Pahankanuwa Sermon #128

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

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(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.65)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

Pali Stanza:

Aṭṭhinaṃ nagaraṃ kataṃ, maṃsalohitalepanaṃ;

jarā ca maccu ca, māno makkho ca ohito ti.

From:

Dhammapada 150 (Jarāvagga)

Dear Listeners,

The Teacher of the Three Worlds, the Buddha, pointed out that the world tries to create a sense of security by forgetting the inconstant nature of life, precisely due to four perversions (*vipallāsa*). It is by relying on these four perverted views—namely, regarding what is impermanent (*anicca*) as permanent, regarding what is suffering/unsatisfactory (*dukkha*) as pleasant, regarding what is not-self (*anattā*) and not one's own as self, and regarding what is foul as beautiful—that the world attempts to secure its existence/becoming (*bhava*). The Buddha constantly reminds us of the inconstant/impermanent (*anicca*) nature of this life and the precarious nature of this cage of a body, with the sole intention of removing these perverted views. Today, this very point is clarified by the verse chosen for our reflection and its corresponding origin story.

The Teacher of the Three Worlds, the Buddha, preached this Dhamma verse at Jetavana monastery to the bhikkhunī Janapadakalyāṇī Rūpanandā. Devotees, this Janapadakalyāṇī Rūpanandā was the princess who was betrothed to Prince Nanda, the younger half-brother of the Buddha. At the time the Buddha visited the city of Kapilavatthu, Prince Nanda was facing three auspicious celebrations: his coronation ceremony, his housewarming ceremony, and his wedding ceremony. While these three auspicious events were close at hand, the Buddha visited the palace, accepted alms-food, and upon departing, handed his alms-bowl to Prince Nanda.

Though reluctant, out of respect, Prince Nanda took the bowl and followed behind the Buddha. When they reached the courtyard, Janapadakalyāṇī received this news; while still bathing, she ran out with her hair still wet and called out, "Noble Lord, return quickly, return quickly!" But Prince Nanda did not return. Instead, the Buddha led him away and ordained him. Now, after some time had passed in this manner, Janapadakalyāṇī pondered: "Now Prince Siddhattha has renounced the kingdom and gone forth; Prince Rāhula too has been ordained; Prince Nanda, who was to marry me, has also been ordained; and Mother Pajāpatī Gotamī has also been ordained. What is the use of me staying at home alone?" Thus, she went and was ordained among the bhikkhunīs. Because she possessed extremely exquisite beauty, she was known by the name 'Rūpanandā'.

Having heard that the Buddha constantly speaks of the defects of form (*rūpa*), preaching that form is impermanent (*anicca*), suffering/unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*), and expounding meditations on the foul (*asubha-bhāvanā*), Rūpanandā was reluctant to go and listen to the Dhamma, fearing that he might say something disparaging about her own beauty. As time went on, hearing praise of the Buddha's virtues here and there, the bhikkhunī Rūpanandā also felt that she should go and listen to the Dhamma one day. She decided to go along with the other bhikkhunīs, hide herself among them, listen to the sermon, and return. When Rūpanandā went to listen to the sermon that day, the Buddha, knowing her mind, what did he do? By psychic power, he created the form of a sixteen-year-old maiden whose beauty far surpassed Rūpanandā's. He showed her fanning the Buddha, dressed in most exquisite garments and ornaments. He resolved that this created form should be visible only to himself and to Rūpanandā.

Thus, when Rūpanandā sat down to listen to the Dhamma and looked at the Buddha, she saw this young woman. She gazed with great fascination at this person of far superior beauty. Comparing herself to this form, she thought, "In comparison to her, am I not like a crow next to a swan?" Thus, her pride regarding her own beauty was humbled, and she gazed with great captivation at the limbs and features of that form. At that moment, while the Buddha was preaching the Dhamma, he gradually caused that created form to assume the appearance of a twenty-year-old. Then, she felt a slight sense of strangeness, thinking, "Has this form now changed?" Next, the Buddha, through psychic power, gradually aged the fanning woman, transforming her into old age. Finally, she became an old hag with broken teeth, grey hair, bent over, relying on a walking staff, yet still fanning the Buddha. Next, the Buddha showed her falling to the ground afflicted with a severe illness, wailing, wallowing in her own urine and excrement, rolling from side to side. Seeing this, Rūpanandā felt a great sense of urgency and disenchantment (*nibbidā*), thinking, "Alas! How has such an exquisite form been destroyed in this manner?"

Next, the Buddha showed that woman passing away. Immediately after, he showed the body swelling, and pus and worms oozing from its nine apertures. In this way, the Buddha made the complete destruction of that form visible to Rūpanandā, like a

fast-moving motion picture. Seeing this, a great fear regarding existence/becoming (*bhava*), a sense of urgency regarding the danger of existence, and in short, an understanding of the inconstant/impermanent (*anicca*) nature of this life and its disadvantages (*ādīnava*) arose in her, culminating in disenchantment (*nibbidā*) with saṃsāra. To assist her in that moment, the Buddha uttered two verses:

Āturaṃ asuciṃ pūtiṃ, passa samussayaṃ;

bālāni abhipatthitaṃ,

yathā idaṃ tathā etaṃ, yathā etaṃ tathā idaṃ...

dhātuyo suññato passa, mā lokaṃ punarāgami;

bhave chandaṃ virājetvā, upasantā carissasīti.

The general meaning of those verses is: "O Nandā, look at this heaped-up body, diseased, impure, putrid, highly yearned for by fools, oozing from above and below. 'As is this (body of yours), so is that (created body); as is that, so is this.' See the elements as empty (*dhātuyo suññato passa*)." Look at these elements—earth, water, fire, and wind—as empty! Empty means to look at them from the perspective of not-self (*anattā*). "Do not return to this world (*mā lokaṃ punarāgami*)." Having relinquished the desire and craving (*taṇhā*) for existence/becoming (*bhava*), wander in tranquil peace (*upasantā carissasi*). The Buddha gave this instruction as a meditation subject. Hearing this, Rūpanandā attained the fruit of Stream-entry (*sotāpatti-phala*) through that very disenchantment.

