Pahankanuwa Sermon #63

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

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(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.137)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

Pali Stanza:

Ārogya paramā lābhā, nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ;

aṭṭhaṅgiko ca maggānaṃ, khemaṃ amatagāminaṃ.

From:

Dhammapada 204 (Sukhavagga)

Dear Listeners,

The realization of the Four Noble Truths is equivalent to the arising of the Dhamma-eye. The arising of that Dhamma-eye is like one born blind receiving sight. Whenever a person born blind begins to see, a great mental revolution takes place within that person at that moment. The Buddha, the Teacher of the Three Worlds, declared to the world that a similar mental revolution occurs with the arising of the Dhamma-eye.

The verse of inspired utterance (*udāna*) declared by the Buddha while explaining this matter to the wanderer (*paribbājaka*) Māgandhiya is what we have set as our topic today. On one occasion, the Buddha was staying in the fire-hall of the Brahmin Bhāradvājagotta in the market town of Kammāsadhamma in the Kuru country, using a grass mat as a bed. That Brahmin Bhāradvājagotta was someone who had some devotion towards the Buddha. One day, the Buddha went to Kammāsadhamma market town for alms in the morning, partook of His alms-food, and entered a forest grove. He went to the foot of a tree for His day-abiding (*divāvihāra*), staying in meditative seclusion during the day. In the meantime, the wanderer named Māgandhiya, while walking about for exercise, arrived at the fire-hall of the Brahmin Bhāradvājagotta. Seeing that grass mat in the fire-hall, he said to the Brahmin Bhāradvājagotta: “Master Bhāradvāja, for whom is this grass mat prepared? This looks like a grass mat prepared for an ascetic (*samaṇa*).” When he said this, the Brahmin Bhāradvājagotta replied: “Master Māgandhiya, there is the ascetic Master

Gotama, who went forth from the Sakyan clan. A glorious report regarding Him has spread, highlighting His nine virtues, starting with: 'He is indeed the Blessed One, the Worthy One, the Fully Self-Awakened One…'"

"It is for Him that this grass mat has been prepared as a bed." Then Māgandhiya said: "Master Bhāradvāja, it is indeed an ill sight that we have seen. To see a bed prepared for that *Bhūnahu* (destroyer of growth/life) ascetic Gotama." The word *Bhūnahu* was used as a term of abuse. These wanderers used that name for the Buddha to mean someone who destroys *Bhava* (Becoming), who thwarts growth and development. The Brahmin Bhāradvājagotta said: "Māgandhiya, watch your words, watch your words! A vast number of wise Brahmins, wise householders, and wise ascetics and kṣatriyas who are highly pleased with Master Gotama have been tamed by Him. Therefore, do not say such things." But Māgandhiya replied: "Even if I meet the ascetic Gotama face to face, I will say this very thing: that the ascetic Gotama is a *Bhūnahu*." Then the Brahmin said: "Very well, if you do not mind, I shall tell the ascetic Gotama that you said this." Māgandhiya replied: "Yes, by all means, tell Him."

The Buddha, while dwelling in seclusion, heard this conversation with His divine ear (*dibba-sota*). Then, that evening, He arose from His meditation, went back to the fire-hall of the Brahmin Bhāradvājagotta where the grass mat was, and sat down. When the Brahmin Bhāradvājagotta came there to converse, the Buddha asked him: "Bhāradvāja, was there some conversation between you and the wanderer regarding this grass mat?" As soon as He asked this, the Brahmin Bhāradvāja's body shuddered and his hair stood on end. He thought: "I was intending to tell this to Master Gotama. Now indeed, there is no need to tell it anew."

Just about then, the wanderer Māgandhiya also came there on his evening walk. Having arrived, he sat down near the Buddha, and while they were engaging in conversation, the Buddha asked him: "Māgandhiya, the eye delights in forms, is enchanted by forms. In the Tathāgata, this eye is tamed, guarded, and restrained; He teaches the Dhamma for the restraint of the eye. Dwell with the eye restrained, and with a mind stilled within. Is it on account of this that you say 'Bhūnahu'?" The wanderer Māgandhiya replied: "Yes, it is because of that. For in our teaching, it is stated that such restraint is something that destroys growth and development. That is why we say so." Then the Buddha asked: "Māgandhiya, if someone dwells with the eye restrained and with a mind stilled within, having attained internal peace, is there anything to be said against that?" Māgandhiya replied: "I have nothing to say against that." (The Buddha likewise spoke about the ear—how the ear delights in sounds and how He teaches the Dhamma for its restraint. In the same way, He spoke about the mind; how the mind delights in thoughts and mind-objects (*dhammā*), and how He teaches the Dhamma for taming and restraining them as well.)

Even though Māgandhiya had previously said it was stated in their teaching, at that moment he had to admit that if one dwells with the eye restrained and with a mind stilled within, and likewise with the other senses, there is nothing negative to be said about it. It was then that the Buddha declared His own past household life:

“Māgandhiya, in my lay life, I too lived a life of gratification, pampered by pleasing, agreeable forms, sounds, tastes, and touches. I had three palaces: one for the rainy season, one for the winter season, and another for the summer season. For the four months of the rainy season, entertained solely by female musicians, I did not even descend to the lower floor, enjoying such happiness and luxury. At a later time, having correctly understood the five aspects of these pleasures—namely their origin (*samudaya*), their passing away (*atthaṅgama*), their gratification (*assāda*), their danger (*ādīnava*), and the escape (*nissaraṇa*) from them—I abandoned the longing and *Taṇhā* (Craving) for forms, tastes, and touches, and now I dwell with a mind stilled within.”

