

# 4a

## Kesa,puttiya<sup>1</sup> Sutta

The Discourse to the Kesa,puttiyas | **A 3.65**

Or, the Kesaputta Discourse; popularly known as **Kālāma Sutta** the Discourse to the Kālāmas

Be **Kesa,mutti(ya) Sutta** The Discourse to Those of Kesamutti

Theme: True religious worth and spiritual assurance

Translated with notes by Piya Tan ©2004, 2006, 2011

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We don't need to take drugs to hallucinate:  
Blur thinking, blur info, blur friends—  
and those who claim to know God—can do worse.

[**Note prefixes:** “§” before a number refers to passages in the Sutta itself. “**Intro**” refers to an Introduction section. “**Comy**” here usually refers to the Commentarial Notes at the end of this chapter. A parenthesized cross-reference without a prefix, eg [8], refers to the section in the same chapter.

- SD 35.4a(1)** Introductory notes
- SD 35.4a(2)** The Sutta
- SD 35.4a(3)** The Commentary
- SD 35.4b** Comparative study: A 3.65 & MĀ 16 (Chinese version)

### Sutta Synopsis

- §§1-2            1 The Kālāmas approach the Buddha.
- §§3-14        2 The moral worth of statements.
- §15a           3 The 4 divine abodes.
- §§15b-16     4 The 4 self-assurances.
- §17            5 The Kālāmas' exultation.
- §18            6 The Kālāmas go for refuge.

<sup>1</sup> So Ce Ee Se; Be *Kesa,muttiya*.

## Part 1. Introductory notes

### 1 The 10 doubtful points: An introduction

#### 1.1 MISINTERPRETATION OF THE SUTTA

##### 1.1.1 Not a “charter of free inquiry”

**1.1.1.1 The Kesa,puttiya Sutta** (A 3.65), popularly known as the Kālāma Sutta, is about how to know things rightly for personal, social, spiritual and universal good, based on the 10 “doubtful points.” Moral good is not beliefs, rituals or vows dictated by any kind of authority, but experienced for oneself. It has very much to do with how we develop our minds so that it is characterized with love, ruth, joy and peace. Finally, the Sutta teaches us why doing good is clearly better than doing bad. (SD 35.4).

**1.1.1.2** The Kesa,puttiya Sutta (better known as the Kālāma Sutta) is perhaps the most misquoted and misused Buddhist text. **Soma Thera**, in his translation of the Sutta, promisingly subtitled it as “the Buddha’s Charter of Free Inquiry” (1981). Alongside the Sutta is quoted Śāntarakṣita’s famous statement from **the Tattva,saṅgraha**,

*Bhikṣavaḥ [sambuddhau] mat-vacaḥ grāhyam paṇḍitaiḥ parīkṣya’īkṣ tu na gauravāt iva suvarṇam tāpāt chedāt nikaṣāt.*

O bhikshus [said the self-awakened one], my word should be accepted by the wise only after investigation, not out of respect (for me)—just as gold (is accepted) only after heating, cutting and rubbing. (Tttvs ch 26/3588) [6]

Those who summarily or vaguely take the Kesa,puttiya Sutta to be a carte blanche for “free thinking,” agnosticism or plain intellectual laziness, would be sorely disappointed to see, after a careful study of the discourse, that it is much more than a “charter of free inquiry.” In fact, it is better described as “**a guide for the perplexed,**” climaxing in a guarantee of spiritual liberation.

**1.1.1.3** We are born **free from religion**, without any idea of religion. We grow, first of all, by working with our senses, avoiding pain and discomfort, enjoy pleasure and comfort. As we grow into adults, we learn to tolerate discomfort, even hardship and lack, understanding that there will be the fruits of our labours. As we live and connect with others in more meaningful and purposeful ways, we learn to conduct ourselves so as to incur minimum disadvantage and loss to ourself and others, with maximum goodness for all. Essentially, this is what the Kesaputtiya Sutta is about.

##### 1.1.2 Main points

The Sutta opens with the Kālāmas of Kesa,puttiya inviting the Buddha to counsel them on the muddle and pain caused by the evangelistic zeal of visiting teachers [§§1-3]. The Buddha begins his admonition by speaking on the moral worthiness of a religion [§§4-14], and goes on to show how to cultivate positive emotions by way of the 4 divine abodes [§§15-16]. The Buddha closes his discourse with a guarantee that whether one believes in rebirth and karma or not, as long as one’s “mind is without enmity thus, without ill will thus, uncorrupted thus, purified thus,” one would enjoy 4 self-assurances or spiritual solaces (*assāsa*) [§§16-17]. [2]

### 1.1.3 The 10 sources of knowledge

The Kesa,puttiya Sutta even made it into the online encyclopaedia, Wikipedia.<sup>2</sup> However, as **Bodhi** has observed in his essay, “A look at the Kālāma Sutta”:

though the discourse certainly does counter the decrees of dogmatism and blind faith with a vigorous call for free investigation, it is problematic whether the sutta can support all the positions that have been ascribed to it. On the basis of a single passage, quoted out of context, the Buddha has been made out to be a pragmatic empiricist who dismisses all doctrine and faith, and whose Dhamma is simply a freethinker’s kit to truth which invites each one to accept and reject whatever he likes.

(Bodhi, 1988)

That “single passage” that has been misconstrued as a carte blanche for a “self-assembled” Buddhism actually refers to the 10 doubtful points (*dasa kaṅkhāniya-ṭ, ṭhāna*),<sup>3</sup> or unreliable sources of knowledge, or inadequate criteria for truth [§§3, 8, 9, 14]. The Buddha’s intention is gradually but clearly and fully revealed as the Sutta unfolds. The Sutta opens with the oft quoted **10 “doubtful points”**:

Come Kālāmas:

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|---|--|
| (1) Do not go <sup>4</sup> by tradition [aural revelation]. <sup>5</sup>  | <i>mā anussavena</i>                   |
| (2) Do not go by lineage [received wisdom].   | <i>mā paramparāya</i>                  |
| (3) Do not go by hearsay.   | <i>mā iti, kirāya</i>                  |
| (4) Do not go by scriptural authority.  | <i>mā piṭaka, sampadānena</i>          |
| (5) Do not go by pure reason [by logic].  | <i>mā takka, hetu[, gāhena]</i>        |
| (6) Do not go by inference (and deduction).   | <i>mā naya, hetu[, gāhena]</i>         |
| (7) Do not go by reasoned thought [by specious reasoning].  | <i>mā ākāra, parivitakkena</i>         |
| (8) Do not go by acceptance of [being convinced of]<br>a view after pondering on it.  | <i>mā diṭṭhi, nijjhāna-k, khantiyā</i> |
| (9) Do not go by (another’s) seeming ability.   | <i>mā bhavya, rūpatāya</i>             |
| (10) Do not go by the thought, “This recluse [holy man]. <sup>6</sup><br>is our teacher” [“This recluse is respected by us”]. | <i>mā samaṇo no garu</i>               |

When you know for yourselves, Kālāmas,  
‘These things are unwholesome. These things are blamable. These things are censured by the wise. These things, fully undertaken, bring about harm and suffering.’

—Then Kālāmas, you should abandon them.

[§3]

<sup>2</sup> Accessed 30 Nov 2006 from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalama\\_Sutta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalama_Sutta).

<sup>3</sup> *Kaṅkhāniya-ṭ, ṭhāna* (eg Prayudh, *Dictionary of Buddhism* §305, 1985:274) is a formation from the 2 components in the sentence, *kaṅkhanīye ca pana vo ṭhāne vicikicchā uppannā* (A 65.3/1:189).

<sup>4</sup> Comy interprets as *mā gaṇhiṭṭha* or *mā gaṇhittha*, “do not accept (lit, ‘take hold of’) (a notion)” throughout (AA 2:305).

<sup>5</sup> Incl revelations and prophecies. In the Buddha’s time (and earlier), this refers to an aural/oral tradition, “secret teachings” handed down directly from guru to chela. Examples from our own times would be a “whispered” tradition. Broadly speaking, this also includes what we have heard and read. More broadly, it implies some kind of lineage that authenticate itself with knowledge shared only amongst initiates.

<sup>6</sup> *Samaṇa* is usually tr as “recluse,” even “holy man,” but here also refers to both monk and nun, or any religious teacher.

This passage, like the Buddha's teachings as recorded in the Pali texts, has its context—that is, a particular audience and situation—and the teaching should be understood in that context.

In none of these passages or anywhere in the Sutta does the Buddha, as often misquoted by proponents of “vague Buddhism,”<sup>7</sup> state that his teachings should not be accepted, or that one could shape Buddhism according to one's likes and biases—“rather, he counsels that the words of the wise should be heeded and taken into account when deciding upon the value of a teaching.”<sup>8</sup>

### **1.1.4 The 3 classes of propositions** [For a threefold categorization: 3.2]

**1.1.4.0 Philosophically**—and for the purposes of easier and helpful discussions—we can group these 10 worldly sources of knowledge into 3 classes, that is, by: I. tradition (1-4); II. reasoning (5-8); and III. Personal authority (9-10). These classes of knowledge are very briefly summarized here. For details, please refer to their reference numbers in **the Sutta Commentary** following the sutta translation.

**1.1.4.1 I. The 4 traditional propositions** refer to the teachings and views of the numerous teachers from ancient times to the Buddha's own times, and, by extension, to our own times. This encompasses not only other religions, but also the various forms of Buddhism that exist today. There are 4 kinds of traditional propositions, which do *not* measure up to being any true criteria for real knowledge or liberating truth, thus:

(1) **The “oral tradition”** (*anu-s, sava*) mentioned here is that of the Vedic tradition. Basically, this refers to teachings directly heard from the various living teachers of the time. In our own time, this would include any teachings we hear or have heard from any teacher, no matter how old, famous, qualified or titled. This also includes sutta translations, interpretations of suttas, even our own reading and theoretical understanding of original texts that we have read. [§3.1 (1): see Part 3, comy]

(2) **“Lineage”** (*paramparā*), an unbroken succession of teachings or teachers, that is, those who have heard and memorized the teachings of those teachers from various religions, groups or authorities. We may call these “sectarian teachings.” Today, this would include any teaching from those who represent any teacher, religion, centre or source. [§3.1 (2): see Part 3, comy]

(3) **“Hearsay”** or “report” (*iti, kirā*) refers to popular opinion or general consensus. Other than listening to teachers and their disciples, we often hear talks from others, especially people we know or associate with. Very often a person, especially a strongly self-opinionated one, will have his own ideas, or misheard or misinterpreted them. This is 2<sup>nd</sup> hand information (even 3<sup>rd</sup> hand), and we, in turn, hear them. Hence, this is more of private views and personal gossips, and should be treated thus. [§3.1 (3): see Part 3, comy]

(4) **“Scriptural authority”** (*piṭaka, sampadā*), that is, regarding a collection of texts, especially religious or sacred scriptures, as authoritative and infallible. “Texts” here broadly refers to any kind of religious teaching that compiled in some form (other than what have been mentioned here). Up to the Buddha's time, such texts were orally transmitted and sacred texts were not written down. [§3.1 (4): see Part 3, comy]

**1.1.4.2 II.** The 2<sup>nd</sup> class of sources of knowledge comprises **the 4 types of reasoning** known in the Buddha's time. Unlike the Buddha, who, speaks from his awakened experience, and presents his teachings of them in a reasoned and reasonable manner based on direct, empirical observation, the “reasonings” listed here are clearly those based on hypothetical or speculative arguments.

<sup>7</sup> On “vague Buddhism,” see SD 4.6 (1).

<sup>8</sup> Accessed 30 Nov 2006 from <http://www.answers.com/topic/kalama-sutta>.

(5) **“Pure reason(ing)”** (*takka,hetu*) may be taken simply to mean “logic.” It works almost in a predictable way, in machines and computers. However, human conduct, although more predictable when we are controlled and compelled by unwholesome thoughts, are less predictable when our mind is wholesome, leading to wholesome conduct. In other words, it goes “against the currents” (*paṭisotā,gamī*) of the world, which is essentially guided by greed, hate and delusion. The awakening and awakened minds, as a rule, do not act by way of these 3 unwholesome roots, but through charity, compassion and wisdom. [§3.1 (5): see Part 3, comy]

(6) **“Inference (and deduction)”** (*naya,hetu*) refers to a prevalent technical Indian philosophical or sectarian view of “standpoint,” In the suttas, these mostly refer to views (*diṭṭhi*) regarding cause and effect, that is, causality. Against like logic, causality works in a predictable manner depending on the nature of the causes and their effects, and how we see them. In other words, this is “reason” applied broadly to how things happen. We often hear people saying: “Things happen for a reason.” But who decides what that “reason” is (if there is one). Moreover, such a statement is made by some of us, without really saying anything new or useful about the situation. Moreover, not everyone would agree that such a statement is even true. [§3.1 (6): see Part 3, comy]

(7) **“Specious reasoning”** (*ākāra,parivattakka*) simply means “imaginative reasoning. We reason from our own inclinations, visions and desires. We can give such reasoning big philosophical names, but it remains that they are purely circumstantial, and serious misses certain vital points. For example, we can say that we found a watch in a desert: we conclude obviously someone has left it there, that it belonged to someone, and someone had made it. Now, here is our world in the universe: someone must have put it there; someone must have made it.<sup>9</sup> It must be God! Even the God-believers wisely would not quote such a “proof” of God’s existence. Think for yourself of the flaws in such a reasoning. [§3.1 (7): see Part 3, comy]

(8) **“After pondering on it”** (*diṭṭhi,nijjhāna-k,khanti*) means we give a proposition some thought, and we find no reason to disagree with it (for example); hence, we accept it as right. We may simply find it agreeable because we do not really know all the reason for doing so! We *feel* that it must be true or right. Or, perhaps because most others, or everyone else thinks so. Of course, we may accept a proposition *provisionally*—without taking it to be right or true, and for some good reason—but this is a different matter altogether. [§3.1 (8): see Part 3 comy, 4b]

**1.1.4.3 III.** The 3<sup>rd</sup> class of sources, consisting of the last two items, contains **the 2 types of personal authority**: the first, “seeming competence” (*bhabbarūpatā*), is the personal charisma of the speaker (perhaps including his external qualifications); the second is the authority of the speaker as one’s Guru (Pāli *garu* being identical with Skt *guru*).

