

CALLING WITNESS WITH A HUNDRED PROSTRATIONS

དཔང་སྐྱོང་ཕྱག་བརྒྱ་པ།

Calling Witness with a Hundred Prostrations

dpang skong phyag brgya pa

Toh 267, Degé Kangyur Vol 68 (mdo sde, Ya), folios 1b-5b.

Translated by the Sakya Pandita Translation Group
(Tsechen Kunchab Ling Division)



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Summary

Calling Witness with a Hundred Prostrations is widely known as the first sūtra to arrive in Tibet, long before Tibet became a Buddhist nation, during the reign of the Tibetan King Lha Thothori Nyentsen (*lha tho tho ri gnyan btsan*). Written to be recited for personal practice, it opens with a hundred and eight prostrations and praises to the many buddhas of the ten directions and three times, to the twelve categories of scripture contained in the Tripiṭaka, to the bodhisattvas of the ten directions, and to the arhat disciples of the Buddha. After making offerings to them, confessing and purifying nonvirtue, and making the aspiration to perform virtuous actions in every life, the text includes recitations of the vows of refuge in the Three Jewels, and of generating the thought of enlightenment. The text concludes with rejoicing in the virtues of the holy ones, a request for the buddhas to bestow a prophecy to achieve enlightenment, and the aspiration to pass from this life in a state of pure Dharma.

Acknowledgments

Translated from Tibetan into English by The Sakya Pandita Translation Group, Tsechen Kunchab Ling Division, by Venerable Khenpo Kalsang Gyaltsen and Reverend Dr. Chodrun-ma Kunga Chodron in 2010.

Introduction

Calling Witness with a Hundred Prostrations is widely known and revered as one of the first Buddhist texts to come to Tibet, arriving during the third century according to the dating by traditional Tibetan historians, or during the fifth century, according to Western scholars such as Hugh Richardson and Erik Haarh¹. In any case, this was long before the people of Tibet became Buddhist or had a written language. This history is substantiated by the text's own colophon, as well as Butön's seminal *History of Buddhism in India and Tibet*. As Butön (*buton*) relates in Obermiller's translation:

As the 26th of this line [beginning with the first Tibetan King Ña-thi-tsen-po], there appeared the King Tho-tho-ri-ñan-tsen. When the latter attained the age of 16 years and was abiding on the summit of the palace Yam-bu-la-gaṅ, a casket fell from the skies, and when its lid was opened, the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, the *100 Precepts Concerning Worship*² and a golden Caitya were found within. The casket received the name of the "Mysterious Helper" and was worshipped (by the king). The latter came to live 120 years and came to witness the dawn of the Highest Doctrine; up to that time, the kingdom had been ruled by the Bön. In a dream (which this king had) it was prophesied to him that on the 5th generation one would come to know the meaning of these (sacred texts which he had miraculously obtained).³

Although the text probably arrived in Tibet not later than the fifth century, it was not translated for several more, as there was

not yet even a script for the Tibetan language. It was only translated in the mid-seventh century, almost immediately after Tibet's written language was developed. Thus, *Calling Witness with a Hundred Prostrations* may be not only the first Buddhist scripture to arrive in Tibet, it was also among the first to be translated and written in the new Tibetan script.

Although the introduction of the text itself does not state from which language it was translated, and the colophon does not state who initially translated it, both Butön and Mangthö Ludrup Gyatso⁴ (*mang thos klu sgrub rgya mtsho*) state that this text was first translated by Thönmi Sambhoṭa (*thon mi sambhoṭa*), the famous Tibetan scholar who is said to have developed the Tibetan alphabet and writing system circa 650 CE and who also translated several texts from Sanskrit. Thus it could well have been one of the first texts to be written in the newly developed Tibetan writing system.

Thönmi is traditionally said to have been active as a scholar and translator during the time that the Potala palace and Jokhang temples were being built in Lhasa. Butön implies that this text may have been read or studied by the first great Tibetan Dharma King Songtsen Gampo (*srong btsan sgam po*). As Butön explains:

[One of King Tho-tho-ri-ñan-tsen's descendents] was born in the year of the fire cow and received the name of Thi-de-sroñ-tsen [later becoming known as Sroñ-btsan-sgam-po].... [At] thirteen years of age he ascended the throne and brought under his power all the petty chiefs of the borderland who offered their presents and sent their messages (of submission).

