

THE SŪTRA ON THE STRENGTH OF THE ELEPHANT

སྐྱེང་པོའི་རྩལ་གྱི་མདོ།

The Sūtra on the Strength of the Elephant

Hastikakṣyasūtra

སྐྱེང་པོའི་རྩལ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་མདོ།

glang po'i rtsal zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo

The Sūtra of the Great Vehicle “The Strength of the Elephant”

Hastikakṣyanāmamahāyānasūtra

Toh. 207, Degé Kangyur, vol. 62, folios 95a-109a

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Summary

This sūtra contains a Dharma discourse on the profound insight into the emptiness of all phenomena, also known as the perfection of wisdom. The Buddha delivers this discourse to the venerable Śāriputra and Youthful Mañjuśrī, as well as to a group of monks, in the presence of a large assembly of laypeople, monks and bodhisattvas on Gṛdhrakūṭa Mountain. This discourse is directed at hearers and outcast bodhisattvas who have not realized the perfection of wisdom and thus remain attached to conceptual attributes. This sūtra therefore emphasizes the illusory nature and nonproduction of all phenomena. The Buddha thus explains that the perfection of wisdom is like space, in which there is nothing to be adopted and nothing to be discarded. Yet, he points out how this profound insight enables bodhisattvas to carry out their compassionate activities with skillful means and the full range of benefits for those who have faith in this discourse.

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Introduction

Setting and Storyline

The narrative of *The Sūtra of the Great Vehicle “The Strength of the Elephant”* is set at Gṛdhrakūṭa Mountain, where the Buddha dwells with a large number of monks and bodhisattvas. One afternoon, after the Buddha is addressed by the venerable Śāradvatīputra with a brief discourse on the empty nature of all phenomena, the Buddha assembles a large audience of monks, bodhisattvas, and people from the city of Rājagṛha to share Śāradvatīputra’s insight.

The Buddha then informs Youthful Mañjuśrī and the others that previous buddhas taught this Dharma discourse on the perfection of wisdom, which is “like the strength of the elephant,” at Gṛdhrakūṭa Mountain, the exact place where their assembly is gathered. Upon request of the venerable Ānanda, a teaching unfolds in which the Buddha replies to questions posed by Youthful Mañjuśrī.

A number of “arrogant monks” in the assembly, however, misunderstand the Tathāgata’s teaching and thus the Buddha is asked to comment upon the intentions behind this discourse. Upon hearing his explanations, realization manifests in the minds of the various listeners and the monks demonstrate their new understanding.

Youthful Mañjuśrī then inquires into the training in the perfection of wisdom and the Buddha responds with additional teachings. He mentions twenty laudable qualities that are possessed by those who have faith in this Dharma discourse. He also recounts how in a previous lifetime as a bodhisattva he himself had become accomplished in it. The Buddha then gives instructions on the practices of bodhisattvas who wish to realize this profound insight. In the end, the Buddha commands Ānanda to remember it. Everybody rejoices and praises the Buddha’s words.

Main Points of the Subject Matter

The illusory nature of phenomena. The empty and thus illusory nature of all phenomena is alluded to in various ways throughout the sūtra. This empty nature covers all the various conceptions, such as the worlds and classes of sentient beings up to central Buddhist concepts, such as the six perfections, monastic discipline, merit and so forth, including the Tathāgata himself. The realization of this empty and illusory nature of all phenomena is the perfection of wisdom which allows one to naturally rest in a state of meditative absorption. Phenomena as well as the perfection of wisdom are said to be like space: “space is not something to be realized, nor is it something to be abandoned. Likewise, no phenomenon is something to be realized or abandoned.” Because of this empty nature of phenomena,

all conceptions about them as substantial or real are completely mistaken. To realize this is what it means to correctly engage in phenomena.

The unity of the bodhisattva's wisdom and skillful means. Bodhisattvas accomplish a wide range of compassionate activities without departing from the profound insight of emptiness which is the perfection of wisdom. In this way, bodhisattvas are able to compassionately engage in the different realms of beings without relinquishing the perfection of wisdom. Through such practices as *samādhi* or *dhāraṇī* recitation, they are able to go to buddha fields without actually coming or going, or they are able to speak different languages without mixing them up.

The perfection of wisdom. The sūtra insists on the idea that the perfection of wisdom and the illusory nature of phenomena are difficult to understand for ordinary beings, hearers, solitary realizers or bodhisattvas who cling to conceptual attributes. Those who are unaware of the Tathāgata's intention behind this teaching are in danger of completely misunderstanding him. The intended understanding of this profound insight is that all conceptions, even that of the Tathāgata, are false and thus all views are mistaken. It is in this way that wrong views come to an end and that those who have no conception of the Tathāgata see the Tathāgata. The Buddha explains that ordinary beings discriminate and conceptualize in various ways. They embrace the view of a self, a being, a life, and a person, and cling to fixations such as 'me' or 'mine.' Thus, they also conceive all of their thoughts, feelings, actions, and experiences according to these conceptions. Those who see this as wrong are said to be right. It was only in order to inspire sentient beings with such experiences that the Tathāgata taught the virtuous qualities associated with nirvāṇa. However, he did not teach that nirvāṇa is something conditioned or amenable to designations. Those who are spiritually advanced are not necessarily those that engage in such conventional practices as generosity and the like, but those who are free from all attachments and who in this sense transcend generosity. If phenomena were substantially or actually existent, sentient beings could never attain nirvāṇa. However, since all phenomena are neither substantial nor actual, sentient beings can attain nirvāṇa. The Buddha also teaches that "yet, because sentient beings do not exist, nothing whatsoever manifests from them as the exhaustion of defilements" and that "whoever neither fixates on the conception of the nonexistence of all sentient beings nor on sentient beings completely realizes the nonexistence of conceptions." Thus, all phenomena are originally unproduced and the acceptance that all phenomena do not arise is known as "the realization of realization." The way to practice this profound insight is to neither take up nor cast away any phenomenon.

Outcast bodhisattvas (*byang chub sems dpa' gdol ba, bodhisattvacāṇḍāla*). As a whole, the *Hastikakṣyasūtra* may be read as a disapproval of the shortcomings of outcast bodhisattvas. At the end of this Dharma discourse, the Buddha makes explicit mention of such outcasts, when he says that "after I have passed away [...] it will not come into the hands, scriptures, or chests of outcast bodhisattvas".¹ Who are these outcast bodhisattvas? The *Aṣṭadaśasahasarikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*

speaks of outcast bodhisattvas as those who have taken up the practice of detachment in the sense of residing in the remote forest, jungle, or far-away places but who have failed to realize the perfection of wisdom. These outcast bodhisattvas will consequently look down on bodhisattvas who dwell near a village, even if the minds of these bodhisattvas are pure, uncontaminated, and have attained the perfection of wisdom. Such a practitioner is referred to as “an outcast among Bodhisattvas, a defamer of Bodhisattvas, a counterfeit Bodhisattva, a thief of the world with its gods, men and Asuras in the guise of a Śramana.”² Another text on the perfection of wisdom, the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*, criticizes bodhisattvas who are attached to dwelling in the wilderness and similar ascetic practices referred to as *dhutaḡaṇa*. These are referred to as “mental fixations [...] that are associated with the śravaka or pratyekabuddha.”³ Thus, bodhisattvas should be detached from the mental fixations associated with śravakas or pratyekabuddhas, but outcast bodhisattvas “will despise other bodhisattva mahāsattvas who dwell on the outskirts of villages but who are uncontaminated by the mental fixations associated with the śravaka or with the pratyekabuddha and who abide in wisdom, creative stratagems, and great compassion.”⁴ Such passages may be understood as a criticism targeting “the susceptibility of forest monks to pride and conceit,”⁵ which actually fits with the notion of the “arrogant monks” found in the *Hastikakṣyasūtra*. In his study of the *Rāṣṭrpalaparipṛcchāsūtra*, another *Mahāyānasūtra*, Boucher claims that the aim of “gnostic texts” such as the *prajñāpāramitāsūtras* is “to undermine the preoccupations with the wilderness” and “to shift the attention away from lifestyle reform and toward cognitive transformation – the sort of genuine detachment.”⁶ Talking about the intended audience of such texts, he also notes that works such as the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā* are likely to be engaged in a “intrafraternal debate ... to incapacitate dissent within the ranks of fellow Mahāyānists,”⁷ which he contrasts with an intra-monastic debate more oriented towards monks deviating from canonical authorities in their practices. We believe that the main themes of the *Hastikakṣyasūtra* may be read in much of the same light.

