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(Bojjhaṅga) Aggi Sutta

The Fire Discourse (on the Awakening-factors) | S 46.53

Theme: Overcoming mental sluggishness and agitation

Translated by Piya Tan ©2011, 2017

1 Sutta summary and highlights

1.1 SUMMARY

1.1.1 The (Bojjhaṅga) Aggi Sutta (S 46.53) relates the Buddha’s response to the claims of some wanderers that they teach the same things about the 5 mental hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇa*)¹ and the 7 awakening-factors (*satta bojjhaṅga*)² [§§1-10].

1.1.2 Questioning the wanderers

1.1.2.1 The Buddha teaches the monks to question the wanderers [§§11-12], thus:

- (1) Which of the 7 awakening-factors don’t work when the mind is “**stuck**” (*līna*), that is, overwhelmed by the hindrance of sloth-and-torpor (*thīna, middha*) [§13-14], and which factors will help [§15-17]? and
- (2) Which of the 7 awakening-factors don’t work when the mind is “**restless**” (*uddhata*), that is, overwhelmed by the hindrance of restlessness-and-guilt (*uddhacca, kukkucca*) [§17-18], and which factors will help [§19-20]?

1.1.2.2 Technically, being “**restless**” (*uddhata*) refers only to the hindrance or defilement of restlessness (*uddhacca*). This is when we are hindered from mental focus due to our mind being excited or troubled by something done or undone (the past), or the possibility of things (the future). Often, this is thinking about the future, what to do next.³

In the 4th hindrance, “**guilt**” (*kukkucca*), that is “guilty feeling,” is worrying about what we have done or undone, something in the past. However, we can also feel guilty about such commissions and omissions. Hence, as a dvandva, the 4th hindrance, comprises *uddhacca* (which refers to being distracted by the future), and *kukkucca* (which refers to being distracted by the past).

1.1.2.3 The usage of *uddhacca* alone may well have been an early version of the teaching, when *uddhacca* is taken to merely mean “mentally restless.” When the teaching of the mental hindrances was introduced, *uddhacca* was paired with *kukkucca*, since they conveniently cover the past and the future, respectively, as sources of distractions. Anyway, in this Sutta, the hindrance which keeps the mind stuck is that of sloth-and-torpor. Hence, for a balanced study, it is more useful if we take “restless” as referring to the 4th hindrance of *uddhacca, kukkucca* as a whole.

1.1.3 The Sutta closes with the Buddha mentioning the unmentioned 1st awakening-factor--that of **mindfulness** (*satī*). As in **the 5 spiritual faculties** (*pañc’indriya*), mindfulness acts independently, *moderating*

¹ On the 5 mental hindrances, see *Nīvaraṇa*, SD 32.1.

² On the 7 awakening-factors, see **(Bojjhaṅga) Sīla S** (S 46.3) SD 10.15.

³ On *uddhacca* by itself, see SD 50.12 (2.4.4); *dharm’uddhacca*, see SD 41.5 (5); SD 32.7 (2.1.4, 2.2.3); SD 41.4 (2.2.1).

the activating and the restraining factors,⁴ ensuring that they are kept in balance. Hence, the Sutta says that it is “always useful.” [§21].

The 5 spiritual faculties, or simply, the 5 faculties—faith (*saddhā*), effort (*virīya*), mindfulness (*sati*), samadhi (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*)—are a sort of basic set underlying the 7 awakening factors. They need to be balanced and harmonized during practice to effect the awakening-factors, resulting in insight and liberating wisdom.⁵ [1.2.2.4]

1.2 THE AWAKENING-FACTORS

1.2.1 The awakening-factors (*bojjhaṅga*) are so called because they are the practices that work together to bring about awakening and liberation. They are 7 in number (*satta bojjhaṅga*) as follows:

(1) The awakening-factor of mindfulness	<i>sati sambojjhaṅga</i>	} Active
(2) The awakening-factor of dharma-investigation	<i>dhmma,vicaya sambojjhaṅga</i>	
(3) The awakening-factor of effort [energy]	<i>virīya sambojjhaṅga</i>	
(4) The awakening-factor of zest	<i>pīti sambojjhaṅga</i>	} Passive
(5) The awakening-factor of tranquillity	<i>passaddhi sambojjhaṅga</i>	
(6) The awakening-factor of concentration	<i>samādhi sambojjhaṅga</i>	
(7) The awakening-factor of equanimity	<i>upekkhā sambojjhaṅga</i>	

1.2.2 Active/passive and activating/restraining

1.2.2.1 Here, **the first 3 factors**—mindfulness, dharma-discernment and effort—are the “active” aspects or conditions (or set of causes) for the arising of the “passive” aspects (or results), namely, the **last 4 factors**, that is, zest, tranquillity, concentration and equanimity. In other words, *we can only work on the active aspects*: maintain mindfulness by letting go of distractions, applying wise attention⁶ to mental states as appropriate, and keeping up the effort with patience and lovingkindness.

These three active awakening-factors are actually the same as their namesake in **the 5 faculties** (*pañc’indriya*), where they are respectively known as *mindfulness, effort and wisdom*.⁷ Effort keeps up the mindfulness, while wisdom investigates states that arise and fall away, by seeing them as processes that are impermanent, unsatisfactory and non-self: in short, by way of the 3 characteristics.⁸ This is the meditation strategy known as “calmness preceded by insight” (*vipassanā,pubbaṅgamā samatha*).⁹

1.2.2.2 Another way of working with the awakening-factors—according to **the (Bojjhaṅga) Aggi Sutta** (S 46.53)—is to see the awakening-factors as functioning to “activate” (that is, directing the mind) or as “restraining” (that is, undirecting the mind).¹⁰ While the first is the *work* we put into the meditation, the second is the *result* or benefit of that work.

The 7 awakening-factors, then, fall into **2 categories**: the activating and the restraining. The activating awakening-factors arise first: *dharma-discernment, effort and zest*. **Zest**, by itself is “passive” [1.2.2.1]: we

⁴ On the activating and the restraining aspects of the awakening-factors, see SD 10.15 (4.3).

