## Pahankanuwa Sermon #46

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

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(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.155)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

(Homage to the Blessed One, the Worthy One, the Fully Self-Enlightened One)

**Pali Stanza:**

*Duppabbajjaṃ me duradhivāsā gehā;*

*Dhammo duradhigamo, bhogā kicchā vutti;*

*No itarītareneva yuttaṃ, cintetuṃ satatamaniccan'ti.*

**From:**

heragāthā (Khuddaka Nikāya) of the Pali Canon, specifically from the verses of Elder Jenta (Jentattheragāthā, Thag 1.111).

Dear Listeners,

The Buddha has praised the perception of the impermanent (*anicca-saññā*) as a meditation capable of uprooting all defilements. Developing the perception of the impermanent paves the way to understanding the Three Characteristics of existence: the impermanent (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self/non-self (*anattā*). Today, we have chosen as our theme a joyful utterance (*udāna*) of a certain Arahant who attained Arahantship by constantly developing the perception of the impermanent. During the time of the Buddha, Jenta, the son of a regional king in the Magadha country, was inclined toward the going-forth even in his youth due to the power of his past merit; however, a doubt (*vicikicchā*) arose in his mind. The going-forth is extremely difficult. Dwelling in the household life is equally arduous. Realizing this Nibbāna is also a very deep matter; the Dhamma is profound. On the other hand, earning wealth while living in the household life is also difficult. Spending some time in hesitation, wondering what he should do, he eventually came to meet the Buddha, listened to the Dhamma, developed a certain degree of faith (*saddhā*), and went forth. Although he went forth, it appears that for a certain period of time, such hesitant thoughts (*vitakka*) continued to dominate his mind. Nevertheless, putting forth great effort, he developed the perception of the impermanent as his meditation, and through that meditation subject

(*kammaṭṭhāna*), he attained Arahantship. After becoming an Arahant, remembering the hesitation that had been in his mind, he joyfully made this utterance of joy with great delight. That verse is the one we have presented as our theme.

*"Duppabbajjaṁ me duradhivāsā gehā"* — Going-forth is extremely difficult for me, and dwelling in the household life is equally arduous. *"Dhammo (gambhīro) duradhigamo"* — the Dhamma is profound and difficult to penetrate. Acquiring wealth and material resources is also difficult. *"Kicchā vutti no itarītareneva"* — after going forth, one has to utilize the four requisites in the spirit of contentment with whatever is received (*yathālābhasantosa*). When going on almsround (*piṇḍapāta*), on some days one receives little, and on other days one receives much. On some days it is coarse; on other days it is delicious. It is one of the two. This is how the going-forth is. Therefore, *"kicchā vutti no itarītareneva"* — our livelihood in this going-forth is also very difficult. But conquering all those thoughts, in the end, that Venerable One states: *"Yuttaṁ cintetuṁ satatam-aniccataṁ"* — "It is indeed proper to constantly contemplate this impermanence (*aniccata*)." Because he saw its benefits, this is briefly what is narrated in this story.

With this as our starting point, let us try to bring out some Dhamma points that the Buddha declared concerning the Dhamma of impermanence (*aniccata*). Indeed, there is a certain passage wherein the Buddha addressed the Saṅgha on one occasion, declaring the powerful strength of this perception of the impermanent. If we express it in Sinhala: "Monks, the perception of the impermanent, when developed and cultivated frequently, brings to an end all sensual lust (*kāmarāga*). It brings to an end all lust for form (*rūparāga*). It brings to an end all lust for existence (*bhavarāga*). It brings to an end all ignorance (*avijjā*). It brings to an end and uproots all conceit of 'I am' (*asmi-māna*)." Having declared the strength and benefits of the perception of the impermanent in this manner on that occasion, he addressed the Saṅgha and further explained how the perception of the impermanent is to be developed to yield such great benefits. Generally, where the meditation on the perception of the impermanent is shown, you devotees might have seen, especially in discourses like the *Girimānanda Sutta*, where ten perceptions are mentioned. When listing those ten meditation subjects in the *Girimānanda Sutta*, the perception of the impermanent is placed right at the beginning. So here too, the Buddha declared that the Saṅgha could attain these benefits by developing the contemplation of the impermanent regarding the five aggregates of grasping/holding (*pañcupādānakkhandha*).

These five heaps—form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), preparations/volitional activity (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*)—are what you devotees have heard of as the five aggregates of grasping/holding (*pañcupādānakkhandha*). *Upādāna* means grasping or holding on. What the Buddha has shown is the constant contemplation of the impermanence of these five heaps that are held onto. The manner of this contemplation is also shown in some places in this way. Here too, he declares to the monks: *"Iti rūpaṁ, iti rūpassa*

*samudayo, iti rūpassa atthangamo"*—"such is form, such the arising of form, such the passing away of form." In the same way, "such is feeling (*vedanā*), such the arising of feeling, such the passing away of feeling," and likewise for perception (*saññā*), preparations (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). The Buddha declared that a practitioner (*yogāvacara*) must constantly contemplate impermanence in whatever way these arise in the mind. These five heaps are indeed the five heaps that we embrace, which we declare as 'I' and 'mine'.

Why these are called "heaps" (or aggregates) is also analyzed. It is declared in the Buddha's own words. They are analyzed in eleven ways. Each of these heaps can be past, future, or present—there are three right there. It could be a past form that comes to mind, a future form, or a present form. Likewise, internal (*ajjhatta*) or external (*bahiddhā*)—it could be a form regarding oneself, or a form regarding another. Sometimes, a form regarding oneself is compared with a form regarding another: "I am more beautiful than them," or "uglier," and so on. These too are things grasped. Thus: past, future, present; internal, external; further, gross or subtle; inferior or superior; and finally, far or near. This completes the eleven-fold classification. Past, future, present, internal, external, gross, subtle, inferior, superior, far, and near—this is the eleven-fold way the Buddha's word analyzes them. Thus, regarding form, feeling, and so on, these are the heaps. We live with these heaps, we carry them on our shoulders, they constantly flow into our minds—either as past things, past forms, future forms, and so on. Now, all these five heaps are described in the Dhamma as the prepared/conditioned (*saṅkhata*)—as things that have been prepared or constructed.

