



The Buddha and His Disciples

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Rahula — The Son of the Enlightened One

86. Just before Prince Siddhartha renounced the world, his wife Yasodhara gave birth to a son. According to legend, when the birth was announced to the prince, he said, "A fetter (*rahula*) has been born, a bondage has been born," and this is how the boy got his name. It is more likely that he was named after a lunar eclipse (*rahu*) that might have occurred around the time of his birth. Either way, the birth of this child only served to make Prince Siddhartha's desire to escape from what had become for him a golden cage, even more difficult. On the evening he had finally decided to leave, the Buddha peered into the royal bedchamber to take one last look at his sleeping wife and child, but the mother's arm obscured the child's face.

87. Seven years after he left, the Buddha returned to Kapilavatthu. Yasodhara took the little Rahula to listen to the Buddha's preaching. When they arrived, she said to him: "This is your father, Rahula. Go and ask him for your inheritance." The child walked through the assembly and stood before the Buddha, saying, "How pleasant is your shadow, O Monk." When the talk had finished and the Buddha left, Rahula followed him, and as they walked along Rahula said: "Give me my inheritance, O Monk." Of course the Buddha no longer had gold or property but he had something far more precious - the Dharma, so he turned to Sariputta and said: "Sariputta, ordain him."^[N1] Later, the Buddha's father, Suddhodana, and Yasodhara complained that the boy had been taken away without their permission, as a result of which the Buddha made it a rule that parental consent was necessary before someone could be ordained.^[N2]

88. As if to make up for the seven years he was without a father, the Buddha took great interest in Rahula's moral and spiritual education, teaching him many times himself, and making Sariputta his preceptor and Moggallana his teacher. Rahula responded to this excellent tutelage by being an eager and attentive student and it is said that each morning as he awoke, he would take a handful of sand and say: "May I have today, as many words of counsel from my teacher as there are here grains of sand." As a result of this enthusiasm, the Buddha said of his son that of all his disciples, he was the most anxious for training. When Rahula was still a boy, the Buddha discussed with him aspects of Dharma that were suitable for the young and in such a way as he could understand and remember.

89. Once, he got a pot of water and calling Rahula to his side said to him:

"Rahula, do you see the small amount of water in this pot?"

"Yes, sir."

"Even so, little is the training of those who have no shame at intentional lying."

The Buddha then threw the water away and said: "Do you see this small amount of water that I have thrown away?"

"Yes, sir."

"Even so, Rahula, thrown away is the training of those who have no shame at intentional lying."

The Buddha then turned the pot over and said: "Do you see this pot that has been turned over?"

"Yes, sir."

"Even so, turned over is the training of those who have no shame at intentional lying."

The Buddha then turned the pot upright again and said: "Do you see this pot now empty and void?"

"Yes, sir."

"Even so, Rahula, empty and void is the training of those who have no shame at intentional lying."

The Buddha then impressed upon his son the importance of speaking the truth.

"Rahula, for anyone who has no shame at intentional lying, there is no evil that that person cannot do. Therefore, you should train yourself like this: 'I will not tell a lie, not even in jest.'"

Having explained what has to be done, the Buddha went on to explain to Rahula how it could be done.

"What do you think about this, Rahula? What is the purpose of a mirror?"

"The purpose of a mirror is to look at yourself."

"Even so, Rahula, one should act with body, speech or mind only after first looking at oneself. Before acting with body, speech or mind, one should think: 'What I am about to do, will it harm me or others?' If you can answer: 'Yes, it will,' then you should not act. But if you can answer: 'No, it will not,' then you should act. You should reflect in the same way while acting and after having acted. Therefore, Rahula, you should train yourself thinking: 'We will act only after repeatedly looking at ourselves, only after reflecting on ourselves.'"[\[N3 \]](#)

90. Rahula was trained in the Ten Precepts and monastic discipline and when he was eighteen, the Buddha decided that he was ready for meditation and then gave him advice on how to practise.

"Rahula, develop a mind that is like the four great elements (earth, water, fire and air) because if you do this, pleasant or unpleasant sensory impressions that have arisen and taken hold of the mind will not persist. Just as when people throw faeces, urine, spittle, pus or blood on the earth or in the water, in a fire or the air, the earth, the water, the fire or the air is not troubled, worried or disturbed. So too, develop a mind that is like the four great elements. Develop love, Rahula, for by doing so ill-will will be got rid of. Develop compassion, for by doing so the desire to harm will be got rid of. Develop sympathetic joy, for by doing so, dislike will be got rid of. Develop equanimity, for by doing so sensory reaction will be got rid of. Develop the perception of the foul for by doing so, attachment will be got rid of. Develop the perception of impermanence for by doing so, the conceit, 'I am', will be got rid of. Develop mindfulness of breathing for it is of great benefit and advantage."[\[N4 \]](#)

Following his father's advice and guidance on meditation, Rahula finally attained enlightenment. He was eighteen at the time. After that his friends always referred to him as Rahula the Lucky (*Rahulabhadda*) and he tells why he was given this name.

They call me Rahula the Lucky for two reasons:

One is that I am the Buddha's son.

And the other is that I have seen the truth.[\[N5 \]](#)

91. Other than this, we know very little about Rahula. He does not seem to have been prominent at being either a Dharma teacher or a trainer of other monks. It is likely that Rahula kept himself in the background so that he could not be accused of taking advantage of being the son of the Enlightened One.