Pahankanuwa Sermon #129

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

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(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.93)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

Pali Stanza:

Porāṇametaṃ Atula, netaṃ ajjatanāmiva;

nindanti tuṇhīmāsīnaṃ, nindanti bahubhāṇinaṃ;

mitabhāṇimpi nindanti, natthi loke anindito;

na cāhu na ca bhavissati, na cetarahi vijjati;

ekantaṃ nindito poso, ekantaṃ vā pasaṃsito ti.

From:

Dhammapada 227–228 (Kodhavagga)

Dear Listeners,

There is a storm in this world that everyone has to face. Even a Buddha cannot escape this storm, which is the storm of blame and praise. It is the habit of ordinary people to judge individuals by using blame and praise as yardsticks. However, the Buddha points out the shortcomings of these yardsticks while highlighting the eternal principles on which blame and praise should actually be based.

Now, these facts will become clear from the verses we have taken as our theme and their related story. There lived a lay disciple named Atula in Savatthi, who had a following of five hundred other lay disciples. One day, this lay disciple Atula went to the Jetavana monastery with his following to listen to the Dhamma. First, he went to the Venerable Revata. After the group sat down near him, the Venerable One did not say anything; he dwelt in solitude, not being one to maintain many associations. He remained completely silent. Angry at this, the lay disciple Atula stood up and went in search of Venerable Sāriputta. The Great Arahant Sāriputta asked, "Why have you come?" He replied, "I came with this group to listen to the Dhamma. We went to Venerable Revata, but he said nothing at all. Therefore, I became angry and came

here." Venerable Sāriputta then said, "Come then, sit down," and delivered a long Dhamma discourse concerning the Abhidhamma. Lay disciple Atula thought, "Who can understand this? This is a long Abhidhamma talk. It is of no use to us," and stood up and left with his following.

Next, they went to Venerable Ānanda. When Venerable Ānanda asked, "Why have you come this way, lay disciple?", he replied, "We came to listen to the Dhamma. First, we went to Venerable Revata, but he did not say anything to us. Out of anger, we then went to Venerable Sāriputta, who preached a very long sermon that we could not understand. Thus, we have come here to listen to the Dhamma." Venerable Ānanda preached a very brief sermon that was easy to understand. Lay disciple Atula became angry at this as well. "Why does he preach only a little Dhamma to us?" and standing up from there too, he went to the Blessed One. When the Blessed One also asked, "Why have you come this way, lay disciple?", he told this entire story: "We went to Venerable Revata, but he said nothing to us. Angry at that, we went to Venerable Sāriputta, who spoke a very deep and long story. We cannot understand those things. Then we went to Venerable Ānanda, who stopped after speaking only a little. Unsatisfied with that as well, we have come here," he told the Blessed One.

Then the Blessed One said: "Atula, this is not something of today. From the past, it has been the custom: they blame the one who sits silent, saying nothing; they also blame the one who speaks much in the world; and they also blame the one who speaks in moderation, measuring and weighing his words. There is no one in the world who does not receive blame. There never was in the past, nor will there be in the future, nor is there now in the present, a person who receives only blame, or only praise." Next, he says: "Some people blame even kings, while others praise them. Some praise and others blame even this great earth, the sun, and the moon. Let alone others, even a Fully Self-Awakened Buddha preaching the Dhamma in the midst of the fourfold assembly is blamed by some and praised by others. This is the nature of the world." Next, the Buddha declares to this lay disciple Atula: "Lay disciple, regardless of how things are, the blame received from foolish people is not real blame. The praise received from such people is not real praise. If one receives blame from a wise person, that is real blame. The praise given by a wise person is real praise." Thus, he brought to light a certain Dhamma principle. That is the story.

When reflecting on this story, we can see that blame and praise can occur with cause, and can also happen to someone without sufficient causal grounds. Praise can also occur in this way. On one occasion, the Buddha addressed the community of monks regarding this very question: "Monks, in this world, possessed of two things, the untalented, foolish, untruthful person"—here, 'foolish' means ignorant—"the ignorant, untalented, untruthful person brings about his own ruin. He is subjected to the fault-finding of the wise, and also accumulates much unwholesome kamma. What are the two things? Without investigating the facts properly, he praises the one who should not be praised. Likewise, without investigating the facts properly, he blames the one who should be praised. That is to say, praising the one who deserves

blame, and blaming the one who deserves praise. Behold, such a person brings about his own ruin in that manner, becomes subjected to the fault-finding of the wise, and accumulates much sin."

