

ཤེར་བྱེད་དོ་ཇི་རྒྱལ་མཆོན།

The Vajraketu Perfection of Wisdom

Vajraketuprajñāpāramitā

འཕགས་པ་ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་པ་རོལ་ཏུ་ཕྱིན་པ་དོན་རྒྱལ་མཆོན་གྱི་མདོ་ཐེག་

པ་ཆེན་སྟེ།

'phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa rdo rje rgyal mtshan gyi mdo
theg pa chen po

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra “The Vajraketu Perfection of
Wisdom”

Āryaprajñānapāramitavajraketumahāyānasūtra

· Toh 30 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 34 (shes rab sna tshogs, ka), folios 178.b–179.a



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Summary

- s.1 *The Vajraketu Perfection of Wisdom* is the fifth in a group of five Prajñāpāramitā scriptures named for their bodhisattva interlocutors. In Rājagṛha, the bodhisattva Vajraketu asks the Buddha which qualities one should possess to arrive at the perfection of wisdom. The Buddha provides an explanation of these four qualities before presenting an additional four qualities that also serve as the cause for the arising of wisdom. Lastly, the Buddha provides instructions on how bodhisattvas should train in and meditate on the perfection of wisdom. The sūtra concludes with Vajraketu and the gathering rejoicing in the Buddha's teaching.

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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. Lowell Cook produced the translation and wrote the introduction. 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 Vajraketu Perfection of Wisdom* is the last in the group of five Prajñāpāramitā texts (Toh 26–30) named for the bodhisattvas who are their interlocutors. In each of these five texts, the Buddha imparts instructions to bodhisattvas on how to train in the perfection of wisdom. *The Vajraketu Perfection of Wisdom* is set in Rājagṛha, presumably at Vulture Peak, the site of many of the Buddha's teachings on the Perfection of Wisdom.

- i.2 In this sūtra, *Vajraketu* asks the Buddha what qualities lead to the perfection of wisdom. The Buddha relates two sets of four qualities. The first set is realization of emptiness, of suffering and impermanence, and of the true nature of all things (*dharmatā*), and practicing nonconceptual meditation. The second set is to attend to a Dharma teacher, to receive teachings from them, to practice and reflect on these teachings, and to teach them to others in turn. The Buddha then further elaborates on the need to train in the perfection of wisdom through understanding the unborn nature of phenomena as lacking intrinsic existence and being beyond dualistic ideas. The sūtra comes to a close with the Buddha uttering a stanza on the wisdom of realizing emptiness, and those gathered rejoicing in the teaching.
- i.3 There is little that can be said about the provenance of *The Vajraketu Perfection of Wisdom* with any certainty. There is no surviving Sanskrit witness, and it does not appear that the sūtra was ever translated into Chinese or included in the Chinese canon. The Tibetan translation is bereft of a colophon that would otherwise inform us when and how it was transmitted to Tibet. Furthermore, it is not found in either of the Tibetan imperial period catalogs. Though there appear to be few, if any, references to or citations of the sūtra throughout the commentarial literature of Tibet, it does appear in *The Flow of the River Ganges: A Record of Transmissions Received* (*dam pa'i chos kyi gsan yig gang+gA'i chu rgyun*) of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Losang Gyatso (ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, 1617–82). There, he describes the lineage of transmission through which this and the other “bodhisattva Prajñāpāramitā” texts came down to him, beginning with Jñānaśrī of Kashmir.¹ This would therefore suggest that the present work was introduced to Tibet no later than the eleventh century CE.

- i.4 *The Vajraketu Perfection of Wisdom* was translated into English along with the other short Prajñāpāramitā sūtras by Edward Conze, who assumes that it dates from the “Tantric period,” that is, after 750 CE.² This is difficult to establish, however, given the lack of a Sanskrit witness. A contemporary translation into Chinese has been published by the Kumarajiva Project.³ The present translation is based on the version of the Tibetan translation found in the Degé Kangyur, with reference to the variants recorded in the Comparative Edition (Tib. *dpe bsdur ma*) and to the version found in the Stok Palace Kangyur.

The Translation

1.

