

The Buddha on “Views”: Four Texts

It's just as if a person were wounded with an arrow thickly smeared with poison. Friends & companions, kinsmen & relatives would provide this person with a surgeon, and the person would say, 'I won't have this arrow removed until I know whether the one who wounded me was a noble warrior, a brahman, a merchant, or a worker.' The person would say, 'I won't have this arrow removed until I know the given name & clan name of the one who wounded me... until I know whether that person was tall, medium, or short... until I know whether the person was dark, ruddy-brown, or golden-colored... until I know the home village, town, or city... until I know whether the bow with which I was wounded was a long bow or a crossbow... The person would die and those things would still remain unknown (MN 63).

The Buddha was asked directly by Vacchagotta, a wandering yogi, about whether there is a self. He did not answer. He was asked whether there is no self; he did not answer. He later said that to emphasize either “self” or “not-self” would confuse the person (SN 44.10).

The purpose of the raft is for crossing over, not for grasping (MN 22).

"It is proper for you, Kalamas, to doubt, to be uncertain; uncertainty has arisen in you about what is doubtful. Come, Kalamas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, 'The contemplative is our teacher.' Kalamas, when you yourselves know: 'These things are bad; these things are blamable; these things are censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill,' abandon them. . . . When you yourselves know: 'These things are skillful; these things are blameless; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to welfare and to happiness,' then you should enter & remain in them'" (Kalama Sutta, AN 3.65).