

## Study and Discussion Questions for *Early Buddhist Discourses*

### Chapter Eight: The Shorter Discourse to Mālunkya (*Cūḷa-mālunkya Sutta*)

#### *Study Questions*

- 1) What are the speculative views (*diṭṭhi*) that the Buddha has left undeclared (*avyākata*), set aside and rejected?
- 2) Why did Mālunkya threaten to give up his religious training under the Buddha? What does he expect from the Buddha?
- 3) How does the Buddha respond to Mālunkya's demand for answers to his questions? Did the Buddha ever promise Mālunkya that he would teach him these matters?
- 4) Summarize the parable of the arrow. How is the parable related to Mālunkya's case?
- 5) Why does the Buddha refrain from declaring speculative views?
- 6) What does the Buddha declare? Why are these matters declared by the Buddha?

#### *Discussion Questions*

- 1) The Buddha rejects the ten speculative views referred to by Mālunkya, but can one avoid holding *all* speculative views (i.e., empirically unverifiable metaphysical assumptions)?
- 2) Most of the world's spiritual or religious traditions are founded on particular answers to speculative metaphysical questions (e.g., the existence of the soul, creation of the world, the nature of the afterlife)—such answers the Buddha would call speculative views. Can a spiritual tradition be effective in meeting the spiritual needs of people without answering such questions? Does the fact that early Buddhism attempts to avoid such questions make the early Buddhist tradition less of a “religion?”
- 3) Mālunkya requests of the Buddha that he not hold back his declaration of a position on the ten speculative views. Is this a reasonable request of one's religious teacher? Does the Buddha have a position on these speculative views that he is holding back? Might he know the answers, but think it unbeneficial to reveal his views?
- 4) Does the parable of the arrow make a convincing case in regard to metaphysically speculative views that (a) they are probably beyond the capacity of human beings to understand and (b) they are irrelevant to (or worse: pose a serious obstacle to) religious progress?
- 5) Since each speculative proposition contradicts the other proposition it is paired with (e.g., “the world is eternal” is the contradiction of “the world is not eternal”), would it not be *logically necessary* that one of the two speculative positions be true and the other false? So, is it just a matter of not knowing which alternative of each pair is true? Or is the Buddha pointing out that a search for the truth of such speculative views is altogether wrongheaded?