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The Account of the Noble Deeds of Śrīsenā

Śrīsenāvadāna



Toh 349
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- ti. Title
- im. Imprint
- co. Contents
- s. Summary
- ac. Acknowledgements
- i. Introduction
- tr. The Account of the Noble Deeds of Śrīsenā
 - 1. The Translation
 - c. Colophon
- n. Notes
- b. Bibliography
 - Source Texts
 - Secondary Sources
- g. Glossary

s.

SUMMARY

- s.1 In this discourse, the Buddha Śākyamuni describes his past life as King Śrīsenā of Ariṣṭa, a bodhisattva renowned for his unstinting generosity and spiritual resolve. In that life, a sage orders his disciple to ask King Śrīsenā for his beautiful wife, Jayaprabhā. Out of compassion, King Śrīsenā gives his wife to the disciple. Śakra, lord of the gods, then claims that King Śrīsenā is also able to give away his own body. The other gods have doubts about this, so to prove his point, Śakra disguises himself as an old brahmin whose lower body has been eaten by a tiger, and then asks King Śrīsenā to gift him his own lower body. With altruistic motivation, King Śrīsenā agrees to the request and orders carpenters to saw him in half. He offers the bottom half to the brahmin, whose body is magically made whole again. King Śrīsenā claims he has felt no regrets and by the power of his words, his own body is restored. During this ordeal, Śakra has kept the king alive and carefully monitored his reactions. Observing nothing but pure altruism, Śakra then confirms that the king is a true bodhisattva who is capable of the highest acts of generosity. With this past life story, the Buddha illustrates the kinds of personal sacrifice a bodhisattva will make to attain awakening, even when these go against the protestations of those closest to him.

ac.

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INTRODUCTION

i.

i.1 *The Account of the Noble Deeds of Śrīsenā* belongs to one of the most beloved narrative genres in Buddhism, the past life story (*avadāna*). It deals with one of the most powerful and pervasive themes in this genre, the bodhisattva's bodily sacrifice for the benefit of living beings.¹ In this *avadāna*, the act of bodily sacrifice performed by the Buddha's previous incarnation, the bodhisattva king Śrīsenā, forms the centerpiece of an elaborate morality tale extolling the virtues and far-reaching benefits of selfless generosity.

i.2 Most past-life stories of the Buddha are found within two genres of Buddhist literature: *avadāna* and *jātaka*. The term *avadāna*, broadly meaning "narrative" or "tale," denotes a type of exemplary story that is common to most Indian religious traditions. In the Buddhist context, *avadāna* is traditionally specified as the tenth of the twelvefold subdivision of Buddhist scripture (*pravacana*), classified according to content, thematic structure, and literary style. Although this class of works is as varied as it is voluminous, the stories typically illustrate the results of good and bad karma, indicating how past deeds have shaped present circumstances. In this vein, many *avadānas*, the present one included, set out to show how the exemplary lives of the Buddha or, more often, his followers, have resulted from their meritorious deeds in past lives. *Avadānas* may also, in certain cases, include prophecies of future spiritual attainments.

i.3 *Avadānas* recounting past deeds, such as the one translated here, typically follow a three-part narrative structure: a story from the present life of the Buddha or another protagonist, a story of an exemplary past deed, and a connecting conclusion that shows how the past protagonist and his circle were prior incarnations of the present protagonist and his circle. In this regard, *avadānas* bear a close relationship to *jātakas* ("birth stories" of the Buddha). One notable difference, however, is that the protagonist of an *avadāna* is often not the Buddha himself, as it is in most *jātaka* stories, but one of his followers or prospective followers.² Another difference is that

avadānas generally concern past *human* lives of realized beings, not those of animals or nonhumans, as is the case in many jāataka tales. Finally, while jāataka stories had wide popular appeal, with plots, characters, and motifs drawn from pan-Indian folklore, the avadānas seem to have originally been intended primarily for monastics, as suggested by their frequent references to attendant monks, their moral tone, and their specific prescriptions for Buddhist practice that are interspersed throughout the narratives. Yet, in the course of their historical diffusion, these edifying tales of spiritual and moral accomplishment eventually gained wide popularity and came to inspire and educate Buddhist monastics and lay followers alike.

i.4 To our knowledge, there is no extant Sanskrit version of the *Śrīsenāvadāna*. Colophons of the Tibetan canonical translations of this text indicate that it was translated from Sanskrit by the Indian preceptor Dharmaśrībhadrā, a chief editor called Sherab Lekpa, and the famous translator Rinchen Zangpo (958–1055 CE), who is said to have learned Sanskrit in Kashmir after traveling there in 975 to study Buddhism. It is interesting to note that the only compilation of Buddhist birth stories in any other language to include *The Account of the Noble Deeds of Śrīsenā* was also produced in Kashmir and at roughly the same time as Rinchen Zangpo's sojourn. This collection was the *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā*,³ a literary retelling of many Buddhist avadānas that was composed in Sanskrit by the famous Kashmiri poet Kṣemendra (ca. 990–ca. 1070 CE).⁴

i.5 In the version of the Śrīsenā narrative translated here, the deeds of its protagonist are related by the Buddha Śākyamuni. At the beginning of the text, the Buddha explains to his disciples that King Śrīsenā was a bodhisattva who ruled from the city of Ariṣṭa. He was aided in his royal duties by his devoted queen Jayaprabhā and chief minister Mahāmati. He is renowned for his generosity and the prosperity he has brought to his kingdom. After he performs the exceedingly generous act of giving away his queen, his fame reaches the god realms. At this point, Śakra, lord of the gods, decides to test the authenticity of Śrīsenā's generosity by disguising himself as the victim of a tiger attack who is missing the lower half of his body, and who has been brought to the king to beg for the monarch's lower body as a replacement. As Śrīsenā sets out to fulfil the man's request, his loyal subjects rise in protest and none will agree to help. It is only after Śakra enchants two of the king's carpenters that they agree to perform the grisly task.

i.6 The bodhisattva king passes Śakra's test by not only suffering the pain of having his body cut in half, but by undertaking, enduring, and recalling the ordeal with nothing but joy, love, and equanimity. He is able to do this, the account explains, because he is motivated by the mind of awakening—the wish to attain awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings. At the end of

the story, the Buddha reveals that he was King Śrīsenā in a past life, his wife Yaśodharā was Queen Jayaprabhā, his ordained disciple Śāriputra was his minister Mahāmāti, his lay disciple King Bimbisāra was the god Śakra, and his duplicitous cousin Devadatta was one of the carpenters.

i.7 Like most of the past life tales of the Buddha, both avadāna and jātaḱa, *The Account of the Noble Deeds of Śrīsenā* is a morality tale that explains and illustrates the relationship between karma and its results. It demonstrates how the performance of good deeds causes beings to experience happiness and, conversely, the performance of harmful deeds causes them to suffer. It also highlights variations in the efficacy of good and bad deeds—good and bad deeds can be big and small, powerful and trifling. Even small deeds, however, can significantly impact an individual’s future behavior and experiences, whether positively or negatively.

i.8 As the narrative demonstrates, much of a deed’s power comes not from the action itself, but from the intention behind it. The two carpenters did not reap the severe karmic consequence that would typically result from sawing a bodhisattva in half because they were enchanted while they performed the deed and had no control over what they did. Nevertheless, their inability to withstand the enchantment did not bode well for them, and we are told that they will continue to act out of ignorance in future lives. The bodhisattva’s actions, by contrast, were deemed to be both powerful and virtuous because they were inspired by the mind of awakening. From the Buddhist perspective, this intention infuses ordinary positive actions with tremendous power and makes extraordinary actions universally significant.

i.9 All the various traditions of Buddhism agree that the Buddha awakened by perfecting these practices over eons, and many past life stories exemplifying this process can be found throughout Buddhist literature. Many of these stories exist in multiple versions, which vary according to the guiding aims and presuppositions of the traditions that have preserved them. Within these traditions, there are dissimilar lists of the behaviors that need to be perfected; some lists include ten behaviors that need to be perfected, others suggest only six. These six perfections appear in all the lists: generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, concentration, and insight.

i.10 The perfection of generosity heads these lists, and it is a central theme in many past life stories, and certainly the main focus of *The Account of the Noble Deeds of Śrīsenā*. Within this narrative, the Buddha demonstrates how important it is not just to perform an act of generosity, but to do so with altruistic motivation and to dedicate any merit that results. King Śrīsenā’s altruistic motivation is noted no fewer than thirteen times in the course of the text, and he repeatedly dedicates the benefit accruing from his acts of compassion to the welfare of others.

i.11 This account not only describes an act of perfect generosity, but also highlights the moral and spiritual implications of this deed. Throughout the sūtra, there is a recurring discussion about the purpose of giving away one's body. King Śrīsenā is presented with many reasons from loved ones why he should not perform this act, such as the grief it will cause his family, the detriments it will inflict on his subjects, and the pointlessness of giving up such a rare and precious life. King Śrīsenā responds to all these objections by patiently explaining that although he is fortunate to have met with such a valuable opportunity, he will not have fulfilled his life's potential if he does not perform the deeds of a bodhisattva. When his relatives and friends beg him not to leave them, he reminds them that saṃsāra's impermanent nature means that sooner or later all those who are close to each other must part. If, however, he awakens to buddhahood, he will have the ability to lead all sentient beings out of this cycle of meeting and parting. Time and again, he responds to those in his circle who beg him to forego his own suffering with a plea to think about the greater cycles of suffering that he and others will all endure if they do not attain liberation from saṃsāra.

i.12 The conversations that King Śrīsenā has about generosity, and the narrative details concerning his sacrificial deed, are reminiscent of other past life stories featuring bodily sacrifice. Reiko Ohnuma calls these "gift-of-the-body stories" and describes how they are found throughout all Buddhist canons, most commonly in avadāna and jātaḥa works but elsewhere as well.⁵ A few of these bodily sacrifice stories were well known across Buddhist traditions. Indeed, as Śrīsenā argues with Mahāmati about the merits of his impending deed, he cites several previous gift-of-the-body stories to make his case. These include the stories of a king of Śibi who gives his eyes to a brahmin, another king of Śibi who gives his flesh to a hawk in order to save a pigeon, and King Candraprabha who gives his head to a brahmin.⁶

i.13 *The Account of the Noble Deeds of Śrīsenā* not only alludes to these other, more famous gift-of-the-body stories, but also follows their literary conventions closely. There are some obvious thematic similarities. Like the bodhisattvas in the other perfection of giving stories, for example, King Śrīsenā is overjoyed at having the opportunity to perform such an enormous act of generosity. It is not every day that a person comes and asks a bodhisattva for his or her body. From the bodhisattva's perspective, the opportunity to give away one's body presents an opportunity to perfect generosity in a very direct way. It is also seen as an opportunity to shorten the time it will take the aspirant to become a buddha. As in related works, the bodhisattva in this story exercises equanimity in offering his body; indeed, it is a stranger that asks for his body, while his close relatives and friends plead with him not to perform the act.

