

AN EPISTLE TO A FRIEND: A LITERAL TRANSLATION OF THE *SUHLLEKHA*

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සුභාල්ලේඛ යනු මහායාන බෞද්ධ සම්ප්‍රදායට අයත් මධ්‍යමක ගුරු කුලයෙහි පුරෝගාමී ආචාර්යවර නාගාර්ජුන පාදයන්ගේ කෘතියකි. තථාගත ශ්‍රී සද්ධර්මයෙන් විවක්ෂණ ලෙස නගා ගත් ධර්ම විග්‍රහයන් මනහර අයුරින් සංග්‍රහ කරමින් ආර්යාගීති නම් ඡන්දසින් සුප්‍රබන්ධිත මේ උපදේශ කාව්‍යය උන්වහන්සේ විසින් ස්වකීය සන්මිත්‍ර ගෞතමීපුත්‍ර ශාතකර්ණි නරේශ්වරයා වෙත යවන ලද්දකැයි සැලකේ. චීන වාර්තාවලට අනුව භාරතයෙහි කුඩා දරුවන් අතර පවා මේ කෘතිය සාදරයෙන් සම්භාවිත විය. මෙහි සුභාවිත පද මාලාව ශ්‍රව්‍ය ගෝචර ය; එය උපමා රූපක ආදී අලංකාරවලින් සුපෝෂිත ය. එහෙයින් ම මෙය ශ්‍රවණය සහ අධ්‍යයනය කරන්නාගේ මනස සමුක්තේජනයට හා සම්ප්‍රහර්ෂණයට පත් කරන අතර ම අමාවෙන් දොවන ලද සඳ කැන් දහරක් මෙන් පරියෝදාන භාවයට ද පත් කරයි. සුභාල්ලේඛයෙහි සංස්කෘත පිටපත ඇසුරින් සෘජු ලෙස ම ඉංග්‍රීසි භාෂාවට නැගෙන මෙම ලිපිය මුල් කෘතියෙහි වීන සහ විබේට් පිටපත් ඇසුරින් සැකසුණු ඉංග්‍රීසි පරිවර්තන පහක් ද පර්යුපාසනය කරයි.

Prologue

As evidenced in the historical records, the author of *Suhrullekha* is venerable Nâgârjuna (50-120 AD) who was the pioneer of the *Madhyamaka* tradition belonging to the *Mahayana* Buddhist confraternity. According to the trustworthy historical accounts, this friendly epistle was dispatched by the author to his intimate comrade *Gautamî-putra Shâtakarnî*, the king of *Shâtavâhana* dynasty whose mind was thoroughly fascinated by *Hinduism* in order to convince

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සංස්. ආචාර්ය පූජ්‍ය මිමුරේ ගුණානන්ද හිමි, මහාචාර්ය ඊශා හේවාබෝවල, මහාචාර්ය

සුසන්ත මහඋල්පත, ජ්‍යෙෂ්ඨ කවිකාචාර්ය ප්‍රියංකර රත්නායක

මානවශාස්ත්‍ර පීඨ ශාස්ත්‍රීය සංග්‍රහය, 19 කලාපය, 2012/13, මානවශාස්ත්‍ර පීඨය, කැලණිය විශ්වවිද්‍යාලය

the latter of the significance of the Buddhism. This whole text was originally composed in Sanskrit whereas it was subsequently translated and preserved in Tibetan and Chinese. As it is mentioned at the very beginning of this text, this was composed in Âryâgîti-metre one of the classical cadence in Indian poetry. However, it is notable that this text has been immensely influenced by the early Buddhist teaching. Even though we are not hasty to insist that venerable Nâgârjuna has quoted all of these from the Pali canon, many of the doctrinal teachings that appear in this text can be traceable in the Tipitaka. Accordingly, it is more rational to state that the contents of the Sanskrit Tripitaka, which is presumably used by the author are remarkably similar to those of the Pali canon. Further, Suhrullekha is an appropriate example to identify the mastery of Venerable Nâgârjuna's versification. He, having properly studied the Buddha's teaching in early Buddhism, is able to present those in condensed form through the elegant Sanskrit stanzas (*shloka-s*).

