

BĀHIYA'S TEACHING

Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus: in the seen will be merely what is seen; in the heard will be merely what is heard; in the sensed will be merely what is sensed; in the cognized will be merely what is cognized. Practising in this way, Bāhiya, you will not be 'because of that'. When you are not 'because of that' you will not be 'in that'. And when you are not 'in that' then you will be neither here not beyond nor in between the two. Just this is the end of suffering." Through this brief teaching, Bahiya was immediately Enlightened **Udana 1.10**

Bāhiya was not a monk. The sutta does not record him giving dāna, nor taking refuge in the Triple Gem, nor keeping any precepts. Moreover, the sutta has no mention at all of Bāhiya ever meditating, let alone reaching a Jhāna. Yet, after receiving a very brief teaching from the Buddha, Bāhiya became fully Enlightened, an Arahant, within seconds!

This episode is very well known in Buddhist circles, because it seems to make Enlightenment so easy. It appears that you don't need to renounce, you can be miserly and not give dāna, no ceremonies such as that of taking refuge are required, precepts are unnecessary, and even meditating can be avoided! What a relief—for some! All you need is intelligence, and everyone thinks that they are intelligent. This makes Bāhiya's Teaching both attractive and notorious.

As usual, there is more to the story than is recorded in the sutta. It is often the case that the suttas record only the highlights of a long episode. Just like the wedding photos do not record the first meeting, the dating and the proposal, so many suttas do not record all that occurred before the finale. So what is the full story of Bāhiya? How can we put the finale, captured for posterity in the Udāna, into its full context? Fortunately, the whole story is recorded in the Apadāna (past lives of the Arahants) and in the commentaries.

In his previous life, Bāhiya was a monk under the Buddha Kassapa. Together with six other monks, he climbed a steep mountain, throwing away the ladder, and determined to remain on top of that rock until they became Enlightened or died. One of the seven monks became an Arahant, another became an Anāgāmī (Non Returner), the other five died on the mountain. Bāhiya was one of the five. In Bāhiya's final life, he was a sailor, successfully crossing the ocean seven times. On the eighth voyage, he was shipwrecked but managed to survive by floating ashore on a plank of wood. Having lost all his clothes, he made temporary garments out of bark and went begging for food in the town of Suppārakā. The townspeople were impressed with his appearance and offered him food, respect and even a costly set of clothes. When Bāhiya refused the new clothes, the people esteemed him even more. Bāhiya had gained a comfortable living and so did not return to sea. The people regarded Bāhiya as an Arahant. Soon, Bāhiya thought he was an Arahant too!

At that point, a deva discerned the wrong thought of Bāhiya and, out of compassion, reprimanded him. That deva was none other than his former fellow monk, one of the seven, the one who had become an Anāgāmī. (It is of interest to add that the remaining four fellow monks were also reborn at this time, and they all, like Bāhiya, eventually attained full Enlightenment. (They were Pukkusāti, Sabhiya, Kumārakassapa and Dabba the Mallian.) Then the Anāgāmī-deva informed Bāhiya about a true Arahant, the Buddha, living at that time on the other side of India, at Sāvattthi. Bāhiya immediately left Suppārakā (present day Sopāra, just north of Mumbai) and reached Sāvattthi (just 17 kilometres west of Balrampur) in only one night. Bāhiya met the Buddha while he was on alms round and asked for a teaching. The Buddha at first refused, for it was an inappropriate time. But on being asked a third time, the Buddha interrupted his alms gathering and gave the famous teaching presented above. Within seconds of hearing that Dhamma, Bāhiya was fully Enlightened. A few minutes later, the Arahant Bāhiya was killed by a cow with calf.

So, Bāhiya's background was exceptional. He had been a monk under the previous Buddha, Kassapa. His powers of determination were so strong that he went to meditate on the mountain with the resolve to become Enlightened or die. In this life, he could hear deva's speak to him and he could travel more than halfway across India, some 1,300 Kilometres as the levitator flies, in only one night. If you had such a background from your previous life, and had such psychic powers already in this life, then perhaps you too would have been Enlightened when you heard Bāhiya's Teaching a few minutes ago!

