

To the Kālāmas

Kālāma Sutta (AN 3:66)

Translator: Bhikkhu Thānissaro

Translator's Note:

Although this discourse is often cited as the Buddha's carte blanche for following one's own sense of right and wrong, it actually sets a standard much more rigorous than that. Traditions are not to be followed simply because they are traditions. Reports (such as historical accounts or news) are not to be followed simply because the source seems reliable. One's own preferences are not to be followed simply because they seem logical or resonate with one's feelings. Instead, any view or belief must be tested by the results it yields when put into practice; and—to guard against the possibility of any bias or limitations in one's understanding of those results—they must further be checked against the experience of people who are observant and wise. The ability to question and test one's beliefs in an appropriate way is called appropriate attention. The ability to recognize and choose wise people as mentors is called having admirable friends. According to [Iti 16–17](#), these are, respectively, the most important internal and external factors for attaining the goal of the practice. For further thoughts on how to test a belief in practice, see [MN 60](#), [MN 61](#), [MN 95](#), [AN 7:80](#), and [AN 8:53](#). For thoughts on how to judge whether another person is wise, see [MN 110](#), [AN 4:192](#), and [AN 8:54](#).

Synopsis (by Jack)

If the underlying argument in the Kālāma Sutta is a little unclear, a brief synopsis shows that it circles back on itself in order to explain why the Kālāmas' worries are misplaced:

Do not worry about what you do not know, but turn your attention to making good use of what you do know: that you are prone to suffering. Your pain is mirrored in others and theirs in yours. The root causes of suffering are three types of intentional urge: greed, aversion and delusion. They can be diminished by practising four kinds of goodwill (the four brahmaviharas): loving kindness (metta), compassion (karunā), empathetic joy (muditā), and equanimity (upekkhā). That way, freedom from intentional desire, including freedom from desire for a better future, becomes a route to happiness. There is no need for doubt or knowledge about what might happen in this life or after this life, for anyone who behaves without ill-will is less likely to be adversely affected by the consequences of their actions in the present or in the future.

The Text

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One, on a wandering tour among the Kosalans with a large Saṅgha of monks, arrived at Kesaputta, a town of the Kālāmas. The Kālāmas of Kesaputta heard it said, “Gotama the contemplative—the son of the Sakyans, having gone forth from the Sakyan clan—has arrived at Kesaputta. And of that Master Gotama this fine reputation has spread: ‘He is indeed a Blessed One, worthy & rightly self-awakened, consummate in clear-knowing & conduct, Well-Gone, an expert with regard to the cosmos, unexcelled trainer of people fit to be tamed, teacher of devas & human beings, awakened, blessed. He makes known—having realized it through direct knowledge—this world with its devas, Māras, & Brahmās, this generation with its contemplatives & brahmans, its royalty & commonfolk; he explains the Dhamma admirable in the beginning, admirable in the middle, admirable in the end; he expounds the holy life both in its particulars & in its essence, entirely perfect, surpassingly pure. It is good to see such a worthy one.’”

Discussion Notes *This paragraph sets the scene: the Buddha is said to arrive with a large retinue of monks, so the visit is inevitably a significant hiatus in village routine. And his reputation comes before him: he makes known...this world...having realized it through direct knowledge...he explains the Dhamma...he expounds the holy life. Thus, it is suggested that he is well-qualified to teach both the meaning of, and the appropriate response to, the conundrums of existence that all sentient beings must encounter.*

So the Kālāmas of Kesaputta went to the Blessed One. On arrival, some of them bowed down to the Blessed One and sat to one side. Some of them exchanged courteous greetings with him and, after an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, sat to one side. Some of them sat to one side having saluted him with their hands palm-to-palm over their hearts. Some of them sat to one side having announced their name & clan. Some of them sat to one side in silence.

The different ways in which the Kālāmas greet the Buddha suggest that he is held in different levels of esteem: some of the audience remain to be impressed.

As they were sitting there, the Kālāmas of Kesaputta said to the Blessed One, “Lord, there are some contemplatives & brahmans who come to Kesaputta. They expound & glorify their own doctrines, but as for the doctrines of others, they deprecate them, disparage them, show contempt for them, & pull them to pieces. And then other contemplatives & brahmans come to Kesaputta. They expound & glorify their own doctrines, but as for the doctrines of others, they deprecate them, disparage them, show contempt for them, & pull them to pieces. They leave us absolutely uncertain & in doubt: Which of these venerable contemplatives & brahmans are speaking the truth, and which ones are lying?”