Then, the Buddha thought of helping her further to attain the higher paths and fruits. To support that, he next preached the verse we used as our opening theme. Looking at the way Nandā's mind was operating, he uttered that verse in a way that made the not-self (*anattā*) nature and emptiness of this body even clearer.

Aṭṭhinaṃ nagaraṃ kataṃ, maṃsalohitalepanaṃ

yatthe jarā ca maccu ca, māno makkho ca ohito

There is a city built of bones, plastered with flesh and blood, wherein are deposited decay and death (*jarāmaraṇa*), pride, and detraction. The idea expressed in this verse is that there is a city made of bones, which is also a description of this cage of a body. It is recorded that upon hearing this verse and the sermon preached accordingly, Nandā attained Arahatship. That is the narrative of the Dhamma.

As we do every day, let us now see what essence of meaning we can extract from this Dhamma narrative and the verse. This story is one that reveals the Buddha's supreme style of Dhamma-instruction, known as his quality of being the incomparable charioteer of men to be tamed (*purisadamma-sārathī*). If we consider the character of Rūpanandā, she was of a disposition that took great pride in her form (*rūpa*). Both her title as a "Janapadakalyāṇī" (the beauty of the land) and her

name indicate her exceptional beauty. Furthermore, among the bhikkhunīs, she was known specifically as Rūpanandā. Because of the pride she held regarding her form in that way, she came to that place with a certain degree of displeasure toward the Buddha. What did the Buddha do to remove that displeasure? Now, as you devotees know, when a thorn pierces the skin, to extract that thorn, one needs another thorn that is even sharper. Similarly, to destroy the pride this woman had in her beauty, the Buddha used form itself. He created the form of a woman with far superior beauty. Moreover, seeing her fanning the Buddha, her previous displeasure must have faded away.

She might even have thought, "Despite what they say, the Tathāgata does not disparage beauty all that much." Be that as it may, while she was gazing with great captivation in that manner, the Buddha then made the transformation (*vipariṇāma*) that occurs to this form over eighty or ninety years visible to Rūpanandā in a matter of a few moments.

By doing so, the Buddha cleared the path for the cognitive process of insight (*vipassanā citta-vīthi*). Now, when we say these things, you devotees might think that such things can be done with modern machines and technology as well. But those are used to increase existence/becoming (*bhava*), not to eliminate the desire for existence (*bhava*). They are used to generate the perception of beauty (*subha-saññā*), not the perception of the foul (*asubha-saññā*). This is a wonderful story for developing a special understanding of Dhamma values. Rūpanandā's story is indeed an exemplary one. The Buddha revealed the true nature of this body in an instant.

In this extremely long saṃsāra, we have spent our time with this body—for an infinite period of time. Yet, we have not truly known the body. The characteristics of the body mentioned earlier... what we called perversions (*vipallāsa*) or perverted views are just like seeing upside-down views when looking at things with one's head on the ground; those are called perverted visions. These are called perverted phenomena (*vipallāsa-dhamma*). In the world, there exists the tendency to take the inconstant/impermanent (*anicca*) as permanent; to regard the inconstant (*anicca*) as permanent. Likewise, regarding what is suffering/unsatisfactory (*dukkha*) as pleasant; regarding what is not-self (*anattā*) as self; and regarding what is foul as beautiful. It was to eradicate these perverted views that the Buddha employed that skillful means.

Next, we can reflect on the transformation of mind that occurred through this. When we contemplate in accordance with the Dhamma, we can consider it in this way. Now we know that form (*rūpa*) is what most people use to prove their identity. "Ah! This is me!" they say fearlessly, pointing to their form (*rūpa*). But the Buddha shows that this form (*rūpa*) is proof of otherwiseness (*aññathābhāva*)—of change. Why does the ordinary world not realize that form (*rūpa*) changes? It is because they have formed a wrong concept regarding this form (*rūpa*) through the perception of compactness (*ghana-saññā*). Forgetting the change that occurs in this, they grasp at specific stages of form (*rūpa*). In short, those who proudly take photographs of their entire

lives, paste them in books, and say, "This is me, this is me," sometimes traveling all over the world to show those photographs and display their pride to others—this matter and this story will prompt them to reflect. The ordinary world does not care about the change in this form (*rūpa*), the change that occurs over many years. Sometimes, upon meeting a friend coming toward them, they might say, "Oh! How much you have changed!" Yet, they do not see their own change. Such is the nature due to self-love—due to grasping these through the perception of compactness (*ghana-saññā*). Therefore, what helps to shatter these is seeing them as preparations (*saṅkhāra*) through insight (*vipassanā*).

We often render *saṅkhāra* in Sinhala as "preparations" (*sakas-kirīm*), constructions, or arrangements. Now, when taking a photograph, many people make certain preparations/arrangements, don't they? They think, "I must look beautiful at this moment to capture it well in this photo." Thus, they proudly take that photograph as "myself". But next, when another year or several months pass and they take another, it has changed. Yet they take that, too, in the same way. In this manner, what we call life is a collection of preparations (*saṅkhāra*), a continuity of preparations (*saṅkhāra*). Many do not consider the inconstant/impermanent (*anicca*) nature of these. There is a tendency in the world to take each of these as "This is mine, this I am, this is my self" (*etaṃ mama, eso hamasmi, eso me attā*).

