Pahankanuwa Sermon #126

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

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(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.32)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

Pali Stanza:

Na antalikkhe na samuddamajjhe,

na pabbatānaṃ vivaraṃ pavissa;

Na vijjatī so jagatīpadesoko,

yatraṭṭhito mucceyya pāpakammā ti.

From:

Dhammapada 127 (Pāpavagga)

Dear Listeners,

Within every living mind, there is a wheel that constantly revolves. We call this the wheel of kamma (*kammacakka*). In this long *saṃsāra*, the wholesome and unwholesome deeds (kamma) we perform through the three doors of body, speech, and mind are deposited like karmic seeds in this *viññāṇa* (consciousness). Having been deposited, they mature and arise at various occasions as turns of retribution, bringing us pleasant or painful *Vedanā* (Feeling). Wholesome deeds bring pleasant *Vedanā* (Feeling). Unwholesome deeds bring painful *Vedanā* (Feeling). This is a natural law (*dhamma-niyāma*) that inevitably happens to everyone. We like pleasant feelings and dislike painful feelings. Therefore, when the turns of retribution for evil deeds that bring painful feelings arise, we try various methods to escape or run away from them. Similarly, we seek shelter and places of protection. But the Blessed Buddha declares that there is no place in this world to escape, flee, or hide from evil deeds. That is the very point declared in the stanza we have set up as our theme. Along with this stanza, there are three background stories that led to its preaching. These stories also demonstrate the idea that there is no place to escape from evil deeds.

While the Blessed Buddha was residing at the Jetavana monastery, a group of monks who had traveled to a distant region were returning to Jetavana to see the Blessed Buddha. On their way, they entered a certain village for alms-round. The people of that village invited these venerable ones, offered them morning gruel, ushered them into the assembly hall, and sat listening to the Dhamma while the midday alms-meal was being prepared. At that moment, as a certain woman who was cooking the meal blew into the hearth, a flame caught the roof, and a wisp of thatch from the roof caught fire and flew up into the sky. Right at that moment, a crow flew by, got its neck caught in that ring of burning thatch, was burnt to death, and fell down in the middle of the village. Seeing this, the monks felt great spiritual urgency (*saṃvega*). "This crow must have arrived there at that exact moment due to some evil deed. Only the Teacher knows the kamma underlying this; we must ask the Teacher about this," they thought, and they set off toward Jetavana. That is the first incident.

Next, another group of monks, while traveling to see the Blessed Buddha, boarded a ship because they had to cross a stretch of sea. Right in the middle of the sea, the ship suddenly stopped on its own. The ship stood completely still there, unable to be moved this way or that. Then, the people on the ship thought, "There must be an unlucky, miserable person here. Let us draw lots to find out who this miserable person is." The first time, the lot fell to the ship captain's wife, a young and beautiful woman. She was chosen as the unlucky person in the first round. So they said, "Draw the lots again." The second time and the third time as well, it fell to her.

Then the crowd looked at the ship captain, asking, "What shall we do about this?" The captain also thought, "I cannot risk the lives of this large crowd for the sake of one person." Therefore, he gave them permission to throw her into the sea. As the crowd prepared to lift her and throw her into the sea, she screamed in mortal terror. Then the captain said, "Not like that. Remove her jewelry and ornaments, dress her in a piece of dirty rag, and throw her into the sea. Moreover, I do not wish to see this woman floating on the water; it pains my heart. Therefore, tie a basket of sand around her neck so that she sinks immediately upon falling into the water."

The men did exactly that. When the woman fell into the water in that manner, only the sharks and sea monsters in the ocean knew what happened to her body. The monks on board, reflecting on the news of the woman who met such a terrible fate, thought, "This must be due to some grave past kamma. We must ask the Teacher about this." That is the second incident.

Next, another seven monks, also traveling to see the Blessed Buddha, arrived at a nearby monastery as night fell. When they inquired about a place to stay the night as guest monks, those monks handed over a certain cave with seven beds to these venerable ones. While they were asleep at night, a massive boulder rolled down and blocked the entrance of the cave. Seeing this, the monks of that monastery cried, "Alas! A great disaster has befallen our seven guest monks!" and gathered the people of several villages to try for seven consecutive days to remove the boulder. Those inside also tried their best, but they could not move it. But on the seventh day, the

boulder rolled away on its own. When it rolled away, those monks were extremely ill and weak from being without food and drink. Those monks also thought, "This must be due to some past evil deed of ours; we must ask the Teacher about this," and they set off.

All three groups met on the way, discussed their experiences and what they had seen, and arrived at Jetavana. They related what they had seen to the Blessed Buddha, one by one. Then, the Blessed Buddha revealed the karmic retribution underlying each event: "Monks, that crow that was burnt by fire in the sky and fell down was, in the past, a certain farmer in this very city of Sāvatthī. That farmer tried very hard to tame his ox. But after going a short distance, the ox would lie down. It was extremely disobedient. After trying repeatedly and failing to tame the ox, the farmer grew angry and thought, 'Fine then, sleep as much as you like!' He wrapped straw around the ox's body and set it on fire. The ox died right there. That was the evil deed. As a result of that evil deed, the farmer boiled in hell for a long time. Thereafter, reborn in the state of a crow, he was burnt by fire in the sky and fell down in this very manner for seven consecutive lifetimes." Thus, the Buddha explained the details of the first evil deed.

