

༄༅། །རྒྱལ་པོ་ལ་གདམས་པ།

---

## Advice to a King (1)

---

*Rājadeśa*

རྒྱལ་པོ་ལ་གདམ་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་མདོ།

*rgyal po la gdam pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*

The Mahāyāna Sūtra “Advice to a King” (1): Advice to King Bimbisāra

*Rājadeśanāmamahāyānasūtra*

· Toh 214 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 62 (mdo sde, tsha), folios 207.a–210.a

TRANSLATED INTO TIBETAN BY

· Dānaśīla · Bandé Yeshé Dé ·



First published 2024

Current version v 1.0.0 (2024)

Generated by 84000 Reading Room v2.23.2

*84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha* is a global non-profit initiative to translate all the Buddha's words into modern languages, and to make them available to everyone.



This work is provided under the protection of a Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND (Attribution - Non-commercial - No-derivatives) 3.0 copyright. It may be copied or printed for fair use, but only with full attribution, and not for commercial advantage or personal compensation. For full details, see the Creative Commons license.

co.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- ti. Title
- im. Imprint
- co. Contents
- s. Summary
- ac. Acknowledgements
- i. Introduction
- tr. The Translation
  - 1. “Advice to a King” (1): Advice to King Bimbisāra
- c. Colophon
- n. Notes
- b. Bibliography
  - Source Texts
  - Western Languages
- g. Glossary

s.

## SUMMARY

- s.1 Discerning that the time is right to train King Bimbisāra, the Buddha Śākyamuni goes to Magadha, along with his entourage. The king is hostile at first but when his attack on the Buddha is thwarted and a verse on impermanence is heard, he becomes respectful. In the discourse that ensues, the Buddha tells the king that it is good to be disillusioned with the world because saṃsāra is impermanence and suffering. He then elaborates with a teaching on impermanence followed by a teaching on suffering. When the king asks where, if saṃsāra is so full of suffering, well-being is to be found, the Buddha responds with a short exposition on nirvāṇa as the cessation of all suffering and the cause for supreme happiness. Moved by his words, the king decides that he will renounce worldly concerns and seek nirvāṇa. The Buddha praises the king and concludes the teaching with the potent refrain, “When one is attached, that is saṃsāra. When one is not attached, that is nirvāṇa.”

ac.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ac.1 Translated and introduced by George FitzHerbert, in consultation with a draft translation by Khenpo Kalsang Gyaltzen and Chodrungma Kunga Chodron of the Sakya Pandita Translation Group.

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

*Advice to a King (1)* which carries the alternative colophon title “*Advice to King Bimbisāra*”, is a poetic discourse on the value of understanding impermanence and the nature of suffering as the key to unlocking the prison of saṃsāra. In concise and direct language, it evokes the fragility and impermanence of human life, points out the futility of worldly accomplishments, and describes in detail the inevitable sufferings of saṃsāra in the six realms of rebirth. The teaching concludes with refrains on nirvāṇa as the cessation of suffering and the supreme happiness.

i.2

The text is one of three sūtras (Toh 214, 215, and 221) included in Kangyurs of the Tshalpa line under the identical title *The Mahāyāna Sūtra “Advice to a King”*. The present sūtra (Toh 214) consists of advice given to Bimbisāra, the king of Magadha. The sūtra that immediately follows it in the Degé Kangyur (Toh 215),<sup>1</sup> consists of advice to Udayana, the king of Vatsa. Finally, a longer sūtra in the next volume of the Degé Kangyur (Toh 221) presents advice to King Prasenajit, the king of Kośala.

i.3

Only the third of these three (Toh 221) is attested in either Sanskrit or Chinese, while both the present text *Advice to King Bimbisāra* (Toh 214) and *Advice to Udayana, King of Vatsa* (Toh 215) have no known Sanskrit or Chinese witnesses and exist only in Tibetan. In their colophons, both of these sūtras are attributed to the translators Dānaśīla and Bandé Yeshé Dé, who were active during the height of Tibetan imperial patronage of Buddhism in the late eighth and early ninth centuries CE. However, neither of the two texts is mentioned in the Phangthangma or Denkarma imperial-period catalogs,<sup>2</sup> nor are they mentioned in Chomden Raldri’s late-thirteenth-century survey of translated texts. Adding further to the uncertainty of their provenance, neither text is found in any Kangyurs of the Thempangma recensional line.<sup>3</sup>

i.4

King Bimbisāra of Magadha was a contemporary of the Buddha Śākyamuni (according to some sources he was born on the same day) whose capital was at Rājagṛha, and he was among the most important royal patrons

of the Buddha and his early community. As such, he features frequently in Buddhist literature. As Skilling notes, however, the framing narrative of *Advice to King Bimbisāra* “is strikingly out of step with the received tradition” concerning this king’s relationship with the Buddha.<sup>4</sup> Other sources, such as the Vinaya literature and the biography of the Buddha titled *The Play in Full* (*Lalitavistara*, Toh 95),<sup>5</sup> suggest that the king first met the Buddha while the latter was still a wandering mendicant and was impressed by him even then. In contrast, this text has the Buddha going to meet King Bimbisāra, apparently for the first time, only after the Buddha’s community was already established at Prince Jeta’s Grove (under the patronage of King Prasenajit of Kośala), and it portrays King Bimbisāra rudely rebuffing him at first. This unusual framing story raises further questions about the textual history of this sūtra. Such questions notwithstanding, at the heart of the sūtra is an eloquent, concise, and forceful teaching on impermanence, suffering, karma, and the promise of peace.

