

THE INQUIRY OF AVALOKITEŚVARA
ON THE SEVEN QUALITIES

The Inquiry of Avalokiteśvara on the Seven Qualities

Avalokiteśvara parapariśrācchā saptadharma-ka

*'phags pa spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug gis zhus pa chos bdun
pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra “The Inquiry of Avalokiteśvara on the Seven Qualities”

Āryāvalokiteśvarapariprcchāsaptadharma nāmamahāyānasūtra

Toh 150, Degé Kangyur, vol. 57 (mdo sde, ba), folios 331a–331

**Translated by the University of Calgary
Buddhist Studies team**



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Summary

The sūtra is introduced with the Buddha residing on Vulture Peak Mountain in Rājagṛha, together with a great monastic assembly of 1,250 monks and a multitude of bodhisattva mahāsattvas. The Buddha is approached and asked by the bodhisattva mahāsattva Avalokiteśvara about the qualities that should be cultivated by a bodhisattva who has just generated the altruistic mind set on attaining awakening. The Buddha briefly expounds seven qualities that should be practiced by such a bodhisattva, emphasizing mental purity and cognitive detachment from conceptuality.

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Translation by the University of Calgary Buddhist Studies team.
This sūtra was introduced and translated by James B. Apple.

Introduction

The Inquiry of Avalokiteśvara on the Seven Qualities is a brief sūtra describing seven qualities that should be cultivated by a bodhisattva immediately upon generating the altruistic mind set on attaining awakening. The mind of awakening is the intention or resolution to attain full and complete buddhahood for the benefit of oneself and all sentient beings.

The structure of the sūtra is in three parts: the opening formula that gives the time, place, and Buddha's retinue when the discourse was taught; the prescription of seven dharmas to be cultivated; and a formulaic conclusion.

The Buddha delivers his teaching in response to the bodhisattva mahāsattva Avalokiteśvara's inquiry. What is unusual in the formulaic inquiry phrases of this sūtra is that Avalokiteśvara places his right knee in the center of a lotus flower; in most sūtras that follow such a pattern, the questioner places his knee on the ground. This implicitly demonstrates the reverence in which Avalokiteśvara was held by the compilers or transmitters of this sūtra. The Buddha prescribes seven qualities or dharmas that one should cultivate after producing the mind of awakening. They emphasize mental purity and cognitive detachment from conceptuality. These prescriptions are straightforward and easy to understand according to the overview of the sūtra by Pekar Sangpo (*pad dkar bzang po*, see bibliography).

The Inquiry of Avalokiteśvara on the Seven Qualities was initially translated from an Indian language, most likely

Sanskrit, into Tibetan by Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna (982-1054) and the Tibetan monk Gewai Lodrö.

The translation took place in all probability at the monastery of Tholing in West Tibet, where the rulers of Ngari (*mnga' ris*) first officially welcomed Atiśa and where Gewai Lodrö was active.¹ Gewai Lodrö collaborated with the great Kaśmīri scholar Subhūtiśrī(śānti) in Tholing before working with Atiśa. Atiśa and Gewai Lodrö worked together on several translations found in editions of the Tengyur, including the verses of the *Bodhipathapradīpa* (Toh 3947) and the *Cittotpādasamvara-vidhikrama* (Toh 3969), and two texts found in most Kangyurs, the *Gaṇḍisamayasūtra* (Toh 299) and the *Siddhaikavīramahā-tantrarāja* (Toh 544, Degé 541).

Atiśa makes explicit reference to this sūtra in his *Bodhimārgapradīpapañjikā*, *Cittotpādasamvaravidhikrama*, and *Ratnakaraṇḍodghāṭanāmamadhyamakopadeśa* (Toh 3930, English translation Apple 2010: 142-43). In the *Bodhimārgapradīpapañjikā* this sūtra is mentioned in the sections discussing the mind of awakening (Sherburne 2000: 101), the monastic life (Sherburne 2000: 127), and the supersensory knowledges (Sherburne 2000: 209). The *Cittotpādasamvaravidhikrama* also advocates the practice of this sūtra's prescriptions for a bodhisattva who wishes to attain supersensory knowledge quickly (Sherburne 2000: 540-541).

