


CHAPTER 8

THE BUDDHA AND HIS RELATIVES

“Service to relatives is a blessing.”

—Maṅgala Sutta

King Siddhodana Desires to See the Buddha

ews that the Buddha was residing at Rājagaha and was preaching his Dhamma reached the ears of the aged King Siddhodana and his anxiety to see his enlightened son grew stronger and stronger. On nine successive occasions he sent nine courtiers, each with a large following, to invite the Buddha to Kapilavatthu. Contrary to his expectations, they all heard the Dhamma and, attaining arahantship, entered the order. Since arahants were indifferent to worldly things they did not convey the message to the Buddha.

The disappointed king finally dispatched another faithful courtier, Kāludāyī, who was a playmate of the Buddha. He agreed to go as he was granted permission to enter the order.

Like the rest he also had the fortune to attain arahantship and join the order. But, unlike the others, he conveyed the message to the Buddha, and persuaded him to visit his aged royal father. As the season was most suitable for travelling, the Buddha, attended by a large retinue of his disciples, journeyed the whole distance by slow stages preaching the Dhamma on the way, and in due course arrived at Kapilavatthu in two months.

Arrangements were made for him to reside at the park of Nigrodha, a Sākya. The conceited elderly Sākyas, thinking within themselves, “he is our younger brother, our nephew, our grandson,” said to the young princes, “You do him obeisance; we will sit behind you.” As they sat without paying him due reverence he subdued their pride by rising into the air and exhibiting the “twin wonder.”¹¹² The King, seeing this wonderful phenomenon, saluted him immediately, saying that it was his third salutation.¹¹³ All Sākyas were then compelled to pay him due reverence. Thereupon the Buddha came down from the sky and sat on the

112. *Yamakapāṭihāriya*, often translated as “the twin miracle” is a psychic phenomenon which only a Buddha could perform. By his psychic powers he makes fire and water issue from the pores of the body simultaneously. The *Paṭisambhidāmagga* commentary states that by fire and water are meant red and blue rays.

seat prepared for him. The humbled relatives took their seats eager to listen to his teaching.

At this moment an unexpected shower of rain fell upon the Sākya kinsfolk. The occurrence of this strange phenomenon resulted in a discussion amongst themselves. Then the Buddha preached the Vessantara Jātaka¹¹⁴ to show that a similar incident took place in the presence of his relatives in a previous birth.

The Sākyas were delighted with the discourse, and they departed, not knowing that it was their duty to invite the Buddha and his disciples for the noon meal. It did not occur to the king too to invite the Buddha, although he thought to himself, "If my son does not come to my house, where will he go?" Reaching home, he, however, made ready several kinds of food expecting their arrival in the palace.

King Suddhodana's Conversion

As there was no special invitation for the noon meal on the following day, the Buddha and his disciples got ready to seek alms from the houses of the citizens of Kapilavatthu. Before proceeding he considered within himself—"Did the Buddhas of the past, upon entering the city of their kinsfolk, straightaway enter the houses of the relatives, or did they go from house to house in regular order receiving alms?" Perceiving that they did so from house to house, the Buddha went in the streets of Kapilavatthu seeking alms.

On hearing of this seemingly disgraceful conduct of the Buddha from his daughter-in-law, Yasodharā, the king, greatly perturbed in mind, hurried to the scene, and saluting him, said, "Son, why do you ruin me? I am overwhelmed with shame to see you begging alms. Is it proper for you, who used to travel in a golden palanquin, to seek alms in this very city? Why do you put me to shame?"¹¹⁵

"I am not putting you to shame, O great King! I am following the custom of my lineage," replied the Buddha, to the king's astonishment.

"But, dear son, is it the custom of my lineage to gain a livelihood by seeking alms? Surely, Lord, ours is the warrior lineage of Mahāsammata, and not a single warrior has gone seeking alms."

113. He saluted him for the first time when he saw the infant prince's feet rest on the head of the ascetic Asita whom he wanted the child to revere. His second salutation took place at the ploughing festival when he saw the infant prince seated cross-legged on the couch, absorbed in meditation.

114. See Jātaka Vol. vi, p. 479, No. 547. *Dhammapadattḥakathā*, vol. iii, pp. 163–164. This interesting story, which is the longest in the Jātaka commentary, illustrates his unrivalled generosity.

