

12a

(Pañcaka) Nāgita Sutta

The (Fives) Discourse to Nāgita | A 5.30

Theme: The 5 meditations on revulsion

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1 Sutta summary and teachings

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY AND HIGHLIGHTS

1.1.1 Sutta summary

The **(Pañcaka) Nāgita Sutta** (A 5.30), the (fives) discourse to Nāgita, records the narrative behind a teaching given by the Buddha to his personal attendant **Nāgita** in a thick wood outside Icchā,naṅgala, in Kosala, where they are staying with a large community of monks. When the brahmin housemasters of the village hear that the Buddha is staying in the forest nearby, they come in a great crowd with food-offerings. [§6]

As they excitedly wait at the forest entrance with their offerings, the Buddha, hearing their din, refuses to see them. He gives this lion-roar: “**May I never meet with fame, Nāgita, nor fame ever meet with me.**” He adds that only those unable to meditate or lack spiritual joy would be drawn to such offerings—“Let him enjoy for himself that dung of pleasure,¹ that sloth of pleasure, those pleasures of gain, honour and praise!” [§8].

Nāgita then suggests that the Buddha should meet them. After all, he declares, the Buddha is so famous that they would throng to meet him wherever he goes [§9], just like heavy mountain showers flowing from the heights down the slopes [§10].

The Buddha only repeats his lion-roar, this time for Nāgita’s benefit [§11].²

The Buddha then gives a set of 5 meditations on revulsion, which closes the Sutta. [1.1.2]

1.1.2 The 5 meditations on revulsion

Of the 3 suttas given to Nāgita—A 5.30; A 6.42; A 8.86 [4.1.1]—the **(Pañcaka) Nāgita Sutta** (A 5.30) stands alone in its teachings, which are not found in the other 2 suttas. It gives a set of 5 insights into spiritual revulsion (*nibbidā*) [3.2.2], meaning a clear rejection of any thought of the following:

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|--|--|
| (1) attachment to food | it all ends up as dung; |
| (2) attachment to people | those dear to us bring us suffering; ³ |
| (3) attachment to the body | a “sign of beauty” is a lustful thought but the body is foul; |
| (4) attachment to things (sense-stimuli) | they are all impermanent; hence, cannot be owned; |
| (5) true reality itself (the 5 aggregates) | our body and mind arise and vanish away every moment. ⁴ |

¹ On *mīḷha, sukha*, see also **Laṭṭukikôpama S** (M 66,19/1:454,14), SD 28.11; **Araṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 139,9.2/3:233,-22, 13(3)/3:236,13), SD 7.8; **(Pañcaka) Nāgita S** (A 5.30,8.4/3:31,13, 11/3:29), SD 55.12a; **(Chakka) Nāgita S** (A 6.-42,8.4/3:342,11, 11/3:27), SD 55.12b; **(Atṭhaka) Yasa S** (A 8.86,8.4/4:341,21, 11/4:42,11), SD 55.13. See [3.4.1.3].

² Up to this point, the sutta narrative of **A 5.30** is the same as those of **A 6.42** (SD 55.12b) and of **A 8.86** (SD 55.-13). The teaching (the set of 5 insights into revulsion) of A 5.30, however, differs completely from that of the other 2 suttas.

³ On this teaching, see **Bhadraka S** (S 42.11,6-13), SD 55.7.

⁴ On A 5.30, see also SD 55.12b (1.2.2).

1.1.3 Nāgita

1.1.3.1 Nāgita Thera 1 (DPPN). There are two prominent persons named **Nāgita** in the Pali canon. The first is an arhat, a Sakya elder from Kapila, vatthu. He renounced after hearing the teaching of **the Madhu, piṇḍika Sutta** (M 18 @ SD 6.14) (ThaA 1:192). In the time of Padum’uttara Buddha, he was a brahmin named Nārada who uttered 3 stanzas in praise of the Buddha. He was once a king named Sumitta.⁵ He is probably identical with Attha, sandassaka Thera of the Apadāna.⁶

1.1.3.2 Nāgita Thera 2 (DPPN). The monk Nāgita was, for a time, the Buddha’s personal attendant (*buddh’upaṭṭhāka*).⁷ He was the maternal uncle of the novice **Sīha**, who is said to have addressed him by his clan-name, Kassapa. He was fat and lazy, and got most of his work done by Sīha.⁸ His love of food is hinted by his enthusiastic suggestion that the Buddha accept the alms-offerings of the brahmins [§9; 3.3.3.1].

2 The Buddha disapproves of noisy crowds

2.1 LIKE A FISHERMEN’S PLUNDER

2.1.1 A high point in the 3 suttas—A 5.30,6, A 6.42,6, A 8.86,6 [4.1.1]—is when the Buddha hears the din made by the crowd of brahmins at the forest entrance. The Buddha asks Nāgita, “What’s that great noise, Nāgita, that din? It sounds to me **like fishermen plundering fish!**” (*ke pana kho nāgita uccā.sadda, mahā.saddā kevaṭṭā maññe maccha, vilope’ti*).⁹ The Buddha’s reaction and this line recur in all the 3 suttas in apparently the same context.¹⁰

2.1.2 The Pali metaphor—“like fishermen plundering fish!”—should be taken to mean “bickering or haggling over fish” or “hauling in fish.” In fact, the Commentary gives these 2 explanations:

- (1) the public gather around where fishermen have set up baskets full of fish, and make din or racket, asking to buy a fish or a string of fish, complaining, “You gave him a big fish, but a small one to me!” and so on;
- (2) the fishermen hauling fish with their nets, create a din or commotion, shouting at fishes that went into the net or do not enter it, it is caught or not caught, and so on. (MA 3:173; UA 181)

⁵ Tha 86; ThaA 1:192 f.

⁶ Ap 3.137/1:168.

⁷ D 1:151; DA 1:310; AA 1:292; J 4:95,14. During the 1st 20 years of the ministry, the foll monks have, at some time, been the Buddha’s personal attendant: Nāga, samāla, Nāgita, Meghiya, Upavāṇa, Sāgata and Sunakkhatta (VA 1:178; UA 217; ThaA 3:111); also Cunda Saman’uddesa (DA 2:418; ApA 307); Rādha, too (AA 1:292); and Nanda (JA 4:95). The Buddha’s personal attendant is listed as one of the 7 kinds of prominent persons arising in ancient India, ie, the buddha (*buddha*), pratyeka-buddhas (*pacceka, buddha*), the great disciples (*mahā, sāvakā*), the Buddha’s personal attendants (*buddh’upaṭṭhāka*), the Buddha’s (chief) disciples (*buddha, sāvaka*), the Buddha’s mother (*buddha, mātā*), the Buddha’s father (*buddha, pitā*), and world monarchs (*cakka, vatti rāja*) (AA 2:36). The only person who came close to being a “world monarch” would be emperor Aśoka. Clearly, the term—following his descriptions in the suttas, such as Mahā Sudassana S (D 17), SD 36.12—is a myth of ideal kingship: SD 36.9 (3); SD 36.10 (2).

⁸ D 1:150 f; DA 1:310; ThaA 1:193.

⁹ The fishermen’s plunder passage recurs in (**Pañcaka**) **Nāgita S** (A 5.30/3:31,4), SD 55.12a, (**Chakka**) **Nāgita S** (A 6.42/3:342,2), SD 55.12b; see foll n.

¹⁰ Besides the 3 suttas [4.1.1] mentioned, this stock passage on the “fishermen plundering fish” also recurs in: **Bhāriyā S** (A 7.59/4:91,15), SD 90.3; (**Aṭṭhaka**) **Yasa S** (A 8.86/4:341,12), SD 55.13; **Yasoja S** (U 3.3/24,27), 28.9c.

The common ideas suggested by these two explanations are those of a crowd and a commotion engaged in worldly activities. In other words, this is just the contrary of the monastic life of renunciation.

2.2 Public knowledge of the Buddha's love of seclusion

2.2.1 The Udumbarikā Sīha,nāda Sutta (D 25) makes a few interesting observations regarding the reactions of non-Buddhists to the love of solitude and quiet by Buddha and his disciples. The Sutta opens with a gathering of wanderers led by **Nigrodha**, engaged in a cacophony of worldly chatter in the Udumbarikā's wanderers' park. With the arrival of the Buddha's lay disciple, **Sandhāna**, the wanderer leader Nigrodha at once hushed up his gathering, thus:

"Good sirs, be quiet please! Don't make a noise, good sirs! The houselord Sandhāna, a disciple of the recluse Gotama, is approaching. He is one of those white-dressed lay disciples¹¹ of the recluse Gotama in Rājagaha. And these good folks are fond of quiet; they are taught to be quiet and speak in praise of quiet. If he sees that this company is quiet, he will most likely want to come and visit us." (D 25,3/3:38), SD 1.4

Clearly here, it is not the nature of the wanderers to be quiet or contemplative. Knowing the Buddhist love of peace and solitude, Nigrodha gets his disorderly crowd into proper peaceful decorum to impress Sandhāna so that he will "most likely want to come and visit us." It would benefit the wanderers to have another lay patron.

2.2.2 During the ensuing conversation between them, **Sandhāna**, after noting how inappropriately noisy the wanderers are, praises the Buddha's love of solitude in these beautiful words:

"The Blessed One's way is different—he resorts to a dwelling in the forest, in the jungle, free from noise, with little sound, alone with the winds, away from humans, conducive for seclusion." (D 25,4/3:38 f), SD 1.4

Nigrodha, clearly annoyed, retorts:

"Well now, houselord, do you know with whom the recluse Gotama talks? With whom does he converse? From whom does he find his clarity of wisdom? The recluse Gotama is destroyed by the solitary life. He is awkward in an assembly. He is no good at conversation. Just as a one-eyed cow, walking in circles, keeps to the fringes (of a field), the recluse Gotama is only occupied with the fringes of things.

Indeed, houselord, if the recluse Gotama were to come to this assembly, we will baffle him with a single question, we will knock him over like an empty pot!" (D 25,5/3:38), SD 1.4

2.2.3 Upon seeing the Buddha approaching, Nigrodha then at once cautions his cacophonous crowd again, this time saying:

"Good sirs, be quiet please! Don't make a noise, good sirs!¹² The recluse Gotama is walking up and down in the open on the Sumāgadhā bank. He is fond of quiet, and speaks in praise of quiet. If he sees that this company is quiet, he will surely want to come and visit us." (D 25,6.2/3:39), SD 1.4

¹¹ Lay disciple, *sāvaka gīhi*, lit householder disciple.

¹² We see a similar response from the wanderer Sakul'udāyi in **Mahā Sakul'udāyi S** (M 77,5), SD 49.5a.

At the end of the long exposition given by the Buddha to Nigrodha and his gathering, Nigrodha is humbled and apologizes to the Buddha, although neither he nor his gathering attain the path or convert.

2.3 THE BUDDHA’S DISAPPROVAL OF NOISINESS

2.3.1 Decorum

Despite Nāgita’s imploring the Buddha—“Let the Blessed One now consent! This is the time ... ” [§9], the Buddha refuses to meet the noisy brahmins, and, in effect, rejects their offerings, too. The Buddha’s response is significant: the lesson here is that offerings to the sangha should not only be proper but also be properly given (allowable gifts given in a proper way), given with calm joy before, during and after the giving. With this mental presence, the givers will gain the full benefit of their charity. The Dharma, too, is transmitted and perpetuated for posterity.

