MN 107 — MN 107 To Gaṇaka Moggallāna | Gaṇaka Moggallāna Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

To Gaṇaka Moggallāna

Gaṇaka Moggallāna Sutta (MN 107)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvatthī in the Eastern Monastery, the palace of Migāra’s mother. Then Gaṇaka Moggallāna the brahman went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side.

As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One, “Master Gotama, in this palace of Migāra’s mother is seen a step-by-step training, a step-by-step activity, a step-by-step practice, down to the last tread of the staircase. Even among these brahmans is seen a

step-by-step training, a step-by-step activity, a step-by-step practice in recitation. Even among these archers is seen a step-by-step training, a step-by-step activity, a step-by-step practice in archery. Even among us accountants [gaṇaka] who earn our living by accounting is seen a step-by-step training, a step-by-step activity, a step-by-step practice in calculation. When we get an apprentice, we first make him count like this: 'One one, two twos, three threes, four fours, five fives, six sixes, seven sevens, eight eights, nine nines, ten tens.' We even get him to count to one hundred.

"Now, Master Gotama, can a step-by-step training, a step-by-step activity, a step-by-step practice likewise be described in this Dhamma & Vinaya?"

"Brahman, a step-by-step training, a step-by-step activity, a step-by-step practice can likewise be described in this Dhamma & Vinaya. Just as when a dexterous horse-tamer, on getting a fine thoroughbred colt, first makes it perform the task of wearing the bit, and then trains it further, in the same way, when the Tathāgata gets a person fit to be tamed, he first trains him thus: 'Come, monk. Be virtuous. Dwell restrained in accordance with the Pāṭimokkha, consummate in your behavior & sphere of activity. Train yourself, having undertaken the training rules, seeing danger in the slightest faults.'

"When the monk is virtuous... seeing danger in the slightest faults, the Tathāgata then trains him further: 'Come, monk. Be one who is guarded in the doors of your sense faculties. On seeing a form with the eye, don't grasp at any theme or details by which—if you were to dwell without restraint over the faculty of the eye—evil, unskillful qualities such as greed or distress might assail you. Practice for its restraint. Protect the faculty of the eye. Attain restraint with regard to the faculty of the eye. On hearing a sound with the ear.... On smelling an aroma with the nose.... On tasting a flavor with the tongue.... On touching a tactile sensation with the body.... On cognizing an idea with the intellect, don't grasp at any theme or details by which—if you were to dwell without restraint over the faculty of the intellect—evil, unskillful qualities such as greed or distress might assail you. Practice for its restraint. Protect the faculty of the intellect. Attain restraint with regard to the faculty of the intellect.'

"When the monk is one who is guarded in the doors of his sense faculties... the Tathāgata then trains him further: 'Come, monk. Be one who is moderate in eating. Considering it appropriately, take your food not playfully, nor for intoxication, nor for putting on bulk, nor for beautification, but simply for the survival & continuance of this body, for ending its afflictions, for the support of the holy life, thinking, "I will destroy old feelings (of hunger) & not create new feelings (from overeating). Thus I will maintain myself, be blameless, & live in comfort."'

"When the monk is one who is moderate in eating... the Tathāgata then trains him further: 'Come, monk. Be one who is devoted to wakefulness. During the day, sitting & pacing back & forth, cleanse your mind of any qualities that would hold the mind in check. During the first watch of the night [dusk to 10 p.m.], sitting & pacing back & forth, cleanse your mind of any qualities that would hold the mind in check. During the second watch of the night [10 p.m. to 2 a.m.], reclining on your right side, take up the lion's posture, one foot placed

on top of the other, mindful, alert, with your mind set on getting up [either as soon as you awaken or at a particular time]. During the last watch of the night [2 a.m. to dawn], sitting & pacing back & forth, cleanse your mind of any qualities that would hold the mind in check.'

"When the monk is one who is devoted to wakefulness... the Tathāgata then trains him further: 'Come, monk. Be one who is possessed of mindfulness & alertness. When going forward & returning, make yourself alert. When looking toward & looking away.... When bending & extending your limbs.... When carrying your outer cloak, upper robe, & bowl.... When eating, drinking, chewing, & tasting.... When urinating & defecating.... When walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, & remaining silent, make yourself alert.'

"When the monk is one who is possessed of mindfulness & alertness... the Tathāgata then trains him further: 'Come, monk. Seek out a secluded dwelling: a wilderness, the shade of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a forest grove, the open air, a heap of straw.'

"He seeks out a secluded dwelling: a wilderness, the shade of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a forest grove, the open air, a heap of straw. After his meal, returning from his alms round, he sits down, crosses his legs, holds his body erect, and brings mindfulness to the fore.1

"Abandoning covetousness with regard to the world, he dwells with an awareness devoid of covetousness. He cleanses his mind of covetousness. Abandoning ill will & anger, he dwells with an awareness devoid of ill will, sympathetic to the welfare of all living beings. He cleanses his mind of ill will & anger. Abandoning sloth & drowsiness, he dwells with an awareness devoid of sloth & drowsiness, mindful, alert, percipient of light. He cleanses his mind of sloth & drowsiness. Abandoning restlessness & anxiety, he dwells undisturbed, his mind inwardly stilled. He cleanses his mind of restlessness & anxiety. Abandoning uncertainty, he dwells having crossed over uncertainty, with no perplexity with regard to skillful qualities. He cleanses his mind of uncertainty.

"Having abandoned these five hindrances—imperfections of awareness that weaken discernment—then, quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, he enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation.

"With the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance.

"With the fading of rapture he remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, 'Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.'

“With the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress—he enters & remains in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain.

“This is my instruction, brahman, to those monks in training who have not attained the heart’s goal but remain intent on the unsurpassed safety from bondage. But for those monks who are arahants—whose effluents are ended, who have reached fulfillment, done the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, laid to waste the fetter of becoming, and who are released through right gnosis—these qualities lead both to a pleasant abiding in the here & now, and to mindfulness & alertness.”

When this was said, Gaṇaka Moggallāna the brahman said to the Blessed One, “When Master Gotama’s disciples are thus exhorted & instructed by him, do they all attain unbinding, the absolute conclusion, or do some of them not?”

“Brahman, when my disciples are thus exhorted & instructed by me, some attain unbinding, the absolute conclusion, and some don’t.”

“What is the reason, what is the cause—when unbinding is there, and the path leading to unbinding is there, and Master Gotama is there as the guide—that when Master Gotama’s disciples are thus exhorted & instructed by him, some attain unbinding, the absolute conclusion, and some don’t?”

“Very well then, brahman, I will cross-question you on this matter. Answer as you see fit. What do you think? Are you skilled in the road leading to Rājagaha?”

“Yes, sir, I am skilled in the road leading to Rājagaha.”

“Now, what do you think? There’s the case where a man would come, wanting to go to Rājagaha. Having come to you, he would say, ‘Venerable sir, I want to go to Rājagaha. Tell me the way to Rājagaha.’ You would tell him, ‘Well, my good man, this road goes to Rājagaha. Go along it for a while. Having gone along for a while, you will see a village named such-&-such. Go along for a while. Having gone along for a while, you will see a town named such-&-such. Go along for a while. Having gone along for a while, you will see Rājagaha with its delightful parks, delightful forests, delightful stretches of land, & delightful lakes.’ Having been thus exhorted & instructed by you, he would take a wrong road and arrive out west.

“Then a second man would come, wanting to go to Rājagaha. Having come to you, he would say, ‘Venerable sir, I want to go to Rājagaha. Tell me the way to Rājagaha.’ You would tell him, ‘Well, my good man, this road goes to Rājagaha. Go along it for a while. Having gone along for a while, you will see a village named such-&-such. Go along for a while. Having gone along for a while, you will see a town named such-&-such. Go along for a while. Having gone along for a while, you will see Rājagaha with its delightful parks, delightful forests, delightful stretches of land, & delightful lakes. Having been thus exhorted & instructed by you, he would arrive safely at Rājagaha. Now, what is the reason,

what is the cause—when Rājagaha is there, and the road leading to Rājagaha is there, and you are there as the guide—that when they are thus exhorted & instructed by you, the first man takes the wrong road and arrives out west, while the second man arrives safely at Rājagaha?"

"What can I do about that, Master Gotama? I'm the one who shows the way."

"In the same way, brahman—when unbinding is there, and the path leading to unbinding is there, and I am there as the guide—when my disciples are thus exhorted & instructed by me, some attain unbinding, the absolute conclusion, and some don't. What can I do about that, brahman? The Tathāgata is the one who shows the way."

When this was said, Gaṇaka Moggallāna the brahman said to the Blessed One, "Those individuals who are without conviction, who—for the sake of a livelihood and not out of conviction—have gone forth from the home life into homelessness; who are fraudulent, deceitful, wily, restless, rowdy, flighty, talkative, of loose words; who leave their faculties unguarded; who know no moderation in food, are undevoted to wakefulness, unconcerned with the qualities of a contemplative, with no respect for the training; who are luxurious, lax, foremost in falling back; who shirk the duties of solitude; who are lazy, lowly in their persistence, of muddled mindfulness, unalert, unconcentrated, their minds scattered, undiscerning, drivelers: Master Gotama does not dwell together with those.

"But as for those sons of good families who, out of conviction, have gone forth from the home life into homelessness; who are unfraudulent, undeceitful, not wily, not restless, not rowdy, not flighty, not talkative or of loose words; who guard their faculties, know moderation in food, are devoted to wakefulness, are concerned with the qualities of a contemplative, have fierce respect for the training; who are not luxurious, not lax, not foremost in falling back; who observe the duties of solitude; who are not lazy; who are aroused in their persistence, of unmuddled mindfulness, alert, concentrated, their minds unified, discerning, not drivelers: Master Gotama dwells together with those.

"Master Gotama, just as black orris root is reckoned as supreme among root scents, and red sandalwood is reckoned as supreme among heartwood scents, and jasmine is reckoned as supreme among floral scents, so too is Master Gotama's exhortation the foremost among today's teachings.

"Magnificent, Master Gotama! Magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what was overturned, to reveal what was hidden, to show the way to one who was lost, or to carry a lamp into the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way has Master Gotama—through many lines of reasoning—made the Dhamma clear. I go to Master Gotama for refuge, to the Dhamma, & to the Saṅgha of monks. May Master Gotama remember me as a lay follower who has gone for refuge from this day forward, for life."

Note

1. To the fore (parimukhaṁ): An Abhidhamma text, Vibhaṅga 12:1, when discussing mindfulness of breathing, defines this term as meaning “the tip of the nose or the sign of the mouth.” However, in the suttas the term appears as part of a stock phrase describing a person engaged in meditation, even for themes that have nothing to do with the body at all, such as sublime-attitude (brahma-vihāra) meditation (AN 3:64). Thus it seems more likely that the term is used in an idiomatic sense, indicating either that mindfulness is placed face-to-face with its object, or that it is made prominent, which is how I have translated it here.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 137; Dhp 274–276