ཆོས་གསུམ་པ།

The Three Qualities

Tridharmaka

ཆོས་གསུམ་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་མདོ།

chos gsum pa zhes bya ba’i mdo

The Sūtra “The Three Qualities”

Tridharmakanāmasūtra

· Toh 253 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 66 (mdo sde, za), folios 69.b–70.b

For referencing Tibetan sources, please see our Scholar’s Edition

First published 2026

Current version v 1.0.2

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Summary

s.1 At Prince Jeta's Grove in Śrāvastī, the Buddha teaches an assembly of monks about three worthy qualities (*dharmas*) that will ensure the monks maintain generosity, meritorious deeds, and ethical discipline. These three qualities are nonattachment, being without miserliness, and being conscientious. The foolish or immature, who do not have these three qualities and are attached, miserly, and careless, will not practice generosity or meritorious deeds and will fail in their commitment to ethical discipline. Those who have the three qualities will, after death, enjoy higher rebirths. Those who do not will fall into lower rebirths. The teaching is then reiterated at greater length in verse. The monks are reminded of their own aging and inevitable death, and encouraged with the thought that even a small act of generosity by a renunciant is worth more than vast offerings and donations made hypocritically, or by those who have exploited or oppressed others.

Acknowledgments

ac.1 This text was translated and introduced by Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Damcho and team. Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Damcho translated the text and Norbu Samphel reviewed the translation.

ac.2 The translation was completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha. George FitzHerbert edited the translation and the introduction, and Ibby Caputo copyedited the text. Martina Cotter was in charge of the digital publication process.

Introduction

i.1 This teaching takes place in Śrāvastī, where the Buddha addresses a large assembly of monks at Prince Jeta's Grove. Without the prompting of an interlocutor, the Buddha points out how the foolish have three qualities (*dharmas*) that are contrary to the sacred Dharma. These are attachment, miserliness, and carelessness. Those under the influence of such qualities do not practice generosity, do not engage in meritorious deeds, and lapse in their ethical discipline. Consequently, after death they will fall into lower rebirths. However, those who have the three worthy qualities of nonattachment, being without miserliness, and being conscientious, will successfully practice generosity, engage in meritorious deeds, and maintain the ethical discipline to which they have committed. As a result, after death they will be reborn in the higher realms.

i.2 The teaching is then reiterated at greater length in verse, emphasizing the disadvantages of miserliness in this and future lives. As an antidote to being attached to things, the Buddha exhorts the monks to be mindful of aging and death, and to strive to accumulate merit for future rebirth in the higher realms. He concludes with verses on the importance of practicing generosity in conjunction with ethical discipline, with the example that even vast donations, if they have been obtained by unethical means or given with hypocrisy, do not match the merit accrued by even a very small offering made with sincerity by a renunciant who lives in accordance with the Dharma.

i.3 Little is known about the early history of the sūtra as it is not extant in Sanskrit and was not translated into Chinese. It is preserved in Kangyurs of the Tshalpa line, as well as the Phukdrak and Mustang manuscript Kangyurs, but it is not found in Kangyurs of the Thempangma line.[1] According to the colophons of the Degé and Phukdrak Kangyur witnesses,[2] it was translated into Tibetan by the Indian preceptor Jinamitra along with chief editor-translator Bandé Devacandra, and edited and finalized by the translator Paltsek. This indicates a translation made under Tibetan imperial sponsorship in the late eighth or

early ninth century. However, the sūtra is not listed in either the Phangthangma or Denkarma imperial-era catalogs of translated texts, nor in Chomden Rikpai Raltri's survey of translated texts compiled in the late thirteenth century. It is, however, found listed among translated texts in Butön Rinchen Drup's catalog compiled in 1322.[3]

i.4 The Tibetan text of *The Three Qualities* is almost identical to the opening section of *The Exemplary Tale of Puṇyabala*,[4] which was also translated by Jinamitra and Bandé Devacandra and is categorized in the Denkarma catalog as a Hīnayāna sūtra (Tib. *theg pa chung ngu'i sde*).[5] Notably, the Chinese translation of *Puṇyabalāvadāna*[6] does not contain the section corresponding to the Tibetan text of *The Three Qualities*. It is said that King Ralpachen (r. 815–38) issued an edict in the early ninth century forbidding the translation of Hīnayāna scriptures, except those acknowledged by the Sarvāstivādins.[7] In light of this, one wonders if *The Three Qualities* may have been omitted from the imperial catalogs due to censorship, or possibly added to the *Puṇyabalāvadāna* to preserve the text. Alternatively, the Tibetan text of *The Three Qualities* could also have been extracted from the Tibetan translation of the *Puṇyabalāvadāna* at a later date and considered a separate text.

