

SD 62.9 (Bojjhaṅga) Kāya Sutta

The (Bojjhaṅga) Discourse on the Body | S 46.2

Theme: Causes of the mental hindrances and of the awakening factors

Translated by Piya Tan ©2010, 2024

1 Sutta summary and significance

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

The (Bojjhaṅga) Kāya Sutta (S 46.2) lays out how “food” (*āhāra*), as our karmic intention, can either prevent spiritual growth or promote it. In a negative sense, “food” causes and worsens the 5 mental hindrances (*pañca, nīvaraṇa*) (impairing meditative focus and attainment), and conversely, in a positive sense, brings about and nurtures the 7 awakening factors (*satta bojjhaṅga*). These processes are compared to how food sustains our body (*kāya*) or deprives it of health, even of life—hence, the Sutta title: (Bojjhaṅga) Kāya Sutta.

1.2 SUTTA SIGNIFICANCE

1.2.1 Food (āhāra)

1.2.1.1 By “food” (*āhāra*) is meant the conditions or supports that “feed,” in an unwholesome sense, that is, arouses and aggravates, the hindrances, and, in a wholesome sense, initiates and promotes the 7 awakening factors. Figuratively, “food” here means **attention** (*manasikāra*). Unwise attention (*ayoniso manasikāra*)—that is, viewing the impermanent as permanent, the suffering as happiness, the nonself as self, and the foul as beautiful—arouses the hindrances. Wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) is the practice of rightly seeing the impermanent, the suffering, the nonself and the foul just as they are; this habitual and consistent practice frees our mind from defilements and attachment to worldliness.

1.2.1.2 The (Bojjhaṅga) Āhāra Sutta (S 46.51, SD 7.15) is a kind of mirror image of the (Bojjhaṅga) Kāya Sutta (S 46.2). The (Bojjhaṅga) Kāya Sutta speaks of “food” as unwholesome conditions—the 5 hindrances—bringing about the arising of the 5 hindrances, and wholesome conditions—the 7 awakening factors—bringing about mental focus and spiritual progress.

On the other hand, the (Bojjhaṅga) Āhāra Sutta’s theme is the “non-food” (*anāhāra*) or not feeding of the hindrances and of the awakening factors. This is the process that prevents them from arising and developing. When the hindrances are deprived of their “food” (by wise attention) they do not arise; when the awakening factors are deprived of their food (by way of unwise attention), they do not arise.

In this treatment on psychological food, the “non-food” or starving of the hindrances is by way of wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*): seeing the hindrances as *impermanent, suffering, nonself and foul* weakens them. In this way, the hindrances are removed at least temporarily. On the other hand, the “non-food” for the awakening factors is “unwise attention” (*ayoniso manasikāra*).

1.2.1.3 The key idea behind the “food” metaphor for the 5 hindrances is unwise attention, and the key idea behind the “food” for the 7 awakening factors is wise attention [1.2.1.1 f]. The role of **attention** in connection with the hindrances and the awakening factors is also highlighted in:

the (Bojjhaṅga) Tṭhāniya Sutta	(S 46.23/5:84)	attention as “basis” or psychological food,
the (Bojjhaṅga) Ayoniso Manasikāra Sutta	(S 46.24/5:84 f)	unwise attention;
the (Bojjhaṅga) Yoniso Manasikāra Sutta	(S 46.35/5:93)	wise attention,

1.2.2 Two types of awakening factors

1.2.2.1 According to **the (Bojjhaṅga) Aggi Sutta** (S 46.53), there are 2 types of awakening factors: the activating factors and the restraining factors. **The activating factors** arise first, that is: *dharmā-investigation, effort and zest*. **The restraining factors** arise later, that is: *tranquillity, concentration and equanimity*. The “activating” factors are so called because they activate and support **mindfulness**; the “restraining” factors are those that restrain the mind by strengthening or protecting that mindfulness. Hence, mindfulness is itself that activating factor and that restraining factor behind each of the other factors.

Mindfulness is to be cultivated as an activating factor when the mind is **sluggish** or stuck (*līna*), just as one feeds a small fire with fuel to make it blaze up. Mindfulness, too, is to be cultivated as the restraining factor when the mind is **excited** or restless (*uddhata*), just as one sprinkles a huge fire with water and wet grass to starve or dampen it. **Mindfulness** thus does not belong specifically to either class; it is useful everywhere, particularly in ensuring that the activating and restraining factors are kept in balance. (SA 3:1711-9)

This is the theme of **the (Bojjhaṅga) Aggi Sutta** (S 46.53).¹ These qualities are also discussed in some detail in **the Visuddhi, magga** under the heading “The tenfold skills in full concentration” (*dasa, vidha appanā, kosalla*, Vism 4.43-65/128-135). Sets of these teachings related to the awakening factors are given in the Saṃyutta Commentary on the (Bojjhaṅga) Āhāra Sutta (S 46.51), and are mentioned below [1.2.3].

