MN 61 — Ambalatthika-rahulovada Sutta: Instructions to Rahula at Mango Stone

English translation by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

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

Completeness: ABBREVIATED. Every source-unit character is preserved, including introductions, notes and verse structure. Thanissaro's collection-level note explicitly states that repetitions were cut: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/about.html. This is evidence about the translation method, not an assertion that every individual unit contains an omission; no repetitions reconstructed.

Text

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Rajagaha, at the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrels' Feeding Ground.

At that time Ven. Rahula[1] was staying at the Mango Stone. Then the Blessed One, arising from his seclusion in the late afternoon, went to where Ven. Rahula was staying at the Mango Stone. Ven. Rahula saw him coming from afar and, on seeing him, set out a seat & water for washing the feet. The Blessed One sat down on the seat set out and, having sat down, washed his feet. Ven. Rahula, bowing down to the Blessed One, sat to one side.

Then the Blessed One, having left a little bit of water in the water dipper, said to Ven. Rahula, "Rahula, do you see this little bit of left-over water remaining in the water dipper?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's how little of a contemplative[2] there is in anyone who feels no shame at telling a deliberate lie."

Having tossed away the little bit of left-over water, the Blessed One said to Ven. Rahula, "Rahula, do you see how this little bit of left-over water is tossed away?"

"Yes, sir."

"Rahula, whatever there is of a contemplative in anyone who feels no shame at telling a deliberate lie is tossed away just like that."

Having turned the water dipper upside down, the Blessed One said to Ven. Rahula, "Rahula, do you see how this water dipper is turned upside down?"

"Yes, sir."

"Rahula, whatever there is of a contemplative in anyone who feels no shame at telling a deliberate lie is turned upside down just like that."

Having turned the water dipper right-side up, the Blessed One said to Ven. Rahula, "Rahula, do you see how empty & hollow this water dipper is?"

"Yes, sir."

"Rahula, whatever there is of a contemplative in anyone who feels no shame at telling a deliberate lie is empty & hollow just like that.

"Rahula, it's like a royal elephant: immense, pedigreed, accustomed to battles, its tusks like chariot poles. Having gone into battle, it uses its forefeet & hindfeet, its forequarters & hindquarters, its head & ears & tusks & tail, but keeps protecting its trunk. The elephant trainer notices that and thinks, 'This royal elephant has not given up its life to the king.' But when the royal elephant... having gone into battle, uses its forefeet & hindfeet, its forequarters & hindquarters, its head & ears & tusks & tail & his trunk, the trainer notices that and thinks, 'This royal elephant has given up its life to the king. There is nothing it will not do.'

"In the same way, Rahula, when anyone feels no shame in telling a deliberate lie, there is no evil, I tell you, he will not do. Thus, Rahula, you should train yourself, 'I will not tell a deliberate lie even in jest.'

"What do you think, Rahula: What is a mirror for?"

"For reflection, sir."

"In the same way, Rahula, bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions are to be done with repeated reflection.

"Whenever you want to do a bodily action, you should reflect on it: 'This bodily action I want to do — would it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Would it

be an unskillful bodily action, with painful consequences, painful results?' If, on reflection, you know that it would lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it would be an unskillful bodily action with painful consequences, painful results, then any bodily action of that sort is absolutely unfit for you to do. But if on reflection you know that it would not cause affliction... it would be a skillful bodily action with pleasant consequences, pleasant results, then any bodily action of that sort is fit for you to do.

"While you are doing a bodily action, you should reflect on it: 'This bodily action I am doing — is it leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it an unskillful bodily action, with painful consequences, painful results?' If, on reflection, you know that it is leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both... you should give it up. But if on reflection you know that it is not... you may continue with it.

"Having done a bodily action, you should reflect on it: 'This bodily action I have done — did it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Was it an unskillful bodily action, with painful consequences, painful results?' If, on reflection, you know that it led to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it was an unskillful bodily action with painful consequences, painful results, then you should confess it, reveal it, lay it open to the Teacher or to a knowledgeable companion in the holy life. Having confessed it... you should exercise restraint in the future. But if on reflection you know that it did not lead to affliction... it was a skillful bodily action with pleasant consequences, pleasant results, then you should stay mentally refreshed & joyful, training day & night in skillful mental qualities.

