

བསྐྱེད་པ་གསུམ་གྱི་མདོ།

The Sūtra on the Threefold Training

Śikṣātrayasūtra

bslab pa gsum gyi mdo



Toh. 282

Degé Kangyur, vol. 68 (mdo sde, ya), folios 55.b–56.a.

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

v 1.0 2018

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s.

SUMMARY

s.1

In *The Sūtra on the Threefold Training*, Buddha Śākyamuni briefly introduces the three elements or stages of the path, widely known as “the three trainings,” one by one in a specific order: discipline, meditative concentration, and wisdom. He teaches that training progressively in them constitutes the gradual path to awakening.

ac.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ac.1

This text was translated from the Tibetan, with comparison to Sanskrit, Chinese, and Pali editions, introduced and edited by the Dharmasāgara Translation Group: Raktrul Ngawang Kunga Rinpoche, Rebecca Hufen, Shanshan Jia, Jason Sanche, and Arne Schelling.

i.

INTRODUCTION

i.1

The Sūtra on the Threefold Training is, in essence, a brief outline of the core teachings of Buddha Śākyamuni, which he gave while travelling toward Kuśinagara in the last year before his parinirvāṇa. It was given to a large audience of fully ordained monks in a grove to the north of Kuṭigrāmaka, a village in the ancient Indian country of Vṛji, which extended from the north bank of the Ganges opposite Pāṭaliputra up to the Madhesh regions of what is currently southern Nepal. The sūtra's condensed teaching represents the three stages of the gradual Buddhist path to enlightenment and emphasizes how the trainings are undertaken in progression. The first training, discipline, is taught as the basis for the second training, meditative concentration, which in turn is a prerequisite to wisdom, the third training.

i.2

There appear to be several parallels or versions of this text. In its Tibetan translation it is preserved not only as an independent sūtra, but also in the form of short passages in two long vinaya texts, the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* (sixth chapter of the *Vinayavastu*)¹ and the *Vinayakṣudrakavastu*.² It is also found as a passage in the non-Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, of which so far only incomplete Sanskrit manuscripts are extant, although a Sanskrit version has been reconstructed by Ernst Waldschmidt (1951). With some variant readings, the same passage appears, too, in the still extant Pali *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*. Translations of it in Chinese can be found as part of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* and passages in some vinaya texts.³

i.3

A number of studies and translations of the aforementioned texts in Western languages have been carried out, for example those by Waldschmidt (1951) and Rhys Davids (1951). However, there have hitherto been no translations, as far as we know, of the independent sūtra.

i.4

In this translation of the sūtra from the Tibetan Kangyur, the text is introduced with the title in Sanskrit and Tibetan, proceeding with the homage and then the general opening formula of "Thus have I heard at one time." Naturally, in the other versions in which this text is embedded as part of a larger work, these introductory statements and the concluding sentence are not included. Besides this, there are a few variant readings in the Tibetan,

Sanskrit, Pali, and especially in the Chinese. Since most of them do not alter the meaning significantly, we have chosen to note only the most important variants.

THE TRANSLATION

The Sūtra on the Threefold Training

- 1.1 [F.55.b] Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas.
- 1.2 Thus have I heard at one time. As the Bhagavān was wandering in the land of Vṛji, he arrived at the village of Kuṭigrāmaka and settled to the north of that village in a grove of sāl trees,⁴ [F.56.a] with a great saṅgha of bhikṣus. Thereupon the Bhagavān taught the following to the bhikṣus:
- 1.3 “This, bhikṣus, is discipline.⁵ This is meditative concentration. This is wisdom. Bhikṣus, training in discipline will lead one to abide for a long time in meditative concentration. Training in meditative concentration will lead one to gain wisdom. By training in wisdom, one’s mind will be completely liberated from desire, anger, and ignorance. In this way, having a completely liberated mind, a noble śrāvaka will perfectly know: ‘My defilements⁶ have ceased. I have lived the sublime life. What was to be done has been done. From here onward, I will not know any further existence.’ ”
- 1.4 After the Bhagavān had thus spoken, the bhikṣus rejoiced and praised the Bhagavān’s words.
- 1.5 This completes the Sūtra on the Threefold Training.

n.

NOTES

- 1 *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, Degé Kangyur vol. 2, F.36b–37a. See also Yao (forthcoming).
- 2 *Vinayaḥśudrakavastu*, Degé Kangyur vol. 11, F.239a–239b. See also Jamspal et al. (forthcoming).
- 3 1. Taishō No. 1 長阿含經; 2. Taishō No. 5 佛般泥洹經; 3. Taishō No. 6 般泥洹經; 4. Taishō 1451 根本說一切有部毘奈耶雜事; 5. Taishō No. 1448 根本說一切有部毘奈耶藥事; 6. Taishō No. 1421 彌沙塞部和醯五分律.
- 4 The Tibetan versions in the *Vinayavastu* and *Vinayaḥśudrakavastu*, as well as the Sanskrit and Chinese versions in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, here instead have *śiṃśapā* (Tib. *shing sha pa*), which refers to the Indian rosewood tree (*Dalbergia sissoo*).
- 5 All versions except that in the *Vinayaḥśudrakavastu* have a plural here, thus referring to a set of ethical-moral rules. With “discipline” being a well established translation for the Sanskrit *śīla* and the Tibetan *tshul khrims*, and the plural “disciplines” being rather misleading in English, we have kept the singular form, though in the sense of a mass noun.
- 6 The *Vinayaḥśudrakavastu* and *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* instead read “My births (Skt. *jāti*; Tib. *skye ba*) have ceased,” which is another commonly found statement made by an arhat, as taught in other discourses.

b.

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GLOSSARY

g.

g.1

Bhikṣu

dge slong

དགེ་སློང།

bhikṣu

A fully ordained monk.

g.2

Discipline

tshul khrim

ཚུལ་ཁྲིམས།

śīla

A mind set on abandoning the undisciplined conduct of body, speech, and mind.

g.3

Kuṭigrāmaka

spyil bu can

སྤྱིལ་བུ་ཅན།

Kuṭigrāmaka

A settlement / village in the country of Vṛji. According to a commentary on the *Mahāvamsa*, the *Vamsatthappakāsinī*, it is one *gāvuta* (about two miles) away from the river Ganges.

g.4

Meditative concentration

ting nge 'dzin

ཉིང་ངེ་འཇིན།

samādhi

A mind focused one-pointedly on an object of concentration.

g.5

Sāl tree

shing sa la

ཤིང་སཱ་ལ།

sāla

Usually identified as *Shorea robusta*, known as the kind of tree under which the Buddha was born and passed away.

g.6

Śrāvaka

nyan thos

ཉན་ཐོས།

śrāvaka

Primarily referring to those disciples of the Buddha who aspire to attain the state of an arhat by seeking self liberation. It is usually defined as “those who hear the teaching from the Buddha and make it heard to others.”

g.7

Vṛji

spong byed

ཕྱོད་ཅེས།

vṛji

One of the sixteen principal *mahājanapadas* (great countries) of ancient India, and a confederacy of eight or nine clans. It extended from the north bank of the Ganges opposite Pātaliputra up to the Madhesh regions of present southern Nepal.

g.8

Wisdom

shes rab

ཤེས་རབ།

prajñā

A mind that sees the ultimate truth directly.