

Dhajagga Sutta

The Discourse on the Foremost Banner

[The recollections of the Three Jewels]

(Saṃyutta Nikāya 11.3/1:218-220)

Translated by Piya Tan ©2006

Introduction

1 Recollection and protection

The popularity of Dhajagga Sutta, since early times, is attested by the fact that it is not only handed down in the Pali oral tradition, but is also found in the Northern Buddhist tradition which has preserved parallel versions in Chinese and in Tibetan, translated from the Sanskrit, and Sanskrit fragments¹ have also been found. A comprehensive comparative study of these Dhajagga Sutta (Skt Dhvajâgra Sūtra) texts have been done by **Peter Skilling** in his *Mahā Sūtras*.² Skilling thinks that

Dhvajâgra [1] [ie the Dhvajâgra nāma Mahāsūtra]³ might be described as a text tailored for merchants. It combines two main elements: a rakṣā [ward rune] in the form of the recommendation of the recollection of the Three Gems as an antidote to fear, and a versified rejoicing or blessing (*abhyānumodanā*), which may also be described as a svasti, gāthā [verse of good fortune].

(1997:428)

The Dhajagga Sutta is a locus classicus for the verses for the recollections of the Three Jewels. These three verses are ancient. Heinz Bechert has pointed out that in their original form they were in old prose metre known as *vedha*.⁴ This metre remains for the most part in the Pali version of the verses, but is lost in the Sanskrit translation.

The recollection verses are stock passages often found in the four Nikāyas.⁵ **The Buddhānussati verse** is an especially well known stock passage servicing as a code or sign that the Buddha is already well known to the audience ahead of the occasion.⁶ The most elaborate example of such a public relations passage appears in **the Veḷu.dvāreyya Sutta** (S 55.7):

The brahmin householders of Veḷu,dvāra heard that:

“The recluse Gotama, the son of the Sakyans who went forth from a Sakyan clan, has been touring Kosala with a large community of monks and has come to Veḷu,dvāra. Concerning this Blessed One, this fair report has been spread about:⁷

‘So, too, is he the Blessed One:⁸ he is,⁹

¹ Sarvāsti,vāda version, reconstructed from the Turfan Collection by E Waldschmidt in *Bruchstücke Buddhistischer Sūtras aus dem Zentralasiatischen Sanskritkanon*, 1932:43-53; based on further materials in “Kleine Brāhmī Schriftrolle” (KBSR), in *Von Ceylon bis Turfan*, 1959:9-18. See MSS list in KBSR 9 n3. Waldschmidt German tr in KBSR 8-13. Also Fragment from the Hoernle Collection (London: Oriental & India Office Collection): unnumbered, microfilm photo 169, Fragm (b), identified by Hartmann & Wille 1992:36.

² P Skilling, *Mahā Sūtras* I, 1994:265-309 & II, 1997:441-467.

³ See Skilling 1994:264-289. The Skt & Pali of the recollection verses are given below [2].

⁴ H Bechert, “A metric ‘Varṇaka’ in Pāli scriptures,” in *Studies in Buddhism and Culture, in honour of Dr Ega-ku Mayeda on his 65th Birthday*. Tokyo, 1991:23-30 (751-758).

⁵ Eg **Vatthūpama S** (M 7.5-7/1:37); (**Agata,phala**) **Mahānāma S** (A 6.10.3-5/3:285 f).

⁶ Eg **Te,vijja S** (D 13.7/1:236) = SD 1.8; **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140.5/3:238) = SD 4.17; **Veḷu,dvāreyya S** (S 55.7/5:352) = SD 1.5; **Venāga,pura S** (A 3.63/1:180); cf **Sugata Vinaya S** (A 4.160.1b/2:147) = SD 6.7; also V 3:1 = D 1:49 = M 2:133 = S 1:219 = A 3:312, qu by Vism 198 & Mahvṛ 26.

⁷ For details on this **Buddhānussati**, see SD 15.7b.

⁸ The Skt parallel to this opening reads: *Iti hi sa bhagavāṃ tathāgato*, but *tathāgato* here is missing from the Pali version. See **Dhajagga S** (S 11.3) = SD 15.5 Intro (2) & **Buddhānussati** = SD 15.7 Intro (2.2) & n.

he is an arhat,
fully self-awakened,
accomplished in wisdom and conduct,
well-farer,
knower of worlds,
peerless guide of persons to be tamed,
teacher of gods and humans,
awakened,
blessed.

Having realized by his own direct knowledge this world with its gods, its Māras and its Brahmas, this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its rulers and people, he makes it known to others. He teaches the Dharma, good in the beginning, good in the middle, good in the end, both in the spirit and in the letter. He proclaims the holy life that is entirely complete and pure.⁹

It is good to see such arhats.”

(S 55.7/5:352) = SD 1.5

The other two verses (on the Dharma and on the Sangha), however, rarely appear on their own.

The Dhajagga Sutta belongs to a class of Buddhist literature known as *paritta* (protective texts)¹⁰ in Pali or *rakṣa* (“guarding” or ward runes) in Sanskrit.¹¹ Skilling notes that “The sūtra’s function as a paritta is easily seen in that it deals with refuge (*śaraṇa*) from fear: *śaraṇa* being close in meaning to *paritrāṇa* or *paritta*.” (1997:64). This is very clear from the Sutta’s commentary:

The Blessed One spoke this Dhajagga Paritta, whose “field of power” (*āṇā,khetta*) (ie range of efficacy) is up to 100,000 *koṭi*¹² of world-systems. For those who by recollecting it have been freed from sufferings such as fear of yakshas and of robbers [fear of disease, and the whole range of samsaric sufferings, SAT], it has no limit, not to speak of the other sufferings it has appeased.

