

༄༅། །བདུད་ཚི་བརྗོད་པ།

The Nectar of Speech

Amṛtavyāharana

འཕགས་པ་བདུན་ཅི་བརྗོད་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་མདོ།

'phags pa bdud rtsi brjod pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra “The Nectar of Speech”

Āryāmṛtavyāharaṇanāmamahāyānasūtra



Toh 197
Degé Kangyur, vol. 61 (mdo sde, tsa), folios 271.b–274.b

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co.

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SUMMARY

- s.1 In this sūtra, in answer to a question put by Maitreya, the Buddha Śākyamuni teaches five qualities that bodhisattvas should have in order to live a long life free of obstacles and attain awakening quickly: (1) giving the Dharma; (2) giving freedom from fear; (3) practicing great loving kindness, great compassion, great joy, and great equanimity; (4) repairing dilapidated stūpas; and (5) causing all beings to aspire to the mind of awakening. Maitreya praises the benefits of this teaching and vows to teach it himself in future degenerate times. Both Maitreya and the Buddha emphasize the positive effects on beings and the environment that upholding, preserving, and teaching *The Nectar of Speech* will bring about.

ac.

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

i.

INTRODUCTION

i.1

The Nectar of Speech is a Mahāyāna sūtra in which the Buddha Śākyamuni, at the request of the bodhisattva Maitreya, teaches a great assembly of monks and bodhisattvas. The setting for the teaching is the famous Veṅuvana forest monastery. This monastery was located outside Rājagṛha, the capital city of Magadha, which at the time was one of the great kingdoms of ancient India (located in the modern-day state of Bihar). The teaching provides an outline of the following five qualities of bodhisattvas that will ensure they avert obstacles, live long, and attain awakening: bodhisattvas should (1) give the Dharma; (2) give freedom from fear; (3) practice great loving kindness, great compassion, great joy, and great equanimity; (4) repair dilapidated stūpas; and (5) cause all beings to aspire to the mind of awakening. When the Buddha delivers this brief teaching, a large number of the monks, bodhisattvas, and celestial beings in attendance attain different stages of realization. Maitreya is inspired to give a discourse on the benefits of this sūtra and vows to teach it himself in the future during the time of degeneration. His exposition of its benefits and commitment to teach it himself are welcomed and endorsed by the Buddha. At the end, the Buddha emphasizes the importance of this teaching and instructs Ānanda to uphold and preserve it. The Buddha names the teaching *The Nectar of Speech* and also gives it an alternative title, *The Question of Maitreya*.¹ In the standard ending formula, the entire assembly rejoices and praises the words of the Buddha.

i.2

At present we are not aware of any surviving Sanskrit version, Chinese translation, or rendering of the text in any other language. The Sanskrit titles are rendered differently in the versions in different Kangyurs: *Amṛtavyāharaṇa* (Degé), *Amṛtadāna* (Narthang), and *Amṛtavariṇa* (Stok Palace). According to the colophon, the Tibetan translation was produced by the Indian preceptor Prajñāvarman and the Tibetan translator Yeshé Dé. It can therefore be dated to the late eighth or early ninth century CE in central Tibet. The text was cited by the Tibetan translator Kawa Paltsek, who was a

contemporary of the translators² and is listed in the Denkarma catalogue,³ which confirms that the translation of this sūtra into Tibetan must have been completed before 812 CE.

i.3 This English translation has been produced based on the Tibetan rendering that is found in the Degé Kangyur as well as the Comparative Edition (Tib. *dpe bsdur ma*) and the Stok Palace manuscript.

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra

The Nectar of Speech

1.

The Translation

[F.271.b]

1.1 Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Thus did I hear at one time. The Bhagavān was residing in Rājagṛha, at the Kalandakanivāsa in Veṇuvana, with a great saṅgha of five hundred bhikṣus and a great saṅgha of seventy-two thousand bodhisattvas. At that time the bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya was also seated in the assembly.

1.2 The bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya rose from his seat, draped his upper robe over one shoulder, knelt on his right knee, and with palms joined bowed to the Bhagavān and said, “With permission, I would like to ask the blessed, thus-gone, worthy, perfect Buddha some questions.”

