

MN 53

Sekha Sutta

“The Noble Disciple in Training”

Translated by Bhikkhu Candana

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I have personally heard this.

At one time, the Lord was staying among the Sakyans at Nigrodha’s monastery, near Kapilavatthu.

It was during that time that a new assembly hall for the community had just been constructed for the Sakyans of Kapilavatthu, which had not yet been used nor occupied by any recluse, brahmin, or human being. Then, the Sakyans of Kapilavatthu approached The Blessed One, and after having greeted The Blessed One, they all sat down to one side.

Now, as they were sitting at a respectful distance, the Sakyans of Kapilavatthu spoke by addressing The Blessed One:

“Bhante, we now have a new assembly hall for the community that has just been constructed for the Sakyans of Kapilavatthu; one that has not yet been used nor occupied by any recluse, brahmin or human being.

We ask that The Blessed One be the first to use it; only then it would be appropriate for us Sakyans of Kapilavatthu to use it. That way, afterwards, and for a long time, this would be for the welfare and happiness of all Sakyans of Kapilavatthu.”

And The Blessed One consented by remaining silent.

Then, on seeing how The Blessed One approved through His silence, the Sakyans of Kapilavatthu got up from their seats, and after circling The Blessed One respectfully and while keeping him on their right, they departed to the newly constructed assembly hall. There, the Sākyans of Kapilavatthu prepared the space by spreading carpets throughout, and arranging seating cushions, setting up a water jug and lighting an oil lamp, and then they went back to The Blessed One and after saluting him respectfully and while sitting to one side, reported on their preparations, by announcing:

“May The Blessed Lord come to the assembly hall, at his convenience.”

Then, by putting on his robes and taking his outer robe and alms bowl, The Blessed One went to the Sākyans’ newly constructed assembly hall accompanied by His Bhikkhus. Once there, He washed His feet before entering the town hall, as He sat on a seat made ready for Him by the central pillar, facing the East. The Bhikkhus, in turn also having washed their feet, entered the

hall as well, as they sat along the Western wall, with The Blessed One being in front of them, as they faced the East. Then, the Sākyans of Kapilavatthu also having washed their feet, entered the assembly hall, and sat down along the Eastern wall, with The Blessed One in front of them, as they faced the West. Once all were gathered, The Blessed Lord spent the majority of the night rousing, encouraging, educating, and inspiring the Sākyans of Kapilavatthu on the Dhamma, delighting them through His discourse. Afterwards, The Blessed One addressed the Venerable Ānanda and said:

“Ānanda, why don’t you speak to your fellow Sākyans of Kapilavatthu about the qualities of the Noble Disciple in Training, as I must now take a break from teaching, because my back is hurting. I need to lie down and give it some rest.”

“Yes, of course, Bhante!” The Venerable Ānanda replied to The Blessed One.

Then, after having folded his outer robe into four, The Blessed One laid down on his right side in the lion’s posture, with one foot overlapping the other, clearly mindful and aware, while also determining the time for Him to rise up.

Then, the Venerable Ānanda addressed Mahānāma the Sākyan, by saying:

“Now, Mahānāma, a Noble Disciple in Training possesses the discipline of moral conduct; he is restrained in his behavior, for he is steadfast in securely guarding his sense doors; he is moderate in eating and consuming, and lives with alertness, always intent on being vigilant; in his heart, he possesses the seven excellent qualities; furthermore, whenever he wants to, at will, and without any difficulty, he attains to the four *jhānas* which are pure forms of mental respite, happy states of rest, which he resorts to with ease, here and now.

“And how, Mahānāma, does a Noble Disciple in Training possess the discipline of moral conduct?

Here, Mahānāma, a Noble Disciple in Training lives and conducts himself with high moral standards; he is virtuous, ethical, and restrained according to the discipline of the Pātimokkha, conducting himself with right conduct, while seeing the danger in the slightest fault, adhering to the code of discipline, the Pātimokkha.

