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The Questions of the Nāga King Sāgara (2)

Sāgaranāgarājaparipṛcchā

'phags pa klu'i rgyal po rgya mtshos zhus pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo

The Noble Great Vehicle Sūtra “The Questions of the Nāga King Sāgara”

Āryasāgaranāgarājapariprcchānāmamahāyānasūtra



Toh 154

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co.

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SUMMARY

s.1 *The Questions of the Nāga King Sāgara* presents a discourse given by the Buddha Śākyamuni on the importance of considering the effects caused by actions. At the start of his teaching, the Buddha remarks how the variety of forms that exist, and in fact all phenomena, come about as the result of virtuous and nonvirtuous actions. By understanding this law of cause and effect and by taking great care to engage in virtue, one will avoid rebirth in the lower realms and enter the path to perfect awakening. In the rest of his discourse he explains in great detail the advantages of engaging in each of the ten virtues and the problems associated with not engaging in them.

ac.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ac.1 Translated by the Dharmachakra Translation Committee under the supervision of Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche. The translation was produced by Benjamin Ewing, who also wrote the introduction. Andreas Doctor compared the translation with the original Tibetan and edited the text. Felin Chung consulted the Chinese versions.

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

i.

INTRODUCTION

i.1 *The Questions of the Nāga King Sāgara* takes place in the unusual setting of the nāga king Sāgara's court deep in the ocean. Here the Buddha gives a discourse on the importance of avoiding the ten nonvirtuous deeds. The sūtra begins with the Buddha Śākyamuni explaining how everything, including all the various life forms of beings in the ocean and even the awakening of a buddha, is created through the law of cause and effect. The Buddha explains the relationship between form and emptiness, showing how despite the essential emptiness of all phenomena, beings appear in various shapes and sizes due to their former virtuous and nonvirtuous actions. The remainder of the text concerns the ten nonvirtuous acts and the need to abandon them by practising instead the ten virtuous acts. First, the Buddha explains the various benefits of abstaining from each of the nonvirtuous acts and shows how this will lead to awakening. He then describes the perilous consequences of engaging in the nonvirtuous acts. Finally, the Buddha explains how cultivating additional positive qualities while engaging in these virtuous acts will lead to even greater spiritual boons.

i.2 The Degé Kangyur contains three sūtras entitled *The Questions of the Nāga King Sāgara*. They can be distinguished by their length, one being quite long (Toh 153, 164 folio pages), one medium-length, which is translated here (Toh 154, 14 folio pages), and one very short (Toh 155 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh155.html>), 1 folio page). All three of these are included as individual texts in the early ninth century Denkarma (*ldan dkar ma*) catalog, confirming their status as independent scriptures in Tibet during the imperial period.¹ Of these, Toh 155 appears to be unrelated to the other two. It seems apparent, however, that at some point in its textual life (presumably in India), Toh 154 was taken as an excerpt from Toh 153 and

transmitted as an independent text. A large number of minor differences and one whole section that is unique to Toh 154² distinguish these two versions, but their shared provenance is nevertheless clear.

i.3 A further indication that the two texts had already circulated independently in India is that the two sūtras were translated into Tibetan by different translation teams. Toh 153 was translated by Jinamitra, Prajñāvarma, and Yeshé Dé while Toh 154 was translated by Jinamitra, Dānaśīla, Munivarman, and Yeshé Dé. Interestingly, in two versions of the colophon to Toh 154 it is explicitly mentioned that this text is an extract from a larger scripture, although Toh 153 is not specified as the source.³

i.4 Both texts were transmitted from India to China, with the longer of the two (Toh 153) appearing four hundred years before the shorter. Toh 154 was translated into Chinese twice under two different titles (Taishō 600 and 601). Taishō 600 is a translation made between 695 and 700 CE by the Khotanese monk Śikṣānanda (652–710 CE) and appears under the title *The Sūtra on the Path of the Ten Virtuous Actions*.⁴ Taishō 601 is a translation made relatively late, between 980 and 1017 CE, by Dānapāla (d. 1017 CE), a monk from the area of Uḍḍiyāna in northwestern India who was one of the four chief Indian translators during the Song dynasty; its title matches the Tibetan and Sanskrit title here.⁵ Given this information, we can surmise that Toh 154 was circulating as an independent text in India prior to 695 CE and that its subsequent transmission to both China and Tibet was also independent from Toh 153. It is difficult, however, to determine exactly when the split occurred.

i.5 This English translation is based on the Tibetan translation in the Degé Kangyur in consultation with the Comparative Edition (Tib. *dpe bsdur ma*) and the Stok Palace Kangyur. We also occasionally compared these sources to the two Chinese translations.

tr.

