ཤེར་ཕྱིན་ཡི་གེ་ཆུང་ངུ།

The Perfection of Wisdom in a Few Syllables

Svalpākṣaraprajñāpāramitā

འཕགས་པ་ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་ཕ་རོལ་ཏུ་ཕྱིན་པ་ཡི་གེ་ཉུང་ངུ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་མདོ་

’phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa yi ge nyung ngu zhes bya ba theg pa chen po’i mdo

The Noble Great Vehicle Sūtra “The Perfection of Wisdom in a Few Syllables”

Āryasvalpākṣaraprajñāpāramitānāmamahāyānasūtra

· Toh 22 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 34 (shes rab sna tshogs, ka), folios 146.a–147.b
For referencing Tibetan sources, please see our Scholar’s Edition

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Summary

s.1 *The Perfection of Wisdom in a Few Syllables* presents a dialogue on Vulture Peak Mountain between the Buddha and Avalokiteśvara, who requests that the Buddha teach the perfection of wisdom in a concise form. The Buddha enters a special meditative state called *liberating all beings*, emanating light that touches all beings and ensures their eventual awakening. He then shares teachings, a heart mantra, and a dhāraṇī, explaining that this condensed perfection of wisdom is the source of all buddhas and has immense benefits.

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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. Andreas Doctor produced the translation and wrote the introduction, with Wiesiek Mical providing some feedback on the Sanskrit. Nathaniel Rich edited the translation and the introduction, and Linda Griffin copyedited the text. Martina Cotter was in charge of the digital publication process.

Introduction

i.1 *The Perfection of Wisdom in a Few Syllables*, according to its Sanskrit colophon, was retrieved by the venerable Nāgārjuna from the realm of the nāgas. It presents a dialogue at Vulture Peak Mountain between the Buddha Śākyamuni and the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, who requests that the Buddha teach a condensed version of the perfection of wisdom that offers great spiritual benefits and purifies karmic obscurations. The Buddha enters a special meditative state called *liberating all beings* and emanates a light that touches all beings across all buddhafields, ensuring their eventual awakening.

i.2 The Buddha then imparts two mantras and explains that this teaching of the perfection of wisdom is the source from which all buddhas arise. He also prophesies that Avalokiteśvara will become a buddha named Samantaraśmisamudgata Śrīkūṭarāja ("King Glorious Summit Totally Enveloped by Light"). The Buddha declares that this perfection of wisdom is "the mother of bodhisattvas" that immediately averts evil and bestows awakening.

i.3 When asked why this teaching is called *perfection of wisdom*,[1] the Buddha explains that it provides an accessible path to awakening, especially for beings with little perseverance. The teaching concludes with Avalokiteśvara praising its benefits for all beings, particularly those with limited merit, followed by a universal rejoicing by everyone present.

i.4 *The Perfection of Wisdom in a Few Syllables* contains all the elements of a dhāraṇī sūtra. This alignment with the dhāraṇī genre is also reflected in the inclusion of the word *dhāraṇī* at the end of the colophon titles in some Sanskrit witnesses of the text. Being a Prajñāpāramitā sūtra of a rather specific kind, it is included in the Degé Kangyur in the Prajñāpāramitā Miscellaneous section (*sher phyin sna tshogs*, Toh 22). Being a tantric dhāraṇī text, it is also included in the Tantra section (*rgyud 'bum*, Toh 530).[2]

i.5 In the Sanskrit manuscripts, “Few Syllables” (Skt. *svalpākṣara*, Tib. *yi ge nyung ngu*) in the title is written as a separate word with a feminine ending (*svalpākṣarā*), placed in apposition to *prajñāpāramitā*. It is thus a *bahuvrīhi* compound that can be interpreted, alternatively, as a title within a title—*The Perfection of Wisdom: The Few Syllables*. This parallels the abbreviated titles of other Prajñāpāramitā sūtras that likewise identify the texts by their length. The Sanskrit titles also deify the perfection of wisdom as the “bhagavatī Prajñāpāramitā” who is additionally called Svalpākṣarā (*svalpākṣarā bhagavatī prajñāpāramitā*), thus allowing for an anthropomorphic interpretation of the title as “the bhagavatī Prajñāpāramitā [by the name of] Svalpākṣarā.”

