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## Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels

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*Triśaranaṇagamana*

*'phags pa gsum la skyabs su 'gro ba zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*

## The Noble Great Vehicle Sūtra “Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels”

Āryatriśaraṇagamananāmamahāyānasūtra



Toh 225

Degé Kangyur, vol. 63 (mdo sde, dza), folios 174.a–175.a.

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co.

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## SUMMARY

s.1 In *Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels*, the venerable Śāriputra wonders how much merit accrues to someone who takes refuge in the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha. He therefore seeks out the Buddha Śākyamuni and requests a teaching on this topic. The Buddha proceeds to describe how even vast offerings, performed in miraculous ways, would not constitute a fraction of the merit gained by someone who takes refuge in the Three Jewels.

ac.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ac.1 This text was translated by the Dharmachakra Translation Committee under the guidance of Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche. Benjamin Collet-Cassart translated the text from Tibetan. Andreas Doctor compared the draft translation with the original Tibetan, edited the text, and wrote the introduction.

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

i.

## INTRODUCTION

i.1

*Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels*<sup>1</sup> unfolds in the Jeta Grove at Śrāvastī, where the Buddha Śākyamuni is residing with a large gathering of monks. The sūtra begins as the venerable Śāriputra, who is practicing meditation alone in the forest, wonders how much merit is obtained by those who take refuge in the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha. After finishing his meditation practice, Śāriputra goes before the Buddha Śākyamuni and requests the Buddha to teach on that topic. In his answer, the Buddha presents an analogy that is meant to describe the enormous merit that such devotees obtain. Even if someone could magically erect a stūpa the size of the entire world and make vast, miraculous offerings to it for eons on end, the merit gained thereby would not constitute even a fraction of the merit gained by those who take refuge in the Three Jewels. After the Buddha has delivered this teaching, the earth quakes, lightning strikes, and the gods in the heavens play divine music to celebrate the teaching. Finally, the Buddha instructs Ānanda to remember the teaching so that he can pass it on to others.

i.2

Very little is known about the history of this text in India. The Sanskrit version of this sūtra is no longer extant, and it seems to have never been translated into Chinese. Hence, the only witness of this sūtra available today is the Tibetan translation included in the Kangyur. The colophon of the Tibetan translation states that it was produced by the Indian paṇḍita Sarvajñādeva and the Tibetan translator-editor Paltsek, thus locating its translation in the late eighth or early ninth century. This dating is also confirmed by the text's inclusion in the Denkarma (*lhan/ldan dkar ma*) catalog of the early ninth century CE.<sup>2</sup> The text has previously been translated into English by Kenneth Liberman (1988) with the assistance of Jampa Losel. The translation presented here was made primarily based on the Degé edition, in consultation with the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*) and the Stok Palace manuscript edition.

tr.

## THE TRANSLATION

### The Noble Great Vehicle Sūtra

#### **Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels**

- 1.1 [F.174.a] Homage to the Three Jewels!
- 1.2 Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was residing at Jeta Grove, Anāthapiṇḍada's park at Śrāvastī, together with a great saṅgha of 1,250 monks.
- 1.3 At that time, while the venerable Śāradvatīputra was alone in the forest, this thought arose in his mind: "I should go before the Teacher so that I can ask the Blissful One, the Dharma Lord, this question: 'How much merit is accumulated by faithful noble sons or noble daughters who take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha of monks?'"
- 1.4 At dusk the venerable Śāriputra emerged from his meditative seclusion and went to see the Blessed One. When he arrived, he bowed his head to the Blessed One's feet and sat to one side. While seated to the side, the venerable Śāriputra asked the Blessed One, "Honored One, while I was staying alone in the forest in meditative seclusion, this thought arose in my mind: 'How much merit is accumulated by faithful noble sons or noble daughters who take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha of monks?'"
- 1.5 The Blessed One replied to the venerable Śāriputra, "Śāriputra, you have asked this question in order to benefit and bring happiness to many beings. Out of love for the world, you seek to help a vast number of beings, [F.174.b] gods and humans alike, by accomplishing their welfare and happiness. That is excellent, excellent! Śāriputra, as you have thought to come and question the Thus-Gone One about this matter, I will reply with an analogy to make you understand.

