AN 3.67 — Kathavatthu Sutta: Topics for Discussion

English translation by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

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Changes: Presentation only: original HTML markup reflowed into plain text; wording, numbering and source repetitions retained. No repetitions expanded.

Completeness: ABBREVIATED. Every source-unit character is preserved, including introductions, notes and verse structure. Thanissaro's collection-level note explicitly states that repetitions were cut: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/about.html. This is evidence about the translation method, not an assertion that every individual unit contains an omission; no repetitions reconstructed.

Text

"Monks, there are these three topics for discussion. Which three?

"One may talk about the past, saying, 'Thus it was in the past.' One may talk about the future, saying, 'Thus it will be in the future.' Or one may talk about now in the present, saying, 'Thus it is now in the present.'

"Monks, it's through his way of participating in a discussion that a person can be known as fit to talk with or unfit to talk with. If a person, when asked a question, doesn't give a categorical answer to a question deserving a categorical answer, doesn't give an analytical (qualified) answer to a question deserving an analytical answer, doesn't give a counter-question to a question deserving a counter-question, doesn't put aside a question deserving to be put aside, then — that being the case — he is a person unfit to talk with. But if a person, when asked a question, gives a categorical answer to a question deserving a categorical answer, gives an analytical answer to a question deserving an analytical answer, gives a counter-question to a question deserving a counter-question, and puts aside a question deserving to be put aside, then — that being the case — he is a person fit to talk with.

"Monks, it's through his way of participating in a discussion that a person can be known as fit to talk with or unfit to talk with. If a person, when asked a question, doesn't stand by what is possible and impossible, doesn't stand by agreed-upon assumptions, doesn't stand by teachings known to be true,[1] doesn't stand by standard procedure, then — that being the case — he is a person unfit to talk with. But if a person, when asked a question, stands by what is possible and impossible, stands by agreed-upon assumptions, stands by teachings known to be true, stands by standard procedure, then — that being the case — he is a person fit to talk with.

"Monks, it's through his way of participating in a discussion that a person can be known as fit to talk with or unfit to talk with. If a person, when asked a question, wanders from one thing to another, pulls the discussion off the topic, shows anger & aversion and sulks, then — that being the case — he is a person unfit to talk with. But if a person, when asked a question, doesn't wander from one thing to another, doesn't pull the discussion off the topic, doesn't show anger or aversion or sulk, then — that being the case — he is a person fit to talk with.

"Monks, it's through his way of participating in a discussion that a person can be known as fit to talk with or unfit to talk with. If a person, when asked a question, puts down [the questioner], crushes him, ridicules him, grasps at his little mistakes, then — that being the case — he is a person unfit to talk with. But if a person, when asked a question, doesn't put down [the questioner], doesn't crush him, doesn't ridicule him, doesn't grasp at his little mistakes, then — that being the case — he is a person fit to talk with.

"Monks, it's through his way of participating in a discussion that a person can be known as drawing near or not drawing near. One who lends ear draws near; one who doesn't lend ear doesn't draw near. Drawing near, one clearly knows one quality, comprehends one quality, abandons one quality, and realizes one quality.[2] Clearly knowing one quality, comprehending one quality, abandoning one quality, and realizing one quality, one touches right release. For that's the purpose of discussion, that's the purpose of counsel, that's the purpose of drawing near, that's the purpose of lending ear: i.e., the liberation of the mind through no clinging.

Those who discuss when angered, dogmatic, arrogant, following what's not the noble ones' way, seeking to expose each other's faults, delight in each other's misspoken word, slip, stumble, defeat. Noble ones don't speak in that way. If wise people, knowing the right time, want to speak, then, words connected with justice, following the ways of the noble ones: That's what the enlightened ones speak, without anger or arrogance, with a mind not boiling over, without vehemence, without spite. Without envy they speak from right knowledge. They would delight in what's well-said and not disparage what's not. They don't study to find fault, don't grasp at little mistakes. don't put down, don't crush, don't speak random words. For the purpose of knowledge, for the purpose of [inspiring] clear confidence, counsel that's true: That's how noble ones give counsel, That's the noble ones' counsel. Knowing this, the wise should give counsel without arrogance."

Notes

1.

Reading aññaatavaada with the Burmese edition. An alternate translation would be, "the teachings of those who know."

2.

According to the Commentary, these qualities are, respectively, the noble truth of the path, the noble truth of stress, the noble truth of the origination of stress, and the noble truth of the cessation of stress.

See also: AN 4.42; AN 5.165; Sn 4.8