

༄༅། །ཚུལ་ཁྲིམས་ཡང་དག་པར་ལྡན་པའི་མདོ།

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## The Sūtra on Having Moral Discipline

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*Śīlasamyuktasūtra*

· Toh 303 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 72 (mdo sde, pa), folios 127.a–127.b



Translated by the Kīrtimukha Translation Group  
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co.

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## SUMMARY

- s.1 At Prince Jeta's Grove in Śrāvastī, the Buddha teaches his saṅgha about the benefits of having moral discipline and the importance of guarding it. It is difficult, he says, to obtain a human life and encounter the teachings of a buddha, let alone to then take monastic vows and maintain moral discipline. But unlike just losing that one human life, which comes and then inevitably is gone, the consequences of failing in moral discipline are grave and experienced over billions of lifetimes. The Buddha continues in verse, praising moral discipline and its necessity as a foundation for engaging in the Dharma and attaining nirvāṇa. He concludes his discourse with a reflection on the folly of pursuing fleeting worldly enjoyments.

ac.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ac.1 This sūtra was translated by the Kīrtimukha Translation Group. Celso Wilkinson, Laura Goetz, and L.S. Summer translated the text from the Tibetan and Sanskrit. William Giddings provided comparisons to the Chinese versions of the text.

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

i.

## INTRODUCTION

i.1

*The Sūtra on Having Moral Discipline* is set in Prince Jeta's Grove in Śrāvastī, where the Buddha teaches his saṅgha of monks about the benefits of having moral discipline and the importance of guarding it. It is difficult, he says, to obtain a human life and encounter the teachings of a buddha, let alone to then take monastic vows and maintain moral discipline. But unlike just losing that one human life, which comes and then inevitably is gone, the consequences of failing in moral discipline are grave and experienced over billions of lifetimes. The Buddha continues in verse, praising moral discipline and its necessity as a foundation for engaging in the Dharma and attaining nirvāṇa. His teaching concludes with a reflection on the folly of pursuing fleeting worldly enjoyments.

i.2

It is noteworthy that this is not designated a Mahāyāna sūtra<sup>1</sup> and does not address any explicitly Mahāyāna subjects. The Buddha is only in the presence of monks, and he only instructs them on how to attain nirvāṇa and the higher realms, rather than buddhahood. As the Buddha is addressing the monastic congregation, it can be assumed that the topic of moral discipline here pertains to maintaining the vows of a fully ordained monk, and indeed he refers to taking monastic vows as if it were a given for his audience.

i.3

In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, this sūtra is included in liturgical texts used in connection with the practice of the Vinaya. It is also cited and quoted in texts related to the Vinaya, and several topical outlines (*sa bcad*) of the sūtra were composed by Tibetan authors. Additionally, there are Tibetan commentaries on the sūtra itself, two of which we have consulted for this translation: one by the Rimé master Thupten Chökyi Drakpa (*thub bstan chos kyi grags pa*, 1823–1905) and one by the Geluk master Losang Palden Tenzin Nyendrak (*blo bzang dpal ldan bstan 'dzin snyan grags*, 1866–1928). This sūtra is also, though less commonly, called *The Sūtra Praising Moral Discipline* (*tshul khrims rab bsngags kyi mdo*).<sup>2</sup>



- i.4 No information is given in the colophon as to the translator or editor of the Tibetan, nor is this sūtra found in any of the Tibetan imperial catalogs. In all, we know little about the history of the Tibetan translation.
- i.5 There was no known Sanskrit original of *Having Moral Discipline* available until recently, when a manuscript containing a collection of twenty sūtras was found in the Potala Palace in Lhasa. Bhikṣuṇī Vinītā published a critical edition and English translation of this collection in the series Sanskrit Texts from the Autonomous Region (2010). Unfortunately, due to the inaccessibility of the manuscript collection and because it is missing a final colophon, its origin and date are currently unknown.<sup>3</sup> There seems to be a thematic connection among these twenty sūtras: Vinītā notes that moral discipline (*śīla*) is a recurrent theme in the manuscript,<sup>4</sup> and we also can identify themes of karmic cause and effect and the hierarchy of merit.
- i.6 There are many details of the Tibetan versions that vary significantly from the Sanskrit manuscript, although the overall content is virtually the same. In the Sanskrit, the verses begin at the very start of the Buddha's teaching (1.3), whereas in the Tibetan the verse structure begins later (1.6). Where the verses do begin in the Tibetan, there are some differences in the grouping of lines, and at times the Sanskrit is wordier or contains entirely different content, although not enough to significantly alter the meaning of the sūtra. We have attempted to group the lines of verse into stanzas by theme rather than into regular quatrains, and though this results in a few stanzas with an irregular number of lines, it matches with the Sanskrit at enough points to seem like a reasonable choice.
- i.7 There is one Chinese translation (Taishō 1497) by Dānapāla (施護, b.?-d. 1017 CE). The Chinese translation is simply called *Śīlasūtra* (*The Sūtra on Moral Discipline*). This may be of interest as there are many texts called *Śīlasutta* in the Pali canon, but as far as we can tell none are similar enough in content for a clear relationship to be established. The Chinese text shows a significant degree of variation in the finer details as compared to both the Sanskrit and the Tibetan, but it shares the same basic structure and does not depart from the content found in the other texts.
- i.8 There are several other English translations of this sūtra available, which we have consulted for our translation. One by Thubten Kalzang Rinpoche, Bhikkhu Nagasena, and Bhikkhu Khantipalo was made in 1973 and published by the Library of Tibetan Works & Archives; another was made in 1985 by the Nālandā Translation Committee as part of *The Rites of Poṣadha*, the translation of a liturgical text incorporating the sūtra by the fourteenth Karmapa, Thekchok Dorje (*theg mchog rdo rje*).<sup>5</sup>

