

## SD 64.12g

## Abhivāda Sutta

## The Discourse on Showing Respect

## A 2.37

Theme: Those who refrain from sensual pleasures are truly worthy of respect

1 Sutta summary and significance

**The Abhivāda Sutta** (A 2.37) records the elder Maha Kaccāna teaching to the brahmin Kaṇḍarāyana on respect and deference especially towards senior brahmin priests. Kaccāna replies that the Buddha does not define maturity in terms of years; rather “**the stage of childishness**” (*dahara, bhūmi*) is the desire for and tendency to have sensual desires [§3], and “**the stage of maturity**” (*vuḍḍha, bhūmi*) is the natural state of non-attraction to and non-indulgence in sensual pleasures [§4].

The Sutta closes with the brahmin acknowledging that the monks younger than he is, because they live morally virtuous lives, are more worthy of respect than he is himself [§5]. He goes for refuge [§6].

2 Significance of the sutta teaching**2.1 THE STAGE OF CHILDISHNESS (DHĀRA, BHŪMI)**2.1.1 The foolish elder

**2.1.1.1 The Abhivāda Sutta** [§§3 f] defines **the stage of childishness** (*dahara, bhūmi*) as follows:

Even though someone is **old**—eighty, ninety, or a hundred years from birth—

if he enjoys sensual pleasures, dwells in sensual pleasures, burns with a fever for sensual pleasures, is consumed with thoughts of sensual pleasures, is eager in the quest for sensual pleasures, then he is reckoned as **a foolish [childish] elder** (*bāla therā*).

Clearly then, **age** (the number of years one has lived) is not a measure of maturity (*vuḍḍha*). We see children physically growing up, learning and socializing with one another, and maturing into responsible individuals. This is in simple terms the process of humanizing, that is, human maturation, growing into a person with human qualities.

Yet, not all those who are born human are fully humanized as they age. Indeed, most of us never actually attain the human state fully at all. We often act and react according to instincts and early conditionings, our minds are often blinkered and warped by sensual desires, religious views and superstition—we are often nothing more than the sum of *greed, hatred, delusion and fear* we have gone through, and we merely live out these emotional biases.

**2.1.1.2** Our bodies may grow with the years; even our brains may unfold with life experiences; but our minds remain subhuman, controlled by the 4 biases of *greed, hatred, delusion and fear*. When we have **craving** for something, we react with *greed* for what we want or burn with *hatred* for what we see as frustrating us; when we are blinded by **ignorance**, we react with *delusion*, turning what we sense into phantoms that afflict us with *fear* that is capable of destroying anyone or anything, even ourselves.

We are likely to become more human when, as we socially mature, we are exposed to instances or possibilities of **non-greed** or generosity, when we learn to share things, or learn to happily make do even when we are deprived by lack. Perhaps we may mature in some way when we understand how hate and fear are healed by **non-hatred**, by love, kindness, and understanding. We mature most of all by overcom-

ing our ignorance and fears by **non-delusion**; wisdom arises by our observing the patterns of our habits and of the events in our lives, and knowing and choosing good over bad.

**2.1.1.3** A person may be an adult, even advanced in years, but when one does not respect what are primarily of value and are vital to others, then one is *socially disengaged, emotionally weak and spiritually childish* (*bāla*); that is:

- one does not respect **life**, harms others and kills living beings;
- one does not respect the **property** of others, steals and takes the not given;
- one does not respect the **freedom** of another, especially a person's person and choice to say no;
- one does not respect **truth**, making claims for one's own benefit, and according to one's inclination;
- one does not respect **the mind**, one's own or those of others; one's mind is neither calm nor clear; one does not act with a mind free from greed, hatred or delusion; one takes no responsibility for one's thoughts and actions.

These are **the 5 values** that naturally and universally pervade our human lives so that we can live with one another, as a family and as a society. Early Buddhism highlights these human values as the roots of **moral conduct**, which are in turn the vital foundation for **mental cultivation** which prepares the mind for seeing directly into true reality and to be liberated from suffering.

