How to Critique the Dhamma and Buddha

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 42:21

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambha sambuddhasa, Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambha sambuddhasa, Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambha sambuddhasa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I'm using this book by Bhikkhu Bodhi, In the Buddha's Words. It's a nice collection, and his translations are very clear and he's got good notes on it. The chapter I'm looking at is "Approaching the Dharma", about stuff that I'm sure you've heard about: no dogma, no belief. But I thought we'd have a look at the scriptures on it.

Before we start, there's a little categorisation here which may be of small interest. There are five types of ideologies, for want of a better word.

A fundamentalist – we all know what a fundamentalist is. Basically they think theirs is the only true mountain, so you think you're actually climbing a mountain but really you're descending into a pit. That's their point of view. It's a case of "I'm right, everybody else is wrong." Obviously, there's going to be contradiction and conflict.

Then you get the relative fundamentalist who has respect for the traditions. They're all mountains, but my mountain is bigger and better. Whereas yours will stop short, mine will actually reach the ultimate goal. At some point, you've got to come across and join my mountain. That even happened to me in India with a Tibetan monk. He told me that the Theravāda path is all right, but if I wanted really to make it, I'd have to become a Mahāyāna.

Then there's a relativist. The relativist is in a sense acknowledging their ignorance of other religions. They usually say all mountains are equal but they're all different. And it's up to you. It's all relative, and there's no way of telling which is more true than the other. I mean the only way realistically a person can decide whether your path is better or less good than their path is by actually doing it, actually reaching the end by some teacher in a path saying, "Yes, this is the end." And they said, "Well, hold on, I went one step further."

This is what happened to the Buddha, remember? He went along to these teachers and they all said, "Yeah, you've got it. We want you to teach, we want you to be part of our faculty." And he felt they hadn't quite made it and he left them. That was two teachers, wasn't it? And then there was the mortification stuff. That was also another path at the time, probably best exemplified by the Nigaṇṭha, the person who founded the Jains. Even that he found wanting – he just said it was more suffering.

Then there's the relativist universalist. The person says, well, if you look below the surface of culture and words, you find that actually all religions are on the same mountain, because eventually they're all saying the same thing. Although each path is distinct and separate going up the mountain, you're always actually on the same mountain. You find that especially between this conjunction between Christianity and Buddhism. There's a lot of work done by a lot of people trying to connect them, trying to find a way, and there's books on it of course. I mean even Thích Nhất Hạnh threw his lot in, didn't he? What was it called? Buddha... But anyway, there's lots of these efforts, both at a very high theological level – when I say high, I mean academic – and at an actual practice level where a lot of Christians practice meditation. A lot of Christians practice *vipassanā*.

But I don't see it going the other way. I don't see much going the other way. In fact, I read an article about this, where the person was saying there was so much connection between Christianity and Buddhism, and that a lot of Christians were – I mean, I'm not putting a percentage on it, just a lot of Christians practiced Buddhist things, but he hadn't seen Buddhists move over to things like belief in God and all that, and a practice of praying to God. If you don't believe in God, there's no point in praying to him. Anyway.

Finally, there's the universalist – not the relative universalist, like yours is equal. There's actually, I would say, the universalist who sees clearly that beneath all these rites and rituals, customs, cultures and all that, there are in fact just three ways. And that's the way of insight, the way of knowledge, the way of love, and the way of action. Usually they're all together.

If you look at the eightfold path, they're there. You start off with right understanding. You have right attitude, which is always described as selfishness to generosity, hatred to love, cruelty to compassion. Those are the three examples that come with it. And then you have, of course, right speech, right action, right livelihood. So you have those three ways in the Eightfold Path, but you can see that each religion does put an accent on one of the ways.

Buddhism obviously tends to be right understanding. A lot of its practices are about understanding things. I mean, there is the heart development, but if you were to categorise Buddhism, you'd put it in the path of understanding, I think, first of all. Because that was the Buddha's own path. You don't hear of the Buddha practising *mettā* before his liberation. I'm sure he did, but I don't know anywhere in scriptures where that's pointed to. It was more the jhānic thing based on the breath and these mortification things, but you don't get... Yet in his writings, he obviously pushes *mettā*, he sees the importance of it. And there seems to be some hint somewhere – I'm working on it – where the Buddha says that *mettā* alone is a path of liberation. But I haven't got proper proof, scriptural proof of that yet.

