

༄༅། །བྱམས་པས་ཞུས་པ།

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## The Question of Maitreya (3)

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*Maitreyapariṣcchā*

འཕགས་པ་བྱམས་པས་ཞུས་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་མདོ།

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

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra “The Question of Maitreya”

*Āryamaitreyapariṣcchānāmamahāyānasūtra*



Toh 149  
Degé Kangyur, vol. 57 (mdo sde, pa), folios 330.b–331.a.

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co.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- ti. Title
- im. Imprint
- co. Contents
- s. Summary
- ac. Acknowledgements
- i. Introduction
- tr. The Question of Maitreya
  - 1. The Translation
- ab. Abbreviations
- b. Bibliography
  - Source Texts
  - Secondary Literature
- n. Notes
- g. Glossary

## SUMMARY

s.

- s.1 The bodhisattva Maitreya approaches the Buddha on Vulture Peak Mountain and asks him to explain the karmic results of teaching the Dharma. The Buddha responds by comparing the merit gained by a person who makes an unfathomably enormous material offering to the buddhas, to the merit gained by another person who teaches a single verse of Dharma, declaring that the merit of the latter is far superior.

ac.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ac.1 This sūtra was translated by the Kīrtimukha Translation Group. Celso Wilkinson, Laura Goetz, and L.S. Summer translated the text from the Tibetan and Sanskrit.

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

## INTRODUCTION

i.

i.1 On Vulture Peak Mountain in Rājagṛha, the bodhisattva Maitreya arises from an audience of monks and bodhisattvas and asks the Buddha to explain the karmic results of teaching the Dharma. The Buddha responds by comparing the merit gained by a person who makes an unfathomably enormous material offering to the buddhas, to the merit gained by another person who teaches a single verse of Dharma, declaring that the merit of the latter is far superior. The Buddha then concludes with a two-verse summary of his pithy explanation.

i.2 This very brief sūtra, found in the General Sūtra (*mdo sde*) section of the Degé Kangyur, is not to be confused with two other sūtras from the Ratnakūṭa (*dkon brtsegs*) collection of the Kangyur called *The Question of Maitreya* (Toh 85)<sup>1</sup> and *The Question of Maitreya on the Eight Qualities* (Toh 86),<sup>2</sup> which are longer and differ thematically from this sūtra.

i.3 While the longer *Question of Maitreya* is well known and has been the subject of several commentaries in the Tibetan tradition, this text seems to have been less utilized. We were only able to locate a few references to it, one of which is in a Prajñāpāramitā commentary by the Indian scholar Dharmamitra (twelfth century) on the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, located in the Tengyur.<sup>3</sup> This shorter *Question of Maitreya* is cited among a series of scriptural quotations regarding how bodhisattvas should not conceal teachings from students but offer them freely out of compassion.

i.4 There was no known Sanskrit original of *The Question of Maitreya* available until recently, when a manuscript containing a collection of twenty sūtras was found in the Potala Palace in Lhasa. Bhikṣuṇī Vinītā published a critical edition and English translation of this collection in the series Sanskrit Texts from the Autonomous Region (2010). Unfortunately, due to the inaccessibility of the manuscript collection and because it is missing a final colophon, its origin and date are currently unknown.<sup>4</sup> There seems to be a thematic connection among these twenty sūtras: Vinītā notes that moral

discipline (*śīla*) is a recurrent theme in the manuscript,<sup>5</sup> and we can likewise identify the prevalence of themes of karmic cause and effect and, as in the case of *The Question of Maitreya*, the hierarchy of merit.<sup>6</sup> In our translation, citations of the Sanskrit are given using Vinītā's emendations of the handwritten manuscript.

i.5 While the Sanskrit manuscript is entitled *Āryamaitreyapariṣcchānāmamahāyānasūtra*, the Degé edition gives the transliterated Sanskrit title *Āryamaitri-pariṣcchānāmamahāyānasūtra*, a variation on the name of the bodhisattva Maitreya. Other Tibetan editions give similar variants, such as *maitre*, *metre*, or *mitri*. We have chosen to adopt the more familiar rendering (*maitreya*) for the title.

i.6 In addition to the Degé Kangyur, we have consulted the Comparative Edition (Tib. *dpe bsdur ma*) and several other editions, including those from Tshalpa, Thempangma, and independent lines, to compare and record variant readings. These editions are generally consistent and closely match the Sanskrit text. There is no known Chinese translation of this sūtra.

i.7 There are three sūtras entitled *The Question of Maitreya* listed in the imperial catalogs, but judging by this sūtra's length it likely corresponds to the "small" (*chung ngu*) *Question of Maitreya* recorded in both the Denkarma (*ldan dkar ma*) and Phangthangma (*'phang thang ma*) catalogs.<sup>7</sup> This suggests that the sūtra was translated into Tibetan by the early ninth century at the latest, as the Denkarma catalog is thought to be dated to 812 CE.<sup>8</sup> The sūtra lacks a translator's colophon, so it is not possible to identify its translators or more precisely determine the context of its transmission to Tibet.

i.8 We have based our translation primarily on the Degé edition of the Tibetan Kangyur, but we consulted the Sanskrit and other Kangyur editions in the case of questionable terms or passages, to establish the most plausible and accurate readings of the text. Any instance where we have diverged from the Degé has been noted, and any significant differences found in the various versions of the sūtra are recorded in the notes.