We have based our translation primarily on the Degé edition of the Tibetan Kangyur, but we also consulted the Sanskrit, Chinese, and other Kangyur editions in the case of questionable terms or passages to establish the most plausible and accurate readings of the text. Citations of the Sanskrit in the notes are given using Vinītā's emendations of the handwritten Potala manuscript. Any instance where we have diverged from the Degé has been noted, and any significant differences found in the various versions of the sūtra are recorded and explained in the notes.

## **The Sūtra on Having Moral Discipline**

1.

## The Translation

[F.127.a]

1.1 Homage to the Omniscient One!

1.2 Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was dwelling in Anāthapiṇḍada's park, Prince Jeta's Grove in Śrāvastī, together with a great saṅgha of 1,250 monks.

1.3 At that time, the Blessed One said to the monks, "Monks,<sup>6</sup> since your consciousness will fade, your life force will cease, and the formations of life are certain to be destroyed, should you not practice with diligence and steadfast determination?

1.4 "This human life is extremely difficult to find. Thus, having obtained it, and having used it to find the Victor's teachings and to go forth in them, if you are deceived by those who are opposed to the meaning of liberation, it is sure that you will suffer.

1.5 "Monks, it is easy to be separated from the life force and succumb to death, but the degeneration of moral discipline is not the same. Why is that?<sup>7</sup> When you are separated from the life force, that particular lifetime comes to an end. But with the degeneration and destruction of moral discipline, for ten million lives you will be separated from your kin, abandon well-being, and experience downfalls.<sup>8</sup>

1.6 "Therefore, the Teacher has praised moral discipline.<sup>9</sup>  
By having moral discipline one will encounter the presence of buddhas.

1.7 "Having moral discipline is the best of all ornaments.  
To acquire moral discipline is to be anointed with fragrance.  
Having moral discipline is the source of all joy.  
Having moral discipline is the water that clears away distress.<sup>10</sup> [F.127.b]

1.8 "Having moral discipline is praised by the whole world.<sup>11</sup>

- Through pure moral discipline one will find the highest states of existence.<sup>12</sup>  
Even beings like huge black poisonous nāga serpents, not to mention other  
kinds,  
Will do no harm to one with moral discipline.
- 1.9 “The monk with moral discipline is radiant.  
Those with moral discipline become renowned and obtain happiness.<sup>13</sup>  
Having moral discipline is the cause for going to higher realms.<sup>14</sup>  
Those who maintain moral discipline attain nirvāṇa.<sup>15</sup>
- 1.10 “Just as without eyes one cannot see forms,  
Without moral discipline one cannot see the Dharma.<sup>16</sup>  
Just as without legs there is no way to embark on a path,  
Without moral discipline there is no liberation.
- 1.11 “In the same way, just as a good vase<sup>17</sup> is a vessel for riches,  
Moral discipline<sup>18</sup> is the foundation for generating good qualities.  
Just as a broken vase is not a suitable vessel for riches,  
If moral discipline is shattered,<sup>19</sup> all good qualities are lost.<sup>20</sup>
- 1.12 “Do you think those who have lost moral discipline from the start  
Will obtain nirvāṇa later?  
For those whose nose and ear are cut off, and so forth,  
There is no need for mirrors.<sup>21</sup>
- 1.13 “Neither hearing with the ears nor seeing with the eyes,<sup>22</sup>  
The person who guards the teachings will travel to the higher realms.  
Those who are well learned and have protected their learning also reach the  
higher realms.<sup>23</sup>
- 1.14 “How can it be appropriate to resort to women?  
How can one delight in the palace of a king?  
How can a bubble have an essence?  
How can enjoyments endure eternally?<sup>24</sup>
- 1.15 “It is not appropriate to resort to women.  
Kingdoms are joyless.  
Bubbles are without an essence.  
Enjoyments are impermanent.
- 1.16 “Enjoyments are like swift-running water.  
Like a boat, such is a household.  
Like a flower, such is a body.  
Life is like froth on water.”<sup>25</sup>

