## Pahankanuwa Sermon #147

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

**Author: Ven. Katukurunde Nanananda Thero**

(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.87)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

**Pali Stanza:**

*"Na santi puttā tāṇāya,*

*na pitā nāpi bandhavā;*

*Antakenādhipannassa,*

*natthi ñātīsu tāṇatā."*

**From:**

Dhammapada Verse 288 (Magga Vagga)

Dear Listeners,

The Supreme Buddha points out that the reason we have run in this cycle of Saṃsāra for such a long, endless time is due to four perverted views. The Blessed One declared that in order to eliminate these four perverted views—namely, taking what is *Anicca* (Impermanent) as permanent, taking what is *Dukkha* (Suffering) as pleasurable, taking what is *Anattā* (Not-self) as self, and taking what is foul (*asubha*) as beautiful (*subha*)—one must cultivate the perception of impermanence, the perception of suffering, the perception of non-self, and the perception of foulness. The story related to the verse we have chosen as our theme today illustrates how these four perceptions assist in attaining Nibbāna.

A child was born to a poor family of cemetery keepers in the city of Rājagaha. That child was named Sopāka. When the child was just four months old, his father passed away. He was brought up by his uncle. When he was about seven years old, one day, this uncle grew furious because Sopāka had a quarrel with his own son. He took Sopāka to the cemetery of corpses (the charnel ground), bound his hands with a rope, tied a corpse to that same rope, and left him in the cemetery to be eaten by jackals. This child possessed the spiritual merit to attain Arahantship in that very life. It is mentioned in the Dhamma that it is a natural law (*dhammatā*) that a person with

such spiritual merit cannot be killed by anyone before attaining Arahantship. Therefore, although various jackals and wild beasts came, they could not even get close to him. During the night, at midnight, this child Sopāka wailed, crying out: "Is there no kinsman of mine? Is there no one to save me, who am bound and left in this cemetery?" Due to that very spiritual merit and because he possessed the supportive conditions to attain Arahantship, the Great Compassionate Buddha perceived this child. Then, the Supreme Buddha uttered a certain verse:

"Sopāka, come here, do not be afraid. Just like releasing the moon caught by Rāhu, I will save you. Look towards the Tathāgata."

As soon as that verse was uttered, through the Buddha-power itself, Sopāka appeared right by the *gandhakuṭi* (perfumed chamber) where the Supreme Buddha resided. Moreover, having attained the fruit of Stream-entry (*sotāpatti-phala*), he stood before the Blessed One. Sopāka's mother, as her child did not return home, asked the uncle, who said nothing. She searched everywhere and thought: "Buddhas know all times—past, present, and future. Perhaps the Blessed One knows where my son is." So she went in search of Him. When she approached the Buddha, the Blessed One made a psychic determination (*iddhi-adhiṭṭhāna*) so that Sopāka could not be seen. When she asked, "My child is lost. I cannot find where he is, does the Blessed One know?" the Supreme Buddha uttered the thematic verse:

"*Na santi puttā tāṇāya, na pitā na pi bandhavā,*

*Antakenādhipannassa, natthi ñātīsu tāṇatā*."

"Sons are no protection, nor is a father, nor are kinsmen. For one seized by the Ender (Death), there is no protection among kinsmen." The meaning of this verse is that when *Antaka*—meaning Māra, or Death—presents himself, no protection can be obtained from relatives. Along with this verse, the Supreme Buddha delivered a certain Dhamma sermon. Having heard it, Sopāka's mother attained the fruit of Stream-entry, and the child Sopāka attained Arahantship.

Next, as soon as the Supreme Buddha withdrew the psychic power, the mother saw that her son was there. She learned from the Buddha that he was now an Arahant, and she gave permission for him to be ordained. Thus, the child Sopāka became a novice monk. One day, watching the Supreme Buddha doing walking meditation in the open air under the shade of the *gandhakuṭi*, the novice monk Sopāka paid homage to the Buddha, asked for permission, and began to perform walking meditation in the exact same manner.

