TEXT AND CONTEXT: A HERMENEUTICAL STUDY OF THE WAYS THE BUDDHA ANSWERS QUESTIONS

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Text and Context: A Hermeneutical Study of the Ways the Buddha Answers Questions

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I hereby declare that this dissertation has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at any other institution, and that it is entirely my own work.

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ABSTRACT

Text and Context: A Hermeneutical Study of the Ways

the Buddha Answers Questions

By

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The central thesis of this project, *Text and Context: A Hermeneutical Study of the Ways the Buddha Answers Questions* seeks to explore the pedagogical features of the Buddha through looking at the methods in which the Buddha replied to his interlocutors within the early Buddhist suttas. We can say that there are four specific ways in which the Buddha chose to answer enquiries. These are: categorical, analytical, counter-questioning, and silence. This project limits itself to the Suttapiṭaka of the Pāli Nikāyas. In this work, I select certain discourses from the Sutta Nikāyas as the main focus, while making references and citing other discourses as support. I will also use Buddhist commentary such as the *Visudhimagga* as secondary source. It is important to note, these selected suttas are well serve in my investigations of the Buddha's dialectical modes. Besides, they are well-known and widely discussed in the scholarly world.

Approaching this dissertation through the hermeneutical[1] lens of *geistige*, each type of response is examined per chapter. For each chapter, one to three suttas (such as SN 44.10, MN 72, AN 3.65, MN 63, MN 71, and MN 90) are chosen for analysis, to show how the Buddha responded to a certain question or subject matter. Here, I will especially consider the Buddha's methods as pedagogy, or methods of guidance.

[1] Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 77. Note: Here, hermeneutics is described as the art of understanding and interpreting a text.

Overall, the dissertation asserts that the Buddha's dialogical modes are a demonstration of his pedagogical method. It shed light on different dialectical modes of the Buddha, such as the novel use of silence, counter-questioning, analytical style, and categorical method. It seeks to provide an alternative interpretation and perspective regarding the selected discourses mentioned above. The aspiration is to make a contribution to the scholarly world on the hermeneutical way of looking at the Buddhist suttas, through exploring the fourfold answering methods.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DN— *Dīgha Nikāya*

MN— *Majjhima Nikāya*

SN— *Saṃyutta Nikāya*

AN— *Aṅguttara Nikāya*

KhN— *Khuddaka Nikāya*

Ud— *Udāna*

Pa. — Pāli

Skr. — Sanskrit

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

PART 1

Introduction and Background

> *Just as in a pond of blue or red or white lotuses, some lotuses might be born in the water, grow up in the water, and thrive while submerged in the water, without rising up from the water; some lotuses might be born in the water, grow up in the water, and stand at an even level with the water; some lotuses might be born in the water, and grow up in the water, but would rise up from the water and stand without being soiled by the water.*[2] — SN 6.1

There are different methods that the Buddha uses to answers question: silence, cross-questioning, analytical, and categorical. This project will show that they all tend to one end and purpose: to help the interlocutor(s) end their suffering (confusion, bewilderment, entanglement) and provide insight or discernment that would help them on the path leading to *nibbāna*. However, for each mode that is being used, it has its own purpose and intention. This can be seen in different cases (Vacchagotta, Mālunkyāputta, Prince Abhaya, Rāhula, the Kālāmas, King Pasenadi) with regard to the specific issue(s) put forth.

Upon his Awakening, the Buddha compared the growth of different lotuses to the potentiality of human beings to comprehend and realize his teachings. He began by scanning throughout the world, and right at that moment, he saw that there are beings with different qualities, capabilities and levels in discerning his Dharma. Here, one would speculate, "How does the Buddha know the capabilities of beings?" During his awakening, according to Richard H. Robinson (2005) in *Buddhist Religions: A Historical Introduction* (pages 9–10), the Buddha is said to have attained the six supernatural

[2] Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya; Translated from the Pāli* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 233.

powers (*chalabhiññā)*: 1) psychic powers; 2) divine hearing; 3) knowledge of other's minds; 4) memory of one's former lives; 5) knowledge of sentient beings reborn according to their karma; 6) knowledge of ending *āsavas* (defilements). In doing so, the Awakened One agreed to the request by Brahmā Sahampati[3] to teach his newly discovered Dharma. The Buddha stated that there were those with "little dust in their eyes and with much dust in their eyes, with keen faculties and with dull faculties, with good qualities and with bad qualities, easy to teach and hard to teach, and a few who dwelt seeing blame and fear in the other world."[4] Having seen thus, the Buddha utters, "Open to them are the doors to the Deathless: Let those who have ears release faith."[5] Thus begins the origins for the Buddha's long teaching career.

Text and Context: A Hermeneutical Study of the Ways the Buddha Answers Questions is a quest to examine the styles and functions of how the Buddha responds to his interlocutors within the Buddhist canon. This project is specifically focused on the Pāli Nikāyas with emphasis on selected suttas[6] that are highly discussed among scholars. The *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (AN 4.42) documents four methods regarding the manner in which the Buddha chose to respond to questions: 1) Categorical (*ekaṁsa*) — definitive explanations that are direct and final; 2) Analytical (*vibhajja*) —detailed expositions that analyze the question; 3) Dialectical (*paṭipucchā*) —counter-questions that begin a conversation or lead an interlocutor to think more deeply; and 4) Silence (*ṭhapanīya*) —

[3] *Samyutta Nikāya* 6.1 having shown that after attained awakening, the Blessed One had a thought arise in his mind that his newly discovered Dharma is too deep and profound and would not be understood by others. At this instant, Brahmā Sahampati appeared in front of the Buddha and requested him to stay in this world to teach the Dharma by explaining, "There are beings with little dust in their eyes who are falling away because they do not hear the Dhamma. There will be those who will understand the Dhamma." Out of compassion for beings, the Buddha accepted the Brahma's invitation.
[4] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 233.
[5] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 233.
[6] The selected suttas are: SN 44.10, MN 72, AN 3.65, MN 63, MN 71, and MN 90.

left standing. This dissertation examines these categories in depth, and more specifically, analyzes how the Buddha's fourfold approach constitutes pedagogy.

In the context of the Buddha's responses, the Sutta Nikāyas illustrate many episodes of the Buddha engaging in discourse and responding to the questions of others. The dialogue occurs not only with his own disciples but also with people from various levels of society (kings, renunciants, religious leaders, householders and so forth). Nonetheless, did the Buddha have a formal method of response with which to answer those who approached and put questions to him?

The *Pañha Sutta* (AN 4.42) offers us a model of this fourfold response. According to the Theravada tradition, all suttas of the Pāli Nikāya are said to have been recounted by the attendant of the Buddha, Ānanda, during the first Buddhist council.[7] Ānanda was well known for his sharp, vivid, and vast memory, and for being well-versed in the Dharma. In this light, the *Pañha Sutta* (AN 4.42) was also recounted by Ānanda. In his extensive work on the Nikāyas, *Skill in Questions,* Thanissaro Bhikkhu details no specific suttas of the Pāli Nikāyas that provide a definition for each category.[8] However, after paying careful attention to what the Buddha says in AN 4.42 about these four types of responses, I conclude that no formal definition was given here. In my investigation of the Pāli suttas thus far, I have also found this to be the case in general. Nonetheless, there is evidence in bits and pieces where the Buddha said that this question should be

[7] Richard Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 20 includes this statement: "Buddhists hold that the whole Canon is 'the word of the Buddha', but some of the canonical texts themselves state that they are by disciples, not by the Buddha himself, so even orthodox Buddhists do not take this blanket term literally." I am also aware of and take into account the critical studies done on the textual evolution of the Pāli Nikāyas (*Dīgha*, *Majjhima*, *Saṃyutta*, *Aṅguttara*, and *Khuddaka*), of which the *Aṅguttara* is considered one of the latest.

[8] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught* (Valley Center, CA: Metta Forest Monastery, 2010), 13.

answered categorically, this question should be answered with a question, this question deserves analysis, or this question should be left aside. Upon examining the Abhidhamma first three books, *Compendium of States or Phenomena (Dhammasaṅgaṇi),*[9] *Book of Analysis (Vibhaṅga),*[10] *Discourse on Elements (Dhātu-Kathā),*[11] there exist no explanation of any categories apart from stylistic useage of the question and answer analytical method. Looking further, in *The Questions of King Milinda,* the eminent monk Nāgasena gave a very brief example of each response using the five *skandhas,* yet he also did not go into much detail.[12] However, a fifth-century work of an eminent monk, Buddhaghosa, offered a simple yet clear delineation, in which it is easy to grasp the main idea:

> "If asked, 'Is the eye inconstant?' one should answer categorically, 'Yes, it's inconstant.' This pattern [holds] with regard to the ear, etc. This is the categorical question. If asked, 'Does inconstant mean eye?' one should answer analyzing, 'Not just the eye; the ear is also inconstant, the nose is also inconstant.' This is an analytical question. If asked, for example, 'Is the eye like the ear? Is the ear like the eye?' and one cross-questions, 'In what sense are you asking?' then if told, 'I am asking in the sense of seeing,' one should answer, 'No.' If told, 'I am asking in the sense of inconstancy,' one should answer, 'Yes.' This is a cross-questioning question. When asked, for example, 'Is the soul the same thing as the body?' one should put it aside, (saying,) 'This is unanswered by the Blessed One.' This question is not to be answered. This is a question to be put aside. *Thus the form in which the question is presented is the measure of the four ways of answering questions.* It is under the guidance of these [categories] that a question should be answered."[13]

[9] Caroline A. F. Rhys Davids, trans., *A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics: Translation of the First Book Abhidhammapitaka Entitled Dhammasangani: Compendium of States or Phenomena* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1900).
[10] Venerable U Thittila, trans., *The Book of Analysis (Vibhanga): The Second Book of the Abhidhamma-Pitaka* (Bristol: The Pali Text Society, 1969).
[11] U Nārada Mūla Paṭṭhāna Sayadaw, trans., *Discourse on Elements (Dhātu-Kathā): The Third Book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka* (London: Pali Text Society, 1962).
[12] T. W. Rhys Davids, trans., *The Questions of King Milinda* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1890), 204–6.
[13] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 481.

We can see that the ways the Buddha answered questions can be grouped into four categories. These are the research questions for this dissertation:

1) What are the main features of these four types of responses? Can any patterns be seen in these fourfold methods?
2) What is the connection between the way the Buddha answered questions and meditation?
3) Can we see the ways the Buddha answered questions as pedagogy? If so, how?

To do this, each style of reply will be developed in separate chapters (selecting from one to three suttas per chapter, such as the *Ānanda Sutta* (SN 44.10), *Aggi-Vacchagotta Sutta* (MN 72), *Kālāma Sutta* (AN 3.65), *Cūlamālukya Sutta* (MN 63), *Tevijjavacchagotta Sutta* (MN 71), and *Kaṇṇakatthala Sutta* (MN 90) as the main groundwork while making references to or using other related discourses from the Sutta Nikāyas as supporting evidence) to illustrate how the Buddha responds to a certain query or speculation. I have chosen this hermeneutical method called *geistige* from Richard Palmer's book, this work considers the socio-historical context of the Buddha's life. I will examine the time period, background, as well as purpose, and principal doctrines of the Buddha's extensive teaching career. This dissertation will show that the Buddha's methods as skillful pedagogical guidance.

The Conversation: Debates and Literature Review

This section focuses on the ways the Buddha answers questions, the fourfold categories of response: 1) Categorical, 2) Analytical, 3) Dialectical, and 4) Silence.

The Ways the Buddha Answers Questions

Thanissaro Bhikkhu (2010) has so far taken on the task of investigating in detail the complete four categories of the ways that the Buddha answers questions. However, Thanissaro's emphasis focuses more on the larger context, the art and science of the Buddha's teachings. His area of discussion places great emphasis on "what" and "how" the Buddha taught[14] and examines the "skill in questions." Besides, Thanissaro examines the answering methods of the Buddha in the order prescribed in the *Pañha Sutta* (AN 4.42) —categorical, analytical, counter-questioning, and silence. In this light, my approach is the opposite: looking first at silence and ending with categorical. Further, my dissertation investigates the "skill in answers."[15]

The method of answering questions that deserves a straightforward answer (yes, no) is the simplest of all four. In a survey of the Sutta Nikāyas, Thanissaro Bhikkhu sees that those suttas "labeled as categorical" fall into two sub-divisions: First, the discourses that discuss the distinction between good bodily, verbal, and mental conduct, and the misconduct of these three. In other words, it is about skillful actions (*kamma-kusala*) and unskillful actions (*kamma-akulasa*). Second is the teaching that lies within the Four Noble Truths.[16]

In this respect, I would add that there is "reservation" in the Buddha's categorical answers because it is confined to skillful actions (*kamma-kusala*) and the Four Noble Truths. Here, "reservation" means the Buddha reserves his answers to that which is

[14] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 7, 470.
[15] Note: Thanissaro Bhikkhu's work studies and analyzes "how questions are put" so that the responses that one receives are conducive and productive answers instead of comments such as "these questions are irrelevant" and having the question be put aside. Nonetheless, my research emphasizes "how the Buddha answers questions"—the forms and functions, in terms of pedagogy and it relevancy to soteriology.
[16] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 66.

experiential—dependent co-arising, the Four Noble Truths…what he sees as helpful to letting-go, detachment and release. More details will be explored in Chapter 5. Further, acting according to what is recommended in these teachings would lead "categorically—universally—to good results."[17] They are principles that help steer the direction of *kamma*. In other words, an individual who acts on them, by adopting *kusala*, skillful actions, and staying away from unwholesome actions (*akusala*), will be rid of fault and suffering.

> "Friends, just as the footprint of any living being that walks can be placed within an elephant's footprint, and so the elephant's footprint is declared the chief of them because of its great size; so too, all wholesome states can be included in the Four Noble Truths."[18]

This area of answering is modeled on skillful actions (*kamma-kusala)* and what is in accordance with the Four Noble Truths. In simple words, the answer is grounded in that which is conducive to the present happy state of mind as well as long-term welfare.

The analytical method is more complicated to examine because there is not much exposition of it. Why is this so? According to Thanissaro Bhikkhu's research, "Of the four categories of questions, this is the one with the fewest examples in the discourses.…" However, investigating deeper into the canon "of how the Buddha and his disciples use this strategy yields some surprises, for their approach to questions of this sort challenges a number of views about the Dhamma that are currently widespread."[19]

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[17] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 66.
[18] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya* (Wisdom Publications, 1995), 278.
[19] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 130.

According to Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "As we survey the range of questions deserving analytical answers, we see that they highlight five important points in the Buddha's teaching that are often misunderstood or underappreciated at present."[20]

1) The first is that the Buddha had no qualms about judging people and their way of life.
2) The second point of the Buddha's teachings that is frequently misunderstood is that the distinction between *skillful* and *unskillful* is not the same as the distinction between *pleasing* and *displeasing* to others.
3) The third point is reflected in the many misunderstandings about *kamma* … for these [show] that the Buddha, in formulating his teaching on *kamma*, was not simply following a belief already well known and widely accepted in his culture.
4) The fourth point, related to the third, is that the multiple variables needed to answer some of the questions dealing with *kamma* show that *kamma* is not as simple a process—or as simplistic a teaching—as is sometimes assumed.
5) The fifth point is …that some of the Buddha's teachings are appropriate for certain stages of the practice and not for others.[21]

Cross-questioning is a unique style of the Buddha because he invites his interlocutor to question the views of the teacher, and this makes the dialogue more meaningful. The dialogue is not restricted by power, regulation or authority. Besides, in this process, the Buddha's aim is not to win or put the questioner to shame, but to make sure that the interlocutor benefits from his or her question. As Thanissaro Bhikkhu explains:

> The Buddha cited cross-questioning *(paṭipucchā)* as a distinctive feature of his general teaching method [§73], noting that it's an effective means for clarifying obscure points and resolving doubts. In this way it helps [one to realize] the rewards of listening to the Dhamma [§8]: clarifying what is not yet clear. By observing the Buddha's use of this particular strategy in action, we can see why this is so.[22]

In this strategy, the discourse is open to a two-way questioning, which Thanissaro Bhikkhu describes as an "interpersonal dynamic." The Buddha is questioned by the

[20] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 133.
[21] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 133–35.
[22] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 173.

student, and the student is cross-questioned by the teacher. According to Thanissaro Bhikkhu, the Buddha "saw that if the student was intent on learning, even a contentious exchange could lead to a positive result." Thus, oftentimes he would allow such a debate if he saw that the sincere interlocutor had the objective/intention of learning the truths, "For he saw that the cross-questioning within the debate would clarify the truth in their minds."[23]

Furthermore, through this cross-questioning method, the Buddha also teaches the interlocutor how to ask or put the question correctly. At times, "by showing his listeners how cross-questioning was done … [he was] giving them an example of how to pursue the process of clarification within their own minds."[24] Having experienced the usefulness of self-cross-examination (he cross-questioned himself during his process of awakening), the Buddha "wanted to expose his listeners to the same process, showing them how it could be done skillfully, in hopes that they would subject themselves to the same process and receive similar results."[25] In other words, the ultimate aim of this method is based on soteriology: ending suffering and leading the questioner to *nibbāna*. (Here, I can also see the process of self-cross-examining as a form of meditation, particularly the reflective type).[26]

Regarding the questions in response to which the Buddha stayed silent, many scholars speculate. However, according to Thanissaro Bhikkhu, those queries the Buddha put aside can be categorized into two groups. 1) It "consists of questions that can have

[23] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 173.
[24] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 174.
[25] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 174.
[26] For example, when looking at suffering, one would ask, "What is the cause of suffering...?" then, "How to eradicate suffering?" and further, "What is the way to put an end to suffering?" and contemplate on these questions until one has insight into the nature of suffering and arrive at the solution for it. It is parallel to the way the Buddha questioned himself when he sat under the Bodhi tree.

true and beneficial answers, but which the Buddha sometimes put aside out of considerations of time and place."[27] 2) These questions have "no beneficial answer—in some cases, the issue is left open as to whether there even *is* a true or a false answer—so the Buddha put them aside regardless of time or place."[28]

Because the Buddha's teaching career had a single purpose, to end suffering and lead sentient beings to *nibbāna*, his teachings are also intended to serve this same purpose. "As he repeatedly stated, all he taught was stress and the end of stress [§192]. Thus he was free to put questions aside on the grounds that they did not lead to that end. And, as we shall see, this was his primary reason for putting a wide variety of questions aside."[29]

Nonetheless, with regard to questions on which he remained silent, in *Majjhima Nikāya* (MN 72) the Buddha did say specifically that they are:

> [A] thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a vacillation of views, a fetter of views. It is beset by suffering, by vexation, by despair, and by fever, and it does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna… Seeing this danger, I do not take up any of these speculative views.[30]

In as much as to say, the Buddha saw these questions as best not answered because responding to them in any way would lead to further suffering and confusion.[31]

Another scholar who investigates the four types of answers is K. N. Jayatilleke (1998). However, his work on the four areas is rather brief, especially regarding the issues of categorical answers, analytical answers and cross-questioning. In his book *Early*

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[27] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 342. Note: more details on "time and place" will be discussed in the second chapter (Chapter 2).
[28] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 342.
[29] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 360.
[30] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya* (Wisdom Publications, 1995), 591–92.
[31] Please see details of the example on the man being hit by a poison arrow in a later chapter.

Buddhist Theory of Knowledge, he illustrates that questions that are answered categorically (*ekaṃsikā*) fall within the "four truths."[32] Some queries that require analytical (*vibhajya*) answers are intended to "[clear] up ambiguities implicit or even remotely implied in the terms or the form in which the question is put."[33] Questions are responded to with counter-questions for the same reasons as the analytical method. They are to clarify the state of mind or to untangle what is confused. As Jayatilleke insists, cross-questioning is, in fact, "a subdivision of the second type [namely, analytical]."[34] Lastly, queries are answered with silence because on pragmatic grounds, "Any of the possible answers were considered irrelevant and otiose for our purpose."[35] Nevertheless, like many other scholars, Jayatilleke pays more attention to the topic of *ṭhapanīya* (not to be answered), the issues that were responded to with silence.

Other scholars who participate in the same discussion touch only on one part of the way the Buddha answers questions, particularly, on the Buddha's silence. There are various positions taken by scholars with regard to the responses the Buddha left unuttered (*avyakata*). Some scholars like Von Glasenapp[36] (1958) and Troy Organ[37] (1954) view his silence to be metaphysical: ineffable and mystical. Moti Lal. Pandit (2008), in his work *The Buddhist View of Knowledge and Reality,* assumes his silence to be a sign of agnosticism.[38] In his article "Early Buddhism: Some Recent Misconceptions," Henry

[32] Kulatissa Nanda Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2010), 283.
[33] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 286.
[34] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 286.
[35] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 288.
[36] Franklin Edgerton, "Did the Buddha Have a System of Metaphysics?," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 79, no. 2 (April 1959): 81, doi:10.2307/595848.
[37] Troy Wilson Organ, "The Silence of the Buddha," *Philosophy East and West* 4, no. 2 (July 1954): 137–38.
[38] Moti Lal. Pandit, *The Buddhist View of Knowledge and Reality* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2008), 136.

Cruise (1983) states: "the silence of the Buddha is likely to be due to the lack of adequate concepts, due to the uncharacterizable, non-describable (but not non-knowable) nature of the Tathāgata."[39] Thanissaro Bhikkhu insists that these questions are not conducive to soteriological aim.[40] In the same light, David Kalupahana (1992) elucidates that the Buddha's only interest was in questions that are practical. It has to do with experience, in terms of cause and effect, *paṭiccasamuppāda*.[41]

Walpola Rahula (1959) in his work, *What the Buddha Taught*, insists the Buddha was a "practical teacher;" he answered questions put to him with careful consideration. That is, he bore in mind the inquirer's standards and capacity of understanding and psychological nature. Therefore, he answered questions not to show off his intelligence or knowledge, but instead to help the interlocutor on the "way to realization." However, in Vacchagotta the wanderer's case, Rahula states, "The Buddha's silence seems to have had [much more of an] effect [on] Vacchagotta than any eloquent answer or discussion" because this same person often visited the Buddha and his disciples and repeated the same question.[42]

Likewise, in his investigation of the Buddha's silence, Asanga Tilakaratne (1993) focuses on determining "whether or not an ineffable transcendent is involved in the process."[43] He concludes, "In early Buddhism, there is neither a mysterious silence nor a

[39] Henry Cruise, "Early Buddhism: Some Recent Misconceptions," *Philosophy East and West* 33, no. 2 (April 1983): 163, doi:10.2307/1399099.
[40] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 372.
[41] David J. Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy: Continuities and Discontinuities* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), 64–67.
[42] Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught: Revised and Expanded Edition with Texts from Suttas and Dhammapada*, Rev. ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 64.
[43] Asanga Tilakaratne, *Nirvana and Ineffability: A Study of the Buddhist Theory of Reality and Language* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: University of Kelaniya, 1993), 109.

mystery which would lead to a transcendent realm which is ineffable."[44] This is because "the silence of the Buddha is not really a silence." As Tilakaratne clarifies, "If a question alludes to an unknowable transcendence, that question has to be invariably unanswerable. It is impossible for that question to be answerable at one time and unanswerable at another time."[45] However, in the Buddha's case, those questions on which he remained silent in some suttas are answered in other suttas.[46] Thus, the Buddha's silence should be rethought. In simple terms, the reason of his silence is considered as pedagogical.

Other scholars have also looked at the Buddha's silence—scholars such as T. R. V. Murti (2013) in *Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of Madhyamika System*[47] and Jin Y. Park (2008) in *Buddhism and Postmodernity: Zen, Huayan, and the Possibility of Buddhist Postmodern Ethics.*[48] However, their works center on Mahāyāna philosophy, and hence, are irrelevant to this present study.[49]

From the discussions of the Buddha's silence above, scholarly interpretations can be divided into the following areas: 1) mystical/transcendental and ineffable, 2) Agnosticism, 3) the limitation of human concepts, and 4) not practical for the goal, soteriology. Are these really the cases? If not, then what is the possible objective behind the Buddha's silence?

In my opinion, there can be also other intentions. If one were to look at the suttas (SN 44.10 and MN 72), the intention of the Buddha is quite clear. The *Ānanda Sutta* (SN

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[44] Tilakaratne, *Nirvana and Ineffability: A Study of the Buddhist Theory of Reality and Language*, 110.
[45] Tilakaratne, *Nirvana and Ineffability: A Study of the Buddhist Theory of Reality and Language*, 121.
[46] See sutta such as SN 44.10 and MN 72 for details.
[47] T. R. V. Murti, *Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of Madhyamika System* (New Delhi: Munshirm Manoharlal Pub. Pvt. Ltd., 2013), 36–54.
[48] Jin Y. Park, *Buddhism and Postmodernity: Zen, Huayan, and the Possibility of Buddhist Postmodern Ethics* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008), 11–30.
[49] Note: My study only focuses on the Pāli Sutta Nikāyas. Therefore, I utilize scholarly works that look at the ways the Buddha answers questions in early Buddhist suttas because they are relevant to my topic of investigation. See *Text and Context: A Hermeneutical Study of the Ways the Buddha Answers Questions*.

44.10) relates an episode in which the wanderer Vacchagotta approaches and asks the Buddha, "Is there self?" To this the Buddha remains silent. Vacchagotta then asks a second question: "Is there no self?" Again, the Buddha stays silent. After Vacchagotta leaves, venerable *Ā*nanda asks the Buddha why he didn't answer those questions. The Buddha replies: "If…I had answered, 'There is a self,' this would have been siding with those ascetics and brahmins who are eternalists. If…I had answered, 'There is no self,' this would have been siding with those ascetics and brahmins who are annihilationists. If…I had answered, 'There is a self,' would this have been [contradict] on my part with the arising of the knowledge that 'all phenomena are nonself'" [50] Most importantly, "when I was asked by him, 'Is there no self?' I had answered, 'There is no self,' the wanderer Vacchagotta, already confused, would have fallen into even greater confusion, thinking, 'It seems that the self I formerly had does not exist now.'"[51]

Nevertheless, the story does not end there. MN 72 shows that Vacchagotta returns. This time he puts the questions in a different way (in terms of cause and effect—a correct way that deserves to be answered), and the Buddha replies in detail. As a result, Vacchagotta takes refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and eventually attains awakening in his cultivation.[52] In other words, the Buddha remained silent not only because those questions were not practical and pragmatic; he also considered the time, place, and psychological nature of the interlocutor. Thus, step by step the Buddha used the art of pedagogy to help guide the inquirer to frame the question in a correct manner (in terms of cause and effect) before elucidating and expounding upon the topic.

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[50] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1394.
[51] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1394.
[52] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 590–94. Note: In MN 72, Vacchagotta takes refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and becomes a lay devotee. In MN 73, Vacchagotta becomes a bhikkhu and through his diligent practice attains awakening.

Another often-discussed method of the Buddha is the analytical response. Today, as Buddhism becomes increasingly popular in the West, scholars examine and discuss other hot topics in light of the early Buddhist teachings. Take, for example, the issue of the *Kālāma Sutta*.

The *Kālāma Sutta,* according to Sabber Uddiyan (2013), is considered a normal sutta in the Theravada tradition.[53] However, in the West, it has become popular and widely known. Why is this so? It is said to be the most-quoted early Buddhist sutta. This sutta, many have said, is a charter of free inquiry.[54] This is especially true for Soma Thera (1981), as he insists the *Kālāma Sutta* is not just a teaching to the Kālāmas but is also an incentive for free inquiry. This is strongly advocated by the title of his article, "The Buddha's Charter of Free Inquiry."[55] In *How Free Is Freedom of Thought?*, Sanath Nanayakkara (1988) states that some insist the *Kālāma Sutta* is the science of the rational and empirical, equivalent to the scientific method.[56]

Unfortunately, when investigating the *Kālāma Sutta*, I have noticed that many scholars quote only a single passage and forget or neglect the rest of the sutta. A host of scholars quote the *Kālāma Sutta* when discussing the issue of authority,[57] while others make reference to it when talking about science.[58] Some even quote it out of context. In

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[53] Sabber Uddiyan, *Kalama Sutta: The Rediscovery of Conscience* (Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2013), xiii.
[54] Soma Thera, "Kalama Sutta–The Buddha's Charter of Free Inquiry," *The Wheel Publication*, 1981, http://enlight.lib.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-AN/an140925.pdf.
[55] Soma Thera, "Kalama Sutta–The Buddha's Charter of Free Inquiry."
[56] Sanath Nanayakkara, *How Free Is Freedom of Thought* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1988), 2.
[57] Shenpen Hookham, "Spiritual Authority: A Buddhist Perspective," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 30 (January 2010): 121–32; Rita M. Gross, "The Crisis of Authority: Buddhist History for Buddhist Practitioners," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 30 (January 2010): 59–72; Elizabeth Harris, "Introduction: Authority in Buddhism and Christianity," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 30 (January 2010): 43–48; Shi Zhiru, "Scriptural Authority: A Buddhist Perspective," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 30 (January 2010): 85–105.
[58] Otto H. Chang, "Buddhism and Scientific Methods," *Hsi Lai Journal of Humanistic Buddhism* 8 (2007): 102–114; David L. McMahan, "Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72, no. 4 (December 2004): 897–933; Seth Robert Segall, *Encountering*

his work "Lost in Quotation,"[59] Thanissaro Bhikkhu (2012) also confirms this when he writes of "our tendency to pick what we like from the old texts and throw the rest away. No need to understand the larger context of the dhamma [as] they teach, the Buddha seems to be saying. You're better off rolling your own."[60] In short, they misrepresent the Buddha's intention—the actual goal and purpose of the sutta. In his article "A Look at the Kalama Sutta," Bodhi Bhikkhu (1988) explains, "In order to understand the Buddha's utterances correctly, it is essential to take account of his own intentions in making them."[61] This suggestion is what I will bear in mind when investigating the *Kālāma Sutta* and other suttas. In other words, part of my goal here is to reexamine this sutta to bring light to the main message, by exploring the way the Buddha analytically answers the queries of the Kālāmas.

Methodology and Contributions

Methodology: Hermeneutical

This project will be grounded in a particular hermeneutical approach to study the ways the Buddha answers questions, specifically in the investigation of the selected suttas (SN 44.10, MN 72, AN 3.65, MN 63, MN 71, and MN 90). First, I would like to discuss the term hermeneutic and explain reason to why I have chosen Friedrich Ast's theory of hermeneutics.

The term "hermeneutic" has its roots from the Greek gods' messenger, Hermes. His role is to deliver the message of the gods to the mortals. In order to do so, he has to

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Buddhism: Western Psychology and Buddhist Teachings (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 92.

[59] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "Lost in Quotation," *Access to Insight*, August 29, 2012, accessed June 20, 2014, http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/lostinquotation.html.

[60] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "Lost in Quotation."

[61] Bhikkhu Bodhi, "A Look at the Kalama Sutta," *BPS Newsletter Cover Essay*, 1988, 1, http://enlight.lib.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-AN/an140786.pdf.

interpret the words of the gods and put them into human terms. Most importantly, "He had to understand and interpret for himself what the gods wanted to convey before he would be able to translate, articulate, and explicate their intention to the mortals."[62]

I am going to use Friedrich Ast's (1778-1841) *geistige* theory of hermeneutics as presented in Richard Palmer's book. I argue that Ast's description of hermeneutics fit nicely in my investigation of historical background and the *geistige* (spirit and goal) of the Buddha. According to Ast:

> The task of hermeneutics, then, [is] the clarification of the work through the development of its meaning internally and the relationship of its inner parts to each other and to the larger spirit of the age. This task is explicitly divided … into three parts, or forms, of understanding: (1) the 'historical,' that is, understanding in relation to the content of the work, which could be artistic, scientific, or general; (2) the 'grammatical,' that is, understanding in relation to the language; and (3) the *'geistige,'* that is, understanding the work in relation to the total view of the author and the total view *(Geist)* of the age.[63]

In his theory, the historical, grammatical, and *geistige* elements of a text are important features in the interpretation of that text.

For this dissertation, I will specifically focus on the historical and *geistige*. My own hermeneutical approach would mainly focus on "the content of the text and total view of the author in a circular mode"—text and context. In other words, I will aim to understand the content of the sutta within various layers of the sutta itself, as well as the main ideology, intention and purpose of the discourse. At the same time, I will examine other related early Buddhist suttas (from the Sutta Nikāya) for evidence and support. In addition, I will also use Buddhist commentary such as the *Visudhimagga* (the Path of Purification) as secondary source. Nevertheless, seen in light of *text and context*, my

[62] Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 1988), 1.
[63] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 77.

work will examine how the *spirit* is fundamentally related to the Buddha's soteriological aim: the ending suffering and leading sentient beings to *nibbāna*. All this is to be done by examine internal reference—Sutta Piṭaka (see appendix 1) and some Buddhist commentaries.[64]

I have chosen Ast's theory over the later scholars (such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, Martin Heidegger …) because from my investigation, I see that the theory of these scholars is enclosed in elements of Ast's ideology of hermeneutic. I also see Ast's idea existed in Donald S. Lopez's concept of Buddhist Hermeneutic.

For example, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1786-1834) hermeneutics theory. It shifted away from the orthodoxy (mainly used to interpret biblical) to broadened its application to various texts. He saw hermeneutics as "the art of understanding,"[65] and puts emphasis on the importance of the interpreter and their understanding process. For Schleiermacher, understanding a text is not just merely reading the text but also involves the knowledge of the author's background and the nature of his or her thinking.[66] This is according to Ast, "understanding the work in relation to the total view of the author and the total view *(Geist)* of the age."[67]

With Schleiermacher as the architect who widely opened up the field of interpretation, hermeneutics generally is described as "the art of interpretation."[68] Later scholars, like Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), also added another element towards the

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[64] Here, I have limited my main spectrum to the Sutta Piṭaka because I am interested in the historical Buddha and his dynamic ways of responding. Second, I want to make sure that my project is "doable" within the time frame. I do understand that openup my spectrum would make my project more valuable, but the time frame would be very long and I am not sure that I would be able to complete it. Therefore, I would suggest investigates the Vinaya, Abhiddhamma and commentaries as future projects.
[65] Mueller-Vollmer, *The Hermeneutics Reader*, 12.
[66] Bjørn Ramberg and Kristin Gjesdal, "Hermeneutics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2013, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/hermeneutics/.
[67] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 77.
[68] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 86.

understanding of a text. Heidegger created the concept of the hermeneutic circle (*hermeneutischer zirkel*). This principle illustrates a text as the whole has a rather close relationship to its individual parts. In simple terms, the hermeneutic circle is a round-cycle process describing the intimacy of parts and totality. Therefore, "Neither the whole text nor any [single] part can be understood without reference to one another."[69] He further stresses that to understand a text, one must also consider its literary context, history, and culture.[70] This idea according to Ast's description is, "the clarification of the work through the development of its meaning internally and the relationship of its inner parts to each other and to the larger spirit of the age." In other words, it is to say, how knowledge of different contexts can be used to analyze, discern, and comprehend a work of an author.

Since, my investigation will be interpreting Buddhist Suttas (the work of the Buddha as well as the work of his noble disciples) it is important to mention the hermeneutical methods applied by scholars in this field. Donald S. Lopez in his *Buddhist Hermeneutics* suggested that one should "rely on instructions provided by the Buddha on the problem of interpretation."[71] He also insisted that one should look carefully at:

1. The intended meaning
2. The foundation of the intention
3. The motive.[72]

From Lopez's description above, it is fit in Ast' theory of "understanding the work in relation to the total view of the author and the total view *(Geist)* of the age." This idea

[69] Ramberg and Gjesdal, "Hermeneutics."
[70] Ramberg and Gjesdal, "Hermeneutics."
[71] Donald S. Jr. Lopez, *Buddhist Hermeneutics* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), 51.
[72] Lopez, *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, 55.

reminds us to carefully look at the content of the whole sutta/s and the author's intention instead of selecting passage to fit one's purpose.

Here, I would like to mention Buddhaghoṣa's great work the *Visuddhimagga* and his Buddhist hermeneutics method.

Buddhaghoṣa (370-450CE), a fifth century Buddhist scholar that is renowned for his commentaries work on the Pāli Tipiṭaka, and his own definitive work, the *Visuddhimagga.*[73] The *Visuddhimagga* otherwise known as the *Path of Purification,* a work that is highly praised and regard in the Theravada Buddhist tradition. According to Bhikkhu Nanamoli's descriptions, the book "systematically summarizes and interprets the teaching of the Buddha contained in the Pali *Tipiṭaka,* which is now recognized in Europe as the oldest and most authentic record of the Buddha's words. As the principal non-canonical authority of the *Theravāda,* it forms the hub of a complete and coherent method of exegesis of the Tipiṭaka, using the 'Abhidhamma method' as it is called. And it sets out detailed practical instructions for developing purification."[74]

The *Visuddhimagga* is a very long detailed work. It contains twenty-three chapters. Chapters one and two discusses how virtue is a central practice of moral-ethical discipline guarding the body, speech and mind. Chapters three to eleven systemically expounds on the process of concentration and how to develop concentration. Chapters twelve and thirteen present the accolade of fully developed concentration in and of itself (without analytical understanding). Chapters fourteen to seventeen dissects and analyzes the meditation experience. Chapters eighteen to twenty-one elucidates on practice and

[73] Robert E. Buswell and Donald S. Lopez, eds., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), s.v. "Visudhimagga" 152. Note: According to Buswell and Lopez, the *Visudhimagga* is "the definitive outline of the Theravāda doctrine."
[74] Bhikkhu Nanamoli, trans., *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga*, 5th ed. (Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991), xxiii.

give instructions for applying the understanding in previous chapters (fourteen to seventeen). Chapter twenty-two presents the different stages of realization. The last section, chapter twenty-three elucidate on the advantages of cultivating discernment.

Speaking in terms of hermeneutics, as Buddhaghoṣa have presented in the *Visuddhimagga*, he adhered to a systematic structure. This according to Bhikkhu Nanomoli is the called the "Abhidhamma Method." In every topic of discussion such as virtue, concentration or wisdom, the passages are formated in a question-answering mode. This methodology allows the author to go into very deep inquisitive details dissecting the matter being explored— in simple terms, of meticulous analytical.

For example, in the topic of Virtue:

1) the author defining the subject of discussion;
2) exploring it elements that includes characteristic, functions…
3) presenting the different types of virtues;
4) the cause of virtue
5) last is the practical exercise, presenting the methods to attain virtue which is called the "ways of purification."

If one were to look at Buddhaghoṣa's way of presentation closely, one would see that the format is in line with the structure of the Four Noble Truths: this is the origin of suffering…the cause…the cessation, and the way out of suffering.

Buddhaghoṣa way of interpretation is very meticulous and well established. The question-answer mode consists of definition, etymology, philology, giving analysis, example and commentaries by referencing/citing discourse(s) of the Buddha. In terms of Buddhist hermeneutic, the *Dīgha Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā* (Commentary) of Buddhaghoṣa

specifically suggest that, '"one's own opinion is the weakest authority of all and should only be accepted if it accords with the Suttas' (DA. 567-68)."[75] Here, Buddhaghoṣa recommended individuals to look at the message of the sutta carefully and should not take one's own opinion literally, but to consider all aspects, and imperatively the main message of the sutta, as well as the goal and intention of the Buddha. In other words, he argues that one's interpretation and analysis should fit with the main aim of the Buddha's teachings and cites other discourses for affirmation.

In summary, the *Visuddhimagga* of Buddhaghoṣa hinges itself on central messages from the Pāli Tipiṭaka such as the Four Noble Truths (*cattāri ariyasaccāni*), and its meticulous way of analysis and interpretation according to the Abhidhamma system. It explores topics of investigation in a well logical connected system with quotation, details explanation as well as provided commentaries on issues (virtue, concentration, wisdom) being discussed. In terms of practice, one might consider it as "a detailed manual for meditation masters," as for hermeneutical, the *Visuddhimagga* can be used as "a work of reference."[76]

In as far as what have been said above, the purpose of discussing hermeneutics and the others scholars' hermeneutical theories is to establish my own hermeneutic approach. It is also to emphasize important aspects that I must cogitate when interpreting a text: the literary context, culture, history, the background of the author, his intention, and all related elements—text and context. Further, I would consider going as far as looking at all recent studies that have been done on that particular subject matter. This in

[75] Bhikkhu Nanamoli, trans., *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga* (Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991), xxxiii.
[76] Bhikkhu Nanamoli, *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga*, xliii.

turn, would generate a better understanding and knowledge of what I am investigating and interpreting.

Understanding of Content and Spirit

Nevertheless, to understand the content of each sutta (SN 44.10, MN 72, AN 3.65, MN 63, MN 71, and MN 90), I must consider two aspects: the author and the text. Within each category, I must look further into the context that is the time, place, content, and historical background. For example, I must investigate where the discourse was spoken, to whom it was expounded, and why it was spoken in such a way. Here, I must also try to understand the audience's level of knowledge, the psychological circumstances and so forth. For external references, I would consider to the Vedic literature, the early Upanishads literature, and the Jain literature whenever is necessary. Why is all this matter?

Any particular form of text, when written or spoken, is generally developed within a given context or horizon. Therefore, to understand the specific text, I must interpret it from the standpoint or the horizon and the cultural milieu in which it was written. In addition, I must consider the author's background and his goal and purpose. As Friedrich Ast explains, one must try to understand the work "through the development of its meaning internally and the relationship of its inner parts to each other and to the larger spirit of the age." Only when I view the text in such a context or light does any discernment become possible. This will throw light onto the concept of pedagogy that I will illustrate.

In other words, understanding a text is dependent upon and conditioned by its time, place and historical background. I would further stress that a text is written to

articulate something at that particular time: time and place created the text. As Jeffrey R. Timm puts, "…the ultimate task of the true textual critic is the interpretation and understanding on the text in its context."[77] Therefore, to understand a text, I must look beyond the content into the time and place it was written, as well as into other related texts and the author's background and goal to be able to grasp the whole picture.

Of course, it is impossible to gather all information, especially when investigating a historical figure such as the Buddha and his teachings, which are more than two thousand and five hundred years old. However, I need to gain as much knowledge as possible, to place myself in the appropriate position to interpret any particular sutta, notably, because it is a historically and culturally influenced/informed text.

Overall, examining the context of the author and text enables me to process all of the information gathered. From this ground, I then make my preliminary or final conclusions.

Contributions

Text and Context: A Hermeneutical Study of the Ways the Buddha Answers Questions (Pañhā Byākaraṇa) is a project that seeks to understand the styles of the Buddha's responses as recounted in certain suttas of the Pāli Nikāya. As a whole, the dissertation aims to shed light on the Buddha's novel use of silence, and his use of dialectical (cross-questioning), analytical, and categorical answers. Conjointly, it sheds light on the purported omniscience of the Buddha, as well as on the relationship between the Buddha's teachings and contemporary issues. It also seeks to dispel textual controversy and polemical interpretation by elucidating the Buddha's intention in such

[77] Jeffrey R. Timm, ed., *Texts in Context: Traditional Hermeneutics in South Asia* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1997), 3.

suttas as SN 44.10, MN 72, AN 3.65, MN 63, MN 71, and MN 90. This project aims to contribute not only to the scholarly world, but to education and to Buddhist practitioners as well.

In terms of early Buddhist research and scholarship: 1) it opens a new field for scholars to examine the Buddha's teaching, specifically, the four ways of responding; 2) it offers a new way to look at and study meditation, especially cross-questioning as reflective meditation.

Also within Buddhism, the study of the *silence* offers a lens through which scholars may see the various scopes of analysis and interpretation made by the two traditions, Mahayana and Theravada, regarding what the Buddha says and how he acts. The reticence of the Buddha would offer scholars a different perspective when examining *silence* in other religions such as Christianity or any mystic religion, which generally see *silence* as numinous, ineffable and mysterious.

Next, in the area of critical thinking and study, there are at least two contributions this dissertation could provide. First, the analytical way the Buddha responded to his interlocutor invites scholars to rethink the Buddhistic method and methodology. Second, the cross-questioning method of the Buddha could be compared to Socrates's style of dialectical teaching.[78] Even better than the Socratic method, it can provide an extra layer of inquiry in the search for truth.

Because this research as a whole is focused only on selected suttas, there is still space left to be filled and more areas needing investigation and study. Thus, future projects in this same area could be continued; for example, a hermeneutical study of the ways the Buddha answers questions by investigating the complete Sutta Nikāyas would

[78] See Chapter 3 for details.

be a worthwhile project. Alternatively, one could do an in-depth comparative study of the Buddha's silence and silence in another religion such as Christianity.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation will be divided into six chapters: 1) Introduction; 2) The Buddha's Silence; 3) The Uniqueness of the Cross-questioning of the Buddha; 4) The Buddha Analytically Answers the Question of the Kālāmas; 5) The Categorical Answer to the Question: Was the Buddha *Sabbaññū* (omniscient)?; and 6) Conclusion.

Chapter one is the introduction**.** This section first takes the reader into the literature review and scholars' conversations (such as Thanissaro Bhikkhu, Troy Organ, David Kalupahana, and Kulatissa Nanda Jayatilleke). Second, it introduces the hermeneutical methodology, and lastly, it provides a brief history of the Buddha's milieu and the principal doctrines of the Buddha.

Chapter two studies "The Buddha's Silence." From a critical standpoint, how does one respond when someone remains silent to a question? In terms of knowledge, is it because that person does not know the answer or he/she does know but has decided not to utter a word? Speaking of emotion, silence can be interpreted as sadness, anger or retaliation. In the Sutta Nikāyas, one finds a number of occasions when the Buddha remains reticent to questions put to him (SN44.1 - 44.11, MN72). There are various positions taken by scholars with regard to the questions the Buddha left unanswered (a*vyākata*). Some view his silence to be metaphysical. Some say it is due to the limitations of human language. Some insist these questions are not conducive to the soteriological aim. Is this really the case? If this is not so, what is the intention behind the

Buddha's silence, and how does it operate? And, what does the Buddha say (if anything) about his silence? In other words, silence is a valuable heuristic tool.