(9) **“(Another’s) seeming ability”** (*bhavya,rūpatāya*) refers to our view that someone is an expert, or well qualified in the matter, or well titled, or even looks good and kind. This includes being biased or blinded by the charms or charisma of another. A common example is when we declare that a certain movie star is a “Buddhist.” We are left to your own level of intelligence to make out what this means, if anything at all. Moreover, we can ask, “What kind of Buddhism, or Buddhist, is he or her?” “Why should we be a Buddhist simply because someone else, especially a movie star, is one?” [§3.1 (9): see Part 3, comy]

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<sup>9</sup> It’s a clear fact that, as a rule, it takes more than 1 person to make a watch. First, there are those who have to produce the raw materials for the various parts of a watch. Secondly, the watch-maker needs many other instruments (each of which has their own series of origins) to work with. Moreover, the watch could have simply fallen there without anyone putting it there, and so on.

(10) “**This recluse is our teacher [respected by us]**” (*samaṇo no garu*): this criterion is doubtful because we are putting the teacher above the teaching. In early Buddhism it is the Dharma that defines the Buddha; hence, the Buddha himself respect the Dharma.<sup>10</sup> Again here, it is not that we should not respect the teacher, but we do so for the right reasons and at the right time: when he is morally virtuous (wholesome in action and speech), and when he teaches us with wisdom, so that we are self-reliant.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the Buddha warns us that even very senior, famous, wealthy, learned teachers can have wrong views.<sup>12</sup> We should then learn from those mistake. Even more so, we should learn from our own mistakes. In either case, we should, in doing so, better ourself. It thus boils down to self-reliance and the respect for learning. [§3.1 (10): see Part 3, comy]

**1.1.4.4** This is not to say that the early Buddhist texts and the Theravāda who rely on such texts hold that the Buddha, too, should be examined and questioned. Interestingly, the Buddha actually insists on just that: he, too, should be examined whether he measures up to the moral virtue he often speaks of, that his actions, speech and mind are all free from defilements. We are all instructed to observe him to the best extent of our own ability.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, this also does not mean that we are automatically or habitually rejecting all teachings. Rather, it means that we should take all teachings provisionally until we know them for certain, from our own experiences, that they are not rooted in any of the 3 unwholesome roots. Even then, we are not to be attached to them as “dharmas”<sup>14</sup>—teachings, mental states, truths, even realities—but we should let them go to seek higher states,<sup>15</sup> until we reach the path of awakening, attain at least streamwinning,<sup>16</sup> if not arhathood itself.<sup>17</sup>

## 1.2 BUDDHIST EPISTEMOLOGY

**1.2.1** The Kesa,puttiya Sutta is a classic discourse on Buddhist epistemology, that is, *theory of knowledge*, or an investigation into what constitutes valid knowledge and what does not. It is interesting to see here how Buddhist epistemology is different from its Western philosophical counterpart, as **P D Premasiri** notes:

The classical epistemological theories of the West fall into one of two principal traditions, viz, rationalism and empiricism. The consequence of the rationalist-empiricist dichotomy has been that philosophers have attempted to search a single paradigm to which all knowledge could conform.

The rationalist has adhered to the view that knowledge has the nature of a deductive<sup>18</sup> system while empiricists have insisted on the view that the most certain and indubitable knowledge claims are those about our immediate sense data. Both points have led to skepticism with respect to many legitimate areas of human knowledge. The attempt to search for an absolute has also led to many an

<sup>10</sup> See eg **Gārava S** (S 6.2/1:138-140), SD 12.3.

<sup>11</sup> See **The one true refuge**, SD 3.1 (3.2); SD 27.3 (3.1.1).

<sup>12</sup> See (**Pañcaka**) **Thera S** (A 5.88), SD 40a.16.

<sup>13</sup> See esp **Vīmaṃsaka S** (M 47), SD 35.6.

<sup>14</sup> On the polysemy of *dharmā*, see SD 51.25 (2.2.2.5).

<sup>15</sup> On *atthi c’ev’ettha uttarim karaṇīyam*, “but there is here something more to be done”: (**Ānanda**) **Subha S** (D 10,1.31 + passim), SD 40a.13; **Assa,pura S** (M 39,3.5/1:271), SD 10.13; (**Gaha,pati**) **Potaliya S** (M 54,14), SD 43.8; **Sevitabbāsevitabba S** (M 114), SD 39.8 (1.1.1.8); SD 51.17 (3.4.2.5).

<sup>16</sup> On attaining streamwinning, even for the laity: SD 4.9 (1.2).

<sup>17</sup> This is, in fact, the themes of **Alagaddûpama S** (M 22/1:130-142), viz, in the parable of the water-snake (§§10-12: *right grasp* of teachings and truths) and of the raft (§§13 f: Dharma as *state*, not status; highest renunciation), SD 3.13.

<sup>18</sup> On deductive reasoning, see SD 35.4a (3.1.1).

elusive metaphysical claim which [has] diverted the human mind from all that is practically relevant and useful.

The admission of the mind in Buddhism as a sixth sense enables it to see reason as a function of the mind and consequently the opposition between sense and reason finds no place in Buddhism.

(Premasiri 2006b:172; also 2006a:146 f)

**1.2.2 The early Buddhist conception of knowledge** is that it has no absolute paradigm, no enduring forms. Knowledge arises not only through the 5 physical senses, but more importantly, such data are actually interpreted by the 6<sup>th</sup> sense, the mind, which additionally presents its own sense-data or form of knowledge. Early Buddhist philosophy and psychology do not view reality as being out there, but as being *in here*, that is, *it is how we view the world that creates and sustains our ideas and philosophies, and motivates our actions.* And we face the consequences of such actions.

Early Buddhism sees knowing as a value-laden process, and we create that value. We give meaning to things: that is why such ideas as “God” are meaningful (or useful) to some but meaningless (or useless) to others [5.2]. Very often, we add on the wrong and negative value. The most basic level of knowing, as such, is *to know the mind*. The mind can be compared to the lens through which we view the world. Very often, this lens is smudged by wrong view, coloured by craving, and blurred by ignorance. The lens-cleaning begins with the restraint of body and speech, that is, moral training, which provides a conducive environment for us *to train the mind*.

**1.2.3** Both moral training and mental training are the vital bases for clearing the mind totally and finally (albeit gradually) of all defilements. This is the stage when we begin to truly understand how the senses work and how we know things. When this knowledge becomes holistically systematized, it is called wisdom (*paññā*), when the knowing is clear and total, it is “full understanding” (*pariññā*), and when it liberates, it is called “direct knowledge” (*aññā*). One then becomes an arhat.

The purpose of life, then, is not merely to know; for, knowledge is not the end, but the means. When knowledge is *valued for itself*, it becomes itself a view (*diṭṭhi*), a fetter (*saṃyojanā*) [Comy 3a(4)2]. When we begin to understand *how we know*, then we see only mental constructs. As such, we have to see beyond knowing and knowledge: the Kesa,puttiya Sutta is an important discourse on how to do this. [4.1]

## 2 Sutta summary & highlights

**2.1** The Kālāmas are the inhabitants of the town of **Kesa,putta** which, says the Commentary, is located on the edge of a forest. Various groups of wanderers would stop there to spend the night before crossing the forest (or on emerging from the forest). During their stay, they would give talks to the Kālāmas, so that they are exposed to a wide range of religious and philosophical ideas (AA 2:305). Understandably, such a bewildering range of views causes doubt and perplexity<sup>19</sup> in the minds of the Kālāmas.

**2.2** From the Sutta [§1], we can surmise that the Buddha’s fame precedes him, and (according to the Commentary) the Kālāmas eagerly welcome him, and “approach him, holding medicines such as ghee and fresh butter, and the 8 kinds of drinks.”<sup>20</sup> Having approached the Buddha, they declare their predicament to the

<sup>19</sup> On doubt (*vicikicchā*), see **Anusaya**, SD 31.3 (6) & **Vicikicchā**, SD 32.8.

<sup>20</sup> *Sappi,nava,nīṭ’ādi,bhesajjāni c’eva aṭṭha,vidha,pānakāni ca gāhāpetvā upasaṅkamimsu* (AA 2:304). **Vinaya** allows the following 8 kinds of drink (even outside the permitted meal hours), viz: (1) mango drink, rose-apple drink, coconut milk, banana drink, honey drink, grape drink, lotus-root drink, and berry drink (*amba,pānaṃ jambū,pānaṃ coca.pānaṃ moca,pānaṃ madhu,pānaṃ muddhika,pānaṃ sālūka,pānaṃ pharusaka,pānaṃ*, V 1:246). **Mahā Niddesa** mentions this set and also another set of 8: (2) *kosamba* fruit drink, *kola* jujube drink, *badara* jujube drink, ghee, oil, congee, fresh



Buddha so that he might dispel it [§2]. The Buddha immediately consoles them by saying that *their doubt is justified*, and goes on to list the 10 doubtful sources of knowledge or criteria for truth that are doubtful [1, §3]. He admonishes them to examine whether such statements are morally wholesome or unwholesome, and to reject them if they are unwholesome.<sup>21</sup>

**2.3** It is obvious here that the Kālāmas, the Buddha’s audience, have some level of ethical sensibility: after all, they have themselves approached the Buddha requesting his admonition. Clearly, such an advice to judge things for oneself would not work if the listener lacks ethical integrity or moral sense. But this is only the start of the admonition.

**2.4** The Buddha continues by questioning the Kālāmas if they understand and reject the 3 unwholesome roots that are the bases for immoral acts because these are *blamable* and *self-harming* [§§4-7]. Having understood these points, the Buddha declares that it is for this reason that he has pointed out the 10 doubtful points [§8].

**2.5** Then he questions them if they understand and cultivate the three wholesome roots that are the bases for moral acts because these are “*praised by the wise*” (that is, the arhats) and are *beneficial* [§§8-13]. When the Kālāmas have understood these points, the Buddha declares that it is for this reason that he has pointed out the 10 doubtful points [§14].

**2.6** The Buddha next explains **the 4 divine abodes**, that a “noble disciple, freed from covetousness, without ill will, unconfused, clearly comprehending, mindful,” dwells pervading the world with lovingkindness, with compassion, with gladness, and with equanimity [§§15-16]. Thus with a mind that is purified, free of hate and malice, he enjoys right here in this life these 4 “**self-assurances**” (*assāsa*) [§17]:

If there is an afterlife and karmic result,	then, he will undergo a good rebirth.
Or, if there is none,	still, he lives happily right here in this life.
Or, if bad results befall a bad-doer,	then, no bad will befall him.
Or, if bad results do not befall a bad-doer,	he is purified anyway. [Comy 15.2-16]

The Kālāmas express their appreciation of the Buddha’s discourse and go for refuge to the 3 jewels [§18].

**2.7** A remarkable feature of the Kesa,puttiya Sutta is the comprehensive manner in which it covers the range of human knowledge and experience, that is, the cognitive, the conative, the affective and the spiritual. The cognitive aspect of the Sutta is covered by the Buddha’s reassuring the Kālāmas they it is right for them *to doubt the doubtful* and exhorting them to examine the 10 doubtful points.

The conative side of the Sutta is not merely about personal will, but that of *moral will*, that good is possible, and is interlinked with our affective qualities, brought to spiritual heights by *the 4 divine abodes*. Above all, this Sutta is remarkable in not being an intellectual or academic exercise but a study in *practical wisdom*, one that leads to spiritual liberation.

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milk, essence drink (*kosamba, pānaṃ kola, pānaṃ badara, pānaṃ ghata, pānaṃ tela, pānaṃ yāgu, pānaṃ payo, pānaṃ rasa, pānaṃ*, Nm 372). Set (1) is canonical, but set (2) is probably late, and may need the consensus of the Sangha or Vinaya masters for approval for consumption outside the permitted time.

<sup>21</sup> **Bhaddiya S** (A 4.193/2:190-194), SD 35.10 contains the same 10 doubtful points & the section on the roots (§§3b-15a). Comy says that in the midst of the discourse, Bhaddiya becomes a streamwinner. (AA 3:173)



### 3 Significance of the Sutta

#### 3.1 THE KĀLĀMAS' PREDISPOSITION

**3.1.1 Bodhi**, in his essay on “A look at the Kālāma Sutta,” makes this helpful observation:

Partly in reaction to dogmatic religion, partly in subservience to the reigning paradigm of objective scientific knowledge, it has become fashionable to hold, by appeal to the Kālāma Sutta, that the Buddha's teaching dispenses with faith and formulated doctrine and asks us to accept only what we can personally verify. This interpretation of the sutta, however, forgets that the advice the Buddha gave the Kalamas was contingent upon the understanding that they were not yet prepared to place faith in him and his doctrine; it also forgets that the sutta omits, for that very reason, all mention of right view and of the entire perspective that opens up when right view is acquired. It offers instead the most reasonable counsel on wholesome living possible when the issue of ultimate beliefs has been put into brackets. (Bodhi 1988:2 f)

**3.1.2** Now, let us examine, from internal evidence (from the Sutta itself), whether it actually admonishes us to dismiss *all* doctrine and faith, and whether it invites us to accept or reject *whatever we like* in a teaching (as some proponents of vague Buddhism hold). Now, as Bodhi has observed, it should be noted that at the start of the discourse, the Kālāmas are *not* followers of the Buddha. They have approached him simply for some sort of spiritual counselling as troubled clients (especially a non-practitioner) would approach a monk or nun today for spiritual help. In fact, there is no hint at all that the Kālāmas are seeking how to awaken, or even to be practitioners. Their question is almost of an intellectual nature:

“Bhante, there are some recluses and brahmins who come to Kesa,putta. They expound and explain their own doctrines, but attack, revile, despise and reject the doctrines of others.

And then some recluses and brahmins come to Kesa,putta and they, too, expound and explain their own doctrines, but attack, revile, despise and reject the doctrines of others.

