

༄༅། །དཔལ་དབྱིག་གྱིས་ལུས་པ།

The Questions of Śrīvasu

Śrīvasuparipṛcchā

Translated into Tibetan by
Surendrabodhi · Prajñāvarman · Bandé Yeshé Dé

འཕགས་པ་དཔལ་དབྱིག་གྱིས་ལྷུས་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་མདོ།

'phags pa dpal dbyig gyis zhus pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo

The Noble Great Vehicle Sūtra “The Questions of Śrīvasu”

Śrīvasuparipṛcchānāmamahāyānasūtra



Toh 162
Degé Kangyur, vol. 59 (mdo sde, ba), folios 139.b–143.b

Translated by the Ratnaśrī Translation Group
under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha

First published 2021
Current version v 1.0.9 (2023)
Generated by 84000 Reading Room v2.19.5

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co.

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SUMMARY

- s.1 The Buddha is approached by the young merchant Śrīvasu, who requests instruction on how to live his life as a novice bodhisattva. The Buddha is pleased and offers some pithy advice regarding the bodhisattva path that encapsulates the main altruistic aims and practices of the Great Vehicle. He states that foremost among the bodhisattva's daily practices are taking refuge in the Three Jewels, practicing the six perfections, and dedicating all resulting merit to the attainment of awakening for oneself and others.

ac.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ac.1 This sūtra was translated from Tibetan into English under the supervision of His Holiness the Drikung Kyabgön Chetsang by Khenpo Konchok Tamphel and the Ratnaśrī Translation Group, Dehradun, India, 2013.

The translation was completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.

i.

INTRODUCTION

i.1

In *The Questions of Śrīvasu*, the Buddha is approached by a young merchant named Śrīvasu, who requests instruction on how to live his life as a novice bodhisattva. Delighted by this request, the Buddha offers some pithy advice regarding the bodhisattva path that neatly summarizes the principal altruistic aims and practices of the Great Vehicle. Beginning with venerating the Three Jewels and rejoicing in their awakened activities, the beginner bodhisattva is advised to cultivate the mind of awakening, i.e., the resolve to attain awakening for the sake of all beings, which is the basis of all Great Vehicle practice. With this altruistic outlook, the Buddha tells Śrīvasu, the aspiring bodhisattva should engage in all the virtuous activities prescribed within the framework of the six perfections and other disciplines central to the Great Vehicle. These cause all wholesome states of mind to blossom in the bodhisattva, and all negative thoughts to wither, bringing the bodhisattva ever closer to the realization of awakening. At the conclusion of the teaching, we learn that the audience has included a prince, the son of a certain King Sindhugiri of Darada, an ancient kingdom in the Gilgit region of larger Kashmir. The prince, who is not named, is so moved by the teaching that he goes before the Buddha and expresses his aspiration to attain awakening, while vowing to henceforth live by the principles that the Buddha has outlined.

i.2

The Questions of Śrīvasu belongs to the general sūtra section of the Kangyur, where it forms part of an important subgenre of sūtras that have “question” (*paripṛcchā*) in their titles and that convey central Buddhist teachings within the format of a dialogue, usually between a buddha and one or more interlocutors.

i.3

There is no extant Sanskrit version of this sūtra, but the Tibetan canonical translation is found in all Kangyurs. It was included in the Denkarma¹ and Phangthangma² inventories of Tibetan imperial translations, so we can establish that it was first translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan no later than

the early ninth century, as the *Denkarma* is usually dated to 812 CE. The present translation was based mainly on Tibetan versions preserved in the Degé Kangyur and the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*) Kangyur, but certain amendments were made based on variant readings recorded in the Stok Palace Kangyur version.

The Noble Great Vehicle Sūtra
The Questions of Śrīvasu

1.

The Translation

[F.139.b]

1.1 Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas.

1.2 Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was in the R̥ṣivadana in the Deer Park at Vārāṇasī, together with a gathering of bodhisattvas and a great assembly of hearers, when a merchant son named Śrīvasu arrived from the city of Vārāṇasī. He walked to where the Blessed One was, and after bowing his head at the Blessed One's feet, offering prostrations, and making three circumambulations, he sat to one side.

