Pahankanuwa Sermon #143

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

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(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.59)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

Pali Stanza:

"Gataddhino visokassa,

vippamuttassa sabbadhi;

Sabbaganthappahīnassa,

pariḷāho na vijjati."

From:

Dhammapada Verse 90 (Arahanta Vagga)

Dear Listeners,

Today, this Vesak Full Moon Poya Day, we all know, is a day to bring to mind the incomparable aggregate of virtues of the Great Compassionate One, the Teacher of the Three Worlds, the Fully Self-Awakened Lord Buddha. The Buddha-activity of that Supreme Lord Buddha of the three worlds was to clarify the path of practice to bring to an end this extremely long journey through Saṃsāra. In this entire world system, no event greater than that has ever occurred, nor will it ever occur. That is why we all consider this Vesak day as an extremely noble day, a memorable day.

Everyone knows that in connection with the Vesak day, we commemorate three important events in the life of the Lord Buddha: the birth, the enlightenment, and the final passing away (*parinibbāna*). Although these appear as three distinct events, devotees, if we look at them truthfully, there is no error in considering them as three stages of a single event. These three events—the final birth of that Lord Buddha who fulfilled the requisites of enlightenment (*bodhi-sambhāra*) over a long period for our sake, the realization through His Buddha-wisdom that this was indeed His final birth, and the termination of His saṃsāric journey in accordance with that realization—are what we celebrate through these three events of birth, enlightenment, and final passing away. Thus, it is a valuable Dhammapada stanza

highlighting this very concept of liberation from Saṃsāra that we have chosen as our theme today.

The background story related to this stanza is connected with a certain event in the Buddha's life that evokes a sense of spiritual urgency (*saṃvega*) in you, devotees. We have all heard of the Elder Devadatta. He was a relative of the Lord Buddha, yet as a retributive turn of a certain hatred he harbored for countless eons, he acted in an extremely terrifying manner during the Lord Buddha's old age, even attempting to take His life, as you all must have heard. The events regarding this are described as follows.

Shortly after his ordination, Elder Devadatta attained supernormal powers (*abhiññā*). However, he did not attain any supramundane state. As the Lord Buddha's old age drew near, a great jealousy arose in Elder Devadatta regarding the spread of the Lord Buddha's fame and glory. Seeing that other members of the Sangha received gains and honors while he did not receive them adequately, a strong desire for gains and honors arose in him. For this purpose, he utilized his psychic powers to win over Prince Ajātasattu, the son of King Bimbisāra. By displaying a psychic miracle, he won the confidence of Prince Ajātasattu, and through that, devised a way and method to receive various gains and honors.

As these gains and honors increased, and his following grew, a certain sinful thought arose in Elder Devadatta. Thinking, "I must let the Buddha retire and take over all the affairs of the Sangha myself," he went and requested the Lord Buddha, "The Blessed One is now aged. Please step aside and hand this over to me." To this, the Lord Buddha replied, "I would not hand over the charge of this Sangha even to my chief disciples, Sāriputta and Moggallāna. It is not fit to hand it over to you." Angered by this, he harbored deep hatred and subsequently plotted to take the Lord Buddha's life. For this purpose, he approached Prince Ajātasattu and employed an extremely subtle scheme. He planned a highly deceptive and intricate conspiracy, sending a squad of archers along the path the Lord Buddha was walking to shoot Him, ensuring that none of those archers would survive to tell the tale. However, it was not successful. By the power of the Lord Buddha's majestic spiritual power, those archers were unable to shoot. Not only that, but by His power, everyone involved was drawn close to the Lord Buddha, and upon hearing the Dhamma He preached, they all became devoted followers. Therefore, Elder Devadatta's attempt failed.

Next, thinking, "Now I must destroy this Buddha myself," he told Prince Ajātasattu, "You kill your father, the king, and take the Kingdom of Magadha. I will kill the Buddha and take the Kingdom of the Buddha." Thus, Prince Ajātasattu, in that very manner—which is a long story—tortured and killed his father, the king, and seized the kingdom. Yet, Elder Devadatta was still unable to fulfill his part of the plan. What did he do next? While the Lord Buddha was walking at the foot of the Gijjhakūṭa (Vulture Peak) mountain, Elder Devadatta climbed to the top of the mountain and rolled a massive boulder down toward the Lord Buddha's head. At that moment, as a

miracle performed through the Buddha's spiritual majesty, two rock peaks sprang up from the ground and intercepted that boulder. However, a splinter that chipped off from it struck the sole of the Lord Buddha's foot, causing a serious wound. A wound that bled profusely was formed.

The Sangha escorted the Lord Buddha to the park called Maddakucchi Migadāya (the Maddakucchi Deer Park). While spending the first night at that Maddakucchi Migadāya, the Lord Buddha experienced sharp, intense feelings (vedanā) that would be unbearable for an ordinary person. With His mindfulness and clear comprehension (*sati-sampajañña*), and through His power of concentration (*samādhi*)—that is, the fruit of Arahantship concentration (*arahattaphala-samādhi*), which is directly connected to Nibbāna, being the most supreme power of concentration in the world that the Lord Buddha possessed—He endured all those feelings (vedanā). So much so, He endured them without any agitation. Seeing this, hundreds of deities (*devatās*) came to the Lord Buddha at night and paid special praise: "This Ascetic Gotama is a great king of elephants. He endures such bitter, sharp, and severe feelings (vedanā) without any agitation." Similarly, other groups praised Him, saying, "The Lord Buddha is a great king of lions, a great thoroughbred, a great and supreme person." While they were praising Him in this manner, the Lord Buddha too, reflecting on His own liberation from Saṃsāra, uttered a joyful solemn utterance (*udāna*) in a stanza: "Behold the power of my developed concentration (*samādhi*) and liberated mind! How feelings (vedanā) are endured with equanimity, completely free from attraction and aversion."