Next, the second story: the tale of the captain's wife. In the past, she was the wife of a householder—or perhaps a farmer's wife—in this very city of Bārāṇasī. She had to do all the household chores. While doing so, the dog at home followed her wherever she went, watching her. When fetching water, going to the forest to gather firewood, or bringing food to the field, the dog followed her constantly, always staying with her. Because of this, people teased her about it. Overcome with anger and shame, what did she do? One day, while taking food to her husband in the field, she hid a rope around her waist. The dog followed behind her. After emptying the food basket she had brought, she came near a well, filled the basket with sand, tied one end of the rope to the basket of sand, and called the dog to tie the other end. The dog came to her, wagging its tail. She tied the rope tightly around its neck and lowered the sand basket into the well. Immediately, the dog was dragged in and drowned. On account of that evil deed, after boiling in hell for a long time, she was bound with a sand basket around her neck and drowned to death in this exact manner for a hundred lifetimes. That is the second matter.

Thirdly, the story of the seven monks. The Blessed Buddha declared their past: in the past, these seven monks were seven cowherd boys. They were tasked with taking the cattle to the forest to graze, in turns—about once every seven days. One day, while returning after grazing the cows, they saw a large land monitor lizard running along. They chased after it. Many people know about the monitor lizard—perhaps as food, or for whatever reason, they chased it. The lizard ran and entered an anthill with seven holes. They tried very hard to get the lizard out, but failed. When they couldn't, what did these boys think? "We must come back tomorrow and catch this monitor lizard," they thought, and gathered various sticks and twigs to block all seven holes. Having blocked them, they went home. Afterwards, they forgot about this incident.

Busy with other activities, seven days later, while passing by that path, they suddenly saw the anthill and remembered the monitor lizard. "We must open it and see what happened to the monitor lizard," they said, and opened it. When they looked, they saw the lizard coming out, extremely weak, trembling, reduced to mere skin and bones. Seeing this, the boys felt great compassion. Instead of killing it, they stroked its back and let it go, saying, "Oh, go on your way safely." The Blessed Buddha declared both the good and bad aspects of that action: "Those seven did not boil in hell because they did not kill the lizard."

"But instead, for fourteen lifetimes, they had to remain without food and drink for seven days each, due to being trapped in this manner." When the Buddha declared these evil deeds, a certain monk asked the Blessed Buddha: "Venerable Sir, it seems then that one cannot escape from one's evil deeds even by flying into the sky, going into the sea, or entering between mountains?" "Indeed, monk, that is precisely so. There is never any way to escape, flee, or hide from evil deeds," the Blessed Buddha declared, and then spoke the stanza we have taken as our theme:

"Na antalikkhe na samuddamajjhe,

Na pabbatānaṃ vivaraṃ pavissa;

Na vijjatī so jagatīpadesoko,

Yatraṭṭhito mucceyya pāpakammā."

The Blessed Buddha declared that there is no place anywhere in the world—neither in the sky, nor in the midst of the sea, nor by entering mountain clefts—where one can escape the retributions of evil deeds. The more we think about this, the gravity of this kamma and evil deeds becomes clearly manifest. Moreover, all three stories mentioned here are about the violation of the first precept—the unwholesome act of destroying life. This shows the immense depth of the sentence we recite: *Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi* ("I undertake the precept to abstain from destroying living beings"). What is spoken of here is the killing of animals, not even humans. We can understand to what extent even killing animal life, like an ox or a dog, leads to experiencing retribution. Furthermore, we must reflect a little on being born as a crow after escaping from hell. Having boiled in hell, the crow was born carrying that black color and an unquenchable hunger. According to this story, we can understand that the crows flying around us are actually animals that have escaped from hell. Such is the terrifying state of affairs in this *saṃsāra*. Just like killing, causing harm and torture brings painful retributions for a long time. The turns of retribution appropriate to kamma, and the way opportunities arise for them, are truly wondrous. As shown here, it is even difficult for someone to comprehend.

When we hear the term "death trap," we think it is something set up for us by others. But as we see here, this death trap is prepared automatically; one prepares it oneself through one's own kamma. There is a certain force of attraction in kamma. When this turn of retribution arises, the individuals, objects, and everything appropriate to

that retribution are drawn towards it. If there is nothing else to deliver the retribution of an evil deed, even a lightning bolt will strike down. To that extent, the entire universe, the entire world, is arranged to exhaust the energy we generate through our volition (*cetanā*). We can say so. Earth, water, fire, and wind—these elemental portions we normally think of make up this body. The same is true for humans and other things in the external world. Yet, all of these operate to exhaust that karmic force, that retribution. This is a wondrous death trap from which not even a Buddha or an Arahant can escape.

