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## The Sūtra of the Sun

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*Sūryasūtra*

*nyi ma'i mdo*

· Toh 41 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 34 (sher phyin, ka), folios 282.a–282.b



Translated by the Pema Yeshé Dé Translation Team  
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co.

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## SUMMARY

- s.1 *The Sūtra of the Sun* is a short discourse providing a Buddhist account of a solar eclipse. On one occasion while the Buddha is residing in Śrāvastī, the sun is seized by Rāhu, lord of the asuras, which causes an eclipse. The god of the sun asks the Buddha for refuge, after which the Buddha urges Rāhu to release the sun. When questioned by Vemacitra, another lord of the asuras, Rāhu explains that if he had not let the sun go, his head would have split into seven pieces. This sūtra enjoys some popularity today and appears in Tibetan collections of mantras and texts for protection.

ac.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ac.1 This sūtra was translated by Giuliano Proença, who also prepared the introduction, the glossary, and the notes. The English translation and ancillary materials were proofread by Daniela Espíndola.

ac.2 The translation was completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.

## INTRODUCTION

i.

i.1 *The Sūtra of the Sun* is a short discourse set in Śrāvastī that presents a Buddhist account of a solar eclipse. It describes Rāhu seizing the sun and the Buddha calling for its release.<sup>1</sup> When the eclipse begins, the god of the sun asks the Buddha for refuge, prompting the Buddha to demand that Rāhu let the sun go. When questioned by the asura Vemacitra, Rāhu explains that if he had not released the sun, his head would have split into seven pieces.

i.2 *The Sūtra of the Sun* is a Tibetan translation of a canonical Theravāda text and thus was probably translated from Pali. It belongs to a group of thirteen late-translated sūtras<sup>2</sup> (*gsar du 'gyur ba*), as noted in Butön Rinchen Drup's<sup>3</sup> (1290–1364) *History of Buddhism* and in the Lithang, Degé, and Urga Kangyurs.<sup>4</sup> One of these sūtras, *The Sūtra of the Moon (1)* (Toh 42),<sup>5</sup> presents an almost identical narrative concerning a lunar eclipse. *The Sūtra of the Sun* features one additional verse not found in *The Sūtra of the Moon*, and the same is true of the Pali counterparts of these two texts. The equivalent of *The Sūtra of the Sun* in the Pali canon, the *Sūryasutta*, is included in the Saṃyutta Nikāya (SN 2.10). Apart from some occasional variations, the Tibetan and Pali are very closely aligned.

i.3 *The Sūtra of the Sun* is unique to the Theravāda tradition, but the extra verse that is missing in *The Sūtra of the Moon (1)* is represented in another similar discourse titled *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)* (Toh 331),<sup>6</sup> which was translated from Sanskrit in the time of the “early diffusion” of Buddhism to Tibet (eighth–ninth centuries). *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)* has Sanskrit, Chinese, and Old Uyghur parallels.<sup>7</sup>

i.4 *The Sūtra of the Sun* and *The Sūtra of the Moon (1)* are popular among Tibetans today,<sup>8</sup> appearing in Tibetan collections of mantras and protective texts. In the Theravāda tradition, they are included in Paritta collections, which have the function of providing protection through recitation.