Next, the opposite side is shown: the wise, talented, and virtuous person, possessed of two things, is praised by the wise, and also accumulates much wholesome kamma and merit. In that case, it is shown that the wise person, having thoroughly investigated the facts, praises where praise is due, and blames where blame is due. Instead of the ordinary worldly custom, the Buddha brought to light a Dhamma principle through this. As mentioned, those of you who have read the life of the Buddha have heard how even the Blessed One was repeatedly subjected to groundless accusations and false charges. Even if we do not go into those long stories, since there are lessons to be learned from them, let us now highlight a few. On occasions when the Blessed One was censured, slandered, or blamed, he showed wonderful responses. He responded in various ways appropriate to each occasion. We can learn something from these.

To give one example, one day a Brahmin named Bhāradvāja came to see the Buddha. This Brahmin came in great anger, in a fierce rage. What was the reason for his anger? A Brahmin of his own clan had listened to the Dhamma from the Blessed One and went forth in the Dispensation. Feeling deep anger over this, he came to the Blessed One and began to abuse him with vulgar, harsh words. You know what vulgar words are—obscene language. He stood before the Blessed One and insulted him severely with vulgar words. The Blessed One simply let him abuse him. This man abused him until he was out of breath. After he had slandered for a considerable time, the Buddha asked, "Now, Brahmin, do relatives and friends ever visit your home?" "Yes, Master Gotama, they visit occasionally." "Then, when they visit, do you offer food and drink to those guests?" "Yes, on some days we do offer such food." "Then, if they do not accept the food you offer, what happens to it?" "If they do not accept it, then it remains ours." "Ah, indeed, Brahmin! Now, you have been abusing, insulting, and reviling us for all this time, coming to pick a fight and quarreling with us."

"I did not engage. Just like the story about that food, all of it now belongs to you, Brahmin. If one abuses him who abuses, quarrels with him who quarrels, fights with him who fights, it is like eating together. Here, the Buddha says, 'All that abuse belongs only to oneself.'" Through this discussion, the Brahmin gradually understood the matter, and such great faith arose in him that he went forth, received higher ordination in the Dispensation, and ultimately, it is said, became an Arahant. Through the Buddha's patience and those few wise words, the Brahmin's anger was stilled, and finally, he became an Arahant.

You have also heard of many other such occasions. One of the most serious accusations leveled against the Blessed One was the story of Ciñcā Māṇavikā. When the sectarian ascetics of other religions saw their gains and hospitality decline while the Blessed One received honor and hospitality, out of jealousy, they devised a

certain strategy, a conspiracy, to bring blame and great disrepute to the Blessed One. What was the conspiracy? They instructed a very beautiful young female wanderer, Ciñcā Māṇavikā, and devised a scheme. In the evening, as people were returning from listening to the Dhamma at Jetavana, this young woman would walk towards Jetavana, well-dressed and carrying flowers.

When asked, "Where are you going, Ciñcā?", she would coquettishly reply, "What is it to you where I am going?" Then she would go and spend the night at a sectarian monastery near Jetavana. Having spent the night there, in the morning, watching for the time when people, the male and female lay disciples, were arriving at Jetavana, she would walk along that road from the direction of Jetavana. When asked, "Where are you coming from?", she would answer in a suspicious manner, "What is it to you where I am coming from?" Proceeding in this manner for some time, after several months had passed, while the Buddha was preaching the Dhamma in the midst of a large fourfold assembly, this woman came directly before the Buddha, disguised as a pregnant woman, and began to make a long accusation of misconduct against the Buddha.

The Buddha's response at that moment was truly wondrous. What did the Buddha do? Halting the Dhamma sermon, it is described that he raised his head straight like a lion and said: "Sister, whether what you say is true or false, only you and I know." "Only you and I know whether the story you are telling is true or false." Why did he say so? If such an accusation were true, a person would bow their head, hide their face, and lack even the strength to speak. However, only someone with strength of character can raise their head straight like that and speak without fear. Thus, the wise people understood from this that the Buddha was innocent. That was the kind of response the Buddha showed there. A long story follows from there. In the end, with the intervention of Sakka and the assistance of certain deities, the disguised pregnant belly slipped and fell off. It became untied and fell. Instantly, people struck her, abused her, and chased her away. Finally, the story concludes by mentioning that the earth split open and she went down to the Great Avīci Hell because of that serious false accusation.

Similarly, another incident related to the Buddha's life is mentioned concerning the female wanderer Sundarī. That too was very similar to the former. The sectarian ascetics used a beautiful female wanderer named Sundarī to execute a plot. Just as before, she would walk towards Jetavana in the evening and return from that direction in the morning. She spent some time doing this. Next, what was the subtle plot of these sectarians? They hired rogue men and had Sundarī killed. Having killed her, they hid her body in the rubbish heap where withered flowers and trash near the Blessed One's Fragrant Chamber (*Gandhakuṭi*) at Jetavana were thrown. After hiding it, they started an outcry: "Where is Sundarī? She is nowhere to be seen. We do not know where Sundarī has gone." Next, they went and complained to the King. The King asked, "Whom do you suspect? Is there any suspicious place?" "She did go towards Jetavana during the past few days. We do not know where she is now."

