MN 53 — MN 53 The Practice for One in Training | Sekha-paṭipadā Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Source revision: sha256:06db98f11dbe5b66e3b290b0f8bcaa44ec5f2fe3d1e1b74062fcf0baea044036

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Text

The Practice for One in Training

Sekha-paṭipadā Sutta (MN 53)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying among the Sakyans at Kapilavatthu in the Banyan Park. Now at that time a new reception hall1 had just been built by the Kapilavatthu Sakyans, and it had not yet been dwelled in by any contemplative, brahman, or anyone at all in human form. So the Kapilavatthu Sakyans went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As they were sitting there they said to him, “Lord, a new reception hall has just been built by the Kapilavatthu Sakyans, and it has not yet been dwelled in by any contemplative, brahman, or anyone at all in human form. May the Blessed One be the first to use it. When the Blessed One has

used it first, the Kapilavatthu Sakyans will use it afterwards. That will be for their long-term welfare & happiness."

The Blessed One acquiesced with silence. Sensing his acquiescence, the Kapilavatthu Sakyans got up from their seats, bowed down to him, circumambulated him, and then went to the new reception hall. On arrival, they spread it all over with felt rugs, arranged seats, set out a water vessel, and raised an oil lamp. Then they went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, stood to one side. As they were standing there they said to him, "Lord, the reception hall has been covered all over with felt rugs, seats have been arranged, a water vessel has been set out, and an oil lamp raised. It is now time for the Blessed One to do as he sees fit."

So the Blessed One—after adjusting his lower robe and taking his bowl & outer robe—went together with a Saṅgha of monks to the reception hall. On arrival he washed his feet, entered the hall, and sat with his back to the central post, facing east. The Saṅgha of monks washed their feet, entered the hall, and sat with their backs to the western wall, facing east, ranged around the Blessed One. The Kapilavatthu Sakyans washed their feet, entered the hall, and sat with their backs to the eastern wall, facing west, ranged around the Blessed One. Then the Blessed One—having spent most of the night instructing, urging, rousing, & encouraging the Kapilavatthu Sakyans with a Dhamma talk—said to Ven. Ānanda, "Ānanda, speak to the Kapilavatthu Sakyans about the person who follows the practice for one in training.2 My back aches. I will rest it."

Ven. Ānanda responded, "As you say, lord."

Then the Blessed One, having arranged his outer robe folded in four, lay down on his right side in the lion's sleeping posture, with one foot on top of the other, mindful & alert, having made a mental note to get up.

Then Ven. Ānanda addressed Mahānāma the Sakyan3: "There is the case, Mahānāma, where a disciple of the noble ones is consummate in virtue, guards the doors to his sense faculties, knows moderation in eating, is devoted to wakefulness, is endowed with seven qualities, and obtains at will—without trouble or difficulty—the four jhānas that constitute heightened awareness and a pleasant abiding in the here & now.

"And how is the disciple of the noble ones consummate in virtue? There is the case where the disciple of the noble ones is virtuous. He dwells restrained in accordance with the Pāṭimokkha, consummate in his behavior & sphere of activity. He trains himself, having undertaken the training rules, seeing danger in the slightest faults. This is how the disciple of the noble ones is consummate in virtue.

"And how does the disciple of the noble ones guard the doors to his sense faculties? There is the case where the disciple of the noble ones, on seeing a form with the eye, doesn't grasp at any theme or variations by which—if he were to dwell without restraint over the faculty of the eye—evil, unskillful qualities such as greed or distress might assail him. He practices with restraint. He guards the faculty of the eye. He achieves 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 feeling a tactile sensation with the body….

“On cognizing an idea with the intellect, he doesn’t grasp at any theme or variations by which—if he were to dwell without restraint over the faculty of the intellect—evil, unskillful qualities such as greed or distress might assail him. He practices with restraint. He guards the faculty of the intellect. He achieves restraint with regard to the faculty of the intellect. This is how the disciple of the noble ones guards the doors to his sense faculties.

