AN 3.101 — Paṁsudhovaka Sutta (The Refining of Gold)

English translation by Bhikkhu Candana.

Source: https://www.mindreleased.com/s/Book-3_Anguttara-Nikya-A-New-Translation.pdf#page=219

Source revision: ee5230c458ad6c1566f518d5909916ad92d12aebf1240750c5357dd9b5699f30

License: Candana — free distribution, unaltered contents — https://www.mindreleased.com/s/Book-3_Anguttara-Nikya-A-New-Translation.pdf

Copyright © Bhikkhu Candana, 2020, 2026. Free distribution only; do not alter the contents. The original book, including its complete permission notice, accompanies this text.

Candana source labels: 100. Site text ID: AN 3.101.

Text

100. Paṁsudhovaka Sutta (The Refining of Gold) Bhikkhus, in order to purify gold from rough impurities such as dirt, sand, pebbles, and other contaminating metal particles and stones, a master gold assayer, goldsmith, or his skilled apprentice first pours the gold dust and gold pellets on a trough, wherein the impurities are carefully washed, cleaned and shaken to be properly sifted, while he uses his fingers to pick and remove visibly large pieces of dirt and other minute impurities.

Then, when the bigger particles are removed, there still remain middle-sized impurities such as fine grit, along with coarse sand grains. Then, the master gold assayer, goldsmith, or his skilled apprentice again carefully washes the gold dust and gold pellets, by cleaning and shaking it on the trough, sifting through it until any remaining middle-sized defilements are removed. Later, with the removal of the middle-sized impurities, with some fine dust particles and black sand grains still remaining, the master gold assayer, goldsmith, or his skilled apprentice carefully and repeatedly washes, cleaning and shaking it yet again, until the small-sized defilements are also sifted and removed, and only the gold pellets and gold dust are left.

Next, taking the raw gold dust and gold pellets, the master gold assayer, goldsmith, or his skilled apprentice, puts the raw gold into a smelting pot, and heats it under intense heat until the gold turns into liquid, meanwhile he carefully attends to it by blowing on it and periodically shaking it gently in the pot.

However, even then the gold does not yet become free from the dross and dirt, which must still be removed. For this reason, the gold in that impure state would still not possess its natural luster, nor is malleable, but instead, it remains brittle and not ready to be made into a piece of jewelry at the hands of the master goldsmith or his skilled apprentice.

However, Bhikkhus, there comes a time when as the gold assayer, goldsmith, or his skilled apprentice heats the liquid gold by continuously blowing on it, by increasing the heat and further purifying it, the liquid gold finally develops a brilliant quality to it, as all the dirt and dross are fully removed. Then, once cooled, the gold becomes lustrous and malleable, flexible and pliant, no longer brittle, thus transformed and fit to be worked with.

And now, whatever the goldsmith desires to fashion out of it, whether a girdle, earrings, or a chain for the neck, it appropriately serves that purpose.

In the same manner, Bhikkhus, as the Bhikkhu develops the mind to a higher degree, he will encounter rough and gross defilements, such as misconduct engaged by body, speech, or mind. Here, the Bhikkhu who is genuinely dedicated to the Path of Practice, will eagerly work to dispel those impurities, by overcoming, abandoning, uprooting and destroying them all.

Now, once the Bhikkhu has done this, there still remain subtle defilements in the mind as he continues to develop the mind to a higher degree. Here, while facing the impurities of sensual thoughts, hateful thoughts, those of ill-will and hurtful thoughts, such a Bhikkhu who is genuinely dedicated to the Path of Practice will eagerly work to dispel and get rid of those impurities, by overcoming, abandoning, uprooting and destroying them all.

And once the Bhikkhu has done this, there still remain in him even more subtle defilements, as he continues to develop the mind to an even higher degree.

Here, while experiencing subtle thoughts about loved ones, about one's race or nationality, or reputation or status, seeing all these as mere impurities due to one's own attachment to them, such a Bhikkhu who is genuinely dedicated to the Path of Practice will eagerly work to dispel and get rid of these, by overcoming, abandoning, uprooting and destroying them all.

Once this is done, what are left in him are then simply thoughts about The Dhamma. Thus, he ponders how he does not attain a collected state of mind that is peaceful, but instead experiences a mind that is unsteady and un-exalted, lacking tranquility and focus. But despite this, he perseveres even by force, if and when necessary, as he keeps reigning in the mind trying to suppress those subtle defilements.

