

Section 8: Praise and Criticism – The Buddha’s Unshaken Wisdom

Throughout his lifetime, the Buddha was revered by both humans and devas for his boundless wisdom and immeasurable compassion. Many recognized him as a Supreme Teacher, a beacon of truth who illuminated the path to liberation. His words inspired countless beings, and those who truly saw his greatness joyfully took refuge in his teachings.

Even among followers of other traditions, there were those who acknowledged his extraordinary leadership and noble qualities. Though they admired him as a great spiritual leader, they hesitated to embrace his path.

Yet, as with all awakened beings, the Buddha also encountered those who opposed him—individuals who neither understood nor appreciated his teachings. Some were displeased by his message, clinging instead to their own views and attachments.

To illustrate this reality—the dual nature of praise and blame—we have selected insightful passages from the scriptures that reveal how the Blessed One, ever serene and unwavering, remained beyond both admiration and criticism, resting in perfect equanimity.

This is what the Buddha taught about Praise and Blame:

“Bhikkhus, if others speak ill of me or disparage me, do not let resentment, anger, or animosity arise in your hearts. For if you allow yourselves to be disturbed, you are only creating an obstacle for your own peace. When faced with criticism, how can you discern whether their words are true or false if you are consumed by anger? Instead, unravel what is false and clearly point it out as untrue, saying: ‘This is not the case, this is not found in us, this is false.’

And if others speak in praise of me or speak highly of you, do not let joy, excitement, or pride take hold of your heart. If you become caught up in exultation, you are once again creating an obstacle for your own spiritual progress. Instead, recognize the truth as truth, saying: ‘This is true, this is a fact, this quality is present in us.’

In both praise and blame, maintain your equanimity. Be steadfast in wisdom, unaffected by fleeting opinions, and focused on the path that leads to liberation. In this way, neither praise nor blame will disturb your mind or hinder your practice, but rather, you will move forward with clarity and peace.”ⁱ

Mind of a Noble One

Gain and loss, disrepute and fame,
blame and praise, pleasure and pain:
these conditions that people meet
are impermanent, transient, and subject to change.

A wise and mindful person knows them
and sees that they are subject to change.
Desirable conditions don’t excite his mind
nor is he repelled by undesirable conditions.

He has dispelled attraction and repulsion;
they are gone and no longer present.
Having known the dustless, sorrowless state,
he understands rightly and has transcended existence.
Quote from AN8:6 (World sutta).

The Disciples' Acclaim of the Buddha

The Blessed One's disciples—both the bhikkhu and bhikkhuni Sangha—accepted the Buddha as their supreme guide, recognizing him as the one who had shown them the path to liberation. Throughout the scriptures, we see how deeply they esteemed and revered him. Below are a few excerpts that reflect this profound respect.



The Buddha and his Bhikkhu and Bhikkhuni disciples ⁱⁱ

Venerable Sāriputta ⁱⁱⁱ

In the *Sampasādanīya Sutta* (DN:128), Venerable Sāriputta offers a profound praise of the Blessed One, saying:

“Whatever, Lord, is possible for a clansman endowed with confidence to achieve through effort, persistence, human exertion, and endurance, the Blessed One has accomplished. For the Blessed One does not indulge in the pleasures of the senses, which are base, vulgar, worldly, and unprofitable for the Noble, nor does he submit to self-torment, which is painful, ignoble, and unproductive. The Blessed One, here and now, is able to experience the supreme happiness of dwelling in the four jhānas.”

This passage reflects the deep admiration and recognition of the Buddha’s achievement of liberation and his profound mastery over the mind and body.



The Buddha in deep meditation-Six rays coming out from his body ^{iv}

Venerable Mahākaccāna ^v

The following extract illustrates how Venerable Mahākaccāna described the greatness of the Buddha to his companion in the spiritual life:

"...the Blessed One knows; seeing, he sees. He has become vision, he has become knowledge, he has become the Dhamma, he has become Brahmā (the Great). He is the expounder, the proclaimer, the elucidator of meaning, the giver of the deathless, the lord of the Dhamma, the Tathāgata..."

Venerable Ānanda ^{vi}

Venerable Ānanda, deeply devoted and respectful to the Blessed One, had the privilege of serving as his attendant for the last twenty-five years. His affection and reverence for the Buddha are reflected in his words on one occasion when the Bhikkhu Sangha was praising the Buddha's remarkable ability to recall past lives. With heartfelt admiration, Venerable Ānanda said:

"Friends, Tathāgatas are wonderful and possess qualities beyond compare. Tathāgatas are marvelous and embody marvels that surpass all understanding." ^{vii}

Through these words, Ānanda expressed not only his awe but also his deep respect for the extraordinary wisdom and transcendental qualities of the Buddha, whom he had faithfully served and cherished for so many years.