It is said that one attending (*āvajjamāno hi*) to it with a heart of faith can find a foothold even in empty space.

This is the story: it is said that when the Dīgha,vāpi Cetiya [in central Sri Lanka]¹³ was being plastered (*sudhā,kamme*),¹⁴ a youth fell from the edge of the uppermost railing (*muddha,vedikā,-pādato*) [encircling the *hammiya*,¹⁵ SAT], fell down the dome (“belly,” *kucchi*) of the caitya. A group of monks standing below called out, “Think of the Dhajagga Paritta!” (*Dhajagga,parittam āvuso āvajjāhī ti*).

⁹ On this tr, see *Buddhānussati* = SD 15.7 (2.2) & n.

¹⁰ *Parittas* < *pari* [cf Gk peri-], “about, around, roundabout” + √TRĀ (probably “instrument, tool”), as in *sūtra*, *mantra*, and *tantra*, lit “instrument which surrounds,” ie “protection” (or verses recited for protection, ward runes) (Skt *paritra*, *paritrāṇa*). The Skt cognate *paritrāṇa* [P *paritta*], however, comes from *pari* + √TRĀ (to rescue) [SED gives √TRAI]. Another possible etym: *pari* + past part of √DA = “small, little, trifling” (BHS, *paritta*, PED sv; BHSD sv). A collection of Pali texts (varying from 28 to 32) taken from the Dīgha, the Majjhima, the Aṅguttara and the Khuddaka (esp Sn) and used as a manual for novices in monastic training and as a collection of mantras for protective, blessing and healing purposes. They are collectively known as the Cātubhāṇavāra (the “four sections for recitation”) known to the Sinhalese as “Pirith Potha”. The special occasion when Sinhalese monks recite the whole Cātubhāṇavāra is known as “pirith pinkima” (fr *paritta puñña,kamma*), a favourite religious ceremony conducted on various occasions like house-warmings, anniversaries, etc. The Sinhalese Cātu,bhāṇavāra comprises 29 extracts of which the first five pieces are preliminary to the remaining 24 which form the Paritta proper. A 13th century monk pupil of Ānanda Vana, ratana wrote the Sārattha Samuccaya as a commentary to it.

¹¹ See Skilling 1997:428-432; also Skilling 1992a.

¹² A *koṭi* is 10,000,000. As such, the Dhajagga S’s efficacy is up to 1,000,000,000,000 or trillion (“million million”) world systems!

¹³ See DPPN 1083 f. Skilling notes: “For the miracle to be meaningful, thus must have been a large *cetiya*.” (1997:65 n16).

¹⁴ *Sudhā* can also mean “whitewash (with slaked lime).”

¹⁵ The *hammiya* (“summer house”) is the rectangular upper chamber on top of the caitya dome.

Stirred by the fear of death, he cried, “May the Dhajagga Paritta protect me!” (*Dhajagga,-parittam mam rakkhatū ti*). Instantly [by the power of the paritta, SAṬ], for his sake, two bricks protruded from the caitya dome wall, and served as steps. Those standing above let down a rope-ladder. When the youth stood on this ladder, the bricks returned to their former position.

(SA 1:341 f)

The traditional invocation to the Dhajagga Paritta summarizes the commentary:¹⁶

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1 <i>Yassānussaraṇenā pi
Antalikkhe pi pāṇino
patiṭṭham adhigacchanti
bhūmiyaṃ viya sabbadā </i></p> | <p>By recollecting this,
may beings even in mid-air
find a foothold
as if on solid ground, ever.</p> |
| <p>2 <i>sabbūpaddava,jālamhā
yakkha,cor'ādi,sambhavā
gaṇanā na ca muttānaṃ
parittan tam bhaṇāma he </i></p> | <p>From the net of all misfortune,
arising from yakshas, thieves, and so on,
Not to be counted are those freed—
Let us recite this protection!</p> |

Peter Skilling's translation:¹⁷

Let us now recite that paritta | recollecting which beings may always gain
a foothold even in empty space | as if it were solid ground:
beyond reckoning are those | who by it have been freed
from the net of all misfortune | caused by *yakkhas*, thieves, and more.

