

ཡངས་པའི་གྲོང་ཁྱེར་དུ་འཇུག་པའི་མདོ་ཆེན་པོ།

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**The Mahāsūtra “On Entering the City of Vaiśālī”**

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*Vaiśālīpraveśamahāsūtra*

འཕགས་པ་ཡངས་པའི་གོང་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་འཇུག་པའི་མདོ་ཆེན་པོ།

*'phags pa yangs pa'i grong khyer du 'jug pa'i mdo chen po*

The Noble Mahāsūtra “On Entering the City of Vaiśālī”

*Āryavaiśālīpraveśamahāsūtra*



Toh 312

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co.

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## SUMMARY

- s.1 Invited to visit the city of Vaiśālī, which has been ravaged by a terrible epidemic, the Buddha instructs Ānanda to stand at the city's gate and recite a proclamation, a long mantra, and some verses that powerfully evoke spiritual well-being. Ānanda does so, and the epidemic comes to an end. One of the *mahāsūtras* related to the literature of the Vinaya, this text, like other accounts of the incident, has traditionally been recited during times of personal or collective illness, bereavement, and other difficulties.

ac.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- ac.1 The translation is an extract from a translation of the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* ("The Chapter on Medicines," the sixth chapter of the *Vinayavastu*, Toh 1) by the Bhaiṣajyavastu Translation Team. The translation was made by Fumi Yao and proofread by Shayne Clarke. The extract has been adapted and annotated to the context of this source text by the 84000 editorial team, who also compiled the introduction.

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

## INTRODUCTION

i.

i.1 *On Entering the City of Vaiśālī* is a text with a rich network of textual, historical, narrative, and literary connections. It is also one of the *mahāsūtras*, whose primary use has traditionally been a ritual one—they were recited to provide protection (*rakṣa*) from sickness and other calamities.

i.2 The association of this mahāsūtra with healing, the banishing of misfortune, and the restoration of spiritual well-being is clearly derived from its narrative context. In essence, a terrible famine and epidemic has been ravaging the city of Vaiśālī, and the text comprises a commanding proclamation, a long mantra, and a set of verses for auspiciousness (*svastigāthā*) that the Buddha instructs his attendant Ānanda to pronounce at the city gate in order to put an end to the disaster. The first half of the text has the Buddha telling Ānanda what to say, and the second half repeats the first half verbatim as Ānanda executes this mission.

i.3 There are several different lists of mahāsūtras in works that recommend their recitation. Compared to the other mahāsūtras in the Kangyur, *On Entering the City of Vaiśālī* is something of an outlier, in that it is not included with the other nine of that category in the early text inventories. Its title and what is known of its history, however, identify it as closely related to the others. No modern discussion of the mahāsūtras would be complete without reference to Peter Skilling’s two-volume *magnum opus* on the subject,<sup>1</sup> and his study of these texts not only covers the nine that are mentioned in some lists but also adds *On Entering the City of Vaiśālī* as the tenth, with the special status of an “independent mahāsūtra.”<sup>2</sup>

i.4 Like the other mahāsūtras, this text belongs to the literature of the Mūlasarvāstivādin school.<sup>3</sup> The mahāsūtra *On Entering the City of Vaiśālī* corresponds almost exactly to a passage in the very long sixth chapter of the Mūlasarvāstivādin *Vinayavastu* (Toh 1), the *Chapter on Medicines* (*Bhaiṣajyavastu*).<sup>4</sup> The present, standalone mahāsūtra version provides minimal detail of the

narrative context in which the event it describes takes place, but from the passages that precede and follow the version in *The Chapter on Medicines* we can understand why this event was considered so significant.

i.5 In *The Chapter on Medicines*, the episode is set during a long and detailed account of the Buddha's final journey toward the north, not long before his parinirvāṇa, which parallels in many other respects the narrative of the *Mahā-parinirvāṇasūtra* in the *Dirghāgama*.<sup>5</sup> While the Buddha is staying in Rājagṛha under the patronage of King Ajātaśatru, an emissary sent by the Licchavis from their capital of Vaiśālī arrives, bearing news of a terrible epidemic that has decimated the city's population and a request to the Buddha to visit and quell the disaster. The Licchavis have been at war with Ajātaśatru, so the Buddha first has to obtain King Ajātaśatru's assent, and he then sets out under the king's protection, stopping at several places on the way to teach before crossing the Ganges into Licchavi territory. He again stays and teaches in several places, including Nādikā, where an epidemic has also struck (there is no mention of it being the same as Vaiśālī's) and many of his disciples have died, providing the setting for a famous teaching on the twelve factors of interdependent arising. Here, *The Chapter on Medicines* inserts the less somber episode (perhaps out of sequence<sup>6</sup>) of the Vaiśālī courtesan Āmrāpālī's invitation, her meeting with the Buddha, his teaching to her, and his interactions with other Licchavis.

i.6 Then comes the episode of quelling the epidemic in Vaiśālī, just as it is told in this mahāsūtra, except that in *The Chapter on Medicines* Ānanda's proclamation at the city gate is followed by the statement, not present in this mahāsūtra version:

“When Ānanda had spoken these words, there by the blessed buddhas' power of buddhahood and the gods' power of the gods, the epidemic was quelled.”