Even though several studies and translations of Suhrullekha are available, which have been done depending on its Tibetan and Chinese translations, yet no study or translation is available for its Sanskrit versions in English. Thus, this literal translation of Suhrullekha is an attempt to fulfill that gap. The main source utilized in this translation is "Padma Tedzin Suhriddlekha Central Institute of High Tibetan Studies, 2002, Varanasi." Here, for the easy reference of the reader, Roman transliteration of each Sanskrit stanza is given before its English translation. As we mentioned above, it is uncontroversial fact that venerable Nâgârjuna has composed this text in Sanskrit. However, when this text converts into Tibetan and Chinese, some minor variations have crept into the original text due to the dissimilarity of syntactical order of these languages. Undoubtedly, these scriptural variations are enormously helpful to the researcher in order to reach deeper and deeper in the field of Pali philological studies.

This Translation

Here, for the first time, Sanskrit version of the Suhrullekha, is translated into English. In this translation, I paid my adequate attention to five English translations of Suhrullekha, which have been done with particular reference to the Tibetan and Chinese versions of it. The main principle applied here is that to pay special attention to each word and phrase of the Sanskrit text, and I attempted not to skip any term and to provide literal interpretation for every term of the original text in the process of translation albeit I felt some of them may appear as awkward in the literal form. My reluctance to provide contextual meanings for some abstruse terms of the text should be considered as the scare of corrupting the reader's mind from irrelevant notions. Especially, it should be mentioned here that I could not be able to note some changing of the passive voice and active voice forms in Tibetan text-based English translations. However, the whole Suhrullekha consists of 123 Sanskrit stanzas, due to its extensiveness this article deals with first fifty stanzas of the text.

1. *prakritisukrutârthagunâdhya
sugatavacobhyah samudânîtâshca mayâ,
shubhamâlankrutya krutâ vai
kâshcidâryâgîtayastvayâ ca sravyâh.*

O, Virtuous One who is endowed with inherited noble qualities, having considered the good benefit, I have composed a few verses from Âryâgîti-metre, indeed derived from the Buddha's teachings. It should be heard by you.

2. *dârumayî hyapi pratimâ
sampûjyate kâpi sugatasya vidvadbhih,
tathâmanojñam kâvyam
saddharmâsrayâcca mamedam na nindyam.*

The image of the Buddha is highly venerated by the wise men even though it is made from wood and such. Likewise, although this

poetry of mine may be deficient, one should scorn it since it's based on expressions of the noble doctrine.

3. *mahâmuneratimadhuram manye
vacanam bhavatâvagatameva syât,
âkalpitam tu sudhayâ
nanvatidhavalam na drshyate candrikayâ?*

I suppose that the sonorousness and the real taste in the speech of the Great-Sage (i.e. Buddha) have already comprehended by you. Don't those moon-rays become whiter when it is bathed with the ambrosia?

4. *jinairbuddhadharmasamghashîlatyâga-
devâdica anusmrutayah,
paradarshitâstâstu tadgunasambhâraih
pruthaganusmaranîyâshca.*

Six fold recollections, namely the recollection of the Buddha, the doctrine, community, morality, generosity, and gods have been well demonstrated by the triumphant-Ones (i.e. Buddhas). Those should be separately recollected with their particular qualities.

5. *dashakushalâh karmapathâh
kâyavâkcittaih sarvadâbhyasaniyâ
madyâdibhivivrate punyamayaishcâjivaih
suprasannah syâh*

Tenfold wholesome pathway should be daily entrusted by yourself with body, speech, and mind. Having turned away from intoxicants, you should delight in the meritorious livelihood.

