4.3. The Discourse on Obstructions and Hindrances

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and the next one begins. The important point, however, remains that the listener has a good idea of what is being recited, and what he is expected to know or reflect on.

1.4 MODERN EDITING ISSUES. We have two general categories of modern Pali sutta manuscripts or Tipiṭaka editions: the Asian versions and the European versions. The Asian versions comprise those of the Sinhala, the Burmese (Myanmar), the Siamese (Thai), the Khmer, the Laotian, and the Indian. The best known and easily available are the first three. These Asian versions follow a traditional referencing system. The Āvaraṇa Nīvaraṇa Sutta, for example, is “S 5.2.4.8,” that is, “Sānīyutta Nīkāya 5, Mahā Vagga 2, Bojjiṭṭhāṅga Sānīyutta 4, Nīvaraṇa Vagga 8,” meaning Sānīyutta Nīkāya 5th vāgga (chapter), that is, the Mahā Vagga, sānīyutta 2, that is, the Bojjiṭṭhāṅga Sānīyutta, vāgga (subchapter) 4, that is, Nīvaraṇa Vagga, sutta 8. Such a numbering is not always easy to remember!

The European editions are mostly done by the Pali Text Society in the UK, using roman letters. The Asian versions, too, are now available in roman letters, and, as such, facilitate easy comparison. The key problem with the PTS (or Ec = European) editions is that, as a rule, they do not have paragraph numbers which facilitate easy referencing, which helps us to quickly and accurately locate a phrase, a sentence or a passage, that is, for a helpful referencing of passages. Where such editions (or modern translations) do give paragraph numbering, they tend to be too long (sometimes covering over a page, or even pages!) and often arbitrarily placed (suggesting a lack of awareness of or disregard for the textual content).

In the SD series, we have tried to number the passages by topic or idea, often breaking up long Pali sentences into manageable phrases, which are numbered. Not to break from the “official” numbering, we have, as a rule, followed them but added decimals to them (such as 1.1, 1.2 etc). The early western editors were language experts, but were mostly neither Buddhists nor familiar with the sutta teachings (at least at the time of editing the texts). They were scholars, mostly philologists, working as pioneers in a new field of study. Any paragraph or internal numbering is mostly done at the editor’s discretion. Hence, the lack of facility and uniformity in the paragraph numbering in the modern European editions of the Pali texts. Perhaps we need a totally new edition of the Pali Tipiṭaka, especially a digital one, with a systematic paragraph numbering.

1.5 RELATED SUTTAS. For an important contrast in terms of meditation emphasis, the Āvaraṇa Nīvaraṇa Sutta should be studied with the (Satipatṭhāna) Nīvaraṇa Sutta (A 9.64). While the former shows how “the 7 awakening-factors...are not obstruction, not hindrances, not mental impurities, which when cultivated, grown, bring about the realization of knowledge and liberation” [§5], the (Satipatṭhāna) Nīvaraṇa Sutta state that “the 4 focuses of mindfulness are to be cultivated for the abandonment of these 5 mental hindrances.”

In other words, the Āvaraṇa Nīvaraṇa Sutta (S 46.38) teaches the overcoming of the mental hindrances and attaining dhyāna for the cultivation of insight (vipassanā, bhāvanā),8 here called “wisdom” (vījā). However, vījā here has a broader sense than vipassanā, whose sense it connotes, but it also refers to the various spiritual knowledges of the different level of saṁnāda, including “final knowledge” (aṇñā), that is, liberating wisdom of the arhat, too.

The (Satipatṭhāna) Nīvaraṇa Sutta (A 9.64), on the other hand, tells us that the practice of the 4 satipatthanas is a way of removing these same 5 mental hindrances. However, the result of satipatthana can also bring about insight wisdom (vipassanā) or mental calm (samatha), depending on our ability and choice during the cultivation of satipatthana. In fact, properly cultivated, satipatthana can bring us to nirvana itself.9

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7 A 9.64.3/4:457, SD 41.13.
8 Note that here, vipassanā, bhāvanā means simply “the cultivation of insight,” not “insight meditation,” which is a modern invention of Burmese teachers. In other word, it is an integral part of balanced meditation that also involves samatha or mental calm. Both samatha and vipassana work together like a flying bird’s wings to help us soar to spiritual liberation. See Samatha and vipassana, SD 41.1.
9 See Samatha and vipassana, SD 41.11 (6.3.4).
The Discourse on Obstructions and Hindrances
S 46.38

(A) Āvaraṇa Sutta, The Discourse on Obstructions
or, (Bojjhaṅga) Āvaraṇa Sutta, “The Discourse on the Obstructions (and the Awakening-factors)

2 Bhikshus, there are these 5 obstructions, hindrances, mental impurities, that which weaken wisdom.10 What are the five?

