Pahankanuwa Sermon #104

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

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(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.121)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

Pali Stanza:

Yesaṃ sannicayo natthi, ye pariññātabhojanā;

suññato animitto ca, vimokkho yesaṃ gocaro;

ākāseva sakuntānaṃ, gati tesaṃ durannayā.

From:

Dhammapada 92 (Arahantavagga)

Dear Listeners,

There are two things in this world: gathering and clearing away. For an infinite length of time in this *Saṃsāra*, what we have done is gathering—the gathering of karma. It was the Teacher of the Three Worlds, the Supreme Buddha, who first explained to the world the method of clearing away karma. On a Full Moon Poya day of Esala like today, the Buddha explained this method of clearing away karma to the group of five monks through the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*. Today, we have chosen as our theme a stanza of the Dhamma relevant to this very matter.

The Buddha preached this stanza at the Jetavana monastery concerning the Elder named Belaṭṭhisīsa. This great Arahant Belaṭṭhisīsa was the preceptor of Venerable Ānanda. His past account is recorded as follows: you may have heard the story mentioned in the Dhamma where the Buddha, through psychic powers, tamed a group of one thousand matted-hair ascetics, led by the three brothers: Uruvela Kassapa, Gayā Kassapa, and Nadī Kassapa. This Venerable Belaṭṭhisīsa was one of those who belonged to the retinue of the ascetic Uruvela Kassapa. Having listened to the preaching of the *Ādittapariyāya Sutta*, all one thousand of them attained Arahantship, including this Elder Belaṭṭhisīsa.

This Elder Belaṭṭhisīsa was a monk who greatly loved solitude and was of few wishes. He mostly lived in the forest. While living in the forest in this manner, on one

occasion a thought occurred to him: "Going to the village daily for alms-round is a nuisance." So he devised a method for his alms-round. What was it? Having gone for alms in one street and obtained the food necessary for the day, he would go to a certain place and consume it. Having finished eating, within that same period, he would go for alms in another street, collect only plain rice, take it to his hut in the forest, dry it in the sun, and then remain for several days enjoying the happiness of dhyāna (meditative absorption) and the happiness of fruition attainment (*phala-samāpatti*), such as the attainment of cessation (*nirodha-samāpatti*). Upon emerging, to merely appease his hunger, he would moisten that dried rice with water and consume it. What he achieved by this was that, by regarding entering the village as a disturbance to that spiritual/unworldly happiness (*nirāmisa-sukha*), he went on alms-round only once every few days.

Seeing this behavior, the monks asked: "Why, friend, do you go for alms only occasionally?" When he explained the details, the monks criticized it. "How can a monk store food and eat it? That is not proper, is it?" saying so, they complained to the Buddha. The Buddha too, while expressing a certain level of rebuke—meaning, usually when something that leads to an offense of this nature occurs, the Buddha rebukes the monks who did wrong as "foolish men" (*mogha-purisa*)—did not do so on this occasion. Addressing him by his name, "Belaṭṭhisīsa," and looking at the future of the Dispensation, saying, "This is not for the benefit of non-believers, nor for the increase of clarity in the believers," he laid down a special training rule (*sikkhāpada*). He instituted a disciplinary training rule stating that if any monk stores and consumes any edible foodstuff for more than a day, or beyond the proper time for eating, it constitutes a disciplinary offense of *Pācittiya* (expiation).

However, the Buddha preached this particular stanza. Through it, he subtly showed that while a normal person hoards food due to great desire—due to an excess of wishes and wanting—this Venerable Belaṭṭhisīsa did so out of fewness of wishes (*appicchatā*). It was due to his fondness for the happiness of dhyāna. Moreover, because he did this before the training rule was laid down, he was blameless in that regard. Thus, through this stanza, linked to a deep Dhamma principle, the blamelessness of the Elder Belaṭṭhisīsa is demonstrated in a profound sense. Now let us try to understand the meaning of that stanza.

Yesaṃ sannicayo natthi, ye pariññātabhojanā,

Suññato animitto ca, vimokkho yesaṃ gocaro,

Ākāseva sakuntānaṃ, gati tesaṃ durannayā.

Those who have no hoarding, who have fully understood the true nature of food, whose resort is the liberations called the empty (*suññata*) and the signless (*animitta*)—their mental process, or rather their path, to translate it literally as stated in the stanza, their path is untraceable like that of birds in the sky. It is difficult to comprehend; it cannot be found.

This is a stanza with a very deep meaning. We have to analyze this stanza step-by-step, gradually moving deeper. Now if we take that first line, *yesaṃ sannicayo natthi*—"for whom there is no hoarding/gathering"—that hoarding can be shown in two senses. Now, what is shown in the stanza is the gathering of karma. What is shown in the story is the gathering of requisites, the hoarding of the fourfold requisites. Thus, hoarding in the world is twofold. However, what is deeply meant here is the accumulation of karma. Arahants have no accumulation of karma. They have no gathering of karma of the sort that yields a new birth (*jāti*).

