Pahankanuwa Sermon #137

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

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(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.29)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

Pali Stanza:

"Yathāpi mūle anupaddave daḷhe, chinnopi rukkho punareva rūhati;

evampi taṇhānusaye anūhate, uppajjatī dukkhamidaṃ punappunaṃ ti."

From:

Dhammapada 338 (Taṇhāvagga)

Dear Listeners,

It is precisely to the extent that we realize the nature of suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*) in samsāric existence that we draw closer to the supreme Nibbāna. It is because of this very reason that the Blessed Buddha has constantly described this samsāric existence by showing its nature of suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*), in a way that arouses spiritual urgency (*saṁvega*) regarding it. All of us wish to be freed from suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*). However, the reason we are not enthusiastic about the eradication of craving / thirst (*taṇhā*)—which is necessary to be freed from suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*)—is that we do not realize that this samsāric existence is suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*), and that this burden of the five aggregates is suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*). Reflecting upon the lives we have spent in this *samsāra* often helps us to understand this.

When hearing, reading, or seeing the life stories of someone else in past *samsāra*, whether through some supernormal power (*abhiññā*) or otherwise, we should internalize them and think, "Could my life also have passed in this manner?" When thinking thus, a great spiritual urgency (*saṁvega*)—a samsāric urgency—arises within us. In truth, the entire samsāric existence is filled with a series of risky somersaults. Taking birth / arising (*jāti*) in various planes of becoming / existence (*bhava*), going up and down, being born and dying, this samsāric journey is indeed

like a series of risky somersaults. The origin story (*nidāna-kathā*) related to the verse we have themed today is a story that vividly reveals the risky nature and the tragic quality of these many somersaults. Although this story begins in the time of the Buddha, it can be considered a reincarnation story that extends right up to our present day. Therefore, on a day like today—especially on this Poson Poya day, the day we received the Buddha Sāsana—it is a story that helps to arouse greater spiritual urgency (*saṁvega*) in us that is connected to this verse.

One day, the Blessed Buddha, accompanied by Ven. Ānanda and surrounded by the community of monks (*saṅgha*), entered the city of Rājagaha for alms. Just as he entered Rājagaha, he saw a young sow (piglet). Seeing it, he smiled. The Blessed Buddha does not smile in vain like ordinary human beings, but rather to bring to light some deep Dhamma principle. Knowing this well, Venerable Ānanda asked the Blessed Buddha:

"Venerable Sir, what is the reason for a smile to arise in the Blessed One?" Then the Blessed Buddha asked Venerable Ānanda, "Ānanda, do you see that young sow over there?" "Yes, Venerable Sir," he replied. "During the time of the Kakusandha Buddha, that young sow was a hen near the assembly hall of a certain monastery of the Sangha. Having listened to a certain practitioner (*yogāvacara*) chanting a subject of insight meditation (*vipassanā kammaṭṭhāna*), even though she did not understand what was being said, she focused her mind on that sound of Dhamma. By the power of that merit, she was born in a royal family in her next life."

We can understand that it must have been the very merit of directing her mind to that subject of meditation (*kammaṭṭhāna*) that enabled her, when born later in a royal family, to evoke the meditation subject on foulness (*asubha*) called the perception of a worm-infested corpse (*pulavaka-saññā*) upon seeing worms in a toilet. That is to say, when a corpse decays, there is a stage where it is infested with worms. This is a sight that arouses extreme disgust and disillusionment regarding *samsāra*. Thereafter, having gone forth among female wanderers (*paribbājikā*), through this perception of a worm-infested corpse, she attained the first absorption (*jhāna*). By the power of that first *jhāna*, she was born in a Brahma world. The Blessed Buddha was briefly indicating this person's past. Having been born in the Brahma world, now she has come and become a young sow; that is what the Blessed Buddha declared.

As soon as he saw this young sow, that past history became clear to the Blessed Buddha in that very instant. When he spoke in this manner, Venerable Ānanda and the other monks developed a powerful sense of spiritual urgency (*saṁvega*) regarding this *samsāra* and craving / thirst (*taṇhā*) for becoming / existence (*bhava*). Next, in a fitting manner, the Blessed Buddha delivered a series of verses. That series of verses is recorded in the Taṇhā Vagga of the Dhammapada. Out of those verses, the first verse is what we have set as our theme.

"Yathāpi mūle anupaddave daḷhe,

chinnopi rukkho punareva rūhati;

Evampi taṇhānusaye anūhate,

uppajjatī dukkhamidaṁ punappunaṁ."

Just as, when the taproot is undamaged and firm (*yathāpi mūle anupaddave daḷhe*), a tree grows back again even though it has been cut down (*chinnopi rukkho punareva rūhati*); likewise, as long as the underlying layer of craving / thirst (*taṇhā*), the latent craving / thirst (*taṇhā-anusaya*)—which is the latency / underlying tendency (*anusaya*) of craving / thirst (*taṇhā*), the most subtle defilement-layer of craving / thirst (*taṇhā*)—is not rooted out (*evampi taṇhānusaye anūhate*), this suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*) arises again and again (*uppajjatī punappunaṁ*). Starting with this verse, the Blessed Buddha preached a series of verses showing the perils of craving / thirst (*taṇhā*).