"Whenever you want to do a verbal action, you should reflect on it: 'This verbal action I want to do — would it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Would it be an unskillful verbal action, with painful consequences, painful results?' If, on reflection, you know that it would lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it would be an unskillful verbal action with painful consequences, painful results, then any verbal action of that sort is absolutely unfit for you to do. But if on reflection you know that it would not cause affliction... it would be a skillful verbal action with pleasant consequences, pleasant results, then any verbal action of that sort is fit for you to do.

"While you are doing a verbal action, you should reflect on it: 'This verbal action I am doing — is it leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it an unskillful verbal action, with painful consequences, painful results?' If, on reflection, you know that it is leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both... you should give it up. But if on reflection you know that it is not... you may continue with it.

"Having done a verbal action, you should reflect on it: 'This verbal action I have done — did it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Was it an unskillful verbal action, with painful consequences, painful results?' If, on reflection, you know that it led to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it was an unskillful verbal action with painful consequences, painful results, then you should confess it, reveal it, lay it open to the Teacher or to a knowledgeable companion in the holy life. Having confessed it... you should exercise restraint in the future. But if on reflection you know that it did not lead to affliction... it was a skillful verbal action with pleasant consequences, pleasant results, then

you should stay mentally refreshed & joyful, training day & night in skillful mental qualities.

"Whenever you want to do a mental action, you should reflect on it: 'This mental action I want to do — would it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Would it be an unskillful mental action, with painful consequences, painful results?' If, on reflection, you know that it would lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it would be an unskillful mental action with painful consequences, painful results, then any mental action of that sort is absolutely unfit for you to do. But if on reflection you know that it would not cause affliction... it would be a skillful mental action with pleasant consequences, pleasant results, then any mental action of that sort is fit for you to do.

"While you are doing a mental action, you should reflect on it: 'This mental action I am doing — is it leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it an unskillful mental action, with painful consequences, painful results?' If, on reflection, you know that it is leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both... you should give it up. But if on reflection you know that it is not... you may continue with it.

"Having done a mental action, you should reflect on it: 'This mental action I have done — did it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Was it an unskillful mental action, with painful consequences, painful results?' If, on reflection, you know that it led to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it was an unskillful mental action with painful consequences, painful results, then you should feel distressed, ashamed, & disgusted with it. Feeling distressed, ashamed, & disgusted with it, you should exercise restraint in the future. But if on reflection you know that it did not lead to affliction... it was a skillful mental action with pleasant consequences, pleasant results, then you should stay mentally refreshed & joyful, training day & night in skillful mental qualities.

"Rahula, all those brahmans & contemplatives in the course of the past who purified their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions, did it through repeated reflection on their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions in just this way.

"All those brahmans & contemplatives in the course of the future who will purify their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions, will do it through repeated reflection on their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions in just this way.

"All those brahmans & contemplatives at present who purify their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions, do it through repeated reflection on their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions in just this way.

"Thus, Rahula, you should train yourself: 'I will purify my bodily actions through repeated reflection. I will purify my verbal actions through repeated reflection. I will purify my mental actions through repeated reflection.' That's how you should train yourself."

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, Ven. Rahula delighted in the Blessed One's words.

Notes

1.

Rahula: the Buddha's son, who according to the Commentary was seven years old when this discourse was delivered to him.

2.

Samañña. Throughout ancient cultures, the terminology of music was used to describe the moral quality of people and actions. Discordant intervals or poorly-tuned musical instruments were metaphors for evil; harmonious intervals and well-tuned instruments, metaphors for good. In Pali, the term sama — "even" — described an instrument tuned on-pitch. There is a famous passage (in AN 6.55) where the Buddha reminds Sona Kolivisa — who had been over-exerting himself in the practice — that a lute sounds appealing only if the strings are neither too taut or too lax, but "evenly" tuned. This image would have special resonances with the Buddha's teaching on the middle way. It also adds meaning to the term samana — monk or contemplative — which the texts frequently mention as being derived from sama. The word samañña — "evenness," the quality of being in tune — also means the quality of being a contemplative: The true contemplative is always in tune with what is proper and good.

See also: MN 62; MN 147.