i.5        There have been two previous English translations of *Advice to King Bimbisāra*: An early, loose translation published in 1973 by Thubten Kalzang Rinpoche et al., and a richly annotated and fine translation by Peter Skilling published in 2021. This English translation was made from the Tibetan as found in the Degé Kangyur, in consultation with variants recorded in the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*).

**The Mahāyāna Sūtra**  
**“Advice to a King” (1): Advice to King Bimbisāra**

1.

## The Translation

[F.207.a]

Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was staying at Prince Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍada's Park, with a large community of monks and a community of many bodhisattvas. At that time, the Blessed One declared to his audience, "Since the time has now come for King Bimbisāra to be trained, we must go to Magadha." He then departed, gliding through the sky like a king of swans along with his entourage.

1.1 When the minister Sucandra<sup>6</sup> saw this, he said to his king, "Lord, the Buddha and his entourage are approaching our land. We should adorn the city to pay our respects."

1.2 "There is no one in Jambudvīpa greater than I," replied the king, inflated with his own arrogance, "so to whom should I pay my respects?"

1.3 Then the Buddha and his entourage sat down on seats laid out at the gates of King Bimbisāra's palace. When the king came to know that the Blessed One and his entourage were thus seated, he called on a wrestler known as a heavy lifter to throw a huge rock at the Blessed One.<sup>7</sup> From the sound of that rock flying through the air came a voice that proclaimed:<sup>8</sup>

1.4 "Alas! Compounded things have no permanence;  
Their nature is to arise and to cease.  
Where there is birth, there is death.  
Where there is coming together, there is separation.  
Where there is accumulation, there is depletion.<sup>9</sup>  
The glow of youth is robbed by illness  
And life itself is snatched by death.

1.5 "Where there is attachment, suffering thrives.  
Where there is dissatisfaction, there will be liberation."

- 1.6 On hearing this, King Bimbisāra became respectful and went before the Buddha with his palms joined. When he had taken a seat, the Blessed One said, “Great King, take interest in the Dharma, take it in, request for it to be taught, and be disillusioned.”
- 1.7 The king inquired, [F.207.b] “Blessed One, with what should I be dissatisfied and disillusioned?”
- “Be dissatisfied and disillusioned with saṃsāra,” replied the Blessed One.
- 1.8 “Why should I be dissatisfied and disillusioned with saṃsāra?” asked the king.
- “Because saṃsāra is impermanence and suffering,” he replied.
- 1.9 “How is saṃsāra impermanence, Blessed One?” inquired the king.
- “This container, the world, is impermanent, and its contents, sentient beings, are also impermanent”<sup>10</sup> replied the Blessed One.
- 1.10 “How is this container, the world, impermanent?” asked the king.
- 1.11 The Blessed One replied:<sup>11</sup>
- 1.12 “When the time of destruction and the fires at the end of the eon rise,  
Nothing will remain, not even ashes  
Of this container-world with its Mount Meru and the continents.  
So too shall it be with the destructions by water and by wind.<sup>12</sup>
- 1.13 Or again, that which grows in warm summer rain dries up in the cold of  
winter.  
Good crops, bad crops, drought, or deluge—there is no certainty.  
As the months and years pass, the time of destruction draws ever nearer.
- 1.14 Impermanence is evident from these and other examples,  
For if there were permanence, how could there be change?”
- 1.15 “How are the contents, sentient beings, impermanent?” asked the king.
- 1.16 The Blessed One replied:
- 1.17 “For the contents, for sentient beings, this life is just the same—  
Counting off the days, the months, and years,  
With every day that passes, death draws ever nearer.
- 1.18 “Though we would like not to die, it is beyond our control.  
Birth, old age, sickness, and death are like pictures we draw ourselves,  
While Māra, Lord of Death, looks on like a black heron waiting for fish.<sup>13</sup>
- 1.19 “Causes of death are more numerous than can be conceived.  
There is nothing at all that has not been a cause of death.  
This body is sustained by eating, but choke on your food, and you will die.  
In this world there are none—neither great nor small, neither rich nor poor—

Who have power over the Lord of Death.

