

༄༅། །གསེར་གྱི་མདོ།

The Gold Sūtra

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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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.

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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

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*.¹

i.3

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, in the Park of Anāthapiṇḍada. At that time the 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 Skilling (2021), pp. 221–26.

b.

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Skilling, Peter. *Questioning the Buddha: A Selection of Twenty-Five Sutras*. Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2021.

GLOSSARY

· Types of attestation for Sanskrit names and terms ·

AS	<i>Attested in source text</i> This term is attested in the Sanskrit manuscript used as a source for this translation.
AO	<i>Attested in other text</i> This term is attested in other Sanskrit manuscripts of the Kangyur or Tengyur.
AD	<i>Attested in dictionary</i> This term is attested in Tibetan-Sanskrit dictionaries.
AA	<i>Approximate attestation</i> The attestation of this name is approximate. It is based on other names where Tibetan-Sanskrit relationship 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 Anāthapiṇḍada

mgon med zas sbyin

མགོན་མེད་བཟ་སྤྱིན།

anāthapiṇḍada

A wealthy layman and famous benefactor of the Buddha who purchased the Jetavana and donated it to the Buddhist community.

g.3 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.4 blessed one

bcom ldan 'das

བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས།

bhagavat

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

In Buddhist literature, 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 $\sqrt{bhañj}$ (“to break”).

g.5 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 under the jurisdiction of 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 any sentient being in the realm of desire (*kāmadhātu*) during the intermediate state between death and rebirth. Gandharvas are said to live on fragrances in the desire realm, hence the Tibetan translation *dri za*, meaning “scent eater.”

g.6 Jetavana

rgyal bu rgyal byed kyi tshal

རྒྱལ་བུ་རྒྱལ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཚལ།

jetavana

“Prince Jeta’s Grove,” a grove near Śrāvastī that was given to the Buddha by the householder Anāthapiṇḍada. The Buddha is said to have spent most rainy seasons there, and it is therefore the setting for many discourses.

g.7 mind of awakening

byang chub kyi sems

བྱང་ལྡན་གྱི་སེམས།

bodhicitta

The intent at heart of the Great Vehicle, namely to obtain buddhahood in order to liberate all beings from suffering. In its relative aspect, it is both this aspiration and the practices towards buddhahood. In its absolute aspect, it is the realization of emptiness or the awakened mind itself.