Source Text and Various Versions

There are five versions of the *Hastikakṣyasūtra* in four languages. Except for fragments in Khotanese and Sanskrit, the complete text, however, is only extant in Tibetan and Chinese translations.⁸ The *Hastikakṣyasūtra* was translated into Chinese by Dharmarakṣa in the third century and by Dharmamitra in the fifth century (T 813 and T 814 respectively).⁹ The Tibetan translation does not mention the names of the translators but can be dated to the ninth century.¹⁰ The translation of Dharmamitra and the Tibetan translation seem to be the two closest versions in terms of vocabulary and technical terms as well as context and content.¹¹ According to the findings of Liu and Chen, the earliest Chinese and the Sanskrit version share an earlier source text while the later Chinese and the Tibetan and Khotanese versions share a later source text.¹² The present translation is based on the edition of the text as it is found in the Degé Kangyur, but we also mention minor and interesting

textual variants found in other editions of the sūtra. The text of the Pedurma edition is very close to that of the Degé Kangyur. We emended the Degé edition on two occasions: a) to correct a superfluous syllable in a verse; b) to offer an alternate reading improving a passage of the text in which a phrase seems to be misplaced when this passage is compared to another one structured on a parallel construction. Both emendations are referenced in the notes.

There are a number of references to the *Hastikakṣyasūtra* in the Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist canons. The *Hastikakṣyasūtra* is referred to in the Tengyur in chapter six of the *Sikṣasamuccaya* and it is cited by Kamalaśīla in his *Sarvadharmāsvabhāvasiddhi* as well as in the tantric work *Mahāyānamelāyanapradīpa*. A verse supposedly taken from the *Hastikakṣyasūtra* is cited by Candrakīrti in his commentaries *Mūlamadhyamaka-vṛttiprasannapadā* and *Bodhisattvayogācāracatuḥśatakaṭīkā*. The content of these citations are identical, but the verse is not found in the sūtra contained in the Kangyur.¹³ These ‘missing verses’ are however mentioned several times in the Tibetan tradition by scholars such as Gyaltan Sangpo, Paljor Lhündrub, Shönnu Lodrö, Sönam Senge, as well as in the *gDams ngag mdzod*. Other passages that are part of the sūtra found in the Kangyur are quoted by Kunga Rinchen, Rongtön Shakya Gyaltan, and Sheja Kunrig, who mention the sūtra in their writings. The *Hastikakṣyasūtra* is also cited a number of times in the Chinese Buddhist canon, which attests that it may have once been an important Mahāyāna text that circulated throughout regions of Central and East Asia.¹⁴

Translation Issues

Due to the absence of the original Sanskrit source text and because of differing interpretations of the title’s translations that involve certain linguistic ambiguities, the English translation of the sūtra’s title into English needs to be critically discussed. The study of Liu and Chen (2014: 302-309) includes a detailed discuss of all the variant titles found in the different translations and their findings will be summarized for the reader in the following.

Concerning first of all the Chinese versions, the Catalogue of Nie Daozhen attests the title “The Elephant’s Armpit” (*Xiangye* or **Hastikakṣa*), which corresponds also to the title of Dharmamitra’s translation. Even though the sūtra does not contain any direct reference to the armpit of an elephant, the title bearing this phrase is cited widely in medieval Chinese Buddhism because of the popularity of Dharmamitra’s works.¹⁵ Dharmarakṣa’s translation speaks of “The Metaphor of the Elephant” (*Yuxiang* or **Hastyupama*), which would indicated that the power of the text is equivalent to the effort of an elephant.¹⁶ Also attested based on his translation is a title that does not make reference to an elephant: “Without Desire” (*Wuxiwang* or **Akāṅkṣa*). The use of this title however is without sufficient evidence and may be due to a misreading or miscopying possibly based on Gāndhārī or Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit written in Kharoṣṭhī or Brāhmī scripts, resulting in the readings of

**Nāstikāṅkṣa* or **Asakāṅkṣa* instead of *Hastikakṣya*.¹⁷ A paraphrase of the title as “The Stride of an Elephant” (*Xiangbu*, **Hastigati* or **Hastivikrama*) is found in the translations of both Dharmarakṣa and Dharmamitra. The Tibetan translation could be understood in a similar way, since *rtsal* can mean both “effort” and “stride.”¹⁸

The Tibetan title (*glang po'i rtsal*) features as an entry in the early ninth century Sanskrit-Tibetan glossary known as the Mahāvvyutpatti (*Hastikakṣyam*, Mvyut 1339 in section LIX on *dam pa'i chos kyi ming*). Csoma de Körös’ textual edition of the Mahāvvyutpatti, which comes with an accompanying English translation, translates the title as “The Elephant’s Dexterity (or Girth).”¹⁹ However, note that in the Mahāvvyutpatti, the Dankarma, and the Phangthangma this is the only instance where *kakṣya* corresponds to *rtsal* and *ākrama* and *vikrama* are given as its more usual correspondents, which would yield Sanskrit forms such as **Hastyākrama* or **Hastivikrama*. They thus argue that the sūtra itself may actually be the source for this entry in the Mahāvvyutpatti. Liu and Chen indeed note that *glang po'i rtsal* “should not be regarded as a correct interpretation of the Sanskrit word *Hastikakṣya*.”²⁰

Turning now to the (Buddhist Hybrid) Sanskrit titles, we can see that *kakṣyā* is derived from the vedic *kakṣa*, which indeed has the meaning of “armpit.” Based on a reading in the Sanskrit manuscript and considering the primitive form *Hastikakṣa*, Liu and Chen reconstruct the sūtra’s title in its Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit form as **Hastikaccha*, which later then was Sanskritized into *Hastikakṣya*. Liu and Chen note the following: “we have the contemporaneous appearance of three titles: *Yuxiang* (**Hastyupma*) and *Wuxiwang* (**Nāstikāṅkṣa*, **Akāṅkṣa* or **Asakāṅkṣa*) in T. 813 and, according to the Catalogue, a *Xiangbu* (**Hastigati* or **Hastivikrama*). Then after more than a century, we have *Xiangye* (*Hastikakṣa* or *Hastikaccha* in its BHS form, *Hastikakṣya* in its developed Skt. form) in T. 814, with its Sanskrit correspondence, *Hastikaccha* in the Sanskrit fragment and *Hastikakṣya* in the Tibetan translation. Finally, the word *Hastikakṣya* is transmitted into *Glang po'i rtsal* and *Glang po'i rtsal lta bu* (**Hastikakṣyopama*) in Tibetan.”²¹ They then conclude that “with the exception of *Wuxiwang*, all the others can possibly be affiliated with a Sanskritization process from Middle Indic via Gāndhārī or BHS.” (Ibid.) As a nominal compound, *Hastikakṣya* is clearly a genitive *tatpuruṣa* or dependent determinative compound. According to Monnier Williams’ Sanskrit dictionary, the compound *hastikakṣya* as a whole may carry the meaning of “lion” or “tiger.” This meaning may be safely discarded in the case of this sūtra’s title. Next, let us look at the individual members of the compound: *hasti* and *kakṣya*. *Hasti* stands in the compound for *hastin*, which can clearly be established as meaning “elephant.” The second member, *kakṣya*, however has a whole range of possible meanings. Monnier Williams notes, “abiding in shrubs or dry grass,” “well fed,” “girth (of an animal),” “the enclosure of an edifice,” “similarity,” “effort, exertion”. The Tibetan translation (*rtsal*) of this member carries similar meanings, but tend more towards meanings such as “skill,” “dexterity,” “potency,” “capacity,” “potential,” or “power.”

Unfortunately, the sūtra itself does not give any real convincing pointers to the correct interpretation of its title, since references to both elephants (*hasti*) and their supposed strength (*kakṣya*) are few. Towards the beginning of the sūtra, Śāradvatīputra declines the Buddha's initial request to assemble the monks and bodhisattvas in the area by stating that "elephants are difficult to convince (*mgu ba*, 'satisfy, content, please, convince')." Toward the end of the sūtra, the Buddha recounts to Ānanda that "beings who yearn for this Dharma discourse will be subdued by the strength of the bull or the strength of the elephant."

Based on these elements, we decided to translate the title as "The Sūtra on the Strength of the Elephant," although we are aware that further research would be necessary to validate this reading.

Relevant Academic Research

Up until recently, there was no extensive academic research on the *Hastikakṣyasūtra*. In the last years, however, a number of scholars authored studies with direct or indirect reference to the sūtra's contents and development (see Chen 2012, Apple 2014, Chen and Zhen, 2014):

(1) Chen (2012) addresses newly identified fragments of a Khotanese translation of the *Hastikakṣyasūtra* together with their Chinese parallels.