i.7 The words that the Buddha instructs Ānanda to pronounce at the city gates can be grouped into three main categories: (1) commands mainly addressed to nonhuman beings to depart, disperse, and stop causing harm, backed up by the invoking of the authority of other more powerful nonhuman beings both awakened and worldly; (2) the long mantra, most of which consists of syllables without evident semantic content and is presumably intended to work its effects through supernatural or magical mechanisms in relation to its sounds; and (3) the *svastigāthā* verses, most of which are addressed principally (but not exclusively) to the city's human inhabitants and convey goodness and well-being by proclaiming and describing the qualities of the Three Jewels—compassion, purity, wisdom, and spiritual power. Some elements belong to more than one category: the commanding words retained (in the Tibetan



translation) in Sanskrit, perhaps in order to conserve their authoritative power, which are also in a sense mantras, and the verses at the end addressed to spirits to tame them by invoking their better natures.

i.8 The presence of mantras in this text is noteworthy, particularly as the Vinaya version of the text includes them too. The mantras are designated in the text itself using the term *gsang sngags kyi gzhi* (*mantrapada* in parallel Sanskrit texts); the long mantra is not described as a dhāraṇī and does not seem to have the function of encapsulating or epitomizing a longer teaching, as a dhāraṇī normally would. The mahāsūtra version of this text has consequently presented problems of classification to the scholars who compiled the different Kangyurs, and in most it is placed in both sūtra and tantra sections. In the Degé Kangyur it is present as three copies: one in the General Sūtra section (Toh 312), one in the Collection of Tantras as an Action (*Kriyā*) tantra related to the Tathāgata family (Toh 628), and one in the Compendium of Incantations (Toh 1093).<sup>7</sup> If the *Chapter on Medicines* passage is included, the text has the unusual distinction of being classified in all four of the main divisions of the Kangyur.<sup>8</sup> Not only does it exist in no less than four different places in Kangyurs that include a compendium of incantations, but in addition, an extract comprising the nineteen stanzas of the verse section is found as a standalone text among the prayers of dedication at the end of the Tantra Collection, Toh 816, with the title *The Verses for Well-Being Extracted from the Noble Sūtra "On Entering the City of Vaiśālī"*<sup>9</sup> and which is also duplicated toward the end of the Tengyur (Toh 4406).

i.9 Both the present, standalone mahāsūtra version and *The Chapter on Medicines* were translated into Tibetan in the imperial period, and both are mentioned in the two imperial text inventories dated to the early decades of the ninth century, the Denkarma and Phangthangma.<sup>10</sup> The translators of the mahāsūtra version<sup>11</sup> were Śilendrabodhi and Yeshé Dé, while the Vinaya version was translated by Sarvajñādeva, Vidyākaraprabha, Dharmakāra, Palgyi Lhünpo, and Kawa Paltsek. Given that the wording of the two Tibetan versions is almost identical and that the translators in the two teams were active in the same period, we have to assume that there was some collaboration or borrowing between the teams with regard to this passage. Despite the close correspondence of the two versions, it nevertheless seems unlikely that the mahāsūtra version started life simply as an extract from *The Chapter on Medicines*, chosen as suitable material and presented as a separate text by the translators in Tibet. It was almost certainly based on a text that had existed on its own in Sanskrit, too—however closely that Sanskrit text might have been related to the wider Mūlasarvāstivādin corpus. Further evidence for its separate existence comes from the opening lines of the text and, in particular, its setting in a somewhat mysterious location not mentioned at all in *The Chapter on Medicines*,<sup>12</sup> as well as from some significant if minor differences in the verse passages.

- i.10 Nevertheless, no separate text in Sanskrit with this title has come to light, and no such title is mentioned in any Sanskrit work. However, one of the Nepalese Pañcarakṣa texts, the *Mahāmantrānusāriṇī*, preserved in a number of Sanskrit manuscripts (but not in Tibetan),<sup>13</sup> is very close in content to the present text, the chief differences being the title, the setting, and the absence in the Sanskrit text of two of the verses present in the Tibetan. The title of the Sanskrit work is interesting in that *mahāmantrānusāriṇī* is also the name used by the Buddha within the text to refer to the mantra. The initial setting mentioned in this version of the text varies across the different manuscripts: some have it as the Veṇuvana in Rājagṛha, some as the Markaṭahrada (the “monkey pond” near Vaiśālī), and in some no setting is mentioned. These comparatively recent Nepalese *Mahāmantrānusāriṇī* manuscripts are the only available witnesses in Sanskrit apart from a few newly identified fragments of *The Chapter on Medicines*.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, the incomplete Gilgit *Vinayavastu* manuscript includes only some parts of *The Chapter on Medicines*, and the passage in question is missing.
- i.11 A commentary by Karmavajra, possibly written in the eleventh century, in which some chapters are devoted to both the *Mahāmantrānusāriṇī* and *On Entering the City of Vaiśālī* (and other chapters to another Pañcarakṣa text, the *Mahāmantrānudhārisūtra*, Toh 563), is to be found in Tibetan translation in the Tengyur, Toh 2692. The commentary appears to focus more on the ritual practice of the texts than on their historical or narrative aspects, and it would no doubt merit further exploration.
- i.12 The *Bhaiṣajyavastu* was translated into Chinese in the early eighth century CE by Yijing,<sup>15</sup> and while there is no Chinese translation of the independent mahāsūtra version as such, a tenth-century translation by Fatian of a text similar to the *Mahāmantrānusāriṇī*, the *Fo shuo da hu ming da tuo luo ni jing*,<sup>16</sup> provides another parallel.
- i.13 The mahāsūtra was studied and translated into French by Léon Feer in 1883,<sup>17</sup> but subsequently little Western scholarly attention appears to have been focused on the mahāsūtra until Skilling’s exemplary comparative editions, notes, and invaluable references were published in the 1990s. An English translation by Tenzin Bhuchung Shastri made under the auspices of the FPMT and distributed online has been available since 2008.
- i.14 More broadly, the story of the Buddha’s arrival in Vaiśālī putting an end to the epidemic figures in a number of textual traditions. The Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādin account is spread over several chapters of the *Mahāvastu*,<sup>18</sup> in which the Buddha’s arrival near the city is enough by itself to expel the harmful spirits that have caused the epidemic, and which culminates in his reciting, still outside the city, a set of nineteen *svastigāthā* extolling the Three Jewels as the

