

SD 62.6a (Bojjhaṅga) Pariyāya Sutta

(Bojjhaṅga) Discourse on a Mode of Teaching

S 46.52

The Buddhist faith of non-Buddhists¹

Translated by Piya Tan ©2010; 2024

1 Sutta summary and significance

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

The followers of outside teachers and religions may say that their teaching is the same as that of the Buddha, such as those regarding the 5 hindrances (*pañca, nīvaraṇa*) and the 7 awakening factors (*satta bojjhaṅga*). But there is a method (*pariyāya*) in the Buddha's teaching whereby the 5 become 10 and the 7 become 14. Other teachers knew neither the pentad nor the septad well enough to be able to explain them satisfactorily.

1.2 SUTTA SIGNIFICANCE

1.2.1 Common teachings?

1.2.1.1 Three suttas of the Bojjhaṅga Saṃyutta seem to suggest that the wanderers of the Buddha's time shared certain teachings with the Buddha:

The (Bojjhaṅga) Pariyāya Sutta	(S 46.52)	[1.2.2],
the (Bojjhaṅga) Aggi Sutta	(S 46.53)	[1.2.3] and
the Mettā Saha, gata Sutta	(S 46.54) ²	[1.2.4]

All the Suttas show that the wanderers were familiar with the 5 mental hindrances and the 7 awakening factors. What is striking is that in none of these 3 suttas is the Buddha represented as categorically denying the wanderers' claim to a teaching that bears close similarity to his own.³

1.2.1.2 The Commentaries, however, seem to play down the Buddha's openness by saying that these wanderers plagiarized his teachings. Some wanderers, they say, would stand at the edge of the gatherings when the Buddha was teaching, pretending to be looking elsewhere, and would pick up the teachings and put them into practice as their own (SA 3:168,25-169,3).

In other words, the Nikāyas seem to accept some form of basic common ground between the Buddha and the wanderers.⁴ So while we do have what amounts to a claim of superiority on the part of the Nikāyas, there is a certain subtlety to their argument here. The wanderers of other schools may abandon the five nivaranas and develop the seven bojjhaṅgas, but the full potential inherent in this practice is not understood or fulfilled by them. In short, they do not really understand what they are doing. (Gethin, 1992a:180)

¹ This theme is taken from the title of R Gethin, "The Buddhist faith of non-Buddhists: From dual belonging to dual attachments," in (edd) G D'Costa & R Thompson, *Buddhist-Christian Dual Belonging: Affirmations, objections, explorations*, London: Routledge, 2016:179-195 (ch 10).

² See S 46.52/5:108-111 (SD 62.6a), S 46.53/5:112-115 (SD 51.13), and S 46.54/5:115-121 (SD 10.11).

³ See R M L Gethin, *Buddhist Path to Awakening*, 1992a:180.

⁴ On this question of a common ground with the wanderers, see E Frauwallner, *History of Indian Philosophy* (1953) tr 1973 1:135.

1.2.2 The 2 key teachings

1.2.2.1 THE 5 HINDRANCES

Psychologically, the 5 hindrances are mental defilements that hold us back as merely physical beings driven by craving and ignorance, that is,

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| (1) sensual pleasure, | <i>kāma-c, chanda;</i> |
| (2) ill will, | <i>vyāpāda;</i> |
| (3) sloth and torpor, | <i>thīna, middha;</i> |
| (4) restlessness and worry, | <i>uddhacca, kukkucca;</i> |
| (5) doubt. | <i>vicikicchā.</i> |

Taking **sensual pleasures** leads us to reject what we see as *not* pleasurable, that is, express **ill will** (*vyāpāda*) towards it. As we sink into this habitual mire of emotional pulling and pushing, we weaken ourselves with **sloth and torpor** (*thīna, middha*). Then, we recall past wrongs and future wishes putting ourselves in a cycle of **restlessness and worry** (*uddhacca, kukkucca*)—*worrying* about the past and *restless* to jump into the future. Being caught up in this maelstrom of defilements, we fail to learn or understand the teaching and have difficulties in mental cultivation, being overwhelmed with **doubt** (*vicikicchā*).

Hence, the hindrances are mental impurities (*cetaso upakkilesa*) that weaken wisdom (*paññāya dubbālī-karaṇe*),⁵ thus preventing us from rising above the mere physicality and sensuality of our being. In short, the hindrances simply prevent our minds from directly knowing the true nature of our being.⁶

1.2.2.2 THE 10 HINDRANCES

How are the 5 hindrances 10?⁷

In the case of the hindrances, **sensual desire**, **ill will** and **doubt** can each be viewed as a pair by virtue of their being either “within” or of oneself (*ajjhattam*), or “without” or of another (*bahiddhā*).⁸ The hindrance “within” is what we ourselves notice as hindering our own meditation. In the case of the hindrance “without,” we may notice its effects occurring in someone else. From such an observation we may have a better idea of its nature and how to overcome it.

Sloth (*thīna*) is sluggishness or dullness of the mind. Its characteristic is the lack of driving power. Its function is to dispel energy. It is manifested as the sinking of the mind. Its proximate cause is unwise attention to boredom, drowsiness, etc.

Torpor (*middha*) is the morbid state of the mental factors.⁹ Its characteristic is unwieldiness. Its function is to smother. It is manifested as drooping, or as nodding and sleepiness.¹⁰ Its proximate cause is the same as that of sloth.

