

*The Sutra on
What is Most Precious
to a Monk*

Bhikshuprarejusutranama

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The Sutra on

What is Most Precious to a Monk

In Sanskrit: *Bhikshuprarejusutranama*

In Tibetan: *dge slong rab tu gces pa'i mdo zhes bya ba*

[In English: The Sutra on What is Most Precious to a Monk.]

Homage to the Omniscient One.

Thus have I heard at one time. The Blessed One was residing in “Fully Blossomed Lotus” vihara in the great city of Shravasti, surrounded by an assembly of fully-ordained monks,¹ 513 altogether. At that time, one among that assembly of the Blessed One known as Arya Upali, whose senses were completely disciplined, who was well-learned, who had profound wisdom, and who was specially devoted to and held paramount the Vinaya teachings that were well-spoken by the Blessed One, arose from his seat, put his upper robe over one shoulder, and having knelt on his right knee, joined his hands together in anjali at his heart, smiled, and spoke these words to the Blessed One:

The Sage’s body, a lotus rising from the mires of samsara,
 Immovable like a refuge-granting mountain,
 Adorned with the ornaments of the minor signs and embellished
 by the blossoms of the major marks,
 Is so glorious that one’s thirst for viewing it is unquenchable.
 To you, Supreme One, I prostrate.

Since only fully-ordained monks are residing here,
 We request you, O Sage,
 To teach to us, gathered here at this time,
 The four: the nature, divisions, meanings of the term, and proper
 activity of “fully-ordained monk.”

Then, the Blessed One, being very pleased,
Looking at Upali, spoke these words:

Listen well, Upali, my son!
That which is said by me
Is for the sake of pleasing your mind
And for the benefit of all fully-ordained monks.

The “fully-ordained monk” is the victory banner of the Dharma;
The “fully-ordained monk” is an adamant life-tree;
The “fully-ordained monk” has abandoned all suffering;
The “fully-ordained monk” is a son of the Conqueror;
The “fully-ordained monk” has slain the afflictions;
The “fully-ordained monk” goes to the grove of liberation.

The very nature of a fully-ordained monk is one of restraint.
The four root vows and so forth, the 250 additional, are his
proper activity—

Completely pure ethical discipline.
As for divisions, in addition to “monk-in-name-only,”
There is “one-possessed-of-the-marks,” and an “authentic monk.”
Regarding the term,
Because one “completely exhausts the afflictions,”
“Begs for virtue,” “begs for food,”
“Abides peacefully,” “resides on the path,”
“Correctly practices,” “abandons desire”
And “Is pleasing to the mind,” one is a “fully-ordained monk.”²

The fully-ordained monk is exquisitely beautified;
Abandoning jewelry, he is greatly beautified by adornments.
Renouncing desire, he practices with great attachment.
Ointments, bathing, food,
Adornments, clothing, colors,
And moreover, supreme riding mounts
Such as horses, oxen, and traveling in palanquins:
Those who engage these are fully-ordained monks;
Those who do not engage these are not fully-ordained monks.

Then Upali spoke
 These words to the Blessed One:

How so? This concealed language
 Spoken by the Sugata is difficult to grasp.
 Pray, may the Sugata's speech
 Be a lamp which clears away
 The darkness of these very words.

The Blessed One replied:

Gold, and so forth, are worldly ornaments;
 Through shunning them,
 One is beautified by the most supreme ornament of compassion.
 Wearing the clothing of listening to transcendental teachings,
 That is the most excellent, beautiful clothing.
 It is not camphor and so forth, by which one is anointed,
 But by moral discipline, the most supreme of ointments.
 It is not by white and red and so forth,
 But by the color of faith that one is completely embellished.
 Joyful perseverance in transcendental activities
 Is the unsurpassable, fastest mount.
 The Dharma activity of meditative concentration is the most
 delicious food;
 Being a wholesome meal, it has the most supreme of tastes.
 The inestimable mansion of the Sangha assembly
 Is completely enjoyed upon a seat of peaceful abiding.
 He who is endowed with these, unable to be turned back,
 He is an authentic monk.

That one endowed with the three chiefs and the five companions,
 Together with a mendicant's bowl and staff,
 Completely restrained in the three: body, speech, and mind,
 One whose behavior is shown to be a disciplined conduct;
 He is an authentic monk.

Those two authentic monks approach the city of salvation,
 The unsurpassable bliss of liberation.
 As for the other two, which are inauthentic,
 That which falls in their begging bowls and so forth,
 Blazing like a flaming river of molten metal in hell,
 Roasts them for four thousand eons.

The moral discipline of some is the cause of happiness;
 The moral discipline of others is the cause of suffering.
 Being endowed with moral discipline is unsurpassable bliss;
 Degenerated moral discipline is suffering.