⁵ On the 5 faculties (*pañc’indriya*), see **Pañc’indriya**, SD 10.4; SD 3.6 (3).

⁶ On wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*), see **Nimitta and anuvyañjana**, SD 19.14.

⁷ On the 5 faculties (*pañc’indriya*), see **Āpaṇa S** (S 48.50/5:225 f), SD 10.4.

⁸ On the 3 characteristics, see **Dhamma,niyāma S** (A 3.134/1:285), SD 26.8.

⁹ On these strategies, see **Mettā Sahagata S** (S 46.54/5:115-121) + SD 10.11 (1) & **Yuganaddha S** (A 4.170/2:156 f), SD 41.5.

¹⁰ See SD 10.15 (4.2).

do nothing about it and just “enjoy” it. But here—as an “activator”—we take it to be “active” because it arises from the preceding two factors; they are a subset.

The restraining awakening-factors—*tranquillity, concentration and equanimity*—emerge later, as the results of the activation of the first 3 awakening-factors (with mindfulness underlying all factors).¹¹ They are said to be “restraining” because they are the passive results of our meditation, and we can do nothing about them—indeed, if we can or try to do anything about them (such as thinking about them), then, we are *not* meditating at all!¹²

They are also said to be “restraining” because their proper and regular development *prevents* us from breaking the precepts or doing unwholesome acts. Habitual immoral conduct will easily weaken, even destroy, the effects of this restraining awakening-factors, and we then need to start all over again with the activating awakening-factors.

1.2.2.3 The restraining factors are to be cultivated when the mind is restless (*uddhata*), just as one sprinkles water, wet grass and dirt on a blaze so that it dies down and is put out. As in the 5 spiritual faculties [4.2], **mindfulness** acts independently, *moderating* the activating and the restraining awakening-factors, ensuring that they are kept in a proper balance. These teachings are found in **the (Bojjhaṅga) Aggi Sutta** (S 46.53).¹³ [4.3.1]

1.2.2.4 It should be noted that although **mindfulness** is not mentioned because it is *implied* as being a natural and necessary component of all the awakening-factors. Mindfulness is the first of the 7 awakening-factors (*satta bojjhaṅga*) as well as the *first* of the 5 spiritual faculties (*pañc’indriya*). As an awakening-factor, it is the beginning of the inner journey *progressing* towards the mind ready for awakening, and it underlies all the other 6 factors, too.

As a spiritual factor, mindfulness works on every level, arousing and strengthening that level like a sturdy rung of a ladder or the stable step of a staircase that goes upwards to a safer and more comfortable space or room. It works to strengthen each level of mind-work, as well as a condition and support for the next factor like as a full chain-reaction of the whole set of awakening-factors, from beginning to end. [1.1.3]

2 A stuck mind and a restless mind

2.1 A STUCK MIND (LĪNA CITTA)

2.1.1 The activating awakening-factors

2.1.1.1 According to the (Bojjhaṅga) Aggi Sutta, when, during meditation, our mind is “**stuck**” (*līna*) or sluggish, that is, overcome by the hindrance of **sloth-and-torpor** (*thīna, middha*), we should *not* apply the awakening-factors of tranquility, of concentration or equanimity, that is, the last three awakening-factors [§§13-14]. This triad is, in fact, known as the “restraining factors,” which are *passive* by nature [1.2.2.1].

Instead, we should apply **the activating factors**—dharma-investigation, effort and zest [§15]—to *free* that mind, just as one stokes a small fire so that it flares up [§16]. These three are the first three awakening-factors (except for no 1, which is mindfulness) [1.2.2.4], and they are called the “activating factors” because we need to work on them.

¹¹ See SD 10.15 (4.3.2).

¹² On thinking and knowing not occurring during dhyana, see **The Buddha discovered dhyana**, SD 33.1b (6).

¹³ S 46.53/5:112-115 (SD 51.13).

2.1.1.2 To free the stuck mind, we begin with the first of the activating factors, that is, dharmainvestigation. We should examine (define) what exactly is troubling us—we should apply **Bahiya’s teaching** here. We should simply regard all our sense-experiences just as they are, objectively. This way, we will “filter” away the conditions that have choked up our mind.¹⁴ Although “effort” must be applied here: it is *not* a cognitive one but an affective engagement.

This affective engagement with **dharmainvestigation** (*dhamma, vicaya*) is the beginning of a true act of renunciation: we *let go* of the whatever arises before us, freeing ourself of all that has burdened us. Sometimes, even a mere inner smile will clear the mind of the distraction. Not a bit of thought must be applied to these “incoming guests” (*āgantuka*).¹⁵ They have over-stayed their welcome and it is time for them to go; we bid them goodbye, and return to the sanctity of our own home.

2.1.1.3 On the level of meditative engagement, the **effort** (*virīya*) is so subtly affective that it makes sense to describe it as “the effort of non-effort.” Our task is never to *react* to whatever arises before us, but to simply welcome it and leave it alone—let it come, let it go. This is the real “going with the flow,” not fighting any sense-experience, but just letting them all go. It’s like gradually switching off all our handphoned: we do not have to answer any more calls.

2.1.1.4 When we are no more troubled by invasive and distracting sense-objects, we feel a profound sense of relief. In fact, the “effortless effort” becomes so natural that we don’t even feel it. Indeed, the attention on the meditation sign is so easy and full now that it becomes a “joyful interest.” This is another word for zest (*pīti*). With this, all the three activating factors have done their respective tasks, and we are back on our meditation track.

2.1.2 How the mind becomes “stuck”

2.1.2.1 The (Majjhima) Ceto, khila Sutta (M 16) and **the Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33) list the 5 mental shackles (*cetaso vinibandha*) as an alternative set of 5 hindrances.¹⁶ The fourth shackle relates directly to torpor (*middha*). It describes one who, after over-eating (*udarāvadehakam bhuñjati*), indulges in the pleasure of the bed (*seyya, sukha*), in the pleasure of lying down (*passa, sukha*), and in the pleasure of sleep (*middha, -sukha*).¹⁷

The Majjhima Commentary glosses *middha* here as “sleep” (*niddā*, MA 2:69). The Thera, gāthā Commentary adds in connection with the elder Anuruddha: “They say that of the elder’s 55 years of sitting practice, he did not sleep for 25. The rest he slept only during the last watch (2.00-6.00 am) on account of bodily tiredness.”¹⁸ However, from the context of the verse, it is also possible to take *middha* as meaning “torpor.” It is unlikely that Anuruddha has not slept for 25 years, especially when the suttas do not give such evidence—either “sleep” is defined in meditation terms, or it only refers to the elder’s sleeping posture.¹⁹

¹⁴ On Bāhiya’s teaching, see **(Arahatta) Bāhiya S** (U 1.10,15-17) + SD 33.7 (1).