Bhante, we are uncertain and in doubt: Which of these good recluses speak truth and which speak falsehood?” [§2]

**3.1.3** However, despite their desperation (with a broad hint of annoyance and perplexity), they will be getting more than they have hoped for. This is clearly because of the Buddha's “good report” (that is, charisma) that has preceded him, and the Kālāmas' own readiness to listen. Also significant is the fact that the Buddha does not give them a progressive talk or gradual discourse, which would be the rule if they were ready for spiritual training leading to sainthood. **The progressive talk** (*ānupubbī,kathā*) stock passage runs thus:

Then the Blessed One gave him a progressive talk—that is to say, he spoke on giving (*dāna*), on moral virtue (*sīla*) and on the heavens (*sagga*). He explained the danger, the vanity and the disadvantages of sensual pleasures (*kām'ādīnava*), and the advantages of renunciation (*nekkhamm'ānisaṃsa*). When the Blessed One perceived that the listener's mind was prepared, pliant, free from obstacles, elevated and lucid, then he explained to him the teaching peculiar to the Buddhas (*buddhānaṃ sām-ukkamsikā desanā*), that is to say, suffering (*dukkha*), its arising, its cessation, and the path.

(V 1:16; D 1:148; A 3:184 etc), see SD 9(10d)

**3.1.4** There is a very good reason why the progressive talk is not given to the Kālāmas here: they have not been established in faith towards the 3 jewels. We are not even sure if they are seeking any spiritual truth. The best we can say is that they are simply seeking clarification to judge who amongst the various teachers

and speakers are right and who are wrong. Perhaps, some of them might even remain perplexed despite the Buddha's clarification. However, we are quite certain there are many of those who truly benefitted from the Buddha's admonition.

**3.1.5** Another important conclusion that we can safely make of the Kālāmas is that they do have some sort of **moral integrity**. This is clear from their statement, "It is good to see such arhats" [§1], from the way most of them respectfully approached the Buddha,<sup>22</sup> and from the sincerity of their question. Although still confused by the various conflicting claims they have referred to, they apparently have a good sense of moral virtue. After all, they have taken the trouble to seek the Buddha's counsel.

### 3.2 THREEFOLD CATEGORIZATION OF THE 10 POINTS [ON THE 3 CLASSES OF PROPOSITIONS: 1.1.4]

**3.2.1** Briefly stated, we can say that the Buddha admonishes that no idea or teaching should be accepted simply on the basis of tradition, of personal authority, or of reason, and the 10 doubtful positions [§3.1] can be thus categorized doctrinally in the following way:<sup>23</sup>

By way of tradition <sup>24</sup>	By way of reasoning <sup>25</sup>	By way of authority <sup>26</sup>
1 tradition, aural revelation, or oral tradition ( <i>anussava</i> )	5 pure reason [logic] ( <i>takka,hetu</i> )	9 another's seeming ability ( <i>bhavya,rūpatā</i> )
2 lineage or received wisdom ( <i>paramparā</i> )	6 inference + deduction ( <i>naya,hetu</i> )	10 the thought, "This recluse is our teacher," or "This recluse is respected by us." ( <i>mā samaṇo no garūti</i> )
3 hearsay ( <i>iti,kira</i> )	7 reasoned thought or specious reasoning ( <i>ākāra,parivitakka</i> )	
4 scriptural authority ( <i>piṭaka,-sampadā</i> )	8 acceptance of [being convinced of] a view after pondering on it ( <i>diṭṭhi,nijjhāna-k,khantiyā</i> )	

**Table 3.2** The threefold categorization of the 10 doubtful points (*kaṅkhāniya-ṭ,ṭhāna*)

This threefold categorization of the 10 doubtful points is based on an important principle—that of **the 3 kinds of wisdom**—namely, the wisdom through hearing (*suta,mayā paññā*), the wisdom through thinking (*cinta,mayā paññā*), and the wisdom through mental cultivation (*bhāvanā,mayā paññā*). (D 3:219; Vbh 324) [Comy 1.3].

**3.2.2** In fact, we find the same classifying principle being used in **the (Deva) Saṅgārava Sutta** (M 100), where the Buddha speaks of 3 kinds of teachers in his own time, that is,

<sup>22</sup> It is true that "[s]ome kept silent and sat down at one side," and such people are even more common today in a Buddhist gathering, even before wise and accomplished teachers. But they are apparently and generally in the negligible minority in the Buddha's case.

<sup>23</sup> See Bodhi 2005:431 ch III n4. These 10 doubtful points are discussed in some detail in Comy Notes below.

<sup>24</sup> This category has been discussed at length by Jayatilleke 1963:169-200 (in terms of Western philosophy).

<sup>25</sup> This category has been discussed at length by Jayatilleke 1963:205-276 (in terms of Western philosophy).

<sup>26</sup> This category has been discussed at length by Jayatilleke 1963:200-204 (in terms of Western philosophy).

- (1) **The traditionalists** (*anussavikā*), who, on the basis of aural tradition, proclaim the fundamentals of the holy life after they have reached the consummation and perfection of direct knowledge here and now. The traditionalists derive their knowledge and claims wholly from “divine revelation,” scriptural tradition and interpretations based on it. Prominent amongst the traditionalists are the brahmins who uphold the authority of the Vedas.

Their knowledge or wisdom is based almost exclusively on hearing (*suta, mayā paññā*). Under this category would be included 6 of the 10 doubtful points (nos 1-4, 9-10), that is, respectively, “by way of tradition” and “by way of authority” as listed in Table 3.2. The traditionalists lack acceptance of facts or truths “by way of reasoning” (nos 5-8).

- (2) **The rationalists and speculators [metaphysicians]** (*takkī vīmaṃsī*): the former are those who try to “reason” things out; the latter tend to work entirely on the basis of mere faith. Using mere reasoning or speculation to reinforce their beliefs, they proclaim their dogmas and faith. The rationalists derive their knowledge and claims through reasoning and speculations without any claim to extrasensory perception. The speculators of the early Upaniṣads, the skeptics, the materialists and most of the Ājīvakas fall into this category.

Their knowledge is mostly that of the wisdom through thinking and reasoning (*cinta, mayā paññā*). Under this category would be included all the 4 doubtful points “by way of reasoning” (nos 5-8), as listed in Table 3.2.

- (3) **The experientialists**, who, in things unheard before, having directly known the Dharma for themselves (*sāmaṃ yeva dhammaṃ abhiññāya*),<sup>27</sup> proclaim the fundamentals of the holy life after they have attained direct knowledge here and now. The experientialists depend on direct personal knowledge and experience, including extrasensory perception on the basis of which their theories are founded. Many of the thinkers of the middle and late Upaniṣads, some of the Ājīvakas and Jains can be put in this class. The materialists, as empiricists (those who advocate reality as known only through personal experience, that is, the senses), may also be classed here, “if not for the fact that they denied the validity of claims to extrasensory perception.”<sup>28</sup> The Buddha declares himself to be a teacher in this category. Their knowledge or wisdom is based on mental cultivation (*bhāvanā, mayā paññā*).

(M 100,7/2:211), SD 10.9<sup>29</sup>

### 3.3 AVOIDING THE POWER MODE

**3.3.1** Firstly, the Buddha basically advises the Kālāmas not to blindly accept any teaching on account of tradition or of authority, that is, not to fall into the “power mode.” The term *tradition*, according to **Bodhi**,<sup>30</sup> refers to the first 4 criteria. They include the following:

- (1) “Aural/oral tradition” (*anussava*) refers to the Vedic lineages, which according to the brahmins, originated with the primal being and came down through successive generations of direct “secret” transmissions

<sup>27</sup> This phrase, notes Bodhi, “emphasizes direct personal realization as the foundation for promulgating a holy life.” (M:ÑB 1304 920).

<sup>28</sup> Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:170.

<sup>29</sup> See Intro (2).

<sup>30</sup> **Bodhi** gives a threefold classification of the doubtful points [1]: “reverence for tradition,” comprising points (1-4); “four types of reasoning,” comprising (5-6); and “two types of personal authority,” comprising (7-10). (2005:431 ch III n4). His main points have been incorporated here. For further discussion, see under Commentary in this chapter. These 10 points are also given a detailed philosophical analysis in **Jayatilleke** 1963:175-205, 271-75.

from guru to chela. This is found in sectarian Buddhism where the sect (such as a triumphalist Abhidhamma group) promotes or gives priority to the teachings of their own gurus rather prioritizing the Buddha Dharma.

- (2) “Lineage” (*paramparā*) refers to an unbroken succession of teachings or teachers. An example of legitimation through lineage is that of the Tibetan sects, and the Chan and Zen traditions.
- (3) “Hearsay” (*iti, kirā*) refers to popular opinion or general consensus. This is common in Buddhist circles, where students attribute various virtues and powers to their teachers.
- (4) “Scriptural authority” (*piṭaka, sampadā*) regarding religious texts as being infallible. This is common amongst modern Mahāyāna teachers who promote late or parochial sutras or texts as the “king of sutras,” and so on. These may be great religious literature, but they are not authentic sources of true liberating knowledge.

**3.3.2** A teaching should not be regarded as being true or beneficial simply on the **authority** of *revelations, testimonies, or received traditions or wisdom, of hereditary lineages or successive traditions (religious and otherwise), of hearsay (including the media and gossip), scripture, expertise (including academic qualification and charisma), or respectability (including status and title)*. To rely on authority in intellectual and spiritual matters (especially the latter) is to surrender our mind to an external agency. Spiritual liberation, on the other hand, can only be obtained through a direct knowledge of reality, even if the means to do so is found externally (say, through another’s “voice” or admonition) [Intro 5.4].

**3.3.3** The power mode is based on unequal relationships, or more technically, a relationship based on *conceit*, that those perceived as lower should look up to those higher. The locus of control is externalized: there is a dependence on an external authority that controls our thoughts and behaviour. On the contrary, a spiritual relationship entails no measuring or status, like the waters of the rivers merging into the great ocean, individuals become freely linked in a spiritual community. This aspect of the Buddha’s admonition becomes especially significant in connection with his instructions on the cultivation of the divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*) [§15].

### 3.4 THE PRIMACY OF FEELING

**3.4.1** Secondly, we should not accept any teaching on the basis of reasoning alone, that is, in terms of “head aspect.” A teaching should not be regarded as being true or beneficial simply on the basis of **reasoning**, that is, through *pure logic, inference, reasoned thought (such as theories), or bias (philosophical or otherwise)*. [4]

**3.4.2** Reasoning only works (if they do) in a controlled situation of conventional premises. Most of living experiences are motivated by and result from *feelings*. That the teaching on the divine abodes should follow here is very significant, as it points to the supremacy of a right understanding of feelings as the basis for spiritual life that ripens in awakening.

**3.4.3** The Brahma, jāla Sutta (D 1) is very clear on this point, declaring that all the 62 grounds for wrong view are based on feeling:

Therein, bhikshus, what those recluses and brahmins who are speculators about the past, who are speculators about the future, who are speculators about both the past and future, who hold various dogmatic views about both the past and future, assert on sixty-two grounds their dogmatic notions—that is only the feeling of those who know not, who see not, merely the agitation and vacillation of those overcome by craving. (D 1,117/1:14), SD 25.2

Then the Brahma,jāla Sutta adds that for those who assert their dogmatic notions on the 62 grounds for wrong view, “it is impossible that they would experience anything other than *contact* (that is, sense-experience).”<sup>31</sup> That is to say, all our experiences are sense-based, and have to be understood so.

### 3.5 MORAL VIRTUE AND MENTAL CULTIVATION

**3.5.1** Having said that by way of clearing away the Kālāmas’ initial doubts and unease, the Buddha then turns to more important teachings: those of moral virtue and mental cultivation. By way of a sustained question-and-answer sequence, the Buddha makes sure that his audience is following the trend of his teaching on **moral virtue** (*sīla*). The Kālāmas agree that actions motivated by the 3 unwholesome roots—greed, hate and delusion—lead one to break the basic moral precepts and to make others to do so. As such, these actions are *blamable (personally unbeneficial), censured by the wise (socially unbeneficial), and bring about bad karmic fruits* [§§3b-8]. All the 10 doubtful points are then repeated to emphasize their connection with the misperception and misinterpretation of contact (sense-experiences) and feeling [§9a].

**3.5.2** On the other hand, actions motivated by the 3 wholesome roots—non-greed (charity), non-hate (lovingkindness and compassion), and non-delusion (wisdom)—do not entail the breaking of the basic moral precepts nor making others to do so. As such, these actions are *not blamable (personally beneficial), praised by the wise (socially beneficial), and bring about good karmic fruits* [§§10-14]. This is no mean teaching, as the destruction of the 3 unwholesome roots leads one to the highest goal, nirvana.

**3.5.3** The Kālāmas, having understood and accepted these basic principles of moral virtue, are now ready for mental cultivation, which understandably consists in **the 4 divine abodes** (*brahma, vihāra*), those conducive to beneficent leadership and community life; that is to say, lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity. These practices lead to the “breaking of barriers” between self and other, and so greatly helps in the forging of spiritual friendship and a wholesome community.

**3.5.4** Finally, the Buddha gives a remarkable teaching, that of **the 4 self-assurances** [§16]. For those who are not concerned beyond the present life, or who are not prepared for any conviction regarding karma and re-birth, such a way of life ensures at least their present welfare, if not their future lives. The 4 self-assurances seem to forestall Pascal’s Wager [7], which pales against their compass and compassion. The 4 self-assurances, in fact, form the theme of **the Apanṇaka Sutta** (M 60).<sup>32</sup>

**3.5.5** The Sutta happily concludes with the Kālāmas taking refuge in the 3 jewels “for life.” It is highly likely that this stock passage (which often concludes successful transmission of the Dharma) refers to at least the attaining of streamwinning of the refuge-takers. For, it is unlikely that one would go to the 3 jewels “for life” merely by way of lip-service, that is, only as a ritual. Moreover, faith—evident from the tone of the passage—is a hallmark of the streamwinner.