1.3 Then, with his hands folded, the merchant son Śrīvasu bowed in front of the Blessed One [F.140.a] and asked, "Blessed One, how many thus-gone ones, worthy ones, fully awakened ones have passed and gone?"

1.4 The Blessed One said, "Merchant son, innumerable and countless thus-gone ones, worthy ones, fully awakened ones have passed and gone; that is, as many as there are grains of sand in the Ganges river."

1.5 The merchant son Śrīvasu asked, "Blessed One, how many thus-gone ones, worthy ones, fully awakened ones will be born and appear? How many thus-gone ones, worthy ones, fully awakened ones are alive and present now?"

1.6 The Blessed One said, "Merchant son, innumerable and countless thus-gone ones, worthy ones, fully awakened ones will be born and appear; that is, as many as there are grains of sand in the Ganges river. Merchant son, innumerable and countless thus-gone ones, worthy ones, fully awakened ones are alive and present now; that is, as many as there are grains of sand in the Ganges river."

1.7 When the Blessed One had spoken thus, the merchant son Śrīvasu asked him, "Blessed One, if a hundred people, a thousand people, a hundred thousand people attained perfect awakening by having striven diligently in the past, then, Blessed One, why would I not attain the same if I were to

strive diligently? Since I have not yet understood, I request you, Blessed One, to think of me with your kind heart and show me properly what novice bodhisattvas should do, what they should dwell upon, and what they should practice.”

1.8 At this request, the Blessed One said to the merchant son Śrīvasu, “Excellent, merchant son, excellent. [F.140.b] Your thought is beautiful and your eloquence virtuous. Therefore, merchant son, listen carefully and keep this in your mind, as I tell you what novice bodhisattvas should do, what they should dwell upon, and what they should practice.”

1.9 “Excellent, Blessed One,” said the merchant son Śrīvasu, and he listened to the Blessed One.

1.10 The Blessed One then said to him, “Merchant son, thinking with full attention,³ novice bodhisattvas should never give up venerating and honoring the Three Jewels three times each day, turning their whole mind to that from the depth of their hearts and the very marrow of their bones.

1.11 “Moreover, thinking with full attention, novice bodhisattvas should never give up their oath to take refuge in the Three Jewels three times each day, turning their whole mind to that from the depth of their hearts and the very marrow of their bones.

1.12 “Moreover, merchant son, thinking with full attention, novice bodhisattvas should never give up praying three times every day that all the world systems may never be without the Three Jewels, turning their whole mind to that from the depth of their hearts and the very marrow of their bones. They should never give up praying three times that the Three Jewels may remain in all the world systems for many eons. They should never give up praying three times that the Dharma may be taught to all sentient beings in all world systems for many eons. They should never give up praying three times that all sentient beings in all world systems may generate the mind of awakening within the Three Vehicles according to their ability, strength, and aspiration. They should never give up praying three times that all their roots of virtue may swiftly and promptly [F.141.a] be completed so that all sentient beings in all world systems may be liberated. They should never give up praying three times that all sentient beings in all world systems may attain the three types of awakening. They should never give up praying three times that all sentient beings in all world systems who have taken birth in the lower realms may be rescued from the lower realms. They should never give up praying three times that all sentient beings in all world systems may abandon all unwholesome actions. They should never give up praying three times that they may be rid of all fear, suffering, unhappiness, and strife. They

should never give up rejoicing three times in the roots of virtue of all the buddhas of the past, present, and future, in those of all bodhisattvas, solitary buddhas, noble hearers and so forth, and in those of all sentient beings.

1.13 “Also, merchant son, thinking with full attention, novice bodhisattvas should make the aspiration, three times every day, to attain perfect awakening, turning their whole mind to it from the depth of their hearts and the very marrow of their bones. They should never give up criticizing their own unwholesome actions, deploring and renouncing them, while desiring and taking up all virtuous actions. They should never give up praying that, life after life, they may serve and attend to the Three Jewels, engage in virtuous conduct that is totally pure, complete the collection of merit for perfect awakening, achieve all the qualities of a buddha, [F.141.b] turn the wheel of the Dharma, and teach the Dharma for many eons.