It is usually the case that one requires very deep samādhi, Jhānas, to achieve such psychic powers. Certainly, Bāhiya would have had a pre-disposition for meditation, taking account of his previous life. And the psychic power of the 'divine ear' that enabled him to hear the deva, and the other psychic power that enabled him to travel so fast, suggest that he was practising Jhāna before he heard the deva. Perhaps this was another reason why he thought himself an Arahant. But there is more evidence to suggest that, though it was not mentioned in the texts, Bāhiya had been practising Jhānas.

Few people are aware that the very same teaching, that here I call Bāhiya's Teaching, was also given by the Buddha to the old monk Mālunkyaputta:

Venerable Maluṅkyaputta approached the Buddha ... and said to him:

“Venerable sir, it would be good if the Buddha would teach me the Dhamma in brief, so that, having heard the Dhamma from the Buddha, I might dwell alone, secluded, diligent, ardent, and resolute.”

“Maluṅkyaputta, what should I say to the young monastics when an old monk like you, come to the last stage of life, asks me for an exhortation in brief?”

“Although, venerable sir, I am old, let the Buddha teach me the Dhamma in brief. Perhaps I may understand the meaning of the Buddha's statement.”

“What do you think, Maluṅkyaputta, do you have any desire, lust, or affection for objects of sight that you have not seen and never saw before, that you do not see and would not think might be seen?”

“No, venerable sir.”

“Do you have any desire, lust, or affection for those sounds cognizable by the ear ... for those odours cognizable by the nose ... for those tastes cognizable by the tongue ... for those tactile objects cognizable by the body ... for those mental phenomena cognizable by the mind that you have not cognized and never cognized before, that you do not cognize and would not think might be cognized?”

“No, venerable sir.”

“Here, Maluṅkyaputta, regarding things seen, heard, sensed, and cognized by you: in the seen there will be merely the seen; in the heard there will be merely the heard; in the sensed there will be merely the sensed; in the cognized there will be merely the cognized.

“When, Maluṅkyaputta, regarding things seen, heard, sensed, and cognized by you, in the seen there will be merely the seen, in the heard there will be merely the heard, in the sensed there will be merely the sensed, in the cognized there will be merely the cognized, then, Maluṅkyaputta, you will not be ‘by that.’ When, Maluṅkyaputta, you are not ‘by that,’ then you will not be ‘therein.’ When, Maluṅkyaputta, you are not ‘therein,’ then you will be neither here nor beyond nor in between the two. This is the end of suffering.”

“I understand in detail, venerable sir, the meaning of what was stated by the Buddha in brief:

“Having seen a form with mindfulness distorted, attending to the pleasing sign, one experiences it with infatuated mind and remains tightly holding to it, many feelings flourish within, originating from the visible form, covetousness and annoyance as well by which one’s mind becomes disturbed.

For one who accumulates suffering thus Nibbāna is said to be far away.

“Having heard a sound, smelt an odour, enjoyed a taste, felt a contact, known an object, with mindfulness distorted; for one who accumulates suffering thus, Nibbāna is said to be far away.

“When, mindfulness is without hindrances, one is not excited by lust for whatever is seen, one experiences it with a dispassion and does not remain holding it tightly. One fares mindfully in such a way that even as one sees and experiences a feeling, suffering is exhausted, not built up. For one dismantling suffering thus, Nibbāna is said to be close by.

“When, mindfulness is without hindrances, one hears a sound, smells an odour, enjoys a taste, feels a contact, knows an object,

One is not excited by lust for objects ...for one diminishing suffering thus Nibbāna is said to be close by. “Sadhu, Maluṅkyaputta! It is good that you understand the meaning of what was stated by me in brief.

