

In the Seeing just the Seeing - Bahiya Sutta

Gil Fronsdal

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So the inspiration for today's topic is that I'm going off to teach a retreat at IRC today, and it's related to the theme that we've selected for the week.

So it's kind of up for me as a topic today. And it's a discourse by the Buddha that I'm fond of teaching. And it's a very famous teaching, the teaching to a man called *Bhāhiya*. And some of you have heard before. And the Buddha gave this teaching twice, the records we have. And maybe I'll make reference to the second teaching because it clarifies a little bit what he was talking about.

And I like this story, partly because it's a story. It's a story that leads up to it. So there was a kind of a spiritual teacher who wasn't Buddhist, living far from where the Buddha was. Apparently it was close to Mumbai on the west coast of India. And he was in meditation one day, and he asked himself this question. Am I, in fact, enlightened, as people think I am?

And am I, or am I even on the path to awakening? So that's what he thought about. And as this fable kind of story is told, there was a deity flying around and heard him ask himself this question. And the deity came down and explained to him, no. You are not awakened, and you're not even on the path to enlightenment. So, but I love it that this man asked himself that question.

That's a very honest question to ask, checking it out. And to his credit, he said, well, who is enlightened? And who knows the path to awakening? Right. And the deity said, well, there's this person up in the northeast named the, called the Buddha. There's a Buddha up there who's awakened and knows the path. So he immediately set off to find the Buddha.

So again, he was heralded in his time and place as being somehow spiritually mature and great teacher. But that didn't keep him from going to find someone who could teach him. So

he made this long trek across much of India to come find the Buddha. And he happened to come across the Buddha at a time in the morning when the Buddha had his bowl out and was off to do his alms round to collect the food for the day. So probably the Buddha was hungry and then people were waiting to give him food in the village or something. And so, but he walked up to the Buddha anyway and said, can you tell me in brief, because I really need to know the essence of the *Dhamma*?

And the Buddha said, well, you know, this is not the right time. I'm going off for my meal. And so, *Bhāhiya* asked again, but I really would like to know, can you please tell me in brief? Because I'll listen to it and I'll put it to practice right away. But I'm about to go on alms round. No, not now.

He asks a third time. And there's a custom in India, if you ask someone three times, that's really serious. So, but the third time he asked, he said, well, you know, time is of the essence. I don't know when I'm going to die. I don't know when you're going to die. It could be any time now.

And, you know, I've come a long way. I really want to, you know, I don't want to wait any more time. Mm-hmm. So the Buddha said, okay. And so he gave him the teaching in brief. And so this is the fairly famous teaching.

So he said, so *Bhāhiya* said, But you never know, sir, when life is at risk. Either the Buddhas are my own. Let the Blessed One teach me the *Dhamma*. Let the Holy One teach me the *Dhamma*. That would be for my lasting welfare and happiness. In that case, *Bhāhiya*, you should train like this.

So the emphasis is not on giving him a teaching, but the path, how do you train, how do you practice? In the seen, and what you see, in the seen will be merely the seen. In the heard will be merely the heard. In the thought will be merely the thought. In the known will be merely the known.

That's how you should train. When you have trained in this way, you won't be involved with that. When you are not involved with that, you won't be with that. When you're not with that, you won't be here or beyond or between the two. Just this is the end of suffering.

Then due to this brief *Dhamma* teaching of the Buddha, *Bhāhiya*'s mind was right away freed from defilements through not clinging.

So he was really sincere, he was dedicated, probably he was well practiced in his own way. So

he was ripe to hear something and this is what he heard. Some people call this pointing out instruction, where you're briefly pointing to a way the mind can be, the mind can function, the awareness can be, that kind of can set someone free of the ways in which we cling and the grasp and hold on. And as the story goes on, But he then says, I don't know if he says thank you, but he should have. And he leaves, and he goes out on the road, and a stray cow then kills him.

And so it's kind of like evidence. You never know how quickly you have. You better get the teachings right away, because you never know, or get started on practice right away. Maybe that's why the story, the fable ends that way. And so this idea of in the seen, just the seen.

The other teaching that Buddha gives this teaching mentions how people often don't see just the seen. Involved in seeing is projection. We signify projection, things that we see. We signify meaning, purpose, we signify what it means for me, what it means for others, what I can do with it, what I don't like about it. There's a lot of complicated ways in which we get involved in what we see.

And some of this is deeply unconscious. In the story that I like to tell, that when I was 19, I traveled with some friends through Morocco. And I'd never been in a country like that as kind of an adult, almost an adult. And it was, you know, very different culture, very different clothes, very different. All kinds of things are so different in the Western, European, and American cultures I grew up in.

