SN 56.45 — Splitting Hairs

English translation by Bhikkhu Sujato.
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Text

Linked Discourses 56.45

5. A Cliff

Splitting Hairs

At one time the Buddha was staying near Vesālī, at the Great Wood, in the hall with the peaked roof.

Then Venerable Ānanda robed up in the morning and, taking his bowl and robe, entered Vesālī for alms. He saw several Licchavi youths practicing archery near the town hall. They were shooting arrows from a distance through a small keyhole, shaft after shaft without missing.

When he saw this he thought, “These Licchavi youths really are trained, so well trained, in that they shoot arrows from a distance through a small keyhole, shaft after shaft without missing.”

Then Ānanda wandered for alms in Vesālī. After the meal, on his return from almsround, he went to the Buddha, bowed, sat down to one side, and told him what had happened.

“What do you think, Ānanda? Which is harder and more challenging: to shoot arrows from a distance through a small keyhole, shaft after shaft without missing? Or to take a horsehair split into seven strands and penetrate one tip with another tip?”

“It’s more difficult and challenging, sir, to take a horsehair split into seven strands and penetrate one tip with another tip.”

“Still, Ānanda, those who truly penetrate suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path penetrate something tougher than that.

That’s why you should practice meditation …”