When one contemplates this, a great sense of spiritual urgency (*saṃvega*) toward *saṃsāra* arises. The Blessed Buddha has declared that due to ignorance (*avijjā*), *Saṅkhāra* (Preparations) arise in the mind. *Saṅkhāra* means the very concept of kamma. A certain preparation is made by the mind. That preparation is made due to ignorance and *Taṇhā* (Craving), based on the notion of "I" and "mine". It is due to the ignorance of "I" and the corresponding *taṇhā* that grasps things as "mine" that one thinks, "If this is my ox, I must be able to tame it." Because it did not bend to his will, he tortured and killed it. Similarly, because that woman felt a certain shame that did not suit her mind, she killed the dog that was the cause of it. The other incidents are the same. Even in the case of the monitor lizard, it must have been due to some craving for food that those boys tried to kill it. Whichever it may be, the mind is defiled by greed, hatred, and delusion, and a certain force arises. It is like a karmic seed. That is why it is stated in the Dhamma:

"Yādisaṃ vapate bījaṃ,

Tādisaṃ harate phalaṃ;

Kalyāṇakārī kalyāṇaṃ,

Pāpakārī ca pāpakaṃ."

"Just as one sows, so does one reap the harvest." Those who perform good kamma receive pleasant retributions. Those who perform evil kamma receive painful retributions. This is a natural law (*dhammatā*). Thus, there is a wondrous entanglement of kamma here. On one occasion, a deity approached the Blessed Buddha and asked a question:

"Anto jaṭā bahi jaṭā,

Jaṭāya jaṭitā pajā;

Taṃ taṃ gotama pucchāmi,

Ko imaṃ vijaṭaye jaṭaṃ."

"An inner tangle, an outer tangle; this generation is entangled in a tangle. I ask you this, Gotama: who can untangle this tangle?" they asked the Blessed Buddha. The Blessed Buddha declared on that occasion:

"Sīle patiṭṭhāya naro sapañño,

Cittaṃ paññañca bhāvayaṃ;

Ātāpī nipako bhikkhū,

So imaṃ vijaṭaye jaṭaṃ."

"If someone, established in virtue (*sīla*), develops the mind—that is, concentration (*samādhi*)—and develops wisdom (*paññā*), and thus walks upon the path of practice consisting of virtue, concentration, and wisdom, fulfilling the Noble Eightfold Path; then such a wise, energetic monk untangles this karmic knot."

From this, we first see the importance of virtue (*sīla*). Nowadays, the Five Precepts are regarded as a simple, minor thing. Just now, these merit-seeking devotees undertook the *Ājīva-aṭṭhamaka-sīla* (virtue with livelihood as the eighth). What is expected through all of this is the taming of body and speech. Though we say body and speech, what lies beneath them is the mind. The Blessed Buddha has declared: *Cetanāhaṃ bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi, cetayitvā kammaṃ karoti kāyena vācāya manasā*. According to the Dhamma, this kamma is something connected to the mind. "Monks, I call volition itself kamma. Why? Having willed, one performs kamma through body, speech, and mind." If actions performed by machines happen automatically, they are of a different kind. But when they are connected to a certain volition, one becomes entangled in that kamma. So much so, we can call this the machine of kamma.

Indeed, ancient teachers, when speaking of the wondrous and sorrowful operation of kamma as described in these stories, used certain words: "operated by the machine of kamma" (*kamma-yanta*). This means the way kamma delivers its retribution is like the working of a machine. This is a wondrous thing. According to the volitional force generated in the mind, various things in the entire universe align and are drawn to that point. Individuals are drawn, things are drawn, and opportunities are aligned. In particular, what is to be understood here is that in the rendering of retribution for evil deeds, what are drawn are often the individuals who were the cause of, or assisted in, the original deed. Also, sometimes it is due to the hatred generated therefrom, for revenge. If one harbors hatred toward someone and thinks, "I will take revenge on them," then in the next life, perhaps that person can take revenge. However, the kamma does not end there. Instead, one becomes more and more entangled. This is what is called the inner and outer tangle. The Blessed Buddha declared that this is like a tangled ball of thread. The Blessed Buddha used several words to describe the entirety of *saṃsāra*: *tantākulakajātā, kulagaṇṭhikajātā, muñjababbajabhūtā*. It is like a tangled skein of thread. Similarly, there is a special type of grass called *babbaja* grass, which also has a tangling nature. It is for this reason that the entire *saṃsāra* is said to be a tangle, possessing a tangled nature. Due to this ignorance, other people are also drawn into the evil deeds one commits. These individuals are involved in this situation as instruments. They too generate

more and more kamma. Thus, there is no end to this. Furthermore, when experiencing the retribution of kamma, unless a Buddha reveals it or one has a correct understanding of kamma, one thinks it is a death trap set up by someone else. So, they develop hatred toward them. But in truth, it was oneself who set this trap through the evil deeds one committed. Therefore, the Blessed Buddha declares that those who perform evil deeds act as their own enemies. They behave as their own enemies because they will have to experience the results of what they have done one day, and they will have to suffer them severely.

Now, when a grain of paddy is planted, it grows into a large plant, a crop of paddy. Similarly, a small seed becomes a tree. In the same way, from the moment a kamma is performed, it begins to mature. In its maturing, it yields results on a massive scale. Because the unwholesome roots of greed, hatred, and delusion draw in the further essence required for it. Having drawn it in, it yields retribution hundreds of thousands of times over, like the original evil deed. The Blessed Buddha declares regarding the retribution of some kamma, that a person boiled in hell for hundreds of years, thousands of years, hundreds of thousands of years. Sometimes, upon performing such grave evil deeds, they boil in hell for aeons (*kappa*).

