

week 1 readings

Excerpt from [Canki Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 95](#)

[click link if you wish to access the full sutta]

Bhikku Bodhi translation

“When [a student] has investigated [a teacher] and has seen that they are purified from states based on [greed, hatred, and] delusion, then he places faith in them; filled with faith they visit them and pay respect to them; having paid respect to them, they give ear; when they give ear, they hear the Dhamma; having heard the Dhamma, they memorize it and examine the meaning of the teachings memorized; when they examine their meaning, they gain a reflective acceptance of those teachings; when they have gained a reflective acceptance of those teachings, zeal springs up; when zeal has sprung up, they apply their will; having applied their will, they scrutinize; having scrutinized, they strive; resolutely striving, they realize with the body the supreme truth and see it by penetrating it with wisdom. In this way, Bhāradvāja, there is the discovery of truth; in this way one discovers truth; in this way we describe the discovery of truth. But as yet there is no final arrival at truth.”

“In that way, Master Gotama, there is the discovery of truth; in that way one discovers truth; in that way we recognise the discovery of truth. But in what way, Master Gotama, is there the final arrival at truth? In what way does one finally arrive at truth? We ask Master Gotama about the final arrival at truth.” “The final arrival at truth, Bhāradvāja, lies in the repetition, development, and cultivation of those same things. In this way, Bhāradvāja, there is the final arrival at truth; in this way one finally arrives at truth; in this way we describe the final arrival at truth.”

Excerpt from the [Sutta on the Simile of the Snake, Majjhima Nikaya 22](#)

[click link if you wish to access the full sutta]

Bhikku Bodhi translation

Here, bhikkhus, some misguided men learn the Dhamma—discourses, stanzas, expositions, verses, exclamations, sayings, birth stories, marvels, and answers to questions—but having learned the Dhamma, they do not examine the meaning of those teachings with wisdom. Not examining the meaning of those teachings with wisdom, they do not gain a reflective acceptance of them. Instead they learn the Dhamma only for the sake of criticising others and for winning in debates, and they do not experience the good for the sake of which they learned the Dhamma. Those teachings, being wrongly grasped by them, conduce to their harm and suffering for a long time. Why is that? Because of the wrong grasp of those teachings.

“Suppose a man needing a snake, seeking a snake, wandering in search of a snake, saw a large snake and grasped its coils or its tail. It would turn back on him and bite his hand or his arm or one of his limbs, and because of that he would come to death or deadly suffering. Why is that? Because of his wrong grasp of the snake. So too, here some misguided men learn the Dhamma...Why is that? Because of the wrong grasp of those teachings.

“Here, bhikkhus, some clansmen learn the Dhamma—discourses...answers to questions—and having learned the Dhamma, they examine the meaning of those teachings with wisdom. Examining the meaning of those teachings with wisdom, they gain a reflective acceptance of them. They do not learn the Dhamma for the sake of criticising others and for winning in debates, and they experience the good for the sake of which they learned the Dhamma. Those teachings, being rightly grasped by them, conduce to their welfare and happiness for a long time. Why is that? Because of the right grasp of those teachings.

“Suppose a man needing a snake, seeking a snake, wandering in search of a snake, saw a large snake and caught it rightly with a cleft stick, and having done so, grasped it rightly by the neck. Then although the snake might wrap its coils round his hand or his arm or his limbs, still he would not come to death or deadly suffering because of that. Why is that? Because of his right grasp of the snake. So too, here some clansmen learn the Dhamma... Why is that? Because of the right grasp of those teachings.

“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.

The Mind of the Open Question

The Buddha discovered that when he asked a question, his mind was engaged yet open. The process of inquiry itself protected him from the extremes of either ignorance or false certainty, providing room for the expression of mind's creative intelligence. He found a way of being in the mind of an open question that was profoundly clear, engaged, and full of adventure, and he called it the Middle Way.

--Elizabeth Mattis Namgyel. *The Power of an Open Question*

There is something important to be said here about the quality of the mind while engaged in a process of inquiry. I have often used the example of "the mind of an open question" to describe it. An open question—as opposed to a question intent on an answer—is one that has not settled on a conclusion or shut down around beliefs or doubts. Rather, when you ask an open question, you remain receptive, humble, and connected to the living and dynamic nature of things. According to this tradition, such characteristics describe a mind poised for insight. In fact, where insight is concerned, it is only an open and attentive mind that is said to perceive its object without mistake.

--Elizabeth Mattis Namgyel. *The Logic of Faith: A Buddhist Approach to Finding Certainty Beyond Belief and Doubt*