

Udana 1.10 - *The Bāhiya Sutta*

Thus, it was heard by me: On one occasion when the Lord was dwelling near *Sāvattṭhī*, in Jeta's Grove, at *Anāthapiṇḍika's* monastery.¹ Then, at that time, Bāhiya of the Bark Robe² was living near *Suppāraka*, on the seashore, being respected, revered, honored, venerated, esteemed, in receipt of robes, alms food, lodging, and medicinal requisites as a support during sickness.³

Then when Bāhiya of the Bark Robe had gone into hiding, into seclusion, this reflection arose in his mind: "Now, among those in the world who are arahants, or have entered the path to arahantship, I must be one of them."

Then a *devatā*, who was a former blood-relative of Bāhiya of the Bark Robe, being compassionate and desiring his welfare, knowing with the *devatā's* own mind the reflection in the mind of Bāhiya of the Bark Robe, went to Bāhiya of the Bark Robe, and after going, said this to Bāhiya of the Bark Robe:

¹ *ārāma* = pleasure park. Margret Cone in her *A Dictionary of Pāli* provides the following: 2. a pleasure-grove, a garden, a park, esp. one given for the benefit of *bhikkhus* (and containing shelters or dwellings). The term was later used to signify a monastery.

² *dārucīriyo* = *dāru* + *cīra* = wood + bark, fibre. Cone suggests a robe made of sticks or wood. Bhikkhu Ānandajoti translates as "Bāhiya of the Bark Robe"; Masefield as "Bahiya, the Wood-robed One"; Ireland as "Bahiya of the Bark-cloth"; Thānissaro Bhikkhu as "Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth." Leigh Brasington provides this note based on a personal communication with John Peacock: "The bark cloth clothing would most likely mean that Bahiya was a follower of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad*. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad* makes a big deal about trees."

From *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, Chapter 3.9

- (1) As a large tree, so indeed is a man. (This is) true. His hair is its leaves, his skin its outer bark.
- (2) It is from his skin that blood flows, and from the bark sap. Therefore when a man is wounded, blood flows, as sap from a tree that is injured.
- (3) His flesh is its inner bark, and his sinews its innermost layer of bark; it is tough. His bones lie under, as does its wood; his marrow is comparable to its pith.
- (4) If a tree, after it is felled, springs again from its root in a newer form, from what root does man spring forth after he is cut off by death?
- (5) Do not say, 'From the seed,' (for) it is produced in a living man. A tree springs also from the seed; after it is dead it certainly springs again (from the seed as well).
- (6) If a tree is pulled out with its root, it no more sprouts, From what root does a mortal spring forth after he is cut off by death ?

³ *cīvarapiṇḍapātasenāsanagilānapaccayabhesajjaparikkhārānaṃ* = *cīvara* is the (upper) robe of a Buddhist mendicant and is the first one of the set of four standard requisites of a wandering *bhikkhu*, namely, *piṇḍapāta* alms-bowl, *senāsana* lodging, a place to sleep at, *gilānapaccaya* + *bhesajja* + *parikkhāra* medicinal requirements for use in sickness or requisite medicines for attending to sickness.

“You are certainly not an arahant, Bāhiya. Nor have you entered the path to arahantship. This practice of yours is not one whereby you could be an arahant, or one who has entered the path to arahantship.”

“Then who now in this world with its *devas* are arahants, or have entered the path to arahantship?”

“There is, Bāhiya, in the northern countries a town by the name of *Sāvattī*. There the *bhagavā*, (the Fortunate One), dwells at the present time who is an arahant, a *sammāsambuddho* (Perfectly Fully-Enlightened One). He, Bāhiya, the *bhagavā*, is certainly an arahant, and one who teaches the Dharma for attaining arahantship.”

Then Bāhiya of the Bark Robe being profoundly stirred by the words of that *devatā*, immediately departed from *Suppāraka*, and staying for only one night in every place⁴, went to *Sāvattī*, Jeta’s Wood, and to *Anāthapiṇḍika*’s monastery. Then at that time many bhikkhus were walking up and down in meditation in the open air. Then Bāhiya of the Bark Robe went to those bhikkhus, and after going, he said this to those bhikkhus:

“Where, reverend bhikkhu’s, is the *bhante*, the Arahant, the Perfectly Fully-Enlightened One? We wish to see that *bhagavā* who is the Arahant, the Fully-Enlightened One.”