⁵ D 12,30/1:246, 25.16/3:49 f; M 39,15/1:276; S 46.37/5:94, 46.38/5:96 (cf Sn 66); A 5.51,3/3:63, 6.57,7/3:386; Vbh 244 f.

⁶ For an overview of the hindrances, see SD 32.1 (3) the hindrances in the suttas.

⁷ On def of these individual components of the hindrances, see Abhs:BRS §2.4 (83-85).

⁸ For this understanding of *ajjhattam* and *bahiddhā*, see Dhs 187.

⁹ “Mental factors” (*cetasika*) are those supporting aspects of the mind that arise simultaneously with the arising consciousness. They comprise *feeling, perception and 50 mental formations*. Of these 52 mental factors, 7 of them are universal (adj), ie, common to all consciousness. They are *contact, feeling, perception, volition, one-pointedness, life-faculty and attention*; they are also called “universals” (n). For the 52 mental factors, see Abhs:ch 2; tr Abhs:BRS 76-113.

¹⁰ These symptoms of torpor are physical, but *torpor* (as a “mental hindrance”) is mental.

Restlessness (*uddhacca*) has the characteristic of disquiet, like water whipped up by the wind. Its function is to make the mind unsteady just as the wind flutters a banner. It is manifested as turmoil. Its proximate cause is unwise attention to mental disquiet.

Worry (*kukkucca*) is remorse, which arises from having done some wrong, perceived or real. Its characteristic is subsequent regret. Its function is to sorrow over what has or what has not been done. It is manifested as guilt. Its proximate cause is what has and what has not been done (the wrongs of commission and omission).

Although **sloth and torpor** arise simultaneously, as do **restlessness and worry**, either pair can each be viewed as separate hindrances; that is, they can be dominate as sloth *or* as torpor, and as restlessness *or* as worry. This of course depends on the dominance of either hindrance in each of the said pairs.

1.2.2.3 THE 7 AWAKENING FACTORS

The term **bojjh'aṅga** is derived from *bodhi*, "awakening" + *aṅga*, "factor, limb," from which we get the Sanskrit *bodhy-aṅga* (Divy 208; Lalv 37). The commentaries tend to interpret the word just like *jhān'-aṅga*, "the dhyana-factors" or *magg'aṅga*, "the path-factors," taking it to mean the factors constituting dhyana and constituting the path of awakening respectively.

The Dhamma,saṅgaṇī defines *bojjhaṅga* as "factors bringing about awakening" (*bodhāya samvat-tanti bojjhaṅgā*, DhsA 217). "*Bojjhaṅga* is a factor of that awakening, like an army with its soldiers, char-iots and so on" (*tassa bodhissa angō'ti'pi bojjhaṅgo, sen'āṅga,rath'aṅg'ādayo viya*).¹¹ Or, simply, *bojjh-aṅgā* are "the factors of an individual's awakening" (*bujjhanakassa puggalassa aṅgā ti vā bojjhaṅgā*).¹²

The technical Abhidhamma method takes the awakening factors strictly as supramundane states of consciousness, those pertaining to the paths of liberation, not to wholesome states of mundane consciousness. In the suttas, such as **the Bojjhaṅga Saṃyutta**, however, the awakening factors are given this designation primarily because they lead to awakening (S 46.5 + 21). They are thus a set of 7 mental factors that function as causes and conditions for bringing about awakening, liberating knowledge and vision (S 46.56), that is to say:

(1) mindfulness	<i>sati,</i>
(2) dharma-investigation	<i>dhamma,vicaya,</i>
(3) effort	<i>viriya,</i>
(4) zest	<i>pīti,</i>
(5) tranquillity	<i>passaddhi,</i>
(6) concentration and	<i>samādhi.</i>
(7) equanimity	<i>upekkhā.</i>

1.2.2.4 THE 14 AWAKENING FACTORS

How are the 7 awakening factors 14?

In the case of the awakening factors, **mindfulness**, **dharma-investigation** and **equanimity** are each considered pairs by virtue of their taking as their object either states (*dhamma*) that are *within* (personal) or states that are *without* (in others).

Zest and **concentration** are pairs because they may be either associated with or dissociated from initial application and sustained application (*vitakka,vicāra*). They are both present in the 1st dhyana; but absent in the higher dhyanas. These qualities apply both to oneself and to others.

¹¹ MA 1:83; DhsA 217.

¹² MA 1:83; SA 3:138; AA 2:53; PmA 1:127; DhsA 217; VbhA 310.

Tranquillity and **energy** may be either of the body or of the mind.¹³ Bodily, they refer to physical comfort and physical effort respectively. Mentally, they are equanimity and mental effort respectively. Mental effort broadly refers to knowing what is unwholesome and refraining from it when it has not arisen, and overcoming it when it has arisen; to knowing what is wholesome and initiating it and maintaining it. These are, of course, the 4 right efforts. These qualities apply both to oneself and to others.

1.2.2.5 It is important to note that this exposition involves making distinctions between the factors according to the principles of early Abhidhamma. This particular analysis of the awakening factors sees a comprehensive expression in the *māṭikā* (opening rubric) of the Dhamma,saṅgaṇī, the 1st book of the Abhidhamma. The particularity of the method's application here is evident from the fact that from the broader perspective of the Dhamma,saṅgaṇī it could have been done differently.