- i.14 These bodhisattva bodily sacrifice narratives also share many symbols and tropes. Tigers, for example, and other flesh-eating animals, like hawks, are often involved. Limbs and eyes are the most commonly offered body parts, and, perhaps by necessity, swords, saws, and other types of knives also make regular appearances in these stories, as well as sharp teeth.
- i.15 Along with the content of these texts—their symbols, language, and narratives—the form of gift-of-the-body stories is also similar. Most of them follow the standard avadāna narrative structure, beginning with the Buddha teaching monks and concluding with the Buddha explaining who the people in the story famously became, typically the Buddha himself and his closest disciples. By way of this framing narrative, the Buddha emphasizes the importance of giving wisely—giving, that is, because the bodhisattva sees saṃsāra for what it is: unsatisfactory, impermanent, and empty of selves. The Buddha-as-narrator then reappears throughout the tale to remind his audience of monks of the importance of the altruistic deed that is about to be performed, thus repeatedly reinforcing the moral of the story.
- i.16 In producing this translation, we have based our work on the Degé xylograph while consulting the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*), as well as the Stok Palace manuscript.

The Account of the Noble Deeds of Śrīsenā

1.

The Translation

1.1 [F.31.b] Homage to the Three Jewels!

1.2 When they were at Śrāvastī, the Blessed One said to the monks, “Monks, I know the fruits of generosity. I also know how the fruits of generosity ripen. What if, like me, sentient beings too knew the fruits of generosity? What if, like me, they knew how the fruits of generosity ripen? Were this so and were someone to ask them for their last mouthful, the last remaining mouthful of their food, they would not eat it so long as they had not offered it or shared it. The growth of miserliness would not continue to completely entangle their minds. I know the fruits of generosity. I also know how the fruits of generosity ripen. But unlike me, sentient beings do not know the fruits of generosity. Unlike me, they do not know how the fruits of generosity ripen. This ignorance is why their minds grasp at everything, why they are not generous, and why they eat without generosity. The growth of miserliness continues to completely entangle their minds.” [F.32.a]

1.3 This is what the Blessed One said. After the Well-Gone One had said this, the Teacher⁷ also said:

“As the great sages have said,
The ripening of sharing is a matter of great import.

1.4 “Thus, if sentient beings knew about this,
They would not eat so long as they could offer.
They would not be miserly,
And never would they give rise to grasping minds.

1.5 “But ignorance obscures immature beings.
Since they do not know, their minds are grasping.
Thus they always eat without first offering,
They become miserly, and their minds are overcome.”

- 1.6 When the Blessed One delivered this discourse, the earth shook in six different ways and light rays shone from the Blessed One's body. When the monks saw the Blessed One's inconceivable and marvelous miracles, they were amazed and inquired of the Buddha, the Blessed One, "Honorable One, the thus-gone, worthy, perfect Buddha would not display such marvelous miracles without causes or conditions. That being so, Honorable One, what are the causes and conditions of such marvelous miracles?"
- 1.7 "Monks, would you like to hear what caused a miracle like this?" asked the Blessed One. The monks requested just this. Then the Blessed One replied, "Monks, if this is so, listen carefully, remember my words, and I will tell you.
- "Monks, at one time there was a royal estate called Ariṣṭa.⁸ It was wealthy, vast, joyous, with good harvests, and full of people. It was twelve leagues long and seven leagues wide.⁹ It was partitioned into quadrants. Parasols, victory banners, and flags were erected over its archways.
- 1.8 "At this royal estate lived a king named Śrīsenā, [F.32.b] who was a universal monarch who ruled through force. He had a lovely physique, and was beautiful, pleasing to the eye, and had a good complexion. He possessed the best attributes in abundance. He could remember his past lives naturally, and he was righteous. He was a Dharma king who ruled Jambudvīpa through righteousness.
- 1.9 "King Śrīsenā's power caused the plants to blossom and bear fruit continuously, the gods to make the rains fall at the right times, and the harvests to be exceedingly abundant. The beings there were free from illness and they all maintained a loving attitude toward each other.
- 1.10 "The king's noble queen was called Jayaprabhā. She had a lovely figure and was beautiful and pleasing to the eye. She had all her major and minor body parts. She was the perfect daughter of that land, and King Śrīsenā loved, adored, and cherished her.
- 1.11 "Monks, King Śrīsenā levied no taxes on any of Jambudvīpa's people; he collected neither road tolls nor boat fares. The harvests made all the people wealthy, and they were peaceful. Families¹⁰ filled the lands, cities, towns, countryside, and the king's estate.
- 1.12 "Monks, King Śrīsenā was a bodhisattva, so he gave away everything. He let go of everything completely—indeed, he let go of everything completely and without attachment. Absorbed in great giving, he even gave away his own flesh. There was nothing that he would not give away or let go.
- 1.13

“Monks, at the eastern edge of the city, at Ariṣṭa Estate, King Śrīsenā created a site for gift offerings from which he distributed gifts and performed meritorious deeds. He distributed gifts and performed meritorious deeds at the city’s southern, western, and northern gates as well, and he distributed gifts and performed meritorious deeds at its intersections. He would, for example, give food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty. He distributed gifts and performed meritorious deeds by giving food, drink, lamps, flower garlands, [F.33.a] scents, perfumes, clothes, blankets, mattresses, back supports, shelters, images, horse-carts, elephants, horses, ornaments, golden containers filled with silver dust, silver containers filled with gold dust, oxen with golden horns and silver hoofs, bronze milking containers that were twice covered with cloth, and maidens who were adorned with various ornaments.

1.14 “Monks, King Śrīsenā gave gifts until everyone in Jambudvīpa was affluent, prosperous, and deeply contented. At that time, 960 million people lived in the city where the king’s royal estate, Ariṣṭa, was located. King Śrīsenā was loved and adored by all. What was more, when men and women saw him, they experienced insatiable delight.

1.15 “Monks, King Śrīsenā had twelve thousand ministers. The supreme one among them was called Mahāmati. He was learned, bright, wise, his charisma affected all, and he took great care¹¹ of the king. King Śrīsenā loved, adored, and esteemed him. Mahāmati would never tire of gazing upon the king’s form, his complexion, his features, or his shape. He could not be separated from the king for even a moment.

1.16 “Monks, King Śrīsenā acquainted all of Jambudvīpa’s people with the path of the ten virtuous actions. He said to them, ‘People of Jambudvīpa, you must follow the path of the ten virtuous actions. You must adopt the path of the ten virtuous actions correctly.’ Monks, this is how King Śrīsenā instructed his subjects. Thus, during the reign of this universal monarch, when people in Jambudvīpa would die and their bodies would perish, [F.33.b] they were reborn in one of the six god realms. Most were born in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three, and the divine city Darśanīya was filled with crowds of gods from the Heaven of the Thirty-Three. When it became too crowded and there was not enough space in the divine city, the gods dwelled on the outskirts of Darśanīya at the Pārijāta and in groves such as Caitraratha, Nandanavana, and so forth. Following this influx, the gods who had been born earlier in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three viewed the perfect accomplishments of the newcomers and were overjoyed. They spoke to Śakra, lord of the gods, saying, ‘Kauśika, how is it that Mount Sumeru is filled with gods, and the divine assembly has increased, while the demigods’ assembly has decreased? We are beholding something marvelous.’

- 1.17 “After hearing about this from the gods, Śakra, lord of the gods, inspected Mount Sumeru, and as soon as he did, he too saw that Mount Sumeru was teeming with multitudes of gods. Seeing this, he thought, ‘What causes and conditions led this many sentient beings to be born here?’ With this in mind, he began to inspect all of Jambudvīpa, and as soon as he did, he saw that it was a result of King Śrīsenā’s influence. Then, with great joy, Śakra, lord of the gods, said to the gods of the Heaven of the Thirty-Three:
- 1.18 “ ‘Friends, you must listen!
There is a king, a ruler of Jambudvīpa,
Who is renowned as Śrīsenā.
He is always inclined toward the Dharma.
- 1.19 “ ‘This great king lives by the Dharma.
In the beginning, middle, and end, he is always virtuous.
He delights in helping all sentient beings
And, principally, he continually brings humans to virtue.
- 1.20 “ ‘He is constantly compassionate,
He gives away his external possessions,
And to those who ask for his flesh,
He gives this away too, with love.
- 1.21 “ ‘Whether that which is asked for is external or internal,
Without any sense of grasping
He bestows everything with kindness
And works diligently to achieve awakening.
- 1.22 “ ‘Like refined gold, [F.34.a]
He accomplishes the wishes of all beings.
Through the encouragement of this king
Everyone is inspired to pursue higher rebirths.
- 1.23 “ ‘Because of the influence
Of this great, intelligent king
No one will be born in hell,
In the preta realm, or the animal realm.
- 1.24 “ ‘This king’s resplendent radiance
Illuminates their migrations.
They take joy in giving and discipline,
And they play joyfully in Nandanavana.
- 1.25 “ ‘Those who follow Śrīsenā

Are respectful and live
In pleasurable divine worlds,
Where they shine with joy.' "

1.26 "When the gods of the Heaven of the Thirty-Three heard these words, their minds were overjoyed, and they celebrated. With such joy in their minds, they exclaimed, 'This king aspires to fulfill his wish to give away his major and minor body parts—this is marvelous! Yet it is difficult to give away one's major and minor body parts. Since there is no one as dear as oneself, he will not be able to give away his major and minor body parts without concern for his own suffering. This act of giving is not something that one can simply infer.'¹²

" 'Friends,' replied Śakra, 'do not say these things! This king is powerful. He has magical powers and intense compassion. This is why he can give away even his own flesh. There is nothing that he cannot relinquish.'

1.27 "Shortly thereafter, on another occasion, Śrīsenā's queen, Jayaprabhā, went to sleep on her large mattress, and just before dawn she dreamt four dreams. First, she dreamt that Śrīsenā carried her down off the mattress and then lifted her back onto it. Then he gouged out his own eyes, but they were later restored. He chopped off his right arm, which fell to the ground, but it was also restored. Finally, she dreamt of a nonhuman that resembled a stone grinder, made from silver. It suddenly pulled off King Śrīsenā's left arm. After it was thus stolen, however, that too was restored. Then she woke up. Filled with fear, she gasped and the hairs on her body stood on end. She thought, 'Either the lord or I [F.34.b] will experience nothing but suffering.' She told King Śrīsenā of her dreams. He had been trained to interpret dreams, so he thought, 'As she has seen in her dream, someone will soon come to ask for my wife.' But he comforted her and said, 'Do not be afraid—what is the point of thinking about illusion-like dreams? Do you not see Śrīsenā sitting on his mattress? My eyes are as they were, and my right and left arms are intact.' The queen sat silently.