i.5 In many of the Tshalpa Kangyurs, including the Degé Kangyur, *The Three Qualities* is not located among other Hīnayāna sutras as one might expect (that is between Toh 287 and Toh 359 of the Degé Kangyur), but is included instead after a group of five sūtras in which the Buddha lays out teachings in sets of four.[8] Although there are several suttas in the Numerical Discourses (Aṅguttara Nikāya) of the Pali canon organized according to sets of three, no text directly parallel to *The Three Qualities* has been identified there, or in its counterpart that was translated into Chinese, the Ekottarikāgama.

i.6 This translation was prepared based on the Tibetan text as found in the Degé Kangyur, in consultation with the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*), the Phukdrak Kangyur,[9] and the Hemis Kangyur. We have also consulted Feer's

French translation [10] and the Tibetan and English translations of *The Exemplary Tale of Puṇyabala*.

The Translation

1.

The Sūtra “The Three Qualities”

1.1 Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas.

1.2 Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was staying at Prince Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍada’s park at Śrāvastī, together with a great saṅgha of monks, when the Blessed One addressed the monks: “Monks, when some foolish people here have three qualities that are contrary to the sacred Dharma, they do not practice generosity, they do not engage in meritorious deeds, and they do not maintain the ethical discipline to which they have committed.

1.3 “What are these three? They are attachment, miserliness, and carelessness.

1.4 “Monks, since some foolish people here have three qualities that are contrary to the sacred Dharma, they do not practice generosity, they do not engage in meritorious deeds, and they do not maintain the ethical discipline to which they have committed. As a result, when their bodies perish, after death, they will fall into lower migrations and be reborn as hell beings.

1.5 “Monks, worthy beings with three worthy qualities practice generosity, engage in meritorious deeds, and maintain the ethical discipline to which they have committed. What are these three? They are nonattachment, being without miserliness, and being conscientious.

1.6 “Monks, when worthy beings have these three worthy qualities, they practice generosity, they engage in meritorious deeds, and they maintain the ethical discipline to which they have committed. As a result, when their bodies perish, after death, they will be reborn in happy upper migrations, among the gods of the world.”

1.7 Thus spoke the Blessed One. Having spoken these words, the Well-Gone One, the Teacher, explained further:

1.8 “Since those who are miserly and careless
Do not practice generosity,
The wise, who wish to create merit,
Should practice generosity.

1.9 “The miserly are fearful
Of hunger and thirst.
Due to this fear, they do not give here and now—
Such are the fears of humans.

1.10 “Those under the influence of miserliness,
Who are fearful, and do not give what they have,
Will be cloaked in their folly[11]
In this world and the life beyond.

1.11 “Those who have abandoned miserliness
And practice timely generosity,
In spite of death, do not die.
They are like well-provisioned travelers.

1.12 “When those who have great difficulty giving
Give a little or a lot,
By giving that which is difficult to give,
They are doers of difficult deeds.[12]

1.13 “The unworthy do not comprehend this.
The worthy do not transgress the Dharma.
Therefore, when the worthy and unworthy[13]
Pass away from this world,

1.14 “The unworthy go to the hells,
And the worthy go to the higher realms.

1.15 “There is no protection from being ravaged by old age.[14]
As one’s lifespan grows shorter, the time when life will be taken approaches.
It is appropriate that when one sees this terror of death
One engages in the accumulation of merit and happiness.[15]

1.16 “Hundreds of thousands upon thousands of offerings and donations
Will not approach even a sixteenth part
Of even small acts of generosity made with joy,[16]
By those who have forsaken women and live by their commitment.[17]

1.17 “Why is it that vast and extensive offerings and donations
Do not lead to a path commensurate with those offerings and donations?
How is it that even great thousands of offerings and donations
Will not serve as even a sixteenth of a renunciant’s gift?