The Sutta is amongst the “fourfold Pali recital” (*catu bhāṇavāra pāḷi*) (also called “Mahā Pirith Potha” or “the great book of protection”) of the Sinhalese,¹⁸ the “Phra.parit” (protective chants) or “Swadmon Chabab Luang” (the royal liturgy) of the Thais,¹⁹ and the “Paruit Rwat” (protective recitation) or “pa.yei.gyi” (Mahā Paritta) of Myanmar.²⁰ Such texts, however, are recited only on special occasions, although some monasteries may recite them as part of their daily office so that they are well memorized.²¹

Although the Dhajagga Sutta itself is not commonly recited today, the verses on recollection of the Three Jewels are very popular, and are included as canticles (*abhitthuti*) in the Thai monastic daily office and the daily devotion of the pious. These canticles, that is, the three verses of recollection of the Three Jewels have been expanded into another well known sutta-paritta, **the Ratana Sutta** (Kh 3-6), the sixth text in the Khuddaka Pāṭha,²² the vade mecum (handbook) of a novice, and as a paritta text.²³

2 Dhajagga Sutta texts

The compounds *dhaj'agga* (P) and *dhvajâgra* (Skt) are usually translated as a tatpurusha as “the crest of the banner,” but this does not seem to have much significance. Moreover, *-agga* or *-agra* has other

¹⁶ Based on Somdet Phra Sangharaj (Phussadeva) (ed), *Nangsu Suadmont Chabab Luang*, 5th ed, Bangkok, RE 130 (CE 1911) 19,17, 39,19 (full); *Suadmont Chabab Luang*, 13th ed, Bangkok, BE 2526 (CE 1983) 16,17; 17,15 (abbr); *Sirimaṅgala,paritta,pāḷi*, Rangoon, 1990:15,7 (vv77-79). See Skilling 1994 App I:741 & n1.

¹⁷ Skilling 1997:65 f.

¹⁸ See CPD Epilegomena to vol 1:93*-94*; de Silva 1981:5-7; Mahā Pirith Potha viii-ix; Suadmont Chabab Luang 13th ed 1983:124.

¹⁹ Also called the Royal Siamese Book of Chants, where it is found in the Cūḷa,rāja and the Mahā,rāja Parittas: Suadmont Chabab Luang, 13th ed, Bangkok: Mahamakut, 1983:17,1-19 ult, 38,1-6 (abbr). See also Montpithi, Chon-buri, nd: 68-71.

²⁰ See *Siri,māṅgala,paritta,pāḷi*; also Skilling 1997:64-66.

²¹ The use of sutta as mantras appears to be an ancient and Pan-Indian practice. Skilling observes that “On the internal evidence of several of the texts themselves (such as the Dhajagga and Āṭānāṭiya Suttas) and on the testimony of the Mahāvamsa, the Theravadins of Ceylon employed Paritta from the beginning.” (1997:75)

²² See Kh:Ñ 4-6 & KhA 157-201 = KhA:Ñ 172-222 (in the same vol).

²³ See Winternitz 1972:80.

meanings beside “top,” that is, “foremost” or “primary” (as in *aggaññā*, both the sutta title and its subject).²⁴ As such, the terms could be translated as “the foremost banner,” or “the banner of the foremost,” or “the leading banner,” or it is even simply as “banner.”²⁵ There is also a possible wordplay in the title, where *agga* refers to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, the foremost three of the Teaching.

It is interesting that where the Dhajagga Sutta has “should look on (at),” *ullokeyyātha* [5, 8 etc], that is the potential 2nd person plural of *ulloketi* (also *ullokayati, ullokayate*), “he looks at, looks up to, regards, pays attention to,” the Sanskrit versions have *samanusmartavyah*, that is, Pali, *samanussareyyātha*, “he should remember, call to mind.” This means that one need not look at the visible banner: it is enough just to recall it, as it is just to recollect one of the Three Jewels. After all, it is not possible to meet the Buddha in person today (although one might look at a Buddha image), or to see the Dharma in physical form, or to pick out a noble disciple from the forest of cloth. Hence, I think the most apt translation of *dhaj’agga* would be “the banner of the foremost.”

The Pali text of **the Dhajagga Sutta** is found in the following Pali Canon editions:

Pali Text Society (UK) ed, roman script	S:Ee 1:218,31-220,16;
Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyanā (Myanmar) ed, Burmese script	S:Be [I] 220,19-220,6;
Nālanda Mahāvihāra (India) ed, Devanagari script	S:eNāl I 220,16-222,2;
Syām,raṭṭha (Royal Siamese) ed, Thai script	S:Se 15:321,2-323,2.

There are two Dhajagga Sutta parallels in Chinese translation in **the Saṃyukta Āgama**.²⁶ A Sanskrit-Pali concordance of the verses of the three recollections as found in the Dhajagga Sutta and its Sanskrit parallel, **the Dhvajāgra Sūtra**²⁷ is given here.²⁸

Buddhānusr̥ti

iti hi sa bhagavām tathāgato
‘rhām
samyak,sambuddho
vidyācaraṇa,sampanna
sugato
loka,vid
anuttaraḥ puruṣa,damya,sārathi
śāstā deva,manuṣyāṇām
buddho
bhagavām |

Buddhānussati

iti pi so bhagavā
araham
sammā,sambuddho
vijjā,caraṇa,sampanno
sugato
loka,vidū
anuttaro purisa,damma,sārathī
satthā deva,manussānam
buddho
bhagavā ti | (S 1:219,31) [11]

Dharmānusr̥ti

svākhyāto bhagavatā dharmāḥ
sāmdr̥ṣṭiko
nirjvara ākālīka
aupanāyika
ehipaśyikaḥ

Dhammānussati

svākkhāto²⁹ bhagavatā dhammo
sandīṭṭhiko
akālīko
ehi,passiko
opanayiko³⁰

²⁴ See **Aggañña S** (D 27) = SD 2.9 Intro (2).

²⁵ As by EM Hare (S:H 3:73), by EB Cowell & WHD Rouse (J:CR 6:259,275, 299), and by JJ Jones (Mvst:J 1:230,10, 140,19). For useful discussion, see Skilling 1997:444-458, esp 445, 450.

