

# The Bāhiya Instruction and Bare Awareness

Bhikkhu Anālayo\*

## Introduction

In this article I explore the instruction given to Bāhiya, which, according to the *Udāna* account, enabled a practitioner without knowledge of other Buddhist teachings to gain full awakening on the spot. In order to appreciate better this rather succinct instruction, I turn to another instance of the same instruction, given to the Buddhist monastic Māluṅkyaputta, based on a translation of the Chinese *Āgama* version of the relevant discourse. My exploration leads me to argue that there is a place for “bare awareness” or “bare attention” within the early Buddhist scheme of meditation, even as an aspect of the mode of practice described in the Pāli *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*. By taking this position, I intend to defend the original intuition to this effect by the pioneer in research on *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation: Ñāṇaponika Thera.

## The Instruction to Bāhiya in the *Udāna*

The *Bāhiya-sutta*, found at the end of the first chapter of the *Udāna*, is a Pāli discourse that has no known parallel. This is not at all uncommon for the *Udāna* collection, as most of its prose narrations have no parallels in other transmission lineages.<sup>1</sup> The

---

\* Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, 149 Lockwood Road, Massachusetts, 01005 USA.

I am indebted to Bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā, Michael Running, and Daniel Stuart for commenting on a draft version of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. in more detail Anālayo 2009.

story itself unfolds in this way:<sup>2</sup>

Bāhiya lives near the ocean in the area of Suppāraka (corresponding roughly to the area of modern Bombay), where he is much respected and well supported by the local people. He believes himself to be an arahant or at least on the path to becoming one. A former relative, now a *deva*, approaches him out of compassion and informs Bāhiya of the fact that he is not even on the path to becoming an arahant, let alone being one himself. Asked if anyone else in the world is an arahant or on the path to becoming one, the *deva* informs Bāhiya of the Buddha, who at that time was staying at Jeta's Grove in Sāvattī (located in the area of modern Uttar Pradesh, to the northeast of its capital Lucknow).

Bāhiya leaves Suppāraka right away and walks across half of the Indian subcontinent until he reaches Jeta's Grove. Finding out that the Buddha has just gone into town to collect almsfood, Bāhiya follows him. Meeting the Buddha on the street in Sāvattī, he begs for an instruction. The Buddha points out that this is not the proper time for him to give teachings, as he is walking for alms. Bāhiya insists, stating that he is not sure of the length of each of their lives. Being requested thrice, the Buddha gives Bāhiya a brief instruction, which leads to Bāhiya becoming an arahant on the spot.

Bāhiya's intuition about the uncertainty of life turns out to be well founded, as soon after his encounter with the Buddha he has an accident and passes away. The Buddha tells the monastics that they should take care of Bāhiya's remains,<sup>3</sup> and informs them that Bāhiya passed away as a fully awakened one.

The instruction that had this remarkable potential of enabling someone not otherwise acquainted with the Buddha's teaching to become an arahant on the spot proceeds as follows:<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Ud 1.10 at Ud 6,24.

<sup>3</sup> On this instruction cf. also Dhammadinnā 2016: 45n37.

<sup>4</sup> Ud 1.10 at Ud 8,4: *tasmātiha te, bāhiya, evaṃ sikkhitabbaṃ: diṭṭhe diṭṭhamattaṃ bhavissati, sute sutamattaṃ bhavissati, mute mutamattaṃ bhavissati, viññāte viññātamattaṃ bhavissati ti. evañ hi (C<sup>c</sup>: evaṃ hi) te, bāhiya, sikkhitabbaṃ. yato kho te, bāhiya, diṭṭhe diṭṭhamattaṃ bhavissati, sute sutamattaṃ bhavissati, mute mutamattaṃ bhavissati, viññāte viññātamattaṃ bhavissati, tato tvaṃ, bāhiya, na tena; yato tvaṃ, bāhiya, na tena, tato tvaṃ, bāhiya, na tatha; yato tvaṃ, bāhiya, na tatha, tato tvaṃ, bāhiya, nev'idha na huraṃ na ubhayamantarena (C<sup>c</sup> and S<sup>c</sup>:*

Therefore, Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus: In what is seen there will be just what is seen, in what is heard there will be just what is heard, in what is sensed there will be just what is sensed,<sup>5</sup> in what is cognized there will be just what is cognized. Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus.