It is this manner, Mahānāma, that a Noble Disciple in Training possesses the discipline of moral conduct.

“And how, Mahānāma, is a Noble Disciple in Training restrained in his behavior, being steadfast in securely guarding his sense doors?

“Here, Mahānāma, the Noble Disciple in Training, on seeing an object with the eyes, is not grabbed by its features nor drawn in by its details, as he restrains himself from whatever is unwholesome. Thus, he attentively watches over his sight and guards it, so that coveting or aversion towards the object seen does not invade and overwhelm his mind. On hearing a sound with the ears, he is not grabbed by its features nor drawn in by its details, as he restrains himself from whatever is unwholesome. Thus, he attentively watches over his hearing and guards it, so

that coveting or aversion towards the object heard does not invade and overwhelm his mind. On smelling an odor with the nose, he is not grabbed by its features nor drawn in by its details, as he restrains himself from whatever is unwholesome. Thus, he attentively watches over his smelling and guards it, so that coveting or aversion towards the object smelled does not invade and overwhelm his mind. On tasting a flavor with the tongue, he is not grabbed by its features nor drawn in by its details, as he restrains himself from whatever is unwholesome. Thus, he attentively watches over his tasting and guards it, so that coveting or aversion towards the object tasted does not invade and overwhelm his mind. On touching a tangible with the body, he is not grabbed by its features nor drawn in by its details, as he restrains himself from whatever is unwholesome. Thus, he attentively watches over his touching and guards it, so that coveting or aversion towards the object touched does not invade and overwhelm his mind. On cognizing a mind-object with the mind, he is not grabbed by its features nor drawn in by its details, as he restrains himself from whatever is unwholesome. Thus, he attentively watches over his cognizing and guards it, so that coveting or aversion towards the object cognized does not invade and overwhelm his mind.

It is this manner, Mahānāma, that a Noble Disciple in Training is restrained in his behavior, for he is steadfast in securely guarding the doors of his senses.

“And how, Mahānāma, is a Noble Disciple in Training one who is moderate in eating and consuming?”

“Here, Mahānāma, a Noble Disciple in Training takes food with careful reflection, and not for enjoyment, intoxication, or to look beautiful. He knows that consumption of food is a necessary sustenance for the upkeep and maintenance of this body, so it could continue functioning well, thus avoiding harm or getting sick, which is needed in order to lead the Holy Life. Thus, he considers: *‘I put an end to earlier feelings and do not arouse new feelings. May my consumption of food not hinder my calm and balanced mind, and may I live comfortably and blamelessly.’* It is this manner, Mahānāma, that a Noble Disciple in Training is moderate in eating and consuming.

“And how Mahānāma, does a Noble Disciple in Training live with alertness, always intent on being vigilant?”

“Here, Mahānāma, throughout the daytime, the Noble Disciple in Training, whether sitting, standing, walking back and forth in a suitable place, constantly works to mindfully purify his mind of all obstructive mental states.

Similarly, in the first watch of the night, the Noble Disciple in Training, whether sitting, standing, walking back and forth in a suitable place, constantly works to mindfully purify his mind of all obstructive mental states.

In the middle watch of the night, the Noble Disciple in Training, while lying down on his right side in the lion’s posture, in a suitable place, keeping one foot over the other, goes to sleep mindfully, having already determined the exact time for waking up.

And on waking up, in the last watch of the night, the Noble Disciple in Training, whether sitting, standing, walking back and forth in a suitable place, constantly works to mindfully purify his mind of obstructive mental states.

It is in this manner, Mahānāma, that a Noble Disciple in Training lives with alertness, always intent on being vigilant.

And how, Mahānāma, does a Noble Disciple in Training possess the seven excellent qualities in his heart?