"Then search for her," the King said. So, these sectarians themselves went, dug up the place where the corpse was hidden, placed the dead body on a cot, carried it into the city, and began a protest: "Look at this! This is the work of the recluse Gotama and his disciples. After committing misconduct in this manner, they have finally killed this woman." Thus, they made a serious accusation.

Following this incident, when the monks went on alms round, the citizens of the city accused them, blaming and insulting them severely. When the monks came and reported this news, at that moment, the Buddha taught them a certain verse. He instructed them to reply with this verse when people accused them. Even though we recite this verse in the Pali language, we will explain its meaning.

Abhūtavādī nirayaṁ upeti

yo cāpi katvā na karomīti cāha

ubho pi te pecca samā bhavanti

nihīnakammā manujā parattha

The meaning of it is: the liar goes to hell. *Abhūtavādī nirayaṁ upeti. Yo cāpi katvā na karomīti cāha*—if someone commits a wrong and says, "I did not do it," that liar also goes to hell. The liar who falsely says he did something he did not do goes to hell, and the one who did it but says he did not do it also goes to hell. *Ubho pi te pecca samā bhavanti*—after death, both go to the same place, becoming equals. *Nihīnakammā manujā parattha*—because both of them perform low actions. Even there, a wise person can discern the truth of what the monks are saying. Through this, a Dhamma point was demonstrated.

Next, another occasion is mentioned where the Buddhas and the community of monks were slandered. In the city of Kosambī, there was a queen of King Udena named Māgandiyā. This queen had harbored hatred toward the Blessed One for a long time, because on one occasion he had disparaged her beauty. In order to insult and blame the Blessed One and his community of monks, she bribed the city dwellers. She told them to abuse the Blessed One and the monks with vulgar words when they came into the city on alms round. Thus, the townspeople, including male and female servants, laborers, and others, gathered and began to abuse the monks. Then Venerable Ānanda came and said:

"O Blessed One, wherever we go, these people blame us. Let us go elsewhere." Then the Buddha asked, "Where else do we have to go, Ānanda?" "Let us go to another city," he replied. "Well, if the people in that city also blame and abuse us in this way, where shall we go?" "We shall go to another city." "Well, what if the same happens in that city too?" "We shall go to yet another city." "No, no, Ānanda, that is not the right way. If an issue arises in a certain place, we must only move to another place after that issue has been settled." Next, the Buddha declared: "I am like an elephant entered into battle. I can endure any arrow shot from around me. Likewise, it is my

task to endure the abuse and insults of these unvirtuous people. This blame will last for only a week; after a week, it will vanish." He said this, seeing it with his Buddha-wisdom. And indeed, after a week, those people stopped their blaming.

In this manner, we find instances in the life of the Buddha where the Buddha responded to blame. Next, we all know that among the virtues of the Buddha, there is the quality of *purisadammasārathī* (the incomparable charioteer of men to be tamed), like a charioteer in taming tamable beings. Now, if we think of a chariot yoked to horses, it is the duty of the charioteer to use a rein and a whip.

That is to say, according to the quality of *purisadammasārathī*, the Buddha also had to blame his disciples in the course of disciplining them. Because it was unavoidable, he had to do so according to the occasion. Similarly, on certain occasions, he also had to praise his disciples. This helps to identify what should and should not be done in this Dispensation. When we know that someone received blame even from the Buddha, we understand that it is an unsuitable thing.

When we think, "This received praise even from the Buddha," we can know that this is a good deed, something to be taken as an example. Such tasks belong to a teacher. In brief, this is known as *nigraha* (censure) and *pragraha* (encouragement/support). We all know that *nigraha* means to blame or censure. The word *pragraha* (*paggaha*) is used to mean giving encouragement. Thus, the duty of a teacher is to censure, punish, and discourage the one who has done wrong, and to highlight and praise the one who has done the right thing. Through this, an example is set. The Buddha had to perform both of these functions in relation to the quality of *purisadammasārathī*.

Specifically, throughout the Vinaya Piṭaka meant for the community of monks, there are shown instances where the Buddha very strictly censured and punished the monks who committed wrongs. Often, the Buddha addressed the wrongdoing monks as *mogha purisa*—foolish man. Particularly, because Venerable Devadatta caused a schism in the Sangha and led a large group towards the path of non-Dhamma and non-Vinaya, instances of severe censure against Venerable Devadatta are shown. Similarly, there was a group of six monks called the *Chabbaggiya*. They also had a large following. Everywhere they looked to behave as they pleased, breaking the training rules in a rebellious manner. The Buddha strictly censured these *Chabbaggiya* monks on many occasions.