1.28 "The second night after this, the supreme one among the ministers, the one named Mahāmati, dreamt a dream in which King Śrīsenā's mansion, which was built of various precious stones, collapsed. The precious stones were then taken away by fearful-looking demons. Later, however, he dreamt that the mansion was rebuilt. He awoke terrified and distressed, with the hairs on his body standing on end. He thought, 'Could someone come to ask for Lord Śrīsenā's body? Could they ask for the body of he who pleases and is affectionate toward all sentient beings, the lord who offers everything, who gives everything completely, he who gives without attachment? There

is nothing that he would not give to lesser, blind, hungry, suffering, and deprived beings. I will not speak of my dream to King Śrīsenā. He would be too delighted about it!

1.29 “He then called a soothsayer and commanded him, ‘Wise one, you must foretell the significance of the dream that I had.’ The soothsayer said, ‘According to the dream, someone will come soon to ask for the lord’s body.’ When he heard the significance of the dream, the great minister Mahāmāti was struck by deep sorrow. His eyes filled with tears, he rested his hand on his cheek, and [F.35.a] he sat depressed, pondering how the force of impermanence had arrived too soon for the loving and compassionate King Śrīsenā, he who had been so affectionate toward all sentient beings and possessed so many great qualities.

1.30 “Then, on the third night, twelve thousand ministers dreamt five dreams. They dreamt that ten thousand beings robbed King Śrīsenā of his parasol and crown, but they were then handed back to him; that everyone’s heads were chopped off, but then restored; that the eyes of every human in Jambudvīpa were gouged out, but then restored; that the hands and feet of every human in Jambudvīpa were chopped off, but then restored; and that King Śrīsenā attempted to ascend the lion throne again after he had descended from it. The terrified, distressed, and despairing ministers thought, ‘Will the force of impermanence come for King Śrīsenā? Will it be the end of this protector of a vast land, he who is so loving and compassionate, he who brings joy and rouses affection in all sentient beings? Will we live without the king? Will we be separated? Will we be parted? Will we be alone? Will Jambudvīpa lose its protector and defender?’

“The ministers then called for soothsayers to ask about the dreams’ significance. After a while, the soothsayers foretold that things would be just as they had dreamt.

1.31 “After hearing about the dreams, the populace of Ariṣṭa city was wretched and started to weep aloud. Word spread from person to person, and soon everyone in Jambudvīpa wailed because of their suffering and intense grief. King Śrīsenā heard of this and thought, ‘How pleasing and delightful that someone would ask for my body!’ Thus, he made an announcement: ‘Wise ones, people of Jambudvīpa, engage in virtue with joy and calmness. What is the point of thinking about illusion-like dreams?’ [F.35.b] When the people of the world heard King Śrīsenā’s announcement, they were relieved.

1.32 “In those days, five hundred sages lived on a mountain about two miles¹³ north of the royal estate of Ariṣṭa. A short time after the dreams, one of the sages came to the king’s estate to do the sages’ bidding. At that time, King Śrīsenā and Queen Jayaprabhā were strolling in the garden. The sage exclaimed, ‘May the king be victorious and live for a long time!’ The sage

also saw Queen Jayaprabhā adorned with ornaments. In a past life the queen had been his wife. The influence of this previous desire and their previous relationship caused him to have inappropriate thoughts. Thinking these inappropriate thoughts, he walked along the path, completed his chores in Ariṣṭa city, and went back to his dwelling.

1.33 “A little while later, on another occasion, a student of this same sage, a brahmin boy, completed his recitation of the Vedas, touched his preceptor’s feet, and asked in gratitude, ‘Preceptor, what wealth can I offer you?’

“The sage replied, ‘Son, if you wish, go ask for King Śrīsenā’s supreme queen, Jayaprabhā. Give her to me as your offering, a gift for your preceptor, an homage to your guru.’

1.34 “When this was said, the brahmin boy was overwhelmed by great sorrow and acute despair; he was like a deer whose vital organ has been pierced. He thought, ‘This situation will only come about with difficulty, and it will be no easy task to acquire her. How could a troubled brahmin like me ask the king to give him Queen Jayaprabhā? Why am I being asked to get something that is unattainable? [F.36.a] The preceptor clearly wants to place a curse on me.’

1.35 “The change in the boy’s facial expression allowed the sage to realize his thoughts, and the sage said, ‘Son, do not be afraid. Why are you so depressed? The king is a great being. He gives away everything. He lets go of everything. He lets go of everything completely and without attachment. He would even give away his own flesh. There is nothing that he would not relinquish in this way. Therefore, son, do not despair; the king will give you his supreme queen.’

1.36 “Then the boy thought, ‘If I do not go, I will be cursed.’ And out of fear of this curse, he said to the sage, ‘Preceptor, if that is so, I will go.’ After touching the sage’s feet, he traveled to the king’s estate, Ariṣṭa.

1.37 “Having applied dust to his body, wearing tree-bark cloth, and holding a staff and a little vase in his hands, the boy went to the site where King Śrīsenā was and exclaimed, ‘May the king be victorious and may his life be long!’ Then he thought, ‘Should I ask? Or will he give her to me without my having to ask? Or will he not give her to me? Will my wishes be fulfilled or not?’ And he stood in front of the king with an unsettled look on his face, castigating himself, not speaking.

1.38 “Thinking that the brahmin boy had come to beg something from him, King Śrīsenā asked him, ‘Brahmin, what is it that you want? Today, I will fulfill your wishes completely.’

When the king said this, the brahmin boy gained confidence and replied to the bodhisattva, ‘This is good. Lord, on a certain mountain my preceptor lives with his companions; they are five hundred sages who recite the Vedas.

I have completed my Vedic studies with him. Great King, through your compassion give me Queen Jayaprabhā, and I will offer her to my preceptor as a gift, [F.36.b] an homage to my guru.'

1.39 "When these words were spoken, King Śrīsenā was distraught. He loved the queen. 'If Queen Jayaprabhā were separated from me,' he thought, 'will we survive?' For a while, all the members of the king's and queen's retinues were as quiet as the oceans' depths. Then it was as if a great pain were piercing their vital organs. 'What is this?' they cried out. 'What is this?'

1.40 "The bodhisattva remained silent, in thought. 'Unsurpassed and perfect awakening cannot be attained without giving up sons, wife, and so forth,' he pondered. 'Therefore, I must happily give my wife to this brahmin.' This thought lifted him out of his sadness at losing a loved one. He descended from the lion throne immediately, and keeping in mind the aspirational mind of awakening, he took the goddess-like, intensely beautiful Queen Jayaprabhā with his left hand and held a golden vase in his right. The queen felt great pain at the prospect of being separated from her husband and sighed heavily. Her eyes filled with tears and her face dropped. She suffered as if she had fallen into a deep, dark abyss.

1.41 " 'Come here, come here great brahmin,' the king said to the brahmin boy:

" 'Handsome, fine brahmin,
You may take my beloved wife.
May this act of generosity swiftly bring,
The attainment of true awakening.'

1.42 "Then, maintaining the mind of awakening, he poured water onto the brahmin's palm.

"Monks, at the very instant that King Śrīsenā poured the water, the earth shook in six different ways. Having witnessed how a bodhisattva gives, a great act of giving, an extremely difficult act of giving, the brahmin boy was utterly seized with wonder. The act even caused hundreds of thousands of sky-dwelling gods to murmur in amazement. Instantly, meteors fell, blazing in all directions, and the celestial gods beat their drums. [F.37.a]

1.43 "Fearing that the king might change his mind, the brahmin boy praised the bodhisattva, uttered some prayers for his prosperity, and left quickly for home, taking Queen Jayaprabhā with him. He then gave the queen to his teacher. For Queen Jayaprabhā, being separated from her beloved was like being a fish taken out of water. She was wretched, but she knew that thinking about or following the bodhisattva would be in vain, like wandering from shadows into pitch darkness. Therefore, she merely lamented, 'Alas, Great King. Alas, Great King.' Her sadness even caused her to refuse food.

- 1.44 “As the queen suffered, the shaking caused by King Śrīsenā’s deed rattled even Śakra’s abode. The gods spontaneously know what happens below them but not what happens above them. Śakra, lord of the gods, therefore wondered:
- 1.45 “ ‘The earth quakes with a tremendous sound.
Whose power is behind this sign?
What kind of power is it?
I must know this very clearly.’
- 1.46 “He began to search all over Jambudvīpa. After a while, he discovered that the shaking was a result of the bodhisattva’s extremely difficult act. When he understood this, he was awed. To the gods of the Heaven of the Thirty-Three, he said, ‘Consider the incredible, amazing act King Śrīsenā has performed. Who can give away such a loving, beautiful, and dear wife without any hesitation, as if they were giving away straw? Friends, through this act we know the great being will give away even his major and minor body parts, without hesitation.’
- 1.47 “ ‘Kauśika,’ replied the gods, ‘we believe that he can give away his sons and daughters. But we do not believe he can give away his major and minor body parts. It is too difficult.’
“Śakra, lord of the gods, responded, ‘Friends, leave it be, leave it be. Do not measure the ocean against a drop of water so small it rests on the tip of a hair strand. [F.37.b] Do not measure space with your arms. Do not compare the light of a firefly to the sun. Do not compare the size of a seed to Mount Sumeru. I will produce evidence for you all.’
- 1.48 “At dawn, Śakra, lord of the gods, spoke again to the gods of the Heaven of the Thirty-Three. ‘Look, friends! Now you shall understand!’ That morning, he and four other gods from the Heaven of the Thirty-Three descended to earth, alighting in a forest near Ariṣṭa city. Śakra transformed himself into an old brahmin whose body had been hacked away below the navel, as if by a saw. Blood gushed from all sides of the wound. The other four gods of the Heaven of the Thirty-Three emanated as this old brahmin’s sons. They lifted him onto a stretcher while wailing wretchedly at the agony of losing their father. They left the forest at sunrise, traveling toward the city, intending to claim that the old brahmin’s lower body had been eaten by a tiger. They arrived at the city gate quickly. Hawks, gulls, and vultures hovered in the sky above them, drawn by the smell of the old brahmin’s blood. Dogs and foxes trailed behind them on the ground.
- 1.49 “The old brahmin looked pitiful. His plight moved the men and women who saw him. Some asked each other, ‘Friends, how is the old brahmin still alive when he has no lower body? How are his organs intact?’ Others

speculated, 'He must be a nonhuman demon who has come to devour us. How else would someone survive without his lower body?' When the fainthearted heard this, they ran away out of fear. But one brave man thought, 'He must be a demon. If he isn't a demon, how could he appear to have his faculties despite his imperiled state? [F.38.a] I will ask him if he is a nonhuman or a demon. It will be difficult for him to speak, but if he does, that would be astonishing.' A while later, one of the others who saw the spectacle asked, 'Brahmin! Are you a human or a demon? Who cut off the lower half of your body and left you in this state? Where did you come from?'

1.50 "Then Śakra, lord of the gods, in the form of the old brahmin, lying on the stretcher and acting as if he were in tremendous pain, replied in verse:

" 'Man of Śibi, be not afraid.
I am a brahmin, not a demon.
Because of past deeds,
I have ended up in this state.

1.51 " 'Were I to explain everything,
My time would run out.
The Lord of Death is coming quickly.
He will snatch my life away.