THE TRANSLATION

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra

The Questions of the Nāga King Sāgara

1.1 [F.198.a] Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas!

1.2 Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was residing within the ocean in the realm of the nāga king Sāgara. He was in the courtyard of the nāga king Sāgara together with a great monastic saṅgha of eight thousand monks and an assembly of bodhisattva great beings who had assembled from the worlds of the ten directions, a vast number of whom had attained supernatural knowledge. Also present there were Śakra, Brahmā, and the guardians of the world, and many trillions of gods, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, asuras, garuḍas, kiṁnaras, and mahoragas.

1.3 Then the Blessed One, knowing the assembly in its entirety, spoke to the nāga king Sāgara, "Lord of nāgas, alas! The state of this world has been shaped by various kinds of karma. The predispositions to various kinds of karma are in turn conditioned by a variety of mental apprehensions. [F.198.b] This is also what causes the variety of beings.

1.4 "Lord of nāgas, consider all the various forms of the beings that are present here in this retinue and in this ocean as well—all the diversity of beings that exist here. Lord of nāgas, all these beings are here in such variety due to the variety of their previous engagement in virtue and nonvirtue through activities of mind, body, speech, and intellect. The mind is formless, invisible, and ungraspable. In the same way, lord of nāgas, because all these forms of beings are fabrications, their present characteristics have no owner, no ownership, and are ungraspable. Being simply a variety of productions formed by whatever karma has been accumulated, they have no creator whatsoever.

1.5 "Lord of nāgas, in this way, all phenomena are inconceivable and have the essential quality of being illusory. Lord of nāgas, since bodhisattvas are skilled in this regard, they understand that any phenomenon only comes to exist by virtue of being constructed. Knowing this, they therefore engage in virtue. Then, because phenomena are constructed, when such virtuous actions are performed, the resultant aggregates, elements, and sense sources are elegant, lovely to behold, and beautiful.

1.6 “Lord of nāgas, the body of a thus-gone one is born from merits numbering in the trillions. This body, which is adorned with marks, perfectly complete, and splendidorous, outshines the worlds of gods and humans and prevails uninterrupted. Consider how even the great brahmā gods, who hold dominion over one million worlds, appear faded, and their eyes are blinded, when they look upon the body of a thus-gone one. Lord of nāgas, look at the forms, marks, bodies, and adornments of these bodhisattvas. Lord of nāgas, they are all beautifully produced by the performance of virtuous actions. [F.199.a]

1.7 “Lord of nāgas, this dominion of yours likewise arose from a great amount of merit. Lord of nāgas, all the dominions of Śakra, Brahmā, and the guardians of the world, and those of the gods, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, asuras, garuḍas, kiṁnaras, mahoragas, humans, and nonhumans, likewise arise from merit. Lord of nāgas, the various bodies within this ocean—whether they are ugly and unshapely, shapely, large, and strong, or small and thin—all those bodies are products of the diversity of virtuous and nonvirtuous actions of mind, body, speech, and intellect that each individual engaged in.

 “Lord of nāgas, because of this, it is said that ‘Beings must be confident in the way karma is appropriated and inherited, shapes beings’ birth, and ripens.’⁶

1.8 “Lord of nāgas, you should train in this way. Being confident in the way karma is appropriated and inherited and the way it ripens, you will become focused on producing virtuous qualities. You will not debase your view. You will not give rise to nihilist or eternalist views. You will please those who are worthy of veneration and, having pleased them, you will also show them respect. Then, because of that respect, the entire world, including the gods, will show their respect to you.

1.9 “Lord of nāgas, there is one teaching that severs, for all beings, all the paths that lead to the unfortunate destinies, the lower realms, the unfavorable states. What is that one teaching? It is to contemplate virtuous qualities while thinking, ‘However I am now, it will pass just like the days go by.’⁷ By repeatedly contemplating virtuous qualities in this way, there will be no opportunity [F.199.b] for nonvirtuous thoughts and mental states to arise. Having abandoned nonvirtue and being endowed with virtuous qualities in this way, such beings have a pure outlook and they will find company with the buddhas and bodhisattvas, and with the noble hearers and solitary buddhas.

1.10 “Lord of nāgas, what are those virtuous qualities? The virtuous qualities are the roots and foundations of the excellence of gods and humans. They are the roots and foundations of the awakening of the hearers and solitary

buddhas. They are the roots and foundations of unexcelled and perfect awakening.

