

Kālāma Discourse (continued)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 21:33

Greetings. I trust you had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, though I hope it has been happy.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

Before I launch into the Kālāma discourse, just to remind you, tomorrow evening, if you want to join the Buddha Day celebrations, it's going to start at 9.45. I'll be sending out a news bite with the details again. And you're going to have to download the Zoom app because they haven't sent me a link which would get you on to Zoom through Google or another way. That's at 19.40. That's quarter to eight tomorrow. And it's about an hour and a half long. I'll repeat it again, of course, this evening, just in case you missed it.

So we were taught, we read yesterday Professor... I can't remember her name now. Anyway, we read it. And it's not as though we don't know that, because we know we're always going through secondhand knowledge, secondhand opinion, views and opinion. It's just that it really made me realize that that's what I'm doing and that I really ought to check out when I read something: who's actually funded it? Where's it coming from? What's the organization? It just made it very much more real to me.

So here we have the Kālāmas, Kesaputta, in the city of Kesaputta. And remember what they said: they've got all these people coming, all these teachers, they're all confused. One says, "This is right, nobody else is wrong." Disparage, denigrate, deride and denounce the doctrines of the others.

So then he goes through all these various ways in which they mustn't believe just because. So there's one which is an appeal to traditions. That's the first one. The first one is not to go by tradition, not just by reports or by because something's been said over and over. Jumping on the bandwagon.

For instance, this habit that some people have — it used to be worse — where they got to be sipping water all the time. It seems that there were two reasons, two origins of this. One was concentration camps where people would approach a doctor in the concentration camp and tell them about their illness, and of course all he could say was drink water. In drinking water, they tended at least to ameliorate the disease they had. But the other one was in 1945, the Food and Nutrition Board of the USA advised people to drink 2.5 litres a day, but seemingly without any research at all. It was just pulled out of the air. So it's just what you hear when you say it's this whole business of what everybody else is doing must be right.

Same with tradition. It's the tradition, "this is the way we've always done it," so this is the way it's going to be. It tends to be very conservative — that's small "c" — just keeping the way things are. And of course, it prevents creativity.

Then you get rumours, mainly anecdotal evidence, just personal evidence. Somebody said this and therefore it must be true. When I ran my first course up in Yorkshire, near Thirsk, it was a beautiful big house. And there was a man who was looking after it, Johnny, a real Yorkshire man. And one day we're in conversation and he was telling me that he'd smoked all his life and it had not done him any harm. And I'd been watching him smoke and it must've just caught me the way he was doing it or something. So I said to him, "Well, do you inhale the smoke, Johnny?" And he said, "No." I said, "Well, you're obviously not going to get lung cancer." But of course, he would have gone around telling everybody that he smoked for 30, 40 a day and nothing's ever happened.

There was also another story, this is way back a few years now, when there was all this stuff about paedophilia, people were afraid. And it seems as though somebody turned up at a house, a gang of people turned up at a house to approach this man. And when he came out and they accused him of paedophilia, he pointed out that he wasn't. He was a paediatrician. So anyway, that's these little stories I've come across.

Of course, religious texts — these, of course, can be quite wicked. We know what fundamentalists do with texts. But just because it's in the scriptures, it doesn't mean it's right. Now, that's really quite radical. So he's basically saying that about his own teaching.

Also, not by inference or by logical conjecture or by inference. It's very interesting that the Buddha doesn't really go beyond what you can personally experience. He says that there's something in us which is not of this order. It's beyond or above or transcendent of the psychophysical organism. And this is the Nibbāna Dhātu as it's put in Theravāda, the element of *Nibbāna*. As Mahāyāna would say, it's our Buddha nature. It's this very *satipañña*, this intuitive awareness.

But he never talks about what the relationship of that is to somebody else's *satipañña* and what happens after death. Of course, there is a tradition that Buddhas are reborn in other realms. But the other one is that that's it, and something happens to that Buddha nature or that *satipañña*. And he doesn't talk about that at all. In other words, there's no ultimate God, there's no Brahman, this impersonal God whom you absorb into, come out of, as it would be in Hinduism. So there's nothing — it doesn't go beyond what can be personally experienced.

The phrase that captures this is "the map is not the territory." It's getting confused with ideas and logical ideas and all that with actually what's real. So the Buddha doesn't go into metaphysical propositions so much.

The other one is upon axiom because it contradicts established norms or beliefs and whatnot. And I found that there's a special title for this. It's called the Semmelweis Reflex. And this is the story. It derives from the name of a Hungarian physician, Ignaz Semmelweis, who discovered in 1847 that childbed fever mortality rates fell tenfold when doctors disinfected their hands with chlorine solution before moving from one patient to another, and most particularly after an autopsy.

At one of the two maternity wards at the University Hospital where Semmelweis worked, physicians performed autopsy on every deceased patient. Semmelweis's procedure saved many lives by stopping the ongoing contamination of patients, mostly pregnant women, with what he termed "cadaverous particles." This is 20 years before germ theory was discovered. Despite overwhelming empirical evidence, his fellow doctors rejected — I think maybe not all, but many of his fellow doctors rejected his hand washing suggestions, often for non-medical reasons. For instance, some doctors refused to believe that a gentleman's hand could transmit disease. So this is the fact and this is the way it is, and that's impossible.

There's also specious silly reasoning, illogical reasoning. This is again a formal thing — they call it divine fallacy. If you can't understand something, if like, for instance, if you're in a God believing community, if you can't understand something, then God knows, everything's put down to God.