## 4 Beyond belief and reason

### 4.1 HOW WE KNOW THINGS

**4.1.1** A very significant characteristic of the Kesa,puttiya Sutta often overlooked by many, especially the proponents of vague Buddhism, is that the 10 doubtful points [1] are closely related to **Buddhist episte-**

<sup>31</sup> D 1,143/1:43 (SD 25.2).

<sup>32</sup> M 60/1:400-413 (SD 35.5).

**mology** [1.2], that is, how we know things. Let us, for a moment, ask ourselves what do we really know for ourselves? We can begin by disregarding all those things we know from books, the mass media (newspapers, radio, TV, phone, etc), from the Internet, and also from what people tell us—then, very little remains that we can truly call *our personal knowledge*.

**4.1.2** Indeed, we would discover that our direct first-hand knowledge of things is really very little compared to second- and third-hand information. And our minds are filled with mostly unverified information, very often half-truths and hearsay. *Our lives are run on rumours*. No wonder, we often find ourselves lost and unhappy, or suspect that something, or much, is missing from our lives. However, thinking, when wisely done, helps us to see through such delusions; otherwise, such delusions only worsen our situation.

**4.1.3** Understandably, the Buddha rejects popular opinion as a measure of spiritual truth, as it tends to be arbitrary and false, and as such is not helpful in the spiritual task. *The crowd never thinks*; the majority is not always right. Thus, as recorded in **the Cūḷa Saccaka Sutta** (M 35), when Saccaka, debating with the Buddha, invokes popular opinion (*mahatī janatā*)—asserting that *the majority must be right*—to support his notion, the Buddha rebukes him, declaring that popular opinion has nothing to do with the truth of the point in question: “What, Aggivessana, has popular opinion to do with you? Come now, extricate just your own assertion!”<sup>33</sup>

**4.1.4** The Buddha and the early Buddhists are not interested in philosophical speculation, that is, in discussing what knowledge is or how we know things, although we do find some interesting and helpful passages in this connection (as evident from the Kesaputtiya Sutta and related discourses). Knowledge is taken merely as a tool for spiritual liberation. The same tools—language and thinking—are also the tools of philosophy. However, while philosophy (“the love for thinking”) takes thinking as a goal in itself, Buddhism takes it only as a step towards spiritual understanding, that is, the love for liberation. Only through the direct experience of mental cultivation can we gain the knowledge leading to spiritual awakening.

## 4.2 WHAT WE CAN REALLY KNOW

**4.2.1** The Saṃyutta Nikāya contains two interesting suttas dealing with the issue of *how we know things* and direct knowledge. They are **the (Musīla Narada) Kosambī Sutta** (S 12.68) and **the Atthi Nu Kho Pariyāya Sutta** (S 35.153). Both Suttas speak of the 5 questionable sources of knowledge—namely, faith, personal preference, repeated hearing, specious reasoning, and acceptance of (or being convinced of) a view after pondering on it<sup>34</sup>—and of true personal knowledge (*paccattam eva ñāṇa*). In **the (Musīla) Kosambī Sutta** (S 12.68), the monk Saviṭṭha asks the arhat Musīla whether he (Musīla) directly knows dependent arising, beginning with this question:

Avuso Musīla,  
apart from faith,  
apart from preference,  
apart from received tradition [what is repeatedly heard],  
apart from specious reasoning [reasoned thought],  
apart from acceptance of [being convinced of] a view after pondering on it,

<sup>33</sup> Or, “Confine yourself to just your own point” (*kiṃ hi te Aggivessana mahatī janatā karissati, iṅgha tvam sakam yeva vadam nibbeṭhehi*) (M 35.11/1:230).

<sup>34</sup> These five are discussed in detail in Jayatilleke 1963:812-188, 274-276.



does the venerable Musīla have personal knowledge thus: “With birth as condition, there is death-and decay”?<sup>35</sup> (S 12.68/2:115), SD 70.11

As an arhat, Musīla, of course, answers in the affirmative. Although he does not wish to declare his arhat-hood, it is clear from his answer that he has direct knowledge of awakening.

**4.2.2** A similar question is asked by the Buddha in **the Atthi Nu Kho Pariyāya Sutta** (S 35.153), whether apart from the five positions—of faith, preference, or repeated hearing [oral tradition], by specious reasoning or reasoned thought, or by acceptance of (or being convinced of) a view after pondering on it—one could declare final knowledge (*aññā*), that is, one’s arhat-hood. The Buddha then goes on to explain how this can be done, thus:

“Here, bhikshus, a monk, having seen a form with the eye, knows when greed, hate and delusion are within, thus: ‘Greed, hate, and delusion are in me.’ He knows when there are no greed, hate and delusion within, thus: ‘Greed, hate and delusion are not in me.’

Since this is so, bhikshus, have these things been understood through faith, through preference, through repeated hearing, through reasoned reflection [by specious reasoning], or through acceptance of [being convinced of] a view after pondering on it?”

“No, bhante.” ...

“This, bhikshus, is the method of exposition by means of which—apart from faith, from preference, from repeated hearing, from specious reasoning, or from acceptance of [being convinced of] a view after pondering on it—a monk can declare final knowledge, thus:

‘Destroyed is birth. The holy life has been lived. What needs to be done has been done. There is (for me) no more of arising in any state of being.’” (S 35.153,7/4:139), SD 85.9

**4.2.3 The Saṃyutta Commentary** explains that one person accepts something through faith (*saddhā*) by placing faith in another and accepting what he says as being true. Another accepts something through personal preference (*ruci*) when he approves of some idea or thesis by reflecting on it, and then takes it to be true. Another accepts through tradition (*anussava*) when he thinks, “This has come down from ancient times by received [aural] tradition; so it must be true.” For another, as he thinks, a certain thesis appears valid, and he concludes, “So it is,” and accepts it by reasoned reflection (*ākāra,parivitakka*).<sup>36</sup> In the fifth case, as he reflects, a view arises by pondering over some hypothesis: this is acceptance of [being convinced of] a view after pondering on it (*diṭṭhi,nijjhāna-k,khanti*). (SA 2:403) [Intro 5.1]

#### 4.3 PERSONAL VERIFICATION

**4.3.1** The Buddha’s teaching is personally verifiable in this life itself (*sacchikato sayam*, Tha 331; *diṭṭhe dhamme viditvā*, Sn 1053). Book religions, such as Brahmanism or Vedism and the modern God-religions, are said to be based on hearsay (*iti,kira*) or tradition (*iti,hīti,ha*). “The Blessed One teaches a holy life that is not based on hearsay or tradition” (A 2:26).<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the Buddha tells Mettagū,

I will expound a teaching that is not based on hearsay or tradition, knowing which, living mindfully, one would here and now transcend the attachment in world. (Sn 1053)<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> *Aññatr’eva āvuso Musīla saddhāya aññatra ruciyā aññatra anussavā ākāra,parivitakkā aññatra diṭṭhi,nijjhāna,-khantiyā atth’āyasmato Musīlassa paccattam eva ñāṇam jāti,paccayā jarā,marañan ti.*

<sup>36</sup> Jayatilleke discusses *ākāra* as meaning “reason.” (1963:274).

<sup>37</sup> *Brahma,cariyam anītiham...adesayi so bhagavā* (A 2:26).

<sup>38</sup> *Kittayissāmi te dhammam (Mettagū ti bhagavā) | diṭṭhe dhamme anītiham | yam viditvā sato caram tare loka visattikam.* (Sn 1053)

**4.3.2 The Thera,gāthā** records an elder as having realized “the Dharma that is not based on hearsay or tradition (*dharmo anītho*)” (Tha 331). The term ***anīti,ha*** is commonly found in **the Culla Niddesa** (that is, the second part of the Niddesa), an ancient commentary on the Pārāyana Vagga of the Sutta Nipāta (Sn 976-1149). The term is found in three of the dialogues (called “questions,” *pañha*) and one in the conclusion (Anugīti Gāthā),<sup>39</sup> and the Culla Niddesa explains *anītihā* as follows:

<u>not by tradition</u>	<i>na iti,hītihaṃ,</i>
not by hearsay	<i>na iti kirāya,</i>
not by lineage	<i>na paramparāya,</i>
not by scriptural authority	<i>na piṭaka,sampadāya,</i>
not by pure reason (and deduction)	<i>na takka,hetu,</i>
not by inference [by invoking causality]	<i>na naya,hetu,</i>
not by reasoned thought [by specious reasoning]	<i>na ākāra,parivitakkena,</i>
not by acceptance of [being convinced of] a view after pondering on it	<i>na diṭṭhi,nijjhāna-k,khantiyā:</i>
the Dharma is realized by oneself for oneself, directly verified by oneself	<i>sāmaṃ sayam abhiññātaṃ atta,paccakkham dhammaṃ. (Nc 49)<sup>40</sup></i>

Omitted are positions (1) “Do not go by tradition [aural tradition] (*mā anussavena*),” (9) “Do not go by another’s seeming ability (*mā bhavya,rūpatāya*),” and (10) “Do not go by the thought, ‘This recluse is our teacher.’ [‘This recluse is respected by us.’] (*mā samaṇo no garū ti*),” all found in the Kesa,puttiya Sutta.

**4.3.3** The Culla Niddesa gloss given above contains only 7 positions (2-8) of the Kesa,puttiya Sutta—from *iti,kirā to diṭṭhi,nijjhāna-k,khanti*<sup>41</sup>—which seems to imply that they together comprise *iti,hīti,ha*. Positions (1), (9) and (10) of the Kesa,puttiya Sutta are not found in the Culla Niddesa definition. Is *iti,kirā* synonymous with ***iti,hīti,ha*** (no 1 of the Culla Niddesa list here)? This is difficult to know from lack of internal evidence [but see Comy 3a(4) below].

**4.3.4** Apparently, the list of 10 doubtful points (as listed in the Kesa,puttiya Sutta, for example) are not exhaustive. However, they are representative of the various unsatisfactory sources of knowledge. Furthermore, the 10 positions are not always mutually exclusive. There is some overlapping or connection of positions. For example, the terms *iti,ha* (traditional instruction, aural tradition) and *anīti,ha* (that which is neither traditional instruction nor aural tradition) are explained in terms of seven of the 10 doubtful points, all of which appear to be included under *anussava* (oral tradition) or its antonym.

**4.3.5** The bottom line is that early Buddhism (as preserved in the Pali Canon) rejects any kind of knowledge based on authority as an effective means of spiritual liberation. The only true source of knowledge is our own **experiences**, that is, how things appear to us through the 5 senses and the mind, especially the mind. They are called wisdom when they are properly understood and used.

**4.3.6 Philosophy** sometimes defines experience differently, for example, as “[t]he guiding or misguiding idea is that for each of us certainty is possible only with regard to our own experience, in this cribbed and ‘private’ interpretation, and that any claims to experience in the everyday or ‘public’ sense must be incorrigibly

<sup>39</sup> As *anītihaṃ*, Dhoṭaka Pañha (Sn 1066; Nc:CSCD 88) = Mettagū Pañha (Sn 1053; Nc:CSCD 62, 67); as *itihītihaṃ*, Hemaka (Sn 1084; Nc:CSCD 112) = Anugīti Gāthā (conclusion) (Sn 1135; Nc:CSCD 191).

<sup>40</sup> In its positive form, *iti,kirāya,paramparāya ... na atta,paccakkham dhammaṃ* (Nc 108). See Jayatilleke 1963:198 f, 202.

<sup>41</sup> The first two positions are reversed in the two sets.

reckless” (Flew 1979:116 f). However, for Buddhists, this need not be the case, as an external truth (such as another person’s spiritual state) can be known simply through “right inference” (*naya*) [Comy 3a(6)1], or better, through “inferential knowledge” (*anvaye ñāṇa*) [Comy 3.1(6)2].

Inferential knowledge, however, only works *after* we have attained some level of spiritual liberation, that is, when the mind has attained some level of calm and clarity. The bottom line is that the answer is not out there: it is found only within oneself.

## 5 Religions, true and false

### 5.1 THE TRUTH AND USEFULNESS OF A RELIGION

**5.1.1** Another interesting and important feature to be noted in the list of 10 doubtful points or theses as given in the Kesa,puttiya Sutta is that the Buddha does *not* declare that they are false. They are to be examined, firstly, for their *truth value* (whether they are true and useful), and, secondly, whether they have *moral worth*.

**5.1.2** The first case—regarding the truth and usefulness of a view or teaching—is explained in **the Caṅkī Sutta** (M 95).<sup>42</sup> As in **the (Musīla) Kosambī Sutta** (S 12.68)<sup>43</sup> and **the Atthi Nu Kho Pariyāya Sutta** (S 35.153)<sup>44</sup> [4], the Caṅkī Sutta, too, state that a view or teaching *may arise* in any of these 5 ways:<sup>45</sup>

(1) through faith	<i>saddhā,</i>
(2) through personal preference	<i>ruci,</i>
(3) through repeated hearing	<i>anussava,</i>
(4) through specious reasoning [reasoned thought]	<i>ākāra, parivattakka, and</i>
(5) through being convinced [through acceptance of] a view after pondering on it	<i>diṭṭhi, nijjhāna-k, khanti.</i>

Even the profoundest teaching based on any of these five positions may turn out “in either of two different ways here and now”: it may be fully accepted through faith, etc, “yet it may be hollow, empty, false (*rittaṃ tuccaṃ musā*),” but something else may *not* be fully accepted through faith, etc, “yet it may be true, real, unmistaken (*bhūtaṃ tacchaṃ anaññathā*).”<sup>46</sup>

**5.1.3** In other words, **the truth or goodness of a teaching or religion** is not that we have faith in it, nor that we prefer it to others (we like it, etc), nor that we are used to listening to it (such as childhood conditioning), nor that we have reasons or use reasoning, no matter to show how good it is, nor that we have accepted it through having long thought about it. The truth and usefulness of a teaching or religion lies in its ability to provide a sustainable moral life as a basis for mental calm and clarity, so that we can realize inner liberation for ourselves.