1.14 “Also, merchant son, novice bodhisattvas should not harm their parents. They should not harm their children, wives, male servants, female servants, laborers, employees, friends, ministers, relatives, or elders. Rather, they should always give them whatever they wish for, as much as they possibly can.

1.15 “Also, merchant son, novice bodhisattvas should abide by the five precepts and practice in remaining firm and steadfast in them. In case they are not able to practice all five precepts, they should practice four, three, two, or at least one of them. If they cannot practice even one precept, but engage in this or that nonvirtuous action, they should only do so when forced to for some reason, and should do so with a purpose, with a mind that is without craving and aggression, with a mind that is not lax, careless, and attached to what is pleasant. They should not engage in the ten nonvirtuous actions under the power of anger, under the power of resentment, or under the power of taking joy or delight in them. When they are about to engage in them, they should criticize and denounce them. While they are engaging in them, they should criticize and denounce them. When they have finished engaging in them, they should criticize and denounce them, and they should confess them individually and renounce them.

1.16 “When they engage in any wholesome, virtuous action, they should do so with a fervent and powerful mind. Not remaining content and satisfied, not being lax and careless, they should engage in the action unimpededly with a mind empowered by faith, joy, sincerity, and delight. [F.142.a] When they are about to engage in such an action, they should then turn their whole mind to it from the depth of their hearts and the very marrow of their bones and, thinking with full attention, completely dedicate it to unsurpassed and perfect awakening in order to liberate all sentient beings, to free them, to

bring them relief, to help them pass beyond sorrow, to help them accomplish the state of omniscience, and to enable them to attain all the qualities of a buddha.

1.17 “Turning their whole mind, from the depth of their hearts and the very marrow of their bones, to all their virtuous actions of the past, present, and future, and thinking of them with full attention they should bring them all together and rejoice in them. They should rejoice with the most excellent rejoicing, with the best, the foremost, the highest, the very highest, sublime, and supreme rejoicing that is unequaled, equal to the unequaled, equal to space, and equal to nirvāṇa. After rejoicing, they should offer that act of virtue to the buddhas, bodhisattvas, solitary buddhas, and hearers and, having offered it, share it with all sentient beings. Three times a day, they should make this dedication to unsurpassed and perfect awakening in order to liberate all sentient beings, free them, bring them relief, help them pass beyond sorrow, help them accomplish all the qualities of a buddha, and enable them to attain the state of omniscience.

1.18 “Even while enjoying various kinds of goods such as garments from Kāśī and incense of sandalwood and aloeswood, and even while enjoying the five sense pleasures, [F.142.b] while traveling, or while engaging in any activity or pursuit, they should always solely and unceasingly remember their strong wish, devotion, desire, and aspiration for unsurpassed and perfect awakening. They should contemplate and meditate on it and do so repeatedly. By doing so, the intent on unwholesome, nonvirtuous actions becomes loosened, lessened, diminished, attenuated, and feeble, while the intent on wholesome, virtuous actions becomes adamant, fervent, strong, firm, and great.

1.19 “When the intent on unwholesome, nonvirtuous actions becomes loosened, lessened, diminished, attenuated, feeble, and nonexistent, and as the intent on wholesome actions that are roots of virtue becomes adamant, the intention to meet with beings in the realms of existence does not wane. For they completely rid themselves of all harming, killing, binding, and violence, and they apply themselves to removing, stopping, and quelling the forms of suffering that endless sentient beings in endless world systems endlessly experience, having accumulated them since beginningless time. These are the suffering of birth, aging, sickness, and death; the suffering of meeting with what is unpleasant and being separated from what is pleasant; the suffering of not having what one wants; the suffering of gods, humans, asuras, animals, pretas, and hell beings; and the suffering of attachment, aversion, and ignorance.

