

༄༅། །སྤྱན་རས་གཟིགས་ཡུམ་གྱི་གཟུངས།

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**The Dhāraṇī “The Mother of  
Avalokiteśvara”**

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*Avalokiteśvaramātādhāraṇī*

འཕགས་པ་སྤྱན་རས་གཟིགས་དབང་ཕྱུག་གི་ཡུམ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་གསུངས།

*'phags pa spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug gi yum zhes bya ba'i gzung*

The Noble Dhāraṇī “The Mother of Avalokiteśvara”

*Āryāvalokiteśvaramātānāmadhāraṇī*



Toh 725  
Degé Kangyur, vol. 94 (rgyud, tsha), folios 200.b–202.a.

Translated by Lhasey Lotsawa Translations and Publications  
under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha

First published 2021  
Current version v 1.1.5 (2021)  
Generated by 84000 Reading Room v2.4.3

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co.

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s.

## SUMMARY

- s.1 In this short sūtra, the bodhisattva Samantabhadra asks the Buddha to reveal *The Mother of Avalokiteśvara*, a powerful dhāraṇī that helps practitioners progress on the path to awakening. The Buddha grants his request and relates how he had himself received the dhāraṇī. Samantabhadra then speaks the dhāraṇī, after which the Buddha states its benefits.

ac.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ac.1 Translated by Lhasey Lotsawa Translations and Publications under the guidance of Phakchok Rinpoche. The translation and introduction were produced by Lowell Cook and Stefan Mang. The translation was checked against the Chinese by Dr. Jeffrey Kotyk.

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

i.

## INTRODUCTION

i.1

*The Noble Dhāraṇī “The Mother of Avalokiteśvara”*<sup>1</sup> begins in the city of Vaiśālī, where the Buddha is residing amidst an assembly of monks and bodhisattvas. The bodhisattva Samantabhadra requests that he reveal the powerful *dhāraṇī* known as *The Mother of Avalokiteśvara*, and the Buddha agrees. The Buddha first relates how he had himself received this *dhāraṇī* in a past life from the brahmin Prabheśvara, who benefited millions of beings by teaching it in Sukhāvātī, the pure land of the Buddha Amitābha. Following this account, Samantabhadra magically speaks the *dhāraṇī* to the assembly, after which the Buddha encourages the audience to recite it and praises its efficacy. Thus, the *dhāraṇī* can be divided into four sections: the request to teach the *dhāraṇī*, the *dhāraṇī*’s origin story, the *dhāraṇī* itself, and a praise of the *dhāraṇī*’s benefits.

i.2

As indicated by the text’s title, the *dhāraṇī* concerns a goddess named or bearing the title Avalokiteśvaramātā, “the mother of Avalokiteśvara.” In the Degé Kangyur,<sup>2</sup> the *dhāraṇī* belongs to a cycle of eight Kriyātantra (*bya rgyud*) texts (Toh 724–31) dedicated to the goddess Tārā. Based on this categorization, we may infer that the Tibetan scholars understood Avalokiteśvaramātā to be the goddess Tārā, but there is no further evidence to confirm this identification.

i.3

According to the Tibetan colophon, *The Dhāraṇī “The Mother of Avalokiteśvara”* was originally translated by the monk and translator Yeshé Dé and the Indian preceptors Jinamitra and Dānaśīla, who were regular collaborators in the late eighth- and early ninth-centuries. The *dhāraṇī* is accordingly found in the Denkarma (*ldan dkar ma*) and Phangthangma (*’phang thang ma*) catalogs of translations made during Tibet’s imperial period.<sup>3</sup> The *dhāraṇī* was translated into Chinese by Fǎxián (法賢, 973-1001) under the title *Fo shuo guanzizai pusa mu tuoluoni jing* (观自在菩萨母陀罗尼经, Taishō 1117). There is to our knowledge no extant Sanskrit version of this work.

i.4

This English translation is based on the Tibetan version in the Degé Kangyur collection, in consultation with the Stok Palace and Phukdrak Kangyurs, as well as the variant readings recorded in the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*) Kangyur. The English translation was compared with the Chinese translation before being finalized.

The Noble Dhāraṇī

**The Mother of Avalokiteśvara**

1.

## The Translation

[F.200.b]

1.1 Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas!

