Pahankanuwa Sermon #141

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

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(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.41)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

Pali Stanza:

"Yassa pāpaṃ kataṃ kammaṃ,

kusalena pithīyati;

So imaṃ lokaṃ pabhāseti,

abbhā mutto va candimā."

From:

Dhammapada Verse 173 (Loka Vagga)

Dear Listeners,

On this Vesak Full Moon Day, you must have awakened with the qualities of the Buddha in your minds. We contemplate the ocean of the Buddha's qualities through the text of the nine supreme virtues. As you all know: *Itipi so Bhagavā Arahaṁ, Sammāsambuddho, Vijjācaraṇasampanno, Sugato, Lokavidū, Anuttaro purisadammasārathi, Satthā devamanussānaṁ, Buddho, Bhagavā*. Among these nine virtues, the infinite great compassion—the quality of great compassion—of our Buddha is beautifully manifested through the sixth quality mentioned among these, namely *Anuttaro purisadammasārathi* (the incomparable leader of men to be tamed).

What is meant by *Anuttaro purisadammasārathi*? The Buddha is described as being like a supreme charioteer in taming individuals who can and should be tamed. That is to say, just as a charioteer tames horses or bulls to guide a chariot on the proper path, the Buddha possesses the quality of taming and disciplining individuals who need to be tamed. A biographical story that exemplifies this quality of *Anuttaro purisadammasārathi* exceedingly well is the story of Aṅgulimāla. The verse we have selected as our theme today was delivered by the Buddha with reference to Venerable Aṅgulimāla. As Buddhists, we have all heard the story of Aṅgulimāla to varying

extents. Today, in keeping with the occasion, we hope to briefly present the story of Aṅgulimāla.

A son was born to the Brahmin lady named Mantānī, the wife of the Brahmin Gagga, who was the royal chaplain (purohita) to King Kosala. The name given to this son by his parents was Ahimsaka (the Harmless One). When this young Brahmin youth, Ahimsaka, reached young adulthood, his parents sent him to the world-renowned teacher (Disāpāmokkha) in Taxila (Takkasilā) to learn arts and sciences. This boy, this Ahimsaka, in a truly harmless manner, won the heart of his teacher, performed his duties and rituals, and mastered the arts with great skill. By the time his studies were nearing completion, a great jealousy arose among the other students regarding this youth Ahimsaka. Driven by this jealousy, they formed groups, conspired, approached the teacher, and fabricated a slanderous rumor involving the teacher's wife.

Although the teacher, who became enraged by this, had an intense urge to kill the youth Ahimsaka, he considered the disrepute it would bring upon himself and thought of a stratagem instead. What was the stratagem he employed? He told this young Ahimsaka, "If you are to reap the proper benefit of these arts and sciences, you must pay the appropriate teacher's fee (guru-dakṣiṇā). You must make an offering of honor. Therefore, the tribute I demand is nothing other than the killing of a thousand wayfarers. Accomplishing that feat is the payment for these arts and sciences as a teacher's fee; complete that," he instructed.

This Brahmin youth Ahimsaka was someone of immense physical strength and vigor. Taking the five types of weapons, he went into a forest and began to kill every person who entered it. As he killed, being unable to keep an accurate count, he cut off a finger from each person he killed and gathered them, attempting to keep a count of the victims. Since those fingers would wither and decay in different places, he eventually strung the fingers together and wore them as a garland. Even if groups of ten, twelve, or twenty people came, he would chase them down and kill them due to his innate strength and vigor, continuing to amass fingers in this manner. Because he wore a garland of fingers, this man came to be known by the terrifying name "Aṅgulimāla" (Finger-garlanded). Due to the dread of Aṅgulimāla, villages, market towns, and provinces began to be deserted. People abandoned their homes. When this terrifying threat arose, the Brahmin chaplain also heard of it. Realizing they might incur the wrath of the king, he spoke to his wife, the Brahmin lady, and said, "Look, our son has become this ferocious." Driven by a mother's affection, the Brahmin lady thought, "I must go tomorrow and somehow bring my son back before he faces the king's wrath." Precisely by that day, Aṅgulimāla's count in his woven garland of fingers had reached nine hundred and ninety-nine. Only one more was needed to complete the thousand. Thus, with great anticipation, Aṅgulimāla resolved to kill whoever came the next day, gather the finger, and perform the teacher's offering.

Precisely on that morning, when the Buddha arose from the attainment of great compassion and surveyed the world, he saw that if he did not go, Aṅgulimāla would kill his own mother, commit that weightiest of sins (ānantarika-kamma), and inevitably be reborn in hell; whereas if he did go, he would be tamed, ordained, and possessed the supportive conditions (hetu-sampatti) to become an Arahant. That day, after returning from his alms-round in Sāvatthi, without informing even an attendant, the Buddha tidied his dwelling and set off alone to the forested area where Aṅgulimāla lived. It is mentioned that, owing to the manner of his travel, even those who saw him could not recognize him as the Buddha. Therefore, the cowherds, farmers, and travelers met along the way, who lived near that forest, thinking he was just an ordinary monk, pleaded with him two or three times, saying, "O monk, do not go down that path. There is a bandit named the notorious Aṅgulimāla. There is no need to speak of those who go alone; even if groups of twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty go, he chases them down, kills them, and collects their fingers. Do not go!" The Buddha silently continued on his way.

Next, Aṅgulimāla saw the Buddha walking from afar. He thought, "While people who come in such large groups fall into my hands, this monk is coming all alone. This seems like a challenge. I must kill this monk by any means," and he gave chase from behind. The Buddha, employing his psychic power, caused the earth to ripple so that no matter how fast Aṅgulimāla ran, and even though the Buddha was walking at his normal, natural pace, Aṅgulimāla was made unable to catch up with him. Thus, Aṅgulimāla ran, panting heavily. Yet, he could not get close to the Buddha at all. It is mentioned that he ran for three leagues (yojanas) in this manner.