115. See *Dhammapadattḥakathā*, vol. iii, p. 164, *Buddhist Legends*, vol. 3, p. 3.

“O great King, that is not the custom of your royal lineage. But it is the custom of my Buddha lineage. Several thousands of Buddhas have lived by seeking alms.”

Standing on the street, the Buddha then advised the king thus:

“Be not heedless in standing (at doors for alms).

Lead a righteous life.

The righteous live happily both in this world
and in the next.”

Dhp v. 168

Hearing it, the king realised the truth and attained the first stage of sainthood. Immediately after, he took the Buddha’s bowl and, conducting him and his disciples to the palace, served them with choice food. At the close of the meal the Buddha again exhorted him thus:

“Lead a righteous life, and not one that is corrupt.

The righteous live happily both in this world
and in the next.”

Dhp, v. 169

Thereupon the king attained the second stage of sainthood (*sakadāgāmi*) and Pajāpati Gotamī attained the first stage of sainthood (*sotāpatti*).

On a later occasion when it was related to the Buddha that the king had refused to believe that his son had died owing to his severe austerities without achieving his goal, the Buddha preached the Dhammapāla Jātaka (No. 447) to show that in a previous birth too he refused to believe that his son had died although he was shown a heap of bones. At this time the king attained the third stage of sainthood (*anāgāmi*).

On his death-bed, the king heard the Dhamma from the Buddha for the last time and attained arahantship. After experiencing the bliss of emancipation for seven days, he passed away as a lay arahant when the Buddha was about forty years old.

The Buddha and Yasodharā

Princess Yasodharā, also known as Rāhulamātā, Bimbā and Bhaddakaccānā, was the daughter of King Suppabuddha, who reigned over the Koliya race, and Pamitā, sister of King Suddhodana. She was of the same age as Prince Siddhattha, whom she married at the age of sixteen. It was by exhibiting his military prowess that he won her hand. She led an extremely happy and luxurious life. In her 29th year, on the very day she gave birth to her only son, Rāhula, her wise and contemplative husband, whom she loved with all her heart, resolved to renounce the world to seek deliverance from the ills of life. Without even bidding farewell to his faithful and charming wife, he left the palace at night, leaving young

Yasodharā to look after the child by herself. She awoke as usual to greet her beloved husband, but, to her surprise, she found him missing.

When she realised that her ideal prince had left her and the new-born babe, she was overcome with indescribable grief. Her dearest possession was lost for ever. The palace with all its allurements was now a dungeon to her. The whole world appeared to be blank. Her only consolation was her infant son.

Though several Kshatriya princes sought her hand, she rejected all those proposals, and lived ever faithful to her beloved husband. Hearing that her husband was leading a hermit's life, she removed all her jewellery and wore a plain yellow garb. Throughout the six years during which the Ascetic Gotama struggled for enlightenment Princess Yasodharā watched his actions closely and did likewise.

When the Buddha visited Kapilavatthu after his enlightenment and was being entertained by the king in the palace on the following day all but the Princess Yasodharā came to pay their reverence to him. She thought, "Certainly if there is any virtue in me, the noble Lord himself will come to my presence. Then will I reverence him."

After the meal was over the Buddha handed over the bowl to the king, and accompanied by his two chief disciples, entered the chamber of Yasodharā and sat on a seat prepared for him, saying, "Let the king's daughter reverence me as she likes. Say nothing."

Hearing of the Buddha's visit, she bade the ladies in the court wear yellow garments. When the Buddha took his seat, Yasodharā came swiftly to him and clasping his ankles, placed her head on his feet and revered him as she liked.

Demonstrating her affection and respect thus, she sat down with due reverence.

Then the king praised her virtues and, commenting on her love and loyalty, said:

"Lord, when my daughter heard that you were wearing yellow robes, she also robed herself in yellow; when she heard that you were taking one meal a day, she also did the same; when she heard that you had given up lofty couches, she lay on a low couch; when she heard that you had given up garlands and scents, she also gave them up; when her relatives sent messages to say that they would maintain her, she did not even look at a single one. So virtuous was my daughter."

"Not only in this last birth, O King, but in a previous birth, too, she protected me and was devoted and faithful to me," remarked the Buddha and cited the Candakinnarī Jātaka (No. 485).