(2) Liu and Chen (2014) include a translation of a Sanskrit fragment of the *Hastikakṣyasūtra* in light of its Chinese and Tibetan parallels as well as a lengthy discussion of all title variants and their possible Sanskrit equivalents. Their study looks at the early development of Mahayāna sūtras and also includes a concordance of the content found in the different translations.

(3) James Apple (2014) considers the *Hastikakṣyasūtra* from the perspective of his research on the historical developments of entrusted transmissions of written texts in India after the fourth century. In the process, he compares the textual differences between the Tibetan translation and the earlier and later Chinese translations of the *Hastikakṣyasūtra*. Regarding the narrative variants of the story of Victory Banner of the Vajra told by the Buddha towards the end of the sūtra, Apple points out that the Dharma discourse is passed on as a Dharma scripture in the Tibetan version, but in the earlier Chinese versions of Dharmarakṣa and Dharmamitra it is said to be passed on as a mantra or a *dhāraṇī* respectively.

Regarding Tibetan mentions of the *Hastikakṣyasūtra*, Karma Phuntsho (2005: 236, n.29) briefly states that, according to the Rimed master Ju Mipham Namgyal Gyatso, the *Hastikakṣyasūtra* stands as one of the sūtras teaching the doctrine of mind-only (*sems tsam*) understood as the cittamātra taught in

canonical scriptures (*bka'i sems tsam*) as opposed to cittamātra *qua* doctrinal system (*grub miha'i sems tsam*).

THE TRANSLATION

The Sūtra on the Strength of the Elephant

[F.95b.1] Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Thus have I heard at one time. The Bhagavān was dwelling at Gṛdhrakūṭa Mountain, together with a large saṅgha of around five hundred monks and sixty thousand bodhisattvas who were famous among the famous²², had attained the *dhāraṇīs*, possessed unobstructed eloquence, taught the Dharma of nonduality, and displayed inconceivable miraculous powers. Thus, the Buddha was accompanied by sixty thousand bodhisattva-mahāsattvas, including the bodhisattva-mahāsattvas Perseverant Beyond Compare and Wise, Essence of the Splendor of the Overwhelming Sound, Blossom of the Four Jewels, Light Beam of the Great Lightning, the One Who Sees Beyond Extremes and Has Transcended All Sensory Objects, Lofty Like the Mount Meru Summit, Gladdened with Supreme Joy, Light that Is Victorious through Undeified Forces, the One Who Cares for Beings and Has Attained the Far Shore of Definitive Meaning, the One Who Has Obtained the Unalterability of the Vajra, the One Beyond All Utterances, Speeches, and Sounds, the One Whose Voice Is More Majestic than Brahmā's, the One Who Overcomes Fears with Well-Known Words, the One Who Has Accumulated All the Precious Roots of Virtue, and the bodhisattva-mahāsattva, Youthful Mañjuśrī.

In the afternoon, the venerable Śāradvatīputra, after arising from complete meditative absorption, approached the Bhagavān who at that time was sitting under another tree, absorbed in the samādhi known as 'the Accomplishment of Perfect Peace.' From far away, the venerable Śāradvatīputra saw the Bhagavān who was peaceful. He quickly gathered some grass and sat down mindfully to one side with his legs crossed and back straightened. [F.96.a] As soon as he sat there, thoughts arose in his mind, such as: "How marvelous are the Tathāgata's perfectly peaceful behavior, happiness, and bliss! Happy are the beings who realize that all phenomena naturally rest in the state of meditative absorption!"

The Bhagavān, perceiving and understanding this, emerged from his concentration and made the sound of clearing his throat. Hearing the Bhagavān clearing his throat, the venerable Śāradvatīputra became filled with joy and inspiration, and walked towards where the Bhagavān was sitting. As he

arrived in the Bhagavān's presence, he prostrated to him in amazement and uttered the following verses:

“In the way I accept that phenomena are empty,

Those who neither conceptualize beings

Nor ever conceptualize phenomena²³

Remain in the world in meditative absorption. [1]

Never ever looking at the confusion of beings

And considering phenomena to be just like space,

Happy are those who believe in the illusory nature

And do not hold the view of a self. [2]

Happy are those who do not fixate on any conception,

Such as ‘These are beings’ or ‘These are not beings,’

Who have no conception of any being

And do not hold the view of a being. [3]

Happy are those who are never attached to any conception of a substantial whole,

Who are always free from the deluded conception of a substantial thing,

Neither cause things to arise nor to remain,

And do not hold the view of existence. [4]

Happy are the wise ones who do not distinguish beings,

Do not contradict the *dharmadhātu*,

Eliminate all conceptions of a person,
And do not think in terms of distinctions. [5]

Happy are those who always abide in generosity and discipline,
Neither forming the concept of miserliness
Nor dwelling on the notion of accumulation,
And who remain free from moral conceit. [6] [F.96.b]

Happy are those who excel in the qualities of endurance and determination,²⁴
Are free from the notion of conflict,
Neither strive nor slack,
And who have no conception of patience. [7]

Happy are those who do not dwell on concentration and mental stability,²⁵
And yet do not indulge into distractions,
Who completely understand the teaching of equanimity,
And have no conception of concentration. [8]

Happy are those who are free from conception about anything,
Have no insight into anything and yet are not under the sway of ignorance,
Who are neither wise nor deluded,
And have no conception of insight. [9]

Happy are those who dwell in a city as if in wilderness,
Remaining in complete equanimity regarding conceptions of both,

And without denigrating the experience of the city

Are not attached to wilderness. [10]

Happy are those who engage in begging for alms as a householder²⁶

Without any conception of engaging in begging for alms,

And who, not entertaining thoughts such as ‘I am a mendicant,’

Have no conception of alms. [11]

Happy are those who pick up refuse-rags,

Put them on their body,

Do not think they have bad clothing²⁷

And who do not put down others. [12]

Happy are those who wear nothing but the three Dharma robes

Allowed by the Buddha and praised by the Tathāgata,

Yet do not think of themselves as fearless

And remain without pride. [13]

Happy are those who teach the supreme and noble teaching

In which there is neither self nor being,

Who do not even think of themselves as teachers

And have not become nonexistent. [14]

Happy are those who are free from conception regarding any virtue,

Do not conceive anything as an essence or a substance,²⁸

Do not think of anything as virtuous or non-virtuous

And who do not behave in a dualistic way. [15]

Happy are those who have no conception of standing as they stand,

No conception of sitting as they sit,

Who at all times cultivate diligence as they move about

And remain without mental elaboration. [16]

Happy are those who are free from the conceptions of abiding or non-abiding,

Do not conceive of some particular understanding as the state of peace, [F.97a]

Make no distinctions between the Tathāgata and the Tīrthikas,

And who are not attached to the supreme. [17]

Happy are those for whom there is neither number nor enumeration,

Who do not dismiss the equality that is like the expanse of space,

Do not think of themselves and others as distinct,

And who have not attained any distinctive qualities. [18]

Happy are those who appear as an illusion and behave as if in a dream,

Resemble hallucinations but are not deluded,

Manifest in the worlds like reflections of the moon in water,

And who do not strive in any way. [19]

Happy are the beings who are wise and contemplate the ultimate,

Understand the absence of an essence of signs and conventions,

Realize that phenomena are utterly appeased

And who remain unbound by attributes. [20]

Thereupon, the Bhagavān congratulated the venerable Śāradvatīputra: “Śāradvatīputra, supreme is this teaching that engages in this way in the profound insight! This is excellent, excellent! Therefore, Śāradvatīputra, assemble all the monks and bodhisattvas abiding in complete meditative absorption in Gṛdhrakūṭa Mountain, as many as there may be.” Śāradvatīputra replied: “Bhagavān, I would prefer not to do so. Why? Because elephants are difficult to convince.” At that very moment, the Bhagavān emitted light rays from his body and summoned the bodhisattvas abiding in infinite world systems. They reached the place where the Bhagavān was residing on Gṛdhrakūṭa Mountain and remained in the sky. All the monks and bodhisattva-mahāsattvas who were abiding in meditative absorption arrived where the Bhagavān was residing, as did also hundreds of thousands of beings from the great city of Rājagṛha.