1.11 “What are those roots and foundations? They are the paths of the ten virtues. What are those paths of the ten virtues? They are to forsake the following: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, slander, harsh words, meaningless talk, covetousness, malevolence, and wrong views. The abandonment of these constitutes the paths of the ten virtues. They are the roots and foundations for both mundane and supramundane excellence.

1.12 “Lord of nāgas, those who have forsaken killing will obtain ten qualities of pacification. What are these ten qualities? They will grant fearlessness to all beings. They will regard all beings with love. They will eliminate the tendency for aggression. They will be able to reduce disease. They will plant the seed for extending life. They will guard, protect, and shield nonhumans. They will sleep happily, awaken happily, and not have negative dreams. They will have the gods’ protection even when asleep. They will be free from animosity and the propensity for animosity. And they will have no fear of the lower realms [F.200.a] and, having died and transmigrated, they will be born among the gods in the joyful celestial realms. Lord of nāgas, those who have forsaken killing will obtain those ten qualities of pacification. If they dedicate the roots of virtue of forsaking killing toward unexcelled and perfect awakening, then, because of those roots of virtue, when they attain awakening the power of their mind will be such that their lifespans become limitless.

1.13 “Lord of nāgas, those who have forsaken stealing will obtain ten qualities of confidence. What are these ten qualities? They will have great wealth and that wealth will not be taken by kings, thieves, fire, water, enemies, or neighbors. They will be well liked because they are pleasing to many beings. They will not have the secondary disturbing emotions. They will be trusted by those who have wealth. Their praises will be sung in every direction and they will not fear harm from adversaries anywhere. The words and verses of the praises of their virtue will be sublime. They will not be timid, engaging with those around them without anxiety. They will obtain abundant life, power, beauty, happiness, eloquence, resources, and wealth. They will be inclined toward expansive generosity. And after leaving this body, they will be born among the gods in the joyful celestial realms. Lord of nāgas, those who have forsaken stealing they will obtain those ten qualities of confidence. If they dedicate the roots of virtue of forsaking stealing toward unexcelled and perfect awakening, then, because of those roots of virtue, knowing themselves to possess the wisdom of a thus-gone one that is free of secondary disturbing emotions, [F.200.b] they will fully awaken to unexcelled and perfect buddhahood.

1.14 “Lord of nāgas, those who have forsaken sexual misconduct will obtain four qualities that are praised by the wise. What are these four qualities? They will have restraint of the senses. They will overcome excitement. They will be praised by the whole world. And they will not seduce married women. Lord of nāgas, those who have forsaken sexual misconduct will obtain those four qualities that are praised by the wise. If they dedicate the roots of virtue of forsaking sexual misconduct toward unexcelled and perfect awakening, then, because of those roots of virtue, they will obtain the sheathed genitals, which are a mark of a great being.

1.15 “Lord of nāgas, those who have forsaken lying will obtain eight qualities that are praised by gods and humans. What are these eight qualities? They will have a clean face with the scent of a blue lotus. They will be held as authoritative by all beings. They will become singularly powerful because they are beloved by gods and humans. They will alleviate the fears of spirits due to their assurances. They will be pure in body, speech, and mind because of their excellent altruism. Their happiness will increase because their words are free of confusion. Their voices will be heard because their words are worthy of being remembered. And they will be free of wrongdoing among gods and humans because they have obtained insight. Lord of nāgas, those who have forsaken lying will obtain those eight qualities that are praised by gods and humans. If they dedicate the roots of virtue of forsaking lying toward unexcelled and perfect awakening, then, because of those roots of virtue, their words will be in accord with the truth.

1.16 “Lord of nāgas, those who have forsaken slander will obtain five qualities of indivisibility. [F.201.a] What are these five qualities? They will obtain indestructible bodies because they have transcended the terror of being harmed by others. They will obtain unswerving retinues because they do not desire that which others own. They will obtain unwavering faith because they trust that karma bears fruit. They will be indivisible from the Dharma because they are dedicated to accomplishment. And they will obtain unshakable friendship because they are undeceiving. Lord of nāgas, those who have forsaken slander will obtain those five qualities of indivisibility. If they dedicate the roots of virtue of forsaking slander toward unexcelled and perfect awakening, then, because of those roots of virtue, they will become thus-gone ones with an indivisible retinues; not even all the māras and opposing teachers will be able to divide the followers of such thus-gone ones.

