

Pronunciation of Chants

SANSKRIT

The Nālandā Translation Committee uses a significant amount of Sanskrit in its translations. Sanskrit words may seem intimidating at first sight because they are so long. However, once they are broken down into syllables, they are easy to pronounce. Sanskrit follows very regular rules and contains no “silent letters” such as those in English. The Translation Committee employs the standard romanization for Sanskrit, with the following exceptions: for the sake of easier pronunciation, we have replaced *r*, *ś*, *ṣ*, and *c* (found in the system most commonly used in the West) with *ri*, *sh*, *ṣh*, and *ch*.

Vowels

In general, vowels are pronounced as in Italian or Spanish. There is, however, a distinction between long and short vowels. A line over a vowel indicates that it is long.

- short *a* as in *siesta*, but long *ā* as in *car*.
- short *i* as in *sit*, but long *ī* as in *feet*.
- short *u* as in *put*, but long *ū* as in *loot*.

The following vowels are always long:

- *e* as in *day*
- *ai* as in *pie*
- *o* as in *go*
- *au* as in *how*

Consonants

Most consonants are pronounced as in English. The aspirated consonants (*kh*, *gh*, *ch*, *jh*, *th*, *dh*, *th*, *dh*, *ph*, *bh*) are pronounced as the consonant plus a noticeable aspiration of breath. For example, the aspirated consonants *th* and *ph* must never be pronounced as in the words *thing* and *photo*, but as in *pothole* and *shepherd*. Also note the following:

- *g* is always pronounced hard as in *go*, never as in *gem*
- *ṅ* is pronounced as the *ng* in *hanger*
- *ñ* is pronounced as in *lunch* before a consonant; before a vowel, as in *canyon*
- *ṭ*, *ṭh*, *ḍ*, *ḍh*, *ṇ*, and *ṣh* are pronounced approximately as in English, but with the tongue turned back along the palate
- *ḥ* is a breathing sound, generally at the end of a word
- *m* is a nasal sound, pronounced like an *m* at the end of a word; if it comes before a consonant it is assimilated to it, becoming either *n*, *ñ*, *ṇ*, *ṅ*, or *m*. In principle, it nasalizes the preceding vowel.

Accent

In classical Sanskrit, each syllable received approximately the same emphasis; vowels were lengthened rather than stressed. Although today we tend to stress syllables, it should not be so emphatic as in English. Accent is placed on the next-to-last syllable when this contains a long

vowel or ends with more than one consonant (not including *h*). Otherwise, it is placed on the last previous syllable that contains a long vowel or ends in more than one consonant. If none exists, the stress is placed on the first syllable. Other syllables containing long vowels may be somewhat stressed. For example, yoginī is pronounced **yo-gi-ni**, not yo-gi-ni.

TIBETAN

The Nālandā Translation Committee has transcribed Tibetan words to reflect pronunciation as accurately as possible. Most of the teachers with whom our saṅgha is familiar are from Kham. The Vidyādhara, however, wanted us to employ Lhasa pronunciation, rather than Kham dialect, because it is considered more proper Tibetan. Therefore, we say “Kagyü” rather than “Kajü.” Notice that ü and ö should be pronounced approximately as in the German words *über* and *möglich*, or in the French words *connu* and *oeuvre*.

In 2010, we introduced a few changes in the way we represent Tibetan words phonetically. (No changes have been made for Sanskrit.) Words once spelled with “ph” and “th” are now spelled with “t” and “p.” Some words ending in “e,” previously spelled with a hyphen in order to clarify pronunciation, are now spelled with a final acute accent (é) and no hyphen. Here are some examples of old and new spellings:

dathün	datün
Nyingthik	Nyingtik
phowa	powa
phurba	purba
Ri-me	Rimé
shi-ne	shiné

FREQUENTLY MISPRONOUNCED WORDS

The following words often tend to be mispronounced:

A-va-lo-ki-tesh-va-ra: The accent, if any, is on the fifth syllable.

BO-DHI-SAT-TVĀ-NĀM (from mantra in oryoki chant): The accent, if any, is on the fourth syllable.

Bud-dha: Pronounce the u of the first syllable like that in put, not as in boot.

DHAR-MĀ-ṄĀM (from mantra in oryoki chant): The accent, if any, is on the second syllable.

dön: Observe the umlaut.

gu-ru: The accent, if any, is on the first syllable.

Ka-gyü: Do not pronounce as Ka-jü (Kham dialect) or Kar-gyu.

Kar-ma-pa: The accent, if any, is on the first syllable.

Lo-drö: Observe the umlaut.

Mi-kyö: Observe the umlaut.

Pad-mā-ka-ra: The accent, if any, is on the second syllable.

pra-jñā-pā-ra-mi-tā: The accent, if any, falls on the second, third, and last syllables, which are long. The next-to-last syllable is not stressed.

rāk-ṣha-sa: The accent, if any, is on the first syllable.

Ro-cha-na: The accent, if any, is on the first syllable.

Seng-ge: The second g is pronounced hard as in get.

Sha-ta-kra-tu: Although people frequently stumble over this word, it is pronounced just as it is spelled. Accent, if any, is on the first and third syllables.

Tro-lö: Observe the umlaut.

Tu-ṣhi-ta: The accent, if any, is on the first syllable.

Vi-dyā-dha-ra: The accent, if any, is on the second syllable.

Vi-ma-la-mi-tra: The accent, if any, falls on the first and fourth syllables.

vi-na-ya: The accent, if any, on the first syllable.