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The Dhāraṇī “The Mother of Avalokiteśvara”

Avalokiteśvaramātādhāraṇī

འཕགས་པ་སྤྱན་རས་གཟིགས་དབང་ཕྱུག་གི་ཡུམ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་གཟུངས།

'phags pa spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug gi yum zhes bya ba'i gzungs

The Noble Dhāraṇī “The Mother of Avalokiteśvara”

Āryāvalokiteśvaramātānāmadhāraṇī

· Toh 725 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 94 (rgyud 'bum, tsha), folios 200.b–202.a

TRANSLATED INTO TIBETAN BY

· Jinamitra · Dānaśīla · Bandé Yeshé De ·



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co.

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SUMMARY

- s.1 In this short sūtra, the bodhisattva Samantabhadra asks the Buddha to reveal *The Mother of Avalokiteśvara*, a powerful dhāraṇī that helps practitioners progress on the path to awakening. The Buddha grants his request and relates how he had himself received the dhāraṇī. Samantabhadra then speaks the dhāraṇī, after which the Buddha states its benefits.

ac.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ac.1 Translated by Samye Translations under the guidance of Phakchok Rinpoche. The translation and introduction were produced by Lowell Cook and Stefan Mang. The translation was checked against the Chinese by Dr. Jeffrey Kotyk.

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

i.

INTRODUCTION

i.1

*The Noble Dhāraṇī “The Mother of Avalokiteśvara”*¹ begins in the city of Vaiśālī, where the Buddha is residing amidst an assembly of monks and bodhisattvas. The bodhisattva Samantabhadra requests that he reveal the powerful *dhāraṇī* known as *The Mother of Avalokiteśvara*, and the Buddha agrees. The Buddha first relates how he had himself received this *dhāraṇī* in a past life from the brahmin Prabheśvara, who benefited millions of beings by teaching it in Sukhāvātī, the pure land of the Buddha Amitābha. Following this account, Samantabhadra magically speaks the *dhāraṇī* to the assembly, after which the Buddha encourages the audience to recite it and praises its efficacy. Thus, the *dhāraṇī* can be divided into four sections: the request to teach the *dhāraṇī*, the *dhāraṇī*’s origin story, the *dhāraṇī* itself, and a praise of the *dhāraṇī*’s benefits.

i.2

As indicated by the text’s title, the *dhāraṇī* concerns a goddess named or bearing the title Avalokiteśvaramātā, “the mother of Avalokiteśvara.” In the Degé Kangyur,² the *dhāraṇī* belongs to a cycle of eight Kriyātantra (*bya rgyud*) texts (Toh 724–31) dedicated to the goddess Tārā. Based on this categorization, we may infer that the Tibetan scholars understood Avalokiteśvaramātā to be the goddess Tārā, but there is no further evidence to confirm this identification.

i.3

According to the Tibetan colophon, *The Dhāraṇī “The Mother of Avalokiteśvara”* was originally translated by the monk and translator Yeshé Dé and the Indian preceptors Jinamitra and Dānaśīla, who were regular collaborators in the late eighth- and early ninth-centuries. The *dhāraṇī* is accordingly found in the Denkarma (*ldan dkar ma*) and Phangthangma (*’phang thang ma*) catalogs of translations made during Tibet’s imperial period.³ The *dhāraṇī* was translated into Chinese by Fǎxián (法賢, 973-1001) under the title *Fo shuo guanzizai pusa mu tuoluoni jing* (观自在菩萨母陀罗尼经, Taishō 1117). There is to our knowledge no extant Sanskrit version of this work.

i.4 This English translation is based on the Tibetan version in the Degé Kangyur collection, in consultation with the Stok Palace and Phukdrak Kangyurs, as well as the variant readings recorded in the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*) Kangyur. The English translation was compared with the Chinese translation before being finalized.

The Noble Dhāraṇī
The Mother of Avalokiteśvara

1.