It is mentioned that upon hearing those verses, many in that assembly attained paths and fruits (*magga-phala*). However, the story does not end there. That is what is significant here. Where was this young sow reborn after she died? In Burma, known in ancient times as Suvaṇṇabhūmi. She was born in Burma—what is called Myanmar. She was born in a royal family. Having been born there, she passed away and was reborn in Benares, India, also in a high-caste family. From there she died and was born in the port of Suppāraka, in the family of a horse dealer. Passing away from there, she was born in the port of Kāvīra, also in a merchant family. From there she passed away and was born in Anurādhapura during the reign of King Dutugemunu. In a very recent period, she was born in Anurādhapura in a high-class, wealthy family. Passing away from there, she was born in the village of Mokkanta, south of Anurādhapura, as the daughter of a householder named Sumana, and she was named Sumanā. From there, the story unfolds in this manner.

Around that time, due to the Tamil disturbances, some people had to abandon their villages. Sumanā's father also had to leave that village and go to a village in the south called Mahāmuṇi. Quite suddenly, a minister of King Dutugemunu named Lakuṇṭaka Atimbara arrived at that village. That minister, having seen this lady, felt an attachment to her, married her, and took her to his own village. Around this time, a monk residing in the Great Monastery of Koṭipabbata came to this minister's house for alms. That monk must have been one possessing supernormal powers (*abhiññā*). The moment he saw this lady, he remembered, "Is this not the young sow from the time of the Buddha?" Then he said to the other monks, "Friends, look, that young sow has now become the wife of the prime minister Lakuṇṭaka Atimbara. What a thing!" Whether by word of mouth, or because she overheard those words, or in some other way, that lady—Sumanā—came to know of this. The moment she heard it, the knowledge of recollection of past lives (*jātissara-ñāṇa*) arose in her.

Pious devotees, this knowledge of recollection of past lives is not (necessarily) the supernormal power (*abhiññā*). Just as we often hear today in stories of reincarnation

in this country and abroad, many people in their childhood see their past lives to some extent. They remember them. Likewise, that too must require a developed mind. Similarly, this lady saw many of her past lives, even more in detail than what the Blessed Buddha had briefly declared. At the same time, a great spiritual urgency (*saṁvega*) arose in her. Filled with urgency, she pleaded with her husband, the minister, and somehow obtained his permission. Since the Order of Nuns (*Bhikkhunī Sāsana*) was well-established at that time, she went forth as a nun (*bhikkhunī*). Having gone forth, it is next shown that while listening to the preaching of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta at the Tissamāhāvihāra, she attained the fruit of Stream-entry (*sotāpatti-phala*). Later, this nun returned to the village of Mokkanta, where her father had previously resided, since the Tamil disturbances had ended by then. Listening to a monk preaching the Āsivīsūpama Sutta, she attained Arahantship. So she was an Arahant. Then, at the time of her final passing away (*parinibbāna*), in the presence of both the bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs, placing a monk who preached the Dhammapada in the position of a witness, she revealed all her past histories.

This is shown in greater detail. She declares: "In the past, during the time of the Kakusandha Buddha, just as the Blessed Buddha declared, I wandered as a hen near the assembly hall of a certain monastery. In that period, having listened to the chanting of insight (*vipassanā*)..." we know there was a certain wholesome potential (*kusala-satti*) within it. A certain mishap that occurred there is mentioned, which is highly poignant—it is said that a hawk snatched that hen away and severed her neck. Although she met with such a terrible death, in her next life she was born in a treasurer's (*seṭṭhi*) family, and in the following life in a royal family. It was when she was born in that royal family that, as the Blessed Buddha declared, she saw worms in a toilet and thereby evoked the meditation subject of foulness (*asubha*) called the perception of a worm-infested corpse (*pulavaka-saññā*), went forth among the female wanderers, and attained the first absorption (*jhāna*).

"Next, by the power of that first absorption (*jhāna*), I was born in the Brahma world. Returning from the Brahma world, as the Blessed Buddha described the nature of those ups and downs of samsāric somersaults, I gradually became a young sow at last. What happened after that is what we have already mentioned. From being a young sow, I was reborn in Burma. Then in Benares, then in the port of Suppāraka, the port of Kāvīra, and thus going on, I had two lives in Anurādhapura, and in my final life, being born as Sumanā, I put an end to birth / arising (*jāti*) in this way. Therefore, strive for Nibbāna with diligence!"—thus stirring spiritual urgency (*saṁvega*) in the fourfold assembly, she entered *parinibbāna* (final passing away / final extinction).

So, what we have just heard is a story. Such stories are frequently found in books and heard in these times as well. But if we do not take the example that we should from this, it merely remains a story that helps to satisfy our curiosity. As we mentioned earlier, utilizing all these stories in accordance with the Dhamma means applying them to our own lives—that is, internalizing them.

Now, this young sow, who was a young sow during the time of the Buddha, finally passed away as a great Arahant nun in Sri Lanka during the time of Dutugemunu. How many somersaults did she perform in *samsāra* in the interim? Several animal births are mentioned. Even more, having gone to the Brahma world—having climbed so high—she fell down again. This indeed is the nature of somersaults in this *samsāra*. Under such conditions, no one can truly harbor conceit / pride (*māna*) or pride regarding the pleasures and luxuries they have received, their birth / arising (*jāti*), prosperity, kingship, or treasurer-status in *samsāra*. Why? Where will this pile of somersaults end? As long as one goes on in *samsāra*, one has to undergo various births according to the results of one's own wholesome and unwholesome actions (*kamma*). Not only animal births and human births, but also as hungry ghosts (*peta*), demons (*yakkhā*), and so forth, or in the terrifying hells (*niraya*). Even as those details were being declared in the Buddha's time, a group of monks understood the nature of suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*) in *samsāra* to such an extent that they attained the paths and fruits (*magga-phala*). They developed disillusionment with *samsāra*. Similarly, later on, having heard the sermon containing the personal history of Sumanā as a nun, we can imagine that many people must have realized Nibbāna.

