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## Introduction

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### I.1

*Upholding the Great Secret Mantra* (*Mahāmantrānudhāraṇi*,<sup>1</sup> Toh 563) is the fifth scripture in a series of five; the other four texts are *Destroyer of the great trichiliocosm* (*Mahāsāhasrapramardanī*, Toh 558), *The Great Peahen, Queen of Incantations* (*Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*, Toh 559), *The Noble Great Amulet, Queen of Incantations* (*Mahāpratisāravidyārājñī*, Toh 561), and *The Sūtra of Great Cool Grove*, (*Mahāśītavana*, Toh 562).<sup>2</sup> Together these five texts have been apotheosized in the Mahāyāna tradition as five goddesses known collectively as the Pañcarakṣā, or the “Five Protectresses.” In the Tibetan tradition this collection is known by the moniker *gzungs chen grwa lnga*, the “Fivefold Great Dhāraṇī.” In the Degé Kangyur collection these texts constitute 60, 49, 43, 25, and 12 folios, respectively, making a total of 189 folios.

### I.2

Tibetan redactors of Kangyur collections have catalogued this set of five texts together within the final Action (*kriyā*) tantras section of the “tantra collection” (*rgyud ’bum*) division. Indeed, these scriptures do contain elements—powerful incantations, an emphasis on external ritual hygiene and other material details such as Auspicious dates, and so forth—that resonate with standard Kṛiyayoga practice as understood in Tibet. Yet missing from nearly all these texts is any extensive mention of the contemplative visualization exercises, specialized ritual gestures (*mudrā*), elaborate maṇḍala diagrams, and initiation ceremonies so typical of full-blown Buddhist tantra. A close perusal of these five texts might then lead the reader to construe them as standard Mahāyāna texts with a preponderance of elements—magical mantra formulas, ritual prescriptions, pragmatic aims, and so forth—that only later coalesced and developed into a typically tantric practice tradition with its own unique set of view, meditation, and conduct. To complicate things further, the core of the *Mahāmāyūrī*, for one, is rooted in Indian Buddhist traditions that predate even the rise of *Mahāyāna*.<sup>3</sup> The *Mahāmāyūrī* also appears as a remedy for snakebites in the earlier *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinayavastu*.<sup>4</sup> This accords with Gregory Schopen’s general observation, based on inscriptional evidence, that “dhāraṇī texts were publically known much earlier and more widely than texts we think of as ‘classically’ Mahāyāna”.<sup>5</sup>

### I.3

Regardless of their bibliographical position in the Tibetan canon, the Five Protectresses have been among the most popular texts used for pragmatic purposes throughout the Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna Buddhist world. While it seems certain that these texts each developed independently and were only later combined into a five-text corpus, their popularity is attested by their eventual spread to Nepal, Tibet, Central Asia, China, Mongolia, Korea, Japan, and Indonesia (Hidas 2007: 189). In

East Asia, the textual tradition associated with the *Mahāmāyūrī* in particular was instrumental in integrating Buddhist and indigenous notions of divine kingship.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the tradition of all five goddesses and their texts still occupies a place of central importance today in the Vajrayāna Buddhism practiced by the Newar population of the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal. Newar Buddhist communities of Kathmandu have even translated the texts of the Five Protectresses into the modern vernacular, based on which they continue to stage a number of annual rites for a broad range of pragmatic purposes.<sup>7</sup> Newars often propitiate the Five Protectresses together by means of a five-section maṇḍala and other tantric elements that do not necessarily feature in the scriptures themselves. This tradition reflects a specifically tantric ritual treatment of the texts, which, judging by the presence of tantric *sādhana* practices associated with these five texts in the Tibetan Tengyur collections, had already developed by the time the Tibetan translations were executed. This helps account for why Tibetan redactors construed these five texts as belonging to the category of Kriyatantra, and not to the Dhāraṇī or Sūtra sections. Indeed, the Tibetan translation of the *Mahāpratisarā* reflects a recension of the Sanskrit text, which, Gergely Hidas suggests, “most likely served the better integration of this text into the Vajrayāna, changing the historical locus of the *nidāna* to a mythical Vajrayānic setting.”<sup>8</sup>

#### 1.4

The designation Five Protectresses denotes the set of five texts, the incantations presented therein, and the goddesses presiding over each. It is believed that all these texts, particularly their incantations, provide special protection against a wide range of illnesses and misfortunes for those who memorize, recollect, read, copy, teach, wear, or otherwise come into contact with them. Each text promises protection against specific misfortunes, with considerable overlap witnessed between the texts. Despite the pragmatic thrust of these scriptures, each text also contains numerous allusions to doctrinal notions. The range of effects described therein sometimes, though rarely, extends beyond the pragmatic sphere to include the purification of negative karma, deliverance from the lower realms, and even the attainment of buddhahood.

