MN 66 — MN 66 The Quail Simile | Laḍukikopama Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

The Quail Simile

Laḍukikopama Sutta (MN 66)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying among the Aṅguttarāpans at an Aṅguttarāpan town named Āpaṇa. Then, early in the morning—adjusting his lower robe and carrying his outer robe & bowl—he went into Āpaṇa for alms. Having gone for alms in Āpaṇa and returning from his alms round after his meal, he went to a certain forest grove for the day’s abiding. Plunging into the grove, he sat down for his day’s abiding at the root of a certain tree.

Ven. Udāyin, too, early in the morning—adjusting his lower robe and carrying his outer robe & bowl—went into Āpaṇa for alms. Having gone for alms in Āpaṇa and returning

from his alms round after his meal, he went to that forest grove for the day's abiding. Plunging into the grove, he sat down for his day's abiding at the root of a certain tree. Then, as he was alone in seclusion, this line of thinking arose in his awareness: "So many painful things has the Blessed One taken away from us! So many pleasant things has he brought us! So many unskillful qualities has the Blessed One taken away from us! So many skillful qualities has he brought us!"

Then, Ven. Udāyin, emerging from his seclusion in the evening, went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One: "Just now, lord, as I was alone in seclusion, this line of thinking arose in my awareness: 'So many painful things has the Blessed One taken away from us! So many pleasant things has he brought us! So many unskillful qualities has the Blessed One taken away from us! So many skillful qualities has he brought us!' For in the past, lord, we used to eat in the morning, in the evening, and in the day at the wrong time (the afternoon). Then there was the time when the Blessed One addressed the monks, saying, 'Monks, please discontinue that daytime meal at the wrong time.' At the time I was upset, at the time I was sad, (thinking,) 'The exquisite staple & non-staple foods that faithful householders give us during the day at the wrong time: even that the Blessed One has us abandon; even that the One Well-Gone has us relinquish!' But, out of consideration for our love & respect for the Blessed One, out of consideration for shame & fear of wrong-doing, we abandoned that daytime meal at the wrong time.

"So we ate both in the evening & in the morning. Then there was the time when the Blessed One addressed the monks, saying, 'Monks, please discontinue that evening meal at the wrong time.' At the time I was upset, at the time I was sad, (thinking,) 'The more exquisitely prepared of our two meals: even that the Blessed One has us abandon; even that the One Well-Gone has us relinquish!' In the past, lord, a man—obtaining some soup during the day—would say to his wife, 'Put this aside and we will all eat it together in the evening.' (Almost) all food preparation is done in the evening, and almost none during the day. But, out of consideration for our love & respect for the Blessed One, out of consideration for shame & fear of wrong-doing, we abandoned that evening meal at the wrong time.

"In the past, lord, monks going for alms in the pitch black of the night have walked into a waste-water pool, fallen into a cesspit, stumbled over a thorn patch, or stumbled over a sleeping cow. They have encountered young hooligans on the way to or from a crime. They have been propositioned by women. Once I went for alms in the pitch black of night. A woman washing a pot saw me by a lightning flash and, on seeing me, screamed out: 'I'm done for! A demon is after me!' When this was said, I said to her, 'I'm no demon, sister. I'm a monk waiting for alms.' 'Then you're a monk whose daddy's dead and whose mommy's dead. Better for you, monk, that your belly were slit open with a sharp butcher's knife than this prowling for alms for your belly's sake in the pitch black of the night!" On recollecting that, lord, the thought occurred to me: 'So many painful things has the Blessed One taken away from us! So many pleasant things has he brought us! So many unskillful qualities has the Blessed One taken away from us! So many skillful qualities has he brought us!'"

“In the same way, Udāyin, there are some worthless men who, when I tell them, ‘Abandon this,’ say: ‘What? Over this little, trifling thing? He’s too much of a stickler, this contemplative.’ They don’t abandon it. They’re rude to me and to the monks keen on training. For them that’s a strong snare, a thick snare, a heavy snare, an unrotting snare, and a thick yoke.

“Suppose a quail were snared by a rotting creeper, by which it could expect injury, captivity, or death, and someone were to say, ‘This rotting creeper by which this quail is snared, and by which she could expect injury, captivity, or death, is for her a weak snare, a feeble snare, a rotting snare, an insubstantial snare.’ Would the person speaking that way be speaking rightly?”

“No, lord. That rotting creeper… is for her a strong snare, a thick snare, a heavy snare, an unrotting snare, and a thick yoke.

“In the same way, Udāyin, there are some worthless men who, when I tell them, ‘Abandon this,’ say: ‘What? This little, trifling thing? He’s too much of a stickler, this contemplative.’ They don’t abandon it. They’re rude to me and to the monks keen on training. For them that’s a strong snare, a thick snare, a heavy snare, an unrotting snare, and a thick yoke.

“Now there are some clansmen who, when I tell them, ‘Abandon this,’ say: ‘What? The Blessed One has us abandon, the One Well-Gone has us relinquish this little, trifling thing?’ But they abandon it and are not rude to me or to the monks keen on training. Having abandoned it, they live unconcerned, unruffled, their wants satisfied, with their mind like a wild deer. For them that’s a weak snare, a feeble snare, a rotting snare, an insubstantial snare.

“Suppose a royal elephant—immense, pedigreed, accustomed to battles, its tusks like chariot poles—were snared with thick leather snares, but by twisting its body a bit it could break & burst those snares and go off wherever it liked. And suppose someone were to say, ‘Those thick leather snares by which the royal elephant… was snared, but which—by twisting its body a bit— it could break & burst and go off wherever it liked: for him they were a strong snare, a thick snare, a heavy snare, an unrotting snare, and a thick yoke.’ Would the person speaking that way be speaking rightly?’

“No, lord. Those thick leather snares… were for him a weak snare, a feeble snare, a rotting snare, an insubstantial snare.”

“In the same way, Udāyin, there are some clansmen who, when I tell them, ‘Abandon this,’ say: ‘What? The Blessed One has us abandon, the One Well-Gone has us relinquish this little, trifling thing?’ But they abandon it and are not rude to me or to the monks keen on training. Having abandoned it, they live unconcerned, unruffled, their wants satisfied, with their mind like a wild deer. For them that’s a weak snare, a feeble snare, a rotting snare, an insubstantial snare.

“Suppose there were a poor person, penniless & indigent, with a single little shack—dilapidated, open to the crows, not the best sort; and a single bed—dilapidated, not the best sort; and a single pot of rice & gourd seeds—not the best sort; and a single wife, not the best sort. He would go to a park and see a monk—his hands & feet washed, after a delightful meal, sitting in the cool shade, committed to the heightened mind. The thought would occur to him: How happy the contemplative state! How free of disease the contemplative state! O that I—shaving off my hair & beard and donning the ochre robe—might go forth from the household life into homelessness!’ But being unable to abandon his single little shack—dilapidated, open to the crows, not the best sort; to abandon his single bed—dilapidated, not the best sort; to abandon his single pot of rice & gourd seeds—not the best sort; and to abandon his single wife, not the best sort, he wouldn’t be able to shave off his hair & beard, to don the ochre robe, or to go forth from the household life into homelessness. And suppose someone were to say, ‘That single little shack—dilapidated, open to the crows, not the best sort; that single bed—dilapidated, not the best sort; that single pot of rice & gourd seeds—not the best sort; and that single wife, not the best sort by which that man was snared, which he was unable to abandon, and because of which he couldn’t shave off his hair & beard, don the ochre robe, and go forth from the household life into homelessness: for him they were a weak snare, a feeble snare, a rotting snare, an insubstantial snare.’ Would the person speaking that way be speaking rightly?”

“No, lord. That single hut… that single bed… that single pot… that single wife… were for that man a strong snare, a thick snare, a heavy snare, an unrotting snare, and a thick yoke.”

“In the same way, Udāyin, there are some worthless men who, when I tell them, ‘Abandon this,’ say: ‘What? This little, trifling thing? He’s too much of a stickler, this contemplative.’ They don’t abandon it. They’re rude to me and to the monks keen on training. For them that’s a strong snare, a thick snare, a heavy snare, an unrotting snare, and a thick yoke.

“Now suppose, Udāyin, that there were a householder or householder’s son—rich, prosperous, & wealthy—with vast amounts of gold ingots, vast amounts of grain, a vast number of fields, a vast amount of land, a vast number of wives, and a vast number of male & female slaves. He would go to a park and see a monk—his hands & feet washed, after a delightful meal, sitting in the cool shade, committed to the heightened mind. The thought would occur to him: How happy the contemplative state! How free of disease the contemplative state! O that I—shaving off my hair & beard and donning the ochre robe—might go forth from the household life into homelessness!’ And being able to abandon his vast amounts of gold ingots, his vast amounts of grain, his vast number of fields, his vast amount of land, his vast number of wives, and his vast number of male & female slaves, he would be able to shave off his hair & beard, to don the ochre robe, and to go forth from the household life into homelessness. Now suppose someone were to say, ‘Those vast amounts of gold ingots… and a vast number of male & female slaves by which that householder or householder’s son was snared but which he was able to abandon so that he could shave off his hair & beard, don the ochre robe, and go forth from the household life into homelessness: for him they were a strong snare, a thick snare, a heavy

snare, an unrotting snare, and a thick yoke.' Would the person speaking that way be speaking rightly?"

"No, lord. Those vast amounts of gold ingots… were for him a weak snare, a feeble snare, a rotting snare, an insubstantial snare.'

"In the same way, Udāyin, there are some clansmen who, when I tell them, 'Abandon this,' say: 'What? The Blessed One has us abandon, the One Well-Gone has us relinquish this little, trifling thing?' But they abandon it and are not rude to me or to the monks keen on training. Having abandoned it, they live unconcerned, unruffled, their wants satisfied, with their mind like a wild deer. For them that's a weak snare, a feeble snare, a rotting snare, an insubstantial snare.

"Udāyin, there are these four types of people to be found existing in the world. Which four? There is the case where a certain person is practicing for the abandoning & relinquishing of acquisitions. As he is practicing for the abandoning & relinquishing of acquisitions, memories & resolves associated with acquisitions assail him. He acquiesces to them. He does not abandon them, destroy them, dispel them, or wipe them out of existence. I tell you, Udāyin, that this sort of person is fettered, not unfettered. Why is that? Because I have known the diversity of faculties with regard to this type of person.

"Then there is the case where a certain person practicing for the abandoning & relinquishing of acquisitions. As he is practicing for the abandoning & relinquishing of acquisitions, memories & resolves associated with acquisitions assail him. He does not acquiesce to them. He abandons them, destroys them, dispels them, & wipes them out of existence. I tell you, Udāyin, that this sort of person is fettered, not unfettered. Why is that? Because I have known the diversity of faculties with regard to this type of person.

"Then there is the case where a certain person is practicing for the abandoning & relinquishing of acquisitions. As he is practicing for the abandoning & relinquishing of acquisitions, then—from time to time, owing to lapses in mindfulness—he is assailed by memories & resolves associated with acquisitions. Slow is the arising of his mindfulness, but then he quickly abandons (those memories & resolves), destroys them, dispels them, & wipes them out of existence. Just as when two or three drops of water fall onto an iron pan heated all day: Slow is the falling of the drops of water, but they quickly vanish & disappear. In the same way, there is the case where a certain person is practicing for the abandoning & relinquishing of acquisitions. As he is practicing for the abandoning & relinquishing of acquisitions, then—from time to time, owing to lapses in mindfulness—he is assailed by memories & resolves associated with acquisitions. Slow is the arising of his mindfulness, but then he quickly abandons (those memories & resolves), destroys them, dispels them, & wipes them out of existence. I tell you, Udāyin, that this sort of person is fettered, not unfettered. Why is that? Because I have known the diversity of faculties with regard to this type of person.

"Then there is the case where a certain person, realizing that acquisitions are the root of suffering & stress, is without acquisitions, released in the ending of acquisitions. I tell you,

Udāyin, that this sort of person is unfettered, not fettered. Why is that? Because I have known the diversity of faculties with regard to this type of person.

“There are these four types of people to be found existing in the world.

“And, Udāyin, there are these five strings of sensuality. Which five? Forms cognizable via the eye—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, enticing, linked to sensual desire. Sounds cognizable via the ear…. Aromas cognizable via the nose…. Flavors cognizable via the tongue…. Tactile sensations cognizable via the body—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, enticing, linked to sensual desire. These are the five strings of sensuality. Now, any pleasure & happiness that arises dependent on these five strings of sensuality is called sensual pleasure, a filthy pleasure, a run-of-the-mill pleasure, an ignoble pleasure. And of this pleasure I say that it is not to be associated with, not to be developed, not to be pursued, that it is to be feared.

“Now, there is the case where a monk—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—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 called renunciation-pleasure, seclusion-pleasure, calm-pleasure, self-awakening-pleasure. And of this pleasure I say that it is to be associated with, to be developed, to be pursued, that it is not to be feared.

“Now, there is the case where a monk—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. That, I tell you, comes under the perturbable. And what comes under the perturbable there? The directed thoughts & evaluations that have not ceased there: That’s what comes under the perturbable there.

“There is the case where a monk, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, enters & remains in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. That, I tell you, comes under the perturbable. And what comes under the perturbable there? The rapture-pleasure that has not ceased there: That’s what comes under the perturbable there.

“There is the case where a monk, with the fading of rapture, 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.’ That, I tell you, comes under the perturbable. And what comes under the perturbable

there? The equanimity-pleasure that has not ceased there: That's what comes under the perturbable there.

"There is the case where a monk, with the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress—enters & remains in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. Now that, I tell you, comes under the imperturbable.1

"Now there is the case where a monk... enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. That, I tell you, isn't enough. Abandon it, I tell you. Transcend it, I tell you. And what is its transcending?

"There is the case where a monk... enters & remains in the second jhāna.... That is its transcending. But that, too, I tell you, isn't enough. Abandon it, I tell you. Transcend it, I tell you. And what is its transcending?

"There is the case where a monk... enters & remains in the third jhāna .... That is its transcending. But that, too, I tell you, isn't enough. Abandon it, I tell you. Transcend it, I tell you. And what is its transcending?

"There is the case where a monk... enters & remains in the fourth jhāna.... That is its transcending. But that, too, I tell you, isn't enough. Abandon it, I tell you. Transcend it, I tell you. And what is its transcending?

"Then there is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of perceptions of (physical) form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not attending to perceptions of multiplicity, (perceiving,) 'Infinite space,' enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of space. That is its transcending. But that, too, I tell you, isn't enough. Abandon it, I tell you. Transcend it, I tell you. And what is its transcending?

"Then there is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of space, (perceiving,) 'Infinite consciousness,' enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness. That is its transcending. But that, too, I tell you, isn't enough. Abandon it, I tell you. Transcend it, I tell you. And what is its transcending?

"Then there is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, (perceiving,) 'There is nothing,' enters & remains in the dimension of nothingness. That is its transcending. But that, too, I tell you, isn't enough. Abandon it, I tell you. Transcend it, I tell you. And what is its transcending?

"Then there is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of nothingness, enters & remains in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. That is its transcending. But that, too, I tell you, isn't enough. Abandon it, I tell you. Transcend it, I tell you. And what is its transcending?

“There is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, enters & remains in the cessation of perception & feeling. That is its transcending.

“Thus, Udāyin, I speak even of the abandoning of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. Do you see any fetter, large or small, of whose abandoning I don’t speak?”

“No, lord.”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, Ven. Udāyin delighted in the Blessed One’s words.

Note

1. According to the commentaries, “imperturbable” denotes not only the fourth jhāna but also the four formless attainments. MN 106, however, explicitly does not include the dimension of nothingness under the term—and the same, apparently, holds for any of the formless attainments higher than that.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 106; MN 137; MN 152; AN 5:30; AN 9:34; Ud 3:3