

Knowledge and Truth in Early Buddhism: An Examination of the *Kālāma Sutta* and Related Pāli Canonical Texts

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[original pagination 74]

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS THE DHARMA? At first glance this may seem a trivial question. At least for a Buddhist, it hardly seems worth asking. Surely, it is the Noble Eightfold Path, the Three Characteristics of Conditioned Existence, the Four Noble Truths and, above all Dependent Origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*). However, upon further investigation it may seem less clear that such teachings are ‘obviously’ the Dharma. If we are not enlightened, how can we *know*? In other words, upon what grounds do we claim that, say, the notion of *anattā* (no fixed self) is the Dharma but the notion of *attā* (fixed self) is not? If we are a Buddhist, we may rest our claim upon the Buddhist tradition; it says so, therefore, it is the case. However, is the Dharma nothing more nor less than what traditional Buddhism has said that it is? How then do we assess contradictory doctrines found in the tradition? Who is to arbitrate over which teachings to admit to the ‘Buddhist tradition’ and which to exclude? How are we to evaluate the historical developments of the Buddhist [75] tradition? In brief, what reliable criteria can we use to assess the claim to authenticity of any traditional or contemporary Buddhist teaching?

Moreover, how is a committed Buddhist to demonstrate to a non-Buddhist that the teachings of Buddhism are sound? We cannot simply invoke the tradition (as some doorstep Christians innocently invoke the authority of the Bible) and expect others to be convinced. Neither is it enough to rest upon our ‘faith’ (*saddhā*). After all, why should anyone accept the perspicacity of *our* faith above, say, that of a fundamentalist Muslim? We need more reliable and less dogmatic and subjective grounds upon which to demonstrate the compelling value of the Buddha’s message.

It is such issues and difficulties that the Buddha addresses in his dialogue with the Kālāmas¹ and which I want to look at here. In considering that sutta I want to examine the criteria rejected by the Buddha as inadequate grounds for confidence in spiritual teachings and then explore critically the criteria that he (allegedly) recommends for the identification of beliefs and views that can be confidently trusted. In doing so, I will look at a number of other texts that deal with similar issues.

THE KĀLĀMA SUTTA

IN HIS DIALOGUE with the Kālāmas the Buddha casts a good deal of light on the question of how he communicated his message to people who had not already gone for refuge to him or who, in other words, did not yet have confidence in his proclamation of Enlightenment (*bodhi*) and the system of liberation that he was steadily developing based upon it. To some extent at least, even practising Buddhists are in the same position unless of course they are already Enlightened. For example, while I may *believe* – for a variety of reasons – that the Buddha gained Enlightenment, I cannot claim to *know* this. Neither can I claim to know that Enlightenment is even possible, even assuming that I can properly understand what it consists in. My understanding is limited by my own *kilesas* (defilements), my own lack of spiritual insight. The question then arises: if one does not already believe that the Buddha was Enlightened and that the Dharma offers a path to liberation how can

one come to develop such confidence? This is precisely the issue that the Buddha tackles in his dialogue with the Kālāmas.[76]

At the beginning of the sutta we encounter the Buddha in a period of itinerant wandering (as was his usual practice outside the rainy season) through the kingdom of Kosala, accompanied by a large retinue of monks. He arrives at the town of Kesaputta where the Kālāmas are based. On hearing that the Buddha has entered their territory, and having heard favourable reports about him such as that he is enlightened, the Kālāmas, perhaps somewhat excitedly, go to see him. After paying their respects to the Buddha it immediately becomes apparent that they have a fundamental spiritual problem, even a universal spiritual problem. This is how they formulate it:

There are some monks and brahmins, venerable sir, who visit Kesaputta. They expound and explain only their own doctrines; the doctrines of others they despise, revile, and pull to pieces. Some other monks and brahmins too, venerable sir, come to Kesaputta. They also expound and explain only their own doctrines; the doctrines of others they despise, revile, and pull to pieces. Venerable sir, there is doubt, there is uncertainty in us concerning them. Which of these reverend monks and brahmins spoke the truth (*sacca*) and which falsehood (*musā*)?²

Are we not in the same position? Shopping, as we now do, in the spiritual supermarket we too are bombarded by self-proclaimed 'enlightened' teachers and charismatic gurus of all creeds and practices, consistently offering seductive, panacean sound-bites. How are we to sort out the truth from the hype, the spiritually realised from the charlatan, the spiritual invigoration from the narcotic reassurance? The spiritual condition of the Kālāmas then has many similarities to the spiritual condition of the contemporary man and woman. It is characterised by uncertainty, confusion, and the proliferation of conflicting perspectives.

The Buddha responds by recognising that the Kālāmas have good reason to feel confused and uncertain. However, his proposed solution to their predicament marks him out as qualitatively different from the other gurus who have passed through Kesaputta extolling themselves and rubbishing their rivals. [77]

Come, Kālāmas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by oral tradition (*anussava*); nor upon succession (from teacher to disciple, *paramparā*); nor upon rumour (*itikirā*); nor upon what is in a scripture (*piṭikasampadā*); nor upon pure reason (*takka*); nor upon inference (*naya*); nor upon reasoned consideration (*ākāraparivitakka*); nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over (*diṭṭhinijjhānakkhanti*); nor upon another's seeming expertise (*bhavyarūpatā*); nor upon the consideration, 'The monk is our teacher' (*samaṇo no garu*). Kālāmas, when you yourselves know: 'These things are bad; these things are blameable; these things are censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill,' abandon them.³

In his response, the Buddha makes no attempt to convince the Kālāmas to go for Refuge to him. He realises that such an approach would be not only premature, it would further proliferate their confusion. After all, why should they accept his authority above that of any other teacher? In his response to the Kālāmas, the Buddha identifies ten grounds which he considers insufficient for accepting a teaching. However, he does not reject these bases of knowledge altogether but rejects them as insufficient grounds *by themselves* to establish the validity of any proposed teaching. It is possible that a teaching recommended on the basis of any of the ten grounds is true but these grounds are not sufficient to establish its truthfulness. Simply because a teaching is so

recommended is not a reason to reject it, rather, the proper attitude is to suspend judgement until we can apply a more decisive means of testing its value.

We can profitably divide the ten insufficient grounds into two main categories for the purpose of analysing them,⁴ first authority and second reason as in the following table:

AUTHORITY

- (1) *Anussava*; (oral) tradition, repeated hearing, report.
- (2) *Paramparā*; succession, series (lineage), tradition.
- (3) *Itikirā*; rumour, hearsay. [78]
- (4) *Piṭikasampadā*; what is in a scripture.
- (5) *Bhavyarūpatā*; another's seeming ability, expert testimony.
- (6) *Samaṇo no garu*; 'The monk is our teacher'.

REASON

- (1) *Takka*; (specious) reasoning, hair-splitting reasoning, sophistry.
- (2) *Naya*; inference, surmise, logic.
- (3) *Ākāraparivitakka*; reasoned consideration.
- (4) *Diṭṭhinijjhānakkhanti*; a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over.

