## Pahankanuwa Sermon #133

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

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(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.63)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

**Pali Stanza:**

*Idha nandati pecca nandati, katapuñño ubhayattha nandati;*

*puññaṃ me katan ti nandati, bhiyyo nandati sugatiṃ gato ti.*

**From:**

Dhammapada 18 (Yamakavagga)

Dear Listeners,

Our long journey in saṁsāra is a journey of accumulating kamma. Within the continuation of saṁsāra, our progress or decline is determined by the merits (*puñña*) and demerits (*pāpa*) we accumulate. That is why it is said that merit leads to a happy destination (*sugati*) and demerit leads to a miserable destination (*duggati*). The Buddha has preached that belief in merit and demerit—Right View (*sammādiṭṭhi*)—is an essential component. Believing that fortune and luck arise only through merit, and that misfortune and bad luck are the inevitable consequences of demerit, is a fundamental principle of a good Buddhist life. Today, we have chosen as our theme a verse which declares that a person who lives their life according to this principle can rejoice both in this world and in the world hereafter. The Buddha preached this verse with reference to Sumana, the youngest daughter of Anāthapiṇḍika, the great banker (*seṭṭhi*).

In the city of Sāvatthī, both the lay disciple Visākhā and the great banker Anāthapiṇḍika had the custom of offering alms daily to about two thousand monks in their respective homes. To put it briefly, those mansions of the seṭṭhis were like alms halls. Although they offered alms daily in this manner, they did not have the opportunity to organize the alms-giving daily themselves. The reason was that those who held large alms-giving ceremonies in Sāvatthī were very keen to invite one of these two to their own alms-givings to organize the events. This was because both

Visākhā and Anāthapiṇḍika had a deep understanding of the needs of the Saṅgha, what was allowable (*kappiya*) and suitable, and their likes and dislikes.

Since they could not organize the daily alms-giving at their own homes, they employed their children for that purpose. Just as the great lay disciple Visākhā employed a daughter of her son for this task, the banker Anāthapiṇḍika employed his eldest daughter, Mahā-Subhaddā, to organize the alms-giving. While attending to the needs of the Saṅgha, she attained the stage of stream-entry (*sotāpanna*) and later entered married life; next, Cūḷa-Subhaddā took over the alms-giving organization. She, too, attained stream-entry and later married, whereupon the duty was passed on to the youngest daughter, Sumana. She did not enter married life. While serving the Saṅgha, she attained the stage of a once-returner (*sakadāgāmī*). On a certain occasion, due to a sudden and severe illness, she was on her deathbed and sent a message to her father. At that time, Anāthapiṇḍika was busy organizing an alms-giving in another house. As soon as he received the message, Anāthapiṇḍika came. Upon arriving, he asked, "What is it, my daughter Sumana?" She asked, "What is it, younger brother (*malli*)?" Then, when he asked, "Why, daughter, are you talking in delirium?" she replied, "No, younger brother, I am not talking in delirium." "Why, daughter, do you seem afraid?"—he was asking if she was afraid of death. Then she said, "No, younger brother, I am not afraid," and passed away immediately after.

At this moment, the banker felt great grief, thinking, "My daughter, who possessed such a sense of moral shame and dread (*hiri-otappa*), died talking in delirium with a confused mind." Having completed the cremation rites, he went to see The Buddha crying and in great distress. The Buddha asked, "Why, banker, have you come weeping, sorrowful and depressed?" He said, "My youngest daughter has passed away." "Why, banker, do you not know that death is common to all?" "I know that, Venerable Sir, but I am sorrowful because my daughter passed away with a confused mind, talking in delirium at the moment of death." Then the Buddha asked, "What did she say?" and requested the details. He explained all the details to The Buddha in a question-and-answer manner. The Buddha said, "No, banker, your daughter addressed you as 'younger brother' because you are junior to her. In terms of the fruits of the path (*magga-phala*), you are established in the fruit of stream-entry (*sotāpatti-phala*). Your daughter was established in the fruit of once-returning (*sakadāgāmi-phala*). That is why she addressed you as younger brother." In this way, the banker's grief was stilled. Next, the banker asked, "Where has she been reborn now?" "In the Tusita heaven," he replied. At that moment, expressing his joy among his relatives, the banker said, "My daughter lived happily, spending a good life, and has now been reborn in a place of happiness." "Yes, banker, if someone practices the Dhamma diligently (*appamāda*), that person rejoices both in this world and in the next world," and giving this meaning, The Buddha uttered the verse we mentioned earlier:

*Idha nandati pecca nandati, katapuññho ubhayattha nandati*

The doer of merit rejoices in this world, rejoices in the world hereafter. He rejoices in both worlds.

*Puññaṁ me katan'ti nandati*

He rejoices with the feeling, "Merit has been made by me" in this world.

*bhiyyo nandati sugatiṁ gato*

"He rejoices even more after going to a happy state in the next world." In this manner, The Buddha uttered a verse expressing the value of merit.

Now, when we look at this story, it appears to be a very simple incident. Only the last few words of Sumana are recorded here. But through this, we can recognize that Sumana was a very wise woman. At the moment of death, she passed away after posing a Dhamma riddle to make her father reflect. Moreover, she did so with clear awareness. Normally, people would think these were words spoken in delirium. But she presented a deep meaning through them. Although she was the youngest daughter, she was senior not only to her two sisters but also to her father in terms of the fruits of the path and supramundane (*lokuttara*) qualities. Regardless of chronological age, when looking at seniority in virtue (*guṇa-vuddhi*) and seniority in spiritual practice (*tapo-vuddhi*), she was more senior, which is why she faced him addressing him as "younger brother." Through this, we can understand that she was a noble character.