<sup>42</sup> M 95/2:164-177 (SD 21.15). Briefly mentioned in **Deva, dāha S** (M 101,11/2:218), SD 18.4.

<sup>43</sup> S 12.68/2:115-118.

<sup>44</sup> S 35.153/4:138-140.

<sup>45</sup> These five are discussed in detail in Jayatilleke 1963:812-188, 274-276.

<sup>46</sup> M 95,14/2:170 f (SD 21.15).

## 5.2 THE MORAL WORTH OF A RELIGION

**5.2.1** The second point to note is that if a view or teaching lacks moral worth, it is to be rejected. These views and teachings that are condemned as false in the sense that they do not conduce to the moral life (*abrahma,-cariya,vāsa*), as pointed in **the Sandaka Sutta** (M 76)<sup>47</sup> and **the Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2),<sup>48</sup> are as follows:

(1) **Nihilism (or materialism)** (M 76,7-9), that is, the notion that this is our only life, there is no after-life, there is no such thing as charity, no karma, no parents, and “there are no recluses and brahmins who, living rightly and practising rightly, having directly known and realized for themselves this world and the hereafter, proclaim them.”<sup>49</sup> **The Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2,22) ascribes this view to Ajita Kesa,kambala, who was also an annihilationist.<sup>50</sup>

(2) **Amoralism** or non-action (*akiriya,vāda*) (M 76,10-12), which denies moral virtue (that is, there is neither good nor bad), that is, there is no bad when one breaks the precepts or cause others to do so. Even if one were to commit mass murder or commit violent acts, such as torture, there is no bad. “In generosity, self-taming, self-restraint, and truthful speech, there is no merit, no source of merit.”<sup>51</sup> **The Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2,22) ascribes this view to Puraṇa Kassapa.<sup>52</sup>

We find further 3 important examples of amoralism mentioned in **the Tittth’āyatana Sutta** (A 3.61), which opens with the Buddha pointing out these three common wrong views in his days as being examples of doctrines of non-action:

Monks, there are three sectarian doctrines<sup>53</sup> which when fully examined, investigated, discussed by the wise, even if taken in any other way,<sup>54</sup> will remain **a doctrine of non-action** (*akiriya,vāda*).<sup>55</sup> What are the three?

- (a) DETERMINISM. There are, monks, some recluses and brahmins who teach and hold this view: “Whatever a person experiences, whether pleasurable, painful or neutral, all that is caused by past action [done in past lives] (*pubbe kata,hetu*).”<sup>56</sup>
- (b) THEISM. There are, monks, others who teach and hold this view: “Whatever a person experiences ... all that is caused by God’s creation (*issara,nimmāna,hetu*).”<sup>57</sup>

<sup>47</sup> M 76,7-19/1:514-521 (SD 35.7). See Jayatilleke 1963:140-143.

<sup>48</sup> On the 6 sectarian teachers, see D 2,16-33/1:52-59 (SD 8.10).

<sup>49</sup> Also at **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41,10/1:287), SD 5.7 & **Sandaka S** (M 76,7/1:515), SD 35.7. See **Apaṇṇaka S** (M 60,5-12/-1:401-404), SD 35.5 where this wrong view is answered.

<sup>50</sup> D 2,21-23/1:55 (SD 8.10).

<sup>51</sup> See **Apaṇṇaka S** (M 60,13-20/1:404-407) where this view is answered.

<sup>52</sup> D 2,16-17/1:52 f (SD 8.10).

<sup>53</sup> “Sectarian doctrines,” *tittth’āyatanāni*. M 1:483,21,23; A 1:173, 175; Nc 154; Vbh 145, 367; AA 2:272; DhA 2:63.

<sup>54</sup> “Even if taken in any other way,” *param pi gantvā*. I have taken the Pali as it is *pace* Comy which glosses it as *yañ kiñci paramparañ gantvā pi*, “even if adopted because of tradition” (A:ÑB 61).

<sup>55</sup> **Sāmañña,phala S** ascribes the doctrine of non-action to Pūraṇa Kassapa (D 2,17/1:52 f). “Although on first encounter the view seems to rest on materialistic premises..., there is canonical evidence that Pūraṇa Kassapa subscribed to a fatalistic doctrine. Thus his moral antinomianism probably follows from the view that all action is predestined in ways that abrogate the ascription of moral responsibility to its agent.” (M:ÑB 1264 n629). See A L Basham, *History and Doctrine of the Ajivikas*, 1951:84.

<sup>56</sup> This determinist view is ascribed by the Buddhists to the Jains; but cf **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,28-30/1:57 & nn), where Nigaṇṭha Naṭaputta is ascribed a different set of teachings. For rebuttal, see **Devadaha S** (M 101).

<sup>57</sup> This theist view is common among the brahmins.

- (c) FATALISM. There are, monks, others who teach and hold this view: “Whatever a person experiences ... all that is uncaused and unconditioned (*ahetu appaccaya*).”<sup>58</sup>  
(A 3.61,1/1:173), SD 6.9

The first view, **determinism**—that everything that one feels now is due to what one did in the past—is discussed in detail in **the Devadaha Sutta** (M 101), where it is said to be a Jain view.<sup>59</sup> They held that all suffering one experiences in this life is due to bad karma from a previous life. The Devadaha Sutta shows that this as a wrong view.<sup>60</sup>

The God-idea (**theism**) becomes especially problematic, even destructive, when it attributes all things (“creation”) to God, thus leaving humans with practically no sense of personal responsibility, or worse, to ascribe all their actions as being willed by God. Such a system effectively lacks personal moral responsibility, or at least would not value human life, since its creator would come first.

Of these 3 deterministic notions, the most harmful is, of course, the third, that of **fatalism**, which is also a characteristic of the “non-conditionality doctrine” (see following).

- (3) Non-conditionality** is, firstly, common with **fatalism or determinism** (*ahetuka, vāda*) (M 76,13-15), which denies moral responsibility, that is, there is no cause (*hetu*)<sup>61</sup> for moral degeneration, moral growth, or spiritual liberation. There is neither cause nor condition for the purification of beings. There is nothing self-caused, nothing other-caused, nothing human-caused; nor effort of any kind.<sup>62</sup>

We are powerless, victims of fickle fate, circumstances and nature. We feel joy and pain being reborn in the 6 social classes.<sup>63</sup> There are a fixed number of origins, karma, beings, and time, and “having transmigrated<sup>64</sup> and wandered on through these, the wise and the foolish alike will put an end to pain.” There is neither karma nor moral life. Pleasure and pain, like everything else, are fixed.

“Just as a ball of string, when thrown, comes to its end simply by unwinding, in the same way, having transmigrated and wandered on, the wise and the foolish alike will put an end to pain.”

**The Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2,19) ascribes this view to Makkhali Gosāla.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>58</sup> This fatalist view (that denies causality) was taught by Makkhali Gosāla, a contemporary of the Buddha who held that all things are fated (D 2,20/1:53, M 30,2/1:198, 36,5/1:238, 36,48/1:250, 60,21/1:407, 76,53/1:524, 77,6/ 2:2 ff). This doctrine, together with the doctrine of non-action (or inaction) belongs to the “wrong views with a fixed destiny” (*niyata micchā, diṭṭhi*), ie a wrong view leading to a bad rebirth (Tkp 168).

<sup>59</sup> M 101/2:101-228 (SD 18.4).

<sup>60</sup> For further discussion, see SD 17.3(6.4): “Not everything is due to past karma.”

<sup>61</sup> *Ahetu, appaccayā*: “condition” *hetu* means “root” (eg greed, hatred, delusion); *paccaya* means “condition.”

<sup>62</sup> These ideas are presented by a certain brahmin to the Buddha who refutes them in **Atta, kāri S** (A 6.38/3:337 f), SD 7.6.

<sup>63</sup> See **Apañṇaka S** (M 60,21-28) where this wrong view is answered. On these 6 classes (*abhijāti*), see **Cha-ḷ-abhijāti S** (A 6.57/3:383), where according to the antinomian **Pūrana Kassapa**, they are (1) the black class (*kaṇhābhijāti*), ie the bloody trade (butchers, fishermen, robbers, etc); (2) the blue class (*nīlābhijāti*), ie monks who subscribe to karma; (3) the red class (*lohitābhijāti*), ie the loin-clad Jains; (4) the yellow class (*haliddābhijāti*), ie the white-clad disciples of naked ascetics; (5) the white class (*sukkābhijāti*), ie the male and female Ājīvikas; (6) the purest white class (*parama, sukkhābhijāti*), ie Nanda Vaccha, Kisa Saṅkicca and Makkhali Gosāla. The Buddha however rejects this arbitrary gesture, and teaches that it is **karma** that makes us, not class (A 6.57/3:383-387; also DA 1:182; MA 3:131; AA 2:342 f; SA 2:342 f).

<sup>64</sup> *Sandhāvitvā*, “having transmigrated” (from *sandhāvati*). This term which connotes a permanent soul is not used in Buddhism.

<sup>65</sup> D 2,18-20/1:53-55 (SD 8.10).

(4) **Atomism** or physicalism (M 76,16-18), which holds that only matter exists by way of seven substances or “bodies” (*kāya*)—the earth-substance, the liquid-substance, the fire-substance, the wind-substance, happiness, pain, and the soul—“uncreated, irreducible, barren, stable as a mountain-peak, standing firm like a pillar, that do not obstruct with one another, are incapable of causing one another happiness, pain or both happiness and pain ... . And among them there is no killer nor one who causes killing, no hearer nor one who causes hearing, no knower nor one who causes knowing. When one cuts off a (person’s) head, there is no one taking anyone’s life. The sword simply passes through the seven substances.” **The Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2,25) ascribes this view to Pakudha Kaccāyana.<sup>66</sup>

The other two views mentioned in the Sāmañña,phala Sutta are the ascetic practice (that is, the fourfold restraint)<sup>67</sup> of Nigaṇṭha Naṭa,putta<sup>68</sup> and the agnosticism of Sañjaya Belaṭṭha,putta.<sup>69</sup>

**5.2.2** The 4 views stated above are rejected outright by the Buddha because they do not conduce to the holy life (*abrahma,carīya,vāsa*), that is, they are false religions. In fact, they are generally very self-centred views, and as such are also anti-social. The 10 doubtful points listed in the Kesa,puttiya Sutta do not fall into the category of *abrahma,carīya,vāsa*, in that they are really modes of inquiry or possible sources of knowledge. However, not all knowledge is useful in terms of personal development or spiritual growth: the value of knowledge lies most importantly in its moral worthiness: *it does not harm us, others or the environment, and conduces to our moral life, mental development and spiritual liberation.*

**5.2.3** Understandably, the Buddha advised the Kālāmas that they should examine the moral worthiness of a view or teaching, and accepting it only if it conduces to one’s moral virtue. A view based on any of the 10 doubtful points are to be rejected for this reason:

When you know for yourselves, Kālāmas,  
*“These things are unwholesome. These things are blamable. These things are censured by the wise. These things, fully undertaken, bring about harm and suffering.”*  
 —Then Kālāmas, you should abandon them.’ [§§3.2, 8]

<sup>66</sup> D 2,24-26/1:56 f (SD 8.10). Here **Sandaka S** (M 76,16-18/1:517 f), conflates the ideas of Pakudha Kaccāyana (D 2,26-1:56) and of Makkhali Gosāla (D 2,18-20/1:53-55). See M:ÑB 1281 n752. The Dīgha tradition appears to be the correct one: see Bodhi (tr), *The Discourse on the Fruits of Recluship*, 1989:72-77.

<sup>67</sup> “The Nigaṇṭha is obstructed by all the waters, conjoined with all the waters, cleansed by all the waters, suffused with all the waters [ie the avoidance of all bad]” (*sabba,vāri,vārīto, sabba,vāri,yuto, sabba,vāri,dhuto, sabba,vāri,phuṭṭo* (with some *vll*), which do not represent the genuine Jain teaching, but seem to parody it in puns. The Jains do have a rule of restraint in regard to water, and *vāri* can mean “water,” “restraint,” or possibly “sin,” and some of the verbal forms are equally dubious. The reference to one “free from bonds” and yet bound by these restraints (whatever they are) is a deliberate paradox. (KR Norman in M Walshe (tr), *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 1996:545 n115)

<sup>68</sup> D 2,27-29/1:57 f (SD 8.10). (Skt) Nirgrantha Jñāti,putra. The name given in the suttas to Vardhamāna Mahāvīra (ca 540-568 BCE?), the leader of the Jains. He is unfavourably described in the Canon, eg **Upāli S** (M 56). *Nigaṇṭha* means “free from bonds.” On Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, see Jayatilleke 1963:140 f (see index) & Jaini (1970) 2001: 57-61.

<sup>69</sup> D 2,31-32/1:58 f (SD 8.10). (Skt) Sañjayin Vairatṭī,putra, also called (P) Belaṭṭhi,putta. Although he is put in unfavourable light in the Pali texts, there appears to be a serious note to his philosophy. It is likely that his standpoint is not made out of ignorance but based on the notion that knowledge was not necessary, even dangerous for salvation. In other words, when one really knows nothing, one then realizes everything. **Shosun Miyamoto**, in his article, “The logic of relativity as the common ground for the development of the middle way” (in Yamaguchi (ed) *Buddhism and Culture*, 1960: 67-88) asserts that Sañjaya’s “system is quite near to the Buddhist standpoint of [the] indescribable or inexpressible [*avyākata*]” and that “Sañjaya’s thought is not far removed from the logic of *Śūnya* of the Mādhyamika.” For a study of Sañjaya as a skeptic, see Jayatilleke 1963:130-135, 336-339 (see index) & Jaini (1970) 2001:57-61.



