ཤེས་རབ་སྒྲུབ་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་གཟུངས།

# The Dhāraṇī “Generating Insight” (1)

*Prajñāvardhanīnāmadhāraṇī*

· Toh 650 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 91 (rgyud ’bum, ba), folio 136.b

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

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## Summary

s.1 This text is a brief dhāraṇī accompanied by ritual instructions. It focuses on memory enhancement, promising that those who follow its prescribed procedures for one month will retain everything they hear.

## Acknowledgments

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. Ana Cristina Lopes produced the translation and wrote the introduction. Rory Lindsay edited the translation and the introduction, and Dawn Collins copyedited the text. Martina Cotter was in charge of the digital publication process.

# Introduction

i.1 This text presents a single dhāraṇī to enable the retention of what has been heard.[1] Of the four types of dhāraṇīs described by the fourth-century scholar-yogi Asaṅga,[2] this text falls into the category of Dharma dhāraṇīs, which enable one to retain knowledge of Dharma teachings. The text opens with a dhāraṇī—or a *vidyāmantra*, in its words—in transliterated Sanskrit, containing a salutation to the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva of compassion. This is followed by ritual instructions, which consist of the recitation of this dhāraṇī twenty-one times over warm water each morning for one month. The text promises that this ritual procedure will hasten the development of insight by means of the enhancement of memory.

## History and Translation

i.2 This text is not known to be extant in Sanskrit, and as with most dhāraṇīs, nothing is known about the context of its production, use, or popularity in ancient India. Given the extensive numbers of sūtras and secondary literary compositions within the Indian Buddhist sphere, one can easily imagine that a dhāraṇī enabling a person to memorize large quantities of text would have broad popular appeal. Whether or not attestations of success accompanied such texts, the promise of such results could easily account for the propagation of the text (and its variations, see below) outside the Indian subcontinent into Tibet, China, and surrounding regions, although no translations into Chinese or other Tibet-peripheral languages have been identified.

i.3 The text lacks a translator's homage or setting but includes a Sanskrit title and a colophon crediting the translation to Jñānagarbha and Bandé Lü Wangpo, and its revision and finalization to Vidyākarasiṃha and Bandé Devacandra. Despite the attribution of its translation to experts who were active during the imperial period, the text is not listed in either the Denkarma or Phangthangma imperial catalogs.

i.4 There are two other texts in the Kangyur with the same name and found in the same sections of the Degé Kangyur, though their content differs somewhat—while all three texts present a short dhāraṇī along with brief instructions for its use, all for the purpose of enhancing one's ability to retain teachings, they differ in their dhāraṇīs and instructions. Toh 718 (= Toh 1037) embeds its dhāraṇī in a proper setting and introduction typical of sūtra works, along with a narrative of its origin. Toh 719 (= Toh 1038), like the present work, lacks a narrative context, and its dhāraṇī takes the form of a different invocation of Avalokiteśvara. Herrmann-Pfandt (2002) has discussed the relationship of these three texts across various recensions of the Kangyur.[3]

i.5 This English translation was produced primarily based on the Degé[4] recensions—one in the Tantra section (Toh 650) and another in the Dhāraṇī section (Toh 1039)—while referring to variant readings from the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*) and the Stok Palace Kangyur.

# The Translation

1.

## The Dhāraṇī “Generating Insight”

1.1 *namo ratnatrayāya | nama ārya avalokiteśvarāya | bodhisattvāya | mahāsattvāya | mahākāruṇikāya | tadyathā | oṃ viva viva | prajñā vardhani | jara jara | medhā vardhani | dhiri dhiri | buddhi vardhani svāhā | |*

1.2 The ritual procedure for this vidyāmantra is as follows: Each morning, recite this twenty-one times over a handful of warm water. Drinking this for one month, one will retain what was heard.

1.3 *This concludes the dhāraṇī “Generating Insight.”*

# Colophon

c.1 This was translated by the Indian preceptor Jñānagarbha and the chief translator Bandé Lü Wangpo. It was revised and finalized by the Indian preceptor Vidyākarasiṃha and the editor-translator Bandé Devacandra.

# Notes

**1.** See Braarvig 1985 for a classic article exploring the connection between dhāraṇī (which Braarvig emphasizes in its sense of "memory") and pratibhāna ("eloquence") as rhetorical principles in Mahāyāna works.

**2.** Asaṅga. *byang chub sems dpa'i sa* (*Bodhisattvabhūmi*). A discussion of various classifications of *dhāraṇī*s is given in Pagel 2007.

**3.** We can also consider these three texts as part of a broader group of closely related works in the Degé Kangyur comprising short rituals to enhance one's ability to retain texts and teachings. Toh 711–716 and Toh 792 (= Toh 1034, 1042–1047) make for a set of brief ritual texts with largely the same structure and all aimed at memorizing large numbers of verses (from one hundred to three thousand) in a short amount of time. All these works bear some relation to the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. Toh 650–651 and Toh 717–720 (= Toh 1037–1041, 1048) make for another similar group of ritual works for retaining what has been learned or memorized.

**4.** Note that there is a discrepancy among various databases for cataloging the Toh 1039 version of this text within vol. 101 or 102 of the Degé Kangyur. See Toh 1039, n.4, for details.

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# Glossary

**Bandé Devacandra**

*ban+de de ba tsan+d+ra*

An Indian “mahāpaṇḍita” (*mkhas pa chen po*) who worked on translations in Tibet during the imperial era (ca. 800).

**Bandé Lü Wangpo**

*ban+de klu’i dbang po*

Name of an imperial-era translator in the eighth century ce, who was a minister of king Tri Songdetsen (khri srong lde’u btsan, ca. 742–796). He is also listed as one of the “seven tested men” (*sad mi mi bdun*), the first group of Tibetan men who were ordained under the Indian paṇḍita Śāntarakṣita.

**dhāraṇī**

*gzungs*

གཟུངས།

*dhāraṇī*

From the Sanskrit verb *dhṛ* (“to hold”), the term refers to the ability to hold or retain the Buddha’s teachings in the memory. It also denotes the specific mnemonic formulas or aids to doing so, which distill the teachings into shorter utterances. From there the term also carries a strong sense that such formulas or devices, when spoken or rehearsed in the mind, have extraordinary power to effect change in the world and in oneself.

**Jñānagarbha**

*dz+nyA na gar+b+ha*

རྗྙཱ་ན་གརྦྷ།

*jñānagarbha*

Name of an Indian preceptor (*mkhan po*) who lived in the mid-eighth century (ca. 700–70) and worked as a translator in Tibet. According to Hodge (2003, p.

24), he was the teacher of Śāntarakṣita (710–79). He is a different person from the Jñānagarbha who lived in the tenth century and was the teacher of Smṛtijñānakīrti (950–1025), and who was known to adhere to Yogācāra-Madhyamaka philosophical positions.

**Vidyākarasiṃha**

*bid+yA ka ra sing ha*

བིདྱ་ཀ་ར་སིང་ཧ།

*vidyākarasiṃha*

An Indian abbot (*mkhan po*) who worked on translations in Tibet during the imperial era (ca. 800).

**vidyāmantra**

*rig sngags*

རིག་སྔགས།

*vidyāmantra*

A spell-like verbal formula that invokes specific deities in order to bring about mundane and transmundane goals in ritual practices. A *vidyāmantra* is considered at once the incantation and the deity it invokes.