“The *bhagavā*, Bāhiya, has entered among the houses in search of alms.”

Then, with the appearance of one in a hurry, Bāhiya of the Bark Robe having emerged from Jeta’s Grove, and having entered *Sāvattī*, saw the *bhagavā* walking for alms in *Sāvattī*, confident, inspiring confidence, with sense faculties at peace, mind at peace, having attained supreme self-control and calm, controlled, guarded, with restrained faculties, a true *nāga*⁵. After seeing him, he went to the *bhagavā*, and after going and prostrating himself with his head at the *bhagavā*’s feet, he said this to the *bhagavā*: “Let

⁴ *eka-ratti-parivāsena* = one + night + sojourn. However, the Commentarial tradition prefers Thānassaro Bhikkhu’s “Then Bāhiya, deeply chastened by the *devatā*, left *Suppāraka* right then and, in the space of one night, went all the way to where the Blessed One was staying near *Sāvattī* at Jeta’s Grove, *Anāthapiṇḍika*’s monastery.” Thānassaro explains that the Commentary prefers this translation, “noting that the distance between *Suppāraka* and *Sāvattī* amounts to 120 leagues, or approximately 1,200 miles. In its version of Bāhiya’s story, Bāhiya had no meditative attainments at all, and so the miraculous speed of his journey had to be attributed either to the power of the deva or the power of the Buddha. However, he may actually have had strong powers of concentration with some attendant psychic powers of his own.

⁵ *nāga* 1. a serpent or supernatural demon (usually living in water or under earth), one of a race of mythical snakes, gifted with miraculous powers and great strength. They often act as fairies and are classed with other divinities (like *devatās*), with whom they are sometimes friendly, sometimes at enmity (as with the *garuḷas*, a mythical bird, a harpy). 2. an elephant. 3. the best and most excellent of its kind; a mighty being. Thānissaro Bhikkhu translates this way: “a Great One (*nāga*).”

the *bhante* preach the Dharma to me, *sugata*, let the *bhagavā* preach the Dharma, that will be for my benefit and happiness for a long time.”

After that was said, the *bhagavā* said this to Bāhiya of the Bark Robe: “It is the wrong time for you, Bāhiya, we have entered among the houses for alms.”

For a second time Bāhiya of the Bark Robe said this to the *bhagavā*: “But it is hard to know, *sugata*, the dangers to the *bhagavā*’s life, or the dangers to my life! Let the *bhante* preach the Dharma to me, *sugata*, let the *bhagavā*, preach the Dharma, that will be for my benefit and happiness for a long time.”

For a second time the *bhagavā*, said this to Bāhiya of the Bark Robe: “It is the wrong time for you, Bāhiya, we have entered among the houses for alms.”

For a third time Bāhiya of the Bark Robe said this to the *bhagavā*: “But it is hard to know, *sugata*, the dangers to the *bhagavā*’s life, or the dangers to my life! Let the *bhagavā*, preach the Dharma to me, *sugata*, let the *bhagavā*, preach the Dharma, that will be for my benefit and happiness for a long time.”

“In that case, Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus: “In seeing let there be merely seeing; in hearing let there be merely hearing; in sensing let there be merely sensing; in cognizing let there be merely cognizing.”⁶

⁶ **Bhikkhu Anālayo**: “Bāhiya, when for you in what is seen there will be just what is seen, in what is heard there will be just what is heard, in what is sensed there will be just what is sensed, in what is cognized there will be just what is cognized”

Thānissaro Bhikkhu: “In reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed, only the sensed. In reference to the cognized, only the cognized.”

Bhikkhu Ānandajoti: “In what is seen there must be only what is seen, in what is heard there must be only what is heard, in what is sensed there must be only what is sensed, in what is cognized there must be only what is cognized. This is the way, Bāhiya, you should train yourself.”

Masefield: “. . . with respect to the seen there will be merely the seen, that with respect to the heard there will be merely the heard, that with respect to the sensed there will be merely the sensed, that with respect to the cognised there will be merely the cognised”

Leigh Brasington explains: Ireland translates the instructions as '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.'

