

བྱམས་པའི་སྡོན་ལམ།

# The Aspiration of Maitreya

*[no Sanskrit title]*

འཕགས་པ་བྱམས་པའི་སྨོན་ལམ།

'phags pa byams pa'i smon lam

The Noble Aspiration of Maitreya

· Toh 1096 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 101 (gzungs 'dus, waM), folios 266.a–267.a

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## Summary

- s.1 *The Aspiration of Maitreya* is an aspiration prayer excerpted from *The Question of Maitreya* (*Maitreyapariṣcchā*). It has enjoyed immense popularity in the Tibetan tradition, where it ranks, perhaps, second only to Samantabhadra's *Prayer of Good Conduct* from the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra*. As the Buddha tells Ānanda in *The Question of Maitreya*, this aspiration prayer was recited by Maitreya six times per day while training on the bodhisattva path. The aspiration touches on many classic Great Vehicle themes such as the seven-limbed practice, the six perfections, the realization of emptiness, and the benefit of beings.

## 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. The translation was produced by Karen Liljenberg with Ulrich Pagel acting as consultant, as part of the 84000 translation of *The Question of Maitreya* (Toh 85). Lowell Cook compared the versions of it as a standalone text and wrote the introduction, which was edited by George FitzHerbert. Ibby Caputo copyedited the text. Sameer Dhingra was in charge of the digital publication process.

## Introduction

- i.1 *The Aspiration of Maitreya* is an aspiration prayer in twenty-four metered stanzas excerpted from the sūtra *The Question of Maitreya* in the Ratnakūṭa collection.<sup>1</sup> As the Buddha tells Ānanda in the sūtra, this was the aspiration prayer that Maitreya recited three times per day and three times per night while training on the bodhisattva path. The aspiration reflects many classic Great Vehicle themes such as the seven-limbed practice, the six perfections, the realization of emptiness, and the benefit of beings.

- i.2 *The Aspiration of Maitreya* was excerpted from *The Question of Maitreya* presumably due to its popularity, particularly in the Tibetan tradition, where it ranks, perhaps, second only to Samantabhadra's *Prayer of Good Conduct* (*bzang spyod smon lam*, Toh 1095 from the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra*, The Stem Array Toh 44-45). The aspiration is recited daily in many monasteries. The prayer is also popular in the Mongolian Buddhist tradition due to the centrality of the Geluk tradition there, in which Maitreya and Tuṣita Heaven occupy positions of great importance. *The Aspiration of Maitreya* is included as one of the “six aspiration prayers,” a collection of prayers frequently recited in the Geluk tradition on behalf of the recently deceased.<sup>2</sup>
- i.3 *The Aspiration of Maitreya* appears as an independent text in the Dhāraṇī section of the Degé Kangyur (Toh 1096)<sup>3 4</sup> and in the Dedication and Aspirations section of the Degé Tengyur (Toh 4378). In the Tengyur, it appears under the slightly more elaborated title *The Sovereign Aspiration of Maitreya* (*byams pa'i smon lam gyi rgyal po*), underscoring its status as a “king” among aspiration prayers.
- i.4 No Indian commentaries on the aspiration prayer are known. It was recognized as an important feature of the sūtra *The Question of Maitreya* at least as far back as the early translation period, as evidenced by the description of the sūtra in the Phangthangma catalog as “the longer *Noble [Sūtra] of the Question of Maitreya* containing the aspiration.” (*'phags pa byams pas zhus pa chen po smon lam can*).<sup>5</sup> The prayer would later be the subject of several commentaries in the Tibetan literature, notably those by Shākya Chokden (*shA kya mchog ldan*, 1428–1507); Drukpa Padma Karpo (*'brug pa pad ma dkar po*, 1527–92); Tāranātha (*tA ra nA tha*, 1575–1634), who adds comments on the significance of the whole sūtra; Choné Trakpa Shedrup (*co ne grags pa bshad sgrub*, 1675–1748); Ngulchu Dharmabhadra (*ngul chu dhar ma bha dra*, 1772–1851); and Kyedor Khenpo Ngawang Khedrup (*kye rdor mkhan po ngag dbang mkhas grub*, 1779–1838).

