

## Study Guide to MN 95

### *Canki Sutta*

#### How to Relate to Religious Teachings

As we begin our year-long study, a preliminary issue is how to relate to the authority of the suttas. More broadly, it is important to ask what are reliable and unreliable grounds for believing in religious teachings? And how does practice go beyond belief and knowing?

We start with the Canki Sutta because it addresses these important issues through a discussion of what we can know as true. The discourse offers three useful guidelines around truth:

1. How to safeguard the truth when talking about religious beliefs which you have not verified for yourself.
2. How one can discover what is true.
3. How one can arrive at truth.

In reading the sutta's discussion of the latter two guidelines, please consider what is the difference between discovering and arriving at the truth.

At the end of the sutta (paragraph 22) the Buddha discusses what supports arriving at truth. How do these supportive qualities relate to studying the Buddhist suttas?

#### Other Issues:

Before reading this discourse, what ideas or assumptions did you have about how the Buddha behaves? Does the behavior of the Buddha in this discourse differ from your previous ideas? What do you think of how the Buddha rebuked the Brahmin youth or how he described the Brahmins as a file of blind men?

In some of the other collections of the Buddha's discourses, for example the Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, the Buddha's teachings mostly appear alone without any narrative providing the context, occasion or events that led the Buddha to teach what he does. One of the characteristics of the Middle Length Discourses is that the suttas here usually present the teachings couched in a story of the occasion that prompted the teachings. In other words, a narrative context is given and we can see that the teachings are given as a specific response to specific circumstances. As you read MN 95 how might the narrative of the sutta strengthen or highlight the value of what the Buddha teaches? If MN 95 was a piece of literature rather than a report of historical events, what do you think is the literary function of the story that frames the teachings?

Note:

In section number 3 of the sutta the reference (*sutta 91, §3*) means that you should use section 3 from sutta 91 to fill in this section of sutta 95. Likewise, use section 37 of Sutta 91 to fill in section 35 of the Canki Sutta.

Reflection:

1. Reflect on the basis on which you believe Buddhist teachings. Do you believe because of "faith, approving/liking, tradition, reasoning, or reflection"? How, if at all, does your relationship to your beliefs change when you are clear on the basis for the beliefs?
2. Which of the 12 qualities that help one to arrive at the truth are you the strongest in? Which are you weakest in?
3. How do you think the Buddha's comments on safeguarding and maintaining the truth might usefully guide the way you reflect on the suttas in our study program?