The 5 mental hindrances11
3 (1) Sensual desire, bhikshus, is an obstruction, a hindrance, a mental impurity that weakens wisdom.
(2) Ill will, bhikshus, is an obstruction, a hindrance, a mental impurity that weakens wisdom.
(3) Sloth and torpor, bhikshus, are an obstruction, a hindrance, a mental impurity that weakens wisdom.
(4) Restlessness and worry, bhikshus, are an obstruction, a hindrance, a mental impurity that weakens wisdom.
(5) Doubt, bhikshus, are an obstruction, a hindrance, a mental impurity that weakens wisdom.
4 These, bhikshus, are the 5 obstructions, hindrances, mental impurities that weaken wisdom.

The 7 awakening-factors
5 There are these 7 awakening-factors, bhikshus, that are not obstruction, not hindrances, not mental impurities, which when cultivated, grown, bring about the realization of knowledge and liberation.12

What are the seven?
6 (1) The awakening-factor of mindfulness, when cultivated, often developed, brings about the realization of knowledge and liberation sati sambojjhaṅga
(2) The awakening-factor of mental investigation when cultivated, grown, brings about the realization of knowledge and liberation dhamma, vicaya sambojjhaṅga
(3) The awakening-factor of effort when cultivated, grown, brings about the realization of knowledge and liberation viriya sambojjhaṅga
(4) The awakening-factor of zest when cultivated, grown, brings about the realization of knowledge and liberation pīṭi sambojjhaṅga
(5) The awakening-factor of tranquillity when cultivated, grown, brings about the realization of knowledge and liberation passaddhi sambojjhaṅga
(6) The awakening-factor of concentration when cultivated, grown, brings about the realization of knowledge and liberation samādhi sambojjhaṅga
(7) The awakening-factor of equanimity when cultivated, grown, brings about the realization of knowledge and liberation upekkhā sambojjhaṅga

10 Bhikkhave āvaraṇā nīvaraṇā cetaso upakkilesā paññāya dubballi,karaṇā.
11 On the mental hindrances, see Nīvaraṇa, SD 32.1
12 Satt'ime bhikkhave bojjhaṅgā anāvaraṇā anīvaraṇā cetaso anupakkilesā bhāvitā bahulī, katā vijjā, vimutti, phala, sacchikiryāya saṁvattanti.
when cultivated, grown, 
brings about the realization of knowledge and liberation. [96]

7 These, bhikshus, are not obstruction, not hindrances, not mental impurities, which when cultivated, grown, bring about the realization of knowledge and liberation.

(B) Nīvaraṇa Sutta The Discourse on Hindrances

or, (Bojjhaṅga) Nīvaraṇa Sutta, “The Discourse on the Hindrances (and the Awakening-factors)

The 5 mental hindrances

8 Bhikshus, when a noble disciple listens to the Dharma, giving it attention with resolve, directing his whole mind to it, open-eared, then the 5 mental hindrances are not present in him.

At that time, the 7 awakening factors are developed to perfection.

9 And what are the 5 mental hindrances that are not present at that time?

(1) The hindrance of sensual desire is not present at that time. 
(2) The hindrance of ill will is not present at that time. 
(3) The hindrance of sloth and torpor is not present at that time. 
(4) The hindrance of restlessness and worry is not present at that time. 
(5) The hindrance of doubt is not present at that time. 

These, bhikshus, are the 5 mental hindrances that are not present at that time.

The 7 awakening-factors

10 And what are the 7 awakening-factors (satta bojjhaṅga) that are brought to fulfillment through cultivation in him?

(1) The awakening-factor of mindfulness is brought to fulfillment through cultivation at that time. 
(2) The awakening-factor of mental investigation is brought to fulfillment through cultivation at that time. 
(3) The awakening-factor of effort is brought to fulfillment through cultivation at that time. 
(4) The awakening-factor of zest is brought to fulfillment through cultivation at that time. 
(5) The awakening-factor of tranquillity is brought to fulfillment through cultivation at that time. 
(6) The awakening-factor of concentration is brought to fulfillment through cultivation at that time. 
(7) The awakening-factor of equanimity is brought to fulfillment through cultivation at that time. [96]

These, bhikshus, are the 7 awakening-factors that are developed to perfection.

11 Bhikshus, when a noble disciple listens to the Dharma, giving it attention with resolve, directing his whole mind to it, open-eared, then the mental hindrances are not present in him.

12 At that time, these 7 awakening-factors are brought to fulfillment through cultivation.

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13 This whole section, right to the end, forms a separate sutta in Ce: see Anīvaraṇa S. “the Without Hindrances Discourse” (S 46.38b/5:95 f), SD 3.2(5.3).

14 On the 7 awakening-factors, see SD 10.15.

15 “Giving it attention with resolve…open-eared,” atthi, katvā manasikatvā sabba, cetaso sammannāharitvā ohita,-soto.