If someone sees this continuity of preparations (*saṅkhāra*) through insight, through the wisdom of insight (*vipassanā-paññā*), then a definite disenchantment regarding existence/becoming (*bhava*) will arise in them. If one hopes for Nibbāna, one must remove the desires for existence/becoming (*bhava*). To hope for Nibbāna while retaining desire for existence (*bhava*) and wallowing in the perception of beauty (*subha-saññā*) is entirely futile. Because one has to face reality—this truth of suffering (*dukkha-sacca*) or this impermanent (*anicca*) and not-self (*anattā*) nature declared by the Buddha. This is not understood by the ordinary world due to ignorance (*avijjā*), craving (*taṇhā*), delusion (*moha*), and pride (*māna*). "A city built of bones" (*aṭṭhinaṃ nagaraṃ kataṃ*). This is a city built of bones. Now, generally, various teachers with wrong views have taught that a subtle soul or self is embedded within this body—that there is a wondrous, permanent self inside. But the Buddha has shown that this is a city made of bones. Just as a house is built by raising pillars, binding them with vines, and plastering them with mud, what is there inside this city or house constructed by raising the pillars of bones, binding them with the vines of sinews, and plastering them with the laths of flesh and blood? It is decay and death (*jarāmaraṇa*), pride, and detraction. One develops pride, saying "I", the conceit "I am" (*asmi-māna*). Likewise, decay and death are entrenched here. These are not things that happen externally. These things—death, decay, etc.—come along with the body itself, right from birth (*jāti*). From the very moment of birth (*jāti*), it begins to decay. The world forgets this by setting up a concept called "youth". Next, in accordance with the perception of beauty (*subha-saññā*), they even employ various artificial methods to preserve it. Now, according to our Buddhist culture, growing old is not something to be hidden in that manner. There is an ancient saying: "Receive

honor with a grey head." But now, according to Western culture, what do the elderly do? They try to receive honor with blackened hair. Dyeing their grey hair with various lotions, and stretching their wrinkled skin using various new medical techniques, they try to remain young until they die. There is no fault in taking medicine for an illness or disease. But that delusion—getting deluded oneself and seeking to deceive others—that is an extremely foolish and ignorant thing. Such people suffer in saṃsāra for a long time. They have never understood the true nature, the reality of this body that exists from birth (*jāti*) until death. So in this story, there is something that prompts reflection not only for Rūpanandās but also for others—especially those who give prominence to fashions in accordance with urban sophistication.

Let us investigate what the Buddha intended through these verses. Indeed, these verses go very deep; though we may not cover every single aspect, we intend to present a brief analysis of them. In the verse preached first by the Buddha, *āturaṃ asuciṃ pūtiṃ*: *ātura* means something diseased. This body is described in some places as a nest of diseases (*roga-nīḷaṃ*), a fragile nest of diseases. Likewise, *asuciṃ* means impure. This is the impurity of this body. In civilized life, one has to cover this impurity to a certain extent. But one must at least understand this impure nature for oneself. There is a tendency to forget this due to the pride generated through cosmetic beauty. *Āturaṃ asuciṃ pūtiṃ*... next, *pūti* means it is putrid. We all know what the condition would be if we did not wash our face and mouth for two or three days. Thus, it has a putrid nature. Next, *samussayaṃ* means something heaped up like a mound of earth. The word *samussaya* is applied to the body in the Dhamma. It is just like a heap built by gathering the four elements (*dhātu*). Under the influence of clinging (*upādinna*), in accordance with the momentum of past karma, it is built up as a body in some mother's womb. What assists this are the very elements of earth (*pathavī*), water (*āpo*), fire (*tejo*), and wind (*vāyo*)—all four elements. Thus, within this, decay and death are firmly established. That is why, having first shown the nature of the body as repulsive and foul (*asubha*), the Buddha then directs the mind toward the meditation on elements (*dhātu-kammaṭṭhāna*) to incline it toward higher insight (*vipassanā*). He turns it in that direction.

"See the elements as empty" (*dhātuyo suññato passa*). See these four elements of which the body is made as empty! The ordinary world takes not only the limbs and organs of this body, but also everything inside it—such as blood, flesh, etc.—as "mine" and "I". But these are the very same elements found in the external world. Though they appear in a peculiar form here, the Buddha points out that they are not things to be taken as "I" or "mine". One must practice contemplating this constantly through insight (*vipassanā*). Look at these elements as empty! Empty means there is no self-substance here; there is no self-nature (*attā*).

Likewise, *yathā idaṃ tathā etaṃ, yathā etaṃ tathā idaṃ*. A certain principle shown in fulfilling insight is that some begin insight (*vipassanā*) from within and complete it externally. Others begin externally and complete it within. "Within" refers to one's

own body. Now here, because of the pride Nandā had regarding her own form (*rūpa*), she did not have the strength to raise her own body to the level of insight (*vipassanā*) all at once, to turn in that direction and understand its foul nature. Therefore, what the Buddha did was to create an external form. Thus, while she kept her attention focused on that form, by allowing her to see the decaying and breaking-up nature of that form, the Buddha showed that both the internal and the external—the two sides—are the same, saying: "As is this (body), so is that (created body); as is that, so is this." This was to bring the mind to equanimity (*upekkhā*).

Indeed, devotees, the explanation concerning consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is a rather deep matter. It is precisely because of the discriminative knowing by consciousness (*viññāṇa*) that a division of these elements into "internal" and "external" is created. This drama called "life" arises from this very division—the division of internal and external. For a long time in saṃsāra, due to ignorance (*avijjā*) and craving (*taṇhā*), a portion of these four elements was taken as "This is me, this is mine." Due to that very craving (*taṇhā*) and grasping/holding (*upādāna*), this seed—this seed of consciousness (*viññāṇa-bīja*)—germinates again in some place. To describe this, the Buddha points out: "Karma is the field, consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is the seed, and craving (*taṇhā*) is the moisture" (*kammaṃ khettaṃ, viññāṇaṃ bījaṃ, taṇhā sneho*). The field is prepared according to the actions (karma) one has performed through mind, body, and speech. In that field of karma, the seed of consciousness (*viññāṇa*) grows, with craving (*taṇhā*) acting as the moisture. Again in saṃsāra, in existence/becoming (*bhava*), craving (*taṇhā*) is the moisture.

