

## **Meditation subjects to RĒhula**

(One day Retreat September 4, 1999)

I will tell you about the types of meditation that were given to the Venerable RĒhula by the Buddha himself. I hope you all know that RĒhula was the son of the Buddha. On the day, or to be exact, on the night of the day when RĒhula was born, Buddha or rather the Bodhisatta renounced the world he left everything behind and went to the forest in search of a way to end all sufferings to reach Buddhahood so that he could help other beings and also to get free from the rounds of rebirth.

Bodhisatta spent six years in the forest and at the end of the six years, he reached or he attained Buddhahood and as you all know it was on a Full Moon day in the month of May. Exactly one year after his enlightenment, Buddha visited his native city. And seven days after his arrival there, Buddha went to the palace to take his meals. And when he was taking meals, YasodharĒ, his former wife encouraged RĒhula to ask for inheritance. RĒhula was at that time seven years old so YasodharĒ pointed to the Buddha and said,

"That is your father, and so you go and ask him for inheritance".

So the boy approached the Buddha while he was eating and asked for inheritance. Buddha did not say anything and after the meal Buddha got up and left. And the boy followed him persistently asking for inheritance. So when they reached the monastery, Buddha told SĒriputta, his chief disciple, to ordain Prince RĒhula as a novice. Buddha said RĒhula was asking inheritance from me and the only inheritance I can give for him is the spiritual inheritance. i.e. the state of a monk or a novice. So SĒriputta acted as a preceptor and ordained RĒhula.

After his ordination, RĒhula was from time to time admonished by the Buddha. Buddha gave him talks every now and then on good behavior and on what to practice and so on. When RĒhula was eighteen years old, one day he was following the Buddha who was going for alms round in the city of SĒvatthi. While following the Buddha from behind, he was looking at the Buddha and he was pleased with the appearance of the Buddha and also he thought Buddha was handsome and so am I because he was His son. And so he had a kind of attachment to his body or to his bodily endowment. Now Buddha while going for alms round found out what RĒhula was thinking at that time. So Buddha thought that attachment has arisen in the mind of RĒhula and if it is not stopped there, it will cause a lot of suffering for him. So Buddha turned round and then talked to RĒhula. He said,

"RĒhula, the earth element whether it is present or past or future, whether it is external or internal, gross or subtle, high or low, far or near, whatever it is you should view it with the true understanding that "It is not mine. This I am not and this is not myself."

When Buddha said this, RĒhula asked,

"Bhante, is it only earth element?"

Then , Buddha said, "No, RĒhula. The other elements also you should view in this way."

When RĒhula got this advice, he thought to himself, "Now I am getting this admonition personally direct from the Buddha and so I should not go further for alms round." So he turned back and sat down under a tree cross-legged with his upper body erect and may be ready for practice of meditation. Now, while he was sitting under the tree, the Venerable SĒriputta came out for alms round.

It is said that the Venerable SĒriputta went for alms round only after the Buddha had left. He did not go along with the Buddha, that was because he wanted to see to it that the monastery is kept clean and tidy. If something is not clean or tidy, he would remedy it. If there are rubbish and others he would clean them. If the pots are without water, he would fill the pots and so on. And only after keeping the monastery neat and tidy, did he go out for alms. So he came out after the Buddha left for the city for alms. When he saw RĒhula sitting ready for practice of meditation, he said to RĒhula, "RĒhula, practice the mindfulness of breathing. Mindfulness of breathing, when practiced, is of great fruit. It is of great benefit." That day it is said that Venerable RĒhula did not get anything to eat. So he was without food on that day.

In the evening after staying by himself in seclusion, he went to the Buddha. I mean novice RĒhula went to the Buddha and asked him,

"Bhante, how should I practice mindfulness of breathing so that I get good results?"

But Buddha did not right away give him instructions for breathing meditation but he continued his talk that he did in the morning. So Buddha said, "There is the earth element and the earth element may be internal or external and so on". And then he pointed out some parts of the body where the earth element predominates such as head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin and so on.

Buddha said that there is also earth element externally and whether it is external or internal, it is simple the earth element, and with regard to earth element you must have correct understanding, and that is to understand that "This is not mine. This I am not. And this is not myself." And Buddha talked about the other elements as well: the water element, the fire element, and air element. All of these elements are both external and internal, and whether they are external or internal they are simply the elements and with regard to the elements you must have this correct understanding that "This is not mine. I am not this. And this is not myself."

Then Buddha said, "RĒhula, develop a mind-development which is like the earth or practice mind-development being like the earth". Buddha said, "People throw different things on the earth; clean things, dirty things, spittle, puss, urine and so on. Although people throw those things on the earth, the earth did not get disgusted with them. It was not disturbed. In the same way you should practice meditation being like the earth."

Now Buddha said this because Buddha wanted RĒhula to develop what is called impartiality, that means whether he was meeting desirable objects or undesirable objects, he was to be neutral. He should not have like for the agreeable objects and dislike for the disagreeable objects. So Buddha wanted him to develop this impartiality, so Buddha wanted him to practice meditation like the earth, like the water.

People wash everything with water, clean things or dirty things and also blood, puss and so on. But water doesn't get this disgusted with these, so it has tolerance. In the same way you should have this attitude towards things: desirable and undesirable. And Buddha said, "You should practice or you should develop mind-development, that is like fire. Again, fire burns everything whether clean or unclean and so on". And then, Buddha said, "You should practice mind-development that is like the air. The air blows both clean and unclean things and so on." And also Buddha said, "You should practice mind-development that is like space. Now, space is not attached to anything at all. There is no footing in space, so you be like space, you be not attached to anything."

