

To save world, free self¹

This reflection is based on [SD 49.2 \(4.5.10\)](#)

In the **Lok'anta Gamana Sutta**, the Buddha, in simple words with profound senses, explains what it really means to “save the world.” We need to first understand what “world” really means. In the **Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23), the Buddha declares that all that there is are our 6 sense-faculties and their 6 respective sense-objects: these are the “all” (*sabba*). This is the world, the universe, we have created for ourselves. Nothing is meaningful for us beyond this.²

The Buddha has never exhorted us to “save the world,” as this ultimately refers to all our senses, from which we liberate ourselves. Even when taunted by the wanderer Uttiya, who asks, with all the Buddha’s attainments and teachings, “Is the whole world liberated by this, or only half of it, or a third of it?” The Buddha remains silent, because the question is wrongly put.³

In an important sense, we can say that the Buddha’s teaching is about “saving oneself” *from* the world. The world is what we make of it: we create our own world. Hence, it is within our power to change our “world,” that is our own self. This is the spirit of “**renouncing the world**,” of letting go of the world so that we are free of the falseness and unwholesomeness we have created for ourselves. To save the world, then, we need to renounce it.

In the **Lok'anta Gamana Sutta** (S 35.116), the Buddha declares what kind of “world” that we can really save or liberate. First, the Buddha shows us what kind of world needs “saving”:

Bhikshus, the end of the world cannot be known, seen or reached by going, I say. Yet, bhikshus, I also say that without reaching the end of the world there is no making an end to suffering.⁴ (S 35.116,2), SD 7.4

The first mention of “the world” refers to the physical universe, which is with neither beginning nor ending in terms of time and space (*okāsa, loka*). It also refers to the world of beings (*satta, loka*), simply put, the cycle of births and deaths (*saṃsāra*) itself, which is external to us, so to speak. However, *within* us are the world of formations (*saṅkhārā, loka*), the self-created and self-centred “world”—this is our real prison of craving and ignorance, what we need to awaken from and so be liberated.⁵

The Lok'anta Gamana Sutta further records the Buddha as declaring, “That in the world by which one is a perceiver of the world, a conceiver of the world—this is called ‘the world’⁶ in the

¹ This reflection is based on [SD 49.2 \(4.5.10\)](#).

² S 35.23 ([SD 7.1](#)).

³ A 10.95/5:195 ([SD 44.16](#)).

⁴ On the meanings of “world,” see **Rohitassa Sutta**, [SD 7.2 \(1\)](#).

⁵ On these “3 worlds” (*loka*), see [SD 7.2 \(1\)](#).

⁶ See for example **Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23/4:15), [SD 7.1](#) where “the world” refers to the 12 sense-bases.

noble one's discipline."⁷ (S 35.116,22). This refers to the workings of the 6 sense-bases. Then, the Buddha famously declares in **the Rohitassa Sutta** (S 2.26):

In this very fathom-long body, endowed with perception and mind, I declare
the world,
the arising of the world,
the ending of the world, and
the way leading to the ending of the world." (S 2.26,9), SD 7.1

In short, the Buddha does not exhort us to "save all beings" —this is simply a logical impossibility (we cannot save beings of the past or the future!) and a theological doublespeak ("ultimately," we might then say, "there are no beings to be saved!") Even when we cultivate lovingkindness, "May all beings be well and happy," we are simply using conventional language to help us clear our mind and heart of all ill will and radiate lovingkindness. It means an unconditional acceptance of others, and to begin there with our wise compassion. We need to awaken ourselves first before we can awaken others. Once we are awakened, then we would see how frivolous and false we have been even in our most religious moments, and how spiritual efficacious we are even in our silent moments.

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha's Example and Teachings]

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⁷ See **Rohitassa Sutta** (S 2.26) + [SD 7.1 \(2\)](#). On the physical sense-bases making one a "perceiver" and the mind-base making one a "conceiver," see Bodhi's remark in Introd above. See **Bhāvanā Sutta** (A 7.67/4:125-127), [SD 15.2](#).