That is to say, there is no absolute reason why mindfulness, like zest and concentration, should not be considered as two by virtue of its association with or dissociation from initial application and sustained application. This suggests that there is intended to be a particular point to the way in which each item is divided into a pair. It is perhaps worth briefly considering this with regard to each of the awakening factors.

The way in which zest and concentration each forms a pair by virtue of association with or dissociation from initial and sustained applications further suggests the parallels that exist between the awakening factors and the description of **dhyana** (*jhāna*) as the stilling (*vūpasama*) of initial and sustained applications. This "stilling" is precisely what marks the transition from the 1st to the 2nd dhyana.

Next, energy and tranquillity seem to be viewed as a complementary pair balancing each other. Finally, mindfulness, dharma-investigation and equanimity are 3 items that are seen as actively involved in the investigation of mental states (*dhamma*) in general. If *zest*, *concentration*, *energy* and *tranquillity* are what prime the mind for awakening, *mindfulness*, *dharma-investigation* and *equanimity* actively promote awakening.¹⁴

1.2.3 The awakening factors in the (Bojjhaṅga) Aggi Sutta (S 46.53)

1.2.3.1 We have thus far examined **the (Bojjhaṅga) Pariyāya Sutta** (S 46.52) as showing that the wanderers were familiar with the 5 mental hindrances and the 7 awakening factors. This Sutta is actually the 1st of 3 consecutive suttas dealing with the hindrances and the awakening factors found in the Bojjhaṅga Saṃyutta [1.2.1.1]. Gethin, in his *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, further analyses the awakening factors as presented in two of these suttas, that is, in **the (Bojjhaṅga) Aggi Sutta** (S 46.53) and **the Mettā Saha,gata Sutta** (S 46.54).¹⁵

The (Bojjhaṅga) Aggi Sutta (S 46.53) treats the awakening factors in precisely the same way as in **the (Bojjhaṅga) Pariyāya Sutta** (S 46.52). However, this time the Buddha states that the wanderers will be unable to respond when questioned about which awakening factors are inappropriate and which appropriate for cultivation when the mind is sluggish (*līna*), and which are inappropriate and appropriate when the mind is excited (*uddhatta*).

¹³ This fourteenfold analysis of the bojjhaṅgas also forms one of the principal parts of their *suttanta-bhājanīya* treatment at Vbh 228.

¹⁴ See Gethin 2001:177 f.

¹⁵ See **S 46.52/5:108-111** (SD 62.6a), **S 46.53/5:112-115** (SD 51.13), and **S 46.54/5:115-121** (SD 10.11). Also Gethin 2001:178-180.

1.2.3.2 The Buddha goes on to explain that when the mind is **sluggish**, it is not the right time (*akāla*) to cultivate tranquillity, concentration or equanimity; to do so would be to act like the man who throws wet grass and so on onto a small fire that he wants to build up.

However, when the mind is sluggish, it is the right time (*kāla*) to cultivate dharma-investigation, effort, and zest; just as one should throw dry grass, and so on, on to a small fire that he wants to build up.

When the mind is **excited**, then it is not the right time to cultivate dharma-investigation, effort or zest; to do so would be to act like a man who throws dry grass, and so on, on to a great fire that he wants to put out.

However, when the mind is excited, it is the right time to cultivate tranquillity, concentration and equanimity; just as one should throw wet grass, and so on, onto a great fire that he wants to put out.

As for mindfulness, this is always of benefit (*sabb’atthika*).¹⁶

1.2.4 THE AWAKENING FACTORS IN THE METTĀ SAHAGATA SUTTA (S 46.54)

1.2.4.1 The Mettā Saha,gata Sutta (S 46.54) records the nature of the wanderers' claim somewhat differently. Like the Buddha they too teach a dharma that consists of abandoning the 5 hindrances and dwelling suffusing the whole world with a mind of love (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), gladness (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*)—a mind that is full (*vipula*), becomes great (*mahaggata*), immeasurable (*ap-pamāṇa*), without hostility (*avera*) and without hatred (*avyāpajjha*).¹⁷

When the matter is put before the Buddha, he answers that the wanderers will not be able to respond when questioned about how these 4 freedoms of mind (*ceto,vimutti*) are cultivated (*katharṃ bhāvītā*), their outcome (*kiṃ,gatikā*), their perfection (*kiṃ,paramā*), their fruition (*kiṃ,phalā*) and their conclusion (*kiṃ,pariyosānā*). A detailed explanation of these questions is then given.

1.2.4.2 A monk cultivates **the 7 awakening factors** each *dependent on seclusion, dispassion and cessation, and ripening in release*. Further, each is accompanied by lovingkindness.

He then, if he wishes, dwells with the idea of the repulsive in what is not repulsive.

He may dwell with the idea of the unrepulsive in what is repulsive.

He may dwell with the idea of what is unrepulsive in *both* what is repulsive and unrepulsive.

Avoiding both the unrepulsive and the repulsive he may dwell with equanimity, mindful, clearly aware. Or:

He attains and dwells in **the liberation that is beautiful**.