Bāhiya, when for you in what is seen there will be just what is seen, in what is heard there will be just what is heard, in what is sensed there will be just what is sensed, in what is cognized there will be just what is cognized, then, Bāhiya, you will not be ‘thereby’ (*na tena*). Bāhiya, when you will not be ‘thereby’, then, Bāhiya, you will not be ‘therein’ (*na tatha*). Bāhiya, when you will not be ‘therein’, then, Bāhiya, you will be neither here, not beyond, nor between the two. This itself is the end of *dukkha*.

Ñāṇananda (2015: 319 and 325) explains the implications of this instruction as follows:

The basic principle in this training seems to be the discipline to stop short at bare awareness, *diṭṭhe diṭṭhamattam*, *sute sutamattam*, etc. The latter half of the discourse seems to indicate what happens when one goes through that training [... what is] meant by the term *na tena* is the attitude of not thinking ‘in terms of’ whatever is seen, heard, sensed or cognized. That is to say, not imagining ‘thereby’.

This in turn leads to non-identification, expressed by *na tatha*, “not in it” or “not therein”. Ñāṇananda (2015: 327) continues:

At whatever moment you neither imagine ‘by the seen’ nor

---

*ubhayamantare*). *es’ev’anto dukkhassā ti* (the part between the first and the third *tato tvam* in the above passage is faulty in the PTS and S<sup>c</sup> editions and has been restored based the B<sup>c</sup> and C<sup>c</sup> editions, whose reading is in line with the corresponding passage in SN IV 73,<sup>11</sup> in all editions, including PTS and S<sup>c</sup>).

<sup>5</sup> Here the term “sensed,” *muta*, would stand for smelling, tasting, and bodily touch sensations. In other words, the initial instruction regarding what is seen, heard, sensed, and cognized would cover the whole range of experience through the six senses.

entertain the notion of being ‘in the seen’, which is tantamount to projecting an ‘I’ into the seen, then you are neither here nor there nor in between.

Besides countering the projection of an ‘I’, according to Ñāṇananda (2016: 146) the target of the instruction is also to undermine the way objects of experience are usually apperceived:

At whatever time one stops short at the seen and takes it only as a seen and not some thing seen and [...] there is no imagining a ‘thinghood’, then one would not be thinking in terms of it [...] if one does not take such a standpoint, one is neither ‘here’ nor ‘there’ nor ‘in between the two’.

Ñāṇananda (2015: 537) then paraphrases the instruction as follows:

When, Bāhiya, you have gone through that training of stopping at just the seen, the heard, the sensed and the cognized, then you would not be imagining in terms of them. The algebraic-like expressions *na tena* and *na tatha* have to be understood as forms of egoistic imagining, *maññanā*. When you do not imagine in terms of them, you would not be in them. There would be no involvement in regard to them [...]. When, Bāhiya, you do not dwell in it, *yato tvam bāhiya na tatha*, then, Bāhiya, you are neither here, nor there, nor in between the two, *tato tvam bāhiya nev’idha na huraṃ na ubhayamantarena*. This itself is the end of suffering. In other words, you would have realized voidness, *suññatā*.

The *Bāhiya-sutta* is not the only instance among the Pāli discourses where this succinct instruction is found. Another occurrence is in a discourse given to the Buddhist monastic Māluṅkyaputta, extant in the *Saḷāyatana-samyutta*. Commenting on the same succinct instruction in the discourse to Māluṅkyaputta, Mahāsi (1981/1992: 15) explains:

The objects just appear for a moment at the sense-doors and the subject just sees or hears them for that moment, and nothing more. This is the gist of the method of meditation.

For the first case of vision, Mahāsi (1981/1992: 19f) enjoins:

When the phenomenon of seeing occurs, you just see it: do nothing more. The Text says: ‘*diṭṭhe diṭṭhamataṃ bhavissati*’ [...]. So, at this stage, although it is true that you are seeing a thing, you can leave seeing alone as it is, as you have not started a-thinking. This agrees with the statement: ‘When you see, just see it.’

### The Instruction to Māluṅkyaputta in the *Samyukta-āgama*

The *Samyutta-nikāya* discourse to Māluṅkyaputta has parallels in Chinese, Sanskrit, and Tibetan. As a basis for further study, in what follows I translate the version extant in the Chinese *Samyukta-āgama* in comparison with its Pāli parallel.<sup>6</sup>

Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was staying at Sāvathī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s Park. At that time Māluṅkyaputta approached the Buddha, paid respect with his head at [the Buddha’s] feet, and withdrew to sit to one side. He said to the Buddha:

“It would be well if the Blessed One were to teach me the Dharma. Having heard the Dharma, alone and in a quiet place I will reflect on it with energy. Being established in the absence of negligence ... *up to* ... there will be no receiving of any further existence.”<sup>7</sup>

At that time the Blessed One said to Māluṅkyaputta: “Those who are young, intelligent, and with sharp faculties, having recently gone forth in my teaching and discipline are nevertheless without indolence in my teaching and discipline. Let alone you who are now old and with ripe faculties, and yet you wish to ask me to teach you an instruction in brief.”