Recalling this past association with her, he consoled her and left the palace.

After the death of King Suddhodana, when Pajāpati Gotamī became a nun (*bhikkhūṇī*), Yasodharā also entered the order and attained arahantship.

Amongst women disciples she was the chief of those who attained great supernormal powers (*mahā abhiññā*).¹¹⁶ At the age of seventy-eight she passed away.

Her name does not appear in the Therīgāthā but her interesting verses are found in the Apadāna.¹¹⁷

The Buddha and Rāhula

Rāhula was the only son of Prince Siddhattha and Princess Yasodharā. He was born on the day when Prince Siddhattha decided to renounce the world. The happy news of the birth of his infant son was conveyed to him when he was in the park in a contemplative mood. Contrary to ordinary expectations, instead of rejoicing over the news, he exclaimed ‘*Rāhu jāto, bandhanam jātam*—A *rāhu* is born, a fetter has arisen!’ Accordingly the child was named Rāhula¹¹⁸ by King Suddhodana, his grandfather.

Rāhula was brought up as a fatherless child by his mother and grandfather. When he was seven years old, the Buddha visited Kapilavatthu for the first time after his enlightenment. On the seventh day after his arrival Princess Yasodharā gaily dressed up young Rāhula and pointing to the Buddha, said, “Behold, son, that golden coloured ascetic, looking like Brahmā, surrounded by twenty thousand ascetics! He is your father, and he had great treasures. Since his renunciation we do not see them. Go up to him and ask for your inheritance, and say —“Father, I am the prince. After my consecration I will be a universal monarch. I am in need of wealth. Please give me wealth, for the son is the owner of what belongs to the father.”

Innocent Rāhula came to the Buddha’s presence, and asking for his inheritance, as advised by his mother, very affectionately said: “O ascetic, even your shadow is pleasing to me.”

116. Aṅguttara Nikāya commentary states: “Only four disciples of the Buddha had great supernormal powers: Others could recall 100,000 *kalpas*, not beyond that; but those four could recall incalculable eras. In our Teacher’s order the two great disciples and the elder Bakkula and Bhadda Kaccāna, just these four, had this power.” *Gradual Sayings*, Vol. 1, p. 22.

117. pp. 584–599. Here she relates her association with the Bodhisatta when he met the Buddha Dīpaṅkara and resolved to become a Buddha.

118. Lit., bound or seized (*la*) by a fetter (*rāhu*)

After the meal the Buddha left the palace and Rāhula followed him, saying, "Give me my inheritance" and uttering much else that was becoming. Nobody attempted to stop him. Nor did the Buddha prevent him from following him. Reaching the park the Buddha thought: "He desires his father's wealth, but it goes with the world and is full of trouble. I shall give him the sevenfold noble wealth which I received at the foot of the bodhi tree, and make him an owner of a transcendental inheritance. He called Venerable Sāriputta and asked him to ordain little Rāhula.

Rāhula, who was then only seven years of age, was admitted into the noble order.

King Siddhodana was deeply grieved to hear of the unexpected ordination of his beloved grandson. He approached the Buddha and, in humbly requesting him not to ordain any one without the prior consent of the parents, said "When the Lord renounced the world it was a cause of great pain to me. It was so when Nanda renounced and especially so in the case of Rāhula. The love of a father towards a son cuts through the skin, (the hide), the flesh, the sinew, the bone and the marrow. Grant, Lord, the request that the noble ones may not confer ordination on a son without the permission of his parents."¹¹⁹

The Buddha readily granted the request, and made it a Vinaya rule.

How a young boy of seven years could lead the holy life is almost inconceivable. But sāmaṇera (novice) Rāhula, cultured, exceptionally obedient and well-disciplined as he was, was very eager to accept instruction from his superiors. It is stated that he would rise early in the morning and taking a handful of sand throw it up, saying, "Today may I receive from my instructors as much counsel as these grains of sand."

One of the earliest discourses preached to him, immediately after his ordination, was the Ambalaṭṭhika-rāhulovāda Sutta in which the importance of truthfulness was emphasised.¹²⁰

One day the Buddha visited the Venerable Rāhula who, seeing him coming from afar, arranged a seat and supplied water for washing the feet.