Venerable Udāyī ^{viii}

In this passage, Venerable Udāyī eloquently praises the Buddha for his noble qualities, expressing profound admiration for the Blessed One's wisdom and restraint:

"It is truly wonderful, Lord, it is marvellous how content the Blessed One is, how deeply satisfied and restrained he remains. Despite being endowed with such immense power and influence, he does not seek to display himself in any way! If the wanderers professing other doctrines could discern even a single such quality within themselves, they would raise a banner and proclaim it to the world! It is truly wondrous... that the Blessed Lord does not make a display of himself!" ix

Venerable Udāyī's words reflect the wonder and reverence he felt for the Buddha, who, despite his vast spiritual accomplishments, lived with humility and restraint. His praise reveals a deep appreciation for the Buddha's perfect embodiment of wisdom, which shines quietly and without the need for self-promotion, inspiring all who witness it.

Venerable Vaṅgīsa ^x

Venerable Vaṅgīsa, a poet and a deeply inspired disciple of the Buddha, composed many verses celebrating the noble qualities of the Blessed One. In one of his most heartfelt poems, he praises the Buddha's teachings with profound reverence:

*"The secure speech that the Buddha utters,
For the attainment of Nibbāna,
For the cessation of suffering,
Is truly the highest and most revered speech.
Having emerged from his serene abode,
With a heart eager to behold the Teacher,
Your disciple Vaṅgīsa, O great hero,
Bows down in worship at your sacred feet." xi*

In these verses, Venerable Vaṅgīsa beautifully expresses the awe and devotion he felt for the Buddha, recognizing his words as the supreme guidance for liberation. His poetry, filled with devotion, reflects a deep reverence for the Buddha's wisdom—an unwavering foundation of peace and the end of all suffering. Through his verses, Vaṅgīsa invites others to follow the path of the Buddha's teachings with the same humility and reverence.

Bhikkhuni Khemā ^{xii}

Venerable Khemā, once the queen of King Bimbisāra, became a great disciple of the Buddha. After receiving his profound teachings, she expressed her transformation with deep insight:

*"Worshiping the stars,
Serving the sacred flame in a grove,
Failing to understand the true nature of things,
Foolish me, I thought this was purity.
But now I worship the Awakened One,
Supreme among all men.
By following the teacher's guidance,
I am freed from all suffering." xiii*

These words reflect Venerable Khemā's awakening, as she transcended her former pride in her beauty and recognized the path to true liberation. Through the Buddha's teachings, she

realized the true nature of purity and achieved freedom from suffering, becoming an arahant in that very moment

Bhikkhunī Sīsupacālā ^{xiv}

On one occasion, Bhikkhunī Sīsupacālā had an encounter with Māra. When Māra asked her about her teacher, she replied with unwavering confidence:

"There is one born in the Sakyan clan, the Enlightened One, incomparable, the Conqueror of all, the subduer of Māra, who is undefeated everywhere, free and unattached. The One with Vision, who sees all. Having reached the end of all kamma, liberated through the extinction of acquisitions, that Blessed One is my teacher..."^{xv}

In these words, Bhikkhunī Sīsupacālā expressed her deep reverence for the Buddha, acknowledging him as the supreme teacher, whose wisdom and liberation are beyond compared. Her reply reflected both her profound faith and her realization of the Buddha's extraordinary qualities.

Venerable Sela

Venerable Sela, who was deeply moved and inspired upon first encountering the Buddha, went forth with his students and, within just seven days, attained arahantship. He praised the Blessed One with heartfelt reverence:

"Eight days have passed, All-Seeing One, since we sought refuge in you. In these seven nights, O Blessed One, we have been tamed by your teaching... You are the Buddha, the Teacher, the Sage, the conqueror of Māra. Having cut off all evil tendencies, you have crossed over and now guide humanity across. Here stand these three hundred bhikkhus, hands held out in adoration. O Hero, extend your feet, and let these great beings worship the Teacher." ^{xvi}

Venerable Sela's words reflect the profound transformation he and his fellow bhikkhus experienced in the Buddha's presence. Within such a short time, they were liberated through the Buddha's wisdom, and their devotion to him was boundless. His praise captures the awe and reverence felt by those who encounter the Buddha's incomparable teachings—guiding them swiftly toward liberation.

