MN 21 — Kakacupama Sutta: The Parable of the Saw

English translation by Acharya Buddharakkhita.

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Changes: Presentation only: original HTML markup reflowed into plain text; wording, numbering and source repetitions retained. No repetitions expanded.

Completeness: PARTIAL. Complete source excerpt preserved, including introductions, notes and verse structure; source omits part of the canonical discourse.

Text

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"Phagguna, if anyone were to reproach you right to your face, even then you should abandon those urges and thoughts which are worldly. There, Phagguna, you should train yourself thus: 'Neither shall my mind be affected by this, nor shall I give vent to evil words; but I shall remain full of concern and pity, with a mind of love, and I shall not give in to hatred.' This is how, Phagguna, you should train yourself.

"Phagguna, if anyone were to give you a blow with the hand, or hit you with a clod of earth, or with a stick, or with a sword, even then you should abandon those urges and thoughts which are worldly. There, Phagguna, you should train yourself thus: 'Neither shall my mind be affected by this, nor shall I give vent to evil words; but I shall remain full of concern and pity, with a mind of love, and I shall not give in to hatred.' This is how, Phagguna, you should train yourself.

The Story of the Mistress Vedehika

"In the past, monks, in this very Savatthi, there was a mistress, Vedehika by name. And, monks, this good reputation had spread about the mistress Vedehika: 'The mistress Vedehika is gentle, the mistress Vedehika is meek, the mistress Vedehika is calm.' Now, monks, the mistress Vedehika had a maid-servant, Kali by name, who was able, energetic and very methodical in her work. Then, monks, it occurred to Kali, the maid-servant: 'This good reputation has spread about my lady: "The mistress Vedehika is gentle, the mistress Vedehika is meek, the mistress Vedehika is calm." Could it be that my lady does have anger within her which she does not show, or could it be that she does not have anger? Or is it because I am methodical in my job that my lady, though she does have anger within, does not show it, and not because she does not have anger? Why don't I test my lady?'

"Thus, monks, the maid-servant Kali got up late the next morning. And, monks, the mistress Vedehika told this to the maid-servant Kali: 'Hey, you Kali!' — 'What is it, lady?' — 'Why did you get up so late?' — 'Oh, that is nothing, lady.' — 'What! That is nothing, indeed! You bad maid-servant, you got up late!' Angry and displeased, she frowned.

"Then, monks, it occurred to Kali the maid-servant: 'Though she does have anger within, my lady does not show it; it is not that she does not have anger. It is because I am methodical in my job that, though she does have anger within, my lady does not show it, and not because she does not have anger. Why don't I test my lady further?'

"Now, monks, Kali the maid-servant got up even later than before. Then, monks, the mistress Vedehika told the maid-servant Kali: 'Hey, you Kali!' — 'What is it, lady?' — 'Why did you get up even later than before?' — 'Oh, that is nothing, lady.' — 'What! That is nothing, indeed! You bad maid-servant, you got up even later than before!' Angry and displeased, she gave vent to her displeasure.

"Then, monks, it occurred to the maid-servant Kali: 'Though she does have anger within, my lady does not show it; it is not that she does not have anger. It is because I am methodical in my job that, though she does have anger within, my lady does not show it, and not because she does not have anger. Why don't I test my lady further?'

"And, monks, the maid-servant Kali got up even later than before. Then, monks, the mistress Vedehika told the maid-servant Kali: 'Hey, you Kali!' — 'What is it, lady?' — 'Why did you get up so late?' — 'Oh, that is nothing, lady.' — 'What! That is nothing, indeed! You bad maid-servant, you got up so late!' And angry and displeased, she hit her on the head with the door-bar. And this injured her head.

"Now, monks, the maid-servant Kali, with her head injured and blood oozing, went about among the neighbors, shouting: 'Look, sirs, at the deed of the gentle one! Look, sirs, at the deed of the meek one! Look, sirs, at the deed of the calm one! How can she, saying to her own maid-servant, "You got up late today," angry and displeased, having taken a door-bar, give me a blow on the head and injure my head?'

"And then, monks, this ill-repute spread thereafter about the mistress Vedehika: 'The mistress Vedehika is violent, the mistress Vedehika is arrogant, the mistress Vedehika is not calm.'