Indeed, it is mentioned in the Buddha's own words: *Garahāva seyyo viññūnaṁ, yañce bālappasaṁsanaṁ* (Better is the censure of the wise than the praise of fools). It means that censure from the wise is better than praise from fools. Why? Because through the praise of fools, one goes astray. Through the censure, blame, and criticism of the wise, one takes the right path. Therefore, we should not misunderstand the blame directed by the Buddha according to the occasion. One should not think, "Even though we speak of the Buddha's quality of Great

Compassion, where is that Great Compassion here?" One must not think in that manner.

On certain occasions, when some monks did not behave properly, the Buddha expelled them. He drove the monks away, saying, "Do not come here near me." Sometimes, when the monks could not be disciplined, the Buddha would depart, saying, "Well then, do whatever you want." He was that strict.

On one occasion, the Buddha said to Venerable Ānanda: "Ānanda, I do not discipline my disciples like a potter carefully moving raw clay pots back and forth with both hands. I discipline my disciples strictly, censuring them," like tapping and testing well-baked pots. "I do not discipline my disciples with fear. I censure them according to the occasion." He also declared regarding the disciplining of disciples: *Saṇhena pi vinemi, pharusena pi vinemi* (I tame them with gentle words, I tame them with harsh words, and I tame them with a mixture of both). This indeed is a special characteristic of the Buddha's quality of *purisadammasārathī*, which many people cannot understand.

On one occasion, Nigaṇṭha Nāthaputta—who was another teacher—devised a certain plot through Prince Abhayarāja, who had come to him. He pointed out: "You can gain great fame by winning a debate against the recluse Gotama, if you present this kind of question to the Master Gotama. What is the question? First, ask: 'Does a Tathāgata speak words that are displeasing and disagreeable to others?' If the recluse Gotama replies that he does, then ask: 'Then what is the difference between an ordinary worldling (*puthujjana*) and a Tathāgata?'" and instructed him to censure the Blessed One using that statement. "On the other hand, if he says, 'No, a Tathāgata does not speak words that are displeasing and disagreeable to others,' then ask: 'Then why did the Master Gotama say of Devadatta that he is bound for hell, destined to boil in hell for an aeon? Because of those words, Devadatta became angry, did he not? Why did you make such a statement?'"

This kind of question is called a two-horned dilemma (*ubhatokoṭika*). A two-horned dilemma means that one can neither say "yes" nor "no" to it. Whichever answer is given, one gets trapped. Having presented this question, Nigaṇṭha Nāthaputta finally told Prince Abhaya: "If this question is presented to the recluse Gotama, he will be like a man with an iron hook stuck in his throat, unable to swallow it and unable to vomit it up. Through this, a great rumor will spread that you have defeated even the recluse Gotama in debate."

Now, to ask this, Prince Abhayarāja prepared the occasion in this way: He invited the Buddha to his palace for an alms-food offering along with three other monks. After they arrived and finished the meal, Prince Abhayarāja asked that two-horned dilemma presented by Nigaṇṭha Nāthaputta: "Does a Tathāgata speak words that are displeasing and disagreeable to others?" What was the Buddha's very first reply? He said that this question cannot be answered categorically. One cannot say categorically "yes" or "no." As soon as he said this, Prince Abhayarāja exclaimed,

"Alas, then the Niganṭhas' plot has failed!" Thus the matter was exposed—that this was indeed the two-horned dilemma presented by Niganṭha Nāthaputta. Prince Abhayarāja confessed the story. The Buddha explained it in detail, giving reasons through a long Dhamma story. The task of a Tathāgata is to speak the truth to the world. Sometimes, the truth can be displeasing and disagreeable to others. Even if it is displeasing and disagreeable, if it is the truth, the Tathāgata speaks it to that person, choosing the right time and season. Looking at it, it may seem like blame or censure, but it has to be done. Thus, the Buddha demonstrated the matter with reasons. To illustrate this, the Buddha first asked a question of Prince Abhayarāja. During this conversation, an infant—his own son—was sitting on Prince Abhayarāja's lap.

Then the Buddha asked, "Prince, if this child sitting on your lap, due to your negligence or the negligence of a maid or wet-nurse, should put a pebble or a piece of gravel in his mouth, what would you do?" "I would pull it out. If I could not do it immediately, I would hold his head with my left hand, crook my right finger, and pull it out, even if it drew blood. Why? Because I have compassion for the child. It is because of compassion that I do it, not out of anger." Seizing upon that very point, the Buddha said, "In the same way, Prince, on certain occasions, even though it is displeasing and disagreeable, and even though it appears like censure or blame, if it is the truth, I say it to my disciples according to the occasion." Because the final words he said are extremely important: "I have compassion for these living beings."