The Buddha washed his feet and leaving a small quantity of water in the vessel, said:

"Do you see, Rāhula, this small quantity of water left in the vessel?"

"Yes, Lord."

"Similarly, Rāhula, insignificant, indeed, is the samaṇaship (monkhood) of those who are not ashamed of uttering deliberate lies."

119. See *Buddhist Legends*, part 1, p. 219.

120. Majjhima Nikāya, No. 61. See *The Blessing*, p. 173.

Then the Buddha threw away that small quantity of water, and said: "Discarded, indeed, is the samaṇaship of those who are not ashamed of deliberate lying."

The Buddha turned the vessel upside down, and said, "Overturned, indeed, is the samaṇaship of those who are not ashamed of uttering deliberate lies."

Finally the Buddha set the vessel upright and said — "Empty and void, indeed, is the samaṇaship of those who are not ashamed of deliberate lying."

"I say of anyone who is not ashamed of uttering deliberate lies, that there is no evil that could not be done by him. Accordingly, Rāhula, thus should you train yourself—"Not even in play will I tell a lie."

Emphasizing the importance of truthfulness with such homely illustrations, the Buddha explained to him the value of reflection and the criterion of morality in such a way as a child could understand.

"Rāhula, for what purpose is a mirror?" questioned the Buddha.

"For the purpose of reflecting, Lord."

"Similarly, Rāhula, after reflecting and reflecting should bodily action be done; after reflecting should verbal action be done; after reflecting should mental action be done.

"Whatever action you desire to do with the body, of that particular bodily action you should reflect: 'Now, this action that I desire to perform with the body—would this, my bodily action be conducive to my own harm, or to the harm of others, or to that of both myself and others?' Then, unskilful is this bodily action, entailing suffering and producing pain.

"If, when reflecting, you should realise: 'Now, this bodily action of mine that I am desirous of performing, would be conducive to my own harm or to the harm of others, or to that of both myself and others.' Then unskilful is this bodily action, entailing suffering and producing pain. Such an action with the body, you must on no account perform.

"If, on the other hand, when reflecting you realise: 'Now, this bodily action that I am desirous of performing, would conduce neither to the harm of myself, nor to that of others, nor to that of both myself and others.' Then skilful is this bodily action, entailing pleasure and producing happiness. Such bodily action you should perform."

Exhorting the Sāmaṇera Rāhula to use reflection during and after one's actions, the Buddha said:

"While you are doing an action with the body, of that particular action should you reflect: 'Now, is this action that I am doing with my body conducive to my own harm, or to the harm of others or to that of

both myself and others?’ Then unskilful is this bodily action, entailing suffering and producing pain.

“If, when reflecting, you realise: ‘Now, this action that I am doing with my body is conducive to my own harm, to the harm of others, and to that of both myself and others.’ Then unskilful is this bodily action, entailing suffering and producing pain. From such a bodily action *you must desist*.

“If when reflecting, you should realise: ‘Now, this action of mine that I am doing with the body is conducive neither to my own harm, nor to the harm of others, nor to that of both myself and others.’ Then skilful is this bodily action, entailing pleasure and happiness. Such a bodily action you should do again and again.”

The Buddha adds, “If, when reflecting, you should realise: ‘Now, this action that I have done is unskilful.’ Such an action should be confessed, revealed, and made manifest to the Teacher, or to the learned, or to your brethren of the holy life. Having confessed you should acquire restraint in the future.”

The admonition with regard to skilful and unskilful verbal and mental actions was treated in the same way.

Stating that constant reflection was essential for purification, the Buddha ended the discourse as follows:

“Thus must you train yourself—

By constantly reflecting shall we purify our bodily actions,
by constantly reflecting shall we purify our verbal actions,
by constantly reflecting, shall we purify our mental actions.”

In the *Samyutta Nikāya* there is a special chapter where the Buddha explains to Sāmaṇera Rāhula, the transitoriness of nature.¹²¹

As Venerable Rāhula entered the order in his boyhood the Buddha availed himself of every opportunity to advise and guide him on the right path. The *Sutta Nipāta*¹²² states that the Buddha repeatedly admonished him with the following stanzas:

“Give up five-fold sensual pleasures
—So sweet, so charming.
Going forth from home, with faith,
Be one who has put an end to suffering.
Seek a remote lodging, secluded and noiseless.
Be moderate in food.

