

༄༅། །མཆོག་ཏུ་གདགས་པའི་མདོ།

The Sūtra “Declaring What Is Supreme”

Agraprajñaptisūtra



Toh 305
Degé Kangyur, vol. 72 (mdo sde, sa), folios 130.b–131.b

Translated by the Pema Yeshé Dé Translation Team
under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha

First published 2023
Current version v 1.0.4 (2023)
Generated by 84000 Reading Room v2.20.2

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co.

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SUMMARY

- s.1 In *The Sūtra “Declaring What Is Supreme”*, the Buddha, while spending the rainy season at the Bamboo Grove in Rājagṛha, teaches his saṅgha of śrāvakas that the Buddha is supreme among all beings, the Dharma of being free of attachment is supreme among all dharmas, and the Saṅgha is supreme among all communities and groups. Those who have faith in these three will be reborn as supreme among gods or humans.

ac.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ac.1 This sūtra was translated by Giuliano Proença, who also prepared the introduction, glossary, and notes. The English translation and ancillary materials were proofread by Daniela Espíndola. Thanks to Karin Kerb for making otherwise unavailable bibliographical material accessible to us.

ac.2 The translation was completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.

i.

INTRODUCTION

i.1

The Sūtra “Declaring What Is Supreme” is a short discourse set in the Bamboo Grove at Rājagṛha, in which the Buddha teaches that the Three Jewels are supreme: the Buddha is supreme among all beings, the Dharma of being free of attachment is supreme among all dharmas, and the Saṅgha is supreme among all communities and groups. In this way, the sūtra presents a declaration of faith in the Three Jewels. The Buddha also states that the reward of being well disposed toward the Three Jewels is rebirth as a supreme god or human.

i.2

Little is known about the history of *The Sūtra “Declaring What Is Supreme”* as an independent text in India, but the existence of similar texts in the Pali and Chinese canons testifies to its antiquity.¹ The closest Pali parallel is the *Aggappasādasutta* (Iti 90), while the *Aggappasādasutta* (AN 4.34) and the *Cundīsutta* (AN 5.32) are also closely related.² In the *Aggappasādasutta* (Iti 90), the Three Jewels are taught to be supreme, using similar language, and they are said therein to be the objects of the supreme kinds of confidence, faith, or favorable disposition.

i.3

The Sūtra “Declaring What Is Supreme” may have had a significant status in early Buddhist Central Asia, since we find Sanskrit fragments of the sūtra and its commentaries in a variety of manuscripts unearthed in present-day Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, China. In addition to an unpublished fragment in the Hoernle Collection,³ a fragment in the Pelliot Collection was published by Bernard Pauly.⁴ The Turfan Collection also holds two fragments from commentaries on the sūtra: a Sanskrit fragment partially edited by Ernst Waldschmidt that includes the colophon,⁵ and an Old Turkish and Sanskrit bilingual fragment containing the beginning of a commentary on the sūtra.⁶

i.4

A version of this teaching is also found in the *Avadānaśataka*, a Sanskrit anthology of avadānas, where this teaching appears almost in its entirety in two different passages (stories 9 and 57). The Tibetan translation of the

Avadānaśataka is included in the Kangyur (Toh 343)⁷ and the wording in these passages is almost identical to the present sūtra. Moreover, an abridged form of this teaching is also contained in the *Divyāvadāna*⁸ as well as in the *Great Upholder of the Secret Mantra* (Toh 563, 1.45–1.47).⁹

i.5 Several versions of *The Sūtra “Declaring What Is Supreme”* are extant in the Chinese Tripitaka: the closest version is found as part of the Ekottarikāgama (*Zeng yi a han jing* 增壹阿含經, Taishō 125).¹⁰ The Chinese translation of the Ekottarikāgama was, for the most part, completed by Zhu Fonian (竺佛念) in 384 CE.¹¹ However, the discourse in this text has a different setting, and unlike Toh 305, it is presented by means of similes and in verse. The other versions of this teaching in the Chinese canon are three sūtras (nos. 902–904) in the Saṃyuktāgama (*Za a han jing* 雜阿含經, Taishō 99), which likewise teach that the Buddha, Dharma and Saṅgha are supreme. The Saṃyuktāgama was translated into Chinese between 435 and 443 CE by Guṇabhadra (394–468) and Baoyun 寶雲 (376–449) in Jiankang (today’s Nanjing).¹²

