

༄༅། །ཚེས་ཀྱི་ཕྱག་རྒྱ།

The Seal of Dharma

Dharmamudrā

Translated into Tibetan by
Bandé Lui Wangpo · Lhai Dawa

འཕགས་པ་ཚེས་ཀྱི་ཕྱག་རྒྱ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་མདོ།

'phags pa chos kyi phyag rgya zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo

The Noble Great Vehicle Sūtra “The Seal of Dharma”

Āryadharmamudrānāmamahāyānasūtra



Toh 203
Degé Kangyur, vol. 62 (mdo sde, tsha), folios 78.a–81.b

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co.

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SUMMARY

- s.1 In this short sūtra, the Buddha addresses the nature of monastic ordination according to the perspective of the Great Vehicle and how going forth from the life of a householder can be said to have the qualities of being noble and supramundane. Following the Buddha's teaching, the two prominent monks Śāriputra and Subhūti engage in a brief discussion on this same topic.

ac.

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ac.1 Translated by the Dharmachakra Translation Committee under the guidance of Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche. The translation was produced by Jordi Roig, who also wrote the introduction. Andreas Doctor checked the translation against the Tibetan and edited the text.

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

i.

INTRODUCTION

i.1

The Seal of Dharma is set in the Jeta Grove outside of Śrāvastī, where the Buddha is teaching a large audience of monks and bodhisattvas. The teaching unfolds as the Buddha replies to a series of questions posed by two prominent monks, Śāriputra and Subhūti. Śāriputra, renowned for his pure observance of monastic discipline, first asks how monastic ordination can be said to have the qualities of being noble and supramundane. After the Buddha replies to Śāriputra, Subhūti asks Śāriputra to explain the Buddha's instructions. Śāriputra then explains that the Buddha's paradoxical response—in which he states that only those who do *not* transcend the qualities of ordinary beings and do *not* attain the uncontaminated qualities have truly renounced the world—is a teaching on the Great Vehicle doctrine of emptiness. When Śāriputra finishes his explanation, the Buddha grants his approval and tells Śāriputra that this teaching constitutes a “seal” (*phyag rgya, mudrā*) that one may use to challenge beings who are overcome by pride that is driven by their conventional understanding of renunciation and ordination.

i.2

Seven hundred monks attain liberation after hearing this teaching, but the controversy over its approach to renunciation and ordination leads a group of one hundred advanced monks to stand up and leave, while an even smaller group of five monks completely reject this teaching and fall into the hell realms. The Buddha takes this opportunity to point out that this understanding of “going forth” (*rab tu byung ba, pravrajita*) may be considered something that the entire world finds disagreeable, but it is nevertheless true. He explains that since ordinary, worldly beings are ultimately nonexistent, one should not object to this teaching simply because the entire world finds it unacceptable. The doctrine of emptiness is thus applied to the “realm of beings” (*sems can gyi khams, sattvadhātu*) in exactly the same way that it is applied to the “realm of phenomena” (*chos kyi dbyings, dharmadhātu*)

to discourage any tendency toward rejecting the doctrine of emptiness simply because it does not accord with the way things appear for ordinary beings.

i.3 To the best of our knowledge, a Sanskrit version of the sūtra is no longer extant, and it was never translated into Chinese. It is thus difficult to determine much about the history of this scripture in India and East Asia, or to evaluate its importance in Indian Buddhist traditions. The only witnesses we have of this sūtra today are the Tibetan translations that were included in the Tibetan Kangyurs.

i.4 The colophon to the Tibetan translation mentions that it was produced by the translators Lui Wangpo and Lhai Dawa, both of whom lived during the early ninth century CE. This dating is also supported by the text's inclusion in the early ninth-century Denkarma (*ldan dkar ma*) inventory of translations into Tibetan.¹ In addition to his work as a translator, Lui Wangpo was also among the first seven monks to be ordained in Tibet. We do not have much personal information regarding Lhai Dawa, but we do know he was a prolific translator who contributed to at least fourteen translations that were subsequently included in the Kangyur, including the Tibetan translation of one of the shorter versions of the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* (Toh 120) from the Sanskrit.

i.5 The translation presented here is based primarily on the Tibetan Degé edition, but the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*) and the Stok Palace manuscript editions were consulted in the case of problematic readings.