Māluṅkyaputta said to the Buddha: “Blessed One, even though I am old and with ripe faculties, nevertheless I wish to be able to hear the Blessed One teach me an instruction

<sup>6</sup> SĀ 312 at T II 89c24 to 90b26.

<sup>7</sup> In the Pāli parallel SN 35.95 at SN IV 72,8 he does not refer to the potential outcome of practicing in seclusion, although the same can safely be assumed to be implicit.

in brief. May the Blessed One teach me an instruction in brief. Having heard the Dharma, alone and in a quiet place I will reflect on it with energy ... *up to* ... I will know for myself that there will be no receiving of any further existence.” For a second and also a third time he requested like this.

The Buddha said to Māluṅkyaputta: “You, enough of that now!” In this way it went for three times and he still did not teach him.<sup>8</sup> At that time, [however], the Blessed One said to Māluṅkyaputta: “I will now question you; answer me according to your understanding.”

The Buddha said to Māluṅkyaputta: “Suppose there are forms you have never seen with the eye.<sup>9</sup> Would you wish for the sight of those forms and give rise to desire, give rise to craving, give rise to thoughts, and give rise to being defiled by attachment?”

He replied: “No, Blessed One.”

For sounds and the ear, odours and the nose, flavours and the tongue, tangibles and the body, and mental objects and the mind *it should also be recited in this way*.

The Buddha said to Māluṅkyaputta: “It is well, it is well, Māluṅkyaputta, see by way of being limited to seeing, hear by way of being limited to hearing, sense by way of being limited to sensing, and cognize by way of being limited to cognizing.”<sup>10</sup>

Then he spoke in verse:

“If you are not in that,  
And [from] that you also do not revert to being [in]

---

<sup>8</sup> In SN 35.95 the Buddha delivers his teaching after Māluṅkyaputta has repeated his request once with an acknowledgment that he is indeed old but requests a teaching nonetheless. The presentation in SĀ 312 is unexpected, as elsewhere in the discourses the Buddha will agree to a request when it has been made a third time, rather than refuting a third time, and then only give the teaching requested.

<sup>9</sup> SN 35.95 at SN IV 72,19 adds that such forms not only have never been seen, but one also does not expect to see them in the future.

<sup>10</sup> The original is somewhat cryptic; in the case of seeing, SĀ 312 at T II 90a12 reads: 見以見為量.

this,<sup>11</sup>  
 And you also are not in between the two,  
 This then is the end of *dukkha*.”

Māluṅkyaputta said to the Buddha: “I have understood, Blessed One, I have understood, Well-gone One!”

The Buddha said to Māluṅkyaputta: “How have you understood in detail the meaning of the teaching I have given herein in brief?”<sup>12</sup>

At that time Māluṅkyaputta spoke in verse to the Buddha:<sup>13</sup>

“On having seen a form with the eyes  
 If right mindfulness is lost,  
 Then in the form that is seen  
 One grasps its sign (*nimitta*) with thoughts of  
 craving.

“For one who grasps the sign with craving and  
 delight  
 The mind will then be constantly in bondage to  
 attachment.  
 It will give rise to various kinds of craving  
 For the countless forms that manifest.

“Thoughts of lustful desire, ill will, and harming  
 Will bring about the mind’s debasement  
 And foster a host of afflictions;  
 One is forever far from Nirvāṇa.<sup>14</sup>

“[If] on seeing a form one does not grasp its sign,

<sup>11</sup> My translation of this part of the stanza is conjectural; SĀ 312 at T II 90a15 reads: 彼亦復非此.

<sup>12</sup> SN 35.95 reports no enquiry by the Buddha, as here Māluṅkyaputta on his own comes out with a series of verses drawing out his understanding.

<sup>13</sup> Some of these verses have already been translated in Anālayo 2015: 113 and Stuart 2015: 196n154.

<sup>14</sup> The general thrust of the corresponding verses in SN 35.95 is similar, although the two versions differ in details. Another difference is that SN 35.95 continues directly from seeing forms with attachment to the other senses, and only after that takes up the opposite case of seeing forms without attachment.