I declare, bhikshus, that beautiful is the perfection of the freedom of mind that is loving-kindness. Here a monk has wisdom [but] not penetrating to a higher freedom.¹⁸

1.2.4.3 The exposition for compassion (*karuṇā*), gladness (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*) follows that for lovingkindness [1.2.4.2], except that what is declared as the perfection is different in each case:

- the perfection of the freedom of mind that is compassion is **the sphere of infinite space** (*ākāsānañ-cāyatana*);

¹⁶ Cf the analysis of awakening factors in terms of *śamatha-vipaśyanā* given by **Harivarman** (Satyaśiddhi tr Aiyaswamy, 1978: §187 (448 f)) and **Asaṅga** (A Wayman, *Analysis of the Śrāvaka bhūmi MS*, Berkeley, 1961:109): *dharma-pravicaya*, *vīrya* and *prīti* constitute *vipaśyanā*; *praśrabdhi*, *samādhi* and *upekṣā* constitute *śamatha*; *smṛti* is either.

¹⁷ S 46.54/5:115-121 (SD 10.11).

¹⁸ *Subharṃ vā kho pana vimokkhā upasampajja viharati. Subha,paramāham bhikkhave mettā,ceto,vimuttiṃ vadāmi. Idha,paññassa bhikkhuno uttarim vimuttiṃ apaṭivijjhato.* (S 5:119,16-19)

- the perfection of the freedom of mind that is gladness is **the sphere of infinite consciousness** (*viññāṇāñcāyatana*).
- the perfection of the freedom of mind that is equanimity is **the sphere of nothingness** (*ākāñcaññāyatana*).

The cultivation of the awakening factors is here considered in the context of the practice of the 4 divine abodes: *lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity*. This is quite surprising when we consider that the *viveka, nissita* formula shows that for the commentaries the awakening factors are characteristically cultivated at the time of insight practice and the arising of the path and fruit.

However, as Gethin has noted above,¹⁹ the commentaries do suggest that this is not quite the whole story. What they have to say on this point is now worth quoting in full:

For there are those who bring out the awakening factors not in respect of the moments of strong insight, path and fruit alone; they also bring them out in respect of kasina-dhyanas that are a basis for insight, breathing-in-and-out, the foul, and divine-abode dhyanas. And they are not contradicted by the teachers of the Commentaries.²⁰

Although it is not cited as such, the above account of lovingkindness practice and so on, would appear to be the kind of passage the commentaries have in mind when they say that the awakening factors can be brought out in respect of divine-abode dhyanas. A few pages later in the Bojjhaṅga Saṃyutta, **the Ānāpāna Vagga** (S 46 ch 7)²¹ is devoted to a description of how the awakening factors are cultivated in association with various meditation subjects, including the divine abodes, that is, the ideas of (i) the skeleton, (ii) the worm-infested corpse, (iii) the discoloured corpse, (iv) the rotting corpse, (v) the bloated corpse; (vi) lovingkindness; (vii) compassion; (viii) gladness; (ix) equanimity; (x) breathing in and out. Here, then, we have the foul and breathing-in-and-out dhyana. The cultivation of the awakening factors in association with these is said to be of great fruit and benefit (*mahā, phala mahā'nisaṃsa*); either direct knowledge in the here and now (*diṭṭhe va dhamme aññā*) or, if there is any residuum of attachment, the state of non-returning (*sati vā upādi, sese anāgāmitā*) is to be expected as a result.

1.2.5 Conclusions

1.2.5.1 So how is the triad of suttas concerning the relationship of the Buddha's teaching to that of wanderers of other sects to be interpreted? It is surely striking that in none of the 3 cases is the Buddha represented as categorically denying the wanderers' claim to a teaching that bears some similarity to his own. This is a fact which the commentary seems to want to play down. In other words, the Nikāyas seem to accept some form of basic common ground between the Buddha and the wanderers. [1.2.1.2]

So, as Gethin points out [1992a:180], "while we do have what amounts to a claim of superiority on the part of the Nikāyas, there is a certain subtlety to their argument here." The outside wanderers may abandon the 5 hindrances and cultivate the 7 awakening factors, but they neither understand the full potential inherent in this practice nor are they fulfilled by them. In short, they do not really understand what they are doing. [1.2.1.2]

¹⁹ Gethin 2001:179 f.

²⁰ MA 1:85 = SA 3:139 = AA 2:99 = VbhA 316: *te hi nu kevalaṃ balava, vipassana, magga, phala-k, khaṇesu eva bojjhaṅgaṃ uddharanti: vipassana, padaka, kasiṇa-j, jhana, ānāpānāsubha, brahma, vihāra-j, jhānesu pi uddharanti, na ca paṭisiddhā aṭṭha, kathācariyehi.*

²¹ S 5:46.57-66/129-232; cf Nirodha Vagga (S 46.67-76/5:132-134). **S 54.2/5:312** also relates to the awakening factors to the breath meditations.

