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## The Dhāraṇī “Maitreya’s Pledge”

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*Maitreyapratijñādhāraṇī*

འཕགས་པ་བྱམས་པས་དམ་བཅས་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་གཞུངས།

*'phags pa byams pas dam bcas pa zhes bya ba'i gzungs*

The Noble Dhāraṇī “Maitreya’s Pledge”

*Āryamaitreyapratijñānāmadhāraṇī*

· Toh 643 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 91 (rgyud 'bum, ba), folios 127.b–128.a

TRANSLATED INTO TIBETAN BY

· Vajrapāṇi · Chökyi Sherap ·



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co.

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## SUMMARY

- s.1 *The Dhāraṇī “Maitreya’s Pledge”* is a short dhāraṇī centered on Maitreya, the bodhisattva who will, as alluded to in this text, awaken as the next buddha in our world. Its dhāraṇī consists of a root mantra, heart mantra, and auxiliary heart mantra and is followed by Maitreya’s vow to benefit beings. The benefits of the dhāraṇī range from receiving prophecies for awakening to acquiring one’s desired material enjoyments. Since these benefits also extend to animals, the text advocates reciting its dhāraṇī so that animals may hear it as well.

ac.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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. Lowell Cook produced the translation and wrote the introduction. Rory Lindsay 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 Dhāraṇī “Maitreya’s Pledge”* is one of two dhāraṇī works in the Degé Kangyur<sup>1</sup> that center on Maitreya, the bodhisattva who will, as alluded to in this text, awaken as the next buddha in our world. This text appears twice in the Degé Kangyur, first in the Action Tantra (*kriyātantra*) section and later in the Compendium of Dhāraṇīs section. In the Action Tantra section, it is classified as an individual action tantra (*bya ba so so’i rgyud*) belonging to the tathāgata family.

i.2 According to Buddhist tradition, Maitreya currently dwells in Tuṣita Heaven and, after the decline of Śākyamuni’s teachings, will appear in this world as the next buddha. Maitreya was perhaps the earliest bodhisattva to develop a devoted following in India, starting at least as early as the first centuries of the Common Era. Later, particularly in Central and East Asia, the cult of Maitreya would flourish widely from the fourth century. It was within this milieu that the text *The Dhāraṇī “Maitreya’s Pledge”* first emerged.

i.3 *The Dhāraṇī “Maitreya’s Pledge”* is comprised of two sections: the dhāraṇī and the pledge. The dhāraṇī formula is presented in three formulas: the root mantra, the heart mantra, and the auxiliary heart mantra. While terms like dhāraṇī, mantra, and vidyāmantra have different connotations and various usages throughout Buddhist literature, they can also be used interchangeably to a certain extent. In the case of this work, it appears that *dhāraṇī* refers to the three formulas together while *mantra* refers to the individual formulas themselves. This is corroborated by how the entire formula is presented as a single “dhāraṇī” in later compendiums. Following the dhāraṇī, Maitreya voices his pledge in which he describes the benefits of hearing, chanting, and contemplating the dhāraṇī and reciting it for others. The benefits primarily concern receiving a prophecy, and hence a guarantee of awakening, from Maitreya himself, which locates this dhāraṇī within a Mahāyāna-centric worldview. In addition to this, Maitreya also describes



