

THE ĀKĀŚAGARBHA SŪTRA

ནམ་མཁའི་སྣོད་པོའི་མདོ།

The Ākāśagarbha Sūtra

Ākāśagarbhasūtra

འཕགས་པ་ནམ་མཁའི་སྣོད་པོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་མདོ།

*'phags pa nam mkha'i snying po zhes bya ba
theg pa chen po'i mdo*

The Noble Mahāyāna Ākāśagarbha Sūtra

Āryākāśagarbhanāmamahāyānasūtra

Toh 260, Degé Kangyur, vol 66 (mdo sde, za), folios 264a–283b

**Translated by the Sakya Pandita Translation Group
(International Buddhist Academy Division)**



TRANSLATING THE WORDS OF THE BUDDHA

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Summary

While the Buddha is dwelling on Khalatika Mountain with his retinue, an amazing display of light appears, brought about by the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha's liberating activities. As he joins the gathering, Ākāśagarbha manifests another extraordinary display, and the Buddha, praising his inconceivable accomplishments and activities, explains how to invoke his blessings. He sets out the fundamental transgressions of rulers, ministers, śrāvakas, and beginner bodhisattvas, and, after explaining in detail how to conduct the rituals of purification, encourages those who have committed such transgressions to turn to Ākāśagarbha. When people pray to Ākāśagarbha, he adapts his manifestations to suit their needs, appearing to them while they are awake, in their dreams, or at the time of their death. In this way, Ākāśagarbha gradually leads them all along the path, helping them to purify their negative deeds, relieve their sufferings, fulfill their wishes, and eventually attain perfect enlightenment.

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Ākāśagarbha, the Bodhisattva “Essence of Space”

Ākāśagarbha features among the so-called Eight Close Sons of the Buddha (*nye ba'i sras brgyad* or *nye ba'i sras chen brgyad*) who are regarded as the principal bodhisattvas in the Buddha's retinue, the other seven being Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, Vajrapāṇi, Kṣitigarbha, Sarvanivaraṇaviṣkambhin, Maitreya, and Samantabhadra. Each bodhisattva fulfills a particular role for the benefit of beings, Ākāśagarbha's being that of helping them to purify themselves from the results of their negative actions.

The name Ākāśagarbha may be rendered in English as “Essence (*garbha*)¹ of Space (*ākāśa*).” To understand his name, it is useful to consider the concept of space in Buddhist thought. In early Buddhist theory, space is non-obstruction, the lack of matter allowing for the unhindered movement of the four great elements of earth, water, fire, and air. Space is also non-obstructible due to its omnipresence and its eternal nature. Apart from being the mere absence of obstruction, it is also counted as one of the three unconditioned dharmas or phenomena in this world, the other two being the two types of cessation.² In the Pāli *Mahāparinibbānasutta*, space is presented as the actual foundation for all other elements of existence.³ We can understand, therefore, the prominent position that space holds

among the elements of existence, and it is an equally prominent position that the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha holds among his peers, his presence outshining everything else in the world, everything except the buddhas themselves. Just as space is the unlimited capacity to accommodate the entirety of phenomenal existence, so Ākāśagarbha possesses countless inconceivable qualities to benefit sentient beings. As the embodiment of non-obstruction, he helps beings remove obstacles from the path to awakening, in particular the obstacles caused by their own misdeeds, by making them disclose their transgressions.

Due to his relation to space and the purification of negative deeds, Ākāśagarbha has become closely associated with Buddha Vairocana, one of the principal figures in the Buddhist tantric traditions, whose main function is the purification of negativities in general, and in particular those of the deceased. It is particularly in the tantric traditions of China and Japan that Ākāśagarbha has become an important figure of worship.⁴

The text of the Ākāśagarbhasūtra

In his work on Ākāśagarbha in China and Japan (unfortunately unfinished), M. W. de Visser gives a comprehensive list of texts related to this bodhisattva.⁵ The first among them to appear in Chinese was the *Sūtra on the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha*, translated by Buddhayaśas between 403 and 413 CE. This is the earliest version of the text we have, for the Sanskrit is no longer extant.

The Chinese version of this text differs significantly from the Tibetan translation found in the Kangyur.⁶ Although the basic content of both texts is the same, their structures are very different and the Chinese contains numerous passages not found in the Tibetan, and vice versa.⁷ It is justified, therefore, to speak of two different versions of the *Ākāśagarbhasūtra*.

The Tibetan text was prepared by Śākyaprabha and Ratnarakṣita, two monks who probably flourished around the

9th century CE.⁸ But even though the Kangyur contains only one *Ākāśagarbhasūtra*, we do have alternative translations of some of its passages. The *Śikṣāsamuccaya* by Śāntideva, of which the Sanskrit has survived as well as its translation into Tibetan, quotes extensively from the sūtra.⁹

Key points of the Ākāśagarbhasūtra

The sūtra is widely known in the Tibetan Buddhist community, at least by name. This stems from the fact that it is mentioned in Śāntideva's highly celebrated and widely studied *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (Tib. *byang chub sems pa 'i spyod pa la 'jug pa*). In the fifth chapter on 'Guarding Alertness,' Śāntideva advises the reader to study the sūtras, beginning with the *Ākāśagarbhasūtra*, in order to learn about the training.¹⁰

The *Ākāśagarbhasūtra* is a Mahāyāna sūtra that emphasizes spiritual practice. It thus can be said to have a strong affinity with the so-called meditative concentration Mahāyāna sūtras, of which the *Śūramṅamasamādhisūtra* is a prominent representative. Our text indeed repeatedly mentions the meditative concentration of brave progression (Skt. *śūramṅamasamādhi*) of the bodhisattvas abiding on the tenth bodhisattva ground.¹¹ Furthermore, in the discussion of the transgressions of beginner bodhisattvas, among other corrupt habits the confinement of monks' practice to the mere recitation of scriptures is criticized.

The main topic of this sūtra, however, is not meditation but faith in and devotion to a bodhisattva as a means of purification. Because the principal activity of Ākāśagarbha, as mentioned above, is the removal of obstructions on the path to awakening, followers are strongly advised to generate pure faith in him. It is this faith, supported by the devotional practices of worship and offering, that will invoke his presence and blessings. Once invoked, the bodhisattva will help devotees according to their capacities and inclinations by first making them disclose their negative actions.

This practice of disclosure or confession of negative deeds is regarded as a fundamental element of Buddhist practice. Essential for the purification of the mind, it forms the third part of the seven-limbed practice (Tib. *yan lag bdun pa*), a preliminary practice recited daily by most practitioners in the Tibetan tradition.¹² The seven limbs are: paying homage to the buddhas, presenting them with offerings, disclosing one's negative deeds, rejoicing in the positive deeds of all beings, requesting the Dharma, supplicating the enlightened ones to remain with us, and dedicating all virtues to the benefit of sentient beings.

But what precisely are those negative actions that are to be disclosed by the followers of the Buddha? In this sūtra, the Buddha himself gives the answer to this question: they are the transgressions (Tib. *lung ba*; Skt. *Āpatti*), also referred to as *downfalls*. The so-called *downfalls* are violations of vows or principles of conduct specific to different kinds of Buddhist followers. In Buddhism, vows are forms of spiritual commitment taken to ensure steady progress on the path. They are the “practical applications and outcomes of different Buddhist theories.”¹³ Thus, transgressions are not actions judged as morally objectionable by some higher authority; rather, they are actions of body, speech, and mind that result in a serious impediment on the spiritual path of the one who commits them. They cause one to ‘fall from’ the path to awakening, so to speak, and in the worst cases fall to the lower realms of existence. These transgressions need to be disclosed and purified at the very outset of the path, and helping people do so is precisely the expertise of Ākāśagarbha. An individual enters the Mahāyāna when he or she produces bodhicitta, the resolve to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.¹⁴ Thus, the first step in the training is the production of this intention, called *the bodhicitta of aspiration* (Tib. *smon pa'i byang chub kyi sems*; Skt. *bodhipraṇidhicitta*), which is later followed by active

engagement in the path, called *applied bodhicitta* (Tib. *'jug pa'i byang chub kyī sems*; Skt. *bodhiprasthānacitta*).¹⁵ In the detailed explanation of the training in applied bodhicitta found in Sakya Paṇḍita's *Elucidation of the Sage's Intent (thub pa dgongs gsal)*, the author explains the cause of its arising, the way to cultivate the conditions conducive to its increase, and the methods for preventing its decline.¹⁶ It is in the latter section that he mentions the fundamental transgressions listed in the *Ākāśagarbhasūtra*. They are the transgressions committed by rulers, politicians, and śrāvakas, or disciples, and, in particular, those of beginner bodhisattvas.¹⁷ This entire list, excluding the śrāvakas' transgressions, became a prominent feature of the Mahāyāna training known as *the fourteen fundamental transgressions*.¹⁸ As the text is commonly studied in all Tibetan Buddhist schools, authors of all lineages refer to the *Ākāśagarbhasūtra* as the source for understanding the bodhisattva transgressions.¹⁹

The sūtra mentions the following list of transgressions:

a) For kṣatriya rulers:

1. Stealing from a place of worship or the saṃgha, or inciting others to do so.
2. Forcing others to give up the Dharma and creating obstacles for the teachings.
3. Forcing monastics to give up their monastic robes and abusing them.
4. Committing any of the five heinous deeds.
5. Advocating the philosophy of the non-existence of causality.

b) For ministers:

1. Stealing from a place of worship or the saṃgha.
2. Destroying a village, district, or town.
3. Forcing others to give up the Dharma and creating obstacles for the teachings.
4. Harming monastics by taking away their robes, punishing, or

even killing them.