Thus, this is a wondrous thing. This is something done by the machine of kamma, and furthermore, other individuals are drawn into it. Not only that, but those individuals are also caught in the kamma. Not knowing that it is a retribution, they too accumulate more and more kamma from it. Like a tangled ball of thread that cannot be untangled, where the end cannot be found, a web of confusion exists here. This can be called the operation of the machine of kamma, or else the wheel of kamma (*kammacakka*). Because having performed kamma, it then revolves and comes back as the turn of retribution.

For example, if we want a certain time on the clock in front of us—often what we call an alarm—we set it to operate at a specific time. Then, when that time passes, the gear wheel revolves and that action takes place, producing a certain sound. In the same way, this kamma revolves within this mind. Volition revolves and yields results as turns of retribution. Not once or twice, but arising hundreds of thousands of times, they yield their results, bringing painful results. Regarding the individuals who serve as instruments for those retributions, it must be said that they accumulate more and more kamma anew. The only wheel that can weaken or stop this wheel of kamma is the Wheel of Dhamma (*dhammacakka*). That Wheel of Dhamma is what we referred to as virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). If we speak first of virtue (*sīla*), since the stories here are about the unwholesome act of destroying life, let us see what is meant by undertaking a precept.

Nowadays, many educated people say, "Is it not enough to undertake it once? Do we have to undertake it every day? Is this something to be taken from a monk every day?" and raise various such questions. But what is being done here? It is a certain technique to tame one's mind. In short, one implants a certain determination in the mind so that by taming the mind, one can then tame the body and speech. "I abstain

from destroying other lives, from the evil deed of destroying others' lives, and from causing harm and torture," and one undertakes this as a training precept. "I do not do this because someone else says so, but because I fear its retributions, I keep this precept," and one develops a firm determination. Once a determination is made, it is a good beginning. When one's mind inclines toward evil, it is that very determination that helps restrain the mind. One remembers, "Did I not undertake the precept in this manner?" Through that, one issues a command, an order to one's own wisdom: "If you see an animal, do not kill it." One's impulses say, "Kill it." Impulses mean emotions. One's feelings—that is, to please the tongue, or to take revenge, or for entertainment, etc.—make one feel like killing a bird, a dog, a goat, a chicken, or a pig. Right then, when the virtue (*sīla*) undertaken in the mind is remembered, a command comes: "This must not be done; do not do this." Because of that, one is able to abstain from it.

It is for this strength that the undertaking of virtue (*sīla*) exists. Without such a method or technique, one cannot escape from this. Because the influences of society as well as one's own feelings are that powerful. When these two come, if there is no prior preparation, it becomes very difficult to control the mind. That restraint or abstaining is an extremely difficult thing. It is as a foundation for this that one undertakes a training precept. In that way, virtue (*sīla*) helps. The retributions of violating such virtue are what we see in all of these stories. Thus, what is done through training precepts is receiving some encouragement to abstain from one's evil deeds. That means taming the body and speech. Yet, a multitude of thoughts arise in the mind. Even that thought is a highly grave kamma.

The Blessed Buddha has declared that volition itself is called kamma. Kamma is not merely the action visible to the external world, nor the word heard, which are caused by volition. The moment an unwholesome volition arises in someone, from that very moment, they are caught in a grave kamma. Let us say, an evil volition. Now, we have heard of the Venerable Devadatta Thero; it is mentioned that he harbored intense hatred and malice toward the Blessed Buddha and did various things. It is not only the things he did, but even that thought itself was an extremely grave unwholesome act. Because that thought was directed toward the Blessed Buddha, the foremost in the three worlds, or toward the Arahants—individuals who have developed their minds to the highest degree. Leaving that aside, as shown here, if someone harbors hatred or a volition to kill even toward animals, from that very moment they will have to face a multitude of grave karmic retributions. Through its execution, it becomes complete. If they are things that proceed to action, the volition is completed through body or speech.

Therefore, to destroy the root here, virtue (*sīla*) alone is not sufficient. That is why it is said: *Sīle patiṭṭhāya*—"established in virtue." If one is not established in virtue, one does not even think of the mind. Therefore, established in virtue, having developed some control over body and speech, next, *cittaṃ paññañca bhāvayaṃ*—one must develop one's mind. Developing the mind means bringing about

concentration (*samādhi*). Because the mind is a scattered thing. The mind of ordinary worldlings is of an extremely scattered nature; it cannot be brought under control. Now, when looking at a flowing stream of water, it turns this way and that, turning toward where the rocks are, running here and there. It goes in whichever direction it pleases. But if this is confined, narrowed, and directed through a pipe, sometimes it yields a massive force capable of turning a giant iron wheel. We see this at hydroelectric power stations. Similarly, in this scattered mind, no real power is seen. The power remains suppressed. The mind is an extremely powerful thing. But this power is hidden; because the power of the mind is scattered, it cannot be put into operation. Through that, one cannot attain that wisdom (*paññā*). Wisdom (*paññā*) means understanding the *Anicca* (Impermanent) and *Anattā* (Not-self) nature of the entire universe of the world. Ultimately speaking, one must come to the realization that there is nothing to be taken as "I" or "mine".