Just as there is no hoarding, next is *ye pariññātabhojanā*—they have thoroughly understood food. This thorough understanding is described in the Dhamma in three ways: as *ñāta-pariññā*, *tīraṇa-pariññā*, and *pahāna-pariññā*. Thus, in accordance with the Dhamma, three levels of understanding regarding food are shown. *Ñāta-pariññā* is the understanding that ordinary worldly people have regarding food—knowing that "this is gruel, not rice" or "this is rice, not gruel." It is the understanding of food as it appears at first glance. *Tīraṇa-pariññā* means bringing to light the perception of elements (*dhātu-saññā*) and the perception of repulsiveness (*paṭikūla-saññā*) regarding that food by subjecting it to reflection (wise review), and by making it an object of meditation, bringing to light its impermanent (*anicca*) and not-self (*anattā*) characteristics. Considering the repulsiveness of food is called the perception of the repulsiveness of food (*āhāre paṭikūlasaññā*). Lastly, *pahāna-pariññā* is shown—the understanding of abandoning. Abandoning means dispelling the desire and attachment, the lustful desire (*chanda-rāga*) for food. The ultimate result of consuming food in this manner is performing that eating as a meditation itself, with mindfulness and clear comprehension (*sati-sampajañña*). What is its final limit? The removal of craving (*taṇhā*) for taste. Then, it is like four elements entering into another four elements. That is *pahāna-pariññā*. Worldly people have a greediness, a covetousness for food. The deepening of understanding to the extent that this greediness and covetousness are eliminated is what is ultimately called *pahāna-pariññā*. Those are the three levels of understanding.

Next, *suññato animitto ca vimokkho yesaṃ gocaro*—now we come to the deep part. Three gateways to Nibbāna: are shown. We have all heard that to realize Nibbāna:, one must cultivate the Three Characteristics in terms of the impermanent (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*). When this characteristic of the impermanent is cultivated deeply to its very end, what is the result? The sign (*nimitta*) disappears. No sign is grasped by the mind. It is on the basis of the perception of permanence (*nicca-saññā*) that signs are grasped by the mind. Therefore, in the fruition attainment (*phala-samāpatti*) of Arahants, there exists that signless state. No signs are grasped by the mind. Due to this very reason, a state of stillness, a state of liberation is brought about in the mind. That is called the signless liberation (*animitta-vimokkha*). Next, regarding the empty (*suññata*)—if we consider the Three Characteristics of impermanence, suffering, and not-self—the end of the characteristic of impermanence is the signless (*animitta*); the end of the

characteristic of suffering is the desireless (*appaṇihita*); and the end of the characteristic of not-self is the empty (*suññata*). It is within the characteristic of self that we get the notion of existence (*bhava*). When it is understood as empty, when voidness is understood, there is no existence there either. That too is a liberation. That *appaṇihita* is the end of the perception of suffering (*dukkha-saññā*). Although it is not explicitly mentioned in words here, it can be taken as implied, meaning it is something to be understood as belonging to this context. "Desireless" (*appaṇihita*) means that when craving (*taṇhā*) is removed, nothing is perceived by the mind as aims or targets. Then, the mind is liberated from signs on that side too; there are no targets or the like. Likewise, there is no perception of self, no feeling of "I" or "mine." Such a wonderful kind of liberation is this state of fruition attainment (*phala-samāpatti*). It is enough to generally understand that Nibbāna: itself is referred to by these three terms. *Suññato animitto ca vimokkho*—those liberations are their resort (*gocaro*). That is their resort. So, we must understand here that for those who have that resort—which is a resort of the mind—when the mind moves in that resort, the path the mind takes cannot be found. That is why the line says, *ākāseva sakuntānaṃ gati tesaṃ durannayā*.

Their path, or rather their mental conduct, the way their mind behaves, is like the path of birds in the sky. There are no tracks, it cannot be found. It is a wonderful movement of the mind where one cannot say, "it went this way, it went that way, or it came from this side"—that mind which is called empty (*suññata*), signless (*animitta*), and desireless (*appaṇihita*). At one level, we can explain this stanza in this manner. Next, we intend to analyze this very stanza in a way that goes deeper step-by-step.

In the discussion on the accumulation of karma, indeed, even the ancient yogis and sages who existed before the advent of the Buddha understood that in *Saṃsāra*, even though one is born again and again, in the end, one keeps dying. The question was, "how do we stop this?" They also saw how births are formed according to karma. But they did not understand how to eliminate this karma. That is precisely why those Niganṭhas (Jains) and others held the wrong stance that by inflicting suffering (*dukkha*) on the body, past karma could be exhausted, and by not accumulating new karma, all karma could be worn away. However, it is recorded that after attaining Supreme Enlightenment (*sambodhi*), the Buddha discovered the method of clearing away karma. In a certain important sutta, four types of karma are mentioned as follows.

There is one type of karma: dark karma with dark results (*vipāka*). Next, bright karma with bright results. The third category is dark-and-bright karma with dark-and-bright results. What is the fourth category? Neither-dark-nor-bright karma with neither-dark-nor-bright results. The Buddha has pointed out in a certain sermon that this fourth category helps to destroy karma, to eliminate karma. The first category, called dark karma with dark results, refers to certain evil deeds which, as their result, yield birth (*jāti*) in hells where there is absolute suffering (*dukkha*). Bright karma

refers to karma that yields birth in the Brahma-worlds, such as the Subhakinha, which are of an absolutely pleasant nature. Dark-and-bright karma refers to karma that yields birth (*jāti*) in human existences, certain heavenly existences, and certain ghost or demon existences, which possess both pleasure and suffering. Those are mixed karmas. The fourth category is shown as the eradication of all these three categories. It is the intention/volition (*saṅkhāra*) developed to eliminate the karma of these three categories.