1.2 Thus did I hear at one time. In the city of Vaiśālī, the Blessed One was surrounded and honored by a great assembly as he sat upon a seat arranged for him. He was surrounded and honored by five hundred fully ordained monks headed by the great śrāvaka Śāriputra, and many bodhisattva great beings headed by Maitreya. Present among this assembly was the bodhisattva great being known as Samantabhadra. Rising from his seat, Samantabhadra draped his upper robe over one shoulder, knelt on his right knee, bowed his head at the feet of the Blessed One, and said:

1.3 “Blessed One, the great dhāraṇī of the vidyāmantra, the mantra formula, known as *The Mother of Avalokiteśvara*, has been taught and is being taught by the blessed buddhas of the past, present, and future. It had previously been taught when the Blessed One was a bodhisattva seeking awakening, and it was taught in order to benefit and care for all beings, up to and including the bodhisattvas. The dhāraṇī is a refuge for all beings who lack refuge, beings who have been the fathers and mothers of the noble sons and daughters who follow the bodhisattva vehicle. It is an ally to those without allies and a protector to those without protection. It brings all misdeeds to an end. All wishes are fulfilled as soon as this dhāraṇī is heard, [F.201.a] and through it all vidyāmantras are successful.”<sup>4</sup>

1.4 The Blessed One replied, “Bodhisattva great being, in the past when I was a bodhisattva seeking awakening, the Thus-Gone worthy, complete, and perfect Buddha Amitābha lived, prospered, and taught the Dharma in Sukhāvātī, a world system far beyond as many world systems as there are grains of sand in the river Ganges. He lives there even now. Among his retinue was a brahmin known as Prabheśvara who had attained the third bodhisattva level. It was he who proclaimed, expounded, and taught this

great queen of vidyāmantras, the dhāraṇī known as *The Mother of Avalokiteśvara*, to many hundreds of thousands of brahmins and numerous billions of sentient beings. As soon as they heard this dhāraṇī, they were freed from all misdeeds and transgressions and remembered their rebirths. This I recall.

1.5 “Great bodhisattva, recite the dhāraṇī! At a later time, the numerous trillions of misdeeds of sentient beings, throughout defiled worlds, who have performed misdeeds and the actions with immediate retribution will be exhausted. They will be well and be happy. It will serve as a protector to those without protection. I also approve and rejoice.”

1.6 The bodhisattva great being Samantabhadra then spoke the great dhāraṇī of the vidyāmantra, the mantra formula, known as *The Mother of Avalokiteśvara*.

1.7 “Homage to the Three Jewels. Homage to the Blessed, thus-gone Amitābha. Homage to the bodhisattva great being endowed with great compassion, Noble Avalokiteśvara. [F.201.b] Having paid homage to them, I shall recite the great vidyāmantra, the mantra formula, the noble dhāraṇī known as *The Mother of Avalokiteśvara*. May I accomplish this vidyā!

1.8 *tadyathā | ili mili | cili mili | kuntule kuntule kuntule | śire śiśire viśire | vīrāyai gauri gāndhāri drāmiṭe mātaṅgi pukkasi kaṣṭaya māṃ | caṇḍāli huttu mālini hūṃ | dhu dhu mālini | cile mile | gṛhṇa saumyadarśani | kuru candramukhi | laḡhumānayante āryadakṣiṇabhujē | sarvavidyānām prasādhane | sarvavidyānām īśvari svāhā | |*

1.9 The Blessed One then said,<sup>5</sup> “This is the rite for this dhāraṇī that is mastered through recitation. As soon as it is heard, all karmic obscurations will be purified, and one will be protected from all fears. If one recites it during the three periods of the day, one will see the bodhisattva great being Samantabhadra within seven days. If one mentally recites it without thinking of anything else, the great vidyā herself, the mother of Noble Avalokiteśvara, will be revealed within one month, and noble Amitābha will also be seen. One’s progress to unsurpassed awakening will be irreversible. One will also remember one’s rebirths and retain whatever has been learned. No matter where one is born, one will not be separated from the sacred Dharma, and one will be affluent.”

1.10 After the Blessed One spoke these words, the entire assembly, including the bodhisattva great being Samantabhadra, the bodhisattvas, and the fully ordained monks, rejoiced and praised what the Blessed One had taught.

1.11 *This completes the noble dhāraṇī “The Mother of Avalokiteśvara.”*

c.

## Colophon

c.1 Translated and edited by the Indian preceptors Jinamitra and [F.202.a] Dānaśīla and the translator-editor Bandé Yeshé Dé, revised according to the new lexicon, and finalized.

n.

## NOTES

- n.1 Following the general application of the honorific “noble” (Skt. *ārya*; Tib. *’phags pa*) in Buddhist literature, the term seems likely to apply to the text itself, not the deity. However, this honorific is so frequently prefixed to Avalokiteśvara’s name that many readers of the Tibetan text may naturally and optionally interpret it in that way instead.
- n.2 Note that there is a discrepancy among various databases for cataloging the Toh 909 version of this text within vol. 100 or 101 of the Degé Kangyur. See Toh 909 note 2 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh909.html#end-note-UT22084-094-002-56>) for details.
- n.3 Herrmann-Pfandt 2008, pp. 221–22. See also Denkarma, 302.b.6.
- n.4 The implication is that Buddhist dhāraṇīs such as this have the capacity to accomplish all other Buddhist and non-Buddhist spells, whatever their purpose.
- n.5 There is no indication at this point in the text that Samantabhadra has finished speaking and that the Buddha begins, but considering that the following quote concludes with the statement, “After the Blessed One spoke these words,” inserting this line for clarity seems warranted.

b.