What is the nature of these prepared/constructed things? They appear to us as permanent (*nicca*); through that very preparation, we try to establish ourselves in them as something stable. This is why they are called *saṅkhata*. Though they are preparations (*saṅkhāra*), they are prepared (*saṅkhata*). *Saṅkhata* means prepared or constructed things. Now, the Buddha points out three characteristics of the prepared. "Monks, there are three characteristics of the prepared. What are the three characteristics? In every prepared thing, an arising is discerned: *'uppādo paññāyati'*. Likewise, a passing away is discerned: *'vayo paññāyati'*. An arising is discerned, a passing away is discerned. Thirdly, it is said: *'ṭhitassa aññathattaṁ paññāyati'*. Even regarding that which we assumed to be stable or static (*ṭhiti*), an alteration—a change into something other—is discerned." So the Buddha is pointing out the actual state of arising and passing away.

But within the prepared (*saṅkhata*), we construct a state called "existence" or "stability" (*ṭhiti*). We construct a "present moment". What is now being shown is that this present moment is constantly changing. Thus, in true insight (*vipassanā*), rather than past or future preparations (*saṅkhāra*), it is the present preparations that are taken as the object in intense insight. The Buddha declared on one occasion: "Monks, past forms and future forms are impermanent (*anicca*). What need is there to speak of present forms?" He reminds us that even this "present" which we think of as so

significant is likewise impermanent. It also changes, being subject to alteration (*aññathābhāvī*). Yet, it is this very nature of alteration that the world grasps onto as existence (*bhava*) and grasping/holding (*upādāna*), trying to establish an existence there. It is within that mental state that various kinds of sorrow (*soka*), lamentation (*parideva*), suffering (*dukkha*), and despair (*domanassa*) arise due to these five aggregates. Why? Because when that foundation we constructed decays, cracks, and collapses—forgetting that it collapses without our knowledge—when we stand upon it, we fall down with its collapse. Those are the characteristics of the prepared (*saṅkhata*). Some people present *uppāda*, *ṭhiti*, and *bhaṅga* (arising, static phase, dissolution) as equivalent. But the important point the Buddha brings out here is that even that which we assumed to be static (*ṭhitī*) is constantly changing. Because of this,

In discourses like the *Bhaddekaratta Sutta*, it is shown that generally, worldly beings have a longing for the past. "Ah, if only that past thing were still there, how good it would be!" They also look forward to the future. Thus, the Buddha declared: *"Yad-atītaṁ pahīnaṁ"*—the past is abandoned, what is gone is gone; *"Appattañ-ca anāgataṁ"*—the future has not yet arrived. Therefore, longing for the past is futile. Since future things have not yet arrived, taking delight in them is also futile. Next, *"Paccuppannañ-ca yo dhammaṁ tattha tattha vipassati"*—one should see the present phenomenon right there, in each place. One should see it right there through insight (*vipassanā*). To see it right there through insight means to see those preparations (*saṅkhāra*) that construct the prepared (*saṅkhata*). The things that help to construct a prepared thing (*saṅkhata*) are called preparations (*saṅkhāra*). No matter how often we hear these words, their meaning is sometimes not clear. These *saṅkhāra* mean preparations or constructions. It is through these preparations that a prepared/constructed thing is made.

But what lies at the root of these preparations/constructions? Ignorance (*avijjā*). You devotees have heard the phrase *"avijjā-paccayā saṅkhārā"* (dependent on ignorance, preparations arise) in discourses on Dependent Arising (*paṭicca-samuppāda*). The most fundamental preparation pointed out by the Buddha is this body we grasp onto, which is prepared/constructed through in-breathing and out-breathing (*assāsa-passāsa*). It was because they could not understand even its impermanence (*aniccata*) that ancient Hindu yogis took this breath as a "life-force" (*prāṇa*) or soul (*ātman*). What a foolish thing to do! This life-force, which is in-breathing and out-breathing, is constantly changing; even within a single breath, the insight-practitioner perceives it in waves, realizing that there is a vast amount within a single inhalation. Yet, the ordinary world grasps tightly onto those preparations (*saṅkhāra*). Thus, the body is prepared/constructed by this in-breathing and out-breathing. This is the primary preparation. Of course, food, drink, and so forth also play a part. Similarly, speech—the words we speak—we take very seriously, as we must in ordinary life. But its true nature is shown to be prepared/constructed by thought-conception and discursive thinking (*vitakka-vicāra*), which is a stream of

thoughts within the mind. That too is constantly changing. It is from those preparations (*saṅkhāra*) that speech is prepared. Next is this mind which we think of as so colorful and complex, which we take so seriously. It is prepared/constructed by perception (*saññā*) and feeling (*vedanā*). Because of this, perception and feeling are called mental preparations (*citta-saṅkhāra*). Thus, what do these preparations—bodily preparation (*kāya-saṅkhāra*), verbal preparation (*vacī-saṅkhāra*), and mental preparation (*citta-saṅkhāra*)—do through these constructive processes? What they do is what comes next in Dependent Arising (*paṭicca-samuppāda*): consciousness (*viññāṇa*) and Name-and-Form (*nāmarūpa*).