5. Committing any of the five heinous deeds.

c) For śrāvakas:

1. Killing.
2. Taking what is not given.
3. Impure conduct.
4. Lying.
5. Harming a buddha.

d) For beginner bodhisattvas:

1. Teaching the profound Dharma of emptiness to spiritually immature people.
2. Discouraging people from practicing the Mahāyāna path.
3. Discouraging people from practicing the vinaya of individual liberation.
4. Disparaging the śrāvaka path, saying it obstructs one from attaining enlightenment and from eradicating the afflictions.
5. Praising oneself and lying out of jealousy and for the sake of gain and honor.
6. Deceiving others, claiming one has realized the profound teachings on emptiness when one has not.
7. Causing fines to be imposed on monastics and offering the bribes received to the kṣatriyas.
8. Causing monastics to abandon their contemplative training and diverting offerings intended for contemplative monastics to benefit monastics engaged in mere recitation practice.

A special feature of this sūtra, and quite a unique one, is the mention of dream-inducing practices.²⁰ Similar practices are known to students of Tibetan Buddhism familiar with the techniques commonly known as dream yoga, but they are fairly rare in non-tantric Mahāyāna contexts.²¹ In this context, the purpose of dream-inducing practice is for those who failed to

meet Ākāśagarbha in the waking state to produce a dream encounter with the bodhisattva in order to disclose their transgressions.

Finally, another recurring theme throughout this sūtra is the use of *dhāraṇīs*. This term has at least two distinct meanings in this text alone: on the one hand, a mystical formula to be repeated with the aim of fulfilling certain worldly and spiritual wishes, whether for oneself or others, and, on the other, a state of unflinching memory that bodhisattvas attain on the higher levels of realization. But the mention of *dhāraṇīs* does not necessarily imply an influence of tantric Buddhism on this text. *Dhāraṇīs* are used quite frequently in early Mahāyāna scriptures predating the development of tantra in Buddhism.²²

Conclusions

The *Ākāśagarbhasūtra* can be understood as a devotional Mahāyāna text, devotion being a skillful means on the path to awakening in Buddhism. The text was eminently important in China and Japan, where the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha became an important figure of veneration, and in the Tibetan tradition, where it served as a primary source for the list of bodhisattva transgressions. The sūtra predates the development of the tantric Buddhist movement in India, but nevertheless contains certain elements that gained in importance and were further developed in Vajrayāna Buddhism.

Ākāśagarbha is the essence, the womb of space. Limitless, he provides beings with whatever they need; knowing no obstacles, he removes whatever may hinder them from seeing reality.

The Translation

For this work, the translators relied on the Degé edition of the Kangyur, supported by the Beijing and Narthang editions with the help of the comparative edition of the Kangyur (see bibliography). Whenever confronted with problematic or

difficult passages, we discussed the variants with the Tibetan scholars we worked with in order to find what is most probably the correct reading of the text.

The task of translation inevitably coincides with the task of interpretation, and any translation will be only one of the possible readings of the text. In this case, the task was rendered difficult by the many obscure and somewhat esoteric poetic verses the sūtra contains. With all of the resources at our disposal, we have tried our best to understand and translate those lines; but the clarity we have aimed for in the resultant English verses does not reflect the ambiguous nature of the Tibetan text, cryptic in many places. We apologize for all instances where we did not do it justice.

Specialized terminology, such as the types of beings present in the Buddha's audience as well as certain technical terms, is given in Sanskrit when we thought that no English rendering would convey the exact meaning. The Tibetan version of the sūtra also contains a number of *dhāraṇīs* in transliterated Sanskrit, and like the Tibetan translators we have left them as they are. In the process of trying to reconstruct their most correct Sanskrit reading, we faced many problems despite the assistance of a Sanskrit expert. Solving them would entail a separate research project, well beyond the scope of the present translation work.

THE TRANSLATION

The Noble Mahāyāna Ākāśagarbha Sūtra

[F.264.a] Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas!

Thus did I hear at one time. The Bhagavān was dwelling on the Khalatika Mountain, in the abode of the Sage's hermits, together with an incalculably large assembly of monks and of great śrāvakas. Great bodhisattva mahāsattvas in numbers as limitless as the sands of the River Ganges, forming an incalculably immense assembly of bodhisattvas, were also staying there. The moment the Bhagavān completed his prophecy on the splendid vows of the tathāgatas, the Indranīla jewel²³ appeared in the west. Many hundreds of thousands of precious wish-fulfilling jewels spread out and surrounded it.

[F.264.b] The light of that precious jewel rendered invisible the totality of manifest form in the whole trichiliocosm. Thus, with the exception of the tathāgatas, all gods and humans, śrāvakas, and bodhisattvas, as well as the manifest forms of the great elements of earth, water, fire, and air—however many manifestations there were of the great elements—all without exception were obliterated, and only the precious jewel remained visible. Everything appeared to be limitless, boundless, and ineffable like space. The Bhagavān, too, became

most radiant, clear, and brilliant.²⁴

Indeed, the sentient beings assembled there could not even see themselves, or each other. For them, all visible manifestations of the great elements also ceased and became imperceptible to the eye. They could not perceive their bodies, their features,²⁵ or shape, nor did they have a sense of touch.²⁶ Whatever they observed, howsoever they observed it, they saw as empty. They did not even see the orbs of the sun or the moon. The stars and the earth element, water element, fire element, and air element also became invisible to their eyes. Sounds did not resonate in their ears. Odors were not perceived by their noses. They did not take their minds and their mental events as “me,” or take them as “mine,” and the perceptions of the six cognitive bases did not arise. The great elements were also imperceptible. Instead, in whichever direction they looked, in all those directions they saw everything as the physical marks, colors, shapes, and bodies of the tathāgatas. Only the precious Indranīla encircled by wish-fulfilling jewels appeared from afar; apart from that, nothing at all was visible.

[F.265.a] At that place, the bodhisattvas dwelling on the tenth ground, who had achieved the meditative concentration of brave progression, and who were bound by one more life and in their last existence, looked and saw, yet were not at all frightened, afraid, or terrified, because they realized that all phenomena are by nature endowed with final reality, suchness, and emptiness. Therefore, they were not at all frightened, afraid, or terrified.

The remaining great bodhisattva mahāsattvas, the śrāvakas, devas, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kinnaras, mahoragas, kimbhāṇḍas, pretas, piśācas, pūtanas, kaṭapūtanas—all of the assembled humans and non-humans—were very frightened and in despair. They were bewildered about what was here and what was there, and in their confusion they were not able to perceive one another. In that state, they asked questions such as “What is this?”, “How did this come about?”, and “What

is the nature of this?”, but could find nothing.

At that time, the great bodhisattva mahāsattva known as “Great Nail of Brahmā” bowed down toward the Bhagavān with folded hands and said:

“Ordinary beings do not recognize
the nature of all phenomena.
They live in the form aggregate,
and so their six sense faculties become deluded.
There is not a single aggregate to be seen,
yet ordinary beings conceptualize the form aggregate.
Consequently, some of these people
develop doubts about the Buddha’s teaching.
It is for them that the Bhagavān
taught the characteristics of the suchness of phenomena.
Thus, here and there
they come to know the characteristics of space, which bears
everything.
This indeed is brave equipoise,
[F.265.b] a state that cannot be expressed.

“A most precious wish-fulfilling jewel
rests on the crown of his head.
Those who perceive a precious Indranīla jewel from afar
are very fortunate beings:
they will perfect the brave progression.

“All who have come to see the Teacher are wise indeed.
Today in this place, a profound discourse
will undoubtedly be proclaimed.

“O Bhagavān, please give relief
to the sentient beings who have come here.
Bringing them to full maturation

is the heroes' sphere of activity.”

The Bhagavān replied:

“It is just as you have said.

The place where the all-basis is heard,
and where, with wisdom, sentient beings are established,
that place is the sphere of activity of meditative concentration.

“It is the sphere of activity
of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha,
who has demonstrated the meditative concentration free of
appearances
and free of proliferations.

“Whoever is attached to the two views
will later be in a realm of delusion.
Attachment to eternalism and nihilism
is utter delusion about here and there.

“Those who wish to free themselves
completely from both of these views
should meditate on that which is inexpressible,
thereby swiftly attaining the grounds.

“Listen well, O companions, for bodhisattva mahāsattvas who
are beginners one must explain the six perfections with a
reference point, with the notion that suchness is expressible.
That is to say, they must understand the nature of the great
elements to be arising and perishing. Only then should they
familiarize themselves with the idea that all phenomena are in
essence inexpressible, non-arising, non-ceasing, not perceptible,
and not in the slightest way existing.

“Thus will they definitively abandon eternalism and nihilism,

and they will not be at all frightened or terrified. Once they have ceased to relate to phenomena with attachment, [F.266.a] they will swiftly perfect the six perfections and henceforth not remain in either nihilism or eternalism.”

No sooner had the Bhagavān spoken than all those assembled in the retinue saw the manifestations in the same way they had previously seen, heard, understood, and known them. Thereupon, extending his right arm, the Bhagavān proclaimed:

“The bodhisattva mahāsattva Ākāśagarbha’s meditative concentration is like an ocean. This bodhisattva’s training is like Mount Meru, his primordial wisdom like space, his vigor like wind, and his tolerance like a vajra. He is like a supreme victory banner among all bodhisattvas. For voyagers to nirvāṇa, he is like a captain. He is like a treasure of all the roots of virtue. For all who suffer, he is like a wishing vase; for those engulfed in darkness, like the sun; for those who have lost their way, like the moon; for the frightened, like Mount Meru; for those severely tormented by the sickness of afflictions, like a medicinal elixir; for those who have severed the roots of virtue and fallen, like a walking stick. For those who make a living by weaving garlands, he is like a flower; for those who observe vows, like a mirror; for those who have conscientiousness and modesty, like clothing; for travelers to nirvāṇa, like a footbridge; for voyagers to the other shore, like a boat; for travelers to the higher realms, like a staircase. For those suffering from insults and slander, he is like a parasol; for those facing opposition, like a lion; for the rains, like water; for those fighting against Māra, like armor; for those who have mistaken the precepts, like the opening of their eyes; for all harvests of the roots of virtue, like the earth. [F.266.b] For the sick he is like a doctor; for the hungry, like grain; for the thirsty, like a water crystal;²⁷ for the exhausted, like a bed; for those in meditative concentration, like a fire lens;²⁸ for those who have entered the path to enlightenment,

like a chariot; for those playing in parks, like a pool; for those striving toward enlightenment, like a rosary. Thus does he appear.