Next, let us consider: the task assigned to her was organizing the alms-giving. You all know that in this Dhamma preached by The Buddha there are ten ways of making merit, called the ten bases of meritorious action (*dasa puñña-kiriya-vatthu*). Giving alms (*dāna*), keeping moral virtue (*sīla*), practicing meditation (*bhāvanā*), sharing merit (*patti-dāna*), rejoicing in others' merit (*pattānumodanā*), rendering service (*veyyāvacca*), paying reverence (*apacāyana*), preaching the Dhamma (*dhamma-desanā*), listening to the Dhamma (*dhamma-savana*), and straightening one's view, i.e., Right View (*diṭṭhijjukamma*)—in this way, ten items are shown as meritorious deeds in the Dhamma. She lived in an environment where she could complete all these ten items. During the Buddha's time, while daily serving the Buddha and the Saṅgha and organizing alms-givings, there were opportunities for a lay person to accumulate all ten bases of meritorious action, expressed as *dānaṁ, sīlañca, bhāvanā, patti-pattānumodanā, veyyāvacca, apacāyañca, desanā-suti-diṭṭhiju*. Indeed, it is only during the period when a Buddha arises (*buddhōtpāda-kāla*) that all ten meritorious actions can be properly completed. Ordinary people of the world consider grain, wealth, gold, silver, pearls, and gems as things to be accumulated and deposited. But in accordance with the Dhamma, as pointed out by The Buddha such wealth is limited only to this world. For a being wandering from becoming (*bhava*) to becoming (*bhava*) in this long saṁsāra, what is truly useful and stands as a support for a long time both in this world and the next is the accumulation of merit (*puñña-sambhāra*) one has gathered, the treasure of merit (*puñña-nidhāna*).

The difference between the treasure of wealth and the treasure of merit is pointed out in many places in the Dhamma. Just as the treasure of material wealth is limited to this world, it can be destroyed by danger from kings, thieves, fire, or water, sometimes even during one's lifetime. But the treasure of merit cannot be taken by kings or thieves. It is not destroyed by fire or water. It follows one like a shadow, as a follower-treasure (*anugāmika-nidhāna*); in this way, The Buddha has declared the value of the treasure of merit on many occasions. Also, it is said here, *katapuñño ubhayattha nandati*. What can be called a fortunate life is having done meritorious deeds. The doer of merit rejoices both in this world and in the world hereafter. Now we know that in the Maṅgala Sutta, "having done merit in the past" (*pubbe ca kata-puññatā*) is mentioned as a blessing. Having done merit in the past is a good foundation for this life. Having done merit in the past is obtained only if one has performed merit in previous times.

If life does not end here, the merit we do now becomes a foundation for the next life in the same way. In saṁsāra, to put it briefly, beneath everything we consider as our fortune or luck, or things we think suddenly fall into place, lies some meritorious deed performed in the past. When we think of it in this way, the opposite is also true: the moment the power of merit (*puñña-sakti*) is exhausted, just as an airplane flying in the sky crashes to the ground when it runs out of fuel, those who flourished with immense wealth and high positions suddenly fall into ruin. We do not see the causes of these events, but a Buddha or those possessing direct knowledge (*abhiññā*) can see them: because of what they received, because of their positions, they fell into negligence (*pamāda*) regarding making merit, and not realizing that their fuel was running out, the airplane descended—not just normally, but amidst flames.

In that manner, we only hear about the incidents of such unfortunate lives. We must understand the natural law (*dhammatā*) within them in accordance with the Dhamma. That is why The Buddha always declared that a wise person is always, constantly diligent (*appamatta*) in making merit. One does not know how much is left of one's deposits, one's treasure in the bank. Without considering these, if one falls into negligence and merely enjoys comforts because of the power of merit brought from the past, then one might sometimes fall into a terrible decline in that manner. The value of the power of merit is so great that if the meritorious kamma with which a person was born is small, and if they perform merit in this life, it will assist as kamma to strengthen the birth-merit they brought as productive kamma (*janaka-kamma*). Likewise, if there are unwholesome kammas, they might be cut down by the meritorious deeds one performs, and as obstructive kamma (*upapīḍaka-kamma*), the power of that unwholesome kamma is broken. Sometimes, it can also completely destroy that wholesome or unwholesome force as destructive kamma (*upaghātaka-kamma*).

In this way, various energies, various functions of kamma are expressed in the Dhamma. We must understand through this that the treasure of merit is the most valuable treasure in a human life. Even if other things are lacking, a wise person has

opportunities to make merit. It is not something done only with money; when we think about the matters mentioned here—giving alms (*dāna*), keeping moral virtue (*sīla*), practicing meditation (*bhāvanā*), and also serving (*veyyāvacca*) etc.—they are not things that necessarily involve expenses. If there is wisdom and if there is faith (*saddhā*), anyone has the ability to act diligently in accumulating merit. Likewise, if one commits a sin, there is remorse from that very moment. Remorse from the very moment it is done. The mind knows that one has done wrong. For the doer of merit, from the very moment it is done, there is great relief. Whenever they think of it, a multitude of meritorious thoughts arise from it, like earning interest. One is encouraged to do more and more merit. There is such a natural law regarding merit. Therefore, understanding the value of merit is extremely important, especially in this day and age.