i.6 The translators of *The Sūtra “Declaring What Is Supreme”* into Tibetan remain unidentified and the sūtra is not listed in any catalogs of the Tibetan imperial period. However, the striking similarity between the Tibetan of the sūtra and the version that appears in the Tibetan translation of the *Avadānaśataka* (Toh 343) suggests that these translations were unlikely to have been made independently of one another. The colophon of the Tibetan translation of the *Avadānaśataka* (Toh 343) states that it was translated by the scholars Jinamitra and Devacandra who were active in Tibet in the early ninth century. By extension therefore, the Tibetan translation of the *The Sūtra “Declaring What Is Supreme”* can perhaps also tentatively be dated to the early ninth century.

i.7 The sūtra is only found as an independent text in the Sūtra section of Kangyurs of the Tshalpa line, the Lhasa and Narthang Kangyurs, and in the Tholing Collection from Western Tibet. The Tibetan title of the text is the same in all Kangyurs included in the Comparative Edition (Tib. *dpe bsdur ma*), *mchog tu gdags pa’i mdo*, while the Tholing Collection has *’phags pa mchog tu gdags pa’i mdo*.¹³ Versions such as the Yongle, Lithang, Kangxi, Narthang, and Choné, do not present the name of the text at the beginning. The Sanskrit title of the sūtra is missing in all versions. Nevertheless, the colophon of the abovementioned fragmentary Sanskrit commentary clearly refers to the sūtra using the title *Agraprajñaptisūtra*.¹⁴

i.8 This English translation is based on the Degé Kangyur print of Toh 305, in consultation with the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*) and Pauly’s edition of the Sanskrit fragment. We also compared the Tibetan text line by line with the corresponding passages in the *Avadānaśataka* in both Sanskrit¹⁵ and

Tibetan. The translators also consulted Léon Feer's early French translation of the *Avadānaśataka*¹⁶ and Naomi Appleton's more recent partial English translation of the same.¹⁷

The Sūtra “Declaring What Is Supreme”

1.

The Translation

[F.130.b]

1.1 Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Thus did I hear at one time. The Bhagavān, together with a saṅgha of śrāvakas, was staying at Kalandakanivāsa in the Bamboo Grove at Rājagṛha, observing the pledge to stay in retreat during the rains. Then the Bhagavān spoke to the monks:¹⁸

1.2 “Monks, there are three declarations of what is supreme.¹⁹ What are the three? They are the declaration of the Buddha as supreme, the declaration of the Dharma as supreme, and the declaration of the Saṅgha as supreme.

1.3 “In this regard,²⁰ what is the declaration of the Buddha as supreme? It is taught that among all beings—those without legs, with two legs, with four legs,²¹ or with many legs; those with form or without form; those with perception, without perception, or neither with perception [F.131.a] nor without perception²²—the tathāgata, the arhat, the completely perfect Buddha²³ is supreme. Those who are well disposed toward the Buddha are well disposed toward what is supreme. Those who are well disposed toward what is supreme should understand that the ripening thereof will always be as a supreme god among gods, or a supreme human among humans. This is called *the declaration of the Buddha as supreme*.²⁴

1.4 “What is the declaration of the Dharma as supreme? It is taught that among all dharmas, conditioned or unconditioned, the Dharma of being free from attachment is supreme.²⁵ Those who are well disposed toward the Dharma are well disposed toward the supreme. Those who are well disposed toward what is supreme should understand that the ripening thereof will always be as a supreme god among gods, or a supreme human among humans. This is called *the declaration of the Dharma as supreme*.

