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The Sūtra of Vasiṣṭha

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'phags pa gnas 'jog gi mdo zhes bya ba

The Noble “Sūtra of Vasiṣṭha”

· Toh 333 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 72 (mdo sde, sa), folios 263.b–268.a

TRANSLATED INTO TIBETAN BY

· Sarvajñādeva · Bandé Paltsek ·



Translated by Elizabeth Angowski
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co.

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SUMMARY

s.1 While residing in Nyagrodha Park in Kapilavastu, the Buddha meets an emaciated, long-haired brahmin named Vasiṣṭha. When the Buddha asks Vasiṣṭha why he looks this way, Vasiṣṭha explains that it is because he is observing a month-long fast. The Buddha then asks him if he maintains the eightfold observance of the noble ones, prompting an exchange between the two about what the eightfold observance entails and how much merit is to be gained by maintaining it. After outlining the eightfold observance, the Buddha tells Vasiṣṭha that there is far more merit to be had in maintaining it, even just once, than there is to be gained by making offerings. At the end of the sūtra, Vasiṣṭha takes refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha, and he pledges to maintain the eightfold observance and practice generosity in tandem.

ac.

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

INTRODUCTION

i.

i.1 While residing in Nyagrodha Park in Kapilavastu, the Buddha meets an emaciated, long-haired brahmin named Vasiṣṭha. When the Buddha asks this brahmin why he looks so thin, unkempt, and haggard, Vasiṣṭha explains that it is because he is observing a month-long fast. The Buddha then asks him whether he maintains the so-called “eightfold observance of the noble ones,” prompting an exchange between the two about what this observance entails, and the extent of the merit gained by maintaining it. After outlining the observance, the Buddha declares to Vasiṣṭha that maintaining the eightfold observance, even just once, results in far more merit than making vast offerings. At the end of the sūtra, Vasiṣṭha takes refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha, and he pledges to maintain the eightfold observance and practice generosity in tandem.

i.2 At its heart, *The Sūtra of Vasiṣṭha* outlines the eightfold observance that laypeople are encouraged to maintain on the four sacred lunar days of the new moon, the full moon, and the two days that fall halfway in between these two lunar events. This practice is closely related to the restorative rite, known in Sanskrit as *poṣadha*, in which the monks and nuns gather on the new moon and full moon days to confess any faults and transgressions and to recite the monastic rules, the *prātimokṣa*.¹ In fact, at times the term *poṣadha* can also refer specifically to the eightfold observance that is adopted by some lay people on the four sacred lunar days.

i.3 Regarding this latter meaning, the Buddha tells Vasiṣṭha that on these days a layperson should emulate the conduct of the worthy ones—the Buddha’s awakened disciples—by refraining from eight things: (1) killing, (2) stealing, (3) engaging in sexual activity, (4) speaking falsely, (5) becoming intoxicated, (6) singing, dancing, music, and beautifying oneself with adornments or cosmetics, (7) using high or large beds, and (8) eating at the improper time.²

- i.4 If one refrains from all these things, even just for one day, one is certain to gain vast amounts of merit. Following this explanation, Vasiṣṭha asks the Buddha how, in terms of merit accumulation, gift-giving compares to maintaining the eightfold observance. The Buddha's response is definitive: the merit produced by generosity does not even come close to a fraction of the merit born of maintaining the eightfold observance. Moreover, the Buddha adds, by maintaining the eightfold observance, one stands to be reborn into heavenly realms where the gods enjoy happiness for far longer than the average human lifetime, and that divine happiness makes sovereignty in the mundane world pale in comparison.
- i.5 Although no Indic source text exists for the Tibetan translation of *The Sūtra of Vasiṣṭha*, the text does share a number of similarities with several Pali suttas, yet the exact relationship between these texts is unclear.³ However, in terms of its circulation and influence beyond the Indian subcontinent, one remarkable fact related to *The Sūtra of Vasiṣṭha* is that, along with two other sūtras,⁴ it appears to have served as a source on the history of India in the famous fourteenth-century Persian historical account of Asia known as *Compendium of Chronicles (Jāmi' al-tawārikh)*.⁵
- i.6 This English translation of *The Sūtra of Vasiṣṭha*, which to the best of our knowledge is the first in any modern language, is based on the Tibetan version in the Degé Kangyur in consultation with the variant readings recorded in the Comparative Edition (Tib. *dpe bsdur ma*) and the Stok Palace Kangyur. The Pali suttas referred to above were also consulted. The colophon to the Tibetan translation states that it was translated, corrected, and finalized by the Indian scholar Sarvajñādeva and the chief editor-translator Bandé Paltsek. The text's inclusion in the Denkarma and Phangthangma imperial catalogs confirms its provenance in the late eighth or early ninth century.⁶

**The Noble
Sūtra of Vasiṣṭha**

1.

The Translation

[F.263.b]

1.1 Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas!

Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was residing in Nyagrodha Park in Kapilavastu. Then, the great sage Kapila, while walking and wandering about for his daily exercise, deliberately proceeded to the place where the Blessed One was residing. After he made all manner of pleasing and polite conversation with the Blessed One, he sat down to one side.

[F.264.a]

1.2 As the brahmin Vasiṣṭha sat down to one side,⁷ the Blessed One, though he already knew, asked him, “Vasiṣṭha, why are you like this—emaciated and sallow, with a long beard, long hair, long nails, long body hair, ragged, and speaking so softly?”

Vasiṣṭha replied, “Gautama, I am like this—emaciated and sallow, with a long beard, long hair, long nails, long body hair, ragged, and speaking so softly—because I observe the month-long fast.”⁸

1.3 The Blessed One, though he already knew, then asked the sage Vasiṣṭha, “Vasiṣṭha, do you maintain the eightfold observance of the noble ones and practice diligently on special days⁹ as well?”