Devotees, if we contemplate along those lines, what is meant by seeing Nibbāna as shown by the Buddha? It is the removal of that moisture of craving (*taṇhā*), drying up that moisture, thereby rendering this seed of consciousness (*viññāṇa*) hollow so that it can no longer germinate. That is how the Buddha brings this saṃsāric journey to a halt. For this, a direct seeing/realization through the cultivation of insight (*vipassanā*) is necessary. If we briefly consider what are called the internal or personal elements: examples of the earth element (*pathavī-dhātu*) are hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, bones, etc. Examples of the water element (*āpo-dhātu*) are blood, pus, urine, and other such liquid things. These are examples of those two elements. Next, the fire element (*tejo-dhātu*) is the nature of heat—warmth, and the heat that helps in digesting food, etc. The wind element (*vāyo-dhātu*) is characterized by inhalation and exhalation and other winds moving through the body. So, accordingly, only the four elements are present here. Yet, there exists in the world a perception of "I" and "mine" regarding these.

In accordance with the principle mentioned as "This is not mine, this I am not" (*n'etaṃ mama, n'eso 'ham asmi*), these must be wisely seen as not one's own. That is why it was said, "See the elements as empty (*dhātuyo suññato passa*)." The Buddha declares that by seeing in this way, one does not return to existence/becoming (*bhava*) again. As long as there is attachment to existence (*bhava*), one returns to existence (*bhava*). Therefore, the ultimate purpose of this Dhamma is the eradication

of attachment to existence (*bhava*), and for that, the disenchantment known as *nibbidā* is absolutely essential. Now, for some, disenchantment with life arises only after contracting a serious illness or when they have become extremely old. At such times, the mind sometimes does not function well enough to raise it to the level of insight (*vipassanā*). But if someone understands its reality while their cognitive faculties are still sharp, it can be easy for them to realize Nibbāna. We must take that into consideration. Because the perception of beauty (*subha-saññā*) regarding this body blinds the eyes of the world in an extremely dangerous way. You devotees all know this. That is why the Buddha has shown the perception of beauty (*subha-saññā*) to be a perversion (*vipallāsa*).

Now, when reflecting on this meditation on the elements (*dhātu-kammaṭṭhāna*), some of you devotees may have heard that in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, there is a section called attention to elements (*dhātu-manasikāra*). There, the Buddha gives a wondrous simile regarding how one should look at this body. He indicates: "Just as a butcher, having slaughtered a cow, cut it into pieces, and sat at a four-way crossroads selling it, no longer has the notion of 'cow', in the very same way, the yogi—the practitioner of insight (*vipassanā-yogi*)—should analyze this body in terms of elements and dissect it in this manner." Sometimes, someone might think that the Great Compassionate Buddha has presented an uncompassionate simile here. But we must understand the depth within this simile in this way: Generally, a butcher works hard to slaughter that cow and cut it into pieces, thereby developing the perception of meat (*maṃsa-saññā*). Similarly, the yogi (*yogāvacara*) dissects this very body, in which the perception of a living being resides, using the scalpel—the weapon—of insight (*vipassanā*), cutting and dividing it to gain understanding. It is for this purpose that this simile is employed. We all know that the knife a ruffian uses to kill someone is sometimes used by a surgeon to cure someone. Similarly, the Buddha employed this seemingly harsh butcher simile to demonstrate the sharpness of the wisdom of insight (*vipassanā-paññā*).

Indeed, it is said that the perception of elements (*dhātu-saññā*) is the domain of, and is accessible to, those of sharp wisdom. Contemplating this body exactly as it is, and establishing equanimity (*upekkhā*) by seeing that only these four elements are present within it. What is the purpose of developing that equanimity (*upekkhā*)? Through that equanimity (*upekkhā*), the division between "internal" and "external" fades away. Eradicating that division is necessary to cease consciousness (*viññāṇa*), or as mentioned, to render it hollow (like a dud seed). To make it hollow means neutralizing the power within this consciousness (*viññāṇa*) to create another existence/becoming (*bhava*). In short, the Buddha has also pointed out that consciousness (*viññāṇa*) serves as the sustenance for future birth (*jāti*). As long as this consciousness (*viññāṇa*) remains, one will be born somewhere in accordance with karma. Therefore, one cannot escape by holding onto a nihilistic view (*natthika-diṭṭhi*), thinking, "Let us enjoy ourselves as we please as long as we live, for life ends here." According to the law of Dependent Arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), the actions (karma) one performs, the karma one accumulates, prepares the field. Into that field

falls the seed of consciousness (*viññāṇa*). The germinating power of that seed of consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is due to that craving (*taṇhā*). In that moisture of craving (*taṇhā*), it strikes roots called grasping/holding (*upādāna*). Craving (*taṇhā*) and grasping (*upādāna*); once it takes root through grasping (*upādāna*), there is existence/becoming (*bhava*)—renewed existence. Once a seed is cast into ground that has moisture, in a few days, its roots strike deep and it becomes a tree. Such is the story of this life. This story of existence/becoming (*bhava*) can be understood even through that short Dhamma passage we mentioned earlier: "Karma is the field, consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is the seed, and craving (*taṇhā*) is the moisture."