In this society, we often think of animal beings as if they have no relation to us. Furthermore, we frequently hear in these times that even in Buddhist homes, pigs and chickens are not only kept but reared. We do not really know whether they do this out of compassion, thinking of their samsāric kinship. Whatever the case may be, among those animals, even one's own parents or children might have been born. Sometimes, people perform various charities and dedicate merit to them. But those relatives to whom they dedicate merit might be living in those very chicken coops and pigpens! Therefore, we must arouse spiritual urgency (*saṁvega*) regarding this as well—our possible kinship with these animals. That is one lesson we can learn from this. Next, although we call them "animals," some of them might be beings who have developed their minds through insight meditation (*vipassanā-bhāvanā*) and so forth in long *samsāra*. Even though those animals have fallen into animal existence due to some unwholesome action (*akusala*), they still possess wholesome potentials.

This is also mentioned in stories about them. Therefore, we should cultivate special compassion toward those animal beings. Next, another point is revealed to us by this: the beneficial aspect of insight meditation (*vipassanā-bhāvanā*). Even though a young hen listening to the chanting of a meditation subject (*kammaṭṭhāna*) does not understand what is being said in that meditation subject, yet such is the power of the Dhamma that if listening to it produces some composure or faith (*saddhā*), this story shows how immensely fruitful even that level of listening can be.

This is revealed to us by the way that young hen obtained her next birth, which inclined her toward the path of meditation that helps in escaping from *samsāra*. From this, we must consider: if even an animal, by listening to this meditation, can obtain such benefits and find help in crossing over from *samsāra*, why are we, who

have obtained this precious human life, not enthusiastic about these meditations? In this series of verses, the Blessed Buddha has shown the simile of the tree. As long as the root of the tree—the taproot—is not severed, no matter how much one prunes it, most people only prune this tree of suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*), without even looking for the taproot. But if one wants to cut the taproot, what needs to be done is this very meditation, only through insight meditation (*vipassanā-bhāvanā*). That is why the Blessed Buddha has declared:

"Savantī sabbadhī sotā,

latā ubbhijja tiṭṭhati;

Tañca disvā lataṁ jātaṁ,

mūlaṁ paññāya chindatha."

This too is a verse from that same series of verses. These rivers flow in all directions. Then these desires sprout and grow, just like creepers, like vines. These must be cut with wisdom (*paññā*). It is with the weapon of insight (*vipassanā*), which is wisdom, that this latency / underlying tendency (*anusaya*) of craving / thirst (*taṇhā-anusaya*) has to be cut down. That is how we must understand the beneficial aspect of this meditation.

If one hopes to escape from *samsāra*, this craving / thirst (*taṇhā*) for becoming / existence (*bhava-taṇhā*)—which we actually treat as something very minor when we call it "craving / thirst" (*taṇhā*) or "desire"—starts through the sense objects that come to these six doors: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Desires grow along with them. Caught up in our past karmic forces, through a multitude of those karmic entanglements, further planes of becoming / existence (*bhava*) are created. This is what is called *samsāra*. When considered from one perspective, this samsāric journey is a very long journey. We call this the infinitely long *samsāra*. But from another perspective, this samsāric journey is like spinning in one place. That is why it is called "samsaraṇa" (wandering/cycling)—spinning in one place, going in one circular loop. Even in these times, in amusement parks, there is something called a merry-go-round. When a small child is placed on a wooden horse, the merry-go-round spins a few rounds amid a great din and music. This child thinks he is going on a great journey. Spinning and spinning, he comes right back to the same place. Yet, it is as if he went on a great journey. Our journey of life is just like that.

Because this journey goes on for an infinite time, it is called the long *samsāra*. But if wise people contemplate it, what is here is just spinning in one place, in one circular loop. Birth / arising (*jāti*), decay / aging (*jarā*), sickness, and death (*maraṇa*)—birth / arising (*jāti*), decay / aging (*jarā*), sickness, and death (*maraṇa*)—that is all that goes on. Because it exists in this way, whatever plane of becoming / existence (*bhava*) one obtains—whether one becomes a king, a treasurer, a deity, or a Brahma—it is not much different from that animal existence, because the fate is the

same. There is a beginning; there is an end. And in the middle, there is a massive pile of suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*).

So, it is this reality that one must understand through meditation. Indeed, it is something to be understood through meditation. Although in many Dhamma stories, and even in this story, it is mentioned that someone attained Arahantship or paths and fruits (*magga-phala*) simply by listening to a sermon, that does not happen to everyone. That happens only to someone who has inclined toward the path of meditation in past *samsāra* and done much of that work. For those whose minds are prepared, the realization of paths and fruits (*magga-phala*) can occur through the mere hearing of a Dhamma sermon. However, some intellectuals make an argument out of this, saying that meditation is unnecessary. If one thinks, as some say in these times, that we can be satisfied merely by reading a book or listening to a sermon, that is a wrong view.