And the mind conforms to right mindfulness,  
 Craving will not defile the mind with what is  
 detrimental,  
 And the bondage of attachment will also not arise.

“Not give rise to cravings  
 For the countless forms that manifest,  
 Thoughts of lustful desire, ill will, and harming  
 Will be unable to afflict the mind.

“Diminishing [what] fosters a host of afflictions,  
 One gradually draws close to Nirvāṇa.  
 As taught by the kinsman of the sun:  
 ‘Being apart from craving is Nirvāṇa.’<sup>15</sup>

“On hearing sounds with the ear  
 If the mind has lost right mindfulness,  
 The sign of sounds is grasped;  
 It is held firmly and not relinquished.

“With the nose and odours, with the tongue and  
 flavours,  
 With the body and tangibles, and with the mind and  
 thoughts of mental objects,  
 Right mindfulness being forgotten  
 One also grasps the sign, it is just the same.

“The mind gives rise to craving and delight  
 And the bondage of attachment is firmly established;  
 Various kinds of craving arise  
 For countless mental objects that manifest.

“Thoughts of lustful desire, ill will, and harming  
 Will debase and harm the mind,<sup>16</sup>  
 And increasingly nourish a host of afflictions;  
 One is forever far from Nirvāṇa.

---

<sup>15</sup> The last two lines have no counterpart in SN 35.95.

<sup>16</sup> Adopting the variant 減 instead of 滅, in keeping with the formulation found earlier and subsequently.

“Not being defiled by mental objects,  
Established in right knowledge and right  
mindfulness,  
The mind is not contaminated  
And no longer delights in them with attachment.

“Not giving rise to various kinds of craving  
For the countless mental objects that manifest,  
Thoughts of lust, ill will, and harming  
Do not debase the mind.

“The host of afflictions consequently decreases  
And one gradually draws close to Nirvāṇa.  
‘The eradication of craving is Nirvāṇa’,  
This has been taught by the Blessed One.<sup>17</sup>

“This describes my understanding in detail of the  
meaning of the teaching the Blessed One gave herein in  
brief.”

The Buddha said to Māluṅkyaputta: “You truly  
understood in detail the meaning of the teaching I gave  
herein in brief. Why is that? It is as you said in verse:

“On having seen a form with the eyes  
If right mindfulness is lost,  
Then in the form that has been seen  
One grasps its sign with thoughts of craving.”  
*To be recited in detail as above.*

At that time the venerable Māluṅkyaputta,<sup>18</sup> hearing  
what the Buddha had said, rejoiced and was delighted. He  
paid homage and left.

At that time the venerable Māluṅkyaputta, having  
understood in detail the meaning of the teaching the  
Blessed One had herein given in brief, alone and in a quiet

---

<sup>17</sup> As earlier in the case of forms, the last two lines have no counterpart in SN 35.95.

<sup>18</sup> It is only from this point onwards that SĀ 312 qualifies Māluṅkyaputta as “venerable”, 尊者, whereas SN 35.95 uses the corresponding *āyasmant* right from the outset.

place reflected on it with energy. Being established in the absence of negligence ... *up to* ... his mind attained liberation and he became an arahant.

Māluṅkyaputta also features in another two discourses in the *Majjhima-nikāya*. In one discourse he is rebuked by the Buddha for misunderstanding the nature of the five lower fetters and in the other he goes as far as to threaten that he will leave the monastic order unless the Buddha gives a categorical reply to a series of metaphysical questions.<sup>19</sup> The second discourse is particularly well-known for its simile of a poisoned arrow, with the help of which the Buddha illustrates why he will not give the type of reply Māluṅkyaputta wants. The simile clarifies that Māluṅkyaputta's attitude is similar to that of a person struck by a poisoned arrow who, instead of allowing the arrow to be taken out, first wants answers to a series of irrelevant details related to how he was shot.

Clearly, Māluṅkyaputta was of quite a different calibre than Bāhiya.<sup>20</sup> The introductory narration gives in fact the impression that, at the time of asking for an instruction in brief for the purpose of intensive meditation practice, Māluṅkyaputta was already beyond the average age when such teachings are usually considered fruitful. Yet, although Māluṅkyaputta did not become an arahant on the spot, the parallel versions agree in reporting that he did reach the final goal after a period of practice.<sup>21</sup> This confirms that he had indeed understood the implications of what the Buddha had told him in brief and successfully put this instruction into practice.

