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Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhasa

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Summary

The town of Kesamutta was located in the middle of a vast expanse of forest so that anyone crossing the forest would have to spend one night there. As ascetics and recluses passed by they spent the nights discussing their views with the Kalamas of Kesamutta.

As this sutta shows, the great variety of views and opinions taught to the Kalamas had led them only to doubt and uncertainty. How were they to decide what was true?

Today as well, we have a lot in common with the Kalamas; though the vast forests are gone, the variety of views and opinions about how to live one's life seem to have multiplied. How are we to decide what is true?

In this sutta you will find an acid test of Truth which if used produces a conclusive result as to the worth of any teaching. The Buddha also gives an illustration of the use of this acid test on part of his own teaching which deals with moral conduct. Lastly, the Buddha shows that virtuous conduct is blameless according to whichever view of life that may be true.

But why should you accept this acid test of Truth? If you apply the acid test on itself you will see that it is wholesome, blameless, approved of by the wise, and if used leads to benefit and happiness. Only true wisdom is like that.

The pali text of this sutta is located in the tika-nipata of anguttara nikaya.

Translation of the Kesamutti Sutta by U Dhamindo.

Kesamutti sutta

Thus have I heard: At one time the Bhagava while travelling in the Kosala country, together with a large company of bhikkhus, had arrived at a market town of the Kalamas called Kesamutta. The Kalamas of Kesamutta heard thus: "Indeed the recluse Gotama, the son of the Sakya, who has gone forth from the Sakya clan has arrived at Kesamutta. Of that Venerable Gotama a good reputation has spread far and wide thus: 'This Bhagava having destroyed the mental defilements is worthy of veneration (araham); he has attained perfect enlightenment by himself (sammāsambuddho); he is perfect in knowledge and the practice of morality (vijjacaranasampanno); he speaks only what is beneficial and true (sugato); he knows the world (lokavidu); he is the unsurpassable leader of men fit to be tamed (anuttaro purisadammasarathi); he is the teacher of Devas and men (sattha devamanussanam); he is an Enlightened One (Buddho); he is the most fortunate possessor of the results of previous meritorious actions (bhagava); he having realized its nature by himself with superknowledge (abhinna), makes known this world with its devas, maras, brahmas, monks, recluses, and men; he teaches Dhamma that is good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end, complete in meaning and letter and he shows

the completely undefiled life of purity (brahmacariya). "Truly, seeing an Arahant like that is profitable."

Then the Kalamas of Kesamutta approached the place where the Bhagava was staying. Having approached that place some having made obeisance sat down in a suitable place. Some exchanged friendly greetings with the Bhagava and having exchanged friendly greetings they sat down in a suitable place. Some having raised their hands together in salutation in the direction of the Bhagava sat down in a suitable place. Some having announced their name and clan sat down in a suitable place. While thus sitting the Kalamas of Kesamutta spoke thus to the Bhagava:

"There are, Venerable Sir, some recluses and brahmins who come to Kesamutta they explain and illuminate their own views but the views of others they attack, look down upon, treat with contempt, and tear apart. Some other recluses and brahmins also come to Kesamutta and they also explain and illuminate their own views but the views of others they attack, look down upon, treat with contempt, and tear apart. About these recluses and brahmins this doubt and uncertainty really arises in us: 'Who among these venerable recluses has spoken the truth and who falsehood?'"

"Indeed it is proper for you, Kalamas, to be doubtful and uncertain, in a doubtful matter uncertainty has arisen.

"Come you, Kalamas, not because of repeated hearing, nor because of tradition, nor because of hearsay, nor because it agrees with the texts, nor because it is logical, nor because of inference, nor because of careful consideration of reasons, nor because it conforms with your own view, nor because of thinking this person appears to be trustworthy, nor because of thinking this recluse is our teacher, but when you, Kalamas, know by yourself: 'These actions are unwholesome; these actions are blameworthy; these actions are censured by the wise; these actions if completely undertaken lead to harm and pain (dukkha)'; then you, Kalamas, should abandon those actions.

"What do you think Kalamas - when greed (lobha) arises in a person does it arise for his benefit or for his harm?"

"For his harm, Venerable Sir."

"And furthermore, Kalamas, this greedy person whose mind is overpowered and overcome by greed, kills living beings, he also takes what is not given, he also goes to another's wife, he also speaks falsely, and he also encourages others to do the same and isn't this the cause of harm and pain for him for a long time?"

"Yes it is, Venerable Sir."

"What do you think Kalamas - when anger (dosa) arises in a person does it arise for his benefit or for his harm?"

"For his harm, Venerable Sir."

"And furthermore, Kalamas, this angry person whose mind is overpowered and overcome by anger, kills living beings, he also takes what is not given, he also goes to another's wife, he also speaks falsely; and he also encourages others to do the same and isn't this the cause of harm and pain for him for a long time?"

"Yes it is, Venerable Sir."

"What do you think Kalamas - when delusion (moha) arises in a person does it arise for his benefit or for his harm?"

"For his harm, Venerable Sir."

"And furthermore, Kalamas, this deluded person whose mind is overpowered and overcome by delusion, kills living beings, he also takes what is not given, he also goes to another's wife, he also speaks falsely, and he also encourages others to do the same and isn't this the cause of harm and pain for him for a long time?"

"Yes it is, Venerable Sir."

"What do you think Kalamas - are these actions wholesome or unwholesome?"

"Unwholesome, Venerable Sir."

"Are these actions blameworthy or blameless?"

"Blameworthy, Venerable Sir."

"Are these actions censured by the wise or approved of by the wise?"

"Censured by the wise, Venerable Sir."

"How does this appear to you, do these actions if completely undertaken lead to harm or pain or not?"

"It appears to us that these actions if completely undertaken lead to harm and pain."