The Aṭṭhakavagga of the (probably early) Sutta-Nipāta indicates that the Buddha was not in favour of views (opinions) on the grounds that their expression leads to disagreement. That sort of heated debate seems to be what the Kālāmas describe in this paragraph, leading to their resulting doubt and uncertainty. Their specific question to the Buddha is about the truth or otherwise of explanations about the nature of existence that they have received from other wandering teachers. Clearly, they consider that differentiating truth from falsity is the obvious way to eliminate doubt.

“Of course you are uncertain, Kālāmas. Of course you are in doubt. When there are reasons for doubt, uncertainty is born. So in this case, Kālāmas, don’t go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, ‘This contemplative is our teacher.’ When you know for yourselves that, ‘These qualities are unskillful; these qualities are blameworthy; these qualities are criticized by the observant; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to harm & to suffering’—then you should abandon them.

In the case of uncertainty, the Buddha recommends that the Kālāmas ‘should not go by’ a list of what appear to be justifications for knowledge: grounds for belief that any particular statement is true. Presumably, ‘should not go by’ means something like ‘do not allow your life to be organised according to...’. There is a hint in this choice of words that the truth-value of statements matters less than their use-value as guides for life.

Of the means of justification mentioned, five (1, 2, 3, 4, 10) boil down to forms of testimony. We cannot be sure, but, as a subtle thinker, there is a good chance that the Buddha was aware that his own recommendations were also just testimony, therefore his own words must be amongst what the Kālāmas ‘should not go by’. This is another example of the paradox, seen first in the Aṭṭhakavagga, that arguing against the holding of views (opinions, or more broadly, any explanation whatever) itself constitutes a view. It is a reasonable conclusion that the Buddha was at least prepared to speak against the constraints imposed by this paradox.

Two items on the list (5 and 6) refer to deduction (logical inference, normally in the form of a syllogism). One (7) seems to be reasoning on the basis of analogy or metaphorical similarity, where the target of the investigation is held to be so like the quality of the metaphorical source of the analogy, that it is held to be in that respect identical; thus, knowledge expands from the known to encompass dissimilar unknowns that are similar in some respect. Another (8) refers to communal agreement after some sort of reflection, but is mainly based on conformity or ‘consilience’ with the rest of that society’s wider body of understanding.

The remaining method of justification (9) seems to present some difficulty.¹ Thānissaro translates bhabbarūpatāya as ‘probability’, which is a markedly different rendering from some other translations: Bhikkhu Soma has ‘...upon another’s seeming ability’; Bhikkhu Sujato has ‘...appearance of competence’; Bhikkhu Buddhadasa gives ‘...believable due to credibility or prestige’. For the root word bhabba, the Pali Text Society Dictionary has ‘able, capable, fit for’ and for bhabbatā it has ‘possibility’. It may be that ...rūpatāya signifies the form of the agent of a possible opinion, so making this another case of testimony, as the other translators seem to suggest, but is not clear that the PTS reading of bhabbatā as ‘capability’ or ‘possibility’ can be stretched to include ‘probability’. This translational difficulty would be only a minor issue, where it not that the concept of probability is an important component of the empirical method of justification that underpins science. When first propounded, a scientific theory has a low level of probability until the logical inferences that constitute the theory can be confirmed by means of observation – often an instrumental observation during an experiment - but always an observation which is capable of careful and precise replication by other persons. With increasing observation comes increasing probability that a theory is true, but never certainty, for either the theory or the confirming observation might yet turn out to be in some way false. But many theories, such as the view that the earth is round, are so frequently confirmed by observation that their probability, numerically expressed, comes close to certainty: close to 100%. It would be anachronistic for the Buddha to have understood the scientific method, which was not clearly propounded until Francis Bacon in the fifteenth century AD, so it is unlikely that he was referring to the quantitative implication of

'probability'. In view of these translation issues, it is likely that the Buddha's ninth form of justification refers to testimony about possibility.

To summarise: the Buddha's list, his ten ways of justifying truth, none of which he recommends, can be reduced to four: testimony (1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 10), logical deduction (5, 6), analogy (7), and agreement (8). The scientific method of inductive inference is not in play.

