***Similes of the Water-Snake and the Raft***

MN 22 Alagaddupama Sutta

From *The Discourse on the Snake Simile*

**The Water-Snake Simile**

"Monks, there is the case where some worthless men study the Dhamma: dialogues, narratives of mixed prose and verse, explanations, verses, spontaneous exclamations, quotations, birth stories, amazing events, question & answer sessions [the earliest classifications of the Buddha's teachings]. Having studied the Dhamma, they don't ascertain the meaning (or: the purpose) of those Dhammas [[5]](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.022.than.html#n-5) with their discernment. Not having ascertained the meaning of those Dhammas with their discernment, they don't come to an agreement through pondering. They study the Dhamma both for attacking others and for defending themselves in debate. They don't reach the goal for which [people] study the Dhamma. Their wrong grasp of those Dhammas will lead to their long-term harm & suffering. Why is that? Because of the wrong-graspedness of the Dhammas.

"Suppose there were a man needing a water-snake, seeking a water-snake, wandering in search of a water-snake. He would see a large water-snake and grasp it by the coils or by the tail. The water-snake, turning around, would bite him on the hand, on the arm, or on one of his limbs, and from that cause he would suffer death or death-like suffering. Why is that? Because of the wrong-graspedness of the water-snake. In the same way, there is the case where some worthless men study the Dhamma... Having studied the Dhamma, they don't ascertain the meaning of those Dhammas with their discernment. Not having ascertained the meaning of those Dhammas with their discernment, they don't come to an agreement through pondering. They study the Dhamma both for attacking others and for defending themselves in debate. They don't reach the goal for which [people] study the Dhamma. Their wrong grasp of those Dhammas will lead to their long-term harm & suffering. Why is that? Because of the wrong-graspedness of the Dhammas.

"But then there is the case where some clansmen study the Dhamma... Having studied the Dhamma, they ascertain the meaning of those Dhammas with their discernment. Having ascertained the meaning of those Dhammas with their discernment, they come to an agreement through pondering. They don't study the Dhamma either for attacking others or for defending themselves in debate. They reach the goal for which people study the Dhamma. Their right grasp of those Dhammas will lead to their long-term welfare & happiness. Why is that? Because of the right-graspedness of the Dhammas.

"Suppose there were a man needing a water-snake, seeking a water-snake, wandering in search of a water-snake. He would see a large water-snake and pin it down firmly with a cleft stick. Having pinned it down firmly with a forked stick, he would grasp it firmly by the neck. Then no matter how much the water-snake might wrap its coils around his hand, his arm, or any of his limbs, he would not from that cause suffer death or death-like suffering. Why is that? Because of the right-graspedness of the water-snake. In the same way, there is the case where some clansmen study the Dhamma... Having studied the Dhamma, they ascertain the meaning of those Dhammas with their discernment. Having ascertained the meaning of those Dhammas with their discernment, they come to an agreement through pondering. They don't study the Dhamma either for attacking others or for defending themselves in debate. They reach the goal for which people study the Dhamma. Their right grasp of those Dhammas will lead to their long-term welfare & happiness. Why is that? Because of the right-graspedness of the Dhammas. [[6]](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.022.than.html#n-6)

"Therefore, monks, when you understand the meaning of my statements, that is how you should remember them. But when you don't understand the meaning of my statements, then right there you should ask me or the experienced monks.

**The Simile of the Raft**

"I shall show you, monks, the Teaching's similitude to a raft: as having the purpose of crossing over, not the purpose of being clung to. Listen, monks, and heed well what I shall say" — "Yes, Lord," replied the monks. and the Blessed One spoke thus:

"Suppose, monks, there is a man journeying on a road and he sees a vast expanse of water of which this shore is perilous and fearful, while the other shore is safe and free from danger. But there is no boat for crossing nor is there a bridge for going over from this side to the other. So the man thinks: 'This is a vast expanse of water; and this shore is perilous and fearful, but the other shore is safe and free from danger. There is, however, no boat here for crossing, nor a bridge for going over from this side to the other. Suppose I gather reeds, sticks, branches and foliage, and bind them into a raft.' Now that man collects reeds, sticks, branches and foliage, and binds them into a raft. Carried by that raft, laboring with hands and feet, he safely crosses over to the other shore. Having crossed and arrived at the other shore, he thinks: 'This raft, indeed, has been very helpful to me. Carried by it, laboring with hands and feet, I got safely across to the other shore. Should I not lift this raft on my head or put it on my shoulders, and go where I like?'

"What do you think about it, O monks? Will this man by acting thus, do what should be done with a raft?" — "No, Lord" — "How then, monks, would he be doing what ought to be done with a raft? Here, monks, having got across and arrived at the other shore, the man thinks: 'This raft, indeed, has been very helpful to me. Carried by it, and laboring with hands and feet, I got safely across to the other shore. Should I not pull it up now to the dry land or let it float in the water, and then go as I please?' By acting thus, monks, would that man do what should be done with a raft.

"In the same way, monks, have I shown to you the Teaching's similitude to a raft: as having the purpose of crossing over, not the purpose of being clung to.

"You, O monks, who understand the Teaching's similitude to a raft, you should let go even (good) teachings, how much more false ones!