Pahankanuwa Sermon #66

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

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(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.23)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

Pali Stanza:

Sududdasaṃ sunipuṇaṃ,

yatthakāmānipātinaṃ;

Cittaṃ rakkhetha medhāvī,

cittaṃ guttaṃ sukhāvahaṃ.

From:

Dhammapada 36 (Cittavagga)

Dear Listeners,

For beings wandering in saṃsāra for an infinite time, the extremely rare opportunity to bring an end to the suffering (*dukkha*) of saṃsāra arises only when a Fully Self-Awakened One, the Teacher of the Three Worlds, appears in the world. Everyone who properly understands the value of this rare opportunity strives and makes an effort to reap the maximum benefit from the rare human existence they have obtained during the era of a Buddha's arising. To whatever extent one feels spiritual urgency (*saṃvega*) regarding the suffering (*dukkha*) of saṃsāra, to that same extent, one diligently goes in search of the supreme bliss of Nibbāna. Furthermore, if there is any sacrifice to be made for that purpose, they strive to make it completely. Such people seek the shortest possible path to fulfill their aspiration—their diligent aspiration for Nibbāna. It is for such individuals that the Blessed Buddha, on certain occasions, enabled the realization of Nibbāna through a brief sermon. The verse we have chosen as our theme today is one such verse. The introductory story behind it is as follows.

There was a certain treasurer (*seṭṭhi*) living in the city of Sāvatthī. He went to his close, associated monk and asked, "I need to escape from this suffering (*dukkha*) of saṃsāra; please tell me a good method for this." This monk, perhaps thinking at the

level of the treasurer, gave him advice: "Then give alms. Offer robes to the Sangha. Serve them with the four requisites. Also, divide your income into three parts: use one part for your business and industries, use another part to support your wife and children, and dedicate the third part to the Sāsana." He gave advice in this manner. The treasurer acted accordingly and asked the monk again, "Is there anything more than this that would help me cross over this saṃsāra?" Then the monk declared, "Guard well the five precepts together with the three refuges." Excellent; having completed that as well, the treasurer asked again, "Is there anything higher than that?" "Then observe the ten precepts," the monk said. When he went back and asked, "Is there anything even higher to do?", he was told, "Then renounce the household life and go forth into monkhood."

In this manner, the treasurer went forth into the Sāsana. But despite having ordained, the teacher (*ācariya*) this newly ordained monk received was an Abhidhammika monk who had reached the further shore of the Abhidhamma. His preceptor (*upajjhāya*) was a Vinayadhara monk who had reached the further shore of the Vinaya. Both of these senior monks continuously taught Abhidhamma and Vinaya to this newly ordained monk at every opportunity. Now, learning is indeed necessary for a newly ordained monk. However, to this monk, who had ordained with the hope of diligently bringing an end to suffering (*dukkha*), this felt like a burden. He felt that his teacher and preceptor were endlessly talking about Abhidhamma and Vinaya all the time, without giving much help for his meditation. Due to the weariness that arose from this, this monk thought, "I renounced the household life and ordained with the intention of ending suffering (*dukkha*), but now there isn't even room to stretch out my hands." What he meant was that there was no room for things like meditation. Having fallen into this state, he became disillusioned and then thought, "It is better for me to return to the household life and try to realize Nibbāna as best as I can." Disillusioned with the monastic life, he did not tell anyone about it. Losing his previous enthusiasm for his duties and vows, he just stared blankly wherever he looked, and stood still wherever he stood. His body also grew weak because of his dejected mind. Seeing this, the novice monks (*sāmaṇeras*) asked him, "What is the reason for this change?" After this monk explained the reason, they informed the teacher and preceptor as well. These teachers and preceptors then took the monk to the Blessed Buddha. When the Blessed Buddha asked about the matter, this monk declared, "Venerable Sir, I ordained with the intention of bringing an end to the suffering (*dukkha*) of saṃsāra. My teacher and preceptor constantly teach me Abhidhamma and Vinaya. I felt that I have no room even to stretch my hands. Therefore, I want to return to the lay life."

Then the Blessed Buddha asked this monk, "Very well, monk, there is no need for many things. Can you guard just one thing?" When asked what that was, the Blessed Buddha declared, "Monk, if you guard only this mind, everything else will automatically be guarded." Having stated this, He uttered the Dhamma verse we chose as our theme earlier:

Sududdasaṃ sunipuṇaṃ,

yatthakāmanipātinaṃ;

Cittaṃ rakkhetha medhāvī,

cittaṃ guttaṃ sukhāvahaṃ.

The meaning of this verse is: *medhāvī* means the wise person. This wise person guards the mind which is *sududdasaṃ*—extremely difficult to see, and *sunipuṇaṃ*—extremely subtle; *cittaṃ rakkhetha*—guards the mind. Why? *Cittaṃ guttaṃ sukhāvahaṃ*—because a guarded mind brings happiness. At first glance, the verse seems very simple. Yet, it is said that upon hearing this very verse, that monk attained stream-entry (*sotāpatti*). Therefore, this must have occurred because there is a certain depth in this verse. Let us now first reflect on this story, and then direct our attention to the meaning contained in this verse. From the story itself, we can see that this monk, due to his enthusiasm to diligently realize Nibbāna, felt a sense of weariness and distress regarding the teachings of his teacher and preceptor. Perhaps those venerable monks showed more concern for books and mere academic knowledge than for meditation.

