Pahankanuwa Sermon #67

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

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(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.71)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

Pali Stanza:

Yo ca vassasataṃ jīve, dussīlo asamāhito;

ekāhaṃ jīvitaṃ seyyo, sīlavantassa jhāyino

From:

Dhammapada 110 (Sahassavagga)

Dear Listeners,

Adversity is an occasion that highlights and brings out the virtue or vice within a person. The noble-minded, virtuous person (*satpuruṣa*) and the base, unvirtuous person (*asatpuruṣa*) act in two entirely different ways in times of adversity. The virtuous person, according to the situation, would even sacrifice his own life for others, whereas the unvirtuous person, in order to save his own life, would even sacrifice the very person who helped him.

This very point becomes clear through the events in the background story (*nidāna kathā*) related to the verse we have chosen as our theme today. In Sāvatthī, a noble lady from a wealthy family passed away due to a sudden illness during her pregnancy. When her body was brought to the cemetery and cremated, the rest of her body burned, but the womb remained unburned. The undertakers, using the iron hooks they employ during cremation, pulled that womb away from the funeral pyre, threw it onto a heap of embers, covered it with another heap of embers, and returned home. When they came back to look in the morning, there was a child lying on top of the extinguished heap of embers. The womb had burned away, but nothing had happened to the child.

The reason given for this is a certain natural law (*dhammatā*) that a person who possesses the spiritual merit (*puñña*) to attain Arahanthood in that very life will not pass away without attaining Arahanthood. Those who are called *pacchimabhavika* (one in their final birth) are those who have the merit to attain Arahanthood in that

very lifetime. There are several stories of this nature mentioned in the texts. This is one such case. Therefore, on one hand, this was a child of immense merit. Be that as it may, those people, being greatly astonished that the body was cremated with such a massive pile of firewood yet this child survived, took the child to the fortune-tellers as a great wonder. They asked them if there was anything special about this child. They said, "If he remains a layman, seven generations of his family will become impoverished"—making him appear extremely unfortunate from a worldly point of view—"but if he ordains, he will live an excellent life surrounded by a large retinue of five hundred." Furthermore, when the womb was being pulled away with those iron hooks and dragged here and there, the hook struck the corner of the child's eye, causing an injury. Those hooks are called *saṅku*. Associated with that word, this child was named Saṅkicca, because of that mark left on his eye, due to the injury.

The relatives thought that once the child grew up, he should be ordained. Meanwhile, the child also overheard other children playing with him say: "When you were in your mother's womb, she passed away in this manner, and you remained unburned during the cremation." The child felt a great sense of urgency and spiritual anxiety (*saṁvega*) over this. He thought, "If I was saved from such a dread of death, why should I remain in lay life?" and at the age of seven, he asked for permission to ordain. His relatives took him and handed him over to Venerable Sāriputta. Venerable Sāriputta, on that very day, gave him the meditation subject of the "pentad of skin" (*taca-pañcaka*) namely *kesā* (hair of the head), *lomā* (hair of the body), *nakhā* (nails), *dantā* (teeth), *taco* (skin), which is given during ordination, shaved his head, and ordained him. Even while his head was being shaved, he attained Arahanthood together with the four analytical knowledges (*paṭisambhidā*). At that time, Venerable Saṅkicca was only seven years old.

Around this time, thirty bhikkhus from Sāvatthī—who had ordained in their old age—received meditation instructions leading all the way to Arahanthood from the Buddha, and asked the Buddha for permission to go and reside in a forest hermitage in a remote area. The Buddha asked, "To which area are you going?" and it appeared to his Buddha-insight that they would face an obstacle and danger in that region due to a poor man. Realizing that Venerable Saṅkicca would be the one capable of helping them on that occasion, the Buddha told those bhikkhus, "Very well, you may go. But first, meet our elder, your elder brother in the Sāsana, Sāriputta, before you leave."

Those bhikkhus then went to Venerable Sāriputta and told him, "The Buddha asked us to meet you before we go." Venerable Sāriputta also reflected on this. Discerning the Buddha's underlying intention, he asked these bhikkhus, "Do you have a novice (*sāmaṇera*) to take with you?" They replied, "Why do we need a novice, friend, while we are living in the forest? If we take a novice, he will only be an impediment and a trouble to us." Venerable Sāriputta then declared, "No, friends, the one you are taking is this Saṅkicca of mine. If you take Venerable Saṅkicca, no harm or impediment will come to you because of him. Indeed, if there is to be any danger, it

will be to this novice Saṅkicca because of your group." However, he did not explain the specific reason.

So, those bhikkhus agreed and set off on their journey along with the young novice Saṅkicca. These thirty-one monks arrived at a village in a remote area. In accordance with the custom of bhikkhus looking for a place to spend the rainy season retreat (*vassa*), when the faithful devotees came and asked, "Venerable sirs, where are you going?" and they replied, "We are searching for a suitable place," the devotees understood from those words that they were seeking a place to spend the rains retreat. Those faithful laypeople invited them, saying, "If you, venerable sirs, out of compassion, spend the rains retreat here with us, we too will be able to observe the Uposatha and the eight precepts in this area." They prepared the necessary huts (*kuṭi*) in a section of the forest, cleared walking paths (*caṅkamana*), and made arrangements for the bhikkhus to spend the rains retreat in that forest hermitage. The bhikkhus went into the village for almsfood.