The path of love, I think most of us would agree, Christianity is very much about love. It's a guru, it's a relationship with Jesus, Jesus Christ, and becoming like Jesus. So as you know, I've been doing this walk with St. Francis, Camino St. Francis. So he's a very great example of that. And the fact that he got the stigmata. Now, of course, in Christian terms, he was given that by Jesus, by Jesus or by God or whatever as

a little gift, even though it hurts and bleeds. But I think we would probably think of it more as such a deep identification that the body – such a deep identification through concentration exercise – that the actual manifestation of Christ's body begins to manifest in his own. So we know the power of mind. That would make more sense to me anyway. So definitely the path of love.

But it's also got the path of good works. And then if you were thinking about good works, in a sense you'd have to see it as Islam. Because Islam is very much on the will of God. The will of God, the will of action. Doing things. And of course it exemplified mainly in their jihād. The jihād – Muhammad said that the inner jihād was much more important than the outer one. But there's still the jihād. Force, will, and all that.

So all these three paths you find, I think, in religions, but you get an accent one way or the other. And probably, I mean, probably the most balanced in a way, or at least seemingly so – I'm not sure about the good works business – but Hinduism has many saints on both sides, the bhakti, the devotional, and the insight one. I can't remember some of the devotional ones. I can't remember. Ramakrishna. But the insight ones, like Ramana Maharshi, who's very modern, and also somebody I really like, Nisargadatta Maharaj, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. His book, I Am That, I think is quite remarkable.

So that's a run through of the types that I see anyway. You can comment on that over the weekend. But what we're interested in now, of course, is how the Buddha explains this whole business about belief and no dogmas. And the main one that I'm sure you've all heard of is the Kālāma Sutta. And we'll just read it through, mainly just to get the flavour of the discourse and the way that what comes across on the discourses. I mean, it's formalised because it has to be formalised for the oral tradition. But you do get a feel for the sorts of conversations that would have carried on, and the Socratic thing where you're asking the person a question and they have to give you an answer. That's very much all the way through the scriptures.

Although the Buddha gives talks, he's very much in conversation, starting off with some problem that's been brought in. And he always leans the conversation to a point, to really find out what the person's opinion is, where they are. And then he tends to show the error of that. And then when they see the error of it, they're open to his own understanding. And then he darts in with his own understanding, and lonely time, for the most part, they all... they all take him as their teacher. Not always. Some go away clicking their tongues.

So here's the Blessed One and he's arrived at Kesaputta amongst the people called the Kālāmas. Now the Kālāmas of Kesaputta heard: "It is said that the ascetic Gotama, the Sakyan son who went forth from the Sakyan family, has arrived in Kesaputta. Now a good report about the Master Gotama has been circulating. Now the Blessed One is an Arahant, perfectly enlightened, accomplished in true knowledge and conduct, fortunate, knower of the world, unsurpassed leader of persons to be tamed, and teacher of devas and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One." So that's what we chant every morning. That's

a basic formula.

"And having realised with his own direct knowledge this world, with its devas, Māra and Brahmā, this population with its ascetics and brahmins, with its devas and humans, he makes it known to others. He teaches a *dhamma* that is good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end. With the right meaning and expression he reveals a spiritual life that is perfectly complete and purified." So he's obviously got a very good reputation by the time he gets to the Kālāmas. That's quite a paeon, isn't it?

So then the Kālāmas approach him, you see, and they pay homage. It's interesting how various people paid homage depending on their relationship to the teacher. It seems though the highest homage was to walk around the seat three times. Others would just añjali, bring their hands together. And others would just call out their name and their clan and then take a seat. So there's all varied ways in which you would approach somebody.

Well, it says, "Some exchanged greetings with him, and after greetings and cordial talk, they sat down to one side. Some saluted him reverentially and sat down to one side. Some remained silent and sat down to one side." Then they said to him, "Venerable sir, some ascetics and brahmins who come to Kesaputta explain and elucidate their own doctrines, but disparage, debunk, revile, and vilify the doctrines of others. But then some other ascetics and brahmins come to Kesaputta and they too explain and elucidate their doctrines but disparage, debunk, revile and vilify the doctrines of others. For us, Venerable Sir, there is perplexity and doubt as to which of these good ascetics speaks the truth and which speaks false."