The Noble Great Vehicle Sūtra
The Seal of Dharma

1.

The Translation

[F.78.a]

1.1 Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas.

1.2 Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was dwelling in Śrāvastī in the Jeta Grove, Anāthapiṇḍada’s park, together with a great monastic assembly of five thousand monks and many bodhisattva great beings. By the power of the Blessed One, Venerable Śāriputra rose from his seat, draped his shawl over one shoulder, and knelt on his right knee. Joining his palms, he bowed to the Blessed One and asked, “Blessed One, when we speak of ‘going forth,’ Blessed One, to what extent is a monk who has gone forth in the well-proclaimed Dharma and Vinaya [F.78.b] fully ordained after taking the noble and supramundane ordination?”

1.3 “Śāriputra,” the Blessed One replied, “a monk who has gone forth in the well-proclaimed Dharma and Vinaya is fully ordained after taking the noble and supramundane ordination to the extent that he does not transcend the qualities of ordinary beings and does not attain the uncontaminated qualities. Those who go forth in this way are genuinely going forth, whereas those who do not go forth in this way are incorrectly going forth. Śāriputra, such monks are worthy of receiving donations that are offered faithfully. They are also worthy of receiving clothing, food, bedding, seats, medicines, and healing substances.

1.4 “Śāriputra, monks who do not abandon exertion will also not abandon form. They will also not abandon feeling, perception, formation, or consciousness. That is why a monk who has gone forth in the well-proclaimed Dharma and Vinaya is fully ordained after taking the noble and supramundane ordination. Those who go forth in this way are genuinely going forth, whereas those who do not go forth in this way are incorrectly

going forth. Śāriputra, such monks are worthy of receiving donations that are offered faithfully. They are also worthy of receiving clothing, food, bedding, seats, medicines, and healing substances.”

1.5 At that point Venerable Subhūti inquired of Venerable Śāriputra, “Venerable Śāriputra, what did the Blessed One have in mind when he said, ‘Śāriputra, a monk who has gone forth in the well-proclaimed Dharma and Vinaya is fully ordained after taking the noble and supramundane ordination to the extent that he does not transcend the qualities of ordinary beings and does not attain the uncontaminated qualities. [F.79.a] Those who go forth in this way are genuinely going forth, whereas those who do not go forth in this way are incorrectly going forth. Śāriputra, such monks are worthy of receiving donations that are offered faithfully. They are also worthy of receiving clothing, food, bedding, seats, medicines, and healing substances?’”

1.6 “Venerable Subhūti,” Śāriputra replied, “the qualities of ordinary beings are illusory and cannot be transcended. Venerable Subhūti, the qualities of ordinary beings are neither created nor easily transcended. Venerable Subhūti, the realm of sentient beings is not apprehended within, it is not apprehended without, and it is also not apprehended anywhere else. The nature of the realm of sentient beings and the nature of all qualities of ordinary beings are not easily transcended.

1.7 “Venerable Subhūti, the Blessed One has said, ‘A monk who has gone forth in the well-proclaimed Dharma and Vinaya is fully ordained after taking the noble and supramundane ordination to the extent that he does not transcend the qualities of ordinary beings and does not attain the uncontaminated qualities. Those who go forth in this way are genuinely going forth, whereas those who do not go forth in this way are incorrectly going forth. Śāriputra, such monks are worthy of receiving donations that are offered faithfully. They are also worthy of receiving clothing, food, bedding, seats, medicines, and healing substances.’

