



Refuge and The Wish Prayer

The Buddhist refuge and bodhichitta prayer is recited at most events as well at the beginning of various Buddhist practices. It is set in verse for easy chanting, thus there are some interesting issues with grammar that points out how to make sentences that are of equal length.

Translation by Geshe Michael Roach:

ལྷོ་བས་འགོ་སེམས་བསྐྱེད།

KYAB DRO SEM KYE

Refuge and the Wish

- 1: །སངས་རྒྱས་ཚེས་དང་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་མཚོག་རྣམས་ལ།
SANG GYE CHÖ DANG TSOK KYI CHOK NAM LA
- 2: །བྱང་ལྷུབ་བར་དུ་བདག་ནི་ལྷོ་བས་སུ་མཆིས།
JANG CHUB BAR DU DAK NI KYAB SU CHI

*I go for refuge
To the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha
Until I achieve enlightenment.*

- 3: །བདག་གིས་སྦྱིན་སོགས་བགྱིས་པའི་བསོད་ནམས་ཀྱིས།
DAK GI JIN SOK GYI PAY SO NAM KYI
- 4: །འགོ་ལ་པན་ཕྱིར་སངས་རྒྱས་འགྲུབ་པར་ཤོག །།
DRO LA PHEN CHIR SANG GYE DRUP PAR SHOK

*By the power
Of the goodness that I do
In giving and the rest,
May I reach Buddhahood
For the sake
Of every living being.*

First Line

སངས་རྒྱལ་ SANG GYE is the word for Buddha, an enlightened being. Buddha is a Sanskrit name (the awakened one, but this term was not used in the Tibetan translation, rather a new definition was created where སངས་ SANGS means *purified*, and རྒྱལ་ GYE means *fully developed*. This word describes a being that has purified all mental obscurations and their potentials, and developed all that could be developed. This is an example of the first wave of Tibetan translations of Sanskrit terms, where the translators translated Sanskrit terms with connotations.

ཚོས་ CHÖ means in this case *buddha dharma, the teachings of Buddha*. Note that this word could have many meanings, such as *phenomena, reality*, and so forth. You could find out from the context what the actual meaning is. Sometimes you need a commentary on the text to find this out.

དང་ DANG is the binding word *and*.

ཚོགས་ཀྱི་མཚོན་རྣམས་ TSOK KYI CHOK NAM is a very interesting word: it means *sangha*. Depending on the practitioner path it could mean different things, in the Universal Vehicle (*mahayana*) it means those who have seen emptiness directly, or *arya* beings. Usually *sangha* means the assembly of those who practice vowed morality, the Buddhist monks and nuns. This is a refuge prayer so it is important to understand what we ultimately take refuge in the *arya* beings. The assembly of Buddhist monks and nuns are the representation and should be the object of veneration.

ཚོགས་ TSOK means *gathering*, ཀྱི་ is the particle *of*, and མཚོན་ CHOK means *supreme*. As the particles bind from right to left, this means *supreme of gathering*, or better, *the supreme gathering*. རྣམས་ NAM is a *plural indicator*, meaning *all, everything*. If this were translated word by word, it would sound like *the gathering of all that is supreme*. This really means the *arya sangha*, the best gathering of beings one could find, or those who have seen emptiness directly.

Finally the ending ལ་ LA is a particle that has many meanings, in this particular case the best translation is *in*.

So the first line says : *In the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha*.

Second Line

བྱང་ལྷན་ JANG CHUB means *enlightenment*. In many cases the Tibetan word is actually a combination of two words; in this case བྱང་ JANG means *purified, perfected*, and ལྷན་ CHUB means *accomplished*, so again the word points out that enlightenment is to accomplish all perfections and finish all the purifications.

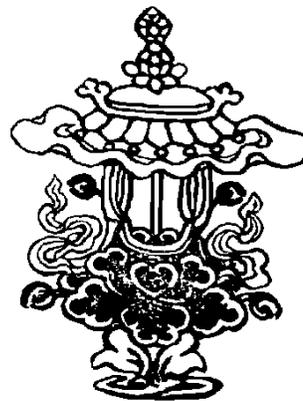
བར་དུ་ BAR DU is a very useful word -- you will encounter this word a lot. It means *until*. The next word is also common: བདག་ DAK, *me*.