1. “Here, Mahānāma, the Noble Disciple in Training possesses unshakable confidence, for he has the faith in the Awakening of the Tathāgata, as he knows clearly: *‘The Blessed One is an Arahant, Perfectly Awakened, endowed with Sublime Knowledge and Supremely Pure Conduct, the Well-Gone, the Knower of worlds, the Incomparable Tamer of those to be tamed, the Teacher of gods and humans, the Enlightened and Blessed.’*

2. “The Noble Disciple in Training possesses wise moral shame, for he is ashamed of any wrong behavior, whether in the form of wrong actions committed through the body, wrong actions committed through speech, wrong actions committed through thought. Thus, in regard to all of these, he possesses wise moral shame to not even allow himself to behave in any way that may lead himself astray, to fall into evil and unwholesome mental states.

3. “Similarly, the Noble Disciple in Training possesses wise moral fear of any wrong behavior, whether in the form of wrong actions committed through the body, wrong actions committed through speech, wrong actions committed through thought. Thus, in regard to all of these, he possesses wise moral fear to not even allow himself to behave in any way that may lead himself astray, to fall into evil and unwholesome mental states.

4. “Furthermore, the Noble Disciple in Training has learned and studied much for his personal development, to gain a better understanding of the Dhamma, constantly recalling what he has memorized by heart, applying the Teachings he has learned throughout his life, whereby he understands with appreciation the Dhamma that is beautiful in its beginning, beautiful at its middle, and beautiful in its end, full of meaning and balanced in its expression and phrasing, while declaring and revealing to him the completeness and purity of the Holy Life. Thus, the Noble Disciple, having studied and learned, while memorizing them, continuously places his attention on them, examining them, whereby he experientially tastes their truth by penetrating them with Right View.

5. “Also, Mahānāma, the Noble Disciple in Training lives with diligence, tirelessly working to develop himself through wholesome actions in his behavior, while keeping his energy up, for he has within him persevering effort to walk away from all unwholesome actions, as he cultivates and mindfully purifies his mind of all obstructive states.

6. “Furthermore, the Noble Disciple in Training is ever mindful; he remains possessed with superior level of mindfulness and full awareness, along with discernment, as he remembers whatever has been said and done long ago.

7. “Also, the Noble Disciple in Training is wise, for he possesses within his heart the wisdom with which he sees the constant appearance and disappearance of phenomena, along with the penetrative insight that leads to the complete end of suffering and anguish.

Therefore, Mahānāma, it is in this manner, that a Noble Disciple in Training possesses the seven excellent qualities in his heart.

“And how, Mahānāma, is the Noble Disciple in Training, whenever he wants to, at will, and without any difficulty, able to attain to the four *jhānas* which are pure forms of mental respite, happy states of rest, which he resorts to with ease, here and now?

“Here, Mahānāma, the Noble Disciple in Training, by secluding himself from sensual pleasures, and pulling himself inwards from all manners of evil and unwholesome states, enters upon and abides in the first *jhāna*, which is accompanied by thinking and pondering, along with joy and pleasure that arise from such a seclusion. Further, through the disappearance of both thinking and pondering, he enters upon and abides in the second *jhāna*, which has self-confidence and unification of mind with no more thinking and pondering, but while experiencing joy and pleasure that are the result of his deepening of collectedness of mind. Furthermore, the Noble Disciple enters the third *jhāna*, about which the Noble Ones declare: “Such a one mindfully abides in happiness, with an ever-present equanimity.” Mindful and fully aware, the Noble Disciple continues feeling pleasure and happiness within the body, and with the disappearance of joy, he remains experiencing equanimity. Finally, the Noble Disciple, by giving up both pleasure and pain altogether, and by already having gone beyond both delight and distress, where he no longer experiences pleasure nor discomfort, and while remaining in the ever-present state of purifying mindfulness, with the overwhelming presence of equanimity, he attains to the fourth *jhāna*.

“It is in this manner, Mahānāma, that the Noble Disciple in Training, whenever he wants to, at will, and without any difficulty, is able to attain to the four *jhānas* which are pure forms of mental respite, happy states of rest, which he resorts to with ease, here and now.