It is not obvious how some of these criteria are differentiable. Nonetheless, by considering the Buddhist attitude to authority in general and then the Buddhist attitude to reason, it will become clearer what groundings for truth claims the Buddha was concerned to reject as inadequate.

THE BUDDHIST ATTITUDE TO AUTHORITY

THUS FAR, I have identified six kinds of authority rejected by the Buddha as adequate grounds for accepting a teaching. This suggests a general scepticism of truth claims from authority. Why is the Buddha so critical of such claims? In the *Sangārava Sutta*,⁵ a young Brahmin student approaches the Buddha and asks him upon what basis he proclaims his teaching. In his response the Buddha identifies three kinds of spiritual teachers who rest their claims upon three different grounds. First, there are those teachers who rest their claim to knowledge 'on the basis of oral tradition... such are the brahmins of the Three Vedas',⁶ these are called 'traditionalists' (*anussavikā*). Second, there are those who rest their claim 'on the basis of mere faith (*saddhāmattakena*)... such are the reasoners (*takkī*) and investigators (*vīmaṃsī*)'. Finally, there are some who have 'directly known the Dhamma for themselves' (*sāmaṃ yeva dhammaṃ abhiññāya*). The Buddha identifies himself with the latter category.

In this three-fold analysis the Buddha identifies those who proclaim the truth of a teaching on the basis of authority alone with the Vedic brahmins. [79] Moreover, the term *anussava* is used to identify 'tradition' in both this context and in the *Kālāma sutta*.

But what exactly is meant by *anussava* understood as an allegedly valid source of knowledge? In the *Cankī Sutta*,⁷ a young brahmin called Kāpaṭika questions the Buddha about the brahminical tradition. He explains that with regard to the ancient brahminical scriptures the brahmins conclude: 'Only this is true, anything else is wrong,'⁸ and asks what the Buddha thinks of this. The Buddha criticises the basis for this claim by establishing that the brahminical lineage does not have, or even claim, direct knowledge of the truths found in the brahminical scriptures. Its truth claims are, therefore, based on faith (*saddhā*) alone. He describes the Vedic tradition as 'blind' because it accepts the truth of its scriptures without any experiential verification of their

authenticity.⁹ Kāpaṭika counters that the scriptures are not accepted simply out of faith but also on the basis of *anussava*. In this context, Bhikkhu Bodhi glosses the term as ‘blind adherence to tradition.’¹⁰

The Buddha then points out that statements accepted on the basis of *anussava* may turn out to be either true or false.¹¹ In other words, the fact that a statement derives from *anussava* says nothing about its veracity, something that must be established on independent grounds. In order to remain faithful to the truth, says the Buddha, if one believes some teaching on the basis of tradition then one may report one’s belief but should resist concluding that it is certainly true and that, therefore, beliefs which contradict it must be wrong.¹²

Jayatilke argues¹³ that during the time of early Buddhism *anussava* had come to refer to the ‘sacred Vedic tradition’ and so in rejecting it as a valid means of knowledge the Buddha specifically challenges the spiritual authority of that tradition. While this seems very likely, we need not limit the scope of the critique to the Vedic tradition alone but can extend it to all claims to knowledge based on the authority of a tradition.

The weakness of tradition alone as a potential source of knowledge finds further amplification in the *Sandaka Sutta*.¹⁴ Here Ānanda converses with Sandaka, a wanderer. He explains that while a teacher may regard oral tradition (*anussava*) as truth some of his teaching may be well-remembered and some ill-remembered, and even if well-remembered some of it may be true [80] and some false.¹⁵ A holy life based upon such grounds is ‘without consolation.’¹⁶ According to Ānanda’s criticism, (oral) tradition is doubly flawed; first, it may be inaccurately transmitted and, second, it may not be true in the first place.

To conclude, the Buddha did not condemn teachings based on *anussava* as necessarily false, in some cases they may be true, but he rejected *anussava* as an unsatisfactory basis for their justification.

It may seem rather naïve that contemporaries of the Buddha were willing to accept the veracity of certain doctrines simply because they belonged to a particular sacred tradition. However, we may just as easily succumb to similar mistakes. We need only consider how easily we invoke the ‘proof by authority’ argument when in a tight corner. For example, I may confidently put forward the view that human beings are reborn. If I have a smart interlocutor, he or she may press me as to how I *know* this to be true. Rather surprised, I am likely to respond with something like, ‘because the Buddhist tradition says so.’ However, the fact that the Buddhist tradition may propose a certain doctrine does not in any way prove that it is true.

PARAMPARĀ

THE MEANING OF THIS TERM seems to overlap with that of *anussava* and some translators reserve the term ‘tradition’ for it alone. More literally, *paramparā* indicates a series or succession and therefore suggests the notion of spiritual lineage, that is an unbroken transmission of a teaching from teacher to disciple over a long period. Again this was a feature of the Vedic tradition and the Buddha seems to attack the authority of this unbroken lineage in his dialogue with Kāpaṭika.

Suppose there were a file of blind men each in touch with the next: the first one does not see, the middle one does not see, and the last one does not see. So too... the brahmins seem to be like a file of blind men.¹⁷

The Buddha seems to be saying that no matter how ‘pure’ a teacher–disciple succession may be, the tenets transmitted through that succession are no more likely to be true, particularly if the originator of the tradition was him-[81]self ‘blind’ – in the sense that he had not personally verified the

teachings which he expounded.¹⁸ In other words, purity of lineage says nothing about the truth-value of the teachings held by that lineage.

Besides indicating the unbroken lineage of teacher–disciple, *paramparā* may also denote the unbroken continuity of a tradition as such, without reference to individuals. Since *paramparā* is specified in addition to *anussava* it is possible that the former term refers to the acceptance of tradition in general on the grounds that it has been handed down for generations, while *anussava* refers more specifically to the Vedic tradition, a dominant example of it at the Buddha's time.¹⁹

It is easy to fall foul of the *paramparā* fallacy. For example, when we learn that a certain teaching has been handed down for centuries from 'master' to disciple, the content of that teaching can seem peculiarly seductive. Surely something that has stood the test of time and that generations of people have believed must be true? However, this need not be so as, for example, shown in how the discovery that the earth orbited the sun overturned the earlier geocentric model of the universe (which had been believed for centuries).

The *paramparā* fallacy has another application too. The fact that a spiritual teacher does not belong to an ancient, unbroken lineage may be used as grounds upon which to discredit him or her. If one does not belong to a hallowed tradition and has not been 'authorised' or 'certificated' to teach then one's teaching is clearly invalid. In fact, similar considerations were used by the brahmins to undermine the authority of the Buddha.²⁰ However, the fact that one's teachings are not the continuation of a particular tradition does not mean that they are not therefore true. This fact says nothing at all about their truth status and we should be wary of dismissing a teaching on such grounds.

At the time of the Buddha, then, the antiquity of a tradition was seen as a valid basis for accepting its veracity. Perhaps it illustrates an inherent conservatism within mankind that we still make use of this criterion to make truth claims when it is clearly so weak.