Moreover, at the very beginning of the rains retreat, they made an agreement among themselves: "We have come having received meditation instructions from the living Buddha himself. Let none of us live in negligence. Except for the time of going for morning almsfood and attending to the elder bhikkhu in the evening, let us meditate individually at all other times. If anyone falls suddenly ill, strike the wooden gong (*gaṇḍi*). Then we will all assemble and assist that monk." Having established this agreement, they meditated diligently.

One day, while returning from the almsround, they bathed near a river and were preparing to partake of their meal on the sandy bank. At that time, a certain poor man of that region, who lived with the help of his only daughter, decided to go to another daughter because of a food shortage in that area. While traveling, he saw the monks preparing to partake of their almsfood and approached them. As he stood there watching, the bhikkhus inquired about his whereabouts. When he explained his situation, they noticed he looked very hungry and told him, "Bring a leaf so we can give you some food." The thirty bhikkhus each took a lump of rice from their own almsfood and placed it on the leaf, giving it to the man to eat.

After eating this, the man thought: "I am so poor. Even when I work hard, I never get such delicious food." He asked the monks, "Venerable sirs, was there a special invitation today?" They replied, "No, we had no special invitation. This is how people offer us alms every day." The man then thought, "In that case, I do not need to go here and there. I should remain here to serve them as an attendant (*kappiyakāra*)." He requested permission from the bhikkhus, saying, "I will stay and perform the daily duties and services." The bhikkhus granted him permission. This man remained there, performing his duties in a way that pleased the monks. After two months had passed, he again thought of visiting his daughter. Then he thought, "If I ask permission from the bhikkhus now, they might not let me go." So, he departed without telling anyone.

While traveling, he encountered a band of five hundred thieves in the forest. It is mentioned that in those days, thieves often lived in bands in the forests. Those thieves had made a vow to the deity of the forest, promising to offer a human sacrifice. That day was the seventh day of their vow. On that day, the chief of the thieves climbed a tree to see if anyone was entering the forest, and he saw this man coming. He then signaled the other thieves, who surrounded and captured the man. Having caught him, they bound him tightly. Then they lit a large fire and began preparing their weapons. This man asked, "I do not see any wild boars or deer here. What are you preparing to do? Why are you lighting a bonfire?" The thieves replied, "We have made a vow to offer a human sacrifice to the deity. Therefore, we intend to kill you and offer the sacrifice with your flesh and blood." Terrified, the man used his cunning and thought of a scheme. He said, "I am an extremely wretched man who lives on leftover rice. In such-and-such a place, there are noble monks ordained from clans like the Sakya clan. Go and bring one of those monks and offer him as a sacrifice. The deity will be far more pleased with that."

The thieves considered this and agreed that it made sense. Guided by that very man, they went to the forest hermitage. Upon arriving, they saw no one. When they asked why, the man, knowing their agreement, said, "Strike this wooden gong, and the monks will assemble." Then the chief of the thieves struck the gong. All thirty bhikkhus came and sat on the stone seats. The chief elder asked, "Who struck the gong?" The chief of the thieves replied, "It was I, venerable sir." When asked, "Why?" he said, "We have vowed to make a human sacrifice. We have come to take one of you monks." Then the chief elder declared, "When a responsibility is given to a group of brothers, it is the leader, the eldest, who must fulfill it. Therefore, venerable sirs, continue your meditation with diligence. I will sacrifice my life for you, venerable sirs, and go with this band of thieves to fulfill this purpose."

When the chief elder gave his pledge to sacrifice his life, the second monk said, "A problem that arises for an elder brother should be resolved by the younger brother. Therefore, let you, venerable sir, and the other venerable ones continue to practice meditation well. I shall go to offer my life." In this manner, all thirty monks, in order of seniority, prepared to sacrifice their lives and go. Finally, the young novice Venerable Saṅkicca said, "Venerable sirs, let all of you remain. I will go and sacrifice my life for you." Then the chief elder and the other monks said, "Even if we all have to die, we cannot send you, young venerable one." When asked, "Why?" they replied, "You are the pupil of Venerable Sāriputta. It would be a great disgrace and blame upon us to have it said that we took a young novice and handed him over to the thieves. Therefore, we can never let you go." Thereupon, Venerable Saṅkicca said, "The Buddha sent you to my preceptor (*upajjhāya*), and my preceptor sent me here with you for this very reason. Therefore, please let me go." Having obtained their permission and asking for forgiveness, saying, "If any wrong has been done by me, please forgive me," he departed.

Then, those bhikkhus felt a deep sense of *saṁvega*—in short, a sorrow so profound that tears welled in their eyes—seeing this young novice step forward to sacrifice his life for them. As Venerable Saṅkicca was preparing to depart, the chief elder made a special request to the thieves: "Please, this young novice might get frightened when you kindle those bonfires and prepare your weapons. Therefore, seat him to one side and carry out your task." The chief of the thieves, in accordance with what was said, had Venerable Saṅkicca seated to one side. Having kindled a great bonfire and sharpened their weapons, the chief of the thieves took his sword, approached Venerable Saṅkicca, swung it around his head, and struck a blow at Venerable Saṅkicca's body. As he struck, the sword bent in two, its sharp edge folding back onto itself. The chief of the thieves thought there must have been some mistake in his swing, so he straightened it out and struck again. This time, the sword curled up like a dry palmyra leaf, twisting and curling from the tip all the way to the hilt.