Looking through the hermeneutical lens, this chapter will investigate why the Buddha *intentionally* puts certain subject matter aside. Here, I want to argue against Troy Wilson Organ's interpretation of the Buddha's silence as "the silence of a 'higher affirmation,'"[79] a view rooted in mysticism.

My objective is to bring to light the meaning lying beneath the Buddha's silence by examining two pieces regarding the *Vacchagotta Sutta,* the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (SN 44.10) and the *Majjhima Nikāya* (MN 72). I will argue that the Buddha's silence is not an expression of "mysticism," but rather is a skillful pedagogical method. The Buddha has another aim: the ultimate goal is, step by step, helping to guide his inquirer to put an end to suffering.

Chapter three gives attention to "The Uniqueness of the Cross-questioning of the Buddha." In general, Westerners are more familiar with Socrates's critical form of dialectic, which is otherwise known as the art or practice of logical discussion as employed in investigating the truth of a theory or opinion. In a similar way, the cross-questioning method is an exercise of cross-examination to make something clear. Both processes involve exchanging of opinions from both sides; however, in Socrates's approach, only one side asks and the other answers. In this light, the Buddha's cross-questioning method is unique. How is it so?

This chapter discusses the importance and uniqueness of the Buddha's dialogical questioning method. It argues that this method is unique because both parties (the respondent and inquirer) are being asked: the interlocutor questions the Buddha, and the

[79] Organ, "The Silence of the Buddha," 137–38.

Buddha questions the inquirer. Here, the Buddha does not try to win for fame, to humiliate the interlocutor or to demolish anyone's reputation. Instead, he 1) clarifies the interlocutor's state of mind with his art and science of pedagogy; and 2) teaches the interlocutor how to use the art of dialogue in terms of "self-cross-examination" to put an end to suffering and to attain *nibbāna*.

To do the above, the chapter will focus on two suttas, MN 63, the *Cūḷamālunkya Sutta* (*Discourse to Mālunkāputta*), and MN 58, the *Abhayarājakumāra Sutta* (*Discourse to Prince Abhaya*), to examine the form and function of the way the Buddha cross-questioned.

Chapter four examines how "The Buddha Analytically Answers the Question of the Kālāmas." The *Kālāma Sutta* (AN 3.65) is well-known to the West because of the empiricism addressed by the Buddha. However, many people outside of academia as well as scholars solely focus on the content of the ten criteria rather than what the sutta is concerned with. Numerous scholars consider it as the free charter for critical thinking (science), rejecting tradition and authority. They do not heed how the Buddha went about addressing the problem being asked. In other words, scholars do not give adequate attention to how the Buddha answered or solved the perplexing issues of the Kālāmas.

This section argues that the *Kālāma Sutta* is neither about negating authority nor about being applicable with science, but rather is focused on the ethical and moral principle as the way to attain happiness in one's actual life. To support my claim, I will examine the way the Buddha analytically answers the question of the Kālāmas. Specifically, I will focus on the way the Buddha frames and structures his answer to what he considers relevant and of utmost importance to humanity, namely, to avoid pain and to

attain happiness.

To do the above, I will: first, investigate why the Buddha did not give a direct answer to the Kālāmas but instead gave the ten criteria. I will tackle this subject matter in the context of the Kālāmas and study the psychological factor, which I argue is a matter of reassurance. Finally, I will examine why the Buddha analytically expounded the ethical principle by demonstrating that it is the way the Buddha allowed the Kālāmas to establish faith in him; second to this, is that this was relevant to the task at hand and practically conducive to happiness. In other words, it is to say that the Buddha did not reject faith (*sammā saddhā*).

Chapter five investigates "The Categorical Answer to the Question: Was the Buddha *Sabbaññu* (omniscient)?" In this chapter, I argue that the Buddha answered this question with *reservation*, which is grounded on pedagogical guidance. To do this, 1) I will investigate the Indian concept of omniscience in the Buddha's time to see how they viewed omniscience; 2) I will specifically be looking at MN 71 and MN 90 to see the Buddha's response to the concept of omniscience and to analyze what he actually said about omniscience and why he answered in that way; and 3) I will put forth scholars' perspectives regarding the omniscience of the Buddha.

Chapter six is the concluding remarks. This chapter will sum up the fourfold way of the Buddha answering questions in areas such as: 1) the objective behind these methods, and 2) suggestions for further study or investigation.

Nevertheless, before going into the discussions of the chapters regarding the ways the Buddha answers questions, it is important to look at the principle teaching of the Buddha. The investigation of this would allow one to understanding the perimeter of the

Buddha's teachings. It is also gives clues as to why the Buddha chooses to answers in different styles.

PART 2

The Perimeter of the Buddha's Teaching

Before investigating the nature of the Buddha's silence and why he was silent on certain topics, it is imperative that readers understand how the Buddha's main goal and intention were often expressed in early suttas. For example, a recurring and arguably most seminal doctrinal scheme found in many early discourses is the Four Noble Truths. This is an important principle in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*: the sutta on the "Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma"[80] that describes the experience of "reality." The teaching is directed straight to the alleged problem of humanity, "suffering," specifying that life contains not only suffering, but that there exists great happiness that lies within oneself.[81] As the Four Noble Truths teach: dukkha, the cause of dukkha, the cessation of dukkha, and the practice leading to the cessation of *dukkha* (the Noble Eightfold Path)—"This doctrine delineates the symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment plan for alleviating human suffering."[82] That is, it offers "an analysis of the basic human process of responding to life's afflictions and a framework for understanding and working with the pain in our own lives and in the world."[83]

The first noble truth is about the acknowledgment of *dukkha* and focuses on the issues of suffering. *Dukkha* is a word translated by many scholars as suffering. The

[80] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1843.
[81] For details see Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Refuge* (Valley Center, CA: Metta Forest Monastery, 2012), 55–58, on section Life Isn't Just Suffering.
[82] Segall, *Encountering Buddhism: Western Psychology and Buddhist Teachings*, 43.
[83] Caroline Brazier, *Buddhist Psychology: Liberate Your Mind, Embrace Life* (United Kingdom: Robinson, 2003), 8.

essence of *dukkha* lies within the sense of dissatisfaction often felt in life, or put in another way by Thanissaro Bhikkhu: life is stressful.[84] The second noble truth is the cause (origin) of suffering—desire, craving, and attachments. These are the elements that thrust the mind to grasp and cling. The third noble truth teaches that suffering can be completely eradicated. The fourth noble truth describes the paths or treatment plan for eradicating suffering and achieving long-term welfare and happiness. According to Bodhi Bhikkhu's *The Noble Eightfold Path: The Way to the End of Suffering*, the essence of this doctrine is to enable liberation.[85] The Noble Eightfold Path as presented in the *Magga-Vibhaṅga Sutta* (SN 45.8) consists of right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.[86] These constitute the way of virtue, concentration and wisdom, the way of nobility and happiness. Further, it offers insight to the nature of *dukkha*, impermanence, and not-self; thus step by step tranquilizing the mind from fashioning (fabrication) and enabling detachment and liberation. This is the basis or framework behind all of the Buddha's teaching focusing on what can be experienced. The ultimate goal is eradicating suffering and leading sentient beings to *nibbāna*.

> In accordance with the first noble truth of *dukkha*,
>
> Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ: Jāti'pi dukkhā, jarā'pi dukkhā, byādhi'pi dukkhā, maraṇam'pi dukkhaṃ, appiyehi sampayogo dukkho, piyehi vippayogo dukkho, yamp'icchaṃ na labhati tam'pi dukkhaṃ - saṃkhittena pañcūpādānakkhandhā dukkhā.
>
> Now, oh monks, this [is] the noble truth of suffering: Birth is suffering, old-age is also suffering, sickness is also suffering, death is also suffering, association with unpleasant [one] is suffering, dissociation from pleasant [one] is suffering, not

[84] Segall, *Encountering Buddhism: Western Psychology and Buddhist Teachings*, 43.
[85] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering* (Seattle, WA: Pariyatti Publishing, 2006), 1–119.
[86] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1528–29.

> getting what one desires is also suffering; in brief, the five aggregates of clinging are suffering. (My own translation)

"This is suffering"—dissatisfaction is suffering—understand, acknowledge, admit and accept all the ways dissatisfaction has caused suffering in one's life. For a person with a sense of pain and agitation, the mind is unstable, very fragile.[87] He or she lacks concentration and the ability to think "straight" and "clearly." It therefore, easier to develop a state of ill will, aversion, annoyance, and irritation directed towards oneself or others which subtly transforms into ignorance without us being aware thereof.[88] Due to mood swings and mental dysfunction, the state of mind is like a "tangled skein"[89] that is as mixed up as a knotted string ball. Understanding this principle allows one to have the power and desire to do something about it.[90]

However, before carrying out the action to eliminate suffering, one needs to know its cause. According to the second noble truth,

> Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkha-samudayaṃ ariya saccaṃ: Yāyaṃ taṇhā ponobbhavikā, nandirāgasahagatā tatratatrābhinandinī, seyyathidaṃ: kāmataṇhā, bhavataṇhā, vibhavataṇhā.
>
> Now, oh monks, this is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: Now this very craving leading to rebirth, connected with passionate delight, *kamma-kusalā* pleasure here and there, just as this: craving for sensual desires, craving for existence, and craving for non-existence. (My own translation)

In Buddhist tenets, according to the second noble truth—the origination of dukkha—all suffering has an origin[91] and is curable—the cure lies within one's own

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[87] Jon Kabat-Zinn and Thich Nhat Hanh, *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness* (Random House LLC, 2009), 64.
[88] Andy Hargreaves, "Mixed Emotions: Teachers' Perceptions of Their Interactions with Students," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 16, no. 8 (2000): 819.
[89] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *The Shape of Suffering : A Study of Dependent Co-Arising* (Valley Center, CA: Metta Forest Monastery?, 2006), 11–50.
[90] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *The Shape of Suffering : A Study of Dependent Co-Arising*, 14.
[91] For details see Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 534–36, on section of Paticca-Samuppada-Vibhanga Sutta: Analysis of Dependent Origination (SN 12.2).

power, which is one's will and determination.[92] Understand that all forms of suffering have their roots in the natural human mind and are deepened by the habitual way of thinking (proliferation and generation).[93] Therefore, the negative way of thinking must be abandoned and renounced. In Udāna 1.3, the Buddha explains, "When this is, that is. From the arising of this comes the arising of that. From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that."[94] That is to say habitual formations (fabrications) that lead to sorrow, grief, lamentation, pain and despair are dependent on ignorance. Contrarily, to eliminate or liberate oneself from pain, despair…sorrow… sickness…is to eradicate ignorance.[95] Note, "ignorance" here means not seeing the origin of suffering. After all, the main implication here is to see the root cause of suffering.

Phenomenogically, the Buddha emphasizes the doctrine of impermanence that all experienced phenomena changes and nothing will remain forever— things arise and cease from moment to moment. Therefore, when something ceases to exist, others will cease to exist as well or over time cease to exist— the same goes for individual moments of suffering, although ignorance would quickly regenerate new instances of suffering. Due to the lack of awareness, one's mind generates, fashions, and proliferates— mental formation. One clings and cries out loud when things do not go one's way— dissatisfaction. The more dissatisfied one is, the more one tends to fabricate.[96] Generally, one will be happy when obtaining what is desired and contrarily, unhappy and frustrated

[92] For details see Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1843–47, sutta on Setting in the Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma (SN 56.11).
[93] For details see Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 879, on section of A Certain Bhikkhu.
[94] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Udāna: Exclamations*, 28.
[95] For details see Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 534–36, on section of Paticca-Samuppada-Vibhanga Sutta: Analysis of Dependent Origination (SN 12.2).
[96] For details see Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 533–36, on the Shorter Discourse to Mālunkyāputta (MN 63).

when one does not.[97] Delights, which are temporary at best, turn out to be stressful as the craving and grasping continue to grow.[98]

In the *Vedanā Saṃyutta Sutta* (SN 36.6), the Buddha also expounded that an "ignorant" person is afflicted with two kinds of feelings: bodily and mental feeling. This feeling is similar to being pierced by a dart, and following the first piercing, he/she is hit by a second dart.[99] The reason that an "ignorant" person suffers more than others is due to the negative attitude of self-denigration. That is "[generalizing] negative outcomes is also incompatible with learning from one's mistakes and failures. Concluding that… [it is] one's own fault, typically leads to intensely negative self-focused attention and emotions, instead of cooler, [fewer] emotional appraisals of what went wrong and what one could do differently next time."[100] For example, thoughts of "I am not good at all, whatever I do will lead to more trauma" and so forth will generate more suffering as one dwells in the mental proliferation. In SN 22:36 the Buddha said, "What one stays obsessed with…that's what one is limited by. Whatever, one is limited by, that's how one is classified."[101] Because of unskillful rumination[102] one cannot liberate oneself. When one is mindful of this state and focuses on the positive aspect (one is still able to overcome difficulties with the right mindset), one is able to regain self-esteem to overcome the habit of bad thinking. Note, the human brain takes sensations and creates a coherent world by filling in the missing information and using past experience to give

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[97] Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy: Continuities and Discontinuities*, 91.
[98] David J. Kalupahana, *Pratītya-Samutpāda*, ed. Lindsay Jones, vol. 11 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 7364.
[99] For details see Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1263–65, on the analogy of the Dart (SN 36.6).
[100] Wolfgang Stroebe and Miles Hewstone, *European Review of Social Psychology* (Psychology Press, 2005), 161.
[101] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *The Shape of Suffering: A Study of Dependent Co-Arising*, 42.
[102] E. Watkins and J. D. Teasdale, "Adaptive and Maladaptive Self-Focus in Depression," *Journal of Affective Disorders* 82, no. 1 (2004): 1.

meaning to whatever a person comes into contact with. So if a person is not mindful of his/her situation, he/she will be in a bad situation without even knowing that he/she is in it. Thus, when the twelve links of interdependent co-arising are penetrated, elements of ignorance diminish, and the element of clarity/insight increases. When "ignorance" is eradicated, defiling views such as suffering are also relinquished.[103]

Further, a proper understanding of phenomena as impermanence (*anicca*) and not-self (*anattā*) would enable a person to pacify his or her dispositional tendencies. Pacification of dispositions leads to a better understanding of one's own personality as well as the world of experience. Thus, when one looks at the nature of stress with right view/discernment it will help one to see that any identity one formulates is based on nutriments, and that the delight in that identity is based on the activity of feeding. The objective is to help practitioners develop disenchantment *(nibbidā)* towards the way consciousness appears in the world. Stress comes into play with fabrication as a "requisite condition…knowing this drawback…comprehending all [fabrication], independent of all nutriment, rightly seeing freedom from disease."[104]

> Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ: Yo tassāyeva taṇhāya asesavirāganirodho, cāgo, paṭinissaggo, mutti, anālayo.
>
> Now, oh monks, this is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering: The complete detachment and cessation to craving, giving up, renunciation, freed, and free from attachment. (My own translation)

The third noble truth is the cessation of dukkha—liberation is possible, that is to say freedom from the suffering caused by greed, hatred, and ignorance is attainable by renunciation and incorporating the Noble Eightfold Path. This is done by taking action to

[103] Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy and Liberation: The Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and Other Basic Buddhist Teachings* (New York: Broadway Books, 1999), 244.
[104] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, trans., *Sutta Nipāta* (Valley Center, CA: Metta Forest Monastery, 2016), 316.

investigate, critically analyze and try to understand what the causes of the suffering are. Since a person is able to identify "suffering arises from within ourselves but not anywhere else," it is up to individuals to completely give up, detach or renounce the ignorance (the subtle negative thinking) so there is no more stress left. The achievement of this is also known as *nibbāna*. As the word *nibbāna* itself is the extinguishing of fire, it is the extinguishing of stress/suffering. The *Taṇhā Sutta* (SN 27.8) emphasizes any desire/passion with regard to craving for forms or any desire/passion with regard to craving for sounds, aromas, flavors, tactile sensations, or ideas is a defilement of the mind. When, with regard to these six bases, the defilements of awareness are abandoned, then the mind is inclined to renunciation. The mind that actualized renunciation feels pliable for the direct knowing of those qualities worth realizing.[105]

> Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ: Ayameva ariyo aṭṭhaṃgiko maggo - seyyathidaṃ: sammādiṭṭhi, sammā saṃkappo, sammā vācā, sammā kammanto, sammā ājīvo, sammā vāyāmo, sammā sati, sammā samādhi.
>
> Now, oh monks, this is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering: Like this noble eightfold path, namely—right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. (my own translation)

The Noble Eightfold Path is the path of practice leading to the cessation of *dukkha* to recovery and liberation. In the *Magga-vibhaṅga Sutta: An Analysis of the Path*, the Buddha expounds the Noble Eightfold Path: "Right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration,"[106] these are recommended ways of life. In summary, these paths are the way of cultivating

[105] For details see Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1012–14, on section of the Kilesasaṃyutta (SN 27.1-10).
[106] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1528–29, see section on the Analysis (SN 45.8).

"wisdom, morality and meditation,"[107] which allows one to cogitate, contemplate, and be aware of the nature of stress (suffering). In other words, it allows one to penetrate stress—having insight of its origination, how to arrive at cessation. That is the extinguishing of all mental proliferation, freeing the mind from generation of stress, stopping it from popping up so all form of stress (ignorance) are eradicated at a very subtle level—this state is synonymous to liberation. All of this is summed up by the Buddha in the *Dhammapada* verse 183, as "cultivate good, avoid evil, and purify the mind."

With this in mind, the next section explores the significance of why Buddha remained silent when others (wanderer and interlocutor) asked certain questions. The main focus is to interpret particularly the meaning behind his intention.

[107] John F. Haught, *What Is Religion?: An Introduction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 52.

CHAPTER 2: THE BUDDHA'S SILENCE

Introduction

In general, silence can be a powerful heuristic tool. An act of silence can indicate an agreement, acceptance, or happy or sad feelings. Alternatively, it can be considered as showing retaliation, anger, or hatred. For example, if one were to ask a friend a question, and the friend remains silent, one can generate many assumptions, such as the friend is not happy, sad, just does not want to talk, and so on. In other words, silence is a form of communication that expresses various emotions and feelings and contains many meanings. Nevertheless, in the Pāli Nikāyas there are numerous occasions that show the Buddha stayed silent or put the questions aside (e.g., SN 44:10, MN 72). "Why did he do so?" is a topic we are going to investigate.

Looking at AN 4:42, the Buddha is said to state that there are four methods with which one would choose to answer questions: 1) By way of an explanation given that is direct and final; 2) By going into details and analysis; 3) By asking another question; and 4) By set aside.[108] Using the hermeneutical approach, this chapter will investigate why the Buddha *intentionally* put a certain subject matter aside. Here, I want to argue against Troy Wilson Organ's interpretation of the Buddha's silence as "the silence of a 'higher affirmation,'"[109] a view that is rooted in mysticism.

The purpose is to explore the Buddha's underlying meaning or reason for his silence through examining the *Vacchagotta Sutta* of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (SN 44:10) and the *Aggi-Vacchagotta Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* (MN 72). In this paper, I will argue

[108] T. W. Rhys Davids, *The Questions of King Milinda*, 205.
[109] Troy Wilson Organ, "The Silence of the Buddha," *Philosophy East and West* 4, no. 2 (July 1954): 137–38.

how the Buddha's silence is not an expression of "mysticism" but rather: 1) by virtue of time, place, and the interlocutor's mentality; 2) an act of pedagogical guidance; 3) staying focused on the goal, the teaching leading to *nibbāna*; and 4) consideration of the knowledge of the questioner.

Before going into the main discussion, I would like to highlight the word "silence" in this context. Silence here is not to be regarded in the general sense of reticence, quiescence, muteness or having nothing to say. Instead, it is to set aside, more correctly to use the original Pāli word *ṭhapanīya* which means, "not to be answered or left undecided"[110] issues that are irrelevant to the goal or considered a waste of time.

Examining the Buddha's acts of silence not only will further the knowledge regarding his teachings, but most importantly, will help readers enhance the way they investigate, analyze or discern why, what, and how the enlightened one speaks.

1. Intention

The Pāli term for "intention" is *cetanā,*[111] this word is also translated by Buddhist as volition, will, or directional. It describes a mental process that steer the mind to a direction or goal. In the similar line of thought, according to Michael Bratman, "Intentions are typically elements in plans. Intentional action generally involves an intention to act. The state of intention is itself the common element in both the states, and the actions included within our conception of intention."[112] The idea of an intention to act is partly tied to future-directed intentions and plans and to their characteristic

[110] T. W. Rhys (Thomas William Rhys) Davids and William Stede, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary* (Chipstead, 1921), s.v. "ṭhapanīya," 431.
[111] A. P. Buddhadatta Mahāthera, *Concise Pāli-English Dictionary* (Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1957), s.v. "cetanā," 105.
[112] Michael Bratman, "Two Faces of Intention," *The Philosophical Review* 93, no. 3 (July 1984): 399, doi:10.2307/2184542.

commitment to future action.[113] In other words, "intention" is "an act or instance of determining mentally upon some action or result." However, "types of actions may be performed intentionally in the course of executing a certain intention,"[114] dependent upon the factors of desires and beliefs. This is to say there is a motivation behind an intentional action.

The same action can be performed by multiple people, but the reason behind it might be different. If your friend were to ask you a question, and you do not answer but stay silent, an assumption can also be made. For example, you are unhappy, angry, or just simply don't want to answer. To take an example about the Buddha, when a wanderer approached and asked the Buddha a certain question and the Buddha intentionally left that aside or stayed silent, various theories can be made. In as much as the Buddha has explained, he relayed in other suttas that this type of question is to be put aside. Why are these questions to be left aside? Indirectly, the Buddha insisted they are not conducive for the path and goal. This will be further discussed later.

In this light, "If we assume that every intentional action is done for a reason, and that this reason can be cast in a teleological form, we can identify doing *A* intentionally with doing *A* in order to do something else."[115] That is, person X is doing "*A* in order to do *B* in order to do *C* … in order to do *Z*, which [X] doing for its own sake."[116] Nonetheless, not all intentional actions are performed with a further end. According to George Wilson and Carl Ginet's view of intention, one does not need to intend "doing *A*

[113] Bratman, "Two Faces of Intention," 391.
[114] Bratman, "Two Faces of Intention," 395.
[115] Kieran Setiya, "Intention," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2014, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/intention/.
[116] Setiya, "Intention."

to promote some additional end in order to count as doing *A* intentionally. It is sufficient to intend, of something one is doing, that it promotes or constitutes one's doing *A*."[117]

All this is to say that a person intentionally performs an action because there must be a reason behind it, no matter if you stay silent or put a question aside. Even if you do not want to answer, in and of itself, the action of doing so would be considered as a reason. In other words, we must therefore attempt to understand the Buddha's intention behind his silence.

2. Silence of the Buddha

a) Scholars' Views

The Pāli term for silence is *tuṇhī*.[118] *Tuṇhī* is generally use together with *ahosi* which means, he remained silent. This can be found in the *Ānanda Sutta* (SN 44.10), the discourse presents an episode where the Buddha stay silence to the questions of the wanderer Vacchagotta.

> *Kinnu kho bho gotama, atthattāti. Evaṃ vutte bhagavā tuṇhi ahosi.*
> Is there self, master Gotama? For this the Buddha remained silent.
>
> *Kiṃ pana bho gotama, natthattāti. Dutiyampi kho bhagavā tuṇhi ahosi.* [119]
> Is there no-self, master Gotama? For a second time, the Buddha remained silent.

In the Pāli Sutta Nikāyas, the Buddha is said to state that certain topics of discussion should be left aside.[120] Note: DN 9, MN 63, MN 72, AN 10.93, SN 44.1-SN 44.11 portray that the Buddha and his disciples, having discerned these tens views/issues/topics as not healthy for the main task at hand (the practice leading to

[117] Setiya, "Intention."
[118] A. P. Buddhadatta Mahāthera, *Concise Pāli-English Dictionary*, s.v. "tuṇhī," 119.
[119] "Ananda Suta (SN IV_utf8)," accessed December 12, 2017, https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sltp/SN_IV_utf8.html#pts.400.
[120] Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya*, 2nd ed. (Wisdom Publications, 2003), 1380–95. .

awakening), refuse to take a position on them. Therefore, do not entertain them and put them aside. Another sutta that indirectly rejects these speculative views is the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (DN 1). The discourse shows that the Buddha negated 62 views of his time because he understood: "These viewpoints thus grasped and adhered to will lead to such-and-such destinations in another world." It does not lead to peace and liberation. See actual suttas for details. In regard to the matter of the Buddha intentionally putting aside or staying silent to specific questions—namely the ten undeclared issues (*avyākatas)* — many investigations have been done. These ten unanswered questions (*avyākatas)* can be classified into three sets. The first set consists of four questions dealing with issues regarding the self and world (*attā loko ca*): questions such as, "Is there self or no-self?" and "Is the world eternal or not?" The second set has two questions mainly inquiring about the "relationship between the soul and body (*jīva* and [*rūpa*], respectively): are they one and the same (*taṃ jīvaṃ taṃ [rūpaṃ]*) or is the soul one thing and the body another (*aññaṃ jīvaṃ aññaṃ [rūpaṃ]*)? The third set deals with the question of whether the enlightened saint or *Tathāgata* exists after death (*hoti tathāgato paraṃ maraṇā*)."[121]

Scholars such as David J. Kalupahana state, "There is a belief that the Buddha observed 'silence' on all these matters, indicating his reluctance to make any statement because these are matters that transcends linguistic expression. While it is true that 'whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent,' such silence is justified only if these questions continued to be raised despite the reason given for not answering or

[121] Hugh Nicholson, "The Unanswered Questions and the Limits of Knowledge," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 40, no. 5 (October 2012): 533–34, doi:http://dx.doi.org.uwest.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10781-012-9165-0.

explaining them (*avyākata*)."[122] They are put aside because it is epistemologically meaningless, pragmatically irrelevant, and not conducive to the task at hand of solving human suffering.[123] This is also acknowledged by A. K. Warders, as he states, "the Buddha rejects ten extreme views as irrelevant to the business [at] hand … instead [commends] the study of the Four Truths."[124] Kalupahana further exemplifies that these speculative questions such as those regarding the afterlife are purely embraced by those who are attached to life in one way or another. On the contrary, for the enlightened person, this is not the case; instead, the liberated one leads a life that is conducive for everyone and the world.[125]

Thanissaro Bhikkhu approaches this issue by citing the example of a man being hit by a poison arrow who does not let others help pull the arrow out unless they answer all of his proliferative questions.[126] Thanissaro Bhikkhu writes, "Because the information requested by the man is theoretically knowable, it is possible to read this simile as suggesting that there would be answers to the ten questions, but the Buddha wanted to avoid giving them because they are a waste of valuable time."[127]

Further, Thanissaro Bhikkhu insists that the general standard of the Buddha's teaching was having to be true and beneficial. He sees that the Buddha put these questions aside because of pragmatic reasons.[128] Some of the reasons are: "This does not lead to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation…to direct knowledge…unbinding,"[129] or

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[122] David J. Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy: Continuities and Discontinuities* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), 98–99.
[123] Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy: Continuities and Discontinuities*, 99.
[124] A. K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism* (Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 2004), 136.
[125] Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy: Continuities and Discontinuities*, 99.
[126] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 371.
[127] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 371–72.
[128] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 372.
[129] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 372.

"this view does not constitute the practice…rather distract[s] attention from the practice."[130] Besides, this kind of objectification would give rise to many forms of conflict. Most importantly, dwelling on some of these views would lead to bad states and prevent awakening.[131] In a similar perspective, Christopher W. Gowans represents these questions as a '"thicket of views' that is 'beset by suffering' and 'does not lead…to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna.'"[132]

A mid-nineteenth to early twentieth-century scholar, Edmond Holmes (1850-1936) views the Buddha's silence as very subtle and profound. He states:

> The more closely I study the stories in which Buddha answers the over-curious with silence and gives his reasons for doing so, and the more freely I surrender myself to the subtle influence of their atmosphere, the stronger does my conviction become that Buddha kept silence, when metaphysical questions were discussed, not because he had nothing to say about great matters, but because he had far too much, because he was overwhelmed by the flood of his own mighty thoughts, and because the channels of expression which the riddle-mongers of his day invited him to use were both too narrow and too shallow to give his soul relief.[133]

In his work *The Creed of Buddha,* Holmes (1908) has one chapter exploring the Buddha's reticence, in which Holmes negates three plausible theories. The first is that Buddha "was a pure and consistent agnostic, an indifferentist not only in the presence of the wrangling dogmatists, but also in the depths of his own soul."[134] The second is that the Buddha's "own attitude towards great matters was one of helpless bewilderment."[135] And the third is that the Buddha "was a negative dogmatist, who refrained, for fear of

[130] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 372.
[131] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 373.
[132] Christopher W. Gowans, *Philosophy of the Buddha* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 152.
[133] Edmond Holmes, *The Creed of Buddha* (New York: Lane, 1908), 156.
[134] Holmes, *The Creed of Buddha*, 170.
[135] Holmes, *The Creed of Buddha*, 171.

scandalizing his disciples and paralyzing their spiritual energies, from openly formulating his sweeping negations."[136]

Nevertheless, Holmes' work mainly tries to advocate that the Buddha's teaching and ideologies have roots established in the Upaniṣads. In other words, Holmes views the Buddha's silence as having to do with the ideology that is taught in the Upaniṣads. Holmes supposes, "The silence of Buddha seems to have … a strong purpose behind it; and that purpose must have been the outcome, not of philosophical indifference, but of some master 'theory of things.'"[137] This master theory Holmes explains as:

> [The] only theory which takes account both of the fact of his silence and of the reasons which he gave for it,—the theory that he had a creed of his own, a creed which went to the root of all great matters, but which, in some sort, *bound him to silence*. Such a creed was, as it happens, already in existence. The deeply spiritual philosophy which had inspired the authors of the Upanishads was, in its essence, esoteric. The conception of God—the Supreme Reality—as, on the one hand, the soul or inner life of the Universe, and, on the other hand, the true self of each individual man, is one in the presence of which thought becomes an impertinence and speech a profanation.[138]

As the evidence in the passage above shows, Holmes claims the Buddha stayed silent because the issue concerns Supreme Reality—Brahman, the Universal Self/Soul. These topics transcend language expression.[139] In as much as to say, although Holmes discusses the negation of metaphysical questions, he himself still hankers for metaphysical issues.

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[136] Holmes, *The Creed of Buddha*, 171.
[137] Holmes, *The Creed of Buddha*, 155–56.
[138] Holmes, *The Creed of Buddha*, 175–76.
[139] Note: According to Nicholson (2012), scholars that take the position that "the Buddha's silence on the Unanswered Questions stems from an awareness of a dimension of reality that transcends the antimonies of human reason" are called absolutist (p. 534). On the other hand, one is named "positivist" if he/she views "the Buddha was an empiricist who correctly recognized direct experience as our only valid source of knowledge. The Buddha's silence constitutes a radical critique of the metaphysical presuppositions underlying each of the Unanswered Questions" (p. 534).

Troy Organ is another scholar who studies the same topic, the Buddha's silence. His article "The Silence of the Buddha"[140] shows that he is aware that the Buddha rejected the two extremes—the annihilationism and eternalism view of his day. He insists that the Buddha remaining silent to these metaphysical questions was to stay away from contemporary views that the Buddha saw as not beneficial at all for the practice and goal. He also argues the Buddha put certain questions aside because he wanted to focus on what he set out to do: to teach sentient beings and help them transcend their suffering. However, Organ does not stop there, but makes a further claim: "the unwillingness of Gautama to answer metaphysical questions is found in the inadequacies of language."[141] His conclusion is:

> The insufficiency of human language to express the fundamental nature of reality… Silence is the best expression of reality… 'What I think may be stated thus: That which is in all beings wordless, speechless, shows no signs, is not possible of cogni[z]ance, and is above all questioning and answering.' Man should live in reality, not discourse about it. But this silence is not the silence of the misologist, it is the silence of a 'higher affirmation.'[142]

From this statement, one would assume that Organ insists the Buddha's awakening experience is inexpressible, beyond expression through language, and ineffable—therefore, he remained silent. In other words, Organ describes the reasons for the Buddha's silence in terms that are highly reminiscent of scholarly discourse on the topic

[140] Organ, "The Silence of the Buddha," 125–40.
[141] Organ, "The Silence of the Buddha," 136.
[142] Organ, "The Silence of the Buddha," 137–38. Note, Troy Organ's final statement of his work claims that the teachings of the Buddha such as dependent co-arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), impermanence (*anicca*), and not self (*anattā*)… are "metaphysical conceptions." He states that, "Buddhism might have remained a religion 'pure and undefiled' if the Four- fold Noble Truth could have been kept free from metaphysics; but a meta- physical view was implicit in the Fourfold Noble Truth, and so from the teachings of this man who refused to engage in metaphysical thinking and who warned others of the dangers which lurk in theorizing have emerged some of the most speculative philosophical systems the world has yet seen. The history of Buddhism is evidence of the inevitability and necessity of metaphysics, in spite of the insistent silence of the Buddha" (p. 140).

of "mysticism," which emphasizes the inexpressibility and ineffability of ultimate truth. However, is the Buddha's enlightenment experience really mystical, inexpressible, and ineffable, as Organ claims? First, let's look at the term mysticism closely.

b) Mysticism

i. Upaniṣads: Mystical Doctrine

There was the existence of mystical doctrine during the Buddha's time. Most noticeably are the teaching of the Upaniṣads. The term Upaniṣads is translated by Paul Duessen as "mystical doctrine."[143] Its contains teachings explains how the universe is created by the Primal Giant known as Brahman (this also can be traced back to the Rig Veda hymn 10 verses 129) and how being comes into existence. Importantly, the teaching on having knowledge of Brahman (Self) one would gain deathless—immortality, *mokṣa*.

According to the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.3.2 and 6.3.3, Brahman creates living beings using three elements (earth, water and fire). The creator then introduces in each being a living soul which is called (*jīva/ātmā*).

> "That Being (i. e. that which had produced fire, water, and earth) thought, let me now enter those three beings (fire, water, earth) with this living Self ([*jīva ātmā*]), and let me then reveal (develop) names and forms." [144]

The mysticism of the Upaniṣads does not end at providing a soul and give name and form, but also makes this individual soul (atman) immortal. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (6.11.3) explains: '"His (body) indeed withers and dies when the living Self has left it;

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[143] Paul Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads* (T. & T. Clark, 1908), 56.
[144] Max Muller, "Chāndogya Upaniṣad," *Sacred-Texts.com*, accessed: December 27, 2017, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe01/sbe01121.htm

the living Self dies not.'"[145] Besides, at death, the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (6.9.2) insisted: "…all these creatures, when they have become merged in the True (…in death), know not that they are merged in the True."[146] Here, one could assume that all these theories are of mystical.

Brahman (the supreme Self) according to the *Upaniṣads* is everything. The brahmin priest, king, gods, animals, the world, "all is that Self."[147] He is also "… endless, unlimited, consisting of nothing but knowledge."[148] Besides, "He is incomprehensible, for he cannot be comprehended."[149] As shown above, he is everywhere but cannot be seen or explains—mystical. To simply use Deussen's words, "in Brih. 4.1.2, is explained as "speech" (vac), and is found to be inadequate to convey a knowledge of Brahman."[150]

In line with mystical/mysterious, according to the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (3.11) knowledge of Brahman is not to be taught to outsiders. *The Philosophy of the Upanishads* explains that, knowledge is to be "'communicated to no one, who is not a pupil, who has not been a pupil for a whole year, who does not propose himself to be a teacher.'"[151] On the contrary, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 3.11.5 state that, "A father may therefore tell that doctrine of Brahman to his eldest son, or to a worthy pupil. But no one should tell it to anybody else, even if he gave him the whole sea-girt earth, full of treasure, for this

[145] Max Muller, "Chāndogya Upaniṣad," *Sacred-Texts.com*, accessed: September 27, 2017, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe01/sbe01129.htm
[146] Max Muller, "Chāndogya Upaniṣad," *Sacred-Texts.com*, accessed: September 27, 2017, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe01/sbe01127.htm
[147] Max Muller, "Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad," *Sacred-Texts.com*, accessed: September 27, 2017, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe15/sbe15061.htm
[148] Max Muller, "Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad," *Sacred-Texts.com*, accessed: September 27, 2017, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe15/sbe15061.htm
[149] Max Muller, "Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad," *Sacred-Texts.com*, accessed: September 27, 2017, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe15/sbe15077.htm
[150] Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*, 56.
[151] Deussen, 70.

doctrine is worth more than that, yea, it is worth more."[152] This is because knowledge of Brahman is very important, precious, and secrecy. It is the key for one to free oneself from death, and to win *mokṣa* (liberation).

As shown above, the Upaniṣads documented the doctrine of Brahman, the Primal Giant that stands above the universe. Brahman is omnipresence, omniscience, and forever-lasting. It also professes the metaphysical philosophy of the origin of the universe and beings. Nevertheless, these doctrines are rejected by the Buddha because they are merely, mystical and metaphysical. More details are examined in later sections: historical background to the concept of self and no-self.

Nevertheless, the Pāli equivalent word of mystical is *abhiññā* (higher knowledge) or *iddhi* (magical power). The terminology is used to describes one who has attained special knowledge (*abhiññāyatta)* or supernormal power (*siddhi*) in spiritual cultivation.[153] In Buddhism, this knowledge or power is gain via the pratice of meditation. According to the Buddhist, this experience is fully discerned and understood (*abhijānāti*).[154] Let us now examines how the term mysticism is render in the Western context.

ii. Western Context of Mysticism

To begin with, I would like to define the word "mystical" as rendered in religious experience. According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, mystical is defined as something rare, mysterious and obscure in meaning; something that is above human understanding.[155]

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[152] Max Muller, "Chāndogya Upaniṣad," *Sacred-Texts.com*, accessed: December 27, 2017, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe01/sbe01069.htm
[153] A. P. Buddhadatta Mahāthera, *Concise Pāli-English Dictionary*, s.v. "abhiññā," 26.
[154] A. P. Buddhadatta Mahāthera, *Concise Pāli-English Dictionary*, s.v. "abhijānāti," 26.
[155] Catherine Soanes et al., *Pocket Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), s.v. "mystical," 597.

Further, the origin of the terms "mystical" and "mysticism" derive from the Greek word, "*muein*," which means to shut one's eyes and fasten one's mouth.[156] One can view it as "mere reproach, to throw at any opinion which we regard as vague and vast and sentimental, and without…facts or logic."[157] Alternatively, one refers to it invariably to describe "a personal encounter with (or an enduring dwelling within) a domain of experience that is of principal metaphysical value and interest [opposite] other life experiences."[158] In this context, it also means ambiguous, fathomless, and open to interpretation.

In the academic world, there is no one definition for mysticism (religious, mystical or meditative experience). For Ninian Smart, religious experience is rendered as an intuition or vision such as "mystical unions, prophetic visions, psychic ascents to heaven, ecstasies, auditions, intoxication."[159] To F. Samuel Brainard, mysterious experience is typically described as ecstatic states such as having a mystical union (with God or the Dao), divine revelation, or samadhi.[160] On soteriological thought, Robert H. Sharf interprets religious experiences as a meditational practice acquired through the course of training with the goal to win liberation.[161] Likewise, William James elucidates it as "states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect."[162] This is to say, there are many ways to describe and interpret mystical experience, all of which

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[156] John F. Haught, *What Is Religion?: An Introduction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 100.
[157] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience : A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Modern Library, 1994), 413–14.
[158] F. Samuel Brainard, "Defining 'Mystical Experience,'" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 2 (July 1996): 375.
[159] Ninian Smart, *Understanding Religious Experience in Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis. Edit by Steven T. Katz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 13.
[160] Brainard, "Defining 'Mystical Experience,'" 375.
[161] Robert H. Sharf, "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience," *Numen* 42, no. 3 (October 1995): 231.
[162] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience : A Study in Human Nature*, 414–15.

is dealing with the utmost "issues such as God or a saving angelic being or ultimate reality and truth."[163]

Mystical experience is an actual experience that is rooted in reality. However, in some sense, every experience evades description. There are no efficacious ways to look at experience in precise language. Although we may find new ways to discuss experience, language still falls short in comprehending the totality of a given experience. Mystical experience is a phenomenon that holds true but cannot be explained in mere ordinary words. We shall discuss ineffability in the next section.

iii. Ineffability

The similar term for ineffable in Pāli is *nibbāna*. According to the *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary, nibbāna* is defined as: "[S]afety, the supreme, the transcendental, the uncreated, the tranquil, the home of ease, the calm, the end of suffering, the medicine for all evil, the unshaken, the ambrosia, the immaterial, the imperishable, the abiding, the further shore, the unending, the bliss of effort, the supreme joy, **the ineffable**, the detachment, the holy city, and many others."[164]

As shown above, ineffable is in the list of the definition of *nibbāna*. In the context of religious experience—this means something that is indescribable to the unwise person. Nevertheless, in the same paragraph above, one can also see many descriptions of *nibbāna* itself: "the home of ease, the calm, the end of suffering, the medicine for all evil" and so forth. These depictions are simple to understand, grasp, and comprehend. In other words, *nibbāna* is not ineffable.

[163] Brainard, "Defining 'Mystical Experience,'" 375.
[164] T. W. Rhys (Thomas William Rhys) Davids and William Stede, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary* (Chipstead, 1921), s.v. "nibbāna," 198. With my emphasis (bolded words).

In contrast, in the West, a prominent facet that is greatly talked about in mystical, religious, or meditative experience is ineffability. Its nature defies words and logic. Expressions such as "indescribable, inexpressible, unspeakable, indefinable, unutterable, incomprehensible"[165] are used to describe and explain it. James describes ineffability as a "quality of being extremely difficult to explain to others."[166] In other words, one cannot communicate fully to another how one experiences the experience. Further, we struggle to find words to do so and never quite succeed.

Many argue that mystical experience itself is often deemed incommunicable. They state that no words or images can fully capture the sense of wonder behind mystical experiences. And, as much as the mystic tries to make known the content of the mysterious experience to others, there is always a feeling of falling infinitely short. It is just like eating an apple and telling other people what it tastes like. The other might have some idea of what one means, but not the actual taste itself. This is as Peter Moore simply puts it: "No experience can literally be 'shared' with or 'conveyed' to another becomes an acutely frustrating limitation for one who wishes to communicate some deeply felt and profoundly valued experience."[167] At times, the failure to communicate causes the mystic to fall into utter silence. From this, mysticism can be categorized as the "way of silence."[168] In this regard, silence also means ineffable; no description is adequate.[169]

Furthermore, ineffability also means something extraordinary. This aspect

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[165] Peter Moore, *Mystical Experience, Mystical Doctrine, Mystical Technique in Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis. Edit by Steven T. Katz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 17.
[166] Haught, *What Is Religion?: An Introduction*, 99–100.
[167] Moore, *Mystical Experience, Mystical Doctrine, Mystical Technique in Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis. Edit by Steven T. Katz*, 103.
[168] Haught, *What Is Religion?: An Introduction*, 99–100.
[169] Moore, *Mystical Experience, Mystical Doctrine, Mystical Technique in Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis. Edit by Steven T. Katz*, 18.

indicates non-ordinary experience, distinguishing "experiential processes that are naturalistically explainable and those that are not."[170] Nevertheless, is mystical experience really ineffable as described above? This question will be explored in the discussion of the sensorium.

iv. Vis Imaginativa

The Pāli equivalent word for "imagination" is *papañcita*. It is a composite of two words: *papañca* means obstacle, and *cita* means mind. In other words, *papañcita* can be defined as things that are obstacle to the mind. In spiritual terms, according to the A. P. Buddhadatta Mahāthera *papañca* means illusion, a "hindrance to spiritual progress."[171] However, there is a western scholar, Antoine Faivre, who speak of religious experience as the *vis imaginativa*. His theory departs from other western scholar's interpretation of mysticism, rather its focus is on the ideological power of imagination. In *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition,* Faive argues that imagination has the power to change things. Faivre cited Oswald Croll (1563 –1609), a sixteenth century alchemist's scholar who "made the *vis imaginativa* the very center of his system by declaring that Man possesses a sidereal body potentially capable of embracing the entire cosmos. The imagination is connected to it, the foundation of all magical operations, and possesses the power of engendering and producing visible bodies."[172]

Faivre also put forth a perspective having the soul as the "center of plastic and magical power that was capable of creating the body, of forming it, that is, of suggesting

[170] Brainard, "Defining 'Mystical Experience,'" 375.
[171] A. P. Buddhadatta Mahāthera, *Concise Pāli-English Dictionary*, s.v. "papañca,"165.
[172] Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition,* 108.

to it through imagination a design to manifest."[173] He further explains, "imagination functions as a seed; the images that our soul produces are not the simple modification of this soul, but body, incarnation, thoughts, and will; they become autonomous and then develop according to their own laws, like the children that we conceive."[174]

Faivre has summarizes and put forth four types of imagination:

1) The one that, beginning elements at its disposal, establishes new symbolic relationships, unprecedented ones. Hence most works of fiction, of poetry, of painting, and the like.
2) There is the imagination that plays on the universal correspondences supposed to exist in the universe…It presides, of course, in the works of art as well, but by its nature also informs of natural magic that put into play these networks of correspondences for the end of knowledge, such as astrology, or of action, such as the science of pentacles and talismans.
3) [The third type] could be called "passive" in the sense that it is the irruption of the *mundus imaginalis* into the consciousness of a subject that has not sought to bring on this imaginal experience.
4) [The fourth type] could be called "active" in a sense that the subject has voluntarily put his active imagination into play in view of entering into relationship with the *mundus imaginalis*.[175]

Faivre insisted that there are false imagination and true imagination. Therefore, one requires to know and distinguished which is false and which is authentic. "Through the false, or extravagant—*fantasia*—one has but a pale reflection of the visible things instead of an encounter with the power of unfathomable nature. It is the seed of madness; it lacks the anchoring…rooting of the image in our sidereal being—just as a plant is rooted in the soil. The true image gives body to our thought, transforms it into desire; it is the very body of this thought and desire, which incarnate themselves in it."[176]

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[173] Antoine Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition: Studies in Western Esotericism*, trans. Christine Rhone (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 102.
[174] Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, 103.
[175] Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, 155.
[176] Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, 103.