The detailed exposition given by Māluṅkyaputta of the implications of the brief instruction he had received points directly to mindfulness. The crucial contrast is between mindfulness being

---

<sup>19</sup> MN 63 at MN I 426,6 and MN 64 at MN I 432,6; for a comparative study of both cf. Anālayo 2011: 353–358.

<sup>20</sup> According to the list of eminent disciples in AN 1.14.3 at AN I 24,27, Bāhiya was in fact foremost in quickly gaining penetrative knowledge, *hippabhinnā*.

<sup>21</sup> SN 35.95 at SN IV 76,17, SHT V 1311 R3f, Sander and Waldschmidt 1985: 216, SHT X 4097 R3, Wille 2008: 265, and D 4094 *ju* 242b2 or Q 5595 *tu* 277a2; corresponding to the indication made to this effect in SĀ 312 at T II 90b26.

either established or else lost.<sup>22</sup> If mindfulness is lost, the danger is that one gives attention to the pleasing characteristics of what is seen (etc.) and becomes attached and clings. The mind then becomes disturbed, one accumulates *dukkha*, and remains far from Nirvāṇa. This can be avoided if one is mindful.

The term used in the Pāli version to draw out the implications of the injunction “in what is seen there will be just what is seen”, etc., is *paṭissati*.<sup>23</sup> The Sanskrit fragment parallel has preserved the corresponding *pratismṛtaḥ*,<sup>24</sup> and the Tibetan parallel speaks of “being endowed with mindfulness”, *dran ldan pa*.<sup>25</sup> The counterpart to *paṭissati* in the *Samyukta-āgama* discourse translated above is “right mindfulness”, 正念.<sup>26</sup>

Given the context it is clear that these terms refer to what we might call a bare form of mindfulness: what is experienced through any of the senses is simply received as such, without being further processed mentally by way of engaging with the sign and any secondary characteristics.

In other Pāli discourses, the term *paṭissati* occurs regularly in the company of the term *sampajāna*, clearly knowing. One such instance involves the heavenly king Sakka who, having just attained stream-entry, proclaims that in future he will dwell clearly knowing and *paṭissato*.<sup>27</sup> Another passage concerns the practice of contentment with regard to any type of robes, food, and lodging, as well as dedication to meditation practice. One can be qualified as established in these four noble lineages, *ariyavaṃsa*, if in relation to each of them one is capable, vigorous, clearly knowing, and *paṭissato*.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Walpola et al. (2017: 143) comment on the cases of Bāhiya and Maluṅkyaputta that “it is likely that they directly experienced the source of the origin of their cognitive phenomena playing out in their own minds, through the application of the mindfulness meditation methods conveyed in this brief instruction.”

<sup>23</sup> SN 35.95 at SN IV 74,22.

<sup>24</sup> SHT V 1311 V3 (the part preserved takes up the sixth sense), Sander and Waldschmidt 1985: 215.

<sup>25</sup> D 4094 *ju* 242a1 or Q 5595 *tu* 276a8.

<sup>26</sup> SĀ 312 at T II 90a26.

<sup>27</sup> DN 21 at DN II 286,9.

<sup>28</sup> DN 33 at DN III 224,30.

Energetically examining the aggregates day and night can take place clearly knowing and being *paṭissato*.<sup>29</sup> The same combination of these two terms can also qualify the meditative practice of the *brahmavihāras*.<sup>30</sup> Alternatively, these two terms can be part of a description of begging for alms in the appropriate manner,<sup>31</sup> of being ready to face death,<sup>32</sup> and of dwelling energetically in a forest hut.<sup>33</sup> All of the contexts surveyed here make sense on the assumption that *paṭissati* can just function as a near equivalent to *sati*.

The term *paṭissati* can also occur on its own to qualify the cultivation of *mettā*, undertaken in a boundless manner,<sup>34</sup> or in relation to mindfulness of breathing.<sup>35</sup> The last example occurs in a verse, where the expression *ānāpāne paṭissato* refers back to what in the preceding prose is a reference to *ānāpānassati*. In this instance, *paṭissati* indubitably has the same meaning as *sati*.

In this way, at least in its usage in the Pāli discourses, the term *paṭissati* can serve as a near-synonym to *sati* and need not be conveying the sense of memory.<sup>36</sup> This is definitely the case for the instruction to Māluṅkyaputta, where the task to remain with just what is seen, etc., requires precisely not to indulge in any memories related to what one has seen. The instruction to Māluṅkyaputta (and to Bāhiya) does not leave room for an interpretation of mindfulness as involving a memory of sorts.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> SN 22.95 at SN III 143,9.