The Translation

[F.200.b]

1.1 Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas!

1.2 Thus did I hear at one time. In the city of Vaiśālī, the Blessed One was surrounded and honored by a great assembly as he sat upon a seat arranged for him. He was surrounded and honored by five hundred fully ordained monks headed by the great śrāvaka Śāriputra, and many bodhisattva great beings headed by Maitreya. Present among this assembly was the bodhisattva great being known as Samantabhadra. Rising from his seat, Samantabhadra draped his upper robe over one shoulder, knelt on his right knee, bowed his head at the feet of the Blessed One, and said:

1.3 “Blessed One, the great dhāraṇī of the vidyāmantra, the mantra formula, known as *The Mother of Avalokiteśvara*, has been taught and is being taught by the blessed buddhas of the past, present, and future. It had previously been taught when the Blessed One was a bodhisattva seeking awakening, and it was taught in order to benefit and care for all beings, up to and including the bodhisattvas. The dhāraṇī is a refuge for all beings who lack refuge, beings who have been the fathers and mothers of the noble sons and daughters who follow the bodhisattva vehicle. It is an ally to those without allies and a protector to those without protection. It brings all misdeeds to an end. All wishes are fulfilled as soon as this dhāraṇī is heard, [F.201.a] and through it all vidyāmantras are successful.”⁴

1.4 The Blessed One replied, “Bodhisattva great being, in the past when I was a bodhisattva seeking awakening, the Thus-Gone worthy, complete, and perfect Buddha Amitābha lived, prospered, and taught the Dharma in Sukhāvātī, a world system far beyond as many world systems as there are grains of sand in the river Ganges. He lives there even now. Among his retinue was a brahmin known as Prabheśvara who had attained the third bodhisattva level. It was he who proclaimed, expounded, and taught this

great queen of vidyāmantras, the dhāraṇī known as *The Mother of Avalokiteśvara*, to many hundreds of thousands of brahmins and numerous billions of sentient beings. As soon as they heard this dhāraṇī, they were freed from all misdeeds and transgressions and remembered their rebirths. This I recall.

1.5 “Great bodhisattva, recite the dhāraṇī! At a later time, the numerous trillions of misdeeds of sentient beings, throughout defiled worlds, who have performed misdeeds and the actions with immediate retribution will be exhausted. They will be well and be happy. It will serve as a protector to those without protection. I also approve and rejoice.”

1.6 The bodhisattva great being Samantabhadra then spoke the great dhāraṇī of the vidyāmantra, the mantra formula, known as *The Mother of Avalokiteśvara*.

1.7 “Homage to the Three Jewels. Homage to the Blessed, thus-gone Amitābha. Homage to the bodhisattva great being endowed with great compassion, Noble Avalokiteśvara. [F.201.b] Having paid homage to them, I shall recite the great vidyāmantra, the mantra formula, the noble dhāraṇī known as *The Mother of Avalokiteśvara*. May I accomplish this vidyā!

1.8 *tadyathā | ili mili | cili mili | kuntule kuntule kuntule | śire śiśire viśire | vīrāyayai
gauri gāndhāri drāmiṭe mātaṅgi pukkasi kaṣṭaya māṃ | caṇḍāli huttu mālini
hūṃ | dhu dhu mālini | cile mile | gṛhṇa saumyadarśani | kuru candramukhi |
laghumānayante āryadakṣiṇabhujē | sarvavidyānām prasādhane | sarvavidyānām
īśvari svāhā | |*

1.9 The Blessed One then said,⁵ “This is the rite for this dhāraṇī that is mastered through recitation. As soon as it is heard, all karmic obscurations will be purified, and one will be protected from all fears. If one recites it during the three periods of the day, one will see the bodhisattva great being Samantabhadra within seven days. If one mentally recites it without thinking of anything else, the great vidyā herself, the mother of Noble Avalokiteśvara, will be revealed within one month, and noble Amitābha will also be seen. One’s progress to unsurpassed awakening will be irreversible. One will also remember one’s rebirths and retain whatever has been learned. No matter where one is born, one will not be separated from the sacred Dharma, and one will be affluent.”