Then, the next day, the Lord Buddha asked the Sangha to take Him to Jīvaka's Mango Grove. When the Sangha brought Him to Jīvaka's Mango Grove, physician Jīvaka arrived quickly and applied a very strong medicine to the Lord Buddha's foot to heal it rapidly. Even nowadays, you know, a strong medicine is applied to bring about a quick recovery. Having applied the strong medicine, physician Jīvaka said to the Lord Buddha: "Venerable Sir, I have come after administering medicine to a certain patient inside the city. I must return there now. Until I return, please let this bandage, this wound-dressing, remain exactly as it is."

So, physician Jīvaka went to the city. Having gone and treated that patient, by the time he was about to return, the city gates had been closed. Thus, physician Jīvaka was unable to return. Sitting there, he thought with great anxiety: "Alas! What a grave mistake I have made. Treating the Lord Buddha like an ordinary person, I applied such a strong medicine and came away, and now it is the time to remove this bandage!" While Jīvaka the physician was thinking thus, the Lord Buddha, perceiving his thought, said to Ven. Ānanda: "Ānanda, Jīvaka went to the city and is unable to return because the gates have closed. He is thinking that it is now the time to remove this bandage. Therefore, remove this." Ven. Ānanda then removed that wound bandage. The moment that wound bandage was removed, the wound was completely healed. The wound had healed entirely.

Thus, early the next morning, physician Jīvaka ran back in great haste and with deep concern, and asked the Lord Buddha: "Blessed One, did you experience any burning sensation (pariḷāha) during the night due to this wound?" When a doctor comes, it is natural to ask how one's health and comfort are. Now, when he inquired about His well-being with deep regret, especially feeling that he had committed a lapse, the Lord Buddha uttered the stanza which we have set as our theme.

The Lord Buddha replied to that question not on a mundane level. When a wound occurs, or due to cold and heat, such physical afflictions arise for the Lord Buddha as well as for anyone else. That is natural. However, bringing out a profound meaning from the word "burning sensation" (*pariḷāha*), the Lord Buddha declared this stanza:

Gataddhino visokassa,

vippamuttassa sabbadhi,

Sabbaganthappahīnassa,

pariḷāho na vijjati.

The meaning of that stanza is:

Gataddhino – for him who has completed his journey (the journey of Saṃsāra),

Visokassa – who is free from sorrow, who has destroyed sorrow,

Vippamuttassa sabbadhi – who is liberated in every way, from all sides,

Sabbaganthappahīnassa – who has abandoned all knots (ties), who is freed from all knots,

for that Destroyer of Cankers (*Khīṇāsava*), the Arahant, the liberated one,

pariḷāho na vijjati – no burning sensation (pariḷāha) exists.

In that manner, He declared in the truest sense that He remained without any burning sensation.

That means, although there was physical burning, there was no mental burning. There was no distress or sorrow. That is what is shown by this stanza. Thus, from this story as well as this stanza, we can extract many excellent events to understand the value of this Dhamma.

Those among you, devotees, who have heard or read the Jātaka stories know well the conduct of Elder Devadatta. Countless eons ago, Devadatta existed as the merchant Serivānija, and the Bodhisatta as Kacchapuṭa. A dispute arose over a golden bowl, and having lost the golden bowl, as the merchant Kacchapuṭa was carrying it away, the other merchant ran after him to snatch it. When he failed, it is mentioned in that Jātaka story that he died vomiting blood. According to that, we can understand that

it was as a retributive turn of that very mind of hatred developed over so many eons in the past, and as a kind of re-enactment, that something similar occurred in this life when the Buddha attained enlightenment. He had not yet acquired any qualification to obtain the Kingdom of the Buddha. He only possessed a fraction of supernormal power (*abhiññā*). Yet, he attempted to usurp the Kingdom of the Buddha through devious means. For this reason, harboring jealousy and hatred, he sought to destroy the Lord Buddha's life, trying to fulfill in this life that very determination born of hatred. That is why he attempted to bring about the death of the Lord Buddha in that manner.

It did not stop there. Two events were mentioned here. You must have heard often about the third attempt he made. That is, as a brutal scheme to take the Lord Buddha's life, he got King Ajātasattu to intoxicate the elephant Nālāgiri with toddy and released him onto the path where the Lord Buddha was walking. However, you have heard many times the story of how the Lord Buddha subdued Nālāgiri through the power of loving-kindness (*mettā*). Although his attempts to take the Lord Buddha's life through three such endeavors failed, he fell into the grave, immediate-retribution kamma (*ānantariya-kamma*) of shedding the blood of a Buddha. An immediate-retribution kamma (*ānantariya-kamma*) means that when such a grave action is committed, one definitely goes to the Avīci hell. No one can kill a Buddha. Yet, he committed another grave unwholesome deed. By gathering a group through underhand means, leading away five hundred newly ordained monks, he caused a schism in the Sangha (*sangha-bheda*). That is, to appear as if he too were a Buddha, he went to Gayāsīsa, keeping associates as if they were chief disciples, and created a split in this Sangha with a false Buddhahood. That too is a grave immediate-retribution kamma (*ānantariya-kamma*). It is revealed in the Dhamma that having committed such grave kammas in this manner, Devadatta went to the Avīci hell.

