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(Satipaṭṭhāna) Bāhiya Sutta

The Bāhiya Discourse (on satipatthana) | S 47.15

Or Bāhika Sutta, The Bāhika Discourse

Theme: Effective meditation and Bāhiya's arhathood

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2008, 2014, 2016

1 Sutta summary and highlights

1.1 The (Satipaṭṭhāna) Bāhiya Sutta (S 47.15) is a short discourse—probably very old—recounting how the monk Bāhiya attains arhathood [2]. He approaches the Buddha to request for a “short teaching” (*saṅkhitta dhamma*), that is, a meditation topic, for his solitary retreat [§§1-3]. The Buddha first instructs him to make sure that his moral virtue is strong and he has right (“straight”) view [§§4-5].

Then, he teaches him the 4 focuses of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) in its basic mode, as in **the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10), but omitting the “satipatthana refrain,” that is, without the 3 modes of contemplating “internally,” “externally,” and “internally and externally”¹ [§§6-7]. This is probably the oldest formula for satipatthana [2].

If he were to follow these instructions diligently, the Buddha assures him, he would gain spiritual success, that is, arhathood [§8]. Bāhiya departs [§9], goes into solitary retreat [§10], and in due course attains arhathood [§§11-12].

1.2 At this point, it is helpful to momentarily go to the annotated translation of **the (Anubaddha) Bhikkhu Sutta** (S 47.3) and study the Introduction (2+3). Then, return to this (Satipaṭṭhāna) Bāhiya Sutta to study it. Then, you may go on to examine the (Anubaddha) Bhikkhu Sutta² (which is probably a later compilation than the (Satipaṭṭhāna) Bāhiya Sutta).

1.3 In the Saṃyutta Nikāya, the (Satipaṭṭhāna) Bāhiya Sutta is followed by **the (Arahatta) Uttiya Sutta** (S 47.16). They are, *mutatis mutandis*, almost identical except for the last line of the Buddha's instruction [§8 n].³

2 The age of the (Satipaṭṭhāna) Bāhiya Sutta

2.1 The main teaching of **the (Satipaṭṭhāna) Bāhiya Sutta** (S 47.15) is the practice of the 4 satipatthanas [§4], that is, the focused observation of the body (*kāyānupassana*), of feelings (*vedanā'nupassanā*), of the mind (*cittānupassanā*) and of dhammas or mind-objects (*dhammānupassanā*) [§§4.2+3+4]. In fact, that is all the Sutta teaches.

2.2 While both **the Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (D 22) and **the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10) have the satipatthana refrain—which presents the contemplations in 3 modes (*ti, vidhena*), that is, internally, externally, and both ways⁴—the (Satipaṭṭhāna) Bāhiya Sutta has only the basic satipatthana pericope, and that's it.⁵

2.3 As a rule of thumb, a simpler or less complicated, especially shorter, version of a passage or a formula, is like to be older. And a short version of a longer sutta, as a rule, means that the shorter sutta is the older. Both the (Satipaṭṭhāna) Bāhiya Sutta (S 47.25) and **the (Anubaddha) Bhikkhu Sutta** (S 47.3)⁶ contain essentially the same text.

In fact, the “certain monk” (*aññataro bhikkhu*) of the (Anubaddha) Bhikkhu Sutta could well be the monk Bāhiya or Bāhika. This means, then, that it is an extended version of the (Satipaṭṭhāna) Bāhiya Sutta. Either way—whether the former is an extension of the latter or not—that the (Satipaṭṭhāna) Bāhiya

¹ See **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10), SD 13.3: on the basic satipatthana pericope, see §3+nn; on the satipatthana refrain, see §5+nn.

² S 47.3/5:142-144 (SD 24.6a).

³ S 47.16/5:166 (SD 47.11).

⁴ See **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** Intro, SD 13.1 (3.7.2-3.7.4).

⁵ D 22,2.5 etc (SD 13.2); M 10,5 etc (SD 13.3).

⁶ S 47.3,2/5:143 (SD 24.6a).

Sutta has only the basic satipatthana formula without any satipatthana refrain shows that it is the older sutta.