“And how does the disciple of the noble ones know moderation in eating? There is the case where the disciple of the noble ones, considering it appropriately, takes his 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.’ This is how the disciple of the noble ones knows moderation in eating.

“And how is the disciple of the noble ones devoted to wakefulness? There is the case where a monk during the day, sitting & pacing back & forth, cleanses his 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, he cleanses his 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 his right side, he takes up the lion’s posture, one foot placed on top of the other, mindful, alert, with his mind set on getting up [either as soon as he awakens or at a particular time]. During the last watch of the night [2 a.m. to dawn], sitting & pacing back & forth, he cleanses his mind of any qualities that would hold the mind in check. This is how the monk is devoted to wakefulness.

“And how is the disciple of the noble ones endowed with seven qualities?

“[1] There is the case where the disciple of the noble ones has conviction, is convinced of the Tathāgata’s awakening: ‘Indeed, the Blessed One is worthy & rightly self-awakened, consummate in clear-knowing & conduct, well-gone, an expert with regard to the cosmos, unexcelled trainer of people fit to be tamed, teacher of devas & human beings, awakened, blessed.’

“[2] He feels shame at (the thought of engaging in) bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, mental misconduct.

“[3] He feels compunction over (the suffering that would result from) bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, mental misconduct.

“[4] He has heard much, has retained what he has heard, has stored what he has heard. Whatever teachings are admirable in the beginning, admirable in the middle, admirable in the end, that—in their meaning & expression—proclaim the holy life that is entirely complete & pure: those he has listened to often, retained, discussed, accumulated, examined with his mind, and well-penetrated in terms of his views.

“[5] He keeps his persistence aroused for abandoning unskillful qualities and taking on skillful qualities. He is steadfast, solid in his effort, not shirking his duties with regard to skillful qualities.

“[6] He is mindful, highly meticulous, remembering & able to call to mind even things that were done & said long ago.

“[7] He is discerning, endowed with discernment of arising & passing away—noble, penetrating, leading to the right ending of stress.

“This is how the disciple of the noble ones is endowed with seven qualities.

“And how does the disciple of the noble ones obtain at will—without trouble or difficulty—the four jhānas that constitute heightened awareness and a pleasant abiding in the here & now? There is the case where, quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, the disciple of the noble ones 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 how the disciple of the noble ones obtains at will—without trouble or difficulty—the four jhānas that constitute heightened awareness and a pleasant abiding in the here & now.

“Now, when a disciple of the noble ones is consummate in virtue in this way, guards the doors to his sense faculties in this way, knows moderation in eating in this way, is devoted to wakefulness in this way, is endowed with seven qualities in this way, and obtains at will—without trouble or difficulty—the four jhānas that constitute heightened awareness and a pleasant abiding in the here & now in this way, then he is called a disciple of the noble ones who follows the practice for one in training, whose eggs are unspoiled, who is capable of breaking out, capable of awakening, capable of attaining the supreme rest from the yoke.4

“Just as if a hen had eight, ten, or twelve eggs that she covered rightly, warmed rightly, & incubated rightly: Even though this wish did not occur to her—‘O that my chicks might break through the egg shells with their spiked claws or beaks and hatch out safely!’—still it is possible that the chicks would break through the shells with their spiked claws or beaks and hatch out safely. In the same way, when a disciple of the noble ones is consummate in virtue in this way, guards the doors to his sense faculties in this way, knows moderation in eating in this way, is devoted to wakefulness in this way, is endowed with seven qualities in this way, and obtains at will—without trouble or difficulty—the four jhānas that constitute heightened awareness and a pleasant abiding in the here & now in this way, then he is called a disciple of the noble ones who follows the practice for one in training, whose eggs are unspoiled, who is capable of breaking out, capable of awakening, capable of attaining the supreme rest from the yoke.

“Now when the disciple of the noble ones has arrived at this purity of equanimity & mindfulness, he recollects his manifold past lives, i.e., one birth, two… five, ten… fifty, a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand, many eons of cosmic contraction, many eons of cosmic expansion, many eons of cosmic contraction & expansion: ‘There I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure & pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose there. There too I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure & pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose here.’ Thus he recollects his manifold past lives in their modes & details. This is his first breaking out, like that of the hen’s chicks from their shells.

