

བདུད་ཅི་བརྗོད་པ།

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**The Nectar of Speech**

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*Amṛtavyāharana*

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra “The Nectar of Speech”

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*Āryāmṛtavyāharaṇanāmahāyānasūtra*



Toh 197  
Degé Kangyur, vol. 61 (mdo sde, tsa), folios 271.b–274.b.

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co.

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## SUMMARY

s.1

In this sūtra, in answer to a question put by Maitreya, the Buddha Śākyamuni teaches five qualities that bodhisattvas should have in order to live a long life free of obstacles and attain awakening quickly: (1) giving the Dharma; (2) giving freedom from fear; (3) practicing great loving kindness, great compassion, great joy, and great equanimity; (4) repairing dilapidated stūpas; and (5) causing all beings to aspire to the mind of awakening. Maitreya praises the benefits of this teaching and vows to teach it himself in future degenerate times. Both Maitreya and the Buddha emphasize the positive effects on beings and the environment that upholding, preserving, and teaching *The Nectar of Speech* will bring about.

ac.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

i.

i.1

*The Nectar of Speech* is a Mahāyāna sūtra in which the Buddha Śākyamuni, at the request of the bodhisattva Maitreya, teaches a great assembly of monks and bodhisattvas. The setting for the teaching is the famous Veṇuvana forest monastery. This monastery was located outside Rājagṛha, the capital city of Magadha, which at the time was one of the great kingdoms of ancient India (located in the modern-day state of Bihar). The teaching provides an outline of the following five qualities of bodhisattvas that will ensure they avert obstacles, live long, and attain awakening: bodhisattvas should (1) give the Dharma; (2) give freedom from fear; (3) practice great loving kindness, great compassion, great joy, and great equanimity; (4) repair dilapidated stūpas; and (5) cause all beings to aspire to the mind of awakening. When the Buddha delivers this brief teaching, a large number of the monks, bodhisattvas, and celestial beings in attendance attain different stages of realization. Maitreya is inspired to give a discourse on the benefits of this sūtra and vows to teach it himself in the future during the time of degeneration. His exposition of its benefits and commitment to teach it himself are welcomed and endorsed by the Buddha. At the end, the Buddha emphasizes the importance of this teaching and instructs Ānanda to uphold and preserve it. The Buddha names the teaching *The Nectar of Speech* and also gives it an alternative title, *The Question of Maitreya*.<sup>1</sup> In the standard ending formula, the entire assembly rejoices and praises the words of the Buddha.

i.2

At present we are not aware of any surviving Sanskrit version, Chinese translation, or rendering of the text in any other language. The Sanskrit titles are rendered differently in the versions in different Kangyurs: *Amṛtaṅgāharāṇa* (Degé), *Amṛtadāna* (Narthang), and *Amṛtavārṇa* (Stok Palace). According to the colophon, the Tibetan translation was produced by the Indian scholar Prajñāvarman and the Tibetan translator Yeshé Dé. It can therefore be dated to the late eighth or early ninth century CE in central Tibet. The text was cited by

the Tibetan translator Kawa Paltsek, who was a contemporary of the translators<sup>2</sup> and is listed in the Denkarma catalogue,<sup>3</sup> which confirms that the translation of this sūtra into Tibetan must have been completed before 812 CE.

i.3

This English translation has been produced based on the Tibetan rendering that is found in the Degé Kangyur as well as the Comparative Edition (Tib. *dpe bsdur ma*) and the Stok Palace manuscript.



tr.

## THE TRANSLATION

### The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra

### **The Nectar of Speech**

- 1.1 [F.271.b] Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas.
- 1.3 Thus did I hear at one time. The Bhagavān was residing in Rājagṛha, at the Kalandakanivāsa in Veṇuvana, with a great saṅgha of five hundred bhikṣus and a great saṅgha of seventy-two thousand bodhisattvas. At that time the bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya was also seated in the assembly.
- 1.4 The bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya rose from his seat, draped his upper robe over one shoulder, knelt on his right knee, and with palms joined bowed to the Bhagavān and said, “With permission, I would like to ask the blessed, thus-gone, worthy, perfect Buddha some questions.”
- 1.5 The Bhagavān replied, “Maitreya, the Tathāgata will always grant you permission. Maitreya, ask the thus-gone, worthy, perfect Buddha whatever you wish, and I shall ease your mind by answering each of your questions.”
- 1.6 The bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya then asked the Bhagavān, “Bhagavān, [F.272.a] what are the qualities that bodhisattva mahāsattvas need to have so that none of Māra’s hordes will cause them obstacles, so that none of Māra’s retinue will transgress against them, so that out of love for sentient beings they will live for a long time, and so that they will soon fully awaken to unexcelled and perfect awakening?”
- 1.7 The Bhagavān replied to the bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya, “Maitreya, excellent, excellent! Maitreya, your intention in asking the thus-gone, worthy, perfect Buddha about this matter is excellent, since you act for the benefit of many beings, aim for the happiness of many beings, have compassion for the world, and seek the welfare, benefit, and well-being of gods and humans. Hence, Maitreya, listen very well and keep it in mind! I will explain it.”

The bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya replied, “I will do so,” and he listened accordingly as the Bhagavān taught as follows.

- 1.8 “Maitreya, there are five qualities that bodhisattva mahāsattvas should have so that none of Māra’s hordes will cause them obstacles, so that none of Māra’s retinue will transgress against them, so that out of love for sentient beings they will live for a long time, and so that they will soon fully awaken to unexcelled and perfect awakening. What are those five qualities? They are the unceasing giving of the Dharma; the unceasing giving of freedom from fear; the unceasing practice of great love, great compassion, great joy, and great equanimity; the unceasing repair of dilapidated stūpas; [F.272.b] and the unceasing inspiring of all beings to set their minds on awakening.<sup>4</sup> Maitreya, if bodhisattva mahāsattvas have those five qualities, none of Māra’s hordes will cause them obstacles, none of Māra’s retinue will transgress against them, out of love for sentient beings they will live for a long time, and they they will soon fully awaken to unexcelled and perfect awakening.”
- 1.9 When the Bhagavān had taught this discourse on the five qualities, the minds of five thousand bhikṣus became free of all defilements with no further appropriation; seventy-two thousand bodhisattvas attained the acceptance that phenomena do not arise; and the Dharma eye of eighty-four thousand gods regarding phenomena became purified, free from dust and stains, and without defilements.
- 1.10 The bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya then said to the Bhagavān, “Bhagavān, I feel inspired to speak. Blissful One, I feel inspired to speak.”
- 1.11 The Bhagavān said, “Noble son, speak if you know the time has come.”
- 1.12 Having thus received the Bhagavān’s permission, the bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya rose from his seat, draped his upper robe over one shoulder, knelt on his right knee, and with palms joined bowed to the Bhagavān and said, “Bhagavān, how marvelous that this Dharma discourse has been taught by the Bhagavān in order that all beings—sick because of desire, anger, and ignorance, and obscured by the darkness of the cataracts and visual aberrations of all views—may have their illnesses of the afflictions cured, and have their unexcelled Dharma eye purified! Bhagavān, this Dharma discourse you have taught is a great nectar! [F.273.a] Bhagavān, this Dharma discourse you have taught is a great panacea! Even for beings born as animals, those who happen to hear this Dharma discourse will have gathered thereby an accumulation of great roots of virtue and will be superior to all beings. They will behold all buddhas. They will be of great service to many beings. They will bring about roots of virtue. They will purify their karmic obscurations, be freed from the animal realm, and attain human bodies. Then, remembering their

previous lifetimes and gaining faith in the teachings of the Tathāgata, they will be reborn in any buddha realm they wish. So if that is the case even for them, what need is there to mention those who hear this teaching as human beings?

1.13 “Bhagavān, hearing this Dharma discourse is of great benefit to beings. Bhagavān, beings who hear this Dharma discourse belong to the assembly of those who are certain to awaken fully to unexcelled and perfect awakening. Respected Bhagavān, because they will be embraced by the thus-gone, worthy, perfect buddhas, they will soon fully awaken to unexcelled and perfect awakening.”

1.14 “Excellent, Maitreya, excellent!” said the Bhagavān. “Maitreya, it is just as you have said. It is the truth. It is that alone. It is unmistakable. Even those who listen to this Dharma discourse doubtingly will have no small roots of virtue, so what need is there to mention those who listen to, retain, hold, read, master, and [F.273.b] teach it extensively and properly without any doubts? Such holders of the sūtra will not encounter the works of Māra. They will not be harmed by desire, anger, ignorance, pride, avarice, rage, or malevolence. Their bodies will not be stricken by plague or disease. In whatever region such a sūtra as this is kept, wherever such a Dharma teacher dwells, or wherever this Dharma discourse is written down as a scripture—in such places all diseases, epidemics, harm, contagions, and conflicts will be quelled.”