To put it another way, it is identified as the Noble Eightfold Path. Then it becomes clear. That wonderful path mentioned in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* under the name of the Middle Way, which is the Noble Eightfold Path, is indeed the path for the destruction of karma. That is why we said at the beginning that it was the Buddha who first discovered the method of clearing away karma. Until then, it remained a problem for the world. Indeed, even the Bodhisatta in the beginning, as if led astray by the views accepted in that era, practiced self-mortification for six years, as we have all heard. According to the views of that time, he thought, *dukkhena ve sukhaṃ adhigantabbaṃ*—"happiness must be attained through suffering"—and so he inflicted manifold pain on his body. He intentionally brought about suffering (*dukkha*). Through various vows, as well as the reduction of food, he performed wonderful acts of self-mortification. In short, you must have seen pictures of those self-mortifications, where the skin of the abdomen clung to the spine. The Buddha states in a sutta on one occasion: "I have practiced bitter and difficult vows, inflicting pain on my body to an extent that no other ascetic has ever borne in the past, present, or future. Yet, when the realization came to me that despite practicing such difficult mortifications, I was unable to attain Nibbāna:—which is a state beyond ordinary human capacity—I fell into reflection: could there be another path to Supreme Enlightenment (*sambodhi*)?" That was the decisive moment.

At that moment, there came to the Bodhisatta's mind the memory of the occasion during his childhood, at his father the King's royal ploughing festival, when he entered into the first dhyāna under the cool shade of a rose-apple tree. That first dhyāna is mentioned as a state born of seclusion, free from sensual desires and unwholesome qualities, and accompanied by spiritual happiness. He remembered that happiness. Then, the Bodhisatta thought: "Ah, could this be the path to Supreme Enlightenment? Why should I fear? Why should I fear a pleasure that is aloof from sensual pleasures and unwholesome states?" He also realized that while not clinging to such pleasure, he must utilize it. There lies the Middle Way. This, indeed, is the path to Supreme Enlightenment.

Many people generally think that the teachers of the Bodhisatta were Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta. That is what they believe. But that view is incorrect. Because we know that when the Buddha met the Ājīvaka Upaka while walking to preach the Dhamma after his Supreme Enlightenment, he declared his Buddhahood to him in a certain stanza. There he declared: *na me ācariyo atthi*—"I have no teacher." Did the Buddha then tell a lie when he said "I have no teacher"? In truth, it is clear that Āḷāra

Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta cannot be called his teachers. Why? Because the moment those two teachers merely moved their lips to speak of those dhyānas, the Bodhisatta had already attained those dhyānic states. That is why those two teachers handed over the discipleship to him, saying, "let both of us look after this group." The teacher made the student his equal. You have heard those stories.

In fact, if we are to say that the Bodhisatta had a teacher, we would have to say that his teacher was Prince Siddhārtha—that young child. The young Prince Siddhārtha was his teacher. What is the meaning of that? Ultimately, it was the power of the perfections (*pāramī*) cultivated by the Buddha over a long period that came to his aid. That is how we must understand it. Due to some karmic obstruction or due to the wrong views prevalent at that time, the Bodhisatta practiced self-mortification for six years. However, remembering the power of the perfections brought from his past, that occasion when he entered dhyāna in his early childhood was the decisive moment. There he understood: "this is the true path." The view of the Nigaṇṭhas was that all pleasure and suffering experienced by beings are due to past results (*vipāka*) alone, and therefore what we must do is remove our clothes, abstain from food, intentionally inflict manifold suffering on the body, exhaust past karma through that, and conduct ourselves in such a way that no new karma arises.

The Buddha pointed out that karma is volition/intention (*saṅkhāra*) itself. It is connected with the present. Not everything occurs due to past karma; it can be changed in the present moment. Not only that, but that pleasure which is aloof from unwholesome states and sensual desires—the happiness of dhyāna—must be used as an aid. The happiness of dhyāna cannot be rejected; it is used as an aid. But without getting drowned in it, using that happiness of dhyāna as an aid, one must cultivate insight (*vipassanā*). All of these are used as aids for the sake of liberation. The Nigaṇṭhas and others thought until then that they could clear away karma through inflicting pain on the body. Instead, the Buddha showed an extremely subtle method through the Middle Path, which is the Noble Eightfold Path. Through it, after a certain great transformation takes place in the individual's mental continuum leading up to right concentration (*sammā-samādhī*), and by utilizing that dhyāna without clinging even to that dhyānic happiness, turning it towards insight and understanding the Three Characteristics, one can realize Nibbāna:. The first part can be analyzed to some extent in that manner.

Next, we spoke of the complete understanding, the full comprehension of food. This can often be helpful to meditating devotees as well. The Middle Path regarding food is also extremely important. The Buddha has expressed this on a certain occasion as follows: *āhārasambhūto ayaṃ kāyo*—"this body is born of food"; however, *āhāraṃ nissāya āhāro pahātabbo*—"dependent on food, food is to be abandoned." There is the Middle Path. When you look at it, it seems like a great riddle. How does one do that?