2.3.2 Disciplining noisy monks

2.3.2.1 The Cātumā Sutta (M 67), like the 3 suttas here [4.1.1], opens with a crowd making a din—this time, it is “some 500 monks, led by Sāriputta and Moggallāna, the 2 chief disciples, who have arrived in Cātuma to see the Blessed One. The visiting monks are exchanging greetings with the resident monks, while lodgings were being prepared, and bowls and robes were being put away—that was the great noise, the din.”¹³

2.3.2.2 It’s interesting that despite being led by the Buddha’s chief disciples, these new monks are unmindfully noisy. It is possible that they are **new monks** and have yet to learn all about monastic discipline.¹⁴ More likely, however, both Sāriputta and Moggallāna are being very compassionate to these new monks, and are giving them some latitude.

The Buddha, as their teacher, understandably, wishes to ensure that they learn to keep decorum as early as possible. Just as the Buddha refuses to meet the noisy brahmins (despite their lavish alms offerings), in the Cātumā Sutta, the Buddha refuses to meet the monks, too—in fact, he dismisses them. When we lose touch with the Dharma, we lose touch with the Buddha; when we lose touch with the Buddha, we lose touch with the Dharma.

2.3.2.3 The Cātumā Sutta then tells us that both the Sakyas and Brahma Sahampati himself interceded on behalf of the noisy monks. The Buddha reconciled with the monks, and then, more mindful and disciplined, come to see the Buddha. It is an occasion for various Dhamma lessons, all of which benefit the monks greatly.¹⁵ Taking this as a case in point, even a precedent, we can safely surmise that the Buddha would, in due course, in that pre-noon itself, consent to the brahmins making the offerings to the community of monks. [3.6]

3 Related teachings

3.1 LION-ROAR

3.1.1 Every one of the 3 suttas taught to Nāgita in this set—A 5.30, A 6.42, A 8.86 [4.1.1]—has more than one lion-roars (*sīha, nāda*), which is rare for such suttas. Normally, a sutta will only have *one* lion-roar

¹³ M 67,3 n, (SD 34.7).

¹⁴ It is possible that they were erstwhile followers of Saṅjaya who followed the newly converted chief disciples. See SD 34.7 (3.1.1).

¹⁵ See M 67,10-20 (SD 34.7).

[3.1.2]. The Buddha makes only 2 lion-roars (each with a different significance) in **A 5.30**, but roars 3 lion-roars in **A 6.42** and **A 8.86**. The lion-roars made by the Buddha in these 3 suttas are as follows:

- (1) “May I never meet with *fame*, Nāgita, nor *fame* ever meet with me” 1 A 5.30 A 6.42 A 8.86 [3.2]
- (2) “May I never meet with *fame*, Nāgita, nor *fame* ever meet with me” 2 A 5.30 A 6.42 A 8.86 [3.3]
- (3) “When, Nāgita, I am traveling on a highway and do not see anyone ahead of me or behind me, or even in the act of defaecating and urinating—at that time I am at ease.” A 6.42 A 8.86 [1.3]¹⁶

As we can see, the 1st two lion-roars are the same and are found in the same place in all the 3 suttas [§§8 + 11]. However, in every sutta, its pair of identically worded lion-roars have each a different significance [3.2 + 3.3]. The 3rd lion-roar, a unique one, is not found in A 5.30, since it closes differently from the other 2 suttas.

3.1.2 Definition of “lion-roar”

3.1.2.1 The Majjhima Commentary defines a “lion-roar” (*sīha,nāda*) as a statement of moral courage (*vesārajjā*); hence, of supremacy and fearlessness, one that cannot be debunked.¹⁷ It is said that even the gods feel fear when they listen to the Buddha’s teaching of impermanence—they realize that despite their astronomically long lifespan, they will still die. When the lion roars, hearing it, the jungle animals fear and cower, flee back into their respective hiding places. We see such a theme in **the (Anicca) Sīha Sutta** (A 4.33) and **the (Dasaka) Sīha,nāda Sutta** (A 10.21).¹⁸

3.1.2.2 A lion-roar is made either by the Buddha himself or by his disciples, by way of a public declaration of faith in the Dharma. Each lion-roar is, as a rule, unique to a sutta—the Buddha or his disciple makes a declaration of a specific or special worthy quality in the Buddha or in the disciple, rooted in **wise faith** (*saddhā*). **The Sampasādanīya Sutta** (D 28), for example, is Sāriputta’s lion-roar on the Buddha’s 16 unsurpassable qualities.¹⁹

3.1.2.3 However, as we have noted, all the 3 very short suttas here [3.1.1] have 2 same lion-roars (A 5.3) but the 2 latter one (A 6.42 + A 8.86) have a 3rd unique lion-roar each. While the first of the pair of lion-roars reflects the Buddha’s non-identifying with fame, the second roar reflects his revulsion towards gains. The 3rd unique lion-roar reflects the Buddha’s joy of solitude or his *revulsion towards the worldly crowd*. [3.1.2.5]

3.1.2.4 **The (Kassapa) Mahā Sīha,nāda Sutta** (D 8) describes a **lion-roar** as a public declaration, as follows: “The ascetic Gotama roars his **lion-roar** in company and confidently, they question and he answers, he wins them over with his answers, they find it pleasing and are satisfied with what they have heard, they show that they are satisfied, they practise for the sake of realizing true reality, and they are satisfied with the practice.”²⁰

¹⁶ See SD 55.12b (1.3).

¹⁷ MA 2:7; AA 2:303, 4:171.

¹⁸ Respectively A 4.33/2:33 f = S 22.78/3:84-86 (SD 42.10) & A 10.21/5:32-36 (SD 81.2).

¹⁹ D 28/3:99-116 (SD 14.14).

²⁰ D 8,22/1:175 (SD 73.12).

In a key lion-roar—in **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16)—the Buddha famously declares that the 4 types of saints are found only in his teaching. There is no mention of other kinds of Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, eternal or cosmic, but only the 1st noble saint (the streamwinner), the 2nd noble saint (the once-re-turner), the 3rd noble saint (the non-returner) and the 4th noble saint (the arhat).²¹

The point is very clear: awakening or liberation can only be attained when we understand and accept the Buddha’s teaching of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self²² through self-effort and self-understanding. **There is no salvation outside of self-awakening.**

3.1.2.5 Although the suttas, as a rule, depict the lion-roar, whether by the Buddha or a disciple, as public declaration of faith in the Buddha Dharma or some special related quality or qualities, we see in the triad of suttas here—A 5.30, A 6.42, A 8.86—that the lion-roar is made before a single monk, the fat and lazy Nāgita [1.1.3.2].

A few points are noteworthy here.

- (1) The Buddha roars his 1st lion-roar to reject the noisy crowd and their lavish offerings [§§7-8]. [3.2]
- (2) He roars his 2nd lion-roar to counter Nāgita’s excitement in the face of fame and food [§§9-11]. [3.3]
- (3) In effect, the Buddha is roaring his lion-roar on account of a large crowd of admirers at the forest entrance.
- (4) His lion-roar has been recorded here, by the Buddha’s great insight, for our benefit even today!²³

3.1.3 Occurrences of the lion-roar

The lion-roar (*sīha,nāda*) is the highlight, even theme, of a number of suttas, some of which bear the word *sīha,nāda* in its title.

Mahā,sīhanāda Sutta	M 12	the Bodhisattva’s struggles; the Buddha’s awakening	SD 49.1
Cūḷa,sīha,nāda Sutta	M 11	witnessing the true teaching and its missiology	SD 49.2
Udumbarikā Sīha,nāda S	D 25	the Buddha’s lion-roar on the Dharma; religious dialogue	SD 1.4
Bakkula Sutta	M 124	the arhat Bakkula’s lion-roar: self-reliance	SD 3.15.
Dhātu Vibhaṅga Sutta	M 140	Pukkusāti: knowing the teacher through the teaching	SD 4.17
Kamma Mallikā Sutta	A 4.197	queen Mallikā’s lion-roar on her spiritual qualities	SD 39.10
Nakula Sutta	A 6.16	Nakula,mātā’s faith in the Dharma: streamwinning	SD 5.2
Pinḍola Bhāra,dvāja Sutta	U 4.6	the foremost of lion-roarers: clearing others’ doubts	SD 27.6a ²⁴

3.2 GAINS, HONOUR, PRAISES: REVULSION

3.2.1 Revulsion towards fame

In the narrative introduction of all the 3 suttas—A 5.30, A 6.42, A 8.86 [4.1.1]—when the Buddha is told by his attendant, Nāgita, that the din at the forest entrance is that of a crowd of brahmins who have come with lavish offerings of almsfood, he at once declares: **“May I never meet with fame, Nāgita, nor fame ever meet with me”** (*māhaṃ nāgita yasena samāgamam, mā ca mayā yaso*) [§8]. This is an example of the Buddha’s beautiful language (a kind of aesthetics) that inspires us to appreciate the Dharma.

²¹ D 16,5.27/2:152 (SD 9); M 11,2/1:64 f (SD 49.2). For details, see SD 36.10 (3).

²² On the 3 characteristics, see SD 1.2 (2); SD 18.2 (2.2).

²³ For more details on the lion-roar, see SD 1.4 (2.2).

²⁴ See esp (1.2+2.3).

This simple yet elegant words of the Buddha have deep significance, which we will examine in some detail in the rest of this section [3.2.2, 3.3]. The sentence is an example of **an antimetabole**, a kind of chiasmus [5.1.2].

3.2.2 Rejecting fame

3.2.2.1 The first half of the Buddha's famous remark, "**May I never meet with fame**" [3.2.1], reflects how he feels **revulsion** (*nibbidā*) towards fame (*yasa*), that he totally rejects it. "**Fame**" serves as a shorthand for "**gain, honour, praise**" (*lābha, sakkāra, siloka*). Spiritually, this is the Buddha's response against monastics behaving like the laity or turning to the world: seeing it as a source of gains (wealth and pleasure), honour (fame and power), and praises (charisma and a great following). In short, this is the makings of an exploitative guru, or simply, a failed teacher who puts himself first and above the Dharma itself.

3.2.2.2 The Pali term for the Buddha's "**revulsion**" towards gain, honour, praise and the way of the world is called *nibbidā*. Its verb is *nibbindati*, which is resolved as *nis* (prefix meaning "out, away from") + *vindati*, "he finds," from √*vid*²⁵, "to find." The literal English translation, "he finds out," hints at some kind of direct knowledge of true reality. Its translation as "revulsed (at)," "repelled (by)," or even "disgusted (with)," may appear strong to some, but the Dharma-inspired or awakened mind apparently sees worldly experience just as we would recoil at seeing a festering body or foul dung (MA 3:129)!²⁵

3.2.2.3 When the Buddha declares, "**Nor (may) fame ever meet with me,**" he means that he simply rejects anything in this world that makes him great. He is revulsed at whatever that makes a statement of him (of seeing him as what he is not) instead of seeing his real and true **state**, that of one fully self-awakened. For "fame (to) meet with me" means to be shaped by the fancies and fads of others, to water down the *state* of awakening. When one fails to know or see the Buddha's true state, one will not be awakened oneself, nor even head for the path in this life.

When we examine ourself as an unawakened person, consciously or unconsciously,

- we are likely to be fascinated with **gain**; we are conditioning ourself to face loss;
- we are likely to love **fame**; we are conditioning ourself to hate obscurity or ill-fame;
- we are moved by **praise**; we are conditioning ourself to be shaken by blame;
- we are uplifted by **joy**; we are conditioning ourself to be crushed by pain or sorrow.

