

41

(Udaka Suddhika) Saṅgārava Sutta

The Saṅgārava Discourse (on the Water-purified) | S 7.21 [Ee S 7.2.11]

Theme: True purification is through moral virtue, not ritual

Translated by Piya Tan ©2017

1 Saṅgārava

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

The **(Udaka Suddhika) Saṅgārava Sutta** (S 7.21) is about the brahmin Saṅgārava, who is “bath-ritualist” or “baptist,” that is, “a believer in purification by water [baptism] (*udaka,suddhika*) and practises purification by water (*udakena parisuddhiṃ pacceti*), devoted to immersing himself in water at dawn and at dusk” [§2]. To distinguish him from the other brahmins of the same name, we can call him **Udaka Suddhika Saṅgārava**, “Saṅgārava the water-purified,” or more simply **Suddhika Saṅgārava** the bath-ritualist.

1.2 SAṅGĀRAVA

1.2.1 Saṅgārava the bath-ritualist

1.2.1.1 Saṅgārava of the (Udaka Suddhika) Saṅgārava Sutta is said to live in Sāvatti [§2]. He is a “bath-ritualist” or “baptist,” one who believes in purification or salvation by water, bathing morning and evening to wash away his badness. The Buddha, at Ānanda’s request, visits his house and teaches him the true baptism in this manner with **S 705** [§13], the meanings of words there being thus:

the Dharma	= “a lake, unturbid”	[§13ab]
a ford by the lake	= moral virtue	[§13a]
unturbid	= refers to mental concentration (including dhyana)	[§13b]
the good amongst the good	= those who know goodness (<i>viññū</i>)	[§13b]
the knowledge-masters	= the noble individuals (streamwinners, etc)	[§13c]
bathe	= awaken, attain arhathood	[§13c]
with dry limbs	= moral perfection and completion of training	[§13d]
cross over to the far shore	= attain nirvana	[§13d]

The brahmin is impressed and goes for refuge, becoming a follower of the Buddha. [2.2.2.1]

1.2.1.2 The Sutta’s Commentary says of Saṅgārava that “he is a householder-friend of the elder” Ānanda (*therassa kir’esa gihi,sahāyo*, SA 1:266). The Dictionary of Pali Proper Names interprets this gloss as that they “had, as laymen, been friends.” This is, of course, possible, if we are not reading too much into the Pali.

The Commentary adds that Ānanda is anxious about the brahmin’s false belief and practice, and wishes to help him and his family, thinking: “This wretch (*varāka*) who, despite our friendship, has fallen into wrong views, and will be a hell-filler. Moreover, he has a great retinue of 500 families who have

faith in him, who will surely follow him (whether into a suffering state or when he is converted).”¹ (SA 1:266)

1.3 OTHER BRAHMINS NAMED SAṄGĀRAVA

1.3.1 Saṅgārava Suttas

The Dictionary of Pali Proper Names (DPPN) lists a total of 7 “Saṅgārava Suttas,” which are here briefly listed:²

Brahmins named Saṅgārava

(1) (Deva) Saṅgārava Sutta	M 100	Brahmin youth of Candala,kappa ³	SD 10.9
(2) (Udaka Suddhika) Saṅgārava Sutta	S 7.21	Brahmin of Sāvattthī ⁴ (S 1:182,28)	SD 50.41
(3) (Nīvaraṇa) Saṅgārava Sutta ⁵	S 46.55	Brahmin of Sāvattthī (S 5:121,7)	SD 3.12
(4) (Pāṭihāriya) Saṅgārava Sutta [1.3.2]	A 3.60	Brahmin of Rājagaha (AA 2:266)	SD 16.10
(5) (Manta) Saṅgārava Sutta ⁶	A 5.193	Rājagaha? (see A 3.60 below)	SD 73.3
(6) (Magga) Saṅgārava Sutta ⁷	A 10.117	Rājagaha? (see A 3.60 below)	SD 18.7(2a)
(7) (Kamma,patha) Saṅgārava Sutta ⁸	A 10.169	Rājagaha? (see A 3.60 below)	SD 18.7(8a)

1.3.2 Saṅgārava of Candala,kappa

1.3.2.1 The Commentary on the (Pāṭihāriya) Saṅgārava Sutta (S 3.60) says that Saṅgārava of Rājagaha (in Kosala) was an overseer in charge of the repairs of dilapidated buildings in that city.⁹ Since he is the only Saṅgārava mentioned in the Aṅguttara Nikāya and its Commentary, it is likely that he is the protagonist of A 5.193, A 10.117 and A 10.169.