6. *jnâtvâ calâmasârâm sampattim
dvija-bhikshudinamitrebhayah
dânam deyam vidhinâ janmântareshu na
dânât param mitram*

Having realized that possessions are transient and lack any essence, those should be donated to the Brahmins, monks, poor people

and miserable friends in a proper manner. There is no a better friend besides generosity in the samsaric-journey.

7. *shilam sevyamamisram*
tvayânupahatâlanghitânupalīptam ca
carâcarapratishtham tu gunâsrayam
bhûvacca râjate shilam

You should practice the morality uncontaminated, undefiled, unbroken, nonattached. The morality that is endowed with these qualities shines just as the earth that helps for the foundation of things moving and unmoving.

8. *shadimâ dânam shilam*
kshântiviryadhyânaprajnâh pâramitâh
aprameyâh samvardhya bhavacca
bhavasâgarapârâgo jinendrah

There are six perfections namely, generosity, morality, patience, perseverance, mental stability, discriminating awareness. One should gain the Buddha who has reached the far shore of the ocean of compulsive existence having immeasurably developed these perfections.

9. *yatra pujâ pitrunam kulam*
tadâcâryabrahmabhīh samruddham
tatpujayâ ca kirtistadanantaram
câdhigamyatebhyudayopi

Any family in which the father and mother are honored will be together with Brahma and together with teachers. The one who honors them will get the fame and his good ambitions become fulfill.

10. *himsâcaurye madirâ*
kâmâtîcâramrshoktinrutya gitâni
tyâjyânyakâlâbhaktam mâlâ-
gandhâdivisheshocca-shayanâni

One should eschew harm, thievery, liquor, sexual misconduct, falsehood, dance, songs, garlands, perfumes, high beds etc.

11. *anukrutyâr hacchilam*

*kuryâduposhadhamashtâbhirangaishcet
labhate hi pumân stri vâ suramya-
kâmâvacarâdi-devakâyam*

One should take on eight precepts in emulation of the Arahant's moral practice. The man or woman who performs this will receive an attractive body of a sensual pleasure god and so on.

12. *mâtsaryasrâthyamâyâbhimânâsakti-*

*kausidyarâgadveshân
kularupayauvanasrutabalâdijam madam
ripumiva paripashyecca*

One should view as an enemy the jealousy, cunning, deceit, false pride, lust, hatred as well as the vanity over greatness of caste, physique, youth, education, and authority and so on.

13. *apramâdomrutapadam pramâdo*

*mrutyupadamiti muninâdishtam
kushaladharmasya vrudhaye
sadâpramâdobhyasaniyastvayâ caiva*

The great sage has proclaimed that the heedfulness is the way of immortality and heedlessness is the way of death. Accordingly, the heedfulness should be constantly practiced by you in order to develop wholesome deeds.

14. *purvapramattah kopi*

*meghânnirgatenduriva
tatopramâdi sa hi
nandângulimâlodayanâjâtashatrusadrushah sushobheta*

If anyone who was previously heedless and later becomes heedful, he is similar to the moon freed of clouds. He, akin to Nanda, AEGulimala, Ajâtaútru, and Udayana enchants the world.

15. *kshântisamam naiva tapastatastvayâ
na krodhâvasaro deyah
buddhenânumatam vai
padamavaivartikam krodhaprahâna*

There is no austerity equal to patience. Thus, you should not give a chance for anger to arise. Buddha has declared that having rid of anger, the state of non-shrinking back can be attained.

16. *akroshdavadhinmâmajajishinmâmahârshid
vai vittam me vairairebhih
kalahastyajati ya
etad vairam sa sukhamshete*

By holding a grudge, as 'This person insulted me, this one struck or overwhelmed me, that one stole my wealth!' generates conflicts. If anyone abandons this grudge, he lives at ease.

17. *jalevanau pâshâne citramiva
cittam tridhâ khalu sattvânâm
kleshavatâm hi prathamam
dharmâbhilâshinâmantimo jyâyân*

The minds of beings are threefold like a picture drawn on water, on earth, or on stone. Among them, the minds of the beings with defilements are similar to the first while the minds of those who wish to Dharma are similar to the last.