As at that time no writing existed in Tibet, the son of Anu of the Thon-mi tribe [later becoming known as Thon-mi-sam-bhota] was sent with 16 companions (to India) in order to study the art of writing. After having studied with the Paṇḍit Devavidyāsimha, they shaped, in conformity with the Tibetan language, (the alphabet) consisting of 30 consonants and 4 vowels. The form (of these letters) was

given a resemblance with the Kashmirian characters. After (this alphabet) had been definitely formed at the Maru temple in Lhasa, (Thon-mi) composed 8 works on writing and grammar, and the king studied them 4 years abiding in seclusion. The *Kāraṇḍavyūha-sūtra*, the *100 Precepts*,⁵ and the *Ratnamegha-sūtra* were then translated (into Tibetan).⁶

Although its contents are not widely cited in scriptural references and there are no commentaries on it in the Tengyur, *Calling Witness with a Hundred Prostrations* is of very great historical and religious significance. Even today, keeping a copy of this text is said to bless the building in which it is kept with protection against obstacles. Due to its status as the first Buddhist text to come to Tibet, it has been revered for centuries as the auspicious beginning of the Dharma in Tibet.

This translation into English is based upon the Degé (*sde dge*) version of the Kangyur, with reference to the differences between various other versions of the Kangyur as found in the *dpe bsdur ma*⁷ comparative edition. The few small variations between the versions of the Kangyur change only a word or two of the English translation, and these variants have been noted in endnotes.

According to the *Tōhoku Catalogue of Buddhist Canons*,⁸ no Sanskrit or Chinese version of this sūtra is known to exist.

Calling Witness with a Hundred Prostrations incorporates the central Mahāyāna Buddhist practices of prostration, offering, confession, rejoicing, refuge, and the thought of enlightenment. It also incorporates the names of many of the most important buddhas, bodhisattvas, disciples of the Buddha, and types of scripture to be regarded as objects of prostration and offering.

Written to be recited for personal practice, the text opens with 108 prostrations and praises to the many buddhas of the ten directions and three times, to the twelve categories of scripture contained in the Tripiṭaka, to the bodhisattvas of the ten directions, and to the arhat disciples of the Buddha. After making offerings to them, confessing and purifying nonvirtue, and making the aspiration to perform virtuous actions in every

life, the text includes recitations of the vows of refuge in the Three Jewels, and of generating the thought of enlightenment. The text concludes with rejoicing in the virtues of the holy ones, a request for the buddhas to bestow a prophecy to achieve enlightenment, and the aspiration to pass from this life in a state of pure Dharma.

One of the difficult aspects of translating this text was the title itself, *Calling Witness with a Hundred Prostrations*, which in Tibetan is *dpang skong phyag brgya pa*. The translation adopted here differs considerably from Obermiller's early loose translation of the title as *One Hundred Precepts Concerning Worship*, cited above. The phrase *dpang skong* means calling witness. It is the same word used to call a witness in a trial. In this context, it probably refers to inviting the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions to be a witness to one's practice of Dharma, particularly to the confession and purification of nonvirtue which is contained in this sūtra, as ideally such confession and purification is done in the presence of holy beings. Following the confession, the buddhas and bodhisattvas also serve as witnesses to the vows of refuge and the thought of enlightenment, and to the subsequent rejoicing and aspiration to virtuous deeds. As for the phrase *phyag brgya*, it means *one hundred prostrations* or *one hundred homages*.

Another difficult aspect of translating this sūtra was translation of the many names of the buddhas, particularly those names that are composed of long compounds. We have rendered the buddhas' names from Tibetan back into Sanskrit when possible following reliable glossaries and dictionaries such as *inter alia* the *Mahāvvyutpatti*, F. Edgerton's *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary* and J.S. Negi's *Tibetan Sanskrit Dictionary*.⁹ Otherwise, we have rendered the Tibetan in English, following as closely as possible the grammar of the compound name as it appears in Tibetan.

THE TRANSLATION

*Calling Witness with a Hundred Prostrations*¹⁰

[F.1.b] Devoted prostrations to every one of the myriad Three Jewels, and to the buddhas and bodhisattvas and their retinues, who appear and dwell in the infinite, endless worlds of existence of the ten directions and three times.

Prostrations to all the buddhas of the ten directions;
Prostrations to the tathāgata Ratnākara, buddha of the east;
Prostrations to the tathāgata Aśokaśrī, buddha of the south;
Prostrations to the tathāgata Ratnārcis, buddha of the west;
Prostrations to the tathāgata Jinendra, buddha of the north;
Prostrations to the tathāgata Samādhihastyuttaraśrī, buddha of the northeast; [F.2.a]
Prostrations to the tathāgata Padmottaraśrī, Buddha of the southeast;
Prostrations to the tathāgata Sūryamaṇḍalapratibhāsottamaśrī, buddha of the southwest;
Prostrations to the tathāgata Chattrottamaśrī, buddha of the northwest;
Prostrations to the tathāgata Padmaśrī, buddha of the nadir;
Prostrations to the tathāgata Ānandaśrī, buddha of the zenith.