- i.5 Although Sanskrit fragments exist for some sections of the sūtra, these do not include Maitreya's aspiration. *The Question of Maitreya* appears in Chinese translation (Taishō 310-41), but the aspiration prayer itself does not seem to have been preserved as an independent work as in the Tibetan tradition. The present translation, which has been excerpted from the translation of *The Question of Maitreya*, was prepared based on the witnesses in the Degé Kangyur and Tengyur which were compared against variant readings listed in the Comparative Edition Kangyur.

## **The Translation**

### **The Noble Aspiration of Maitreya**

- 1.1 Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas.<sup>6</sup>
- 1.2 Homage to all the buddhas!  
Homage to the bodhisattvas,  
Those sages with the divine eye,  
And to the śrāvakas, too.
- 1.3 Homage to the mind of awakening,  
Which reverses all negative rebirths,  
Shows the path to higher rebirths,  
And leads beings to the state free from aging and death.
- 1.4 Whatever negative actions I have done  
Under the influence of mind,  
Here in the presence of the buddhas  
I confess them.

- 1.5      Whatever accumulation of merit  
I have produced through the three kinds of actions,<sup>7</sup>  
May it be the seed of my omniscience  
And inexhaustible awakening.
- 1.6      Whatever offerings to the buddhas  
Arise in all realms throughout the ten directions,  
The buddhas know and rejoice in them,  
And at that, I too rejoice.
- 1.7      I confess all negative actions.  
I rejoice in all meritorious acts.  
I pay homage to all the buddhas.  
May I attain supreme wisdom!
- 1.8      I exhort the bodhisattvas  
Of all ten directions,  
Who abide on the ten levels,  
To attain supreme awakening.
- 1.9      May they become truly awakened buddhas,  
Overcoming negative influences of every kind,  
And then, to benefit living beings,  
May they turn the wheel of the Dharma.
- 1.10     Through the sound of the great Dharma drum,  
May they bring the suffering of sentient beings to an end.  
For unimaginable millions of eons,  
May they teach the Dharma and continue to remain in this world.

- 1.11 I beg you, best of all humans,  
Look upon those who are trapped in the swamp of desire,  
And tightly bound by the ropes of craving,  
Fettered in every kind of bond.
- 1.12 Buddhas, do not belittle  
Those whose minds are defiled,  
But with loving intent toward all beings,  
Save them from the sea of existence.
- 1.13 May I train in the footsteps  
Of the perfect buddhas—those present now,  
Those of the past, and those of the future—  
And may I engage in the conduct of the bodhisattvas.
- 1.14 May I complete the six perfections  
And liberate beings of the six realms.  
May I realize the six supernormal powers  
And reach supreme awakening.
- 1.15 Unproduced and nonarising,  
Without self-nature or location,  
Neither mental cognition, nor substance—  
May I realize the teaching of emptiness.
- 1.16 Just like the Buddha, the great sage,  
May I realize the teaching of non-self:  
The sentient being does not exist, nor does the living being,  
Nor does the individual, nor the person.<sup>8</sup>

- 1.17     May I not dwell on there being anything substantial,  
          A belief in a self, or what I take to be mine.  
          Instead, to make all beings happy,  
          May I give everything away without miserliness.
- 1.18     Since material objects do not really exist,  
          May my wealth be spontaneously accomplished.  
          Since all material objects decay,  
          May I complete the perfection of generosity.
- 1.19     Possessing conduct that is flawless,  
          Conduct that is perfect,  
          And conduct that is without arrogance,  
          May I complete the perfection of discipline.
- 1.20     Like the elements of earth, water, fire,  
          And wind, not dwelling on anything,<sup>9</sup>  
          With patience and free of anger,  
          May I complete the perfection of patience.
- 1.21     Through assiduous application of diligence,  
          May I have constant enthusiasm without laziness,  
          And with strength of body and mind,  
          May I complete the perfection of diligence.
- 1.22     Through the illusory absorption,  
          The absorption of the heroic gait,  
          And the vajra-like absorption,  
          May I complete the perfection of concentration.