18. *vâcastridhâ janebhyah proktâ
jinena madhurasatyamithyâkhyâ
kramasho madhuh pushpâshucitulyâshcaramâ
ca pariharttavayitâsu*

The three modes of the people's speech viz. pleasing, truthful and wrong, has been proclaimed by the Victorious-one. These are respectively similar to honey, flower and excrement. Among them, the last mode of speech should be abandoned.

19. *caturvidhâ vai purushâ*
prakâshâtprakâshe tamasastamasi
punahtamah prakâshâd gacchati
tamasastejasi pudgalo varah prathamah

There are four types of persons: one who enters to the light from the light, to the darkness from darkness, to the darkness from the light and to the light the darkness. Among those, the first person is noble.

20. *janânâm tvâmraphalamiva*
pakvamapakve pakvepakvatulyam
caapakvepakvam tathâ pakve
pakvamiva bhâti câturvidhyam

Four types of people who are living in the world akin to a mango fruit unripe but seemingly ripe, ripe but seemingly unripe, unripe appears as unripe and ripe shines as ripe should be known.

21. *paradârâna tu pashyed drushte ca*
jneyâ avasthânurupyena
kanyâmbâbhaginivad
âsaktâvapyashucimeva cintayecca

You should not gaze upon others' wives. However, if you happen to see them, should formulate a conception in accord with their age as a daughter, a mother and as a sister. If lust arises on them, contemplate the filthy state of their body.

22. *raksheccanlalacittam*
sruti-putra-nidhi-prânasadruam ca
nitarâmcittam pariharttavvyamshatrusarpa
vishâyudhâgnisamât kâmât

One should frequently protect the trembling mind as a great learning, as your son, as a treasure and as your life. It should be recoiled from sensory pleasure as though they were like a foe, venom, a weapon and fire.

23. *kâmastvanarthajanakah proktah
kimpâkaphalasamo
jinendrenapâshaistasya hi baddho
bhavacârake lokah sa prahâtavyah*

‘Sensory pleasure produces calamities. It is similar to kimpâka fruit (that has a good taste but poisonous)’ declared by the lord of the Victorious-one. The one who is bound by its fetters recurs for a long time in the saCsâric journey. (Thus,) it should be abandoned.

24. *calâdhruvâni shadakshâni jayanti
samare vâ sratrunapi caike
tayoshca sudhiyah prathamam
varamindriyavijetâram ca manyante*

Some triumph over the six ever-unstable and wavering sense-faculties whereas some triumph over a host of foes in the battle. Out of these, the wise people know, that the first category i.e. those who win their sense-faculties is noble.

25. *yuvatisrariram hi puti
yannavâshucidvâramashucibhândasamam
carmâvrutadushpûram bhushitamapi
bhushanaih pruthag drashtavyam*

The body of a young woman is stinking that it has nine doors that ooze impure things. It resembles an object that has filthy things and it is a badly filled object that is wrapped with the skin. Although it is adorned, should be viewed apart from those adornments.

26. *krumipidito hi kushthi
sukhalipsayâ ca yathâ vahnimâsrayate
pidâ na yâti shântim tathaiva hi
kâmâsaktirapi boddhavyâ*

Even though a leper tormented by maggots relies on fire for the sake of comfort (his) pain does not sooth. Similarly, the attachment to the lust should be known.

27. *paramârtham prativettum
sarvabhâveshu savidhi
manasi nidhâyaiv sa ca khalu bhâvayitavyo na hi
tattulyoparo gunayuto dharmah*

In order to actualize the ultimate meaning, all phenomena should be properly contemplated. Indeed, no other virtuous activity which is similar that.

28. *sukulinopi na pujoyo jnânashilavimukho
srutirûpavân pumân
gunadvayaitadyuktah pujoyate
sonyagunairhinopi satatam*

Although a person who belongs to a high caste and who has handsome physique and education is not worthy-enough for veneration if he averts from wisdom and morality. The one who is endowed with these two qualities is forever esteemed though lacking others should be venerated.

