Ud 1.10 — Bāhiya Sutta: Bāhiya

English translation by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvatthī at Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. And on that occasion Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth was living in Suppāraka by the seashore. He was worshipped, revered, honored, venerated, and given homage — a recipient of robes, alms food, lodgings, & medicinal requisites for the sick. Then, when he was alone in seclusion, this line of thinking appeared to his awareness: "Now, of those who in this world are arahants or have entered the path of arahantship, am I one?"

Then a devatā who had once been a blood relative of Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth — compassionate, desiring his welfare, knowing with her own awareness the line of thinking that had arisen in his awareness — went to him and on arrival said to him, "You, Bāhiya, are neither an arahant nor have you entered the path of arahantship. You don't even have the practice whereby you would become an arahant or enter the path of arahantship."

"Then who, in this world with its devas, are arahants or have entered the path to arahantship?"

"Bāhiya, there is a city in the northern country named Sāvatthī. There the Blessed One — an arahant, rightly self-awakened — is living now. He truly is an arahant and teaches the

Dhamma leading to arahantship."

Then Bāhiya, deeply chastened by the devatā, left Suppāraka right then and, in the space of one night,[1] went all the way to where the Blessed One was staying near Sāvatthī at Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. Now on that occasion, a large number of monks were doing walking meditation in the open air. He went to them and, on arrival, said, "Where, venerable sirs, is the Blessed One — the arahant, rightly self-awakened — now staying? We want to see that Blessed One — the arahant, rightly self-awakened."

"The Blessed One has gone into town for alms."

Then Bāhiya, hurriedly leaving Jeta's Grove and entering Sāvatthī, saw the Blessed One going for alms in Sāvatthī — serene & inspiring serene confidence, calming, his senses at peace, his mind at peace, having attained the utmost tranquility & poise, tamed, guarded, his senses restrained, a Great One (nāga). Seeing him, he approached the Blessed One and, on reaching him, threw himself down, with his head at the Blessed One's feet, and said, "Teach me the Dhamma, O Blessed One! Teach me the Dhamma, O One-Well-Gone, that will be for my long-term welfare & bliss."

When this was said, the Blessed One said to him, "This is not the time, Bāhiya. We have entered the town for alms."

A second time, Bāhiya said to the Blessed One, "But it is hard to know for sure what dangers there may be for the Blessed One's life, or what dangers there may be for mine. Teach me the Dhamma, O Blessed One! Teach me the Dhamma, O One-Well-Gone, that will be for my long-term welfare & bliss."

A second time, the Blessed One said to him, "This is not the time, Bāhiya. We have entered the town for alms."

A third time, Bāhiya said to the Blessed One, "But it is hard to know for sure what dangers there may be for the Blessed One's life, or what dangers there may be for mine. Teach me the Dhamma, O Blessed One! Teach me the Dhamma, O One-Well-Gone, that will be for my long-term welfare & bliss."

"Then, Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus: In reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed, only the sensed. In reference to the cognized, only the cognized. That is how you should train yourself. When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in reference to the heard, only the sensed in reference to the sensed, only the cognized in reference to the cognized, then, Bāhiya, there is no you in connection with that. When there is no you in connection with that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This, just this, is the end of stress."[2]

Through hearing this brief explanation of the Dhamma from the Blessed One, the mind of Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth right then and there was released from effluents through lack of clinging/sustenance. Having exhorted Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth with this brief explanation of the Dhamma, the Blessed One left.

Now, not long after the Blessed One's departure, Bāhiya was attacked & killed by a cow with a young calf. Then the Blessed One, having gone for alms in Sāvatthī, after the meal, returning from his alms round with a large number of monks, saw that Bāhiya had died. On seeing him, he said to the monks, "Take Bāhiya's body, monks, and, placing it on a litter and carrying it away, cremate it and build him a memorial. Your companion in the holy life has died."

Responding, "As you say, lord," to the Blessed One, the monks — placing Bāhiya's body on a litter, carrying it away, cremating it, and building him a memorial — went to the Blessed One. On arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As they were sitting there, they said to him, "Bāhiya's body has been cremated, lord, and his memorial has been built. What is his destination? What is his future state?"

"Monks, Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth was wise. He practiced the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma and did not pester me with issues related to the Dhamma. Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth, monks, is totally unbound."

Then, on realizing the significance of that, the Blessed One on that occasion exclaimed:

Where water, earth, fire, & wind have no footing: There the stars don't shine, the sun isn't visible. There the moon doesn't appear. There darkness is not found. And when a sage, a brahman through sagacity, has realized [this] for himself, then from form & formless, from bliss & pain, he is freed.

Note

1.

Eka-ratti-parivāsena: This phrase can also mean, "taking one-night sojourns" (i.e., resting no more than one night in any one spot); or "with a one-night sojourn." The Commentary prefers the meaning used in the translation, noting that the distance between Suppāraka and Sāvatthī amounts to 120 leagues, or approximately 1,200 miles. In its version of Bāhiya's story, Bāhiya had no meditative attainments at all, and so the miraculous speed of his journey had to be attributed either to the power of the deva or the power of the Buddha. However, he may actually have had strong powers of concentration with some attendant psychic powers of his own.

2.

For a discussion of these instructions, see the article, "Food for Awakening: The Role of Appropriate Attention."

See also: SN 35.95; AN 4.24.