“This son of noble family is like the fruition of the perfections, like a wish-fulfilling jewel for those on the tenth ground, like a wish-fulfilling tree for those who have achieved the meditative concentration of brave progression. For all who are engaged in negative views, he is like a weapon because he severs; for those afflicted beings entangled in latent tendencies, he is like a vajra because he overcomes. The demons cannot conquer him. For those of skillful means, he is the measure of time;²⁹ for primordial wisdom, he is discernment. For the entire Buddhadharmā, he is the abode; for pratyekas, like a garland; for all śrāvakas, like the robes; for gods, like an eye; for humans, like a path; for those born in the animal realm, a shelter; for pretas, a support; for hell beings, a protector. For those sentient beings who receive donations, he transforms into a container; for bodhisattvas, into a chariot. For all the tathāgata, arhat, perfectly complete buddhas of the three times, this son of noble family is like a minister. He is the gatekeeper of the city of Dharma. This son of noble family possesses the perfect buddhas’ primordial wisdom complete with all adornments, including the eighteen excellent qualities unique to a buddha. This son of noble family is someone whom all sentient beings, with the exception of the tathāgatas, should worship with every supreme offering. Therefore, all of you who have gathered here should now welcome him. [F.267.a]

“Using every mode of worship and respect, honor him as much as you can with jeweled umbrellas, victory banners, flags, flowers, incense, garlands, ointments, divine garments, ornaments, and vessels of many kinds. Honor, venerate, and revere him. Sweep his path, adorn him with ornaments, and praise him in different ways. All of you will also acquire excellent qualities like his, and before long become vessels like

him.”

All in the assembly without exception then rose from their seats and turned towards where the bodhisattva mahāsattva Ākāśagarbha appeared. With overjoyed hearts, happily smiling faces, and eyes full of admiration, they stood with palms joined and gazed at him. In that assembly were bodhisattva mahāsattvas and śrāvakas, the lord of devas, the lord of nāgas, the lord of yakṣas, the lord of gandharvas, the lord of asuras, the lord of garudas, the lord of kinnaras, the lord of mahoragas, and hermits in possession of the five kinds of supernatural knowledge. All of them were thinking the same thought, “What kind of sublime display shall we prepare to honor him with?”

At that very moment, the bodhisattva mahāsattva Ākāśagarbha manifested this buddhafiield, the *sahā* world, as being made entirely of seven precious materials. It was free of mountains, high lands, rocky landscapes, caves, ravines, abysses, grasses, walls, soil, thorns, unpleasant odors, and so on, and was smooth like the palm of a hand. He manifested melodies sung by the glorious gandharvas; [F.267.b] and all the trees, made of seven precious materials, bore delicious fragrances, leaves, flowers, and fruits. He also caused all of the trees, grass, dry wood, and leaves, everything on the ground, to appear as if made of the seven precious materials.

Moreover, he completely healed the diseases of the entire *sahā* world. He pacified all the sufferings of hell beings, and of those abiding in the animal realms and in the world of Yama, the lord of death. These beings received food, drink, clothing, Dharma robes, and ornaments. At that moment, the wishes of all beings in the realm of the *sahā* world were completely fulfilled. They were possessed of good bodies, alluring beauty, sublime excellent complexions, and perfect limbs. The bright radiance of an illuminating orb of light, free of dust and dimness, made them even more beautiful. They were free of mental afflictions,

their minds were very calm, inclined to every kind of virtue, and their faith in the Three Jewels deepened.

Next, he manifested precious jewels in the hands of all the beings gathered in this assembly, each jewel radiating its own light rays. The entire realm of the *sahā* world was completely pervaded by that great light. Different kinds of melodious sounds also emanated from those jewels as a rain of a multitude of jewels showered down. Rains of various fine garments, of ornaments, of flowers, incense, garlands, parasols, vessels, and of fruit [F.268.a] also showered down. He produced manifestations of divine garments, Dharma robes, golden threads, and pearl necklaces; of lotus flowers, *utpala* flowers, jasmine, and white lotuses; of *Uragasala* trees, snake-heart sandalwood, *tamala* tree leaves, and of white sandalwood powder scattered along the path.

On both sides of the road, right and left, he produced manifestations of residences resembling the celestial palace of Indra and divine mansions made of the seven precious materials. In those palaces, he manifested the lord of desire Kāmeśvara's most sublime consort and her retinue; they were playing pleasant music endowed with the five qualities, and were engaging in joyful play and entertainment.

He also produced a manifestation that exquisitely decorated the sky above the Bhagavān's head. Made of jewel filigrees and garlands of pearl jewelry, vast by some hundred *yojanas*, it resembled the great Brahmā's parasol of divine precious jewels. From these ornaments the sound of melodious songs of the five qualities, even more beautiful than divine music, also emerged. The grass, woods, leaves, flowers, fruit, and everything on the ground, too, emitted scintillating music of five qualities, even more beautiful than divine music, from which words of praise emerged. No one who heard these sounds would ever turn away from attaining complete and perfect enlightenment.

When the assembly saw the grand display of the bodhisattva

mahāsattva Ākāśagarbha, the entire gathering had the most wonderful and marvelous experiences. They wondered, “How shall we arrange the seat of this holy being in the presence of the Bhagavān?”

At that very moment a lotus flower appeared in front of the Bhagavān. Made of precious substances, it had a stem of silver, leaves of gold, [F.268.b] a core of emerald, and flower anthers made of the light of Brahmā’s precious stone. Its width was about one *krośa*. Myriad kinds of lotus anther seats emerged in front and around it. On the lotus, the bodhisattva mahāsattva Ākāśagarbha appeared, sitting cross-legged. On his crown there was a precious jewel. Similarly, many myriads of bodhisattva mahāsattvas, servants of the bodhisattva mahāsattva Ākāśagarbha, appeared. Sitting on their respective lotus anther seats, they were absorbed in the meditative concentration of brave progression. Each was adorned with an Indranīla jewel.

The bodhisattva mahāsattva Maitreya said to the bodhisattva mahāsattva Bhaiṣajyarāja:

“All bodhisattvas of great renown
respectfully pay homage
first, when they arrive,
and only then do they take their seats.
When this great being arrived
and made his grand displays,
he appeared sitting on his seat
without having prostrated to the Buddha.”

Bhaiṣajyarāja replied:

“We see that this great being
dwells excellently in the Buddhadharmā.
Since he does not dwell in discursive thought,
we do not see him as a sentient being.”

Bodhisattva Maitreya asked:

“Since he abides in final reality,
We do not see him as a sentient being.
If that is so, to what purpose has he made this great display?
I am afflicted by doubts: please explain further!”

At this, Bhaiṣajyarāja replied:

“Immature beings do not understand ultimate reality;
their experience is a complete mental construction.
This is a hero’s method
that brings these sentient beings to maturity.
By means of ultimate reality
suffering beings will be completely freed.
To this end, [F.269.a] by means of relative truth, the skillful
ones
manifest displays such as this one here.”

The Bhagavān now said to the bodhisattva mahāsattva Bhaiṣajyarāja, “What you say is well-spoken, well-spoken indeed. It is exactly as you say, holy being! However many immature, ordinary beings there may be, not one of them understands the field of experience, practice, or liberation of a stream-enterer. Imagine that all sentient beings had become stream-enterers. Even then, not one of them would understand the field of experience, practice, or liberation of a single once-returned. Similarly, once-returned would not understand non-returned, non-returned would not understand arhats, and arhats would not understand pratyekabuddhas. Even if all sentient beings had become pratyekabuddhas, who dwell alone like the rhinoceros, none of them would understand the field of experience of a single bodhisattva who has attained acceptance

that phenomena are non-arising, nor his liberation, his analysis of ultimate reality, or his practice of bringing sentient beings to complete spiritual maturity. Imagine that all sentient beings had attained acceptance that phenomena are non-arising. Even so, not one of them would understand the field of experience of a single bodhisattva who has realized discriminating awareness and attained the meditative concentration of brave progression; nor would they fathom his aspirations, or the transformative power of his investigating ultimate reality.

“An uncountable number of eons ago, this son of noble family, the bodhisattva mahāsattva Ākāśagarbha, attained acceptance that phenomena are non-arising, attained discriminating awareness, and attained the meditative concentration of brave progression. Hence, he knows the mentalities and latent tendencies of the beings now present in my great assembly. [F.269.b] Indeed, some of the beings came here for the great display. In order to observe meditative concentration and a great display, one must abide on the level of freedom from attachment. The son of noble family did not appear in this way to those beings, but instead came from the western direction to this place and displayed meditative concentration and the supernatural knowledge of the bases of perception of śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and of the extraordinary beings of the boundless infinity of space.

“Ordinary sentient beings, however, became very disheartened, so he then showed a great display, created on the level of relative truth, in order to bring all sentient beings to complete maturity. He also showed a great display of meditative concentration. If the son of noble family had manifested a display of unborn ultimate reality, then the world’s inhabitants, including the gods, would have become confused and defiled. Since even bodhisattvas dwelling on the grounds up to the eighth ground may become defiled, they themselves do not have the capacity to display such a field of experience and the

distinguishing qualities of his practice. Thus he abides in the qualities of the profound Dharma.

“This son of noble family abides in the understanding of skillful means. He possesses all the ocean-like qualities of a buddha, has no doubt, and is a wise person who does not need to depend on others’ wisdom. He is like the supreme victory banner of all bodhisattvas, suitable for a king.