The Venerable Maluṅkyaputta delighted and rejoiced in the Buddha’s words, rose from his seat, and, after paying homage, keeping him on his right, departed. Later, dwelling alone, secluded, diligent, ardent, and resolute, the Venerable Maluṅkyaputta, by realizing it for himself with direct knowledge, in this very life entered and dwelt in that unsurpassed goal of the holy life. He directly knew: “Destroyed is birth, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been

done, there is no more rebirth.” And the Venerable Mālunkyaṇḍaputta became one of the arahants. (SN 35.95).

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Mālunkyaṇḍaputta also appears, in *sutta* 64 of the Majjhima Nikāya where the Buddha begins by scolding Mālunkyaṇḍaputta for his wrong view, then teaches the necessity of attaining at least one of the *Jhānas* in order know what the five lower fetters really are and then relinquish them.. The Buddha said in front of Venerable Mālunkyaṇḍaputta that it is impossible to achieve Non Returning (let alone Full Enlightenment) without a *Jhāna* just as much as it is impossible to reach the heartwood of a tree without first going through its bark and sapwood.

There is one path only, Ānanda, one way, to the abandoning of the Five Basic Fetters. It is impossible that anyone can understand or abandon these Five Basic Fetters without relying on that path. No more than it is possible to cut out the hardwood from a tree without cutting through its bark and sapwood. What is that path? The four Jhānas and the first three Immaterial Attainments. (MN.64)

So, Venerable Mālunkyaṇḍaputta was first taught the necessity of *Jhānas*, and then later he was given Bāhiya’s Teaching. After hearing Bāhiya’s Teaching ‘dwelling alone, withdrawn, diligent, ardent and resolute’ Mālunkyaṇḍaputta soon became an *Arahant*. It is therefore certain that Mālunkyaṇḍaputta achieved *Jhāna* before Bāhiya’s Teaching could be effective. Or else the Buddha would be blatantly inconsistent. It also adds weight to the inference that Bāhiya also had experience of *Jhāna* before he heard the same teaching – otherwise he would have reached the heartwood of the tree without going through its bark and sapwood!

So what did Bāhiya, and Venerable Mālunkyaṇḍaputta, see in the Buddha’s words that generated the *Arahant* experience? What does it mean ‘In the seen will merely be what is seen’?

What it means is to see without any distortion of the data, without adding or subtracting from it. As modern psychology knows, what come to our attention as ‘the seen’ has already been sifted and distorted by our desires and aversions. This process of distortion occurs prior to the event of cognition. It is impossible to see this process as it occurs. It is subconscious. We can only infer its occurrence. We discover that our preferences have embellished the data to present to our mind what we wanted to see, while hostility has denied any access to the mind for those features that we didn’t want to see. What we see is rarely, merely the seen. That which we see with bare attention is seldom the truth. It is not the way things are, it is only the way things seem.

The Buddha explained that it is the Five Hindrances that distort perception and corrupt our thinking. He called the Five Hindrances the nutriment that feeds delusion (AN 10.61). The first hindrance, Sensual Desire, selects what we want to see, hear, sense and cognize. It often embellishes the truth. It presents to our consciousness the product of wishful thinking. The second hindrance, Ill Will, is that negative impulse

that blocks us seeing, hearing, sensing or cognizing, what we don't want to know. It blinds us to what is unpleasant, and to what is contrary to our view. Psychology knows the second hindrance as the process of denial. The third hindrance is Sloth and Torpor. This does not distort what we see, hear, sense or cognize. It buries it in a fog so that we are unable to discern clearly. The fourth hindrance is Restlessness and Remorse, which keeps our senses on the run, so fast that we do not have sufficient time to see, hear, sense or cognize fully. Sights do not have time to fully form on our retina, before the back of the eye has another sight to deal with. Sounds are hardly registered, when we are asked to listen to something else. The fourth hindrance of Restlessness, and its special case of Remorse (inner restlessness due to bad conduct), is like the over-demanding boss in your office who never gives you enough time to finish a project properly. The fifth hindrance is Doubt, which interrupts the gathering of data with premature questions. Before we have fully experienced the seen, heard, sensed or cognized, doubt interferes with the process, like a cocky student interrupting the teacher with a question in the midst of the lecture. You should now be able to appreciate that it is these Five Hindrances that distort perception, corrupt the thinking and maintain a deluded view.