However, before being reborn in the Avīci hell, he took refuge in the Lord Buddha. At the final moment, he understood something of the Lord Buddha. Throughout all these events, it is recorded that no hatred ever arose within the Lord Buddha. This becomes very clear when we discuss this burning sensation (*pariḷāha*). In the entire Saṃsāra, there is burning and running (struggling). Here, by the word *gataddhino*, something is said about the journey of Saṃsāra. After harboring that hatred, Elder Devadatta's journey through Saṃsāra was a journey completely burnt and scorched by hatred. After the Lord Buddha attained Buddhahood, He radiated loving-kindness (*mettā*) even toward those who devised such schemes against His life. That is why on His side, there are no burning sensations. Furthermore, established in His liberated mind, established in the concentration of the fruit of Arahantship (*arahattaphala-samādhi*), He endured even those severe pains without sorrow or distress.

Thus, on one hand, we see from this story how the murderous Devadatta acted toward the Lord Buddha's life, and on the other hand, how physician Jīvaka healed the Lord Buddha through medical treatments that are considered miraculous even today. You, devotees, do not need to dwell too much on the conduct of Elder

Devadatta. What we need to understand through it is only the danger of hatred. It is not proper to harbor hatred thinking, "He did such and such to our Lord Buddha." Such things are what exist in the long Saṃsāra. If anyone harbors hatred, it goes on and on as a retributive cycle. That is the nature. That is the way of things. It goes on like a mere habit. That saṃsāric habit continues in the same way in various forms. That is why the Lord Buddha has declared: "By attachment, attachment is not appeased; by lust, lust is not appeased; by hatred, hatred is not appeased. It is through equanimity, the middle path, through peaceful neutrality between the two, that all of this can be conquered." As they accumulate more and more, the simile given is that of a creeper growing in the rainy season—cravings branch out and grow. Next, as you add more of the anger called hatred, it is like adding straw to a fire; there too, the fire burns.

This is precisely why the entire Saṃsāra is said to be a heap of burning sensations. In short, the reason for this running is the burning sensation. It is said to arise due to the thirst of craving (taṇhā). The Lord Buddha revealed that it is because of craving (taṇhā) that we wander in Saṃsāra for a long time. It is called *taṇhā ponobhavikā*—craving (taṇhā) is what produces a renewed becoming (bhava). Craving (taṇhā) is this desire. It has a nature of never being satisfied, never being content. The Lord Buddha declared this. There are two sides to craving (taṇhā). Through craving (taṇhā), in terms of lust, attachment, and desires, certain things are expected. One attempts to acquire them. Due to the obstacles that arise in obtaining them, hatred arises. Then, both of those are burning sensations. Next, through the futile effort made to appease them, the fire of delusion (*moha*) also burns. In this way, the Lord Buddha has pointed out three fires: lust, hatred, and delusion (*rāga, dosa, moha*).

Now you, devotees, can understand: though not at such a severe level, when a strong attachment to something is formed in one's life, until it is appeased, there is a great burning sensation—a great burning inside the mind. If someone obstructs it, then that burning of hatred, that fire, emerges. Next, one attempts to complete or appease this in devious ways. The Lord Buddha has declared that it can never be appeased by feeding it with more and more things. Instead, this can be conquered by directing the mind toward equanimity which lies between the two, by directing the mind to neutrality. However, the ordinary person who does not know this runs to appease that lust and hatred. Through that running, the fire of defilement (*kilesa*) called delusion also grows. In our sermons, we have illustrated this in many instances with a well-known simile: it is like a deer running after a mirage.

Thus, the entire saṃsāric running, as described by the Lord Buddha, is a running to quench the thirst of craving (taṇhā). The multitude of burning sensations that grow through it is what is indicated in the stanza by the word *pariḷāha*. In fact, the fundamental word, the main word in that stanza, is *pariḷāha*—the burning sensation. Thus, by this stanza, the Lord Buddha declared that He is free from these burning sensations. Accordingly, on a Vesak day like this, we must bring to mind the uniqueness of the Dhamma presented by the Lord Buddha.