The Buddha has pointed out this consciousness (*viññāṇa*) as an illusion (*māyā*). This consciousness always co-exists with Name-and-Form (*nāmarūpa*). Consciousness grasps an object, and the Buddha presents that grasped object as Name-and-Form. Regarding this Name-and-Form, no matter how much we think about it, we cannot understand form on its own in that way. Name (*nāma*) also assists in it. The mind cannot grasp a form in isolation; Name and Form always go together. Therefore, the object that comes to the mind is designated as 'Name-and-Form'; otherwise, the Buddha could have called it 'mind-form' (*citta-rūpa*). Now, the ordinary world thinks that 'mind' and 'form' exist as two separate things. Physical scientists also think that form exists separately on its own. If so, the Buddha could have called it 'mind-form' (*citta-rūpa*) or 'mental-form' (*mano-rūpa*). Why did he call it 'Name-and-Form' instead? It is because form can only be recognized through the naming (*nāma*) that is given to it. And it is through the resistance or impingement (*paṭigha*) presented by form that the concept of impingement comes to the Name (*nāma*). This relationship is shown by a well-known simile accepted in Buddhist thought since ancient times, which you devotees may have heard—the journey of a blind man who can walk and a lame man who can see. The lame man climbs onto the back of the blind man and shows the way. Similarly, Name can see but cannot walk, while Form can walk but is blind. Everyone knows these two as Name-and-Form. Insight-practitioners identify the object that comes to the mind as Name-and-Form. Thus, contemplating these preparations (*saṅkhāra*) of Name-and-Form is what belongs to the insight-practitioner. Through this, the capacity to quickly see that widely assumed impermanence (*aniccata*) right there, is present within those very phenomena (*dhamma*) of Name-and-Form.

What is analyzed as Name-and-Form phenomena—specifically Name-phenomena (*nāma-dhamma*)—are the five phenomena: feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), intention/volition (*cetanā*), contact (*phassa*), and attention (*manasikāra*). You can think of them like the five fingers of a hand: feeling, perception, volition, contact, attention. Many people, not only in modern times but since the distant past, have tried to alter this classification of Name-phenomena. Some suggest putting contact (*phassa*) at the beginning. But the Buddha's word says: feeling, perception, volition, contact, and attention. Feeling is the first. Next are perception, volition, contact, and attention in that order. However, logically speaking, it is true that contact (*phassa*) occurs before feeling. But one should not move contact to the front. That is what we

have to say. Contact must remain in its place. Feeling, perception, volition, contact, attention. What is the reason? Think about it for a moment. Our hand touches a hot object. After touching it, we do not think about the contact (*phassa*) first. We think first of the feeling (*vedanā*). Activity arises through feeling, and it is through feeling that those physical phenomena are identified. Primarily, although we describe it, this does not take a long time. In a split second, as soon as the hand touches the hot object, it is instantly withdrawn. Within that, there is the entire group of Name-phenomena just mentioned. Through feeling (*vedanā*), there arises the perception (*saññā*) that the hand is burning. Through perception, there arises the volition (*cetanā*) that the hand must be withdrawn. Next, attention (*manasikāra*) is directed to the burnt spot. Thus, it is through the Name-phenomena of feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), volition (*cetanā*), contact (*phassa*), and attention (*manasikāra*) that form is identified.

Next, as for things belonging to Form—what is called Form (*rūpa*)—you devotees have heard of the great primary elements (*mahābhūta-dhamma*), namely earth (*pathavī*), water (*āpo*), fire (*tejo*), and wind (*vāyo*). They are called "great primaries" because they cannot be identified individually; they always exist in a mixed state. But we identify them according to their characteristics. Those characteristics are what are called Name-phenomena (*nāma-dhamma*). That is why we said form is recognized through those Name-phenomena. What gives Name-phenomena the concept of resistance, the concept of contact, are the physical phenomena. This point is shown very deeply in this Dhamma. The Buddha divides the word contact (*phassa*) into two parts: designation-contact (*adhivacana-samphassa*) and resistance-contact (*paṭigha-samphassa*). "Designation" (*adhivacana*) refers to Name (*nāma*). Thus, within this contact, there is both a naming and an impingement/resistance, and they are mutually supportive. From that simile, you devotees can understand why all these points are shown in the Dhamma: it is on the day we understand the true nature of this illusion of consciousness (*viññāṇa*) that weariness (*nibbidā*) toward preparations (*saṅkhāra*) arises. As long as weariness toward preparations does not arise, and as long as there is attachment to preparations, the prepared (*saṅkhata*) continues to be constructed.

The Buddha shows this next: where is this prepared/constructed (*saṅkhata*) manufactured? This prepared is manufactured within the six sense-bases (*saḷāyatana*). In modern times, one may understand "bases" as spheres of experience, and that is fine if it helps. It is within these six sense-bases that the five aggregates of grasping/holding (*pañcupādānakkhandha*) are prepared, created, and produced. What are the six? Eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. They are called the base of eye-contact (*cakkhu-samphassāyatana*), the base of ear-contact (*sota-samphassāyatana*), and finally, the base of mind-contact (*mano-samphassāyatana*). Why are they called bases (*āyatana*)? They belong to two sides; to be a base, there must be two. The eye and forms, the ear and sounds, and so on, going down to the mind and thoughts/ideas (*manodhamma*) that come to the mind. Although we do not list them all, you devotees can infer all six. The eye and forms,

the ear and sounds, and so on. Now, the deepest point is the sixth: the mind. The objects that come to the mind are called *dhamma* (phenomena/ideas). We are frequently reminded of the Dhammapada verse: *"Manopubbaṅgamā dhammā, manoseṭṭhā manomayā"*. According to this verse spoken by the Buddha, regarding these *dhamma* or "things"—we in the world think that things exist separately on their own. But what is the actual state of affairs? The mind precedes these "things". Furthermore, between the two, the mind is supreme. Finally, it says *manomayā*—these things are made of the mind. That is what is difficult for the world to accept. It is a very difficult state to accept: that these things in front of us are prepared/constructed by the mind. It is a very profound matter.