1.17 “Lord of nāgas, those who have forsaken harsh words will obtain eight purities of speech. What are these eight? They are timely speech, beneficial speech, appropriate speech, gentle speech, comprehensible speech, audible speech, speech that pleases many beings, and dignified speech. Lord of

nāgas, those who have forsaken harsh words will obtain those eight purities of speech. If they dedicate the roots of virtue of forsaking harsh words toward unexcelled and perfect awakening, then, because of those roots of virtue, they will become thus-gone ones with voices that resound like Brahmā's speech.

1.18 "Lord of nāgas, those who have forsaken meaningless talk will obtain three complete certainties. What are these three? Because of their timely words they will certainly please the wise. Because they answer⁸ questions so well, their minds will certainly reach the truth. And because they are genuine friends, they will certainly obtain the greatness of gods and humans. Lord of nāgas, those who have forsaken meaningless talk [F.201.b] will obtain those three complete certainties. If they dedicate the roots of virtue of forsaking meaningless talk toward unexcelled and perfect awakening, then, because of those roots of virtue, they will become thus-gone ones who teach continuously and do not otherwise speak.

1.19 "Lord of nāgas, those who have forsaken covetousness will obtain five strengths. What are these five? Because they do not have impaired faculties they will obtain strength of body, speech, and mind. Because they are unassailable by all enemies they will obtain vast dominion over resources and power. Due to the power of their merit, they will experience all the vast pleasures and enjoyments. Because they obtain the supreme joy⁹ they will be honored by kings and lords. And because they lack any prior jealousy, the wealth they obtain will be a hundred thousand times greater than what they wished for. Lord of nāgas, those who have forsaken covetousness will obtain those five strengths. If they dedicate the roots of virtue of forsaking covetousness toward unexcelled and perfect awakening, then, because of those roots of virtue, they will become the sole teachers, thus-gone ones who are revered by the three worlds.

1.20 "Lord of nāgas, those who have forsaken malevolence will obtain eight qualities that bring peace of mind. What are these eight? They will be inclined toward nonviolence. They will be inclined toward pacifying malevolence. They will be inclined toward eliminating conflicts and quarrels. They will be inclined toward being honest, kind, and gentle. They will be renowned as noble beings. They will have greater ability to benefit all beings through such means as delighting in others' happiness and having loving kindness. They will be honored by many beings since they delight in others' happiness and have much faith. And because they are kind and capable, [F.202.a] it will not be difficult to attain rebirth in the abode of Brahmā. Lord of nāgas, those who have forsaken malevolence will obtain those eight qualities that bring peace of mind. If they dedicate the roots of virtue of

forsaking malevolence toward unexcelled and perfect awakening, then, because of those roots of virtue, they will become thus-gone ones with unobstructed minds whom one never tires of seeing.

1.21

“Lord of nāgas, those who have forsaken wrong views will obtain ten excellent qualities. What are these ten? Their thoughts will become virtuous and they find virtuous friends; because of trusting that actions bear fruit they do not commit evil deeds even at the cost of their lives. They consider the Buddha to be their deity and they do not consider anyone else to be their deity. They have a sincere view because they do not believe in wonders and luck. They associate with gods and humans, but they do not associate with animals and those who live in the realm of the Lord of Death. They obtain distinction by practicing virtue. They have entered the path of the noble ones because they do not follow false paths. They are free from the belief in the transitory collection and they have abandoned all evil deeds. They have unobscured insight because they have journeyed toward perfection and entered perfection; and they are free from unfavorable states among gods and humans. Lord of nāgas, those who have forsaken wrong views will obtain those ten excellent qualities. If they dedicate the roots of virtue of forsaking wrong views toward unexcelled and perfect awakening, then, because of those roots of virtue, they will manifest all the qualities of a buddha. They will become thus-gone ones with swift supernatural knowledge.

1.22

“Lord of nāgas,¹⁰ these paths of the ten virtues are the roots and foundations for all the mundane and the supramundane excellence up to and including unexcelled and perfect awakening. Their opposites [F.202.b] are the paths of the ten nonvirtues. If one has predominantly resorted to, cultivated, and engaged in them to a great extent, that is cause for birth in the hell realms. If one has engaged in them to a middling extent, that is cause for birth in the realm of animals. If one has engaged in them to a lesser extent, then that is cause for birth in the realm of the Lord of Death.

1.23

“Furthermore, lord of nāgas, those who have practiced, cultivated, and engaged in killing to a great extent will be led to the hell realms, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Even if they are subsequently born in the human realm, they will experience two consequences: their lives will be shortened, and they will be sickly.

