

THE TEACHINGS OF THE BUDDHA

*The*  
*Middle Length*  
**Discourses**  
*of the*  
**Buddha**



*A Translation of the*  
**Majjhima Nikāya**



*Translated from the Pāli*

ORIGINAL TRANSLATION  
*by*

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TRANSLATION EDITED AND REVISED  
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## 61 *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* Advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā

[414] 1. THUS HAVE I HEARD. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Rājagaha in the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrels' Sanctuary.

2. Now on that occasion the venerable Rāhula was living at Ambalaṭṭhikā.<sup>637</sup> Then, when it was evening, the Blessed One rose from meditation and went to the venerable Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā. The venerable Rāhula saw the Blessed One coming in the distance and made a seat ready and set out water for washing the feet. The Blessed One sat down on the seat made ready and washed his feet. The venerable Rāhula paid homage to him and sat down at one side.

3. Then the Blessed One left a little water in the water vessel and asked the venerable Rāhula: "Rāhula, do you see this little water left in the water vessel?"—"Yes, venerable sir."—"Even so little, Rāhula, is the recluseship of those who are not ashamed to tell a deliberate lie."

4. Then the Blessed One threw away the little water that was left and asked the venerable Rāhula: "Rāhula, do you see that little water that was thrown away?"—"Yes, venerable sir."—"Even so, Rāhula, those who are not ashamed to tell a deliberate lie have thrown away their recluseship."

5. Then the Blessed One turned the water vessel upside down and asked the venerable Rāhula: "Rāhula, do you see this water vessel turned upside down?"—"Yes, venerable sir."—"Even so, Rāhula, those who are not ashamed to tell a deliberate lie have turned their recluseship upside down."

6. Then the Blessed One turned the water vessel right way up again and asked the venerable Rāhula: "Rāhula, do you see this hollow, empty water vessel?"—"Yes, venerable sir."—"Even so

hollow and empty, Rāhula, is the recluship of those who are not ashamed to tell a deliberate lie.”

7. “Suppose, Rāhula, there were a royal tusker elephant with tusks as long as chariot poles, full-grown in stature, high-bred, and accustomed to battle. In battle he would perform his task with his forefeet and his hindfeet, with his forequarters and his hindquarters, with his head and his ears, with his tusks and his tail, [415] yet he would keep back his trunk. Then his rider would think: ‘This royal tusker elephant with tusks as long as chariot poles...performs his task in battle with his forefeet and his hindfeet...yet he keeps back his trunk. He has not yet given up his life.’ But when the royal tusker elephant...performs his task in battle with his forefeet and his hindfeet, with his forequarters and his hindquarters, with his head and his ears, with his tusks and his tail, and also with his trunk, then his rider would think: ‘This royal tusker elephant with tusks as long as chariot poles...performs his task in battle with his forefeet and his hindfeet...and also with his trunk. He has given up his life. Now there is nothing this royal tusker elephant would not do.’ So too, Rāhula, when one is not ashamed to tell a deliberate lie, there is no evil, I say, that one would not do. Therefore, Rāhula, you should train thus: ‘I will not utter a falsehood even as a joke.’

8. “What do you think, Rāhula? What is the purpose of a mirror?”

“For the purpose of reflection, venerable sir.”

“So too, Rāhula, an action with the body should be done after repeated reflection; an action by speech should be done after repeated reflection; an action by mind should be done after repeated reflection.

9. “Rāhula, when you wish to do an action with the body, you should reflect upon that same bodily action thus: ‘Would this action that I wish to do with the body lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both? Is it an unwholesome bodily action with painful consequences, with painful results?’ When you reflect, if you know: ‘This action that I wish to do with the body would lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it is an unwholesome bodily action with painful consequences, with painful results,’ then you definitely should not

do such an action with the body. [416] But when you reflect, if you know: ‘This action that I wish to do with the body would not lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it is a wholesome bodily action with pleasant consequences, with pleasant results,’ then you may do such an action with the body.

10. “Also, Rāhula, while you are doing an action with the body, you should reflect upon that same bodily action thus: ‘Does this action that I am doing with the body lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both? Is it an unwholesome bodily action with painful consequences, with painful results?’ When you reflect, if you know: ‘This action that I am doing with the body leads to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it is an unwholesome bodily action with painful consequences, with painful results,’ then you should suspend such a bodily action. But when you reflect, if you know: ‘This action that I am doing with the body does not lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it is a wholesome bodily action with pleasant consequences, with pleasant results,’ then you may continue in such a bodily action.

11. “Also, Rāhula, after you have done an action with the body, you should reflect upon that same bodily action thus: ‘Did this action that I did with the body lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both? Was it an unwholesome bodily action with painful consequences, with painful results?’ When you reflect, if you know: ‘This action that I did with the body led to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it was an unwholesome bodily action with painful consequences, with painful results,’ then you should confess such a bodily action, reveal it, and lay it open to the Teacher or to your wise companions in the holy life. Having confessed it, revealed it, and laid it open, [417] you should undertake restraint for the future.<sup>638</sup> But when you reflect, if you know: ‘This action that I did with the body did not lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it was a wholesome bodily action with pleasant consequences, pleasant results,’ you can abide happy and glad, training day and night in wholesome states.