1.3.2.2 Caṇḍala,kappa¹⁰ was a village (*gāma*)¹¹ in Kosala, and the residence of the brahminee Dhān-añjāni and the brahmin youth Saṅgārava. Todeyya’s mango grove, where the Buddha taught the (Deva) Saṅgārava Sutta (M 100), was located nearby (M 2:210), SD 10.9.

¹ *Therassa kir’esa gihī,sahāyo, tasmā thero “ayaṃ varāko maṃ sahāyaṃ labhitvā’pi micchā,diṭṭhiṃ gahetvā mā apāya,pūraho ahoṣīti āyācati. Api c’esa mahā,parivāro, tasmīṃ pasanne pañca,kula,satāni anuvattissantāti mañ-ñamāno’pi āyācati.* (SA 1:266)

² For details, see SD 3.12 (2).

³ Caṇḍala,kappa is located in Kosala.

⁴ Capital of Kosala.

⁵ S 5.193 is identical to S 46.55 (which has a section on the 7 awakening-factors, but the former does not).

⁶ S 46.55 (which has a section on the 7 awakening-factors) is identical to A 5.193, which lacks that section.

⁷ A 10.117 parallels A 10.169.

⁸ A 10.169 parallels A 10.117.

⁹ *Rājagaha,nagare jiṇṇa,paṭisaṅkharana,kārako āyuttaka,brāhmaṇo* (AA 2:266).

¹⁰ M:Ee 2:209. Also Ce MA:Ee 3:451 **Maṇḍala,kappa**; Ke Se **Paccala,kappa**; M:Be 2:424 f MA:Be 3:307 **Cañcali,-kappa**.

¹¹ MA:Be 3:307.

2 Related suttas

2.1 VATTHŪPAMA SUTTA (M 7)

2.1.1 Sacred river. Another important discourse dealing with bathing ritual or water-purification ritual is the **Vatthūpama Sutta** (M 7), SD 28.12. The Sutta records how the brahmin Sundarika Bhāra,dvāja asks the Buddha if he (the Buddha) has, for the benefit of auspicious purification, washed himself in the holy river Bāhukā.

2.1.2 The outer washing

2.1.2.1 In the Puṇṇikā Therī,gāthā, the nun Puṇṇika remarks in her Therī,gāthā that if the water were to have such salvific power, then water-creatures such as frogs, turtles, and crocodiles would all go to heaven! Those practising wrong livelihood, such as animal-trappers, thieves, executioners and other bad-doers would be released from their bad karma by mere ablution. But, worst of all, the waters would carry away their merit, too! (Thī 239-244)

2.1.2.2 In the Vatthūpama Sutta, the Buddha explains to the brahmin Sundarika that rivers and water do not wash away our bad deeds (or sins), and famously declares:

For the pure, it is always a holy day!
For the pure, it is always a precept day!
For the pure, whose deeds are pure,
his vow is always fulfilled.

Wash right here, brahmin!
Towards all being give safety.
If you speak no falsehood,
if you harm no life,

If you do not take the not-given,
Faithful, free from selfishness—
What need is there to go to Gayā?
Any well is Gayā to you!

(M 7,20/1:39; DA 1:139), SD 28.12

2.1.3 The inner washing. The Buddha exhorts the brahmin to “wash right here,” that is, the purity of our deeds (*suci,kamma*).¹² Sundarika is converted, joins the order, and becomes an arhat. This is called the “waterless baptism” (*sināna anodaka*) (S 198ef) [2.2.2.2] or the “inner washing” (**ajjhatta nhātaka*) [2.2.2.4].

2.1.4 Sundarika the fire-worshipper. There is another brahmin of the same name—**Sundarika of the Sundarika Sutta** (S 7.9)—who is fire-worshipper, converted by the Buddha, and who then becomes a monk and, in due course, an arhat.¹³ He is not a bath-ritualist, like Saṅgārava of M 7 or S 7,21. However, M 7 shares the S 7.9 verse on the Buddha’s teaching on the true spiritual washing or baptism. [2.2]

¹² M 7,20/1:39 (SD 28.12); DA 1:139. Cf Dh 24; MA 1:179, where the phrase refers to the Buddha’s teaching.

¹³ On these two brahmins named Sundarika (whether they are the same person), see SD 22.3 (3).

