

Study Guide for *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*

Texts 34 – 37, pp. 58-68

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34. Do Monks Benefit Others? (AN 3:60), pp. 58-61

Considering the text

In the first few sentences of this sutta the brahmin Saṅgārava asserts the superiority of the practice of sacrifice by the brahmins compared with the actions of those who go forth into the homeless life (such as the Buddha and his monastic disciples) to pursue the attainment of Nibbāna. Notice how the Buddha initially responds to Saṅgārava. How would you describe the Buddha's way of responding here?

Notice the qualities that Ānanda subsequently asks Saṅgārava to consider in contrasting these two practices. In what ways would the renunciate path be "simpler", "less harmful", or give "richer fruit and greater benefit" compared to the practice of Brahmanic sacrifice? Why might Saṅgārava have been unwilling to respond directly to Ānanda's question contrasting the renunciate path and the practice of sacrifice?

Note the thoughts attributed to the Buddha when Saṅgārava won't respond directly to Ānanda's question for the third time. What seems to be the Buddha's motivation here? How does the Buddha release Saṅgārava from the situation? How do you think the Buddha chose the topic that he did?

Of the three types of miracles (*pāṭihāriya*), or wonders, described by the Buddha in this text, note which one he appears to confirm as being the "most excellent and sublime"? What does the sutta say are the elements that comprise the miracle of instruction?

Questions for reflection

Consider the ways in which the Buddha responds to the challenging statements of the brahmin Saṅgārava at the beginning of this sutta, and after Saṅgārava evades the question posed by Ānanda. How would you contrast the Buddha's response with common ways of debating religious differences in our day and age? How would it feel to you to be in Saṅgārava's shoes and have the Buddha respond to you in this way?

Do you believe that people perform supernormal acts or acts of mind reading as described here? What informs your belief about this? Have you had personal experience of any of them, or heard reliable accounts of such phenomena?

Why do you think that the Buddha raises the question, and appears to confirm, that the most excellent and sublime of the three miracles is the miracle of instruction?

Read over the three statements that are given to exemplify the wonder of instruction. How do these statements strike you in light of your understanding of the Buddha's path? Can you identify elements of the Buddha's path that correspond to each of the three statements?

Suggestions for practice

Consider cultivating the compassion and sensitivity manifested by the Buddha in this sutta toward those who may disagree with you about religious questions. What qualities do you think would be needed to develop such a response? How would you go about nurturing these qualities in yourself? Consider making a plan to support this cultivation and try carrying it out.

Consider the three statements given to illustrate the wonder of instruction. Based on your knowledge of the Dhamma, try making a list of ways that the Buddha teaches how one should think, and how one should not think.

Similarly, what do you understand the Buddha has taught that one should attend to and not attend to? Also, what one should give up and what should one dwell in?

If you like, use these reflections to identify areas to cultivate or let go of in your practice.

35. Three Sektarian Tenets (AN 3:61), pp. 61-64

Considering the text

After reading the three sektarian tenets try to express them in your own words.

The sutta lists ten unwholesome actions that one may engage in. If any of the three sektarian views are true, how would such unwholesome acts come about? According to the sutta what are the consequences of holding any of these three beliefs? What would living by any of the three tenets mean for viewing oneself as an “ascetic”?

What does the Buddha say is the Dhamma taught by him in this sutta?

Note how the sutta describes the six elements (*dhātu*), the six bases of contact (*phassāyatana*), the 18 mental examinations (*manopavicāra*), and the initial description of the Four Noble Truths (*ariyasaccāni*).

The subsequent, longer explanations of the first and fourth Noble Truths are given here in a way that is found elsewhere in the Sutta Piṭaka (see, for example, [SN 56:11](#)). However, the longer explanations of the second and third Noble Truths are more unusual, drawing on the formula of dependent origination. Why might the Buddha have chosen to describe them this way in this sutta?

Questions for reflection

Do any of the three sektarian tenets as described here seem to correspond to beliefs held by our contemporaries? How does the sektarian view given in the sutta, “Whatever a person experiences, be it pleasure, pain or a neutral feeling, all that is caused by past action” differ from the Buddha’s teaching of kamma?

Consider the consequences described in the sutta for holding each of the three sektarian tenets. Do you think that these results would follow as described? If not, what would make things come out differently?

Why might the Buddha have chosen in this sutta to describe the Dhamma he taught in terms of the six elements, six bases of contact, 18 mental examinations, and Four Noble Truths? In what ways does the Dhamma he teaches here contrast with that of the three sektarian tenets?

Consider how the explanations for the second and third Noble Truths are elaborated here in terms of dependent origination. In what ways do you think this brings out the meaning of these truths?

Suggestions for practice

Do any of your habitual thoughts or beliefs lead to spiritual inaction in some form? See if you can identify all such beliefs in yourself. What steps might you take to change these beliefs?

Try working with the six bases of contact, or with the 18 mental examinations, as a mindfulness practice. While sitting in meditation, or at other times, bring awareness to experience as it is occurring through the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or the mind. In the case of the 18 mental examinations, note how whatever is presenting itself at one of the sense bases may give rise to joy, sadness, or indifference. See what insights come from this practice.