Indeed, the world does not hope to escape from existence/becoming (*bhava*); they want to bring an end to suffering (*dukkha*). Everyone talks about ending suffering (*dukkha*). Because they dislike the word "suffering" (*dukkha*), they talk about eliminating unrest or stress. No matter what beautiful words are used to express it, all the wise people who have appeared in the world thus far have contemplated that there is a certain nature of suffering (*dukkha*) in this existence/becoming (*bhava*), in this state of being. There is an unsatisfying, insatiable nature to it. Seeking a remedy for this, seeking a way to eradicate this suffering (*dukkha*), even followers of other religions have been presenting various views. But the Buddha pointed out the limitations of the solutions they offer. Indeed, this existence remains precisely because of a certain truth of reality that they are unwilling to accept. That is why the Buddha declared the entirety of the five aggregates of grasping to be suffering (*dukkha*). What are called form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), preparations (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*), the Buddha designates in the Dhamma by the name "aggregates" (*khandha*). The aggregate of form (*rūpakkhandha*) means a heap of form; a heap of feelings (*vedanā*), a heap of perceptions, a heap of preparations (*saṅkhāra*), and a heap of consciousness (*viññāṇa*). Then, it is immediately clear that gathering five heaps together and calling them "mine, mine" is a foolish thing. Although this is understood in a general sense, one must see this through the eye of insight (*vipassanā-cakkhu*). To see it thus, one must maintain attention—maintain contemplation—in such a way that the aforementioned perception of compactness (*ghana-saññā*) is removed.

In that collection of forms which the Buddha created and showed by psychic power like a motion picture, Rūpanandā grasped each one, moment by moment. That grasping is what is called preparations (*saṅkhāra*). There, her mind was constructed along with desire for it, thinking, "How beautiful! How beautiful!" Right after that, all of it broke up and dissolved, moment by moment. Now, you devotees know that little children sometimes blow soap bubbles. When the soap bubbles float in the air, they are very beautiful. Like a wondrous painting, they are extremely beautiful. Just as one goes to touch them, they pop and vanish. "Where did they go? Where did they go?" That is the answer one must then seek. That little child does not know how to reflect on it. He just keeps blowing more and more soap bubbles. In this saṃsāra, we have done the very same thing. But what the practitioner of insight (*vipassanā-yogi*) does is, along with this blowing, and as soon as this blown bubble bursts, he looks at

what happens internally. Looking at that internal state is different from running after it by blowing more and more bubbles. Radical attention / Wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) means directing attention to the mind itself, concurrent with the breaking-up of the object. That itself is what is called the understanding of Name-and-Form (*nāmarūpa-dhamma*).

Indeed, in the Dhamma, everything is looked upon as the preparations of Name-and-Form (*nāmarūpa-saṅkhāra*). If we consider the phenomena of feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), intention (*cetanā*), contact (*phassa*), and attention (*manasikāra*) as mental phenomena (*nāma-dhamma*): in dependence on each of these, a feeling (*vedanā*)—an experiencing—exists. Through that, one forms a perception—a recognition. Through that, certain intentions are generated. In accordance with those, a certain sense of contact (*phassa*) arises. One looks at all these things with attention (*manasikāra*). This is all that is meant by mental phenomena (*nāma-dhamma*).

When we isolate and examine any single moment of life, this is all there is as mental phenomena. So when Nandā was looking at each of those forms, as they finally broke up, she must have thought: "What is this that is breaking up? It is my own mind that is breaking up along with it." In insight (*vipassanā*), what is seen is not just the breaking up of the object. The ordinary world sees only the breaking up of the object. Seeing the objects break up, they construct more and more objects, hoping to make at least some of them permanent. The world runs after such a mirage. But the yogi (*yogāvacara*), concurrent with that breaking-up object, looks within next. What happened? The mind that grasped that object also broke up. Even if it grasps another, it is just the same—that breaking-up mind. Looking at that breaking-up mind, one then realizes: "There is no such thing as a self (*attā*) here. There is nothing to be taken as 'I'. Here there is only a collection of preparations (*saṅkhāra*), only a continuity of preparations (*saṅkhāra*)."

Seeing reality as it really is (*yathābhūta*), one cannot help but become disenchanted (*nibbindati*). Now, some people want to live without any disenchantment toward this existence/becoming (*bhava*), this state of being, while at the same time wishing to see the truth. This is impossible. As we said in a simile on another occasion, if you give a little child a beautiful piece of cake, he wants to keep looking at its beauty and showing it off proudly to others, and he also wants to eat it. He cannot do both. Reality is just like that. To think that one can see the truth as it really is (*yathābhūta*) and yet not become disenchanted is a delusion. Therefore, we are compelled to speak the truth. Along with the knowledge and vision of things as they really are (*yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana*) comes the disenchantment known as *nibbidā*.

Indeed, what we have described in a few words is precisely what is presented in the Dhamma as the stages of insight-knowledge (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*). It is as the final result of that extremely rapid transformation within the mind that the path-knowledges (*magga-ñāṇa*) of Stream-entry and so forth are obtained. Therefore, the

first thing is the nature of the impermanent (*anicca*). That is why one must gain the understanding of what is impermanent (*anicca*) precisely as impermanent (*anicca*). This five-aggregate bundle is a heap of form, a heap of feeling... it is called a heap. That is precisely what is illustrated by various similes, such as a lump of foam. The way feelings (*vedanā*) break up is shown to be like bubbles on water when it rains. Form (*rūpa*) is said to be like a lump of foam, feeling (*vedanā*) like a water bubble. Through such similes, the Buddha has shown the nature of the arising and passing away of these. When one rapidly contemplates this nature of arising and passing away, there arises from it an understanding of the disadvantageous (*ādīnava*) nature of this existence. One realizes the disadvantageous, defective nature of each of these, and concurrent with that, disenchantment (*nibbidā*) arises. It is through that disenchantment that the door to Nibbāna (Extinction) is opened.