That monk bound by thoroughly excellent moral discipline
 Is an attractive figure;
 Such a person, who abides closely by his monastic commitments³
 And has personal conviction in the trainings on moral discipline
 But for a single day,
 That person will gather an immeasurable heap of merit
 And will produce the fruit of buddhahood.

However, such a person who deceives even himself,
 Who doesn't abide by the trainings,
 And wears the costume of a monk,⁴
 And having depended merely on that appearance
 Proclaims, "I am a fully-ordained monk"
 But for a single day,
 Like a crazed elephant whose nose has been pierced by a chain,
 Or a passionate woman drunk on wine,
 That one gathers immeasurable seeds of non-virtue
 And only brings myriad harm to oneself.⁵

Whoever does not abide by the trainings
 While wearing the robes of a monk,
 The very moment he wavers from the trainings,
 He is fit to be a house-holding layman.
 The inauthentic monk characterized by not abiding in the trainings,
 A worldly person,

Fails to capture the hearts of all,
 And is the object of every ridicule.⁶
 For example, in the same way that branches
 Grow on a beautiful tree trunk over a long period of time,
 It is taught that if such a person remains a mere token-monk
 for a long time,
 His perverted speech will increase,
 And his negative karmas will increase.

Moral discipline is unsurpassed bliss;
 Moral discipline is the path of liberation;
 Moral discipline is a field of excellent qualities;
 Moral discipline is the cause of buddhahood;
 Moral discipline is paramount.
 In the same way that one protects one's eyeball,
 One should protect this moral discipline,
 Even at the cost of one's life;
 To discard it is foolish and unwise.

Although one may die protecting his moral discipline,
 It is a cause for future happy rebirths.
 If one dies having abandoned his moral discipline,
 It is a cause for unhappy future rebirths.
 It is not otherwise.
 Therefore, Upali and others, you must firmly grasp
 this very point.

Thus was spoken by the Blessed One. Then, Upali and the other
 fully-ordained monks greatly praised what had been spoken by the
 Blessed One.

This completes the *Sutra on What is Most Precious to a Monk*.

Notes:

1. Throughout the text, including the title, the Tibetan term consistently used is *dge slong*, equivalent to the Sanskrit *bhikshu*, which is a “fully-ordained monk,” in contradistinction to a *dge tshul*, a novice monk, or a *rab byung*, one who has just gone forth from the householder life and lives in monastic morality without having yet taken the vows. For aesthetic purposes, I have occasionally rendered this term as “monk” throughout this translation, most notably in the title, though this is somewhat incorrect. The Tibetan term *dge sbyong*, “one striving in/toward virtue,” is the umbrella term encompassing all three varieties of monastic engagement referenced above, *shramana* in Sanskrit. Technically, this term is best translated as the general “monk.” My use of the abbreviated “monk,” hoping to avoid the bloat of continually repeating the lengthy English terminology, distorts what is clear in the original, that this text is only referencing fully-ordained monks. I hope this footnote somewhat helps rectify that distortion.
2. This list conveys a series of various etymological interpretations for the term “fully ordained monk,” which is lost in English, and even in Sanskrit and Tibetan some of the variations require commentary to be clearly understood. Suffice it to say it is understood that in the very language of “fully-ordained monk,” all of these concepts and identities are implicitly understood.
3. This verse is a play on words lost in the English. The monk *Upali* is famous for having repeated all of the teachings of the Buddha on monastic discipline (*Vinaya*), and his name is roughly translated from the Tibetan as “one who abides close.”
4. The actual phrase used is “one who grasps the victory banner of the *Sugata*,” which is a euphemism for wearing the robes of a follower of the Buddha. In this context, I have translated it as “costume” as it is referencing an inauthentic monk, but the same euphemism is used in respectful contexts as well. The same phrase can also be interpreted as one who promotes or serves as a standard for the Buddha’s teachings.
5. These lines are referencing a “monk-in-name-only.”
6. These lines are referencing “one-possessed-of-marks.”

Translator’s Colophon:

This text was translated by Ven. Gyalten Lekden at Sera Je Monastery during the first month of the Female Water Snake year (February/March 2013). The input of Ven. Tenzin Gyurme Rinpoche, Andy Francis, and Thupten Phuntsog was invaluable, I owe them great thanks. With that said, all errors are my fault alone, and for those I sincerely apologize.

This translation is dedicated and offered to Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche, the pinnacle of an “authentic monk,” without whose great kindness I would never have

had the occasion to understand a single syllable of Dharma, much less attempt a translation. May any benefit from the translation and contemplation of this text be dedicated to the perfect, complete enlightenment of all mother sentient beings.

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