2.2 (SUDDHIKA) SUNDARIKA S SUTTA (S 7.9)**2.2.1 Recurrent verse**

Verse **S 705**, the key teaching of the (Udaka Suddhika) Saṅgārava Sutta [§13] recurs as verse **S 646** in the **(Suddhika) Sundarika Sutta** (S 7.9),¹⁴ even though Sundarika is not mentioned in the Sutta to be a bath-ritualist. However, the presence of S 646 as part of the Buddha's instruction to him suggests that he may also have practised purification by water. In fact, this is confirmed by the commentary on S 7.9. [2.2.2.1]

2.2.2 Related teachings

2.2.2.1 The Commentary on the **(Suddhika) Sundarika Sutta** (S 7.9) actually implies that the brahmin Sundarika does practise the bath-ritual. We can deduce this from the Commentary's record of how the Buddha instructed him on the true purification by water:

“Just as you, after having worshipped the fire, enter the Sundarikā river and wash away the ashes, soot, and sweat from your body, so, too, for me the Dharma of the eightfold path is the lake when I bathe [baptize] hundreds, or thousands, or 84,000 living beings all at once. The lake is limpid (*anāvīla*, “undisturbed”) because, unlike your river which becomes muddy when four or five bathe in it at the same time, the Dharma lake remains limpid and clean, even when hundreds of thousands enter it to bathe.” (SA 1:237). [1.2.1.1]

2.2.2.2 The **Uppatha Sutta** (S 1.58) has only these two verses (**S 197 f**), of which the last two lines of S 198 is related to our theme, that is, that of “the bath without water” [the waterless baptism] (*sinānam anodakan*) (S 198ef) [2.2.2.4]:

SD 50.41(2.2)**Uppatha Sutta**

The Discourse on the Wrong Path • **S 1.58/1:38** = S 197-198

Traditional: S 1.1.6.8 = Saṃyutta 1, Sa, gāthā Vagga 1, Devatā Saṃyutta 6, Jarā Vagga 8

Theme: The wrong path and the right path to spiritual purity

- | | | |
|--|--------------|---|
| <p>1 <i>kiṃsu uppatho akkhāto</i>
 <i>kiṃsu rattin, diva-k, khayo</i>
 <i>kiṃ malarṃ brahma, cariyassa</i>
 <i>kiṃ sinānam anodakan'ti</i></p> | S 197 | <p>What has been shown to be the wrong path?¹⁵
 What comes to destruction night and day?
 What is the stain of the holy life [celibacy]?
 What is the bath without water?</p> |
| <p>2 <i>rāgo uppatho akkhāto</i>
 <i>vayo rattin, diva-k, khayo</i>
 <i>itthī malarṃ brahma, cariyassa</i>
 <i>etthāyaṃ sajjate pajā</i>
 <i>tapo ca brahma, cariyañ ca</i>
 <i>taṃ sinānam anodakan'ti</i></p> | S 198 | <p>Lust has been shown to be the wrong path.
 Life [Age] comes to destruction every night and day.
 Women are the stain of the holy life [celibacy]:
 here, this stain sticks to all men.
 Asceticism and the holy life—
 this is the bath without water [waterless baptism].</p> |

¹⁴ S 646 = S 7.9,17.5/1:169 (SD 22.3).

¹⁵ *Uppatha* occurs at S 1:38,10* (SA 1:94,6), 43,13*; as *adhammo* ~o, J 5:265,29*, 266,8*, 5:453,26*, 6:235,25*; V 4:205,10 (VA 897,27).

2.2.2.3 The Commentary explains this poem (S 198) thus (with explanations within parentheses):

(1) **“The wrong path”** (*uppatho*) is not the path (*amaggo*) for going to heaven and nirvana.

(2) **“Comes to destruction day and night”** (*rattin, diva-k, khayo*): Life (*vayo*) is destroyed by day and night, or during the day and night (*ratti, divehi, ratti, divesu vā khīyati*) (that is, life is affected by change, or it is itself change).

(3) **“Women are the stain ... ”** (*itthī malam*). An external stain, such as ash or lye, can be washed off so that one is clean, but for those who renege on their vow of celibacy, defiled by the stain of women [sex], it is impossible wash it off—hence, one is truly impure—becoming the victims of bad karma. (This statement applies to those who have taken the vow of celibacy, and should be understood in terms of the very first rule of the monastic code (Pāṭimokkha), that is, Pārājika 1, V 3:23,33-36).¹⁶

(4) **“Austerity”** (*tapo*) is a name for the sense-restraint, the ascetic practices (*dhutaṅga, guṇa*), effort, and self-mortification (*dukkara, kārika*). All these, except self-mortification, burn away the defilements.

(5) **“The holy life”** (*brahma, cariya*) includes celibacy (abstinence from coupling, *methuna, virati*)—see (3) on “Women are the stain” above.