“This son of noble family, the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha, shows all beings the way to rebirth in the higher realms and to liberation. He frees them completely of the disease of mental afflictions, and cures the body’s poisons, the diseases derived from the four great elements. Even those sentient beings who, suffering in the desolate place of saṃsāra, have become polluted by their negative views and do not know the means to reach the higher realms and liberation may utter the name of the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha, pay homage, [F.270.a] and offer perfume and incense of aloe wood. And this son of noble family examines their mentalities and latent tendencies, how they are influenced by afflicted views, and how they generated roots of merit in the past, and he understands how their minds have to be trained. He teaches them how to generate roots of virtue toward the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṃgha, or else the meritorious character of the essence of giving, of ethical discipline, or meditation, whichever might be appropriate. Whether in dreams or during waking hours, in all these ways the skillful one teaches the path directly and with straightforward methods. These methods quickly liberate beings from negative views and actions, from unwholesome intentions, from wrong objects of refuge, and from a mind engaged in negativity.

“It is certain that their actions of body, speech, and mind will become upright, their aspirations will become honest, and they will follow an honest spiritual friend. They will quickly be freed from stains, from mental afflictions, and from negative views. All the unwholesome paths that lead to the lower realms will

swiftly be purified by the power of aspirations and the activities of excellent conduct. He also teaches the methods that allow beings to swiftly gain control over their own minds and abide in profound tolerance.

“If those sentient beings who suffer from various physical diseases, whose minds are distracted, who have impaired eyesight, who are inarticulate, or who are physically disabled in any way, wholeheartedly recite the name of the bodhisattva mahāsattva Ākāśagarbha in order to pacify their diseases and reach a state free of ills, [F.270.b] and if they burn aloe wood and Chinese incense and prostrate to the holy being Ākāśagarbha, then that son of noble family will appear in their dreams in front of them in the guise of a brahmin, Śakra, Śrī, Sarasvatī, a king, minister, hero, doctor, father, mother, boy, or girl. In the dreams he will sit before sick people and manifest whatever appropriate medicine and instruments can pacify their illness. And with one treatment he will heal all illness.

“Similarly, the son of noble family teaches the appropriate methods to those who desire good advice or possessions, wish to recite prayers and to study, long for solitude, desire to abide firmly in meditative concentration, gain wisdom, be famous, or learn crafts; those who desire power, a good body, wealth, saintliness, a high caste, a son, or a servant; those who desire good qualities, or giving, ethical discipline, and the other perfections up to wisdom; those who desire soft-spoken words, to be in harmony with other beings, liberation from negativity, or to bring others to the practice of all of the perfections from giving to wisdom; those who desire a long life, or to have property and never lack it; and those who wish to cause the stingy to be generous, the immoral to be ethical, or the lazy to be diligent. [F.271.a]. Those who are never lacking in great compassion, and who observe themselves and practice equanimity toward all beings, thinking ‘By whatever means necessary, I will place these beings’ minds in unsurpassable,

perfectly complete enlightenment, I will familiarize them with skillful means, I will anchor them in all the mental states from the four sublime abodes³⁰ up to great compassion,' they should all pay homage to the bodhisattva Akāśagarbha.

“In a remote place, or in the open plains, or in an unsheltered place, they should burn incense of aloe wood and Chinese incense at specific times. With palms joined, they should make prostrations with the five limbs³¹ in all the cardinal and secondary directions and recite the words of this mantra:

*tadyathā | sumriśa | sumriśa | kāruṇika | caracara | vicara |
saṃcara | kāruṇika | murmur | vegadhari | maca me |
bhujapāda | mahākāruṇikā | cinatamaṇi³² pūrāya | kāruṇika |
sarva śamesthapāya | ajñādhāri | sphu guṇ sphu guṇ | ruti
viveka guṇ driṣṭi viveka³³ gung | pūraya kāruṇika | pūrāyantu
mama | aśa sarva antha ca | aśokagati svāhā |*

“They should recite this mantra many times and then go to sleep. The son of noble family will appear to them in the form of a human being, a wild animal, a bird, in his own form, or as a body that corresponds to their fortune of merit. Or he will employ such methods as using words in a similar way. That method alone has the power to bring billions of billions of beings to complete maturity. Whether they do not follow any path, or practice the śrāvaka path, or the pratyekabuddha’s path, in a single brief instant of wisdom and with just a minimum of skillful means he has the power to place them irrevocably on the unsurpassable Mahāyāna path, [F.271.b] thereby establishing them in meditative concentration, in the *dhāraṇīs*, in the various states of tolerance, and up to the tenth ground. This shows that the bodhisattva mahāsattva Ākāśagarbha is endowed with inconceivable methods, primordial wisdom, and great compassion.

“Son of noble family, some people can comprehend the extent

of space, but no-one can comprehend the extent of this noble son's methods and primordial wisdom, of his great love and great compassion, the extent to which he has developed the strength of meditative concentration and brings beings to complete maturation. This shows that the bodhisattva mahāsattva Ākāśagarbha possesses inconceivable qualities.

“Son of noble family, beings who are without deceit, without pretense, are diligent, endowed with honest views, who do not belittle others and do not praise themselves, who have abandoned jealousy and greed, who are free from hypocrisy, and have altruistic minds—such beings are all deeply loved by this son of noble family. He teaches them skillful means, primordial wisdom, vigor, and how to maintain determination. These means, wisdom, vigor, and determination liberate beings from their sufferings and cause them to generate a mind that strives for unsurpassable, perfectly complete enlightenment. Moreover, since they dedicate all the roots of virtue to enlightenment, they will never turn away from attaining the state of unsurpassable, perfectly complete enlightenment. Their energy, vigor, and great determination will become the great enthusiasm and determination needed to bring the six perfections to complete perfection. They will swiftly awaken entirely and perfectly to unsurpassable, perfectly complete enlightenment. This shows that the bodhisattva mahāsattva Ākāśagarbha possesses determination and good qualities that are inconceivable, and that he brings all sentient beings [F.272.a] to complete maturation.”

The bodhisattva Maitreya asked the Bhagavān, “Bhagavān, for what purpose does this son of noble family carry on his head, the holiest part of the body, a precious jewel shining with brilliant bright light, whereas other bodhisattvas do not possess anything like it?”

The Bhagavān replied, “The bodhisattva mahāsattva Ākāśagarbha possesses great compassion, he benefits beings, and liberates them from great suffering. Thus, for all beings who

have committed a root transgression, who are bound for the lower realms, who have exhausted all roots of virtue—for all these frightened beings, this son of noble family is medicine. For those drowning in the pitch black darkness of ignorance and those tormented by their negative views, he is like the sun. He brings them to disclose their root transgressions; he lifts the doubts from their hearts. For those whose hearts have become like a broken vessel, who have fallen, who have committed a fundamental transgression, who have destroyed all their virtuous qualities, who are bound for the lower realms, who are protectorless, devoid of support, abandoned by all the wise ones—for all of them, this son of noble family is like a crutch. He shows the way, reveals and cleanses all negative actions and all stains. He turns beings away from the paths leading to the lower realms. He is like a chariot. He establishes beings in the higher realms and in the state of liberation. For all beings who have minds entangled in intense desire or intense hatred, who are malevolent, who conceal their faults, whose minds are disturbed by miserliness, who grope in darkness because of extreme dullness, [F.272.b] who proclaim the non-existence of causality, who hold the view that one should be fearless concerning the next life, who lack contentment in their accumulation of wealth, and whose minds are constantly involved in all the ten unwholesome actions, this son of noble family performs every role, from closing the door to the lower realms up to serving as a chariot. He establishes those sentient beings in the higher realms and in the state of liberation.

“For these reasons, with the exception of the tathāgata, arhat, completely perfect buddhas, the whole world including the gods should worship this son of noble family.”

Bodhisattva Maitreya asked, “Bhagavān, sentient beings stained by a root transgression forfeit their roots of virtue and are bound for the lower realms. They are in a state of transgression and will be deprived of any happiness of the god

and human realms. Yet this son of noble family brings about these beings' fulfillment with the bliss of the higher realms and liberation. What are these particular transgressions?"

The Bhagavān answered, "Son of noble family, there are five root transgressions for a kṣatriya on whom royal authority has been bestowed. By committing any of these root transgressions, a kṣatriya upon whom royal authority has been bestowed will forfeit all previously generated roots of virtue, and will be in a state of transgression. Such a kṣatriya will be deprived of all the happiness of the god and human realms, and will go to the lower realms.

"What are these five transgressions? Son of noble family, for a kṣatriya on whom royal authority has been bestowed, stealing from a place of worship, stealing that which has been offered to the local saṃgha or the saṃgha of the four directions, or inciting someone to steal it: these constitute the first root transgression.

Forcing someone to give up the Dharma, whether it is the instructions on the śrāvakas' definite deliverance, the instructions on the pratyekabuddhas' definite deliverance, or the instructions on the Mahāyāna definite deliverance, as well as creating obstacles to the teachings, or concealing them:[F.273.a] all of these constitute the second root transgression.

"Taking by force the saffron robes of those who have shaved their heads and beards for my sake and donned the saffron robes—whether they uphold the precepts or not, whether they observe the discipline or not—thus making them householders; inflicting corporal punishment on them, imprisoning or killing them: all of these constitute the third root transgression.

"Furthermore, a kṣatriya commits the fourth root transgression with any one of these five heinous deeds: purposely killing one's own mother, father, or a śrāvaka, arhat, or the Bhagavān; dividing the saṃgha; or purposely and out of negative intention causing a tathāgata, arhat, perfectly complete buddha to bleed.

“Furthermore, if a kṣatriya advocates the philosophy of the non-existence of causality, denies the existence of future lives, embraces the ten paths of unwholesome action and engages in them, and also influences many other people to follow the ten paths of unwholesome action, manipulates them, encourages them and brings them to do so: these actions constitute the fifth root transgression.