i.6 This short title (or name) also alludes to the teaching in this text being condensed in three stages—first, the text itself is very short; second, the meaning is further condensed in the form of the dhāraṇī mantra, which is described in the Sanskrit text as *alpopāya* (“condensed means”); and third, it is condensed even further as the heart mantra (*hṛdaya*) *oṁ mune mune mahāmunaye svāhā*. Thus, this text presents an attractive alternative for those who are of “little perseverance” (*alpotsāha*) and who might be disinclined to study the longer versions of the Prajñāpāramitā scriptures.

i.7 We do not know who translated *The Perfection of Wisdom in a Few Syllables* into Tibetan, but the text is listed in the Denkarma and Phangthangma imperial Tibetan catalogs of translated works, indicating that some version of the text had been translated into Tibetan by the mid-ninth century.[3] Unfortunately, however, the received text does not include a colophon, so it is impossible to know with certainty who translated the version that is currently preserved in the Degé Kangyur.

i.8 *The Perfection of Wisdom in a Few Syllables* is extant in Sanskrit in several witnesses (for details, see Yuyama 1977). Editions of the Sanskrit have been published by Edward Conze (1956), P. L. Vaidya (1961),[4] and Akira Yuyama (1977). An English translation from the Sanskrit was published by Conze in

1955. The text also exists in Chinese translation, produced in 982 CE by the translator Devaśāntika 天息災 (Taishō 258).[5] English translations of the Chinese text have been published by Charles Willemen (1973) and Yuyama (1977).

i.9 Among the Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese texts, the Chinese seems to differ most significantly from the other two (based on comparison of the Tibetan and Sanskrit with the two English translations of the Chinese text). As for the Sanskrit and Tibetan texts, the differences vary from very minor to moderately significant. The text in the Sanskrit manuscripts is slightly more developed than in the Tibetan translation, especially in stock phrases and standard formulae, which are presented in a more expanded form.

i.10 Since no translation of the Tibetan text has been previously produced in English, we have decided to present here a translation that closely follows the Tibetan text. The two mantras have therefore also been transcribed as they are found in the Degé Kangyur, with only minor emendations. We have, however, listed in the annotations to our translation all the places where the Sanskrit differs from the Tibetan, and we also point out the differences between the Sanskrit editions of Conze and Yuyama. We have not been able to do the same for the Chinese translation, but the interested reader may consult the two translations of the Chinese text prepared by Willemen and Yuyama.

i.11 This translation was made from the Tibetan translation preserved in both the Prajñāpāramitā Miscellaneous section and the Tantra section of the Degé Kangyur, in consultation with the Comparative Edition of the Kangyur (*dpe bsdur ma*) and the Stok Palace Kangyur. We also, as mentioned above, consulted the Sanskrit editions of Conze and Yuyama.

The Translation

1.

The Noble Great Vehicle Sūtra

The Perfection of Wisdom in a Few Syllables

1.1 Homage to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas![6]

1.2 Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was dwelling at Rājagṛha on Vulture Peak Mountain, together with a great saṅgha of monks, consisting of twelve thousand five hundred monks, and also with many hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of bodhisattvas. He was surrounded and attended by hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of gods, including Śakra, Brahmā, and the lokapālas, as he was seated on the *śrīgarbha* lion throne.[7] [8]

1.3 Then the bodhisattva mahāsattva, the noble Avalokiteśvara, arose from his seat, arranged his upper robe over one shoulder, placed his right knee on the ground, and bowed with folded hands toward the Blessed One, smiling gently.

1.4 He addressed the Blessed One, saying, "Blessed One, please declare *The Perfection of Wisdom in a Few Syllables*, which has great merit. All the karmic obscurations of anyone who merely hears it will be purified, and they will be certain to progress toward awakening. Those who strive to accomplish mantras will accomplish the mantras without hindrances."

1.5 The Blessed One gave his approval to the bodhisattva mahāsattva, the noble Avalokiteśvara,[9] saying, "Son of good family, you have been striving for a long time to benefit all beings. Excellent! Excellent! Therefore, son of good family, listen well and keep this in mind! I will explain to you *The Perfection of Wisdom in a Few Syllables*, which has great merit. All the karmic obscurations of anyone who merely hears it will be purified, and they will be certain to progress to-

ward awakening. Those who strive to accomplish mantras will accomplish the mantras without hindrances.”