- 1.20 “Because they have a mind of loving kindness and a mind of great compassion, because they wear the great armor and have set out in the Great Vehicle, and because they are devoted to the vast teachings of the Buddha and are ensuring that the lineage of [F.143.a] the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha will not be broken, their unwholesome, nonvirtuous actions decrease and diminish until they are fully attenuated, and their wholesome, virtuous actions increase until they become boundless. Thus, their accumulation and cultivation of the bodhisattva intention becomes perfectly complete, as it becomes firm and solid like a diamond.
- 1.21 “Thus, merchant son, in this life, in the next life, and for many lives thereafter, novice bodhisattvas gradually and incrementally decrease and diminish their unwholesome, nonvirtuous actions until there are none; they increase their wholesome, virtuous actions until these become boundless; and they accumulate and cultivate their bodhisattva intention. By the ripening of their wholesome and virtuous actions, they will quickly attain unsurpassed and perfect awakening.”
- 1.22 Now at that time, from the country of Darada, the son of King Sindhugiri of Darada had come to Vārāṇasī to see the Blessed One and to offer him his homage and veneration, and he was seated not far from the Blessed One. At this moment, the son of King Sindhugiri rose from his seat, draped his upper robe over one shoulder, placed his right knee on the ground, and with his hands folded bowed to the Blessed One and said, “You have spoken well, Blessed One! You have spoken well, Sugata! Blessed One, when one makes the request for the mind of awakening, turning one’s whole mind to it from the depth of one’s heart and the very marrow of one’s bones and thinking of it with full attention, then to the extent that one makes the request and expresses it three times, Blessed One, [F.143.b] the accumulations that bring perfect awakening will increase, grow, accumulate, and become incalculable. And if this bodhisattva intention becomes firm and solid like a diamond when one accumulates, cultivates, and accomplishes it, how much more so will it when one exerts oneself even more and never gives up striving!
- 1.23 “Blessed One, I too, turning my whole mind to it from the depth of my heart and the very marrow of my bones, and thinking of it with full attention, I give rise to the aspiration for perfect awakening in order to liberate all sentient beings, free them, bring them relief, help them completely pass beyond sorrow, help them accomplish all the qualities of a buddha, and enable them to attain the state of omniscience. Over and over, hundreds of times, endlessly, I will make the aspiration for unsurpassed and perfect awakening so that I may become a buddha who liberates sentient beings

who have not crossed the ocean of saṃsāra, frees those who are not free, brings relief to those who have no relief, and helps those who have not passed beyond all sorrow to completely pass beyond all sorrow.”

1.24 Thereupon, following his lead, the merchant son Śrīvasu gave rise in just the same way to the aspiration for unsurpassed and perfect awakening.

1.25 When the Blessed One had given this teaching, the merchant son Śrīvasu, the son of the king of Darada, the bodhisattvas, the monks, and the world with its gods, humans, asuras, and gandharvas all rejoiced and praised what the Blessed One had said.

1.26 *This concludes the noble Great Vehicle sūtra “The Questions of Śrīvasu.”*

c.

Colophon

c.1 Translated, edited, and finalized by the Indian preceptors Surendrabodhi and Prajñāvarman, and the chief editor and translator Bandé Yeshé Dé and others.

n.

NOTES

- n.1 Denkarma, folio 299.a.7. See also Herrmann-Pfandt 2008, p. 106, no. 199.
- n.2 Phangthangma, p. 16.
- n.3 Here and in subsequent parallel passages we have followed the Stok Palace Kangyur reading *sems thams cad kyis bsams nas* (*sarvacetasā samanvāhṛtya*), which is attested in many translations instead of the grammatically problematic Degé reading *sems can thams cad kyis*. The expression could also be translated “focusing with all their heart/mind.”

b.