The chief of the thieves was utterly astonished. "Nothing like this has ever happened before. I have used this sword for so long. What is this? Even an inanimate sword knows the virtues of this young novice. It is only I who did not know." Saying this, he prostrated himself at the novice's feet and begged for forgiveness. He asked, "Venerable sir, all this time, whenever people entering this forest see us, they tremble with fear. Why is it that you remain so calm, with such a pleasant countenance?" At that moment, Venerable Saṅkicca arose from his absorption—for the young novice had not simply sat there, but had entered into absorption (*jhāna*). It was through psychic power (*iddhi*) that this miracle had occurred. Then he uttered several verses as a Dhamma teaching.

This is the meaning of those verses. He did not address him as the chief of thieves, but in common address, called him "village headman" (*gāma-jeṭṭha*). "Headman, for one who has no *Taṇhā* (Craving) or expectation, there is no mental *Dukkha* (Suffering) regarding death. For an Arahant (one whose taints are destroyed, *khīṇāsava*) who has removed *taṇhā*, death is like laying down a heavy burden from one's head; it is a matter of joy, not something that causes fear." Thus he preached the Dhamma. Having heard this and being inspired, the chief of the thieves asked the others, "Now, what shall we do?" They asked, "What do you intend to do?" The chief of the thieves replied, "After witnessing such a miracle, there is no use in lay life for me. I shall ordain under this venerable sir." All the other four hundred and ninety-nine agreed, and they all requested ordination from Venerable Saṅkicca, the young novice.

Adapting to the situation, the young novice dyed their existing garments with copper-colored clay, shaved their heads with those very swords, and ordained all five hundred of them. While thinking of setting off to see the Buddha, he thought: "From the moment I left, those bhikkhus must have been in great grief. They might not be able to concentrate their minds. I must go and see them before I leave." So, accompanied by the five hundred, the young novice returned to the forest hermitage where the thirty monks resided. When they arrived, the bhikkhus were astonished.

He explained the situation: "When this chief of thieves tried to harm me, it failed. Out of faith, they have all ordained. Now, venerable sirs, continue to practice your meditation diligently." Having said this, Venerable Saṅkicca, along with the newly ordained band of thieves, went to Venerable Sāriputta.

Venerable Sāriputta, seeing him, expressed his joy, saying, "Why is it, Saṅkicca, that you return with such a large retinue of pupils?" After Venerable Saṅkicca explained the matter, Venerable Sāriputta sent the group to see the Buddha, saying, "Go and pay respects to the Buddha as well." When they went to the Buddha, he too expressed his joy in the same manner, and the admonitory message he declared regarding the chief of the thieves is what is expressed in today's verse:

Yo ca vassasataṁ jīve, dussīlo asamāhito,

Ekāhaṁ jīvitaṁ seyyo, sīlavantassa jhāyino.

Though one should live a hundred years, immoral and unconcentrated, yet better is a single day's life of one who is virtuous and meditative.

Through this, we can see the exemplary life of the young novice, who lived virtuously and endowed with the power of *jhāna*. On the other hand, we see the immoral life led by those thieves. Accordingly, the Buddha delivered an admonitory sermon. It is said in the Dhamma texts that upon hearing this, all five hundred of them attained Arahanthood. In any case, it served as a support for Nibbāna.

This is what is mentioned in the scriptures as the background story and the occasion for the teaching of this verse. The account of Venerable Saṅkicca is a highly valuable event in the Dispensation. So, let us try to bring out the points that we, by way of commentary, should extract from this.

First of all, let us consider the birth of Venerable Saṅkicca. The Buddha has declared that *jāti*—that is, birth or arising—is *Dukkha* (Suffering). However, lay devotees generally do not like to accept that birth is *dukkha*. This reality is obscured by the concept of the "blessing of children." Yet, we see here that when a child cannot be born naturally, various surgeries are performed, causing great pain to the mother in order to bring the child into the world. This birth was even more miraculous. Here, indeed, birth took place in the midst of a funeral pyre. If someone's birth occurs in the middle of a fire, there can be nothing more terrifying and filled with *saṁvega*. Yet, he survived the fire, and thus his birth occurred. We can only conceive of it as a highly miraculous birth. Along with the power of merit from Venerable Saṅkicca's past, there must have also been some great unwholesome karma (*akusala*). That is why it was said that if he remained a layman, seven generations of his family would be impoverished. Be that as it may, it is shown here as a natural law (*dhammatā*) that a *pacchimabhavika* (one in their final birth) cannot be killed under any circumstances. If someone has attained their final existence, they will not die without attaining Arahanthood. It was because of such a *dhammatā* that this took place.

The next important point is this young child's attainment of Arahanthood through the *taca-pañcaka* meditation subject. Often, the attainment of Arahanthood by highly meritorious individuals is reported at a very tender age—seven years of age being a very young, childhood stage where one is just beginning to understand things. On that occasion, such a simple meditation subject—hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin—parts of the body which ordinary worldly people beautify and consider as additions to their physical attractiveness. Yet, as you virtuous people know, the Buddha placed these at the very beginning of the thirty-two impure parts of the body. Contemplating this meditation subject of hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, and skin, even as the hair of his head was being shaved, insight-knowledges (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*) arose through a deep disenchantment with saṁsāra, allowing him to attain Arahanthood. This is what we see from this story. It is a Dhamma miracle.

We mentioned that both the Buddha and the great Arahant Sāriputta foresaw this series of future events. Venerable Saṅkicca was sent with a special purpose because some danger was to befall those thirty monks due to that poor man. But why did the Buddha let them go there, rather than telling them to go elsewhere, despite knowing of such a danger? It is because there was a certain *dhammatā* (natural lawfulness) inherent in this. This poignant sequence of events—that is, the *saṁvega* felt by those thirty monks when the band of thieves came and tried to take one of them, as well as the sacrifice of their lives that they offered—must have actually aided those thirty in attaining Nibbāna. That, too, was visible to the Buddha's eye. Moreover, the Dhamma-power of Venerable Saṅkicca, as well as the fact that the band of thieves would ordain, must have been perceived by the Buddha's eye, which is why he permitted those thirty monks to go to that region.