- 1.5 “What is the declaration of the Saṅgha as supreme? It is taught that among all assemblies, gatherings, crowds, and retinues, the Saṅgha of śrāvakas of the tathāgata, the arhat, the completely perfect Buddha²⁶ is supreme. Those who are well disposed toward the Saṅgha are well disposed toward the supreme. Those who are well disposed toward what is supreme should understand that the ripening thereof will always be as a supreme god among gods, or a supreme human among humans. This is called *the declaration of the Saṅgha as supreme*.”
- 1.6 After the Bhagavān had spoken thus, the monks rejoiced and praised his words. [F.131.b]
- 1.7 *Thus ends The Sūtra “Declaring What Is Supreme.”*

ab.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AN</i>	Aṅguttara Nikāya
<i>Avś</i>	Speyer's Sanskrit edition of the <i>Avadānaśataka</i> (1902–6), story 57
<i>C</i>	Choné (<i>co ne</i>) Kangyur
<i>D</i>	Degé (<i>sde dge</i>) Kangyur
<i>EĀ</i>	Ekottarikāgama
<i>Frgm</i>	Sanskrit fragment of the <i>Agraprajñapti</i> edited by Pauly (1960)
<i>H</i>	Lhasa (<i>zhol</i>) Kangyur
<i>Iti</i>	Itivuttaka
<i>K</i>	Kangxi (<i>pe cin</i>) Kangyur
<i>K_Y</i>	Yongle (<i>g.yung lo</i>) Kangyur
<i>U</i>	Urga (<i>phyi sog khu re</i>) Kangyur

n.

NOTES

- n.1 The Pali canon emerged in written form around the first century BCE. The oldest Chinese parallel for this text is included in the Ekottarikāgama (Taishō 125). It was translated into Chinese in 384 CE.
- n.2 For online links to all three Pali texts along with English translations, see the Bibliography.
- n.3 British Library, Hoernle 149.140.
- n.4 Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Pelliot Sanskrit: petit fragment 83. Pauly (1960, pp. 519–24) provides a transcription of the fragment and reproduces a passage from Speyer’s edition of the *Avadānaśataka*, which is supplemented with notes detailing variant readings of the fragment.
- n.5 Oriental Department of the State Library at Berlin, SHT 24f. See Waldschmidt (1965), pp. 16–17, n. 24.
- n.6 Türkische Turfan-Text VIII H. See von Gabain (1954), pp. 54–56.
- n.7 In the ninth story, there is no setting or conclusion given for *The Sūtra “Declaring What Is Supreme,”* although it is referred to as a sūtra: *bhagavān idaṃ sūtram bhāṣate sma*. In that version, the Buddha preaches the sūtra to brahmins and householders. See Speyer (1902–6), pp. 49–50. In the fifty-seventh story, only the setting is omitted, and the Buddha preaches it to monks, as found here in *The Sūtra “Declaring What Is Supreme.”* See Speyer (1902–6), pp. 329–30.
- n.8 For a Sanskrit edition, see Vaidya (1959), p. 95, and for an English translation, see Rotman (2008), p. 268.
- n.9 The version that appears in the *Great Upholder of the Secret Mantra*, one of the Pañcarakṣā, suggests the teaching was considered to have a protective

function. This would be in line with the Pañcarakṣā being seen as protective texts (Hartmann and Maue 1996, p. 149, n. 9).