“When the disciple of the noble ones has arrived at this purity of equanimity & mindfulness, he sees—by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human—beings passing away & re-appearing, and he discerns how they are inferior & superior, beautiful & ugly, fortunate & unfortunate in accordance with their kamma: ‘These beings—who were endowed with bad conduct of body, speech & mind, who reviled noble ones, held wrong views and undertook actions under the influence of wrong views—with the break-up of the body, after death, have re-appeared in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. But these beings—who were endowed with good conduct of body, speech, & mind, who did not revile noble ones, who held right views and undertook actions under the influence of right views—with the break-up of the body, after death, have re-appeared in a good destination, a heavenly world.’ Thus—by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human—he sees beings passing away & re-appearing, and he discerns how they are inferior & superior, beautiful & ugly, fortunate & unfortunate in accordance with their kamma. This is his second breaking out, like that of the hen’s chicks from their shells.

“When the disciple of the noble ones has arrived at this purity of equanimity & mindfulness, he enters & remains in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having directly known & realized them for himself right in the here & now.5 This is his third breaking out, like that of the hen’s chicks from their shells.

“Now, when the disciple of the noble ones is consummate in virtue, that is a matter of his conduct. When he guards the doors to his sense faculties… knows moderation in eating… is devoted to wakefulness… is endowed with seven qualities, that is a matter of his conduct. When he obtains at will—without trouble or difficulty—the four jhānas that constitute heightened awareness and a pleasant abiding in the here & now, that is a matter of his conduct.

“When he recollects his manifold past lives… in their modes & details, that is a matter of his clear-knowing. When he sees—by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human—beings passing away & re-appearing.… When he enters & remains in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having directly known & realized them for himself right in the here & now, that is a matter of his clear knowing.

“This, Mahānāma, is called a disciple of the noble ones who is consummate in clear-knowing, consummate in conduct, consummate in clear-knowing & conduct. And by the Brahmā Sanaṅkumāra this verse was said:

‘The noble warrior is the best among people

when judging by clan.

But a person consummate

in clear-knowing & conduct,

is the best of beings

human & divine.’

“This verse was well-sung by the Brahmā Sanaṅkumāra, not ill-sung; well-said, not ill-said; connected with the goal, not unconnected with the goal. It was endorsed by the Blessed One.”

Then the Blessed One got up and said to Ven. Ānanda, “Good, good, Ānanda. What you have said to the Kapilavatthu Sakyans about the person who follows the practice for one in training is good.”

That is what Ven. Ānanda said, and the Teacher approved. Gratified, the Kapilavatthu Sakyans delighted in Ven. Ānanda’s words.

Notes

1. According to the Commentary, this was a hall built to receive royal guests, together with their entourages.

2. This phrase—“the person who follows the practice for one in higher training”—translates the Pali phrase, sekho pāṭipado. Although this phrase may be taken as two separate words, the Commentary treats it as a compound and translates it as “one

who follows the sekha-paṭipadā." Grammatically, as a compound, the form is strange, with the first member maintaining its case ending, instead of being reduced to a stem form connected with the following member of the compound, as in a normal compound. However, this form has been found in other parts of the Canon as well, and modern grammarians have coined a term to describe it: a syntactical compound. I have thus followed the Commentary in my translation.

"One in training" is a person who has attained at least stream entry, but not yet arahantship.

3. The chief of the Kapilavatthu Sakyans. See AN 3:73; AN 11:12; and AN 11:13.

4. The yoke is fourfold: the yoke of sensuality, the yoke of becoming, the yoke of views, & the yoke of ignorance. See AN 4:10.

5. At this point, one becomes an asekha, one no longer in training because one's training is complete. In other words, one is an arahant.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: SN 22:101; SN 48:53; SN 55:1; AN 4:37; AN 7:6