1.24

“Those who steal will be led to the hell realms, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Even if they are subsequently born in the human realm, they will experience two consequences: they will have few resources and their resources will be ordinary.

1.25 “Those who engage in sexual misconduct will be led to the hell realms, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Even if they are subsequently born in the human realm, they will experience two consequences: their followers will not be trustworthy, and their wives will be adversarial.

1.26 “Those who engage in lying will be led to the hell realms, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Even if they are subsequently born in the human realm, they will experience two consequences: they will be greatly criticized, and they will be deceived by others.

1.27 “Those who engage in slander will be led to the hell realms, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Even if they are subsequently born in the human realm, they will experience two consequences: their attendants will be fractious and have bad characters.

1.28 “Those who use harsh words will be led to the hell realms, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Even if they are subsequently born in the human realm, [F.203.a] they will experience two consequences: they will hear unpleasant speech and aggressive speech.

1.29 “Those who engage in meaningless talk will be led to the hell realms, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Even if they are subsequently born in the human realm, they will experience two consequences: their words will not be valued, and their eloquence will be unreliable.

1.30 “Those who engage in covetousness will be led to the hell realms, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Even if they are subsequently born in the human realm, they will experience two consequences: they will be insatiable, and their desires will increase.

1.31 “Those who engage in malevolence will be led to the hell realms, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Even if they are subsequently born in the human realm, they will experience two consequences: they will crave what is unhelpful and others will do them harm.

1.32 “Those who hold wrong views will be led to the hell realms, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Even if they are subsequently born in the human realm, they will experience two consequences: they will lapse into degenerate views and they will be deceitful. Therefore, lord of nāgas, these ten nonvirtues will truly give rise to an immeasurably great mass of suffering.

1.33 “Lord of nāgas, if bodhisattvas who have forsaken killing engage in generosity, then their wealth will increase. It will not be stolen, and they will have long lives. And when they engage in bodhisattva activity, they will be free from any fear of being harmed by others.

1.34 “Lord of nāgas, if bodhisattvas who have forsaken stealing engage in generosity, then their wealth will increase. It will not be stolen, and they will become freely generous without consideration for any of their possessions. [F.203.b] And when they engage in bodhisattva activity, they will accomplish all the aspects of a buddha and so gain unexcelled qualities.

1.35 “Lord of nāgas, if bodhisattvas who have forsaken sexual misconduct engage in generosity, then their wealth will increase. It will not be stolen, and their wives will not be adulterous. And when they engage in bodhisattva activity, they will not view any mother, child, or wife with hostility.

1.36 “Lord of nāgas, if bodhisattvas who have forsaken lying engage in generosity, then their wealth will increase. It will not be stolen, and they will not be slandered but earnestly defended. And when they engage in bodhisattva activity, they will act as they say, and they will keep their word.

1.37 “Lord of nāgas, if bodhisattvas who have forsaken slander engage in generosity, then their wealth will increase. It will not be stolen, and their followers will not be divided. And when they engage in bodhisattva activity, they will gain retinues of bodhisattvas because their harmonious attitude.

1.38 “Lord of nāgas, if bodhisattvas who have forsaken harsh words engage in generosity, then their wealth will increase. It will not be stolen, and their words will be heeded and respected. And when they engage in bodhisattva activity, no one in their retinues will be discontent.

1.39 “Lord of nāgas, if bodhisattvas who have forsaken meaningless talk engage in generosity, then their wealth will increase. It will not be stolen, and their words will become worth hearing and trustworthy. And when they engage in bodhisattva activity, they will be skilled at cutting through all doubts.

1.40 “Lord of nāgas, if bodhisattvas who have forsaken covetousness engage in generosity, then their wealth will increase. It will not be stolen, and their minds will be inclined toward great pleasures and enjoyments. [F.204.a] And when they engage in bodhisattva activity, they will aspire to the vast and they will be renowned as mighty.

1.41 “Lord of nāgas, if bodhisattvas who have forsaken malevolence engage in generosity, then their wealth will increase. It will not be stolen. They will be beautiful, and they will delight and please many beings. And when they engage in bodhisattva activity, they will have unobstructed intellect, unobstructed minds, and unimpaired faculties.

1.42 “Lord of nāgas, if bodhisattvas who have forsaken wrong views engage in generosity, then their wealth will increase. It will not be stolen. They will have faith in the Buddha and be born into households with correct views.

And when they engage in bodhisattva activity, they will always behold the Buddha, listen to the Dharma, and serve the Saṅgha, while never failing to generate the mind set on awakening.

