

སྒྲོལ་མ་འཇིགས་པ་བརྒྱད་ལས་སྒྲོབ་པ།

Tārā Who Protects from the Eight Dangers

**Tārāṣṭaghoratāraṇī*

འཕགས་མ་སྒྲེལ་མ་འཇིགས་པ་བརྟུན་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, tsha), folios 222.b–224.b.

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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 an incantation (*dhāraṇī*) that will help them to achieve this goal. The gods then commend Tārā for her instruction, praise her qualities, and request her divine protection. Finally, the Buddha enjoins his audience to read and practice Tārā's teaching and share it with others.

ac.

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ac.1

Translated by Lhasey Lotsawa Translations and Publications under the guidance of Phakchok Rinpoche. The translation and introduction were produced by Stefan Mang and Peter Woods with the kind assistance of David Higgins. The translation and introduction were edited by Oriane Lavolé and Laura Goetz.

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 incantation (*dhāraṇī*) as a means to help others achieve liberation from saṃsāra. The grateful gods respond to Tārā's words by extolling her myriad qualities, in particular her ability to protect beings from the eight dangers. Finally, the Buddha encourages the audience to read, practice, and share Tārā's 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) an incantation that practitioners can employ as a method for advancing toward liberation;¹ and (3) a praise to Tārā offered by the assembled gods. In the third section, the gods praise Tārā as an awakened protectress² and request her to keep them 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 (*Idan 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.

tr.

THE TRANSLATION

The Noble Sūtra

Tārā Who Protects from the Eight Dangers

- 1.1 [F.222.b] 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 *om, bodhisattva great lady, goddess, please protect us!*⁷
- om nama āryāvalokiteśvarāya bodhisattvāya mahāsattvāya mahākāruṇikāya* |⁸ *tadyathā*
|⁹
- om 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 sarva-*
karmāvaraṇa svabhāvaśuddhe [F.224.a] *viśuddhe śodhaya viśodhaya hūṃ phaṭ svāhā*
|¹¹
- 1.20 Then the gods praised the goddess
Who was herself the embodiment of buddhahood.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 *kalavinka* 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 The Blessed One then declared, “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 this point, 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

- 1 Parts of this incantation are also found in other incantations to Tārā such as the *Sādhanaṃālā* mantra of Vajratārā (Bhattacharyya 1925, p. 178) and *The Incantation of Tārā* (Toh 729, *sgrol ma'i gzungs*), to give only two examples.
- 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.
- 3 The Kangyur manuscripts suggest that the Sanskrit title of this text was **Ārya-tārāṣṭhaghoratāsvīsūtra* or a variant thereof. We have followed the Tōhoku catalogue, amending the title to **Āryatārāṣṭhaghoratāraṇīsūtra*. It is worthwhile to note that the Sanskrit term **aṣṭaghora* 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.
- 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.
- 5 See Willson 1996, pp. 87–93. Willson's translation is based on the Peking Kangyur version of the sūtra.
- 6 Quintessence (*hṛdaya, snying po*) here refers to an incantation (*dhāraṇī, gzungs*) that is considered to encapsulate the essence of a deity, in this case Tārā.
- 7 The first part of this incantation (*dhāraṇī*) is an homage to Tārā. Since the Tibetan translators chose to render this part into Tibetan, it is also translated into English here.
- 8 The second part of this incantation 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 Incantation of Tārā*. A tentative translation of it is as follows: “om!

Homage to Noble Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva mahāsattva, the great compassionate one!”

- 9 *Tadyathā*, literally “it is like this,” is used to indicate the beginning of a mantra.
- 10 The third part of this incantation is a request to Tārā to dispel obstacles. This part is found as an independent incantation in, for example, the *Sādhanaṃālā* as the mantra of Vajratārā (Bhattacharyya 1925, p. 178), *The Incantation 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! *hūṃ hūṃ hūṃ phaṭ phaṭ phaṭ svāhā!*”
- 11 The fourth part of this incantation is a request to Tārā to purify one’s obscurations. We have amended the first two beginning syllables *mama* to *nama* following the incantation as given in Butön’s *Incantation Collection* (*gzungs bsdus*) in his *Collected Works* (*gsung ’bum*). The remaining part of the incantation 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 *bhodbhisattvo 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! *hūṃ phaṭ svāhā!*”
- 12 This is a tentative rendering of the phrase: *de nas sangs rgyas nyid kyis su/ /lha mo nyid la rab tu bstod*.
- 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

g.

g.1 Banyan tree

n+ya gro d+ha

ཉལ་རྒོད་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་ཙ

piśāca

A class of flesh-eating and shape-shifting demons.

g.3 Eight dangers

'jigs pa brgyad · 'jigs pa brgyad

འཇིགས་པ་བརྒྱད། · འཇིགས་པ་བརྒྱད།

*aṣṭamahābhaya · *aṣṭaghora*

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.4 Kalaviṅka

ka la ping ka

ཀ་ལ་ཕིང་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.5 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.

Mallow

- g.6 *ha lo*
ཧ་ལོ།
—
A flower belonging to the *lcam pa* family, a type of malva flower used in Tibetan medicine.
- g.7 **Mount Meru**
ri rab
རི་རབ།
Meru
In Buddhist cosmology, the great mountain at the center of the universe.
- g.8 **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.9 **Preta**
yi dwags
ཡི་དྭགས།
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.10 **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.11 **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.12 **Trumpet flower**
ug chos
ཡུག་ཇོས།
—
Incarvillea compacta maxim, an herb with pink trumpet-shaped flowers used in Tibetan medicine.
- g.13 **Vidyāmantra**
rig sngags
རིག་སྟགས།
vidyāmantra

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

g.14

Yama

gshin rje

ཀཤིན་རྗེ།

Yama

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