In truth, this merit is not something that helps only in the next life. If one has a certain goal in the long saṁsāra, such as becoming a Buddha, a Paccekabuddha, or an Arahant, this merit is capable of fulfilling even those goals. To achieve those goals, what is required is to firmly make a resolution (*adhiṭṭhāna*) and aspiration (*prārthanā*) in that regard. Through that, one can direct those merits to realize and succeed in the desired goal one hopes for. Now, you have heard about the word *praṇidhi* (aspiration/resolve). One makes a *praṇidhi* for Buddhahood (*buddha-bhava*). One aspires, "May I become a Buddha!" and makes a firm resolution. Then, all the wholesome kammas (*kusala-kamma*) performed are pulled towards that *praṇidhi* as perfections (*pāramī*). In the same way, if one has made a certain *praṇidhi*, a certain direction in the mind, the essence of the meritorious deeds one performs is drawn to that direction, and in the end, those merits help one even to end the suffering (*dukkha*) of saṁsāra. However, some people these days think that making merit is an action of those who have only ignorant, foolish faith, and that it prolongs saṁsāra. That is a misunderstanding. This happens because of not properly understanding the Middle Path (*majjhimā paṭipadā*) in the Dhamma of The Buddha. Let us consider a little the fundamental principles of the Middle Path of The Buddha because it is important for us to dispel the doubts that often arise within us regarding making merit.

You have heard of the Middle Path preached by The Buddha. It is the path which is a valuable middle way going between, or rather transcending, two extreme views existing in the world. Those extreme views are shown as the annihilationist view (*ucchēda-diṭṭhi*) and the eternalist view (*sassata-diṭṭhi*). The annihilationist view, dear devotees, is the idea that after we die, life ends right here; there is no rebirth, and there is no distinction between this world and the next world. Next, the eternalist view is the idea that there is a permanent soul (*attā*) within us that goes on forever, eternally. The Buddha rejects both of these as extremes. Instead, let us investigate a little what the middle way shown by The Buddha is. It is Right View (*sammādiṭṭhi*) itself, or rather, this Noble Eightfold Path itself that The Buddha has introduced as the middle way. This Noble Eightfold Path begins with Right View—

with correct seeing. The Buddha has preached that there are two aspects to this Right View. "Monks, I declare that Right View is twofold." What are these two types?

One is this: there is a Right View which is described as *sāsavā puññabhāgiyā upadhivepakkā*. *Sāsavā* means "with taints" (*āsavas*). Within saṁsāric becoming (*bhava*), there are three forces that intoxicate and pull us in. There is a tendency to be drawn to sensual pleasures; that is the taint of sensual desire (*kāmāsava*). The taint of becoming / existence (*bhavāsava*) means liking becoming / existence; wishing to obtain becoming / existence, loving becoming / existence. The taint of ignorance (*avijjāsava*) means being drawn towards ignorance, towards darkness. There is such an intoxicating nature of taints. So, this Right View is *sāsava*, with taints. It accepts that. But it is *puññabhāgiyā*. *Puññabhāgiyā* means inclined towards the side of merit. Next, it is called *upadhivepakkā*. *Upadhi* resources (*upadhi-sampatti*) are the material resources and wealth that support a person's life and help to maintain life properly. Next, lives free from deformities—such acquisitions are called *upadhi*. So, what is done through this Right View is providing those resources. They are indeed with taints, but they are inclined towards merit. Also, they provide the resources of becoming / existence (*upadhi*) in saṁsāra. Even for someone who hopes to see the Nibbāna, if they have a good life, they can engage in listening to Dhamma, meditation, etc., without trouble. *Upadhivepakkā*.

Next, the other Right View is introduced as *ariyā anāsavā lokuttarā maggāṅgā*. That is Noble Right View. It is also free from those taints mentioned, thus *anāsavā*. Next, *lokuttarā maggāṅgā* means a factor of the supramundane path. It is a deep thing. Here it refers to a deep aspect: a factor of the supramundane path. In fact, dear devotees, by these two aspects of Right View, those two extremes mentioned are removed. How are they removed? The person who has adopted the annihilationist view, based on the idea that life ends here and there is no rebirth, abandons belief in merit and demerit. They also destroy belief in good and bad. Next, what do they do? As long as they live, committing crimes as they please, whether by good or bad means—you have heard of devotion to sensual pleasures (*kāmasukhallikānuyoga*). Devotion to sensual pleasures, being attached and immersed in sensuality, is the way of life of the person who has taken that wrong view, the annihilationist view. There is an old Sanskrit verse expressing this. It is not something in the Tipiṭaka; it is from Sanskrit literature. There is an ancient verse that very briefly and beautifully shows the life purpose of the person who has gone to the extreme of devotion to sensual pleasures:

> *Yāvaj jīvet sukhaṁ jīvet, ṛṇaṁ kṛtvā ghṛtaṁ pibet;*
>
> *bhasmībhūtasya dehasya, punarāgamanaṁ kutaḥ.*

As long as one lives, one should live happily. *Yāvaj jīvet sukhaṁ jīvet*—one should remain enjoying pleasures well. *Ṛṇaṁ kṛtvā ghṛtaṁ pibet*—even by taking loans, one should drink ghee. Ghee refers to something showing luxurious living, because wealthy people often use ghee. Therefore, even if you are in debt, even if you do not

have it, run into debt and drink ghee, because you won't have to repay the debt; there is no rebirth! Drink ghee even by borrowing. Why? Because *bhasmībhūtasya dehasya*—once the body is reduced to ashes, *punarāgamanaṁ kutaḥ*—how can that body return? In this way, because of this annihilationist view, they go and get stuck in devotion to sensual pleasures.