One does this through the reflection on food. As we mentioned earlier, the full comprehension of food does not mean the general understanding that "this is gruel, this is rice." Rather, it is done by knowing it through *tīraṇa-pariññā* as impermanent (*anicca*) and not-self (*anattā*), and acting in a way that removes the lustful desire (*chanda-rāga*) within it. What ultimately happens through that action? One cannot live without eating food. Food is used as an aid, with reflection and careful consideration. Some of you may know that meditators, and especially the monks, consume food by reflecting on it wisely. This is what is called "consuming with wise review" (*paccavekkhaṇā*). It is not for fun, nor for beautifying the body. Merely—and that word is important—merely for the maintenance of this body, for its sustenance. For the survival and upkeep of the body. Furthermore, it is as an aid to this holy life (*brahmacariya*), the holy life of the Dispensation. Likewise, food should be consumed with the reflection: "I consume this food to dispel the past painful feeling of hunger, to prevent new painful feelings from overeating, and to carry on life blamelessly and in comfort."

Not only that, at the time of taking food, one contemplates in terms of elements (*dhātu*): only the four elements of earth (*paṭhavī*), water (*āpo*), fire (*tejo*), and wind (*vāyo*) are present in this food, and those same four elements are present in this body. Once this food, which appears clean, enters this unclean, decomposing body, it becomes unclean. Thus, it is turned into two kinds of meditation: the attention on elements (*dhātu-manasikāra*) and the attention on repulsiveness (*paṭikūla-manasikāra*). By turning eating into meditation in this way, what ultimately happens? Food is abandoned. Worldly people think of food as prey to be swallowed. You see how beasts swallow prey. Through reflection, that perception (*saññā*) disappears. When the practitioner's craving (*taṇhā*) for taste is eliminated, it is seen as though four elements are merely merging with another four elements. In a wonderful way, that itself becomes a state of concentration (*samādhi*). That is why ancient texts mention that some practicing monks attained Arahantship while sipping gruel in the alms-hall, at the very moment of consuming food. That itself is a meditation—a powerful meditation—because it represents the arising of insight (*vipassanā*) concerning the sensitivity of the tongue. It is the moment of conquering the craving (*taṇhā*) for taste. Then, it is no longer "food"; it is merely a part of meditation. Arriving at such a state is indeed the full comprehension of food. It is also what we referred to as *ye pariññātabhojanā*—they have thoroughly understood food.

The Buddha called this very thing the Middle Way: abandoning food by utilizing food. Just as we discussed regarding karma, a Middle Path is shown there too. Thus, when going to the extreme of self-mortification (*attakilamathānuyoga*) yielded no results, the Bodhisatta began taking food in a moderate measure, bringing comfort and ease to the body. Once he adopted that practice, the group of five monks became displeased, thinking: "This ascetic Gotama has returned to a life of luxury." They departed in disappointment. That is precisely why, in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, the Buddha declared to the world that there is a Middle Way to be followed,

avoiding both the extreme of sensual indulgence (*kāmasukhallikānuyoga*) and the extreme of self-mortification (*attakilamathānuyoga*). It was to remove the wrong views of those five monks. The term "Middle Way" indeed carries an extremely deep and broad meaning. Ordinary people think that the Middle Way lies merely between the two extremes of giving too much pleasure or too much pain to the body. Not only that, but just as with karma, there are other extremely deep meanings, which we will not bring up at this moment. A wonderfully profound meaning exists within this concept of the Middle Way. However, in this context, regarding the story of removing the wrong views of the five monks, we see that he pointed out a path for the destruction of karma as well as a Middle Way regarding the consumption of food.

The Buddha allowed the monks to consume food in a way that avoids attachment, by turning it into a meditation. He gave them the opportunity to use robes and food with fewness of wishes; he did not ask them to go naked like the Nigaṇṭhas. Thus, regarding food: *ye pariññātabhojanā*. Next, *suññato animitto ca vimokkho yesaṃ gocaro*—now we come to the deep part. We have already mentioned this discussion of Nibbāna:. It is so profoundly deep that it is beyond thought, and one might even fear to say anything about it. However, in accordance with the Dhamma, we can show that it is a matter connected with the behavior of the mind. We often use the term Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) to refer to this mind of ours. Indeed, if we look at it fundamentally, Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is a division. What is this division? It is the duality of "myself" and "the world." On this side am I, and on that side is the world. Thus, according to the Buddha's analysis, this division is Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) and Name-and-Form (*nāmarūpa*). Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is on one side. The object called Name-and-Form (*nāmarūpa*) is like a shadow falling on that Consciousness (*viññāṇa*)—like a reflection. Taking this shadow to be real, getting attached to it and immersed in it, worldly people carry this very thing along throughout *Saṃsāra*. This is being deceived by the shadow. That is why Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is said to be an illusion.

However, on some occasion, through the cultivation of the Three Characteristics, that perception of permanence (*nicca-saññā*) is thinned out. The cultivation of the Three Characteristics is necessary because worldly people have taken up the perception of permanence. To ordinary worldly people, due to the perception of permanence, everything they grasp appears permanent at that moment. As one goes deeper into insight (*vipassanā*), that perception of permanence thins out. It begins to be seen, in a subtle way, as a flux of arising and passing away. This is not at a level that can be shown to another; rather, it is directly realized by oneself as that permanent sign (*nicca-nimitta*) fades away—gradually. What seemed permanent is seen as impermanent (*anicca*), as a flux of arising and passing away. Gradually progressing, the state where those signs disappear brings a great freedom to the mind. As long as signs exist, it is a great trouble for Consciousness (*viññāṇa*).