The present translation from Tibetan is based upon a critical edition of ten Kangyur exemplars. A detailed philological analysis of the extant editions of this sūtra indicates that the oldest copies of this sūtra are preserved among Western Kangyur collections such as the Gondhla Collection, Hemis Kangyur, and Phudrak (*phug brag*) Kangyur.

THE TRANSLATION

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra

The Inquiry of Avalokiteśvara² on the Seven Qualities³

Homage to the Bhagavān Mañjuśrīkumārabhūta!

Thus have I heard at one time. The Bhagavān was dwelling in Rājagrha⁴ on the Vulture Peak mountain⁵ together with a great monastic assembly of 1,250 monks and a multitude of bodhisattva mahāsattvas. At that time, the bodhisattva mahāsattva Noble Avalokiteśvara rose from his seat, arranged his upper robe on one shoulder, and placed his right knee in the center of a lotus flower.

Joining his hands in devotion toward the Bhagavān, he asked him, “Bhagavān, in how many qualities should a bodhisattva train, just after generating the altruistic mind set on attaining awakening?”⁶

The Bhagavān replied to the bodhisattva mahāsattva Noble Avalokiteśvara’s inquiry with the following words.

“Kulaputra, bodhisattvas should train in seven qualities just after generating the altruistic mind set on attaining awakening.⁷ What are the seven? They are as follows.

“(1) One should not have sexual enjoyment even in thought, not to mention joining together the two sexual organs. [331b]

“(2) One should not take up with a non-virtuous friend even in dreams.

“(3) With a mind free like a bird, one should be completely without grasping.

“(4) With mastery in skill and wisdom, one should be without pride and reified conceptions of ‘I.’

“(5) One should abandon conceptions of existence and non-existence and be firm in the emancipation (*vimokṣa*) of emptiness.

“(6) One should not take delight in *samsāra* through an inauthentic conceptual understanding, *samsāra* being like a magical illusion or dream.

“(7) And one should refrain from deprecating the law of cause and effect.

“Kulaputra, a bodhisattva who has just generated the altruistic mind set on attaining awakening should train in these seven qualities.”

When the Bhagavān had spoken, the bodhisattva Noble Avalokiteśvara, along with the monks and bodhisattvas, rejoiced and praised highly what had been proclaimed by the Bhagavān.⁹

*This completes the Noble Mahāyāna sūtra, “The Inquiry of Avalokiteśvara on the Seven Qualities.”*¹⁰

Translated and edited by the Indian master Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna and the translator monk Gewai Lodrö.

Notes

Abbreviations

MsK Manuscript Kangyur

PK Printed Kangyur

D Degé (sde dge) Kangyur PK

F Phug brag MsK

Go Gondhla Collection MsK

He Hemis MsK

J Lithang PK

L London MsK

Q Peking Qianlong PK

rKTS University of Vienna Resources for Kanjur & Tibetan Studies
(<http://www.istb.univie.ac.at/kanjur/xml3/xml/>)

S Stog Palace MsK

Z Shey Palace MsK

1 See Chattopadhyaya 1967: 325.

2 D, Go, He, J, L, and Q: *spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug*; F, S, and Z: *spyan ras gzigs kyi dbang phyug*

3 Go has the title '*phags pa spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug gyis zhus pa / byang chub sems dpa 'i slab pa bdun pa*

4 Go, L, S, and Z: *rgyal po 'i khab na*; D, F, He, J, and Q: *rgyal po 'i khab*

5 F, Go, L, S, and Z: *bya rgod kyi phung po*; D, He, J, and Q: *bya rgod phung po*

6 F, Go, He, L, S, and Z: *byang chub tu sems*; D, J, and Q: *byang chub kyi sems*

7 D, F, Go, He, L, S, and Z: *byang chub tu sems bskyed*; J and Q: *sems bskyed*

8 D, F, Go, J, and Q: *byang chub tu sems bskyed*; He, L, S, and Z: *sems bskyed*

9 Go omits '*phags pa spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug dang / dge slong de dag dang byang chub sems dpa 'i de dag yi rangs te/ bcom ldan 'das kyis gsungs pa la mingon par bstod do*

10 D, F, He, J, L, Q, S, and Z: *chos bdun pa*; Go: *byang sems dpa 'i / slab pa bdun pa*

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For abbreviations, see notes

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bdun pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*
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