Next, what is the other view? It is the one that existed among the Nigaṇṭhas and others: the eternalist view (*sassata-diṭṭhi*). What they did was think, "There is a permanent soul, an eternal soul, inside this body of ours. We must free this soul from the body," and they tried to liberate the soul by practicing various difficult vows like the goat-vow, the dog-vow, and the cattle-vow—behaving like goats, dogs, and cattle—inflicting suffering on the body and torturing it. That is called self-mortification (*attakilamathānuyoga*). Those who held the eternalist view went to the extreme of the practice of inflicting excessive suffering on the body. Then, through the deep aspect of the Right View of The Buddha described as *ariyā anāsavā lokuttarā maggāṅgā*, that very idea of a permanent soul is rejected. What is there is indeed the deep teaching of dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*): becoming / existence according to causes and conditions. In short, if we are to define the Right View that is *ariyā anāsavā lokuttarā maggāṅgā*, it must be defined through the Four Noble Truths: the entire five aggregates are suffering (*dukkha*), underlying them is craving / thirst (*taṇhā*), the stilling of craving is the Nibbāna, and the path to the Nibbāna is the Noble Eightfold Path. What is done through this second Right View? A permanent soul is rejected. Here there is no soul. There is nothing to cry about just because there is no soul. In truth, what is here is only the five aggregates; merely five heaps existing due to causes and conditions. At that point, the eternalist view of the Nigaṇṭhas, as well as self-mortification, were rejected. Instead, the Middle Path of The Buddha is a wonderfully unique middle way. That middle way is described by a few other terms.

The Buddha always declares that in this Dispensation of mine, there is a gradual training (*anupubba-sikkhā*), a gradual action (*anupubba-kiriyā*), and a gradual practice (*anupubba-paṭipadā*). It is a training that goes systematically, step-by-step, in sequence; a practice that goes in sequence; a program, procedure, and process of action that goes in sequence. These points we presented along with various Pali terms can be understood very easily through a beautiful simile mentioned in the Dhamma, in the *Oghataraṇa Sutta*. On one occasion, a deity came to The Buddha and asked a question. The address deities use for The Buddha is translated into Sinhala as *nidukāṇeni* ("O painless one"). "O painless one, how did you cross over the flood?" Dear devotees, four saṁsāric sweeping floods are shown in the Dhamma: the flood of sensual desire (*kāmōgha*), the flood of becoming / existence (*bhavōgha*), the flood of views (*diṭṭhōgha*), and the flood of ignorance (*avijjōgha*). This being is swept away by the flood of sensual desire. Likewise, one is drawn into the flood of becoming / existence. Next, one is drawn into views, and then into ignorance. It is in the midst of these four floods that saṁsāric becoming / existence continues. So, how did you

cross over these four floods?—this was the question asked of The Buddha. What was the answer given by The Buddha? "Friend, without halting and without straining, I crossed over the flood."

Next, the deity asked, "But how, O painless one, did you cross over the flood without halting and without straining?" asking for more details. Then The Buddha declared, "Friend, when I halted, I sank; and when I strained, I was swept away." This refers to his own saṁsāric experience. This can be understood in this way according to the Dhamma principles mentioned earlier. If on any occasion, according to the annihilationist view, according to devotion to sensual pleasures, I had passively thought, "There is no result of merits and demerits; there is no importance to them," and if I had lived in that way, what would have happened to me was sinking completely. The philosophy of the annihilationist view regarding merits and demerits is analyzed in ten points like this, as the ten-point wrong view (*dasa-vatthuka micchā-diṭṭhi*): there is no giving (*dāna*), there is no sacrifice (*yāga*), there is no offering (*homa*)—meaning those ancient methods of giving, sacrifices, and offerings are of no use. Next, there is no fruit or result of good and bad kammas. There is no this world, there is no next world. There is no special duty toward a mother, there is no special duty toward a father. There are no spontaneously born (*opapātika*) beings. There are no ascetics and brahmins in the world who, having realized by their own direct knowledge, declare this world and the next world. In this way, ten points are stated as "there is no, there is no" in the annihilationist view. Instead of those ten, The Buddha presents "there is, there is."

"There is giving (*dāna*), there is sacrifice, there is offering. There is fruit and result of good and bad kammas. There is this world, there is the next world. There is a mother, there is a father. There are spontaneously born beings in the world, like gods and hungry ghosts (*petas*). Next, there are ascetics and brahmins who, having realized by their own direct knowledge, declare this world and the next world." In this way, The Buddha shows Right View in ten forms. By that ten-fold Right View, the ten "there is no, there is no" points declared in the annihilationist view are rejected. Then we can clearly see that if the annihilationist view says something "is not," The Buddha says it "is." If the eternalist view says something "is"—meaning if it says there is a permanent soul—The Buddha says it "is not." The saying "is not" is done indeed by taking refuge in the Four Noble Truths. Now, so that you can easily consider this, if we recollect again, the annihilationist view says "is not, is not," such as there is no mother, there is no father, there is no this world, there is no next world, there is no fruit or result of sacrifices and offerings, etc. To put it briefly, they reject the doctrine of kamma (*kammavāda*). Instead, The Buddha said "there is, there is." Those are saṁsāric indeed, *sāsavā puññabhāgiyā upadhivepakkā*. It is true that they are with taints. But they are merits. The Buddha presented a Right View that is inclined towards the side of merit: the ten-point Right View, or otherwise called the Right View of ownership of kamma (*kammassakatā sammādiṭṭhi*).