With these Buddha taught RĒhula to practice what is called *R/pa KammaġthĒna* (matter meditation) – meditation taking matter as object. Here taking the five elements as object: earth, water, fire, air and space. Sometimes Buddha taught four elements: earth, water, fire and air. Sometimes he taught five elements. In this discourse, he taught five elements. In some other discourses, he taught six elements. So Buddha taught different elements in different places. Here, he taught RĒhula to practice to be like these five elements.

Buddha had not come to the practice of breathing meditation. Buddha continued with the advice that RĒhula practiced *Metta* meditation so that he could get rid of *Dosa*, he could get rid of anger. And he advised him to practice compassion or *KarunĒ* to get rid of cruelty, and he admonished him to practice sympathetic joy to get rid of what is called non-delight in other people's prosperity. And he admonished him to practice *UppekkhĒ* (equanimity) in order to get rid of ill-will. Then Buddha said, "Also, practice mindfulness of the foulness of the body." This Buddha exhorted for RĒhula to get rid of the attachment to the body. And then Buddha said, "Practice also the perception of impermanence." That means try to see things as impermanence. And this is to get rid of pride in oneself or pride in things. When you know yourself to be impermanent, there can be no pride in you. But so long as you do not see the impermanence of the mind and body of yourself, you may have this pride or even conceit. So Buddha taught RĒhula to practice the perception of impermanence, that means to practice *VipassanĒ* meditation and to see the impermanence of mental and physical phenomena.

And last, Buddha said, "RĒhula, mindfulness of breathing, when practiced, can bring great results. And it should be practiced in this way." And then Buddha taught like he taught in the *MahĒsatipalġhĒna ĄEnĒĒnassati Sutta*.

At the end of this discourse, Buddha said, "If you practice mindfulness of breathing regularly, when the end of life comes, you'll die mindfully". What Buddha said was the final or the last in-breathing and out-breathing, will cease being known, that means you'll be mindful until the last moment. You'll be mindful of your breathing-in and breathing-out until the last moment. That is, if you practice the mindfulness of breathing regularly.

In this discourse, Buddha exhorted RĒhula to practice different kinds of meditation. But he did not teach him how to meditate, how to practice the other types of meditation. He gave some details only for the mindfulness of breathing meditation. At the end of many discourses, the person who was listening to the discourse became enlightened, but here RĒhula did not

become enlightened. He was just pleased with what the Buddha said. But later, after he became a monk, Buddha taught him another discourse and he became an *Arahant*.

Now in this discourse Buddha taught RĒhula how many kinds of meditation?

Earth element ,  
Water element,  
Fire element,  
Air element,  
Space element,  
*MettĒ* (Loving-Kindness),  
*KarunĒ* (Compassion),  
*MuditĒ* (Sympathy),  
*UppekhĒ* (Equanimity),  
Foulness of the body (*Asubha*),  
Impermanence (*Anicca*), and  
Breathing (*ĀnĒpĒna*).

Now we can take the five elements as one type of meditation. It is called *R/pa Kam-māthĒna*. So if we take it as one type of meditation, then Buddha taught five elements, and then *MettĒ*, *KarunĒ*, *MuditĒ*, *UppekhĒ*, foulness of the body, *Annica* (impermanence) and *ĀnĒpĒna* (Breathing). So Buddha taught eight kinds of meditation to RĒhula.

We must keep it in mind. (Because) when we read books telling us what meditation is suitable for what kind of temperament, we take that to be a fixed statement. If you have temperament of lust, and you practice foulness of the body meditation. Right? But that does not mean that you are not to practice other types of meditation. Because the statement as to the suitability is made because the meditation and the temperament stated to be compatible are very suitable types of meditation for that particular temperament. So it does not mean that that meditation is not good for people of other temperaments.

Now, we can see this. Here to just one person RĒhula, Buddha was giving eight kinds of meditation. So when we practice, we can practice any kind of meditation. There are forty subjects of *Samatha* meditation, so we can practice any of them. And there is *VipassanĒ* meditation. But if we follow the instructions in the commentaries, then we will have to find out of what temperament we are first. And that is not easy. Although there are said to be six temperaments, there are mixture of all these also. So, there can be many kinds of temperaments, and it is not easy to find out even for oneself what temperament one is.

But nowadays everybody is practicing *ĀnĒpĒna* meditation or the abdomen meditation. Some people criticize because we are giving the same meditation to all people. But this shows that any type of meditation is good. We can practice any type of meditation. There is no type of meditation which does not reduce mental defilements and which does not increase the wholesome mental states of *Kusala*. So whatever kind of meditation we practice, if we practice with diligence, if we practice with real effort, then we will get the result. So, (nowadays) it is like standard that we practice either *ĀnĒpana* meditation or *VipassanĒ* meditation. But if you want to, you can practice other types of meditation as well. So, the practice we are doing here

is *Satipāṭhāna* or *Vipassanā* meditation. Setting up of mindfulness or trying to see the three characteristics of all conditioned phenomena because our aim is not to get *Jhānas* or not to get miraculous powers but to get free from mental defilements.

In order to get free from mental defilements, we need to see the three characteristics or common characteristics of all conditioned phenomena, that is impermanence, suffering, and non-soul. Once we see these three characteristics, we get weary with or disenchanted with all conditioned phenomena. At this disenchantment or dispassion towards these formations or towards these phenomena will lead us ultimately to the realization of truth or to the eradication of mental defilements. So, we must note that any kind of meditation is good for any people. But if you want to follow the instructions given in the commentaries, then you choose the one that is supposed to be correct for you and that is supposed to be compatible with your temperament.

But whatever temperament we have, we practice *Vipassanā* meditation and if we do it in a correct way and if we make necessary effort, then we will not fail to see the true nature of things and this seeing of true nature of things will lead us to seeing the four noble truth and at the same time eradicating mental defilements.

Sēdhu!, Sēdhu!, Sēdhu!.