Next, one is prompted to develop the three characteristics (*ti-lakkhaṇa*) shown by the Buddha: the impermanent (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*). Why is one prompted to develop them? When, through this disenchantment (*nibbidā*), the feeling arises: "I do not need to construct such an existence (*bhava*) again," one searches for the means to achieve this. This is described in the Dhamma as: "He does not grasp at any existence, just as one would not grasp a red-hot iron ball" (*na gaṇhāti bhavaṃ kiñci, suddhattaṃva ayoguḷaṃ*). The mind of the yogi (*yogāvacara*) becomes unwilling to grasp at this entire existence/becoming (*bhava*). It is at that very moment, then, having seen the true nature of this existence as impermanent (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*), that the attachment one had toward form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), etc., ceases, and the mind is liberated for a moment from the five aggregates. That itself is what is called this peace—the ultimate peace of Nibbāna. That state of being liberated from the five aggregates, that mind.

That itself is the Nibbāna-element (*nibbāna-dhātu*) described by the Buddha as the final mind of the Arahant—the unborn (*ajātaṃ*), the un-decaying (*ajaraṃ*), bringing an end to birth (*jāti*) and an end to decay (*jarā*). Thus, the path leading to it is visible through this. If Rūpanandā, who held such great pride in her form (*rūpa*), could attain Arahatship through a single Dhamma sermon by the Buddha's skillful means (*upāya-kosalla*), should we not reflect: "Is this not possible for us too?" Perhaps our own saṃsāric merit-power is embedded within us. The only slight shortcoming we have is our reluctance to accept that truth. Instead, we prefer to cover up the truth. If we think in that manner, it will never be possible to escape from this saṃsāra. That is what we have to take from this story as well as from these verses.

Next, when considering the dissection of this body in terms of elements (*dhātu*), it is a very easy thing for someone. In one sense, it is simple. One must contemplate it constantly. Now, what is expected through contemplating it as repulsive, contemplating it as foul (*asubha*), and contemplating it in terms of elements (*dhātu*), is seeing the true nature of this body. First is the perception of the foul (*asubha-saññā*). We know that. The ordinary world dislikes the word "foul", we can

understand that; but why does the Buddha give meditations on the foul (*asubha-kammaṭṭhāna*)? For an extremely long time, the world has been wallowing in this very perception of beauty (*subha-saññā*). It is to soothe or pacify, at least to some extent, this limitless wallowing in the perception of beauty (*subha-saññā*) that we are told to cultivate the perception of the foul (*asubha-saññā*). After doing that, next, one brings it to equanimity (*upekkhā*). What helps to bring it to equanimity is that very perception of elements (*dhātu-saññā*). Once we see it as elements—both the internal and external as elements—when we think in that way, the mind gradually comes to equanimity (*upekkhā*). It is for this purpose that the Buddha has declared: "See the elements as empty" (*dhātuyo suññato passa*), meaning there is nothing to be grasped here as a self (*attā*). One must practice contemplating in such a way that this understanding arises. From this story of Rūpanandā, we can extract many points specifically relevant to insight (*vipassanā*).

Now, what we call preparations (*saṅkhāra*) is a collection of constructions and arrangements. Throughout our whole life, whether our day-to-day thoughts and wishes are photographed or not, they are deposited in this mental continuum (*citta-santāna*) as preparations (*saṅkhāra*). In this mental continuum, due to that sense of "I-ness," a multitude of experiences are deposited as "This I am, this is mine, this is my self." As a result, that karmic energy (*kamma-sakti*) will not fade away without yielding its fruit. Such is the nature of the cosmic law (*dhammatā*). That is why saṃsāra grants renewed birth (*jāti*) again and again for an infinite period of time. It is as if it says, "Since you asked for it, here you go!" and hands it over. Sometimes, at the moment of death, one might hope: "For me, I must go to a heaven, or to such-and-such a place." But it is not received merely by wishing or hoping for it, because one lacks the qualification. One lacks the qualification if one has performed unwholesome deeds (*akusala-kamma*), sinful deeds; there are specific places in this universe destined for those, where their fruits ripen and yield results.

Indeed, the Buddha has declared that the reason why there is such a thing as existence/becoming (*bhava*)—the reason we say there are various worlds, states of deprivation, and hells—is because places are required to ripen the momentum of karma performed through ignorance (*avijjā*) by this being who possesses consciousness (*viññāṇa*). Then, they go and are born in those places. Having been born, they are compelled to experience that long story of suffering (*dukkha*)—birth (*jāti*), decay (*jarā*), sickness, and death (*maraṇa*). Now, in the form the Buddha showed to Rūpanandā here, all of it was present: decay, sickness, and death—every single one of them. Seeing the state to which that woman finally deteriorated, Rūpanandā drew out her understanding. We too, then, must look at the world by relinquishing that aforementioned wrong view—that is, by regarding decay and growing old as something we must indeed be prepared to accept.

In this life, old age is not something to be hidden. It is common to everyone. Therefore, in association with that old age, we must try to develop composure, understanding, and equanimity (*upekkhā*). Instead of that, if one tries to live in a

self-constructed youthfulness, deceiving others and deluding oneself, that is an extremely ignorant and childish thing. Perhaps that is some of the habits of the Rūpanandās of the present day. There are even some among our Buddhist devotees, especially in urban society, who take examples from the Western world. What happens through this? One is unable to open that Dhamma-eye (*dhamma-cakkhu*). The most supreme thing in the world is the opening of this Dhamma-eye. Even if one has the capability through all other forms of knowledge to go to the moon, yet spends one's life in a state destined for hell, the person who returned from the moon will next be born in hell, in a state of deprivation. So, what is the use of that? Next, let us consider what is generally regarded in the world as various levels of knowledge. People generate various conceits through degrees and so forth. There are various other positions of authority. Those who have shone at the very top with offices, power, and wealth, sometimes, due to a grave karma, a sinful deed, go and are born in bad destinations. Such is the dangerous situation that exists in this saṃsāra. That is precisely why a Buddha is necessary. We do not pay homage to this Blessed Buddha because of some ordinary, trivial matter.

