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Teaching the Benefits of Generosity

Dānānuśaṃsānirdeśa

འཕགས་པ་སྤྱིན་པའི་ཕན་ཡོན་བསྟན་པ།

'phags pa sbyin pa'i phan yon bstan pa

The Noble “Teaching the Benefits of Generosity”

Āryadānānuśaṃsānirdeśa



Toh 183
Degé Kangyur, vol. 61 (mdo sde, tsa), folios 95.b–96.b.

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SUMMARY

- s.1 This short discourse was taught to an audience of monks in Śrāvastī, in the Jetavana. The Buddha details thirty-seven ways in which the wise give gifts, how those gifts are properly given, and the positive results that ripen from giving such gifts. The Buddha makes clear that the result that ripens is similar to the gift that was given or the manner in which the gift was given.

ac.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ac.1 This sūtra was translated from Tibetan into English by Khenpo Kalsang Gyaltzen and Chodrungma Kunga Chodron. Venerable Bhiksuni Heng-Ching Shih kindly assisted with comparison to the Chinese version. The sūtra was then edited and introduced by the 84000 editorial team.

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

i.

INTRODUCTION

i.1

The setting for this discourse is the Park of Anāthapiṇḍada in the Jetavana, where the Buddha spent many rainy-season retreats and where many of the Buddha's discourses are said to have been delivered. In this particular discourse, the Buddha succinctly describes thirty-seven ways in which the wise give gifts, as well as the results that ripen from their gift giving. More specifically, the first five ways in which the wise give gifts that the Buddha enumerates are relatively general and pertain primarily to the manner in which gifts are given and the purpose for which gifts are given. The wise are said, for example, to give gifts with faith in order to dispel stinginess, or respectfully in order to dispel mental agitation. For each of the remaining thirty-two ways in which gifts are given, the Buddha describes the result that ripens from the particular act, and in each case the result that ripens is similar to the gift that was its cause. For example, giving a gift of food ripens as the elimination of hunger in all one's future lives. The discourse concludes with the Buddha proclaiming the thirty-seventh and final way in which the wise give gifts, namely, without any expectation of reward, the full ripening of which is the unsurpassed and perfect awakening of a buddha.

i.2

Although this sūtra's Sanskrit original is no longer known to be extant, the colophon to the Tibetan translation tells us that it was translated into Tibetan by the Indian preceptor Surendrabodhi and the Tibetan translator-editor Yeshé Dé. It is also listed in the Denkarma (*ldan dkar ma*)¹ and Phangthangma (*'phang thang ma*)² imperial catalogs, so we can infer that this sūtra was translated from Sanskrit sometime during the late eighth- to early ninth-century. In the Degé Kangyur, this sūtra is placed after *The Perfection of Generosity*,³ a longer, explicitly Mahāyāna sūtra, also translated by Yeshé Dé during the imperial period, that also treats the topic of generosity. Not only is the present sūtra significantly shorter than *The Perfection of Generosity*, but its

content, apart from a small number of references to the result of buddhahood, is not in the same way explicitly or exclusively concerned with the bodhisattva path.

i.3 A version of the sūtra is also included in the Chinese Buddhist canon (Taishō 705 佛說布施經). In both the Tibetan and Chinese versions, the opening section, which describes the circumstances under which the discourse was delivered, and the closing section are identical. The enumerated gifts, the descriptions of how these gifts should be given, and the ripened results are identical in more than half of the stanzas.⁴

i.4 The present translation is based on the version in the Degé Kangyur, with reference to the Comparative Edition (*dpe sdur ma*).

The Noble

Teaching the Benefits of Generosity

1.

The Translation

[F.95.b]

1.1 Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas!

Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was dwelling in Śrāvastī in the Jetavana, in the park of Anāthapiṇḍada. Then the Blessed One said to the monks, “Monks, the wise give gifts in thirty-seven ways. What are those thirty-seven? They are as follows:

1.2 “They give gifts with faith in order to rid themselves of stinginess.

“They give gifts at the right time.

“They give gifts, in a pure manner, of the three things suitable to be given by the Thus-Gone One.⁵

1.3 “They give gifts respectfully in order to rid themselves of all the faults of mental agitation.

“They give gifts with their own hands in order to take hold of the essence from the essenceless body.

“When they have given a gift that does not harm others, the ripening is that they will acquire great generosity.

1.4 “When they have given a gift with exquisite colors, the ripening is that they will acquire a beautiful complexion.

“When they have given a gift with an exquisite scent, the ripening is that they will acquire the scent of fame.