- 1.17 When the Blessed One had spoken, the monks rejoiced and praised the words of the Blessed One.
- 1.18 *This concludes "The Sūtra on Having Moral Discipline."*

ab.

## ABBREVIATIONS

- C* Choné (*co ne*) Kangyur  
*Chinese* Tenth–eleventh century Chinese translation (Taishō 1497) by  
Dānapāla (施護)  
*D* Degé (*sde dge*) Kangyur  
*J* Lithang (*'jang sa tham*) Kangyur  
*K* Peking (*pe cin*) Kangxi Kangyur  
*K<sub>y</sub>* Peking Yongle (*g.yung lo*) Kangyur  
*N* Narthang (*snar thang*) Kangyur  
*S* Stok Palace (*stog pho brang bris ma*) Kangyur  
*Sanskrit* Sanskrit manuscript found in the Potala Palace (see [i.5](#))

n.

## NOTES

- n.1 The same is true of most of the other texts classified in the Degé and other Tshalpa Kangyurs in this later part of the General Sūtra section. According to the Degé Kangyur's catalog (*dkar chag*, vol. lakṣmī, folio 123.a), the General Sūtra (*mdo sde* or *mdo mang*) section is divided into 193 Mahāyāna sūtras (corresponding to Toh 94–286) and 73 "Hīnayāna" (*theg dman*) sūtras (Toh 287–359).
- n.2 See "tshul khriṃs rab bsngags kyi mdo" (1985). This title is also found referenced in Jamgön Kongtrül's *Treasury of Knowledge* (*shes bya kun khyab mdzod*), which says that it is to be recited during a confession ceremony (*gso sbyong*).
- n.3 Currently the manuscript is kept in the Potala. Vinītā's critical edition is based on a copy of the manuscript that is kept in the China Tibetology Research Center. For further details on the state of this manuscript, see Vinītā (2010), pp. xv–xvii.
- n.4 Vinītā (2010), pp. xxvii–xxix.
- n.5 Nālandā Translation Committee (2001). There seem to be a few differences, such as extra or missing lines of verse, in the source for Thekchok Dorje's Tibetan compared to the sources we have consulted, so the source for this Tibetan translation of the sūtra is not clear. See Thekchok Dorje (2013), pp. 20–23.
- n.6 Sanskrit begins the verses here and gives the three statements in reverse order.
- n.7 This line in Sanskrit (from "Monks") is "It is better to give up life, / better to succumb to death, / than that moral discipline should be abandoned. / Thus proclaimed the buddhas" (*varam te jīvitam tyaktam varam mṛtyuvaśaṃgatam | na*



*tvayā khaṇḍitam śīlam evaṃ buddhaiś ca varṇitam*). The Chinese has the same meaning but in prose. In Sanskrit, the section of verse begins here and proceeds through the rest of the text until the closing “the Blessed One had spoken” (1.17).

- n.8 Sanskrit omits “abandon well-being, and experience downfalls.”
- n.9 This line in the Sanskrit manuscript reads, “The one who abandons life / would separate from their kin” (*jīvitam tyajamānāya viyogo jñātibhir bhavet*).
- n.10 Sanskrit: “cool fluid water” (*śītodakam jalam*).
- n.11 Sanskrit: “It is moral discipline that pacifies” (*śīlam eva praśamnāti*).
- n.12 Sanskrit: “Moral discipline is the highest of the world” (*śīlam lokasya cottamam*).
- n.13 This line consists of two lines in Sanskrit: *śīlena labhate yaśaḥ | śīlena labhate saukhyaṃ*. Sanskrit then omits the final line of this verse (see [n.15](#)).
- n.14 This line absent in S.
- n.15 This line absent in Sanskrit and C, J, K, Y, N, and S.
- n.16 Sanskrit substitutes “truth” (*satya*) for “Dharma” (D: *chos*).
- n.17 Sanskrit adds “solid” (*sāraṃ*).
- n.18 Sanskrit adds “well-protected” (*surakṣitam*).
- n.19 Extrapolated by the Sanskrit *khaṇḍitam*; the Tibetan reads *ral ba* (“torn”).
- n.20 Lit. these good qualities will “arrive at (*gtugs*) [their end].” This is supported by the Sanskrit: *parihīyate* (“forsaken”).
- n.21 Thupten Chökyi Drakpa (folio 15.a) explains these two lines to mean (in paraphrase) that if one is, for example, missing a nose or has one’s nose destroyed by a sword, there is no need for mirrors to know this, and there is no use in wondering, “Am I beautiful?” (*dper na dang po nas byad bzhin mdzes byed kyi sna gtan nas med pa’am/ yod kyang mtshon sogs kyis bcad nas sna rdum du gyur pa la sogs pa de ’dra’i rigs gang yin pa de ni byad gzugs mdzes rtogs byed kyi me long dag gi dgos pa gtan nas med de/ e mdzes snyam pa’i re ba btsam yang byed rgyu med pa bzhin no*).
- n.22 Sanskrit gives two lines here (see [n.23](#)).