“When, Mahānāma, the Noble Disciple in Training possesses the discipline of moral conduct, he is restrained in his behavior, for he is steadfast in securely guarding the doors of his senses; he is moderate in eating and consuming, and lives with alertness, always intent on being vigilant; in his heart, he possesses the seven excellent qualities; furthermore, whenever he wants to, at will, and without any difficulties, he attains to the four *jhānas*, which are pure forms of mental respite, happy states of rest, which he resorts to with ease, here and now. Then, Mahānāma, he is declared to be ‘a Noble Disciple in Training’ who is on his way to Full Awakening, for he is supported by the solid foundation of the Dhamma; someone who is ready and assured the breakthrough of Awakening; the one ‘whose eggs are unspoiled and ready to be hatched,’ for he is soon to win the matchless safety, as he secures his freedom from all bondage.

Mahānāma, imagine there was a chicken that sat on its eight or ten or a dozen eggs she had laid, while she properly keeps tending to them by keeping them warm and properly incubated, as she sits carefully on them, protectively.

“Now, Mahānāma, whether or not that chicken thinks to herself: ‘*O, if only my chicks could pierce through their eggshells by clawing their way out with their feet or beaks; if only they could safely come out and break free!*’, those chicks would still break free, safely coming out by piercing through their eggshells, clawing their way out with their feet and beaks!

“In the same manner, Mahānāma, the Noble Disciple in Training possesses the discipline of moral conduct, he is restrained in his behavior, for he is steadfast in securely guarding the doors of his senses; he is moderate in eating and consuming, and lives with alertness, always intent on being vigilant; in his heart, he possesses the seven excellent qualities; furthermore, whenever he wants to, at will, and without any difficulty, he attains to the four *jhānas*, which are pure forms of mental respite, happy states of rest, which he resorts to with ease, here and now. Then, Mahānāma, he is declared to be ‘a Noble Disciple in Training’ who is on his way to Full Awakening, for he is supported by the solid foundation of the Dhamma; someone who is ready and assured the breakthrough of Awakening; the one ‘whose eggs are unspoiled and ready to be hatched,’ for he is soon to win the matchless safety, as he secures his freedom from all bondage.

1. “Such a Noble Disciple in Training, Mahānāma, having arrived to this state of supreme purity through equanimity and thanks to his mindfulness, recollects his many past lives in all their details and features; that is, one birth, two births, three births, four births, five births, ten births, twenty births, thirty, forty, fifty births, a hundred births, a thousand births, a hundred thousand births, many eons of world-contractions, many eons of world expansions, many eons of world contractions and expansions, recalling thus:

‘There I was so named, of such a family, with such an appearance, such was my food and sustenance, such were my experiences of pleasure and pain, such was my life-span; and after passing away from there, I was reborn elsewhere; and there too I was so named, of such a family, with such an appearance, such was my food and sustenance, such were my experiences of pleasure and pain, and such was my life-span; and passing away from there, I was reborn here.’ Now, this is the first breakthrough, much like that chick breaking out of its eggshell.

2. “And then, Mahānāma, such a Noble Disciple in Training, having arrived at this state of supreme purity through equanimity and thanks to his mindfulness, can employ the psychic power of knowing the destinations of beings as they die and reappear in the different realms of existence. Thus, with the Divine Eye, which is far superior and pure compared to those of human beings and other animals, he sees clearly all types of beings dying at the end of life, whether being reborn into exalted or miserable states, beautiful or ugly, fortunate, or unfortunate, as he sees and understands clearly how beings pass on to different states according to their actions, thus:

“These good beings who behaved badly through their bodily actions, their speech, and their mental actions, being disrespectful towards the Noble Ones, while grasping onto their wrong views, and on account of their wrong views in action, with the breakup of the body, after death, are now reborn in a state of misery, utter deprivation, in a bad destination, in evil states, and in the hells; but these worthy beings who behaved virtuously through their bodily actions, their speech, and their mental actions, being respectful towards the Noble Ones, being right in their views, and on account of their right views in action, with the breakup of the body, after death, are now reborn in a state of happiness, in a good destination, even in the heavenly world.”