“When they have given a gift with an exquisite taste, the ripening is that they will acquire the excellent marks of supreme taste.

1.5 “When they have given a gift that is abundant, the ripening is that they will acquire abundant wealth.

“When they have given a gift that is vast, the ripening is that they will acquire vast wealth.

1.6 “When they have given a gift of food, the ripening is that they will acquire the elimination of hunger in all future lives.

- “When they have given a gift of drink, [F.96.a] the ripening is that they will acquire the elimination of thirst in all future lives.
- “When they have given a gift of clothing, the ripening is that they will acquire a manifold wealth of clothing.
- 1.7 “When they have given the gift of a dwelling, the ripening is that they will acquire houses with parapets and multiple stories, and they will acquire courtyards, mansions, palaces, gardens, parks, and land.
- “When they have given a gift of bedding, the ripening is that they will acquire a higher caste-status.
- “When they have given the gift of a conveyance, the ripening is that they will acquire the four bases⁶ of miraculous power.
- 1.8 “When they have given a gift of medicine, the ripening is that they will acquire the nirvāṇa that is free from aging and death and is the cessation of sorrow and defilement.
- “When they have given a gift of Dharma, the ripening is that they will acquire the recollection of former lives.
- 1.9 “When they have given a gift of flowers, the ripening is that they will acquire the flowers that are the branches of awakening.
- “When they have given a gift of garlands, the ripening is that they will acquire the purification of the stains of attachment, aversion, and ignorance.
- 1.10 “When they have given a gift of incense, the ripening is that they will acquire total freedom from the stench of the defilements.
- “When they have given a gift of a parasol, the ripening is that they will acquire sovereign mastery of the Dharma.
- 1.11 “When they have given a gift of a bell, the ripening is that they will acquire a pleasing voice.
- “When they have given a gift of cymbals, the ripening is that they will acquire a voice like Brahmā’s.
- 1.12 “When they have given a gift of a lamp, the ripening is that they will acquire the divine eye, unobscured and pure.
- “When they have given a gift of silk, the ripening is that they will acquire the silken bond of liberation among gods and humans.
- 1.13 “When they have made an offering of fragrant oil or perfumed bathing water to a stūpa of the Thus-Gone One or an image of the Thus-Gone One, the ripening is that they will acquire the thirty-two marks [F.96.b] and eighty excellent signs of a great being.
- 1.14 “When they have given a gift of bathing necessities, the ripening is that in all their future lives they will acquire few illnesses, birth in the highest caste, and great beauty.

- “When they have given a gift of the five essential substances,⁷ the ripening is that in all future lives they will acquire great power and irrepressible great joy.
- 1.15 “When they have given a gift while abiding in loving kindness, the ripening is that they will acquire freedom from ill will.
“When they have given a gift while abiding in compassion, the ripening is that they will acquire harmlessness.
- 1.16 “When they have given a gift while abiding in joy, the ripening is that they will acquire the ability to bestow fearlessness.
“When they have given a gift while abiding in equanimity, the ripening is that they will rid themselves of sadness.
- 1.17 “When they have given gifts of various kinds, the ripening is that they will acquire various riches.
“When they have given a gift while abiding with no expectation of reward, the ripening is that they will acquire unsurpassed and perfect awakening.
- 1.18 “Monks, the wise give gifts in these thirty-seven ways.”
The Blessed One having spoken thus, the monks rejoiced and praised what the Blessed One said.
- 1.19 *This completes the noble “Teaching the Benefits of Generosity.”*

c.

Colophon

c.1 This was translated, edited, and finalized by the Indian preceptor Surendrabodhi and the translator-editor Bandé Yeshé Dé.

NOTES

n.

n.1 Denkarma, 299.b.7. See also Herrmann-Pfandt (2008), p. 122, no. 231.

n.2 See Phangthangma (2003), p. 18.

n.3 See Dharmachakra Translation Committee, trans., *The Perfection of Generosity* (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh182.html>), Toh 182 (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, 2019).

n.4 Both the gifts and their results are identical in nineteen of the thirty-seven stanzas. Interestingly, where there are differences, they are usually in the result rather than the gift itself. An example is where the Tibetan reads, “When they have given a gift while abiding in loving kindness, the result is that they will acquire freedom from ill will.” The corresponding verse appears in Chinese as “If a gift is given in loving kindness, your appearance will be benevolent and without anger.”

n.5 Translation tentative. Tib: *de bzhin gshegs pas gnang ba'i rung ba dngos po gsum yongs su dag par sbyin par sbyin no.*

n.6 Literally “feet” (*rkang pa*), hence the connection to the gift of a conveyance.

n.7 Possibly a reference to molasses, ghee, honey, sesame oil, and salt.

b.