- n.10 Ekottarikāgama 21.1 (*di yi de* 第一德). An English translation of this text from Chinese by Thích Huyền-Vi, Sara Boin-Webb, and Bhikkhu Pāsādika is available at SuttaCentral with the title *Highest Faith* (<https://suttacentral.net/ea21.1/en/huyenvi-boinwebb-pasadika?reference=none&highlight=false>).
- n.11 See Bhikkhu Anālayo (2016), p. 1.
- n.12 See Bingenheimer (2011), p. 1.
- n.13 For further information, see Resources for Kanjur and Tenjur Studies (<http://www.rkts.org/>) at Universität Wein (last accessed 30 May 2023).
- n.14 Although the colophon is fragmentary, it begins as follows: *agraprajñapti-sūtrasyopadeśaḥ...*, “instructions on *The Sūtra “Declaring What Is Supreme” ...*” See Waldschmidt (1965), p. 16.
- n.15 Speyer (1902–6) edited the Sanskrit text of the *Avadānaśataka* based on four different Nepalese manuscripts. Manuscript B in Nepalese script, dated to 1645, is the common source for the other three. Vaidya (1958) published another edition based on Speyer’s.
- n.16 Feer’s translation (1891) predates Speyer’s edition and is based on a single Nepalese manuscript.
- n.17 Naomi Appleton (2020) translates the first four sections of the *Avadānaśataka*.
- n.18 The version that is found in the *Avadānaśataka* (Avś), and in its Tibetan translation (Toh 343) begins with this sentence.
- n.19 Reading with K_Y, K, C, U and H: *dge slong dag ’di gsum ni mchog tu gdags pa yin te*, and Avś *tisra imā bhikṣavo ’graprajñaptayaḥ*. Dhere has the corrupt reading *na* in place of *ni*.
- n.20 The phrase “in this regard” (Tib. *de la*) is absent in Avś and in Toh 343.
- n.21 The words “with four legs” are absent in Avś, though present in Frgm and in Toh 343.
- n.22 This refers to the category of beings abiding in the fourth and highest level of the formless realm. These are either the gods that abide there or persons who have reached this state through meditative equipoise. This state is also referred to as the “peak of existence” (Skt. *bhavāgra*; Tib. *srid rtse*) and is

situated at the apex of saṃsāra. The beings there do not experience perceptions and yet cannot be said to be without perceptions.

- n.23 The phrase “the arhat, the completely perfect Buddha” is absent in Frgm.
- n.24 Frgm reads instead *iyaṃ prathamā agraprajñaptiḥ*, “This is the first declaration as supreme.”
- n.25 Alternatively, this may be rendered “dispassion (i.e., being free of attachment) is the supreme Dharma.”
- n.26 The phrase “the arhat, the completely perfect Buddha” is absent in Avś and its Tibetan translation (Toh 343).

b.

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GLOSSARY

· Types of attestation for names and terms of the corresponding ·
source language

AS	<i>Attested in source text</i> This term is attested in a manuscript used as a source for this translation.
AO	<i>Attested in other text</i> This term is attested in other manuscripts with a parallel or similar context.
AD	<i>Attested in dictionary</i> This term is attested in dictionaries matching Tibetan to the corresponding language.
AA	<i>Approximate attestation</i> The attestation of this name is approximate. It is based on other names where the relationship between the Tibetan and source language is attested in dictionaries or other manuscripts.
RP	<i>Reconstruction from Tibetan phonetic rendering</i> This term is a reconstruction based on the Tibetan phonetic rendering of the term.
RS	<i>Reconstruction from Tibetan semantic rendering</i> This term is a reconstruction based on the semantics of the Tibetan translation.
SU	<i>Source Unspecified</i> This term has been supplied from an unspecified source, which most often is a widely trusted dictionary.

g.1 arhat

dgra bcom pa

དག་བཙུག་པ།

arhat^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

According to Buddhist tradition, one who is worthy of worship (*pūjām arhati*), or one who has conquered the enemies, the mental afflictions or emotions (*kleśa-ari-hata-vat*), and reached liberation from the cycle of rebirth and suffering. It is the fourth and highest of the four fruits attainable by śrāvakas. Also used as an epithet of the Buddha.

g.2 avadāna

rtogs pa brjod pa

འོགས་པ་བརྗོད་པ།

avadāna ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

One of the twelve types of the Buddha’s teaching (*dvādaśāṅga*). In this sense, the Sanskrit word *avadāna* means “exceptional feat” or “magnificent deed,” but in the context of the twelve types of *buddhavaṇana* the term came to refer to the narrative accounts of such deeds.

g.3 Bamboo Grove

’od ma’i tshal

འོད་མའི་ཚལ།

veṇuvana ^{AD}

The famous Bamboo Grove in Rājagṛha where the Buddha regularly stayed and gave teachings. It was situated on land donated by King Bimbisāra of Magadha, and as such, was the first of several landholdings donated to the Buddhist community during the time of the Buddha.