1.6 Then the bodhisattva mahāsattva, the noble Avalokiteśvara, said to the Blessed One, “Please[10] teach in order to benefit all beings!” [11]

1.7 Then, at that moment, the Blessed One entered the samādhi called *liberating all beings*.[12] Having entered that samādhi, many hundreds of thousands [13] of light rays emanated from the curl of hair between his eyebrows, and those light rays pervaded all buddhafields. All the beings who were touched by that light, even those in the hell realms, [14] became destined to reach unsurpassed and perfect awakening. All the buddhafields also trembled in six ways. A rain of divine sandalwood powder fell at the feet of the Thus-Gone One.

1.8 Then, at that moment, the Blessed One spoke the perfection of wisdom as follows: “Bodhisattvas[15] should cultivate a mind of equanimity, a mind of loving-kindness, [16] gratitude, [17] and a mind free from all negativity. They should also recite [18] this heart mantra of the perfection of wisdom:

1.9 Homage to the thus-gone, worthy, perfect buddha Śākyamuni![19]

1.10 *tadyathā | oṁ mune mune mahāmunaye svāhā |*[20]

1.11 “It was by discovering this perfection of wisdom that I attained unsurpassed and perfect awakening, and all the buddhas arise from this. Because you[21] have received this [22] from the great thus-gone one Śākyamuni, you have become foremost among bodhisattva mahāsattvas.[23] You shall become [24] a thus-gone, worthy, perfect buddha named Samantaraśmisamudgata Śrīkūṭarāja.[25] Thus you have been prophesied for awakening.

1.12 “Those who hear your name, remember it, recite it, extensively teach it to others, or write it in a book and make offerings to it[26] will all become thus-gone ones in the future. [27] [28]

1.13 *tadyathā | jaya jaya | padmābhe | ava me sara saraṇi | dhiri dhiri | dhiri dhiri | devatānupālane | buddha uttāraṇi pūraya bhagavati | sarvāśama śama sarva sattvānāṃ | sarva karmāvaraṇa viśodhaya | buddha adhiṣṭhānena svāhā ||*[29]

1.14 "Ultimately, this perfection of wisdom is what gives rise to all the buddhas.[30] It is the mother of bodhisattvas and immediately averts[31] evil. It bestows awakening. All the buddhas would not be able to fully describe its benefits even in hundreds of millions of eons. By reading this,[32] one will be initiated into all maṇḍalas.[33] All mantras will also be actualized."

1.15 Then, the bodhisattva mahāsattva, the noble Avalokiteśvara, said to the Blessed One, "Blessed One, why is this called *perfection of wisdom*?"[34]

1.16 The Blessed One replied, "Because it is an easy method.[35] Those beings who have little interest, when they retain,[36] read aloud, write, or cause others to write this perfection of wisdom,[37] all of them will easily[38] progress toward awakening. Therefore,[39] it is called *perfection of wisdom*."[40]

1.17 The bodhisattva mahāsattva, the noble Avalokiteśvara, then said to the Blessed One, "This Dharma teaching has truly been taught by the Blessed One to benefit all beings, and for the welfare, benefit, and happiness of beings with little merit.[41] Blessed One, it is wonderful! Well-Gone One, it is wonderful!"

1.18 Once the Blessed One had spoken, the bodhisattva mahāsattva, the noble Avalokiteśvara, the monks, the bodhisattvas, and the world with its gods, humans, asuras, and gandharvas rejoiced and praised what the Blessed One had said.[42]

1.19 *This concludes the noble Great Vehicle sūtra "The Perfection of Wisdom in a Few Syllables."*[43]

Notes

1. The wording of the question asked in the Sanskrit text is “Why is this perfection of wisdom called *The Few Syllables*?”

2. In the Toh 530 version of the text there is a slight discrepancy in the folio numbering between the 1737 *par phud* printings and the late (post *par phud*) printings of the Degé Kangyur. Although the discrepancy is irrelevant here, further details concerning this may be found in n.2 of the Toh 530 version of this text.

3. Denkarma, folio 295.a.7; see also Herrmann-Pfandt 2008, pp. 10–11, no. 16. Phangthangma 2003, p. 4.

4. An online version based on Vaidya’s edition is available here: “Svalpākṣarā Prajñāpāramitā,” Digital Sanskrit Buddhist Canon, input 2004.