The Blessed One has declared in a certain discourse: "Monks, all those who are newly ordained in this Sāsana, who have newly entered this Dhamma-Vinaya, should be established in the four foundations of mindfulness (*cattāro satipaṭṭhānā*). They must practice the four foundations of mindfulness." From this, we can see that the foundation of going forth is the four foundations of mindfulness. If one engages in other activities without paying much attention to the four foundations of mindfulness, it becomes an obstacle for someone who has ordained with great diligence and enthusiasm to realize Nibbāna. That is why the Blessed Buddha, as a relief to that monk, asked, "Can you do just one thing?" Thus, from this story, we can see that the Blessed Buddha, with great skill in means (*upāya-kosalla*) and compassion, through a certain masterly device, must have directed this monk's mind towards meditative reflection by means of this verse. For, what is expected from all those things taught as Abhidhamma is to demonstrate the extreme subtlety of this mind.

The mind is something difficult to see. Its nature is extremely subtle. What books and other teachings attempt to show, a meritorious meditator (*yogāvacara*)—someone who has turned towards meditation—realizes through their own direct experience. Through meditative reflection, through *Yoniso manasikāra* (Wise attention)—which means wise reflection—a meditator understands the extremely subtle nature of this mind and that it is difficult to see, grasping the very essence of the entire Abhidhamma. Furthermore, *yatthakāmanipātinaṃ* means that the mind alights on whatever object it pleases. That is the nature of the mind; it falls upon whatever object it desires. *Kāmanipātinaṃ*—it is precisely to prevent this falling onto whatever object it pleases that various Vinaya rules and regulations have been laid down.

Various disciplinary rules are prescribed for the restraint of body and speech. Thus, the Blessed Buddha declared that it is this very mind—which has the nature of alighting on whatever object it pleases, denoted as *yatthakāmanipātinaṃ*, which is the essence of the Vinaya—that must be guarded. It must have been because he contemplated the meaning of that verse deeply that the monk was able to attain even the realization of the paths and fruits (*magga-phala*).

Although ordinary worldly people exert themselves regarding the body, they do not direct their attention to the importance of the mind. Yet, this entire bondage of saṃsāra rests upon the mind. What is done through meditation is the training of this mind, the guarding of this mind. The factor necessary for guarding that mind is mindfulness and clear comprehension (*sati-sampajañña*)—which means mindfulness and proper wisdom, or mindfulness and awareness. When the mind that runs to the past and the future, and similarly runs towards greed and hatred, is brought to the present and strengthened with equanimity and concentration, it is only then that one can understand the true nature of this life and the world through insight knowledge (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*). To guard the mind, the Blessed Buddha has first of all pointed out mindfulness and clear comprehension (*sati-sampajañña*). For,

it is said, "mindfulness is the guardian" (*sati ārakkhikā*). Just like a driver who is there to protect a chariot, mindfulness is the guardian of the mind. It is called mindfulness and clear comprehension (*sati-sampajañña*): mindfulness and wisdom, mindfulness and awareness. To the extent that one develops this mindfulness and clear comprehension, one can eliminate the scattered nature of the mind and attain concentration (*samādhi*).

As taught in the Dhamma, by developing mindfulness and awareness in daily life, one first establishes concentration. Next, one realizes the three characteristics: *anicca* (impermanent), *dukkha* (suffering), and *anattā* (not-self). To realize this, one uses these very things that are closest to oneself: the body, feeling (*vedanā*), the mind, and the objects of the mind—by maintaining the mind upon them. Because of the instigation of defilements, the mind always looks to the past and the future. Keeping the mind that runs to the past and future anchored in the present, making it concentrated, one then observes how everything arises, exists, and vanishes. If we look more closely at what we call "impermanence" (*anicca*) in the world, we see everything arising; there is a certain phase we regard as its existence, and then it fades away. There are only these three phases. Not a single thing is permanent. This

one who dwells with mindfulness and clear comprehension (*sati-sampajañña*) regarding the body, feeling (*vedanā*), the mind, and mental objects, understands the subtlety of this mind. That is why the Blessed Buddha declared that what is done through mindfulness and clear comprehension, even in ordinary postures, is: when walking, he knows "I am walking"; when standing, he knows "I am standing"; when sitting, he knows "I am sitting"; when lying down, he knows "I am lying down"—thus

becoming aware of daily postures in a very simple manner. It is being aware with mindfulness and proper wisdom. Furthermore, in whatever way his body is positioned, he understands it as such. By always observing how one's body is positioned and how it moves, the impermanent (*anicca*) nature of this body, of feelings (*vedanā*), of the mind, and of mental objects, and their nature of arising and passing away, automatically begins to be seen. For this, reflection (*manasikāra*) is particularly helpful. Reflection coupled with mindfulness and clear comprehension is necessary.

Here lies an important point. Generally, when there is mindfulness and clear comprehension, one is able to see feelings (*vedanā*) and so forth arising, persisting, and ceasing. Similarly, one sees perceptions (*saññā*)—which we regard as recognition—arising, persisting, and passing away. Even thoughts are seen arising, persisting, and passing away. However, it is difficult for a person to gain this understanding all at once. Why? Because of the deceitful nature of the mind. In many instances, we know how the mind operates; some people feel, "Now I am thinking." Yet, it is as if thoughts occur without one even realizing it. Even when one thinks "I am thinking," thoughts just happen. One is carried away by the mind.

