

Nālandā Sutta

The Discourse at Nālandā

[Sāriputta's lion-roar; his last meeting with the Buddha]

(Sāmyutta Nikāya 47.12/5:159-161)

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(1) Sāriputta meets the Buddha for the last time

This sutta is found almost verbatim in **the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta** (M 16).¹ It also appears in **the Sampasādanīya Sutta** (D 28),² with a much longer account by Sāriputta of the Buddha's virtues and concludes in the same way. This is Sāriputta's last meeting with the Buddha. Knowing that he will die in seven days' time, he takes leave of the Buddha and visits his mother, and predeceases the Buddha on the full moon day of Kattikā (October-November).³ **Moggallāna**, his closest friend and the Buddha's left hand monk, passes away a fortnight later on the new moon day.⁴ Both Sāriputta and Moggallāna are older than the Buddha (DhA 1:73).

(2) Spiritual progress

At the end of the discourse, Sāriputta makes a very important statement regarding the training leading to awakening, that all the Buddhas of the past and of the future, and the present Buddha, all,

having overcome the five mental hindrances⁵ that are mental impurities sapping the strength of wisdom, then placing their minds firmly in the four focusses of mindfulness,⁶ then cultivating the seven factors of awakening⁷ according to reality, attain to the peerless full self-awakening. [10]

¹ D 16.1.16/2:81.

² D 28.1-2/3:99-101 = SD 10.12.

³ Tha 1158-61; DA 2:549 f; SA 3:214-221; J 1:391. On **Sāriputta's** parinirvana, see Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, 2004:5.26; for details, see Nyanaponika & Hecker, *Great Disciples of the Buddha*, 1997:47-59.

⁴ See **Ukkacelā S** (S 47.14/5:163-165) (SA 3:225; J 1:391)—see J 5:125 ff; DhA 3:65 ff for details of the attempts on his life. On **Moggallāna's** parinirvana, Piya Tan 2004:5.35; for details, see Nyanaponika & Hecker 1997:100-5.

⁵ **The 5 mental hindrances** (*pañca nīvaraṇā*) are: (1) sensual desire (*kāma-c, chanda*); (2) ill will (*vyāpāda*); (3) sloth and torpor (*thīna, middha*); (4) restlessness and worry (*uddhacca, kukkuccha*); (5) persistent doubt (*vicikicchā*). See **(Nīvaraṇā) Saṅgārava S** (S 46.55/5:121-126).

⁶ **The focusses of mindfulness** (*satipaṭṭhāna*) are: (1) **Contemplation of the body** (*kāyānupassanā*), comprising 14 exercises: the 4 postures, full awareness, reflection on foulness, the 4 elements [12-13], and the 9 “corpse” meditations; (2) **Contemplations of feelings** (*vedanā'nupassanā*), 1 exercise, considering feeling in terms of the affective quality—as either pleasant, painful or neutral—with each being examined again as being either carnal or spiritual; (3) **Contemplation of the mind (or mind-consciousness)** (*cittānupassanā*), 1 exercise, examining 16 states of mind coloured by their concomitants—**Pubba S** (S 51.11/5:263-266); (4) **Contemplation of mind-objects** (or “the nature of things”) (*dhammānupassanā*) [36-45] is the most diversified exercise involving these 5 schemes: the 5 hindrances, the 5 aggregates, the 6 sense-bases, the 7 factors of awakening, and the 4 noble truths. See **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22), **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10), **Ānāpānasati S** (M 118) and **Mahā Rāhul'ovāda S** (M 62).

⁷ **The 7 factors of awakening** (*satta (sam)bojjhaṅga*) are: (1) awakening factor of mindfulness (*sati sambojjhaṅga*); (2) awakening factor of mental investigation (*dhamma, vicaya sambojjhaṅga*); (3) awakening-factor of effort (*virīya sambojjhaṅga*); (4) awakening-factor of zest (*pīti sambojjhaṅga*); (5) awakening-factor of tranquillity (*passaddhi sambojjhaṅga*); (6) awakening-factor of concentration (*samādhi sambojjhaṅga*); (7) awakening-factor of equanimity (*upekkhā sambojjhaṅga*) (D 3:251, 282; Vbh 277).

In other words, a **comprehensive meditation practice** comprises three steps:⁸

- (1) the abandoning of the five mental hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇā*),
- (2) the calming of the mind through the four satipaṭṭhanas (*cattāro satipaṭṭhāna*), and
- (3) the proper development of seven awakening-factors (*satta bojjhaṅga*).