Having stated this, the Buddha asked: “Suppose there is a very wealthy householder, fully enjoying the five strands of sensual pleasure. On a later occasion, having fulfilled wholesome qualities and practiced good conduct, he is reborn in the Nandana Grove of Tāvatiṃsa, enjoying celestial pleasures in the company of celestial nymphs. After receiving such pleasures, would that person ever long for the pleasures enjoyed by ordinary householders in the human world?” Then Māgandhiya replied: “No, because celestial pleasures are far superior to human pleasures.” At that, the Buddha declared: “Just so, Māgandhiya, having abandoned the desires for the five strands of sensual pleasure and stilled the mind within, I experience a happiness that is aloof from those sensual pleasures and unwholesome states, which is far superior even to celestial happiness. Therefore, seeing those who enjoy the five strands of sensual pleasure, I do not envy them, nor do I develop a longing for those pleasures.”

Next, the Buddha gave a simile: “Māgandhiya, suppose there is a leper whose entire body is covered in sores and boils, which are festering and being eaten by worms. This man, sitting near a pit of fire, a pit of glowing embers, cauterizes and scratches the scabs of his wounds. His relatives and friends summon a surgeon to treat this leper. After the treatment, he is cured and becomes healthy.”

“Once cured, if this man sees another leper scratching his wounds near a pit of embers in the same manner, would this cured man feel any longing or envy towards that leper or his treatment?” the Buddha asked the wanderer. Māgandhiya replied: “No, Master Gotama. It is only when there is a disease that medicine is of use. For this healthy person, medicine or those treatments have no meaning.” Just so, the Buddha declared: “When I have abandoned the longing for those five strands of sensual pleasure, I do not feel any envy or longing when seeing someone enjoying them. Just as the cured leper, upon looking at another leper, feels no desire for the treatments, medicines, or cauterizations that the other is undergoing.”

This simile given by the Buddha is profound. It is given to convey a deep meaning. Next, the Buddha presented another simile concerning that very leper: “Suppose someone who was cured of leprosy in that manner is grabbed by his arms by two strong men and dragged towards a pit of glowing embers. What do you think,

Māgandhiya? Would that man twist his body this way and that to escape from being dragged towards the pit of embers? Why would he do so?" Māgandhiya replied: "Because the fire in that pit of embers is painful to touch; fire is something that causes burning and torment. That is why he would twist his body."

Then the Buddha asked: "Is it only now that the fire causes burning and torment, or was it so previously as well?" Māgandhiya replied: "Both now and previously, fire is indeed something that causes burning and torment. However, the leper, because of his leprosy and the distorted condition of his body, had developed a distorted perception (*viparīta-saññā*) of pleasure regarding that fire." Thereupon, the Buddha declared: "These five strands of sensual pleasure are themselves a mass of burning and torment. Those with bodies distorted by them and fraught with painful contacts regard those sensual pleasures as happiness." This is where the similes of the pit of embers and the leper apply. The five strands of sensual pleasure are things that cause great burning and torment. Yet, ordinary worldlings, due to their distorted perception, do not understand that they cause burning and torment, just as the pit of embers was appealing to the leper. But once cured, the burning and tormenting nature of these things becomes apparent.

Through these similes, the Buddha reveals that the five strands of sensual pleasure, which the ordinary world regards as supreme, are actually a distorted state, and that freedom from them is the true state of health. Next, the Buddha further expanded on the simile of the leper, saying that if a leper scratches and cauterizes the open sores of his body near a fire-pit or a pit of embers, the more he scratches and cauterizes, the more infected, foul-smelling, and festering those sores become. Yet, he derives a mere measure of gratification from that cauterization. In the same way, the five strands of sensual pleasure are entirely a mass of burning and torment. But due to the world's ignorance, they derive a mere measure of gratification in accordance with those sensual pleasures.

Then the Buddha asked: "Have you ever seen or heard of any king or royal minister who, while enjoying the fivefold sensual pleasures, dwelt with a stilled mind having attained internal peace—either in the past, now in the present, or in the future?" Māgandhiya replied that he had never seen such a person. "Very well, I too have never seen such a person. But if any ascetics and Brahmins have liberated their minds from the five strands of sensual pleasure and attained internal peace, it is because they understood their feverish burnings (*pariḷāha*), fully comprehended the arising and passing away of sensual pleasures, their gratification (*assāda*), their danger (*ādīnava*), and their escape (*nissaraṇa*), and thereby detached themselves from them," declared the Buddha. It was at that moment that the Buddha uttered that inspired verse (*udāna*):

Ārogya paramā lābhā

Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ

Aṭṭhaṅgiko ca maggānaṃ

Khemaṃ amatagāminaṃ

Among gains, the highest gain is health, the state of being free from disease. Among pleasures, the supreme pleasure is Nibbāna. Among paths leading to the Deathless, the eight-factored Noble Eightfold Path is secure (*khemaṃ*) and safe.

