Pahankanuwa Sermon #145

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

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(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.101)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

Pali Stanza:

"Attānam eva paṭhamaṃ,

patirūpe nivesaye;

Atha'ññam anusāseyya,

na kilisseyya paṇḍito."

From:

Dhammapada Verse 158 (Atta Vagga)

Dear Listeners,

We have all heard the wise saying, "Example is better than precept." The Buddha declared that where there is no practical example, the effectiveness of advice is diminished, and the one who offers advice is subject to blame and reproach. Today, we hope to present a verse and its background story that reveal this very fact.

During the time of the Buddha, there lived a monk named Upananda Sakyaputta. This means he was someone who had gone forth into the monkhood from the Sakya clan. This Venerable Upananda Sakyaputta was highly skilled in preaching the Dhamma. He often skillfully delivered sermons on the virtue of fewness of wishes (*appicchatā*)—meaning having few desires, which is a highly valuable quality. Hearing these sermons, other monks, who practiced rigorous vows such as the ascetic practices (*dhutaṅgas*), would offer their own robes to this monk, and he would gather and accumulate all those requisites.

One day, this Venerable Upananda went to a countryside region nearby. When he arrived at a certain monastery, the novice monks there, desiring to hear the Dhamma, invited him, saying, "Venerable sir, please spend this Rains Retreat (*vassa*) here." He had arrived just as the Rains Retreat was drawing near. So, this

monk asked, "What is received here as Rains Retreat robes (*vassāvāsika*) after the retreat?" They replied, "One robe is received." Then, this Venerable Upananda Sakyaputta, to show as if he intended to return there, left his pair of sandals behind and went to another monastery. There he asked, "What is received here after the Rains Retreat?" They said, "Two robes are received." He left his walking stick there. Having left it, he went to another monastery. There he asked, "How is it after the Rains Retreat? What is distributed to the Saṅgha as Rains Retreat requisites?" They said, "Three robes are received." There he left his water vessel.

When he went to a fourth monastery and inquired, he found that four robes—four cloths—were received there after the Rains Retreat. Saying "Very well," he spent the retreat there. After preaching the Dhamma beautifully to the monks and laypeople there, they offered many requisites to this monk. Not only that, this monk also sent messages to the three previous monasteries, saying, "I left those items there with the expectation of returning for the Rains Retreat. Therefore, those Rains Retreat robes rightfully belong to me," and had those requisites brought to him as well.

Having gathered them in this manner, Venerable Upananda was traveling with them loaded in a cart. On the way, he saw two young monks who were arguing, unable to divide two cloths and a valuable woolen blanket they had received. While they were arguing, saying, "You take the two robes, and I will take the blanket," they saw this Elder and said, "Oh, please settle this dispute of ours." Venerable Upananda said, "No, you should resolve it among yourselves." They replied, "No, no, it is difficult for us. Please solve this, Venerable Sir." He asked, "Then will you stand by my word? Will you accept what I say?" When they agreed, Venerable Upananda Sakyaputta gave the two cloths to the two monks, said, "This blanket belongs to me who preaches the Dhamma," took the blanket, and departed.

When those two monks reported this matter to the Buddha, the Blessed One used it as an occasion to deliver a sarcastic Dhamma sermon, censuring this monk Upananda, and uttered the very verse we have chosen as our theme:

Attānameva paṭhamaṃ patirūpe nivesaye

Ath'aññamanusāseyya na kilisseyya paṇḍito

"First, one should establish oneself in the proper practice. Only then should one instruct another. By doing so, the wise person does not become defiled by receiving the blame and censure of others." This is the meaning of this short verse. Thus, we can see that Venerable Upananda set a very bad example.

In the Dhamma stories of the Buddha's time, it is mostly mentioned that when the Rains Retreat drew near, the monks would obtain meditation subjects (*kammaṭṭhāna*) from the Buddha and journey to remote countryside areas in search of a suitable place, aiming for Arahantship. They would not even explicitly state they were looking for a place. If a faithful laywoman or layman offered them alms and asked, "Venerable sirs, where are you traveling?" they would simply say, "We are

traveling in search of a suitable and supportive (*sappāya*) place." Then those laypeople would invite them, saying, "Venerable sirs, please reside here for this Rains Retreat. We shall support you." In that manner, those monks, setting a highly exemplary standard, spent those three months practicing rigorous vows such as the ascetic practices, meditating diligently, attaining Arahantship, and ultimately receiving praise from the Buddha. That was generally the practice of those monks.

But this monk Upananda gave a completely different kind of example. He went from monastery to monastery, searching for a place where more requisites could be obtained. Having found the place where the most could be obtained, he spent the Rains Retreat there, and in an indirect, improper, and crooked way, secured requisites from the other places as well. To make matters worse, he also took the woolen blanket from the two novice monks and earned the censure of the Buddha. Here, the difference between these two practices is clearly seen.

The Buddha has delivered a valuable sermon where we can contemplate the difference between these two: *"Dhammadāyādā, bhikkhave, bhavatha, mā āmisadāyādā."* "Monks, be heirs to my Dhamma, not heirs to material things." "Material things" (*āmisa*) refers to objects such as robes and other requisites. The literal meaning of *āmisa* is "bait"—just like what is used to catch fish. Requisites and such things are like bait to a greedy and covetous person.