1.4 “O, Gautama,” replied Vasiṣṭha, “what will become of those who maintain the eightfold observance of the noble ones and practice diligently on special days?”

The Blessed One responded, “Those brahmins will experience all they wish for among gods and humans.”

1.5 “Gautama, what is the so-called eightfold observance of the noble ones?” asked Vasiṣṭha. “And how, by adhering to the eightfold observance of the noble ones, will one experience all one wishes for among gods and humans?”

“Vasiṣṭha, when faithful sons or daughters of good families want to maintain the eightfold observance of the noble ones, they get up in the morning and go before a monk, or a brahmin, or anyone else who is wise. They arrange their upper robe over one shoulder, place their right knee on the ground, join their palms, and utter this statement: ‘I, named so-and-so, from now through sundown tonight and until sunrise tomorrow,¹⁰ abandon taking life and abstain from taking life. [F.264.b] I relinquish the stick and the sword, behaving with conscientiousness and compassion as I abandon and abstain from taking the life of any being, living creature, or spirit—even the least among them, including tiny creatures such as ants. Just as those noble ones, the worthy ones, who, for as long as they live, have abandoned taking life and have abstained from taking life, relinquished the stick and the sword, and abandoned and abstained from taking the life of any being, living creature, or spirit—even the least among them, including tiny creatures such as ants—likewise I, so-and-so, from now through sundown tonight and until sunrise tomorrow, also abandon taking life and abstain from taking life. I relinquish the stick and the sword, behaving with conscientiousness and compassion as I abandon and abstain from taking the life of any sentient being, living creature, or spirit—even the least among them, including tiny creatures such as ants. Through this first factor, I emulate, act in accordance with, and imitate the course of conduct of the noble ones, the worthy ones.’

1.6 “ ‘Just as I abstain from killing, likewise I abandon and abstain from taking what is not given; sexual activity; false speech; heedlessness from having become drunk on fermented or distilled spirits; singing, dancing, and music, as well as wearing garlands, perfumes, ornaments, and cosmetics; high beds and large beds; and eating at the improper time.¹¹ Just like those noble ones, the worthy ones, who, for as long as they live, have abandoned eating at the improper time and abstained from eating at the improper time, likewise I, so-and-so, from now through sundown tonight and [F.265.a] until sunrise tomorrow, also abandon eating at the improper time and abstain from eating at the improper time. Through this eighth factor, I emulate, act in accordance with, and imitate the course of conduct of those noble ones, the worthy ones.’

1.7 “Recite thus a second and a third time. Vasiṣṭha, this is the eightfold observance of the noble ones, and thus, by maintaining the eightfold observance of the noble ones, one will experience all one wishes for among gods and humans. Vasiṣṭha, you should maintain the eightfold observance of the noble ones, practice diligently on special days, and experience all you wish for among gods and humans!

- 1.8 “Regarding the merit of those faithful sons or daughters of good families who maintain the eightfold observance of the noble ones, Vasiṣṭha, one cannot fathom the extent of the merit, nor the fruits of the merit, nor the ripening of the fruits of the merit by saying, ‘It is this much.’ And yet, it is described as ‘many heaps of merit.’
- 1.9 “As an analogy, Vasiṣṭha, it is like how the five great rivers—the Ganges, the Yamunā, the One With the Lake, the One With Houses, and the Saté¹²—flow down into one, and thus, one cannot fathom their volume, saying, ‘There is this much water, or these many hundred jugs of water, or these many thousand jugs of water, or these many hundred thousand jugs of water.’ And yet, it is described as ‘a lot of water’ and ‘a huge river.’
- 1.10 “Similarly, Vasiṣṭha, regarding the merit of those sons or daughters of good families who maintain the eightfold observance of the noble ones, one cannot fathom the extent of the merit, nor the fruits of the merit, nor the ripening of the fruits of the merit by saying, ‘It is this much.’ And yet, it is described as ‘a lot of merit.’ [F.265.b]
- 1.11 “Vasiṣṭha, what do you think? Can someone fathom the waters of the great ocean, saying, ‘There is this much water, or this many hundred jugs of water, or this many thousand jugs of water, or this many hundred thousand jugs of water?’”
 “Gautama,” replied Vasiṣṭha, “regarding the waters of the great oceans, it is baseless and untenable for someone to fathom their volume, saying, ‘There is this much water, or this many hundred jugs of water, or this many thousand jugs of water, or this many hundred thousand jugs of water.’ Gautama, if you ask why that is the case, it is because there is not a fathomable volume.”
- 1.12 The Blessed One said, “One should understand this through the following illustration: it is possible that someone, at some time, and by some means could fathom the volume of water in the great ocean, saying, ‘There is this much water, or this many hundred jugs of water, or this many thousand jugs of water, or this many hundred thousand jugs of water,’ but one cannot fathom the extent of the merit of maintaining the eightfold observance of the noble ones a single time, or the fruits of the merit, or the ripening of the fruits of the merit, saying, ‘It is this much.’ And yet, it is described as ‘a lot of merit’ and ‘a big heap of merit.’
 “Vasiṣṭha,” continued the Blessed One, “such is the great fruit of maintaining the eightfold observance of the noble ones; such is the great benefit; such is the great power; such is the abundance. Vasiṣṭha, maintain the eightfold observance of the noble ones, practice diligently on special days, and experience all you wish for among gods and humans!”

1.13 The brahmin Vasiṣṭha then replied to the Blessed One with these words: “O Gautama, now consider two people: the first practices gift giving for as long as they live, but the second, for as long as they live, [F.266.a] maintains the eightfold observance of the noble ones. Of the two, Blessed One, who is superior?”