²⁶ SĀ 980 (T1.99.980) = T2.254c2-255a24 & SĀ 981 (T1.99.981) = T2.255a25-b14. Both tr into German by **Waldschmidt** in BBS, 1932:44-51. On the Skt parallels, see Skilling 1997:401-432. For Tibetan parallels, see Skilling 1997:401, 433-467. See Skilling 1997:442 f for other refs.

²⁷ The Skt of the Buddhānussati verse is found in Sander (1987); all three passages are found in Skilling 1994 1:269-275.

²⁸ On the complex relationships of the various parallel texts of these suttas, see Skilling 1997:467. For a comparative tr, see **SD 15.10a(3)**.

²⁹ Be Nāl Se *svākkhāto*; Ee *svākhyāto*.

pratyātmedvedyo vijñāiḥ |

Saṅghānusr̥ti

suprapatipanno bhagavataḥ śrāvaka,saṅghaḥ
nyāya,pratipannaḥ
r̥ju,dr̥ṣṭi,pratipannaḥ
dharmānudharma,pratipannaḥ anudharma,cārī |

³²santi saṅghe srotāpatti,phala,sākṣātkriyāyai
pratipannakāḥ
santi saṅghe srotāpannāḥ
santi saṅghe sakṛdāgāmi,phala,sākṣātkriyāyai
pratipannakāḥ
santi saṅghe sakṛdāgāmināḥ
santi saṅghe anāgāmi,phala, sākṣātkriyāyai
pratipannakāḥ
santi saṅghe anāgāmināḥ
santi saṅghe arhat,phala, sākṣātkriyāyai
pratipannakāḥ
santi saṅghe arhantāḥ |

yad uta catvāri puruṣa,yugāni
aṣṭau puruṣa,pudgalāḥ

³⁴eṣa bhagavataḥ śrāvaka,saṅghaḥ
śīla,sampannaḥ samādhi,sampannaḥ
śraddhā,sampannaḥ śruta,sampannaḥ
vimuktaḥ,sampannaḥ vimukti,jñāna-
darśana.sampannaḥ |

³⁵āhavanīyaḥ
prāhavanīyaḥ
añjali,karaṇīyaḥ
samīci,karaṇīyaḥ
anuttaraṃ puṇya,kṣetraṃ dakṣaṇīyo lokasya |

paccattaṃ veditabbo viññūhī ti | (S 1:220,1) [13]

Saṅghānussati

supaṭipanno³¹ bhagavato sāvaka,saṅgho
uju,paṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka,saṅgho
ñāya,paṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka,saṅgho
sāmīci,paṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka,saṅgho
(S 1:220,7) [15]

[*sotāpanno*

sotāpatti,phala,sacchikiriyāya paṭipanno

sakadāgāmī

sakadāgāmi,phala,sacchikiriyāya paṭipanno

anāgāmī

anāgāmi,phala,sacchikiriyāya paṭipanno

arahā

arahattāya paṭipanno |]

(A 4:292,12 = D 3:255)³³

yad idaṃ cattāri purisa,yugāni

aṭṭha purisa,puggalā | (S 1:220,11) [15]

esa bhagavato sāvaka,saṅgho

āhuneyyo

pāhuneyyo

dakkhiṇeyyo

añjali,karaṇīyo

anuttaraṃ puñña-k,khettaṃ lokassā ti |

(S 1:220,12) [15]

In the Saṅghānussati, there is a noticeable break after the line *sāmīci,paṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka,-saṅgho*, which abruptly goes on with *yad idaṃ cattāri purisa,yugāni aṭṭha purisa,puggalā*, where, as a rule, *yad idaṃ* refers back to a previous statement which it expands. This preceding passage (given in **bold italics** above), apparently missing from the Saṅghānussati verse, is found in **the Aṭṭha,puggala**

³⁰ Ee Nal *opanayiko*; Be Nāl *opaneyyiko*.

³¹ Ee Se *supaṭipanno*; Be Nāl Se *suppaṭipanno* throughout para.

³² Artha,viniścaya Sūtra 46,3. For tr, see Table 3 = SD 15.10a(3).

³³ This parallel, missing from the Buddhānussati stock passage, is from **Saṅgīti S** (D 33.3.1(3)/3:255) & **Aṭṭha,-puggala S 1** of **Sa-ādhāna Vagga** in **Aṭṭhaka Nipāta** (A 8.59/4:292,12; A:Be [III] 115,26; A:Nāl 383,12; A:Se 23:301,6; no vll except that the *vagga* is called *Sandhāna-* in Se and *Gotamī-* in Be and Nāl. For tr & nn, see **Aṭṭha,-puggala S 1** = SD 8.59.

³⁴ Artha,viniścaya Sūtra 47,6.

³⁵ Artha,viniścaya Sūtra 47,7.