The Buddha now makes a subtle shift in his argument², turning the discussion away from the Kālāma's question about truth in general, in order to focus on ethical issues in particular. After rejecting knowledge justified by all the external means of which he was aware, the Buddha seems to accept intuition as a valid form of justification: 'When you know for yourselves...', at least with respect to 'qualities that are unskillful...blameworthy...criticised by the observant...lead[ing] to harm and suffering.' Since we can only rely on the words of this recorded saying, we cannot know if the Buddha gave further reasons why intuition should be considered particularly reliable in matters ethical, or how he proposed to differentiate the apportioning of 'blame' or 'criticism by the observant' from the other forms of testimony that he had just rejected. It is possible that he was impressed by the combination of intuition, which is internal to the mind, with criticism by the observant (elsewhere translated as 'criticism by the wise'), which is external input from other people. That said, the means are not clarified as to how to determine who is observant or wise from who is neglectful or foolish. Probably, the Buddha means anyone who has fully understood the four Noble Truths.

"What do you think, Kālāmas? When greed arises in a person, does it arise for welfare or for harm?"

"For harm, lord."

"And this greedy person, overcome by greed, his mind possessed by greed, kills living beings, takes what is not given, goes after another person's wife, tells lies, and induces others to do likewise, all of which is for long-term harm & suffering."

"Yes, lord."

"Now, what do you think, Kālāmas? When aversion arises in a person, does it arise for welfare or for harm?"

"For harm, lord."

"And this aversive person, overcome by aversion, his mind possessed by aversion, kills living beings, takes what is not given, goes after another person's wife, tells lies, and induces others to do likewise, all of which is for long-term harm & suffering."

"Yes, lord."

"Now, what do you think, Kālāmas? When delusion arises in a person, does it arise for welfare or for harm?"

"For harm, lord."

“And this deluded person, overcome by delusion, his mind possessed by delusion, kills living beings, takes what is not given, goes after another person’s wife, tells lies, and induces others to do likewise, all of which is for long-term harm & suffering.”

Notice that the Buddha is talking about greed, hatred and delusion as they ‘arise’ within a person. These are three very basic motivational, psychological and intentional categories. They are motivational because they are the cause of action, even in the most primitive sentient beings, which move towards some things (usually food sources), away from some things (sources of threat to life) or dither over what to do (strange or unidentified things). These three are psychological because they are the basic reactive functions of the central nervous system, as the variety of external attractants, threats and strangenesses leads, over the course of evolutionary time, to the development of increasingly sophisticated neuronal responsivity (minds). They are intentional categories because they are, from a Buddhist point of view, all varieties of thirst (taṇhā); from a cognitive-scientific point of view they are unconscious attitudes of intent towards external objects.³

The Buddha’s talk of being ‘overcome’ and ‘possessed’ by greed, hatred and delusion gives some indication that the arising of these attitudes of intent is an unconscious process. It takes conscious awareness to avoid being overcome or possessed in individual cases, and it takes habitual practice to avoid being overcome or possessed in oft-repeated cases.

Presumably because he is in discussion with lay persons,⁴ The Buddha uses the example of the five ethical trainings for lay-persons (pañcasikkhapada): not to kill, steal, engage in sexual misconduct, lie, or induce others to any of these unethical behaviours. The fifth lay precept of ‘abstention from intoxication’ is omitted.

“Yes, lord.”

“So what do you think, Kālāmas: Are these qualities skillful or unskillful?”

“Unskillful, lord.”

“Blameworthy or blameless?”

“Blameworthy, lord.”

“Criticized by the observant or praised by the observant?”

“Criticized by the observant, lord.”

“When adopted & carried out, do they lead to harm & to suffering, or not?”

“When adopted & carried out, they lead to harm & to suffering. That is how it appears to us.”

The Buddha presents a simple scheme for knowing when the consequences of any action are likely to prove unethical, based on an intuition that they are as likely to be harmful to others (normally indirectly known) as they are for oneself (normally directly-known). Thus, Buddhist ethics proceeds from consequences of which one has direct knowledge, to consequences that

can only be indirectly known, via an assumption that all persons normally experience roughly the same sorts of feelings.

“So, as I said, Kālāmas: ‘Don’t go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, “This contemplative is our teacher.” When you know for yourselves that, “These qualities are unskillful; these qualities are blameworthy; these qualities are criticized by the observant; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to harm & to suffering” —then you should abandon them.’ Thus was it said. And in reference to this was it said.

“Now, Kālāmas, don’t go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, ‘This contemplative is our teacher.’ When you know for yourselves that, ‘These qualities are skillful; these qualities are blameless; these qualities are praised by the observant; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to welfare & to happiness’ —then you should enter & remain in them.