As soon as this verse was uttered, the wanderer Māgandhiya, thinking of the first two lines: "Health is the supreme gain, Nibbāna is the supreme bliss," said: "Master Gotama, this is a well-spoken statement you have made. We too have heard our former teachers of the wanderers uttering these first two lines. This agrees perfectly with the Dhamma of the Blessed One. In our teaching, our teachers have also stated these first two lines." The Buddha then asked: "What is the health and Nibbāna that is meant according to the view of your teachers?" When asked this, the wanderer Māgandhiya began to stroke his own limbs and said: "Master Gotama, this is health, this is Nibbāna. I have no illness whatsoever. I am in perfect health. I have no affliction at all."

Then the Buddha declared: "Māgandhiya, because you do not possess the Noble Eye, you see this which is diseased as healthy." Here, five terms are mentioned that convey the idea of this body being purely a disease, purely a boil, purely a dart, purely a calamity, and purely an affliction: *rogabhūta* (consisting of disease), *gaṇḍabhūta* (consisting of boils/tumors), *sallabhūta* (consisting of darts), *aghabhūta* (consisting of calamity), and *ābādhabhūta* (consisting of affliction). "It is because you lack the Noble Eye that you speak of health and freedom from disease regarding this body, which is purely a disease and an affliction."

Here, we realize that the Buddha is pointing to a concept far superior to what ordinary worldlings consider to be health. The entire body is a disease. This is frequently mentioned throughout the Dhamma, in terms such as *rogatiddaṃ pabhaṅguraṃ* (a nest of disease, fragile). This body is purely a cage of disease. Yet, we hold on tightly to our concept of health and wellness. The concept of health that the Buddha intends here is far more excellent. What that wanderer spoke of is the ordinary mundane concept of health. That is why the Buddha said to him: "This is not the real health, this is not the real Nibbāna." It was to explain this matter that the Buddha presented the simile of the person born blind.

"Now, Māgandhiya, suppose there is a man blind from birth. That blind man cannot distinguish black and white, nor can he see colors like blue, yellow, or red. He cannot see even and uneven places, nor can he see the sun, moon, and stars. He is completely blind. That man hears a sighted person saying: 'A white cloth is spotless, clean, and extremely beautiful.' This man then goes about searching for a white cloth. Then, a deceitful man brings an extremely dirty, greasy, and soiled cloth, and deceives him:

‘Here is a beautiful, spotless white cloth.’ That blind man wraps himself in it and makes a joyful exclamation: ‘Ah, now I am wearing a beautiful, clean, white cloth!’ Then the Buddha asked Māgandhiya: ‘Does that man say that the cloth is white and clean out of his own knowing and seeing, or is it because he heard what the sighted person said?’ Māgandhiya replied: ‘He says so only having heard what another said, but that is not a clean, genuine cloth.’ ‘Just so, Māgandhiya, these wanderers have no eyes. It is merely their statement that you are expressing. This body is purely a boil and a disease, yet you speak of health within it.’ Here, the Buddha presented the simile of the blind man.

The Buddha further declared: “If, on a later occasion, his relatives summon an eye physician who treats him, and this man is cured of his blindness and his eyes begin to see, he might even feel angry towards the person who had previously deceived him with the dirty cloth, thinking: ‘For so long indeed, this person has been deceiving me with a soiled cloth!’ In the same way,” the Buddha declared, “if the Noble Eye arises, on some occasion you will realize that these five—namely form, *Vedanā* (Feeling), perception, *Saṅkhāra* (Preparations), and *Viññāṇa* (Consciousness)—are purely a boil, a disease, a dart, and an affliction. It is because you lack the Noble Eye that you have formed a concept of health regarding them.” Thus did the Buddha explain to Māgandhiya.

Then Māgandhiya said: “In that case, O Blessed One, now a great devotion has arisen in me towards the Blessed One. Please preach the Dhamma to me so that I may be freed from this blindness. I can see that you are capable of freeing me from this blindness.” At that, the Buddha declared: “Suppose there is a man born blind, and a doctor comes and administers medical treatment. Yet, the man’s eyes do not clear up. That would only be a weariness and trouble for the doctor. In the same way, if I tell you what the Noble Eye is and what Nibbāna is according to the Noble concept, and you do not understand it, that would only be a weariness and trouble for Me.”

Then Māgandhiya pleaded again: “I feel that the ascetic Master Gotama is indeed capable of explaining to me how to be freed from this blindness.” It was then that the Buddha declared: “When you develop that eye, you will experience revulsion towards these five aggregates of grasping (*upādāna*)—namely form, *Vedanā* (Feeling), perception, *Saṅkhāra* (Preparations), and *Viññāṇa* (Consciousness). Just as the cured man felt resentment toward the person who had deceived him for so long, you will realize: ‘For a long time indeed, have I been deceived and cheated by this mind (*iminā cittena*)!’ Here, the mind is revealed as the culprit. Just as the dirty cloth was seen as a clean cloth, this mind has presented these things as beautiful (*subha*), healthy, good, and attractive. It is in order to bring about that realization that the Buddha preaches the Dhamma.”