source of blessings and well-being. In the Pali Canon, an almost identical set of seventeen verses makes up the *Ratana-sutta*,<sup>19</sup> a text very widely recited as a protection or *paritta*, as will be discussed below. The *Ratana-sutta* itself consists only of the verses, without any narrative setting, and in Pali sources what is recorded of the background episode comes only from later commentaries:<sup>20</sup> the Buddha teaches the verses to Ānanda at the city gate, Ānanda goes around inside the city reciting them, and finally the Buddha himself enters the city and recites them again. The *Ratana-sutta* and *Mahāvastu* verses are not the same as the verses in the present mahāsūtra, although some elements are shared and the general theme is very similar. Unlike the Mūlasarvāstivādin account, however, these traditions place the episode earlier in the Buddha’s life, during the reign of Bimbisāra rather than that of Ajātaśatru, his son, and perhaps even on the Buddha’s very first visit to Vaiśālī.

i.15 A further text relating the incident, and in which the same verses as the *Ratana-sutta* and *Mahāvastu* are found, is another of the Pañcarakṣa texts, the *Mahāsāhasrapramardanī*, this one surviving not only in Nepalese Sanskrit manuscripts but also in a Tibetan translation in the Action Tantra section of the Kangyur (Toh 558, available in English as *Destroyer of the Great Trichiliocosm* (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh558.html>))<sup>21</sup> and in Chinese.<sup>22</sup> In this text, too, the epidemic occurs while Ajātaśatru is reigning in Magadha, and the Buddha himself utters a mantra and the verses while standing at the gates of the city. The bulk of this complex (and probably composite) text, however, digresses from the Vaiśālī episode and is centered on the origins and uses of the mantra. Some verses extracted from it comprise a standalone Kangyur text with the title *The Aspiration Spoken in “Destroyer of the Great Trichiliocosm.”* (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh813.html>)<sup>23</sup> The existence of these selected verses as an extract is interesting in that—out of all the many verse passages that could have been extracted—the verses in question are those that correspond to the *Ratana-sutta*, and they must surely have been selected in the awareness that they had their own, more ancient origin.

i.16 Yet another version among the Nepalese Sanskrit manuscripts is the *Ujvālīkādānakathā*, the seventeenth story in the post-canonical *Dvā-viṃśatyavadāna* collection. It shares narrative elements with the *Mahāsāhasrapramardanī*, and the verses that are recited in Vaiśālī by five hundred bhikṣus headed by Ānanda contain phrases similar to the prose rakṣa of the mahāsūtra as well as verses identical to some in the *Mahāmantrānusāriṇī*.

i.17 Epidemics must have been relatively frequent occurrences at the time of the Buddha’s life, but the epidemic of Vaiśālī seems to have been particularly severe. Some of the accounts mention that it had been preceded by a famine, no doubt weakening human defenses. There are passing references in *The Chapter*

on *Medicines* to both famine and epidemic in a wider region in the same period. All the accounts agree in ascribing the epidemic to the presence of harmful spirits and nonhuman beings, and some of them associate those unseen influences—whether as causes or effects—with the loose morals, licentiousness, and defiled mental states of the inhabitants of Vaiśālī.

i.18 The Buddha’s confident, masterful intervention in this disaster and his swift restoration of well-being to the inhabitants of Vaiśālī seems to have had the effect, in Buddhist cultural perceptions, of endowing textual accounts of the incident with a lasting power to heal. The works detailed above in which the incident is invoked, the *Mahāsāhasrapramardanī*, the *Mahāmantrānusāriṇī*, *Ujjoḷikādānakathā*, and *Ratana-sutta*, as well as this mahāsūtra itself, are all used ritually to confer protection. The Sanskrit Pañcarakṣa texts are still popular in Nepal and are often recited. However, of all the Vaiśālī-related texts, it is certainly the Pali *Ratana-sutta* that is the best known and most widely used. The fifth-century Sri Lankan commentary, the *Mahāvamsa*, relates how the late fourth-century King Upatissa I had it recited on the saṅgha’s advice to end a famine and epidemic (with success).<sup>24</sup> It is unlikely that this was the earliest such incident, and today, too, it is still much used in both temples and households to ward off evil and bring well-being.

i.19 While the mahāsūtras as a group, at least in recent times, do not appear to have been especially well known or much used in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, *On Entering the City of Vaiśālī* is probably the best known and most used among them. Recited on its own,<sup>25</sup> or as part of several widely used collections of dhāraṇī, it is still seen as a powerful protection against epidemics and sickness in general.

i.20 The publication of this translation during the difficult months of the worldwide coronavirus pandemic in 2020 will, we hope—in commemorating the healing of Vaiśālī more than two millennia ago—bring comfort, hope, and inspiration.

tr.

## THE TRANSLATION

### The Noble Mahāsūtra

## Entering the City of Vaiśālī

1.1 [F.157.b] Homage to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas!

Thus did I hear at one time: The Blessed One was residing in Nāḍikā, at the Impenetrable Dwelling Place.<sup>26</sup> The Blessed One said to the venerable Ānanda, “Ānanda, let us proceed to the city of Vaiśālī.”

“Let us do so, O Honored One,” replied the venerable Ānanda, assenting to what the Blessed One had said.

Thereupon the Blessed One, traveling through the country of Vṛjī, arrived in Vaiśālī. In Vaiśālī, he stayed in Āmrapālī’s grove.