In truth, in those days, they attained paths and fruits (*magga-phala*) through hearing the Dhamma because they listened to it with meditative attention (*manasikāra*). Since we often record sermons on devices and think we can listen to them later, we do not show much interest in them. But in those days, when books were scarce, a word of Dhamma was listened to with total attention. What is contained within "listening with total attention"? If we contemplate it in terms of meditation, it is those phenomena of Name-and-Form (*nāmarūpa*). While listening to the Dhamma, one begins to see how one's own mind operates. First, one directs the mind to the Dhamma. Next, through hearing the Dhamma, one understands how the mind grasps the objects coming to one's senses—in short, the eyes, ears, nose, and so forth. Thus, it is through understanding this subtly that one is able to escape from *samsāra*, that one can cut the latency / underlying tendency (*anusaya*) of craving / thirst (*taṇhā-anusaya*), and that wisdom (*paññā*) arises. For someone who listens to the Dhamma in this way, it truly becomes a meditation, a meditative attention. One who does not have this must train gradually from the very beginning. The practitioner (*yogāvacara*) is the one who is engaged in the practice. The workplace belonging to that person is called the subject of meditation (*kammaṭṭhāna*). If "kamma" is taken as "work" and "ṭhāna" as "place," then "kammaṭṭhāna" is the workplace. Therefore, if one has taken up a certain workplace, working in that workplace is what belongs to the practitioner (*yogāvacara*).

Many people are attracted to the numerous reincarnation stories we hear. Often, they only derive curiosity from them. Why? Because they think of it as something that happened only to those people. The Blessed Buddha has shown in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta that when seeing someone's corpse, one should apply it to oneself: "This will happen to me too. When my body decays, it will be like this. When my body is infested with worms, it will be like this." That is what meditative attention is. In truth, it is applying that external object to one's own life and thereby generating spiritual urgency (*saṁvega*). Not only regarding corpses; the Blessed Buddha has preached on certain occasions: "Monks, when you see a very poor, very miserable

person, you should think, 'I too have been in this state for an infinite time in *samsāra*.'" When we see a beggar, or a blind, mute, deaf, or deformed person on the street, we either look away or mock them. But we do not think, "In the infinite time of *samsāra*, I too must have spent my time like this according to my kamma. In the future too, it could be like this." It is in that very way, by applying it to our lives on every occasion, that meditation is put into practice.

The Blessed Buddha has declared this as something to be directly realized. This direct realization begins with the understanding of the suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*) of *samsāra*. It is not difficult to understand samsāric suffering through these very five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*). Inside this, there is a massive pile of suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*). But it is kept covered.

Now we are in this one posture. After a little while, this becomes a great trouble. Next, we feel like turning. According to that thought, we turn our body to another side. Next, to yet another side. In this way, let us say we spend an hour. But what did we do through this? We covered up the truth of suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*), preventing it from being understood. We covered up suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*). Without understanding the painful nature of the body—the nature of not being able to remain in a single posture—we turned this body as we wished. It is just the same with other things. The filthy nature of this body, and the painful nature regarding existence in this world—all of these are covered up for us by this civilization, and also by the conceit (*māna*) present within us humans. The point here is not that we should expose them and throw everything into confusion. But we must contemplate them.

Although it is visible on the outside, this is only the outer skin. It is with the thought "this is only the outer skin" that the practitioner (*yogāvacara*) contemplates, whether going into a city or anywhere else. What are these built as massive buildings made of? Concrete, with some paint applied on them. That is how the power of wisdom (*paññā*) is shown, like the way things below are seen when one has climbed to the top of a mountain. That is to say, no matter how superior or valuable they look, when actually seen, all of these are things that deceive the eye. This *samsāra* exists within a mass of such things that deceive the eye and deceive the ear. If we do not contemplate those deceptions at least on a Poya day like this, we will never be able to reach realization. If even that young sow, though unable to do so during the Buddha's time, came to Sri Lanka and became an Arahant, yet if we who live in Sri Lanka do not engage in sermons and meditation at least in this way and at this time—even in this final period of the Buddha Sāsana—we will not be able to bring an end to samsāric suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*) in that manner.

We must bring to light the extremely deep points contained in this verse. There is a great depth in every simile given by the Blessed Buddha. In another verse of this group of verses, a simile like this is mentioned. There, the nature of craving / thirst (*taṇhā*) is shown. This craving / thirst (*taṇhā*) for becoming / existence (*bhava-taṇhā*)—that is, the desire to be born again and again in *samsāra*. Why does one

desire to be born so? How hard does one strive to reach the targets one expected in this life? Although one worked hard, sweating, yet when life comes to an end, one sees that those things are not finished. This is just like walking on a new mat; as one side is unrolled, the other side rolls up. In that way, desires sprout and grow.

Under such conditions, when drawing the last breath, one sees: "Alas! My life is a blank. The things I expected in this were not fulfilled." Saying so, one wishes for another life. One wishes for a life according to that desire, that craving / thirst (*taṇhā*). That is called grasping / holding / fuel (*upādāna*). Through that desire, next, it is not necessarily what we wish for that we get. Birth / arising (*jāti*) is received according to the action (*kamma*) one has performed. It is according to kamma. In Dhamma stories, these pious devotees must have heard many times that at the final moment, according to kamma, one develops an attachment to a mother's womb that is extremely foul-smelling, like an unimaginable pit of excrement, or to a similar womb of an animal, or to the fiery flames of hell. It is through that that one next takes birth / arising (*jāti*). Thereafter, one holds tightly onto that state of existence (*ātma-bhāva*). Even if it is an animal, it is not in the way we look at animals that animals think of themselves. In that way, everyone, according to that birth / arising (*jāti*), holds on as "I" and "mine," and once it becomes "I," the effort to collect more and more as "my things" is indeed craving / thirst (*taṇhā*), those desires. It never reaches satisfaction. Because of this, the journey in this long *samsāra* goes on...