“Thus, with the Divine Eye, which is far superior to those of human beings and other animals, he sees clearly beings dying at the end of life and being reborn into exalted or miserable states, beautiful or ugly, fortunate or unfortunate, as he sees and understands clearly how beings pass on to different states according to their actions.”

This, then is the second breakthrough, much like another one of those chicks breaking out of its eggshell.

3. “Now that, Mahānāma, the Noble Disciple in Training, having arrived to this supremely pure state of equanimity and through the power of his mindfulness and by the destruction of all his mental contaminants, here and now, and in this very body, finally attains the spotless Freedom of the Heart, along with the Freedom through Wisdom, having directly known and intuitively understood and realized it, through his own efforts. This becomes his natural state of being, as he dwells in it.

This is his third breakthrough, much like another one of those chicks breaking out of its eggshell.

“Therefore, Mahānāma, such a Noble Disciple in Training, when declared to be possessed by the discipline of moral conduct, this means he is the embodiment of moral conduct; when he is declared as being restrained in his behavior, for he is steadfast in securely guarding the doors of his senses, this means he is the very embodiment of restraint; when he is declared as being moderate in eating and consuming, this means he is the very embodiment of moderation; when it is declared that he lives with alertness, always intent on being vigilant, this means he is the embodiment of vigilant alertness; when he is declared as possessing the seven excellent qualities in his heart, this means he is the very embodiment of these seven excellent qualities; furthermore, when he is declared as one who, whenever he wants to, at will, and without any difficulty, is able to attain to the four *jhānas*, which are pure forms of mental respite, happy states of rest, which he resorts to with ease, here and now, this means that these states are with him, and are part and parcel of his very conduct.

“And when, Mahānāma, such a Noble Disciple in Training recollects his many past lives in all their details and features, this is declared as being the outcome of his true knowledge and direct experiencing.

Similarly, when the Noble Disciple in Training employs the psychic power of knowing the destinations of beings as they die and reappear in the different realms of existence, seeing and understanding clearly how beings pass on to different states according to their actions, this is declared as being the outcome of his true knowledge and direct experiencing.

Similarly, when the Noble Disciple in Training, here and now, and in this very body, finally attains the spotless Freedom of the Heart, along with the Freedom through Wisdom, as a result of the destruction of all his mental contaminants, having directly known and intuitively understood and realized it, through his own efforts, whereby it becomes his natural state of being, as he dwells in it; this too is declared as being the outcome of his true knowledge and direct experiencing.

“For this reason, Mahānāma, this Noble Disciple in Training is declared to be perfectly established in true knowledge, perfectly established in good conduct, and perfectly established in both true knowledge and good conduct.

“Also, Mahānāma, this verse was uttered by Brahmā Sanankumāra Himself:

*‘Although a noble warrior king is considered as the best
Among those people who value royal lineages;
But, the truly best among both gods and humans
Is the one who is perfectly established in both true knowledge and good conduct.*

“Now, Mahānāma, this verse was appropriately and justly sung, not wrongly or inappropriately, by Brahmā Sanankumāra; it was appropriately and justly uttered, not wrongly or inappropriately; for it is meaningful in its significance, as it is directly connected with the goal, having nothing to do with what is not the goal. As such, it has been approved by The Blessed Lord Himself.”

Then, The Blessed Lord, having risen from His rest, addressed the Venerable Ānanda, by saying:

“It is good, it is good, Ānanda; it is good that you, Ānanda, spoke to the Sākyans of Kapilavatthu on the qualities of the Noble Disciple in Training.”

These were the words spoken by the Venerable Ānanda, which the Great Teacher approved. And the Sākyans of Kapilavatthu were inspired and happy in having listened to the Venerable Ānanda’s words.

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