ITIKIRĀ

ITIKIRĀ, THE THIRD INVALID GROUND for knowledge, literally means 'so I guess' or 'I have heard'²¹ and connotes 'rumour', 'gossip' or 'hearsay'. [82] Ñāṇamoli renders it as 'legendary law',²² while it may also mean 'report'. On its simplest interpretation *itikirā*, refers to any knowledge that is passed on. In other words, the fact that someone reports a certain fact or state of affairs or teaching to be true does not therefore mean that it is true. However, neither does it mean that it is false, it simply says nothing decisive about its veracity.

This is a particularly difficult fallacy to resist. We tend to believe what people tell us because, perhaps rather naively, we believe that people generally tell the truth. We seem particularly susceptible to believing *bad* reports about others. Noticing, for example, how we respond to accusations made against public figures (which are yet to be proved) shows the strength of our tendency to accept things on the basis of hearsay. After all, we say, 'no smoke without fire'. It seems that the very fact of someone reporting an accusation is enough for us to believe that there must be some truth in it. To suspend judgement in such cases and wait for independent evidence to either prove or disprove the assertion seems rather difficult. The very claim that a certain accusation is true often prejudices us in its favour. This is particularly the case when the accusation is made by the media. If we hear an accusation reported in the newspaper or broadcast on radio or television it seems to lend the accusation validity.

An example from the *Udāna* illustrates this process in action.²³ Here a group of disgruntled wanderers, jealous and resentful of the Buddha and his spiritual community, murder a female wanderer named Sundarī and bury her in the Jeta Wood where the Buddha and his community are

staying. They then publicly exhume the body and accuse the bhikkhus of the murder, inciting the villagers of Sāvattihī against them. Significantly, none of the villagers makes any attempt to prove or disprove the accusation, even though many of them are presumably followers of the Buddha. Instead, they simply swallow the whole story and consequently ‘when people saw bhikkhus in Sāvattihī they reviled, abused, provoked and annoyed them with insults and harsh words.’²⁴ How fickle human nature is! Fortunately, due to the Buddha’s forbearance, the accusations die down after seven days and life returns to normal. However, not everyone is so lucky – a false accusation may stigmatise an innocent man or woman for life. It becomes painfully clear then why we must resist accepting things as true on the basis of hearsay alone. [83]

The Buddha’s own approach was exemplary in this respect. For example, in the episode of the quarrel at Kosambī,²⁵ where two rival factions of bhikkhus were ‘stabbing each other with verbal daggers’,²⁶ upon hearing a report of the situation the Buddha calls the bhikkhus to him. When they arrive, his first objective is to establish the truth of the reports and only when they themselves have admitted what is going on does he admonish them. The Buddha demonstrates this approach throughout the suttas, never accepting the truth of a rumour without confirming it with the relevant person first.

PIṬIKASAMPADĀ

PIṬIKASAMPADĀ IS MOST COMMONLY TRANSLATED as ‘what is in a scripture’ but Woodward takes it to mean ‘proficiency in the Collections’²⁷ and so restricts its application specifically to the Buddhist scriptures. This restriction seems unnecessary since the term *piṭaka* (basket, collection) while popularly used to refer to the Buddhist scriptures could also refer to the Vedic scriptures too.²⁸ This fallacy may be glossed as ‘scriptural fundamentalism’ (always bearing in mind that ‘scriptures’ were at this time of oral provenance only). In relying upon the authority of sacred scriptures (of whatever tradition) one accepts the entire contents of those scriptures as unquestionably true. Consequently, whatever propositions that agree with those scriptures are therefore also true while whatever propositions disagree with them must be false.

This unjustified reliance on scriptural authority is widespread. For example, if one asks a fundamentalist Christian how he or she knows that a certain Christian teaching is true, they may well answer ‘because it’s in the Bible.’ Buddhists offer similar justifications. For example, if questioned on how I can be confident that a certain doctrine is true or even authentically Buddhist, I may be tempted to invoke the authority of the early Buddhist texts as preserved by the Pāli Canon. On this criterion, Buddhism (or the Dharma) is whatever accords with (early Buddhist) scripture. However, how can we be sure that all the teachings in the Pāli Canon are the Dharma? We cannot even be confident that it derives directly from the Buddha. In fact, Western scholarship has shown conclusively that substantial portions of it were developed by his disciples – who may not have been Enlightened – and that the extant recensions of the teachings were not committed to writing until [84] several hundred years after the Buddha’s death in a language that he never spoke. To claim that the Pāli Canon is the word of the Buddha and therefore authentic is no longer a credible intellectual stance. Even if every word of the Canon had been written by the Buddha this would not constitute sufficient grounds for accepting its veracity. After all, the Buddha could have been wrong about certain things.

The appeal to scriptural authority functions as a self-validating justification of one’s chosen spiritual tradition. However, since it is based upon the dogmatic, unverifiable assumption that one’s own tradition is, in some self-evident way, true and authentic, such an appeal is unlikely to cut much ice with someone who does not accept that tradition at its own estimation. In other words, it is

a justification that assumes faith in one's chosen tradition and hence carries no compelling weight for someone who does not share that faith.

BHAVYARŪPATĀ

THE FINAL TWO FORMS OF AUTHORITY rejected by the Buddha both relate to the testimony of reliable persons. There is a range of opinion among commentators as to the precise meaning of *bhavyarūpatā*. Woodward translates it 'because it fits becoming' (that is, it conforms to the Buddha's doctrine of becoming).²⁹ This seems a rather unlikely reading, particularly in view of the context of the sutta. Jayatilleke suggests that it may mean 'because of its having the nature of what ought to be' and hence renders it more freely as 'because of its propriety or fittingness.'³⁰ This would entail the acceptance of a proposition on the grounds that it 'seems right.' However, the most likely reading, according to Jayatilleke, interprets *bhavyarūpatā* as referring to the person from whom a teaching is accepted rather than to the teaching itself. The phrase would then mean 'on the ground of the competence (or reliability) of the person.'³¹ Ñāṇamoli renders it 'because of someone else's ability',³² while Soma Thera has 'upon another's seeming ability.' *Bhavyarūpatā*, then, seems to refer to teachings accepted on the basis of expert testimony and the Buddha identifies this too as an unreliable source of knowledge. Even if someone is an expert in their field and a skilled advocate of their position, [85] their judgement may still be flawed. After all, even experts may disagree with each other and how is one to determine which of them is right?

It is also possible that the Buddha is highlighting the potential danger of succumbing to charisma (in the contemporary sense of that term). For example, someone may seem very plausible, persuasive, even charismatic but their aims may be disreputable as with a confidence trickster. Impressive rhetoric and reassuring charm may anaesthetise our critical faculties and seduce us into accepting a view that, with a clearer head, we would reject. We may be 'taken in'. Alternatively, we may be overawed by someone's reputation or position and consequently incline to accept their views uncritically. The mistake here then is failing to discriminate between the person (who seems authoritative, attractive, or persuasive) and their views (which may or may not be reliable).