## 2.2 THE STAGE OF MATURITY (*vuḍḍha*, *bhūmi*)

### 2.2.1 The wise elder

**2.2.1.1** According to the Commentary on **the Brāhmaṇa, dhammika Sutta** (Sn 2.7/p50), **maturity** (*vuḍḍha*) refers to “a growth in the quality that is moral conduct and so on.”<sup>1</sup> The phrase “and so on” (*-ādi*) refers to the last 2 components of the 3 trainings, those in *moral virtue, mental concentration and insight wisdom*. In Buddhist training, these 3 entail the practice of:

- (1) moral conduct, that is, keeping the 5 precepts for (the laity) and the Vinaya (for monastics);
  - (2) mental cultivation for gaining calm and concentration;
  - (3) which are the basis for cultivating wisdom for seeing into true reality, especially impermanence.
- In this way, we train ourselves to become true individuals (*sappurisa*)<sup>2</sup> who live happily in this life itself, and upon dying become at least streamwinners, that is, we gain the path of awakening.

**2.2.1.2** A simple practical way of envisioning **Dharma training** is that of respecting traffic lights on a street where we move safely and quickly heading for home. The traffic lights at appropriate junctions regulate traffic flow by signalling a red light for **stop**, amber for **look**, and green for **go**.

Similarly, on the path of training, we can reflect on the red light as warning us to **stop** the moment we notice we are going to act with *greed, hatred or delusion*. It is easy to notice when we have greed or its opposite, hatred, or even anger. When we notice that we are going to act out of greed or out of hatred, we simply *stop*. This is nipping the deed in the bud. This means that we have taken the decision to act responsibly, since we know that when the action is bad or evil, it will have a negative consequence on ourselves. Furthermore, we will bear its fruit that is bad or evil.

<sup>1</sup> *Vuḍḍhā ti sīlācār'ādi, guṇa, vuḍḍhi, yuttā* (SnA 1:131).

<sup>2</sup> SD 64.12a (3.1.4).

**2.2.1.3** To prevent “road rage” or any kind of negative emotion, early in this “stop” phase of our Buddhist training, we should constantly cultivate **lovingkindness**, that is, accepting others as we accept ourselves. Empowered by **lovingkindness**, our mind is better inclined thus:

- not to kill: to respect life, and be kind to others and protect the environment;
- not to take the not given, and to be generous and charitable to others not only with material things but with our time, effort, and wisdom, or simply being present with others;
- not to violate the person of others, but to show them love and to respect their views and decisions which are good for their personal development;
- not to lie to others through words, deeds or deception that prevent them from learning what is right and good, which helps them grow wholesomely as individuals; and
- not to mind others in any way with greed, hatred, delusion or fear, but to inspire a happy, calm and clear mind in them so that (and we, too) they become *self-reliant* and *emotionally independent* individuals filled with love, ruth, joy and peace. [2.3.1.1]

In practical terms, this is how we can view **moral conduct** as a training to *stop* any unwholesome intention right before we act it out. This is the training in self-restraint, that is, preventing any of the sense-faculties from acting out of *greed, hatred or delusion*. We can deal with the thought itself (that is the root that is *greed, hatred or delusion*) in due course in the **look** phase of our training. [2.2.1.2, 2.2.1.4 f]

**2.2.1.4** The 2<sup>nd</sup> traffic light on the road of Dharma training is that of the amber light. This is the light that tells us to **look** to ensure that our path ahead is clear and safe so that we can continue our journey forward. In Dharma training, we now look on with lovingkindness or with calmness into our own mind. In a practical sense, this is still the “stop” stage of our training, that is, we continue to strengthen our **moral conduct** [2.2.1.2] with lovingkindness (*mettā*), which inspires us to be at peace by accepting others at their best or as they are, allowing them to grow at their own pace.

This lovingkindness that we cultivate also forms the support to keep our mind happily free from being distracted by the senses. This way, the mind turns to fully focus on itself, that is, to see directly into impermanence, especially how events arise and fall away before us. We also see ourselves—such as our breath—arising and falling away in this manner. Thus we see ourselves as an integral part of everything else that exists.