There, the Buddha further declared: “If you are to develop this eye, you must associate with superior persons (*sappurisa*). When associating with superior persons, you will get to hear the True Dhamma (*saddhamma*). Having heard the True Dhamma, you must then engage in the practice of the Dhamma in accordance

with the Dhamma (*dhammānudhamma-paṭipatti*). When practicing the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma, on some occasion, you will be able to develop this Noble Eye." When this was declared, the wanderer requested going forth (*pabbajjā*) and higher ordination (*upasampadā*) from the Buddha. The Buddha said: "In this dispensation, if a member of another sect wishes to go forth and receive higher ordination, he must undergo a probationary period (*parivāsa*) of four months. After that probationary period, only if the Saṅgha is pleased, they will grant the going forth and higher ordination. However, I have room to make exceptions for certain individuals." The wanderer said: "Master Gotama, if there is such a rule in your dispensation, I will undergo probation not just for four months, but for four years." In any case, the Buddha granted the going forth and higher ordination to the wanderer Māgandhiya. It is said that not long after his higher ordination, practicing meditation with firm energy, the monk Māgandhiya attained Arahatship.

The essence that we can extract from this detailed narrative is what the Buddha points out here. We have often heard the phrase *ārogya paramā*. However, there is a much deeper concept there. In sayings such as: "Health is the supreme gain, contentment is the supreme wealth (*santuṭṭhi paramaṃ dhanaṃ*)," what is spoken of is the ordinary worldly concept of health, identifying the greatest gain in terms of wealth. But here, the greatest gain and the greatest bliss is shown to be Nibbāna. That means the state of being liberated. True health is the liberation from what is a disease, what is a boil. It is in this sense that Nibbāna becomes both a gain and a bliss.

Thus, the Buddha has presented a meditation subject (*kammaṭṭhāna*) for insight (*vipassanā*) known as comprehension (*sammasana*), instructing us to contemplate the five aggregates of grasping in eleven ways:

1. *Aniccato* – as Impermanent / Inconstant

2. *Dukkhato* – as Suffering / Unsatisfactoriness / Stress

3. *Rogato* – as a disease

4. *Gaṇḍato* – as a boil

5. *Sallato* – as a dart

6. *Aghato* – as a calamity

7. *Ābādhato* – as an affliction

8. *Parato* – as alien (not belonging to oneself)

9. *Palokato* – as disintegrating

10. *Suññato* – as empty

11. *Anattato* – as Not-self / Non-self / Unsubstantial

Let us consider this through a simile. Although it is not mentioned in the Dhamma in this way, let us reflect for a moment in light of the *Māgandhiya Sutta*, just as we spoke of the leper. Suppose a thorn or a dart has pierced someone's hand or foot, but they are unaware that it has pierced them. However, it begins to swell. Sometimes, this person might think: "This is starting to heal." They might even consider the swelling as a sign of health. But when they go to a physician, upon examination, the physician understands: "This is happening because a thorn has pierced here." Then, the thorn must be pulled out. Only then is it cured.

Let us contemplate a little based on that simile. Now, when the Buddha asks us to look at each aggregate (*khandha*) in this way—as *Anicca* and so on—we can easily understand why. *Aniccato* – this is impermanent. Then, this bodily cage arose for us as a swelling, just as we mentioned in the simile of the thorn. The swelling that occurs in the body does not affect only the body; it also goes to the head. That is what is called the intoxication of health (*ārogya-mada*). It means: "Others may be sick, but I am healthy." This is an intoxication. Thus, that swelling is not confined to the body. Now, many people take pains to enlarge their bodies using various kinds of nourishing foods, trying to make the body look robust in different ways. Having made it robust, they then develop the intoxication of health. But the Buddha says that this growth is actually the swelling of a pierced thorn. What is the thorn? The dart of *Taṇhā* (Craving). The dart of *Taṇhā*.

The Buddha Himself uses terms like the supreme and incomparable physician and surgeon to refer to Himself. This is because, just as surgeons use special instruments to locate a pierced thorn and pull it out, the Buddha, with the aid of mindfulness (*sati*) and wisdom, pulled out the dart of *Taṇhā* (Craving) that had pierced the heart. Therefore, we must understand this body as a wound caused by that dart of *Taṇhā* which has pierced the heart. Thus, the Physician says: "This is *Anicca*." That swelling is not something that belongs to you. It has arisen due to a certain cause of disease. Now, let us try to understand those eleven ways of contemplation according to our own capacity:

- *Aniccato* – This is impermanent. The Physician has said that this is impermanent; it is merely a swelling caused by the piercing of that dart of *Taṇhā*.
- *Dukkhato* – As this festers and purulates, it is a mass of suffering (*Dukkha*).
- *Rogato* – He asks us to look at this purely as a disease, an illness.
- *Gaṇḍato* – This is a boil, a festering wound.
- *Sallato* – Beneath this lies a dart or a thorn.
- *Aghato* – This is a great calamity, a trouble.
- *Ābādhato* – This is an affliction.
- *Parato* – This is not something that belongs to you; it is something that arose due to the thorn.