1.3 The Bhagavān replied, “Maitreya, the Tathāgata will always grant you permission. Maitreya, ask the thus-gone, worthy, perfect Buddha whatever you wish, and I shall ease your mind by answering each of your questions.”

1.4 The bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya then asked the Bhagavān, “Bhagavān, [F.272.a] what are the qualities that bodhisattva mahāsattvas need to have so that none of Māra’s hordes will cause them obstacles, so that none of Māra’s retinue will transgress against them, so that out of love for sentient beings they will live for a long time, and so that they will soon fully awaken to unexcelled and perfect awakening?”

1.5 The Bhagavān replied to the bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya, “Maitreya, excellent, excellent! Maitreya, your intention in asking the thus-gone, worthy, perfect Buddha about this matter is excellent, since you act for the benefit of many beings, aim for the happiness of many beings, have compassion for the world, and seek the welfare, benefit, and well-being of gods and humans. Hence, Maitreya, listen very well and keep it in mind! I will explain it.”

The bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya replied, “I will do so,” and he listened accordingly as the Bhagavān taught as follows.

- 1.6 “Maitreya, there are five qualities that bodhisattva mahāsattvas should have so that none of Māra’s hordes will cause them obstacles, so that none of Māra’s retinue will transgress against them, so that out of love for sentient beings they will live for a long time, and so that they will soon fully awaken to unexcelled and perfect awakening. What are those five qualities? They are the unceasing giving of the Dharma; the unceasing giving of freedom from fear; the unceasing practice of great love, great compassion, great joy, and great equanimity; the unceasing repair of dilapidated stūpas; [F.272.b] and the unceasing inspiring of all beings to set their minds on awakening.⁴ Maitreya, if bodhisattva mahāsattvas have those five qualities, none of Māra’s hordes will cause them obstacles, none of Māra’s retinue will transgress against them, out of love for sentient beings they will live for a long time, and they will soon fully awaken to unexcelled and perfect awakening.”
- 1.7 When the Bhagavān had taught this discourse on the five qualities, the minds of five thousand bhikṣus became free of all defilements with no further appropriation; seventy-two thousand bodhisattvas attained the acceptance that phenomena do not arise; and the Dharma eye of eighty-four thousand gods regarding phenomena became purified, free from dust and stains, and without defilements.
- 1.8 The bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya then said to the Bhagavān, “Bhagavān, I feel inspired to speak. Well-Gone One, I feel inspired to speak.”
- 1.9 The Bhagavān said, “Noble son, speak if you know the time has come.”
- 1.10 Having thus received the Bhagavān’s permission, the bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya rose from his seat, draped his upper robe over one shoulder, knelt on his right knee, and with palms joined bowed to the Bhagavān and said, “Bhagavān, how marvelous that this Dharma discourse has been taught by the Bhagavān in order that all beings—sick because of desire, anger, and ignorance, and obscured by the darkness of the cataracts and visual aberrations of all views—may have their illnesses of the afflictions cured, and have their unexcelled Dharma eye purified! Bhagavān, this Dharma discourse you have taught is a great nectar! [F.273.a] Bhagavān, this Dharma discourse you have taught is a great panacea! Even for beings born as animals, those who happen to hear this Dharma discourse will have gathered thereby an accumulation of great roots of virtue and will be superior to all beings. They will behold all buddhas. They will be of great service to many beings. They will bring about roots of virtue. They will purify their karmic obscurations, be freed from the animal realm, and attain human bodies. Then, remembering their previous lifetimes and gaining faith in the

teachings of the Tathāgata, they will be reborn in any buddha realm they wish. So if that is the case even for them, what need is there to mention those who hear this teaching as human beings?

1.11 “Bhagavān, hearing this Dharma discourse is of great benefit to beings. Bhagavān, beings who hear this Dharma discourse belong to the assembly of those who are certain to awaken fully to unexcelled and perfect awakening. Respected Bhagavān, because they will be embraced by the thus-gone, worthy, perfect buddhas, they will soon fully awaken to unexcelled and perfect awakening.”