1.2.3 How the awakening factors arise

1.2.3.1 The Commentary on the (Bojjhaṅga) Āhāra Sutta (S 46.51) gives interesting details of conditions that can initiate or feed each of the awakening factors. The relevant sets of conditions are listed for each of the awakening factors, thus:

[§11] Mindfulness. The Commentary adds the following 4 conditions that lead to the arising of the awakening factor of mindfulness:

- (1) mindfulness and clear awareness;
- (2) avoiding persons with confused minds;
- (3) associating with persons who keep ready mindfulness;
- (4) inclination towards mindfulness. (SA 3:155)

[§12] Dharma-investigation. The Commentary adds the following 7 conditions that lead to the arising of the awakening factor of dharma-investigation:

- (1) investigative questioning (regarding the aggregates, elements, sense-bases, etc);
- (2) purification of the basis (that is, personal and environmental cleanliness);
- (3) balancing the spiritual faculties [Vism 4.45-49/129 f];
- (4) avoiding the foolish;
- (5) associating with the wise;
- (6) reviewing the depth of wisdom (the differences between hard-to-perceive processes of the aggregates, elements, sense-bases, etc);
- (7) right resolution (a mind that is bent towards the establishment of mindfulness). (SA 3:157)

¹ S 46.53/5:112-115 (SD 51.13).

[§13] Effort. The Commentary adds the following 11 conditions that lead to the arising of the awakening factor of effort:

- (1) reflecting on the fearfulness of the suffering states;
- (2) seeing the benefits (of energy);
- (3) reflecting that one is taking the path (taken by the buddhas, individual buddhas and noble disciples);
- (4) reflecting on living up to the alms one receives;²
- (5) reflecting on the greatness of one's heritage [of the Dharma];
- (6) reflecting on the greatness of the Teacher;
- (7) reflecting on the greatness of the lineage (the noble sangha);
- (8) reflecting on the greatness of one's colleagues in the holy life;
- (9) avoiding lazy people;
- (10) associating with exertive people;
- (11) right resolution (a mind that is bent towards the establishment of effort). (SA 3:158)

[§14] Zest. The Commentary adds the following 11 conditions that lead to the arising of the awakening factor of zest:

- (1) recollection of the Buddha;
- (2) recollection of the Dharma;
- (3) recollection of the (noble) sangha;
- (4) recollection of moral virtue;
- (5) recollection of generosity;
- (6) recollection of deities;
- (7) recollection of peace;
- (8) avoiding coarse (*lūkha*) people;
- (9) associating with refined (good) people;
- (10) reflecting on inspiring suttas;
- (11) right resolution (a mind that is bent on arousing zest). (SA 3:161)

[§15] Tranquillity. The Commentary adds the following 7 conditions that lead to the arising of the awakening factor of tranquillity:

- (1) nutritious diet;
- (2) congenial climate;
- (3) proper posture;
- (4) showing impartiality (reflecting on one's karma and that of others);
- (5) avoiding restless people;
- (6) associating with calm people;
- (7) right resolution (a mind that is bent towards the establishment of tranquillity). (SA 3:162)

[§16] Concentration. The Commentary adds the following 11 conditions that lead to the arising of the awakening factor of concentration:

- (1) purification of the basis: meaning either the clearing up (clear focusing) of the mind-object, or personal and environmental cleanliness (or both);
- (2) skill in the meditation sign [adjusting to the meditation object];
- (3) balancing the spiritual faculties;

² See (Arahatta) **Susīma S** (S 12.70,58), SD 16.8; SD 45.18 (2.3.3.2) almsfood; SD 49.2 (1.1.3) recluses. Such qualities are of course those of true renunciants. These qualities should be reflected as "recollection of the sangha" (*saṅghānussati*) [SD 15.10a].

