

Introduction to the Bodhisattva-caryāvatāra translations on our web-site

The Bodhisattva-caryāvatāra is without doubt one of the most significant works in Mahāyāna Buddhist literature. Written entirely in verse, the text is a remarkable piece of didactic Sanskrit poetry, extolling the bodhisattva ideal and guiding a Buddhist practitioner along the complete Mahāyāna path, culminating in the attainment of enlightenment. The text is generally thought to have been written in the 8th century at the Buddhist university of Nālandā by the Indian master and monk Śāntideva. The text soon acquired great popularity, and a rich tradition of commentarial writing on the Bodhisattva-caryāvatāra developed. This, however, ended with the decline of Buddhism in India.

As part of establishing Indian Buddhism in Tibet, an enormous project of translating Buddhist texts was carried out by Tibetan translators assisted by Indian paṇḍitas, yogin-scholars. Of the many texts that were translated into Tibetan, the Bodhisattva-caryāvatāra rapidly gained a prominent position. Many Tibetan explanation lineages [bshad brgyud] of the Bodhisattva-caryāvatāra came into existence then and have been preserved in Buddhist monasteries and philosophical colleges up to the present day. All the main schools of Tibetan Buddhism—Nyingma, Kagyü, Sakya, the Old Kadampa, and the New Kadampa School, also known as the Gelukpa School—maintained their own explanation lineages of this revered text.

This work focuses on the explanation lineage of the Bodhisattva-caryāvatāra according to the Nyingma School as taught by the East Tibetan master Paltrül Rinpoche Orgyen Jigme Chökyi Wangpo (1808-1887). Paltrül Rinpoche, one of the greatest Nyingma scholars and practitioners of the 19th century, is reputed to have taught the entire text more than one hundred times during his life. Although he was a prolific writer, he left us no written commentaries on the Bodhisattva-caryāvatāra. However, the Nyingma interpretation he gave orally was preserved in writing by a few of his main students, especially Khenpo Kunpal (1862-1943), who studied for many years with Paltrül Rinpoche and wrote a comprehensive commentary on the Bodhisattva-caryāvatāra.

Khenpo Kunpal's commentary is entitled, "A Word-by-Word Commentary on the Bodhisattva-caryāvatāra, called *Drops of Nectar*, according to the Personal Statement of the Mañjuḥṣa-like Teacher" [byang chub sems dpa'i spyod pa la 'jug pa'i tshig 'grel 'jam dbyangs bla ma'i zhal lung bdud rtsi'i thig pa]. This commentary, specifically designed for practitioners of Buddhist meditation, has gained wide acceptance among followers of the Nyingma School and is highly respected by the Sakya and Kagyü Schools as well. Even now, Khenpo Kunpal's commentary is studied and practiced in Buddhist monasteries, universities, and dharma centers throughout the world.

On this site, we present the first few chapters of the Bodhisattva-caryāvatāra together with Khenpo Kunpal's commentary, both in transliteration and translation. Khenpo Kunpal's teachings are based on Paltrül Rinpoche's oral lineage. At present, Paltrül Rinpoche's explanation lineage of the Bodhisattva-caryāvatāra is taught and

maintained at many monasteries in East Tibet, particularly at Śrī Siṃha University of Dzogchen Monastery. We have added to Khenpo Kunpal's written commentary the oral explanations given by a modern scholar from that university, Dzogchen Khenpo Chöga. Following the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Khenpo Chöga studied with qualified masters and began teaching in the late 1980s at Śrī Siṃha University. Throughout his commentary, Khenpo Chöga, in keeping with traditional Tibetan Buddhist didacticism, often reiterates key points, a method designed to reinforce the text's crucial messages in the mind of the student. We felt it important to retain this element of repetition in order to present the total work in the manner of a classical oral commentary. We have divided the root text and both commentaries into small sections and numbered each section. This offers the reader an easy way to work with both commentaries.

This present commentary on the Bodhisattva-caryāvatāra by Khenpo Kunpal is suitable for all readers who are interested in studying a classical presentation of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Because of the Bodhisattva-caryāvatāra's importance in the Buddhist world, we have translated this commentary to make it available to the non-Tibetan reader, thus introducing a small part of Tibet's rich oral and written explanation lineages on this text. We suggest that the reader moves between Khenpo Kunpal's commentary and Khenpo Chöga's explanation of the commentary. Since each section of Khenpo Kunpal's commentary is numbered, reference to Khenpo Chöga's explanation of the text section bearing the same number is easy.

The first volume of our work contains the translator's introduction that may be of interest to the academic reader who wishes to understand the details of the translation and lineage history of the Bodhisattva-caryāvatāra thoroughly. An introduction by Khenpo Chöga is presented from the viewpoint of a highly trained scholar of the Nyingma tradition and establishes the Bodhisattva-caryāvatāra within the context of the study and practice of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Tsoknyi Rinpoche approaches the Bodhisattva-caryāvatāra from the perspective of a well-known and accomplished meditation master, explaining how to use the text for personal meditation practice. Furthermore, we have included interviews with the eminent Sakya master Khenpo Ape as well as with the Kagyü-Nyingma scholar Khyabche Khenpo on the study of Bodhisattva-charyavatara.