Group of Bhikkhu Sangha Praising the Buddha

In the following sutta, a group of bhikkhus gathered to discuss the great abilities of the Blessed One, and they expressed their awe:

"It is truly wonderful, friends, it is marvellous, how mighty and powerful the Tathāgata is! For he is able to know about the Buddhas of the past—those who attained final Nibbāna, who cut through the tangle of proliferation, broke the cycle, ended the round of samsara, and surmounted all suffering. He knows the details of their lives: how they were born, their names, their clans, their virtues, their state of samadhi, their wisdom, their progress in the attainments, and their deliverance." ^{xvii}

In their praise, the bhikkhus expressed deep admiration for the Buddha's extraordinary wisdom and insight into the lives of past Buddhas, recognizing his unparalleled knowledge of the path to ultimate liberation.

Brahmās, Devas, and Yakkhas Praising the Buddha

The Buddha's teachings were not only a beacon for humans but also for countless other beings—Brahmās, Devas, and Yakkhas—who, having heard his wisdom, approached him with reverence. Many of them attained noble status through the Buddha's guidance, recognizing him as their supreme teacher.^{xviii}

Brahmā Sanaṅkumāra Praises the Blessed One

On one occasion, while the Blessed One was residing at Rājagaha, by the bank of the river Sappinī, the night grew deep, and Brahmā Sanaṅkumāra, radiant with stunning beauty and illuminating the entire riverbank, approached the Blessed One. With deep reverence, he paid homage to the Buddha, stood to one side, and recited this inspiring verse in the presence of the Blessed One:

*"The khattiya is the best among people,
For those whose standard is the clan,
But one accomplished in knowledge and conduct
Is the best among devas and humans."*^{xix}

Brahmā Sanaṅkumāra's words beautifully express the Buddha's unparalleled excellence—not just among humans but among all beings. He affirms that the highest ideal is not lineage or birth, but the noble qualities of wisdom, conduct, and realization. Through his teachings, the Buddha illuminated the path to transcendence, inspiring not only humans but all beings in the cosmos.



Devas paying homage to the Blessed One ^{xx}

Sakka, King of the Devas, Praises the Buddha ^{xxi}

On one occasion, Sakka, the King of the Devas, addressed the assembly of devas and spoke of the Buddha's incomparable qualities, extolling him with great reverence. He declared:

1. "As regards the way in which the Lord has striven for the welfare of the many, for the happiness of the many, and out of compassion for the world—both devas and humans—there is no teacher endowed with such qualities, whether in the past or present, other than the Lord."
2. "Well-proclaimed, truly, is the Lord's Teaching—visible here and now, timeless, inviting inspection, leading onward, and to be realized by the wise, each one for himself. We find no proclaimer of such a teaching other than the Lord."
3. "The Lord has well explained what is right and what is wrong, what is blameworthy and blameless, what is to be followed and what is not, what is base and noble, what is foul, fair, and mixed in quality. We find no teacher who expounds such distinctions other than the Lord."
4. "The Lord has well explained the path leading to Nibbāna, and this path and Nibbāna coalesce, just as the waters of the Ganges and the Yamunā merge and flow together. We find no teacher who has explained the path to Nibbāna in this way other than the Lord."
5. "The Lord has gained companions, both learners (sekha) and those who have attained liberation by abolishing the corruptions (arahants), and he dwells with them, all rejoicing in the same goal. We find no teacher who has such companions other than the Lord."
6. "The gifts given to the Lord are well-bestowed, his fame is well-established. I believe the Khattiyas will remain devoted to him, yet the Lord accepts offerings without conceit. We find no teacher who does this other than the Lord."
7. "The Lord acts as he speaks, and speaks as he acts. We find no teacher who does the same in every detail of doctrine other than the Lord."
8. "The Lord has transcended doubt, passed beyond all 'how' and 'why,' and has accomplished his aim regarding his goal and the supreme holy life. We find no teacher who has done this, whether in the past or present, other than the Lord."

After proclaiming these eight truths in praise of the Blessed One, Sakka's words filled the Thirty-Three Gods with even greater joy, delight, and happiness. His praise of the Buddha not only expressed his reverence but also illuminated the depth of his realization as a stream-winner, inspiring all who heard him to reflect on the Buddha's incomparable qualities and the profound wisdom contained in his teachings.

