

The Buddha Teaches His Son

An Essay on Majjhima Nikāya 61

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In this sutta, the Buddha is teaching his son, Rāhula, who—the Commentary tells us—was only seven years old at the time. Of the various teachings he gave to his son that are recorded in the Pāli Canon, this is apparently the first. What’s especially impressive about it is the care with which the Buddha goes about teaching the Dhamma to a young child. In terms of style, he uses vivid similes to make his points clear. In terms of content, he doesn’t treat the child off-handedly, nor does he teach him simplistic notions. Instead, he takes the opportunity to describe, in clear and vivid terms, a course of action that embodies many of the basic principles of the Dhamma—principles that will be useful not only at the beginning of the practice, but all the way through to the end. In this way, he’s giving Rāhula a solid practical foundation on which to build his search for genuine happiness as he grows into adulthood.

Because the Buddha’s words to his son in this sutta are so fundamental to the practice of the Dhamma, they provide a good starting point for anyone interested in exploring the Dhamma as explained in the suttas.

In the course of his conversation with Rāhula, the Buddha touches on many points of Dhamma that he explains elsewhere in the suttas but that he doesn’t name here. The purpose of this essay is to point out some of those principles, and to indicate where more information on them can be found.

For example, the Buddha once listed, in MN 80, two qualities that he would look for in a potential student: that the student be observant and that he be honest—in his words, “not fraudulent, not deceitful, one of an honest nature.”

In this sutta, he is teaching his son how to become that person.

But he also teaches more.

- ♦ He teaches Rāhula the qualities of character needed for becoming a healthy-minded, mature, responsible adult.
- ♦ He teaches him a specific technique for knowing how to learn from his mistakes so that he can act for his own well-being and that of others.
- ♦ He teaches him, by example, the two qualities that he identified in Iti 16–17 as the most important internal and external qualities conducive to awakening: appropriate attention and friendship with admirable people.
- ♦ He introduces Rāhula to some of the basic theoretical principles of the Dhamma, such as the teaching on kamma and the causal principle that underlies both the way in which suffering is caused and the way in which it can be brought to an end.
- ♦ And, in teaching Rāhula how to observe his own actions and learn from his mistakes, he provides an introduction to the practice of meditation, both in the sense of

(1) leading his life in a way that will be conducive to meditation and (2) developing the skills that will be needed in the practice of right mindfulness and right concentration.

These teachings are as relevant now as they were when the Buddha taught them to his son. Several years back I taught this sutta to a group of people in New Mexico, and a psychotherapist was in the group. She led a mindfulness-based therapy group, and so, the following day, she took the instructions to Rāhula and showed them to the members of the group for their last session together. After they had read the passage, she asked them, “What do you think of the Buddha as a teacher and a parent?” They replied, “If our parents had taught us like that, we wouldn’t be needing therapy groups like this.”

The sutta falls into two sections. The first section teaches the value of truthfulness and a healthy sense of shame. The second section then proceeds to show how these two values should be applied in the practice of purifying your thoughts, words, and deeds.

PART ONE

Truthfulness is one of the most basic virtues in the practice of the Dhamma. In Iti 25, the Buddha singles out truthfulness as the most important of the five precepts, the precept on which the other four depend: “Monks, for the person who transgresses in one thing, I tell you, there is no evil deed that is not to be done. Which one thing? This: telling a deliberate lie.”

So in the first section of this sutta, the Buddha—using the simile of the empty water dipper—teaches Rāhula that if he feels no shame at telling a deliberate lie, he is empty of the qualities that he will need in order to practice the contemplative life.

Truthfulness, for the Buddha, was an absolute. He saw no way that false statements, in the long run, could serve a good purpose. In MN 58, he outlines three criteria for speech that would be worthy of speaking: that it be true, beneficial, and timely (in the sense that there are times when speech should be pleasing, and other times when, to have a beneficial effect, it has to be displeasing). As he lists the possible combinations of these three criteria, he never even entertains the possibility that something untrue could be beneficial. For him, only truths can be beneficial. The theory of useful fictions and white lies—i.e., that there are times when falsehoods would have a beneficial effect—would qualify as the attitude that one can, in some circumstances, tell a deliberate lie without any sense of shame. This is precisely the attitude that the Buddha is denouncing here.