So now here's the famous passage, you see. "So it is fitting for you to be perplexed, O Kālāmas. It is fitting for you to be in doubt. Doubt has arisen in you about the perplexing matter," you see. So he agrees with them that they are in fact confused.

And then come, Kālāmas. So now this very famous statement: "Do not go by oral tradition, by lineage of teaching, by hearsay, by a collection of texts, by logic, by inferential reasoning, by reasoned cogitation, by the acceptance of a view after pondering it, by seeming competence of the speaker, or because you think 'the ascetic is our teacher.' But when you know for yourselves, these things are unwholesome, these things are blameable, these things are censured by the wise, these things, if undertaken and practised, lead to harm and suffering, then you should abandon them."

So these four categories really cover everything. We're talking about spiritual authority, scriptural authority – oral tradition, lineage of teaching, hearsay, collection of texts. That's where the fundamentalists place themselves, isn't it? They place themselves directly into their texts, what the text says.

And then you get the four rational grounds: logic, inferential reasoning, reasoned cogitation, and accepting of view after pondering it. So this is more the modern thing, isn't it? So you've got fundamentalists, you've got people who will only look at the texts, and that's it. And even though they

have a reason to it, they'll only accept what has been reasoned in the past. Fundamentalists are very much based in the past. Whereas the modernists – I mean, by that people brought up in the Enlightenment, the European Enlightenment – really relying also on their own rationality, on their own logic. Even that you can't depend upon. You can't depend upon your own logical thinking, because remember, all logical thinking has to be based on a premise. If the premise is wrong, that's the end of it.

So I mean, I think that's one of the doubts of present day people, that you can't believe anything because beliefs in the past have caused such a huge problem. For instance, once you believe you're in a racist understanding, then you end up with some form of Nazism. If you believe in the proletariat and all that sort of stuff you end up with a form of communism. But if the premise is wrong then the whole thing becomes quite nasty and evil. These days of course we're stuck with this capitalist consumerism, materialistic capitalism, which is a world religion, and that's it. And the basis – I mean most thinking people know that the basis is greed and all that – it shouldn't be there.

It's that understanding that you cannot trust your logical thing. You always have to go back to the premise to see whether what you're basing all this fantastic architecture of philosophy on. And if that's wrong, then the whole thing's a complete waste of time. Worse. It creates a lot of problems.

And then, of course, there are authoritative persons: impressive speakers and respected teachers. And that gives us our breakdown really. So that depends on your relationship to somebody. And there's a later one which I'll quote a bit later concerning how the Buddha says that people should actually find a critique about him. How do they know that he's fully liberated? Okay. So he doesn't even let himself off the hook.

So then, of course, the conversation. Now, once he's cleared the boards and said, "Look, don't believe anything," but then he puts to them really a manner of Socratic conversation where he asks a question and they answer him. So he's very basic, you see.

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

So there you've got your basic precepts, your basic conduct, things that you ought not to do. Sometimes we overstress that because the whole point of being clear as to what we don't do should make us clear as to what we should do.

So then, of course, he really wants to drive it home. He says, "What do you think, Kālāmas, are these things wholesome or unwholesome?" "Unwholesome, Venerable sir." "Blameable or blameless?" "Blameable, Venerable sir." "Censured or praised by the wise?" "Censured, Venerable sir." "Undertaken and practised, do they lead to harm and suffering or not? And how is it in this case?" "Undertaken and practised, these

things lead to harm and suffering, so it appears to us in this case." "It is for this reason, Kālāmas, that we said do not go by oral tradition." And then he repeats himself.

So again, he's, this business of accepting where a person is and then drawing them, as it were, towards the Dharma. So in fact, it's twice not to go. So he really drums it home, you see. Well, I mean, this is, remember, a formalised version.

And then, of course, he gives them the opposite. So "What do you think, Kālāmas? When non-greed, non-hatred, non-delusion arise in a person, is it for their welfare or harm?" See, by actually negating it, by saying non-greed, he opens up all the virtues to do with non-greed: generosity, kindness, etc., etc.