SAMAṆO NO GARU

THE FINAL MODE OF AUTHORITY rejected by the Buddha can be rendered 'our recluse is a respected teacher,' or '(this) recluse is respected by us.'³³ Ñāṇamoli renders it 'the monk is our teacher.'³⁴ These translations indicate two possible senses of the phrase *samaṇo no garu*. The first can be seen as a version of the 'truth by consensus' fallacy. According to this line of reasoning, since someone is widely respected we too should respect them. Presumably, we reason, they are respected (as a spiritual teacher) because they know what they are talking about. Consequently, we should accept their teachings. Put in these terms, this approach is obviously flawed – since it assumes consensus opinion to be well-founded – and yet the tendency to accept a statement or teaching because it is generally so accepted is widespread. This is a group response.

The second reading of *samaṇo no garu* is more personal. We tend to accept what a spiritual teacher says if he or she is *our* teacher and we respect them. While there are *bona fide* grounds for trusting our spiritual teacher (such as reliability in the past) he or she may still be wrong about certain things. Certainly, a strong personal conviction as to the veracity of a certain teaching is not justified *merely* on the grounds that our teacher says so and we respect them. The weakness of this position will become evident when we declare [86] our conviction to someone who does not share our respect. When asked how we know that a certain teaching is true it sounds rather lame to bleat, 'because my teacher says so!'

To conclude this section, it will be clear by now that in his dialogue with the Kālāmas the Buddha demonstrates a general distrust of authority as a means of knowledge. Importantly, though, he does not suggest that teachings recommended on this basis should therefore be rejected, only that their truth or falsity is not established by means of authority alone. The proper attitude to such claims, then, is to neither accept nor reject them but seek independent grounds upon which to establish their truth or falsity. Let's now turn to the other category of belief justification rejected by the Buddha – reason.

THE BUDDHIST ATTITUDE TO REASON

I REFERRED ABOVE to the *Sangārava Sutta*³⁵ where a young Brahmin student approaches the Buddha and asks him upon what basis he proclaims his teaching. To recap, the Buddha identifies three grounds upon which spiritual teachers rest their claims. The first is authority which, as we have seen, was rejected by the Buddha while the second is 'on the basis of mere faith (*saddhāmattakena*)... such are the reasoners (*takkī*) and investigators (*vīmaṃsī*)'.³⁶ The Buddha disassociates himself from this approach too, instead placing himself in the category of 'experientialists' as we shall see.

TAKKA

THE PRECISE CONNOTATION of the term *takka* is uncertain. In the Pāli Canon, it seems to be a generic term for reason which allows of different interpretations depending on context. Sometimes it is understood to mean *specious* reasoning, 'hair-splitting reasoning', even sophistry. A sophist, in this context, is someone who employs fallacious reasoning to outwit an opponent in debate while having no positive doctrine to propose. The wanderer Pilotika has obviously met such people:

I have seen here certain learned nobles who were clever, knowledgeable about the doctrines of others, as sharp as hair-splitting marksmen; [87] they wander about, as it were, demolishing the views of others with their sharp wits.³⁷

They are concerned only with the thrill of intellectual victory, delighting in their power to trap others into accepting unpalatable conclusions. The Buddha explicitly criticised this practice:

Some misguided men learn the Dhamma... only for the sake of criticising others and for winning in debates, and they do not experience the good for the sake of which they learned the Dhamma.³⁸

It is tempting to interpret this passage as describing the approach of some modern Buddhologists whose motivation in approaching Buddhist teachings has little or nothing to do with a desire for spiritual development.³⁹ But to the extent that we don't embrace the soteriological function of Buddhist thought and practice, we will not experience its deepest benefits. The Buddha goes on to explain, invoking the well-known parable of the snake, that such men will suffer as a result of wrongly grasping the Dhamma. The simile of the raft also appears in the same passage illustrating the insight that the Buddha's Dhamma was offered as a plan of action – a method of self-transformation – not a theory merely to be debated.

Notwithstanding, Jayatilleke argues that *takka* is employed in a more positive sense too and proposes that to understand the term fully we must investigate who the *takkī* (reasoners) were.⁴⁰ In the *Sandaka Sutta*⁴¹ the Buddha identifies them as a reputable – but mistaken – class of spiritual teacher.

Here a certain teacher is a reasoner (*takkī*), an inquirer (*vīmaṃsī*). He teaches a Dhamma hammered out by reasoning (*takka*), following a line of inquiry (*vīmaṃsa*) as it occurs to him. But when a teacher is a reasoner, an inquirer, some is well reasoned (*sutakkita*) and some is wrongly reasoned (*duttakkita*), some is true and some is otherwise.⁴²

Accordingly, a wise man (*viññu*) realises that a holy life resting upon such a basis is ‘without consolation’ and so turns away from it. In this context then a teaching based upon *takka* is not dismissed as sophistic or insincere, simply regarded as an inadequate basis for spiritual life. It is inadequate because the reasoning used may be either good or bad and, even if it is good, the conclusions may be false since the reasoning may rest upon premises which are themselves false.

It would seem then that the term *takkī* applies to the reasoners and debaters in general not only to a narrow class of sophists. They are rationalists or ‘pure reasoners’ who aim to construct comprehensive metaphysical theories on the basis of reason alone seemingly without reference to the contingencies of experience. The *Brahmajāla sutta* identifies the (wrong) view that the self and the world are eternal as an example of a belief generated in this way.⁴³

It will already be clear that the Buddha himself made use of some forms of reasoning. Here it becomes useful to distinguish between:

- (1) Reasoning used to defend/criticise a theory which may itself not be grounded on reasoning alone;
- (2) The kind of speculative reasoning used to construct *a priori* metaphysical systems.

The Buddha certainly made use of the former even while criticising the latter.

Another way of distinguishing between the Buddha’s attitude to reasoning and the metaphysicians’ approach is to contrast ‘pure reason’ with ‘practical reason’. The Buddha was concerned with the latter, the metaphysicians with the former. This distinction rests upon different starting points and aims. The starting point of the pure reasoner is theoretical while that of the practical reasoner is experiential. The practical reasoner has a spiritual problem – the reality of *dukkha* (suffering). The practical reasoner wants to overcome *dukkha* and (in Buddhist terms) attain enlightenment. The pure reasoner misunderstands the aim of spiritual inquiry. He or she hopes to generate a universal system of metaphysical principles that may describe ‘the way the world is in itself’. The practical reasoner, however, has a more personal aim. He or she seeks to generate an outlook that will be *useful* in bringing about the spiritual goal that they have already adopted. Reason then functions as a tool to assist the process of spiritual transformation – its value is subordinate to the realisation of Enlightenment.

The parable of the raft illustrates this very clearly. For the Buddha, reason was part of the raft the aim of which is to get one from this shore to [89] the farther shore (which represents enlightenment). Reason is useful only to the extent that it assists in this function. Hence the Buddha’s evaluation of reason was *pragmatic* which is why he generally avoided metaphysical speculation.