1.14 “Vasiṣṭha,” answered the Blessed One, “in this case, maintaining the eightfold observance of the noble ones and generosity are not equal. As an analogy, Vasiṣṭha, say that a son or daughter of a good family, for as long as they live, makes offerings to whosoever is a worthy one on this Jambu continent—their contaminants ceased, their work done, their task complete, their burden laid down, their own purpose attained, their connection to existence entirely extinguished, and satisfied thanks to the complete liberation of their minds through right knowledge. They make offerings of the precious things contained in the sixteen great kingdoms¹³—Aṅga, Magadha, Kośala, Kāśī, Vṛji, Malla, Puṇḍra, Sreṅga,¹⁴ Kāmā,¹⁵ Avanti, Kuru, Pañcāla, Vatsa, Śūrasena,¹⁶ Yavana, and Kamboja. That is to say, they make offerings of diamonds, emeralds, rubies, sapphires, magnificent sapphires, crystals,¹⁷ pearls, beryl, shell stones,¹⁸ coral, silver, alluvial gold, aśmagarbha emeralds, cat’s eyes,¹⁹ red pearls, and right-coiling conches—all begotten through strenuous effort, earned thanks to the sweat of one’s brow and by the strength of one’s arms, and justly and lawfully obtained. They make offerings of those things along with provisions, garments, food, bedding, and medicines that cure illness. When compared to a second person maintaining the eightfold observance of the noble ones a single time, the heap of merit that arises from the aforementioned acts of generosity does not even come close to a hundredth part of the heap of merit that arises from maintaining the eightfold observance of the noble ones. It does not even come close to a thousandth, [F.266.b] or a hundred thousandth, or any number, fraction, sum total, analogy, or comparison. Vasiṣṭha, such is the great fruit of maintaining the eightfold observance of the noble ones; such is the great benefit; such is the great power; such is the abundance. Vasiṣṭha, maintain the eightfold observance of the noble ones, practice diligently on special days, and experience all that gods and humans wish!

1.15 “Furthermore, Vasiṣṭha, in comparison to the happiness of the god realms, sovereignty²⁰ in the human realm is of paltry worth. That which among humans is fifty years is but one day for the gods of the Heaven of the Four Great Kings. Fifteen of those spans of one day equal half a month, and thirty such days equal a month, and twelve such months equal a year. By that way of calculating, whatever constitutes five hundred years for the gods, that is the lifespan for the gods of the Heaven of the Four Great Kings. If calculated by human standards, it is nine million years.²¹ Vasiṣṭha, upon separation

from the body, the fate of a faithful son or daughter of a good family, one who has maintained the eightfold observance of the noble ones a single time, will be a rebirth equal in status to the gods of the Heaven of the Four Great Kings. Vasiṣṭha, this is what I had in mind when I proclaimed, 'In comparison to the happiness of the god realms, sovereignty in the human realm is of paltry worth.'

1.16 "That which among humans is one hundred years is but one day for the gods of the Heaven of the Thirty-Three. Fifteen of those spans of one day equal half a month, and thirty such days equal a month, and twelve such months equal a year. By that way of calculating, whatever constitutes one thousand years for the gods, that is the lifespan for the gods of the Heaven of the Thirty-Three. If calculated by human standards, it is thirty-six million years. Upon separation from the body, the fate of a faithful son or daughter of a good family, one who maintains the eightfold observance of the noble ones a single time, [F.267.a] will be a rebirth equal in status to the gods of the Heaven of the Thirty-Three. Vasiṣṭha, this is what I had in mind when I proclaimed, 'In comparison to the happiness of the god realms, sovereignty in the human realm is of paltry worth.'

1.17 "Vasiṣṭha, that which among humans is two hundred years is but one day for the gods of the Heaven Free from Strife. Fifteen of those spans of one day equal half a month, and thirty such days equal a month, and twelve such months equal a year. By that way of calculating, whatever constitutes two thousand years, that is the lifespan for the gods of the Heaven Free from Strife. If calculated by human standards, it is one hundred and forty-four million years.²² Upon separation from the body, the fate of a faithful son or daughter of a good family, one who maintains the eightfold observance of the noble ones a single time, will be a rebirth equal in status to the gods of the Heaven Free from Strife. Vasiṣṭha, this is what I had in mind when I proclaimed, 'In comparison to the happiness of the god realms, sovereignty in the human realm is of paltry worth.'

1.18 "Vasiṣṭha, that which among humans is four hundred years is but one day for the gods of the Heaven of Joy. Fifteen of those spans of one day equal half a month, and thirty such days equal a month, and twelve such months equal a year. Just so, by that way of calculating years, whatever constitutes four thousand years for the gods, that is the lifespan for the gods of the Heaven of Joy. If calculated by human standards, it is five hundred and seventy-six million years. Vasiṣṭha, upon separation from the body, the fate of a faithful son or daughter of a good family, one who maintains the eightfold observance of the noble ones a single time, will be a rebirth equal

in status to the gods of the Heaven of Joy. Vasiṣṭha, this is what I had in mind when I proclaimed, 'In comparison to the happiness of the god realms, sovereignty in the human realm is of paltry worth.'

1.19 "Vasiṣṭha, that which among humans is eight hundred years [F.267.b] is but one day for the gods of the Heaven of Delighting in Emanations. Fifteen of those spans of one day equal half a month, and thirty such days equal a month, and twelve such months equal a year. By that way of calculating years, whatever constitutes eight thousand years for the gods, that is the lifespan for the gods of the Heaven of Delighting in Emanations. If calculated by human standards, it is two billion three hundred four million years.²³ Upon separation from the body, the fate of a faithful son or daughter of a good family, one who maintains the eightfold observance of the noble ones a single time, will be a rebirth equal in status to the gods of the Heaven of Delighting in Emanations. Vasiṣṭha, this is what I had in mind when I proclaimed, 'In comparison to the happiness of the god realms, sovereignty in the human realm is of paltry worth.'