By saying non-hatred, by not specifying that, but saying where there's no hatred, there has to be the opposite. Because you don't live in a vacuum. And remember that these qualities, there's no middle ground. Sometimes people translate this as some sort of middle ground where you're greedy and then you're non-greedy, meaning there's nothing there. You're neither generous nor greedy. But all he's saying is there's a state in which there's no greed. And because you're always in relationship, you must manifest some relationship. And that relationship depends upon the condition, the situation, and so on.

So by saying that when I walk into the dining room and sit down to eat, there is non-greed, you're also saying that there's a right attitude to the food, which is to nourish the body, and so on. So it's not as though he's saying that there's a state of neutrality. Same with non-hatred. So we're always in some sort of position of love, some sort of connection. And non-delusion means that we understand. We're in a state of wisdom.

Now is that for his welfare or harm? For his welfare, Venerable Sir. Kalama is a person who is without greed, without hatred, without delusions. Here he translates it as without — you see, this makes it a bit more clear — not overpowered by greed, hatred, and delusion, his thoughts not controlled by them, will abstain from the destruction of life, from taking what is not given, from sexual misconduct, and from false speech. He will also prompt others to do likewise.

That's an interesting one, you know. Normally the precepts are a very personal thing, taking precepts and keeping precepts are things that I don't want to do. But remember that we are exemplars. Wherever we go, we exemplify what we actually believe in. Maybe not in a pure, beautiful way, but we're there. So if you say to somebody, well, I practice Buddhist meditation and I'm a follower of the Buddha and all that, and next morning they find you in the gutter completely stupefied, then it makes you wonder. They say, oh, that's the Buddha's teaching, isn't it?

So, undertaken and practised, will this lead to their welfare and happiness or not? Or how is it in this case? Well, undertaken and practised, these things lead to welfare and happiness, so it appears to us in this case. And then he repeats the things. And then he basically reinforces that by telling us how we should develop. So he's telling them how we should develop, how they should develop.

So he says, look, noble disciples, devoid of covetousness, devoid of ill will, unconfused, clearly comprehending, ever mindful — see, that happens occasionally, doesn't it? — dwells pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with loving kindness, likewise the second, the third, and the fourth. Thus above, below, and across, and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he dwells pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with loving kindness, vast, exalted, measureless, without hostility, and without ill will. And he dwells one quarter of the mind imbued with compassion and so on, with altruistic joy, with equanimity. He dwells pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with love, compassion, altruistic joy and equanimity, vast, exalted, measureless, without hostility and without ill will.

So here you notice he doesn't say, practice *vipassanā*. His advice to the Kalamas here is to practise *mettā*. The word *mettā*, although it has a specific meaning of love, we translate it as a non-attached or universal love. It's often used as a metaphor, as a figure of speech. It's normally used to refer to the four illimitables.

Now he says they see — now he connects it with the daily life, with the effect of that both short-term and long-term. When this noble disciple has thus made his mind free of enmity, free of ill will, uncorrupted and pure, he's won four assurances in this life. The first assurance he has won is this: if there is another world and if good and bad deeds bear fruit and yield results, it is possible that with the breakup of the body after death I shall arise in a good destination, in a heavenly world.

Okay, so it's *kamma*. *Kamma* in the sense of your comeuppance. So here what he's saying — I mean, this was one of his three knowledges at the point of his awakening, wasn't it — that he saw that the driving force behind all his rebirths was his ethical decisions, his ethical life, and that he saw beings moving from one realm to another driven by the same force: ethical decisions. And here he's making it clear to them that particularly — in other words, what had been a very personal law became universal through that understanding upon awakening. That's one of the things he understood: this connection between delusion, the ethical life or the non-ethical life, and how wisdom always draws you towards an ethical life and the other way around. The more ethically you live, the more wise you must become because the mind and heart are connected.

Now the second assurance he has won is this: if there is no other world and if good and bad deeds do not bear fruits and yield results, still, right here in this very life, I live happily, free of enmity and ill will. So he often points to the fact that living according to the Dhamma has immediate results. It is just to be seen immediately.

And the third one is this. The third assurance he has won is this: suppose evil befalls the evildoer. Then as I do not intend evil for anyone, how can suffering afflict me, one who does no evil deed? Now that's always a big problem because evil, horrible things do happen to good people. So I think you always have to read this from the point of view of *kamma*. And *kamma*, in terms of liberation from suffering, is always internal, and it's always to do with dependent origination.