1.2 At that time the Blessed One said to the venerable Ānanda, “Ānanda, go to the city of Vaiśālī, place your foot on the threshold of the city gate, and utter these mantras [F.158.a] and these verses:

“ ‘*Visarata visarata visarata visarata*<sup>27</sup>”

1.3 “ ‘The Buddha, who has compassion for the world, has spoken.<sup>28</sup> This is the wish of all buddhas. It is the wish of all pratyekabuddhas. It is the wish of all arhats. It is the wish of all those undergoing training. It is the wish of all śrāvakas. It is the wish of all who speak words of truth. It is the wish of the Dharma.<sup>29</sup> It is the wish of Kāmeśvara. It is the wish of Brahmā. It is the wish of Pratyekabrahman. It is the wish of Indra. It is the wish of the gods. It is the wish of the lord of the demigods. It is the wish of all demigods. It is the wish of the servants of the demigods. It is the wish of all bhūtas:

“ ‘*Visarata visarata visarata visarata*<sup>30</sup>”



- 1.10 “ ‘He in whom all attachment and greed  
Are conquered, all defilement gone,  
His mind at peace without harmful intent—  
He will bring you well-being.
- 1.11 “ ‘He who leads all worldly beings  
To tread the path of liberation,  
The teacher of all dharmas—  
He will bring you well-being.
- 1.12 “ ‘The teacher, support of wandering beings,  
Who, for the sake of every living creature,  
Brings them all to master happiness— [F.159.a]  
He will bring you well-being.
- 1.13 “ ‘The protector who, with thoughts of love  
For all these beings, sustains them always  
Just as he would his only child—  
He will bring you well-being.
- 1.14 “ ‘He who in saṃsāra has been  
For all saṃsāric beings a support,  
An island, and a friend—  
He will bring you well-being.
- 1.15 “ ‘He who has laid bare all phenomena,  
Who is pure and free from deception,  
Whose words are pure, whose very acts are purity—  
He will bring you well-being.
- 1.16 “ ‘This great hero who, by taking birth,  
With perfection attained his purpose  
And accomplished all his goals<sup>37</sup>—  
He will bring you well-being.
- 1.17 “ ‘He whose birth, when this whole earth  
With all its forests shook and trembled,  
Brought joy for every living creature—  
He will bring you well-being.
- 1.18 “ ‘He who caused, on the seat of awakening,  
The earth to quake in all six ways  
And Māra to feel despair—  
He will bring you well-being.

- 1.19 “ ‘He who, turning the wheel of the Dharma,  
Pronounced the Truths of the Noble Ones  
And was extolled as a sage, the Muni—  
He will bring you well-being.
- 1.20 “ ‘The alluring one<sup>38</sup> who defeated  
All the extremists with the Dharma  
And brought all assemblies<sup>39</sup> under his influence—  
He will bring you well-being.
- 1.21 “ ‘May the Buddha bring you well-being;  
May Śakra and the gods bestow well-being;  
And may well-being from the bhūtas, too,  
Be provided to you always.
- 1.22 “ ‘By the Buddha’s merit and power  
And the wishes of the gods,  
May whatever goal you seek  
This very day be accomplished.
- 1.23 “ ‘Two-legged beings, be well.  
Four-legged beings, be well.  
When you set out, be well;  
And when you return, be well.
- 1.24 “ ‘Be well in the daytime; be well in the night;  
Be well at midday, too.  
May all of you be always well; [F.159.b]  
May all of you know no evil.<sup>40</sup>
- 1.25 “ ‘Surrounded by a thousand gods,  
The Buddha has arrived—  
So, you with hateful thoughts, disperse!  
And you whose nature is compassion, stay.
- 1.26 “ ‘By the power of the true words of the buddhas,  
Pratyekabuddhas, arhats, and those being trained,  
Those who do harm to the world  
Should be gone from this city.<sup>41</sup>
- 1.27 “ ‘All sentient beings, all living creatures,  
All bhūtas, and every one of you—  
May you have nothing but happiness.  
May you all be free from illness.



May you all see what is good.  
May all of you know no evil.<sup>42</sup>

1.28 “ ‘May whatever bhūtas are assembled here,  
All those who live upon the earth or in the sky,  
Act always lovingly for human beings  
And practice Dharma day and night.’ ”<sup>43</sup>

1.29 To these instructions, the venerable Ānanda replied, “I will do so, O Honored One.”

1.30 He went to Vaiśālī as the Blessed One had instructed and, placing his foot on the threshold of the city gate, uttered these mantras and these verses:<sup>44</sup>

*“Visarata visarata visarata visarata”*<sup>45</sup> [F.160.a]

1.31 “The Buddha, who has compassion for the world, has spoken.<sup>46</sup> This is the wish of all buddhas. It is the wish of all pratyekabuddhas. It is the wish of all arhats. It is the wish of all those undergoing training. It is the wish of all śrāvakas. It is the wish of all who speak words of truth. It is the wish of all the Dharmas.<sup>47</sup> It is the wish of Kāmeśvara. It is the wish of Brahmā. It is the wish of Pratyekabrahman. It is the wish of Indra. It is the wish of the gods. It is the wish of the lord of the demigods. It is the wish of all demigods. It is the wish of the servants of the demigods. It is the wish of all bhūtas.

*“Visarata visarata visarata visarata”*

1.32 “The Buddha, who has compassion for the world, has spoken.

*“Muñcata muñcata”*

1.33 “Do not stay. The epidemic should cease.