It is clear from the two paragraphs above that Buddhist ethics is not limited to the kammically-formative intentions (greed hatred and delusion), which, once ‘adopted’ underpin any action, Here, Buddhist ethics also concerns the actions that may actually be ‘carried out’. Thus, an accidental act may not generate kamma, but still it should be avoided by vigilant attention.

“What do you think, Kālāmas? When lack of greed arises in a person, does it arise for welfare or for harm?”

“For welfare, lord.”

“And this ungreedy person, not overcome by greed, his mind not possessed by greed, doesn’t kill living beings, take what is not given, go after another person’s wife, tell lies, or induce others to do likewise, all of which is for long-term welfare & happiness.”

“Yes, lord.”

“What do you think, Kālāmas? When lack of aversion arises in a person, does it arise for welfare or for harm?”

“For welfare, lord.”

“And this unaversive person, not overcome by aversion, his mind not possessed by aversion, doesn’t kill living beings, take what is not given, go after another person’s wife, tell lies, or induce others to do likewise, all of which is for long-term welfare & happiness.”

“Yes, lord.”

“What do you think, Kālāmas? When lack of delusion arises in a person, does it arise for welfare or for harm?”

“For welfare, lord.”

“And this undeluded person, not overcome by delusion, his mind not possessed by delusion, doesn’t kill living beings, take what is not given, go after another person’s wife, tell lies, or induce others to do likewise, all of which is for long-term welfare & happiness.”

“Yes, lord.”

“So what do you think, Kālāmas: Are these qualities skillful or unskillful?”

“Skillful, lord.”

“Blameworthy or blameless?”

“Blameless, lord.”

“Criticized by the observant or praised by the observant?”

“Praised by the observant, lord.”

“When adopted & carried out, do they lead to welfare & to happiness, or not?”

“When adopted & carried out, they lead to welfare & to happiness. That is how it appears to us.”

“So, as I said, Kālāmas: ‘Don’t go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, “This contemplative is our teacher.” When you know for yourselves that, “These qualities are skillful; these qualities are blameless; these qualities are praised by the observant; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to welfare & to happiness” —then you should enter & remain in them.’ Thus was it said. And in reference to this was it said.

It is significant that the section above does not replace the three poisons of ‘greed, aversion and delusion’ with positive alternatives, but refers to ‘lack of’, ‘not overcome by’, ‘not possessed by’, greed aversion and delusion. These absences of intention are what is being praised as skillful, blameless, praised, leading to welfare and happiness. How so?

The vigilant follower of the Buddha avoids doubt and uncertainty about what to do, by remaining skilfully aware of their underlying state of their mind, prior to the emergence of any underlying or unconscious intentions, and prior to any action. This is an inherent or preparatory (prior to any action) state of mind, a mind at rest, worthy in itself and occurring prior to any action that might be ethical or unethical. This is an early indication of the view, widespread in the later Buddhist tradition, that the mind, when at rest and free from greed, aversion and self-dulling or delusion, does not just sink into neutral blankness, but displays inherent qualities of clarity, sensitivity and responsiveness, all of which are wholesome and ethically benign. This underlying state of mind is often metaphorically described as open, spacious, bright and luminous.

This state of mind bears comparison, or is maybe synonymous with, the liberating condition described as aimlessness, desirelessness or wishlessness (Skt. apraṇihita): just being at peace and acting without intention. It is also reminiscent of the concept of wu-wei, which under the Confucians meant action without effort in accordance with the natural order of things, before evolving under Taoism to encompass the state of mind that gives rise to such action.

Note that this greed-, aversion- and delusion-free state of affairs is both commended and provides a foundation for Buddhist ethics (sīla), but that it does not specifically describe what to do: it is not yet a system for assisting judgment about what actions to take in complex or difficult ethical cases. Such cases often involve weighing-up ethical imperatives that are in conflict (such as the right to life and the certification of brain death for organ transplantation), or dilemmas that have not previously arisen (such as limits to free speech in social media), or events having unanticipated or unknown consequences (such as new scientific and engineering innovations like the benefits of nuclear power versus the half-life of the waste, or the continuing manufacture of plastics that turn out to be non-biodegradable, toxic and environmentally-invasive). Buddhists still have work to do in these complex ethical cases.

“Now, Kālāmas, one who is a disciple of the noble ones—thus devoid of greed, devoid of ill will, undeluded, alert, & resolute—keeps pervading the first direction [the east]—as well as the second direction, the third, & the fourth—with an awareness imbued with goodwill. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, & all around, everywhere & in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with goodwill: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.