Finally, when he was utterly exhausted, he stopped and shouted, "Stop, monk! Stop, monk!" Then the Buddha declared, "I have stopped. You, too, stop!" Being a wise person, Aṅgulimāla thought, "These monastics are truthful. What is the meaning of this statement?" Then he asked, "Why is it that while I am standing still, you tell me to stop, and while you are walking, you say you have stopped?" In response to this, the Buddha said, "Aṅgulimāla, I have stopped for all time, having abstained from harming living beings, having abstained from violence to creatures, and having laid aside weapons. But you, because you have no restraint regarding the destruction of life, have not yet stopped," thus expressing a profound truth. Comprehending the truth of this, Aṅgulimāla cast away his weapons and asked the Buddha for ordination. The Buddha ordained him with the formula *Ehi Bhikkhu* (Come, Bhikkhu).

Then, Venerable Aṅgulimāla, the new monk, walked behind the Buddha. Having traveled to Sāvatthi, they went to Jetavana monastery. Meanwhile, there was a huge uproar in the royal courtyard of King Kosala's palace. The public had gathered and was protesting: "O Lord, in your realm there has arisen such a terrifying, persistent bandit, who is killing people, cutting off their fingers, and causing such devastation. Villages, market towns, and provinces are deserted. Eradicate this terrifying dread of this thief!" Then, King Kosala set out with a cavalry of five hundred soldiers to

capture this bandit Aṅgulimāla. On his way, he thought he should also visit the Buddha and came to Jetavana. The Buddha asked, "Great King, why are you marching as if for battle? Has King Bimbisāra of Magadha declared war? Or have the Licchavi kings declared war? What is the matter?" When asked, he replied, "No, Blessed One, there is a terrifying bandit in my realm. Therefore, I am going to subdue that bandit." Then the Buddha asked, "Great King, if you were to see that Aṅgulimāla, with his hair and beard shaved, wearing saffron robes, abstaining from taking life, from taking what is not given, from false speech, and so on—having abstained from those things pertaining to the five precepts—and living the celibate life of a monk, what would you do?" "In that case, Blessed One, I would bow to that Aṅgulimāla. I would offer him the four requisites. But, Blessed One, how could such a sinner obtain such moral restraint?" At the moment the King was saying this, Venerable Aṅgulimāla was seated not far from the Buddha. The Buddha pointed with his right hand and said, "Great King, that is Aṅgulimāla." Upon hearing this, the King was seized with great fear and terror. The Buddha said, "Do not be afraid, Great King, do not be afraid. Now, you have no reason to fear this Aṅgulimāla."

Then the King approached Venerable Aṅgulimāla and asked, "Are you, Venerable Sir, the Venerable Aṅgulimāla?" "Yes." The King thought that the name "Aṅgulimāla" was not very suitable, and not respectful enough for this member of the Sangha. Next, he asked, "Of what clan is your father, Venerable Sir?" "Gagga." "Of what clan is your mother?" "Mantāṇī." In accordance with the ancient way of addressing a person, the King then said, "Ah, then, Venerable Gagga Mantāṇīputta, I invite you to accept the four requisites from me. Regard me as your supporter. I shall serve you with the four requisites: robes, alms-food, lodging, and medicine for the sick." By this time, Venerable Aṅgulimāla had not only become ordained, but was also training in the strict practices known as ascetic practices (*dhutaṅgas*). He had already entered upon a rigorous lifestyle: living in the forest, going on alms-rounds, wearing rag-robes, and being content with just three robes. Therefore, Venerable Aṅgulimāla replied, "Great King, my robes are complete. I do not need robes." Deeply inspired by this, the King said to the Buddha, "Blessed One, this is wonderful and marvelous! One whom I could not tame even with sticks and weapons, the Blessed One has tamed in this manner without sticks or weapons," and making this wonderfully praiseful statement, the King departed.

Now, Venerable Aṅgulimāla goes on alms-round in Sāvatthi. As soon as people hear, "Venerable Aṅgulimāla is coming on alms-round," they close their doors. Some run into the forests out of fear. Consequently, Venerable Aṅgulimāla does not receive proper alms-food and has to return. Furthermore, Venerable Aṅgulimāla seeks quiet places to meditate. Day and night, he strives to meditate. But he cannot raise his mind to the meditation object (*kammaṭṭhāna*). Instead of the meditation object, what comes to his mind is the way he killed people during his time as Aṅgulimāla, and the screaming voices begging for their lives. Next, how they struggled in the throes of death. These are the things that fall into his mind. He cannot concentrate