- benefits of a more mundane nature, such as acquiring one’s desired material enjoyments. Maitreya makes clear that the benefits extend to any animals that hear the dhāraṇī and, thus, advocates reciting it into the ears of animals.
- i.4 *The Dhāraṇī “Maitreya’s Pledge”* is extant in Sanskrit in a number of *dhāraṇīsamgraha* or “Dhāraṇī Compendiums.” Gergely Hidas identifies at least ten *dhāraṇīsamgrahas* that contain *Maitreya’s Pledge*.<sup>2</sup>
- i.5 The dhāraṇī was also translated into Chinese by Faxian (法賢 337–422).<sup>3</sup> The Chinese version diverges in several ways. It begins with a narrative opening (*nidāna*) and includes a dialogue between the Buddha Śākyamuni and Maitreya. It would seem that these variations are unique to the version of the dhāraṇī transmitted to China since they do not appear in the Tibetan or the (albeit, much later) Sanskrit recensions.
- i.6 The colophon to the Tibetan translation of *The Dhāraṇī “Maitreya’s Pledge”* states that it was translated by the Indian paṇḍita Vajrapāṇi and the Tibetan translator Chökyi Sherap. According to Gö Lotsawa, Vajrapāṇi traveled to Tibet in 1066 at the age of sixty,<sup>4</sup> which would situate the translation in the latter half of the eleventh century. As should be expected, this work is not listed in any of the extant catalogs from the Imperial Period (629–841) since it was translated during the Later Dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet (*bstan pa phyi dar*).
- i.7 *The Dhāraṇī “Maitreya’s Pledge”* had a small but unmistakable presence in the later Tibetan tradition. In the fourteenth century, the dhāraṇī was reproduced by Butön Rinchen Drup (bu ston rin chen grub, 1290–1364) in his *Grand Anthology of Dhāraṇīs from the Four Classes of Secret Mantra Tantras* (*gsang sngags rgyud sde bzhi’i gzungs rnams gcig tu bsdus pa’i gzungs ’bum chen mo*). Later, in the eighteenth century, the dhāraṇī was included in the quadrilingual imperial collection of *dhāraṇīmantras* produced by the court of the Qianlong Emperor (1711–99). *The Dhāraṇī “Maitreya’s Pledge”* has also been included in several other Tibetan liturgy collections, particularly among the Geluk School.
- i.8 *The Dhāraṇī “Maitreya’s Pledge”* was not only subject to devotional reproduction in Tibet; it also inspired original composition. Most notably, the fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Losang Gyatso (1617–82), authored an aspiration prayer to be chanted after the recitation of *The Dhāraṇī “Maitreya’s Pledge”*.<sup>5</sup> In the eighteenth century, the third Zimok, Champa Tenzin Trinlé, penned verses to be inserted before and after (*mgo mjug gi tshig[s] bcad*) the text.<sup>6</sup> The meaning of the dhāraṇī’s words was also commented on by Ngawang Nyima (1907–90), a Mongolian geshé who was an abbot of the Gomang college at Drepung Monastery.<sup>7</sup> That this short dhāraṇī text inspired a number of notable masters to write on it speaks to the relative prominence it maintained in Tibetan monasteries throughout history. Beyond these, there

are numerous references to the dhāraṇī as a part of larger liturgies, as a member of records of transmissions received (*gsan yig, thob yig*), and in other textual records.

i.9 To the best of our knowledge, *The Dhāraṇī “Maitreya’s Pledge”* has not been the subject of any in-depth academic studies in modern times. Zsuzsa Majer does, however, observe that the nineteenth-century Russian explorer A. M. Pozdneev records in his travelog of the Khalkha Mongol lands that *The Dhāraṇī “Maitreya’s Pledge”* was performed in funerary rites. Despite this, Majer writes that she never witnessed its performance during her fieldwork, which was undertaken on modern Mongolian Buddhist postmortem rites between 2016 and 2017.<sup>8</sup> Uranchimeg Tsultemin also mentions in her examination of the iconography of Maitreya in Mongolian art that Agwaankhaidav (ngag dbang mkhas grub, 1779–1839), the Mongolian abbot of Ikh Khüree, taught a longevity and transference (*‘pho ba*) practice predicated on extensive accumulations of the dhāraṇī.

i.10 Our translation used the versions of the dhāraṇī preserved in the Degé Kangyur as our source text. We also consulted the variant readings found in the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*) of the Kangyur and the Stok Palace Manuscript Kangyur.

**The Noble Dhāraṇī**  
**Maitreya's Pledge**

1.

## The Translation

[F.127.b]

1.1 Homage to the Three Jewels.

Homage to Maitreya the Victorious One.

1.2 *namo ratna trayāya | namo bhagavate | śākyamunaye | tathāgatāya | arhate  
samyaksaṃbuddhāya | tadyathā | oṃ ajite ajite | aparājite<sup>2</sup> | ajitaṃ jaya | hara  
hara | maitri avalokite | kara kara | mahāsamayasiddhe | bhara bhara | mahābodhi-  
maṇḍabīje | smara smara | asmakaṃ samaya bodhi bodhi | mahābodhi svāhā | |<sup>10</sup>*

This was the root mantra.

1.3 *oṃ mohi mohi | mahāmohi svāhā | |<sup>11</sup>*

This was the heart mantra.