- 1.20 “Those people who have died in the past,  
They too hoped that things would last.  
They gathered children and wealth around them,  
But neither their children nor their wealth,  
Nor even in the end, their bodies, were of any use,  
For in death we are accompanied by our good and bad deeds alone.
- 1.21 “Even now, while still living,  
Haven’t you seen, or haven’t you heard,  
Of friends or relatives—  
Those you like or those you do not,  
Those your own age, or older, or younger— [F.208.a]  
Who have died?
- 1.22 “Everyone<sup>14</sup> who lives upon this earth  
May survive up to a hundred years,  
But all will die, without exception.  
It is our nature, each and every one of us, to die.  
Whether death will come today or tomorrow,  
No one knows.
- 1.23 “Even having the measure of it offers no respite from fear,<sup>15</sup>  
For what will happen next year, or this very day?
- 1.24 “When you die, neither your parents nor your sons,  
Neither your relatives nor friends,  
Neither your servants nor all your possessions  
Will accompany you beyond death.  
None will share even a part of your pain.
- 1.25 “At birth, you are born alone,  
And in the end, at death, you will die alone.  
In an instant, all that you hold nearest and dearest in life,  
Will depart, like guests returning home after a brief stay.<sup>16</sup>
- 1.26 “That which you dare not part with, even for a moment—  
Relatives, possessions, land, and home<sup>17</sup>—all will be left behind,  
As you embark on the fearful road alone.
- 1.27 “Wealth may be accumulated through this or that connivance or dispute,  
But while the obscurations incurred by such wrongdoing must be borne,  
The wealth accumulated thereby will soon be carried away by relatives,<sup>18</sup>

So what is gained by amassing wealth?

- 1.28 “Even this body that is held so dear,  
Will be discarded at death, like a used earthenware pot.  
Even flesh and bone, born together, will come asunder.  
Powerless, you will wander alone,  
Until by the power of karma, you are reborn.  
So, for the sake of the body, do no wrong.
- 1.29 “Do not be content with this body which treads the firm earth—  
It is an impure heap, born from impure karma.  
Subject to sickness, old age, and death, it is the site of every suffering.  
Once dead, it is nothing but some filth to be discarded anywhere,  
For birds, jackals, and other animals to feed upon.  
Even if efforts are made to respect and venerate them,  
The Lord of Death and his demons will drag you away.
- 1.30 “Disparaged by the wise and an object of attachment for fools—  
What learned person is attached to the body?  
So do not fret for the sake of the body.  
For the sake of this life, dispense wages for food and clothing,  
But for lasting benefit, make merit and so on,  
For the only friends you will have at death are your own good and bad  
deeds. [F.208.b]  
While good deeds lead to higher realms and liberation,  
Bad deeds lead to the suffering of the lower realms.
- 1.31 “Even before death, this body is impermanent.  
From a small child you grow into a youth,  
Then on to adulthood, middle age, and old age.  
If the body were permanent,  
How could there be such phases?
- 1.32 “The objects of experience, those that bring pleasure and pain, are also  
impermanent.  
Those who have power and wealth may become miserable and destitute,  
And those who are miserable and destitute may become powerful and  
wealthy.  
The enjoyments of youth are ravaged by illness, aging, and death.  
All these worldly phenomena are impermanent.”
- 1.33 King Bimisāra asked, “Blessed One, what are the sufferings of beings in  
saṃsāra?”
- 1.34 The Blessed One replied,

- 1.35 “For beings in saṃsāra there is never any lasting happiness.  
The main kinds of suffering are four: birth, aging, illness, and death.
- 1.36 “The sufferings of beings born in the hells are like this:  
Merely seeing the guards of hell and the fires of hell  
Sets off great wails of fear and terror.  
Counting the cost to oneself and feeling deep remorse about one’s former  
actions—  
Are of no use whatsoever.
- 1.37 “Some obtain massive bodies with tender skin,  
Subject to intense and violent sensations.  
Some have bodies that burn in a blazing mass of fire.  
Some are crushed like seeds in rooms with iron walls,<sup>19</sup>  
Rolling back and forth, and burning all over.
- 1.38 “Others are thrown headfirst into huge iron cauldrons  
Where they cook like grains in a boiling soup.  
Some are gashed by saws and pounded in mortars.  
Some are kept in dwellings and houses and roasted alive,  
Scorched by glowing embers, hot ashes, hot water, and such.  
There are tortures more numerous than can be conceived.
- 1.39 “Where a single day and night is a hundred eighty thousand human years,  
They stay in such hells for an eon.  
Even though they long for death, death does not come  
To those whose karma is not exhausted,  
Until the time when the world itself disintegrates  
And a new world is born again.
- 1.40 “Those born as pretas are tormented by hunger and thirst, [F.209.a]  
With heads the size of mountains, mouths as narrow as the eye of a needle,  
Throats just as narrow, and bellies the size of districts.  
They see food and drink, but others guard these things,  
Or else they perceive them as something else—blood, pus, vomit, and the  
like.  
Though some manage to eat, the food turns to molten metal in their throats.
- 1.41 “Those born as animals eat one another, and,  
Mired in the sufferings of ignorance, they have no freedom—  
They are tied up, beaten, exploited, and killed by others.
- 1.42 “Those born as humans suffer even while still in the womb.  
When the mother eats her fill, it is like being crushed between rocks.