For the Buddha, the project of pure reason is an expression of *papañca* (proliferation), the obsessive urge to conceptualise and speculate about experience. It is thus a form of craving and, as such, must be abandoned in order to make spiritual progress. If humanity is suffering then pure reason is a symptom of this suffering not the means to its alleviation. This does not, however, entail that we must give up thinking or reasoning altogether.

The Buddha makes it clear that his own approach is not limited by reason.

There are, monks, other matters, profound, hard to see, hard to understand, peaceful, excellent, beyond mere thought (*atakkāvacarā*), subtle, to be experienced by the wise, which the tathāgatha, having realised them by his own superknowledge, proclaims.⁴⁴

The important term *atakkāvacarā* is variously translated as ‘unattainable by reasoning’ or ‘beyond the sphere of thought’.⁴⁵ This implies that the Buddha believed that the content of his spiritual realisation could not be fully grasped or emulated by employing reason alone. Instead, one must develop direct knowledge (*abhiññā*). We shall see what this means a little later.

NAYA

THE PRIMARY MEANING of *naya* is inference though it may also mean logic. Inference is the process of deriving a conclusion from given premises or assumptions. An inference may be wrong for two reasons. First, the premises upon which it is based may not be true yielding a valid inference but one which is not true. Secondly, the inference may not be valid as in the following example.

Here, monks, a certain ascetic or brahmin has by means of effort, exertion, application, earnestness and right attention attained to such a state of mental concentration that he thereby recalls past existences... And he says, ‘The self and the world are eternal’.⁴⁶ [90]

The ascetic in question draws his inference from his experience of remembering past lives. However, the inference is wrong because it assumes, as a suppressed premise, that continuity of experience implies a fixed unchanging subject who experiences. This assumption is unwarranted. Hence it is possible to make invalid inferences based on genuine experiences.

So far, I have been discussing *logical* inference (valid deductive inference) but the Buddha also addresses the potential pitfalls of inductive inference too, that is, a general conclusion based upon a limited number of examples. In the *Mahākammavibhanga sutta*⁴⁷ the Buddha deals with a variety of mistaken *inductive* inferences about the truth of *kamma*. For example, some recluse may see, with his divine eye, a being who has acted skilfully being reborn in hell. From this he concludes:

Indeed there are no good actions, there is no result of good conduct; for I saw a person here who abstained from killing living beings... and held right view, and I see that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he has appeared in a state of deprivation... even hell... [Therefore] On the dissolution of the body, after death, everyone who abstains from killing living beings... and holds right view reappears in a state of deprivation... even in hell.⁴⁸

There are two unwarranted inferences here. First, the principle of *kamma* cannot be true since someone who acted skilfully suffered at death and, second, everyone who acts skilfully will suffer at death. Both these inferences are based on one (apparently genuine) example. However, someone’s suffering after death may be explained in other ways. According to the Buddha, ‘either earlier he did an evil action to be felt as painful, or later he did an evil action to be felt as painful, or at the time of death he acquired and undertook wrong view’.⁴⁹ Moreover, a generalisation about the future consequences of skilful conduct based on only one example is not justifiable.

However, it is worth noticing that the Buddha made considerable use of inference himself. The *Anumāna sutta*⁵⁰ even derives its name from another term for ‘inference.’ Here Mahāmoggallāna encourages the bhikkhus to infer what is disagreeable and displeasing to others from what is disagreeable and displeasing to themselves. Moreover, as we will see, the criteria that the [91] Buddha recommends to the Kālāmas for assessing the value of a teaching depends upon making inferences.

ĀKĀRA-PARIVITAKKA

TRANSLATORS AGAIN DIFFER as to how to render this term. Woodward has ‘after considering reasons’,⁵¹ Ñāṇamoli has ‘with weighing evidence’,⁵² Soma Thera has ‘upon axiom’, while the Pāli-English Dictionary has ‘study of conditions, careful consideration, examination of reasons.’ In another context, Bhikkhu Bodhi renders the term ‘reasoned cogitation’.⁵³ The implication seems to be that even if one has thought something through, perhaps quite vigorously and over a period of time, then one is still not justified in (fully) trusting one’s conclusions. The explanation of this would seem to be that, since one’s understanding is not direct (*abhiññā*), it may be fallible.

DIṬṬHI-NIJJHĀNA-KKHANTI

HERE WOODWARD has ‘after reflection on and approval of some theory’,⁵⁴ Ñāṇamoli has ‘with liking for a view after pondering over’,⁵⁵ Bhikkhu Bodhi has ‘with reflective acceptance of a view’,⁵⁶ while Soma Thera has ‘a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over’. It is not altogether clear how this criterion is different from the previous one but most translators point towards an emotional attachment arising from familiarity with a certain idea or belief. The more we think about something the less alien and strange it seems and it is not long before we find ourselves accepting the veracity of a belief on these grounds. After all, we are creatures of habit and this applies to our views – we are happiest with the familiar and novel views can be unsettling. It is worth noting that in the *Cankī sutta*⁵⁷ a very similar phrase, *dharmā-nijjhānam-khamanti*, is identified as a specific stage in the process of realisation. Once one has heard the Dhamma, memorised it, and examined the meaning of it, one gains a *reflective acceptance* of it.⁵⁸ However, this constitutes a relatively preliminary stage, before any decisive spiritual insight has been attained, and hence should not be overvalued. One has not yet realised the truth for oneself and so should adhere to one’s beliefs in a provisional way only. This entails resisting the temptation to declare, ‘Only this is true, anything else is wrong.’⁵⁹ [92]

Having examined all ten grounds rejected by the Buddha at Kesaputta, we must conclude that he believed that neither authority nor reason can yield sufficiently reliable judgements upon which to base a claim to knowledge. The Buddha seems almost ruthless in his rejection of almost every possible source of knowledge we can imagine. There is no doubt that, to some extent at least, the Buddha was responding to his philosophical milieu and wanted specifically to criticise some of the spurious grounds upon which teachers based their claims. This seems, for example, particularly clear in the case of *anussava*. However, is his list exhaustive? The *Cankī sutta*⁶⁰ offers a five-fold list of criteria for knowledge which the Buddha rejects as inadequate.

There are five things, Bhāradvāja, that may turn out in two different ways here and now [i.e. turn out to be either true or false]. What five? Faith (*saddhā*), approval (*ruṇi*), oral tradition (*anussava*), reasoned cogitation (*ākāra-parivittakka*), and reflective acceptance of a view (*diṭṭhi-nijjhānakkhanti*).⁶¹

The Buddha explains that something accepted on any of these five grounds may turn out to be ‘empty, hollow, and false’, whereas something not so accepted may be ‘factual, true, and unmissaken.’ Of these five I have already commented on items 3–5 but items one and two are worth noticing here.

Saddhā is often cited as a crucial spiritual emotion and so, at first glance, it seems puzzling that it is here accorded a rather lowly status. However, if we understand *saddhā* to mean (mere) ‘belief’ then it becomes clear why it is rejected. A belief may function as a *provisional* basis for

making decisions and orienting one's life until such times as one attains 'awakening to truth' (*saccānubodha*). On the basis of faith alone, however, one is not in a position to insist that 'only this is true, anything else is wrong.' At best, belief of this kind is a second-hand knowledge and as such not to be fully relied upon.