These are **the 8 worldly conditions** (*aṭṭha loka, dhamma*), popularly known as the "8 winds" since they blow us around, when we identify with any of them. They are our daily storms: we are so used to being tossed around that seem to have forgotten what fair weather is. When we have a chance to get out of these storms, or they seem to stop for a while, then we realize how beautiful and productive that peace is. Then, we would rather avoid storms. We would be revulsed²⁶ by the damages that they incur and will incur.

²⁵ On "revulsion," see *Nibbidā*, SD 20.1; for longer pericope: SD 20.1 esp (2.2.2); shorter pericope: *Alagaddûpama S* (M 22,29), SD 3.13.

²⁶ Lexically, "to revulse" (active) "to drag, draw, or pull back; to tear away" (OED) and is rare; the passive form, "to be revulsed" is even rarer. However, the Buddhist sense is clear, from a back-formation from "revulsion" (n) and "revulsive" (adj), and serves well as a verb for them. It can be used either transitively or intransitively (usually with "at" or "with").

3.3 GAIN, HONOUR, PRAISE: NON-IDENTIFYING

3.3.1 Non-identifying with fame

3.3.1.1 We have noted that the Buddha utters his lion-roar on **fame** twice in each of the 3 suttas [4.1.1]. The 1st time is response to the noisy brahmin crowd gathered at the forest entrance; the 2nd time is for Nāgita's benefit—on account of his interest in that crowd and its offerings [3.3.3.1]. Dharma-wise, there is another, profounder, reason for the 2nd lion-roar. While we have reflected on the Buddha's 1st lion-roar as his revulsion with fame [3.2.1], the 2nd lion-roar [§11] reflects his **non-identifying** (*atam, mayatā*) with **gain, honour and praise** (*lābha, sakkāra, siloka*), the 3 worldly poisons that a monastic must do his best to avoid.²⁷

3.3.1.2 In a sutta from the “connected teachings of gain and honour” (*Lābha, sakkāra Saṃyutta*, S 17), **the (*Lābha, sakkāra*) Sigāla Sutta** (S 17.8), the Buddha compares a monastic whose mind is overcome and obsessed with gain, honour and praise does not feel at ease whether he goes into an empty hut, or to the foot of a tree, or in the open air; wherever he stands, sits or lies down—there he is at a loss and meets with disaster (*anaya, vyāsaṇa*). This is characteristic of a worldly monastic.

He is like a jackal afflicted with mange (*ukkaṇṭaka*), a terrible skin ailment.²⁸ He feels not at ease whether he is in a cave, or at the foot of a tree, or in the open air. Wherever he goes, wherever he stands, wherever he sits, wherever he lies down, there he meets with loss and disaster. (S 17.8/2:230 f)

3.3.1.3 When we lack a clear understanding of true reality, that is, the universality of **impermanence**—that everything is impermanent, changing, becoming other—we will be profoundly troubled by notions of an imagined **perfect but suffering** world, but over which we seem to have little or no control. Hence, we are caught in a mindset or religion of “power” and “control.”

When we think in such terms, we fall into a persistent and pervasive void and angst, burned and burdened by a fear of loss of what we think we have, driven by a thirst for what we seem not to have; gripped by a fear of retribution for what we have done or not done, by a fear of death since we have life. Hence, we blindly grasp at the straws of an Almighty God, an immortal life or an eternal heaven. The painful reality is that such ideas are simply incongruous and dissonant with the real world that is impermanent, unsatisfactory and impersonal.

Note that the teaching of “non-identification” works to counter any attraction or euphoria towards the notion of a “Thing,” “Thingness,” “Essence,” “Being”—especially that of an abiding self, immortal soul, eternal heaven, Almighty God—that only *promises* us a sense of survival (a heaven or afterlife). When we identify with such imagined ideas of permanence and perfection, we are shackled and fettered with notions of sin and guilt.

Our spiritual freedom starts when we simply refuse to identify with any view that others impose upon us and then falsely promise to succour us! We are all accountable for our actions—unless we are afflicted with some serious cognitive degeneration. Good and bad are done by us alone; we must each bear our burden of karma (intentional deeds and their fruits). By our wholesome actions, too, we will free ourself.

The self is the master of the self;
With a self that is well-tamed, indeed,

for, who else can the master be?
one gains a master that is hard to find.

(Dh 160; cf380)²⁹

²⁷ See the 43 suttas of *Lābha, sakkāra Saṃyutta* (S 17) all of which directly or indirectly deal with the dangers that gain, honour and praise bring upon a monastic (S 17.1-43/2:225-243).

²⁸ Spelt *ukkaṇṭaka*, *ukkaṇḍaka*, *ukkaṇṇaka*. Described at SA 2:2:208,13.

3.3.2 Disengaging from fame

3.3.2.1 *Atam,mayatā* is an ancient Pali term for not identifying with anything *in* this world or *of* this world (since everything is in a flux of arising and passing away). The term is analysed as comprising *na* (not) + *taṃ* (that) + *maya* (made of) + *tā* (a suffix denoting an abstract noun), literally meaning “a state (or condition) of making nothing of that” or “having nothing to do with it.”³⁰

Note that this teaching is specially meant to counter any notion of “thing,” “thingness” or “essence” that we want to identify with. When we lack a clear understanding of true reality, that is impermanence, we are profoundly troubled by a sense of **imperfection** or sense of lack. Hence, we seek to fill that void with countable things or bigness or fixed ideas.

The **real** situation is the other way around: it is because we identify with things and the world that we feel we want them; hence, we lack them. We stand in the light, see our shadow, run after it, try to catch it—and wonder why we can’t! So, we create a theology behind this failure. **No want, no lack.**³¹

3.3.2.2 The Buddha’s remark, “May I never meet with fame, ... nor fame ever meet with me,” can and should be reflected by way of **non-identification** (*atam,mayatā*). The first half of the sentence, “**May I never meet with fame,**” means that he does not identify with the **crowd**, with what it has to offer, with fame—that which attracts a crowd and its things in the first place.

The crowd does not think: it only acts and reacts, like the wind blowing about unpredictably and mercilessly. Consciously or unconsciously, we are easily caught up with the restless crowd, tossed about by the 8 worldly winds of gain and loss, fame and ill-fame, praise and blame, joy and sorrow [3.2.2.3]. In fact, most of us are not used to remaining still (like a shady and fruitful tree): we are more excited by being tossed about. Otherwise, we find our life is simply dull. This is **the Sisyphian effect**.³²

3.3.2.3 The second half of the Buddha’s lion-roar read: “**nor (may) fame ever meet with me.**” This half-sentence means that the Buddha does not identify with **anything is the world**, even when it makes him look great. Even when fame *comes* to him, he neither wants it nor needs it. Hence, he declares: Let one who is unable to meditate, who has no spiritual joy at all, have it—“that dung of pleasure, that sloth of pleasure.”

Here, the Buddha is reminding Nāgita and us of the true nature of food: it ends up as faeces and it makes us lazy. We need to be really mindful about it, and also the other kinds of “foods” (that feed our mind): gain, honour and praise. [§8].

Since he does *not* identify with any of them, he is not defined or limited by them. He has left all this behind and found **awakening**. He has left behind all the things of the crowd and the crowded world; he has found and enjoys what can never be lost: the joy of awakening.

3.3.3 Nāgita’s inviting the Buddha to “consent”

3.3.3.1 Why does Nāgita beseech the Buddha to “**consent**” (*adhivaseti*) to the brahmins’ offerings of food? We are told that Nāgita is a fat and lazy monk, often neglecting his chores and tasks, and getting his nephew, Sīha, to get them done [1.1.3.2]. Understandably, he is more excited about the alms offer-

²⁹ On self-accountability, see **Deva,dūta S** (M 130,4.5 passim), SD 2.23. On self-refuge, see **The one true refuge**, SD 3.1 (3.2); SD 27.3 (3.1.1).

³⁰ For details on *atam,mayatā*, see **Atam,maya S** (A 6.104), SD 19.13(2.4); **Atam,mayatā**, SD 19.13.

³¹ This identification makes us “measure” self and others so that we are caught in **conceit** (*māna*), which is an interesting topic in itself: **Me: The nature of conceit**, SD 19.2a.

³² On the Sisyphus myth, see SD 23.3 (1); SD 48.3 (1.2.2.2); SD 49.2 (4.3.2.1); SD 50.8 (1.2.1.7; 2.3.2.6).

ings of various dishes than he is concerned with the religious decorum and spiritual readiness of the noisy crowd. In this sense, Nāgita is little different from the worldly crowd, too.

Hence, the Buddha repeats the same remark, “**May I never meet with fame, Nāgita, nor fame ever meet with me.**” He is reminding Nāgita not to be swept away by the lust for food, by worldly greed, by the crowd. Nāgita is certainly not an exemplary attendant, much less a diligent monk. In fact, we see the Buddha here taking this development as an occasion to teach Nāgita some Dharma—as he has famously done, too, in the case of the headstrong attendant, **Meghiya**, as related in **the Meghiya Sutta** (A 9.3).³³

3.3.3.2 The Buddha has had, during the first 20 years of the ministry, other **attendants**—such as Nāga, samāla, Meghiya, Upavāṇa, Sāgata and Sunakkhatta [1.1.3.2]—none of whom served him satisfactorily. At the end of the 20th year, the 55-year-old Buddha assembles the monks to look for a really capable attendant. The previous ones, he says, sometimes disobeyed him, and at times even dropped his bowl and robe, or deserted him. It is on this occasion that the elder **Ānanda** is accepted by the Buddha as his attendant, serving him right up until his parinirvana.³⁴

3.4 THE 5 INSIGHTS THROUGH REVULSION

3.4.0 The section on **the 5 insights through revulsion** [§§12-16] closes **the (Pañcaka) Nāgita Sutta** (A 5.30). For our purposes here, we will reflect on these 5 insights in terms of the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k-khandha*),³⁵ thus:

- (1) What is eaten, drunk, chewed, tasted ends up as **dung and urine**: this is its outcome. (Form) [3.4.1]
- (2) From the change and becoming-other of things that are dear arise **sorrow**, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, despair: this is its outcome. (Feeling) [3.4.2]
- (3) For one devoted to practising meditation on the sign of the foul, **revulsion** towards **the sign of the beautiful** is established: this is its outcome. (Perception) [3.4.3]
- (4) For one who dwells contemplating impermanence in *the 6 contact-bases*, **revulsion** towards **contact** is established: this is its outcome. (Formations) [3.4.4]
- (5) For one who dwells contemplating arising and ending in *the 5 aggregates of clinging*, **revulsion** towards **clinging** is established: this is its outcome.” (Consciousness) [3.4.5]

The Sutta Commentary says that these are the 5 aspects of insight (*vipassanā*) addressed by the Sutta (AA 3:238,4).

3.4.1 “**What is eaten, drunk, chewed, tasted ends up as dung and urine: this is its outcome**” (*asita, pīta, khāyita, sāyitassa kho nāgita uccāra, passāvo, eso tassa nissando*). [§12]

3.4.1.1 This statement refers to insight into the true nature of **form** (*rūpa*), that is, our body, which must be sustained by **food** (*āhāra*). The suttas speak of the 4 kinds of food, that is to say:³⁶

³³ A 9.3 = U 4.1 (SD 34.2).