Then, the Bhagavān, knowing that all were present in the assembly, looked at the face of Youthful Mañjuśrī [F.97b] and smiled. At that moment, Youthful Mañjuśrī rose from his seat, draped his robe over one shoulder, and knelt on his right knee. He bowed in the direction of the Bhagavān with joined palms and asked him: “As the tathāgatas, the arhats, the perfectly enlightened buddhas, do not smile without causes and conditions, what are the causes for your smile, what are the conditions for it?” The Bhagavān replied to Youthful Mañjuśrī: “Mañjuśrī, ten thousand buddhas have expounded the Dharma discourse known as ‘Like the Strength of the Elephant’ on this Gṛdhrakūṭa Mountain.”

When the venerable Ānanda heard what the Bhagavān said, he swiftly rose from his seat, draped his robe over one shoulder, and knelt on his right knee. He bowed in the direction of the Bhagavān with joined palms and requested: “Bhagavān, it would be excellent if you could now teach me this Dharma discourse known as ‘Like the Strength of the Elephant.’ Sugata, it would be excellent if you could explain this to me. It is rare nowadays to hear a Dharma discourse that would cause you, Bhagavān, to smile upon seeing the face of Youthful Mañjuśrī. Such a Dharma discourse is marvelous. It manifests as profound and difficult to understand.” The Bhagavān answered: “Ānanda, indeed, you are skilled in the practice of discernment and your analysis is excellent, excellent. Therefore, Ānanda, listen very well and keep this in mind. I will explain it to you.” The venerable Ānanda acquiesced, “Excellent, Bhagavān,” and he listened as requested.

The Bhagavān made a sign to Youthful Mañjuśrī so that he enquired about this Dharma discourse. Mañjuśrī thought to himself: “Thus, I will ask the Tathāgata [F.98a], what is this discourse manifesting as profound and difficult to understand which is not within the realm of hearers, solitary realizers, or bodhisattvas who have fallen into conceptual attributes?” After Youthful Mañjuśrī had reflected upon this, he enquired: “If the Bhagavān is giving me this opportunity to present my queries so that they can be answered, then I will ask questions on various topics to the Bhagavān, the Tathāgata, the Arhat, the perfectly enlightened Buddha.” The Bhagavān replied: “Since everyone in this assembly has come together, Mañjuśrī, ask whatever you wish.”

Mañjuśrī asked: “Bhagavān, how do bodhisattvas accomplish all their activities while also abiding within all virtuous qualities? How do they both remain in all Buddha fields in the same way the moon is reflected in water and also fully ripen countless beings?” The Bhagavān replied: “Mañjuśrī, your concise and meaningful questions are excellent, excellent! Listen attentively to this detailed explanation I will give you and keep it in mind.” “Bhagavān, I will do so,” answered Youthful Mañjuśrī, and he listened as requested.

The Bhagavān spoke these words: “Mañjuśrī, if bodhisattvas possess six qualities, they both completely accomplish their activities and also abide within all virtuous qualities. What are these six? When bodhisattvas practice generosity, as givers, they give up all their possessions, yet do not regard themselves as having completely given up miserliness. They observe discipline, yet do not consider themselves as being beyond actions that result from inferior discipline. They possess patience and determination, yet do not regard themselves as being free from malicious thoughts. [F.98b] They cultivate diligence, yet do not exert themselves through the body and mind. They are skilled in concentration, complete liberation, samādhi, and all meditative absorptions, yet they do not remain in a one-pointed mental state. Their experience does not depart from insight, yet they regard themselves as not being fully liberated from transmigration. Mañjuśrī, if bodhisattvas possess these six qualities, while they completely accomplish their activities, they also abide within all virtuous qualities.

Mañjuśrī, if bodhisattvas possess another six qualities, they can accomplish their activities, while abiding at the same time within all virtuous qualities. What are these six? Bodhisattvas acquire the condition of a hell being while at the same time experiencing the qualities of the higher realms. They acquire the condition of an animal, while at the same time experiencing the great extent of human qualities. They embrace a birth in the lower castes, while at the same time experiencing the pleasures of a *cakravartin*'s kingdom. They manifest within all forms of existence while at the same time

experiencing a particular form of existence. They excel in going to all Buddha-fields, while at the same time they do not move from their location; they neither come nor go, and yet appear in all Buddha-fields in the way the moon is reflected in water. They speak all languages yet do not mix them up. Mañjuśrī, if bodhisattvas possess these six qualities, they completely accomplish their activities and also abide within all virtuous qualities.”

Youthful Mañjuśrī enquired: “Bhagavān, how do bodhisattvas acquire the condition of a hell being while at the same time experiencing the qualities of the higher realms?” The Bhagavān replied: [F.99a] “Mañjuśrī, bodhisattva-mahāsattvas acquire the condition of a hell being by entering the samādhi known as ‘Great Lotus’ while at the same time experiencing all the joys of the gods, including the most subtle of them. For their part, hell beings perceive these bodhisattvas as hell beings because they are themselves hell beings. Through this appearance, bodhisattvas expound the Dharma to those who have become hell beings²⁹. They completely liberate many thousands of beings from the hells. Thus, Mañjuśrī, bodhisattvas acquire the condition of a hell being while at the same time experiencing the conditions of the higher realms.”

Mañjuśrī asked: “Bhagavān, how do bodhisattvas assume the state of an animal, while at the same time experiencing the great extent of human qualities?” The Bhagavān replied: “Mañjuśrī, bodhisattvas obtain the state of an animal by entering the samādhi known as ‘Settling in Complete Peace,’ and without experiencing any impairment to their mental faculties, they experience the great extent of human qualities. Through this appearance, they explain the Dharma to beings who have become animals and so establish many thousands of beings in the Dharma. Thus, Mañjuśrī, bodhisattvas experience the condition of an animal while at the same time experiencing the great extent of human qualities.”

Mañjuśrī requested: “Bhagavān, how do bodhisattvas embrace a birth in the lower castes, while at the same time experiencing the pleasures of a *cakravartin*’s kingdom?” The Bhagavān replied: “Mañjuśrī, in order to do this, bodhisattvas enter the samādhi known as ‘Subduing and Illuminating.’ By means of this samādhi, which is conquering and illuminating, they embrace a birth in the lower castes, while at the same time experiencing the pleasures of a *cakravartin*’s kingdom. [F.99b] Through these skillful means, they establish many thousands of beings in the Dharma. Thus, Mañjuśrī, bodhisattvas embrace a birth in the lower castes, while at the same time experiencing the happiness of a *cakravartin*’s kingdom.”

Mañjuśrī enquired: “Bhagavān, how do bodhisattvas both manifest within all forms of existence and also experience the activities of one specific realm?” The Bhagavān replied: “Mañjuśrī, in order to do this, they enter the samādhi known as ‘Particular Display Illuminating the Abandonment of All Activities.’ Abiding in that samādhi, they both manifest within all forms of existence and also experience the activities of one specific realm. Thus, Mañjuśrī, bodhisattvas manifest within all forms of existence while experiencing a particular realm of existence.”

Mañjuśrī asked: “Bhagavān, how do bodhisattvas excel in going to all Buddha-fields while at the same time not moving from their location? Although they neither come nor go, how do they appear in all Buddha-fields in the same way the moon is reflected in water?” The Bhagavān replied: “Mañjuśrī, with respect to this, bodhisattvas enter the samādhi known as ‘Conquering All Forms.’ Then, abiding in that samādhi, they at once manifest their bodies throughout the world systems of the ten directions, without moving from their location, without going or coming. By remaining in equanimity, they see the Buddha, the Bhagavān, and hear the Dharma. Thus, Mañjuśrī, bodhisattvas excel in being reborn in all Buddha-fields while at the same time not moving from their location; they neither come nor go, and yet they appear in all Buddha-fields in the same way the moon is reflected in water.”

Mañjuśrī then asked: “Bhagavān, how can bodhisattvas speak all kinds of languages [F.100a] and yet not mix them up?” The Bhagavān replied: “Mañjuśrī, bodhisattvas possess the *dhāraṇī* known as ‘Infinite Recitation.’ As a result of that, they can engage with the infinite thoughts of the minds of beings, understand infinite languages, and comprehend infinite individual ways of being. By possessing this *dhāraṇī*, they both speak all languages and also do not mix them up. Thus, Mañjuśrī, bodhisattvas speak all languages and yet do not mix them up.”

Mañjuśrī requested: “Bhagavān, the bodhisattvas’ skillful means are difficult to manifest. However, Bhagavān, how should this Dharma discourse be understood by the bodhisattvas who wish to understand it?” The Bhagavān replied: “Mañjuśrī, those bodhisattvas who wish to understand this Dharma discourse should understand it to be like space.”