- When she is hungry, it is like being abandoned to wolves.  
When she does heavy labor, it is like being pounded in a mortar.  
The experience of birth is as rough as being dragged along the side of a wall  
After the skin has been peeled off,  
While tormented by heat rashes, hunger, thirst, and aching limbs.
- 1.43 “When grown up, humans suffer by laboring in fields, through poverty,  
By separation from loved ones, oppression by enemies, and debt.  
They also suffer from heat, cold, hunger, thirst, and the rest.  
While the poor have no means of escaping their hardship, try as they might,  
The wealthy suffer too, needing to be vigilant to protect what they have.  
The work of farming and trading is suffering too.
- 1.44 “Sufferings such as these and others, are more numerous than can be  
conceived.  
The bases of suffering are generally two—food and clothing—  
While even the pleasures of this world are for the most part  
The causes of suffering in lower rebirths later on.
- 1.45 “Those born as asuras endure suffering caused by  
Pride and envy, rage and conflict, and more.
- 1.46 “Those born as gods also endure suffering, such as the pain caused by  
Falling from heaven at death, the five signs of impending death,  
And the suffering of conditioned being.
- 1.47 “The sufferings of the elderly are like this:  
White hair, gathering wrinkles, being ignored by others,  
Dribbles of spittle and snot at the mouth and nose,  
Trembling hands, and unsteady legs.  
The body becomes too feeble to do what the mind intends.  
Relative all consider you better off dead;  
Your advice is not heeded and your authority is lost.  
Some may even say, ‘That old monster should have died long ago.’  
Some may even threaten to beat you with cudgels and sticks.  
Seeing and hearing this, you may want to die, but die you cannot.
- 1.48 “The sufferings of the sick are like this:  
When the four great physical elements are out of balance,  
The body is oppressed by combinations of wind, bile, and phlegm, [F.209.b]  
So that even objects of enjoyment hold no allure.  
Physical strength is sapped and you cannot even stand up.  
Your luster and radiance are gone; you look like a preta.

- 1.49 “The sufferings of the dying are like this:  
Though friends and relatives may gather and mourn,  
There is no looking on, or listening in, or thinking of them.  
The vital force is severed, as if cut by a blade,  
With your past deeds toward friends and enemies,  
Both good and bad, appearing as if in a dreamscape.
- 1.50 “The terrifying minions of Yama close in on all sides.  
Eyes wide with fear, you look here, there, and everywhere,  
But no savior is to be seen.  
In abject fear and total despair, with no idea where to go,  
The uncertain liminal state arises.<sup>20</sup>
- 1.51 “Impermanence will be a constant source of torment  
Through these endless sufferings  
From beginningless time right up to the present,  
Until you accept the noble path.”
- 1.52 Then the king asked, “Blessed One, if saṃsāra is so much suffering, then  
where is well-being to be found?”
- 1.53 The Blessed One replied, “Nirvāṇa is perfect well-being.”<sup>21</sup>
- 1.54 “How is it perfect well-being?” asked the king.  
The Blessed One answered,
- 1.55 “Nirvāṇa is peace; it is happiness supreme.<sup>22</sup>  
Devoid of concepts, of perceiving a self, and of afflictions.  
Devoid of the sufferings of the three lower realms, of hunger and thirst, of  
heat and cold,  
Of birth, of aging, of illness, of death, and the rest.  
All the sufferings of impermanent saṃsāra cease forever,  
And henceforth all actions are those that benefit others,<sup>23</sup>  
With powers and miraculous abilities beyond imagination.”
- 1.56 When the Blessed One had spoken, King Bimbisāra became disillusioned  
with saṃsāra, discarded his royal power like spittle in the dust, and set his  
mind on accomplishing nirvāṇa.
- 1.57 Then the Blessed One said,
- 1.58 “Great King, well done, well done!  
Among all footprints, the footprint of the elephant is the greatest.  
Among all flowers, the white lotus is the greatest. [F.210.a]  
Among all notions, the notion of impermanence is the greatest.  
Among all motivations, disillusionment with saṃsāra is the greatest.

- 1.59 “Great King, it is good that you are disillusioned with saṃsāra.  
It is good that you have become dissatisfied.  
When one is attached, that is saṃsāra.  
When one is not attached, that is nirvāṇa.”
- 1.60 After the Blessed One had spoken, everyone, King Bimbisāra and the rest,  
rejoiced and praised what the Blessed One had said.
- 1.61 *This concludes The Mahāyāna Sūtra “Advice to King Bimbisāra.”*

c.

## Colophon

c.1 Translated, edited, and finalized by the Indian preceptor Dānaśīla and Bandé  
Yeshé Dé.

n.

