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Tārā Who Protects from the Eight Dangers

**Tārāṣṭaghoratāraṇī*

འཕགས་མ་སྒོལ་མ་འཇིགས་པ་བརྒྱད་ལས་སྒྲོབ་པའི་མདོ།

'phags ma sgrol ma 'jigs pa brgyad las skyob pa'i mdo

The Noble Sūtra “Tārā Who Protects from the Eight Dangers”

**Āryatārāṣṭaḥorātāraṇīsūtra*



Toh 731
Degé Kangyur, vol. 94 (rgyud 'bum, tsha), folios 222.b–224.b

Translated by Samye Translations
under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha

First published 2020
Current version v 1.2.11 (2023)
Generated by 84000 Reading Room v2.19.5

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co.

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SUMMARY

- s.1 In this sūtra, the goddess Tārā warns the gods of the desire realm about the miseries of saṃsāra and offers a pithy Dharma teaching to free them from harm. Tārā begins by vividly portraying the various kinds of suffering endured by beings in each of the six realms of saṃsāra and then points out the futility of reciting mantras without maintaining pure conduct. She goes on to encourage the listeners to engage in virtue, which puts an end to saṃsāra, and she bestows on them a dhāraṇī that will help them to achieve this goal, a praise of her qualities, and a request for her divine protection that they should recite. Finally, she enjoins the audience to read and practice the teaching and share it with others.

ac.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ac.1 Translated by Samye Translations under the guidance of Phakchok Rinpoche. The translation and introduction were produced by Stefan Mang and Peter Woods, and edited by Oriane Lavolé.

This translation has been completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.

INTRODUCTION

i.

i.1 While the Buddha is dwelling on top of Mount Meru, along with the goddess Tārā and an assembly of gods, Tārā warns the divine gathering about the various kinds of suffering endured by beings in each of the six realms of saṃsāra. She explains that the fate of each being is the result of past negative actions and that virtuous conduct is the only way to avoid suffering in the future. Tārā describes the path to liberation using a series of evocative metaphors and also offers a sacred dhāraṇī as a means to help others achieve liberation from saṃsāra. She also outlines for recitation a praise of her myriad qualities, in particular of her ability to protect beings from the eight dangers. Finally, she encourages the audience to read, practice, and share this teaching widely.

i.2 The sūtra can be divided into three sections: (1) a concise teaching given by Tārā on the suffering of saṃsāra and the virtuous practices that will eradicate such suffering and lead to fortunate states; (2) a dhāraṇī that practitioners can employ as a method for advancing toward liberation;¹ and (3) a praise to be recited to Tārā. In this third section, Tārā is praised as an awakened protectress² and requested to keep those who petition her safe from the eight dangers. These dangers are identified in this text as lions, elephants, fire, snakes, robbers, waters, infectious diseases, and demons. These final verses, in which Tārā's ability to protect beings from the eight dangers is described, are thus what lend the text its title.³

i.3 There is to our knowledge no extant Sanskrit version of this sūtra, nor is there a Chinese version recorded in the Taishō Buddhist Canon. It is also not found in the Denkarma (*ldan dkar ma*) or Phangthangma (*'phang thang ma*) Tibetan imperial translation inventories. The translation has no colophon, so we do not know who the translators were, nor do we have knowledge of any other circumstances surrounding the translation into Tibetan.⁴

i.4 The text has previously been introduced and translated into English by Martin Willson.⁵ The English translation presented here is based on the Tibetan version in the Degé Kangyur, in consultation with the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*) and the Lhasa Kangyur edition.