This mind is just like a wild bull. Led by defilements—according to greed, hatred, or delusion—this mind runs very far along some object without us even knowing it. Therefore, one can practice reflection only by being established in a certain level of concentration (*samādhi*). Now, a running wild bull cannot be caught and stopped all at once. A certain momentum is required. For that, there is a general method through the "Four Protective Meditations" (*caturārakkhā bhāvanā*): the recollection of the Buddha (*buddhānussati*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), foulness (*asubha*), and the mindfulness of death (*maraṇassati*), by practicing and training in a certain simple meditation subject (*kammaṭṭhāna*). For this, a short word is used as an aid. If it is the recollection of the Buddha, one of the virtues of the Buddha is recalled. By bringing this to mind at all times, the scattered nature of the mind is stopped and the mind is calmed. Some wholesome object is used for this purpose. One strives to concentrate the mind on a wholesome object. When one repeatedly exerts effort to stop the running mind or calm the scattered mind using a short word, one gradually realizes that this can be done more and more quickly. Then, through the recollection of the Buddha, faith (*saddhā*) increases in a person. Through loving-kindness, one gains the strength to suppress the thoughts of hatred that constantly arise. Through the meditation on foulness, one gains the ability to subdue thoughts of lust. Through the mindfulness of death, spiritual urgency (*saṃvega*) is aroused, urging one to practice diligently. These are the special qualities present in the Four Protective Meditations. By using a short word as an aid for each of them—for instance, for loving-kindness: "May all beings be well and happy!" When these are practiced in daily life, whenever the mind runs to unnecessary things, one unifies the mind with the thought: "May they be well and happy!"

In that way, the person who has established that concentration is then able to reflect wisely by using that level of concentration. *Yoniso manasikāra* (Wise attention) is generally explained as wise reflection. Otherwise, it is reflecting on things according to the actual origin from which various things arise in the world. In the ordinary world, the Blessed Buddha has compared these perceptions (*saññā*) to a mirage; there is a tendency in our minds to run after these perceptions. Why? Because we take that distant mirage to be something real. But the true understanding regarding it is that from where we are looking, it is merely something that appears. It has a deceptive nature. This is revealed by understanding that this is a certain delusion connected to one's own mind, or rather, to one's own eye. In the same way, through *Yoniso manasikāra* (Wise attention), through wise reflection, one is able to escape from the delusion called ignorance (*avijjā*) and from this tight bondage called craving (*taṇhā*). The method used for this wise reflection is mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānassati*).

The Blessed Buddha has taught, has declared, mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānassati*) for the purpose of cutting off distracting thoughts (*vitakka*)—for cutting off thoughts. One’s in-breath and out-breath are something that is always with oneself. Applying mindfulness to that, mindfulness of breathing means the mindfulness directed towards the in-breath and out-breath. One establishes that mindfulness at the point where the breath touches. While constantly bringing the mind back to that spot, one gradually subdues the scattered things, the scattered mind. Most often, the mind scatters along the objects that come to the five senses: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body. Those objects generally try to pull the mind away, according to greed, hatred, or delusion. What, then, is the device to stop that running? Generally, regarding what is seen, without taking their signs (*nimitta*) and going far, the meditator (*yogāvacara*) briefly reflects twice: "a form, a form," "a sound, a sound," thereby cutting off the running mind right there, or breaking it, and bringing it back to the meditation subject, to mindfulness of breathing. In that manner, through reflection, the mind that runs after perceptions (*saññā*) can be kept within the meditation subject itself. Distracting thoughts (*vitakka*) grow in accordance with those perceptions, and thoughts grow. It is through those thoughts that defilements are dragged in.

The Blessed Buddha has declared five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) that obstruct the concentration of the mind and obstruct realization. They are: sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), which refers to sensual thoughts; ill-will (*byāpāda*), which refers to thoughts of hatred; sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha*), which refers to laziness of mind and sleepiness; restlessness and worry (*uddhacca-kukkucca*), which refers to the scattered nature of the mind and regret; and doubt (*vicikicchā*), which refers to indecisiveness. It is through these that one becomes subject to them. It is precisely these hindrances that drag in those distracting thoughts. Therefore, it is only when these hindrances are absent that the mind becomes properly concentrated. A wholesome meditation object (*kusala-ārammaṇa*) is helpful for this. Thus, a person who has developed some concentration by practicing the Four Protective Meditations

is able, while practicing mindfulness of breathing, to gradually stop the running mind and understand the internal state of this mind, the subtlety of the mind.

The reason why the mind was described here as subtle and difficult to see is that there is a certain quality in this mind. The Blessed Buddha has shown consciousness (*viññāṇa*) to be like an illusion (*māyā*). This is an extremely deep matter. An illusion means showing something that does not exist as if it exists. An illusionist or a magician shows something non-existent as existing by conjuring it up. There is such a power in our minds. It shows a non-existent thing as if it were an existing thing. It is because of this illusion that the mind is difficult to see. How is this revealed? Only a Buddha points out the way to this. When that understanding regarding the nature of this world and life matures through insight knowledges (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*), one must realize: what is actually here that we have taken as "I" and "mine"? It is only a collection of mental phenomena (name-factors) and physical phenomena (form-factors)—only Name-and-Form (*nāmarūpa*). The mental phenomena (name-factors) are mentioned as: feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), intention (*cetanā*), contact (*phassa*), and attention (*manasikāra*). Chiefly, there are these five. "Name" (*nāma*) refers to certain powers within the mind itself that help us identify something. Feeling (*vedanā*), as everyone knows, is experiencing. Next, perception (*saññā*) means recognition; if there is a certain experiencing, there is a corresponding recognition. Next, there is also a volitional power (*cetanā*) in our minds regarding what should be done with them. Contact (*phassa*) is the awareness of their impingement or collision. Next is attention (*manasikāra*), which is reflection. If we can present these five factors as an analogy, they are just like the five fingers of the hand. Feeling (*vedanā*) is like the little finger. Perception (*saññā*) is like the ring finger. Intention (*cetanā*) is like the middle finger. Contact (*phassa*) is like the index finger. Attention (*manasikāra*) is like the thumb.