- *Palokato* – This is a swelling that disintegrates. This festering wound will burst open at any moment. This can be clearly seen in the charnel ground during the stage of discoloration (*vinīlaka*). The time when this body becomes most swollen and bloated is a few days after one takes their last breath; only then can one see its bloated form clearly. It turns blue and bursts open. That is *palokato* – a thing that disintegrates.
- *Suññato* – This is an empty thing. In the end, nothing remains.
- *Anattato* – There is nothing to be taken as a self, as "I" or "mine" (*Anattā*). The bones lie scattered here and there. That burst body becomes food for other animals, dissolves and merges with the earth, returning to the four great elements. That is the whole story.

If we connect this to that simile, it is stated in the Dhamma that it is due to ignorance (*avijjā*) and craving (*taṇhā*) that we wander in *saṃsāra*. Within the darkness of ignorance, through lack of knowing and the absence of the Noble Eye, one longs for a body out of craving (*taṇhā*). As long as craving is not abandoned, a body is brought into existence somewhere through those karmic energies. That is the story of the body. It is the same with other things. Therefore, the Buddha points out that elevenfold comprehension (*sammasana*) regarding the five aggregates of grasping (*upādāna*). To this, we can add the two main similes presented by the Buddha in the *Māgandhiya Sutta*. The first is the simile of the leper. A patient does not represent a normal state; rather, it is a distorted state. It is because that person's body was distorted that he developed a distorted perception (*viparīta-saññā*) regarding the painful glowing embers, perceiving them as pleasant. Similarly, the Buddha shows that it is by clinging to this bodily cage that the world runs after the five strands of sensual pleasure. Those sensual pleasures are always of a burning nature. But this is not realized, just like the distorted perception of the leper.

Next, we also see from that story how the deceitful man brought a cloth stained with oil and dirt, claiming: "This is a beautiful, clean white cloth." That blind man wrapped it around himself and walked along the streets. That is exactly how we have been carrying this burden throughout *saṃsāra*. That is why the Buddha declared:

Bhārā have pañcakhandhā

Bhārahāro ca puggalo

Bhārādānaṃ dukkhaṃ loke

Bhāranikkhepanaṃ sukhaṃ

"The five aggregates are indeed burdens, and the person is the bearer of the burden. Taking up the burden is suffering in the world, and laying down the burden is happiness."

"The five aggregates are indeed burdens" – these five aggregates of grasping are five heaps of burdens. "The person is the bearer of the burden" – the person is the one

who carries this burden. Some regard the person as a self (*attā*); that is incorrect. "Person" is merely the one with such-and-such a name. A conventional name is given to this heap of five aggregates. There is no need to give further examples to you, devout devotees. A certain name is given. These five aggregates of grasping are identified as that "person". The person is indeed these five heaps. "The person is the bearer of the burden" – the person is the one carrying and lifting these five heaps.

Next, the Buddha declared: *Bhārādānaṃ dukkhaṃ loke* – carrying these five burdens and holding onto them is suffering (*Dukkha*). *Bhāranikkhepanaṃ sukhaṃ* – letting go of those five heaps of burdens is happiness (*sukha*). Therefore, the health that the Buddha refers to there is not about curing this body with medicines to make it healthy. There is something much deeper here. If the five aggregates of grasping are themselves a disease, a boil, a dart, and a calamity, then the moment of letting them go is the real health, the real happiness. That moment of letting go is when the Arahants liberate their minds in the attainment of fruition (*phala-samāpatti*)—liberating the mind from them and experiencing the bliss of pacification that we call Nibbāna, described as *ajjhattaṃ vūpasantacitto* (with a mind stilled within). That is indeed the moment of laying down the five heaps of burdens: *Bhāranikkhepanaṃ sukhaṃ* – "laying down the burden is happiness."

Thus, at the moment of attaining the Path and Fruit, it is to some like laying down a heavy burden on the ground. Even in ancient Dhamma stories, Arahants are described as *ohitabhāro* (one who has laid down the burden), *anuppattasadattho* (who has attained his own goal), and *parikkhīṇabhavasaṃyojano* (whose fetters of *Bhava* (Becoming) are destroyed). The burden has been laid down on the ground. Similarly, the hooks of becoming that bind one to existence are unhooked. Having destroyed the fetters of becoming, they have arrived at the destination.

Nibbāna is described as a happiness, specifically as *avedayita* (unexperienced/non-sensory bliss), because it is the state where the mind is liberated from these five aggregates of grasping. That is the very state where craving is extinguished. As long as the thirst of *Taṇhā* (Craving) exists, one wanders in this *saṃsāra*, creating a physical form—whether subtle or gross—from *Bhava* to *Bhava* (Becoming), while experiencing the five strands of sensual pleasure.

The wanderer Māgandhiya abused the Buddha using terms that certain Brahmins of that time used, such as *ucchedavādī* (annihilationist) and *bhūnahu* (destroyer of growth). They used the word *bhūnahu* to mean "one who destroys *Bhava* (Becoming)," because they highly valued the continuation of existence, holding the view that one should live boundlessly chasing after forms, sounds, and so forth. They considered any form of control or restraint over these to be an error. However, on this occasion, the Buddha showed Māgandhiya that it is only when one restrains oneself regarding forms, smells, tastes, and mind-objects (*dhammā*)—the objects of these senses—and liberates the mind from them, that true pacification is found.