- i.5 Peter Skilling dates the translation of the thirteen late-translated sūtras to the first decade of the fourteenth century.<sup>9</sup> *The Sūtra of the Sun* is found in the Kangyurs of the Tshalpa, the Thempangma, and the mixed lines, as well as in some canonical collections from Western Tibet.<sup>10</sup>
- i.6 The colophons of all versions of the Tshalpa line only indicate the conclusion of the sūtra, while the other collections mention the translators and the place where they worked: Ānandaśrī and Tharpa Lotsāwa Nyima Gyaltsen Palsangpo<sup>11</sup> at the monastery of Tharpa Ling<sup>12</sup> in Central Tibet.
- i.7 Apart from the thirteen sūtras, Tharpa Lotsāwa also translated several other texts that are preserved in the tantra section of the Kangyur, working mainly with Indian and Nepalese paṇḍitas.<sup>13</sup> Notably, Tharpa Lotsāwa was one of Butön's teachers. Ānandaśrī is described in the colophon of the *Ārya-maitrīsūtra*,<sup>14</sup> which he also translated together with Kūnga Gyaltsen Thupten Palsangpo,<sup>15</sup> as a prominent paṇḍita from Sri Lanka, but little is known about how or why he came to be in fourteenth century Tibet or how long he stayed there.
- i.8 It is interesting to note that this Tibetan translation gives the Sanskrit title *Sūryasūtra*, while its presumed Theravāda source would have had the title *Sūryasutta*. It is possible that the translators and later editors Sanskritized the title in accordance with the translation practices of the time.
- i.9 The French Sanskritist and Orientalist Léon Feer studied Buddhist accounts of eclipses, including the legend of Rāhu according to Hindu and Buddhist texts. He translated Daniel John Gogerly's English translation of the Pali *Candimasutta* into French and produced his own French translations of *The Sūtra of the Moon (1)* and *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)*. His notes are detailed and rich in explanations. He finalized and published the unfinished work of Paul Grimblot on some Paritta texts, presenting the Pali equivalent to the *Sūtra of the Sun*, excerpts of its commentary in the *Aṭṭhakathā*, and its translation into French.<sup>16</sup>
- i.10 Peter Skilling has studied the thirteen late-translated sūtras (Toh 31–43) in detail, examining the location of these texts in the Kangyur, and their colophons, contents, translators, and possible original language. He notes parallels, dates the translations, and reviews scholarship on these works.
- i.11 As far as we know, a complete translation of the Tibetan version of *The Sūtra of the Sun* into Western languages has not been published. Nonetheless, there are multiple translations of *The Sūtra of the Sun* from Pali: Feer's translation into French (1871), Wilhelm Geiger's translation into German (1930),<sup>17</sup> Rhys Davids's translation into English (1950), and a recent translation into English by Bhikkhu Sujato (2018).<sup>18</sup>

- i.12 Our translation is based on the Tibetan text as found in the sūtra section of the Degé Kangyur, but we note variant readings from the witnesses of the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*), the Stok Palace Kangyur, and the Bardan Collection. In addition, we have compared the Pali with the Tibetan and noted cases where the Pali presents different readings. We occasionally refer to *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)* and its Sanskrit parallel.
- i.13 Our translation benefitted from Feer's notes on *The Sūtra of the Moon (1)* and *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)*, as well as from his translations. We also consulted Geiger's translation of the Pali *Sūryasutta* into German, and Sujato's translation into English.

# **The Sūtra of the Sun**

1.

## The Translation

[F.282.a]

1.1 Respectful homage to the noble Three Jewels!

Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was dwelling in Śrāvastī, in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍada’s Park.<sup>19</sup> At that time the god Sūrya was seized by Rāhu, lord of the asuras. Then [F.282.b] the god Sūrya, recollecting and taking the Blessed One to heart,<sup>20</sup> recited this verse:

1.2 “I bow to the heroic Buddha.<sup>21</sup>  
May you swiftly liberate all beings!<sup>22</sup>  
As I have come into confinement  
I take refuge in you.”<sup>23</sup>

1.3 Then the Blessed One, for the sake of the god Sūrya, addressed Rāhu, lord of the asuras, with these verses:

1.4 “Since buddhas have compassion for the world,  
Sūrya took refuge  
In the Worthy One, the Tathāgata.  
Therefore, Rāhu, set the sun free!<sup>24</sup>

1.5 “The sun, circle of mighty splendor,  
Illuminates darkness with light.  
Rāhu, do not conceal the sun in the sky!  
Set this sun free, Rāhu!”<sup>25</sup>

