



Sutta Study Bahiya Ud 1.10

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Bahiya Ud 1.10 [Translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu](#)

An alternative translation by John D. Ireland is [here](#).

A related sutta, To Māluṅkyaputta,¹ is [here](#).

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvattḥī at Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. And on that occasion Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth was living in Suppāraka by the seashore. He was worshipped, revered, honored, venerated, and given homage—a recipient of robes, alms food, lodgings, & medicinal requisites for the sick. Then, when he was alone in seclusion, this line of thinking appeared to his awareness: “Now, of those who in this world are arahants or have entered the path of arahantship, am I one?”

Then a devatā who had once been a blood relative of Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth—compassionate, desiring his welfare, knowing with her own awareness the line of thinking that had arisen in his awareness—went to him and on arrival said to him, “You, Bāhiya, are neither an arahant nor have you entered the path of arahantship. You don’t even have the practice whereby you would become an arahant or enter the path of arahantship.”

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

“Bāhiya, there is a city in the northern country named Sāvattḥī. There the Blessed One—an arahant, rightly self-awakened—is living now. He truly is an arahant and teaches the Dhamma leading to arahantship.”

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 Sāvattḥī at Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. Now on that occasion, a large number of monks were doing walking meditation in the open air. He went to them and, on arrival, said, “Where, venerable sirs, is the Blessed One—the arahant, rightly self-awakened—now staying? We want to see that Blessed One—the arahant, rightly self-awakened.”

“The Blessed One has gone into town for alms.”

Then Bāhiya, hurriedly leaving Jeta’s Grove and entering Sāvattḥī, saw the Blessed One going for alms in Sāvattḥī—serene & inspiring serene confidence, calming, his senses at peace, his mind at peace, having attained the utmost tranquility & poise, tamed, guarded, his senses restrained, a Great One (nāga). Seeing him, he approached the Blessed One and, on reaching him, threw himself down, with

his head at the Blessed One's feet, and said, "Teach me the Dhamma, O Blessed One! Teach me the Dhamma, O One-Well-Gone, that will be for my long-term welfare & bliss."

When this was said, the Blessed One said to him, "This is not the time, Bāhiya. We have entered the town for alms."

A second time, Bāhiya said to the Blessed One, "But it is hard to know for sure what dangers there may be for the Blessed One's life, or what dangers there may be for mine. Teach me the Dhamma, O Blessed One! Teach me the Dhamma, O One-Well-Gone, that will be for my long-term welfare & bliss."

A second time, the Blessed One said to him, "This is not the time, Bāhiya. We have entered the town for alms."

A third time, Bāhiya said to the Blessed One, "But it is hard to know for sure what dangers there may be for the Blessed One's life, or what dangers there may be for mine. Teach me the Dhamma, O Blessed One! Teach me the Dhamma, O One-Well-Gone, that will be for my long-term welfare & bliss."

"Then, Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus: 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. That is how you should train yourself. When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in reference to the heard, only the sensed in reference to the sensed, only the cognized in reference to the cognized, then, Bāhiya, there is no you in connection with that. When there is no you in connection with that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This, just this, is the end of stress."

Through hearing this brief explanation of the Dhamma from the Blessed One, the mind of Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth right then and there was released from effluents through lack of clinging/sustenance. Having exhorted Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth with this brief explanation of the Dhamma, the Blessed One left.

Now, not long after the Blessed One's departure, Bāhiya was attacked & killed by a cow with a young calf. Then the Blessed One, having gone for alms in Sāvaththī, after the meal, returning from his alms round with a large number of monks, saw that Bāhiya had died. On seeing him, he said to the monks, "Take Bāhiya's body, monks, and, placing it on a litter and carrying it away, cremate it and build him a memorial. Your companion in the holy life has died."

Responding, "As you say, lord," to the Blessed One, the monks—placing Bāhiya's body on a litter, carrying it away, cremating it, and building him a memorial—went to the Blessed One. On arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As they were sitting there, they said to him, "Bāhiya's body has been cremated, lord, and his memorial has been built. What is his destination? What is his future state?"

"Monks, Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth was wise. He practiced the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma and did not pester me with issues related to the Dhamma. Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth, monks, is totally unbound."

Then, on realizing the significance of that, the Blessed One on that occasion exclaimed:

*Where water, earth,
fire, & wind
have no footing:
There the stars don't shine,
the sun isn't visible.
There the moon doesn't appear.
There darkness is not found.
And when a sage,
a brahman through sagacity,
has realized [this] for himself,
then from form & formless,
from bliss & pain,
he is freed.*

Sutta Study Notes

1. What is the setting?

- a. Near Savatthi at Jeta's Grove, monastery Upper Pradesh, Northern India. Bahiya was living in Suparaka near the seashore (near Mumbai?). The Buddha is on morning alms rounds.