The value of truthfulness, as the Buddha explains it, goes hand-in-hand with another value: the high value of a healthy sense of shame. To understand this point, it’s important to note that there are two kinds of shame: the unhealthy shame that’s the opposite of self-esteem, and the healthy shame that’s the opposite of shamelessness.

This second kind is the shame that the Buddha calls a bright guardian and a treasure (AN 2:9; AN 7:63). He couples this healthy shame with a healthy sense of honor: the sense that you deserve respect for holding to a high standard of conduct. In this sense, shame is a sign of high, rather than low, self esteem.

Both shame and honor begin with the desire not only to *be* good, but also to *look* good in the eyes of others. The Buddha's insights into healthy honor and shame came from his own experience in searching for, and finally finding, awakening. His initial search for the right path had taught him that honor and shame had to be treated with discernment, in that he couldn't always trust the opinions of others. If he had been swayed by the opinions of his family, he would have stayed at home and lived by the military code of honor: the kind of honor that leads to feuds, duels, and honor killings. If he had been swayed by the honor shown him by his early teachers, he would have stayed stuck in the practice of concentration without developing discernment. If he had been swayed by the disdain shown by the five brethren when he abandoned his austerities, he would have died without ever finding the goal (MN 36).

But, as he realized after his awakening, the problem with shame and honor is not that you want to look good in the eyes of others. It's that you want to look good in the wrong people's eyes. If you can focus on the right people, wanting to look good in the eyes of the truly wise, shame and honor can be an enormous help in developing what the Buddha identified as the most important external factor in gaining awakening: admirable friendship. He was now in a position to give others the guidance he had lacked in his own quest, and to teach his disciples to be admirable friends to others. This is why the Buddha set up the monastic Saṅgha: to keep the lineage of admirable friends alive. As we will see in the second section of this sutta, this lineage of friends plays a key role, not only in developing a healthy sense of shame and honor, but also in training the mind in the other good qualities it needs to be responsible and mature.

One of the dangers that can come from shame and honor in admirable friendship is that, out of a desire to look good in your friends' eyes, you might want to show off your good qualities. To counteract this tendency, the Buddha warned that if you want to show off, your good qualities immediately get ruined. One of the signs of integrity, he said, is modesty—to speak as little as possible of your own good qualities, and never to exalt yourself over others who lack them (AN 4:73; AN 4:28; AN 8:23; AN 8:30).

The other danger of shame and honor is that you might want to hide your mistakes from your admirable friends. This is why the Buddha stressed that, if you've made mistakes in the past but have now learned not to repeat them, you brighten the world like the moon when released from a cloud (Dhp 172–173). And it's also why the Buddha began this sutta with a discussion on truthfulness, letting Rāhula know that making a mistake is much less shameful than making a mistake and not admitting it. If you hide your faults, you not only lose the trust of your friends, but you also close the way to making progress on the path. Or even worse: As noted above, if a person feels no shame in telling a deliberate lie, there's no evil that that person won't do.

Here in MN 61, the Buddha illustrates this point with the image of elephants in battle. If an elephant goes into battle and uses his feet and tusks, but holds back his trunk, the elephant trainer knows that the elephant hasn't given his life to the king. But if an elephant uses his feet and his tusks *and* his trunk, the elephant trainer knows that the elephant has given his life to his king. There's nothing it won't do.

This image is a good lesson in the Buddha's revolutionary sense of honor. At first glance, it would seem that the elephant who doesn't hold back would be the hero of the image—after all, that's the kind of elephant a king would want to send into battle, and it represents the kind of honor often extolled in warrior cultures, such as the noble warrior culture in which the Buddha was raised. But here the Buddha is actually presenting the image in a negative light: The elephant's willingness to risk its trunk is a sign of its servility to the king. In effect, the Buddha's telling Rāhula that if, like the elephant who protects his trunk, he's heedful to protect his truthfulness, it's a point of genuine honor: a sign that he's a servant to no one, neither to anyone outside nor to his own defilements inside.