Next, a proof for the point we made at the very beginning was spontaneously illustrated in this story. That is, it is only in times of adversity and disaster that one can recognize whether someone is a virtuous person (*satpuruṣa*) or an unvirtuous person (*asatpuruṣa*), by the way they behave. Now, that poor man, like biting the hand that feeds him, was ready to sacrifice one of the very monks who had helped him, in order to save his own life. On one hand, this demonstrates the behavior of a wicked person. On the other hand, we see how those thirty monks acted. When such a situation arises, what we usually expect regarding the sacrifice of life is that senior, high-ranking elders, holding onto their titles and leadership, would save their own lives by sacrificing others. That is what is commonly seen in the ordinary, worldling (*puthujjana*) world. But these noble monks—indeed, they had not even attained Arahanthood yet. It is mentioned here that these thirty were not even children of the same mother, nor were they Arahants. Yet, they were thirty monks of such sublime virtue. The chief elder took that death upon himself. Then, the other junior monks did the same. The second monk thought of it as a service to the Saṅgha, a service to the elder, and said, "I must perform the duty that belongs to him." In the same way, the monks junior to him took it upon themselves. This is an extremely exemplary event. That is the quality of a virtuous person. It is clearly illustrated in this story

how virtuous people sacrifice their own lives for others in times of adversity. This is extremely valuable. It provides a Dhamma-based model of how we should act in our own lives in such situations.

Furthermore, if we look deeper, the most profound Dhamma point within this is what was declared by the young Venerable Saṅkicca. An Arahant has no fear of death. Why, indeed, is there no fear of death? It is because death has been conquered. That victory over death was not achieved merely by bending the sword as he did. The bonds, the hooks that tie us to this saṁsāra, have been bent back in the opposite direction. These are what are called fetters (*saṁyojana*). It is by these ten kinds of bonds called fetters that ordinary worldly people are bound to saṁsāra. It is by reversing them that Arahanthood is attained—meaning they have been destroyed, eradicated. That is why there is no fear of death. In short, Nibbāna is neither a drink obtained from some other world nor a strange, eternal existence. It is the cessation of the fear of death that goes hand-in-hand with the notion of "I" and "mine" which is created within this very person, within this being, due to *Taṇhā* (Craving) and ignorance (*avijjā*). When *taṇhā* and expectations are eliminated, the fear of death is also eliminated. This is the deepest point in this Dhamma. This, too, is revealed through the words of Venerable Saṅkicca.

In all of our sermons, we direct the final portion towards Dhamma analysis. We mentioned that the willingness to step forward and sacrifice their lives must have helped those thirty monks in their attainment of Arahanthood. What is called sacrifice of life is the letting go of the desire for life. The relinquishment of the desire for life served as a rehearsal for those thirty monks to let go of the entire heap of acquisitions (*upadhi*). It was according to that very same natural law (*dhammatā*) that the young Venerable Saṅkicca, even as his hair was being shaved, severed all bonds tying him to saṁsāra and realized the Deathless, Great Nibbāna. Thereby, he eradicated the fear of death. That is why he showed no fear whatsoever when the chief of the thieves brought the sword. When we contemplate Nibbāna, we see that the Buddha has shown the true liberation in a way that no other teacher has ever declared. Venerable Saṅkicca further told the chief of the thieves that for an Arahant, death is like letting go of a heavy burden carried on the head. Why? Because an Arahant is described as "one who has laid down the burden" (*ohitabhāra*).

What is this burden? It is the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*). You virtuous people may have generally heard of *rūpa* (form), *Vedanā* (Feeling), *saññā* (perception), *Saṅkhāra* (Preparations), and *viññāṇa* (consciousness). However, these are not just single things, they are heaps; *khandha* means a heap or a pile. We show a photograph to others and say, "This is my form (*rūpa*)." But according to the Dhamma, what is shown here is a heap of forms. Similarly, it is a heap of *Vedanā* (Feeling), a heap of *saññā* (perceptions). *Saṅkhāra*—that is, our intentions and volitions, the series of active thoughts we generate—that, too, is a heap. Next, *viññāṇa* (consciousness), which we call "my thoughts"—that, too, is a heap. In this way, they are presented in the Dhamma as heaps. How are these five heaps formed?

Let us consider that for a moment. Since each of us can understand things according to our own level of comprehension, there is a certain nature—the Buddha points out that the ordinary person, the person lacking Dhamma-knowledge, spends this saṁsāra merely piling things up.

How do we pile them up? Every one of us possesses six sense-bases (*āyatana*). When we say *āyatana* (bases), various everyday institutions might come to mind. Looking at it through the term itself, it is somewhat similar. The Buddha points out that we have six sense-bases: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. What is the work done within these six sense-bases? What is the process? Through these, due to ignorance (*avijjā*) and *Taṇhā* (Craving), in order to gratify and maintain this physical cage, we pile up a vast number of thoughts along various kinds of objects. Based on forms seen with the eye, because of the *Vedanā* (Feeling) arising from them, according to the *saññā* (perceptions) given by those feelings, we generate various expectations and thoughts (*vitakka*). A stream of thoughts runs along, separating "them" as one thing and "I" as another, based on each of these sense-bases. Just as we spoke of the eye, think also of the other sense-bases. Hearing a sound through the ear, if it is a pleasant sound, like a beautiful song, one develops an attachment based on it. According to those *vedanā*, various thoughts and reflections (*vitakka*) are generated. Then one thinks, "On such-and-such a day, I listened to so-and-so's song. I am the one who listened to that song; others did not get the chance to hear it." In this way, it gets stored in the mind.