Sutta 1 (A 8.59),³⁶ and also in the Sanskrit version of the Saṅghānusmṛti, as evident above. The Sanskrit version of the missing section of the Saṅghānussati translates as follows:

santi saṅghe srotāpatti,phala,sākṣātkriyāyai pratipannakāḥ	There are those in the Sangha on the path the realization of the fruit of streamwinning.
santi saṅghe srotāpānāḥ	There are the streamwinners in the Sangha.
santi saṅghe sakṛdāgāmi,phala,sākṣātkriyāyai pratipannakāḥ	There are those in the Sangha on the path the realization of the fruit of once-return.
santi saṅghe sakṛdāgāmināḥ	There are the once-returners in the Sangha.
santi saṅghe anāgāmi,phala, sākṣātkriyāyai pratipannakāḥ	There are those in the Sangha on the path the realization of the fruit of non-return.
santi saṅghe anāgāmināḥ	There are the non-returners in the Sangha.
santi saṅghe arhat,phala, sākṣātkriyāyai pratipannakāḥ	There are those in the Sangha on the path the realization of the fruit of arhathood.
santi saṅghe arhantāḥ	There are arhats in the Sangha.

3 The gods

The Dhajjagga Sutta relates a celestial battle, well known in the Nikāyas,³⁷ when Shakra (P *Sakka*), the leader of the gods, led his forces into battle, advising them that if fear should arise, they should look at his foremost banner (*dhaj'agga*), then their fears would immediately vanish. Or, they could look on at the crest of the banners of Prajāpati (P *Pajāpati*) or of Varuṇa or of Īśāna (P *Isāna*).

Shakra (P *Sakka*) or Indra is the best known of deities in the early Buddhist canon.³⁸ In the Pali texts, the deva kings Shakra, Prajāpati, Varuṇa and Isāna are often mentioned together.³⁹ **The Āṭānāṭiya Sutta** (D 32) mentions Inda (Skt Indra = Shakra), Varuṇa and Prajāpati amongst the great yakshas to be invoked by Buddhists in times of danger.⁴⁰ The Saṃyutta Commentary says that in the deva assembly, Shakra takes the foremost seat. Prajāpati, who looks like Shakra and is of the same age, takes the second seat; Varuṇa, the third; and Isāna, the fourth respectively (SA 1:341). Prajāpati is sometimes mentioned with Brahmā.⁴¹ In Mahāyāna, Prajāpati is one of the 16 devaputras who guard the Bodhi sanctum (*bodhi-maṇḍa*) (Lalv 277.12).

In Brahmanism, **Prajāpati** is the most important epiphany (divine manifestation in the world), the lord of all that exists (*sarvaḥ kaścit prabhuḥ*) (R̥gv 3.7). In the R̥gveda, the name Prajāpati refers to the lord or preserver of creatures (R̥gv 4.2), and is applied to Savitṛ, Soma, Agni and Indra. Later, he is regarded as a supreme god, overseeing procreation. In the Epic Purāṇic period, he is regarded both Śiva and Viṣṇu. Still later, the name refer to the ten primeval progenitors created by Brahman—Marīci, Atri, Aṅgiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Vaśiṣṭha, Pracetas or Dakṣa, Bhṛgu and Nārada. In Purāṇic and classical literature, Prajāpati is a name of Brahman.⁴²

The asura **Varuṇa** is one of the oldest Vedic gods and is commonly thought to correspond to the Greek Uranus, and is often regarded as the supreme deity (SED). He is the world-protector (*loka,pāla*) of the west.⁴³ In the Bṛhad Araṇyaka Upaniṣad (1.4.11), he is classed with Rudra, Indra, Varuṇa, Soma, Parjanya, Yama, and Mṛtyu as *kṣatra*, ruling power or sovereign might.

³⁶ See n ad loc.

³⁷ D 2:285; M 1:253; S 1:216, 222, 4:201, 5:247; A 4:432. See also Loka,paññatti (Denis) II n12; Hōbōgirin 1:43 (Ashura) for some refs in Chinese sources; and Skilling 1997:423-426.

³⁸ See **Recollection of the Devas** = SD 15.13 Intro, esp (2).

³⁹ D 1:244, 2:274; S 1:219; J 5:28 (Soma is also mentioned).

⁴⁰ D 32.10/3:204.

⁴¹ M 1:140, 327, 329; J 6:568, 571.

⁴² Bhattacharji 1970:322-329; Gonda 1970:13, 20, 28-30, 38, passim. See also SD 11.7 Intro 5 (Prajāpati & Brahmā) & SD 15.13(3).

⁴³ See **Sigāl'ovāda S** (D 31) = SD 4.1 Intro 2.

Īsāṇa, the “world-protector” (*loka,pāla*) ruling the north-east, is an ambiguous figure. In brahmanical religions, when Siva’s name is taboo, Īsāṇa is used instead or as a euphemism, but in due course, he assumed an independent identity. As such, he is sometimes depicted with his colleagues as a worshipper of Siva, the god of destruction, invoked and adored with flowers and incense. Often he is regarded as identical with Siva himself, and offered a bull as his mount. In post-Buddha Hinduism, Īsāṇa is one of the older names of Śiva-Rudra, or the sun as a form of Śiva, or a name of Vishnu (Viṣṇu) (SED).

The Mūla,pariyāya Sutta, however, warns us not to confuse perception or imagination (*maññanā*), even mythology, with reality, and in a penetrating analysis of the perceptual processes of different types of individuals shows how religious notions and emotions arises, all revolving around the conception of a “self,” thus:

He perceives⁴⁴ **beings**⁴⁵ as beings.
 Having perceived beings as beings:
 he conceives⁴⁶ beings;
 he conceives (himself) in beings;
 he conceives (himself apart) from beings;
 he conceives, ‘Beings are mine’
 —he delights in beings...in gods...in Prajāpati...in Brahmā.
 Why is that? Because he lacks full understanding, I say. (M 1.7-18/1:2 f) = SD 11.8

The same is said of ...**gods**⁴⁷ as gods...**Prajāpati** as Prajāpati...**Brahmā** as Brahmā...and so on up to **the formless realms**.

