

## **To the Kālāmas (Aṅguttara Nikāya, 3:65)**

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was wandering on tour together with a large Sangha of monks when he arrived at a town of the Kālāmas named Kesaputta.<sup>47</sup> Now the Kālāmas of Kesaputta heard: "It is said that the ascetic Gotama, the Sakyan son who went forth from a Sakyan family, has arrived at Kesaputta. Now a good report about that master Gotama has been circulating thus: 'That Blessed One is an arahant, fully enlightened, accomplished in true knowledge and conduct, sublime, knower of the world, unsurpassed leader of persons to be tamed, teacher of devas and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One. He makes known this world with its devas, with Māra, with Brahmā, this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, with its devas and humans, having realized it through his own direct knowledge. He teaches a Dhamma that is good in the beginning, good in the middle and good in the end, with the right meaning and expression; he reveals a holy life that is perfectly complete and purified.' Now it is good to see arahants such as this."

Then the Kālāmas of Kesaputta approached the Blessed One. Some paid homage to him and sat down to one side; some exchanged greetings with him and, after their greetings and cordial talk, sat down to one side; some saluted him reverentially and sat down to one side; some remained silent and sat down to one side. Then the Kālāmas said to the Blessed One:

"There are, Lord, some ascetics and brahmins who come to Kesaputta. They explain and elucidate their own doctrines, but disparage, debunk, revile and vilify the doctrines of others. But then some other ascetics and brahmins come to Kesaputta, and they too explain and elucidate their own doctrines, but disparage, debunk, revile and vilify the doctrines of the others. For us, Lord, there is perplexity and doubt as to which of these good ascetics speak truth and which speak falsehood."

"It is fitting for you to be perplexed, Kālāmas, it is fitting for you to be in doubt. Doubt has arisen in you about a perplexing matter. Come, Kālāmas. Do not go by oral tradition, by lineage of teaching, by hearsay, by a collection of scriptures, by logical reasoning, by inferential reasoning, by reflection on reasons, by the acceptance of a view after pondering it, by the seeming competence of a speaker, or because you think, 'The ascetic is our teacher.'<sup>48</sup> But when you know for yourselves, 'These things are unwholesome, these things are blamable; these things are censured by the wise; these things, if undertaken and practised, lead to harm and suffering,' then you should abandon them.

"What do you think, Kālāmas? When greed, hatred and delusion arise in a person, is it for his welfare or harm?"<sup>49</sup> – "For his harm, Lord." – "Kālāmas, a person who is greedy, hating and deluded, overpowered by greed, hatred and delusion, his thoughts controlled by them, will destroy life, take what is not given, engage in sexual misconduct and tell lies; he will also prompt others to do likewise. Will that conduce to his harm and suffering for a long time?" – "Yes, Lord."

"What do you think, Kālāmas? Are these things wholesome or unwholesome? – "Unwholesome, Lord." – "Blamable or blameless?" – "Blamable, Lord." – "Censured or praised by the wise?" – "Censured, Lord." – "Undertaken and practised, do they lead to harm and suffering or not, or how is it in this case?" – "Undertaken and practised, these things lead to harm and suffering. So it appears to us in this case."

"It was for this reason, Kālāmas, that we said: Do not go by oral tradition..."

"Come, Kālāmas. Do not go by oral tradition, by lineage of teaching, by hearsay, by a collection of scriptures, by logical reasoning, by inferential reasoning, by reflection on reasons, by the acceptance of a view after pondering it, by the seeming competence of a speaker, or because you think, 'The ascetic is our teacher.' But when you know for yourselves, 'These things are wholesome, these things are blameless; these things are praised by the wise; these things, if undertaken and practised, lead to welfare and happiness,' then you should engage in them.

"What do you think, Kālāmas? When non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion arise in a person, is it for his welfare or harm?" – "For his welfare, Lord." – "Kālāmas, a person who is

without greed, without hatred, without delusion, not overpowered by greed, hatred and delusion, his thoughts not controlled by them, will abstain from the destruction of life, from taking what is not given, from sexual misconduct and from false speech; he will also prompt others to do likewise. Will that conduce to his welfare and happiness for a long time?" – "Yes, Lord."

"What do you think, Kālāmas? Are these things wholesome or unwholesome? – "Wholesome, Lord." – "Blamable or blameless?" – "Blameless, Lord." – "Censured or praised by the wise?" – "Praised, Lord." – "Undertaken and practised, do they lead to welfare and happiness or not, or how is it in this case?" – "Undertaken and practised, these things lead to welfare and happiness. So it appears to us in this case."