It is well known among serious students of Buddhism that the only way to suppress these Five Hindrances is through the practice of *Jhāna*. As it says in the Nalakapāna Sutta (MN 68), in one who does not attain a *Jhāna*, the Five Hindrances (plus discontent and weariness) invade the mind and remain. Anything less than *Jhāna* is not powerful and lasting enough to suppress the Five Hindrances sufficiently. So, even if you are practising bare mindfulness, with the Five Hindrances still active at a subconscious level, you are not seeing things as they truly are, you are seeing things as they seem, distorted by these Five Hindrances.

Thus, in order to fulfil the Buddha's Teaching to Bāhiya and Venerable Mālunkya-putta, in order that 'in the seen will be merely what is seen, in the heard will be merely what is heard, in the sensed will be merely what is sensed, and in the cognized will merely be what is cognized' – the Five hindrances have to be suppressed and that means *Jhāna*!

The Final Part of Bāhiya's Teaching

"Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus: in the seen will be merely what is seen, in the cognized will merely be what is cognized. Practising in this way, Bāhiya, you will not be 'because of that'. When you are not 'because of that', you will not be 'in that'. And when you are not 'in that', you will be neither here nor beyond nor in between the two. Just this is the end of suffering."

What does it mean "you will not be 'because of that'"? The Pāli is *na tena*. *Tena* is the instrumental of the word for 'that'. *Na* is the negative. It means, literally, "not because of that, not through that, not by that". It means in essence, you will not assume that there is a self, a soul, a me; because of, through, or by; the seen or the heard or the sensed or the cognized. The Buddha is saying that once you have penetrated the truth of sensory experience, by suppressing the Hindrances through *Jhāna*, you will see that there is no 'doer', nor a 'knower', behind sensory experience.

No longer will you be able to use sensory experience as evidence for a self. Descartes' famous "I am because I think" is refuted. You will not be because of thinking, nor because of seeing, hearing or sensing. In the Buddha's words, "You will not be because of that (any sensory experience)".

When the sensory processes are discarded as tenable evidence for a self, a soul or a me, then you are no longer located in the sensory experience. In the Buddha's words, "You will not be 'in that'". You no longer view, perceive or even think that there is a 'me' involved in life. In the words of the doctor in the original series of Star Trek, "It is life, Jim, but not as we know it"! There is no longer any sense of self, or soul, at the centre of experience. You are no more 'in that'.

Just to close off the loophole that you might think you can escape non-existence of a self or soul by identifying with a transcendental state of being beyond what is seen, heard, sensed or cognized, the Buddha thunders, "and you will be neither here (with the seen, heard, sensed or cognized) nor beyond (outside of the seen, heard, sensed or cognized) nor in between the two (neither of the world nor beyond the world). The last phrase comprehensively confounded the sophists!

In summary, the Buddha advised both Bāhiya and Venerable Mālunkya-putta to experience the *Jhānas* to suppress the Five Hindrances. Thereby one will discern with certainty the absence of a self or a soul behind the sensory process. Consequently, sensory experience will never again be taken as evidence of a 'knower' or a 'doer': such that you will never imagine a self or a soul at the centre of experience, nor beyond, nor anywhere else. Bāhiya's Teaching put in a nutshell the way to the realization of No-Self, *Anattā*. "Just this", concluded the Buddha "is the end of suffering".

Enlightenment requires all of the Noble Eightfold Path. It requires faith in the Triple Gem, the keeping of precepts and the practice of *dāna*. There is only one path to *Nibbāna*, and that is the Noble Eightfold Path. There are no short cuts.