The Dhajagga Sutta opens with mention of a battle between the devas and the asuras. Such battles between the devas, under the leadership of Shakra,⁴⁸ and the asuras, are often recounted in stock passages in other early suttas.⁴⁹ The origin of this animosity is given in a very interesting story. When Shakra and his 33 friends were reborn into the asura world (before it became Tāvātimsa), the asuras (the old gods)

⁴⁴ “Perceives,” *sañjānāti*, here it refers to a sense-experience before it is “value-added,” ie, before the mind filters, shapes and colours it. However, in the case of on spiritually weak, even at this stage such a conscious experience could still be biased by wrong view, esp taking the impermanent to be permanent, the painful as pleasurable, the not self as having an abiding entity. However, this negative tendency becomes strong habituated at the “conceiving” (*maññanā*) level. While the ordinary person is said to “perceive” (*sañjānāti*) each of the elements or the spheres, the noble learner (*sekha*) is said to “directly know” (*abhiñānāti*) them. The learner knows them as they really are through direct knowledge that they are impermanent, unsatisfactory and not self. See foll 3 nn.

⁴⁵ “Beings,” *bhūta*. Comy says that here “beings” signifies only living beings below the heaven of the Four Great Kings, the lowest of the sense-sphere heavens. The higher levels of beings are designated by the terms that follow. Qu at Vbh 35. See §3 & n.

⁴⁶ “He conceives,” *maññati*, “he thinks.” This is the predominant verb here. The verb *maññati* is often used in the Pali Suttas to refer to distorted thinking, that is, ascribing to an object or experience characteristics and significance that are not derived from that object or experience, but from one’s own subjective imaginings (*maññanā*). “The cognitive distortion introduced by conceiving consists, in brief, in the intrusion of the egocentric perspective into the experience already slightly distorted by spontaneous perception.” (M:ÑB 1162 n6). Comy explains that **the 3 types of conceiving** (*maññanā*) can be applied here in this manner: (1) when a person is attached to beings as a result of sight, hearing, etc or desires rebirth in a certain class of beings, this is conceiving due to craving; (2) when he regards himself as “superior,” “inferior” or “equal” with others, this is conceiving due to conceit; (3) when he thinks, “Beings are permanent, stable, etc,” this is conceiving due to views. (MA 1:26, 32). For a shorter version of this teaching, see for example **Nakula,pitā S** (S 22.1/ 3:1-5).

⁴⁷ “Gods,” *devā*. Comy says that “gods” here refers to the six sense-sphere heavens, except for Māra and his retinue in the Para,nimmita,vasavatti heaven. On cosmology, see eg M:ÑB Intro 45-48.

⁴⁸ On Shakra (P *Sakka*; Skt *Śakra*), see **Devatānussati** = SD 15.13(2)..

⁴⁹ Eg D 2:285; M 1:253; S 1:216 ff, 222, 4:201 ff, 5:447; A 4:432. The Dhammapada Comy relates Shakra’s romantic marriage to **Sujā**, daughter of **Vepacitti**, one of the asura leaders, who in fact becomes Shakra’s father-in-law (DhA 1278 f; cf J 1:205 f). Buddhaghosa explains that in those days, father-in-law (*sasura*) and son-in-law (*jā-māta*) sometimes battle with one another (SA 1:345)!

prepared “the fragrant drink” (*gandha,pāna*).⁵⁰ Shakra, however, warned his companions not to drink it. The asuras who drank it became drunk and were thrown down Mt Sineru. Halfway down, they became sober and vowed never to take strong drinks (*surā*) again; hence their name, *asura*.⁵¹

The drift of the Dhajagga Sutta is very clear, and this is in total agreement with the Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan versions: that even the gods are “human,” ridden with greed, hate and delusion.⁵² However, unlike human beings, the gods enjoy the fruits of their past good karma, but which again are impermanent. As the gods can notice signs of the impending death, over which they have no control, they invariably panic or are troubled by it, and as such, there is a technical term for their death: they “fall” (*cavati*) from the heavens to lower births, sometimes even into subhuman planes.

The Buddha, the Dharma and the Noble Sangha are free from fear and other defilements, and as such they serve as excellent objects of recollection exercises.⁵³ The conditions that bring about and support the lives of the gods, too, are wholesome, and as such can be used as mental objects for spiritual exercise for those with a strong faculty of faith, or for those in need of faith to facilitate their meditation in its initial stages. Such an exercise is found in the recollection of deities (*devatānussati*).⁵⁴ □

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⁵⁰ Be *gandha,pāna*; Ce Ee *gaṇḍa,pāna*.

⁵¹ SA 1:338. At DhA 1:272, the drink is called “the divine drink” (*dibba,pāna*). SED defs *gandha,pāna* as “a fragrant beverage.” The asuras are often compared with the Titans (12 brother and sisters according to Hesiod’s *Theogony*), who in Greek mythology were the children of Heaven and Earth. When the Titans rebelled against the chief god, Zeus, they were defeated and imprisoned in the underworld. The Titans may have been gods of an earlier cult ousted by the Olympian pantheon under Zeus, just as the devas under Shakra overthrew the asuras and built Tāvatiṃsa.

⁵² See Skilling 1997:461 f.

⁵³ On **Dhammānussati**, see SD 15.9; on **Saṅghānussati**, see SD 15.10.

⁵⁴ See SD 15.13.

The Discourse on the Foremost Banner

(S 11.3/1:218-220)

1 At Sāvattihī.

2 There the Blessed One addressed the monks thus:

“Bhikshus!”

“Venerable sir!” the monks answered the Blessed One in assent.

The banner-crests of the gods

3 The Blessed One said this:

4 “Bhikshus, in the past, the devas and the asuras were arrayed for battle.

5 Then, Shakra, the lord of the devas, addressed the Tāvatiṃsa devas [the host of the 33 gods] thus: ‘Sirs, when the devas go into battle, [219] if fear or trembling or hair-raising [horripilation] should arise, then you should look on at my foremost banner.⁵⁵

For when you look on⁵⁶ at my foremost banner, whatever fear or trembling or hair-raising [horripilation] you may have will be abandoned.

6 If you cannot look on at my foremost banner, then you should look on at the deva-rajah Prajāpati’s foremost banner.

For when you look on at his foremost banner, whatever fear or trembling or hair-raising [horripilation] you may have will be abandoned.

7 If you cannot look on at the deva-rajah Prajāpati’s foremost banner, then you should look on at the deva-rajah Varuṇa’s foremost banner.

For when you look on at his foremost banner, whatever fear or trembling or hair-raising [horripilation] you may have will be abandoned.

8 If you cannot look on at the deva-rajah Varuṇa’s foremost banner, then you should look on at the deva-rajah Īsāna’s foremost banner.

For when you look on at his foremost banner, whatever fear or trembling or hair-raising [horripilation] you may have will be abandoned.’

9 Bhikshus, for those who look on at the foremost banner or Shakra, the lord of the devas;

or for those who look on at the deva-rajah Prajāpati’s foremost banner;

or for those who look on at the deva-rajah Varuṇa’s foremost banner;

or for those who look on at the deva-rajah Īsāna’s foremost banner;

whatever fear or trembling or hair-raising [horripilation] they may have, may or may not be abandoned.

10 What is the reason for that? Because Shakra, the lord of the devas, is not freed from greed, not freed from hate, not freed from delusion. When timid, or petrified, or fearful, he fled.⁵⁷

The Three Jewels

11 But, bhikshus, I say this:

If you have gone to the forest, or to the foot of a tree, or to an empty house, and fear or trembling or hair-raising [horripilation] should arise, then you should recollect me thus:

⁵⁵ “The crest of the banner,” *dhaj’agga*, Skt *dhvajāgra*. See Skilling, *Mahā Sūtras* 2:237 & S:B 490 n611.

⁵⁶ “Should look on (at),” *ullokeyyātha*, pot 2 pl of *ulloketi* (also *ullokayati*, *ullokayate*), “he looks at, looks up to, regards, pays attention to.” The Skt versions have *samanusmartavyaḥ* = P *samanussareyyātha*, “should remember, call to mind.” See Skilling 1997:450 f. See Intro (2).

⁵⁷ *Taṃ kissa hetu. Sakko hi bhikkhave devānam indo avīta, rāgo avīta, doso avīta, moho bhīru chambhī utrāsī palāyī ti.*

(1) THE RECOLLECTION OF THE BUDDHA⁵⁸

‘So too, is he the Blessed One:⁵⁹ for, he is arhat, fully self-awakened one, accomplished in wisdom and conduct, well-farer, knower of worlds, peerless guide of persons to be tamed,⁶⁰ teacher of gods and humans, awakened, blessed.’

*iti pi so bhagavā
araham
sammā,sambuddho
vijjā,caraṇa,sampanno
sugato
loka,vidū
anuttaro purisa,damma,sārathī
satthā deva,manussānam
buddho
bhagavā ti*

12 For when you recollect me, whatever fear or trembling or hair-raising [horripilation] you may have will be abandoned. [220]

13 If you cannot recollect me, then you should recollect the Dharma, thus:

(2) THE RECOLLECTION OF THE DHARMA⁶¹

‘Well-taught⁶² is the True Teaching of the Blessed One, visible here and now, immediate [having nothing to do with time], inviting one to come and see, accessible [to bring oneself up to it], to be personally known by the wise.’⁶³

*svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo
sandīṭṭhiko
akāliko
ehi,passiko
opanayiko
paccattam veditabbo viññūhī ti*

14 For when you recollect the Dharma, whatever fear or trembling or hair-raising [horripilation] you may have will be abandoned.

15 If you cannot recollect me, then you should recollect the Sangha, thus:

(3) THE RECOLLECTION OF THE SANGHA⁶⁴

‘The Blessed One’s community of disciples keeps to the good way,’⁶⁵

supaṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka,saṅgho

⁵⁸ The 9 virtues of the Buddha, commented on at Vism 7.1-67/197-213. For further detailed analysis, see *Buddhānussati* = SD 15.7 see also **Sundarika Bhāra,dvāja S** (Sn 3.4) = SD 15.7b.