his mind. Meanwhile, one day, as Venerable Aṅgulimāla was on alms-round, he saw in a house a pregnant mother undergoing extreme labor pains and distress. Developing great compassion for her, he came to the Buddha and kindly expressed his sorrow, saying, "Alas, to what great suffering do these living beings fall!" On that occasion, the Buddha said to Venerable Aṅgulimāla, "In that case, Aṅgulimāla, go to that woman. Go and perform an act of truth (*saccakiriya*) in this manner: *'Yatohaṁ, bhagini, jātiyā jāto nābhijānāmi sañcicca pāṇaṁ jīvitā voropetā, tena saccena te hotu sotthi hotu gabbhassa.'* Perform the act of truth in that way. What is its meaning? 'Sister, since I was born, I do not recall intentionally depriving a living being of life. Sister, by this truth, may there be well-being for you, and well-being for your child in the womb!'—make such a wish." Then, Venerable Aṅgulimāla asked the Buddha, "Alas, Lord, how can I perform such an act of truth? Would that not be telling a deliberate lie? Have I not deprived so many living beings of life?" Offering a small modification, the Buddha declared, "In that case, Aṅgulimāla, perform the act of truth in this manner. How? *'Yatohaṁ, bhagini, ariyāya jātiyā jāto nābhijānāmi sañcicca pāṇaṁ jīvitā voropetā, tena saccena te hotu sotthi hotu gabbhassa.'* What is its meaning? 'Sister, since I was born of the noble birth'—'noble birth' (*ariyā jāti*) means the noble birth of renouncing the lay life and joining the noble Sangha, since the day of receiving this noble birth—'I do not recall intentionally depriving a living being of life. By this truth, may there be well-being for you, and well-being for your child in the womb!'" "Ah, in that case, I can do it," said Venerable Aṅgulimāla. He went to that house and performed the act of truth in that manner. This is the origin of the highly powerful Aṅgulimāla Pirith, which is cherished with love by all virtuous laypeople to this day.

Now, some might have a doubt as to why the Buddha allowed such a protection chant (*pirith*) for Venerable Aṅgulimāla, given that practicing medicine is prohibited for monks according to the Vinaya (monastic discipline) laid down by the Buddha. However, this is not a medical practice; it is merely an act of truth. On the other hand, out of great compassion, why did the Buddha specifically present this practice to Venerable Aṅgulimāla? Venerable Aṅgulimāla was suffering to the extent that he was not even receiving alms-food. There was great fear among the public even when Venerable Aṅgulimāla walked for alms. It was to provide relief regarding that, and also as a solution to the problem of his meditation object not developing.

There is a special meaning in saying "noble birth" (*ariyā jāti*). In this long *saṁsāra*, there is no one who has not committed actions related to the five evils. But if we are to walk on this path of Dhamma, what we need is the foundation of virtue (*sīla*). There is a certain boundary in that foundation of virtue. It is by relying on a resolution and a reflection that one can perform an act of truth. Here, the Buddha gives a immense solace to Venerable Aṅgulimāla. How? It was not the physical birth he had in this life that was taken there. If that were taken as the boundary, there would be no room for Venerable Aṅgulimāla to find peace, considering how many humans he had killed. Instead, through the phrase "since I was born of the noble

birth," a great relief was brought about. A boundary was set from that point onward. From that boundary, his mind was pure. That is why Venerable Aṅgulimāla was able to do it. Out of great compassion, the Buddha allowed this stratagem to remove the remorse that was obstructing his meditation object. Because the act of truth succeeded, Venerable Aṅgulimāla felt great solace and a immense self-confidence. Through that self-confidence—thinking, "Now, since the day of my noble birth, I am pure; my virtue is pure"—Venerable Aṅgulimāla was able to concentrate his mind. Unremittingly and intensely developing insight (*vipassanā*), he became an Arahant.

Having become an Arahant in that way, Venerable Aṅgulimāla now goes on alms-round—the Arahant Aṅgulimāla. Alms-food was now received well, but other things were also received. What were they? Stones, pebbles, sticks, and clubs thrown by the villagers would fly through the air and fall upon Venerable Aṅgulimāla's head, striking his body, hitting his torso. In the end, Venerable Aṅgulimāla would return from his alms-round with his bowl broken, his head cut and bleeding, and his robes torn. Seeing this, the Buddha declared, "Brahmin, Brahmin! Endure it, Brahmin!" (The word "Brahmin" is used by the Buddha with reference to Arahants). "For whatever evil deed you would have boiled in hell for hundreds of years, thousands of years, hundreds of thousands of years, you are now experiencing a minor result as a ripening to be experienced in this very life (*diṭṭhadhammavedanīya-kamma*). Bear with it!"—so the Buddha consoled him. When Venerable Aṅgulimāla entered the attainment of the fruit of Arahantship (*arahattaphala-samāpatti*), he would be freed even from those physical pains considered as ripening in this very life, and while experiencing the bliss of liberation (*vimutti-sukha*), he would utter an exclamatory verse of joy (*udāna*). The freedom even from those bodily afflictions regarded as *diṭṭhadhammavedanīya* is found in Arahants when they enter the concentration of the fruit of Arahantship. Experiencing that bliss of liberation, the true bliss of Nibbāna, the pure bliss of Nibbāna, Venerable Aṅgulimāla then expressed a verse (which is not directly a word of the Buddha):

"Yo ca pubbe pamajjitvā

Pacchā so nappamajjati

So imaṁ lokaṁ pabhāseti

Abbhā mutto va candimā"

"He who was formerly negligent, but later is not negligent, illuminates this world like the moon freed from a cloud." Venerable Aṅgulimāla uttered this noble and precious verse as an exclamation of joy, a statement of spiritual triumph.

Thus, while experiencing the bliss of liberation as an Arahant, he did not live for long. Perhaps due to the severity of his past unwholesome deeds of destroying life, when his life-Preparations (*āyu-saṅkhāra*) waned, Venerable Aṅgulimāla attained Parinibbāna (final extinguishment). Many members of the Sangha did not even know

that this Venerable monk had become an Arahant. After his Parinibbāna, a discussion arose among the monks assembled in the Dhamma hall: "Where was this Venerable Aṅgulimāla reborn? He has passed away; where was he reborn?" When the Buddha was asked, and they related this discussion, he declared, "No, bhikkhus, my son Aṅgulimāla attained Parinibbāna as an Arahant." It was on that occasion that he uttered the verse we selected as our theme:

"Yassa pāpaṁ kataṁ kammaṁ

Kusalena pithīyati

So imaṁ lokaṁ pabhāseti

Abbhā mutto va candimā"

"He whose evil deed is covered by a wholesome deed illuminates this world like the moon freed from a cloud." He delivered this Dhamma verse. Briefly put, this is the story of Aṅgulimāla.