2.4 We can venture to surmise that the (Satipaṭṭhāna) Bāhiya Sutta [2.3] is a very early sutta, probably going back to **the first period**, that is, within the first 20 years of the Buddha’s ministry.⁷ This was a time when Buddhism was still “primitive,” with the Buddha and his monks, wandering all over the Middle Country (the central Gangetic plain) for up to as long as 9 months of the year, spending only the 3 months of the rains in residential retreat. This was also a time when the Dharma teachings were simple, almost without any technical terms, and less structured, unlike the longer suttas of the Dīgha Nikāya.⁸

3 Monks named Bāhiya

3.1 The name Bāhiya is often linked to **Bāhiya Dāru, cīriya**. We know from **the (Arahatta) Bāhiya Sutta** (U 1.10), that Bāhiya Dāru, cīriya, the “bark-wearer,” becomes an arhat while still a layman, while intently listening to the Buddha teaching him. However, before he is able to find the robes and bowl for his ordination, he is gored to death by an agitated goat or cow on the same day.⁹

3.2 The interlocutor of **the (Satipaṭṭhāna) Bāhiya** is also called Bāhiya. However, we do not have any details of his identity. The Sutta records that he is taught the 4 satipatthanas in its 3 modes [2.2], and practising them, attains arhathood, and that he is also known as **Bāhika**, which is a variant of “Bāhiya.”¹⁰ Surely then, he cannot be Bāhiya Dāru, cīriya, the best known of the monks named Bāhiya [2.1].

3.3 To complicate matters, we apparently have a third Bāhiya—that of **the (Anattā) Bāhiya Sutta** (S 35.89)—who is also an arhat, but his practice, given by the Buddha upon his own request, is the reflection on the impermanence, suffering and non-self of the 6 sense-faculties and their respective external sense-bases, sense-consciousnesses, sense-contacts and feelings. As a result of this practice, he becomes an arhat.¹¹ He is definitely neither of the previous two monks named Bāhiya. This Bāhiya, however, is not listed in the Dictionary of Pali Proper Names.

3.4 In summary, then, we have the following three monks bearing the name Bāhiya:

Bāhiya 1 , or Bāhiya Dāru, cīriya	(Arahatta) Bāhiya Sutta	U 1.10	SD 33.7	[3.1]
Bāhiya 2 , also known as Bāhika	(Satipaṭṭhāna) Bāhiya Sutta	S 47.15	SD 47.10	[3.3]
Bāhiya 3	(Anattā) Bāhiya Sutta	S 35.89	SD 93.14	[3.4]

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The Bāhiya Discourse (on satipatthana)

S 47.15

Bāhiya requests for a short teaching

1 Originating in Sāvattṭhī.

2 Then, **the venerable Bāhiya [Bāhika]** approached the Blessed One, saluted him, and sat down at one side.

Sitting thus at one side, the venerable Bāhiya said this to the Blessed One:

3 “It would be good, bhante, if the Blessed One were to teach me the Dharma in brief,¹² having heard the Dharma from the Blessed One, I would dwell alone, aloof [secluded],¹³ diligent, exertive and resolute.”¹⁴

⁷ On the 2 periods of the Buddha’s ministry, see SD 1.1 (2.2) & SD 40a.1 (1.3).

⁸ On the Nikāyas, see SD 30.8 (4.1.2).

⁹ U 1.10/8-11 + SD 33.7 (2.2.3).

¹⁰ The reading *bāhika* is found in some Sinhala MSS (Ce), and so noted in DPPN, sv 3. Bāhiya (2:282).

¹¹ S 35.89/4:63 f (SD 93.14).

¹² *Sādhu me bhante bhagavā saṅkhittena dhammam desetu*. This is stock, and flows into the next sentence.

Cultivating moral virtue

- 4 ¹⁵“In that case, Bāhiya, **purify the very beginning in wholesome states.**”¹⁶
 5 And what is the very beginning in wholesome states?
 It is moral virtue that is well purified,¹⁷ and view that is straight.¹⁸
 6 Then, Bāhiya, when your moral virtue is well purified, and your view is straight,
 depending on that moral virtue, established in that moral virtue,¹⁹
cultivate the 4 focuses of mindfulness [the 4 satipatthanas].²⁰

The basic 4 satipatthanas²¹

- 7 What are the four?
 (1) CONTEMPLATING THE BODY
 Here, Bāhiya, dwell ²²exertive, clearly aware, mindful,
contemplating [watching] the body in the body.²³
 removing²⁴ covetousness and displeasure²⁵ in the world.²⁶

