

། །གསེར་གྱི་སྟོན།

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## The Gold Sūtra

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*Suvarṇasūtra*

འཕགས་པ་གསེར་གྱི་མདོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་མདོ།

*'phags pa gser gyi mdo zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*

The Noble Great Vehicle Sūtra “The Gold Sūtra”

*Āryasuvarṇasūtranāmamahāyānasūtra*

· Toh 125 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 54 (mdo sde, tha), folio 239.a



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co.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- ti. Title
- im. Imprint
- co. Contents
- s. Summary
- ac. Acknowledgements
- i. Introduction
- tr. The Translation
  - 1. The Gold Sūtra
- n. Notes
- b. Bibliography
- g. Glossary

s.

## SUMMARY

- s.1 In this very brief sūtra, Venerable Ānanda asks the Buddha about the nature of the mind of awakening, the aspiration to attain the awakening of a buddha for the benefit of all beings. The Buddha explains that the mind of awakening is like gold because it is pure. He also teaches the analogy that just as a smith shapes gold into various forms, yet the nature of the gold itself does not change, so too the mind of awakening manifests in various unique ways, yet the nature of the mind of awakening itself does not change.

ac.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ac.1 This sūtra was translated from Tibetan into English by Khenpo Kalsang Gyaltzen and Chodrungma Kunga Chodron. It was then edited and introduced by the 84000 editorial team.

The translation was completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.

i.

## INTRODUCTION

i.1

*The Gold Sūtra* presents a very brief but meaningful teaching on the mind of awakening, the aspiration to attain the unsurpassed and perfect awakening of a buddha for the benefit of all beings. It consists of the Buddha's answer to a single question posed by Venerable Ānanda about how the mind of awakening should be viewed. The Buddha declares that the mind of awakening is like gold because it is pure, and he gives the analogy that just as a smith may shape gold into various forms, yet the nature of the gold itself does not change, so too the mind of awakening appears with various unique attributes, yet the nature of the mind of awakening itself does not change. The Buddha then proclaims a single four-line verse that succinctly articulates the nature of the mind of awakening and the way to practice it.

i.2

Gold is used as an analogy to illustrate the noble and precious nature of awakening itself in a number of canonical texts. Notably, of the nine famous analogies set out in the *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra* for the nature of awakening or "buddha-nature" (*tathāgatagarbha*) that is innate in sentient beings but concealed by different layers of adventitious obscurations, at least two—a piece of gold that has been discarded by mistake in a heap of filth, and an image cast in gold but still enclosed within its clay mold—explicitly mention gold.<sup>1</sup> The analogy of pure gold whose nature does not change, despite being worked by a smith into different forms, is also found in *Vidyutprāpta's Questions* (*Vidyutprāptaparipṛcchā*, Toh 64), but there illustrates the single nature of the dharmadhātu rather than that of awakening.<sup>2</sup> However, gold as an analogy for the mind of awakening (*bodhicitta*), rather than for awakening itself, seems to be unique to the present text.

i.3

As far as we can tell, no Sanskrit or Chinese version of *The Gold Sūtra* exists. As there is no colophon at the end of the sūtra, we have no information on when or by whom it was translated into Tibetan. The sūtra is not listed in either of the two inventories of translations completed during the early, imperial period, and it appears to be found only in Kangyurs of the Tshalpa



line of transmission. There is a recent English translation of the sūtra, along with helpful notes, in Peter Skilling's 2021 anthology, *Questioning the Buddha: A Selection of Twenty-Five Sutras*.<sup>3</sup>

i.4 The present translation is based on the version in the Degé (*sde dge*) Kangyur, with reference to the Comparative Edition (*dpe sdur ma*).

**The Noble Great Vehicle Sūtra**  
**The Gold Sūtra**

1.

## The Translation

[F.293.a]

1.1 Homage to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

1.2 Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was dwelling in the Jetavana, Anāthapiṇḍada's Park. At that time Venerable Ānanda asked the Blessed One, "Blessed One, how should the mind of awakening be viewed?"

