AN 3.60 — AN 3:61 To Saṅgārava | Saṅgārava Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

To Saṅgārava

Saṅgārava Sutta (AN 3:61)

Then the brahman Saṅgārava went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One: “I say, Master Gotama. We brahmans perform sacrifices and get others to perform sacrifices. And whoever performs a sacrifice, whoever gets others to perform a sacrifice, they have all practiced a practice of merit—the business of a sacrifice—(that benefits) countless beings. But whoever, leaving his family, has gone forth from the home life into homelessness, and tames his single self, brings his single self into tune, brings his single self to unbinding: his practice of merit—this business of going forth—is one (that benefits) only one being.”

“Very well then, brahman, in that case I will cross-question you. Answer as you see fit. What do you think? There is the case where a Tathāgata appears in the world, a worthy one, rightly-self-awakened, consummate in clear-knowing & conduct, Well-Gone, an expert with regard to the cosmos, unexcelled trainer of people fit to be tamed, teacher of devas & human beings, awakened, blessed. He says: ‘Here! This is the path, this is the practice which, having practiced, I make known the unexcelled gaining of a footing in the holy life,1 having directly known & realized it for myself. Come! You, too, practice in such a way that you will remain in the unexcelled gaining of a footing in the holy life, having directly known & realized it for yourselves.’ Thus the Teacher teaches the Dhamma, and others practice, for authenticity [tathattā].2 And there are countless hundreds of them, countless thousands of them, countless hundreds of thousands of them. This being the case, is this practice of merit—this business of going-forth—one that benefits countless beings, or only one being?”

“This being the case, Master Gotama, this practice of merit—this business of going-forth—is one that benefits countless beings.”

When this was said, Ven. Ānanda said to the brahman Saṅgārava, “Of these two practices, brahman, which appeals to you as the less complicated, the less violent, the more fruitful, & the more rewarding?”

When this was said, the brahman Saṅgārava said to Ven. Ānanda, “Just as with Master Gotama & Master Ānanda, I worship them, I praise them (both).”

A second time, Ven. Ānanda said to him, “I didn’t ask you whom you worship and whom you praise. I ask you, ‘Of these two practices, brahman, which appeals to you as the less complicated, the less violent, the more fruitful, & the more rewarding?’”

A second time, the brahman Saṅgārava said to Ven. Ānanda, “Just as with Master Gotama & Master Ānanda, I worship them, I praise them (both).”

A third time, Ven. Ānanda said to him, “I didn’t ask you whom you worship and whom you praise. I ask you, ‘Of these two practices, brahman, which appeals to you as the less complicated, the less violent, the more fruitful, & the more rewarding?’”

A third time, the brahman Saṅgārava said to Ven. Ānanda, “Just as with Master Gotama & Master Ānanda, I worship them, I praise them (both).”

Then the thought occurred to the Blessed One, “Being asked a legitimate question by Ānanda up to the third time, the brahman Saṅgārava evades it and does not reply to it. Suppose I were to get him out (of this dilemma).”

So the Blessed One said to the brahman Saṅgārava, “Brahman, what was the topic of conversation that arose today when the royal court sat gathered in the royal palace?”

“Master Gotama, this was the topic of conversation that arose today when the royal court sat gathered in the royal palace: ‘In the past, there were fewer monks but more who, endowed with superior human attainments, displayed the miracle of psychic power. Now there are more monks but fewer who, endowed with superior human attainments, display the miracle of psychic power. This, Master Gotama, was the topic of conversation that arose today when the royal court sat gathered in the royal palace.”

“Brahman, there are these three miracles. Which three? The miracle of psychic power, the miracle of telepathy, & the miracle of instruction.

“And what is the miracle of psychic power? There is the case where a certain person wields manifold psychic powers. Having been one he becomes many; having been many he becomes one. He appears. He vanishes. He goes unimpeded through walls, ramparts, & mountains as if through space. He dives in and out of the earth as if it were water. He walks on water without sinking as if it were dry land. Sitting cross-legged he flies through the air like a winged bird. With his hand he touches and strokes even the sun & moon, so mighty & powerful. He exercises influence with his body even as far as the Brahmā worlds. This is called the miracle of psychic power.

“And what is the miracle of telepathy? There is the case where a certain person reads (another person’ thoughts) by means of a sign [vision], (saying,) ‘Such is your thinking, here is where your thinking is, thus is your mind.’ And however much he may read, that’s exactly how it is, and not otherwise.

“Then there is the case where a certain person reads (another person’s thoughts), not by means of a sign or vision, but by hearing the voice of human beings, non-human beings, or devas, (saying,) ‘Such is your thinking, here is where your thinking is, thus is your mind.’ And however much he may read, that’s exactly how it is, and not otherwise.

“Then there is the case where a certain person reads (another person’s thoughts), not by means of a sign or vision; not by hearing the voice of human beings, non-human beings, or devas; but by hearing the sound of the directed thought & evaluation of a person thinking directed thoughts and evaluating, (saying,) ‘Such is your thinking, here is where your thinking is, thus is your mind.’ And however much he may read, that’s exactly how it is, and not otherwise.