Bringing to an end the journey of Saṃsāra is the purpose of this Dhamma. The fundamental purpose of the entire Buddha-Dhamma is liberation from Saṃsāra. When we say this, it means He brought to an end the journey of Saṃsāra. The Lord Buddha, when reflecting upon Himself, rejoiced in that very fact: "I have brought to an end this journey of Saṃsāra." Then, what is bad about the journey of Saṃsāra? The Lord Buddha always reminds us of its perilous side. Some people might think, "No matter how the Lord Buddha says it, we must continue this existence (bhava)." In most people, a desire for this existence (bhava) called craving for becoming (*bhava-taṇhā*) exists in a very subtle manner. It is to break this that the Lord Buddha presented various similes to arouse a sense of spiritual urgency (*saṃvega*) regarding Saṃsāra. Indeed, the essence of the Buddha-Dhamma must be the sense of spiritual urgency (*saṃvega*) regarding Saṃsāra and the keen desire for liberation from Saṃsāra. One must reflect on what exists in Saṃsāra and arouse a sense of spiritual urgency (*saṃvega*). Similarly, one must exert an effort, a struggle, to be liberated from Saṃsāra. One must make an effort to properly appease that craving (taṇhā) through wisdom, through realization, and through equanimity.

In this manner, the Lord Buddha has preached many relevant Sutta discourses. Those Suttas are generally known as the *Anamatagga Suttas*. There are many Sutta discourses where the Lord Buddha, by means of various similes, points out the length of this Saṃsāra, saying, "For this much time have you wandered in this Saṃsāra." When one directs the mind to them, a great sense of spiritual urgency (*saṃvega*) arises regarding this saṃsāric existence (bhava). The Lord Buddha declares: "Monks, for you who are shrouded by ignorance, bound by craving (taṇhā), as you travel along this journey of Saṃsāra, no beginning is to be seen. It cannot be conceived when this began. For such a long time have you traveled in this Saṃsāra."

Next, He gives a simile: "Monks, if a person were to collect all the grass, wood, branches, and foliage in this entire India (Jambudīpa), cut them into four-inch pieces, and lay them down one by one, saying: 'This is my mother, this is my mother's mother, this is my mother's mother's mother,' and start counting the mothers one has had in the past using those pieces of wood, those pieces of wood would run out, but the number of mothers one has had in the past would not come to an end." "So, through traveling in Saṃsāra for this long, what is the only thing you have achieved? What was its purpose?" The Lord Buddha points this out too. What is the feat you have performed all this time? It is called *kaṭasivaḍḍhitā*—which means filling up the cemeteries. That means you have only increased the number of graves. All have increased the cemeteries. You have become 'cemetery-extenders,' 'graveyard-extenders.' That is all you have done; in the entire Saṃsāra, you have filled up the cemeteries.

In another Sutta categorized under the *Anamatagga* group, the Lord Buddha asks the Sangha: "Monks, what do you think? Which is more: the tears you have shed as you wept and wailed when associated with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable during this extremely long Saṃsāra, or the water in the four great oceans?"

The Sangha replies: "Venerable Sir, as we understand the Dhamma preached to us by the Blessed One, the tears we have shed are indeed more than the water in the four great oceans." Connecting to that very point, the Lord Buddha declares again: "Not only the tears shed for all your relatives, but if we take separately the tears you wept for your mother, for your son, for your daughter, then for other relatives, for the loss of wealth, for the onset of illnesses—even each of these is more than the water in the four great oceans." The Lord Buddha concludes: "This is enough, monks, to become disillusioned with all preparations (saṅkhāra)—which are the things that cause the running after which the world runs; this is enough to lose interest in them all, this is enough to be liberated from them." That is how the sermon ends.

Similarly, on another occasion, the Lord Buddha points out: "Monks, if we were to collect the mother's milk you drank after being born in various births (jāti) in the past, which is more: that volume of milk, or the water in the four great oceans?" There too, the Sangha replies: "Venerable Sir, as we understand the Dhamma preached by the Blessed One, the milk we drank from mothers is indeed more, and the water in the four great oceans is less."

Likewise, a certain monk came to the Lord Buddha and asked: "Blessed One, since you often speak of this eon (*kalpa*), and use the word *kalpa*, how long indeed is an eon?" Then the Lord Buddha says: "Monk, an eon is so long that it cannot be counted or indicated in numbers, in calculations, such as this many hundreds of years, or this many thousands of years." "In that case, Blessed One, can you give a simile?" "I can," He says. Then He gives the simile: What is the simile? "Suppose, monk, there were a solid rock mountain, a yojana long, a yojana wide, and a yojana high, completely solid without any cleft or crack. A man would come once every hundred years with a fine cloth from Kāsī and stroke that mountain once. By this stroking with the Kāsī cloth once every hundred years, that rock mountain would be worn away and exhausted, but the eon would still not have ended." In that manner, the Lord Buddha points out the length of an eon. Having said this, the Lord Buddha then points out: "Monks, through such a long Saṃsāra, you have passed through hundreds, thousands, hundreds of thousands of such eons."

On another occasion, when the Lord Buddha was in the vicinity of Mount Vepulla, He pointed out Mount Vepulla to the Sangha and said: "Monks, if the skeletons left behind by a single person during a single eon were collected, they would become as large as this Mount Vepulla." There too, what is shown is the length of Saṃsāra. Next, there is another highly poignant and moving Sutta that was preached. To thirty monks who had come as visitors from the city of Pāvā, none of whom had attained any path or fruit, the Lord Buddha preached a discourse that evokes the fear of Saṃsāra. There, the Lord Buddha points out: "Monks, if the blood shed by you when being decapitated during this extremely long Saṃsāra were collected, which is more: that blood, or the water in the four great oceans?" Then too, those monks declare: "Venerable Sir, as we understand the Dhamma declared by the Blessed One, the blood so shed is indeed more, and the water in the four great oceans is less."