1.10 After the Blessed One spoke these words, the entire assembly, including the bodhisattva great being Samantabhadra, the bodhisattvas, and the fully ordained monks, rejoiced and praised what the Blessed One had taught.

1.11 *This completes the noble dhāraṇī “The Mother of Avalokiteśvara.”*

c.

Colophon

c.1 Translated and edited by the Indian preceptors Jinamitra and [F.202.a] Dānaśīla and the translator-editor Bandé Yeshé Dé, revised according to the new lexicon, and finalized.

n.

NOTES

- n.1 Following the general application of the honorific “noble” (Skt. *ārya*; Tib. *’phags pa*) in Buddhist literature, the term seems likely to apply to the text itself, not the deity. However, this honorific is so frequently prefixed to Avalokiteśvara’s name that many readers of the Tibetan text may naturally and optionally interpret it in that way instead.
- n.2 Note that there is a discrepancy among various databases for cataloging the Toh 909 version of this text within vol. 100 or 101 of the Degé Kangyur. See Toh 909, [n.2 \(https://read.84000.co/translation/toh909.html#UT22084-094-002-56\)](https://read.84000.co/translation/toh909.html#UT22084-094-002-56), for details.
- n.3 Herrmann-Pfandt 2008, pp. 221–22. See also Denkarma, 302.b.6.
- n.4 The implication is that Buddhist dhāraṇīs such as this have the capacity to accomplish all other Buddhist and non-Buddhist spells, whatever their purpose.
- n.5 There is no indication at this point in the text that Samantabhadra has finished speaking and that the Buddha begins, but considering that the following quote concludes with the statement, “After the Blessed One spoke these words,” inserting this line for clarity seems warranted.

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 Amitābha

'od dpag med

འོད་དཔག་མེད།

amitābha

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The buddha of the western buddhaheld of Sukhāvātī, where fortunate beings are reborn to make further progress toward spiritual maturity. Amitābha made his great vows to create such a realm when he was a bodhisattva called Dharmākara. In the Pure Land Buddhist tradition, popular in East Asia, aspiring to be reborn in his buddha realm is the main emphasis; in other Mahāyāna traditions, too, it is a widespread practice. For a detailed description of the realm, see *The Display of the Pure Land of Sukhāvātī*, Toh 115. In some tantras that make reference to the five families he is the tathāgata associated with the lotus family.

Amitābha, “Infinite Light,” is also known in many Indian Buddhist works as Amitāyus, “Infinite Life.” In both East Asian and Tibetan Buddhist traditions he is often conflated with another buddha named “Infinite Life,” Aparimitāyus, or “Infinite Life and Wisdom,” Aparimitāyurjñāna, the shorter version of whose name has also been back-translated from Tibetan into Sanskrit as Amitāyus but who presides over a realm in the zenith. For details on the relation between these buddhas and their names, see *The Aparimitāyurjñāna Sūtra* (1) Toh 674, i.9.

g.2 Avalokiteśvara

spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug

སྤྱན་རས་གཟིགས་དབང་ཕྱུག

avalokiteśvara

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

One of the “eight close sons of the Buddha,” he is also known as the bodhisattva who embodies compassion. In certain tantras, he is also the lord of the three families, where he embodies the compassion of the buddhas. In Tibet, he attained great significance as a special protector of Tibet, and in China, in female form, as Guanyin, the most important bodhisattva in all of East Asia.

g.3 Bandé Yeshé Dé

ban+de ye shes sde

བརྗེ་ཡེ་ཤེས་སྡེ།

—

A prolific Tibetan translator active during the late eighth and early ninth centuries. He is credited with translating no fewer than 380 works.