Now, an explanation is needed regarding the lesson we should draw from this story. On one hand, as we mentioned earlier, there are many facts herein that help to develop our faith (*saddhā*) in the Buddha's quality of the attainment of great compassion. The skill in means (*upāya-kosalla*) employed by the Buddha to save Venerable Aṅgulimāla from the path to hell was such that, in truth, Venerable Aṅgulimāla escaped hell by a hair's breadth—just as he was saved at nine hundred and ninety-nine. If he had killed his mother and completed the thousand, not even a Buddha could have saved Aṅgulimāla. The weightiest sin (*ānantarika-kamma*) is that severe. Before that could happen, the Buddha acted, without informing anyone, traveling there all alone out of his quality of great compassion.

Furthermore, the Buddha used only two short sentences to tame Aṅgulimāla: "I have stopped. You, too, stop, Aṅgulimāla." That was all. The notorious bandit Aṅgulimāla, whom neither kings nor weapons could tame, was tamed by the Buddha through those two invaluable sentences, which served as a meditation object (*kammaṭṭhāna*). "I have stopped. You, too, stop." Aṅgulimāla, who possessed past meritorious power, past perfection (*pāramī*) power, and whose intellect was sharpened by the arts and sciences he had mastered as the youth Ahimsaka, understood the meaning of this. He understood that the lack of restraint regarding the destruction of life is "not stopping," and that true "stopping," being settled in the truest sense, is liberation from this. Having understood this, he became ordained.

Moreover, why did the Buddha give Venerable Aṅgulimāla a protection chant (*pirith*), or rather, instructions helpful for a protection chant? The Buddha saw that although he was making an effort, Venerable Aṅgulimāla was unable to concentrate his mind. He was also facing various difficulties regarding alms-food due to the public's fear. Furthermore, he could not gather his mind together. That is why the Buddha gave him an act of truth in that manner. When Venerable Aṅgulimāla

performed that act of truth, it was not only instantly verified, but it remains verified to this day. What was manifested there was a marvelous Buddha-power. We must also reflect on the power inherent in that act of truth.

Virtue (*sīla*) is the foundation of an act of truth. We see the value of virtue through this. Now, in today's society, there is a group of people called "defeated ones." Perhaps even among this audience there may be those who think, due to various reasons, "The path of Dhamma does not belong to us. We do not have the strength to walk the Dhamma-path. There is no merit in us." It was for those people that we uttered those two verses. Even the simile presented in those two verses is sufficient. Now, on a full moon day like today, someone tries to look at the moon. But it is covered by a dark cloud. They watch with great effort. There is nothing more beautiful than the orb of the moon emerging from a dark cloud. In the same way, if there are some dark blemishes in one's character which one considers as obstacles to the Dhamma-path, it is on that very background that one can attain this liberation. The character of Aṅgulimāla is like an embroidery of silver thread on a background of black velvet. That is primarily how the lesson we must draw from it appears to us.

The primary lesson we must learn from the story of Aṅgulimāla is that if one generates the perception of capability ("I can") at any moment, establishes faith (*saddhā*) in the Triple Gem, makes a firm resolution, and enters upon this path, one has the strength to go all the way. Furthermore, when reflecting on the power of acts of truth performed with virtue (*sīla*) as the head, it becomes clear that a certain boundary is necessary for that. A person who practices meditation does all this in order to forget the past. Now, wearing this robe, bringing about this external change, is done to remove the remorse arising in one's mind. Those activities also assist in that. What helps even more is making a firm resolution with a specific boundary: "From today, from this very moment, I shall conduct myself in this virtue." Going along with this virtue is what reflection (*āvarjana*) means—looking back.

Virtue (*sīla*) is the foundation. The resolution regarding virtue is what supports it. Now, depending on the occasion, some of you have undertaken the *ājīva-aṭṭhamaka-sīla* (virtue with livelihood as the eighth precept). As I see it, the majority of people on this precious full moon day have undertaken the Eight Precepts (*aṭṭha-sīla*) with the right intention and with a true, deep understanding of its meaning. Others have undertaken the Ten Precepts (*dasa-sīla*). In this way, some virtue was resolved upon. That is the foundation for walking on this Dhamma-path and concentrating the mind.

Having laid down that foundation, what next helps to settle the mind for meditation is reflecting on that virtue. Through reflection, joy arises in a person. The benefit of virtue is described as non-remorse (*avippaṭisāra*). That is the essence of virtue. Undertaking virtue and not meditating is like laying the foundation of a building and not constructing the building. Therefore, having laid the foundation of virtue, standing upon it, and reflecting upon it, one then concentrates the mind on the

meditation object (*kammaṭṭhāna*) through that strength. In such instances, the meditation object becomes very clear. That is the principle revealed to us by the story of Aṅgulimāla. After performing that act of truth, Venerable Aṅgulimāla was able to concentrate his mind, thinking: "So, my mind is pure; the past is gone." At that point, he turned a new page. He turned a completely new page in his life. Now, something you often hear is about "turning a new page in life." Once you turn that page, the other page is no longer visible; it is just like that. Virtue is what helps in this. We can realize the value of virtue through that.