1.6     “Imagine that someone endowed with magical powers were to transfer into another world all the beings that live in Jambudvīpa—the land of Jambudvīpa and its subcontinents, which measure seven thousand leagues across and lengthwise. Having made the ground even like the palm of a hand, that person would then build a stūpa made of the seven precious gems—gold, silver, beryl, crystal, red coral, emerald, and white coral. It would be the size of Jambudvīpa, and its summit would reach the Brahmā realms. That person would then worship that stūpa with offerings of divine incense, divine flowers, divine garlands, and divine parasols, banners, and flags. This person endowed with these magical powers would then pour all the water of the four great oceans into another world system and replace it with four oceans filled with maruka oil.<sup>3</sup> He would then place a wick the size of Mount Sumeru into the oceans so that for many eons this oil lamp would continuously burn.

1.7     “Śāriputra, tell me, would that person accumulate a lot of merit on that basis?”

      “Blessed One, yes, a lot! Blissful One, yes, a lot! That person would surpass all the hearers and solitary buddhas. Blessed One, this is the domain of the thus-gone ones. Blissful One, this is the domain of the thus-gone ones.”

1.8     “Śāriputra, that amount of merit would not match even a hundredth, [F.175.a] a thousandth, or even a hundred thousandth of the merit created by a noble son or noble daughter who takes refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha. This difference could not be illustrated by any numbers, examples, or calculations.”

1.9     When this Dharma teaching was given, the whole great trichiliocosm began to quiver, tremble, quake, wobble, rock, sway, vibrate, shudder, and reel. Great lightning flashes struck, and the gods caused the sound of drums to be heard.

1.10    The venerable Ānanda asked the Blessed One, “Blessed One, what is the name of this Dharma teaching? How should it be remembered?”

1.11    The Blessed One replied, “Ānanda, you should remember this Dharma teaching as *Accomplishing Limitless Gateways*.<sup>4</sup> This is how you should see its meaning, and this is how you should remember it.”

1.12    When the Blessed One had spoken, the venerable Śāriputra and the other monks praised the Blessed One’s words.

1.13    *This concludes the noble Great Vehicle sūtra “Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels.”*

c.

## COLOPHON

c.1    This was translated, edited, and finalized by the Indian pañdita Sarvajñādeva and the translator-editor Bandé Paltsek.

## n.

## NOTES

n.1 Although the title in the Degé version only reads *Taking Refuge in the Three*, we have added *Jewels* based on the title as it appears in the Stok Palace manuscript. This is also clearly the subject and meaning of the text.

n.2 The Denkarma catalog is dated to ca. 812 CE. See Denkarma, folio 301.a.3. See also Herrmann-Pfandt (2008), p. 162, no. 298.

n.3 Tibetan: *ma ru ka'i til mar*.

n.4 Translated based on Choné, Lithang, Kangxi, Yongle, and Narthang: *sgo mtha' yas pa*. Degé and Stok: *sgo mtha' yas pas*.

b.

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## GLOSSARY

g.1	Ānanda	The personal attendant and cousin of the Buddha, who compiled the sūtras.
	kun dga' bo	
	ཀੁਣ-ਦਾ	
Ānanda		
g.2	Anāthapiṇḍada	A wealthy householder of Śrāvastī renowned for his generosity. He spent a small fortune to purchase the grove of Prince Jeta, built a monastery there, and offered both to the Buddha.
	mgon med zas sbyin	
	མਣ-ਪੇਦ-ਯਾ-ਛੀ	
Anāthapiṇḍada		
g.3	Brahmā realms	The heaven of Brahmā, usually located just above the desire realm ( <i>kāmadhātu</i> ) as one of the first levels of the form realm ( <i>rūpadhātu</i> ) and equated with the state that one achieves in the first meditative absorption ( <i>dhyāna</i> ).
	tshangs pa'i 'jig rten	
	ਕਦਸ-ਚਦ-ਤਵੀ-ਏ-ਹੈ	
Brahmāloka		
g.4	Great trichiliocosm	The largest universe spoken of in Buddhist cosmology, consisting of one billion smaller world systems.
	stong gsum gyi stong chen po'i 'jig rten gyi khams	
	ਤ੍ਰਿ-ਸਾ-ਰਾ-ਮਾ-ਹਾ-ਸਾ-ਲੋ-ਕਾ-ਹਾ-ਤੁ	
Great trichiliocosm		
	trisāhasramahāsāhasralokadhātu	
g.5	Hearer	The personal attendant and cousin of the Buddha, who compiled the sūtras.
	nyan thos	
	ਨ-ਨ-ਬ-ਸ-ਾ	
Hearer		
	śrāvaka	