Or, they should be accepted if,

When you know for yourselves, Kālāmas,  
*“These things are wholesome. These things are not blamable. These things are praised by the wise. These things, fully undertaken, bring about good and happiness.”*  
 —Then Kālāmas, you should live cultivating them.’ [§§9.2, 14]

“So I have spoken; it is for this reason that I have spoken” (*iti yaṃ taṃ vuttaṃ idam etaṃ paṭicca vuttaṃ*), the Buddha then declares each time, and the passage on the 10 doubtful points immediately follow [8, 9a, 14]. In short, all reports or religions may contain some truth, but although they are not false, they are unsatisfactory (*anassāsikāṃ*), that is, they provide no guarantee for spiritual liberation. [§7]

### 5.3 CONDITIONS LEADING TO SPIRITUAL LIBERATION.

#### (1) TWO CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING

The **Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43) mentions two conditions for the arising of right view, namely, “the voice of another” (*parato,ghosa*) and wise attention (*yoniso,manasikāra*) (M 1:294; A 1:87)<sup>70</sup> [5.4]. The Sutta Commentary explains that wise attention is the personal skillful means of minding (*attano upāya,manasikāra*), and that the voice of another is “the listening to conducive Dharma” (*sappāya,dhamma-s,savana*) (MA 2:346).<sup>71</sup>

**5.3.1 Attention** (*manasikāra*) is a Buddhist psychological term belonging to the definition of “name” (*nāma*) of name-and-form (*nāma,rūpa*), as found in **the Sammā,diṭṭhi Sutta** (M 9):

Feeling, perception, volition, contact and attention<sup>72</sup>—these are called name.  
*(Vedanā saññā cetanā phasso manasikāro idaṃ vuccati nāmaṃ).* (M 9,54/1:53), SD 11.14

In the Abhidhamma, *manasikāra* belongs to the formations aggregate (*saṅkhāra-k,khandha*) and is one of the 7 mental factors (*cetasika*),<sup>73</sup> inseparably associated with all states of consciousness. In other words, they refer to a morally significant process. When this is motivated by greed, hate or delusion, seen with “unwise attention” (*ayoniso,manasikāra*) it is regarded as unwholesome; when it is free from greed, hate or delusion, seen with “wise attention” (*yoniso,manasikāra*), it is said to be wholesome,.

**5.3.2 Manasikāra** is the very first stage of the mind’s encounter with an object,<sup>74</sup> and it holds the associated mental factors to the object. As such, it is the prominent factor in two specific classes of consciousness, that is, advertence (*āvajjana*) at the five-sense doors and at the mind-door. These two states of consciousness,

<sup>70</sup> **Mahā Vedalla S** (M 43,13/1:294), SD 35.1 & **Āsā Vg** (A 2.11.9/1:87).

<sup>71</sup> MA says that these 2 conditions—“the voice of another” and “wise attention”—are necessary for the disciple desiring to arrive at the right view of insight and the right view of the supramundane path. But the individual buddhas (*pacceka,buddha*) and the omniscient buddhas (*sabbāññū,buddha*) arrive at their awakening solely in dependence on wise attention without “the voice of another.” (MA 2:346)

<sup>72</sup> On “name-and-form,” see SD 17.1a(4). On “name,” see Analayo, *Comparative Study of the Majjhima Nikāya* (draft), 2005:23 n121 (at M 1:53).

<sup>73</sup> The 7 are sense-impression (*phassa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), volition (*cetanā*), concentration (*samādhī*), vitality (*jīvita*), and attention (*manasikāra*). See Abhs:BRS 2.2(7) (Guide).

<sup>74</sup> “*Manasikāra* should be distinguished from *vitakka*: while the former turns its concomitants towards the object, the latter applies them onto the object. *Manasikāra* is an indispensable cognitive factor present in all states of consciousness; *vitakka* is a specialized factor which is not indispensable to cognition.” (Abhs:BRS 2.2(7) (Guide).

breaking through into the life continuum (*bhavaṅga*), form the first stage of the perceptual process (*citta-vīthi*).<sup>75</sup>

The term *manasikāra* often occurs in the suttas as the phrase, “wise attention” (*yoniso, manasikāra*). It is found throughout **the Sabb’āsava Sutta** (M 2), and is, in fact, its key action word, and where it is said to counter the mental influxes.<sup>76</sup> **The Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43) says that wise attention is a condition for the arising of right view (M 43),<sup>77</sup> of streamwinning,<sup>78</sup> and of the awakening-factors.<sup>79</sup>

The term *yoniso* (in *yoniso manasikāra*) comes from *yonī*, meaning “the womb, origin (place of birth).” As such, *yoniso* means “down to its origin or foundation” (PED), and *yoniso manasikāra* means “directing the attention to the roots of things,” that is, observing phenomena as they truly are, as being characterized by impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self.

**(2) THE PERCEPTION OF IMPERMANENCE.** The opposite of wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) is “unwise attention” (*ayoniso manasikāra*), which basically involves seeking or seeing permanence in the impermanent, pleasure in the painful, and a personal entity in what is not self. It leads to the arising of the mental influxes (M 2),<sup>80</sup> and of the mental hindrances.<sup>81</sup> Mental cultivation is simply impossible under such circumstances.

**5.3.3** In spiritual practice, we only need to begin and focus on the perception of impermanence (*anicca-saññā*) in our being and experiences (for example, reflecting on how we are nothing more than the 5 aggregates)<sup>82</sup> and in all phenomena (that is, noting the rising and falling of things).<sup>83</sup> **The Indriya, bhāvanā Sutta** (M 152), for example, explains how a “good worldling” (one amenable to the spiritual life, whether lay or monastic) keeps to “the supreme cultivation of the faculties in the noble one’s discipline (*ariyassa vinaye anuttarā indriya, bhāvanā*), that is, by regarding all sense-experiences and mentation as “conditioned, gross and dependently arisen,” or in simple terms, by noting their momentariness or impermanence. (M 152,4-9)<sup>84</sup>

<sup>75</sup> See *Vism* 14.152/466 & **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b(5).

<sup>76</sup> M 2/1:6-12 (SD 30.3). “Mental influxes,” *āsava*. The term *āsava* (lit “influxes”) comes from *ā-savati*, meaning “flows towards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously tr as “cankers, taints (‘deadly taints,’ RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, bad (influence),” or simply left untr. The *Abhidhamma* lists 4 kinds of *āsava*: the influxes of (1) sense-desire (*kāma’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav’āsava*), (3) views (*ditth’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjā’sava*) (D 16,2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These 4 are also known as “floods” (*oghā*) and “yokes” (*yogā*). The list of 3 influxes (omitting the influx of views) [43] is prob older and is found more frequently in the suttas (D 33.1.10(20)/3:216; M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these influxes is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: *āsava*.

<sup>77</sup> M 43,13/1:294 (SD 35.1).

<sup>78</sup> It is one of the limbs of streamwinning (*sotāpatti-y-aṅgāni*): (1) association with true persons (ie true practitioners, esp saints); (2) hearing the true teaching; (3) wise attention; (4) practice of the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma (D 33,1.11(13)/3:227; Pm 2:189 f). These are preliminary practices that lead to attainment of streamwinning. In **Paññā, vuḍḍhi S** (A 5.246) these same 4 qualities are called *vuḍḍhi, dhamma*, “states conducive to growth” (A 5.246/2:245); cf the 5 factors of noble growth (*ariya, vuḍḍhi*): **(Tadah’) Uposatha S** (A 3.70,8.2/1:210), SD 4.18; **Sambadh’okāsa S** (A 6.26,8/-3:316), SD 15.7a; **Pañca Vaḍḍhi S 1** (A 5.63/3:80); **Pañca Vaḍḍhi S 2** (A 5.64/3:80). See S:B 762 n120. Cf (2) *sotāpannessa aṅgāni*, **Pañca Vera Bhaya S** (S 12.41/2:68-70), SD 3.3(4.2).

<sup>79</sup> See SD 10.1(8); **Kāya S** (S 46.2/5:64-67); **(Bojjhaṅga) Sīla S** (S 46.3/5:67-70), SD 10.15; **(Ajjhatta) Aṅga S** (S 46.49-/5:101), **(Bahiddhā) Aṅga S** (S 46.50/5:102), **Āhāra S** (S 46.51/5:102-107), SD 7.15.

<sup>80</sup> M 2/1:6-12 @ SD 30.3.

<sup>81</sup> The mental hindrances are: (1) sense-desire (*kāma-c, chanda*), (2) ill will (*vyāpāda*), (3) sloth and torpor (*thīna, middha*), (4) restlessness and worry (*uddhacca, kukkuccha*), and (5) doubt (*vicikicchā*): S 46.2, 51.

<sup>82</sup> On a detailed study of the 5 aggregates, see SD 17.

<sup>83</sup> **Dīgha, jānu S** (A 8.54,15/4:285), SD 5.10. See below (5.5).

<sup>84</sup> M 152,4-9/3:299 f (SD 17.13).

**5.3.4** The perception of impermanence (*anicca,saññā*) is in fact the key practice for a lay Buddhist, as clearly exhorted in the ten discourses (by way of perceptions of impermanence) of **the Okkanta Saṃyutta**. One who accepts the truth of impermanence after pondering over them with some wisdom<sup>85</sup> (by way of wise attention) is called **a truth-follower**, and one who accepts the truth of impermanence *through wise faith* (either by another's voice [5.4] or by wise attention) is called **a faith-follower**. The ten suttas declare regarding either of them:

He has entered the fixed course of rightness, entered the plane of superior persons, gone beyond the plane of the worldlings.

He is incapable of doing any intentional deed by which he might be reborn in hell, or in the animal birth, or in the ghost realm. He is incapable of dying without attaining the fruit of stream-winning. (S 25.1-10/3:225 ff): see SD 16.7

## 5.4 ANOTHER'S VOICE

**5.4.1** **"The voice of another"** (*parato,ghosa*) is a key concept of early Buddhism that apparently has not received any scholarly attention, except perhaps from **Peter Masefield**.<sup>86</sup> In the second paragraph of his section on *"Parato ghosa,"* Masefield claims that "the Nikāyas appeared to be almost totally silent upon the question of how right view was to be attained ... [except] for one cryptic message, found on only two occasions" (1986:50): he is, of course, referring to the "two conditions that give rise to right view,"<sup>87</sup> that is, another's voice (*parato ghosa*) and wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*).<sup>88</sup> We have discussed the latter, wise attention [5.3], so we will focus our discussion here on the former, another's voice.

**5.4.2** **The Aṅguttara Commentary** explains *parato ghosa* in terms of how wrong view arises through "hearing the false Dharma before [in the presence of] another" (*parassa santikā asaddhamma,savanaṃ*), and how right view through "hearing the true Dharma" (*saddhamma,savanaṃ*) (AA 2:157).

**5.4.3** **The Majjhima Commentary** is more informative. It glosses another's voice as "the listening to conducive Dharma" (*sappāya,dhamma-s,savana*), and adds that wise attention is the method of the Pratyeka Buddhas and the All-knowing Buddhas, since there is no *parato ghosa* for them. *Parato ghosa* is the means of the listeners or disciples (*sāvaka*) (MA 2:346). This interpretation is supported by **the Sutta Nipāta Commentary** which says that the "noble listener [disciple]" (*ariya,sāvaka*) is one who is characterized by "hearing (the Dharma) before the aryas" (*ariyānaṃ santike sutattā*) (SnA 166).

**5.4.4** **The Nālaka Sutta** (Sn 3.11) records how Asita's prophecies to his nephew Nālaka regarding the Buddha's awakening, and how the latter then renounces and follows to the Buddha himself:

*Buddho ti ghosam̐ yada parato suṇāsi sambodhi,patto vicarati dhammam aggam̐ gantvāna tattha samayaṃ paripucchiyāno carassu tasmim̐ bhagavati brahmacariyam̐*

When you hear the sound, "Buddha," from others, he, attained to self-awakening, moves in the foremost Dharma, going there, asking about the doctrine (*samaya*), live the holy life under that Blessed One. (Sn 696)

*Sutvāna ghosam̐ jina,vara,cakka,vattane gantvāna disvā isi,nisabham̐ pasanno*

Hearing the voice of the noble conqueror's wheel-turning, going, seeing the lordly bull of seers, he becomes faithful.

<sup>85</sup> *Yassa kho bhikkhave ime dhammā evar̐ paññāya mattaso nijjhānam̐ khamanti.*

<sup>86</sup> 1986: ch 2 esp 50-54.

<sup>87</sup> *Dve'me ... paccayā sammā,ditṭhiyā uppādāya.*

<sup>88</sup> **Mahā Vedalla S** (M 49,13/1:294; A 2.11.9/1:87).

*moneyya, seṭṭham muni, pavaram apucchi  
samāgate asita, vhayassa sāsane ti*

He asked the noble sage about supreme sagehood;  
when the one called Asita's message had come to pass.

(Sn 698)

**5.4.5 The Majjhima Commentary** cites the well known case of Sāriputta's conversion. Although he has fulfilled a hundred thousand aeons [world-cycles] (*kappa*) and one uncountable aeon (*asaṅkheyya kappa*)<sup>89</sup> and, he is still unable to destroy even an iota (*aṇumatta*) of defilement, and yet upon hearing a single stanza from the newly awakened elder Assaji (MA 2:346), he is able to realize the Dharma eye (V 1:40), which the Dhammapada Commentary confirms as the attainment of streamwinning (DhA 1:92 f).

It is said that during their first meeting, Sāriputta earnestly requests for a teaching from Assaji, who then recites:

Of all things that arise from a cause,  
Their cause the Tathāgata has told.

*Ye dhammā hetu-p, pabhavā  
tesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato āha*

As soon as Sāriputta hears these first two lines, he is established in the fruit of streamwinning. Then Assaji completes the stanza:

And also how these cease to be—  
This too the great sage has told.

*tesañ ca yo nirodho  
evaṃ vādī mahā, samaṇo*

Sāriputta then relays the stanza to his best friend, Moggallāna, who similarly gains the fruit of streamwinning on hearing the first two lines. Both of them then become the Buddha's disciples.<sup>90</sup>

**5.4.6** It is possible to interpret *parato ghosa* in a figurative sense as "the voice from THE beyond," as suggested by Masefield, thus:

Moreover, whilst *para-* is used to denote other people, it can also refer to the beyond, the further side and so on, as in, for instance, such terms as *paraloka* and the distinct possibility exists that the phrase *parato ghoso* may have originally meant "the sound from the Beyond" in the sense of the sound of the supermundane Dhamma; though it would at the same time also be true to say that it is "the voice of another" in the sense that it requires another person—usually the Buddha but on occasion, as in the case of Sāriputta, some other ariyan—to mediate it.