Fairve wrote in his conclusion, "by the idea that the human being was conceived in God's image, and since God is himself imagination, the human has something of the divine and thus not devoid of magical power."[177] He make further emphasis by citing apostle Paul in Man (Roman 8:19-22) "a being who is not only created but also a creator, a transformer of an awaiting Nature."[178]

With that said, one could argue that imagination is a product of illusion. It is not real. For example, Sigmund Freud describes reality as an illusion, stemming from man's imagination and his desire for wish fulfillment. He supports his theory with an analogy of a child needing a protector. The child projects the world as a catastrophic reality, and he needs a father figure to protect him. The child's imagination runs rampant with thoughts of a world that is terrifying, and he desires someone to save him. Freud even implies that the existence of a God stems from man's fear of the world and his need for a supreme being to safeguard him.[179] In other words, the man's imagination of the world has led him to create an illusion of a God that can protect him from the world.

In as far as what has discussed above, "imagination" as believe by the tradition (biblical), has the power do extraordinary things. It can move things (rocks), heal sickness, transform things (alter baby color), and even creates prodigies (with imagination power, women can produce baby by themselves without the help of a male). However, imagination itself, false or authentic, is an actual experience that is willed by the human's mind, therefore, phenomenological. Thus, it still falls under the categories of

[177] Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, 125.
[178] Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, 125.
[179] Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion Translate by W.D. Robson-Scott* (Martino Fine Books, 2010), 42.

the sensorium. In simple, one should discern and comprehend the experience within the senses faculties.

v. Sensorium

The Pāli equivalent term for sensorium is *āyatana,* translated in English *as* sense organs or the faculties.[180] According to Buddhism, all experiences are a product of the six faculties (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind) and six objects (forms, sounds, odors, tastes, tactile things, ideas)—in Pāli it is called, *Saḷāyatanā*. The coming of the six sense organs and objects creates six forms of consciousnesses (eye consciousness, ear consciousness…), which otherwise known as experiences (see below section for details).

According to Robert Sharf, experience has two meanings: "1) to directly encounter, participate in or live through; and 2) to directly perceive, observe, be aware of, or be conscious of."[181] Let us consider the following example:

1. A person under the influence of drugs having an experience, union with God in a state of ecstasy.
2. A person while doing prayer/contemplation sees "Light."
3. A person practicing meditation enters into *jhāna* states.

Rudolf Otto's word "numinous" can be used to describe a specific moment (awakening, union, *jhāna*, etc.) that sets itself apart from philosophizing. In other words, he argues that to seek meaning in any of these experiences is meaningless. Religious (mystical) experience itself is inexpressible and ineffable, in the sense that it "completely eludes

[180] A. P. Buddhadatta Mahāthera, *Concise Pāli-English Dictionary*, s.v. "āyatana," 44.
[181] Sharf, "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience," 265.

apprehension in terms of concepts."[182]

From the example above, we see that all three cases discuss experience but only the second and third case speak of a consciousness—an awareness that one is in an awakened state. The person in the first case is not aware due to intoxication. Regarding experience, the Buddha says to look at the senses. As David J. Kalupahana asserts:

> The most important method utilized by the Buddha in order to get rid of this metaphysical self is the analysis of the process of sense experience showing how this belief arises and what its consequences are. [183]

This experiential process is described as the relationship between the six senses and six objects, which are referred to as the twelve spheres or gateways (Pāli: *āyatana*). The interaction between these six pairs creates six types of consciousnesses, as illustrated below.

Six senses	**Six objects**	**Six forms of consciousness**
Eye	Visual form	Visual consciousness
Ear	Sound	Auditory consciousness
Nose	Smell	Olfactory consciousness
Tongue	Taste	Gustatory consciousness
Body	Tangible	Tactile consciousness
Mind	Mental objects	Mental consciousness

This is to say, for the Buddhist, every human experience must be understood in terms of our sensorium—the eighteen *dhātus* (elements) that consist of the six senses, six objects and six forms of consciousness. This is what the Buddha rendered as the "All." In the

[182] Jean Jacques. Waardenburg, *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion: Aims, Methods, and Theories of Research* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 435.
[183] David J. Kalupahana, *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1987), 29.

Sabba Sutta, he expounds:

> "And what, bhikkhus, is the all? The eye and forms, the ear and sounds, the nose and odours, the tongue and tastes, the body and tactile objects, the mind and mental phenomena. This is called the all…If anyone, bhikkhus, should speak thus: 'Having rejected this all, I shall make known another all'—that would be a mere empty boat on his part. If he were questioned he would not be able to reply and, further, he would meet vexation. For what reason? Because, bhikkhus, that would not be within his domain [of experience]."[184]

This is the basis of our human experience. To understand this (the process of the sensorium/how it works) is to come to apprehend our experience in terms of the six senses, six objects, and six consciousnesses. If we do not understand them and the processes (the cause and effect) we will be deceived by our experience, get lured into its trap and become stuck in it. This is because our brains autonomously take in sensations and create a coherent world, oftentimes filling in missing information by using past experience to give meaning to what we see, hear, touch, smell, and so on.

The Buddha teaches in the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta*:

> Depending upon the visual sense and the visible object, O brethren, arises visual consciousness; the coming together of these three is contact; depending upon contact arises feeling. What one feels one perceives; what one perceives, one reasons about. What one reasons about, one is obsessed with. Due to such obsessions, a person is assailed by obsessed perceptions and concepts in regard to visible objects cognizable by the visual organ, belonging to the past, the future and the present.[185]

This is what happens to mystics when they experience light or enter into deep meditation states and only enjoy the mystical bliss without performing phenomenological investigation. As one is delighted in the experience, one is stuck. Even in the depth of meditation, one still gets trapped within the sensorium. Whatever sense one is bounded

[184] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1140.
[185] Kalupahana, *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology*, 32.

by, that is what one is stuck with; one is subject to mental, verbal and conceptual proliferations, which leads one to obsessions. This is why according to the Satipaṭṭhāna *Sutta* (MN 10), the Buddha encouraged his disciples to thoroughly investigate their experience during meditation: this is *dukkha*; this is the origin of *dukkha*; this is the cessation of *dukkha;* and to transcend them until they reach *nibbāna* (the extinguishing of desire).

The first book of the Abhidhamma entitled *Dhammasaṅgaṇi (Compendium of States or Phenomena)* describes that,

> "…even the Fourth Jhāna, to gain which all sense of ease must have been put away, and all sense of ill must have been put away, and there must have been a dying out of the happiness and misery he was wont to feel - (the rapt meditation) which is imbued with disinterestedness, and where no ease is felt nor any ill, but only the perfect purity that comes of mindfulness and disinterestedness then the contact, etc. … the balance thatarises, these . . . are states that are good."[186]

This is to says, with regard to all of our experiences, the right way to examine them is to look at them on their terms—that is, to look at them as activity. Rather than having a great deal of interpretation and speculation, we should feel and see what is really going on in our body and mind. This in turn allows us to see the mental, verbal, and conceptual proliferation surrounding the experience—to use Nyanaponika Thera's words, "bare attention,"[187] that which is non-judgmental, paying close attention and observing the activity of one's mind without feeding additional information (philosophical or interpretative) on top of it. In other words, to discern the experience in and of itself (how it arises and passed away) without adding any other information on top of it.

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[186] Caroline A. F. Rhys Davids, *A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics: Translation of the First Book Abhidhammapitaka Entitled Dhammasangani: Compendium of States or Phenomena*, 73.
[187] Nyanaponika Thera, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation: The Buddha's Way of Mindfulness* (San Francisco, CA: Weiser Books, 2014), 17.

The activities of the mind can be deconstructed into experiential units. In other words, one can investigate experience in terms of the behavioral tendencies of the mind. In doing so, one can work towards understanding, improving, and refining the mind's perception of its experience. If we are looking at this experience from a metaphysical perspective, we are preventing ourselves from having the opportunity to look at the actual, experiential mechanism by which the conceptual arises.

The point here is to deconstruct the mystical phenomena into experiential units: put it into the five aggregates. In that way, one can be able to make a clear record of what one has been contact with. Otherwise, one would go on adding a lot of one's own imagination, interpretation, and speculation to that particular experience. In other words, stripping bare what is ineffable in the so-called "mystical experience" is important. This is because the experience has to come through our senses (eye, ear, nose, etc.). All this is merely sensorium experience: what I think is through my mind, what I see is through the eye, what I hear is through the ears, and so forth. When we are able to see that experience in experiential terms, then we can come to honestly accept that experience—something that is graspable.

The Buddha in the *Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta* (*Greater Discourse on the Mass of Suffering)* is said to expound: "[Those] who do not understand as it actually is … in the case of [feelings], can either themselves fully understand [feelings] or instruct another so that he can fully understand [feelings]—that is impossible."[188] In contrast, those "who understand as it actually is … in the case of [feelings], can either themselves fully understand [feelings] or instruct another so that he can fully understand [feelings] —that

[188] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya* (Wisdom Publications, 1995), 182–83.

is possible."[189] In other words, in this sutta, in terms of feelings, the Buddha teaches the disciples to recognize, discern and have insight into the gratification, the danger, and the way of out of it. Only when one is able to do so could one be able to explain what one has experienced to others.

Further, even if you claim that your experience is outside your domain (sensorium), you can only speculate inside what you can experience (the senses); you cannot talk outside of your experience. This same perspective is founded in the work of cognitive scientist Francisco Varela, philosopher Evan Thompson, and psychologist Eleanor Rosch's theory, as they insist that:

> Cognition depends upon the kinds of experience that come from having a body with various sensorimotor capacities, and… these individual sensorimotor capacities are themselves embedded in the more encompassing biological, psychological, and cultural contexts.[190]

In sum, all human experience is apprehensible. I am a human being. All experience is of the sensorium, and "I hold nothing human alien to me."[191]

As mentioned above, mysticism is described as to close one's eyes and fasten one's mouth; the context is open to interpretation. However, I argue that to claim an experience as mystical and ineffable is something that needs to be reconsidered. It is evidently clear that all experience falls in the realm of the sensorium—the six senses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind), the six objects (material form, sound, smell, taste, tangible, concepts), and six consciousnesses (visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, mental). That is to say, how could one be able to know/perceive such an experience if it

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[189] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 182–83.
[190] Christian Coseru, "Buddhist 'Foundationalism' and the Phenomenology of Perception," *Philosophy East and West* 59, no. 4 (October 2009): 411.
[191] Christopher K. Germer and Ronald D. Siegel, *Wisdom and Compassion in Psychotherapy: Deepening Mindfulness in Clinical Practice* (New York: Guilford Press, 2012), 292.

does not lie within the realm of senses at the first place? If senses are conditioned, one might say that the mystical is quite graspable.

I argue that, one should not view the Buddha's silence as mysticism. The Buddha (the Enlightened One) had perfectly comprehended and discerned the aggregates (the senses, everything in the experiential world), and made them known to everyone. Therefore, there is nothing within the realm of sensorium that is mystical/mysticism at all. It is just because we do not deeply understand the way our senses work that we find our experience to be awesome and mystical. Further, in SN 6.1, after the Buddha attained awakening, a line of thinking arose in his mind: "This Dhamma that I have attained is deep, hard to see, hard to realize, peaceful, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise…" Here, the Buddha did not say that the experience he had is "mystical" but rather the experience he had is to be "experienced by the wise." Further, the Dhamma that he taught could be discerned by a handful of people. The evidence of his teaching career has shown this is the case, as many of his disciples attained Arahatship. This is because what he teaches is very phenomenological and experiential. The concept is clearly emphasized in his principle doctrine, the Four Noble Truths: "This is suffering…this is the origin of suffering…this is the cessation of suffering…this is the path leading to the cessation of suffering." In other words, one should not view the Buddha's silence as mysterious phenomena—ontological or metaphysical.

Many have assumed that the Buddha's silence indicates a level of esotericism. In context, the word esoteric means teachings that is understood by the selected few who

have special knowledge.[192] To negates this, the *Mahāparinibbāna* Sutta (DN 16) illustrates a scene where the Buddha tells Ānanda that he does not hold anything back: "…I have taught the Dhamma, Ānanda, making no "inner" and "outer": the Tathāgata has no "teacher's fist" in respect of doctrines."[193]

The Buddha does insist in suttas that his teaching is deep and profound, hard to understood and to be discerned by the wise. But, there is a path of cultivation that he prescribes to comprehend his teaching namely, the Four Noble Truths, otherwise known as the ways of morality, meditation, and wisdom. Importantly, this path is available for everyone, as seen in many examples of the Buddha's disciples. People from high class families such as Sāriputa and Mahāmoggallāna[194] or low-class people like Upāli (the barber) who practiced the path prescribed by the Buddha and has won enlightenment. In simple, these paths are not beyond the human power, however, it does require special training. Since, this research focus on the ways the Buddha's answers questions, for details and explanation of the paths, please see Buddhagosa's work, *The Path of Purification*.[195]

In regard to the ten questions that are not to be discussed, questions have arisen whether the Buddha's silence is due to the capability of the human mind to comprehend such knowledge or that it takes a special level of insight that is directly impacted by a teacher. Many discourses have argue that these questions are a waste of time and not

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[192] Soanes et al., *Pocket Oxford English Dictionary.*, s.v. "esoteric,"303.
[193] Maurice O'C Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 245. Note: In the endnote number 388 (p568), the translator explains that this is "A famous statement, implying that there is no 'esoteric' teaching in Buddhism, at least as originally taught by the Founder."
[194] Nyanaponika Thera and Hellmuth Hecker, *Great Disciples of the Buddha: Their Lives, Their Works, Their Legacy*, ed. Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003), 4–5.
[195] Bhikkhu Nanamoli, trans., *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga*, 5th ed. (Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991).

conducive toward the path of enlightenment. However, let us examines first these ten questions.

3. Historical Background to the Concept of Self and No-Self

The avyākatas (unanswered) questions, why are they unanswered? This section I argue that because: 1) It is not related to the goal of the Buddha; The discussion of it would not leads to letting go but cause further entanglement, confusion, and bewilderment. 2) The questions are pertaining to identification and clinging to the notion of self. 3) These questions are not right views. To do the above, first, I will look at the Vedic literature and Upaniṣads and Jain literature. Finally, I will examine the early Buddhist Suttas (such as AN44.1-44.10) to see what the Buddha and his disciples said with regards to this matter.

a) Context of the Ten Unanswered Questions

The questions that the Buddha put aside or left unanswered consists of: *Is the cosmos eternal, is the cosmos not eternal? Is the cosmos finite, is the cosmos infinite? Is the soul and the body are the same, is the soul one thing and the body another? After death does a Tathāgata exists, after death does a Tathāgata not exist, after death does a Tathāgata both does and does not exist, after death does a Tathāgata neither does nor does not exist?* According to Karunadasa, "the list of ten questions to which Buddhism refers was there before the rise of Buddhism." Karunadasa further demonstrates, that "the ten theses contained in the ten unexplained questions were vigorously debated by many and various heretical teachers, recluses, brahmins, and *paribbājakas*. Each of these controversial propositions is said to have been held by a school of recluses and brahmins who were at loggerheads with each other in maintaining the truth of their own

propositions."[196] In other words, these are hot topics of discussion prior and during the Buddha's time.

These unanswered questions (*avyākatas)* can be classified into three sets.[197] The first set consists of four questions that enquiries about the nature of the cosmos. The second set contains two theses about the relationship between the body and soul, and the third set holds four questions about the nature of the Tathāgata after death. Here, one can see that all ten queries are a product of self-identification for either permanent existence or non-existence. Thus, I would like to categorize them into two subjects: self/soul (permanent existence) and no-self/no-soul (non-existence).

Evidence suggested that prior and during the Buddha's era, there are two groups of people, one that adhere to the concept of soul and profess it immortality, and there are those that negate and rejected it continual, permanent existence. Let us examine these areas.

i. Vedic and Upaniṣads Literature: Soul (Self) Theory

To begin with the Rig Veda and how the cosmos and everything in it were formed. Jayatilleke meticulous investigation in the work *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* having illustrated: "In the Ṛgveda there was a primitive conception of causality underlying the idea of ṛta which seems to have denoted the 'course of things' or the observable physical order of the world before it acquired a moral and theological connotation. But in the Brāhmaṇas, which value 'what lies beyond the sphere of the

[196] Yakupitiyage Karunadasa, "The Unanswered Questions: Why Were They Unanswered? A Re-Examination of the Textual Data," *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies* 9 (2007): 8–9.
[197] Hugh Nicholson, "The Unanswered Questions and the Limits of Knowledge," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 40, no. 5 (October 2012): 533–34, doi:http://dx.doi.org.uwest.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10781-012-9165-0.

senses' (parokṣa-), the conception of a causal order gives way to that of a magical order."[198] Rig Veda hymn X, 129 translated by Max Muller stated: "He from whom all this great creation came."[199]

The continuation of the creation genre is carried over in the Upaniṣads which specified in the Brahmanism teachings that the Universe is born of the Primal Giant (the Universal Soul). However, there is a new aspect that is added, that is rewarding those who comprehended the breathing principle. '"He who knows that [vital principle] is the totality of all individuals conquers repeated death.'"[200] In other words, one who has knowledge of the vital principle (prāna) or the breath is rewarded with immortality.[201] According to Jayatilleke's investigation, "There is, however, no explanation as to why this knowledge should give this specified result."[202] This, lead us to explore the concept of the soul/self and it immortality professed by some Upaniṣads philosophers: Uddālaka, Prajāpati, and Yājñavalkya.

1) The Philosophy of Uddālaka

The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (6.2.1 and 6.2.2) having recorded of episode of Uddālaka Āruni dialogue with his son Svetaketu:

> In the beginning, 'my dear,' there was that only which is (τὸ ὄν), one only, without a second. Others say, in the beginning there was that only which is not (τὸ

[198] Kulatissa Nanda Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2010), 29.
[199] F. Max Müller, *The Vedas*, (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1969), 80.
[200] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 31.
[201] Max Muller, "Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad," *Sacred-Texts.com*, accessed: September 27, 2017, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe15/sbe15054.htm. According to Max Muller's footnote (84:2), "The Prāna pervades all creatures, and he who identifies himself with that Prāna, obtains the rewards mentioned in the Brāhmana," immortality.
[202] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 31.

μὴ ὄν), one only, without a second; and from that which is not, that which is was born.[203]

But how could it be thus, my dear?' the father continued. 'How could that which is, be born of that which is not? No, my dear, only that which is, was in the beginning, one only, without a second.[204]

According to Uddālaka's philosophy, the Primal Being is the creator principle, it produces all-beings out of three elements, "heat, water and food."[205] It then inserted in them the living soul/self and also give it names and forms (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6.3.2*). Later in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (6.9.3-4) specifies that each individual living creatures have its own essence, jīva/ātmā (self/soul). This essence does not die, but the physical body does. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (6.11.3) explains: '"His (body) indeed withers and dies when the living Self has left it; the living Self dies not. 'That which is that [subtle] essence, in it all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self, and thou, *S*vetaketu, art it.'"[206]

Besides, at death, the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (6.9.2) insisted: "…all these creatures, when they have become merged in the True (…in death), know not that they are merged in the True."[207] In simple terms, to use Jayakellite' words, "We are therefore produced from Being though we do not know it... We also reach Being at death for in the process of dying there is a reversal of the process of production, the mind (the product of food) goes into breath (prana, the product of water) and breath in turn to heat and heat

[203] Max, Muller, "Chāndogya Upaniṣad," *Sacred-Texts.com*, accessed: September 27, 2017, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe01/sbe01120.htm
[204] Max, Muller, "Chāndogya Upaniṣad," *Sacred-Texts.com*, accessed: September 27, 2017, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe01/sbe01120.htm
[205] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 35.
[206] Max, Muller, "Chāndogya Upaniṣad," *Sacred-Texts.com*, accessed: September 27, 2017, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe01/sbe01129.htm
[207] Max, Muller, "Chāndogya Upaniṣad," *Sacred-Texts.com*, accessed: September 27, 2017, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe01/sbe01127.htm

into the highest deity, at which point he knows not…, for he cannot recognize the people who gather round him."[208]

In sum, Uddālaka's theory was that of rational and metaphysical speculation.[209] As shown above, we can see that the philosophy of Uddālaka having suggested that there is a soul in our body and it is one thing and the body is another. The body which produces from food, water and heat and the soul is formless. Importantly, on the dissolution of the body, the soul of an individual will merge back to the Universal Self—Brahman.

2) The Theory of Prajāpati

There is another Upaniṣad's philosopher that discuss about the soul named, Prajāpati. This detail is recorded in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad.* Section 8.7.1 of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* having presented Prajāpati's theory as follows: "'The Self which is free from sin, free from old age, from death and grief, from hunger and thirst, which desires nothing but what it ought to desire, and imagines nothing but what it ought to imagine, that it is which we must search out, that it is which we must try to understand. He who has searched out that Self and understands it, obtains all worlds and all desires.'"[210]

Prajāpati further elaborates in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad 8.7.3*: "'The person that is seen in the eye, that is the Self. This is what I have said. This is the immortal, the fearless,

[208] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 35.
[209] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 36.
[210] Max, Muller, "Chāndogya Upaniṣad," *Sacred-Texts.com*, accessed: September 27, 2017, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe01/sbe01167.htm

this is Brahman.'"[211] In other words, if one having knowledge of the Self (seen and discerns), would be able to return to the Highest Self (Brahman).

Let us critically analyze what has been said in the above paragraphs. Prajāpati suggested that the Self has characteristics and can be seen.[212] However, how are we going to locate this soul in the actual person's character? To locate the Self/soul in one's personality, as recorded in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (8.7-8.11), Prajāpati has put forth the following assumptions:

a. "The first suggestion is that the soul may be the physical personality, which is seen reflected in a pan of water (8.8.1)."[213]

b. "The next suggestion is that the soul may be identified with the self in the dream-state (8.10.1)."[214]

c. "The next suggestion is that the soul may be identified with the state of deep sleep (8.11.1)."[215]

Here, the first assumption does not fit. Because if the Self/soul is of physical personality, then it is subjected to old age, sickness, death, perishes. The second suggestion of the dream state, presented the soul would be free from death. However, this too could be negated because the soul in this case does not have characteristics (free from pain, grief, hunger and thirst so forth). The third thesis of the "deep sleep" state would suggest the soul free from death, pain and suffering, but in the deep sleep state the soul would have no awareness, knowledge whatsoever, which is opposed to its nature of all-awareness, and all-knowledge. Thus, this thesis too would be turned down. In simple words, "The

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[211] Max, Muller, "Chāndogya Upaniṣad," *Sacred-Texts.com*, accessed: September 27, 2017, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe01/sbe01167.htm. According to Max Muller's clarification (footnote 134:3), "… the knowledge of the true Self, which leads beyond the world of Brahmā (masc.), and enables the individual self to return into the Highest Self."
[212] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 36.
[213] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 36–37.
[214] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 37.
[215] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 37.

argument up to this point is that the atman cannot be identified with any aspect of the personality, physical or psychological."[216]

3) Yājñavalkya Rational Theory

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* recorded a teaching from Yājñavalkya to Maitreyī expounding that the Great Self is everything and all-knowledge. Therefore, when one has discernment of the Self, then the whole cosmos and everything in it is known.

> *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (2.4.5):
> "…Verily, the Self is to be seen, to be heard, to be perceived, to be marked, O Maitreyī! When we see, hear, perceive, and know the Self, then all this is known."[217]
>
> *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (2.4.6):
> "…This Brahman-class, this Kshatra-class, these worlds, these Devas, these creatures, this everything, all is that Self."[218]
>
> *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (2.4.12):
> "…O Maitreyī, does this great Being, endless, unlimited, consisting of nothing but knowledge, rise from out these elements, and vanish again in them. When he has departed, there is no more knowledge. "[219]
>
> *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (4.5.15):*
> "For when there is as it were duality, then one sees … smells … tastes … hears … perceives … touches the other, one knows the other; but when the Self only is all this, how should he see… smell … taste …hear … perceive, touch the other, how should he know another? … He is incomprehensible, for he cannot be comprehended; he is imperishable, for he cannot perish."[220]

As shown above regarding the Self—it is suggested that the Giant Soul is "unknowable" because he is the all-comprehending, omniscience (all-knowledge),

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[216] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 38.
[217] Max Muller, "Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad," *Sacred-Texts.com*, accessed: September 27, 2017, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe15/sbe15061.htm
[218] Max Muller, "Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad," *Sacred-Texts.com*, accessed: September 27, 2017, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe15/sbe15061.htm
[219] Max Muller, "Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad," *Sacred-Texts.com*, accessed: September 27, 2017, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe15/sbe15061.htm
[220] Max Muller, "Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad," *Sacred-Texts.com*, accessed: September 27, 2017, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe15/sbe15077.htm

omnipresence (pervasive) and immortal. Besides, if this was the case for the great Self, one would assume these same characteristics are to be ascribed to the individual ātmā/jīva (self/soul). However, according to Yājñavalkya descriptions of the afterlife as recorded in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (3.9.28.4)* that a man after death does not rise again. This as Jayatilleke puts, could be a "plain denial of the possible rebirth."[221] Alternatively, it could just imply that after death there is a lack of the sense consciousness, but not all consciousness.[222]

In summary, these sections are in regard to the concept of the soul. The philosopher Uddālaka, professes the existence of soul but say that it is not identifiable in form. Another philosopher, Prajāpati also insists the presence of soul with characteristics, but fail to locate/identify the soul. The third thinker insisted that there is the presence of the Self/soul with attributes such as omniscience, omnipresence. However, he suggests the great Soul is unfathomable (it is *neti neti* –not this not that).

b) The Theory of No-Self

i. The Materialist

There are sectarians that reject the concept of self and teaches of no-self, this would include: The Materialists school and Buddhism. According to Jayatilleke, the *Maitrī Upaniṣad*[223] recorded a section describing a denomination wearing "ruddy robe" and "deny the doctrine of the soul,"[224] teaching and adheres to the dharma that is,

[221] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 41.
[222] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 41.
[223] Max Muller, "Maitrī Upaniṣad," *Sacred-Texts.com*, accessed: September 27, 2017, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe15/sbe15118.htm. The *Maitrī Upaniṣad* 7.8 stated: "…and others who falsely wear red dresses, earrings, and skulls…who wish to entice… the denial of Self, by false comparisons and arguments, does not know what is the difference between Veda and philosophy."
[224] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 66.

"destructive of the Vedas and orthodox scriptures."[225] However, through careful analysis, Jayatilleke has determined that is referred to the Buddhist.[226]

There was one other sect during the Buddha's time that also denied the existence of self and its continual hereafter called the Materialists. Their teaching adheres to the four great elements, explaining that all things in this cosmos are made up of earth, water, wind, and fire (*cātummahābhūta*). Likewise, it stresses there is no afterlife or the continual of the soul. According to the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (1.2.6),[227] there presented a group of people who insisted "'this is the world, there is no other' and deny survival."'[228]

In the literature of the Jains, the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, there is also mention of this group. "Some profess (the exclusive belief in) the five gross elements: earth, water, fire, wind, and air. These five gross elements (are the original causes of things), from them arises another (thing, viz ātman); for on the dissolution of the (five elements) living beings cease to exist."[229] This school is also mention by the Buddha in the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (DN1) as nihilism school, "Here a certain ascetic or Brahmin declares and holds the view: "Since this self is material, composed of the four great elements,…, at the breaking-up of the body it is annihilated and perishes, and does not exist after."[230]

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[225] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 66.
[226] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 67. Here, Jayatilleke said there are four sects that wear ruddy robe, the Materialists, Ājīvikas, Jains, and Buddhists. However, he has come to excluded the Materialists because the Materialists have no respect of the dharma. He also insisted it was not the Ājīvikas and the Jains because they themselves adhere to the concept of the Soul.
[227] Max Muller, "Kaṭha Upaniṣad," *Sacred-Texts.com*, accessed: September 27, 2017, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe15/sbe15011.htm. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.2.6, '"The Hereafter never rises before the eyes of the careless child, deluded by the delusion of wealth. "This is the world," he thinks, "there is no other;"—thus he falls again and again under my sway.'"
[228] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 71.
[229] Hermann Jacobi, trans., *Gaina Sutras Part II* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1895), 236.
[230] Maurice Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya*, 2nd ed. (Wisdom Publications, 1995), 84.

Next section will be examining the Buddhist discussion regard the notion of "self and no-self." This is done specifically investigate suttas that presented the unanswered question.

ii. No-Self in Early Buddhist Suttas

Early Buddhist suttas presented the Buddha as negating the self's notion. The question to examine here is, why did the Buddhist reject the concept of self/soul (ātmā/jīva)? In other words, here one should question, in what context does the questioner means when asked, "is there no-self?" For critical analysis, what ideas, background, knowledge does the interlocutor have in mind regarding self and no-self when ask these questions? One would assume that, the interlocutor might have heard of words from another leader that the Buddha speaks of no-self, mistakenly taken it as it literally is like nihilism.

> The Sūtrakṛtāṅga of the Jains describes the Buddhist as follows:
>
> "Some fools say that there are five skandhas of momentary existence. They do not admit that (the soul) is different from, nor identical with (the elements), that it is produced from a cause (i.e. the elements), nor that it is without a cause (i. e. that it is eternal)."[231]

As shown by the Jains' literature, the Buddhist sees what others called self (permanent entity) as of the five skandhas (aggregates). The five aggregates (form, feeling, perception, mental formation, and consciousness ….) nature is transient, suffering and no self. The Buddhist also does not accept theories such as the body and the soul are the same, different or produce by the Primal Giant (Self), nor of eternal essence. In the work *A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics,* explains that form, the constituents body, "the sentient organ which is derived from the four Great Phenomena . . . this that is 'an

[231] Jacobi, *Gaina Sutras Part II*, 238.

empty village.'"[232] It is so because "there is no headman *(i.e.,* Ego or soul)"[233] according to the translator's footnote. In simple, "…the belief in a permanent spiritual essence is, together with a number of other speculations, waived aside as subjects calculated to waste time and energy."[234]

In line with what has discusses, *Vacchagotta Sutta* (SN 44.8) present a dialogue between the wanderer, Vaccha and the Buddha on the ten undeclared topics. The Buddha having explains why he did not give answers to these questions.

> "How is it, Master Gotama, is the world eternal?". . . *(as above)*
> . . .
> "What, Master Gotama, is the cause and reason why, when wanderers of other sects are asked such questions, they give such answers as: 'The world is eternal' ... or 'The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death.' And what is the cause and reason why, when Master Gotama is asked such questions, he does not give such answers?"

The Buddha replied to Vaccha,

> "Vaccha, wanderers of other sects regard form as self, or self as possessing form, or form as in self, or self as in form. They regard feeling as self … perception as self … volitional formations as self … consciousness as self, or self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in self, or self as in consciousness. Therefore, when the wanderers of other sects are asked such questions, they give such answers as: 'The world is eternal'… or 'The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death.' But, Vaccha, the Tathāgata, the Arahant, the Perfectly Enlightened One, does not regard form as self … or self as in consciousness. Therefore, when the Tathāgata is asked such questions, he does not give such answers."[235]

Looking at the above paragraph, here one would link wanderers of the sects that "regard form as self, or self as possessing form, or form as in self, or self as in form … feeling as

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[232] Davids, *A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics*, 213.
[233] Davids, *A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics*, 175.
[234] Caroline A. F. Rhys Davids, *A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics: Translation of the First Book Abhidhammapitaka Entitled Dhammasangani: Compendium of States or Phenomena*, xxxvi.
[235] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya; Translated from the Pāli; Original Translation by Bhikkhu Bodhi.* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 1391.

self …consciousness as self, or self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in self, or self as in consciousness" to teacher such as Uddālaka, Prajāpati, and Yājñavalkya. This is because the first two philosophers (Uddālaka, Prajāpati) professes "self in form or form in self," and the third see self in consciousness.

iii. The Nature of the Tathāgata After Death

Early Buddhist Suttas did explore questions pertaining to the nature of the Tathāgata himself. According to Yakupitiyage Karunadasa there are two separate lists that have the same questions regarding the nature of the Tathāgata—the long list and the short list. However, they are different in contexts.

> "[I]n the longer list the term *tathāgata* always means, as the Pāli commentaries say, the living being or the empiric individuality understood as a separate self-entity; in the shorter list the term in question always means the one who has realized the final goal of *nibbāna*." [236]

From investigating the *Avyākata Sutta* (SN 44.1-44.11) in the Saṃyutta Nikāya, I have notice that there are eight suttas (SN44.1 – 44.6, SN 44.9, SN 44.11) associate with the short list, while only two suttas (SN44.7, SN 44.8) speak of the long list.[237] Importantly, most sutta with the short list is been asked by the disciples of the Buddha, while the long list is inquired by the wanderer, Vacchagotta.

According to the article "The Unanswered Questions," in the short list, "[T]he terms *tathāgata* is often preceded by the three words: the noblest person (*uttamapuriso*), the highest person (*paramapuriso*), and the one who has attained the highest goal (*paramappattipatto*). The use of these three descriptive terms shows that here the term

[236] Karunadasa, "The Unanswered Questions," 10.
[237] Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya*, 2nd ed. (Wisdom Publications, 2003), 1381–95.

tathāgata means none other than the liberated saint."[238] In another word, the term Tathāgata in the long list is refer to the individual self—the one that is subject to birth and death. While the short list relates the word Tathāgata as a liberate one; the one that have done away with the five skandhas, transcend birth and death.

Nevertheless, why does the Buddha not answer these questions about the nature of the Buddha? In the Avyākata Sutta (SN44.1-SN 44.11), it is presented that the Buddha as well as his noble disciples said these questions are reckoned by form, feeling, perception, mental formation, and consciousness. Because it is associate with the five skandhas that why the Buddha does not answer. In the *Sabhiya Kaccāna* (SN 44.11), a disciple of the Buddha, venerable Kaccāna explains to Vaccha that, "as to the cause and condition for describing him as 'consisting of form' or as 'formless' or as 'percipient' or as 'non-percipient': if that cause and condition were to cease completely and totally without remainder, in what way could one describe him as 'consisting of form' or as 'formless' or as 'percipient' or as 'non-percipient'?"[239]

In AN 7.54 (*Undeclare* sutta) here, the Buddha explains in detail to his disciples why he did not answer the questions about nature of the Tathāgata hereafter.

> "'The Tathāgata exists after death': this is an involvement with craving… this is an involvement with perception ... something conceived…a proliferation…an involvement with clinging…a [ground for] remorse; 'The Tathāgata does not exist after death': this is a [ground for] remorse; 'The Tathāgata both exists and does not exist after death': this is a [ground for] remorse; 'The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death': this is a [ground for] remorse.
>
> "Bhikkhu, the uninstructed worldling does not understand remorse, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to its cessation. For him, that remorse increases.

[238] Karunadasa, "The Unanswered Questions," 11.
[239] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1394.

> He is not freed from birth, from old age and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain dejection., and anguish; he is not freed from suffering, I say. [240]

On the polar end, the instructed disciple, having discerns suffering, the origin of suffering, its cessation, and the paths to end suffering. One is free from birth and death. Thus, the noble disciple, does not declare about the nature of the Tathāgata, or generate comments on the undeclaring points.

> "But the instructed noble disciple understands remorse, its origin, its cessation and the way leading to its cessation. For him, that remorse ceases. He is freed from birth, from old age and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and anguish; he is freed from suffering, I say.
>
> "Knowing thus, seeing thus, the instructed noble disciple does not declare: 'The Tathāgata exists after death'; or: 'The Tathāgata does not exist after death'; or: 'The Tathāgata both exists and does not exist after death'; or: 'The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death. Knowing thus, seeing thus, the instructed noble disciple does not make declarations regarding the undeclared points."[241]

In as far as what have been discussed above, the ten queries are not related to the Buddha's goal, they are not conducive to end suffering and leading to nibbāna. In other words, the Buddha sees that holding/clinging to any of these views is subject to identification, it is a product of will, dependent co-arisen, inconstant. This does not lead to unbinding and liberation, but rather to suffering and becoming. In the same manners, all the questions above are identifying questions. That is, these questions carry the intention of identification. It is pertaining to self, I, my etc., In terms of identification, the Buddha says in AN 10.93, what is brought into existence is subject to impermanence, a product of suffering, and it is not self.[242]

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[240] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The numerical discourses of the Buddha*, 1047.
[241] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The numerical discourses of the Buddha*, 1047.
[242] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The numerical discourses of the Buddha*, 1466.

iv. Self and No-self: Not Right View

There are misinterpretations about the Buddhist concept of self and not-self. For example, regarding the word "self" that the Buddha mentioned in the Pāli Nikāyas, some scholars such as Edmond Holmes[243] and I. B. Horner[244] literally take it as the metaphysic self—the highest Self, God—the ultimate, permanence and blissful.

As Harvey describes, I. B. Horner views the word "self" used in the early Buddhist sutta (teaching of Buddha) as the highest Self—Brahman, the universal self, undying and everlasting.[245] In the same line of conjecture, Holmes insists that the message of the Buddha to human beings is to find the "true self." And this "true self" according to Holmes, is none other than the Universal Soul.[246]

Countering these scholars, Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi in the introduction to the *Majjhima Nikāya* (MN) (otherwise known as the *Middle Length Discourses*) state that there are numerous occasions in which the Buddha rebuked the view of self. In the *Pañcattaya Sutta* (MN 102), the Buddha is said to have undertaken a widespread survey of propositions put forth about the view of self and declare them all to be "conditioned and gross." In the *Sabbāsava Sutta* (MN 2.8), six views of self are branded as "thicket of views, wilderness of views, contortion of views, vacillation of view, and fetters of views." The *Cūḷasīhanānda Sutta* (MN 11) presents the Buddha comparing his teaching to that of other recluses and Brahmins thoroughly, and underneath the similarities, there is a great departure on the view of the rejection of self. Further, the *Alagaddūpama Sutta (*MN 22) offers many arguments against the notion of

[243] Holmes, *The Creed of Buddha*, 112.
[244] Peter Harvey, *Peter Harvey, The Selfless Mind: Personality, Consciousness and Nirvāṇa in Early Buddhism* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1995), 17.
[245] Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 17, 22.
[246] Holmes, *The Creed of Buddha*, 112.

self, resultantly the Buddha declared that he does not see any doctrine of self that would not lead to pain, suffering and despair. Importantly, in his teaching steps to liberation, any view of self in relation to the five *skandha*s (Pāḷi: *khandha*s) is held to be the first fetter to be broken with the arising of the vision of Dhamma.[247] Nevertheless, our purpose here is to see how self and not-self is explained in relation to the early Buddhist soteriology. In simple terms, what does "self" and "not self" mean?

In Peter Harvey's study *The Selfless Mind*, he notices the word "*atta*" (self) is being used in the early suttas in the following ways:

1) Only as a changing empirical self.
2) *Atta* referring to character.
3) *Atta* being used in a compound such as *atta-bhava*, meaning one being/existence.
4) *Atta* being used as equivalent to *citta* (mind). [248]

Here, Peter Harvey renders that the Buddha describes *atta* as the changing, empirical self. That is the conventional self, the self of conditions, the self of constituents—namely, the five aggregates (form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness). It is the experiential self that is subject to impermanence and *dukkha*.

In soteriological terms, Thanissaro Bhikkhu in his article "No-self or Not-self" insists that self should be viewed in accordance with the Four Noble Truths and that *anattā* should not be seen as a doctrine of no-self. Instead, it should be seen as "a not-self strategy for shedding suffering by letting go of its cause," to bring about the highest, undying happiness.[249] This is well demonstrated in the *Anatta-lakkhaṇa Sutta*.

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[247] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 28.
[248] Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 21–22.
[249] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Noble Strategy: Essays on the Buddhist Path* (Valley Center, Calif.: Metta Forest Monastery, 1999), 73–74.

In the *Anatta-lakkhaṇa Sutta* (SN 22.59), (*Discourse on the Characteristic of Non Self),* the Buddha expounds: "form…feeling…perception…mental formations…and consciousness is non self." The explanation is that if consciousness were the self, then it would not lend itself to disease. It would be possible to say, "'Let my consciousness be thus. Let my consciousness not be thus."' But precisely because consciousness is not self, it lends itself to disease. Therefore, it is not possible to say, "'Let my consciousness be thus; Let my consciousness not be thus."'[250]

In the same discourse (SN 22.59), the Buddha further demonstrates, "Bhikkhus, how do you see it, is form permanent or impermanent?" "Impermanent, venerable Sir." "Now what is impermanent, is it painful or pleasant?" "Painful, venerable Sir." "Now, what is impermanent, painful, subject to change, is it fit to regard thus: this is mine, this is myself, this is what I am?" "No, venerable Sir."[251]

This same principle is also applied to feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. Therefore, regarding form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness, one must discern with right view thus: "this is not mine, this is not myself, this is not what I am." When one discerns thus: "He find dispassion in form…in feeling…in perception…in mental formations…in consciousness." When he finds dispassion, passion fades away. With the fading of passion, he is liberated.[252] In other words, regarding "self" and "not-self," the Buddha encouraged his disciples to hold the view in terms of "suffering, the origin of suffering…the way to end suffering" until they reach *nibbāna*.

[250] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 901–2.
[251] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 902.
[252] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 902–3.

In the *Ānanda Sutta* (SN44.10), which will be discusses in later section, this sutta considers all possible shortcomings about the concept of self and not self. One would say that the Buddha was also taking in consideration that if he were to say there is no self at all (not even the conventional, experiential self), then how can one practice the path? How can there be spiritual achievement?

However, there are occasions the Buddha taught his disciples to letting go of all views: self and no-self. He actually taught that to hold onto either view, self or no-self, is to fall into wrong views. MN 2 states: "the view I have a self…the view I have no self…this is called a thicket of views, the wilderness of views, contortion of views, vacillation of views, and fetters of views." Why is this so?

The Buddha explained in the *Diṭṭhi Sutta: Views* (AN 10.93) that whatever that has been brought to being is fabricated, willed, and dependent co-arisen. Basically, it is inconstant. Whatever is inconstant is suffering. Whatever is suffering is not mine, is not myself, and is not what I am.[253] The *Dhammapada* verses 277-279 teach that *sabbe saṅkhāra aniccā* (all conditioned things are impermanent, inconstant), *sabbe saṅkhāra dukkhā* (all conditioned things are *dukkhā*, unsatisfactory)*, sabbe dhammā anattā* (all *dhammas*, conditioned and unconditioned things, are not-self). Notice in the first two verses, the word *saṅkhāra* is used, while the third verse uses the word *dhammā*. According to Rahula's (1959, p. 57-8) explanations, the term *saṅkhāra* refers to "the Five Aggregates, all conditioned, interdependent, relative things and states, both physical and mental." Therefore, "If the third verse said: 'All [*saṅkhāra*] are without self,'" one might misunderstand and think, "Although conditioned things are without self, yet there may be

[253] Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The numerical discourses of the Buddha: a complete translation of the Anguttara Nikaya teachings of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012), 1466.

a Self outside conditioned things, outside the five aggregates." This is one of the reason for which the term *dhamma* is used instead. Further, the term *dhamma* is much wider than the word *saṅkhāra*. It includes conditioned and unconditioned things, states, and phenomena. This is to say, one should not make a self out of something that is inconstant and unsatisfying because holding on to them would lead to further suffering and becoming.[254]

In light of what has been discussed above, the Buddha taught the holding of a view (including the view of no self), however sublime, is a cause of re-becoming. It is also why the Buddha said holding on to the view of no self is a wrong view. Nevertheless, the Buddha did teach the concept of not-self, but only as a utilitarian perception.

Here, I would like to use Edward Conze's way of describing how the Buddha taught the concept of self and not-self. In the work *Buddhist Thought in India,* Conze explains that there were course-grained people like the materialists who denied the existence of a self in such a way that they reject the spiritual life and all of its meanings. To help them understand the meaning of the spiritual life, the Buddha spoke of a self. There are other people who were more refined but were still attached to the concept of self, adhered to the belief of self, and sought the existence of the self. To them, the Buddha taught not-self so as to weaken their attachment to the false view of self-identification and to engender in them a desire for *nibbāna*. Finally, there were others

[254] Just like a fire that burns is conditioned by fuel (fire here means existence and suffering; fuel means desire, grasping or attachment), so, as long as one keeps feeding fuel to the fire, it will continue to burn and generate further becoming.

who were close or near to *nibbāna*, free from all love of self and able to understand the truth of the words of the Buddha. They were taught there is neither self nor not-self.[255]

As shown above, the Buddha did teach the concept of self and not-self to his disciples, but as a meditative maneuver, in a context depending on seclusion, dispassion and cessation—leading to letting go. In soteriological terms, the teaching of self and not self or the action of staying silent to the question of self and no-self can be viewed as skillful ways the Buddha employed to teach a specific audience, so that they could move up in levels of cultivation (*jhāna*)—leading to *nibbāna* (liberation).

Nevertheless, I see that the Buddha remained silent to these ten questions because of other intentions that he had in mind—this is of pedagogical. This is well illustrated in the SN 44:10 and MN 72 suttas of the Pāli Nikāyas. Let us investigate the context and background to these questions first before looking into these suttas and see what they actually say.