The Noble Sūtra

Tārā Who Protects from the Eight Dangers

1. The Translation

[F.222.b]

- 1.1 Homage to the Three Jewels.
Homage to the venerable lady Tārā.
Homage to the Blessed Śākyamuni.
- 1.2 Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was dwelling in the realm of gods atop Mount Meru. At that time, the goddess Tārā, who was in the assembly, spoke the following words:
- 1.3 “Now that you have reached this jewel-like higher realm,
You should understand actions and their results:
Adhere to the good and abandon the bad,
For those who engage in evil actions [F.223.a]
Will plunge downward when they pass from this world.
- 1.4 “Animals, dull and mute, devour one another.
They climb and descend, up and down, on an abysmal path of toil.
Terrified and afraid, they tremble in panic,
As their dreadful suffering defies imagination.
- 1.5 “*Pretas* suffer from hunger and thirst, their bodies deformed.
If food and drink should appear, it is guarded by others,
And even if they consume a little, it turns into fire and swords.
Their suffering from hunger and thirst defies imagination.
- 1.6 “Those beings who are born in the hell realms
Are powerlessly led by Yama’s henchmen.
Burned and boiled, they are sliced asunder by swords;
Their suffering from heat and cold is unbearable.
- 1.7 “Thus, those who commit evil deeds in this life

- Are committing a great injury to themselves.
They will be tormented by intense suffering for many eons,
With no chance to escape and no means of enduring it.
- 1.8 “Keep this clearly in mind, and understand the results of actions.
Otherwise you will sow your own unbearable suffering and lament.
Even others will be frightened by the terrible din of your agonized screams,
For these kinds of sufferings are beyond imagination!
- 1.9 “Whoever understands such grave faults
Will abandon the causes of the three lower realms.
Wherever evil manifests, subtle or coarse,
Act swiftly by way of body, speech, and mind.
- 1.10 “You will then be happy and offer help to all beings.
You will give up attachment, aversion, and ignorance and strengthen the
root of compassion.
You will practice virtue, striving avidly with body, speech, and mind,
And endeavor in this most profound quintessence.⁶
- 1.11 “The fruit of a flower overcome by frost,
Although cultivated, will produce no sprouts.
Likewise, those who transgress their vows and entertain doubts
May practice the most profound of *vidyāmantras*,
Thinking, ‘Blessings will come,’ but this is impossible—
Their efforts amount to meaningless hardship.
- 1.12 “Their *vidyāmantra* becomes like the prattle of common folk,
And their absorption resembles the musings of a child.
But if people without fault practice *vidyāmantras*, [F.223.b]
They shall swiftly accomplish whatever they desire.
- 1.13 “Minute though it is, the seed of the banyan tree
Well moistened with water and manure
In seven months can grow as much as a league.
If there can be so much change in outer matter,
What need to speak of accomplishing knowledge with knowledge?
The inner change of luminosity is beyond all measure.
- 1.14 “If one relies on a merchant who knows the way
And sets out to sea in an excellent ship,
One will find whatever riches are desired
And sail smoothly back to one’s home.

- 1.15 “If one relies on love, compassion, joy, and equanimity
And practices virtue endowed with the mind of awakening,
One will set out on a truly perfect path
And be sure to reach the land of wisdom.
- 1.16 “When an arrow is released from a person’s fingers,
It has certainly been shot, even if one thinks otherwise.
When a person fully comprehends the meaning of reality,
The other shore has been reached, even if one thinks otherwise.
- 1.17 “Once the aspects of conduct are naturally perfected,
The fruit of buddhahood will undoubtedly be attained.
When the pristine nature of reality is realized,
There is no self, no life force, and also no termination of life force.
There is no action and no ripening of action.
The extremes are abandoned, and one is liberated.
- 1.18 “In order for you to realize that goal,
Devotedly recite this quintessence as I proclaim it.
If you do, the evil deeds of three incalculable eons will be eradicated,
The three lower realms and all the suffering of saṃsāra will be purified,
And the obscurations will be cleared away.
The meaningful quintessence is as follows:
- 1.19 *oṃ, bodhisattva great lady, goddess, please protect us!*⁷
- oṃ nama āryāvalokiteśvarāya bodhisattvāya mahāsattvāya mahākāruṇikāya |⁸
tadyathā |⁹*
- oṃ tāre tuttāre ture sarvaduṣṭān praduṣṭān mama kṛte jambhaya stambhaya mohaya
bandhaya hūṃ hūṃ hūṃ phaṭ phaṭ phaṭ svāhā |¹⁰*
- nama āryāvalobhayā narā bodhisattvā mahāsattvāni adhiṣṭhānādhiṣṭhite mama
sarvakarmāvaraṇa svabhāvaśuddhe [F.224.a] viśuddhe śodhaya viśodhaya hūṃ phaṭ
svāhā |¹¹*
- 1.20 “Then the goddess, who is herself
The embodiment of buddhahood, is praised:¹²
- 1.21 “ ‘Lady who acts with immense compassion for the good of beings—
You have all the major and minor marks and are bedecked with precious
substances.
Your smile is ravishing, your countenance is joyful,
And your eyes are like flax blossoms.