³⁴ AA 1:292,24-296,26; Tha 1041-1043.

³⁵ This is only a scheme of study for the time being: The 5 insights are also a gradual progression from the most basic aspect of our being, “food” (the 1st insight) up to the 5 aggregates (the 5th insight). The 5 aggregates of clinging (*pañc’upādāna-k,khandha*)—form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness—are all that we are; hence, we cling to them. In essence, they are the body-mind that we are. They are simply called “the 5 aggregates” (*pañca-k,khandha*) in the case of the arhats since they are free from all clinging. See SD 13.

³⁶ See SD 20.6 (2); (**Nīvaraṇa Bojjhaṅga**) **Āhāra S** (S 46.51), SD 7.15; **Abhisanda Ss** (S 55.31-33).

(1) material food,	<i>kabalīṅkārahāra</i>	the kind of “solid” food referred to above
(2) contact,	<i>phass’āhāra</i>	sense-stimuli, including the thinking process
(3) mental volition and	<i>saṅkhār’āhāra</i>	karma-formations
(4) consciousness.	<i>viññāṇ’āhāra</i>	the basic functions of “sensing.” ³⁷

3.4.1.2 Of the 4 kinds of food, **material food** is taken in from outside. The Pali texts speak of it as being consumed in 4 ways, that is,

- eaten (*asita*)³⁸ solid food chewed and consumed, such as rice, vegetables, meat, fish;
- drunk (*pīta*) liquids, such as soup, gruel and porridge;
- chewed (*khāyita*) a toothstick, betel-nut, chewing gum (they are not consumed);
- tasted (*sāyitā*) what is licked or sucked: sweets, chocolate, ice-cream.

The other 3 kinds of food or nutriment are non-physical and are “self-sustaining.” They are fed by their respective processes of feeling, willing and knowing. They refer to the affective, the conative and the cognitive processes of our being. In simple terms, they feed our being by our feelings, our karmic intentions, and our knowing through the 6 sense-bases.³⁹

3.4.1.3 The word “**outcome**,” *nissanda*, comes from *ni* (down) + *√SYAD*, “to flow, trickle” (literally, a discharge, dropping; figuratively, the effects of karma, A 3:32). A dark dung humour (scatology) is evident. On a deeper level, “faeces” (*karīsa*) belongs to the earth element; that by which what is “eaten, drunk, chewed, tasted” is digested belongs to the fire element (M 62,8+9), SD 3.11.

3.4.2 “From the change and becoming-other of things that are dear arise sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, despair: this is its outcome” (*piyānaṃ kho ... vipariṇāmaññathā, bhāvā uppajjanti soka, parideva, dukkha, domanass’upāyāsā*). [§13]

We can take this 2nd insight as that referring to the aggregate of **feeling** (*vedanā*), that is our hedonic reaction after we have recognized a sense-object as “pleasant,” and projected our craving onto it. We seem to enjoy it for a moment. Then, it is gone, and we react in various negative ways. As a result, there “arise sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, despair” in us.

The **suffering** lessens when we recognize this whole process thus: “from the change and becoming-other of things that are dear arise sorrow” With that only the **pain**—and a sense of urgency—remains. We then continue reflecting on the impermanence of it all.

3.4.3 “For one devoted to practising meditation on the sign of the foul, revulsion towards the sign of the beautiful is established: this is its outcome” (*asubha, nimittānuyogaṃ anuyuttassa kho ... subha, nimitte pāṭikulyatā saṇṭhāti, eso tassa nissando*). [§14]

When we are trained and ready, we carefully note “the sign of the foul” (*asubha, nimitta*) so that we are able to reject, free our mind from “the sign of the beautiful” (*subha, nimitta*). This sign is our agreeable mental-object rooted in lust (*raga-ṭ, ṭhāniye iṭṭh’ārammaṇe*, AA 3:238,1), or simply the lust that grips our mind.

The **sign of the foul** is our focus and mental image of any of the 31 body-parts, beginning with “head-hair, body-hair, nail, teeth, skin,” or the impurities of bodily secretions at any of the body-

³⁷ On the Buddha giving this teaching on the 4 kinds of food for the sake of restraint towards “gains and honours” (*lābha, sakkāra*) so that monastics do not fail by way of the 5th “defeat” (*pārājika*), See SD 55.14 (1.2.1.4).

³⁸ See CPD: ²asita.

³⁹ For details, see SD 55.14 (2.1.1.1).

orifices, or wound-discharges.⁴⁰ These images, unwholesome or wholesome, that we *recognize* are our aggregate of **perception** (*saññā*). Basically, it is how we “see” things—as pleasant (resulting in liking it), or as unpleasant (disliking it), or as neither (ignoring it).⁴¹

This is “powerful” meditation which should not be done unmentored by an experienced meditation teacher. The basic rule is that any such effort should always close with some cultivation of lovingkindness. When samadhi or mental stillness is attained, we should go on to the breath meditation.⁴²

3.4.4 “For one who dwells contemplating impermanence in the 6 contact-bases, revulsion towards contact is established:⁴³ this is its outcome” (*chasu kho ... phass’āyatanesu aniccānupassino viharato phasse pāṭikulyatā sañṭhāti, eso tassa nissando*). [§15]

The “6 contact-bases” (*phass’āyatana*) are our sense-stimuli, our sensing in action: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, (tactile) feeling, and thinking. Each of these sense-stimuli occurs as a “triangle of experience,” famously defined in **the Madhu,piṇḍika Sutta** (M 18), thus:

“Dependent on	<u>the eye and form,</u>	eye-consciousness arises.
⟨Dependent on	<u>the ear and sound,</u>	ear-consciousness arises.⟩
⟨Dependent on	<u>the nose and smell,</u>	nose-consciousness arises.⟩
⟨Dependent on	<u>the tongue and taste,</u>	tongue-consciousness arises.⟩
⟨Dependent on	<u>the body and touch,</u>	body-consciousness arises.⟩
⟨Dependent on	<u>the mind and thought,</u>	mind-consciousness arises.⟩

The meeting of the three is **contact**. With contact as condition, there is feeling.

What one feels, one perceives. **What one thinks about, one mentally proliferates.** ...⁴⁴

The perception of the foul (*asubha,saññā*) [3.4.3] or the perception of impermanence (*anicca,saññā*), in practice, is our habitually holding our mind at the point of **recognizing** the object for what it really is. We do not let our attention go beyond this point. For, beyond that, thinking starts; then, greed, hate and delusion take over. Bad karma is formed. Hence, it is called “karma-formation,” that is, the aggregate of formations (*saṅkhārā*).

3.4.5 “For one who dwells contemplating arising and ending in the 5 aggregates of clinging, revulsion towards clinging is established: this is its outcome” (*Pañcasu kho ... upādāna-k,khandhesu udaya-b,-bayānupassino viharato upādāne pāṭikulyatā sañṭhāti, eso tassa nissando*). [§16]

⁴⁰ *Asubha*, a meditation on the foul, impermanent and conditioned nature of our physical body, viz, of the 31 (or 32, Comy) body-parts. The term *asūci*, “the impurities,” refers to secretions of the 9 bodily openings: 2 eyes, 2 ears, 2 nostrils, mouth, (anus, urethra; Comy): **Vijaya S** (Sn 197 f). Elsewhere, called *asubha,saññā*, “perception of the foulness”: **Giri-m-ānanda S** (A 10.60,6), SD 19.16. Reflected on in **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 62) as earth element (§8) and water element (§9), SD 3,11. In post-canonical works, it is called *asubha,bhāvanā*, “cultivation on the impurities”: V 3:68,5 = S 54.9/5:320,12, SD 6.21 (cf M 118/3:82,11, SD 7.13; MA 1:281,33; MA 3:141,2; UA 235,17 (= *asubha*). A broader meditation is *kāya,gata,sati*, “mindfulness regarding the body”: **Kāya,gata,sati S** (M 119) SD 12.21; **Kāya,gata,sati Vg** (A 1.19.1-41/1:43-45), but narrowly refers to 32 parts in Vism 8.44/240.

⁴¹ By liking we feed greed and lust; by disliking we feed hate and aversion; by ignoring we feed delusion and ignorance. See **Anusaya**, SD 31.3 (1.1.2).

⁴² See **Anāpāna,sati S** (M 118), SD 7.13.

⁴³ *Chasu kho nāgita phass’āyatanesu aniccānupassino viharato phasse pāṭikulyatā sañṭhāti*. See **Sabba S** (S 4.23), SD 7.1 (6). On the triangle of experience, see **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18,16-17), SD 6.14.

⁴⁴ **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18,16), SD 6.14; also **Mahā Hatthi,padōpama S** (M 28,27-38), SD 6.16.

The very first step that our mind takes towards the path of awakening begins with our contemplating **arising and ending** (*udaya-b, baya*)—as in the case of each of the preceding 4 practices—all of which generate insight (*vipassanā*), our seeing directly into the true reality of things. Here, we closely examine, as it were, the process of **impermanence** itself: how phenomenon *arises, stays, passes away*, from moment to moment, as it were.

3.4.6 The idea of “from moment to moment” is a simple expression referring to keeping our attention before us on what is occurring right now. After the fact, when we speak of it, when we refer to this profoundly personal experience, we speak of moments. When we speak of **a moment** (*khaṇa*), it makes sense to speak of what is “before” and what is “after.”

However, these are only **concepts** for our mind to step on so that we can peer over the wall to see what really is on “the other side,” true reality. Philosophy discusses whether such “moments” are real or not, or that only the present is real, or all the 3 moments are real. The only true reality is that all things are *impermanent, change, become other*. Beyond all these notions is nirvana. This is when **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*) has no more footing,⁴⁵ and all “moments” and ideas of them cease.⁴⁶

3.5 NIBBIDA, ATAMMAYATĀ AND THE 3 CHARACTERISTICS

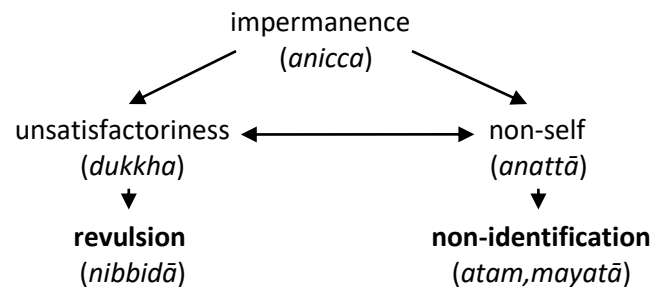


Fig 3.5. Seeing true reality

3.5.1 The most basic and essential teaching of early Buddhism is that of **impermanence** (*anicca*). When we know, see and accept the true reality that is impermanence, we then see its **unsatisfactoriness** (*dukkha*). When we further examine this true reality that is unsatisfactoriness, we see **suffering** as inherent in all things: we can never be satisfied with what is out there. Since suffering arises whenever we enjoy any of these things out there, we see neither meaning nor goodness in it—this is essentially the truth of **nibbidā**. This is usually the experience of a practitioner who is more of a “feeling” or “heart” person. We know it is suffering; we are not drawn to it; we have no desire for it at all, only revulsion. We have completely let it all go, we are liberated.