## NOTES

- n.1 Sakya Pandita Translation Group, trans. *Advice to a King (2)* (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh215.html>), Toh 215 (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, 2024).
- n.2 Although a title *Mahāyāna Sūtra “Advice to a King”* is found in the Denkarma, this refers to the advice to King Prasenajit (Toh 221). This can be ascertained because it is listed there as having 160 ślokas. Denkarma, fol. 229.a; Hermann-Pfandt 2008, pp. 102–3.
- n.3 As Peter Skilling notes, both texts appear seemingly “out of nowhere” in the Kangyurs of the Tshalpa line. Skilling 2021, pp. 410 and 430.
- n.4 Skilling 2021, pp. 412–13.
- n.5 Dharmachakra Translation Committee, trans. *The Play in Full* (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh95.html>), Toh 95 (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, 2013).
- n.6 *blon po zla ba bzang po*. According to Negi’s *Tibetan-Sanskrit Dictionary*, *zla ba bzang po* is elsewhere attested as a translation for Sucandra as the name of a king and a householder. Skilling also uses Sucandra, but makes note of the fact that a minister under Bimbisāra’s son Ajātaśatru may have been called Candraprabha, so the name could also be a rendering of that. For further discussion, see Skilling 2021, p. 571, n. 920.
- n.7 *gyad chen po’i ’degs pa zhes bya ba rbad de rdo shin tu che ba bcom ldan ’das la ’phangs so*. This might also be rendered “the Malla known as Heavy Lifter...” The Malla were a prominent clan or people during the time of the Buddha, whose name *malla* (Tib. *gyad*) literally means “athlete,” “wrestler,” or “strongman.” The term *rbad*, which is attested elsewhere as a translation of *prerita* (“to dispatch,” “urge,” or “impel”), indicates that the king dispatched

this strongman to throw the rock. Skilling translated the passage differently: “the king picked up a huge rock dubbed ‘rock that no one but a muscleman can lift,’ and hurled it at the Fortunate One.”

- n.8 In Tibetan, the following verse is in seven-syllable meter.
- n.9 These first five lines reprise a common theme on impermanence found across many texts. For a similar set of oppositions, see, for example, *The Account of the Noble Deeds of Śrīsenā Toh* 349, [1.107](#). Similar verses are also found in the *Vinayavastu* and *Udānavarga*, and in the Pali *Dīgha Nikāya*. For references see Skilling 2021, p. 571, n. 922.
- n.10 *snod kyi 'jig rten 'di yang mi rtag la/ bcud ki sems can yang mi rtag go*. These lines play on the Tibetan expression for the world, *snod bcud*, lit. “vessel and contents,” which is a condensation of the Buddhist pairing of *bhājanaloka*, the “container-world” of inanimate things, and *sattvaloka* the “world of animate beings.”
- n.11 In Tibetan, the Buddha’s replies are henceforth in nine-syllable meter with a light caesura or hiatus usually after the fourth syllable of each line, and no obvious parsing into verses.
- n.12 As alluded to in many canonical works, the end of an eon is said to be marked by a threefold destruction of the world by fire, wind and water.
- n.13 *so bya nya sdod 'dra*. In Tibetan, *so bya*, or “watchman-bird,” is listed in dictionaries as a “large black bird which eats fish.” Skilling translates it as “heron,” which fits well with the image of a bird standing still waiting for its prey. Although black herons are not native to India or Tibet, the black color has some relevance for the simile here, so it has been included in the translation.
- n.14 *sems can 'di kun*. While *sems can* refers to all “sentient beings,” the intended referents here, with life spans of up to a hundred years, are clearly humans.
- n.15 *tshod 'dzin pa yang mi 'jigs sbyin med pas*. Skilling translates: “Even if someone can predict our death, he cannot grant us any immunity.”
- n.16 Translation tentative. Tib. *skad cig tshe las 'thun pa nye gzhi rnam// 'gron po gnas 'thun tsam ste so sor 'gro*. Skilling has: “After a brief life shared with one’s relatives in one’s home town, one goes one’s separate way, like a traveler who leaves behind a pleasant stopping place.”
- n.17 *yul dang mkhar*, lit. “land and fortress.” According the *Mahāvīyutpatti*, the Tibetan *mkhar* was used to translate the Sanskrit *koṭṭa*, also meaning

“fortress,” “stronghold,” or “castle.”

- n.18 *bu tsha* lit. “sons and nephews.”
- n.19 Translation tentative. Tib. *kha cig lcags mkhar khang pa sbrum mar rdung*. Here we follow Skilling’s translation, which apparently reads *sbrum* as an orthographic error for *’bru*. Normally *sbrum ma* means “a pregnant woman.” At a later point, the text speaks more directly of enduring the sensation of being crushed while “in the womb” (*mngal na*), so this could also be an allusion to that.
- n.20 *bdag nyid gar ’gro gtol med bar do ’byung*. Skilling translates: “You have no idea where to go, and you’re at your tether’s end.” We suggest that the term *bar do* here refers here to the liminal or intermediate state (*antarābhava*) between births.
- n.21 *bde legs phun sum tshogs pa*. Both Thubten Kalzang and Peter Skilling give “the perfection of well-being.”
- n.22 *mya ngan ’das pa zhi ba bde ba’i mchog*. For this line, we have adopted the words of Peter Skilling’s elegant translation.
- n.23 *las su gzhan don ’ba’ zhig spyod byed cing*. Here, the Yonglo and Peking editions of the Kangyur have the alternate reading *lus su*, which Skilling favors in his translation: “still in a body, one acts solely for others’ benefit” (Skilling 2021, p. 426).

b.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### · Source Texts ·

*rgyal po la gdam pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo* (*Rājadeśanāmamahāyānasūtra*).