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## GLOSSARY

g.

g.1 Amitābha

*'od dpag med*

འོད་དཔག་མེད།

*Amitābha*

The buddha residing in the western buddha realm Sukhāvati.

g.2

Avalokiteśvara

*spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug*

སྤྱན་རས་གཟིགས་དབང་ཕྱུག

*Avalokiteśvara*

One of the eight main bodhisattvas, the heart sons of the Buddha.

g.3

Bandé Yeshé Dé

*ban+de ye shes sde*

བརྗེ་ཡེ་ཤེས་སྡེ།

—

A prolific Tibetan translator active during the late eighth and early ninth centuries. He is credited with translating no fewer than 380 works.

g.4

Blessed one

*bcom ldan 'das*

བཙེམ་ལྷན་འདས།

*bhagavat*

An epithet of the buddhas.

g.5

Dānaśīla

*dA na shI la*

-

དྲན་ལྷི་ལ།

*Dānaśīla*

An Indian preceptor from Kashmir who was resident in Tibet during the late eighth- and early ninth-centuries. He was a frequent collaborator of Yeshé Dé.

g.6 Dhāraṇī

*gzungs*

གཟུངས།

*dhāraṇī*

The term *dhāraṇī* has the sense of something that “holds” or “retains,” and as such can refer to the special capacity of practitioners to memorize and recall detailed teachings. It can also refer to a verbal expression of the teachings—an incantation, spell, or mnemonic formula that distills and “holds” essential points of the Dharma and is used by practitioners to attain mundane and supramundane goals. The same term is also used to denote texts that contain such formulae.

g.7 Dhāraṇī of the vidyāmantra

*gzungs kyi rig sngags*

གཟུངས་ཀྱི་རིག་སྒྲགས།

*vidyāmantradhāraṇī*

g.8 Ganges

*gang gA*

གང་ལྷ།

*Gaṅgā*

g.9 Jinamitra

*dzi na mi tra*

ཇོ་ན་མི་ཏ།

*Jinamitra*

An Indian preceptor from Kashmir who was resident in Tibet during the late eighth and early ninth centuries. He was a frequent collaborator of Yeshé Dé.

g.10 Maitreya

*byams pa*

བྱམས་པ།

*Maitreya*

One of the eight main bodhisattvas, the heart sons of the Buddha.

g.11 Mantra formula

*gsang sngags kyi gzhi*

གསང་སྐྱབས་ཀྱི་གཞི།

*mantrapada*

g.12 Mother

*yum*

ཡུམ།

*mātā*

g.13 Prabheśvara

*dbang phyug 'od*

དབང་ཕྱུག་འོད།

*Prabheśvara*

A brahmin who teaches the dhāraṇī known as *The Mother of Avalokiteśvara* in Sukhāvātī, the realm of the Buddha Amitābha.

g.14 Samantabhadra

*kun tu bzang po*

ཀུན་ཏུ་བཟང་པོ།

*Samantabhadra*

One of the eight main bodhisattvas, the heart sons of the Buddha.

g.15 Śāriputra

*shA ri'i bu*

ཤཱ་རི་བུ།

*Śāriputra*

One of the closest disciples of the Buddha, known for his wisdom and pure observance of discipline.

g.16 Śrāvaka

*nyan thos*

ཉན་ཐོས།

*śrāvaka*

The word, based on the verb “to hear,” means “disciple” in general, and is more specifically applied to the followers of the non-Mahāyāna traditions of Buddhism.

g.17 Sukhāvati

*bde ba can*

བདེ་བ་ཅན།

*Sukhāvati*

The pure realm of the Buddha Amitābha.

g.18 Tārā

*sgrol ma*

སྒྲོལ་མ།

*Tārā*

A goddess whose name can be translated as “Savior.” She is known for giving protection and is variously presented in Buddhist literature as a great bodhisattva or a fully awakened buddha.

g.19 Thus-gone one

*de bzhin gshegs pa*

དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ།

*tathāgata*

An epithet of the buddhas.

g.20 Vaiśālī

*yangs pa*

ཡངས་པ།

*Vaiśālī*

A major city during the Buddha’s time, the capital of the Licchavi republic. It was an important location where a number of Buddhist sūtras are said to have been taught.

g.21 Vidyā

*rig pa*

རིག་པ།

*vidyā*

A term that at once refers to a type of spell or dhāraṇī and to the goddess it invokes, thereby reflecting their inseparability.

g.22 Vidyāmantra

*rig sngags*

འིག་སྒྲགས།

*vidyāmantra*

The formula associated with and identical to the goddess it invokes.