**2.2.1.5** The 3<sup>rd</sup> traffic light is the green light that invites us to **go**, that is, move ahead, to progress in our Dharma-spirited training. This green light marks an important development from the love-based moral conduct that empowers our mind to become calm and clear. This mind is now able to see the true reality that is *impermanence* [2.2.1.4]. In **the breath meditation**, for example, we see and feel the air that we take in from “out there”; this air becomes a part of us, giving us the **wind** of life and activity. We also notice how solid food becomes the **earth** element that is our physical body. The **water** we take in then irrigates over three-quarters of our body. Then there is the **fire** of oxidation, metabolism and bodily processes and changes—the decay that besets us every living moment.

The instability of the 4 elements—*earth, water, fire and wind*—not only brings about bodily changes and aging, but it also brings us *pain*. Our mind notices this pain, and not seeing the nature of these processes, we experience **suffering**. The Buddha teaches us that there are 2 kinds of pains: the bodily and the mental. It is the nature of our elemental body to go through change, and thus pain. However, the mind that understands the nature of the elements leaves the pain where it is, in the body. The mind can wisely choose not to suffer or to limit the suffering. In this sense, we understand that **pain is natural, suffering is optional**.

## 2.3 THE POSITIVE SOCIAL EMOTIONS

### 2.3.1 Love, ruth, joy, peace

**2.3.1.1 A mature person** or “wise elder” (*paṇḍita therā*) is one with a deep understanding of the true nature of life, rooted in *impermanence, suffering and nonself*. All the things we value in life—that make our life meaningful and precious—are impermanent. **Life** itself is impermanent; what we **are** and what we **have** are all impermanent; our **body** is impermanent, often limited in its abilities, and age robs us of our body and mind; the **truth** is timeless and universal, but we often forget it; and **the mind** is changing all the time, but we rarely notice it.

When we understand that suffering is rooted in greed, hatred and delusion, we are more inspired to work with **charity, love and wisdom**. To be **charitable** then begins with treasuring life, to live well and to let live; to give and share what gives life and betters it; to respect the body that it will live well and free; to see this as universal truth that integrates and heals; and to keep the mind open and happy.

**To live** then is to love, to see others kindly as we see ourself. When we see others with love, that is, unconditionally, we learn that we all share similar love—thus, to love is to learn. When we **learn** more about others, we also understand ourself better, and grow as a person—thus, to learn is to grow. **To grow** well is to be healthy in mind and in body; with a healthy mind in a healthy body, we live fully and wisely—thus, to grow is to be free from suffering.

To live is to love; to love is to learn; to learn is to grow; to grow is to be free.

**2.3.1.2** We can call this **the truth and beauty** of living regarding body and mind. In practical terms, these are humanizing qualities. They make us the best humans we can be; in other words, we become truly well and happy like the gods themselves, or even better. Thus these qualities are called **the 4 divine abodes**.

These divine abodes should be applied to social realities in these ways:

- (1) **Lovingkindness**, in the sense of an unconditional acceptance of others, ranging from befriending, liking, loving and partnering; basically, this human quality is that of being wholesomely able to live with others.
- (2) **Compassion** or ruth,<sup>3</sup> that is, the willingness and ability to respond to others with kindness when they are “less” than we are, that is, they are less fortunate, have personal difficulties or have fallen into hard times; that is, we are moved by the desire to better their lives or at least be free from the current predicament.
- (3) **Joy**, that is, a spontaneous appreciative feeling for others when our efforts have bettered the lives of others, or that they have by themselves gained happiness, or are even “greater” than we are in some ways; that is, we are happy when others are happy.
- (4) **Equanimity**, that is, we are at peace in our hearts that, despite all our efforts, there are still those who suffer or are deprived, and will continue to face life’s vicissitudes. We begin to understand that kindness is not merely doing things for others, but that there are times when we must just let things be so that others have the freedom to live and grow, and that we, too, will live and grow.<sup>4</sup>

**2.3.1.3** At the Sutta’s end, the brahmin Kaṇḍarāyana “rose from his seat, arranged his upper robe over one shoulder, and bowed down with his head at the feet of the young monks, [saying:]

<sup>3</sup> On “**ruth**” as tr of *karuṇā*, “compassion,” a divine abode: SD 38.5 (2.3.2.1); SD 48.1 (5.2.1.3); SD 60.2 (5.4.2.2 n).

