

Gārava Sutta

The Discourse on Respect

(Saṃyutta Nikāya 6.2/1:138-140)

Nearly identical to **Uruvelā Sutta 1** (A 4.21/2:20 f)

[Even the Teacher respects the Teaching]

Translated by Piya Tan ©2004

1 Introduction

Like **the Āyācana Sutta** (S 6.1),¹ the Gārava Sutta is one of the familiar canonical episodes in the life of the Buddha. Both events—Brahmā’s request and Brahmā’s appearance here—occur at the same venue: the Goatherd Banyan Tree beside the Nerañjarā river at Uruvelā. This sutta is nearly identical to **the Uruvelā Sutta 1**,² by way of a narrative by the Buddha, which however omits the fifth Dharma aggregate [§7] but has an additional closing paragraph [§13].

There are two Chinese Āgama versions of this Sutta, both entitled 尊重經 (Zūnzhòng jīng), that is,³
SĀ 1188 = T99.44.321c18-322a27;
SĀ2 101 = T100.5.410a3-410b9.

These two Chinese versions are closely identical, but they locate the venue as being under the Bodhi tree and not at the Goatherd’s Banyan Tree as the Pali versions do [§1].⁴

2 The teaching is above the teacher

The sutta records how the Buddha reflects over his need of a spiritual teacher to show deference to. If a proper teacher cannot be found, then, he reflects, the Teaching should be respected. This theme is also in the last teachings of the Buddha, where he admonishes us to “take the Dharma as refuge.”⁵

In showing respect to the Dharma, the Buddha is, in a historical sense, keeping to an ancient tradition of the great Vedic rishis who venerate (*payirupāsati*)⁶ the Vedic texts. The Chāndogya Upaniṣad, for example, relates how the rishis Aṅgiras, Bṛhaspati and Ayāsyā are said to venerate the “high chant” (*Udgītha*) as the breath within the mouth. The text then reveals the hidden etymologies of the rishis’ names so that they identify with the breath (ChU 1.2.10-13).

In the case of the Buddha, he venerates the Dharma, that is, the realization of true reality, which makes him Buddha. Indeed, he is no different from that true reality, that is, to say, he is awakened to true reality, with nothing more to identify with in reality. As such, it is simply natural that the Buddha would respect what he really is.

On a simpler level, when *we* venerate (say, bow down to) a teacher or a spiritual symbol), we connect with the spiritual qualities of the teacher or the symbol, pointing to true reality. If we do this mindfully, at that moment of veneration, we *are* that true reality, but only at that moment. With spiritual liberation, we

¹ S 6.1/1:136-138 = SD 12.2.

² A 4.21/2:21 f.

³ The Chinese Āgama versions are listed under A 4.21 in RS Bucknell’s *Pali-Chinese Sutra Correspondences* (draft, 2004).

⁴ See Etienne Lamotte, “The Gāravasutta of the Saṃyuttanikāya and its Mahāyānist developments,” *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 9 1981:127-144

⁵ **Mahāparinibbāna S** (D 16.4.2 f/2:122 f, 16.6.1/2:154).

⁶ “Venerate,” *payirupāsanti* (pl), *payirupāsati*, “he attends on (acc), honours, pays homage, worship” (D 1:47, 2:257; M 2:117; S 1:146; A 1:124, 126, 142, 4:337; Dh 64, 65; Tha 1236; J 6:222 (PED); def as *punappunam upa-saṅkamati* (VbhA 457); from *pari-upa* √*ās*, “to sit” (with metathesis as in *payirudāharati*) (Geiger 47.2) = Skt *pary-upatiṣṭhati*, from *pary-upa* + √*STHA*, “to stand” (SED): see **Caṅkī S** (M 95.20/2:173) = SD 21.15 & **Kīṭā, giri S** (M 70.22-24/1:479 f) = SD 11.1.

are permanently linked with true reality, or at the highest stage (having realized the nature of not-self), we *become* that true reality.