I remember I was up in Kandy once, and I was up there visiting and I happened to share a bench with a Muslim and we got talking and I asked him about God. And I said to him, "What's the proof that God exists?" And he just pointed to nature and said, "All this — God made this." And that was it. That was it. There's no argument against that. By the way, this also includes conspiracy theories.

And the final one — yes, the final one. The final one is upon another's seeming ability or that this particular monk or this particular person is my teacher. So this is often a big mistake, isn't it? Where people devote themselves blindly to a teacher or to a particular tradition and they can't get out of it. An example of this is "How dare you criticise the prime minister? What do you know about running an entire country?" So we won't go into that one.

Now, usually when people mention this Kālāma discourse and they point out the free thinking that the Buddha is saying, that it's up to you. Let me just get the quote there. "But when, Kālāmas, you know for yourselves these things are unwholesome, these things are blameworthy, these things are censured by the wise, these things, if accepted and undertaken, lead to harm and suffering, then you should abandon them." And of course, he says the opposite for what's good.

So he's always really pushing people to investigate for themselves and to be sure for themselves by their own experience. So that's why it's called a charter of free thought, the Kālāma Discourse.

But he doesn't stop there. He does go into quite a discourse then about really the two things that he teaches throughout the scriptures: ethics and transcendence. This one is not so concerned with transcendence. It comes right at the end, as you'll see, but always about ethics.

So that's his first question here: "What do you think? When greed arises in a person, is that for his welfare or for his harm?" "It is for his harm, Bhante." "Kālāmas, is a greedy person overcome by greed, with mind obsessed by it, destroys life, takes what he's not given, transgresses with another's wife, speaks falsehood, and he encourages others to do likewise. Will that lead to his harm and suffering for a long time?" "Yes, Bhante."

And of course then he goes on to hatred and on to delusion. And then he says the opposite, of course. It's a question and answer thing. Remember these are remembered, so there has to be a certain repetition to make it easy to remember these discourses. "What do you think, Kālāmas? Are these things wholesome or unwholesome? Blameworthy or..." and then he goes on.

And then, of course, says the opposite. "When non-greed arises in a person, is it for his welfare or his harm?" Says "for his welfare." "Kālāmas, a person without greed, not overcome by greed, his mind not obsessed by it, does not destroy life, take what is not given, transgress with another's wife or speak falsehood. Nor does he encourage others to do likewise. Will that lead to his welfare and happiness for a long time?" "Yes, Bhante." And of course, the same with non-hatred and the same with non-delusion.

The Buddha does more often than not prefer the negative. So if there's not greed, then there must be all those qualities that are not greed. So instead of saying generosity and all that, trying to find words for all that, he just simply says where there's no greed, then there's not that possibility of making mistakes that greed would lead you to.

So then when he's cleared the path, when he said, "Look, it's up to you to decide what is to your welfare, to the welfare of others," then he goes: "Kālāmas, that noble disciple who is thus devoid of longing, devoid of ill will, unconfused, clearly comprehending, ever mindful, dwells pervading one quarter with his mind imbued with loving kindness, with a mind imbued with compassion, with a mind imbued with altruistic love, with a mind imbued with equanimity. And the second quarter, the third and the fourth quarter, thus above and below, across and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he dwells pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with equanimity, vast, exalted, measureless, without enmity, without ill will."

So that's a beautiful way of saying to people that once you stop all this negative stuff, the mind naturally moves towards these very beautiful mental states.

Now, and then he talks about the solaces or the assurances that come for somebody who behaves like that. "The noble disciple, Kālāmas, whose mind is in this way without enmity, without ill will, undefiled and pure, has won four assurances or solaces in this very life."

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

"The second assurance he has won is this: if there is no other world and there is no fruit and result of good and bad deeds, still right here in this very life I maintain myself in happiness without enmity and ill will, free of trouble." Right now — you've got to be careful here — doesn't mean to say that the person wouldn't have trouble, but in himself, in himself there remains this equanimity.

"The third assurance he has won is this: suppose evil comes to one who does evil. Then when I have no evil intentions towards anyone, how can suffering afflict me since I do no evil deed?"

"The fourth assurance he has won is this: supposing evil does not come to one who does evil" — right, evil does not come to one who does evil. So that's often a big question, isn't it? People get away with murder, as they say. "Suppose evil does not come to one who does evil, then right here I see myself purified in both respects."

"The noble disciple, Kālāmas, whose mind is in this way, without enmity, without ill will, undefiled and pure, has won these four assurances in this very life."

"So be it, O blessed one, so it is, fortunate one. This noble disciple whose mind is in this way, without enmity, without ill will, undefiled and pure, has won four assurances in this very life. Excellent, Bhante. We go to refuge to the Blessed One, to the Dharma and to the Sangha of Bhikkhus. Let the Blessed One consider us lay followers who from this day on has taken refuge for life."

That wasn't bad, was it? That was a very quick conversion there by the Buddha. They don't seem to have had time to take his words for real, to go away and actually see if what the Buddha was saying was actually true. So they've broken all the rules. Never mind.

So that's it, really. That's the Kālāma discourse. And as I say, normally only the first bit is discussed, how he talks about freedom of thought and that one has to have one's own personal experience as to what is beneficial or unbeneficial. But then he has no problem with getting people to understand the way that he himself saw was beneficial.

So I hope that's clarified the Kālāma Sutta a bit. If you hadn't come across it, it's a good one to remember. So I hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused depression, anxiety, confusion, and that it will encourage you to continue your investigations.

Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.

So we can do a bit of meditation.

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