We generally think of *anukampā* (compassion/sympathy) and *karuṇā* (compassion/mercy) as the same. Semantically, they are indeed similar. However, within *anukampā* there is a sense of deep resonance or "shaking along with" (*kampa*). That is to say, even if it is not exactly like the affection a mother or a father has for their children, it is the desire to discipline those children. Truly, what lies within it is compassion (*karuṇā*). It is out of compassion and sympathy (*anukampā*) for them that one has to do such things, as the Buddha explained to Prince Abhayarāja on that occasion. In various ways, the Buddha sometimes strictly blamed the monks to discipline them. Furthermore, when that was insufficient, he meted out punishments. Looked at superficially, these may seem unkind. However, it is something that helps to maintain the Dispensation. That is the side of blame. Likewise, the Buddha praised according to the occasion.

Blame as well as praise is necessary for practically carrying on a Dispensation. That is why the Buddha awarded positions to a large number of individuals who possessed special skills among the fourfold assembly of monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. In the Sutta Piṭaka, there is a separate chapter called the *Etadagga Vagga* (Chapter on the Foremost). Just like the graduation ceremonies held in universities today, the Buddha introduced those with special skills in various fields to the community of monks: "Monks, this one is foremost among my highly wise disciples. Among those with psychic powers, Moggallāna, Mahāmoggallāna, is foremost. Among those who observe the ascetic practices (*dhutaṅgadhārī*)—that is, those who maintain rigorous

practices—Mahākassapa is foremost. Among the attendants, Ānanda is foremost. Among those monks who have attained the divine eye, Anuruddha is foremost." In this manner, instances where those deserving praise were specifically introduced are mentioned in the Dhamma.

Not only that, the Buddha praised the Chief Disciples, the Great Arahants Sāriputta and Moggallāna, on many occasions. He told the monks: "Monks, the two Chief Disciples are very wise. They are very helpful to their companions in the holy life. So much so, Sāriputta is like a mother to you. Moggallāna is like a wet-nurse to you." In that way, the Buddha introduced his disciples. Special praise was also shown for the Great Arahant Mahākassapa. Why? Because he was respectful of the practice. When the decline of the Dispensation begins, the very first thing to easily loosen is the practice. Therefore, the Buddha praised the Great Arahant Mahākassapa, who observed the ascetic practices (*dhutaṅgadhārī*) and stood firm in strict practice, at the highest level. On certain occasions he said, "If anyone is to advise this community of monks or preach the Dhamma, it is either I or Mahākassapa who is fit to do so." He praised him at the highest level, saying, "Whatever jhānas and direct knowledges (*abhiññā*) I have attained, Mahākassapa has also attained them all." In those instances, the Buddha described the virtues of those who deserved to be praised. Why? For the sake of the posterior folk—"posterior folk" was used in the past to mean future generations. For future generations to take as an example. Thus, what should not be done can be understood from the characters of those who did wrong in the Vinaya Piṭaka, based on the censure directed at them. What should be done, the correct path, is shown by the noble ones who received praise from the sacred lips of the Buddha in the *Etadagga Vagga* and other places; they are the ones we must take as our example. He did not stop just by saying that.

Among the Sutta discourses, there is a hidden and valuable sutta. It is a very wonderful sutta. The Buddha presents this sutta in a very special way, indicating from whom one should take an example. This is how the sutta goes: As you know, a mother, harboring certain future aspirations for her only child, says to him: "Now, in this day and age, son, become somebody. Become an engineer. Become a millionaire. Become someone holding various positions. Become world-famous." Instead of that, the Buddha shows something like this: A faithful laywoman, a faithful mother, should make a request of her only son in this manner. The word *āyācanā* (petition/request) is used there. To her only son, she says this as an aspiration.

Now, in this day and age, parents, especially mothers, no matter how poor they are, when addressing their son, add the word "gold" (dear/darling) to it. Let us say it in the same way: "Oh, my golden son, in the future, be like the lay disciple Citta Householder. Be like the lay disciple Hatthaka of Āḷavī." Why was this said? The Buddha himself declares: "I say that among my lay disciples, Citta the Householder and Hatthaka of Āḷavī are the standard (*tulā*)." *Tulā* means a scale/balance. But we cannot just say "balance" now; we can call it a standard of weight, in this era when such tools are becoming obsolete. What we called a balance is a standard of weight.