¹⁵ See **Radiant mind**, SD 8.3 (3.3 + 6).

¹⁶ M 16,8-12/1:102 f (SD 32.14); D 33.2.1(20)/3:238.

¹⁷ See **Nīvaraṇa**, SD 32.1 (3.6).

¹⁸ *Therassa pañca, paññāsāya vassesu nesajjikassa sato ādito pañca, vīsati, vassāni niddā nāhosi, tato param sarīra, kilamathena pacchima, yāme niddā ahoṣi ti vadanti* (ThaA 3:70).

¹⁹ There is a similar ref to sleeping in a sitting posture, but without mention of *nesajjika*, in **Bakkula S** (M 124), where the elder Bakkula is said to have practised it; for, he says, “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having used a reclining board (*apassenakam apassetā*),” ie, sleeping at an angle of 45° or higher, not lying prone on a bed: see M 124.35/3:127 @ SD 3.15. The reclining board is allowed at V 2:175.

2.1.2.2 It is interesting that **the (Bojjhaṅga) Aggi Sutta** only speaks of the mind as being “stuck” (*līna*) [§§13-16], and not as being “slothful and torporific.” In fact, there is no such adjectival phrase in Pali. It is possible that the dvandva (twin compound), *thīna,middha*, was originally a tatpuruṣa (determinative compound), *thīna-m-iddha*, meaning “increase of sleepiness” or “preponderance of sluggishness.”

It is possible that, at a very early date (in the few centuries after the Buddha), the term came to be taken as a dvandva, *thīna,middha*, “sloth and torpor.” Sloth-and-torpor is then placed third in the stock-list of the 5 hindrances. However, we do not seem to see any term or phrase in the suttas describing one being “overcome by sloth and torpor.”²⁰

In **Bhagu’s Thera.gāthā**, the elder described how, “overcome with torpor was I” (*ahaṃ middhena pakata*, Tha 271a), as he goes forth from his dwelling, falls flat on the ground, but undaunted, he perseveres in his practice and gains arhathood. In this excerpt, he only uses the word, *middha*, to describe his tired mind.

The Pacalā Sutta (A 7.58) describes how Moggallāna, before his awakening, in meditation and overcome by “nodding” (*pacalā*), without mention of neither *thīna* nor *middha*. But what he assails him is just that: sloth and torpor. In other words, *thīnamiddha* is not always the technical term that we are familiar with in the suttas today.²¹

2.2 A RESTLESS MIND (UDDHATA CITTA)

2.2.1 The restraining awakening-factors

2.2.1.1 According to the (Bojjhaṅga) Aggi Sutta, when, during meditation, our mind becomes “restless” (*uddhata*), that is, overcome by the hindrance of **restlessness-and-guilt** (*uddhacca,kukkucca*), we should not apply the awakening-factors of dharma-investigation, effort or zest, that is, the first three awakening-factors [§§17-18] (minus no 1, mindfulness) [1.2.2.4]. This triad is, in fact, known as the “activating factors,” which are *active* by nature [1.2.2.1].

Instead, we should apply **the restraining factors--tranquility, of concentration or equanimity** [§19]—to *still* that mind, just as one works to extinguish a large blaze [§20]. These three are the last three awakening-factors, and they are called “restraining factors” because we can do almost nothing with them, except to “enjoy” them.

2.2.1.2 To still the restless mind, we begin with the first of the restraining factors, that is, **tranquility** (*passaddhi*). More fully, this is called “bodily tranquility” (*kaya,passaddhi*), which, according to Buddhaghosa, refers to the 3 mental aggregates: feeling, perception and formations (Dhs 40).²² In simpler terms, this means we do not have any more sense-reactions—assuming we have already cultivated the first 4 awakening-factors of *mindfulness, dharma-investigation, effort and zest*. We are no more distracted by any sense-experience so that the mind is profoundly still.

²⁰ See, eg. **(Bojjhaṅga Nīvaraṇa) Pariyāya S** (S 46.52) which lists the hindrances by breaking the cpd: “Whatever sloth there is, it is a hindrance; whatever torpor there is, it is a hindrance” (*yada pi ... thīnaṃ tad api nīvaraṇaṃ; yada pi middhaṃ tad api nīvaraṇaṃ*, S 5:110,12, and the same for *uddhacca,kukkucca*). **(Chakka) Arahatta S** (A 6.66) mentions a set of 6 qualities that prevents the attaining of arhathood: sloth, torpor, restlessness, guilt, lack of faith, heedlessness (*thīnaṃ middhaṃ uddhaccaṃ kukkuccaṃ assaddhiyaṃ pamādaṃ*) (A 6.66/3:421). In the line, “He should overcome sleepiness, drowsiness, sloth” (*niddaṃ tandim sahe thīnaṃ*), *thīna* seems to appear alone (**Sn 942**). These samples show that that at least *thīnamiddha* is not a fixed term.

²¹ On **Pacalā S** (S 7.58), SD 4.11; for summary, see SD 32.6 (3.3.2.2).

²² Vism 14.144/465. The 3 mental aggregates are part of the 5 aggregates, which are form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness: see **(Upādāna) Parivaṭṭa S** (S 22.56) SD 3.7; def at SD 3.7 (6+7).

Thus, with mindfulness, we have carefully investigated our mental states with the right kind of effort, arousing zest (or joyful interest) in us. From zest, comes tranquility. With all our bodily activities—our sense-experiences of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching—suspended, as it were, we are now really ready to work fully with the mind only.