A Deva praising the Buddha

In the following sutta a deva praised the Buddha thus:

*"From the city of Kapilavatthu- the World Leader has gone forth.
He is a scion of King Okkāka, a Sakyan, and a beacon.
For he, brahmin, is the Awakened One!"*

*He has gone beyond all things; - he has attained to all knowledge and power;
his eye sees clearly in all things, he has attained the end of all deeds;*

*he is freed with the ending of attachments.
That Buddha, the Blessed One in the world, - the Clear-eyed One, teaches Dhamma.
Go to him and ask—he will answer you.”* ^{xxii}

Yakkhas Praising the Buddha

On one occasion the Buddha was teaching Dhamma to the Sangha. Then the female Yakkha who was paying attention to the teaching praised the Buddha thus:

*“...I wish to listen to the Dhamma
Of the Teacher, the Supreme Buddha.
When the Blessed One speaks of Nibbāna,
Release from all the knots,
There has arisen within me
Deep affection for this Dhamma.*

*He is the maker of light
For bewildered devas and humans;
Enlightened, bearing his final body,
The One with Vision teaches the Dhamma.”* ^{xxiii}

On one-time Sātāgira and Hemavata Yakkhas honoured the Buddha thus:

*“Behold him of perfect name,
the one who sees the subtle meaning,
the giver of wisdom, unattached
to the lair of sensual pleasures,
all-knowing, very wise,
the great rishi treading the noble path.*

*Today indeed we have had a good sight,
a good morning, a good arising,
since we have seen the Enlightened One,
one without influxes who has crossed the flood.*

*These thousand yakkhas
possessing psychic potency and fame
all go to you for refuge:
you are our unsurpassed teacher.*

*We will wander from village to village,
from mountain to mountain,
paying homage to the Enlightened One
and to the excellence of the Dhamma”* ^{xxiv}

On one occasion Great King Vessavaṇa^{xxv} approached the Buddha paid homage and said:

*“ There are, reverend Sir, some ... yakkhas who are not pleased with the Gracious One, there are,
... some yakkhas who are pleased with the Gracious One. But, reverend Sir, almost all of the yakkhas
are not pleased with the Gracious One... What is the reason for that? Because, reverend Sir,*

the Gracious One preaches the Dhamma of refraining from killing living creatures... from taking what has not been Given...from sexual misconduct...from false speech...from liquor, wines, or intoxicants which cause heedlessness. But, reverend Sir, almost all of the yakkhas do not refrain from killing living creatures, do not refrain from taking what has not been given, do not refrain from sexual misconduct, do not refrain from false speech, do not refrain from liquors, wines, or intoxicants which cause heedlessness. To them that is neither dear nor appealing”^{xxvi}



King Pasenadi paying homage to the Buddha ^{xxvii}

King Pasenadi of Kosala ^{xxviii}

King Pasenadi of Kosala, a proud and powerful monarch, approached the Blessed One with profound humility. He prostrated himself before the Buddha, kissed his feet, and caressed them with his hands, offering the highest respect. The Buddha, seeing the king's deep reverence, inquired:

"...Great king, what reasons do you have for showing such supreme honor to this body and offering such an outpouring of loving-kindness?"

King Pasenadi, moved by gratitude and admiration, replied:

"Bhante, it is out of my profound gratitude and thankfulness that I show this supreme honor to the Blessed One and offer this act of loving-kindness."

The king went on to explain ten reasons why he held the Buddha in such high regard: ^{xxix}

1. "The Buddha has established countless beings in the noble method, guiding them along the path of the good Dhamma, the path of wholesomeness."
2. "The Buddha is virtuous, embodying mature and wholesome conduct in every aspect of his life."
3. "The Buddha lives as a forest-dweller, seeking seclusion in remote groves and jungle sanctuaries."
4. "The Buddha is content with whatever four requisites he receives, demonstrating profound simplicity and renunciation."
5. "The Buddha is worthy of gifts, hospitality, offerings, and reverential salutation—an unsurpassed field of merit for the world."

6. "The Buddha listens, without difficulty or obstruction, to teachings on the austere life that purifies the heart and opens the mind to liberation."
7. "The Buddha attains, at will, the four jhānas—the higher states of mind that are serene and delightful, providing joyful dwellings in this very life."
8. "The Buddha recollects his manifold past lives, spanning countless births, and sees them with clarity and insight."
9. "With the divine eye, purified and beyond ordinary human vision, the Buddha perceives beings passing away and being reborn—whether they are inferior or superior, beautiful or ugly, fortunate or unfortunate—and understands how they fare according to their karma."
10. "With the destruction of all taints, the Blessed One has realized, through direct knowledge, the taintless liberation of mind, and liberation through wisdom, in this very life."