<sup>30</sup> SN 42.8 at SN IV 322,3, SN 42.13 at SN IV 351,8, and AN 10.208 at AN V 299,16. These instances point to an intriguing relationship between mindfulness, *sati*, and *brahmavihāra* meditation, in particular *mettā*; cf., e.g., Sn 150f.

<sup>31</sup> Sn 413.

<sup>32</sup> Th 20.

<sup>33</sup> Th 59.

<sup>34</sup> AN 8.1 at AN IV 150,19 and It 1.27 at It 21,5.

<sup>35</sup> It 3.85 at It 81,5.

<sup>36</sup> Pace Levman 2017: 129, who argues that “the word *paṭissati* [...] usually means ‘remembrance’ in the *suttas* (<OI *prati* + *smṛ*, ‘to remember, to recollect’).”

<sup>37</sup> On this topic in more detail cf. Anālayo 2018.

### The Refrain Part of the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*

In addition to the occurrences of *paṭissati* surveyed above, the same term can also be part of the compound *paṭissatimatta*, which combines *paṭissati* with *matta*. The term *matta* features also in the instructions to Bāhiya and Māluṅkyaputta, where it serves to qualify that there should be “just” what is seen, *diṭṭhamatta*, etc.

The reference to *paṭissatimatta* occurs in a part of the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* that I have dubbed “the refrain”, because it invariably follows the individual contemplations described in the discourse. The similarity of terminology helps to relate this part of the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* to the instructions given to Bāhiya and Māluṅkyaputta.

The refrain in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* stipulates four dimensions of meditative cultivation relevant for each of its exercises:<sup>38</sup>

- contemplate internally, externally, and both;
- contemplate the nature of arising, passing away, and both;
- establish mindfulness just for the sake of being mindful;
- dwell independently, without clinging to anything.

This stipulation is specific to the Pāli version, as the Chinese parallels differ.<sup>39</sup> Of particular interest for the present discussion is the third dimension described, where mindfulness is established just for its own sake. For evaluating this instruction in its context, it is significant that the first three dimensions of *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation are connected with one another through the particle *vā*, which usually functions as a disjunctive conveying the sense “or”. In contrast, for the final dimension the refrain instead employs the conjunctive particle *ca*, “and”. This suggests the first three dimensions to be alternative modes of practice, whereas the final is relevant throughout. In other words, the passage on just being mindful for its own sake describes one of several alternative modes of mental cultivation within the framework of *satipaṭṭhāna*; it is not the only valid mode for doing so.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> MN 10 at MN I 56,27.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. in more detail Anālayo 2013b: 15–19.

<sup>40</sup> As pointed out by Bodhi 2011: 27, “in the light of canonical sources, it is hard

Nevertheless, at this stage of practice, the purpose of establishing mindfulness is “just for the sake of being mindful,” *yāvadeva ... paṭissatimattāya*.<sup>41</sup> The term *paṭissatimatta* here serves to convey nuances that are clearly similar to what the instructions to Bāhiya and Māluṅkyaputta imply: the need to stay receptively open to experience without proliferating it in various ways through recollective associations and memories. In short, the task in these instructions is indeed to cultivate “bare awareness”.

In his ground-breaking study, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, Ñāṇaponika (1962/1992: 30) placed a spotlight on what he called “bare attention” as a “key to the distinctive method of Satipaṭṭhāna.” According to his explanation:

Bare Attention is the clear and single-minded awareness of what actually happens *to* us and *in* us, at the successive moments of perception. It is called ‘bare’, because it attends just to the bare facts of a perception as presented either through the five physical senses or through the mind which, for Buddhist thought, constitutes the sixth sense. When attending to that six-fold sense impression, attention or mindfulness is kept to a bare registering of the facts observed, without reacting to them by deed, speech or by mental comment which may be one of self-reference (like, dislike, etc.), judgement or reflection. If during the time, short or long, given to the practice of Bare Attention, any such comments arise in one’s mind, they themselves are made objects of Bare Attention.

In his book on *The Power of Mindfulness*, Ñāṇaponika (1968/1986: 3) explains that:

---

to see ‘bare attention’ as a valid *theoretical* description of mindfulness applicable to all its modalities [...] while certain methods emphasize a type of awareness that might be pragmatically described as ‘bare attention,’ in the full spectrum of Buddhist meditation techniques this is only one among a number of alternative ways to cultivate mindfulness.”