3.5.2 On the other hand, a “thinking” or “head” person is likely to notice impermanence as a series of mind-events. **Time** is always there, as it were, but it moves so fast as to give us the impression that there is some fixed connection in time—like a vast stretch of white sand. But when we examine this sand, and look deeply, we will notice that it is not only made up of tiny granules, but that each of these granules actually seems to float on its own without touching any other!⁴⁷

We cannot really point to any one of these granules and say, “That’s the sand!” It’s even more complicated with time since it is always in motion, with neither beginning nor end. We cannot identify with

⁴⁵ On consciousness having no “footing,” see SD 17.8a (11.3).

⁴⁶ On the problem of “moments,” see SD 26.1 (4).

⁴⁷ On the sandy beach parable, see SD 17.8a (4.3.1).

any **point** in time: the moment we point at it, it is gone. At this point, we may see ourself as being in the “eye of the existential storm,” that *this* is the unchanging essence of being. Then, we realize that even this eye moves with the storm; hence, it is itself conditioned by the storm.

The real peace, then, is within us: we are no more attracted to any peace or essence “out there.” This is essentially the meaning of *atam, mayatā*. We have neither feeling nor thought of connection or connecting with any “thing” or “thingness,” an abiding self or eternal soul: we see neither purpose nor pleasure in it. We are *neither* this nor *that*—neither here nor beyond nor in between—we are liberated.⁴⁸

3.6 DID THE BUDDHA “CONSENT” TO THE BRAHMINS AND THEIR OFFERINGS?

The Sutta is silent on whether the Buddha actually “consented” to meeting the brahmins and accepting their alms-offerings [§§9-10]. The Sutta is silent because this has no bearing on it. In fact, to state whether the Buddha completely ignored the brahmins, or subsequently welcome them would significantly distract us from the Sutta’s vital teachings. The Sutta would then be merely *a pious story*, not a spiritual lesson.

Having said that, surely the reader’s curiosity is still left as it is. Indeed, if the Buddha had remained adamant in rejecting the brahmins, one might wonder if it were self-righteous, even callous. After all, the only wrong that the brahmins have done is to be annoyingly boisterous. They are not really good Buddhists, if they are Buddhists at all. The point is that in all the similar cases of **the noisy crowd** [2.1], the Buddha forgives the faulty party, and they progress in the Dhamma.

Putting all this together, we may surmise that, surely, after the Dharma lesson has been well taught—even if Nāgita does not immediately benefit from it, it is to our benefit even today—the Buddha would subsequently welcome the brahmins. It is also likely that the brahmins are taught about moral virtue and calmness, which would, of course, benefit them tremendously. Furthermore, in that location, the monks are dependent on Icchā,naṅgala for alms. After all, since the Buddha is already there, surely, it is for the spiritual benefit for the people of Icchā,naṅgala. [1.1.1]

4 Related suttas

4.1 THE COMMON BACKGROUND NARRATIVE OF THE 3 SUTTAS

4.1.1 These 3 suttas are given by the Buddha to the monk **Nāgita** while he is serving as the Buddha’s personal attendant, all of them given in the very same venue: the thick wood outside Icchā,naṅgala. These 3 suttas are as follows:

A 5.30/3:30-32	(Pañcaka) Nāgita Sutta	The 5 meditations on revulsion	SD 55.12a
A 6.42/3:341-344	(Chakka) Nāgita Sutta	The 4 advantages of forest practice	SD 55.12b
A 8.86/4:340-344	(Aṭṭhaka) Yasa Sutta	The benefits of forest life and solitude	SD 55.13

4.1.2 The background narrative behind each of these 3 Suttas [4.1.1] is identical, thus:

- §1 The Buddha with a large community of monks arrive at Icchā,naṅgala
- §2 They stay in the thick wood outside the village.
- §§3-4 The Buddha is well known to the brahmin housemasters of the village.
- §5 A great crowd of them with alms-offerings, wait at the forest entrance, making a din.
- §§6-7 Upon the Buddha’s asking, his personal attendant Nāgita informs him about the brahmins.
- §8 The Buddha roars a lion-roar about rejecting fame.

⁴⁸ See **(Arahatta) Māluṅkya,putta S** (S 35.95,13), SD 5.9.

- §9-10 Nāgita implores the Buddha to consent to meet the brahmins: he is famous.
 §11 The Buddha repeats his lion-roar, directing it at Nāgita this time.
 §§12-end **The teachings.**

4.1.3 A more detailed comparative analysis of the 3 suttas—A 5.30, A 6.42 and A 8.86 [4.1.1]—is given elsewhere [SD 55.13 (2)].

4.2 THE UNIQUE TEACHING OF A 5.30

Of the 3 suttas [4.1.1] given to Nāgita mentioned, **the (Pañcaka) Nāgita Sutta** (A 5.30) stands alone in its teachings, which are not found in the other 2 suttas. It gives a set of 5 insights into spiritual revolution (*nibbidā*), meaning a clear rejection of any thought for the following:

- | | |
|--|---|
| (1) attachment to food | it all ends up as dung; |
| (2) attachment to people | those dear to us bring us suffering; ⁴⁹ |
| (3) attachment to the body | a “sign of beauty” is a lustful thought but the body is foul; |
| (4) attachment to things (sense-stimuli) | they are all impermanent; hence, cannot be owned; |
| (5) true reality itself (the 5 aggregates) | our body and mind arise and vanish away every moment. ⁵⁰ |

5 Chiasmus and related literary devices

5.1 CHIASMUS

5.1.1 Forms of chiasmus

5.1.1.1 “Chiasmus” (plural “chiasmi” or “chiasmuses”) comes from the Greek for “a placing cross-wise, diagonal arrangement.” Hence, it is also called “parallelism,” more fully, “inverted parallelism”; and colloquially called “X” or “crisscross.” It is a figure of speech in which the grammar of the other or parallel phrase is inverted, such that the two key concepts from the first phrase recur in the second phrase in the reverse order.

Symmetry is key to a good chiasmus, but the repeated phrases themselves need not be exactly symmetrical. So, a latter phrase may be a much longer elaboration of the preceding phrase that it echoes. Hence, there are a variety of chiasmi [5.3]. They can occur in verse or prose, or even a literary work, and basically form an ABBA or a-b-b-a sequence.⁵¹

5.1.1.2 The sentence “**May I never meet with fame, Nāgita, nor fame ever meet with me**” [§8] is an example of chiasmus. It is a specific form of chiasmus known as **antimetabole**; its Pali form—*māham nāgita yasena samāgamaṃ, mā ca mayā yaso*—is called **viparita** [5.1.2]. Technically, the Pali form is, in modern terms, a **parallelism** [5.3.6]. However, the general term, chiasmus, covers all these features.

5.1.1.3 A chiasmus often employs synonymous concepts, but it can also use opposite or contrasting concepts. Here is a simple example where it uses “walked” and its synonym “trudged,” and “tiredly,” a synonym for “drowsily.”

⁴⁹ On this teaching, see **Bhadraka S** (S 42.11,6-13), SD 55.7.

⁵⁰ On A 5.30, see also SD 55.12b (1.2.2).

⁵¹ See eg Shi Huifeng 2015.

“We walked tiredly; drowsily, we trudged along toward hotel.”

In this next example, we have a case of chiasmus that uses **concepts** that contrast with one another:

“His heart burned with lust, but his body chilled for fear of its bitter fruit.”

“Heart” refers to a feeling or emotion for a *future* state, but the “body” refers to a physical or *present* feeling. The heart and the body, though not exact opposites, are clearly contrasted here. On the other hand, “burned” and “chilled” are direct opposites. Thus, we have a chiasmus of contrast between the physical sensations of hot and cold that highlight both emotional and physical feelings.

5.1.2 *Viparita*

5.1.2.1 The Pali sentence--“**May I never meet with fame, Nāgita, nor fame ever meet with me**” [§8], according to the Subodhāṅkara (a classic on Pali rhetoric), is a case of *viparita upama* (“reversed” simile) [Fryer 1875:9], which is also applicable to the English translation. Technically, the English translation is an antimetabole, the simplest and best known form of chiasmus. In this case, we see that *viparita* and anti-metabole refer to the same thing. [5.1.2.2]

5.1.2.2 The usual **antimetabole** follows the pattern ABBA, with AB’s idea opposed to that of BA, as in “Fair is foul, foul is fair” (Macbeth, Act 1, Sc 1). In the Buddha’s quote [5.1.2.1], interestingly, the intentions behind both AB and BA are actually *the same*! This is rare even in English.⁵²

The most famous antimetabole in English poetry must surely be this immortal line from John Keats’ *Ode to a Grecian Urn* (1819): “**Beauty is truth, truth beauty.**” One way of understanding this is that beauty is impermanent, that is why we treasure it: this is an eternal truth, so to speak. To know such a truth of impermanence allows us, inspires us, to appreciate the good things in life, making our life beautiful, and in turn we see beauty in all things.

5.1.3 Chiastic pattern or “mirror” narrative

5.1.3.1 The chiasmus can also take the larger pattern as a narrative framework, that is, a **chiastic structure**. This structure is also called a “mirror narrative pattern” since it comprises 2 major narrative cycles: as a rule, there is an opening “negative” cycle of **the apophasis** or “apophatic phase” (eg, “Fair is foul”), and the closing “positive” cycle or **the kataphasis** or “kataphatic phase” (eg “foul is fair”).

In a “mirror” or chiastic sutta, the teaching structure comprises 2 complementary aspects, a negative or apophatic opening phase, and a positive or kataphatic phase. The first half of **the Papāṭa Sutta** (S 56.42), for example, describes how one who has not penetrated the 4 noble truths *cannot* fully awaken (§§6-11). The latter half is about how one who, having penetrated the 4 noble truths, is fully awakened (§§12-17). The Sutta resolves itself with “the closing exhortation” by the Buddha to us to reflect on the 4 noble truths (§18).⁵³

The Pariḷāha Sutta (S 56.43), too, has a similar pattern.⁵⁴

⁵² On antimetabole, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antimetabole...> On chiasmus, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiasmus...>; <https://www.litcharts.com/literary-devices-and-terms/chiasmus>. I thank Bh [Anandajoti Bhikkhu](#) for his helpful advice on antimetabole.

⁵³ S 56.42 + SD 53.15 (1.1.2).

⁵⁴ S 56.43 (SD 53.16).