g.4 bhagavān

bcom ldan ’das

བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས།

bhagavat ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

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, in addition, as “one who destroys

the four mārās.” This is achieved either by reading *bhagavat* as *bhagnavat* (“one who broke”), or by tracing the word *bhaga* to the root √*bhañj* (“to break”).

g.5 bodhisattva

byang chub sems dpa'

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔལ།

bodhisattva ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

A being who is dedicated to the cultivation and fulfilment of the altruistic intention to attain perfect buddhahood, traversing the five bodhisattva paths and ten bodhisattva levels. Bodhisattvas purposely opt to remain within cyclic existence in order to liberate all sentient beings, instead of simply seeking personal freedom from suffering. In terms of the view, they realize the two aspects of selflessness, with respect to afflicted mental states and the nature of all phenomena.

g.6 buddha

sangs rgyas

སངས་རྒྱལ།

buddha ^{AD}

The Indic term *buddha* is used in Buddhism as an epithet for fully awakened beings in general and, more specifically, often refers to the historical buddha, Siddhārtha Gautama, also known as the Buddha Śākyamuni. The term *buddha* is the past participle of the Sanskrit root *budh*, meaning “to awaken,” “to understand,” or “to become aware.” Sometimes also translated here as “awakened one.”

g.7 completely perfect buddha

yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas

ཡང་དག་པར་རྫོགས་པའི་སངས་རྒྱལ།

samyaksambuddha ^{AD}

The attainment of a buddha, who has gained total freedom from conditioned existence, overcome all tendencies imprinted on the mind as a result of a long association with afflicted mental states, and fully manifested all aspects of buddha body, speech, and mind. Also used to emphasize the superiority of buddhahood when contrasted with the achievement of the arhats and pratyekabuddhas. A *samyaksambuddha* is considered superior by virtue of his compassionate activity, his omniscience, and his ten special powers.

g.8 conditioned

'dus byas

འདྲིམ་བྱས།

saṃskṛta ^{AD}

When referring to phenomena or the constituents of experience, *saṃskṛta* usually means “conditioned.” But it can also mean “refined,” “adorned,” “ornamented,” “polished.” It seems that the text is here playing on the multivalence of the term in combination with the multivalence of the term “dharma.”

g.9 dharma

chos

ཆོས།

dharma ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The term *dharma* conveys ten different meanings, according to Vasubandhu’s *Vyākhyāyukti*. The primary meanings are as follows: the doctrine taught by the Buddha (Dharma); the ultimate reality underlying and expressed through the Buddha’s teaching (Dharma); the trainings that the Buddha’s teaching stipulates (dharmas); the various awakened qualities or attainments acquired through practicing and realizing the Buddha’s teaching (dharmas); qualities or aspects more generally, i.e., phenomena or phenomenal attributes (dharmas); and mental objects (dharmas).

g.10 Kalandakanivāsa

bya ka lan da ka gnas pa

བྱ་ཀ་ལ་ན་ད་ཀ་གནས་པ།

kalandakanivāsa ^{AD} · *kalandakanivāpa* ^{AD}

Literally “the dwelling place of *kalandakas*.” A location within the Bamboo Grove where the Buddha stayed. The alternative Sanskrit Kalandakanivāpa means “where food offerings are made to *kalandakas*.” It is said that the place was given its name by King Bimbisāra after he was rescued from a snake attack there. Pali sources suggest he was saved by the squawking of many *kalandaka* or flying squirrels. In Tibetan translation these were called “kalandaka birds” (*bya*).

g.11 monk

dge slong

དག་སྦྱང་།

bhikṣu ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The term *bhikṣu*, often translated as “monk,” refers to the highest among the eight types of prātimokṣa vows that make one part of the Buddhist assembly. The Sanskrit term literally means “beggar” or “mendicant,” referring to the fact that Buddhist monks and nuns—like other ascetics of the time—subsisted on alms begged from the laity.

