

AN 3.68: Kathāvatthu Sutta

Conversation

Translated by Bhante Suddhāso

“Monks, there are three kinds of conversation. What three? Monks, one speaks about the past: ‘This is how it was in the past.’ Or one speaks about the future: ‘This is how it will be in the future.’ Or one speaks about the present: ‘This is how it is now.’

“Monks, it is through conversation that one can know whether a person is worth speaking to or not. Monks, if a person does not give a straightforward answer when asked a question that should be answered with a straightforward answer, does not analyze a question that should be analyzed, does not respond with a counter-question to a question that should be responded to with a counter-question, and does not set aside a question that should be set aside, then that person is not worth speaking to. However, monks, if a person gives a straightforward answer when asked a question that should be answered with a straightforward answer, analyzes a question that should be analyzed, responds with a counter-question to a question that should be responded to with a counter-question, and sets aside a question that should be set aside, then that person is worth speaking to.

“Monks, it is through conversation that one can know whether a person is worth speaking to or not. Monks, if, when asked a question, a person is not clear about their position, is not clear about their intention, and is not clear about their method, then that person is not worth speaking to. However, monks, if, when asked a question, a person is clear about their position, their intention, and their method, then that person is worth speaking to.

“Monks, it is through conversation that one can know whether a person is worth speaking to or not. Monks, if, when asked a question, a person speaks about other things, leads the conversation to unrelated subjects, or displays anger, hatred, and resentment, then that person is not worth speaking to. However, monks, if, when asked a question, a person does not speak about other things, does not lead the conversation to unrelated subjects, does not display anger, hatred, and resentment, then that person is worth speaking to.

“Monks, it is through conversation that one can know whether a person is worth speaking to or not. Monks, if, when asked a question, a person overrides, overpowers, derides, or fixates on mistakes, then that person is not worth speaking to. However, monks, if, when asked a question, a person does not override, overpower, deride, or fixate on mistakes, then that person is worth speaking to.

“Monks, it is through conversation that one can know whether a person is reasonable or unreasonable. Monks, a person who does not listen is unreasonable; a person who listens is reasonable. One who is reasonable directly understands one thing, fully understands one thing, discards one thing, and realizes one thing. Directly understanding one thing, fully understanding one thing, discarding one thing, and realizing one thing, one contacts right liberation. Monks, this is the benefit of conversation, the benefit of consultation, the benefit of being reasonable, the benefit of listening – liberation of the mind through non-clinging.”

“Obstructed by stubbornness and arrogance,
They engage in conversation
With those who lack the qualities of nobility,
Seeking ways to attack each other.

“They delight when the other falls into
Misspeech, mistakes, confusion, defeat -
But this is not how noble beings act.

“If a wise person wishes to speak,
Then they know the right time,
Their speech is related to the Dhamma,
And to noble behavior.

“This is how the steadfast speak,
Unobstructed, not arrogant,
With a humble mind, not malicious, violent, or envious,
They speak based on correct understanding.

“They rejoice in good speech, but they do not disparage misspeech,
They do not attack, they do not fixate on mistakes,
They do not override or overpower,
They do not speak carelessly.

“Good people seek consultation
For the sake of understanding and faith.
This is how the noble ones consult,
This is the consultation of the noble.
Understanding this, a wise person
Gives advice - free of arrogance.”