

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE EXALTED KING OF SUTRAS *SUBLIME GOLDEN LIGHT*

Send your questions about the *Sutra of Golden Light* to me at

www.fpmt.org/golden_light_sutra/questions.asp

As of March 12, 2010

Qqs about **violence, war, catastrophe, etc.** are addressed at Qq. 4, 32, 33, 34, 45, 53.

Qqs about **reciting, reading silently, and listening** are addressed at Qq. 2, 20, 29, 36, 40, 53

Qqs about **mantras, prayers, visualizations, offerings, and dedications** related to reciting the *Sutra of Golden Light*, are addressed at Qq. 5, 9, 22, 25, 28, 29, 42, 46, 47, 50, 53.

Qqs about the **Bodhisattva Samucchaya** are addressed at Q. 10, 44; Qqs about **other figures who appear** in the sutra are at Q 13, 34, 56

Qqs about **sections as separate practices** are addressed at Qq. 15, 17; (see also the **Experiences** file: http://www.fpmt.org/golden_light_sutra/contact.asp?Contact=Experiences)

Qqs about **transmission** are addressed at Qq 31, 37, 38 and in the Experiences (see above).

Questions are numbered in the order received. New Questions are added at the end of the file. Updated responses are flagged in GREEN.

Because I research all questions as thoroughly as possible, they are continuously updated. Therefore, you may want to periodically read through the entire file because answers are expanded and clarified as my research continues. This also means there may be a lag in responding and I apologize for that.

May authentic love, compassion and wisdom ripen in my heart, and in the hearts of all sentient beings, right now, immediately, without a second's delay. May everyone meet the kind spiritual friend in each and every life, and may each one act according to the kind spiritual friend's advice, and never not in accord with it.

May anyone who hears even one word of the *Sutra of Golden Light*, or even hears about activities relating to this practice, immediately accumulate merit, purify all obscurations and quickly attain Enlightenment. May we be able to fulfill our Teachers' inconceivably compassionate vision immediately, without delay.

with love,

Beth Simon

1. What are the English names of Sarasvati's aromatic plants?

From S:

In ... the chapter on Sarasvati, ... 30 medicines that are mentioned. Are there corresponding medicinal plant [names] ... in English? [C]an they be found in the USA? Thank you.

Dear S,

All of the aromatic medicines named by the noble goddess of Sarasvati are plants with medicinal or therapeutic applications. Some are herbs, some are shrubs, some are trees.

On the next page is a preliminary set of equivalents here. This list is intended solely for casual, intellectual pleasure. It is not intended for ritual, medicinal or cosmetic uses.

With love,

Beth Simon

Great Goddess Sarasvati's medicinal plants "with which the wise bathe"

This list is a response to the request for the Latin and English equivalents for the aromatic, medicinal materials named by the Great Goddess Sarasvati. These are preliminary, and offered solely in response to that request. These are not intended for any ritual, medicinal, or cosmetic purpose.

<i>vacha</i>	<i>Acorus calamus</i> ; Aroideae family; Uragandha; Sweet Flag
<i>gorochana</i>	Gall stone of a cow.
<i>sprkka</i>	<i>Anisomeles malabarica</i> , a medicinal plant of the Labiatae family
<i>shirisa</i>	Short for <i>panchashirisa</i> – a plant with five different parts used medicinally
<i>shamyaka</i>	Also <i>aragvadha</i> . <i>Cassia Fistula</i> . Various pudding-pipe tree, purging cassia, Indian laburnum, golden shower.
<i>shami</i>	<i>Prosopis cineraria</i> ; Hindi: Kejri, Jaanti; Kejri tree
<i>indrabasta</i>	No Information
<i>mahabhaga</i>	[Possibly <i>maha bhagya</i> ; "great fortune"; sun yoga.]
<i>jnamaka</i>	Possibly <i>Holarrhena Antidysentrica</i> ; Herba malabarica
<i>agaru</i>	<i>Aquilaria Agallocha</i> ; Kala agar; a type of aloe.
<i>tvach</i>	Possibly <i>Toddalia Asiatica Lam</i> ; a type of pepper; Jangli mirch, wild or "jungle" pepper
<i>shrivestaka</i>	Possibly <i>Salix Caprea</i> ; (Goat's) Willow; a fragrant shrub, Namraka, Vanjula, Abhra pushpa
<i>resin of sarja</i>	<i>Shorea robusta</i> ; Sal tree.
<i>shallaki</i>	<i>Boswellia Serrata</i> , <i>B. Thurifera</i> ; Indiana frankincense
<i>guggulu</i>	oleogum resin derived from <i>Balsamadendron mukuk</i> ; <i>Burseraceae</i> , <i>Commiphora mukul</i>
<i>tagara</i>	<i>Valeriana wallichii</i>
<i>patra</i>	<i>Nirgundi patra</i> ; possibly <i>Vitex</i> or Chasteberry
<i>shaileya</i>	<i>Parmelia perlata</i> ; Charila, Dagad phool; stone flower
<i>chandana</i>	sandalwood
<i>manashila</i>	<i>manosila: realgar</i> , red arsenic sulfide, a red-orange pigment.
<i>sarochana</i>	Possibly <i>Vateria Indica L.</i> ; or, possibly related to the cypress tree
<i>kushta</i>	<i>Saussurea lappa</i> , <i>Aucklandia lappa</i> ; Costus
<i>kunkuma</i>	<i>Curcuma longa</i> ; turmeric
<i>musta</i>	<i>Cyperus rotundus</i> ; nutgrass
<i>sharshapa</i>	<i>Brassica nigra</i> ; black mustard or black mustard seed
<i>nalada</i>	<i>Spica nardi</i> ; nard, spikenard
<i>chavya</i>	<i>Piper cubeba</i> ; Cardamom seed
<i>shukshmaila</i>	<i>Ellateria cardamomum</i>
<i>ushira</i>	<i>Vetiveria zizanioides</i> ; also <i>Reshira</i> , <i>Sugandhimula</i> , <i>khus khus</i> ; vetiver
<i>nagakesara</i>	<i>Mesua ferrea</i> ; Ironwood or Magnolia

2. Must we recite the *Sutra of Golden Light* out loud?

From L:

Do you have to read the sutra out loud for benefit to occur?

(Initial reply from Ven. Mindrol)

Dear L,

Lama Zopa Rinpoche recommends that sutra texts at least be whispered. You don't have to make a lot of sound, but at least some! This is best for anyone around - even insects - because then they can hear the words. There may be other benefits as well...

Thank you for reciting the sutra!

Warm Wishes,
Mindrol

(Update May 14, 2009; See also Questions 20, 29, 36 and 41 down thread)

Dear All,

Many ask about the differences between reading silently to oneself and reciting out loud. This Sutra urges us to recite, and repeatedly mentions reciting so that one **hears** the Sutra.

The importance of saying it, hearing, causing others to hear it, and the beneficial results of this is one of the primary instructions running through the entire sutra.

Several of the central figures tell us to recite, causing others to hear it. Great Goddess Śri keeps in mind those who recite just the name of the *King of Glorious Sutras, Sublime Golden Light*. Drdha, Earth Goddess expands on the benefits of hearing and causing others to hear this Sutra.

In this regards, I think the jataka tale (birth story of a previous life of the Buddha) of the Well-born King (Susambhava) is particularly impressive.

King Susambhava dreams of Ratnocchaya (another name for Akśobhya). When he awakens, he is taken to Ratnocchaya, who abides in the sphere of absolute truth, always expounding the *Sutra of Golden Light*. From this meeting, Susambhava comes to fully renounce the world.

At the end of the story, the Buddha tells us that equal to being born as Shakra, king of gods, a Chakravartin, a universal ruler, and even as one with the ten inconceivable powers is the merit of having heard the Sutra of Golden Light and rejoicing in it.

with love,

Beth

3. Could we get in touch with others doing recitation of the **Sutra of Golden Light**?

From M:

Hello! If there are others here doing the recitation, or in any way linked to FPMT, how could we get in touch? Maybe this would be nice.

Dear M,

I agree. It is so helpful to think of others reciting as we do our recitations! If anyone near Lisbon is reciting the **Sutra of Golden Light**, please let me know.

with love,

Beth

(Update, May 10, 2009)

Dear All,

We know that the karma created by the action of one individual in a group is shared by all those performing that action in the group. So, joining together to recite is an important, powerful method for practicing the **Golden Light Sutra**.

In the past two years, several World-Wide Recitations have resulted in over 1000 recitations. This is a group activity of the best kind!

At the *Benefits* page http://www.fpmt.org/golden_light_sutra/benefits.asp are the benefits of reciting, and suggestions for organizing group recitations. Some people gather together at their centers, others connect in long-distance, off-site recitations.

During the winter Kadampa Retreat, 2008, at Root Institute in Bodh Gaya, Lama Zopa Rinpoche told me he thought a great many people were reciting the **Golden Light Sutra**. These group recitations are part of the reason that so many people are involved.

It is so exciting hear about all the effective ways for reciting this sublime sutra! If you organize a group recitation, please tell me about it.

Love and thanks to all!

Beth Simon

4. How does the *Sutra of Golden Light* stop wars?

From T:

... First I would like to express my gratitude that there is anyone ... to answer our questions! ... It is said, that reading the *Sutra* will help to prevent and stop wars. How is that possible?

(Initial reply from Ven. Mindrol)

Dear T,

How the *SGL* ends war and creates world peace is a huge, huge question, and that is better answered by Rinpoche. I think it has to do with the fact that it is a dharmakaya relic, and so it has amazing power - the power of a Buddha. HOW it does this is a huge topic best answered by a lama. HOW WE KNOW it does this is easy: we're relying on scriptural authority. The sutra itself repeatedly says that it has this function.

Also, I think this can be related to ... [this:] If we have faith in Rinpoche's advice and that kind of devotion, then we can trust that the sutra has these effects, because Rinpoche states ... [these effects] often, and He asks for it to be read in places where war and terrorism are a threat (or happening).