Then, not stopping there, the Lord Buddha declares next: "If the blood shed by you when being decapitated after being born as cows in this long Saṃsāra were collected, even that is more than the four great oceans. Next, if we collect the blood shed by being decapitated as water buffaloes, as goats, as chickens, as sheep—being born as each of these animals in turn—it is more than the four great oceans." The Lord Buddha presents all of these in the form of questions and answers. "What do you think, monks?" He asks. The monks are obliged to answer each one. "Similarly, when you were caught as highway robbers and decapitated, or caught committing other misdeeds like adultery and decapitated by the king's men—the blood shed on such occasions is more than the water in the four great oceans." In this way, He delivered a certain discourse. So moving was that discourse that at its conclusion, all those thirty monks attained Arahantship. From this, we can see that if we are to be liberated from Saṃsāra, if we desire liberation from Saṃsāra, we must experience the fear of Saṃsāra. One must become disillusioned with Saṃsāra. While harboring attachment to Saṃsāra, being liberated from Saṃsāra does not happen. That is a major issue. For you, devotees, in your day-to-day lives, this too can be a problem. Even for a small child, as we know, if we give a beautiful piece of cake, they want to admire its shape and take pride in it, and they also want to eat it. Both cannot be done. We are just like that.

Truly, we must understand that a Buddha arises specifically to show the dangerous aspect of this Saṃsāra. However, nowadays, the prevailing trend is toward the expansion of the world (*loka-vaḍḍhana*). Most people are enthusiastic about expanding the world. Even this Dhamma is often used to fulfill social requirements and to find satisfaction within this. But that will never happen. If that were possible, the Lord Buddha points out, during eras like the reign of a Wheel-Turning Monarch (*Cakkavatti*), craving (taṇhā) should have been satisfied. Yet, it was never satisfied through any of those. For the thirst of craving (taṇhā) can never be quenched. The Lord Buddha has pointed out that even if a rain of gold coins were to fall, one would never be satisfied. It is because such a nature exists in the world that a Buddha arises. It is to introduce the supramundane—which rises above the mundane—to the world, and to point out supramundane liberation. Now, what is spoken of in this stanza is that very supramundane liberation. Therefore, what we have to say is that if we are true Buddhists, we must try to cross over from the world, rather than becoming 'graveyard-extenders' or 'world-extenders.' A Buddha-sāsana exists, the Buddha-Dhamma exists, only if we act in accordance with this fundamental purpose pointed out by the Lord Buddha. If it drifts in the opposite direction, toward the side of Saṃsāra, toward the mundane side—there is no Dhamma there, there is no sāsana. That fact must be specially remembered.

In this stanza, it is further said *gataddhino visokassa*, that He remained without sorrow or spiritual distress. When feelings (vedanā) and the like arise, everyone experiences afflictions. But what is spoken of here is that the Lord Buddha, due to His equanimity, did not generate mental distress or sorrow through physical feelings (vedanā). The entire Saṃsāra is completely a sorrowful narrative. In Saṃsāra, there

is entirely a nature of falling into sorrow because one cannot fulfill the things one expects. However, the Lord Buddha, utilizing the supramundane liberation He had attained, transcended sorrow.

Similarly, "liberated in every way" (*vippamuttassa*) means from the five aggregates. You, devotees, have heard of the five aggregates: form (*rūpa*), feeling (vedanā), perception (*saññā*), preparations (saṅkhāra), and consciousness (viññāṇa). The Lord Buddha has pointed out that every individual clings to these, thinking, "This is mine, this I am." It is by abandoning craving (taṇhā) and abandoning attachment toward these that one is liberated from them. Thus, the Lord Buddha, seeing these five aggregates as impermanent (anicca), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self (anattā), realized Buddhahood and attained supramundane liberation. That is why He is *vippamuttassa sabbadhi*—liberated in every way. Similarly, *sabbaganthappahīnassa*. "Freed from knots" is explained in the Dhamma as being freed from four kinds of knots (*gantha*): covetousness (*abhijjhā*), which is obsessive greed; ill-will (*vyāpāda*), which is hatred; clinging to rules and vows (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*), which is grasping wrong habits and vows; and dogmatic insistence on truth (*idaṃsaccābhinivesa*), which is grasping certain views/dogmas. The Lord Buddha declared that He was freed from all those knots.

Thus, within that stanza lies the value of the liberation He attained. Through that, He replied to physician Jīvaka: "Throughout the night, I appeased and conquered those burning sensations (pariḷāha) through the bliss of liberation I have attained in this manner." On a Vesak day like this, if we are to preserve the valuable portions of this Dhamma in this Sāsana, we must live in accordance with them. The Lord Buddha has pointed out the path of liberation that leads to supramundane knowledge and brings to an end this journey of Saṃsāra. The fearfulness of this journey of Saṃsāra is revealed in that very multitude of *Anamatagga Suttas*. One must frequently contemplate that multitude of Suttas. In accordance with them, whatever hardships may arise while trying to fulfill various expectations in one's life, one must become more and more courageous through them to be liberated from Saṃsāra.