5.1.3.2 On a bigger scale, the chiastic pattern, “mirror” narrative cycle or “ring composition” can be seen in the structure of whole texts, such as a sutta or a Jātaka story. The chiastic patterns take the form of a **ring composition**⁵⁵ in the **Ceto, khila Sutta** (M 16). In such ring compositions or chiastic works, the narrator touches on a number of topics until a significant one is reached, then retraces the processes in a reverse order which progresses until it reaches the significant point.⁵⁶

5.1.3.3 The Vessantara Jātaka (J 547), the last, longest and most popular of the commentarial birth-stories (*jātaka*) of the Buddha, illustrating his perfection of giving (*dāna, pāramī*), has a chiastic structure of inverted parallelism. The chiastic story structure of **J 547** can be summarized as follows:

O	<u>Story of the present</u> : The Buddha in Kapilavatthu. The arrogant Sakyas are humbled by the Buddha’s twin miracle; a light rain falls wetting only those wishing to be wet.	JA 6:479
A	Story of the past : Vessantara marries Maddī, consecrated king.	JA 6:487
B	Vessantara gives away gifts, even his albino elephant.	JA 6:488
C	Banished with his wife and children Jālī and Kaṇha, jinā; lives in a hermitage.	JA 6:511
D	Maddī’s bad dreams. Greedy brahmin Jūjaka asks for the children and is given.	JA 6:521
E	Sakra appears as a brahmin and asks for Maddī, who is given, too.	JA 6:569
X	Vessantara declares nothing is dearer than omniscience (<i>sabbaññuta</i>).	JA 6:570
E’	Sakra returns Maddī, grants 8 books.	JA 6:571
D’	Jālī and Kaṇhājīnā back in Jetuttara; king Sañjaya reclaims them; Jūjaka dies.	JA 6:573
C’	Sañjaya, Phusatī, children and elephant go to the hermitage to receive Vessantara.	JA 6:581
B’	The 6 kshatriyas—Vessantara’s parents, his family, white elephant—reunited; rain falls.	JA 6:586
A’	Vessantara reinstated as king. Sakra showers jewels. End of Vessantara Jātaka proper.	JA 6:588
O	<u>Story of the present</u> : The Buddha identifies the key characters of the Jātaka.	JA 6:593

A scholarly analysis of this has been made by Shī Huifeng.⁵⁷

5.2 FORMS SIMILAR TO AN ANTIMETABOLE

5.2.1 Difference between chiasmus and antimetabole

5.2.1.1 The main difference between a chiasmus and an antimetabole is that an **antimetabole** will reverse *the very same words* in the sentence, as in the Buddha’s quote--“May I never meet with fame, Nāgita, nor fame ever meet with me” [§8]—while a **chiasmus** will reverse grammatical structure, not necessarily with the same words. Hence, by definition, a chiasmus includes antimetabole (but not necessarily the reverse).

5.2.1.2 Rhetoricians and specialists do not agree on whether a **chiasmus** should contain any repetition of words, but most agreed that it should. Hence, it is best to see that all cases of antimetaboles are also chiasmi, but not all cases of chiasmi are antimetaboles.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ See eg Mary Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, Yale Univ Press, 2007.

⁵⁶ See SD 32.14 (1.2).

⁵⁷ Shī Huifēng, “Chiastic structure of the Vessantara Jātaka,” *Buddhist Studies Review* 32,1 2015.

⁵⁸ Some of the non-Buddhist examples here are taken from <https://www.litcharts.com/literary-devices-and-terms/chiasmus>.

The rules-of-thumb are that:

- **A chiasmus** repeats similar concepts within a repeated and inverted *grammatical structure*, but not necessarily the repetition of the same words, eg, “It’s good to be kind, but its kinder to be good.”
- **An antimetabole** uses the inverted repetition of words or phrases: the given example is also an anti-metabole.

Here are a few famous antimetaboles:

- “He who sees the Dharma, Vakkali, sees me; he who sees me sees the Dharma.”⁵⁹
Yo kho vakkali dhammaṃ passata, so maṃ passati; yo maṃ passati, so dhammaṃ passati. (S 22.87)
- “He who sees dependent arising sees Dharma; he who sees Dharma sees dependent arising.”⁶⁰
Yo paṭicca,samuppādaṃ passati, so dhammaṃ passata; yo dhammaṃ passati, so paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passati. (M 28), SD 6.16.
- “Bhikshus, who would serve me, he would serve the sick.”⁶¹
Yo bhikkhave maṃ upaṭṭhaheyya so gilānaṃ upaṭṭhaheyya. (V 1:300-302)
- Just as this is, so is that; just as that is, so is this.
Yathā idaṃ tathā etaṃ, yathā etaṃ tathā idaṃ. (Sn 203 = Tha 396)⁶²

5.2.2 Palistrophe

A more complex type of antimetabole is the **palistrophe** which has “4 topics”: a-b-c-d-x-d-c-b-a. In the early Buddhist texts, we have a palistrophe of “12 topics,” that is the “12 links” of **dependent arising** (*paṭicca samuppāda*) and its reverse, the “12 links” of dependent ending (**paṭicca sannirodha*).⁶³ The fullest statement or “standard version” of dependent arising formula (the X-paccayā-Y pattern) or “if x, then y” conditionality, has *12 links in 11 propositions*. Similarly, the full or standard version of dependent ending has the same 12 links in the 11 propositions.

This twin formula of dependent arising and dependent ending is found in such discourses as **the (Paṭicca,samuppāda) Desanā Sutta** (S 12.1) and **the Kaccā(ya)na,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15),⁶⁴ thus:

<i>avijjā,paccayā</i>	<i>saṅkhārā</i>	with ignorance as condition, there are volitional formations;
<i>saṅkhārā,paccayā</i>	<i>viññāṇaṃ</i>	with volitional formations as condition, there is consciousness;
<i>viññāṇa,paccayā</i>	<i>nāma,rūpaṃ</i>	with consciousness as condition, there is name-and-form;
<i>nāma,rūpa,paccayā</i>	<i>sa’āyatanaṃ</i>	with name-and-form as condition, there are the 6 sense-bases;
<i>sa’āyatana,paccayā</i>	<i>phassa</i>	with the 6 sense-bases as condition, there is contact;
<i>phassa,paccayā</i>	<i>vedanā</i>	with contact as condition, there is feeling;

⁵⁹ **Vakkali S** (S 22.87,2) + SD 8.8 (1.3). Cf “That monk, bhikshus, sees the Dharma; seeing the Dharma, he sees me” (*dhammaṃ hi so bhikkhave bhikkhu passati, dhammaṃ passanto maṃ passati*), **Saṅghāṭi,kaṇṇa S** (It 92,1.4/3.5.3/-90-92), SD 24.10a.

⁶⁰ **Mahā Hatthi,padopama S** (M 28,28) + SD 6.16 (5). See Harvey 1995a:231-134.

⁶¹ SD 3.15 (3.8). For the story of the sick dying monk, see DhA 3.7/1:319-211 (on **Dh 41**), but it has no quote.

⁶² SD 5.16 (2.2). See also Sn:P n11:11ab.

⁶³ “Dependent ending,” **paṭicca sannirodha*. The asterisk or star means that this is a neologism, a provisional term (that is not found in the Tipiṭaka), but is a back-translation from the English opposite of “dependent arising.” While *paṭicca* is a common Pali word, *sannirodha* is apparently found only in a “new subcommentary” (*nava,ṭīkā*), DANṬ:Be 2:91 (VRI 2:79). See SD 5.16 (0.1.2).

⁶⁴ S 12.1/2:1 f (SD 83.1) & 12.15/2:16 f (SD 6.13).

vedanā, paccayā taṇhā
taṇhā, paccayā upādānaṃ
upādāna, paccayā bhava
bhava, paccayā jāti
jāti, paccayā jarā, maraṇaṃ
soka, parideva, dukkha, -
domanass'upāyasā sambhavanti
evam-etassa kevalassa dukkha-k, -
khandhassa samudayo hoti
avijjāya tveva asesā, virāga, nirodhā
saṅkhāra, nirodho
saṅkhāra, nirodhā viññāṇa, nirodho
viññāṇa, nirodhā nāma, rūpa, nirodho
nāma, rūpa, nirodhā saḷāyatana, nirodho
saḷāyatana, nirodhā phassa, nirodho
phassa, nirodhā vedanā, nirodho
vedanā, nirodhā taṇhā, nirodho
taṇhā, nirodhā upādāna, nirodho
upādāna, nirodhā bhava, nirodho
bhava, nirodhā jāti, nirodho
jāti, nirodhā jarā, maraṇaṃ
soka parideva, dukkha, -
domanass'upāyasā nirujjhanti
evam-etassa kevalassa dukkha-k, -
khandhassa nirodho hoti

with feeling as condition, there is craving;
 with craving as condition, there is clinging;
 with clinging as condition, there is existence;
 with existence as condition, there is birth;
 with birth as condition there arise decay-and-death,
 sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair.

—Such is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.

But with the utter fading away and ending of ignorance,
 volitional formations end;
 with the ending of volitional formations, consciousness ends;
 with the ending of consciousness, name-and-form ends;
 with the ending of name-and-form, the 6 sense-bases end;
 with the ending of the 6 sense-bases, contact ends;
 with the ending of contact, feeling ends;
 with the ending of feeling, craving ends;
 with the ending of craving, clinging ends;
 with the ending of clinging, existence ends;
 with the ending of existence, birth ends;
 with the ending of birth, there end decay-and-death,
 sorrow, lamentation, physical pain,
 mental pain and despair.

—Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering.

(S 12.1/2:1 f); (S 12.15/2:16 f), SD 6.13⁶⁵

5.2.3 Ring composition

When the palistrophe is applied to a large unit, say, a sutta, we have what is known as a “**ring composition**.” Here is the “ring composition” framework of **the (Majjhima) Ceto, khila Sutta** (M 16):⁶⁶

- §1 Preamble (by reciter or redactor).
- §2 **Thesis (1):** It is impossible for those *with* [A] mental barrenness and [B] mental bondage to progress spiritually.
- §§3-7 Negative cycle: [A] promotes lack of faith in 5 ways.
- §7 Tag: “These are the 5 mental barrennesses that he has *not* abandoned.”
- §§8-12 Negative cycle: [B] promotes sensual lust in 5 ways.
- §12 Tag: “These are the 5 types of mental bondage that he has *not* cut off.”
- §13 **Thesis (1) tag (restatement):** It is impossible for those *with* [A] mental barrenness or [B] mental bondage to progress spiritually.
- §14 **Thesis (2):** It is possible for those *with neither* [C] mental barrenness *nor* [D] mental bondage to progress spiritually.
- §§15-19 Positive cycle: [C] promotes faith in 5 ways.
- §19 Tag: “These are the 5 mental barrennesses that he *has* abandoned.”
- §§20-24 Positive cycle: [D] removes sensual lust in 5 ways.

⁶⁵ On the “12 links” (rather than “11 links”), see SD 5.16 (1.4.2, 4.1).

⁶⁶ SD 32.14 (1.2).

- §24 Tag: “These are the 5 types of mental bondage that he *has* cut off.”
 §25 Thesis (2) tag (restatement): It is possible for those *with neither* [C] mental barrenness *nor* [D] mental bondage to progress spiritually.
 §26 Sub-thesis: [E] The 5 bases of success.
 §27 The “breaking-out” tag.
 §27.2 Parable of the hatchlings.
 §27.3 The “breaking-out” tag.
 §28 Closing: The monks joyfully approve.

5.3 OTHER FORMS OF CHIASM

5.3.1 Anastrophe

An **anastrophe** (from the Greek, ἀναστροφή, *anastrophē*, “a turning back or about”) is a figure of speech in which the normal word order of the subject, the verb and the object is changed. For example, subject–verb–object (“I go to the Buddha for refuge”) is changed to object–subject–verb (“To the Buddha for refuge I go,” *buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*). This is very common in Pali.⁶⁷

5.3.2 Diacope

A **diacope** (from the Greek meaning “cutting in two”) is a figure of speech in which a pair of repeated words or phrases is separated by a small number of intervening words. The opening line of Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (1878) is a **diacope**: “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.”

Because the diacope pattern has a very common repetition scheme, it often appears in the form of other figures of speech, including anaphora [5.3.3], epistrophe [5.3.4], epanalepsis [5.3.5], parallelism [5.3.6], and epizeuxis [5.3.7].

5.3.3 Anaphora

5.3.3.1 An **anaphora** is a figure of speech in which words are repeated at *the start* of successive clauses, phrases or sentences. It is the same as an **epistrophe** [5.3.4] except that an epistrophe repeats one or more words at the *end* of successive phrases, clauses or sentences.