¹³ “Aloof,” *vūpakaṭṭha* (pp), “alienated, withdrawn, drawn away (from), secluded: often in phrase,” as in stock, *eko vūpakaṭṭho appamatto ātāpī*, etc (see PED: arahant II.B.): D 3:76; S 1:117, 2:21, 244, 3:35, 73 f, 4:72; A 4:299. It is uncertain whether it comes from *vi+upakaṭṭha* (since the latter is only used of time), or from *vavakaṭṭha*, of which it is a synonym. Cf also BHS *vyapakṛṣṭa* (AvadŚ 1:233, 2:194) of which it might be a retranslation. Cf also A 4:435 (*gaṇasmā* ~, (of an elephant) “secluded from the herd”). Its verb *vūpakāseti* is caus (1) of *vavakassati*, “to draw away, alienate, distract, exclude” (V 4:326; A 5:72 f, caus (2) *vūpakāsāpeti*, “to cause to distract or draw away” (V 1:49, 4:326).

¹⁴ *Yam ahaṃ bhagavato dhammaṃ sutvā eko vūpakaṭṭho appamatto ātāpī pahit’atto vihareyyan’ti*. This is stock: V 2:258; M 1:177; A 2:258, 3:218; U 24. The first word, “**alone**” (*eka*) refers to bodily aloneness and physical solitude; “**aloof**” (*vūpakaṭṭha*) is mental solitude; both body and mind are aloof from the objects of sense-pleasures; often this word alone refers to a practitioner’s effort to rid the mind of sense-desire (M 36/1:246f = 85/2:93); “**diligent**” (*appamatta*), keeping to his meditative mindfulness; “**exertive**” (*ātāpī*) is putting forth both physical and mental efforts; “**resolute**” (*pahit’atta*, pp of *padahati*, “to exert, take a stand”: see U:W 27 n2), “mentally resolute” by absence of longing regarding the body or life itself (DA 2:363; MA 1:180). Also as *ekā vūpakaṭṭhā appamattā ātāpīno pahit’attā vihareyya* (V 2:258; A 3:218 (Ke Se ekeka ...), 4:280). Sometimes the initial *eka* is omitted from the pericope. See below §10 nn.

¹⁵ From hereon, as at (Anubaddha) Bhikkhu S (S 47.3), which is prob given to Udāyī (S 47.3,3.4 etc), SD 24.6a.

¹⁶ *Tasmā-t-īha tvaṃ bāhiya ādim eva visodhehi kusalessu dhammesu.*

¹⁷ On “moral virtue that is well purified” (*sīlaṅ ca suvisuddham*), see SD 47.3 (2.4). See also SD 24.6a (2.3).

¹⁸ Prev line and this one: *Ko c’ādi kusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ, sīlaṅ ca suvisuddham diṭṭhi ca ujukā*. “View that is straight,” *diṭṭhi ca ujukā*, ie, the view that we are responsible for our own actions (*kamma-s,sakatā,diṭṭhi*) (SA 3:-199). This entails both acceptance of karma and rebirth. On “view that is straight” (*diṭṭhi ca ujukā*), see SD 47.3 (2.5); also SD 24.6a (2.5).

¹⁹ *Tato tvaṃ bāhiya sīlaṃ nissāya sīle patiṭṭhāya ...*

²⁰ *Yato kho te bhikkhu sīlaṅ ca suvisuddham bhavissati diṭṭhi ca ujukā tato tvaṃ bhikkhu sīlaṃ nissāya sīle patiṭṭhāya cattāro satipaṭṭhāne ti,vidhena bhāveyyāsi*. In the parallel passage in (Anubaddha) Bhikkhu S (S 47.3), the closing phrase here reads “cultivate the 4 focuses of mindfulness [satipatthanas] in a threefold manner” (*cattāro satipaṭṭhāne ti,vidhena bhāveyyāsi*) (S 47.3,4), but *ti,vidhena* is omitted in S 47.15 and S 47.16 (SD 47.11).

²¹ This is the “basic satipatthana stock” or “fundamental satipatthana”: also at (Arahatta) Uttiya S (S 47.16,7), SD 47.11(12).

²² *Ātāpī sampajāno satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhā,domanassaṃ*. Here we find 4 of the 5 spiritual faculties (*pañc’-indriya*) in action: see SD 13.1(4.2).