So, among the five mental phenomena (*nāma-dhamma*) present here, we already mentioned attention (*manasikāra*). Attention is helpful and applicable for understanding the true reality of this world, or rather, of life. If we take an analogy for this, we know that in some murder or criminal cases, one of the accused arrested as defendants has to be granted a pardon if there is no other evidence. If no one else comes forward to give evidence, because the case would otherwise be dismissed, one of the defendants is pardoned in court itself—like a state pardon—and the facts are obtained from him. When the testifying is finally over, it is revealed that he himself was also involved in the crime. However, somehow the case is proven and the truth is uncovered. It is in this very way that we have to understand Name-and-Form (*nāmarūpa*). Yet, what helps us untangle this is that very factor called attention (*manasikāra*). We compared it to the thumb. According to this analogy, when we think about the functioning of the fingers of our hand, we can see that the thumb maintains a relationship with the little finger, the ring finger, the middle finger, and the index finger—with every one of them. The thumb is the one that can bear witness to them. In the same way, there is a power in this factor of attention (*manasikāra*). Attention directs itself to feeling (*vedanā*), to intention, and to contact (*phassa*), and

by directing itself to these, it can understand their true reality. This is precisely what the Blessed Buddha highlighted. Thus, we understand what are called Name-and-Form (*nāmarūpa*) not by bringing in an external witness, but through this very factor of attention (*manasikāra*). However, the difference here is that ordinary worldly people reflect in the wrong way. In the Dhamma, this is called *ayoneso manasikāra* (unwise attention)—wrong reflection. Now, if we consider

what we said earlier, a deer thinks of the mirage, regards its appearance, as water in the distance. Thinking it is water, the deer runs. But a wise person considers, "This is merely an appearance due to a defect in my eyesight and due to atmospheric and climatic causes." Thus he does not run, but stops right there. Having stopped, he investigates the matter.

In the same way, reflecting on the very place where this arises is what is taken as *Yoniso manasikāra* (Wise attention). This itself is called wise reflection—proper reflection. In that manner, even though we utilize the mental phenomenon (*nāma-dhamma*) of attention (*manasikāra*) here, it is not used in an *ayoniso* (unwise) way, but in a *yoniso* (wise) way. This is just like after a defendant is pardoned in order to give evidence in a case: that person is now a witness for the state. He is not like before when he gave false evidence; now he speaks the absolute truth. It is under obligation that he receives such a pardon, to declare the complete truth. It is having promised, and having been made to promise, that such a pardon is granted to someone. In the same way, here too, attention is applied with *Yoniso manasikāra* (Wise attention) for the sake of realizing the truth. It is precisely through attention utilized in this way that we strive to arouse insight knowledges (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*). When we reflect on the manner in which these arise and pass away, we see that there is nothing here to be grasped. What is here is only a collection of mental phenomena (*nāma-dhamma*), and what is called physical phenomenon (*rūpa-dhamma*)—which is a conjuring up by the elements of earth (*pathavī*), water (*āpo*), fire (*tejo*), and air (*vāyo*). This is all that is present here: a collection of mental phenomena (*nāma-dhamma*) and a few physical phenomena (*rūpa-dhamma*) (Name-and-Form).

As this realization matures, the dogma of self-illusion (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*)—the tightly held view of 'I' and 'mine'—is gradually relinquished; as the Blessed Buddha declared, this must be realized by oneself, individually. As long as this is not realized, this bondage of saṃsāra, this bondage of kamma, persists. So terrifying is the nature of this saṃsāra that there are accumulated in our minds the seeds of kamma gathered over an infinite, long period in this saṃsāra. So powerful are those kamma-seeds that they repeatedly bring about rounds of retribution. Those kammas committed in the past arise through our mental continuum in various ways, and they keep flowing. The vast amount of kamma accumulated in relation to the eye arises according to the occasion, subjecting the eye to it, and accumulates still more kamma. Thus, what is happening here is also the operation of ignorance and craving (*taṇhā*). Unknowingly, we do not know that these are kammas. We do not know that this is happening due to kamma. Often, when things come to us according to kamma,

because we lack realization, we do not understand them, and we accumulate kamma over and over again through them.

When we reflect on the entirety of saṃsāra, we can say that it consists of a lot of struggling and writhing. We have struggled for an infinite time in this saṃsāra. This is done by accumulating kamma, based on the notion of 'I' and 'mine'. As long as one takes these five aggregates—form, feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), Preparations (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*)—associated with this body or other things, as 'I' and 'mine', one accumulates various kammas in terms of intentions, by way of liking, disliking, and delusion regarding them. Having accumulated those kammas, when we subsequently experience their retributions, we do not know that these are retributions. Sometimes we develop hatred towards those who are instrumental in bringing them about; we conflict with them. In that manner, due to the arising of those defilements, from that mass of struggling, another mass of struggling is created. When the rounds of retribution come, one accumulates more kamma through them due to ignorance, because of the lack of true understanding. Instead, when one's understanding of Name-and-Form (*nāmarūpa*) develops, one realizes: "Here, there is only a process occurring due to causes and conditions—merely a series of activities." By establishing that realization within the mind, kamma is no longer accumulated. This is what helps one towards liberation.