Then, what should be done to cut this craving / thirst (*taṇhā*) for becoming / existence (*bhava-taṇhā*)? One must understand the true nature of these desires. For this, we must first understand what it is that we think of as "I" and "mine." The Blessed Buddha has pointed out that what we grasp are form (*rūpa*), feeling / sensation (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), preparations / Preparations / volitional activity (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). These that we grasp as "I" and "mine" are heaps. Not just one. A heap of forms (*rūpa*), a heap of feelings / sensations (*vedanā*), a heap of perceptions (*saññā*), a heap of preparations (*saṅkhāra*)—meaning fabrications, those mental paintings—and next, a heap of thoughts of consciousness (*viññāṇa*). Every single one of these is impermanent / inconstant (*anicca*). They arise and pass away.

This arising and passing away nature is not understood by the ordinary mind. A rapidly spinning wheel appears as if it is stationary in one place. The impermanent / inconstant (*anicca*) nature present within this process of ours is generally not understood. To understand it, one must compose the mind with concentration (*samādhi*), and then direct that mind through meditative attention (*bhāvanā-manasikāra*) to know what the true nature of the things we took as "I" and "mine" is. In fact, the Blessed Buddha has indicated the entire *samsāra* in a single word. Everything we have taken as "I" and "mine," the Blessed Buddha calls a heap of preparations / Preparations / volitional activity (*saṅkhāra*). Whatever the meaning of that word *saṅkhāra* may be, if we look for a close Sinhala word, we can think of it

as a heap of fabrications, a collection of mental paintings. One can understand that in daily life to some extent.

Now, if the small children, youth, and elderly present in this place contemplate their lives spent so far, they can think of it for a moment like watching a movie. Even in movies, sometimes the upcoming movie is shown running very fast, saying "here is the movie." If one thinks in that way for a moment, from the time one can remember—the period in the mother's womb is not remembered—and thereafter, from the barely remembered age, what we call "one's life," how much have these desires and cravings / thirsts (*taṇhā*) operated within that life? In childhood, desires operate abundantly regarding food and drink, toys, or things we think of as dolls. Next, during the growing stage, in youth, regarding fancy things, and then due to conceit (*māna*), one strives in various ways to achieve targets of social status and prosperity. That very collection of efforts made to achieve those targets and satisfy those desires is what we call "life." There is nothing other than that. When that collection of efforts is removed, there is no existence here. This is what is called the cessation of becoming (*bhava-nirodha*).

Ultimately, the realization that comes is that there is actually no existence within what we think of as becoming / existence (*bhava*) or existence. This is an extremely wonderful thing. So, how to see it? Every single one of these fabrications, these mental paintings, has a beginning and an end. What is in between, we call "existence." We recognize something called "existence." There is a beginning, and there is an end. The portion between these two is what we call "existence." We say it exists. Now let us consider an object in front of us. As far as we can see, what we think of as its beginning is the day we bought it brand new from the shop—a brand new item. So, with that feeling of newness, we do not think beyond its beginning; there is no need to. When that brand new item gradually becomes old, because of our desire for it, we repair/re-fabricate it in various ways. We further repair/re-fabricate that heap of preparations / Preparations / volitional activity (*saṅkhāra*). We mend it more and more. Doing so, because of our attachment to it, we do not throw it away, until at last, when we can do nothing more, we are forced to throw it away.

So, it is the very same with this body of ours. This body, which is called a heap of preparations / Preparations / volitional activity (*saṅkhāra*), is also like that. To prepare this heap of preparations (*saṅkhāra*), the action (*kamma*) performed in the past was primarily helpful. Next, through parents, and other food and drink, this created cage of a body is maintained. We take that as "existence." We think "I exist." But within this, there is a very rapid breaking up, which is called momentary death (*khaṇika-maraṇa*). That is understood only by the meditative mind. Until that is understood, one does not realize the nature of suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*) in samsāric existence. What is needed for that is the aforementioned wisdom (*paññā*), the wisdom of insight (*vipassanā-paññā*), and subtle reflection. It is only through the power of that reflection. We cannot understand suffering /

unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*) by traveling all over the world, or by seeing many humans in the world, or by visiting countries where miserable people live.

Closing our eyes, we must direct our mind to our own five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*) and strive to see the impermanent / inconstant (*anicca*) nature of the feelings / sensations (*vedanā*) arising therein, and of the perceptions (*saññā*) operating through them, and the impermanent / inconstant (*anicca*) nature of our thoughts, aspirations, and expectations, which we think of as intentions arising because of them. Likewise, we must focus our mind on the respective nature of what we take as contact (*phassa*). For all of these, reflection called attention (*manasikāra*) helps us. Indeed, that reflection itself is wisdom (*paññā*). Now we have the capacity to reflect on something, to focus the mind; to reflect on something is an action done entirely within the mind, not something given externally. Through that reflection, the true nature of those respective occasions is understood. Now, what often happens is that without reflection, our thoughts move very rapidly, like something caught in a river being swept away—a current of thoughts (*vitakka*)—one thought being overwhelmed by another group of thoughts. It is a state where one does not know where it starts and where it ends.