Ruci has three principal meanings; first, 'splendour, light, brightness'; second, 'inclination, liking, pleasure, and; third, 'will or influence'. Bhikkhu Bodhi suggests 'approval'.⁶² The term may refer to the adoption of a position because we 'like' it, it appeals to our sensibilities, perhaps confirms our prejudices. However, the term could also indicate the acceptance of a view [93] due to the *influence* of some authority. The following passage illustrates this sense:

Nigrodha, it is hard for you, holding different views, being of different inclinations and subject to different influences (*añña-rucika*), following a different teacher, to understand the doctrine which I teach my disciples.⁶³

The general meaning seems to be the acceptance of a view on emotive grounds.

Having clarified the grounds for knowledge that the Buddha was keen to reject, I want now to look at the test he proposes to the Kālāmas for constructing reliable knowledge.

THE BUDDHA'S CRITERIA FOR KNOWLEDGE

FIRST, THE BUDDHA proposes a negative criterion by formulating a test which will identify a class of beliefs to be rejected.

Kālāmas, when you yourselves know: 'These things are bad (*akusala*); these things are blameable (*sāvajja*); these things are censured by the wise (*viññūgarahita*); undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm (*ahita*) and ill (*dukkha*),' abandon them.⁶⁴

It is immediately apparent that the Buddha's criterion for rejecting beliefs is entirely *pragmatic* and, moreover, primarily *ethical* in its orientation. He is not concerned with truth in the abstract but with the practical consequences of any proposed beliefs or courses of actions.

Thus far, the Buddha has presented his criteria in general terms only, it is not clear, for example, what things are 'blameable' and therefore lead to 'ill'. The Buddha then proceeds, in the course of dialogue, to clarify with the Kālāmas what things they themselves accept as blameable and so on. He establishes that they accept that greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*) – the three 'unwholesome roots' (*akusala mulā*) – 'appear in a man' for his harm. The Buddha then outlines how, on the basis of one – or all – of the three unwholesome roots, a man transgresses the basic ethical precepts – not to take life, not to steal, not to commit sexual misconduct, not to tell lies – [94] and, moreover, prompts others to do the same. The Kālāmas accept that such conduct will lead to harm and ill.

Having established all this, the Buddha presents his approach in positive terms.

Kālāmas, when you yourselves know: 'These things are good (*kusala*); these things are not blameable (*anavajja*); these things are praised by the wise (*viññūppasattha*); undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit (*hita*) and happiness (*sukha*),' enter on and abide in them.⁶⁵

The Buddha then establishes that the Kālāmas also accept that a man who is free of greed, hatred, and delusion and who, consequently, does not transgress the ethical precepts will experience benefit and happiness as a result.

This then is the Buddha's response to the Kālāmas predicament. Essentially it is an ethical solution. The Buddha does not put forward any abstract test of truth and shows no interest here in

establishing any metaphysical principles. He recognises the practical needs of the Kālāmas and consequently proposes a means of testing any teachings they come across that is relevant to their situation. Importantly, the Buddha establishes a number of principles that the Kālāmas *already* accept and builds his response on them.

First, it is clear that the Kālāmas already have a developed ethical sense. They can discriminate between skilful (*kusala*) and unskilful (*akusala*) mental states. Second, they are able to recognise that the former leads to happiness while the latter leads to suffering. Third, they accept that happiness is a desirable goal whereas suffering is not.

The ethical sense has two aspects; personal and social. The personal aspect, here spoken of in terms of what is 'blameable', is elsewhere termed '*hiri*',⁶⁶ one's sense of shame. *Hiri* is the ethical response to an action (or proposed action) that one knows transgresses one's own standards of behaviour. Within Buddhism it is recognised as an important positive mental event. The social aspect, described here as 'the censure of the wise', is elsewhere termed *ottappa*⁶⁷ or 'moral sensitivity to the wise'. *Hiri* and *ottappa* function as complementary aspects of one's conscience, each supporting the other. If one's internal ethical monitor does not prevent one from carrying through with a proposed action that is unskilful then one's respect for the 'wise' may [95] prove a sufficient deterrent. But who are the wise here? Clearly, they are not the spiritually enlightened since for the Kālāmas this would entail a certain question begging (after all, their problem is that they don't know who the spiritually enlightened are). I suggest that what is meant here is the 'moral community'. In other words, the class of society that has respect for ethical precepts but is not necessarily spiritually awakened.

I don't think, however, that the Buddha is implying that the moral community is always right (this would seem impossible according to the Buddha's own stringent requirements for reliability). In the context of the *Kālāma Sutta*, the censure of the wise seems to function as a further confirmation of an ethical decision that one is already fairly clear about.

But are the Buddha's criteria comprehensive? After all, humanity has a seemingly unlimited capacity for self-delusion; we may not, for example, recognise that a certain course of action is unskilful and will consequently lead to suffering and our moral community may not be sufficiently sensitive to recognise this either. It is no accident, then, that the Buddha follows up his teaching with a presentation of the four Sublime Abodes (*brahmavihārā*). These are a series of meditation exercises whose aim is to generate their corresponding ethical-cum-spiritual psychological states. The practices serve to further refine one's ethical sensibilities. In order, the meditator develops universal loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*).

Having developed these lofty spiritual emotions towards all beings, such a person can be assured of four consolations (*assāsā*), promises the Buddha. These can be summarised as follows:

- (1) If there is an after-world (*paraloka*) and there are fruits of good and bad actions (*kamma-phala*), he or she can expect to be reborn in a heaven world (*sagga*), in a state of bliss.
- (2) If there is no after-world and no fruits of good and bad actions, the person free from greed, hatred, and delusion will still be happy here and now.
- (3) If evil (*pāpa*) consequences befall an evil-doer, the ethically pure has nothing to fear.
- (4) If evil consequences do not befall an evil doer, the ethically pure [96] has nothing to fear either.

These four consolations amount to a sort of 'wager' argument to demonstrate that there is more to be gained from living ethically than from living unethically. The Kālāmas are so impressed by these consolations that they consequently go for Refuge to the Buddha by becoming lay disciples.

But is even this enough? Has the Buddha offered reliable grounds upon which to differentiate truth from falsehood? From a strict philosophical point of view it seems clear that he hasn't. However, it is also clear that in this dialogue the Buddha has a very specific aim. First, we must remember that the Kālāmas are not initially his followers and so in addressing them he must formulate criteria that they themselves will accept as trustworthy. Moreover, the Kālāmas' problem is a practical not a theoretical one and the Buddha offers them a practical solution accordingly. They are not concerned with abstract notions of truth but are ordinary people preoccupied with the business of everyday social living. The Buddha turns their attention away from any truth claims from authority and also warns them to be careful of claims that recommend themselves on the basis of reason. Presumably, they are a fairly simple people and the Buddha is aware that they may be overwhelmed by the seeming prestige of authority or hoodwinked by clever argument. This is probably a danger to which most – if not all – people are subject. Instead, then, he encourages them to look at their own experience, to examine their consciences, and to identify what courses of conduct lead to happiness and what to suffering. While there is no doubt that one could get this wrong (as presumably we often do), this approach does, nevertheless, offer a pretty good rule of thumb.