4. Silence as Skillful Act of Pedagogical Guidance

In and of itself, the silence of the Buddha has generated many speculations among scholars. Some of these theories are:

1. He accepted the current views. He accepted the conclusions of the Brahmanism of his day. He had nothing new to offer.[256]
2. He rejected the current views. Perhaps the Buddha's silence was a formal denial of the views of Brahmanism.[257]
3. He had no views of his own … he had no answers to give. He could not accept the Upanisadic solutions; he could not offer alternatives. He was agnostic.[258]
4. He would not tell his own views…because he believed men would not understand

[255] Edward Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India: Three Phases of Buddhist Philosophy* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1967), 208.
[256] Organ, "The Silence of the Buddha," 128.
[257] Organ, "The Silence of the Buddha," 129.
[258] Organ, "The Silence of the Buddha," 131.

them,[259] [or due to the] "inadequacies of language."[260]

5. He would not be distracted from his main purpose.[261]

Are these speculations on what the Buddha had in mind well-founded speculations or unfounded? For hypothesis 1 and 2, we could find the answer to it in the *Ānanda Sutta* (SN 44:10). For the latter theories (3, 4 and 5) we could find the answers in the Vacchagotta discourse (MN 72). Nevertheless, first let us examine what the Buddha said in SN 44:10 and interpret why he did so. Second, we will turn to MN 72 and carefully analyze in detail the way the Buddha answered in reference to the metaphysical questions.

a) By Virtue of Interlocutor's Mentality, Time and Place

SN 44:10 records an episode where the Buddha remained silent when the wanderer Vacchagotta asked about the matter of "self" and "no-self." However, soon after Vacchagotta had left, Venerable Ānanda asked the Buddha, '"Why is it, Venerable sir, that when the Blessed One was questioned by the wanderer Vacchagotta, he did not answer?'"[262] To this, the Buddha answered if he were to answer that there is a self, then that would be in accord and conforming to the view of eternalism, a concept that accepted that there is an everlasting, unchanging soul—the eternal self. On the other hand, to answer there is no-self would be to agree with those who teach annihilationism, the view that death is the destruction/termination of consciousness.

According to Holmes's words, "In this story Buddha gives two reasons for refusing to answer Vacchagotta's question. He is asked to answer Yes or No. Whichever

[259] Organ, "The Silence of the Buddha," 134.
[260] Organ, "The Silence of the Buddha," 136.
[261] Organ, "The Silence of the Buddha," 138.
[262] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1394.

answer he may give, some school of metaphysicians is sure to claim him as its own. And whichever answer he may give, he is sure to bewilder Vacchagotta."[263] Nevertheless, there is more.

Importantly, the Buddha elucidated if he said there is a self, then it would not concord with the doctrines of dependent co-arising and non-self that he taught.[264] Likewise, if he said there is no-self, then Vacchagotta would be greatly confused. All this is explicitly stated in SN 44:10:

> "If, Ānanda, when I was asked by the wanderer Vacchagotta, 'Is there a self?' I had answered, 'There is a self,' this would have been siding with those ascetics and brahmins who are eternalists. And if, when I was asked by him, 'Is there no self?' I had answered, 'There is no self,' this would have been siding with those ascetics and brahmins who are annihilationists."
>
> "If, Ānanda, when I was asked by the wanderer Vacchagotta, 'Is there a self?' I had answered, 'There is a self,' would this have been consistent on my part with the arising of the knowledge that 'all phenomena are nonself'?"
>
> "No, venerable sir."
>
> "And if, when I was asked by him, 'Is there no self?' I had answered, 'There is no self,' the wanderer Vacchagotta, already confused, would have fallen into even greater confusion, thinking, 'It seems that the self I formerly had does not exist now.'"[265]

The explanation that the Buddha gave to Ānanda would directly terminate those speculations such as the Buddha accepted the current views of self or no self,[266] and the hypothesis that he rejected the contemporary view of self and no self.[267] Further, it also

[263] Holmes, *The Creed of Buddha*, 159.
[264] See section on "Self and Not-self."
[265] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1393–94.
[266] Organ, "The Silence of the Buddha," 128.
[267] Organ, "The Silence of the Buddha," 129.

eliminates the perspective that the Buddha was agnostic and had no views of his own.[268] In as much as it has been said, this question of self and no self is to be considered as irrelevant and not conducive to the goal of enlightenment.

Nevertheless, this would lead to another speculation about the Buddha not telling his own views.[269] The Buddha's silence may be explained by the theory that even though he had the explanation for all speculative problems, he did not expound them because he considered that people would not comprehend them. It would be better to let people work out answers themselves rather than give them doctrines that they would corrupt. This is well exemplified in the *Siṃsapā Sutta* (SN 56:31), in which the Buddha held up a handful of leaves and compared what he teaches to the handful of leaves in his hand, and what he knows to be as vast as the number of leaves in the forest.[270] In this case, it leads to another supposition that the Buddha is unwilling to answer metaphysical questions because it is not helpful for the path.[271] This is strongly demonstrated in SN 35:23 as the sutta explains that what lies beyond the range of the six senses, six objects and six consciousnesses is out of reach. Therefore, if one were to speak about ontological things, it is just of imagination and proliferation; there are no grounds for support. Why? This is because it would not be within the area of experience.[272] It seems that the Buddha was mainly concerned about what is in the realm of experience and how we relate to this experience in order to transcend suffering and proceed to liberation.

The time, place and the nature of a question plays a very important role in this sutta (SN 40:10). As we can see, the Buddha was silent about Vacchagotta's question of

[268] Organ, "The Silence of the Buddha," 131.
[269] Organ, "The Silence of the Buddha," 134.
[270] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1857–58.
[271] Organ, "The Silence of the Buddha," 136.
[272] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1140.

self and not-self; however soon after Vacchagotta got up and left, the Buddha explained to Ānanda his intention. Thus, one can see that the Buddha understood Vacchagotta's mind, which is why the Buddha insisted that any answer that he could give would make Vacchagotta more bewildered, confused and baffled. This is well emphasized by Rāhula in his work *What the Buddha Taught* as follows: "The Buddha was not a computing machine giving answers to whatever questions were put to him by anyone at all, without any consideration…He always spoke to people bearing in mind their standard of development, their tendencies, their mental make-up, their character, their capacity to understand [the answer to] a particular question."[273] In addition to Rāhula's line of thought, Thanissaro Bhikkhu states:

> The questions the Buddha put aside thus fall into two distinct categories. The first consists of questions that can have true and beneficial answers, but which the Buddha sometimes put aside out of considerations of time and place. The second category consists of questions for which there is no beneficial answer—in some cases, the issue is left open as to whether there even *is* a true or a false answer—so the Buddha put them aside regardless of time or place.[274]

The Buddha also sees the subtle act in one's mind as karma (action). The Buddha's main intention was making the distinction between actions that are good or bad, efficacious or inefficacious, and the limits and compoundedness of all actions—all of which pertains to awakening. Moreover, the Buddha was also aware of the way of asking and answering questions is counted as action. Therefore, it was normal for the Buddha to just concentrate on the matter of which questions would be conducive to answers and which not. Likewise, for some questions, the Buddha insisted that it was just not beneficial to respond to them because of time and place, in some cases it was out of

[273] Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught: Revised and Expanded Edition with Texts from Suttas and Dhammapada* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 63.
[274] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 342.

politeness. However, there are other questions about which the Buddha stated: "It would be unskillful to answer them in any situation because they were inherently unconducive to awakening."[275]

To use Chandima Wijebandara's words, the silence of the Buddha might have been based on two kinds of reasons: 1) contextual reasons and 2) religio-philosophical reasons.[276] For contextual reasons, Chandima Wijebandara sees that "the Buddha was aware that people had their own reasons for asking questions."[277] However, the people who came to question the Buddha are categorized into five groups.

1) One who asks questions due to sheer ignorance,
2) One who asks due to bad motives,
3) One who asks in order to ridicule others,
4) One who asks due to a genuine desire to know, and
5) One who asks thinking that 'if he does not answer satisfactorily I will and show him up, and if he does that is good.'[278]

In religio-philosophical terms, the *avyākata* questions in their nature seem to be hot topics of the age. These questions when put forth "demand positive or negative straight answers for complex metaphysical problems. They are so framed that either answer would lead to a strong metaphysical view which fits into prevalent dichotomy of thought."[279] In other words, these questions if answered in either way (yes or no) would not satisfy the inquirer. As Wijebandara insists, "These problems are being answered by many teachers and philosophers but people are not convinced and continue doubt."[280] To exacerbate the matter, even today, these issues are still causing headache to philosophers. In as much as to say, "What the Buddha has done is meaningful since his position does

[275] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 342.
[276] Chandima Wijebandara, *Early Buddhism: Its Religious and Intellectual Milieu* ([Kelaniya], Sri Lanka: Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies, University of Kelaniya, 1993), 177.
[277] Wijebandara, *Early Buddhism: Its Religious and Intellectual Milieu*, 177.
[278] Wijebandara, *Early Buddhism: Its Religious and Intellectual Milieu*, 178.
[279] Wijebandara, *Early Buddhism: Its Religious and Intellectual Milieu*, 178–79.
[280] Wijebandara, *Early Buddhism: Its Religious and Intellectual Milieu*, 182.

not add to [people's] problems, at least not in the way that the others do."[281]

From doing a careful close reading of this sutta (SN 44:10), one can assume that the Buddha, having considered Vacchagotta's background, remained silent to the questions of self and no-self. He did not want Vacchagotta to be mistaken that his teaching is the same kind of doctrines that were taught by other teachers of his time, which did not coincide with his teaching of non-self, impermanence and dependent co-arising. Besides, this sutta also shows that the Buddha was thinking of Vacchagotta's mental state, which was still grasping at the self; he was seeking for an answer. The Buddha saw the possibility of saying "no-self" would make Vacchagotta more bewildered and confused and lead him to speculate on a further question, "What happened to that self that I formerly had?" In other words, this strategy of silence could be viewed as a skillful and thoughtful action. In as much as to say, the Buddha did not utter a word because he was considering the interlocutor's mentality, time and place.

Nevertheless, Vacchagotta's case did not end there. Later on he returned and questioned the Buddha again. This time, questions were put in a different way. The Buddha then gave a discourse. Having heard the profound teaching, Vacchagotta took refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and Sangha, and eventually attained arahantship in his cultivation.[282] The scenario is recorded in MN 72. This will be analyzed in the next section on the Buddha's silence as pedagogical guidance.

b) Pedagogical Guidance

MN 72 describes that Vacchagotta comes back later on, and asks the Buddha a set

[281] Wijebandara, *Early Buddhism: Its Religious and Intellectual Milieu*, 182.
[282] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 590–94. Note: In MN 72, Vacchagotta takes refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and becomes a lay devotee. In MN 73, Vacchagotta becomes a bhikkhu and through his diligent practice attains awakening.

of questions, to which the Buddha says "no" to each and every one.

> "How is it, Master Gotama, does Master Gotama hold the view: 'The world is eternal…The world is not eternal…The world is finite…The world is infinite…The soul and the body are the same…The soul is one thing and the body another…After death a Tathāgata exists…After death a Tathāgata does not exist…After death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist…After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist: only this is true, anything else is wrong'?"
>
> "Vaccha, I do not hold the view: 'The world is eternal…The world is not eternal…The world is finite…The world is infinite…The soul and the body are the same…The soul is one thing and the body another…After death a Tathāgata exists…After death a Tathāgata does not exist…After death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist…After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist: only this is true, anything else is wrong.'"[283]

In terms of grouping, these questions can be interpreted as relating to the cosmos and the one who has achieved liberation. For the questions toward the awakened one, it can be subcategorized into two: 1) pertaining to one who attained freedom but is still alive; 2) pertaining to one who is liberated but passed away. According to Kaluhapana, "In both cases the term used is Tathāgata, meaning the 'thus-gone-one.' Unfortunately, it is this notion of the 'thus-gone' that led to the emergence of many metaphysical issues relating to the concept of freedom, because it is when a freed person is so described questions such as 'Where did he go?' can arise. If he is living, then his life must be different from that of everyone else. If he is dead and is not reborn like everyone else, then he must be surviving in a totally different form of existence."[284] As we can see, the six propositions of Vacchagotta are:

1. The soul is identical with the body
2. The soul is different from the body
3. The Tathāgata exists after death
4. The Tathāgata does not exist after death

[283] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 590–94.
[284] Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy: Continuities and Discontinuities*, 97.

5. Both 3 and 4
6. Neither 3 and 4

Glancing at these propositions, the first two schemes are commonly regarded as the metaphysical ideology of self (*atman*). The last four point to the Tathāgata, specifically after passing away (*parammaraṇā*).[285] The question is, however, did the Buddha really remain silent on those matters? It is certainly not the case. In this context, Kalupahana insists that the Buddha was "…vehemently against raising such questions, because the questions themselves were meaningless, let alone the answer. Such questions are not only epistemologically meaningless and unanswerable but pragmatically irrelevant, for answers to them do not in any way help solve the problem of immediate human suffering."[286] In simple terms, the Buddha gave no answer because the question was irrelevant. However, the intention of the Buddha did not end there. He was waiting for Vacchagotta to put the questions in the right way so that they would be more meaningful and conducive to answers.

In the same line of thought, Piya Tan says, "The Buddha's silence is not merely reflective of the uselessness of the 10 questions… or that they cannot really be meaningfully declared in any way."[287] He insists that there is more insight on the way the Buddha remained silent in such a situation. By responding with silence, "The Buddha is gently diverting the questioner and the speculating away from the distractions of discursiveness, and directing him to the true path of inquiry, intuition, healing and liberation."[288] In other words, "the Buddha's teaching—is about personal transformation.

[285] Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy: Continuities and Discontinuities*, 98.
[286] Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy: Continuities and Discontinuities*, 99.
[287] Piya Tan, "Silence and the Buddha," accessed October 30, 2015, http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/44.1-Silence-and-the-Buddha.-piya.pdf, 21.
[288] Piya Tan, "Silence and the Buddha," 21.

If it takes silence to help spiritually transform a person, the Buddha would use it."[289] Although the act of silence cannot provide the interlocutor with instantaneous insight, it does help extirpate discursive thoughts, and it stops one's mind from running wild. This could assist in stopping the mind from hankering after unnecessary thoughts to fulfill its own interest. In sum, the act of silence of the Buddha could help steer one to the correct path of spiritual cultivation.[290]

In light of pedagogical guidance, the Buddha was trying to guide his questioners to the right path, giving the interlocutor time to reflect, contemplate and put the question in the right manner (in terms of cause and effect, karma). Nevertheless, the Buddha did not spoon-feed this to the wanderer Vacchagotta. This is very obvious in the structure of the sutta itself. The sutta shows first the Buddha saying "no" to a string of questions. Then the questioner reframed his questions in a skillful way, "How is it …when Master Gotama is asked each of these ten questions, he replies: 'I do not hold that view.' What danger does Master Gotama see that he does not take up any of these speculative views?"[291] To this, the Buddha expounded:

> Vaccha, the speculative view that the world is eternal is a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a vacillation of views, a fetter of views. It is beset by suffering, by vexation, by despair, and by fever, and it does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna. The speculative view that the world is not eternal...that the world is finite...that the world is infinite...that the soul and the body are the same...that the soul is one thing and the body another...that after death a Tathāgata exists...that after death a Tathāgata does not exist...that after death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist...that after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist is a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a vacillation of views, a fetter of views. It is beset by

[289] Piya Tan, "Silence and the Buddha," 21.
[290] Piya Tan, "Silence and the Buddha," 21.
[291] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 591.

> suffering, by vexation, by despair, and by fever, and it does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna. Seeing this danger, I do not take up any of these speculative views.[292]

However, by looking at the above passage, would one generate an assumption that the Buddha, having pointed out what constitutes a wrong view, "had no views of his own … he had no answers to give… he could not offer alternatives. He was agnostic?"[293] Nevertheless, one can counter this statement by arguing that one could hardly negate a view unless one has another standpoint. Particularly, to say a certain view is wrong one must have an alternative, especially the correct or right view.[294] To use Pandit's words, what the Buddha's taught and was concerned with was "not a philosophical viewpoint, but a fact of experience, which is that of suffering."[295] That is to say, whatever the Buddha preached "is about suffering, about the content of suffering, about the cessation of suffering, and about the method that leads to the cessation of suffering."[296] In and of itself, it is to say the Buddha's concern was existential, experiential, and behavioral rather than the spinning of a philosophical theory. This is well demonstrated in the parable of the poison arrow in MN 63.

c) Remaining Focused on the Goal

One other possible reason for the Buddha's silence is because he "would not be distracted from his main purpose."[297] This point is well demonstrated in the analogy of the poison arrow. The analogy has it that there was a man who is wounded by a poison

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[292] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 591–92.
[293] Organ, "The Silence of the Buddha," 131.
[294] Moti Lal. Pandit, *The Buddhist View of Knowledge and Reality* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2008), xi.
[295] Pandit, *The Buddhist View of Knowledge and Reality*, xii.
[296] Pandit, *The Buddhist View of Knowledge and Reality*, xii.
[297] Organ, "The Silence of the Buddha," 138.

arrow. While others want to help pull out the arrow, the man would not let them do so until he knew who shot the arrow, whether he was tall or short, strong or weak, what the bow looked like, and so forth. Thus, the man would die while these things would still remain unknown to him. In the same manner, the questioner would die and those things (whether the cosmos is eternal or not, whether there is self or no self, etc.) would still remain unknown to him. Regarding this, the Buddha stressed that these entire facets are not conducive to the goal at all.[298] Here the implication is to say, death is the subject at the forefront and one needs to attend to that problem first. Other issues for now are not necessary.

This point is acknowledged in Organ's article "The Silence of the Buddha," as he asserts that these metaphysical questions "about the origin and end of the cosmos, about the relationship of soul and body, and about human immortality are questions which positivists from Comte to Carnap would reject as insoluble by scientific methods, as unverifiable, as super-empirical, as metaphysical, as meaningless."[299] Simply, to use Edmond Holmes' words, metaphysical knowledge is information that "Buddha looked upon with distrust and aversion; but knowledge itself—the knowledge which has its counterpart in inward enlightenment, the knowledge of reality which makes for peace and deliverance—was the very goal to which the Path was intended to lead."[300]

According to Piya Tan, "Speculative thinking, especially worrying about things and situations that do not really matter, or even if they do matter, is rarely helpful."[301] In terms of psychological thinking, it is similar to the feeling of being stranded in a dark

[298] For details see Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 533–36, on the Shorter Discourse to Mālunkyāputta (MN 63).
[299] Organ, "The Silence of the Buddha," 127.
[300] Holmes, *The Creed of Buddha*, 166.
[301] Piya Tan, "Silence and the Buddha," 5.

room—feeling cold and scared. To make things worse, instead of trying to find the way out along the wall, one just screams out, "What to do, what to do?" and keep moving around in circles, bumping into things and tumbling over them. Thus, one could hurt, injure or even kill oneself. In this context, time is very valuable; if one does not know how to use it wisely, one will waste all one's energy, and even one's life. In as much as to say, speculative thinking on irrelevant issues is futile, a waste of time and effort.

d) Considering the Knowledge of the Questioner

As mentioned earlier, the Buddha replies to Vacchagotta's questions. However, regarding the nature of the Tathāgata, when the Buddha said appearing and reappearing do not apply to the Tathāgata, Vaccha became confused. Why is this so? The Buddha explained that the information he instilled is "profound, hard to see and hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, unattainable by mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise."[302] It was too sophisticated for Vaccha to penetrate so long as he held "another view, accept[ed] another teaching, approve[d] of another teaching, pursue[d] a different training, and follow[ed] a different teacher."[303] In other words, the knowledge of Vacchagotta was limited by his background context.

In as much as to say, the knowledge of Vacchagotta was not at the level to be able to comprehend what the Buddha just spoke about. Therefore, to make Vacchagotta understand in regard to the nature of the Tathāgata, the Buddha used the simile of the fire that has gone out. If one were to ask about the nature of an extinguished fire, "'To which

[302] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 593.
[303] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 593.

direction did it go: to the east, the west, the north or the south?' the proper answer would be 'That does not apply.'"[304] The Buddha then concluded:

> So too, Vaccha, the Tathāgata has abandoned that material form by which one describing the Tathāgata might describe him; he has cut it off at the root, made it like a palm stump, done away with it so that it is no longer subject to future arising. The Tathāgata is liberated from reckoning in terms of material form, Vaccha, he is profound, immeasurable, unfathomable like the ocean. The term 'reappears' does not apply, the term 'does not reappear' does not apply, the term 'both reappears and does not reappear' does not apply, the term 'neither reappears nor does not reappear' does not apply. [305]

SN 44:1 also illustrates a similar scenario, when King Pasenadi approached the nun Khemā and asked about the existence of the Tathāgata hereafter. To this, the nun replied that it "does not apply."[306] Why does appear and reappear not apply to the Tathāgata? This is because he has gone beyond them, just as the word "Tathāgata" itself has meanings of "thus gone, thus come." To put it simply, the Tathāgata has done away with form, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness. In sum, one cannot view or relate the Tathāgata with the five *skandha*s (Pāli*: khandha*s).

Nicholson in his work "The Unanswered Questions and the Limits of Knowledge" quotes a passage from the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* Mi.140 (MN 22), translated by Norman (1991, p. 5) thus: anyone including the gods "Indra, Brahmā and Prajāpati, searching for a bhikkhu whose mind is released in this way, (thinking) 'This is what a [T]athāgata's consciousness is dependent upon', do not find him. Why is this? I say, bhikkhus, that a [T]athāgata is not findable in the phenomenal world."[307]

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[304] Gowans, *Philosophy of the Buddha*, 152.
[305] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 593.
[306] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya; Translated from the Pāli; Original Translation by Bhikkhu Bodhi.* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 1380.
[307] Nicholson, "The Unanswered Questions and the Limits of Knowledge," 545.

In A. K. Warder's view, "There is no being, such as a thus-gone, who could either exist or cease to exist. There is only the sequence of conditions, which may occur or cease according to the laws discovered by the Buddha."[308] The Tathāgata is not fastened by conditional terms. Therefore, to speak of such a question is the Tathāgata this or that is misleading.[309]

Final Remarks

From exploring SN 44:10 and MN 72 in and of themselves, one would see there was an intention behind the Buddha's silence. First, he saw that his interlocutor was embedded with other doctrines and attached to the concept of self. Therefore, he proceeded not to answer any of the metaphysical queries until the time was ripe and the questions put in the correct way. This can also be explained as a method of guidance. Not only that, the Buddha also took into account the questioner's knowledge—although it was still lacking. However, because of the willingness and aspiration of the interlocutor wanting to learn the Dharma, the Buddha had to describe what he means in simple terms, like the simile of the "fire gone out." Lastly the Buddha was focused on what he set forth to do—his teaching heeded eradicating sentient beings' suffering and leading them to *nibbāna*. As he expounded, these metaphysical questions are not conducive to the practice and path at all.

It is obvious that the Buddha remained silent to some questions not because he felt that it was inexpressible, ineffable or ungraspable. So to say, his act of silence is not about mysticism at all. According to Thanissaro Bhikkhu, these topics are theoretically knowable (just like the analogy of the man hit by the poison arrow who asked a whole list

[308] Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, 135.
[309] Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, 135.

of questions regarding the person that shot the arrow which could possibly be answers). However, these topics are not conducive to the goal of enlightenment or in the example above, the removal of the poison arrow to prevent death.[310] The Buddha stayed silent on the metaphysical issues because he recognized them to be unbeneficial to the practice and goal. Nonetheless, there were times he put certain questions aside because of time and place, the nature of the question and who the interlocutor was, and further, as a way of pedagogical guidance. This was a strategy of the Buddha to help steer the inquirer's mind to the right way. This is demonstrated by Vacchagotta's question on self and non-self. Regarding the doctrine of self and non-self, there is obvious evidence that the teaching was intended as a strategy for gaining release from suffering, in that one can use the concept of non-self as skillful means to dis-identify and detach oneself from all phenomena and transcend all suffering and stress or to help one attain a higher level of cultivation (*jhāna*). Further, the question, "Is the world eternal or not?" and the question, "Is the Tathāgata this or that?" constitute "a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a vacillation of views, a fetter of views."[311] In sum, it is a suffering and distressing view, not conducive to direct knowledge and release. Although the Buddha indirectly answered these questions, one should view it as an act of skillful guidance considering time, place, and the interlocutor's mentality and knowledge. Importantly, the main emphasis was to lead sentient beings to *nibbāna*.

[310] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 371–72.
[311] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 591.

CHAPTER 3: THE UNIQUENESS OF THE CROSS-QUESTIONING OF THE BUDDHA

Introduction

In the second chapter we have seen one method among the many ways the Buddha uses to answer questions. The Buddha used the mode of *silence* to answer and guide his interlocutors. We have also seen how and why this method was utilized. In doing so, we attempt to discern the intention of the Buddha in using the method of silence to answer questions.

> He should not train in faultfinding
> nor seize on the other's mistakes;
> he should not overwhelm and crush his opponent,
> nor speak mendacious words.
> Truly, a discussion among the good
> is for the sake of knowledge and confidence.
> Such is the way the noble discuss things;
> this is the discussion of the noble ones.
> Having understood this, the wise person
> should not swell up but should discuss things.[312] —*AN 3:67*

This passage opens up to the exploration of the Buddha's cross-questioning method. It is important to bear in mind the Buddha's ultimate goal in his discussion with his interlocutors—that is, to help others liberate themselves from suffering and lead them to *nibbāna*.

For this third chapter, I will explore the function of the second method with which the Buddha answered questions, the mode of "counter-questioning or cross-examination"—in Pāli it is called "*paṭipucchā*."[313] This is done by investigating MN 63: *Cūḷamālunkya Sutta* (*Discourse to Mālunkyāputta*), MN 58: *Abhayarājakumāra Sutta* (*Discourse to Prince Abhaya*), and MN 61: *Ambalaṭṭhikarāhulovāda Sutta* (*Advice to*

[312] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The numerical discourses of the Buddha*, 289.
[313] In A. P. Buddhadatta Mahāthera, *Concise Pāli-English Dictionary* (Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1957), s.v. "*paṭipucchā*," is defined as ask in return, 158 .

Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhika). The intention is to highlight the uniqueness in this pedagogical style. It is argued that this method is distinctive because the aim is to: 1) clear the interlocutor's state of mind but not to defeat or ridicule; and 2) teach the interlocutor the skill of how to cross-examine oneself in the practice leading to *nibbāna*. In addition, I argue that the practice of cross-examining oneself was conferred as a practice of meditation, especially reflective thinking.

The Uniqueness of the Buddha's Cross-Questioning

1. Background Discussion, Definitions and Synonyms

Cross-questioning is a form of dialectic. It is the art or practice of communication employed in "the investigation of truth of opposing opinions by logical discussion."[314] The exercise is well known to the Western world as the Socratic method. The Greek called this method "*elenchus*,"[315] which is often referred to as refutation. Other words that can be used to describe the term are acquisitioning, testing, probing, questioning, counter-questioning, inquiring, investigating, and cross-examining. Because of this, it is very popular today for interrogatories, proofs, or examinations in the law of the court.

This method, according to Christopher Meckstroth, consists of asking "a series of questions that push the interlocutor to clarify and draw out the implications of his own views. Ultimately, it becomes clear that some of these consequences contradict others, and this shows the interlocutor's position to be incoherent."[316] Meckstroth further argues, "Socrates never simply deduces the contradictions in his interlocutors' beliefs for them; instead, he only asks them questions and allows them to fall into self-contradiction

[314] Soanes et al., *Pocket Oxford English Dictionary.*, s.v. "Dialectic," 245.
[315] Alessandro Stavru, "Socrates," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones, 2nd ed., vol. 12 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 8503.
[316] Christopher Meckstroth, "Socratic Method and Political Science," *The American Political Science Review* 106, no. 3 (2012): 646.

through their own responses."[317] In the western sense of cross-examination, "To refute a particular interlocutor's claim to knowledge, it is sufficient to show that he cannot make coherent sense out of his own position when pressed to do so."[318] In as much as to say, the prominent feature of the Socratic method, the elenchus (refutation), is "*pressure*."[319] The aim is, to press the interlocutor with questions. Another way of saying this is, to *force* or *push* the interlocutors to fall into their own trap of self-contradiction.

According to Francis L. Wellman's book the *Art of Cross Examination,* it suggested that to become proficient in the art of cross-examination

> "[R]equires the greatest ingenuity; a habit of logical thought; clearness of perception in general; infinite patience and self-control; power to read men's minds intuitively, to judge of their characters by their faces, to appreciate their motives; ability to act with force and precision; a masterful knowledge of the subject-matter itself; an extreme caution; and, above all, the instinct to discover the weak point in the [interlocutor] under examination."[320]

Although there are many aspects mentioned in the above passage, one can see "force" is a feature within that listed.

There is a scholar, Professor Berti, who goes against the mode of pressing. Berti "argues that in each case the dialectical mode of thought, with its dependence on the refutation of opposing theses as a means of attaining the truth, requires free discussion and the resulting conflict of ideas."[321] In other words, truth should be arrived at through free discussion under the guidance of a moral and ethical basis.

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[317] Meckstroth, "Socratic Method and Political Science," 647.
[318] Meckstroth, "Socratic Method and Political Science," 648.
[319] In Soanes et al., *Pocket Oxford English Dictionary,* s.v. "pressure," pressure is defined as to "persuade or force someone into doing something," 711.
[320] Francis L. Wellman, *The Art of Cross Examination* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1903), 24–25.
[321] James Seaton, "Dialectics: Freedom of Speech and Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 41, no. 2 (1980): 283, doi:10.2307/2709461.

There are some similarities in Socrates' style of cross-examination and the Buddha's method of counter-questioning. That is, both the Buddha and Socrates posed questions with the aim to arrive at true knowledge (truth).

Looking into Buddhist scholars' works, there are only two scholars that touch on this method in their work. Thanissaro Bhikkhu reserves two chapters (Chapter 5 and Chapter 6) on this topic in his work *Skill in Questions*.[322] K. N. Jayatilleke in his dense book *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* writes one to two pages on this matter.[323] In other words, not much studies have been done on this topic. I also look at a similar topic called *vedalla*. The Pāli term *vedalla* means questions and answers: "person A raises a question and B answers it, then A, being pleased with the answer, raises a further question, then B again answers it."[324]

According to Maeda, suttas that are formulated in such style as "question and answer" have the following features:

1. It consists of questions and answers between disciples or between the Buddha and a disciple or the god Sakka. The inferior one raises questions and the superior one answers.
2. In several of the quoted examples, the term *veyyākaraṇa* occurs, which shows that this genre is a variety of another genre *veyyākaraṇa* ("explanation").
3. The most characteristic feature of *vedalla* and *veyyākaraṇa*, which differentiates them from other genres, is the repeated occurrences of the following set phrase: [A asks a question, B answers.] … ("After rejoicing and gladly receiving what B had said, saying 'Very good! O venerable B', A raised another question to B.") In this way, questions and answers continue.
4. Contents of questions are varied but mainly concern the principal Buddhist doctrines.[325]

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[322] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 173–341.
[323] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 286–87.
[324] Seishi Karashima, "Who Composed the Mahāyāna Scriptures?—The Mahāsāṃghikas and Vaitulya Scriptures," 113, accessed April 19, 2016, https://www.academia.edu/12854001/Who_Composed_the_Mah%C4%81y%C4%81na_Scriptures_The_Mah%C4%81s%C4%81%E1%B9%83ghikas_and_Vaitulya_Scriptures.
[325] Karashima, "Who Composed the Mahāyāna Scriptures?," 113.

Besides, there is a hierarchical relationship between the respondent and the interlocutor in this *vedalla* genre. One is superior, and the other is inferior: for example, the Buddha and his disciples or a senior monk (such as Sāriputta) and a younger monk.

In the Pāli Sutta Piṭaka, there are explicitly two discourses that are indicated to be *vedalla*, the *Cullavedalla* (MN 44), and *Mahāvedalla* (MN 43). However, when investigating these two discourses, I found them only to be conversations between the disciples of the Buddha—monastic to monastic or monastic to lay person. The *Cullavedalla Sutta* is a question-and-answer discussion between Dhammadinnā (a prominent nun) and a layman named Visākhā regarding the subject of the five clinging *skandhas* as self, their cessation, and letting-go.[326] The *Mahāvedalla Sutta* is a dialogue between Venerable Mahā Kotthita and Sāriputta (a senior disciple of the Buddha). The discourse discusses various topics: discernment, consciousness, feeling, perception, the eye of discernment, right view, becoming, first jhāna, five facilities, vitality-fabrications, and awareness-release.[327] In as far as what is illustrated in these *vedalla* suttas, the structure is: the interlocutor asks, and the respondent replies. There seem to be no cross-questions.

Nevertheless, there are many suttas structured in the form of *counter-questioning*.[328] There are nine cases where counter-questioning is carried out according to the Pāli *Nikāya*.

1. A monk is accused of an offense that he denies committing. His fellow monks cross-question him to see if he can give a coherent and believable account of his behavior.

[326] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 396–404.
[327] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 387–95.
[328] For details see: Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 200–302, 318–41.

2. A monk, even after being reproved by his fellow monks, maintains a position in the Buddha's presence that is clearly pernicious. After the Buddha ascertains that the monk will not abandon the pernicious view, he rebukes the monk and then turns to the other monks to cross-question them as to the relevant right view.
3. The Buddha or one of his disciples makes a statement that a listener finds unclear. The listener asks him to explain what the statement means and how it fits in with his other statements.
4. A person asks a question unclear in its wording or underlying motive. The Buddha cross-questions him to clarify the original question.
5. A person asks for a definition of a term without realizing that he has enough knowledge to provide at least part of the definition himself.
6. A person asks a question in a way indicating that he may not understand the response the Buddha will give—either the content of the response or the strategy with which it is given. The Buddha then draws an example, usually an activity, familiar to the person and questions him on it. From the person's replies, the Buddha shows how the proper response to the original question can be understood in the same frame as the person's understanding of the familiar activity.
7. A person presents an argument against the Buddha's teaching. The Buddha cites a hypothetical example that disproves the person's position and then questions him on it. From the person's answers, the Buddha shows how the person has contradicted himself and so disproven his own argument.
8. The Buddha encourages his listeners to cross-question themselves about their actions or traits present in their minds.
9. The Buddha cross-questions his listeners as to phenomena they are experiencing in the present moment.[329]

Besides, I have come to understand that very little scholarship has been done on this method of the Buddha. Why is this so? Is it because of its similarity to the Socratic method, or is it because it is a *subcategory* of the analytical method, as Jayatilleke argues?[330] Here, I would maintain that, firstly, the Buddha's method of cross-questioning is distinct from the Socratic method (*elenchus*). And secondly, there is more to this than just serving as a *subcategory* of an analytical method because one finds the Buddha employed cross-questioning widely throughout the Pāli Sutta Piṭaka, and the Buddha

[329] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 175.
[330] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 287.

himself listed "counter-questions" as a main category (AN 4:42).[331] Due to this great emphasis, I assume that there is an intention behind exercising this method beyond just clearing the state of mind of other people in a way that cannot be done by using the analytical method. This leads us to the next section, "The Way of Cross-questioning: Wisdom and Compassion."

2. The Way of Cross-questioning: Compassion and Wisdom

This section argues that the Buddha employed cross-questions to clear the interlocutor's state of mind, but not to defeat or ridicule. How so? Let us look first at the *Cūḷamālunkya Sutta* (MN 63) and then the *Abhayarājakumāra Sutta* (MN 58).

MN 63 records an episode where a young monk, Mālunkyāputta, having witnessed the Buddha put aside *avyākata* (undeclared) questions, could not bear such action and even in his meditation still thought of it. Exacerbating his proliferative thoughts, he decided to ask those questions again of the Buddha: if the Buddha answered them, he would remain in the *Saṅgha*, if not, he would disrobe and return to ordinary life.

> [Bhikkhus], while the venerable Mālunkyāputta was alone in meditation, the following thought arose in his mind:
>
> "These speculative views have been undeclared by the Blessed One, set aside and rejected by him, namely: 'the world is eternal' and 'the world is not eternal'; 'the world is finite' and 'the world is infinite'; 'the soul is the same as the body' and 'the soul is one thing and the body another'; and 'after death a Tathāgata exists' and 'after death a Tathāgata does not exist' and 'after death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist' and 'after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist.' The Blessed One does not declare these to me, and I do not approve of and accept the fact that he does not declare these to me, so I shall go to the Blessed One and ask him the meaning of this. If he declares to me either 'the world is eternal' or 'the world is not eternal'...or 'after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor

[331] Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Complete Translation of the Anguttara Nikaya Teachings of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012).

> does not exist,' then I will lead the holy life under him; if he does not declare these to me, then I will abandon the training and return to the low life."[332]

When Mālunkyāputta went to the Buddha and asked him of these matters, the Buddha then counter-questioned him thus:

> "How then, Mālunkyāputta, did I ever say to you: 'Come, Mālunkyāputta, lead the holy life under me and I will declare to you "the world is eternal" ... or "after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist'"?" - "No, venerable sir." - "Did you ever tell me: 'I will lead the holy life under the Blessed One, and the Blessed One will declare to me "the world is eternal" or "after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist'"?" - "No, venerable sir."[333]

The Buddha then used an analogy of a man badly wounded by a poison arrow. His relatives and friends want to help him by inviting a doctor to come to pull out the arrow and apply ointment. However, the injured man would not let the physician do so unless he could answer a long list of questions regarding the man that shot the arrow: his physical appearance, parents, village and home town, the materials of the arrow and bow, and so forth. In summary, the Buddha pointed out:

> "All this would still not be known to that man and meanwhile he would die. So too, Mālunkyāputta, if anyone should say thus: 'I will not lead the holy life under the Blessed One until the Blessed One declares to me: "the world is eternal" … or "after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist" that would still remain undeclared by the Tathāgata and meanwhile that person would die.[334]

As seen in the discourse above, firstly the interlocutor, Mālunkyāputta, was confused and mixed up with regard to those questions in response to which the Buddha stayed silent. It overwhelmed his mind to the extent that the unskillful thought arose that if the Buddha does not give him an answer on these subjects, he would abandon the monkhood. Here,

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[332] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 533.
[333] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 534.
[334] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 535.

there are two things to be discerned separately. The first is about the monkhood, and the second is the unanswered questions. However, Mālunkyāputta mixed the two topics together. As an insightful and skillful teacher, the Buddha untangled them. First, the Buddha responded, did I ask you to join the *Saṅgha* so I would tell you these things, and you did not become my disciple to know these things. Mālunkyāputta understood and came to terms by saying, "No, venerable sir." The Buddha made it very clear that all of these questions had nothing to do with the life of a monk.

The Buddha moved to the next issue—resolving the perplexed state of mind of Mālunkyāputta. Here, I assume that the Buddha was aware that Mālunkyāputta's mind was still agitated and therefore used the analogy of the man wounded by the poisoned arrow instead of directly stating that all of these questions are not conducive to the holy life and are not helpful for the path leading to emancipation. As the sutta presents, the Buddha left these topics undeclared, "Because it is unbeneficial, it does not belong to the fundamentals of the holy life, it does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna."[335]

It is important to note here that the analogy that the Buddha used is very close to him as well as to the interlocutor. The doctor resembles the Buddha; the poison arrow represents suffering; the ointment is the Dharma (the teaching to end suffering); the proliferation of questions is the action of not being willing to listen and learn the dharma—this is similar to Mālunkyāputta's situation. Not accepting the doctor's treatment equates to not accepting the Dharma. Friends and relatives are wise friends (other noble monks and nuns). To borrow Thanissaro Bhikkhu's words, the Buddha's "most distinctive form of cross-questioning was to cite activities familiar to them and —

[335] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 536.

from his own experience—similar to the context in which the teaching was to be used."[336]

There is a scholar (K. N. Jayatilleke) that insists that the counter-questioning method is a *subcategory* of analysis. He states: "The third kind of question, the *paṭipucchāvyākaraṇīya*, appears in fact to be only a subdivision of the second type, since the necessity for counter-question[s] is again due to ambiguities in the original question, which in fact can be cleared up by analytical answer."[337] This I would argue is not the case. First, the Buddha categorized this cross-questioning style as a main group in and of itself. Second, one would find many suttas throughout the Pāli canon in which the Buddha employed cross-questions. Further, there is another intention of why it was used—that is, for pedagogical ends, to show the interlocutor how the method is to be used in helping oneself attaining the path (more details will be discussed in a later section). In simple terms, there is great emphasis and prominent evidence suggesting that this is a main category.

One facet that is the same between the analytical and the cross-questioning method is that they have the same function: to clear up the state of the inquirer's mind. Nevertheless, the way of exercising them was rather different. In the analytical method, the explanation to resolve the ambiguities that the interlocutor/inquirer puts forth was done by the Buddha going into details of the issue.[338] In other words, the answer and resolution was provided or given by the Buddha. However, in the cross-questioning method, it was not the Buddha that provided the answer, but the interlocutor. In this method, it seems that the Buddha only acted as a guide. The Buddha allowed the

[336] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 174.
[337] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 287.
[338] See Chapter 4: "The Way the Buddha Analytically Answers the Question of the Kālāmas."

interlocutor the freedom to question him regarding a particular topic and then he used his pedagogical skill (counter-questions) step by step to have the interlocutor see the answer from his or her own mouth.[339] The Buddha uncovered that insight within the inquirer. The questioner knew the knowledge but never thought of it previously because it was hidden beneath a curtain of ignorance. In short, the Buddha guided the interlocutor to the insight regarding such matter. Besides, the insight discovered would be easier to retain in the interlocutor's mind because it was from his or her own knowledge. This is another aspect that makes this method of cross-questioning unique.

It is important to bear in mind that the time of Buddha (6th century BCE) was an era during which many religious leaders arose and various thoughts, ideologies and philosophies were developed. Much discussion and debates occurred amongst religious leaders as well as wanderers of different beliefs at the time. Due to this, the Buddha himself as well as his disciples could not escape from people from different walks of life (kings, princes, religious leaders, monks, and householders) approaching him to ask questions.

The Buddha welcomed others to ask questions. MN 22 stated, "Therefore, bhikkhus, when you understand the meaning of my statements, remember it accordingly; and when you do not understand the meaning of my statements, then ask either me about it or those bhikkhus who are wise."[340] Here, the Buddha invited people to question him. According to Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "[A] teacher who welcomes cross-questioning is concerned less with his status as a teacher and more with communicating something clear and useful. In honoring his listeners' freedom to question, he opens the discussion to their

[339] This is a matter of compassion and wisdom.
[340] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 228.

subjective experience of doubt and their desire for knowledge."[341] In terms of education, questions and discussion "should lead the students to [a] greater realization of these concepts, understandings, skills, and abilities."[342] In sum, it should generate insight and discernment.

However, there were requirements for the Buddha to respond to the interlocutor. The following are some examples of requirements needed for a dialogue to be carried out:

> Householder, if you will debate on the basis of truth, we might have some conversation about this.[343] — *MN 56*

> Vappa, if you will allow of me what should be allowed, protest what should be protested, and further cross-question me directly then [and] there on the meaning of any statement of mine that you don't understand— 'How is this, lord? What is the meaning of this?'—then we could have a discussion here.[344] — *AN 4:195*

> If this person is asked a question and he answers evasively, diverts the discussion to an irrelevant subject, and displays anger, hatred, and bitterness, in such a case this person is unfit to talk.
> But if this person is asked a question and he does not answer evasively, divert the discussion to an irrelevant subject, or display anger, hatred, and bitterness, in such a case this person is fit to talk.[345] — *AN 3:67*

> It is in relation to talk, bhikkhus, that a person should be understood as either fit to talk or unfit to talk. If this person is asked a question and he overwhelms [the questioner], crushes him, ridicules him, and seizes upon a slight error, in such a case this person is unfit to talk.
> But if this person is asked a question and he does not overwhelm [the questioner], or crush him, or ridicule him, or seize upon a slight error, in such a case this person is fit to talk.[346] — *AN 3:67*

As shown above, the Buddha was selective in terms of whom he would answer and respond to. He expected the interlocutor to indicate proper manners and also give him the

[341] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 173.
[342] Lewis C. Goffe and Nancy H. Deane, "Questioning Our Questions," *College Composition and Communication* 25, no. 4 (1974): 289, doi:10.2307/356423.
[343] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 481.
[344] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 190.
[345] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, 287–88.
[346] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, 288.

right to question back at them. One reason was because there were cases in which people came to the Buddha and asked questions with evil intentions.[347] Second, the Buddha was selective with regard to whom he dialogued because his intention in debates was not "simply for the sport of trying to defeat an opponent"[348] or to ridicule them, but rather, to clear-up and eradicate wrong view. This is a grand aspect of his uniqueness.

In terms of pedagogy, "the Buddha cross-questions his opponents for the compassionate purpose of clearing up their misunderstanding and establishing them in right view."[349] One would assume that there is great wisdom and compassion in the way the Buddha responded. These features can be seen from the *Abhayarājakumāra Sutta: Discourse to Prince Abhaya* (MN 58).

MN 58 presents a scenario in which a prince named Abhaya, having listened to a Jain teacher, Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, goes to contest, repudiate, and put the Buddha down. The situation occurred while the Buddha was staying at Rājagaha. The story is told that on one occasion a prince named Abhaya went and visited the Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta. Nātaputta then encouraged the prince to go and rebuke the Buddha so that a good report of the Prince will spread afar.

> "Come, prince, refute the recluse Gotama's doctrine, and a good report of you will be spread to this effect: 'Prince Abhaya has refuted the doctrine of the recluse Gotama, who is so powerful and mighty.'"[350]

Prince Abhaya then said, how can this be done? And Nātaputta taught him thus:

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[347] Chandima Wijebandara, *Early Buddhism: Its Religious and Intellectual Milieu* ([Kelaniya], Sri Lanka: Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies, University of Kelaniya, 1993), 178 states there are some people who queried the Buddha because of sheer ignorance, bad motives, or to ridicule.
[348] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 190.
[349] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 193.
[350] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 498.