- (4) timely restraining the mind;
- (5) timely exerting the mind;
- (6) timely inspiring the mind with faith or samvega;
- (7) looking on with equanimity at the proper time;
- (8) avoiding distracted people;
- (9) associating with mentally focused people;
- (10) reviewing of dhyanas and liberations;
- (11) right resolution (a mind that is bent towards the establishment of concentration). (SA 3:163)

[§17] Equanimity. The Commentary adds the following 5 conditions that lead to the arising of the awakening factor of equanimity:

- (1) an impartial attitude towards beings;
- (2) a detached attitude to formations [here meaning thoughts and inanimate objects];
- (3) avoiding possessive people;
- (4) associating with equanimous people;
- (5) right resolution (a mind that is bent towards the establishment of equanimity). (SA 3:164)

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(Bojjhaṅga) Kāya Sutta

The (Bojjhaṅga) Discourse on the Body

S 46.2

I. Food for the hindrances

1-2 Originating in Savatthī.

3 “Bhikshus, just as this body, supported by food,³
is sustained dependent on food, and does not thrive without food,
so, too, bhikshus, **the 5 hindrances**, supported by food,
thrive dependent on *food* and are not sustained *without* food.⁴

<p>4 (1) And what, bhikshus, is <u>the food for the arising of unarisen</u> or⁵ <u>for the continued existence and abundance of arisen</u> There is, bhikshus, the sign of the beautiful.⁶ frequently giving <u>unwise attention</u>⁷ to it is <i>the food for the arising of unarisen</i> <i>or for the continued existence and abundance of arisen</i></p>	<p>sensual desire <i>sensual desire?</i></p> <p><i>sensual desire</i> <i>sensual desire.</i></p>
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<p>5 (2) And what, bhikshus, is <u>the food for the arising of unarisen</u> or <u>for the continued existence and abundance of arisen</u> There is, bhikshus, the sign of the repulsive.⁸ frequently giving <u>unwise attention</u> to it is <i>the food for the arising of unarisen</i> <i>or for the continued existence and abundance of arisen</i></p>	<p>ill will <i>ill will?</i></p> <p><i>ill will</i> <i>ill will.</i></p>
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<p>6 (3) And what, bhikshus, is <u>the food for the arising of unarisen</u> or for <u>the continued existence and abundance of arisen</u> There are, bhikshus, discontent, lethargy, lazy stretching, after-meal drowsiness, mental sluggishness.⁹ [65]</p>	<p>sloth and torpor <i>sloth and torpor?</i></p>
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³ This and next lines: *Seyyathāpi bhikkhave ayaṃ kayo āhāra-ṭṭhiko āhāraṃ paṭicca tiṭṭhati, anāhāro no tiṭṭhati.*

⁴ “Food,” (*āhāra*) here has the meaning of condition (*paccaya*). This paragraph of the Sutta is repeated below at **(Bojjhaṅga) Āhāra S** (S 46.51), SD 7.15, to which Comy gives a detailed explanation of the foods for each of the 7 awakening factors. On a set of 10 short suttas on “abandoning the hindrances” see **Nīvaraṇa-p, pahāna Vagga** (A 1.11-20/1:3-5), for detailed discussion of **Nīvaraṇa**, see SD 32.1.

⁵ “Or,” *vā*, but here has the sense of “and” throughout the Sutta.

⁶ “The sign of the beautiful” (*subha, nimitta*) is a sensually attractive object, particularly an object that arouses sexual desire. The word **nimitta** here refers to a mental or meditation “sign.” Elsewhere it means “basis (*nidāna*), formation (*saṅkhāra*), cause (*hetu*), condition (*paccaya*),” such as in **Uppaṭi, pāṭika S** (S 48.40/5:213,16, etc). Comy glosses “unwise attention” (*ayoniso manasikāra*) with “unskillful attention, offtrack (drifting) attention” (*anupāya, -manasikāro, uppatha, manasikāro*, SA 3:139,23 f) which Subcomy further explains: because it is not the right method for gaining wellbeing and happiness (SAPṬ:Be17:415). Vbh 373 glosses “unwise attention” as that directed to view the impermanent as permanent, the suffering as happiness, the nonself as self, and the foul as beautiful. Comys consistently follow this mode of explanation.

⁷ “Unwise attention” (*ayoniso manasikāra*): [1.2.1.1].

⁸ “Sign of the repulsive,” (*patigha, nimitta*). Comy: “The sign of the repulsive is aversion (*patigha*) or a repulsive object (*patigh’ārammaṇa*)” (SA 3:139,30 f).

frequently giving unwise attention to them is *the food for the arising of unarisen* sloth and torpor
or for the continued existence and abundance of arisen sloth and torpor.

7 (4) And what, bhikshus, is the food for the arising of unarisen **restlessness and worry**
or for the continued existence and abundance of arisen restlessness and worry?

