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## The Four Factors

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*Caturdharmaka*

ཚོས་བཞི་པའི་མདོ།

*chos bzhi pa'i mdo*

The Sūtra on the Four Factors

*Caturdharmakasūtra*



Toh 250  
Degé Kangyur, vol. 66 (mdo sde, za), folios 59.b–60.a

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under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha

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co.

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## SUMMARY

s.1 In this short sūtra the Buddha explains that throughout one's life there are four beliefs one should not hold: (1) that there is pleasure to be found among women, (2) or at the royal court; (3) that happiness can be ensured by depending on health and attractiveness, (4) or on wealth and material possessions.

ac.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ac.1 The translation was completed by Adam Pearcey, under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, and edited by the 84000 editorial team.

## INTRODUCTION

i.

i.1 *The Sūtra of the Four Factors (Caturdharmakasūtra, Toh 250)* is the second of three short sūtras with similar titles, all referring to sets of four factors (Skt. *dharma*), that contribute to accomplishing the goal of the path. In many Kangyurs (predominantly those of Tshalpa origin, including the Degé Kangyur) these sūtras are found grouped together.

i.2 Of the other sūtras in this set, *The Sūtra Teaching the Four Factors (Toh 249)*<sup>1</sup> is concerned with the four factors necessary for the practice of confession, while *The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra on the Four Factors (Toh 251)*<sup>2</sup> identifies four factors of the path that bodhisattvas must not abandon under any circumstance. Two further works, *The Accomplishment of the Sets of Four Qualities: The Bodhisattvas' Prātimokṣa (Toh 248)* and *The Fourfold Accomplishment (Toh 252)*<sup>3</sup> also concern themselves with “sets of four” (*catuṣka, bzhi pa*), thereby forming a larger group of five sūtras in the Degé Kangyur that lay out key elements of the practice of the path in discrete sets of four factors.

i.3 In the present sūtra, the Buddha addresses an audience of 1,250 monks in Jeta Grove in Śrāvastī. He tells them about four beliefs (which, interestingly, are not explicitly called “factors” in the text), describing them as beliefs that a “wise son of good family” should not accept as true: (1) that there is pleasure to be had in consorting with women, (2) or in attending the royal court, (3) that one can depend on health and attractiveness, (4) or on material wealth. The sūtra concludes with two verses in which the Buddha reiterates the inappropriateness of such beliefs and stresses the fragility and transience of wealth, home, and beauty—and, indeed, of life itself.

i.4 As with the majority of Buddhist sūtras, the original recipients of this teaching were monks, and it is thus presented from a male perspective. Yet, despite its androcentrism, the sūtra touches upon universal themes. Is it



meaningful to seek pleasure in physical attractions or prestigious connections, to rely on present good health or ephemeral stores of wealth? The Buddha tells us that the wise never do so.

- i.5 The main prose section of the sūtra employs the rhetorical device of *anaphora*, the repetition of phrases or opening lines for effect. Successive lines repeat the same opening formula: “Monks, for as long as he lives, a wise son of good family does not hold the belief that...” Such repetition is common throughout Buddhist canonical literature; it has a clear mnemonic advantage and may point to the oral origins of the sūtras.
- i.6 The sūtra’s two concluding verses also appear among the concluding verses of the *Śīlasaṃyuktasūtra* (*tshul khrims yang dag par ldan pa’i mdo*, Toh 303).<sup>4</sup> This is of particular interest since there is a Sanskrit version of that sūtra,<sup>5</sup> whereas there is no known Sanskrit version of *The Sūtra of the Four Factors*.
- i.7 As Peter Skilling has noted, *The Sūtra of the Four Factors* is not called a Mahāyāna text in its Sanskrit or Tibetan titles, and there is nothing in its content that is indicative of a uniquely Mahāyāna viewpoint. In fact, the Stok Palace Kangyur version concludes with a line stating that the sūtra belongs to the teachings of the first turning of the Dharma wheel,<sup>6</sup> which is to say, the tradition of the śrāvakas.
- i.8 A text by the name of *Sūtra of the Four Factors* (*chos bzhi’i mdo* or *chos bzhi pa’i mdo*) is listed in the Denkarma<sup>7</sup> and Phangthangma<sup>8</sup> catalogs of translated works. This very likely refers to the current sūtra, which is also summarized in Kawa Paltsek’s *An Account of the Precious Teachings together with a Lineage of the Śākya Clan* (*gsung rab rin po che’i gtam rgyud dang shA kya’i rabs rgyud*, Toh 4357), suggesting that it was translated during the imperial period. Even so, since it lacks a translator’s colophon, we cannot say precisely who translated it or when.
- i.9 The sūtra does not appear to have been cited in any Indian treatise contained in the Tengyur. Nor was it commonly cited by later Tibetan authors. There is no Chinese version. A French translation of it was first published by Léon Feer in 1866 (and reprinted in 1883).<sup>9</sup> Peter Skilling has also published a translation along with helpful introductory notes in his book, *Questioning the Buddha: A Selection of Twenty-Five Sutras*.<sup>10</sup>
- i.10 The following translation was made based on the Degé block print with reference to the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*) and the Stok Palace Kangyur.

**The Sūtra on  
The Four Factors**

1.

## The Translation

[F.59.b]

1.1 Homage to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas! [F.60.a]

1.2 Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was residing in Śrāvastī at Jeta Grove, Anāthapiṇḍada’s Park, together with a great saṅgha of 1250 monks.

1.3 At that time, the Blessed One addressed the monks in a voice that was steady, deep, harmonious, and far-reaching, saying, “Monks, there are four beliefs that a wise son of good family does not hold for as long as he lives. What are these four?