"In the same way, monks, some monk here is very gentle, very meek, and very calm, so long as disagreeable ways of speech do not assail him; but when disagreeable ways of speech do assail the monk, it is then that the monk is to be judged whether he is 'gentle,' 'meek,' or 'calm.' Monks, I do not call that monk 'dutiful,' who is dutiful on account of the requisites he gets, i.e., the robe, almsfood, lodging and medicaments, whereby he falls into pseudo-dutifulness. And why? For, monks, when that monk fails to get the requisites of the robe, almsfood, lodging and medicaments, he ceases to be dutiful, and is not in keeping with the norms of dutifulness. But, monks, whichever monk out of reverence for the Teaching, out of respect for the Teaching, out of dedication to the Teaching, showing honor to the Teaching, and giving regard to the Teaching, comes to be dutiful and is in keeping with the norms of dutifulness, him do I consider as dutiful. Therefore, monks, you should consider: 'Only out of reverence for the Teaching, out of respect for the Teaching, out of dedication to the Teaching, showing honor to the Teaching, and giving regard to the Teaching, shall we become dutiful, shall we be in keeping with the norms of dutifulness.' Thus, indeed, monks, you should train yourselves.

Positive Response of Love

"Monks, there are these five modes of speech which people might use when speaking to you — speech that is timely or untimely, true or false, gentle or harsh, with a good or a harmful motive, and with a loving heart or hostility.

"Monks, some might speak to you using speech that is timely or untimely; monks, some might speak to you according to truth or falsely; monks, some might speak to you gently or harshly; monks, some might speak to you with a good motive or with a harmful motive; monks, some might speak to you with a loving heart or with hostility. On all occasions, monks, you should train yourselves thus: 'Neither shall our minds be affected by this, nor for this matter shall we give vent to evil words, but we shall remain full of concern and pity, with a mind of love, and we shall not give in to hatred. On the contrary, we shall live projecting thoughts of universal love to that very person, making him as well as the whole world the object of our thoughts of universal love — thoughts that have grown great, exalted and measureless. We shall dwell radiating these thoughts which are void of hostility and ill will.' It is in this way, monks, that you should train yourselves.

The Great Earth

"Suppose, monks, a person were to come to you, holding a hoe and a basket and he were to say: 'I shall make this great earth earthless.' Then he would strew the earth here and there, spit here and there, and urinate here and there, and would say:' 'Be earthless, be earthless.' What do you think, monks, would this person render this great earth earthless?"

"No, indeed not, most venerable sir."

"And why?"

"Because this great earth, most venerable sir, is deep and without measure. It cannot possibly be turned earthless. On the contrary, that person would only reap weariness and frustration."

"In the same way, monks, others may use these five modes of speech when speaking to you — speech that is timely or untimely, true or false, gentle or harsh, with a good or a harmful motive, and with a loving heart or hostility. In this way, monks, you should train yourselves: 'Neither shall our minds be affected by this, nor for this matter shall we give vent to evil words, but we shall remain full of concern and pity, with a mind of love, and we shall not give in to hatred. On the contrary, we shall live projecting thoughts of universal love to that very person, making him as well as the whole world the object of our thoughts of universal love — thoughts that have grown great, exalted and measureless. We shall dwell radiating these thoughts which are void of hostility and ill will.' It is in this way, monks, that you should train yourselves.

Empty Space

"Suppose, monks, a person were to approach you, carrying paints of lacquer, turmeric, indigo or carmine, and he were to say: 'I will draw this picture, I will make this painting appear on this empty space.' What do you think, monks, could he make this painting appear on empty space?"

"No, indeed not, most venerable sir."

"And why not?"

"Because this empty space, most venerable sir, is formless and invisible. He cannot possibly draw a picture or make a painting appear on this empty space. On the contrary, that person will only reap weariness and frustration."