- 1.22 “ ‘Your ears are like blossoming trumpet flowers.
Your nose is like a lotus bud.
Your mouth is like a mallow in full bloom.
You have a sparkling body and the figure of a young maiden.
- 1.23 “ ‘Your speech is like a *kalaviṅka* bird, proclaiming the Dharma.
Your compassionate mind guards all beings with love.
Your left hand holds a lotus, for you are unstained by saṃsāra’s flaws.
Your right hand grants protection to all beings to fulfill their aims.
- 1.24 “ ‘You are seated on the sun and moon of method and wisdom.
Venerable lady Tārā, we take refuge in you!
Protect us from the great abyss of saṃsāra!
- 1.25 “ ‘As we circle within the six transmigrations,
May you secure us with your noose of great compassion.
As we go astray into the three lower realms,
May you place us on a path free from straying.
- 1.26 “ ‘As we are born into families with wrong views,
Please introduce us to teachers who possess the mind of awakening,
Lest we encounter unwholesome teachers.
- 1.27 “ ‘You protect from the eight dangers—
Lions, elephants, fire, snakes,
Robbers, waters, infectious diseases, and demons.
We pay homage to you!
In this world and in others as well,
Protect us from these eight dangers!
- 1.28 “ ‘Until we have reached our goal, the other shore,
May we make the ten perfections of generosity, moral conduct,
Patience, diligence, concentration, insight,
Method, aspiration, strength, and wisdom
Our inseparable allies!’
- 1.29 “ ‘Sons and daughters of noble family should write down this teaching, read it, recite it, understand it, contemplate it correctly, and explain it extensively to others.’ [F.224.b]
- At her words, the whole assembly rejoiced and offered praise.
- 1.30 *This completes the sūtra “Venerable Lady Tārā Who Protects from the Eight Dangers.”¹³*

n.

NOTES

- n.1 Parts of this dhāraṇī are also found in other dhāraṇīs to Tārā such as the *Sāadhanamālā* mantra of Vajratārā (Bhattacharyya 1925, p. 178) and *The Dhāraṇī of Tārā* (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh729.html>) (Toh 729, *sgrol ma'i gzungs*), to give only two examples.
- n.2 For various iconographic descriptions of Tārā Who Protects from the Eight Dangers, see for example Shin 2010, pp. 20–22 and Shaw 2006, pp. 319–322.
- n.3 The Kangyur manuscripts suggest that the Sanskrit title of this text was **Āryatārāṣṭaḥoretāsvīsūtra* or a variant thereof. We have followed the Tōhoku catalogue, amending the title to **Āryatārāṣṭaḥoratāraṇīsūtra*. It is worthwhile to note that the Sanskrit term **aṣṭaḥora* appears to be a unique way to refer to the eight dangers. The commonly used Sanskrit term is *aṣṭamahābhaya*. Both terms are very similar in meaning and both can be translated into Tibetan as *'jigs pa [chen po] brgyad*.
- n.4 Interestingly, the text is only found in Kangyur collections of the Tshalpa (*tshal pa*) group, such as the Degé, Lhasa, Lithang, and Choné Kangyurs. It is not included in any of the Thempangma (*them spangs ma*) group, the Ladakh/Mustang Kangyur collections, or the Dunhuang collections.
- n.5 See Willson 1996, pp. 87–93. Willson's translation is based on the Peking Kangyur version of the sūtra.
- n.6 Quintessence (*hṛdaya, snying po*) here refers to a dhāraṇī that is considered to encapsulate the essence of a deity, in this case Tārā.
- n.7 The first part of this dhāraṇī is an homage to Tārā. Since the Tibetan translators chose to render this part into Tibetan, it is also translated into English here.

