Pahankanuwa Sermon #114

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

Author: Ven. Katukurunde Nanananda Thero

(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.167)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

Pali Stanza:

So bodhisatto ratanavaro atulyo,

manussaloke hitasukhāya jāto,

sakyānaṃ gāme janapade lumbineyyeyya,

tenamha tuṭṭhā atiriva kalyarūpā;

so sabbasattuttamo aggapuggalo,

narāsabho sabbapajānamuttamo,

vattessati cakkaṃ isivhaye vane,

nadaṃva sīho balavā migābhibhū ti.

From:

Nālaka Sutta (Sn 683–684) Sutta Nipāta, Khuddaka Nikāya.

Dear Listeners,

Today, this Vesak Full Moon Poya Day, is known as a thrice-blessed day. We believe that during the three events of birth (*jāti*), supreme enlightenment (*Sambodhi*), and final passing away (*Parinibbāna*) of the Lord Buddha, the Sakya Sage, the teacher of the three worlds, certain miraculous and wonderful events occurred. To indicate that even the birth of that Bodhisatta destined for Buddhahood in this human world was such an auspicious event that the deities in heaven held festivals, we have chosen two verses from the Nālaka Sutta of the Sutta Nipāta as our theme today.

You, noble devotees, have heard that the father of Prince Siddhartha was King Suddhodana. The royal priest (*purohita*) of King Sihahanu, the father of King Suddhodana, was a Brahmin named Asita. Prince Suddhodana also studied arts and

sciences under this Brahmin Asita during his youth. Later, after ascending to the throne, Asita continued to serve as the royal priest of King Suddhodana. At some point, this Brahmin Asita felt inclined to renounce the lay life and become an ascetic. When he informed the King of this, the King, unable to prevent it, requested, "If so, please ordain as an ascetic and reside in my royal garden so that I may see you frequently." Ascetic Asita agreed to this, became an ascetic, and resided in the King's garden, practicing *kasiṇa* meditation and other contemplations. He would accept his alms from the royal palace. By practicing *kasiṇa* meditation while residing in that very garden, he attained the eight meditative attainments (*aṭṭha-samāpatti*) and the five higher knowledges (*pañcābhiññā*). Having attained these, Ascetic Asita would occasionally go to the Himalayas to remain in concentration (*samādhi*). At other times, he would spend his time in meditation within the celestial mansions of the heavens, such as the *Cātumahārājika* (Four Great Kings) and *Tāvatiṃsa* (Thirty-Three). On one occasion—what is called the "daytime dwelling" (*divāvihāra*), which means sitting in meditation during the afternoon after accepting alms—while he was in the *Tāvatiṃsa* heaven for his daytime dwelling, upon arising from his concentration and looking outside, he saw Sakka and the host of deities celebrating a festival in an extraordinary state of joy, waving their garments, shouting with joy, singing, playing instruments, dancing, and clapping their hands.

Then, Ascetic Asita asked the host of deities, "Why are you celebrating this festival with such intense joy and jubilation, even exceeding that of the occasion of victory in the war between the Devas and Asuras? Please tell me the reason for this." On being thus invited, the explanation given by the deities is what is expressed in the two thematic verses of the Sutta mentioned above:

"So bodhisatto ratanavaro atulyo,

manussaloke hitasukhāya jāto,

sakyānaṃ gāme janapade lumbineyyeyya,

tenamha tuṭṭhā atiriva kalyarūpā..."

"That incomparable Bodhisatta, like a peerless jewel, is born in the village of Lumbini, in the territory of the Sakyas, for the welfare and happiness of the human world. That is why we are filled with such joy and delight."

"So sabbasattuttamo aggapuggalo

narāsabho sabbapajānamuttamo

vattessati cakkaṃ isivhaye

vane nadaṃva sīho balavā migābhibhū"

"That Bodhisatta, supreme among all beings, the chief individual, the bull among men, the foremost of all people, will roll the Wheel of Dhamma in that forest named

after the sages (meaning Isipatana), just like a powerful lion roaring, having conquered the wild beasts." As soon as the deities answered in this manner, Ascetic Asita descended from the celestial world, went to the palace of King Suddhodana, and said to the King, "I too need to see the newborn prince." Thereupon, the King and his entourage brought the Bodhisatta to be shown to the ascetic.

As mentioned in the Sutta, when the prince was being brought in, it is said that the deities held a white parasol over him and fanned him with whisks. However, those holding them were not visible. A white parasol was held, and whisks were waving. It is said that such miraculous things happened at that time. Having witnessed these, Ascetic Asita was filled with great joy and took the prince into his hands. Since he was well-versed in the Vedic mantras and bodily characteristics, he examined him and declared that this prince would become the supreme one among human beings. Having made this prophecy, and because he possessed foresight, he realized that he would not be alive when this Bodhisatta attained Buddhahood and preached the Dhamma; his life would end before that. Reflecting on this, he became sorrowful and began to shed tears.

Then the King and his entourage asked if there was any danger to the prince. Ascetic Asita replied that there was no such danger, but rather that this was an extraordinary person, and told them to be gladdened at heart. "But there is this one thing: my life will not last much longer. Therefore, I became sorrowful. I will not get to hear the Bodhisatta when he preaches the Wheel of Dhamma; that is why I am sad." Having comforted the King and his entourage, Ascetic Asita went and related this matter to his sister's son, a youth named Nālaka, and made him promise: "If at any time the sound of the Dhamma spreads that a Buddha has appeared in the world, seek him out at that moment, request his teaching, and practice the holy life (*brahmacariya*) in his dispensation." Accordingly, that youth Nālaka, looking forward to that future event, lived the life of an ascetic, focusing on the restraint of the senses and other practices.

At a certain point, after the resonance created by the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* spread among deities and humans, having heard it—and as mentioned in the texts, a week after the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* was preached—Ascetic Nālaka went to see the Buddha and declared, "O Gotama, I have heard of you from Ascetic Asita. Please explain to me the proper practice of a sage (*muni*) who is dedicated to this homeless life and subsists on alms (this is known as the *moneyya-paṭipadā*)." Thereupon, the Buddha advised him, saying, "Very well, I shall explain it to you. That *moneyya-paṭipadā* is an extremely difficult, unsurpassable practice. Listen to it and make your mind firm." The Buddha then began to give basic instructions relevant to the life-conduct of a sage who dwells in solitude and subsists on alms.

"O Sage, after entering the village, receive both the abuse and insults as well as the homage you receive from the village with an equal mind. Do not let your mind be defiled by them. Furthermore, conduct yourself peacefully, in a tranquil manner. Be

humble. Next, regarding the impediments and distresses that can come to the life of a sage from society, the Buddha declared that just as during a forest fire flames approach from above and below, women will try to seduce the sage; do not be caught by them. Escape from them. Discard the wishes, greed, and other defilements that ordinary worldlings are attached to, and conduct yourself by stepping away from sensual pleasures and the fivefold sensual chords. Next, he speaks of matters specifically related to the practice of collecting alms-food (*piṇḍapāta*)."

"Ūnodaro mitāhāro appicchassa alolupo" - *Ūnodaro* means, as we understand the meaning of that word which is later mentioned in the Buddha's discourses, to consume food leaving space in the stomach for about four or five mouthfuls of rice. Next, *mitāhāro* means knowing the proper measure, eating with moderation; eating with the aforementioned sense of proportion. Next, *alolupo* means not being greedy; receiving alms-food without being greedy for food. After that, taking the alms-food so obtained, entering the forest, eating that food at the foot of a tree, and spending the time in the bliss of absorption (*jhāna*) by engaging in meditation and *jhāna*. Next, in that very Sutta, many more details regarding the alms-round conduct (*piṇḍa-cariyā*) to be observed by a sage are further explained.

After entering the village, do not behave in an unrestrained manner among the houses. Also, do not drop hints or indicate regarding food or alms, saying "I need such-and-such things." When carrying the bowl, to anyone who sees him, he should be *amūgo mūgasammato*—which means "though not mute, behaving like one who is mute." Next, it is said that when some food is received, he should not feel disgust toward it. Likewise, he should not disparage or look down upon the person who gives only a little. Next, a beautiful idea is presented in a verse:

"Yadidaṃ sādhu nālañcuṃ, kusalaṃ iti ubhayeneve so tādī... rukkhaṃva upanivattati"

If something is received on the alms-round, it is well. If nothing is received, that too is well. *Ubhayeneva so tādī*—with both, he remains "tādī" (such). There is a special word *tādī* which carries a profound meaning in the Dhamma. It means that under both conditions, in whatever manner, it is just the same; both are accepted in the same way. This word *tādī* denotes the quality of equanimity (*upekkhā*). Thus, whether alms-food is received or not, preserve that quality of being *tādī*. Remain in such a state. Next, a simile is given: *rukkhaṃva upanivattati*. The meaning of this is that someone goes to a tree hoping for fruit. Even though he went with expectation, there is no fruit on the tree. Yet, he does not scold, blame, or curse the tree; he simply returns.

Walk in that manner. When going on the alms-round, do not go with the thought, "I must receive, they must give." Whether received or not, it is the same. Behave on the alms-round with that attitude. In this manner, the details regarding the alms-round conduct are presented.

Furthermore, a special saying is mentioned regarding eating, which is also relevant to the *moneyya-paṭipadā*: *khuradhārūpamo bhava* (be like the edge of a razor). This too is a profound simile given by the Buddha. Perhaps you, noble devotees, have heard it. This is a simile given by the Buddha to free oneself from *Taṇhā* (Craving) for food while eating, and to prevent giving room to that *taṇhā*. The Buddha has given highly profound similes on various occasions. Keep this in mind. For this phrase *khuradhārūpamo bhava*, the Buddha has illustrated on some occasions: *lippataṃ*—that is, when honey is smeared on a razor's edge, how carefully must the person who wants to taste the honey lick the blade without cutting his tongue? In that manner, *khuradhārūpamo bhava* means, according to the simile of the razor's edge, to consume food having freed oneself from the aforementioned craving for taste (*rasa-taṇhā*) and other defilements.

Likewise, it is declared, *ekattaṃ moneyyaṃ* (solitude is sagacity). Those who search for the etymology of the word *muni* (sage) point out that if we consider it according to the concept of *muni* used since ancient times, one aspect is oneness, solitude. The other is silence. That is why it is said, *ekattaṃ monamakkhātaṃ* (solitude is declared as sagacity). There are two meanings for this word *mona* or *mauna*. Generally, *mauna* refers to silence. Along with that, there is another meaning: wisdom, understanding. It is not that just by being silent one possesses wisdom. However, according to that vow of a sage (*muni-vata*), there is no unnecessary talk or loquaciousness. That is why it is called *ekattaṃ*. Thus, one aspect is solitude, and the other is speaking little.

Next, toward the end of this Sutta, the Buddha presents extraordinary similes to Ascetic Nālaka. Learn a lesson from the rivers. Also, learn something from small water channels like waterfalls and streams. What is it? *Saṇantā yanti kussobbhā, tuṇhī yāti mahodadhi*. That is, small waterfalls, streams, etc., flow making noise. But large rivers/oceans flow silently. That is the idea. Next, it is further said: *yadūnakaṃ taṃ saṇati*—where there is a deficiency, there is more noise. Empty vessels make the most noise. *Yaṃ pūraṃ santameva taṃ*—whatever is full is indeed tranquil. Next, the simile you, noble devotees, have also heard, "Water shakes in a half-filled pot, but a full pot remains still." There is another saying that goes closely with this:

"Aḍḍhakumbhūpamo bālo, rahado pūro va paṇḍito."

The fool (*bāla*) is noisy like a half-filled jar. The wise person (*paṇḍita*) is silent like a full pool. In this manner, using similes, the Buddha says: therefore, do not be talkative. Speak only what is relevant to the Dhamma, in accordance with the Dhamma. On certain occasions, even if you have understood or received, remain silent. In this way, true silence—meaning solitude for external seclusion, as well as that silence of being free from thoughts (*vitakka*) for internal seclusion—is shown. It is evident from this that the Buddha added more qualities to the ancient concept of the *muni*, presenting the value and the ideal of a sage through the Nālaka Sutta.

Also, an extremely valuable discourse related to this concept of the *muni* is mentioned in that very book, the Sutta Nipāta, under the name "Muni Sutta." That Muni Sutta is a discourse of about fifteen verses. However, unfortunately, we have to say that the commentators (*aṭṭhakathācariya*), by dividing this Muni Sutta and attempting to provide separate background stories (*nidāna-kathā*) for various groups of verses, seem to have obscured the depth of this discourse. It is a set of extremely valuable verses. They are a series of verses flowing in connection with one another. Moreover, in nine of those verses, a refrain (*dhruva-pada*)—what is called the repetitive phrase at the end of certain verses—has been given as the refrain of the verses.

"Taṃ vāpi dhīrā muniṃ vedayanti"—the wise, the intelligent, declare such a person to be a sage. The fact that there are nine verses ending in this manner shows us that this is a highly systematic, flowing series of verses. Indeed, the very way those verses begin is amazing. It starts with an unusual verse:

> *"Santhavāto bhayaṃ jātaṃ, niketā jāyate rajo;*
>
> *aniketamasanthavaṃ, etaṃ ve munidassanaṃ."*

"Santhavāto bhayaṃ jātaṃ" - *Santhava* means associating with relatives, friends, and so forth. Thus, taking this as a word of the Buddha, *santhavāto bhayaṃ jātaṃ* means that from such associations, fear and danger arise.

"Niketā jāyate rajo" - *Niketa* means home. From homes, the dust of defilements arises. Thus, through association, various dangers, fears, and obstacles arise. From homes, the dust of defilements is born.

"Aniketamasanthavaṃ, etaṃ ve munidassanaṃ" - That means the opposite of it. *Aniketa* means being homeless; it indicates the state of homelessness (*anagārika*). *Asanthava* means the reduction or absence of those kinds of connections and associations; that indeed is the vision of a sage. Thus, it is said of the sage that those associations are an obstacle to spiritual progress. In the same way, next in that Muni Sutta, that ancient concept of the *muni* is explained by connecting it specifically to the life of an Arahant, so that the ideal of Arahantship is fully completed.

From there onwards, there are many verses. Let us state only their general meaning. If we go to analyze each one, it will take us in a completely different direction. The point mentioned there is: if we have obtained this birth (*jāti*) due to some cause, that cause must be eliminated. It must be uprooted. Also, do not accumulate actions (*kamma*) that cause further becoming (*bhava*). That is the general idea. Eradicate *Taṇhā* (Craving) which causes the accumulation of action; this is referred to as the moisture of craving (*taṇhā-sineha*). In one verse, it says: *yo jātamucchajja na ropeyya*—one who, having uprooted what has arisen, does not replant it, nor does he water things that are growing. Here, "water" refers to the moisture of *taṇhā*. If we consider the thoughts and Preparations (*saṅkhāra*) arising in the mind, even an

Arahant has these Preparations. But they do not add *taṇhā* to them. If they add it, it is like adding moisture to them. The end of this is the destruction of birth (*jāti*), bringing the end of birth to realization in this very life. This discussion is about Arahantship. From there onwards, that Sutta continuously speaks of the pure mind freed from attraction, repulsion, lust, and anger. Arahants are such in every way—*taṃ vāpi dhīrā muniṃ vedayanti*—they have demonstrated the state of being unshaken by the eight worldly conditions (*aṭṭha-lokadhamma*). At bathing ghats in India, there is a pillar; it does not matter who comes and rubs their back against it. Like that pillar at the bathing ghat, the capacity to bear various insults and abuses is expressed through various such similes regarding the sage who proceeds toward Arahantship.

Next, some highly striking similes are given, which some of you might have heard. They present the vision of an Arahant who is unshaken by the eight worldly conditions and has reached perfect purity: *ekaṃ carantaṃ munimappamattaṃ, nindūpasaṃsāsu aveghamānaṃ* (the sage walking alone, diligent, unshaken by blame and praise). Next, the simile of the lion is presented: like a lion unstartled by noises; *vātaṃ va jālamhi asajjamānaṃ*—like the wind not caught in a net; like a lotus unsmeared by mud. These similes are presented to show the unshakable nature, the non-attachment, the dispassion, and the purity of the Arahants. In this manner, throughout this Sutta, the similes given by the Buddha regarding the concept of the *muni* are presented, culminating finally in Arahantship.

Thus, in the Nālaka Sutta, we showed the general practice to be observed by a monk living alone in the forest and subsisting on alms. In the Muni Sutta, through those similes, it directly indicates the person who has developed the mind up to Arahantship. In this way, the Buddha declared the depth of this concept of the *muni*. From this, what we have to reflect upon is: if this is an era in which we think about the values of this Sasana, we must consider that the Buddha praised so highly the monk who has stepped away from the crowd and its currents, dedicating himself in solitude to spiritual progress, because even bringing to mind the ancient concept of the *muni* helps to strengthen one's own path of practice. For if one travels the path of the world for spiritual progress, one will not be able to go very far. That is what is shown through the ancient concept of the *muni*.

Dwelling in solitude and living in the forest as a solitary dweller refers to seclusion (*viveka*). The Buddha pointed out the benefits of that seclusion on many occasions. Usually, when we think of a Buddha, we think of someone who has finished all work and does not need anything new. Yet, even in the life of the Buddha, as you noble devotees might have heard, at the beginning of the rains retreat (*vassa*), he would suddenly tell the Sangha: "Monks, I am going into retreat for three months, to dwell in solitude in the forest. No one should come to see me, except the monk who brings my alms-food." It is amazing to imagine a Buddha making such a statement; according to our concept, a Buddha is always surrounded by a large crowd. However, the Buddha himself sometimes said: "Being surrounded by kings, royal ministers,

non-Buddhist ascetics, and lay devotees is a great hassle to me." It is called a hassle for this reason: there is no opportunity to enter into that noble dwelling in ease in this very life (*diṭṭhadhamma-sukha-vihāra*), which is the concentration of the fruit of Arahantship (*arahatta-phala-samādhi*). Therefore, for dwelling in ease in this very life, and for mindfulness and clear comprehension (*sati-sampajañña*), even the Buddha went into solitary retreat from time to time. Another reason is given for this: *pacchimaṃ janataṃ anukampamāno*—out of compassion for future generations, as an example for future generations, even the Buddha went to reside alone in the forest. Through this, the value of residing in a forest hermitage, living in the forest, was demonstrated.

Likewise, another valuable event is mentioned among the Dhamma Sutta discourses. On one occasion, while wandering on tour with a large community of monks, the Buddha arrived at the Brahmin village of Icchānaṅgala in the Kosala country. Having traveled to that area, he stayed in the Icchānaṅgala forest grove (*vana-saṇḍa*). A forest grove means a dense patch of forest. He stayed to reside in that forest grove with a large community of monks. Then, having heard the widespread fame of the Buddha's arrival—you have heard how the formulation of his nine virtues starting with *"Itipi so bhagavā..."* had spread across India at that time:

Having heard that rumor, those Brahmin householders prepared food throughout the night and, the next morning, brought the alms-food to the Icchānaṅgala forest grove where the Buddha and the community of monks were residing. Having arrived, near the entrance where the Buddha was staying, by the gateway, this group of Brahmins began to make a huge noise and clamor. It might have been their custom. They were shouting in loud voices. As mentioned there, the Buddha's attendant at that time was the monk named Nāgita. You might have heard that before Ven. Ānanda, there were several monks who attended on the Buddha. At that time, this monk named Nāgita was serving as the Buddha’s attendant.

The Buddha addressed the monk Nāgita and asked: "Nāgita, who is making that noise and clamor, like fishermen scrambling over a catch of fish?" This was an expression the Buddha frequently used on such occasions: *kevaṭṭā va macchavilope*—"Who are these people shouting like fishermen ready to plunder fish?" Then the monk Nāgita replied: "Blessed One, the Brahmin householders of the Icchānaṅgala area have arrived, having prepared a great deal of food and drink for the Blessed One and the community of monks. It is they who are making this noise."

Thereupon, the Buddha made an unusual and somewhat stern statement to the monk Nāgita:

"Nāgita, I have no use for that fame (*yasa*). In short, I have no association with that fame." Fame (*yasa*), as you noble devotees know, refers to an entourage, crowds, and the renown that comes from having a following. All of this is contained within the word *yasa*. At that time, the Buddha said to the monk Nāgita: "Nāgita, I have no use for fame. I have no association with fame, nor do I go seeking fame." Next, the

Buddha declared: "If someone possesses and experiences the bliss of renunciation (*nekkhamma-sukha*), the bliss of seclusion (*paviveka-sukha*), the bliss of appeasement (*upasama-sukha*, meaning the bliss of calming), and the bliss of awakening (*sambodhi-sukha*), then to such a person, that gain, honor, and praise..."—here he used an unusual term, *mīḷhasukhaṃ*. *Mīḷha*, noble devotees, means dung or excrement. Look at the word the Buddha used there! He referred to the pleasure obtained from gains, honors, and praise as *mīḷhasukhaṃ*—indicating that he does not regard it highly, treating it like excrement.

The Buddha might have said this targeting the monk Nāgita as well. When this was said, Ven. Nāgita said again: "May the Blessed One be patient. This is the time for the Blessed One to be patient. Wherever the Blessed One goes, these Brahmin householders follow behind the Blessed One." Monk Nāgita spoke again in a manner that favored and allowed for those gains and honors. Once more, the Buddha replied in the same way:

"Nāgita, I have no association with that fame. I have no connection with that fame," and gave the same simile as before for gains, honors, and praise.

The Buddha did not stop there. Next, addressing the monk Nāgita directly, he delivered an unusual discourse: "Nāgita, sometimes I see a monk residing in a village monastery (*gāmanta-vihāra*) sitting in concentration (*samādhi*). At that moment, it occurs to me: 'Right now, some monastery attendant will come to this monk who is in the bliss of concentration, disturb him, and break his concentration. Or a novice (*sāmaṇera*) will come here, engage with him, and destroy that concentration.' Therefore, I do not find joy in that monk who sits in concentration in a village monastery, nor do I approve of that village dwelling."

"But Nāgita, at other times I see a forest monk nodding and dozing in the forest. Seeing that forest monk dozing, it occurs to me: 'In a short while, this monk will overcome this drowsiness, wipe his eyes, look around, establish the perception of the forest (*arañña-saññā*), bring his mind to a state of oneness, and enter a state of concentration (*samādhi*).' Therefore, I approve of even that dozing forest monk and of the forest dwelling." Then the Buddha declared: "Nāgita, sometimes I see a forest monk residing in the woods sitting without concentration. At that moment, it occurs to me: 'In a short while, this monk will attain concentration and make an effort to protect that concentration.' Because of that, I approve of that forest monk." Next, he declared: "Nāgita, on some occasions, I see a forest monk sitting in concentration. Then I think: 'Now this concentrated monk will quickly bring about the liberation of his mind (meaning, by practicing insight, he will attain liberation) and guard that liberation.' For that reason, I find joy in that forest monk."

Next, the Buddha further declared: "Nāgita, gains and honors—the requisites of robes, alms-food, lodging, and medicinal provisions for the sick—flow toward a monk residing in a village monastery. By becoming greedy for and attached to those gains and honors, that monk has no interest in meditation. He does not turn toward forest

dwelling, nor toward practicing Dhamma and meditation in forest lodgings. Therefore, because of that attitude he adopts toward those gains and honors, I do not find joy in that village dwelling."

The Buddha further declared: "The fourfold requisites of robes, alms-food, lodging, and medicinal provisions for the sick flow toward a forest monk residing in the forest. Yet, that monk, putting aside those gains, gives pride of place to concentration and meditation, and directs his mind toward solitary dwelling. For that reason, I find joy in that forest dwelling." This also shows us the values held by the Buddha: consistently emphasizing solitude, oneness, and stepping away from the crowd and its currents to focus on spiritual progress.

In this era, you noble devotees might sometimes think, regarding these matters we have discussed, that these are things necessary only for the Sangha. However, it is extremely important for the lay devotees as well to understand these dispensational values. Mention is made of lay devotees who lived in the past, during the Buddha's time, who followed these precious portions of the Dhamma. Some of them declared to the Buddha: "Venerable Sir, whenever we were engaged in the practice of *Satipaṭṭhāna* (foundations of mindfulness), on those occasions we experienced an extraordinary joy"—such were the lay devotees during the Buddha's time. Instead of chasing after various other things as people do in this present day, they followed the Sangha and focused on spiritual progress. You have heard many times that the lay disciples (*upāsaka-upāsikā*) of the Buddha's time did not obtain these results casually. They must have adjusted their lifestyle to be suitable for these teachings and meditations. Here is a verse declared by the Buddha:

"Ko pana hīnena aggassa patti hoti, aggeneva aggassa patti hoti."

"Ko pana hīnena aggassa patti hoti"—how can the supreme be attained by weak effort or inferior practice?

"Aggeneva aggassa patti hoti"—the supreme can only be attained through supreme practice.

Therefore, without thinking of these paths and fruits (*magga-phala*) as something that can be purchased if one has money, like buying fruit from a shop, one must walk in alignment with that very practice declared by the Buddha, at least to some extent. Only then can one's spiritual progress be brought about.

As the Buddha frequently declared, especially at the time of his final passing away (*Parinibbāna*), the essence of this Sasana is not learning (*pariyatti*), but the portion related to practice (*paṭipatti*). The core, the heartwood of this Sasana, lies within the thirty-seven factors of enlightenment (*bodhipakkhiya-dhamma*), starting from the four foundations of mindfulness (*cattu-satipaṭṭhāna*) and ending with the Noble Eightfold Path. Therefore, what is helpful for that is what one must practice as much as possible, even in one's daily life.

Sometimes, people might think that these things are impossible in this day and age. Often, it is the perception of "impossibility" that arises, is highlighted, and is heard. Nevertheless, there may be lay devotees, men and women, who have built up this habit. Yet, as mentioned before, due to turning toward fame, praise, gains, and honors, they do not make an effort to grasp the heartwood, the essence of this Dhamma. Instead, they run in other directions. Then, the essence of the Dhamma cannot be grasped. Within this Noble Eightfold Path, or this practice, highlighted by the Buddha, lies the discipline of one's own mind. To bring about that concentration (*samādhi*) and other qualities, there must be a sufficient amount of seclusion (*viveka*). One must love seclusion. Instead, if one keeps the mind bound only to ordinary worldly things, one will never be able to attain those noble states.

Therefore, without thinking of this sage's practice (*muni-paṭipadā*) taught by the Buddha as something limited only to the Sangha, one must practice it from time to time in one's own life. Some talk of taking a break or holiday. A certain holiday or pause is necessary for everyone. However, in this day and age, lay devotees often use even that pause to further develop some aspect of lay life, or to make it even more complicated and tangled. Yet, one must reflect wisely on the nature of this life. We have only a very short time to live.

You have heard many of those discourses delivered by the Buddha. Even in times when human lifespan was sixty thousand years, it is mentioned in the Buddha's discourses that the teachers of that era had the attitude that this life is extremely short and full of suffering (*dukkha*). You have heard the similes for this life—extraordinary similes such as a dewdrop on the tip of a blade of grass, a line drawn on water, and so forth. In an extraordinary way, those ancient teachers pointed out the brevity of this life. It was so even in eras when the lifespan was thousands of years. Yet, we have a lifespan of less than a hundred years, in fact, less than seventy or eighty years. Therefore, when this Dispensation (*Sāsana*) is available, we must make an effort. Foreigners often suffer because they do not even get to hear a proper word of the Buddha.

In this day and age, in our country, people talk with a sense of possessiveness about the Dispensation, saying, "The Dhamma belongs to us, Buddhism belongs to us, the Dispensation is ours." Yet, they do not make an effort to benefit from it. Instead, many treat it as something to be exported abroad. Rather than doing that, whether lay or ordained, if one is to bring the Dhamma into oneself, one must make the necessary sacrifice. The Buddha highlighted precisely that point. By abandoning the path of material gains (*āmisa*) involving gains, honors, and praise in which the ordinary world is submerged, choose the path that must be traveled toward spiritual, non-material joy (*nirāmisa-pīti*).

Next, make an effort to cultivate the aforementioned concentration (*samādhi*). What can be obtained through meditation and other practices is non-material joy (*nirāmisa-pīti*) and non-material happiness (*nirāmisa-sukha*). It was because of the bliss of appeasement (*upasama-sukha*), the bliss of seclusion (*viveka-sukha*), and

the bliss of awakening (*sambodhi-sukha*) that the Buddha had, that those gains and honors were reduced to excrement; that is how the simile was given. Therefore, we must reflect. This was not something the Buddha said to insult us. We must reflect that these indeed are the true values in the world. If we look at it according to the Dhamma, we have heard that the arising of a Buddha in the world is extremely rare. Here too, as was mentioned at the beginning, why did even the deities rejoice at the birth of the Buddha? Because this is the opportunity to escape from this Saṃsāra.

Turning the Wheel of Dhamma is nothing other than this: within it lies the sole opportunity to escape from this perilous Saṃsāra. It is only when a Fully Self-Awakened One (*Sammāsambuddha*) appears. Even if a Paccekabuddha arises, though one can develop one's strength of merit to some extent by attending on and offering alms to him, a Paccekabuddha cannot show the path to Nibbāna to others. Only a Fully Self-Awakened One reveals this path to Nibbāna, the Eightfold Path, to the world through that profound Dhamma. He is the one who correctly explained teachings such as Dependent Arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) to the world.

Therefore, when such a Dhamma is present before us, if we do not make an effort regarding it, our lives will simply pass away in vain. We must contemplate the nature of what is called life even more deeply than the similes given by the Buddha. In this era abundant in illnesses, disasters, and dangers, one must reflect that the time one gets to operate with a healthy body and a healthy mind is extremely brief. When one reflects in this manner, as the Buddha pointed out, if one is to tread this path of Dhamma, a sense of spiritual urgency (*saṃvega*) is necessary. That is what the bases of urgency (*saṃvega-vatthu*) are about. The devotee who has generated such spiritual urgency internally is the one who remembers those points and Sutta discourses declared by the Buddha from time to time regarding those values.

Likewise, one must look at the other side. Now, as we have mentioned on a previous occasion, many people have watered down this Truth of Suffering (*dukkha-sacca*). The Buddha preaches this Truth of Suffering against the background of this immense, long Saṃsāra. As shown in the Anamatagga Sutta and others, for beings shrouded in ignorance (*avijjā*) and bound by craving (*taṇhā*), no first beginning is discernable. On many occasions he declared, "Monks, you and I have traveled and wandered for a very long time in this Saṃsāra, shrouded in ignorance and bound by craving."

Thus, this birth (*jāti*) is easy. Escape from birth is what is difficult. Now, *jāti-khaya* (destruction of birth) is indeed the cessation of birth. That practice is extremely difficult. The world generally does not understand it, because the world is always satisfied with craving for becoming (*bhava-taṇhā*). However, within the Buddha's Truth of Suffering (*dukkha-sacca*), the results of that craving (*taṇhā*) are demonstrated. Due to craving, the world undergoes becoming (*bhava*) and is born again and again. Next, in accordance with ignorance, particularly due to the dogma of self-illusion (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), and based on wrong views, people perform various

evil deeds and spend most of their time taking birth in hell, the animal realm, and the ghost realm. The Buddha pointed out that obtaining a human birth is extremely difficult and rare. You have heard that the Buddha on some occasions illustrated this with a little soil on his fingernail, showing that among dying beings, only a very few obtain a human birth again. He demonstrated this by comparing the soil on his fingernail to the soil of the great earth.

From that simile declared by the Buddha, we must reflect that we have obtained this extremely rare human birth, complete with sensory faculties. We possess the asset of wisdom to understand the Dhamma. At the same time, there are other things in the world, inviting us to chase after them. However, one must understand: "We have received such a valuable Dhamma, our lifespan is short, so what should we choose?" There are invitations from other sides. Yet, one must reflect wisely on what benefit should be derived from this short life.

If this opportunity slips away—let us think for a moment—a wise person can understand: quite apart from the animal realm or hell, even in this human world, how dangerous it would be to be born among those of wrong views where one does not get to hear the Dhamma. That is one level. But an even more dangerous situation, as the Buddha declared, is when one leads a good life, yet without even knowing it, due to some heavy bad kamma committed in the past or perhaps a bad deed committed in this very life, one occasionally falls into animal births, ghost realms, or hells. Thinking about that duration of time is mind-boggling. We have obtained such a difficult and rare opportunity. That is why we say we are fortunate and blessed. The Buddha has declared that the only opportunity free from the eight unfortunate states (*aṭṭha-akkhaṇa*) is a wise human birth obtained during the period of a Buddha's dispensation. That is what must be made the foundation for fulfilling the practice.

Then, next is right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*). Belonging to right view is precisely the selection of true values, the selection of essential qualities (*sāra-dhamma*). One hears a lot about "essential qualities" these days. However, the true essential qualities have been highlighted by the Buddha. If one has become a human being, and the Dhamma is present before oneself, one must secure one's welfare by practicing accordingly. Otherwise, instead of living like a human ghost or a human demon, and departing to those very states after death, one should endeavor as much as possible to become a human deva, a human brahma, or even more importantly, as shown in this Sutta, to develop one's mind to achieve the destruction of birth (*jāti-khaya*).

Therefore, one must constantly try to direct the mind toward the Four Noble Truths. The Buddha once declared: "Monks, do not engage in other thoughts (*vitakka*). If you think, if you engage in thought, let it be on these four." "Venerable Sir, what are the four?" "Suffering (*dukkha*), its origin (*samudaya*), its cessation (*nirodha*), and the path (*magga*). Your thoughts should be directed toward these." Thus declared

the Buddha. Other things are secondary; sometimes they are useless. Therefore, the Buddha showed how to bring out the Four Noble Truths through every thought.

Some people read Suttas about Wheel-Turning Kings (*Cakkavatti*) and their gains and honors with great pleasure. If one thinks about what the dining hall of a Wheel-Turning King would be like, it is indeed mind-boggling—groups of eighty-four thousand things. Be that as it may, how do those Suttas end? The Buddha has declared that in the end, those kings are no more, the queens are no more, the princes are no more, the children are no more; no one is left. Everything is finished. Having demonstrated impermanence (*aniccatā*) in that manner, he says: "Monks, that is enough to be disenchanted with Preparations (*saṅkhāra*). That is enough to free the mind from Preparations."

Through this, the Buddha shows that even though he pointed out certain things that existed in past saṃsāric lives, he concludes by urging disenchantment with them: "That is enough, monks, to be disenchanted." We must contemplate those words. In our daily lives, there may be various things that support our excitement, pride, and inflation. Yet, by bringing the perception of impermanence (*anicca-saññā*) close to them, considering their impermanent nature—that they disappear, that they are mere Preparations (*saṅkhāra*)—one must try to turn back to the Dhamma through that. Everything that is heard in life, things that are considered to be one's worldly progress—the Truth of Suffering (*dukkha-sacca*) declared by the Buddha is understood precisely by starting from there. Everything regarding these Four Noble Truths is shown within the four foundations of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*).

Contemplation of phenomena (*dhammānupassanā*) includes the Four Noble Truths. When we say it includes the Four Noble Truths, it means that during that contemplation of phenomena, everything can be categorized under these four: "Ah, this is an illustration of suffering (*dukkha*). This is an illustration of craving (*taṇhā*)." Next, freeing the mind from it, freeing it from craving—the state of liberation—reflecting on that is relevant to Nibbāna. That very way of thinking is what is called the Eightfold Path. Thus, the Four Noble Truths are present within the contemplation of phenomena. The one who has constantly adjusted their lifestyle and way of thinking in accordance with that can easily reach Nibbāna through this Dhamma. That is the value highlighted by the Buddha. The Four Noble Truths are what we have to reflect upon. That is why the Buddha declared: "Do not think about useless things. If you think, think: 'This is suffering (*dukkha*). This is the cause of suffering. This is the cessation of suffering. This is the path.' Reflect in accordance with that."

In that manner, in our daily lives, which normally pass away just like that, we must make an effort. We must make an effort to maintain our thinking in accordance with these Dhamma points and Sutta discourses highlighted by the Buddha, and especially in accordance with the three characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*). Through that, the Buddha showed everything: the impermanence (*aniccatā*) of these Preparations

(*saṅkhāra*). Because they are impermanent (*anicca*), one cannot find satisfaction in them; they are full of suffering (*dukkha*). They are subject to change (*vipariṇāma-dhamma*), possessing the nature of change. One must try to turn the mind away from them. Thus: impermanent (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), non-self (*anattā*). Instead of the grasp of taking things as "This is mine, this I am, this is my self," one must make an effort at every opportunity to think: "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self." Not merely as a word, but one's thinking too must be maintained accordingly. As soon as a thought arises, one must contemplate: "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self." Then, that insight-oriented understanding grows within oneself little by little.

That is indeed what is called *Yoniso manasikāra* (Wise attention). *Yoniso manasikāra* means the correct view. For convenience, we call it "wise reflection." Foolish reflection, improper reflection, is indeed *ayoniso manasikāra*. For a very long time in the world, we have practiced this wrong view. Furthermore, as you noble devotees have heard, there are the distortions (*vipallāsa-dhamma*): treating the impermanent (*anicca*) as permanent, the foul as beautiful, the painful (*dukkha*) as pleasant, and the non-self (*anattā*) as self. If one tries to step away from those distortions, and maintain one's thinking free from them, you will be able to develop your mind from the side of insight (*vipassanā*) as well.

When an opportunity for leisure is obtained, without spending it on other things, try as much as possible—even for a few days, or two or three days—to develop this concentration (*samādhi*) in solitude, as a solitary dweller, according to your individual capacity, as taught by the Buddha. Although the sublime *moneyya-paṭipadā* declared by the Buddha was spoken addressing the monks, one must reflect that the path to Nibbāna lies within it. With the help of this Dhamma sermon you have heard, you must make more and more effort regarding the practices you observe and protect. Within this very era of a Buddha's arising, you must make an effort to escape from this extremely perilous Saṃsāra.

Through the Dhamma preached so far, today on this valuable Vesak Poya day, we hope that you noble devotees, being devoted to practice, having undertaken a higher virtue (*sīla*), have also developed along with that virtue some form of meditation, and through meditation, concentration (*samādhi*). At this moment, we wish that these Dhamma points you have heard may be helpful for concentration as well as for insight!

With the support of the accumulation of merit you have gathered so far, and this Dhamma sermon you have heard, we bless you that you may quickly gain the strength and power to attain the supreme goals you hope for! We wish that this Dhamma sermon may help you to quickly escape from all saṃsāric suffering, such as birth (*jāti*), aging and death (*jarāmaraṇa*), and illness, and to be pacified by the noble, deathless, supreme Nibbāna! Furthermore, if there be any living beings, from the Avīci hell up to the Akanitṭha heaven, who wish to rejoice in this merit of sharing

and hearing the Dhamma, may they, through rejoicing, realize the noble, deathless, supreme Nibbāna through whichever awakening they aspire to! With that aspiration, recite the verses in this manner.

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……..*"