If one is to escape from this bondage of saṃsāra, one must gain a correct understanding of the process occurring here. This is what is meant by the understanding of mental phenomena (*nāma-dhamma*). The realization that there is no 'I' or 'mine' to be taken here must come through direct experience—not merely because someone else said so, nor because it is written in a book. It is only by being established in a certain level of concentration and realizing, through insight reflection by way of *Yoniso manasikāra* (Wise attention), the true nature of these things—that they all arise, persist, and pass away—that one can obtain liberation, escape from saṃsāra.

Therefore, this very realization is what we must consider as the ultimate goal of our life. As long as this realization is absent, we will have to wander in this saṃsāra for an infinite, long period, repeatedly accumulating kamma, and consequently facing the mass of saṃsāric suffering (*dukkha*) known as birth (*jāti*), decay, sickness, and death (*jarāmaraṇa*). To attain this realization, we must make a certain effort in our daily life; we must make a certain sacrifice. Now, that treasurer renounced all his vast wealth and ordained. This was due to such a powerful desire, a powerful aspiration (*chanda*). In the same way, we must reflect that in this human existence obtained during the era of a Buddha's arising, there may be various other things, various other goals, and things that can be done. However, if one considers this as the most rare opportunity to escape from saṃsāra, what one has to do is to develop one's mind through meditation and gain this very realization.

First of all, while establishing concentration in daily life through some meditation subject (*kammaṭṭhāna*) such as loving-kindness, recollection of the Buddha, foulness, or mindfulness of death, one must understand their impermanent (*anicca*) nature by performing activities such as maintaining postures with mindfulness and proper wisdom, with mindfulness (*sati*), in accordance with the four foundations of mindfulness. The three characteristics of *anicca* (impermanent), *dukkha* (suffering), and *anattā* (not-self) are matters that must be realized by each person individually. What helps in this is attention, which is called *Yoniso manasikāra* (Wise attention). Thus, to realize this group of Dhammas, by initiating them in daily life and then generating the effort called right endeavors (*sammappadhāna*) in one's mental continuum, and by developing the other factors called the bases of spiritual power (*iddhipāda*), one is gradually able to arouse insight knowledges (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*). Generally, some individuals are able to arouse these much sooner than they expected. The meditative capacities accumulated in past saṃsāra are stored within our mental continuum. For that, we must make an effort. Without such an effort, they will not arise on their own. When the deep understanding of this impermanence (*aniccatā*), which we regard as insight knowledge, matures as insight knowledges (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*), one sees that what is here is only arising and passing away (*udayabbaya*). In this world, we see the sun rise and the sun set. In the same way, in everything of ours—regarding both our body and thoughts—in every single one of them, there is an arising and a passing away. Because we lack the understanding of this arising and passing away, we regard everything as permanent.

Indeed, the Blessed Buddha has declared that in this world, there is only emptiness. If told this, a person cannot easily conceptualize it. The Blessed Buddha has used an analogy for these six sense-spheres we call the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—the word *āyatana* is used in the Dhamma for these six senses—that all six of these sense-spheres are empty. So much so, that they are to be seen as an empty village. An empty village is what is called when the people of that village have fled; there is no one in that village. In the same way, in not a single one of these—the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—is there anything that can be taken as 'I' or 'mine'. In that sense, it is void; the Blessed Buddha declared it is empty. So, it is through that very attention (*manasikāra*) that one can see these as an empty village. There is no essence to be grasped in the forms met by the eye. Moreover, there is nothing there other than a mere natural phenomenon. But what happens here? Because of the lack of that realization, grasping (*upādāna*)—which means holding on—occurs. One grasps them as 'I' and 'mine'. As long as one grasps them as 'I' and 'mine', it is precisely because of that grasping (*upādāna*) that those kammas are accumulated. That is why one wanders in saṃsāra for a long time. In accordance with the dogma of self-illusion (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) conjured up by the mind as 'I', one is born in saṃsāra over and over again.

To give an analogy, when twisting a rope made of several strands, if the two people at either end try, even by mistake, to twist the rope in the exact same direction, it will never twist into a knot. But if someone comes and holds it in the middle, then a rope-

like thing is twisted there. This happens because it was grasped in the middle. In the same way, everything in the world is spinning. The mind is also spinning. All other things in the world can be thought of as spinning things. They go in circles to that extent. Otherwise, they have a nature of arising and passing away. There is a certain cycle between arising and passing away. It is because of that grasping (*upādāna*) that we perceive something substantial out of that spinning, or rather, out of that struggling. If it were allowed to twist in only one direction, there would be no knot there. Why? If it is not held in the middle, it will not twist either. But because of that grasping (*upādāna*), it appears there as a thing. When this is let go, its complete emptiness (*suññatā*) is understood. That is exactly the kind of thing that happens.

In many instances, it is mentioned in the Dhamma that some individuals with developed insight wisdom (*vipassanā-paññā*), when the Blessed Buddha uttered a single line of a verse, realized the path-knowledge of stream-entry (*sotāpatti*) and so forth. Why is that? What was the reason for this? That grasping (*upādāna*) present in the mind, the force of holding on, suddenly slipped away. At some point, if a realization arises that is powerful enough to let go of these five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*)—namely form, feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), Preparations (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*), which are the five heaps we hold on to with this mind—then, at that moment, just like the rope unraveling, like how the thing that appeared as a rope unraveled, the true reality of this is understood.