Again, prostrations to the tathāgata, buddha of the east,
 Akṣobhya;
 Prostrations to the tathāgata buddha of the south,
 Ratnasambhava;
 Prostrations to the tathāgata buddha of the west, Amitābha;
 Prostrations to the tathāgata buddha of the north,
 Amoghasiddhi;
 Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha “Joyous King Vīrasena;”¹¹
 Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha Amitāyus;
 Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha Akṣobhya;
 Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha
 Bhaiṣajyaguruvaiḍūryaprabharāja;
 Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha Śālasaṃkusumitarājendra;
 Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha Śākyamuni;
 Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha Ratnaśrīrāja; [F.2.b]
 Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha Samantabhadra;
 Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha Vairocana;
 Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha “King whose Fragrance¹²
 is that of a Blossoming Utpala;”
 Prostrations to the tathāgata in the “World of the Saffron-
 Colored Victory Banners,” Buddha “Well-Tamed by the Vajra
 Essence;”
 Prostrations to the tathāgata in the “World in which the Wheel
 of No Regress has been Proclaimed,” Buddha “Whose Body is
 the Blossoming Lotus of Complete Absence of Doubt;”
 Prostrations to the tathāgata in the “World Without Dust,”
 Buddha Siṃha;
 Prostrations to the tathāgata in the “World of Supreme
 Illumination,” Buddha Ratnaśikhin;
 Prostrations to the tathāgata in the “World of Noble Light,”
 Buddha Vairocana;
 Prostrations to the tathāgata in the “World that is Difficult to
 Transcend,” Buddha “Whose Body is the Widely Spreading
 Light of the Dharma;”
 Prostrations to the tathāgata in the “World that is Supremely
 Noble,” Buddha “King who is the Light of Intelligence that
 Understands All;”

Prostrations to the tathāgata in the “World where the Mirror-disk has been Proclaimed,” Buddha “Whose Mind is like the Moon;”

Prostrations to all the tathāgatas in the “World of the Glory of the Lotus,” the splendid noble buddhas.

Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha Candraprabha;¹³

Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha “Greatly Handsome;”

Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha “King who is Lord of the World's Orb;”

Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha “Joyful Eyes;”

Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha Sāgaraśrī; [F.3.a]

Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha “Golden Pillar;”

Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha, “Light of Infinite Good Qualities;”

Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha “King who is Extremely Exalted by the Precious Majesty Arising from All Aspirations;”

Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha “King of Renowned Melodious Sounds;”

Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha “Lord of the Ocean that is the Wisdom Vajra;”

Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha Vipāśyin;

Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha Śikhin;

Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha Viśvabhū;¹⁴

Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha Krakucchanda;

Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha Kanakamuni;

Prostrations to the tathāgata Buddha Kāśyapa;

Prostrations to all past buddhas;

Prostrations to all buddhas dwelling in the present;

Prostrations to all future buddhas;

Prostrations to the glory of the bodhisattvas,¹⁵ all the great illuminators;¹⁶

Prostrations to the Buddha's infinite dharmakāya;

Prostrations to all rupakāyas in infinite worlds;

Prostrations to all relics;

Prostrations to all stūpas.

Prostrations to the category of sūtras, the holy Dharma,¹⁷
 Prostrations to the category of melodic verses;
 Prostrations to the category of prophetic teachings;
 Prostrations to the category of metered verses;
 Prostrations to the category of special accounts;
 Prostrations to the category of themes; [F.3.b]
 Prostrations to the category of illustrative accounts;
 Prostrations to the category of parables;¹⁸
 Prostrations to the category of past life accounts;
 Prostrations to the category of extensive scriptures;
 Prostrations to the category of marvelous teachings;
 Prostrations to the category of finalized instructions;
 Prostrations to the Bodhisattvapiṭaka, the entire treasure of the
 Mahāyāna;
 Prostrations to all scriptures of the ten directions and three
 times, and to every possible method of taming without
 exception;
 Prostrations to the dharmadhātu, indescribable ultimate
 perfection;
 Prostrations to every syllable of the holy Dharma, such as the
 mother of all tathāgatas, the Prajñāpāramitā.