2.2.1.3 Or, rather, our mind is now able to look at itself, free from any distraction from the physical senses. The mind is completely undistracted and settles down composed: it attains **concentration** or stillness (*samādhī*). This is like a perfect shiny sphere that stays fully still at only a tangent on a perfectly flat plane.²³

2.2.1.4 This vision of a perfect sphere standing at a tangent on a perfect plane is also a beautiful image of total mental balance and equipoise. A lot of more wonderful things can be said of the mind in this state. Suffice it to say that this mind has reached such a state of **equanimity** (*upekkhā*) that it is brilliantly radiant and profoundly joyful. We have attained dhyana (*jhāna*).

Even if the mind is unable to attain dhyana, it is so calm that it just “looks on” (*upekkhati*), which is the verb of the noun, *upekkhā* or meditative equanimity. The mind is neither asleep nor unconscious. Indeed, it is most aware that any mind can naturally be. It not a *reactive* (cognitive) mind but a receptive (affective) one. It fully experiences itself, so to speak: it is radiantly blissful and profoundly aware. This is the kind of mind that is ready for the path of awakening, even nirvana itself.²⁴

2.2.2 How the mind becomes “restless”

2.2.2.1 Both learners (saints of the path) and serious practitioners can experience restlessness through excessive striving, as mentioned in such discourses as **the Paṃsu, dhovaka Sutta** (A 3.100a), which compares a restless practitioner to when a goldsmith keeps blowing on gold in the fire, as a result of which the gold gets burnt.²⁵ We need to be less extreme in our spiritual quest and daily life, and it helps to be less goal-driven, especially in meditation.

2.2.2.2 In fact, **the Iddhi, pāda Vibhaṅga Sutta** (S 51.20) clearly says that when desire for progress on the path becomes excessive (*atipaggahīta chanda*), it will give rise to restlessness.²⁶ The same is true of excessive energy. Hence, even though desire for progress or energy must be exerted for cultivating the path, if there is too much of it, the hindrance of restlessness will arise and obstruct our progress.

As long as there is restlessness, notes **the (Chakka) Arahatta Sutta** (A 6.66), it will be impossible to reach the final goal.²⁷ Moderate effort is famously pointed out by the Buddha in the parable of the well-tuned lute given to the monk Soṇa Kolivisa in **the Soṇa (Kolivisa) Sutta** (A 6.55).²⁸

2.2.2.3 According to **the Pacalā Sutta** (A 7.58), speaking harsh and provocative words, too, can bring about restlessness, as they may lead to argumentation, as a result of which restlessness arises in the mind, preventing mental concentration.²⁹ Restlessness can also arise in connection with alms-collecting, adds the Sutta, as when a monastic receives nothing because people are too busy to notice that

²³ On the mind knowing itself, see SD 33.1b (6.2.1.2).

²⁴ For more on this dhyanic mind, see **The Buddha discovered dhyana**, SD 33.1b (6.2, 6.5, 7). On the “lack of knowing” by a dhyanic mind, see SD 33.1b (6.2.1.3).

²⁵ A 3.100a.13/1:257 (SD 19.11).

²⁶ S 51.20.5/5:277 (SD 28.14).

²⁷ A 6.66/3:421.

²⁸ A 6.55/3:375 @ SD 20.12 (2.4.2).

²⁹ A 7.58.10/4:87.

someone has come, an unmindful monastic might become restlessness and wonder who has caused a rift between them and their supporters.³⁰

3 The wanderers and the Buddha’s teachings

3.1 ORIGINS

3.1.1 *Paribbājaka* (Skt *parivrājaka*, from *pari*, “around” + √VRAJ, “to proceed”) as a motley group of “wanderers,” who had given up the worldly life, or the roots of such a practice, probably predated the brahminical system of the Buddha’s time, and go to the Indus Valley civilization (3300-1300 BCE), that is, the Bronze Age in India.

3.1.2 By the Buddha’s time, they mostly lived as **itinerants**, wandering about for the 8-9 month outside of the rainy season of the Gangetic plain. Many were eremites who wandered about alone, and many of whom were teachers who publicly debated with wanderers or any ready opponents. This was clearly also an effective way to win public recognition and patronage by way of basic supports of life.

3.1.3 The wanderers were an important part of the *samaṇa* (Skt *śramaṇa*) or “recluse” movement that arose well before the Buddha’s time. The movement was at first an alternative to the brahminical system. When Brahmanism became significantly dominant, the “recluses” (a blanket term for the non-brahminical religious) became more hostile to it, and, as a rule rejected it. In fact, in the Buddha’s time, the recluses were the predominant religious group in the central Gangetic plain, where **the kshatriyas** (*khattiya*) became more powerful politically (as kings) and economically (pastoral and commercial).

3.2 THE WANDERERS IN THE BUDDHA’S TIME

3.2.1 Settled wanderers

Many of the wanderers of the Buddha’s time seemed to live a more settled life, or had their own residential parks donated by others, where public debates were often held. The best known of such abodes was perhaps the Udumbarikā wanderers’ park.³¹ **The Udumbarikā Sīha.nāda Sutta** (D 25) mentions the wanderer Nigrodha as residing there with a following (*gaṇa*) of 3,000 wanderers.³²

3.2.2 Great debaters

The “wanderers” (*paribbājaka*) were a special class of ancient Indian mendicants (including women wanderers) who held various beliefs, who were often great debaters, and wandered around India from pre-Buddhist times. They are highlighted in **the Nānā Tittiya Sutta 1** (U 6.4). which describes the lively milieu of inquiry and debate amongst the various religious groups of the Buddha’s time:

³⁰ A 7.58.10/4:87 f.

³¹ *Udumbarikā paribbājak’ārāma*. This park belongs to queen Udumbarikā who has dedicated it to the wanderers. Nearby is the peacocks’ feeding-ground (*mora,nivāpa*) beside the Sumāgadhā lotus lake (DA 3:835), both of which are part of the Bamboo Grove (*Velu,vana*). On other wanderers’ parks, see **Kuṇḍaliya S** (S 46.6), SD 35.3 (1.1).

³² D 25,1.2 (SD 1.4).