1.4 *oṃ muni muni smara svāhā | |<sup>12</sup>*

This was the auxiliary heart mantra.

1.5 “Once I have fully awakened to unsurpassed and perfectly complete enlightenment, I will be certain to search out any being who simply hears, recites, chants, correctly contemplates, or meditates on this dhāraṇī and offer them a prophecy for unsurpassed and perfectly complete enlightenment. Even if this dhāraṇī is recited into the ear of a deer or bird from the animal realm, they will also receive a prophecy for unsurpassed and perfectly complete enlightenment. Whoever merely hears this will never go to the lower realms, nor will they be stained by the dirt of the lower realms. They will not be reborn in a mother’s womb. They will become a universal monarch for a thousand divine eons. [F.128.a] They will inhabit the path of the ten virtuous actions. Whichever material enjoyments they wish for and

seek will appear for them. I, a blessed one, will never forget that being. Having reached the seat of awakening, I will absolutely provide them, no matter who they are, a prophecy for unsurpassed and perfectly complete enlightenment.”

1.6 *This completes The Noble Dhāraṇī “Maitreya’s Pledge.”*

c.

## Colophon

c.1 Translated, edited, and finalized by the Indian preceptor Vajrapāṇi and the Tibetan translator-monk Chökyi Sherap.

n.

## NOTES

- n.1 Note that there is a discrepancy among various databases for cataloging the Toh 890 version of this text within vol. 100 or 101 of the Degé Kangyur. See Toh 890, n.1 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh890.html#UT22084-091-040-114>), for details.
- n.2 See: Hidas 2021. The ten manuscripts of *Maitreya's Pledge* in Sanskrit are:  
A.4 University of Tokyo Library, Ms. 2015  
A.6 Private collection Ms., Kathmandu = NGMPP E 1774–310  
A.7 National Archives, Kathmandu, Ms. NAK 5/31 = NGMPP B 107–1411  
A.8 Unspecified collection Ms. and Asha Archives, Kathmandu, Ms. 250713  
A.10 Asha Archives, Kathmandu, Ms. No. 2566  
A.11 Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Ms. No. 6224  
A.13 Private collection Ms., Kathmandu = NGMPP E 614–327  
A.14 University of Tokyo Library, Ms. 41929  
A.16 Toyo Bunko, Tokyo, Ms. No. 1334  
A.18 National Archives, Kathmandu, Ms. NAK 3/641 = NGMPP A 131–1044
- n.3 *Cishi pusa shiyuan tuoluoni jing* 慈氏菩薩誓願陀羅尼經 (*Maitreyapratijñādhāraṇī*), Taishō 1143 (CBETA (<https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/en/T1143>); SAT (<https://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT2018/T1143.html>)).
- n.4 Schaeffer 2005, p. 63.
- n.5 Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Losang Gyatso (tA la'I bla ma sku phreng lnga pa ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho). *byams pas dam bcas pa'i gzungs kyi rjes su 'don rgyu'i smon lam tshigs bcad* [An Aspiration in Verse to Accompany the Recitation of “The Dhāraṇī of Maitreya’s Pledge”]. In *gsung 'bum ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho*, vol. 24, Beijing: krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2009, pp. 332–33. [BDRC MW1PD107937\\_C8131D](https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW1PD107937_C8131D) ([https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW1PD107937\\_C8131D](https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW1PD107937_C8131D)).

