ཐོས་པ་འཛིན་པའི་གཟུངས།

The Dhāraṇī for Retaining Learning (1)

· Toh 651 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 91 (rgyud ’bum, ba), folios 136.b–137.a

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

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Contents

s.	**Summary**	**6**
ac.	**Acknowledgments**	**6**
i.	**Introduction**	**7**
tr.	**The Translation**	**9**
n.	**Notes**	**10**
b.	**Bibliography**	**11**
g.	**Glossary**	**12**

Summary

s.1 *The Dhāraṇī for Retaining Learning (1)* presents a short dhāraṇī formula that allows its practitioner to retain everything they hear by incanting sweet flag and consuming it.

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. Lowell Cook 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 *The Dhāraṇī for Retaining Learning (1)* is one of two distinct texts in the Degé Kangyur, the other being Toh 720/1041, that both share the same title. It is also nearly identical to a different work in the Kangyur called *The Dhāraṇī of Non-Forgetfulness* (*mi brjed pa'i gzungs*, Toh 717/1048), except that there the sweet flag incanted with the mantra is white rather than black, and the number of repetitions of the mantra is not specified.[1] The present text appears twice in the Degé Kangyur, once in the Action tantras section (Toh 651) and once in the Compendium of Dhāraṇīs section (Toh 1040). This short dhāraṇī consists of three parts—the first part contains two homages, the second the dhāraṇī itself, and the third a ritual instruction for employing the dhāraṇī.

i.2 The phrase "to retain learning" (*śrutadhara*, *thos pa 'dzin pa*) is a common expression found throughout Buddhist literature.[2] The word *śruta*, translated here as "learning," literally means "that which is heard," underscoring how the traditional mode of knowledge production in India was, and continues to be, orally transmitted from teacher to student.

i.3 It is in this context that the present text aims to augment one's ability to retain knowledge received aurally through the use of a dhāraṇī. The word *dhāraṇī* comes from the root √*dhṛ* meaning "to hold" and refers both to the capacity to memorize and recall detailed teachings as well as to incantations or mnemonic formulas that distill and "hold" the essential points of the Dharma. To employ the dhāraṇī for these means, the text instructs the practitioner to use it to incant sweet flag (*Acorus calamus*), a psychoactive grass native to India commonly used in Ayurvedic medicine and rites for memory and intelligence. The text specifies that it should be "black sweet," a subvariety of sweet flag that we were unable to identify.

i.4 As is the case for other short dhāraṇīs, it is likely this dhāraṇī did not circulate as a freestanding text in its own right. Rather, it may have been initially trans-

mitted in dhāraṇī compendiums before its inclusion in Tibetan canonical collections such as the Kangyur, at which time its title and conclusion would have been appended to it, giving it its current form as an independent text.

i.5 We are unaware of any extant Sanskrit witness to this text, nor does it appear to have been translated into Chinese. Given that the Tibetan translation is bereft of a colophon and is not included in any of the extant imperial catalogs, it is difficult to say with any certainty when, by whom, and under what circumstances this text was transmitted to Tibet and translated.

i.6 This translation was prepared based on the witness in the Degé Kangyur,[3] with reference to variant readings as found in the Comparative Edition and the Stok Palace Kangyur.

The Translation

1.

The Dhāraṇī for Retaining Learning

1.1 Homage to the Three Jewels. Homage to the bodhisattva great being noble Avalokiteśvara.

1.2 *tadyathā | smṛti mati mati tejovidyā huru me huru huru me kṛṣṇa huru me svāhā ||*

1.3 If one incants black sweet flag with this mantra one hundred and eight times and consumes it, one will, without a doubt, retain learning.

1.4 *This concludes "The Dhāraṇi for Retaining Learning."*

Notes

1. We can consider these two 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.

2. The term *śruta* also appears in the first of the three wisdoms (*trividhā prajñā*), namely, the wisdom arising from hearing (*śrutamayī prajñā*).

3. Note that there is a discrepancy among various databases for cataloging the Toh 1040 version of this text within vol. 101 or 102 of the Degé Kangyur. See Toh 1040, n.3, for details.

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Glossary

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.

bodhisattva great being

byang chub sems dpa’ sems dpa’ chen po

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའ་སེམས་དཔའ་ཆེན་པོ།

bodhisattva mahāsattva

The term can be understood to mean “great courageous one” or "great hero,” or (from the Sanskrit) simply “great being,” and is almost always found as an epithet of “bodhisattva.” The qualification “great” in this term, according to the majority of canonical definitions, focuses on the generic greatness common to all bodhisattvas, i.e., the greatness implicit in the bodhisattva vow itself in terms of outlook, aspiration, number of beings to be benefited, potential or eventual accomplishments, and so forth. In this sense the *mahā-* is closer in its connotations to the *mahā-* in “Mahāyāna” than to the mahā- in “mahāsiddha.” While individual bodhisattvas described as *mahāsattva* may in many cases also be “great” in terms of their level of realization, this is largely coincidental, and in the canonical texts the epithet is not restricted to bodhisattvas at any particular point in their career. Indeed, in a few cases even bodhisattvas whose path has taken a wrong direction are still described as *bodhisattva mahāsattva*. Later commentarial writings do nevertheless define the term—variably—in terms of bodhisattvas having attained a particular level (*bhūmi*) or realization. The most common qualifying criteria mentioned are attaining the path of

seeing, attaining irreversibility (according to its various definitions), or attaining the seventh bhūmi.

Three Jewels

dkon mchog gsum

དཀོན་མཆོག་གསུམ།

triratna

The Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha—the three objects of Buddhist refuge. In the Tibetan rendering, “the three rare and supreme ones.”