29. *ashtasu lokadharmeshu lokavit
samatayâ pravartayeccittam
hâni-lâbha-yashoyashonushamsâ-
nindâ-sukhadukheshvashocyeshu*

The one who has understanding about the world should equally face upon the eightfold unregrettable world phenomena viz. in gain and loss, fame and defame, praise and scorn, happiness and unhappiness.

30. *bhavadbhirbrâhmanabhikshu
devâtithimâtâpitrukulamahishibhyah
pâpam nâcaraniyam yatah katamopi na
narakaphalasya bhâgi*

Any negative act should not be performed by you even for the sake of a Brahmin, a monk, a god, or a guest, father, mother or your queen for none of them are responsible for that hellish consequence.

31. *na ca kruntati pâpakarma tat-
kshanamastra-pâtavat kamapi pâpinam
mrutyorhi samaye kintu tatkarmanah
phalamabhimukhi-bhavatyeva*

The evil act does not immediately afterwards cut (i.e. instantly yield its consequence) its doer just as a weapon that instantly falls upon him. Nonetheless, on the verge of his death its outcome will become manifest.

32. *saptadhanânyuktâni sraddhâ-
shila-tyâgâmalashruta-dhiyah
apatrapâ hri muninâ
mudhaivâparadhanâni hi sâdhâranâni*

The sevenfold spiritual wealth viz. faith, morality, generosity, untainted learning, wisdom, shame of sinning and fear of sinning by the Sage. Except these, other wealth indeed has no meaning.

33. *dyutakridâ kautuka-darshanâlasyakumitra-
sanga-madirâshc
nishâviharanamshadime
tyâjyâ durgatidâ yashovinâshakâshca*

Six factors that bring about worse rebirth states and destroys dignity viz. gambling with dice, looking for the objects that increase lust, laziness, relying on misleading friends, taking liquor and roaming around at night should be abandoned.

34. *sanarâmarashâsakena santoshah
sarvadhanapradhânāmuktam
santoshonushttheyah dhanam
vinaiva sa dhanikah sati santoshe*

It has been preached by the Teacher of gods and men that among all wealth, happiness is the best. If anyone has happiness, he is rich even if he does not have wealth. (Thus,) one should be happy.

35. *yathâ samruddhâh purushâ
dukhino bhavanti naiva tathâlpecchukâh
yâvatyah santi phanâ ârya
dukhakarâh nâgasya tâvatyah*

O, noble one, rich people fall into calamities but never those whose have desires are few. As many hoods as the cobra has, many problems arise from them.

36. *patni tyâjyâ trividhâ prakrutyâ
ripusambaddhâ svaghâtikeva
patyurapamânakartri svairâ
laghuvastucauryaratâ steyiva*

Three kinds of wives viz. like a murderess like wife by nature associating with your enemies, a tyrant like wife who is scornful of her husband, thief like wife who steals even little stuffs should be abandoned.

37. *bhaginisamânukûlâ mitravad
hrudayaEgamâ ca sevaniyâ
mâtevopakârini pujoyâ
sevikevâjnâkrud deviva*

The wife who as mutual as a sister; dear to the heart like a friend; as helpful as a mother; as compliant as a servant should be associated honoring as a goddess.

38. *vihâya râgadveshau bhojanamaushadhid-
avagatya seveta
kâyasthityai nitarâm na ca saundarya-
garva-mânârtham sevyam*

Food should be always taken as though it were a medicine only to maintain the body having given up desire and hatred. It should not be taken for the bodily gorgeousness, conceit and arrogance.

39. *dinamakhila shubhakârye*
yâpayed râtrerâdyantau yâmau ca
dhîman madhye yâme shayita
yato hi na bhaved viphalâ nidrâ

O Intelligent One, you should dedicate entire daytime, first and last periods of night for the performance of wholesome activities. You could sleep between those two periods so as not to be fruitless the repose.