That is why one must, in terms of meditation, establish oneself on a certain level of concentration (*samādhi*) and maintain mindfulness (*sati*) regarding the posture of this body, how this body works, and how this mind works, let alone how one maintains the postures. When maintaining postures, because of saying "I stretch the arm, I bend the arm," and so forth, the perception of permanence (*nicca-saññā*) arises in many people. What helps the perception of permanence is this thing taken as "I." Therefore, removing what is here, as the Blessed Buddha declared, we must evoke the preparations / Preparations / volitional activity (*saṅkhāra*). Every one of these is a heap of preparations (*saṅkhāra*). To evoke this, it is necessary to be observant of how one spends one's daily life, the activity of one's body, the things we encounter, how our mind works, and so on. That very keeping watch is what is called attention (*manasikāra*)—reflection. If the mind is not applied in that way, what mostly happens is merely being caught in that web of thoughts (*vitakka*) and being pushed forward. Indeed, craving / thirst (*taṇhā*) is called "bhava-netti" (the conduit of becoming). "Bhava-netti" means being pushed forward in becoming / existence (*bhava*), like a protruding forward. We always like new clothes, and we do not throw away the old ones and reflect on their impermanent / inconstant (*anicca*) nature.

Likewise, the world always likes to become new. The Blessed Buddha declares that the entire *samsāra* exists on the side of arising (*samudaya*). Human beings in this *samsāra* look for the sun rising every next morning. But the Blessed Buddha shows that that is not what should be looked at. One should look at where the sun sets. No matter how much majesty, power, or wealth we have, all of these are impermanent / inconstant (*anicca*) in *samsāra*. The bliss of Nibbāna is often shown like the setting of the sun. Just as the sun that has traveled the whole day falls into the ocean, everything sinks down. Therefore, we must reflect on this impermanent / inconstant

(*anicca*) nature. Truly, what exists in the world is the perception of permanence (*nicca-saññā*), the perception of beauty (*subha-saññā*), and the perception of self (*atta-saññā*). In opposition to this, we must maintain our attention (*manasikāra*) in a way that evokes the impermanent / inconstant (*anicca*) and non-self / unsubstantial (*anattā*) nature. Through everything we see and hear in daily life, through every single one of them, we can evoke a meditation subject (*kammaṭṭhāna*). Not only through what is seen in a meditation hall or a meditation center elsewhere, but even from what is seen in a toilet. When that lady was born as a royal princess named Ubbarī, she took the meditation subject on foulness called the perception of a worm-infested corpse (*pulavaka-saññā*) from a toilet. In that way, everywhere in this world, these trees and leaves, and everything, help us to arouse samsāric urgency (*saṁvega*). They help us to always bring out the impermanent / inconstant (*anicca*) nature.

Now, various products are created in this world. They are sold at very high prices. But when looking at their raw materials, they are very minor things. Likewise, the world might think, "Can this path to Nibbāna be evoked from something very minor?" The wise person extracts the most supreme thing sometimes from what is considered worthless, from a hair of the head, or a corpse, or a skeleton; from these, they evoke the most supreme thing. That is where the value lies. Our viewpoint—if we use the word currently in use, "point of view"—we must adjust the way we look at things. As long as we do not adjust the way we look at things, we remain within the delusion of this long *samsāra*. Ignorance (*avijjā*) is nothing other than not realizing the painful nature (*dukkha*) of this samsāric existence, not realizing the suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*) of *samsāra*.

When we say "samsāric suffering (*samsāra-dukkha*)," it is not merely that such-and-such disasters happened to so-and-so, or that diseases spread, or that one reaches old age. One must understand that this entire five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*)—form (*rūpa*), feeling / sensation (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), preparations / Preparations / volitional activity (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*)—bearing this heavy pile of the five aggregates is itself suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*). We do not realize this. When there is hunger, there is food; through that, hunger is forgotten. When thirst comes, there is water; through that, thirst is forgotten. When we cannot remain in one posture, we turn to the other side; through that, it is forgotten. In this way, we cover up sufferings (*dukkha*). By covering up suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*), one can never understand suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*). That is how things are in the world. But the wise person who hopes to escape from *samsāra* does not do any covering of that latent tendency of becoming / existence (*bhava-anusaya*). The latency / underlying tendency (*anusaya*) of craving / thirst (*taṇhā-anusaya*) is, in short, the attachment to this becoming / existence (*bhava*). Craving for sensuality (*kāma-taṇhā*) is the desire to possess respective things and objects. An even more subtle desire is the effort made to maintain this person called "I" in this *samsāra* for a long time. Within that, there is a massive delusion—a delusion caused by that perception of

permanence (*nicca-saññā*). Since whatever collection of expectations and desires this person called "I" had are not finished when life comes to an end, next, along with the last breath, that person expects another becoming / existence (*bhava*). Another becoming / existence (*bhava*) somewhere. One does not even consider the end of becoming / existence (*bhava*) as suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*).