Furthermore, as stated in that verse, during the sermons of this Venerable Upananda, he spoke mostly about the fewness of wishes. Yet, while other monks were relinquishing requisites to safeguard their practice, he gathered them all. Thus, he was seen as a monk traveling with carts full of accumulated requisites. He was one who honored material things (*āmisagaru*). Therein lies the inheritance of material things (*āmisadāyāda*), received by one who fails to follow the true inheritance of the Buddha.

There is not just one incident, but a multitude of incidents recorded regarding this monk Upananda. The characters of good monks who lived during the Buddha's time are recorded, and the characters of bad monks are also recorded. Which of these two is followed more in this present era is somewhat doubtful. In any case, there are several other stories about this Venerable Upananda. They are mentioned here not as an example to be followed, but because they are relevant to this discourse. Another such incident is mentioned in the Vinaya Piṭaka. On one occasion, Venerable Upananda accepted King Pasenadi of Kosala's invitation to spend the Rains Retreat. He had accepted the invitation—or rather promised—to spend the retreat at a certain monastery. Having made the promise, on his way to that monastery, he visited two other monasteries and came to know that more robes could be obtained there. Subsequently, he spent the Rains Retreat at those two monasteries instead.

Learning of this, King Pasenadi of Kosala became highly displeased and criticized him: "Do the Sakyaputta ascetics perform such deeds? Breaking their promises! When the Blessed One has declared the danger of lying to such an extent, do they

commit such actions?" When the monks went and reported this matter to the Buddha, the Blessed One summoned Venerable Upananda, censured him as a "foolish man" (*mogha purisa*), and laid down a training rule (*sikkhāpada*).

Another such incident is recorded. Upon examination, it appears even somewhat comical. Because this monk, as mentioned before, was highly skilled in preaching the Dhamma, a certain merchant's son (*seṭṭhiputta*) once came, heard him preach, became deeply inspired, and made an invitation: "Venerable sir, people like us are capable of providing anything. Please let me know if you need anything regarding your four requisites." Then Venerable Upananda said, "Very well, if you wish to give, give me that upper robe of yours." He was asking for the very upper robe that the merchant's son was wearing. Then the merchant's son said, "We are respected people in society. Going about with only one garment is improper for us. Therefore, Venerable sir, please be patient. I will go home and send you not just something like this, but something even more valuable."

But there was no escaping Venerable Upananda. He asked for it a second time. The merchant's son again said, "Oh, it is very difficult for us to walk on the street like that." Still, the monk did not listen. For the third time, Venerable Upananda made the same request. When the merchant's son explained why he could not give it at that moment, the monk censured him, saying, "Then why do you make an invitation if you are not ready to give?"

Finally, unable to bear the harassment any longer, the merchant's son offered his upper robe to Venerable Upananda. As he was walking along the street, people asked, "Why are you wearing only one garment today?" So he told them the story. Subsequently, people began to criticize, saying, "The Sakyaputta ascetics have intense desires; there is no fewness of wishes among them when they perform such deeds." After this story spread, the Buddha summoned Venerable Upananda again, severely censured him as a "foolish man" (*mogha purisa*), and laid down a training rule. Thus, several such incidents regarding the four requisites are recorded in connection with this monk. That is the dark side.

Next, let us look at the other side, which contains valuable examples. Those are the ones we should truly contemplate and highly appreciate. Everyone knows the chief attendant of the Buddha, the Great Elder Ānanda. To put it briefly, he accepted the position of attendant from the Buddha only upon a certain condition: "I do not want any robes from the Blessed One. If you do not give me robes, then I will attend upon you." Anyone else would have attended upon him expecting such things. Venerable Ānanda was so exemplary that he rejected even those.

Moreover, the incident being referred to actually occurred after the Buddha's *parinibbāna*. After the *parinibbāna* of the Buddha and the conclusion of the cremation rites, Venerable Ānanda journeyed to the city of Kosambī to perform a certain Vinaya act—the details of which are not necessary here—accompanied by a group of monks. Having arrived, he was seated at the foot of a tree near King Udena's

park. At this time, King Udena was spending time in the park with the women of his harem. Those harem women heard that Venerable Ānanda had arrived. In those days, the female followers had a special affection for Venerable Ānanda—especially because he had helped establish the Bhikkhunī Sasana. Therefore, saying, "Our teacher has arrived," they obtained permission from the king to go and listen to the Dhamma.

After listening to the Dhamma from Venerable Ānanda, they were deeply inspired, and ultimately those harem women offered five hundred upper robes to Venerable Ānanda. When they returned to the king, King Udena asked these harem women, "How was it? Did you go to see Venerable Ānanda?" When they replied, "Yes, great king," he asked, "Did you offer anything after listening to the Dhamma?" They answered, "We offered five hundred upper robes." Hearing this, the king thought, "What is Venerable Ānanda going to do with such a pile of robes? Is he going to start a cloth trade? Is he going to open a drapery shop? Is he going to open a textile store?" With such critical thoughts, the king went to meet Venerable Ānanda.

The king asked, "Did our harem retinue come to see you, Venerable sir?" Having asked that, he then asked, "Did they offer anything?" Venerable Ānanda replied, "They offered five hundred robes." "Venerable sir, what will you do with those five hundred robes—with so many robes?" Then he said, "We will distribute these robes among those monks whose robes are worn out." Then the king asked, "Very well, but what will you do with those monks' old robes?" "We will use them as bedspreads."