1.52 " 'Please report all this
To your Dharma king.
It is certain that I must experience
The fruits of past actions today.

1.53 " 'Where can I gaze upon the great one?
Where is the one adorned with all good qualities,
The one who is as peaceful as the moon,
The one who loves giving and discipline?

1.54 " 'Where does the Dharma king live?
Where lives the one who is as deep as the ocean,
The one who is as stable as Mount Sumeru,
He who is chief among all beings?

1.55 " 'Where is he who is a refuge for the fearful?
Where is the one to whom all beggars travel,
The one who speaks pleasantly,
He who gives generously and upholds discipline?

1.56 " 'Quickly, death is looming before me.
Tell me, people of Śibi, where can I see him?

No one but the great compassionate one
Will give me half his own body.'

1.57 "In this manner, the old brahmin kept wailing pitifully, uttering weak and disheartened words as he made his way along the path toward the gate of King Śrīsenā's royal estate. Hundreds and thousands of astonished beings followed after him. As they proceeded, crowds of gods, nāgas, yakṣas, asuras, garuḍas, kinnaras, and mahoragas, [F.38.b] those who understood the physical damage and bodily pain King Śrīsenā was about to endure, were tormented by sadness and began to lament. 'Alas,' they cried, 'it is painful to learn that the loving, compassionate King Śrīsenā, who is peaceful and affectionate toward all sentient beings, is about to suffer and will be overpowered by impermanence.'

1.58 "Hearing this, the throngs of people began to lament, too. At this time, the whole of Jambudvīpa descended into turmoil and chaos spread everywhere. Smoke darkened the land, meteors fell blazing in all directions, and the celestial gods beat their drums.

1.59 "While all this was happening, the brahmin who lived in the mountains, who had been offered Queen Jayaprabhā, noticed her distress at being separated from her husband. He noticed that she sighed heavily, refused to eat, and gave no thought to him. His heart trembled with compassion for her, and he thought, 'I should give her back to King Śrīsenā.' Queen Jayaprabhā was greatly relieved when he assured her that he would do this.

1.60 "He also saw that the whole of Jambudvīpa had descended into great turmoil, and chaos had spread everywhere. Seeing this, he said to his disciple, the brahmin boy, 'Brahmin boy, Jambudvīpa is dark with smoke in every direction; it has descended into great turmoil, and chaos has spread everywhere. Not even the sun and moon are shining, bright and steady. Surely, in a short time Jambudvīpa's great being will cease to exist.' Then the brahmin recited the following verses:

1.61 " 'The kinnaras, the forest-dwelling gods,
And even the celestial gods complain.
The moon has no light; the sun cannot dispel the darkness.
Not even musical instruments make a sound today.

1.62 " 'Trees with fruit and flowers are falling,
As if blown over by the wind.
Given that everyone has heard the fearsome and awful sounds,
It is clear that the city will experience unbearable sorrow. [F.39.a]

1.63 " 'All the residents in the delightful city Ariṣṭa are suffering.
Expressing grief and pain among themselves,

- They say, "We are definitely defeated."
 Young women with faces like goddesses wail on rooftops.¹⁴
- 1.64 " 'The people weep profusely as if they were in a terrifying cemetery.
 These clouds hanging in the sky thunder but do not rain.
 Even the waterholes resting in the earth are drying up.
 Peacocks scream as if the forest were crushing them.
- 1.65 " 'People rush between their homes in turmoil.
 Their lands shake as if they were a ship at sea, battered by winds.
 Gales blast piles of garbage and dust into the air.
 There are many signs of demise in Ariṣṭa.
- 1.66 " 'Brahmin boy, today in this land with which you have a karmic connection,
 There are many inauspicious signs.
 It is only reasonable that we set off
 Toward a place that is auspicious.'
- 1.67 " 'Alas, brahmin boys,' the sage continued, 'just as these trees are being
 blown in the direction of the Ariṣṭa royal estate, so it is certain, brahmin boys,
 that there will long be tremendous fear of harm and destruction in Ariṣṭa.'
- 1.68 " 'At the same time, in Ariṣṭa, the bodhisattva was seated on the top floor of
 his mansion. Hearing a large crowd of people lamenting below, he came
 down from his mansion made of precious stones and sat on his large lion
 throne. Urgently he asked, 'Wise ones, what is it? What is happening?'
- 1.69 " 'The four gods carried Śakra, lord of the gods, into the king's court on his
 stretcher, and then placed the stretcher on the floor. Blood dripped from his
 bisected body, but he still extended his right hand and in a pitiable voice
 called out salutations of victory and long life to the bodhisattva. As his eyes
 filled with tears, he displayed his bisected body to the bodhisattva, and
 implored him, [F.39.b] 'You are this world's compassionate one. You suffer
 the pains of others. Lord, protect me. Give me half your body.'
- 1.70 " 'Hearing this request, Mahāmati, supreme among ministers, said, 'Lord,
 this person is not human. He must be a demon or someone possessed by
 demons. A human would not survive being sliced in half at the waist. It is
 impossible and unheard of.'
- 1.71 " 'To this, Śakra, lord of the gods, responded, 'People of Śibi, you need not
 be afraid. I am not a demon. On the contrary, I am a brahmin. I left my wife
 and children because we were poor and, intent on creating wealth, I traveled
 in King Śrīsenā's direction. I came to the royal estate slowly, and by the time
 I arrived the sun had set, and the city's gates were closed. I stayed at a
 manor not far from the city. While I was there, I was overcome by the
 weariness of traveling and fell into a deep sleep. Because of my previous

negative deeds, during the night a tiger came along and used its sharp, saw-like teeth to cut my body in half and steal away the lower half. When I awoke, I experienced an extreme sensation. The tiger may have used its saw-like teeth to cut my body in half, but because I recognized this was caused by my previous actions, I did not die. Still, my suffering was incomparable. It was incomparably violent. It was incomparably harsh. It was incomparably intense. It was an incomparably overwhelming pain, and how I screamed in my misery!

1.72 “ ‘When the celestial gods overheard my cries, they consoled me. A goddess said:

“ ‘Be not afraid, best of brahmins, be not afraid.
We foresee a long life for you.
Once you have swiftly traveled to Ariṣṭa,
You will be fine.

1.73 “ ‘A king lives there who grants everything.
He is known as Śrīsenā. [F.40.a]
If you beg him for half his body,
He will certainly give it to you.’

1.74 “ ‘Having said this, the goddess disappeared. As I heard these words from the goddess, my hope of survival grew, and the pain subsided. Then I became dejected again as I realized I could not get up, let alone walk, with only half of my body. Coincidentally, at dawn, my four kin arrived. They started to cry when they saw my desperate state and thought I would die. To console them, I told them in detail about the goddess’s words. They placed me on this stretcher and carried me here.’

1.75 “ ‘Having spoken these words, the face of Śakra, lord of the gods, was awash with waves of tears. He then said to the bodhisattva:

“ ‘Great King, I am poor and sick.
I am also an old man and a brahmin.
Please give me half your body,
To grant me this life so difficult to find.

1.76 “ ‘Please compassionately grant me
The gift of preserving my life.
Please give me half your body,
Such a gift being the highest of aims.

1.77 “ ‘By giving me half of your body
The merit accrued will be as vast as the ocean.
Similarly, the merit you will gain

- Will be as limitless as space.
- 1.78 “ ‘Having seen my excruciating pain
And my unbearable hunger and thirst,
Exercise supreme compassion
And give me half your body!
- 1.79 “ ‘Virtuous bodhisattva, you abide by the Dharma.
If you claim to become the equal of an omniscient one,
Then please give me half your body today.
Let me keep this life so difficult to find.
- 1.80 “ ‘Great King, give to me half of your body,
Which is so difficult to give;
If you do, the Dharma, and likewise your fame,
Will spread throughout the entire world.’
- 1.81 “Upon hearing these words, the bodhisattva’s past habits of virtue and his stores of positive predispositions infused his mind, causing him to shake with compassion. [F.40.b] ‘Great brahmin,’ he consoled him, ‘do not be afraid. Your body will soon be whole. Your wishes will be fulfilled. With an unwavering mind, I offer you half my body.’ His heart filled with joy, the bodhisattva then spoke the following verses:
- 1.82 “ ‘O, soon you will see me
Give away my body.
It will not be very difficult
To give away my limbs.
- 1.83 “ ‘Although I am my father’s only son,
You can take my body.
Offering my body will result in great awakening.
May it alleviate the intense suffering of all beings.’
- 1.84 “The bodhisattva had heard Śakra’s words, which he had spoken in the form of a brahmin. Therefore, with an entirely satisfied mind and his eyes open, he said, ‘Brahmin, I will give you half my body. Take it without any qualms.’
- 1.85 “Looking around, he saw his attendants and said to one of them, ‘O, you, go quickly and bring me an exceedingly sharp saw.’
- 1.86 “As he had been enchanted by Śakra, the attendant quickly found a saw and brought it to the bodhisattva. ‘Lord,’ he said, ‘here is a saw.’
“Promptly, the bodhisattva said to his ministers, ‘Quickly cut off my lower body and give it to the brahmin, before the Lord of Death takes him to the other world. I offer it to the brahmin.’

- 1.87 “The sound of the bodhisattva’s utterly horrifying words created panic in the city as if they were lightning strikes.¹⁵ ‘Oh, the sorrow, the sorrow!’ the people cried in secret and from on high. Then Mahāmati, the great minister, was wretched with intense pain, as if a vital organ had been pierced, and his face was as wet from crying as from the rain. He feared the bodhisattva would give away his body without any attachment to it, [F.41.a] and seeking to change his mind, he bowed down at his feet and said, ‘Lord, this is not possible. If your body is cut by a saw, you will certainly die. If you die, you will become a useless corpse. A useless corpse is no good to this brahmin. Giving your life to him is pointless. Cutting one person’s limb off and attaching it to another does not work. Your divine efforts will be in vain. Please, be patient. Do not kill yourself in vain. Do not give up your life.’
- 1.88 “Consoling the great minister Mahāmati, the bodhisattva replied, ‘Mahāmati, leave it be, leave it be. At some point, I hope to attain unsurpassed, perfect awakening and liberate saṃsāra’s beings. Do not hinder my awakening. It is the nature of our existence that we must all separate, even from those who have been very dear to us for a long time, like our children.’ Having said this, he glanced once again at the saw and said, ‘This saw is an incomparable object that will direct my merit toward unsurpassed and perfect awakening.’ This is how he thought of it, and again he said to his minister, ‘Cut off the lower half of my body as soon as you can, before the brahmin dies. Otherwise, my intent will be fruitless.’
- 1.89 “Mahāmati, the great minister, knew then that the bodhisattva was determined to give away his body. He held the bodhisattva’s feet in both his hands and kissed them. As tears flowed down his face like rain, he despaired and, overwhelmed with compassion, said to the bodhisattva, ‘Alas, the force of impermanence will strike the lord today. The lord takes care of all of Jambudvīpa, he is the compassionate one, he has innumerable qualities, and he pleases and is affectionate to all sentient beings. [F.41.b] But, alas, impermanence is powerful! Whoever has seen the lord was fortunate.’
- 1.90 “Having spoken, he stared at the bodhisattva’s face for a long time without blinking. Then, as he contemplated how he could not bear to witness the bodhisattva’s death, his eyes closed and he fell to the ground unconscious. The bodhisattva then spoke to two carpenters who happened to be present: ‘Good people,¹⁶ will you help me complete the perfection of generosity? Will you take this saw and quickly cut off the lower half of my body? Let us fulfill the brahmin’s wish. Let us fulfill my wish to attain awakening.’
- 1.91 “Tears of immense sadness covered the two carpenters’ faces like stormy weather. They touched the bodhisattva’s feet and said, ‘Lord, your words are inappropriate. If someone else were to challenge you, we could oppose

them. But how are we to use a weapon against you? You are compassionate, loving, pleasing, and affectionate toward all sentient beings. You take care of all of Jambudvīpa. If we were to use this saw to cut through your body, our actions would cause us to fall instantly into hell.'