Prostrations to the bodhisattvas, mahāsattvas, illuminators;
 Prostrations to the bodhisattva of the east, Samantaprabha;
 Prostrations to the bodhisattva of the southern direction,
 Aśokadatta;
 Prostrations to the bodhisattva of the west, “Intelligence in
 Conduct;”
 Prostrations to the bodhisattva of the north, Jayadatta;
 Prostrations to the bodhisattva of the northeast, Vijayavikrāmin;
 Prostrations to the bodhisattva of the southeast, Padmapāṇi;
 Prostrations to the bodhisattva of the southwest, Sūryaprabha;
 Prostrations to the bodhisattva of the northwest, “Exalted
 Jewel;”
 Prostrations to the bodhisattva of the nadir, Padmottara;
 Prostrations to the bodhisattva of the zenith, “Given by Joy;”
 Prostrations to the bodhisattva Lord Avalokiteśvara;

Prostrations to the bodhisattva Maitreya;
Prostrations to the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha; [F.4.a]
Prostrations to the bodhisattva Samantabhadra;
Prostrations to the bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi;
Prostrations to the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī;
Prostrations to the bodhisattva Sarvanīvaraṇaviṣkambhin;
Prostrations to the bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha;
Prostrations to the bodhisattva Vimalakīrti;
Prostrations to the bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta;
Prostrations to the all the bodhisattvas, mahāsattvas of the ten
directions and three times.

Prostrations to noble Śāriputra, foremost in great wisdom;
Prostrations to noble Maudgalyāyana, foremost in great
miracles;
Prostrations to noble Ānanda, foremost in having heard much;
Prostrations to noble Kāśyapa, foremost in the good qualities of
discipline;
Prostrations to noble Kauṇḍinya, foremost in devotion to the
precepts;
Prostrations to noble Upāli, foremost in holding the Vinaya;
Prostrations to noble Aniruddha, foremost in possessing the
miracle eye;
Prostrations to noble Subhūti, foremost in questioning and
answering;
Prostrations to the entire assembly of noble arhats;
Prostrations to all pratyakabuddhas;
Prostrations to all saṅgha dwelling in the ten directions.

By prostrating with devotion to the Three Jewels,
May all negativities be purified; accumulation of merit fully
flourish, and
The special good qualities arising from
The sermons of each bhagavān be accomplished.

Prostrations to all the Three Jewels in the ten directions.
I praise and glorify them, behold and discern them.

I constantly offer and venerate, without cessation until the end of time, all of the Three Jewels that have not been, are not now, nor ever will be relinquished. I make Dharma offerings, as well as a variety of offerings comparable to the incomparable, that arise from the infinite merit of the bodhisattvas, and are exalted, foremost, holy, special, noble, supreme and unsurpassable, comparable to the incomparable, and that completely fill the entire world of the ten directions.[F.4.b] Having offered these, please accept them. I shall venerate, honor, respect and please you.

Not holding back even the most trifling, I avow and confess the sins and nonvirtuous actions that contradict all holy scripture and that I myself have committed in this life or while wandering in the three worlds through beginningless, endless births, or that I caused others to perform, or even rejoiced in others' performance of. They are: the ten nonvirtues of body, speech, and mind that were committed under the influence of desire, anger, and ignorance; the five heinous crimes and so forth. I purify and dispel¹⁹ them, examine them and cast them out. I shall not hide, shall not conceal, and shall not fail to acknowledge them. Then, at that time, all negativities will be purified, and all merit will be completely accomplished.

From this time until the essence of enlightenment is reached,²⁰ in every future life, may I never fall into inferior hindering births, such as birth in the three lower realms, excepting only emanations for the benefit of others. May I never lean toward nor perform wrong, nonvirtuous actions. May I never lean toward nor accumulate the causes of karma and defilements. After being completely freed from results, such as suffering and a contemptible body, may I never again experience them.

From this time until the essence of enlightenment is reached, may the virtues of my body, voice, and mind continue as unceasingly as a stream. [F.5.a] In whatever life I might be born, may I possess magnificent happiness and joy, and attain the ability and power to work for the benefit of all sentient beings. That Dharma which is understood only by the tathāgatas, that suchness which without doubt causes

unsurpassable enlightenment—may I fully understand it without mistake, meditate upon it, teach it to others without mistake, and guide them.

From this time until the essence of enlightenment is reached, I take refuge in the Three Jewels. I offer them my body; may each of the greatly compassionate ones forever accept it. The buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three times, who are free of all²¹ things, who are comparable to selfless dharmas not comprised within the aggregates (*skandha*), domains (*dhātu*)²² or bases of cognition (*āyatana*),²³ and who are unborn since beginningless time, generated the thought of enlightenment because of their nature of emptiness. So likewise, I whose name is ..., do also generate the thought of enlightenment from this time until the essence of enlightenment is reached. May I never lose or disregard the thought of enlightenment, and never be separated from noble spiritual masters.