Now at that time, there were a number of sectarian recluses, brahmins, and wanderers of various outlook, living around Sāvattthī, holding various views, of various persuasions, of various inclinations [preferences],
relying, for their support, by way of these various views.³³

The phrase, “various sectarian recluses, brahmins and wanderers” (*nānā,titthiya,samaṇa,brahmaṇa,paribbājakā*) is interesting as it not only includes the “non-Buddhists,” but also sets apart the wanderers as a class of their own, showing their significance in terms of religious debate and controversy.³⁴

3.2.3 The religious serving the world

3.2.3.1 A more sombre picture of the various sectarian groups are highlighted in **the Satta Jaṭila Sutta** (S 3.11), beginning with this description of a public parade of 5 religious groups of 7 persons each, that is, fire-worshipping matted-hair ascetics, Jain monks, naked ājīvakas, loin-clothed Jain monks and wanderers:

Now at that time, seven matted-hair ascetics,³⁵ seven nirgrantha [Jain] ascetics,³⁶ seven naked ascetics,³⁷ seven loin-clothed [single-robed] ascetics,³⁸ and seven wanderers,³⁹ with long head-hair, long finger-nails and long body-hair,⁴⁰ each carrying his pole and khari,⁴¹ passed by not far from the Blessed One.
(S 3.11) = **Ossajjana S** (U 6.2), SD 14.11

³³ On the famous parable of the blind men and the elephant: U 6.4/66 f (SD 40a.14).

³⁴ See SD 25.1 (1) & DEB: samaṇa,brāhmaṇa,paribbājaka. Dhammapāla explains *titthiya* as being derived from *tittha*, “ford, river-crossing,” meaning it is here that they cross over (*taranti*) samsara to enter nirvana; but here it refers to those with various outlooks or dogmas (*tittha*) (UA 338). Buddhaghosa says that they are renunciants who hold on to one or other of the 62 views (see **Brahma,jāla S**, D 1), SD 25 (MA 2:7,23), and that they are neither able to overcome the 5 mental hindrance nor cultivate the 4 divine abodes (SA 3:171,16). The term *titthiya* often refers to the 6 sectarian teachers: Pūraṇa Kassapa, Makkhalī Gosāla, Ajita Kesa,kambali, Pakudha Kaccāyana, Sañjaya Be-laṭṭhi,putta and Nigaṇṭha Nāta,putta: see N Dutt 1941:34-41 (ch IV). For philosophical analyses on them, see Jayatilleke 1969 index.

³⁵ “Matted-hair ascetics,” *jaṭila*, so called because of their matted (thick and untidy) hair (UA 74, 330), at times classed as “seers” (*isi*, Nc 149), at times as “sages” (*muni*, Nc 513). The most famous of them are the fire-worshipping “former matted-hair ascetics” (*purāṇa jaṭilas*), Uruvela Kassapa, Naḍī Kassapa and Gayā Kassapa, who become arhats on listening to **Āditta Pariyāya S** (S 35.28 = V 1:33f), SD 1.3.

³⁶ “Jains,” *nigaṇṭha*, are the followers of Mahāvīra (Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta). On their teaching, see eg **Cūḷa Dukkhak,khandhaka S** (M 14,15-19/1:92 f).

³⁷ *Acela*, often identified as Ājīvakas, on which see A L Basham, *History and Doctrines of the Ājīvikas*, London, 1951; DPPN: Ājīvakā; also Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:143-145 (see index) & Jaini, *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies*, (1970) 2001:57-61.

³⁸ “Single-robed ascetics,” *eka,sāṭaka*, are the Jains who habitually wear only a simple lower robe or waist-cloth reaching the knees or lower. For refs & on problem of identifying them, see CPD sv. Cf V:H 5:191 n6.

³⁹ “Wanderers,” *paribbājaka*. These peripatetics—more fully, “the sectarian wanderers of other faiths” (*añña,-titthiyā paribbājakā*)—were a special class of ancient Indian mendicants (including women wanderers) who held various beliefs, and wandered around India from pre-Buddhist times. They were often not ascetics, except when they were celibate. Such wanderers who were teachers often engaged in debates over a wide range of topics. Special debating halls and meeting places were set aside for them and the local inhabitants came to pay their respects and support them. In a few rare instances, wanderers were lay devotees of the Buddha: See **Susīma S** (S 12.70), SD 16.6; also DPPN: *paribbājaka*; G C Pande, *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism*, 2nd ed 1974:330-337; Uma Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*, 1987:36-38, 132.

⁴⁰ “With long head-hair ... long body-hair,” *parūḷha,kaccha,nakha,loma* (S 1:78; U 65; J 4:362, 371, 6:488; SA 1:146), where *parūḷha* means “grown long, overgrown.” Kern notes the awkwardness of this phrase and suspects a

3.2.3.2 What concerns us here of this story is that the king confides in the Buddha that these “holy men” are really his spies and secret agents who have returned from their respective missions to report to him. When the king has left, the Buddha is recorded as instructing that we (monastics and laity) should never act in this manner for anyone. These are false and deceitful conduct, and never to judge or trust others by looks alone. In short, we should never play Jesuit⁴² nor make jesuitry of Buddhism.⁴³ [3.2.3.3]

3.2.3.3 The Satta Jaṭila Sutta story is a sobering reminder that in developed religions, those higher up the social chain are likely to take advantage of such power. And where there is power, pleasure is not too far behind. This is the way of the world. The Buddha’s closing verses are timely reminders of living the true and truthful life of **renunciation**, and that we should learn to see into the true nature of things:

Not easily known is a man by looks or form, For in the guise of one well restrained	nor should one trust a casual [quick] glance. the unrestrained wander the world.	(S 399)
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Like a false ear-ring of clay, Some move and follow about in disguise,	Like an iron half-cent in the guise of gold, Inwardly impure, outwardly beautiful.	(S 400)
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3.2.4 Wanderers emulating the Buddha

3.2.4.1 From the Saṃyutta Commentary, we are made to understand that the wanderers do not have teaching of their own (very much like the Hippies of northern California in the 1960s, living the pleasures of the moment and perhaps learning something new about life). They certainly do not have any original teachings on the 5 hindrances and the 7 awakening-factors. The Commentary on **the (Nīvaraṇa Bojjhaṅga) Pariyāya Sutta** (S 46.52), describes the wanderers as follows:

Having gone to the park monastery, they stand at the fringe of the assembly, looking at others, as if preoccupied with other, as if listening to the Blessed One teaching. They observe the Buddha teaching, “Abandon this; cultivate that.” Then, they return to their own park, spread a seat in the middle of the park, surrounded by male and female supporters, holding up their heads, puffing up their bodies, and teach, “The 5 hindrances are to be abandoned; the 7 awakening-factors are to be cultivated,” as if they have penetrated these truth by their own self-knowledge.⁴⁴ (SA 3:168 f)

distortion of *kaccha* (armpit) either from *kesa* (hair) or *kaca* (head-hair), ie with long head-hair, nails and body-hair (sv *Toevoegselen* 2:139). Cf *parūlha,kesa,nakha,loma* (J 1:303), *parūlha,nakha,loma* (J 3:315). CPD notes that *kaccha* as metonym for “hair in the armpit”: *ubho kacchā parūlhā* (MA 3:61), but this is commentarial. As such, it is probably best to read it here as ***parūlha,kesa,nakha,lomā***, “with overgrown head-hair, nails and body-hair.” However, cf *parūlha,kacchā tagarā* (J 6:100), where *kacchā* means grass, forest, or marsh.

⁴¹ *Khāri,vidha*, ie a carrying-pole with the *khāri* container (D 1:101; DA 269; S 1:78 = U 65; J 3:116, 5:204, 207; SA 1:148). A *khāri* is a measure of grain, and is used by ascetics for carrying their requisites.

⁴² For def, see SD 40a.8 (5.1.2.1); in Chinese Buddhism, see SD 31.12 (3.4.2). See also SD 10.16 (14.4.6); SD 29.6a (4.2.7).

⁴³ For the fuller significance of this story, see **Satta Jaṭila S** (S 3.11) + SD 14.11 (2). On **Jesuit and jesuitry**, see SD 40a.8 (5.1.2.1). On Tartuffe, see SD 51.14 (4.2.2.4).

⁴⁴ *Te pana ārāmaṃ gantvā parisa,pariyante thatvā aññaṃ olokento viya añña,vihitakā viya hutvā bhagavato dhamma,desanaṃ suṇanti. Tato “samaṇo gotamo idaṃ pajahatha idaṃ bhāvēthāti vadatīti sallakkhetvā attano ārāmaṃ gantvā ārāma,majje āsanaṃ paññāpetvā upaṭṭhāyaka,upaṭṭhāyikāhi parivutā sīsaṃ ukkhipitvā kāyaṃ unnāmetvā attano sayambhū,ñāṇena paṭividdh’ākāraṃ dassentā – “pañca nīvaraṇā nāma pahātabbā, satta bojjhaṅgā nāma bhāvetabbāti kathenti. (SA 3:168 f)*

3.2.4.2 It is also clear that the Buddha’s teachings were not the only teachings available during the Buddha’s time. Even by that time, the Indian society of his time had a rich legacy of ancient religious ideas and teachings, such as those of the speculative and mythical visions of the 3 Vedas and the early Upaniṣads.⁴⁵ Just as today, we see how the “living” mainstream religions and “new” religions or cults borrow and build on the successful teachings and methods of other religions, we see this similar vital process at work amongst the major sects and religions of the Buddha’s time.

The wanderers surely had their own teachings and ideologies, but none of these seemed to have had the vision or impact on society as the Buddha’s teachings and methods.⁴⁶ The Buddha himself often adapts and pervades such “imports” with the Dharma to present them as the warm and welcome familiar teachings and social realities of his day. The Buddha not only uses skillful means (*upāya*) in his teachings, but also effectively makes “natural adaptations” of the dominant teachings and popular methods of other sects and religions. He gives these outside means the voice of the Dharma as their noble ends.⁴⁷

3.2.4.3 The key significance of **the wanderer ideology** is that it is an open tradition and lifestyle for those who are dissatisfied with society and the world as they are, and those who are visionary, seeing reality and liberation beyond our human state. The time and society of the Buddha were rich and rife with philosophical and religious ideas and ways. The Buddha and his path are perhaps the spiritual and liberating fruits of these times, so that the Buddha and Buddhism transcend the limits of culture and history to come down to us, touching and turning our lives even today anew, and will continue to do so for a very long time to come, that is, as long as we value and seek spiritual awakening and liberation.⁴⁸

— — —

(Bojjhaṅga) Aggi Sutta The Fire Discourse (on the Awakening-factors)

S 46.53

The wanderers claim to teach the same things

[1 At one time, the Blessed One was staying in Anātha,piṇḍika’s park in Jeta’s grove, outside Sāvathī.]⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Only the 3 Vedas—Ṛgveda, Yajurveda and Sāmaveda—but not the Atharvaveda—existed in the Buddha’s time: see **Te,vijja S** (D 13) @ SD 1.8 (2.1); and also the early Upaniṣads (philosophical teachings of forest seers, some of which were embedded in the Vedas themselves): see **Ambaṭṭha S** (D 3), SD 21.3 (3); “Did the Buddha ‘borrow’ ideas from the Upaniṣads?” SD 6.15 (5). The Vedas were the oldest roots of Brahmanism, which was, along with the Upaniṣads, the key foundations of later Hinduism.

⁴⁶ For R Gethin’s opinion on this, see *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, Oxford, [1992] 2001:180.

⁴⁷ On brahmanical terms adapted into Buddhism, see SD 12.1 (6). On language as skillful means, see SD 12.1 (7). On that lying is *not* skillful means, see SD 30.8 (5.3); SD 10.16 (3.5.3); SD 43.6 (2.3.4). On “natural adaptation,” see SD 39.3 (3.3.4).

⁴⁸ For readings on *paribbājaka*, see: U Chakravarti 1987:46-55; S Dutt 1924:30-56 (ch II); N Dutt 1941:31-33; S Karunaratna 2003. Many of these refs are dated, but make interesting historical reading. Our priority should be to understand the *paribbājaka* in the context of our study of early Buddhism.