" 'Sons,' responded the bodhisattva, 'do not block the final outpouring of the immortal elixir of a bodhisattva's patience. Come here, help me to awaken. Cut off the lower half of my body while the brahmin is still alive.'

1.92 "Śakra, lord of the gods, used his power to compel the two carpenters to begin the process. A little while later, hundreds of thousands of people had gathered in the royal estate and hundreds of thousands of gods had [F.42.a] gathered in the sky. They had flocked to see the bodhisattva perform this extremely difficult task, a task so difficult it made their body hairs stand on end. The bodhisattva stepped down instantly from his lion throne. His intention to give away his body gave him extreme joy, and he was overwhelmed by his love for the brahmin who asked for it.

1.93 "Monks, at the very instant the bodhisattva Śrīsenā stepped down from his lion throne, all of Jambudvīpa's parasols, banners, and flags bent toward Ariṣṭa Estate. Meteors fell toward it from the four directions. But those who dwelled in the city wailed with the pain of separation. 'This evil brahmin is going to kill King Śrīsenā!' they shouted. 'Throw him out of here!'

1.94 "Śakra, lord of the gods, prevented the people from hearing what was happening. They were stupefied. The yakṣas, those who dwell in space and on the ground, came to know that the bodhisattva was unconcerned with his body and wailed in the torment of their immense sorrow. 'Alas,' they cried, 'King Śrīsenā! He who takes care of everyone in Jambudvīpa, he who is compassionate toward all sentient beings, he will give up his entire body!' A deity who lived on the royal estate also came to know that he would give up his entire body, and lamented aloud, 'King Śrīsenā, he who is endowed with so many qualities, is not going to survive because of this beggar!'

1.95 "After this, the bodhisattva looked around in the four directions. 'Gods, nāgas, yakṣas, and kinnaras, all you who dwell in this city, listen! Make pure prayers for me! I am making this gift today. [F.42.b] I am making the greatest of gifts, the gift of one's body. I am not making this gift for myself, the king, nor to attain rebirth in a higher realm. I am not making it for Śakra or for Brahmā. I am not making it to become a universal monarch. I make this gift to attain unsurpassed and perfect awakening. I make it to liberate sentient beings who are not yet liberated. I make it to console those who need consoling, to unbind those who are bound. By the truth of my words, may it be accomplished. May some small sign of my awakening appear!'

1.96

- “To the brahmin, he said, ‘By this action, may you attain all you have imagined. May all your wishes be fulfilled. And may I realize unsurpassed awakening completely.’
- 1.97 “The bodhisattva asked his relatives and the city’s inhabitants for patience. He consoled the poor and stricken, before speaking to the two carpenters. ‘Good people, come here. Before the brahmin’s time runs out, saw at my navel. May I protect all beings who suffer!’ In this way, with love suffusing all, and with the help of a man who supported him, he promptly lay down on his back and stretched out his legs.
- 1.98 “Monks, as the bodhisattva was lowered onto the ground, the great earth shook in six different ways. The ladies of the court were deeply tormented when they heard the news and rushed to the bodhisattva’s side. Tears poured down their faces like rain. They let their hair fall and beat their chests in mourning. ‘Alas,’ they cried, ‘the pain!’ They were no longer attractive like goddesses. [F.43.a] They touched the bodhisattva’s feet briefly and wailed, ‘Please have mercy!’ ‘Alas,’ they cried, ‘it pains us that the power of impermanence is now at hand and today will separate, isolate, detach, and remove us from our relationships with this lord. He is the lord who protects all of Jambudvīpa, who pleases and is affectionate toward all sentient beings, who has immense compassion, and who has innumerable good qualities.’
- 1.99 “ ‘Lord,’ they persisted, ‘please have patience with us! Please don’t leave all of the communities of people living in Jambudvīpa without a protector by taking your own life. Lord, please look at the ladies of the court and your vast treasuries and storehouses filled with myriad precious gems. Look at Jambudvīpa’s people, who are always experiencing many types of happiness. Look at the city of Ariṣṭa, which resembles a divine park complete with an abundance of fine features, where so many joyful people live.
- 1.100 “ ‘Protector, you have always taken care of everyone
As if they were your own children.
How will these beings survive
When they are surely scorched by the fire of losing you?
- 1.101 “ ‘If separated from you,
We will all be overpowered by the Lord of Death.
O Protector, if we are separated from you,
We will not be able to survive!
- 1.102 “ ‘If the queen is stricken by suffering,
And if sentient being all suffer as one,
We pray that you look upon us, ruler of humans,
With the compassion of one who embodies compassion.

- 1.103 “ ‘Lord who is affectionate toward all beings,
Please take care of us—don’t give away your life!
Who will be our protector, our hero, if you pass on?
Who will protect the world?’
- 1.104 “After hearing their pitiable lament, the bodhisattva’s heart was heavy with compassion. ‘Your lament is understandable,’ he said to console them, [F.43.b] ‘but it is the way of the world that we must separate even from those we have known for a long time. For this reason, you should always be mindful of virtuous deeds.’ Then he turned to the two carpenters again and said, ‘Good people, come here. Without taking too much time, cut my body.’
- 1.105 “Because Śakra had enchanted them, the two carpenters immediately began sawing the bodhisattva’s body at his navel. Mahāmati, revived and imagining the unbearably intense pain the bodhisattva was experiencing, rebuked the two carpenters. ‘Alas,’ he cried, ‘alas! What are the two of you doing! How can you kill the compassionate one? How can you kill the one who is pleasing and affectionate to everyone, he who has numerous good qualities, he who takes care of all of Jambudvīpa, he who is faultless and harms none? How can you ignorant people take joy in killing a Dharma king? How does this great land’s goddess allow you to live? Why haven’t you been pierced by the single-pointed vajra? The weapon-wheel? The great arrow? The single-pointed weapons of the gods, nāgas, yakṣas, asuras, gandharvas, garuḍas, kinnaras, and mahoragas? You have committed such an ignoble act. How is it that your bodies have not exploded into a thousand pieces? Why haven’t you fallen instantly into hell, in this very body? Didn’t this great being also treat you as his sons? You ignorant beings!’
- 1.106 “He said these things and many others besides. ‘Alas, lord!’ he cried, and getting up from his seat, Mahāmati, the great minister, [F.44.a] grabbed the saw with his own two hands, and as his tears wet the bodhisattva’s body, he pushed the two carpenters away. To console the discouraged Mahāmati, the bodhisattva said, ‘Son, leave it be, leave it be. Do not lament. It is certain that we will be separated from those dear to us, those we love, those who draw near to us, and those of whom we are extremely fond. We will be isolated, divided, and separated. Moreover, Son:
- 1.107 “ ‘The end of all accumulation is dispersion.
The end of rising is falling.
The end of meeting is parting.
The end of living is dying.¹⁷
- 1.108 “ ‘Therefore, do not stop those who ask for my body. Mahāmati, in the past, another person tried to ask for my body but goddesses stopped them. Not only did those goddesses prevent me from achieving unsurpassed

- awakening, they also created much nonvirtue. If the goddesses had not prevented those people asking for my body, I would have attained unsurpassed and perfect awakening by now.
- 1.109 “ ‘What is more, son, in this very place I met a tigress whose hunger pains were so intense that she wanted to eat her own cubs. Out of supreme compassion, I gave myself to her immediately so that she might be saved. By so doing, I surpassed¹⁸ the deeds of the bodhisattva Maitreya, who had set out for buddhahood forty eons before that.¹⁹
- 1.110 “ ‘Another time, Mahāmati, when I was king of the Śibi people, an old brahmin came seeking the gift of sight. Moved by compassion, I immediately extracted my unimpaired eyes and gave them to him, while they were still stained with blood. My eyes had been as unstained as an utpala flower, a blue lotus. They were extremely beautiful and captured the hearts and attention of all people—indeed, all beings.
- 1.111 “ ‘Yet another time, Mahāmati, when I was a king named Candrababha, [F.44.b] a brahmin rudely asked me for not only my eyes but also my head. Groups of nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, asuras, garuḍas, kinnaras, mahoragas, siddhas, vidyādharas, and hundreds of thousands of gods tried to stop me from making this gift. Despite all this opposition, I saw that sentient beings had no protector, and with the loving intention to liberate them from saṃsāra’s wilderness, I aspired to attain unsurpassed and perfect awakening. My sword was the blue color of an utpala flower. It was decorated with precious gems, gold, silver, beryl, diamonds, sapphires, and emeralds. I picked it up and chopped off my head as if it were a blade of grass, and then I gave it to the brahmin.
- 1.112 “ ‘Another time, Mahāmati, when I was again king of the Śibi people, I saw an unprotected, terrified pigeon, ducking and diving as it was chased by a hawk. As I watched the unprotected pigeon seek refuge, I shook with supreme compassion. To protect the pigeon from the hawk and to deceive the hawk, I cut off a piece of my own flesh and gave it to the hawk.
- 1.113 “ ‘In the past, in this very land, I have given thousands of legs, hands, sons, and wives for the sake of unsurpassed and perfect awakening, and no one stopped me. You should understand this, Mahāmati. And you should not stop the brahmin seeking my body.’
- 1.114 “Following this, the great minister Mahāmati understood that the bodhisattva had given rise to great miraculous powers, and he developed profound faith in him. This great minister remained silent while waves of tears flowed down his face continually. He thought, ‘Alas, these beings are unfortunate. They will soon lose their Dharma king. Alas, the Dharma’s victory banner is about to fall.
- 1.115 “ ‘The lamp of Dharma will be extinguished.