Another important term in this connection is *bandhu*, which usually means a relative or kin, “but when one thing is said to be a *bandhu* of another, the meaning is that the former is connected to or is a counterpart of the latter.”⁷ In the Upaniṣads, such a connection with the universe is a hierarchical one, with reality right at the top; however, such connections are always hidden.⁸ The secret knowledge of the Upaniṣads, tapped through the teacher, is what liberates the pupil.

In early Buddhism, the word *bandhu* is found in *Ādicca,bandhu*, “the Kinsman of the Sun,” a common epithet of the Buddha.⁹ While it is true that the Buddha has discovered the *secret* of true reality, he then keeps this knowledge *open* to all who would learn: he does not have the hidden “fist of the teacher” (*ācariya,muṭṭhi*).¹⁰ Just as the sun shines on all and sundry, the Buddha’s compassion reaches out to all who are willing and ready for the Dharma.

In the ancient Vedic tradition, the sun (Sūrya, Āditya) is the supreme light (ṚV 1.50.10), gives light to everything else (ṚV 1.50.4),¹¹ and possesses the highest knowledge, and benefits all beings (ṚV 5.81.2). The early Upaniṣads, especially the Bṛhad Āraṇyaka and the Chāndogya, again and again allude to the Sun as deity, giver of life and of light, and worthy of the highest worship.¹² Understandably, the early Buddhists give the highest place in the universe to the Buddha, whose wisdom shines even beyond the sun, that is, because the Buddha has realized nirvana, which is beyond all words and thought, yet experienceable.

It is very significant that the message that the Teaching is above the Teacher, that the Dharma is above the person, is stressed by the Buddha at the beginning of this Buddha-life (as recorded in **the Gārava Sutta**, S 6.2), but is also an integral part of the Buddha’s last instructions, as recorded in **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16):

“Ānanda, it may be that you would think:

‘Gone is the Teacher’s word! We have no teacher.’

It should not be seen thus, Ānanda, for the Dharma-Vinaya [the Teaching and the Discipline] that I have taught and explained to you, will, at my passing, be your teacher.”

(D 16.6.1/2:154) = SD 9

The significance of the highest priority of the Dharma has been discussed elsewhere.¹³

⁷ See P Olivelle (tr), *Upaniṣads*, 1996: lii.

⁸ See eg ChU 1.1.10, 1.13.4.

⁹ V 1:145, 2:296 = A 1:54, V 5:145, 177, 210, 212, 215; D 2:287, 3:197; S 1:192 = Tha 1237d, S 1:186 = Tha 1212; A 4:228; Sn 915a, 1128; Tha 417.

¹⁰ *Ācariya,muṭṭhi*: **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16.2.25a/2:100) = SD 9. Comys: “The teacher’s fist is found amongst outsiders who do not tell certain things to their pupils when they are still boys (*dahara,kāle*), who keep certain teachings for their beloved and favourite pupils, telling it to them only at the last moment from their death-bed. The Tathāgata does not hold back anything, keeping a closed fist, thinking, ‘I will teach this in my old age, at the last moment.’” (DA 2:548 = SA 3:203 f)

¹¹ The whole of ṚV 1.50 is in praise of Sūrya.

¹² It is interesting, as recorded in **Sundarika Bhāra,dvāja S** (Sn 3.4), that the Buddha, when questioned by Sundarika Bhāradvāja whether he (the Buddha) is a brahmin or not, responds by asking Sundarika about the Sāvitrī (or Gāyatrī) (RV 3.62.10) (Sn 457), the best known of the Vedic verses invoking Savitṛ (the deity associated with the stimulating power of the sun) “in its three lines and 24 syllables.” See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gayatri_-_Mantra. Comy thinks that the Buddha good-naturedly plays a pun (paronomasia) on the brahmin, and refers to “the Sāvitrī of the noble ones” (*ariya,sāvitti*), ie the three refuges (*ti,saraṇa,gamana*) formula—*Buddham saraṇaṃ gacchami, Dhammam saraṇaṃ gacchami, Saṅgham saraṇaṃ gacchami*—which also has 3 lines and 24 syllables (SnA 403)!

¹³ See **The Teacher or the Teaching?** = SD 3.14; also **Paṭhama Jhāna Pañha S** (S 40.1) = SD 24.11 Intro (1.3).