Toh 214, Degé Kangyur vol. 62 (mdo sde, tsha), folios 207.a–210.a.

*rgyal po la gdam pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo. bka' 'gyur* (dpe bsdur ma)

[Comparative Edition of the Kangyur], krung go'i bod rig pa zhib 'jug ste gnas kyi bka' bstan dpe sdur khang (The Tibetan Tripitaka Collation Bureau of the China Tibetology Research Center). 108 volumes. Beijing: krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang (China Tibetology Publishing House), 2006–9, vol. 62, pp. 550–59.

Denkarma (*pho brang stod thang ldan dkar gyi chos kyi 'gyur ro cog gi dkar chag*).

Toh 4364, Degé Tengyur vol. 206 (sna tshogs, jo), folios 294.b–310.a.

### · Western Languages ·

Herrmann-Pfandt, Adelheid. *Die lHan kar ma: ein früher Katalog der ins Tibetische übersetzten buddhistischen Texte*. Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2008.

Skilling, Peter. *Questioning the Buddha: A Selection of Twenty-Five Sutras*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2021.

Thubten Kalsang Rinpoche, Bhikkhu Nagasena, and Bhikkhu Khantipale.

“Rajadesananama—Mahayana Sutra I (The Discourse on the Great Way named Instructions to a King).” In *Three Discourses of the Buddha*, 1–11.

Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1973.

## 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 Anāthapiṇḍada's Park

*mgon med zas sbyin gyi kun dga' ra ba*

མགོན་མེད་ཟས་སྦྱིན་གྱི་ཀུན་དགའ་ར་བ།

*anāthapiṇḍadārāma*

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

This was an important early site for the Buddha's growing community. Anāthapiṇḍada, a wealthy patron of the Buddha, purchased the park, located outside Śrāvastī, at great cost, purportedly covering the ground with gold, and donated it to the saṅgha. It was there that the Buddha spent several rainy seasons and gave discourses that were later recorded as sūtras. It was also the site for one of the first Buddhist monasteries. (*Provisional 84000 definition. New definition forthcoming.*)

g.2 asura

*lha min*

ལྷ་མིན།

*asura*

*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.3 Bandé Yeshé Dé

*ye shes sde*

ཡེ་ཤེས་སྡེ།

—

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

Yeshé Dé (late eighth to early ninth century) was the most prolific translator of sūtras into Tibetan. Altogether he is credited with the translation of more than one hundred sixty sūtra translations and more than one hundred additional translations, mostly on tantric topics. In spite of Yeshé Dé's great importance for the propagation of Buddhism in Tibet during the imperial era, only a few biographical details about this figure are known. Later sources describe him as a student of the Indian teacher Padmasambhava, and he is also credited with teaching both sūtra and tantra widely to students of his own. He was also known as Nanam Yeshé Dé, from the Nanam (*sna nam*) clan.

g.4 Bimbisāra

*gzugs can snying po*

གཟུགས་ཅན་སྤྱིང་པོ།

*bimbisāra*

The account in this sūtra of the conversion of Bimbisāra into a follower of the Buddha's teachings only after the Buddha and his community were well established at Prince Jeta's Grove, is somewhat at odds with other, better-known accounts of the Buddha's relationship with this important and long-lived Magadhan king. *The Play in Full* (Toh 95, *Lalitavistara*), for example, narrates their meeting much earlier in the Buddha's life story. What is clear is that Bimbisāra would become an important royal patron for the early Buddhist community. King Bimbisāra of Magadha was a contemporary of the Buddha Śākyamuni (according to some sources he was born on the same day) whose capital was at Rājagṛha, and he was among the most important royal patrons of the Buddha and his early community. As such, he features frequently in Buddhist literature.

g.5 Blessed One

*bcom ldan 'das*

བཅོམ་ལྡན་འདས།

*bhagavan*

*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 mārās, *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 mārās.” 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.6 bodhisattva

*byang chub sems dpa'*

བྱང་ལྡན་སེམས་དཔའ།

*bodhisattva*

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

A being who is dedicated to the cultivation and fulfilment of the altruistic intention to attain perfect buddhahood, traversing the ten bodhisattva levels (*daśabhūmi*, *sa bcu*). Bodhisattvas purposely opt to remain within cyclic existence in order to liberate all sentient beings, instead of simply seeking personal freedom from suffering. In terms of the view, they realize both the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of phenomena.