So to clarify this point and the impermanence (*aniccata*) in it, the Buddha impresses this perception of the impermanent (*anicca-saññā*) upon the minds of the Saṅgha in a very powerful discourse, the *Dvaya Sutta*. He presents it in a wonderful way. The theme of that discourse is *Dvayaṁ*—meaning 'dyad' or 'pair', concerning 'two'. "Monks, consciousness (*viññāṇa*) arises dependent on a dyad." We think that consciousness exists independently on its own. But consciousness arises dependent on a dyad. What is the dyad? The eye and form; thus, eye-consciousness arises dependent on the eye and form. Ear-consciousness arises dependent on the ear and sound. Infer in this way. Finally, mind-consciousness arises dependent on the mind and mind-objects (*dhamma*). Apart from this, there is no such thing as consciousness (*viññāṇa*) on its own. Thus, in accordance with the Dhamma, there are six types of consciousness. As we mentioned earlier, there is a rapid, reciprocal conditioning (*aññamaññā-paccayatā*) or mutual causal relationship between consciousness (*viññāṇa*) and Name-and-Form (*nāmarūpa*). Thus, what is called consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is those six. Eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. How does the Buddha demonstrate the impermanence (*aniccata*) of each of those types of consciousness? Consciousness arises dependent on a dyad, such as the eye and form. Then he tells the Saṅgha: "Monks, the eye is impermanent (*anicca*), subject to change, subject to alteration. Form is also like that; impermanent, subject to change, subject to alteration." In all of these, the word *cala* (unstable/moving) is used. Even in modern times, we speak of movement/oscillation (*calanaya*). The eye, form, and everything are in constant motion. They are constantly moving. They are constantly wearing away. *"Calā ca eva vayā ca, aniccā vipariṇāmino"*—they undergo change/transformation, and they undergo alteration (*aññathābhāvī*). This is said to impress it upon the mind. Thus, the eye is impermanent (*anicca*), constantly trembling and changing. Forms are also like that. Next, he says that the consciousness (*viññāṇa*) that arises from the coming together of the eye and form is also impermanent and subject to change.

Then the Buddha asks the Saṅgha a question: "Monks, how could consciousness (*viññāṇa*), which arises from the coming together of two impermanent things, be permanent?" He asks this. Thus, that eye-consciousness (*cakkhu-viññāṇa*) is also impermanent. But he does not stop there. Next, the Buddha declares that the coming

together of the eye, form, and eye-consciousness is contact (*phassa*). The meeting of these three—the eye, form, and the eye-consciousness arising from them—is the moment of contact. That eye-contact (*cakkhu-samphassa*) is also impermanent. It also changes. It also undergoes alteration. There too, the Buddha asks: if eye-contact arose dependent on certain causes and conditions (*hetu-paccaya*), those causes and conditions are also impermanent and subject to change. Then he asks, how can that which depends on changing causes and conditions be permanent? In this manner, the Buddha attempts to impress upon minds the impermanence of every single aspect of these six sense-bases (*saḷāyatana*). Thus, the insight-practitioner realizes this truth of impermanence through constant perception of the impermanent (*anicca-saññā*) and by applying attention (*manasikāra*) to those Name-phenomena. When contemplation is applied more and more subtly, that "foundation"—that state of stability (*ṭhiti*) we assumed—becomes narrower and narrower. Indeed, the "present" is not something that can be measured. It is a squeezed state between the past and the future. If someone is asked, "What is 'now'?", can they answer? What is 'now'? One has to answer according to the context. 'Now' could sometimes refer to a long period. Sometimes, depending on the situation, it could be very narrow. Thus, for the insight-practitioner, 'now' becomes narrower and narrower as attention becomes subtler, as attention becomes stronger. Through this insight-attention—this radical attention/wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) which sees things right there—that perception of permanence (*nicca-saññā*) wears away. When the perception of permanence wears away, a prepared/constructed thing (*saṅkhata*) is not built up there. Within these few words, you devotees can understand many points relevant to insight (*vipassanā*).

Next, the Buddha points to the common term applied to these words about impermanence: "knowledge of things as they are" (*yathābhūta-ñāṇa*). On one occasion, the Buddha declares how Nibbāna emerges through these six sense-bases. Or rather, how instead of the five aggregates growing, they wear away. First, he shows how they are built up. If someone does not know the eye as it really is (*yathābhūta*), and does not know forms as they really are. By "as they really are," one must understand: they do not know their impermanence (*aniccata*). Not knowing their impermanence, disregarding their impermanence, disregarding the impermanence of the consciousness (*viññāṇa*) that arises dependent on the eye and form, disregarding the impermanence of the contact (*phassa*) that arises therefrom, disregarding the impermanence of the felt experience, feeling (*vedanā*), and so forth arising from that contact—if one does not know them as they really are, that person develops attachment toward them, develops craving (*taṇhā*), and through that arising of craving, they are built up. That anchors itself. Let us think of the form components present in that moment—say, a moment one is pleased with. Those relevant aspects of form come together and build up one's aggregate of grasping/holding for form (*rūpa-upādānakkhandha*). The feelings relevant to that compile together, and "I experienced such feeling on such a day, in such a situation"—thus feelings are built up. "I was one who had such a form," "I was one

who had such feeling," and so on, and regarding the other aggregates too, in this way, the five aggregates of grasping/holding (*pañcupādānakkhandha*) are separated and constructed, flowing out from those six sense-bases (*saḷāyatana*). This happens by taking the six sense-bases as permanent, taking each part of the six sense-bases as permanent, due to the lack of knowledge of things as they are (*yathābhūta-ñāṇa*). Next, the Buddha shows the other side of this: going toward Nibbāna. So that is how the prepared (*saṅkhata*) is made, that is how it is built up.

He also shows how they wear away. How is that? If an insight-practitioner sees right at each point: "the eye is impermanent (*anicca*), it changes, it undergoes alteration, it undergoes *aññathābhāva*," and lives constantly with this understanding, then in that moment, those experiences wear away right then and there; they do not go and pile up. They do not pile up as grasping/holding (*upādāna*) or as the prepared (*saṅkhata*). When this becomes powerful, it is then that one can realize even that noble Nibbāna called the cessation of the six sense-bases (*saḷāyatana-nirodha*). The cessation of the six sense-bases is the state of the cessation of existence (*bhava-nirodha*). This is what is called Nibbāna. That is why the Buddha declared: "Within this very fathom-long body, I declare the world, the arising of the world, the cessation of the world, and the path leading to the cessation of the world." The Buddha points this out based on these very six sense-bases (*saḷāyatana*). The culmination of impermanence (*aniccata*) is the signless (*animitta*). Three things are shown as aids to Nibbāna: the signless (*animitta*), the desireless/uncommitted (*appaṇihita*), and the void/empty (*suññatā*). The signless (*animitta*) refers to the culmination of the perception of the impermanent. When the perception of the impermanent is developed to its utmost, no sign (*nimitta*) comes to the mind. A state arises where the mind cannot take up any sign. It is then signless (*animitta*). This is itself a name for Nibbāna. For that very reason, if something is impermanent,

