

The Kalama Sutta

What is the one thing that sets Buddhism apart from all other religions?

The freedom of enquiry

Blind faith is not only not required, it 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.

Background to the Kalama Sutta

The Buddha visited the village of Kesaputta and was greeted by the people who lived there : the Kalamas. They told Him that many holy men and ascetics pass through their village, expounding their own teachings and disparaging the teachings of others.

The Kalamas asked the Buddha whose teachings they should follow. The Buddha told them that it is right to doubt and to ask questions. He did not say “do not believe the others, believe me”. Instead, the Buddha taught them the proper way to discover the truth.

Thus, the Kalama Sutta is also known as the Buddhist “Charter of Free Enquiry”.

- 1. The Ten Grounds for Belief which may require further verification**
- 2. The Three Unwholesome Roots**
- 3. The Criteria for Acceptance or Rejection**
- 4. The Four Divine Abidings**
- 5. The Four Assurances**

1. The Ten Grounds for Belief which may require further verification **Do not rely on the following without further verification :**

1. Divine revelations
2. Tradition
3. Reports or rumours
4. Scriptures or holy books
5. Logical reasoning
6. Philosophical reasoning
7. Outward appearances
8. One's own opinions
9. Authorities or experts
10. One's own teacher

Based on Faith

Divine revelations
Tradition
Reports or rumours
Sacred texts
Authorities or experts
One's own teacher

Based on Conjecture

Logical reasoning
Philosophical reasoning
Outward appearances
One's own opinion

Faith and conjecture

Blind faith and conjecture

- Dogmatic, unquestioning

Wisdom faith and conjecture

- Receptive, enquiring

2. The Three Unwholesome Roots

Greed - Hatred - Delusion

These will cause a person to :

- Harm or kill
- Take what is not given
- Commit sexual misconduct
- Speak what is not true

These actions lead to the harm and ill for oneself and others too, and should thus be avoided.

3. The Criteria for Acceptance or Rejection

- Are they blamable or not blamable
- Will they lead to harm or good for oneself and others?
- Will a wise person praise or disapprove of them?

Observe, analyze and test them out for ourselves.

If yes, then accept it and live up to it.

4. The Four Divine Abidings (or the Four Brahma Viharas)

Loving-Kindness / Metta

The desire for all sentient beings, unconditionally and without exception, to be well and happy.

Compassion / Karuna

The desire for all sentient beings, unconditionally and without exception, to be free from suffering.

Sympathetic joy / Mudita

To be happy and rejoice at the virtue, happiness and success of others.

Equanimity / Upekkha

To accept and be unaffected (or less affected) by the 8 Worldly Conditions :

Gain and loss

Honour and disgrace

Praise and blame

Pleasure and pain

5. The Four Assurances

1. If there is an after-life, there will be a good rebirth.
2. If there is no after-life, the present life will be happy and free from troubles.
3. If harm befalls an evil-doer (kamma), one will be safe from harm.
4. If no harm befalls an evil-doer (no kamma), one is still pure and happy.

In summary :

- It is right to doubt and question. Avoid blind faith and conjecture.
- Be aware of greed, hatred and delusion.
- Observe, analyze and test for ourself.
- The Four Divine Abidings are to be both contemplated and acted on.
- Our practice is its own reward.

Several Further Points

- Gave the appropriate teaching.
- No criticism of other teachings.
- Gave the tools to reach a decision.
- Confidence in His own Teachings.
- Emphasized self reliance.
- Can be practiced without religion.

Religion

Definition of the word 'Religion' :

The Concise Oxford Dictionary :

"Human recognition of superhuman controlling power and especially of a personal God entitled to obedience"

Webster's New World Dictionary :

"Any specific system of belief and worship, often involving a code of ethics and a philosophy."

Wikipedia :

Religious belief usually relates to the existence, nature and worship of a deity or deities and divine involvement in the universe and human life. Alternately, it may also relate to values and practices transmitted by a spiritual leader. In some religions, like the Abrahamic religions, it is held that most of the core beliefs have been divinely revealed.

Buddhism therefore does not fall under the standard definitions of 'religion'. It does not recognize a "personal god entitled to obedience". It also is not "a specific system of belief and worship". Buddhism transcends 'religion' as it is a self-reliant way of life and practice leading to happiness in this life and beyond.