40. *maitri-karunopekshâ-muditâshca*
sadâ samyag bhâvayitavyâh
alabdhenuttarapade dhruvameva
brahmaloke sukhâvâptih

One should always properly develop loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. (Through this process,) even though one may not attain the highest state, he will definitely attain to the bliss of the Brahma Realm.

41. *kâmân pritivicârau sukhanca*
dukhkanca vihâya caturbhireva
dhyânairbrahmâbhâsvara-shubhakrutsna-
bruhatphala-bhâginashca bhavanti

(People) by means of the four contemplations having eliminated sensory pleasure, joy, sustained application, happiness and suffering enable to attain Brahma realm, Radiant Light realm, Entirely lustrous realm and Great fruition realm.

42. *kushalâkushalam ca karma*
sadâbhiniveshâpratipaksha-vastu-gunaih
pancabhishcotpadyate tasmâd
yataniya kushala-caryâyâm

Wholesome and unwholesome actions are arisen from five aspects: frequent performance, adherence, apposite behavior, rely on appropriate circumstance and possession of pertinent qualities. Accordingly, one should strive for the performance of virtue.

43. *yathâlpakshâra-niram**parivartayatyalpajala-rasam na**gângam pâpam tathaiva câlpam**nâshayatyalpa-kushalam na purna-kushalam*

A liquid with slight compound of salt, transform the taste of a small quantity of water, but not that of the Ganges River. In the same manner, a minor evil action destroys the (power of) a minor wholesome action, but not that of the weighty wholesome action.

44. *auddhatyam kaukrutyam**vyâpâdah styânamiddhe ca kâmecchâ**vicikitseti pancaiva**kushaladhanahârakânimâni jneyâni*

These factors viz. excitement, remorsefulness, malice, sloth and torpor, desire of sense pleasure and doubt, should be known as the plunderers of the wealth of wholesome actions.

45. *uttamâh pancadharmâhsraddhâvirye**smrtisamâdhiprajnâshca**balendriyâni câgryâni kathyante**yataniyametesu tasmâd*

It is said that noble five factors viz. actual faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom as powers as well as faculties that enable to attain to the highest state. Thus, one should strive upon these.

46. *vyâdhijarâmaranapriyaviyogavacca**karmaparâyanâh sarve**punah punastu cintayâ**pratipakshenaivam prahiyate mânah*

All the human beings are dependent on the consequence of their own actions (facing to) sickness, aging, death, separation from beloved ones. By repeatedly thinking in this opposite manner, conceit can be removed.

47. *svargam moksham cecchet
samyagdrushtistâvad bhâvaniyaiva
krutâni mithyâdrushtyâ purushaih
sucaritânyapi vishamavipâkâni*

If you desire the higher realms and liberation, you must develop the right view for even good deeds done by a person with wrong view will all have terrible consequences.

48. *anâtmâshucirduhkkhipudgalonityashca
samyagvijneyah
smrutyupasthânarahitâ vinashyante ca
viparyâsaishcaturbhih*

You should properly know that the human being is soulless, impure, impermanent and miserable. Those who do not have the establishment of mindfulness are devastated with these four misapprehensions.

49. *uktam rupam nâtmâ rûpavâmsheca
nâtmâ rupe naivâtmâ na câtmanyasti
rûpam shûnyamevam
skandhacatushkamapi jneyam*

It has been declared (by the Buddha) that the ‘form is not the soul, no form to the soul, no soul in the form, no form in the soul.’ In this manner, the voidness of the other four aggregates also should be known.

50. *skandhâ na hi jâyante yadrucchayâ na
prakrutishvarakâlebhyah
nâhetoh svabhâvato jneyâ
ajnânena trushnyâ jâtâh*

The aggregates do not arise at random, not with a primordial substance, not from *Îûvara*, not from time, nor without a cause, not spontaneously. It should be known that they arise from the ignorance and craving.

To be continued**Bibliography****Suh[ilekha Translations**

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