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GLOSSARY

· Types of attestation for Sanskrit names and terms ·

AS	<i>Attested in source text</i> This term is attested in the Sanskrit manuscript used as a source for this translation.
AO	<i>Attested in other text</i> This term is attested in other Sanskrit manuscripts of the Kangyur or Tengyur.
AD	<i>Attested in dictionary</i> This term is attested in Tibetan-Sanskrit dictionaries.
AA	<i>Approximate attestation</i> The attestation of this name is approximate. It is based on other names where Tibetan-Sanskrit relationship is attested in dictionaries or other manuscripts.
RP	<i>Reconstruction from Tibetan phonetic rendering</i> This term is a reconstruction based on the Tibetan phonetic rendering of the term.
RS	<i>Reconstruction from Tibetan semantic rendering</i> This term is a reconstruction based on the semantics of the Tibetan translation.
SU	<i>Source Unspecified</i> This term has been supplied from an unspecified source, which most often is a widely trusted dictionary.

g.1 asura

lha ma yin

ལྷ་མ་ཡིན།

*asura**Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

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).

g.2 **blessed one**

bcom ldan 'das

བཙོམ་ལྷན་འདས།

bhagavān

An epithet of the Buddha. The Tibetan rendering can be explained as “one who has conquered the four māras and is endowed with the six excellent qualities.”

g.3 **bodhisattva**

byang chub sems dpa'

བྱང་ལྷུབ་སེམས་དཔའ།

bodhisattva

A being who is dedicated to the cultivation and fulfilment of the altruistic intention to attain spiritual awakening, traversing the five bodhisattva paths and ten bodhisattva levels. Bodhisattvas purposely opt to remain within saṃsāra to liberate all sentient beings, instead of simply seeking personal freedom from suffering. Philosophically, they realize the two aspects of selflessness, namely, the nonexistence of any individuating principle (self) in persons and phenomena.

g.4 **Darada**

da ra da

དར་ད།

darada

The ancient kingdom of the Darada people in the Gilgit region of larger Kashmir.

g.5 **Deer Park**

ri dags kyi nags

རི་དགས་ཀྱི་ནགས།

mṛgadāva

The forest outside of Vārāṇasī where the Buddha first taught the Dharma.

g.6 five precepts

bslab pa'i gzhi lnga

བསྐྱབ་པའི་གཞི་ལྔ།

pañcaśikṣā

Five trainings for all vehicles in general: avoiding killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and taking intoxicants (alcohol, etc.).

g.7 gandharva

dri za

དྷི་ཟ།

gandharva

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

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 under the jurisdiction of 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 any sentient being in the realm of desire (*kāmadhātu*) during the intermediate state between death and rebirth. Gandharvas are said to live on fragrances in the desire realm, hence the Tibetan translation *dri za*, meaning “scent eater.”

g.8 Ganges

gang gA

གང་གླ།

gaṅgā

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The Gaṅgā, or Ganges in English, is considered to be the most sacred river of India, particularly within the Hindu tradition. It starts in the Himalayas, flows through the northern plains of India, bathing the holy city of Vārāṇasī, and meets the sea at the Bay of Bengal, in Bangladesh. In the sūtras, however, this river is mostly mentioned not for its sacredness but for its abundant sands—noticeable still today on its many sandy banks and at its delta—which serve as a usual metaphor for infinitely large numbers.

According to Buddhist cosmology, as explained in the *Abhidharmakośa*, it is one of the four rivers that flow from Lake Anavatapta, and cross the southern continent of Jambudvīpa—the known human world or more specifically the Indian subcontinent.

g.9 hearer

nyan thos

ཉན་ཐོས།

śrāvaka

One who listens to and hears the teachings from a buddha and strives to become a worthy one.

g.10 Kāśī

ka shi

ཀ་ཤི།

kāśī

Another name for Vārāṇasī or Benares, a city known for its fine garments and embroidery.

g.11 mind of awakening

byang chub sems

བྱང་ལྡན་སེམས།

bodhicitta

Refers to the aspiration for oneself and others to attain spiritual awakening in order to live a life of maximum benefit to all beings.

g.12 Prajñāvarman

pradz+nyA barma

པར་ཇ་ཡེ་འཕམ་པ།

prajñāvarman

An Indian Bengali preceptor resident in Tibet during the late eighth and early ninth centuries. Arriving in Tibet on an invitation from the Tibetan king, he assisted in the translation of numerous canonical scriptures. He is also the author of a few philosophical commentaries contained in the Tengyur collection.