> "Come, prince, go to the recluse Gotama and say: 'Venerable sir, would the Tathāgata utter speech that would be unwelcome and disagreeable to others?' If the recluse Gotama, on being asked thus, answers: 'The Tathāgata, prince, would utter speech that would be unwelcome and disagreeable to others,' then say to him: "Then, venerable sir, what is the difference between you and an ordinary person? For an ordinary person also would utter speech that would be unwelcome and disagreeable to others.' But if the recluse Gotama, on being asked thus, answers: "The Tathāgata, prince, would not utter speech that would be unwelcome and disagreeable to others,' then say to him: 'Then, venerable sir, why have you declared of Devadatta: "Devadatta is destined for the states of deprivation, Devadatta is destined for hell, Devadatta will remain [in hell] for the aeon, Devadatta is incorrigible"? Devadatta was angry and dissatisfied with that speech of yours.' When the recluse Gotama is posed this two-horned question by you, he will not be able either to gulp it down or to throw it up. If an iron spike were stuck in a man's throat, he would not be able either to gulp it down or to throw it up; so too, prince, when the recluse Gotama is posed this two-horned question by you, he will not be able either to gulp it down or to throw it up."[351]

The Prince then agreed to Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta's guidance and left. Having realized that it was late in the afternoon, the prince went to the Buddha, and after paying respects, he then invited the Buddha to have lunch at the prince's house the next day. The Buddha accepted in silence.

Let's pause a moment here and analyze what happened. The passages above present several points: it was not the prince's intention, but rather Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta's idea that he would like to take down the Buddha's reputation. He instilled this idea in the prince with a wrong teaching and wicked mind so that the prince would go and rebuke the Buddha. According to his reasoning, if the Buddha failed to answer those questions, not only would the prince be famous, but the reputation of Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta would as well spread afar. How could this be so? This would occur because Nātaputta was the person who taught the prince to do such a thing. In as far as to say, there was a burning desire to win and achieve fame, and this thirst was embedded with bad intention and wrong views.

[351] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 498–99.

The next day, the Buddha came to the prince's house and ate lunch. After finishing his meal, the conversation between Prince Abhaya and the Buddha began.

> "Venerable sir, would a Tathāgata utter such speech as would be unwelcome and disagreeable to others?"
>
> "There is no one-sided answer to that, prince."
>
> "Then, venerable sir, the Nigaṇṭhas have lost in this."
>
> "Why do you say this, prince: 'Then, venerable sir, the Nigaṇṭhas have lost in this'"?[352]

The prince then recounted his whole conversation with the Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta to the Buddha. In replying to the double-hooked question that the Buddha could supposedly neither "gulp it down or to throw it up," the Buddha cross-questioned the prince with what is closely associated with him. The Buddha saw that there was a baby resting on the lap of the prince; therefore, he asked the prince: "'What do you think, prince? If, while you or your nurse were not attending to him, this child were to put a stick or a pebble in his mouth, what would you do to him?'" Prince Abhaya replied without any hesitation that because of compassion, he would do whatever it takes to save the child: '"Venerable sir, I would take it out. If I could not take it out at once, I would take his head in my left hand, and crooking a finger of my right hand, I would take it out even if it meant drawing blood. Why is that? Because I have compassion for the child."'[353] In responding to the prince, the sutta presents the Buddha saying:

> "So too, prince, such speech as the Tathāgata knows to be untrue, incorrect, and unbeneficial, and which is also unwelcome and disagreeable to others: such speech the Tathāgata does not utter. Such speech as the Tathāgata knows to be true and correct but unbeneficial, and which is also unwelcome and disagreeable

[352] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha,* 499.
[353] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha,* 499.

> to others: such speech the Tathāgata does not utter. **Such speech as the Tathāgata knows to be true, correct, and beneficial, but which is unwelcome and disagreeable to others: the Tathāgata knows the time to use such speech.** Such speech as the Tathāgata knows to be untrue, incorrect, and unbeneficial, but which is welcome and agreeable to others: such speech the Tathāgata does not utter. Such speech as the Tathāgata knows to be true and correct but unbeneficial, and which is welcome and agreeable to others: such speech the Tathāgata does not utter. **Such speech as the Tathāgata knows to be true, correct, and beneficial, and which is welcome and agreeable to others: the Tathāgata knows the time to use such speech**. Why is that? Because the Tathāgata has compassion for beings."[354]

What the Buddha presented with regard to "speech" can be listed as follows:

1) untrue, incorrect, unbeneficial, disagreeable and unwelcomed by others.
2) untrue, incorrect, unbeneficial, agreeable and welcomed by others.
3) true, correct, but unbeneficial, disagreeable and unwelcomed by others.
4) true, correct, but unbeneficial, agreeable and welcomed by others.
5) true, correct, beneficial, but unwelcomed and disagreeable for others.
6) true, correct, beneficial, welcomed and agreeable for others.

The first four are types of speech the Buddha did not say because they were unbeneficial. The last two are speech uttered by the Buddha with the consideration of time, since they were helpful and conducive. As Walpola Rahula illustrates, the Buddha was not a machine programmed to answer every question being asked. But when he did answer a particular question, it was done with compassion, wisdom and consideration, "to help the questioner on the way to realization."[355] In other words, it is about compassion and right discernment, that is, knowing what is unbeneficial or beneficial, right and wrong, and when the appropriate time is to speak.

Prince Abhaya then turned to the next issue and inquired of the way the Buddha responded. He asked, Venerable sir, when others such as learned nobles, brahmins, householders, and renunciants, approach and question the Blessed One on a particular

[354] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 500. With my emphasis.
[355] Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 63.

topic prepared beforehand, "has there already been in the Blessed One's mind the thought: 'If they come to me and ask me thus, I shall answer thus'? Or does that answer occur to the Tathāgata on the spot?"[356] For this the Buddha counter-questioned the prince with a subject that was close and well-known to him. "Are you skilled in the parts of a chariot?"[357] To this the prince replied, "Yes, I am." The Buddha then asked him a second question: since that was the case, if someone were to ask:

> "'What is the name of this part of the chariot?' has there already been in your mind the thought: 'If they come to me and ask me thus, I shall answer them thus'? Or does that answer occur to you on the spot?"
>
> "Venerable sir, I am well known as a charioteer skilled in the parts of a chariot. All the parts of a chariot are well known to me. That answer would occur to me on the spot."[358]

The Buddha said it was the same, when a person comes with a question and asks him, the answer comes to him on the spot:

> "So too, prince, when learned nobles, learned brahmins, learned householders, and learned recluses, after formulating a question, then come to the Tathāgata and pose it, the answer occurs to the Tathāgata on the spot. Why is that? That element of things has been fully penetrated by the Tathāgata, through the full penetration of which the answer occurs to the Tathāgata on the spot."[359]

This question of Prince Abhaya consists of two facets. First, the Buddha has the power to know others' minds. The second aspect is regarding the Buddha discernment. However, in the Buddha response, he denied the use of his power to know others' minds. Instead, he demonstrated that his knowledge of things in this universe was instantaneous: "That element of things has been fully penetrated by the Tathāgata, through the full penetration of which the answer occurs to the Tathāgata on the spot." Similarly, the prince was

[356] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 500.
[357] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 500.
[358] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 500.
[359] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 500.

skilled in chariots, had expert knowledge of the parts of the chariot, and could answer any questions with regard to the parts on the spot. Thus, the counter-questioning dialogue ended with Prince Abhaya's mind cleared and enlightened from hearing the response of the Blessed One and the prince taking refuge in the Buddha.

To sum up this section, there are two main points being emphasized. First, it is very clear that the first issue the Prince Abhaya asked about indirectly concerns compassion. Take an example: Where is your compassion when you say speech that is "unwelcome and disagreed to others," or when you say that Devadatta is destined for hell and to stay there for a long time? For this the Buddha used compassion to answer his questions. This was done through the means of counter-questions with the analogy of the baby that accidently swallowed a stick that got stuck in the throat, to which the prince would show great compassion to save the child. The Buddha then further made an emphasis by listing six types of speech of which four types he would not say because they are unbeneficial. And, he only would utter only two types of speech; this is because they were conducive with regard to the right time to say it.

The second point is about the knowledge of the Buddha. The Prince Abhaya asked when an interlocutor comes and inquires the Buddha a question, does he have the answer prepared prior to the interlocutor coming or does the answer come to him instantly. The Buddha responded that the answer comes immediately after the question is asked, the reason being the Dharma of things is well discerned by the Buddha. With no further ado, we move to the next section on counter-questioning for cross-examining oneself.

3. Meditation: Cross-Examining Oneself

One aspect that makes this counter-questioning method distinctively unique is the fact that the Buddha employed the method to teach the interlocutor the skill of how to cross-examine oneself in the practice leading to *nibbāna*. It is also suggested that this is a form of meditation practice—reflective thinking—because it consists of meticulous contemplation and analysis. To address the above, first, I will examine the *Ambalaṭṭhikarāhulovāda Sutta (*MN 61). Second, I will look at some aspects of the Western mode of reflective thinking consonant to that of the Buddha's style of reflection.

a) Reflection: The *Ambalaṭṭhikarāhulovāda Sutta (*MN 61)

MN 61 records an episode in which the Buddha visited Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā to teach him. The lecture is on the admonishing of lying and how lying will ruin one's cultivation. The sutta presents: "Rāhula, those who are not ashamed to tell a deliberate lie have thrown away their recluseship" and "those who are not ashamed to tell a deliberate lie have turned their recluseship upside down."[360] The Buddha then further moved to teach Rāhula the way to not commit unskillful karma through reflecting on the action of one's body, speech, and mind. The Buddha asked: "What do you think, Rāhula? What is the purpose of a mirror?" Rāhula replied: "For the purpose of reflection, venerable sir."

> "So too, Rāhula, an action with the body should be done after repeated reflection; an action by speech should be done after repeated reflection; an action by mind should be done after repeated reflection.[361]

In terms of reflection, the Buddha instructed Rāhula on how to cross-examine oneself:

> "Rāhula, when you wish to do an action with the body, you should reflect upon that same bodily action thus: 'Would this action that I wish to do with the body

[360] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 523.
[361] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 524.

> lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both? Is it an unwholesome bodily action with painful consequences, with painful results?' When you reflect, if you know: 'This action that I wish to do with the body would lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it is an unwholesome bodily action with painful consequences, with painful results,' then you definitely should not do such an action with the body. But when you reflect, if you know: 'This action that I wish to do with the body would not lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it is a wholesome bodily action with pleasant consequences, with pleasant results then you may do such an action with the body.[362]
>
> "Also, Rāhula, while you are doing an action with the body, you should reflect upon that same bodily action… [similar as above.]
>
> "Also, Rāhula, after you have done an action with the body, you should reflect upon that same bodily action… [similar as above.] 'This action that I have done with the body does not lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it was a wholesome bodily action with pleasant consequences, pleasant results,' you can abide happy and glad, training day and night in wholesome states.[363]
>
> [This formula is to be repeated for speech and mind.]

As can be seen, this form of cross-questioning is totally different from that of the analytical method. Because in this mode the interlocutor cross-examines oneself and gradually penetrate into the issues of inquiry. Thus, insight and the nature of discernment is arrived with one's own effort of repeated deep thinking and reflections.

In the discourse above, the first thing that can be noticed is what is wholesome action and what is not wholesome. If activities are not beneficial (unwholesome) to oneself and others, then one should abandon it. If activities are helpful (wholesome) to others and oneself, then one should carry it out, act upon, continue doing, and abide in it. According to Thanissaro Bhikkhu, the strategy of cross-questioning oneself is implicitly embedded with compassion: "[I]n the desire not to harm oneself or others; integrity, in the ability to take responsibility for one's mistakes; and a healthy sense of shame—i.e.,

[362] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 524–25.
[363] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 525.

the shame toward unworthy actions that grows from high self-esteem."[364] Second, there are three levels of reflection: 1) when you wish to do an action; 2) while you are doing an action; and 3) after you have done an action with the body. Here, the Buddha is presented as teaching meticulous details on how one should reflect. Before one carries out an action, one should reflect to see if it's good or bad before acting upon it. Then repeat again: reflect while one is doing it. Again, after having done the action, contemplate on it one more time to see if it to be wholly accepted or completely abandoned. It is a learning process. Third, this action of reflection is to be carried out for body, speech and mind. This trio functions at different levels of subtleness. For example, the action of the body can physically be seen, while the work of the mind is very subtle and hard to see. In short, the basic feature of cross-questioning oneself is "conviction," that is to develops confidence "in four things: in the power of one's actions to yield results, in one's ability to evaluate those results, in the importance of making these judgments, and in one's ability to learn and benefit from them."[365]

In term of meditation, the objective of the cross-questioning method is aimed at "[I]mproved understanding and mindfulness … and heightened alertness in the case of self-cross-examination." Thus, when the triple qualities of mind: "understanding, mindfulness, and alertness—is combined with ardency in abandoning unskillful qualities and developing skillful ones," the mind that is pervaded with these good qualities would develop "the path factor of right mindfulness [§33] leading to right concentration and release."[366]

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[364] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 309.
[365] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 309.
[366] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 305.

MN 135: *The Shorter Analysis of Action Sutta* presents a series of questions similar in style but to be asked when approaching a wise teacher: "'Venerable sir, what is wholesome? What is unwholesome? What is blameable? What is blameless? What should be cultivated? What should not be cultivated? What kind of action will lead to my harm and suffering for a long time? What kind of action will lead to my welfare and happiness for a long time?'"[367] Similarly, cross-questioning oneself fosters the qualities of critical thinking, skillfulness in questions, awareness, mindfulness, and insight. These inquiries would lead one to a better state of happiness, discernment and even to *nibbāna*.

One can find similar example of cross-questioning oneself in the *Book of Analysis (Vibhaṅga): The Second Book of the Abhidhamma-Piṭaka*, "And how does a bhikkhu engender wish, make effort, arouse energy, exert the mind, strive for the non-arising of evil bad states that have not arisen? Therein what are evil bad states that have not arisen?"[368] Further, "And how does a bhikkhu engender wish, make effort, arouse energy, exert the mind, strive for the abandoning of evil bad states that have arisen? Therein what are evil bad states that have arisen?"[369] According to Thanissaro Bhikkhu, on the surface level, these questions that cross-examine oneself aim at pinpointing that which is skillful (*kusala*) and unskillful (*akusala*). The next level

[367] For details see Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 1056–57, on section of the Cūḷakammavibhanga Sutta (MN 135).
[368] Venerable U Thittila, trans., *The Book of Analysis (Vibhanga)*, 271. Note: "The three bad roots (i.e.,) greed, hatred, dullness and the corruptions occurring therewith; the aggregate of feeling, aggregate of perception, aggregate of mental concomitants, aggregate of consciousness associated therewith; the bodily action, verbal action, mental action generated thereby. These are called evil bad states that have not arisen. Thus he engenders wish, makes effort, arouses energy, exerts the mind, strives for the non-arising of these evil bad states that have not arisen."
[369] Venerable U Thittila, trans., *The Book of Analysis (Vibhanga)*, 272. Note: "The three bad roots (i.e.,) greed, hatred, dullness and the corruptions occurring therewith; the aggregate of feeling, aggregate of perception, aggregate of mental concomitants, aggregate of consciousness associated therewith; the bodily action, verbal action, mental action generated thereby. These are called evil bad states that have arisen. Thus he engenders wish, makes effort, arouses energy, exerts the mind, strives for the abandoning of these evil bad states that have arisen."

develops concentration and observation of one's own activities—being critical of one's intentions, actions and the results. At the subtle level, the objective is about being alert and aware of the activities of one's mind. To follow the same inquiry method, however, leads "into more and more subtle levels of activity in the mind until they can uproot the subtlest levels of attachment, thus bringing about the total freedom of unbinding."[370]

In as far as to say, cross-examining oneself can range from flawed to very subtle, from the actions of the body and speech to the action of the mind: so subtle that even in the different states of *jhāna*, the Buddha still encouraged his pupils to cross-question themselves as to is this suffering, is this the cessation of suffering, and is this the way leading to the cessation of suffering, until attainment of *nibbāna*. This reflection exercise was recommended by the Buddha to be done by one before, during and after any action.

According to Thanissaro, this same process of inquiry (and reflection) was used by the Buddha while sitting under the Bodhi tree, yielding the results of awakening and the path to salvation.[371] In other words, "the process of [cross-questioning oneself] functions not only to yield progress on the path, but also to evaluate the goal after it is reached." So as to say, "there is no level of the practice where it is inappropriate to pose questions in a skillful way. Anything that cannot stand up to questioning can't be genuine Dhamma; if anything is genuine Dhamma, it is sure to pass the test."[372]

b) Cross-examining Oneself and the Western Concept of Reflective Thinking

There are features that resonate between cross-examining oneself (reflection) and the Western mode of reflective thinking. This method of "reflection" that was elucidated

[370] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 304.
[371] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 174.
[372] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 316.

by the Buddha more than 2,500 years ago seems to have been revisited by Western scholars of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Many modern scholars have written on reflection: John Dewey (1910) in *How We Think*, E. Boyd and A. Fales (1983) in "Reflective Learning: Key to Learning from Experience," Charles R. Baker (1996) in "Reflective Learning: A Teaching Strategy for Critical Thinking," Brian A. Griffith and Frieden Gina (2000) in "Facilitating Reflective Thinking in Counselor Education," G. J. Posner (2000) in *Field Experience: A Guide to Reflective Thinking*, Carol Rodgers (2002) in "Defining Reflection," R. Campoy (2010) in "Reflective Thinking and Educational Solutions," and S. C. Choy and P. S. Oo (2012) in "Reflective Thinking and Teaching Practices," for example.

Here, I would like to start with the western term "*reflection*," for this context is otherwise known as reflective thought or reflective thinking. To reflect means to contemplate, ruminate, speculate, investigate, and to consider; it is to see, examine, discern and learn. With regard to reflective thinking, there are various definitions being put forth by different scholars. According to John Dewey (1910), reflection is an "Active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends."[373] His reason for reflection start with "(a) a state of perplexity…and (b) an act of search or investigation directed toward bringing to light further facts which serve to corroborate or to nullify the suggested belief."[374]

According to Boyd and Fales (1983), reflection is "a process of thinking about and exploring an issue of concern, which is triggered by an experience. The aim…is to

[373] John Dewey, *How We Think* (D.C.Heath & Co., Publishers, 1910), 6, http://archive.org/details/howwethink000838mbp.
[374] Dewey, *How We Think*, 9.

make sense or meaning out of the experience and to incorporate this experience into one's view of the self and the world."[375] To Ross (1989), "[Reflective thinking is] a way of thinking about educational matters that involves the ability to make rational choices and to assume responsibility for those choices," and for Brubacher, Case, and Reagan (1994), "[Reflective thinking is] our attempts to understand and make sense of the world."[376] As can be seen, there are multiple facets embedded in reflective thinking.

Thus, one would say that reflective thinking involves the mental strength and effort in "overcoming the inertia that inclines one to accept [experiences] at their face value."[377] It also takes into account *moral effort* and *ethical critical thinking* before making a decision to accept or reject an *experience*. In this way, reflective thinking is similar to the Buddhist principle of right thought and right view. The main purpose is to learn and benefit from it.

Nevertheless, according to Dewey, there are of two types of experience: educative and miseducative experience. The latter type of experience "leads in a callous, insensitive, and generally immoral direction."[378] This experience is not conducive "toward growth…nor does it contribute the greater good of society." In addition, it is not helpful for "broadening of one's moral understanding of self and the world."[379] On the other hand, "An educative experience…is one that broadens the field of experience and

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[375] Charles R. Baker, "Reflective Learning: A Teaching Strategy for Critical Thinking," *Journal of Nursing Education* 35, no. 1 (January 1996): 19.
[376] Nancy Lynelle Burrows, "Reflective Thinking by Teachers and Improvement in Teaching Practices" (Ed.D. diss., Oklahoma State University, 2012), 18, http://search.proquest.com.uwest.idm.oclc.org/docview/1039155985/abstract/EC79241DED1C4E0APQ/20.
[377] Dewey, *How We Think*, 13.
[378] Carol Rodgers, "Defining Reflection: Another Look at John Dewey and Reflective Thinking," *Teachers College Record* 104, no. 4 (2002): 847.
[379] Rodgers, "Defining Reflection," 847.

knowledge, brings awareness to bear, and leads in a constructive direction, toward 'intelligent action.'"[380]

However, with regard to the experience itself, "even educative ones, are not enough…What is critical is the ability to perceive and then weave meaning among the thread of experience."[381] To discern, have insight into the process, and be able to link them (experience and considerations) together and make meaning out of them is what matter most. Thus, as Carol Rodgers writes in her article, "it is the meaning that one perceives in and then constructs from an experience that gives that experience value."[382]

Generally, there are two modes of making sense of an experience: that is, through apprehension and comprehension. Apprehension means to summarize one's experience without any judgment or validity. Comprehension is to examine, analyze and understand the experience according to one own knowledge, to understand it in one's own words (way of thinking).[383] However, an experience is generally conditioned. It is affected by other experiences, particularly, the past ones. Our brain uses past phenomena to make meaning for the new one, and it functions autonomously most of the time. Therefore, one must be mindful and reflect upon the experience. Succinctly, reflection on experience is a necessity.

According to Hea-Jin Lee, there are three tiers in reflective thinking: to recall, to rationalize and to reflect.[384] To recall is to bring the past experience (memory) into view. To rationalize is to interpret, to ask critical questions of such memory and experience. To

[380] Rodgers, "Defining Reflection," 847.
[381] Rodgers, "Defining Reflection," 847.
[382] Rodgers, "Defining Reflection," 848.
[383] Hans Gelter, "Why Is Reflective Thinking Uncommon," *Reflective Practice* 4, no. 3 (2003): 339.
[384] Hea-Jin Lee, "Understanding and Assessing Preservice Teachers' Reflective Thinking," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 21, no. 6 (2005): 703.

reflect is to analyze the experience with the intention to change for improvement (this includes moral values). According to Rodgers, "Reflection is that process of 'reconstruction and reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience."[385] To draw upon Julia Myers' words, reflection is "the process of thinking beyond the superficial elements of experiences to explore them in greater depth, is undeniably the key to *deep* and *meaningful* learning."[386]

Reflection engenders critical thinking. How so? This is because regarding any particular experience, one would be critical and ask questions. This is a desire that drives one "to do something to resolve it—namely, to start the process of inquiry, or reflection."[387] For example, putting forth questions such as: Is this so? Can anything be done to improve it? How to better the outcome? Should I totally reject it?

Reflection, in contrast to acceptance of conventional belief, is "a systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking" that is based on the scientific method of inquiry.[388] Besides, it comes along with the moral disposition "that value[s] the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and of others."[389] All this Rodgers refers to in the work "Defining Reflection" as:

> Reflection is a meaning-making process that moves a learner from one experience into the next with [a] deeper understanding of its relationships with and connections to other experiences and ideas. It is the thread that makes continuity of learning possible, and ensures the progress of the individual and, ultimately, society. It is a means to essentially moral ends.[390]

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[385] Rodgers, "Defining Reflection," 848.
[386] Julia Myers, "Creating Reflective Practitioners with Preservice Lesson Study," *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning* 8, no. 1 (April 2013): 1.
[387] Rodgers, "Defining Reflection," 850.
[388] Rodgers, "Defining Reflection," 845.
[389] Rodgers, "Defining Reflection," 845.
[390] Rodgers, "Defining Reflection," 845.

Dewey considers reflective thinking as an "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends.'"[391] Further, in this light, but, tending toward the spiritual side, Maslow (1979) insisted that, this process of reflection "not only improves critical thinking skills, but also contributes to growth in self-awareness, self-actualization."[392]

In as much as to say, there are great parallels between the western concept of reflection (reflective thinking) and the Buddhist mode of cross-examining oneself. Both methods encourage the meticulously studying and examining of experience in and of itself, rather than taking experience at face value. This process is rigorous and involves mental strength, courage, and careful consideration. This type of reflection requires the skill of critical thinking, honesty, and proper knowledge. The outcome of such exercise is to the benefit of the individual. In addition, society may benefit as these individuals would utilize integrity in their interaction with others. At the spiritual level, it would lead the individual to achieve the highest level of self-actualization or in Buddhist terms, awakening.

Final Remarks

So far we have seen some unique features of the Buddha's cross-questioning method. The Buddha did not counter-question others for sport, personal victory or ridicule. Instead, he sought to help others who came to inquire about eradicating wrong views, establishing right view, and fostering discernment. The main aim was to lead the

[391] Rodgers, "Defining Reflection," 850.
[392] Baker, "Reflective Learning," 19.

interlocutor(s) on the right path toward *nibbāna* because his ultimate goal was to liberate others from suffering.

The purpose of "the process of cross-questioning has a clear goal—awakening—attainable in this life, and the discourses show that in many cases the arguments and analogies explored through cross-questioning either lead the listeners there immediately, inspire them to practice with ardency and resolution until they soon achieve awakening, or encourage them to take refuge as a first step in that direction."[393] This is well emphasized in MN 61: *The Teaching on Reflection to Rahula*, and MN 58: *The Discourse to Prince Abhaya*.

One point that stands out most in the cross-questioning strategy of the Buddha is the use of analogies. The Buddha regularly used analogies to teach and guide the inquirer(s). His analogies often resonated with the life experiences of the interlocutor. The Buddha used analogies that often paralleled either the skills or the profession of the interlocutor as a way to make a point clear: for example, the analogy of the man wounded by the poison arrow or the prince who had mastered charioting. In other words, the analogies were closely associated with both the inquirer and responder and were easy to grasp and discern.

In sum, cross-questioning *(paṭipucchā) is* "an effective means for clarifying obscure points and resolving doubts."[394] On the surface level, this exercise clears the interlocutors' state of mind and guides them onto the right path. At a deeper level, the practice of reflection (cross-examining oneself) would generate insight into the nature of things—seeing the danger and the way out. In brief, it is to discern suffering, the cause of

[393] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 196.
[394] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 173.

suffering, and the way leading to cessation and the end of suffering. The next chapter discusses the way the Buddha answered analytically.

CHAPTER 4: THE WAY THE BUDDHA ANALYTICALLY ANSWERS THE QUESTION OF THE KĀLĀMAS

Introduction

As humans, we are born with different interests. Therefore, we take on distinct preferences. Thus, something that might not be noticed by one person might be of great interest to others. To take the *Kālāma Sutta*, in the East, it is a low-profile discourse, but in the West it is placed in the paradigm of rational science.

The *Kesaputta Sutta,* otherwise known as the *Kālāma Sutta* (AN 3.65), is well-known to the West because of its alleged messages of epistemology and radical empiricism—features addressed by the Buddha. Epistemology shows how to arrive at knowledge, while radical empiricism shows how to verify something as truth.

Nevertheless, a handful of general readers, practitioners, and scholars like to give much detail regarding ten reference points (only quoting the ten criteria).[395] Some take it as the free charter of inquiry, while others see it as epitomizing critical thinking applicable to the way of science in negating authority, scripture, tradition, faith, and so forth. They do not look at the rest of the sutta and its main intention. In short, not many focus on the way the Buddha guided the perplexed (confused) Kālāmas and provided an ethical moral.

This chapter presents an argument that the *Kālāma Sutta* is neither about rejecting authority nor about being compatible with science. Instead, it is about how ethics and morality can be exercised to attain happiness in our daily life. To support this view, I will investigate the way the Buddha analytically answered the questions of the confused

[395] Segall, *Encountering Buddhism: Western Psychology and Buddhist Teachings*, 92; Gross, "The Crisis of Authority," January 2010, 61; Hookham, "Spiritual Authority," 123; Zhiru, "Scriptural Authority," 86.

Kālāmas. This would particularly concentrate on how the Buddha structured and formed his answers in terms of the psychological[396] and pedagogical.[397] It is also argued that through the method that the Buddha employed, he was trying to plant faith in him in the Kālāmas.

To do the above, this section will explore the possible reason for the Buddha's indirect answer (the ten criteria, but not something else such as the Four Noble Truths). This issue is looked upon through careful consideration of the Kālāmas' context and studying the psychological attributes, which I believe is an issue of reassurance. Next, I investigate the reason as to why the Buddha analytically elucidated on the ethical principle. Here, I assume that it was the Buddha's strategy that enabled the Kālāmas to freely establish faith in him.

1. Review of Scholarship

Many people have participated in the discussion regarding the *Kālāma Sutta*. Unfortunately, several people have only focused on a single passage and have misrepresented the whole sutta. More details of this will be explored further in the later section, "Buddhism and Authority."

In "The Buddha's Charter of Free Inquiry,"[398] Soma Thera says that the *Kālāma Sutta* is a teaching to the Kālāmas but is also an incentive for free inquiry. The teaching is exempted from authoritative dogmas, intolerance and personal interest. He further insists that if one were to discern the discourse correctly, wisdom is processed throughout. The sutta, he says, is very obvious "in rejecting the bad and adopting the good way… the

[396] Consider the nature of the mind of the Kālāmas being confused, bewildered and having great tension.
[397] Consider how the Buddha guides the perplexed Kālāmas to liberate their mind from entanglement…and how the Buddha steers the Kālāmas' minds beyond the ethical principle into the four *brahmavihāra*s (the four abodes).
[398] Thera, "Kalama Sutta–The Buddha's Charter of Free Inquiry."

place of critical examination and analysis in the development of right vision."[399] The Buddha's insight into the matter of judgment is beyond our normal understanding. As the four solaces show, a noble life is not about faith in rebirth and retribution. Instead, it is about happiness of the mind by conquering our own avarice, enmity, and ignorance. Basically, the teaching is for everyone.

Soma Thera concludes his essay by citing a short conversation between Moncure D. Conway and Ponnambalam Ramanathan, who follow different faiths, but come together and listen to the discourse of the Kālāmas and profess this good doctrine is essential to humanity's development.

However, scholar and monastic Bhikkhu Bodhi has a different perspective on the *Kālāma Sutta*. In his essay "A Look at the Kalama Sutta," he states that it is "quoted out of context" to turn the Buddha into "a pragmatic empiricist who dismisses all doctrine and faith, and whose Dhamma is simply a freethinker's kit to truth which invites each one to accept and reject whatever he likes."[400] In simple terms, people have misinterpreted the sutta and the Buddha's intention.

Along the same line of thought, Thanissaro Bhikkhu in his article "Lost in Quotation"[401] criticizes many scholars that have misconstrued the main teaching of the sutta by only citing what they selected as appropriate for their purpose. Thanissaro Bhikkhu writes about "our tendency to pick what we like from the old texts and throw the rest away. No need to understand the larger context of the dhamma [as] they teach, the Buddha seems to be saying. You're better off rolling your own."[402] Since people have the

[399] Thera, "Kalama Sutta–The Buddha's Charter of Free Inquiry," 2.
[400] Bhikkhu Bodhi, "A Look at the Kalama Sutta," 1.
[401] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "Lost in Quotation."
[402] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "Lost in Quotation."

tendency to pick what they like and select what is suitable for their purpose of discussion, they have left out a large amount of information that is crucial.

Overall, Thanissaro Bhikkhu argues that one should look at the totality of the *Kālāma Sutta* rather than examine the doctrine in piecemeal. Many scholars have studied parts of the sutta without reference to the main message that comes from reading the entire text. Thus, many misinterpretations have occurred.

Therefore, one should take the complete passage that the Buddha speaks of and analyze the entirety, not just take a part of it and leave the rest out. The passage that is commonly quoted clearly shows skepticism regarding authorities, traditions, and even oneself. It covers both, inside and outside. In other words, it asks one to examine by experience within oneself and then seek for the suggestions of the wise and further reflect on it before making any final decision. This is because one's interpretation based on personal experience still has shortcomings and prejudice.

Further along this line of thought, Bhikkhu Bodhi suggests that one must take into consideration the Buddha's intention to be able to comprehend the discourse fittingly. "[I]n order to understand the Buddha's utterances correctly, it is essential to take account of his own intentions in making them."[403]

By examining the *Kālāma Sutta* completely, Bhikkhu Bodhi writes, "the discourse to the *Kālāmas* offers an acid test for gaining confidence in the Dhamma as a viable doctrine of deliverance." The sutta opens "with an immediately verifiable teaching whose validity can be attested by anyone with the moral integrity to follow it through to its conclusions." As the sutta explains, "defilements cause harm and suffering both personal and social, that their removal brings peace and happiness, and that the practices

[403] Bhikkhu Bodhi, "A Look at the Kalama Sutta," 1.

taught by the Buddha are effective means for achieving their removal."[404] In sum, the sutta discusses the issues in doing good and evil and the effects of acts righteous and wicked. Most importantly, it emphasizes the issue of morality, that is, doing good and keeping the mind pure will produces happiness.

Furthermore, another scholar, Sanath Nanayakkara, in his work *How Free Is Freedom of Thought* admits the importance that Western scholarship has attributed to the popular *Kālāma Sutta*. On the other hand, he also criticizes scholars for misunderstanding what the Buddha said. In his studies, Nanayakkara divides the ten criteria into two groups, authority and reasoning (science). He ridicules scholars for having taken as fact that the Buddha encourages rejecting authority (doctrine, faith…) and going by one's own logical thinking. It is a clear misunderstanding and misrepresentation because the Buddha never said so.[405] In other words, the context of not going by the ten criteria is not to be taken at face value. Rather, the Buddha asks one to look at it (the ten criteria) carefully. Nevertheless, as "free inquiry" is turning into a fad, Buddhism has been given a trademark, thus opening the gate for further misinterpretation and falsification of the Buddha's teaching.

In *Kālāma Sutta: Rediscovery of Conscience,* Saber Uddiyan has gone to great lengths to trace back the *Kālāma Sutta* to its original source, the Pāli canon. The author mentions that this sutta is of minor and lowly status in the canon. On the other hand, he did an investigation of the sutta's popularity in Google search and found that this is the most quoted scripture of Buddhism (up to 80,000 times). It surpasses the *Diamond Sutra*, the *Lotus Sutra,* and the *Heart Sutra*. In other words, the *Kālāmā Sutta* is very well

[404] Bhikkhu Bodhi, "A Look at the Kalama Sutta," 3.
[405] Nanayakkara, *How Free Is Freedom of Thought,* 2–6.

known to the modern world.[406]

Uddiyan insists that in the world that we live in today, there are many catastrophes caused by our selfish desire: adhering to power, clinging to personal identities, and showing less care and respect for others. He states, "It is hard to imagine a time when we have needed this advice from the Buddha more than we do now."[407] Because of this, Uddiyan insists the *Kālāma Sutta* is a great teaching of the Buddha that encourages us to develop a moral sense and guides us to happiness. This is the reason why he wrote the *Kālāma Sutta: Rediscovery of Conscience.*

The *Kālāma Sutta: Rediscovery of Conscience* itself contains two books: Book one is a full translation of the sutta from Pāli to English by the author. Book two is the analysis of what the Buddha said and how the Kālāmas responded. There are three parts into which the author divides up his investigation of the *Kālāma Sutta*. Part one investigates the Kālāmas' background and their confusion. Part two examines the Buddha's solution by considering the peculiarities of the Buddha's answer, the Buddha's condemnation of certainty, and the Buddha's summons to free inquiry and introduction to the spiritual path. Lastly, part three analyses the way the Kālāmas responded to what the Buddha said.

Asanga Tilakeratne in his article, "Critical Thinking and Logic: A View from the Periphery" mentions the *Kālāmas Sutta* through the moral or ethical feature. He expounds: "Morality, the foundation of Buddhist religious practice, has been described using the following standard set of epithets: 'unbroken and unaltered those rules of conduct that are spotless, leading to liberation, *praised by the wise*, unstained and

[406] Uddiyan, *Kalama Sutta*, xiii.
[407] Texts quote come from the back cover of Sabber Uddiyan's work, *Kalama Sutta: The Rediscovery of Conscience.*

conducive to concentration.'" To support his claim, he cites a conversation between the Buddha and the Kālāmas "demonstrating how the three defilements, lobha, dosa and moha, are unwholesome."[408]

> Well, then [Kālāmas,] what do you think? Are these things profitable or unprofitable? Unprofitable, sir. Are they blameworthy or not? Blameworthy, sir. *Are they censured by the intelligent or not? They are censured*, sir. If performed and undertaken, do they conduce to loss and sorrow or not? They conduce to sorrow and loss. . . But [Kālāmas,] when you know for yourself: These things are unprofitable. . . *censured by the intelligent.* . . then indeed you reject them (emphasis added).[409]

However, in this article, the author stops after examining greed, hatred, and delusion. He does not continue on to cover non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion, the four *brahmavihāra*s and the four solaces. In other words, although Tilakeratne talks about morality, he has only touched on part of it; he falls short.

In the article "Doubting the *Kālāma-Sutta*," the author Stephen A. Evans looks at the sutta via ethics and epistemology. He dissects the discourse meticulously in terms of logical and epistemological reasoning and comes to conclude that it is about ethics and how to arrive at truth (knowledge). As Evans states:

> The subject matter of the Buddha's answer to the Kālāmas is at least as much ethical as it is epistemological. The Buddha is talking not about doctrines and their truth or falsity, but about attitudes and actions and whether they are good or bad. Indeed, the Kālāmas are not invited to know for themselves in any general way, but only to know for themselves (or to come to feel) that certain attitudes and actions are good or bad. They are not then invited to believe or disbelieve certain *dhamma*s in the sense of doctrines but rather, either to enter and abide in or to abandon *dhamma*s in the sense of fundamental attitudes or motivations. Their choices, moreover, are to be made not only in a spirit of free inquiry, but

[408] Asanga Tilakeratne, "Critical Thinking and Logic: A View from the Periphery," *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences* 2007, no. 29/30 (2006): 54.
[409] Tilakeratne, "Critical Thinking and Logic," 54.

> also in terms of public opinion, authority and tradition, with faith as a component.[410]

To put it simply, according to Evans, the sutta seems to teach one how to arrive at true knowledge: not by rejecting "public opinion, authority and tradition," and faith, but rather, by taking them into consideration as well. However, the underlying emphasis is on recognizing the ethical principle as the core.

In as far as all studies done by the scholars above, their focus extends beyond the content of the ten criteria of knowledge. There are other scholars who only talk of these issues. This leads us to the next section's discussion on authority, which then is followed by an exploration of the significance of rationality (Buddhism and Science).

2. Authority, Science, and Buddhism

a) Buddhism and Authority

The *Kālāma Sutta* is being used as a means by many skeptics and rationalists to denounce hearsay, tradition, scripture, and faith. They support their arguments by citing the passage that the Buddha gave to the perplexed Kālāmas. "Come, Kālāmas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing …tradition …rumor …scripture ...surmise …axiom …specious reasoning …bias towards a notion pondered over …another's seeming ability, nor upon the consideration 'The monk is our teacher.' When you yourselves know…"[411]

The book *Encountering Buddhism* edited by Seth Robert Segal only cites this passage[412] and states that, "Buddhism is a form of radical empiricism. The Buddha taught

[410] Stephen A. Evans, "Doubting the Kalama-Sutta: Epistemology, Ethics, and the 'Sacred,'" *Buddhist Studies Review* 24 (2007): 105.
[411] Bhikkhu Bodhi, "A Look at the Kalama Sutta," 1.
[412] Segall, *Encountering Buddhism: Western Psychology and Buddhist Teachings,* 92.

that one should not take his word on his authority, but that one should see things for oneself. And seeing means radically seeing with nothing taken for granted."[413] Is this so? In the *Kālāma Sutta* the Buddha never says "that one should not to take his word on his authority, but that one should see things for oneself." Further, the argument would be that if one were to look at the above passage and take these words to heart, it is the same as relying on the Buddha's authority.

Shenpen Hookham in his work, "Spiritual Authority: A Buddhist Perspective" also only cites this paragraph.[414] Hookham explains that, "This passage is often taken to imply that the Buddha rejected the spiritual authority of scriptures and teachers. However, as Bhikkhu Bodhi points out, the Buddha was telling the [Kālāmas] how to choose a teacher rather than that there was no need for one."[415] In Hookham's view, the paragraph is "often taken to mean that the Buddha took a relativist position and was telling the Kālāmas to find their own truth for themselves, it is significant that the Buddha suggests that their own judgment be tempered by the approval of the wise."[416]

Shi Zhiru, in "Scriptural Authority: A Buddhist Perspective" also recounts the same passage.[417] However, she insists that:

> The *Kālāma Sutta* explicitly rejected the transmitted tradition. Instead, Buddhists are exhorted "to know for themselves," that is, to derive authority from their own experiences. In other words, experiential authority based on the individual is privileged over and against scriptural or textual authority. The *Kālāma Sutta* was really criticizing heretical beliefs as false sources of religious authority deriving from "hearsay" and charismatic authority, and further highlights the problems of relying solely on "repeated hearing," "tradition," and "scripture," all of which

[413] Segall, *Encountering Buddhism: Western Psychology and Buddhist Teachings*, 92.
[414] Hookham, "Spiritual Authority," 123.
[415] Hookham, "Spiritual Authority," 123–24.
[416] Hookham, "Spiritual Authority," 124.
[417] Zhiru, "Scriptural Authority," 86.

> must be understood as references to Vedic and Brahmanical understanding of religious authority.[418]

Further, Zhiru claims this discourse "argues for the authority of individual experience and realization of truth over transmitted teachings." And it is "explicit prioritization of personal experience over transmitted text as the source of religious authority…"[419] Is this true? Because the Buddha never seems to say such in the *Kālāma Sutta;* instead, the discourse asks one to be critical and examine, investigate (based on the ethical principle of good and evil) before adhering to, accepting or rejecting anything. It never claims accepting "authority of individual experience and realization of truth over transmitted teachings."

So far, we have described scholars who cite only a single passage and claim that the whole sutta insists on rejecting tradition, spiritual authority, and faith, while arguing for the primacy of individual/personal experience. The rest of the sutta remains unexplored and its central thesis is never touched upon. In other words, these scholars only pick what has seemed to them as relevant for their topics of discussion.

Besides, is the evidence that states the Buddha rejected authority and faith well established or unestablished? If it is, then the Buddha must have contradicted himself. On the other hand, if it is not, what evidence is there to support it? The evidence is very clear. Nowhere in the passage does the Buddha say he rejected authority. While it says, "Do not go upon by," it does not stop there. There is more to it.

The passage also shows that the Buddha says not to go along with them without examining them first. However, in terms of examining, there is a criterion that needs to

[418] Zhiru, "Scriptural Authority," 86–87.
[419] Zhiru, "Scriptural Authority," 87.

be met. As the Buddha says, "When you yourselves know: **'These things are bad, blamable, censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill,'** abandon them." On the other hand, "When you yourselves know: **'These things are good, blameless, praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness**,' enter on and abide in them."[420]

Notice the words in bold in the section above. First, one must consider the moral aspect. Second, seek for advice with the wise. Third, experience it yourself and observe others that are experiencing the same thing that you did. Finally, before making the final decision, one must reflect on it again to see if it has led to suffering or happiness before accepting or abandoning it. In other words, the Buddha asks one to be very careful and not take things blindly: consider thoroughly, internally and externally before engaging in it or not. This is well demonstrated by Nanayakkara as he writes:

> An unbiased and a careful reading of the Sutta makes it clear that there is no evidence in it, either implicit or explicit, to show that the Buddha advocated the 'rejection' of the ten means (criteria) of knowledge (truth). On the contrary, the Sutta contains evidence, corroborated by canonical references, to accept the fact that the Buddha himself made appropriate use of many of these means as aids to get at the truth and to distinguish between right and wrong.[421]

Further supporting this, Nanayakkara refers to the *Tevijja Sutta* (DN 13) and says the Buddha did not ridicule or condemn the ascetics or *brahmin*s as foolish; he only pointed out their shortcomings and limitations so that we be cautious about accepting them blindly.[422]

Now, to return the context of the Kālāmas: they were confused and baffled because some ascetics and brahmins had approached them and expounded their doctrines,

[420] Bhikkhu Bodhi, "A Look at the Kalama Sutta," 1. My emphasis.
[421] Nanayakkara, *How Free Is Freedom of Thought*, 2.
[422] Nanayakkara, *How Free Is Freedom of Thought*, 3.

claimed their doctrines as the only truth, and then rejected, abused, depreciated, ridiculed, and condemned others' doctrines. This made them doubt and waver. According to John J. Holder, the Buddha is different. "In responding to the Kālāmas, the Buddha demonstrates his empiricism and balanced teaching methods."[423] Holder further argues that the way in which the Buddha teaches "Stands out (perhaps, even alone) among religious teachers for his antidogmatic treatment of religious doctrines. Most religions, of course, hold that their scriptures or the pronouncements of their spiritual leaders are ultimate truths and should be accepted unquestioningly by faithful."[424] As he demonstrates earlier, "The Buddha makes it clear that he disagrees with traditions that require unquestioning faith in scriptures or spiritual leaders. Instead, he proposed that there should be proper *reasons* for accepting a doctrine, even a religious doctrine."[425] They should at least be based on the moral principle.

In so far as to say, "It is to allay this specific 'doubt and wavering' that the Buddha presented the novel criterion, involving a personal test of the teachings concerned."[426] It is not out of ignorance that the Buddha said to do not go upon tradition, authority, faith…and so on. Because in doing so, he would have contradicted himself. Rather, faith (*saddhā*) and authority are important elements in Buddhism.

