

Scatology in early Buddhism

(Be warned--this may offend those not used to calls of nature!)

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(Pañcaka) Nāgita Sutta (Abridged)

The (Fives) Discourse to Nāgita | A 5.30/3:30-32 (SD 55.12a)

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2010, 2019

The Buddha visits Icchā,naṅgala

Once when the Buddha and a large community of monks were staying in a thick wood outside Icchā,naṅgala in Kosala, the local brahmins came in large numbers, bringing a lot of various almsfood, to meet the Buddha.

Upon reaching the forest entrance to where the Buddha was staying, these brahmins made a lot of **noise**. Hearing this din, the Buddha remarked to Nāgita, the monk attending to him, that it sounded like a crowd of noisy fishermen, and refused to meet them.

The Buddha's lion-roar

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

Nāgita, only those who do not meditate or have difficulty in meditation, may desire such fame and gains.

Only those who have no joy of renunciation, no joy of solitude, no joy of stillness, no joy of self-awakening, desire such fame and gains.

Let them enjoy all this gain, honour and praise!”

Nāgita's reaction

Nāgita then persuaded the Buddha that no matter where he went, these brahmin householders would want to meet him and make offerings,

“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 householders of town and country will incline in the same direction.

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

In response, the Buddha only repeated his lion-roar.

The Buddha's teaching

Then, the Buddha gave this teaching for our benefit:

(1) What is eaten, drunk, chewed, tasted ends up as **dung** and urine: this is its outcome.

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

(3) For one devoted to practising meditation on the mark of **the foul**, revulsion toward the mark of the beautiful is established: this is its outcome.

(4) For one who dwells contemplating **impermanence** in the 6 contact-bases, revulsion toward contact is established: this is its outcome.

(5) For one who dwells contemplating **arising and ending** in the 5 aggregates of clinging, revulsion toward clinging is established: this is its outcome.

---End of the Sutta---

Modern commentary

In his teaching, the Buddha does not mince his words, but uses strong language. At the end of each of the 5 teachings, the Buddha says, “This is its outcome” (eso tassa nissando).

The word nissanda is composed of *ni-* (a prefix meaning “down”) + *sanda* (a word for what drops or flows). This is a word is often applied to our toilet activity.

This is a case of **dark humour**: a dark dung humour, to be exact. This is a case of scatology used to stress a Dhamma point: The Buddha rejects fame and gains as if they are **dung**! This is a reflection on revulsion.

This Sutta is a powerful reminder on **renunciation** for monastics of today who worry about money, and who will take care of them in old age and so on. So, these worried priests make money, save them!

It is also a reminder for the laity to practise the reflection of **impermanence**—and to remind the monastics of renunciation and not to worry about the world.

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha’s Example and Teachings]

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