*“Nirgacchata nirgacchata nirgacchata nirgacchata”*

1.34 “The Buddha, the Great God, the God of Gods, the Supreme God, has arrived. The gods including Indra, the gods including Brahmā, the gods including Īśāna, the gods including Prajāpati, and the Four Protectors of the World have come. Hundreds of thousands of gods, lords of the demigods, and hundreds of thousands of demigods have also come. Hundreds of thousands of bhūtas who have faith in the Blessed One have also come for the sake of all living beings, and they have come to bring great harm to you; so:

*“Nirgacchata nirgacchata nirgacchata nirgacchata”*



- Just as he would his only child—  
He will bring you well-being.
- 1.42 “He who in saṃsāra has been  
For all saṃsāric beings a support,  
An island, and a friend—  
He will bring you well-being.
- 1.43 “He who has laid bare all phenomena,  
Who is pure and free from deception,  
Whose words are pure, whose very acts are purity—  
He will bring you well-being.
- 1.44 “This great hero who, by taking birth,  
With perfection attained his purpose  
And accomplished all his goals<sup>50</sup>—  
He will bring you well-being.
- 1.45 “He whose birth, when this whole earth [F.161.a]  
With all its forests shook and trembled,  
Brought joy for every living creature—  
He will bring you well-being.
- 1.46 “He who caused, on the seat of awakening,  
The earth to quake in all six ways  
And Māra to feel despair—  
He will bring you well-being.
- 1.47 “He who, turning the wheel of the Dharma,  
Pronounced the Truths of the Noble Ones  
And was extolled as a sage, the Muni—  
He will bring you well-being.
- 1.48 “The alluring one who defeated  
All the extremists with the Dharma  
And brought all assemblies<sup>51</sup> under his influence—  
He will bring you well-being.
- 1.49 “May the Buddha bring you well-being;  
May Śakra and the gods bestow well-being;  
And may well-being from the bhūtas, too,  
Be provided to you always.
- 1.50 “By the Buddha’s merit and power  
And the wishes of the gods,

- May whatever goal you seek  
This very day be accomplished.
- 1.51 “Two-legged beings, be well.  
Four-legged beings, be well.  
When you set out, be well;  
And when you return, be well.
- 1.52 “Be well in the daytime; be well in the night;  
Be well at midday, too.  
May all of you be always well;  
May all of you know no evil.
- 1.53 “Surrounded by a thousand gods,  
The Buddha has arrived—  
So, you with hateful thoughts, disperse!  
And you whose nature is compassion, stay.
- 1.54 “By the power of the true words of the buddhas,  
Pratyekabuddhas, arhats, and those being trained,  
Those who do harm to the world  
Should be gone from this city.<sup>52</sup>
- 1.55 “All sentient beings, all living creatures,  
All bhūtas, and every one of you—  
May you have nothing but happiness.  
May you all be free from illness.  
May you all see what is good.  
May all of you know no evil.<sup>53</sup>
- 1.56 “May whatever bhūtas are assembled here,  
All those who live upon the earth or in the sky,  
Act always lovingly for human beings [F.161.b]  
And practice Dharma day and night.”<sup>54</sup>
- 1.57 *This completes the Noble Mahāsūtra “On Entering the City of Vaiśālī.”*

c.

## COLOPHON

- c.1 Translated, edited, and established by the Indian paṇḍita Surendrabodhi and  
the principal editor-translator Bandhé Yeshé Dé.<sup>55</sup>

## NOTES

n.

n.1 Skilling's (1994–97) exhaustive two-volume study comprises critical editions of the Tibetan texts compiled from the many versions of the ten Mahāsūtras, which are also compared with equivalent works in Sanskrit and Pali where they exist, accompanied by detailed introductions and other material, tables, and extensive notes, for the set in general and for each individual text. It is the source of much of the information in this introduction.

n.2 Skilling (1994–97), vol. 2, p. 12.

n.3 Most of this literature is preserved in Tibetan because it was to the Mūlasarvāstivādin tradition that the early paṇḍitas who came to Tibet belonged, and the Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya corpus that they brought with them happens to be the most extensive of all the different vinaya collections, almost a canon in itself, containing a huge range of material.

n.4 See Bhaiṣajyavastu Translation Team (forthcoming).

n.5 Pali accounts of the Vaiśālī epidemic, as well as the Sanskrit *Mahāvastu* (see below), place the incident much earlier in the Buddha's life, during the reign of Ajātaśatru's father, Bimbisāra.

n.6 Other texts place it after the quelling of the epidemic, which seems more likely given the account of the young Licchavi men appearing in all their finery in Āmrapālī's Grove.

n.7 This last version, Toh 1093, and all those contained in this same volume (*gzungs 'dus, waM*), are listed as being located in volume 101 of the Degé Kangyur by the Buddhist Digital Resource Center (BDRC). However, several other Kangyur databases—including the eKangyur that supplies the digital input version displayed by the 84000 Reading Room—list this work as being located in volume 102. This discrepancy is partly due to the fact that the two volumes of the *gzungs 'dus* section are an added supplement not mentioned in the original catalog, and also hinges on the fact that the compilers of the Tōhoku catalog placed another text—which forms a whole, very large volume—the