g.7 community

*dge 'dun*

དགེ་འདུན།

*saṅgha*

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

Though often specifically reserved for the monastic community, this term can be applied to any of the four Buddhist communities—monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen—as well as to identify the different groups of practitioners, like the community of bodhisattvas or the community of śrāvakas. It is also the third of the Three Jewels (*triratna*) of Buddhism, the Buddha, the Teaching, and the Community.

g.8 Dānaśīla

*dA na shI la*

དྲན་ཤི་ལ།

—

An Indian paṇḍita who was resident in Tibet during the late eighth and early ninth centuries.

g.9 disillusionment

*yid 'byung ba*

ཡིད་འབྱུང་བ།

*nirvid*

A sense of disenchantment and weariness with the world that is preliminary to seeking nirvāṇa. The Pali term is *nibbidā*. This can also carry a sense of disgust and revulsion or indifference towards the world of material things and sense pleasures. Connected with the term *skyo ba* (“dissatisfaction”).

g.10 dissatisfaction

*skyo ba*

སྐྱོ་བ།

*udvega*

A sense of distress or anxiety that gives rise to disillusionment and weariness with the world. Connected with the term *yid 'byung ba* (“disillusionment”).

g.11 four great elements

*'byung chen bzhi*

འབྲུང་ཆེན་བཞི།

*caturmahābhūta*

The four main outer elements of earth, water, fire, and air.

g.12 god

*lha*

ལྷ།

*deva*

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

Cognate with the English term *divine*, the devas are most generally a class of celestial beings who frequently appear in Buddhist texts, often at the head of the assemblies of nonhuman beings who attend and celebrate the teachings of Śākyamuni and other buddhas and bodhisattvas. In Buddhist cosmology the devas occupy the highest of the five or six “destinies” (*gati*) of saṃsāra among which beings take rebirth. The devas reside in the *devalokas*, “heavens” that traditionally number between twenty-six and twenty-eight and are divided between the desire realm (*kāmadhātu*), form realm (*rūpadhātu*), and formless realm (*ārūpyadhātu*). A being attains rebirth among the devas either through meritorious deeds (in the desire realm) or the attainment of subtle meditative states (in the form and formless realms). While rebirth among the devas is considered favorable, it is ultimately a transitory state from which beings will fall when the conditions that lead to rebirth there are exhausted. Thus, rebirth in the god realms is regarded as a diversion from the spiritual path.

g.13 karma

*las*

ལས།

*karman*

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

Meaning “action” in its most basic sense, karma is an important concept in Buddhist philosophy as the cumulative force of previous physical, verbal, and mental acts, which determines present experience and will determine

future existences.

g.14 liminal state

*bar do*

བར་དོ།

*antarābhava*

The *bardo* or intermediate state between death and rebirth.

g.15 Lord of Death

*'chi bdag*

འཇི་བདག།

*yamarāja*

“Lord of Death” is typically another name for King Yama (Skt. *yamarāja*; Tib. *gshin rje rgyal po*), the deity who judges the dead and rules over the hell realms of the underworld. Here the lord of death is identified as Māra (Tib. *bdud*).

g.16 Magadha

*ma ga dhA*

མ་ག་ཏྲ།

*magadha*

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

An ancient Indian kingdom that lay to the south of the Ganges River in what today is the state of Bihar. Magadha was the largest of the sixteen “great states” (*mahājanapada*) that flourished between the sixth and third centuries BCE in northern India. During the life of the Buddha Śākyamuni, it was ruled by King Bimbisāra and later by Bimbisāra's son, Ajātaśatru. Its capital was initially Rājagṛha (modern-day Rajgir) but was later moved to Pāṭaliputra (modern-day Patna). Over the centuries, with the expansion of the Magadha's might, it became the capital of the vast Mauryan empire and seat of the great King Aśoka.

This region is home to many of the most important Buddhist sites, including Bodh Gayā, where the Buddha attained awakening; Vulture Peak (*Gṛdhra-kūṭa*), where the Buddha bestowed many well-known Mahāyāna sūtras; and the Buddhist university of Nālandā that flourished between the fifth and twelfth centuries CE, among many others.

g.17 Māra

*Bdud*

མ་རྩ་

*māra*

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

*Māra*, literally “death” or “maker of death,” is the name of the deva who tried to prevent the Buddha from achieving awakening, the name given to the class of beings he leads, and also an impersonal term for the destructive forces that keep beings imprisoned in saṃsāra:

(1) As a deva, Māra is said to be the principal deity in the Heaven of Making Use of Others’ Emanations (*paranirmitavaśavartin*), the highest paradise in the desire realm. He famously attempted to prevent the Buddha’s awakening under the Bodhi tree—see *The Play in Full* (Toh 95), 21.1—and later sought many times to thwart the Buddha’s activity. In the sūtras, he often also creates obstacles to the progress of śrāvakas and bodhisattvas. (2) The devas ruled over by Māra are collectively called *mārakāyika* or *mārakāyikadevatā*, the “deities of Māra’s family or class.” In general, these māras too do not wish any being to escape from saṃsāra, but can also change their ways and even end up developing faith in the Buddha, as exemplified by Sārthavāha; see *The Play in Full* (Toh 95), 21.14 and 21.43. (3) The term māra can also be understood as personifying four defects that prevent awakening, called (i) the divine māra (*devaputramāra*), which is the distraction of pleasures; (ii) the māra of Death (*mṛtyumāra*), which is having one’s life interrupted; (iii) the māra of the aggregates (*skandhamāra*), which is identifying with the five aggregates; and (iv) the māra of the afflictions (*kleśamāra*), which is being under the sway of the negative emotions of desire, hatred, and ignorance.