...it is of the nature of suffering (*dukkha*). Where there is the nature of suffering, there is no desire. *Paṇidhi* means desire or aspiration. Thus, it is called the desireless/uncommitted (*appaṇihita*). Why did we say that by developing the perception of the impermanent (*anicca-saññā*), all Three Characteristics are developed? It is because it is stated in the Dhamma: *"Yad-aniccaṁ taṁ dukkhaṁ, yaṁ dukkhaṁ tad-anattā"*—a passage frequently mentioned in the Dhamma. Whatever is impermanent (*anicca*) is suffering (*dukkha*). If it is suffering, it cannot be a self (*attā*); it cannot be maintained as 'I' and 'mine'. Thus, when these Three Characteristics are developed to the highest level, when impermanence is developed to the highest, the mind goes to the signless (*animitta*). It is like the gateway to Nibbāna. Next, the desire called aspiration (*paṇidhi*) disappears because of that nature of suffering. That is called the desireless/uncommitted (*appaṇihita*). Next, if there is no state of self (*attā*), it is void/empty (*suññata*). Where there is a self, one grasps a "thing". Where there is no state of self, it is void. This indeed approaches the subject of voidness (*suññatā*).

In the past, when the Buddha preached this Dhamma, he brought up and compared various teachings and views (*diṭṭhi*) of the teachers of that time, polishing and highlighting this Dhamma. Today, we are compelled to speak in the same way in this Dhamma. Why is that? In this era, physical science is something that many people talk about, and to which many minds are drawn. Even nuclear physicists themselves have now realized the shortcomings in some of the fundamental hypotheses of physical science. What was the mistake they made? Instead of what we mentioned earlier from the Dhammapada verse, *"Manopubbaṅgamā dhammā, manoseṭṭhā manomayā"*, those people thought that there was some separate thing, distinct from the mind and undetected by the mind, existing on its own. This is not just their delusion; it is an idea coming down from the past. The view that there is some truly existing substance, a reality existing permanently, has existed since ancient times. Next, that there is an "atom" as something real, some truth independent of the mind. But now, they have come to understand the Buddha's word to such an extent that those nuclear physicists themselves—even the leading ones of this recent era—say that as long as something is not measured, one cannot attribute qualities or characteristics to it as "such-and-such a thing".

Furthermore, let alone anything else, one cannot even say that something exists as long as it is not measured. What this demonstrates is—as you devotees may have heard in our previous sermons—that Nibbāna is described as "the crushing of the conceit 'I am'" (*asmi-māna-samugghāta*). It is according to this viewpoint of 'I am' (*asmi*) that these five aggregates operate. When one assumes 'I am', one measures accordingly. There is a valuable discourse in the Buddha's own words that declares this measuring. On one occasion, Ven. Ānanda explains to the Saṅgha something declared by the Buddha: a definition of the word "world" (*loka*). What is the "world"? "That by which one gains a perception of the world, that by which one does a measuring of the world, that is called the 'world' in this Noble Discipline." That by which one identifies the world, that by which one does a measuring of the world, is what is called the "world" in this Dispensation, according to this Noble Discipline (*ariya-vinaya*). With what does one measure? Here are the things with which one measures: with the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, and finally, with the mind—with these six sense-bases. It is stated that without these measurings, there is no world. So this is the very story that these people have had to accept. Without a measurement, where there is no measuring, one cannot attribute anything to a thing; one cannot even say that it exists. Likewise, one cannot speak of any characteristic of that existing thing.

To what extent—those devotees who do science may have heard—this is called quantum physics. This is the latest branch of physical science considered the most advanced in recent times. Even the philosophers presenting quantum theory have now had to accept that where there is no observation, one cannot say that something exists. As long as there is no observation, one cannot say that something exists; that is to say, without observation, one cannot say that something exists separately on its own. One cannot say that there is a separate world independent of the mind. To what

extent—some of those leading nuclear physicists say that when their observations become contradictory, when with every observation their premise that 'there is a separate thing on its own' is disproved, having nothing else to do, in the end they say: "If I had known earlier that one could not escape this quantum leap after seeing the results of these observations, I would not have laid my hands on this." Those scientists say this. Having nothing they can do, they have become perplexed. They started from the wrong end: assuming that things exist independent of the mind. They still continue to look with that idea, assuming that such a thing exists. But in the end they realize, and they are forced to say, especially regarding whether electrons exist: "If by the mere act of our looking, that electron is disturbed, how can we know its true state?" Thus, if it changes even by the mere extent of our directing the mind to it, how can we say what it is? They have had to face such a dilemma. What is the reason for this? Now, let us state the corresponding part in our Buddha-Dhamma. The Buddha has preached a discourse—since we have declared this discourse on previous occasions, it is nothing new to those devotees who have heard our sermons.

On one occasion, the Buddha said to the Saṅgha: "Monks, if other sectarians (*aññatitthiyā*) come and ask you such questions, what answers would you give them?" This shows that the Buddha had prepared the minds of the Saṅgha to answer when such questions arose. The Buddha says: "Other sectarians might come and ask you questions like this: 'What is the root of all things? What is the arising of all things? Where do all things originate? Toward what are all things directed?'" There are many such questions. We will shorten them according to the situation in a way relevant to this topic. Then the monks say: "We do not have the ability to answer these. May the Blessed One himself explain." Thereupon, the Buddha delivers that discourse: "If they ask so, monks, say this:

*"Chandamūlakā, āvuso, sabbe dhammā"*—'Friends, all things are rooted in desire/interest (*chanda*).' *Chanda* means desire or interest. Our mind is directed toward something first of all because of the desire for it. Let us take *chanda* as a lighter shade of craving (*taṇhā*). Thus, it is within a sense of purpose or need that even those scientists engage in research—it is because of *chanda*. They expect to analyze the atom or its components; they have a great interest in it. That *chanda*—all things are rooted in desire (*chanda*). Next, it says: *"Manasikārasambhavā sabbe dhammā"*—all things originate in attention (*manasikāra*). To express *sambhava* in Sinhala, it means the arising of all things; everything is met by us when our attention, our contemplation, is directed to it. That is the very point about "observation" mentioned earlier. If by our very act of observing, the thing we subject to observation changes, how can we know its true state? That is the question they ask. This demonstrates that there is nothing apart from the mind. This is *manomayā*! If those scientists had correctly understood these three phrases—*"Manopubbaṅgamā dhammā, manoseṭṭhā manomayā"*—they would not have fallen into this. They started from the wrong side, saying that "things" exist.