1.6 Thereupon Rāhu, lord of the asuras, set the god Sūrya free and hurriedly<sup>26</sup> approached Vemacitra,<sup>27</sup> lord of the asuras. He then sat to one side, displeased,<sup>28</sup> agitated, and with all his body hairs bristling. Vemacitra, lord of the asuras, now questioned Rāhu, lord of the asuras, in verse:

- 1.7      “Why, Rāhu, did you release  
The sun in such a fright?  
You are a very miserable sight.  
Why did you approach in fear?”<sup>29</sup>
- 1.8      He replied:<sup>30</sup>
- 1.9      “Had I, hearing the Buddha’s verse,  
Not then released the sun  
My head would have split into seven pieces<sup>31</sup>  
And my life would be without happiness.”
- 1.10     *This concludes “The Sūtra of the Sun.”*<sup>32</sup>

n.

## NOTES

- n.1 For an account of Rāhu's reasons for seizing the sun and the moon according to Hindu texts, see Feer 1865, pp. 5–12. For alternative Buddhist theories of lunar and solar eclipses, see *The Application of Mindfulness of the Sacred Dharma* [3.69–74](#), [3.77–78](#) and [3.254–3.256](#).
- n.2 For a general introduction to all thirteen late-translated sūtras, see the 84000 Knowledge Base article on [the thirteen late-translated sūtras](#) (<https://read.84000.co/knowledgebase/thirteen-late-translated-sutras.html>).
- n.3 *bu ston rin chen grub*.
- n.4 Skilling 1993, p. 73.
- n.5 Pema Yeshe De (2023), trans., *The Sūtra of the Moon (1)* (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh42.html>), Toh 42 (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha).
- n.6 Pema Yeshe De (2023), trans., *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)* (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh331.html>), Toh 331 (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha).
- n.7 See the [introduction](#) to the *Sūtra of the Moon (2)*.
- n.8 Skilling 1993, p. 133.
- n.9 Skilling 1993, p. 97.
- n.10 These include the Egoo, Stagrino, Stongde, and Bardan collections. For information on differences in its location in the various Kangyur collections, see the Knowledge Base article on [the thirteen late-translated sūtras](#)

<https://read.84000.co/knowledgebase/thirteen-late-translated-sutras.html>); see also Skilling 1993, pp. 73–78.

- n.11 *thar pa lo tsA ba nyi ma rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po.*
- n.12 *thar pa gling.*
- n.13 Skilling 1993, pp. 86–94.
- n.14 Narthang Kangyur (N 328). This is missing in the Degé, but closely related to Toh 35.
- n.15 *kun dga' rgyal mtshan thub bstan dpal bzang po.*
- n.16 This is one of the editions we used for the Pali text, the other being the *Mahāsaṅgīti Tipiṭaka Buddhavaṣṣe 2500* available at [SuttaCentral](https://suttacentral.net/sn2.9/pli/ms?layout=plain&reference=none&notes=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin) (<https://suttacentral.net/sn2.9/pli/ms?layout=plain&reference=none&notes=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin>).
- n.17 Wilhelm Geiger's German translation is available on SuttaCentral: <https://legacy.suttacentral.net/de/sn2.10> (<https://legacy.suttacentral.net/de/sn2.10>).
- n.18 This translation is available on SuttaCentral: <https://suttacentral.net/sn2.10/en/sujato> (<https://suttacentral.net/sn2.10/en/sujato>).
- n.19 The Paritta collection gives the setting in full, as does the Tibetan, but it is abbreviated as *sāvattihinidānaṃ* in the SN.
- n.20 “Taking to heart” is missing in the Pali. Alternatively, it is possible that the Tibetan phrase *bcom ldan 'das rjes su dran pa yid la byas* is an attempt to translate the Pali *bhagavantam anussaramāno* and might be rendered “bringing to mind the remembrance of the Blessed One.”
- n.21 The Pali reads *namo te buddha vīratthu* (“Homage to you, Buddha, heroic one!”).
- n.22 Here the Pali reads *vipparamuttosi sabbadhi* (“You are completely liberated!”).
- n.23 The Pali reads *sambādhaṭṭipannosmi, tassa me saraṇaṃ bhavā'ti* (“I have entered confinement, be my refuge!”). Though the Tibetan translation *bdag 'di'i kha ru bcug pas na/ /bdag ni khyed la skyabs su mchi*, the first part of which seems to say, “As I have entered into the mouth of it,” seems distant at first, upon reflection it conveys the meaning of the Pali well.