That is precisely why the Blessed Buddha declared: "What is regarded as truth by the world is untruth to the Buddhas and Noble Ones (*ariyas*). What appears as truth to the Noble Ones is untruth to the world." When we look at this, it is a very amazing statement. It seems contradictory. Why? The reason for this is that the world lives within a delusion—within ignorance (*avijjā*). We do not want to accept that. Society always looks to bring that ignorance to the forefront. It is like a process of cultivating and consuming. However, Buddhas arise in the world to point out the way to free our minds from this very delusion. Some individuals with developed wisdom destroyed this delusion extremely rapidly. They realized that emptiness (*suññatā*), that these are empty villages. The eye is an empty village, the ear is an empty village, the nose is an empty village. Why are they called empty villages? If we reflect generally, the forms we saw in our childhood, the sounds we heard—none of them exist now. Yet, they are present in our minds. We think, "I saw these, I heard these." Because of that notion of 'I', these are held onto by way of grasping (*upādāna*). Because of that very grasping, being bound to that bondage of kamma, one wanders in saṃsāra over and over again.

A very amazing thing is present here. That is why consciousness (*viññāṇa*) was said to be an illusion (*māyā*). It is showing something non-existent. Yet, to the one who watches, it is real. Everyone goes to a magic show to see something. Indeed, it is shown as such, but despite being shown, there is no essence there—no substance. That is precisely why the Blessed Buddha declared that this consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is an illusion. In every other religion, consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is regarded as the

essence, the core, the self (*attā*). Even if they say all other things are not-self, every other teacher in the world takes consciousness (*viññāṇa*) to be the self. But the Blessed Buddha alone declared that consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is an illusion. For, what is here is a great deception, and what aids this deception is that very ignorance (*avijjā*). Ignorance is entirely a veil. It is called a hindrance (*nīvaraṇa*); it is covered by that veil. When performing a magic trick, a black cloth is put up and some false projection is made through it. Similarly, the black cloth of ignorance (*avijjā*) produces delusion.

Next, that bondage called craving (*taṇhā*) is experienced as an attachment. By means of that craving—called by various names such as craving (*taṇhā*), lust (*rāga*), or greed (*lobha*)—that thing is shown as if it exists. It is in accordance with that craving (*taṇhā*) itself that grasping (*upādāna*) exists. In daily life, one can experience these directly for oneself, to whatever level one is at. When we reflect on the instances that caused our emotional outbursts, we see how we conjured up an existing thing out of something non-existent. Especially, if one reflects on the past as an example—on one's own childhood, or for elderly people, on their youth—where are those things that they held onto as grasping (*upādāna*)? None of them exist. Yet, regarding them, there is a certain notion of 'I' and 'mine' created by the mind. Once 'I' is taken, the feeling that "there is also something that is mine" arises. Between these two, there lies a very amazing delusion. In realizing this, in daily life, one can properly practice the four foundations of mindfulness, using mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānassati*) as an insight practice. Although we regard our in-breath and out-breath as a single thing, what is present here is a certain process. Through that process, we see its impermanence (*aniccatā*). That is a good illustration. Similarly, when the nature of arising, persisting, and ceasing of all things is understood, that perception of permanence (*nicca-saññā*) is gradually removed.

The Blessed Buddha has declared that there are four perversions (*vipallāsa*) in the world. Perversions mean four wrong understandings: the perception of permanence in the impermanent (*anicca*), the perception of pleasure in the painful (*dukkha*), the perception of beauty in the foul (*asubha*), and the perception of self in the not-self (*anattā*). There is a notion in the world taking the impermanent (*anicca*) to be permanent. There is a tendency to regard what is painful (*dukkha*) as pleasant. There is a tendency to regard what is foul as beautiful. There is a tendency to regard what is not-self (*anattā*) as self. The mind must escape from this distorted state called perversions (*vipallāsa*). What helps in that escape is the knowledge and vision of things as they really are (*yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana*)—the understanding of true reality. That is not something that can be shown to another. Within our own mind, as said before, it is comprised of mental phenomena (*nāma-dhamma*). All of them are defendants. Yet, at least one must be pardoned to get the work done. By turning this attention into *Yoniso manasikāra* (Wise attention), we must make an effort in our daily life itself, established in a certain virtue (*sīla*), to wisely understand the nature of that subtle mind—the nature of the subtle mind which is difficult to see.

What is done through virtue (*sīla*) is subduing this body and speech, and providing the necessary opportunity for mental seclusion (*citta-viveka*). It is freeing the mind from regrets and allowing room for mental seclusion. To establish concentration, there must be mental seclusion within that person. It is through the stages described as physical seclusion (*kāya-viveka*), mental seclusion (*citta-viveka*), and seclusion from acquisitions (*upadhi-viveka*) that the realization of Nibbāna can be achieved. Thus, after establishing that concentration, by relying on concentration and reflecting properly, one sees the mirage-like nature of everything. Why is it stopped right there as "a form, a form," "a sound, a sound"? If one wishes, one can analyze in detail. But that does not help Nibbāna. It may help in daily activities—analyzing what kind of form it is, whose it is, how beautiful, bad, or ugly it is. But through those, saṃsāra only grows further, delusion grows, ignorance grows, and it does not help in realizing the Four Noble Truths declared by the Blessed Buddha. Therefore, everything we do is either good or bad in accordance with our ultimate goal. Thus, the meditator (*yogāvacara*), the meritorious person who hopes to realize Nibbāna, no matter how the world thinks—even if they consider it madness—must direct his attention (*manasikāra*) according to his goal, according to the target he aspires to.