Through these ten reasons, King Pasenadi expressed not only his profound reverence for the Buddha's qualities but also his deep understanding of the Buddha's enlightened nature. From a proud king to a faithful follower, the king's heart was transformed by the Buddha's teachings, recognizing the Buddha as the ultimate source of wisdom, purity, and liberation, worthy of the highest honor and devotion.

People from Other Religious Sects

During the time of the Blessed One, many prominent figures from other religious sects praised the wisdom and skillful leadership of the Buddha. While some of them chose to follow him, others did not. Among the most powerful religious sects of the time were the Brahmins and Jains. The scriptures often depict how some of their members opposed the Buddha and his teachings, while others recognized him as a great teacher worthy of respect.

Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta's Displeasure

In the *Upali Sutta* (MN:56), we find a statement from Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, the leader of the Jain sect, who, upon hearing that his former pupil Upali had become a follower of the Buddha, expressed his displeasure. He said:

"Householder, you are mad, you are an imbecile. You went saying, 'Venerable sir, I shall refute the recluse Gotama's doctrine,' and you have come back caught in the vast net of his doctrine. Just as if a man went to castrate someone and came back castrated himself, or went to put out someone's eyes and came back with his own eyes put out—so too, householder, you went saying, 'Venerable sir, I shall refute the recluse Gotama's doctrine,' and you have returned caught in the vast net of his teachings. Householder, you have been converted by the recluse Gotama with his converting magic!"

Brahmin Verañjā's Criticism

In the *Verañjā Sutta* (AN8:11), a Brahmin from Verañjā approached the Buddha, accusing him of improper conduct for not paying homage to elderly Brahmins and other perceived failings. He listed eight reasons for his disapproval of the Buddha:

1. The ascetic Gotama does not pay homage to elderly Brahmins.
2. He is not hospitable.
3. He is an advocate of non-doing.
4. He is an annihilationist.
5. He is a repeller.
6. He is an abolitionist.

7. He is a tormentor.

8. He is retiring.

After listening to the Brahmin, the Buddha gave a lengthy discourse, skillfully addressing each of the eight points. At the end of the discourse, Brahmin Verañjā, having gained a deeper understanding, changed his view. He declared:

“Master Gotama is the eldest... he is the best! Excellent, Master Gotama has made the Dhamma clear in many ways. I now go for refuge to Master Gotama.”

Through his teachings, the Buddha transformed the hearts and minds of those who came into contact with him, even those from opposing religious sects. His wisdom and compassion were so compelling that they won the respect and admiration of many, leading even those who initially opposed him to recognize the truth of his teachings.

Daṇḍapāṇi the Sakyan's attitude

In the following passage from the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* (MN:18), we see how Daṇḍapāṇi, ^{xxx} an elderly Sakyan, failed to respect or believe the teachings of the Buddha, despite the fact that the Buddha hailed from his own clan:

On one occasion, the Blessed One was in the Sakyan country at Kapilavatthu, in Nigrodha's Park. Daṇḍapāṇi, the Sakyan, met the Buddha and asked,
“What does the recluse assert, what does he proclaim?”

The Buddha replied,

“Friend, I assert and proclaim my teaching in such a way that one does not quarrel with anyone in the world, with its gods, its people, or anyone else.”

Upon hearing this, Daṇḍapāṇi the Sakyan shook his head, wagged his tongue, and raised his eyebrows, causing his forehead to wrinkle in three lines. Afterward, he departed, leaning on his stick.

Sakuludāyīn the Wanderer Praises the Buddha ^{xxxi}

On one occasion, the Buddha met Sakuludāyīn at his monastery in Peacocks' Sanctuary. After greeting the Buddha, Sakuludāyīn expressed admiration for how the disciples of the Buddha honored, respected, revered, and venerated him, unlike the followers of other religious sects who did not show the same devotion to their teachers. He said:

“Venerable Sir, I see five qualities in the Blessed One that inspire his disciples to honor, respect, revere, and venerate him, living in dependence on him...” ^{xxxii}

He then described the five qualities as follows:

1. The Blessed One eats little and commends eating little;
2. He is content with any kind of robe and commends contentment with any kind of robe;
3. He is content with any kind of almsfood and commends contentment with any kind of almsfood;
4. He is content with any kind of resting place and commends contentment with any kind of resting place;
5. He is secluded and commends seclusion.