Likewise, from the stratagem employed here by the Buddha to tame a person, we too, in our own measure, can appreciate the importance of association with a noble friend (*kalyāṇa-mitta*). The monks asked the Buddha, "How did Aṅgulimāla attain Arahantship despite committing such evil deeds?" It was on that occasion that the Buddha declared, "He committed such evil deeds in that manner because he did not have a true noble friend. But because he obtained a noble friend like me, those committed evil deeds could be covered by the wholesome deed of the supramundane path (*lokuttara-magga-kusala*)." Here, "covered by a wholesome deed" (*kusalena pithīyati*) does not refer to ordinary wholesome deeds. They were covered by the wholesome deed of the path of Arahantship. There are levels within that wholesomeness as well.

What is the victory achieved through the supramundane state of Stream-entry (*sotāpanna*), which you frequently hear of? It is bringing the mind to a state where it cannot fall into the four lower realms of misery. That is, one is freed from unwholesome karma leading to rebirth in hell. An ordinary worldling (*puthujjana*) does not know when the results of unwholesome karma will strike. A person who has not achieved Stream-entry does not know when they might have to go to hell. The value of the Wheel of Dhamma shown by the Buddha is apparent from this. Virtuous friends, there are two rotating wheels in this world: the wheel of karma (*kamma-cakka*) and the Wheel of Dhamma (*dhamma-cakka*). The wheel of karma rotates and rotates in a wonderfully powerful manner. But there is another wheel that can break its power, and that is the Wheel of Dhamma. That is the Wheel of Dhamma discovered by the Buddhas after fulfilling perfections (*pāramīs*) for four incalculable aeons and a hundred thousand aeons. What it does is break that power. It cannot be broken entirely at once, but it is broken stage by stage.

The first breaking is when someone attains the path-knowledge of Stream-entry (*sotāpatti-magga-ñāṇa*). If that state of Stream-entry is attained, then in accordance with that level of mental development, by the very power of the supramundane state of Stream-entry, those unwholesome deeds leading to hell are discarded. In short, birth (*jāti*) is limited to at most seven times more in the happy realms of existence (*sugati*). A happy destination means bringing the mind to a state where it is born only in the human world or the deva worlds, excluding the lower realms of misery. That is why the Buddha, on many occasions, described the wonderful peace thus obtained using various similes. Just as the great earth cannot be compared to the

dust on a fingernail, the remaining unwholesome karma of a Stream-enterer is like the dust on a fingernail. The Stream-enterer stands having obtained liberation from karmic forces as vast as the great earth. Such immense solace is received merely by becoming a Stream-enterer. Next, proceeding gradually in that manner, one reduces birth to at most once more (Once-returner), and then becomes a Non-returner (*anāgāmī*) who does not return to this world, but is reborn in the Brahma realms, and subsequently becomes an Arahant in the Brahma realm.

Even after becoming an Arahant, there is an important point there. We saw from this story of Aṅgulimāla that even after becoming an Arahant, the unwholesome karma to be experienced in this very life (*diṭṭhadhammavedanīya-kamma*) remains effective, showing how severe the wheel of karma is. Venerable Aṅgulimāla, having obtained relief in that manner, became an Arahant with great difficulty. Yet, even after becoming an Arahant, why did stones and pebbles thrown elsewhere fly through the air and land on his head when he went on alms-round? Because after one becomes an Arahant, the past unwholesome deeds to be experienced in this very life struggle intensely to yield their results. They have to be experienced. That is how powerful the wheel of karma is.

Yet, there is an opportunity for Arahants to obtain, at least temporarily, relief even from such karmic results and to experience the true nature of liberation in the mind stilled (Nibbāna). This is called the concentration of the fruit of Arahantship (*arahattaphala-samādhi*). While remaining entered in that attainment of the fruit of Arahantship (*arahattaphala-samāpatti*), having greatly thinned out those karmic forces, they directly realize the pure state of cessation (*nirodha*), the state of extinguishment, complete extinguishment. That is the highest peace in the world. This peace shown by the Buddha is not something at the level of what ordinary worldly people think. This supramundane peace is a certain power of peace and extinguishment obtained by calming and taming the power of those karmic forces as well as all other Preparations (*saṅkhāra*); it is called the bliss of liberation (*vimutti-sukha*). It was by experiencing that bliss of liberation that Venerable Aṅgulimāla declared that if someone, having previously fallen into negligence, frees himself from negligence and becomes diligent, he illuminates the world like the moon freed from a dark cloud. With reference to this, we can understand how the Buddha's Wheel of Dhamma helps to break this wheel of karma.

Ultimately, when we reflect on it, there is nothing in this *saṁsāra* worth holding onto. That is why the Buddha declared, "I do not praise becoming (*bhava*) even for a moment. Just as even a tiny amount of excrement is foul-smelling, the entirety of becoming (*bhava*) is a place of great terror." Let alone other realms, even existence in the Brahma worlds—wherever there are Preparations (*saṅkhāras*), there is suffering (*dukkha*); this was pointed out by the Buddha. Therefore, during a period when a Buddha has appeared, everyone must walk this path to Nibbāna and strive, at the very minimum, to achieve Stream-entry to be freed from the four lower realms of misery, and at the maximum, to end all the suffering of *saṁsāra* and find peace in

the supreme, deathless, great Nibbāna. Make that resolution in that manner; the day of Vesak is the best opportunity to turn a new page. Thinking about this year, it is one thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine (1999). Here too, we have an instance of escaping at "ninety-nine" (like Aṅgulimāla at 999). If, even at this juncture, one does not reflect wisely and turn toward the Dhamma-path, but expects to live in a state of defeat in this society, then not only the individual but also society as a whole will be subjected to a terrifying destruction.