1.20 "Vasiṣṭha, that which among humans is sixteen hundred years is but one day for the gods of the Heaven of Making Use of Others' Emanations. Fifteen of those spans of one day equal half a month, and thirty such days equal a month, and twelve such months equal a year. By that way of calculating years, whatever constitutes sixteen thousand years, that is the lifespan for the gods of the Heaven of Making Use of Others' Emanations. If calculated by human standards, it is nine billion two hundred sixteen million years.²⁴ Upon separation from the body, the fate of a faithful son or daughter of a good family, one who maintains the eightfold observance of the noble ones a single time, will be a rebirth equal in status to the gods of the Heaven of Making Use of Others' Emanations. Vasiṣṭha, this is what I had in mind when I proclaimed, 'In comparison to the happiness of the god realms, sovereignty in the human realm is of paltry worth.'

"Vasiṣṭha, maintain the eightfold observance of the noble ones, practice diligently on special days, and experience all you wish for among gods and humans!"

1.21 The brahmin Vasiṣṭha then said these words to the Blessed One: [F.268.a] "O Gautama, for a long time, for every lunar special day, I have wearily performed severe austerities, yet I have gained nothing at all. Today and henceforth, I take refuge in the Buddha; I take refuge in the Dharma and in the Saṅgha. With all the power and strength that I possess, I will maintain the eightfold observance of the noble ones, and I will practice generosity."

1.22 The Blessed One proclaimed, "Vasiṣṭha, this is excellent! That is your task!" After the Blessed One proclaimed those words, the brahmin Vasiṣṭha, along with the world with its gods, humans, asuras, and gandharvas,

rejoiced and extolled what the Blessed One had taught.

1.23 *This concludes the Noble Sūtra of Vasīṣṭha.*

c.

Colophon

c.1 This was translated, revised, and finalized by the Indian preceptor Sarvajñādeva, the chief editor-translator Bandé Paltsek, and others.

n.

NOTES

- n.1 On the etymology of the term *poṣadha*, see the introduction (i.3 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh342.html#UT22084-074-003-6>)) in *The Questions of Dīrghanakha the Wandering Mendicant*, Toh 342 (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, 2021).
- n.2 This order varies from the typical series in which eating at the improper time (i.e., after noon) is listed sixth and the series concludes with the prohibition against using high and large beds. While the first five of these correspond to the standard vows observed by lay practitioners, namely *upāsakas* (Tib. *dge bsnyen*) and *upāsikās* (Tib. *dge bsnyen ma*), the three additional abstentions render them closer in kind to novice monastics, though the vows for novices count the abstentions related to entertainment and adornment separately and include a further vow not to accept money.
- n.3 According to Gregory Schopen, *The Sūtra of Vasiṣṭha* represents a “version of an old sūtra which occurs in five slightly different versions as the first of five suttas of the Uposathavagga of the Pali Aṅguttara-nikāya (iv 248–62).” See Schopen 1982, p. 227. Indeed, several Pali suttas overlap at various points with *The Sūtra of Vasiṣṭha*, perhaps most notably the *Mūluposathasutta* (AN 3.70), the *San̄khittūposathasutta* (<https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an08/an08.041.vaka.html>) (AN 8.41), the *Vitthatūposathasutta* (<https://suttacentral.net/an8.42/en/bodhi>) (AN 8.42), the *Visākhūposathasutta* (AN 8.43), and the *Bojjhasutta* (<https://suttacentral.net/an8.45/en/bodhi>) (AN 8.45). For much of the text, the *Vāseṭṭhasutta* within the Aṅguttara Nikāya (i.e., AN 8.44) follows the *Vitthatūposathasutta*, but it also goes on to laud the benefits of observing the *uposatha* in general. The *Vāseṭṭhasutta* one finds in Sutta Nipāta 3.9 (cf. Majjhima Nikāya 98) is a sutta in which a brahmin named Vāseṭṭha asks the Buddha how to discern who is a true brahmin, and deals more with the topic of lay ethics in general without mention of the *uposatha*. For resonance with

works that can be found within the Tengyur, it is worth mentioning Sunāyaśrīmitra's *Eight Verses on the Vows of Laypersons* (*Upāsakasamvarāṣṭaka*, Toh 4141) and its commentary, *An Explanation of "Eight Verses on the Vows of Laypersons"* (*Upāsakasamvarāṣṭakavivaraṇa*, Toh 4142), wherein we find a section detailing the poṣadha. See the text beginning at folio 158.b.1. Giulio Agostini, in his 2010 edition and translation of the verses and their commentary, dates these works between the last quarter of the eleventh century and the first quarter of the twelfth.

n.4 *The Devatā Sūtra* (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh329.html>) (Skt. *Devatāsūtra*; Tib. *lha'i mdo*, Toh 329) and the *Maitreyavyākaraṇa* (Tib. *'phags pa byams pa lung bstan pa*). Although this latter text does not appear in the Degé Kangyur, it can be found in several others. See *Resources for Kanjur and Tanjur Studies* (<http://www.rkts.org/>), Universität Wien, accessed March 27, 2022.

n.5 Preserved in Persian and Arabic, this work was authored by Rashīd al-Dīn Hamadani (1247–1318), who used information obtained from a Kashmiri monk known as Kamālāshrī Bakhshī to produce the India- and Buddhism-related sections. On this topic, see Schopen 1982 and Jahn 1956. Karl Jahn, writing in the middle of the twentieth century, produced a summary of the section that Schopen later determined to be a version of *The Sūtra of Vasiṣṭha* within the *Compendium*. Based on Jahn's summary, the Vasiṣṭha account that Rashīd al-Dīn includes does, indeed, seem to be a version of the sūtra translated here. However, Jahn's summary offers certain details that are absent from Toh 333. See, for example, Jahn 1956, p. 100, where the Buddha is said to list six days of the month on which one might fast if one wishes to be reborn in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three.

