



## Kālāma Sutta

AN: 3:65

### Introduction

All of the discourses delivered by the Gautama Buddha who lived and preached in India during the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, were grouped into five collections at the first Buddhist council that was held three months after the passing away of the Buddha in 483 BC.

1. Collection of long discourses (*digha nikaya*)
2. Collection of middle length discourses (*majjhima nikaya*)
3. Collection of connected discourses (*samyutta nikaya*)
4. Collection of numerical discourses (*anguttara nikaya*)
5. Collection of minor discourses (*khuddaka nikaya*)

Collection of numerical discourses (*anguttara nikaya*) contain the discourses in eleven groups (*nipatas*), grouped numerically from one to eleven, based on the number of facts discussed by the Buddha in each discourse. The discourse to the Kalamas (Kalama sutta) is included in the third group of the discourses in the Anguttara Nikaya (1).

Kalama sutta is one of the Buddha's discourses that has been popular among the Buddhist practitioners as well as Buddhist scholars. It is often cited as an example of the Buddha's discourses in which the Buddha encouraged the disciples to use free inquiry, when confronted with any new or divergent theories of spiritual practice. The Buddha was keen to discourage the disciples from accepting any teaching through dogmatism, one's own opinion or blind faith towards any teacher or scripture. Instead, the disciples were encouraged to put them into practice and judge their value based on the results of personal experience and advice from wise people. As the Kalama sutta was delivered by the Buddha in a place named Kesamutta, it is also known as the Kesamutti sutta in the Buddhist literature.

### Back ground to the Kalama sutta

While on a walking tour preaching to the people in the Kingdom of Kosala, the Buddha, accompanied by a large community of monks, arrived at a market town named Kesamutta. The inhabitants of Kesamutta known as the Kalamas, heard about the arrival of the Buddha in their town and that the Buddha had a great reputation as a wise teacher with the following qualities.

“Indeed, the Blessed One is thus consummate, fully enlightened, endowed with knowledge and practice, sublime, knower of the worlds, peerless guide of men to be tamed, teacher of divine and human beings, which he by himself has through direct knowledge understood clearly. He set forth the Dhamma, good in the beginning, good in the middle, good in the end, possessed of meaning and the letter, and complete in everything; and he proclaims the holy life that is perfectly pure” (2)

They decided that it will be good to visit the Buddha and many of them arrived at the place where the Buddha was staying. Having sat after paying homage and exchanging courteous greetings with the Buddha, they asked the following question from the Buddha.

## Lesson -03 The Buddha's Charter of Free Inquiry

### The question from the Kalamas

“There are some contemplatives and brahmins, Venerable Sir, who visit Kesamutta. They expound and explain only their own doctrines, the doctrines of others they despise, revile, and pull to pieces. Some other contemplatives and brahmins too, Venerable Sir, come to Kesamutta. They also expound and explain only their own doctrines, the doctrines of others they despise, revile, and pull to pieces. Venerable Sir, there is doubt, there is uncertainty in us concerning them, which of these reverend contemplatives and brahmins are speaking the truth and which are telling lies?”

### The response from the Buddha

Having stated that it was right for them to feel uncertain and doubtful about the doctrines expounded by various religious teachers, the Buddha presented them with a list of criteria against which they should decide whether a particular doctrine is acceptable or not.

1. Do not accept based on reports that one hears repeatedly (*anussava*)
2. Do not accept just because it has become the traditional practice (*paramparaya*)
3. Do not accept things one hears through rumours or unconfirmed reports (*itikiraya*)
4. Do not accept just because it is cited in a text or the scriptures (*pitaka sampadana*)
5. Do not accept based just on logical reasoning (*takkahetu*)
6. Do not accept just by coming to a conclusion through logical deduction (*nayahetu*)
7. Do not accept just through pondering, superficial thinking or common sense (*akaraparivitakkena*)
8. Do not accept just because after consideration, what another person stated agrees with one's preconceived opinions (*ditthinijjhanakkhantiya*)
9. Do not accept just because the preacher appears to be acceptable and competent (*bhabbarupataya*)
10. Do not accept just because something is stated by one's admired and respected teacher (*samano no garu ti*)

Having presented the ten criteria, the Buddha instructed the Kalamas that,

“When you know for yourselves that, these qualities are unskillful, these qualities are blamable, these qualities are censured by the wise, these qualities, when adopted and observed, will lead to harm and to suffering, then you should abandon them”

Then the Buddha continues to preach to the Kalamas by questioning them about the ill effects of the three unwholesome roots of greed (*lobha*), ill-will (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*).