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The Fearsome Vajra of Destruction

Vajrabhairavavidāraṇa

དཔལ་རྗེ་འཇིགས་བྱེད་རྣམ་པར་འཛོམས་པའི་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ།

dpal rdo rje 'jigs byed rnam par 'joms pa'i rgyud kyi rgyal po

The Glorious King of Tantras: The Fearsome Vajra of Destruction

Śrīvajrabhairavaavidāraṇatantrarāja

· Toh 409 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 79 (rgyud, ga), folios 247.a–248.a

TRANSLATED INTO TIBETAN BY

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co.

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SUMMARY

- s.1 This short tantra, *The Fearsome Vajra of Destruction*, presents a dialogue between the bodhisattva Vajragarbha and the Blessed One, in which the latter gives detailed explanations of the meanings of the terms that constitute the tantra's title. The majority of the tantra deals with elucidations of the various aspects of the word *vajra*, which center on a vajra's quality of indestructibility and its ability to crush and destroy dualistic concepts.

ac.

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ac.1 This publication was completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.

ac.2 The text was translated, edited, and introduced by the 84000 translation team. Bruno Galasek-Hul produced the translation and wrote the introduction. Ryan Damron edited the translation and the introduction, and Dawn Collins copyedited the text. Martina Cotter was in charge of the digital publication process.

i.

INTRODUCTION

i.1

In *The Fearsome Vajra of Destruction*, the bodhisattva Vajragarbha asks the Blessed One¹ to explain the meaning of the key words from the tantra's title.² When the Blessed One finishes his initial short exposition of these terms, Vajragarbha, requests a more detailed explanation. The Blessed One assents by further elaborating on the terms, with most of his exposition focused on the term *vajra*. He explains *vajra* using the threefold framework of the "true vajra" (*don gyi rdo rje*), the "symbolic vajra" (*rtags kyi rdo rje*), and the "material vajra" (*rdzas kyi rdo rje*). Each of these categories is then elaborated on based on how they crush and destroy the dualistic concepts of subject and object. The Blessed One's explanation seems to center on the quality of hardness and indestructibility ascribed to a vajra, a term that can also be translated as "diamond."

i.2

The Fearsome Vajra of Destruction is classified as an Unexcelled Yoga class (*rnal 'byor bla na med pa'i rgyud*), the highest of the four classes of tantra according to the new traditions (*gsar ma*) of the period of the later transmission (*phyi dar*) of Buddhism in Tibet.³ Within this class, the tantra belongs to the so-called Rali tantras (*ra li'i rgyud*),⁴ a group of tantras that form a subset of thirty-two shorter explanatory tantras from the Śaṃvara corpus in the Yoginītantra section (*rnal 'byor ma'i rgyud*) of the Degé Kangyur.⁵ Except for the title that seems to coincidentally contain the term *vajrabhairava*, which is also the name of the fierce buffalo-headed deity Vajrabhairava, *The Fearsome Vajra of Destruction* does not appear to have any explicit connection to the corpus associated with Vajrabhairava in the Kangyur.⁶ Because of their disputed status as authentic documents of Indian tantric Buddhism, the Rali tantras were excluded from the Kangyurs of Narthang and Lhasa (the latter being mainly based on Narthang).⁷

i.3

According to the translator's colophon, *The Fearsome Vajra of Destruction* was translated by the Indian paṇḍita Gayādhara and the Tibetan translator Drokmi Lotsāwa Śākya Yeshe (*'brog mi lo tsā ba śākya ye shes*), who also

translated the other thirty-one Rali tantras in this group.⁸ This information suggests that the text was translated in the first half of the eleventh century CE. Nothing certain is known about the Indian provenance of these texts, as there are no extant Sanskrit versions and they are not cited or referenced in other works of Indic Buddhism.

i.4 This English translation was prepared on the basis of the Tibetan translation preserved in the Degé Kangyur, in consultation with the Stok Palace Kangyur and the comparative notes in the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*) of the Degé Kangyur.

The Fearsome Vajra of Destruction

1.