(3) Chronological problem

Bodhi notes a chronological problem in the account related in **the Cunda Sutta** (S 47.13),⁹ which follows immediately after the Nālandā Sutta in the Satipaṭṭhāna Saṃyutta, that

[it] poses a problem for the traditional chronology of the Buddha's life. In the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, Sāriputta's lion roar [**the Nālandā S**, S 47.12] takes place during what appears to be the Buddha's final journey along the route from Rājagaha to Vesālī. From Vesālī the Buddha heads for Kusinārā without returning to Sāvattihī, some 200 km to the west. Yet the present sutta shows the Buddha residing at Sāvattihī when he receives the news of Sāriputta's death. To preserve the traditional chronology, the Commentaries (SA here & DA 2:550) have the Buddha make an additional side trip to Savattihī following his rains retreat at Beluva, gāmaka,¹⁰ an excursion not mentioned in Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta. Sāriputta accompanies him on this trip to Sāvattihī, later takes his leave and returns to his native village Nālaka, gāma, where he falls ill and dies.

(S:B 1923 n157)

Further discussion on this chronology problem is found in SD 10.12.

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⁸ See "The Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas" = SD 13.1(6b).

⁹ S 47.13/5:161-163.

¹⁰ D 16.2.21-26/2:98 f.

The Discourse at Nālandā

(S 47.12/5:159-161)

[159]

1 At one time, the Blessed One was staying in the Pāvārika Mango Grove near Nālandā.

2 Then the venerable Sāriputta went up to the Blessed One. Having saluted the Blessed One, he sat down at one side. Seated thus at one side, he said this to the Blessed One:

3 “It is thus clear to me [Such is my faith],¹¹ venerable sir, that there never has been, there will never be, and there is now no other recluse or brahmin who is better or wiser than the Blessed One, that is to say, as regards self-awakening!”¹²

“Lofty indeed, are the words you utter, Sāriputta, and lordly, too! You are absolutely caught up in a lion-roar,¹³ saying, ‘It is clear to me [Such is my faith],¹⁴ venerable sir, that there never has been, there will never be, and there is now no other recluse or brahmin who is better or wiser than the Blessed One, that is to say, as regards self-awakening!’

4 Well now, Sāriputta, you were with the arhats [worthy ones], fully self-awakened ones, of past times, so that with your mind you have grasped the minds of all the Blessed Ones thus, ‘Such is the moral virtue of the Blessed Ones, such is their nature, such is their wisdom, such is how they live, such is their liberation?’¹⁵

“No, venerable sir.”

5 “Well then, Sāriputta, you will be with the arhats [worthy ones], fully self-awakened ones, of future times, so that with your mind you will grasp the minds of all the Blessed Ones thus, ‘Such is the moral virtue of the Blessed Ones, such is their nature, such is their wisdom, such is how they live, such is their liberation?’” [160]

“No, venerable sir.”

6 “Well then, Sāriputta, you know me as the arhat [worthy one], fully self-awakened one, so that with your mind you have grasped my mind thus, ‘Such is the moral virtue of the Blessed One, such is his nature, such is his wisdom, such is how he lives, such is his liberation?’”

“No, venerable sir.”

7 “So then, Sāriputta, you do not have the knowledge of the minds of the arhats [worthy ones], fully self-awakened ones of the past, the future and the present! But then, Sāriputta, why do you utter lofty [83] and lordly words; why are you absolutely caught up in a lion-roar, saying, ‘It is clear to me [Such is my faith], venerable sir, that there never has been, there will never be, and there is now no other recluse or brahmin who is better or wiser than the Blessed One, that is to say, as regards self-awakening!’?”

“No, venerable sir, I do not have the knowledge of the minds of the worthy fully self-awakened ones of the past, the future and the present. **But it is known through the drift of the Dharma.**¹⁶

¹¹ *Evam pasanno’ham...*

¹² Cf Pasenadi’s remarks about arhats, S 3.11/177-79 = Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, ch 8 “The Thundering Silence” §14.