- Vimalaprabhānāmakālacakratatraṭṭikā* (*dus 'khor 'grel bshad dri med 'od*, Toh 845), before the volume 100 of the Degé Kangyur, numbering it as vol. 100, although it is almost certainly intended to come right at the end of the Degé Kangyur texts as volume 102; indeed its final fifth chapter is often carried over and wrapped in the same volume as the Kangyur *dkar chags* (catalog). Please note this discrepancy when using the eKangyur viewer in this translation.
- n.8 There are also mantras in two other mahāsūtras, the *Mahāsamājasūtra* and the *Āṭānāṭṭiyasūtra*. In the Degé Kangyur, both are placed in the Tantra section (Toh 653 and 656, respectively) with duplicates in the Compendium of Incantations (Toh 1062 and 1061).
- n.9 *'phags pa yangs pa'i grong khyer du 'jug pa'i mdo las 'byung pa'i bde legs kyi tshigs su bcad pa.*
- n.10 See Denkarma, folios 302.a.5 and 304.b.2; and Hermann-Pfandt (2008), pp. 202 [353] and 277 [483].
- n.11 The translators' colophon is found only in the duplicates of the text in the Tantra and Incantations sections, not in the General Sūtra version.
- n.12 See note 26.
- n.13 An edition based on eight manuscripts is included in Skilling (1994–97), vol. 1, pp. 608–622. There are five Pañcarakṣa texts in the Kangyur representing the five protector goddesses, but this particular text does not seem to have been translated into Tibetan. It seems to be the only one with such a direct relationship to the Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya.
- n.14 See Yao (2013) and (2015).
- n.15 根本說一切有部毘奈耶藥事 (Taishō 1448).
- n.16 佛說大護明大陀羅尼經 (Taishō 1048).
- n.17 See Feer (1883), pp. 423–429.
- n.18 Especially chapters 25 and 29. See bibliography for Sanskrit text. For translation see Jones (1949), vol. 1, p. 208 et seq. and p. 242 et seq.
- n.19 The *Ratana-sutta* is found in the Canon as Khuddakapāṭha 6 and Suttanipāta 2.1. It is also found in a large number of liturgical collections of *paritta* texts, such as the *Catubhāṇavārapāli* (“Text of the Four Recitals”), along with some of the Pali counterparts of other mahāsūtras. See Pemaloka (2018), pp. xv and 54–63.
- n.20 Especially the *Khuddakapāṭha-atthakathā*; see Skilling (1994–97), vol. 2, p. 605, n. 83.
- n.21 See Dharmachakra Translation Committee (2016). The epidemic is introduced at 1.4 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh558.html#UT22084-090-002-14>), the Buddha quells it at 1.243 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh558.html#UT22084-090-002-253>), and the

verses in question start at 1.249

(<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh558.html#UT22084-090-002-259>).

- n.22 佛說守護大千國土經 (*Fo shuo shouhu da qian guotu jing*, Taishō 999), translated by Dānapāla in the late tenth or early eleventh century.
- n.23 *stong chen mo rab tu 'joms pa las gsungs pa'i smon lam*, Toh 813 in the Tantra section, duplicated as Toh 1098 in the Incantations.
- n.24 See Pemaloka (2018), p. ix.
- n.25 A ritual framework for reciting the mahāsūtra was composed (date unknown) by a Losang Jampal Gyatso (blo bzang 'jam dpal rgya mtsho, possibly the eighth Dalai Lama, although there are many other authors of the same name), with the title *yangs pa'i grong khyer du 'jug pa'i mdo'i 'don thabs*; see pp. 264–5 in *u rgyan slob dpon pad+ma 'byung gnas kyis mdzad pa rdzu 'phrul gyi 'phur lto brgya rtsa ba rgya nag nas 'byung pa'i tshul sogs* (W1NLM624 (<https://www.tbrc.org/#!rid=W1NLM624>)) recently scanned by BDRC and ACIP in the National Library of Mongolia.
- n.26 In the Tibetan of this mahāsūtra version, the setting is rendered as *'dam bu'i khrod na gzings pa'i 'dug gnas*, something of a conundrum for the translator. In the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* version this opening is absent, but according to its narrative the dialog that follows can be surmised to have taken place at the Giñjakāvasatha at Nādikā, a village near Pāṭaliputra (present-day Patna, in Bihar). To summarize personal communications with Peter Skilling: The Sanskrit Nādikā is attested in passages of the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* that parallel parts of the *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, but in the Tibetan of the latter Nādikā is rendered as *sgra can*, perhaps meaning “a place with noise,” and in other texts *sgra sgrogs* (similar in meaning) and *chu bo can* (“having a river”); these renderings are all based on Skt. √*nad* (“roar”) and its derivative *nadī* (“river”). Given that Nādikā has several variant spellings in the Pali texts, it is plausible—given the weight of the evidence from these other texts—that *'dam bu'i khrod* could be a Tibetan rendering of the same place name, based instead on Skt. *naḍa* (“reed,” Tib. *'dam bu*), sometimes spelt *nala* or *nada*; this is also supported by the fact (Yao, personal communication) that the rendering of Nādikā as 販葦聚落 in the Chinese translation of the *Kṣudrakavastu* (Taishō 1451) is also based on reference to reeds. As for the building or dwelling (*gzings pa'i 'dug gnas*), this Tibetan rendering may or may not correspond to the Giñjakāvasatha of other texts, a name sometimes interpreted from Pali sources as meaning a “brick building,” but with inconclusive evidence. The Tibetan here, *gzings pa*, according to Negi, may translate the Sanskrit *gahana* (“impenetrable,” “thicket”) but does not allow the name to be matched with any certainty to the Giñjakāvasatha or any other known place name. The whole phrase is found as a setting in only one other