- n.6 Khenpo Jamlo (mkhan po 'jam blo), ed. *byams pas dam bcas pa'i gzungs smon tshig dang bcas pa* [The Dhāraṇī of Maitreya's Pledge and Aspiration]. In *dpal sa skya ba'i chos sde nA lendra'i gdan rabs rim byon gyi gsung 'bum*, vol. 6, Lhasa: bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, 2016, pp. 205–6. [BDRC MW3CN3418\\_2AF43E](https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW3CN3418_2AF43E) ([https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW3CN3418\\_2AF43E](https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW3CN3418_2AF43E)).
- n.7 Ngawang Nyima (ngag dbang nyi ma). *byams pas dam bca' pa'i gzungs kyi sngags don* [The Meaning of the Mantras in “The Dhāraṇī of Maitreya's Pledge”]. In *gsung 'bum ngag dbang nyi ma*, vol. 3, Drepung Gomang Library, 2003, pp. 595–96. [BDRC MW28809\\_8FC1BA](https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW28809_8FC1BA) ([https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW28809\\_8FC1BA](https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW28809_8FC1BA)).
- n.8 Majer 2017, p. 71.
- n.9 Toh 643: *aparājite* is absent in C, K, K<sub>Y</sub>, and L. Toh 890: *aparājite* is absent in C, K, K<sub>Y</sub>, and L.
- n.10 Provisional English translation: “Homage to the Three Jewels. Homage to the blessed, thus-gone, worthy, perfect Buddha Śākyamuni. It is thus: *Oṃ*. Invincible One, Invincible One. Indomitable One. Conquer the unconquered. Capture, capture. Loving One. All-Seeing One. Bestow, bestow. The accomplishment of the great pledge. Increase, increase. The essence seed of great awakening. Remember, remember. Our pledge, awakening, awakening, great awakening. *Svāhā*.”
- n.11 Provisional English translation: “*Oṃ*. Deluder, deluder. Great deluder. Cleared away. *Svāhā*.”
- n.12 Provisional English translation: “*Oṃ*. Sage, sage. Recollect. *Svāhā*.”



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 animal realm

*dud 'gro*

དུད་རྒྱུ།

*tiryak · tiryāñc*

One of the five or six classes of sentient beings, who suffer from gross ignorance or bewilderment (*gti mug, moha*). They inhabit the realm of desire along with human beings.

g.2 Chökyi Sherap

*chos kyi shes rab*

ཚོས་ཀྱི་ཤེས་རབ།

—

An eleventh-century Tibetan translator who translated over eighty seven works in the Kangyur and Tengyur.

g.3 dhāraṇī

*gzungs*

གཟུངས།

*dhāraṇī*

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The term *dhāraṇī* has the sense of something that “holds” or “retains,” and so it can refer to the special capacity of practitioners to memorize and recall detailed teachings. It can also refer to a verbal expression of the teachings—an incantation, spell, or mnemonic formula—that distills and “holds” essential points of the Dharma and is used by practitioners to attain mundane and supramundane goals. The same term is also used to denote texts that contain such formulas.

g.4 lower realms

*ngan song*

ངན་སྟོང་།

*apāya · durgati*

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

g.5 Maitreya

*byams pa*

བྱམས་པ།

*maitreya*

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The bodhisattva Maitreya is an important figure in many Buddhist traditions, where he is unanimously regarded as the buddha of the future era. He is said to currently reside in the heaven of Tuṣita, as Śākyamuni's regent, where he awaits the proper time to take his final rebirth and become the fifth buddha in the Fortunate Eon, reestablishing the Dharma in this world after the teachings of the current buddha have disappeared. Within the Mahāyāna sūtras, Maitreya is elevated to the same status as other central bodhisattvas such as Mañjuśrī and Avalokiteśvara, and his name appears frequently in sūtras, either as the Buddha's interlocutor or as a teacher of the Dharma. *Maitreya* literally means "Loving One." He is also known as Ajita, meaning "Invincible."

For more information on Maitreya, see, for example, the introduction to *Maitreya's Setting Out* (Toh 198).

g.6 seat of awakening

*byang chub kyi snying po*

བྱང་ལྷན་གྱི་སྣོད་པོ།

*bodhimāṇḍa*

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The place where the Buddha Śākyamuni achieved awakening and where every buddha will manifest the attainment of buddhahood. In our world this is understood to be located under the Bodhi tree, the Vajrāsana, in present-day Bodhgaya, India. It can also refer to the state of awakening itself.

g.7 ten virtuous actions

*dge ba bcu'i las*

དགེ་བ་བརྒྱུད་ལས།

*daśakuśalakarman*

Abstaining from the ten nonvirtuous actions. Namely, abstaining from killing, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct, lying, uttering divisive talk, speaking harsh words, gossiping, covetousness, ill will, and wrong views.

g.8 Three Jewels

*dkon mchog gsum*

དགོན་མཚོག་གསུམ།

*triratna*

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.9 Vajrapāṇi

*badzra pA Ni*

བརྗ་པ་ལྷི།

*vajrapāṇi*

An Indian paṇḍita who was born in 1017 and was influential in Tibet.