This inversion of the old military sense of honor is echoed in the Buddha's comment that better than victory in battle over a thousand-thousand men is victory over one person: yourself (Dhp 103).

PART TWO

After having taught Rāhula the value of truthfulness and a healthy sense of shame, the Buddha then showed him how to apply them in the practice of the Dhamma. To understand the teachings in this second section, it's necessary first to understand the teachings on kamma.

In the West, these teachings are often misunderstood and, as a result, disliked. Part of the problem is that people, believing that these teachings to be deterministic, dismiss them as psychologically unhealthy. The complaint is that the teaching on kamma makes people fatalistic about their own suffering, complacent about their pleasure, and callous and indifferent to the sufferings of others.

But this complaint is based on a misunderstanding of the Buddha's actual teachings on kamma. In fact, the Buddha taught kamma in a way that is psychologically very healthy: neither fatalistic, complacent, nor callous.

To see how this is so, try a thought experiment. Suppose you have a child. When you train your child, what principles would you want to teach the child to give it a healthy attitude toward his or her own actions?

The first principle would be, "Think before you act. Choose carefully what you want to do because your actions do have results. Some actions can be very harmful, others can be very helpful." This is the first principle, the principle of heedfulness, which in turn assumes, at least to some extent, that you are free to be heedful—in other words,

that you are able to choose whether or not to follow a particular course of action, and that some courses of action give better results than others.

The second principle would be, “Your intentions make a difference.” If the child breaks something intentionally, the punishment should be very different from when he breaks it unintentionally.

The third principle would be, “Pay attention to what you’re doing and see the results you’re getting. If you see that you’re doing something hurtful, stop.” Further, “If you see you’ve done something harmful, resolve not to repeat it.” This is the principle of compassion.

The next principle would be, “Admit your mistakes. If you broke something, don’t say that it was already broken before you stepped on it. Don’t be debilitated by remorse, but at the same time, don’t be callous about the harm you’ve done.” This is the principle of integrity along with truthfulness.

Finally, “Learn from your mistakes so that you don’t have to repeat them. If you’ve made a mistake, talk it over with someone you trust.” This is the principle of discernment: both in recognizing a mistake and in recognizing who is worthy of trust and who isn’t.

Now, to teach your child these principles, you yourself have to be trustworthy. If your child comes and says that he crashed your car, take a long deep breath and tell him how to be careful not to do it again. If you fly off the handle, your child will never again admit a mistake to you.

So these are the basic principles in teaching a healthy attitude toward action and toward the mistakes people make in their actions. Nobody is born perfect, so we have to be willing to admit the fact that we will make mistakes, but we should also be willing to learn from them.

These are actually the same principles that the Buddha taught to his son, Rāhula.

The first principle—as we saw in the first section of the sutta—is to be **truthful**, which means being truthful not only to other people but also to yourself. Truthfulness in both senses is the basis for all progress in the life of the mind.

Truthfulness to yourself means being honest with yourself about your intentions, your actions, and the results of your actions. This is why, in this second section of the sutta, the Buddha teaches Rāhula exactly how to go about this in the most effective way. He prefaces his remarks with another simile: that of a mirror. This is an extension of the theme of **shame**, because, after all, what is a mirror for if not to see how you look in the eyes of others? What the Buddha is proposing here might be called the mirror of the wise. If you want to see how you look in the eyes of the wise, you have to reflect on your own actions, because that’s how wise people judge you: not by your external appearance, but by the skillfulness of your actions and your willingness to learn.