2.2.2.4 “The bath without water” (*sināna anodaka*) [S 198f] refers to asceticism (*tapā*) and the holy life (*brahma, cariya*). Here, “the holy life” refers to celibacy (not by or for itself) but in the context of spiritual training, that is, the 3 trainings (*sikkha-t, taya*)¹⁷—in moral virtue, mental concentration and wisdom—for the sake of attaining the path of awakening, meaning, at least streamwinning in this life itself.¹⁸

Purification by ritual washing, especially in some sacred rivers or body of water was common in the Buddha’s time, and is still common today amongst Hindus in India. The Buddha rejects such ritualistic conduct as being frivolous and detrimental to one’s karmic state. Attachment to rituals and vows (*śīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*) is a fetter to spiritual progress because we are looking for external solution to internal (psychological and spiritual) problems.¹⁹

Unequivocally rejecting ritual purification of the body by water, the Buddha declares the “inner washing” of the mind, as taught in **the Vatthūpama Sutta** (M 7) [2.1], **the Mahā Assa, pura Sutta** (M 39) [2.2.2.5], **the Sabhiya Sutta** (S 3.6) [2.2.2.6] and **the (Udaka Suddhika) Saṅgārava Sutta** (S 7.21) [§13 = S 705].

2.2.2.5 In the Mahā Assa, pura Sutta (M 39), the Buddha explains how a monk is “one who has been washed [baptized]” (*nahātaka*): “He has washed off bad unwholesome states that defile, that bring re-birth, troubling, resulting in pain, that bring further birth, decay and death.”²⁰ In the case of ritual washing, the ritualist only seems to wash off the bad he has accumulated; even then, he is only temporarily cleansed of the bad, as it were. In other words, it is a cyclic routine—only a symptomatic stop-gap. The

¹⁶ This is the rule for monks. The rule for the for the nuns is at **Bhikkhunī Pārājikā 5** (no 1 in V:H) in the Bhikkhunī Vibhaṅga. The nuns’ Pār 1 reads: *Yā pana bhikkhunī avassutā avassutassa purisa, puggalassa adhakkhakarā ubbhajānumaṅḍalarā āmasanā vā parāmasanā vā gahanā va chupanā vā patipīlanā vā sādīyeyya, ayam pi pārājikā hoti asanvāsā ubbhajānumaṅḍalikā’ti*, “Whatever nun, filled with desire, should consent to rubbing, or rubbing up against, or taking hold of or touching or pressing against a male person below the collar-bone, above the circle of the knees, if he is filled with desire, she becomes one who is defeated, not in communion—she is one who touches above the circle of the knees.” (V 4:213,34-36). For nn, see https://suttacentral.net/files/Book_of_the_Discipline.pdf.

¹⁷ On the 3 trainings, see **Sikkha-t, taya S 1** (A 3.88), SD 24.10c.

¹⁸ On streamwinning, see **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

¹⁹ On attachment to rituals and vows, see **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8 (5).

²⁰ M 39,25/1:280 (SD 10.13).

Buddha teaches how we can directly deal with our problems at their roots, and then uproot the root-causes and be forever free of suffering.

2.2.2.6 The Sabhiya Sutta (S 3.6) offers us this verse related to the “inner washing”:

*Ninhāya sabba, pāpakāni
ajjhataṃ bahiddhā ca sabba, loke
deva, manussesu kappiyesu
kappan n’eti tam āhu nhātako*

Having bathed free of all bad,
within and without in all the world,
amongst those reckoned as devas and humans,
he goes unreckoned—he is said to be one washed.
(Sn 521), SD 77.8; cf Sn 646; M 56,29/1:386*

The term “**washed**” (Skt *śnātaka*), in Brahmanism, refers to a brahmin who has performed the ritual ablution required on finishing his first “station” (*āśrama*), that is, the period of pupillage as a *brahma-cārī* (celibate student), or a brahmin who has just returned from his preceptor’s house to become a married man or initiated householder.²¹ The Buddhist term, however, refers to anyone who has done the “inner washing” [2.2.2.4], that is, completed the 3 trainings, and now walks the path of awakening.