Just because you're the most peaceful, loving, compassionate, charismatic, booming personality in the

world, doesn't mean that somebody's not going to hate you. And in fact, you create a lot of jealousy in somebody, and they'll shoot you. And if you look at examples, Martin Luther King, Gandhi, and all these people, going right back — you always find Socrates himself. So you always find that when the Buddha's talking about evil deeds or things happening to a person, you have to see it from the point of view of this inner *kamma*, the wheel of dependent origination. In other words, the atmosphere we live in.

Now, it doesn't mean to say that the world doesn't mirror back to us our problem. I mean, if I'm angry and I happen to meet somebody who's angry and bigger than me, I might end up in hospital. It's not so much that. It's just that when it comes to suffering, when it comes to liberation, it's always this internal thing. And I don't think we really grasp that until we realise that actually the world that we're living in is being completely manufactured within me. Although of course I'm getting information, photons and sounds coming in as air pressure and all that, what I actually make of it is totally dependent on my perceptual faculties. And then what I make of that and the internal atmosphere I create — my emotional life and my thoughts — is again entirely dependent on something in me.

And in meditation when we open up to ourselves a little bit we find that there's all this stuff, leftover stuff. Smelly stuff like a kitchen smells after lunch, leftovers of yesteryear and who knows, yesterlife. But it's that, it's understanding that that makes us understand this better. Because it's quite obvious that good people suffer from evil coming from outside them.

And then the fourth assurance he has won is this: suppose evil does not befall the evildoer, then right here I myself am purified both ways in this respect. In other words, just because the evildoer gets away with it, well that's their good luck.

And this of course does, shall we say, put a question mark on what I've just said, because here the Buddha seems to be suggesting that some of the evil, or put it this way, we can understand perhaps that some of the evil that does befall us is a reaction from somebody else towards us. But obviously you can't talk about, say an earthquake, if you get squashed by an earthquake — that's your personal *kamma*. What is your personal *kamma* is how you've experienced the process of being squashed.

When Kalamas, this noble disciple, has thus made his mind free of enmity, free of ill will, uncorrupted and pure, he's won these four assurances in this very life. So it is, blessed one, so it is, fortunate one, when this noble disciple has thus made his mind free of enmity, free of ill will, uncorrupted and pure, he has won these four assurances in this very life.

And then this, before I say that, when you read anything, but when you read the scriptures, you see this constant repetition of things. If you understand it to be a way in which we absorb stuff in a sort of like where stuff can be digested in the heart, you see — so remember that spiritual reading is different from reading for knowledge or reading for facts so that you can present a good argument. It's really about being affected by something deeply. So just as you might read a poem or listen to some music and it really draws something out of you — you really feel it, great joy or sadness or whatever — so it is with these little

phrases. So you can take some of these phrases, and if it strikes you, you just keep repeating it, repeating it, until you get that sense of digestion.

So even this whole idea of the tradition, do not go by oral tradition, lineage of teaching. And after you've understood it, just to keep repeating it. And it has an effect. It just has an effect by just keep repeating something in the heart towards yourself and you get this feeling of digestion like it's been — and then it becomes — you don't get anything more from it and when you go back to the text you might find it again has an inspirational effect on you and then finally it doesn't do anything at all because the effect has been is complete and there's no need to keep going over it.

I mean, on a slightly different note, one of the things that had an enormous effect on me when I look back at it was Beckett's play, Waiting for Godot. It really did something. And every time, for a while, every time I saw it, I would still get this feeling from it of this peculiar mixture of the complete senselessness of life and yet somehow the inherent humour of it. He has that quality about that particular play. But then, much later on, many years afterwards, I happened to see another production. I just saw it as a play. Beautifully acted and all that. But it had lost that zappiness. So whatever that play gave me at that spiritual level — spiritual meaning emotional, the whole thing — really had been absorbed. And I sometimes find that with poems, although some poems I read over and over again.

So, here's the Buddha telling us how to approach the Dhamma, basically. Don't do anything until you've proved it to be true for yourself. Then there's a whole section here, I won't go over it mostly, but I'll give you a hint of it, in which you have to investigate the teacher himself. So he's putting himself up for an investigation. And he addresses the monks, you see. A monk who is an inquirer, by the way, the word monk, remember, in all the scripture refers to all listeners. It would be better to translate it as listener. Anyway.