In the Tibetan tradition, which follows the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, a monk follows 253 vows as part of his moral discipline. A nun (*bhikṣuṇī*; *dge slong ma*) follows 263 rules. A novice monk (*śrāmaṇera*; *dge tshul*) or nun (*śrāmaṇerikā*; *dge tshul ma*) follows thirty-six rules of moral discipline (although in other vinaya traditions novices typically follow only ten).

g.12 Rājagṛha

rgyal po'i khab

རྒྱལ་པོའི་ཁབ།

rājagṛha ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The ancient capital of Magadha prior to its relocation to Pāṭaliputra during the Mauryan dynasty, Rājagṛha is one of the most important locations in Buddhist history. The literature tells us that the Buddha and his saṅgha spent a considerable amount of time in residence in and around Rājagṛha—in nearby places, such as the Vulture Peak Mountain (Gṛdhrakūṭapārvata), a major site of the Mahāyāna sūtras, and the Bamboo Grove (Veṇuvana)—enjoying the patronage of King Bimbisāra and then of his son King Ajātaśatru. Rājagṛha is also remembered as the location where the first Buddhist monastic council was held after the Buddha Śākyamuni passed into parinirvāṇa. Now known as Rajgir and located in the modern Indian state of Bihar.

g.13 Ripening

rnam par smin pa

རྣམ་པར་སྒྲིན་པ།

vipāka ^{AD}

The result or maturation of karmic actions and the manifestation of their effects.

g.14 saṅgha

dge 'dun

དགེ་འདུན།

saṅgha ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

Though often specifically reserved for the monastic community, this term can be applied to any of the four Buddhist communities—monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen—as well as to identify the different groups of practitioners, like the community of bodhisattvas or the community of śrāvakas. It is also the third of the Three Jewels (*Triratna*) of Buddhism, the Buddha, the Teaching, and the Community.

g.15 śrāvaka

nyan thos

ཉན་ཐོས།

śrāvaka ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

It is usually defined as “those who hear the teaching from the Buddha and make it heard to others.” Primarily it refers to those disciples of the Buddha who aspire to attain the state of an arhat by seeking self-liberation and nirvāṇa. They are the practitioners of the first turning of the wheel of the Dharma on the four noble truths, who realize the suffering inherent in saṃsāra and focus on understanding that there is no independent self. By conquering disturbing emotions, they liberate themselves, attaining first the stage of stream enterers at the path of seeing, followed by the stage of once-returners who will be reborn only one more time, and then the stage of non-returners who will no longer be reborn into the desire realm. The final goal is to become an arhat. These four stages are also known as the “four results of spiritual practice.”

g.16 tathāgata

de bzhin gshegs pa

དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ།

tathāgata ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

A frequently used synonym for *buddha*. According to different explanations, it can be read as *tathā-gata*, literally meaning “one who has thus gone,” or as *tathā-āgata*, “one who has thus come.” *Gata*, though literally meaning “gone,” is a past passive participle used to describe a state or condition of existence. *Tatha(tā)*, often rendered as “suchness” or “thusness,” is the quality or

condition of things as they really are, which cannot be conveyed in conceptual, dualistic terms. Therefore, this epithet is interpreted in different ways, but in general it 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 that does not abide in the two extremes of existence and quiescence. It also often used as a specific epithet of the Buddha Śākyamuni.

g.17 unconditioned

'dus ma byas

འདུས་མ་བྱས།

asaṃskṛta ^{AD}

When referring to phenomena or constituents of experience, *asaṃskṛta* usually means “unconditioned.” But it can also mean “unrefined,” “unadorned,” “unpolished.” It seems that the text is here playing on the multivalence of the term in combination with the multivalence of the term “dharma.”

g.18 well disposed

mngon par dga' ba

མཛོད་པར་དགའ་བ།

abhiprasanna ^{AD}

The Sanskrit term means either “favorably disposed towards” or “having faith in.” The Tibetan term means “highly appreciating.”