1.8 “Venerable Subhūti, regarding that statement, how could something that has no basis or foundation possibly be attained? Venerable Subhūti, [F.79.b] if the uncontaminated qualities were possible to attain, then the state of the worthy ones would arise based on apprehension. The nature of the thus-gone ones, the worthy ones, the perfect buddhas, is without basis.

1.9 “Venerable Subhūti, this is what the Blessed One had in mind when he said, ‘A monk who has gone forth in the well-proclaimed Dharma and Vinaya is fully ordained after taking the noble and supramundane ordination to the extent that he does not transcend the qualities of ordinary beings and does not attain the uncontaminated qualities. Those who go forth in this way are genuinely going forth, whereas those who do not go forth in

this way are incorrectly going forth. Śāriputra, such monks are worthy of receiving donations that are offered faithfully. They are also worthy of receiving clothing, food, bedding, seats, medicines, and healing substances.’ ”

1.10 Venerable Subhūti asked, “Venerable Śāriputra, what did the Blessed One have in mind when he said, ‘Monks who do not abandon exertion will also not abandon form. They will also not abandon feelings, perceptions, formations, or consciousness. That is why a monk who has gone forth in the well-proclaimed Dharma and Vinaya is fully ordained after taking the noble and supramundane ordination. Those who go forth in this way are genuinely going forth, whereas those who do not go forth in this way are incorrectly going forth. Śāriputra, such monks are worthy of receiving donations that are offered faithfully. They are also worthy of receiving clothing, food, bedding, seats, medicines, and healing substances?’ ”

1.11 Śāriputra replied, “Venerable Subhūti, the Blessed One [F.80.a] had the nature of reality in mind when he said, ‘Monks who do not abandon exertion will also not abandon form. They will also not abandon feelings, perceptions, formations, or consciousness.’

1.12 “Venerable Subhūti, the realm of phenomena is not apprehended internally, it is not apprehended externally, and it is also not apprehended anywhere else. What is imputed as ‘internal’ is without anything to impute and is an imputation of what is unborn. In view of that, the realm of phenomena is sameness because the realm of sentient beings is sameness, and the realm of sentient beings is sameness because the realm of phenomena is sameness. Therefore, the realm of sentient beings and the realm of phenomena are indivisible and undivided. That which is indivisible and undivided is also without anything to remove² or add. That which is without anything to add or remove³ is not something to transcend or attain.

1.13 “Venerable Subhūti, the Blessed One had this in mind when he said, ‘Monks who do not abandon exertion will also not abandon form. They will also not abandon feelings, perceptions, formations, or consciousness. That is why a monk who has gone forth in the well-proclaimed Dharma and Vinaya is fully ordained after taking the noble and supramundane ordination. Those who go forth in this way are genuinely going forth, whereas those who do not go forth in this way are incorrectly going forth. Śāriputra, such monks are worthy of receiving donations that are offered faithfully. They are also worthy of receiving clothing, food, bedding, seats, medicines, and healing substances.’

1.14 “Monks who have no qualms do not raise qualms. Monks who lack verbal expression and have transcended verbal expression are unable to make presentations based on deliberations. [F.80.b] For such monks there is no

coming, going, standing, sitting, and lying down. Monks who are not skilled logicians delight in examination. Monks who are skilled logicians delight in nonexamination. Venerable Subhūti, that is what the Blessed One had in mind when he said, 'That is why a monk who has gone forth in the well-proclaimed Dharma and Vinaya is fully ordained after taking the noble and supramundane ordination. Those who go forth in this way are genuinely going forth, whereas those who do not go forth in this way are incorrectly going forth. Śāriputra, such monks are worthy of receiving donations that are offered faithfully. They are also worthy of receiving clothing, food, bedding, seats, medicines, and healing substances.' "

1.15 At that time, the Blessed One expressed his approval to Venerable Śāriputra: "Excellent, Śāriputra, excellent! The way that you have presented this is exactly what I intended and taught. This is what going forth means according to the well-spoken Dharma and Vinaya. Śāriputra, one who wishes to challenge proud beings using this seal should explain this seal in their presence. Śāriputra, one who truly understands it can use this seal to challenge multitudes of proud beings."