We would probably have to be omniscient ourselves to know how it does it, and to perceive the actual physical results... But it would be interesting to see if anyone notices an effect. I once recited it loudly to a group of extremely aggressive hummingbirds, some of whom were very curious about what I was doing. I didn't do the whole sutra, but they did stop dive bombing me every time I left the house after that... Not sure if that was a result or not!

love,
mindrol

(Update, December 11, 2007)

Dear T,

Recently in Portland Oregon, U.S., Rinpoche was naming the benefits of the *Sutra of Golden Light*. He said it has "special benefits" for this world. He also said that it was the "best way to bring peace." He specifically named Iraq and Burma.

love,
Beth

5. What is the mantra to increase the merit of reciting the *Sutra of Golden Light*?

From J:

I just heard Rinpoche mention that if one recites a particular mantra 7 times before reciting the *Golden Light Sutra* it multiplies the merit immensely. ... Maybe you know this mantra or know someone who does?

(Initial reply from Ven. Mindrol)

Dear J,

The mantra Rinpoche suggests before reciting sutras is:

OM DHARE DHARE BENDHARE SVAHA (7x)

It increases the merit of reciting the sutra by one million times. Pretty good one!

(Update May 10, 2009; see also Question 47 down thread)

6. In the *Sutra*, we are advised to make ourselves clean before listening. What does this mean? Must we bathe and clean the entire place?

From T:

Is it really necessary to wash up completely to gain the benefits of reading the Sutra? It is ... difficult to create the right circumstances for reading.

Dear T,

With regard to washing up completely in order to get the benefits of reciting the *Sutra of Golden Light*, it is certainly better to recite than not recite!

For myself, before I begin, I wash, try to purify my speech, and try to make my mind focused. (Sometimes I clean the house a little bit too.)

warm regards,

Beth

(Update, February 16, 2009)

Recently, Lama Zopa Rinpoche said specifically that we should clean the body, “mouth, both hands, feet.” He also said we should have “virtuous thought.”

If you are a Buddhist practitioner, you may want to add the daily purification of speech to your morning. You’ll find a version of this simple yet powerful practice in Volume I of the FPMT prayer book.

Warm regards,

Beth

7. Why are there so many versions of the *Sutra of Golden Light*?

From L:

I thought to recite this sutra as much as I can, to help end the war in Iraq and help the burning in California and help this planet with the global warming. I want to thank you very much for giving us this incredible chance to create huge merits and at the same time purify our negative ones. I might have more than one question; I hope you don't mind.

Why [does] this sutra have so many versions?

Thank you very much !!!

Dear L,

Even before this renewed interest, the *Sutra of Golden Light* has existed in many Asian languages including Sanskrit, Khotanese, Tibetan, Mongolian, Oirat, Chinese and Japanese. The Mongolian are translations from Tibetan.

In Tibetan, three versions exist. All three are found in every redaction of the Kangyur (the collection of the Buddha's discourses.)

The short (18 chapter) version is the version available from the FPMT website and what thus far has been translated into English. The middle (29 chapter) and long (31 chapter) versions include the text of the short 18 chapter version, although some chapters or parts of chapters are arranged differently. The middle and long also have text that isn't in the short version. The long differs from the middle length only in having two more chapters of praises.

At Lama Zopa Rinpoche's request, I am currently translating the 31 chapter version from the Tibetan. A translation from the Mongolian is just now finished! Rinpoche has said that he first met the *Golden Light Sutra* in Mongolia, and according to what I have read, in Mongolia, it is the 29 chapter version which has long been used and held in high respect.

With love,

Beth

8. Are events in the *Sutra of Golden Light* chronological?

From L:

The events described in the *Sutra* took place at the time Lord Shakyamuni was walking on this planet ... [but] it seems ... that the *Sutra* describes different times ... and many [different] eons. Could you maybe explain this a little bit? Were the chapters arranged ... [chronologically] in order of events?

Thank you very much !!!

(See also Q. 25 downthread)

Dear L,

The chapter order in the *Sutra of Golden Light* are not the chronological order of events. In the short version currently available, we begin at Vultures' Peak with Buddha Shakyamuni, the Transcendent Victor, calling to anyone suffering to come and hear. In this version, at about the same time, the Great Bodhisattva Ruchiraketu is at home worrying over the lifespan of Buddha Shakyamuni. Later, he sleeps and dreams of the Golden Drum. When he wakes, he goes to where the Buddha is teaching, joining a great assembly of others gathered there.

In longer versions [SEE Question 7 UPFILE] however, other beings at the assembly rise and address questions to the Buddha.

Sometimes Buddha Shakyamuni tells stories about someone's life at another time. These *jataka* (birth) stories of previous lives of the being who becomes the Buddha, occur during the eons of other buddhas.

An example is the event where King Susambhava (the Well-born King) dreams of the Dharma teacher-orator, Ratnocchaya, Jewel Cluster, listens to this *Sutra*, and consequently gives everything away occurred during the eon of Buddha Ratnaśikin.

Buddha Ratnaśikhin was the last in the line of buddhas of the first great eon.

Hope this helps.

love,

Beth Simon

9. What prayers should we say before reciting the *Sutra of Golden Light*?

From A:

Are the best prayers to do at the beginning of reciting the sutra the same ones in the Appendix of the *Sanghata Sutra*? Thanks

(Update, May 11, 2009; See Question 5 Up thread, Questions 25, 29, Down thread)

Dear A and All,

This question about prayers to say before reciting the *Sutra of Golden Light* has come in from several people.

Rinpoche has not named specific prayers. I have, however, requested advice from Lama Zopa regarding specific preliminary prayers or visualization for reciting the *Sutra*.

Of course, taking refuge, setting one's motivation, offering a mandala, and doing the Seven Limb Puja is a good way to begin a recitation or any practice.

Also, Rinpoche says reciting the mantra OM DHARE DHARE BENDHARE SVAHA seven times before beginning one's recitation increases the merit of reciting the sutra by one million times.

with love and many prayers,

Beth

10. Who is the Noble Goddess Bodhisattvasamucchaya?

From B:

I tried to find out more about Bodhisattvasamucchaya, but had no luck. Is there any material for research?? Thanks

S

(For an extended discussion, see Question 43 down thread)

Dear B,

The noble goddess Bodhisattvasamucchayaa, is, as the name indicates, a *bodhisattva*. The Sanskrit word, *samucchaya* (pronounced “suhmuchaya”) refers to a collection, an assembly. In this case, perhaps the collection is the perfected bodhisattva deeds or qualities, or the resulting whole, or collection, of all bodhisattvas.

In the *Exalted Sutra of Golden Light*, Bodhisattvasamucchaya acts as Buddha Shakyamuni’s prompter, much as Sarvashura, Maitreya (briefly), and Bhaishajyasena do in the noble *Sanghata Sutra*, or as Ananda does in other sutras. That is, she poses questions that prompt the Buddha for stories and explanations.

In the longer versions of the *Sutra of Golden Light*, the noble goddess Bodhisattvasamucchayaa is present throughout. This is the case in all long and middle length versions of the Sutra I am aware of, not only in Tibetan, but also in the Mongolian and the (probably original) Khotanese.

Warm regards,

Beth

11. WHY IS THE *SUTRA OF GOLDEN LIGHT* SO IMPORTANT?

From L:

Can you tell me why this Sutra has been so important for Lama Zopa Rinpoche?

(See also Q. 4 upthread and Q. 14 downthread)

Dear L,

Lama Zopa urges us to recite this sutra, and encourage others to recite it. He has told us the many amazing benefits of reciting this Sutra.

Perhaps the best way to see the importance of reading and reciting this sutra is to go to the Benefits page

http://www.fpmt.org/golden_light_sutra/benefits.asp

There you can see the long, long list of benefits that Rinpoche has specifically identified with reciting this sutra.

When Rinpoche gave the transmission for the *Sutra of Golden Light* in Portland, Oregon, he spoke of the special connection this sutra has with this world (Jambudvipa) and the benefits it has for leaders of countries in this world.

with love,

Beth

12. Will there be a pronunciation guide or guide to the meaning of the names?

From L and L:

How do you pronounce the names in the *Sutra of Golden Light*? I know the names are in Sanskrit, but without accent marks its difficult to pronounce them. I feel uncomfortable pronouncing these names incorrectly. Will you be putting a list of the names used with punctuation...? best regards

...

Is a glossary of names used in the *Sutra* possible?

(Update November 10, 2009; see question 54 downthread)

Dear All,

Sanskrit names may look more difficult than they are. The diacritics (the marks above and below the letter symbols) indicate things such as vowel length or nasalization. A simple approach is to break the name into parts.

Be assured that reciting is beneficial, even if your pronunciation isn't the same as a Sanskrit scholar's pronunciation. A present-day scholar's pronunciation of the Sanskrit still isn't the same as an earlier one.

I have a Pronunciation Guide and Glossary for the *Sutra of Golden Light*.

I will post it soon.

regards,

Beth

13. Who are the different types of beings names in the *Sutra*?

From L:

The more information I can get about this *Sutra* the better it would be for me. ... Sometimes I get very confused with the names ... such as the Four Great Kings, and others. For example, who ...[are] the King of Humans, Shakra, upasakas, etc.

From T:

In the *Sutra*, several types of beings are specifically mentioned: yakshas, asuras, garudas, kinnaras and so on. Who are they, who are their leaders? ... Who are the gods in the *Sutra*?

(Update, May 14, 2009)

Dear All,

The Four Great Kings (*Lokapalas*, World Guardians) are associated with the four cardinal directions, east, south, west and north. Each has vowed to protect the Buddha's teachings and those who practice the teachings in the Desire Realm. Followers of the Buddha's teachings are often divided into *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis* (males and females who have taken ordination), and *upasakas* and *upasikas* (males and females who keep lay vows, that is, vows of a householder).

All the beings, human and deity, mentioned in the *Sutra* are part of the *Desire Realm*.. No matter where they are born in the Desire realm, their births are due to karma and delusion. So, the gods and goddesses, from Shakra (or Indra), King of the Gods, to Śri, the goddess of auspiciousness, do not have a permanent, unchanging existence. They cycle through samsara, just as do those who take birth as an animal or a human.