But did the Buddha take the same approach with his disciples? Were they expected to be so cautious about his own teachings or to simply follow his commands? Moreover, where – if anywhere – does faith come into the picture? So far it seems to have been given short shrift. A popular passage from the *Vinaya*, where the Buddha advises his maternal aunt Mahāpajāpati (who has become a Buddhist nun), suggests that the Buddha *did* recommend a similar approach for his disciples. [97]

Those things which you know: 'These things lead to dispassion, not to passion; to detachment, not to attachment; to dispersal not to amassing; to modesty, not to ambition; to content, not to discontent; to seclusion, not to association; to energy, not to idleness; to frugality, not to luxury,' of them you can quite certainly decide: 'This is the Dhamma, this is the Discipline, this is the Master's teaching.'⁶⁸

As we noted earlier, the Buddha identified himself with the 'Experientialist' group of spiritual teachers as opposed to those who rested their claims on authority or reason. His approach to spiritual development was empirical and pragmatic and he trained his disciples to follow the same approach. He did not borrow authority from an existing spiritual tradition, neither did he aim to evolve a comprehensive philosophical system. He simply wanted to alleviate suffering and evaluated all teachings and practices in the light of this practical aim. Importantly, however, the Buddha's empiricism was 'transcendental' because it rested on the experience of *abhiññā*. But before discussing in more detail the nature of the Buddha's own knowledge and realisation, are there any grounds – in addition to the test proposed to the Kālāmas – that can give us surer confidence in our beliefs and understanding?

THE PATH TO KNOWLEDGE IN THE CANKĪ SUTTA

THE *CANKĪ SUTTA*⁶⁹ outlines an alternative method for examining spiritual teachings to that offered to the Kālāmas, one which has a more exalted end in mind. Here, the Buddha encounters an enthusiastic young brahmin named Kāpaṭika and they engage in a lengthy dialogue about the truth claims of the Vedic tradition. We have already seen that the Buddha rejected the brahminical claim that their tradition is true and everything else is false on the grounds that it is a 'blind' tradition. Kāpaṭika then asks the Buddha about the 'protection of truth' (*saccānurakkhana*).⁷⁰ He seems to be

asking, ‘How can I communicate about what I think and believe without stepping beyond what I know.’ The Buddha responds by saying that one protects the truth by declaring what one does actually believe, and the grounds upon which one believes it, while resisting the temptation to conclude that one’s own belief is true and everything else is wrong. [98]

However, Kāpaṭika’s interest goes much further. He wants to know how one brings about an ‘awakening to truth’ (*saccānubodha*). The Buddha then offers him a rigorous method. The first stage is to identify a potential teacher. Having found one, the seeker investigates that teacher to determine whether he is subject to greed, hatred, and delusion. Based on his observation, the seeker then considers whether, out of greed, hatred, or delusion the potential teacher is likely to claim that he knows when he does not know or urge others to act in a way that would lead to their suffering. After thoroughly investigating the teacher, and concluding that he is free of all such unskillful states, the disciple places his faith (*saddhā*) in him. The sutta then prescribes a path of successive stages.

Filled with faith he visits him and pays respect to him; having paid respect to him, he gives ear; when he gives ear, he hears the Dhamma; having heard the Dhamma, he memorises it and examines the meaning (*upaparikkhati*) of the teachings he has memorised; when he examines their meaning, he gains a reflective acceptance of those teachings (*dhammā-nijjhānaṃ-khamanti*); when he gains a reflective acceptance of those teachings, zeal springs up (*chanda*); when zeal has sprung up, he applies his will (*ussahati*); having applied his will, he scrutinises (*tūleti*); having scrutinised, he strives (*padahati*); resolutely striving, he realises with the body the ultimate truth (*paramasacca*) and sees it by penetrating it with wisdom (*paññā*).⁷¹

This process, if engaged in scrupulously, will eventually lead to the ‘final arrival at truth’ (*saccānupatti*) which seems to be equivalent to arhantship. This suggests that the depth of inquiry in the *Cankī Sutta* is rather more searching than it is with the Kālāmas. Kāpaṭika is concerned with the attainment of spiritual realisation not simply with the construction of an ethical code that will lead to mundane happiness. In view of this, the Buddha’s suggested method is correspondingly more rigorous and comprehensive.

Moreover, while there is clearly a place for faith within this process of spiritual discovery, it is evidently not blind faith of the brahminical sort but a provisional *belief* which provides a basis for further investigation. Having discovered, through one’s own experience, that a teacher is ethically pure, [99] one places provisional trust in that teacher by developing receptivity to his teaching. However, this trust only becomes firm at the point of ‘awakening to truth’.

In the *Vīmaṃsaka Sutta*⁷² the Buddha recommends a still more scrupulous and cautious approach. After having investigated a teacher – along the lines recommended in the *Cankī Sutta* – one should approach him and hear his teaching. Only after one has seen with direct knowledge (*abhiññā*) the truth of his teaching should one place faith in him. The Buddha concludes,

Bhikkhus, when anyone’s faith has been planted, rooted, and established in the Tathāgatha through these reasons, terms, and phrases, his faith is said to be supported by reasons, rooted in vision, firm.⁷³

We can therefore distinguish the rational confidence (*ākāraṇatī saddhā*) of the partially spiritually realised being from the blind faith (*amūlikā saddhā*) associated with the brahmins. But what order of experience was this rational confidence based on? What was the ground of the Buddha’s claim to knowledge?

THE BUDDHA'S BASIS FOR KNOWLEDGE

ALREADY I HAVE TOUCHED on a term, *abhiññā*, which refers to the special kind of seeing and knowing possessed by a spiritually realised being and which enables them to rest confident in their understanding, not reliant upon others. *Abhiññā* is most popularly understood to refer to a series of supernormal powers allegedly possessed by a fully enlightened being. However, only one of these, knowledge of the destruction of the taints (*āsavā*), seems to relate specifically to the content of spiritual realisation. This super-knowledge recalls the more archaic significance of the term *abhiññā* which is 'higher or special knowledge'. Seemingly, then, the term refers to an illumined means of cognition, the possession of which constitutes the beginnings of decisive spiritual realisation (Stream Entry). For the Buddha, it is this direct knowing alone that provides the basis for reliable knowledge claims.

However, *abhiññā* is not simply an abstract knowing but a profound sensitivity to experience that leads to a corresponding personal transformation. It may be described in terms of an acute, existential responsiveness to the [100] three characteristics of experience (*ti-lakkhana*) which leads to a complete reorganisation of values, desires, and views. Even at this exalted stage, the practitioner is nevertheless still vulnerable to misconceptions arising from greed and conceit, tendencies not yet fully eradicated. The culmination of the process of spiritual development is *pariññā*,⁷⁴ 'exact knowledge' or 'full understanding' (sometimes just *aññā*). This level of understanding belongs only to the fully enlightened and is, according to the Buddha, the only completely sure foundation for knowledge.