"Then what will you do with the old bedspreads?" "We will use them as pillowcases." "What will you do with those old pillowcases?" "We will use them as floor rugs, spread on the ground." "Then what will you do with those old floor rugs?" "We will use them as foot-wipes." "What will you do with those old foot-wipes?" "We will use them as dust-rags to wipe away dust." "Then what will you do with those old—what we now call rags—those old pieces of cloth?" "We will knead them with clay—nowadays, people talk about plastering wattle-and-daub houses with cow dung. In those days, they would knead them with clay to plaster the walls." That means using them as plaster.

King Udena was highly pleased and thought, "These Sakyaputta ascetics do not let anything go to waste. They derive the proper use from everything; they have fewness of wishes and do not hoard." Being deeply inspired, he offered another five hundred robes to Venerable Ānanda. This is an exemplary story from the life of Ānanda.

Furthermore, even greater than that, the supreme example in this Sasana regarding virtues such as the fewness of wishes was set by the Great Arahant Mahākassapa. So immense was his mass of virtue that the Buddha praised Venerable Mahākassapa on many occasions. At times, the Buddha would invite him, saying, "Kassapa, preach the Dhamma to these monks. If others are to be admonished, it is either you or I. Only we are fit to do so"—to that wonderful extent. On one occasion, the Blessed One even exchanged his own robe with the Great Arahant Mahākassapa, and praised

Mahākassapa's virtues of contentment and fewness of wishes with words of high commendation.

This virtue of fewness of wishes (*appicchatā*) means having fewer desires. We know that monks are those who have abandoned lay pleasures, gone forth in search of Nibbāna——and depend on the four requisites provided by faithful lay devotees. Therefore, fewness of wishes, or having diminished desires, is presented as their social duty. Not only that, but this practice of fewness of wishes also supports them in safeguarding their practice, reducing desires, and eliminating *Taṇhā* (Craving). It was on these points that the Buddha especially highlighted and presented the Great Arahant Mahākassapa, showing the Saṅgha, "Look at these valuable qualities present in Mahākassapa."

On one occasion, the Buddha declared to the Saṅgha: "Mahākassapa is a person like this. He is content with whatever robe he receives, whether coarse or fine. This is the quality of contentment (*santuṭṭhi*)—being satisfied with what one gets. He does not go around choosing only good robes. The quality of being content with any coarse or fine robe received is present in Mahākassapa. Furthermore, Mahākassapa praises this virtue to others as well." This means he describes the virtue of fewness of wishes that is present in himself. This is a valuable quality. He saw its benefits. Therefore, he recommended it to others—what nowadays we call "recommending"—saying, "This is the virtue of it, and it has such benefits."

Not only that, but as the third point, it is shown that when he did not receive robes, he was not troubled by it. He did not become displeased because he did not receive them. Moreover, he did not resort to improper means to obtain robes, unlike the monk Upananda. He did not descend into improper practices—meaning wrong livelihood (*micchā-ājīva*)—when robes were lacking. Furthermore, even after receiving robes, he used them without greed or intense attachment, with the goal of Nibbāna——in view, reflecting wisely upon them. In this way, the Buddha on various occasions declared the mass of virtues of the Great Arahant Mahākassapa regarding robes.

Similarly, regarding the Great Arahant Mahākassapa, on another occasion, a point highly relevant to this era is shown. Two aspects of preaching the Dhamma are pointed out: pure Dhamma teaching and impure Dhamma teaching. The Buddha explains pure Dhamma teaching precisely by taking the Great Arahant Mahākassapa as the model. First, he speaks of impure Dhamma teaching. Impure Dhamma teaching is described thus: when a certain monk preaches to a group, he thinks, "May this audience, having listened well and become inspired, offer me various requisites in accordance with their inspiration." He preaches with such a selfish motive. That is designated as impure Dhamma teaching.

Pure Dhamma teaching is described thus: before preaching to the audience, a monk thinks, "This Dhamma of the Buddha is well-proclaimed (*svākkhāto*), visible here and now (*sandiṭṭhiko*), immediate (*akāliko*), inviting one to come and see

(*ehipassiko*), worthy of being applied (*opaneyyiko*), to be personally realized by the wise (*paccattaṃ veditabbo viññūhi*). It is a Dhamma characterized by this collection of qualities. It is a Dhamma that can be experienced in this very life, yielding results without delay, possessing the quality of 'come and see', capable of leading onward, and to be directly realized by the wise within themselves." He reflects on the valuable qualities of the Dhamma. Furthermore, he preaches with a mind of compassion, kindness, and sympathy towards them, wishing: "May these people listen to the Dhamma and understand it well! Having understood it, may they practice in accordance with it and realize this Dhamma!" That is pure Dhamma teaching.

Thus, what the monk Upananda did was impure Dhamma teaching, whereas what Venerable Mahākassapa and other such Elders did was pure Dhamma teaching. By this alone, that matter can be understood.

So, based on such incidents, we must understand that for the survival of this Sasana, the preaching of the Dhamma is indeed necessary. What is being conducted now is also a Dhamma sermon. Because the sound of this sermon was insufficient, we even had to wait a while to adjust this amplifier system. However, even though we do so due to contemporary needs, the true Dhamma sermon is the "silent sermon." What is meant by the "silent sermon"? Let us try to understand it. The "silent sermon" means the example of one's character. In short, the Great Arahant Mahākassapa did not go around proclaiming that he was virtuous. The Buddha simply pointed a finger in his direction and said, "Look over there." That is the silent sermon. Therefore, what this society needs now is the silent sermon. It is true that many people are drawn to vocal, sounding sermons. That is natural. But this sound sometimes becomes a hollow sound if it does not go hand in hand with practice. That is why the Buddha declared that one must first establish oneself in a certain practice before advising others. Otherwise, as he said, one becomes defiled—defiled by receiving censure.