In this *Sutra*, attention is given to the motivations of, actions by, and effects on inhabitants of the Desire Realm, and especially to those who take births as humans, and the various classes of nonhumans who are able to hear, benefit from or protect the teachings of the Buddha.

Those identified as *asuras*, *kinnaras*, *garudas*, *yakshas*, and *mahoragas* are various types of worldly beings too. Sometimes *asura* is translated as demi-god.

warm regards,

Beth

14. Should we recite the *Golden Light Sutra* as a method to influence political elections?

From DO:

A couple ... [Center] members mentioned how important it would be to read the *Sutra* in light of the [upcoming] presidential elections [in the United States]. Has Lama Zopa Rinpoche made any comment on this?

(Update, February 16, 2009; see also Q. 4 upthread)

Dear DO,

Lama Zopa Rinpoche has talked about the beneficial effects of reciting and listening to the *Sutra of Golden Light*. Go here for the list:

http://www.fpmt.org/golden_light_sutra/benefits.asp

In November of 2007, he specifically listed the benefits for leaders of countries and for the people of those countries where leaders recited the *Sutra of Golden Light*. In fact, Rinpoche tells about suggesting a once-a-year recitation to the president of Mongolia.

Recently he specifically talked again about the benefits to world leaders. He said it made “harmony among the people” of the country, and that it was the “best way to bring peace.”

To date, he has *not* suggested reciting the *Sutra of Golden Light* in order to influence a specific election in a specific way.

If you check the Experiences file, however, you will see that several people around the world report dedicating recitations to the best outcome from the November, 2008 U.S. presidential election. To read these dedications, go to www.fpmt.org/golden_light_sutra/default.asp#exp

warm regards,

Beth

15. Is it acceptable to recite the same chapter over and over, rather than reciting from beginning to end?

What about using a specific section of the *Sutra* as a specific practice?

From S

I recite the Chapter on Confession separately as a purification practice.

From E

Some chapters are so enjoyable, so beautiful, that I recite them several times in a row. Is it all right to do this? I only ask because it takes longer to complete an entire recitation, when re-reading specific passages, (I've just read chapter 6 three times over the past 3 days) and will stop doing this if it's more beneficial to recite the sutra in its entirety.

Dear All,

You'll see the Experiences pages, others recite specific portions for specific reasons.

Reciting the *Sutra of Golden Light* is a profound practice with unbelievable benefits, and included within it many opportunities for making prayers of aspiration, and performing practices for accumulating merit, for purifying negativities, for developing renunciation, compassion and wisdom, for generating bodhicitta, and for making extensive dedications.

Historically, the Chapter on Confession was practiced as a separate purification practice in China and in Japan. So, you are in good company!

I have added this verse from the Confession chapter to my morning and evening prayers of aspiration/dedication:

For those without a refuge/ without base, support or friend/ May I become their
supreme refuge, their base, support and friend.

This just something I do.

Warm regards,

Beth

16. Is an audio recording of the *Sutra of Golden Light* available?

From D, MW

Hi Beth,

Curious if it has been uploaded as an audio file anywhere as of yet. Thanks

Dear D,

Some people have reported to me that they recorded themselves while reciting. They've put the audio files up on personal sites. I don't know whether these are complete recitations.

Right now, the plan is that once the new translation of the *Sutra of Golden Light* is finished, a beautiful, well-made audio recording will follow, and that will be available in a number of ways.

with love,

Beth

17. What about reciting the names of the buddhas and bodhisattvas given in Chapter Ten of the short version in order to remember our past lives.

From P

At the beginning of Chapter Ten, it says that anyone who memorizes and recites the names of these buddhas and bodhisattvas will remember their past lives. I've been doing extra recitations of those names.

(See also Question 15 upthread)

Dear P,

Question 15 upthread shows that you are not alone in using specific portions of this profound sutra for specific practices or results. Others are doing the same thing.

The sutra itself mentions remembering past lives in several places, always as a result of a specific virtuous practice. In fact, being able to remember past lives as a result of great attainment is mentioned in other teachings of the Buddha.

What the teachings and our teachers tell us, though, is that our motivation and our actions are always directed toward benefiting others. When we practice the Dharma correctly, then our hearts become purer and our minds become clearer. A result such as remembering past lives and other extraordinary phenomena are not ends in themselves.

Developing pure renunciation, compassion, and wisdom are the important activities. Developing true universal responsibility, the elimination of self-cherishing and the spontaneous cherishing of others – this is the best motivation and this is, at the same time, the best goal.

As Lama Zopa says, if one does everything with bodhicitta, if one pays attention to one's actions now, there is no need to worry about future attainments.

with love,

Beth

18. Is the *Sutra of Golden Light* being translated into more languages?

From S

Hello! I'd like to know if somebody is planning to translate *Golden Light Sutra* into Polish. I'm from Poland so it would be very nice to read or recite this profound sutra in my language.
Greetings

(See also Q. 40 down thread)

Dear S,

As you say, the *Sutra of Golden Light* is profound, and being able to read and recite it in one's own language would be especially nice!

Translations into Nepali and English (the long version) are currently underway. The translation of the middle length sutra in Mongolian is now finished.

I'm sorry to say that at present, there is no translation of the *Sutra of Golden Light* being prepared in Polish.

When you recite, perhaps you might pray to create the causes to have this profound sutra available in Polish! I shall do that.

with love,

Beth

19. There are wood-cut images of deities on the pages of the Tibetan *Sutra of Golden Light*. Who are they? How do they relate to the Sutra?

From JC

I would like to know if the Deity Maha Pratisara (So sor trangma) as well one of the Deity of Her retinue, Maha Sitavati (Sil wai tsal) are related to the *Golden Light Sutra*. I asking this because I saw a picture of them together with some verses of praise in the Tibetan version of this Sutra:

Thank you very much for your good Dharma work.

Dear JC

[For a download of the sutra in Tibetan, please go to <http://www.fpmt.orgteacherszopaadvicepdfgoldenlight21chapterstibetn.pdf>.]

These two goddesses, Bodhisattva Mahapratishara and the Bodhisattva Mahasitavati, along with two, or, depending on the tradition, three others, (Mahasahasra Pramardani, Mahamayuri, and Mahamantranusarini,) are protectors.

The Bodhisattva Mahapratishara, like Buddha Ratnaketu (aka Ratnasambhava) is associated with the south. She is a protector from all forms of illness and the results or dangers of past negative karmic actions.

The Bodhisattva Mahasitavati, like Buddha Amitayus (or Amitabha) is associated with the west. She is a protector from the dangers of planets, wild animals and poisonous plants.

In the Chapter on Praise by All the Bodhisattvas, they are, presumably, present with all the other bodhisattvas.

with love,

Beth

20. Will traceable versions of the *Sutra of Golden Light* be available?

From AL

My friend ... asked ... if it would be possible to get a traceable version of the *Golden Light Sutra* (in German), like the one existing for the *Sanghata Sutra* in English. He finds his life has found new meaning through being involved with the *GLS* by reading it and would like to write it in gold.

(See also Q. 29 down thread)

Dear AL,

There have been several requests for a method to write out the *Sutra of Golden Light* as there currently is for the *Sanghata Sutra*.

The Noble *Sanghata Sutra* itself emphasizes the merit of writing it out and how much more merit one creates by not just reciting but writing it. This may be the basis for Lama Zopa Rinpoche deciding to write it himself, and to make it available in that form for others to do so.

In the *Sutra of Golden Light*, the Buddha repeatedly urges reading and reciting it, remembering (memorizing) it, causing others to hear it, and sponsoring the expounding of it so that others hear it. In the seventh chapter of the short version, the Buddha with the Four Great Kings describe the great joy a king would experience by having a bhikshu come to expound this sutra and by being present. The deities also emphasize how they will help with the recitation.

In the tenth chapter of the short version, the Earth Goddess, Drdha, talks about the great benefit of going to hear it, causing others to hear it, and talking with others about hearing it.

Rinpoche has strongly encouraged reciting the sublime *Sutra of Golden Light*, and suggests reciting at least one page a day. To date, as far as I know, he hasn't suggested writing it.

The line in the *Sutra of Golden Light*, "hearing, causing others to hear," really shows how one action, reciting, has an expanded effect! In his preface to the print edition of the English, Lama Zopa reminds us what the Sutra says, "By hearing this text, one's karma is purified."

with love,

Beth Simon

21. What about reciting the **Sutra of Golden Light** in Tibet?

From NS

Do you think there is a possibility to get the *Sutra of Golden Light* to Tibet, to find an educated and experienced monk in Tibet who can recite it each day for the peace and happiness of all the beings in Tibet?

Maybe it would be possible to sponsor this monk in gratitude?

Maybe even more than one Monk could recite it?

Many questions. I hope for your understanding.

Dear NS,

This is an excellent idea!

When Lama Zopa Rinpoche talked to me last summer about encouraging others to recite the ***Sutra of Golden Light*** and the benefits of reciting, one specific benefit he named was that China would become Buddhist, and another was that oppression of Tibet would cease.

Recently, Rinpoche mentioned his idea of taking the Sutra to Tibet and having Tibetans there recite in order to change the situation.

Since the terrible conflict and violence in Tibet and China in the last few months, several people, including some western Sangha, have expressed their wish to recite the ***Sutra of Golden Light*** in Tibet. Perhaps there might be a way to organize a trip?

with love,

Beth

22. Is it necessary to finish reciting the entire *Sutra* in one sitting? If I don't finish, should I begin the next session where I left off?

From KKH

I've just started to recite the Sutra last night (15th March 2008). I started with preliminary practices [=preliminary prayers] and the 7x mantra [=om dhare dhare bendhare svaha] before I began with the Sutra proper. I could only complete 6 chapters. Could I continue with Chapter 7 to continue my recitation after my preliminary [prayers] and the mantra? Thank you.

Dear KK H

Yes, definitely. Each day or each time you are ready to recite, pick up from where you left off. One benefit of this is that you will become thoroughly familiar with this profound sutra.