1.43 “Lord of nāgas, if these paths of the ten virtues are adorned with generosity in that way, one will reap great fortune. If these paths of the ten virtues are adorned with discipline, then aspirations for all buddha qualities will be fulfilled. If these paths of the ten virtues are adorned with patience, then the excellent major and minor marks, and the voice of a buddha, will be perfected. Likewise, if they are adorned with diligence, then māras and opponents will be overcome and all buddha qualities will be perfected. If they are adorned with concentration, then mindfulness, intelligence, understanding, modesty, and joy will be purified. If they are adorned with insight, then all degenerate views will be vanquished. If they are adorned with love, then there will be no anger toward any being. If they are adorned with compassion, then no beings will be abandoned. If they are adorned with joy, then one will not be discouraged. [F 204.b] If they are adorned with equanimity, then attachment and anger will be abandoned. If they are adorned with the means of attraction, then they will ripen all beings. If they are adorned with the applications of mindfulness, then one will become expert in the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena. If they are adorned with the correct relinquishments, then all nonvirtuous qualities will be abandoned and all virtuous qualities will be perfected. If they are adorned with the four bases of miraculous power, then body and mind will be light. If they are adorned with the five faculties, then one’s faith will be stable, diligence will blaze, there will be no delusion, one will be skilled at training the mind, and one will be skilled at eliminating all disturbing emotions. If they are endowed with the powers, then one will not be oppressed and will overcome all poverty and misfortune. If they are adorned with the limbs of awakening, then all phenomena will be comprehended exactly as they are. If they are adorned with the path, then true wisdom will be obtained. If they are adorned with tranquility, then all disturbing emotions will be vanquished. If they are adorned with insight, then there will be the insight and wisdom of comprehending all phenomena exactly as they are. If they are adorned with skillful means, then one will attain compounded and uncompounded happiness.

1.44 “Lord of nāgas, in short, by means of these paths of the ten virtues, the ten powers will be perfected. Everything from the attainment of the four types of fearlessness and the eighteen unique qualities of a buddha up to the attainment of all the qualities of a buddha will be perfected. Therefore, lord of nāgas, you must strive to adorn the paths of the ten virtues with these numerous distinctions.

1.45 "Lord of nāgas, consider the following analogy: The earth is the foundation for all things established on the ground, such as all villages, towns, cities, districts, regions, and kingdoms. [F.205.a] It is the basis for all grass, shrubs, herbs, forests, and farmland, and all seeds, sprouts, and harvests. It is where all sowing, ploughing, and cultivation take place. In the same way, lord of nāgas, the paths of the ten virtues are the basis for taking birth in the realms of gods and humans. They are the basis for everything from the path of learning to achieving the fruition of no-more-learning, and the awakening of the hearers and the solitary buddhas. They are also the basis for everything from all buddha and bodhisattva deeds all the way up to all buddha qualities."

1.46 When the Blessed One had spoken these words, the nāga king Sāgara, the monks, the bodhisattvas, the whole assembly, and the world with its gods, humans, asuras, and gandharvas rejoiced and praised the Blessed One's words.

1.47 *This concludes the noble Great Vehicle sūtra "The Questions of the Nāga King Sāgara."*

c.

Colophon

c.1 Translated, edited, and finalized, having been revised according to the new terminological register, by the Indian scholars Jinamitra, Dānaśīla, and Munivarman, and the chief editor-translator Venerable Yeshé Dé and others.

ab.

ABBREVIATIONS

C Choné Kangyur

D Degé Kangyur

S Stok Palace Kangyur

Z Shey Palace Kangyur

n.

NOTES

n.1 See Denkarma: 297.a.6 (Toh 153), 299.a.5 (Toh 154), and 300.a.2 (Toh 155). See also Herrmann-Pfandt 2008: Toh 153 = no. 96 (p. 55), Toh 154 = no. 187 (p. 100), Toh 155 = no. 237 (p. 125).

n.2 Toh 154 contains a section of nearly two folios that is not included in Toh 153. We have noted this section in the translation.

n.3 These two colophons are those of the Stok Palace and Shey Palace, which both belong to the Thempangma (*thems spang ma*) group of Kangyurs. S, Z: *mdo che ba'i nang nas bkod pa snang ngo*.

n.4 Chinese: 十善業道經 (*Shishan ye dao jing*). This text has been translated into English from the Chinese at least three times: Saddhaloka 1996; Rulu 2012; and Wong, n.d.