¹³ *Ekamso gahito sīha, nādo nadito.*

¹⁴ “It is clear to me,” *evam passano.*

¹⁵ *Kin nu Sāriputta ye te ahesuṃ atītaṃ addhānaṃ arahanto sammā, sambuddhā, sabbe te Bhagavanto cetasā ceto paricca viditā, evaṃ, sīlā te Bhagavanto ahesuṃ iti pi, evaṃ, dhammā evaṃ, paññā evaṃ, vihārī evaṃ, vimuttā te Bhagavanto ahesuṃ iti pī ti.*

¹⁶ “The drift of the Dharma,” *dhamm’ anvaya* (D 2:83 = 3:100), ie by inference through the Dharma. CPD gives these meanings of *anvaya*: (1) series, lineage, succession; (2) successor, next, following; (3) ifc: following, descended from, dependent on; (4) (logical) connection, reasoning, inference, conclusion, consequence; (5) “positive concomitance.” I here follow the tr of PED 338b & Walshe, and guided by Comys which gloss *anvaya* as *anumāna* (inference) (DA 3:880, MA 3:352, SA 3:210). Sāriputta means that his lion-roar is based on his understanding and realization of the Dharma.

Parable of the frontier city

8 Venerable sir, it is just as if there were a royal frontier city¹⁷ with strong bastions and a strong wall with an archway that has a single gate, where a wise gate-keeper, skilled and intelligent, who keeps out strangers and lets in only those he knows. And he, constantly patrols and follows along a path, so that he would see any fissure or cleft in the walls (large enough) for even a cat to crawl through. But whatever larger creatures that enter or leave the city, must all enter or leave through this very gate.¹⁸

Even so, venerable sir, is the drift of the Dharma known to me.

9 Venerable sir, whatever arhat [worthy ones], fully self-awakened ones, there were of past times, all these Blessed Ones, having overcome the five mental hindrances,¹⁹ that are mental impurities that weaken wisdom, then placing their minds firmly in the four focusses of mindfulness,²⁰ then cultivating the seven factors of awakening²¹ [161] according to reality, attain to the peerless full self-awakening.²²

10 “Sadhu! Sadhu! Therefore, Sāriputta, you should frequently speak this Dharma exposition to the monks and the nuns, to the layman followers and the laywoman followers. Even though some empty persons²³ may have doubt or uncertainty regarding the Tathagata, when they hear this Dharma exposition their doubt or uncertainty regarding the Tathagata will be removed.”²⁴

— evaṃ —

050528; 051221; 081221a

¹⁷ Parables of the city are popular in early Buddhism. See eg **Nagara S** (S 12.65) = SD 14.2; **Kimsuka S** (S 35.204/4:194 f), see SD 2.17(8).

¹⁸ This is a beautiful parable for mental cultivation. Cf another “frontier city” parable for mental cultivation in **Kimsuka S** (S 35.245/4:194 f) = SD 2.17.8 (2003) where the Buddha explains the imageries he uses.

¹⁹ **The 5 mental hindrances** (*pañca nīvaraṇā*) are: (1) sensual desire (*kāma-c, chanda*); (2) ill will (*vyāpāda*); (3) sloth and torpor (*thīna, middha*); (4) restlessness and worry (*uddhacca, kukkuccha*); (5) persistent doubt (*vicikicchā*). See (**Nīvaraṇā**) **Saṅgārava S** (S 46.55/5:121-126).

²⁰ **The focusses of mindfulness** (*satipaṭṭhāna*) are: (1) **Contemplation of the body** (*kāyānupassanā*), comprising 14 exercises: the 4 postures, full awareness, reflection on foulness, the 4 elements [12-13], and the 9 “corpse” meditations; (2) **Contemplations of feelings** (*vedanā’nupassanā*), 1 exercise, considering feeling in terms of the affective quality—as either pleasant, painful or neutral—with each being examined again as being either carnal or spiritual; (3) **Contemplation of the mind (or mind-consciousness)** (*cittīnupassanā*), 1 exercise, examining 16 states of mind coloured by their concomitants—**Pubba S** (S 51.11/5:263-266); (4) **Contemplation of mind-objects** (or “the nature of things”) (*dhammānupassanā*) [36-45] is the most diversified exercise involving these 5 schemes: the 5 hindrances, the 5 aggregates, the 6 sense-bases, the 7 factors of awakening, and the 4 noble truths. See **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22), **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10), **Ānāpānasati S** (M 118) and **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 62).

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²² *Pañca, nīvaraṇe pahāya cetaso upakkilese paññāya dubbalīkaraṇe catusu satipaṭṭhānesu supatiṭṭhita, citto satta, bojjhaṅge yathā, bhūtaṃ bhāvevā anuttaraṃ sammā, sambodhiṃ abhisambuddho ti.*

²³ “Empty persons,” *mogha, purisā*, alt tr “hollow persons.”

²⁴ This conclusion is also closes **Sampasādaniya S** (D 28.21/3:116) verbatim excepting the *sādhu* exclamations. This passage, however, is not found in **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.1.16/2:81.).