Pahankanuwa Sermon #113

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

Author: Ven. Katukurunde Nanananda Thero

(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.55)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

Pali Stanza:

Puttā m'atthi dhanam m'atthi, iti bālo vihaññati;

attā hi attano natthi, kuto puttā kuto dhanaṃ.

From:

Dhammapada 62 (Bālavagga)

Dear Listeners,

In the Dhamma, unlimited craving (*taṇhā*) for material objects is described as a severe rust that arises in the mind. This vice, known in society as stinginess or avarice, carries the tendency of thinking only of oneself. Reluctant to give but eager to take, reluctant to discard but eager to accumulate, this rust of stinginess leads to a person's ruin in this world and the next. This is clearly explained in the background story of the verse we have chosen as our theme today.

During the time of the Buddha, there lived a wealthy merchant named Ānanda in the city of Sāvatthi. He possessed forty crores of wealth, but despite having such immense wealth, he was an extremely stingy miser. This merchant had an only son named Mūlasiri. It was the merchant's custom once every fortnight to gather his relatives and, in their presence, preach a certain "sermon of stinginess" to his son: "Do not think that forty crores of wealth is a lot. Even if you spend just one Kahāpaṇa at a time, it will soon run out. This existing wealth must not be given to anyone; one should only accumulate more." As similes for this, he would point out that just as collyrium applied to the eye, even when put on in small amounts, soon gets exhausted, so too is this wealth depleted. Likewise, just as termites build an anthill, or bees build a honeycomb, one must spend one's time solely accumulating wealth. In this manner, living an extremely miserly life, this merchant died without even revealing to his only son the locations where his five treasures were hidden. Having

died, where was he born? He was conceived in the womb of an outcaste woman in an outcaste village near the gate of that very city.

There were five hundred families in that village. From the moment of his conception, those people could not even find proper wage labor. They struggled greatly to obtain even a meager amount of food and drink, falling into severe distress. They began to think, "Some unfortunate, wretched being must have been born among us." To test this, they divided the five hundred families into two groups of two hundred and fifty. Then they divided them again. In this manner of separation, they pinpointed the family where this child was to be born. Having found them, they exiled and removed that woman from the community. With great difficulty, she gave birth to the child. The child's hands, feet, ears, and nose were not in their proper places; he was born with a body resembling a hideously deformed hungry ghost (*peta*). Yet, no matter how a child is born, a mother's affection remains. So, with immense difficulty, she nurtured the child.

So great was the child's misfortune that if the mother took him along with her to work, she could not secure even a single day of wage labor. Only when she left him at home out of sheer desperation did she manage to get something. After enduring such hardships, when the child grew old enough to beg, the mother said, "My son, we have suffered greatly because of you. Now go and find something from the places where they distribute food and drink to the poor, travelers, and beggars in the city." Placing a potsherd in his hand, she sent him away. As this child begged from house to house, he came to the merchant's mansion where he had lived in his past life. Somehow, due to the negligence of the guards, he entered unnoticed through three gates. At the fourth gate, the children of the merchant Mūlasiri—to whom the king had newly granted the title of merchant—saw this outcaste boy and began to scream in fear. Then the guards came, beat the child, and threw him onto a rubbish heap.

It was at that moment that the Buddha, accompanied by Ven. Ānanda, was walking for alms. On many occasions, when such events occurred, the Buddha would display a gentle smile to reveal a story from the past. When such a sign was made, Ven. Ānanda would inquire about the reason, and the Buddha would explain. Similarly, when Ven. Ānanda questioned Him here, the Buddha said, "Ānanda, the one lying on that rubbish heap is Ānanda, the former merchant." Then, Ven. Ānanda summoned the merchant Mūlasiri to that place. The Buddha then asked Mūlasiri, "Do you know who this is?" When he replied, "No," the Buddha said, "This is your father." The merchant did not believe it; he could not fathom that this outcaste boy was his father.

Thereupon, the Buddha addressed the outcaste child and said, "Merchant Ānanda, show your son the places where you hid the five treasures." At that moment, the outcaste boy revealed the locations where those treasures were hidden. At this, the merchant Mūlasiri believed the matter and gained faith. By then, a large crowd, including the merchant Mūlasiri, had gathered there. It was to this crowd that the Buddha preached the verse we placed at the beginning as our theme.

"I have sons, I have wealth"—thus the fool torments himself and is ruined. But what is the truth? *"Attā hi attano natthi"*—even oneself does not belong to oneself (is non-self, *anattā*). If that is so, whence sons, whence wealth? There are no sons, there is no wealth. It is a short, simple verse, yet highly meaningful. It is recorded that upon hearing this verse, many attained the paths and fruits of liberation. Here, it is not just the verse; we can also understand that the incident itself must have caused a great sense of urgency (*saṃvega*) in the large crowd. They must have thought, "Alas, this great merchant has been reduced to the status of an outcaste boy." Through this story and this verse, we can extract many valuable Dhamma principles applicable to our own lives. From this story, we see how a multi-millionaire became a deformed, utterly poor human-ghost (*peta*) in his very next birth (*jāti*).

Generally, in society, a millionaire is known as a rich man. But, pious devotees, this richness is not something that can be measured by wealth. Richness is a state of mind. Although that merchant possessed forty crores of wealth, he was extremely poor in his mind. That is why, without spending this wealth or even utilizing it himself, he lived like a human-ghost (*peta*) even while being a wealthy merchant. Through this, we can see that no matter how much wealth is acquired, as richness of mind is gradually lost, how dangerous stinginess can be. The Buddha has shown that a person with unlimited desire, with craving (*taṇhā*) for material objects, is like the great ocean—meaning, no matter how much water flows into it, it is never filled. Similarly, in this instance, the merchant had a certain distorted mental state. Despite having so much wealth, he was poor in mind. It was in accordance with that distorted mental state that his physical body was received, corresponding to his karma.

You all must have often heard the passage preached by the Buddha regarding karma. It is highly relevant here: *"Kammassakā sattā kammadāyādā kammayonī kammapaṭisaraṇā, kammaṃ satte vibhajati yadidaṃ hīnaṃ paṇītatāya."* This is a very famous passage. "Beings are owners of their karma, heirs of their karma, born of their karma, related to their karma, and have karma as their refuge. It is kamma that differentiates beings, making them low or high." One's birth (*jāti*) is also determined by karma. Whether one is elevated or degraded is also directed by karma. In this manner, we can understand the situation here. Here, volition (*cetanā*) itself is karma. Therefore, the stream of thoughts of this merchant was entirely distorted, or rather, a narrow stream of thoughts. It was precisely because of this that he received a corresponding next state of existence (*bhava*).

Through such incidents, we see, for one, how karma leads to rebirth. Even in this modern age, many people show a great interest in past-life events revealed through hypnosis. Often, however, they merely study them without deriving any practical benefit for their lives. What we have here is something similar. Today, people are often placed into a hypnotic trance to retrieve their past. Here too, the Buddha did something somewhat similar. The knowledge that arose in this child is called the memory of past births (*jātissara-ñāṇa*). It was not a state attained by developing absorptions (*jhāna*) as a supernormal power (*abhiññā*). In many individuals,

memories of past lives remain stored in consciousness (*viññāṇa*). Especially during childhood, it is easy to bring this out. Here too, it was through the track of past memory that the child, thinking of it as his own place and walking as if going to his own home, entered that merchant's mansion without fear.

Furthermore, he was also able to reveal to his son the places where the treasures were hidden. Correspondingly, the Buddha addressed the child as, "Merchant Ānanda, tell your son about the five treasures." When He said this, the contents stored in his consciousness (*viññāṇa*) were revealed. Thus, we can understand that these are not strange phenomena. These things that are frequently mentioned in modern books were pointed out countless times by the Buddha during His time. Accordingly, through the Dhamma advice presented by the Buddha, many people corrected their weaknesses, and even attained supramundane states; this is clear from those Dhamma stories. Next, let us contemplate a bit more on this rust of stinginess and how it operates in the mind. We know that even if a pile of ironware is left unused, it rusts. Eventually, only a pile of rust remains. Similarly, if wealth is not put to use, and one only looks at the income side, a rust forms within that person, which is called the rust of stinginess. The Buddha has pointed out in other instances how dangerous a weakness this stinginess is.

Here, it was not merely stinginess that caused merchant Ānanda to end up in that deformed, mutilated state, but also the "stinginess sermon" he preached to his son. What was the reason for this? In a Sutta preached to King Kosala on one occasion—when King Kosala came to the Buddha and reported the news of another miserly merchant in Sāvatthi—the Buddha declared that if anyone prevents others from giving, or creates obstacles for the gifts given by others, such individuals are born in bad destinations like hell, the animal realm, etc., and fall into states of extreme poverty without even food and drink. According to this, we can understand that in addition to his narrow, miserly mind, the advice he gave to his son and his wrong guidance was a wrong view. It was also due to this that such a fate befell him.

Similarly, the Buddha has declared to King Kosala that this stinginess is entirely an unwholesome characteristic, a mark of an unworthy person (*asappurisa*). Why is he called an unworthy person? Though that miser accumulates vast wealth, he does not use it himself. He does not give it to his children, nor to his wife. He does not give it to relatives, friends, and associates, nor does he give it to ascetics and brahmins. He leads an extremely unworthy lifestyle, and to illustrate this, a simile is given: that person's wealth is like a pond haunted by demons (*rakkhasa*). In a certain place, there is a beautiful pond, filled with clean water, perfect in every way. But it is haunted by demons. Consequently, no matter who comes, no one enters it, fearing to drink even a drop of water. In the same way, the Buddha compared the miser's wealth to a demon-haunted pond. In this manner, the Buddha has pointed out the dark side of stinginess.

Next, based on this, we can understand what is the good or worthy person's (*sappurisa*) practice. The Buddha has systematically pointed this out. Now, when all

of you discuss virtues, especially the virtues of this Sasana, you speak of giving (*dāna*) first of all. Because everyone does it, many think there is no depth to it, treating it as something done casually. But what is the deep meaning within it? Through giving, what we primarily do is cultivate the volition of relinquishment (*pariccāga-cetanā*). Although there are benefits to giving, what actually happens through giving is the enrichment of the mind. Through giving and altruistic conduct, the mind expands. When these are absent, the mind becomes narrow through jealousy and stinginess. If we want to expand this mind, we must be keen on meritorious deeds like giving. That is true wealth.

You all must have heard of noble wealth (*ariya-dhana*). Among the valuable virtues found in a stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*), who has attained a noble state, one is mentioned as the quality of generosity (*cāga*), the quality of relinquishment. In short, the way a good noble disciple lives in the household life is described by the Buddha in this passage: *"Vigatamalamaccherena cetasā agāraṃ ajjhāvasati muttacāgo payatapāṇi vossaggarato yācayogo dānasaṃvibhāgarato."* This means dwelling at home with a mind free from the stain of stinginess. *Muttacāgo* means practicing relinquishment, giving away. *Payatapāṇi* means hands always washed and ready for giving. *Vossaggarato* means taking delight in the release of that wealth, finding joy and pleasure in it. *Yācayogo* means being responsive to requests, someone whom beggars and those who ask can easily approach. Not like that demon-haunted pond, but instead, someone whom one can approach without fear and ask, "I have this difficulty, can you help me with this?" That is shown as a virtue of a worthy person (*sappurisa*). *Dānasaṃvibhāgarato* means not only giving gifts, but also being able to share from one's own portion, the capacity to distribute. The Buddha has pointed this out as a highly valuable virtue.

On one occasion, the Buddha pointed out that being able to share even from one's own food and drink is an extremely valuable virtue. The Buddha declared: "If beings knew, as I know, the fruits of giving, they would not eat without having shared, nor would the stain of stinginess obsess their minds. Even if it were their last morsel, their last mouthful, they would not eat without sharing it if there were someone to share it with." The Buddha declared this because He had clearly seen the benefits of giving during His time as a Bodhisatta. When one is eating, and a human or animal arrives in extreme hunger—in intense hunger—one should have the capacity to give at least a portion of the morsel of rice in one's hand. That is the depth of the quality of relinquishment.

In that way, not only giving but sharing what one has was a Buddhist custom in the past, though I do not know if it still exists. When preparing the daily meals, a handful of rice was put into a separate pot, so that it could be given to a beggar or someone in need who came to the house. Even in that instance, there is that volition of relinquishment—sharing, such valuable virtues. Today, perhaps these have disappeared because the economy alone is emphasized. The greatest example for this is the Bodhisatta ideal. We all know that in the Bodhisatta's life, the perfection of

giving (*dāna-pāramitā*) comes first among the perfections (*pāramīs*). The reason is that among all virtues, what seems hardest to relinquish first is one's own possessions. There is a certain craving (*taṇhā*) in the world for all those assets which one has acquired with great effort and expense, or claims as "mine." Therefore, calming that craving is not easy, even when it comes to giving away external objects.

But it did not stop there. Without stopping at the giving of external objects, the Buddha next gave away even internal assets such as His eyes, head, flesh, and blood. In making those gifts, the giver must pay special attention to one's own mind. Indeed, one should look at one's mind, not just at the object being given. Although one is separating from the object, and is not giving it in an impure manner, while giving, one must watch one's mind. That is why the Buddha has pointed out to give with a purified mind in three stages (three minds). You all must have heard of this "threefold mind" which the Buddha indicates to complete the wholesome act (*kusala*): *"Pubbeva dānā sumano, dadaṃ cittaṃ pasādayaṃ, datvā attamano hoti."* Before giving, one must generate joy. This is called the prior mind (*pubba-cetana*). Why? Because if the mind changes at the moment of giving, it might falter. This mind changes very quickly. Therefore, one must prepare it beforehand with joy, cultivating happiness and pleasure. That prior volition is extremely important.

Next, *"dadaṃ cittaṃ pasādayaṃ"*—at the moment of giving, too, one generates a certain clarity and confidence, a peaceful joy. If giving to the Triple Gem, one can focus on the virtues of the Sangha or the Buddha, generating joy in them. If giving to the poor, travelers, or beggars, one should generate joy by thinking, "Will this not bring them great comfort?" Next, after giving, one must maintain the mind in such a way that no regret arises. In the Dhamma, illustrative stories show that many are born miserly precisely because the third factor was not fulfilled. You must be aware of the troubles that occurred even in the *Kusa Jātaka*. After running after a Paccekabuddha to retrieve a cake she had offered, she snatched it back from his bowl. Due to that unwholesome deed, her face became misshapen like a cake.

Likewise, there are accounts in the Dhamma stories where some people, despite acquiring wealth, do not feel inclined to enjoy it, and the reason is this third factor—meaning, after giving, they regret it. Instead of rejoicing, they feel regret. Due to that regret, that wholesome deed (*kusala*) becomes somewhat defiled. Its strength is diminished. That is why one must watch the mind, keeping a close eye on it. By spoiling the mind in that manner, even various physical ailments can sometimes arise.

Now, you all know that in society there are many wealthy people and millionaires. No matter how much wealth they have, due to some illness, they might only be able to eat a rough, dry slice of bread. From this, some people develop a sense of urgency (*saṃvega*), realizing, "There must be some karma behind this." You might have heard that not only in Buddhist countries but even abroad, some think about this and direct their lives onto the right path. The Rockefeller Foundation, a social service

organization, was established because that billionaire became disillusioned. Why was he disillusioned? Because he could not eat anything more than a slice of bread. So he contemplated, "There must be some defect in this." In this way, wise people contemplate that even karmic illnesses might be caused by errors in our giving, and they strive to correct them.

Thus, we all practice giving (*dāna*) according to our capacities. Opportunities for this arise. Sometimes, we have to give something suddenly. That moment is an opportunity to perform an immensely great wholesome deed (*kusala*). If we hesitate and keep thinking about it, the mind weakens, and that wholesome energy is lost. When an opportunity to give arises, stepping forward and saying "I, I" (with a sense of eagerness to give), having the capacity to step forward and give, comes when one has trained the mind for it. We must contemplate the benefits of these actions, as explained by the Buddha. Likewise, we must contemplate what Extinction (Nibbāna means. Extinction means releasing the mind from defilements like craving (*taṇhā*) or greed. That defilement is bound first with our possessions. Going a step further, it is bound with this body of ours. Why did the Buddha, during His time as a Bodhisatta, give away His eyes, head, flesh, and blood? It was with the intention of destroying the attachment to this body through that act.

Thus, giving, starting with such external objects, extends to other things as well. Not only that, giving is also shown as one of the four bases of benevolence (*saṅgaha-vatthu*). The bases of benevolence refer to the services one must render to society as a good citizen. This too is the practice of a worthy person (*sappurisa*). These are: giving (*dāna*), kindly speech, useful conduct, and impartiality. The Buddha has pointed out these four factors as the four bases of benevolence. In short, He gives a simile: just as a linchpin supports the wheel of a moving chariot, these four virtues support the progress of society. What are these virtues? Giving. Next, kindly speech—one must treat others not only with gifts but also with kindly words. Next, useful conduct means helping others for their welfare and progress through one's knowledge, understanding, or Dhamma strength. Impartiality means cultivating the capacity in the mind to share equally without discrimination. Impartiality is the ability to help everyone regardless of high or low class, considering their common humanity, according to the situation. These are shown in the Dhamma as the four bases of benevolence.

Even when we speak of giving (*dāna*), virtue (*sīla*), and mental development (*bhāvanā*), and when we speak of the perfections (*pāramīs*), giving comes first. Similarly, among the four bases of benevolence, giving is prominently listed. Therefore, this generosity, this relinquishment, has been shown by the Buddha as noble wealth (*ariya-dhana*). Through that giving, in relation to the gifts given, it is often the very nature of the given object that is received as its benefit. As an example of this, the Buddha states this regarding the gift of food. Indeed, for beings, what primarily supports the continuation of life is food. The gift of food.

The Buddha says that in a single morsel of food given as a gift, there lies the power to bring five things: long life, beauty, happiness, strength, and wisdom. In this manner, the expected benefits of giving food are shown as: *"āyussa dāyi hoti, vaṇṇassa dāyi..."*—if one has given life to someone, through the gift of food, that person can expect long life in saṃsāra. Similarly, beauty, happiness, strength, and wisdom are contained in that gift of food. That very energy can be obtained as a benefit. In this way, the Buddha has pointed out, in accordance with karma, that the fruits and results correspond to the various gifts one gives. For, in the journey of saṃsāra, what prevents many from progressing is this poverty and destitution.

Therefore, it is not a matter of refraining from giving due to poverty. Rather, it is about enriching the mind to the extent that one can give properly. No matter how much is received, no matter how much wealth is possessed, that is not a limit to whether one can give or not. The story of this stingy merchant is a great lesson in this regard. It was so in the past, and it is so in modern times. Thus, we must understand that it is not the quantity that matters; richness, which is the capacity to give, is something that must be cultivated in the mind. It is through Dhamma understanding, right view, faith, compassion, and such virtues that we obtain this richness. One sees an extremely poor person or someone without food. The heart melts, and compassion arises. It is then that the person realizes, as declared by the Buddha: "This is a morsel of rice I took to put in my mouth. Yet, I can give from this; even this is too much for me," and gives it to that person. Either one gives it completely, or at least a portion, even if one is in great difficulty oneself. Such is the wondrous nature of the mind. Therefore, regarding this giving, we often look only at the external aspect. Sometimes, large almsgivings are given, but the mind is extremely narrow.

Why does it become narrow? Either because pride is generated through it—excessive pride. Some kind of conceit is formed. Or else praise, fame, and so forth are expected. That does not lead to the true benefits declared by the Buddha. The Buddha has shown that the mind maintained at the moment of giving is what supports one as the benefit of giving in saṃsāra. In some places, it is shown in eight ways, and finally, from the deepest aspect, the way the mind should be maintained in giving is shown as follows:

"Cittālaṅkāraṃ cittaparikkhāratthaṃ dānaṃ"—meaning, "May my mind be adorned and equipped through this gift." Adorning the mind here refers to serenity (*samatha*). In that context, the Buddha speaks of the recollection of generosity (*cāgānussati*), stating that a habitually generous person can even develop concentration (*samādhi*) by reflecting on their own volition of relinquishment. If one constantly maintains the thought, "Among people bound by stinginess, I dwell constantly generous," through that, great joy and clarity arise, leading to concentration.

That is how the mind is adorned. To contemplate, "I give this gift to lighten my mind through relinquishment and bring it to concentration," is a deep thought. Similarly, *cittaparikkhāratthaṃ* means that through this gift, the bonds of craving (*taṇhā*) are broken, and for at least a single moment, my mind is freed from greed, hatred, and so forth. Furthermore, if one gives realizing that "all of this is impermanent (*anicca*)," at that moment, one can utilize that giving from an insight perspective (*vipassanā*). All of these, we must understand, are objects for fashioning our own minds. By giving to another, we fashion our own mind. Thus, it does not go to waste.

The maximum benefit we can derive from it is Dhamma realization—contemplating that giving deeply, having a pure understanding of one's ultimate goal, one's intention, and one's aspiration. That is why the Buddha declared: *"Appam pi ce saddhāyeva dadāti, tena eva so hoti parattha..."*—even if one gives a small thing, if given with faith (*saddhā*) in the mind, one's life in the next world becomes happy. There, the mind is primary. Similarly, even if we reflect on society, the environment we live in, the environment of our birth (*jāti*), we must look at this world as a resting hall (*ambalama*). For, as we travel along this long journey of saṃsāra, we received this state of existence (*bhava*) according to our past karma. Due to certain parents, we were born in a certain environment. We must train ourselves to look at those lands, houses, and everything as a resting hall.

Now, the concept of a resting hall (*ambalama*) might also be largely lost, so I have to explain it a bit to you. A resting hall refers to small halls built by people in the past, at various locations, when most people traveled on foot. When they were tired, they would come there to spend the night. Those who gathered at the resting hall, no matter which area they came from, would spend that night sharing what they had, thinking of themselves as a group gathered for a moment, gathered for a single night. It was not a matter of living by deceiving others like the *āṇḍis* (mendicants) in the story of the seven *āṇḍis* drinking porridge. Not like that. It was about sharing one's things in complete keeping with impartiality. That is how we must think of the life we live. When we think of this entire world as a resting hall, the mind urges us to give to those in need according to our capacity. Otherwise, if we harbor pride, thinking "this land is mine, this house is mine, these are mine," and consequently cultivate stinginess over them, then, like that stingy merchant, or even worse, we might be born in animal states of existence (*bhava*) as dogs, cats, or rat-snakes, forced to live around those very houses. Especially, a state of existence as a hungry ghost (*peta-bhava*) is shown as a result of stinginess.

Instead, what we must do is cultivate that kind of attitude. When we contemplate society, that is an extremely valuable thing. What I have received is something very valuable. This is a state received due to wholesome karma performed in the past. Thus, every time we utilize these, that wholesome karma is worn away. Instead of this wearing-away karma, we must build up further wholesome karma, using this very wealth, these possessions, and these lands. Thinking thus, we must develop the capacity to help the poor, travelers, beggars, and all needy people according to the

situation. If we begin to hide everything under the pretext of economic pressure or poverty, then our cultivation of virtue, our cultivation of qualities, comes to a standstill. Through that, as a result, one falls into an even more dangerous abyss. It does not even have to wait for the next world. Even in this world, for one who generally helps others, at an unexpected moment when they themselves are in difficulty, someone will come and help them naturally. There is such a natural law. Such incidents do occur in society. Whether it happens in this life or not, the Buddha has declared that their results exist as benefits in the future as well. We must cultivate faith (*saddhā*) in that word of the Buddha.

Next, when we contemplate from a social perspective, there is another deeply profound aspect within this verse. *"Attā hi attano natthi"*—which is the third line spoken by the Buddha here. First, He says the fool torments himself thinking, "I have sons, I have wealth." "Torments himself" means he is subjected to a mountain of suffering (*dukkha*) for the sake of his children and wealth. Although he thinks of it as pleasure, a mountain of suffering (*dukkha*) is involved in protecting and acquiring wealth. But due to pride—the pride of thinking "wealth is mine"—that is somewhat forgotten. Thus, although the fool holds onto these, the Buddha declares: *"Attā hi attano natthi"*—"even oneself does not belong to oneself" (or "oneself is non-self", *anattā*). A profound point is being made here: "oneself does not belong to oneself." You all must have heard that the Dhamma declared by our Buddha is a teaching of non-self (*anattā*). Here too, the statement "even oneself does not belong to oneself" is like shattering the very foundation of craving (*taṇhā*).

Craving (*taṇhā*), as we said before, is like an ocean that cannot be filled. In other words, calling something "mine, mine" is like dealing with something bottomless. But the Buddha points out here that the ordinary person sees "I" as the bottom. "I" and "mine"—these two words go together. When asked "Who am I?", how do I identify myself? Through "my" things. Through my lands, my children, my titles, my knowledge and education—it is through these that I identify myself. Or else, through my body. In short, the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*). The Buddha has shown that it is in association with the five—form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), Preparations (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*)—that one considers oneself as "I." But the Buddha points out that these very things, the things taken as "mine," do not belong to oneself. How do they not belong to oneself? From here, we go straight to the teaching of non-self (*anattā*) declared by the Buddha.

The Buddha first preached the characteristic of non-self (*anattā*), the nature of non-self, to the world in His sermon to the group of five monks (*pañcavaggiya*). On that occasion, He demonstrated in a very simple manner why these five aggregates of form, feeling, etc., do not belong to oneself. The Buddha declared to those five monks: "Monks, first of all, form is non-self (*anattā*). If form were self (*attā*), form would not lead to affliction and trouble. It would be possible to keep it under one's control." If it causes trouble, it cannot be one's own. Therefore, the Buddha first says: "Form is non-self (*anattā*). If form were self (*attā*), one should be able to keep it

under one's control. Likewise, one should be able to command form: 'Let my form be thus, let it not be otherwise.' But monks, we cannot control form as we wish. It gets sick, it grows old, it dies, it is destroyed. Therefore, form is not mine." In that way, the Buddha declared to those five monks. Of the five heaps we are grasping, the heap of form is not mine. Why? Because it cannot be kept under my control. From this, we see that the word "self" (*attā*) implies that which can be kept under one's own control.

Although that merchant considered his son as "my son," when he came to his house after falling into that outcaste state, what was the reception he received? He was dragged and thrown onto a rubbish heap. Even his son could not recognize him. Thus, his son was no more. What happened to his wealth? His wealth was lost after death. Even while alive, he could not properly manage his wealth or derive any use from it. Through this, we can see that although the Buddha applied the term "self" (*attā*) to that story, we must consider it deeply. Considering it deeply means that the statement "even oneself does not belong to oneself" is indeed like shattering the bottom of craving (*taṇhā*). In this notion of "I" and "mine," there is no core, no essence, no permanent foundation, no permanent nature in the things taken as "I."

Next, the Buddha asks those five monks: "Monks, is form permanent (*nicca*) or impermanent (*anicca*)?" At once they reply: "Impermanent, venerable sir." "If something is impermanent, is it happiness or suffering (*dukkha*)?" They have to answer: "Suffering, venerable sir." Why do they say so? If it is impermanent, one has to keep maintaining it, repairing it over and over. That is great suffering. That is a great trouble. Thus is this body as well. They say directly: "It is suffering." Next, the Buddha asks: "Monks, if something is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change, is it fit to regard it as: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self'?" Then they have to answer: "No, venerable sir." In this way, with a few simple questions, the Buddha convinced the five monks regarding form, feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), Preparations (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*).

Regarding this five aggregates, taking them as "I" and "mine," the Buddha has declared in this Dhamma that they are not some permanent thing or self residing inside our body, as taught in some other religions. Instead, what we can directly realize is that we have a physical form-part (*rūpa*) made up of earth (*paṭhavī*), water (*āpo*), fire (*tejo*), and air (*vāyo*). Next, based on this form-part, we have various feelings (*vedanā*)—a multitude of sensations. A multitude of feelings, a heap of feelings, classified as pleasant, painful, or neutral (neither-painful-nor-pleasant). Each of these is a heap. The five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*) means five heaps. Each of these is a heap. It is not just one heap made by combining these five; each one of them is a heap. A heap of form (*rūpa*), a heap of feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*) meaning a heap of recognitions. Next, Preparations (*saṅkhāra*) meaning a heap of fabrications, volitions, aspirations, and preparations made inside the mind. How many palaces do we build in the mind before building a single house? You all know this. We build many castles in the air during sleepless nights before finally

constructing a house. We do a task by accumulating such a vast number of thoughts and expectations. It is a heap of Preparations (*saṅkhāra*). That is why it is compared to a banana trunk. There is no heartwood inside. It is just a heap of sheaths. When you peel the sheaths away, there is nothing substantial to be found inside. Yet, it looks massive. Such is the heap of Preparations (*saṅkhāra*).

Next, consciousness (*viññāṇa*) refers to the mind, thoughts. It is not something you can grasp with your hands. Yet, it is directly experienced by everyone that this stream of thoughts flows rapidly. Because we do not clearly see the nature of arising and passing away in that continuity, in that stream, we say "my mind." The mind that exists now changes in the next moment. Such is the situation. The Buddha shows that it is these five heaps that a person takes as "I" and "mine."

If you contemplate each of these a bit more deeply, you will find that in Suttas like the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, they discuss this body. The thirty-two impure parts of the body. Laywomen and others often hear and utilize this for meditation. Even these thirty-two impure parts have been shown by the Buddha through a wonderful simile, in a way that reveals their impermanent (*anicca*) nature, their nature of arising and passing away. The Buddha instructs us to contemplate these thirty-two parts of the body as if looking at a bag open at both ends, filled with various kinds of grain like paddy, mung beans, etc. Laywomen and others meditate saying, *"Atthi imasmiṃ kāye..."*—within this body, there are these: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, etc., all of them. At that moment, we must realize that although we separate them to count them as if taking them out of a bag, they are like being placed into a bag open at the other end. Why did He use such a simile? Everything within this body has the nature of arising and passing away. The breath we take, the food and drink we consume. Nay, even the things we think of as hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, etc., gradually arise and pass away. The nature in all of this is that it is received from one side and departs from the other. That is what happens. Arising and passing away. It is within this that impermanence (*aniccatā*) lies. Therefore, when the Buddha declared that everything is impermanent (*anicca*), He was referring to that very nature of the world. Arising and passing away. Filling and emptying. We must contemplate wealth in the exact same manner.

Now, if we return to the story, that miser failed to realize that this wealth, these possessions, are also meant to be spent. He only thought of the income side, not the expenditure side. If both income and expenditure are not balanced, if one does not think of both, it is like being unable to digest the food and drink one has consumed, eventually falling into a dangerous disease. For, everything that is put inside must also go out. It must be expelled. Holding onto it is like accumulating crores of wealth without enjoying it or giving it to anyone; that is how the rust forms. It is exactly like that.

Therefore, we must apply the very same natural law found in this body to society. We must look at the entire world through those eyes. That world-nature is twofold:

arising and passing away. Income and expenditure. Filling and emptying. When the mind is directed to this natural law, there is nothing to grasp here. From everything, we extract the utility needed for the moment, and then we dismiss it from the mind. One's lands, houses, children—all of them. If we make them a burden to the mind, if we grasp and cling to them, then in the next birth (*jāti*) we will be born as hungry ghosts (*peta*) or in animal states of existence around those houses. Instead, we must train the mind during this state of existence received in this world-resting-hall. Those nearby are our closest relatives, then neighbors, then friends and companions, then ascetics and brahmins. In this way, the Buddha has shown them as segments of society, and everyone belongs to that entire resting hall. We must cultivate an attitude of sharing not only our wealth, but also our labor and whatever we can give to the world in this world-resting-hall according to the situation. That is how one purifies the volition of giving. One must prepare the mind for this well in advance.

The very breath we inhale in this life is what others inhale as well. We cannot separate it as "ours." It is the same with other things. Furthermore, for a single grain of rice we consume as food, how many people have shed tears of blood? We think, "We bought this from the shop with our money." If we contemplate society, you can understand this very easily. When we contemplate how many people shed their sweat and blood for the consumer goods we utilize, we cannot reduce it to rupees and cents. We must think, "A vast number of people made a great sacrifice, labor, and surrender, and as a result of that, we are eating this mouthful of rice." If we can contemplate all our resources in this way, that wise person can cultivate those bases of benevolence (*saṅgaha-vatthu*) toward society and the world: giving (*dāna*), kindly speech, useful conduct, and impartiality. Because of a philosophy of life developed through that deep vision, the devotees who lived in this country in the past led such peaceful lives. Not like today, where people think excessively about the economy, making grand plans and living highly stressed lives. Every plan is subject to impermanence (*aniccatā*).

Therefore, we must contemplate according to the plan shown by the Buddha for our long journey in saṃsāra. What is that plan? Our volition (*cetanā*) must be pure. When volition is impure, a physical body corresponding to that volition, to that mold, is created. The four elements of earth, water, fire, and air are innocent. These four elements combine in accordance with one's thought. It is according to that thought that creations occur. When we speak of creating something, we only think of things created in the scientific age. But something far more subtle occurs. In our mind, in our consciousness (*viññāṇa*), in that mental energy, there is a great wonder. Through that mental energy, the Buddha has shown that as long as the defilements of ignorance and craving (*taṇhā*) exist, one wanders in the world of existence (*bhava*). No matter how much we think, "May existence (*bhava*) end here, this is enough for me, I do not want to be born again," though some say this when facing difficulties, when good times return, they wish to continue in existence (*bhava*). However, merely wishing does not end existence (*bhava*). If it were so, a Buddha would not be needed. Instead, we must systematically train our minds to correspond to that state.

How do we train the mind? We must strive to gradually suppress those defilements of greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*). It is a long journey from greed (*lobha*) to non-greed (*alobha*). It is a long journey from hatred (*dosa*) to non-hatred (*adosa*), which is a state free of hatred. It is a long journey from delusion (*moha*)—meaning foolishness—to wisdom (*paññā*). But even the longest journey starts with a single step, with what is close at hand.

Therefore, even if what is given is a small thing, at that moment, one detaches one's mind from greed. This is called abandonment by substitution of opposites (*tadaṅga-vasena*). It is by removing greed temporarily that one gives a gift. Temporarily removing the attachment and clinging to it, one gives, thinking, "May this be a help, a comfort, may it extinguish the fire of hunger." At that moment, for a brief second, like a flash of lightning, the mind catches a glimpse of the peace of Extinction (The Mind Stilled / Extinguishiment). A peace of Extinction. It is freed from greed, freed from hatred, freed from delusion, and from the feeling of "I" and "mine." It is by developing this systematically that a Bodhisatta practices it at the highest level. In short, in everything that started with the perfection of giving (*dāna-pāramitā*), what is present is the giving and sacrifice performed by the Buddha for the sake of the world. Otherwise, He could have realized Extinction much earlier. Within that multitude of perfections (*pāramīs*), there is only relinquishment and sacrifice. He relinquished His energy, wisdom, mental power, wealth, body, eyes, head, flesh, and blood. When we contemplate in this way, we can extract a deep vision from this. Here, giving means departing from greed.

To put it another way, in the concept of "I" and "mine," if we take "I," it is ignorance (*avijjā*). "Mine" is craving (*taṇhā*). These two create the entire saṃsāra. As long as these exist, no matter how much we think, a next state of existence (*bhava*) is created. Why? Because due to ignorance, a force of Preparations (*saṅkhāra-vega*) or a mental impulse is generated, which creates a physical body using the elements of the universe accordingly.

Now, it was that highly deformed human-ghost (*peta*) appearance that was granted to merchant Ānanda due to his distorted mind. Because he died with a distorted mental state, he received a distorted body with corresponding deformities. Therefore, we must strive to maintain our minds in accordance with the Dhamma so that they do not become distorted. For, we do not know at what moment death will come. When discussing a next state of existence (*bhava*), the near-death thought (*āsanna-citta*) is often mentioned. If the mind is in a bad state at the moment of death, one might go straight to a bad destination. That is why, at the moment of death, people invite monks to preach the Dhamma, and perform various other actions to prepare the dying person's mind. Thus, instead of waiting only for that moment, and instead of making one's children struggle to do it then, if one can live with the awareness that death can come at any moment, as if maintaining a constant near-death mind, that person is the one who progresses. No matter when death comes, that near-death

mind remains pure. Strive to prepare your mind in that manner. That is the flavor of the Dhamma we can absorb from this story and verse.

The Buddha declared that passage precisely to strike a blow against craving (*taṇhā*) and ignorance (*avijjā*): *"Attā hi attano natthi, kuto puttā kuto dhanaṃ"*—even oneself does not belong to oneself. When oneself does not belong to oneself, whence sons for oneself? Whence wealth? Thus, we must contemplate this deeply. At first glance, it might not strike the mind as to what meaning the Buddha declared this. Everything claimed as "mine"—not only this body but everything considered as one's own possession—undergoes a multitude of arisings and passings away. They undergo this constantly, not only when we notice it. We say someone has changed, or something is lost, or has decayed. This is not something that happens in a single moment. Before we see it, it occurs extremely rapidly and instantly. It is to the extent that we see this process that we directly realize it. Direct realization of the three characteristics of impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*) is what is called attaining supramundane states. That is why you all practice meditation. It is not visible to the ordinary physical eye. There is an aspect visible to the ordinary physical eye—we can understand the fate of food and drink, and the fate of inhalation and exhalation in a general way. But beyond that, one cannot see the nature of extremely rapid change in everything, including this body. However, to a mind developed through meditation, this becomes visible. Nay, it is visible even to the eye when the mind is stilled. It is when one has gradually developed in this manner that insight wisdom (*vipassanā-paññā*) matures to the point of liberating oneself from saṃsāra.

The Buddha points out that as long as craving (*taṇhā*) for existence (*bhava*), desire for existence (*bhava*) remains, no matter how much we think, we cannot escape from existence (*bhava*). The desire for this must be destroyed, in the proper way, and it must be directly seen as declared by the Buddha. It is by directly seeing: "This form is impermanent (*anicca*), changing moment by moment. Feeling (*vedanā*) changes. Perception (*saññā*) is the same, Preparations (*saṅkhāra*) are the same, the mind is the same," that one can escape from this existence (*bhava*). It is by extinguishing the continuation called the cessation of existence (*bhava-nirodha*), escaping from continuation and arriving at the stilled state called Extinction (Nibbāna which the Buddha points out. No matter what is said in other religions, as Buddhists we contemplate with regard to craving for existence (*bhava-taṇhā*) that this saṃsāra is suffering (*dukkha*). This liberation is the true happiness. The Buddha has shown that escaping from this state does not happen only when going from this world to the next, but can be directly realized in this very life.

Liberation from craving (*taṇhā*) and ignorance (*avijjā*) can only be achieved by a pure, luminous mind. Not by a defiled mind of that sort, not by a rusted mind. Rust is the simile for that. Rust refers to something inactive. Rust is something that lacks luster and light. Therefore, the entire effort within this Sasana is to free the mind from the rust of greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*). When the mind

is freed from those rusts, there exists a luminous, bright, or radiant mind; it is within that mind that all peace resides. That is what is called Extinction (Nibbāna. He who has attained that mental state, which can be directly realized in this very life, is the one who does not claim a further rebirth (*jāti*). Why? Because he has removed all those attachments and bonds. Instead, he has obtained the highest peace of calming, called the calming of all Preparations (*sabbasaṅkhārasamatha*). It is through this that the entire journey of saṃsāra can be ended. Having fulfilled the perfections (*pāramīs*) to such an extent, giving away His eyes, head, flesh, and blood, the Buddha revealed to the world this very vision of non-self (*anattā*). Therefore, through this sermon of ours, which began with stinginess, we must also strive to remove our stinginess toward saṃsāra. As long as this stinginess exists, we wander in this long saṃsāra, suffering without end. Just as you have undertaken the precepts today, you must be mindful of virtue (*sīla*). Established in virtue (*sīla*), and then developing concentration (*samādhi*) through meditation, and bringing forth that insight wisdom (*vipassanā-paññā*), one can end this suffering of saṃsāra through the realization of the paths and fruits of Stream-entry, Once-returning, Non-returning, and Arahantship, and find peace in the noble, deathless Extinction.

Thus, for about an hour today, this pious gathering listened to a valuable verse of the Buddha and the story associated with it. Through this, you can extract certain things that support your lives and the path to Extinction (Nibbāna. Not only that, I believe you were able to extract certain principles applicable to the life you lead in this worldly society. Through listening to the Dhamma for this duration, we have deposited those virtues of faith (*saddhā*), energy (*viriya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*) within our minds. You should rejoice that through this, you have been able to develop those virtues supporting Extinction, which can arise as spiritual powers (*bala*) at some point.

This is the first, valuable Full Moon Poya day of this year. Certain life principles or determinations made on this day affect the entire year. Therefore, if any deep understandings have arisen through this Dhamma sermon, if any novel and valuable feelings regarding life have arisen, keep them as your principles and lead your life forward accordingly. Amidst a world heading on the path of decline, may you live in accordance with the Dhamma, with Dhamma comfort, setting an example, living as spiritual friends (*kalyāṇa-mitta*) to the world. Make an aspiration: "May these merits and the benefits of listening to the Dhamma support me to find peace in the noble, deathless Extinction through the realization of the paths and fruits as quickly as possible." Likewise, may the protector deities and Brahmas, and all beings from the Avici hell to the Akanittha heaven who are able to share in these merits, rejoice in this store of merits we have accumulated through this Dhamma preaching and Dhamma listening. Having rejoiced, may they all be liberated from all suffering of saṃsāra as quickly as possible, freed from birth (*jāti*), decay (*jarā*), sickness, and death (*maraṇa*), and find peace in the noble, deathless Extinction. Share the merits by reciting the verses in this manner:

“*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……*”