⁴⁹ The parenthesis is supplied by (**Pubbaṅgamā**) **Avijjā S** (S 45.1/5:1,8), SD 94.1.

2 Then, early in the morning, the monks, having dressed themselves, taking robe and bowl, entered Sāvattḥī for alms.

3⁵⁰ Then, it occurred to those monks:

“It is too early to enter Sāvattḥī for alms. What now if we go to the park of the outside sectarian wanderers?”⁵¹

4 Then, the monks went to the park of the outside sectarian wanderers and exchanged friendly words and cordial greetings with them. When the exchanges of friendly greetings were concluded, they sat down at one side.

To the monks sitting at one side, the outside sectarian wanderers said:

5 “Avuso, the recluse Gotama teaches his disciples the Dharma, thus:

‘Come now, bhikkhus, abandon **the 5 hindrances**, the mental impurities that weaken wisdom. Cultivate **the 7 awakening-factors** just as they are!’⁵²

5.2 *We, too, avuso, teach our disciples the Dharma, thus:*

‘Come now, bhikkhus, abandon the 5 hindrances, the mental impurities that weaken wisdom. Cultivate the 7 awakening-factors just as they are!’

5.3 What, then, avuso, is the distinction, what is the disparity, what is the difference, here, between the recluse Gotama and us⁵³—that is to say, between this Dharma teaching and the other, between this instruction and the other?⁵⁴

6 Then, the monks, neither approving nor disapproving the word of the outside sectarian wanderers, rose from their seats and left,⁵⁵ thinking

“We will learn in the Blessed One’s presence the meaning of this statement.”⁵⁶

The monks report to the Buddha

7 Then, the monks, having walked for almsfood in Sāvattḥī, after their meal, returned from their almsround. They approached the Blessed One, saluted him and sat down at one side. [109]

7.2 Sitting thus at one side, the monks said to the Blessed One:

“Here, bhante, early in the morning, we, having dressed ourselves, taking robe and bowl, entered Sāvattḥī for alms.

8 Then, bhante, it occurred to us:

‘It is too early to enter Sāvattḥī for alms. What now if we go to the park of the outside sectarian wanderers?’

8.2 Then, bhante, we went to the park of the outside sectarian wanderers and exchanged friendly words and cordial greetings with them. When the exchanges of friendly greetings were concluded, we sat down at one side.

To us, sitting at one side, the outside sectarian wanderers said:

⁵⁰ §§3-10 are ellipses (*peyyāla*) supplied by the preceding **Pariyāya Sutta** (S 46.52/5:108,5-109,20).

⁵¹ *Yaṃ nūna mayaṃ yena añña,tiṭṭhiyānaṃ paribbājakānaṃ ārāmo ten’upasaṅkameyyāmāti.* On “outDEBe sectarians,” *añña,tiṭṭhiya*, see SD 23.15 (2)

⁵² *Etha tumhe, bhikkhave, pañca nīvaraṇe pahāya cetaso upakkilese paññāya dubbalīkaṇe satta bojjhaṅge yathābhūtaṃ bhāvēthāti.*

⁵³ *Idha no āvuso ko viseso ko adhippāyāso kiṃ nānā,karaṇaṃ samaṇassa vā gotamassa amhākañ vā.* Cf **Cūḷa Sīha,nāda S** (M 11,4.2/1:64), SD 49.2.

⁵⁴ *Yad idaṃ dhamma,desanāya vā dhamma,desanaṃ, anusāsanīyā vā anusāsanin’ti?* Lit, “that is to say, between Dharma teaching and Dharma teaching, between instruction and instruction?”

⁵⁵ *Atha kho te bhikkhū tesarṃ añña,tiṭṭhiyānaṃ paribbājakānaṃ bhāsitaṃ n’eva abhinandimsu na-p,paṭikkosimsu, anabhinanditvā appaṭikkositvā utṭhāy’āsanaṃ pakkamimsu.*

⁵⁶ *Bhagavato santike etassa bhāsitassa atthaṃ ājānissāmāti.* See **Samaṇa,maṇḍika S** (M 78,6 n), SD 18.9.

9 ‘Avuso, the recluse Gotama teaches his disciples the Dharma, thus:

“Come now, bhikshus, abandon the 5 hindrances, the mental impurities that weaken wisdom. Cultivate the 7 awakening-factors just as they are!”

9.2 We, too, avuso, teach our disciples the Dharma, thus:

“Come now, avuso, abandon the 5 hindrances, the mental impurities that weaken wisdom. Cultivate the 7 awakening-factors just as they are!”

9.3 What, then, avuso, is the distinction, what is the disparity, what is the difference, here, between the recluse Gotama and us—that is to say, between this Dharma teaching and the other, between this instruction and the other?’

10 Then, we, neither approving nor disapproving the word of the outside sectarian wanderers, rose from our seats and left, thinking:

‘We will learn in the Blessed One’s presence the meaning of this statement.’”

THE BUDDHA’S INSTRUCTIONS

11 “Bhikshus, when the outside sectarian wanderers speak thus, you should reply thus:⁵⁷

11.2 ‘Avuso, when the mind is **stuck** [sluggish] (*līna*),

which awakening-factor is it untimely to cultivate then?

Which awakening-factor is timely to cultivate then?

11.3 But, avuso, when the mind is **restless** [agitated] (*uddhata*),

which awakening-factor is it untimely to cultivate then?

Which awakening-factor is timely to cultivate then?