Nowadays, there are various examples of this. Because some people do not conduct their lives according to the Dhamma they preach, they distort the Dhamma. This is happening frequently now. They turn the Dhamma upside down; they turn it inside out. Do not think it strange when I say this, but one hears some say, in a ridiculous manner, that the precept *"Surāmerayamajjapamādaṭṭhānā"* means "taking it in moderation is fine." Although we might have regarded such explanations as ridiculous in the past, this is an era where some people take such talk as the truth. In that manner, the Dhamma is being distorted in a strange way. The reason for this is that this valuable Dhamma, which is beyond mere reasoning (*atakkāvacara*), is subjected purely to logic, studied in isolation from one's life, and presented through academic analysis, without entering into the actual practice. Far more valuable than that is the silent sermon mentioned earlier. That is why the Buddha highlighted the character of Mahākassapa and presented him with special honor before the Saṅgha.

The Great Arahant Mahākassapa was an example for the people of the future—the term used in the Sasana for this is *pascimā janatā*, meaning the future generations,

the future generation of monks. Therefore, the Buddha not only constantly praised the Great Arahant Mahākassapa, but also, since Mahākassapa was not someone who traveled around preaching extensively but instead guarded his practice impeccably, the Buddha himself frequently invited him, saying, "Mahākassapa, preach the Dhamma to these monks." On some occasions, the Great Arahant Mahākassapa would say, "Blessed One, these monks are highly undisciplined," expressing his reluctance at first. He observed the practice to such a rigorous degree. Yet, he received such great honor from the Buddha because in the future, his exemplary character would serve as a silent sermon.

In the same way, we must reflect within our own small capacity. What the world needs, what society needs, is that very example of character—that silent sermon. There is a relevant Dhamma discussion on this which I have explained in detail on previous occasions. Venerable Ānanda asked the Buddha, "Blessed One, the scent of flowers, the scent of sandalwood, tagara, and kolitha, as well as the scent of roots and heartwood—all these travel only with the wind, not against the wind. Is there a fragrance that travels against the wind?" The Buddha replied, "What is that?" (and explained): "If in some village, market town, or city, there is a woman or a man who has gone for refuge to the Buddha, gone for refuge to the Dhamma, gone for refuge to the Saṅgha, and who refrains from taking life, from taking what is not given, and from other wrong actions violating the Five Precepts; and who spends their lay life generously and selflessly—the reputation of that virtuous person spreads among ascetics and brahmins, among the public, and among the devas." The verse says: *"Na pupphagandho paṭivātameti"*—the scent of flowers does not travel against the wind. But the Buddha declares there: *"Satañca gandho paṭivātameti"*—but the fragrance of the virtuous, the scent of their goodness, the fragrance of their virtue (*sīla*), blows both with and against the wind in all directions. This, too, refers to the story of exemplary character.

In the Buddha's Dhamma, both the dark side and the bright side are constantly shown. Often, the dark side is shown first. Even here, the impure Dhamma teaching was mentioned first. After depicting the dark side, the Buddha then shows the bright side. It is then highlighted clearly, like a white dot or mark on a black velvet background.

In that manner, the dark side was painted by the monk Upananda Sakyaputta. These events occurred at a certain time of year in the Sasana. When I say "at such a time," you might think of it in a different way. This is an important period in the lives of the Saṅgha. Today we conclude the four months of the rainy season (*vassāna*). The month starting from the Vap Full Moon Poya, which is considered the final month of the four Rains Retreat months, and ending with this Il Full Moon Poya, is known as the "Robe Month" (*cīvara māsa*). It is during this Robe Month that meritorious deeds are conducted in many places, and robes and other requisites are offered to the Saṅgha.

It is an incident from such a season and such a period that we have taken as our topic today. Therefore, it is timely in several aspects. In any case, we must contemplate that if we hope to grasp the true essence of the Buddha's Sasana, we must not honor material things; we must honor the Dhamma. Honoring material things (*āmisagaru*) means being drawn to that bait. What is the bait? Robes, almsfood, lodgings, and medicinal requisites. One has to swallow this bait to maintain this life. However, because it must be swallowed with great care, the Buddha instructed the monks to reflect upon the four requisites and use them with wise consideration. This is presented as a form of meditation.

When speaking of virtue (*sīla*), it is mentioned as restraint according to the Pātimokkha (*pātimokkha-saṃvara*), restraint of the sense faculties (*indriya-saṃvara*), purification of livelihood (*ājīva-pārisuddhi*), and virtue concerning the use of requisites (*paccayasannissita-sīla*). Virtue concerning requisites is the virtue related to those four requisites. Relevant to this is the reflection on the four requisites. That is, considering them wisely: "These requisites are of such a nature; they are made of the four great elements—earth (*paṭhavī*), water (*āpo*), fire (*tejo*), and air (*vāyo*). Whether it is a robe, almsfood, or anything else, everything is constructed from these four elements," thereby bringing the mind to equanimity. Furthermore, one considers "the repulsiveness that arises once they enter this decaying body, or how the robe becomes soiled by sweat and dirt once worn on the body."