121. *Samyutta Nikāya*, ii, pp. 244–253, *Kindred Sayings*, ii, pp. 164–168.

122. *Sutta Nipāta*, Rāhula Sutta. See Chalmers, *Buddha's Teachings*, p. 81.

Have no attachment to robes, alms, requisites and lodging.
Come not to this world again.

Practise restraint with regard to the Fundamental Code
And the five senses.

Cultivate mindfulness as regards the body
And be full of dispassionateness.

Avoid alluring, lust-provoking objects (of sense).
Develop your one-pointed, composed mind towards
loathsomeness.

Think not of the outward appearance of sense.
Give up latent pride. Thus eradicating pride,
you shall fare on in perfect peace."

In Rāhula's eighteenth year the Buddha preached a profound discourse on mind-culture, the occasion for it being a sense-desire that arose in Venerable Rāhula's mind on account of his beautiful appearance.

One day the Venerable Rāhula was following the Buddha in quest of alms. As the Buddha went along, followed by Rāhula, it seems that the pair was like an auspicious royal elephant and his noble offspring, a royal swan with its beauteous cygnet, a regal lion with its stately cub. Both were golden in complexion, almost equal in beauty; both were of the warrior caste; both had renounced a throne. Rāhula, admiring the Teacher, thought: "I too am handsome like my parent the Exalted One. Beautiful is the Buddha's form, and mine is similar."¹²³

The Buddha instantly read his evil thought, and looking back addressed him thus:

"Whatsoever form there be should be regarded thus:

"This is not mine (*n'etam mama*); this am I not (*n'eso'haṃ asmī*); this is not my soul (*na me so atta*)."¹²⁴

Rāhula submissively inquired of him whether he should regard only form as such.

The Buddha replied that he should regard all the five aggregates (*khandhas*)¹²⁵ as such.

The Venerable Rāhula, having been thus edified by the Buddha himself, preferred not to enter the village for alms. He turned back and sat at the foot of a tree, with legs crossed, the body held erect, intent on mindfulness.

Venerable Sāriputta noting the suggestive posture of Rāhula

123. Majjhima Nikāya, No. 62. See *The Blessing*, p. 182.

124. See Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, Ch. 6.

125. See note 88 on page 50.

Sāmaṇera, advised him to concentrate on inhaling and exhaling, not knowing that he was practising another object of meditation on the instruction of the Buddha.

Venerable Rāhula was perplexed because he was given two different objects of meditation—one by the Buddha and the other by his own teacher. In obedience to his teacher he concentrated on “breathing” and went to the Buddha to get his own instruction on the subject. As a wise physician would give the needed medicine, ignoring the desires, the Buddha first expanded his brief instruction on meditation on form and other aggregates and then briefly enumerated certain subjects of meditation with the specific evil conditions temporarily eliminated by each and then explained the meditation on “respiration” (*ānāpānasati*).

Acting according to the Buddha’s instructions, he succeeded in his meditations, and, before long, hearing the Cūla Rāhulovāda Sutta,¹²⁶ he attained arahantship.

In the fourteenth year after the enlightenment of the Buddha, Sāmaṇera Rāhula received his higher ordination. He predeceased the Buddha and Venerable Sāriputta.

Venerable Rāhula was distinguished for his high standard of discipline. The following four verses are attributed to him in the Theragāthā:

“Being fortunate from both sides,
they call me ‘Lucky Rāhula.’
I was the son of the Buddha
and that of the seer of truths.

Destroyed are all my corruptions.
There is no more rebirth to me.
An arahant am I, worthy of offering.
Possessed of threefold knowledge
and a seer of Deathless am I.¹²⁷

‘Blinded by sense-desires, spread over by a net,
covered by a cloak of craving,
bound by the ‘kinsman of heedlessness’
was I like a fish caught in the mouth of a funnel-net.

That sense-desire have I burnt.
The bond of Māra have I cut.
Eradicating craving, from its root,
cool am I, peaceful am I now.”



126. Majjhima Nikāya, No. 147.

127. vv. 297, 298. *Psalms of the Brethren*, p. 183.