

Mil. 7.8.7

Kuddaka Nikāya The Minor Discourses

MILINDAPAÑHA “*The Questions of King Milinda*”

Opammakathā Pañhā Questions About the Similes

Kumbha Vagga The ‘Water Pot’ Section

Issāsaṅga Pañha “Inquiring about ‘The Archer’”

Translated by Bhikkhu Candana

Copyright © Bhikkhu Candana 2025

“Bhante Nāgasena, and what are those four crucial traits of the archer that you mentioned earlier, which the meditator must adopt by constantly developing himself in them?”

a. “Great King, just like an archer who is about to aim and shoot his arrows, before doing so, first he must ground himself by planting both feet firmly on the ground he stands upon; keeping his knees strong yet agile; hanging his quiver right next to him, lifted at his waist for easy access to his arrows; and in the same way, that determined and skilled archer keeps his whole body steady, while gripping the bow with one hand to keep it steady, and locking the thumb and fingers of the other hand, as he carefully pulls on the bow string.

“Being intently focused, and with perfect control over his grip of the bow, the tightening string, and the suspended arrow in between the two, the archer thus leaves no openings or any weakness between his fingers, as he knows exactly which finger is where.

“Then, keeping his spine tall, he carefully lengthens his neck; and closing his mouth and focusing on his target by closing one eye, while grabbing the target through the other eye, he takes aim in a relaxed attitude. And with a tranquil and welcoming boldness, he thinks joyfully to himself: *‘I am definitely hitting this target!’*”

“Now, Great King, it is just in the same manner that the meditator must approach This Practice. That is, he must be seriously driven and dedicated in his effort, as he firmly anchors himself upon the solid ground of virtuous living, intentionally rooting both his feet that are full of persevering energy.

“Supported by his patience and consistently flexible adaptability, the meditator must closely keep watch over the mind; always keeping it steady and under control; maintaining self-restraint throughout, as he challenges his baser instincts, old tendencies, and all other weaknesses.

“In this manner, he must not leave any openings for anything to seep in to dismantle his focus, as he crushes any drives of longing or obsessive thoughts that might slither their way into his heart, through the means of his ever-present application of wise reflective attention. Thus, he musters up the abundant supply of energy and effort within him, while keeping the six sense doors firmly shut and fully protected.

“Continuing on like this with full control over his faculties, the meditator must keep his mindfulness seamless and always at the forefront of his living experience. And with a tranquil and welcoming boldness, he thinks joyfully to himself:

‘With my sharp arrows of wisdom, I am going to shoot down each and every defiling quality that arises or still lurks and hides within the heart; not letting any of them slip by me, I’m definitely hitting my targets, one-by-one!’

“This, Great King, you may therefore understand to be the first of the four crucial traits of the skilled archer, briefly mentioned earlier.

b. “Next, Great King, knowing full-well that much of his success depends on having each of his arrow shafts be sharp and straight, the skilled archer always carries with him an arrow straightener, with which he quickly fixes any crooked or warped arrows he might have, by reshaping and straightening them to perfection, keeping them all battle-worthy.

“Now, in the same exact manner, Great King, the dedicated and ardently diligent meditator, so long as he still has a body, wherever and in whichever state he may find himself, he must always carry with him The Satipaṭṭhāna, The Four Establishments of Mindfulness, with which he should quickly attend to whatever is being noticed, by fixing a crooked and warped mind as he reshapes and straightens it to perfection.

“This, Great King, you may therefore understand as the second of the four crucial traits of the skilled archer, mentioned earlier.

c. “Furthermore, Great King, the master archer keeps honing his sharp-shooting skills by constantly practicing them on a target.

“Now, in just the same manner, Great King, the dedicated and ardently diligent meditator must keep his attention squarely fixed upon the body, while cultivating and developing the mind into its finest and most subtle levels of maturity, anchoring himself in the body. Thus, he continuously practices by developing and fine-tuning his mind.

“And how, Great King, must the meditator accomplish this, to cultivate and develop the mind through the means of anchoring himself in the body?