g.4 blessed one

bcom ldan 'das

བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས།

bhagavat

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 $\sqrt{bhañj}$ (“to break”).

g.5 Dānaśīla

dA na shI la

དྲན་ལྷི་ལ།

dānaśīla

An Indian preceptor from Kashmir who was resident in Tibet during the late eighth- and early ninth-centuries. He was a frequent collaborator of Yeshé Dé.

g.6 dhāraṇī

gzungs

གཟུངས།

dhāraṇī

The term *dhāraṇī* has the sense of something that “holds” or “retains,” and as such 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 formulae.

g.7 dhāraṇī of the vidyāmantra

gzungs kyi rig sngags

གཟུངས་ཀྱི་རིག་སྒྲུབ།

vidyāmantradhāraṇī

g.8 Ganges

gang gA

གང་གླ།

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.9 Jinamitra

dzi na mi tra

ཇོ་ན་མི་ཏྲ།

jinamitra

An Indian preceptor from Kashmir who was resident in Tibet during the late eighth and early ninth centuries. He was a frequent collaborator of Yeshé Dé.

g.10 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.11 mantra formula

gsang sngags kyi gzhi

གསང་སྐྱབས་ཀྱི་གཞི།

mantrapada

g.12 mother

yum

ཡུམ།

mātā

g.13 Prabheśvara

dbang phyug 'od

དབང་ཕྱུག་འོད།

prabheśvara

A brahmin who teaches the dhāraṇī known as *The Mother of Avalokiteśvara* in Sukhāvātī, the realm of the Buddha Amitābha.

g.14 Samantabhadra

kun tu bzang po

ཀུན་ཏུ་བཟང་པོ།

samantabhadra

One of the eight main bodhisattvas, the heart sons of the Buddha.

g.15 Śāriputra

shA ri'i bu

ཤ་རི་བུ།

śāriputra

One of the closest disciples of the Buddha, known for his wisdom and pure observance of discipline.

g.16 śrāvaka

nyan thos

ལྷན་ཐོས།

śrāvaka

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The Sanskrit term *śrāvaka*, and the Tibetan *nyan thos*, both derived from the verb “to hear,” are usually defined as “those who *hear* the teaching from the Buddha and *make it heard* to others.” Primarily this refers to those disciples of the Buddha who aspire to attain the state of an arhat seeking their own liberation and nirvāṇa. They are the practitioners of the first turning of the wheel of the Dharma on the four noble truths, who realize the suffering inherent in saṃsāra and focus on understanding that there is no independent self. By conquering afflicted mental states (*kleśa*), they liberate themselves, attaining first the stage of stream enterers at the path of seeing, followed by the stage of once-returners who will be reborn only one more time, and then the stage of non-returners who will no longer be reborn into the desire realm. The final goal is to become an arhat. These four stages are also known as the “four results of spiritual practice.”

g.17 Sukhāvātī

bde ba can

བདེ་བ་ཅན།

sukhāvātī

The pure realm of the Buddha Amitābha.

g.18 Tārā

sgrol ma

སྒྲོལ་མ།

tārā

A goddess whose name can be translated as “Savior.” She is known for giving protection and is variously presented in Buddhist literature as a great bodhisattva or a fully awakened buddha.

g.19 thus-gone one

de bzhin gshegs pa

དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ།

tathāgata

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.20 Vaiśālī

yangs pa can

ཡངས་པ་ཅན།

vaiśālī

A major city during the Buddha’s time, the capital of the Licchavi republic. It was an important location where a number of Buddhist sūtras are said to have been taught.

g.21 vidyā

rig pa

རིག་པ།

vidyā

A term that at once refers to a type of spell or dhāraṇī and to the goddess it invokes, thereby reflecting their inseparability.

g.22 vidyāmantra

rig sngags

རིག་སྒྲགས།

vidyāmantra

The formula associated with and identical to the goddess it invokes.