n.6 Both catalogs (Denkarma folio 301.a and Phangthangma 2003, p. 22) classify *The Sūtra of Vasiṣṭha* as a "Hīnayāna sūtra" (*theg pa chung ngu'i mdo*).

n.7 The unexplained shift from the sage Kapila to the brahmin Vasiṣṭha seems abrupt here. The text most obviously appears to imply that the great sage Kapila is out and about with others, perhaps his own followers, and one of them, a brahmin named Vasiṣṭha, proceeds with Kapila to where the Buddha is staying. This echoes the beginning of Sutta Nipāta 3.9 (cf. Majjhima Nikāya 98), in which we read that among the many brahmins who are staying at the Icchānaṅgala grove, two in particular—Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja—while walking and wandering about for exercise, decide to approach the Buddha so that he can advise them on the question of true brahminhood. Alternatively, there is perhaps here a conflation of the two sages, Kapila and Vasiṣṭha. One might also speculate that at some point in the evolution of the text a distortion of some further reference to the setting, Kapilavastu, may

have caused Kapila's appearance as a protagonist in the narrative instead. The great sage Kapila is more usually mentioned as a figure of the distant past after whom the city of Kapilavastu was named, as for example in the story of the Śākya clan lineage near the beginning of the *Saṅghabhedavastu* (Toh 1, chapter 17, Degé Kangyur vol. 4, 'dul ba, ga, F.271.b).

- n.8 The "month-long fast" (*dgung zlar smyung ba*) might refer to the ancient brahmanical *cāndrāyaṇavrata*, or simply the *cāndrāyaṇa*, a month-long observance in which one begins by eating fourteen mouthfuls of food and decreases food intake by one mouthful every day until the new moon day, during which one does not eat anything at all. Then, during the moon's waxing phase, one increases food intake by one mouthful a day until the full moon. See the *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* 3.8 as well as *Manusmṛti* 11.217–18 and the accompanying note provided by Olivelle 2009, p. 290.
- n.9 The term "special days" (*cho 'phrul gyi phyogs*) likely reflects the Sanskrit *prātihāryapakṣa* or the Pali *pāṭihāriyapakkha* (https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?q=p%2C%81%E1%B9%ADih%2C%81riya&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact), defined in *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary* as "an extra holiday, an ancient festival, not now kept." (Here, "extra" likely means in addition to the new moon, the full moon, and the two days that fall halfway in between these two.) Ultimately, there is a lack of commentarial and scholarly consensus regarding what, exactly, this special holiday or festival period once entailed and when it is supposed to have occurred. However, certain sources take care to note that "special days" does not necessarily mean single extra days during the lunar fortnight. For monastics, at least, it might also refer to longer stretches of time, such as the three months of the summer rains retreat. On this topic, see, for example, Bodhi 2003, p. 480, n. 573; Bodhi 2012, p. 1642, n. 387.
- n.10 This is to say that one maintains the eightfold observance for a whole day, from the time one gets up, through the evening, and until the following day's sunrise.
- n.11 Although the text only states the full formula for the first and last branches of the observance, it should be understood that one recites the same formula for each of the eight branches in turn.
- n.12 Tentative translation. The Tibetan here reads *gang gA dang / ya mu na dang / mtsho ldan dang / khyim ldan dang / sa ste*. The series of five sacred rivers in Pali is often the Ganges, the Yamunā, the Ajiravatī, the Sarabhū, and the Saritā. The Tibetan *sa ste* could be a phonetic approximation of the Saritā. The

designation *mtsho ldan*, literally “has a lake,” could refer to the Sarasvatī river, or one of the rivers connected to Lake Manasarovar, perhaps the Brahmaputra. The designation *khyim ldan*, literally “has houses,” is difficult to identify with any certainty, and looking to sources on rivers in Vedic literature yields several possibilities. In another canonical use of the simile, we find *dper na chu bo chen po lnga po 'di lta ste / gang gA dang / ya mu na dang / sar yu dang / gnas ldan dang / chen po zhes bya ba*, i.e., the Ganges, the Yamunā, the Sarabhū, the Ajiravatī, and the Mahī. See *The Chapter on Medicines* (Toh 1–6), 8.227 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh1-6.html#UT22084-001-006-2948>). Searching the Buddhist Digital Resource Center’s database of e-texts reveals that where later Tibetan texts refer to *The Sūtra of Vasiṣṭha*, the last river in the series varies especially (i.e., *sa ste* above), such that one also finds *palgu* (i.e., Phalgu) and *pak+Sha*.

- n.13 In Aṅguttara Nikāya 3.70 and 8.43, both of which are suttas on the *uposatha*, we find the sixteen kingdoms listed as Aṅga, Magadha, Kāsi, Kosala, Vajji, Malla, Ceti, Vaṅga, Kuru, Pañcāla, Maccha, Sūrasena, Assaka, Avanti, Gandhāra, and Kamboja.
- n.14 Not identified. Cases can be made for *sreg pa* (var. *srag pa*) as one of the kingdoms (without an obvious correlate) listed in n. 17 above, e.g., Ceti or Assaka, but further research is needed to determine exactly which kingdom it might be—if it might be any of these at all. For the variant *srag pa*, see the Phukdrak (*phug brag*) Kangyur vol. 65, folio 321.a.3, and the Hemis Kangyur vol. 78, folio 57.b.3.
- n.15 *kA mA*, possibly for Kāmarūpa, which is identified with modern-day Assam. On the history of this region, see Shin 2017.
- n.16 The spelling for this region varies. While the Degé and Comparative Edition read *dpal sde*, the Stok Palace Kangyur reads *dpe sde*, and the Hemis and Phukdrak Kangyurs read *dpa' sde*. The latter is reflected above.
- n.17 *nor bu* (Skt. and Pali *maṇi*) typically denotes a “gem” or “jewel.” Since the text is enumerating specific precious items, however, “crystal” is used over the generic sense. On this point, see esp. *The Pali Text Society’s Pali–English Dictionary*, p. 516.
- n.18 *shang ka shi la* (Skt. *śaṅkhaśilā*; Pali *sankhasilā*). See the entry for *sankha*, “shell,” in *The Pali Text Society’s Pali–English Dictionary*, p. 663.
- n.19 *spug*. Understandings of what this term refers to vary, but it could be *musāragalva* (Pali *masāragalla*), i.e., a green precious stone like a green cat’s eye,