- 1.23     Actualizing the three gates to liberation,  
The sameness of the three times,  
And the threefold knowledge,<sup>10</sup>  
May I complete the perfection of insight.
- 1.24     May I be praised by all the buddhas,  
And blaze with light and splendor;  
Through the diligence of a bodhisattva,  
May my aspirations be fulfilled.
- 1.25     Thus, engaging in such conduct,  
May I, who am known as Maitreya,  
Complete the six perfections  
And dwell on the ten levels.
- 1.26     Ānanda,<sup>11</sup> this is the skillful means through which the bodhisattva mahāsattva  
Maitreya—by adhering to it, through the easy vehicle, the easy avenue, and the  
easy path—perfectly accomplished unsurpassed and perfect awakening.
- 1.27     This concludes “The Noble Sovereign Aspiration of Maitreya,” excerpted from  
the Great Vehicle Sūtra “The Exposition of Maitreya’s Question” in the Heap of  
Jewels.<sup>12</sup>

## Notes

1. See: 1.67–1.90 of *The Question of Maitreya* (Toh 85, *Maitreyapariṣcchā*).
2. Majer, Zsuzsa 2017, pp. 73–74.
3. This text, Toh 1096, and all those contained in this same volume (*gzungs 'dus, waM*), are listed as being located in volume 101 of the Degé Kangyur by the Buddhist Digital Resource Center (BDRC). However, several other Kangyur databases—including the eKangyur that supplies the digital input version displayed by the 84000 Reading Room—list this work as being located in volume 102. This discrepancy is partly due to the fact that the two volumes of the *gzungs 'dus* section are an added supplement not mentioned in the original catalog, and also hinges on the fact that the compilers of the Tōhoku catalog placed another text—which forms a whole, very large volume—the *Vimalaprabhānāmakālacakra tantraṭīkā* (*dus 'khor 'grel bshad dri med 'od*, Toh 845), before the volume 100 of the Degé Kangyur, numbering it as vol. 100, although it is almost certainly intended to come right at the end of the Degé Kangyur texts as volume 102; indeed its final fifth chapter is often carried over and wrapped in the same volume as the Kangyur *dkar chags* (catalog). Please note this discrepancy when using the eKangyur viewer in this translation.
4. [note 8394160a...]
5. Phangthangma 2003, 5-10, Herrmann-Pfandt 2008, p.37, no.65. The standalone prayer is also listed as a separate text in both extant imperial catalogs, the Phangthangma and the Denkarma. See Herrmann-Pfandt 2008, p. 269, no. 469.
6. This first line of homage is found only in Toh 4378, not in Toh 1096.
7. *las rnam pa gsum*, “the three [kinds of] actions,” is interpreted by Dharmabhadra and Ngawang Khedrup to mean meritorious actions of body, speech, and mind. Padma Karpo interprets it to mean meritorious actions causing rebirth as a human, meritorious actions causing rebirth as a god, and “nontransferring” actions (*mi g.yo ba'i las*) causing rebirth in the two higher realms (of form and no-form).
8. “Person” here is a translation of *gso ba*.
9. The commentaries differ considerably in their interpretations of these two lines, with Padma Karpo emphasizing simply the inanimate nature of the four elements, and most of the others detailing particular qualities of patience for which each of the four is a simile. Despite the syntax, most agree that “not dwelling” (*mi gnas pa*) refers principally to the wind element. The translation here is an attempt to remain open to more than one interpretation.
10. According to Tāranātha’s commentary, the threefold knowledge (*rig pa gsum*) comprises (1) knowledge of the whole of the past (*sngon gyi mtha' rig pa*), (2) knowledge of the whole of the future (*phyi ma'i mtha' rig pa*), and (3) knowledge of the exhaustion of defilements (*zag zad rig pa*). The other commentaries take the three kinds of knowledge to be (1) knowledge of the minds, (2) mental events, and (3) their causes, of all sentient beings in the past, present, and future.
11. This narrative ending, also excerpted from *The Question of Maitreya* (Toh 85), is found only in Toh 4378, not in Toh 1096.