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra

**The Question of Maitreya**

1.

## The Translation

[F.330.b]

1.1 Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas!

Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was dwelling in Rājagṛha, on Vulture Peak Mountain, together with a great saṅgha of monks and a great saṅgha of bodhisattvas.

1.2 On that occasion the bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya<sup>9</sup> rose from his seat, draped his shawl over one shoulder, and knelt on his right knee. Joining his palms and bowing to the Blessed One, he spoke these words: “Blessed One, what are the karmic results of bestowing the Dharma?”

1.3 The Blessed One replied to the bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya, “Maitreya, suppose one person filled as many great trichiliocosms as there are grains of sand in the river Ganges with the seven precious substances and offered them to the tathāgata, arhat, truly perfect buddhas, and another person, out of compassion, established a single verse of the Dharma in the mindstream of another. Maitreya, the former mass of merit would not even come close to a hundredth of this latter mass of merit. Nor could it be compared to even a thousandth, a hundred-thousandth, a ten-millionth, a hundred-sextillionth,<sup>10</sup> or any other portion, fraction, enumeration, or example.”

1.4 After the Sugata had said this, the Teacher furthermore declared:

“Consider one who has caused as many world realms as there are sand grains in the Ganges

To be filled to the brim with an abundance of riches<sup>11</sup>

And offered these to the victors with a joyful mind,

And another who has bestowed a single verse to a sentient being—

1.5 “If that exceedingly vast gift of riches

Does not equal any fraction or portion<sup>12</sup>

Of cultivating compassion and then bestowing a single verse, [F.331.a]  
How could one fathom the ripening of giving a verse twice, or three times?"

- 1.6 When the Blessed One had spoken, the bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya, the other bodhisattvas and the monks,<sup>13</sup> and the world with its gods, humans, asuras, and gandharvas rejoiced and praised the words of the Blessed One.
- 1.7 *This completes the noble Mahāyāna sūtra "The Question of Maitreya."*

ab.

## ABBREVIATIONS

*Degé* Degé (sde dge) Kangyur

*Sanskrit* Sanskrit manuscript found in the Potala Palace (see introduction and bibliography)

*Stok* Stok Palace (stog pho brang bris ma) Kangyur

n.

## NOTES

- n.1 See Liljenberg (2016a) (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh85.html>).
- n.2 See Liljenberg (2016b) (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh86.html>).
- n.3 *Abhisamayālaṅkārikārikāprajñāpāramitopadeśasāstraṭīkāprasphuṭapadā* (Toh 3796). The quotation from *The Question of Maitreya* can be found on folio 37.a in the Degé edition.
- n.4 Currently the manuscript is kept in the Potala. Vinītā’s critical edition is based on a copy of the manuscript that is kept in the China Tibetology Research Center. For further details on the state of this manuscript, see Vinītā (2010), pp. xv–xvii.
- n.5 Vinītā (2010), pp. xxvii–xxix.
- n.6 See in particular Toh 172: *Mañjuśrīpariṣcchāsūtra* (*‘jam dpal gyis dris pa’i mdo*) in Vinītā (2010), pp. 703–69. Here also the teaching of the Dharma, or the speech of the Buddha—or in this case his Dharma conch—is said to be supremely meritorious. For translation see Kīrtimukha Translation Group (2021) (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh172.html>).
- n.7 Of the three sūtras called *The Question of Maitreya* (*byams pas zhus pa*) listed in the Denkarma, the first is most likely the aforementioned longer sūtra from the Ratnakūṭa, Toh 85 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh85.html>). The second is listed among the general Mahāyāna sūtras (*theg pa chen po’i mdo sde sna tshogs*) and described in the catalog as having the length of seventy ślokas (a śloka equaling sixteen syllables in the Sanskrit), which is far too long for this text. Finally, the “small” *Question of Maitreya* (*‘phags pa byams pas zhus pa chung ngu*) has a lacuna in the printed text where the number indicating its length would normally be visible; however, since the texts listed in the catalog are ordered by descending length, it can be surmised that it is

between fifteen and thirty ślokas in length (Denkarma, folio 300.a). This correlates with the “small” *Question of Maitreya* (spelled slightly different, *'phags pa byams pas zhus pa nangs kyi chung ngu*) found in the Phangthangma, which is listed as having sixteen ślokas (Phangthangma (2003), p. 18). Although these lengths listed in the catalogs tend to be somewhat unreliable, this length closely matches our text. As a side note in regard to the seventy-śloka *Question of Maitreya*, the Phangthangma does not mention the seventy-śloka text in the catalog’s section for general Mahāyana sūtras, but it does mention a *Question of Maitreya* of forty ślokas in a miscellaneous section for texts that were not found in the official catalogs but in a list recorded by a certain monk, Shönu Nyingpo (*ban dhe gzhon nu snying po*; see *ibid.*, p. 50). See also Halkias (2004), pp. 75–76.