<sup>4</sup> On *brahma, vihāra*, see **Tevijja S** (D 13, 76-79), SD 1.8; SD 51.14 (3.2.2.3); **Brahma, vihāra**, SD 38.5.

‘You elders stand at the stage of an elder; we youths stand at the stage of a youth’” [§5].  
And he went to the 3 jewels for refuge with Mahā Kaccāna as witness [§6].

The lesson of the Sutta is that **moral virtue** in the form of sense-restraint is vital serving as the beginning, the middle and the end of monastic life. This is not a ritual conduct with merely a show of piety or the power of status, but a real effort towards turning the mind away from being distracted by the senses, and in seeing their true nature. Thus seeing and understanding impermanence, we will then notice suffering in what is impermanent. Seeing how the impermanent and the suffering are intimately related, we then are more ready to see or get a glimpse of nonself—the interrelatedness or interbeing—of all things. This is a first step in the direction of the path of awakening.

### **3 Respecting the worthy and its benefits**

#### **3.1 ĀYU,VAḌḌHANA KUMĀRA VATTHU (DhA 8.8/2:235-239)**

##### **3.1.1 The story of the boy whose years increased**

**3.1.1.1** The Buddha related this Dhammapada story while he was residing in a small forest hut (*arañña,kūṭika*)<sup>5</sup> near Dīgha,lambika (or Dīgha,laṅghika), in reference to the youth **Dīgh’āyu**.

There were 2 brahmins of Dīghalambika who joined a sectarian cult and lived performing austerities for 48 years. At the end of that period, one of them thought, “My line will perish!” and returned to the world. He “sold”<sup>6</sup> the merits of the austerities he had performed and with the cattle and money he received, started a family.

The other brahmin, an ascetic and his former companion, went abroad and then returned. On hearing that he had returned, the lay brahmin brought his wife and child to see the ascetic brahmin. The wife saluted the ascetic and he replied, “Live long!” But the ascetic remained silent when the boy was made to salute him.

**3.1.1.2** When the boy’s father asked the ascetic why he remained silent, he replied that some disaster awaited the boy and that he would die in seven days. Despite his wisdom, the ascetic brahmin was unable to help the lay brahmin. When asked how he could help his son, the ascetic brahmin suggested that they consult the Buddha.

The Buddha, adds the Commentator, instructed the brahmin to construct a pavilion before the main door of his house. The brahmin should place a chair at the centre and surround it with 8 or 16 chairs. The Buddha and the monks then occupied these chairs and would uninterruptedly (in relay groups) recite the protective texts (*paritta*) for 7 nights and 7 days.<sup>7</sup>

##### **3.1.2 How the boy’s years increased**

<sup>5</sup> Several forest huts (*arañña,kūṭika*) were mentioned in connection with the Buddha. One was in the bamboo grove (M 3:128,10); another near Rāja,gaha, used by Moggallāna (J 3:33,10), and also Mahā Kassapa (J 3:71,6). Samiddhi stayed in one near the bamboo grove (M 3:207,1). Evidently other monastics dwelt there from time to time, such as the novice Aciravata (M 3:128). There was one hermitage in the Malla sal grove (*upavattane mallā-narā sālā,vane*, U 37,30), another near Dīgha,lambika DhA 2:234), one in the great forest (S 3:116,5 ≈ 380,1), and one in the foothills of the Himavā (DhA 2:31, 4:129,14; Kosala S 1:61,3), where the Buddha sometimes stayed.

<sup>6</sup> This is a non-Buddhist and unbuddhist practice which should be totally avoided [3.2.1.1].

<sup>7</sup> The Buddha and the monks remained within the chanting circle, and were offered alms food by the brahmin. They recited in small groups to maintain an unbroken recital, taking toilet breaks in turn, and resting in groups in between.

**3.1.2.1** The story tells us that when the Buddha came, the deities (of the sense-world) assembled there too. Now a certain yaksha (ogre) named Avaruddhaka had served the celestial king, Vessavaṇa,<sup>8</sup> for 12 years, for which he received a boon. The yaksha would receive the boy at the end of the week.