The Right View of ownership of kamma (*kammassakatā sammādiṭṭhi*) means the idea that kamma is one's own property. That is the first aspect of Right View. It is through that that the annihilationist view and devotion to sensual pleasures are rejected. Next, the deep aspect is that Right View which was shown as the Noble Supramundane Path-factor regarding the Four Noble Truths. Through that, the eternalism of the Niganṭhas is rejected. Here, that there is a soul is rejected, showing that the five aggregates are entirely a heap of suffering (*dukkha*). Behold, then, The Buddha presents a wonderfully unique solution here. One cannot cross over that flowing flood of saṁsāra all at once. When caught in a whirlpool, one knows that if they halt, they sink; and if they strain, they are swept away. It is such a whirlpool. Therefore, by a certain systematic device—which is what we mentioned as gradual action (*anupubba-kiriyā*), gradual practice (*anupubba-paṭipadā*), and gradual training (*anupubba-sikkhā*)—it is only through systematic discipline, a systematic practice, and a systematic course of action that one can cross over a whirlpool or a swift current. You can now consider deeply this Middle Path shown by The Buddha. Normally, we think that we have abandoned devotion to sensual pleasures, and we have abandoned self-mortification, and that the Middle Path is just that much. There is something much deeper than that in it.

Now, we say all of this for a certain reason. Some scholars often make statements like this: "Saṁsāra grows through meritorious deeds. If there is no doer of kamma, how can there be a recipient of the fruit? If The Buddha preached a teaching of not-self (*anattā*), and if there is no one to say 'this is mine' regarding the kammas we performed, how do we receive their fruits?" Through this, they make it an excuse to fall into passivity and finally even to go into devotion to sensual pleasures. This is a completely wrong idea. It is a misunderstanding of the Dhamma. It is an overrunning. It is what is called an overrunning, going beyond limits, created through mere logic. Why? Just because a permanent soul is rejected, The Buddha does not reject responsibility for kamma. What is the reason for that? In short, kamma is something that arises out of ignorance. Whether it is a good kamma or a bad kamma, according to the teaching "with ignorance as condition, Preparations (*saṅkhāra*) arise" (*avijjā-paccayā saṅkhārā*), it is due to ignorance that one performs some merit or demerit as a formation (*saṅkhāra*) according to one's desires. In doing that, the feeling of "self" is presented. According to the responsibility of that presented feeling of "self", if one is responsible for that kamma, one has to be responsible for the result as well. Therefore, one cannot merely claim responsibility for the kamma and escape the result through logical arguments. That is the point; many people confuse this.

That supramundane path Right View is very far from them. They have not even come close to that side yet. However, pointing to that supramundane path Right View, they try to escape from those things called making merit shown by The Buddha in this life. One cannot escape like that. In fact, in the book called the Dhammapada, there is a chapter, a section, called the *Atta Vagga*. *Vagga* means a chapter. Sometimes it is translated as "Chapter on the Soul". Often, non-Buddhists take the word *atta*

(soul/self) in this *Atta Vagga* incorrectly and try to show: "The Buddha did not preach a teaching of not-self (*anattā*). Look, isn't he talking about a soul here?"

But in this *Atta Vagga*, dear devotees, it speaks of oneself. It must be taken there as meaning "oneself". There is a verse which makes this very clear to us:

*Attanā va kataṁ pāpaṁ, attanā saṅkilissati;*

*attanā akataṁ pāpaṁ, attanā va visujjhati;*

*suddhī asuddhī paccattaṁ, nāñño aññaṁ visodhaye.*

This is a verse in that very chapter, *Atta Vagga*. Through this, we can see that this word *atta* is used here with the meaning of "oneself". Because *attanā va kataṁ pāpaṁ attanā saṅkilissati*—by oneself is evil done, by oneself is one defiled; *attanā akataṁ pāpaṁ attanā va visujjhati*—by oneself is evil left undone, by oneself is one purified. "Leaving evil undone" means refraining from evil. You all know that is a wholesome deed (*kusala*). Thus, by oneself is evil left undone, by oneself is one purified. Therefore, *suddhī asuddhī paccattaṁ*—purity and impurity are individual matters (*paccattaṁ*). *Nāñño aññaṁ visodhaye*—no one can purify another. So, through this, even from the words of The Buddha it is clearly evident to us that this is something concerning oneself. If one did it, one must experience it. At that point, because of taking this word *atta* incorrectly as a permanent soul through an overrunning of intellect, many people, without even knowing it, fall into the nihilistic view (*nāstika-diṭṭhi*). Very learned and scholarly people confuse this because of not properly understanding the Middle Path of The Buddha. They think: "Thinking about merit is a foolish thing. It only increases saṁsāra."

You are all familiar with hearing the word *puñña* (merit) and the word *kusala* (wholesome/skillful) shown by The Buddha. Especially within the word *kusala*, there is the meaning of "skillfulness". Often they seem to have almost the same meaning; we say "making merit" and we say "performing wholesome deeds". But *kusala* means a certain skillfulness. What is this skillfulness? It is skillfully, step-by-step, breaking away and escaping from that flood. According to that, even in making merit, a person must wisely progress in a practice that goes step-by-step, so that there is development—that is, going from merits of lesser value towards higher, supreme, and noble merits. That is what true *kusala* is.

