བྱམས་པའི་སྨོན་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 4378 ·

Degé Tengyur, vol. 207 (sna tshogs, nyo), folios 303.b–304.b

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

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Summary

s.1 *The Aspiration of Maitreya* is an aspiration prayer excerpted from *The Question of Maitreya* (*Maitreyaparipṛcchā*). 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.[1] 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.[2]

i.3 *The Aspiration of Maitreya* appears as an independent text in the Dhāraṇī section of the Degé Kangyur (Toh 1096)[3] 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*).[4] 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 (*dngul 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.[5]

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,[6]
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.[7]

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,[8]
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,[9]
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,[10] 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.*[11]

Notes

1. See: 1.67–1.90 of *The Question of Maitreya* (Toh 85, *Maitreyaparipṛcchā*).

2. Majer, Zsuzsa 2017, pp. 73–74.

3. Note that there is a discrepancy among various databases for cataloging the Toh 1096 version of this text within vol. 101 or 102 of the Degé Kangyur. See Toh 1096, n.3, for details.

4. 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.

5. This first line of homage is found only in Toh 4378, not in Toh 1096.

6. *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).

7. "Person" here is a translation of *gso ba*.

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. This narrative ending, also excerpted from *The Question of Maitreya* (Toh 85), is found only in Toh 4378, not in Toh 1096.

11. The conclusion here is translated from Toh 4378. Toh 1096 ends with the simpler formulation, "*This concludes 'The Noble Aspiration of Maitreya.'* "

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Glossary

Ānanda

kun dga’ bo

ཀུན་དགའ་བོ།

ānanda

Use standard.

awakening

byang chub

བྱང་ཆུབ།

bodhi

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

bodhisattva

byang chub sems dpa’

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའ།

bodhisattva

Use standard.

bodhisattva mahāsattva

byang chub sems dpa’ sems dpa’ chen po

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའ་སེམས་དཔའ་ཆེན་པོ།

bodhisattvamahāsattva

Use standard.

buddha

sangs rgyas

སངས་རྒྱས།

buddha

A fully realized (“awakened”) being.

concentration

bsam gtan

བསམ་གཏན།

dhyāna

Use standard.

diligence

brtson ’grus

བརྩོན་འགྲུས།

vīrya

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.

discipline

tshul khrims

ཚུལ་ཁྲིམས།

śīla

Use standard.

divine eye

lha’i mig

ལྷའི་མིག

divyacakṣus

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).

emptiness

stong pa

སྟོང་པ།

śūnyatā

Use standard.

existence

srid pa

སྲིད་པ།

bhava

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”).

exposition

lung bstan pa

ལུང་བསྟན་པ།

vyākaraṇa

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

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.

Great Vehicle

theg pa chen po

ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོ།

mahāyāna

Use standard.

Heap of Jewels

dkon brtsegs

དཀོན་བརྩེགས།

ratnakūṭa

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.

higher rebirths

mtho ris, 'gro drug

མཐོ་རིས།, འགྲོ་དྲུག

svarga, ṣaḍgati

The states of devas, asuras, and humans.

insight

shes rab

ཤེས་རབ།

prajñā

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.

level

sa

ས།

bhūmi

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

Maitreya

byams pa

བྱམས་པ།

maitreya

Use standard.

merit

bsod nams

བསོད་ནམས།

puṇya

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.

mind of awakening

byang chub sems

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས།

bodhicitta

Use standard.

negative rebirths

ngan ’gro

ངན་འགྲོ།

apāya, durgati

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

omniscience

kun mkhyen

ཀུན་མཁྱེན།

sarvajña

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

patience

bzod pa

བཟོད་པ།

kṣānti

Use standard.

sage

drang srong

དྲང་སྲོང་།

ṛṣi

Use standard.

seven-limbed practice

yan lag bdun pa

ཡན་ལག་བདུན་པ།

saptāṅga

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.

six perfections

pha rol phyin drug

ཕ་རོལ་ཕྱིན་དྲུག

ṣaṭpāramitā

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.

six supernormal powers

mngon shes drug

མངོན་ཤེས་དྲུག

ṣaḍabhijñā

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.

skillful means

thabs mkhas pa

ཐབས་མཁས་པ།

upāyakauśalya

Use standard.

śrāvaka

nyan thos

ཉན་ཐོས།

śrāvaka

Use standard.

the absorption of the heroic gait

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

དཔའ་བར་འགྲོ་བའི་ཏིང་ངེ་འཛིན།

Śūraṃgamasamādhi

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

the illusory absorption

sgyu ma lta bu'i ting nge 'dzin

སྒྱུ་མ་ལྟ་བུའི་ཏིང་ངེ་འཛིན།

māyopamasamādhi

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

the vajra-like absorption

rdo rje lta bu'i ting nge 'dzin

རྡོ་རྗེ་ལྟ་བུའི་ཏིང་ངེ་འཛིན།

vajropamasamādhi

An advanced bodhisattva samādhi celebrated in many Mahāyāna sūtras.

three gates to liberation

rnam par thar pa'i sgo gsum

རྣམ་པར་ཐར་པའི་སྒོ་གསུམ།

trivimokṣadvāra

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.

Tuṣita Heaven

dga’ ldan

དགའ་ལྡན།

tuṣita

Use standard definition.

wheel of the Dharma

chos kyi ’khor lo

ཆོས་ཀྱི་འཁོར་ལོ།

dharmacakra

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.

wisdom

ye shes

ཡེ་ཤེས།

jñāna

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.