

བྱམས་པས་ཚོས་བརྒྱད་ལུས་པ།

The Question of Maitreya on the Eight Qualities

Maitreyapariṣcchādharmāṣṭa

འཕགས་པ་བྱམས་པས་ཚོས་བརྒྱད་ལུས་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་མདོ།

'phags pa byams pas chos brgyad zhus pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra “The Question of Maitreya on the Eight Qualities”

Āryamaitreyapariṛchādharmāṣṭanāmamahāyānasūtra



Toh 86

Degé Kangyur, vol. 44 (dkon brtsegs, cha), folios 116.b–119.b.

Translated by Karen Liljenberg
under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of
the Buddha.

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SUMMARY

- s.1 In *The Question of Maitreya on the Eight Qualities*, Maitreya asks the Buddha what qualities bodhisattvas need in order to be sure of completing the path to buddhahood. In response, the Buddha briefly lists eight qualities. Starting with the excellent intention to become enlightened, they include loving kindness, as well as realization of the perfection of wisdom, which the Buddha explains in terms of reflection on the twelve links of dependent origination.

ac.

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- ac.1 This sūtra was translated by Dr. Karen Liljenberg, with Dr. Ulrich Pagel acting as consultant.

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INTRODUCTION

i.

i.1 *The Question of Maitreya on the Eight Qualities*,¹ like most of the sūtras that comprise the Ratnakūṭa collection, was translated into Tibetan from a Sanskrit original that is now lost, but that may have dated back as far as the first or second centuries CE, i.e., several centuries before the collection itself was compiled. Apart from the Tibetan Kangyur version, translated in the ninth century, the sūtra is extant only in an earlier Chinese translation.

i.2 Both the work translated here and the work that precedes it in the collection, *The Question of Maitreya*,² focus on the important figure of the bodhisattva Maitreya, who is generally accepted as destined to be the future Buddha of this world-system.

i.3 In this sūtra, Maitreya asks the Buddha what qualities bodhisattvas need in order to be sure of completing the whole path to buddhahood. The Buddha responds with a list of eight qualities that, while individually all standard elements of the Mahāyāna path, as a set of eight appear to be specific to this text. The Buddha briefly explains each quality and, in his explanation of the last—the perfection of wisdom—outlines the doctrine of the twelve links of dependent origination in both their “forward” and “reverse” orders, corresponding to causation and cessation.

i.4 It is difficult to determine the precise historical relationship of *The Question of Maitreya on the Eight Qualities* with *The Question of Maitreya* (Toh 85), the longer sūtra that immediately precedes it. Their themes are obviously closely linked—in both, Maitreya questions the Buddha about the bodhisattvas’ qualities. However, their geographic settings differ: *The Question of Maitreya on the Eight Qualities* takes place on Vulture Peak Mountain near Rājagṛha, like many other Ratnakūṭa sūtras, while *The Question of Maitreya* is delivered in a relatively obscure location, Mount Śuśumāra in the country of the Bhargas.

i.5 Both texts are included in the Denkarma (*Idan dkar ma*) inventory of early translations, dated to a year of the dragon thought to be most likely 824 (but possibly 812), so they must have been translated by that date. The translation of this one, the shorter sūtra, is attributed to Jinamitra and Danaśīla, and

Yeshé Dé is said to have corrected it using the revised terminology (*skad gsar*). Since *The Question of Maitreya* appears to have needed no such revision, its first Tibetan translation by Jinamitra and Surendrabodhi, under the editorial supervision of Yeshé Dé, may have been slightly later.