Since there are no articles in the Pali language, "the seen" etc. cannot be correct. "Seen" itself is correct as the Pali is a past participle. So literally it would read 'In seen will be merely seen; in heard will be merely heard; in sensed will be merely sensed; in cognized will be merely cognized.'

And then converting to a better flowing English, we have 'In seeing let there be merely seeing; in hearing let there be merely hearing; in sensing let there be merely sensing; in cognizing let there be merely cognizing.'

This is the way, Bāhiya, you should train yourself.⁷

“And since for you, Bāhiya⁸, in seeing let there be merely seeing; in hearing let there be merely hearing; in sensing let there be merely sensing; in cognizing let there be merely cognizing., therefore, Bāhiya, you will not be ‘thereby’ (*na tena*); and since, Bāhiya, you will not be ‘thereby’ (*na tena*), therefore, Bāhiya, you will not be ‘therein’ (*na tattha*); and

⁷ This instruction was also given to *Maluṅkyaputta* in SN 35.95: “In that case, when, *Maluṅkyaputta*, things seen, heard, sensed, and cognized by you, in seeing there will be merely seeing, in hearing let there be merely hearing; in sensing let there be merely sensing; in cognizing let there be merely cognizing, then, *Maluṅkyaputta*, you will not be ‘by that’ (*na tena*) When, *Maluṅkyaputta*, you are not ‘by that,’ (*na tena*) then you will not be ‘therein.’ (*na tattha*)’ When, *Maluṅkyaputta*, you are not ‘therein,’ then you will be neither here nor beyond nor in between the two. This itself is the end of *dukkha*.”

⁸ Leigh Brasington offers an explanation for why the Buddha gave this particular instruction to Bāhiya: The bark cloth clothing marked him as a serious student of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad*; thus he would be familiar with the teaching found there: "The unseen seer, the unheard hearer, the unthought thinker, the uncognized cognizer... There is no other seer but he, no other hearer, no other thinker, no other cognizer. This is thy self, the inner controller, the immortal...." *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad*; 3.7.23.

Bāhiya would also be familiar with "... that imperishable is the unseen seer, the unheard hearer, the unthought thinker, the understood understander. Other than it there is naught that sees. Other than it there is naught that hears. Other than it there is naught that thinks. Other than it there is naught that understands...." *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad*: 3.8.11.

The Buddha, as he often does, takes something his questioner is familiar with and gives it a subtle but profound twist: there's no Atman, there's just seeing, just hearing, etc.

since, Bāhiya, you will not be ‘therein’ (*na tattha*), therefore, Bāhiya, you will not be here or beyond or in between the two—this itself is the end of *dukkha*.⁹

⁹ Bhikkhu Ānandajoti translates the concluding phrase of the instructions in this way: “therefore, Bāhiya, you will not be with that; and since, Bāhiya, you will not be with that, therefore, Bāhiya, you will not be in that; and since, Bāhiya, you will not be in that, therefore, Bāhiya, you will not be here or hereafter or in between the two—just this is the end of suffering.”

In a private e-mail, Leigh Brasington expressed his interpretation of this passage: I take this to mean, “if you don’t go creating an object, you won’t be creating yourself as the subject”. This is my interpretation, not what it literally says. Subject-Object duality was not an idea at the time of the Buddha, so he had to come up with some way of expressing it. Given the limitations of language/ideas, this is what he came up with.

I tend to translate this as “You will not be in that (the object), you will not be in this (the subject), you will not be in-between.” I derive this principally from the “therefore, *Bāhiya*, you will not be here [subject] or beyond [object] or in between the two—this itself is the end of *dukkha*.”

According to Ñāṇananda, the target of the instruction is also to undermine the way objects of experience are usually apperceived:

At whatever time one stops short at the seen and takes it only as a seen and not some thing seen and [...] there is no imagining a ‘thinghood’, then one would not be thinking in terms of it [...] if one does not take such a standpoint, one is neither ‘here’ nor ‘there’ nor ‘in between the two’.

