difficult to Teach"). Kano's edition of the Sanskrit reads *duṣprasava* ("Difficult to Command"?). Hidas's edition (p. 32) reads *duṣprasaha* ("Difficult to Bear").
- n.18 This stanza is missing in Yongle, Lithang, Kangxi, Narthang, and Choné.
- n.19 The Sanskrit in Kano's edition reads *kalpakotīśahasrebhir na te gacchanti durgatim*, which corresponds to the Stok Palace Kangyur: *bskal pa bye ba stong du ni/ de ni ngan 'gror 'gro mi 'gyur*, and Phukdrak: *bskal pa bye ba stong du yang/ de ni ngan 'gror 'gro mi 'gyur*. "They will not go to the lower realms for ten billion eons."

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 Difficult to Follow

bsten dka'

བསྐྱེན་དཀའ།

—

Buddha that uttered *The Four Stanzas* and dwells in the northeastern direction. See [n.17](#).

g.2 lower realm

ngan 'gro

དན་འགྲོ།

durgati ^{AS}

A collective name for the realms of animals, hungry ghosts, and denizens of the hells.

g.3 parinirvāṇa

mya ngan las 'das pa

ཡོངས་སུ་སྐྱེ་དན་ལས་འདས་པ།

parinirvāṇa ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

This refers to what occurs at the end of an arhat's or a buddha's life. When nirvāṇa is attained at awakening, whether as an arhat or buddha, all suffering, afflicted mental states (*kleśa*), and causal processes (*karman*) that lead to rebirth and suffering in cyclic existence have ceased, but due to previously accumulated karma, the aggregates of that life remain and must still exhaust themselves. It is only at the end of life that these cease, and since no new aggregates arise, the arhat or buddha is said to attain *parinirvāṇa*, meaning "complete" or "final" nirvāṇa. This is synonymous with the attainment of nirvāṇa without remainder (*anupadhiśeṣanirvāṇa*).

According to the Mahāyāna view of a single vehicle (*ekayāna*), the arhat's parinirvāṇa at death, despite being so called, is not final. The arhat must still enter the bodhisattva path and reach buddhahood (see *Unraveling the Intent*, Toh 106, [7.14](#).) On the other hand, the parinirvāṇa of a buddha, ultimately speaking, should be understood as a display manifested for the benefit of beings; see *The Teaching on the Extraordinary Transformation That Is the Miracle of Attaining the Buddha's Powers* (Toh 186), [1.32](#).

The term *parinirvāṇa* is also associated specifically with the passing away of the Buddha Śākyamuni, in Kuśinagara, in northern India.

g.4 perfect buddha

rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas

རྫོགས་པའི་སངས་རྒྱས།

saṃbuddha ^{AS}

A term used to emphasize the superiority of buddhas as contrasted with the achievement of worthy ones (*arhat*) and solitary buddhas (*pratyekabuddha*).

g.5 relic

sku

སྐྱུ།

śarīra ^{AS}

The physical remains or personal objects of a previous tathāgata, arhat, or other realized person that are venerated for their perpetual spiritual potency. They are often enshrined in stūpas and other public monuments so the Buddhist community at large can benefit from their blessings and power.

g.6 stūpa

mchod rten

མཚོད་རྟེན།

stūpa ^{AS}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The Tibetan translates both *stūpa* and *caitya* with the same word, *mchod rten*, meaning “basis” or “recipient” of “offerings” or “veneration.” Pali: *cetiya*.

A caitya, although often synonymous with *stūpa*, can also refer to any site, sanctuary or shrine that is made for veneration, and may or may not contain relics.

A stūpa, literally “heap” or “mound,” is a mounded or circular structure usually containing relics of the Buddha or the masters of the past. It is considered to be a sacred object representing the awakened mind of a buddha, but the symbolism of the stūpa is complex, and its design varies throughout the Buddhist world. Stūpas continue to be erected today as objects of veneration and merit making.

g.7 sugata

bde gshegs

བདེ་གཤེགས།

sugata ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

One of the standard epithets of the buddhas. A recurrent explanation offers three different meanings for *su-* that are meant to show the special qualities of “accomplishment of one’s own purpose” (*svārthasampad*) for a complete buddha. Thus, the Sugata is “well” gone, as in the expression *su-rūpa*

(“having a good form”); he is gone “in a way that he shall not come back,” as in the expression *su-naṣṭa-jvara* (“a fever that has utterly gone”); and he has gone “without any remainder” as in the expression *su-pūrṇa-ghaṭa* (“a pot that is completely full”). According to Buddhaghōṣa, the term means that the way the Buddha went (Skt. *gata*) is good (Skt. *su*) and where he went (Skt. *gata*) is good (Skt. *su*).

g.8 tathāgata

de gshegs · de bzhin gshegs pa

དེ་གཤེགས། · དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ།

tathāgata^{AS}

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

g.9 thirty-two supreme marks

mtshan mchog sum cu gnyis

མཚན་མཚོག་སུམ་བུ་གཉིས།

—

These are the major physical marks that identify the buddha body of emanation and which also, in some sources and traditions, portend the advent of a universal monarch. They are listed in *The Play in Full* (Toh 95), 7:-99.

g.10 Three Jewels

dkon mchog gsum

དཀོན་མཚོག་གསུམ།

triratna^{AO}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha—the three objects of Buddhist refuge. In the Tibetan rendering, “the three rare and supreme ones.”

g.11 victorious one

rgyal ba

ཀུན་ལ་བཀའ་

jina^{AS}

One of the epithets applied to a buddha.