1.16 When this Dharma teaching was taught, the minds of seven hundred monks were freed from contaminants without further appropriation. However, one hundred monks who had reached their final existence⁴ did not adopt, understand, or appreciate this Dharma teaching, so they rose from their seats and left. Five monks even rejected the teaching and turned their backs on it, so they fell into the great hells in their current embodiments.

1.17 "Śāriputra," the Blessed One said, "I have taught this Dharma knowing well that, unfortunately, the entire world will find it disagreeable. [F.81.a] I knew this but taught it anyway, as there is nothing disagreeable about it at all. To give an analogy, Śāriputra, a person may fall asleep and dream that I am teaching the Dharma to you in front of a crowd of people. That person might object to this, saying, 'That Dharma is disagreeable to the entire world!' But what do you think, Śāriputra? In that case would those people who disagree with this Dharma truly exist?"

Śāriputra replied, "No, Blessed One, they would not."

1.18 The Blessed One said, "Śāriputra, likewise, even though I also admit that this Dharma is disagreeable to the entire world, I teach it this way because that very world itself is not seen correctly. As the world does not exist, the Dharma is incalculable. Even the designation of the world is also nonexistent. Śāriputra, the expression *disagreeable to the entire world* refers to the fact that phenomena are unadulterated and unmixed.

1.19 Śāriputra asked, "Blessed One, what does the word *unadulterated* mean?"

The Blessed One replied, “Śāriputra, *unadulterated* refers to the fact that phenomena have the same taste. They are neither exclusively the same nor exclusively different. Śāriputra, *unadulterated* is a synonym for *emptiness*.”

1.20 Śāriputra asked, “Blessed One, what does the word *emptiness* mean?”

The Blessed One replied, “Śāriputra, *emptiness* means *absence of designation*. That which is beyond designation is not amenable to designation. That which is not amenable to designation is neither mundane nor supramundane. Śāriputra, that which is neither mundane nor supramundane is called *emptiness*.”

1.21 When the Blessed One had said this, Venerable Śāriputra, the entire assembly of monks, the bodhisattva great beings, and the world with its gods, humans, asuras, and gandharvas [F.81.b] rejoiced and praised what the Blessed One had said.

1.22 *This concludes the noble Great Vehicle sūtra “The Seal of Dharma.”*

c.

Colophon

c.1 This was translated and finalized by the translators Bandé Lui Wangpo and Lhai Dawa.

n.

NOTES

- n.1 The Denkarma catalog is dated to c. 812 CE. See Denkarma, folio 299.b.4. See also Herrmann-Pfandt 2008, pp. 113–14, no. 213.
- n.2 Translated based on Stok: *bsal ba*. Degé: *gsal ba*.
- n.3 Translated based on Yongle and Peking Kangxi: *bsal ba*. Degé (and other versions): *gsal ba*.
- n.4 In this case, those who have reached their final existence refers to monks who had reached the state of a worthy one. In other contexts, it can denote a bodhisattva in the last life before awaking to the state of a buddha.

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 Anāthapiṇḍada

mgon med zas sbyin

མགོན་མེད་ཟས་སྤྱིན།

anāthapiṇḍada

An important benefactor of the Buddha who purchased a plot of land on the outskirts of Śrāvastī that belonged to Prince Jeta and then donated it to the Buddhist community.

g.2 apprehension

dmigs pa

དམིགས་སུ།

upalabdhi

A conceptual, dualistic perception.

g.3 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.4 contaminant

zag pa

ཟག་སུ།

āsrava

Mental affliction.

g.5 disagreeable to the entire world

'jig rten thams cad dang mi 'thun pa

འཇིག་རྟེན་གསལ་ཅད་དང་མི་འགྲུན་སུ།

sarvalokavipratyanika

The Buddha seems to have been well aware of the outcry some of his central teachings would provoke. In several discourses, he warns that whole world would be averse to (Skt. *sarvalokavipratyanika*, Tib. *'jig rten thams cad dang mi*