5. *fo shuo sheng fo mu xiao zi bo re bo luo mi duo jing* 佛說聖佛母小字般若波羅蜜多經 (Taishō 258).

6. In Yuyama’s Sanskrit edition we have “Homage to the Bhagavatī, the noble Prajñāpāramitā!”

7. Conze’s Sanskrit edition omits the words “hundreds,” “Śakra,” and “Brahmā” and reduces the description of the lion throne to just *śrī* (“glorious”): “He was surrounded and attended by thousands of millions of billions of gods including the lokapālas, as he was seated on the glorious lion throne.” Yuyama’s edition fully supports the Tibetan translation, though there the description of the throne reads *śrīratnagarbha*, a reading that is supported by one of his manuscripts. The Tibetan reads simply *dpal gyi snying po* (Skt. *śrīgarbha*), but the meaning is the same, referring to the fact that the throne was made of or ornamented by *śrīgarbha* gems.

8. Yuyama’s Sanskrit edition includes at this point an extra paragraph: “He was teaching the pure conduct that is good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end; one that is meaningful, clearly manifest, simple, complete, completely pure, and highly accomplished.”

9. The Sanskrit editions of Conze and Yuyama include among the epithets of Avalokiteśvara “very compassionate” (*mahākaruṇika*).

10. The Sanskrit editions of Conze and Yuyama say, “Because of that, please…,” alluding to the reasons listed in the previous paragraph.

11. Conze’s Sanskrit edition says, “…in order to benefit all beings, and for the sake of their prosperity and happiness.” Yuyama: “may the well-gone one (*sugata*) teach for the sake of the prosperity and happiness of all beings.”

12. The name of the samādhi in Conze’s edition is “liberating from all suffering.” Yuyama’s edition supports the Tibetan.

13. The editions of both Conze and Yuyama read, “hundreds of thousands of millions of billions.”

14. In Yuyama’s edition this part is expanded to “all of them, even those in the hell realms, experienced happiness.”

15. Yuyama’s edition reads, “A bodhisattva mahāsattva...”

16. Conze's edition says, "loving-kindness toward all beings." In Yuyama's edition the adverbial phrase "toward all beings" is distributed among all the qualities that a bodhisattva mahāsattva should cultivate, namely equanimity, loving-kindness, etc.

17. In the editions of both Conze and Yuyama, the cultivation of gratitude is particularized into "feeling grateful" and "expressing gratitude."

18. The Sanskrit *ā√grah* suggests not just reciting but also holding on to it and internalizing it.

19. This homage is preceded in the editions of both Conze and Yuyama with "Homage to the Three Jewels!"

20. English translation: "*Oṁ*, to the sage, to the sage, to the great sage, *svāhā*!" The sage (*muni*) addressed in this mantra is the great sage of the Śākyas, i.e., Śākyamuni. This mantra also appears elsewhere in the Kangyur, such as in Toh 29, Toh 485, and Toh 533.

21. Conze's edition here seems to have been edited incorrectly, because it uses the first-person pronoun *mayā* instead of the expected second person *tvayā* (in the passive construction, hence the instrumental case), which is reflected in the Tibetan translation. The first-person pronoun seems impossible in this context, as it would contradict the narrative that the Buddha himself is the speaker of these words of prophecy.

22. Yuyama's edition reads, "this perfection of wisdom."

23. In Yuyama's edition, the phrase "foremost among bodhisattvas" is part of the prophecy: "Because you have received this perfection of wisdom…I make this prophecy about your [attainment of] buddhahood as the foremost one among all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. You, O brahmin youth, will become in the future…" and so forth.

24. In the editions of both Conze and Yuyama, this phrase is expanded to "You, O brahmin youth, shall become in the future…"

25. Tibetan: *'od zer kun nas 'phags pa dpal brtsegs rgyal po*. After the name Samantaraśmisamudgata Śrīkūṭarāja, Conze's edition includes a further string of epithets: "the well-gone one (*sugata*) who understands the world (*lokavid*), the supreme guide of people who need to be tamed, the instructor (*śāstṛ*) of both gods and humans, and a blessed buddha." Yuyama's, in addition to the same, includes also "endowed with knowledge and conduct" (*vidyācaraṇasampanna*). In the Sanskrit witnesses the name is given as Samantaraśmyudgataśrīkūṭarāja.