1.18 “Some foolish people kill and enslave;[18]
They steal the wealth of others and bring them to ruin.
Offering and donating those takings with tearful faces and punishments
Will not lead to a commensurate path.

1.19 “In that way, vast and extensive offerings and donations
Will not lead to a path commensurate with those offerings and donations.
And in that way, even thousands upon thousands of offerings and donations
Will not approach even a sixteenth of a renunciant’s gift.

1.20 “Those who are not hypocritical,
Who give[19] wealth that has been obtained in accordance with the Dharma,
Are those who give what is difficult to give.
They will go to the gods’ abodes by their own merit.”

1.21 After the Blessed One had spoken these words, the monks rejoiced and praised what had been spoken by the Blessed One.

1.22 *This concludes the sūtra "The Three Qualities."*

Colophon

c.1 Translated by the Indian preceptor Jinamitra and senior editor-translator Bandé Devacandra and edited and finalized by the translator Paltsek.

Notes

1. *Resources for Kanjur & Tanjur Studies*, catalog entry rKTs-K253. Accessed February 10, 2024.

2. There is no colophon for the Hemis Kangyur witness.

3. Butön, *chos ’byung*, pp. 934–35. Butön states that it was “translated by Devacandra and Paltsek.”

4. The Exemplary Tale of Puṇyabala (*Puṇyabalāvadāna*, Toh 347).

5. Yoshimura 1950, p. 142, Hermann-Pfandt 2008, pp.155–56. Phangthangma, p. 20–23. The Denkarma attributes the translation to Devancandra alone.

6. *Fo shuo fuli taizi yinyuan jing* 佛說福力太子因緣經, Taishō 173 (CBETA; SAT).

7. As described by Butön, *chos ’byung*, pp. 891–92. Mentioned by Halkias 2004 p. 51, n. 13.

8. These are The Accomplishments of the Sets of Four Qualities: The Bodhisattvas’ Prātimokṣa (*Bodhisattvaprātimokṣacatuṣkanirhāra*, Toh 248); The Sūtra Teaching the Four Factors (*Caturdharma-nirdeśasūtra*, Toh 249); The Sūtra on the Four Factors (*Caturdharmakasūtra*, Toh 250); The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra on the Four Factors (*Āryacaturdharmakanāmamahāyānasūtra*, Toh 251); and The Fourfold Accomplishment (*Catuṣkanirhāra*, Toh 252). In the Hemis Kangyur, *The Three Qualities* is preceded by a slightly different set of five sūtras on sets of four: *The Sūtra Teaching the Four Factors*; two versions of *The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra on the Four Factors*, *The Four Stanzas* (*Caturgāthā*); and *The Sūtra on the Four Truths* (*Catuḥsatyasūtra*). There it is followed by *The Sūtra on the Threefold Training* (*Śikṣātrayasūtra*). In the Phukdrak Kangyur, the sūtra is not grouped with other sūtras concerned with numerical lists.

9. There are two versions of the sūtra preserved in the Phukdrak Kangyur, in vol. 70 (mdo sde, tsa), folios 104.a–105.b, and vol. 96 (mdo sde, ngi), folios 69.a–70.b. We have consulted the version in vol. 70 for this translation.

10. Feer 1883.

11. Following Feer’s translation of *de yis byis pa bgos par ’gyur* as “Celui-la revêtira la folie” (1883, p. 193).

12. Following Degé: *dka’ ba’i las dag*. Hemis: *dga’ ba’i las dag* (“delightful deeds”). Feer also notes that in a play on words *dka’ ba’i las dag* could also refer to austerities or ascetic practices (1883, p. 194, n. 1).

13. Degé: *de phyir dam pa dam pa min*. Phukdrak: *de phyir dam pa dam pa yin* (“therefore the worthy ones are worthy”).

14. Degé: *rga bas*. Hemis: *dga’ bas* (“by pleasure”).

15. Degé: *bsod rnams bde sbyor dag ni bya ba’i rigs*. Phukdrak: *bsod rnams dben sbyor dag gis bya ba’i rigs* (“rightly practice by striving for merit and seclusion”).