Seeing this cleverness, the Supreme Buddha asked him ten questions. He asked ten Dhamma-related questions, starting with "What is one?" and "What is two?" Whatever answer the Buddha expected, this novice monk gave exactly that answer. Highly pleased with this, the Buddha considered him worthy of higher ordination (*upasampadā*) solely by virtue of his answering these questions, and granted him higher ordination. This is a special event. Even today in the history of the Sāsana, a

topic that those newly ordained get to read is this series of questions and answers known as the *Kumāra Pañha* (The Novice's Questions). This is also known as a special higher ordination called *Pañhavākaraṇūpasampadā* (Higher ordination by answering questions). The history of the Sāsana records this unique higher ordination granted by the Supreme Buddha to the novice monk Sopāka. The past causes and the story are shown as to how the child Sopāka possessed such spiritual merit that he was able to attain Arahantship and receive higher ordination from the Buddha at the tender age of seven.

Ninety-four aeons (*kappas*) ago, during the time when the Buddha named Siddhārtha lived in the world, this Sopāka was born as a Brahmin. He learned the arts and sciences belonging to the Brahmins, grew disillusioned with the household life, ordained as an ascetic, and lived on a certain mountain. The Buddha Siddhārtha saw that this ascetic's life would soon come to an end, and He journeyed to that place. The ascetic was cleaning the mountain terrace. Developing great faith and joy, this ascetic prepared and offered a seat made entirely of flowers to the Buddha. Seated on that flower-seat, the Buddha delivered a Dhamma sermon on impermanence, starting with "*aniccā vata saṅkhārā*" (Impermanent indeed are *Saṅkhāra* (Preparations). Having heard this, that Brahmin abandoned the perception of permanence customary to Brahmins and directed his mind toward the perception of impermanence (*Anicca*). It is mentioned that shortly after, he passed away, was reborn in the heavenly world, and it was by the support of that very power of meditation cultivated since then that he attained Arahantship so rapidly in this present life.

So, this is the outline or skeleton of the story of Sopāka. Now let us try to extract the narrative essence and the Dhamma essence contained within this. We see that the life of the child Sopāka began in a very helpless and tragic manner. He was born into such a poor family of cemetery keepers. Furthermore, losing his father at a young age, he seemed to have the misfortune of receiving treatment from his uncle that was akin to the harsh treatment of a stepmother.

He also had to face a cruel form of punishment. Although that side of his life was harsh, those experiences, as well as the environment of his birth, must have assisted the child Sopāka on the path to Nibbāna. We often recall a few common sayings of the modern era, though they are not explicitly found in the Dhamma. One is "a blessing in disguise." Another saying familiar to us Sinhalese is "the suffering that comes is sweet as honey." Then there is also "every dark cloud has a silver lining." Sometimes, within the experiences and events of our lives that might tempt us even towards suicide, great opportunities arise to cultivate the perception of impermanence (*Anicca*), the perception of suffering (*Dukkha*), the perception of non-self (*Anattā*), and the perception of foulness (*asubha*), which can aid even in attaining Nibbāna. Thinking in this way, the child Sopāka's birth in a cemetery environment could have been a blessing in disguise.

In such an environment, impermanence is constantly brought to mind. So too is the perception of foulness. One gets to see people coming there, crying and wailing. That brings the perception of suffering (*Dukkha*). Right there, the perception of non-self (*Anattā*) also exists. Especially, after his uncle bound him to a corpse, these bitter experiences must have thoroughly brought home the perception of non-self (*Anattā*) and the perception of suffering (*Dukkha*). We can assume that once his mind was prepared through these experiences, the moment he heard something related to the Dhamma from the Supreme Buddha, the child Sopāka was able to realize its true fruit, the fruit of Nibbāna. From this, we must reflect that in our lives too, various calamities and misfortunes come to us and those we associate with. We must turn them into blessings in disguise. No matter how many dark clouds arrive, we must try to enrich our lives and enrich ourselves with the Dhamma, at least by looking at their silver linings.

Instead of saying "the suffering that comes is sweet as honey," we should strive to direct our minds toward those aforementioned perceptions of impermanence (*Anicca*), suffering (*Dukkha*), non-self (*Anattā*), and foulness, to the point where we can say "the suffering that comes is the taste of Nibbāna." Let us also look at the life of this novice monk Sopāka; adults have a great deal to learn from young children. It is a habit of young children to imitate adults. You know that children at home put on their mother's or father's big shoes and walk back and forth, saying, "This is how our mother and father walk." In the same way, the novice monk Sopāka, watching the Supreme Buddha doing walking meditation, began to imitate Him and do walking meditation in the exact same clever and fitting manner. In keeping with this, the Supreme Buddha, like a compassionate father asking a child if he knows right from wrong or if he knows how to count to ten, asked him ten questions.

