

Secular Buddhism – A Study Retreat

Stephen Batchelor, Gaia House, Devon, England • July 17, 2013

Study Guide • Part 4 of 7

The Ultimate

Reflections on the Suddhattakasutta (The Discourse of Eight on Purity) from the Atthakavagga of the Sutta Nipata (Sn. 788-95)

1. Framing the poet's words in the context of a fertile ground as opposed to arid, the sense of renunciation in these verses is quite positive; it is clearing away the dead to make space for new growth. Cite a line or two from the poem that illustrates Batchelor's point.

2. Referencing the sutta *The Quest*, in which conditioned arising [*paticcasamuppada*] i.e. a constant flux and change, is the ground which is obscured by one's love for place [*alaya*], i.e. a ground of constant grasping for position: what clears or opens up space for *the stilling of all inclinations, the relinquishing of all bases, the fading away of craving, desirelessness, stopping, nibbana?*

3. Batchelor lists three meanings for 'hard to see' in the verse from *The Quest*, ... *dhamma is hard to see*. Rephrase these three meanings and state which of the three is the most relevant to you, explaining why that is so.

4. In the Buddha's reply in his questioning Sivaka on whether he knows when greed, hatred and attachment are present in his mind and when they are not, by Sivaka's reply of 'yes', Sivaka indicates that he knows the dharma, discriminating between the state of being driven by greed, hatred and attachment and not. Is this dharma visible to you? If not, what obscures its visibility?

5. Batchelor likens the space of not being driven by impulses, i.e. the sudden immediate presence of possibility, to Zen, in which there is no implied temporality – a methodical path marked by paths and stages, that over time gets you to a result. Which verses express this sudden immediacy that is free of drives?

6. The first three of four lines in the second stanza of the poem offer a pithy summation on the paths of salvation. Define each

- a) by vision,
- b) by knowledge and
- c) by others.

7. Following on Batchelor's acknowledging that the paths of salvation are efficacious – that one may have visions in meditation, gain insights through knowledge, and experience a transformation in the presence of a teacher – what caution does he offer? What does he advise one to consider in order to reverse a mistaken view that may follow on vision, knowledge and transformation?

8. What does the poet refer in the verse *purity is nothing foreign*?

9. A morality *not mired in views and words (sutta), ideas and rules, good and evil* is one based on an appropriate response to the dynamics of the situation. Such a response requires letting go of categories while appreciating the need for a response that is specific to the situation. What are your thoughts on what, in some Christian sects is called 'situational ethics'?

10. Reflect on how you have worked with a conflict when another's ethics were abhorrent to you and their actions something that you could not just blow off. In light of the ideal of a morality *not mired in views and words, ideas and rules, good and evil* what in that situation could have been made better or made worse?

11. The verse *He's discarded what he believed – and builds nothing here* makes the claim that the priest (i.e. the author, not mired in views and words) is not

interested in building up another system or structure. What is the paradox of this claim? What explanation does Batchelor offer to soften this paradox?

12. In light of the second verse on purification by vision, by knowledge and by others, another paradox is evoked in the verses *The wise suffer no highs and lows – having met the dharma through knowledge and learning*. How does Batchelor distinguish the former reference to knowledge and learning from the latter?

13. How do the verses from the Kaccānagotta sutta ...*one who sees the arising of the world as it happens with complete intelligence has no sense of 'it is not' about the world. And one who sees the ceasing of the world as it happens with complete intelligence has no sense of 'it is' about the world* pertain to the poet's *One who takes no issue with things sees what's before his eyes, is open to what is said, acts in tune with what he senses?*

14. With respect to the four tasks, experiencing the stopping (the third task) that is the precondition for engaging in skilful action, i.e. the eightfold path (the fourth task), is, according to Batchelor, what is pointed out to the reader of this poem. How is this so?



¶ The talk to which the questions above relate, along with the others given by Stephen and Martine Batchelor during the course of this study retreat, can be found on both the Secular Buddhism Aotearoa New Zealand website at: <http://secularbuddhism.org.nz/resources/retreats-conferences/online-study-retreat/> and at: <http://dharmaseed.org/retreats/1954/>. Dharma Seed welcomes your donations to enable them to provide the service of enabling talks by Buddhist teachers to be freely downloaded and streamed.

¶ This study guide was written by Christine Johnson for a course at Upaya Sangha of Tucson, AZ, USA from September through December 2014.

¶ Stephen and Martine Batchelor follow the Buddhist tradition of not charging for the teachings they give, the organisations that host their retreats and seminars generally only covering their travel expenses. However in return for their teaching and instruction, Martine and Stephen gratefully accept donations which enable them to continue doing this work. If you would like to support them you can do so using your debit card, credit card or PayPal here: <http://www.stephenbatchelor.org/index.php/en/donation>

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