“Son of noble family, if a kṣatriya on whom royal authority has been bestowed commits any of these five root transgressions, this kṣatriya will forfeit all previously generated roots of virtue. He will be in a state of transgression. Such a kṣatriya will be deprived of any happiness of the god and human realms, and will be bound for the lower realms.

“When that happens, the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha will manifest his birth and appear in an uncivilized land or another place, manifesting for some in the form, attire, and conduct of a monastic, for others in the form, attire, and conduct of a brahmin [F.273.b]. However and wherever he manifests, he will explain the Dharma to such kṣatriyas. He will explain and teach the hitherto unheard of, the unprecedented, the instructions of the omniscient one, the deep and profound sūtras, the *dhāraṇīs*, tolerance, and the grounds. And for this reason the kṣatriyas on whom royal authority has been bestowed will be caused to develop shame about their previous negative and unwholesome actions. They will reprimand themselves and disclose, give up, and abandon negative actions. They will develop great enthusiasm for giving, discipline, taking precepts, and determination, and they will reach the higher realms.

“Maitreya, the transgressions of a minister are also five in number. What are these five? Stealing from a place of worship or from the saṃgha of the four directions is considered the first root transgression of a minister. Destroying a village, a district, or a town constitutes the second root transgression. Furthermore, for a minister, forcing somebody to give up the Dharma,

whether this entails the instructions on the śrāvakas' definitive deliverance, the instructions on the pratyekabuddhas' definite deliverance, or the instructions on the definite deliverance of the omniscient one, as well as creating obstacles for the teachings or concealing them: these constitute the third root transgression. Furthermore, for a minister, harming those who have taken ordination with the Bhagavān—whether they uphold the precepts or not, whether they observe the discipline or not, taking by force their saffron robes and making them householders; resorting to corporal punishment, imprisoning them or taking their lives: these all constitute the fourth root transgression. Finally, for a minister to commit one or more of the five heinous deeds [F.274.a] constitutes the fifth root transgression.

“Son of noble family, if a minister commits any of the five root transgressions he will forfeit all previously generated roots of virtue, and will be in a state of transgression. Such a minister will be deprived of any happiness of the god and human realms, and will descend to the hell realms. Then, for the sake of such a person, the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha will be born, live, and teach in the land of the uncivilized or another place. For some beings he will manifest in the form, attire, and conduct of a monk, for others in various other forms and attires, including that of a girl, and he will teach the Dharma.

“Irrespective of where and in which guise he has manifested, he will explain the Dharma to those ministers. He will explain and teach the hitherto unheard of, the unprecedented, the instructions of the omniscient one, the deep and profound sūtras, the *dhāraṇīs*, tolerance, and the grounds. Then those ministers will be made to develop shame about their previous unwholesome negative actions. They will reprimand themselves and disclose, give up, and relinquish negative actions. And they will eagerly practice giving, discipline, and having determination for the vows; and they will reach the higher realms.

“Son of noble family, there are five root transgressions for śrāvakas. Which are the five? They are killing, taking what was not given, impure conduct, lying, and physically harming or drawing blood from the body of a tathāgata. These are the five.³⁴ According to how it has always been explained, when my śrāvakas commit any of these root transgressions, the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha will manifest birth in different places for the benefit of those beings. To some he teaches in the form of a monastic with the appropriate attire and conduct, [F.274.b] and so forth, including all forms previously mentioned, and those beings will reach the higher realms.

“There are eight root transgressions for sons of noble family who are beginners and who have correctly embarked on the Mahāyāna path. These root transgressions cause confusion, and beginners who have correctly entered the Mahāyāna will forfeit the entirety of their previously generated roots of virtue, and they will be in a state of transgression. They will be deprived of the happiness of gods, of humans, and of the Mahāyāna, go to the lower realms, be separated from a spiritual friend, and remain in saṃsāra for a very long time. What are the eight?

“There are beings who were born in this worldly realm of afflictions and five impurities because they conducted themselves in evil ways in the past. They rely upon a spiritual friend and listen to the most profound Mahāyāna owing to the tiny root of virtue they possess. Though they do so with little understanding, those sons of noble family give birth to the aspiration to unsurpassable, perfectly complete enlightenment. Some beginner bodhisattvas among them listen to the collection of sūtras that present the most profound emptiness, transmit, and read them. In the presence of other sentient beings who understand as little as those just mentioned, they recall these sūtras in great detail in word and meaning, just as they heard and understood them, and they teach them to others. When those ordinary, immature beings who have not gone through arduous

training hear such profound sūtras, they become extremely frightened and terrified. Because they are terrified, they turn back from attaining unsurpassable, perfectly complete enlightenment and aspire to the vehicle of the śrāvakas. This is the first root transgression for a beginner bodhisattva.

“Son of noble family, due to this root transgression, they will forfeit the entirety of their previously generated roots of virtue. They will be in a state of transgression and be deprived of the happiness of the higher realms and of liberation. [F.275.a] They will betray their bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment, and go to the lower realms.

“It is like this. Just as, for instance, one travels the great ocean in stages, similarly bodhisattvas must initially know other sentient beings, their inclinations and latent tendencies. In accordance with the other beginner bodhisattvas’ predispositions, they must teach the Dharma step by step.

“The bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha manifests his birth and appears in different places for their benefit. Therefore, if beginner bodhisattvas who have incurred such a root transgression and are terrified by the lower realms hear the name of the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha and wish to see him in order to disclose those transgressions, they should burn aloe wood and Chinese or other incense, join their palms, and utter the name of the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha at the break of dawn.

“Having seen such sentient beings, this son of noble family will manifest in a form corresponding to their respective fortunes. Thus, in the presence of some, he will manifest in an ordinary form and teach the Dharma. In the presence of others, he will teach in the form of a brahmin, and in the presence of yet others he may manifest in any other form, including the form of a girl, and cause the beginner bodhisattvas to disclose their root transgressions just as they occurred. He also teaches them expertise in skillful means, the profound conduct of the unsurpassable Mahāyāna. He establishes them in meditative

concentration, tolerance, the *dhāraṇīs*, and the grounds. As a result, they will be completely liberated from the lower realms and will not turn back from attaining perfectly complete enlightenment. In vajra-like manner, they will rely upon the six perfections with great strength and determination, and will soon manifestly and completely awaken to unsurpassable, perfectly complete enlightenment.

“If [F.275.b] he does not directly appear in front of them, the beginner bodhisattvas should rise before dawn and pray to Aruṇa, uttering these words: ‘Aruṇa, o Aruṇa, endowed with great compassion! O Aruṇa, as soon as you have risen in this world, enfold me in your compassion. Convey these words of mine to Ākāśagarbha, the one of great compassion: Please show yourself in my dreams so that I may disclose my root transgressions. Lead me to obtain the great eyes of wisdom endowed with the skillful means of the noble Mahāyāna.’

“Then they should go back to bed to sleep. Here too, the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha will appear at the break of dawn in the dreams of those beginner bodhisattvas who have committed a transgression, and with great skillful means of primordial wisdom he will lead them to disclose their root transgressions. He also teaches primordial wisdom endowed with skillful means. This enables the beginner bodhisattvas to obtain the meditative concentration called *not forgetting the mind of enlightenment* at that very moment. They will firmly abide by the Mahāyāna and swiftly come to complete the six perfections.

“Furthermore, beginner bodhisattvas may say to some people: ‘You are not able to engage in the practice of the six perfections. You are not able to manifestly and completely awaken to unsurpassable, perfectly complete enlightenment. Therefore, quickly turn your minds to either the śrāvaka vehicle or the pratyekabuddha vehicle and you will swiftly be definitively released from saṃsāra.’ Speaking these words is the second root transgression for a beginner bodhisattva.

“Furthermore, beginner bodhisattvas may say to some, ‘Oh! What is the use of practicing the vinaya of individual liberation, [F.276.a] ethical discipline, and good conduct? You should swiftly bring forth the mind that strives for unsurpassable, perfectly complete enlightenment and study the Mahāyāna. Then even the tiniest unwholesome deeds you have committed with your body, speech, and mind due to the afflictions will be purified, and they will not come to maturation.’ Saying these words is the third root transgression for beginner bodhisattvas.

“Furthermore, son of noble family, beginner bodhisattvas may say to some, ‘Son of noble family, eschew the discourses of the śrāvaka vehicle! Do not listen to them, do not read them, and do not teach them to others. Son of noble family, eschew the discourses of the śrāvaka vehicle! They are the reason why you cannot obtain the great result, why you are not able to eradicate the afflictions. Therefore, have faith in the discourses of the Mahāyāna. Listen to the Mahāyāna, study the Mahāyāna, and teach it to others. Thus you will not go to the lower realms, you will not enter any path leading to the lower realms, and swiftly you will manifestly and completely awaken to unsurpassable, perfectly complete enlightenment.’ If these words are spoken and the listener acts accordingly and adopts a similar view, then both actions incur a root transgression. This is the fourth root transgression of beginner bodhisattvas.

“Furthermore, beginner bodhisattvas may be two-faced, thinking one thing but professing another. They may also propagate and versify the Mahāyāna teachings, and for the purpose of gain and honor they may chant those verses, recite, memorize, read, and explain them, and even teach others things that they have merely heard, saying, ‘I am a follower of the Mahāyāna; [F.276.b] others, however, are not.’ Because they seek gain and honor, they act jealously and become upset when others are appreciated and respected. Uttering their names, they disparage, abuse, and speak badly of them, praising themselves

instead. Out of jealousy, they say, ‘I possess supreme qualities.’ This action constitutes a transgression and deprives them of the happiness of the Mahāyāna. It is therefore considered a very serious transgression that leads to rebirth in the lower realms.

