

1.11B ☸ TEXT <i>Numerical Discourses 3.65</i>	1.11B ☸ PALI <i>Aṅguttara Nikāya 3.65</i>
<p>Do not go by:  oral tradition;  lineage of teaching;  hearsay;  a collection of scriptures;  logical reasoning;  inferential reasoning;  reasoned cogitation;  the acceptance of the view after pondering it;  the seeming competence [of a speaker];  or because you think: ‘The teacher is our guru’.</p> <p>When you know for yourselves:  these things are unhealthy;  these things are blameworthy;  these things are censured by the wise;  these things, if accepted and undertaken,  lead to harm and suffering.’  —then you should abandon them.</p> <p>When you know for yourselves:  these things are healthy;  these things are blameless;  these things are praised by the wise;  these things, if accepted and undertaken,  lead to welfare and happiness.’  —then you should live in accordance with them.</p>	<p><i>etha tumhe  mā anussavena,  mā paramparāya,  mā itikirāya,  mā piṭakasampadānena,  mā takkahetu,  mā nayahetu,  mā ākāraparivitakkena,  mā diṭṭhinijjhānakkhantiyā,  mā bhavbarūpatāya,  mā samaṇo no garū ti.</i></p> <p><i>yadā tumhe attanāva jāneyyātha –  ‘ime dhammā akusalā,  ime dhammā sāvajjā,  ime dhammā viññugarahitā,  ime dhammā samattā samādinna  ahitāya dukkhāya saṃvattanti’ ti,  atha tumhe pajaheyyātha.</i></p> <p><i>yadā tumhe attanāva jāneyyātha –  ‘ime dhammā kusalā,  ime dhammā anavajjā,  ime dhammā viññuppatthā,  ime dhammā samattā samādinna  hitāya sukhāya saṃvattanti’ ti,  atha tumhe upasampajja vihareyyātha.</i></p>

## 1.11B ❖ COMMENT

A. This text is from the famous ‘*Kālāma Sutta*’ (which is not actually its proper name, but close enough), wherein the Buddha advises a group of villagers who live at a crossroads on the travel routes of the day and have thus come in contact with the conflicting teachings of many different wandering teachers. ‘How do we know what is true?’ they ask, when so many people say so many different things. The Buddha steers them to their own experience as the ultimate guide. The key phrase here is ‘*when you know for yourselves*’ things are unhealthy or healthy, you should abandon them or cultivate them accordingly. This attitude of personal investigation is aligned with what was said elsewhere (UNIT 1.1B) about the teachings being something to be investigated directly.

B. Sometimes this passage is presented as supporting ‘free inquiry’ to the degree that everyone can ‘decide for themselves’ or even ‘chose for themselves’ what is right and wrong, what is true and untrue. A close reading, however, will show that this is not at all the case. The last thing the Buddha is saying here is that what is healthy and unhealthy is relative, and that it is a matter of personal choice. By saying that one is to investigate whether something is ‘blameworthy’ or ‘blameless’, and whether it is ‘censured’ or ‘praised’ by people who are wise, invokes the perspective of others in addition to one’s own inquiries. And by recommending that one contemplates the effects of the teachings being put into practice, he is bringing in empirical testing in one’s own experience. The ultimate guide, therefore, is not one’s own ‘opinions’, which as we all know can easily be flawed, but the practical benefits or drawbacks as revealed by investigation, as well as the good sense of the community.

C. It is an interesting list of what factors *not* to be led by, and no doubt these were all popular trends at the time. In particular we can see the importance of religious tradition, which was central to the Brahmanical teachers of the day who received the Vedic hymns from their ancestors and passed them down carefully and reverently without (according to the Buddha’s critique), investigating their accuracy for themselves in their own experience. He says they are thus like a file of blind men, each trusting that the one he is following knows where he is going. We can also see here the Buddha’s distrust of logic and reasoning as a source of valid knowledge, for it is all too apparent that rationality is more often used to rationalize what one believes than as a tool for discovering what is true. It is also worth noticing that at this stage of the tradition, the Buddha seems to be arguing against anyone placing their faith in a teacher as a ‘guru’.