#### 1.5

*Upholding the Great Secret Mantra* was translated into Tibetan under Tibetan imperial patronage sometime during the early ninth century by a translation team that included the translator-editor Bandé Yeshé Dé (ca. late eighth to early ninth century) and the Indian scholars *Śilendrabodhi*, *Jñānasiddhi*, and *Śākyaprabha*. The sūtra promises protection against a range of threats, from illnesses, natural disasters, and dangers while traveling, to warfare, corporal punishment, and theft. This text frames all of these perils as originating from the animosity and ill will of human beings and spirits. The principal focus is threats posed by the capricious spirit world of “non-humans” (*mi ma yin*), who feed off the life force, vitality, flesh,

and blood of humans. The negative impact of these non-humans extends beyond the individual to include homes, villages, towns, cities, regions, and entire countries. The text claims to be efficacious by means of “drawing” or demarcating a “boundary” around those in need of protection, sealing them off from the source of harm and thereby restoring health and internal cohesion. It is through “receiving, holding, reciting, preaching, and mastering” this scripture that such a protective boundary is formed.

## 1.6

The narrative of the sūtra begins with an interchange between the Buddha and the god [Brahmā](#). Brahmā, along with his divine retinue, visits the Blessed One at the [Jetavana](#) hermitage and requests that he “guard, protect, look after, and bring peace and well-being” to the entire trichiliocosm of a thousand million worlds, just as the god himself does for the [chiliocosm](#) of a thousand worlds under his care. The Buddha acquiesces to his request by remaining silent. He subsequently proceeds to teach the scripture’s dhāraṇī formulas and to extol its many benefits. Much as in the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*, but with less elaboration, the Buddha prescribes the invocation by name of the spirits responsible for personal and communal misfortunes. These litanies, which the Buddha separates into groups based on the locations and activities of these beings, hierarchically arrange the spirits so that they are all subordinate to the Buddha’s command and to the command of his saṅgha. The Buddha states that just “upholding” or intoning these names along with the mantra formula that accompanies each group will urge them to obey members of the saṅgha so that they desist from causing harm and instead serve the pragmatic needs of the saṅgha and surrounding lay communities.

## 1.7

Owing to the absence of a reliable Sanskrit edition that reflects the Tibetan translations, this English translation is based on the Tibetan Degé edition, in consultation with the Pedurma (*dpe bsdur ma*) comparative edition. Thus, rather than adjudicate on the many variant readings of the dhāraṇī formulas found in the different Tibetan versions of this text, we have chosen to defer this issue for now and record only the Degé version until a Sanskrit edition is produced that might shed further light on the matter.

### THE TRANSLATION

#### The Sūtra of

## Upholding the Great Secret Mantra

### 1.1

[F.150.b] Homage to the Three Jewels!

Homage to the Buddha!

Homage to the Dharma!

Homage to the Saṅgha!

Homage to the seven perfectly and completely awakened buddhas, along with their śrāvakas—those who have perfectly gone, and those who have perfectly entered!

## 1.2

Following this homage:

May these incantations be practiced for a purpose!

May these incantations be accomplished!

May their purpose—the goal for which they are practiced—

Be accomplished!

## 1.3

Thus have I heard at one time. The Blessed One was dwelling in the Jetavana, Anāthapiṇḍada's grove in Śrāvastī. At that time, Brahmā, Master of the Sahā world, with the gods of the Brahmā realm; Śakra, lord of the gods, with the gods of the Heaven of the Thirty-Three; the four great kings, with the gods of their realm; the twenty-eight great yakṣa generals; and Hārītī with her children and retinue of servants went before the Blessed One, bowed their heads at his feet, and stood to one side.