- n.8 The second part of this dhāraṇī presents a standard homage to Avalokiteśvara. We have amended *namo* to *nama* following the homage as given in the *Vajratārāsādhana*s in the *Sādhanaṃālā* (see e.g. Bhattacharyya 1925, p. 178) and *The Dhāraṇī of Tārā*. A tentative translation of it is as follows: “*om!* Homage to Noble Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva mahāsattva, the great compassionate one!”
- n.9 *Tadyathā*, literally “it is like this,” is used to indicate the beginning of a mantra.
- n.10 The third part of this dhāraṇī is a request to Tārā to dispel obstacles. This part is found as an independent dhāraṇī in, for example, the *Sādhanaṃālā* as the mantra of Vajratārā (Bhattacharyya 1925, p. 178), *The Dhāraṇī of Tārā*, and elsewhere (Beyer 1978, pp. 280–281). A tentative translation of it is as follows: “It is like this: *om!* Deliverer! Savior! Swift One! Crush, suppress, confound, restrain all the wrong and evil beings for me! *hūm hūm hūm phaṭ phaṭ phaṭ svāhā!*”
- n.11 The fourth part of this dhāraṇī is a request to Tārā to purify one’s obscurations. We have amended the first two beginning syllables *mama* to *nama* following the dhāraṇī as given in Butön’s *Dhāraṇī Collection* (*gzungs bsdus*) in his *Collected Works* (*gsung ’bum*). The remaining part of the dhāraṇī appears to be corrupted. The letters *bha* and *ka* are very similar and often confused in old Newar and other scripts, so *āryāvalobha-* probably was originally *āryāvaloka-*. This is probably a reference to Āryāvalokiteśvara, whose name might have been followed by the standard *bhōdhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ*. A tentative translation is as follows: “Homage to you, [Tārā,] empowered with the blessing of Noble Avalokita, the great bodhisattva mahāsattva! Purify, completely purify, cleanse, and completely cleanse all my karmic obscurations! *hūm phaṭ svāhā!*”
- n.12 This is a tentative rendering of the phrase: *de nas sangs rgyas nyid kyis su/ lha mo nyid la rab tu bstod*.
- n.13 The title listed here differs from the title given on the first page as “Noble” (*’phags ma*) is missing. Instead, “Venerable Lady” (*rje btsun ma*) is added. The Comparative Edition notes that the Lithang and Choné versions add *yang zhus ste/te skar* to the end of the colophon (p. 601). The phrase could be rendered as “re-edited and sorted.”

b.

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GLOSSARY

· Types of attestation for Sanskrit names and terms ·

AS	<i>Attested in source text</i> This term is attested in the Sanskrit manuscript used as a source for this translation.
AO	<i>Attested in other text</i> This term is attested in other Sanskrit manuscripts of the Kangyur or Tengyur.
AD	<i>Attested in dictionary</i> This term is attested in Tibetan-Sanskrit dictionaries.
AA	<i>Approximate attestation</i> The attestation of this name is approximate. It is based on other names where Tibetan-Sanskrit relationship 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 banyan tree

n+ya gro d+ha

ཉལ་གྲོ་ད་མ།

nyagrodha

A fast-growing fig tree that can quickly become a large tree. It features prominently in Indian stories and myths.

g.2 demon

sha za

ཤ་ཟ།

piśāca

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

A class of nonhuman beings that, like several other classes of nonhuman beings, take spontaneous birth. Ranking below *rākṣasas*, they are less powerful and more akin to pretas. They are said to dwell in impure and perilous places, where they feed on impure things, including flesh. This could account for the name *piśāca*, which possibly derives from √*piś*, to carve or chop meat, as reflected also in the Tibetan *sha za*, “meat eater.” They are often described as having an unpleasant appearance, and at times they appear with animal bodies. Some possess the ability to enter the dead bodies of humans, thereby becoming so-called *vetāla*, to touch whom is fatal.