There is, bhikshus, **unsettledness of the mind**.¹⁰

frequently giving unwise attention¹¹ to it is *the food for the arising of unarisen* restlessness and worry
or for the continued existence and abundance of arisen restlessness and worry.

8 (5) And what, bhikshus, is the food for the arising of unarisen **doubt**
or for the continued existence and abundance of arisen doubt?

There are, bhikshus, **states [things] that are the bases for** doubt;
frequently giving unwise attention to them is *the food for the arising of unarisen* doubt;
or for the continued existence and abundance of arisen doubt.

9 Just as this body, bhikshus, supported by food,
is sustained dependent on food, and does not thrive without food,
so, too, bhikshus, **the 5 hindrances**, supported by food,
thrive dependent on food and are not sustained *without* food.

II. Food for the awakening factors

10 Bhikshus, just as this body, supported by food,
is sustained dependent on food and does not thrive without food,
so too, bhikshus, **the 7 awakening factors** supported by food,
thrive dependent on *food* and are not sustained *without* food.

11 (1) And what, bhikshus,
is the food for the arising of the unarisen awakening factor of **mindfulness**
or¹² for the fulfilment by cultivation of the arisen (*sati sambojjhaṅga*)
There are, bhikshus, **states that are the bases for** awakening factor of *mindfulness*?
frequently giving wise attention¹⁴ to them is the awakening factor of mindfulness:¹³
the food for the arising of the unarisen awakening factor of mindfulness
or for the fulfilment by cultivation of the arisen awakening factor of mindfulness. **[66]**

⁹ *Arati tandi vijambhitā bhatta, sammado cetaso ca līnattam*. Both Vbh 352 and Comy cite this passage; Vbh then explains them by a register of synonyms. Also mentioned in **Niddā, tandī S** (S 1.16/1:7 = vv 30 f), SD 54.3f.

¹⁰ *Cetaso avūpasama*. Comy: Unsettledness of mind is, by denotation (*atthato*), *restlessness and worry* themselves (SA 3:140,24-28).

¹¹ "Unwise attention" (*ayoniso manasikāra*): [1.2.1.1].

¹² "Or," *vā*, but here has the sense of "and" throughout the Sutta.

¹³ *Sati, sambojjhaṅga-ṭṭhāniyā dhammā*. Comy: The states that become objects of mindfulness [SAPṬ: the 4 focus-
es of mindfulness, SAPṬ:Be 17:418,1-3], the 37 wings of awakening, and the 9 supramundane states (SA 3:141,3-5).

¹⁴ "Frequently giving wise attention," *yoniso, manasikāra, bahulī, kāro*. [2.1.1.1]

12 (2) And what, bhikshus, is <u>the food for the arising</u> of the <i>un arisen</i>	awakening factor of dharma-investigation (<i>dhamma, vicaya sambojjhaṅga</i>)
or <i>for the fulfilment by cultivation of the arisen</i>	awakening factor of dharma-investigation?
There are, bhikshus, wholesome and unwholesome states , blameable and blameless states, inferior and superior states, dark and bright states with their counterparts: ¹⁵ frequently giving <u>wise attention</u> to them is <i>the food for the arising of the un arisen</i> or <i>for the fulfilment by cultivation of the arisen</i>	awakening factor of dharma-investigation awakening factor of dharma-investigation.
13 (3) And what, bhikshus, is <u>the food for the arising</u> of the <i>un arisen</i>	awakening factor of effort [energy] (<i>virīya sambojjhaṅga</i>)
or <i>for the fulfilment by cultivation of the arisen</i>	awakening factor of effort?
There are, bhikshus, the element of initiative , the element of endeavour , the element of exertion . ¹⁶ frequently giving <u>wise attention</u> to them is <i>the food for the arising of the un arisen</i> or <i>for the fulfilment by cultivation of the arisen</i>	awakening factor of effort awakening factor of effort.
14 (4) And what, bhikshus, is <u>the food for the arising</u> of the <i>un arisen</i>	awakening factor of zest (<i>pīti sambojjhaṅga</i>)
or <i>for the fulfilment by cultivation of the arisen</i>	awakening factor of zest?
There are, bhikshus, states that are the bases ¹⁷ for the frequently giving <u>wise attention</u> to them is <i>the food for the arising of the un arisen</i> or <i>for the fulfilment by cultivation of the arisen</i>	awakening factor of zest: awakening factor of zest awakening factor of zest.