g.13 preta

yi dags

ཡི་དགས།

preta

A class of beings who, in Buddhist traditions, are particularly known to suffer from hunger and thirst and the inability to acquire sustenance.

g.14 R̥ṣivadana

drang srong smra ba

རང་སྲོང་སྐྱ་བ།

r̥ṣivadana

A place in the Deer Park (Mṛgadāva) outside Vārāṇasī where the Buddha Śākyamuni first turned the wheel of Dharma. The name, meaning “speech of *r̥ṣis* (sages or seers),” may refer to a story that in this same place during the time of the previous Buddha, Kāśyapa, five hundred seers (in some versions pratyekabuddhas) uttered prophecies and attained nirvāṇa on hearing that the Buddha Śākyamuni was to come. Also known as R̥ṣipātana.

g.15 Sindhugiri

sin du gi ri

སིན་དུ་གི་རི།

sindhugiri

Lit. “The Mountain of Sindhu.” A king of the ancient Darada kingdom, which lay in the Gilgit region of larger Kashmir, the mountainous area through which the river Indus (Sindhu) flows.

g.16 six perfections

pha rol tu phyin pa drug

ཕ་རོལ་ཏུ་ཕྱིན་པ་དུག།

ṣaṭpāramitā

The trainings of the bodhisattva path: generosity (*dāna*, *byin pa*), discipline (*śīla*, *tshul khrims*), patience or acceptance (*kṣānti*, *bzod pa*), diligence or effort (*vīrya*, *brtson 'grus*), meditative concentration (*dhyāna*, *bsam gtan*), and insight (*prajñā*, *shes rab*).

g.17 solitary buddha

rang sangs rgyas

རང་སངས་རྒྱལ།

pratyekabuddha

One who, in their last birth in saṃsāra, attains the realization of the selflessness of the person and a partial realization of the selflessness of phenomena, by observing the suchness of all that arises through interdependence on their own, without relying on a teacher.

g.18 Śrīvasu

dpal dbyig

དཔལ་དབྱིག

śrīvasu

Lit. "Splendor and Wealth." A young merchant from Vārāṇasī.

g.19 sugata

bde bar gshegs pa

བདེ་བར་གཤེགས་པ།

sugata

An epithet of the Buddha.

g.20 Surendrabodhi

su ren+dra bo d+hi

སུ་རེ་རྒྱ་བོ་རྗེ།

surendrabodhi

An Indian preceptor actively involved in translation in Tibet during the late eighth and early ninth centuries.

g.21 ten nonvirtuous actions

mi dge ba bcu

མི་དགེ་བ་བརྒྱ།

daśākuśala

Ten unethical and harmful behaviors. They consist of actions of the body (killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct), speech (lying, slandering, harsh words, and gossip), and the mind (covetousness, harmful intent, and wrong view).

g.22 Three Jewels

dkon mchog gsum

དགོན་མཚོག་གསུམ།

triratna

The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha. In the Tibetan rendering, “the three rare and excellent ones.”

g.23 three types of awakening

byang chub gsum

བྱང་ལྡན་གསུམ།

tribodhi

The awakening of a worthy one, the awakening of a solitary buddha, and the awakening of a buddha.

g.24 Three Vehicles

theg pa gsum

ཐེག་པ་གསུམ།

triyāna

The vehicles of the hearers, solitary buddhas, and bodhisattvas.

g.25 thus-gone one

de bzhin gshegs pa

དེ་བཞིན་གསེགས་པ།

tathāgata

One who has attained ultimate awakening through the path of suchness that transcends the extremes of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. An epithet of the Buddha.

g.26 Vārāṇasī

bA rA Na sI

བཱ་རྩ་ཏ་སྒྲི།

vārāṇasī

An ancient city in North India on the outskirts of which the Buddha first taught the Dharma.

g.27 worthy one

dgra bcom pa

དགྲ་བཙོམ་པ།

arhat

A person who has accomplished the final fruition of the path of the hearers and is liberated from saṃsāra. The Tibetan rendering, “foe destroyer,” can be explained as “one who has destroyed and defeated the four māras.”