There is a verse uttered by ancient Buddhist scholars:

> *Nahi sīlavataṃ tathāgatā...*
>
> *aṭṭhakkhārā tīni padā*
>
> *sambuddhena pakāsitā.*

Tathāgatas do not arise in the world merely to teach ordinary moral vows. What the Fully Enlightened Buddhas do is preach three words consisting of eight syllables. What are the three words? *Aniccaṃ, dukkhaṃ, anattā* (Impermanent, Suffering, Not-self). Within these very words are eight syllables—referring to those eight vocalic measures. So then, it is this three-fold characteristic (*ti-lakkhaṇa*)—impermanent (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*)—that our Buddhist devotees should indeed practice.

If one develops this three-fold characteristic (*ti-lakkhaṇa*) to some extent, regarding both one's own body and external things, one can gradually draw closer to that wisdom. No matter how much one piles this up as academic knowledge, there is no use in it. Indeed, the world accumulates experiences. Sometimes, a person lives for a hundred years, but they depart carrying only the dregs of the vast multitude of experiences accumulated throughout their entire life. They did not extract the essence. The essence is to practice seeing that three-fold characteristic—impermanent (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*)—within one's own life, as well as within the lives of those whom one meets, sees, and associates with. Now, when members of the Saṅgha go to a house of mourning, they say they are going to witness a foul sight (*asubha-dassana*). But nowadays, for lay devotees, there might not be much difference between going to a house of mourning and going to a wedding house.

In any case, a friend of ours has passed away, or has fallen ill, or met with an unexpected death. Likewise, those we associate with, who looked so handsome, show us what becomes of these cages of bodies, of this city made of bones. While there are so many such examples, why are we unable to see this Dhamma? No matter how many books have been written, no matter how many good, deep books have been written, if we do not practice raising this to our own lives as direct experience, if we do not try to develop that Dhamma-eye, then no matter how advanced or educated we think we are, we are always in the kindergarten class. We remain in the very same place forever. Just as shown by the Buddha, even the very word "attention to the repulsive" (*paṭikūla-manasikāra*) is repulsive to some. For you devotees, too, when a serious illness strikes, the medicine given by doctors is indeed bitter. Sometimes, if necessary, you have to take it with a bit of sugar. Thus, somehow, even if it is bitter, what matters is that it does the job. Just so is this teaching which the Buddha has shown to the world as the truth. The ordinary world does not want to accept it. Because regarding this suffering (*dukkha*), some people think like this: "There is nothing wrong with this existence (*bhava*); it is only because of small shortcomings that this little part of ours is suffering," and they try to isolate only that part.

But the Buddha, taking the entire saṃsāric background into account, declared that this entire existence/becoming (*bhava*) is suffering. Having listed birth (*jāti*), decay (*jarā*), sickness, death (*maraṇa*), sorrow, lamentation, and so forth, how does he conclude it? With what phrase? "In short, the five aggregates of grasping are suffering" (*saṅkhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā dukkhā*). When certain scholars analyze and comment on this suffering (*dukkha*), they forget that final part. Perhaps it slips their mind. Even if they disregard the suffering of birth (*jāti-dukkha*), they are willing to accept that decay (*jarā*), separation from the loved, and association with the unloved are suffering (*dukkha*). But that statement of the Buddha—"In brief, the entire five aggregates are suffering" (*dukkha*)—is something certain people are unwilling to accept.

That is why most people run after the perception of beauty (*subha-saññā*). But the Buddha has shown that this is the truth, and as long as one does not understand this, one will suffer in saṃsāra. Therefore, if one needs examples of this, they can be obtained not only by looking around but also from one's own body. That is why insight (*vipassanā*) has been declared. Looking at one's own body, reflecting on the existence of the body, one can direct what are called contemplation of the body (*kāyānupassanā*), contemplation of feelings (*vedanānupassanā*), contemplation of the mind (*cittānupassanā*), and contemplation of mind-objects (*dhammānupassanā*)—as found in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta—internally toward oneself and externally toward others. Regarding one's own body and the bodies of others, regarding one's own feelings (*vedanā*) and the feelings of others—one knows that one does not directly experience another's feelings, yet in dependence on their reactions, we can know the nature of those feelings (*vedanā*): their impermanent (*anicca*) nature, their nature of suffering (*dukkha*), and so forth.

Likewise, regarding minds and mind-objects (*dhamma*), one must understand the true nature of each through insight (*vipassanā*). To know that, one must place that Dhamma shown by the Buddha as the path to Nibbāna—such as the Satipaṭṭhāna meditation—in a place of high respect and practice accordingly. One cannot realize Nibbāna merely by studying them and obtaining degrees. It is only by bringing them close to one's own life as a matter of meditation, making them accessible to the meditative mind, that these can be directly realized. Therefore, we must take lessons from such Dhamma narratives. Even though the Buddha is no longer with us, we still have the Dhamma. We must make an effort to guide our daily lives accordingly, by directing our mind deeply and reflecting even on a single sermon.

To begin with, establishing oneself in some virtue (*sīla*)... some do not even consider virtue (*sīla*) to be a necessary thing. Some misunderstand these as things that manifest suddenly and spontaneously on their own. Now, regardless of other factors, Rūpanandā here was perhaps a person who had fulfilled great spiritual perfections (*pāramī*). We constantly remind you that the Buddha cannot produce Nibbāna (Extinction) anew for anyone. It is in accordance with their own power of perfections (*pāramī-sakti*) that even the Buddha's attention is directed toward that person. This becomes very clear to us from those stories where the attainment of Great Compassion (*mahākaruṇā-samāpatti*) is seen. When surveying the world, the Blessed Buddha sees those whose past perfections (*pāramī*)...

