

How to Test the Buddha

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 14:07

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

If you remember, we read the Kalama discourse, where the Buddha is basically saying that you have to question everything that's been taught to you, and it has to be true for yourself. You have to put it into practice and make sure it's true for yourself. Then, of course, he takes the opportunity of telling them what the Dhamma is. But this here, this particular section is the Buddha actually telling people how to investigate whether the teacher is fully liberated or not. He was talking about himself.

Thus have I heard: on one occasion the Blessed One was living at Savatthi in Jeta's Grove, Anathapindika's Park. And there he addressed the group of monks. Remember in the scriptures "monks" refers to the listeners, so it could have been quite a large congregation really. "Venerable Sir," they replied, and the Blessed One said this: "A monk"—occasionally I'll translate that as a person—"a person who is an inquirer, not knowing how to gauge another's mind, should make an investigation of the Tathagata in order to find out whether or not he is perfectly enlightened."

So he's already saying that to these people who are his followers: How do you know I'm the Tathagata? How do you know I'm fully liberated? And they reply: "Our teachings are rooted in the Blessed One, guided by the Blessed One, have the Blessed One as their resort. It would be good if the Blessed One would explain the meaning of these words. Having heard it from him, we shall remember it." "Then listen and attend closely to what I shall say." "Yes, Venerable Sir."

"A person who is an inquirer, not knowing how to gauge another's mind"—in other words, not being able to see a person as they are—"should investigate the Tathagata"—remember that's what he referred to himself as; he translates rather sillily as "thus gone," just "the transcendent" I think, because he always talks about the other shore, so "the transcendent one" I think is the best translation I've come across—"should investigate the Tathagata with respect to two kinds of states: states cognisable through the eye and through the ear. Thus: Are there found in the Tathagata or not any defiled states cognisable through the eye or through the ear?"—in other words, how he behaves and what he says—"And when he investigates him, he comes to know: no defiled states cognisable through the eye or through the ear are found in the Tathagata."

That's the first thing, right? So, in other words, observe a person's behaviour and listen to what they say.

"When he comes to know this, he investigates further thus: Are there found in the Tathagata or not any mixed states cognisable through the eye or through the ear? When he investigates him thus, he knows: no mixed states cognisable through the eye or through the ear are found in the Tathagata." So mixed states refers to the fact that sometimes we behave well and sometimes we behave awfully. Sometimes we say things are good and sometimes not. So these are mixed states. But these are not found in the Tathagata. That's the important point.

"When he comes to know this, he investigates further: Are there found in the Tathagata or not cleansed states cognisable through the eye or through the ear? When he investigates this: cleansed states cognisable through the eye or through the ear are found in the Tathagata." And of course those are your beautiful states.

There's a little story that I remember hearing about Ajahn Chah, which if I remember rightly goes something like this. He'd heard that there was somebody who was fully liberated. And so he thought, well, I'll go and live with the person. And for a long time, I don't know how long, he was quite convinced that this person had in fact was fully liberated and he had that reputation. And one day he caught—what had happened was somebody had offered meat to the monks there, and a dog had got onto the meat, and he saw this, the Tathagata, this very liberated person, get very angry and give the dog one hell of a kick. And upon that, it seems, he left.

So he doesn't say—it's not actually in this particular discourse, or at least he's not quoted in this discourse—that you have to live a long time with somebody to know what they're like.

So that's the first thing, you see, to actually observe the person, the Tathagata, to see what they do and what they say.

Now the next thing is, he investigates further: "Has this venerable one attained the wholesome state over a long time, or did he attain it recently? When he investigates him, he comes to know: the venerable one has attained this wholesome state over a long time and has not attained it just recently." So that gives a certain depth to his practice, you see.

"Now when he comes to know this, he investigates still further: Has the Venerable One acquired renown and attained fame so that the dangers connected with renown and fame are found in him? For as long as a monk has not acquired renown and attained fame, the dangers connected with renown and fame are not found in him. But when he has acquired renown and attained fame, those dangers are found in him." So the dangers are, of course, conceit, arrogance, etc. "And when he investigates him, he knows thus: this venerable one has acquired renown and attained fame, but the dangers associated with renown fame are not found in him." That's another way you can tell whether somebody is fully liberated.