- n.23 “Reach” is added here for clarification and to match the sense of the Sanskrit. Thupten Chökyi Drakpa, folio 15.b, gives a short explanation of this passage and explains that this verse is meant to convey the sense that moral discipline is the cause for going to higher realms, and even though it is not conventionally witnessed that those who guard their moral discipline go to higher realms, it is known from scripture (*lung*) that going to higher realms is the definite result of maintaining moral discipline. Even with Thupten Chökyi Drakpa’s explanation, the intended meaning of this stanza is quite ambiguous, and there is a possibility that the verses have been corrupted. The Sanskrit reads quite differently and has, instead of this three-line verse, the following two stanzas: “Much is heard by the ear, much is seen by the eye. / Those who practice after hearing go to the higher realms. // The ear that is impaired does not obtain learning. / Those who practice after hearing go to the higher realms” (*bahu śrūyati śrotreṇa bahu paśyati cakṣuṣā | ye śrutoā pratipadyante narāḥ te svargagāmināḥ | | na hi śrotreṇa vaikalyaṃ prabhūtaṃ labhate śrutam | ye śrutoā pratipadyante te narāḥ svargagāmināḥ*).
- n.24 Like verse 1.16, this verse is also found in *The Sūtra on Four Points* (Toh 250, *Caturdharmaka*), folio 60.a, with only minor variation in the Tibetan translation.
- n.25 The Chinese reads this final verse slightly differently and adds a final unique remark not found in either the Tibetan or Sanskrit: “Forms and appearances are like flowers, there for a moment then changing into something else. Life is like a ripened fruit; it cannot last long. It is like a fast current carrying a boat away, or a like a rundown house one cannot stay in for long. Do you prefer to eat poison? Do not drink liquor. Do you prefer to enter a great fire? Do not indulge in the passions.” (色相如花須臾變異。壽如熟果不可久停。如急流渡船。如朽屋暫住。寧食毒藥不得飲酒。寧入大火不得嗜慾。) Like verse 1.14, this verse is also found in *The Sūtra on Four Points* (Toh 250, *Caturdharmaka*), folio 60.a, with only minor variation in the Tibetan translation.

b.

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## GLOSSARY

· Types of attestation for names and terms of the corresponding ·  
source language

AS	<i>Attested in source text</i> This term is attested in a manuscript used as a source for this translation.
AO	<i>Attested in other text</i> This term is attested in other manuscripts with a parallel or similar context.
AD	<i>Attested in dictionary</i> This term is attested in dictionaries matching Tibetan to the corresponding language.
AA	<i>Approximate attestation</i> The attestation of this name is approximate. It is based on other names where the relationship between the Tibetan and source language is attested in dictionaries or other manuscripts.
RP	<i>Reconstruction from Tibetan phonetic rendering</i> This term is a reconstruction based on the Tibetan phonetic rendering of the term.
RS	<i>Reconstruction from Tibetan semantic rendering</i> This term is a reconstruction based on the semantics of the Tibetan translation.
SU	<i>Source unspecified</i> This term has been supplied from an unspecified source, which most often is a widely trusted dictionary.

## g.1 Anāthapiṇḍada's Park

*mgon med zas sbyin gyi kun dga' ra ba*

མགོན་མེད་ཟས་སྦྱིན་གྱི་ཀུན་དགའ་ར་བ།

*anāthapiṇḍadasya ārāmaḥ*

A name of one of the first Buddhist monasteries, which is located outside of Śrāvastī. The monastery is also known as Prince Jeta's Grove.