We know that when walking in a city, not only so many people, but various objects also strive to captivate our eyes and minds. Through that, our mind becomes

distracted. The Buddha has shown the entire world to be like that—as a heap. A king tells his executioners to pierce a condemned man with three hundred spears in the morning, three hundred spears at noon, and three hundred spears in the evening. In that manner, the Buddha has declared the painful nature of Consciousness (*viññāṇa*). What are the spears? Those very objects of the mind. Those objects come and fall upon the mind—all those faces and sights. This, indeed, is the danger within Consciousness (*viññāṇa*). However, when that perception of permanence is removed, it is understood as signless (*animitta*). No sign whatsoever is grasped by the mind. There is a great freedom. Although it is often left unsaid for the sake of the poetic meter of the stanza, let us speak next of the desireless (*appaṇihita*). Through craving (*taṇhā*), many people construct desires and targets, but here, no target is presented to the mind. To say there is a desire implies future expectations. Here, there are no expectations. There is no place for the mind to establish itself—desireless (*appaṇihita*). Next is the empty (*suññata*). "Empty" means that when the perception of self—the grasping of things as "I" and "mine"—is destroyed, a sense of voidness is felt by the mind everywhere. There itself is liberation. That is called empty liberation (*suññata-vimokkha*).

Normally, there is a nature in Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) to record everything. However, in that non-manifestative Consciousness (*anidassana viññāṇa*), the phenomena of Name-and-Form (*nāmarūpa*) are not recorded. Likewise, in references to that state, it is mentioned that the elements of earth (*paṭhavī*), water (*āpo*), fire (*tejo*), and wind (*vāyo*) have no footing there. These four elements are identified in the Dhamma as the great elements (*mahābhūta*). They show their presence—making themselves felt as "I am earth"—only when they are in disparity. When the four elements are in equilibrium, there is no way for them to stand out. They exist in complete blend. What we call the four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind based on qualities like hardness, are not some fundamental elements that exist eternally in the world, like atoms in the way physics analyzes them. Rather, they are named according to how they are perceived by the mind: based on hardness or softness, it is called earth (*paṭhavī*); based on the flowing nature, it is called water (*āpo*); based on heat or coldness, it is called fire (*tejo*). Contemplating them in this way is a recognition. That recognition is made when those elements are in disparity. When the mind is established in equanimity (*upekkhā*) and the elements are perceived as balanced, there is no way for them to stand out. Because of that very reason, they are not recorded.

The markings arising based on the four elements are shown. There are divisions in this world such as long and short, beautiful and ugly, and we perceive everything as a duality. Here and there. This end and that end. Long and short, beautiful and ugly, large and small. In this way, the people of the world are trapped between two extremes. All measurements exist between two pegs, between two extremes. Thus, to speak of the liberated mind, which has no such state—let us imagine for a moment someone going far out to sea in a canoe, a boat, or a ship. Here, what is seen in the distance is like the sky and the sea merging. No matter how much further one goes, it

remains the same—like a mirage. In that manner, there is this end and that end. Such is the nature of ordinary Consciousness (*viññāṇa*). Now, when it is said "it is not here," it means it is not there, nor is it here, nor is it in the middle. This is the wonderfully liberated state of the mind, which is the nature of the Arahant's mind, the mind of fruition (*phala-citta*). That is the little portion that has been declared here.

Suññato animitto ca vimokkho yesaṃ gocaro. Here, the word *gocara* (resort) is also very important. Dear devotees, if we look at the word *gocara* etymologically, it means the place where cattle graze. We translate it into Sinhala as *godura* (prey/food). When we say *godura*, yes, the prey of a snake is also a *godura*. But the primary, original meaning of that word is the pasture ground of cattle. We still use the term "pasture village" (*gocara-gama*) even today in reference to the monks. In the past, when monks arrived at a monastery or a forest hermitage, they would ask, "where is the pasture village?" The pasture village refers to the village where they go for alms-round. Monks too have to collect "pasture" (nourishment). The pasture village is the village for alms-round. Now, why is this word *gocara* important? We mentioned the story of the Elder Belaṭṭhisīsa at the beginning. Ordinary people think, and at first glance in this story it appears, that the great Arahant Belaṭṭhisīsa's collecting and storing of food to consume later was a great wrong. But he did so out of fewness of wishes. What his true pasture ground (resort) was is contained in this stanza. His resort was not that village; it was that Arahant-fruition attainment (*arahattaphala-samāpatti*) mentioned earlier. Therefore, it was because of his desire to enter into his true resort that he did not even go for alms-round. That is how we must understand it. The pasture of ordinary worldly people is that tasty food and so on. Now, what this Venerable Belaṭṭhisīsa stored and consumed was just plain rice—dried rice. Can you even imagine? It was because it was far more delicious that he would enter the attainment of cessation (*nirodha-samāpatti*), sometimes for seven days. After emerging from the attainment of cessation, there is a great hunger—it is generally said, when one remains without food for seven days, how great a hunger must there be in the body? How is that hunger appeased? With a highly delicious food? With luxurious food? No, with that dried rice brought seven days ago, moistened with water. There you can understand the vast difference between material happiness (*āmisa-sukha*) and spiritual happiness (*nirāmisa-sukha*).

Therefore, that Arahant Belaṭṭhisīsa had such an attachment to spiritual happiness (*nirāmisa-sukha*) that he used only that dried rice brought from the village for the mere survival, sustenance, and maintenance of this bodily cage. He enjoyed a far more delicious food through the happiness of dhyāna in the forest. Also, an important point regarding his conduct is mentioned in a stanza concerning him in the book called *Theragāthā*. That stanza is an utterance of joy (*udāna*) expressing his experience of that spiritual happiness. I will state only its meaning at this moment, even without the Pali stanza. There, he gives a simile: "Just as when a strong, energetic ox is yoked to a plough, when such an ox is ploughing a field, it

drags the plough back and forth with great ease. There may be various roots; there may be bushes. Ignoring all of them, it drags it this way and that. For me, day and night pass with similar ease. Because *sukhe laddhe nirāmise*—as the last line states, 'since I have obtained spiritual happiness,' for me the remainder of this life, day and night, passes just like that strong ox pulling the plough from one end of the field to the other, without any concern or burden." There you can understand the great gulf between material happiness (*āmisa-sukha*) and spiritual happiness (*nirāmisa-sukha*). Now, therefore, understand the value of these precious Dhamma truths, such as Nibbāna:, through this itself. What are the values and evaluations we speak of in our world? If there are luxurious things in foreign countries that do not exist in this country, these poor people target them. Looking in that direction, everyone is prepared to obtain them, wondering: "When will we ever live a luxurious life?" However, we must recollect as our models the lives of those Arahants who developed within their inner continuum a spiritual joy (*nirāmisa-pīti*) so great that they could consume even dry rice as if it were delicious food.

In that way, we have been able to extract many deep meanings from this. In the Buddha's Dhamma, there is especially a treatment of the cause (etiology/root) of the disease. Worldly people think of solving this problem of suffering (*dukkha*) by treating the symptoms of the disease. That is what the Niganṭhas expected too. They treated the symptoms. What is the symptom? Suffering (*dukkha*). They inflicted pain on the body. Because of that, they thought they must destroy it through suffering itself, by inflicting pain. The Buddha treated the root cause of the disease. The Buddha gives a good simile for that on one occasion. That simile might be very interesting to you devotees. The Buddha gives very unusual similes. Having explained to the Niganṭhas and others that suffering (*dukkha*) definitely does not have to be destroyed through suffering itself, when relating that story to the monks, he states: "There are certain pains where, considering the root cause of that pain, one must destroy that pain by putting forth a special effort." Let us assume that even for monks, if certain defilements (*kilesa*) arise intensely, they are permitted to contemplate wisely and apply certain strict practices called dhutanga—not mere vows, but strict practices—according to the situation, to shatter those defilements. Such occasions are indeed shown. That means treating the root cause of the disease. The most fundamental thing in this Buddhist Dhamma is to engage in radical attention/wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*). Radical attention/wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*), dear devotees, means going to the very root of something and reflecting on it according to the cause that produces it. It is reflecting according to the source where it arises. When a problem comes, one reflects in that way. What is the medicine for this illness? For certain illnesses, there can be occasions where one makes a special effort, applying a special practice as mentioned.

The Buddha states that on some occasions, a person may face a problem, and to solve it, they must utilize equanimity (*upekkhā*). Equanimity means neutrality—looking on with neutrality. The Buddha presents here a story about an occasion where that equanimity is utilized. He clarifies it through a question-and-answer format with the

monks: "Now, monks, suppose a man has lust, a lustful mind, and an attachment towards a certain woman. That man sees that woman staying with another man, talking, laughing, and laughing out loud. When he sees that, monks, do sorrow, lamentation, pain, and grief arise in that man?" "Yes, Venerable Sir." "Why, monks, does that arise when he sees it? Monks, that man has developed a lustful mind, an attachment towards that woman. To use an old term, a mind of lust has arisen. That is why such sorrow and grief arise in that man. Well, monks, suppose that man reflects: 'Seeing this woman behave in this way brings me suffering (*dukkha*). Why did this arise in me? Because I have an attachment to that woman. I must eliminate this attachment. I must remove this attachment and turn my mind to equanimity.' Thinking thus, suppose that man at some point removes his attachment, his lust, his thoughts regarding that woman. Then, what is the situation? No matter whom that woman talks with, or laughs and chuckles with, would suffering (*dukkha*) arise in that man, monks?" "No, Venerable Sir." There, the Buddha obtains the answers from the monks themselves.

These, after all, are things that happen in society. But when some people see such a thing, they do not think according to its root cause. They do not think: "Where is the disease? It is due to this attachment that has arisen within myself." It is to think deeply in this manner that we are urged. The teachers of the past illustrate the Buddha's method with a simile: the Buddha is like a lion, while the Niganṭhas and others are like dogs. Why is this said? Not to insult, but to make room for a simile. If a hunter shoots an arrow at a lion from afar, does the lion bite the arrow? Instead, what does that wise animal do? It looks to see where the arrow came from and leaps at the hunter. But if you throw a stick at a dog? If you throw a stick at a dog, the dog keeps biting the stick. Treating the symptoms of the disease is just like that.

Sometimes, some people treat the effect, leaving out the cause. One must treat the root cause of the disease. That is what was expressed by that lion simile. Thus, the Buddhas are like lions. Or rather, like skilled physicians, they consider the root cause of the disease. That is precisely what is in the Buddha's True Dhamma. We have all heard that the Buddha described himself as *sallakatto anuttaro*—the supreme surgeon—and also as *bhisakko sallakatto*—the physician and surgeon. Why is he called a supreme physician? Because if one is a physician, a true physician, one treats the cause of the disease, not its symptoms.

Dear devotees, the essence of the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* is the Four Noble Truths. The entire Dhamma is contained within it: suffering (*dukkha*), the cause of suffering, the cessation of the cause, and then the path to it. Thus, it is the same even with a physician: first, he observes the condition of the illness. Next, he finds its underlying cause, its reason, how it arose. Then, he treats it—not by merely applying ointment to an itch on the skin, but by treating the blood impurity that caused it. In that manner, he treats the root cause of the disease. Next, by treating it, he shows that health can be attained. Health comes third. Next, the Noble Eightfold Path that leads to it is described by us on some occasions as being like a decoction—like a

herbal decoction boiled down from eight parts to one. When one drinks those four doses, all illnesses are completely cured, prevented. That is how we must understand suffering (*dukkha*).

The cause of suffering (*dukkha*) is craving (*taṇhā*). That is exactly what was shown in the story of the man and the woman. That man did not get angry because that woman talked to someone else. When we look in the end, the cause was within himself: that lustful mind, that attachment. In that manner, the Buddha declares that this suffering is *ponobhavikā*—leading to renewed existence. Through craving (*taṇhā*), renewed existence (*bhava*) is brought about; craving (*taṇhā*) is also called *ponobhavikā*. The very nature of craving (*taṇhā*) is that it is always leaning forward. That is why it leads towards a new birth (*jāti*). Craving (*taṇhā*) leans precisely towards grasping/holding/fuel (*upādāna*). Craving (*taṇhā*) is inclined in that direction. To give another simile, when a donkey is yoked to a vehicle—a heavily loaded vehicle—what is the easiest way to make that donkey run? Hanging a carrot from something like a hook and showing it in front of the donkey's tongue. It keeps stretching its tongue and moving forward. As the carrot moves, it also moves forward. Such indeed are the things that happen in society. What does that show? It shows the nature of the worldly person, or rather, the nature of craving (*taṇhā*). It always goes forward, leaning ahead. In the stories mentioned in the past about kings like Mahāmandhātu, those Wheel-turning Kings (*cakkavatti*) enjoyed wonderfully luxurious comforts and pleasures for about eighty-four thousand years—comforts that would make the people of modern luxurious countries feel ashamed—yet died unsatisfied, with a craving (*taṇhā*) leaning forward. As a result of that, they obtained a new birth (*jāti*).

The Buddha declared that a new birth (*jāti*) is obtained because of that craving (*taṇhā*). *Yāyaṃ taṇhā ponobhavikā nandirāgasahagatā tatratatrābhinandinī*—that craving which leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, finding delight here and there, goes forward, delighting here and there. It creates a new birth (*jāti*). It is for the eradication of that craving (*taṇhā*) that everything is shown throughout the Buddha's Dhamma. One must consider wisely, "where and to what extent does it exist?" and apply the remedy to that very place. That Middle Way is what we discussed earlier regarding the destruction of karma. Here, regarding food and the other fourfold requisites, what is shown to the monks is meant to remove the defilements (*kilesa*) that may arise in the course of utilizing those fourfold requisites. That is called "restraint through wisdom" (*ñāṇa-saṃvara*). Restraint through wisdom means utilizing wisdom on those occasions. One cannot live without food. One cannot live without robes.

Yet, those are utilized to develop restraint through wisdom regarding them. Restraint through wisdom is indeed that reflection (*paccavekkhaṇā*). That reflection is the consideration of the true purpose of this food. "This is not for fun, nor for amusement. Merely as an aid to the holy life (*brahmacariya*), for the sustenance of the body, do I use this." Not only does one impress this well upon the mind, but one

also brings to light the true nature of this food. What we called *pahāna-pariññā* is this: when considered in terms of elements, this is not something towards which attachment should be formed—here are four elements, and there are four elements. Within that, without becoming a slave to those flavor-enhancers, whether artificial or natural, bringing to light the understanding that "this is merely four elements" is what is contained in that meditation on taking food. Thus, if that is done correctly, there is the Middle Path. That is why it was declared: *āhāraṃ nissāya āhāro pahātabbo*—"dependent on food, food is to be abandoned." A wonderfully profound Middle Way exists regarding that too.

We are obliged to bring up again and again a sublime declaration made by the Buddha. That is why he declared: "Within this very fathom-long body, endowed with perception (*saññā*) and mind, I declare the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world, and the path leading to the cessation of the world." Then, we must reflect: we run searching for this liberation. We run searching for satisfaction. These humans put forth a wonderful effort to fulfill those targets, those various aspirations. Considering our lives in terms of those virtues and ultimate goals spoken of in these times, in accordance with the ancient Dhamma literature, and looking back at our own lives, now is the best opportunity to make decisions according to that Middle Way. Because by running after this mirage, many people have become exhausted. Now they look in every direction, wondering: "How can this be solved? Where is the solution?" This solution is not found in other philosophical systems, nor in books of other foreign lands. This path of liberation lies within the Middle Way presented to the world by our Buddha two thousand five hundred and fifty years ago through the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*. That is exactly what we have declared. The character of Venerable Belaṭṭhisīsa is also exemplary for us in that regard. Although it appeared as an offense, indeed, when considered wisely, it was not an offense; rather, out of fewness of wishes and due to his attachment to spiritual happiness, he followed such a practice regarding food.