The Translation

[F.247.a]

1.1 Homage to the glorious Heruka.

Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was staying on top of Mount Meru together with an inestimable assembly, when the bodhisattva Vajragarbha circled the Blessed One three times, folded his hands, and asked:

1.2 “Compassionate Blessed One, please explain:

What does *vajra* mean, and what is *fearsome*?

What does *destruction* mean, and what about *tantra*?

Please explain what *king* means.”

1.3 The Blessed One replied:

1.4 “*Vajra* has three aspects,

That are *fearsome* to the māra of the afflictive emotions and the others,⁹

And *destructive* to the enemy, the afflictive emotions, and so forth.

These are causal *tantra*, resultant *tantra*, and ultimate *tantra*;

It is these that are taught to be *king*.”

1.5 Vajragarbha spoke again:

1.6 “This does not provide specifics for the individual terms, so please explain them in detail.” [F.247.b]

1.7 The Blessed One replied:

1.8 “*Vajra* has three aspects:

The true vajra, the symbolic vajra,

And the material vajra.

Now, to explain the true vajra:

- 1.9 “It is explained as the *true vajra*
Because it is undivided by dualistic thinking.
Each of the four initiations are vajras
And are described as ‘the four vajras.’
- 1.10 “The symbolic vajra is of three kinds:
Three-pronged, five-pronged, and nine-pronged.
The three prongs represent body, speech, and mind;
The five prongs represent the five wisdoms;
And the nine prongs represent the nine levels of the three worlds.
- 1.11 “The true vajra¹⁰ is of four kinds:
“The deity, with its colors and implements,
Connected to the vase initiation, is *vajra*
Because it crushes and destroys
The dualistic concepts of subject and object.
- 1.12 “The channels, winds, and drops,
Connected to the secret initiation, are *vajra*
Because they crush and destroy
The dualistic concepts of subject and object.
- 1.13 “Innate joy and the other joys
Connected to insight-wisdom are *vajra*
Because they crush and destroy
The dualistic concepts of subject and object.
- 1.14 “The emptiness of the self-aware mind itself,
Connected with the fourth initiation, is *vajra*
Because it crushes and destroys
The dualistic concepts of subject and object.
- 1.15 “Next is the symbolic vajra:
The three-pronged vajra is explained as body, speech, and mind,
Because a vajra crushes and destroys
Attachment, anger, and delusion.
- 1.16 “The five-pronged vajra symbolizes the five wisdoms
Because it crushes and destroys
The five afflictions of pride and the rest.
- 1.17 “Next, the material vajra

Is taught to be of four kinds:
“When sharp and triangular it pierces,
When four sided it purifies,
When round, it destroys all that is material,
While one with five angles fulfills desires.
Such are the material vajras.

- 1.18 “The meaning of *tantra* is fourfold:
There are the two tantras, causal and resultant,
And the ultimate tantra that is *king*.
By gaining mastery over them all,
The tantra of wrong view is eliminated.”
- 1.19 The Blessed One finished speaking, and the countless bodhisattvas in the assembly felt joy and devotion, and then rejoiced. After circling the Blessed One to the right three times, they disappeared by using their individual, miraculous powers.
- 1.20 “*The Destruction of The Glorious Vajrabhairava, A King of Tantras,*” is complete.
[F.248.a]

c.

Colophon

c.1 This was translated by the paṇḍita Gayādhara and the translator-monk Śākya Yeshé.

ab.

ABBREVIATIONS

C Choné

D Degé

J Lithang

K Peking 1737 (Qianlong)

S Stok Palace MS

Y Yongle

n.