“The analogy here is of a group of people who wish to go to a jewel island and set out to cross the great ocean by boat, but the boat breaks apart in the great ocean. In the same way, even though these beginner bodhisattvas wish to cross the great ocean of the Mahāyāna, they destroy their boat of faith and part from the vital force of wisdom when they lie out of jealousy. Therefore, beginner bodhisattvas incur a very weighty transgression when they lie out of jealousy. This is the fifth root transgression for beginner bodhisattvas.

“Furthermore, son of noble family, in the future there will be beginner bodhisattvas, householders or ordained, who will read, recite, and chant sūtras that contain profound emptiness. These Mahāyāna sūtras are the object of understanding of bodhisattvas who need only little effort, and who are greatly intelligent beings, adorned with *dhāraṇīs*, tolerance, meditative concentration, and the grounds.

“Having recited them, they extensively teach these sūtras to others. They say, ‘I have understood these teachings with my own intelligence; I teach them to you in this way because I am compassionate. Therefore, you must meditate on this profound Dharma in order to directly perceive it [F.277.a] and you too will come to behold primordial wisdom, just as I do now.’ Instead of stating, ‘I have not actualized this most profound Dharma, but teach it by merely reading it out,’ they promote themselves for the purpose of gain and honor. Therefore, in the eyes of the tathāgata, arhat, perfectly complete buddhas of the three times, bodhisattva mahāsattvas, and noble beings, they have become stained by faults. A heavy transgression has occurred. Having deceived gods and humans using the Mahāyāna, there will be no śrāvaka vehicle of the buddha for

those bodhisattvas, much less the Mahāyāna, or the particular realizations which are the entry into the Mahāyāna, or unsurpassable, perfectly complete enlightenment.

“The analogy here is that of someone who travels out into the great secluded wilderness, where he suffers hunger, thirst, and exhaustion. He then approaches a tree, intending to eat of the great fruit it bears. However, ignoring the tree with its fine aroma and delicious fruit, he climbs instead a poisonous tree bearing fruit devoid of taste, and eats its poisonous fruit. In doing so, he causes his own death. Such a beginner bodhisattva committing the sixth transgression is said to be like the person in this analogy.

“Therefore, if beginner bodhisattvas who have gained this hard-to-achieve human birth live with a spiritual friend and wish to enter the Mahāyāna, yet praise themselves and disparage others for the purpose of gain, honor, and fame, they incur a serious transgression. Because of this root transgression, all the wise ones will strongly criticize them and they will go to the lower realms. No kṣatriya, brahmin, vaiśya, or śudra will rely upon such a person. Anyone who does rely upon such a person is definitely unwise. This, again, is the sixth root transgression for beginner bodhisattvas.

“Furthermore, son of noble family, in the future kṣatriyas will have dishonorable³⁵ advisors³⁶ and ministers, dishonorable soldiers [F.277.b] and physicians—rich and powerful fools who are proud of their expertise. Seeming to engage in many meritorious deeds of giving, they will become proud and haughty due to their giving. Out of arrogance and pride, they will cause division within the kṣatriyas, as well as separation between the monastics and the kṣatriyas. Backed by the kṣatriyas, they may even punish the monastics, robbing them by imposing fines. Thus, being wronged, those monastics will steal from whichever individual, local saṃgha, saṃgha of the four directions, and whichever place of worship they can, and give

what they have robbed to pay their fine. And those dishonorable people in turn will offer this to the kṣatriyas. Both of these actions become root transgressions. This is the seventh root transgression.

“Furthermore, those dishonorable kṣatriyas together with the monastics commit the following fault. They declare pure Dharma to be non-Dharma, and refer to that which is non-Dharma as Dharma, thus abandoning the true Dharma. They do not observe the precepts of the sūtras and the vinaya, nor do they observe the black teachings,³⁷ nor the great teachings. Having abandoned their training in loving kindness, great compassion, and the perfection of wisdom, as well as their training in skillful means and the trainings taught in other sūtras, they organize duties for the monastic community that are dissociated from such meritorious activities in order to harm the bhikṣus. Because such duties have been organized, the bhikṣus are harmed. They abandon the practices of calm abiding and special insight. Harmful intentions multiply in those meditators, as a result of which they cannot pacify their unpacified emotions. As these do not subside, these bhikṣus then degenerate in terms of intention, ethical discipline, conduct, and view. Therefore, they become negligent, and ever more negligent, and their ethical discipline degenerates. Even though they are not monastics, they pretend to be, and even though they do not lead a chaste life they pretend to. [F.278.a] They resemble donkeys, and they explain the Dharma most clearly. Once they have been greatly honored and venerated by the kṣatriyas and their retainues and have received their offerings, they criticize, in front of the householders, the other bhikṣus who diligently practice relinquishment. And the kṣatriyas together with their retainues become angry at the bhikṣus who diligently practice relinquishment, and disparage them.

“If the support and material riches that were destined for the bhikṣus who diligently practice relinquishment are offered to the

bhikṣus exerting themselves in recitation, at this point, then both actions³⁸ become root transgressions. Why? Because the bhikṣu meditators are holy, while those who only recite and advise others are not. The bhikṣu meditators have become vessels for meditative concentration, *dhāraṇīs*, tolerance, and the grounds. They have become holy beings worthy of receiving offerings; they have become sacred vessels. They illuminate the world and show the way, liberating beings from the realm of karma and afflictions and placing them on the path leading beyond sorrow.

“Son of noble family, since they have no misgivings concerning such actions and fear no consequences, this is the eighth root transgression for beginner bodhisattvas. When beginner bodhisattvas commit these root transgressions, they forfeit all previously generated roots of virtue. They have incurred a transgression, will be deprived of the happiness of the higher realms and of liberation, and have deceived themselves.

“Son of noble family, for the benefit of beginner bodhisattvas, the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha is born and appears in the places where such bodhisattvas dwell. To some he teaches in the form of a monastic with the appropriate attire and conduct, displaying to others a variety of forms, from that of a brahmin with the proper attire and conduct to the semblance and conduct of an animal. For an extensive explanation of this, one should read the *Sūtra on the Meditative Concentration of Brave Progression* (*Śūramgama-samādhisūtra*).³⁹

“Ākāśagarbha teaches the Dharma in various places according to the specificities of various beings. [F.278.b] He conveys the sūtras, meditative concentration, tolerance, and bodhisattva grounds taught by the omniscient one in a way that was previously unheard of and unprecedented. Consequently, beginner bodhisattvas ignorant of skillful means who have incurred transgressions are ashamed. Because of those transgressions, they are very frightened and terrified. They disclose the transgressions, give them up, and reject them.

“If, upon hearing the name of the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha, those beings wish to see him, and if, fearful of falling to the lower realms, they wish to disclose their root transgressions, pay homage to the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha, and call out his name, then, son of noble family, in accordance with their merit, he will stand before those sentient beings as an ordinary person, or in front of those beginner bodhisattvas in various forms, from that of a brahmin to that of a girl, and make them disclose those transgressions just as they have occurred.

“He displays his profound skill in means and shows them how to engage in the unsurpassable Mahāyāna. On the various bodhisattva grounds, he establishes them in meditative concentration, *dhāraṇīs*, and tolerance by having them gradually practice the entire eightfold path. He frees them completely from their immense fear of the lower realms and establishes them on the stage of not turning away from unsurpassable, perfectly complete enlightenment. As quick as a flash of lightning, they thereby become very strong and determined in the practice of the six perfections. In this way they swiftly come to manifestly and completely awaken to unsurpassable, perfectly complete enlightenment.

“If he does not show himself to them directly, the beginner bodhisattvas who pray to him and who have erred in their ways should rise during the watch of dawn, stand facing the eastern direction, and pray to Aruṇa, the divine son, uttering these words: ‘Aruṇa, o Aruṇa, endowed with great compassion! Great fortunate one! [F.279.a] As soon as you have risen in this world, enfold me in your compassion. Summon the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha, who is endowed with great compassion, with these my words: Show yourself in my dreams that I may disclose my transgressions. Lead me to obtain the skillful means and wisdom of the noble Mahāyāna.’

“Having spoken these words, they should go back to bed to sleep. Then, at the first light of dawn in this world, the bodhi-

sattva Ākāśagarbha will come and appear in the dreams of those beginner bodhisattvas, in the guise of an ordinary person, and will make them disclose their root transgressions. With great primordial wisdom and skillful means, that expert in skillful means and primordial wisdom will bring these beginner bodhisattvas to attain the meditative concentration called *not forgetting bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment* at that very moment. They will come to firmly abide by the Mahāyāna, to swiftly complete the six perfections, and, before long, to manifestly and completely awaken to unsurpassable, perfectly complete enlightenment. Such skillful means and wisdom will he also teach them. Son of noble family, this is why the bodhisattva mahāsattva Ākāśagarbha bears the precious wish-fulfilling jewel, which arises from great bravery, on his head, the holiest part of the body. The bodhisattva mahāsattva Ākāśagarbha is endowed with inconceivable excellent qualities.

“Furthermore, son of noble family, if the beings who have heard the name of the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha, who draw his form or have made offerings to him, venerate him, revere him deeply, and worship and honor him in numerous ways with flowers, incense, garlands, ointments, parasols, banners of victory, and flags—if they pay homage to him and even offer their lives to him, then those beings [F.279.b] will not die in fire or in water, nor will they be killed with weapons or poison. Except when their lives are naturally exhausted, no one—neither humans nor non-humans—will be able to rob them of their life force. They will not die an untimely death, become sick, or die of hunger or thirst, nor will they be killed by order of a ruler, and for the rest of their lives they will not incur a single transgression.