"In the same way, monks, others may use these five modes of speech when speaking to you — speech that is timely or untimely, true or false, gentle or harsh, with a good or a harmful motive, and with a loving heart or hostility. In this way, monks, you should train yourselves: 'Neither shall our minds be affected by this, nor for this matter shall we give vent to evil words, but we shall remain full of concern and pity, with a mind of love, and we shall not give in to hatred. On the contrary, we shall live projecting thoughts of universal love to that very person, making him as well as the whole world the object of our thoughts of universal love — thoughts that have grown great, exalted and measureless. We shall dwell radiating these thoughts which are void of hostility and ill will.' It is in this way, monks, that you should train yourselves.

The River Ganges

"Suppose, monks, a person were to come holding a burning grass-torch, and he were to say: 'With this burning grass-torch I shall set fire to and scorch this river Ganges.' What do you think, monks, could that person set fire to and scorch the river Ganges with a grass-torch?"

"No, indeed not, most venerable sir."

"And why not?"

"Because, most venerable sir, the river Ganges is deep and without measure. It is not possible to set fire to and scorch the river Ganges with a burning grass-torch. On the contrary, that person will only reap weariness and frustration."

"In the same way, monks, others may use these five modes of speech when speaking to you — speech that is timely or untimely, true or false, gentle or harsh, with a good or a harmful motive, and with a loving heart or hostility. In this way, monks, you should train yourselves: 'Neither shall our minds be affected by this, nor for this matter shall we give vent to evil words, but we shall remain full of concern and pity, with a mind of love, and we shall not give in to hatred. On the contrary, we shall live projecting thoughts of universal love to that very person, making him as well as the whole world the object of our thoughts of universal love — thoughts that have grown great, exalted and measureless. We shall dwell radiating these thoughts which are void of hostility and ill will.' It is in this way, monks, that you should train yourselves.

The Catskin Bag

"Suppose, monks, there was a supple and silky leather bag made of catskin that had been beaten, tanned, cured and fully processed, and made completely free of all creases and wrinkles. Then a man were to come with a stick or mallet and say, 'With this stick or mallet I shall make creases and wrinkles in this supple and silky catskin bag which has been beaten, tanned, cured and fully processed, and made free of creases and wrinkles.' What do you think, monks, could that person with a stick or mallet make creases and wrinkles in that supple and silky catskin bag which has been beaten, tanned, cured and fully processed, and made free of creases and wrinkles?"

"No, indeed not, most venerable sir."

"And why not?"

"Because, most venerable sir, that supple and silky leather bag made of catskin has been beaten, tanned, cured and fully processed, and made free of creases and wrinkles. It is not possible to make creases and wrinkles in it with a stick or mallet. On the contrary, he will only reap weariness and frustration."

"In the same way, monks, others may use these five modes of speech when speaking to you — speech that is timely or untimely, true or false, gentle or harsh, with a good or a

harmful motive, and with a loving heart or hostility. In this way, monks, you should train yourselves: 'Neither shall our minds be affected by this, nor for this matter shall we give vent to evil words, but we shall remain full of concern and pity, with a mind of love, and we shall not give in to hatred. On the contrary, we shall live projecting thoughts of universal love to that very person, making him as well as the whole world the object of our thoughts of universal love — thoughts that have grown great, exalted and measureless. We shall dwell radiating these thoughts which are void of hostility and ill will.' It is in this way, monks, that you should train yourselves.

The Parable of the Saw

"Monks, even if bandits were to savagely sever you, limb by limb, with a double-handled saw, even then, whoever of you harbors ill will at heart would not be upholding my Teaching. Monks, even in such a situation you should train yourselves thus: 'Neither shall our minds be affected by this, nor for this matter shall we give vent to evil words, but we shall remain full of concern and pity, with a mind of love, and we shall not give in to hatred. On the contrary, we shall live projecting thoughts of universal love to those very persons, making them as well as the whole world the object of our thoughts of universal love — thoughts that have grown great, exalted and measureless. We shall dwell radiating these thoughts which are void of hostility and ill will.' It is in this way, monks, that you should train yourselves.

"Monks, if you should keep this instruction on the Parable of the Saw constantly in mind, do you see any mode of speech, subtle or gross, that you could not endure?"

"No, Lord."

"Therefore, monks, you should keep this instruction on the Parable of the Saw constantly in mind. That will conduce to your well-being and happiness for long indeed."

That is what the Blessed One said. Delighted, those monks acclaimed the Teaching of the Blessed One.