(1986:52)

The "voice from the beyond" should clearly be taken in its *figurative* sense as referring to the truth regarding the afterlife, and also liberation from suffering (that is, *samsara*) itself. This interpretation helps to explain the numerous occasions when many of the early disciples who attain various stages of sainthood merely by listening to the Buddha or one of the awakened disciples teaching.

<sup>89</sup> An uncountable aeon is one of the 4 "uncountable aeons" of the full world-cycle (*kappa*), and here prob refers to the stable state of the 4 cycles: the other three are the collapsing (or devolving) universe, the collapsed (or devolved) universe, the evolving universe, and the evolved or stable universe. See **Aggañña S** (D 27,10-13/3:84-86), SD 2.10 & Appendix.

<sup>90</sup> V 1:40 f; J 1:85. After the Buddha's passing, esp during the late Gupta until the end of the Pāla period (c 600-1200 CE), this verse attained cult status as inscriptions often interred in stupas. See Daniel Boucher, "The *Pratītyasamutpāda-gāthā* and its role in the medieval cult of the relics," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 14,1 1991: 1-27.

**5.4.7** The awakening of the two foremost disciples are classic examples of *liberation through hearing* “the voice from the beyond.” **The Dīgha,nakha Sutta** (M 74) records how Sāriputta, two weeks after his joining the order, while standing behind the Buddha fanning him and listening to the Buddha discoursing on feeling to his nephew, Dīgha,nakha, gains arhathood:

Now at that time, the venerable Sāriputta<sup>91</sup> was standing behind the Blessed One, fanning him.<sup>92</sup> Then he thought:

“The Blessed One, indeed, speaks to us of the abandoning of these things through direct knowledge.<sup>93</sup> The Sugata [the well-farer], indeed, speaks to us of the relinquishing of these things through direct knowledge.”

As the venerable Sāriputta reflected thus, through not clinging, his mind was freed from the mental influxes.<sup>94</sup> (M 74,14/1:500 f), SD 16.1

**5.4.8** Similarly, **the Pacalā Sutta** (A 7.58) records how the Buddha admonishes the newly ordained Moggallāna as he struggles with drowsiness while meditating. The Buddha teaches him eight ways of dealing with drowsiness and the conditions conducive to mental concentration. At the end of the teaching, Moggallāna becomes an arhat.<sup>95</sup>

## 5.5 SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP

**5.5.1 The Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43) goes on to say that **right view** (pertaining to the path of arhathood) is assisted by 5 factors when it has the liberation of mind (from lust) and liberation by wisdom (from ignorance) as the goal (both referring to the fruit of arhathood). These 5 factors are: moral conduct, learning, discussion, calmness and insight. (M 43)<sup>96</sup>

These teachings are also found in **the Saṃyutta Nikāya** and **the Iti,vuttaka** where it is said that spiritual friendship is the chief *external support* for spiritual development and skillful means its chief *internal support*.<sup>97</sup> Here, moral conduct, learning and discussion would fall under the category of **spiritual friendship**,<sup>98</sup> while calmness and insight (that is, cultivation or meditation) come under **wise attention**. As wise attention has already been discussed [5.3], we will only look at spiritual friendship here.

**5.5.2** For the lay follower, the Buddha gives this instruction of spiritual friendship, found in **the Dīgha,jānu Sutta** (A 8.54), under “worldly welfare”:

Here, Vyagghapajja, in whatever village or market town the son of family dwells, he associates, converses, discusses with householders or householders’ sons, young men mature in virtue, or old men mature in virtue, endowed with faith, moral virtue, charity and wisdom.<sup>99</sup> He

<sup>91</sup> Comy says that this is two weeks (*aḍḍha,māsa,pabbajitena*) after Sāriputta’s going forth (MA 3:203).

<sup>92</sup> On monks fanning the Buddha, see Intro (4) above.

<sup>93</sup> “Direct knowledge,” *abhiññā*, also “superknowledge.” Comy says that the Buddha talks of the ridding of the notions regarding the eternal, regarding the partially eternal, and regarding form, through the direct knowledge of these things. (MA 3:208)

<sup>94</sup> “Mental influxes,” *āsava*. See Intro (5.3(1)) n.

<sup>95</sup> A 7.58/4:85-91 (SD 4.11)

<sup>96</sup> M 43/1:294 (SD 35.1).

<sup>97</sup> **Kālyāṇa,mitta S** (S 45.49/5:5:29), **Sīla,sampadā S** (S 45.55/5:30 f); It 16, 17

<sup>98</sup> See **Spiritual friendship**, SD 8.1.

<sup>99</sup> These 4 are the conditions for spiritual welfare: see SD 5.10 §11.

emulates the faith<sup>100</sup> of the faithful, the virtue of the virtuous, the charity of charitable, and the wisdom of the wise. (A 8.54,6/4:282), SD 5.10

**5.5.3 The 4 spiritual qualities** are defined in the Sutta's section on spiritual welfare as follows:

**12** (1) What is the accomplishment of faith?

Here, Vyagghapajja, the son of family has (wise) faith. He has faith in the Buddha's awakening thus:

'So too, is he the Blessed One:<sup>101</sup> for, he is arhat, the fully self-awakened one, accomplished in wisdom and conduct, well-farer, knower of worlds, peerless guide of tamable persons, teacher of gods and humans, awakened, blessed.'

This, Vyagghapajja, is called the accomplishment of faith.

(2) What is the accomplishment of moral virtue?

**13** Here, Vyagghapajja, the son of family abstains from harming life, from taking the not-given, from sexual misconduct, from false speech, from strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks and that which causes heedlessness.

This, Vyagghapajja, is called the accomplishment of moral virtue.

(3) What is the accomplishment of charity?

**14** Here, Vyagghapajja, the son of family dwells in at home with a heart free from the stain of miserliness, devoted to charity, open-handed, delighting in giving, devoted to alms-giving, delighting to have a share in giving.<sup>102</sup>

This, Vyagghapajja, is called the accomplishment of charity.

(4) What is the accomplishment of wisdom? [285]

**15** Here, Vyagghapajja, the son of family is wise, possesses wisdom directed to [noting] the rising and falling away [of phenomena] that is noble and penetrative, leading to the complete destruction of suffering.

This, Vyagghapajja, is called the accomplishment of wisdom.

These are the 4 things that lead to the welfare and happiness of a son of family in the world to come. (A 8.54,12-15/4:284 f), SD 5.10

**5.5.4 In the Meghiya Sutta** (A 9.3 = U 4.1), the following 5 factors—very similar to the 4 given in the Dīgha, jānu Sutta—are given by the Buddha to the monk Meghiya for his training:

<sup>100</sup> "Faith," *saddhā*. There are 2 kinds of faith (*saddhā*): (1) "rootless faith" (*amūlaka, saddhā*), baseless or irrational faith, blind faith (M 95,14/2:170); (2) "faith with a good cause" (*ākāravati, saddhā*), faith founded on seeing (M 47,15/-1:320,8); also called *avecca-p, pasāda* (S 12.41,11/2:69). "Wise faith" is syn with (2). *Amūlaka* = "not seen, not heard, not suspected" (V 2:243 3:163 & Comy). Gethin speaks of two kinds of faith: the cognitive and the affective (eg ERE: Faith & Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:387): "Faith in its cognitive dimension is seen as concerning belief in propositions or statements of which one does not—or perhaps cannot—have knowledge proper (however that should be defined); cognitive faith is a mode of knowing in a different category from that knowledge. Faith, in its affective dimension, is a more straightforward positive response to trust or confidence to wards something or somebody ... the conception of *saddhā* in Buddhist writings appears almost, if not entirely affective, the cognitive element is completely secondary." (Gethin 2001:207; my emphases).

<sup>101</sup> Alt tr: "For the following reasons, too, he is the Blessed One [the Lord]..." On the meaning of *iti pi so*, see *Buddhānussati*, SD 15.7 (2.2) & n.

<sup>102</sup> This passage is stock, found in eg *Dhana S* (A 7.6/4:6), *Nakula, māta S* (A 8.48/4:268 f); cf *Vata, pada S* (S 11.11/-1:228). Commented upon at *Vism* 7.101-106: see *Cāgānussati*, SD 15.12.



- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. <u>Spiritual friendship.</u>   | wise faith ( <i>saddhā</i> ) <sup>103</sup> |
| 2. Moral conduct in keeping with the code of discipline, seeing danger in the slightest moral breach.       |   |
| 3. Talk on contentment, aloofness and the spiritual life.   | study and discussion                        |
| 4. Energy in abandoning unwholesome states and promoting wholesome states.                                  | calmness                                    |
| 5. The wisdom that sees the rise and fall of phenomena that leads to the complete destruction of suffering. | insight                                     |
- (A 9.3/4:357 = U 4.136 f; UA 221), SD 34.2

**5.5.5** From the above discussion, it is obvious that spiritual friendship is crucial in personal development, and this is in fact attested by the Buddha in a dialogue with Ānanda, as recorded in **the Upaḍḍha Sutta** (S 45.2), thus:

“Bhante, spiritual friendship, good companionship, good comradeship, is half of the holy life.”

“Not so, Ānanda! Not so, Ānanda! Spiritual friendship, good companionship, good comradeship, is **the whole of the holy life**. When a monk has a spiritual friend, a good companion, a good comrade, it is to be expected that he will develop the noble eightfold path.

And how, Ānanda, does a monk who has a spiritual friend, a good companion, a good comrade, cultivate the noble eightfold path, develop the noble eightfold path?

Here, Ānanda, a monk cultivates right view, ... right intention, ... right speech, ... right action, ... right livelihood, ... right effort, ... right mindfulness, ... right concentration, *based on seclusion, on dispassion, on cessation, maturing in release*.

It is in this way, Ānanda, that a monk who has a spiritual friend, a good companion, a good comrade, cultivates the noble eightfold path, develops the noble eightfold path.

In this way, too, Ānanda, it should be known, in a manner of speaking, how the whole of the holy life is spiritual friendship ... :

By relying upon me as a spiritual friend, Ānanda,

beings subject to birth are freed from birth,

beings subject to decay are freed from decay,

beings subject to death are freed from death,

beings subject to sorrow, lamentation, bodily pain, mental pain, and despair are freed from them.

In this way, Ānanda, it should be known, in a manner of speaking, how spiritual friendship, good companionship, good comradeship is the whole of the holy life.

(S 45.2/5:2 f @ SD 34.9; also at S 3.18/1:87 f; cf Sāriputta’s remark, S 5:4)

## 6 Testing the teacher

**6.1** As mentioned above [1], Śāntarakṣita makes this famous statement in his **Tattva,saṅgraha**:

O bhikshus [said the self-awakened one], my words should be accepted by the wise only after investigation, not out of respect (for me)—just as gold (is accepted) only after heating, cutting and rubbing. (Tts ch 26/3588) [6]

<sup>103</sup> Cf UA 221.

Śāntarakṣita is not saying here you should simply pick and choose what you like about Buddhism. In a sense, you need not have to do so, as you would likely be drawn to what you can understand and find inspiring, and would probably skim over other teachings you find unintelligible. Śāntarakṣita's words have 3 main points:

- (1) you should use your wisdom when searching the scriptures,
- (2) you should not accept a teaching or instruction from a teacher simply out of respect for him, and
- (3) check out the teaching to ensure that it is wholesome, and if so, make sure you practise it.

**6.2 The Vīmaṃsaka Sutta** (M 47) is a complete discourse on testing the teacher before accepting him as your own. The Buddha actually invites his disciples (or anyone else) to test him to discover whether he is awakened or not, thus:

Bhikṣhus, an inquiring monk, not knowing another's mind, should investigate the Tathagata in order to find out whether or not he is fully self-awakened. M 47,2/1:317), SD 35.6<sup>104</sup>

The discourse goes on to instruct how this investigation is to be done, that is, he should observe through his own eyes and ears:

- (1) whether the Buddha's bodily conduct or his speech is defiled (*saṅkiliṭṭha*);<sup>105</sup>
- (2) whether the Buddha's action or speech is morally "mixed" (*vītimissa*) (that is, not fully wholesome);
- (3) whether purified (*vodāta*) mental states are found in the Buddha;
- (4) whether the Buddha has attained his wholesome state (*kusala dhamma*) for a long time or just recently;
- (5) whether the Buddha has reached such a height of fame that he is negatively affected by it;
- (6) whether the Buddha fearlessly restrains himself from lust (*abhayūparata*), or he does so out of fear; or whether he avoids sensual lust through having destroyed it.

Then, he should go on to question the Buddha on these points so that they can be confirmed to be wholesomely so. He carefully listens to the Buddha's teaching. And if others were to question him on such matters, he would be able to confidently declare through his direct knowledge, thus<sup>106</sup>

"The Blessed One is fully self-awakened. The Blessed One's Dharma is well taught. The Sangha is well-practised."

Bhikṣhus, when one's faith has been planted, rooted and established in the Tathagata for these reasons, by these words, by these phrases, this faith is said to be supported by reasons, rooted in vision, firm: it is unshaken by any recluse or brahmin or god or Māra or Brahmā or by anyone in the world.<sup>107</sup> (M 47,4-16/318-320, summarized), SD 35.6<sup>108</sup>

**6.3** Here we have seen how spiritual investigation and wisdom lead to reasoned faith (*ākāra, vatī saddhā*) or wise faith (*avecca-p, pasāda*). The wise layman **Citta**, in a witty encounter with the Jains, when they speak of

<sup>104</sup> *Vīmaṃsakena bhikkhave bhikkhunā parassa ceto, pariyāyaṃ ajānantena tathāgatena samānesanā kātabbā, - sammā, sambuddho vā no vā iti viññāṇāyā ti* (M 47/1:317). Foll Be, Ce:BJT & Se: see M:ÑB 1244 n482.