In short, the word *kusala* is used all the way up to being led to the saṁsāric state of Buddhahood (*buddha-bhava*). That too is skillfulness. Inside the word *kusala* lies the skillfulness regarding everything: going to a happy destination without going to hell in saṁsāra, and ending the entire saṁsāric suffering (*dukkha*) without going to hell or to a happy destination, and thereby seeing the Nibbāna. So, one does that by breaking away from the whirlpool step-by-step, in sequence. This cannot be done all at once. Even if one halts, one sinks. That is the nature of saṁsāra. This is exactly why a Buddha is needed to solve this riddle of saṁsāra. This is not a knot that can be

easily cut. It is not a problem that can be easily solved. That is why a Buddha is absolutely necessary, and why a Middle Path is absolutely necessary. If you confuse this, you fall into trouble, like catching a snake by its tail. In that case, there is no merit made here, but the talk is supramundane (*lokuttara*). The work is of no use either for this world or for the next world.

Such views exist among certain scholars. These are often heard. Through them, many people are misled, even helpless Buddhists. That is why we specially presented this as a topic today, to clarify this matter. Accordingly, we must understand the section of the Dhammapada called the *Atta Vagga* (Chapter on the Self). The Buddha is not preaching about a permanent soul there. Rather, it is to show a fundamental principle of that Right View which is *puññabhāgiyā upadhivepakkā*. If, through the feeling of "self" created out of ignorance, one has performed some merit or demerit, its result and benefit belong to oneself in a saṁsāric sense. If one accepts that truth, then, in accordance with the word *kusala*, we must gradually try to make the merit we perform a supreme merit by cultivating the qualities of faith (*saddhā*) and wisdom (*paññā*) within ourselves.

There is also a good discourse (*sutta*) regarding this. We will mention one illustration due to time limitations. Giving alms (*dāna*) is a familiar thing to all of you. In a certain discourse speaking about this alms-giving, The Buddha points out eight ways of giving alms. He points them out like this: some people give alms out of desire (*chanda*). *Chanda* means because of a special liking or attachment; because of attachment to someone. *Chandā dānaṁ deti*. Another person gives out of hatred (*dosa*), throwing it like it's a nuisance. Another person gives out of delusion (*moha*)... not even knowing whether they gave it or not, giving it without mindfulness—there is an old story about "giving a horse to Kaluhāmi"—that is out of delusion. Next, fear of blame. Sometimes, out of fear of blame: "If I don't give, others will blame me," so they give. Next, it is shown that another person gives thinking: "Our ancestors kept the custom of giving alms. We should not break that custom, therefore we must give alms." Another person thinks: "By giving this alms, I should be reborn in a happy state," and gives alms looking forward to heavenly pleasures. Next, a seventh point is shown: another person thinks: "In giving alms, at the moment of giving, a great joy and happiness arises in my mind," and thinking of that joy, they give alms.

The eighth way is shown by The Buddha using two somewhat deep words: *cittālaṅkāraṁ cittaparikkhāraṁ dānaṁ deti*—one gives alms for the adornment of the mind, as an equipment for the mind. That is shown as the supreme giving. The things mentioned earlier are also alms-givings, indeed. But they are mentioned as being of a lower level. What is mentioned at the very end is the supreme thing. Giving alms with the thought *cittālaṅkāraṁ cittaparikkhāraṁ dānaṁ deti* means giving alms hoping for some growth of one's mind. Not hoping for: "May I receive a hundred-thousandfold of what I give! May I receive heavenly bliss! Or may I receive a status socially!" Not out of fear of blame for breaking a custom—not such narrow purposes. What is the deepest meaning? When performing a meritorious deed, it is

drawing one's mind closer to the Nibbāna; purifying the mind. That practice of purifying the mind is introduced as *cittālaṅkāraṁ cittaparikkhāraṁ*. The commentators explain those two words as serenity (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*). Briefly considered, what is done through serenity is making the mind concentrated, calm, and gentle; making it soft and gentle.

In truth, there is a deep meaning in both those items. To explain practically what it means to give alms for the growth of the mind by looking at one's own mind: now, let us say we offer some object of alms to the Saṅgha. At the moment of giving, one can give according to the ways mentioned earlier. It could be due to one's attachment, due to hatred, as a custom during a time of blame, or due to various other reasons. But in truth, if we hope to reap its supreme benefit at the highest level, we must think in this way. This is an act that must be done with close attention in a meditative manner. "Through this, my mind becomes soft and gentle." How does it become soft and gentle? The occasion of giving alms is indeed an occasion where the mind of the giver becomes gentle, and the mind of the receiver also becomes gentle. When giving with compassion, kindness, and loving-kindness, the mind becomes gentle. When giving with faith (*saddhā*), the mind not only becomes soft, but also becomes pure. At the moment of giving with faith, through special meditative ways like recollections of the Buddha (*buddhānussati*), Dhamma (*dhammānussati*), and Saṅgha (*saṅghānussati*), the mind is purified in relation to serenity meditation (*samatha-bhāvanā*).

Next, "insight-oriented" (*vipassanā-maya*) means that at the moment of giving, one's mind abandons greed regarding that object, at least temporarily (*tadaṅga-pahāna*); a mind of non-greed (*alobha*) arises. Next, one is freed from hatred; it is called non-hatred (*adosa*). One is freed from delusion (*amoha*); freed from the feeling of "I" and "mine". When giving it, one does not ask for it back saying "it is mine" again. At that moment, one understands: "This is what The Buddha preached as not-self (*anattā*). The attachment that was there when I was holding onto this is no longer there, is it? I am now freed from that, am I not?" Through that, one deeply understands. If the Nibbāna is indeed the destruction of greed, hatred, and delusion, then if one can say: "Even for one brief moment, I saw Nibbāna through this alms-giving, I saw Nibbāna through this gift," then that is the supreme gift. That is *cittālaṅkāraṁ cittaparikkhāraṁ*. If one could take a picture of that mind, it would be a very beautiful picture. The mind is very calm, soft, and gentle. Also, it has a nature of deeply seeing through, in terms of the impermanent (*anicca*) and the not-self (*anattā*). So, when making an offering of alms—you all might be giving alms frequently in your daily lives—if you give alms indeed by thinking deeply in this way, even from a small thing without much else, you can reap a great benefit. You know there are big businessmen who gather immense wealth sometimes from a small thing. It is said that an ancient *seṭṭhi* obtained the position of a banker from a dead mouse. Similarly, we must be wise to turn even a small meritorious deed we perform into a great treasure of merit that leads to this world, to the next world, and finally to the Nibbāna.