Therefore, all of us must resolve to bring the lesson given by Aṅgulimāla's character close to our own lives. Indeed, it is a wonderfully marvelous miracle. We must bring forth not only the miracle of the Buddha, but also the miraculous power within ourselves through this. After Venerable Aṅgulimāla was ordained, the way he walked diligently on that Dhamma-path—with his head cut, spilling blood, not even receiving alms-food properly, in the midst of various obstacles, yet remaining energetic, standing firm in his virtue (*sīla*), and meditating—he realized the supreme state of Arahantship.

Similarly, we must understand that whether one is a layperson or a monk, many obstacles and hardships may arise when walking the Dhamma-path. None of those are excuses. Within every one of us, there are wholesome as well as unwholesome deeds done in *saṁsāra*. There is a good side and there is a bad side. Unwholesome deeds support unwholesome deeds, and wholesome deeds support wholesome deeds. It is just as the Buddha pointed out: association with bad friends (*pāpa-mitta*) is extremely dangerous. At the beginning of this story, that is exactly what happened. The friends around Aṅgulimāla were bad friends. Furthermore, his teacher also eventually became a bad friend, and by giving that kind of wrong advice, prompted the innocent Ahimsaka to evil, turning the innocent Ahimsaka into the fierce Aṅgulimāla.

On the other hand, while so many people warned him, the Buddha went alone to find the bandit Aṅgulimāla, tamed him with just two sentences, and brought him back as a monk, solely because of his own great compassion. We must understand that this miracle of the Dhamma is not only within Aṅgulimāla, but within each and every one of us. Thinking of it in this way, this present auspicious time is a highly suitable opportunity to undergo a special life transformation. The true auspicious time is the Buddhist auspicious time. What is this auspicious time? It is the auspicious time of the Buddha's birth, his awakening, and his Parinibbāna (final extinguishment). This is the day on which the three most noble and supreme events of the Buddha's life occurred. On such a day, we must reflect that we too have certain goals.

Now, every one of us has various mundane goals. We must have formed such mundane goals countless times in this long *saṁsāra*. Whether they were achieved or not—as the Buddha points out, this *saṁsāra* is a journey of falling prey to birth (*jāti*), aging (*jarā*), sickness, and death (*maraṇa*), being subjected to suffering (*dukkha*) countless times due to other karmic results, and traveling from suffering to suffering.

Therefore, the Buddha pointed out that instead of running, we should bring forth extinguishment, which is the escape (*nissaraṇa*) from *saṁsāra*, escaping from the spinning-in-one-place of wandering (*saṁsaraṇa*); that is what is called the Wheel of Dhamma. That Wheel of Dhamma is something that must rotate within one's own mind-stream. The Dhamma-path to be walked for that purpose is the path of meditation.

So, using virtue (*sīla*) as the foundation, resolving on virtue, gladdening and delighting one's mind through that reflection, one then concentrates the mind through some tranquil meditation object (*samatha-kammaṭṭhāna*). A tranquil meditation object is what helps to concentrate the mind. When one constantly reflects on the quality of *Anuttaro purisadammasārathi* mentioned on this occasion, in accordance with the faith (*saddhā*) arising within oneself, a power and concentration (*samādhi*) capable of keeping the mind anchored in that very object emerges, bringing about a certain unification, a one-pointedness of mind. Relying on that, one can turn toward insight (*vipassanā*) to understand the reality of the world as impermanent (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*).

In the same way, there are various meditation objects such as recollection of the Buddha (*buddhānussati*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), foulness (*asubha*), and mindfulness of death (*maraṇasati*). If someone, by relying on these, concentrates the mind and then directly perceives the impermanent nature of Preparations (*saṅkhāra*) as impermanent (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*), turning the mind to insight and meditating, they can bring forth the path-knowledges (*magga-ñāṇa*). It is by bringing them forth in that manner that one can escape from this *saṁsāra* forever.

We bow to a Buddha and honor a Buddha not by thinking of the qualities of his physical body, nor by thinking of other things. A Buddha is so called because he discovered something that no other teacher could discover. What is that? The method of escaping from this terrifying *saṁsāra* and from the wheel of karma. This is not something that can be achieved by going to an extreme. As shown in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, it is neither by indulging in sensual pleasures nor by torturing one's body as if taking revenge upon it that one can escape from this *saṁsāra*. It is through the Middle Path (*majjhimā paṭipadā*) shown by the Buddha, namely, the Noble Eightfold Path. The Noble Eightfold Path consists of Right View (*sammā-diṭṭhi*), Right Intention (*sammā-saṅkappa*), Right Speech (*sammā-vācā*), Right Action (*sammā-kammanta*), Right Livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*), Right Effort (*sammā-vāyāma*), Right Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*), and Right Concentration (*sammā-samādhi*). This is the very thing the Buddha describes as the Middle Path. This path is one that must be developed within one's own mind-stream.

What first supports this path is Right View (*sammā-diṭṭhi*). One must understand good and bad. One must properly understand good and bad, merit and demerit. Next, one must understand the difference between this *saṁsāra* and the liberation

from *saṁsāra*. That is the understanding that this entire *saṁsāra* is suffering (*dukkha*), and the deep understanding that underlying it is craving (*taṇhā*). It is the understanding that where craving is absent, there is peace and extinguishment—Nibbāna. Next, what supports that is this very path. Through this understanding, through this Right View, one generates Right Intentions (*sammā-saṅkappa*), which are proper thoughts. One must strongly generate the desire and wish for renunciation (*nekkhamma*), for leaving the lay life. For a long period of time, the Buddhas fulfilled that renunciation as a perfection (*pāramī*).