“Here, Great King, while keeping his awareness squarely fixed upon the body, whatever the meditator comes to experience, he must always look at and clearly perceive its impermanent nature, which is ubiquitous. Similarly, he must look at and clearly see the ever-present suffering within it. And, he must carefully look with penetrating scrutiny and clearly recognize the non-substantial nature of the body, which he uses as his foremost reference point and the very ground of his living experience.

“Thus, while closely looking at its fickle and conditioned nature, the meditator must see the body and all phenomena as no more than a terrible disease, an open and oozing wound, a bothersome pain that never goes away; a debilitating sickness with which he has been afflicted; a painful arrow that he is struck by; a hole that can never be filled; something that is and will forever be foreign and never his own; a horrific accident; a destruction; a dangerous and imminent disaster that’s bound to happen; a fearful and uncontrollable event; a terribly unstable and volatile situation that could explode any moment; an utterly corruptible and leaky situation that is never stable or reliable; a source of much sorrow and grief.

“Furthermore, Great King, the meditator sees, that there is no shelter or refuge to be sought or found in this body and in all that it offers, for, it is constantly dissolving and always coming apart. Thus, he clearly recognizes that there could truly be no help or protection from the unpredictable events that are taking place and those that are bound to occur. Therefore, he clearly sees that the body and whatever he experiences in life are essentially empty and lacking, with no solid core, just like a plantain or palm tree that is no more than layers upon layers of leaves and not much else, empty of a substantial essence.

“He thus continues to develop in his mental cultivation as he constantly looks at his own body and the phenomena of life with caution; seeing how the body is in fact untrustworthy; that it constantly needs to be maintained and is never something that could be fully trusted or truly relied upon. He sees how it is also the source of vanity, not to mention the fact of it being completely dependent on so many causes and conditions to keep it functioning or looking a certain way.

“Also, he closely witnesses how it is full of impurities, in addition to being a fertile source for evil to sprout at any moment, which is why it is the very favorite tool for Māra, who uses it ceaselessly at any opportunity he gets, to access and deceive the heart, by repeatedly putting him in jeopardy of falling into lower and miserable states. Therefore, the meditator looks upon this body as being the result of and subject to birth, sickness, old age, and death, the very source of sorrow and grief, and of endless anguish.

“This, Great King, you may therefore understand as the third of the four crucial traits of the skilled archer, mentioned earlier.

d. “Finally and what is more, Great King, is that the master archer keeps himself sharp by practicing and honing his skills early on, while also retiring late.

“In the same manner, Great King, the dedicated meditator who is diligent in his efforts, being thus resolutely intentional in his trajectory, rises early to quickly resume his ongoing practice, while also making sure he is still awake, practicing till late at night, even when others have already retired for the day and are fast asleep.

“This was the case even with the Venerable Sāriputta himself, The Great Elder, The General and Marshal of The Dhamma, The Chief Disciple of The Blessed One.

“Thus, we have the Venerable Sāriputta echoing the truth of this, as he states:

*“Rising early and retiring late, the true archer continues practicing his aim,
Honing and perfecting each and every strike with his bow and arrow,
And, it is by never slacking nor becoming negligent in hitting the target,
That he earns his wage and reward as a highly skilled master archer.*

*“In just the same way,
All the Children of the Buddha too, like Their Father,
Ceaselessly go on practicing their skills in order to attain mastery.
Thus, by never slacking nor neglecting to keep their attention directed at the body,
And the various experiences and conditions it undergoes,
With mindfulness thus firmly fixed upon the body,
They finally come to taste the Highest Fruit of The Holy Life, by attaining Arahanthood,
The only and very reason why they went forth, in the first place.”*

“And this, Great King, you may understand as the last of the four crucial traits of the skilled archer, mentioned earlier.”

Thus concludes the simile of the Archer, given by the Venerable Nāgasena.

Here, the two hundred and sixty-two questions asked by King Milinda, handed down and included within this volume with its six major divisions, and further adorned with twenty-two chapters, come to an end. Those sections, however, that are not included here, hence not handed down, are forty-two in number, which when combined, make up three hundred and four in total. All of them together are considered as: “*Questions of Milinda.*”

Sādhū

Sādhū

Sādhū