1.3 The Blessed One replied, "Venerable Ānanda, the mind of awakening should be viewed as being in nature like gold. Just as gold is pure by nature, so the mind of awakening is pure by nature. Just as a smith shapes gold into a multiplicity of forms, yet the nature of the gold does not change, although the mind of awakening may appear to have a variety of unique attributes, ultimately these never waver from the mind of awakening. Therefore, its nature does not change."

1.4 Then the Blessed One proclaimed the following verse:

"The mind of awakening is pure.  
Strive for the benefit of self and other.  
Meditate on the insubstantial essence.  
Be intent on what causes the birth of wisdom."

1.5 The Blessed One spoke thus, and Venerable Ānanda, the entire retinue, and the world together with its gods, humans, asuras, and gandharvas rejoiced and praised what the Blessed One had said.

1.6 *This completes the noble Great Vehicle sūtra "The Gold Sūtra."*

n.

## NOTES

- n.1 *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra* (Toh 258), F.250.b–251.a and F.254.a–254.b. The analogies in the *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra* are taken up and explained in detail in Maitreya-Asaṅga’s *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* (*rgyud bla ma*, Toh 4024–5).
- n.2 *Vidyutprāpta’s Questions* (*Vidyutprāptaparipṛcchā*, Toh 64), F.6.a.
- n.3 Skilling 2021, pp. 221–26.

b.

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## GLOSSARY

· Types of attestation for names and terms of the corresponding ·  
source language

AS	<i>Attested in source text</i> This term is attested in a manuscript used as a source for this translation.
AO	<i>Attested in other text</i> This term is attested in other manuscripts with a parallel or similar context.
AD	<i>Attested in dictionary</i> This term is attested in dictionaries matching Tibetan to the corresponding language.
AA	<i>Approximate attestation</i> The attestation of this name is approximate. It is based on other names where the relationship between the Tibetan and source language is attested in dictionaries or other manuscripts.
RP	<i>Reconstruction from Tibetan phonetic rendering</i> This term is a reconstruction based on the Tibetan phonetic rendering of the term.
RS	<i>Reconstruction from Tibetan semantic rendering</i> This term is a reconstruction based on the semantics of the Tibetan translation.
SU	<i>Source unspecified</i> This term has been supplied from an unspecified source, which most often is a widely trusted dictionary.

g.1 Ānanda

*kun dga' bo*

ཀུན་དགའ་བོ།

*ānanda*

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

A major śrāvaka disciple and personal attendant of the Buddha Śākyamuni during the last twenty-five years of his life. He was a cousin of the Buddha (according to the *Mahāvastu*, he was a son of Śuklodana, one of the brothers of King Śuddhodana, which means he was a brother of Devadatta; other sources say he was a son of Amṛtodana, another brother of King Śuddhodana, which means he would have been a brother of Aniruddha).

Ānanda, having always been in the Buddha's presence, is said to have memorized all the teachings he heard and is celebrated for having recited all the Buddha's teachings by memory at the first council of the Buddhist saṅgha, thus preserving the teachings after the Buddha's parinirvāṇa. The phrase "Thus did I hear at one time," found at the beginning of the sūtras, usually stands for his recitation of the teachings. He became a patriarch after the passing of Mahākāśyapa.

g.2 asura

*lha ma yin*

ལྷ་མ་ཡིན།

*asura*

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

A type of nonhuman being whose precise status is subject to different views, but is included as one of the six classes of beings in the sixfold classification of realms of rebirth. In the Buddhist context, asuras are powerful beings said to be dominated by envy, ambition, and hostility. They are also known in the pre-Buddhist and pre-Vedic mythologies of India and Iran, and feature prominently in Vedic and post-Vedic Brahmanical mythology, as well as in the Buddhist tradition. In these traditions, asuras are often described as being engaged in interminable conflict with the devas (gods).