Among lay devotees, the true standard of weight, or the measure, the correct quantity, the standard is indeed those two. So this is said to the only son. This mother says to her only son: "Oh, golden son, someday be like Citta Householder. Be like Hatthaka of Āḷavī." Next, it does not stop there. The Buddha further says: "Golden son, if you go forth from the home life and become ordained, be like the Great Arahant Sāriputta. Be like the Great Arahant Moggallāna." The Buddha presents this as if spoken by the mother. "Why do I say so?" the Buddha next declares: "Among my ordained disciples, these two—Sāriputta and Moggallāna—are the true measure, the true standard, the true yardstick, the true balance." In that manner, he presents it regarding that son.

Furthermore, the sutta continues to say that a faithful laywoman should make a request of her daughter in this manner: "Oh, golden daughter, if you remain in the lay life, be like Khujjuttarā. Be like Nandamātā of Veḷukaṇṭaka." "Why do I say so? Among my female disciples, the laywomen disciples, these two are foremost. These two are the true measure," he introduces them in that way. "Daughter, if you should somehow go forth from the home life and become ordained, be like the Nun Khemā, be like the Nun Uppalavaṇṇā." "Why do I say so? Khemā and Uppalavaṇṇā are the true yardstick." The Buddha shows such a sutta discourse.

Similarly, on certain other occasions, the Buddha, as a Teacher, created wonderful opportunities to praise his disciples as mentioned. Kapilavatthu was the country of the Sakyans. On one occasion, when the Buddha was residing at the Nigrodhārāma in Kapilavatthu, the Sakyans had built a new assembly hall (*santhāgāra*) for their Sakyan princes to gather and discuss, and the time came to inaugurate it. In the past, the word "open/inaugurate" was not used. Instead, they had the community of monks, led by the Blessed One, use and occupy that assembly hall as a special meritorious deed.

That night, the Buddha preached the Dhamma for most of the night, and then what did he do? He said to Venerable Ānanda: "Ānanda, my back is aching a bit. I will lie down for a while. In the meantime, you preach the Dhamma to this assembly." A topic of the sermon that Venerable Ānanda could fearlessly preach was the *Sekha Patipadā* (the practice of the initiate) related to the path of Stream-entry. Having asked him to preach to this group under the topic of the *Sekha Patipadā*, what did the Blessed One do? Folding his outer robe (*saṅghāṭi*) into four layers, he spread it out and lay down right there. The Buddha lay resting in that very Dhamma hall. Venerable Ānanda preached the Dhamma. Throughout the entire night, Venerable Ānanda preached the Dhamma.

At that time, there was also the awareness that the Teacher of the Three Worlds, the Buddha, was listening. After the sermon was finished, the Buddha got up and praised Venerable Ānanda, saying, "Sādhu, sādhu! It is extremely valuable," and praised how well he had delivered the discourse. He employed that strategy precisely to create that opportunity. There are many other such instances. On certain occasions, the

Buddha would preach a deep discourse in brief to the monks. Having finished, he would suddenly get up and enter his dwelling. No one could understand it; he would say something in brief, get up, and leave. Thus, the monks would be utterly bewildered: "What is the meaning of this?" This was a strategy of the Teacher. Even in this day and age, teachers have a lot to learn from this. So, after the Buddha got up and went to his dwelling, the assembly would discuss: "Now, we cannot go back and invite the Blessed One again. How shall we explain this?" and they would look around.

Then, they would see various Venerable Ones step forward. Particularly, Venerable Mahākaccāna—in that *Etadagga Vagga* "graduation ceremony" (do not consider our use of this word as disparaging, we used it contextually)—was declared by the Buddha: "Monks, among my disciples who are capable of explaining in detail the Dhamma discourse and the Dhamma points delivered in brief by the Buddha, Mahākaccāyana is foremost." Thus, on such occasions, if Venerable Mahākaccāyana was in that assembly, those monks would go and request him: "O Venerable Sir, please explain this to us. After all, the Buddha has praised you highly in this regard." Yet, those Venerable Ones would not accept it immediately. They would reply humbly, "Indeed, the right time to ask was when you were with the Blessed One. Just like someone searching for leaves while the heartwood of a Sal tree is right there, you come searching for us." However, when they repeatedly implored him, Venerable Kaccāna would finally say, "Well then, I shall explain what the Buddha said in brief, according to my understanding," and he would explain it thoroughly.

"However, do not accept what I say just like that. Go to the Buddha and report the sermon I preached, and accept it only if the Buddha approves it," he would tell the monks.