g.3 dhāraṇī

gzungs

གཟུངས།

dhāraṇī

The term *dhāraṇī* has the sense of something that “holds” or “retains,” and as such can refer to the special capacity of practitioners to memorize and recall detailed teachings. It can also refer to a verbal expression of the teachings—an incantation, spell, or mnemonic formula that distills and “holds” essential points of the Dharma and is used by practitioners to attain mundane and supramundane goals. The same term is also used to denote texts that contain such formulae.

g.4 eight dangers

'jigs pa brgyad · *'jigs pa brgyad*

འཇིགས་པ་བརྒྱད། · འཇིགས་པ་བརྒྱད།

aṣṭamahābhaya · **aṣṭaghora*^{RS}

Listed in *Tārā Who Protects from the Eight Dangers* as lions, elephants, fire, snakes, robbers, waters, infectious diseases, and demons. A more common enumeration gives “imprisonment” rather than “infectious diseases.”

g.5 kalaviṅka

ka la ping ka

ཀ་ལ་པིང་ཀ།

kalaviṅka

In Buddhist literature refers to a mythical bird with the head of a human and the body of a bird. The kalaviṅka's call is said to be far more beautiful than that of all other birds and so compelling that it could be heard even before the bird has hatched. The call of the kalaviṅka is also used as an analogy to describe the voice of the Buddha.

g.6 league

dpag tshad

དཔག་ཚད།

yojana

A measure of distance. The exact value varies in different sources, though typically it is between 6 and 14 km.

g.7 mallow

ha lo

ཧ་ལོ།

—

A flower belonging to the *lcam pa* family, a type of malva flower used in Tibetan medicine.

g.8 Mount Meru

ri rab

རི་རབ།

meru

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

According to ancient Buddhist cosmology, Meru is the great mountain forming the axis of the universe. At its summit lies Sudarśana, home of Śakra and his thirty-two gods, and on its flanks live the asuras. The mount has four sides facing the cardinal directions, each of which is made of a different precious stone. Surrounding it are several mountain ranges and the great ocean where the four great island continents lie: in the south, Jambudvīpa (our world); in the west, Godānīya; in the north, Uttarakuru; in the east, Pūrvavideha. Above it are the abodes of the gods of the realm of desire. Often also referred to as Mount Sumeru.

g.9 perfections

pha rol tu phyin pa

ཕ་རོལ་ཏུ་ཕྱིན་པ།

pāramitā

The trainings of the bodhisattva path. Most commonly listed as six: generosity, moral conduct, patience, diligence, concentration, and insight. Sometimes, such as in this text, an additional four are added: method, aspiration, strength, and wisdom.

g.10 preta

yi dwags

ཡི་དྲགས།

preta

A class of beings who, in the Buddhist tradition, are particularly known to suffer from hunger and thirst and the inability to acquire sustenance.

g.11 realm of gods atop Mount Meru

ri rab kyi steng lha'i gnas

རི་རབ་ཀྱི་སྟེང་ལྷ་འི་གནས།

—

Likely refers to the Heaven of the Thirty-Three (*Trāyastriṃśa, sum cu rtsa gsum*), the second heaven of the desire realm situated on the summit of Mount Meru and presided over by thirty-three gods, of whom Śakra is the chief.

g.12 Tārā

sgrol ma

སྟོན་མ།

tārā

A goddess (lit. “Savior”) known for giving protection. She is variously presented in Buddhist literature as a great bodhisattva or a fully awakened buddha.

g.13 trumpet flower

ug chos

ཉུག་ཚོས།

—

Incarvillea compacta maxim, an herb with pink trumpet-shaped flowers used in Tibetan medicine.

g.14 vidyāmantra

rig sngags

རིག་སྒྲགས།

vidyāmantra

A sacred utterance or spell made for the purpose of attaining either worldly or transcendent benefits.

g.15 Yama

gshin rje

གཤིན་རྗེ།

yama

The lord of death who judges the dead and rules over the hells.