The Buddha then shows Rāhula how to reflect on his actions, phrasing his instructions as a series of questions. This is actually an introduction to the quality that the Buddha identified as the most important internal quality for achieving awakening:

appropriate attention (*yoniso manasikāra*). In MN 2, he shows that this quality means knowing how to pay attention to the right questions: questions that focus on actions and their results in a way that will lead to the end of suffering. In a way, appropriate attention can be understood as a mature form of the two qualities the Buddha said he looked for in a student: being honest and observant. As MN 2 shows, the highest expression of this quality is asking questions in terms of the four noble truths: unskillful action (craving) leading to undesirable result (suffering); skillful action (the noble eightfold path) leading to desirable result (the cessation of suffering). In this way, the Buddha in this sutta is giving Rāhula the foundation he'll need to reach the highest form of discernment.

He tells Rāhula to begin reflecting on his actions by examining his intentions. And the questions he has Rāhula ask at this stage, in essence, come down to this: "What are the consequences you anticipate from the action?" This applies to actions of the body, actions of speech, and actions of mind. "Do you foresee any harm from the action—harm to yourself, harm to others, or to both?" If so, don't do it. If not, you can go ahead and do it.

While you're doing it, ask yourself if the action is actually leading to harm. If it is, stop. If not, you can continue with the action.

Once the action is done, you're still not done. You have to ask yourself about its long-term consequences. If you see that the action did cause harm, you should develop a sense of shame over the mistake. In other words, you see that if you were to repeat the mistake, you would be ashamed, because you realize that it doesn't live up to your original intention not to cause harm.

Notice, however, that in advocating shame here, the Buddha is not advocating a sense of remorse. As he states in SN 42:8, remorse does not undo the harm that was done. The best course of action, as he advises in that sutta, is to resolve not to repeat the mistake, and then to spread goodwill to all: to others, so that you solidify your resolve not to harm them; and to yourself, so that you don't harm yourself with debilitating thoughts of guilt and remorse that might actually weaken you.

Having developed a sense of shame over the mistake, the Buddha then advises that you talk it over with someone else who has experience on the path.

This is where the Buddha, in effect, introduces the most important external practice conducive to awakening: **admirable friendship** (*kalyāṇa-mittatā*). You need admirable friends to show you, not only through word but also through deed, how you can best act for the sake of awakening. As the Buddha said in SN 45:2, if we didn't have him as an admirable friend, we wouldn't even know that there was a path to the end of suffering. And as he states in AN 8:54, admirable friendship means not only having friends who embody such qualities as conviction, virtue, generosity, and discernment, but also emulating those qualities in your own behavior.

This aspect of the training shows one reason why the Buddha instituted the monastic Saṅgha: to train people, through apprenticeship, to be experienced enough to

give good advice to one another. In following the Buddha's advice to Rāhula that you talk your mistake over with an admirable friend, you gain the friend's perspective on what you did wrong and what might have been a better course of action to follow instead. This way you don't have to keep re-inventing the Dhamma wheel.

Once you have received your friend's advice, you resolve not to repeat the same mistake again.

However, if—on inspection—you don't see any harmful consequences from your original action, take joy in the fact that your practice is developing and continue trying to get better and better.

This joy is what healthy shame and honor are for: to help you see for yourself the well-being that comes from mastering higher levels of skill and harmlessness in your actions. When this becomes your source of happiness, you become an adult, with less need for the approval and affirmations of others. In seeing the power of your actions and really wanting to act in harmless ways, you make the wisdom and compassion of your admirable friends your own.

As we contemplate these instructions, we can see that they embody the five principles of a healthy attitude toward action—heedfulness, compassion, truthfulness, integrity, and discernment:

heedfulness in that you take the results of your actions seriously;

compassion in that you don't want to do any harm;

truthfulness in your willingness to admit your mistakes;

integrity in taking responsibility for any harm that you've done; and

discernment in using your own ingenuity and the advice of the wise to help you not repeat the mistake.

Here it's important to note that, in teaching compassion to his son, the Buddha recommends that he develop compassion both for himself and for others at the same time. He never advocates harming yourself for the sake of the well-being of others. As he explains the issue in AN 4:96, you harm yourself when you break the precepts against killing, stealing, engaging in illicit sex, telling lies, or taking intoxicants. You harm others when you get *them* to break those precepts. As for loss in terms of your wealth or health, the Buddha doesn't regard those kinds of loss as anywhere near as serious as loss in terms of your virtue (AN 5:130). This means that sacrificing your wealth or health either for the sake of your virtue or for the sake of helping others to protect their virtue doesn't count as harm. It would actually count as skillful.