NOTES

- n.1 It is not clear from the text if the term “Blessed One” (*bhagaṅtat; bcom ldan ’das*) refers to the Buddha Śākyamuni or another figure. The tantra begins with an homage to Heruka, but such opening homages are often added by the Tibetan translators and were not part of the original text.
- n.2 The structure of this tantra is similar to that of Toh 384, see Dharmachakra Translation Committee, trans. *The Tantra That Resolves All Secrets*, Toh 384, [i.11](#).
- n.3 For a general explanation of the terms and the structure and contents of this section of the Kangyur, see [here \(https://84000.co/canon-sections/unexcelled-yoga-tantra-treatises\)](https://84000.co/canon-sections/unexcelled-yoga-tantra-treatises).
- n.4 Tōhoku nos. 383–414.
- n.5 See also Dharmachakra Translation Committee 2012, [i.10](#).
- n.6 Tōhoku nos. 467–473. See also Siklós 1990, p. 96, note 3.
- n.7 Cf. Dharmachakra Translation Committee 2012, [n.1](#), and [n.15](#).
- n.8 Unfortunately, we neither possess many biographical details nor exact dates for these two important figures. Drokmi’s dates are tentatively given as 992/93–1043 or 1072. On Drokmi Lotsāwa, see [The Treasury of Lives \(https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Drokmi-sakya-Yeshe/5615\)](https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Drokmi-sakya-Yeshe/5615), and Dharmachakra Translation Committee 2012, [i.8](#). See also Davidson 2005, pp. 161–209.
- n.9 This is perhaps a reference to the “four māras,” the *devaputramāra* (*lha’i bu’i bdud*), the divine māra, which is the distraction of pleasures; *mṛtyumāra* (*’chi bdag gi bdud*), the māra of death; *skandhamāra* (*phung po’i bdud*), the māra of the aggregates, which is the body; and *kleśamāra* (*nyon mongs pa’i bdud*), the māra of the afflictive emotions.

n.10 This translation follows C, J, K, and Y, in reading *don gyi rdo rje*. D and S read *rdzas kyi rdo rje*, “material vajra.”

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 afflictive emotions

nyon mongs

ཉོན་མོངས།

kleśa^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The essentially pure nature of mind is obscured and afflicted by various psychological defilements, which destroy the mind's peace and composure and lead to unwholesome deeds of body, speech, and mind, acting as causes for continued existence in saṃsāra. Included among them are the primary afflictions of desire (*rāga*), anger (*dveṣa*), and ignorance (*avidyā*). It is said that there are eighty-four thousand of these negative mental qualities, for which the eighty-four thousand categories of the Buddha's teachings serve as the antidote.

Kleśa is also commonly translated as “negative emotions,” “disturbing emotions,” and so on. The Pāli *kilesa*, Middle Indic *kileśa*, and Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit *kleśa* all primarily mean “stain” or “defilement.” The translation “affliction” is a secondary development that derives from the more general (non-Buddhist) classical understanding of √*kliś* (“to harm,” “to afflict”). Both meanings are noted by Buddhist commentators.

g.2 Blessed One

bcom ldan 'das

བཙེམ་ལྷན་འདས།

bhagavat^{AD}

In this text the Blessed One is Heruka.

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

In Buddhist literature, this is 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 √*bhañj* (“to break”).

g.3 channel

rtsa

རྩ།

nāḍī^{AD}

A channel in the subtle body conducting *prāṇa*.

- g.4 drop
thig le
 ཐིག་ལེ།
bindu ^{AD}
 A drop (as of liquids); a “drop” of concentrated energy in the channels of the subtle body.
- g.5 five wisdoms
ye shes lnga
 ཡེ་ཤེས་ལྔ།
pañcajñāna
 The five wisdoms that constitute a Buddha’s awakened state of mind. The five wisdoms are the transformations of the five afflictive emotions. The wisdoms are as follows: mirror-like wisdom, wisdom of discrimination, wisdom of equality, all-accomplishing wisdom, and the wisdom of the dharmadhātu.
- g.6 four initiations
dbang bzhi
 དབང་བཞི།
caturabhiṣeka ^{AD}
 Literally “sprinkling,” Skt. *abhiṣeka* is a ritual initiation that often functions as a deity initiation. Tantric initiation in Buddhism qualifies the initiand for the meditative practice of tutelary deities and their maṇḍalas. Historically, different systems of initiation have developed, and the particulars of any initiation ritual depend on the specific tantric system, the individual transmission, and the class of tantra. The four initiations of the highest yoga-tantra class are the so-called vase initiation, secret initiation, insight-wisdom or wisdom-consort initiation, and the fourth initiation.
- g.7 Gayādhara
ga ya dha ra
 ག་ཡ་དྭ་ར།
gayādhara
 Gayādhara, c. 994–1043; Indian (possibly Bengali) paṇḍita who visited Tibet three times; teacher of Drokmi Śākya Yeshe; a complex personality and a key figure in the transmission to Tibet of the Hevajra materials later incorporated in the Lamdré (*lam 'bras*) tradition.