16. Following Hemis: *dga’ bas sbyin pa*. Degé: *dka’ bas* (“with difficulty”). We have chosen the former reading because the version of this text found in Toh 347 also reads *dga’ bas sbyin pa* in the Degé.

17. Degé: *sbyor bas ’tsho ba*. Hemis: *bor bas ’tsho ba* (“live by renunciation”).

18. Degé: *'ching byed*. Yongle, Lithang, Kangxi, Narthang, Choné, Lhasa, and Hemis: *'chi bye*d ("cause death"). Phukdrak: *gcod bye*d ("sever life").

19. Degé: *gtong byed pa*. Phukdrak: *stong byed pa* ("empty out").

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Glossary

Anāthapiṇḍada's park

mgon med zas sbyin gyi kun dga' ra ba

མགོན་མེད་ཟས་སྦྱིན་གྱི་ཀུན་དགའ་ར་བ།

anāthapiṇḍadarāma

This was an important early site, located outside Śrāvastī, for the Buddha's growing community. Anāthapiṇḍada, a wealthy patron of the Buddha, purchased the park 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.

attachment

'dod chags

འདོད་ཆགས།

rāga

One of the six root afflictions (Skt. mūlakleśa), often listed as one of the three poisons (Skt. triviṣa) along with anger (Skt. dveṣa) and delusion (Skt. moha). In this text, attachment is one of the three unworthy qualities because it impedes generosity and thus destroys merit.

Bandé Devacandra

ban de de ba tsan dras

བན་དེ་དེ་བ་ཙན་དྲས།

An Indian paṇḍita who participated in translations during the reign of King Trisong Detsen (khri srong lde btsan, r. 742–98 ce). Together with Jinamitra and Jñānagarbha, he translated the *Mahāyāna mahāparanirvāṇa sūtra* from Sanskrit into Tibetan.

being conscientious

bag yod pa

བག་ཡོད་པ།

apramāda

One of the eleven virtuous mental factors (Skt. kuśala). Heedful attention to virtuous qualities.

blessed one

bcom ldan ’das

བཅོམ་ལྡན་འདས།

bhagavān

In Buddhist literature, an epithet applied to buddhas, most often to Śākyamuni. The Sanskrit term generally means “possessing fortune,” but in 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—reflects the commentarial tradition whereby 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”).

Butön Rinchen Drup

bus ston rin chen grub

བུས་སྟོན་རིན་ཆེན་གྲུབ།

A master of the Sakya school who lived 1290–1364. He was an influential scholar, historian, and compiler and cataloger of the canon. A key figure in the emergence of the Kangyur and Tengyur collections.

carelessness

bag med pa

བག་མེད་པ།

pramāda

One of the twenty secondary afflictions (Skt. upakleśa). Disregard for virtuous qualities. In this text, carelessness is one of the three unworthy qualities because it impedes generosity and thus destroys merit.

Chomden Rikpai Raltri

bcom ldan rig pa'i ral gri

བཅོམ་ལྡན་རིག་པའི་རལ་གྲི།

A Tibetan scholar of the early Kadam school who lived 1227–1305. He composed a history of Buddhism in India and Tibet in 1261 and compiled a catalog of Buddhist canonical texts in 1295.

ethical discipline

tshul khrims

ཚུལ་ཁྲིམས།

śīla

In a general sense, morally virtuous or disciplined conduct and the abandonment of morally undisciplined conduct of body, speech, and mind. Such discipline is the cause for rebirth in higher, more favorable states, but it is also foundational to Buddhist practice as one of the three trainings (triśikṣā) and one of the six perfections of a bodhisattva. The term can also refer to specific ethical precepts undertaken, such as the five precepts. Often rendered as "ethics," "discipline," and "morality."

generosity

sbyin pa

སྦྱིན་པ།

dāna

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

gods

lha

ལྷ།

deva

One of the five or six classes of sentient beings, dominated by exaltation, frivolousness, and pride. According to Buddhist cosmology, the gods live in many divine realms within the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm.

happy upper migrations

bde ’gro mtho ris

བདེ་འགྲོ་མཐོ་རིས།

svarga

The fortunate rebirth states of humans and gods (Skt. deva) that occur as a result of creating virtuous actions.

hell beings

sems can dmyal ba

སེམས་ཅན་དམྱལ་བ།

naraka

One of the six classes of sentient beings engendered by anger and powerful negative actions. Hell beings are dominated by great suffering and said to dwell in different hells with specific characteristics.