Finally, when the monks, having listened to Venerable Kaccāna's sermon, went to the Buddha and reported the matter, the Buddha said: "Monks, Mahākaccāna is wise. He has great wisdom. If you had asked me about this matter, I too would have answered it in the very same way. Therefore, maintain the explanation given by Mahākaccāyana as my own word." That is praise. So, what was done here? It was not merely that the Buddha went to his dwelling. It was a way of lending a hand to the pupil's skill and capability, and setting an example for future generations, so that when the Blessed One is no more, the next generation will have those who are foremost in these respective fields. Thus, those monks will not be left lost. Not only that, on certain occasions, the Buddha would leave the assembly, allowing Venerable Sāriputta, or even Venerable Ānanda who closely associated with him, to explain and preach the Dhamma points in detail to the gathering. There we see the act of praising. It is something a teacher must possess. One must praise where it is appropriate. It is not for any other reason but for the long-lasting endurance of the Dispensation. Many other such instances are found throughout the Tipiṭaka.

A special occasion of this kind can be described in this way: During the daytime in the assembly hall of Jetavana, Venerable Visākha Pañcāliputta delivered a Dhamma

discourse to the monks in a wonderfully eloquent manner, using very pure and polished words. He was a very eloquent monk in preaching the Dhamma to the assembly. He preached the Dhamma in an inspiring way. The Buddha listened to this from a distance. Having listened, he came to the assembly hall in the evening and asked the monks, "Monks, who was preaching the Dhamma in the assembly hall?" "Venerable Sir, it was Visākha Pañcāliputta." "Ah, extremely valuable. Sādhu, sādhu!" Thus praising it, both to encourage him and to show the value of that Dhamma sermon, the Buddha uttered a certain valuable verse.

Bhāsaye jotaye dhammaṁ

paggaṇhe isinaṁ dhajaṁ

subhāsitadhajā isayo

dhammo hi isinaṁ dhajo

If we translate this verse, it goes like this. This is a very valuable and powerful verse. *Bhāsaye jotaye dhammaṁ*—Preach and illuminate the True Dhamma! *Isinaṁ dhajaṁ (paggaṇhe)*—Hold and raise the banner of the Sages! It says to hold and lift up the banner of the Sages. *Subhāsitadhajā isayo*—Well-spoken words are the banner of the Sages! The banner belonging to the Sages is well-spoken speech. *Dhammo hi isinaṁ dhajo*—The Dhamma indeed is the banner of the Sages! Therefore, if we translate this into English, we can also take it like this:

Preach! Illuminate the True Dhamma,

Hold and raise the Sages' banner!

Well-spoken words are the banner of the Sages,

The Dhamma itself is the Sages' banner!

So then, what is the real Buddhist flag? The Dhamma. The real Buddhist flag is the Dhamma. When it says to raise this flag, it means to preach the Dhamma. That Dhamma is our true flag. "Sage" (*Isi*) refers to the community of monks. There too, the Buddha made use of the opportunity to give respect in that manner to that eloquent Dhamma preacher, even though he was his own disciple. In this way, there are countless Sutta discourses that demonstrate such praise.

Likewise, we know that sometimes praise is even more dangerous than blame. The Buddha had to deliver a series of very special discourses regarding that topic. Specifically within that theme, a few words are mentioned: *Lābha, sakkāra, siloka*—gain, honor, and praise. This praise comes along with gain and honor. The danger of these is such that sometimes they are shown to be more dangerous than blame. The Buddha has described this category of gain, honor, renown, and praise with these words: *Daruṇo*—it is a dreadful thing; *Kaṭuko*—it is a bitter thing; *Pharuso*—it is a harsh thing; because of the disasters they cause. If one succumbs to gain, honor,

renown, and praise, there is nothing one cannot do. That is why it is called dreadful. Gain, honor, renown, and praise are shown to be things one must guard against. When looked at, they are even more dangerous than blame. Through them, it becomes very easy for someone to go astray.

Indeed, the Buddha shows wonderful similes for this as well. One simile is how a fisherman catches fish: he casts a bait for the fish. This gain, honor, renown, and praise are described as the bait cast by Māra, the fisherman. If one swallows this bait, one falls into trouble; that is what the Buddha points out there. He also shows another simile: "Monks, high up in the sky there is a storm called the Verambha wind." Earlier we spoke of the storm of blame. Now we are speaking of the storm of praise. "High up in the sky there is a great storm called the Verambha wind. If a bird is caught in this storm, its legs go one way, its wings are swept another way, its head goes another way, and its body goes yet another way. Behold, the bird meets with such great destruction when caught in the Verambha wind." Here, this Verambha wind is compared to the aforementioned gain, honor, renown, and praise. It shows that once caught in it, one knows not what will happen. In this way, the Buddha also showed the dangerous side of praise.