However, due to the presence of the devas of the higher realms (the yaksha was from the lowest of the sense-world heavens, that of the 4 great kings), Avaruddhaka was held back at the end of the celestial crowd and was unable to get near the boy at all!<sup>9</sup>

**3.1.2.2** With the dawn of the 8<sup>th</sup> day, the boy was brought before the Buddha to salute him.

The teacher said, “Live long!” On being asked, the Buddha replied that he would live for 120 years. So the boy was called **Āyu,vaḍḍhana**, “the one whose age increased.”

Later on, when the monks were discussing the whole amazing event, the Buddha declared:

“Bhikshus, it is not a matter of years alone. Living beings in the world who respect and salute the virtuous, increase in 4 ways, gain release from danger, and abide in safety to the end of their days.”

So saying the Buddha then uttered this Dhammapada verse: [3.2.2.2]

*abhivādana, sīlissa*

*niccaṃ vuḍḍhāpacāyino*<sup>10</sup>

*cattāro dhammā vaḍḍhanti*

*āyu vaṇṇo*<sup>12</sup> *sukhaṃ balaṃ*

For one who habitually shows respect,

constantly respectful of elders,<sup>11</sup>

four states increase:

age, beauty, happiness and strength.

(Dh 109)<sup>13</sup>

### 3.2 RESPECTING THOSE WHO ARE VUḌḌHA

#### 3.2.1 Superstition versus skillful means

**3.2.1.1** Stories like the above (from the Dhammapada Commentary) [3.1] may work piously amongst an Indian audience, even today, or perhaps with some traditional Sinhala Buddhists and their followers. This is also the kind of story that makes interesting movies, which are meant to entertain, but clearly must be appreciated critically in the Dharma spirit.

From the teachings regarding streamwinning, we know that the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the 3 fetters<sup>14</sup> is “attachment to rituals and vows” (*sīla-b, bata parāmāsa*). This is **superstition**, the over-reliance on religious externalities, that rituals work without merit, that one does not have to do good to deserve good. Imagine what the outcome would be when priests who do not keep to the Vinaya recite the suttas or parittas, who teach others to “transfer merits” (like the 1<sup>st</sup> brahmin in the story above!). This then is the Buddhism of superstition which should be simply and totally avoided.

**3.2.1.2** The way the **Ayu,vaḍḍhana,kumara Dhammapada story** (DhA 8.8) is told reflects the commentarial times in ancient India and perhaps south Asia as a whole. This is a commentarial story, which

<sup>8</sup> Vessavaṇa is the great king (*mahā,rāja*), lord of yakshas, and divine protector of the north of Tāvātimsa: SD 54.3a (3.3.3.1).

<sup>9</sup> Which meant that the boy had to stay within the protective circle of chanting monks for that duration.

<sup>10</sup> Be Se *vuḍḍha*-; Ce Ee *vaḍḍha*-.

<sup>11</sup> Cf **Kimsīla S** (Sn 325). “Elders” (Be Se *vuḍḍha*; Ce Ee *vaḍḍha*).

<sup>12</sup> Gāndhārī Dh 172, *kirta*, and Prakrit Dh *kirti*; both words mean “praise, renown, glory, fame.”

<sup>13</sup> **Prākṛt Dh**: *adhivādāna, sīlisa* | *nica vṛḍḍha, vasayino* | *catvari tassa vardhati* | *āyo kirti subha bala* (Dh:P 34) [Barua & Mitra, *Prakrit Dhammapada*, 1921:81]. **Gāndhārī Dh**: *ahivādāna, sīlisa* | *nica vṛidha, vayariṇo* | *catvari tassa vardhadi* | *āyo kirta suha bala* || (Dh:G 172 [11.11] Suha). Manusmṛti (a post-Buddha brahminical work): *abhivādana, sīlasya* | *nityaṃ vṛddhōpasevina* | *catvāri sampravardhante* | *āyur vidyā yaśo balaṃ* (Manusmṛti 2.121). See SD 22.13 (1.1).

<sup>14</sup> See **Abhabba Tayo, dhamma S** (A 10.76,6), SD 2.4; **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8; SD 3.3 (5).

means that its significance and spirit—the *neyy’attha*—must be drawn out properly. A vital point of the Dhammapada story above [3.1] is that **respect** for those worthy of respect is not merely a religious teaching—it is not the unique teaching of any religion (though highlighted in Buddhism)—but a natural and universal good quality of a wholesome society. This is a basic human gesture that shows acceptance of another so that wholesome communication and society are possible; so that human progress is possible.