Martin Luther King’s famous “I Have a Dream” speech (28 Aug 1963) contains **anaphoras** (or **anaphors**): “So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania.” Notice that “let freedom ring ...” is repeated at the *start* of each sentence.

5.3.3.2 The Dhamma, cakka Pavattana Sutta (S 56.11), to highlight the Buddha’s full understanding of the 4 noble truths in its 3 phases and 12 aspects, closes each of the 12 verses with this **anaphora**:

“Regarding what was unheard before, there arose in me vision [the eye], there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose insight, there arose light” (*pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi ñāṇaṃ udapādi paññā udapādi vijjā udapādi āloko udapādi*).⁶⁸

⁶⁷ In the Star Wars epic space-opera movie series, the Jedi Yoda often uses anastrophes in his speech, eg, “Powerful you have become, the dark side I sense in you.” <https://genius.com/George-lucas-yoda-quotes-annotated>; Geoffrey K Pullum, “*Language Log: Yoda’s syntax the Tribune analyzes; supply more details I will!*” 18 May 2005: <http://itre.cis.upenn.edu/~myl/language-log/archives/002173.html>.

⁶⁸ Mv 1.6.23-26 = S 56.11,9-12 (SD 1.1).

Note, however, that the original Pali of the sentence is, in fact, an **epistrophe**.

5.3.3.3 The Udaya Sutta (S 7.12) records how when the brahmin Udaya complains, “This nuisance of the ascetic Gotama keeps coming again and again!” the Buddha humorously retorts with an **anaphora**, repeating “again and again” (*punappunam*) at the *start* of each line, thus:

<i>Punappunam c’eva vapanti bījam</i>	Again and again,	they sow the seeds;
<i>punappunam vassati deva,rājā</i>	Again and again,	down comes the rain; ⁶⁹
<i>punappunam khettaṃ kasanti kassakā</i>	Again and again,	the farmers plough the fields;
<i>punappunam aññam upeti raṭṭhaṃ</i>	Again and again,	the land yields grain;
<i>punappunam jāyati miyyati ca</i>	Again and again,	he is born and he dies;
<i>punappunam sīvathikaṃ haranti</i>	Again and again,	they take him to the cemetery.
<i>maggā ca laddhā apunabbhavāya</i>	But when one has found	the path to no more rebirth,
<i>na punappunam jāyati bhūri,pañño ti</i>	One great in wisdom	is not born again and again!

(S 7.12/1:173 f), SD 16.13 (2 verses omitted in the hiatus)

However, this poem closes with an epistrophe, *ending* with “again and again.” Hence, technically, the last verse is both an anaphora (mostly) and also an **epanalepsis** [5.3.5], since it repeats what it starts with.

5.3.4 Epistrophe

5.3.4.1 An **epistrophe**—also called *epiphora* or *antistrophe*—is a figure of speech in which one or more words repeat at the *end* of successive phrases, clauses or sentences. It is the same as an **anaphora** [5.3.3] except that an anaphora repeats one or more words at the *start* of successive phrases, clauses or sentences. When it repeats both at the *start* and at the *end* thus, it is an **epanalepsis** [5.3.5].

Abraham Lincoln, in his Gettysburg Address (19 Nov 1863), urged the American people to ensure that, “the government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” His repetition of “the people” at the end of each clause is an example of an epistrophe.

5.3.4.2 The 3 suttas—A 5.30, A 6.42, A 8.86 [4.1.1]—each has the same powerful sentence spoken by the Buddha rejecting gains: “Let him enjoy for himself that dung of pleasure, that sloth of pleasure, those pleasures of gain, honour and praise!” [§§8.4 = 11.4]. This quote actually combines the best effects of both anaphora and epistrophe.

The Āditta (Pariyāya) Sutta (S 35.28) has this well known combination of **epistrophe** (lines 3, 4, 5, 7) and **anaphora** (almost all the other lines), thus:

“Bhikshus, all is burning (*sabbaṃ ādittaṃ*). And what, bhikshus, is the all that is burning?

The eye, bhikshus, is burning,

forms are burning,

eye-consciousness is burning,

eye-contact is burning, and

whatever feeling arising with eye-contact as condition—

whether pleasant or painful or neutral [neither painful nor pleasant]—that, too, is burning.

⁶⁹ *Puna-p,punam vassati deva,rājā*, lit “again and again the rain-gods rains down.”

Burning with what?

Burning with the fire of **greed**, with the fire of **hate**, with the fire of **delusion**;

burning with birth, decay and death; with grief, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair,
I say!" (S 35.28,3 = Mv 1.21), SD 1.3

The whole cycle then repeats for the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, and the mind.

5.3.5 Epanalepsis

5.3.5.1 An **epanalepsis** (from Greek: *epi-* (upon) + *ana-* (back) + *lepsis* (taking hold)) is a figure of speech in which the *beginning* of a clause or sentence is repeated at the *end* of that same clause or sentence, the words acting like "bookends."

A well known example of epanalepsis is the proclamation: "The king is dead, long live the king!"

A famous epanalepsis in literature is from Shakespeare's *King Lear*, when Lear stands in the open and shouts at a terrible storm: "Blow winds and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!" (Act 3, Scene 2). The word "blow" at the start and the end highlights the thunderous chaos which captures both the growing storm and Lear's growing madness.

Another well known epanalepsis is this aphorism of Lucretius (c 99-55 BCE): "Nothing can be created out of nothing," from his *De Rerum Nature* (On the nature of things, bk 1 lines 156 f).

5.3.5.2 Epanalepsis can also refer to repetition at the *very close* to the start or end of a sentence or clause, as well as *across* two separate sentences. A simple mnemonic for epanalepsis is to remember that "p" appears close to the beginning of the word and recurs near its end: epanalepsis.

Charles Dickens, in *Our Mutual Friend* (ch 4), puts into the petulant young Bella Wilfer's mouth an elaborative diacope, an **epanalepsis**, where she vividly elaborates on her disdain for poverty:

"I hate to be poor, and we are degradingly poor, offensively poor, miserably poor, beastly poor."

5.3.5.3 In the suttas, the abandoning of the 5 mental hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇa*) is formulated as **epanalepses** (as in the *Sāmañña,phala Sutta*, D 2), thus:

(1) Abandoning **covetousness** with regard to the world, he dwells with a mind devoid of covetousness. He cleanses his mind of covetousness.

(2) Abandoning **ill will and anger**, he dwells with a mind devoid of ill will, compassionate in the welfare of all living beings. He cleanses his mind of ill will and anger.

(3) Abandoning **sloth and torpor**, he dwells with a mind devoid of sloth and torpor, mindful, alert, perceiving light. He cleanses his mind of sloth and torpor.

(4) Abandoning **restlessness and worry**, he dwells undisturbed, his mind inwardly stilled. He cleanses his mind of restlessness and worry.

(5) Abandoning **spiritual doubt**, he dwells having crossed over doubt, with no perplexity with regard to wholesome mental states. He cleanses his mind of doubt. (D 2,68), SD 8.10

Another sutta example of **epanalepsis** is the passage on "the ignoble quest" (*anariya pariyesanā*), formulated in **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26), thus:

And what, bhikshus, is **the ignoble quest**?

Here, bhikshus, someone

being himself subject to birth,

seeks what is also *subject to birth*;

being himself subject to decay,

seeks what is also *subject to decay*;

being himself subject to disease,

seeks what is also *subject to disease*;

being himself <u>subject to death</u> ,	seeks what is also <i>subject to death</i> ;
being himself <u>subject to sorrow</u> ,	seeks what is also <i>subject to sorrow</i> ;
being himself <u>subject to defilement</u> ,	seeks what is also <i>subject to defilement</i> .

(M 26,5.2), SD 1.11

Following this passage in **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26), are various repeated passages in the teaching cycles where we see epanalepses in the refrains to highlight the sutta's key teaching.⁷⁰

See also last paragraph of the section on anaphora [5.3.3].⁷¹

5.3.6 Parallelism

A **parallelism** is a figure of speech in which two or more elements of a sentence, or series of sentences, have the same grammatical structure. The basic structure is “First X, then Y ... and so on,” where the “parallel” elements are used to intensify the rhythm of language, or to draw a comparison, emphasize, or elaborate on an idea.

The following well-known saying on the folk notion of karma—recorded in **the Isayo Samuddaka Sutta** (S 903*), is part of a curse used by desperate seers to ward off the violent incursions of some belligerent asuras is an example of parallelism:

*Yādisaṃ vapate bījaṃ
tādisaṃ harate phalaṃ
kalyāṇa, kārī kalyāṇaṃ
pāpa, kārī ca pāpakam
pavuttaṃ tāta te bījaṃ
phalaṃ paccaṇubhossasīti.*

Whatever the seed that is sown,
that's the fruit reaped from it;
good be to the good-doer,
and bad to the bad-doer!
By you, dear, the seed is sown,
so, too, the fruit you will taste!

(S 11.10/903*/1:227) + SD 39.2 (2)

5.3.7 Epizeuxis

5.3.7.1 An **epizeuxis** (ἐπιzeugnumi, *epizeugnumi*, “fastening together”) is a figure of speech in which a word or a phrase is repeated in immediate succession, with no intervening words. In Buddhist cosmogony, the Ābhassara (2nd-dhyana heaven) devas are so profoundly joyful that they keep exulting, “O what bliss! O what bliss!” (*aho sukhaṃ, aho sukhaṃ*), which is said to be the best of sounds.⁷² This exultation is an example of epizeuxis.

5.3.7.2 Epistrophe, anaphora and epizeuxis are forms of diacopes [5.3.2], but they significantly differ from one another. An **epistrophe** repeats the *ending* words of successive sentences [5.3.4]. An **anaphora** [5.3.3], the reverse of an epistrophe, repeats the *beginning* words or successive sentences [5.3.4]. An **epizeuxis** is the least refined of the three, but it gives us a powerful impact. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, when Polonius asks Hamlet what he's reading, he wistfully replies: “Words, words, words” (Act 2, Scene 2), which is an example of epizeuxis.⁷³

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⁷⁰ See eg M 26,6-13 (SD 1.11).

⁷¹ <https://www.litcharts.com/literary-devices-and-terms/epanalepsis>.

⁷² SD 54.3a (3.8.1.3). See also **Bhaddaji S** (A 5.170/3:202), SD 95.4.

⁷³ <https://literarydevices.net/epizeuxis/>.

(Pañcaka) Nāgita Sutta The (Fives) Discourse to Nāgita

A 5.30

1 Thus have I heard.⁷⁴

The Buddha visits Icchā,naṅgala

1.2 At one time, the Blessed One was wandering in Kosala together with a large community of monks. He reached a brahmin village of the Kosalas named **Icchā,naṅgala**.⁷⁵

2 There the Blessed One stayed in a thick wood outside Icchānaṅgala.

3 **The brahmin housemasters**⁷⁶ of Icchānaṅgala heard:⁷⁷

“It is said that the recluse Gotama, the Sakya son who went forth from a Sakya family, has arrived at Icchānaṅgala and is now dwelling in the thick wood outside Icchānaṅgala.

4 Concerning this Blessed One, this fair report has been spread about, thus:⁷⁸

‘So, too, is he the Blessed One:⁷⁹

for, he is arhat,	fully self-awakened,
accomplished in knowledge and conduct,	well-gone,
knower of the worlds,	unexcelled trainer of tamable people,
teacher of beings, human and divine,	awakened,
blessed.	