Due to time constraints, these can only be mentioned briefly. The novice monk Sopāka gave answers that contained very deep matters. Right away, first of all, the Buddha asked:

"What is one?" (*eka nāma kiṃ?*) As soon as he was asked "What is one?", this novice monk Sopāka said: "All beings subsist on food (*sabbe sattā āhāraṭṭhitikā*)." That is a universally applicable, common fact. The answer that everyone lives on food is what he gave.

When asked, "What is two?", he said, "*Nāmarūpa*" (Name-and-Form). Those of you who practice meditation know that in insight meditation (*vipassanā*), everything that becomes an object of the mind, the entire world, is categorized into these two divisions as *Nāmarūpa* (Name-and-Form). The profound Buddhist philosophy that only Name and Form exist here is what was taken as the two: Name and Form.

"What is three?" Then he said, "The three *Vedanā* (Feeling)." What are the three *Vedanā*? Painful (*Dukkha*), pleasant (*sukha*), and neutral (*adukkham-asukha*). Painful, pleasant, and neither-painful-nor-pleasant. Neither-painful-nor-pleasant refers to neutral *Vedanā*. When observed in terms of feelings, only these three are

found in the world of *Vedanā*. There is painful *Vedanā*, there is pleasant *Vedanā*, and in between these two is the neutral, neither-painful-nor-pleasant *Vedanā*.

When asked, "What is four?", he said, "The Four Noble Truths." That is: *Dukkha* (Suffering), *Samudaya* (its origin—the cause of suffering), *Nirodha* (its cessation—the ending of suffering), and then *Magga* (the path—the Noble Eightfold Path). Suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering which is Nibbāna, and the path to it. That is the four.

"What is five?" To this, he said, "The five aggregates of *Upādāna* (Grasping)." As you well know, instead of the conventional designation of a "person," the Supreme Buddha explained this "I" and "mine"—this person—as five aggregates: the aggregate of form (*rūpa-kkhandha*), a heap of form; the aggregate of *Vedanā* (Feeling), a heap of feelings; the aggregate of perception (*saññā-kkhandha*), a heap of perceptions; the aggregate of *Saṅkhāra* (Preparations), a heap of Preparations; and the aggregate of *Viññāṇa* (Consciousness), a heap of consciousness. This is what is meant by the five aggregates of grasping. Wherever these five heaps are grasped, there arises the perception of an "I," a "person," or a "self." It is a perverted view, yet people take it to be so. That, then, is the five aggregates of grasping. It can be called the world of the aggregates. There too, a totality is presented, viewed from different aspects in each of the answers to these questions.

When asked, "What is six?", he replied, "The six internal sense bases (*ādhātmika āyatana*)." The six internal sense bases are the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind, which exist within oneself. It is through these that we cognize a world. This is called the world of the sixfold sense base (*saḷāyatana*). In short, a "world" is produced by these: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. That is what Ven. Sopāka explained as the six, exactly as expected by the Supreme Buddha.

When asked, "What is seven?", he said, "The seven factors of awakening (*satta bojjhaṅgā*)." Seven: mindfulness (*sati*), investigation of phenomena (*dhamma-vicaya*), energy (*viriya*), rapture (*pīti*), tranquility (*passaddhi*), concentration (*samādhi*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). The seven factors of awakening are a sequence of seven qualities that assist in the realization of awakening—which means Arahantship or Buddhahood.

"What is eight?" To this, he said, "The Noble Eightfold Path." This refers to right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*), right intention (*sammā-saṅkappa*), right speech (*sammā-vācā*), right action (*sammā-kammanta*), right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*), right effort (*sammā-vāyāma*), right mindfulness (*sammā-sati*), and right concentration (*sammā-samādhi*)—a practice which when rendered in Sinhala can be expressed as right seeing, right thinking, right speech, right action, right living, right exerting, right remembering, and right unifying of the mind. The entire Noble Eightfold Path was matched with the number eight.