### 3.2.2 *Vaḍḍha* and *vūḍḍha*

**3.2.2.1** Note that the Pali of line 2 of **Dh 109** [3.1.2.2] reads *niccaṃ vaḍḍhāpacāyino* where the word *vaḍḍha* (old, senior, mature) can also be read as *vaḍḍha* (growth, increase, wealth). We see the plural verb for *vaḍḍha*, that is, *vaḍḍhanti* in line 3. I’m raising this point on the wistful notion that the reading *vaḍḍhāpacāyino*, “respectful for increase or wealth,” is what we often see in organized religion and in urbanized circles today. A “class” mentality is sadly well and alive even today amongst us, and we need to work early to correct this insidious habit by inculcating the idea of true values and habits of true respect in the young, especially in the upholding of moral virtue, that is, full respect for self and others. [§§4 f]

**3.2.2.2** The key Buddhist teaching on **respect** (*gāraṇa*) is that even the Buddha respects the Dharma, as stated in **the Gāraṇa Sutta** (S 6.2).<sup>15</sup> For us as Dharma practitioners or who love Buddhism, we can easily see the close connection between respect and values. “Respect” means to regard a person as he or she is or something as it is. When we respect a child, we accept the child for its childishness, or an aged person for his infirmity. Furthermore, we respect the values that underpin each of the 5 precepts; thus we respect life and so on [2.2.1.3].

Further, **Dh 109** speaks of the 4 blessings from respecting elders as those of “age, beauty, happiness and strength” (*āyu vaṇṇo sukhaṃ balaṃ*), that is, longevity, grace, joy and power. Elsewhere the list is extended to 6 blessings: “long life, beauty, fame, glory, happiness and power” (*āyu vaṇṇa yasa kitti sukha bala*).<sup>16</sup> These 4 blessings are quite well-known;<sup>17</sup> they seem to form part of a longer list of blessings, such as in connection with the keeping of the 5 precepts.<sup>18</sup>

| <u>Precept</u>                                          | <u>Benefit: increases</u>        |                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|
| (1) keeping to the precept against destroying life      | age (long life);                 | <i>āyu</i>       |
| (2) keeping to the precept against taking the not given | happiness and health;            | <i>sukha</i>     |
| (3) keeping to the precept against sexual misconduct    | beauty and grace <sup>19</sup> ; | <i>vaṇṇa</i>     |
| (4) keeping to the precept against falsehood            | strength or power;               | <i>bala</i>      |
| [5] keeping to the precept against intoxication         | wisdom.                          | [ <i>paññā</i> ] |

**3.2.2.3 The Abhivāda Sutta** (A 2.37) speaks of *vaḍḍha* at 2 levels: at the level of seniority, that is, the increase of one’s years, and at the level of maturity, that is, the growth of one’s moral virtue, self-

<sup>15</sup> S 6.2/1:138-140 (SD 12.3).

<sup>16</sup> **Agga-p, pasāda S** (A 4.34,5\*/2:35), SD 45.13. Cf (**Pañcaka**) **Iṭṭha S** (A 5.43): “long life, beauty, happiness, fame and heaven” (*āyu vaṇṇo sukha yasa sagga*), which are said to be pleasant and desirable, but difficult to obtain here (A 5.43,2/3:47), SD 47.2. See also SD 54.6 (3.1.2.1) n.

<sup>17</sup> (**Catukka**) **Agga-p, pasāda S** (A 4.34,5/2:35), SD 45.13 = **Cundī S** (A 5.32/3.34), SD 66.4 = (**Tika**) **Agga-p, pasāda S** (It 90,10/89), SD 45.17. Also: **Suppavāsā S** (A 4.57/2:63), SD 22.13; **Sudatta S** (A 2:64); (**Catukka**) **Bhojana S** (A 2:64); (**Pañcaka**) **Bhojana S** (A 3:42); **Latā Vv** (Vv 41); **Mahā, ratha Vv** (Vv 97); **Vinaya** (the 4 benefits of giving porridge, *yāgu*, V 1:221 + 221\*), V 5:390; **Sivi J** (J 499).