or it could refer to *pukh* as in *pukhraj*, i.e., yellow sapphire.

- n.20 Tib. *rgyal srid*, literally “kingship” or “kingdom,” is an unexpected term here, not having been mentioned so far in the comparisons of merit. The term is sometimes found as a synonym of *mitho ris*, “the higher realms,” but we have chosen to interpret this term in line with the parallels to this part of the text in the Pali (as seen in the *Vitthatūposathasutta*, AN 8.42 and the texts that follow it, see [n.3](#)) where the comparison made is with the worth of kingship over the countries mentioned in the preceding passage, rather than (as in this text) with the merit of making of offerings with the precious substances contained in them.
- n.21 As written, the total numbers of years calculated in human time do not always seem to reflect the longhand multiplication of the initial number of god years by thirty, twelve, and x years. Here, the text reads *lo brgya phrag dgu stong*, i.e., nine hundred thousand years. However, multiplying fifty (years) times thirty (days) times twelve (months) times five hundred (years) yields nine million years.
- n.22 *lo bye ba phrag bcu bzhi dang / lo stong phrag bcu bzhi*. Multiplying two hundred (years) times thirty (days) times twelve (months) times two thousand (years) yields one hundred and forty-four million years.
- n.23 *lo bye ba phrag nyis stong sum brgya dang / lo brgya phrag stong bzhi bcu*. Multiplying eight hundred (years) times thirty (days) times twelve (months) times eight thousand (years) yields two billion three hundred four million years.
- n.24 *lo bye ba phrag dgu brgya nyi shu rtsa gcig dang / lo brgya phrag stong drug cu [=bcu]*. The numbers in this passage are even more curious than they are in the previous passages, given that here the initial number of years in human time, *stong phrag drug cu [=bcu]*, i.e., sixty thousand, departs from the pattern in which the initial numbers increase twofold at each juncture. Following the pattern, eight hundred years would become sixteen hundred years. Multiplying sixteen hundred (years) times thirty (days) times twelve (months) times sixteen thousand (years) yields nine billion two hundred sixteen million years.

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 alluvial gold

sa le sbram

ས་ལེ་སྒྲམ།

suvarnacūrṇa

Alluvial gold; gold dust. Pali *suvarnacunna*.

g.2 Aṅga
ang ga
ཨང་ག།
aṅga
One of the sixteen great kingdoms of ancient India.

g.3 aśmagarbha emerald
rdo'i snying po
རྫོང་རླིང་པོ།
aśmagarbha

g.4 Avanti
a ban ti
ཨ་བན་ཏི།
avanti
One of the sixteen great kingdoms of ancient India.

g.5 Bandé Paltsek
ban de dpal brtsegs
བན་དེ་དཔལ་བརྟེན།

—
Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

Paltsek (eighth to early ninth century), from the village of Kawa north of Lhasa, was one of Tibet's preeminent translators. He was one of the first seven Tibetans to be ordained by Śāntarakṣita and is counted as one of Guru Rinpoché's twenty-five close disciples. In a famous verse by Ngok Lotsawa Loden Sherab, Kawa Paltsek is named along with Chokro Lui Gyaltsen and Zhang (or Nanam) Yeshé Dé as part of a group of translators whose skills were surpassed only by Vairotsana.

He translated works from a wide variety of genres, including sūtra, śāstra, vinaya, and tantra, and was an author himself. Paltsek was also one of the most important editors of the early period, one of nine translators installed by Tri Songdetsen (r. 755–797/800) to supervise the translation of the Tripiṭaka and help catalog translated works for the first two of three imperial catalogs, the Denkarma (*ldan kar ma*) and the Samyé Chimpuma (*bsam yas mchims phu ma*). In the colophons of his works, he is often known as Paltsek Rakṣita (*rak+Shi ta*).

- g.6 beryl
bai dU r+ya
 བི་དུ་ཅུ།
vaiḍūrya
 A cat's-eye gem or beryl.
- g.7 cat's eye
spug
 སྤྱག།
musāragalva
 Understandings of what *spug* might refer to vary, but it could be *musāragalva* (Pali *masāragalla*), i.e., a green precious stone, a cat's eye, or *pukh* as in *pukhraj*, i.e., yellow sapphire.
- g.8 coral
byi ru
 ཕྱི་རུ།
pravāḍa
- g.9 crystal
nor bu
 རོར་བུ།
maṇi
 A jewel, gem, or crystal.
- g.10 earned thanks to the sweat of one's brow
rdul cing dri ma chags chags
 རྩུལ་ཅིང་རྩི་མ་ཆགས་ཆགས།
svedamalāvakṣipta
 Lit. "produced as one sweats and becomes dirty."
- g.11 eightfold observance
yan lag brgyad dang ldan pa'i bsnyen gnas
 ་ཤམ་པའི་ཡན་ལག་བརྒྱད་དང་ལྷན་པའི་བསྟེན་གནས།
 ་འཕགས་པའི་ཡན་ལག་བརྒྱད་དང་ལྷན་པའི་བསྟེན་གནས།
 —