- i.6 In the Degé Kangyur, the text has two different titles: the first, in the initial line introducing it as the forty-second section of the Ratnakūṭa, calls it “The Noble Elucidation of the Question of Maitreya on the Eight Qualities” (*’phags pa byams pas chos brgyad zhus pa lung bstan pa*), while the second, immediately afterwards, is simply “The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra of the Question of Maitreya” (*’phags pa byams pas zhus pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po’i mdo*), which is the same as the title of the preceding text. The Sanskrit titles of both sūtras, as transliterated in Tibetan in the Degé Kangyur, are also the same: *Maitreyaparipṛcchā*. In other Kangyurs, a variety of similar titles are given, while in some—e.g. the Narthang (*snar thang*) and Stok Palace Manuscript (*stog pho brang bris ma*) Kangyurs—the Sanskrit title includes mention of the eight qualities: *Maitreyaparipṛcchā-dharmāṣṭa*. Whether the reference to the “eight qualities” figured in the title of the Sanskrit original or, if not, at what stage it was integrated into the title as a convenient way of distinguishing this text from the preceding one, is difficult to determine. In the Tibetan title, at least, inclusion of the eight qualities was a feature in some Kangyurs and text catalogues early in the imperial period, even if it was not universal. It is found (as *’phags pa byams pas zhus pa’i chos brgyad pa*) in the early ninth century Denkarma inventory mentioned above.
- i.7 This sūtra and the preceding one in the Ratnakūṭa section, both often simply called *The Question of Maitreya*, are not to be confused with a third sūtra of the same name in the General Sūtra (*mdo sde*) section, Toh 149, a short work (also set in Rajagṛha) in which Maitreya asks a quite different question.
- i.8 The main Tibetan text used for the present translation was the Degé (*sde dge*) edition of the Kangyur. Other Kangyurs were also consulted but, apart from the one noted, no significant variations were found.

THE TRANSLATION

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra

The Question of Maitreya on the Eight Qualities

- 1.1 [F.116.b] Homage to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas!
- 1.2 Thus have I heard at one time. The Blessed One was staying in Rājagṛha, on Vulture Peak Mountain, together with a great saṅgha of 1,250 monks and 10,000 bodhisattvas. The Blessed One, surrounded by a retinue of many hundreds of thousands, surveyed those before him, and taught the Dharma.
- 1.3 At that time, the bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya was present among that very retinue. He rose from his seat, draped his shawl over one shoulder, set his right knee on the ground, and paid homage with palms joined toward the Blessed One. He then said to the Blessed One, “Would the Blessed One please, if he has time, answer a certain question that I would like to put to the Tathāgata, the Arhat, the perfectly enlightened Buddha?”
- The Blessed One [F.117.a] answered the bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya, “Maitreya, you may put to the Tathāgata, the Arhat, the perfectly enlightened Buddha whatever question you wish. What I shall say in response to your question will cause you to rejoice.”
- 1.4 So, since the Blessed One had given him the opportunity, the bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya asked the Blessed One, “Blessed One, how many qualities do bodhisattva mahāsattvas need to possess in order to become irreversibly set on supreme and perfect enlightenment without regressing, without regressing in the slightest, and to gain special attainments; to vanquish negative and hostile influences; and, while engaging in the conduct of a bodhisattva, to realize the intrinsic characteristics of all phenomena just as they are and therefore be indefatigable in saṃsāra? And, as well as having that indefatigable mind, through the pristine awareness that does not rely on anything else,³ to awaken quickly to supreme, perfect enlightenment and become a buddha?”

1.5 The Blessed One replied to the bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya, “Very good, Maitreya. It is good that you have thought to ask the Tathāgata a question on this point. Therefore, Maitreya, listen well and retain in your mind what I shall explain to you.”

“Blessed One, please do so,” said the bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya, and listened as the Blessed One had instructed him.

1.6 The Blessed One, in turn, continued, “Maitreya, if bodhisattvas possess eight qualities, they will become irreversibly set on supreme and perfect enlightenment [F.117.b] without regressing, without regressing in the slightest, and will gain special attainments; they will vanquish negative and hostile influences; and, while engaging in the conduct of a bodhisattva, they will realize the intrinsic characteristics of all phenomena just as they are and therefore be indefatigable in saṃsāra. And, as well as having that indefatigable mind, through the pristine awareness that does not rely on anything else, they will quickly awaken to supreme, perfect enlightenment and become a buddha.