The Buddha himself says several times in the sutra, there is inconceivable merit from even reciting a four-line verse, so do not regret "only" getting up to chapter 6. That is wonderful!!!

You can read and recite each day, as much as you have time to do. Lama Zopa Rinpoche urges reading and reciting this profound sutra. He says even one page each day is good.

For ideas and examples of ways to recite this Sutra, go to http://www.fpmt.org/golden_light_sutra/default.asp#exp and click on "recommendations."

Thank you for practicing this profound method for accumulating merit, purifying negativities, and establishing peace in the world for all!

with love,

Beth

23. The Sutra spends a great deal of time talking about itself and the benefits of reciting it. Why does it do that?

From KD, CK, CY, and others

I have the *Sutra of Golden Light* many times now, and I notice that throughout the text, the sutra talks so much about those who read it, how they came into contact with it, and so on. It seems as though many sutras do this, saying “those who read this sutra gain great merit,” and then provide a story which proves this. It seems as though we never get to the sutra itself.

Dear KD,

You are right. *Sutra of Golden Light* refers to itself throughout! This is deliberate. This sutra, (and there are others,) has the extraordinary quality of generating its benefit by the reciting itself! This means it comes into being each time it is recited, as it is recited. This also means that when the Buddha says to come and hear it, saying this is doing this!

The stories the Buddha recounts in the Sutra work in several ways. One is that we, who are present, hear how this sutra brought others to make great prayers of aspiration, to develop attainments, and become free from the ocean of suffering. Another is that at the same time that we are hearing, reading and reciting these stories and explanations, we are, by virtue of hearing reading and reciting, doing the same thing. That is why, at the beginning, the Buddha urges having a focused mind.

If you read or recite other sutras, the *Lotus Sutra* for instance or the *Sanghata Sutra*, you will find that they refer to themselves as they lay out their line of argument.

with love,

Beth Simon

**24. What are the reasons to recite one sutra rather than another?
Should we recite the *Sutra of Golden Light* for specific purposes?
How do we know which sutra to recite?**

from AB and others,

I have been focusing on the *Golden Light Sutra* for several months. I was thinking that perhaps I might start reciting the *Diamond Cutter Sutra* as well. However, I will not deviate from my current path if it is important to Lama Zopa Rinpoche and most beneficial to mother-beings.

I would very much appreciate hearing from you.

(See also Q. 48 down thread)

Dear All,

Traditionally, certain Buddhist practices, and certain sutras, are associated with specific kinds of activities, events, and aspirations.

Lama Zopa has urged reciting the *Sutra of Golden Light* for world peace, to avert natural disasters, to quell terrorism, and other temporal events especially in this world. He also urges reciting it as a way to help eliminate obstacles to the successful completion of projects the preserve, maintain and propogate the Buddha Dharma.

Recently, these practices were recommended in response to the disasters in Burma and in China:

http://www.fpmt.org/teachers/zopa/advice/pdf/Disasters_in_Burma_and_China_08.pdf

I'll will definitely ask about this and return soon with advice.

with love,

Beth

25. Where is it appropriate to recite the *Sutra of Golden Light*? What offerings or practices go with reciting the Sutra?

From KC

Beside reciting the sutra, any specific offerings required, or any specific observances to practice?

Is this recitation suitable for funeral?

If we break the sutra into parts, is there a specific time frame within which recitation of the whole sutra must be finished?

Dear KC

Before beginning your recitation, try to generate a feeling of love, or warmth toward others, in your heart. Also, have a strong sense of why you are reciting, a good motivation.

If you have a Buddhist practice, excellent prayers with which to begin are the Refuge Prayer and prayers to generate the altruistic intention, the commitment to release all sentient beings from the suffering cycle of existence. You might also offer a mandala.

In the chapter on the King Susambhava (a previous life of the Buddha), the one who expounds the Dharma, Ratnocchaya, comes to the king's palace. Before he begins, he first remembers all the buddhas. Then he takes his seat and generates the heart of compassion toward all beings.

I think this is a good model for anyone who wants to recite the Sutra! Also, we read that the king offers everything he has, the four continents filled with jewels, to the Dharma teacher. So, I think another good thing to do before beginning is to make a mandala offering.

Then recite the mantra, *Om Dhare Dhare Bendhare Sva Ha*, 7 times. This multiplies the merit 7 million times!

Almost anywhere could be suitable for reciting. You want to use your wisdom to determine whether that place and time is appropriate.

Finally, recite as little as one page each day and as much as the entire sutra in one sitting.

warm regards,

Beth

24. What is the “sphere of Buddhas’ activity?” What is Dharmadhātu?

From TL

In the first chapter of the *Sutra of Golden Light*, what is meant by “the sphere of a buddha’s activity”? How does one “enter” the sphere of a buddha’s activity?

What does *dharmadhātu* mean?

(Updated November 14, 2009)

Dear TL

Dharmadhātu is referred to both directly and indirectly throughout the *Sutra of Golden Light*.

The word *dharmadhatu* is Sanskrit compound of two word, *dharma* and *dhātu*. Like most Sanskrit compounds, each part of this word has several meanings. In the *Sutra of Golden Light*, *dharmadhatu* is the true arena, state, dimension, factors or elements of existence. It is not a physical, phenomenological “place,” although it appears as a symbol or metaphor in the Sutra. For instance, the stupa works as a symbol in this way.

In relation to a buddha, *dharmadhatu* can be understood as the realization of emptiness of a buddha. The dharmakaya, the true body of a buddha, dwells in or is the ever-present nondualistic realization of the emptiness of all phenomena.

In the Sutra, we are told that the Buddha, who is about to give the Sutra, “enters” or “dwells in” the *dharmadhātu*, the profound sphere of reality. This should remind us of the *Heart Sutra*, where the Buddha is engaged in meditation on “the appearance of the profound,” and simultaneously moving others to examine the meaning of emptiness and the nature of reality.

In the recent *Freedom From Extremes: Gorampa’s Distinguishing the Views* (José Cabezón & Geshe Dargay 2007), *dharmadhātu* is glossed as “freedom from proliferations.” (235) This gets at the point that buddhas are free from conceptualizing, dualistic thought and do not perceive the appearance of phenomena as independently existing as real.

with love,

Beth

25 In the Chapter on the Tigress, the Buddha says, “I, the Tathagata, was formerly the prince Mahasattva, who made the tigress well.” When does this event occur?

From DB

In the *Golden Light Sutra*, Mahasattva becomes Siddhartha. Mahasattva’s father becomes Siddhartha’s father in the next life. Did Mahasattva wait in the bardo for his parents to die, be reborn, and mature? Or is it as some traditions hold, that Mahasattva was already enlightened, and he simply went to other other world systems to benefit beings until King Maharatha and his Queen were ready to become the parents of the being who would become the Buddha?

(See also Q. 8 upthread)

Dear DB

The being who becomes Guru Shakyamuni took countless rebirths over countless eons, in each, performing actions that led to his own enlightenment and, as he says in several places in the sutra, releasing others from suffering even before he was fully free of the delusions himself.

At the beginning of the chapter, the Buddha describes to Ananda and the others what the bones signify. He doesn’t say it was his immediate previous life.

When he shows the relics, the Tathagata says these are the remains of one who “continually strove” for his enlightenment. This suggests many lifetimes. Then, the Tathagata says specifically, “in a time long past.” This makes it clear that the life of Prince Mahasattva, son of King Maharatha was a much earlier life.

This story of the Tigress, the story of Giving Up The Body Completely, is found in other sutras as well as in the *Sutra of Golden Light*. It is a popular and important story of renunciation and compassion.

with love,

Beth

26 Will reciting the *Sutra of Golden Light* cure illness? Will reciting the *Sutra* help me find a job?

From Several People

I believe in Amitabha and am a Shinran follower. I recite OM AMI DEWA HRIH and wish to be born in Dewatchen. Is it a problem to recite the *Golden Light Sutra* too? Because Shinran teaches the Other Power... I had an accident and can only walk for about one hour or so. My 2 feet were broken badly. Do you think my recitations can do something good for me? My situation isn't very good now, and I hope things will get better. Thank you ... for so many things!!

I have lost my job, and my wife is pregnant. I hope that reciting the *Golden Light Sutra* will help my situation.

Is there some delay between the moment you recite the *Golden Light Sutra* and when you can see the result?

I try to practice what Lama Zopa has told me, and to remember Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, and to recite. But I feel so alone, and people at work are not kind to me. Will this change?

Dear Friends,

The best way to understand and work with our present condition, whether good or bad health, wealth or poverty, happy conditions or unhappy conditions, is to see these as results of previous actions in previous lives.

Truly knowing the causes of current situations, and the effects of one's actions is complex and subtle, something only a Buddha knows.

For all kinds of useful advice on how to understand and work with conditions in our present lives, go here: <http://www.fpmt.org/teachers/zopa/advice/Default.asp>

Lama Zopa keeps an ongoing, current advice book on the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive site, and answers specific questions and pleas for help. You can give questions directly there.

Try this: <http://www.lamayeshe.com/lamazopa/advicebook/index.shtml>

with love and prayers for peace,

Beth Simon

27 If the *Sutra of Golden Light* is brought into a region where the ruler does not respect it, will this cause harm to the people in that region?

From TD

In the chapter on the Four Great Kings, it says, “if that king of humans does not respect, revere, venerate and worship bhikshus, bhikshunis, upasakas and upasikas who uphold the King of Glorious Sutras, the Sublime Golden Light, then he will not satisfy us four kings ... with the hearing of the Dharma and the nectar juice of the Dharma. ... Venerable Transcendent Victor, we four great kings, along with our armies and retinues and ... yakshas will neglect the land. Venerable Transcendent Victor, when we neglect the land, then all the assembly of gods and goddesses who dwell in the land will also neglect the land. Venerable Transcendent Victor, when the gods and goddesses discard the land, there will be various conflicts in the land. There will be fierce disputes among kings. All beings living in that land will become quarrelsome, accusatory and contentious. They will be divided and ruined. The land will experience various illnesses and unfavorable planets. ... Beings will experience rampant afflictions. The land will become most unpleasant. Venerable Transcendent Victor, when we the four great kings, along with our armies and retinues, numerous hundreds of thousands of yakshas, nagas who live in the land and gods and goddesses all ignore it, there will arise hundreds of these and similar harms and thousands of harms in that land.”

