

A talk offered by Philip Jones to the Silent Mind-Open Heart Sangha on 03-15-2016.

Tonight I'd like to explore a short teaching that the Buddha gave. This may be familiar to some of you, since it is often cited by contemporary teachers.

The teaching is found in a collection called *The Udāna*, chapter 1, sutta #10. The Pāli word *udāna* is usually translated as "inspired utterances". *Udāna* is a reference to a brief verse found at the end of each of the suttas in this collection. The verse usually sums up the significance of the teaching. It is preceded by a section of prose which is the larger part of the sutta and provides the context and background for the inspired utterance.

The main character in this sutta, besides the Buddha, is a spiritual seeker usually called Bāhiya of the Bark Cloth.¹ (I've also seen him referred to as Bāhiya of the Bark Robe , and Bāhiya, the Wood-robed One.)²

The background story is that Bāhiya was a well-respected spiritual seeker³ who lived in the area of modern day Mumbai, which is on the southwest coast of India.⁴ One day the thought arose in his mind "Am I an arahant or on the path to arahant-ship?" In other words he wondered if he was fully Awakened and free of all defilements and fetters, or at least on his way to that. The story is that a minor deva (a non-material being, perhaps like an angel), who had once been a relative of Bāhiya's, came to him and broke the news "No. You are not an arahant and are not even on the path." But the deva told Bāhiya that the Buddha was fully Awakened, that he was teaching others to Awaken, and that he could be found in the town of Sāvattḥī, in northern India.

Bāhiya immediately trekked across India to find the Buddha. I've seen the distance quoted as 600 miles⁵, 720 miles⁶, and as 1200 miles⁷. Whatever the actual distance, he traveled a very long way, probably on foot, to find the Buddha. Eventually he arrived at Jeta Wood in Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery outside Sāvattḥī, where the Buddha was staying. He was told that the Buddha was gathering alms food for his only meal of the day.

Having a great sense of urgency, Bāhiya tracked down the Buddha in Sāvattḥī and asked for a teaching. Two times the Buddha turned him down saying it wasn't an appropriate time, since he was gathering alms. But when Bāhiya asked a third time the Buddha gave him this teaching:

"...Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus: 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."⁸

"And since for you, Bāhiya, in what is seen there will be only what is seen, in what is heard there will be only what is heard, in what is sensed there will be only what is sensed, in what is cognized there will be only what is cognized, 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."⁹

The sutta reports that Bāhiya immediately attained full Awakening after hearing this teaching. But it also indicates that his sense of urgency was well-founded, because he was killed by a cow shortly after this interaction with the Buddha.

The sutta, being a *udāna*, ends with this inspired utterance:

"Where neither water nor yet earth
Nor fire nor air gain a foothold,
There gleam no stars, no sun sheds light,
There shines no moon, yet there no darkness reigns.
When a sage, a brahmin, has come to know this
For himself through his own wisdom,
Then he is freed from form and formless.
Freed from pleasure and from pain."¹⁰

The first set of instructions — "In what is seen there must be only what is seen" and so forth — captures the experience of being completely mindful at each of the sense doors. When there is a continuity of mindfulness from moment to moment, there is just the experience of seeing a form, hearing a sound, smelling an odor, tasting a flavor, experiencing a tactile sensation and knowing a thought as a thought. When we meet experience in this way, it interrupts the causal chain of mental events that leads from sense contact to feeling and misperception and then to some kind of reactivity to the object,

perhaps grasping after it, aversion towards it, identification with it, or the proliferation of thoughts about it. Some people call this bare awareness or naked awareness. The ability to meet all of experience in this way is said to be one of the characteristics of an arahant, a fully Awakened one. But one doesn't have to be Fully Awakened to have had some experience with this. I'm sure all of you have had moments, or maybe more than moments, where you are simply experiencing the seen in the seen, and so forth. When we are meeting sense experiences in this way, the mind is quiet, which may be what you notice. It's not as though the mind has stopped or become still, as it may seem during an experience of jhāna or absorption. When in the seen there is only the seen, the mind is silent yet active.

It's important to recognize when there is an experience of "in the seeing only the seen". It's also important to notice or reflect on what that experience is like. To notice what it is like to live that way. To notice whether it is wholesome or not. To notice whether it is something you would like more of in your life. These are reflections that can support the faculty of Faith, and help us to maintain our devotion to practice and determination to practice.

I'm going to stop here tonight. Next week I'll explore the second part of the instructions which seem more obscure in meaning. I'll be using another sutta that, I think, helps to make the meaning more clear.

© Philip L. Jones, 2016

Notes

1. Udāna 1.10. Bark Cloth is found in:

Ireland, John. *The Udāna and The Itivuttaka*, Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1997, pp. 19-22. (Ud 1.10 also available at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/ud/ud.1.10.irel.html>)

Thānissaro Bhikkhu. *Udāna*, Valley Center, CA: Mettā Forest Monastery, 2012, p. 36-39. (A 1994 version of Ud 1.10 is also available at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/ud/ud.1.10.than.html>)

2. Udāna 1.10.

Bark Robe is found in Ānandajoti Bhikkhu. *Udāna: Exalted Utterances*. revised version 2.2, Feb. 2008, epub format, downloaded from <http://www.ancient-buddhist-texts.net/Texts-and-Translations/Udana/index.htm> and from <https://suttacentral.net/en/ud1.10>, 2016-03-09 ~ 9:00 a.m.

Wood-robbed One is found in Masefield, Peter. *The Udāna and The Itivuttaka*, Bristol, UK: Pāli Text Society, 2013, pp. 11-16.

3. Note: Stephen Batchelor explains Bāhiya's bark attire as a result of him being a tree worshiper (citation?). Leigh Brasington cites the British scholar/practitioner John Peacock as suggesting that the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* places an emphasis on trees, so Leigh suggests that given Bāhiya's attire he was likely a follower of these teachings (http://www.leighb.com/ud1_10.htm).

4. Anālayo Bhikkhu. *Compassion and Emptiness in Early Buddhist Meditation*, Cambridge, UK: Windhorse Publications, 2015, p. 110.
5. Ānandajoti Bhikkhu, op cit., note 50, pp. 998-999.
6. Ireland op cit. note 20, pp. 119-120.
7. Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, op cit., note 1, p. 38.
8. Anālayo Bhikkhu, (*Satipaṭṭhāna*, Birmingham, UK: Windhorse Publications, 2003, note 58, p. 231), comments on the similarity between this instruction and two passages in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. Leigh Brasington, op cit. (note 3), comments "Why did the Buddha give this particular instruction to Bahiya? The bark cloth clothing marked him as a serious student of the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad; thus he would be familiar with the teaching found there..."
9. Ānandajoti Bhikkhu, op cit, pp. 97-100.
10. Ireland, op cit., p. 22.