ཐོས་པ་འཛིན་པའི་གཟུངས།

The Dhāraṇī for Retaining Learning (2)

· Toh 720 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 93 (rgyud ’bum, tsa), folio 180.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 text presents a single dhāraṇī to enable the retention of learning.

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. Paul G. Hackett 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 learning (literally, "what has been heard") with no additional explanation. Of the four types of dhāraṇīs described by the fourth-century scholar-yogi Asaṅga,[1] this text falls into the category of Dharma dhāraṇīs, which enable one to retain knowledge of words—Dharma teachings—that have been heard. Following a salutation to the Buddha Śākyamuni, the dhāraṇī is presented immediately without introduction.

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. Nonetheless, given the extensive nature of Buddhist teachings, one can easily imagine that a dhāraṇī enabling a person to remember extensive oral teachings 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 outside of the Indian subcontinent into Tibet, China, and surrounding regions, although no translations into Chinese or other Tibet-peripheral languages have been identified.

i.3 There is no colophon to this text to indicate when or by whom the translation was made, nor are there any linguistic indicators to its era of production or any listing for the text in the imperial era catalog, the Denkarma.[2] Therefore, its provenance must remain undetermined.

i.4 In its Tibetan translation, this text is found in two different locations in several recensions of the Kangyur.[3] One version (Toh 720) is found in the Action Tantra (*kriyātantra*; *bya ba'i rgyud*) section of the canon, specifically in the sectional classification offered by the Tibetan editors of the canon, as associated with the "Lotus" tantric family (*pad+ma'i rigs*).[4] The second version (Toh 1041) is found in the Compendium of Dhāraṇīs section. All versions of the text are almost

identical, having only minor differences between them and between their appearance in the various recensions of the Kangyur.

i.5 Another text in the Kangyur, Toh 651/1040, bears the same title as this text. This is a different work, but with a few similarities, including its structure and its goal of enabling one to retain what has been heard.[5]

i.6 This translation was produced based on the Degé[6] recension while cross-referencing variant readings found in other recensions as noted in the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*), as well as the Stok Palace recension. The dhāraṇī itself was edited to reflect normative Sanskrit spellings in reference to similar mantras found in other tantric texts, most notably, *The Sovereign Ritual of Amoghapāśa* (*Amoghapāśakalparāja*, Toh 686). No previous translation of this text into a language outside the Tibetan sphere of influence is known.

The Translation

1.

The Dhāraṇī for Retaining Learning

1.1 I pay homage to the tathāgata, the arhat, the perfectly complete Buddha Śākyamuni.

1.2 *tadyathā | matibāhulye | tathāgatājñānadarśane | prajñāptagambhīre | bodhimaṇḍānusariṇi | avidhātmo 'ndhakāravidhamani | jvala jvala | prajñādīpe | medhāvardhani*[7] *| sarvādhiṣṭhite | suru suru | dhuru dhuru | medhā ānaya | svāha |*[8]

1.3 As for the ritual, if one recites this every morning, it will be easy to learn things. If one places brāhmī medicine in one's cupped hands and recites this until smoke rises up, then after eating, one will retain learning.

1.4 *This completes "The Dhāraṇī for Retaining Learning."*

Notes

1. Asaṅga, *byang chub sems dpa'i sa* (*Bodhisattvabhūmi*). A discussion of various classifications of dhāraṇīs is given in Pagel 2007.

2. Denkarma (*pho brang stod thang ldan dkar gyi chos kyi 'gyur ro cog gi dkar chag*). Toh 4364, Degé Tengyur vol. 206 (sna tshogs, jo), folios 294.b–310.a.

3. It is worth noting that the text is duplicated in the Degé, Peking (Q 231 and Q 666), and Urga (U 720 and U 1043) Kangyurs, but is contained only once in the other major recensions, such as Narthang (N 773).

4. Herrmann-Pfandt (2002, pp. 125–31) has speculated on the significance of these subcategories, to which the interested reader is referred.

5. 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.

6. Note that there is a discrepancy among various databases for cataloging the Toh 1041 version of this text within vol. 101 or 102 of the Degé Kangyur. See Toh 1041, n.6, for details.

7. Degé reads **medhāvadini* (*me dhā pa/ba di ni*), which would seem to be a corruption of a common Sanskrit expression. Stok reads *pa di na*.

8. Tentative translation: "O you of abundant intelligence! O one who points out the wisdom of the tathāgatas! O you whose insight is expansive and profound! O follower of the essence of awakening! Help, O great being, dispeller of darkness! Burn! Burn! O lamp of insight! Increaser of intelligence! Ruling over all! Suru suru! Dhuru Dhuru! Bring forth intelligence! May auspiciousness abound!"

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thos pa 'dzin pa'i gzungs. Toh 651, Degé Kangyur vol. 91 (rgyud 'bum, ba), folios 136.b–137.a.

Asaṅga. *rnal 'byor spyod pa'i sa las byang chub sems dpa'i sa* (*Yogācārabhūmaubodhisattvabhūmi*). Toh 4037, Degé Kangyur vol. 129 (mdo 'grel, wi), folios 1.a–213.b.

Denkarma (*pho brang stod thang ldan dkar gyi chos kyi 'gyur ro cog gi dkar chag*). Toh 4364, Degé Tengyur vol. 206 (sna tshogs, jo), folios 294.b–310.a.

84000. *The Sovereign Ritual of Amoghapāśa* (*Amoghapāśakalparāja*, *'phags pa don yod pa'i zhags pa'i cho ga zhib mo'i rgyal po*, Toh 686). Translated by The Dharmachakra Translation Committee. Online publication. 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, 2025.

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Glossary

arhat

dgra bcom pa

དགྲ་བཅོམ་པ།

arhat

According to Buddhist tradition, one who is worthy of worship (*pūjām arhati*), or one who has conquered the enemies, the mental afflictions (*kleśa-ari-hata-vat*), and reached liberation from the cycle of rebirth and suffering. It is the fourth and highest of the four fruits attainable by śrāvakas. Also used as an epithet of the Buddha.

brāhmī

bram hi

བྲམ་ཧི།

brāhmī

Bacopa monnieri, known in English as water hyssop, thyme-leafed gratiola, and Indian pennywort, has long been used in Āyurvedic medicine to improve memory.

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.

Śākyamuni

shAkya thub pa

ཤཱཀྱ་ཐུབ་པ།

śākyamuni

An epithet for the historical Buddha, Siddhārtha Gautama: he was a *muni* (“sage”) from the Śākya clan. He is counted as the fourth of the first four buddhas of the present Good Eon, the other three being Krakucchanda, Kanakamuni, and Kāśyapa. He will be followed by Maitreya, the next buddha in this eon.

tathāgata

de bzhin gshegs pa

དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ།

tathāgata

A frequently used synonym for *buddha*. According to different explanations, it can be read as *tathā-gata*, literally meaning “one who has thus gone,” or as *tathā-āgata*, “one who has thus come.” *Gata*, though literally meaning “gone,” is a past passive participle used to describe a state or condition of existence. *Tatha(tā)*, often rendered as “suchness” or “thusness,” is the quality or condition of things as they really are, which cannot be conveyed in conceptual, dualistic terms. Therefore, this epithet is interpreted in different ways, but in general it implies one who has departed in the wake of the buddhas of the past, or one who has manifested the supreme awakening dependent on the reality that does not abide in the two extremes of existence and quiescence. It is also often used as a specific epithet of the Buddha Śākyamuni.