- The lamp of Dharma will disappear.
The Dharma drum is about to break.
The ocean of Dharma will dry up. [F.45.a]
- 1.116 “ ‘The great mountain of Dharma will soon crumble.
The city of Dharma will soon be looted.
The ship of Dharma will soon disintegrate.
When the Dharma tree is uprooted, it is painful indeed.
- 1.117 “ ‘The wheel of time is about to crush
The father of the entire world,
Who has helped all beings.
The great king will be no more.
- 1.118 “ ‘Yet, in this unbearable moment,
Why hasn’t this great being’s mind
Been shattered into a thousand pieces,
But is instead like a great vajra?
- 1.119 “ ‘The good times are all gone.
Unbearable times are now at hand.
There will not be many wise people left
And worldly ones will also be destroyed.
- 1.120 “ ‘Through many omens of the earth,
Which can be clearly seen,
It is certain that it won’t be long
Before the lion king is no more.
- 1.121 “ ‘This stainless sun of humanity,
So difficult to find, is about to set.
Before long, it will no longer
Shine forth in this world.
- 1.122 “ ‘In the absence of this great king
Who benefits all sentient beings,
When his light no longer illumines the world,
Who will there be to protect the world?’
- 1.123 “ ‘After this speech, the two carpenters whom Śakra, lord of the gods, had
enchanted recovered enough from their grief to reapply the saw to the
bodhisattva’s body. The bodhisattva encouraged them. ‘Well done, good
people! Cut off the lower half of my body more quickly! Won’t my travail be
fruitless if the brahmin dies?’

- 1.124 “There was a great crowd of people wailing, mourning, and attempting to stop the two carpenters from following the bodhisattva’s instructions and cutting his body, but Śakra had stupefied them. The bodhisattva kept silent, aspiring for awakening and joyously intending to fulfill the gift seeker’s wishes. After a while, a great deal of blood gushed from the bodhisattva’s middle where the saw was cutting. Seeing this, the great minister Mahāmati [F.45.b] became despondent and fell unconscious, thinking, ‘It is too painful to see the lord killed.’
- 1.125 “Wracked by intense grief, masses of sky-dwelling gods, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, asuras, garuḍas, kinnaras, and mahoragas started to cry. As their tears flowed, the crowds of people below wondered what was happening and looked up at the sky. There they saw hundreds of thousands of weeping gods, which made them fall further into grief. They saw the bodhisattva in great pain and, becoming utterly confused, they thought, ‘Alas! It is so very painful to see the lord killed!’
- 1.126 “A few moments later, Śakra, lord of the gods, gazed with intense compassion and concern upon the hundreds of thousands of beings who were stricken by the bodhisattva’s tragedy. Then compassionate thoughts suddenly arose in him. ‘It is not right to cause intense pain to this great being who is so kind and affectionate toward all sentient beings and who gives away everything out of compassion. I will do the opposite. I will make him immortal.’
- 1.127 “As the two carpenters cut his body with the sharp saw, the bodhisattva suffered intense pain. But he had the power to keep his mind stable and generate a loving attitude toward the gift seeker. ‘If I have understood the nature of saṃsāra’s faults and thereby gained firm and lasting perseverance but am nonetheless suffering this much pain as my body is cut in half, what can be said of the excruciating painful sensations suffered by the majority of sentient beings when they previously took rebirth in hell!’ Thinking thus, the bodhisattva established a loving mind [F.46.a] that encompassed all sentient beings, and with a lion’s roar, he declared, ‘By attaining unsurpassed and perfect awakening, I must free sentient beings from such suffering!’
- 1.128 “In order to uplift his own mind that was wracked by such intense pain, the bodhisattva also said the following:
- “ ‘Look at the world’s suffering, mind, and abandon your faults!
Be very steady and develop vastness in scope.
Be mentally stable in patient endurance so as to protect
These beings tormented by the pain of birth, aging, sickness, and death.’
- 1.129 And again he said:

“ ‘Alas, these poor sentient beings!
Because you are the cause for all beings
To cross over the ocean of saṃsāra,
It would be unreasonable for you
To not patiently endure such harms.’

1.130 “These were the ways the bodhisattva truly settled his mind and established a compassionate attitude toward all sentient beings. He thought to himself, ‘Alas! The suffering of beings who are stuck in saṃsāra is unbearable. For the sake of these beings in saṃsāra, by rejoicing in patiently enduring all saṃsāra’s suffering, may no sentient being have the misfortune of suffering!’

1.131 “Monks, the very instant the bodhisattva generated this mind of awakening, the pain produced by his body being sawed abruptly ceased. The bodhisattva wondered, ‘Why did the pain of my body being sawed in two cease? Did they stop sawing?’ He checked, but he could still see the saw. Having seen it, he felt extremely distressed and started to shake.

1.132 “Reading the king’s mind, Śakra, lord of the gods, said:

“ ‘King, why do you shake so,
Like a feeble, sickly person?
Look at how my body is cut in half,
Yet my mind is not shaken.

1.133 “ ‘You are renowned all over the earth
For saying that you give everything away.
So it doesn’t make sense to feel regret,
Or else your words would be lies.’

1.134 “ ‘Brahmin,’ responded the bodhisattva, ‘this is not why my body shakes. I have no regrets [F.46.b] whatsoever. I am shaking at this thought: “The saw has penetrated deep into my body, but so far my lower body has not been severed. What if I am unable to make this gift? What if I am not able to fulfill the gift seeker’s wish?” I would be happy if they were to saw my body with more force.’ Hearing this, Śakra, lord of the gods, was completely in awe of the bodhisattva and fell silent.

1.135 “In the meantime, the two carpenters whom Śakra had enchanted finished cutting the bodhisattva’s body in half. They placed the lower half of his body on the ground and it began to twitch. Without thinking of his own suffering—the suffering of having his body cut in half—the bodhisattva addressed the two men: ‘Good people, join my lower half to the brahmin’s body without delay.’ They did as he instructed. At the moment the two body halves were joined, Śakra, lord of the gods, imbued the body with a blessing that made its wounds heal, the joints join together well, and the two bodies’ skin tones

match. He showed everyone the body, and to please the bodhisattva, he, Śakra, lord of the gods, stood up from his stretcher, walked around, stood still, and then sat down.

1.136 “Seeing that his labors had borne fruit, that the gift seeker had a complete body and his wishes had been fulfilled, the bodhisattva’s mind overflowed with joy. ‘I have saved this brahmin’s life,’ he thought to himself, ‘and staved off his fear of death by giving him my body. May the seed of this virtue cause me to attain unsurpassed and perfect awakening. Then may I be able to rescue [F.47.a] this brahmin from the suffering of saṃsāra and establish him in nirvāṇa where he will experience the ultimate happiness.’

1.137 “As he thought this, the bodhisattva was overwhelmed. Even as he aspired to awaken, he slipped into unconsciousness, and his eyes began to close. Śakra, lord of the gods, revived him immediately. He used medicines and care to treat and heal him.

1.138 “Monks, in the instant King Śrīsenā’s body was cut in half, the trichiliocosm shook in three different ways: it shook, shook a lot, and shook extremely much. It also rocked, rocked a lot, and rocked extremely much. This great earth was unable to support the bodhisattva’s great act of generosity. It was a marvelous gift of everything and thus it resounded—it resounded as if all the world’s cauldrons had been beaten at once. Mountains, ravines, rivers, and oceans all emitted horrifying noises. Terrifying smoke appeared from the four directions. Meteors fell from all sides. Falling stars blazed in every direction. The gods beat drums in the sky.

1.139 “The trichiliocosm first darkened and then turned pitch black. Even the gods traversing the center of the sky chattered about a bodhisattva tormented with sorrow. They arranged utpala flowers above the bodhisattva and showered him with pink and white lotus flowers. They also sprinkled agaru, tagara, cinnamon-leaf, and sandalwood incense on him, and the flowers of the gods’ tree, the mandārava.²⁰ They even draped their clothes on him, danced, and played divine music loudly. All of Jambudvīpa’s people were deeply puzzled by these noises. [F.47.b]

1.140 “When the city’s inhabitants, hundreds and thousands of people, saw the bodhisattva’s body cut, they were tormented by intense grief. With a single voice they cried out in their grief, ‘Alas, seeing the lord killed is painful!’

1.141 “Some rolled on the ground, others flailed their arms and wailed. The voices of some became hoarse from passionate sobbing. They were unable to clearly voice their words, yet still they screamed and beat their chests. Others remained silent, their minds mournful and unsettled, thinking, ‘Impermanence is powerful indeed!’

1.142

“Śakra, lord of the gods, was convinced that the bodhisattva’s resolve to attain unsurpassed and perfect awakening was as immovable as Mount Sumeru. He marveled at how the bodhisattva had given so completely. The hairs on his body stood on end. He was filled with joy and witnessed something outstanding. Marveling at this, he opened his eyes, and together with the other four gods, he dissolved his brahmin semblance, and he and the four gods appeared in their own forms. Śakra then spoke to the bodhisattva: ‘Great King! I am no brahmin, I am Śakra, lord of the gods. Well done, Great King, well done! How amazing, your diligence! How amazing, your uncontrived resolve! How amazing that you gave your body so completely, without clinging! How amazing, your compassion toward sentient beings and love for them! Your joy in giving! Well done, well done! Great King, even though you were overwhelmed by intense suffering, you did not change your mind about giving away your body. Great King, I have a question for you: what was the reason you underwent such hardship and such a prolonged trial?’

1.143 “ ‘Kauśika,’ replied the bodhisattva, ‘by giving away my body, I wish to attain unsurpassed and perfect awakening. I wish to liberate sentient beings from saṃsāra.’

1.144 “Śakra then asked, ‘Great King, as your body was deteriorating, as you offered your body, as you gave it away completely, did you have any regrets? Did your mental state change at all?’ [F.48.a]

“ ‘Kauśika, I had no regrets,’ replied the bodhisattva.

1.145 “ ‘How can we know this?’ Śakra asked.

“ ‘Kauśika,’ said the bodhisattva, ‘to prove it, I will allow you to place the lower half of my body wherever you like.’

1.146 “Śakra, lord of the gods, then put the lower half of the bodhisattva’s body in a place of his liking. The bodhisattva established a loving attitude toward all sentient beings, and invoking truth at that time, he spoke the following verses:

1.147 “ ‘As I wish for awakening,
I did not experience miserliness or sadness
When I let go of my body compassionately.
Now, I have no regrets.

1.148 “ ‘And as I have no regrets, Śakra,
May the truth of my words and goodness of my actions
Now restore my body,
Exactly as it was before.
May all my senses be complete!’

1.149

“Monks, as soon as he spoke these verses, the bodhisattva’s body was restored. The sky-dwelling gods, nāgas, yakṣas, garuḍas, kinnaras, and mahoragas who witnessed this were wide-eyed in amazement and started babbling and laughing. The crowds of people gathered there were also awed and amazed. Both gods and humans were overjoyed at this magical display. When they saw that the bodhisattva’s body was completely restored, they developed wonder as if they had found their own lives after having lost them. They said, ‘How amazing! Let us gaze upon this marvel of your resurrection! The beings of this world, those on the land and in the forest, are fortunate indeed!’

