

The Kalama Sutta

The people of the small-town Kalama complained that they were confused by contradictions they discovered in what they heard from various teachers who praised their own doctrines. They asked Buddha, who was staying in the town then, who to believe out of all who, like himself, passed through their town:

"Venerable Sir, some recluses and brahmins visited this town and praised only their own doctrines, but condemned and despised those of others. And it is common that they do so. Sir, who among them told the truth and who told falsehood?"

Buddha advised them, saying, "Kalama people, it is proper for you to doubt and to have perplexity under such circumstances, when doubt has arisen in a doubtful matter."

He went on to instruct that it is wise to make a proper examination before committing. He said this was to be applied to his own teachings as well. The benefit is: not being too bound by unverifiable propositions, hopefully.

Buddha's reply is recorded thus:

- Do not believe something just because it has been passed along and retold for many generations.
- Do not believe something merely because it has become a traditional practice.
- Do not believe something simply because it is well-known everywhere. [Do not be led by hearsay or common opinion.]
- Do not believe something just because it is cited in a text. [Do not be led by what the scriptures say]
- Do not believe something solely on the grounds of logical reasoning. [Do not be led by mere logic.]
- Do not believe something merely because it accords with your philosophy. [Do not be led by mere deduction or inference.]
- Do not believe something because it appeals to "common sense". [Do not be led by considering only outward appearance.]
- Do not believe something just because you like the idea. [Do not be led by preconceived notions (and the theory reflected as an approval)]
- Do not believe something because the speaker seems trustworthy. [Do not be led by what seems acceptable; do not be led by what some seemingly believable one says.]
- Do not believe something thinking, "This is what our teacher says". [Do not be led by what your teacher tells you is so.]

Kalamas, when you yourselves directly know, "This is [these things are] unwholesome, this is blameworthy, this is condemned or censured by the wise, these things when accepted and practised lead to poverty and harm and suffering," then you should give them up.

Kalamas, when you yourselves directly know, "These things are wholesome, blameless, praised by the wise; when adopted and carried out they lead to well-being, prosperity and happiness," then you should accept and practise them."

Kesaputti Sutta, 5th sutta (sutra) in the Book of Threes (Mahavagga) in the Gradual Sayings (Tika Nipata).