AN 3.67 — Topics of Discussion

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Text

Numbered Discourses 3.67

7. The Great Chapter

Topics of Discussion

“There are, mendicants, these three topics of discussion. What three? You might discuss the past: ‘That is how it was in the past.’ You might discuss the future: ‘That is how it will be in the future.’ Or you might discuss the present: ‘This is how it is at present.’

You can know whether or not an individual is competent to hold a discussion by seeing how they take part in a discussion. When an individual is asked a question, if it needs to be answered categorically and they don’t answer it categorically; or if it needs analysis and they answer without analyzing it; or if it needs a counter-question and they answer without a counter-question; or if it should be set aside and they don’t set it aside, then that individual is not competent to hold a discussion. When an individual is asked a question, if it needs to be answered categorically and they answer it categorically; or if it needs analysis and they answer after analyzing it; or if it needs a counter-question and they answer with a counter-question; or if it should be set aside and they set it aside, then that individual is competent to hold a discussion.

You can know whether or not an individual is competent to hold a discussion by seeing how they take part in a discussion. When an individual is asked a question, if they’re not consistent about what their position is and what it isn’t; about what they propose; about speaking from what they know; and about the appropriate procedure, then that individual is not competent to hold a discussion. When an individual is asked a question, if they are consistent about what their position is and what it isn’t; about what they propose; about speaking from what they know; and about the appropriate procedure, then that individual is competent to hold a discussion.

You can know whether or not an individual is competent to hold a discussion by seeing how they take part in a discussion. When an individual is asked a question, if they dodge the issue; distract the discussion with irrelevant points; or display annoyance, hate, and bitterness, then that individual is not competent to hold a discussion. When an individual is asked a question, if they don’t dodge the issue; distract the discussion with irrelevant points; or display annoyance, hate, and bitterness, then that individual is competent to hold a discussion.

You can know whether or not an individual is competent to hold a discussion by seeing how they take part in a discussion. When an individual is asked a question, if they

intimidate, crush, mock, or seize on trivial mistakes, then that individual is not competent to hold a discussion. When an individual is asked a question, if they don't intimidate, crush, mock, or seize on trivial mistakes, then that individual is competent to hold a discussion.

You can know whether or not an individual has what's required by seeing how they take part in a discussion. If they actively listen they have what's required; if they don't actively listen they don't have what's required. Someone who has what's required directly knows one thing, completely understands one thing, gives up one thing, and realizes one thing—and then they experience complete freedom. This is the purpose of discussion, consultation, sitting close, and listening well, that is, the liberation of the mind by not grasping.

Those who converse with hostility,

too sure of themselves, arrogant,

ignoble, attacking virtues,

they look for flaws in each other.

They rejoice together when their opponent

speaks poorly and makes a mistake,

becoming confused and defeated—

but the noble ones don't discuss like this.

If an astute person wants to hold a discussion

connected with the teaching and its meaning—

the kind of discussion that noble ones hold—

then that attentive one should start the discussion,

knowing when the time is right,

neither hostile nor arrogant.

Not over-excited,

contemptuous, or aggressive,

or with a mind full of jealousy,

they'd speak from what they rightly know.

They agree with what was well spoken,

without criticizing what was poorly said.

They'd not persist in finding faults,

nor seize on trivial mistakes,

neither intimidating nor crushing the other,
nor would they speak suggestively.
Good people consult
for the sake of knowledge and clarity.
That’s how the noble ones consult,
this is a noble consultation.
Knowing this, an intelligent person
would consult without arrogance.”