Mañjuśrī questioned, saying: “How is it like space, Bhagavān?” The Bhagavān replied: “Mañjuśrī, it is as follows: space is not desirous, not angry, not ignorant. Likewise, no phenomenon is desirous, angry, or ignorant. It is as follows: space is not the excellence of generosity, and so forth, up to the excellence of wisdom. Likewise, no phenomenon is the excellence of generosity, and so forth, up to the

excellence of wisdom. It is as follows: space is not something to be realized, nor is it something to be abandoned. Likewise, no phenomenon is something to be realized or abandoned. It is as follows: space is not something to be cultivated, nor is it something to be actualized. Likewise, no phenomenon is something to be cultivated or actualized. [F.100b] It is as follows: space is not obscurity, nor is it light. Likewise, no phenomenon is obscurity or light. It is as follows: space is not something to be apprehended. Likewise, no phenomenon is something to be apprehended. It is as follows: one does not correctly engage in space, neither through the path nor through a bad path. Likewise, one does not correctly engage in all phenomena, neither through the path nor through a bad path. It is as follows: one does not correctly engage in space through the hearers' vehicle, the solitary realizers' vehicle, or the great vehicle. Likewise, one does not correctly engage in all phenomena through the hearers' vehicle, the solitary realizers' vehicle, or the great vehicle. It is as follows: space is not an agent reflecting or knowing. Likewise, no phenomenon is an agent reflecting or knowing. It is as follows: space is not an agent accepting or rejecting, nor is it an object to be accepted or rejected. Likewise, no phenomenon is an agent accepting or rejecting, or an object to be accepted or rejected. It is as follows: space cannot be defiled by anything whatsoever. Likewise, no phenomenon belonging to supreme nirvāṇa can be defiled in any possible way. Thus, it will neither be assuaged nor pacified. It is as follows: space is not an abode because it is not abiding, nor does it abide, waver, or vacillate. Likewise, bodhisattvas should regard each and every phenomenon as abiding in non-abiding. By perfectly achieving all this, bodhisattvas do not vacillate, waver, abide, or cause to abide.

[F.101a] Mañjuśrī, the nature of all phenomena is like this. Therefore, those who wish to see the Tathāgata hold a wrong view. Those who see this as wrong are correctly engaging in all phenomena. Being generous towards those who correctly engage in all phenomena ensures neither great result nor great benefit. Those from whom one can neither reap great result nor receive great benefit through generosity are worldly objects of generosity. For those who are worldly objects of generosity, there is no ripening result of generosity. Those for whom there is no ripening of generosity have completely accomplished the nonexistence of conception. Those who have completely accomplished the nonexistence of conception will quickly accept that all phenomena do not arise.”

As sixty very arrogant monks in this assembly heard this teaching, they thought by themselves: “This is the path of confusion. Even the Tathāgata teaches the path of confusion. It is as follows: some Tīrthikas also teach these words. Since the Tathāgata teaches these words too, his speech is comparable to those of some Tīrthikas, such as Kaśyapa, Maskari Gośāliputra, Ajita Keśakambalī, Sañjayi Vairattīputra, Kakuda Kātyāyana, and Nirgrantha Jñatiputra.”

The Bhagavān read the thoughts of these sixty very arrogant monks. He said to Youthful Mañjuśrī: “Thus, Mañjuśrī, if the Dharma I have expounded is comparable to what some Tīrthikas teach, then these Tīrthikas do not understand the Dharma taught by the Tathāgata.” After the Bhagavān had spoken these words, the arrogant monks became very distressed, depressed, displeased, and dejected. Still not understanding this exposition of the Dharma teaching, they rose from their seats and left. Then, the venerable Śāriputra said to these monks: “Venerable ones, where are you leaving to?” They answered: “[F.101b] Honorable Śāriputra, we do not need this exposition of the Dharma.” Śāriputra replied: “Venerable ones, you should know that this is the Tathāgata teaching with an intention. Therefore, stay for a while until you ask the Tathāgata what his intention was when he taught in these ways.”

After hearing the venerable Śāriputra’s words, the monks went back to their seats. At that point, the venerable Śāriputra requested: “Bhagavān, in order to clarify these monks’ doubts, I beseech you to explain what the intention of the Tathāgata was when he taught in these terms.” The Bhagavān replied: “Śāriputra, what do you think? Would monks whose minds are free from grasping and liberated from all defilements become frightened, scared, and terrified by these words?” Śāriputra answered: “No, they would not, Bhagavān. Monks who see the truth do not become frightened, scared, and terrified by any words. What need is there to mention those monks whose minds are free from grasping and liberated from all defilements?” The Bhagavān said: “In the present case, Śāriputra, because some foolish beings have conceptions of a teaching that is not true, they became and have remained very proud.”

Śāriputra supplicated: “I beseech the Bhagavān to expound a teaching that, upon hearing it, will remove the doubts of all those present in this assembly.”

The Bhagavān spoke these words: “Śāriputra, those who see the Tathāgata as a dream and an illusion see him truly. Those who truly see him do not conceive of the Tathāgata in terms of truth, essence, substance, real entity, or body. Those who do not conceive of the Tathāgata in terms of truth, essence, substance, real entity, or body, regard all conceptions as false [F.102a]. Those who see all conceptions as false understand every phenomenon as mistaken. All those who know every phenomenon as mistaken are taught by the Bhagavān that wrong views have come to an end. They also understand that all views are mistaken. Moreover, this is why some are referred to as holding a wrong view. Śāriputra, according to this discourse, those who wish to view the Tathāgata are referred to as holding a wrong view. Śāriputra, some view the Tathāgata’s body without distortion. Those who understand the

Tathāgata's body as mistaken have no conception of the Tathāgata. Śāriputra, those who know this as mistaken see the Tathāgata.”

Śāriputra asked: “Bhagavān, how do those who hold a wrong view correctly engage in all phenomena?” The Bhagavān replied: “Śāriputra, ordinary beings discriminate and conceptualize, examine and analyze, emerge and emerge thoroughly, rely and dwell, adopt and abandon; they embrace the view of a self, a being, a life, and a person, and cling to fixations such as ‘me’ or ‘mine.’ They conceive their conduct, knowledge, movements, and such mental elaborations according to these conceptions. They understand the nonexistent just in that way. Śāriputra, the word ‘nonexistent’ is a designation for that which is untrue. That which is untrue is a lie. The word ‘lie’ is a designation for that which is false. Thus, those who see how mistaken are those who cling to such wrong views are therefore said to ‘correctly engage.’ Śāriputra, according to this very explanation, those who see this as wrong correctly engage.”

Śāriputra asked: “Bhagavān, in what way do those who correctly engage neither reap great result nor receive great benefit when they are generous? [F.102b] The Bhagavān replied: “Śāriputra, for those who correctly engage through this approach, generosity is directed towards nirvāṇa; it leads and led to nirvāṇa; it will reach the ultimate nirvāṇa. However, nirvāṇa is neither a small nor a great result, neither a small nor a great benefit. Why? Because nirvāṇa, being free from all results, is not a designation and should not be designated.”

Śāriputra requested: “Well then, Bhagavān, in what way did the Tathāgata teach unique virtues of infinite virtuous qualities with respect to the nirvāṇa which does not exist as a designation?”

The Bhagavān replied: “Śāriputra, the Tathāgata taught unique virtues of infinite virtuous qualities with respect to nirvāṇa, though it does not exist as something to be designated, in order to inspire sentient beings who experience birth and assert identity, beings, existence, or persons. However, Śāriputra, one should not consider spiritually advanced persons as those who engage in generosity but as those who are free from attachment and who turn away from generosity. Śāriputra, it is as follows: for example, farmers plant barley seeds in a field. Then, from the barley itself, chaff, straw, and leaves are produced. In that case, Śāriputra, do you think that chaff, straw, and leaves are the fruit produced by the actions of those farmers?” Śāriputra replied: “No, Bhagavān, I do not.” The Bhagavān said: “Śāriputra, it is as follows: merely on account of the barley, namely, those barley seeds planted by the

farmers, chaff, straw, and leaves will be produced, as well as more barley grain. Likewise, when noble beings practice generosity, great wealth comes to them with little difficulty. In addition, all fruits resulting from craving for the exhaustion of afflictions desiccate. [F.103a] It is as follows: for example, those who want barley consider that chaff, straw, and leaves are not the fruit of these barley seeds or the grain produced by these barley seeds. As a consequence, they are neither pleased by the chaff nor rejoice in the straw and leaves. Likewise, it should not be taught that [the result of] practicing generosity in the field of the unconditioned is a result that is conditioned. Śāriputra, according to this discourse, the result of generosity is not great for those who have correctly engaged.”