Anāthapiṇḍada, a merchant and benefactor of the Buddha, bought the land from Prince Jeta and donated it to the saṅgha. It is said that both names are used to acknowledge their mutual efforts in building the monastery. It was there that the Buddha spent several rainy seasons and gave discourses that were later recorded as sūtras.

## g.2 determination

*brtson 'grus*

བརྩོན་འགྲུས།

*vīrya*

The Sanskrit term *vīrya* may be understood as “energy” or “vigor.” In Buddhist contexts the term implies having enthusiasm toward a virtuous endeavor, which includes taking joy in such virtuous endeavor, and it is considered an antidote to laziness. It is included in many different lists of positive attributes, and later in the Mahāyāna context it is included as the fourth of the six perfections (*ṣaṭpāramitā*).

## g.3 formations

*'du byed*

འདུ་བྱེད།

*saṃskāra*

The Sanskrit term *saṃskāra* varies according to context. It literally means something that “causes aggregation” or “causes to be put together.” In a general sense it refers to any phenomenon that comes into being on the basis of causes and conditions. In more specific usage it is also the term describing the fourth of the five aggregates and the second of the twelve links of dependent origination. Although both of these latter uses have their own technical contexts, in both cases the term carries a more active and volitional aspect and refers to the formative factors, mental volitions, and other supporting factors that perpetuate birth in saṃsāra.

## g.4 go forth

*rab tu byung ba*

རབ་ཏུ་བྱུང་བ།

*pravrajyā*

The Sanskrit *pravrajyā* literally means “to go forth,” with the sense of leaving the life of a householder and embracing the life of a renunciant. When the term is applied more technically, it refers to the act of becoming novice monk (*śrāmaṇera*; *dge tshul*) or nun (*śrāmaṇerikā*; *dge tshul ma*), this being a first stage leading to full ordination as a fully ordained monk or nun.

g.5 life force

*srog*

སྲོག

*jīvita*

The life force present in all beings. Often this life force is associated with the breath (*prāṇa*).

g.6 monk

*dge slong*

དགེ་སློང་།

*bhikṣu*

A fully ordained monk of the Buddhist Saṅgha. In the Tibetan tradition, which follows the Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya, a bhikṣu follows 253 vows as part of his moral discipline. A nun (*bhikṣunī*; *dge slong ma*) follows 364 rules. A novice monk (*śrāmaṇera*; *dge tshul*) or nun (*śrāmaṇerikā*; *dge tshul ma*) by contrast follows thirty-six rules of moral discipline (although in other vinaya traditions novices typically only follow ten).

g.7 moral discipline

*tshul khrims*

ཚུལ་ཁྲིམས།

*śīla*

Morally virtuous or disciplined conduct and the abandonment of morally undisciplined conduct of body, speech, and mind. The term is often used in reference to following precepts or rules according to one’s ordination or vows. It is foundational to Buddhist practice as one of the three trainings (*triśikṣā*). In the Mahāyāna, it is the second of the six perfections (*ṣaṭpāramitā*).

g.8 nāga

*klu*

ལུ།

*nāga*

A supernatural being usually depicted as having the top half of a human and the bottom half of a snake. However, the nāga has a myriad of associations within Buddhism and Indian traditions in general; the term may be associated with deities, snakes (more specifically cobras), elephants, subterranean spirits, water spirits, or ethnic groups of people from the Indian subcontinent. In Tibet they became specifically associated with water spirits (*klu*), and in China they came to be associated with dragons (龍).

g.9 Prince Jeta's Grove

*rgyal bu rgyal byed kyī tshal*

རྒྱལ་བུ་རྒྱལ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཚལ།

*jetavana*

One of the first Buddhist monasteries, it is located outside of Śrāvastī and is also known as Anāthapiṇḍada's Park. Anāthapiṇḍada, a merchant and benefactor of the Buddha, bought the land from Prince Jeta and donated it to the saṅgha. It is said that both names are mentioned to acknowledge their mutual efforts in building the monastery. It was there that the Buddha spent several rainy seasons and gave discourses that were later recorded as sūtras.

g.10 Śrāvastī

*mnyan du yod pa*

མཉམ་དུ་ཡོད་པ།

*śrāvastī*

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

During the life of the Buddha, Śrāvastī was the capital city of the powerful kingdom of Kośala, ruled by King Prasenajit, who became a follower and patron of the Buddha. It was also the hometown of Anāthapiṇḍada, the wealthy patron who first invited the Buddha there, and then offered him a park known as Jetavana, Prince Jeta's Grove, which became one of the first Buddhist monasteries. The Buddha is said to have spent about twenty-five rainy seasons with his disciples in Śrāvastī, thus it is named as the setting of numerous events and teachings. It is located in present-day Uttar Pradesh in northern India.