2. Who is teaching?

- a. The Buddha

3. Who initiates the teaching?

- a. someone with questions: Bahiya

4. To whom are the teachings directed?

- a. Bahiya

5. What is the method of presentation?

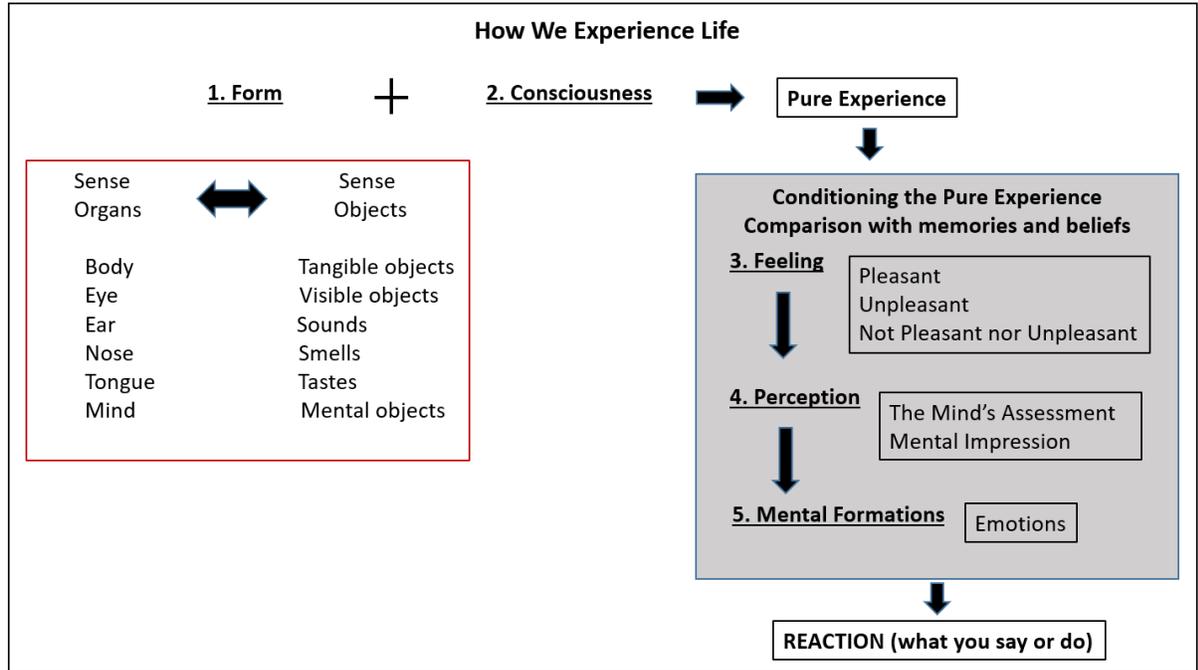
- a. Direct

6. What is the story?

- a. Narrative story
- b. Bahiya, a very devout layperson, wonders if he is an arahant (awakened one). A devata tells him that he is not even entered the path. She tells him that he should visit the Buddha in Savatthi because the Buddha is awakened and can teach him. Bahiya sets off and travels to Savatthi in one night (unlikely), encounters some monks who tell him that the Buddha has gone into town for alms. Bahiya goes there, meets the Buddha and asks him to teach him the dhamma. The Buddha says that he will do it later as he is on alms rounds. Bahiya asks two more times and finally the Buddha gives him a short teaching. Bahiya is awakened and the Buddha departs. Not long after, Bahiya is attacked and killed by a cow with a young calf. The Buddha learns of this after his meal and directs the monks to cremate him and build a memorial. He states that Bahiya was wise, did not pester him with questions, and that he became totally unbound. The story ends with a verse by the Buddha.

7. What is the essential teaching?

- a. This is essentially a focus on wisdom and concentration, two parts of the Eightfold Path.)
- b. The essential teaching is to train oneself to realize that in regard to what is seen, heard sensed, or thought, that is all. There is no self involved. There is only the pure experience of the seen, heard, sensed, cognized.
- c. We experience life through the Five Aggregates: Form, Consciousness, Feeling, Perception, and Mental Formations as noted on the diagram below.