Śāriputra requested: “Bhagavān, how can those be objects of veneration in the world when one neither reaps great result nor receive great benefit when something is given to them?” The Bhagavān replied: “Śāriputra, generosity will not arise in those who do not conceive result as great or small. Those for whom generosity will not arise will become worthy objects of veneration, including in the realms of the gods. In that case, Śāriputra, the practice of generosity in the inexhaustible field of generosity neither becomes a flower nor turns into a fruit. Śāriputra, according to this discourse, those for whom there is neither a great result nor a great benefit when they are generous are worthy objects of veneration.”

Śāriputra requested: “Bhagavān, why does generosity not ripen for those who are worthy objects of veneration?” The Bhagavān replied: “What do you think, Śāriputra? Is the generosity that culminates as nirvāṇa a matter of full ripening?” Śāriputra replied: “No, Bhagavān, it is not. Bhagavān, if the generosity that culminates as nirvāṇa was a matter of ripening, sublime beings would not be distinguished in terms of the unconditioned.” The Bhagavān declared: “Excellent, Śāriputra, excellent. According to this discourse, for those who are worthy objects of veneration, generosity does not entail ripening.”

Śāriputra asked: “Bhagavān, how have those for whom generosity does not ripen completely accomplished the absence of conception?” [F.103b] The Bhagavān replied: “What do you think, Śāriputra? Do those who know the very nature of all phenomena exist? Or else, do they not exist?” Śāriputra replied: “Bhagavān, those who understand the very nature of all phenomena understand the very nature of illusions. Bhagavān, this nature is nonexistent. It is not existent. Why? Bhagavān, you taught that all phenomena have the very nature of illusions. That which is like an illusion is nonexistent. Those who understand the very nature of all phenomena have no conceptions. Why? Because nothing, no actual phenomenon whatsoever, is perceived with respect to them.” The

Bhagavān said: “Excellent, Śāriputra, excellent. It is just like that. Śāriputra, if some phenomena were substantially or actually existent, sentient beings would not even in the future attain nirvāṇa. Śāriputra, since all phenomena are neither actual, nor existent or substantial, therefore sentient beings as numerous as the grains of sand in the river Ganges have attained nirvāṇa. Yet, because sentient beings do not exist, nothing whatsoever manifests from them as the exhaustion of defilements. Thus, Śāriputra, whoever neither fixates on the conception of the nonexistence of all sentient beings nor on sentient beings completely realizes the nonexistence of conceptions. Śāriputra, according to this discourse, those for whom there is no ripening of generosity have completely realized the nonexistence of conceptions.”

Śāriputra asked: “Bhagavān, how will they quickly accept the nonarising of all phenomena through this conception of having completely accomplished the nonexistence of conceptions?” The Bhagavān replied: “Śāriputra, those who have actually realized nonexistence understand. But what is nonexistence? That which is called ‘nonexistent’ is the view of a self, or of sentient beings, lives, persons, as well as nihilism or eternalism. That which is called ‘nonexistent’ is the conception of Buddha, or of Dharma, Saṅgha, or nirvāṇa. [F. 104a] No matter how much one mentally applies oneself, practices, understands, acts or conceptually fabricates, all this is nonexistent. Therefore, Śāriputra, those who are completely free from such incorrect reifications understand. Śāriputra, according to this discourse, those who have completely accomplished the nonexistence of conceptions will quickly accept that all phenomena do not arise.”

As the Bhagavān expounded this teaching with a distinct purpose, forty-two thousand bodhisattvas accepted that all phenomena do not arise. Six thousand male lay vow holders gave rise to the unsurpassable, truly perfect thought of awakening. Thirty-six thousand sons of the gods manifested the realization of wisdom. As for the sixty very arrogant monks, their minds became free from defilements, devoid of grasping.

With a mind free from defilements, these sixty arrogant monks spoke the following words in unison: “Bhagavān, from this day forth, we become renunciants following the six teachers. From this day forth, our teacher is not the Buddha and we rely neither on Dharma nor on Saṅgha. From this day forth, we are proponents of the nonexistence of action, causation, karma, maturation, and discipline.”

At that moment, several thousand beings in the assembly thought to themselves: “These monks have thus become proponents of such non-truths. Now, will they not give back the precepts they received from the Bhagavān and uphold the behavior of the Tīrthikas?”

The venerable Śāriputra clairvoyantly understood what those beings in the retinue were thinking. Therefore, he asked the monks: “Venerable ones, what was your intention when you said ‘From this day forth, we become renunciants following the six teachers’?” The monks answered: “Venerable Śāriputra, from this day forth, we perceive all our teachers as identical to the six teachers, as being of a single character, without any difference. [F.104b] Perceiving all teachers as undifferentiated, we are renunciants following renunciants without conceptualizing.”

Śāriputra said: “What was your intention when you said, ‘From this day forth, our teacher is no longer the Buddha’?” They said: “From this day forth, we will rely on ourselves, but not on others. We will take refuge in ourselves, but not in others. We are our own teacher, but none other is. Therefore, from this day forth, our teacher is no longer the Buddha. Why? Aside from oneself, there is no Buddha. Aside from a Buddha, there is no self.”

Śāriputra asked: “What was your intention when you said, ‘From this day forth, we rely neither on Dharma nor on Saṅgha’?” They answered: “From this day forth, we do not perceive any phenomenon whatsoever that anyone should rely upon or accompany. Therefore, from this day forth, we rely neither on Dharma nor on Saṅgha.”

Śāriputra asked: “What was your intention when you said, ‘From this day forth, we will assert the nonexistence of action’?” They answered: “From this day forth, we know all phenomena to be unproduced. We have realized that phenomenon which neither includes the result of production nor change. Therefore, from this day forth, we are proponents of the nonexistence of action.”

Śāriputra asked: “What was your intention when you said, ‘From this day forth, we are proponents of the nonexistence of causation’?” They answered: “For us, the cause of birth in all destinies of cyclic existence has come to an end today. We have realized that phenomenon which neither includes causes nor conditions. Therefore, from this day forth, we are proponents of the nonexistence of causation.”

Śāriputra asked: “What was your intention when you said, ‘From this day forth, we are proponents of the nonexistence of maturation’?” They answered: “From this day forth, we perfectly understand that all phenomena which neither include karma nor karmic maturation are completely beyond suffering. Therefore, from this day forth, we are proponents of the nonexistence of karmic maturation.”

Śāriputra asked: “Venerable ones, what was your intention when you said, ‘From this day forth, we are proponents of the nonexistence of discipline’?” [F.105a] They answered: “Venerable Śāriputra, from this day on, we perfectly understand the fact that there is neither discipline, nor discourse on it, nor non-discipline, and that all phenomena are completely disciplined. Therefore, from this day forth, we are proponents of the nonexistence of discipline.”

Upon hearing this teaching revealing the supreme arrogance of these monks, three thousand six hundred other monks obtained a mind that was free from defilements, devoid of grasping. The Bhagavān said to them: “Excellent! Monks, that which is free from the realization of any phenomenon is the attainment of truth. That is excellent, excellent.”

Then, Youthful Mañjuśrī spoke in these words: “Bhagavān, which phenomenon is denominated by that realization known as ‘realization of realization’?” The Bhagavān replied: “Mañjuśrī, that which is called ‘realization of realization’ is a designation for the acceptance that all phenomena do not arise.” Mañjuśrī asked: “How should those bodhisattvas, who seek to attain the acceptance that all phenomena do not arise, train, practice, and engage in yoga?” At that time the Bhagavān uttered the following verses in order to explain to Youthful Mañjuśrī the training for accepting that all phenomena do not arise:

“Those who wish to obtain the wisdom of Buddha,

The supreme omniscience,

Should neither take up

Nor cast away any phenomenon. [1]

No phenomena at all can be found

That come into being,

Yet childish people accept these phenomena as arising,

Although they are devoid of arising. [2]

When it is taught to beings that phenomena

Are to be known and rejected,

Childish people who experience arising

Will not arouse faith in nonarising. [3]

Having abandoned the noble path to awakening

As well as its attributes,

Childish people cling to duality

And do not understand nonduality. [4]

In myriad illusions,

Childish people perceive distinctions [105b]

Where there are none,

For all these illusions are of a single character. [5]

Since those who are called 'ordinary beings'

And the skillful buddhas of the world systems

Are not two, they are not separable into two,

And as illusions, are identical. [6]