To come to that, one must first see the impermanence (*anicca*) of all these things. Due to that impermanent nature, the realization must arise that the entirety of existence is constantly *Dukkha* (Suffering). Then, it will automatically be understood that there is nothing to be grasped here as "I" or "mine". When those first two aspects are understood, the realization of this *Anattā* (Not-self) nature arises—that there is nothing in the world that can be taken as "I" or "mine". The absence of this (realization) is what causes the volitions that put kamma into action. "These things must exist in the world as I wish. Others must exist as I wish." It is based on such firmly held notions that worldlings are inclined toward various evil deeds. To eliminate this perception of self (*atta-saññā*), this feeling of "I" and "mine" lying beneath that notion, one must develop the insight-wisdom (*vipassanā-paññā*) declared by the Blessed Buddha. Insight (*vipassanā*) means a special seeing, a penetrative seeing. One must see the impermanent nature of our life, of our body, of everything in this world. To do all of that, the mind must be concentrated. That is what is called *cittaṃ bhāvayaṃ*—developing the mind. Developing the mind is developing absorption (*jhāna*). Establishing a concentration (*samādhi*) in the mind by way of *jhāna* meditation and so on. A mind so concentrated becomes powerful, just like a large flow of water restricted into a pipe becomes strong enough to generate electricity.

Therefore, not being satisfied with virtue alone, one must constantly raise in the mind some meditation subject (*kammaṭṭhāna*) as a wholesome thought, not an unwholesome one. One should constantly bring to mind a wholesome thought—such as recollecting the Buddha (*buddhānussati*), either a phrase on the Buddha's virtues or one of the nine virtues of the Blessed Buddha; or a thought of loving-kindness (*mettā*) such as "may all beings be well and happy"; or a part of the body that feels particularly repulsive to oneself, like hair, body hair, or bones; or a short phrase like "death is certain, life is uncertain". A *kamaṭahana* or meditation subject (*kammaṭṭhāna*) does not mean saying things like "I will kill, I will kill, somehow I will kill, I will kill," but rather a thought like "may they be well, may they be well!" That is right concentration (*sammā-samādhi*). For a good concentration, one must

use a good wholesome *kammaṭṭhāna* in a way that inclines the mind toward the wholesome. If the mind becomes concentrated through that, then one can experience the power of the mind at that moment, seeing how powerful the mind is. Then, that is used to gradually stop the unwholesome thoughts that flow in the mind like a torrent of water. That is, when a thought arises, our mind rolls over and inclines toward the unwholesome. For a long time, like a river flowing downwards, the mind of beings in *saṃsāra* has inclined toward the unwholesome side. When such a thought arises, due to the thoughts and thought-conceptions (*vitakka*) that arise upon it, a multitude of further kammas are automatically accumulated.

To stop the operation of this machine of kamma, one must break the power of those unwholesome thoughts, the volitional force. One must gradually calm this down. This is what *Saṅkhāra* (Preparations) means. The mind constantly has a restless nature. Stopping those, one must bring about a calming, an extinguishment (Nibbāna. Because with every single instance of this restlessness, the kammas generated create more and more *Bhava* (Becoming) and lifetimes. This is a wondrous thing. The way birth (*jāti*) is brought about in various states of existence to yield the retribution of a kamma, and how corresponding to it, in an appropriate manner, the four elements—earth, water, fire, and wind—come together to create a body in some womb or elsewhere.

They say this body is created precisely to experience the feelings (*vedanā*) corresponding to that kamma. As a way of giving an opportunity to experience them. If kamma is to yield its retribution, one must experience the corresponding feelings (*vedanā*). Those feelings are experienced through some body. That is how the body is created. Thus, some are born blind, mute, deaf, deformed, or in various other ways. Various other sufferings, illnesses, and accidents all come to exhaust that karmic force. The entire universe is arranged to yield retributions according to the force generated by that volition (*cetanā*). So, one might think: "Then, why not just keep performing meritorious deeds? Can we not remain in this *saṃsāra* forever?" To remain forever as one wishes is something that can never be done. This *saṃsāra* is a heap of *Dukkha* (Suffering).

Everyone is struggling to satisfy their own cravings (*taṇhā*) and desires. In such a place, one can never live as one wishes, according to one's own desires. That is one aspect. The other is that even if one performs wholesome deeds, as soon as their retributions are exhausted, one must experience the retributions of past evil deeds. Let us say one is born in heaven; after that merit is exhausted, one falls back into hell. No matter how many meritorious deeds one performs, even after aeons have passed, once their retributions are exhausted, one has to experience the retributions of one's unwholesome deeds. That is what impermanence (*anicca*) means. The Blessed Buddha declared that even the Brahmas in the Brahma worlds think they are permanent, yet they too are impermanent. Even after aeons, when that merit and wholesome kamma are exhausted—it is just like when the paddy in the barn runs out. One lives eating, drinking, and dancing, but the day the paddy in the barn runs out,

on that day, one understands this danger. In the same way, even if one performs wholesome deeds, on one hand, the mind is never satisfied. Therefore, looking at it ultimately, this knot must be broken first. This tangled ball of thread can never be untangled—so much so, not even a Buddha can untangle it (for us, we must do it ourselves).