1.15 Then the bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya said to the Bhagavān, “Bhagavān, later, in the future, during the final five hundred years when the time of destruction has come, the true Dharma is disappearing, and there is a great danger that the Buddha’s awakening will vanish, I shall teach this Dharma discourse to those noble beings. I shall invigorate them. In places where a holder of this sūtra resides, I shall quell all untimely cold winds, winter rains, famine, diseases, plagues, epidemics, infectious disease, harm, and conflict. In a place where this Dharma discourse is kept and written down as a scripture or tied at the top of a banner and worshiped—in such a place, all the terrors of hostile armies, thieves, rākṣasas, and ḍākinīs will be quelled through my blessing. I shall bless those places where such Dharma teachers reside and where this sūtra is kept, so that all harvests, riches, grains, flowers, leaves, and fruits may be abundant, and all kinds of joy may arise.” [F.274.a]

1.16 “Excellent, Maitreya!” said the Bhagavān. “It is excellent indeed that you have donned the great armor and proclaimed the lion’s roar for the benefit of all beings in order to uphold the true Dharma of the Tathāgata and to sustain<sup>5</sup> the Dharma way of the Tathāgata. I entrust this Dharma discourse to you. Thereby, later, in the future, during the final five hundred years when the time of destruction has come, the true Dharma is disappearing, and there is a great danger that the Buddha’s awakening will vanish, you should teach this Dharma discourse to all beings. You should proclaim it. You should inspire

those noble beings. You should proclaim that they must do nothing else but persevere in taking ultimate reality as their authority. You should teach them only according to ultimate reality. You should be sure to teach them in such a way that those noble beings understand this Dharma discourse unmistakably as it is.”

The bodhisattva Maitreya said, “Bhagavān, I will do so.”

1.17 Thereupon Indra and his retinue of gods, Brahmā and his retinue of gods, Prajāpati, and others, realizing that this Dharma discourse was coming to an end, offered heavenly flowers, fragrant smoke, incense, flower garlands, ointments, powders, garments, parasols, banners, and flags to the Bhagavān and the bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya.

1.18 They then exclaimed, “Bhagavān, this Dharma discourse that benefits innumerable beings is indeed a marvelous nectar of speech!” [F.274.b]

1.19 The Bhagavān now said to Venerable Ānanda, “Ānanda, such a Dharma discourse is rarely heard. Therefore, you must retain this Dharma discourse. You must write it down, hold it, read it aloud, and master it!”

1.20 “Bhagavān, I will retain this Dharma discourse,” said Ānanda. “Bhagavān, what is the name of this Dharma discourse? How should it be remembered?”

“Ānanda,” replied the Bhagavān, “you should remember this Dharma discourse as *The Nectar of Speech*. You should also refer to it as *The Question of Maitreya*.”

1.21 After the Bhagavān had thus spoken, the entire assembly—Venerable Ānanda, the bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya, the bhikṣus, the bodhisattvas, and also the gods, humans, asuras, and gandharvas—all rejoiced and praised the words of the Bhagavān.

*This concludes the noble Mahāyāna sūtra “The Nectar of Speech.”*

## c. COLOPHON

c.1 Translated, edited, and finalized by the Indian abbot Prajñāvarman and the chief editor-translator Venerable Yeshé Dé.

## NOTES

n.

- 1 It should be noted that there are three sūtras elsewhere in the Kangyur whose main titles are *The Question of Maitreya* (*Maitreyapariṣcchā*, *byams pas zhus pa*): Toh 85 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh85.html>), Toh 86 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh85.html>), and Toh 149.
- 2 In his *gsung rab rin po che'i gtam rgyud dang shAkya'i rabs rgyud* (Toh 4357), a treatise in the Tengyur; see note 4.
- 3 Denkarma, folio 299.b. See also Hermann-Pfandt (2008), p. 114, no. 215.
- 4 Kawa Paltsek, folio 283.b, quotes this passage as follows: “When bodhisattvas are endowed with five qualities, they will not be harmed by Māra, they will live long, and they will soon attain awakening. These five are (1) always giving sentient beings the Dharma, (2) giving sentient beings freedom from fear, (3) practicing the four immeasurable qualities, (4) repairing old stūpas, and (5) causing all beings to aspire to the mind of awakening.”
- 5 Translated based on S: *bskyang*. D: *bskyed*.

b.