In reference to Form once we are conscious of it, that is all there is. The Feeling, Perception and Mental Formations are created by the mind and we are conscious of these as additional Forms and we can only be conscious of one Form at a time. In the verse at the end, the Buddha states “Where water, earth ,fire, & wind have no footing” he means when we are not attached to the elements and “then from form & formless, from bliss & pain, he is freed.”

- d. The English language requires a subject. In this case, no subject is needed. No one is experiencing. It is just experienced.

8. How does it end?

- a. Bahiya is awakened and dies.

9. What does this sutta have to offer me?

- a. Insights: There is no real self, only the concept of self. For example, when we see something, our feelings, perceptions, and mental formations that arise give us the impression that there is a self that is not only experiencing them but that we are them and are a being. What is really happening is that the cognized (feelings, perception, and mental formations) are just that and nothing else.

Additional Learnings: Barriers to Awakening

Ajahn Brahmavamso notes: “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)²” and “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.”³

Let’s explore the Hindrances and Deep Concentration (the jhanas).

The Hindrances

The hindrances are phenomena that obscure our perception. The Buddha used the following simile to describe how each hindrance obscures the mind:

There is a pool of clear water that reflects our image.

*When **sense desire** is present in the mind, it is as if the pool were suffused with a colored dye.*

Desires color our perceptions.

*When **aversion** is present, it is like boiling water. We can’t see clearly.*

When we’re heated up by anger, we’re in a state of turbulence.

***Sloth and torpor** are like the pool overgrown with algae.*

There is a stagnation of mind that prevents us from seeing clearly.

***Restlessness and worry** are like water when it is stirred up by the wind.*

The mind is tossed about by agitation.

*And **doubt** is like muddy water, where we can’t see to the bottom, and everything is obscured.*

-- Sangaravo Sutta⁴

The hindrances have an unwholesome effect on our minds. It is necessary to abandon them before moving on to the next dhammas. “He (the Buddha) said that when attended to carelessly, “these five hindrances are makers of blindness, causing lack of vision, causing lack of knowledge, detrimental to wisdom, tending to vexation, leading away from nibbāna.” But when we attend to these states carefully, we learn to see into their empty, transparent nature and no longer get so caught up in their seductive power. They then become the focus of our mindfulness and the very vehicle of our awakening.”⁵

Each hindrance can be viewed as to its definition, the clear pool effect, manifestations, conditions leading to arising, conditions leading to removal, and prevention. The chart below gives a summary of the five hindrances with these aspects. The summary below and more details can be found on the [White Hall Meditation](#) web site in the series of talks on the [Four Foundations of Mindfulness](#) (Talks XIII-XVIII).

The Five Hindrances: Summary

	Desire	Aversion	Sloth & Torpor	Restlessness & Worry	Doubt
Definition	Insatiable want	Condemnation	Physical & Mental Laziness	Agitation & Anxiety	Uncertainty Skepticism
Clear Pool Effect	Boiling	Turbulence	Stagnation	Stirred by the wind	Muddy
Manifestations	Excitement Greed, avarice, craving	Anger, ill will, hatred, animosity, irritation, annoyance, fear, sorrow, grief, violent rage	Lack of energy Withdrawal Sluggish, dull and confused mind	Jumping out of skin Distraction, fear, anxiety, remorse, regret	Skeptical about relevance of teachings, path of practice, ability to practice
Conditions leading to arising	Unwise attention to intense wanting Lost in (attached to) pleasure, gain, fame, praise	Physical Pain Unpleasant thoughts Unpleasant situations Taking experiences personally	Imbalance – more concentration than energy Bored, lazy, drowsy, discontent Overeating	Imbalance – more energy than concentration Unwise attention causing mental proliferation Too much talk	Unwise attention to uncertainty Lack of inquiry and investigation
Conditions leading to removal	Mindful awareness Wise Reflection on consequences	Mindful awareness Awareness of adding judgments & commentary Depersonalizing experiences	Mindful awareness More energy Engaging with good friends Take rest	Mindful awareness More concentration Wise Reflection Patience Contentment	Mindful awareness Inquiry/investigation Ask “Is this wholesome?” “Does this teaching help to free the mind?”
Prevention	Mindfully guarding the sense doors No exposure to wanting conditions Moderate eating	Practicing loving kindness (metta) Focus on the good rather than the faults	Practicing the elements of Arousal Endeavor Exertion	Foster stillness of awareness	Paying wise attention in our meditation practice and in our lives.