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra

The Vajraketu Perfection of Wisdom

- 1.1 Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas.
- 1.2 Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was staying in Rājagṛha with his entire assembly. At that time, the bodhisattva Vajraketu was present in the gathering. He rose from his seat and asked the Blessed One, “Blessed One, which qualities should one possess to arrive at the perfection of wisdom?”
- 1.3 The Blessed One responded, “Vajraketu, there are four qualities one should possess.⁴ What are the four? They are as follows: to directly perceive all phenomena as being empty, to know that all conditioned things are impermanent and of the nature of suffering, to be connected with the true nature of things that is beyond all conceptual elaborations, and to practice meditation without conceptualizing or apprehending anything.

- 1.4 “There are an additional four qualities that, when one possesses them, act as the cause for the arising of wisdom. What are the four? The first is to rely on a person who is a Dharma teacher and preceptor. The second is to listen to sublime Dharma teachings from them. The third is to engage with and reflect on the meaning of their teachings. The fourth is to be intent on teaching them correctly to others. These are the causes for the arising of wisdom.
- 1.5 “Son of good family, bodhisattvas should understand that all phenomena are, by nature, intrinsically pure and therefore empty; selfless; essentially nonexistent; signless; neither bound nor free; and neither light nor darkness. That being so, bodhisattvas should train in the perfection of wisdom. They should train in the perfection of wisdom according to the principle that all phenomena as unborn and groundless.”
- 1.6 The Blessed One then said:
- 1.7 “Meditate on nonexistence as the essential nature. Be intent on the causes for the dawning of wisdom. Train in the meaning of wisdom That is free from all signs.”
- 1.8 When the Blessed One had spoken, the bodhisattva Vajraketu and the rest, along with the entire world with its devas, humans, asuras, and gandharvas, rejoiced and praised what the Blessed One had taught.
- 1.9 This concludes the noble sūtra “The Vajraketu Perfection of Wisdom.”

Notes

1. Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Losang Gyatso 1970–71, folios 155.a–155.b.
2. Conze 1973, p. iv.
3. 聖般若波羅蜜多金剛幢大乘經 (*Āryaprajñāpāramitāvajraketumahāyānasūtra*, Toh 30), *The Kumarajiva Project*.
4. Reading the absence of *'dug pa de* in Lhasa, Narthang, and Stok.

Glossary

null

lha ma yin

ལྷ་མ་ཡིན།

null

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).

null

bcom ldan 'das

བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས།

null

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”).

null

chos nyid

ཆོས་ཉིད།

null

The real nature, true quality, or condition of things. Throughout Buddhist discourse this term is used in two distinct ways. In one, it designates the relative nature that is either the essential characteristic of a specific phenomenon, such as the heat of fire and the moisture of water, or the defining feature of a specific term or category. The other very important and widespread way it is used is to designate the ultimate nature of all phenomena, which cannot be conveyed in conceptual, dualistic terms and is often synonymous with emptiness or the absence of intrinsic existence.

null

'dus byas

འདུས་བྱས།

null

All phenomena produced by causes and conditions.

null

lha

ལྷ།

null

In the most general sense the devas—the term is cognate with the English *divine*—are 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 the Buddha 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.

null

dri za

དྷི་ཟ།

null

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.”

null

mkhan po

མཁན་པོ།

null

A person's particular preceptor within the monastic tradition. They must have at least ten years of standing in the saṅgha, and their role is to confer ordination, to tend to the student, and to provide all the necessary requisites, therefore guiding that person for the taking of full vows and the maintenance of conduct and practice. This office was decreed by the Buddha so that aspirants would not have to receive ordination from the Buddha in person, and the Buddha identified two types: those who grant entry into the renunciate order and those who grant full ordination. The Tibetan translation *mkhan po* has also come to mean “a learned scholar,” the equivalent of a paṇḍita, but that is not the intended meaning in Indic Buddhist literature.

null

shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa

ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་ཕ་རོལ་ཏུ་ཕྱིན་པ།

null

The sixth of the six perfections, it refers to the profound understanding of the emptiness of all phenomena, the realization of ultimate reality. It is often personified as a female deity, worshiped as the “Mother of All Buddhas” (sarva jīnamātā).

null

rdo rje rgyal mtshan

རྡོ་རྗེ་རྒྱལ་མཚན།

null

The bodhisattva interlocutor after whom The Vajraketu Perfection of Wisdom is named. His name literally means Vajra Banner.

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