

# The Instruction to the Kalamas

Mahavagga, Sutta No. 65

Anguttara Nikaya

- Translated from Pali by Soma Thera. Notes by Martin Evans.

At one time the Buddha entered the town of the Kalama people called Kesaputta. The Kalamas, knowing of the good reputation of the Buddha came to see him and asked him this question, "many monks and brahmins visit Kesaputta and they expound their own doctrines, the doctrines of others they despise, revile, and pull to pieces. There is doubt and uncertainty in our minds concerning which is true and which is false." {1} "It is right to doubt, to be uncertain, Kalamas. Doubt has arisen over what is doubtful. {2}

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## The criterion for rejection

Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumour; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, 'The monk is our teacher.' Kalamas, when you yourselves know: 'These things are bad; these things are blameable; these things are censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill,' abandon them.

"What do you think, Kalamas? **Does greed, does hate, does delusion, appear for one's benefit or harm?**" -- "For one's harm, venerable sir." -- "Kalamas, being given to greed, hate and delusion and being overwhelmed and vanquished mentally by greed, hate and delusion, one takes life, steals, commits adultery, tells lies; and prompts another to do likewise. Will that be long for one's harm and ill?" "Yes, venerable sir."

"Therefore, did I say, Kalamas, 'Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition .....when you yourselves know: "These things are bad; these things are blameable; these things are censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill," abandon them.' {3}

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## The criterion for acceptance

Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumour; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, 'The monk is our teacher.' Kalamas, when you yourselves know: 'These things are good; these things are not blameable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness,' cultivate and abide in them.

"What do you think, Kalamas? **Does absence of greed, absence of hate, absence of delusion, appear for one's benefit or harm?**" -- "For one's benefit, venerable sir." -- "Kalamas, being not given to greed, hate and delusion and being not overwhelmed and not vanquished mentally by greed, hate and delusion one does not take life, does not steal, does not commit adultery, and does not tell lies; nor prompt another to do likewise. Will that be long for his benefit and happiness?" -- "Yes, venerable sir."

"Therefore, did I say, Kalamas, 'Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition .....when you yourselves know: "These things are good; these things are not blameable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness," enter on and abide in them.' {4}

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## Cultivating loving kindness

"The disciple of the Noble Ones, Kalamas, who in this way is devoid of coveting, devoid of ill will, undeluded, clearly comprehending and mindful, {5} abides, pervading with the thought of loving kindness, the first quarter; likewise the second; likewise the third; likewise the fourth; so above, below, and all around; he abides, pervading the entire world, with extensive, expanded, boundless thoughts of loving kindness, free from hatred and ill will.

"He abides, pervading with the thought of compassion ..... empathy .....equanimity, the first quarter; likewise the second; likewise the third; likewise the fourth; so above, below, and all around; he abides, pervading the entire world, with extensive, expanded, boundless thoughts of compassion .....empathy .....equanimity, free from hatred and ill will

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### Living in the present - the here and now

"The disciple of the Noble Ones, Kalamas, who has such a hate-free mind, such a malice-free mind, such an undefiled mind, and such a purified mind, is one by whom four solaces are found **here and now**.

"Suppose there is rebirth and there is a fruit, result, of deeds done well or ill. Then it is possible that at the dissolution of the body after death, I shall be reborn in a heaven world, in a happy state.' This is the first solace found by him.

"Suppose there is no rebirth and there is no fruit, no result, of deeds done well or ill. Yet in this world, here and now, free from hatred, free from malice, safe and sound, and happy, I keep myself.' This is the second solace found by him.

"Suppose bad results befall a wrong-doer. I, however, think of doing wrong to no one. Then, how can ill affect me who do no evil deed?' This is the third solace found by him.

"Suppose bad results do not befall a wrong-doer. Even then, I have purified my own mind This is the fourth solace found by him.

"The disciple of the Noble Ones, Kalamas, who has such a hate-free mind, such a malice-free mind, such an undefiled mind, and such a purified mind, is one by whom, here and now, these four solaces are found." {6}

"Marvellous, venerable sir! It is as if a person were to turn face upwards what is upside down, or to uncover the concealed, or to point the way to one who is lost or to carry a lamp in the darkness, thinking, 'Those who have eyes will see,' so has the Dhamma been set forth in many ways by the Blessed One. We go to the Buddha for refuge, to the Dhamma for refuge, and to the Sangha for refuge. May the Blessed One regard us as lay followers who have gone for refuge for life, from today." {7}

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### Notes

{1} The Buddha wasn't interested in disputing doctrines and avoided debate on views about things which cannot be known by personal experience. He considered them 'unprofitable questions'.

{2} "It is right to doubt what is doubtful."

The Buddha accepted that there are things which cannot be known and should be set aside. Blind faith is simply attachment to beliefs and has no place in Buddhism.. Even the attachment to a belief in enlightenment has to be abandoned before we can experience it.

{3} How do we determine what is harmful or beneficial?

"Does greed, hate, and delusion, arise for ones benefit or harm?" This is where we should look, and when we see greed, hate and delusion we should abandon them.

{4} The Buddha lists the first 4 (of the 5) precepts. By cultivating non-greed, non-hate and non-delusion we support our observance of the precepts - and prompt others to do likewise.

{5} "Devoid of coveting, devoid of ill will, undeluded, clearly comprehending and mindful". Without mindfulness we cannot notice when greed, hate and delusion have arisen, so how could we abandon it?

{6} “If there is life after death, rebirth, results of deeds done well or ill .... “ The Buddha invites us to doubt (or set aside) doctrines we do not know by experience. We should rather live in the here and now and do good, avoid evil and purify the mind’. But this depends on having confidence that this teaching is for our benefit. If we lack this confidence, this sceptical doubt drains our resolve and obstructs our progress.

{7} This is how you become a Buddhist, by taking refuge in the Buddha (his enlightenment), the Dhamma (the teaching) and the Sangha (those who have followed and are following the path).