1.12 “Excellent, Maitreya, excellent!” said the Bhagavān. “Maitreya, it is just as you have said. It is the truth. It is that alone. It is unmistakable. Even those who listen to this Dharma discourse doubtfully will have no small roots of virtue, so what need is there to mention those who listen to, retain, hold, read, master, and [F.273.b] teach it extensively and properly without any doubts? Such holders of the sūtra will not encounter the works of Māra. They will not be harmed by desire, anger, ignorance, pride, avarice, rage, or malevolence. Their bodies will not be stricken by plague or disease. In whatever region such a sūtra as this is kept, wherever such a Dharma teacher dwells, or wherever this Dharma discourse is written down as a scripture—in such places all diseases, epidemics, harm, contagions, and conflicts will be quelled.”

1.13 Then the bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya said to the Bhagavān, “Bhagavān, later, in the future, during the final five hundred years when the time of destruction has come, the true Dharma is disappearing, and there is a great danger that the Buddha’s awakening will vanish, I shall teach this Dharma discourse to those noble beings. I shall invigorate them. In places where a holder of this sūtra resides, I shall quell all untimely cold winds, winter rains, famine, diseases, plagues, epidemics, infectious disease, harm, and conflict. In a place where this Dharma discourse is kept and written down as a scripture or tied at the top of a banner and worshiped—in such a place, all the terrors of hostile armies, thieves, rākṣasas, and ḍākinīs will be quelled through my blessing. I shall bless those places where such Dharma teachers reside and where this sūtra is kept, so that all harvests, riches, grains, flowers, leaves, and fruits may be abundant, and all kinds of joy may arise.” [F.274.a]

1.14 “Excellent, Maitreya!” said the Bhagavān. “It is excellent indeed that you have donned the great armor and proclaimed the lion’s roar for the benefit of all beings in order to uphold the true Dharma of the Tathāgata and to sustain⁵ the Dharma way of the Tathāgata. I entrust this Dharma discourse to you. Thereby, later, in the future, during the final five hundred years when the time of destruction has come, the true Dharma is disappearing, and there

is a great danger that the Buddha’s awakening will vanish, you should teach this Dharma discourse to all beings. You should proclaim it. You should inspire those noble beings. You should proclaim that they must do nothing else but persevere in taking ultimate reality as their authority. You should teach them only according to ultimate reality. You should be sure to teach them in such a way that those noble beings understand this Dharma discourse unmistakably as it is.”

The bodhisattva Maitreya said, “Bhagavān, I will do so.”

1.15 Thereupon Indra and his retinue of gods, Brahmā and his retinue of gods, Prajāpati, and others, realizing that this Dharma discourse was coming to an end, offered heavenly flowers, fragrant smoke, incense, flower garlands, ointments, powders, garments, parasols, banners, and flags to the Bhagavān and the bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya.

1.16 They then exclaimed, “Bhagavān, this Dharma discourse that benefits innumerable beings is indeed a marvelous nectar of speech!” [F.274.b]

1.17 The Bhagavān now said to Venerable Ānanda, “Ānanda, such a Dharma discourse is rarely heard. Therefore, you must retain this Dharma discourse. You must write it down, hold it, read it aloud, and master it!”

1.18 “Bhagavān, I will retain this Dharma discourse,” said Ānanda. “Bhagavān, what is the name of this Dharma discourse? How should it be remembered?”

“Ānanda,” replied the Bhagavān, “you should remember this Dharma discourse as *The Nectar of Speech*. You should also refer to it as *The Question of Maitreya*.”

1.19 After the Bhagavān had thus spoken, the entire assembly—Venerable Ānanda, the bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya, the bhikṣus, the bodhisattvas, and also the gods, humans, asuras, and gandharvas—all rejoiced and praised the words of the Bhagavān.

This concludes the noble Mahāyāna sūtra “The Nectar of Speech.”

c.

Colophon

c.1 Translated, edited, and finalized by the Indian preceptor Prajñāvarman and the chief editor-translator Venerable Yeshé Dé.

n.