## 1.4

Standing there, Brahmā, master of the Sahā world, bowed toward the Blessed One with palms joined, and said, “Venerable Blessed One, I rule as lord over the realms of the chiliocosm. [F.151.a] Venerable Blessed One, when needed I guard, protect, look after, and bring peace and well-being to the realms in the chiliocosm. Venerable Bliss-Gone Dharma Sovereign, Blessed One, you rule as lord over the realms of the great trichiliocosm. Blessed One, when you see fit you, too, guard, protect, look after, and bring peace and well-being to the realms of the great trichiliocosm. So, Venerable Blessed One, I request you to guard, protect, look after, and bring peace and well-being to the realms of the trichiliocosm!”

## 1.5

The Blessed One acquiesced by remaining silent. Brahmā, master of the Sahā world, understood that the Buddha had acquiesced by his silence, and at that moment he vanished.

## 1.6

Subsequently, the Blessed One said to the monks, “Monks, last night I was approached by Brahmā, master of the Sahā world, along with the gods of the Brahmā realm; Śakra, lord of the gods, with the gods of the Heaven of the Thirty-

Three; the four great kings, with the gods of the realm of the four great kings; and the twenty-eight great yakṣa generals; and Hārītī with her children and retinue of servants also came.

1.7

“Brahmā, **Master** of the **Sahā world**, said to me, ‘Venerable Blessed One, I rule as lord over the realms of the chiliocosm. Venerable Blessed One, when needed, I guard, protect, look after, and bring peace and well-being to the realms in the chiliocosm. [F.151.b] Venerable Bliss-Gone Dharma Sovereign, Blessed One, you rule as lord over the realms of the great trichiliocosm. Blessed One, when you see fit, you also guard, protect, look after, and bring peace and well-being to the realms of the great trichiliocosm. So, Venerable Blessed One, I request you to guard, protect, look after, and bring peace and well-being to the realms of the trichiliocosm!’

1.8

“Monks, I acquiesced by not responding to **Brahmā**, master of the Sahā world. Then Brahmā, master of the Sahā world, knowing that I had acquiesced by remaining silent, disappeared at that moment.

1.9

“Monks, this queen of incantations, *Upholding the Great Secret Mantra*, was taught by the perfectly and completely awakened thus-gone arhats of the past. It will be taught by the perfectly and completely awakened thus-gone arhats in the future. And likewise, right now in the present, I will also teach it as an aid for the awakening of buddhahood.”

1.10

Then the Blessed One said to venerable **Ānanda**, “Ānanda, you are to receive, hold, recite, preach, and master this queen of incantations, *Upholding the Great Secret Mantra*! Ānanda, this queen of incantations, Upholding the Great Secret Mantra, will bring welfare, benefit, happiness, and comfort to the four assemblies.

1.11

*tadyathā ubuddhe nibuddhe vibuddhe saṃbuddhe viśvaṣṭabuddhe īhabuddhe  
tattrabuddhe niyaṃgame chavila apula tapula [F.152.a] tāle māle  
maṅgagamaṅga manana imam vidyā hudume huhume pūrvaprahare |*

1.12

“Ānanda, this strong and **Powerful** secret mantra, which has been practiced for a long time, was taught by the perfectly and completely awakened thus-gone arhats of the past. It will be taught by the perfectly and completely awakened thus-gone arhats in the future. And such is also the case at present, as I now teach it to aid in

the awakening of buddhahood. With this queen of incantations, *Upholding the Great Secret Mantra*, I will protect and form a boundary around the person named such-and-such. I will form a boundary one [league](#) to the east. I will form a boundary one league in all the cardinal and intermediate directions.

1.13

*tadyathā samuca vimuca palamuca jagadhara madaṣṭhala nalakamaga  
samuḥśvavāti vimukti yoga hinasagama aradamula vihaṃgami idiciri  
vitalākhayo makhayo lagabhidharaṇi pratiprāyogi aḥcakrapati samasraḥvati  
ilāya milāya bahusaddhya anatama arthavati garavati tikhinitive akanati  
sakanati samidima vasuvaṭe aṭe aṭe taṭṭa kharusmin kharusmin lahataṃ  
lahutaṃ sambhara sambhara vatiranataṃ nirutaṃ ila taila saraphala  
bahuphala satamata daṃṣṭrimata |*

1.14

“Ānanda, this strong and powerful secret mantra, which has been practiced for a long time, was taught by the perfectly and completely awakened thus-gone arhats of the past. It will be taught by the perfectly and completely awakened thus-gone arhats in the future. And such is also the case at present, for I too teach it. [Brahmā](#), lord of the [Sahā world](#), teaches it. [Śakra](#), lord of the gods, also teaches it. The four great kings also teach it. The twenty-eight great [yakṣa](#) generals also teach it. [F.152.b] And [Hārītī](#), with her children and retinue of servants, also teaches it.