- n.24 The causal connections in this verse are not explicit in the Pali.
- n.25 The Pali reads *yo andhakāre tamasi pabhaṅkaro, verocano maṇḍalī uggatejo, mā rāhu gilī caramantalikkhe, pajaṇi mamaṇi rāhu pamuñca sūriyaṇ”ti* (“He lights up darkness and gloom, / The sun, circle of mighty splendour. / Rāhu, do not swallow the sun as he traverses the sky! / Rāhu, set my offspring, the sun, free!”). This verse is missing in Toh 42 (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh42.htm>) and in its Pali source, but it has a parallel in Toh 331 and in its Sanskrit and Chinese counterparts.
- n.26 Here translated with reference to the Pali *taramānarūpo yena vepacitti asurindo tenupasaṅkami*. The Tibetan phrase *sngar gyi gzugs bzhin du* corresponds to the Pali *taramānarūpo*, which means “hurriedly.”
- n.27 In Toh 331 Rāhu’s interlocutor is Bali. These asuras are often associated, and are accredited with the role of leaders. See *The White Lotus of the Good Dharma*, Toh 113 (1.8) and *The Play in Full*, Toh 95 (16.15).
- n.28 Missing in the Pali.
- n.29 The Pali has *kiṃ nu santaramānova, rāhu sūriyaṇi pamuñcasi; saṃviggaraṇi āgamma, kiṃ nu bhītova tiṭṭhasī”ti* (“Why did you, Rāhu, in a hurry, release the sun? After having approached, moved by fear, why are you standing here so scared?”).
- n.30 Missing in the Pali.
- n.31 This theme is found in parallel sūtras and elsewhere in the Kangyur. See *The White Lotus of the Good Dharma*, Toh 113 (21.20), *The Hundred Deeds*, Toh 340 (6.196), *The Root Manual of the Rites of Mañjuśrī*, Toh 543 (15.107) and *Destroyer of the Great Trichiliocosm*, Toh 558 (1.286)
- n.32 Narthang, Stok Palace, Lhasa, and Bardan here add: *paNDi ta chen po A nanda shrI’i zhal snga nas/ mang du thos pa’i lo tsA ba shAkya’i dge slong nyi ma rgyal mtshan dpal bzang pos skad gnyis smra ba rnams kyi gdan sa/ gtsug lag khang chen po dpal thar pa gling du bsgyur cing zhus te gtan la phab pa’o/ sa’i steng du nyi ma dang /zla ba ltar gyur cig* (“Translated, edited, and finalized by the great paṇḍita Ānandaśrī and the learned translator the Śākya monk Nyima Gyaltsen Palsangpo at the seat of translators, the great monastery glorious Tharpa Ling. May the sun and moon transform above the earth in the same way”).