...are mature. When we reflect in that way, those who understood this Dhamma quickly were those who possessed that power of perfections (*pāramī*) in the past. Accordingly, we should not think that there is no such path as the path of virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*) declared by the Buddha, or that there is no Noble Eightfold Path. We must practice that path shown by the Buddha which helps to realize Nibbāna, without harboring any unusual pride. When practicing them, if one's power of perfections (*pāramī*) is developed, one's progress can be rapid. If one practices virtue (*sīla*) properly, dwells in concentration (*samādhi*), and if one's power of merit is mature, it is possible that what others achieve in years, one might achieve in a matter of days. But one must apply oneself to it. Without application, it will not succeed. That is why, no matter how great a scholar one is considered in the ordinary world, one cannot set aside these teachings. Having undertaken a certain virtue (*sīla*) to discipline the body and speech, next, one must concentrate the mind through some object of meditation (*kammaṭṭhāna*). It is to the concentrated mind that the reality of this world is understood as it really is (*yathābhūta*).

Therefore, once the mind is composed, next, in accordance with those teachings declared by the Buddha, we must understand that three-fold characteristic (*ti-lakkhaṇa*). It is not a matter of merely repeating "anicca, anattā". One must practice contemplating the impermanence of these in dependence on those aforementioned Name-and-Form phenomena (*nāmarūpa-dhamma*). When contemplating thus, if at some point the necessary factors are fulfilled, that lineage of insight-knowledges

(*vipassanā-ñāṇa*) flows through one's mental continuum (*citta-santāna*). Now, if someone is attached, or if they develop an attachment toward something, as a result of that attachment, they obtain that thing and rejoice.

Likewise, if we look at the opposite side, when one's desire/will (*chanda*) for this world is removed, it ultimately ends in the supreme peace of Nibbāna. If one developed a specific attachment to something, because of that craving (*taṇhā*), a certain grasping/holding (*upādāna*) occurs. Next, one thinks that one has obtained it. That is how it works on one side. To turn it to the other side, one must see its impermanent (*anicca*) nature. That is what is meant when showing the insight-knowledges (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*): when contemplating this impermanence deeply, there is only arising (*jāti*) and passing away. There is only arising and passing away in every single thing. When the mind is directed toward this arising and passing away, gradually this aspect begins to be understood more clearly.

Just as in the story of blowing soap bubbles, when this is understood as futile, when all these are regarded as empty and vanishing things, disenchantment (*nibbidā*) arises within that person. It is through that disenchantment that, at some point, the truth of Nibbāna can be realized. Then, the Buddha calls this the peace of Nibbāna, tranquility, the destruction of craving (*taṇhākkhaya*). It is also called the cessation of existence (*bhava-nirodha*)—the end of existence/becoming (*bhava*). Thus, the ordinary world tries to escape from suffering (*dukkha*) while securing this very existence (*bhava*). That is an entirely futile effort.

Rūpanandā lived harboring pride regarding her beauty. Yet, she understood the truth very quickly. But even without possessing such exceptional beauty, some of these devotees are unable even to face a word like "foul" (*asubha*). Such a weak mental state exists even among certain scholars. Therefore, we must reflect wisely: the reason why this Buddha-Dhamma transcends all other philosophies is because the Buddha solved that very problem concerning this entire existence/becoming (*bhava*), which no one else had been able to solve until then.

That is why we call him the Buddha, the Teacher of the Three Worlds—the Supreme One of the Three Worlds. It is not because he presented other political or social philosophies. We must understand this well. If we are to preserve the true essence of that Dhamma within ourselves and by helping others to do so, we must make an effort. If only the dregs are left, there is no Dispensation (*Sāsana*) here. That is why we have briefly mentioned these points. You devotees, on this valuable Poyaday, have undertaken the Ajīva-aṭṭhamaka sīla (virtue with livelihood as the eighth factor) and even more valuable virtues, taming your body and speech, and have listened to this Dhamma sermon for about an hour. During this time, you devotees must have gained, to some extent, the strength to develop those qualities that assist in realizing Nibbāna—namely, faith (*saddhā*), energy (*viriya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*), which are the spiritual powers (*bala-dhamma*).

In any case, without trying to cut short this Dhamma study and meditation out of an impatient desire to attain the fruits immediately, one must constantly apply oneself to these, practicing virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*) in accordance with the Noble Eightfold Path declared by the Buddha. A practitioner (*yogāvacara*) means one who applies himself. If one applies oneself to these, and strives while carrying out these tasks, then perhaps even in this period, which appears to be the final phase of the Dispensation, it is still possible to realize the supreme, deathless, great Nibbāna through the penetration (*paṭivedha*) of the paths and fruits declared by the Buddha—namely, Stream-entry (*sotāpatti*), Once-returning (*sakadāgāmitā*), Non-returning (*anāgāmitā*), and Arahatship.

Therefore, you should make a wish: through this multitude of wholesome intentions accumulated today, and through that Dhamma-energy developed as energy (*viriya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*), and by relying as much as possible on the association with noble friends (*kalyāṇa-mitta*) to study the Dhamma and meditate—may this merit definitely serve as a supportive condition to realize the supreme, deathless, great Nibbāna, escaping from all saṃsāric suffering (*dukkha*) as quickly as possible through the penetration (*paṭivedha*) of the paths and fruits known as Stream-entry, Once-returning, Non-returning, and Arahatship. Likewise, may all the Sasana-protecting deities and Brahmas in this universe, and all beings from Avīci hell up to the Akanitṭha heaven who desire merit and Nibbāna, rejoice in this merit of our Dhamma preaching and Dhamma listening! May they, having rejoiced, realize the supreme, deathless, great Nibbāna through whichever Bodhi they have aspired for! Make this aspiration and share the merits by reciting the verses in this manner.

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……..*"