"And when he comes to know this, he investigates him further: Is the Venerable One restrained without fear, not restrained by fear? And does he avoid indulging in sensual pleasures because he is without lust

through the destruction of lust? And when he investigates him, he comes to know: yes, the Venerable One is restrained without fear, not restrained by fear, and he avoids indulging in sensual pleasure because he is without lust through the destruction of lust." Lust here refers to any sensual pleasure.

"Now if others should ask that monk thus: What are the Venerable One's reasons and what is his evidence whereby he says that Venerable One is restrained without fear, not restrained by fear, and he avoids indulging in sensual pleasures because he is without lust through the destruction of lust? Answering rightly, that monk would answer thus: Whether that Venerable One dwells in the Sangha, or alone, while some there 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 sullied, are unsullied by material things, still the Venerable One does not despise anyone because of that. And I have heard and learned this from the Blessed One's lips: that I am restrained without fear, not constrained by fear. And I avoid indulging in sensual pleasure because I am without lust through the destruction of lust."

In other words, even though he himself is fully liberated, he does not despise people who aren't because of their behaviour. He remains impartial, faithfully enough.

"So the Tathagata monk should be questioned further about this, about this: Are there found in the Tathagata or not any defiled states cognisable through the eye or through the ear? The Tathagata would answer: No defiled states cognisable through the eye or through the ear are found in the Tathagata. And if asked: Are there found in the Tathagata or not any mixed states cognisable through the eye or through the ear? The Tathagata would answer thus: No mixed states cognisable through the eye or through the ear are found in the Tathagata. And if asked: Are there found in the Tathagata or not cleansed states cognisable through eye or through the ear? The Tathagata would say: Cleansed states cognisable through the eye or through the ear are found in the Tathagata. They are my pathway, my domain, yet I do not identify with them."

So now he's answered these questions, you see, but he makes the clear statement that this is the way he lives, but he does not identify with them. So again it's a statement of the Tathagata being the transcendent one. Transcendent but also immanent in the world.

"A disciple should approach the teacher who speaks thus in order to hear the Dhamma. 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, the monk comes to a conclusion about the teachings. He places confidence in the Buddha thus: the Blessed One is perfectly enlightened, the Dhamma is well proclaimed by the Blessed One, and the Sangha is practising in a good way."

So here we see the growth of faith, and the growth of faith drawing the monk, or the practitioner, into further practice. There's a note here which tries to clarify that. I may as well try and read it: "When the Dharma has been taught by the Master"—this is from one of the commentaries—"when the Dharma has

been taught by the Master, the monk, by directly knowing the Dharma, through penetration of the path, fruit and *Nibbāna*, comes to a conclusion regarding the preliminary teachings of the Dharma about the aids of enlightenment, which are the factors of enlightenment." In other words, it's a long-winded way of saying that as the person becomes, has his own experience of path and fruit, he understands the factors of enlightenment.

And then finally: "What are the Venerable One's reasons and what is his evidence whereby he says the Blessed One is perfectly enlightened, the Dharma is well proclaimed by the Blessed One, the Sangha is practising the good way? Answering rightly, that monk would answer thus: Here friends, I approach the Blessed One in order to hear the Dharma. The Blessed One taught me the Dharma with its successively high levels, with its successively more sublime levels, with its dark and bright counterpart. And as the Blessed One taught the Dhamma to me in this way, through direct knowledge of a certain teaching here in that Dhamma, I came to the conclusion about the teachings, and I placed confidence in the teacher thus." So in other words, at this point he's actually had the experience of path and fruit, and the confidence is a strong one in the Buddha. "The Blessed One is perfectly enlightened, the Dhamma is well proclaimed by the Blessed One, and the Sangha is practising well."

"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 the vision"—in other words his own experience—"firm. It is invincible by any 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 Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma. And that is how the Tathagata is well investigated in accordance with the Dhamma. That is what the Blessed One said, and the monks were satisfied"—the listeners were satisfied—"and delighted in the Buddha's words."

So, the Buddha here is telling us that we just need to keep that questioning going. We need not to take anything just because he's the Buddha. Everything that has been handed down to us has to be verified by our own personal experience. That's what it comes down to.

I can only hope this small exposition has been of some assistance and that you may be fully liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

Sādhu, sādhu.

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