My question is that it would seem to bring harm rather than benefit if one is in a country or one goes to a country where the leader does not respect people upholding the *Golden Light Sutra*, and one recites the sutra.

(See also Q. 33 down thread)

Dear GP,

That “if” is very important. In the Chapter on the Worldly Protectors, the Four Great Kings, the Kings and Buddha Shakyamuni alternate describing various situations where the Sutra exists, where it does not exist, where it exists and is respected and revered, and where it exists but is not respected and revered. This passage that you quote is a description by the Four Great Kings of what will occur in the country or region where the *Sutra of Golden Light* exists but the ruler does not revere and respect those who maintain and teach it.

In contrast, as Lama Zopa reminds us in his preface to the English edition of the short version, where the *Sutra* is taught, “the whole country will benefit. ... It would be excellent to go into countries where there is much killing and read this precious sutra...[t]his would be very valuable, very beneficial.”

regards, Beth

28 What is the difference between reading the Sutra and reciting it?

From CK

I've been reading the *Sutra of Golden Light* ever since I received the copy in the mail. I try to read some every day. Should I be reciting it? Do I need to read it aloud?

From GP

Does "recite" mean "read" as well or must the Sutra be spoken?

(See also Q. 2 up thread and Q. 43 down thread)

Dear All,

Yes, definitely! Reciting out loud is the best, most beneficial way to practice the *Sutra of Golden Light*. In the Sutra itself, Buddha Shakyamuni tell us this, as do others in the Sutra. By reciting out loud, you hear it, and you cause others to hear it.

One of the very first questions asked was about the differences between reading to oneself, internally, and reciting aloud.

The Sutra itself speaks to the important effects of reciting so that one **hears** the Sutra. Indeed, the importance of saying it, hearing, causing others to hear it, and the beneficial results of this is a thread that runs through the entire text. Lama Zopa notes in his preface that by "hearing this text, one's karma is purified."

As you recite, you may want to visualize that all around you are all sentient beings. They have come to hear this sublime sutra, and you are reciting it to them. By causing others to even hear one word or even the name is unbelievably great merit.

Best wishes,

Beth

29 Are there specific dedications we should make when we finish a recitation session?

From MY

Please add another recitation [from me]. Is there a specific dedication I should make?

Dear MY,

Dedicate your merits, those of all sentient beings in the past, future and present, and those of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, and especially your merits from practicing the *Sutra of Golden Light*, for the long lives of our Teachers, for removing all obstacles to their projects and wishes, and for the peace and prosperity as well as the attainments of all sentient beings in this and in all world systems.

In particular, Lama Zopa has specifically asked that we dedicate the merits of reciting to end war and conflict in Tibet and China, and other places in this world where there is violence including acts of terrorism.

By September 19, 2008, over 150 dedications had been reported to me.

As of May 10, 2009, well over 400 dedications have been reported directly to me using this website! Of course, this doesn't include all of the dedications people say.

I use several of these dedications myself when I recite.

To see how people dedicate the incalculable merit generated by reciting, hearing and causing others to hear this sublime sutra, go here

http://www.fpmt.org/golden_light_sutra/contact.asp?Contact=Experiences

Go here for specific discussion about dedicating the merits.

http://www.fpmt.org/golden_light_sutra/dedication.asp

For me, the act of dedicating the merits is itself so important. It helps me really think in concrete ways about the sufferings and causes of sufferings, and about the usefulness of this precious human rebirth.

with love and prayers,
Beth

30 Is the *Exalted King of Sutras, Sublime Golden Light* the same text as *The Wish-Fulfilling Golden Sun*?

From EG

I would like to know if the "sublime golden light" is the same as "the wish fulling golden sun", in the required reading booklist for the Beginning Buddhism program.

Dear EG,

The *Sutra of Golden Light* is available for free, for download, in a number of languages: English, French, German, Chinese

Here is the link to the download for the Sutra:

<http://www.fpmt.org/teachers/zopa/advice/goldenlight.asp>

Please note that now there is a quite recent French translation.

For everything about this sublime sutra, from motivation and benefits, to downloads, experiences, questions, and even a complete audio transmission by Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche, please go here:

http://www.fpmt.org/golden_light_sutra/

Please download freely and distribute this text to others if you care to do so.

The Wishfulfilling Sun is a collection of extraordinary teachings on Buddha Dharma from Lama Zopa Rinpoche. This too is available for free download, from the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive: <http://www.lamayeshe.com/lamazopa/wfgs/wfgs.shtml>

It is wonderful, but not the same.

with love and prayers,

Beth

31 Do we need to have an initiation or any direct transmission or *lung*, in order to recite or practice the *Sutra of Golden Light* ?

From BR:

Does one need to have the *lung* or an initiation for the practice of the *Golden Light Sutra*? I came across a CD online saying it contained *lung*.

Best wishes,

(See also down thread, Qq. 37, 38)

Dear BR,

No, you do not need a *lung* or direct oral transmission, or any sort of empowering ceremony for a sutra. So, you do not need a transmission of the *Sutra of Golden Light* to read it, recite it, listen to it, contemplate it, or meditate on it.

At the same time, especially in the tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, a teacher often does transmit or give the *lung* of a text.

Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche has given the complete transmission of the short, 21 chapter, version of the Sutra. You download it by going to http://www.fpmt.org/golden_light_sutra/ and scrolling down the page. There is some commentary with the transmission.

Please understand however that a “transmission” is direct. This means that listening to this audio isn’t a transmission of the text from him to you.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche has given two partial transmissions of the long, 31-chapter version, together with commentary, once in Portland and once in New York. The mp3 audio files of these are available at the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, lamayeshe.com. Go here:
<http://www.lamayeshe.com/lamazopa/portland07.shtml>
and
<http://www.lamayeshe.com/lamazopa/ny07.shtml>

with love and prayers,

Beth

32 Is it necessary or more effective to recite the *Sutra of Golden Light* in areas of conflict or where difficulties are obviously occurring?

From J-P G

Je decouvre ce site aujourd'hui seulement. Depuis 1 an environ jusqu'a ce jour j'ai fait 111 recitations completes de ce sutra ... dans des pays de l'Europe des Balkans (principalement pays de l'ex-Yougoslavie) ... Que pensez-vous de cette pratique de recitation sur place dans des pays en crise ou en difficulte?

(See Question 39 down thread)

Dear J-P G

The sutra itself and all the commentaries on the sutra that I know of say that the *Sutra of Golden Light* has a real, specific and special relation with this "southern continent" – that is, this world. Reciting the sutra, hearing and causing others to hear even one chapter, one four-line verse, or even just the name, has inconceivable benefits. This means we cannot understand how many or all the kinds of benefits that result from actions related to propagating this sutra.

Lama Zopa said he suggested to the president of Mongolia that the Sutra be recited annually to alleviate conflicts, and last winter, he mentioned it might be beneficial if Tibetans in Tibet recited it.

In his preface to the English edition of the short version, Rinpoche says that this precious text "is very powerful to stop violence ... It would be excellent to go into countries where there is much killing and read this precious sutra ... [t]his would be very valuable, very beneficial."

No matter where you are, most important is to recite the sutra with the motivation to release all sentient beings from the suffering of cyclic existence and to place them in full enlightenment.

Lama Zopa tells us: Where the *Golden Light Sutra* exists, there Dharma exists. So, it seems that the sutra is a means to this result.

with love,

Beth

33. Could reciting or establishing the *Sutra of Golden Light* in a place where it does not now exist become a cause for misfortune or negative karmas to ripen?

From TD

There must be some countries where the *Sutra of Golden Light* does not exist, and where the leader of the country does not respect Buddhism, so if one goes there with the *Sutra of Golden Light* and reads the sutra, then it would seem to create the cause for the misfortunes to happen to that place. Or if the *Sutra of Golden Light* exists at a place, but there's no one upholding it, and a person who upholds the sutra goes there, then it would cause the misfortunes to happen to that place.

(See also Q. 27 up thread)

Dear TD

In the Chapter on the Four Great Kings (in the 21 chapter version) several hypothetical scenarios are described, but neither of these scenarios is described, nor is either of these implied. Your "effect" clauses ("so if one goes there..." as well as "and a person who uphold the sutra goes there ...") are not suggested or mentioned at all.

Bringing or establishing the Sutra into a region either where it is not yet established or where the ruler or population do not abide by it isn't discussed.

In fact, though, textually, establishing the *Sutra of Golden Light* is the desired activity. Historically, this is how the Sutra moved through central and east Asia.

The parallel chapter, The Inviolable Commitments of Divine Kings, presents this same pattern in the form of a directed lecture or mandate.

with love,

Beth

34. In the *Sutra of Golden Light*, we hear about Buddha Ratnaśikhin. Who is this Buddha? What does the name Ratnaśikhin mean?

From J

I was wondering what *Ratnaśikhin* means. I know that *ratna* means “jewel” or “treasure,” but I can’t find *śikhin*. ... I looked on a sanskrit online dictionary, and also searched on google, but nothing came up. If you could tell me what *shikhin* means that would be really cool.

Dear J,

The name spelled *Ratnaśikhin* using the roman alphabet is a Sanskrit compound. It is made of *ratna* "jewel" + *śikhin* "crown" "summit" "peak" (here, in relation to wisdom knowledge); it may also signify the tuft of hair on the top of the head.

So, the name *Ratnaśikhin* is Jeweled Crown or Peak in the sense of jeweled peak of knowledge or wisdom.

Buddha Ratnaśikhin has been identified as the last or final buddha of the first of the incalculable or immeasurable eons, and often included in the list of the first seven buddhas.

In the sublime *Sutra of Golden Light*, the Buddha tells *jatakas* (stories of the previous lives of the one who becomes Buddha Śakyamuni,) some of which occur during the time of Buddha Ratnaśikhin, that is, while that buddha’s bodily form still appeared, or while the Dharma established by this buddha still existed.