NOTES

- n.1 It should be noted that there are three sūtras elsewhere in the Kangyur whose main titles are *The Question of Maitreya* (*Maitreyapariṣcchā*, *byams pas zhus pa*): Toh 85 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh85.html>), Toh 86 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh85.html>), and Toh 149.
- n.2 In his *gsung rab rin po che'i gtam rgyud dang shAkya'i rabs rgyud* (Toh 4357), a treatise in the Tengyur; see [n.4](#).
- n.3 Denkarma, folio 299.b. See also Hermann-Pfandt (2008), p. 114, no. 215.
- n.4 Kawa Paltsek, folio 283.b, quotes this passage as follows: “When bodhisattvas are endowed with five qualities, they will not be harmed by Māra, they will live long, and they will soon attain awakening. These five are (1) always giving sentient beings the Dharma, (2) giving sentient beings freedom from fear, (3) practicing the four immeasurable qualities, (4) repairing old stūpas, and (5) causing all beings to aspire to the mind of awakening.”
- n.5 Translated based on Stok Palace Kangyur: *bskyang*. Degé Kangyur: *bskyed*.

b.

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GLOSSARY

· Types of attestation for Sanskrit names and terms ·

AS	<i>Attested in source text</i> This term is attested in the Sanskrit manuscript used as a source for this translation.
AO	<i>Attested in other text</i> This term is attested in other Sanskrit manuscripts of the Kangyur or Tengyur.
AD	<i>Attested in dictionary</i> This term is attested in Tibetan-Sanskrit dictionaries.
AA	<i>Approximate attestation</i> The attestation of this name is approximate. It is based on other names where Tibetan-Sanskrit relationship 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 acceptance that phenomena do not arise

mi skye ba'i chos la bzod pa

མི་སྐྱེ་བའི་ཚོས་ལ་བཟོད་པ།

anutpattikadharmakṣānti

The particular realization that all phenomena are beyond birth.

g.2 Ānanda

kun dga' bo

ཀུན་དགའ་བོ།

ānanda

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

A major śrāvaka disciple and personal attendant of the Buddha Śākyamuni during the last twenty-five years of his life. He was a cousin of the Buddha (according to the Mahāvastu, he was a son of Śuklodana, one of the brothers of King Śuddhodana, which means he was a brother of Devadatta; other sources say he was a son of Amṛtodana, another brother of King Śuddhodana, which means he would have been a brother of Aniruddha).

Ānanda, having always been in the Buddha's presence, is said to have memorized all the teachings he heard and is celebrated for having recited all the Buddha's teachings by memory at the first council of the Buddhist saṅgha, thus preserving the teachings after the Buddha's parinirvāṇa. The phrase "Thus did I hear at one time," found at the beginning of the sūtras, usually stands for his recitation of the teachings. He became a patriarch after the passing of Mahākāśyapa.

g.3 bhagavān

bcom ldan 'das

བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས།

bhagavān

Epithet of the Buddha. In Sanskrit usually defined as someone who is the possessor of six specific qualities as well as the conqueror of māras. The usual definition of the Tibetan term is *bcom* ("subdue"), referring to the subduing of the four māras; *ldan* ("to possess"), referring to the possession of the great qualities of buddhahood; and *'das* ("beyond," "transcended"), meaning that such a person has gone beyond saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.

g.4 bhikṣu

dge slong

དགེ་སློང་།

bhikṣu

A fully ordained monk.

g.5 Brahmā

tshangs pa

ཚེངས་པ།

brahmā

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

A high-ranking deity presiding over a divine world where other beings consider him the creator; he is also considered to be the lord of the Sahā world (our universe). Though not considered a creator god in Buddhism, Brahmā occupies an important place as one of two gods (the other being Indra/Śakra) said to have first exhorted the Buddha Śākyamuni to teach the Dharma. The particular heavens found in the form realm over which Brahmā rules are often some of the most sought-after realms of higher rebirth in Buddhist literature. Since there are many universes or world systems, there are also multiple Brahmās presiding over them. His most frequent epithets are “Lord of Sahā World” (*Sahāñpati*) and Great Brahmā (*Mahābrahmā*).