<sup>18</sup> On the first 4 precepts, see **Sigāl’ovāda S** (D 31,3.2/3:181), SD 4.1.

<sup>19</sup> “Grace” here may take a sense of the Skt reading *kirta/kirti* in **Dh 109d** [3.1.2.2].

restraint and wisdom. While conventional “respect” extends to biological relationships and to social status, such a show of deference is merely out of obligation or fear, in other words, one may really feel no respect for the object of deference.

Even when a person of power or status receives a show of deference, it does not really benefit that person, except in a worldly sense. Such an immoral person will face the consequences of his actions, and history will record a truer account of his misdeeds.

When we respect the worthy, we too grow in goodness; we encourage others in goodness, too.

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## Abhivāda Sutta

### The Discourse on Showing Respect

A 2.37

#### Not all old brahmins are worthy of respect

**1** [Ee 7] At one time, the venerable **Mahā Kaccāna** was dwelling in Gundā’s grove at Madhurā.

Then the brahmin **Kaṇḍarāyana**<sup>20</sup> approached the venerable Mahā Kaccāna and exchanged friendly words and cordial greetings with the venerable Mahā Kaccāna. When the friendly greetings were concluded, the brahmin Kaṇḍarāyana sat down at one side and said to the venerable Mahā Kaccāna:

**2** “I have heard, master Kaccāna:

‘The recluse Kaccāna does not pay homage to brahmins who are old, aged, burdened with years, advanced in life, reached the last stage of life; neither does he stand up for them nor offer them a seat.’

This is indeed true, for master Kaccāna, too, *does not pay homage to brahmins who are old, aged, burdened with years, advanced in life, reached the last stage of life; neither does he stand up for them nor offer them a seat.*

This is not proper, master Kaccāna.”<sup>21</sup>

**3** “Brahmin, the Blessed One, arhat, **[68]** fully self-awakened, knowing and seeing, has proclaimed **the stage of maturity** and **the stage of childishness**.

#### True seniority is spiritual maturity

Even though someone is **old**—eighty, ninety, or a hundred years from birth—  
if he enjoys sensual pleasures, dwells in sensual pleasures,<sup>22</sup> burns with a fever for sensual pleasures,  
is consumed with thoughts of sensual pleasures, is eager in the quest for sensual pleasures,  
then he is reckoned as **a foolish elder** (*bāla therā*).

<sup>20</sup> Only Be *kandarāyana*.

<sup>21</sup> The same charge is made against the Buddha himself in **Verañjā S** (Pār 1.1.2 @ V 3:2 = A 8.11/4:173). SD 96.12; **Uruveḷa S 2** (A 4.22/2:22), SD 71.13; and **Doṇa Brāhmaṇa S** (A 5.192,2/3:223), SD 36.14.

<sup>22</sup> Be Ce *kāmam-ajjhāvasati* (pref); Ee Se *kāma,majjhe vasati*, “he dwells in the midst of sensual pleasures.”

4 But even though someone is **young**,  
 a youth with dark black hair, endowed with the blessing of youth, in the prime of life,  
 if he does *not* enjoy sensual pleasures, does *not* dwell in sensual pleasures,  
does *not* burn with a fever for sensual pleasures, is *not* consumed with thoughts of sensual pleasures,  
 is *not* eager in the quest for sensual pleasures, then he is reckoned as **a wise elder** (*paṇḍita therā*)."

**The brahmin rejoices in Mahā Kaccāna's teaching**

5 When this was said, the brahmin Kaṇḍarāyana rose from his seat, arranged his upper robe over one shoulder, and bowed down with his head at the feet of the young monks, [saying:]  
 "You elders stand at the stage of an elder; we youths stand at the stage of a youth.

6 Excellent, master Kaccāna! Excellent, master Kaccāna!  
 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, in numerous ways, the Dharma has been declared by master Kaccāna.  
 Master Kaccāna, I go to the blessed Gotama for **refuge**, to the Dharma, and to the sangha of monks.  
 May master Kaccāna remember me as a layman who has gone for refuge from this day forth for life."

—evaṃ—

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