1.150 “When Śakra, lord of the gods, saw that the bodhisattva’s body had been restored to its original state, he was overwhelmed. To please the bodhisattva, he said, ‘Great King, your mind is [F.48.b] heroic. Your aspiration is steadfast, and you engage with sentient beings out of great compassion. Well done, well done! You are not afraid of anyone who attempts to frighten you. Due to your efforts, you will, therefore, attain unsurpassed and perfect awakening in a short while.’ Śakra, lord of the gods, then recited the following verses:

1.151 “ ‘Ah! Your diligence is great and fierce.
Your steadfastness is unsurpassed.
Ah! Your compassion for beings!
Ah! Your determination to awaken!

1.152 “ ‘Ah! How wonderful would the world be
If you, lord, were its ruler!
You will travel beyond suffering’s fearful and ferocious ocean;
You will attain nirvāṇa!’

1.153 “As he said these words, Śakra, lord of the gods, shed tears like rain, and in a hoarse voice he sought forgiveness from the bodhisattva. ‘O Great King,’ he said, ‘thinking that you might meet with failure, I coerced you to suffer excruciating pain. Please forgive me.²¹ And please think of me when you attain unsurpassed and perfect awakening.’

1.154 “ ‘Kauśika,’ replied the bodhisattva, ‘I am patient. I will do as you ask and remember you.’ In that instant, due to the bodhisattva’s power, a variety of divine, enchanting, precious gems rained down upon all of Jambudvīpa. All of Jambudvīpa was ornamented by myriad precious stones, and it became even brighter than the realms of the gods.

1.155 “The sage who lived in the mountains had witnessed all these marvels, and he was overwhelmed. ‘What are these marvels?’ he thought. ‘Have such marvels ever been seen before? Whose power occasions this?’

1.156

“A god who lived in the same place as he told him the story in detail. As he listened to the story of the bodhisattva’s extraordinary, awe-inspiring austerities, [F.49.a] the sage came to genuinely admire him. ‘This great being is worthy of veneration,’ he thought. After that, he hastily led his five-hundred-strong retinue and Queen Jayaprabhā to the bodhisattva. There they uttered salutations of victory and long life to the king. In unison with Śakra, the sage said, ‘Lord, you have protected these fine, goddess-like, beautiful women. Now please enjoy life with this virtuous woman. I offer you back the beautiful queen. She has not been unhappy with her husband. Please do not give her away again to anyone else who asks for her.’

1.157 “The bodhisattva compassionately accepted the request of the sage and Śakra, lord of the gods, by remaining silent. Śakra, lord of the gods, then summoned Viśvakarma, the architect of the gods. ‘Viśvakarma,’ he said, ‘please set up a divine lion throne quickly. I would like to honor King Śrīsenā myself.’

1.158 “ ‘That is excellent, Kauśika,’ Viśvakarma responded. ‘I will do as you instruct.’

Indeed, at the very moment he was listening to Śakra, lord of the gods, Viśvakarma, the architect of the gods, magically created a lion throne. It was decorated with a variety of precious gems, and it was garlanded with pearls on all sides. Śakra, lord of the gods, took the bodhisattva with both his hands and escorted him onto the divine lion throne. Hundreds of thousands of gods played and sang melodious music for him. Having shown great respect in this way, they crowned him.

1.159 “During the coronation, the bodhisattva’s power caused the earth to shake in six different ways. Out of joy and satisfaction, the gods showered flowers and precious gems on Jambudvīpa. So many fell that the flowers and gems were piled up to the peoples’ knees. In sheer amazement at seeing this amount of wealth, the gods and humans exclaimed, [F.49.b] “Amazing! How powerful is King Śrīsenā’s merit! Amazing! It is wondrous!”

1.160 “After thoroughly pleasing the bodhisattva, Śakra, lord of the gods, along with hundreds of thousands of other gods, returned to his abode. The sage and his retinue of five hundred also returned home, after openly praising the bodhisattva.

1.161 “After these events, the much-venerated bodhisattva ruled as a Dharma king for a long time. He satiated Jambudvīpa’s poor, blind, hungry, and destitute by granting them wealth, and he led everyone along the path of the ten virtuous actions. He thoroughly satisfied all six classes of gods in the desire realm. At another time, he caused them, along with hundreds of thousands of others, to be reborn in Tuṣita heaven.”

1.162

After telling this tale, the Blessed One said, “Monks, do not have any doubts or confusion that King Śrīsenā was someone other than me. At that time, I was the king and I gave away my body. Monks, the one who was King Śrīsenā’s wife back then, Queen Jayaprabhā, is none other than Yaśodharā. The supreme one among the ministers, Mahāmati, is none other than the monk Śāriputra. Śakra, lord of the gods, is none other than King Bimbisāra.

Those who were the gods of the Heaven of the Thirty-Three at that time are none other than the eighty thousand gods who realized the truth simultaneously with King Bimbisāra. The masses of people in the city of Ariṣṭa are none other than [F.50.a] the brahmins and householders of Magadha who come to me along with King Bimbisāra. Monks, the sage who lived in the mountains is none other than the monk Maudgalyāyana. The young brahmin boy who came to me to beg for Queen Jayaprabhā is none other than the Śākya lady Gopā. Monks, the two who were carpenters at that time are Devadatta and Kokālika.

- 1.163 “It is due to the power of his prayers that such miracles of the Thus-Gone One manifested. Monks, therefore, you too must train in this way. You must train by telling yourselves, ‘I will practice generosity and perform meritorious acts.’ ”
- 1.164 When the Blessed One had said these words, the monks rejoiced and praised the Blessed One’s words.
- 1.165 *This completes “The Account of the Noble Deeds of King Śrīsenā.”*

c.

Colophon

c.1 This was translated by the Indian preceptor Dharmasribhadra and the chief editor-translator Sherab Lekpa. It was then revised and finalized by the translator Rinchen Zangpo.

NOTES

n.

- n.1 It is worth noting that although the subject of giving away one's life, bodily parts, or family members is treated in this and similar texts as a rather commonplace aspect of a bodhisattva's training, it is made abundantly clear in the commentarial treatises that Buddhist tradition does not teach these kinds of "great giving" (*gtong ba chen po*) or "exceptionally great giving" (*shin tu gtong ba*) to ordinary practitioners who have not yet attained one of the ten bodhisattva levels (and many texts specify the three highest or "sublime" levels). Only such advanced bodhisattvas have both fully realized emptiness, and also given rise to the vast altruistic intentions that make such an act viable and meaningful. In the meantime, such stories of "ultimate giving" are intended to inspire a commensurate attitude of selfless generosity in the reader.
- n.2 Jātakas typically relate stories from the Buddha's past lives, in which the Buddha is either the protagonist of the story or a witness to other events. See Appleton 2010, pp. 3–6, and Rothenberg 1990, pp. 4–5.
- n.3 For a critical edition and partial translation of this work, see Rothenberg 1990. For text-critical remarks on the text, see de Jong 1979.
- n.4 On Kṣemendra's life and works, see Chakraborty 1991 and Chattopadhyay 1994.
- n.5 See Ohnuma 2007, p. 22.
- n.6 Ohnuma (2007) discusses all these tales and the connections between them in her work. She also provides a list of the various versions of the texts in her work's first appendix, pp. 273–83.
- n.7 Blessed One (*bhagavān*), Well-Gone One (*sugata*), and the Teacher (*śāstr*) are all epithets for the Buddha. The repetition of terms referring to the Buddha is

most probably for emphasis.

- n.8 We chose to translate *pho brang* as “royal estate” instead of the more usual “palace” as the text says this “palace” included fields and the dwellings of the king’s subjects. A palace is a building; it does not include grounds, fields, or villages.
- n.9 Here we have read *chur* as *tshur*.
- n.10 This translation follows the Narthang edition, which reads *khyim ba*. The Degé edition reads *khyim bya*, meaning “chicken.” We assume this is a misspelling.
- n.11 This translation follows the Degé edition, which reads *skyong ba*. The Comparative Edition, Narthang, and Lhasa editions read *skyob pa*, which means “to protect.”
- n.12 In other words, it has to be seen to be believed.
- n.13 One *rgyang grags* (Skt. *krośa*) is approximately two miles.
- n.14 The use of *mchog* to describe a house is ambiguous; it could mean “the best of houses” or “the (roof)top of a house.” Clues for how to translate the line were found in a similar line from the Newari version of the *Candra-prabhāvādāna* (*The Noble Deeds of Candraprabha*). This line reads: *etās candranibhānanā yuvatayo rodanti veśmottame* (Matsumura 1980, p. 101, n. 34). This line could be translated as: “These young women, whose faces resemble the moon, cry on the (roof)tops of their houses.” As this text provides more context for the young women’s actions, we have rendered *mchog* as “(roof)top.” We thank our anonymous reviewer for this reference.
- n.15 *Rdo rje lhung* is a Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit term *vajrapāta*, which means “the fall of a thunderbolt” or a “lightning strike.”
- n.16 We have read *gzhin bzangs* as *bzhin bzang*. The Lhasa edition of the text reads *bzang*.
- n.17 This stanza is widely quoted in Buddhist literature across traditions. It is found, for example, in the *Vinayavastu* and *Udānavarga*.
- n.18 Here the Tibetan reads *phyir lus*, which usually means “turn back” but can also be a Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit term *avapṛṣṭhīkṛtaḥ*. A synonym of *paścānmukhīkṛtaḥ*, *avapṛṣṭhīkṛtaḥ* also has the figurative meaning of “surpassed, outdone.” This is the only meaning that makes sense in the context of this story, so we have chosen to translate *phyir lus* as “surpassed.”

The obtuseness of this usage is most probably compensated for by the familiarity most readers of the avadāna would have with the story of the Buddha offering his body to the tigress.