Next, moving away from ill-will, there is the thought of loving-kindness, the thought of non-ill-will (*avyāpāda*), and then the thought of harmlessness (*avihiṁsā*), which is the thought of abstaining from violence. Perhaps the bandit Aṅgulimāla also developed Right View from those two phrases uttered by the Buddha. Then, through that, he generated the right intentions of renunciation, non-ill-will, and harmlessness. From that point on, it is about taming one's body and speech. Right Speech (*sammā-vācā*) means proper words. An act of truth is indeed Right Speech. What Aṅgulimāla did was use Right Speech. We see that he was unwilling to speak a wrong word. What was the first hint given by the Buddha? The Buddha employed a very subtle stratagem there. He first told Venerable Aṅgulimāla, "In that case, perform the act of truth in this way: 'Since I was born, I have not killed a living being.'" Because Venerable Aṅgulimāla was by then observing the precept of abstaining from false speech, he asked, "Alas, Blessed One, how can I perform such an act of truth falsely? Would that not be telling a deliberate lie?" That shows how Venerable Aṅgulimāla was conscientious about his speech. Next, with the polished feeling of "since my noble birth, I am pure," Venerable Aṅgulimāla fearlessly performed the act of truth. That indeed is truthful speech.

Thus, if Venerable Aṅgulimāla was able to utilize truthful speech to shape his life, it is not impossible for us. Next, bodily deeds—Right Action (*sammā-kammanta*), which means proper deeds. The deeds he had done as Aṅgulimāla were not proper deeds. He discarded those wrong deeds done by taking up the five weapons; he discarded them in a single moment.

Now, we find it difficult to let go of many things in this society. Abstaining from the wrong modes of livelihood mentioned at the end of the *ājīva-aṭṭhamaka-sīla* we undertook may be something that you find highly unappealing—to the extent of saying, "That is simply impossible to do." But just as Aṅgulimāla discarded all five weapons, one must develop the mental strength within oneself to abandon those five wrong trades or five wrong lifestyles. What are they? Slaughtering animals, trading in flesh, trading in intoxicants, trading in weapons, and breeding animals for slaughter. One must develop the strength to abstain from such wrong livelihoods. For if one abstains from the five evils and also rectifies one's livelihood, one can establish Right Livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*). Before long, even by the time the King invited him to accept robes, Venerable Aṅgulimāla was undertaking and observing strict ascetic practices (*dhutaṅgas*). That is why he refused even the King's offer of the four

requisites. From this, we can see how conscientious Venerable Aṅgulimāla was regarding his livelihood.

From this story, we see the immense contrast that occurred within a single lifetime. Now, many present this story through films and such. In truth, this is a film that one can watch within one's own mind-stream. As we went along narrating earlier, what kind of person was Aṅgulimāla? What did we think of him? Even though his name was Ahimsaka, had he not committed so many sins? Then, a complete life occurred. Thus, we see from this story of Aṅgulimāla the background necessary for a complete transformation of life. After having such a livelihood, and while going on alms-round in such a difficult manner, Venerable Aṅgulimāla drew close to the supreme state of Arahantship. He concentrated his mind, applying strong effort—Right Effort (*sammā-vāyāma*)—and practicing Right Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*) which brings about concentration. That is, initially, the meditation object was not clear. But he did not back down. Instead, using the solace given by the Buddha, he settled and concentrated his mind. It was through that concentration that, by reflecting on his entire past, Venerable Aṅgulimāla was able to understand the nature of the entire *saṁsāra*, understand suffering (*dukkha*), and eradicate craving (*taṇhā*), which is the path to escaping from that suffering.

Therefore, we must think of bringing this character of Aṅgulimāla close to our lives. Bringing the character of Aṅgulimāla close to us does not mean walking on the path of unrighteousness (*adhamma*) that Aṅgulimāla walked. It means abandoning all the feelings associated with that name Aṅgulimāla, built up by collecting fingers, and then having the strength to undergo such an immense life transformation as to become a wonderfully calm and tranquil monk, as Venerable Aṅgulimāla did. That strength becomes an encouragement for every one of us. For the majority of people in this society are those who hold the perception of inability ("I cannot"). There are very few who have the perception of ability ("I can"). Generating the perception of inability by saying, "We cannot do any of these things. It is impossible in this day and age. Although it was possible during the Buddha's time, it is impossible now," is how we walk on this unrighteous path and support unrighteousness.

So, what is the lesson we draw from this story? Due to the wonderfully infinite great compassion of the Buddha, such a notorious criminal was turned into a wonderfully tranquil member of the Sangha. Similarly, we must reflect that something very helpful for our lives is looking back, examining ourselves—in other words, introspection. Through that, some might only feel remorse or regret.

But that is not how we should think. In such situations, according to the Buddha's Dhamma, there is room for us to turn a new page. If one discards the wrong views (*micchā-diṭṭhi*) within oneself and turns to Right View (*sammā-diṭṭhi*), from that very point, the path ahead is clear. If Right View is established, next, the proper thoughts and wishes known as Right Intention (*sammā-saṅkappa*) must follow accordingly. It proceeds like a flight of steps. When proper thoughts and wishes are

fulfilled, proper words are spoken—what we can call proper speech. When proper speech is perfected, the proper path of action—Right Action—is automatically established. By resolving upon virtue, such as the Five Precepts, one rectifies one's actions, rectifies one's conduct. When that is properly and systematically established, one is inclined to rectify one's livelihood as well. What lies within the effort to rectify that livelihood? The effort to turn away from the unwholesome and draw close to the wholesome, which is the proper striving known as Right Effort (*sammā-vāyāma*). Through a proper way of life, the proper striving, which is proper energy, arises. It arises in the proper manner—physical energy arises. Relying on that energy, Right Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*) arises through it—proper mindfulness, the ability to establish mindfulness. When that mindfulness is maintained for a long time, the mind becomes concentrated on a single object. This is how the Noble Eightfold Path is completed.