The Buddha explains how this piling up occurs, the way the worldlings who spend their time in this saṁsāra continuously accumulate these five heaps. This can also be shown in a subtle way. To summarize and express this briefly, we can say it as follows. The Pali phrase is applied in this manner:

> *"Etaṁ mama, esohamasmi, eso me attā"*
>
> (This is mine, this I am, this is my self.)

The Buddha points out that we think about these things in three ways. These three ways are identified as *Taṇhā* (Craving), conceit (*māna*), and view (*diṭṭhi*). By way of *taṇhā*, we think: "This is mine" (*etaṁ mama*). Next, by way of conceit, we regard it as: "This I am" (*eso hamasmi*)—"this is indeed me." Next: "This is my self" (*eso me attā*). Now, we spoke of a photograph. If that photograph is beautiful, everyone thinks they themselves are beautiful: "This is mine." They do not even like to give the photograph away; they try to preserve it. *"Etaṁ mama."* Next, *"eso hamasmi"*—"This is me, not anyone else. Me, me, me." *"Eso me attā"*—"So this indeed is my self." This is what we submit even for an identity card. We do not need to speak of other things. To recall the precious moments of life, we say: "There, in that photograph, at that spot, stands me. Me. And next to me is so-and-so." I have used this small analogy so that it can be understood in an everyday manner.

Gathering this vast number of experiences received through the eye, we say: *"etaṁ mama, eso hamasmi, eso me attā."* We collect them, bundle them up, and finally, it is just like putting a seal on them. We collect and bundle them up through *taṇhā*. We stack them neatly through conceit (*māna*). Then we place the seal: *"eso me attā"*— "This is my self." In this way, when our experiences are seized and grasped in three ways, by way of *taṇhā* and *upādāna* (grasping / fuel / holding), they are filtered, and the form (*rūpa*) aspect of that experience goes and joins our pile called "form." The feeling (*vedanā*) aspect goes and joins there as "my heap of feelings." The perception (*saññā*) aspect goes and joins as "my heap of perceptions." You virtuous people can understand this in relation to some important occasion on a certain day in your life. Let us say, if it was an important event like a wedding, you regard that photograph taken with great pride as something highly significant. Inside that photograph taken on my most important occasion, all of this is contained. The *vedanā*, *saññā*, and intentions (*cetanā*) generated on that occasion are all a part of that person. When one reflects upon one's life, what is called "I" and "mine" is precisely this little bundle.

But the Buddha points out that not a single one of these can be taken as a solid, singular thing. Although they are grasped as a single unit through the perception of compactness (*ghana-saññā*), they are actually a heap of processes that arise and cease. They are *Saṅkhāra* (Preparations). The precise Dhamma term for it is simply "a heap of *saṅkhāra*." All of these are regarded as *saṅkhāra*. They are merely a heap of preparations. Even this which we consider as our body is a heap of preparations that changes moment by moment. We carry this along, nourishing it with food and drink. If we contemplate deeply, what we call "life" is actually a continuous effort to avoid dying. It is an effort to avoid dying. Even the inhalation we take, though we take it as "my breath," is a heap of breath-ripples. The exhalation, too, is a heap of breath-ripples. Even if we look at the food and drink we take, the Buddha shows every single one of them as a heap of arisings and ceasings (*anicca*). Right there lies *Anicca* (Impermanent). But ordinary worldly people do not understand this. They collect, pile up, and bind these things as mentioned before, and go on and on in saṁsāra. They expand saṁsāra; they expand *Bhava* (Becoming). This is the nature of the world, until a Buddha appears in the world and explains it.

What is the other side of this? How do we untie this? How do we reduce these heaps? The Buddha shows that as well. If we are to present it as a meditation subject, we can state it in this way. Previously, we said: *"etaṁ mama, eso hamasmi, eso me attā."* The Buddha points out, in a perfectly corresponding manner:

> *"Na etaṁ mama, na eso hamasmi, na eso me attā"*
>
> (This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.)

Here, the word "na" (not) is placed in front. Scholars and learned people try to debate and analyze this logically. This was not given for logical debate. This is a passage presented by the Buddha for a practical purpose, for practical *vipassanā*

(insight). Thus, what we have to extract from this is: *"na etaṁ mama"*—"this is not mine," or rather, it implies that saying "this is mine" is incorrect. *"Na eso hamasmi"*—"this I am not," meaning it is incorrect to say "this is me." *"Na eso me attā"*—"this is not my self," indicating that the wrong view held so far, the view that "this is my self," is incorrect.

The Buddha points out that if someone adjusts their vision insightfully in this manner, their piling up is reduced. Those heaps get unraveled right then and there. They get unraveled by seeing them as *Saṅkhāra* (Preparations). As long as one does not see them as *saṅkhāra*, that feeling of "I" and "mine" is gathered, bundled, stacked, and sealed in that manner, saying, "This is me, this is me." That is what is called *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* (dogma of self-illusion). We can understand it in this way.