During his many lives as a bodhisattva during the first of the three eons, the being who becomes Buddha Shakyamuni honored 75,000 buddhas. Buddha Ratnaśikhin is the last of in that line of buddhas.

Iconographic images of some of the less know figures who appear in the *SGL*, including Buddha Ratnaśikhin, can be found in Chinese and Nepalese Buddhist art collections.

Hope this helps,

Beth

35 In the Chapter on Confession, what is meant by the aspiration that all women become like men?

From EE

Just wanted to know what this means: “May all women become like men: heroic, learned, lucid and strong.”

(See also Q. 44 down thread)

Dear EE,

We can see from this that the Buddha Dharma exists in many times and places. This line suggests that in a community where women are held to have different qualities or potential from men, they needn't accept this cultural view.

In terms of the Buddha Dharma, the term “heroic” immediately brings to mind the arhats, and especially the heroes Manjushri and Samantabhadra, who “see things as they are.” They have pure view. They have ceased all wrong conceptions. They embody the perfection of Wisdom and Method. They are fully knowledgeable/accomplished (“learned”). They have removed the knowledge obstacle and are clear-minded. They are brave (a better translation than “strong” here) in seeing things as they are. So, you see, these four descriptions are closely related.

I dedicate any merit I have every generated so that all sentient beings achieve arhathship. May they all achieve these perfections. May I cause them to do so.

Years ago, I was taking second year literary Tibetan with my incomparable teacher, Venerable Geshe Lhundub Sopa Rinpoche. We were reading a short text on Vasubhandu. The mother of Vasubhandu and his brother Asanga lived at a time that Buddhism appeared to be waning, and she wanted to reestablish it. In the text, it says that she decides she cannot reestablish Buddhism herself because she is a woman, so she will bear sons who will do so.

In class, I pointedly asked Geshe-la for some commentary. First he laughed at my irritation. He said that Vasubandhu's mother was right. At that time, this was what she could do.

Then he became very serious. He said, that isn't the case here.

with love and prayers,

Beth

36. Does the *Sutra* need to be memorized and recited?

FROM ML

Can I just read the *Sutra* - say a chapter or more per day as I have been doing, or do I have to memorize and recite it?

Dear ML,

The *Sutra of Golden Light* is among the group of sutras considered “self-realizing.” This means that, in a way, it comes into being when it is recited or spoken. You may have noticed that Buddha, the Earth Goddess Drdha, and others, encourage reciting, hearing and causing others to hear the Sutra and list the many benefits that follow from these activities.

Reciting needn’t be a public performance. Reading out loud is reciting. I live with cats, and often they lie down near me when I recite.

One needn’t memorize a text, this sutra or any other. On the other hand, memorizing is beneficial in a number of ways. It is always with you. You are imprinting it on your mental continuum. You can recite and thus hear, contemplate and meditate on specific lines or sections at any time.

More than that, however, having a text truly with you, in your mental continuum, ensures preservation and perhaps transmission of that text. You “hold” that text, and it exists as long as you do.

I’ve found that particular passages have become imprinted on my mind, without consciously trying to memorize them.

37 Will Lama Zopa Rinpoche give a transmission of the *Sutra of Golden Light*?

From SJB

Will Lama [Zopa] Rinpoche be giving the transmission of the *Golden Light Sutra* again in the future?

(See also Q. 38 immediately following)

Dear SJB,

Don't worry if you have not received a *lung*, a direct oral transmission, of the *Golden Light Sutra*. You do not need a *lung* to recite this or any sutra.

At the same time, some practitioners very much want to receive the transmission, but actually being present at a complete transmission seems to be a little difficult, perhaps largely because the text is quite long and requires a great deal of time.

In 2007, Lama Zopa gave two partial transmissions of the "long," 31 chapter version, once in Portland, completing four chapters over the course of two sessions, and later, in New York, where he completed seven chapters.

Audio recordings of these are available for download at the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive site (lamayeshe.com). For the audio files from Portland, and from New York, go here <http://www.lamayeshe.com/index.php?sect=article&subsect=audio&cid=87>

In these, you will find Lama Zopa interspersing commentary on the *Sutra* as well as teachings related to the Seven-Limb Puja with the transmission itself.

The great Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche gave a complete transmission. This is available as mp3 audio files from the fpmt site. For the downloads, go here: http://www.fpmt.org/golden_light_sutra/

This year, the Chakrasamvara Center on Hibiscus Island reports that Phaggyab Rinpoche did a complete text recitation for the sangha there, at their request. He was sponsored, with a translator, and gave the transmission over the course of several evenings.

For possibility of Lama Zopa giving a transmission in the future, the best thing to do is to check the calendar at the fpmt website or ask directly.

with love and many prayers,

Beth

38 Does one need a transmission of the *SGL* before reciting it?

From KH

The [Relic] Tour came during the summer and it was so wonderful to see the relics and to learn about the sutra there! I was fortunate to be able to bring a precious teacher of mine ... to the relic tour, and have since asked him to give the transmission of the sutra, which hopefully he will do sometime soon. I'm not sure if it's ok to report that recitation without first having a transmission of some kind. In any case, if I read/recite it again before the transmission, should I report it? Or is it best to wait till afterwards?

Dear Friends,

Don't worry if you have not received a *lung*, a direct oral transmission, of the *Golden Light Sutra*. You do not need a lung to recite this or any sutra.

What is necessary to practice this Sutra is the motivation, especially with regard to ending the suffering and causes of suffering of all beings, and especially the war, illnesses, famines, and disasters experienced by beings in this world system. Reciting with this motivation, and dedicating your practice is so beneficial.

At the same time, some practitioners very much want to receive the transmission. The fact is that the long version of this sutra is quite long, perhaps three times that of the one now available for download in Tibetan, English, and other languages. This means that arranging a complete transmission may be a little difficult.

39 How does reciting the *Golden Light Sutra* end violence or stop injustice?

From J

I am upset at all the injustice in the world. I was advised to read the *Sutra Of Golden Light* to help others but ... I am confused how can this sutra protect when Tibetans are subject to violence,starvation etc. It would not appear to be working for Tibet.

[\(See Question 32 Up thread\)](#)

Dear All,

Many of you ask about the effects of the Sutra on events in the present-day.

We don't know (or, I don't anyway) all of the karma involved in any single moment of each individual's life. We would have to be omniscient to see the past, the future and the present.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche and all of our teachers show us how the practice of the Buddha Dharma is the best method to end suffering and establish peace and happiness. To help others and help ourselves, we can work to develop strong motivation to control our minds, eliminate negative emotions, and cultivate compassion and warm feelings toward others.

with love,

Beth

40 Will the *Sutra of Golden Light* be translated into Croatian?

From DR

I recited the complete *Sutra* once, loudly, alone in my apartment. Now, I can not stop thinking about translating the *Sutra* into the Croatian language. I can do that but it will take time. I wonder whether I should try to translate?

Dear DR,

I am so happy to hear about your experience!

You said that you were using the English translation, and now are considering translating from that into Croatian.

The text you are using is itself a translation. What is best is to translate from the Sanskrit, or from Tibetan.

I'll send on your interest in having a translation in Croatian.

with love,

Beth

41 Is reciting the *Golden Light Sutra* better than just reading to oneself? Are the benefits the same whether I recite out loud or read it silently?

From Ch Jh:

Hello, Regarding *Golden Light Sutra*, is it better to recite the sutra than to read, or the same?
Thank you for your kind assistance.

(See also questions 2, 20, 29, and 36 up thread!)

Dear Ch,

People ask this quite often. For this sutra in particular, the best, most beneficial way to practice is to recite out loud. In the Sutra itself, Buddha Shakyamuni and others say that it is important. By reciting out loud, you hear it, and you cause others to hear it.

The Sutra itself speaks to the important effects of reciting so that one hears the Sutra. Indeed, the importance of saying it, hearing, causing others to hear it, and the beneficial results of this is a thread that runs through the entire text.

Before reciting, you can say this mantra seven times: *Dhare Dhare Bendhare Soha*

This multiplies the good merits almost immeasurably!

Of course, even hearing the name of this Sutra is beneficial.

with love,

Beth

42 Should we make offerings to the *Sutra of Golden Light*?

From various people:

Should there be offerings to *the Golden Light Sutra*? Are water bowls offered to the *Sutra*? Is it acceptable to offer just one bowl of water? How should I set up my altar?

(See also Q. 46 down thread)

Dear All,

One specific offering to make to the *Sutra of Golden Light* is incense. The chapter on the Four Worldly Protectors, the Four Great Kings, talks about offering incense at length. Lama Zopa Rinpoche, in teaching on the Sutra, says to offer incense.

An altar is where you place objects and images that inspire you to do the following:

- practice Dharma
- remember the holy words of your precious teachers
- to develop love and compassion for all others in your heart
- to determine to make good use of your precious body and life for the benefit of others
- etc.

So, you want to put images and objects on your altar that do this.

For Buddhists, some images and objects are particularly effective. An image or statue of the Buddha, for instance, is so pleasing to the mind!

A Buddhist altar would typically have a text on it. The *Sutra of Golden Light* might be the text you put on your altar.

Re water bowls: remember, you aren't offering bowls of water, but different beautiful and rare ingredients, and great amounts of each. Think of oceans or skies full of these offerings. Think that you are offering these to your precious teachers, to Buddha Shakyamuni, to all the buddhas and bodhisattva, and even to the *Sutra of Golden Light*. You can just visualize it too.

Most important is your motivation and your dedication.

with love,

Beth

43 Who is the noble goddess Bodhisattvasamuccaya?

From JB, RS, and others

I started reciting the *Sutra of Golden Light* a short while ago, and I can already feel its tremendous purifying power. I particularly enjoy the last chapter (chapter 21), and would like to know more about the goddess Bodhisattvasamuccaya, as I'm very drawn to her words but cannot find any information on her. Who is she? Is she better known under another name? Any answer or directions to other sources of information would be much appreciated. Thank you!