Reflecting in this manner, one turns it into meditation. What is accomplished through this? It is called restraint through wisdom (*ñāṇa-saṃvara*). Restraint through wisdom means exercising restraint with the aid of wisdom. Now, the Niganṭhas (Jains), thinking "craving and desire will increase through these," went without wearing any clothes at all. That is falling into an extreme. The Buddha did not go to that extreme. You all know that a robe is cut into pieces and sewn together to reduce the material value of the cloth. Next, it is dyed with vegetable dye to discolor it. Through such means, the intention is to reduce desire and greed for them.

When we transition from lay life to monkhood, we bring along a massive bundle of desires and a bundle of *Taṇhā* (Craving). Therefore, what a monk should do is reduce these, not stimulate them further. One must make an effort to reduce them and diminish desires. That is what fewness of wishes (*appicchatā*) means. Contentment (*santuṭṭhitā*) is the quality that goes hand-in-hand with it—being satisfied with what is received. It is a highly valuable thing, which is why it is preached: "This Dhamma is for one with few wishes, not for one with many wishes." "This Dhamma is for the monk who is content with what he receives." Saying "the Dhamma is for such persons" is meant to highlight the value of that quality.

That example is received at the highest level from the character of Mahākassapa. We must take as our model both the conduct of the exemplary monks of the past and the conduct of the exemplary lay devotees. There were noble individuals like

Anāthapiṇḍika the merchant, Citta the householder, and many others in the past who lived valuable lives having realized the fruits of the path. Although the story of Anāthapiṇḍika the merchant is not directly related to this, it is worth recollecting at this moment.

"Anepidu Sītāṇan" means Anāthapiṇḍika—the one who feeds the helpless. He was an extraordinarily generous and meritorious merchant who helped not only the Saṅgha but also the destitute. He gave so much alms that, without pursuing or chasing after the debts owed to him, and even when the loans he had granted to various people were not repaid, he did not reduce his meritorious deeds of giving. Ultimately, it went so far that this merchant Anāthapiṇḍika, who used to provide the Saṅgha with various delicious and exquisite foods of various tastes, was on one occasion reduced to offering sour gruel and coarse, broken rice as alms. If that was what the merchant offered to the Saṅgha, we can imagine what the members of his household must have eaten. Even when reduced to such a state, those merchants gave foremost place to the Dhamma. They gave foremost place to practice. Therein lies reverence for the Dhamma (*dhammagāravatā*). Thus, such an exemplary generation of laypeople also existed in the past during the Buddha's time.

Similarly, there is no need to speak further about noble Elders like Mahākassapa, Ānanda, and Sāriputta. If one thinks of the future generations (*pascimā janatā*), the Buddha specifically declared, "Look at this Mahākassapa." Accordingly, we too must be vigilant. In this era, we get to hear sermons through the media to an extent never seen in any other era. We get to read books. Even this morning, a beautiful book was given to you lay devotees free of charge. To that extent, the Dhamma is abundant. Indeed, we say the Dhamma is priceless. When it is received for free, some might think it has no value. We distribute it for free because it is priceless Dhamma. However, some might mistakenly think, "They are distributing this because they have nothing else to do."

In the past, people traveled many leagues (*yojanas*) with great difficulty to meet the Buddha or the Great Arahants, listened to a word of Dhamma with their full attention, and deposited it in their minds like placing lion's fat in a golden casket. Instead of such Dhamma listening, today one can not only listen to sermons while sitting on a comfortable chair at home, but one can also watch sermons. The media has developed to such an extent that one can listen to and watch sermons by the country's well-known monks. Dhamma discussions are so accessible that one can ask any deep question from the comfort of one's home and receive answers; the Dhamma is that abundant.

Yet, a question arises: "If so, with so much Dhamma being heard, why is this country heading in this direction? Why have lawlessness and terrible crimes increasingly reached a level that is animalistic, in this media-abundant era where so much Dhamma is heard and read?" We must realize it is because of that very reason: silent sermons are scarce. Examples are scarce. What do we do about this? How do we

increase silent sermons? We must consider the answer the Buddha gave to Venerable Ānanda's question about the fragrance of flowers. If a virtuous person, in this crime-ridden world, keeps at least the first training rule—that is, the training rule of refraining from taking life, from killing living beings—properly, the Buddha compared and equated it to granting the gift of fearlessness (*abhayadāna*) to endless, boundless beings.

But nowadays, the gift of fearlessness (*abhayadāna*) is often thought of as performing some special act worthy of having one's picture published in a newspaper. You lay devotees know this. That is what is commonly regarded as *abhayadāna*. However, during the Buddha's time, if some lay devotee quietly, without shouting or making a fuss, made a determination and kept the Five Precepts properly, that was a silent sermon. That is like the fragrance of flowers. If in a certain house, let us say the master of the house or the wife, either by agreement or individually, trains themselves saying, "Let us guard this practice," the children too will guard that practice. The servants and maids will also guard that practice. Subsequently, the neighbors too will observe, thinking, "This house is somewhat unusual; there is less noise; they are a different kind of people," and they too will follow that Dhamma. That is how example spreads from house to house. The spreading of that scent of virtue, the fragrance of Dhamma, throughout a village in that manner is what we called the silent sermon. It happens naturally; one only has to make the effort to guard one's own practice. That is why the Buddha said, *"Attānameva paṭhamaṃ patirūpe nivesaye"*—first of all, one must establish oneself in the proper practice. Instruction then follows naturally. If an occasion arises, or if someone presents a problem, a sermon is delivered by that virtuous person in the form of offering a Dhamma-compliant solution.