Rita M. Gross in the "Crisis of Authority: Buddhist History for Buddhist Practitioners" also cites the ten criteria, but insists this is what is well known in the Western circles.[427] However, for Gross, Buddhism is popular because it is a "rational

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[423] John J. Holder, *Early Buddhist Discourses* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 2006), 19.
[424] Holder, *Early Buddhist Discourses*, 19.
[425] Holder, *Early Buddhist Discourses*, 19.
[426] Nanayakkara, *How Free Is Freedom of Thought*, 4.
[427] Rita M. Gross, "The Crisis of Authority: Buddhist History for Buddhist Practitioners," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 30 (January 2010): 61.

religion that encourages individual investigation of Buddhist claims." However, "one should note that what is encouraged is deep individual investigation of Buddhist teachings, not a free-for-all search without any traditional basis. Buddhist teachers do not encourage students to throw out all the traditional teachings to start all over in their individual investigation."[428]

In the fundamental teachings of Buddhism, namely the *Thirty-Seven Factors of Enlightenment*, the Buddha elucidates on "faith" twice. According to Bhikkhu Bodhi, faith not just function as an initiation for one to enter the spiritual path, but also "a prerequisite for the higher training."[429] In *Purity of Heart,* faith is described by Thanissaro Bhikkhu as a factor that "can take you all the way to the deathless."[430] This means the weight of faith (s*addhā*) in Buddhism is very imperative. "It is well known that *saddhā*, in whichever manner it is translated—confidence, trust, faith etc.—is an essential feature of Buddhist practice. It is not a kind of blind faith (*amūlikā saddhā*) but faith founded on reasonable grounds, (*ākāravati saddhā*). To develop saddhā one need not have absolute proof, but reasonably acceptable evidence. Free inquiry comes very much later, after saddhā."[431] Likewise, authority is as necessary as faith. This is well exemplified in the *Mahapari-nibbana Sutta* (DN16), in which the Buddha said, take refuge in the Dharma, be your own island, and light the wisdom torch yourself. In DN16[432] as well as the *Mahapadeśa Sutta* (*Discourse on the Great Authorities*),

[428] Gross, "The Crisis of Authority," 61.
[429] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon* (Boston, Mass: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 87.
[430] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Purity of Heart: Essays on the Buddhist Path* (Valley Center, CA: Metta Forest Monastery, 2006), 5.
[431] Nanayakkara, *How Free Is Freedom of Thought*, 5.
[432] See Walshe translation on the *Long Discourses of the Buddha*, DN16 pages 255-6 for the Buddha details explanation of the four criteria. This is also found in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (AN 180) pages 545-7, translate by Bhikkhu Bodhi—sutta on *The Great References (Cattāro Mahāpadesā).*

authorities are given as words spoken by 1) the Buddha himself, 2) a community of elders, (3) some learned elders, and (4) a single learned monk.[433] Note: in the *Mahapadeśa* discourse, it is recommended that one should rely on the authority of a person or a group only after one has thoroughly checked them against the critera prescribed by the Dhamma and Vinaya (help end suffering and lead to liberation). In other words, authority in this context is not about power, arrogance, or fame. Rather, it is a subject matter of wisdom and compassion: the main aim is to help others end their suffering and lead them to *nibbāna*.

It is a fact that there are many things we do not understand and know for ourselves. Only when we come to study (at school, or by chance) that we learn them. However, how do we know that is it correct? "This is why we seek the help, and advice of those who are more knowledgeable, and possessing expertise in different areas."[434] As Thanissaro Bhikkhu puts it, "Even when judging the results of your own actions, you [cannot] simply take your own ideas of 'what works' as a trustworthy standard. After all, you can easily side with your greed, aversion, or delusion, setting your standards too low. So to check against this tendency, the Buddha recommends that you also take into consideration the views of the wise, for you'll never grow until you allow your standards to be challenged by theirs."[435] This is as the *Kālāma Sutta* says: to seek the wise and ask for their opinion.

Nevertheless, the Buddha said one must observe them (even the wise) over a period of time before establishing faith in them. As recorded in the *Caṅkī Sutta* (MN 95):

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[433] Etienne Lamotte, "The Assessment of Textual Interpretation in Buddhism," in *Buddhist Hermeneutics,* ed. Donald S. Jr. Lopez, 11-27 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), 11.
[434] Nanayakkara, *How Free Is Freedom of Thought*, 5.
[435] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "Lost in Quotation."

> When he has investigated him and has seen that he is purified from states based on greed […], hate [and…] delusion, then he places faith in him; 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 memorizes it and examines the meaning of the teachings he has memorized; when he examines their meaning, he gains a reflective acceptance of those teachings; when he has gained a reflective acceptance of those teachings, zeal springs up; when zeal has sprung up, he applies his will; having applied his will, he scrutinizes; having scrutinized, he strives; resolutely striving, he realizes with the body the ultimate truth and sees it by penetrating it with wisdom.[436]

Thus, faith is the essential element to overcome the arduous and bumpy challenges on the path to awakening. Faith enables one to maintain endurance (patience) on the path, which wisdom then envelopes, and liberation can be attained. As Hookham simply puts it, "We have to trust the teacher enough to be able to work with him and absorb the teaching of the truth from both his instruction and his example, which means relating to him as having spiritual authority."[437] However, here one is asked to be very critical; one should question as well as investigate first, and then make a decision to go ahead and adhere to something.

According to Thanissaro Bhikkhu, the approach to the dhamma is "a skill to be mastered. As with any skill, your inner sensitivity and assurance as to who's truly wise in the skill grows only through your willingness to learn." [438] However, in the West, especially in America, with freedom of right (democracy), some people like to do things themselves. They purchase the "do-it-yourself-kit" that comes along with some simple steps, but are not assured that it is going to work. Now, if there is an expert who is available and reliable that could guide you on how to end suffering and attain happiness

[436] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 781–82.
[437] Hookham, "Spiritual Authority," 127.
[438] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "Lost in Quotation."

with the guarantee if you follow his or her instructions correctly, would not you prefer to trust the latter?

Regarding giving advice on how to end suffering, according to Thanissaro Bhikkhu, the Buddha does not speak "with the authority of your creator who can tell you what you have to believe."[439] Instead, the Buddha articulates as "an expert in his field, one who knows from experience what does and [does not] work. If you want to learn from him, you [are] wise to accept his observations on how it's best done."[440] Further, when you look for the wise "to learn from them…the Buddha shows that there [is] more to wisdom than just words."[441]

To sum up this section, it is evidence that the Buddha did not reject authority. Instead, he suggested that we be aware of the nature of authority. This is because he was insightful that people depend on many different types of authority, internally or externally. However, he reminded us that there are some that are reliable while a handful are not.

Nevertheless, for us to know what is "reliable" the Buddha asked us to investigate and examine thoroughly before following them. It is very clear in the *Kālāma Sutta* that the Buddha did not say that ancient teachings were irrelevant. He did not say not to read scripture. He did not say not to accept the guidance of the wise or teachers. Instead, he recommended attending to them with the moral principle in mind. If they bring you to harm and suffering, abandon them. On the other hand, if they bring happiness and lead to liberation, then abide in them. It is a matter of being able to recognize what is skillful and what is unskillful. In other words, there is need for right discernment (view). The next

[439] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "Lost in Quotation."
[440] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "Lost in Quotation."
[441] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "Lost in Quotation."

section will examine the topic of Buddhism and science.

b) Buddhism and Scientific Method

"The *Kālāma-sutta* (or, more accurately, the *Kesamutti-sutta*) is one of the best known and most widely cited *sutta*s of the Pāli Nikāyas. Its importance, on the one hand, is that it seems to give an account of the Buddha's epistemology; its popular appeal, on the other, is that the epistemology seems strikingly modern."[442] Looking closely at the *Kālāma Sutta,* one would assume that the structure is very familiar. One would theorize that it is consonant with science. In other words, one cannot ignore the fact that the information given and the way the Buddha expounded his teaching is very similar to that of scientific methodology, namely, empiricism. It is very much akin to the scientific method that is well-known today: theory, hypothesis, test, and results. Further, the Buddha placed great emphasis on critical thinking and reasoning, making it vividly clear for scholars that think that Buddhism is in agreement with science.

> Let us examine the passage that is highly discussed in the academic world:
>
> Come, [Kālāmas]. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing, nor upon tradition, nor upon rumor, nor upon scripture, nor upon surmise, nor upon axiom, nor upon specious reasoning, nor upon bias towards a notion pondered over, nor upon another's seeming ability, nor upon the consideration 'The monk is our teacher.' When you yourselves know: 'These things are bad, blamable, censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill,' abandon them. . . When you yourselves know: 'These things are good, blameless, praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness,' enter on and abide in them.[443]

The *Kālāma Sutta* shows that after the Buddha lists the ten criteria that one should not go upon, he follows up by explaining the reason why and what one should do instead. The

[442] Evans, "Doubting the Kalama-Sutta," 91.
[443] Bhikkhu Bodhi, "A Look at the Kalama Sutta," 1.

passage starts off with a theory and next asks one to critically analyze: "When you yourselves know." Further one cross-investigates what one knows through theorizing with the "wise."[444] However, the sutta does not stop there; it asks one to do more, engage in one's personal experiments, and try it out for oneself. Not only that, one should also observe others who performs those actions. With all this having been done, one should make a conclusion to accept or reject the matter in question. To simply borrow Evans' words, "Reading the Kālāmas' uncertainty…. [and cogitating at] the first portion of the Buddha's answer to the Kālāmas reads like the beginning of an essay on critical reasoning or even scientific method."[445]

In Otto H. Chang's article "Buddhism and Scientific Methods" he studies the similarities and differences of the two ways of investigating a problem or issue. Chang describes the methods and process commonly used in scientific research today as follows:

1. The first step in the solution of any problem, whether practical or theoretical, starts with the identification and statement of the research problem.
2. The second step of the process is [a] literature review. What has been done with this problem?
3. The third step of the process is the development of hypotheses.
4. The fourth step of a scientific inquiry is research design and research methodology.
5. The fifth step of the research is to present the experimental or empirical results of the study and to conclude if the hypotheses are supported by the observation or the data collected.
6. The last step of the research process is to discuss the implication of the research conclusion with respect to previous literature or with respect to its practical application in the real world.[446]

The list above can be summarized as theory, hypothesis, experimental test, results, and acceptance or rejection. This process is very much like what the Buddha suggested

[444] "Wise" in this context refer to one that has integrity, compassion, and gratitude. In other words, it is a noble person.
[445] Evans, "Doubting the Kalama-Sutta," 100.
[446] Chang, "Buddhism and Scientific Methods," 104–5.

above. Nevertheless, through his thorough analysis, Chang concludes that the methods that the Buddhist used for investigation are not only in harmony with scientific methods, but provides additional elements, which help further develop science's way of research and its shortfalls.[447]

It is important to know that Buddhism and science is an issue and colloquialism known to the West about one-and-a-half-century ago, when Anagārika Dharmapāla (1864-1933) brought the issue to the Parliament of the World Religions in Chicago in 1893. According to David L. McMahan, "It was here that some of the themes connecting Buddhism to modern science that endure to the present day were proffered to an American audience by Asian Buddhists."[448] Not only Dharmapāla took on this task; there were two Westerners who also fought for and propagated Buddhism in the context of drawing links between Buddhism and science. "Two Americans, Henry Steel Olcott and Paul Carus, represent different approaches to relating Buddhism and science, one embedded in Theosophy and spiritualism and one reflecting the extravagant optimism in the promise and epistemic reach of science in the Victorian era."[449]

Anagārika Dharmapāla is the most important figure in the turn-of-the-century Sinhalese Buddhist revitalization movement. He links what the Buddha teaches (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) with Darwin's theory of evolution.[450] According to McMahan, to demonstrate this Dharmapāla draws a passage from Grant Allen's work (*Life of Darwin*) saying:

> The teachings of the Buddha on evolution are clear and expansive. We are asked to look upon the cosmos "as a continuous process unfolding itself in regular order

[447] Chang, "Buddhism and Scientific Methods," 111–12.
[448] McMahan, "Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism," 900.
[449] McMahan, "Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism," 900.
[450] McMahan, "Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism," 900.

> in obedience to natural laws. We see in it all not a yawning chaos restrained by the constant interference from without of a wise and beneficent external power, but a vast aggregate of original elements perpetually working out their own fresh redistribution in accordance with their own inherent energies. He regards the cosmos as an almost infinite collection of material, animated by an almost infinite sum of total energy," which is called Akasa.[451]

This passage of appropriating what the Buddha teaches to support Darwin's theory of evolution sounds very intellectual and convincing.

On the other hand, Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907), one of the first Americans who officially became Buddhist, saw the Buddha as a perfect model of a freethinker with integrity, benevolence and tolerance. He also saw the Buddha as someone who advocates loving-kindness among humanity as well as teaches people to rely on themselves.[452] Because of this, Olcott tried to resolve the teachings of the Buddha so that it can be applicable to scientific worldview and modernity. This is well demonstrated in his work called *The Buddhist Catechism.*

The book *The Buddhist Catechism* contains five parts: "Life of Buddha," "Dharma or Doctrine," "The Sangha," The Spread of Buddhism" and "Buddhism and Science."[453] According to McMahan, *The Buddhist Catechism,* which was published in 1881, was "intended as a compilation of fundamental Buddhist beliefs, set out in question-and-answer format."[454] Basically, Olcott's work aims to resolve the issues that were raised against Buddhism and to demonstrate that Buddhism is consonant with science.

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[451] McMahan, "Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism," 900–901.
[452] McMahan, "Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism," 904.
[453] Henry Steel Olcott, *The Buddhist Catechism* (Colombo: The Floating Press, 2009).
[454] McMahan, "Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism," 909.

According to McMahan, "Olcott insists… that Buddhism …displays an experimental, pragmatic attitude and is based on empirical evidence and autonomous reason, an implicit but obvious contrast with traditional Christianity for which he often showed contempt. '[W]e are earnestly enjoined to accept nothing on faith; whether it be written in books, handed down from our ancestors, or taught by the sages.'"[455] Here, one would assume that the idea comes from *Kālāma Sutta*.

One must also bear in mind the background that on the one hand, "there is a crisis of authority in modern religion, particularly in the West."[456] This crisis for a handful of Westerners has generated a great sense of awareness and criticism toward religion and its old ways of belief. In other words, it asks one to be very skeptical and wary of religious authority. At the same time, there is the rise of science, a new way of seeing things—empirically. Because of this, one would assume that the Buddha's teachings such as the *Kālāma Sutta* are compatible and very practical.

Paul Carus (1852-1919) is another person who also associates Buddhism with science. Carus asserts that a religion that is not in conflict with science and proffers truth that can be demonstrated empirically is therefore called a "Religion of Science."[457] In his famous work, *The Gospel of Buddhism,* which he edited and structured in a similar way to Christian thought,[458] his message is very clear in the introduction: "Buddhism is a religion which knows of no supernatural revelation, and proclaims doctrines that require no other argument then the 'come and see.' The Buddha bases his religion solely upon

[455] McMahan, "Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism," 912.
[456] Zhiru, "Scriptural Authority," 86.
[457] McMahan, "Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism," 913.
[458] McMahan, "Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism," 914.

man's knowledge of the nature of things, upon provable truth."[459] In other words, according to McMahan, "[Carus] came to believe that Buddhism was the religion most likely to develop into the Religion of Science, for Buddhism, he claimed, 'is a religion which recognizes no other revelation except the truth that can be proved by science.'"[460]

In simple terms, these three influential figures made great contributions to the early views on Buddhism and science that have had a vast impact on the way scholars interpret Buddhism. In as much as to say, they initiated the development of Buddhism in the West.[461]

Furthermore, one can go as far as involving the famous scientific icon Albert Einstein in the discourse surrounding Buddhism and science. In Donald Lopez's work "Buddhism and Science," he cites a quote attributed to Einstein:

> The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogmas and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual as a meaningful unity. If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs, it would be Buddhism.[462]

According to Lopez's investigation, he insists that Einstein never did speak of this.[463] Nevertheless, there must have been some factors that helped to generate this statement. Maybe it was because of the similarity and consonance between science and Buddhism. It also could be that what Buddhism offers has not yet been proven by science. However, it is a fact that many books have been written about Buddhism and science recently. For

[459] McMahan, "Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism," 915.
[460] McMahan, "Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism," 917.
[461] McMahan, "Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism," 900.
[462] Donald S. Jr. Lopez, "Buddhism and Science," 2009, 1–2. Accessed June 16, 2014. https://quark.phy.bnl.gov/~pisarski/talks/Colloquia/Lopez.pdf
[463] Lopez, "Buddhism and Science," 2.

example, Alan Wallace's *Buddhism and Science*,[464] Donald S. Lopez's *Buddhism and Science: A Guide for the Perplexed*,[465] Sharon Begley's *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain*,[466] or Daniel Goleman's *Destructive Emotions: A Scientific Dialogue with the Dalai Lama.*[467] Whatever the case is, "Science, in a popular representation, offers …different appeal, an appeal to the quest for what has never been known by anyone yet is somehow there, waiting to be discovered, if we just knew how to find it."[468] As for the present moment, "we must live in doubt of our deepest knowledge. Perhaps this is why we yearn for the teachings of an itinerant mendicant in Iron Age India, even of such profound insight, to somehow anticipate the formulae of Einstein."[469]

Despite the increase of dialogue between science and Buddhism, there are still challenges to the fusion of its relationship. Science was developed as a response to a need to understand our physical environment along with the laws that govern its properties. This scope is limited to the manifestation of the physical world as there are few avenues to experiment beyond that plane. It can be argued that while Buddhism does provide some answers regarding the physical world, its main focus looks beyond the physical world.

The goal of the Buddha's teachings (Buddhist knowledge) aims at transcending human suffering and freedom from *saṃsāra* (birth, death, and rebirth). It takes a holistic approach in looking at all human suffering, including physical, psychological, and mental

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[464] B. Alan Wallace, *Buddhism and Science* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).
[465] Donald S. Jr. Lopez, *Buddhism and Science: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2010).
[466] Sharon Begley, *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain: How a New Science Reveals Our Extraordinary Potential to Transform Ourselves*, Reprint ed. (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007).
[467] Daniel Goleman, *Destructive Emotions: A Scientific Dialogue with the Dalai Lama* (New York: Bantam, 2004).
[468] Lopez, "Buddhism and Science," 21–22.
[469] Lopez, "Buddhism and Science," 21–22.

activities. While science has sought knowledge to alleviate suffering in these areas as well, its scope is limited in treating the suffering causes by multiple rebirths. Despite sciences' immense contribution to society's well-being, people are still subject to death and birth.

The point of mentioning all the above is to say that the topic of Buddhism and science is an ongoing topic. Although what the Buddha taught sounds familiar to science and the method he instructed is embedded with what we today called empiricism, it has nothing to do with science. Instead, it is for practitioners to examine critically what they practice. This is exemplified in the Four Noble Truths, which teaches what is suffering, what is the cause of suffering, how to end suffering, and the way leading to the end of suffering.

In as much as to say, the *Kālāma Sutta* is not about science and its methodology or appropriateness. In fact, there is no place in the sutta that one can find the word science or its method. One would arguably say it is only the scholar's point of view that thinks that Buddhism is relatively consonant or not with science. In as far as the *Kālāmā Sutta* states as a whole, the sutta purely discourses about morality and happiness. This is what will be examined in the next section.

3. The Way the Buddha Analytically Answers the Question of the *Kālāmas*

a) Context of the Kālāmas

The Kālāmas were the people of the Kesuputta. They were visited by two kinds of people. Who were these people really? According to the sutta, one is the *samaṇā* (ascetics) and the other is the *brāhmaṇa* (brahmins). They are spiritual teachers. Nevertheless, they have adhered to different philosophies, doctrines, and practices.

According to the work of Saber Uddiyan the *samaṇā* are "[T]hose engaging in spiritual exercises. In the Buddha's time word was used for those spiritual seekers who went into the wilderness to pursue their quest beyond the sphere of sophisticate rigidities of the ritual-dominated institutional region of mainstream society."[470] They would be the Ājīvika (Naturalists), the Lokāyata (Materialists), the Ājñāna (Agnostics), and the Jainas (Mahāvīra, people who adhere to extreme asceticism).[471]

On the other hand, the *brāhmaṇa* (Hindu brahmins) are those who adhere to the teachings of the *Brāhmaṇas* and Vedas. These people are well versed in the triple Vedas. Not only that, but according to the words of Soṇadaṇḍa in DN 4 (*Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta*), "A Brahmin is well-born on both the mother's and father's side, of pure descent to the seventh generation. . . he is a scholar versed in the mantras. . . he is handsome, pleasing. . . he is virtuous. . . he is learned and wise, and is the first or second to hold the sacrificial ladle."[472]

Basically, the Kālāmas had encountered the two types of peoples who are revered by society as men with supreme knowledge and social status.[473] However, what did these people teach that made the Kālāmas confused and filled with speculative views? In the sutta it explains, "They explain and elucidate their own doctrines, but disparage, denigrate, deride, and denounce the doctrines of others. […] We are perplexed and in doubt…which of these good ascetics speak truth and which speak falsehood."[474] According to Bhikkhu Bodhi's work "A Look at the Kālāma Sutta," an assumption is

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[470] Uddiyan, *Kalama Sutta*, 27.
[471] Pandit, *The Buddhist View of Knowledge and Reality*, 37–45.
[472] Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 1995, 129.
[473] According to the "caste system" the Brahmins and ascetics are held at the top of society because they have knowledge of God or *mokṣa*.
[474] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 280.

made that "From the subsequent development of the sutta, it is clear that the issues that perplexed them were the reality of rebirth and karmic retribution for good and evil deeds."[475] For more details on doctrine/philosophies and practice of the Brahmanism and the five *samaṇa* sects: Ājīvika, Lokāyata, Ājñāna, and Jainas, please see A. K. Warder's book, *Indian Buddhism* (p32-41).

However, according to Bhikkhu Bodhi, it is imperative for one to bear in mind that "in order to understand the Buddha's utterances correctly it is essential to take account of his own intentions in making them."[476] Particularly, it is important to keep in mind the context of why the Buddha was reassuring his audience that it is understandable to doubt and waver and why he issued the ten criteria that one should not depend upon without thorough investigation. This will be discussed in the following section, reassurance.

b) Reassurance—The Psychological Factor

Why did the Buddha not give a direct answer to the Kālāmas but expound the ten criteria instead? It is important to bear in mind that the main aim of the Buddha's teachings is to end suffering, bring happiness and lead sentient beings to *nibbāna*. As a teacher and as a spiritual guide, the Buddha was very careful of what he said. This is because he understood that any activity generating from body, speech, and mind are karmic. In other words, what he did or said was for the benefit and happiness of the interlocutors. This is obvious in the *Kālāma Sutta*.

The Kālāmas were perplexed, confused and baffled by the words of others, the noblemen (brahmins) and ascetics. They did not know what to do. To use a psychological

[475] Bhikkhu Bodhi, "A Look at the Kalama Sutta," 1.
[476] Bhikkhu Bodhi, "A Look at the Kalama Sutta," 1.

way of interpretation, they were in distress and suffering. Torn between emotion and knowledge, which teacher's doctrine was correct and which was not? Who should they listen to and follow? This puzzlement, uncertainty and bewilderment led them to search.

In the Pāli sutta (AN 6.63) the Buddha describes when a person feels distress:

> And what is the result [suffering]? There are some cases in which a person overcome with pain, his mind exhausted, grieves, mourns, laments, beats his breast, [and] becomes bewildered. Or one overcome with pain, his mind exhausted, comes to search outside, 'Who knows a way or two to stop this pain? I tell you, monks, that stress results either in bewilderment or in search.[477]

What the passage describes is arguably consonant with the nature of the *Kālāmas*. The sutta explains, as they searched they came across the Buddha just arriving in their town, Kesaputta. However, they only heard that the Buddha was an ascetic from the Sakyan clan, and his good reputation had spread about. Not knowing about his doctrine and goal, they decided to approach the Buddha and ask him for his recommendation.

Understanding their psychological circumstances that they were perplexed and doubtful regarding ideologies, the Buddha reassured[478] them that it is acceptable to doubt. It is understandable to waver. By reassuring them, the Buddha helped them to feel at ease. It would have released their tension and burdens. However, the Buddha did not stop there. The Buddha said to the Kālāmas:

> *"Etha tumhe, kālāmā, mā anussavena, mā paramparāya, mā itikirāya, mā piṭakasampadānena, mā takkahetu, mā nayahetu, mā ākāraparivitakkena, mā diṭṭhinijjhānakkhantiyā, mā bhabbarūpatāya, mā samaṇo no garūti. Yadā tumhe, kālāmā, attanāva jāneyyātha—'ime dhammā akusalā, ime dhammā sāvajjā, ime dhammā viññugarahitā, ime dhammā samattā samādinnā ahitāya dukkhāya saṃvattantī''ti, atha tumhe, kālāmā, pajaheyyātha. . . Yadā tumhe, kālāmā,*

[477] (Geoffrey DeGraff) Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *The Shape of Suffering* (USA, 2008), 3.
[478] Note: According to Catherine Soanes et al., *Pocket Oxford English Dictionary.* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), s.v. "reassure" means to cause someone to feel less worried and afraid, to restore confidence, 753.

> *attanāva jāneyyātha —'ime dhammā kusalā, ime dhammā anavajjā, ime dhammā viññuppasatthā, ime dhammā samattā samādinnā hitāya sukhāya saṃvattantī'ti, atha tumhe, kālāmā, upasampajja vihareyyātha."*
>
> "Come, Kālāmās, do not go by tradition, not by lineage, not by hearsay, not by collections of scriptures, not by logical reasoning, not by inferential reasoning, not by appearance of consideration, not by perception resulting from sense organ's theory, not by the appearance of capability, and indeed not because the ascetic is our teacher. Only when, Kālāmās, you know for yourselves: 'These things are unwholesome; these things are blamable; these things are reproached by the wise; these things, if accepted and taken upon lead to harm and suffering,' then you should abandon them. . . Only when, Kālāmās, you know for yourselves: 'These things are wholesome; these things are blameless; these things are extolled by the wise; these things, if accepted and takes upon lead to welfare and happiness,' then you should abide in them." (My own translation)

Because of the perplexed state of the Kālāmas, the Buddha provided them with the list of the ten criteria. Assumedly, one can argue that what the Buddha spoke of sounds like he told the Kālāmas that their doubtful nature is correct and not to go by the ten criteria. This is only true when one stops reading after the tenth criteria and takes the advice to not go by the consideration "the ascetic is our teacher" at face value.

In Bhikkhu Bodhi's view, "this passage, like everything else spoken by the Buddha, has been stated in a specific context–with a particular audience and situation in view–and thus must be understood in relation to that context. The *Kālāmas,* citizens of the town of Kesaputta, had been visited by religious teachers of divergent views"[479] and were perplexed. Following the line of reassurance and psychological understanding, one would argue that offering the ten criteria that one should not go upon was aimed at asking the Kālāmas to put down what they have heard before: basically, to let go of the doctrines that have made them bewildered. It was for the Kālāmas to release their tension and stress. As the Buddha demonstrated, do not take up things that lead to harm and suffering,

[479] Bhikkhu Bodhi, "A Look at the Kalama Sutta," 1.

but only abide in what is healthy and conducive to happiness.

As a relevant aside, in counseling practice, when a patient seeks out a counselor or psychologist, he or she would inform the counselor of the issue that needs to be resolved. Because of this, the counselor would be well-informed of the context of the patient's problem. Therefore, he would find the procedure that would help his patient most. In other words, the counselor knows what he needs to do, step by step, to help his patient overcome the problem. The purpose is to make the patient better.

It is the same in this sutta. The Kālāmas sought the Buddha for counseling or advice. The Kālāmas told the Buddha about the perplexing and doubtful nature of the information that was preached by some brahmins and ascetics. And, like the psychologist, the Buddha found the best method to help them. In as far as the Buddha would guide them, they would not fall into the same trap again. This is self-explanatory in the sutta, as Buddha asks them to investigate, analyze, self-experiment and observe to see if it is healthy before taking something on. In addition, he asks the Kālāmas to examine teachers based on their ethical principles or virtues, in terms of their speech and actions.

c) The Ethical Principle—Establishing Faith and Heedfulness for the Task at Hand

Why did the Buddha analytically expound the ethical principle to the Kālāmas instead of something else? Why did he not teach the Four Noble Truths? One would assume this is because they would not understand it. Following the psychological pattern of explanation, it is because the Kālāmas were people sensitive to moral doctrines. The work of Bhikkhu Bodhi shows that the Buddha was:

> advising the *Kālāmas* to abandon those things they know for themselves to be bad and to undertake those things they know for themselves to be good. This advice can be dangerous if given to those whose ethical sense is undeveloped, and we can thus assume that the Buddha regarded the *Kālāmas* as people of refined moral sensitivity.[480]

Mindful of the perplexed and doubtful nature of the Kālāmas, the Buddha himself was also aware that he was subject to scrutiny by the Kālāmas like other ascetics that came before him. Therefore, this passage shows that expounding on the moral principle was more appropriate and suitable for the audience: they could understand and grasp the concept more easily.

Besides, it would not be appropriate to preach the Four Noble Truths. Why? First, because the Kālāmas were not disciples of the Buddha, they did not know the intention of the Buddha and his teachings. "They approached him merely as a counselor who might help dispel their doubts, but they did not come to him as the Tathagata, the Truth-finder, who might show them the way to spiritual progress and to final liberation."[481] Second, it would be that the Four Noble Truths would be too sophisticated for the Kālāmas to grasp. As Bhikkhu Bodhi puts it, "it would not have been in place for him [the Buddha] to expound to them the Dhamma unique to his own Dispensation: such teachings as the Four Noble Truths, the three characteristics, and the methods of contemplation based upon them."[482]

According to common sense, when there is something that is close to you and you have good knowledge of, it is easier for you to accept. Therefore, when the Buddha analytically expounded the moral principle through the concept of desire, hatred and

[480] Bhikkhu Bodhi, "A Look at the Kalama Sutta," 2.
[481] Bhikkhu Bodhi, "A Look at the Kalama Sutta," 2.
[482] Bhikkhu Bodhi, "A Look at the Kalama Sutta," 2.

delusion and the freedom from these three, the Kālāmas understood straight away. They knew that when a person generates any of these three facets, it does not rise to their profit, but to their loss, while freedom from wanting, aversion, and ignorance are to their profit. According to Evans, "The ethical interpretation is again more natural: attitudes and actions *are* blamed and censured, and, in as much as ethics is a social concern, consultation with respected authorities and consideration of popular opinion are appropriate."[483] Here, one also needs to take into account the social norms and context of that period. One would assume that morality and ethics are very important aspects, as it plays a great role in the doctrine of karmic effects that is taken upon (with further development) by various well-known sects of the time, such as Jainism and Buddhism.

This topic is well exemplified in the dialogue between the Buddha and the Kālāmas:

> *"Taṃ kiṃ maññatha, kālāmā, lobho purisassa ajjhattaṃ uppajjamāno uppajjati hitāya vā ahitāya vā"ti?*
>
> "What do you think, Kālāmās, when greed arisen inside a person, does it arise for his welfare or for his harm?"
>
> *"Ahitāya, bhante".*
>
> "For his harm, Venerable Sir."
>
> *"Luddho panāyaṃ, kālāmā, purisapuggalo lobhena abhibhūto pariyādinnacitto pāṇampi hanati, adinnampi ādiyati, paradārampi gacchati, musāpi bhaṇati, parampi tathattāya samādapeti, yaṃ sa hoti dīgharattaṃ ahitāya dukkhāyā"ti.*
>
> "Kālāmās, a greedy person, overpowered by greed, with his mind exhausted by it, he kills living beings, he takes what is not given, he goes to somebody else's wife, he speaks falsehood, and further, he instigates others to do so. Because of that, [does it lead] to his harm and suffering for a long time?"
>
> *"Evaṃ, bhante".*

[483] Evans, "Doubting the Kalama-Sutta," 103.

“Yes, Venerable Sir.”

“Taṃ kiṃ maññatha, kālāmā, doso purisassa ajjhattaṃ uppajjamāno uppajjati hitāya vā ahitāya vā”ti?

“What do you think, Kālāmās, when hatred arisen inside a person, does it arise for his welfare or harm?”

“Ahitāya, bhante”.

“For his harm, Venerable Sir.”

“Duṭṭho panāyaṃ, kālāmā, purisapuggalo dosena abhibhūto pariyādinnacitto pāṇampi hanati, adinnampi ādiyati, paradārampi gacchati, musāpi bhaṇati, parampi tathattāya samādapeti, yaṃ sa hoti dīgharattaṃ ahitāya dukkhāyā”ti.

“Kālāmās, a wicked person, overpowered by hatred (anger), with his mind exhausted by it, he kills living beings, he takes what is not given, he goes to somebody else’s wife, he speaks falsehood, and further, he instigates others to do so. Because of that, [does it lead] to his harm and suffering for a long time?”

“Evaṃ, bhante”.

“Yes, Venerable Sir.”

“Taṃ kiṃ maññatha, kālāmā, moho purisassa ajjhattaṃ uppajjamāno uppajjati hitāya vā ahitāya vā”ti?

“What do you think, Kālāmās, when delusion arisen inside a person, does it arise for his welfare or harm?”

“Ahitāya, bhante”.

“For his harm, Venerable Sir.”

“Mūḷho panāyaṃ, kālāmā, purisapuggalo mohena abhibhūto pariyādinnacitto pāṇampi hanati, adinnampi ādiyati, paradārampi gacchati, musāpi bhaṇati, parampi tathattāya samādapeti, yaṃ sa hoti dīgharattaṃ ahitāya dukkhāyā”ti.

“Kālāmās, a deluded person, overpowered by delusion (ignorance), with his mind exhausted by it, he kills living beings, he takes what is not given, he goes to somebody else’s wife, he speaks falsehood, and further, he instigates others to do so. Because of that, [does it lead] to his harm and suffering for a long time?”

“Evaṃ, bhante”.

“Yes, Venerable Sir.”

“Taṃ kiṃ maññatha, kālāmā, ime dhammā kusalā vā akusalā vā”ti?

What do think, Kālāmās, are these things wholesome or unwholesome?”

“Akusalā, bhante”.

“Unwholesome, Venerable sir.”

“Sāvajjā vā anavajjā vā”ti?

“Blamable or blameless?”

“Sāvajjā, bhante”.

“Blamable, Venerable sir.”

“Viññugarahitā vā viññuppasatthā vā”ti?

“Reproached or extolled by wise?”

“Viññugarahitā, bhante”.

“Reproached by the wise, Venerable Sir.”

“Samattā samādinnā ahitāya dukkhāya saṃvattanti, no vā? kathaṃ vā ettha hotī”ti?

“[When] accepted and undertaken, do they lead to harm and suffering or not, or how [do you take it] in this context?”

“Samattā, bhante, samādinnā ahitāya dukkhāya saṃvattantīti. evaṃ no ettha hotī”ti.

“Venerable Sir, [when] accepted and undertaken, these things lead to harm and suffering, and that is how [we take it] in this context.

“Iti kho, kālāmā, yaṃ taṃ avocumhā — ‘etha tumhe, kālāmā! mā anussavena, mā paramparāya, mā itikirāya, mā piṭakasampadānena, mā takkahetu, mā nayahetu, mā ākāraparivitakkena, mā diṭṭhinijjhānakkhantiyā, mā bhabbarūpatāya, mā samaṇo no garūti. yadā tumhe kālāmā attanāva jāneyyātha — ‘ime dhammā akusalā, ime dhammā sāvajjā, ime dhammā viññugarahitā, ime dhammā samattā samādinnā ahitāya dukkhāya saṃvattantīti, atha tumhe, kālāmā, pajaheyyāthā’ti, iti yaṃ taṃ vuttaṃ, idametaṃ paṭicca vuttaṃ.”

"Indeed, Kālāmās, when we said: 'Come, Kālāmās, do not go by tradition, not by lineage, not by hearsay, not by collections of scriptures, not by logical reasoning, not by inferential reasoning, not by appearance of consideration, not by perception resulting from sense organ's theory, not by appearance of capability, and indeed not because the ascetic is our teacher. Only when, Kālāmās, you know for yourselves: 'These things are unwholesome; these things are blamable; these things are reproached by the wise; these things, if accepted and takes upon lead to harm and suffering,' then you should abandon them, it is because of this that this was said."

[…]

"Taṃ kiṃ maññatha, kālāmā, alobho purisassa ajjhattaṃ uppajjamāno uppajjati hitāya vā ahitāya vā"ti?

What do you think, Kālāmās, when non-greed arisen in a person, does it arise for his welfare or for his harm?"

"Hitāya, bhante".

"For his welfare, Venerable Sir."

"Aluddho panāyaṃ, kālāmā, purisapuggalo lobhena anabhibhūto apariyādinnacitto neva pāṇaṃ hanati, na adinnaṃ ādiyati, na paradāraṃ gacchati, na musā bhaṇati, na parampi tathattāya samādapeti, yaṃ sa hoti dīgharattaṃ hitāya sukhāyā"ti.

"Kālāmās, a non-greedy person, not overpowered by greed, with his mind not exhausted by it, he does not kills living beings, he does not takes what is not given, he does not go to somebody else's wife, he does not speaks falsehood, and further, he does not instigate others to do so. Because of that, [does it lead] to his welfare and happiness for a long time?"

"Evaṃ, bhante".

"Yes, Venerable Sir."

"Taṃ kiṃ maññatha, kālāmā, adoso purisassa ajjhattaṃ uppajjamāno uppajjati ... pe ... Yaṃ sa hoti dīgharattaṃ hitāya sukhāyā"ti.

What do you think, Kālāmās, when non-hatred arises in a person…[same as above]. Will that lead to his welfare and happiness for a long time?"

"Evaṃ bhante".

"Yes, Venerable Sir."

"Taṃ kiṃ maññatha, kālāmā, amoho purisassa ajjhattaṃ uppajjamāno uppajjati ... pe ... Yaṃ sa hoti dīgharattaṃ hitāya sukhāyā"ti.

What do you think, Kālāmās? When non-delusion arises in a person…[same as above]. Will that lead to his welfare and happiness for a long time?"

"Evaṃ bhante".

"Yes, Venerable Sir."

"Taṃ kiṃ maññatha, kālāmā, ime dhammā kusalā vā akusalā vā"ti?

"What do you think, Kālāmās*?* Are these things wholesome or unwholesome?"

"Kusalā, bhante".

"Wholesome, Venerable Sir."

"Sāvajjā vā anavajjā vā"ti?

"Blamable or blameless?"

"Anavajjā, bhante".

"Blameless, Venerable sir."

"Viññugarahitā vā viññuppasatthā vā"ti?

"Reproached or extolled by wise?"

"Viññuppasatthā, bhante".

"Extolled by the wise, Venerable Sir."

"Samattā samādinnā hitāya sukhāya saṃvattanti no vā? kathaṃ vā ettha hotī"ti?

"[When] accepted and undertaken, do they lead to welfare and happiness or not, or how [do you take it] in this context?"

"Samattā, bhante, samādinnā hitāya sukhāya saṃvattanti. Evaṃ no ettha hotī"ti.

"Venerable Sir, [when] accepted and undertaken, these things lead to welfare and happiness, and that is how [we take it] in this context."

"Iti kho, kālāmā, yaṃ taṃ avocumhā — 'etha tumhe, kālāmā! mā anussavena, mā paramparāya, mā itikirāya, mā piṭakasampadānena, mā takkahetu, mā nayahetu,

mā ākāraparivitakkena, mā diṭṭhinijjhānakkhantiyā, mā bhabbarūpatāya, mā samaṇo no garūti. yadā tumhe, kālāmā, attanāva jāneyyātha — ime dhammā kusalā, ime dhammā anavajjā, ime dhammā viññuppasatthā, ime dhammā samattā samādinnā hitāya sukhāya saṃvattantīti, atha tumhe, kālāmā, upasampajja vihareyyāthā'ti, iti yaṃ taṃ vuttaṃ idametaṃ paṭicca vuttaṃ.

"Indeed, Kālāmās, when we said: 'Come, Kālāmās, do not go by tradition, not by lineage, not by hearsay, not by collections of scriptures, not by logical reasoning, not by inferential reasoning, not by appearance of consideration, not by perception resulting from sense organ's theory, not by appearance of capability, and indeed not because the ascetic is our teacher. Only when, Kālāmās, you know for yourselves: 'These things are wholesome; these things are blameless; these things are extolled by the wise; these things, if accepted and takes upon lead to welfare and happiness,' then you should abide in them, it is because of this that this was said." (My own translation)

Ethics is well elucidated in the sutta. Here, ethics can be explained in terms of cause and effects: for cause/action is to "stop bad action" and as result/achievement it has "the quality of taintlessness." As the discourse shown, concerning desire, hatred, and delusion, the Buddha asks the Kālāmas, "When adopted and carried out, do they convert into loss and suffering, or not? How does it appear to you?"[484] To which the Kālāmas answer, "When adopted, sir, and carried out, they convert into loss and suffering. That is how it appears to us."[485] Regarding freedom from wanting, aversion, and ignorance, the Buddha inquires of the Kālāmas, "When adopted and carried out, do they convert into profit and bliss, or not? How does it appear to you?"[486] The Kālāmas reply: "When adopted, sir, and carried out, they convert into profit and bliss. That is how it appears to us."[487] Thus, the Buddha concludes, "*yaṃ taṃ vuttaṃ idametaṃ paṭicca vuttaṃ* — it is because of this that this [the ten criteria] was said."

The Buddha further explains:

[484] Uddiyan, *Kalama Sutta*, 9.
[485] Uddiyan, *Kalama Sutta*, 9.
[486] Uddiyan, *Kalama Sutta*, 13.
[487] Uddiyan, *Kalama Sutta*, 13.

> Who is thus devoid of longing, devoid of ill will, unconfused, clearly comprehending, ever mindful, dwells pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with loving-kindness…with a mind imbued with compassion… with a mind imbued with altruistic joy… with a mind imbued with equanimity, likewise the second quarter, the third quarter, and the fourth quarter. Thus above, below, across, and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he dwells pervading the entire word with a mind imbued with equanimity, vast, exalted, measureless, without enmity, without ill will.[488]

This passage clearly demonstrates that the Buddha did not stop at just having the Kālāmas know what is evil and what is good. He further turned their minds toward the four abodes (*brahmavihāras*), the sublime states of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity pervading through the universe, all sentient beings as well as oneself. In other words, he steered their minds toward higher state of happiness.

The Buddha further expounded on the benefits of a person whose mind is without enmity, ill will, undefiled and pure. These consist of four solaces. One is a better rebirth (in place or heaven) after the dissolution of the body. Two, they have a happiness here and now. Three, evil does not come to you because you do not have any evil intentions. The last, one is purified from all evils. In terms of rewarding those with virtue, one can find similar examples described in the *Visuddhimagga* (Path of Purification). These includes: gaining great fortune, good reputation spread afar, enter any place without fear or hesitation, having a clear mind at death, and reborn into happy place (heaven) after death.[489] Thus, having listened to the Blessed One's discourse on the four assurances, the Kālāmas were established in his teaching and took refuge in the Triple Gems—the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.[490]

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[488] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 282.
[489] Bhikkhu Nanamoli, trans., *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga* (Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991), 12–13.
[490] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 283.

In Evans' words, The Buddha, "gives [the *Kālāmas*] a sample of his own teachings and guides them through a discourse such that they agree that following these teachings would lead to the achievement of material and spiritual goals." By satisfying themselves with the Buddha's answer and explanation, the Kālāmas "commit themselves to him, so that, although he did not say so directly, the implied answer to their question would appear to have been, '*This* teacher!'"[491] Thus, faith was established in their minds.

In sum, the Buddha attended to the problem of Kālāmas with an intention to bring happiness to them. Through psychological means, he settled their perplexity and doubt with what was common for them—the moral principle. He recommended the Kālāmas to not go upon any of the ten criteria if they were evil, but only abide in them if they were good and conducive to happiness. He steered their minds toward loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. Further, he assured them with the four solaces, for one whose mind is freed of greed, ill-will, and defilements.

Final Remarks

It is evident that the *Kālāma Sutta* expounded by the Buddha is neither about science nor about rejecting authority. Rather, it is about how to attain happiness in this life. This is totally different from other preachers who had come to Kesaputta before, who claimed their doctrines were truth while denouncing and deriding other teachings. The Buddha did not ask the Kālāmas to follow his teaching; he did not claim his teaching was the best or ridicule the ideologies of others.

Having discerned the psychological nature of the Kālāmas as perplexed, confused, and baffled, the Buddha did not make them more befuddled, but rather reassured them

[491] Evans, "Doubting the Kalama-Sutta," 99.

that is okay to doubt and not go along with anything (even the ten knowledge that people abide by) if it brings evil and leads to suffering. In simple terms, the Buddha eased their minds and asked them to let go of anything that generates loss and suffering. Likewise, he recommended that they should abide in those things that are good, beneficial and conducive to happiness.

He saw that the Kālāmas were people with morality. Therefore, he expounded the moral principle so that they could grasp the teaching more easily. Not only that, the Buddha saw that the ethical principle is the basic elements of a good person. Thus, when a person is freed from desire, hatred, and delusion, his or her mind abides in loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. This in turn results in freedom from all defilements—and attaining supreme happiness.

In much as to say, the Buddha, with his unique, analytical way of answering, slowly guided the Kālāmas regarding ethical values, helping the Kālāmas to understand and acknowledge what is good and skillful (*kusalā*) and what is evil and unskillful (*akusalā*). In sum, the Buddha achieved what he set out to accomplish because he had helped to relieve the perplexed and confused Kālāmas of their bewilderment and attain happiness. Likewise, the Kālāmas firmly established faith in the Buddha.

Readers should bear in mind that "although the Pāli Canon is treated with great reverence by all Buddhists, especially those who practice Theravāda Buddhism, it is not considered the 'word of God' or as infallible Truth." Besides, the Buddha asked his followers to carefully look at his teachings with "an open and a critical mind." Further, to those who are philosophically minded, critically dissecting the ideas that are illustrated in the text and reflecting upon it is according to *Kālāma Sutta* not being "disrespectful of

Buddhism." Rather, "such critical investigation is encouraged and welcomed in the Buddhist tradition."[492]

[492] Holder, *Early Buddhist Discourses,* xxii.

CHAPTER 5: THE CATEGORICAL ANSWER TO THE QUESTION: WAS THE BUDDHA *SABBAÑÑU* (OMNISCIENT)?

Was the Buddha *Sabbañña* (Omniscient)?

Introduction

As discussed in previous chapters, discourses show that a number of people came to the Buddha to seek answers to their questions. Some of these questions the Buddha addressed.[493] Some questions were put aside. These questions tended to be metaphysical in nature, thus their answer would be conjecture.[494] More importantly, the Buddha perceived those answers as compounding of suffering in the individual rather then a path toward enlightenment. Still, these questions were directed to the Buddha by various people. Does this indicate that the interlocutors thought the Buddha knew everything? Was he omniscient?

