

Gains, honour, praises: revulsion

Source: **(Pañcaka) Nāgita Sutta**, the (Fives) Discourse to Nāgita (A 5.30, SD 55.12a) translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2010, 2019, 2026.¹

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**” (*māham nāgita yasena samāgamaṃ, 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.

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 $\sqrt{\text{vid}^2}$, “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)!²

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

¹ <http://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/55.12a-Pancaka-Nagita-S-a5.30-piya.pdf>

² On “revulsion,” see *Nibbidā*, SD 20.1; for longer pericope: SD 20.1 esp (2.2.2); shorter pericope: **Alagaddûpa-ma S** (M 22,29), SD 3.13.

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 revulsed³ by the damages that they incur and will incur.

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³ 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”).