1.15

“Ānanda, any monk, nun, layman, or laywoman who receives this queen of incantations, *Upholding the Great Secret Mantra*, and understands, sees, or performs it, precisely as it has been taught and mastered, will be guarded, protected, looked after, and brought peace and well-being for as long as he or she shall live.

1.16

“Ānanda, by the command of the perfectly and completely awakened thus-gone arhats of the past, future, and present, this queen of incantations, *Upholding the Great Secret Mantra*, shall guard, protect, look after, and bring peace and well-being to the person named such-and-such. It will form a boundary. It will form a boundary one [league](#) to the east. Likewise, it will form a boundary one league to the west. It will form a boundary one league to the south. It will form a boundary one league to the north. It will form a boundary one league in all the cardinal and intermediate directions.

1.17

“Ānanda, there are four who dwell on and off the path of the four great kings.<sup>9</sup> Who



are they? They are Auspicious, Friend to All, Complete, and Glory of Joy. Whoever knows their names and families will not be in danger of the great kings, nor will he be in danger of robbers, fire, water, humans, or non-humans.

1.18

“Ānanda, Vajrapāṇi’s older brother called Swift Hand resides in the city known as Cakravālapur. Whoever knows his name and family will be guarded, protected, looked after, pardoned, [F.153.a] and brought peace and well-being by him. On behalf of the person named such-and-such, I beseech and supplicate Vajrapāṇi’s older brother Swift Hand! By the command of the blessed buddhas of the past, future, and present, all yakṣas, rākṣasas, pretas, piśācas, kumbhaṇḍas, pūtanas, and kaṭapūtanas who seek an occasion and look for an opportunity to harm the person named such-and-such will not find any such opportunity, nor will they be able to quarrel with him!

1.19

“Ānanda, there are fourteen great rākṣasīs. They protected the Bodhisattva while he was in his mother’s womb. They also protected him during his birth, as a newborn, and while he was being reared. Who are they? They are Powerful, Stainless, Tumult, Supple, Terrifying Lady, Voice of Jambū, Supreme Seizer, Master, Renowned Female, Amazing Renown, Conflict Lover, Playful Lady, Earth Supporter, and Conflict Engager. Whoever knows their names and families will be guarded, protected, looked after, and brought peace and well-being by them!

1.20

“Ānanda, there are eight rākṣasīs who steal the vitality of men or women regardless of whether they are asleep or not. Who are they? They are Horn, Unassailable, Instigator of Evil, Slandorous, Red Female Servant, Greatest, Excellent Eyes, and Terrifying. Whoever knows their names and families will be guarded, protected, looked after, and brought peace and well-being by them!

1.21

“Ānanda, there are seven rākṣasīs who travel as far as one hundred miles when they smell the scent of blood. Who are they? They are Excellent Splendor, Layered Joy, Giver of Various Things, [F.153.b] Excellent White Female Servant, Desiring Engagement, Surrounding City, and Mountain Protector. Whoever knows their names and families will be guarded, protected, looked after, brought peace and well-being, and granted pardon!

1.22

“Ānanda, there is a rākṣasī called Mahākālī with one thousand sons who lives at the

seashore and travels 80,000 miles in a single night. Whoever knows her name and family will be guarded, protected, looked after, brought peace and well-being, and granted pardon by her!

1.23

“Ānanda, there are five rākṣasīs who, along with 7,700,000 yakṣas, guard and protect the humans in the Jambu continent. Who are they? They are Always Insane, Further Insane, Bloated with Power, Bamboo Stick, and Wealthy. Whoever knows their names and families will be guarded, protected, looked after, brought peace and well-being, and granted pardon by them!

