

Kakacupama Sutta

The Simile of the Saw



Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.
For free distribution only

Compiled for the Serene Joy and Emotion of the Pious

A Gift of Dhamma

FOREWARD

“*The simile of the saw*”, *Kakacupama Sutta*, is a discourse of Buddha admonition to his disciples’ monks. Given the training practice that Monks must follow we can assume that it will be appropriate for some dedicated householders to adopt this training practice.

This is the training'

- *Our minds will be unaffected and we will say no evil words.*
- *We will remain sympathetic, with a mind of good will, and with no inner hate.*
- *We will keep pervading these people with an awareness imbued with good will and, beginning with them, we will keep pervading the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with good will -- abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.'*

That's how you should train yourselves.

Appendix – A *shows how the Buddha’s chief disciple Sariputta trains himself in the way that this discourse subscribes.*

Sariputta: "Venerable Sir! How could a bhikkhu, who steadfastly keeps his mind on the body, set out on a journey without apologizing, after doing wrong to a fellow bhikkhu?"

- *I am like the earth, which feels no pleasure when flowers are cast on it or resentment when rubbish and excreta are piled upon it.*
- *I am also like the door-mat, the beggar, the bull with broken horns; I also feel abhorrence for the impurity of the body and am no longer attached to it."*

When Thera Sariputta spoke thus, the young bhikkhu felt very much distressed and wept bitterly, and admitted that he had lied about the Chief Disciple Sariputta. Then the Buddha advised Thera Sariputta to accept the apology of the young bhikkhu, lest a heavy punishment should fall on him and get his head crushed. The young bhikkhu then admitted that he had done wrong and respectfully asked for pardon.

Thera Sariputta pardoned the young bhikkhu and also asked to be forgiven if he also had done any wrong.

The blessed one: *Attend constantly to this admonition on the simile of the saw. That will be for your long-term welfare and happiness."*

Compiled for the Serene Joy and the Emotion of the Pious

*Maung Paw
California*

Kakacupama Sutta

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Majjhima Nikaya 21

(Excerpt)

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1. Lady Vedehika Reputation

"Once, monks, in this same *Savatthi*, there was a lady of a household named *Vedehika*. This good report about *Lady Vedehika* had circulated:

- *'Lady Vedehika is gentle.*
- *Lady Vedehika is even-tempered.*
- *Lady Vedehika is calm.'*

Now, Lady Vedehika had a slave named Kali who was diligent, deft, and neat in her work. The thought occurred to Kali the slave:

Slave Kali: "This good report about my Lady Vedehika has circulated:

- *"Lady Vedehika is even-tempered.*
- *Lady Vedehika is gentle.*
- *Lady Vedehika is calm."*

2. Test on Lady Vedehika's Patience

Slave Kali: Now, is anger present in my lady without showing, or is it absent? Or is it just because I'm diligent, deft, and neat in my work that the anger present in my lady doesn't show?

Why don't I test her?'

"So Kali the slave got up after daybreak.

Lady Vedehika: 'Hey, Kali!'

Slave Kali: "'Yes, madam?'

Lady Vedehika: "Why did you get up after daybreak?"

Slave Kali: "No reason, madam."

Lady Vedehika: "No reason, you wicked slave, and yet you get up after daybreak?"
Angered and displeased, she scowled.

Slave Kali: "Then the thought occurred to Kali the slave: 'Anger *is* present in my lady without showing, and not absent. And it's just because I'm diligent, deft, and neat in my work that the anger present in my lady doesn't show.

Why don't I test her some more?"

"So Kali the slave got up later in the day.

Lady Vedehika: "Hey, Kali!"

Slave Kali: "Yes, madam?"

Lady Vedehika: "Why did you get up later in the day?"

Slave Kali: "No reason, madam."

Lady Vedehika: "No reason, you wicked slave, and yet you get up later in the day?"
Angered and displeased, she grumbled.

"Then the thought occurred to Kali the slave: 'Anger *is* present in my lady without showing, and not absent. And it's just because I'm diligent, deft, and neat in my work that the anger present in my lady doesn't show. Why don't I test her some more?"

"So Kali the slave got up even later in the day.

Lady Vedehika: "Hey, Kali!"

Slave Kali: "Yes, madam?"

Lady Vedehika: "Why did you get up even later in the day?"

Slave Kali: "No reason, madam."

Lady Vedehika: "No reason, you wicked slave, and yet you get up even later in the day?"

Angered and displeased, she grabbed hold of a rolling pin and gave her a whack over the head, cutting it open.

"Then Kali the slave, with blood streaming from her cut-open head, went and denounced her mistress to the neighbors:

Slave Kali: 'See, ladies, the gentle one's handiwork?

See the even-tempered one's handiwork?

See the calm one's handiwork?

How could she, angered and displeased with her only slave for getting up after daybreak, grab hold of a rolling pin and give her a whack over the head, cutting it open?"

"After that this evil report about Lady Vedehika circulated: 'Lady Vedehika is vicious. Lady Vedehika is foul-tempered. Lady Vedehika is violent.'

3. How Monk should handle the Disagreeable?

"In the same way, monks, a monk may be ever so gentle, ever so even-tempered, ever so calm, as long as he is not touched by disagreeable aspects of speech. But it is only when disagreeable aspects of speech touch him that he can truly be known as gentle, even-tempered, and calm.

I don't call a monk easy to admonish if he is easy to admonish and makes himself easy to admonish only by reason of robes, alms food, lodging, and medicinal requisites for curing the sick. Why is that? Because if he doesn't get robes, alms food, lodging, and medicinal requisites for curing the sick, then he isn't easy to admonish and doesn't make himself easy to admonish.

But if a monk is easy to admonish and makes himself easy to admonish purely out of esteem for the Dhamma, respect for the Dhamma, reverence for the Dhamma, then I call him easy to admonish.

Thus, monks, you should train yourselves: 'We will be easy to admonish and make ourselves easy to admonish purely out of esteem for the Dhamma, respect for the Dhamma, and reverence for the Dhamma.' That's how you should train yourselves.

"Monks, there are these five aspects of speech by which others may address you:

- timely or untimely,
- true or false,
- affectionate or harsh,
- beneficial or unbeneficial,
- With a mind of good-will or with inner hate.

Others may address you in a timely way or an untimely way.

They may address you with what is true or what is false.

They may address you in an affectionate way or a harsh way.

They may address you in a beneficial way or an unbeneficial way.

They may address you with a mind of good-will or with inner hate.

4. How should Monk be trained

In any event, you should train yourselves:’

Our minds will be unaffected and we will say no evil words.

We will remain sympathetic to that person's welfare, with a mind of good will, and with no inner hate.

We will keep pervading him with an awareness imbued with good will and, beginning with him, we will keep pervading the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with good will -- abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.’

That's how you should train yourselves.

Example.1. could some one make this great earth disappear?

"Suppose that a man were to come along carrying a hoe and a basket, saying, 'I will make this great earth be without earth.' He would dig here and there, scatter soil here and there, spit here and there, urinate here and there, saying, 'Be without earth. Be without earth.' Now, what do you think -- would he make this great earth be without earth?"

"No, lord. Why is that? Because this great earth is deep and enormous. It can't easily be made to be without earth. The man would reap only a share of weariness and disappointment."

"In the same way, monks, there are these five aspects of speech by which others may address you:

- timely or untimely,
- true or false,
- affectionate or harsh,
- beneficial or unbeneficial,
- With a mind of good-will or with inner hate.

Others may address you in a timely way or an untimely way.

They may address you with what is true or what is false.

They may address you in an affectionate way or a harsh way.

They may address you in a beneficial way or an unbeneficial way.

They may address you with a mind of good-will or with inner hate.

In any event, you should train yourselves:

'Our minds will be unaffected and we will say no evil words.

We will remain sympathetic to that person's welfare, with a mind of good will, and with no inner hate.

We will keep pervading him with an awareness imbued with good will and, beginning with him, we will keep pervading the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with good will equal to the great earth -- abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.' That's how you should train yourselves.

Example 2. Could some one paint picture in space?

"Suppose that a man were to come along carrying lace, yellow orpiment, indigo, or crimson, saying, 'I will draw pictures in space, I will make pictures appear.' Now, what do you think -- would he draw pictures in space and make pictures appear?"

"No, lord. Why is that? Because space is formless and featureless. It's not easy to draw pictures there and to make them appear. The man would reap only a share of weariness and disappointment."

- timely or untimely,
- true or false,
- affectionate or harsh,
- beneficial or unbeneficial,
- With a mind of good-will or with inner hate.

Others may address you in a timely way or an untimely way.

They may address you with what is true or what is false.

They may address you in an affectionate way or a harsh way.

They may address you in a beneficial way or an unbeneficial way.

They may address you with a mind of good-will or with inner hate.

In any event, you should train yourselves:

'Our minds will be unaffected and we will say no evil words.

We will remain sympathetic to that person's welfare, with a mind of good will, and with no inner hate.

We will keep pervading him with an awareness imbued with good will and, beginning with him, we will keep pervading the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with good will equal to the great earth -- abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.' That's how you should train yourselves.

Example. 3. Could some one heat the river with his grass torch?

"Suppose that a man were to come along carrying a burning grass torch and saying, 'With this burning grass torch I will heat up the river Ganges and make it boil.' Now, what do you think -- would he, with that burning grass torch, heat up the river Ganges and make it boil?"

"No, lord. Why is that? Because the river Ganges is deep and enormous. It's not easy to heat it up and make it boil with a burning grass torch. The man would reap only a share of weariness and disappointment."

- timely or untimely,
- true or false,
- affectionate or harsh,
- beneficial or unbeneficial,
- With a mind of good-will or with inner hate.

Others may address you in a timely way or an untimely way.

They may address you with what is true or what is false.

They may address you in an affectionate way or a harsh way.

They may address you in a beneficial way or an unbeneficial way.

They may address you with a mind of good-will or with inner hate.

In any event, you should train yourselves:

'Our minds will be unaffected and we will say no evil words.

We will remain sympathetic to that person's welfare, with a mind of good will, and with no inner hate.

We will keep pervading him with an awareness imbued with good will and, beginning with him, we will keep pervading the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with good will equal to the great earth -- abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.' That's how you should train yourselves.

Example 4. Could some one with a stick beating the cat skin bag to make it rustle and crackle?

"Suppose there were a cat skin bag -- beaten, well-beaten, beaten through and through, soft, silky, free of rustling and crackling -- and a man were to come along carrying a stick or shard and saying, *'With this stick or shard I will take this cat skin bag -- beaten, well-beaten, beaten through and through, soft, silky, free of rustling and crackling -- and I will make it rustle and crackle.'* Now, what do you think -- would he, with that stick or shard, take that cat skin bag -- beaten, well-beaten, beaten through and through, soft, silky, free of rustling and crackling -- and make it rustle and crackle?"

"No, lord. Why is that? Because the cat skin bag is beaten, well-beaten, beaten through and through, soft, silky, and free of rustling and crackling. It's not easy to make it rustle and crackle with a stick or shard. The man would reap only a share of weariness and disappointment."

- timely or untimely,
- true or false,
- affectionate or harsh,
- beneficial or unbeneficial,
- With a mind of good-will or with inner hate.

Others may address you in a timely way or an untimely way.

They may address you with what is true or what is false.

They may address you in an affectionate way or a harsh way.

They may address you in a beneficial way or an unbeneficial way.

They may address you with a mind of good-will or with inner hate.

6. Monk should be trained this way

In any event, you should train yourselves:

- **'Our minds will be unaffected and we will say no evil words.**
- ***We will remain sympathetic to that person's welfare, with a mind of good will, and with no inner hate.***

- *We will keep pervading him with an awareness imbued with good will and, beginning with him, we will keep pervading the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with good will equal to the great earth -- abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.' That's how you should train yourselves.*

Example. 5. If a Bandit were to carve your limb savagely with a saw?

"Monks, even if bandits were to carve you up savagely, limb by limb, with a two-handled saw, he among you who let his heart get angered even at that would not be doing my bidding.

Even then you should train yourselves:

5. That's how you should train yourselves:

This is the training'

- *Our minds will be unaffected and we will say no evil words.*
- *We will remain sympathetic, with a mind of good will, and with no inner hate.*
- *We will keep pervading these people with an awareness imbued with good will and, beginning with them, we will keep pervading the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with good will -- abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.'*

That's how you should train yourselves.

"Monks, if you attend constantly to this admonition on the simile of the saw, do you see any aspects of speech, slight or gross, that you could not endure?"

"No, lord."

"Then attend constantly to this admonition on the simile of the saw. That will be for your long-term welfare and happiness."

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

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<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/canon/sutta/majjhima/mn021.html>

Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!

Appendix – A

Dhammapada Verse 95

The Story of Thera Sariputta

While residing at the *Jetavana* monastery, the Buddha uttered Verse (95) with reference to the Chief Disciple *Sariputta* and a young bhikkhu.

It was the end of the vassa; and Thera Sariputta was about to set out on a journey with some followers. A young bhikkhu, who bore some grudge against the thera, approached the Buddha and falsely reported that Thera Sariputta had abused him and beaten him. The Buddha therefore sent for the thera and questioned him, and Thera Sariputta replied as follows:

Sariputta: "Venerable Sir! How could a bhikkhu, who steadfastly keeps his mind on the body, set out on a journey without apologizing, after doing wrong to a fellow bhikkhu?"

- *I am like the earth, which feels no pleasure when flowers are cast on it or resentment when rubbish and excreta are piled upon it.*
- *I am also like the door-mat, the beggar, the bull with broken horns; I also feel abhorrence for the impurity of the body and am no longer attached to it."*

When Thera Sariputta spoke thus, the young bhikkhu felt very much distressed and wept bitterly, and admitted that he had lied about the Chief Disciple Sariputta. Then the Buddha advised Thera Sariputta to accept the apology of the young bhikkhu, lest a heavy punishment should fall on him and get his head crushed. The young bhikkhu then admitted that he had done wrong and respectfully asked for pardon. Thera Sariputta pardoned the young bhikkhu and also asked to be forgiven if he also had done any wrong.

All those present talked in praise of Thera Sariputta, and the Buddha said, "Bhikkhus, a bhikkhu like Sariputta has no anger or ill will in him. Like the earth and the door-post, he is patient, tolerant, and firm; like the lake free from mud, he is serene and pure.

Then the Buddha spoke in verse as follows:

Verse 95. Like the earth, the arahat is patient and is not provoked to respond in anger; like the door-post he is firm; he is unperturbed by the ups and downs of life; he is serene and pure like a lake free from mud. For such an arahat there will be no more rebirths.

(Translated by Daw Mya Tin, Yangon, Burma)