“He keeps pervading the first direction—as well as the second direction, the third, & the fourth—with an awareness imbued with compassion. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, & all around, everywhere & in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with compassion: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.

“He keeps pervading the first direction—as well as the second direction, the third, & the fourth—with an awareness imbued with empathetic joy. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, & all around, everywhere & in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with empathetic joy: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.

“He keeps pervading the first direction—as well as the second direction, the third, & the fourth—with an awareness imbued with equanimity. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, & all around, everywhere & in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with equanimity: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.

The idea of pervasion in all directions springs from Indian (Vedic/Brahmanic) ritual practice, with the magical implication that the four ‘divine abodes’ or brahmavihārās: goodwill (or loving-kindness: mettā), compassion (karuṇā), sympathetic joy (muditā), and equanimity (upekkhā), are qualities that, by pervading the world, can actually change it for the better.⁵

In a religion that downplays the self-other distinction, the sentiment of muditā has wider implications than just rejoicing in the good fortune and well-being of others. It includes

appreciation and gratitude for aspects of others and aspects of oneself, and it is an antidote to the suffering that people inflict on themselves through jealousy. Rather than suppressing jealousy by attempting to create artificial feelings of rejoicing in the good fortune of others, it is possible to feel the suffering that jealousy causes in oneself and in others, and feel joy when jealousy fades in the light of compassionate understanding.

In effect, equanimity helps to guard against movement away from the desireless (apraṇihita) state of mind, into a mind activated by greed, aversion and delusion. How is this to be achieved, when the mind is so quick to respond to emotion and feeling (affectively) in response to external inputs? If we take the mind to be intimately associated (or even identical) with the operations of the brain, then affective responses in the amygdala and insula are normally kept under neuro-chemical restraint. These are ‘fixed-action-patterns’, which can be instantaneously released and which quickly overcome all other cognitive operations in an overwhelming response to threat.⁶ It is a matter of opinion, how far the practice of equanimity could prevent such evolved mind/brain quick-response mechanisms. But still, equanimity is like homeostasis: a harmonious, balanced state of affairs, both physically for the body and psychologically for the mind. And while desires, aversions and confusions do arise unconsciously, not all will instigate berserk reactions. A state of equanimity allows time and sufficient reflection for most, if not all, intentional urges to be forestalled and simply not done.

Similarly, kindness and compassion are to be undertaken with equanimity, both in formal ritual practice when they are undertaken as deliberate actions, and over the course of ordinary, informal interactions. Buddhism is less about rules ‘to go by’ than about training and practice, with the underlying assumption that when things go awry one can always make another attempt. Magical or not, pervading the world with the brahmavihārās is a steady and ongoing process.

“Now, Kālāmas, one who is a disciple of the noble ones—his mind thus free from hostility, free from ill will, undefiled, & pure—acquires four assurances in the here & now:

“‘If there is a world after death, if there is the fruit & result of actions rightly & wrongly done, then this is the basis by which, with the break-up of the body, after death, I will reappear in a good destination, a heavenly world.’ This is the first assurance he acquires.

“‘But if there is no world after death, if there is no fruit & result of actions rightly & wrongly done, then here in the present life I look after myself with ease—free from hostility, free from ill will, free from trouble.’ This is the second assurance he acquires.

“‘If evil is done through acting, still I have willed no evil for anyone. Having done no evil action, from where will suffering touch me?’ This is the third assurance he acquires.

“‘But if no evil is done through acting, then I can assume myself pure in both respects.’ This is the fourth assurance he acquires.

“One who is a disciple of the noble ones—his mind thus free from hostility, free from ill will, undefiled, & pure—acquires these four assurances in the here & now.”

In effect, the sutta comes full circle, as the Buddha turns away from giving the Kālāmas his ethical/psychological explanation of what ‘to go by’, towards finally giving an appropriate answer to the question that they actually put to him. The teachings that had confused them

were most likely to have been the views about kamma and rebirth, which are described in the *Samaññaphala Sutta* as the opinions of six other wandering renunciants; the followers of *Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta* (Jains), *Pūrana Kassapa*, *Pakrudha Kaccāyana* and *Makkhali Gosala* (*Ājīvakas*), *Sānjaya Belatthiputta* (Sceptic) and *Ajita Kesakambalī* (Materialist).