The Blessed Buddha declares a truth that no other religious teacher could state, a truth that no one likes to say. The Blessed Buddha declared: "Becoming / existence (*bhava*) is suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*). Cessation is peace." Becoming / existence (*bhava*) means being crushed by a burden. Cessation means being freed from the burden, being freed from the burden of the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*). That indeed is the truth found there. That is why we said that ordinary people in *samsāra* always expect another morning, thinking: "At least today things will go well for me," "At least today I will receive the things I expected," and in that way, they wander in this *samsāra* for an infinite time. But the one who hopes to escape from *samsāra* looks at its impermanent / inconstant (*anicca*) nature, the way these break up. Everything that arises breaks up. If it breaks up, why should I renew this again and again? Why should I expect to evoke these again? Thus they arouse spiritual urgency (*saṁvega*) regarding *samsāra*. As we mentioned at the beginning, it is to the extent that samsāric urgency (*saṁvega*) and disillusionment with *samsāra* arise that we draw closer to the supreme Nibbāna.

Most people in these times do not like to think about those things. They act in a way that grows this becoming / existence (*bhava*), just like the growth of that tree, like the growth of that vine called the creeper of craving / thirst (*taṇhā-latā*). Similarly, various views and opinions in the world also exist in that very manner. The Blessed Buddha has declared: "Health is a disease... life ends in death." We all wish health and freedom from disease for everyone. But no matter how much we wish it, its end is sickness, falling ill. Likewise, we wish for long life—the blessing of longevity and health. That is a good thing. But we know that no matter how much we wish for the blessing of longevity and health, there is a limit, a certain moment comes when that person has to abandon life and go. Therefore, the things we wish for do not happen in this *samsāra*.

We have related a story involving several lives. The Blessed Buddha declared on one occasion: "Monks, there is no plane of becoming / existence (*bhava*) in which I have not been born in past time, except for the Suddhāvāsa (Pure Abodes)." Suddhāvāsa is a Brahma world where Non-returner noble persons are born. "Only in Suddhāvāsa have I not been born," and the Blessed Buddha also stated the reason for this: "If I were born in Suddhāvāsa, I would not return to this world again." That is to say, because he aspired for Buddhahood, he could not take birth in the Suddhāvāsa. Apart from that, the Blessed Buddha has spent his Bodhisatta period in every state of existence. It was that comprehension of life (*pariññā*) and understanding of the samsāric condition which the Blessed Buddha, out of compassion for the world, preached sometimes through a long discourse, sometimes through a short verse, a

line of a verse, a single word, or on another occasion, through a brief smile. This story began with a brief smile. That smile of the Blessed Buddha is not like our smiles. Our smile is something we do when our mind is amused, with a delight in becoming / existence (*bhava*). That gentle smile of the Blessed Buddha is not such a thing. That gentle smile is a certain response shown out of great compassion to make the world understand the painful nature of this *samsāra*. Knowing its meaning, Venerable Ānanda raised the question in that manner. In this story, through the answer given by the Blessed Buddha, many were able to attain the paths and fruits (*magga-phala*). Similarly, that young sow connected to the story, having become an Arahant nun and declaring her past histories in more detail, brought about true realization of the Dhamma for a large number of people.

Stories about reincarnation and re-becoming / rebirth are often heard in this country and in the world. How many derive the true benefit from them? To some, this is just like other short stories or novels we write. They do not even have proper faith (*saddhā*) in them. From these, they only get the taste of curiosity: "So-and-so is born in such-and-such a place," and then they also carry out research. If they had directed that research toward the Noble Quest (*ariya-pariyesana*), they could have achieved far greater benefits for themselves. We know that in the mathematical method called geometry, no matter how many problems we solve, if we have not properly learned the underlying principle, the core theorem, we have not derived the true benefit from it. Likewise, within every word of Dhamma, there is something called the taste of liberation (*vimutti-rasa*). It is that taste of liberation we must bring out, not the taste of curiosity contained within it. However, the world mostly looks to gain publicity from these, to obtain more titles and honors, and to further grow becoming / existence (*bhava*). We are now reminding you that the attitude and point of view held by many regarding such stories must be different. Not much is needed for this. These pious devotees have read the Jātaka stories of the Blessed Buddha from past times. From those too, one can evoke these things. The Blessed Buddha has also pointed out that for some, spiritual urgency (*saṁvega*) is aroused more by the past histories of someone close to them, someone they know. One should think about that; then it is easy to apply it to oneself: "Our mother, our child, our father is in this state. Then is this not the same condition for us too?" One must think in that manner.

Especially, let us take the point related to that wrong livelihood (*micchā-ājīva*) we brought up—namely, keeping animal beings in homes. Indeed, I do not need to say it specially; these pious devotees know why they do it. Even such people should contemplate: "Our deceased parents and children could be among these beings." In that way, one can arouse a great spiritual urgency (*saṁvega*) regarding the becoming / existence (*bhava*) of the entire world. It is only by arousing such urgency that, leaving aside other activities on a Poya day like this, dedicating the mind to Dhamma, dedicating the mind to virtue (*sīla*), and dedicating the mind to meditation, one can obtain the leisure and retirement to utilize what is the most supreme opportunity received to escape from this entire *samsāra*. Leisure or

"holiday" is not something given by the government. A holiday is something we must obtain ourselves. We often wait until we get a holiday from the government. Then we wait until we get a holiday from our job or in other ways. A holiday is something we can obtain ourselves. So, those who have obtained their holiday in that manner are the ones who properly engage in these activities and benefit from them.

