

# “Dharma as Power in Buddhist Tradition”

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**Defeat of Mara and Enlightenment transforms the cosmos**

## Jātakanidāna:

“The ten thousand world systems revolved and remained like a wreath of garlands tossed about or like a well-arranged spread of flowers. The intervening regions of eight thousand yojanas between the world spheres which had not been lit before even with the radiance of seven suns shining together became one mass of light. The great ocean eighty-four thousand yojanas deep turned into sweet water. Rivers ceased to flow. Those blind from birth were able to see...”

Reality is always responsive to consciousness, but only a Buddha can exercise utter control over it.... As reality is linked to Buddhahood. The Buddha displays this truth through his command of the physical elements.... He offers a dramatic demonstration of matter being utterly malleable in the hands of a realized being.” – Eviatar Shulman, “Buddha as the Pole of Existence, or the Flower of Cosmos,” *History of Religions* 57, no. 2 (2017).



*Mañjuśrī*

## **Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa Passages**

**Purpose of Text.** “The power of all the buddhas, and the bodhisattvas who are full of wisdom Manifests itself as an accomplishment in all activities that involve the mantras.  
It is in order to bring about this accomplishment  
That this king of manuals has been taught by the lord of sages.” {15.216}



*Yamāntaka*

**Scope of this text.** The extensive tract of this great manual will now be explained; it has been approved by me and taught by all the buddhas. It is the manual that effects the accomplishment of the conduct of great beings; that is blessed by the buddhas; that achieves the aims of bodhisattvas; that contains the mantra topics together with the secret empowerments, *mudrās*, *maṇḍalas*, and empowerment rituals; that brings about long life, lack of illness, and dominion and fulfills all wishes; that contains all the tantras on sādhana rites; that causes one to know all minds and mental objects, the occurrences in all times, all hidden phenomena, and the kingdoms and realms in the past, present, and future—in short, the fulfillment of all the wishes of all beings. This mantra practice that facilitates the generation of good qualities and is the cause of the joy of beings. This manual contains instructions on becoming invisible; traveling through space; fast walking; increasing intelligence; the magic of summoning; the ability to visit subterranean paradises; the rites of assault; the obtainment of every sensual pleasure; the power to summon the multitudes of *yakṣas* and *yakṣiṇīs*, *kiṃkaras*, *piśācas*, *bhūtas*; and the power to become a child, an old person, or a youth, as required by circumstances. [1.33]

**Fierce Bodhisattva, Yamāntaka.** Mañjuśrī, the divine youth, seeing that this great assembly had gathered, said to Yamāntaka, the Lord of Wrath, “Ho, ho, Great Lord of Wrath, who emanates from all the buddhas and bodhisattvas! Please protect this great gathering! Protect and enthrall it! Tame the wicked ones! Awaken the gentle ones into realization! Placate the implacable ones! As long as I am teaching this bodhisattva basket that accords with my own mantra practice and contains extensive instructions on mantra practice and the maṇḍala, go outside and guard this gathering.” [1.109]

Thus addressed, the Great Lord of Wrath, of extremely ugly, misshapen appearance, acknowledged the command and went outside in order to protect all the beings and to train the assembled audience. Letting out a terrible roar into the four directions, above, below, and across, he took up his position in the form of Yamāntaka Lord of Wrath, with a retinue of many hundreds of thousands of wrathful deities. Thus all beings, having become peaceful and content, did not transgress his orders. [2.4]

## **Dhāraṇīs as More Potent than Karma.**

“Even if they commit offenses  
Such as the five acts of immediate retribution,  
Even if they lack morality, they will succeed  
At the various mantras that have been taught. [5.15]

## **Benefits of Recitation Praxis**

“Having done their recitation  
They will swiftly gain accomplishment.  
The sick will be freed from their illness,

The poor will obtain wealth,  
The childless will obtain sons  
**Art as Transformative Spiritual Medium.**  
When they behold the medium painting. [5.16]

“In terms of purpose, the only purpose of ritual performance  
Is always for the sake of aim-oriented activity.  
Ritual performance...with a motive is a karman (retributive activity).  
As activity that relies on ritual bears results,  
One should always perform rituals. [11.249]

### Buddhist Legitimation of Astrology.

"Their birth-assigned position has been described in brief  
By the most eminent of men.  
Its limitations and standards are determined  
By the planets who oversee the world. [15.176]  
"These planets rise regularly  
At their usual time, as is their nature.

Auspicious or inauspicious, they always

Course in their orbits. [15.177]

### Dhāraṇīs Act on Spirit Beings.

"All spirits can be summoned

By those who correctly employ the mantra methods.