To refrain from (1) killing, (2) stealing, (3) sexual activity, (4) false speech, (5) intoxication, (6) singing, dancing, music, and beautifying oneself with adornments or cosmetics, (7) using a high or large bed, and (8) eating at improper times. Typically, this observance is maintained by lay people for twenty-four hours on new moon and full moon days, as well as other special days in the lunar calendar.

g.12 emerald

mar gad

མར་གད།

marakata

g.13 factor

yan lag

ཡན་ལག

aṅga

A branch or limb; member; subdivision or supplement; factor or element.

g.14 Ganges

gang ga

གང་ག།

gaṅgā

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The Gaṅgā, or Ganges in English, is considered to be the most sacred river of India, particularly within the Hindu tradition. It starts in the Himalayas, flows through the northern plains of India, bathing the holy city of Vārāṇasī, and meets the sea at the Bay of Bengal, in Bangladesh. In the sūtras, however, this river is mostly mentioned not for its sacredness but for its abundant sands—noticeable still today on its many sandy banks and at its delta—which serve as a common metaphor for infinitely large numbers.

According to Buddhist cosmology, as explained in the *Abhidharmakośa*, it is one of the four rivers that flow from Lake Anavatapta and cross the southern continent of Jambudvīpa—the known human world or more specifically the Indian subcontinent.

g.15 Heaven Free from Strife

'thab bral

འཐབ་བྲལ།

yāma

The third of the six heavens of the desire realm.

g.16 Heaven of Delighting in Emanations

'phrul dga'

འཕྲུལ་དགའ།

nirmāṇarati

The fifth of the six heavens of the desire realm.

g.17 Heaven of Joy

dga' ldan

དགའ་ལྡན།

tuṣita

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

Tuṣita (or sometimes Saṃtuṣita), literally “Joyous” or “Contented,” is one of the six heavens of the desire realm (*kāmadhātu*). In standard classifications, such as the one in the *Abhidharmakośa*, it is ranked as the fourth of the six counting from below. This god realm is where all future buddhas are said to dwell before taking on their final rebirth prior to awakening. There, the Buddha Śākyamuni lived his preceding life as the bodhisattva Śvetaketu. When departing to take birth in this world, he appointed the bodhisattva Maitreya, who will be the next buddha of this eon, as his Dharma regent in Tuṣita. For an account of the Buddha’s previous life in Tuṣita, see *The Play in Full* (Toh 95), 2.12, and for an account of Maitreya’s birth in Tuṣita and a description of this realm, see *The Sūtra on Maitreya’s Birth in the Heaven of Joy*, (Toh 199).

g.18 Heaven of Making Use of Others’ Emanations

gzhan 'phrul dbang byed

གཞན་འཕྲུལ་དབང་བྱེད།

paranirmitavaśavartin

The sixth and highest of the six heavens of the desire realm.

g.19 Heaven of the Four Great Kings

rgyal chen bzhi'i ris

རྒྱལ་ཆེན་བཞིའི་རིས།

caturmahārājakāyika

The first of the six heavens of the desire realm.

g.20 Heaven of the Thirty-Three

sum cu rtsa gsum

སུམ་རུ་ཙ་གསུམ།

trāyastrimśa

The second heaven of the desire realm, it is found at the top of Mount Meru and is the abode of Śakra and the thirty-three gods.

g.21 Jambu continent

'dzam bu'i gling

འཛམ་བུ་རྒྱིང་།

jambudvīpa

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The name of the southern continent in Buddhist cosmology, which can signify either the known human world, or more specifically the Indian subcontinent, literally “the *jambu* island/continent.” Jambu is the name used for a range of plum-like fruits from trees belonging to the genus *Szygium*, particularly *Szygium jambos* and *Szygium cumini*, and it has commonly been rendered “rose apple,” although “black plum” may be a less misleading term. Among various explanations given for the continent being so named, one (in the *Abhidharmakośa*) is that a jambu tree grows in its northern mountains beside Lake Anavatapta, mythically considered the source of the four great rivers of India, and that the continent is therefore named from the tree or the fruit. Jambudvīpa has the Vajrāsana at its center and is the only continent upon which buddhas attain awakening.

g.22 Kāmā

kA mA

ཀ་མ།

—

One of the sixteen great kingdoms of ancient India.

g.23 Kamboja

kam po

ཀམ་པོ།

kamboja

One of the sixteen great kingdoms of ancient India.

g.24 Kapila

ser skya

མེར་སྐྱུ།

kapila

The name of a sage. See [n.7](#).

g.25 Kapilavastu

ser skya'i gnas

མེར་སྐྱུ་འི་གནས།

kapilavastu

The Śākya capital, where the Bodhisattva (i.e., Siddhārtha Gautama before his awakening) grew up.

g.26 Kāśī

kA shi

ཀཱ་ཤི།

kāśī

One of the sixteen great kingdoms of ancient India.

g.27 Kośala

ko sa la

ཀོ་ས་ལ།

kośala

One of the sixteen great kingdoms of ancient India.

g.28 Kuru

ku ru

ཀུ་རུ།

kuru

One of the sixteen great kingdoms of ancient India.

g.29 lunar special day

dgung zla

དགུང་ཟླ།

—

A period of time related to the moon's phases during which one engages in religious observances.

g.30 Magadha

ma ga d+hA

མ་ག་རྒྱ།

magadha

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

An ancient Indian kingdom that lay to the south of the Ganges River in what today is the state of Bihar. Magadha was the largest of the sixteen “great states” (*mahājanapada*) that flourished between the sixth and third centuries BCE in northern India. During the life of the Buddha Śākyamuni, it was ruled by King Bimbisāra and later by Bimbisāra's son, Ajātaśatru. Its capital was initially Rājagṛha (modern-day Rajgir) but was later moved to Pāṭaliputra (modern-day Patna). Over the centuries, with the expansion of the Magadha's might, it became the capital of the vast Mauryan empire and seat of the great King Aśoka.