The benefits they have personally experienced, the practices they keep, and the benefits of practicing those Five Precepts are spoken of in that very manner. That too is a sermon. It does not have to be a grand affair. Even without a formal seat, if one meets someone on the way under a tree and speaks to them when they bring a problem, that is a sermon—a silent sermon. That silent sermon expresses itself naturally according to the occasion, through one's practice.

Thus, we must understand that this Dhamma must indeed be understood through practice. The best illustration of this is how the Buddha, at the time of his *parinibbāna*, summarized the Dhamma he had preached for forty-five years from a practical standpoint, through a practical lens. In this day and age, if one asks scholars what the Dhamma preached by the Buddha is, you lay devotees might not be able to articulate it, even if you live according to the Dhamma. Scholars, however, would recite a series of texts in one breath. They would list the collection of texts known as the Tipiṭaka. They would say the Buddha preached such-and-such Dhamma, and if you listen further, they might even recite the Suttas.

But the Buddha summarized the Dhamma he had preached during his entire life—during those forty-five years from his Enlightenment onward—from a practical

standpoint. That is, he showed the Dhammas known through direct knowledge (*abhiññā*) as the Thirty-Seven Factors of Enlightenment (*sattissa-bodhipakkhiya-dhamma*). These consist of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*cattāro satipaṭṭhānā*), the Four Right Strivings (*cattāro sammappadhānā*), the Four Bases of Spiritual Power (*cattāro iddhipādā*), the Five Spiritual Faculties (*pañcindriyāni*), the Five Powers (*pañca balāni*), the Seven Factors of Enlightenment (*satta bojjhaṅgā*), and the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga*), which altogether add up to thirty-seven.

Those are what the Buddha referred to as "the Dhamma preached by me." If that is the Dhamma we have to preserve, if that is the Dhamma we have to preach and teach, then these are not things that can be learned from books alone. They must be put into practice and preserved. They have a side of danger/drawback (*ādīnava*) and a side of benefit (*āniśaṃsa*). One must also understand the danger of not fulfilling them. To some, even this is not clear.

The Buddha declared that many people do not even know the danger (*ādīnava*) of not keeping virtues such as *sīla*. If they knew it, would they turn to alcohol and drink continuously until they die of terrible illnesses? Surely not. The same applies to other things. They would not resort to killing animals or stealing just because they get a large income, if they only understood the danger of those actions. The Buddha pointed out the danger not only in this world. At the final moment of life, one has to suffer regret. Not only that, he explained the danger in the next world and declared, "This is not good."

Similarly, they do not know the benefits (*āniśaṃsa*) of guarding it. The benefits of guarding it can only be known by the person who guards that practice. When one refrains from alcohol, with what a vigilant mind and with what capability to act according to the situation does one live! When one refrains from sinful actions such as killing living beings and stealing, the peace that people search for through various external means is realized. The direct realization that this peace can be obtained, at the very least, by keeping the Five Precepts properly, belongs only to the one who guards them.

That refers to the silent sermon related to the Five Precepts. Similarly, on this Poya day, you lay devotees observed the Eight Precepts (*aṭṭhasīla*). When you guard a training rule properly, you feel the strength within it. With the support of that strength, you can succeed in your Dhamma study and meditation. In this way, the Buddha has pointed out the Ten Precepts (*dasasīla*), and beyond that, the novice virtue (*sāmaṇera-sīla*) and monk virtue (*bhikkhu-sīla*) for the Saṅgha. Turning towards that practice is the first step. Then, utilizing that support, the part concerning the concentration of the mind is presented next.

Next, with the support of that concentration, through insight (*vipassanā*), one understands this life and the world deeply, and puts an end to this *saṃsāra* (round of rebirths)—this is what the Buddha has shown. Therefore, one does not need

instructions merely to pass exams. It is to accomplish what one has been unable to do throughout this *saṃsāra*. That is, birth (*jāti*) occurs automatically. No matter how much one tries to stop it, as long as those forces of karma (*kamma-vegas*) exist, one is born somewhere. Even after dying, one is born again and again. That is the word of the Buddha.

Therefore, the most difficult task we face is stopping this birth—this *Jāti* (Birth). It is for this that the Buddha has shown this Dhamma of Nibbāna—. Next, as you lay devotees have heard, the one who first attains the path and fruit known as Stream-entry (*Sotāpanna*) is born at most seven more times, traversing only seven more *Bhava* (Becoming). At that level, the round of rebirths is broken. The Once-returner (*Sakadāgāmī*) returns to the human world only once more. The Non-returner (*Anāgāmī*) goes to the Brahma world and puts an end to *Dukkha* (Suffering) in the Pure Abodes (*Suddhāvāsa*). The Arahant puts an end to *dukkha* right here and does not undergo *jāti* again.

