

Sedaka Sutta: The Bamboo Acrobat

Translated from the Pali by Bhikkhu Sujato¹

At one time the Buddha was staying in the land of the Sumbhas, near the town of the Sumbhas called Sedaka. There the Buddha addressed the mendicants:

“Once upon a time, mendicants, an acrobat set up his bamboo pole and said to his apprentice Medakathālikā, ‘Come now, dear Medakathālikā, climb up the bamboo pole and stand on my shoulders.’

‘Yes, teacher,’ she replied. She climbed up the bamboo pole and stood on her teacher’s shoulders.

Then the acrobat said to Medakathālikā, ‘You look after me, dear Medakathālikā, and I’ll look after you. That’s how, guarding and looking after each other, we’ll display our skill, collect our fee, and get down safely from the bamboo pole.’

When he said this, Medakathālikā said to her teacher, ‘That’s not how it is, teacher! You should look after yourself, and I’ll look after myself. That’s how, guarding and looking after ourselves, we’ll display our skill, collect our fee, and get down safely from the bamboo pole.’

That’s the way,” said the Buddha. “It’s just as Medakathālikā said to her teacher. Thinking ‘I’ll look after myself,’ you should cultivate mindfulness meditation. Thinking ‘I’ll look after others,’ you should cultivate mindfulness meditation. Looking after yourself, you look after others; and looking after others, you look after yourself.

And how do you look after others by looking after yourself? By development, cultivation, and practice of meditation. And how do you look after yourself by looking after others? By acceptance, harmlessness, love, and sympathy.

Thinking ‘I’ll look after myself,’ you should cultivate mindfulness meditation. Thinking ‘I’ll look after others,’ you should cultivate mindfulness meditation. Looking after yourself, you look after others; and looking after others, you look after yourself.”

¹ This translation by Bhikkhu Sujato is available on [Sutta Central](#) (side-by-side English and Pali). Other translations can be found here: [Bhikkhu Bodhi](#), [Thānissaro Bhikkhu](#), and [Andrew Olendzki](#).

Chinese Canon Version

Discourse on the Simile of the Pole Acrobat

Translated from the Chinese by Bhikkhu Anālayo²

This discourse (SĀ 619) is the *Samyukta-āgama* parallel to the the *Sedaka-sutta* of the *Samyutta-nikāya* (SN 47.19³). The original Chinese text can be found [here](#).

Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was dwelling among the Kosalans, in a simsapā grove north of the town of Sedaka. At that time, the Blessed One said to the monks:

"In former times, there was a teacher of acrobatics done in dependence on a pole. He placed the pole straight up on his shoulder and told his disciple: 'Getting up and down on the pole, you protect me and I will also protect you. Protecting each other we will put on a show and gain much wealth.'

Then the disciple of acrobatics said to the teacher of acrobatics: 'It won't do, as you said. Instead, we should each take care to protect ourselves. [Like this] we will put on a show and gain much wealth. We will be physically at ease and yet I will get down safely.'

The teacher of acrobatics said: 'As you said, we will take care to protect ourselves, this is correct and is also the meaning of what I said.'

[The Buddha said]: "Having protected oneself, one right away protects the other; when protecting the other and oneself, this is protection indeed.

[How does protecting oneself protect others]? Becoming familiar with one's own mind, developing it, protecting it accordingly and attaining realization — this is called 'protecting oneself protects others'.

How does protecting others protect oneself? By the gift of fearlessness, the gift of non-violation, the gift of harmlessness, by having a mind of benevolence and empathy for the other — this is called 'protecting others protects oneself'.

For this reason, monks, you should train yourself like this: 'Protecting myself I will develop the four spheres of mindfulness, protecting others I will develop the four spheres of mindfulness.'

When the Buddha had spoken this discourse, the monks, who had heard what the Buddha had said, were delighted and received it respectfully.

² From Anālayo, "Protecting Oneself and Others Through Mindfulness – The Acrobat Simile in the *Samyukta-āgama*", Sri Lanka International Journal of Buddhist Studies, 2012, vol. 2 pp. 1–23.