The nature of this running mind is like flowing water, or like being dragged by a wild bull. First of all, this scattered mind must be calmed. Having calmed it, concentration must be established. Next, this running mind must be gradually subdued and stopped. The mind is stopped, indeed, through weariness (*nibbidā*) regarding this; when true reality is understood, weariness grows. When the perception of impermanence (*anicca-saññā*) grows, realizing "there is nothing here to be taken as 'I' and 'mine', everything is impermanent (*anicca*)," the previous momentum regarding these is lost. Grasping (*upādāna*)—which means holding on—gradually thins out. Having become so, at some point when the exact realization arises, at that moment, it is not that one let go of it on purpose, but it is let go of on its own. To the extent it is let go of, weariness (*nibbidā*) arises. That is what is called weariness with saṃsāra. Disillusionment (*nibbidā*) means weariness with saṃsāra. It is that weariness regarding everything that helps towards ultimate liberation, which is called dispassion (*virāga*).

When looked at as words, to most people in the ordinary world, these are unpleasant words. Why? Because this world always looks to expand the world. The Blessed Buddha has declared, *na siyā loka-vaḍḍhano*—one should not be a world-expander. Expanding the world is not what is to be done. That expanding of the world is Māra's work. Māra always tries to keep us in delusion. The Buddhas and the Noble Ones strive to free the world. To free them from the grip of Māra, what helps is realization. Realization cannot be created for another. Even the Blessed Buddha cannot do that. According to each individual's saṃsāric potential, sometimes through a line of a verse, sometimes through a verse, sometimes through a longer discourse, and through various other devices, the Blessed Buddha directed their matured saṃsāric wisdom towards Nibbāna and granted them the realization of Nibbāna.

Therefore, everyone must reflect that, without any distinction between young and old, the capacity to realize Nibbāna can be present within us. Why did even seven-year-olds become Arahants? Because their saṃsāric wisdom had matured within them. At the very beginning here, we mentioned a teacher who taught Abhidhamma, and a Vinayadhara monk who taught Vinaya. No matter how much one learns from books, if that which helps towards Nibbāna is absent, one remains in the grip of Māra forever.

Generally, whether we think about ordaining or other things, we regard only this erudition as the valuable thing in the world. But that is merely wisdom based on learning (*sutamaya-paññā*)—wisdom gathered from books. One cannot obtain even an understanding of the state of Nibbāna through that wisdom. Generally, by looking at a map, we cannot obtain the actual experience of traveling. It cannot be obtained by looking at a map; one must actually make the journey. In the same way, if one experiences this directly for oneself, at that moment, one's doubts are dispelled; doubts are removed. No matter how much is obtained from books and so forth, doubts still remain. What helps in this is insight reflection (*vipassanā-manasikāra*).

These should not be regarded as things to be done only by the Sangha, only after ordaining. Even during the Buddha's time, and even recently, lay devotees—both men and women—aroused their saṃsāric potential, developed these insight knowledges (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*), and attained the realization of the paths and fruits (*magga-phala*). Therefore, by practicing some meditation subject (*kammaṭṭhāna*) in daily life, establishing concentration, and gradually associating with those capable of giving instructions on them, one must make an effort to arouse those insight knowledges. The opportunity to bring an end to this saṃsāric suffering (*dukkha*) is obtained, as we mentioned earlier, only during the era of a Buddha's arising.

The era of a Buddha's arising is an extremely rare opportunity. That is why the Blessed Buddha, as daily advice from the Sugata, pointed out those rare things:

> *Dullabho buddhupādo lokasmiṃ,*
>
> *dullabho manussatta-paṭilābho,*
>
> *dullabhā khaṇasampatti,*
>
> *dullabhā pabbajjā,*
>
> *dullabhaṃ saddhammasavanaṃ,*
>
> *dullabho sappurisasaṃsevo.*

Thus, six things are pointed out as rare. The era of a Buddha's arising is extremely rare. Next, the human existence obtained during the era of a Buddha's arising can be said to be even rarer. If one had obtained other forms of existence—if one were born as an animal or a hungry ghost (*peta*)—one would not be able to realize Nibbāna;

that is why human existence during the era of a Buddha's arising is regarded as something extremely precious. Even being an ordinary human is not enough. Just having a human form is not enough; a wise human existence with intact sense faculties and the intellectual capacity to understand the Dhamma is what can be regarded as the "opportune moment" (*khaṇa-sampatti*). Even if that opportune moment is obtained, next is going forth (*pabbajjā*). Going forth is described as renunciation (*nekkhamma*). The strength to renounce, that going forth, is even rarer. Even if one goes forth, though one might get to hear the Dhamma, hearing the Dhamma that actually helps towards Nibbāna is extremely rare. Even if one hears such Dhamma, to practice according to that Dhamma, the association with a person of integrity (*sappurisa*) who can guide one—which is called association with a noble friend (*kalyāṇa-mitta*)—is extremely rare. Looking at it in this way, like the bullseye in the center of a target, the association with a noble, spiritual friend (*kalyāṇa-mitta*), as well as the era of a Buddha's arising, can be regarded as the final phase of this Gautama Buddha's Sāsana. If someone hopes to realize Nibbāna, it is at this very moment that it is possible.