"Thus, this is what I meant when I said: "Come you, Kalamas, not because of repeated hearing, nor because of tradition, nor because of hearsay, nor because it agrees with the texts, nor because it is logical, nor because of inference, nor because of careful consideration of reasons, nor because it conforms with your own view, nor because of thinking this person appears to be trustworthy, nor because of thinking this recluse is our teacher, but when you, Kalamas, know by yourself: "These actions are unwholesome; these actions are blameworthy; these actions are censured by the wise; these actions if completely undertaken lead to harm and pain (dukkha)"; then you, Kalamas, should abandon those actions.

"Come you, Kalamas, not because of repeated hearing, nor because of tradition, nor because of hearsay, nor because it agrees with the texts, nor because it is logical, nor because of inference, nor because of careful consideration of reasons, nor because it conforms with your own view, nor because of thinking this person appears to be trustworthy, nor because of thinking this recluse is our teacher, but when you, Kalamas, know by yourself: "These actions are wholesome; these actions are blameless; these actions are approved of by the wise; these actions if completely undertaken lead to benefit and happiness (sukha)"; then you, Kalamas, should live completely undertaking and practising these actions.

"What do you think Kalamas - when non-greed (alobha) arises in a person does it arise for his benefit or for his harm?"

"For his benefit, Venerable Sir. "

"And furthermore, Kalamas, this non-greedy person whose mind is not overpowered and overcome by greed, he does not kill living beings, he does not take what is not given, he does not go to another's wife, he does not speak falsely, and he also encourages others to do the same, and isn't that the cause of benefit and happiness for him for a long time?"

"What do you think Kalamas - when non-hatred (adosa) arises in a person when non-delusion (amoha) arises in a person and isn't that the cause of benefit and happiness for him for a long time?"

"Yes it is, Venerable Sir."

"What do you think Kalamas - are these actions wholesome or unwholesome?"

"Wholesome, Venerable Sir."

"Are these actions blameworthy or blameless?"

"Blameless, Venerable Sir."

"Are these actions censured by the wise or approved of by the wise?"

"Approved of by the wise, Venerable Sir."

"How does this appear to you, do these actions if completely undertaken lead to benefit and happiness or not?"

"It appears to us that these actions if completely undertaken lead to benefit and happiness."

"Thus, this is what I meant when I said: "Come you, Kalamas, not because of repeated hearing, nor because of tradition, nor because of hearsay, nor because it agrees with the texts, nor because it is logical, nor because of inference nor because of careful consideration of reasons, nor because it conforms with your own view, nor because of thinking this person appears to be trustworthy, nor because of thinking this recluse is our teacher, but when you, Kalamas, know by yourself: "These actions are wholesome; these actions are blameless; these actions are approved of by the wise; these actions if completely undertaken lead to benefit and happiness (sukha)'; then you, Kalamas, should live completely undertaking and practising these actions.

"This disciple of the Noble Ones, Kalamas, being thus free from covetousness, free from ill-will, free from delusion, with clear understanding and mindfulness lives having pervaded one quarter with a mind possessed of loving-kindness and in the same way a second, a third, and a fourth. Thus he lives having pervaded the entire world, above, below, across, everywhere without exception, with a mind possessed of loving-kindness that is extensive, lofty, unlimited, free from enmity, and free from pain ... with a mind possessed of compassion ... with a mind possessed of sympathetic joy ... he lives having pervaded one quarter with a mind possessed of equanimity and in this same way a second, a third, and a fourth quarter. Thus he lives having pervaded the entire world, above, below, across, everywhere without exception, with a mind possessed of equanimity that is extensive, lofty, unlimited, free from enmity, and free from pain.

"To this disciple of the Noble Ones, Kalamas, whose mind is thus free from enmity, free from pain, free from defilements, and pure, four consolations are obtained in this very life.

"If there is a future life after this one and there is also result of good and bad actions, then I after the breaking up of this body, after death, will get to a happy abode, the Deva world. 'This is the first consolation which is obtained by him.

"If there is no future life after this one and there is also no result of good or bad actions, then in this very life I keep myself free from enmity, free from oppression, free from pain (dukkha) and happy.' This is the second consolation which is obtained by him.

"If there is evil done when evil is done, then I don't perceive having done evil to anyone, so not having done evil actions how will pain (dukkha) reach me?' This is the third consolation which is obtained by him.

"If there is no evil done when evil is done, then I behold myself truly pure in both cases'. This is the fourth consolation which is obtained by him.

"To this disciple of the Noble Ones, Kalamas, whose mind is thus free from enmity, free from pain, free from defilements, and pure, four consolations are obtained in this very life."

"Thus it is Bhagava, thus it is Sugata.

"To this disciple of the Noble Ones, Venerable Sir, whose mind is thus free from enmity, ... in this very life.

"If there is a future life after this one ... This is the first consolation which is obtained by him.

"If there is no future life after this one ... This is the second consolation which is obtained by him.

"If there is evil done when evil is done ... This is the third consolation which is obtained by him.

"If there is no evil done when evil is done ... This is the fourth consolation which is obtained by him.

"To this disciple of the Noble Ones, Venerable Sir, whose mind is thus free from enmity, free from pain, free from defilements, and pure, four consolations are obtained in this very life.

"It is wonderful, Venerable Sir! It is indeed wonderful, Venerable Sir: Just as, Venerable Sir, one should turn up that which is upside down or lay bare that which is concealed, or tell the way to one who has lost his way, or hold a lamp in the dark so that those who have eyes might see things; even so, the Dhamma has been revealed to us in many ways by you, Venerable Sir. So we, Venerable Sir, go for refuge to the Bhagava, to the Dhamma and to the Sangha. May the Bhagava regard us as lay-disciples who have gone for refuge from today onward as long as our life lasts."