Next, the Blessed Buddha declared the way to calm these kammas, and that is called the Wheel of Dhamma (*dhammacakka*). On that side, it revolves automatically, yielding retributions. The Blessed Buddha points out the Wheel of Dhamma which must be revolved through effort. The Wheel of Dhamma must be revolved through effort, just like swimming upstream in a river. The Blessed Buddha directly declares regarding this entire Dhamma that it is a path that goes against the current (*paṭisotagāmī*). Going against the current (*paṭisotagāmī*) means like swimming upstream against the flowing torrent. Going with the torrent is easy, but swimming upstream is difficult. The Dhamma is something like that. Because the mind of the ordinary worldling is inclined toward evil. Unless one makes an effort, one can never escape from this *saṃsāra*. Then we can understand that the effort applied for this is breaking the power of that volition in that manner.

This is broken in four stages. In the first stage, when a deep understanding of the Three Characteristics of *Anicca* (Impermanent), *Dukkha* (Suffering), and *Anattā* (Not-self) arises through the insight-knowledge called the path-knowledge of Stream-entry (*sotāpatti-magga-ñāṇa*), as a matter of natural law, that person's mind sees Nibbāna for the first time. One experiences a certain calming. Although not freed from all defilements, due to one's wisdom (*paññā*), a certain portion of karmic seeds dry up. That is, the kammas known as those leading to states of deprivation (apāya)—if one performs an unwholesome kamma by holding very strongly to the notion of "I" and "mine", its retribution is a grave one that might lead to hell itself. Therefore, first of all, the power of those kammas in the mind is broken. What helps to break that power is wisdom (*paññā*). Why? Because if *saṅkhāra* (Preparations) arise due to ignorance (*avijjā*), when ignorance is thinned out to some extent, *saṅkhāra* must also be thinned out. When ignorance is completely eliminated, *saṅkhāra* must also be completely stilled. This is the natural law (*dhammatā*). It is according to this natural law that the Blessed Buddha has shown those four stages of paths and fruits (*magga-phala*).

The Blessed Buddha illustrates the liberation gained through that path-knowledge of Stream-entry in the first stage with this simile: By the liberation gained through the path-knowledge of Stream-entry, the remaining *Dukkha* (Suffering) that person has to experience in the entirety of *saṃsāra* is like the dust on a fingernail, whereas the portion from which they have received relief is like the great earth. So terrifying is *saṃsāra*; to the ordinary worldling, it feels as though one can never escape from it. Such is the wondrous, massive entanglement of "an inner tangle, an outer tangle," tangled both inside and outside. But the path of virtue, concentration, and wisdom shown by the Blessed Buddha reveals that through four stages, these karmic forces

can be broken. The Stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*) receives great relief, being one who will be reborn in *saṃsāra* only seven times at most. When that Wheel of Dhamma is revolved once more further along, at that stage that person is called a Once-returner (*sakadāgāmī*). That means they return to this world only once. Having been reborn in heaven, if at all, they return to the human world only once; or else, departing from the human world, they are reborn in heaven. Thus, they receive great relief by returning to this world only once. Thereafter, they definitely become an Arahant and bring *Dukkha* (Suffering) to an end.

Next is the state called Non-returner (*anāgāmī*). Non-returner means they do not return to this world. Being reborn in a Pure Abode (*suddhāvāsa*) Brahma world, they bring *Dukkha* (Suffering) to an end right there. Becoming an Arahant, they attain final Nibbāna (extinction / extinguishment). Ultimately, becoming an Arahant means penetratively seeing the Three Characteristics of *Anicca* (Impermanent), *Dukkha* (Suffering), and *Anattā* (Not-self) in the deepest manner in this very life, experiencing the complete calming of *saṅkhāra* (Preparations) in the attainment of fruition (*phala-samāpatti*), drying up those karmic seeds, and bringing the sufferings of *saṃsāra* to an end so that one is never reborn again. Yet, so powerful is that wheel of kamma we spoke of, that even Buddhas and Arahants had to experience the retributions of certain kammas performed in the past. The most famous instance of this, as you have all heard, is the Great Arahant Moggallāna. Ninety-one aeons ago, he beat and crushed the bones of his parents, killing them. So intense was the retribution of that evil deed that, in physical terms, his body became dark-colored, like that crow we mentioned. Furthermore, even though he was someone of such great psychic power, in the end, he was killed at the hands of five hundred bandits, his bones crushed to pieces. In that manner, the retributions of those evil deeds are received even by Arahants. Such is the power of kamma. But what is the relief? There is no further rebirth (*jāti*).