Johannes Bronkhorst has argued that the 4 dhyanas represent a characteristically Buddhist meditation tradition—a tradition original to the Buddha and quite distinct from the mainstream severely “ascetic” non-Buddhist meditation tradition.²² According to Bronkhorst, this distinctively Buddhist meditation is described in the texts as “a pleasant experience, accompanied by joy (*pīti*), and bliss (*sukha*), or bliss alone, in all but the highest stages, whereas non-Buddhist meditation is not described as pleasurable.”²³

1.2.5.2 Gethin however is more cautious, stating that:

While Bronkhorst’s basic thesis concerning the existence of two meditation traditions is not without its attractions, it seems to me that we cannot dismiss the idea of a “pre-Buddhistic” form of “Buddhist meditation” quite so readily as he suggests. Towards the end of his study Bronkhorst writes:

We have become acquainted with a number of descriptions of non-Buddhist religious practice in the Buddhist canon in the course of this book. None of them ascribe to outsiders what we have come to regard as authentic Buddhist meditation. (Bronkhorst 1986:116)

Yet, if I am right concerning the nature of the *bojjhaṅga* list (namely that it links directly into a range of ideas associated with the *jhānas* and is intended to characterize a particular variety of *jhāna*) then surely in preserving the wanderers’ claim that they too taught the abandoning of the *nīvaraṇas*²⁴ and development of the *bojjhaṅgas* the Nikāyas do preserve a tradition of “non-Buddhists” practising “Buddhist meditation.”

That is to say, it is not unreasonable to see in the wanderers’ claim a reflection of a historical situation where various groups, among them the Buddha and his followers, practised a form of meditation distinct from what Bronkhorst identifies as the main stream [sic] ascetic tradition. If we bear in mind the way in which the *bojjhaṅgas* are related to various meditation subjects, the point in all this would seem to be not that the Buddha teaches new or original meditation subjects, but that he is *unsurpassed in defining the finer points of technique and relating these to progress towards the final goal.* (Gethin 2001:181; emphases added)

1.2.5.3 Gethin then explains how the Buddha highlights the way in which the awakening factors lead to awakening (*bodhi*) as a kind of dhyana. This is salient to the whole teaching: it is concerned with the transition from ordinary dhyana to the special dhyana that is awakening itself. The various teachings are here presented as the particular domain of the Buddha and his followers. They are concerned with seeing the precise nature of the items in question: knowing how they stand in relation to each other and how they interact. This once more points to “causality” or “conditionality” represented by *paṭicca,samuppāda*, “the realm of discriminating *dharmas* and discerning *dhamma*” (Gethin 2001:181)

In terms of Nikāya psychology what we are concerned with is **wisdom** (*paññā*)—the wisdom that discerns *dhamma* (as teaching) and *dharmas* (as mental states), and that knows the nature of suffering, its cessation and what brings about both. Thus what is claimed as distinctive about the Buddha’s teaching is that it always perfectly relates the abandoning of the hindrances and the cultivation of the awakening factors to bring about the cessation of suffering.

²² See J Bronkhorst, *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India*, Stuttgart, 1986.

²³ Bronkhorst 1986:17.

²⁴ Note that the phrase used here to describe the abandoning of the *nīvaraṇas* (*pañca,nīvaraṇe pahāya cetaso upakkilese paññāyo dubbhālī,karaṇe*) is regularly used to introduce the stock description of the dhyanas; see D 3:49; M 1:52, 181, 270, 276, 347; 3:4, 36, 136; A 3:93, 100, 386 f, 4:195 (Gethin’s n).

“It is the *completeness* of the Buddha’s teaching in this respect that is emphasized, rather than its radical departure from the wanderers’ teaching. What this seems to show is how the Nikāyas present the special *dhmma* teaching of the Buddhas not as something extra simply tacked on at the end, but as something that imbues the *whole* teaching.” (Gethin 2001:182)

1.3 UNIVERSALIST CLAIMS AND NATURAL TRUTHS

1.3.1 Religious assimilation

1.3.1.1 Religion, especially organized religion, starts off by first claiming to offer some kind of saving grace or secret knowledge of life and the world, revealed by some higher power to the chosen. Religious prophets and theologians then construct and consolidate their power by conditioning the minds and lives of followers to a set of authorized facts and rules of a very exclusive (or private) reality. Followers are conditioned to believe so that they will accept all this as true and follow without question.

Historically, a single religion or family of religions tended to dominate a particular country, culture or region which shared a common or overlapping history. Over time, as contact with other societies grew, so did religions encounter with one another, and each had to contend with challenging new truths and world-views. New teachings and mythology were then adapted and adopted into the local religion.

1.3.1.2 Assimilating teachings from other religions is common even today, especially in the early 21st century, when, for example, Catholics and other religionists took up Buddhist meditation—especially the breath meditation and lovingkindness meditation—in droves. Within a decade of such an adoption, we begin to hear of such meditation labeled as “Christian meditation” and so on.

Religious teachers often feel inspired to borrow or plagiarize teachings, presenting them as their own, and, depending on their power or charisma, followers believe them or have to pay them lip service. Take, for example, the witty anecdotes of the Sufi Mullah Nasruddin²⁵ (1208-1285); the Mullah’s stories are so witty and humorous that astute (but unimaginative) religious preachers, writers and leaders often use such stories as if they were their own, that is, not citing their source.

1.3.1.3 After all, almost every religion has some kind of notion that whatever is well spoken comes from God, their God, and whatever good they do is, openly or subtly, in the service of and for the good of their God. In this sense, when religion places God above human, it makes religion a glorified and sanctimonious dehumanizing system. Those who define God or speak “for God,” not only have control over believers, but they commit the most atrocious inhuman acts in the name of God.