A monk who is an inquirer not knowing how to gauge another mind should make an investigation of the Tathagata in order to find out whether or not he's perfectly enlightened. So they should investigate me, that's what he's saying to them. And they of course say well, we're rooted in the blessed one, guided by the blessed one, we have the blessed one as our resort. So it'd be good if you could explain these things to us. And then he says, should investigate the Tathagata with respect to two kinds: states cognizable by the eye and through the ear. In other words, what you see of a person and, although he's actually talking about himself, this in a sense is what we do with anybody, isn't it? You first of all see what they're doing and you hear what they're saying. So it's cognizable by the eye. So he's asking people to watch him to see how he behaves and to listen to what he's saying.

And in this way, they have to ask, is there any defilement there? Any defilement that's cognizable. In other words, is he, the Buddha, doing something which is immoral, unethical? Or is there not? Is there no state? Or is it more subtle? Is it mixed? Like sometimes he's the Buddha and sometimes he's not. He's doing naughty things without telling us, you see.

And then he talks about are there found in the Buddha or not cleansed states through the eye or through the ear. And these cleansed states cognizable through the eye, those are beautiful states, beautiful states of mind. Then he wants to know has he attained this wholesome state over a long time or did he attain it recently? And when he comes to know the venerable one has attained this wholesome state over a long time, then he has a deeper faith in that person.

And then he asks, he investigates him further thus. Has this venerable one acquired renowned and attained fame so that the dangers connected with renown and fame are not found in him? That's a common error isn't it, that people who become famous take on that sort of conceit or arrogance that comes with it? I'm not that famous yet so. How does a person bear their reputation really? Is the one restrained without fear or restrained by fear? Does he avoid indulging in sensual pleasures because he is without lust through the destruction of lust, or is he just doing it out of fear? So you've got to watch that as well. Is he putting it on, in other words?

And then he says whether the venerable one dwells in the *saṅgha* or alone while some that are well behaved and some are ill behaved and some there teach and some there teach a group while some here are seen concerned with material things and some are unsullied by material things still the venerable one does not despise anyone because of that. So in other words, although he's living with people with different virtues, he's impartial. He doesn't side with one or the other. That sort of impartiality.

And so, I am restrained without fear, not restrained by fear. And I avoid indulging in sensual pleasures because I am without lust through the destruction of lust. So these are signs of the Tathagata.

And then it's basically repeated because then he simply reinforces those positions that we talked about. And so, a disciple should approach the teacher who speaks in order to hear the Dhamma. And the teacher teaches him the Dhamma with its successively higher levels, with its successively more sublime levels, with its dark and bright counterparts. And as the teacher teaches the Dhamma to a monk in this way, through direct knowledge of a certain teaching, here in that Dhamma.

And when he comes to the conclusion about the teachings. He places confidence in the teacher thus. The blessed one is perfectly enlightened. The Dhamma is well proclaimed by the blessed one. And the *saṅgha* is practising in a good way. And then he repeats that in a slightly different way. As the blessed one taught the Dhamma to me in this way. Through direct knowledge of a certain teachings. Here in the Dhamma. I came to a conclusion about the teachings, I placed confidence in the teacher. And the Blessed One was perfectly enlightened.

So then finally, just to sum up the actual situation. And of course it is always, the proof is always in one's personal experience. When anyone's faith has been planted, rooted and established in the Tathagata, through these reasons, terms and phrases, his faith is said to be supported by reasons, rooted in vision, firm.

It is invincible by an ascetic or brahmin or deva or Mara or Brahma or by anyone in the world. That is how, monks, there is an investigation of the Tathagata in accordance with the *dhamma*, and that is how the Tathagata is well investigated in accordance with the *dhamma*.

So what he's saying here is that once we have that confidence in the teacher and we follow the teachings, then the description here is of one who has attained first path and fruit, is a noble person.

He's very much in line with our modern way of approaching things, not having blind faith and really questioning things, and always coming back to our own personal experiences. But even there there's danger, just because we've had an experience. It is of value to have it commented upon by somebody who you feel has the authority to do so. I don't mean in authority, I mean somebody who's an authority.

Very good. I can only hope that these scriptural readings and my commentary, shall we call it, have been of some use, may you by your practice and personal experience finally arrive at the gates of *Nibbāna* sooner rather than later.

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