We spoke about the ten meritorious actions shown by The Buddha. But more famously, there are three mountains of merit: giving (*dāna*), moral virtue (*sīla*), and meditation (*bhāvanā*)—meritorious actions of giving, meritorious actions of moral virtue, and meritorious actions of meditation. Briefly considered, giving, moral virtue, and meditation are all meritorious deeds. If so, you know that moral virtue is nobler than giving. Why is moral virtue nobler? Giving is an external object. Moral virtue means disciplining one's body and speech. It comes closer to oneself; it gets closer to one's mind. Body and speech do not discipline themselves. One must apply the mind to discipline them. Next, directly focusing attention on that mind and developing the mind is what is called meditation (*bhāvanā*).

Thus, dear devotees, all of these are known by the name of merit. Higher than the meritorious deed of giving is the meritorious deed of moral virtue—disciplining body and speech. Even higher than that is the meritorious deed of meditation. Whether because there were people who feared merit in the past just as in the present, we do not know, but on one occasion The Buddha declared how noble meritorious action is, like this: "Do not fear merits, monks." *Mā, bhikkhave, puññānaṁ bhāyittha. Sukhassetaṁ, bhikkhave, adhivacanaṁ... yadidaṁ puññāni.* "Monks, 'merits' is a designation for happiness, which is extremely pleasant, beloved, and agreeable." In this way, after making a great praise of merit, The Buddha says: "Why do I say so? I know that I have experienced the great benefits of merits performed by me in saṁsāra over a long period. It is direct experience to me. That is why I say so," and he gives an illustration for that:

"Monks, at one time in saṁsāra, for seven years, I developed loving-kindness as a liberation of mind (*mettā cetovimutti*) spreading equal friendliness towards everyone, completely throughout the entire universe, for seven years." That means he performed the highest level of meditative merit. Through meditation, he developed the mind up to those noble, high absorptions (*jhāna*) called the liberation of mind through loving-kindness. He says: "As its benefit, I obtained such and such things." Next, he declares: "For seven aeons of world-contraction and world-expansion, I lived in the Brahma worlds. Next, likewise in the heavenly worlds, as a wheel-turning monarch (*cakkavatti*), as various regional kings, etc., for a long time I received such a mass of resources, and when I reflected on them, I knew: 'These have arisen for me due to such and such meritorious deeds.' When considering all of these broadly, they were indeed the benefits of *dānassa damassa saññamassa*—giving (*dāna*), self-taming (*dama*) which is moral virtue, and self-control (*sañyama*) which is restraining the mind. It is the benefits of these virtues that I experienced to such an extent." In this way, The Buddha spoke about merits. From that too, it is apparent to us that if we confuse matters and, bringing forward the deep things of this Dhamma, neglect what should be done in this world, at this moment, we will fall into negligence (*pamāda*).

The Buddha always points out to us the value of this human existence (*manussa-attabhāva*), especially during the period when a Buddha arises. Some of those in the

heavenly worlds leave those heavenly pleasures, pass away, and come to the human world. Because it is during the period when a Buddha arises that one can accumulate merits. Sometimes, remaining in the heavenly worlds, one can only enjoy pleasures. If one wants to earn merit, one must come to the human world during the period when a Buddha arises. Just as those ten bases of meritorious action were present in that banker's mansion, one can accumulate those treasures of merit during the period when a Buddha arises. They become follower-treasures (*anugāmika-nidhāna*) that cannot be destroyed by the mentioned dangers of water, fire, kings, etc. Also, if one has certain resolves and aspirations, one can perform merits placing those aspirations at the forefront, so that they are drawn towards them and fulfilled.

Therefore, when making merit, you should bear in mind not to give alms with low purposes, as described in the eight points. It is not suitable to give because of a special attachment to someone. Removing such occasions as giving out of hatred, out of fear of blame, or out of delusion, one must always prepare the mind and act. Indeed, through that we can see that a person with a meditative mind (*bhāvanāmaya-manasa*) can reap a massive heap of merit even from a small thing. Within that meditative mind, there is faith (*saddhā*), there is wisdom (*paññā*), there is mindfulness (*sati*), and there is clear comprehension (*sampajañña*). A person possessing such can give alms with a joyful mind in three stages, as described in the Dhamma. You have often heard about giving alms with a joyful mind in three stages: *Pubbeva dānā sumano, dadaṁ cittaṁ pasādaye; datvā attamano hoti*... "Before giving, one is glad; while giving, one purifies the mind; having given, one is gratified." So, even before giving, with a good joy, without any hesitation, one can create a great joy as the prior volition (*pūrva-cetanā*) from the very moment one intended the meritorious deed. At the moment of giving, if one performs that act with mindfulness and clear comprehension, with faith and wisdom, a great clarity and joy arises in that person's mind. Next, after performing it, without any remorse, one can be happy for the rest of one's life thinking: "I have done a valuable thing." That is what was declared in that verse: *Puññaṁ me katan'ti nandati*—"He rejoices with the thought, 'Merit has been made by me.'" Even that thought, "I have made merit," is a matter for one to rejoice over.