3 The fivefold Dharma aggregates

3.1 DEFINITION OF THE DHARMA AGGREGATES. The key teaching here is the set of the five Dharma aggregates or aggregates of the Dharma (*pañca dhamma-k,khandha*) [§§3-7], which are, namely,

- (1) the aggregate of moral virtue (*sīla-k,khandha*),
- (2) the aggregate of concentration (*samādhi-k,khandha*),
- (3) the aggregate of wisdom (*paññā-k,khandha*),
- (4) the aggregate of liberation (*vimutti-k,khandha*) and
- (5) the aggregate of the knowledge and vision of liberation (*ñāṇa,dassana-k,khandha*).

The five Dharma aggregates comprise of the threefold training (*sikkhā*), which is the path (*magga*), and the last two factors—liberation and the knowledge and vision of liberation—which constitute the result or fruition (*phala*) of the path. Similarly, the five Dharma aggregates are listed in full as the ten “right states” (*sammatta*), that is, the noble eightfold path (*ariy’atṭhaṅgika magga*) along with right knowledge (*sammā,ñāṇa*) and right liberation (*sammā,vimutti*).¹⁴

However, according to the Sāmyutta Commentary, these Dharma aggregates are both mundane and supramundane (*lokiya,lokuttara*), except for the fifth, the knowledge and vision of liberation, which is mundane (*lokiya*) only, since it is review knowledge (*paccavekkhaṇa,ñāṇa*) (SA 1:204).

In the case of the Buddha’s reflection on the five Dharma aggregates, as recorded in **the Gāraṇa Sutta** (S 6.2), it is not that his awakening is incomplete in a spiritual sense: after all, he is *fully self-awakened* (*sammā,sambuddha*). The Dharma does not exist in itself, but as the direct experience of living beings. As a matter of course, the awakened mind would seek to see if there are others *more* awakened, a mental event that occurs only once in the Buddha’s life.

3.2 THE DHARMA AGGREGATES AS AN ADEPT’S QUALITIES. **The Sila,sampanna Bhikkhu Sutta** (A 5.107) records the Buddha as stating that a monk endowed with these five qualities, namely,

- (1) he is endowed with moral virtue (*sīla,sampanno hoti*),
- (2) he is endowed with concentration (*samādhi,sampanno hoti*),
- (3) he is endowed with wisdom (*paññā,sampanno hoti*),
- (4) he is endowed with liberation (*vimutti,sampanno hoti*), and
- (5) he is endowed with the knowledge and vision of liberation (*vimutti,ñāṇa.dassana,sampanno hoti*),

are “worthy of offerings (*āhuneyyo*), worthy of hospitality (*pāhuneyyo*), worthy of gifts (*dakkhineyyo*), worthy of salutation with the lotus-palms (*añjali,karaṇīyo*), a supreme field of merit for the world (*anuttaram puñña-k,khettam lokassā ti*).”¹⁵ (A 5.107/3:134)

The discourse that follows—**the Asekha Sutta** (A 5.108)—declares that those with these five qualities of the non-learner or adept (*asekha*), too, are “worthy” in the same manner, that is, regarding those endowed with these five qualities, namely,

- (1) he is endowed with the moral virtue of an adept (*asekhena sīla,sampanno hoti*),
- (2) he is endowed with the concentration of an adept (*asekhena samādhi,sampanno hoti*),
- (3) he is endowed with the wisdom of an adept (*asekhena paññā,sampanno hoti*),
- (4) he is endowed with the liberation of an adept (*asekhena vimutti,sampanno hoti*), and

¹⁴ D 3:271, 292; M 1:42; A 5:212. It is interesting that the noble eightfold path is not listed in **the Aṅguttara** Book of Eights (*aṭṭhaka nipāta*), but in its Book of Tens (*dasaka nipāta*) (A 10.103/5:212), where they are called “rightness, right states” (*sammatta*), ie, as the eightfold path plus right knowledge (*sammā,ñāṇa*) and right liberation (*sammā,vimutti*). In fact, this latter forms the complete path of training and liberation.