1.7 “What are those eight qualities? Well, Maitreya, they are for bodhisattva mahāsattvas to have excellent intention, excellent application, excellent giving, skill in dedicating merit, excellent loving kindness, excellent compassion, skill in methods, and emancipation in the perfection of wisdom.

1.8 “Maitreya, how do such bodhisattvas have excellent intention? Well, Maitreya, such bodhisattva mahāsattvas, whether they hear praises or slander of the Buddha, have the intention to attain supreme, perfect enlightenment. Whether they hear praises or slander of the Dharma, they have the intention to attain supreme, perfect enlightenment. Whether they hear praises or slander of the Saṅgha, they have the intention to attain supreme, perfect enlightenment. This, Maitreya, is how the bodhisattvas have excellent intention.

1.9 “Maitreya, how do such bodhisattvas have excellent application? Well, Maitreya, such bodhisattva mahāsattvas renounce killing, theft, [F.118.a] sexual misconduct, falsehood, slander, harsh speech, and gossip. This, Maitreya, is how the bodhisattva mahāsattvas have excellent application.

1.10 “Maitreya, how do such bodhisattvas have excellent giving? Well, Maitreya, such bodhisattva mahāsattvas give clothes, food, bedding, curative medicines, and necessities to ascetics, brahmins, poor people, and beggars. Their generosity then becomes pure.⁴ This, Maitreya, is how the bodhisattvas have excellent giving.

1.11 “Maitreya, how do such bodhisattvas have skill in dedicating merit? Well, Maitreya, such bodhisattva mahāsattvas dedicate all the accumulations of roots of virtue that they have created through their body, speech, and mind to

supreme, perfect enlightenment. This, Maitreya, is how the bodhisattva mahāsattvas have skill in dedicating merit.

1.12 “Maitreya, how do such bodhisattvas have excellent loving kindness? Well, Maitreya, such bodhisattva mahāsattvas’ physical actions are kind, their verbal actions are kind, and their mental actions are kind. This, Maitreya, is how the bodhisattva mahāsattvas have excellent loving kindness.

1.13 “Maitreya, how do such bodhisattvas have excellent compassion? Well, Maitreya, the bodhisattva mahāsattvas’ physical actions are without malice, their verbal actions are without malice, and their mental actions are without malice. [F.118.b] This, Maitreya, is how the bodhisattvas have excellent compassion.

1.14 “Maitreya, how do such bodhisattva mahāsattvas have skill in their methods? Well, Maitreya, such bodhisattva mahāsattvas are skilled in conventional truth, they are skilled in the absolute truth, and they are skilled in both. This, Maitreya, is how the bodhisattva mahāsattvas have skill in their methods.

1.15 “Maitreya, how do such bodhisattva mahāsattvas have emancipation in the perfection of wisdom? Well, Maitreya, such bodhisattva mahāsattvas correctly train as follows.

1.16 “They think, ‘Because one thing exists, another one arises; because this is born, that is born. Conditioned by ignorance, karmic formations come into being. Conditioned by karmic formations, consciousness comes into being. Conditioned by consciousness, name and form come into being. Conditioned by name and form, the six sources of perception come into being. Conditioned by the six sources of perception, contact comes into being. Conditioned by contact, feeling comes into being. Conditioned by feeling, craving comes into being. Conditioned by craving, grasping comes into being. Conditioned by grasping, existence comes into being. Conditioned by existence, birth comes into being. Conditioned by birth, aging and death come into being, as well as misery, lamentations, suffering, unhappiness, and agitation. That is how this great heap of suffering comes into being; without these conditions, it does not come into being.

1.17 “When these conditions cease to exist, it also ceases. When ignorance ceases, karmic formations cease. When karmic formations cease, consciousness ceases. When consciousness ceases, name and form cease. When name and form cease, the six sources of perception cease. When the six sources of perception cease, contact ceases. When contact ceases, feeling [F.119.a] ceases. When feeling ceases, craving ceases. When craving ceases, grasping ceases. When grasping ceases, existence ceases. When existence ceases, birth ceases. When birth ceases, aging, death, misery, lamentations,

suffering, unhappiness, and agitation cease. That is how this great heap of suffering ceases.’ This, Maitreya, is how the bodhisattva mahāsattvas have emancipation in the perfection of wisdom.