When we reflect on the changes occurring in today's society, looking at it from all sides, in a few generations, even the word "Nibbāna" might be forgotten by the world. Instead, other things—other things that overflow—may arise. Due to physical forces and various other forces of defilements, as time goes on, it will fade. That is why when a Buddha arises in the world, some people develop an amazing kind of faith (*saddhā*) just upon hearing the word "Buddha". Until then, even the word "Buddha" is buried. The word "Nibbāna" is buried. Since such an era is coming in the future, every meritorious person at this moment must reflect: we must not dedicate our lives to those mundane pleasures and wealth. It must be dedicated for the sake of the rare human existence we have obtained.

We must make some effort to guard our mind—this mind whose true nature is difficult to see, extremely subtle, and which grows upon whatever object it pleases. If that effort is completed, as the Blessed Buddha declared, *"cittaṃ guttaṃ sukhāvahaṃ"*—if this mind is properly guarded, if the purity of the mind is established, if liberation is attained—then that person gains the capacity to be pacified by the supreme, deathless Nibbāna, escaping from all suffering (*dukkha*) of Preparations (*saṅkhāra*) such as birth (*jāti*), decay, sickness, and death (*jarāmaraṇa*). We should not regard these as things that are far away. We must regard them as things that are extremely close to us. The Blessed Buddha has declared: *"Santike na vijānanti, magā dhammā..."*—"Alas, they do not understand the Dhamma that is close at hand; they are like beasts, foolish people." "Beasts" (*magā*) here refers to fools—alas, what foolishness, they do not see the Nibbāna that is right here! From this, we can see that Nibbāna is not something far away like the sun or the moon. It is something that exists within ourselves.

There is an extremely valuable discourse of the Blessed Buddha: "Monks, within this fathom-long body itself, 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 world" here refers precisely to the Four Noble Truths. The Blessed Buddha declared that suffering (*dukkha*), the cause of suffering, Nibbāna attained by ending suffering, and the path to it, are all within this fathom-long body itself. It is within this living body endowed with perception (*saññā*) and mind—not within a dead corpse.

Nowadays, it is only when someone dies, keeping that dead body in front, that we say, "May they attain the bliss of Nibbāna!" This is not what is being said here. The capacity to obtain Nibbāna is within this living human being endowed with perception (*saññā*) and mind. If that is not brought out, then, as the Blessed Buddha declared: *"Santike na vijānanti, magā dhammā..."*—we would have to say, "Alas, fools do not understand the Nibbāna that is close at hand!" Therefore, we must reflect wisely, bring close to our lives the sublime Dhamma pointed out by the supreme Buddhas within this precious human existence we have obtained, arouse our saṃsāric potentials, arouse that wisdom, and reflect: "May this hearing of the Dhamma also help us to be pacified by the supreme, deathless Nibbāna!"

So, on this Poya day, having undertaken the precious virtue of *ājīva-aṭṭhamaka-sīla* (morality with livelihood as the eighth factor), and subduing body and speech, you have listened to the Dhamma with mindfulness (*sati*) and wisdom during this short time. We regard the realization of Nibbāna as the benefit of this hearing of the Dhamma. If we look at it deeply, it is not something that happens automatically, nor is it a magical event. Within our mental continuum, during this listening to the Dhamma, a certain series of Dhammas is deposited. These, known as faith (*saddhā*), energy (*viriya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*), are mentioned as the five spiritual faculties (*pañcindriya*) and five spiritual powers (*pañcabala*) among the thirty-seven factors of enlightenment (*bodhipakkhiya-dhamma*) that help towards Nibbāna. They are presented as five faculties and five powers: faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. During this short time, faith (*saddhā*) in the Triple Gem arose in the mental continuum of you meritorious people. Likewise, generating a certain energy (*viriya*), you sat for about an hour listening to this attentively. Through that, next, mindfulness (*sati*) developed; awareness developed. Next, concentration (*samādhi*) arose; when mindfulness is maintained for a long time, concentration is established. Through this, certain understandings arise in the concentrated mind; those are what is called wisdom (*paññā*).

In that way, a wholesome mental succession arose within your own mental continuum at this moment, which helps to establish faith (*saddhā*), energy (*viriya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*) as spiritual faculties and powers. Utilizing them, you must aspire: "May we gain the strength and power to realize the supreme deathless Nibbāna as quickly as possible, in this very life, through the penetration of the paths and fruits (*magga-phala*)—namely Stream-entry (*sotāpatti*), Once-returning (*sakadāgāmitā*), Non-returning (*anāgāmitā*), and Arahanthood!" Likewise, may all deities and Brahmas—including the guardians of

the Sāsana, the right-viewed deities and Brahmas, and the deities presiding over this place—rejoice in this heap of merit we have accumulated through this preaching and hearing of the Dhamma! Having rejoiced, may they realize the supreme, deathless Nibbāna through whatever state of awakening (*bodhi*) they aspire to, and may they protect the Sāsana! Furthermore, may all our departed relatives, and all beings from the Avīci hell up to the Akaniṭṭha heaven who desire merit and Nibbāna, rejoice in this merit of our preaching and hearing of Dhamma, and through their aspired state of awakening (*bodhi*), may they realize the supreme, deathless Nibbāna and escape from all saṃsāric suffering (*dukkha*)! Aspiring thus, share the merit by reciting the verses.

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……..*"