Truly, based on the Buddha's word, the life of the Buddha, and the Dhamma-Vinaya, we now know what our problem is. What should be done? What should not be done? How is it right? How is it wrong? The Buddha presents blame and praise as examples for precisely that. So-and-so acted in such a way and received blame from the Buddha. So-and-so acted in such a way and received praise from the Buddha. Through this, we can extract a standard, a true measure, as well as Dispensation-related values and virtues. That is why the Buddha praised. In any case, accepting it with humility is the quality of the wise. That is precisely why, even though Venerable Mahākaccāna and other Venerables had received "degrees" as being foremost (*etadagga*), when the monks came and requested, "Oh, please explain this to us," they did not say, "Oh, then there is no need to go to the Buddha; I shall tell you." Showing great reluctance, they would say, "Oh, why now? The time has passed, hasn't it? You should have asked when the Buddha was present," and with much hesitation, they would humbly say, "Do not accept what I say just like that. Accept it only if the Buddha approves it." Thus, even the disciples who received praise from the Buddha in the past acted with humility. Because this praise was solely for the purpose of setting an example for the world.

Indeed, you virtuous people have also heard that blame and praise are things belonging to the Eight Worldly Conditions (*Aṭṭha Lokadhamma*): "Lābho alābho ayaso (yaso ca), nindā pasaṁsā ca sukhañca (dukhaṁ)." This is the Eight Worldly Conditions. All these are impermanent (anicca). In the world, one receives gain and also loss. *Lābho alābho*. *Ayaso yaso ca*—one receives fame and disrepute. This "yasa" refers specifically to the wealth of retinue. Next, *nindā pasaṁsā*—one receives blame and praise. One receives happiness and also suffering (*dukkha*). These keep turning in the world like a chariot wheel. Therefore, these are impermanent (anicca).

There is no point on a turning wheel that one can grasp. One must understand the turning wheel as it turns. Blame and praise are part of these Eight Worldly Conditions. They have a certain practical value when we think of the Dispensation and the future generations. It is with this in mind that the Buddha censured certain individuals according to the occasion, and praised certain individuals. Through this, there are many things for us to learn. Therefore, we should not merely talk about the principles of this Dhamma from the Buddha's life; we must also take these character examples. We can understand from the Dhamma literature and Vinaya literature: who should be taken as our model from among the close disciples of the Buddha, and who should not. We must try to understand these by contemplating deeply and investigating the facts.

Regarding blame and praise, in the ordinary world, as mentioned earlier, if the majority of people blame someone, then he is indeed considered contemptible. If the majority of people praise someone, then he is indeed considered the best person because of the praise. However, the Buddha said: *Garahāva seyyo viññūnaṁ, yañce bālappasaṁsanaṁ*—Better is the censure of the wise than the praise of fools. Through this, the Buddha showed the true yardsticks to the world. There are countless examples in Dhamma literature for us to recognize these values and virtues. He highlighted eternal principles regarding blame and praise. He also showed that there are two sides to those mentioned. Sometimes, people blame without investigating the facts. They praise without investigating the facts. There is a wrong side to both. Blaming without investigating the facts is a mistake. Praising without investigating the facts is also a mistake. It indicates that we must do both mindfully. When we finally look at these, every single one of them is impermanent (anicca). They belong to the Eight Worldly Conditions. They are like a turning chariot wheel. Therefore, while taking the practical value from them, we must extract the portion relevant to this path to Nibbāna.

We constantly recall this practice of virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*) as the Buddha's Dispensation. This virtuous assembly spent today practicing the meditation subjects (*kammaṭṭhāna*) and observing virtue (*sīla*) to the best of their ability, fulfilling the practice relevant to the Buddha's Dispensation. The real benefit, the maximum benefit, and the most valuable thing that can be obtained during the era of a Buddha's appearance is liberation from this suffering (*dukkha*) of saṁsāra—liberation from the suffering (*dukkha*) of the round of rebirths. During a time when there is no Buddha, any other clever feats can be performed. But the greatest feat that can be performed when a Buddha is present is this. Therefore, as a dedication towards that end, today helped you to fulfill these practices. With that strength, on this occasion, you also listened to this Dhamma sermon which supports that very Nibbāna.

If you, virtuous people, have accumulated any wholesome energies through this, may this merit of listening to the Dhamma be of support. Through the association of noble friends (*kalyāṇamitta*) in this very life, may you dispel the obstructive factors

to your meditation, acquire the supportive factors, and through the realization of the paths, fruits, and penetration of Stream-entry, Once-returning, Non-returning, and Arahantship, may this wholesome deed of Dhamma-sharing surely be a supportive condition for the realization of the supreme, deathless, great Nibbāna! Aspire thus. Likewise, from the Avīci hell up to the Akaniṭṭha heaven, if any beings, including your relatives, wish to escape from this suffering (*dukkha*) of saṁsāra, or wish to rejoice in this wholesome deed of sharing and listening to the Dhamma, may all of them rejoice in this merit! Having rejoiced, may they realize the supreme, deathless, great Nibbāna through the Bodhi of their aspiration! Say *Sādhu*. Recite these verses.

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……*"