One must make an effort specifically to walk on this path of Dhamma. You have heard that the path of Dhamma consists of virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). Today, most of this meritorious group observed precepts such as the ten precepts or eight precepts, and another group at this moment undertook the precepts of right livelihood as the eighth (*ājīva-aṭṭhamaka-sīla*). Virtue (*sīla*) is foremost, because it is through the taming of body and speech that the opportunity to tame the mind is subsequently provided. Just as the Lord Buddha distinguishes black and white, He has pointed out the things to be done and not to be done in the world, the wholesome and unwholesome, merit and demerit. Thus, by guarding these three doors of mind, body, and speech, without falling into these unwholesome and sinful things, and through the restraint developed while walking on the path of wholesome actions, one can attain the calming of the mind through concentration (*samādhi*). Utilizing that very concentration (*samādhi*), one must understand the impermanent

(anicca) nature of all of this, the impermanent (anicca) nature of this entire existence.

The ordinary world does not understand this because they take everything as "me" and "mine." Through that, the running in Saṃsāra increases. Due to craving (taṇhā), a strong grasping (upādāna) occurs. It is that very grasping (upādāna) that manifests at the moment of death. You have seen in many instances the struggle that occurs at the time of death, which we refer to as gasping for breath. What is happening here? What is done by that? That force, that force of grasping (upādāna), goes outward and establishes itself on a sign (*nimitta*) that presents itself in accordance with kamma. In accordance with that, even if we do not expect it, if we have committed grave unwholesome deeds, we will be forced to take birth (jāti) in places such as hell. Such is the dangerous nature that exists in this Saṃsāra.

In this day and age, some people try to dilute these facts. Everyone likes it if these problems are diluted. Therefore, some people present modernistic arguments regarding these: "Where are they? We cannot see hells or heaven worlds. Those were presented by the Lord Buddha merely as symbols; they are all right here in this world. Those who are economically destitute in this very place are the ones existing as hungry ghosts (*petas*); those who commit sinful deeds are the demons (*yakkhas*), and so forth." Such a method of interpretation is coming forward now. Many people have been trapped by these.

Instead of moving toward the supramundane liberation pointed out by the Lord Buddha in the Dhamma by understanding it correctly, they content themselves with a kind of temporary solace in their day-to-day lives. However, one must recognize these well. This Dhamma cannot be diluted in that manner. A Buddha does not fulfill the perfections (*pāramīs*) for four incalculable eons and a hundred thousand eons to point out such trivial things. There are many things in this existence (bhava) that are invisible to oneself. If someone says that hells and heaven worlds do not exist merely because they are invisible to them, the Lord Buddha compares it to a blind man saying that the sun and moon do not exist because he cannot see them.

This meritorious group must think in that manner, without succumbing to mere logic. There are certain truths revealed to the world by Buddha-wisdom as well as by those possessing supernormal powers (*abhiññā*). There are many invisible things in the world. Things invisible to the ordinary physical eye are seen by some through various instruments. Even things invisible through those instruments are seen by some through that very power of concentration (*samādhi*) and supernormal power (*abhiññā*). Therefore, if one lives thinking that only what is visible to oneself is true, that person can never bring to an end Saṃsāra.

Therefore, our thoughts and aspirations must truly be directed specifically toward this disillusionment with Saṃsāra. "These events in our day-to-day lives are all a part of that river of blood pointed out by the Lord Buddha. This is but one part, one single drop, of the blood I have shed in this entire long Saṃsāra." One must think in that

way. "This is but one of the heaps of skeletons." One must think in that manner. Thinking in that way and realizing the dangerous nature of this Saṃsāra, one must walk on the path of liberation from it.

We said the path of liberation is virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). If, by being established in a certain virtue (*sīla*), one calms one's body and speech through the peace obtained thereby and strengthens the power of concentration (*samādhi*) developed, and if one has obtained supernormal powers (*abhiññā*) through that power of concentration (*samādhi*) which are unseen by the ordinary world, then heaven worlds, Brahma worlds, and the like become visible to the divine eye (*dibba-cakkhu*). Hells, the purgatory, and all those places which the world claims do not exist, are visible to those with supernormal powers (*abhiññā*). This is called the divine eye. However, the Lord Buddha points out the eye of wisdom (*paññā-cakkhu*)—which is insight (*vipassanā*)—as being higher than both the physical eye and the divine eye. The eye of wisdom means insight (*vipassanā*). Then, if one has understood in that manner that such a dangerous thing exists in the world, that it exists in Saṃsāra, one must next direct one's attention specifically to that insight (*vipassanā*). Insight (*vipassanā*) means a special seeing.

What is briefly indicated in that insight (*vipassanā*) meditation is the seeing of the three characteristics: impermanent (anicca), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self (anattā). One must frequently contemplate the three characteristics (*tilakkaṇa*)—the impermanent (anicca) nature of this entire existence. The reason it is not visible to the ordinary world is because of the notion of taking it as "I" and because of the forces of defilements such as craving (taṇhā). But as the mind becomes calmer and calmer, one can obtain a certain understanding regarding these. One must direct the mind to the nature of continuity (*santati*) in each of these, the flowing nature, the nature of arising (jāti) and passing away. As one directs the mind, applying the reflection called wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*), they begin to be understood more and more subtly. Through that understanding, when they begin to be shown in accordance with reality (*yathābhūta*), disillusionment arises naturally. The Lord Buddha has declared that if one sees the world through the knowledge of reality (*yathābhūta-ñāṇa*), disillusionment with Saṃsāra arises simultaneously.