n.5 Chinese: 佛爲娑伽羅龍王所說大乘經 (*Fo wei suo jia luo long wang suoshuo dasheng jing*).

n.6 This is a standardized formula that is very commonly repeated; a version is even found, for example, in the *Upajjhātthana Sutta* of the Pali Canon, as the fifth of the five recollections. These recollections are recited daily by many modern Theravāda Buddhists.

n.7 This translation is tentative. The Tibetan reads, *bdag ji ltar gyur cing nyin zhag rnams 'gro zhig gu snyam du dge ba'i chos rnams la rab tu rtog pa'o*.

n.8 Reading *glon* from S in place of *lon*.

n.9 Reading *dga' ba* from S, C, D: *dgab pa*.

n.10 The following section detailing the negative effects of engaging in the ten nonvirtuous acts, until the beginning of the section on engaging with generosity (starting on 1.33: "Lord of nāgas, if bodhisattvas who have forsaken killing engage in generosity") is absent from Toh 153. See the introduction (i.2) for more information on this sūtra.

b.

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g.

GLOSSARY

g.1 Applications of mindfulness

dran pa nye bar gzhag pa

ស្ម័គ្រិតិវត្ថុសាស្ត្រា

smṛtyupasthāna

The application of mindfulness with regard to body, feelings, mind, and phenomena.

g.2 Asura

lha ma yin

អ្នូមិន្តា

asura

The asuras, sometimes called the demigods, are the enemies of the gods, fighting with them for supremacy. They are powerful beings who live around Mount Sumeru and are usually classified as belonging to the higher realms.

g.3 Bases of miraculous power

rdzu 'phrul gyi rkang pa

ផ្លូវក្រុងគុណ

rddhipāda

The four supports for supernatural abilities: determination, discernment, diligence, and meditative concentration.

g.4 Belief in the transitory collection

'jig tshogs la lta ba

ឥន្ទាក់សាស្ត្រាម៉ា

satkāyadr̥ṣṭi

This term refers to the mistaken view that identifies the self with the ultimately transient collection of mind and body.

g.5 Brahmā

tshangs pa

កំសាសា

Brahmā

The creator god of the Hindu pantheon.

g.6 Correct relinquishments

yang dag par spong ba

ཡନ୍ଦନ୍ତ୍ରମନ୍ତ୍ରମା

samyakprahāna

This term refers to a list of four: relinquishing negative acts that have been committed and will be committed in the future, and increasing current and future positive acts.

g.7 Courtyard

'khor gyi khyams

ମନ୍ତ୍ରମୁଦ୍ରମା

maṇḍalamāda

This term describes a circular open space or a space for assembly.

g.8 Dānaśīla

dA na shI la

ଦ୍ଵାରାମୁଦ୍ରମା

Dānaśīla

An Indian paṇḍita who was resident in Tibet during the late eighth and early ninth centuries.

g.9 Eighteen unique qualities of a buddha

sangs rgyas kyi chos ma 'dres pa bco brgyad

ସତ୍ତାକୁର୍ମଶ୍ରୀକର୍ମମାତ୍ରମାତ୍ରମାତ୍ରମାତ୍ରମା

aṣṭādaśāvenīkabuddhadharma

Eighteen special features of a buddha's physical state, realization, activity, and wisdom that are not shared by ordinary beings.

g.10 Five faculties

dbang po lṅga

ମୁଦ୍ରମା

pañcendriya

Faith, diligence, mindfulness, absorption, and knowledge.

g.11 Four types of fearlessness

mi 'jigs pa bzhi

ମୀର୍ମିଳମାତ୍ରମା

caturabhaya

Fearlessness in declaring that one has (1) awakened, (2) ceased all illusions, (3) taught the obstacles to awakening, and (4) shown the way to liberation.

g.12 Gandharva

dri za

-

ଶ୍ରୀ

gandharva

Gandharvas, literally “smell eaters,” are a class of spirits, sometimes described as celestial musicians.

g.13 Garuda

nam mkha' lding

ଶ୍ରୀଶର୍ଵରାଜୁଦା

garuḍa

A mythical creature which is half bird, half man, and is the enemy of serpents.

g.14 Great brahmā gods

tshangs pa chen po

ଶ୍ରୀବ୍ରାହ୍ମାଦେଵୀ

mahābrahmā

Gods from the higher subdivision of the world of Brahmā.