This is a somewhat deep matter. But we simplify it and present it using analogies. It was by hearing about this very deep philosophy, right at the moment of ordination of that seven-year-old child, regarding the five things—hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin—which everyone beautifies, shows off, and tries to assert to the world, and considers beautiful—that the young novice attained Arahanthood. How did that happen? Let us look at that in some detail. All of you virtuous people know the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. Indeed, what was declared here are the first five of the thirty-two impure parts of the body mentioned under mindfulness of the body (*kāyagatāsati*) in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin. This is, in fact, the first meditation subject given even today to a newly ordained young novice as a tradition of the Dispensation. Even so, if we look at the state of the Dispensation today, for some people, this is both the first and the last meditation subject they ever receive in their monastic life. To such a state has the Dispensation fallen today. These are open secrets of ours. Nevertheless, what we have to say is that in the past, through this very first meditation subject, some individuals realized the fruit of Arahanthood. There were such highly meritorious individuals who were deeply devoted to the Dispensation.

Be that as it may, let us contemplate the depth contained within these five: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin. For those who have practiced *asubha-bhāvanā* (meditation on foulness) for a long time in saṁsāra, even these parts which we beautify and display to the world—hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin—are very quickly understood as repulsive. When the young child's head was being shaved, he must have thought: "Previously, I was with hair; now, I am without hair." Within this, even the change in one's own appearance helps one to understand *anicca* (impermanence / inconstancy) and the Dhamma of *anattā* (not-self / non-self). Next, there is a simile given by the Buddha for this. You virtuous people might have heard of it. That simile is stated in the Pali words as follows. Where the thirty-two parts of the body are mentioned, the Buddha gives a wonderful simile. Just as if there were a bag with an opening at both ends, and a man with good sight were to open it and examine its contents, saying: "This is hill-paddy, this is wheat, this is mung-beans, this is kidney-beans, this is husked rice," even so, one should reflect upon the

impure parts of this body: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, and so on. This is what is found in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta.

Focus your attention on this simile for a moment. Now, what is spoken of here is a bag with two openings. Think about it: a bag with two openings is a bag open at both ends. Is a bag open at both ends really a bag? Is a bag open at both ends a bag? When you think about it deeply, it is not a bag. Yet, ordinary worldly people generally regard it as a bag. To the person who has taken it as a single unit through *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* (dogma of self-illusion) and through the perception of compactness (*ghana-saññā*), it is not apparent that this is not a bag. Why? Because the two processes of arising and ceasing are not seen here.

To see the two processes of arising and ceasing, which occur extremely rapidly moment by moment within this body, is what is called *vipassanā* (insight). It is to see it in an extremely subtle manner. As long as one does not see it properly, one grasps it through the perception of compactness (*ghana-saññā*). "This is my form, this is my breath, this is my food." In this way, one takes it as "mine, mine." Yet, every single one of these is wonderfully subject to the law of *Anicca* (Impermanent). They are merely a collection of arisings and ceasings. It was to make us understand this fact of arising and ceasing that the Buddha compared it to a bag open at both ends, or a bag with two openings. Some might think that the Buddha gave this simile only in relation to the food and drink we consume. Because one can at least think about that to some extent. That food and drink takes a bit of a detour before exiting; it does not leave the moment it is put in. That is why we think: "The 'I' who goes to the dining hall or restaurant and the 'I' who goes to the toilet are both one and the same." There is a vast difference between those two. The "I" who goes to the restaurant and eats delicious food might not be the same "I" who goes to the toilet by the time one returns. But one is not inclined to contemplate this.

Within this, there is a massive, circular process, like a labyrinth, that deceives us. There is a process. Even inhalation and exhalation are like this. In modern terms, they might say that the air we inhale is oxygen, and what we exhale is carbon dioxide. What is this? If we contemplate this according to the Dhamma, this body is constantly like a funeral pyre. The breath we take in is exhaled carrying away the heap of charcoal from this burning body. That is why it is called carbon dioxide (or "charcoal-acid"). This etymology might not be scientifically precise, but we say it to highlight a Dhamma point. Even when we inhale the sweet fragrance of a flower, it is subsequently exhaled carrying the toxic gases from within the body. Such a transformation takes place. Yet we say, "I am breathing in, I am breathing out." That is how ordinary worldly people think. This is true not only of our food and drink, but also when we examine inhalation and exhalation.

Let us go even further. Now, let us examine hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth. Is the hair we have now the very same hair we had at birth? There is no need to speak specifically about beards; all of you virtuous people know. It grows, falls out, sheds, and is shaved. Such is the process. In this manner, every single part of the

body changes moment by moment. Or rather, day by day, some transformation or change occurs in them. Through ignorance (*avijjā*), we forget this. We bundle this up and stand firmly in the view that says, "This is me." That is *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*. *Sakkāya-diṭṭhi* means going to the extreme of saying "form is mine, feeling is mine." The Buddha points out that these are merely a heap of *Saṅkhāra* (Preparations); when examined ultimately, there is no "thing" here. There is only a heap of preparations, becomings, and endeavors here. We have explained on many occasions that when we look back at our entire life in the end, there is nothing done, nothing remains. There is only a heap of highly sorrowful endeavors.

Saying we are hungry, we consume some food. For how many hours does it last? Then we drink some water. For how short a time does the breath we took support us? Therefore, living is actually a series of massive efforts made just to avoid dying. Generally, we think of it as meaningless (*niratthaka*) only at the moment we realize we are dying. But even before that, it is meaningless. It is this meaninglessness that the Buddha points out as emptiness (*suññatā*). There is no "self" essence here. Here, there is only the internal play of the four great elements (*cattāro mahābhūtā*): earth (*pathavī*), water (*āpo*), fire (*tejo*), and air (*vāyo*). We have prepared ourselves to take responsibility for it. That is what is called "clung-to" (*upādinna*). We do not care as much about the things in the external world as we do about these four elements in the body. That is why doctors search for imbalances in these gases, or in the wind, bile, and phlegm. We do not care so much about external things; if they go bad, we discard them and acquire new ones.