26. Conze's edition says, "write it in a book, keep it at home, and make offerings to it."

27. Conze's edition omits "in the future" but adds instead "by few means, through hearing few [words]."

28. In Yuyama's edition this paragraph reads, "Also (*ca*) [the others] who (*ye*) hear this so-named [Prajñāpāramitā sūtra], memorize it, read it aloud, write it down, commission it to be written down, contemplate it, study it, explain it in detail to others, keep it at home and read it aloud having written it down in the form of a book, they will all become buddhas in the future."

29. The extant Sanskrit version and other versions of this dhāraṇī preserved in other texts allow for a tentative reconstruction of the Sanskrit text and a coherent translation. Without going into detail, one of the possible ways that the dhāraṇī could be reconstructed is as follows: *tadyathā | oṁ jaya jaya padmābhe | ava me ava me sarasaraṇi | dhiri dhiri dhiri dhiri | devatānupālani yuddha uttāraṇi pūraya*

pūraya bhagavati sarvāśāṃ mama ca sarvasattvānāṃ ca | sarvakarmāvaraṇāni viśodhaya buddhādhiṣṭhānena svāhā ||. There is also a slightly longer version of this dhāraṇī that includes the phrase *paracakranivāriṇi* after *yuddha uttāraṇi*. The English translation would be as follows: "It is as follows: *Oṁ*, be victorious, be victorious, O lotus-hued one! Protect me, protect me, O one who moves here and there! Be firm, be firm, be firm, be firm! O protectress from [hostile] deities, one who safeguards through a battle! Fulfill, fulfill, O Bhagavatī, every wish of both myself and all beings! With the blessing of the Buddha, purify all karmic obscurations, *svāhā*!" The longer version would include "you who suppress enemy armies" after "you who safeguard through a battle."

30. Conze's edition says, "This particular [dhāraṇī], O son of the noble family, is the perfection of wisdom of the absolute truth. She is the mother (*jananī*) of all the buddhas." Yuyama's edition omits "O son of the noble family."

31. Instead of "averts," the editions of Conze and Yuyama both have "removes" (√*hṛ*). After "removes evil" Yuyama's edition adds "[and] is the guide of bodhisattvas."

32. The editions of Conze and Yuyama say, "Through merely reading/reciting it…" (*paṭhitamātreṇa*), where "it" (feminine) refers to the dhāraṇī, possibly also to the entire dhāraṇī sūtra.

33. Conze's edition says, "into the maṇḍalas of all assemblies." Yuyama's edition supports the Tibetan.

34. In the editions of both Conze and Yuyama, the question that is asked here includes a reference to the "few syllables". It can be interpreted as either "Why does this perfection of wisdom consist of [only] a few syllables?" or "Why is this perfection of wisdom [called] *The Few Syllables*?"

35. In the editions of both Conze and Yuyama, the word "few" (*alpa*) is repeated in both the question and the reply. The Sanskrit reply is "Because [this perfection of wisdom in a few syllables] is a condensed means."

36. Conze's edition says, "Even beings with little perseverance will also be able to retain…" Yuyama supports the Tibetan.

37. The editions of both Conze and Yuyama here have "this perfection of wisdom in a few syllables."

38. Instead of "easily," Conze and Yuyama say "by that condensed (*alpa*) means."

39. The editions of Conze and Yuyama add here "O son of the noble family."

40. Conze's edition says, "Therefore, this is the perfection of wisdom condensed (*saṃkṣipta*) in a few syllables." The pronoun "this" is feminine. Yuyama's Sanskrit edition, which additionally includes "O son of the noble family," could be interpreted as "Therefore, O son of the noble family, this perfection of wisdom has been condensed."

41. Conze's edition omits the word "merit." Yuyama's supports the Tibetan.

42. In the editions of Conze and Yuyama, this paragraph reads, "So spoke the Blessed One. Elated, the bodhisattva mahāsattva noble Avalokiteśvara, the monks, and the bodhisattvas, this entire assembly along with the world with its gods, humans, asuras, and gandharvas rejoiced in the words of the Blessed One." Yuyama's edition additionally expands "and the bodhisattvas" to "and the bodhisattva-mahāsattvas."

43. Conze and Yuyama: “This concludes *The Perfection of Wisdom in a Few Syllables*.” In Yuyama’s edition this colophon is augmented by “retrieved from the *pātāla*s [i.e., the abode of the nāgas] by the venerable Nāgārjuna.”