36. To the Kālāmas (AN 3:65), pp. 64-67

Considering the text

What do the Kālāmas say is the reason they are in doubt about what teaching is true and what is false? Spend some time taking in each of the ten criteria that the sutta says are not adequate for accepting a teaching as true.

What things does the text say one should know for oneself in order to evaluate the truth of a teaching?

Following the explanation of what should and should not be relied upon in accepting a teaching as true, the Buddha asks the Kālāmas to consider whether the arising of greed, of hatred, and of delusion is for one's welfare or harm. Note the kind of "reasoning", or appeal to experience, that takes place here. In what ways does this clarify what was meant by the Buddha in the first part of this sutta?

According to the text if one develops the four *Brahmavihāras* to the extent of freeing the mind of enmity, and purifying the mind, it produces four assurances in this life. Note the explanations of the four assurances.

Questions for reflection

Do you think the sutta is saying that one should never use any of the ten criteria or sources that are not adequate for accepting a teaching? If one were to use them, how do you think one could do so in keeping with the approach given in the sutta?

[Majjhima Nikāya 95](#) addresses some of these same issues, including a discussion of how one can use five similar sources or criteria in a way that preserves or safeguards truth. Read over the section in MN 95 about "five things that can turn out in two ways", including the paragraphs explaining the "safeguarding of the truth". Consider how this approach corresponds to what is taught in the Kālāma Sutta about accepting a teaching as true.

Suggestions for practice

Reflect on the ten criteria described in this sutta as inadequate for accepting a teaching as true. In what ways do you make use of these criteria or sources. Do you rely on any of them to reach conclusions about what is really true or not true?

Cultivate the practice for preserving or safeguarding truth as described in MN 95 (see [Thanissaro](#), or ITBW text III,5, pp. 96-103). To do this, carefully distinguish in your thinking and your words what you have come to believe on the basis of faith, on the basis of approval, oral tradition, reasoned cogitation, or acceptance of a view as a result of pondering it, from things that you know to be true directly. Observe how this practice affects your state of mind and your clarity of mind. (For a brief explanation of the meaning of the five terms, faith, approval, etc., see ITBW, n. 21, p. 433.)

37. Lust, Hatred and Delusion (AN 3:68), pp. 67-68

Considering the text

What are the distinctions between lust (*rāga*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*) described in this sutta?

What does the text say is the cause for the arising of unarisen lust and the strengthening of arisen lust? What is the cause for the arising of unarisen hatred and the strengthening of arisen hatred? And, what is the cause for the arising of unarisen delusion and the strengthening of arisen delusion? How does improper attention (*ayoniso manasikāra*) play a role in each case?

According to the sutta what is the cause for the non-arising of unarisen lust and the abandoning of arisen lust? Similarly, what is the cause for the non-arising of unarisen hatred and the abandoning of arisen hatred, and for the non-arising of unarisen delusion and the abandoning of arisen delusion? How does proper attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) play a role in each of these cases?

Questions for reflection

Why do you think that lust would be less blamable but hard to remove, hatred more blamable but easier to remove, and delusion very blamable and hard to remove? What do you think are the implications of these claims?

In your experience, what would be involved in attending to a “beautiful object” in such a way that unarisen lust would arise, and arisen lust would be strengthened? Similarly, what would be involved in attending to a “repulsive object” in such a way that unarisen hatred would arise, and arisen hatred would be strengthened? How does one attend improperly such that unarisen delusion would arise, and arisen delusion would be strengthened?

How do you think would one attend to a “foul or unattractive object” in such a way that unarisen lust would not arise, and arisen lust would be abandoned? What would be involved in attending to “the liberation of mind by loving-kindness” so that unarisen hatred would not arise, and arisen hatred would be abandoned? And, how would one attend properly such that unarisen delusion would not arise, and arisen delusion would be abandoned?

Suggestions for practice

Try intentionally noticing when the mind perceives an attractive object, either as an external phenomenon, or as internal thoughts or sensations, or both. Notice how lust (*rāga*) arises in connection with the perception, whether the lust is subtle or blatant, weak or strong, etc. How does mindful observation seem to affect the experience? Try cultivating other aspects of appropriate attention in addition to mindfulness when noticing an attractive object.

You may wish develop the same practice in response to the perception of a repulsive or irritating object, noticing how the experience of the object gives rise to hatred or aversion (*dosa*). (You may want to be careful with this contemplation as it can put you in a bad mood.)

Similarly, try bringing mindfulness and appropriate attention to the perception of an unattractive object. (May also put one in an irritable mood initially.)

Consider cultivating the “liberation of mind through loving-kindness” as an antidote to hatred and aversion. (Much better for one’s frame of mind.)

Lastly, consider working intentionally with appropriate attention, observing how it affects the experience of lust and hatred, and especially noticing how it affects the arising or diminishment of delusion (*moha*).

Abbreviations and References:

AN	Āṅguttara Nikāya (Numerical Discourses).
ITBW	Bodhi, Bhikkhu, trans. and ed., <i>In the Buddha’s Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon</i> , Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005.
MN	Majjhima Nikāya (Middle Length Discourses).
NDB	Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans. and ed., <i>Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: An Anthology of Suttas from the Āṅguttara Nikāya</i> , Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1999.
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya (Connected Discourses).