Even if we keep fixing pieces onto this body—blood from someone else, a set of teeth from somewhere else, a kidney from another person, and if needed, perhaps even a heart from someone else—it is still "I." The one who leaves that hospital is the very same "I" who entered. That is how it is held in the mind. In that manner, we go on fixing these pieces. The vehicle number is the same, but what is running are parts taken from here and there. The body is such a thing. Why? Because due to *Taṇhā* (Craving) and ignorance (*avijjā*), there is a powerful *upādāna* (grasping / fuel) regarding this body. This cannot be broken by logic. What is required is to see it through *vipassanā* (insight).

Here, we must deeply contemplate the bag open at both ends. That is the true result of reciting and practicing mindfulness of the body (*kāyagatāsati*). It has two aspects. By reflecting on hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, and so on, one develops concentration (*samādhi*). The mind becomes unified. It is mentioned in the past that some monks developed concentration on each of these individual parts. Monks with such wondrous powers of concentration are mentioned in the texts. After establishing such concentration, as the Buddha points out in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, one must look at every single one of them through *vipassanā* (insight). There is a division between their internal and external aspects. Similarly, there is a division between their arising and ceasing. These are two things that come and go: arising and ceasing. At times, we live looking only at the arising side. Lay devotees who

practice the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta might know about this. The Buddha points out that these thirty-two impure parts exist within oneself, and they also exist within other persons whom one loves. It is so internally; it is so externally. This is the very nature of every human body. Next, they arise and cease. Just as we spoke of various bodily organs and food and drink, they arise and cease. But when one arrives at intense *vipassanā*, these begin to be understood instantly. Both arising and ceasing are seen instantly. As *vipassanā* becomes sharper and sharper, there comes a point when their dissolution (*bhaṅga*)—their breaking nature, the speed of their breaking, which is even faster than their arising—is understood. It is at such a moment, indeed, that a deep disenchantment with saṁsāra arises through the insight-knowledge (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*), and the mind is liberated.

It is with the mind that we carry these five heaps. We must realize that what is spoken of here is not the weight measured on a weighing scale. It is the mind that bears the burden of the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*). It is this mind, defiled with taints, that carries it because it takes them as a single entity. To use an analogy: when a heavy vehicle like a truck is running at high speed, where does the entire weight of that truck reside? Can you pinpoint where it rests? It is only at that point where the rotating wheel touches the ground. The mind is just like that. This mind moves extremely rapidly, with immense speed. Ordinary worldly people cannot grasp where this moving mind rests. For that, deep concentration (*samādhi*) is required—a strong concentration. Similarly, wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) and insight-contemplation (*vipassanā-manasikāra*) are necessary. It is through contemplation with insight-attention that, in the end, one realizes: "It is right here that this exists," and with the meditative mind (*jhāna-citta*), one gathers these scattered five aggregates.

Next, by way of *vipassanā* (insight), one sees this as *Anicca* (Impermanent), *dukkha* (unsatisfactory / suffering), and *Anattā* (Not-self). Seeing it thus, the mind finally becomes liberated (*vimutta*). The mind frees itself from those five aggregates. That experience is just like dying while still alive. Now, when we normally say "dying while still alive," we mean the feeling of barely surviving a serious accident. That is not what is meant here. What does "dying while still alive" mean? It means that when death arrives, one has already let go. One has already surrendered everything. When Māra (Death) comes, everything has already been given up. Māra comes to snatch things away, but by then, everything has already been surrendered. These five aggregates have already been abandoned by the mind. Regarding some Arahants endowed with the power of *jhāna* and higher knowledges (*abhiññā*), like Venerable Dabba Mallaputta, it is mentioned in the texts how they attained final extinguishment (*parinibbāna*). Having obtained permission from the Buddha, they rose into the air and set fire to their own bodies. A person with worldly consciousness would not set fire to their own body, would they? Why is this? It is said that their entire body burned while they were in mid-air. Why was this possible? Because they had completely detached their mind from this body. Such is the wondrous liberation called the liberation of the fruit of Arahanthood (*arahatta-phala-vimutti*). At that

moment, they placed their mind in the concentration of the fruit of Arahanthood (*phala-samāpatti*) which they had attained while alive. That is the secret.

To attain the Deathless in this very life, to attain it in the present life (*diṭṭhadhamme*), is precisely that wondrous cessation—let us call it cessation (*virāma*) or liberation (*vimutti*)—declared by the Buddha. This is the detaching of the mind. This can only be achieved through a highly powerful cognitive series of insight-knowledges (*vipassanā-ñāṇa-vīthi*), by seeing this arising and ceasing, and then seeing how it breaks apart. Next, by developing an apprehension and disenchantment towards it, and through the desire to be liberated from it, one deeply cultivates the three characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*): *Anicca* (Impermanent), *Dukkha* (Suffering), and *Anattā* (Not-self). That is how this mind is freed from the five aggregates. It is mentioned in this Dhamma that this occurs in four stages or four phases: Sotāpanna (Stream-enterer), Sakadāgāmi (Once-returner), Anāgāmi (Non-returner), and Arahant. That is what we mean by "seeing Nibbāna" (seeing the stilled mind / extinction)—witnessing the cooling down. Previously, we mentioned carbon dioxide. Although that is not scientifically accurate, I used it as an analogy. If this body is completely like a burning funeral pyre, a heap of fire? All of you virtuous people know that this is not a lie. By what is the food we eat digested? By fire, indeed. It is by the fire within that this life is sustained, through the heat within. Looking at it in this way, it is exactly like a funeral pyre. In the end, what the Buddha shows here is extinguishment (Nibbāna. This heap of *Dukkha* (Suffering) that we accumulate through this burning, the Buddha turns into extinguishment. This is concerning the mind.