g.6 Indra

dbang po

དབང་པོ།

indra

Name of a god.

g.7 Kalandakanivāsa

bya ka lan da ka gnas pa

བྱ་ཀ་ལན་དཀ་གནས་པ།

kalandakanivāsa · kalandakanivāpa

Literally, “the dwelling place of kalandaka (birds).” A location within the Veṇuvana where the Buddha stayed. The place was given its name by King Bimbisāra after he had been saved from a snake attack there by the squawking of many *kalandaka*—flying squirrels, Sanskrit and Pali sources suggest, but Tibetan translations understand the Sanskrit term to refer to a kind of bird. The alternative Sanskrit *Kalandakanivāpa* means “where food-offerings are made to kalandakas.”

g.8 Kawa Paltsek

ska ba dpal brtsegs

སྐ་བ་དཔལ་བརྟེན།

—

A famous Tibetan translator and monk of the eighth to the ninth century.

g.9 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 Tuṣita heaven, 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.10 Māra

bdud

བདུད།

māra

Originally the name of Indra's principal enemy among the asuras. In early Buddhism he appears as a drought-causing demon and eventually his name becomes that of Māra, the principal opponent of the Buddha's teaching. The name also applies to the deities ruled over by Māra who attempted to prevent the Buddha's awakening and who do not wish any being to escape from saṃsāra.

g.11 mind of awakening

byang chub kyi sems

བྱང་ལྷན་གྱི་སེམས།

bodhicitta

The wish, resolve, and practice to attain complete awakening for the sake of all sentient beings.

g.12 Prajāpati

skye dgu'i bdag po

སྐྱེ་དགུའི་བདག་པོ།

prajāpati

Name of a god.

g.13 Prajñāvarman

pradza+nyA barma

པརྒྱ་བམ།

prajñāvarman

An Indian scholar and translator of the eighth to the ninth century who translated, in collaboration with other Indian and Tibetan scholars, about eighty texts of the Kangyur into Tibetan. He also composed commentaries that are preserved in the Tengyur.

g.14 Rājagṛha

rgyal po'i khab

རྒྱལ་པོའི་ཁབ།

rājagṛha

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The ancient capital of Magadha prior to its relocation to Pāṭaliputra during the Mauryan dynasty, Rājagṛha is one of the most important locations in Buddhist history. The literature tells us that the Buddha and his saṅgha spent a considerable amount of time in residence in and around Rājagṛha—in nearby places, such as the Vulture Peak Mountain (Gṛdhrakūṭaparvata), a major site of the Mahāyāna sūtras, and the Bamboo Grove (Veṇuvana)—enjoying the patronage of King Bimbisāra and then of his son King Ajātaśatru. Rājagṛha is also remembered as the location where the first Buddhist monastic council was held after the Buddha Śākyamuni passed into parinirvāṇa. Now known as Rajgir and located in the modern Indian state of Bihar.

g.15 tathāgata

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 also often used as a specific epithet of the Buddha Śākyamuni.

In this text:

Also rendered here as “thus-gone.”

g.16 thus-gone

de bzhin gshegs pa

དེ་སྟོན་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 also often used as a specific epithet of the Buddha Śākyamuni.

In this text:

Also rendered here as “tathāgata.”

g.17 Veṇuvana

'od ma'i tshal

འོད་མའི་ཚལ།

veṇuvana

King Bimbisāra’s park (lit. “Bamboo Grove”) near Rājagṛha. Here the Buddha dwelled regularly and gave many teachings.

g.18 Well-Gone One

bde bar gshegs pa

བདེ་བར་གཤེགས་པ།

sugata

Epithet of the Buddha.

g.19 worthy

dgra bcom pa

དགའ་བཙམ་པ།

arhat

Depending on the etymological interpretation, “worthy one” or “a person who has defeated the enemy of the afflictions (*kleśa*).”

g.20 Yeshé Dé

ye shes sde

ཡེ་ཤེས་སྡེ།

—

A famous Tibetan translator and monk of the eighth to the ninth century, who translated and revised in collaboration with various Indian scholars more than 250 texts of the Kangyur and Tengyur into Tibetan.