Some childish people say,

‘One day our attachment will end,
And our hatred and ignorance will be pacified;
One day there will be no afflictions.’ [7]

For those who have taught emptiness
In order to dismantle the attachment and hatred
That conceptualize the nonexistent as existent,
Their exhaustion is nirvāṇa. [8]

Nirvāṇa is perfectly taught
As being without cessation or arising.
Yet far from my teaching are those
Who strive for the unceasing or the nonarisen. [9]

Those who delight in conceptions
Of generosity, moral conduct, and awakening
Remain within the sphere of conceptual attributes,
And therefore do not realize my awakening. [10]

Childish people deluded by the nonexistent
Do not realize that phenomena are hollow,
And thus establish distinctions
Regarding phenomena that are of a single character. [11]

Awakening is not difficult to attain

For those who know this phenomenon
Inherently without an essential characteristic,
Like a hand that is nothing but five fingers. [12]

Awakening is far from no one,
Awakening is close to no one.
But far from awakening are those
Who dwell in inquiring and discursive thought. [13]

Since childish people denigrate each other
When they get involved with one another,
They lack discipline.
Those who lack discipline are not tamed. [14]

Phenomena are like dreams
And all conditioned things are untrue.
Considering arising as an illusion,
Wise ones do not grasp them as something substantial. [15]

In truth, they have no discipline,
And yet, they truly do not have a lack of discipline.
Since phenomena arise in dependence on conditions,
Phenomena do not have a self. [16]

Throughout a million eons,

The guide diligently practiced generosity

And maintained supreme and stainless discipline.

Yet he did not teach a self. [17]

It is taught that awakening has been attained

When one is free from any conception about oneself,

And all conceptions of generosity

As well as discursive thought have been abandoned. [18]

It is taught that through generosity one will be wealthy, [F.106a]

And through discipline one will be reborn in the higher realms.

However, in which there is nothing to be perceived

Is the unsurpassable awakening. [19]

Childish people fixate on their perceptions:

‘I have attained the acceptance that phenomena

Do not arise and are not conditioned.’

Such is the way childish people think. [20]

Yet, even if they strive for a billion eons,

This acceptance is difficult to attain

For those who believe that those phenomena,

Devoid of arising, do arise. [21]

Phenomena are designated with names,

But phenomena are beyond production.

Devoid of root and abode,

They all have the character of space. [22]

Although myriad buddhas indeed expounded

The supremely pure Dharma

For abandoning attachment and hatred,

The exhaustion of phenomena still does not come into being. [23]

If these phenomena were true,

They could truly exhaust.

But since they are not true,

No end to phenomena can ever be attained. [24]

Endless are attachment and hatred,

And so too is delusion.

Devoid of a root are those

Which are devoid of an end. [25]

If there are neither seeds nor sprouts,

How could leaves and fruits originate?

Thus, so too, that which has no leaves,

Has no flowers. [26]

Within the nonarising of phenomena,

The seeds of sentient beings cannot be found.

Since there are no seeds of sentient beings,

There is no arising and no nirvāṇa. [27]

A barren woman

Has no child.

Thus, if she has no child,

She is free from sorrow regarding this child! [28]

Likewise, those wandering in saṃsāra

Who realize and understand

That all phenomena are devoid of arising

Are free from fear of suffering. [29]

Childish people are deluded by nonexistence

And therefore do not recognize the nature of phenomena.

Encumbered by space as if it was a burden,

Weary will be those who lack discernment! [30]

But free from sorrow

Are those who know phenomena

As nonexistent, endless,

Innumerable, and measureless. [31]

I have taught that all limits in the sense of a beginning

Or an ending are nonexistent.

Likewise, all limits such as an ending

Or a middle are of a single character. [32]

Limits resulting from conceptual thought are devoid of limit.

Thus, limits are fictitious and nonexistent.

If all things have been understood in this way,

There will not be two separate entities. [33] [F.106b]

Because limits have the characteristic of space,

Limits of beings are inconceivable.

Because limits are like hallucinations,

One does not realize wisdom. [34]

If one engages in discursive thought,

How will negativity come to end?

One will likewise come to think,

‘One day I will become a Buddha.’ [35]

Since buddhas are unborn,

For them there is no arising.

And yet, childish people accept phenomena

That do not arise, as arising. [36]

One cannot take space as a support,

Abide, or settle in space.

Space is without abiding,

Obstruction, or substance. [37]

Just as space is not a substantial thing,

So too should awakening be understood.

Just as awakening should be understood,

So too should sentient beings be understood. [38]

Identical are the expanse of space,

The awakening, and the realms of beings.

For those who know these to be equal,

Awakening is easy to attain. [39]

For those who neither strive for awakening

Nor direct their mind in the appropriate way,

Nor analyze phenomena,

Awakening is easy to attain. [40]

Awakening cannot be analyzed.

However much one analyzes,

No one can realize the unsurpassable awakening

Through the achievements of mind. [41]

As one thinks that awakening is attained through generosity,

There is no attainment of awakening

In terms of this thought of generosity or the thought of anything at all.

Nonattainment is supreme awakening! [42]

Those who are fixated on having a disciplined mind,

Who think of diligence as truth itself

And engage in conceptions,

Do not practice my teaching. [43]

I have given instructions about the practice

Of all phenomena beyond practice.

That which is free from the slightest undertaking

Is the unsurpassable practice. [44]

They erroneously think,

Those who entertain conceptions such as

‘These phenomena are without outflows’

Or ‘Those phenomena are with outflows.’ [45]

But unsurpassed is the insight of those

Who regard phenomena beyond conceptual thought

As being similar to space,

And who are neither bound nor liberated. [46]

Conceiving anyone as endowed with

Or lacking discipline

Are both explained as inferior discipline. [F.107a]

That which is nondual is supreme discipline. [47]

Thus, those who perceive and understand phenomena

As not to be distinguished,

Without particularity or an essential characteristic,

Hold my teaching. [48]

Those whose mind is like space

Go in a direction without attachment.

Likewise, perfect is the virtuous endeavour

Of those free from attachment to wisdom. [49]

Easy to attain is awakening

For those who do not analyze in the slightest,

And are completely free from volitions

As well as ideas of sentient beings or phenomena. [50]

Easy to acquire is awakening

For those who do not dwell within the boundaries of attachment,

And are neither free from attachment

Nor subdue attachment. [51]

Easy to attain is awakening

For those who during eons do not lose courage,

And neither come to fear extremes,

Nor dread saṃsāra. [52]

After the Bhagavān had uttered these verses, he spoke these words to Youthful Mañjuśrī: “Mañjuśrī, twenty laudable qualities will certainly be possessed by those who have faith in this Dharma discourse, do not doubt it, do not question it, transmit it, memorize it, recite it, accomplish it, and further, correctly teach it in detail to others. What are these twenty qualities? [1] They will be protected by the gods, [2] the nāgas, [3] and the yakṣas; [4] their minds will remain undistracted; [5] they will recall their former lives after they are reborn; [6] they will obtain the five clairvoyances; [7] they will immediately see the bodhisattva Maitreya when they die; [8] thus, if they keep this Dharma discourse in mind without any distraction and also eliminate indolence, they will certainly see the Buddha and bodhisattvas in their dreams; [9] if they have faith in this Dharma discourse, they will certainly accept that phenomena are in complete harmony with it; [10] if they contemplate this Dharma discourse, they will certainly be free from malicious thoughts in this very life; [11] even if they come into contact with swift-acting venom, they will certainly be free from fear, provided that they keep this Dharma discourse in mind; [12] furthermore, they will certainly put an end to all opposition [F.107b]. [13] They will certainly also attain the all-illuminating samādhi; [14] as they directly understand this Dharma discourse, they will certainly purify all karmic obscurations; [15] if they, moreover, explain this Dharma discourse, they will certainly reach countless Dharma gates; [16] they will also certainly remember the thought of awakening and possess the *dhāraṇī* ‘Infinite Recitation;’ [17] furthermore, if they keep in mind this Dharma discourse, they will certainly not be encircled by māras; [18] they will also certainly be reborn in the presence of the Buddha; [19] all their prayers will certainly be accomplished; [20] they will certainly be protected from all species of venomous beings, including those without legs, and those with two, four, or more legs.

Hence, they will certainly be free from fears that upset human kings. Mañjuśrī, Dharma teachers who do not doubt this Dharma discourse, and who do not question it, but memorize it, hold it, recite it, accomplish it, and further, correctly teach it in detail to others will certainly possess these twenty laudable qualities.