Perhaps that is why the daughter Sumana declared just before passing away that she was not afraid of death. Reflecting on the life she had spent, there was no remorse to such an extent. Because she knew precisely that she would go to a good place after death, she spoke fearlessly in that manner. Generally, when looking at this as a mere story, there is nothing major here. There are stories much more interesting than this in short stories, novels, etc., but there is nothing of value to be taken from them. But this small story—it can be further analyzed to see: for whom is this Dhamma preached by The Buddha? It is not for those few self-proclaimed scholars mentioned. It is for everyone swept away by the flood of this saṁsāra, to go towards the Nibbāna gradually, step-by-step, through this Middle Path. If we make an effort, the things necessary for it are within us; they are with us. The only shortcoming is not knowing that they are there. So, what we must do is prepare them and arrange them in proper

order. Then, according to the Dhamma preached by The Buddha we can cross over this saṁsāra with the help of both those types of Right View. Through that ten-point Right View, which is called *sāsavā puññabhāgiyā upadhivepakkā* and which we generally describe as being of a lower level, one realizes that if one has performed a kamma, when the result of that kamma comes, one cannot escape saying, "This is not me, I don't know."

In truth, sometimes even in this life, when one receives a result identical to the evil kamma one performed, one feels in one's heart, "Ah, this is indeed what has given fruit to me," even if one does not tell others. Regarding the next world, it can be known from one possessing direct knowledge (*abhiññā*), or else these days through various modern methods like hypnosis, etc. Just as those possessing direct knowledge in the past did, Buddhas clearly pointed out, "This happened because of such and such past kamma." It is like that. Therefore, that responsibility cannot be rejected. If one is responsible for kamma, one is responsible for the result too. For that reason, we must not make the word *atta* in this *Atta Vagga* a logical argument like those of other religions, and make the mistake of saying, "Even though The Buddha preached the not-self (*anattā*), look, there is a soul here." In short, when a kamma is mentioned, there is a personal aspect there. It becomes a kamma that gives a result because it arises out of ignorance. In the Dhamma, the term for this is Preparations (*saṅkhāra*). Preparations (*saṅkhāra*) arise due to ignorance.

So, we must accept that. Starting from there, through the Middle Path, making that merit a supreme merit, making that wholesome action a supreme wholesome action, we gradually develop the Noble Eightfold Path in a meditative manner, and we develop it so that those factors—Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration, which were purified individually one by one—arise rapidly in one mind, in a single moment. What is called *lokuttarā maggāṅgā* is the arising of all those eight in a single mind for a moment as path-concentration (*magga-samādhi*). It is by that path-concentration that one breaks the levels of saṁsāric defilements, is freed from the four lower realms, is freed from the entire becoming (*bhava*), and is granted liberation through the noble, deathless Nibbāna. Behold, according to that we can understand that this word "kamma" is not an ordinary, small, narrow word. This is a word we can present meaningfully all the way up to seeing the Nibbāna.

We must bring these points presented by this short verse close to our lives. Today, you all have also undertaken a valuable moral virtue (*sīla*). You perform meritorious deeds such as giving alms according to your capacity daily. Next, you must be particularly keen regarding the meditative merit. Ancient poets have said that the noblest of all merits is the merit of meditation. The supreme merit among merits is the merit of meditation. As The Buddha declared, the merit of meditation provides even heavenly and Brahma pleasures for a long time in becoming (*bhava*). But it is not becoming (*bhava*) that should be aspired to. Even if those are natural results, in the end, as an inevitable result of developing that mind, when those levels of

defilements are removed, it is through that light of wisdom that one can realize the noble, deathless Nibbāna through the penetration of the path and fruit of stream-entry, once-returning, non-returning, and Arahantship.

Today, you have completed moral virtue (*sīla*) at various levels through the eight precepts, etc. You have engaged in meditation to some extent. Next, at this moment too, we believe you have received the strength to generate within your minds those qualities of faith (*saddhā*), energy (*viriya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*) which assist towards the Nibbāna as faculties (*indriya*) and powers (*bala*). With the help of all those accumulations of wholesome deeds (*kusala-sambhāra*), associating with noble friends (*kalyāṇa-mitta*), engaging diligently in Dhamma and meditation, reaping the highest fruit that should be taken from this period when a Buddha arises as quickly as possible—and unless there is a special aspiration or *praṇidhi* for Buddhahood, etc.—may you, according to your aspiration, escape from the four lower realms as quickly as possible through the path and fruit of stream-entry, etc., and finally, through Arahantship, escaping from this great saṁsāric suffering (*dukkha*) consisting of birth (*jāti*), aging and death (*jarāmaraṇa*), sickness, and all other saṁsāric sufferings, realize the noble, deathless Nibbāna! May the merit of listening to this Dhamma be a supportive condition (*hetu-vāsanā*) for that! Make that aspiration.

Next, likewise, may all beings, including the guardian deities of the Dispensation, and whoever is there from Avīci hell to the Akaniṭṭha heaven, including our departed relatives, rejoice in this accumulated mass of merit! May they rejoice in this wholesome deed of preaching and listening to the Dhamma! Having rejoiced, and having escaped from all saṁsāric suffering (*dukkha*) consisting of birth (*jāti*), aging and death (*jarāmaraṇa*), sickness, etc., through whichever Bodhi (awakening) they have aspired to, may they be stilled in the noble, deathless Nibbāna! Make that aspiration and recite the verses in this manner:

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……*"