When the Great Arahant Aṅgulimāla walked for alms, broken pots thrown from houses or stones thrown by boys would fly through the air and hit his head. When he returned from the alms-round with blood flowing from his split head, the Blessed Buddha consoled him: "Brahmin, that evil deed for which you would have had to boil in hell for a very long time—that evil deed of destroying the lives of so many people for which you would have had to boil in hell—you are now freed from it, and this danger you face now is a minor thing." From that, we see that this wheel of kamma is extremely powerful. What is the way to escape from this? It is the terrifying escape from this *saṃsāra*—namely, the cessation of further rebirth (*jāti*) by raising wisdom (*paññā*). When this is said, nowadays Buddhists often feel afraid: "Oh, then what about existence?" The craving for existence is the most subtle *Taṇhā* (Craving) within worldlings. The Blessed Buddha declares this to be *bhava-taṇhā* (craving for existence).

Beings always try to exist in the world somehow. No matter how much this is explained, a fear arises: "Oh, we are going to cease to exist." To eliminate that fear,

what is to be done? One must eliminate that dogma of self-illusion (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*)—which causes our feeling of "I"—by raising wisdom (*paññā*). There is nothing here to be taken as "I" or "mine". Both the things taken as "I" and "mine," and that "I" itself—each and every thing is impermanent (*anicca*). From moment to moment, they change extremely rapidly. Likewise, there is nothing there to be taken as pleasure. Everything that changes, due to the agitation caused by its alteration and preparation, produces only *Dukkha* (Suffering). This nature of *dukkha* is what exists in the entirety of *saṃsāra*. In short, the Blessed Buddha has declared that if one sees it correctly, *dukkha* is like a thorn. Similarly, what is called pleasure is also, in reality, *dukkha*. In that way, everything that worldlings think of as pain and pleasure, the Blessed Buddha designates as *dukkha*. Because even that feeling (*vedanā*) we think of as pleasure, when it changes, becomes *dukkha* for us. When a pleasant thing or a beloved person is separated from us, *dukkha* comes to us. Everything that comes in the form of pleasure is actually *dukkha*.

For this reason, the Blessed Buddha declares that there is no escape other than being liberated from the entirety of *saṃsāra* existence. The reason one does not want to be liberated from it is delusion (*moha*) or ignorance (*avijjā*). When that ignorance is eliminated, that person has no fear, because through that deep understanding, the realization arises that there is no "self" here to cease to exist. It is such a profound vision that the Blessed Buddha presents to escape from this entanglement of kamma in *saṃsāra*. There is a nature in kammas to yield such terrifying retributions, chasing and yielding results again and again. Some kammas yield results in this very life, some in the next life, and some in a life further beyond. In this way, some kammas chase and yield retributions hundreds of thousands of times. Therefore, these merit-seeking devotees must reflect: "Why do we bring this Dhamma close to our lives? It is for liberation from *saṃsāra*." The sufferings of *saṃsāra* do not mean merely those superficial sufferings identified by ordinary worldlings. It is something far deeper, and it is well understood by a concentrated mind. When the mind becomes still, one understands that everything we think of as pleasure actually possesses a nature that brings *dukkha*. One can never be satisfied with any of it; there is no lasting satisfaction. The Blessed Buddha has described *Taṇhā* (Craving) as a wondrous thirst. Like a fever-stricken patient asking for water, if our expectations in this life are not fulfilled, at the moment of death, we draw our last breath with the wish and desire to be reborn somewhere. According to that desire and wish, what we receive is not merely what we want; it is arranged according to the kamma we have performed. In that story, by killing the ox, that person obtained some pleasure and satisfaction. Fittingly, he received a body suitable to exhaust those retributions, in the form of a crow.

The retributions of the evil deeds done for one's own entertainment and pleasure must be experienced by oneself in return. This is called being the owner of one's kamma (*kammasakatā*). Kamma and its retribution are often identical. The retribution is exactly corresponding to the kamma, in that very manner. Thus, this is a world where the wheel of kamma revolves. In short, this *saṃsāra* is an ocean of

kamma. It is called an ocean of *dukkha* because it is an ocean of kamma. One performs kamma here; indeed, one cannot remain without performing kamma. To carry on existence, one must use this volition (*cetanā*) and perform various kammas. And it is not only wholesome deeds that are performed; because one is automatically forced to commit sins for the sake of one's loved ones, and for the maintenance of one's own life.

Therefore, other than being liberated from the entirety of *saṃsāra*, there is no way to cut this knot. That is why the Blessed Buddha declared to that deity: *Sīle patiṭṭhāya naro sapañño…*—"The wise, energetic, and capable monk established in virtue, developing the mind and wisdom…" Though it says "monk," here it is not only a monk, but any practitioner (*yogāvacara*)—whether lay or ordained—who untangles this knot. Virtue, concentration, and wisdom are the Noble Eightfold Path itself. Right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*), right intention (*sammā-saṅkappa*), right speech (*sammā-vācā*), right action (*sammā-kammanta*), right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*), right effort (*sammā-vāyāma*), right mindfulness (*sammā-sati*), and right concentration (*sammā-samādhi*). In this manner, one must reorganize one's entire stream of thought. First of all, one must align one's daily view of life with right view—possessing a basic understanding of good and bad, wholesome and unwholesome, as well as some understanding of the Four Noble Truths: *Dukkha* (Suffering), the cause of *dukkha*, the cessation of *dukkha* which is Nibbāna, and the path to it.