The Buddha then explained to Sakuludāyīn another set of five qualities, which inspire his disciples to honor, respect, revere, and venerate him, and to live in dependence on him:

Udāyīn, my disciples esteem me for:

1. My higher virtue;
2. My excellent knowledge and vision;
3. My higher wisdom;
4. When my disciples encounter suffering, they come to me and ask me. I explain to them the Four Noble Truths;
5. I teach them the way to develop wholesome states of mind.

These, Udāyin, are the five qualities for which my disciples honor, respect, revere, and venerate me, living in dependence on me.

Although Sakuludāyin could not become a disciple of the Buddha at that time, he greatly admired him. Tradition holds that in a future life, he became a great arahant.

Sunakkhatta the Licchavi Blaming the Buddha

Sunakkhatta, a member of the Licchavi clan from Vesali, became a disciple of the Buddha and served as his attendant for a time. He once requested the Blessed One to perform miracles and explain the origins of things. However, when the Buddha declined, Sunakkhatta became disheartened and left the Sangha. In his discontent, he made deceptive statements about the Buddha, saying:

“The recluse Gotama does not possess any superhuman qualities or any distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones. The recluse Gotama teaches a Dhamma merely derived from reasoning, following his own line of inquiry as it occurs to him. And when he teaches the Dhamma to anyone, it leads them, upon practice, to the complete destruction of suffering.” ^{xxxiii}

Wanderer Pilotika’s Commendation of the Buddha

On one occasion, Brahmin Jāṇussoṇi, knowing that the wanderer Pilotika had visited the Buddha, asked him what he thought about the lucidity of the Buddha’s wisdom. Pilotika replied:

“Sir, who am I to know the recluse Gotama’s lucidity of wisdom? One would surely have to be his equal to understand the clarity of his wisdom.”

Brahmin Jāṇussoṇi responded, *“Master Vacchāyana praises the recluse Gotama with high praise indeed.”*

Pilotika answered, *“Sir, who am I to praise the recluse, Gotama? The recluse Gotama is praised by the praised as the best among gods and humans.”*

Then Brahmin Jāṇussoṇi inquired how Pilotika had established such firm confidence in the recluse Gotama. Pilotika explained in detail how he came to trust the Blessed One and said:

“...I saw four footprints of the recluse Gotama, and I came to the conclusion: ‘The Blessed One is fully enlightened, the Dhamma is well proclaimed by the Blessed One, and the Sangha is practicing the good way.’” ^{xxxiv}

Saccaka, the Nigaṇṭha’s Son ^{xxxv}

According to the *Cūlasaccaka Sutta* (MN:35), on one occasion, Saccaka approached Venerable Assaji and asked,

“How does the recluse Gotama discipline his disciples?”

Venerable Assaji replied, but Saccaka disagreed with his answer, saying, *“If we have heard what the recluse Gotama asserts, we have indeed heard something disagreeable. Perhaps,*

sometime, we might meet Master Gotama and have a conversation with him. Perhaps we might convince him to abandon that misguided view.”

Saccaka then approached the assembly of Licchavis and invited them to join him in witnessing his upcoming debate with the Buddha, elaborating further:

“...Today there will be a conversation between me and the recluse Gotama. If the recluse Gotama maintains what was said by one of his famous disciples, the bhikkhu named Assaji, then just as a strong man might seize a long-haired ram by the hair and drag it back and forth, so in debate, I will drag the recluse Gotama back and forth, around and around...”

According to the scriptures, a debate ensued between the Blessed One and Saccaka. Despite his boasting that he could defeat the Buddha, Saccaka was unable to refute any of the Buddha’s logical arguments. At the end of the debate, he admitted:

“Master Gotama, we were bold and impudent in thinking we could challenge you in debate. A man might attack a mad elephant and find safety, yet he could not attack Master Gotama and find safety. A man might attack a blazing mass of fire and find safety, yet he could not attack Master Gotama and find safety. A man might attack a terrible poisonous snake and find safety, yet he could not attack Master Gotama and find safety...” ^{xxxvi}

Potaliya the Householder

On one occasion, the Buddha was residing in the town of Āpaṇa in Anguttarāpaṇa country when he encountered the householder, Potaliya. At that time, Potaliya had renounced his worldly affairs and considered himself a spiritual person. However, when the Blessed One addressed him as “householder,” Potaliya was displeased and angry, saying:

“Master Gotama, it is neither fitting nor proper that you address me as ‘householder.’