<sup>41</sup> The elided part also speaks of *ñāṇamattāya*, where *ñāṇa* stands for a bare form of knowledge, distinct from more penetrative types of knowledge that can be referred to by the Pāli term *vijjā*; on other terms that describe penetrative types of knowledge, such as *abhiññā*, *pariññā*, and of course *paññā*, cf. Premasiri 1987. A bare form of knowing is indeed a regular feature of the instructions for the individual contemplations in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*, which enjoin that one “knows,” *pajānāti*.

mindfulness (*sati*) is mostly linked with clear comprehension (*sampajañña*) of the right purpose or suitability of an action, and other considerations. Thus again it is not viewed in itself. But to tap the actual and potential *power* of mindfulness it is necessary to understand and deliberately cultivate it in its basic, unalloyed form, which we shall call *bare attention* [...]. Bare attention then becomes the key to the meditative practice of Satipaṭṭhāna, opening the door to mind’s mastery and final liberation.

The idea of bare attention has been criticized as requiring an elimination of time,<sup>42</sup> as a recent innovation without a grounding in early Buddhist or traditional Theravāda thought and practice,<sup>43</sup> and as not being at all relevant to the path to liberation.<sup>44</sup> Yet, the instructions given to Bāhiya and Māluṅkyaputta undeniably involve a form of bare awareness. They entail precisely what Nāṇaponika Thera describes when one “attends just to the bare

---

<sup>42</sup> Levman 2017: 137 reasons that “‘bare attention,’ as Ven. Nyanaponika translates *sati*, can only be achieved through combining past, present and future to effectively eliminate time altogether.” Yet there is no reason for assuming that Nāṇaponika Thera’s description of bare attention involves an elimination of time altogether. The point of qualifying attention (or awareness) as “bare” is simply that one remains in the present moment without clinging to or proliferating whatever is experienced.

<sup>43</sup> Sharf 2015: 475 argues that “the psychological model behind Nyanaponika’s understanding of *sati* as bare attention may owe more to internalist and empiricist epistemologies than it owes to early Buddhist or traditional Theravāda formulations.” Sharf 2015: 470 comments on the notion of a “non-judgmental, non-discursive attending to the moment-to-moment flow of consciousness. This approach to Buddhist meditation can be traced to Burmese Buddhist reform movements of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and is arguably at odds with more traditional Theravāda Buddhist doctrine and meditative practices.” Yet the instructions to Bāhiya and Māluṅkyaputta show that bare attention is an aspect of the conception of *sati* in early Buddhism, which thus does form a precedent for the approach to Buddhist meditation that evolved in Burma in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The position taken by Sharf 2015 reflects a predilection among some academics to opt for a rhetoric of recent invention that risks losing sight of relevant historical roots and precedents in early Buddhist (or traditional Theravāda) thought; for another example cf. Perreira 2012 and a reply in Anālayo 2013a.

<sup>44</sup> Ṭhānissaro 2012: 61 asserts that “there is no role for bare attention or bare awareness on the path,” apparently based on the assumption that bare awareness implies an unconditioned form of awareness, which is not the case; cf. Anālayo 2017: 25n14.

facts of a perception as presented either through the five physical senses or through the mind.” In this way, “attention or mindfulness is kept to a bare registering of the facts observed, without reacting to them.” The discourses to Bāhiya and Mālun̄kyaputta leave no doubt about the liberating potential of such bare awareness.

### Conclusions

Bare awareness does after all appear to have a place in accounts of early Buddhist meditation. In the *satipaṭṭhāna* scheme this place comes into its own alongside a comprehensive exploration of the contemplated phenomena from internal and external perspectives and insight into their nature of arising and passing away. Building on these aspects of the practice, one of the modalities of *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation can then be the cultivation of mindfulness just for the sake of being mindful. The terminology employed in this instruction recurs in an exposition by Maluṅkyaputta of an injunction, also given to Bāhiya, to remain with bare awareness of sense experience. Such practice is, according to the Pāli discourses and their parallels, clearly invested with the potential of leading to awakening.

The intuition by Ñāṇaponika Thera that “bare attention” (or “bare awareness”) is a valid modality of mindfulness practice appears to be quite accurate. Such practice requires stepping back from the usual involvement with experience by way of cultivating receptive and non-interfering mindfulness. As Ñāṇaponika (1968/1986: 4) explains:

Particularly in an age like ours, with its superstitious worship of ceaseless external activity, there will be those who ask: “How can such a passive attitude of mind as that of bare attention possibly lead to the great results claimed for it?” In reply, one may be inclined to suggest to the questioner not to rely on the words of others, but to put these assertions [...] to the test of personal experience.