When speaking of Nibbāna, just as the laying down of the five heaps of burdens is shown as Nibbāna, on some occasions it is also referred to as *saḷāyatana-nirodha* (the cessation of the six sense-bases). These six sense-bases function through an interaction between two aspects: the eye and forms, the ear and sounds, the nose and smells, the tongue and tastes, the body and touch (*phassa*), and the mind and mind-objects (*dhammā*). It is through this interaction between the sense organs and their objects that *Taṇhā* (Craving) and desires are nurtured. Thus, the Buddha pointed out their impermanence. When one comprehends them in those eleven ways through the three characteristics of *Anicca* (Impermanent), *Dukkha* (Suffering), and *Anattā* (Not-self)—which means reflecting on them with wisdom—one develops revulsion (*nibbidā*) towards the five aggregates of grasping (*upādāna*).

That is why the Buddha said that when your eyes open, you will feel resentment toward that deceitful person who cheated you with the dirty cloth. You might even feel like killing him. Who is the deceitful one here? It is the mind itself – *citta*. Through this, the understanding arises: “Has not this mind deceived me for so long?”

What is this mind? This mind is a highly diverse, variegated thing. The Buddha declared that there is nothing as diverse as this mind. There are many colorful, beautiful things in the world, but none is as diverse as the mind. It is by this diverse mind that we have been deceived. To the world, these things appear as good and beautiful (*subha*), which is a distorted perception (*viparīta-saññā*). This diverse mind presents what is *Anicca* (Impermanent) as permanent, and what is *Dukkha* (Suffering) as pleasant. It presents what is foul as beautiful, and what is not one's own as one's own. Within these distorted perceptions, worldlings go on multiplying *saṃsāra*. When, in accordance with the three characteristics, one understands the impermanence and unsubstantiality (*Anattā*) of form, *Vedanā* (Feeling), perception, *Saṅkhāra* (Preparations), and *Viññāṇa* (Consciousness), and likewise correctly understands the impermanent nature and lack of essence in the sense organs—the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body—and their objects—forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches—the state of liberating the mind from them is shown in various places as Nibbāna. That is what is called supramundane (*lokuttara*)—the state of having gone beyond the world. If that state is liberation, and if the ultimate goal of this dispensation is freedom, then the Buddha is not pointing to some kind of eternal existence here.

The Buddha declares that *Bhava* (Becoming) is definitely a mere mass of suffering. *Dukkhe loko patiṭṭhito* – the world is established on suffering. It is like two panels of a door that fit together perfectly. When you finish talking about suffering, you have finished talking about the world; when you finish talking about the world, you have finished talking about suffering. They are like two door panels. The world is established on suffering, and suffering is established on the world. This is the reality. But worldlings do not understand this. It is like their attitude towards existence. There are concepts everywhere in the world that boundlessly encourage this. Philosophies that cultivate becoming and reinforce the view of becoming (*bhava-*

diṭṭhi) are found everywhere. Amidst these philosophies, the Buddha presented the concept of the cessation of becoming (*bhava-nirodha*). *Bhava-nirodha* is Nibbāna. Thus, the cessation of this becoming, this existence, is what the Buddha showed here as Nibbāna. This is *sandiṭṭhiko dhammo* – a Dhamma that can be realized directly here-and-now. Through that direct realization, one can attain that internal peace in this very life. It is not an eternal existence or a separate realm of Nibbāna.

Thus, we can make use of the two similes shown in the *Māgandhiya Sutta* to understand these matters. The simile of the leper is not something pleasing to the mind. Yet, the Buddha presented it here to deeply impress this upon the world. According to the Buddha's concept, if even a person who is considered "healthy" is drawn towards the five strands of sensual pleasure, they must be regarded as a leper. If one has understood this through the power of comprehension—understanding their impermanence (*Anicca*) and unsubstantiality (*Anattā*)—then liberating the mind from them is the true state of health. That is the genuine gain, the real health, the supreme gain. Thus: *Ārogya paramā lābhā Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ*.

Next, the Buddha pointed out the path to it: "and of paths, the Eightfold…" Various teachers point out different paths, claiming: "By this path, one goes to the Deathless." Since ancient times, even before the Buddha's era, everyone spoke of a "Deathless" (*amata*). They conceptualized and imagined the Deathless as a place where there is no dying, as an eternal existence. The Buddha pointed out that this Deathless is not some special drink, nor is it a drink that grants eternal existence. Why? Because existence is everywhere. If there is existence (*Bhava*), there is *Jāti* (Birth), there is *Jarā* (decay/aging), there is sickness, and there is *Maraṇa* (death). Nowhere is there an existence free from *Jāti*, *Jarā*, sickness, and *Maraṇa*. It does not exist anywhere in the universe. Therefore, the Buddha declared that existence itself is purely suffering (*Dukkha*). Thus, the cessation of becoming (*bhava-nirodha*), the extinguishment of existence, is what the Buddha showed here as Nibbāna.