History and politics have repeatedly shown that the worst evils are those done in the name of religion. When a religion has considerable power, it will, as a rule, have no compunction about excluding, punishing, even destroying others, whether singly or en masse. Not only is there no salvation outside the tribe or Church, there is also neither love nor goodness outside.

How religious followers answer the question, “**What is the worst evil or sin in your religion?**” the most common answer will likely reflect whether the religion is exclusivist or universal. A God-religion believer is likely to answer: “Not believing in God,” or “Taking God’s name in vain.” Some Buddhists may answer that suffering is the worst evil. But then the superstitious are likely to give the same answer.

²⁵ Mullah Nasruddin (1208-1285; variants incl Nasreddin or Nasreddin Hodja, Khoja Nasreddin) is a character in Muslim folklore from Bukhara to China, and a hero of humorous short stories and satirical anecdotes: Sara Hunziker, “Humour in Folklore Rewind: Nasreddin Hoca’s humorous and moralist anecdotes,” in (edd) M-L Dumitru Oancea & R Mihaila, *Myth, Symbol, and Ritual: Elucidatory Paths to the Fantastic Unreality* 3, Univ of Bucharest, Jan 2019:357-361; S Attardo (ed), *Ency of Humor Studies*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014:108 f.

Clearly, then, “suffering” has a different sense for each of the two. An informed Buddhist is likely to answer, “The worst evil in Buddhism is ignorance or lack of wisdom.”

A zealous God-believer might retort that human wisdom is foolishness in God’s eye. What can we say to a person who claims to be “foolish” and yet pronounces a seemingly almighty truth?

1.3.1.4 The world religions—unlike Buddhism—are, as a rule, centred on beliefs of an external Agency (some kind of God) that is neither historical nor verifiable except by their own Scriptures interpreted by only their leaders. Hence, there is a total reliance on **faith**, sophistry and authoritarian power. The most effective ways to counter such authoritarian religions is a good education system based on empirical verification and political freedom guided by such an education—and of course a just socio-economic system.

Religion, as a rule, is “**future superstition**” that must be left in the past. Humankind will only progress and divinity evolve among humans when religion is understood to be at best a private delusion that should not be imposed on others or be a part of the public domain. In fact, this is what has been happening slowly and *naturally* over the last few centuries as human society progresses.

1.3.2 Natural goodness

Ironically, all that is **naturally good in religion** can be found in any organized religion or in almost any faith. We often hear quips like “all religions teach good.” While this is more wishful thinking or uninformed quixotic pietism, there is some truth in that most religions, at some point, teach, even practise, some common good.

The question however remains whether the good done in the name of religion is more of a strategy to convert others or to present a publicity façade merely to benefit the religion. It is well known that the more power-based a religion is, the more it takes advantage of its followers, and often the victims are simply powerless to defend themselves, while the religious leaders and perpetrators keep their unholy silence.²⁶

The humanitarian quality of a religion is, as a rule, the extent to which it is willing and able to actually care for others in their hour of need. In fact, our human society is so globalized with a predominance of peace, better communication, more open education, and a universal sense of economic progress that religions, too, are becoming more open to one another for the sake of our common welfare.

We will here briefly explore the nature of this “common and natural good” in religions in general, and how we can imbibe and practise such good no matter what religion we follow (or if we have no religion). In sharing such common ground, what are the effects it may have on us as followers of a particular religion? Indeed, what would become of religion when such commonality and freedom are more universally accepted? Can we mix practices from different religions? Can we follow two or more religions at a time? This overarching theme is, of course, **religious pluralism**. [SD 62.6b]

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²⁶ On child molestation by the Church, see SD 39.1 (7.3.4.2, 7.3.4.4); SD 40a.8 (5.5.4); SD 60.1e (13.13.2 (9) (iii)); SD 64.17 (10).

(Bojjhaṅga) Pariyāya Sutta

The (Bojjhaṅga) Discourse on a Mode of Teaching

S 46.52

The wanderers' question

[108] 2 Then, in the morning, **some**²⁷ monks dressed themselves and, taking robe and bowl, entered Sāvattihī for alms.

3 Then it occurred to them:

“It is still too early to walk for alms in Sāvattihī. Let us go to the park of **the wanderers of other sects.**”

4 Then those monks went to the park of the wanderers of other sects.²⁸

They exchanged greetings with those wanderers and, when they had concluded their greetings and cordial talk, sat down at one side.

5 As they sat at one side, the wanderers said to them:

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

‘Come, bhikshus, abandon **the 5 hindrances**, the corruptions of the mind that weaken wisdom; (and) cultivate **the 7 awakening factors** just as it is.’²⁹

5.2 We too teach the Dharma to our disciples thus:

‘Come, avuso, abandon the 5 hindrances, the corruptions of the mind that weaken wisdom, and cultivate the 7 awakening factors just as it is.’

5.3 So, avuso, what here is the distinction, the disparity, the difference between the recluse Gotama and us, that is, regarding the one Dharma teaching and the other, regarding the one manner of instruction and the other?” [1.2.1]

6 Then those monks neither delighted in nor rejected the statement of those wanderers. Without delighting in it, without rejecting it, they rose from their seats and left, thinking,

“We shall learn the meaning of this statement before the Blessed One.”

