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Verses on the Prajñāpāramitā

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KHYENTSE VISION
PROJECT

shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i tshigs su bcad pa

B448

Kabum, vol. 6 (cha), 194.3–195.5, Dzongsar 2014.

Translated by Peter Olin under the supervision of Jamie Creek, with the kind assistance of Lopön Sonam Jamtsho as consultant. The translation was completed under the patronage of KhyentseFoundation and the supervision of Khyentse Vision Project.

First Published 2025

Version 1

Generated from KVP's reading room on 17-Sep-2026

Khyentse Vision Project: Translating the Works of
Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo

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CONTENTS

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION	1
VERSES ON THE PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ	3
NOTES	5
BIBLIOGRAPHY	7
GLOSSARY	9

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

This work is one among four texts in a loose thematic collection concerned with the three trainings (*śīla*, *samādhi*, and *prajñā*) and with the ground, path, and fruition of the Buddhist path. These verses on the Prajñāpāramitā (the perfection of wisdom), concern the topic of *prajñā*, wisdom, or supreme knowing.

The text references terminology that is found in *The Ornament of Clear Realization* (*Abhisamayālaṅkāra*)¹, a commentary on the hidden meaning of the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras. The eight topics consist of the three knowledges of entities, paths, and aspects; the four applications; and the dharmakāya.

ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་ཕ་རོལ་དུ་ཕྱིན་པའི་ཚིགས་སུ་བཅད་པ།

Verses on the Prajñāpāramitā

You, who realized the foremost wisdom
Of the single taste of all phenomena,
Proclaimed the lion’s roar beyond the reach of thought—
Lord of Sages, please protect us!

Those with childish minds will find it hard to comprehend
This Prajñāpāramitā, most profound.
It is the natural state of all that can be known
To be discovered by one’s own intelligence.

It is not confined by fabricated limitations
Like existence, nonexistence, permanence, nothingness,
Arising, or cessation. It is like space.
It is primordially utter peace.

That is so, yet all those things
Are brought about by transient conditions.
“Whatever rests upon conditions, that is emptiness,”²
Are nectar-like words that make this eminently clear.

How wonderful! There is a unity, not a contradiction,
Between how things appear, arising in dependence,
And their basic nature, [195] beyond analysis and thinking,
This realization is called the Mother of All Victors.

When knowledge of the ground, the entities, the path, and every aspect
Has been studied and reflected on until perfection,
Then the practice of applying the four trainings
Makes the suchness of the five paths a reality.

The result, the supporting kāyas,
And the supported wisdoms and their activity,
Belongs to the domain
Of victors poised in sky-like equilibrium.

The single moon of enlightened speech,
Pours the pristine nectar of this path
In streams profound and vast, explained as two
By the traditions of the charioteers.

Thus, by validation through analysis,
And having trust in the profound,
May I constantly exert myself
In this method extolled by noble beings and the wise.

These nine verses concisely summarize the meaning of the Prajñāpāramitā.

Śubham.

NOTES

1. *mngon rtogs rgyan*. See Brunnhölzl, *Groundless Paths*; Brunnhölzl, *Gone Beyond 1, 2*; Conze, *The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom*; Thrangu Rinpoche, *The Ornament of Clear Realization*.
2. This is a paraphrase from Nāgārjuna's analysis of conditions in chapter one of his *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (*dbu ma rtsa ba shes rab*).

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GLOSSARY

all that can be known

ཤེས་བྱ་ཀུན། • *shes bya kun*

Objects of knowledge, anything that exists that can be known.

arising in dependence

རྟེན་འབྲེལ། • *rten 'brel* • pratīyasamutpāda

The fact that all phenomena, inner as well as outer, arise through the coming together of their own specific causes and conditions.

basic nature

གཤམ་ལུགས། • *gshis lugs*

The natural state of things, that is found when properly investigated and analyzed.

beyond the reach of thought

བསམ་གྱིས་མི་ཁྱབ། • *bsam gyis mi khyab*

Beyond the intellect, incomprehensible by the conceptual mind, impossible to capture with thinking.

charioteer

ཤིང་རྟ། • *shing rta*

The two charioteers referred to here are Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga, associated with the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra traditions, respectively.

childish minds

བྱིས་པའི་སྒྲོ། • *byis pa'i blo*

The immature minds of those of lesser capacity, unable to comprehend the truth of emptiness.

eight topics

དངོས་པོ་བརྒྱད། • *ngos po brgyad* • aṣṭa padārtha

The eight main topics of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*: (1) knowledge of all aspects (*rnam mkhyen, sarvākārajñatā*); (2) knowledge of the path (*lam shes, mārgajñatā*); (3) knowledge

of all bases (*gzhi shes, vastujñāna*); (4) complete application of all aspects (*rnam rdzogs sbyor ba, sarvākārābhisambodha*); (5) culminating application (*rtse mor sbyor ba, mūrdhābhisamaya*); (6) progressive application (*mtshar gyis sbyor ba, anupūrvābhisamaya*); (7) instantaneous application (*skad cig ma'i sbyor ba, ekakṣaṇābhisamaya*); (8) dharmakāya (*dharmakāyābhisambodha, chos sku*).

every aspect

རྣམ་མཁྱེན། • *rnam mkhyen*

Knowledge of all aspects. One of the eight main topics of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*.

fabricated limitations

སྒྲིམ་པའི་མཐའ། • *spros pa'i mtshā*

Any conceptual ideas formulated in the mind about how things are or are not.

five paths

ལམ་ལྔ། • *lam lnga* • pañcamārga

Lord of Sages

ཐུབ་པའི་དབང་པོ། • *thub pa'i dbang po* • Munīndra

An epithet of Śākyamuni, the historical buddha.

Mother of All

ཀླུ་ལ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ཡུམ། • *rgyal ba rnams kyi yum*

An epithet of Prajñāpāramitā, personified as the source of all buddhas.

natural state

གནས་ལུགས། • *gnas lugs*

The natural state of things, or the “abiding mode” of phenomena.

Prajñāpāramitā

ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་ཕ་རོལ་དུ་ཐྱིན་པ། • *shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa* • prajñāpāramitā

The perfection of wisdom that knows the empty nature of all phenomena, the collection of canonical texts on this subject, and also that wisdom personified in the form of the goddess Prajñāpāramitā.

profound and vast

ཟབ་དང་རྒྱ་ཆེ། • *zab dang rgya che*

This refers to the traditions of the two charioteers: the tradition of the profound view of emptiness founded by Nāgārjuna, and the tradition of the vast conduct of bodhisattvas founded by Asaṅga.

suchness

དེ་ཉིད། • *de nyid* • tathatā

The ultimate nature of things, the way things are in reality as opposed to the way they appear to beings who are not awakened. In this context a synonym for dharmakāya which is one of the eight main topics of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*.

victors

རྒྱལ་བ། • *rgyal ba* • jina