1.18 “Maitreya, if bodhisattva mahāsattvas possess those eight qualities, they will become irreversibly set on supreme and perfect enlightenment without regressing, without regressing in the slightest, and will gain special attainments; they will vanquish negative and hostile influences; and, while engaging in the conduct of a bodhisattva, they will realize the intrinsic characteristics of all phenomena just as they are and therefore be indefatigable in saṃsāra. And, as well as having that indefatigable mind, through the pristine awareness that does not rely on anything else, they will quickly awaken to supreme, perfect enlightenment and become a buddha.”

1.19 After the Blessed One had spoken these words, the bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya, together with the monks, as well as all the worlds of gods and men, demigods and gandharvas, rejoiced and praised what the Blessed One had said.

c. Colophon

c.1 This concludes “The Question of Maitreya on the Eight Qualities,” the forty-second section of *The Noble Dharma Discourse, the Great Heap of Jewels*, in one hundred thousand sections.

The Indian scholars Jinamitra and Danaśīla together with the chief editor and translator Yeshé Dé translated, edited, corrected this text using the revised terminology, and finalized it.

n.

NOTES

- 1 In the Degé Kangyur this title, included within the text, is preceded by this introductory sentence: “From *The Noble Dharma Discourse, the Great Heap of Jewels* in one hundred thousand sections, section 42: ‘The Noble Elucidation of the Question of Maitreya on the Eight Qualities’ in a half-fascicle” (*’phags pa dkon mchog brtsegs pa chen po’i chos kyi rnam grangs le’u stong phrag brgya pa las le’u bzhi bcu rtsa gnyis pa ste ’phags pa byams pas chos brgyad zhus pa lung bstan pa / bam po phyed pa*). See i.6 for a discussion of the various titles by which this text is known.
- 2 They are sūtra numbers 42 and 41, respectively, in the Tibetan version of the Ratnakūṭa collection, but are numbered 86 and 85 in the Tōhoku catalogue of the Degé Kangyur as a whole.
- 3 Tentative translation of *gzhan gyi kha na ma las pa’i ye shes*.
- 4 The Degé and the other *tshal pa* Kangyurs have *sbyin pa dag tu gyur pa yin te*. The Stok Palace Kangyur has *sbyin bdag tu gyur pa yin te*, which would mean “he becomes their benefactor.”

b.

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GLOSSARY

g.

g.1 Application

sbyor ba

སྐྱོར་བ།

g.2 Country of the Bhargas

yul bha rga

ཡུལ་བླ་ཤ།

Bharga

g.3 Emancipation

nges par byung ba

ངེས་པར་བྱུང་བ།

g.4 Giving

gtong ba

གདོང་བ།

g.5 Indefatigable

mi skyo ba

མི་སྐྱོ་བ།

g.6 Intention

bsam pa

བསམ་པ།

g.7 Intrinsic characteristics

ngo bo nyid kyi mtshan nyid

ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་མཚན་ཉིད།

g.8 Maitreya

byams pa

བྱམས་པ།

Maitreya

g.9 Malice

gnod sems

གནོད་སེམས།

g.10 Mount Śuśumāra

chu srin byis pa gsod lta bu'i ri

ཚུ་སྲིན་བྱིས་པ་གསོད་ལྷ་བུའི་རི།

Śuśumāragiri

Sometimes has the alternative Sanskrit spelling Śiśumāragiri.

g.11 Perfection of wisdom

shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa

ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་ཕ་རོལ་ཏུ་ཕྱིན་པ།

prajñāpāramitā

g.12 Vulture Peak Mountain

bya rgod phung po'i ri

བྱ་གོད་ཕུང་པོའི་རི།

Gṛdhrakūtaparvata