12. The conclusion here is translated from Toh 4378. Toh 1096 ends with the simpler formulation, “*This concludes ‘The Noble Aspiration of Maitreya.’*”

## Glossary

**null**

*ngan 'gro*

ངན་འགྲོ།

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

**null**

*byang chub*

བྱང་ཆུབ།

Awakening refers to the state of realization and understanding possessed by a buddha regarding the nature of things.

**null**

*srid pa*

སྤེན་པ།

Denotes the whole of existence, i.e., the five forms of life or the three planes of existence—all the possible kinds and places of karmic rebirth. It is also the tenth of the twelve links of dependent origination (often translated as “becoming”).

**null**

*sa*

ས།

Literally the “grounds” in which qualities grow. Here it refers specifically to levels of awakening, especially the ten levels of the awakened bodhisattvas.

**null**

*byang chub sems*

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས།

Use standard.

**null**

*byang chub sems dpa'*

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔལ།

Use standard.

**null**

*byang chub sems dpa' sems dpa' chen po*

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔལ་སེམས་དཔལ་ཆེན་པོ།

Use standard.

**null**

*brtson 'grus*

བརྩོན་འགྲུས།

The fourth of the six perfections. A state of mind characterized by joyful persistence when engaging in any virtuous behavior of body, speech, or mind.

**null**

*bsam gtan*

བསམ་གཏན།

Use standard.

**null**

*bsod nams*

བསོད་ནམས།

In Buddhism more generally, merit refers to the wholesome karmic potential accumulated by someone as a result of positive and altruistic thoughts, words, and actions, which will ripen in the current or future lifetimes as the experience of happiness and well-being. According to the Mahāyāna, it is important to dedicate the merit of one's wholesome actions to the awakening of oneself and to the ultimate and temporary benefit of all sentient beings. Doing so ensures that others also experience the results of the positive actions generated and that the merit is not wasted by ripening in temporary happiness for oneself alone.

**null**

*sangs rgyas*

སངས་རྒྱས།

A fully realized (“awakened”) being.

**null**

*byams pa*

བྱམས་པ།

Use standard.

**null**

*bzod pa*

བཟོད་པ།

Use standard.

**null**

*chos kyi 'khor lo*

ཆོས་ཀྱི་འཁོར་ལོ།

When a buddha gives their first teaching they set in motion the wheel of the Dharma, just as how a monarch with exceptional merit sets in motion a magical wheel that easily subdues all their enemies.

**null**

*dga' ldan*

དགའ་ལྷན།

Use standard definition.

**null**

*tshul khrims*

ཚུལ་ཁྲིམས།

Use standard.

**null**

*lha'i mig*

ལྷ་མིག།

Clairvoyance, i.e., the ability to see all forms whether they are near or far, subtle or gross; also the ability to see the births and deaths of sentient beings. This is the first of the six (or sometimes five) superknowledges (ṣaḍabhijñā).

**null**

*dkon brtsegs*

དགོན་བརྩེགས།

The Ratnakūṭa section of the Kangyur (Toh 45–93) is a distinct collection of forty-nine selected sūtras on a range of themes. It is also found in the Chinese Tripiṭaka (Taishō 310). In some titles and colophons the collection is presented as a single sūtra with its component texts as chapters.