Ñāṇananda then paraphrases the instruction as follows:

When, Bāhiya, you have gone through that training of stopping at just the seen, the heard, the sensed and the cognized, then you would not be imagining in terms of them. The algebraic-like expressions *na tena* and *na tattha* have to be understood as forms of egoistic imagining, *maññanā*. When you do not imagine in terms of them, you would not be in them. There would be no involvement in regard to them [...]. When, Bāhiya, you do not dwell in it, *yato tvaṃ bāhiya na tattha*, then, Bāhiya, you are neither here, nor there, nor in between the two, *tato tvaṃ bāhiya nev’idha na huraṃ na ubhayamantarena*. This itself is the end of suffering. In other words, you would have realized voidness, *suññatā*.

Anālayo refers to Ñāṇananda’s ground-breaking study, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, which placed a spotlight on what he called “bare attention” as a “key to the distinctive method of *Satipaṭṭhāna*.” According to his explanation:

Bare Attention is the clear and single-minded awareness of what actually happens to us and in us, at the successive moments of perception. It is called ‘bare’, because it attends just to the bare facts of a perception as presented either through the five physical senses or through the mind which, for Buddhist thought, constitutes the sixth sense. When attending to that six-fold sense impression, attention or mindfulness is kept to a bare registering of the facts observed, without reacting to them by deed, speech or by mental comment which may be one of self-reference (like, dislike, etc.), judgement or reflection. If during the time, short or long, given to the practice of Bare Attention, any such comments arise in one’s mind, they themselves are made objects of Bare Attention.

Then through the *bhagavā*'s brief teaching of this Dharma Bāhiya of the Bark Robe's mind (*citta*) was immediately released from the *āsavas*, without grasping¹⁰ Then the *bhagavā*, having advised Bāhiya of the Bark Robe with this brief instruction, went away.

Then, not long after the *bhagavā* had gone, a cow with a young calf, having attacked Bāhiya of the Bark Robe, deprived him of life.

Then the *bhagavā* after walking for alms in *Sāvattthī*, while returning from the alms-round after the meal, after going out from the city with many bhikkhus, saw that Bāhiya of the Bark Robe had died. After seeing him, he addressed the bhikkhus, saying:

"Bhikkhus, take up Bāhiya of the Bark Robe's body, and after putting it on a bier, carrying it away, and burning it, make a *stupa* for him, your fellow in the spiritual life (*brahmacariya*), bhikkhus, has died."

"Yes, *bhante*," said those bhikkhus, and after replying to the *bhagavā*, putting Bāhiya of the Bark Robe's body on a bier, carrying it away, burning it, and making a *stupa* for him, they went to the *bhagavā*, and after going and worshipping the *bhagavā*, they sat down on one side.

While sat on one side those bhikkhus said this to the *bhagavā*: "Burnt, reverend Sir, is Bāhiya of the Bark Robe's body, and the *stupa* for him has been made. What is his destination? What is his future state?"

"A wise man, bhikkhus, was Bāhiya of the Bark Robe, who practiced Dharma in accordance with the Dharma, and did not trouble me on account of the Dharma. Completely emancipated, bhikkhus, is Bāhiya of the Bark Robe has attained *parinibbāna*¹¹."

Then the *bhagavā*, having understood the significance of it, on that occasion uttered this exalted utterance (*udana*):

*Where neither water nor yet earth
Nor fire nor air gain a foothold,*

¹⁰ Leigh Brasington also asks us to consider Udana 8.3: "There is, bhikkhus, a not-born, a not-brought-to-being, a not-made, a not-conditioned. If, bhikkhus, there were no not-born, not-brought-to-being, not-made, not-conditioned, no escape would be discerned from what is born, brought-to-being, made, conditioned. But since there is a not-born, a not-brought-to-being, a not-made, a not-conditioned, therefore an escape is discerned from what is born, brought-to-being, made, conditioned."

¹¹ ***parinibbāna***: According to the PTS Dictionary: "complete *Nibbāna*" in two meanings: 1. complete extinction of *khandhalife*; i. e. all possibility of such life and its rebirth, final release from (the misery of) rebirth and transmigration, death (after the last life -- span of an Arahant). . . . 2. release from cravings and attachment to life, emancipation (in this life) with the assurance of final death

*There sparkle no stars, no sun sheds light,
There glows no moon, yet there no darkness is not found.
When sage, brahmins, have come to know this
For themselves through their own wisdom,
Then they are freed from form and formless.
Freed from suhhka and from dukkha.*