¹⁵ On these 9 qualities of the Noble Sangha, see **Dhājagga S** (S 11.3/1:218-220) = SD 15.5.

- (5) he is endowed with the knowledge and vision of liberation of an adept (*asekhena vimutti,ñāṇa.dassana,sampanno hoti*). (A 5.108/3:134)

It is obvious that these two suttas refer to the same kind of person, that is, the arhat.

Similarly, there are three other very short discourses—the **Upasampādetabba Sutta** (A 5.251), the **Nissaya Sutta** (A 5.252), and the **Sāmaṇera Sutta** (A 5.253)—which state that those with these same five aggregates of Dharma of an adept (*asekha*) is one who “should be ordained” (*upasampādetabbam*), “tutelage should be given” (*nissayo dātabbo*) by him, and is “a novice who should attend” (*sāmaṇero upaṭṭhāpetabbo*) to him (A 3:217).

The same statements in the form of monastic rules are found in the Mahāvagga:

Bhikkhus, a monk endowed with five factors should be ordained; should be given tutelage; should have a novice should attend (to him), that is to say,

- (1) he is endowed with the moral virtue of an adept,
- (2) he is endowed with the concentration of an adept,
- (3) he is endowed with the wisdom of an adept,
- (4) he is endowed with the liberation of an adept,
- (5) he is endowed with the knowledge and vision of liberation of an adept.

Bhikkhus, a monk endowed with these five factors should be ordained; should be given tutelage; should have a novice should attend (to him).

Pañcahi bhikkhave aṅgehi samannāgatena bhikkhunā upasampādetabbam, nissayo dātabbo, sāmaṇero upaṭṭhāpetabbo.

*Asekhena sīlakkhandhena samannāgato hoti,
asekhena samādhikkhandhena samannāgato hoti,
asekhena paññākkhandhena samannāgato hoti,
asekhena vimuttikkhandhena samannāgato hoti,
asekhena vimuttiñāṇadassanakkhandhena samannāgato hoti.*

Imehi kho bhikkhave, pañcahaṅgehi samannāgatena bhikkhunā upasampādetabbam, nissayo dātabbo, sāmaṇero upaṭṭhāpetabbo. (Mv 1.36/1:62 f)

The best explanation for this is that these Vinaya rules provide for the ordination of those who have become arhats, that they still need to be trained in the rules and nature of monastic life, and that they should be attended to by novices. The non-necessity for further learning of the non-learner (*asekha*) refers only to his spiritual state, which is consummate.

3.3 OCCURRENCES OF THE DHARMA AGGREGATES SET IN THE SUTTAS. The five dharma aggregates are listed in the following suttas and in the Paṭisambhidā,magga:

Issatta Sutta	S 3.24/1:99 f
Gāraḥ Sutta	S 6.2.3-7/1:139 = A 4.21/2:20
Cunda Sutta	S 47.13.7/5:162 (qualities attributed to Ānanda)
Anātha,piṇḍika Sutta 1	S 55.26.18-19/5:384 (qualities attributed to Anātha,piṇḍika)
Vaccha,gotta Sutta	A 3.57/1:159
Uruvelā Sutta 1	A 4.21/2:20 = S 6.2.3-7/1:139
Asekha Sutta	A 5.108/3:134
Upasampādetabba Sutta	A 5.251/3:271
Nissaya Sutta	A 5.252/3:271
Sāmaṇera Sutta	A 5.253/3:271
Pañcaṅga Sutta	A 10.12/5:16
Sīla,sampanna Sutta	It 4.5/108
Paṭisambhidā,magga	Pm 2:193

The first four aggregates (*cattāro dhamma-k,khandhā*) are separately listed in **the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta** (D 16),¹⁶ **the Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33),¹⁷ and **the Uruvela Sutta 1** (A 4.21).¹⁸ This set of four Dharma aggregates is found in **the Sāra Sutta** (A 4.150), where they are known as the four “essences” (*sāra*).¹⁹

3.4 PROBLEM PASSAGES INVOLVING THE DHARMA AGGREGATES. From the citations of the list of five Dharma aggregates [3.2], it evidently, as a full set, refers to the qualities of an arhat, or the Buddha, as in **the Gāraḥa Sutta** (S 6.1). However, in **the Cunda Sutta** (S 47.13), Ānanda (then still a streamwinner) is ascribed with the five Dharma aggregates, *including the last two*:

[Cunda Samaṇ’uddesa:] Why, Ānanda, when Sāriputta attained final nirvana,
 did he take away your aggregate of moral virtue,
 did he take away your aggregate of concentration,
 did he take away your aggregate of wisdom,
 did he take away your aggregate of liberation,
 did he take away your aggregate of knowledge and vision of liberation?