Thus, escaping from *saṃsāra* is the greatest problem in the world. All other problems are minor compared to it. For an infinite time in *saṃsāra*, we have been solving those small, emerging problems of ours. None of them provided an eternal solution. But the Buddha placed this single question before the world. That is why the great philosophers and teachers of that time were waiting for the appearance of a Buddha. It is called the "announcement of a Buddha" (*Buddha-kolāhala*). Before a Buddha appears, sages who could see the future uttered prophecies, saying, "In such an era, such a person will be born." That is what is meant by *Buddha-kolāhala*—not in the sense of a riot or uproar as the word is used today. Everyone was talking, saying, "There is a rumor that someone is going to be born, a Buddha is going to be born. Where? Where?" and they were inquiring in this manner.

Thus, everyone was hoping for that very escape from *saṃsāra*, and they took various measures according to their respective philosophies. However, at some point, they realized, "This is not the true path." It is mentioned in our Dhamma stories that around the time of the Buddha, there was a group called wanderers (*paribbājakas*). They went from place to place. They would go to one teacher; it was not there. They would go to the next teacher; it was not there either. In this manner, they went about searching. Searching in this way, when a Buddha finally appeared, they went in search of him. This present era is somewhat like that era. Countless people go from place to place like wanderers. Why? Because that silent sermon mentioned earlier is absent. Due to the lack of that silent sermon, after a while, a hollow sound is heard from those places. Therefore, wise people who go about searching for the Dhamma seek instructions that will help them lean towards the path of practice (*paṭipadā*).

There is a carpenter's workshop, and all the carpentry tools are there. But if there is no carpenter, no teacher to explain, no master carpenter, then that workshop is just an empty building. Something similar is happening now regarding the Dhamma. As the number of people who put the Thirty-Seven Factors of Enlightenment into

practice and live within them decreases, the Dhamma on one hand becomes difficult to comprehend. On the other hand, it is distorted by excessive intellectualism. That is even more dangerous—like a medicine going bad. That is far more dangerous. It leads to wrong view (*micchā-diṭṭhi*). One gets trapped in half-truths. A half-truth is something that appears to be the truth at first glance. However, a half-truth is even more dangerous than an outright lie. A lie is easily exposed, but a half-truth is far more dangerous. People go and get trapped in it. Those logicians with half-baked wisdom go and get trapped in them. Having got trapped, they struggle for years and years, and only when no result is achieved, they sigh in frustration and leave. Such things happen because they do not look at the Dhamma through the lens through which it should be viewed.

At his final moments, the Buddha analyzed the Dhamma from a practical standpoint: "This is the Dhamma I have preached." He has preached a Dhamma consisting of the foundations of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*), right strivings (*sammappadhāna*), and so forth, which can be put into action and personally realized, and which is visible here and now (*sandiṭṭhika*), immediate (*akālika*), and inviting one to come and see (*ehipassika*). Otherwise, this is not an academic subject. It is not something to be understood through external research. What exists as the Buddha's Dhamma are the clues and primary instructions obtained through the Noble Quest (*ariya-pariyesanā*) conducted by the Buddha at the highest level: "Abandon these things; act according to these things." This is the very reason why the Buddha, on certain occasions, did not value psychic powers (*iddhi*).

It is to the miracle of psychic power (*iddhipāṭihāriya*) that the world is often drawn. If it is heard that someone is flying through the air, all the wealthy people of this country will run there, taking their vehicles. They will line up their vehicles if they hear that someone can fly even six inches off the ground. Those are the people who are drawn to the miracle of psychic power. There is also the miracle of mind-reading (*ādesanā-pāṭihāriya*)—meaning being able to read others' minds. That too is highly regarded. On one occasion, a certain householder named Kevaṭṭha (Sermon literally says:— a certain monk named Kevaṭṭha) invited the Buddha to perform these miracles to elevate and strengthen our Sasana. The Buddha said, "Others also show the miracle of psychic power. The miracle of mind-reading is also known by some who have developed their minds and jhānas. But what is regarded as supreme in my Sasana is the miracle of instruction (*anusāsanī-pāṭihāriya*)." What is that? The miracle of instruction is making a challenge to put things into action.

> *"Evaṃ vitakketha, mā evaṃ vitakkayittha;*
>
> *evaṃ manasikarotha, mā evaṃ manāsattha;*
>
> *idaṃ pajahatha, idaṃ upasampajja viharatha."*

The miracle of instruction is expressed through these few phrases: "Think in this way, do not think in that way. Reflect in this way, do not reflect in that way. Abandon this; enter and dwell in that." That is all there is in the miracle of instruction.

Thus, when followers of other religions, and nowadays even many who are Buddhists only by name, hear of a miracle of psychic power in this country or in another country—whether it is flying through the air as mentioned, materializing objects, or some other display of psychic power—our Buddhists also flock to them. The Buddha did not highly regard these things. Only in unavoidable situations, to break the pride of those who came with psychic powers, did the Buddha utilize psychic powers; he did not use psychic powers simply to grant Dhamma realization. In unavoidable cases, he countered those who came with psychic powers using psychic powers, employing his spiritual strength, but he did not use psychic powers beyond that.

If we are to obtain knowledge of the instructions that the Buddha regarded as supreme and bring about that miracle within ourselves, we must perform that very task. "Think in this way" refers to right thoughts, good thoughts—right intention (*sammā-saṅkappa*). "Maintain such thoughts. Do not think bad thoughts." We must do just that. Next, "Reflect in this and that way." That is, as impermanent (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), not-self (*anattā*), repulsive (*asubha*), and so forth. There are specific methods of reflection shown by the Buddha in accordance with the Dhamma, presented as perceptions (*saññā*). In short, it is called *Yoniso manasikāra* (Wise attention). It is about maintaining that reflection. Therefore, we must control our thoughts. We must control our reflection—the application of the mind.