From DJ

I am very new to Buddhism and am unfamiliar with the deities. Who is the noble goddess Bodhisattvasamuccaya?

(See also Question 10 up thread)

Dear Dharma Friends,

First, the term *bodhisattva* is, itself, a compound. The term *bodhi* has the sense of “perfect wisdom” or “perfected wisdom,” that is, the wisdom that is unobscured. This refers to the wisdom of a buddha. As a compound with *bodhi*, the term *sattva*, here means “one” or “a being.”

The bodhisattva is a being with an enlightened mind, or one with the mind of enlightenment.

The name, Bodhisattvasamuccaya, is a compound of *bodhisattva*, “(one with) the mind of enlightenment,” and *samuccaya*, which has the sense of “collection” or “gathered together into one”.

Bodhisattvasamuccaya appears in the *Sutra of Golden Light*. A great gathering of bodhisattvas, shravakas (“hearers”), and other beings (gods and goddesses and sons and daughters of gods) are all present. In the long version of the Sutra, other great beings such as the Bodhisattva Akashagarbha and one of the Buddha’s foremost disciples, Shariputra, also rise, pay homage, and ask questions, but clearly, it is through Bodhisattvasamuccaya we are able to express our devotion and aspiration.

Neither the noble goddess Bodhisattvasamuccaya nor a figure like her appears in the *Diamond Cutter (Vajracchedika) Sutra*, the *Sanghata Sutra*, or the *Lotus Sutra*.

44 In the Confession chapter, the *Sutra* prays that all women become like men. What does this mean? Why make that prayer?

from EF and others

Sorry but I have a hard time reciting the Sutra when I come to these lines...

May all women become like men,
Heroic, learned, lucid and strong.

This is beyond me even if it is part of some "Crazy Wisdom" teaching. But please enlighten me.
All the best

(See also Question 35 up thread)

Dear All,

The issue of the forms in which one takes birth, and the karma that determines birth is subtle and deep. Comprehending the karma of any individual is something only a fully enlightened being, a buddha, can know. (I cannot!!)

What we do understand, though, are the levels of meaning that a term that is translated as "men" has. Certainly any of the Buddha's teachings is specific to the immediate audience as well as to all levels of existence.

This verse is an important aspiration. I see it as aspiration that all women become heroic, thoroughly knowledgeable of the scriptures and practices, with clarity of mind, and never discouraged, even for a moment, from practicing the heroic deeds of the bodhisattvas. I see it as dedicating my own self to do that, and taking responsibility to cause others to do that.

warm regards,

Beth

45 Can we use our *Sutra* recitation to help with the suffering of the current global financial crisis?

From AB

Many, many people are suffering in this current financial crisis. Many are losing their homes. I am working very hard and will work harder and harder to help them. But would it be too much to ask Lama Zopa Rinpoche to pray for them and to include the healing of their situation in the recitation?

(Update May 10, 2009)

Dear AB,

This is such a difficult time for so many, everywhere in the world. Many beings, humans and animals, are experiencing loss of their means to support themselves, their very food and shelter.

What a wonderful, beneficial way to dedicate your recitation!

To make a specific request or ask a question directly to Lama Zopa, go here:
<http://www.fpmt.org/teachers/zopa/contact.asp>

You will see a specific place where you can ask Rinpoche to make prayers.

with love and best wishes,

Beth

46 Should we offer incense before beginning our recitations of the *Sutra of Golden Light*? Why is this to be an offering specifically of incense?

From W,

Hasn't Lama Zopa Rinpoche said to offer incense before reciting the *Sutra of Golden Light*? I think he talked about it in New York.

One person who received the *SGL* in the mail had an urge to light incense and offer it to the sutra even before he had opened the package! (You'll see this in the *Experience* file at the website.

(See also Q. 42 up thread)

Dear W,

Yes, he has recommended offering incense more than once. He did in New York, and he also mentions it during the teachings he gave in Portland too.

I'm not sure, but perhaps he makes a point of offering incense because the Sutra talks about this specifically. In the chapter on the Four Great Kings, they say that the single line of smoke from a stick of incense will expand into a lattice of tendrils, and that a golden light will spread and call forth protectors and other beings. The Buddha suggests that dedicating merits from offering incense to the Four Great Kings will bring their protection.

47 What does the mantra *OM DHARE DHARE BENDHARE SVAHA* mean?

From several people,

Lama Zopa Rinpoche recommends that we recite the mantra *Om Dhare Dhare Bendhare Svaha* before we begin the recitation. What does it mean?

I would like to know if the mantra DHARE DHARE BENDHARE SVAHA can be used before any practice of sutra, sadhana and prayers.

(Updated May 10, 2009)

Dear Friends,

Lama Zopa Rinpoche recommends reciting this mantra before each recitation session of the Sutra of Golden Light.

He has not suggested that this specific mantra be recited before any other sutra, and he has not provided a translation of this mantra.

Rinpoche researches all of the practices and the mantras he recommends thoroughly. He takes them from the authoritative sutras in the Kangyur, the collection of the Buddha's own teachings.

Up to now, he has provided translations for a great many mantras, especially those he suggests are useful to create merit as we go about our daily lives.

By the way, I have mentioned the request for a translation of the mantra.

Thank you for asking!

with love and best wishes,

Beth

48 If the *Sutra of Golden Light* is “the King of Sutras,” then how can other sutras be the king of sutras?

From JW,

I’m wondering what you think about this doubt I have. I’ve read both the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Golden Light Sutra* and they both claim to be the King of Sutras. The *Golden Light Sutra* claims several times to be the King of Sutras and the *Lotus Sutra* is very emphatic about being the King of all the Sutras.

How can there be two kings of sutras??

(Also, I haven’t read the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* or the *Avatamsaka Sutra* so I don’t know if either of those sutras make the same claim but I’m guessing that they might because some people have put either the *Nirvana Sutra* or the *Flower Garland* as the supreme sutra in their system of classification so I’m wondering if there are even more sutras that claim to be the king. This is just more of the same doubt, I suppose, which could be addressed by a good answer to this question of mine.) Thank you in advance for responding to my question.

(Updated September 15, 2009)

Dear JW,

You are correct that more than one sutra claims to be the *King of Sutras*. How is this possible? Can there be more than one king?

A sutra is a *king of sutras* when it has or teaches everything needed to complete the paths and grounds, that is, when it has everything needed to attain Enlightenment. Does the *Sutra of Golden Light* have everything needed to complete the path to Enlightenment? Yes. Some of the teachings, the things to practice, are taught directly or explicitly. Among these are confession or purification, understanding of interdependent origination, renunciation, and cherishing others.

Recently, my teacher, the great Geshe Sopa Rinpoche, read through chapter two of the long version of the *SGL* in Tibetan with me. Here is what he said to me about the *SGL*: “There are so many sutras, but this one is very important. It contains all of the core ideas!”

Are there other sutras that are the “king”? Yes. Does that make each one less than a king? No.

Don’t worry. Have no doubt that the *Sutra of Golden Light* is the King of Sutras.

with many best wishes,

Beth

49 In the chapter on Emptiness, what is the meaning of the images the Buddha uses?

From BR

I'm reciting the *Sublime Sutra of Golden Light*. On the chapter on emptiness there is a passage that reads: The body, like a machine in empty village/ Is without motion and completely without action./ Lacking core essence/it arises from conditions/ Arising from concepts, it lacks inherent nature. Earth, water, fire and wind,/ Abiding separately in different parts,/ Like deadly snakes on the same den, /Are ever in conflict with each other./Of these four snakes of the elements, Two move up and two move down. Moving by twos in directions and sub-directions, These snakes of the elements will surely perish. The earth snake and water snake, Perish down below The fire snake and the wind snake, Ascend to the space above.

I would like to know the overall meaning of this chapter and also in particular of this passage. ... Thank you very much for this wonderful sutra. Please translate others!

(Updated September 15, 2009)

Dear BR,

In this chapter on emptiness, the Buddha teaches the doctrine of *interdependent origination*, that is, the fundamental idea that nothing arises independently, without causes and conditions. He does this first by analogy and image. This is the set of verses you quote. Then he teaches it directly, by naming the twelve links of dependent origination and telling us how to understand them.

The description you quote is an explanation of how the body is empty of any permanent, unitary, unchanging existence. The images are of a body that has no independent existence, but is animated by the various consciousnesses, which, too, are interdependent with their objects.

The body itself doesn't exist independently. It has no unchanging form of existence. It has no permanent essence. It is made up of parts, and these parts, too, are not permanent and unchanging. The parts themselves can be reduced to four elements, earth and water, which, like two snakes, eventually disintegrate, and air/wind and fire, which like two more snakes, also disintegrate. Even the elements that make up the parts of the body are neither permanent nor unchanging.

best wishes!

Beth

50 Does the *Sutra of Golden Light* really fulfill “all of one’s wishes”?

From J Ch

I was wondering. [In the *Sutra*], it says all my wishes will be fulfilled. Do I need to write down my wishes or will they spontaneously be fulfilled?

[Is it possible that] just reciting one [recitation or one session] of the sutra can fulfill one's wishes? Thanks so much for your precious advice. Look forward to hearing from you. Thanks again.

(Updated September 19, 2009)

Dear J Ch

The *Sutra* fulfills wishes, your own individual wishes and those of others. It does this in a number of ways.

Reciting the *Sutra* is the best way to begin to ripen your heart and begin to fulfill your wishes. Do you wish for a peace life? Do you wish for safety from bad conditions? As the *Sutra* says, listen with a focused mind, hear, and cause others to hear.

What will this do? Reciting the *Sutra* leads you to purify negativities, for instance, and to transform obstacles.

If you are poor or unemployed when you sit down to recite, and still poor or unemployed you when finish, does this mean the *Sutra* has failed to fulfill your wishes? No. All of our present conditions, including our health, circles of family or friends, successes, etc., these are all results from past actions. Reciting the *Sutra*, listening, thinking, and meditating on it is an excellent way to purify countless past negative actions, and to create virtuous actions which will definitely ripen as good conditions.