In time, Bhikkhus, he experiences a collected state of mind (samādhi) that is peaceful, steady and exalted, while enjoying tranquility and thus becoming focused, yet without trying to force or reign in the mind to try and suppress anything. Then, to whatever lofty state the mind inclines, the Bhikkhu is able to realize and attain it with wisdom, with his direct knowledge and understanding.

At this point, if the Bhikkhu wishes:

'May I possess the various types of psychic powers, such as while being one, may I become many; by being many, may I become one again; may I appear and disappear as I please; may I move unobstructed through walls, embankments and rocks, as though passing through space; may I slip in and out of the earth beneath me as if submerging into water; may I walk on water without disturbing its surface as though its solid ground; may I sit comfortably and fly, while traveling through the skies like a bird; may I touch the Moon and the Sun with my hand; and may I wield these powers, while in this body, as far as the Brahma world.'

Then, he is able to experience and witness all these for himself, due to the mind's mastery over that specific mental sphere.

If he so desires:

'May I, with the Divine ear that is pure and goes beyond the capacity of mere human abilities, hear the sounds of both Divine and human origin, those that are far distant as well as near.'

Then, he is able to experience and witness all these for himself, due to the mind's mastery over that specific mental sphere.

And if he so desires:

'May I have the ability to penetratingly know the mental states of other beings, as well as of people; may I know and recognize a mind with lust, as a mind with lust, and a mind without lust,

as a mind with without lust; may I know and recognize a mind with hatred, as a mind with hatred, and a mind without hatred, as a mind without hatred; may I know and recognize a mind with delusion, as a mind with delusion, and a mind without delusion, as a mind without delusion; may I know and recognize a torpid mind, as a torpid mind, and a scattered mind, as a scattered mind; may I know and recognize an expansive mind, as expansive, and a narrow-range mind, as narrow-ranged; may I know and recognize a mediocre mind as mediocre, and an excellent mind, as excellent; may I know and recognize a mind that is collected into stability, as collected into stability, and an uncollected mind as uncollected; may I know and recognize a released mind as a released mind, and an unreleased mind as unreleased.'

Thus, he is able to experience and witness all of these for himself, due to the mind's mastery over that specific mental sphere.

And if he so desires:

'May I recall my innumerable previous births, such as one birth, two births, three, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty births, one hundred, one thousand, one hundred thousand births, innumerable eons of world expansions, innumerable eons of world contractions, and innumerable eons of world expansions and contractions. Thus, he recalls: "Here, I was of such name, lineage, clan, with such a disposition, with such food as my nourishment, experiencing such pleasant and unpleasant feelings and with such a life span. Dying from that state, I was born there, of such name, lineage, clan, with such a disposition, with such food as my nourishment, experiencing such pleasant and unpleasant feelings and with such a life span. Dying from that state there, I was born here.'

Thus, he then begins recollecting his innumerable previous births with their specific characteristics and details, whereby he is able to experience and witness all these for

himself, with direct knowledge and understanding, due to the mind's mastery over that specific mental sphere.

And if he so desires:

'May I, with the Divine eye that is pure and goes beyond the capacity of mere human abilities, see beings dying and being reborn, whether into inferior or superior births, beautiful or ugly, in good or evil states. May I know and recognize how they fare along on their respective states, according to their actions.'

Thus, he knows and recognizes:

'These beings, due to their bodily, verbal, and mental misconduct, on account of abusing the noble ones, by adhering to their wrong views, and acting on those wrong views, after death, are reborn into terrible states of misery, in the lower worlds, in hell; whereas these good beings, due to their bodily, verbal, and mental good conduct, on account of not abusing and instead honoring the noble ones, by adhering to right view, and acting on right view, after death, are reborn into sublime states of happiness, in the heavenly realms.'

In this manner, with the Divine eye that is pure and goes beyond the capacity of mere human abilities, he sees beings dying and being reborn, whether into inferior or superior births, beautiful or ugly, in good or evil states, knowing and recognizing how they all fare along on their respective states, according to their actions.

Thus, he is able to experience and witness all these for himself, due to the mind's mastery over that specific mental sphere.

And Bhikkhus, if he so desires:

'May I realize for myself, here and now, the taintless liberation of the mind through wisdom, with the release of the mind from the contaminants (āsavā). Thus, by having entered into that state, may I abide in that state.'

Thus, he is able to experience and witness all this for himself, due to the mind's mastery over that specific mental sphere.