And I noticed something strange was happening to my mind, or to me, being there for the couple of weeks I was there. There was a little bit more clarity. Something was more open, more clear in my mind that I couldn't quite understand. It's just like, what's with my mind? What's happening here? And so I kind of went along.

I was happy enough with it. But what is this? And after a while I realized or identified it to be was that the men in Morocco back then wore yalabas, which are kind of like a robe. And they didn't wear, you know, pants and suits or, you know. So whatever the Western clothes were that in the West... I was constantly assumed I knew who people were based on their clothes, their hair, and all these things.

That person's a jock, that person's a businessman, that person's this and that. And I had all these judgments about people. So it wasn't just an innocent, look, there's someone walking around with a suit on, as if that's the end of the story. It's like, you know, for who I was at 19, the suit wasn't a good deal. And so I had all these judgments about people or assumptions about people or ideas about people based on what they look like.

In Morocco, I didn't have any of that, what I was accustomed to. And that was the clarity. That was the way my mind was more at ease because of that absence of kind of projecting and assuming and signifying that the mind operates under. So it was a very powerful experience for me to be able to see for the first time what my mind was up to when I wasn't paying attention. My subconscious, my unconscious, and how much of this was operating in my life.

And I think it was the beginning to put a question mark behind my assumptions and beginning of being able to see the active way in which my mind is constructing the world or building the world or signifying the world or projecting onto the world, all kinds of things. And in meditation, certainly, it's been a steady process of learning how to deconstruct these projections, deconstruct these assumptions, these biases that come along so automatically in us because we kind of are built to have them. Human beings in order to get around in the world effectively do generalize in order to understand what's going around. Otherwise, it's too much to try to reconstruct what's going on, understand fresh every time. So there's a kind of way in which we generalize and have these projections, but we also cause a tremendous amount of harm for them.

And we cause a lot of harm for ourselves because this signifying often has to do with our attachments, how we cling, how we have aversion, greed and hatred are part and parcel of this kind of projected kind of world that we live in. And so in meditation, to let that become quieter and quieter, more and more settled, and not to do it, until we're not telling ourselves stories, we're not fantasizing about the past and future, we're not caught up in dramas of resentment and desires and romance, and things get quieter and quieter, and our sense experience becomes simpler and simpler.

I remember I had, I've been a classic experience for many people on retreat is to have a noisy neighbor. Someone who's, you know, just really noisy. And I had someone in retreat to, for three months, sitting right next to me. The person would always come late into the hall, but there was this long kind of hardwood floor. The person had to cross to get to where I was, and he had this way of walking hard and fast, like I called it a lumberjack walk.

Okay. With heavy boots, kind of, you know, stomping. So we were all sitting there quietly. He'd always come late with this big stomping. And then he would sit down next to me.

And I guess he was, he must have been out running or something because it took him five minutes for him to catch his breath. And I... And then finally his breathing would quiet down, and then the jacket would come off that had velcro. So And so you can imagine that I had a little bit of this projecting mind, this signifying mind, signifying this meant something and what this meant for me and all kinds of things. But three months was a long time.

And what was quite remarkable was to have all my reactivity settle down over the days and weeks until it did nothing to me. All the sounds would be there, just sounds. In the heard, just the heard. In the seen, just the seen. And so this idea of what the Buddha is offering to *Bhāhiya* is a possibility, a way of being, where we stay radically simple in relationship to what we see, hear, even think, because we're not going to stop thinking, and even what we cognize or know.

How simple can you be with those things? How can you allow them to be their own pristine experience without the overlay of our concepts and idea? A very significant moment in my life, also kind of like about this projection, was when I was going off to the Zen monastery deep in the mountains. I'd never been there. And we were driving down this long valley, Carmel Valley, if you know it there, way behind Carmel Village to the east of it.

And there are some magnificent oak trees there. You know, California has great oak trees. And so I was just going to a new place, it was all new for me. And I was just sitting in the back and it was kind of quiet and calm and kind of maybe already kind of getting into the spirit of being in the monastery because I remember feeling quite cozy and nice and simple. And I was looking out from the back seat at these oak trees and I had an experience I've never had before, which was I could feel, I could see almost, almost like I could see.

That as I looked at the trees, I was overlaying on top of the trees, like painting on top of them a tree. I had a concept of tree that was a perfect fit for the oak trees for that moment. It was kind of like I could see the oak tree, but there was something added going on. There was a kind of a reconstruction in my mind of oak tree that I was kind of through which I was seeing the oak tree. Mostly we don't see we're doing that.

We see that we're just seeing a tree, innocently to see a tree. But I was doing something a little extra. And so that was like the last experience before going into the Zen monastery. And that also set me up to even see more deeply the ways in which the mind does more than just see and more than just hear and more than just think a thought. I think of thoughts as a way are innocent, kind of.