12. “Rāhula, when you wish to do an action by speech...(*complete*

as in §9, substituting “speech” for “body”)...you may do such an action by speech.

13. “Also, Rāhula, while you are doing an action by speech... (complete as in §10, substituting “speech” for “body”) [418]...you may continue in such an action by speech.

14. “Also, Rāhula, after you have done an action by speech... (complete as in §11, substituting “speech” for “body”)...you can abide happy and glad, training day and night in wholesome states.

15. “Rāhula, when you wish to do an action by mind...(complete as in §9, substituting “mind” for “body”) [419]...you may do such an action by mind.

16. “Also, Rāhula, while you are doing an action by mind... (complete as in §10, substituting “mind” for “body”)...you may continue in such a mental action.

17. “Also, Rāhula, after you have done an action by mind... (complete as in §11, substituting “mind” for “body”<sup>639</sup>)...you can abide happy and glad, training day and night in wholesome states. [420]

18. “Rāhula, whatever recluses and brahmins in the past purified their bodily action, their verbal action, and their mental action, all did so by repeatedly reflecting thus. Whatever recluses and brahmins in the future will purify their bodily action, their verbal action, and their mental action, all will do so by repeatedly reflecting thus. Whatever recluses and brahmins in the present are purifying their bodily action, their verbal action, and their mental action, all are doing so by repeatedly reflecting thus. Therefore, Rāhula, you should train thus: ‘We will purify our bodily action, our verbal action, and our mental action by repeatedly reflecting upon them.’”

That is what the Blessed One said. The venerable Rāhula was satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One’s words.

- six classes, see Bodhi, *Discourse on the Fruits of Recluseship*, pp. 73–75. Also, AN 6:57/iii.383–84.
- 632 This is a denial of the four immaterial planes of existence, the objective counterparts of the four immaterial meditative attainments.
- 633 These are the gods of the planes corresponding to the four jhānas. They possess bodies of subtle matter, unlike the gods of the immaterial planes who consist entirely of mind without any admixture of matter.
- 634 MA: Even though the wise man discussed here has doubts about the existence of the immaterial planes, he attains the fourth jhāna, and on the basis of that he attempts to attain the immaterial absorptions. If he fails he is certain of rebirth in the fine-material planes, but if he succeeds he will be reborn in the immaterial planes. Thus for him this wager is an “incontrovertible teaching.”
- 635 MA: Cessation of being (*bhavanirodha*) here is Nibbāna.
- 636 MA: Even though this person has doubts about the existence of Nibbāna, he attains the eight meditative attainments, and then, using one of those attainments as a basis, he develops insight, thinking: “If there is cessation, then I will reach arahantship and attain Nibbāna.” If he fails he is certain of rebirth in the immaterial planes, but if he succeeds he reaches arahantship and attains Nibbāna.

## SUTTA 61

- 637 Rāhula was the only son of the Buddha, born on the day his father left the palace to seek enlightenment. At the age of seven he was ordained as a novice by Ven. Sāriputta on the occasion of the Buddha’s first return visit to Kapilavatthu after his enlightenment. The Buddha declared him the foremost disciple among those desirous of training. According to MA, this discourse was taught to Rāhula when he was seven years old, thus very shortly after his ordination. At MN 147 he attains arahantship after listening to a discourse by the Buddha on the development of insight.
- 638 To acknowledge a wrong deed as such, confess it, and

undertake restraint for the future leads to growth in the discipline of the Noble One. See MN 65.13.

- 639 In this section, however, the phrase “then you should confess such a bodily action...and laid it open” is replaced by the following: “Then you should be repelled, humiliated, and disgusted by that mental action. Having become repelled, humiliated, and disgusted by that mental action...” This substitution is made because unwholesome thoughts, unlike bodily and verbal transgressions, do not require confession as a means of exoneration. Both Horner in *MLS* and Ñm in *Ms* missed this variation.

#### SUTTA 62

- 640 According to *MA*, this discourse was taught to Rāhula when he was eighteen years old, for the purpose of dispelling desire connected with the household life. The Shorter Discourse of Advice to Rāhula is MN 147.
- 641 *MA*: While Rāhula was following the Buddha, he noted with admiration the physical perfection of the Master and reflected that he himself was of similar appearance, thinking: “I too am handsome like my father the Blessed One. The Buddha’s form is beautiful and so too is mine.” The Buddha read Rāhula’s thought and decided to admonish him at once, before such vain thoughts led him into greater difficulties. Hence the Buddha framed his advice in terms of contemplating the body as neither a self nor the possession of a self.
- 642 *MA*: Ven. Sāriputta, Rāhula’s teacher, gave Rāhula this advice unaware that he had already been given different meditation instructions by the Buddha. He was misled by Rāhula’s cross-legged posture into thinking that he was practising mindfulness of breathing.
- 643 *MA*: The Buddha here explains the meditation on the four great elements rather than mindfulness of breathing in order to dispel Rāhula’s attachment to the body, which had not yet been removed by the brief instruction on the egolessness of material form. See n.329 for explanation of terms requiring comment.