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g.

GLOSSARY

g.1

Anāthapiṇḍada

mgon med zas sbyin

མགོན་མེད་བས་སྤྱིན།

Anāthapiṇḍada

A wealthy layman and famous benefactor of the Buddha who purchased the Jetavana and donated it to the Buddhist community. He is better known in the West by the alternative Pāli form Anāthapiṇḍika.

g.2

Blessed one

bcom ldan 'das

བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས།

bhagavat

In Buddhist literature, an epithet applied to buddhas, most often to Śākyamuni. The Sanskrit term generally means “possessing fortune,” but in specifically Buddhist contexts it implies that a buddha is in possession of six auspicious qualities (*bhaga*) associated with complete awakening. The Tibetan term—where *bcom* is said to refer to “subduing” the four *māras*, *ldan* to “possessing” the great qualities of buddhahood, and *'das* to “going beyond” *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*—possibly reflects the commentarial tradition where the Sanskrit *bhagavat* is interpreted as “one who destroys the four *māras*.” This is achieved either by reading *bhagavat* as *bhagnavat* (“one who broke”), or by tracing the word *bhaga* to the root $\sqrt{bhañj}$ (“to break”).

g.3

Brahmā

tshangs pa

ཚངས་པ།

Brahmā

A high-ranking deity who presides over a divine world where other beings consider him the creator; he is also considered to be the lord of the Saha world (our universe).

g.4 Branches of awakening

byang chub kyi yan lag

བྱང་ཚུབ་ཀྱི་ཡན་ལག

bodhyaṅga

Mindfulness, discrimination, diligence, joy, pliability, absorption, and equanimity.

g.5 Eighty excellent signs

dpe byad bzang po brgyad cu

དཔེ་བྱད་བཟང་པོ་བརྒྱད་ཅུ།

aśītyanuṣyañjana

A set of eighty bodily characteristics and insignia borne by both buddhas and universal emperors. They are considered “minor” in terms of being secondary to the thirty-two marks of a great being.

g.6 Four bases of miraculous power

rdzu 'phrul gyi rkang pa bzhi

རྩུ་འཕྲུལ་གྱི་རྐང་པ་བཞི།

catoāraṇḍhipādā

Determination, discernment, diligence, and concentration.

g.7 Jetavana

rgyal bu rgyal byed kyi tshal

རྒྱལ་བུ་རྒྱལ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཚལ།

Jetavana

“Prince Jeta’s Grove,” a grove near Śrāvastī that was given to the Buddha by the householder Anāthapiṇḍada. The Buddha is said to have spent most rainy seasons there, and it is therefore the setting for many discourses.

g.8 Ripening

rnam par smin pa

རྣམ་པར་སླིན་པ།

vipāka

The manifest result of a former action.

g.9 Śrāvastī

mnyan yod

མཉམ་ཡོད།

Śrāvastī

The capital of the ancient Indian kingdom of Kośala, and the setting for many sūtras, as the Buddha spent most rainy seasons outside the city. It has been identified with the present-day Sāhet Māhet in Uttar Pradesh on the banks of the river Rapti.

g.10 Surendrabodhi

su ren dra bo d+hi

སུ་རེན་བླ་བོ་རྗེ།

Surendrabodhi

One of the Indian teachers invited to Tibet at the time of the emperor Ralpacan (early ninth century). He was one of the great Indian pandits who assisted the Tibetan translators such as Yeshé Dé with the translation of Buddhist texts from Sanskrit.

g.11 Thirty-two marks of a great being

skye bu chen po'i mtshan sum cu rtsa gnyis

སྐྱེ་བུ་ཚེན་པོའི་མཚན་སུམ་རྩ་གཉིས།

dvātriṃśamahāpuruṣalakṣaṇa

The main identifying physical characteristics of both buddhas and universal monarchs, to which are added the eighty excellent signs.

g.12 Thus-gone one

de bzhin gshegs pa

དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ།

tathāgata

A frequently used synonym for buddha. In Sanskrit, *gata*, though literally meaning “gone,” is a past passive participle used to describe a state or condition of existence. *Tatha(tā)* is the quality or condition of things as they really are, which cannot be conveyed in conceptual, dualistic terms, and is often rendered as “suchness” or “thusness.” Therefore, this epithet is interpreted in different ways but general 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 (*dharmatā*) that does not abide in the two extremes of existence and quiescence.

g.13 Yeshé Dé

ye shes sde

ཡེ་ཤེས་སྡེ།

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