འི་ NI is another particle; it is used to define something that will follow, *as follows*. Or sometimes it's good to think about substituting this word with the colon (:) character. It is also used in verses as a filler word to make sure that the syllable count is the same across all the verses.

སྐྱབས་ KYAB is *refuge*; you find this word frequently in the Tibetan Buddhist scriptures. སྐྱ is another particle (you will see a lot of particle words in Tibetan!), it actually belongs to a family of subordination particles སྐྱ་རྒྱ་སྐྱ་སྐྱ་, where in this case སྐྱ is used as སྐྱབས་ ends with a ས་ (SA). This particle is used in establishing relations, something on the right side of this particle leads to the thing on the left side. It establishes a meaning, such as a goal of an action, the state, the condition of being something, and so forth. In this case, the last word in this sentence is a verb, so the action we are doing will establish us to take refuge. The last word is མཆིས་ CHI, is an existential verb, *to be, there is, to exist*.

A rough translation of this sentence would be: *it is me who will take refuge until I am enlightened*. A better translation is to convert this to *I will take refuge until I am enlightened*. The two sentences could be combined into: *I go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, until I achieve enlightenment*.

This is the first section of the prayer, སྐྱབས་འགོ་ KYAB DRO, *taking refuge*, where འགོ་ DRO is the verb *to go*, or *going for refuge*.



Third Line

When writing Tibetan verses, the beginning and end has the ། symbol. The exception is an ending །; as this already looks like a line it does not need to have the ending །.

བདག DAK means *me*, གིས GI is another important particle word, it's an agent, it indicates someone acting or doing something, in this case *me*. In many cases, the first word to be used for the translation is *by*.

སྤྱིན JIN is the word for *giving*, one of the six perfections. Giving means giving material help, giving protection, or giving dharma. སོགས SOK means *and so forth*. The implication is that the verse here talks about the six perfections. This is another example how to encode more information into a short verse.

བགྱིས་པ GYI PA is a very ancient Tibetan word meaning *to do*. In this case the verb ends as བགྱིས་པའི GYI PAY where the འི is another particle! In this case it's the genitive *of*. Now we need to carefully note what is to the right of this word for seeing the relationship. བསོད་ནམས SÖ NAM means *merit*, Sanskrit *punya*. Thus, this is the *merit of giving and so forth (the six perfections)*.

The line ends with གྱིས KYI, this is another member of the agent particle family, so it's translated as *by*, and the next line will indicate the relationship.

Exercise: Do a rough translation of the third line.

Fourth Line

འགྲོ་ལ་ཕན་ཕྱིར DRO LA PHEN CHIR means *for the benefit of sentient beings*. The breakdown is that འགྲོ DRO means *to walk*, and those in cyclic (Samsaric) existence migrate or walk from one existence to the next. These beings are called འགྲོ་བ DRO WA, *sentient beings*.

ལ LA is again the particle *to*. Note that ལ could actually have many translations; it usually indicates *why something is done* or *why the action takes place*. Common translations for this particle are *to*, *for*, *with regards*.

ཕན PHEN means *benefit*; ཕྱིར CHIR means *because, in order to*. In many cases, you see this at the end of the sentence, so the next sentence will explain what the previous sentence is defining.

སངས་རྒྱལ་ SANG GYE is as earlier mentioned *buddha*.

འགྲུབ་པ་ DRUP PA means *to achieve*. This word ends as འགྲུབ་པར་ where the ending ར་ is actually an agent particle indicating *by*, or *by achieving*. The goal of action is to become a སངས་རྒྱལ་.

The final word འོག་ SHOK is a very common verb that ends Buddhist verses, it means *may!* It indicates that may all this absolutely happen.

Exercise: Do a rough translation of the fourth line.

The third and fourth line constitute སེམས་བསྐྱེད་ SEM KYE, *the wish to become enlightened, or bodhichitta*.

སེམས་ SEM means *mind* (another very common word you will encounter quite a lot), and བསྐྱེད་ KYE means to *generate, to produce*. In this case, the mind of enlightenment is not the mind of a Buddha, rather the resolution to become a Buddha for the benefit of all sentient beings. In other words, from now always think about benefiting sentient beings, of which the best way to benefit sentient beings is to become an enlightened being.