The term "omniscience" is a prominent feature that is attributed to the Buddha and some founders of other religions.[495] However, its nature is very ambiguous. During the Buddha's time, the concept of omniscience varied in different traditions/religions. For example, in the Vedas, omniscience (*sarvajña*) refers to the gods such as Agni, Indra, and Soma.[496] In the *Upaniṣad,* omniscience is used to describe Ātman/Brahman. As the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (IV 5.6) states, "When the Self has been… known, then all… is known."[497] In Jainism, omniscience consists of two kinds, one is called *Avadi Jñāna,*[498]

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[493] The Buddha answered questions of the Kālāmas (see Chapter 4 for details).
[494] The Buddha put aside the questions of Vacchagotta (see Chapter 2 for details) and Mālunkyāputta (see Chapter 3 for details).
[495] S. S. Shashi, *Encyclopaedia Indica*, s.v. "Omniscience," (Bangladesh: Anmol Publications, 1996), 153.
[496] Lakshuman Pandey, "The Buddhist Conception of Omniscience," (PhD dissertation, McMaster University 1972), 20–22, https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/handle/11375/8746.
[497] "The Upanishads, Part 2 (SBE15): Brihadāranyaka Upanishad: IV, 5," *Sacred-texts,* accessed December 4, 2015, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe15/sbe15077.htm.

which is omniscience coming under visual knowledge, and the other *Manaḥparayāya Jñāna*,[499] which is omniscience arrived at from mental knowledge. According to Jainism, "When a person attained perfect knowledge (*kevala jñāna*), he is called an omniscient,"[500] and omniscience to the Jains means all knowing.

However, was the Buddha omniscient in the way Jains defined omniscience? In other words, did he know everything? Or at least, did he claim himself as someone who knows everything? What did the Buddha actually say about *sarvajña* (Pāli: *sabbaññu*)? Some modern scholars' studies suggest that the word "omniscience" is not found as a feature of the Buddha in the early section of the Pāli Canon, but rather, is a later attribution.[501] All of the above features will be examined as part of this chapter.

The purpose of this section is to explore the controversy surrounding the Buddha's omniscience by examining early Buddhist texts. This section's main argument will primarily focus on dialogues between the Buddha and his interlocutors—especially the categorical answers of the Buddha—thus highlighting the perspective of omniscience from both parties. To do the above, first, I will investigate and discuss the Indian concept of "*sarvajña*" or "*sabbaññu*" from the standpoint of Vedas, Upaniṣads, and Jainism. Second, I will provide my interpretation of the subject matter of what the Buddha said: a) looking at early Buddhist suttas that may indicate that the Buddha is omniscient, b) providing some evidence that suggests the Buddha is not all-knowing, and c) examining the *Tevijjavacchagotta Sutta* (MN 71) and *Kaṇṇakatthala Sutta* (MN 90) to see what the

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[498] Shashi, *Encyclopaedia Indica*, 154.
[499] Shashi, *Encyclopaedia Indica*, 154.
[500] Shashi, *Encyclopaedia Indica*, 154.
[501] Ramjee Singh, *The Jaina Concept of Omniscience* (Ahmedabad: L.D. Institute of Indology, 1974), 8; Anālayo, "The Buddha and Omniscience," *The Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies* 7 (2006): 10; Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 380–81.

Buddha actually said regarding this topic, *sabbaññu*, and how. Here, I will consider the Buddha's answer to this issue with "reservations."[502] In addition, other scholarly work will be included to further assess the Buddha's omniscience.

This investigation on the "Categorical Answer to the Question: Was the Buddha *Sabbaññu* (Omniscient)" would shine light on the way the Buddha provided pedagogical guidance through the categorical answering method. It also provides a clearer definition and better understanding of the word "omniscient." Further, it clarifies what the Buddha, his disciples, and scholars said in reference to the controversy revolving around the Buddha's alleged omniscience.

1. Indian Concept of *Sarvajña* (omniscience)

a) Omniscience of the Vedas and the Upaniṣads

The word *sarvajña* is a combination of two derivatives: *sarva* and *jña*, where *sarva* means "all" and *jña* means "knowledge." In other words, as a whole, *sarvajña* could be illustrated as "all-knowledge." Nevertheless, how was this ideology being used in ancient India? Let us trace this concept back to the Vedas. There are two types of omniscience, one of the gods and one of humans—the *Ṛṣi* (wise or sage). For the prior, all-knowing is a feature of the gods. In other words, omniscience is the very nature of divinity.[503] As for the latter, this knowledge is revealed by divine sources. It is "not discursive, nor ratiocinative, but has the nature of full-blown intuition."[504]

According to Lakshuman Pandey's investigation, the idea of omniscience can be found in the Vedas using various terms: "*Viśvavit, Viśva-Vedās, Viśva -Vidvāna,*

[502] The Buddha reserves his answer to the insight that he has discerned about the nature of things—*paṭiccasamuppāda, dukkha, anattā, anicca,* and the Four Noble Truths.
[503] Pandey, "The Buddhist Conception of Omniscience," 5.
[504] Pandey, "The Buddhist Conception of Omniscience," 19–20.

Sarvavit, Viśva-Chakshu, and Viśva Draṣṭā."[505] A similar context is discovered by Padmanabh S. Jaini, as he states, "The Vedic seers were well acquainted with the concept of omniscience, as can be seen from adjectives like *viśva-vit, viśva-vidvān, viśva-cakṣu, sarva-vit,* applied to the Vedic deities, and notably to Agni."[506]

The Vedas ascribe Agni as omniscience, wise, and a seer. For example, Vedas Book 10: Hymn 3.1 states: "O KING, the potent and terrific envoy, kindled for strength, is manifest in beauty. He shines, all-knowing, with his lotty splendour: chasing black Night he comes with white-rayed Morning."[507] Vedas Book 1: Hymn 1.2 presents Agni as worthy "to be praised by living as by ancient seers. He shall bring hitherward the Gods." [508] Book 1: HYMN 31.1 shows, "Thou, Agni, wast the earliest Aṅgiras, a Seer; thou wast, a God thyself, the Gods' auspicious Friend. After thy holy ordinance the Maruts, sage, active through wisdom, with their glittering spears, were born."[509] Book 1: Hymn 31.2 includes, "O Agni, thou, the best and earliest Aṅgiras, fulfillest as a Sage the holy law of Gods. Sprung from two mothers, wise, through all existence spread, resting in many a place for sake of living man."[510] Book 1 Hymn 36.3 includes, "Thee for our messenger we choose, thee, the Omniscient, for our Priest."[511]

The *Rig Vedas* also present Agni as omnipresent; he is everywhere, in the sky, on land, and in the waters. He is known as *Sahasrākṣa* (the one that has thousand eyes) as

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[505] Pandey, "The Buddhist Conception of Omniscience," 18.
[506] Padmanabh S. Jaini, *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2001), 97.
[507] *Rig Veda,* translated by Ralph T. H. Griffith, *Sacred-texts,* accessed May 6, 2015, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/rv10003.htm.
[508] *Rig Veda,* accessed May 6, 2015, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/rv01001.htm.
[509] *Rig Veda,* accessed May 6, 2015, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/rv01031.htm.
[510] *Rig Veda,* accessed May 6, 2015, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/rv01031.htm.
[511] *Rig Veda,* accessed May 6, 2015, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/rv01036.htm.

well as a *Ṛṣi* that inspired and promoted omniscience in man.[512] This is as the *Rig Veda* Book 10: Hymn 87.12 suggests, "Lead thou the worshipper that eye, O Agni, wherewith thou lookest on the hoof-armed demon. With light celestial in Atharvan's manner burn up the foot who ruins truth with falsehood."[513]

Beside Agni, there are other gods that are also considered omniscient, such as Varuṇa, Soma, and Indra. "Varuna, the Omniscient, sees all and makes revelations. Varuṇa is the upholder of the moral law (*ṛta dhṛta*). He sits high above Gods and perceives all things. He governs the whole universe morally."[514] "The god Soma is all-knower (*Viśvavid*). He is the controller of the mind (*Manasā Patih*) and is endowed with a thousand eyes. He has immediate insight into the nature of all things and is king of all worlds."[515] Indra, the god with many eyes (*Sahasrākṣa*), "is the all-perceiving."[516] In as much as to say, omniscience, all-knowing, or all-purveying are features attributed to the sky's gods. In short, these "gods who are connected with the heavenly realms of light […and] are omniscient because their nature is self-luminous."[517]

As mentioned above so far, there is evidence of omniscience in the Vedas. Besides, this omniscience is of two types: one of the gods, as a feature of their divinity, and the other is of humans, where all-knowledge is either provided or inspired by the gods.

By the time of the Upanishads (Skr. *Upaniṣad),* omniscience was being used in a different sense. It was used as *Ātmajñatā* or *Brahmanjñatā*, which is the knowledge of the

[512] Pandey, "The Buddhist Conception of Omniscience," 20.
[513] *Rig Veda*, accessed May 6, 2015, http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/rv10087.htm.
[514] Pandey, "The Buddhist Conception of Omniscience," 21.
[515] Pandey, "The Buddhist Conception of Omniscience," 21.
[516] Pandey, "The Buddhist Conception of Omniscience," 22.
[517] Pandey, "The Buddhist Conception of Omniscience," 22.

Self or Brahman. As the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (IV 5.6) states, "When the Self has been… known, then all… is known."[518] In as much as to say, what is illustrated in the Upaniṣads is that all one needs to know is Ātman because with this knowledge, everything else in the universe would be known.[519] As Ramjee Singh concludes, "In short, the Upaniṣadic thinkers want to bring home the truth that one who knows the cosmic spirit, either as Brahman or Atman, knows everything. Thus, omniscience means knowledge of the Self (*Ātmajñatā*) or knowledge of Brahman (*Brahmanjñatā*)."[520] In other words, s*arvajña* is being used in the Upanishad in a "metaphoric sense;" it has "becomes a synonym for *Brahmajña* or *Ātmajña*, the knower of the eternal self."[521]

"The term *Sarvajña*…applied to an aspirant upon reaching the goal [liberation or *mokṣa*]…the aspirant was previously the knower of finite on account of his *avidyā*, but with the removal of the latter he now becomes the All."[522] According to the teaching of Brahmanism, one cannot see the truth and become the All because of *māyā* (illusion) or *avidyā* (delusion). Thus, when one is able to unveil *māyā* or be rid of *avidyā*, one realizes union with Brahman/Ātman. In other words, the one who knows Brahman is considered to be omniscient and have infinite knowledge. Because of this, one also has the ability of "direct perception, independent of the mind and body."[523]

To sum up this section, from the Vedas one comes to see that omniscience is a feature of the gods as well as of the divinity that has the power to engender human omniscience. However, by the time of the Upaniṣads, the context of human *sarvajña* had

[518] "The Upanishads, Part 2 (SBE15): Brihadāranyaka Upanishad: IV, 5."
[519] Singh, *The Jaina Concept of Omniscience*, 38.
[520] Singh, *The Jaina Concept of Omniscience*, 38.
[521] Jaini, *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies*, 98.
[522] Jaini, *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies*, 98.
[523] Jaini, *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies*, 98.

changed. It was no longer inspired or provided by the gods; rather, from the removal of *avidyā* (ignorance), one unveils *māyā* (illusion) and realizes Brahman (the Self). With this in mind, the next section examines the idea of omniscience in Jainism.

b) Omniscience of Jainism

As mentioned in the first chapter, Jainism is one of the sects that rejected the Vedic and Brahmanical tradition. However, it did not totally reject everything; one of the ideologies that it did not negate is omniscience. Jain teaching accepts human omniscience. However, their concept of human all-knowing is rather different. Jains believe that human omniscience is not inspired or provided by the gods, and neither is it about having knowledge of the Brahman/Self. Instead, Jains think that human omniscience is attained through the removal of karma[524] from the *jīva* (soul).[525]

According to Jay L. Garfield's and William Edelglass's description, "The *Jīva* has infinite knowledge as one of its inherent qualities. This knowledge is obscured by the presence of knowledge-obscuring karma."[526] As one cultivates ethical confinement and harsh ascetic disciplines, the karmic that binds to the *jīva* begin to be shed. Regarding the Jain path, "obscuring karmic matter expelled from the *jīva*, one also develops clairvoyance (*vadhi*) and, at a more advanced stage, telepathy (*manaḥparayāya*). When all the karmic material is gone, and the intrinsic nature of *jīva* is fully revealed, one

[524] Ramjee Singh's (1974) work, *The Jaina Concept of Omniscience* on page 111 presents, "The soul being infected with four-fold passions, namely, wrong belief (*mithyā-darśana*), vowlessness *(avirati*), carelessness (*pramāda*), passions (*kaṣāya*) and vibrations (yoga), attracted matter. These karmic particles attached to the soul are called karmas."
[525] Shri Jayatilal S. Sanghvi, *A Treatise on Jainism* (Netlancers Inc, 2014), 1.
[526] Jay L. Garfield and William Edelglass, *The Oxford Handbook of World Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 165.

experiences *kevala jñāna…*which is defined as perfect omniscience."[527] In other words, Jain omniscience is attainable through exercising physical austerity.

In the *Kalpa-sūtra*, Mahāvīra is said to achieve omniscience while engaged in extreme austerities:

> "…in a squatting position with joined heels, exposing himself to the heat of the sun, after fasting two and a half days without drinking water, being engaged in deep meditation, reached the highest knowledge and intuition, called *kevala*, which is infinite, supreme, unobstructed, unimpeded, complete and full.
>
> When the Venerable Ascetic Mahāvīra had become a Jina and arhat, he was *kevalin*, omniscient (*sabbaññu*) and comprehending all objects (*sabba-bhāva-darisī*); he knew and saw (*jānamāṇe pāsamāṇe*) all conditions of the world, of gods, men and demons; when they come, whither they go, whether they are born as men or animals or become gods or hell beings, the ideas, the thoughts of their minds, the food, doings, desires, the open and secret deeds of all living beings in the whole world; he the Arhat, for whom there is no secret, knew and saw all conditions of all living beings in the world."[528]

In Jainism, the essence of the soul is a knowing substance. It has the power to become omniscient. "So in the state of *Mokṣa*, when the Karmic veil is removed, the soul shines in its full splendour and possesses omniscience."[529] Just as the analogy of the luminous sun that is "obscured by clouds, fog, etc., so the all-knowing nature of the [soul] is obscured by…karmas."[530] However, when the layers of shields are removed, the

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[527] Garfield and Edelglass, *The Oxford Handbook of World Philosophy*, 165. Note: in Padmanabh S. Jaini's (2001) work *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies,* pages 101-2 shows that there are the varieties and gradations of knowledge. "*Mati-jñāna*: Sensory cognition caused by the senses and the mind. Where appropriate, it also includes remembrance, recognition, induction and deduction." "*Śruta-jñāna*: Sensory knowledge followed by instruction, whether verbal or non-verbal. This also includes scriptural knowledge." "*Avaidhi-jñāna*: 'Clairvoyance'. This knowledge can be acquired by human beings through yogic methods. It is comparable to the Buddhist concept of the 'Heavenly Eye' and the 'Heavenly Ear.'" "*Manaḥ-paryayajñāna*: 'Telepathy'. It is 'that knowledge through which the objects thought of by the minds of others are known.'" And, in a state where "The soul, being totally independent of the senses and the mind, will, without conscious effort whatsoever, directly and simultaneously mirror the whole range of the knowables. This is called *kevala-jñāna*, attained by the soul once it is totally isolated (*kaivalya*)."

[528] Jaini, *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies*, 99–100. [Note: this passage is quoted by Jaini from the *Kalpa-sūtra* (120-1) H. Jacobi (tr.): Jaina Sutras, Pt.1 (SBE, Vol. XXII), p. 263].

[529] Singh, *The Jaina Concept of Omniscience*, 26.

[530] Singh, *The Jaina Concept of Omniscience*, 118.

sun would shine in it full radiance. In other words, all-knowledge appears from the *jīva* when all karmic bondage is removed or destroyed.[531]

In a similar light, Jaini expounds, "the soul… under proper conditions, be able to recognize the entire mass of knowables (*sarvaṁ jneyaṁ*)…Therefore, a total destruction of the forces of *karma*, together with the causes of their accumulation, must invariably result in perfect purity, which would automatically usher in the state of 'omniscience.'"[532] This also means that there are processes in the emancipation from karma.

Jains thus believe that omniscience is attained when one achieve *mokṣa* (liberation). It is also considers as an interrelationship. According to Ramjee Singh's work *The Jaina Concept of Omniscience*, there are several reasons behind the correlation and association between *mokṣa* and omniscience:

1) "Since the idea of *Mokṣa* has been regarded as the highest value and the ultimate purpose of life…the state of *Mokṣa* is generally described as the state of supreme and untrammeled knowledge. Hence a close relation between the two concepts of *Mokṣa* and omniscience becomes inevitable."[533]
2) "The genesis of the idea of *Mokṣa* has also been traced to 'the endeavour of man to find out ways and means by means of which he could become happy.' This presupposes that the knowledge is at very root of salvation…"[534]
3) "*Mokṣa* has been described as the annulment of *avidyā* or nescience and the consequent dawn of knowledge, so much so that knowledge has been regarded as an essential precondition of *Mokṣa*."[535]

[531] Singh, *The Jaina Concept of Omniscience*, 118.
[532] Jaini, *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies*, 102.
[533] Singh, *The Jaina Concept of Omniscience*, 21–22.
[534] Singh, *The Jaina Concept of Omniscience*, 22.

4) "The state of omniscience involves a direct, immediate, intuitive apprehension of Truth. This is very much similar to the mystic state of mind of a liberated soul."[536]
5) "The state of omniscience is also the perfection of the cognitive faculty of self…Hence the liberated soul is described 'as endowed with knowledge and happiness.'"[537]

From what is stated above, one would assume that Indian philosophy and thought surrounding the word *sarvajña* is presented as a dual concept. It is about perfect knowledge (omniscience) and *mokṣa* (liberation). To the borrow Singh's words, "It is perhaps because of the notion of a liberated being implies the idea of perfection and since omniscience is [the] perfection of knowledge,"[538] it is correlated.

Thus, so far the Jains' theory of omniscience is a realizable ideal for human beings. This infinite knowledge (*sarvajña*) is attainable by one's own effort through exercising the recommended method—asceticism. Since Mahāvīra achieved salvation through this means, it is believed by the Jains that perfect knowledge (*kevala jñāna*) is also given by this path. Importantly, for the Jains, omniscience is "[A]n immediate and direct knowledge of all the objects of the universe, past, present, and future, subtle and remote, far and near, by a single ever-lasting act of knowledge requiring no assistance from the senses and even mind."[539] In simple terms, this knowledge is perfect in quality and quantity.

2. Early Buddhist Concept of *Sabbaññu* (Omniscience)

a) Early Buddhist Indication of Buddha Being *Sabbaññu*

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[535] Singh, *The Jaina Concept of Omniscience*, 22.
[536] Singh, *The Jaina Concept of Omniscience*, 22.
[537] Singh, *The Jaina Concept of Omniscience*, 23.
[538] Singh, *The Jaina Concept of Omniscience*, 21.
[539] Singh, *The Jaina Concept of Omniscience*, 18.

In common understanding, the word omniscience to most of us means, "all knowing." However, in the *Webster's New World Dictionary*, it has two meanings:

1. Having infinite knowledge.[540]
2. Knowing all things.[541]

Much of the early Buddhist texts presented that the Buddha have numerous or seemingly great knowledge, especially the *Siṃsapā Sutta: The Siṃsapā Leaves* (SN 56.31). In this discourse, the Buddha grasps a handful of leaves from the Siṃsapā forest and asks his disciples:

> "What do you think, bhikkhus, which is more numerous: these few *siṃsapā* leaves that I have taken up in my hand or those in the *siṃsapā* grove overhead?"
>
> "Venerable sir, the *siṃsapā* leaves that the Blessed One has taken up in his hand are few, but those in the *siṃsapā* grove overhead are numerous."
>
> "So too, bhikkhus, the things I have directly known but have not taught you are numerous, while the things I have taught you are few. And why, bhikkhus have I not taught those many things? Because they are unbeneficial, irrelevant to the fundamentals of the holy life, and do not lead to revulsion, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbana. Therefore I have not taught them."[542]

On another hand the Buddha said:

> "And what, bhikkhus, have I taught? I have taught: 'This is suffering: I have taught: 'This is the origin of suffering'; I have taught: 'This is the cessation of suffering'; I have taught: 'This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.' And why, bhikkhus, have I taught this? Because this is beneficial, relevant to the fundamentals of the holy life, and leads to revulsion, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna. Therefore I have taught this."[543]

From the above sutta, the Buddha's intention is very clear: letting his student know that

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[540] David B. Guralnik, ed., *Webster's New World Dictionary* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), s.v. "Omnisicence," 993.
[541] David B. Guralnik, ed., *Webster's New World Dictionary* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), s.v. "Omnisicence," 993.
[542] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1857–58.
[543] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1857–58.

he has vast knowledge and that his knowledge extends beyond the realm of his teaching. Does this means the Buddha is *sabbaññu* (all-knowing)?

According to Pandey, there are certain important ideas that can be drawn from the analogy of the siṃsapā leaves and the Buddha's knowledge. Beginning with the obvious, "The Buddha claims to know much more than he actually taught."[544] Nevertheless, one can logically reason that "[T]o claim to know much more than one teaches is not the same as claiming omniscience. Infinity of knowledge and omniscience are logically two things; the former is possible without the latter."[545] Second, "the Buddha contends that his knowledge could not be doubted or challenged by an ordinary man ruled by passions."[546] Once again, this *de facto* does not mean "the Buddha was claiming omniscience, or that Buddha was wrong in according indubitability to his knowledge which was not omniscient. Knowledge of the dharma is possible without omniscience."[547]

In light of what is suggested in *Siṃsapā Sutta*, there are some scholars who delve deeper into the Sutta Nikāyas and insist that there are other suttas indicating the Buddha acclaimed omniscience. For example, they make a claim that *Kevaḍḍha Sutta* (DN 11) suggests the Buddha was "all-knowing" because the discourse presents that the Buddha knows the answer to a question that Brahmā, the highest of all gods, is ignorant of.[548] Next, they claim the *Tittha Sutta* (Ud 6.4) shows the limitation of human knowledge compared to that of the Buddha, as the sutta describes the blind men having different

[544] Pandey, "The Buddhist Conception of Omniscience," 44.
[545] Pandey, "The Buddhist Conception of Omniscience," 44.
[546] Pandey, "The Buddhist Conception of Omniscience," 44.
[547] Pandey, "The Buddhist Conception of Omniscience," 44.
[548] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge.*, 378.

views regarding the same elephant.[549] The story illustrates one blind man feeling the elephant's head and saying it is like a jar; one feeling the ear and saying it is like a winnowing basket; one feeling the tusk and saying it is like a plowshare; one feeling the trunk and saying it is like a pole of a plow; one feeling the body and saying it is like granary; one feeling the foot and saying it is like a post; and one feeling the tail and saying it is like a broom. In short, there are various opinions: "'The elephant is like this, it's not like that. The elephant's not like that, it's like this,' they struck one another with their fists."[550] Regarding this, the Buddha said,

> In the same way, monks, the wanderers of other sects are blind [and] eyeless. They don't know what is beneficial and what is harmful. They don't know what is the Dhamma and what is non-Dhamma. Not knowing what is beneficial and what is harmful, not knowing what is Dhamma and what is non-Dhamma, they keep on arguing, quarreling, [and] disputing, wounding one another with weapons of the mouth, saying, 'The Dhamma is like this, it's not like that. The Dhamma's not like that, it's like this.'"[551]

However, closely examining the cases above, they do not state that the Buddha is omniscient. Instead, the *Kevaḍḍha Sutta* (DN 11) suggests that Brahmā's knowledge was said to be limited, while the parable of the blind men (Ud 6.4) suggests that other religious teachers only had partial knowledge of reality.[552] Nevertheless, in Jayatilleke's analysis on the nature of the Buddha's omniscience, he concludes that we should not regard the Buddha "as one who is omniscient all the time but as one who has 'a three-fold knowledge.'"[553] In other words, if one were to suggest the Buddha is *sabbaññu*, then one must consider in what context this *sabbaññu* (omniscience) is being referred to. More

[549] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge.*, 378.
[550] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, trans., *Udāna: Exclamations* (Valley Center, CA: Metta Forest Monastery, 2012), 96.
[551] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 96.
[552] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge.*, 378–79.
[553] Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge.*, 380.

details on this point will be examined in a later section.

Next, the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (DN1) of the *Diga Nikāya* shows that the Buddha pointed out that there are sixty-two wrong views which were held by the ascetics or Brahmins of the time. Not only did the Buddha claim to know these knowledges, but he also understood what lay beyond that.[554] In line with logical reason, in order to say that other teachers' views are wrong, one must have a great deal of insight regarding such teaching before making such claims. However, it does not mean that one is *sabbaññu*. It could mean that one is not limited to just one's perspective, and that one is open to studying other knowledges. After all, being subjective in one's own view is equivalent to knowing next to nothing.[555]

There are two other discourses of the Buddha that are sometimes taken to imply a claim to omniscience. One occurs in AN 4.23 and the other in AN 4.24. According to these discourses, the Buddha stated that "he knows what is seen, heard and experienced by men and gods in this world."[556] For example, AN 4.23 relays as below:

> Bhikkhus, the Tathāgata has fully awakened to the [all]; the Tathāgata is detached from the [all]. The Tathāgata has fully awakened to the origin of the [all]; the Tathāgata has abandoned the origin of the [all]. The Tathāgata has fully awakened to the cessation of the [all]; the Tathāgata has realized the cessation of the [all]. The Tathāgata has fully awakened to the way leading to the cessation of the [all]; the Tathāgata has developed the way leading to the cessation of the [all].
>
> Bhikkhus, in this world with its devas, Māra, and Brahmā, among this population with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans, whatever is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, reached, sought after, examined by the mind—all that the Tathāgata has fully awakened to; therefore he is called the Tathāgata. [557]

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[554] Maurice O'C Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 75.
[555] Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Religion*, 11. Max Muller's well-known statement, "He, who knows one, knows none."
[556] Anālayo, "The Buddha and Omniscience," 7.
[557] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The numerical discourses of the Buddha*, 410. Note: in the actual sutta the word "world" is use instead of the "all." Here, the word "world" is substituted by the word "all" as a synonym

Again, in AN 4.24 the Buddha is said to exclaim,

> Bhikkhus, in this world with its devas, Māra, and Brahmā, among this population with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans, whatever is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, reached, sought after, examined by the mind— that I have directly known. It has been known by the Tathāgata but the Tathāgata did not become subservient to it.[558]

Looking at these passages, one might raise the following questions: First, "[W]hat does the Buddha mean when he says that he knows all that can be seen etc.?"[559] And second, "Does [the Buddha] know these things as a finite range of possible facts of which he may gain knowledge or does he know them [principally], that is, does he in principle know the true nature of all things, that is as being subject to the three characteristics of conditioned existence: unsatisfactoriness (dukkha, impermanence (anicca), and absence of permanent identity (anattā)?"[560]

According to this sutta, the Tathāgata knows all that is seen, heard and experienced. Upon first glance, one might say that the terminology "all" seems to support and qualify a claim to "omniscience." However, "The point made by this different term is that the [Tathāgata] had "awakened…in regard to all that is seen, heard, and experienced. The very next sentence in the same discourse makes it clear that this proclamation refers to the penetrative insight into all aspects of experience the Buddha achieved on the night of his awakening."[561] Likewise, "…it would not be possible to interpret the present discourse to mean that during the night of his awakening the Buddha accomplished

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because the term "all" refers to the six senses organs, which experience the phenomenal world. See the *Sabba Sutta* for more details.

[558] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The numerical discourses of the Buddha,* 411–12.

[559] Naagapriya Dharmacari, "Was the Buddha Omniscient?," *Western Buddhist Review Vol. 4,* 2006, http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/vol4/was_the_ buddha_omniscient.html, (accessed: January 9,02-2014).

[560] Dharmacari, "Was the Buddha Omniscient?"

[561] Anālayo, "The Buddha and Omniscience," 8.

omniscient knowledge into all that is and will be seen, heard and experienced in the entire world. Instead, this discourse appears to refer to the Tathāgata's penetrative insight into the nature of all aspects of experience."[562]

To be able to wholly acknowledge the greatness of such dialogue, we need to pay heed to what the term "all" means in this implication. Here, I would like to reference the *Sabba Sutta* (SN 35.23), in which the Buddha expounded on "all," which simply refers to the sensorium (the sense faculties and their objects).[563] In other words, the conclusion is that "in its early Buddhist usage to speak of "all" is to speak of subjective experience, not of some abstract totality of all existing data in past, present and future times."[564] Therefore, to say the Buddha "knows everything" (*sabbaññu*) is only to be viewed in this way: "the Buddha 'knew all' in the sense that he had penetrative insight into the nature of every aspect of experience and was thereby completely detached from 'all' and free from 'all' defilements, the passages examined so far indicate that he did not claim to be omniscient in the technical sense of the term."[565] In sum, in and of itself, when the Buddha speaks of "all knowing," it is about the knowledge of the aggregates, or the sensorium.

In a similar light, in Iti 1.7 the Blessed One is said to state thus:

> 'Monks, one who has not fully known [and] fully understood the All, whose mind has not been cleansed of passion for it, has not abandoned it, is incapable of putting an end to stress. But one who has fully known [and] fully understood the All, whose mind has been cleansed of passion for it, has abandoned it, is capable of putting an end to stress.'[566]

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[562] Anālayo, "The Buddha and Omniscience," 9.
[563] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1140.
[564] Anālayo, "The Buddha and Omniscience," 9.
[565] Anālayo, "The Buddha and Omniscience," 10.
[566] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, trans., *Itivuttaka* (Valley Center, CA: Metta Forest Monastery, 2013), 9.

According to Thanissaro Bhikkhu's note, "the All" means the six senses (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind) and the objects they come into contact with.[567] Logically, it makes sense to argue that "It is beyond human power …to know everything by sense-organs. The senses function with reference to specific objects and cannot transcend their natural limits of power though their sphere might be increased to some extent through repeat practice."[568] However, Iti 1.7 says it is possible: "Knowing the All from all around, not stirred by passion for anything at all: he, having comprehended the All, has gone beyond all stress."[569] For Dharmacari, comprehending "the All" means the following: a) [I]nsight of the *catāriariya saccāni* (Four Noble Truths), (b) the *tilakkhaṇa* (triple characteristics: impermanent, dukkha and not-self), and c) discernment of *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination).[570] Simply put, "[K]nowing the 'All' (*sabba*) is equivalent to knowing the nature of the world (*loka*). It is a spiritual insight into the way things are that leads to a profound transformation."[571]

In contrast to other scholars, Chitrarekha Kher in his article "Some Aspects of the Concept of Omniscience (Sarvajñatā) in Buddhism" provides another angle as evidence supporting the Buddha as all-knowing. He insists the Buddha is omniscient by arguing that there are three types of *Arahants:* "[T]he simple arahat, the *Pratyeka-Buddha* and the *Sammā Saṃbuddha,* i.e., the Supreme Buddha."[572] Trying to explain his point using logic, Kher illustrates, "The sphere of knowledge of each aspirant on a particular stage of

[567] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, trans., *Itivuttaka,* 9.
[568] Chitrarekha Kher, "Some Aspects of the Concept of Omniscience (Sarvajñatā) in Buddhism," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 53, no. 1/4 (January 1, 1972): 180.
[569] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, trans., *Itivuttaka,* 9.
[570] Dharmacari, "Was the Buddha Omniscient?"
[571] Dharmacari, "Was the Buddha Omniscient?"
[572] Kher, "Some Aspects of the Concept of Omniscience (Sarvajñatā) in Buddhism," 176.

spiritual progress is limited. The higher the stage, the wider the sphere of knowledge."[573] It is the same as to say, a person of the lower sphere cannot discern the things above him. While a man at higher level knows all, his level as well as the lower. In other words, "a simple 'arahat' has no access to the knowledge of a pratyekabuddha or of a Buddha. The last alone is *sabbaññu*."[574] Nevertheless, one could counter Kher by saying that even though the Buddha's insight is far greater than the other two (*Arahants* and *Pratyeka-Buddha*), it could just mean that he knows far more. Furthermore, more insight does not mean that one is *sabbaññu*.

To summarize this section, looking at the suttas that suggest that the Buddha is all-knowing, nowhere in those suttas can the word omniscience or its synonym be found. Therefore, instead of attaching something that is *not* attributed to the Buddha, one could classify the Buddha's knowing in three ways: (a) the Buddha discerns more than any ordinary human does; (b) the insight of the Buddha surpasses the understanding of other renunciants, wanderers, ascetics, Hindu priests and even Brahma;[575] and (c) the Buddha's knowledge is about the Dharma—the teachings leading to *nibbāna*.

b) Early Buddhist Indications that the Buddha is Not *Sabbaññu*

There are suttas that give hints that the Buddha was not *sabbaññu*. These discourses suggest that the Buddha had limitations in terms of knowledge regarding certain situations. For example, there is an account showing the Buddha does not know who the noisy assembly of monks just arriving at the monastery is.[576] The second episode

[573] Kher, "Some Aspects of the Concept of Omniscience (Sarvajñatā) in Buddhism," 176.
[574] Kher, "Some Aspects of the Concept of Omniscience (Sarvajñatā) in Buddhism," 176.
[575] Pandey, "The Buddhist Conception of Omniscience," 48.
[576] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 560–65.

presents the Buddha as not knowing about the group of monks committing suicide.[577] The third situation is the dialogue when King Pasenadi inquires the Buddha about the attainment of the ascetic wanderers that had just walked by them and the Buddha speaks of something else.[578] Further, countering the assumption of the all-knowing Buddha is the controversy of the Blessed-One having admitted Devadatta into the Sangha, which later stirred the community. Let us examine these cases.

According to Pandney's investigation *The Buddhist Conception of Omniscience,* scholars have formed two sides when regarding the omniscience of the Buddha. One supports *for*[579] and the other argue *against*. "[To] one group—the omniscience of Buddha is accepted in the early Pāli Nikāyas. In the view of the other group of thinkers, the early Pāli Nikāyas do not establish the omniscience of Buddha."[580] Here, we will look at the latter.

One possible way to debunk the theory that the Buddha was omniscient is to show evidence illustrated in the Pāli canon, early Buddhist suttas that indicates otherwise. However, the aim here is not to falsify omniscience, but rather to show there are episodes in the Sutta Nikāyas that present the Buddha's lack of knowledge, just as Dharmacari insists against the theory that the Buddha is omniscient by pointing to "examples in the Pāli Canon that clearly demonstrate a lack of knowledge on his part."[581]

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[577] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1773–74.
[578] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, trans., *Udāna: Exclamations,* 92–93.
[579] Pandey, "The Buddhist Conception of Omniscience," 52. Statement: "Some modern scholars have… accepted [the Buddha] as an omniscient religious teacher in the Pāli Nikāyas. The arguments in support of the omniscience of the Buddha have been presented by Kern, Oldenberg, Keith and Poussin." However, Pandey suggests not taking these scholars' words blindly. He has examined through their works thoroughly and claims that the theory is not established (pages 52-58).
[580] Pandey, "The Buddhist Conception of Omniscience," 51–52.
[581] Dharmacari, "Was the Buddha Omniscient?"

i. *Cātumā Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* Sutta 67)[582]

The discourse describes that one time the Buddha was dwelling at Cātumā in a myrobalan garden. Having heard that the Buddha was staying there, Sāriputta and Moggallāna, the two elder disciples of the Buddha, led an assembly number of five-hundred monks and came to see the Blessed One. Upon their arrival at the grove, the monks exchanged greeting with the resident monks very loudly and made lots of noise, which disturbed the peace of the Buddha. The Buddha then called his assistant, Ānanda, and asked: "Who are these loud and noisy people? One would think they were fishermen hawking fish."[583] Ānanda replied: "Venerable sir, they are five hundred bhikkhus headed by Sāriputta and Moggallāna."[584] This episode clearly shows that the Buddha is not aware of who this group of monks is and why they are so noisy and undisciplined.

ii. The Monks Who Commit Suicide[585]

SN 54.9 illustrates a suggestive event; one day while the Blessed One was staying at Vesāli in the Greatwood Hall, he taught an assembly of monks on contemplating the foulness of the body (*asubhabhāvana*). After the lesson, the Buddha went into the forest for solitary retreat for a period of half a month. During this time, he was not to be contacted by anyone apart from the one that brings alms food. After half a month, the Buddha emerged from his seclusion and saw that there were fewer monks in the Sangha. He then asked venerable Ānanda, "Why, Ānanda, does the Bhikkhus Sangha look so diminished?'" Ānanda then told the Buddha that a handful of monks had committed suicide because of being repulsed, disgusted, and humiliated with the body. Seemingly,

[582] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 560–65.
[583] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 560.
[584] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 560.
[585] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1773–74.

this scenario indicates that the Buddha did not know that a number of monks killed themselves and Ānanda had to tell him what actually happened. Once again, this episode shows that the Buddha was not omniscient.

iii. Conversation between King Pasenadi Kosala and the Buddha (Ud 6.2)

At one time, the Buddha was staying in Sāvatthī, at the Eastern Monastery of the palace of Migāra's mother. The Buddha, having arisen from his late-afternoon meditation, was sitting outside, near the door under the shade of the veranda. Then King Pasenadi Kosala approached the Blessed One, and having approached the Buddha, paid respect to the Lord and sat down beside him. Coincidently, at that time ascetics from different sects walked past them. Having seen those ascetics, King Pasenadi Kosala turned to the Buddha and asked: "Of those in the world who are arahants or on the path to arahantship, are these among them?"[586]

The Buddha is said to have replied:

> "[It is] through living together that a person's virtue may be known, and then only after a long period, not a short period; by one who is attentive, not by one who is inattentive; by one who is discerning, not by one who is not discerning. [It is] through trading with a person that his purity may be known.… [It is] through adversity that a person's endurance may be known…. [It is] through discussion that a person's discernment may be known, and then only after a long period, not a short period; by one who is attentive, not by one who is inattentive; by one who is discerning, not by one who is not discerning."[587]

The conversation above presents that King Pasenadi thought the Buddha had the ability to discern other people's state of mind as well as spiritual achievement. However, the Buddha's answer is noteworthy. In this instance, the Buddha completely denied it, although according to Buddhism, the Buddha is said to have the power of knowing what

[586] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, trans., *Udāna: Exclamations,* 92.
[587] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, trans., *Udāna: Exclamations,* 93.

other people think. However, it is not so in this case. This incident, according to Dharmacari's statement, "appears to reveal the Buddha denying omniscience and, in particular, denying his apparent ability to know the thoughts of others."[588] In simple terms, the Buddha is not omniscient.

iv. Accepting Devadatta into the Order

Another piece of data that could be used to argue that the Buddha is not omniscient is the admission of Devadatta into the Sangha. How is this episode related to the Buddha's omniscience? This is because if the Buddha were all-knowing, he would have foreseen that accepting Devadatta into the bhikkhu community would create a schism; Devadatta would stir the Sangha and create disputes and division in the peaceful community. Further, as the result of that wicked act, Devadatta would suffer in hell for eons.

Regarding this, Nāgasena in the *Milinda Pañha* (Questions of King Milinda)[589] answered that out of great compassion the Buddha accepted Devadatta into the Sangha. On the contrary, if Devadatta did not join the Order, he would still commit this major offence and suffer similar consequences. Having been admitted, Devadatta caused a schism, and as a result, he suffered torments. Nevertheless, under the Buddha's guidance, Devadatta at the end of his life actually took refuge in the Buddha, and because of this action, it is said that after his purgatory he would be released and become a *Pacceka-Buddha*.

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[588] Dharmacari, "Was the Buddha Omniscient?"

[589] *Milinda Pañha* (*Questions of King Milinda*) is part of the *Khuddaka Nikāya* of the Theravada tradition. According to T. W. Rhys David's introduction (page 3), this conversation between the eminent monk Nāgasena and King Milinda took place 500 years after the Buddha passed away. In other words, it is a later addition to the Pāli canon.

> If Devadatta […] had not entered the Order, then as a layman he would have laid up much Karma leading to states of woe, and so passing for hundreds of thousands of Kalpas from torment to misery, and from one state of perdition to another, he would suffered constant pain.
>
> […]
>
> "And Devadatta's sorrow. O king, was mitigated. For Devadatta at the moment of his death took refuge in [the Buddha] for the rest of his existences…After he has suffered the […] purgatory he will be released, and will become a [Pacceka-Buddha] under the name of Athissara.[590]

After all, Buddhism does not teach determinism, despite the fact that the Buddha in the early Buddhist suttas is said to have the ability to know sentient beings' future birth.[591] However, it is stated that this is known in the context only according to their karma (action). In other words, it is to say the Buddha has knowledge of what is experienced but not of what is not yet done. As Nāgasena in the *Milinda Pañha* relates, "Yes, O king, the Buddha was omniscient. But the insight of knowledge was not always and (consciously) present in him. The omniscience of the Blessed One was dependent on reflection. By reflection he knew whatever he wanted to know."[592] In response, King Milinda says, "Then, sir, the Buddha cannot have been omniscient, if his all-embracing knowledge was reached through investigation…Moreover, sir, reflection is carried on for the purpose of seeking (that which is not clear when reflection begins)." [593]

Does this mean that the Buddha forgot to reflect when he initiated Devadatta into the Order? Such an omission could have happened, as other scenarios examined earlier show that there are things of which the Buddha is unaware.

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[590] T. W. Rhys Davids, trans., *The Questions of King Milinda: Part 1 and 2.* (Forgotten Books, 2007), 171.
[591] This is one of the three knowledges that the Buddha claims instead of omniscience. More detail will be discussed in a later section.
[592] Jaini, *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies*, 112.
[593] Jaini, *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies*, 112.

From the above cases, evidence suggests that the Buddha is *asarvajña*, which is *not* all-knowing. Nevertheless, one could argue still that this does not mean the Buddha is not omniscient. First of all, what does it mean to claim omniscience, and how can one verify this? Further, how could a person who has not experienced omniscience be expected to explain or prove it? Even when looking at accounts that are recorded in scriptural texts, we can only speculate or make assumptions and guesses. Alternatively, one might be able to verify *sarvajña* by attaching a certain context to the word, but this is not the full meaning of the word itself. In other words, this type of omniscience can be viewed with reservations. This leads to the next section looking at the categorical answer to the question: was the Buddha *sabbaññu* (omniscient)?

c) The Categorical Answer to the Question: Was the Buddha *Sabbaññu* (Omniscient)?

In this section I will draw attention to two suttas in the *Nikāya*, MN 71 and MN 90. First, I will examine the *Tevijjavacchagotta Sutta* (MN 71), the discourse between the Buddha and Vacchagotta on the question of the Buddha's claim of omniscience (all-knowing knowledge at once). In fact, this conversation clearly highlights that it is not the case. The following is found in the dialogue between the wanderer Vacchagotta and the Buddha:

> "Venerable sir, I have heard this: 'The recluse Gotama claims omniscient and all-seeing, to have complete knowledge and vision thus: "Whether I am walking or standing or sleeping or awake, knowledge and vision are continuously and uninterruptedly present to me."' Venerable sir, do those who speak thus say what has been said by the Blessed One, and not represented him with what is contrary to fact? Do they explain in accordance with the Dhamma in such a way that nothing which provides a ground for censure can be legitimately deduced from their assertion?"
> "Vaccha, those who say thus do not say what has been said by me, but

misrepresent me with what is untrue and contrary to fact." [594]

Vaccha then asked: How should he answer that it would not misrepresent the Buddha and not be contrary to fact? The Buddha is said to then reply:

> "Vaccha, if you answer thus: 'The recluse Gotama has threefold true knowledge,' you will be saying what has been said by me and not misrepresent me with what is contrary to fact. You will explain in accordance with the Dhamma in such a way that nothing provides a ground for censure can be legitimately deduced from your assertion."[595]

A later discourse, the *Kaṇṇakatthala Sutta* (MN 90), records King Pasenadi Kosala's inquiry about what the Buddha said on the same subject matter:

> "Venerable sir, I have heard this: 'The recluse Gotama says: "There is no recluse or brahmin who is omniscient and all-seeing, who can claim to have complete knowledge and vision; that is not possible.'" Venerable sir, do those who speak thus say what has been said by the Blessed One, and not misrepresent him with what is contrary to fact? Do they explain in accordance with the Dhamma in such a way that nothing that provides a ground for censure can be legitimately deduced from their assertions?"
>
> "Great King, those who speak thus do not say what has been said by me, but misrepresent me with what is untrue and contrary to fact."
>
> "I recall having actually made the utterance in this way, great king: 'There is no recluse or brahmin who knows all, who sees all, simultaneously; that is not possible.'"[596]

From what is presented in the above dialogues, a question about omniscience was asked directly to the Buddha. It is evidence that in his answer the Buddha did not mention that he is *sabbaññu*. In essence, one would say that the Buddha categorically said "no" to the question of whether he is all-knowing. Further, in his answer, he claimed something else: the *tevijjā* (three knowledges). First, *pubbe nāvāsānussati-nāṇa*—knowledge of many past lives. Second, *dibba-cakkhu-nāṇa*—knowledge of beings passing away and being

[594] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 587–88.
[595] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 587–88.
[596] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 735.

reborn according to their karma (actions). Third, *āsava-kkhaya-nāṇa*—knowledge of ending all defilements/taints.[597]

At the beginning of this chapter, we came to understand that omniscience is attached to anyone who has attained awakening (*mokṣa*) in other contexts. However, for early Buddhism this is not the case. According to Anālayo, awakening in early Buddhism means,

> [P]enetrative insight into the nature of all things, and not as if they were to intend a factual knowledge of everything. Thus, though the Buddha "knew all" in the sense that he had penetrative insight into the nature of every aspect of experience and was thereby completely detached from "all" and free from "all" defilements, the passages examined so far indicate that he did not claim to be omniscient in the technical sense of the term."[598]

A thorough investigation of the *Tevijjavacchagotta Sutta* (MN 71) and the *Kaṇṇakatthala Sutta* (MN 90) shows that the Buddha categorically claims that one cannot see all and know all at the same time. This seemed to be logical as it makes the position clear as to why the Buddha disowns "omniscience" and again at the same time accepts the validity of it. Consider that in the period during the Buddha's time, the word "omniscient" was vaguely used.[599] The Buddha eschews the word omniscience when it is being used in the form of knowing and seeing all at once and all the time, even while walking, sleeping and so forth. However, the Buddha does, in fact, claim that he has the threefold knowledge, which is the knowledge of countless past lives, the knowledge of the appearance, disappearance and re-appearance of beings in the cycle of existence (*samsara)* according to their karma, and the knowledge to achieve the total eradication of mental fermentations. This threefold knowledge is conducive and relevant to his

[597] Dharmacari, "Was the Buddha Omniscient?"
[598] Anālayo, "The Buddha and Omniscience," 10.
[599] Upadhyaya, *Early Buddhism and the Bhagavadgita*, 274.

teaching.