Jinamitra

dzi na mi tra

ཇི་ན་མི་ཏྲ།

Jinamitra

Jinamitra was invited to Tibet during the reign of King Trisong Detsen (khri srong lde btsan, r. 742–98 ce) and was involved with the translation of nearly two hundred texts, continuing into the reign of King Ralpachen (ral pa can, r. 815–38 ce). He was one of the small group of paṇḍitas responsible for the

Mahāvyutpatti Sanskrit-Tibetan dictionary. He is also the author of the *Nyāyabindupiṇḍārtha* (Toh 4233), which is contained in the Tengyur (*bstan ’gyur*).

lower migrations

ngan song ngan ’gro

ངན་སོང་ངན་འགྲོ།

apāya, durgati

The unfortunate rebirth states of hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals that occur as a result of creating nonvirtuous actions.

merit

bsod nams

བསོད་ནམས།

puṇya

Wholesome tendencies imprinted in the mind as a result of positive and skillful thoughts, words, and actions that ripen in the experience of happiness and well-being.

miserliness

ser sna

ཞེན་སྣ།

mātsarya

One of the twenty secondary afflictions (Skt. upakleśa). In this text, miserliness is one of the three unworthy qualities because it impedes generosity and thus destroys merit.

nonattachment

ma chags pa

མ་ཆགས་པ།

alobha

One of the eleven virtuous mental factors (Skt. kuśala). The opposite of craving or greed (Skt. lobha), which is synonymous with attachment (Skt. rāga).

offerings and donations

mchod sbyin

མཆོད་སྦྱིན།

yajur, yajña

Literally “offering and giving.” The *Yajur Veda* (Tib. *mchod sbyin gyi rig byed*) was one of the four Vedas of the Brahmans concerned with rites for making offerings to gods and giving donations to the less fortunate.

Paltsek

dpal brtsegs

དཔལ་བརྩེགས།

Paltsek (eighth to early ninth century), from the village of Kawa north of Lhasa, was one of Tibet’s preeminent translators of the early diffusion (snga dar). He was one of the first seven Tibetans to be ordained by Śāntarakṣita and is counted among Guru Rinpoche’s twenty-five close disciples. In a famous verse by Ngok Lotsawa Loden Sherab, Kawa Paltsek is named along with Chokro Lui Gyaltsen and Zhang (or Nanam) Yeshé Dé as part of a group of translators whose skills were surpassed only by Vairotsana.He translated works from a wide variety of genres, including sūtra, śāstra, vinaya, and tantra, and was an author himself. Paltsek was also one of the most important editors of the early period, one of nine translators installed by King Trisong Detsen (khri srong lde btsan, r. 742–98 ce) to supervise the translation of the Tripiṭaka and help catalog translated works for two of the three imperial catalogs, the Denkarma (*ldan kar ma*) and the Samye Chimpuma (*bsam yas mchims phu ma*). In the colophons of his works, he is often known as Paltsek Rakṣita (rak+Shi ta).

Prince Jeta’s Grove

rgyal bu rgyal byed kyi tshal

རྒྱལ་བུ་རྒྱལ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཚལ།

jetavana

A grove that was bought by the Buddha's wealthy follower and supporter Anāthapiṇḍada from a prince named Jeta and donated to the Buddha and his saṅgha (the story of the purchase and the events leading up to it are told in the Cullavagga of the Pali Vinaya).

Śrāvastī

mnyan yod

སྣན་ཡོད།

śrāvastī

The capital of the ancient Indian kingdom of Kośala and the setting for many sūtras, as the Buddha spent most rainy seasons outside the city. It has been identified with the present-day Sāhet Māhet in Uttar Pradesh on the banks of the river Rapti.

Well-Gone One

bde bar gshegs pa

བདེ་བར་གཤེགས་པ།

sugata

One of the standard epithets of the Buddha Śākyamuni. 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).