Next is abandoning. There is also a portion to be abandoned. You lay devotees can easily understand the things to be abandoned—abstaining from the five sins. That is what is called *veramaṇī* (abstinence). The things the world is generally inclined towards are killing living beings, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and drinking alcohol. Do not do those. Instead, guard these virtues of *sīla*. That is the other side of it. Nowadays, some scholars say that the Buddha tells us to abstain, abstain (*veramaṇī, veramaṇī*) from everything, as if telling us to sit with our hands and feet folded. "What is the meaning of this?" they ask. But they do not consider the other side of it. Along with such abstaining, the Buddha also shows a wealth of attitudes to be developed within oneself. It is not just about refraining from killing living beings; the following passage further states:

"Nihitadaṇḍo nihitasattho, lajjī dayāpanno, sabbapāṇabhūtahitānukampī viharati."

"He dwells having laid aside the rod, having laid aside the weapon; he is conscientious, merciful, and dwells compassionate and kind to all living beings."

Nihitadaṇḍo—having laid aside the rod and staff, having laid aside weapons, putting them aside. *Lajjī*—being conscientious, feeling shame regarding the killing of living beings. Feeling shame toward unwholesome deeds and sins is a strength. It is shown

as a divine quality (*deva-dhamma*). *Dayāpanno*—being merciful, having kindness toward living beings. *Sabbapāṇabhūta-hitānukampī*—dwelling with compassion and kindness toward all living beings. That is what should be done.

One should not distress the mind by thinking only of what should not be done. Every training rule has another side. You can contemplate that for yourselves. When refraining from stealing, as a benefit of it, they live honestly. That is how one must think about every other training rule. To the one who refrains from alcohol, because of that very abstinence, the opportunity arises to spend their life without confusion, with good memory and mindfulness (*satimant*).

Every one of them has a side of benefit (*āniśaṃsa*). On one hand, we must comprehend the danger (*ādīnava*). Next, having understood that danger and abstained from these things, we must walk on that path of Dhamma. That is what is meant by turning toward the practice (*paṭipadā*). Where practice is lacking, as stated in the verse, one becomes defiled through blame and censure, just like the monk Upananda.

Furthermore, if that person tries to distort the Dhamma to escape censure, that becomes an even more dangerous thing. On a day like today, what we are saying may in various ways be timely and relevant. You lay devotees must consider this with wisdom. In any case, it is indeed visible that this Sasana is increasingly sliding into decline, from both the lay and ordained sides. When we contemplate according to this method of evaluation, it does not become a problem or a puzzle to us.

We must recollect the great examples shown by the Buddha. On the ordained side, the characters of noble Elders such as Mahākassapa, Ānanda, and Sāriputta are mentioned, and on the lay side, extraordinary characters such as Anāthapiṇḍika, Citta the householder, and Hatthaka of Alavi are recorded in those Dhamma stories. Indeed, the young people of this era should all try to read about such noble characters—the characters of the disciples (*sāvaka*). Various clues that offer the courage needed to build a life are often present in those biographies. As we mentioned earlier, when reading the stories of those Elders (*theras* and *therīs*), the dark side is often presented first: "Oh! We lived such low lives as murderers, thieves, and courtesans. But at some point, a transformation of life occurred." Such examples help one understand both the dark side and the bright side. That is why it is said: *"Kaṇhaṃ dhammaṃ vippahāya, sukkaṃ bhāvetha paṇḍito."* "Having abandoned dark qualities, the wise person should develop bright qualities." Removing dark qualities and developing bright qualities is the duty of the wise.

Since our time is drawing to a close, you lay devotees can understand these briefly mentioned points in detail as a timely necessity. Make an effort to develop that silent sermon mentioned earlier. Even if you do not shout it out to the world, by doing so, a developing environment will be created in this society. Regarding the decline of the Sasana, we should not just push it into inconstancy by saying, "Everything is impermanent (*anicca*)." We should not push what is falling into the abyss further

into the abyss. Our ultimate purpose should be to help at least one more human being to walk this Dhamma path and realize Nibbāna—. Likewise, it is to preserve the Sasana for at least one more day.

Today, by observing this valuable virtue (*sīla*) and listening to this Dhamma sermon, valuable thoughts and aspirations must have arisen within you lay devotees, relevant to developing the spiritual faculties (*indriya-dhamma*) we often mention: faith (*saddhā*), energy (*viriya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). Utilizing these as support, and securing the association of noble friends (*kalyāṇa-mitta*), may you practice with greater effort and succeed in your Dhamma study and meditation. May you gain the strength and capability to escape the suffering of *saṃsāra* through the supreme, deathless Nibbāna——by penetrating the paths and fruits of Stream-entry (*Sotāpanna*), Non-returning (*Anāgāmī*), and Arahantship in this very life! Furthermore, may whatever relatives of yours from the Avīci hell up to the Akaniṭṭha heaven, and whoever else wishes to rejoice in this merit of Dhamma preaching and Dhamma listening, by so rejoicing, find peace in the supreme, deathless Nibbāna through a Bodhi of their aspiration! With this aspiration in mind, please recite these verses:

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……..*"