²³ “Observing the body in the body” (*kāye kāyānupassī*). See SD 13.1 (3.4).

²⁴ *Vineyya* can mean “should remove” (as pot, like *vineyya*, Sn 590) or as “having removed” (as ger, like *vinaitvā*, Pm 1:244), and both senses apply in Satipaṭṭhāna S. U Silananda similarly ends the sentence with “removing covetousness and grief in the world” (*The Four Foundations of Mindfulness*, 1990:177); also 1990:22-25. See SD 13.1 (4.2.3).

- (2) CONTEMPLATING FEELINGS
Here, Bāhiya, dwell exertive, clearly aware, mindful,
contemplating feelings in the feelings,
removing covetousness and displeasure in the world.
- (3) CONTEMPLATING THE MIND
Here, Bāhiya, dwell exertive, clearly aware, mindful,
contemplating the mind in the mind,
removing covetousness and displeasure in the world.
- (4) CONTEMPLATING DHARMAS
Here, Bāhiya, dwell exertive, clearly aware, mindful,
contemplating dharmas [phenomena] in the dharmas,
removing covetousness and displeasure in the world.

Benefits of the practice

8 Bāhiya, when, depending on that moral virtue, based on that moral virtue, you cultivate *these 4 focuses of mindfulness* [satipatthanas],
then, the night or day will come when you can be certain of growth in the wholesome states, not decline.²⁷ [166]

9²⁸ Then, the venerable Bāhiya, delighting, rejoicing, in the Blessed One’s word, rose from his seat and, after paying homage to the Blessed One, keeping him on his right, departed.²⁹

Bāhiya’s arhathood

10 THE FULL ARHATHOOD PERICOPE.³⁰ Then, the venerable Bāhiya, dwelling *alone*,³¹ *aloof, diligent, exertive, and resolute*,³²

in no long time at all, right here and now, having realized it for himself through direct knowledge, attained and dwelled in the supreme goal of the holy life, for the sake of which sons of family rightly go forth from the household life into homelessness.

11 THE ARHAT’S REVIEW KNOWLEDGE. He directly knew:

“Birth is destroyed,	<i>khīṇa, jāti</i>
the holy life has been lived,	<i>vusitam brahma, cariyam</i>
done what is to be done,	<i>katam karanīyam</i>
there is no more of this state of being.” ³³	<i>nāparam itthattāyāti</i>

12 And the venerable Bāhiya became one of the arhats.³⁴

— evaṃ — 141014 141027 150924 160727

²⁵ “Covetousness and displeasure,” *abhijjhā, domanassam*, alt trs: “desire and discontent,” “desiring and disliking,” or “longing and loathing.” Walshe (1995:335 & n632) renders it as “hankering and fretting [for the world].” See SD 13.1(4.2).

²⁶ “World” (*loka*). See SD 13.1 (4.2.4).

²⁷ *Tato tuyham bāhiya yā ratti vā divaso vā āgamissati, vuddhiy-eva pāṭikāṅkhā kusalessu dhammesu, no parihānīti*. While the whole Sutta is mutatis mutandis almost identical with (Arahatta) Uttiya S (S 47.16), it is here that they differ. Here (Arahatta) Uttiya S reads: “... then, Uttiya, you will go beyond Māra’s realm” (*tato tvam uttiya gamissasi maccu’ dheyassa pāran’ ti*) (S 47,16,8/5:166,15), SD 47.11.

²⁸ From here right to the end, very similar to the closing of **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9,56.2/1:203), SD 7.14.

²⁹ This para as at (Anubaddha) Bhikkhu S (S 47.3,6/5:143 f), SD 24.6a & (Sāvattihī) Uttiya S (S 47.16,8), SD 47.11(12).

³⁰ For details, see **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9,56.2+56.3), SD 7.14.

³¹ “Alone,” Ee *eke* (preferred); Ce *eko*; Be Se omit.

³² *Atha kho āyasmā bāhiyo eko vūpakaṭṭho appamatto ātāpī pahit’atto viharanto*. This is stock: see §3 above n.

³³ On this para and the next (the attainment of arhathood), see **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9,56.2/1:203) n, SD 7.14.

³⁴ On the prec and this para (the attainment of arhathood), see **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9,56.2/1:203) n, SD 7.14.