The monks approach the Buddha

7 Then, when those monks had walked for alms in Sāvattihī and had returned from the alms round, after their meal they approached the Blessed One.

Having paid homage to him, they sat down at one side. **[109]**

8 As they sat at one side, the monks said this to the Blessed One:

²⁷ “Some” (*sambahula*), also “a number of.” Comy says: According to the Vinaya method (VA 2:1), 3 persons are called “some”; more than that there is a “community” (*saṅgha*). According to the Suttanta method, 3 is just “three”; more than that, “many” (*bahula*). Here the latter is meant. (SA 3:168,13-16). In terms of sangha law, a “sangha” is a group of 5 legitimate monks led by a Vinaya expert that may perform an ordination in locations beyond the Middle Country (*anujānāmi bhikkhave evarūpesu paccantimesu janapadesu vinaya.dhara,pañcamena gaṇena upasampadam*, V 1:197,31).

²⁸ Not far from Jeta’s grove (SA 3:22,22).

²⁹ “Cultivate ... just as it is,” *yathā,bhūtaṃ bhāvetha*.

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

8.2 Then it occurred to us:

‘It is still too early to walk for alms in Sāvattthī. Let us go to the park of the wanderers of other sects.’

8.3 Then we, bhante, went to the park of the wanderers of other sects.

We exchanged greetings with those wanderers and, when we had concluded our greetings and cordial talk, sat down at one side.

9 As we sat at one side, the wanderers said to us:

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

“Come, bhikshus, abandon **the 5 hindrances**, the corruptions of the mind that weaken wisdom; (and) cultivate **the 7 awakening factors** just as it is.”

9.2 We too teach the Dharma to our disciples thus:

“Come, avuso, abandon the 5 hindrances, the corruptions of the mind that weaken wisdom, and properly cultivate the 7 awakening factors just as it is.”

9.3 So, avuso, what here is the distinction, the disparity, the difference between the recluse Gotama and us, that is, regarding the one Dharma teaching and the other, regarding the one manner of instruction and the other?’

10 Then we, bhante, neither delighted in nor rejected the statement of those wanderers. Without delighting in it, without rejecting it, we rose from our seats and left, thinking,

‘We shall learn the meaning of this statement before the Blessed One.’”

11 [The Blessed One said:]

“Bhikshus, when wanderers of other sects speak thus, they should be asked:

‘Avuso, is there (for you) a method of exposition by means of which **the 5 hindrances become 10**, and **the 7 awakening factors become 14**?’

Being asked thus, those wanderers would not be able to reply and, further, they would meet with vexation.³⁰

12 What is the reason for this?

Because that would not be within their domain.

I do not see anyone, bhikshus, in this world with its devas, brahmas and Mara, in this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its rulers and people, who could satisfy the mind with an answer to these questions except the Tathagata or the Tathagata’s disciple or one who has heard it from them. [110]

The 5 become 10

13 And what, bhikshus, is the method of exposition by means of which **the 5 hindrances** (*pañca-nīvaraṇa*) become 10?

14 (1) Bhikshus, whatever **sensual desire** there is for the internal is a hindrance; whatever *sensual desire* there is for the external is also a hindrance.³¹

³⁰ Comys: If they tried to explain, they would not be able to (*sampādetvā kathetuṃ na sakkuṇeyyam ti attho*, DA 1:117), “**vexed**” (*vighāta*): failing to explain they would fall into further difficulties (*asampāyanato uttarim pi dukkham āpajjissanti*, MA 2:55,17-20; SA 3:169,20-23; AA 5:22,15-19). DA describes their vexation incl trouble with dryness of lip, palate, tongue and throat (*oṭṭha, tālu, jivhā, gala, sosana, dukkham eva assā ti attho*, DA 1:117,26-28).

³¹ Comy: **Sensual desire** “for the internal” is desire for one’s own 5 aggregates; “for the external,” desire for the aggregates of others (and for other states and things). (SA 3:170,2-4)

Thus, bhikshus, what is spoken of as a way of teaching the hindrance of *sensual desire* becomes, by this method of exposition, twofold.

15 (2) Bhikshus, whatever **ill will** there is towards the internal is a hindrance; whatever *ill will* there is towards the external is also a hindrance.³²

Thus, bhikshus, what is spoken of as a way of teaching the hindrance of *ill will* becomes, by this method of exposition, twofold.

16 (3) Bhikshus, whatever **sloth** there is, is a hindrance; whatever **torpor** there is, is also a hindrance.³³

Thus, bhikshus, what is spoken of as a way of teaching the hindrance of *sloth and torpor* becomes, by this method of exposition, twofold.

17 (4) Bhikshus, whatever **restlessness** there is, is a hindrance; whatever **worry** there is, is also a hindrance.³⁴

Thus, bhikshus, what is spoken of as a way of teaching the hindrance of *restlessness and worry* becomes, by this method of exposition, twofold.

18 (5) Bhikshus, whatever **doubt** there is about the internal is a hindrance; whatever *doubt* there is about the external is also a hindrance.³⁵

Thus, bhikshus, what is spoken of as a way of teaching the hindrance of *doubt* becomes, by this method of exposition, twofold.