The fundamental requirement for all of this is the perception of capability—the feeling that "we can." To strengthen that feeling, Buddhist Dhamma stories found in the Sasana, such as this story of Aṅgulimāla, help us. Indeed, we must reflect that there is hardly any unwholesome deed we have not committed in this long *saṁsāra*. If we could see our past, we must have committed various kinds of evil deeds just like Aṅgulimāla over infinite time, and suffered in hells. But we should not weaken our minds because of that. If, from today, from this very moment, we observe virtue (*sīla*), we can make a new beginning, turn a new page from that point. The path to be walked from that point onward is what the Buddha has shown.

Therefore, you must reflect that today, on this precious Vesak Full Moon Day, you can obtain through this a great opportunity to turn a completely new page in life, and to shape your life-conduct like the orb of the moon emerging from a dark cloud. One must always compare the Dhamma story heard to one's own life and practice discipline accordingly. That is why the Dhamma is called leading-onward (*opanayika*). This Dhamma is called visible-here-and-now (*sandiṭṭhika*) because its results can be seen right before our eyes in this very life—just as the bandit named Aṅgulimāla became an Arahant. It is timeless (*akālika*); without delay, whenever one changes one's mind, a transformation takes place from that very moment. Next, *ehipassika* means "come and see"—here, the Buddha did not merely say "come and see," but invited Aṅgulimāla to look at the Dhamma. There, Aṅgulimāla understood the difference between stopping and not stopping. Likewise, the quality of leading-onward (*opanayika*)—Aṅgulimāla turned toward the Dhamma-path and, by implementing those principles of virtue and the path of meditation within his own mind-stream, reaped the fruits through the quality of leading-onward. *Paccattaṁ veditabbo viññūhi*—it is to be personally realized by the wise.

Therefore, during a period like this when a Buddha has appeared, whether we are laypersons or monks, unless we have other deep aspirations such as Buddhahood, we should maintain only two targets in this life. That is, as mentioned earlier, we must walk this Dhamma-journey with a firm resolution either to achieve the state of

Stream-entry to be freed from the four lower realms of misery, or to cross over the entire suffering of *saṁsāra* and attain Parinibbāna through supreme Arahantship. If virtue, concentration, and wisdom (*sīla, samādhi, paññā*) constitute the Dispensation (*sāsana*), then we can illuminate this Buddha-dispensation only by shaping our lives in that manner. To the extent that our lives are shaped, those around us obtain a noble friend (*kalyāṇa-mitta*). On many occasions, it is said that noble friends are as rare as the mythical *kaḷunika* herb. Especially in this day and age, a person becomes a noble friend when they develop the Noble Eightfold Path within themselves, starting with Right View, and acquire the capacity to support others through the Dhamma. It is not supporting through money or wealth. A noble friend is someone who possesses that capacity to support through the Dhamma, which is gained in proportion to how far one walks on the Dhamma-path.

Today, on this precious full moon day, many of you, while disciplining yourselves in some virtue (*sīla*), listened for about an hour to a sermon concerning Venerable Aṅgulimāla Arahant, who can be shown as an extremely valuable disciple in the Buddha's Dispensation. Within that character, there are many highly valuable lessons for one to learn. We should reflect that during this hour, we have absorbed many valuable points from Venerable Aṅgulimāla's character that we can absorb into our lives. Thus, using the Dhamma-solace obtained so far as the very foundation, and disciplining ourselves through it, we must resolve to walk on this very path of Dhamma.

Furthermore, obtaining the association of noble friends, practicing meditation, settling the mind through tranquility (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*) meditation, we must make the aspiration: "May we obtain the strength and power to cross over this highly terrifying and formidable ocean of *saṁsāra*, cross over the desert of *saṁsāra*, and find peace in the supreme, deathless, great Nibbāna shown by the Buddha!" We often describe these benefits of hearing the Dhamma (*dhamma-savana-āniśaṁsa*), which support this, as a certain transformation arising within one's own mind-stream. Through the stories we present during Dhamma-listening, faith (*saddhā*) arises. Next, along with faith, a certain mental energy arises—the feeling of "we too can do it," just as Aṅgulimāla did. Settling the mind accordingly—merely by directing the mind during Dhamma-listening, mindfulness (*sati*), proper mindfulness, arises. Likewise, through that, if one keeps the mind properly focused on listening to the Dhamma, listening to it word by word, a certain concentration (*samādhi*) arises, as a form of recollection of the Dhamma (*dhammānussati*).

Next, if a deep understanding regarding that Dhamma has been generated, that is considered as wisdom (*paññā*). In that manner, one should rejoice that this hour or so was spent to generate within one's mind-stream, to some extent, the qualities of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom (*saddhā, viriya, sati, samādhi, paññā*), which as spiritual powers (*bala-dhamma*) support the attainment of Nibbāna. While rejoicing thus, make the aspiration: "By the power of this store of merit accumulated so far, may all beings from the Avīci hell to the Akaniṭṭha Brahma

realm, including the assembly of devas and Brahmas who protect the Dispensation, and all our relatives, rejoice in this merit! Having rejoiced, may they be released from this formidable *saṁsāra* and directly realize the supreme, deathless, great Nibbāna through whichever of the three Bodhis they aspire to!" For yourself, perform the sharing of merit by reciting the verses, wishing: "By the power of this accumulated store of merit, may I, as quickly as possible, relying on the association of noble friends, realize Nibbāna!"

Recite the verses to share merit:

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……..*"