These qualities are obviously good qualities to develop in the course of daily life, but—as we'll see below—they are also good qualities to bring to meditation practice as well.

In addition to developing a healthy psychological attitude toward your actions, these instructions teach what might be called the metaphysical implications of that

healthy attitude. We don't often stop to think what sort of universe we assume when we try to think in healthy ways, but for the Buddha, it was important to be clear about those assumptions, so that we can examine their implications and benefit from knowing exactly what further skills might be possible in the universe we're assuming.

- ♦ The first metaphysical implication concerns *the primacy of the mind*: Mental actions are not simply the result of physical phenomena. Instead, the mind can be an instigator (Dhp 1–2). Your actions begin, not with fate, nor with the stars, nor with outside conditions (AN 3:62). They begin with your intentions. This is why, when examining your actions, you first have to look at what you anticipate the results of your actions will be. In fact, the role of intention in shaping your actions is so strong that in AN 6:63 the Buddha says that the intention *is* the action.

- ♦ Two, *you are free in how you choose to act*. Just because an intention appears in the mind doesn't mean that you have to act on it. And just because you've started an action doesn't mean you have to continue with it. You're free to question your action at both of these stages and, if you find that it causes harm, you can decide not to continue with it. If you didn't have this freedom of choice, the whole idea of teaching a path of practice to put an end to suffering wouldn't make any sense, for no one could choose whether to follow the path or not (AN 2:19).

- ♦ Three, *actions have results*. When you act, you're not writing in water. The action is not illusory, nor are the results. What you do has an impact both on yourself and on others. This is why the Buddha has Rāhula be on the lookout both for harm to himself and harm to others that might come from his action.

- ♦ Four, *the quality of an action is determined not only by the intention behind it but also by the results it gives*. Good intentions, on their own, are not enough. Simply meaning well, you can still cause harm. You have to learn how to make your intentions better than good: skillful. This is why you also have to check the actual results of your actions. It's through experience, learning from our mistakes, connecting cause and effect, that you learn what genuinely is helpful and genuinely is harmful.

In fact, to see things in this way is the beginning of wisdom. As MN 135 notes, the questions leading to discernment are, "What, when I do it, will lead to long-term welfare and happiness? What, when I do it, will lead to long-term harm and suffering?" The wisdom here lies in understanding three things. The first is realizing that happiness and suffering come from your actions. The second is that there is such a thing as long-term happiness. And the third is realizing that long-term happiness is better than short-term.

In Dhp 290, the Buddha illustrates this principle by saying that if you see a long-term happiness that would come from abandoning a short-term happiness, you should be willing to give up the short-term happiness for the sake of the long-term. A British translator once translated this passage into English and added a footnote, saying that this could not possibly be what the passage really means because the principle is so

basic that everybody knows it. Still, even though everybody may know it, not everybody acts on it, which is why the Buddha has to remind us.

✦ A fifth metaphysical implication that can also be drawn from the Buddha's instructions to Rāhula is that *the results of actions follow a pattern*. Otherwise, you couldn't learn from a mistake. If you did one thing today and the same thing tomorrow but got different results, you wouldn't be able to learn from your past actions. It's because there *is* a pattern to actions and their results that we can learn.

This pattern has two features:

1) In some cases, an action can give immediate results. If you spit into the wind, you don't have to wait until your next lifetime for it to come back at you. It comes back right away. This is why the Buddha recommends looking for the results of an action while you're doing it.

2) In other cases, you don't see the results until a long time after. If you plant a seed today, the fruit won't come until a later day. This is why the Buddha recommends checking the results of the action after it's done.

Sometimes these patterns combine, so that the action gives results both immediately *and* after a long time.