⁵⁹ Alt tr: “For the following reasons, too, he is the Blessed One [the Lord]...” On the meaning of *iti pi so*, see *Buddhānussati* = SD 15.7 (2.2) & n.

⁶⁰ *Purisa,damma sārathī*. Here *-damma* (adj) is grd, meaning “to be tamed or restrained,” often spoken of a young bullock (M 1:225, *bala,gāvā damma,gāvā*, “the strong cattle and cattle to be tamed,” ie bulls and young steers); also of other animals: *assa,damma,sārathī*, a horse trainer (A 2:112); It 80. In *purisa,damma sārathī*, fig (“the trainer of the human steer”) of unconverted persons, likened to a refractory bullocks; D 1:62 (wr *-dhamma*) = 2:93 = 3:5; M 2:38; A 2:112; Vv 17.13; cf VvA 86.

⁶¹ For detailed analysis of terms here, see *Dhammānussati* = SD 15.9.

⁶² Here begins the 6 qualities of the Dharma (*cha dhamma,guṇa*) (M 1:37; A 3:285).The 6 virtues of the Dharma, commented on at Vism 7.68-88/213-218. See *Dhammānussati* = SD 15.9.

⁶³ *Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo sandīṭṭhiko akāliko ehi,passiko opanayiko paccattam veditabbo viññūhī ti*. The Dharma is something that can be seen for oneself (*sandīṭṭhika*); that can be known immediately (*akālika*); that it entails personal verification (*ehi,passika*); that it is accessible (*opanayika*); that it is to be personally realized by the wise (*paccattam veditabbo viññūhī*). “The terms all highlight, not the intrinsic nature of the Dhamma, but its relation to human knowledge and understanding. They are all epistemological in import, not ontological; they are concerned with how the Dhamma is known, not with the temporal status of the known.” (Bodhi, 1998 §27/p31 digital ed). Bodhi also notes that “the common rendering of [*opanayiko*] as ‘leading onward’ seems difficult to justify either on etymological grounds or by reference to the texts. The Commentaries take it as an implicit gerundive, *upanetabba*, “to be brought near, to be drawn close to.’ Hence ‘accessible’ may be the English word that best captures the intended sense. (See Vism 7.83 f).” (Bodhi op cit n44). On the tr of this passage, see Brahmavariso, 2003b:59-62.

⁶⁴ For detailed analysis of terms here, see **Aṭṭha,puggala S** (A 8.59) = SD 15.10a.

the Blessed One's community of disciples
keeps to the straight way;

uju,paṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka,saṅgho

the Blessed One's community of disciples
keeps to the right way;

ñāya,paṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka,saṅgho

the Blessed One's community of disciples
keeps to the proper way.⁶⁶

sāmīci,paṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka,saṅgho

These are the four pairs of persons,
the eight individuals:

yad idaṃ cattāri purisa,yugāni

this Blessed One's community of disciples is
worthy of offerings,⁶⁷

aṭṭha,purisa,puggalā

worthy of hospitality,

āhuneyyo

worthy of gifts,⁶⁸

pāhuneyyo

worthy of salutation with the lotus-palms,

dakkhiṇeyyo

a supreme field of merit for the world.⁷

añjali,karaṇīyo

anuttaraṃ puñña-k,khettaraṃ lokassā ti

16 For when you recollect the Sangha, whatever fear or trembling or hair-raising [horripilation] you may have will be abandoned.

17 What is the reason for that?

Bhikshus, the Tathagata, arhat, fully self-awakened, is free from fear, free from trembling, free from hair-raising; he does not take flight.

18 The Blessed One said this. Having said this, the Sugata [well gone], the Teacher, further said this:

868 In a forest, or at the foot of a tree,
Or in an empty house, bhikshus,
Should you recollect the self-awakened one,
There will be no fear in you.

869 If you cannot recollect the Buddha,
The eldest in the world, the lordly bull of men,
Then you should recollect the Dharma,
Liberating and well taught.

870 If you cannot recollect the Dharma,
Liberating and well taught,
Then you should recollect the Sangha,
The supreme field of merit.

871 For those who thus recollect the Buddha,
The Dharma, and the Sangha, bhikshus,
Nor fear nor trembling
Nor hair-raising will occur.

— evaṃ —

⁶⁵ Here begins the 9 virtues of the Sangha (*nava saṅgha,guṇa*) (M 1:37; A 3:285), commented on at Vism 7.89-100/218-221. See **Aṭṭha,puggala S** (A 8.59) = SD 15.10.

⁶⁶ These seems to be an abrupt break here, with the mention of “These four pairs of persons...” which seems to refer back to some missing passage, which evidently is found in the Skt version: see Intro 3: Saṅghānusmṛti & **Aṭṭha,puggala S 1** (A 4:292 = D 33.3.1(3)/3:255).

⁶⁷ *Āhuneyyo*. That is, worthy of receiving sacrifices or offerings. The Skt cognate *āhavanīya* refers to that which was offered as an oblation as in *āhuneyy'aggī*, one of the 3 brahminical sacrificial fires (the one in the east).

⁶⁸ *Dakkhiṇeyyo*. Specifically refers to offerings made for the benefit of the departed by way of dedication of merits to them.

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[For more references on the Dhajagga Sutta, see Skilling 1997:442 f.]

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