g.8 Heruka

he ru ka

ཉེ་མཁའ་

heruka ^{AD}

Generally, a type of wrathful deity associated with charnel grounds. In the higher classes of Buddhist tantra, the central deity of many maṇḍalas takes the form of an heruka.

g.9 Innate joy

lhan cig skyes dga'

ལྷན་ཅིག་སྤྱེས་དགའ།

sahajānanda ^{AD}

The fourth of the four joys experienced during the initiatory process and subsequent tantric practice. It is equated with the realization of nondual bliss.

g.10 insight-wisdom

shes rab ye shes kyi dbang

ཤེས་རབ་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་དབང།

prajñājñānābhīṣeka ^{AD}

The third of the four initiations in the higher tantras.

g.11 Mount Meru

ri rab

རི་རབ།

meru ^{AD} . *sumeru* ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

According to ancient Buddhist cosmology, this is the great mountain forming the axis of the universe. At its summit is Sudarśana, home of Śakra and his thirty-two gods, and on its flanks live the asuras. The mount has four sides facing the cardinal directions, each of which is made of a different precious stone. Surrounding it are several mountain ranges and the great ocean where the four principal island continents lie: in the south, Jambudvīpa (our world); in the west, Godāniya; in the north, Uttarakuru; and in the east, Pūrvavideha. Above it are the abodes of the desire realm gods. It is variously referred to as Meru, Mount Meru, Sumeru, and Mount Sumeru.

g.12 Śākya Yeshé

shAkya ye shes

ལྷན་ཡེ་ཤེས།

—

Śākya Yeshé, commonly known as Drokmi Lotsāwa (*'brog mi lo tsā ba*), was a Tibetan translator from Lhatsé in Western Tsang and an important figure in the Lamdré (Tib. *lam 'bras*) lineage. Drokmi's dates are uncertain, but Tibetan literature offers a range of possible dates, beginning in 990 CE and ending in 1074 CE. One of his principal teachers was the Indian paṇḍita Gayādhara.

g.13 secret initiation

gsang ba'i dbang

གསང་བའི་དབང།

guhyābhiṣeka ^{AD}

The second of the four initiations in the higher tantras.

g.14 three worlds

kham s gsum

ཁམས་གསུམ།

tridhātu

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The three realms that contain all the various kinds of existence in saṃsāra: the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm.

g.15 vajra

rdo rje

རྡོ་རྗེ།

vajra ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

This term generally indicates indestructibility and stability. In the sūtras, *vajra* most often refers to the hardest possible physical substance, said to have divine origins. In some scriptures, it is also the name of the all-powerful weapon of Indra, which in turn is crafted from vajra material. In the tantras, the vajra is sometimes a scepter-like ritual implement, but the term can also take on other esoteric meanings.

g.16 Vajragarbha

rdo rje snying po

རྡོ་རྗེ་སྡིང་པོ།

vajragarbha ^{AD}

Name of a tantric bodhisattva. He is the interlocutor of the Blessed One in many tantras of the Unexcelled yoga class, most prominently in the *Hevajra Tantra*. He is also the bodhisattva who teaches *The Ten Bhūmis*.

g.17 vase initiation

bum pa'i dbang

བུམ་པའི་དབང་།

kalasābhiṣeka ^{AD}

The first of the four initiations in the higher tantras.

g.18 winds

rlung

རླུང་།

prāṇa ^{AD}

Subtle “energy” that moves in the channels of the tantric subtle body.