These two features of the causal pattern are very important. The fact that there are actually two patterns interacting is what allows the Buddha's teachings on causality to avoid determinism on the one hand and chaos on the other. In other words, because there are patterns, there is no chaos. There are some influences coming in from the past and they follow a pattern that you simply have to accept. At the same time, though, because the patterns interact, they leave openings that allow you to be free in the present moment to change your actions, which means that there is no strict determinism.

In this way, the Buddha finds a middle way that allows for freedom within the patterns of cause and effect in our actions. The fact of the patterns is what allows us to learn lessons from our actions today that we can apply with some confidence tomorrow. The fact of the openings in the intersection of the patterns is what allows us to develop our mastery of action into a skill.

These interacting patterns are related to the basic metaphysical principle on the nature of causality that the Buddha discovered in the course of his awakening, called *idappaccayatā*, this/that conditionality (Ud 1:1). Together they form the fifth metaphysical implication of a healthy psychological attitude toward actions: that actions have a pattern that we can learn and master, but that the pattern is not deterministic. We can use our understanding of this pattern to manipulate causes and effects in the direction we want.

In addition, the Buddha's instructions to Rāhula in this sutta have some implications in terms of the practices and qualities of mind that play a crucial role in the practice of meditation.

The first quality is *attention*—in particular, appropriate attention, asking the right questions about your actions before you do them, while you’re doing them, and after they’re done. This connects with the principle of heedfulness.

The second quality you need to develop is *alertness*, the ability to see clearly what you’re doing while you’re doing it, and the results you’re actually getting as they arise. In other words, you don’t see just what you *hope* to be getting; you see what actually happens as a result of your actions. This connects to the principle of honesty or truthfulness.

The third quality is *ardency*, which is the whole-hearted desire to be skillful in whatever you do. If you’re alert to the fact that something is skillful, you want with your whole heart to develop it. If you’re alert to the fact that something is unskillful, you want with your whole heart to avoid it. This connects with the principle of compassion, wanting to avoid the harm coming from unskillful behavior and to enjoy the benefits of skillful behavior—both for yourself or for others.

The fourth quality is *mindfulness*, remembering to keep asking the right questions, remembering to be alert to what you’re doing, remembering your purpose in practicing, and remembering what you’ve learned from past actions: where to look in the present moment, and how to skillfully handle different issues as they come up.

When you combine mindfulness with ardency, they connect with the principle of integrity, in that you want to remember your mistakes and not repeat them.

These four qualities are the qualities that go together in establishing mindfulness, which counts as right mindfulness and provides the theme for right concentration (DN 22).

All four of these qualities should be developed in all of your actions, which is why the Buddha’s instructions to Rāhula are a good example of how to give beginning instructions in meditation. The Pāli word for meditation, *bhāvanā*, means to develop—and specifically, to develop good qualities of mind. This process doesn’t begin only when you sit down with your eyes closed. It begins in the way you conduct your entire life, because the same mind is acting in all circumstances, whether your eyes are open or closed. If you’re dishonest in your daily life, you’ll find it hard to be honest with yourself in meditation. If you’re careless or apathetic in your daily actions, it’ll be hard to be careful as you meditate.

SN 47:16 notes that purified virtue is one of the qualities you need to develop mindfulness. And one of the reasons why is that the practice of virtue develops all four of the qualities mentioned here. You need to use *appropriate attention* to ask yourself how you will observe the precepts in your life, and in particular, what changes you need to make in your behavior to bring it in line with the precepts. You also need *ardency* in the whole-hearted desire to follow the precepts strictly, *alertness* to make sure that you really are following them, and finally *mindfulness* in keeping the precepts in mind. Without these qualities, you cannot observe the precepts. When you do observe the

precepts, you reinforce these qualities. When they're reinforced, you can bring them, developed, into your meditation.

In fact, the lessons from these instructions to Rāhula apply all the way to the highest levels of meditation practice. When the Buddha in MN 121 discusses how the perception of emptiness applies to concentration practice, he says to examine your state of mind to see where it still contains disturbance and where it's empty of disturbance. If you detect any disturbance, ask yourself what you're doing in your concentration to cause that disturbance. When you see a perception that causes a disturbance, you let it go—in the same way that the Buddha told Rāhula to examine his actions and let go of any unskillful ones.