“Then there is the case where a certain person reads (another person’s thoughts), not by means of a sign or vision; not by hearing the voice of human beings, non-human beings, or devas; not by hearing the sound of the directed thought & evaluation of a person thinking directed thoughts and evaluating; but by encompassing with his own awareness the awareness of one who has attained a concentration devoid of directed thought & evaluation, he discerns, ‘Given the way the mental fabrications of this venerable person are inclined, the directed thoughts of his mind will immediately think about this.’ And however much he may read, that’s exactly how it is, and not otherwise.

“This, brahman, is the miracle of telepathy.

“And what is the miracle of instruction? There is the case where a certain person gives instruction in this way: ‘Direct your thought in this way, don’t direct it in that. Attend to things in this way, don’t attend to them in that. Let go of this, enter and remain in that.’ This is called the miracle of instruction.

“And these are the three miracles.

“Now, brahman, of these three miracles, which one appeals to you as the highest & most sublime?”

“Master Gotama, of these three miracles, the miracle of psychic power where a certain person wields manifold psychic powers… (and) exercises influence with his body even as far as the Brahmā worlds: That is a miracle experienced only by him who does it; it belongs only to him who does it. It seems to me to be of the nature of an illusion.

“As for the miracle where a certain person by means of a sign or vision… by hearing the voice of human beings, non-human beings, or devas… by hearing the sound of the directed thought & evaluation of a person thinking directed thoughts and evaluating, (saying,) ‘Such is your thinking, here is where your thinking is, thus is your mind.’ … (or) who by encompassing with his own awareness the awareness of one who has attained a concentration devoid of directed thought & evaluation, he discerns, ‘Given the way the mental fabrications of this venerable person are inclined, the directed thoughts of his mind will immediately think about this.’ And however much he may read, that’s exactly how it is, and not otherwise: That is a miracle experienced only by him who does it; it belongs only to him who does it. It seems to me to be of the nature of an illusion.

“As for the miracle where a certain person gives instruction in this way: ‘Direct your thought in this way, don’t direct it in that. Attend to things in this way, don’t attend to them in that. Let go of this, enter and remain in that’: this is the miracle that, of the three, appeals to me as the highest & most sublime.

“How amazing, Master Gotama! How astounding, how well this has been said by Master Gotama. And we hold that Master Gotama is endowed with these three marvels: Master Gotama wields manifold psychic powers… (and) exercises influence with his body even as far as the Brahmā worlds. … By encompassing with his own awareness the awareness of one who has attained a concentration devoid of directed thought & evaluation, Master Gotama discerns, ‘Given the way the mental fabrications of this venerable person are inclined, the directed thoughts of his mind will immediately think about this.’ Master Gotama gives instruction in this way: ‘Direct your thought in this way, don’t direct it in that. Attend to things in this way, don’t attend to them in that. Let go of this, enter and remain in that.’”

“Well, brahman, you are certainly being rude & presumptuous in making this statement, but still I will respond to you. Yes, I wield manifold psychic powers… (and) exercise influence with my body even as far as the Brahmā worlds; … by encompassing with my own awareness the awareness of one who has attained a concentration devoid of directed

thought & evaluation, I discern, 'Given the way the mental fabrications of this venerable person are inclined, the directed thoughts of his mind will immediately think about this.' I give instruction in this way: 'Direct your thought in this way, don't direct it in that. Attend to things in this way, don't attend to them in that. Let go of this, enter and remain in that.'"

"Aside from Master Gotama, is there another monk who is endowed with these three miracles?"

"Brahman, there are not only one hundred other monks… two… three… four… five hundred other monks: The monks who are endowed with these three miracles are many more than that."

"And, Master Gotama, where do those monks now live?"

"In this very same Saṅgha of monks."

"Magnificent, Master Gotama! Magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what was overturned, to reveal what was hidden, to show the way to one who was lost, or to carry a lamp into the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way has Master Gotama—through many lines of reasoning—made the Dhamma clear. I go to Master Gotama for refuge, to the Dhamma, & to the Saṅgha of monks. May Master Gotama remember me as a lay follower who has gone for refuge from this day forward, for life."

Notes

1. The Commentary divides this phrase into two: the "unexcelled" refers to nibbāna; the footing (ogādha) in the holy life refers to the path of arahantship. The analogy here is that of crossing a stream: as one approaches the far shore, one reaches a point where one can touch bottom and gain a footing; even though one is not yet on the shore, one is safe from being swept away. Throughout the Canon, however, the word ogādha—"gaining a footing," "coming ashore"—is frequently used in connection with unbinding and the deathless. See in particular AN 7:15.

2. Tathattā literally means "thus-ness." On the thus-ness of the Tathāgata, see Iti 112.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: DN 2; DN 11; SN 41:4; AN 4:35; AN 4:95—96; AN 4:99