4.2 Having realized by his own direct knowledge
this world with its gods, its Māras and its Brahmās,
this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its rulers and people,
he makes it known to others.

⁷⁴ This Sutta opening narrative up to the Buddha’s lion-roar on fame (§§1-11) recurs in **(Chakka) Nāgita S** (A 6.42,1-11), SD 55.12b & **(Atṭhaka) Yasa S** (A 8.86,1-11), SD 55.13.

⁷⁵ A brahmin village near Ukkatthā in Kosala country; also called Icchā,naṅgala (Sn p15). See SD 34.8 (1.3).

⁷⁶ “Brahmin housemasters,” *brāhmaṇa,gahapati* (M 60,2/1:400,30; A 3.14/1:110,1, 8.86/4:340,26; U 7.9/78,8; It 4.1.8/111,13; J 1:83, 12/1:152, 52/1:267; PvA 22), as a rule, a karmadharaya (descriptive cpd), not a dvandva (as in PED), invariably a collective term, never an individual, ie, heads of the landed community in a brahmin village (*brāhmaṇa,gāma*) or fiefs (*brahma,deya*) as a whole. Also in phrasal combination of *khattiya, brāhmaṇa* and *gaha,-patika* (D 25,10/3:44,4, 13/3:46,33, 26,5/3:61,8; A 2.4.7/1:66,8), where in the last—we have *gaha,patika* (“house-master”) by itself, who, strictly speaking, are “brahmin housemasters” [SD 84.9]. This classification is based on land-ownership (ie their economic function), who nonetheless is still identified with the larger priestly class. As such, individually, they (such as Kūṭa,danta, Caṅkī, etc) are still referred to simply as *brāhmaṇa*. The word *gaha,patika* or “housemaster” is glossed as “a houselord who is the elder of only a single house” (*gehasa pati eka,geha,matte jeṭṭhako*, DA 1:171; Nc 342; PvA 39), but they are all addressed as “houselord/s,” eg **Apaṇṇaka S** (M 60,3+4/1:401), SD 35.5. On the other hand, a “houselord” (*gaha,pati*) not only owned a house(s) and were heads of families, who worked their land: Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*, 1987: ch 3 (esp 72 f, 86 f).

⁷⁷ §3 is stock, recurring eg in **Kūṭa,danta S** (D 5,2-5/1:128 f), SD 22.8; **Raṭṭha,pāla S** (M 82,2/2:55).

⁷⁸ *Evam kalyāṇo kitti,saddo abbhuggato*: V 1:35; D 1:49, 116, 236, 2:317; M 1:285, 2:167; S 5:352; A 1:180, 3:58, 4:80 (*kalyāṇo ... abbhuggaccheyya*); Sn p103; J 1:509.

⁷⁹ Alt tr: “For the following reasons, too, he is the Blessed One [the Lord] ... ” On the meaning of *iti pi so*, see **Buddhānussati**, SD 15.7 (2.2) & n.

He teaches the Dharma, good in the beginning, good in the middle, good in the end,
both in the spirit and in the letter.

He proclaims the holy life that is entirely complete and pure.’

4.3 It is good to see arhats such as these.”⁸⁰

The brahmins visit the Buddha

5 Then, when the night had passed, the brahmin housemasters of Icchānaṅgala took abundant food of various kinds and went to the thick wood outside Icchānaṅgala.

They stood outside the entrance, making a great noise, a din.⁸¹ [31]

6 Now at that time, the venerable Nāgita was the Blessed One’s attendant. [1.1.3.2]

The Blessed One then addressed the venerable Nāgita:

“What’s that great noise, Nāgita, that din? It sounds to me like fishermen plundering fish!”⁸²

7 “Bhante, it is the brahmin housemasters of Icchānaṅgala who have brought abundant food of various kinds. They are standing outside the entrance, expecting (to make the food-offerings to) the Blessed One and the community of monks.”⁸³

The Buddha’s lion-roar on non-fame

8 ⁸⁴“May I never meet with fame, Nāgita, nor fame ever meet with me!”⁸⁵

8.2 Nāgita, let one who does not attain at will, without trouble or difficulty, this joy of renunciation, this joy of solitude, this joy of stillness, this joy of self-awakening⁸⁶—

8.3 *this joy of renunciation, this joy of solitude, this joy of stillness, this joy of self-awakening* that I can attain at will, without trouble or difficulty⁸⁷—

8.4 let him enjoy for himself that dung of pleasure,⁸⁸ that sloth of pleasure, those pleasures of gain, honour and praise!”⁸⁹

⁸⁰ *Sādhū kho pana tathā,rūpānaṃ arahataṃ dassanaṃ hotī ti. Arahataṃ* is 3 gen pl. For details on this statement, see **Kesa,puttiya S** (A 3.65/1:188-193) @ SD 35.4a (comy n 1d). On “kept silent” as social or emotional distance, see SD 44.1 (2.2); see also **Love**, SD 38.4 (6.3).

⁸¹ *Baḥi,dvāra,koṭṭhake atthaṃsu uccā,sadda,mahā,saddā*. On the Buddha disapproving of noisy crowds, see (2).

⁸² *Ke pana kho nāgita uccā,sadda,mahā,saddā kevaṭṭā maññe maccha,vilope’ti*. See (2).

⁸³ *Baḥi,dvāra.koṭṭhake tṭhitā bhagavantañ ñeva uddissa bhikkhu,saṅghaṃ cāti*.

⁸⁴ §8 recurs in A 6.42,8 (SD 55.12b) = A 8.86,8 (SD 55.13).

⁸⁵ *Māhaṃ nāgita yasena samāgamaṃ, mā ca mayā yaso*. This English sentence is an example of an antimetabole and both are cases of *viparīta* (opposition) in Buddhist rhetoric (Subodhālaṅkāra) [5.1.2]

⁸⁶ *Yo kho nāgita na-y-imassa nekkhama,sukhassa paviveka,sukhassa upasama,sukhassa sambodha,sukhassa nīkāma,lābhī assa akiccha,lābhī akasita,lābhī*. Psychologically, the implication is that those who lack inner joy, esp that of meditation and awakening, are drawn to “gain, honour and praise.”

⁸⁷ *Yassāhaṃ nekkhamma,sukhassa paviveka,sukhassa upasama,sukhassa sambodha,sukhassa nīkāma,lābhī akiccha,lābhī akasira,lābhī*. The underscored is stock describing the ease with which the Buddha attains dhyana: see eg **Sampasādaniya S** (D 28,19.3) +n (SD 14.14).

⁸⁸ On *mīlha,sukha*, see also **Laṭukikôpama S** (M 66,19/1:454,14), SD 28.11; **Arāṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 139,9.2/3:233,-22, 13(3)/3:236,13), SD 7.8; (**Pañcaka**) **Nāgita S** (A 5.30,8.4/3:31,13, 11/3:29), SD 55.12a; (**Chakka**) **Nāgita S** (A 6.-42,8.4/3:342,11, 11/3:27), SD 55.12b; (**Aṭṭhaka**) **Yasa S** (A 8.86,8.4/4:341,21, 11/4:42,11), SD 55.13. See [3.4.1.3].

⁸⁹ *So taṃ mīlha,sukhaṃ middhā,sukhaṃ lābha,sakkāra,silokaṃ sādīyeyyāti*.

Nāgita's reaction

9 “Let the Blessed One now consent,⁹⁰ bhante, let the welcome one consent. This is now the time for the Blessed One to consent.⁹¹

Wherever the Blessed One will go now, the brahmin housemasters of town and countryside will incline in the same direction.

10 Just as, when **heavy rain-drops** are falling, the water flows down along the slopes, even so, wherever the Blessed One will go now, the brahmin housemasters of town and country will incline in the same direction.

10.2 What is the reason for this? Because of the Blessed One's moral virtue and wisdom.”

Reprise: The Buddha's lion-roar

11 “*May I never meet with fame, Nāgita, nor fame ever meet with me.*

11.2 *Nāgita, let one who attains not at will, without trouble or difficulty, this joy of renunciation, this joy of solitude, this joy of stillness, this joy of self-awakening,*

11.3 *this joy of renunciation, this joy of solitude, this joy of stillness, this joy of self-awakening that I can attain at will, without trouble or difficulty*

11.4 *let him enjoy for himself that dung of pleasure, that sloth of pleasure, those pleasures of gain, honour and praise!*⁹² [32]

The 5 insights through revulsion⁹³

12 (1) Nāgita, what is eaten, drunk, chewed, tasted⁹⁴ ends up as **dung and urine**: this is its outcome.⁹⁵

13 (2) Nāgita, from the change and becoming-other of things that are dear arise **sorrow**, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, despair:⁹⁶ this is its outcome.

14 (3) Nāgita, for one devoted to practising meditation on the sign of the foul, **revulsion** towards **the sign of the beautiful** is established:⁹⁷ this is its outcome.

15 (4) Nāgita, for one who dwells contemplating impermanence in the 6 contact-bases, **revulsion** towards **contact** is established:⁹⁸ this is its outcome.

⁹⁰ “Consent” to welcoming the noisy brahmins and their offerings.

⁹¹ *Adhivāsetu dāni bhante bBhagavā, adhivāsetu sugato, adhivāsana, kālo dāni bhante bBhagavato*. On the likely reason for his enthusiasm, see (3.3.3.1).

⁹² This reprise is a subtle rebuke to Nāgita! See (3.2.2.4).

⁹³ See (This teaching is not found in the other 2 Nāgita Ss (A 6.42 (SD 55.12b) & A 8.86 (SD 55.13))).

⁹⁴ *Asita, pīta, khāyita, sāyitā*. These are the 4 modes of consuming food, namely: *eat* food; *drink* liquids; *chew* solid food, a toothstick, betel-nut, chewing gum; *taste* (or lick) sweets, ice-cream.

⁹⁵ *Asita, pīta, khāyita, sāyitassa kho nāgita uccāra, passāvo, eso tassa nissando*. *Nissanda* = *ni* (down) + *vsyad*, to flow, trickle (lit, a discharge, dropping; fig, effect of karma, A 3:32). Dark dung humour (scatology) is evident. On a deeper level, “faeces” (*karīsa*) belongs to the earth element, and that by which what is “eaten, drunk, chewed, tasted” is digested belongs to the fire element (M 62,8+9), SD 3.11. For details: (3.3.3.0, 3.3.3.1).

⁹⁶ *Piyānaṃ kho nāgita vipariṇāmaññathā, bhāvā uppajjanti soka, parideva, dukkha, domanassa upāyāsā*. See (3.4.2).

⁹⁷ *Asubha, nimittānuyogaṃ anuyuttassa kho nāgita subha, nimitte paṭikulyatā saṇṭhāti*. For details, see (3.3.3.0, 3.4.3).

⁹⁸ *Chasu kho nāgita phassa āyatanesu aniccānupassino viharato phassa paṭikulyatā saṇṭhāti*. The “6 bases of contacts” are simply sense-stimuli: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling (tactile) and thinking. These are reflected as being impermanent as they arise, stay a moment, pass away. For details, see (3.4.4).

16 (5) Nāgita, for one who dwells contemplating arising and ending in *the 5 aggregates of clinging*, **revulsion** towards ***clinging*** is established:⁹⁹ this is its outcome.”

— evaṃ —

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⁹⁹ *Pañcasu kho nāgita upādāna-k, khandhesu udaya-b, bayānupassino viharato upādāne pāṭikulyatā saṇṭhāti*. For details, see (3.4.5).