The Buddha, with compassion, inquired about the reason for Potaliya’s displeasure. Potaliya replied:

“Master Gotama, I have given up all my wealth, grain, silver, and gold to my children as their inheritance. I no longer involve myself in these matters, and I live simply on food and clothing. This is how I have renounced all my affairs and works.”

The Buddha gently explained that true renunciation in his dispensation was different from what Potaliya had practiced. Realizing the depth of the Buddha’s wisdom, Potaliya, who had some insight, humbly requested the Buddha to elaborate on his teaching of renunciation. The Blessed One shared profound insight, and by the end of the discourse, Potaliya’s anger was transformed into reverence. With a heart filled with gratitude, Potaliya said:

“Venerable sir, the Blessed One has inspired in me love for recluses, confidence in recluses, and reverence for recluses... Master Gotama, you have made the Dhamma clear in so many ways, as though turning upright what had been overthrown, revealing what was hidden, showing the way to one who was lost, or holding up a lamp in the dark for those with eyesight to see forms. I go to Master Gotama for refuge, to the Dhamma, and to the Sangha of bhikkhus.” ^{xxxvii}

In that moment, Potaliya’s heart opened, and he became a devoted follower of the Buddha, embracing the path to liberation.

Ordinary People Blaming and Criticizing the Buddha

In the Vinaya Pitaka, it is recorded that when the Buddha was residing in Rājagaha, many young men from Magadha, inspired by his teachings, became his disciples. This led to complaints and criticism from the people of the town:

“The ascetic Gotama is making us childless; he’s making us widows. He’s breaking up good families! A thousand dreadlocked ascetics have now gone forth because of him, and also these two hundred and fifty wanderers who were disciples of Sañcaya. All these well-known gentlemen from Magadha are practicing the spiritual life under the ascetic Gotama.”

Despite the growing number of followers, the Buddha remained focused on his mission of teaching the Dhamma with love and wisdom. His work was misunderstood by many, but he knew the profound impact his teachings would have in the long run.

On another occasion, while the Buddha was dwelling in Rājagaha, a Brahmin named Akkosaka Bhāradvāja heard that his fellow Brahmin, a member of the Bhāradvāja clan, had gone forth into homelessness under the ascetic Gotama. Filled with anger, he approached the Buddha and harshly reviled him with rude words. Yet, the Blessed One, with his boundless compassion and patience, did not respond with anger. Instead, he imparted a brief but powerful teaching: ^{xxxviii}

“One who repays an angry man with anger only makes things worse for himself. But if one does not repay anger with anger, he wins a battle that is hard to win.”

Upon hearing the Buddha's words, the Brahmin Bhāradvāja realized the depth of the Buddha's wisdom and compassion. His heart softened, and he understood that the Buddha was not an enemy to be fought but a compassionate teacher. In that moment, Bhāradvāja let go of his resentment and became one of the Buddha's disciples, finding peace and clarity in the Dhamma.

Through this profound encounter, we see how the Buddha's wisdom transformed even the harshest critics, leading them to the path of understanding, compassion, and ultimately, liberation.

The Buddhas' empathy

The Buddha, throughout his life, received both praise and blame from people of all walks of life, yet he responded to each with remarkable wisdom, universal compassion, and a deep understanding of human nature. Whether praised as the supreme teacher or criticized by those who misunderstood his path, the Buddha remained unmoved by ego or pride. He understood that human reactions were often shaped by ignorance, fear, or attachment, and he responded with patience, clarity, and empathy.

In the face of praise, the Buddha did not indulge in self-congratulation but recognized that any good attributed to him was a reflection of the Dhamma, the truth he taught. In the face of blame, he did not retaliate but offered teachings that encouraged self-reflection and liberation from suffering. His wisdom allowed him to see beyond superficial judgments and penetrate to the deeper motivations and concerns of those who praised or blamed him.

The Buddha's compassion was not limited to humans; it extended to all beings. His responses were always guided by the understanding that true transformation comes not through force or criticism, but through awakening the mind and heart to the realities of life. In this way, he became the ideal teacher, showing that the path to peace and liberation lies in wisdom, compassion, and equanimity—qualities that transcend all praise and blame.

With that inspiring note we will end this section. The next section (9) will focus on The Past Lives of the Buddha.

Endnotes: Section 8

ⁱ DN:1 (The Brahmajāla Sutta).