<sup>105</sup> ... *dvīsu dhammesu tathāgato sammanesitabbo, cakkhu, sota, viññeyyesu dhammesu: ye saṅkiliṭṭha cakkhu, sota, - viññeyyā dhammā samvijjanti vā te tathāgatassa no vā ti* (M 47,4/1:317)

<sup>106</sup> *Sammā sambuddho bhagavā, svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo, supaṭipanno saṅgho'ti. Yassa kassa ci bhikkhave imehi ākārehi imehi padehi imehi byañjanehi tathāgate saddhā niviṭṭhā hoti mūla, jātā patitṭhitā, ayaṃ vuccatī bhikkhave ākāra, vatī saddhā dassana, mūlikā daḥhā, asaṃhāriyā samaṇena vā brāhmaṇena vā devena vā mārena vā brahmunā vā kenaci vā lokasmīṃ.*

<sup>107</sup> This in fact refers to the streamwinner's faith.

<sup>108</sup> See below Comy 3a(10). See also Jayatilleke 1963:392-394.

the stopping of thinking and pondering<sup>109</sup> in the second dhyana, declares that he “does not go by faith in the Blessed One.”

The Jain leader, Nigaṇṭha Nāta,putta, however, mistakes this, literally, thinking that Citta has *no* faith in the Buddha, and even goes on to state that “knowledge, householder, is indeed superior to faith!” (*saddhā-ya kho gahapati ñāṇaṃ yeva paṇītataram*).<sup>110</sup> Citta then explains that what he really means is that having understood it for himself he has *no* need of faith (that is, blind faith) in the Buddha!<sup>111</sup> [4]

## 7 Kesaputtiya Sutta and Pascal’s Wager

### 7.1 PASCAL’S WAGER

**7.1.1** In the **Apaṇṇaka Sutta** (M 60), as here in the Kesa,puttiya Sutta, the Buddha wagers, as it were, that it is better to eschew the three notorious false views of nihilism, amoralism and determinism, and two views denying the formless states and cessation.<sup>112</sup> While in the Apaṇṇaka Sutta, it might be said that the Buddha gives *philosophical and ethical* arguments for rejecting these five false views, here in the Kesa,puttiya Sutta, he gives *meditative and spiritual* arguments for living a morally virtuous life.

**7.1.2** The “**Buddha’s wager**” is that of a proposal of a single positive choice in the face of four uncertain situations. The Buddha argues that regardless of whether the teachings of karma and rebirth are valid, even taking it *as if* they were, brings one positive rewards here and now. The relieved and jubilant Kālāmas (or a significant number of them) go for refuge in the 3 jewels [§18 & Table 7.2].

**7.1.3** This penultimate section of the Kesa,puttiya Sutta has often led some of the philosophically inclined to compare it to **Pascal’s wager**,<sup>113</sup> as if presaging it. Both the four self-assurances [§18] and Pascal’s wager are classic instances of a decision theory<sup>114</sup> application of a choice under uncertainty. Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) gives this wager:

... you *must* wager. It is not optional... Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation that He is.

(Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* 1670:3.233, Infini-Rien. Tr W F Trotter, 1910)

**7.1.4** Pascal’s wager tries to justify belief in God not from proof of his existence but rather with an appeal to self-interest. It is in our interests to believe in the Christian God, the wager suggests, and it is therefore rational for us to do so. The wager can be simply explained in this way:

<sup>109</sup> That is, initial application (*vitakka*) and sustained application (*vicāra*).

<sup>110</sup> Apparently, PD Premasiri (2006:128 f) misinterprets this sentence, taking it literally (as Nigaṇṭha does!), out of context.

<sup>111</sup> **Nigaṇṭha Nāta,putta S** (S 41.8/298 f). A similar pun is used by Sāriputta in **Pubba,koṭṭhaka S** (S 48.44/5:220-222), SD 10.7. For a summary of Nigaṇṭha Nāta,putta S, see SD 10.7(5).

<sup>112</sup> M 60/1:400-413 @ SD 35.5.

<sup>113</sup> See Kaufman 1958:170-172, 203; and esp <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pascal-wager/> for an authoritative write-up and refs, or for other refs, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pascal%27s\\_Wager](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pascal%27s_Wager); Theodore M Drange, “Pascal’s Wager Refuted” (2000): [http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/theodore\\_drange/wager.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/theodore_drange/wager.html). See also **Apaṇṇaka S** (M 60), SD 35.5.

<sup>114</sup> **Decision theory** is an interdisciplinary concern regarding how real or ideal decision-makers make or should make decisions, and how optimal decisions are to be made. The central idea in decision theory is “choice under uncertainty,” which characterizes Pascal’s wager. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decision\\_theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decision_theory).

- You believe in God:  
If God exists, you go to heaven: your gain is infinite.  
If God does not exist, your loss (because of mistaken belief) is finite.
- You do not believe in God:  
If God does not exist, your gain is finite and therefore negligible.  
If God does exist, your loss is infinite: your gain is zero, and you may be punished.

**7.1.5** Pascal's argument can be graphically represented in the following decision matrix, listing all the 4 possibilities:<sup>115</sup>

	<i>God exists</i>	<i>God does not exist</i>
<i>Wager: God exists</i>	Happiness	We lose nothing
<i>Wager: God does not exist</i>	Suffering	We win nothing

**Table 7.1.5: How Pascal's wager fails**

In simple terms, Pascal's wager is simply ludicrous for the following reasons:

- We assume that there is only *one* God: most religions and cultures believe there are many Gods.
- In that case, why must it be *your* God? Why not some *other* God?
- Even then, if God is really *all-loving*, wouldn't He tolerate both belief and unbelief?
- What gives you the right to speak *for* God? For you to resort to such a *gamble*, only shows that you lack faith in your own God.

**7.1.6** The main criticisms (logical fallacies)<sup>116</sup> of Pascal's wager, in some detail, are as follows:

- (1) It assumes that there is a *need* for belief.** The main problem is that a decision-theoretic analysis would show that this argument regards belief in these concepts to be rational for or applicable to all non-zero levels of belief. One could, for example, simply declare that one does not believe in any of the premises!
- (2) It assumes that God rewards belief.** It is illogical to assume that there are only these two possibilities: that (a) the Christian God exists and punishes or rewards, and (b) that God does not exist. The wager does not account for the possibility that there may be many gods. Such a God or gods, rather than behaving as Pascal or Christians would have it, *could instead reward skepticism and punish blind faith, or reward honest reasoning and punish false faith*.
- (3) It does not constitute a true belief.** Another logical fallacy of the wager is that if a person is uncertain whether a particular religion is true and the god of that religion is real, but that person still believes in it because of the expectation of a reward and the fear of punishment, then that belief is not a true valid belief or a true faith in that religion and its god.

<sup>115</sup> See Walter A Kaufman 1958:170 & Edward McClennen 1994:115-137.

<sup>116</sup> For an easy to read "List of Common Fallacies" (Jim Walker): <http://www.nobeliefs.com/fallacies.htm>. This is also found in **Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16), SD 9 (Appendix 2).

**William James** (1842-1910),<sup>117</sup> in *The Will to Believe*, summarizes this argument thus:

Surely Pascal's own personal belief in masses and holy water had far other springs; and this celebrated page of his is but an argument for others, a last desperate snatch at a weapon against the hardness of the unbelieving heart. We feel that a faith in masses and holy water adopted willfully after such a mechanical calculation would lack the inner soul of faith's reality; and if we were ourselves in the place of the Deity, we should probably take particular pleasure in cutting off believers of this pattern from their infinite reward.

*(The Will to Believe, 1897)*

In modern times, this criticism is often used against evangelistic Christianity, especially those who try to incite fear such as by claiming that non-believers will go to eternal hell. Such a belief is sometimes called "afterlife insurance," "heaven insurance," or "hell avoidance insurance."

- (4) It assumes that one can choose what one believes.** This fallacy is similar to the previous one. The wager says that if one is uncertain about Christianity, one should still believe in it, just in case it is true after all. But, to believe that something is true may not be based on fact or certainty. Therefore, the wager could be interpreted to mean that if we are uncertain that it is true then *we should decide or pretend to be certain that it is*.
- (5) It assumes that Christianity is the only religion that makes such a claim.** Pascal's wager assumes that Christianity is the *only* religion which claims that a person will be judged and punished by God for not believing in him (that is, not believing in that religion). In reality, Christianity is *not* the only religion which claims that God will judge and punish nonbelievers. Many other religions—such as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Daoism and many indigenous religions—also claim that God (or some deity) will judge and punish unbelievers.

So, if you claim that we should believe in Christianity (or in any other religion), just because of the possibility of being punished for not believing in it, then what are we going to say about other religions that make the same claim? And as a believer of a religion which makes such a claim, what do you think about their similar claims anyway?

For example, in the "Homer the Heretic"<sup>118</sup> episode of the Simpsons, Homer stops going to church and decides to follow God in his own way: by watching TV, slobbering about and dancing in his underpants. Throughout the episode he justifies himself in a number of ways, such as:

- "What's the big deal about going to some building every Sunday, I mean, isn't God everywhere?"
- "Don't you think the almighty has better things to worry about than where one little guy spends one measly hour of his week?"
- "And what if we've picked the wrong religion? Every week we're just making God madder and madder?"

We do not need subtle philosophical arguments to understand the import of such claims. These are very simple facts of life, and as such they can be simply stated by even Homer Simpson!

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<sup>117</sup> James was a pioneering American psychologist, philosopher, and leader of the philosophical movement of Pragmatism, who wrote influential books on the young science of psychology, educational psychology, the psychology of religious experience, and the philosophy of pragmatism. On James' role in Buddhist psychology, see **Consciousness and meditation**, SD 17.8c(2).

<sup>118</sup> Epi 62, Prod code 9F01, orig airdate 8 Oct 1992, written by George Meyer & directed by Jim Reardon. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homer\\_the\\_Heretic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homer_the_Heretic).

**(6) There are opportunity costs.** Pascal's wager fails to mention any cost (disadvantages) relating to belief. Philosophers have proposed that there may be both direct costs (time, health, wealth) and opportunity costs.<sup>119</sup> Most modern religions require their followers to spend time attending religious services at houses of worship and to donate money for the maintenance of such places and/or to the needy, when possible. As a result, *if a person believes in a God that does not exist*, then that person has lost time, money and chance that could have been used for some other purpose.

There may be opportunity costs for those who choose to believe in a religion. For example, scientific understanding, such as the theory of evolution, that seems to some to contradict scripture, could enable a non-believer to discover or accomplish things a creationist could not. It is also argued that belief incurs a cost by not allowing the believer to participate in and enjoy actions forbidden by religious rules and dogmas. Many religious followers make significant (but not necessarily wise) sacrifices for their beliefs. For example, the Jehovah's Witnesses reject blood transfusions, even if it may cost their lives or those of their loved ones.

**(7) Measure theory.** Pascal's wager assumes that God is possible, and hence there is a non-zero probability of him existing. But this does not work all the time. It is not clear what is meant when "probability" or "chance" is said in the context of something possibly existing, but probability cannot be used as defined in mathematics to justify the wager as it is, since God being possible does not mean that God's existence has positive probability.<sup>120</sup>

**7.1.7** The most important fallacy or weakness to note in Pascal's wager is that it takes a very speculative ("as if") approach to the God-idea. The Buddha, in the Kesa,puttiya Sutta, however, does not in any way advocate a speculative notion of karma and rebirth. It is obvious that Pascal's wager is based on a "power mode," in fact, a threat with a clear agenda: believe in God, or God will punish you. The mature and clear logic of the 4 self-assurances reflects the "love mode" of a thinker's faith. Otherwise, any comparison between the two is at best academic and speculative. Furthermore, one might assert that if Buddhism were false, it is of no consequence, but if Buddhism is true, the implication is universal.<sup>121</sup>

## 7.2 THE 4 SELF-ASSURANCES

**7.2.1** The Kesa,puttiya Sutta closes with a guarantee that whether we believe in rebirth and karma or not, as long as our "mind is without enmity thus, without ill will thus, uncorrupted thus, purified thus," we would enjoy **4 self-assurances** or spiritual solaces (*assāsa*) [§17], as follows:

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<sup>119</sup> In economics, **opportunity cost** or **economic cost**, is *the cost of something in terms of an opportunity forgone* (and the benefits that could be derived from that opportunity), or *the most valuable forgone alternative*, ie the second best alternative. For example, if the local town council decides to build a shopping mall on a piece of vacant land that it owns, the opportunity cost is *some other thing* that could have been done with that land and the construction funds. In building the mall, the town council has forgone the opportunity to build, say, a parking lot on that land, or a recreation centre, or to sell the land to reduce the council's debt, and so on. Opportunity cost need not be assessed in monetary terms, but in terms of *anything* that is of value to the person or persons doing the assessing. For example, a person who chooses to meditate would not be able to use that time watching TV. In any case, if he chooses to watch a TV show, he would only be able to watch one show at a time, and (even if he is recording another show) he can only watch either one at a time, foregoing the other one. Whichever one he chooses entails a lost opportunity to experience the other.

<sup>120</sup> This is a summary of a technical argument. I am not very familiar with measure theory, for which see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pascal's\\_Wager#Measure\\_theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pascal's_Wager#Measure_theory), and other refs there.

<sup>121</sup> On how to fully benefit from the 4 self-assurances, see Comy 15b-16.



(1) if karma and rebirth are true	we will have a good rebirth;
(2) if karma and rebirth are false	we will still be happy right here;
(3) if good and bad exist	we face no bad karmic result;
(4) if there is neither good nor bad	we remain pure and unaffected anyway.

**Table 7.2** The 4 self-assurances [§18]

If all this sounds somewhat abstract, perhaps, this thoughtful little prose poem by **Annie Dillard** (b 1945), US Pulitzer Prize writer, best known for her narrative non-fiction, makes very good sense:

Somewhere, and I can't find where,  
 I read about an Eskimo hunter who asked the local missionary priest,  
 "If I didn't know about God and sin, would I go to hell?"  
 "No," said the priest, "not if you did not know."  
 "Then why," asked the Eskimo earnestly, "did you tell me?"

Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974)

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