If someone has experienced that cessation (*virāma*) within the mind—if they have experienced those wondrous mental states of Sotāpanna, Sakadāgāmi, Anāgāmi, and Arahant in this very life—then at the moment of death, that very state presents itself. Why? If one can attain such deep states of concentration (*samādhi*) while the body is still here, like dying while still alive, to the extent that one is detached from the world, then at the moment of actually freeing oneself from the body, that very state naturally presents itself. This is a natural law (*dhammatā*). That is why, for Arahants, at their final moment, that very attainment of the fruit (*phala-samāpatti*) emerges almost spontaneously. This is what the Buddha declared as liberation (*vimutti*).

Because there are various types of analyses regarding this Nibbāna, I have tried to provide some analysis in this brief sermon. However, all of these are not things to be attained through logical reasoning. These belong to the path of direct realization. Even if one cannot do much, if one can properly contemplate each of the thirty-two parts of the body by way of tranquility (*samatha*), repeatedly reflecting on them to generate some power of concentration and unify the mind, then, as stated in that very Sutta, by deeply grasping the understanding that "these are things that arise and cease, these are not to be taken as 'I' or 'mine'," and by developing *vipassanā* (insight), one can indeed attain Arahanthood even through the first five of the thirty-

two parts of the body, just as was said of Venerable Saṅkicca. It is possible even through a single part, such as hair of the head.

In this way, there is a highly wondrous *dhammatā*, a Dhamma here. We must consider that this path of liberation shown by the Buddha is something we can traverse according to our own capacity. In the past, those highly energetic monks and lay devotees attained that supramundane state (*lokuttara*) by walking on that very path, and not by merely debating about it. Thus, one must properly understand: What is its target? What is its ultimate goal? What is expected from this? It is liberation from *Bhava* (Becoming), the cessation of *bhava* (*bhava-nirodha*). As long as one remains in this *bhava*, as long as expectations remain, death is a fear. The moment of death is an occasion when everyone becomes greatly afraid. But why did Venerable Saṅkicca face death fearlessly? Because he had already conquered death. Although he used his power of concentration, perhaps out of compassion, to prevent any physical harm from the weapons through a miracle—lest the chief of the thieves lose his chance to attain Arahanthood if any harm befell him—Venerable Saṅkicca had in reality already attained the Deathless. That is how you virtuous people should understand this. You have heard many such stories. In using these stories, we try as much as possible not to merely provide the pleasure of a narrative, to intoxicate you, or to treat them like short stories. It is to challenge you virtuous people to enter the practice (*paṭipadā*) of this Dhamma path. It is so that even the characters in these stories help in shaping our own lives.

You virtuous people must reflect: today, based on a Dhammapada verse and its corresponding background story, we have gained some understanding of the path of liberation preached by the Buddha. We must also contemplate the virtues such as faith (*saddhā*) and virtue (*sīla*) which support us in entering upon it, as well as concentration (*samādhi*) as mentioned here.

Next, the things that support the attainment of Nibbāna are mentioned. These are *saddhā* (faith), *viriya* (energy / effort), *sati* (mindfulness), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (wisdom), which are known as spiritual faculties (*indriya*) and powers (*bala*). We must contemplate these as well. Even by listening to a Dhamma sermon such as this, some people can generate these qualities. It is these that support the attainment of Nibbāna. Faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. That is why the Buddha declared them as spiritual powers. One must strive to develop these. Indeed, this is an era when the Buddha's Dispensation is heading towards decline, like its final stage. Yet, if wise and virtuous people properly understand their value and walk on that practice (*paṭipadā*), while associating with noble friends (*kalyāṇa-mitta*), it is still possible to escape from this extremely terrifying saṁsāra. One can still obtain the true essence, the core of this human existence. Thinking in this manner, there are those among us here who observe the *ājīva-aṭṭhamaka-sīla* (virtue with livelihood as the eighth) or even more valuable precepts. Having observed some level of virtue according to your capacity, restraining body and speech, and if you have focused your mind on this Dhamma sermon on this occasion,

then through that, those very qualities of *saddhā*, *viriya*, *sati*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* must have been developed to some extent. Let us make an aspiration: using this very support, and making it a strong decisive support (*upanissaya*), developing them further and further, striving as much as possible through your own meditation, may this wholesome deed of listening to the Dhamma be a cause and a decisive support for realizing the supreme, noble, Great Deathless Nibbāna through the penetration (*paṭivedha*) of the paths and fruits (*magga-phala*) of Sotāpanna, Sakadāgāmi, Anāgāmi, and Arahant in this very life!

Likewise, may all beings, including the deities, from the lowest hell (*Avīci*) to the highest heaven (*Akaniṭṭha*), rejoice in this merit of listening to and preaching the Dhamma. Through their rejoicing, may they all realize the supreme, noble, Great Deathless Nibbāna through their own aspired Bodhi (awakening)! Having made this aspiration, recite these verses and share the merit.

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……..*"