- n.19 The Tibetan grammar in this short rendition of a famous tale is less than clear. It could be read to suggest that Maitreya lengthened his period as a bodhisattva by offering his life to the tiger. The idea that such an action would increase the time it took to attain buddhahood runs counter to the rest of the narrative, however, in which Śrīsenā, a past rebirth of Śākyamuni Buddha, is trying to hasten buddhahood by offering his body. It also contradicts several other renditions of this tale, all of which explain that a previous incarnation of Maitreya could not offer himself to the tigress but a previous incarnation of Śākyamuni Buddha did, thereby surpassing the deeds of the bodhisattva Maitreya, who had set out for buddhahood forty eons earlier than Śākyamuni Buddha. This tale is not only told in both the *Śrīsenāvadāna* and the *Candraprabhāvadāna*, but also in the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa Sūtra* (See translation in Emmerick 1970, pp. 85–97). This last work identifies Maitreya as the older brother Mahāpraṇāda, who had set out for buddhahood forty eons earlier, but does not offer his body to the tigress and is consequently surpassed by his younger brother who does make this sacrifice. Ohnuma (2007, pp. 9–14) discusses this story. She concludes (p. 14) that “[i]t was his (Maitreya’s) failure to act in the same exalted manner as Śākyamuni that made him lose the cosmic race toward perfect buddhahood.” Among all the other retellings of the tigress tale, one that is particularly helpful for understanding this passage is a parallel passage in the Sanskrit and Tibetan editions of the *Candraprabhāvadāna* (Matsumura 1980). This avadāna includes a reminiscence by another of Śākyamuni Buddha’s incarnations, Candraprabha, about the same offering to the tigress. The passage in question reads, in Sanskrit: *esa eva devate sa pradeśo yatra mayā vyāghryātmanam parityajya catvārimśat-ka[ḷpa sam]prasthito maitreyo bodhisatvaḥ ekena śīrasā parityāgena avapṛṣṭhīkṛtaḥ* (Matsumura, pp. 111–12). And, in Tibetan: *lha mo gang du ngas stag mo la bdag nyid yongs su btang ste / lus yongs su gtong ba gcig gis byang chub sems dpa’ byams pa bskal pa bzhi bcur zhugs pa / phyir ’dums par byas pa’i sa phyogs ni ’di yin no //* (Matsumura 1980, p. 267). It could be translated: “Goddess, this is the very place in which I gave myself to the tigress. By this one act of completely giving my head (body in Tibetan), I surpassed the bodhisattva Maitreya who had set out (for buddhahood) forty eons earlier (than I).” In this passage, the use of the Sanskrit pronoun *mayā* clearly indicates that it was Candraprabha’s previous incarnation (and, therefore, Śākyamuni Buddha’s and Śrīsenā’s previous incarnation) who offered his body (or head) to the tigress, not the previous incarnation of the bodhisattva Maitreya. As explained in the preceding note, the use of

ambiguous phrases in the present rendition of this tale was probably compensated for by the familiarity most readers had with the tale of the hungry tigress. We are much indebted to one of our anonymous reviewers for helping to understand this short but complicated vignette and to refine our translation of it.

- n.20 Puṇḍarīka is a white lotus flower, *Nelumbium speciosum*. Agarū is agarwood, taken from the inside of the *Aquilaria* and *Gyrinops* trees after they have been attacked by mold. Tagara incense is made from the milky sap of *Tabernaemontana divaricata*. Indian tradition has it that the mandāra tree growing in Indra's garden is the *Erythrina variegata*, or Indian coral tree.
- n.21 Translated based on Narthang and Lhasa, which read *bzod par mdzod*.

b.

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GLOSSARY

g.

g.1 Ariṣṭa

a riSh+Tha

ཨ་རིཿལ།

Ariṣṭa

King Śrīsenā's royal estate.

g.2 Bimbisāra

gzugs can snying po

གཟུགས་ཅན་སྡིང་པོ།

Bimbisāra

The king of Magadha.

g.3 Caitraratha

shing rta sna tshogs can

ཤིང་རྩ་སྣ་ཚོགས་ཅན།

Caitraratha

"The Garden of Chariots"; one of the four parks in Sudarśana city, home of Śakra (Indra) and his thirty-two gods, located on the summit of Mount Meru.

g.4 Darśanīya

blta na sdug

བལྟ་ན་སྤུག

Darśanīya

A divine city filled with crowds of gods.

g.5 Desire realm

'dod khams

འདོད་ཁམས།

kāmadhātu

One of the three realms of saṃsāra, it is comprised of the traditional six realms of saṃsāra, from the hell realm to the realm of the gods, including the human realm. Rebirth in this realm is characterized by intense cravings via the five senses and their objects.

g.6 Devadatta

lhas byin

ལྷས་བྱིན།

Devadatta

The Buddha's disloyal cousin.

g.7 Diligence

brtson 'grus

བརྩོན་འགུས།

vīrya

Fourth of the six perfections and one of the seven limbs of awakening, the five abilities, the four bases of magical power, and the five powers.

g.8 Giving

sbyin pa

སྤྱིན་པ།

dāna

The first of the six or ten perfections, often explained as the essential starting point and training for the practice of the others.

g.9 God (lord)

lha

ལྷ།

deva

A being in the paradises from the base of Mount Meru upward. It can also refer to a deity in the human world and is sometimes (as in the present work) used as a term of endearment for a ruler or leader (translated as "lord").

g.10 Gopā

sa 'tsho ma

ས་འཚོ་མ།

Gopā

One of the wives of Prince Siddhārtha, prior to his leaving his kingdom and attaining awakening as the Buddha.

g.11 Heaven of the Thirty-Three

sum cu rtsa gsum

སུམ་རུ་ཙ་གསུམ།

Trayastrimśa

The second heaven of the desire realm located above Mount Meru and reigned over by Indra, otherwise known as Śakra, and thirty-two other gods.

g.12 Infer

rjes su dpag pa

རྗེས་སུ་དཔག་པ།

anumāna

In Buddhism, inference is one of the two sources of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*), the other being direct perception (*pratyakṣa*).

g.13 Jambudvīpa

'dzam bu'i gling

འཛམ་བུ་འི་གླིང།

Jambudvīpa

The continent (*dvīpa*) on which we live, shaped like a rose-apple (*jambū*) according to ancient South Asian cosmology.

g.14 Jayaprabhā

rgyal ba'i 'od

རྒྱལ་བའི་འོད།

Jayaprabhā

King Śrīsenā's wife.

g.15 Kauśika

kau shi ka

ཀོ་ཤི་ཀ།

Kauśika

Another name of Śakra, see definition for “Śakra.”

g.16 Kokālika

ko ka li ka

ཀོ་ཀ་ལི་ཀ

Kokālika

Devadatta's companion.

g.17 **Magadha**

ma ga d+hA

མ་ག་རྒྱ།

Magadha

A kingdom on the banks of the Ganges (in the southern part of the modern day Indian state of Bihar), whose capital was at Pāṭaliputra (modern day Patna). During the life of Śākyamuni Buddha, it was the dominant kingdom in north central India and is home to many of the most important Buddhist sites, including Bodh Gayā, Nālandā, and its capital Rājagṛha.

g.18 **Mahāmāti**

blo gros chen po

བློ་གྲོས་ཆེན་པོ།

Mahāmāti

King Śrīsenā's chief minister.

g.19 **Maitreya**

byams pa

བྱམས་པ།

Maitreya

The bodhisattva and future buddha, Maitreya.

g.20 **Maudgalyāyana**

maud gal gyi bu chen po

མོད་གལ་གྱི་བུ་ཆེན་པོ།

Maudgalyāyana

One of the Buddha's two principal monastic disciples.

g.21 **Mount Sumeru**

ri'i rgyal po ri rab

རི་འི་རྒྱལ་པོ་རི་རབ།

Sumeru parvatarāja

The great mountain at the center of the universe according to ancient Indian cosmology. At its summit lies Sudarśana city, home of Śakra (Indra) and his thirty-two gods. The mountain is also referred to as "Mount Meru."

g.22 Nandanavana

dga' ba'i tshal

དགའ་བའི་ཚལ།

Nandanavana

“The Pleasure Grove”; the chief of the parks in Sudarśana city, where the resident gods of the city, headed by Śakra (Indra), go for their amusement.

g.23 Pārijāta

yongs 'du

ཡོངས་འདུ།

Pārijāta

In Indian mythology, a tree in Indra’s heaven that is said to fulfill all desires.

g.24 Preceptor

mkhan po

མཁན་པོ།

upādhyāya

g.25 Predispositions

bag chags

བག་ཚགས།

vāsanā

Latent propensity to certain behaviors.

g.26 Preta

yi dags

ཡི་དགས།

preta

One of the five or six classes of sentient beings, considered to be the karmic fruition of past miserliness. In Sanskrit, literally “the departed”; they are analogous to the ancestral spirits of Vedic tradition, the *pitṛs*, who starve without the offerings of descendants. They live in the realm of Yama, the Lord of Death. They are particularly known to suffer from great hunger and thirst and the inability to acquire sustenance.

g.27 Royal estate

pho brang

ཕོ་བླང།

—

g.28 Śakra

brgya byin

བརྒྱའཇུག་པོ།

Śakra

The lord of the gods. More commonly known in the West as Indra, the deity that is called “lord of the devas” dwells on the summit of Mount Sumeru and wields the thunderbolt. The Tibetan translation *brgya byin* (meaning “one hundred sacrifices”) is based on an etymology that śakra is an abbreviation of *śata-kratu*, one who has performed a hundred sacrifices. Each world with a central Sumeru has a Śakra. He is also called “Kauśika.”

g.29 Śāriputra

shA ri'i bu

ཤ་རིའི་བུ།

Śāriputra

One of the Buddha’s two principal monastic disciples.

g.30 Śibi

shi bi

ཤི་བི།

Śibi

(1) A name sometimes used for King Śrīsenā’s country. (2) The name of a country he once ruled in previous lifetimes.

g.31 Śrīsenā

dpal gyi sde

དཔལ་གྱི་སྡེ།

Śrīsenā

A king, who was a past life of the Buddha. He was a bodhisattva renowned for his unstinting generosity and spiritual resolve.

g.32 The perfection of generosity

sbyin pa'i pha rol tu phyin pa

སྤྱིན་པའི་ཕ་རོལ་ཏུ་ཕྱིན་པ།

dānapāramitā

The act of giving motivated by the wish to attain awakening for all sentient beings.

g.33 Tuṣita heaven

dga' ldan

དགའ་ལྷན།

Tuṣita

One of the six heavens of the desire realm.

g.34 Universal monarch who rules through force

stobs kyi 'khor los sgyur

སྟོབས་ཀྱི་འཁོར་ལོས་སྐུར།

balacakravartin

In Buddhist mythology, a universal monarch who rules the four continents and is willing to use force (Skt. *bala*; Tib. *stobs*) if necessary.

g.35 Unsurpassed and perfect awakening

bla na med pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i byang chub

བླ་ན་མེད་པ་ཡང་དག་པར་རྫོགས་པའི་བྱང་ཚུབ།

anuttarasamyaksambodhi

The awakening of the buddhas, so-named to distinguish it from the limited realizations of lesser beings such as arhats, solitary buddhas, and the like.

g.36 Vajra

rdo rje

རྡོ་རྗེ།

vajra

The term stands for indestructibility and perfect stability. According to Indian mythology, the vajra is the all-powerful god Indra's weapon, likened to a thunderbolt, which made him invincible. It also relates to the diamond which is the hardest physical material.

g.37 Veda

rig byed

རིག་བྱེད།

Veda

Name of the ancient sacred scriptures of Hinduism, the most famous of which is the Ṛg Veda.

g.38 Viśvakarma

las sna tshogs pa

ལས་སྣ་ཚོགས་པ།

Viśvakarma

Literally “maker of sundry things,” Viśvakarma is the architect of the gods. He was an important deity in the Vedic tradition. In the Ṛg Veda, he is regarded as the personification of ultimate reality, the abstract creative power inherent in deities, living, and nonliving being in this universe.

g.39 Worthy

dgra bcom pa

དག་བཙམ་པ།

arhant

A person who has accomplished the final fruition of the path of the hearers and is liberated from samsāra.

g.40 Yaśodharā

grags 'dzin ma

གྲགས་འཛིན་མ།

Yaśodharā

The principal wife of Prince Siddhartha, prior to his leaving his kingdom and attaining awakening as the Buddha.