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Glossary

asura

lha ma yin

ལྷ་མ་ཡིན།

asura

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).

Avalokiteśvara

spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug

སྤྱན་རས་གཟིགས་དབང་ཕྱུག

avalokiteśvara

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.

Blessed One

bcom ldan 'das

བཅོམ་ལྡན་འདས།

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 √*bhañj* ("to break").

Brahmā

tshangs pa

ཚངས་པ།

brahman

A high-ranking deity presiding over a divine world; 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 the Sahā World" (*sahāṃpati*) and Great Brahmā (*mahābrahman*).

gandharva

dri za

དྲི་ཟ།

gandharva

A class of generally benevolent nonhuman beings who inhabit the skies, sometimes said to inhabit fantastic cities in the clouds, and more specifically to dwell on the eastern slopes of Mount Meru, where they are ruled by the Great King Dhṛtarāṣṭra. They are most renowned as celestial musicians who serve the gods. In the Abhidharma, the term is also used to refer to the mental body assumed by sentient beings during the intermediate state between death and

rebirth. Gandharvas are said to live on fragrances (*gandha*) in the desire realm, hence the Tibetan translation *dri za*, meaning “scent eater.”

lokapālas

’jig rten skyong ba

འཇིག་རྟེན་སྐྱོང་བ།

lokapāla

Rājagṛha

rgyal po’i khab

རྒྱལ་པོའི་ཁབ།

rājagṛha

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.

Śakra

brgya byin

བརྒྱ་བྱིན།

śakra

The lord of the gods in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three (*trāyastriṃśa*). Alternatively known as Indra, the deity that is called “lord of the gods” dwells on the summit of Mount Sumeru and wields the thunderbolt. The Tibetan translation *brgya byin* (meaning “one hundred sacrifices”) is based on an etymology that *śakra* is an abbreviation of *śata-kratu*, one who has performed

a hundred sacrifices. Each world with a central Sumeru has a Śakra. Also known by other names such as Kauśika, Devendra, and Śacipati.

Śākyamuni

shAkya thub pa

ཤཱཀྱ་ཐུབ་པ།

śākyamuni

An epithet for the historical Buddha, Siddhārtha Gautama: he was a *muni* (“sage”) from the Śākya clan. He is counted as the fourth of the first four buddhas of the present Good Eon, the other three being Krakucchanda, Kanakamuni, and Kāśyapa. He will be followed by Maitreya, the next buddha in this eon.

Samantaraśmisamudgata Śrīkūṭarāja

’od zer kun nas ’phags pa dpal brtsegs rgyal po

འོད་ཟེར་ཀུན་ནས་འཕགས་པ་དཔལ་བརྩེགས་རྒྱལ་པོ།

samantaraśmisamudgataśrīkūṭarāja

According to the prophesy revealed by the Buddha Śākyamuni, Avalokiteśvara will in the future become a buddha known as Samantaraśmisamudgata Śrīkūṭarāja. The name means “King Glorious Summit Totally Enveloped by Light”.

Vulture Peak Mountain

bya rgod phung po’i ri

བྱ་རྒོད་ཕུང་པོའི་རི།

The Gṛdhrakūṭa, literally Vulture Peak, was a hill located in the kingdom of Magadha, in the vicinity of the ancient city of Rājagṛha (modern-day Rajgir, in the state of Bihar, India), where the Buddha bestowed many sūtras, especially the Great Vehicle teachings, such as the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras. It continues to be a sacred pilgrimage site for Buddhists to this day.

Well-Gone One

bde bar gshegs pa

བདེ་བར་གཤེགས་པ།

One of the standard epithets of the buddhas. A recurrent explanation offers three different meanings for *su-* that are meant to show the special qualities of "accomplishment of one's own purpose" (*svārthasampad*) for a complete buddha. Thus, the Sugata is "well" gone, as in the expression *su-rūpa* ("having a good form"); he is gone "in a way that he shall not come back," as in the expression *su-naṣṭa-jvara* ("a fever that has utterly gone"); and he has gone "without any remainder" as in the expression *su-pūrṇa-ghaṭa* ("a pot that is completely full"). According to Buddhaghoṣa, the term means that the way the Buddha went (Skt. *gata*) is good (Skt. *su*) and where he went (Skt. *gata*) is good (Skt. *su*).