**Abbreviations:**

AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
B <sup>c</sup>	Burmese edition
C <sup>c</sup>	Ceylonese edition
D	Derge edition
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
It	<i>Itivuttaka</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
PTS	Pali Text Society
Q	Peking edition
SĀ	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i>
S <sup>c</sup>	Siamese edition
SHT	Sanskrithandschriften aus den Turfanfunden
SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
Sn	<i>Sutta-nipāta</i>
Th	<i>Theragāthā</i>
Ud	<i>Udāna</i>

**References:**

- Anālayo, Bhikkhu. 2009. “The Development of the Pāli Udāna Collection.” *Bukkyō Kenkyū* 37: 39–72.
- Anālayo, Bhikkhu. 2011. *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikāya*. Taipei: Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation.
- Anālayo, Bhikkhu. 2013a. “A Note on the Term Theravāda.” *Buddhist Studies Review* 30.2: 216–235.
- Anālayo, Bhikkhu. 2013b. *Perspectives on Satipaṭṭhāna*. Cambridge: Windhorse.
- Anālayo, Bhikkhu. 2015. *Compassion and Emptiness in Early Buddhist Meditation*. Cambridge: Windhorse.

- Anālayo, Bhikkhu, 2017. *Early Buddhist Meditation Studies*. Barre, MA: Barre Center for Buddhist Studies.
- Anālayo, Bhikkhu, 2018. “Once Again on Mindfulness and Memory.” *Mindfulness* 79: 1–6.
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu. 2011. “What Does Mindfulness Really Mean? A Canonical Perspective.” *Contemporary Buddhism* 12.1: 19–39.
- Dhammadinnā, Bhikkhunī. 2016. “The Funeral of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī and Her Followers in the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya.” *Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies* 17: 25–74.
- Levman, Bryan. 2017. “Putting smṛti Back Into sati (Putting Remembrance Back Into Mindfulness).” *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies* 13: 121–149.
- Mahāsi Sayādaw. 1981/1992. *A Discourse on Mālūkyaputta Sutta*. Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: Selangor Buddhist Vipassana Meditation Society.
- Ñāṇananda, K. 2015. *Nibbāna — The Mind Stilled (Volumes 1–7), Library Edition (The Nibbāna Sermons 1–33)*. Sri Lanka, Mādhyā Bhāraya: Pothgulgala Dharmagrantha Dharmasravana.
- Ñāṇananda, K. 2016. *The Law of Dependent Arising (Paṭicca Samuppāda), The Secret of Bondage and Release, Library Edition*. Sri Lanka: Kaṭukurunde Ñāṇananda Sadaham Senasun Bhāraya.
- Ñāṇaponika Thera. 1962/1992. *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, Kandy: BPS.
- Ñāṇaponika Thera. 1968/1986. *The Power of Mindfulness*, Kandy: BPS.
- Perreira, Todd LeRoy. 2012. “Whence Theravāda? The Modern Genealogy of an Ancient Term”, in *How Theravāda Is Theravāda? Exploring Buddhist Identities*, P. Skilling et al. (ed.), 443–571, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Premasiri, P.D. 1987. “Early Buddhist Analysis of the Varieties of Cognition.” *Sri Lanka Journal of Buddhist Studies* 1: 51–69.

- Sander, Lore and E. Waldschmidt. 1985. *Sanskrihandschriften aus den Turfanfunden, Teil 5*. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner.
- Sharf, Robert H. 2015. “Is Mindfulness Buddhist? (and Why it Matters).” *Transcultural Psychology* 52.4: 470–484.
- Stuart, Daniel M. 2015. *A Less Traveled Path: Saddharmasmṛtyupasthānasūtra Chapter 2, Critically Edited with a Study on its Structure and Significance for the Development of Buddhist Meditation*. Vienna and Beijing: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press/China Tibetology Publishing House.
- Ṭhānissaro, Bhikkhu. 2012. *Right Mindfulness, Memory & Ardency on the Buddhist Path*. California: Metta Forest Monastery.
- Walpola, P.L., D.Y. Walpola, I.C. Walpola, and T. Toneatto. 2017. “Mapping the Mind: A Model Based on Theravada Buddhist Texts and Practices.” *Contemporary Buddhism* 18.1: 140–164.
- Wille, Klaus. 2008. *Sanskrihandschriften aus den Turfanfunden Teil 10*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner.