Pahankanuwa Sermon #116

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

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(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.9)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

Pali Stanza:

Attānañce piyaṃ jaññā, rakkheyya naṃ surakkhitaṃ;

tiṇṇaṃ aññataraṃ yāmaṃ, paṭijaggeyya paṇḍito ti.

From:

Dhammapada 157 (Attavagga)

Dear Listeners,

Our Great Compassionate Fully Self-Enlightened Buddha showed the correct path to secure safety and protection for those who seek it. Many people in this world harbor various expectations regarding this protection and eagerly look forward to seeing the signs of their fulfillment. However, they do not contemplate whether they practice the true course of action, the path of practice, to secure that protection. Consequently, they end up facing disappointment and shattered hopes in the end. This situation becomes clear to us from the background story of this very verse.

While the Buddha was residing in the Bhesakaḷā Forest, Prince Bodhirāja, an extremely wealthy and prosperous ruler of that region, had a magnificent palace built—the likes of which could not be found anywhere else on earth. He named it *"Kokanada"* and invited the Buddha to the housewarming ceremony of that palace. In preparing for this festival, they smeared the floor of the palace with various perfumes and laid down white cloths starting right from the threshold of the palace. This prince had these cloths spread not merely out of respect for the Buddha, but with another personal expectation in mind.

Although this prince possessed various pleasures and riches, he lacked the blessing of children, which is generally considered a great treasure in lay life. Therefore, he thought: "If I am to have a son or a daughter, the Buddha will walk over these cloths as a foretoken of that." When the Buddha arrived at the ceremony in accordance with the invitation, Prince Bodhirāja paid homage to Him, took the alms bowl, and invited

Him to enter the palace. However, the Buddha did not enter the palace. A second and a third time the prince made his plea, yet the Blessed One did not step forward. Instead, the Buddha looked at Ven. Ānanda's face. Ven. Ānanda understood from this that the Buddha would not enter because of the white cloths. He told the prince to remove them. Once the prince removed those cloths, the Buddha entered the palace.

After serving the almsfood and when the meal was finished, the prince paid homage to the Buddha, sat down to one side, and asked: "Venerable Sir, Blessed One, I am a very supportive lay disciple of the Blessed One. Even before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb, my mother went for refuge to the Buddha on my behalf. Later, in my infancy when I could not understand, my nursemaid went for refuge to the Buddha on my behalf. When I reached an age of understanding, I myself went for refuge to the Buddha. Yet, when someone like me spread these cloths, why did the Blessed One not walk over them?" The Buddha asked, "Prince, with what thought did you spread these cloths?" Then the prince confessed that he had held the thought: "If I have the fortune to obtain a son or a daughter, the Buddha will walk over these cloths." "It is precisely for that reason, prince, that I did not walk over those cloths." "Then, Blessed One, is there no fortune for me to obtain a son or a daughter?" he asked. "Yes, that is because of you and your wife"—meaning, it appears that Prince Bodhirāja and his wife had lived in such a way in the past. To put it simply in terms of the Dhamma, he declared that they had fallen into negligence regarding wholesome states (*kusala dhamma*). That is to say, they had committed an unwholesome karma. When the prince became eager to know the details, the Buddha revealed the story of the past.

In the very distant past, hundreds of people boarded a ship and set out to sea. In mid-ocean, the ship wrecked. Of all those on board, only a married couple, clinging to a plank of wood, managed to swim to safety and reach a small nearby island. The others drowned in the sea. This couple had nothing to eat or drink on that island. A flock of birds nested there. What did these two do? They began roasting birds' eggs in hot embers and eating them. When the eggs ran out, they began eating the young fledglings. In this manner, they spent their entire lives on that island. The Buddha declared: "During all three stages of life—youth, middle age, and old age—these two lived by killing animals. If even one of you had been diligent regarding wholesome qualities, you would have obtained a child. Or else, if during the first stage of life, or the middle stage, or the final stage, you had abandoned those evil deeds and inclined your minds toward wholesome qualities, you would have obtained a son." Next, the Buddha declared: "If one considers oneself dear, one must strive to protect oneself during all three stages of life—indeed, during all three. If somehow that is impossible, one should think of oneself and take care to protect oneself during at least one stage of life." Emphasizing this idea, He uttered that Dhamma verse found in the Atta Vagga of the Dhammapada, which we mentioned at the beginning as our theme.

"Attānañce piyaṃ jaññā,

rakkheyya naṃ surakkhitaṃ,

tiṇṇam aññataraṃ yāmaṃ,

paṭijaggeyya paṇḍito."

"Attānañce piyaṃ jaññā"—if someone considers oneself dear, if one holds oneself dear; *"naṃ surakkhitaṃ"*—then, if one holds oneself dear, one protects that beloved self very well. No one opposes that. It is a well-known fact that if one holds oneself dear, (*"rakkheyya naṃ surakkhitaṃ"*) one takes good care to protect oneself. *"Tiṇṇam aññataraṃ yāmaṃ"*—while "the three watches of the night" usually refers to three periods of the night, here it refers to the three stages of life. The wise person (*"paṭijaggeyya paṇḍito"*) must seek, watch over, tend to, and protect oneself during at least one of these three stages of life: youth, middle age, or old age. It is recorded that upon hearing this discourse delivered by the Buddha through this Dhamma verse on that occasion, Prince Bodhirāja, bringing forth the power of his past accumulation of merit, attained the fruit of Stream-entry (*Sotāpatti-phala*).

In relation to this story, what we must think of most is the subtle force of karma described here. This mentioned karma must have been committed in the very distant past. One should not think that the only result of that evil karma of killing animals was the inability to obtain children. Often, the suffering (*dukkha*), pain, accidents, troubles, calamities, and disasters we see in this human world are merely the tail-end, the last remnants, of some past evil karma. The greater portion of heavy evil karmas is paid for in the unseen woeful states (*apāya*), or in the ghost realms (*peta-loka*), or in the animal realms and the demon (*asura*) realms. It is the remaining, residual portion of those retributions that one has to experience here. What is shown here is merely the minor residual result of an evil karma committed by this prince together with his wife in the very distant past.

If we contemplate this verse even more deeply, everyone, especially in this day and age, is concerned about security and protection. Regarding one's home, the world considers security to be locking the doors and windows properly, and if necessary, employing watchmen and guards. However, it is not this kind of protection that is being declared here.

Even those who have set up such security measures sometimes fall into the jaws of death at the hands of their own security guards due to the heavy force of karma. Otherwise, as we hear in some Jātaka stories, even a thunderbolt might strike down to cause the disaster. The force of karma is that terrifying. It is not that kind of protection that is declared here. It is not that kind of shutting of doors and windows. What is meant here is securing protection by being diligent regarding wholesome states. Whether lay or ordained, what is expressed here is diligence regarding wholesome qualities (*kusala dhamma*) such as giving (*dāna*), virtue (*sīla*), and meditation (*bhāvanā*). Indeed, the wise person should be diligent in these during all three stages of life. If, unfortunately, one neglected wholesome states during youth due to various sports, entertainment, and so forth, one must practice them at least during middle age. If, during middle age, one somehow neglected them due to

activities concerning one's children and did not show interest in these matters, then at the very least, in old age one must be diligent in them. The meaning of this verse is that to cultivate these virtues of giving, virtue, meditation—or virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*)—one must remove any unwholesome livelihood or evil deeds and enter the path of merit. This declaration of the Buddha is applicable even to an ordained person. Even in ordained life, sometimes one is initially engaged in activities like learning and studying, but gets interested in meditation later. What is meant by this is walking on this path to Nibbāna. Crossing over this samsāric suffering (*dukkha*) is the true protection.

The fundamental reason for the Buddha's appearance in the world is to incline those traveling on the path to woeful states (*dugati*) toward the path of happy states (*sugati*). Explaining wholesome and unwholesome, good and bad, demerit and merit to the world is like introducing these as dark states and those as bright states. The Buddha declared a certain natural law of the world here: "One is dear to oneself." Now, some people misunderstand this fact. They think: "I do this because I want to, because it is good for me, because I think it is good." Similarly, "I am dear to myself." However, the Buddha declared that while accepting this natural law, precisely because one is dear to oneself, one must reflect that other people's lives are also dear to themselves. The Buddha showed this on one occasion:

"Sabbā disā anupatitvā cetasā,

nevajjhagā piyataraṃ attanā kvaci,

Evaṃ priyo puthu attā paresaṃ,

tasmā na hiṃse paraṃ attakāmo."

Even if we traverse all directions with the mind, we will never find anyone in the world dearer to oneself than oneself. Even if we search deeply with our mind, no one else is as dear to us as our own self. Sometimes we might think, "I hold so-and-so dear, I love so-and-so very much." But when we examine it, when we contemplate deeply, why do we say we love them or hold them dear? It is because of the attachment one has for oneself. It is due to the attachment to oneself, because one derives some satisfaction from it. "Evaṃ priyo puthu attā paresaṃ"—but the matter does not end there. One must reflect: just as I am dear to myself, so too are others' lives dear to themselves. "Sabbesaṃ jīvitaṃ piyaṃ"—the Buddha declared that all life is dear. Therefore, "tasmā na hiṃse paraṃ attakāmo"—since that is the natural law, one who loves oneself should not harm others. What happens if one does? This law of karma (*kamma-niyāma*) is an astonishing natural law in the world. It has a marvelous, unalterable, and terrifying law of karma that bears fruit even for Buddhas and Arahants—terrifying in terms of its retributive aspect. That is why the Buddha declared:

"Kammassakā sattā kammadāyādā kammayoni kammabandhū kammapaṭisaraṇā"

Beings are the owners of their karma, heirs to their karma, born of their karma, related to their karma, have karma as their refuge. What everyone can call their own is the wholesome or unwholesome karma they commit. *"Kammassakā kammadāyādā"*—their inheritance; indeed, what stands as one's inheritance is the wholesome or unwholesome deeds one has performed. What can be called one's relative or kinsman is also one's own wholesome and unwholesome karma. What becomes one's ultimate refuge and support is precisely this. "Refuge" here means this very protection. Therefore, it is by abandoning unwholesome karma and engaging in wholesome states that this is achieved, not by closing doors and windows. However, there are three doors that must indeed be protected. They are not the doors found in houses. The Buddha declared three doors that one must protect: the mind, the body, and speech. These three doors. Even if houses do not have doors, everyone possesses these three doors. If one does not control or protect these three doors, one is destined for the four woeful states. When reading some sutta discourses where the Buddha describes those who have fallen into such states in this long samsāra, one's hair stands on end. It is that astonishing; it is that terrifying. Even the trials and tribulations experienced in the visible animal realm are clear to us, as we hear about them daily in the human world. It is hundreds of thousands of times worse in the animal realm, and next, in the ghost realm (*peta-loka*), which is invisible to us but known in various ways. And then, there is hell (*niraya*), which is visible to those with higher psychic powers.

As declared by the Buddha as well as the Great Arahant Moggallāna, when compared to the suffering (*dukkha*) of hell, the disasters, calamities, troubles, and fears we consider major in this human world are extremely trivial. One has to undergo a terrifying suffering (*dukkha*) crores of times greater than those sufferings in accordance with those evil karmas. This is an operative law in the world. No one can change this. No matter how many evil deeds one has committed in the past, if one walks the right path in this life, engaging in wholesome qualities and performing those deeds, the retributive side can gradually decrease, or those retributions might even be neutralized (become *ahosi-kamma*). It depends on one's effort. Just as during the period when a flower blooms and the fruit forms and ripens, the outcome or the ripening fruit can change depending on the fertilizer applied, similarly, even though one has committed an evil karma, if one walks the good path, the path of merit, and performs wholesome deeds until the time that evil karma ripens to give its result, one might receive less of the retribution of that evil karma.

Furthermore, one can increase the retributive benefits and blessings of wholesome karma if one is constantly engaged in wholesome actions. In any case, it is by reflecting on the law of karma (*kamma-niyāma*) operating in this world that the Buddha declared this protection. This samsāric journey is an extremely dangerous journey. If we think of this as a journey, what is primary in undertaking this journey

is the mind. This mind is like the steering wheel of a vehicle. Whichever way the mind turns, speech turns, and the body turns. Therefore, what is primarily required is guarding the mind. The Buddha has declared:

"Cetanāhaṃ, bhikkhave, kammaṃ vadāmi. Cetayitvā kammaṃ karoti kāyena vācāya manasā."

"Monks, I say intention (*cetanā*) is karma. Having intended, one performs karma through body, speech, and mind." Because it is only after generating an intention that one acts through body and speech, the mind is primary. Therefore, if we think of this vehicle—our life, or rather the journey of life—as driving a certain vehicle, the mind is like the steering wheel of this vehicle. Next, the direction it turns—if we turn it towards happy states (*sugati*) or turn it towards woeful states (*dugati*), what happens? There are several words declared by the Buddha: "apāyaṃ duggatiṃ vinipātaṃ nirayaṃ." "Apāya" (state of ruin) is like veering off the road. "Duggati" (woeful destination) is like sliding down into a ditch, and then "vinipāta" (abyss) is falling into a great precipice, and finally getting smashed to pieces in hell ("niraya"). It is in this manner that one falls into the four woeful states and experiences suffering (*dukkha*). The other side is the happy destinations (*sugati*), the heavenly realms (*deva-loka*), the brahma realms (brahma-loka), and so on. These kinds of realms exist in the world. Thus, what helps in steering this vehicle is right vision—establishing the mind correctly. The Buddha has declared, "micchā-paṇihitaṃ cittaṃ"—that a wrongly directed mind, a mind established by turning it in the wrong direction, toward the unwholesome and toward evil karma, can bring upon oneself such pain and suffering (*dukkha*) that even one's worst enemy could not inflict. One can cause oneself more harm than even an enemy could do, if one directs one's mind toward evil, toward the bad side.

On the other hand, He declares that if directed toward the good—"sammā-paṇihitaṃ cittaṃ"—if directed toward the correct side, it can do for oneself a benefit that not even one's parents could perform. Similarly, the Buddha Himself declares that some people, by doing things thinking they are dear to themselves, become their own enemies, their own adversaries. Normally, we think: "Since I am dear to myself, I perform these activities." However, foolish people, while thinking thus, actually treat themselves in the very manner that their enemies would act.

"Caranti bālā dummedhā, amitteneva attanā,

Karontā pāpakaṃ kammaṃ, yaṃ hoti kaṭukapphalaṃ."

The Buddha has declared: "Fools of poor intelligence wander about as enemies to themselves, committing evil deeds that yield bitter fruit." When contemplating the terrifying nature of this samsāric journey, the message that the Buddhas always declare for protection is guarding those three doors. They explain and show good and bad to the world. Here, we took upon ourselves the *"ājīva-aṭṭhamaka-sīla"* (virtue with livelihood as the eighth). *"Ājīva"* means livelihood. Now, in this story as well, we

find someone who lived by making a livelihood of killing birds and eating birds' eggs. When we think of the present day, everyone's biggest problem is livelihood. When thinking about security, there are various types of insurance (*rakṣaṇa*) schemes. The word "livelihood" (*rakṣāva*) itself contains the idea of security (*ārakṣāva*). In addition to that, everyone thinks of and focuses on financial insurance schemes. However, righteous insurance does not fit that way. The Buddha did not declare this out of envy toward the world earning wealth. He pointed out those things that a faithful lay disciple should not do as wrong livelihoods (*micchā-ājīva*): trading in weapons, trading in human beings/animals for slaughter, trading in flesh, trading in poisons, and trading in intoxicants.

A righteous livelihood is now considered a huge problem for the world, for someone leading a lay life. Yet, one must reflect with wisdom and take into consideration that the Buddha declared these with good reason, even if it means a lower income. The unwholesome karma accumulated through activities like killing animals follows one very far in samsāra. Reflecting in this manner, one should gradually free oneself from them and strive to turn toward a righteous occupation. Even if one lived unrighteously during one stage of life, one must strive to live apart from those at least during the second stage; or if one lived like that during the second stage too, then at least during the third stage. It is the disregard for this Dhamma, not only in this country but in the entire world, that is the unfortunate cause of the world's current state. No matter how scientifically advanced we become, and no matter how much we try to secure protection externally, we still have to experience the retributions according to the law of karma declared by the Buddha. Therefore, we must contemplate deeply on that matter of the Buddha: "Even if one rules as a king, the deeds committed will bear fruit."

Because of this natural law of karma, one must make a strong determination to walk the path of Dhamma with a clear understanding of wholesome and unwholesome deeds, and of merit and demerit. What is expected through the path of practice consisting of giving, virtue, and meditation is the removal of the defilements of craving (*taṇhā*), greed, and various other agitations and unrestrained behaviors from one's mental continuum, and behaving in accordance with that message of guarding the three doors. Indeed, the Buddha has declared that nowhere in samsāra can one find a true form of protection. Now, sometimes someone might think that safety is secured upon going to a heavenly realm. However, even a heavenly state of existence is not permanent. Even a brahma state of existence is not permanent. Even in the brahma world, after residing there as long as the retributions of merits are experienced, one suddenly falls away (passes away/cuti). Some deities, when an angry thought arises, pass away from there immediately. Having passed away, they might become a yakkha (demon) or a peta (hungry ghost). Such is the danger present in this samsāra. No matter how high one goes, one falls down once the power of those merits is exhausted. When one contemplates the samsāric journey in this manner, there is no true protection anywhere in this samsāra.

That is why the Buddha declared Nibbāna to be the supreme solace, the supreme protection. In some places in the Dhamma, the entire samsāra is described as a desert. For someone traveling in a desert, the only hope for a little solace is the oasis (khema-bhūmi) at the end of that desert. A fertile area with drinking water and food is called an oasis. In that manner, in this Dhamma, the entire samsāric journey is sometimes shown as a journey in a desert, and Nibbāna as the oasis. "Khema" is a name for Nibbāna itself. This Nibbāna is the true protection. It is liberation from this samsāra—the liberation from this suffering (*dukkha*) called wandering in samsāric existence (*bhava*). Birth (*jāti*) in this samsāra is itself suffering (*dukkha*). If one is born, from the very moment of birth, one travels toward aging, which is called decay. We separate this into youth and old age, but in reality, from the moment of birth, one is subject to decay. Following the stages of that decaying process, there is sickness, called disease. Then, in the end, comes the event that everyone fears, called death. It is the moment when one must abandon this cage of a body. In the meantime, there are various disasters, troubles, calamities, and the suffering (*dukkha*) of searching for food and drink; in this way, a multitude of sufferings exist in this samsāra. That is why, to free Himself from this samsāra, and not only to free Himself but also to liberate all living beings of the world, the Buddha fulfilled the perfections (*pāramitās*) for such a vast period of four incalculable aeons and a hundred thousand world-cycles.

One should think: "The Buddha attained Enlightenment for my sake." In the past, devout Buddhists strengthened their minds to walk this path of Dhamma by thinking: "He became enlightened for my sake, solely for my sake." Thinking that the Buddha attained Enlightenment for oneself. When reflecting on the era of a Buddha's appearance, it is a very special opportunity. As long as a Buddha does not appear in the world, one cannot know about good and bad. In the past, there were ascetics who had attained higher psychic powers (*abhiññā*), but even they did not understand the secret of escaping this samsāra. They did not have a deep understanding of this karma either. So much so, some of them, based on their limited psychic powers, saw these retributions and arrived at wrong conclusions. Even today, there are people who arrive at such conclusions among the debaters and intellectuals in society. Some think: "Even if you talk about wrong livelihood, so-and-so lives by a wrong livelihood. They kill animals and eat them, they do various other things, yet they live wonderfully. No harm is seen, and they live comfortably in luxury." Something the Buddha declared is that just as milk does not flow immediately when milking a cow, the retribution does not occur the very instant an evil deed is committed.

Like embers covered by ashes—*"bhasmāchannena"*—burning slowly, these evil deeds follow one deep in this samsāra; the Buddha has declared this profound aspect of the Dhamma. Why do they not give retribution immediately? If it is a human state of existence, one was born as a human due to some wholesome karma. Because of the power of that wholesome karma, those evil deeds are temporarily prevented from yielding their results. However, these wholesome karmas are things that get exhausted. Just as money gets spent, as one spends this human life and enjoys

comforts and pleasures, those wholesome merits also get exhausted. This is something that gets exhausted. What happens while it is being exhausted? Like embers that were covered by ashes, those evil deeds emerge. One has to experience their retributions according to those past evil deeds. That is why, no matter how high one flies in the sky, one falls and dies without even knowing why. One cannot escape this karma by hiding anywhere. The Buddha declared through this verse the way the frightened world runs in search of protection. It appears to be identical today as it was during the Buddha's time.

"Bahuṃ ve saraṇaṃ yanti, pabbatāni vanāni ca,

Ārāmarukkha-cetyāni, manussā bhayatajjitā."

Driven by fear, many people go for refuge to mountains, forests, parks, groves, and shrines, hoping for protection. In this day and age, the situation is the same. It is just like in the Buddha's time. But the Buddha declares:

"N'etaṃ kho saraṇaṃ khemaṃ, n'etaṃ saraṇamuttamaṃ,

N'etaṃ saraṇamāgamma, sabbadukkhā pamuccati."

This is not a secure refuge; this is not the supreme refuge. Having gone to this refuge, one is not liberated from all suffering (*dukkha*). "N'etaṃ kho saraṇaṃ khemaṃ"—this is not a refuge of true protection, it is not security. The Buddha declares that by going to such parks, trees, and shrines, pleading and lamenting, one cannot be liberated from samsāric suffering (*dukkha*). How, then, what is that which is called protection?

"Yo ca buddhañca dhammañca, saṅghañca saraṇaṃ gato,

Cattāri ariya-saccāni, sammappaññāya passati."

But if someone goes for refuge to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, and sees with right wisdom, with right vision, the Four Noble Truths—namely, suffering (*dukkha*), the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path, which is the Noble Eightfold Path—then such a person indeed:

"Etaṃ kho saraṇaṃ khemaṃ, etaṃ saraṇamuttamaṃ,

Etaṃ saraṇamāgamma, sabbadukkhā pamuccati."

This is the secure refuge; this is the supreme refuge. Having gone to this refuge, one is liberated from all suffering (*dukkha*).

One must contemplate in accordance with those words of the Buddha. Therefore, if one has obtained a human life during the era of a Buddha's appearance, our ultimate purpose must be the realization of these Four Noble Truths. Everyone understands, at various levels, that this samsāra is suffering (*dukkha*). If you ask anyone, they will say: "We understand what this suffering is." Yet, they have not understood it at the

highest level. That is why they still harbor expectations to continue further in this samsāra, in this becoming (*bhava*). Underlying this is craving (*taṇhā*). Within this, there exists deep ignorance (*avijjā*) and craving (*taṇhā*). That is why the Buddha has declared: "Monks, it is through not knowing these Four Noble Truths that you and I have wandered and run in this samsāra for such a long time, an unimaginably long time. Wrapped in ignorance and bound by craving (*taṇhā*), we have come through this samsāra." One must contemplate in accordance with that natural law.

If we have obtained a human mind, an opportunity to hear the Dhamma during the era of a Buddha's appearance, and the chance to behave according to the Dhamma, along with the association of noble friends (*kalyāṇa-mitta*), the Buddha describes that state as the opportune moment (*khaṇa-sampatti*). This human state of existence obtained during the era of a Buddha's appearance is shown as a unique auspicious moment, as an instant, as the opportune moment (*khaṇa-sampatti*). Let alone humans, even the deities hope to be born in the human world to accumulate merit. After going to heavenly realms and experiencing the retributions of their performed merits there, they look toward this side, hoping to be born in the human world. This is because it is in the human world that a Buddha appears. It is also the best place to perform meritorious deeds and practice meditation. In the heavenly realms, because of the available pleasures and luxuries, it is difficult to unify the mind. Today, everyone exerts themselves for maximum benefit, the maximum yield in financial terms. In economic activities like trade and commerce, they are keen to gain the maximum return. Yet, very few reflect on the maximum yield that can be derived from a human state of existence obtained during the era of a Buddha's appearance.

Let alone the maximum yield, at the very least, as the minimum yield, the Buddha points to what is called Stream-entry (*Sotāpatti*). Through this, one can limit this entire samsāric journey, which has gone on for an unimaginably long time, to only seven more existences (*bhava*) or seven more lives, and bring it to an end there. This does not happen through some strange miracle, but through the understanding of these Four Noble Truths—by the arising of the Dhamma-eye (*dhamma-cakkhu*). Having taken upon oneself a good virtue like the "ājīva-aṭṭhamaka-sīla" and living accordingly, one must walk this path of Dhamma by engaging in some form of meditation to develop and calm the mind. Through that, one becomes able to understand, at a certain level, the three characteristics of the true nature of this world declared by the Buddha: impermanent (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*). From that, at some point, one gains the realization of the suffering (*dukkha*) of samsāra, that the cause of suffering is craving (*taṇhā*), that the place where this craving is stilled is the true solace of Nibbāna, and that the path to be taken for that is this very path on which I am walking.

Because of that realization, a certain great transformation occurs in the mind. When ignorance is removed to a certain extent in that manner and wisdom arises, it is called the Dhamma-eye (*dhamma-cakkhu*), the eye of wisdom. When that Dhamma-eye arises, the immense relief obtained by that person is such that the Buddha, taking

a little soil onto His fingernail, declared: "The amount of suffering (*dukkha*) remaining for a Stream-enterer to experience is like this soil on my fingernail, whereas the amount of suffering already exhausted and freed is like the soil of the great earth." It is like the soil on a fingernail because they will only experience seven more becomings (*bhava*), seven more lives; they will be born only seven more times in this existence. Even lay male and female disciples obtained this state of Stream-entry, which yields such solace, during the Buddha's time. They were not only engaged in supporting the Saṅgha and similar activities, but were also engaged in learning the Dhamma and in meditation. They calmed their minds by contemplating the deep aspects of the Dhamma.

That is why the Buddha declares that there were hundreds and thousands of people in those various villages who attained the paths and fruits, such as Stream-entry. These are not things that are obtained for nothing. They cannot be obtained through certificates. They must be attained by one's own effort, walking the path of Dhamma, listening to the Dhamma, and meditating. Wholesome qualities (*kusala dhamma*) that support these might be hidden within one's mental continuum from the past. Just like evil deeds, wholesome deeds also sometimes lie like embers under ashes. However, lighting these embers does not happen on its own in the case of wholesome karma; one must blow on them a little. One must blow to remove the ashes and bring forth a light. That is the good side. Wholesome qualities also exist like embers under ashes, but they should be utilized to bring forth a light, not to burn oneself.

When we reflect in this manner, it becomes clear that to obtain the ultimate happiness and ultimate protection, one must walk this path to Nibbāna declared by the Buddha. Various economic organizations, insurance schemes, and so on, applied in mundane terms, sometimes go to waste, shattering and ruining one's expectations. Although one might prepare vast accumulations of wealth, thinking, "These will support me in my final days," sometimes one has to die amidst terrifying disasters even before those final days arrive. Even from the children one raises thinking, "These will support me," sometimes the expected help and protection are not received, and instead, destruction comes upon oneself. We hear of many such incidents. Therefore, as declared by the Buddha, the true refuge and support for a person is obtaining this peace of Nibbāna, this solace. While there is burning everywhere in this world, here the Buddha declares Nibbāna. Nibbāna means cooling down. Instead of burning, it is cooling down. Likewise, instead of destruction, it is solace; instead of agitation, it is relief. All of this is connected to this mind.

The power that takes us to woeful states, to heavenly realms, and ultimately can even make us a Buddha, a Paccekabuddha, or an Arahant, lies within this mind of ours. One must strive to bring this out. The path to this has been declared by the Buddha as the Noble Eightfold Path. On the paths in this world, what happens is physical travel. But this path is one concerning the mind. *"Sammā-diṭṭhi"* means right vision. If someone has developed this right vision regarding the Four Noble Truths, as well

as regarding good and bad, merit and demerit, then that person travels the journey according to a certain goal.

The Buddha declares that this Noble Eightfold Path is a straight path, a direct path. Why is *"sammā-diṭṭhi"* (right vision) mentioned at the very beginning of this Noble Eightfold Path? Because then that person knows, "I am traveling on a journey to Nibbāna." What supports this is fundamentally understanding good and bad, merit and demerit. However, through that, one does not expect to linger in the heavenly or brahma realms. By training one's body and speech, and then unifying the mind and developing meditation, a moment comes when one realizes, as declared by the Buddha, that this entire samsāra is suffering (*dukkha*). Everyone might say, "This is suffering." Yet, most people refer to suffering by taking only a single part of it, treating it like a small department, and saying only this part is suffering. But the Buddha declares that this entire samsāra is suffering (*dukkha*). This realization must be reached systematically. That is called wise attention ("*yoniso manasikāra*")—proper contemplation. In this manner, first of all, the Buddha declared "*sammā-diṭṭhi*", which is this right vision.

The Buddha has presented this Noble Eightfold Path in an astonishingly systematic way. Following *"sammā-diṭṭhi"*—right vision—good thoughts, called *"sammā-saṅkappa"* (right intention), arise in that person. With right vision, the target of the path being traveled becomes visible. That is why right thoughts arise from within that person. Those are namely *"nekkhamma"* (renunciation), *"avyāpāda"* (non-ill-will), and *"avihiṃsā"* (non-harming)—constantly thinking about escaping from samsāra. Next, removing hatred and generating thoughts of loving-kindness (*mettā*). Instead of harming others and animals, radiating compassion (*karuṇā*) toward them. Such thoughts arise. Instead of committing those evil deeds selfishly thinking "I am dear to myself," the person with right vision also thinks of the world and lives with a broad mind of loving-kindness and compassion. Furthermore, they obtain the realization that this samsāric journey is suffering, even from a basic knowledge of the Four Noble Truths they have received, thinking: "If the Buddha's word is true, this cannot be a good place. What must be done is escaping from here." In that manner, these intentions—these thoughts—can be developed not only by the members of the Saṅgha, but even by lay devotees through the vision of the Saṅgha. Next, through the experiences encountered in daily life, one must strive to bring forth thoughts about escaping from this samsāra. What must be done is not getting stuck and immersed in this very world. In that manner, *"sammā-saṅkappa"*, which means good thoughts, are things that can be experienced in this Noble Eightfold Path. The words uttered by a person living in accordance with those good thoughts are also endowed with the quality of *"sammā-vācā"* (right speech). *"Sammā-vācā"* means abstaining from using wrong words—abstaining from lying, abstaining from slander, abstaining from harsh speech, and abstaining from useless, gossipy words that distort one's mind.

The person who uses right words next reflects: "My actions must correspond to my words." Therefore, discarding deceit, lies, and so on, that person strives to abstain

from those wrong actions called killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. Living apart from killing animals, stealing, and sexual misconduct is what is called *"sammā-kammanta"* (right action)—not the other industries in the world. Thus, we call this "right doing." In that manner, while there are various doings in the world, this is the true doing. So: right vision, right thinking, right speaking, right doing. All these qualities are like links in a chain, where one arises due to the other. Next, *"sammā-ājīva"* (right livelihood) means a good livelihood. Just as in this story, for some, it appears as though they cannot avoid committing sins for the sake of their livelihood. They commit sins thinking: "This is my job, I have to do this to earn a living." *"Sammā-ājīva"* means abstaining from these mentioned wrong methods of livelihood, at least with effort. The sacrifice made for that—one must make a sacrifice for everything. Great things in the world cannot be obtained without a sacrifice. To pass an examination, to earn great wealth, or to become a millionaire, it is impossible without some sacrifice. Therefore, one must make such a sacrifice for this too, if one is to travel on this path to Nibbāna, to be liberated from samsāric suffering, to live according to the Buddha's word, and to be a true Buddhist lay disciple; one has to make a sacrifice for that.

For instance, let us assume that a person who lives by wrong livelihood throughout the entire month observes virtue (*sīla*) on one *Uposatha* (poya) day. On that day, that person's right livelihood, their good livelihood, becomes established. If they observe virtue on two days of the month, then during those two days; if they observe virtue on all four Uposatha days, then during those four days. When implemented in this way, it becomes clear that these can be abandoned. Thus, reflecting on some such practical method, everyone must strive to move away from these. The Buddha does not tell us to move away from these wrongs out of envy toward our earning wealth, but having reflected on the terrifying retributions of these.

The Buddha has pointed out that a person living by wrong livelihood has to face four types of fear: *"attānuvāda-bhaya"* (fear of self-reproach), *"parānuvāda-bhaya"* (fear of reproach by others), *"daṇḍa-bhaya"* (fear of punishment), and *"duggati-bhaya"* (fear of woeful states). *"Attānuvāda-bhaya"* means one's own mind blames oneself. Some people cannot sleep once they grow old, thinking: "I earned this wealth by committing such evil deeds." Then they have to search for sleeping pills. That is the fear of self-reproach; one's own mind blames oneself, one's conscience blames oneself. Next, *"parānuvāda-bhaya"*—neighbors and wise people censure that person, saying: "No matter how he lives now, we know how he earned that money." Next, *"daṇḍa-bhaya"*—sometimes they have to face punishments; they get caught in the clutches of the law. Even if one escapes from any of these, ultimately one has to go to woeful states. In accordance with the Buddha's word, one truly has to experience the retributions of these evil deeds. One must reflect on the retributive aspect in that manner. This is not meant as harm or insult to anyone, but as a presentation of the Buddha's word. However, considering the present times, detailing these matters at length might not be timely. Yet, as disciples of the Buddha, our duty is to introduce good and bad, black and white, to the world. Therefore, a

person who, even with difficulty, changes from that kind of livelihood receives immense solace. They sleep well. Even with a lower income, they can live peacefully, bringing forth those wholesome qualities.

Similarly, escaping from the fear of reproach by others, the fear of punishment, and the fear of woeful states, one can lead a good life. Next, the effort applied for that is called *"sammā-vāyāma"* (right effort)—right striving. Indeed, it is the effort made to establish this right livelihood. Those with physical strength work very hard, lift various weights that others cannot, and set grand records, showing these as feats of skill, as displays of great heroism. However, the Buddha does not identify these as right effort. What is right striving? It is applying some endeavor, effort, and energy to prevent the arising of unwholesome states (*akusala dhamma*) that are waiting to slip into this mental continuum. Next, expelling the unwholesome states already present within oneself. It is like closing the front door to prevent enemies from entering, and then pushing out through the back door the enemy who has already entered inside. That is the bad side. On the good side, too, two things must be done. What are they? One must make an effort to bring close the wholesome states (kusala dhamma) that have not yet arisen. One must draw good people close to one's home. Waving and calling, "Come, come, come inside and sit down," in that manner, one must draw good wholesome states close. Next, those good guests, those good visitors who have arrived—those good wholesome states:

In that manner, this fourfold energy is shown: for the non-arising of unarisen unwholesome states, for the abandoning and expelling of arisen unwholesome states, for the arising of unarisen wholesome states, and for protecting, stabilizing, and developing the arisen wholesome states so as to live by them. This person who exerts such energy is not particularly visible to the world. Perhaps they are sitting with closed eyes, or perhaps they spend their daily life calmly. Yet, this is being performed within their mental continuum. This is the right effort praised by the Buddha. Therefore, if some devout person is keen to correct their livelihood, and sincerely tells their children and spouse, "Let us try to make such a change starting from today, somehow or other," within that effort, this very right effort is developed. The person who develops this "sammā-vāyāma" unconsciously becomes a practitioner (*yogāvacara*). Because of this process carried out with the mind, that person becomes a meditator (*bhāvanā-yogī*), even though it is not visible externally.

Next, what is the result of that applied right effort? It is *"sammā-sati"* (right mindfulness). Here, one has to act like a watchman. If one is to act as a watchman, one must remain constantly mindful and heedful, with awareness. Then *"sammā-sati"*, that good mindfulness, becomes established in that person. By that good mindfulness, one grasps the nature of the four foundations of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*): "This is the nature of the body; this is the nature of feelings (*vedanā*); this is the nature of the mind; this is the nature of the mental objects coming to the mind." The four foundations of mindfulness are indeed what is called *"sammā-sati"*. When this is fulfilled, next, one obtains the power of concentration

(*samādhi*) to keep the mind on a wholesome object for a long time. That is called *"sammā-samādhi"* (right concentration). The Buddha has declared, *"Sammādiṭṭhissa sammāsaṅkappo pahoti, sammāsaṅkappassa sammāvācā pahoti..."* showing how these are connected to one another. Within a person of right vision, good thoughts called right intentions arise. From the person with those good thoughts, good words are uttered. The person who utters good words engages in good courses of action. The person who engages in good courses of action establishes a good livelihood. Within the person who has established a good livelihood, good endeavor and energy arise. Within the person who generates that energy, good mindfulness and clear awareness arise. Within the person who generates that mindfulness, there arises concentration—a good state of calmness.

In this very manner, the Noble Eightfold Path becomes complete within a person. These are practical things. In the past, too, Buddhist lay devotees practiced these. One must reflect that it is possible. One must contemplate that Nibbāna, which is this cooling down, is the true protection and refuge declared by the Buddha. This cooling down, this ending of the entire samsāric suffering (*dukkha*) experienced for an infinite time—expressed as birth (*jāti*), decay and death (*jarāmaraṇa*), sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair—to bring this to an end, the best opportunity is this human state of existence during the era of a Buddha's appearance. One must strive to take the true, maximum advantage of this opportune moment (khaṇa-sampatti). When it is said that Prince Bodhirāja attained Stream-entry upon hearing this Dhamma verse, it means the merits and power of merit accumulated in the past emerged through a single verse of the Buddha. This became a key to the door of Nibbāna.

Even if not as quickly as that, these devout listeners must correct their shortcomings with effort and travel on this path to Nibbāna in this manner, without thinking, "These are impossible for us." One must strive to enter and walk on this path. Primarily, this involves guarding the three doors: mind, body, and speech. Next, virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). One must constantly reflect on and live according to one's Five Precepts or the *"ājīva-aṭṭhamaka-sīla*". Along with that, calming this mind, and next, wisdom—wisdom means the realization of the Four Noble Truths. One must make a firm determination to strive for that. The purpose of such a Dhamma sermon is to generate a series of wholesome thoughts in us. We reflect on the blessings that arise from hearing this Dhamma. Even in past times, on occasions of hearing the Dhamma, beings realized the paths and fruits as the deepest blessing of it. The mental continuum operates in connection with one's life: "I must correct these shortcomings in my life. Going home, I will live in this manner." Only the person who is able to remove even the craving (*taṇhā*) for the wealth and grain in their home at that moment can realize the paths and fruits. When one thinks, "If only I could live according to such a Dhamma, this indeed is the noblest life," those bonds one held are broken, and the realization of truth arises. One must contemplate in that manner. This Dhamma declared by the Buddha is *"sandiṭṭhika"* (to be seen here and now), *"akālika"* (timeless), *"ehipassika"* (inviting

one to come and see), and *"opanayika"* (leading inwards). This is a path of Dhamma where one can see the results in this very world, obtaining them without delay—a Dhamma to be realized by the wise within their own mental continuums.

Contemplating in that manner, on this valuable *Uposatha* (poya) day, these devout listeners must make a special determination to put into practice the lessons to be drawn from this story and the lessons to be drawn from the verse. For some time, you observed a valuable virtue—the *"ājīva-aṭṭhamaka-sīla"*—which is connected to the Noble Eightfold Path. One must reflect that a great merit, a strength in the mental continuum, has been generated through that undertaking of virtue. Next, when focusing the mind on this Dhamma sermon, you listen to these with a certain concentration and calmness. Next, by contemplating deeply on the basis of the Dhamma, you generate certain capacities of understanding. Virtue, concentration, and wisdom arise naturally in the person who listens to the Dhamma properly. Next, similarly, the Buddha has declared that through these, five faculties that support Nibbāna arise in a person: faith (*saddhā*), energy (*viriya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*).

A certain amount of faith exists within us. However, it must be developed into a faculty to realize Nibbāna. This faith (saddhindriya) is not a physical faculty like the eyes, ears, or nose. It means that faith must gain dominance in our mental continuum. Faith, next energy. Accordingly, one must think: "In this manner, I will expel these unwholesome states and draw wholesome states close"—such is energy. Next, due to that application, mindfulness, a good awareness arises. Through that, bringing forth concentration, one gains an understanding. One must make a determination to walk on this path of Dhamma.

Aspire thus: "May this mass of merit accumulated within our mental continuums up to this moment support the realization of Nibbāna! May this mass of wholesome intentions support us in escaping from this entire terrifying samsāric suffering (*dukkha*) consisting of birth (*jāti*), decay and death (*jarāmaraṇa*), sickness, and so forth, and in realizing the supreme, deathless Nibbāna!" Similarly, there is a group of beings who rejoice in this accumulated store of merit. Various beings of the world from above and below are watching those who perform these meritorious deeds. Some watch as if expecting some help. Some rejoice in this and generate empathetic joy (*muditā*). Such are the deities and Brahmas, chief among whom are the guardian deities of the Sasana. One must reflect on that.

Then, let us aspire: "May that assembly of deities and Brahmas, as well as any guardian deities presiding over this place, rejoice in our merit accumulated through this delivering and hearing of the Dhamma! Having rejoiced, may they be freed from all woeful states, reach happy states, and next, walking on that path of meditation, realize solace through the supreme, deathless Nibbāna—known as the un-aging and deathless—by means of their aspired Enlightenment!" Next, make that same aspiration for all deceased relatives who have passed away in your names, as well as

all classes of beings from the Avīci hell up to the Akaniṭṭha heaven who expect these merits, who desire merits, and who desire Nibbāna: "May everyone, by rejoicing in this merit, be liberated from samsāric suffering (*dukkha*) and realize solace through the supreme, deathless Nibbāna, known as the un-aging and deathless." With that aspiration, recite these verses to share the merit.

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……..*"