Next, there is another aspect: *"Phassasamudayā sabbe dhammā"*—all things arise from contact (*phassa*). What is called contact? Just now we spoke of the six sense-bases (*saḷāyatana*). Each of these bases is called the base of eye-contact (*cakkhu-samphassa*), the base of ear-contact (*sota-samphassa*), the base of nose-contact (*ghāna-samphassa*), and so forth. Both words *phassa* and *samphassa* are used. Thus, it is through these bases that contact arises, and it is from contact that a thing originates. It is by mental contacting that those things are constructed. Regarding *"Manopubbaṅgamā dhammā"*, it is when there is mind-contact (*mano-samphassa*) that the thing taken as its object emerges: contact (*phassa*). Furthermore, the Buddha used this word contact (*phassa*) in the *Brahmajāla Sutta* to dismantle all speculative views (*diṭṭhi*). How did the Buddha reject even those views established by the ancient sages who, far exceeding the achievements of modern scientists, developed the mind, developed all five supernormal knowledges (*pañca-abhinna*) to the extent of seeing past births, and stood upon that direct experience? "That too is dependent on contact." "That too is dependent on contact." He dismantles them by that very fact. What does it mean to say that it arises dependent on contact? It is connected to the mind. It is not something correct, not the ultimate reality. That is the point. Now, to clarify these points further, later two illustrations are given, which have been frequently shown to you devotees. But before that, let us mention another thing stated by those nuclear physicists, which was referred to earlier: "If by the mere directing of our mind to something—by the mere directing of our mind toward what we intend to observe—it is disturbed, how can we know its true state?"

The best answer to that question is found in two points we previously presented as similes when explaining the phenomena of Name-and-Form (*nāmarūpa*). One is the dog walking across a footbridge, who is deceived by his own reflection. Thinking it is another dog, if he is angry, he growls, or if he is pleased, he wags his tail. Otherwise, he keeps looking to see who is there. But that problem is resolved in this way: as we briefly mentioned, the dog thinks: "I look because it is visible." But "it is visible because I look." What happened to this dog is what happens to most people. That dog on the footbridge, going to the middle of the bridge, looks at the reflection cast in the water and thinks: "I look because it is visible." But it is visible because he looks. That "looking" is what is called observation. Now, connect those words. Through this, one can understand that regarding this Name-and-Form (*nāmarūpa*), even scientists are already caught up in the Name-phenomena (*nāma-dhamma*) within that act of looking. A separate reality cannot be seen on its own. *"Manopubbaṅgamā dhammā, manoseṭṭhā manomayā."*

Another simile for this was presented recently when explaining Name-and-Form (*nāmarūpa*) phenomena, and it seems this simile has become popular with many for various reasons. What is it? We illustrated it using an ancient Greek myth. Briefly, there is an ancient myth about Narcissus, a beautiful Greek youth who had never seen his own face. While walking in the forest, as he bent down over a pond to wash his face, he mistook his own reflection for a water nymph dwelling in the water and tried to embrace her. He tried all day, and for many days, and in the end, he

sacrificed his life. When Narcissus reached his hands into the water to embrace the nymph, each time he did so, the water was disturbed and rippled. Now, consider that it is through our very attention (*manasikāra*), through our very attempt to know what it is, that it is disturbed—this is the kind of disturbance meant. What, then, is being looked at here? It is Name-and-Form (*nāmarūpa*). Although it is taken as a separate thing, what is constantly the object of our mind and consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is Name-and-Form. This is a form merely in name. It is not real form. It is not the reality (*yathā*). As we said, form is recognized through name because of that naming. And the concept of impingement/resistance is given to name through form. Why is it said that one cannot attribute qualities or characteristics to either of them? This too has been shown very well by the Buddha in a very profound discourse named the *Mahānidāna Sutta*.

A discourse showing a very profound aspect of Dependent Arising (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), a very profound aspect concerning the word contact (*phassa*), was preached step by step by the Buddha to Ven. Ānanda. We have also shown this on various occasions. Briefly, he demonstrates contact through the relationship between Name and Form, stating that without those modes, signs, and characteristics by which the group belonging to Name is designated, no concept of designation regarding physical form would be manifest. That is to say, without those Name-phenomena of feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), volition (*cetanā*), contact (*phassa*), and attention (*manasikāra*), no identification of physical form can be made. Next, without those physical impingements/resistances arising from earth (*pathavī*), water (*āpo*), fire (*tejo*), and wind (*vāyo*) which belong to Form, no talk of sensory contact, impingement, or experiencing regarding Name-phenomena would be manifest. These two aspects are shown. There too, those characteristics can be attributed only after the mind is applied to it. Apart from that, there is no such thing as characteristics inherent or intrinsic to them on their own. It has to be accepted that they are attributed by the mind. Regarding this point, there is a valuable discourse in the text *Sutta Nipāta* named the *Mahāviyūha Sutta*. In those days, intense debates and disputes existed in India, even more than today. The Buddha has delivered an extraordinary sermon that pacifies those debates and disputes. In it, a valuable verse is shown:

> *Passaṁ naro dakkhati nāmarūpaṁ,*
>
> *Disvāna vā ñassati tānimeva;*
>
> *Kāmaṁ bahuṁ passatu appakaṁ vā,*
>
> *Na hi tena suddhiṁ kusalā vadanti.*

This verse is specifically cited here because it is also relevant to the problem of those nuclear physicists mentioned earlier.