**null**

*dpa' bar 'gro ba'i ting nge 'dzin*

དཔའ་བར་འགྲོ་བའི་ཉིང་རེ་འཛིན།

An advanced bodhisattva samādhi. see The Sūtra on the Samādhi of Valiant Progress (Śūraṅgamasamādhisūtra, Toh 132).

**null**

*drang srong*

བར་སྟོང་།

Use standard.

**null**

*sbyin pa*

སྤྱན་པ།

The first of the six or ten perfections, often explained as the essential starting point and training for the practice of the other perfections.

**null**

*stong pa*

སྟོང་པ།

Use standard.

**null**

*lung bstan pa*

ལུང་བསྟན་པ།

A clear analysis or detailed presentation. Also translated as “prophecy.”

**null**

*theg pa chen po*

ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོ།

Use standard.

**null**

*mtho ris*

*'gro drug*

མཐོ་རིས།

འཕྲོ་བྱུག

The states of devas, asuras, and humans.

**null**

*shes rab*

ཤེས་རབ།

As the sixth of the six perfections, prajñā refers to the profound understanding of the emptiness of all phenomena, the realization of ultimate reality. In other contexts it refers to the ability to correctly discern the qualities of a given object, such as its characteristics or whether it should be taken up or rejected.

**null**

*ye shes*

ཡེ་ཤེས།

Although the Sanskrit term jñāna can refer to knowledge in a general sense, it is often used in Buddhist texts to refer to the mode of wisdom of a realized being. In contrast to ordinary knowledge, which mistakenly perceives phenomena as real entities having real properties, wisdom perceives the emptiness of phenomena, that is, their lack of intrinsic essence.

**null**

*kun dga' bo*

ཀུན་དགའ་བོ།

Use standard.

**null**

*kun mkhyen*

ཀུན་མཁྱེན།

The all-knowing state of complete buddhahood that is the goal of the path of the Great Vehicle.

**null**

*mngon shes drug*

མངོན་ཤེས་དྲུག།

These comprise divine sight, divine hearing, knowledge of the minds of others, remembrance of past lives, the ability to perform miracles, and the ability to destroy all mental defilements.

**null**

*sgyu ma lta bu'i ting nge 'dzin*

སྐུ་མ་ལྷ་བུའི་ཏིང་ངེ་འཛིན།

An advanced bodhisattva samādhi. see The Illusory Absorption (Māyopama samādhi, Toh 130).

**null**

*nyan thos*

ཉན་ཐོས།

Use standard.

**null**

*pha rol phyin drug*

པ་རོལ་ཕྱིན་བྱུག

The six practices or qualities that a follower of the Great Vehicle perfects in order to transcend cyclic existence and reach the full awakening of a buddha. They are generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, concentration, and insight.

**null**

*rdo rje lta bu'i ting nge 'dzin*

རྡོ་རྗེ་ལྷ་བུའི་ཏིང་ངེ་འཛིན།

An advanced bodhisattva samādhi celebrated in many Mahāyāna sūtras.

**null**

*rnam par thar pa'i sgo gsum*

རྣམ་པར་ཐར་པའི་སློ་གསུམ།

These are (1) emptiness as a gateway to liberation, (2) signlessness as a gateway to liberation, and (3) wishlessness as a gateway to liberation. Among them, emptiness is characterized as the absence of inherent existence, signlessness as the absence of distinguishing marks, and aspirationlessness as the absence of hopes and fears.

**null**

*yan lag bdun pa*

ཡན་ལག་བདུན་པ།

The seven limbs are paying homage to the buddhas, presenting them with offerings, disclosing one's negative deeds, rejoicing in the positive deeds of all beings, requesting the Dharma, supplicating the awakened ones to remain with us, and dedicating all virtues to the benefit of sentient beings.

**null**

*thabs mkhas pa*

ཐབས་མཁས་པ།

Use standard.

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