'*thun pa*) teachings such as no-self, emptiness, and dependent origination because they contradict some of the most deeply held assumptions people have about themselves and the world.

g.6 emptiness

stong pa nyid

སྤོང་པ་ཉིད།

śūnyatā

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

Emptiness denotes the ultimate nature of reality, the total absence of inherent existence and self-identity with respect to all phenomena. According to this view, all things and events are devoid of any independent, intrinsic reality that constitutes their essence. Nothing can be said to exist independent of the complex network of factors that gives rise to its origination, nor are phenomena independent of the cognitive processes and mental constructs that make up the conventional framework within which their identity and existence are posited. When all levels of conceptualization dissolve and when all forms of dichotomizing tendencies are quelled through deliberate meditative deconstruction of conceptual elaborations, the ultimate nature of reality will finally become manifest. It is the first of the three gateways to liberation.

g.7 fully ordained

rdzogs par bsnyen pa · bsnyen par rdzogs pa

རྫོགས་པར་བསྐྱེན་པ། · བསྐྱེན་པར་རྫོགས་པ།

upasampanna · upasampadā

Someone fully ordained.

g.8 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.9 going forth

rab tu byung ba

རབ་ཏུ་བྱུང་བ།

pravrajita · pravrajyā

The Tibetan term can refer to a religious mendicant or monk or to the life of such a mendicant or monk.

g.10 Jeta Grove

rgyal bu rgyal byed kyī tshal

རྒྱལ་བུ་རྒྱལ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཚལ།

jetavana

The park that Anāthapiṇḍada purchased from Prince Jeta and then donated to the Buddha.

g.11 Lhai Dawa

lha'i zla ba

ལྷ་འི་རྩ་བ།

—

Prolific Tibetan translator active during the late eighth and early ninth centuries.

g.12 Lui Wangpo

klu'i dbang po

ལྷུ་འི་དབང་པོ།

—

Tibetan translator active during the late eighth and early ninth centuries. One of the first seven Tibetans to take monastic ordination.

g.13 nature of reality

chos nyid

ཚོས་ཉིད།

dharmatā

The state of phenomena as they are according to the absolute truth.

- g.14 realm of phenomena
chos kyi dbyings
 ཚོས་ཀྱི་དབྱིངས།
dharmadhātu
 The element, or nature, of ultimate reality.
- g.15 realm of sentient beings
sems can gyi khams
 སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་ཁམས།
sattvadhātu
 The world as it is perceived by ordinary beings.
- g.16 Śāriputra
shA ri'i bu
 སྤྲི་འུ་བུ།
śāriputra
 One of the Buddha's foremost disciples; regarded as the disciple with the purest observance of discipline.
- g.17 skilled logician
rtog pa can
 རྟོག་པ་ཅན།
tārkika
 A skilled dialectician, logician, or philosopher.
- g.18 Śrāvastī
mnyan yod
 མཉམ་ཡོད།
śrāvastī
 Capital of the ancient Kosala kingdom in northern India during the sixth–fifth centuries BCE.
- g.19 Subhūti
rab 'byor
 རབ་འབྱོར།
subhūti

One of the Buddha's foremost disciples and younger brother of the benefactor Anāthapiṇḍada; regarded as the disciple with the foremost understanding of emptiness.

g.20 those who have reached their final existence

srid pa tha ma pa

སྲིད་པ་ཐ་མ་པ།

caramabhavika

In this text, it refers to monks who had reached the state of a worthy one. In other contexts, it can denote a bodhisattva in the last life before awaking to the state of a buddha.

g.21 thus-gone one

de bzhin gshegs pa

དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ།

tathāgata

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

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 also often used as a specific epithet of the Buddha Śākyamuni.

g.22 worthy one

dgra bcom pa

དགའ་བཅོམ་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.”