Then, just as mentioned regarding the piece of cake, one must hope to walk on the path to gain the right understanding. When the right understanding comes, an opportunity to be liberated from this Saṃsāra arises. The Lord Buddha has presented a great revolution regarding the values held by the world. This understanding can occur at any moment in life, from a seven-year-old child to the final deathbed, depending on that individual's power of perfections (*pāramī*); at any moment, these powers, these supramundane powers, can emerge. Therefore, what we must do is exert the effort required to bring out that supramundane aspect.

Although one's past power of perfections (*pāramīs*) is not visible to oneself, if such a thing is to emerge, one must engage in this path of Dhamma as a support to it. Some

people think: "This virtue (*sīla*) is a great hassle, so we do not need that either. Concentration (*samādhi*) and meditation (*bhāvanā*) are anti-social activities done by isolating oneself from society, so we do not need those either." There are those who speak in this manner. However, one must contemplate wisely: the Lord Buddha considered the liberation of the individual as supreme. It is by the coming together of many individuals that a society is formed, a nation is formed, a world is formed. Therefore, there is no social code that disregards the individual.

Some people think virtue (*sīla*) means merely refraining from doing wrong to society. But it is not completed by that alone. The Lord Buddha points out something far deeper. The virtue (*sīla*) shown in this Dhamma is a foundation for concentration (*samādhi*). It is something that supports concentration (*samādhi*). Relying on virtue (*sīla*), one proceeds to concentration (*samādhi*). Relying on concentration (*samādhi*), one proceeds to wisdom (*paññā*). However, as natural laws (*dhammatā*), the Lord Buddha points out that within virtue (*sīla*) lies what is beneficial to both oneself and society. That is, the Lord Buddha has pointed out virtue (*sīla*) as a path that causes harm neither to oneself nor to others.

Similarly, in that regard, some people think this is directed solely at society and is something done only for society. If taken in that way, that is a narrow view. One gets stuck there. There is no progress for oneself there. If looked at in that way, there is no need to observe precepts like this. If military forces and police are deployed properly, that happens automatically. What is present there is not self-discipline. What is there is a forced taming, for the benefit of society. But here, the Lord Buddha points out: *cetanā sīlaṃ, cetasikaṃ sīlaṃ*—this virtue (*sīla*) is something connected with volition (*cetanā*) and mental factors (*cetasika*). It is not merely sitting with folded hands and feet. That is what is visible to the world: wearing white clothes, staying to one side with folded hands and feet.

But there is something more than that here. This morning, this meritorious group established themselves in a deep determination called virtue (*sīla*), undertaking some form of virtue (*sīla*) belonging to them, whether the ten precepts or the eight precepts. Within that undertaking lies a great power. That is one thing. One must think: "Today I am standing upon this virtue (*sīla*). It is within these eight pillars, or ten pillars, that I conduct myself today." One must guard this virtue (*sīla*) with that thought. That becomes a strength for meditation (*bhāvanā*). Established in that, one's mind does not wander toward sinful deeds and the like outside of it. A special feature of that virtue (*sīla*) is that, with the support of the power of determination in virtue (*sīla*), past events do not barge into the mind. "Today my virtue (*sīla*) is pure. May this pure virtue (*sīla*) support my meditation (*bhāvanā*)! May it support the development of my meditation (*bhāvanā*)!" If one meditates upon that power of determination in virtue (*sīla*), one can make the meditation (*bhāvanā*) successful.

The Lord Buddha has pointed out this virtue (*sīla*) in a way that, through right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*), it supports one's own liberation. In day-to-day life, we utilize only a very small fraction of the mind's total power. The mind is scattered. In completing

day-to-day activities, we live with a scattered mind. Because of that, the true state and true power of the mind are not understood by oneself. Therefore, the Lord Buddha has pointed out that the mind should be established on a certain meditation object (*kammaṭṭhāna*), on a single object. That object too must be a wholesome object, not an unwholesome object. It must be an object that supports the growth of one's mind. In that manner, if it is the meditation on loving-kindness (*mettā-bhāvanā*), it is "May they be well and happy!" If it is regarding the Lord Buddha, it is terms like *Itipi so Bhagavā, Arahaṃ*, etc. When one contemplates and develops such a meditation object (*kammaṭṭhāna*), that scattered mind is removed and establishes itself on a single object. Through that, one can test the full power of the mind.

In that manner, at the levels of concentration (*samādhi*), some can also obtain physical comfort along with it. One with a scattered mind seeks happiness in external things. They seek happiness in shops. But for the person who has concentrated their mind, happiness is right there. To show the difference between what the world enjoys as these five cords of sensual pleasure (*pañca-kāma-sampatti*) and the bliss of concentration (*samādhi-sukha*), the Lord Buddha compares those five cords of sensual pleasure to a small child who, in the absence of his parents, plays with feces and urine, when compared to that concentration (*samādhi*). The Lord Buddha has pointed out such similes. Then, after the mind is calmed through concentration (*samādhi*) in that manner, if one next looks with diligence at one's life—whether at one's body, mind, or feelings (vedanā)—each of these begins to be understood in a more subtle manner than what is understood by the ordinary world.