- Kangyur text, a dhāraṇī called *lcags mthu nag po* (Toh 763). In Karmavajra’s commentary (see Introduction i.10), the place is given instead as *’dam bu’i khrod na gzigs pa’i ’dug gnas*, i.e., the same primary locality but “the Dwelling Place of Seeing” as the secondary one. The commentary provides no explanation of the name but goes on to describe it, in tantra style, as a measureless palace at the center of Vaiśālī made by the gods, asuras, and other nonhuman beings.
- n.27 There are many variants between the extant Tibetan texts in the mantras transliterated from Sanskrit, and in particular between the present Mahāsūtra version and the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* version. Here, the spelling and number of word repetitions reproduces the Degé Kangyur version in the Tantra section. Variants are fully documented in Skilling (1994–97), vol. 1, pp. 564–607 and 696–738.
- n.28 Here the Chinese translation of the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* transliterates the entire passage down to “*Muñcata muñcata*,” whereas the Tibetan translates it.
- n.29 Plural (*chos rnam*s) in the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* version.
- n.30 “Disperse! Disperse! Disperse! Disperse!”
- n.31 “Move! Move!”
- n.32 “Depart! Depart! Depart! Depart!”
- n.33 The *Bhaiṣajyavastu* version here, instead of *lus la yang ’jug par gyis shig*, has *dgongs pa la yang ’jug par gyur cig* (“engage in the intention”).
- n.34 See note 33; the divisions in the long mantra have been introduced to facilitate recitation rather than to reproduce the “word” breaks and punctuation in the source text.
- n.35 “Depart quickly!”
- n.36 The full set of verses that follows is also found as a separate, standalone text, *The Verses of Well-Wishing in the Sūtra on Entering the City of Vaiśālī* (Toh 816 in the Kangyur and Toh 4406 in the Tengyur).
- n.37 Tib. *don grub* (“accomplished goals”) could also be taken as the Buddha’s name at birth, Siddhārtha.
- n.38 In the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* version, it is the Dharma that is described as “alluring” (*yid ’phrog*) rather than the Buddha.
- n.39 Tib. *tshogs kun*. Although the words could be interpreted in a more general sense, according to Skilling this stanza refers to the Buddha’s resolution of the schism in the saṅgha in Śrāvastī (see Skilling 1994–97, vol. 2, p. 595).
- n.40 This stanza and the preceding one are also found as the third and fourth stanzas of the verse passage in the *Dhvajāgra-mahāsūtra* (Toh 292), in the



- Pañcarakṣa text *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* (Toh 559), and in the *Mahāvastu* (see Skilling 1994–97, vol. 2, p. 426).
- n.41 The Chinese *Bhaiṣajyavastu* and the *Mahāmantrānusāriṇī* lack these two verses (“Surrounded by . . . Should be gone from this city”). The newly identified Sanskrit *Bhaiṣajyavastu* fragments tally with the line “Those who have thoughts of anger . . . should stay.”
- n.42 This six-line stanza is also found in the Pañcarakṣa text *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* (Toh 559), in the *Bhadrakarātrīsūtra* (Toh 313), and in the version of the *Upasenasūtra* found in the *Vinayavibhaṅgha* (Toh 3). Some of the lines, in Sanskrit and Pali, are found in inscriptions and in other forms all over Asia. For details see Skilling (1994–97), vol. 2, p. 596.
- n.43 This stanza is also found in the *Mahāsamāja-mahāsūtra* (Toh 653) and, in the Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya, in the *Vinayakṣudrakavastu* (Toh 6) and in the *Chapter on Going Forth (Pravrajāvastu)*, Toh 1-1 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh1-1.html>), at 4.258 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh1-1.html#UT22084-001-001-1901>)), as well as in the version of the present text in the *Chapter on Medicines (Bhaiṣajyavastu)*, Toh 1-6).
- n.44 The Chinese *Bhaiṣajyavastu* does not repeat the mantras and verses as the Tibetan versions do, but only states 咸依上法 (“everything accords with the above method”). Here the newly discovered Sanskrit *Bhaiṣajyavastu* fragments (Yao, 2013 and 2015) tally with the Chinese concerning this lack of repetition.
- n.45 See note 27.
- n.46 See note 28.
- n.47 Here *chos thams cad*, a difference compared to the initial passage, 1.3 which simply reads *chos*, and to the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* version (see note 29).
- n.48 As before (see note 33), the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* version here, instead of *lus la yang 'jug par gyis shig*, has *dgongs pa la yang 'jug par gyur cig* (“engage in the intention”).
- n.49 There are some minor differences, reproduced here, in the exact spelling of some elements of this second version of the mantra compared to the first. See also note 34.
- n.50 See note 37.
- n.51 See note 39.
- n.52 The Chinese *Bhaiṣajyavastu* and *Mahāmantrānusāriṇī* lack these two verses (“Surrounded by . . . Should be gone from this city”). The newly identified Sanskrit *Bhaiṣajyavastu* fragments tally with the line “Those who have thoughts of anger . . . should stay.”
- n.53 See note 42.

n.54 See note 43. In the *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, this verse is followed by the statement: “When Ānanda had spoken these words, there by the blessed buddhas’ power of buddhahood, and the gods’ power of the gods, the epidemic was quelled.”

n.55 This translators’ colophon is not present in the versions of the text in the General Sūtra section of the Tshalpa Kangyurs. It is, however, found in the versions of the text found in the Tantra sections of all Kangyurs and in the versions in the Incantations section in the Degé and Qianlong Peking, but not in the Berlin, Choné, or Lithang Kangyurs.

b.

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## GLOSSARY

g.

g.1 **Ajātaśatru**

*ma skyes dgra*

མ་སྐྱེས་དགའ།

*Ajātaśatru*

The son of King Bimbisāra.

g.2 **Āmrapālī**

*a mra srung ba*

ཨ་མ་སྐྱུང་བ།

*Āmrapālī*

A courtesan of Vaiśālī.

g.3 **Arhat**

*dgra bcom pa*

དགའ་བཙུག་པ།

*arhat*

One who has achieved the fourth and final level of attainment on the śrāvaka path and who has attained liberation with the cessation of all mental afflictions.

g.4 **Bandhé Yeshé Dé**

*ban de ye shes sde*

བན་དེ་ཡེ་ཤེས་སྡེ།

—

A prolific Tibetan translator of the eighth and ninth centuries who assisted with the translation of hundreds of texts that appear in the Kangyur and Tengyur.

g.5 **Bhūta**

*'byung po*

འབྱུང་པོ།

*bhūta*

A generic term for “spirit” or “ghost.” They can be malevolent or benevolent.

g.6 **Bimbisāra**

*gzugs can snying po*

གཟུགས་ཚན་སྡིང་པོ།

*Bimbisāra*

The king of Magadha.

