

Buddhist analysis of revelation, reason and experience P3

Kalama Sutta AN 3.65

* It reveals how one should exercise one's ability to critically investigate on practical grounds and to discover what is true and wholesome among the divergent religious and philosophical views.

* The Kalama Sutta also distinguishes Buddhism from contemporary Indian religious thought based on the following doctrinal issues:

- A) The Assurance of Free Inquiry
- B) Salvation without a Saviour
- C) The Freedom of Expression
- D) The Autonomy of Moral Judgement
- E) The Right to Dissent
- F) Free Will and Responsibility
- G) Personal Verification

A) The Assurance of Free Inquiry

* **Upali Sutta, MN 56:** When Upali, the Jain householder expressed his wish to take the Buddha as his refuge and become a follower, the Buddha told him not to be emotional and sentimental: "Analytical reasoning is better for persons of your status. You are a person of good fame."

* **Vimamsaka Sutta, MN 47:** The Buddha asked his disciples to examine whether the professed Enlightenment of the Buddha was factual and real.

* **Nanasarasamuccaya** (Buddhist Sanskrit text): "Just as the quality of gold is determined by heating, cutting and rubbing on a whetstone by a wise one, even so, O monk; my word has to be accepted after examination and not out of honour to me."

B) Salvation without a Saviour

* **Dhp 276:** "Things have to be performed by yourselves; the Tathagatas are only showing the way (to emancipation)."

* **Dhp 160:** "Oneself, indeed is one's saviour, for what other saviour would there be? With oneself well-controlled, one obtains a saviour difficult to find."

* **Dhp 165:** "By oneself indeed is evil done, by oneself is one defiled. By oneself is evil left undone, by oneself indeed is one purified. Purity and impurity depend upon oneself. No one purifies another."

* **Mahaparinibbana, DN 16:** "Be an island unto yourselves! Be a refuge unto yourselves! Do not depend upon others (for your emancipation)!"

* The Buddha discouraged his followers from creating a personality cult around him. When a monk Vakkali who was in the habit of looking at the face of the Buddha in admiration, the Buddha persuaded him to look for the doctrine instead.

➔ **Vakkali Sutta, SN 22.87:** "What good does it bring to you, Vakkali; by looking at this physical body of filth? He who sees the doctrine sees me. He who sees me, sees the doctrine."

* The Buddha instructed the disciples to go by the dhamma and vinaya as teacher after his demise. However, the doctrine is not to be dogmatised and worshipped.

C) The Freedom of Expression

* The address to the Kalamas clearly shows that the Buddha had accepted the right of others to express their views. But having been listened to, they are to be scrutinised and digested.

D) The Autonomy of Moral Judgement

* Herein the criterion is formulated on the premise of moral value. Any theory that leads to lobha, dosa and moha would not be conducive to one's happiness and thus must be discarded altogether.

* As discussed in another context in the canon, the autonomy of moral judgement could be based on three alternative standpoints:

- a) on one's conscience (attadhipateyya)
- b) on the world opinion (lokadhipateyya)
- c) on the doctrinal point of view (dhammadhipateyya)

E) The Right to Dissent

* This is also a significant event in the history of Buddhist thought. Those who preached different teachings were not obstructed from coming to Kesaputta for their missionary activities.

* Religious tolerance is not alien to ancient India. King Asoka following the spirit of the Buddha's attitude to other religions inscribed on the rock

Edict in Girnar, “He who disparages another’s religion, virtually disparages his own religion.”

* The free exchange of conflicting ideas clears the path to reality by broadening the horizon of vision.

F) Free will and Responsibility

* Buddhism does not resort to determinism, either theistic or kammic, to resolve problems. It advocates neither indeterminism (adhiccasamuppannavada) nor strict causal determinism (pubbekatahetuvada).

* The freedom to will and the responsibility for subsequent actions rest upon the individual himself, he is, therefore, moulder of his own fate. The concepts of free will and responsibility are so central to Buddhist philosophy, without which emancipation expounded in Buddhism would be meaningless.

* In Buddhism, these concepts become meaningful in the context of self-perfection and self-realisation. Hence, freedom is to be understood as the freedom to choose any moral or immoral action whether good or evil, free will as purposive willing, and responsibility as one’s responsibility for the retributive effect of that action. As Buddhism does not propose any strict causal determinism, it stresses the fact of restraining the mind with the aid of the mind and not to be under the sway of the mind but to put the mind under one’s sway. “Mind is the forerunner of all evils.”

* According to some psychologists, parental training, advertising, mass media and environment play prominent roles in determining the actions of an individual. In other words, he is not personally responsible for his actions. He has been conditioned to act in that particular way.

* Certainly, in Buddhism, 5 laws that influence the world and individual have been discussed: physical, biological, psychological, natural and kammic. But it does not mean that there is no free will.

* Theologians like St. Augustine argued that as God himself is the sole causal agent, therefore, an individual’s actions are predetermined by God’s prior decision and acknowledgement.

* The contradictory nature of these theistic and deterministic arguments has been shown by Gunapala Dharmasiri in “A Buddhist Critique of the Christian Concept of God”. It stated that “Doctrines of free will, positive appeals and moral exhortations to man prove absurdly futile in the face of any kind of determinism.”

* William James (1842-1910), the American psychologist and philosopher, brought forward 2 arguments to refute determinism.

i) the feeling of remorse after performing an action and the expression of regret for not doing it otherwise have no meaning had they not the possibility of choosing an alternative action.

ii) attribution of responsibility and meting out punishment to an offender is meaningless if things are predetermined.

G) Personal Verification

* Blind faith is discouraged. Instead, questioning and investigating is encouraged, so that we can make our own informed decisions about the path we want to take for ourselves.

* Doubt (vicikiccha) is one of the nivarana to the clear understanding of Truth and to spiritual process.

* There is no point in saying that one should not doubt or one should believe. Just to say ‘I believe’ does not mean that you understand and see → verification.

* **Kitagiri Sutta MN 70**: 12 successive stages in the process of evaluation leading to realisation of truth.

* It is because of the place ascribed to personal verification that one is asked to repose confidence even in the Buddha only after thoughtfully reflecting on what he preaches.