We must consider: even though we hold various festivals saying that the Buddha Sāsana was received in Sri Lanka, the Sāsana does not exist through them. The Sāsana exists by these three qualities—virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*)—living within the hearts of Buddhists. If the qualities of virtue, concentration, and wisdom do not live in the hearts of Buddhists, the Sāsana is dead. No matter how many decorations there are, even if gold is painted wherever one looks, if the inside is empty, there is no use in them. Therefore, it must be because these pious devotees understand this that on a valuable day like today, as much as possible, some have observed the eight precepts (*aṭṭha-sīla*) on this Poya day, and some the ten precepts (*dasa-sīla*), spending the day with meditative attention (*bhāvanā-manasikāra*). It is such people who can especially reap the benefits of hearing the Dhamma. Today, within this one hour, these pious devotees listened to a Dhamma sermon that helps them understand something about their own samsāric nature, about that truth declared by the Blessed Buddha, and about craving / thirst (*taṇhā*) which causes it. Next, they must also think of its opposite. This craving / thirst (*taṇhā*) must be eradicated. This suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*) must be eradicated.

What helps in that is the Noble Eightfold Path declared by the Blessed Buddha. These pious devotees have heard many times: *sammā-diṭṭhi, sammā-saṅkappa, sammā-vācā, sammā-kammanta, sammā-ājīva, sammā-vāyāma, sammā-sati, sammā-samādhi*. If we translate this into Sinhala, we can say: right seeing, right thoughts and aspirations, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration of mind. The Blessed Buddha calls "the Noble Eightfold Path" a path capable of making a complete transformation, a revolution of this entire life through these eight aspects. The Blessed Buddha has declared that this is superior to every other path in the world: "Maggan'aṭṭhaṅgiko seṭṭho" (Of paths, the eightfold is the best).

There are various paths in the world—beautiful, wide paths. The Noble Eightfold Path is superior to all those paths. However, this is not something that exists elsewhere in the world. It is a path that must be created, established, developed, and cultivated within one's own heart. It starts from right seeing and ends in true concentration (*samādhi*). It is through that power of concentration (*samādhi*) that, as the Blessed Buddha declared, one is able to understand the three characteristics—the three basic characteristics of impermanence / inconstancy (*anicca*), suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*), and non-self / unsubstantial (*anattā*)—present within this entire existence. It is then that wisdom (*paññā*) can be evoked. One should not be afraid of that word "wisdom" (*paññā*). That wisdom operates within

everyone—young and old, learned and unlearned—at respective moments through the aforementioned meditative attention (*bhāvanā-manasikāra*), through what is shown in the Dhamma as proper reflection: wise attention / radical attention (*yoniso manasikāra*). Not in a wrong way.

Removing the notions of permanence, beauty, pleasure, and self—called the perception of permanence (*nicca-saññā*), perception of beauty (*subha-saññā*), and perception of self (*atta-saññā*)—one must reflect in a way that develops the impermanent / inconstant (*anicca*) nature, painful (*dukkha*) nature, foul (*asubha*) nature, and non-self / unsubstantial (*anattā*) nature of this. Indeed, even without thinking in an unusual way, when keeping watch over the existence of one's body and the existence of the mind in daily life in the aforementioned manner, one sees that all of these are a collection of mental paintings, a collection of fabrications—preparations / Preparations / volitional activity (*saṅkhāra*). There is no end to these mental paintings. No real end. When one ends, we look for new things, calling it "renewal." Why does it become new? Because of becoming old. It is when disillusionment with *samsāra* has arrived that one gets to see that very impermanent / inconstant (*anicca*) nature present within these two—renewal and aging.

No matter how much we pray, "May I receive the Deathless (*amata*)!" as a beautiful phrase, one cannot obtain it through that. It is not something that can be bought from shops. What must be seen within one's own mind is that this entire becoming / existence (*bhava*), this existence, every single bit of it is suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*). Then, the journey toward that realization is what is called this journey to Nibbāna, the journey of the Sāsana, the Sāsanic existence. Therefore, indeed, the threefold Sāsana—learning (*pariyatti*), practice (*paṭipatti*), and realization (*paṭivedha*)—ends with the state of realization (*paṭivedha*). That is to say, one learns something. Next, accordingly, one begins to fulfill the practice through virtue (*sīla*). But that ends in what is called realization (*paṭivedha*)—the realization of paths and fruits (*magga-phala*). Therefore, it is through the wisdom of insight (*vipassanā-paññā*) that one is able to realize this supreme, great Nibbāna. Then, all of you should resolve: "May this hearing of the Dhamma help us to transcend all these wishes and obtain the strength and power to realize that supreme, great wish for Nibbāna in this very life!"

On this valuable Poya day, these pious devotees listened to the Dhamma for about an hour. We too have accumulated some merit of preaching the Dhamma. If there are any deities, including the assembly of Devas and Brahmas who protect this Buddha Sāsana, may they all rejoice in this supreme merit of preaching and hearing the Dhamma! Rejoicing in it, providing protection to the Sāsana, may they help to sustain this Sāsana for a long time! Likewise, having fulfilled their own supreme aspired Dhamma, may they realize the supreme great Nibbāna through the aspired Bodhi they hope for! Similarly, if our deceased relatives, and any beings from Avīci to Akaniṭṭha, wish to be freed from this samsāric suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress (*dukkha*), may they all, by rejoicing in this merit of preaching and hearing the

Dhamma, escape from samsāric suffering in the manner they hope for, and find peace in the supreme, great Nibbāna! Having made this aspiration, recite these verses and dedicate the merit:

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……..*"