Deep Concentration (the jhanas)

Concentration is defined as the direction or focus of attention on a single object, a singleness of mind⁶. The Buddha described four states of deep concentration as the jhanas.

Mark Epstein states: “As concentration increases, the mind and body relax. Thoughts diminish, emotional pressures weaken, and a kind of calm takes over. The mind gradually comes under some degree of control and settles down...Right concentration ... offers stillness, not just as respite, but as a way of entertaining uncertainty.”⁷

Skillful or wholesome concentration is concentration that is free of what the Buddha called the hindrances. As noted above, the Hindrances cloud our concentration.

The Buddha stated the four developments of concentration⁸

- leads to a pleasant abiding in the here & now
- leads to the attainment of knowledge & vision
- leads to mindfulness & alertness
- leads to the ending of the defilements (hindrances, poisons)

In meditation, we start with concentration practice by focusing on the breath as our object of attention. If we have trouble focusing, we look see if any of the hindrances above are present. By continuing to practice concentration, these hindrances usually fall away. After calming the mind, we can shift to insight (Vipassana) meditation by using concentration to focus on whatever phenomena (thoughts,

memories, sensations) are arising in the mind in order to investigate. Mindfulness makes us aware of what is and concentration keeps our attention on it. In everyday life, we can use concentration on the breath to calm the mind. Just applying concentration to two or three breaths can be beneficial. With full concentration or jhanic meditation, you are going deeper and focusing directly on the experience of impermanence without the objects, investigation, or thinking. The mind is focused on the mind. Bhante Gunaratana notes: “This is the experience of pure impermanence, the impermanence of experiencing awareness itself.”⁹

He continues: “Both concentration and mindfulness must work together to see things as they really are. One without the other is not strong enough to break the shell of ignorance and penetrate the truth. You may start with concentration and gain jhana, and then use the concentration to purify insight or mindfulness to see things as they are. Or, you may start with mindfulness, then gain concentration to purify mindfulness, so that you can use this purified mindfulness to see things as they really are.”¹⁰

Deep concentration focuses on the smaller and smaller details. These are called moments of mind and each mind moment consists of three briefer mind moments: rising, peak and dying mind moments. There are four stages of deep concentration (the jhanas) to that one can practice in order to focus on these mind moments to see the truth of impermanence. The first stage will be discussed here. For more information on the jhanas, see Bhante Gunaratana’s article, [The Jhanas in Theravada Buddhist Meditation](#), his book, *Beyond Mindfulness in Plain English*, and Leigh Brasington’s book, *Right Concentration: A Practical Guide to the Jhanas*.

Practicing the First Level of Deep Concentration or First Jhana

First the mind must be cleared of hindrances.
Next, five mental factors must come together:

- “initial application of thought,”
- “sustained application of thought,”
- Joy
- happiness,
- concentration.

Start with the initial application of thought (focusing on an object such as the breath) and then sustained application (continued focus)

Joy and happiness arise. Joy arises from the hopeful anticipation of happiness. This is the joy of non-attachment. Happiness arises out of contentment when the hopeful anticipation has been fulfilled. The object of concentration seems to fade and becomes a mental image (sign of concentration). The sign of concentration fades and the mind concentrates on itself.

*“Quiet, secluded from sense pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states of mind,
One enters and dwells in the first jhana,
Which is accompanied by applied thought and sustained thought,
With rapture and happiness born of seclusion.”¹¹*

Ajahn Brahmavamso [BĀHIYA'S TEACHING- in the Seen is just the Seen](#) May 2005
Bhikkhu Thanissaro [Food for Awakening: The Role of Appropriate Attention](#)

¹ To Māluṅkyaputta [Māluṅkyaputta Sutta](#) (SN 35:95)

² Ignorance [Avijjā Sutta](#) (AN 10:61)

³ Ajahn Brahmavamso [BĀHIYA'S TEACHING- in the Seen is just the Seen](#) May 2005

⁴ The metaphor here is a bowl of water [Sangaravo Sutta](#): Sangarava (SN 46.55)

The Hindrances

⁵ Goldstein p. 124

⁶ https://www.dhammadata.org/suttas/SN/SN48_10.html

⁷ <https://tricycle.org/magazine/meditations-secret-ingredient/>

⁸ [Concentration Samādhi Sutta \(AN 4:41\)](#)

⁹ Bhante Gunaratana Beyond Mindfulness in Plain English p. 94

¹⁰ Bhante Gunaratana p. 17

¹¹ Bhante Gunaratana p. 121 from the [Pañcakanga Sutta](#): Carpenter Fivetools SN 36.19