#### 1.11B ♦ LANGUAGE

A. The word ‘*garu*’ at the end of the first section of this text is ‘translated’ literally as ‘guru’, a Sanskrit word that has found its way into English because of all the Indian spiritual teachers that have come over in the last several decades. The word ‘*garu*’ literally means ‘heavy’ (as opposed to light = *lahu*), and is related to our words for ‘gravity’, ‘gravitas’, and ‘grave’ (as in having a grave demeanor). In Pali as in English the sense is that someone who is ‘heavy’ is to be taken seriously and is worthy of respect (anyone remember ‘heavy dude’ from the 60s?). So this phrase might also be translated as saying one should not judge the value of a teaching merely ‘out of respect for a teacher’.

B. It is an instrumental form of ‘self’ we find in the word ‘*attanā*’, which is strengthened by the emphatic particle ‘-*va*’. When (*yadā*) you-all (*tumhe* = plural) would know (*jāneyyātha* = 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural) ‘by means of your own self’ (*attanāva*), or ‘even for your very selves’ that something is healthy or unhealthy...let that be your guide. Needless to say, *attan* is not being used in the technical sense of a ‘soul’ (Skt. *ātman*), but is just a general word referring reflexively back in the direction of the subject. This has nothing to do, in other words, with appealing to a ‘higher self’ for guidance or authority.

C. In this passage we also find part of a definition for ‘healthy’ (*kusala*) and ‘unhealthy’ (*akusala*) states, which has to do with whether something leads to harm and suffering (*ahitāya dukkhāya saṃvattanti*) or leads to welfare and happiness (*hitāya sukhāya saṃvattanti*). This verb ‘*saṃvattati*’ is

actually based on a word for turning (as in the English ‘vortex’), so by ‘leads to’ we actually mean ‘turns in the direction of’ or ‘inclines toward’ either welfare or harm. Notice once again that the proof of something’s value will lie in how it is actually engaged in lived experience, rather than on abstract principles.

#### 1.11B ★ INVESTIGATION

- A. Investigate the experience of ‘knowing for yourself’ what is going on each moment of awareness. There are so many things we take on hearsay, or accept through custom, or that seem plausible, that we actually do not engage as directly with our experience as we might do. Among other things, this phrase ‘know for yourself’ is an invitation to pay closer attention, to suspend judgment, to look anew at something, and to generally encounter your world with greater mindfulness.
- B. ‘Knowing for yourself’ also involves getting out from under the tyranny of the mind door and opening to the other five modes of experience (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching). You might think things are a certain way because of how concepts are framed in language or social convention, but how about getting in direct touch with things and seeing for yourself what is true. Maybe there is a lot going on each moment that is not captured in thoughts alone...
- C. The quality of ‘knowing’ we are being encouraged here to have for ourselves is primarily an evaluative knowing of whether something is beneficial or harmful. How can you develop this kind of knowing? Start with what is most obvious, and work gradually toward more subtle things.

#### 1.11B ✪ PRACTICE

- A. Develop the habit of ‘knowing for yourself’ whether what you are doing or what you are encountering inclines to welfare or harm. We are endowed with an innate sense of conscience, and with an innate sensitivity to what our peers would condemn, and our ability to access this inner compass is enhanced by training in awareness and attending to the inner life. Does it feel right? That is not to say, Does it feel good?, which is a different question. Learning to pay attention to how things feel, and learning to develop an intuitive sense of what is beneficial and harmful, are useful skills to develop.
- B. Now comes the hard part: When you know something you are doing does not feel right, but is somehow ‘off’, you need to stop doing it. To abandon what is harmful is not to suppress it or reject it or somehow thrust it away from you. You see it, you understand it is harmful, and you let go of it, much as you might let go of a hot coal.
- C. Equally difficult can be the follow-through of ‘living in accordance’ with the things we know to be healthy and conducive to welfare. Forcing ourselves to ‘do what is right’ is not as good a long-term strategy as ‘knowing for ourselves’, deeply and intuitively, in what direction our true happiness lies.