Remember to dedicate the merits of your actions so that all sentient beings become free of sorrow and bad conditions. This is the best way to finish your recitation. Dedicating the merits of your activity for the benefit of all who are experiencing suffering and violence is so useful!

with love,

Beth

50 How should we pronounce the unfamiliar words in the *SGL*? How should we pronounce mantras? What is the pronunciation of the unfamiliar Sanskrit names?

FROM CT,

Is there a guide to the pronunciation of the names of certain figures mentioned in the *Sutra*, for example, Samjnaya or Drdha - and most especially the mantras in Chapters 8 & 9? ... [At] Amitabha Buddhist Centre in Singapore, we do group recitations from time to time. At the moment, we are winging it with regards to the pronunciation of these mantras! Your help would be much appreciated ... I really enjoy the Q & A section. I wondered if it would be possible to list the questions posted after the introductory page. Then one could zoom in to specific questions ... rather than having to scroll through the entire selection.

51 What does the *Sutra* mean when it says there “is no such thing as a relic” of the Buddha?

From TT

I have a question about the end of Chapter 2, The Chapter on the Measure of Life of the Tathagata. At the end of this chapter Kaundinya makes a request for a relic of the Lord, the size of a grain of mustard - because it is said that if one has honoured a relic of the Lord the size of a grain of mustard, one obtains lordship over the Thirty-three gods. Then Sarvalokapriyadarsana replies to Kaundinya with many similes stating that there is no such thing as a relic of the lord. For example, he says, “When from tortoise-hairs there should be a well-made cloak removing the cold in winter, then there will be a relic”, etc. etc. Kaundinya replies that he in fact already knew that there is no such thing as a relic of the Lord and he only posed the question in order to reveal this truth.

So my question is...: Why is it been said that there is no such thing as a relic of the Lord? It is clear that even today there are many relics of the Buddha still in existence (we see many of them in the Heart Shrine Relic Tour for example) - so what is the deeper meaning of this passage? - that there is no such thing as a relic of the Lord Buddha? If you could shed some light on this I would be most grateful. And thank you for the excellent work you are doing on this sutra, it is very very beneficial.

52 Are there benefits from listening to the *Sutra of Golden Light* even if asleep?

From KS

I read one page of the *Sutra of Golden Light* to my daughter almost every night. ... [I]f my daughter is listening and then falls asleep, is this still beneficial for her? Thank you very much.
With love

Dear KS

Yes, definitely! you and your daughter benefit from hearing this king of sutras, sublime Golden Light. There is no doubt about this.

The Buddha tells us not only to listen to the *Sutra of Golden Light*, but to cause others to hear. We recite aloud because any living being, awake or asleep, human or not human, can benefit from being present. Our minds are affected in many ways by being within the sound of the sutra.

with love,

Beth

53 How do we dedicate the merits from reciting the *Sutra of Golden Light*?

From KS

I don't know how to dedicate the merits created when I finish reading the page.

[See also Q. 29 upthread](#)

Dear KS,

You can dedicate the merits of this very virtuous activity, or any virtuous activity, by offering them from your heart so that all living beings can be free of all the various kinds of suffering and all the various causes of suffering.

You can dedicate all the merits toward the long, stable lives of our precious teachers and spiritual friends, and fulfilling their compassionate wishes.

Specifically, this *Sutra* is particularly beneficial with regard to pacifying the terrible sorrows of war, violence, diseases and disasters – all the situations which disrupt and harm living beings so that they cannot be safe even for a moment or have any peace.

You can think of specific situations where this is the case, and dedicate your reading and reciting for ending the suffering endured by anyone, human and not human, in those situations. You can dedicate your recitation of the *Sutra* and your daughter's hearing the *Sutra* so that these situations never arise again.

You can dedicate your reading, reciting, and causing others to hear the *Sutra* so that everyone has the causes and conditions to practice Dharma, so that they develop love and compassion in their hearts, and so that they act with love and compassion towards each other.

You can also dedicate your virtuous actions so that the Buddha's teachings and those who teach them remain for a very very long time, so that you and others meet these teachers, and because of hearing these teachers, act immediately to eliminate the causes and conditions of unhappiness, and bring peace and happiness to all.

with love,

Beth

54 Must our recitations be perfect to be effective? What happens if we miss a word or mispronounce a name?

From HTH

What should I do when I make a mistake in my recitation? Should I repeat only the word, repeat the entire sentence or repeat the entire paragraph?

What will happen if I mispronounce a name in Sanskrit because I cannot pronounce it?

Dear Friend,

The three most important aspects of reciting the *Sutra of Golden Light*, or any sutra, are your motivation for reciting, the focus of your mind while reciting, and the dedications and prayers you make based on the merits of your recitation. (This is true for all of your practices. This is true for everything you do in your life!)

Your pronunciation need not be perfect for your practice to be beneficial and effective.

You will find that each time you recite, you become even more at ease with saying the names. It is true, those mantras are unfamiliar, but don't worry too much about it.

Don't let the unfamiliar words discourage you from reciting and rejoicing in doing this beneficial practice!

with much love,

Beth

55 Is Reciting the Sutra of Golden Light to Animals Beneficial?

From BB

I have one question regarding *The Sutra of Golden Light*. I downloaded audio transmissions of this sutra from this site and since I am very compassionate to animals I was wondering something. Is it beneficial for animals if I cause them to hear this transmission? Will that gesture in any way help them? Thank you.

Dear Friend,

Yes! Definitely. Causing others, any and all others, to hear this sublime sutra, is extraordinarily beneficial. When you recite, causing others to hear is a good thing.

This is a very good way of fulfilling the two works of self and others!

56 At the end of the Chapter on the Tigress, the Buddha explains who each one was. Specifically, he says “the tigress was Mahaprajapati; the five bhikshus were her five cubs.” Who is Mahaprajapati, and who are the five bhikshus?

From LE

Where can I find the story of Mahaprajapati and the five bhikshus? Searching I saw a Mahaprajapati Gautami (the Buddha’s maternal aunt). Is she the same person? Thanks.

Dear LE,

The story of the tigress is remarkable in so many ways and your questions go to some of the less obvious ones. This story is a *jataka*, “birth” story, telling one of the previous lives of the bodhisattva who becomes Shakyamuni Buddha. There are several jatas in the sublime *Golden Light*, but this one describes the very act of giving up the body completely that Mahasattva (“great being”) performs.

In the story, Mahasattva nourishes the tigress with his body. In the life in which he becomes Buddha, he is born as a prince in the royal Shakya clan and the tigress is born as his maternal aunt, Mahaprajapati. His birth mother, Queen Maya, dies, and it is Mahaprajapati who raises him. After he achieves enlightenment and establishes a sangha community of ordained monks, she comes to him and requests ordination. It is because of Mahaprajapati’s request that the Buddha establishes ordination of women. Thus, from famished tigress to Mahaprajapati Gautama, the first ordained Buddhist nun.

The Tigress story is also pertinent because of brahmin Kauṇḍinya. The tigress’s five cubs are born as five brahmins who, at Siddhartha’s birth, make predictions about his future. One of the brahmins is Kauṇḍinya who predicts Siddhartha will renounce the world and become an ascetic.

When Siddhartha leaves his royal life to go in search of the solution to suffering, the five brahmins follow him. At first he engages in extreme acts of asceticism but then decides this will not lead to his goal and takes food. The brahmins are disgusted, leave him and go to an area outside of Banaras.

After he achieves his goal, enlightenment, the Buddha goes to find his former companions, and it is to them he gives the first Dharma teaching on the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. Thus, from five new-born tiger cubs, these five become what is called the Five Fortunate Ones (Panchavaggiya). From hearing the teachings, Kauṇḍinya achieves arhatship and realizes no-self. He also becomes ordained, making Kauṇḍinya both the first arhat under Buddha Shakyamuni and the first ordained monk.

with much love,

Beth

57 How should I treat or dispose of images of buddhas and bodhisattvas that I've created?

From ED

I've been making drawings and pictures of Buddhas and bodhisattvas as one way of collecting merits and a sort of virtuous action. Since some of those drawings are not as beautiful as I want them to be I don't know what to do with them, how to manage them? I read that they should not be thrown in the trash. I would be very thankful if you can help me with this. I do not want to act out of ignorance and unnecessary create negative karma.

Dear ED

All things that are produced are impermanent. This means they do not exist independently or inherently, but rather, arise, decay, disintegrate, and perish, from causes and conditions.

As you note in your questions, though, dharma objects are manifestations of and embody the precious Buddha Dharma. For this reason, even when we need to dispose of them, we do so differently from things such as paper scraps or coffee grounds.

Traditionally, materials with dharma written or drawn on them should be burned, not thrown away. When you burn dharma materials that contain words or letters, you can recite the mantra, OM AH HUM, and visualize the text absorbing into the AH, the mantric syllable of speech, and that AH then absorbs into you. Think that the meaning of that text becomes one with your mind. Then burn the texts while you recite OM AH HUM.

If you have taken refuge in the Three Jewels, then your commitments include acting with respect toward any buddha image no matter the quality of work. Regard these images as the actual Buddha. Similarly, have respect for word of Dharma, even a single syllable or letter.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche's specific recommendation (at fpmt.org) for dharma images is not to burn them but place them "in a stupa, tree, or other high, clean place," and seal the place if possible so the image is kept off of the ground.

Hope this helps!

warm regards,

Beth

58 How Does Reciting This *Sutra* Result In Creating Or Experiencing The Benefits Described in Chapter 1?

From M:

I understand the value of the mantras remains when spoken in Tibetan to an English-speaking person, but can you ... [explain] to me ... how this transmission of understanding and experience of the specific value this sutra occurs in this case?

59 Some of what it says in the *Sutra* seems wrong to me, the statements about women for instance in the Confession Chapter where we are to pray that all women become like men.

Why can't you change those parts?

From EE

Thank you Beth for the answer 44... Why would I want to become like a man? Something is so wrong here. Why not change it for the sake of us all ,please! [For instance, why not change the text to say] *May all beings become ... or May all men and women become ... or May all people become ... heroic, learned, lucid and strong*

See also Q. 35, 44 upthread