<i>Kin nu te Ānanda Sāriputto</i>	
<i>sīla-k,khandham vā</i>	<i>ādāya parinibbuto,</i>
<i>samādhi-k,khandham vā</i>	<i>ādāya parinibbuto,</i>
<i>paññā-k,khandham vā</i>	<i>ādāya parinibbuto,</i>
<i>vimutti-k,khandham vā</i>	<i>ādāya parinibbuto,</i>
<i>vimutti,ñāṇa.dassana-k,khandham vā</i>	<i>ādāya parinibbuto’ ti. (S 47.13/5:162)</i>

It is possible that Cunda is asking a rhetorical question, so that Ānanda’s affirmative answer makes perfect sense. However, in **the Anātha,piṇḍika Sutta 1** (S 55.26), the ailing Anātha,piṇḍika, who is still a streamwinner then, is told to reflect on these five Dharma aggregates (*which he is expressly said to have*) within himself (S 55.26/5:384).

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¹⁶ D 16.4.2-3/2:122 f.

¹⁷ D 33.1.11(25)/3:229.

¹⁸ A 4.21/2:20 f = SD 12.3.

¹⁹ A 4.150/2:141; Nett 56; DhA 1:114.

The Discourse on Respect

(S 6.2/1:138-140)

1 Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed One was staying at the foot of the Goatherd Banyan Tree on the bank of the river Nerañjarā at Uruvelā, just after he had become fully self-awakened.²⁰ [139]

2 Then when the Blessed One was alone in retreat, this reflection arose in his mind:

“One dwells in suffering if one is without respect, without deference (to another).²¹ Now what ascetic or brahmin can I, honouring, respecting, dwell in dependence on?”

3 Then it occurred to the Blessed One:

“(a) For the sake of fulfilling an unfulfilled aggregate of moral virtue, I, honouring, respecting another ascetic or brahmin, should dwell in dependence on him.

However, in this world with its gods, with its Māra, with its Brahmās, this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its rulers²² and people, I do not see any ascetic or brahmin more accomplished in moral virtue than myself, whom I, honouring, respecting, should dwell in dependence on.

4 (b) For the sake of fulfilling an unfulfilled aggregate of concentration, I should, honouring, respecting, another ascetic or brahmin, dwell in dependence on him.

However, in this world... I do not see any ascetic or brahmin more accomplished in concentration than myself, whom I could, honouring, respecting, dwell in dependence on.

5 (c) For the sake of fulfilling an unfulfilled aggregate of wisdom, I should, honouring, respecting, another ascetic or brahmin, dwell in dependence on him.

However, in this world... I do not see any ascetic or brahmin more accomplished in concentration than myself, whom I could, honouring, respecting, dwell in dependence on.

6 (d) For the sake of fulfilling an unfulfilled aggregate of liberation, I should, honouring, respecting, another ascetic or brahmin, dwell in dependence on him.

However, in this world... I do not see any ascetic or brahmin more accomplished in concentration than myself, whom I could, honouring, respecting, dwell in dependence on.

7 (e) For the sake of fulfilling an unfulfilled aggregate of knowledge and vision of liberation, I should, honouring, respecting, another ascetic or brahmin, dwell in dependence on him.

However, in this world... I do not see any ascetic or brahmin more accomplished in concentration than myself, whom I could, honouring, respecting, dwell in dependence on.²³

8 What now, if I, honouring, respecting this very Dharma, to which I have fully awakened, were to dwell in dependence on it?”