1.4 “Monks, for as long as he lives, a wise son of good family does not hold the belief that there is pleasure to be found in women.

1.5 “Monks, for as long as he lives, a wise son of good family does not hold the belief that there is pleasure to be found at the court of the royal palace.

1.6 “Monks, for as long as he lives, a wise son of good family does not hold the belief that he is attractive, handsome, good looking, and in good health.

1.7 “Monks, for as long as he lives, a wise son of good family does not hold the belief that he is rich, wealthy, and has abundant resources.”

1.8 The Blessed One spoke these words. Once the Sugata had spoken in this way, he, the Teacher, also said the following:

1.9 “How could it be right to depend on women?  
How could the royal palace ever be delightful?  
How could a bubble possess a solid core?  
How could one’s wealth possibly endure?

1.10 “Wealth is like a rushing river.  
A home is like a ferryboat.  
One’s body resembles a flower.  
Life itself is like a water bubble.”

1.11 When the Blessed One had said this, the monks, together with the world of devas, humans, asuras, and gandharvas, rejoiced and praised the words of the Blessed One.

1.12 *This concludes "The Sūtra on the Four Factors."*<sup>11</sup>

n.

## NOTES

- n.1 Pearcey, Adam. trans., *The Sūtra Teaching the Four Factors* (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh249.html>), Toh 249 (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, 2019).
- n.2 Pearcey, Adam. trans., *The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra on the Four Factors* (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh251.html>), Toh 251 (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, 2023).
- n.3 Dharmachakra Translation Committee, trans., *The Fourfold Accomplishment* (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh252.html>), Toh 252 (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, 2020).
- n.4 Kīrtimukha Translation Group, trans., *The Sūtra on Having Moral Discipline*, Toh 303, [1.15](#) (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, 2021).
- n.5 See Vinīta (2010), pp. 334–38. See also Skilling (2021), p. 532 n. 350.
- n.6 *bka' 'khor lo dang por gtogs pa'o* (“This belongs to the teachings of the First Turning”). As Skilling notes, this line is also found in other Kangyur of the Themphangma (*thems spangs ma*) tradition.
- n.7 See Denkarma, F.301.a.5. See also Herrmann-Pfandt (2008), pp. 166–67, no. 306B.
- n.8 *dkar chag 'phang thang ma*, p. 22.
- n.9 Feer (1866), pp. 280–83.
- n.10 Skilling (2021), pp. 163–69.
- n.11 As noted above, the Stok Palace edition concludes with the line, “This belongs to the teachings of the First Turning” (*bka' 'khor lo dang por gtogs pa'o*).

b.

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## GLOSSARY

· Types of attestation for names and terms of the corresponding ·  
source language

AS	<i>Attested in source text</i> This term is attested in a manuscript used as a source for this translation.
AO	<i>Attested in other text</i> This term is attested in other manuscripts with a parallel or similar context.
AD	<i>Attested in dictionary</i> This term is attested in dictionaries matching Tibetan to the corresponding language.
AA	<i>Approximate attestation</i> The attestation of this name is approximate. It is based on other names where the relationship between the Tibetan and source language 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's Park

*mgon med zas sbyin gyi kun dga' ra ba*

མགོན་མེད་ཟས་སྦྱིན་གྱི་ཀུན་དགའ་ར་བ།

*anāthapiṇḍadārāma*

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*



This was an important early site for the Buddha's growing community. Anāthapiṇḍada, a wealthy patron of the Buddha, purchased the park, located outside Śrāvastī, at great cost, purportedly covering the ground with gold, and donated it to the saṅgha. It was there that the Buddha spent several rainy seasons and gave discourses that were later recorded as sūtras. It was also the site for one of the first Buddhist monasteries. (*Provisional 84000 definition. New definition forthcoming.*)

g.2 Jeta Grove

*rgyal bu rgyal byed kyī tshal*

ལྷུ་བུ་ལྷུ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་རྩེ་ལ།

*jetavana*

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

A park in Śrāvastī, the capital of the ancient kingdom of Kośala in northern India. It was owned by Prince Jeta, and the wealthy merchant Anāthapiṇḍada, wishing to offer it to the Buddha, bought it from him by covering the entire property with gold coins. It was to become the place where the monks could be housed during the monsoon season, thus creating the first Buddhist monastery. It is therefore the setting for many of the Buddha's discourses.

g.3 śrāvaka

*nyan thos*

ཉན་ཐོས།

*śrāvaka*

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

This term is usually defined as “those who hear the teaching from the Buddha and make it heard to others.” Primarily it refers to those disciples of the Buddha who aspire to attain the state of an arhat by seeking self-liberation and nirvāṇa. They are the practitioners of the first turning of the wheel of the Dharma on the four noble truths, who realize the suffering inherent in saṃsāra and focus on understanding that there is no independent self. By conquering afflicted mental states, they liberate themselves, attaining first the stage of stream enterers at the path of seeing, followed by the stage of once-returners who will be reborn only one more time, and then the stage of non-returners who will no longer be reborn into the desire realm. The final goal is to become an arhat. These four stages are also known as the “four results of spiritual practice.”

g.4 Śrāvastī

*mnyan yod*

མཉན་ཡོད།

*śrāvastī*

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

During the life of the Buddha, Śrāvastī was the capital city of the powerful kingdom of Kośala, ruled by King Prasenajit, who became a follower and patron of the Buddha. It was also the hometown of Anāthapiṇḍada, the wealthy patron who first invited the Buddha there, and then offered him a park known as Jetavana, Prince Jeta's Grove, which became one of the first Buddhist monasteries. The Buddha is said to have spent about twenty-five rainy seasons with his disciples in Śrāvastī, thus it is named as the setting of numerous events and teachings. It is located in present-day Uttar Pradesh in northern India.