



Speculative Views Sutra

By Mu Soeng

In “Speculative Views Sutra,” Mu Soeng, inspired by the Cula-Malunkyovada Sutta, MN 63, explores the relationship between liberation and letting go of speculative views.

“Friends, the Tathagata has set aside, discarded, not declared a position on questions like, ‘The cosmos is eternal,’ ‘The cosmos is not eternal,’ ‘The cosmos is finite,’ ‘The cosmos is infinite,’ ‘The soul & the body are the same,’ ‘The soul is one thing and the body another,’ ‘After death a Tathagata exists,’ ‘After death a Tathagata does not exist,’ ‘After death a Tathagata both exists & does not exist,’ ‘After death a Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist.’

“Friends, there have been disciples like Malunkyaputta who have confronted the Tathagata and asked him to admit whether he knows about these questions or not. Malunkyaputta declared that he will follow the spiritual life only if the Tathagata were to declare one way or another where he stands on these questions.

“Friends, I asked Malunkyaputta if I ever promised an answer to these questions as an inducement for his following the spiritual path. He admitted this was not the case. He also admitted that he never raised these questions before he formally joined the community to follow the path of liberation.

“So, I asked him what claim he had to be making grievances or making demands of anyone. It’s just as if a man were wounded with an arrow thickly smeared with poison. His friends & companions, kinsmen & relatives would provide him with a surgeon, but the man would refuse to have the arrow removed until he was told who the shooter of the arrow was, the clan name of the person, whether the person was tall or short, from the north or the south, the east or the west. He may put up a thousand preconditions before the arrow could be removed; in the meantime, though, he would die and the answers to his questions would still remain unknown to him.

“In the same way, friends, if a person would say that they would not live a holy life until they were given answers to their questions about the cosmos or eternal life, they would die and those things would still remain undeclared by the Tathagata. This is because the Tathagata has said that regardless of the view one holds there is still the birth, there is the aging, there is the death, there is the sorrow, lamentation, pain, despair, and distress whose destruction I make known right in the here and now.

“Friends, remember that what is undeclared by me remains undeclared because these are speculative views and they are not connected with the goal [of liberation], are not fundamental to the holy life. They do not lead to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, calming, direct knowledge, self-awakening. That’s why they are undeclared by me. Conversely, what has been declared by me leads to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, calming, direct knowledge, self-awakening. That’s why they are declared by me.

“Friends, the foolish person seeks answers to speculative views and insists that such answers have a bearing on living the holy life. It is how things are done in the world of the

Brahmin priest and his followers. They speak of the cosmos and the origin of the universe. They demand blind faith in unverified doctrines. But the Tathagata does not engage with speculative views. He only teaches that all speculative views are poison arrows and you will die of the wound and not yet get answers to your questions.

“Friends, the proliferation of speculative views belongs to the person holding those views and not to the Tathagata. When a person like Malunkyaputta comes to the Tathagata seeking answers to their speculative views, he remains silent out of compassion. The Tathagata teaches that a wholesome view (*samma-ditthi*) is a proposition to discard all speculative views and not hold any views at all. Even when he teaches the origination of stress, the cessation of stress, and the path leading to the cessation of stress, he asks that this teaching be held as investigating into one’s own experience rather than a speculative view.

“Friends, not holding a speculative view is not a sign of stupidity or lack of knowledge about things but a positive and wholesome recognition of the speculative view as a poison arrow. A speculative view is a rabbit’s hole and once one keeps burrowing into it, it only leads to confusion and bewilderment.

“Friends, not holding a speculative view is “not knowing” which is a wholesome kind of knowing in which the wise disciple knows that one is not sucked into speculative views.

“Friends, the Tathagata has taught about seeing things just as they are. In seeing, there is only the seeing, without any speculative view about what is being seen. In hearing, there is only the hearing, without any speculative view about what is being heard... in smelling... in tasting... in touching... in

thinking there is only thinking without any speculative view about what is being thought about.

“This direct seeing is not a speculative view, friends. This direct seeing allows the poisoned arrow to be pulled out immediately by a healer, or oneself, and apply balm to the wound. One does not die of the poison spread by metaphysical views that have nothing to do with the healing of stress and anguish in the here and now.

“Friends, the Tathagata has taught that the roots of stress and anguish are to be found in the conditioned mind. Speculative views are also to be found in the conditioned mind. They do not exist outside the conditioned mind. The non-human species also do not indulge in speculative views.

“Friends, all speculative views are conceptual in their construct. All conceptual thinking is speculative at its core. All speculative views are abstract. All conceptual thinking is abstract at its core. They have nothing to do with how one experiences in one’s own mind-body. Speculative views are the product of language used in a certain way—in abstract and conceptual ways.

“Friends, a wholesome view (*samma-ditthi*) is the discarding of all speculative views. The discarding is done by a noble disciple through a keen investigation into if what is arising as view is true, and whether one can personally know if this view is true. One asks what would be added or diminished if one were to let go of that view.

“This discarding has tremendous consequences, for it allows for a wholesome intention (*samma-sankappa*) to emerge. In the wholesome intention, there is the intention to dwell in the not-knowing spaciousness which rejects all speculative views as soon as they arise. Conversely, there is the wholesome

intention to see things directly, to not interpret, to not distort what is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, touched, and thought about.

“Friends, with the presence of wholesome intention, there is the arising of wholesome action (*samma-kammata*) in which the unwholesome is not acted upon and the wholesome is acted upon. The wholesome view, intention, and action is the making of ethical life and it provides faith and courage to walk on the eightfold path of liberation.