9 Then Brahmā Sahampati, having known with his own mind the reflection in the Blessed One’s mind, just as a strong man might stretch his arm out or bend it back, Brahmā Sahampati disappeared from the Brahmā world and reappeared before the Blessed One.

10 Then Brahmā Sahampati, having arranged his upper robe on one shoulder, knelt down on his right knee on the ground, raised his palms lotus-wise towards the Blessed One, and said this to him: [140]

11 “So it is, Blessed One! So it is, Sugata [well-gone one]! Those who were the arhats, the fully self-awakened ones, in the past, too, honouring, respecting, this very Dharma, dwelt in dependence on it.

²⁰ “Just after he had become fully awakened,” *paṭhamābhisambuddho*, lit “when he first became fully awakened.”

²¹ *Dukkham kho agāravo viharati appaṭisso* (S 1:139 = A 2:20; qu at MA 2:136; also V 2:89 = D 3:244 = M 2:245 = Vbh 381).

²² *Deva*, here in the sense of “devas by convention” (*sammati, deva*), ie kings. The other 2 types of *deva* are “gods by rebirth” (*upapatti, deva*) and “gods by purification” (*visuddhi, deva*), ie the Buddhas, Pratyeka Buddhas and arhats (Nc 307 KhA 123).

²³ On these 5 Dharma aggregates, see Intro. This fifth item is not found in **Uruvelā S 1** (A 4.21/2:20 f), whose Comy however identifies this with “reviewing knowledge” (*paccavekkhaṇa, ñāṇa*), ie the knowledge with which one ascertains that one’s mind is fully liberated (AA 3:25).

Those who will be the arhats, the fully self-awakened ones, in the future, too, honouring, respecting, this very Dharma, will dwell in dependence on it.

May the Blessed One, the arhat, fully self-awakened one, now, too, honouring, respecting, this very Dharma, dwell in dependence on it.”

12 This is what the Brahmā Sahampati said. Having said that, he further said this:

- 562 The Buddhas of the past,²⁴
The Buddhas of the future,
And he who is Buddha now,
Removing the sorrow of the many—
- 563 All have dwelled, they (now) dwell,
And they will dwell, too,
Deeply revering the true teaching—
For this is the nature of the Buddhas.
- 564 Therefore, one desiring ⟨one’s own⟩ good,²⁵
Aspiring to spiritual greatness,
Should revere the true teaching,
Recollecting²⁶ the Teaching of the Buddhas.

[13 Bhikshus, Brahmā Sahampati spoke thus. Having spoken this, he saluted me, and making a right-wise circumambulation, disappeared right there.

Then, bhikshus, having known Brahmā’s request, and that it is also proper for myself, I, honouring, respecting, this very Dharma, fully awakened to by me, dwell in dependence on it.²⁷

Moreover, bhikshus, since the Order has been endowed with greatness, I hold the Order, too, in deep respect.]²⁸

— evaṃ —

050419; 071206; 080927; 090519

²⁴ *Ye ca atītā sambuddhā; v1 ye c’abbhatītā sambuddhā.*

²⁵ “One desiring...good,” *attha,kāmena* (A 2:21,23, Ce, PTS 1884); v1 *atta,kāmena* (A 4:91,1, Be, PTS 1998)

²⁶ *Saram*, “probably a truncated instrumental” (S:B 433 n375), glossed by Comy as *sarantena* (SA 1:204).

Norman however thinks that it could be a *ṇamul* type absolutive (Tha:N n ad Thī 26): see also S:B 406 n235.

²⁷ *Tam eva dhammaṃ sakkatvā garukatvā upanissāya vihāsīm*, lit “I, having honoured, having respected, dwell dependent this very Dharma.” I have rendered this passage in the simple present.

²⁸ This concluding para is found only in **Uruvelā S 1** (A 4.21/2:20 f). Comy to Uruvelā S 1 says that the final remark regarding honouring the Sangha is made when Mahā Pajāpatī has offered a set of robes to the Blessed One [M 3:253], who then says: “Give them to the order, Gotamī. If you do so, both the order and I will be honoured.” (AA 3:26). This last remark is clearly a late interpolation as it does not fit well with the context here nor is it found anywhere else.