11.4 When asked thus, bhikshus, the outside sectarian wanderers will not be able to reply, and furthermore, they will be vexed.⁵⁸

12 What is the reason for this? Because, bhikshu, it is beyond their ken.⁵⁹

12.2 Bhikshus, I see no one in this world with its gods, its maras and its brahmas, this generation with its recluses, its brahmins, its rulers, its people,

who can satisfy the mind with an answer to these questions other than the Tathagata or the Tathagata’s disciple or one who has heard it from them.⁶⁰

(1) The stuck mind: Untimely factors

13 Bhikshus, when the mind is **stuck** (*līna*),

it is untimely to cultivate the awakening-factor that is tranquility;

it is *untimely* to cultivate the awakening-factor that is concentration;

it is *untimely* to cultivate the awakening-factor that is equanimity.

passaddhi sambojjhaṅga

samādhi sambojjhaṅga

upekkhā sambojjhaṅga

13.2 What is the reason for this?

The mind, bhikshus, is stuck; it is *hard* to be uplifted by these states.⁶¹

⁵⁷ *Evam-vādino bhikkhave añña, titthiyā paribbājakā evam assu vacanīyā.*

⁵⁸ *Evam puṭṭhā bhikkhave añña, titthiyā paribbājakā na c’eva sampāyissanti, uttariñ ca vighātaṃ āpajjissanti.*

⁵⁹ *Taṃ kissa hetu, yathā taṃ bhikkhave avisayasmirā.*

⁶⁰ *Yo imesaṃ pañhānaṃ veyyākaraṇena cittaṃ ārādheyya aññatra tathāgatena vā tathāgata, sāvakena vā ito vā pana sutvā.*

⁶¹ *Taṃ etehi dhammehi dussamuṭṭhāpayam hoti. Dussamuṭṭhāpaya*, “difficult to cause to arise” = *du* (“difficult”) + *sam* (“together”) + *uṭṭha* (“to raise”) + *āpaya* (causative 7th conjugation), the caus of *samuṭṭhahati*, “to rise up, originate.” On causative verbs with *-āpaya*, see Warder, *Introduction to Pali*, 2nd ed, 1974:79.

14 Suppose, bhikshus, a person wants to build up a small fire, but he stokes it with wet grass, and with wet cowdung, and with wet wood,⁶² [113] he exposes it to a moist wind, and scatters dirt over it— would that person be able to build up the small fire?”
“Not at all, bhante!”

14.2 So, too, bhikshus, *when the mind is stuck*,
it is untimely to cultivate the awakening-factor that is tranquility;
it is untimely to cultivate the awakening-factor that is concentration;
it is untimely to cultivate the awakening-factor that is equanimity.

13.3 What is the reason for this?

The mind, bhikshus, is *stuck*; it is *hard* to be uplifted by these states.

(2) The stuck mind: timely factors

15 Bhikshus, when the mind is *stuck*, it is timely to cultivate the awakening-factor that is **dharma-investigation**; it is timely to cultivate the awakening-factor that is **effort**; it is timely to cultivate the awakening-factor that is **zest** [joy].

*dhamma, vicaya s.
viriyā sambojjhaṅga
pīti sambojjhaṅga*

15.2 What is the reason for this?

The mind, bhikshus, is *stuck*; it is easy to be uplifted by these states.

16 Suppose, bhikshus, a person wants to *build up a small fire*, and he stokes it with dry grass, and with dry cowdung, and with dry wood, he exposes it to a dry wind, and does not scatter dirt over it— would that person be able to build up the small fire?”
“Yes, bhante!”

16.2 So, too, bhikshus, *when the mind is stuck*,
it is timely to cultivate the awakening-factor that is dharma-investigation;
it is timely to cultivate the awakening-factor that is effort;
it is timely to cultivate the awakening-factor that is zest.

16.3 What is the reason for this?

The mind, bhikshus, is *stuck*; it is *easy* to be uplifted by these states.

(3) The restless mind: untimely factors

17 Bhikshus, when the mind is *restless* (*uddhata*), it is untimely to cultivate the awakening-factor that is dharma-investigation; it is untimely to cultivate the awakening-factor that is effort; it is untimely to cultivate the awakening-factor that is zest. [114]

*dhamma, vicaya s.
viriyā sambojjhaṅga
pīti sambojjhaṅga*

17.2 What is the reason for this?

The mind, bhikshus, is *restless*; it is *hard* to be settled by these states.⁶³

⁶² So tattha allāni c’eva tiṇāni pakkhipeyya, allāni ca gomayāni pakkhipeyya, allāni ca kaṭṭhāni pakkhipeyya, | udaka, vātañ ca dadeyya, paṃsukena ca okireyya.

⁶³ Uddhataṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ, taṃ etehi dhammehi duvūpasamayaṃ hoti. **Duvūpasamaya** = du (difficult) + vi (apart) + upa (nearness) + vśAM, to be quiet.

18 Suppose, bhikshus, a person wants to extinguish a large blaze, but he stokes it with dry grass, and with dry cowdung, and with dry wood, he exposes it to a dry wind, and does not scatter dirt over it— would that person be able to extinguish the large blaze?”

“Not at all, bhante!”

18.2 So, too, bhikshus, *when the mind is restless, it is untimely to cultivate the awakening-factor that is dharm-investigation; it is untimely to cultivate the awakening-factor that is effort; it is untimely to cultivate the awakening-factor that is zest.*

18.3 *What is the reason for this?*

The mind, bhikshus, is restless; it is hard to be settled by these states.

(4) The restless mind: timely factors

19 Bhikshus, when the mind is *restless*, it is timely to cultivate the awakening-factor that is **tranquility**; it is timely to cultivate the awakening-factor that is **concentration**; it is timely to cultivate the awakening-factor that is **equanimity**.

*passaddhi sambojjhaṅga
samādhī sambojjhaṅga
upekkhā sambojjhaṅga*

19.2 *What is the reason for this?*

The mind, bhikshus, is restless; it is easy to be settled by these states.

20 Suppose, bhikshus, a person wants to extinguish a **large blaze**, and he throws wet grass, and wet cowdung, and wet wood into it, he exposes it to a moist wind, and scatters dirt over it— would that person be able to extinguish the large blaze?”

“Yes, bhante!”

20.2 So, too, bhikshus, *when the mind is restless, [115] it is timely to cultivate the awakening-factor that is tranquillity; it is timely to cultivate the awakening-factor that is concentration; it is timely to cultivate the awakening-factor that is equanimity.*

20.3 *What is the reason for this?*

The mind, bhikshus, is restless; it is easy to be settled by these states.

21 And, indeed, bhikshus, **mindfulness** (*sati*) is always useful, I say!⁶⁴

— evaṃ —

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⁶⁴ *Satīṃ ca khvâham bhikkhave sabbatthikam vadāmīti.*