1.24

“Therefore, on behalf of the person named such-and-such, I beseech and supplicate those five rākṣasīs, along with the 7,700,000 yakṣas! By the command of the blessed buddhas of the past, future, and present, may the person named such-and-such be guarded, protected, looked after, brought peace and well-being, and granted pardon!

1.25

*tadyathā vīmude vītide picarite pigarite karaṭi karavīra swāri madhuraghoṣe śatahanita bhaṣitaghe akke nakke vika ḍitā vikuṭite viraje viḡhaṣṭavāte |*

1.26

“Ānanda, nowhere in the worlds of gods, demons, Brahmā, mendicants, priests, humans, kiṃnaras, and mahoragas have I seen anyone—whether human, non-human, yakṣa, rākṣasa, asura, gandharva, nāga, garuḍa, guhyaka, preta, piśāca, vetāla, kākhorda, kṛtya, pūtana, kaṭapūtana, unmāda, or apasmāra—[F.154.a] who, seeking an opportunity to hurt and looking for conflict, was ever able to harm a person guarded, shielded, protected, looked after, brought peace and well-being, and granted pardon by this queen of incantations, *Upholding the Great Secret Mantra*—unless, that is, the ripening of their karma precludes it.

1.27

“Therefore, by the command of the blessed buddhas of the past, future, and present, I will use this queen of incantations, *Upholding the Great Secret Mantra*, to guard the person named such-and-such from humans, non-humans, yakṣas, rākṣasas, piśācas, asuras, gandharvas, nāgas, garuḍas, guhyakas, pretas, vetālas, kākhordas, kṛtyas, pūtanas, kaṭapūtanas, unmadās, and apasmāras. He will be protected, shielded, brought peace and well-being, granted pardon, and purged of poison.



1.28

“This queen of incantations, *Upholding the Great Secret Mantra*, will intoxicate all those with hostile intentions, ill will, animosity, and rage, as well as all demons, [F.154.b] trail guards, fort guards, and customs guards. It will intoxicate them, cause paralysis and stupefaction, and seize their hands, feet, minds, and tongues. Through this queen of incantations, *Upholding the Great Secret Mantra*, the person will escape on each and every occasion.

1.29

“Oh wonder! Brahmin! You transcended anguish,  
Crossed over existence within the world,  
And finally, after so long,  
Saw the transcendence of all resentment and fear!

1.30

“Patience is the supreme austerity;  
Patience is the supreme nirvāṇa—so proclaims the Buddha.  
As for the ordained who harm others,  
One who is violent toward others is not a proper renunciant.

1.31

“On the other hand, just as those with eyesight  
Also have capabilities,  
The wise, in this world of the living,  
Avoid misdeeds.

1.32

“To all the buddhas  
Of present, future, and past  
I pay homage!  
To all of them I go for refuge!

1.33

“Since in the world it is the bliss-gone arhats  
To whom the moon goes for refuge,  
Buddhas, with compassion for the world,  
Free the moon from Rāhu!

1.34

“ ‘Rāhu! The moon dispels darkness.  
Illuminating the sky,  
It shines with white  
And pristine light.

Instead of seizing it in the sky,  
Instantly release the lantern of creatures!’

1.35

“Then, suddenly,  
Rāhu, with his body trembling and in a sweat  
Like a sick person,  
Abruptly released the moon.

1.36

“ ‘Rāhu, why did you,  
Trembling and in a sweat  
Like a sick person,  
Suddenly release the moon?’

1.37

“ ‘If, upon uttering these verses of the Buddha,  
The moon were not released,  
My head would crack into seven pieces,  
And even while alive, I would be unhappy.’<sup>10</sup>

1.38

“Oh wonder! Amazing is the emergence of buddhas  
Who see the truth!  
If one recites these verses,  
Rāhu will release the moon.