¹⁵ *Kaṇha, sukka, sappatibhāgā*. Comy: Dark states are “with counterparts” (*sappatibhāgā*) because they yield dark results, and bright states because they yield bright results; the meaning is “having similar results” (*sadisa, vipāka, -koṭṭhāsā*). Or “with counterparts” means “having opposites” (*paṭipakkha, bhūtaṣṣa vā bhāgassa atthitāya sappatibhāgā*): the dark states have the bright as their opposites, and the bright the dark. Or “with counterparts” means “with exclusion” (*sappatibhāhit’atthena vā sappatibhāgā*): the unwholesome excludes the wholesome and has its own results, and conversely. An extended example of the opposition between good and bad states is found in **Sal-lekha S** (M 8), SD 51.8, where the Buddha enumerates 44 pairs of wholesome and unwholesome opposites. The explanation of this awakening factor suggests that while “dharma-investigation” may be technically identified with *paññā*, the initial function of *paññā* as an awakening factor is not to discern the 3 characteristics, etc, but simply to discriminate between the good and bad mental states as they emerge with the deepening of mindfulness. (SA 3:141,7-18)

¹⁶ These terms recur in (**Bojjhaṅga**) **Āhāra S** (S 46.51,10(3)/5:102-107) + SD 7.15 (22(3)). Comy: The element of initiative or arousal (*ārambha, dhātu*) is the initial phase of effort, the element of endeavour (*nikkama, dhātu*) is intermediate effort, and the element of exertion (*parakkama dhātu*) is effort at full capacity. (SA 3:141,19-22). These key terms are discussed in the context of self-effort in **Atta, kāri S** (A 6.38/3:337 f), SD 7.6.

¹⁷ See (1.2.3 [§14]) above.

15 (5) And what, bhikshus,
is the food for the arising of the *un arisen*

awakening factor of **tranquillity**
(*passaddhi sambojjhaṅga*)

or for the fulfilment by cultivation of the arisen

awakening factor of tranquillity?

There are, bhikshus, **tranquillity of body, tranquillity of mind**.¹⁸

frequently giving wise attention to them

is the food for the arising of the unarisen

awakening factor of tranquillity

or for the fulfilment by cultivation of the arisen

awakening factor of tranquillity.

16 (6) And what, bhikshus,
is the food for the arising of *the unarisen*

awakening factor of **concentration**
(*samādhī sambojjhaṅga*)

or for the fulfilment by cultivation of the arisen

awakening factor of concentration?

There is, bhikshus, **the calmness sign**, the non-dispersal sign.¹⁹

frequently giving wise attention to it

is the food for the arising of the unarisen

awakening factor of concentration

or for the fulfilment by cultivation of the arisen

awakening factor of concentration. [67]

17 (7) And what, bhikshus,
is the food for the arising of *the unarisen*

awakening factor of **equanimity**
(*upekkhā sambojjhaṅga*)

or for the fulfilment by cultivation of the arisen

awakening factor of equanimity?

There are, bhikshus, **states that are the bases**²⁰ for the

awakening factor of equanimity:

frequently giving wise attention to them

is the food for the arising of the unarisen

awakening factor of equanimity

or for the fulfilment by cultivation of the arisen

awakening factor of equanimity.

18 Bhikshus, just as this body, supported by food, is sustained dependent on food, and does not thrive without food, so, too, bhikshus, these **7 awakening factors**, supported by food, thrive dependent on food and are not sustained *without* food.”

—evam—

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¹⁸ Comy: **Tranquillity of body** (*kāya-p,passaddhi*) is the tranquillizing of distress in the 3 mental aggregates (feeling, perception, volitional formations), **tranquillity of mind** (*citta-p,passaddhi*) the tranquillizing of distress in the aggregate of consciousness (SA 3:141,24-26). Comys frequently interpret the pair, body and mind, mentioned in the texts according to Abhidhamma, which draws a contrast between mind (*citta*), the chief factor in cognition, and its accompanying “body” of mental factors (*cetasika*), which perform secondary cognitive functions. In this Sutta, however, “body” is used in a literal sense referring to the physical body, as actively colouring the quality of an experience.

¹⁹ *Atthi, bhikkhave, samatha, nimittam avyagga, nimittam*. Comy: The calmness sign (*samatha, nimitta*) is the calmness itself as well as its object (SAPt:Be 17:418,29-32), the *patibhāga, nimitta* or counterpart sign. The sign of non-dispersal (*avyagga, nimitta*; Be *avyagga*-) is synonymous with the “calmness sign”; “non-dispersal” (*avyagga*) is samadhi itself (SA 3:141,27). See SD 37.2a (2.2.3).

²⁰ See (1.2.3 [§17]) above.