Youthful Mañjuśrī then spoke these words: “Bhagavān, it is as follows: for example, medicinal trees pacify all the diseases of beings. Likewise, this Dharma discourse should also be regarded as

completely pacifying all diseases.” The Bhagavān replied: “It is like that, Mañjuśrī, it is like that. Your words are well spoken. This Dharma discourse completely pacifies all diseases. Why? Mañjuśrī, countless eons in the past, a tathāgata, an arhat, a perfectly enlightened Buddha called Walking Like a Lion appeared in the world. [F 108a] From afar, he expounded this Dharma discourse to myriad beings. At that time, he summoned and included in his retinue a bodhisattva called Victory Banner of the Vajra who heard this Dharma discourse from this tathāgata. Then, with a mind free from distraction, doubt, or disbelief, he accepted that this Dharma discourse was related to the twenty laudable qualities and became accomplished in this. He came to possess the power of faith. He travelled to towns, villages, valleys, lands, provinces, and royal palaces where he proclaimed himself as a healer. Following this, thousands of beings tormented by various diseases swiftly arrived where the bodhisattva Victory Banner of the Vajra was staying to save their lives. The bodhisattva, with a mind abiding in the power of faith, offered them this Dharma scripture. Mantras of knowledge that arose from this Dharma discourse protected, saved, and aided them.

Mañjuśrī, what is the utterance of this particular mantra of knowledge?

Tadyathā alata vitāla vibhrina atirtha abhrida anuḍa vibramha nahikhagarunga māyāsukha ānanda jālada nadamitra amitra jotrahita sarvadatrāla aṃgamaṃga arthayuta sabrāmāyīśa.

The utterance of this mantra of knowledge protected these beings. On account of this, beings intensely tormented by various diseases were fully freed from all their afflictions, whether they had ingested poison, were harmed by non-humans, possessed by any noxious type of beings, consumed by a disease, afflicted by leprosy, or struck by a sickness related to wind, bile, or phlegm. Thus, Mañjuśrī, the bodhisattva Victory Banner of the Vajra, abiding in this Dharma discourse, [F.108b] fully freed these beings from disease. What do you think, Mañjuśrī? If you think I was somebody other than the bodhisattva called Victory Banner of the Vajra at that time, in that life, you should abandon this view. Why? Because at that time, in that life, I myself was the bodhisattva called Victory Banner of the Vajra. I had faith in this Dharma discourse and acted for the sake of these very beings. According to this discourse, Mañjuśrī, you should understand in this way. Regard this Dharma discourse as the essence of all medicines.”

Mañjuśrī asked: “Bhagavān, how should bodhisattvas who memorize, keep, and realize the words of this mantra of knowledge practice?” The Bhagavān answered: “Mañjuśrī, bodhisattvas who recite this

mantra of knowledge should practice cleanliness and should not eat meat. They should not anoint their feet and engage in distractions. They should again and again arouse feelings of kindness toward all sentient beings. They should not resent those who happen to hurt them. Furthermore, they should not chant this Dharma discourse without being very clean. Neither should they put it in a filthy place.”

Mañjuśrī said: “Bhagavān, it seems to me that bodhisattvas who teach this Dharma discourse should not even look after their own body and life.” The Bhagavān replied: “Mañjuśrī, it is like that. It is just how you said it is.”

Then, the Bhagavān spoke to the venerable Ānanda: “Because this Dharma discourse will benefit many beings, Ānanda, you should remember it. Ānanda, beings who yearn for this Dharma discourse will be subdued by the strength of the bull and the strength of the elephant. Ānanda, [F.109a] those who arouse faith in this Dharma discourse will walk like a lion, like a bull. Ānanda, this Dharma discourse delights bodhisattvas and makes them appear. After I have passed away, it will come into the hands of bodhisattvas, into their scriptures, and treasuries. It will not come into the hands, scriptures, or chests of outcast bodhisattvas.”

The venerable Ānanda then promised: “Bhagavān, I will hold this Dharma discourse according to the way explained by the Tathāgata.” The Bhagavān replied: “Excellent, Ānanda. It is excellent that you will commit yourself to teaching this Dharma discourse, just as you have received it, to the beings for whom it was given.” After the Bhagavān had spoken these words, the venerable Ānanda, the venerable Śāriputra, Youthful Mañjuśrī, and the worlds of the gods, humans, demi-gods, and gandharvas rejoiced and praised the Bhagavān’s words.

This completes the Sūtra on the Strength of the Elephant.

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Transliteration Table (included also in the glossary)

Gyaltsan Sangpo = *rgyal mtshan bzang po*

Paljor Lhündrub = *dpal 'byor lhun 'grub*

Shönnu Lodrö = *gzhon nu lo 'gros*

Sönam Senge = *bzod nams seng+ge*

Kunga Rinchen = *kun dga' rin chen*

Rongtön Shakya Gyaltsan = *rong ston shAkya rgyal mtshan*

Sheja Kunrig = *shes bya kun rig*

Endnotes

¹ See f.108b.

² Transl. in Conze 1975: 438ff.

³ Transl. in Boucher 2009: 57. On the *dhutaḡaṇa*, see Ray 1994: 295 ff.

⁴ Boucher 2009: 57.

⁵ Ibid.: 56.

⁶ Ibid.: 58.

⁷ Ibid.: 59.

⁸ Chen 2012: 273-276.

⁹ Wuxiwang jing 無希望經 (T.813), translated by Dharmarakṣa, and Xiangye jing 象腋經 (T.814), translated by Dharmamitra.

¹⁰ Apple 2014: 41.

¹¹ Liu and Chen 2014: 295ff.

¹² Ibid.: 309.

¹³ The passage in the *Bodhisattvayogācāracatuḡāṣṭakaṭīkā* reads: *de bzhin du 'phags pa glang po'i rtsal gyi mdo las / gal te chos rnams rang bzhin yod 'gyur na / rgyal ba nyan thos bcas pas de mkhyen 'gyur / ther zug chos ni mya ngan 'da' mi 'gyur / mkhas rnams nam yang spros dang bral mi 'gyur / zhes gsungs so.* (sde dge, dbu ma, ya, 224b).

¹⁴ Liu and Chen 2014: 293f.

¹⁵ Ibid.: 302.

¹⁶ Ibid.: 304.

¹⁷ Ibid.: 306f.

¹⁸ Ibid.: 305f.

¹⁹ Ibid.: 303, n.17.

²⁰ Ibid.: 303.

²¹ Ibid.: 308.

²² The stog edition reads *mngon par grags pa* instead of *mngon par grags pas mngon par grags pa*.

²³ The verse has ten syllables instead of nine: *chos la'ang nams kyang rtog par mi byed pa*. Instead, we read: *chos la nam yang rtog par mi byed pa*.

²⁴ In this stanza, the sde dge edition seems to read *nges pa'i yon tan* and *thab mo dag*, while the stog edition reads *des pa'i yon tan* and *thal mo dag*. The latter is a translation of *añjali*, thus the understanding of “supplication.”

²⁵ The sde dge edition reads *brtan pa mi gnas*, while the stog edition reads *brtan par mi gnas*.

²⁶ The somewhat obscure phrase *gang dag bsod snyoms khyim dang bcas par spyod* has been translated with “engage in begging for alms as a householder.”

²⁷ The sde dge edition reads: *blangs nas bdag gis lus la 'chad par byed / bdag ni gos ngan snyam du de mi sems*, the stog edition reads: *blangs nas lus la 'chang bar byed pa dag / bdag ni gos ngan snyam du de mi shes*.

²⁸ The sde dge edition reads: *snying po med pa rjes su 'du shes med*, the stog edition reads *snying po dang ni rdzas su 'du shes med*.

²⁹ *de cha lugs des sems can dmyal ba pa'i sems can de dag dmyal ba dang bral bar gyur pa la chos 'chad*. Something is wrong in this sentence since *dmyal ba dang bral bar* and *gyur pa* seem to be misplaced. As it stands, this clause cannot be read in apposition to *sems can dmyal ba pa'i sems can de dag*. We read instead: *de cha lugs des sems can dmyal ba par gyur pa'i sems can de dag la chos 'chad*. We find a parallel construction in the following paragraph regarding beings born in the animal realm: *dud 'gror gyur pa'i sems can nams la chos 'chad* (see f.99a,5). The whole paragraph reads: “Without experiencing any impairment to their mental faculties, they enjoy the whole range of conditions of the human world. Through this form of manifestation, they explain the Dharma to beings who have become animals.”