It's thinking which gets us in trouble. Thinking is a train of thoughts, one triggering the other. There's some kind of little attachment that we have a thought that triggers some other attachment or idea or conception. And so we're kind of building and continuing something rather than a thought arises and passes. So for *Bhāhiya*, who probably... you know, had done the equivalent in his time of being at a Zen monastery and practicing deeply.

And he was just poised to have something this pointed out to him. Hey, look, this is possible.

This is maybe the next step. In the seen, just the seen. In the heard, just the heard.

In the thought, just the thought. In the cognized, or the known, just the known. And then it goes on to say, if you do this... then you won't be involved in that. You won't be, or the involved is added, is an interpretive addition to the text.

It's a little bit vague what it means. You won't be defined by that. You won't be caught involved in that. Whatever that is, in what is seen, what is heard, what is thought, what is cognized, you won't be involved. You won't define yourself by it.

You won't be caught by it. In the other teaching on the same *sutta*, the Buddha talks about what involved means as being desire and lust and craving. So it's very powerful forms of desire. You won't be involved. You won't be doing those things.

And with that, you won't be making, you won't be defining yourself. You won't be making a self in relationship to it. And so if you're not involved, then the more powerful thing that happens is that there's no kind of subject-object going on. There's no that over there, and there's no here, and there's nothing going on in between. And that's a little strange to understand, but if your mind gets really, really quiet and clear, you wouldn't be concerned about protesting.

Or trying to figure out what does this mean, or this doesn't make any sense. There's no here or there, no subject and object. There's just the experience. There's the seen, it's just the seen. There's no defining it or caught up me as the seer, me as the hearer, me as the thinker.

And so this very simple way of being. And so this is a kind of pointing out for us in what's possible through this practice. And I offer it to you today, not that it's easy for you not to go home and do this, but rather that it's a reference point to pointing out that this is actually possible to have to admit now it maybe highlights for you in a useful way for mindfulness practice what's extra that you add, that you're probably adding extra. If you're fantasizing about... Oh, you know, all the New Year's presents you're going to get, you're involved. Romance, you're involved.

Resentment from work, you're involved. You're caught in something. You're tied up in something. If you are caught up in, like I'm trying to, you know, in meditation, if I just huff and puff in meditation long enough, I'll get enlightened. You're involved.

You're involved. You're projecting. You're signifying. You're caught up in that world. And if you have a noisy meditator next to you, rather than being upset with them and writing a letter to the president of the IMC board and saying about it, you would take responsibility for how your mind is reacting, how your mind is signifying it, and take a deep look at that.

So that's what I'm hoping the outcome of this talk will be, that it heightens in a wonderful way, in a receptive way, in a meaningful way, a deeper self-understanding of what you're adding to your experience. And it is possible from time to time in the right situation to put all that projections, all that signifying to rest. Let it come to a stop. And that is a wonderful thing to do. And just maybe, just maybe if you see that and relax enough, subtle enough, really in the present enough, one of two things might happen.

One is you discover how delicious it is. To be alive. Just to be alive is enough because just breathing and sensing and feeling and knowing it can be so simple. It's just peaceful and contentedly and everything is good in the world in a wonderful way in a few moments in that kind of state. The second thing might happen is something deep in your heart that's been held for a long time, held tight for a long time, might finally feel like it can relax and let go, release, which is what happened to *Bhāhiya* when he heard these teachings.

So that's the *Bhāhiya Sutta*. And so we have about 15 minutes before the potluck. You're all welcome to stay. You don't have to bring anything. The point is not the food is wonderful.

The point is the generosity of the people who brought it, thank you, and the receptivity and the socializing that, you know, get to meet people here. So what I'd like to suggest is that we take about maybe seven, eight minutes. To have those of you who like to be part of a little conversation, to sit with some people next to you, maybe introduce yourself, and maybe if you want to say something about this talk. Did it spark any interesting things for you or interesting protests? And whatever you'd like to do.

And talk about, just share a little bit. And... And then after about seven, eight minutes, learning Abel, we'll come back here like this and we can have some questions a little bit or a little discussion as a whole group. If you don't want to be part of these discussions, you're welcome to go if you'd like. You're welcome to go and maybe, I don't know if there's a setup to do for the Potluck.

Or you're also welcome, which some people choose to do, is just stay where you are and close your eyes and keep meditating. But if you do turn to people next to you, look around, make sure, maybe it's just two of you or three of you, but look around before you start talking, make sure that everyone who wants to be in a small discussion is being included. It's too easy for people to accidentally turn away from the person in the middle, and then they're left there kind of alone. So please, and I'll ring a bell in a few minutes.