- g.7 **Blessed one**  
*bcom ldan 'das*  
 བཙེམ་ལྷན་འདས།  
*bhagavān*  
 An epithet for a buddha.
- g.8 **Brahmā**  
*tshangs pa*  
 ཚེངས་པ།  
*Brahman*  
 A god.
- g.9 **Demigod**  
*lha ma yin*  
 ལྷ་མ་ཡིན།  
*asura*  
 The traditional adversaries of the devas (gods) who are frequently portrayed in brahmanical mythology as having a disruptive effect on cosmological and social harmony.
- g.10 **Dhāraṇī**  
*gzungs*  
 གཟུངས།  
*dhāraṇī*  
 A statement, or spell, meant to protect or bring about a particular result, it has the function of encapsulating or epitomizing a longer teaching; also refers to extraordinary skills regarding retention of the teachings.
- g.11 **Four Protectors of the World**  
*'jig rten skyong ba bzhi po*  
 འཇིག་རྟེན་སྐྱོང་བ་བཞི་པོ།  
*Catvāro lokapālā*  
 The Four Great Kings of the cardinal directions.
- g.12 **Impenetrable Dwelling Place**  
*gzings pa'i 'dug gnas*  
 གཟིངས་པའི་འདུག་གནས།  
 —  
 May, or may not, correspond to the Giṅjakāvasatha of other texts. See [note 26](#).
- g.13 **Indra**  
*dbang po*  
 དབང་པོ།  
*Indra*  
 A god.
- g.14 **Īśāna**  
*dbang bdag*  
 དབང་བདག།  
*Īśāna*  
 One of the eight guardians of the directions, Īśāna guards the northeast quarter.

- g.15 **Kāmeśvara**  
*'dod pa'i dbang phyug*  
 འདོད་པའི་དབང་ཕྱུག  
*Kāmeśvara*  
 Literally, “Lord of Desire.” Name of Kubera/Vaiśravaṇa.
- g.16 **Licchavi**  
*li ts+ tsha bl*  
 ལི་ཚྭ་བློ།  
*Licchavi*  
 A tribe based in Vaiśālī, part of the Vṛjī confederacy.
- g.17 **Magadha**  
*ma ga dhA*  
 མ་ག་ལྷ།  
*Magadha*  
 One of the most important regions during the time of Buddha Śākyamuni, ruled by Bimbisāra and later his son Ajātaśatru from the capital Rājagṛha.
- g.18 **Māra**  
*bdud*  
 བདུད།  
*Māra*  
 The demon who assailed the Buddha Śākyamuni prior to his awakening; the personification of conceptual and emotional obstacles.
- g.19 **Markaṭahrada**  
*spre'u rdzিং*  
 སྤྲེ་འུ་རྩིང་།  
*Markaṭahrada*  
 The “monkey pond” near Vaiśālī.
- g.20 **Nāḍikā**  
*'dam bu'i khrod*  
 འདམ་བུའི་ཁྲོད།  
*Nāḍikā, Nāḍikā*  
 A village presumed to be near Pāṭaliputra (present day Patna) but whose exact location is unknown. Rendered in Tibetan in other texts as *sgra can* or *chu bo can*. See [note 26](#).
- g.21 **Prajāpati**  
*skye dgu'i bdag po*  
 སྐྱེ་དགུའི་བདག་པོ།  
*Prajāpati*  
 A god.
- g.22 **Pratyekabrahman**  
*tshangs pa so so*  
 ཚངས་པ་སོ་སོ།  
*Pratyekabrahman*  
 A god.



g.23 Pratyekabuddha

*rang sangs rgyas*

རངསངས་རྒྱལ།

*pratyekabuddha*

Someone who has attained liberation entirely through their own contemplation as a result of progress in previous lives but, unlike a buddha, does not have the accumulated merit and motivation to teach others.

g.24 Rājagṛha

*rgyal po'i khab*

རྒྱལ་པོའི་ཁམ།

*Rājagṛha*

Now known as Rajgir and located in the modern Indian state of Bihar, it was the capital of the kingdom of Magadha during the Buddha's lifetime.

g.25 Śakra

*brgya byin*

བརྒྱལ་བྱིན།

*Śakra*

The lord of gods (Indra).

g.26 Śrāvaka

*nyan thos*

ཉན་ཐོས།

*śrāvaka*

A "hearer" or "listener," someone who first hears the Dharma from another. This refers to the disciples of the Buddha who sought the enlightenment of an arhat, that is, their own liberation from cyclic existence.

g.27 Surendrabodhi

*su ren dra bo dhi*

སུ་རེན་ང་བོ་དྷི།

*Surendrabodhi*

One of the Indian teachers invited to Tibet at the time of the emperor Ralpachen (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.28 Vaiśālī

*yangs pa can*

ཡངས་པ་ཅན།

*Vaiśālī*

A great city during the Buddha's time, the capital of the Licchavi republic. It was an important location where a number of Buddhist sūtras are said to have been taught.

g.29 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.

Vṛji

g.30

*spong byed*

མོ་ཕུང་།

*Vṛjī*

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 Pāṭaliputra up to the Madhesh regions of present southern Nepal.