CONCLUSION

WE HAVE SEEN that the Buddha was critical of the grounds upon which knowledge was claimed that prevailed within his socio-religious culture. He rejected all manner of claims from authority as ultimately untrustworthy and was also suspicious of reason, at least in the sense of metaphysical speculation. For these unreliable sources of knowledge, the Buddha substituted the touchstone of experience and, ultimately, the direct intuitive knowing termed *pariññā*. The Buddha's conception of knowledge was a practical one; to know meant to be transformed by one's knowledge and so act on it. Knowing meant becoming a different person and living one's life differently, not merely acquiring abstract information to be filed away in one's mind.

Importantly, for the Buddha knowledge was not simply a cognitive shift – say, the adoption of a new set of views – but had affective (that is emotional) and volitional analogues too. In affective terms, Buddhist knowledge can be described in terms of joy (*sukha*), contentment (*santutṭhi*), the transcendence of suffering (*dukkha*). In volitional terms it may be described as a state of freedom (*vimokkha*), like the experience of a man being released from prison. The cognitive, affective, and volitional dimensions are all aspects of one integrated, unfolding experience. This suggests too that there may be different ways into knowledge.⁷⁵

In this essay I have concentrated primarily on a cognitive analysis but knowledge may be approached affectively and volitionally too. So a systematic practice of the Buddhist ethical code and a rigorous engagement in the development of positive mental states through meditation are as indispensable to the attainment of knowledge in Buddhism as is a refined critical faculty. [101] Wisdom in Buddhism is inherently ethical as is shown by the identification of wisdom (*paññā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*). In intellectual discussions of Buddhism the necessary affective and volitional work is often ignored but, if the Buddha's teaching is to be appreciated in an unprejudiced manner, this tendency must be resisted. We must always remember that the Buddha claimed to teach the end

of suffering and the way to the end of suffering. It is only through practising that way that we can ultimately disclose what knowledge is in the context of Buddhism.

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Notes

- ¹ *Aṅguttaranikāya*, III.7.65. A very similar sutta is found at *Aṅguttaranikāya* IV.20.193. Here the Buddha's interlocutor is Bhaddiya the Licchavī.
² Soma.
³ *ibid.*
⁴ Following Jayatilleke, p.172ff.
⁵ *Majjhimanikāya* 100.
⁶ Bodhi, p.820.
⁷ *Majjhimanikāya* 95.
⁸ Bodhi, p.779.
⁹ *Majjhimanikāya* 95.13.
¹⁰ Bodhi, p.1297.
¹¹ *Majjhimanikāya* 95.14.
¹² *Majjhimanikāya* 95.15.
¹³ Jayatilleke, p.177ff.
¹⁴ *Majjhimanikāya* 76.
¹⁵ *Majjhimanikāya* 76.24.
¹⁶ Bodhi, p.624.
¹⁷ Bodhi, p.780.

- ¹⁸ The *Tevijja Sutta*, *Dīghanikāya* 13, offers a similar criticism.
- ¹⁹ Jayatilleke, p.193ff.
- ²⁰ See, for example, *Majjhimanikāya*, ii.165ff.
- ²¹ Rhys-Davids.
- ²² Ñāṇamoli, p.175. Jayatilleke offers a plausible but rather technical argument to support such a translation (p.195ff).
- ²³ *Udāna* 4.8.
- ²⁴ Ireland, p.62.
- ²⁵ *Majjhimanikāya* 48.
- ²⁶ Bodhi, p.419.
- ²⁷ Woodward, Vol.1, p.171.
- ²⁸ *Majjhimanikāya* 76.24.
- ²⁹ Woodward, Vol.1, p.172.
- ³⁰ Jayatilleke, p.200.
- ³¹ Jayatilleke, p.201.
- ³² Ñāṇamoli, p.175.
- ³³ Jayatilleke, p.201.
- ³⁴ Ñāṇamoli, p.175.
- ³⁵ *Majjhimanikāya* 100.
- ³⁶ Bodhi p.820.
- ³⁷ Bodhi, p.270.
- ³⁸ Bodhi, p.227.
- ³⁹ This kind of approach has been identified and criticised in Jackson and Makransky. For instance, Makransky writes: “Under the rubric of religious studies, the functionally secular Western academy mines world religions for its use: to generate research findings, publications, conferences to explore whatever may be of current interest and benefit to the academy” (p.15).
- ⁴⁰ Jayatilleke, p.206.
- ⁴¹ *Majjhimanikāya* 76.
- ⁴² Bodhi, p.624-5.
- ⁴³ *Dīghanikāya* 1.34. The *Brahmajāla Sutta* (*Dīghanikāya* 1) also includes the theory that consciousness is permanent even though the senses are impermanent, that the world is neither finite nor infinite, and that the soul and the world are non-causal in origin within this class of reasoning. They are declared wrong views.
- ⁴⁴ Walshe, p.73.
- ⁴⁵ Rhys Davids.
- ⁴⁶ Walshe, pp.73–4.
- ⁴⁷ *Majjhimanikāya* 136.
- ⁴⁸ Bodhi, p.1062.
- ⁴⁹ Bodhi, p.1065.
- ⁵⁰ *Majjhimanikāya* 15.
- ⁵¹ Woodward, Vol.1 p.172.
- ⁵² Ñāṇamoli, p.175.
- ⁵³ Bodhi, p.780.
- ⁵⁴ Woodward, Vol.1 p.172.
- ⁵⁵ Ñāṇamoli, p.175.
- ⁵⁶ Bodhi, p.780.

⁵⁷ *Majjhimanikāya* 95.

⁵⁸ *Majjhimanikāya* 95.20.

⁵⁹ Bodhi, p.780.

⁶⁰ *Majjhimanikāya* 95.

⁶¹ Bodhi, p.780. This same list of five items is also found at *Samyuttanikāya* XII.68 and at *Samyuttanikāya* XXXV.152. The latter sutta affirms the inadequacy of the five grounds for yielding knowledge of whether or not one is enlightened and recommends a method (*pariyāya*) that consists in the personal investigation of the ethical quality of one's mental states for clarifying whether or not one has become liberated. Both texts seem to emphasise the primacy of direct, personal experience.

⁶² Bodhi, p.782.

⁶³ *Dīghanikāya* 25.7, Walshe p.387.

⁶⁴ Soma.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Itivuttaka* 42, *passim*.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Vinaya*. Cv.10.5, Ñāṇamoli, pp.107–8.

⁶⁹ *Majjhimanikāya* 95.

⁷⁰ *Majjhimanikāya* 95.15.

⁷¹ Bodhi, p.782. An almost identical passage is found *Majjhimanikāya* 70.23.

⁷² *Majjhimanikāya* 47.

⁷³ Bodhi, p.418.

⁷⁴ *Majjhimanikāya* 1.51.

⁷⁵ For a discussion on such matters see, for example, Sangharakshita (1991) Chapters 11 & 14.