g.18 monk

*dge slong*

དགེ་སྤྲོད།

*bhikṣu*

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

The term *bhikṣu*, often translated as “monk,” refers to the highest among the eight types of prātimokṣa vows that make one part of the Buddhist assembly. The Sanskrit term literally means “beggar” or “mendicant,” referring to the fact that Buddhist monks and nuns—like other ascetics of the time—subsisted on alms (*bhikṣā*) begged from the laity.

In the Tibetan tradition, which follows the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, a monk follows 253 rules as part of his moral discipline. A nun (*bhikṣuṇī*; *dge slong ma*) follows 364 rules. A novice monk (*śrāmaṇera*; *dge tshul*) or nun (*śrāmaṇerikā*; *dge*

*tshul ma*) follows thirty-six rules of moral discipline (although in other vinaya traditions novices typically follow only ten).

g.19 Mount Meru

*ri rab*

རི་རབ།

*meru*

*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, Godānīya; 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.20 nirvāṇa

*mya ngan las 'das pa*

མྱ་ངན་ལས་འདས་པ།

*nirvāṇa*

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

In Sanskrit, the term *nirvāṇa* literally means “extinguishment” and the Tibetan *mya ngan las 'das pa* literally means “gone beyond sorrow.” As a general term, it refers to the cessation of all suffering, afflicted mental states (*kleśa*), and causal processes (*karman*) that lead to rebirth and suffering in cyclic existence, as well as to the state in which all such rebirth and suffering has permanently ceased.

More specifically, three main types of nirvāṇa are identified. The first type of nirvāṇa, called nirvāṇa with remainder (*sopadhīśeṣanirvāṇa*), is when an arhat or buddha has attained awakening but is still dependent on the conditioned aggregates until their lifespan is exhausted. At the end of life, given that there are no more causes for rebirth, these aggregates cease and no new aggregates arise. What occurs then is called nirvāṇa without remainder (*anupadhīśeṣanirvāṇa*), which refers to the unconditioned element (*dhātu*) of nirvāṇa in which there is no remainder of the aggregates. The Mahāyāna teachings distinguish the final nirvāṇa of buddhas from that of arhats, the latter of which is not considered ultimate. The buddhas attain what is called

nonabiding nirvāṇa (*apraṭiṣṭhitanirvāṇa*), which transcends the extremes of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, i.e., existence and peace. This is the nirvāṇa that is the goal of the Mahāyāna path.

g.21    preta

*yi dags*

ཡི་དགས།

*preta*

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

One of the five or six classes of sentient beings, into which beings are born as the karmic fruition of past miserliness. As the term in Sanskrit means “the departed,” they are analogous to the ancestral spirits of Vedic tradition, the *pitṛs*, who starve without the offerings of descendants. It is also commonly translated as “hungry ghost” or “starving spirit,” as in the Chinese 餓鬼 *e gui*.

The pretas live in the realm of Yama, the Lord of Death, where they are particularly known to suffer from great hunger and thirst and the inability to acquire sustenance.

g.22    Prince Jeta’s Grove

*rgyal bu rgyal byed kyī tshal*

རྒྱལ་བུ་རྒྱལ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཚལ།

*jetavana*

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

A park in Śrāvastī, the capital of the ancient kingdom of Kośala in northern India. It was owned by Prince Jeta, and the wealthy merchant Anāthapiṇḍada, wishing to offer it to the Buddha, bought it from him by covering the entire property with gold coins. It was to become the place where the monks could be housed during the monsoon season, thus creating the first Buddhist monastery. It is therefore the setting for many of the Buddha's discourses.

g.23    saṃsāra

*'khor ba*

འཁོར་བ།

*saṃsāra*

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

A state of involuntary existence conditioned by afflicted mental states and the imprint of past actions, characterized by suffering in a cycle of life, death, and rebirth. On its reversal, the contrasting state of nirvāṇa is attained, free from suffering and the processes of rebirth.

g.24 Sucandra

*zla ba bzang po*

ལྷ་བ་བཟང་པོ།

*sucandra*

The name of King Bimbisāra's minister in this story.

g.25 three lower realms

*ngan song gsum*

དན་སོང་གསུམ།

*tryapāya · tridurgati*

A collective name for the three lower realms in which migratory beings can be reborn: the hell, preta, and animal realms.

g.26 Yama

*gshin rje*

གཤིན་རྗེ།

*yama*

The lord of death who, in Indian mythology, judges the dead and rules over the hell and preta realms.