19 This, bhikshus, is the way of exposition by which the 5 hindrances become 10.

The 7 become 14

20 And what, bhikshus, is the method of exposition by means of which **the 7 awakening factors** (*satta bojjhaṅga*) become 14?³⁶

21 (1) Bhikshus, whatever mindfulness there is of things *internal* is the awakening factor of **mindfulness**; whatever mindfulness there is of things *external*, it is also the awakening factor of mindfulness.

Thus, bhikshus, what is spoken of as a way of teaching as the awakening factor of *mindfulness* becomes, by this method of exposition, twofold. **[111]**

22 (2) Bhikshus, whenever one discriminates things *internally* with wisdom, examines them, makes an **investigation** of them, it is the awakening factor of investigation of states;

whenever one discriminates things *externally* with wisdom, examines them, makes an investigation of them, it is also the awakening factor of *investigation of states*.

³² Comy: **Ill will** towards *the internal* may be understood as anger directed towards oneself, ill will towards *the external* as anger directed to other beings and to external conditions. (SA 3:170,5-7)

³³ Buddhaghosa shows the distinction between **sloth and torpor** (Vism 14.167/469): Sloth (*thīna*) has the characteristic of “lacking drive,” the function of removing energy, and manifestation as “sinking of the mind.” Torpor (*middha*) has the characteristic of unwieldiness, the function of smothering, and manifestation as nodding and sleep. *Sloth* may thus be understood as mental dullness, *torpor* as drowsiness. (SA 3:170,8-10)

³⁴ **Restlessness** (*uddhacca*) is agitation or disquietude; **worry** (*kukkucca*) regret or guilt over faults of commission and omission. Worry incl “remorse” in the positive sense of realizing one’s moral lapse. (PmA 1:315)

³⁵ **Doubt** about the internal, says Comy, is uncertainty regarding one’s own 5 aggregates (whether they are truly impermanent, etc); doubt about the external is the “great doubt” (*mahā, vicikicchā*) about 8 matters (the Buddha, the Dharma, the sangha, and the training; the past, present, and future; and dependent arising). (SA 3:170,8-10)

³⁶ The bifurcation of each awakening factor is also found at Vbh 228, modelled on this Sutta.

Thus, bhikshus, what is spoken of as a way of teaching as the awakening factor of *investigation of states* becomes, by this method of exposition, twofold.

(3) Bhikshus, whatever bodily energy there is, bhikshus, it is the awakening factor of **energy**; whatever mental energy there is, it is also the awakening factor of *energy*.

Thus, bhikshus, what is spoken of as a way of teaching as the awakening factor of *energy* becomes, by this method of exposition, twofold.

(4) Bhikshus, whatever zest there is accompanied by *initial application* and *sustained application* is the awakening factor of **zest**; whatever zest there is *without* initial application and *without* sustained application, it is also the awakening factor of *zest*.³⁷

Thus, bhikshus, what is spoken of as a way of teaching as the awakening factor of *zest* becomes, by this method of exposition, twofold.

(5) Bhikshus, whatever tranquillity of body there is, it is the awakening factor of **tranquillity**; whatever tranquillity of mind there is, it is also the awakening factor of *tranquillity*.³⁸

Thus, bhikshus, what is spoken of as a way of teaching as the awakening factor of *tranquillity* becomes, by this method of exposition, twofold.

(6) Bhikshus, whatever concentration there is accompanied by *initial application* and *sustained application*, it is the awakening factor of **concentration**;

whatever concentration there is *without* initial application and *without* sustained application, it is also the awakening factor of *concentration*.³⁹

Thus, bhikshus, what is spoken of as a way of teaching as the awakening factor of *concentration* becomes, by this method of exposition, twofold.

(7) Bhikshus, whatever equanimity there is towards things *internal*, it is also the awakening factor of **equanimity**;

whatever equanimity there is towards things *external*, it is also the awakening factor of *equanimity*.

Thus, bhikshus, what is spoken of as a way of teaching as the awakening factor of *equanimity* becomes, by this method of exposition, twofold.

This, bhikshus, is the method of exposition by means of which the 7 awakening factors become 14."⁴⁰
[112]

—evaṃ—

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³⁷ The former is the zest of the 1st dhyana, the latter the zest of the 2nd dhyana.

³⁸ Comy explains bodily tranquillity (*kāya-p,passaddhi*) as the tranquillizing of distress in the 3 aggregates (feeling, perception, volitional formations), mental tranquillity (*citta-p,passaddhi*) as the tranquillizing of distress in the aggregate of consciousness (SA 3:170,19-22). Comys frequently interpret the pair, *body and mind*, in the suttas in the light of the Abhidhamma, which draws a contrast between mind (*citta*), the chief factor in cognition, and its accompanying "body" (fig) of mental factors (*cetasika*), which perform secondary cognitive functions. However, in the present passage, and similar sutta contexts, "**body**" clearly refers to *the physical body*, considered as giving karmic tone to an experience by way of one's intentions and latent tendencies.

³⁹ "Concentration with initial application and sustained application" is the concentration of the 1st dhyana and the access to it; "concentration with neither initial application nor sustained application," the concentration of the 2nd dhyana and higher stages. (SA 3:170,26-28)

⁴⁰ At the end of the teaching, some monks attained streamwinning, some once-returning, some non-returning, and some arhathood. (SA 3:170,32 f)