Within that, the true nature (*dhammatā*), the impermanence (anicca) pointed out by the Lord Buddha, becomes clear. It is clearly understood that everything is of the nature of arising (jāti) and passing away. The reason it is not visible to the world is because it is covered by the shroud, the veil, of the perception of compactness (*ghana-saññā*). This entire world is covered by a certain shroud. That supports the growth of delusion (*moha*), which causes the existence (bhava) of the world, the saṃsāric existence (bhava). Delusion (*moha*) is within ignorance (*avijjā*). That is why the Lord Buddha declared "hindered by ignorance" (*avijjā-nīvaraṇa*). Ignorance (*avijjā*) is a screening veil. Covered by that, and bound by craving (taṇhā), we have been carried along in this Saṃsāra. The Lord Buddha has declared a joyful solemn utterance (*udāna*) in this stanza regarding Himself. Drawing from that, we must reflect to draw close to this liberation declared by the Lord Buddha. There are various liberations accepted by society. You get to hear of various kinds of liberations. All of those are temporary liberations. Through those liberations, sometimes one is bound even further to Saṃsāra. None of those is the true liberation.

This very liberation pointed out by the Lord Buddha is the true liberation. Taking it as a society, if someone is mature in that society, there is no distinction of educated or uneducated, rich or poor, in attaining this liberation. That too is not received for nothing; if one exerts effort for it, one can attain it. Without any strange expenditure, without any strange cost, it comes as the definite result of the effort one exerts.

Maintaining a Buddha-sāsana means living in accordance with that. The Buddha-sāsana is truly like a message going from heart to heart. Through association with noble friends (*kalyāṇa-mitta*), this is a journey made by supporting one another as those who walk on the path of Dhamma. It is through that connection that a Sāsana exists.

Thus, the Lord Buddha acted as a noble friend (*kalyāṇa-mitta*) to the Sangha, and the Sangha acted in the same manner toward the lay devotees and everyone else who walked on that path of Dhamma. That is how a Sāsana is maintained. All of them placed Nibbāna at the forefront. They gave pride of place to Nibbāna. For a Buddha arises to preach specifically this message. There is an ancient stanza:

Na hi sīlavataṃ hetu,

uppajjanti Tathāgatā,

Tīṇi padā sambuddhena pakāsitā.

There were those in society who observed vows as dogs or as cows. A Buddha does not arise in the world to preach such ordinary vows. Buddhas arise to declare a certain truth consisting of three terms, made of eight letters. That truth is this three-fold characteristic: impermanent (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and not-self (anattā). It is to reveal this that a Buddha arises in the world. Therefore, on this Vesak day, we must think: "It is for our sake that the Lord Buddha fulfilled the requisites of enlightenment (*bodhi-sambhāra*) over such a long time. It is to attain Buddhahood for my sake that He made this effort."

Thus, the Lord Buddha declared here the end of that long journey traveled for so long in Saṃsāra, saying, "I have completed the journey." Just as He completed the journey, He is free from sorrow. He is free from attraction and aversion. He declared regarding Himself: "I am liberated from all five aggregates (pañcakkhandha)." As the Lord Buddha declares, "let one be of a stilled mind" (*nibbāna-manaso siyā*), we must always try to live with a mind stilled (Nibbāna). Through all these things, we must see the Four Noble Truths. "This is suffering (dukkha)." "Underlying this suffering (dukkha), the cause is craving (taṇhā)." "If this craving (taṇhā) is appeased anywhere, that appeasement is true happiness." "The path to that is right view." Starting from right view, that course of action is virtue, concentration, and wisdom (*sīla, samādhi, paññā*), or the Noble Eightfold Path. One must understand it in that way. Through day-to-day life, one then walks on the path to Nibbāna. Whatever one's status or social standing may be, one can fearlessly say that one is walking on the path to Nibbāna. In that manner, understanding the true meaning of the Vesak day, one must try to live accordingly.

Today, on this valuable day, this meritorious group observed a certain virtue (*sīla*) to the best of their ability, and generated meditative thoughts. Likewise, through the Dhamma sermon at this time, you have listened for an hour to the Dhamma

discourse that supports the growth of those qualities of faith (*saddhā*), energy (*viriya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*) within your minds—which can be considered the essence of a Dhamma sermon that we frequently mention, which are developed within us for the sake of Nibbāna. May the multitude of wholesome volitions generated by this meritorious group through this, before the period of decline of this Buddha-sāsana comes to an end, serve as a supportive condition (*hetu-vāsanā*) for attaining that noble supramundane liberation by realizing the paths, fruits, and penetration (*magga-phala-paṭivedha*) of stream-entry (*sotāpatti*), once-returning (*sakadāgāmi*), non-returning (*anāgāmi*), and Arahantship!

Similarly, may the merit we have accumulated through preaching and listening to the Dhamma be shared by the deities and Brahmas protecting this Sāsana, as well as by all those who desire merit, including one's relatives, from the Avīci hell up to the Akaniṭṭha heaven! May they rejoice in it, and as quickly as possible, be freed from all saṃsāric suffering (dukkha), and attain peace in the noble, supreme Deathless Nibbāna, which is free from aging and death (jarāmaraṇa)! Having aspired thus, share the merits by reciting the stanzas.

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……..*"