“At the time of death they will not see forms with their eyes, hear sounds with their ears, smell odors with their noses, experience tastes with their tongues, or experience tactile objects with their bodies. They will, however, continue to breathe out

and breathe in with a subtle breath, and their life force, warmth, and consciousness will still remain in their bodies. At that time, the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha will show himself to them as an ordinary person. To those beings who in the past revered the brahmins, this son of noble family will show himself in the form of a brahmin. To those who revere Kāmeśvara, he will display the form of Kāmeśvara. To those who have taken refuge in and revere Nārāyaṇa, Maheśvara, Śakra, a cakravartin, the sun, the moon, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Virūdhaka, Virupākṣa, or Vaiśravaṇa, or who have taken refuge in various objects such as devas, mountains, trees, fountains, ponds, and pools, he will show himself accordingly. And in the form that corresponds to their disposition he will speak the following words:

‘Whoever has insight into the four noble truths
Is liberated from existence in saṃsāra.
Therefore, those dwelling in saṃsāra should know all four.
Having understood these Dharmas, these beings will reach
the higher realms.’

“Appearing before beings who have strong faith in the Buddha, [F.280.a] he will display the form of the Buddha and utter these words:

‘The truth of the Buddha’s primordial wisdom
Frees those dwelling in the ocean of existence.
Swiftly attain that primordial wisdom,
And you will be liberated from all suffering.’

“At this time, these beings will be joyful and delighted by the sound (of those words) that bring the Buddha to mind. Then they will die and be reborn in a buddhafiield, unsullied and pure, in which a buddha bhagavān dwells, lives, and resides, and where he teaches the Dharma. The same can be said with respect

to the Dharma and the Saṃgha. This shows that the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha is endowed with inconceivable excellent qualities.

“Those who wish to perfectly master different kinds of meditative concentration should pay homage to the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha during the watch of dawn and make as many offerings as possible. Establishing the mind in loving kindness for all sentient beings, they should then utter these words: ‘Give heed, give heed to me. Ākāśagarbha, you have achieved great compassion. I pray, please bestow upon me mindfulness and the yoga of meditative concentration. Thus it is:

*umuraṇakhe | bakṣamanile | samudra | avadarena |
nayanaya | mahākāruṇikā | anupamajambhasmṛti |
akrajambhasmṛti | vajrajambhasmṛti | koṣasmṛti |
anupamasmṛti | bhūtakoṭismṛti svāhā |*

“To those who recite in this way, Ākāśagarbha grants mindfulness and entrance into meditative concentration.

“Those who desire to study treatises, whether the words of the Buddha or expositions by the śrāvakas, should first bathe and then pay homage to the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha at the break of dawn, make as many offerings as possible, generate loving kindness for all sentient beings, and speak these words: ‘Give heed, give heed to me! Greatly learned one, among all beings, Ākāśagarbha, son of noble family beyond imagination, you are supreme. Pray bestow upon me the yoga of mindfulness and meditative concentration.’ Thus [F.280.b] it is:

*inīlaja | viṣanaduṣaja | viyavanaja | vibakṣisame | pāśalajasi |
sthānaśarave | śastrakarṇṇe | humahuma | mahākāruṇika
svāhā |*

“Those who wish to enter the great ocean or caves, or to make use of the sacred essence,⁴⁰ who have been imprisoned, are

separated from friends, or face hostile people: such beings may call out the name of the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha, make as many offerings as possible, settle the mind in loving kindness for all sentient beings, and utter these words: ‘Give heed, give heed to me, Ākāśagarbha of great renown, endowed with great compassion and intent on the welfare of beings! You, who are endowed with great compassion, look upon me; liberate me from these circumstances and bestow good fortune upon me. Supremely powerful one, I am worn out by suffering. I am destitute. Relying upon you, I will attain peace and happiness in this and future lives.’

“Then the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha will appear in front of them, in various forms including that of a common person and that of a girl, and he will bring them relief and free them from whatever fears they may have.

“This also applies to those who are afraid of fire, water, weapons, toxins, curses, tigers, lions, strong poisons, thieves, and rogues,⁴¹ are shackled, or punished, or are about to be killed; those who are struck by a disease or who are afraid of diseases; and those who are bereft of monastic robes, alms, bedding, a seat, medicine to cure disease, or of basic necessities.

“Some princes [F.281.a] may wish to be promoted to a higher rank. They might utter the name of the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha and pay homage to him, worship and venerate him, and so forth. Having heard the name of the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha, those who wish to be promoted to a high rank among the brahmins, householders, craftsmen, those engaged in studies, or meditators, up to whatever high rank they aspire to, should pay homage to him. Once they have bathed and put on clean clothes, they should take refuge in the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha during the watch of dawn and pray to him, uttering these words: ‘O Ākāśagarbha, your compassion is great indeed! I pray, please bestow good fortune upon me. Fulfill my aspirations and intentions, each one of them, according to my wishes. You, who

are endowed with great compassion, grant me whatever I wish, and kindly do whatever I request.’

“If they do all this and utter these words, the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha will hear this with the purified faculty of divine hearing which is beyond human capacity and show himself to those beings in whatever form is appropriate. He will also teach them such skillful means.

“The bodhisattva mahāsattva Ākāśagarbha is endowed with the excellent quality of such skillful means. He is endowed with a great ocean-like mind.

“Son of noble family, some may be able to estimate how many drops of water are contained in the great ocean, but no one can fathom the extent to which the bodhisattva mahāsattva Ākāśagarbha is gifted in skillful means and wisdom, or the extent of his activities that ripen sentient beings through skillful means. Son of noble family, some may be able to apprehend the expanse of the whole of the infinite, limitless space in the ten directions, but it is impossible to fathom the multitude of forms the bodhisattva mahāsattva Ākāśagarbha takes in order to bring sentient beings to spiritual maturity. Sometimes he manifests in the form of a buddha in order to ripen sentient beings, [F.281.b] sometimes in the form of a brahmin. He manifests in whatever form is required to tame beings. Among those born in the animal realm he manifests in the form of an animal; among hell beings, in the form of a hell being; and for those of the Yama world, as a being of the Yama world, and so forth.

“For some he emanates as a directly perceptible manifestation, for others he manifests in dreams. For some he manifests in various forms at the time of death and transference, at the last movement of consciousness, in order to eliminate the karma of their negative deeds, to liberate them from the lower realms, to place them in the higher realms, and to bring about the wellbeing of sentient beings. Having taken refuge in and seen these manifestations, these beings will obtain all forms of

happiness, up to the happiness of abiding in the worlds of the higher realms. It is for this reason that no one can fathom the magnitude of all of the manifestations of Ākāśagarbha.

“Indeed, the bodhisattva mahāsattva Ākāśagarbha is endowed with the inconceivably excellent qualities of skillful means and wisdom. He is endowed with the excellent qualities of a buddha. That is why a precious wish-fulfilling jewel appears on the head, the supreme part of the body of this son of noble family.”

The entire assembly was amazed and marveled at the bodhisattva mahāsattva Ākāśagarbha. Having paid homage to their teacher and honored him, they all joined their palms and made offerings to the bodhisattva mahāsattva Ākāśagarbha, and honored him in various ways. They made offerings of flowers, incense, garlands, ointments, lamps, parasols, victory banners, flags, monastic robes, ornaments, garments, praises, songs, and cymbal music.

The bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha in turn [F.282.a] presented the Bhagavān with all of these offerings, then prostrated at the feet of the Bhagavān and supplicated him with these words:

“Venerable Bhagavān, in this afflicted buddhafield stained by the five impurities, beings are deluded due to the great darkness of ignorance. How can those beings be benefited, so as to bring about their enlightenment?”

The Bhagavān replied:

“It is thus, son of noble family. The sky is neither bound nor liberated. It is not afflicted, nor deluded, and is naturally pristine. The wind scatters particles of dust in the sky, and tosses them around. Thus, the sky appears impure, as dark as night. Then water makes the particles fall and renders the sky stainless and completely pristine. In this case, if the stars, the planets, the sun, and the moon are not visible, then the seconds, minutes, hours,⁴² days, nights, seasons, and years will be imperceptible as well.

“Son of noble family, in the same way, mind—which is pervaded by emptiness, the ultimate reality of the tathāgata—is by nature utterly pristine and pure. However, the minds of sentient beings have been defiled by adventitiously arisen afflictions. For their benefit, the Dharma is taught out of the tathāgata’s great compassion, which is likened to water. Sentient beings’ afflicted minds are completely purified, rendering them pristine and stainless. Because of this, when the sun of the tathāgata has risen, these beings will be filled with the light rays of primordial wisdom and will actualize the inconceivably excellent qualities of a buddha.

“Thus they will be established in the four close applications of mindfulness and so on, up to the eighth branch of the eightfold noble path. They will achieve all possible qualities, up to the eighteen unique qualities of a buddha. All of these beings will be firmly rooted in compassion. From among them, arhats will appear in the world. [F.282.b] Pratyekabuddhas and bodhisattva mahāsattvas will appear in the world. Tathāgata, arhat, perfectly complete buddhas will appear in the world.

“Son of noble family, what do you think: does space abide in the eye?”

Ākāśagarbha replied, “Bhagavān, it does not.”

“Does it abide in the eye consciousness?”

“Bhagavān, it does not.”

“Does it abide in that which is apprehended by the eye?”

“Bhagavān, it does not.”

“Does space abide anywhere inside, in the arising of the three feelings⁴³ caused by the eye apprehending an object?”

“Bhagavān, it does not.”

“The same is to be said about the ears, the nose, the tongue, and the body as well. Son of noble family, what do you think: does space abide in the mind, or anywhere else up to the arising of the three feelings caused by the mind apprehending an object?”

“Bhagavān, it does not.”

“Son of noble family, what do you think: do sentient beings abide in space?”

“Bhagavān, they do not.”

“What do you think, son of noble family: does space abide in sentient beings?”

“Bhagavān, it does not.”