He also described this *Bhava* (Becoming) as a fire. This journey of *saṃsāra* is a journey that goes on creating a mass of fires of suffering through *Upādāna* (Grasping) and the thirst of *Taṇhā* (Craving). The Buddha has presented the liberation from this as a peaceful, sublime extinguishment (Nibbāna that can be directly realized in this very life, by elevating those five aggregates of grasping to the level of meditation. Having deeply impressed upon the mind their impermanence (*Anicca*) and unsubstantiality (*Anattā*), when the three characteristics are fully developed, one experiences revulsion (*nibbidā*) towards them. Just as the cured leper, upon seeing another leper, develops no longing for that condition, nor any desire for those medicines, the Buddha points to Nibbāna as the ultimate reality, and the continuation of *saṃsāra* as a distorted state. That is why the Buddha constantly speaks about ending the suffering of *saṃsāra*. Yet, this view, this vision, is disagreeable to many.

The Buddha states that the majority of people are “world-multipliers” (*lokavaḍḍhanā*). Their talk is about developing the world. But the Buddha declares that multiplying the world is merely multiplying the cemeteries (*kaṭasivaḍḍhanā*). For such a long time, as the Buddha reveals in suttas like the *Anamatagga Sutta* using marvelous similes that are beyond imagination—which you must have heard many times—such as the grief of a single being over the death of their mother. It is said that the tears shed by a single being throughout *saṃsāra* over the death of their mother are greater than the waters in the oceans. For such a long time, we have been wandering, being born and dying in *saṃsāra*. What operates within this long existence is ignorance (*avijjā*) and craving (*taṇhā*). Therefore, if what the world expects is the cessation of suffering, the Buddha declares:

It is only when one is liberated from *Bhava* (Becoming), when one has directly realized the cessation of becoming (*bhava-nirodha*), that the true bliss of pacification is obtained. That is why it is described as an unexperienced/non-sensory bliss (*avedayita-sukha*). However, the worldlings, those “world-multipliers,” only think about multiplying this world. That is why the Buddha declares: *Na siyā lokavaḍḍhano* – “do not be a world-multiplier.” Think about liberating yourself from this becoming. You cannot be free from suffering while remaining in this becoming. If you are freed from suffering, along with it, becoming also ends. You cannot have both.

The Buddha reveals that it is the mind that presented these five aggregates of grasping as beautiful (*subha*) and pleasant. The very moment the eye of understanding arises, one experiences revulsion towards the mind: “Was it not this mind that has been deceiving me for so long?” That understanding arises through wisdom. Therefore, the Noble Eightfold Path is the path that leads to that wisdom. That is why, as you devotees know, it begins with the first factor, Right View (*sammā-diṭṭhi*). Through Right View, right thoughts and intentions arise, and one acts accordingly. What is shown here is a complete transformation of personality. When Right View is fulfilled to some extent, it turns into right thoughts and intentions. Consequently, there is the utterance of right speech, followed by acting in accordance with it, which is Right Livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*) and Right Action (*sammā-kammanta*). The effort and mindfulness applied to this are Right Effort (*sammā-vāyāma*) and Right Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*). Finally, Right Concentration (*sammā-samādhi*) is presented as the one-pointedness of that person.

It is such a complete transformation that is presented as the Noble Eightfold Path. The Buddha has shown here a path that is more marvelous than any other pathways accepted by the world. This path is something that must be developed within one's own mental continuum (*citta-santāna*). If you develop that Noble Eightfold Path to some extent in your daily life, one day, at the moment of attaining the Path and Fruit, all eight factors will arise in a single mind-moment. It is through that Noble Path-energy, that supramundane Path-energy, that one is cast out of this world. That is what is called the supramundane (*lokuttara*) state. Ultimately, what is the driving

force needed for this? It is revulsion (*nibbidā*) towards *saṃsāra*. The Buddha's words actually point us ultimately towards: *ekanta-nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya* – "for utter revulsion, dispassion, and cessation." The Buddha's Dhamma is preached solely for the sake of developing revulsion towards *saṃsāra*, to end the attachment to *saṃsāra*. Yet, the world looks in the opposite direction – towards the development of the world. That was how Māgandhiya also looked at it. If any control or restraint was practiced regarding these, they used the word *bhūnahu*. But here, the Buddha reveals to us something that no other philosopher has ever shown. The cause of the fear within worldlings is their wrong view of self (*atta-diṭṭhi*). The vision of "I" and "mine" is completely wrong. Here, there are only five heaps. "I" and "mine" is something super-imposed upon these five heaps. That is why, when the Noble Eye arises, the Buddha declares that you will realize:

"...was it not merely a heap of form that I was grasping as 'I' and 'mine'? Was it not merely a heap of *Vedanā* (Feeling) that I was grasping as 'I' and 'mine'? Was it not merely a heap of perception that I was grasping as 'I' and 'mine'? Was it not merely a heap of *Saṅkhāra* (Preparations) that I was grasping as 'I' and 'mine'? Was it not merely a heap of *Viññāṇa* (Consciousness) that I was grasping as 'I' and 'mine'?" That is the understanding that comes. Just as the blind man, after receiving sight, thinks: "For so long indeed, have I been holding onto a dirty, oil-stained cloth!" when the Noble Eye arises, one sees that there is nothing here to be taken as "I" or "mine". It is merely a heap of form constantly arising and passing away.