The Buddha now addresses some of these views, but without assessing whether they are true or false.⁷ Instead, he treats these views as hypothetical or fictional: 'If there is a world after death...'. He describes these hypotheses, not as truths, but as psychological 'assurances' ('solaces' or 'consolations' in other translations). His underlying point seems to be that opinions about what happens after death cannot be known to be true or false because they are unjustified, either by any of the ten means of justification that he rejects, or by personal experience that might lead to intuitive 'know[ing] in yourself', or by the opinion of 'the wise'. The paradox here is that [elsewhere] the Buddha is reported to claim direct knowledge of his own rebirth as part of an enlightenment experience.

Still, the Kālāmas do not claim that sort of direct knowledge, and the Buddha only points out the assurances that they can obtain as a side-effect of making their minds 'free from hostility, ill-will, undefiled and pure...'.⁸

“So it is, Blessed One. So it is, O One Well-Gone. One who is a disciple of the noble ones—his mind thus free from hostility, free from ill will, undefiled, & pure—acquires four assurances in the here & now:

“‘If there is a world after death, if there is the fruit & result of actions rightly & wrongly done, then this is the basis by which, with the break-up of the body, after death, I will reappear in a good destination, a heavenly world.’ This is the first assurance he acquires.

This is a simple expression of the view of kamma and rebirth held by both Buddhists and Jains.

“‘But if there is no world after death, if there is no fruit & result of actions rightly & wrongly done, then here in the present life I look after myself with ease—free from hostility, free from ill will, free from trouble.’ This is the second assurance he acquires.

This logical alternative roughly encompasses both the materialist view of Ajita Kesakambalī and the fatalist (niyati) view espoused by the Ājīvakas.

“‘If evil is done through acting, still I have willed no evil for anyone. Having done no evil action, from where will suffering touch me?’ This is the third assurance he acquires.

This alternative is worded confusingly. It may be an attempt to differentiate between the Jain view that any action has kammic consequences for a future rebirth, and the Buddhist view that it is the intention preceding the action that generates kammic consequences.

“‘But if no evil is done through acting, then I can assume myself pure in both ways.’ This is the fourth assurance he acquires.

Again this alternative is not clearly expressed. It seems to mean that a person may be reassured that they can be pure in two respects: firstly, if actions do not generate kamma; and secondly, whatever the way in which kamma is generated, if their intentions and actions have been untainted by greed, aversion delusion.

“One who is a disciple of the noble ones—his mind thus free from hostility, free from ill will, undefiled, & pure—acquires these four assurances in the here & now.

“Magnificent, lord! Magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what was overturned, to reveal what was hidden, to show the way to one who was lost, or to carry a lamp into the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way has the Blessed One—through many lines of reasoning—made the Dhamma clear. We go to the Blessed One for refuge, to the Dhamma, and to the Saṅgha of monks. May the Blessed One remember us as lay followers who have gone to him for refuge, from this day forward, for life.”

As is usually reported, those who hear the Buddha’s explanations are mightily impressed. That they choose to use metaphors to praise the teaching, and that they also praise his reasoning, suggests that they remain wedded (as is their right) to some of the means of justification that the Buddha suggested they should not ‘go by’. Their attitude is understandable, for no explanation would be meaningful if it were not underpinned by logic and illustrated by simile. Whether any explanation is true remains a separate question.

¹ Here is another case of Quine’s ‘Indeterminacy of Translation’: without a perfect translation manual, there can be no surety as to the precise extension of the meanings of a word for an unknown community of native language speakers.

² It can be argued that this shift is inappropriate, since he is moving away from addressing the question put to him by the Kālāmas.

³ Hulse, D., Read, C.N., Schroeder, T., 2004, ‘The Impossibility of Conscious Desire’, in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 41 (1), pp. 73-80.

⁴ It has been suggested that the Kālāmas were Brahmins.

⁵ An action or practice is magical for a particular community if it exerts an effect in ways that cannot be explained.

⁶ For an explanation of fixed-action-patterns, see: Panksepp, J., 1998, *Affective Neuroscience: the foundations of human and animal emotion*, (Oxford, O.U.P.).

⁷ One of the discussants remarks that: ‘Whatever the original question as worded...practically what the Kālāmas wanted to know as individuals...is ‘what should we do...what is the best way ahead for us/me? Jiyu Kennett sometimes spoke of the ‘three questions’: 1) The question a person asks, 2) The question a person is afraid to ask, 3) The question of which they may be unaware but which is always a matter of will. It seems as if uncertainty about their own basis for knowing, and for a way ahead, had been blocking and binding the Kālāmas. The Buddha tried to address this by answering the ‘third question’ illuminatingly, and by providing a liberating solution.’