As you follow this process of looking for disturbances and their causes, and letting go of the causes, the mind grows more and more empty of disturbance, the disturbances and the perceptions causing them get more and more subtle, until you finally reach awakening. This process follows the same pattern that the Buddha taught to Rāhula. Examining your actions, seeing the causes and the results in your mind in the present moment, letting go of anything unskillful: This can take you all the way to the end of the path.

At the end of this sutta, the Buddha summarizes all the qualities and practices he as taught Rāhula—heedfulness, compassion, truthfulness, integrity, and discernment; appropriate attention, ardency, alertness, and mindfulness—under a single word: *purification*. This is not the ritual purification of the brahmans, the ancient priestly caste of India. Instead, it's the purification of your thoughts, words, and deeds in the sense that they are actually free of harm—to yourself and to others.

Now, purity is one of the three main qualities traditionally attributed to the Buddha, along with discernment and compassion. This sutta helps to show how those three qualities are related in practice—and why they don't have to be regarded as belonging to the Buddha alone. We can develop them, too.

Discernment, as we have seen, begins with the question, “What, when I do it, will lead to my long-term welfare and happiness?”

As Ud 5:2 shows, compassion grows by bringing discernment to your desire for happiness: If your happiness depends on harming others, it's not going to last.

And as this sutta shows, purity means examining your actions so that they actually embody these qualities of discernment and compassion in your dealings with yourself and with others.

In this way, the Buddha's qualities are all related to the desire for a trustworthy and harmless happiness. And the Buddha's instructions to Rāhula in this sutta show precisely how to bring that happiness about.

The Buddha's instructions in training Rāhula to purify his actions eventually bore fruit. Instead of taking pride in the fact that he was the Buddha's son, Rāhula showed a

willingness to learn from all the monks (see, for instance, MN 62). And after he gained awakening, the Buddha extolled him for being foremost among the monks in his desire to learn (AN 1:209).

Of course, at that point Rāhula didn't need the Buddha's praise. He had already found a deathless happiness that was beyond the reach of other people's respect. Actually, the Buddha was praising Rāhula for our sake, to let us know that shame, honor, truthfulness, and all the other qualities embodied in his instructions to Rāhula can be useful tools on the path. If you're careful in choosing whose opinions you let into your psyche, and internalize the qualities that make shame and honor healthy, you'll not only look good in the eyes of the wise. Your eyes will become wise as well.

Further Readings:

In addition to the suttas cited in this essay, you may want to read the following books or articles:

On honesty and truthfulness: "Honest to Goodness"; "Truths with Consequences"

On shame and honor: "In the Eyes of the Wise"

On heedfulness: "The Practice in a Word"; "The Buddha's Last Word"

On compassion: *The Sublime Attitudes*; "Metta Means Goodwill"; "Head & Heart Together"; "Educating Compassion"; "Freedom from Buddha Nature"; "The Wisdom of the Ego"

On kamma: *Kamma Q&A*; *The Karma of Mindfulness*; *The Wings to Awakening*; "The Road to Nirvāṇa is Paved with Skillful Intentions"; "The Karma of Now"; *Selves & Not-self*

On virtue: "The Healing Power of the Precepts"; "Getting the Message"

On appropriate attention: "Questions of Skill"; "Untangling the Present"; "Food for Awakening"; *Skill in Questions*; *On the Path*; *Into the Stream*

On discernment: *Merit*; *Discernment*; "Ignorance"; "The Power of Judgment"

On this/that conditionality: *The Wings to Awakening*; *The Shape of Suffering*; *On the Path*

On applying the lessons of MN 61 to meditation practice: "The Integrity of Emptiness"; "Mindfulness Defined"; *Right Mindfulness*

On using the lessons of MN 61 to test religious and philosophical truths: "Perennial Issues"