Thus did the bodhisattva mahāsattva Ākāśagarbha reply to the Bhagavan’s questions. He continued, “Bhagavān, they do not depend on each other. One is not the other’s object. Bhagavān, all phenomena are to be understood in this particular way: they are devoid of concepts, they are empty, devoid of superimposition; they are the final reality and suchness. Bhagavān, with regard to the essence of space, it is thus. Its particular characteristic is that it is not differentiated; it is non-conceptual, completely non-conceptual, unmoving, and lacking in substance. It is devoid of sprout, seed, fruit, and ripening, devoid of words, and of mental fixation. Bhagavān, [F.283.a] a bodhisattva mahāsattva who understands all phenomena in this way attains acceptance that all phenomena are non-arising. Bhagavān, it is thus:

*vyavarāja | mantakṣāya | jinajaya | jananimamunihara |
anayaphala | guṇagarbha | niyamasurināya | bupaśa |
śataśapa | śamaśana | tathakama | śamaṅgu | mātuśiṣa |
śamacetanāya | kleśāntasaṃśoṣaṇe svāhā |”*

The Bhagavān replied, “Well said, well said. Son of noble family, when you use this *dhāraṇī* of ‘the majestic lion turning backwards, which overwhelms everyone who sees him,’⁴⁴ at the time of death, at the last moment of beings’ consciousness, you will have the capacity to eliminate their obscuration of afflictions, their obscuration of karma, and their obscuration with regard to phenomena, and send them to the completely pure

buddhafields. You will go to limitless, uncountable world systems, and by the power of compassion for sentient beings you will expound various classes of Mahāyāna sūtras in the villages, towns, market places, provinces, countries, and kings' palaces, manifesting in various forms with appropriate attire and conduct. You will bring sentient beings to maturity in such a way that all of them, from the lowliest among the kṣatriyas up to the lowliest among the monastics, will be able to abandon the negative dharmas and will abide by the wholesome dharmas.”

As the Bhagavān was teaching, limitless, countless beings of nine types of birth among gods and men attained various states of meditative concentration, *dhāraṇīs* and tolerance, whereas for others the wisdom of the ten grounds arose. Tens of thousands of beings attained acceptance that all phenomena are non-arising.

“When beings give up the root of conflict,
Whatever the quarrels might be about,
Then the foundation of all views will quickly change.”⁴⁵

When the Bhagavān had spoken these words, the monks, the entire retinue, and the whole world, including gods, humans, asuras, and gandharvas, [F.283.b] rejoiced and praised the Bhagavān's teachings.

This completes the Noble Mahāyāna Ākāśagarbha Sūtra.

Edited, translated, and established by the Indian abbot Śākyaprabha and the monk Ratnarakṣita.

Notes

Abbreviations for Kangyur editions:

C Cone, D Degé, L Lithang, N Narthang,
P Beijing, Y Yunglo, Zh Zhol

Other abbreviations:

BCA Bodhicaryāvatāra,
LVP La Vallée Poussin

1. The term *garbha* can refer to different things, depending on the context. Womb, embryo, heart, and essence are all possible translations. Historically, Tibetans opted for the translation *snying po*, which has the connotation of being an essence or the heart of a matter. For a discussion of this term see Zimmermann 2002: 40-41.
2. LVP 1923: 7-8.
3. See <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.16.1-6.vaji.html>
4. For a discussion of Ākāśagarbha's role in the Buddhist tantric traditions and his relation to Mahāvairocana see De Visser (1931: 11-16).
5. De Visser (1931: 17-18).
6. De Visser (1931: 18-27) gives an extensive summary of the Chinese version of this sūtra. For a German translation from the Korean and Chinese see Tarchin and Lindmayer (2010).
7. The Chinese text, for instance, contains a part of the prologue that the Tibetan does not have. Conversely, in the discussion of the eight fundamental transgressions for beginner bodhisattvas, the Tibetan text presents the measures to be taken to purify one's negative deeds right after the explanation of the first transgression, an explanation we do not find in this place in the Chinese version.
8. Śākyaprabha is reported to have worked in collaboration with the translator/editor Yeshé Dé (*ye shes sde*) who flourished around the turn of the 9th century (see for instance Toh. No. 558/559/562/563).
9. For a translation of the relevant passages see Bendall and Rouse (1922: 61ff). The extensive quotes from the *Ākāśagarbhasūtra* found in the Tibetan version of the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, however, are not identical to the corresponding passages from the *Ākāśagarbhasūtra* included in the Kangyur. As both translations were produced around the same time, they were either prepared independently from each other, or the former represents some kind of heavily revised edition of the latter. Interestingly,

the editor-in-chief of the translation of Śāntideva's work was Yeshé Dé who, as mentioned above, also worked with Śākyaprabha, one of the translators of the *Ākāśagarbhasūtra*.

10. BCA V, 104.
11. Surprisingly, this sūtra is specifically referred to in our text, a reference we do not find in the corresponding portions quoted in Śāntideva's *Śikṣāsamuccaya*. It is possibly an addition by the translators of our text, who happen to be the same as the ones responsible for the Tibetan rendering of the *Śūraṅgamasamādhisūtra*, namely Śākyaprabha and Ratnarakṣita.
12. There are many versions of this seven-limbed practice, the most famous being taken from the *Aspirations of Samantabhadra* (Tib. *bzang spyod smon lam*).
13. Kongtrul Lodrö Tayé (2003: 22).
14. For an extensive study of this concept see Wangchuk (2007).
15. This distinction is famously attested by Śāntideva in his *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (1.15).
16. *Thub pa'i dgongs pa rab tu gsal ba* (16a2-17a2).
17. The terms used in the sūtra are: kṣatriya, ministers, śrāvakas, and beginner bodhisattvas. For a clear and brief presentation of these vows see Kongtrul Lodrö Tayé (2003: 176-179).
18. It should be noted here that the presentation of the fourteen fundamental transgressions may vary depending on the different teaching traditions. According to the *Ākāśagarbhasūtra*, the complete list comprises five transgressions for kṣatriyas (or kings), five for ministers, and eight for beginner bodhisattvas. Since the first four of the ministers' transgressions are the same as those of the kṣatriyas', there is a total of fourteen different fundamental transgressions.
19. See Kongtrul Lodrö Tayé (2003: 176), and Ngari Panchen (1996: 84).
20. On the significance of dreams in general in Mahāyāna sūtras see Harrison (2003).
21. The Chinese 'version' of our text was produced at the very beginning of the 5th century, which means that the original predates any major influence from the tantric traditions.
22. On dhāraṇī see Davidson (2009).
23. The Indranīla Jewel is also translated as jewel of Indra, or *cintāmaṇi*. According to Visser (1931: 19), translating from the Sanskrit, the *cintāmaṇi* is the main jewel appearing on Ākāśagarbha's head: "At that moment the multitude assembled around Śākyamuni saw the brilliant light of Ākāśagarbha's *cintāmaṇi* (nyoi-hōju) surrounded by numberless

Śakrābhilagna (shakabiryōga) pearls, appearing in the West and superseding all other lights except that of Śākyamuni.” See also Tharchin and Lindmayer (2010: 51).

24. *lham me lhan ne lhang nge*. This expression refers to the body, speech, and mind of the Buddha. The body is described as radiant; the speech is clear and unconfused; and the mind is brilliant, serene, peaceful, and compassionate.
25. Y and P have *mtshan ma*, which has the additional meaning of “gender of a person.”
26. D reads *rig pa* (mind), P reads *reg pa* (touch).
27. A magical stone endowed with the power to produce water or rain.
28. A fire lens (Tib. *me shel*) concentrates the sun’s rays in order to produce fire, just like powerful meditative concentration is used to achieve supernatural powers, such as clairvoyance.
29. This usually refers to the number of lunar days in a month.
30. These four are: loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity.
31. In the Buddhist context, the head is considered the superior of the limbs, the others being the hands and the legs.
32. sic. (probably reads *cintāmaṇi*)
33. sic. (probably reads *drṣṭiviveka*)
34. The fifth root transgression is twofold: the destruction of representations of a buddha and the drawing of a buddha’s blood.
35. Tib. *phyag dar ba* . Śāntideva’s *Śikṣāsamuccaya* quotes this passage from the *Ākāśagarbhasūtra*. *phyag dar ba* renders the Skt. *caṇḍāla*, meaning in general “outcast, person of lowest value,” etc. According to Monier-Williams it can also mean “a very low representative of” (see MW 383/3).
36. Tib. *mdun na ’don* (Skt. *purohita*). This could also be a house priest.
37. The black teachings are the systems of philosophical views and religious practices which cause one to continuously roam in saṃsāra, in contrast to the great teachings, referring to the buddhadharma, which liberates from it.
38. “Both actions” refers to the actions of the monastics as well as those of the donors.
39. Skt.: *Ārya-śūraṅgamasamādhi-nāma-mahāyāna-sūtra*; Tib. *’phags pa dpa’ bar ’gro b’i ting nge ’dzin ces bya ba theg pa chen po’i mdo*. D 132: vol. 55 (mdo sde, da) 253b5-316b6. For a translation of this sūtra see Lamotte (1998).
40. This probably refers to the old Indian practice of *rasāyana* , an alchemical

process for attaining health and power, immortality and liberation. Also see Sachau (1888: 188).

41. Tib. *g.yon can*. Alternative translation: demons.
42. The terms in the text are *skad cig* (Skt. *kṣaṇa*), the shortest units of time, *thang cig* (*lava*), one-thirtieth of a *muhūrta*, and *yud tsam* (*muhūrta*), one-thirtieth of a day.
43. Pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings.
44. No other reference to this *dhāraṇī* could be located.
45. This version of the stanza differs from that found in other editions of the Kangyur. Here we followed the Degé edition, generally regarded as the most reliable. As other versions of this passage, such as those found in Narthang and Beijing, for instance, are difficult to make sense of, the editors of the Degé Kangyur apparently revised this stanza particularly carefully.

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