

Buddhism as Non-Dogmatic ¹

From *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, 3.65 ²

The Kālāma Sutta

...The Kālāmas, who were inhabitants of Kesaputta sitting on one side, said to the Blessed One [the Buddha]: “There are some monks and brahmins, venerable sir, who...expound and explain only their own doctrines; the doctrines of others they despise, revile, and pull to pieces. Some other monks and *brahmins* [do the same]. Venerable sir, there is doubt, there is uncertainty in us concerning them. Which of these reverend monks and brahmins spoke the truth and which falsehood?”

It is proper for you, Kālāmas, to doubt, to be uncertain; uncertainty has arisen in you about what is doubtful. Come, Kālāmas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias toward a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another’s seeming ability; nor upon the consideration “The monk is our teacher.”

Kālāmas, when you yourselves know: “These things are bad; these things are blamable; these things are censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill,” abandon them.

What do you think, Kālāmas? Does greed occur for benefit or harm?

–For harm, venerable sir.

Kālāmas, being given to greed, and being overwhelmed and vanquished mentally by greed, a person takes life, steals, commits adultery, and tells lies; this prompts others too, to do likewise. Will that be for harm and ill?

–Yes, venerable sir.

What do you think, Kālāmas? Does hate occur for benefit or harm?...Does delusion occur for benefit or harm?...

What do you think, Kālāmas? Are these things good or bad?

–Bad, venerable sir...

Undertaken and observed, do these things lead to harm and ill, or not? Or how does it strike you?

–Undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill. Thus it strikes us here...

Therefore, did we say, Kālāmas, what was said thus, ‘Come Kālāmas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias

¹ The source-numbers below are the volume/page numbers from the Pāli Text Society’s standard edition. Small changes were made to the translations to improve style, to be gender-inclusive, etc.

² Translated by Soma Thera at <https://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/soma/wheel008.html>

toward a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, "The monk is our teacher."

Kālāmas, when you yourselves know: "These things are bad; these things are blamable; these things are censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill," abandon them...

What do you think, Kālāmas? Does absence of greed occur for benefit or harm?

–For benefit, venerable sir.

Kālāmas, being not given to greed, and being not overwhelmed and not vanquished mentally by greed, a person does not take life, does not steal, does not commit adultery, and does not tell lies; this prompts others too, to do likewise. Will that be long for his benefit and happiness?

–Yes, venerable sir.

What do you think, Kālāmas? Does absence of hate occur for benefit or harm?...Does absence of delusion occur for benefit or harm?...

What do you think, Kālāmas? Are these things good or bad?

–Good, venerable sir...

Undertaken and observed, do these things lead to benefit and happiness, or not? Or how does it strike you?

–Undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness. Thus it strikes us here...

Therefore, did we say, Kālāmas, what was said thus, 'Come Kālāmas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias toward a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, "The monk is our teacher."

Kālāmas, when you yourselves know: "These things are good; these things are not blamable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness," enter and abide them...