g.3 blessed one

*bcom ldan 'das*

བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས།

*bhagavat*

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

In Buddhist literature, this is an epithet applied to buddhas, most often to Śākyamuni. The Sanskrit term generally means "possessing fortune," but in specifically Buddhist contexts it implies that a buddha is in possession of six auspicious qualities (*bhaga*) associated with complete awakening. The Tibetan term—where *bcom* is said to refer to "subduing" the four māras, *ldan* to "possessing" the great qualities of buddhahood, and *'das* to "going beyond" saṃsāra and nirvāṇa—possibly reflects the commentarial tradition

where the Sanskrit *bhagavat* is interpreted, in addition, as “one who destroys the four māras.” This is achieved either by reading *bhagavat* as *bhagnavat* (“one who broke”), or by tracing the word *bhaga* to the root √*bhañj* (“to break”).

g.4 gandharva

*dri za*

དྲི་ཟ།

*gandharva*

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

A class of generally benevolent nonhuman beings who inhabit the skies, sometimes said to inhabit fantastic cities in the clouds, and more specifically to dwell on the eastern slopes of Mount Meru, where they are ruled by the Great King Dhṛtarāṣṭra. They are most renowned as celestial musicians who serve the gods. In the Abhidharma, the term is also used to refer to the mental body assumed by sentient beings during the intermediate state between death and rebirth. Gandharvas are said to live on fragrances (*gandha*) in the desire realm, hence the Tibetan translation *dri za*, meaning “scent eater.”

g.5 Jetavana, Anāthapiṇḍada’s Park

*rgyal bu rgyal byed kyi tshal mgon med zas sbyin gyi kun dga’ ra ba*

རྒྱལ་བུ་རྒྱལ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཚལ་མགོན་མེད་ཟས་སྦྱིན་གྱི་ཀུན་དགའ་ར་བ།

*jetavanam anāthapiṇḍadasyārāmaḥ*<sup>AO</sup>

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

One of the first Buddhist monasteries, located in a park outside Śrāvastī, the capital of the ancient kingdom of Kośala in northern India. This park was originally owned by Prince Jeta, hence the name Jetavana, meaning Jeta’s grove. The wealthy merchant Anāthapiṇḍada, wishing to offer it to the Buddha, sought to buy it from him, but the prince, not wishing to sell, said he would only do so if Anāthapiṇḍada covered the entire property with gold coins. Anāthapiṇḍada agreed, and managed to cover all of the park except the entrance, hence the name Anāthapiṇḍadasyārāmaḥ, meaning Anāthapiṇḍada’s park. The place is usually referred to in the sūtras as “Jetavana, Anāthapiṇḍada’s park,” and according to the *Samṅhabhedavastu* the Buddha used Prince Jeta’s name in first place because that was Prince Jeta’s own unspoken wish while Anāthapiṇḍada was offering the park. Inspired by the occasion and the Buddha’s use of his name, Prince Jeta then



offered the rest of the property and had an entrance gate built. The Buddha specifically instructed those who recite the sūtras to use Prince Jeta's name in first place to commemorate the mutual effort of both benefactors.

Anāthapiṇḍada built residences for the monks, to house them during the monsoon season, thus creating the first Buddhist monastery. It was one of the Buddha's main residences, where he spent around nineteen rainy season retreats, and it was therefore the setting for many of the Buddha's discourses and events. According to the travel accounts of Chinese monks, it was still in use as a Buddhist monastery in the early fifth century CE, but by the sixth century it had been reduced to ruins.

g.6 mind of awakening

*byang chub kyi sems*

བྱང་ཆུབ་ཀྱི་སེམས།

*bodhicitta*

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

In the general Mahāyāna teachings the mind of awakening (bodhicitta) is the intention to attain the complete awakening of a perfect buddha for the sake of all beings. On the level of absolute truth, the mind of awakening is the realization of the awakened state itself.