This region is home to many of the most important Buddhist sites, including Bodh Gayā, where the Buddha attained awakening; Vulture Peak (*Gṛdhra-kūṭa*), where the Buddha bestowed many well-known Mahāyāna sūtras; and the Buddhist university of Nālandā that flourished between the fifth and twelfth centuries CE, among many others.

g.31 magnificent sapphires

mthon ka chen po

མཐོན་ཀ་ཆེན་པོ།

mahānīla

A large and/or deep-blue sapphire.

g.32 Malla

malla

མལ་།

malla

One of the sixteen great kingdoms of ancient India.

g.33 month-long fast

dgung zlar smyung ba

དགུང་རྗེར་སྦྱང་བ།

cāndrāyaṇavrata

A month-long observance in which one begins by eating fourteen mouthfuls of food and decreases food intake by one mouthful every day until the new moon day, during which one does not eat anything at all. Then, during the

moon's waxing phase, one increases food intake by one mouthful a day until the full moon.

g.34 Nyagrodha Park

shing n+ya gro d+ha'i kun dga' ra ba

ཤིང་བྱ་གློ་རྒྱའི་ཀུན་དགའ་ར་བ།

nyagrodhārāma

A grove of banyan trees (Skt. *nyagrodha*, Tib. *nya gro dha*)

near Kapilavastu where the Buddha sometimes took up residence. It was a gift to the Buddhist community from King Śuddhodana, the father of the Buddha.

g.35 One With Houses

khyim ldan

ཁྱིམ་ལྗན།

—

A river.

g.36 One With the Lake

mtsho ldan

མཚོ་ལྗན།

—

A river. Lit. "has a lake." Possibly the Sarasvatī river, or one of the rivers connected to Lake Manasarovar, perhaps the Brahmaputra.

g.37 Pañcāla

lga len

ལྗ་ལེན།

pañcāla

One of the sixteen great kingdoms of ancient India.

g.38 pearls

mu tig

མུ་ཏིག།

muktikā

g.39 Puṇḍra

pun dra

ཕུན་པ།

punḍra

One of the sixteen great kingdoms of ancient India.

g.40 red pearl

mu tig dmar po

ལྷ་ཏིག་དམར་པོ།

lohitamuktikā

g.41 rubies

pad ma rA ga

པདམ་རྒྱ་ག།

padmarāga

g.42 sapphires

an da rnyil

ཨན་དརྩིལ།

indranīla

g.43 Sarvajñādeva

sarba dz+nya de ba

སར་རྩོ་དེཔ།

sarvajñādeva

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

According to traditional accounts, the Kashmiri preceptor Sarvajñādeva was among the “one hundred” paṇḍitas invited by Trisong Detsen (r. 755–797/800) to assist with the translation of the Buddhist scriptures into Tibetan. Sarvajñādeva assisted in the translation of more than twenty-three works, including numerous sūtras and the first translations of Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and Nāgārjuna’s *Suhṛllekha*. Much of this work was likely carried out in the first years of the ninth century and may have continued into the reign of Ralpachen (*ral pa can*), who ascended the throne in 815 and died in 838 or 841 CE.

g.44 Saté

sa ste

ས་སྟེ།

—

A river. Possibly a phonetic approximation of Saritā, as in the river Saritā.

g.45 shell stone

shang ka shi la

ཤང་ཀ་ཤི་ལ།

śaṅkhaśilā

A type of stone or shell. Pali *sankhasilā*.

g.46 sixteen great kingdoms

yul chen po bcu drug

ཡུལ་ཆེན་པོ་བརྒྱ་དྲུག་

mahājanapada

g.47 special days

cho 'phrul gyi phyogs

ཚོ་འཕྲུལ་གྱི་ཕྱོགས།

prātihāryapakṣa

A sacred day; an ancient festival, not now kept. A special period of religious observance. Pali *pāṭihāriyapakkha*.

g.48 Srekpa

sreg pa · srag pa

སྲེག་པ། · སྲག་པ།

—

A Tibetan rendering of the name of one of the sixteen great kingdoms of ancient India.

g.49 Śūrasena

dpal sde · dpe sde · dpa' sde

དཔལ་སྡེ། · དཔེ་སྡེ། · དཔའ་སྡེ།

śūrasena

One of the sixteen great kingdoms of ancient India.

g.50 the five great rivers

chu bo chen po lnga po

ཚུ་བོ་ཆེན་པོ་ལྔ་པོ།

pañcamahānadī

The five great rivers of ancient India.

g.51 Vasiṣṭha

gnas 'jog

གནས་འཛོག

vasiṣṭha

The name of one of the great sages of ancient India; one of the composers of the Vedic hymns. In Pali sources, a figure named Vāseṭṭha (Skt. Vasiṣṭha) also appears as a young brahmin.

g.52 Vatsa

bad sa

བད་ས།

vatsa

One of the sixteen great kingdoms of ancient India.

g.53 Vṛji

br-i dzi

བྷི

vṛji

One of the sixteen great kingdoms (*mahājanapada*) of ancient India. The land and people of Vṛji or Vaji (Pali *Vajji*), a country situated on the northeastern Gangetic plain.

g.54 Yamunā

ya mu na

ཡ་མུ་ན།

yamunā

The river Yamunā.

g.55 Yavana

ya ba na

ཡ་བ་ན།

yavana

One of the sixteen great kingdoms of ancient India.