"It was for this reason, Kālāmas, that we said: Do not go upon oral tradition...."

"Then, Kālāmas, that noble disciple – devoid of covetousness, devoid of ill will, unconfused, clearly comprehending, ever mindful – dwells pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, likewise the second quarter, the third and the fourth.<sup>50</sup> Thus above, below, across and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he dwells pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, vast, exalted, measureless, without hostility and without ill will.

"He dwells pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with compassion ... with altruistic joy ... with equanimity, likewise the second quarter, the third and the fourth. Thus above, below, across and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he dwells pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with equanimity, vast, exalted, measureless, without hostility and without ill will.

"When, Kālāmas, this noble disciple has thus made his mind free of enmity, free of ill will, uncorrupted and pure, he has won four assurances in this very life.

"The first assurance he has won is this: 'If there is another world, and if good and bad deeds bear fruit and yield results, it is possible that with the breakup of the body, after death, I shall arise in a good destination, in a heavenly world.'

"The second assurance he has won is this: 'If there is no other world, and if good and bad deeds do not bear fruit and yield results, still right here, in this very life, I live happily, free of enmity and ill will.

"The third assurance he has won is this: 'Suppose evil befalls the evil-doer. Then, as I do not intend evil for anyone, how can suffering afflict me, one who does no evil deed?'

"The fourth assurance he has won is this: 'Suppose evil does not befall the evil-doer. Then right here I see myself purified in both respects.'<sup>51</sup>

"When, Kālāmas, this noble disciple has thus made his mind free of enmity, free of ill will, uncorrupted and pure, he has won these four assurances in this very life."

"So it is, Blessed One! So it is, Sublime One! When this noble disciple has thus made his mind free of enmity, free of ill will, uncorrupted and pure, he has won these four assurances in this very life.

"Excellent, Lord!... Let the Blessed One accept us as lay followers who have gone for refuge from today until life's end."

## Notes

47. According to Commentary, this town was situated at the edge of a forest and thus served as a way station for various groups of wanderers and ascetics. Their visits gave the townsfolk exposure to a wide range of philosophical theories, but the conflicted systems of thought to which they were exposed caused doubt and confusion. This sutta is often described as "the Buddha's charter of free inquiry," but while it certainly discourages blind belief it does not quite advocate the supremacy of personal opinion in the spiritual domain. One important criterion for sound judgement the Buddha will propose is, as we shall see, the opinion of the wise, and to apply this criterion implies that one is prepared to recognize others as wiser than oneself and to accept their recommendations in the confidence they will lead to one's long-range benefit.

48. These ten inadequate criteria of truth may be grouped into three categories: (1) The *first* are propositions based on tradition, which includes the first four criteria. Of these, "oral tradition" (*anussava*) is generally understood to refer to the Vedic tradition, which, according to the

brahmins, had originated with the Primal Deity and had been handed down orally through successive generations. "Lineage" (*paramparā*) signifies tradition in general, an unbroken succession of teachings or teachers. "Hearsay" (or "report"; *itikirā*) may mean popular opinion or general consensus. And "a collection of scriptures" (*piṭaka-sampadā*) signifies any collection of religious texts regarded as infallible. (2) The *second* set, which comprises the next four terms, refers to four types of reasoning recognized by thinkers in the Buddha's age; their differences need not detain us here. (3) The *third* set, consisting of the last two items, comprises two types of personal authority: the first is the personal charisma of the speaker (perhaps including too his external qualifications, e.g. that he is highly educated, has a large following, is respected by the king, etc.); the second is the authority stemming from the speaker's relationship to oneself, i.e. that he is one's own personal teacher (the Pali word *garu* used here is identical with the Sanskrit *guru*). For a detailed analysis, see Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, pp.175–202, 271–75.

49. These, according to the Buddha, are the three unwholesome roots, which underlie all immoral conduct and all defiled states of mind; see Texts 24, 37. As the aim of the Buddha's Teaching is the destruction of greed, hatred and delusion, the Buddha has subtly led the Kālāmas to affirm his Teaching simply by reflecting on their own experience, without any need for him to impose his authority on them.

50. At this point the Buddha introduces the practice of the four "divine abidings" (*brahmavihāra*), the development of universal loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy and equanimity. Loving-kindness (*mettā*) is formally defined as the wish for the welfare and happiness of all being; compassion (*karuṇā*), as empathy with those afflicted by suffering; altruistic joy (*muditā*), as rejoicing in the success and good fortune of others; and equanimity (*upekkhā*), as an attitude of neutrality or impartiality towards beings.

51. Comy: "In both respects' (*ubhayen'eva*): because he does no evil and because no evil will befall him."