Primarily referring to those disciples of the Buddha who aspire to attain the state of a worthy one by seeking personal liberation. The term is usually defined as a person who hears the teaching from the Buddha and makes it heard to others.

g.6 Jambudvīpa

*'dzam bu'i gling*

ཇམ்஬ुද්‍රීෂ්වා

*Jambudvīpa*

The continent (*dvīpa*) on which we live, shaped like a rose apple (*jambū*) according to ancient South Asian cosmology.

g.7 Jeta Grove

*rgyal bu rgyal byed kyi tshal*

ຈුෂාසුජුජාස්ථුජ්ජා

*Jetavana*

The grove of Prince Jeta in Śrāvastī purchased by Anāthapiṇḍada; the Buddha taught many of his discourses there, especially during the rainy season retreat.

g.8 Meditative seclusion

*nang du yang dag 'jog*

នංදුයන්දණඅංජ

*pratisaṇḍhayana*

This term can mean both physical seclusion and a meditative state of withdrawal.

g.9 Mount Sumeru

*ri rab*

ශීෂ්ව

*Sumeru*

The great mountain at the center of the universe according to ancient Indian cosmology.

g.10 Paltsek

*dpal brtsegs*

ධ්‍යාපත්සා

—

Paltsek, from the village of Kawa north of Lhasa, was one of Tibet's preeminent translators. He was one of the first seven Tibetans to be ordained by Śāntarakṣita and is counted as one of Guru Rinpoche's twenty-five close disciples. In a famous verse by Ngok Lotsawa, Paltsek is named along with Chokro Lui Gyaltsen and Zhang Nanam Yeshé as part of a group of translators whose skills were surpassed only by Vairotsana. He translated works from a wide variety of genres, including sūtra, śāstra, vinaya, and tantra, and was an author himself. Paltsek was also one of the most important editors of the early period, one of nine translators installed by Trisong Detsen to supervise the translation of the Tripitaka and help catalog translated works for the first two of three imperial catalogs (the *ldan kar ma* and *bsam yas mchims phu ma* catalogs).

g.11 Śāradvatīputra

*sha ra dwa ti'i bu*

—

ସାରଦ୍ଵତିପୁତ୍ର

*Śāradvatīputra*

Along with Maudgalyāyana, Śāradvatīputra (also known as Śāriputra) was one of the two main disciples of the Buddha. He was renowned for his pure discipline and was praised by the Buddha as being foremost in terms of insight.

g.12 Śāriputra

*shA ri'i bu*

ସାରିପୁତ୍ର

*Śāriputra*

The same as Śāradvatīputra.

g.13 Sarvajñādeva

*sarba dz+nyA de ba*

ସାରବଜ୍ଞାଦେବ

*Sarvajñādeva*

According to traditional accounts, the Kashmiri abbot Sarvajñādeva was among the “one hundred” panḍitas invited by Trisong Detsen (r. 755–797/800) to assist with the translation of the Buddhist scriptures into Tibetan. Sarvajñādeva assisted in the translation of more than twenty-three works, including numerous sūtras and the first translations of Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and Nāgārjuna’s *Suhrilekha*. Much of this work was likely carried out in the first years of the ninth century and may have continued into the reign of Ralpachen, who ascended the throne in 815 and died in 838 or 841 CE.

g.14 Solitary buddha

*rang sangs rgyas*

ସାର୍ଯ୍ୟବୁଦ୍ଧ

*pratyekabuddha*

Individuals who, in their last life, attain realization by realizing the nature of dependent origination without relying upon a spiritual guide.

g.15 Śrāvastī

*mnyan yod*

ସାର୍ଵାଷାଦ

*Śrāvastī*

During the life of the Buddha, Śrāvastī was a major city in the kingdom of Kosala, in present day Uttar Pradesh.