However, because future monks would not be like Venerable Belaṭṭhisīsa, and if they too were to begin storing food saying, "even Venerable Belaṭṭhisīsa did such a thing," they would drift back towards the lay life. For this reason, certain rules regarding food were laid down for higher-ordained monks (*upasampadā bhikkhu*). The daily noon meal, or rather the food taken before the sun passes the meridian, is called temporary (*yāvakālika*)—meaning it can be stored only during that period. After that, it cannot be kept. It does not belong to them. It must be handed over to a novice (*sāmaṇera*) or to a lay-attendant (*kappiyakāra*). Next, what is called *yāmakālika* refers to certain beverages, such as those made from mango, rose-apple, banana, etc., to alleviate illness, which are allowable beverages for those who observe the precept of abstaining from food at improper times (*vikāla-bhojana*). What is shown as permissible for use is called *yāmakālika*. *Yāmakālika* means they can be used until the final watch of the night of the following day. That too is abandoned; it is for one day. That too must be relinquished. Next, there are other medicines like ghee, honey, etc., which the Buddha allowed for the convenience of sick monks, such as sugar,

ghee, jaggery, cane-sugar, and the like. Such food can be kept by a higher-ordained monk for only seven days (*sattāhakālika*). If he goes beyond that, he falls into the training rule called hoarding (*sannidhikāraka*). Finally, *yāvajīvika* is shown. There are certain things like yellow myrobalan (*araḷu*), belleric myrobalan (*buḷu*), emblic myrobalan (*nelli*), black hellebore (*kaṭukarosana*), and such substances, which once accepted by the monks, can be kept for the rest of their lives and utilized whenever necessary.

In that manner, the Buddha has declared four levels regarding the foodstuffs to be utilized. Why were such various training rules (*sikkhāpada*) laid down? By storing them in abundance, the life of the Sangha would become like lay life. Through gathering (hoarding), clearing away (de-hoarding) is forgotten. That is why we must understand in what way true peace arises: not by the measure of what is gathered, but by developing within the mind the capacity to clear away. When we consider wisely, we understand that the Buddha laid down a training rule regarding this with a very deep consideration—that Venerable Belaṭṭhisīsa's action might create a wrong impression for future monks.

At any rate, on a day like today, this exposition was made regarding the Middle Way, which is a certain profoundly deep aspect of the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*. Dear devotees, if we are to briefly point out the path to Nibbāna:, it is the threefold training of virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhī*), and wisdom (*paññā*). Now, at this moment, on a precious day like today, just as many of you have engaged in observing the precepts, which we regard as a worship of practice (*paṭipatti-pūjā*), you have also inclined towards concentration through some experienced concentration at your own levels. Likewise, we hope that this sermon will help you in your insight (*vipassanā*) to understand the Three Characteristics of the impermanent (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*). Its culmination is that wonderfully marvelous state of fruition attainment (*phala-samāpatti*) called the signless (*animitta*), the desireless (*appaṇihita*), and the empty (*suññata*). Once that state is reached, there is no longer any sign there to lead to a new birth (*jāti*); there is no grasping/holding/fuel (*upādāna*), no attachment, no craving for existence/becoming (*bhava-taṇhā*). Right there is liberation. That is what we call Nibbāna:. One must understand that. Nibbāna is not a world with some unusual eternal pleasure that increases the craving for existence/becoming (*bhava-taṇhā*). It is the very end of this suffering (*dukkha*) we have spoken of.

The peace that arises when suffering (*dukkha*) is ended is experienced by Arahants in this very life (*diṭṭha-dhamma*) through the happiness of concentration, and since their final mind-moment is also a mind of fruition attainment (*phala-samāpatti*), as a result, no birth (*jāti*) occurs anywhere again. That is why the Buddha, through the stanza beginning with *anekajātisamsāraṃ*, declared that in this extremely terrifying *Saṃsāra*, being born again and again occurs whether one makes a special effort or not. One must strive to eliminate birth (*jāti*). The effort to be made is what is contained within this Middle Way, which is the Noble Eightfold Path.

Through the power of merit accumulated today, and through the practice you have maintained, cultivating the Noble Eightfold Path in its supramundane aspect, may this Dhamma sermon definitely serve as a strong supportive condition (*upanissaya*) for the realization of the noble, deathless, great Nibbāna:, through the penetration of the paths and fruits of Stream-entry (*Sotāpatti*), Once-returning (*Sakadāgāmi*), Non-returning (*Anāgāmi*), and Arahantship. Guided by the power of merit accumulated so far through listening to the Dhamma, may it be a supportive cause for you devotees to realize that noble, deathless, great Nibbāna: before this Dispensation fades away! Likewise, from the Avīci hell up to the Akaniṭṭha heaven, if there be anyone, including our departed relatives, who wishes to share in this merit of preaching and listening to the Dhamma, may they, by sharing in it, realize the noble, deathless, great Nibbāna: through their own aspired Bodhi (Enlightenment)! Thinking thus, recite this stanza now.

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……..*"