*"Passaṁ naro dakkhati nāmarūpaṁ"*—"A man seeing, sees only Name-and-Form (*nāmarūpa*)." There is nothing apart from Name-and-Form. *"Disvāna vā ñassati tānimeva"*—"having seen, what he knows is just that." It is nothing apart from it. *"Kāmaṁ bahuṁ passatu appakaṁ vā"*—"Let him see much or little, it is of no use." *"Na hi tena suddhiṁ kusalā vadanti"*—"the wise do not say that purity comes by that, nor do they say it is complete." That is the story. Thus, the Buddha rejected all sixty-two speculative views (*diṭṭhi*) in the *Brahmajāla Sutta*—all views concerning both the past and the future—showing that they are dismantled through this teaching, and the Buddha concluded the *Brahmajāla Sutta* with an extraordinary simile.

I hope to bring that simile to the minds of you devotees on this occasion. In it, the Buddha shows why this should be called *Brahmajāla* (the Net of Brahma / the Supreme Net). The Buddha presents the story of this Supreme Net in this way: "Monks, suppose a skilled fisherman or a fisherman's apprentice casts a very finely woven net, with very fine mesh, over a small pond. After covering the pond containing the fish with that fine net, that fisherman knows very well that whatever fish are in it, whenever they rise to the surface, they are caught within that net. They cannot rise above the mesh; they remain trapped in the net. That is what is meant by saying any speculative view (*diṭṭhi*) is caught in this net." What, then, is this mesh of the net? The mesh of the net is indeed contact (*phassa*). That is why every speculative view in that discourse is dismantled. The Buddha dismantles all sixty-two views saying: *"Tad-api phassa-paccayā, tad-api phassa-paccayā, tad-api phassa-paccayā"*—"that too is dependent on contact, that too is dependent on contact, that too is dependent on contact." This is the very same story we have to say here regarding the problem of those scientists. They must realize one day that they cannot see this apart from the thing they observe. What they see is that very Name-and-Form (*nāmarūpa*). They think they are seeing an independently existing thing there. That is why it is said: "If by the mere act of our looking to see if this electron exists, it is disturbed, how can we know its true state?" It is from the very degree of mental application—through attention (*manasikāra*)—that these arise. They originate from contact (*phassa*). That point of origin is what the Buddha brought out in the *Brahmajāla Sutta*. All those speculative views contact again and again through the six sense-bases (*saḷāyatana*): *"phussa phussa paṭisaṁvedenti"*. Contacting through those six sense-bases, they experience feeling (*vedanā*) through them. Through that, they develop perceptions and cravings (*taṇhā*). Developing perception and craving, they rotate again in existence (*bhava*)—in this way, those speculative views are dismantled. Apart from contacting through the six sense-bases, they cannot know. What they see is not ultimate reality; that is what the *Brahmajāla Sutta* points out.

What, then, is the truth? What is the truth discovered by the Buddha? It is the very thing we mentioned earlier: the ultimate culmination of the view of not-self/non-self (*anattā*) is voidness (*suññatā*). Voidness is the truth. Worldly beings are trapped within things measured by that wedge they have driven in, called 'I am' (*asmi*), assuming "they exist, they exist." The Buddha showed that when that wedge of 'I am'

(*asmi*) is pulled out, nothing remains. He declared this: *"Sassato-r-iva khāyati, passato natthi kiñcanaṁ"*—in an inspired verse on one occasion, the Buddha declared: "It appears as if eternal, but to one who sees (*passato*), there is nothing." It appears as if eternal. He points this out on another occasion: *"Jānato passato natthi kiñcanaṁ"*—"to one who knows and sees, there is nothing in the world." That is also a realization; there is a moment when it is directly experienced. That is exactly what the Buddha meant when he said that the cessation of the world is also right here. The arising of the world is due to craving (*taṇhā*); *"taṇhā ponobhavikā"*—it is by craving that existence (*bhava*) is prepared. The Buddha has declared this in various ways: the hindrance of ignorance (*aviijjā-nīvaraṇa*) covers up the impermanence (*aniccata*) of these things. The glue of craving sticks them together. Within that, in the present, one assumes that "a thing exists", assuming a state of stability (*ṭhiti*). In that darkness of ignorance, with that force of craving called thirst, it is also described as the glue of craving. It is by gluing with that glue of craving that this existence (*bhava*) is constructed. It is within that constructed world that one travels further and further in this *saṁsāra*.

Thus, to escape from *saṁsāra*, the Buddha points to that true state of affairs (*yathā-tatta*). What is true realization? *"Jānato passato natthi kiñcanaṁ"*. As for those names for Nibbāna we mentioned—the signless (*animitta*), the desireless/uncommitted (*appaṇihita*), and the void (*suññata*)—there is a place where signs disappear, desires disappear, and there is no stable self assumed as 'I' and 'mine'. That is what is called the cessation of existence (*bhava-nirodha*), experienced in this very life. Therefore, the liberation that humans seek—the Buddha has pointed out that speculative views (*diṭṭhi*) are like a headache. Regarding what those nuclear physicists declared, one nuclear physicist stated at one point: "If we had known that we could not escape this wretched quantum leap, we would not have laid our hands on this quantum theory." They say so when they are helpless. Why did he call it wretched? Because in the end, what is done in this observation is merely the expansion of *saṁsāra*, not the realization of reality. In reality, the Buddha points out that voidness (*suññatā*) comes at the end. Because each of these worlds is constructed through one's own six sense-bases (*saḷāyatana*). Our world is not the dog's world. Other animals construct their worlds through their six sense-bases. It is that very world that the Buddha described as suffering (*dukkha*); there is no satisfaction in it. There are the sufferings of birth (*jāti*), decay and death/aging and death (*jarāmaraṇa*), sickness (*vyādhi*), and death. If one hopes to escape from it, one has to start from that very impermanence (*aniccata*). If something is impermanent, one understands that it is suffering (*dukkha*). All these reconstructions—these preparations/constructions (*saṅkhāra*)—are:

*Aniccā vata saṅkhārā,*

*Uppādavayadhammino;*

*Uppajjitvā nirujjhanti,*

*Tesaṁ vūpasamo sukho.*

This is frequently heard in houses of mourning; you devotees might think of it as something inauspicious. But within it lies the entire truth. *"Aniccā vata saṅkhārā"*—preparations (*saṅkhāra*) are indeed impermanent. *"Uppādavayadhammino"*—they are of the nature of arising and passing away. They arise only to be destroyed. *"Tesaṁ vūpasamo sukho"*—the calming/stilling of those preparations is bliss. This is why you devotees have heard that Nibbāna is described as *"sabbasaṅkhārasamatha"*—the stilling of all preparations. When preparations are stilled, a prepared/constructed thing (*saṅkhata*) does not arise. When a prepared thing is not constructed, those graspings/holdings (*upādāna*) called the five aggregates of grasping/holding are not built up. The Buddha declared that this state can be realized in this very life. This is what is called "extinguishment without grasping/holding" (*anupādā-parinibbāna*). When all that is let go, the mind is liberated; it is not some strange thing, not something to be grasped—that mind. If within this grasping/holding (*upādāna*), there are birth (*jāti*), decay and death/aging and death (*jarāmaraṇa*), sickness, and death, and they are responsible for them, then the moment of letting go of this is the bliss of liberation. The understanding within that is indeed *"Jānato passato natthi kiñcanaṁ"*—to one who sees, there is actually nothing here. When that knowledge and vision (*ñāṇadassana*) is developed to the highest level, that conjuring of a existence (*bhava*) by craving (*taṇhā*)—the Buddha has on some occasions compared craving to a seamstress (*sibbānī*). Think of how a stitch is made, how a sewing machine makes a stitch. Each time the needle goes down, a thread passes underneath and forms a knot. That is *"taṇhā-paccayā upādānaṁ"*—dependent on craving, grasping/holding arises; because of grasping/holding, a existence (*bhava*) is woven. The Buddha has shown this in a verse:

*Yo ubhantena viditvā,*

*Majjhe mantā na lippati;*

*Taṁ brūmi mahāpurisoti,*

*So'dha sibbanimaccagā.*

The Buddha declares an extraordinary verse: "He who, having understood both ends, does not cling to the middle with wisdom (*mantā*)—him I call a Great Man; he has escaped from that seamstress (sewing work) here."

The Buddha declares an extraordinary verse. One who, having correctly understood both ends (*ubhante*), does not cling to the middle with wisdom (*mantā*)—*"taṁ brūmi mahāpurisoti"*—"him I call a Great Man." *"So'dha sibbanimaccagā"*—that person has escaped from that seamstress (sewing work) here. He went beyond the seamstress; he was not caught by the seamstress. Now, the Buddha shows how the ordinary world is caught by the seamstress. What are these two ends, and what is the

middle? One end is contact (*phassa*). The second end is the arising of contact (*phassa-samudaya*). In the middle is the cessation of contact (*phassa-nirodha*). What, then, does this seamstress do? Gluing with the glue of craving (*taṇhā*), she glues together, disregarding the cessation (*nirodha*) in the middle. With every contact, there is a cessation. But because of craving, forgetting that cessation, we collect those contacts together and construct a "thing". Regarding this, there is a passage about the insight-practitioner making attention subtle: *"phussa phussa vayaṁ passaṁ, evaṁ virajjati"*. *"Phussa phussa vayaṁ passaṁ"* means seeing the passing away of contact with each and every contact, and in this way, one becomes dispassionate, developing non-attachment. As long as one does not see cessation, gluing with that glue of craving, one weaves a existence (*bhava*). That is the stitch of becoming (*bhava-sibbanī*). What, then, does that Great Man do? He sees cessation (*nirodha*). That is why the Buddha declares that both the beings in the form realms and the beings in the formless realms return to existence again and again because they do not know cessation (*nirodha*). You devotees may have heard that craving is described as *"taṇhā ponobhavikā"*—it creates renewed existence. It links existence to existence. Forgetting cessation, through craving, one brings out contact and the arising of contact, generating another contact, while disregarding the cessation of that contact. In this very way, what the Buddha does is to bring out that cessation which the world had forgotten. That cessation is itself called Nibbāna. That noble state, ending in the cessation of the six sense-bases (*saḷāyatana-nirodha*), is what the Buddha brought out. This is not only for those times. This is not only for the recluses and brahmins of that day. Even today's philosophers and scientists can learn something from it. Therefore, you devotees must take this matter of the perception of the impermanent (*anicca-saññā*) deeply to heart. Although we preach this much about meditation, some minds are drawn to that scientific physical philosophy, taking it as the latest and most modern philosophy. Those who have got lost within it as a philosophy are not ordinary people; the purpose of saying these words was to show that nuclear physicists are among them. According to these most modern concepts and discoveries, we ultimately return once again to that very Dhammapada passage declared by the Buddha: *"Manopubbaṅgamā dhammā, manoseṭṭhā manomayā"*.

Therefore, today, I hope you devotees have gathered at least some small fragment regarding that powerful perception of the impermanent (*anicca-saññā*) which, as mentioned earlier, is capable of destroying the entire mass of defilements, and which supports insight (*vipassanā*). May the virtue practiced, the meditation cultivated, and this Dhamma sermon heard by you devotees today support you to escape from this world situated within this fathom-long body—from this entire existence (*bhava*) which brings the suffering of birth (*jāti*), decay and death/aging and death (*jarāmaraṇa*), and so forth—and may this Dhamma sermon support you to realize that noble state of Nibbāna through the penetration of the paths and fruits of Stream-entry (*sotāpatti*), Once-returning (*sakadāgāmitā*), Non-returning (*anāgāmitā*), and Arahantship. Let us aspire that whatever beings from Avīci to

Akaniṭṭha wish to rejoice in the merit of this Dhamma preaching and Dhamma hearing, may they realize those highest goals expected through that rejoicing. May everyone, through the power of this merit, attain the supreme, deathless, great Nibbāna. Let us share the merit by reciting these verses.

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……*"