Devout devotees, you have often heard the beautiful similes—let us call them beautiful, though they might be unappealing to some—given by the Buddha summarizing the entire Dhamma:

Pheṇapiṇḍūpamaṃ rūpaṃ

Vedanā bubbuḷūpamā

Marīcikūpamā saññā

Saṅkhārā kadalūpamā

Māyūpamañca viññāṇaṃ

Desitādiccabandhunā

"Form is like a lump of foam, feeling is like a water bubble, perception is like a mirage, Preparations are like a plantain trunk, and consciousness is like an illusion—so has the Kinsman of the Sun declared."

It is said in that simile that the Buddha, who is the Kinsman of the Sun (*ādiccabandhu*), declared this in the following way:

Pheṇapiṇḍūpamaṃ rūpaṃ – this form, this bodily cage that we puff up so greatly and beautifully, using it to compete and display our wellness and health, is shown by

the Buddha to be purely like a lump of foam. When you go near a bridge during the rainy season, you can see a heap of debris collecting near a log as the dirty water flows. From a distance, that pile of rubbish looks like a beautiful, white, solid rock. It appears as something strong. But it is just a heap of foam! A heap of foam! Similarly, this bodily cage is built up from the food we consume – the foam of rice, the foam of gruel, all gathering together. Thus, we can see that form is like a lump of foam. It is constantly arising and passing away, changing even more subtly than what is described in the cellular theories of modern scientists. That is how the heap of form is.

Vedanā (Feeling) is also like that. To show that *Vedanā* is constantly changing, the Buddha illustrated it with the simile of raindrops falling on water during a heavy rain. *Vedanā bubbuḷūpamā*... If you watch for a moment, you can see the raindrops falling from the roof forming bubbles and bursting right there. That is *vedanā bubbuḷūpamā* – the bubble-simile that we see in our daily lives.

Next, *marīcikūpamā saññā* – this perception is what we grasp through the eye, ear, nose, and so on. Just as a deer, seeing a mirage, runs after it—a mirage being something that deceives the deer, which is a characteristic of the dry season—the Buddha compares the entirety of perception to a mirage.

Saṅkhārā kadalūpamā – Saṅkhāra (Preparations) refer to our volitional energies, our desires, hopes, and intentions. Highlighting every one of them as "I" and "mine", we cultivate expectations and make various plans. The Buddha compares that entire mass of expectations to a plantain trunk (banana stem). Just as a plantain trunk has no core or heartwood, being merely a collection of layers or sheaths, there is no essence to be found even at its center. In the same way, there is nothing here that can be grasped as a self. This is merely a heap of *Saṅkhāra*.

Next, the Buddha points out something even deeper: *māyūpamañca viññāṇaṃ* – and *Viññāṇa* (Consciousness) is like an illusion. Other religionists and teachers ultimately grasped onto *Viññāṇa*, the invisible mind. The Buddha points out that this mind is purely illusory. The Buddha reveals *Viññāṇa* to be like a magician's trick, which conjures up and displays something non-existent as if it exists. Thus, although there is no actual self (*attā*), it presents a non-existent thing as if it is real: "This is my *Viññāṇa*. I think, therefore I am." In this manner, one falls into wrong view. But the Buddha reveals that *Viññāṇa* is purely an illusion. Even the *Viññāṇa* that others grasp onto is shown by the Buddha to be like an illusion. It is when this is understood that complete liberation is attained.

Therefore, devout devotees, you should reflect on this. Do not think that the long sutta we took as our topic is too heavy or profound. Even if the sutta itself seems so, the similes within it can be brought close to our daily lives. Take the leper: we too get skin diseases, and we have seen lepers; they are among us. We have also seen many blind people. If we apply their way of thinking and their experiences to ourselves and reflect, we can understand this matter. When the Buddha looked through the

Buddha-eye, we appeared to Him as lepers, and as blind people too. That is why He declared this. Reflecting in this way, without developing any displeasure toward the Buddha's word, if we expect ultimate liberation, ultimate bliss, and ultimate health, realize that it lies within this Dhamma. Try to walk on this Path of Dhamma with an eye of understanding.

As you devotees know, although this valuable Noble Eightfold Path has eight factors, it is comprised of the threefold training of virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). Among them, virtue is foremost. It is by establishing oneself in virtue that everything else can be accomplished. Thus, today, you have observed virtue according to your respective levels, and then, as occasion permitted, you developed concentration by practicing meditation and so forth. This Dhamma sermon, as mentioned, also helps you to journey on this Path of Dhamma. Four factors of a superior person (*sappurisa*) are shown: *sappurisa-saṃsevo* (association with superior persons), *saddhamma-savanaṃ* (hearing the True Dhamma), *yoniso manasikāro* (radical attention / wise attention), and *dhammānudhamma-paṭipatti* (practice of the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma). One must associate with superior persons, associate with noble friends (*kalyāṇa-mitta*), listen to the Dhamma, practice *Yoniso manasikāra* (Wise attention)—which means developing correct reflection—and then engage in the practice of the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma. Only then does the Dhamma-eye arise.

May the wholesome energy gathered by you devotees today, and gained through this Dhamma sermon, serve as a supportive condition for the arising of that Dhamma-eye! We aspire that by sharing the merits of this great store of wholesome deeds gathered through preaching the Dhamma and listening to the Dhamma, any merit-desiring beings from Avīci to Akaniṭṭha may rejoice in it, transcend the suffering of *saṃsāra*, and find peace in the supreme Deathless Nibbāna!

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……..*"