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 Ānandaśrī

*A nanda shrī*

ཨྲ་ནན་ཤྲི།

*ānandaśrī*<sup>AD</sup>

A paṇḍita from Sri Lanka who was active as a translator in Tibet in the early part of the fourteenth century.

g.2 Anāthapiṇḍada

*mgon med zas sbyin*

མགོན་མེད་ཟས་སྤྱིན།

*anāthapiṇḍada* <sup>AD</sup>

Pali: *anāthapiṇḍika*

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

A wealthy merchant in the town of Śrāvastī, famous for his generosity to the poor, who became a patron of the Buddha Śākyamuni. He bought Prince Jeta's Grove (Skt. *Jetavana*), to be the Buddha's first monastery, a place where the monks could stay during the monsoon.

g.3 asura

*lha ma yin*

ལྷ་མ་ཡིན།

*asura* <sup>AD</sup>

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

A type of nonhuman being whose precise status is subject to different views, but is included as one of the six classes of beings in the sixfold classification of realms of rebirth. In the Buddhist context, asuras are powerful beings said to be dominated by envy, ambition, and hostility. They are also known in the pre-Buddhist and pre-Vedic mythologies of India and Iran, and feature prominently in Vedic and post-Vedic Brahmanical mythology, as well as in the Buddhist tradition. In these traditions, asuras are often described as being engaged in interminable conflict with the devas (gods).

g.4 Bali

*stobs can*

སྟོབས་ཅན།

*bali* <sup>AD</sup>

Pali: *bali*

A lord of the asuras; son of Virocana.

g.5 blessed one

*bcom ldan 'das*

བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས།

*bhagavat*<sup>AD</sup>

Pali: *bhagavant*

*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 √*bhañj* (“to break”).

g.6 buddha

*sangs rgyas*

སངས་རྒྱལ།

*buddha*<sup>AD</sup>

Pali: *buddha*

A fully realized (“awakened”) being.

g.7 god

*lha'i bu*

ལྷ་འི་བུ།

*devaputra*<sup>AD</sup>

Pali: *devaputta*

Lit. “son of a god.” A class of beings in the higher planes of existence in the desire realm, as well as in the form and formless realm.

g.8 happiness

*bde ba*

བདེ་བ།

*sukha*<sup>AD</sup>

Pali: *sukhaṇi*

Also translated as “bliss.”

g.9 Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍada's Park

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

ཀུལ་བྱེད་ཚལ་མགོན་མེད་ཟས་སྦྱིན་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.10 Nyima Gyaltzen Palsangpo

*nyi ma rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po*

ཉིམ་ཀུལ་མཚན་དཔལ་བཟང་པོ།

—

Also known as "the translator from Tharpa Ling," he was a Tibetan who translated several Kangyur texts, working mainly with Indian and Nepalese paṇḍitas. He was also one of the teachers of the famous scholar Butön Rinchen Drup (1290–1364).

g.11 Rāhu

*sgra gcan 'dzin · sgra gcan*

ལྷ་གཙུག་འཛིན། ་ ལྷ་གཙུག།

*rāhu* <sup>AD</sup>

Pali: *rāhu*

A lord of the asuras who seizes the sun and moon and causes eclipses.

g.12 Śrāvastī

*mnyan yod*

མཉམ་ཡོད།

*śrāvastī* <sup>AD</sup>

Pali: *sāvattihī*

*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.13 Sūrya

*nyi ma*

ཉིམ།

*sūrya* <sup>AD</sup>

Pali: *sūriya*

The god of the sun; the sun.

g.14 tathāgata

*de bzhin gshegs pa*

དེ་བཞིན་གསེགས་པ།

*tathāgata* <sup>AD</sup>

*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.15 Three Jewels

*dkon mchog gsum*

དཀོན་མཚོག་གསུམ།

*triratna*<sup>AD</sup>

The Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha—the three objects of Buddhist refuge.

g.16 Vemacitra

*thags bzangs ris*

ཐགས་བཟངས་རིས།

*vemacitra*<sup>AD</sup>

Pali: *vepacitti*

A lord of the asuras.

g.17 worthy one

*dgra bcom · dgra bcom pa*

དགའ་བཅོམ། · དགའ་བཅོམ་པ།

*arhat*<sup>AD</sup>

Pali: *arahant*

One who has achieved the fourth and final level of attainment on the hearer's path and who has attained liberation from saṃsāra with the cessation of all defilements. Also used as an epithet of the buddhas.