Next, according to that view of life, one must direct one's thoughts. The very thought of escaping from this *saṃsāra* is what is called renunciation (*nekkhamma-saṅkappa*). It is not merely the thought of becoming a monk. One must generate thoughts of departing from this *saṃsāra—saṅkappa*. Next, thoughts of loving-kindness, and thoughts of non-harming (*avihiṃsā-saṅkappa*) which are separate from harmful thoughts. In that manner, one must train the mind in good thoughts. Following those thoughts, one must next align one's speech. Abstaining from false speech, slanderous speech, harsh speech, and idle chatter, one must practice the good side, such as speaking beneficial and truthful words.

Next, regarding one's actions, *sammā-kammanta* (right action)—here, one must particularly abstain from grave unwholesome deeds, the wrong bodily actions of killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. Furthermore, not only that, but also one's livelihood (*ājīva*). It is there that we must reflect: nowadays, killing animals is an extremely easy thing. Something seemingly unavoidable, something one cannot do without if one is to live in society and become rich. If one can kill animals by the thousands, one can get rich quickly. But the retributions one has to suffer for them are exactly what we see in those stories. Therefore, one who wishes to make a profit can live in that manner, causing such harm. The Blessed Buddha declared the loss that comes from it. One can even take it as a "profit" in another sense: one kills only one animal, but one has to die hundreds of thousands of times. So, in that way, one receives it hundreds of thousands of times over. One could think of it as "not a loss" in that ironic sense!

In any case, one must reflect on the terrifying retributions of those evil deeds. Reflecting thus, one must arrange one's livelihood as declared by the Blessed Buddha, abstaining from wrong trades—such as trading in intoxicants, poison, animals for slaughter, and weapons—and arrange one's livelihood in a way that aligns one's thoughts. While so arranging, through that very effort, one trains oneself to prevent the mind from entering unwholesome states, to abandon unwholesome states already within, to arouse wholesome states, and to develop wholesome states already present. Through the very arrangement of one's livelihood, one practices that fourfold Right Effort (*sammā-vāyāma*). Then, when the mind constantly moves only in good thoughts in that manner, that person's *sati* (mindfulness) develops. One is compelled to remain with good mindfulness and clear comprehension, like a gatekeeper.

Next, through that, by constantly raising wholesome thoughts in the mind, one can also establish concentration (*samādhi*). In that way, when the Noble Eightfold Path is completed, if someone deeply penetrates the Three Characteristics of *Anicca* (Impermanent), *Dukkha* (Suffering), and *Anattā* (Not-self) through what we consider insight-meditation (*vipassanā-bhāvanā*), then that person is the one who, through the path, fruit, and penetration of Stream-entry, Once-returning, Non-returning, and Arahantship, escapes from this extremely terrifying *saṃsāra* and attains liberation by the calming of all *saṅkhāra* (Preparations) in the noble, deathless Nibbāna. One realizes noble Nibbāna.

On a Poya day like today, these merit-seeking devotees inclined their minds toward the Noble Eightfold Path, and therein toward concentration and wisdom. You have maintained good thoughts, even for this short period, by reflecting on the terrifying nature of evil deeds and the terrifying nature of *saṃsāra*, thus generating fear of *saṃsāra* and understanding its nature of *dukkha*. That helps toward Nibbāna. One must close the door to *saṃsāra* and turn toward Nibbāna. Therefore, you have generated a multitude of such valuable thoughts based on a Dhamma stanza preached by the Blessed Buddha. Rejoicing in that, you must continue to maintain your thoughts in a way that develops the virtues of faith (*saddhā*), energy (*viriya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). You must seek out things that develop them. What are the things that develop them? The Dhamma. Dhamma reflection. Or else, performing wholesome, meritorious deeds. Through all of those, one's mind is inclined toward the wholesome. Ultimately speaking, it is by subjecting the mind to meditation and escaping from *saṃsāra* through insight meditation (*vipassanā-bhāvanā*) that one can escape. Resolving in that manner, at this moment, you must make a firm determination to turn your entire livelihood toward the path of goodness. Because you will have to experience the retributions of the evil deeds you perform. There is no shelter or place of protection in this entire world to ever escape or be liberated from them.

According to that sermon, during this short time, these merit-seeking devotees have accumulated a great store of merit by way of hearing the Dhamma and by way of

meditation. Utilizing that multitude of wholesome volitions as a supportive sufficing condition (*upanissaya*), may you develop your Dhamma practice and meditation in this very life, and may you gain the power and strength to find solace in the noble, deathless Nibbāna through the path, fruit, and penetration of Stream-entry, Once-returning, and so on! One must make such a wish. Furthermore, may this mass of merit we have accumulated so far through this Dhamma sermon and Dhamma listening be shared with the assembly of deities and Brahmas who protect the Sasana, and with all those who assist and direct their minds to this Dhamma! May they rejoice in this merit, and having rejoiced, may they find solace in the noble, deathless Nibbāna through a Bodhi of their aspiration! One must make that wish. Similarly, may all beings, from the Avīci hell to the highest heaven of the peak of existence (*bhavāgra*), including our departed relatives, rejoice in this merit of Dhamma preaching and Dhamma listening! Having rejoiced, may they realize the noble, deathless Nibbāna through a Bodhi of their aspiration! Recite this stanza to share the merit with that aspiration:

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi.....*"