Instead of attaching all-knowledge to the Buddha in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN 16), Sāriputta, the Buddha's senior disciple, is said to proclaim his teacher as someone who has abandoned the five hindrances and all mental defilements. In addition, the Buddha had well established his mind in the four foundations of mindfulness (*sati*) and rightly cultivated the seven factors of enlightenment: mindfulness (*sati*), keen investigation of the dharma (*dhamma-vicaya*), energy (*vīrya*), rapture or happiness (*pīti*), calm (*passaddhi*), concentration (*samādhi*), and equanimity (*upekkha*).[600]

In reference to the threefold knowledge, Ānanda describes his teacher, the Buddha, as the Thus Gone, "[W]ho was himself, ascertained, observed and made known in this universe."[601] What the Buddha teaches is the way leading to the attainment of the "three sciences,"[602] which is the recollection of all his previous lives, understanding of the transmigration of beings according to their actions, and knowledge of the exhaustion of the effluences.[603] Likewise, Ānanda ridicules those who have claimed omniscience, especially Nātaputta, otherwise known as Mahāvīra.

> Here, Sandaka, some teacher claims to be omniscient and all-seeing, to have complete knowledge and vision thus: 'Whether I am walking or standing or sleeping or awake, knowledge and vision are continuously and uninterruptedly present to me.' He enters an empty house, he gets no almsfood, a dog bites him, he meets with a wild elephant, a wild horse, a wild bull, he asks the name and clan of a woman or man, he asks the name of a village or a town, and the way to go there. When he is questioned: 'How is this?' he replies: 'I had to enter an empty house, that is why I entered it. I had to get no almsfood, that is why I did not get any…'[604]

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[600] Maurice O'C Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 235.
[601] A. K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism* (Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 2004), 133.
[602] Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, 133.
[603] Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, 133.
[604] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 623–24.

This passage of the *Sandaka Sutta* (MN 76) shows that Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta (Mahāvīra) is not able to support his declaration of *sabbaññu* (omniscience).[605] The rejection of Nātaputta's claim is further highlighted in the *Cūḷasakuludāyi Sutta* (MN 79).[606]

In the *Cūḷasakuludāyi Sutta*, the discourse presents that the wanderer Udāyin reported to the Buddha how Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta was claiming omniscience, all seeing simultaneously and at all time, even when, "Walking, standing or sleeping or awake, knowledge and vision are continuously and uninterruptedly present."[607] However, when Udāyin asked about the past, Nātaputta spoke falsely, side talked, showed enmity and distress, and retaliated.

Interestingly, when Udāyin inquired the Buddha about the knowledge of past and future, the Buddha basically recommended that Udāyin let the past be past, let the future be future, and expounded on the concept of *paṭiccasamuppāda*: "When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases."[608] In light of this conversation, one could make an assumption that the Buddha is not interested in the idle discussion of worldly men on information regarding the past and future and on matters that are not helpful for the mind and practice. Rather, importance is greatly placed on the insight of Dhamma, the nature of things—*paṭiccasamuppāda*.[609] Here, in terms of pedagogy, the Buddha is trying to guide his inquirer to what is conducive to attaining happiness.

In as much as what is said in the above discourses, it is rather clear that the

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[605] Dharmacari, "Was the Buddha Omniscient?"
[606] Dharmacari, "Was the Buddha Omniscient?"
[607] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha,* 654.
[608] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha,* 655. Note: earlier we see the Buddha claimed the three knowledges: many past lives, beings reborn according to their karma, and ending all taints. Here, the Buddha recommended "let the past be past, let future be future," and spoke of something else.
[609] Jaini, *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies,* 108.

Buddha directly rejected omniscience (all-knowing simultaneously). Therefore, it is contradictory to claim there is any other sutta indicating that the Buddha is omniscient in this sense. However, the Buddha did imply some other knowledges, which means that he had reservations in his answer.

3. Scholarly Commentary on the Buddha's Omniscience

With regard to this reservation, the *Milinda Pañha* (Question of King Milinda) records an episode about King Milinda inquiring about the Buddha's omniscience. Venerable Nāgasena replied: "[T]he knowledge of the Blessed One…is dependent upon reflection, and it is on reflection that he knows whatever he wishes to know."[610] One can refer to the actual dialogue to understand how it explains the way the Buddha's brain/mind worked.[611]

The book *Introduction to the Science of Religion* by F. Max Muller explains that the Buddha himself appeals only to what we should call the inner light.[612] When the Buddha first preached the Four Noble Truths. He said, "Mendicants, for attainment of these previously unknown doctrines, the eye, the knowledge, the wisdom, the clear perception, the light were developed within me."[613] His earliest student called him omniscient. However, in later times, on several occasions, it was seen that:

> Buddha had but spoken the language of his age, and had shared the errors current among his contemporaries with regard to the earth and the movement of the heavenly bodies, an important concession in that was made by Buddhist theologians. They limited the word 'omniscient' applied to Buddha, to as "knowledge of the principal doctrines of his system and concerning these, but

[610] *The Questions of King Milinda*, 166.
[611] *The Questions of King Milinda*, 163–68.
[612] F. Max Muller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion: Four Lectures Delivered at the Royal Institution, Two Essays on False Analogies and the Philosophy of Mythology* (Oxford: Kessinger Publishing, 2006), 21.
[613] Muller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 21.

these only, they declared him to have been infallible."[614]

In addition, the book *Early Buddhism and the Bhagavad Gita* by Upadhyaya Kashi Nath makes reference to how the word "omniscient" was ambiguously[615] used and therefore, why the Buddha disclaims one and accepted another. The Buddha disclaims knowing that was perceived by him all times, such as while walking, sleeping and so forth. Further, Upadhyaya Kashi Nath says that early Buddhism defined the concept of omniscience with reservation.[616] In the book *Buddhist Philosophy*, David J. Kalupahana's analysis says that the development of the extrasensory perception is always looked upon as a causal occurrence.[617] Moreover, it was the realization of the limitations of all sources of knowledge that prompted the Buddha to deny the kind of omniscience that was claimed by others. Instead, the Buddha claimed the threefold knowledge.[618]

Dharmacari Naagapriya's article "Was the Buddha Omniscient"[619] makes reference to an account recorded in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, in which the Buddha went into retreat by himself. During this period, a number of bhikkhus committed suicide. When the Buddha came out at the end of his retreat, he saw there were fewer monks than before; the Buddha asked Ānanda why there were fewer monks, and Ānanda told him what happened. From this account, it is obvious that the Buddha was not omniscient. He was unaware of what had happened to the Saṇgha. Hence, the claim made by his disciple that the Buddha's omniscience is based only on reflection might have some basis.

Further, some suttas show that there are times that the Buddha remained silent to

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[614] Muller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 21.
[615] Upadhyaya, *Early Buddhism and the Bhagavadgita.*, 274.
[616] Upadhyaya, *Early Buddhism and the Bhagavadgita.*, 276.
[617] David J. Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1976), 19.
[618] Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis*, 19.
[619] Dharmacari, "Was the Buddha Omniscient?"

some questions.[620] Is it because the Buddha did not know the answer to these metaphysical questions, or he did know but just ignored them? The Buddha indirectly said it was a question to be set aside because it was not conducive to the cessation of stress, and allegedly, whatever way you answer the question, it will lead to suffering and stress.[621]

In line with omniscience with reservation, in his article "Some Aspects of the Concept of Omniscience (Sarvajñatā) in Buddhism," Ker suggests, "an omniscient Buddha, it is not meant that he knows everything expressible but only so far as he knows the *Dharma* and *adharma* etc….The Buddha is omniscient as he ably guides about the means leading to *Svarga* and *mokṣa*. His omniscience with regard to the rest of the thing is secondary…" [622]

Anālayo, in his work "The Buddha and Omniscience" not only looks at the Pāli version of the *Kaṇṇakatthala Sutta* but also investigates the Chinese version of it as well. "[Accordingly,] to which the Buddha pointed out that it is impossible to have omniscient knowledge 'at once,' … a proposition which, according to the commentarial gloss, refers to knowing all simultaneously by a single act of mental adverting."[623] In addition, Anālayo argues that the Buddha does not make a claim of any other type of omniscience at all. Because if the Buddha does, "[One] would expect to find this ability mentioned elsewhere in the discourses. Yet, the early discourses do not refer to such a type of omniscience when listing the ten powers or the four intrepidities of a Tathāgata, nor does

[620] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 590–94; Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1393–94. Note: this suttas has been discussed in detail in Chapter 2.
[621] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 590–94.
[622] Kher, "Some Aspects of the Concept of Omniscience (Sarvajñatā) in Buddhism," 180.
[623] Anālayo, "The Buddha and Omniscience," 6.

any form of omniscience occur in a listing of altogether hundred epithets of the Buddha given in the Upāli Sutta and its Sanskrit and Chinese parallels."[624]

According to Pandey, "The text Kevaddha-Sutta shows that the Buddha is able to answer the question which was unanswerable for Brahmā, but we cannot draw the conclusion that the Buddha is omniscient because, unlike Brahmā, he was able to answer the question. The Buddha does not claim to be omniscient while answering the question. We have already seen that in the early Pāli Nikāyas the Buddha is claimed to have some supernatural power to know some supersensuous things, but is not acclaimed omniscient." [625] Pandey further emphasized, "[T]he Kevaḍḍha-Sutta maintains that Buddha has three-fold knowledge, but it does not establish his omniscience."[626]

Another scholar who examines the nature of the Buddha's omniscience is Padmanabh S. Jaini. He concludes that it is not possible for any human to have complete knowledge of all objects in the universe viewing one by one each time, not to mention knowing them all simultaneously. Even for the Buddha with his meditation power, it is still doubtful that he could have exhausted infinite objects.[627] Jaini puts forth the following theory and reasons to support his view. Jaini says, "[T]here are those who say that the Buddhas are called *sabba-vidū* because their cognition always exists having only the present characteristics [birth, decay, death] of all the knowables as its object, and is free from all imaginations."[628] However, there is still fault in this view. The reason being "having present characteristics (*ṭhita-lakkhaṇas*) as the focus of one's knowledge must exclude the past and future dhammas as well as the nominal dhammas, all of which are

[624] Anālayo, "The Buddha and Omniscience," 7.
[625] Pandey, "The Buddhist Conception of Omniscience," 56–57.
[626] Pandey, "The Buddhist Conception of Omniscience," 56–57.
[627] Jaini, *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies*, 111.
[628] Jaini, *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies*, 114.

devoid of those characteristics. Consequently the Lord's knowledge will only have a portion of the knowables as its objects, and it therefore cannot be said that the knowledge of the Buddha cognizes all objects at once."[629]

If one were to say, that the Buddha "perceives all objects in individual succession" it is still not right. [630] After all, one would argue, "The knowables divided by genes, nature, place and time etc., are infinite; hence there is no possibility of knowing them all one by one."[631] One might say, then the Buddha is partially omniscient since "he knows a portion of the knowables by direct perception."[632] This view too, according to Jaini, is incorrect. Why? "Because in the absence of direct perception of all, it is not possible to establish [consistency] with that portion which has not been directly perceived."[633]

Here we see a whole list of speculation, theories, conjecture, and reasons. According to the Buddha and the path of Buddhism, it is all irrelevant. First, the Buddha's range of knowledge cannot be accessed by the human mind (unenlightened person).[634] Second, all of these conjectures do not help to liberate the mind, but instead causes more entanglement.

In as far as many of the above scholars, when investigating whether the Buddha was omniscient, they only look at the Buddha's answer at the plain surface. Some take what the Buddha said, in and of itself, and stop there. Of course, they achieve the purpose of what they had set out to attain—to make clear the nature of the Buddha's omniscience.

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[629] Jaini, *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies*, 114.
[630] Jaini, *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies*, 115.
[631] Jaini, *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies*, 115.
[632] Jaini, *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies*, 115.
[633] Jaini, *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies*, 115.
[634] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 364.

However, I wanted to do some further interpretation as to why the Buddha answered in that way. In the context of pedagogy, only by looking into what the Buddha said and did not say and why can we possibly understand more deeply why the Buddha did so.

As mentioned above, many scholars have insisted that the Buddha rejected the concept of omniscience of all knowing at all times and places while accepting the threefold knowledge. What is the intention behind the Buddha's action? We can interpret that he disclaims omniscience because the word itself was misunderstood, misrepresented by others, or partly due to intended motives with a metaphysical ideology—knowledge beyond the sphere of experience. Thus, claiming the "three knowledges" is more in line with his purpose and framework of teaching. This is because the knowledge of many previous lives, the knowledge of beings reincarnating according to their karma and the knowledge of ending defilements is meticulously linked to the Four Noble Truths. How so?

Through close reading of the "threefold knowledges" one can see that it closely associates with the Four Noble Truths in the following ways. The first knowledge—the knowledge of many previous lives—can be identified with the First Noble Truth of *dukkha*. That is by having this discernment, one would realize this is suffering: birth, old age, sickness and death. The second knowledge—the knowledge of beings reincarnating (reborn) according to their karma—can be linked with the Second Noble Truth. This awareness enables one to penetrate the origin of suffering. Due to greed, hatred, and ignorance, one creates karma that leads to becoming. The third knowledge, the knowledge of ending *āsava*s (defilements, cankers, and fetters) can be associated with the Third and Fourth Noble Truths, the cessation of *dukkha* (from renunciation of greed,

hatred and ignorance), and the way to end *dukkha* through the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path. This is the knowledge that the Buddha claimed to have penetrated and discerned under the Bodhi tree on the night of his awakening.[635]

Final Remarks

As the above investigation has shown, the Indian term *sabbaññu* (Skr. *sarvajña*) means all-knowledge and this knowledge is present all the time and simultaneously. This knowledge is attributed to gods or those who have attained *mokṣa* (liberation). The Jains called this knowledge *kevala-jñāna.*

There are early Buddhist suttas that present the Buddha as possessing vast knowledge, even greater than that of Brahmā. On the other hand, there are also suttas depicting the Buddha as not *sarvajña* (he neither knows who his disciples are nor what happened to some of them). There are discourses that illustrate that the Buddha did rebuke the claim of omniscience—all-knowledge at all times. Nevertheless, the Buddha neither claimed omniscience nor totally rejected it. The Buddha never disowned omniscience in regards to the dhammas that lead to salvation or knowledge of the experiential phenomenal world.

On the other hand, the way the Buddha dealt with this subject of omniscience was profoundly interesting, and very categorical and pedagogical. When asked of omniscience all the time at once, he said "it is misrepresentative of him." At the same time, he claimed the three-knowledges (past lives, rebirth, and annihilation of taints) that are conducive to enlightenment. In other words, the Buddha showed reservations in his answer. Why? As have discussed earlier in the chapter, these knowledges are useful for

[635] John Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism: Sources and Interpretations* (Thomson/Wadsworth, 2007), 22–23.

the path leading to salvation, and other knowledges are irrelevant. Thus, speculation and philosophizing on these other knowledges is not helpful at all.

In sum, the word omniscience was ambiguously used during the Buddha's time. The Buddha claimed omniscience in regards to the insight knowledge of the Four Noble Truths, impermanence, no self, and the threefold knowledge.[636] Some of his disciples used the term in referring to what the Buddha could do while he was in meditation.[637] With regard to both of these accounts, some scholars have agreed upon and accepted that omniscience is used with reservation in early Buddhism. With this in mind, the Buddha carefully limited the types of questions to only those that pertained to the teachings, and set aside the others as irrelevant. In other words, the Buddha should not be taken as the one who knows "everything," but rather the one that knows "everything that is important and relevant to liberation." In addition, when the Budddha is referred to as being aware of all things, it should be taken to mean an awareness of everything leading to the attainment of awakening.,[638] This definition points at the sole purpose of Buddhism which is to extinguish suffering and attain enlightenment. Therefore, the Buddha's omniscience should be regarded in respect to his understanding of the Dhamma and such teachings conducive for one to reach *nibbāna*.[639]

[636] Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, 137.
[637] Rhys Davids, *The Questions of King Milinda,* 154.
[638] Paul J. Griffiths, *On Being Buddha: The Classical Doctrine of Buddhahood* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 170.
[639] For details see Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1858, section on the Siṃsapā Sutta (SN 56.31).

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Conclusion

Introduction

Thus far, we have seen all four methods of answering of the Buddha: silence, cross-questioning, analytical, and categorical. One would say that the four different modes lead to one end and purpose: to help the interlocutor(s) end their suffering (confusion, bewilderment, entanglement) and provide insight or discernment that would help them on the path leading to *nibbāna*. However, for each mode that is being used, it has its own purpose and intention. This can be seen in different cases (Vacchagotta, Mālunkyāputta, Prince Abhaya, Rāhula, the Kālāmas, King Pasenadi) with regard to the specific issue(s) put forth.

This last chapter consists of three sections: The first will be a summary of what has been discussed in four main chapters (2-5). Second, I will discuss the finding of the four methods of the Buddha answering questions with specific attention to the three questions: a) What are the main features of these four types of responses? Can any patterns be seen in these fourfold methods? b) What is the connection between the way the Buddha answers questions and meditation? c) Can we see the ways the Buddha answers questions as pedagogy? If so, how? All of the above will be considered in relation to the objective/goal/ spirit (or Geist) behind the mode used and the intention of the Buddha. It is to be seen as pedagogical strategies of the Buddha, which are employed to guide the interlocutor(s) to eliminate suffering and lead them to total freedom—*nibbāna*. Finally, I will offer comments and suggestions for further/future study.

Recapitulation of Chapters

This section provides a brief review of the four main chapters: two, three, four, and five.

Chapter 2 — "The Silence of the Buddha." The act of silence is considered as pedagogical. This chapter shows that the Buddha stayed reticent regarding some issues put forth by the wander Vacchagotta (such as self, not-self, the world is finite or infinite). There are many views being discussed. Some scholars suggest that these topics are unanswerable, and that therefore, he remained silent. Some say the answer to these questions are beyond human reach—ineffable, mystical. Some insist these questions might be answerable, but because the answer is irrelevant and not conducive at all to the practical path leading to salvation, the Buddha rather responded with silence. However, other suttas show that the Buddha did answer these issues. Because of this, I insist there are other intentions behind this act of silence. The response takes into consideration the interlocutors' capacities of discernment, psychology, as well as time and place. In short, silence is a method of guidance and pedagogical; this can be seen in SN 44.10, in which the Buddha remains reticent and MN 72, in which the Buddha slowly guides Vacchagotta to awakening.

Chapter 3 — "The Uniqueness of the Cross-Questioning Method of the Buddha." This chapter examines the Buddha's style of cross-questioning (cross-examination). It argues that the method of the Buddha is unique because it is not used to destroy the reputation or to put the inquirer(s) down, but rather to clear the state of mind of the interlocutor(s). This can be seen in MN 63, in Mālunkyāputta's case, and in the example of Prince Abhaya in MN 58. Besides, this method (self-cross-examination) would be

considered as a method of meditation, namely, reflective thinking. This can be discovered in MN 61, the discourse on reflection to Rahula. The main intention behind this method is for the interlocutor(s) to discover the answer or insight by themselves through the guidance of the Buddha's cross-questioning or by following the method of cross-examining oneself (reflection) recommended by the Buddha.

Chapter 4 — "The Way the Buddha Analytically Answers the Question of the Kālāmas." This chapter discusses a well-known sutta, AN 3.56. The discourse shows a situation in which the Kālāmas has been confused by the different teachings (from the brahmins and ascetics). They approached the Buddha and asked him to help solve the problem of who speaks truth and who speaks falsehood. The Buddha gave them advice by saying do not go upon the ten knowledges: "repeated hearing …tradition …rumor …scripture …surmise … axiom …specious reasoning …bias towards a notion pondered over … another's seeming ability …the consideration 'The monk is our teacher,'"[640] if they lead to suffering and harm. On the other hand, the Buddha advised that they only abide by them if they are helpful and lead to happiness. However, with regard to these ten criteria, it has been picked up and discussed by many scholars. One group suggests that it is a statement of rejecting tradition, scripture and authority. Another group argues it is not about the negation of these criteria, but rather an admonition to be critical of them. In this chapter I argue that the Buddha listed the ten criteria of "not to go upon" as a skillful means to ease the mind of the confused Kālāmas. I further looked deep into the discourse where the corpus of the sutta *analytically* talks of moral and ethical aspects. This, I suggested as the way the Buddha had the Kālāmas realize what is right and wrong and to

[640] Bhikkhu Bodhi, "A Look at the Kalama Sutta," 1.

accept authority with right discernment. The discourse ends with the Kālāmas taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Chapter 5 — "The Categorical Answer to the Question: Was the Buddha *Sabbaññu* (Omniscient)?" This chapter discusses the concept of omniscience. This section show that omniscience is being used in a different sense and with reservation. The chapter provides an overview of the Vedas, Upaniṣads, and Jainism to view how this term was used. It also examines what the Buddha said in regard to omniscience. For what is suggested in the Vedas is that only the synonym of the word "all-knowledge" (Snkrt. *sarvajña)* is used, and it refers to the gods such as Agni, Indra, and Soma.[641] In the Upaniṣads, all-knowledge is dedicated to Brahman/Ātman, the universal self. *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (IV 5.6) states, "When the Self has been… known, then all… is known."[642] Nevertheless, for Jainism, all-knowledge is realizable for humans. "When a person attained perfect knowledge (*kevala jñāna*), he is called an omniscient"[643] and omniscience to the Jains means simultaneous all-knowing. This is achieved through the removal of all karma (bondage) from the *jiva* (soul).

Nevertheless, when discussing omniscience in early Buddhism and exploring the Nikāyas specifically, there are two groups of scholars. One group insists the Buddha is all-knowing and the other does not. Looking at two early suttas, MN 71 and MN 90, in which Vacchagotta as well as King Pasenadi inquires of the Buddha's omniscience, it is shown that the Buddha *categorically* states that it is not possible to claim omniscience of all things at once. Instead, he claims only the three-sciences: knowledge of countless past

[641] Pandey, "The Buddhist Conception of Omniscience," 20–2.
[642] "The Upanishads, Part 2 (SBE15): Brihadāranyaka Upanishad: IV, 5."
[643] Shashi, *Encyclopaedia Indica,* 154.

lives, knowledge of beings been reborn, and the knowledge ending defilements. In simple terms, it is to says all-knowledge of everything at the same time is not possible.

Findings:

Main Features and Pattern

There is a similar pattern that can be found in the four methods. The structure from its beginning to the end can be divided into four phases/steps, and these four phases is in accord with that of the Four Noble Truths. The first phase starts with "pointing out," that is showing what is the problem or issue of concern (the suffering). "If it was in reference to an individual, the Buddha would explain that person's present situation. If it concerned an event, thing, or phenomenon, the Buddha would explain the problem as it existed."[644]

The second phase includes a form of "puzzlement," in which what the Buddha says makes the interlocutor(s) feel confused since it is against or opposite to what they had learned previously. This can be seen in the case of Vacchagotta, Prince Abhaya, the Kālāmas, and King Pasenadi. This phase is correlated to that of learning the origin of suffering.

For example, in MN 72 when Vacchagotta comes back and asks a list of ten questions ("How is it, Master Gotama, does Master Gotama hold the view: 'The world is eternal…The world is not eternal…The world is finite…The world is infinite…The soul and the body are the same…The soul is one thing and the body another…"[645]), the Buddha answers "no" to all ten. Another example is when Prince Abhaya asks the

[644] David J. Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy: Continuities and Discontinuities* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), 65–66.
[645] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 590–94.

Buddha, "Venerable sir, would a Tathāgata utter such speech as would be unwelcome and disagreeable to others?" and the Buddha responds: "There is no one-sided answer to that, prince."[646] The puzzlement can also be seen in the situation of the Kālāmas (AN 3.65), who seek the Buddha asking him to tell who (the ascetics and brahmins, highly respected men in the society) speaks the truth and who speaks falsely. The Buddha answers: "Come, Kālāmās, do not go by tradition, not by lineage, not by hearsay, not by collections of scriptures, not by logical reasoning, not by inferential reasoning, not by appearance of consideration, not by perception resulting from sense organ's theory, not by the appearance of capability, and indeed not because the ascetic is our teacher." Note: This passage is oft-quoted by many scholars as a rejection of tradition and authority. Similarly, there is the case of King Pasenadi in MN 90, in which the king approaches the Buddha to ask about omniscience: "Venerable sir, I have heard this: 'The recluse Gotama says: "There is no recluse or brahmin who is omniscient and all-seeing, who can claim to have complete knowledge and vision; that is not possible….'" And the Buddha responds with: "Great King, those who speak thus do not say what has been said by me, but misrepresent me with what is untrue and contrary to fact," and "I recall having actually made the utterance in this way, great king: 'There is no recluse or brahmin who knows all, who sees all, simultaneously; that is not possible.'"[647]

In sum, all of the cases presented above show that information given from the Buddha created puzzlement or a sense of initial disconnect in the interlocutors' minds because it went against the teachings of other religious teachers and the knowledge of the interlocutor(s).

[646] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 499.
[647] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 735.

Phase three presents a stage of pacification, in which the Buddha clears all doubt or bewilderment of the interlocutor(s). It is generally done through explaining in detail analytically, or by cross-questioning regarding the issues of concern. This can be correlated to that of the third noble truth—the cessation of suffering.

Phase four shows that the hearer/interlocutor(s) are appeased, happy, and satisfied with the answers of Buddha and often takes refuge in him. In other words, they take refuge in his teachings—which is similar to that of taking on the fourth noble truth—the path of practice leading one to emancipation, freedom, *nibbāna*.

Many interlocutors approached the Buddha and asked various questions. However, it all can be reduced to "seeking knowledge." One main feature to highlight in the Buddha's answering styles to provide knowledge is the use of analogies. The Buddha often employed analogies to guide his inquirer(s). Further, the examples that he used were closely associated with the interlocutor(s). It could be the skill or knowledge that the interlocutor(s) had mastered or their profession. Another feature to consider is right view. Although the Buddha's method does not literally speak of right discernment, it does ask his interlocutor to have right view; it indicates how one should ask questions, i.e., Vacchagotta's case (MN 72), or the episode showing Rāhula how to reflect (MN 61). In other words, all of this is tending to one goal: discerning knowledge and insight to end suffering—and further lead to *nibbāna*.

The Answering Mode and Meditation

In terms of meditation, the investigation shows that not all four modes the Buddha used to answer questions can be utilized as a method of meditation. However, every style

does encourage mindfulness in regards to one's action, speech and thinking. It encourages one to be aware of how one thinks, speaks and acts.

There is one method that could be considered as meditation— cross-examination (particularly, self-cross-examination). This method shows that meditation is not just about the focusing of the mind, but rather includes deep thinking and reflection on phenomena that would lead one to realize the nature of things. The Buddha teaches that karma derives from the three factors: mental, speech and bodily actions. Therefore, meditation should also focus on these three. Although the mind is the forerunner of everything (prior to the other two elements, body and speech), these two elements also affect the mind. Take as an example, the six senses. With regard to the sixth sense, the mind controls and influences the other five senses (eye, nose, ear, mouth, and body). Likewise, the opposite process also happens: these five senses also influence and exert some control over the sixth sense.

This is well highlighted in MN 61, in which the Buddha teaches Rāhula: "What is the purpose of a mirror?" Rāhula answers: "to reflect." The Buddha then teaches with regard to reflection that one should deeply contemplate on three aspects: mental, verbal and bodily actions. Continuing to do so from the visible to a more refined and subtle level, one should reflect on the nature of things: is this suffering…is this the origin of suffering…is this the way to end suffering. As the sutta MN 61 presents, before, during and after a bodily action, one should reflect, does "'This action … lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it is an unwholesome bodily action with painful consequences, with painful results.'"[648] If it does, then one should not do it. Contrarily, when one reflects upon an action, and it "'…does not lead to

[648] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 524–25.

[one] own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it was a wholesome bodily action with pleasant consequences, pleasant results,' [one] can abide happy and glad, training day and night in wholesome states."[649] This process of reflection is to be repeated for the actions of speech and mind as well. It is recommended by the Buddha to continuously practice until one realizes *nibbāna*.

Pedagogy

Pedagogical is found throughout the four methods. In each mode of responding, the Buddha guides his interlocutor(s) to a better state of understanding or discernment. In the mode of silence, the Buddha slowly steers Vacchagotta to the right path with consideration of time, psychology, and the inquirer's level of discernment. In the method of cross-questioning, the Buddha counter-questions his inquirers to clear up their misunderstanding and confusion. Not only that, the Buddha also provides a detailed exercise for the interlocutor to cross-examine him or herself in the practice leading to release, emancipation—that is, to *nibbāna*.

Regarding the analytical mode, the Buddha guides the Kālāmas out of their bewilderment regarding which teaching is true and which is false. He lists the ten commonly accepted knowledges and asks the Kālāmas to critically look at them. He then analytically guides the Kālāmas to moral and ethical values. Regarding the categorical method, the Buddha responds that it is a misrepresentation to view him as having omniscience—all-knowledge and knowing simultaneously. Instead, he teaches the interlocutors, King Pasenadi (MN 90) and Vacchagotta (MN 71), that he has full insight

[649] Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 525.

of three knowledges: countless past lives, beings' rebirth in regard to their karma, and the knowledge of ending taints.

In summary, as research has shown throughout the project, the interlocutors' minds seem to be confused and bewildered when they approach the Buddha. However, their nature of bewilderment is different in each story because their topic of concern is different. Having noticed this, the Buddha exercises different methods of answering/responding for different audiences (inquirers) and their issues. He provides the right knowledge to ease, calm, and clear their minds and steer their minds to the correct path. The interlocutors seem to be pleased and satisfied with the answers that the Buddha gives. Moreover, as the present project discusses, some interlocutors (Vacchagotta, Prince Abhaya, and the Kālāmas) even take refuge in the Buddha.

Suggestions for Further Study

As we have seen, this project, "Text and Context: A Hermeneutical Study of the Ways the Buddha Answers Questions," is limited to the Pāli Sutta Nikāyas—specifically, to selected suttas. Therefore, the scope of research can still be opened up more broadly for future studies. This could include a full exploration of the Pāli Tripitaka (sutta, vinaya, and abhidhamma), and to examines commentaries done on these areasas well. However, it would demand a great length of time.

Alternatively, each method of the Buddha's answers (silence, categorical, analytical, and categorical) could produce individual projects, looking at each at greater depth. For example, future researchers could investigate the cross-examining (*paṭipucchā*) method in terms of meditation in and of itself, to see if there is any

connection to another form of meditation such as *Satipaṭṭhāna* (mindfulness of the breath).

Opening up to the field of comparative studies, some of these methods could be compared to aspects in another religion. One could do an investigation of the Buddha's silence and the meaning of silence in Christianity, or carry out a comparative study between the cross-questioning method of the Buddha and the Socratic form of cross-examination. More broadly, one can take the questions that the Buddha sets aside and explore them in fuller depth. For example, the question is whether the *jīva* and body are identical or not. The connection between *jīva* ("soul" or "vital principal") and body is a subject to be discuss worldwide. One can examine this by consulting three or four external sources (the Greek philosophers, ancient Egypt [Pyramid Texts and New Kingdom documents], the Hebrew Scriptures), and the Vedic [also Vedānta and Sāṃkhya Darśanas] and Śrāmaṇical traditions to review their various approaches to the body and the "spirit").

In the field of education, one could suggest studies including how these answering styles of the Buddha could be implemented at schools for teachers to use to help teach and increase the efficiency of the learning of students.

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APPENDIX

The Four Categories: Put Aside, Cross-Questioning, Analytical, Categorical

1. Example of Suttas with Questions the Buddha Put Aside (*Ṭhapanīya*)

AN 4.77: *Inconceivable Matters* — This sutta presents that there are four inconceivable matters: the domain of the Buddhas, the domain of one in jhāna, the result of kamma, and speculation about the world/cosmos.

AN 7.54: *Undeclared Sutta* — Here, the Buddha explains why he did not answer the ten questions.

AN 10.95: *Uttiya Sutta* — Here, the wanderer Uttiya asks questions regarding the cosmos as eternal or not eternal.

AN 10.96: *Kokanada Sutta* — Here, the wanderer Kokanada inquires venerable Ananda about the 10 undeclared questions. Venerable Ananda explains that these are views subject to perspective or standpoint.

AN 10.93: *Views Sutta* — With regard to views: "Whatever has come into being and is conditioned, a product of volition, dependently originated, is impermanent. Whatever is impermanent is suffering. Whatever is suffering is not mine; I am not this; this is not my self."[650]

SN 44.1: *Khema Sutta* — Here, Bhikhuni Khema explains to King Pasenadi why questions regarding the Tathāgata after death are unanswerable.

SN 44.2: *Anuradha Sutta* — Here, Venerable Anuradha comes to comprehend that if one cannot locate the Tathāgata in the present life, how can one answer questions about where he goes after death?

SN 44.3: *Sariputta-Kotthita Sutta* — This discourse explains that the Buddha takes no stand on questions regarding the Tathāgata after death because such questions are germinated from the five aggregates.

SN 44.4: *Sariputta-Kotthita Sutta* — Here, the discourse insists that questions about the nature of the Tathāgata do not arise in those who see the aggregates as they actually are.

SN 44.5: *Sariputta-Kotthita Sutta* — This discourse presents that questions about the nature of the Tathāgata do not arise in those that are rid of desire regard the five aggregates.

[650] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, 1466.

SN 44.6: *Sariputta-Kotthita Sutta* — This discourse presents that questions about the nature of the Tathāgata do not arise in those that no longer cling to the five aggregates (craving or delight).

SN 44.7: *Moggallana Sutta* — The discourse explains that the Buddha takes no position on the ten speculative views because he sees that the six senses are not self.

SN 44.8: *Vacchagotta Sutta* — This discourse presents that the Buddha takes no stand on the ten speculative views because he does not identify with any of the five aggregates as self.

SN 44.9: *Kutuhalasala Sutta* — In this discourse, the Buddha uses the image of a fire to explain what carries a being over into the next rebirth.

SN 44.10: *Ananda Sutta* — In this discourse, the Buddha explains to Ananda why one does not give answers to the questions of self and no-self.

SN 44.11: *Sabhiya Sutta* — This discourse explains that the nature of the Tathāgata cannot be described in conditional terms because the Tathāgata has transcended them.

SN 12.47: *Jāṅussoṅi Sutta* and SN 12.48: *The Cosmologist Sutta* — These two suttas show two men asking the Buddha cosmological/metaphysical questions: does all exist; does all not exist; is all a unity; is all a plurality. However, the Buddha only entertains the middle path regarding suffering and the cessation of suffering.

SN 23.2: *A Being Sutta* — In this discourse, Venerable Radha inquires the Buddha regarding the nature of a being (*satta*).

SN 35.116: *Going to the End of the World Sutta* — This discourse explains that the concept of cosmos is generated by the six senses.

SN 12.44: *The World Sutta* — This discourse explains that the six senses and their objects create the cosmos. Depending on conditions (dependently co-arisen) is the requisite for becoming and existence.

SN 41.3: *Isidatta Sutta* — This discourse explains that when there is self-identification, there being come to be:

> "As to the various views that arise in the world, householder, 'The world is eternal'… these as well as the sixty-two speculative views mentioned in the Brahmajāla: when there is [self-identity] view, these views come to be; when there is no [self-identity] view, these views do not come to be."

"But, venerable sir, how does identity view come to be?"

> "Here, householder, the uninstructed worldling, who … is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, … regards form as self, or self as possessing form, or form as in self, or self as form. He regards feeling as self …perception as self…volitional formations as self…consciousness as self, or self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in self, or self as in consciousness. It is in such a way that [self-identity] view comes to be."[651]

MN 72: *Aggivacchagotta Sutta* — This discourse presents a dialogue between the Buddha and the wanderer Vacchagotta on the ten undeclared questions.

MN 63: *Cūḷamāluṅkya Sutta* — Here, Mālunkyāputta, a disciple of the Buddha, inquires the Buddha on the matter of the ten undeclared questions.

SN 16.12: *After Death* — This discourse presents a dialogue between two great disciples of the Buddha. Mahākassapa gives an answer to Sāriputta on the nature of the Buddha after death.

DN 9: *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta* — A discussion with Poṭṭhapāda on the nature of the soul, in which the Buddha states the inquiry is irrelevant and not conducive to enlightenment.

2. Example of Suttas in which the Buddha Answers through Cross-Questioning (*Paṭipucchā*)

DN 2: *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* — The Buddha expounds to King Ajātasattu on the fruit of a contemplative/renunciant life.

MN 82: *Raṭṭhapāla Sutta* — Using the cross-questioning method, Venerable Raṭṭhapāla expounds to King Koravya on Four Dhamma Summaries: the world is inconstant, without a shelter/protector, without ownership, insatiable and the slave of desire.

MN 87: *Piyajātikā Sutta* — King Pasenadi questions Queen Mallikā on the statement made by the Buddha about pain and suffering arising from one who is dear. Queen Mallikā explains in the form of cross-questioning: if a dear one passes away, pain and suffering would arise in the mother or father, etc.

MN 58: *Abhayarājakumāra Sutta (Dialogue Between Prince Abhaya and the Buddha*) — The Buddha responds to the Prince's double-hooked questions with the analogy of a baby with a stick stuck in his throat due to ignorance.

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[651] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya; Translated from the Pāli ; Original Translation by Bhikkhu Bodhi*. (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 1317–18.

MN 61: *Ambalaṭṭhikarāhulovāda Sutta* — The Buddha teaches Rāhula the method of self-cross-examination to see if it is beneficial (wholesome) before acting on anything.

MN 63*: Cūḷamāluṅkya Sutta* — This discourse explains why the Buddha does not answer certain types of speculative questions with the analogy of a man being hit by a poison arrow.

MN 75: *Māgandiya Sutta* —The Buddha relates his renunciation of the life of the senses and speaks on the abandonment of sensual desires.

MN 90: *Kaṇṇakatthala Sutta* — A dialogue between the Buddha and Pasenadi on caste, the devas, and Brahma.

MN 93: *Assalāyana Sutta* — The brahmin Assalāyana discusses caste with the Buddha. An important presentation of the Buddha's teaching on this subject.

MN 95: *Caṅkī Sutta* — A discussion of conviction regarding ancient hymns of the brahmins.

MN 97: *Dhānañjāni Sutta* —Venerable Sāriputta explains to Dhanañjāni righteous action and unrighteous action.

MN 14: *Cūḷadukkhakkhandha Sutta* — A conversation between the Buddha and the Nigaṇṭhas with regard to who dwells in pleasure (happiness), the King Seniya Bimbisāra or the Buddha.

MN 56: *Upāli Sutta* —The conversion of Upāli the Jain. The Buddha uses cross-questioning to help Upāli, the householder, understand that he has wrong views regarding the karma of mental and bodily action.

MN 35: *Cūḷasaccaka Sutta* — The Buddha cross-questions the debater Saccaka, who claims the five skanhdas (form, feeling, perception, mental formation, and consciousness) as self.

AN 3.61: *Sectarian Sutta* — A discourse on the merits of one who has gone forth and achieved awakening.

AN 3.35: *Hatthaka Sutta* — A discourse to Hatthaka on sleeping at ease due to the destruction of passion, aversion, and delusion.

AN 4.195: *Vappa Sutta* — A discourse between the Buddha and Vappa, the Nigaṇṭhas disciple, on the result of restraining the body, speech and mind.

AN 6.20: *Mindfulness of Death Sutta* — The Buddha teaches the monks to constantly reflect on oneself day and night. One should abandon evil, unskillful qualities and train

oneself in skillful qualities day and night, dwelling in joy and rapture (self-cross-questioning method).

AN 6.55: *Soṇa Sutta* — The Buddha teaches Venerable Soṇa in the discourse of the tuning of the guitar: too tight or too loose will not make a good sound. Only when the guitar is rightly tuned will it produce delightful sounds. The same applies to the practice of the path.

AN 7.57: *Sīha Sutta* — The Buddha explains to General Sīha the six fruits of giving visible in the here and now.

AN 10.51: *One's Own Mind Sutta* — This discourse presents the Buddha teaching the monks to cross-examine oneself on how to be skillful in reading and understanding one's own mind.

SN 51.15: *The Brahmin Uṇṇabhā Sutta* — Discourse between Venerable Ānanda and the brahmin Uṇṇabhā about the holy life with the aim of abandoning desire.

3. Example of Suttas Presenting the Buddha Answering in Analytical (*Vibhajja*) Format

Note: "Of the four categories of questions, this is the one with the fewest examples in the discourses, and the examples all center on a common theme: a misunderstanding of skillful and unskillful action." [652]

DN 1 *Brahmajāla Sutta* — A discourse presenting detailed explanations of the 64 wrong views of the time.

DN 12: *Lohicca Sutta* — The discourse on wrong view pertaining to kamma: the wrong argument that each person has his or her individual kamma so cannot do anything for others.

MN 126: *Bhūmija Sutta* — This discourse contains an analysis of the misunderstanding that kamma is barren and the holy life bears no outcome.

SN 42.9: *Families Sutta* — This sutta discusses the assumption that families would suffer if they are encouraged to be generous during a famine.

MN 90: *Kaṇṇakatthala Sutta* — This sutta expounds that one's future course is determined by one's own ethical actions (good or evil) and not by one's social caste status.

MN 110: *Cūḷapuṇṇama Sutta* — A discourse on the features of a person with integrity and a person without integrity.

[652] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Skill in Questions: How the Buddha Taught*, 130.

MN 136: *Mahākammavibhaṅga Sutta* — The Buddha refutes those who deny the operations of *kamma*.

AN 3.65: *Kālāma Sutta* — The Buddha answers the Kālāmas' questions with the ethical principle.

AN 4.192: *Facts Sutta* — The discourse explains that one cannot understand another's virtue or wisdom by staying with him just for a short time; only through living with a person over a long period (observing his actions of mind, speech, and body) can one come to discern that person.

AN 4.193: *Bhaddiya Sutta* — In this sutta the Buddha tells Bhaddiya to not go by the ten traditional points and rather to take on things that are wholesome and abandon things that are unwholesome. This sutta is similar to the *Kālāma Sutta.*

4. Example of Suttas Presenting the Buddha Answering with the Categorical *(Ekaṁsa*) Method

The Buddha's categorical answers to questions can be grouped into areas: 1) the Four Noble Truths (*cattāri ariyasaccāni*), the main features including suffering, impermanence, not-self, and dependent co-arising, and 2) skillful (*kusalā*) and unskillful (*akusalā*) actions. Of the four methods, this style (categorical) is widely used by the Buddha in the Sutta Piṭaka. The following are some examples of suttas including this method:

DN 9: *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta* — In this discourse the Buddha states which teachings he taught and declared as non-categorical (the ten undeclared questions) and which as categorical (suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path to end suffering).

MN 2: *Sabbāsavā Sutta* — On the elimination of the cankers. Here, the Buddha explains that cankers on the view of self and no-self would lead to further becoming, birth and death—the mass of suffering. Only on the elimination of the cankers can one be liberated and released.

MN 18: *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* — The Buddha teaches about the six senses (eyes, ear, noise, tongue, body, and intellect), which upon contact with the six objects would produce six types of consciousness. The mass of proliferation would occur after that.

MN 22: *Alagaddūpama Sutta* — Here, The Buddha uses the analogy of the "raft" to teach that even clinging to the dhamma and not letting it go is wrong view. The Dhamma should be used for crossing over to the other shore, and once one is over to the other shore, one should let the Dhamma go.

MN 71: *Tevijjavacchagotta Sutta* — The wanderer Vacchagotta visits the Buddha inquiring about the nature of the Buddha's omniscience (*sabbaññu*). The Buddha explains that he possesses three kinds of knowledge: many previous lives, sentient beings reborn according to their kamma, and the knowledge of ending all defilements (*āsava*).

MN 90: *Kaṇṇakatthala Sutta* — King Pasenadi inquires the Buddha about the nature of claims of omniscience (all knowing at all times). The Buddha categorically says that is a false claim and instead only claims the threefold knowledge.

MN 117: *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* — The exposition of the Noble Eightfold Path (right view…right concentration); the teaching of right view without fermentations.

SN 45.8: *Analysis Sutta* — This discourse teaches right view with regards to the Four Noble Truths (suffering, its origin, cessation, and the practice to end suffering).

SN 12.15: *Kaccānagotta* — Venerable Kaccāna inquires the Buddha about right view.

SN 22.39: *In Accordance with the Dhamma Sutta* — The right way of practicing the Dhamma with regard to form, feeling, perception, mental formation, and consciousness.

SN 22.79: *Being Devoured Sutta* — This discourse explains the meaning of the five aggregates (form, feeling, perception, mental formation, and consciousness).

AN 2.18: *Disciplinary Issues* — Here, the Buddha expounds to Ānanda about the drawbacks of misconduct (*akusalā*) and the benefits of good conduct (*kusalā*).

AN 10.92: *Enmity Sutta* — This discourse explains the discernment of dependent co-arising: "When this is, that is. From the arising of this comes the arising of that. . . From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that."

AN 10.103: *The Wrong Course Sutta* — This discourse explains that wrong view, intention lead to wrong speech, action. . . mindfulness and concentration. Basically, wrong paths.

SN 22.155: *Identity View Sutta* — This discourse explains that when there is clinging to form…consciousness, identity view arises.

SN 22.156: *View of Self* — In this discourse, the Buddha explains that by clinging and adhering to form. . . feeling. . . perception. . . mental formations. . . consciousness, view of self arises.