One who knows the mantras for summoning and possession

Can use them on beings who inhabit the bodies of others. [15.197]

### Glen Wallis describes the world the Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa imagines:

The men and women of the world are engulfed by moral and mental darkness. The darkness prevents them from perceiving the enlightened power of the Buddha at work in the universe. There are means, however, by which this power can be disclosed... - ritual and cultic in nature – [by which] the practitioner is transformed into a being of power himself or herself. The disclosure of the text and the transformation of the practitioner represent the culmination of India's religious history. (2002:102)

## Āryabuddhahṛdayanāmadhāraṇīdharmaparyāya, "Noble Discourse of the Dhāraṇī of the Buddha's Essence"

"These are the Buddha's words, the Buddha's great words, the great words that were given by the Buddha, the words of all buddhas, the words of all the thus-gone ones:

*tadyathā buddhe subuddhe mahā buddhe iha buddhe tatra buddhe buddhe [F.73.b] buddhe buddha mati buddhe sarva buddhānumati*

*sarva buddhānujñāna te buddha buddha buddha buddha buddha buddha buddha buddha buddha*

"Although the objects that the Buddha perceives and the Dharma that he has taught are infinite, the simplified instruction is that one should focus the mind on a single thing. "The following *dhāraṇī* has been taught by all the buddhas out of their sincere love for all beings. It is the seal of all qualities:

*tadyathā śuddhe suśuddhe suśuddhe śodhani saṁśodhani saṁśodhani nirmale malāpagate gate samatikranti krame samasare sarāsaraparyāśoke viśoka śokaśamani  
śānte upaśānte praśānte avabhāse sarvapūnye parimaṇḍite sarvadharmā pratimaṇḍite hara hara mala hara cara cara saṁcara cala cala saṁcala tala tala matala  
samatala riṇe riṇe suriṇe samariṇe riṇamati loka dhare loka dhariṇe dhara dhara ḍara ḍara rodha rodha mahāvijaya vāhini hana hana sarva buddhe hriphreṣi trasi  
sarva jñāpathe sarva jñāpāramite mahā pratibhāna saṁpanne samantāloke buddhe viśaye buddha pratimaṇḍite bhagavate sara sara prasara prasara visara visara  
prasara sarva śokāpagate svāhā."*

As soon as the Blessed One had spoken this *Discourse of the Dhāraṇī of the Buddha's Essence*, the mountains, the surrounding areas, and the forests shook in the following six ways: the whole trichiliocosm shook, shook violently, and shook all over. The great ocean trembled, trembled violently, and trembled all over. The supreme king of mountains trembled and quaked. The entire abode of Māra was terrified, and all of the deities of Māra's horde and the wicked Māras were extremely distressed and miserable.

... "All beings should continually contemplate this *dhāraṇī* and meditate while recollecting the Buddha. If they contemplate the words of the *dhāraṇī*, all their karmic obscurations will be purified, they will attain the meditative concentration called "*the lotus array*," and they will be able to wash away all illnesses and diseases with their hands. They should perform innumerable recitations of this *dhāraṇī*."

The claim of supernatural power of recitation may be disputable among scholars as well as sectarians, yet one point has clearly emerged. . . . From an insider's viewpoint, the power of recitation is extremely powerful, and in certain cases, it is claimed to be even more powerful and preferable than either a philosophical understanding or the excellence in moral disciplines. – Jan Yun-hua, "Buddhist Self-Immolation in Medieval China"

### Conclusions:

Mantras and *dhāraṇīs*, forms of Dharma, are derived from Buddhas and bodhisattvas, a form of "other power" gifted to humanity. ✦ By paying attention to the totality of extant ritual texts found in archives and libraries, and taking seriously their ubiquity, the focus on Dharma as power can allow a reassessment of Buddhism in history. ✦ The sheer number of ritual and recitation manuscripts (such as the *Pañcarakṣā*) copied in so many places across Asia venues support the proposition that rituals harnessing the powers established in the "Buddhaverse" were at the center of Buddhism throughout its history. ✦ Decentering philosophical discourse and scholasticism as the imagined center of Buddhism, and scaling up the importance of the material, praxis-protective, and institutional ritual traditions are all essential correctives in understanding the history of the tradition. Only then can scholars finally get beyond the first draft of Buddhist history oversampling the role of the elite and the impact of philosophical study. ✦ Seeing the reality of Dharma as a source of power and the popularity of taking refuge in ritual practices is a historical desideratum in Buddhist studies. ✦ Yamāntaka and Mañjuśrī are both essential to understanding the history of Buddhist Dharma and Buddhism.