- n.8 For a discussion of dating of the Denkarma catalog, see Herrmann-Pfandt (2008), pp. xviii–xx.
- n.9 Sanskrit adds *devaparṣanmaṇḍale saṃniṣaṇṇaḥ* (“who was seated in an assembly of gods”).
- n.10 In Sanskrit the sequence varies slightly: “not even a hundredth, a thousandth, a hundred-thousandth, a ten-millionth, a billionth, a ten-billionth, or a trillionth” (*śatatamīm api . . . sahasratamīm api śatasahasratamīm api koṭīśatasahasratamīm api saṃkhyām api*).
- n.11 Sanskrit has “give excellent world realms full of riches” (*ratnasya pūrṇān varalokadhātun | dadyād*).
- n.12 Translated from Stok: *gang gi*, which aligns more closely with the attested Sanskrit *kāṃcin*. Degé has *gang gA'i* (“Ganges”), which is mentioned in the previous verse but does not fit in grammatically with this line.
- n.13 Sanskrit omits “monks” in this list.

b.

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## GLOSSARY

g.

g.1 Arhat

*dgra bcom pa*

དགའ་བཙེམ་པ།

*arhat*

Used both as an epithet of the Buddha and to refer to the final accomplishment of the śrāvaka path.

g.2 Blessed one

*bcom ldan 'das*

བཙེམ་ལྷན་འདས།

*bhagavat*

An epithet for a buddha. The Sanskrit means “one who has good fortune.” In Sanskrit literature the term is used for the most eminent of humans or the divine, but in a Buddhist context it refers explicitly to a buddha. The Tibetan translation of the term *bcom ldan 'das* is not a literal translation of the Sanskrit but means *bcom*: “one who has conquered (the māras or afflictions)”; *ldan*: “possesses (the qualities of enlightenment)”; and *'das*: “has transcended (saṃsāra, or both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa).”

g.3 Ganges

*gang gA*

གང་གླ།

*Gaṅgā*

The Ganges River.

g.4 Hundred-sextillion

*bye ba khrag khrig brgya stong*

བྱི་བ་ཐུག་ཐུག་བརྒྱ་སྟོང་།

*koṭiniyutaśatasahasra*

A number calculated by multiplying a *koṭi* (*bye ba*), or ten million, by a *niyuta* (*khrag khrig*), or a hundred billion according to the Abhidharma system (although it is only one million in Classical Sanskrit), and by a *śatasahasra* (*brgya stong*), or one hundred thousand, all of which together equals ten to the 23rd power or a hundred sextillion. This term is often used as to express a number so large as to be inconceivable.

g.5 Karmic result

*rnam par smin pa*

རྣམ་པར་སྐྱིན་པ།

*vipāka*

Literally, the “ripening.”

g.6 Maitreya

*byams pa*

བྱམས་པ།

*Maitreya*

The bodhisattva who became Śākyamuni’s regent and is prophesied to be the next buddha, the fifth buddha in the current eon. In early Buddhism he appears as the human disciple sent to pay his respects by his teacher; the Buddha gives him the gift of a robe and prophesies that he will be the next buddha.

g.7 Rājagṛha

*rgyal po’i khab*

རྒྱལ་པོ་འཛིན་པ།

*Rājagṛha*

The ancient capital of Magadha. Currently known as Rajgir, it is situated in the India state of Bihar.

g.8 Seven precious substances

*rin po che sna bdun*

རིན་པོ་ཆེ་སྣ་བདུན།

*saptaratna*

g.9 Sugata

*bde bar gshegs pa*

བདེ་བར་གཤེགས་པ།

*sugata*

An epithet for a buddha meaning “well-gone one.”

g.10 Tathāgata

*de bzhin gshegs pa*

དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ།

*tathāgata*

An epithet for a buddha. The Sanskrit compound may be ambiguously parsed to mean either “thus-gone one” (*tathā + gata*) or “thus-come one” (*tathā + āgata*); this concurs with the Tibetan translation with the verb *gshegs*, which can mean either “to come” or “to go.” The Sanskrit root  $\sqrt{\text{gam}}$  (“to go”) also often denotes the meaning “to understand,” while *tathā* refers to thusness, suchness, or the way things really are, so the *tathāgata* can be rendered as the one who understands things as they really are or who has gone to such a state.

g.11 Trichiliocosm

*stong gsum gyi stong chen po'i 'jig rten gyi kham*

སྟོང་གསུམ་གྱི་སྟོང་ཆེན་པོའི་འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱི་ཁམས།

*trisāhasramahāsāhasralokadhātu*

A term from Abhidharma cosmology referring to one thousand dichiliocosms, or one billion world systems.

g.12 Vulture Peak Mountain

*bya rgod kyi phung po'i ri*

བྱ་རྗེ་དགྱི་ཕུང་པོའི་རི།

*Gr̥dhrakūṭaparvata*

Mountain near Rājagṛha where the Buddha delivered many of the Mahāyāna teachings.