Just as the buddhas of the three times rejoiced in unsurpassable merit, I whose name is.... also rejoice in all worldly and beyond-worldly merit. When the time of death is certain, may I directly behold the holy faces of all those buddhas and bodhisattvas, and when they extend their golden right hands and place them upon my head, may I receive a prophecy. And may I die with my mind undeluded by defilements, with aspirations that accord with the selfless dharmas, and with limitless thought of enlightenment. [F.5.b]

In short,

After purifying all habitual tendencies without exception,
I will completely accomplish the two accumulations of merit and
wisdom.

For the purpose of liberating all beings without exception,
May I swiftly reach perfect enlightenment.

This completes Calling Witness with a Hundred Prostrations. As an omen of the arising of the holy Dharma in Tibet, during the reign of King Lha Thothori Nyanshal (lha tho tho ri snyan shal),

this text descended from the sky into the palace Yumbu Lhakang (yum bu bla mkhang). The king dreamed that after five generations it would be possible to understand the meaning of this text. Thus the holy Dharma began.

Notes

- 1 See Richardson 2003, p. 159, Haarh 1969, p. 126-127.
- 2 Obermiller very loosely translated *dpang skong phyag brgya pa* as *100 Precepts concerning Worship*. We have translated it *Calling Witness With a Hundred Prostrations*.
- 3 Obermiller 1999, p. 182. The transliteration and punctuation are those of Obermiller.
- 4 Mangthö Ludrup Gyatso (*mang thos klu sgrub rgya mtsho*) Chronology (*Bstan rtsis gsal ba'i nyin byed lhag bsam rab dkar*, Book 5). In *Sa skya'i dpe rnying bsdu sgrig u lhan nas bsgrigs*, published in *Sa skya'i chos 'byung gces bsdu* published by Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2008. Page 385.
- 5 Here translated as *Calling Witness With a Hundred Prostrations*
- 6 Obermiller 1999, p. 183-4.
- 7 I.e., *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*.
- 8 Toh. 270.
- 9 We have also made use of Lokesh Chandra 1987 and 1976.
- 10 D. *dpang skong phyag brgya pa*; S. N. *dkon mchog gsum la phyag 'tshal lo* (prostrations to the Triple Gem).
- 11 One of the thirty-five buddhas of confession. See #2300-2334 in Lokesh Chandra 1987.
- 12 D. *bsung* : S. N. add *tog gi* (crown ornament).
- 13 D. *zla 'od* : L. C. *pad mo dpal gyi* (Glorious Lotus).
- 14 The Tibetan reads *ma lus pa'i dbang po* “Lord of All”, which is not the usual rendition of Viśvabhū, i.e. *kun skyobs*. However the context clearly indicates that the sūtra is presenting the traditional list of the six tathāgatas who preceded Śākyamuni, from Vipāśyin to Kāśyapa. In that list Viśvabhū follows Śikhin.
- 15 D. *dpal* : Y. *dpa' ba'i dpal* (brave glory); L., Q, C. *dpa'* (courageous).
- 16 *rnam par snang mdzad* – also the name of the Buddha Vairocana
- 17 The “category of sūtras” (*mdo'i sde*) is the first of the twelve branches of scripture (*gsung rab kyi yan lag bcu gnyis*) which are enumerated here.
- 18 The Tibetan reads *'das pa brjod pa'i sde*. Mahāvyutpatti 1274, however, gives *de lta bu byung ba'i sde* for the category *itīvṛttaka* (parables, stories), and this seems to be the more usual equivalence.
- 19 D. S. N. *bsal* : L. Q. C. *bslad* (express).
- 20 The Tibetan *byang chub kyi snying po* (literally: “essence of enlightenment”) generally renders the Sanskrit *bodhimaṇḍa* (“seat of

enlightenment”) in these types of expressions. “Essence” has been chosen for reasons of readability.

- 21 Y. L. Q. C. add *yod pa* (possession of).
- 22 D. *kham*s : Y. L. N. C. *dngos po dang sems* (matter and mind).
- 23 These three classifications of elements (*dharma*) are, following the Abhidharma, ways to describe the impersonal constituents that go to make up a person. The five aggregates collect all conditioned elements, while the eighteen domains are comprised of the six types of objects, the six corresponding faculties—five sensory and one mental—and the six consciousnesses. The twelve bases are the six objects and the six corresponding faculties that serve as sources of cognition.

Abbreviations: C. Coné edition, D. Degé edition, L. Lithang edition, N. Narthang edition, Q. Beijing edition, Y. Yunglo (*g.yung lo*) edition.

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