ⁱⁱ A 2600 Year Journey Source: <https://present.bhikkhuni.net/2600-year-journey/>

ⁱⁱⁱ He was the first chief disciple of the Buddha, the foremost among those with great wisdom. See: AN1:189. *For more detailed biographical account: see: Great Disciples of The Buddha by Bhikkhu Nyanaponika and Helmut Hecker.

^{iv} AI generated image.

^v He was a great disciple of the Buddha; and the foremost of those who can analyses in detail what had been stated by the Buddha in brief: AN1:197. * See: Master of Doctrinal Exposition by Bhikkhu Bodhi: Wheel No. 405/406, PBS.

^{vi} He was the cousin of the Buddha and followed him to the day of the passing away. The Buddha declared him: the foremost of bhikkhu disciples among those who are learned, with good memory, with a quick grasp of Dhamma, who are resolute and among personal attendants is Ānanda. AN1:219-223.

^{vii} MN:28 (Acchariya-abbhūta Sutta).

^{viii} He was a pupil of the Buddha during his early period. In AN6:43 & Thag:15.2 he praised the Buddha.

^{ix} DN:28.

^x In SN8: Vangisasamyutta include most of his verses, he was declared by the Buddha as foremost among bhikkhus who compose inspired verses; see: AN1:212.

^{xi} SN8: 5 & 8. (Well spoken & Over a thousand)

^{xii} Before becoming a nun, she was the consort of King Bimbisara, became a great bhikkhuni disciple of the Buddha, he declared her as foremost in wisdom. See: AN1:236.

^{xiii} Thig:6.3: (Translated by Bhikkhu Sujato: www.suttacentral.net)

^{xiv} She was the youngest sisters of Venerable Sāriputta, her verses are at Thig:8.1.

^{xv} SN:5: 8.

^{xvi} MN: 92 (Sela sutta)

^{xvii} DN:28.

^{xviii} In Samyutta Nikaya (SN1, SN2, SN6, SN10 & SN11) we can see all those non-humans, approaching the Buddha, having listened to his teachings praised and honour him.

^{xix} SN6:11.

^{xx} Source: <https://thebuddhadhamma.wordpress.com/>

^{xxi} DN: 19 (Mahāgovinda Sutta).

^{xxii} Snp:5.0 (Parayanavagga: this devata was the one who directed brahmin Bavari to go to the Blessed One)

^{xxiii} SN10:7.

^{xxiv} Snp:1.9 (Hemavata sutta, translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi).

^{xxv} He is one of the four devas of the “Four Great Kings Deva realm”.

^{xxvi} DN:32 (Āṭānāṭiya Sutta)

^{xxvii} Source: Daily News Paper-Sri Lanka <https://archives.dailynews.lk/2006/08/09/art07.asp>

^{xxviii} He was an ardent follower of the Buddha, in SN:3 (Koslasamyutta) describes his encounters with the Blessed One.

^{xxix} AN10:30 (Kosala sutta).

^{xxx} Dandapāṇi, whose name means “stick-in-hand,” was so called because he used to walk around ostentatiously with a golden walking stick, even though he was still young and healthy. According to MA, he sided with Devadatta, the Buddhas’ arch foe, when the latter attempted to create a schism in the Buddha’s following. His manner of asking the question is arrogant and deliberately provocative, see: MN: Note:226.

^{xxx}_i He was a teacher of a large group of students, though he follows another religion he had confidence in the Buddha as a great teacher. In MN: 78 we can see he wanted to become disciple of the Buddha, but his student obstructed him, see: MN: Note:78.

^{xxx}_{ii} MN:77.

^{xxx}_{iii} DN: 8 (MN: Mahāsīhanāda Sutta) * For further information of Sunakkhatta’s leaving the Sangha see: DN: 24 (Pāṭika Sutta).

^{xxx}_{iv} MN:27 * The four prints of the Buddha are described in the sutta.

^{xxx}_v He was considered as a debater and clever speaker and also a saint, see: MN: Notes: 369, p. 1099.

^{xxx}_{vi} See also MN: 36 (Mahasaccaka Sutta) * Per commentary: even though Saccaka did not ...become established in the Three Refuges, the Buddha taught him two long suttas in order to deposit in him a mental impression (vāsānā) that would come to maturity in the future. For he foresaw that at a later time, after the Dispensation became established in Sri Lanka, Saccaka would be reborn there and would attain arahantship as the great arahant, Kāla Buddhārakkhita Thera. See: MN: Notes: 394, p.1101.

^{xxx}_{vii} MN:54 (Potailya sutta).

^{xxx}_{viii} SN7:2 (Abuse Sutta)