Pahankanuwa Sermon #109

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

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(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.124)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

Pali Stanza:

Yassa jito kāma-kaṇṭako,

akkoso ca vadho ca bandhanañca;

pabbato viya so ṭhito anejo,

sukhadukkhesu na vedhatī sa bhikkhū ti.

From:

Itivuttaka (It 53)

Dear Listeners,

Among the nine supreme qualities of the Buddha, the Teacher of the Three Worlds, beginning with *Araham*, the quality of *purisadamma-sārathī* (the incomparable charioteer of those to be tamed) is an extremely profound quality. Just as a skilled charioteer driving a horse-carriage directs the horses onto the correct, virtuous path, the Buddha, the Teacher of the Three Worlds, utilizing His great wisdom and great compassion, like a charioteer in taming individuals who are fit to be tamed, directed all of them onto the right path. The background story behind the Udāna verse we have chosen as our theme today is a fine illustration of this.

Once, when the Blessed One was residing in Sāvatthī, five hundred monks led by the Venerable Yasoja came to Jetavana Monastery to see the Blessed One. Having arrived as guest monks, while they were conversing with the resident monks, preparing lodgings, setting aside their alms-bowls and robes, and engaging in friendly exchanges, they created a massive uproar—a very loud shouting sound. They made a noise like a chaotic market-place. Hearing this, the Blessed One asked Venerable Ānanda, "Ānanda, who are these people shouting like fishermen scrambling over fish at a landing place, like fishmongers?" Then Venerable Ānanda replied, "Venerable Sir, Blessed One, this noise arises because these five hundred

monks led by Venerable Yasoja have arrived and are preparing their lodgings in this manner." "In that case, Ānanda, go and tell those venerable ones to come; say that the Teacher has summoned them." And so, Venerable Ānanda went to that group and told them that the Blessed One had summoned them.

After Venerable Yasoja and the five hundred monks arrived, paid homage to the Blessed One, and sat to one side, the Blessed One asked, "Monks, why are you shouting so loudly? Why this uproar like fishmongers?" When asked, Venerable Yasoja replied, "Venerable Sir, we have come from afar to see the Blessed One, and while preparing our lodgings in this manner, such a commotion arose." Then the Blessed One said, "Depart, O monks. Do not reside with me. Leave!" and dismissed them, saying, "I am dismissing you, expelling you." Thereupon, Venerable Yasoja and the five hundred monks paid homage to the Blessed One, circumambulated Him, took their alms-bowls and robes, and departed. Gradually wandering on, they arrived in the Vajjian country. By that time, the rainy season was near, and they prepared to spend the rains retreat on the banks of the river Vaggumudā, building leaf-huts thatched with leaves. Having prepared, Venerable Yasoja addressed his followers and said: "Friends, the compassionate Blessed One, who desires our welfare and is full of sympathy for us, expelled us precisely out of consideration for our own welfare. Now, let us spend these three months of the rains retreat in such a manner that the Blessed One would be pleased with our way of living." The other monks agreed, saying, "Very well." Thus, practicing diligently and putting forth strong effort, all those five hundred monks became Arahats possessing the higher spiritual knowledges (*abhiññā-lābhī*) by the end of the three months of the rains retreat.

After this rains retreat, the Blessed One gradually wandered on and arrived in the Vajjian country, specifically at the Gabled Hall (*Kūṭāgāra-sālā*) in the Great Forest (*Mahāvana*) of Vesālī, which is within the Vajjian territory. Having arrived there with His community of monks, He examined the minds of the monks on the banks of the river Vaggumudā with His own mind. He saw, through His direct knowledge (*abhiññā*), that they had become Arahats. Thereupon He said to Venerable Ānanda: "Ānanda, it is as if a light is shining from the direction where those monks on the Vaggumudā bank reside. My mind is pleased to think of that direction; there is no aversion at all. Send a messenger to those monks; tell them to come, saying that the Teacher wishes to see them." So, Venerable Ānanda assigned a certain monk who possessed higher knowledges (*abhiññā*) as a messenger to go and convey this message on behalf of the Blessed One to the monks of the Vaggumudā bank. Then that monk, though there were no modern technologies back then, surpassed all modern methods, as the ancient phrase goes, "just as a strong man might stretch out his bent arm or bend his stretched arm," he disappeared from the Gabled Hall in the Great Forest, and through psychic power (*iddhi*), appeared and stood before the monks on the Vaggumudā bank. Having appeared, he conveyed the Blessed One's message to the monks of the Vaggumudā bank. Those venerable ones, having put their lodgings in order, also disappeared from there "just as a strong man might

stretch out his bent arm or bend his stretched arm," and appeared before the Blessed One at the Gabled Hall in the Great Forest.

At the time of their arrival, the Blessed One was seated in a state of concentration (*samādhi*). This is called *āneñja-samādhi*—an imperturbable concentration. What exactly it was is not explicitly stated. The Blessed One was dwelling in an unshakeable state of concentration known as the imperturbable concentration (*āneñja-samādhi*). Those monks, having examined the Blessed One's mind and understood, "The Blessed One is dwelling in this concentration, we too must dwell in this concentration," sat right there and fell into meditation, entering into concentration. To Venerable Ānanda, this was a riddle. The Blessed One Himself had invited these monks to come. Yet, though they had arrived, why was it like this? Usually, when monks arrived from afar, the Blessed One had the habit of engaging in friendly conversation, asking, "How are you? Did you obtain sufficient alms-food? Did you arrive without much trouble?" But on this occasion, the Blessed One Himself had invited them, and here He was, sitting in concentration. By this time, it was evening. Now, until the first watch of the night had passed, the Blessed One sat in concentration on one side, and those five hundred monks sat likewise. To Venerable Ānanda, this was a puzzle. So, as the first watch of the night passed, Venerable Ānanda stood up, adjusted his robe over one shoulder, bowed down low before the Blessed One, and said, "Venerable Sir, Blessed One, those monks of the Vaggumudā bank have arrived. May the Blessed One engage in friendly conversation with the guest monks!"

In this way, the first watch of the night had passed. These monks had been sitting there for a very long time. The Blessed One was silent. Next, the middle watch of the night also passed by in the same manner, with the Blessed One and that group remaining seated. Venerable Ānanda stood up again, approached the Blessed One, and said, "Blessed One, now the middle watch of the night has passed. These guest monks have been sitting and waiting for a long time. May the Blessed One engage in friendly conversation!" The Blessed One remained silent. Then came the final watch of the night, the dawn-watch, when the sun was about to rise. Even at that time, Venerable Ānanda went to the Blessed One again and said, "Now the night has passed. The sun is rising and dawn has broken. May the Blessed One engage in friendly conversation with these guest monks who have been staying here for so long!" Then the Blessed One, emerging from His concentration, said, "Ānanda, if you had understood the matter correctly, you would not have spoken even this much. Both I and these five hundred monks have been dwelling all this time in the imperturbable (*āneñja*), that unshakeable concentration." Having said so, He uttered the Udāna verse which we have taken as our topic today:

Yassa jīto kāma-kaṇṭako,

akkoso ca vadho ca bandhanañca,

pabbato viya so thitho anejo,

sukhadukkhesu na vedhatī sa bhikkhū.

"He by whom the thorn of sensual lust, abuse, physical assault, and imprisonment have been conquered, stands unshaken like a mountain. Imperturbable (*aneja*), he is not shaken by pleasure and pain—he indeed is a monk."

By whichever monk the thorn of sensual lust, verbal abuse, physical assault, and bondage have been conquered, that monk stands unshaken like a mountain. In both pleasure and pain, that monk does not tremble. That is the meaning of that verse.

Now, through this story, let us look at its inner meaning. Here we see a highly wondrous and valuable skillful means (*upāya*) employed by the Blessed One, utilizing His great compassion and great wisdom. It was out of great compassion that the Blessed One expelled those untrained monks in order to tame them. From that moment, a valuable example was given to society by Venerable Yasoja. Nowadays, if such an expulsion were to happen, people would harbor hatred towards the Blessed One, getting angry and thinking, "Oh! Even though we came from so far, He did not speak even a single word to us." No matter how far they had come, the Blessed One expelled His disciples. Not only that, it is mentioned in the Dhamma that even His chief disciples with their retinue of five hundred monks were expelled in the same manner under the comparison of fishermen's talk—calling them like fishermen, like fishmongers. There were such instances of expulsion. Although we speak of His great compassion, we can see how, with such amazing discipline, He tamed the monks within a strict discipline according to the occasion.

Next, the most valuable point in this story is the response of Venerable Yasoja. He took the very fact of their expulsion as a subject of meditation (*kammaṭṭhāna*), thinking, "This Great Compassionate One expelled us out of compassion for us, to give us an example, and to teach us a lesson." Making that very event his meditation subject, he reminded his group—the other four hundred and ninety-nine monks—of this matter. All of them unanimously made a resolute effort, and in whatever way the Blessed One would be pleased, they attained that state, and finally came to see the Blessed One. Furthermore, when we consider how the Blessed One invited them, He Himself invited them saying that a light was appearing. Usually, for invited guests, the custom is to say, "Come, it is very good that you have arrived," and to engage in friendly conversation. But here, there was something else. It is something that we, the world, cannot easily understand.

Now, you all know that when a friend comes at mealtime, one invites them to eat, saying, "Pull up a chair, come close to the table," and places a plate before them. Similarly, here, although it is not explicitly mentioned, we can imagine that the Blessed One invited them to partake of the most valuable and delicious food in the world, which is likely the concentration of the fruition of Arahatship (*arahatta-phala-samādhi*), generally referred to as the imperturbable concentration. When we

speak generally of *āneñja-samādhi*, it usually refers to the fourth jhāna or jhāna states. However, from any of those jhānas, one can enter the attainment of fruition (*phala-samāpatti*). Thus, we can think that perhaps they were in the *arahatta-phala-samādhi*. In any case, whatever concentration the Blessed One was in, those monks also entered into that very same state. Here we see that the Blessed One welcomed them not with friendly chatter, but with silence. This story gives us a highly sublime example of welcoming guests with silence. It is a wondrous thing that the world cannot easily comprehend. Thus, the Blessed One entertained those guests with the delicious food of Nibbāna that He Himself partakes of, with that very taste of the bliss of Nibbāna, with that spiritual peace. To understand this, Venerable Ānanda—whose duty was to introduce guests—stood waiting for the Blessed One to engage in friendly conversation. But this was the reality. That is one aspect.

Next, if we contemplate further, alongside the Blessed One's quality of *purisadamma-sārathī*, there is His power to tame even a large crowd through silence. Many examples of this are found in the Dhamma stories. There are several extremely valuable verses showing that the Blessed One loved silence. Among the verses spoken to the ascetic Nālaka, who came from the Himalayas about a week after the Blessed One preached the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, there are several beautiful verses about silence. As an analogy, it is said that small rivers, creeks, and streams flow with noise. There is noise in small puddles. Puddles near paddy fields make some kind of noise. But in the deep ocean, there is no noise at all. This point is mentioned in those verses:

Sannantā yanti kussubbhā, tuṇhī yāti mahodadhi.

"Little creeks flow noisily; the great ocean flows in silence."

In that way, the Blessed One expresses it in a beautiful verse. Those small puddles and small streams go along making noise. But the ocean, the deep ocean, flows silently. The verse that follows this point expresses it even more beautifully:

Yadūnakaṃ taṃ saṇati, yaṃ pūraṃ santam-eva taṃ,

Addhakumbhūpamo bālo, rahado pūro-va paṇḍito.

"What is deficient makes a noise; what is full is calm indeed.

The fool is like a half-filled pot; the wise man is like a full pool."

Wherever there is a deficiency, there is noise. If something is full, it is peaceful; it is silent. Next, *addhakumbhūpamo bālo*—the fool, the ignorant person, is like a half-filled water pot. *Rahado pūro-va paṇḍito*—the wise man is like a full, still lake. This very idea has entered our Sinhala folklore as the proverb everyone knows: "Water in a full pot does not shake" (*pīruṇu kaḷē diya nosalē*). The very same analogy is found here. Thus, the Blessed One showed the value of silence to the ascetic Nālaka. Those

of you who have read the Jātaka stories and other texts know that when the Blessed One entered the Dhamma Assembly (*Dhamma-sabhā*)—before the Blessed One's arrival, the community of monks would already be assembled. They wouldn't just be sitting there doing absolutely nothing. You know what kinds of conversations take place when a group of people gather in the ordinary world, even if not necessarily here. In the Dhamma Assembly too, certain conversations would arise. What was the first question the Blessed One would ask? "Monks, in what kind of talk were you engaged before I arrived?" The Dhamma mentions thirty-two low topics of conversation (*tiracchāna-kathā*). You might have heard of them. Even if you do not know them by name, you might still engage in them. "Animal talk" (low talk) does not mean talk by animals. The word "animal" (low/vulgar) is used to mean base or low. That is, conversations that are not fitting for monks who have gone forth from the home life, or for practitioners of meditation—gossip and the like. If they were engaged in such thirty-two-fold low talk, the Blessed One would admonish them, and on many occasions, He would make this statement:

"Sannipatitānaṃ vo, bhikkhave, dvayaṃ kāraṇīyaṃ: dhammī vā kathā, ariyo vā tuṇhībhāvo."

"Monks, when you are gathered together, there are two things to be done: either Dhamma talk or noble silence."

This means you must do one of the two. If you speak, let it be Dhamma talk; otherwise, maintain noble silence. This also demonstrates the high place the Blessed One gave to silence. Either Dhamma talk or the noble, sublime silence. The Blessed One's respect for silence, and the taming of His disciples within that silence, is revealed in a highly valuable story from the Buddhist literature—the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, which is one of the most precious discourses, preached to King Ajātasattu. The background story to this discourse demonstrates this noble quality of the Blessed One in an exceptionally beautiful manner.

On a full-moon night like this, King Ajātasattu, surrounded by his ministers, was engaged in a friendly conversation in the moonlight on the upper terrace of his palace. King Ajātasattu said, "This night, illuminated by the moonlight, is extremely beautiful. It is highly delightful. On such a night, by associating with what kind of ascetic or brahmin might my mind find peace and clarity?" He posed this question to find out the views of his ministers. Then, a minister who was a follower of the teacher Pūraṇa Kassapa spoke: "Your Majesty, there is a teacher named Pūraṇa Kassapa who has a large following of disciples, who is very elderly and esteemed. By associating with such a teacher, Your Majesty's mind can find peace." King Ajātasattu remained silent. In the same manner, various ministers stood up and praised the other six prominent sectarian teachers of that time—Pūraṇa Kassapa, Makkhali Gosāla, Ajita Kesakambalī, Sañjaya Belaṭṭhiputta, Pakudha Kaccāyana, and Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta—suggesting to the king that if he were to associate with or attend to these teachers, he would find peace of mind. But King Ajātasattu remained silent.

After everyone had finished speaking, King Ajātasattu looked at the royal physician Jīvaka, who was sitting nearby, and said, "Why, friend Jīvaka, are you silent?" At that time, the Blessed One was residing in Rājagaha in the mango grove belonging to Jīvaka the physician, together with a community of twelve hundred and fifty monks. Jīvaka the physician then spoke of this matter. He recited the nine supreme qualities of the Buddha, saying, "Great King, the Blessed One who is an Arahat, fully self-awakened (*sammā-sambuddha*), of such high renown, is currently residing in our mango grove with a community of twelve hundred and fifty monks. If Your Majesty associates with that Teacher, you will be able to find peace and clarity in your mind." Immediately, Ajātasattu said, "In that case, friend Jīvaka, prepare the carriages—the state elephants!" So, Jīvaka the physician quickly prepared the state elephants and other transport for the king and his entire retinue to go to the monastery that very night.

And so, this group set off. As they approached the mango grove, King Ajātasattu was seized by a great fear, and his hair stood on end. Trembling, he said, "Friend Jīvaka, I hope you are not deceiving me. I hope you are not betraying me to my enemies. How is it that in a place where there are as many as twelve hundred and fifty monks, not even the sound of a cough or a sneeze is to be heard?" The king was terrified by this absolute silence. We can understand from this that there is a majestic power in a silence that can terrify a king. If there is such a large crowd, how much noise ought there to be? The king was accustomed to such noise. He was brought here on the promise that the Blessed One was residing here, but seeing this silence, he thought it was an empty place. Jīvaka the physician then reassured the king, "No, no, Sire, there is no such thing. Do not be afraid, O King. Those are the lamps shining in the distance." Thus, from this story too, we can see that the community of twelve hundred and fifty monks sat in absolute silence, waiting in expectation of the Blessed One's Dhamma sermon.

Similarly, there is another excellent illustration showing that the Blessed One's special ability to quieten crowds was highly renowned even among the wandering ascetics of other sects (*aññа-titthiya paribbājaka*). While the wanderer Sakuludāyī was residing at the wanderers' park called Moranivāpa, the Blessed One, having prepared to go for alms-round in Rājagaha, thought: "It is still too early to go for alms. I should go to the Moranivāpa wanderers' park where the wanderer Sakuludāyī is residing," and He walked in that direction. At that time, the wanderer Sakuludāyī was engaged in various low topics of conversation (*tiracchāna-kathā*)—gossip—with a large crowd of wanderers. They were conversing in a very loud noise. From afar, he saw the Blessed One approaching. Seeing Him, he quietened his group, saying: (In the Pāli texts, the word often used for "be quiet" is *appasadda*, meaning "make little noise." For absolute silence, there is the precise word *tuṇhībhāva*). Often when quietening a crowd, they say, "Appasaddā hontu, bhavanto"—"Be quiet, sirs, be quiet! Do not make noise. The ascetic Gotama is coming this way. The ascetic Gotama is a lover of quietude, a lover of silence, and one who praises silence. If we remain silent, the Blessed One might think this is a suitable place to visit." Only after

he had quietened the crowd did the Blessed One enter. Having entered, the Blessed One, as was His custom, asked the wanderer Sakuludāyī, "Friend, in what kind of talk were you engaged just before I arrived?"

Then this wanderer replied, "The talk we were engaged in is not something rare for the Blessed One to hear. Let that talk be. But there is a special matter I would like to report to the Blessed One," and he narrated another story. What was that story? In those days, there were places where such groups of wanderers assembled and held discussions; these were called *kutūhala-sālā* (halls of curiosity)—what we would call conference halls today. In those times, wealthy people built and donated such halls for truth-seekers wandering from place to place to gather and discuss. Those who wished to know what they were talking about could go there out of curiosity and listen.

In such an assembly hall, among a large crowd of wanderers belonging to various religious sects, a side-discussion arose. This is the report the wanderer was conveying to the Blessed One. What kind of talk was it? Those people were saying: "This is a great benefit to our two countries, Anga and Magadha. What is it? The six famous teachers and the ascetic Gotama are all residing in our city for this rains retreat. This is a grand thing." After talking in this manner, they discussed: "Among these teachers, who is highly respected and honored by their own disciples? Who is the most honored?" As soon as this question was raised, one group narrated a past incident. In the past, while the teacher Pūraṇa Kassapa was delivering a sermon to a group of his followers, one of them stood up and, addressing the others, said: "Hey, hey! Do not ask him that question. He does not know how to answer that. Ask us. If you ask us, we will tell you," thus interrupting him. At that, Pūraṇa Kassapa raised his hands and shouted: "No, no! That question was asked of me. Why are you speaking?" and thus a great confusion arose there, and that group left with agitated minds. Another group mentioned that similar discord, disputation, and dissatisfied departures occurred among the followers of Makkhali Gosāla and the other six teachers. Having related this, they said: "But on one occasion, while the ascetic Gotama was delivering a sermon to hundreds of people, a certain monk coughed. At that, a monk sitting nearby nudged him with his knee as a signal, saying, 'Venerable brother, make no noise, make no noise! Our Teacher is preaching the Dhamma.'" Since the wanderer Sakuludāyī had a great appreciation for the Blessed One, he related this incident with high praise for Him.

Next, he made another appreciative statement about the Blessed One: "Wherever the Blessed One preaches the Dhamma to hundreds of people, at that time, that crowd gazes at the Blessed One with great eagerness, listening to receive and understand that Dhamma." He then gave an analogy for this: "Just as when a man squeezes a pure honeycomb at a four-way crossroads, and people stand watching eagerly to drink that honey, in the same way, people listen when the ascetic Gotama preaches the Dhamma." Such was the appreciative praise that the wanderer Sakuludāyī offered. This is one illustration.

There is also another excellent illustration concerning the wanderer Samaṇamaṇḍikāputta. This happened in Sāvatthī. In Sāvatthī, there was a park called Mallikārāma, containing a hall built by Queen Mallikā for other religious sects to meet. While the wanderer Samaṇamaṇḍikāputta was staying at this Mallikārāma, there lived in Sāvatthī a very faithful lay disciple of the Blessed One named Pañcakanga, a master carpenter. "Basunnehe" (carpenter) is not a very polite term; in the old parlance, we would say "Mr. Carpenter"—there was a carpenter named Pañcakanga. This carpenter Pañcakanga left Sāvatthī in the middle of the day, intending to see the Blessed One. Along the way, he thought: "This midday is an untimely hour to see the Blessed One. The Blessed One would be meditating at this time." The term for this is *paṭisallāna* (seclusion)—that is, being in quiet retirement. Then he thought, "In that case, I should see the community of monks." But he thought again, "No, the monks would also be in meditation at this time. This hour is unsuitable; it is untimely. Therefore, I should spend this remaining time going to Mallikārāma to meet the wanderer Samaṇamaṇḍikāputta," and he turned in that direction. When he approached, Samaṇamaṇḍikāputta was also engaged in low talk (*tiracchāna-kathā*) with a crowd of seven hundred followers. Seeing him from afar, Samaṇamaṇḍikāputta quietened his crowd: "Appasaddā hontu, sirs, be quiet! Do not make noise. Here comes a lay disciple of the Blessed One, the householder Pañcakanga. Of all the white-clad lay disciples of the Blessed One residing in Sāvatthī, this householder Pañcakanga is one. These lay disciples—please remember this phrase well—even the lay disciples of the Blessed One are tamed in silence and praise silence. Therefore, if we remain silent, he might think it fit to approach our group, and he may come here." This is what the wanderer Samaṇamaṇḍikāputta did to quieten his crowd. We must remember those words. Thereupon, the carpenter Pañcakanga came and held a Dhamma discussion. Though we will not go into the details of that discussion, we mention only this event.

From these numerous examples, we can see that the Blessed One was indeed a sublime being who loved silence, and that He tamed His followers through silence. Nowadays, even if ten or twelve guests arrive, what a commotion they make! In the past, the groups coming to see the Blessed One are always described as numbering around five hundred. If groups of five hundred were allowed to talk and shout like that, what would it be like? Yet, the Blessed One, through His unique power, quietened thousands of people. Of course, in later times, some shortcomings occurred due to the swelling of numbers and the decline of the dispensation. However, in the beginning, we clearly see that a major place was given to silence through the spiritual power of the Blessed One.

Therefore, this is a lesson for us on the taming we saw in that story. It is a lesson on taming, as well as on the value of silence. Because things are done differently nowadays, perhaps you may not even know that a great place was given to silence even within the customs of the Dispensation (*sāsana-cāritra*). For example, let us say a gentleman comes and invites the Blessed One and the community of monks for the following day. How does the Blessed One accept this invitation? How is it

accepted? Through silence. In silence. He does not say, "Oh! If there are donors like you, we will have no shortage!"—accepting it immediately upon the offer. In fact, in ancient times, they did not speak to accept an invitation; they consented through compassion (*anukampā*). Consenting in silence out of compassion. You know, when offering the Buddha-pūjā, you recite: "Adhivāsetu no, bhante, bhojanaṃ parikappitaṃ, anukampaṃ upādāya patiggaṇhātu muttamaṃ" — "May the Blessed One, out of compassion, accept this food prepared for Him." But the Blessed One does not say a word beforehand. This is called silence. It is a noble custom of the Dispensation. For the Blessed One does not value material offerings (*āmisa*); He values the spiritual, non-material (*nirāmisa*).

According to that custom, even an invitation to a meal is accepted in silence. The wise donor knows that the Blessed One has accepted it through His silence. Only afterwards are other arrangements made. So, that is an ancient custom. Furthermore, a high place was given to silence within the assemblies of the Dispensation. We do not need to speak of modern times; you can make the comparison. During the Buddha's time, in the meetings of the Sangha, especially in disciplinary procedures (*vinaya-kamma*) and Sangha acts (*saṅgha-kamma*), there is a custom called *ñatti* (motion) to present a proposal for assembly approval. First, it is presented: "This is the matter before us." To obtain the consent and consensus of the Sangha, a certain formula is recited: "We are now doing such and such a thing." Those who agree to it accept it. They express their agreement through silence. Only if someone disagrees do they speak. Thus, words are used only for objection. Through silence, acceptance is shown. The approval of the assembly, the unanimity, is achieved through silence. That is the custom among the assembly procedures.

Next, we all know that the Blessed One highly praised quiet dwelling—places of little noise, little din (*appasadda, appanigghosa*). What is the reason for this? In this dispensation, meditation (*bhāvanā*) is the effort to concentrate the mind (*samādhi*). Especially in the initial stages, noise is a thorn. It is said, "Saddo kaṇṭako jhānassa"—"Noise is a thorn to jhāna." Specifically, the first jhāna (*paṭhama-jhāna*) is disrupted by the presence of noise. Therefore, to those devotees who are beginning their meditation, noise is a great obstacle and trouble. This is why the Blessed One always gave a prominent place to silence.

We must ponder on this wisely. Why is such a place given to silence? If the Blessed One did not train them by making that beginning, the monks led by Yasoja would not have been able to attain that sublime inner peace. That inner peace, as described in the verse, is the imperturbable (*aneja*) state—an unshakeable concentration that is unmoved by pleasure and pain (*sukha-dukkha*), like a mountain. It is the ability to keep both mind and body unshakeable. But to develop that, as a starting point, there must be a certain silence in the environment, a quiet dwelling. That is why the Blessed One gave so much weight to silence. One cannot reach that sublime state overnight. As preparation, many tasks must be performed in silence. There are

countless illustrations in the Dhamma literature showing how sublime this ultimate spiritual peace is.

To mention a long story briefly: when the Blessed One was walking towards Kusinārā for His final extinguishment (*parinibbāna*), Pukkusa Mallaputta, a young man of the Malla clan, saw the Blessed One sitting under a tree and expressed his joy, saying, "Oh! How peaceful is the dwelling of these renunciants!" Then he related a past event concerning Āḷāra Kālāma, whom he regarded as his teacher. Āḷāra Kālāma was a teacher of the concentration state of the base of nothingness (*ākiñcaññāyatana*), whom the Buddha too had once approached as a teacher. Pukkusa Mallaputta related this past event about him as a praise. Once, when Āḷāra Kālāma was sitting in concentration near a river, a caravan of five hundred carts crossed that river. While they were passing, Āḷāra Kālāma was in concentration. After the carts had gone, a man who was following behind the caravan saw Āḷāra Kālāma sitting in concentration. There was even mud splattered on the robe of that sage. The man asked, "Did you not see this caravan of carts passing by?" He replied, "No, I did not see them." "Did you not hear the sound?" "No, I did not hear it." Pukkusa Mallaputta praised this, saying how peaceful was the dwelling of the teacher Āḷāra Kālāma that he did not even hear the noise of five hundred carts passing by. Then the Blessed One asked, "Which is greater and more difficult: to be in a concentration where one does not hear the noise of five hundred carts passing by, or to be in a concentration so strong that one knows nothing even when a thunderbolt strikes, killing four oxen and two farmers?" At that, he admitted that the second one was indeed greater. Then the Blessed One related an event concerning Himself:

"Once, I was staying in seclusion at a place called Ātumā. At that time, during a sudden torrential rainstorm with thunderbolts crashing, a thunderbolt struck and killed four oxen and two farmers. A large crowd gathered there. When I had emerged from that concentration and was walking up and down in the open air, a man from that crowd approached me. I asked him, 'Friend, why is this large crowd gathered here?' He replied, 'Such and such an event occurred. Did you not see it, Venerable Sir?' 'No, I did not see it.' 'Did you not hear it?' 'No, I did not hear it.' 'Was the Blessed One asleep?' 'No, I was not asleep.' 'Did the Blessed One have perception (*saññā*) at that time?' 'Yes, I had perception.' At that, the man, coming from that crowd, expressed his great wonder: 'How amazing, Venerable Sir! Even though the Blessed One was not asleep, had perception, and was awake and standing, He did not hear such a massive sound!'"

From this we can see: that, dear devotees, is what is called the *arahatta-phala-samādhi* (the concentration of the fruition of Arahatship). It is the state where all the six sense-bases (*āyatana*), which have tortured us for so long, are ceased (*niruddha*). Through that power of concentration and insight-wisdom (*vipassanā-paññā*), the concentration achieved by the Blessed One surpasses even the jhāna states of Āḷāra Kālāma. Having directly realized the emptiness (*suññatā*) of the world through insight, the concentration of the fruition of Arahatship where all these six sense-

bases—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—are ceased must indeed be that special concentration spoken of by the Blessed One. When dwelling in that concentration, even when a thunderbolt crashes, such a sound is not heard. To that extent, that is the ultimate spiritual peace. Thus, the Blessed One frequently states: "Dhammī vā kathā, ariyo vā tuṇhībhāvo" — "Either Dhamma talk or noble silence." If we are to understand "noble silence" in its highest sense, this is how it is explained. Noble silence, in its truest meaning, is indeed that attainment of fruition (*phala-samāpatti*) which is the supreme spiritual peace.

Although the word *āneñja* is used, we can think, as expressed in the verse, that on that day, Venerable Yasoja, his five hundred followers, and the Blessed One must have been dwelling in that very *arahatta-phala-samādhi*, which is as unshakeable as a mountain.

Be that as it may, that was the place given to silence during the Buddha's time. But, dear devotees, what is the place given to silence in present-day society? One is forced to say there is no place at all. From dawn until night, noise reigns supreme. As you all know, noise rules in society. Submerged in the clamor of globalization, caught in between sound waves, there is a massive uproar, a heap of sound waves, not only in the houses of lay people but perhaps in other places too. There is no place for silence. The environment is so overwhelmed by noise that there is no opportunity to quieten the mind, to bring forth mindfulness (*sati*) and concentration (*samādhi*) which are essential for a beginner meditator (*yogāvacara*), and thereby to develop wisdom (*paññā*). On the streets, one often sees people walking alone, talking to themselves while wearing modern ear-ornaments that produce sound. We do not need to name what that ear-ornament is. To such an extent, the world loves noise. A situation has arisen in this society where silence has become a nuisance. Perhaps this might even be considered a necessity of the modern era.

But, swept away by this media wave, we Buddhists, at least, must wake up to the underestimation of the value of silence. This is not an invitation to protest on behalf of silence. Devotees, do not misunderstand. We must be careful to give a place to silence through our own example. This does not mean we should hold protests saying there is no place for silence; rather, it is about bringing out Buddhist values. We do not expect things to be exactly as they were in the Buddha's time. But if we desire the Mind Stilled (Nibbāna, if we desire concentration (*samādhi*), if we desire that spiritual peace, we must be keen about it. Today, our likes and dislikes are determined from all sides by the advertising media of commercial civilization. That is how our tastes are chosen. Such a strange era this is. Everyone is submerged in the media wave. But we must reflect wisely. Meditating practitioners (*yogāvacara*) who practice at home come and tell us this: "We want to meditate, but just as described, from morning till night, and even until dawn, noise reigns supreme." Yet, if we desire the Mind Stilled (Nibbāna, if we desire liberation (*vimutti*), if we desire that spiritual peace, we must not drown in that worldly wave, that wave of noise, but must understand the value of silence, just as the Blessed One declared in the Nālaka Sutta.

We know that in the past, even though the social wave was not so noisy, the monks established themselves first in virtue (*sīla*) and, to develop concentration (*samādhi*), went deep into the forests among wild beasts—perhaps thinking that the sounds of wild beasts were not such a nuisance. But nowadays, humans love noise so much that staying without noise even for five minutes is a torment. That is how far society has gone. Therefore, according to the Buddha's word, we must call this a base preference. As was said, "The fool is like a half-filled pot, the wise man is like a full pool." Only the half-filled pot shakes. The full pot does not shake. Thus, if we have a supreme goal within us to be like a still lake, we must make an effort ourselves to organize our lifestyle by reducing at least unnecessary sounds. There is no need for any external protest here. If we desire liberation (*vimutti*) in this Saṃsāra, the supreme peace, one step on that path is seclusion (*viveka*). You have heard of the three kinds of seclusion: bodily seclusion (*kāya-viveka*), mental seclusion (*citta-viveka*), and seclusion from assets/substrata (*upadhi-viveka*). Bodily seclusion means physically separating oneself from the crowd. But even if we say we are physically separated, if that noise still penetrates, it is not a complete liberation or separation.

Now, when we consider the eye and the ear: closing the eyes is not difficult. It happens effortlessly with every blink—closing of the eye. If we see something unpleasant, if we dislike something, we can close our eyes. But can we close our ears like that? That requires an artificial effort. If one plugs one's ears, it is very awkward. One cannot meditate with earplugs either, though some have tried. This is why we have the expression "kandoskiriya" (ear-tormenting noise). I do not know how that word originated, but we can think of "kandoskiriya" as having nothing else to do in the end but to blame the ear itself. There are times when one blames the ear, thinking, "Oh, it is because of this ear that I have this trouble. I can close my eyes, but I cannot close my ears." So, one is forced to listen to this ear-tormenting din. This very matter is mentioned in the Dhamma in a valuable verse, as the Buddha's word:

Viññātasārāni subhāsitāni, sutañca samādhisāraṃ.

This is a valuable verse. *Viññātasārāni subhāsitāni*—the well-spoken words (*subhāsita*). "Subhāsita" means well-spoken. Indeed, the words of the Blessed One are entirely well-spoken. Every word of the Blessed One is considered a *subhāsita*. But what is said here? Knowing the essence of well-spoken words is their understanding. The Buddha's word, which is well-spoken, is there for us to learn. Next, a far more valuable thing is said: *sutañca viññātaṃ samādhisāraṃ*—what is the essence of what is heard and understood? It is concentration (*samādhi*), one-pointedness of mind (*citta-ekaggatā*). Now, we all struggle a lot to learn the Buddha's word. Everyone tries to memorize the Buddha's word, or record it, learn it, study it, and research it. Trying to learn well-spoken words is good, because well-spoken words are meant to be learned and retained. But after learning, *sutañca viññātaṃ*—what is the essence, the core, the heartwood, the ultimate purpose of what has been learned? It is concentration (*samādhi*), one-pointedness of mind. From this we see that the Buddha's word is an invitation, a challenge, to practice. We

say the Dhamma is *ehipassiko*—"come and see." We learn the Dhamma. But we are not ready to accept the invitation and challenge of the Dhamma. If we are ready to accept it, we must cherish silent environments and seclusion. We must love them. We must reduce our greed for noise, our greed for those ear-tormenting noises.

In the texts, only thirty-two low topics of conversation (*tiracchāna-kathā*) are listed. But nowadays, there might be sixty-four or more of those gossip stories. There may be far more than thirty-two kinds of stories that we should not associate with, which we constantly hear, read, and listen to. Through them, the mind becomes increasingly defiled. Then concentration (*samādhi*) declines, and we move away from spiritual peace. A word that many of us speak of nowadays, much like "globalization," is "environmental pollution." This too is a term that has come to the forefront of modern society—environmental pollution. But many people blame physical materials for this environmental pollution.

But, dear devotees, there is no talk about mental environmental pollution. One thing that causes mental environmental pollution is that very ear-tormenting noise, those sounds—that overflowing of noise beyond limits. By yielding to it, especially lay devotees in their household lives lose the opportunity to fulfill their deep aspirations for the True Dhamma, or their aspirations for the Mind Stilled (Nibbāna. In the Buddha's time, silence was noble, practically valuable, and highly regarded individually, socially, and even where crowds assembled. We usually think of a gathering as a commotion, a shouting match. We have that kind of idea. That is like a gathering of crows. If it is a meeting of crows, it is indeed so. Nowadays, even in high places—though I will not mention names—it is just the same. There is not much difference from a gathering of crows.

But in the assembly of twelve hundred and fifty monks around the Blessed One, there was not even the sound of a cough or a sneeze. The Teacher, through His quality of *purisadamma-sārathī*, His knowledge of skillful means (*upāya-kosalla-ñāṇa*), blending His great wisdom and great compassion, tames the crowd in that manner. Sometimes, the Blessed One's own words describe how He tamed them: *"Sanhena pi vinemi, pharusena pi vinemi, sanha-pharusena pi vinemi"* — "I tame some gently, I tame some harshly, I tame some both gently and harshly." Here, it was clearly illustrated in the story of Yasoja: first, He tamed that crowd with harsh words. Later, He invited them, sending an invitation saying, "I wish to see you." In this way, we have on one side the noble quality of the Buddha in taming crowds—taming those who are fit to be tamed.

Likewise, if we squeeze this story to extract its essence, silence is what we must bring forth. We do not ignore the changes of this era. Over more than two thousand years since the Buddha's time, amid various changes, certain transPreparations have also occurred through what we think of as material progress. But we must reflect: if the end, the climax of material progress, is not to be spiritual degeneration, if the final step of material progress is not to lead to spiritual decay, we, at least as Buddhists, must understand the value of that silence. One can control the whole world with a

fingertip. We can bring out everything in the world with a fingertip. We can also close it with a fingertip. Such a thing exists today. Therefore, wise devotees must think: the fingertip must be operated to hear what should be heard, and to shut out what should not be heard—that ear-tormenting noise. If you learn to use the fingertip correctly, you can solve this problem and give an example to the world without holding protests. Thus, what we have presented to you is this: sometimes, at first glance, even these words of ours in this Dhamma journey may appear outdated. But the Blessed One has declared, as mentioned in the Dhamma: *"Satañca dhammo na jaraṃ upeti"* — "The Dhamma of the virtuous never decays." It never becomes outdated. Whether Buddhas arise or Tathāgatas do not arise, this nature of the Dhamma, these Dhamma realities in the world, are always true, as the Blessed One declared. Therefore, if we, as Buddhists, aspire to those noble goals, we must be eager to prepare a suitable environment for them, at least to a minimum degree. Otherwise, if we allow that media wave, that noise wave, and submit to those designations (*paññatti*) of globalization and the like, surrendering our daily lives, the inner strengths within us to develop mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*) will be blunted. They will be blunted more and more. Because, overwhelmed by those noises coming from outside, we yield to those base things, paving the way to lose that future spiritual peace.

Therefore, you must reflect wisely. Today, you have spent this valuable day undertaking a precious virtue (*sīla*), abandoning all the various activities of your daily lives, both to organize your own lives and as an example to others. Moving away at least a little from that ear-tormenting noise in your households, in an environment of some silence, focusing your mind on a familiar subject of meditation (*kammaṭṭhāna*), and spending the day with mindfulness (*sati*), you have entered the practice of appreciating the silence praised by our Buddha, spending your time to cultivate internal silence—silence within.

At the same time, regarding this Dhamma sermon of ours, a short while ago we told a lay devotee that today's sermon might seem contradictory, because in front of me, too, stands a loudspeaker. But there is nothing to be done; as was said, we have to make that "protest." Even through this contradiction, we are conveying this matter as a message to this audience. In such an environment, we must try at least to give ear to what should be heard. Since we cannot close our ears to what should not be heard, if we can make some effort in that direction, in a way that is not harmful to ourselves or others, we must try to secure our spiritual progress at least through that.

Thus, today, through the virtue (*sīla*) you kept, the meditation you performed, and by listening to this Dhamma sermon, you have generated some wholesome energy (*kusala-shakti*). We often explain this wholesome energy in this way: on this Dhamma journey, instead of the five sense faculties we use in daily life, we bring forth five spiritual faculties introduced by the Buddha. The world spends its life submerged in those external faculties—eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body. The Blessed One brought forth five spiritual faculties (*indriya*): faith (*saddhā*), energy (*viriya*),

mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). The Mind Stilled (Nibbāna is for the one who has developed these five faculties. Actually, they are fully established only after reaching the stage of Stream-entry (*sotāpatti*). An *indriya* (faculty) means a ruler, implying a powerful mastery within certain limits. For the one who has developed these faculties, those five also stand as powers. That is why they are called the five powers (*pañca-bala*).

To generate those faculties of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom (*saddhā, viriya, sati, samādhi, paññā*), and to cultivate those five powers, you have made a certain effort today, to the best of your ability, through virtue (*sīla*) and concentration (*samādhi*). We spoke these few words precisely as a support and help to that effort. Utilizing all of this, if there is anything to be gained from listening to this Dhamma, may you use it to develop what was mentioned. In this era of the decline of the dispensation, you truly understand—everyone says, "Now we understand the suffering (*dukkha*) of Saṃsāra." If that is true, some path of action must be taken.

May this accumulated heap of merit support that effort! May obstructing factors be removed! May supporting factors approach! I wish that this wholesome energy (*kusala-shakti*) may indeed become a strong support (*upanissaya*) to quickly realize those supreme goals you hope for—the realization of the noble paths and fruits of Stream-entry (*sotāpatti*), Once-returning (*sakadāgāmitā*), Non-returning (*anāgāmitā*), and Arahatship (*arahatta*). Likewise, by sharing this merit of Dhamma-preaching and Dhamma-listening with all beings from the Avīci hell up to the Akaniṭṭha heaven, may all of you, through the Bodhi of your aspiration, be liberated from all the suffering (*dukkha*) of Saṃsāra, and find peace in the supreme, deathless state of the Mind Stilled (Nibbāna! Saying so, please recite the verse!

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……*"