1.39

“By such truth and true words, as follows: [F.155.a] one who is unforgettable to beings appearing in the world is a ‘thus-gone one;’ that he speaks by speaking truly means he speaks by speaking truly at the appropriate time. Furthermore, Ānanda, those verses were spoken by the Thus-Gone One to assist in the observation of pure conduct. And what is more, Ānanda, the following words will secure the purpose, as well as further assist and ease, whatever function those verses are set to perform:

1.40

*syād athedana svasti mati vilumati praharati kaśumadchi nanda mati vihagrahe  
vidumati edakṛta ārtha sudṛśabuddhi bodhimati suhudume alakhūme alamite  
higaraśara āśuha pragaśini |*

1.41

“Ānanda, the ten roots of seeds and the ten root words of seeds have been spoken by the Thus-Gone One. Ānanda, these words will be spoken by Thus-Gone Ones,

and will be taught by them; so if people who dwell in their teaching utter them, yakṣas and rākṣasas will perform activities for them like slaves.

1.42

“By such truth and true words, as follows: true words at the irreversible level are called the ‘words that are supreme in the world.’ Those who, of all renunciants, are ‘the most joyful renunciants,’ the perfectly and completely awakened, thus-gone arhats, who have neither fear nor terror, who, neither cowering nor fleeing, lack fear, and who, having abandoned fear and its impetus, are called ‘free of anything that causes one to cry out in hair-raising panic’—these are what is meant by ‘those who speak by speaking truly, those who speak by speaking truly at the appropriate time.’ By their truth and those true words, may the person named such-and-such have well-being!

1.43

“By such truth and true words, as follows: of all those who observe ethical discipline, controlled conduct, austerities, or pure conduct, those who are known as ‘supreme in the discipline that pleases the noble ones’—by their truth and their true words, may the person named such-and-such have well-being!

1.44

“Of the elders, Ājñātakaundinya, like the eldest of a king’s sons, foremost among those practicing pure conduct, [F.155.b] for a long time has passed since his ordination; Mahākāśyapa, supreme among those with few desires who adhere to the qualities from training and have contentment; Śāradvatīputra, supreme among those with great wisdom and eloquence; Mahāmaudgalyāyana, supreme among those with great miraculous powers and great magical abilities; Aniruddha, supreme among those with the divine eye; Ānanda, supreme among the learned; Upālī, supreme among holders of discipline; Pūrṇamaitrāyaṇīputra, supreme among Dharma preachers; Rāhula, supreme among those with respect for the trainings; Vasumallaputra, supreme among those who distribute bedding and cushions; Pinḍola Bhāradvāja, supreme among those who proclaim the lion’s roar; Kālodāyin, supreme among those who inspire householders; and Sudarśana, supreme among those who are venerated by gods and men—by the truth and true words of these elders, may the person named such-and-such be guarded, protected, looked after, brought peace and well-being, and granted pardon. He shall be protected from kings, ministers, robbers, fire, water, enemies, and adversaries, and when traveling, lost, asleep, drunk, or careless!

1.45

“By such truth and true words, as follows: among all possible beings—those without feet, with two feet, with four feet, or with many feet; those with form or without form; those with perception, without perception, or neither with nor without

perception—the Thus-Gone One is called ‘supreme.’ By his truth and his true words, may the person person named such-and-such be guarded, protected, looked after, brought peace and well-being, and granted pardon!

1.46

“By such truth and true words, as follows: in the entire range of conditioned and unconditioned phenomena, freedom from attachment is called ‘supreme.’ By that truth and those true words, [F.156.a] may the person person named such-and-such be guarded, protected, embraced, brought peace and well-being, and granted pardon.

1.47

“By such truth and true words, as follows: of all kinds of assemblies, gatherings, multitudes, and retinues, the saṅgha of the Thus-Gone One’s śrāvakas is called ‘supreme.’ By their truth and their true words, may countries, regions, cities, towns, villages, houses, abodes, fields, and this sick patient be guarded, protected, looked after, and brought peace and well-being. Boundaries will be formed around them. All bhūtas will be turned back. Those who steal vitality will be turned back.

1.48

“By such truth and true words, as follows: in order that I—a blessed, perfectly and completely awakened, thus-gone arhat—may end this person’s desire, anger, and ignorance, by the truth and true words of the teaching, explanation, and enunciation of the 84,000 sections of teachings, may the 404 sicknesses of the person named such-and-such come to an end! May they be eliminated! May they cease! May they cease completely!”

1.49

When the Blessed One had spoken, the world, including venerable Ānanda, Brahmā, Master of the Sahā world, and all gods, humans, asuras, and gandharvas rejoiced and praised what the Blessed One had said.