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## GLOSSARY

g.

g.1 Acceptance that phenomena do not arise

*mi skye ba'i chos la bzod pa*

མི་སྐྱེ་བའི་ཚོས་ལ་བཟོད་པ།

*anutpattikadharmakṣānti*

The particular realization that all phenomena are beyond birth.

g.2

Ānanda

*kun dga' bo*

ཀུན་དགའ་བོ།

*ānanda*

Name of a first cousin, close student, and attendant of the Buddha.

g.3

Bhagavān

*bcom ldan 'das*

བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས།

*Bhagavān*

Epithet of the Buddha. In Sanskrit usually defined as someone who is the possessor of six specific qualities as well as the conqueror of māras. The usual definition of the Tibetan term is *bcom* (“subdue”), referring to the subduing of the four māras; *ldan* (“to possess”), referring to the possession of the great qualities of buddhahood; and *'das* (“beyond,” “transcended”), meaning that such a person has gone beyond saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.

g.4

Bhikṣu

*dge slong*

དགེ་སློང།

*bhikṣu*

A fully ordained monk.

g.5

Blissful One

*bde bar gshegs pa*

བདེ་བར་གཤེགས་པ།

*Sugata*

Epithet of the Buddha.

g.6

Brahmā

*tshangs pa*

ཚངས་པ།

*Brahmā*

Name of a god.

**g.7 Indra**

*dbang po*

དབང་པོ།

*Indra*

Name of a god.

**g.8 Kalandakanivāsa**

*bya ka lan da ka gnas pa*

བྱ་ཀ་ལན་ད་ཀ་གནས་པ།

*Kalandakanivāsa · Kalandakanivāpa*

Literally, “the dwelling place of kalandaka (birds).” A location within the Veṇuvana where the Buddha stayed. The place was given its name by King Bimbisāra after he had been saved from a snake attack there by the squawking of many *kalandaka*—flying squirrels, Sanskrit and Pali sources suggest, but Tibetan translations understand the Sanskrit term to refer to a kind of bird. The alternative Sanskrit *Kalandakanivāpa* means “where food-offerings are made to kalandakas.”

**g.9 Kawa Paltsek**

*ska ba dpal brtsegs*

སྐ་བ་དཔལ་བརྟེན།

—

A famous Tibetan translator and monk of the eighth to the ninth century.

**g.10 Maitreya**

*byams pa*

བྱམས་པ།

*Maitreya*

Name of a bodhisattva who, it is believed, will be the future buddha after Śākyamuni, becoming the fifth buddha of this eon.

**g.11 Māra**

*bdud*

བདུད།

*Māra*

Originally the name of Indra’s principal enemy among the asuras. In early Buddhism he appears as a drought-causing demon and eventually his name becomes that of Māra, the principal opponent of the Buddha’s teaching. The name also applies to the deities ruled over by Māra who attempted to prevent the Buddha’s awakening and who do not wish any being to escape from saṃsāra.

**g.12 Mind of awakening**

*byang chub kyi sems*

བྱང་ཆུབ་ཀྱི་སེམས།

*bodhicitta*

The wish, resolve, and practice to attain complete awakening for the sake of all sentient beings.

**g.13 Prajāpati**

*skye dgu’i bdag po*

སྐྱེ་དགུ་འི་བདག་པོ།

*Prajāpati*

Name of a god.



- g.14 **Prajñāvarman**  
*pradza+nyA barma*  
 པརྫོ་བམ།  
*Prajñāvarman*  
 An Indian scholar and translator of the eighth to the ninth century who translated, in collaboration with other Indian and Tibetan scholars, about eighty texts of the Kangyur into Tibetan. He also composed commentaries that are preserved in the Tengyur.
- g.15 **Rājagṛha**  
*rgyal po'i khab*  
 རྒྱལ་པོའི་ཁབ།  
*Rājagṛha*  
 Situated in the modern Indian state of Bihar, Rājagṛha was the capital of Magadha, one of the great kingdoms of ancient India.
- g.16 **Tathāgata**  
*de bzhin gshegs pa*  
 དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ།  
*Tathāgata*  
 Epithet of the Buddha. Also rendered here as “thus-gone.”
- g.17 **Thus-Gone**  
*de bzhin gshegs pa*  
 དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ།  
*Tathāgata*  
 Epithet of the Buddha. Also rendered here as “tathāgata.”
- g.18 **Veṇuvana**  
*'od ma'i tshal*  
 འོད་མའི་ཚལ།  
*Veṇuvana*  
 King Bimbisāra’s park (lit. “Bamboo Grove”) near Rājagṛha. Here the Buddha dwelled regularly and gave many teachings.
- g.19 **Worthy**  
*dgra bcom pa*  
 དགའ་བཙམས་པ།  
*arhat*  
 Depending on the etymological interpretation, “worthy one” or “a person who has defeated the enemy of the afflictions (*kleśā*).”
- g.20 **Yeshé Dé**  
*ye shes sde*  
 ཡེ་ཤེས་སྡེ།  
 —  
 A famous Tibetan translator and monk of the eighth to the ninth century, who translated and revised in collaboration with various Indian scholars more than 250 texts of the Kangyur and Tengyur into Tibetan.