g.15 Jinamitra

dzi na mi tra

ଶ୍ରୀଜ୍ଞାମିତ୍ରା

Jinamitra

An Indian Kashmiri pañdita who was resident in Tibet during the late eighth and early ninth centuries. He worked with several Tibetan translators on the translation of several sūtras. He is also the author of the *Nyāyabindupiṇḍartha* (Toh 4233), which is contained in the Tibetan Tengyur (*bstan 'gyur*) collection.

g.16 Kimnara

mi 'am ci

ଶ୍ରୀନାରାତ୍ରି

kimnara

A race of celestial musicians who are half human and half horse.

g.17 Limbs of awakening

byang chub kyi yan lag

ଶ୍ରୀବ୍ରତ୍ତୁଷ୍ଟୁଯଶ୍ଵର

bodhyāṅga

Recollection, analysis, diligence, joy, pliancy, absorption, and equanimity.

g.18 Lord of Death

gshin rje

ଶ୍ରୀଯମ

Yama

The ruler of the lower realms.

g.19 Mahoraga

lto 'phye chen po

ସ୍ମ୍ରାନ୍ତାକେଶାର୍ଣ୍ଣ

mahiraga

Literally “large serpent.” A subterranean semi-divine being that takes the form of a large serpent, sometimes with a human torso and head.

g.20 Means of attraction

bsdu ba'i dngos po

ସମ୍ପ୍ରାପନୀତର୍ଦ୍ଵାରା

saṃgrahavastu

This is generally given as a list of four qualities or methods for attracting students: generosity, kind talk, meaningful actions, and practicing what one preaches.

g.21 Munivarman

mu ni bar ma

ମୁନିବରମା

Munivarman

An Indian paṇḍita who was resident in Tibet during the late eighth and early ninth centuries.

g.22 Nāga

klu

ନ୍ରୀ

nāga

A semidivine class of beings who live in subterranean aquatic environments where they are known to guard wealth and esoteric teachings. Nāgas are associated with serpents and often assume a snakelike appearance. In Buddhist art and in written accounts, nāgas are regularly portrayed as being half human and half snake, and, as mentioned in this sūtra, said to have the ability to change into human form. Some nāgas are Dharma protectors, but they can also bring retribution if they are disturbed. Nāgas likewise fight one another, wage war, and destroy the lands of others by causing lightning, hail, and flooding.

g.23 Opposing teacher

phas kyi rgol ba

ଅପ୍ରାପ୍ରାପ୍ତିପଦୀ

parapravādī

One who teaches a false doctrine.

g.24 Retinue

g.yog

ପରିବାର

parivāra

The Tibetan and Sanskrit terms both carry a dual sense of “servant” or “retinue.”

g.25 Sāgara

rgya mtsho

ସୁଗର୍ଣ୍ଣ |

Sāgara

Literally meaning “ocean,” he is a king of the nāgas, a class of semidivine snake creatures.

g.26 Śakra

brgya byin

ସକ୍ରାତ୍ମୀୟ |

Śakra

An epithet for Indra, the king of the gods in Hindu mythology.

g.27 Secondary disturbing emotions

nye ba'i nyon mongs

ୱେଶର୍ତ୍ତମାର୍ଦ୍ଦଶ୍ଵା

upakleśa

These are “secondary” in the sense that they flow from the primary disturbing emotions of desire, aversion, and ignorance. There appears to be no set list.

g.28 Ten powers

stobs bcu

ୱେଶାଶ୍ଵା

daśabala

The classical list of the Buddha’s ten powers, which appears frequently throughout both Pali and Sanskrit sources, refers to the following powers of knowing (*jñānabala*): (1) Knowing what is possible and what is impossible (*sthānāsthāna*), (2) Knowing the ripening of karma (*karmavipāka*), (3) Knowing the various inclinations (*nānādhimukti*), (4) Knowing the various elements (*nānādhātu*), (5) Knowing the supreme and lesser faculties (*indriyaparāpara*), (6) Knowing the paths that lead to all destinations (*svartṛagāminīpratipad*), (7) Knowing the concentrations, liberations, absorptions, and attainments (*dhyānavimokṣasamādhisamāpatti*), (8) Knowing the recollection of past existences (*pūrvanivāsānusmṛti*), (9) Knowing death and rebirth (*cyutiyupapatti*), and (10) Knowing the exhaustion of the defilements (*āsravakṣaya*).

g.29 Yakṣa

gnod sbyin

ସର୍ଦ୍ଦଶ୍ଵିଣୀ

yakṣa

A class of mostly malevolent spirits.

g.30 Yeshé Dé

ye shes sde

ཡେ ଶେ ଶେ

A prolific Tibetan translator active during the late eighth and early ninth centuries.