— — —

The Saṅgārava Discourse (on the Water-purified)

S 7.21

Ānanda see Saṅgārava

1 Originating in Sāvattḥī.

2 Now at that time, a brahmin named Saṅgārava was residing in Sāvattḥī. He was a believer in purification by water [baptism] and practised purification by water.²² He lived devoted to immersing himself in water at dawn and at dusk.²³

3 Then, at dawn, the venerable Ānanda, having dressed himself, taking robe and bowl, entered Sāvattḥī for alms. Having walked in Sāvattḥī for alms, when his almsround was over, and after he had finished his alms-meal, he approached the Blessed One. He saluted the Blessed One and sat down at one side. **[183]**

4 Sitting thus at one side, the venerable Ānanda said to the Blessed One:

“Here, bhante, there is a brahmin named Saṅgārava living in Sāvattḥī.²⁴ He is a believer in purification by water and practises purification by water. He lives devoted to immersing himself in water at dawn and at dusk.

²¹ See SED sv *śnātaka*.

²² *Udaka, suddhiko udakena parisuddhiṃ pacceṭi*.

²³ *Sāyaṃ pātaraṃ udak’orohanānuyogam anuyutto viharati*.

²⁴ Comy: It is said that Saṅgārava is a householder friend of the elder Ānanda (*therassa kir’esa gihi, sahāyo*), and the elder is concerned that his unhelpful (*varāka*, “wretched”) practice would bring him to hell (*apāya*). So, he interceded by inviting the Buddha to instruct him (SA 1:266). [1.2.1.2]

5 It would be good, bhante, if the Blessed One were to approach the brahmin Saṅgāra's house, out of compassion."

6 The Blessed One consented by his silence.

The Buddha meets Saṅgāra

7 Then, at dawn, the Blessed One, having dressed himself, taking robe and bowl, approached the brahmin Saṅgāra's house for alms, and there sat down on a seat that was prepared for him.

8 Then, the brahmin Saṅgāra approached the Blessed One, and exchanged greetings with him. When the courteous and friendly exchange was concluded, he sat down at one side.

9 The Blessed One said to the brahmin as he sat there:

"Is it true, brahmin, that you are *a believer in purification by water and practise purification by water—that you live devoted to immersing yourself in water at dawn and at dusk?*"

"Yes, master Gotama."

10 "But, brahmin, what benefit do you see *as a believer in purification by water and practise purification by water—that you live devoted to immersing yourself in water at dawn and at dusk?*"

11 "Here, master Gotama, whatever bad I have done in the day, I remove them by bathing at dusk.²⁵ Whatever bad I've done in the night, I remove them by bathing at dawn.

This, master Gotama, is the benefit that I see *as a believer in purification by water and practise purification by water—that you live devoted to immersing yourself in water at dawn and at dusk.*"

The Buddha instructs Saṅgāra

[Then, the Blessed One said to the brahmin:]

13 *Dhammo rahado brāhmaṇa sīla, tittho
anāvilo sabbhi satam pasattho*

*yattha have veda, guno sinātā
analla, gattā'va²⁷ taranti pāran'ti* 705²⁸

The Dharma, brahmin, is a ford of virtue, a lake, unturbid [undisturbed], praised by the good amongst the good, where indeed the knowledge-masters²⁶ bathe, and with dry limbs,²⁹ they cross to the far shore.

14 When this was said, the brahmin Saṅgāra said to the Blessed One:

"Wonderful, master Gotama! Wonderful, master Gotama! Just as if one

were to place upright what had been overturned, or

were to reveal what was hidden, or

were to show the way to one who was lost, or

were to hold up a lamp in the dark so that those with eyes could see forms,

in the same way master Gotama has, in numerous ways, made the Dharma clear.

²⁵ *Idha me bho gotama* [Be:Ka Ee add *aham*] *yaṃ divā papa, kamman katarṃ hoti, taṃ sāyaṃ nahānena* [all MSS so; only Be *nahānena*] *pavāhemi*.

²⁶ *Veda, gū*, ie, masters of the 3 Vedas, but here a wordplay referring to the arhats with the 3 knowledges (*te, vij-ja*), ie, those of rebirth, karma and the destruction of the influxes (*āsava-k, khaya*) of sensual desire (*kām'āsava*), existence (*bhav'āsava*) and ignorance (*avijjāsava*): see SD 30.3 (1.3.2).

²⁷ Be:Ka *anallīna, gattā'va* (wr). *Analla, gattā* is resolved as *na* → *a(n)* ("not") + *alla* ("wet") + *gattā* ("limbs").

²⁸ = S 646, **Sundarika S** (S 7.9/1:169), SD 22.3. (2.2)

²⁹ On the symbolism of dryness and moral purity, see the parable of the 3 kinds of fire-sticks: **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,17-19), SD 49.4.

I go to master Gotama for refuge, and to the Dharma, and to the community of monks, too.
May master Gotama remember me as a layman who has gone for refuge from this day forth for life.”

— evaṃ —

170518 170520 170614r