When asked, "What is nine?", he pointed to the nine abodes of beings (*nava sattāvāsā*)—the nine states of *Bhava* (Becoming) such as human, heavenly, Brahma, etc. Since it is a somewhat deep matter, we will not discuss it in length. It is presented as nine.

The answer given to the question "What is ten?" was that when Right Knowledge (*sammā-ñāṇa*) and Right Liberation (*sammā-vimutti*) are added to the eight factors of the Noble Eightfold Path, one becomes an Arahant. Through this, he also spontaneously revealed that he himself had attained Arahantship. At the end of the Noble Eightfold Path is Right Knowledge, which is the knowledge of the fruit of Arahantship (*arahattaphala-ñāṇa*) attained through that path. Next, likewise, is liberation—Right Liberation. When considered together with those, they make ten. Thus, the ten were presented. So, the novice monk Sopāka knew how to count to ten. Therefore, the Supreme Buddha authorized his higher ordination.

We have many valuable things to learn from that young child there. In that manner, he answered the points of the Dhamma very cleverly and fearlessly, evoking the Buddha's appreciation. That Dhamma story unfolds in this way. Next, let us direct our minds to the meaning conveyed in this verse. The verse mentions that parents generally consider their children as their protection. For those children, the father, or else kinsmen, stand as their protection. Or, kinsmen help the children. The child Sopāka also cried out and wailed: "Is there no one for me?"

But the Supreme Buddha declared that neither sons, nor a father, nor kinsmen, nor anyone can save one when death presents itself. There is no protection. What, then, is protection? The verse says: *natthi ñātīsu tāṇatā*. *Tāṇa* means protection. The Supreme Buddha points out that the only protection available to beings caught in this Saṃsāra is Nibbāna. It is for this reason that among the many terms used to designate Nibbāna, the word *tāṇa* is also used. A multitude of words such as *tāṇaṃ* (protection), *leṇaṃ* (cave/shelter), *saraṇaṃ* (refuge), *parāyanaṃ* (final resort), and *amataṃ* (the deathless) are used to refer to Nibbāna. *Tāṇa* means protection, *leṇa* means shelter, *saraṇa* means refuge. *Amataṃ* means the deathless.

In the past, there was an opinion among Brahmins that the gods never die because they consume a drink called *amṛta* (ambrosia/nectar). However, the Supreme Buddha also designated Nibbāna by the name *Amata*—the Deathless. How does this become the Deathless? It is a somewhat deep matter. The Supreme Buddha points out that if we are to escape from Māra (Death), we must first recognize Māra. Who is this Māra? There is a place where Māra is defined. A monk named Rādha once came and asked the Supreme Buddha: "It is said, 'Māra, Māra.' Venerable Sir, to what extent is there a Māra, or who is Māra?" Then the Supreme Buddha replied: "Rādha, where there is form (*rūpa*), there is Māra, or a slayer, or one who dies." He took each aggregate one by one. The aggregate of form: "Where there is form, there is Māra, or a slayer, or one who dies. Therefore, Rādha, see form itself as Māra. Regard form as Māra. See form as a disease, as a tumor, as a dart, as a calamity, as an affliction. That

seeing is right seeing," the Blessed One declared. In the same way regarding *Vedanā* (Feeling): *Vedanā* is Māra. Perception is Māra. *Saṅkhāra* (Preparations) is Māra. *Viññāṇa* (Consciousness) is Māra. Preaching in this manner, He finally designated each one of these as Māra. Thus, seeing the five aggregates as Māra, escaping from them, and releasing the mind from them—in short, not grasping them through *Taṇhā* (Craving) and *Upādāna* (Grasping)—is shown as liberation, shown as the state of the Deathless (*amata*).

Then Ven. Rādha asked: "But, Blessed One, what is the purpose of this right view? What is the purpose of right seeing?" Then the Supreme Buddha declared: "The benefit of right seeing is *nibbidā*—disillusionment with the cycle of existence (Saṃsāra)." Then he asked, "What is the purpose of disillusionment?" "Disillusionment is needed because of the necessity to develop dispassion (non-attachment) toward the five aggregates." He asked, "What is the purpose of dispassion?" Dispassion means *virāga*. "Dispassion is developed for the purpose of liberation—the freeing of the mind, the freeing of the mind from these five aggregates of *Upādāna* (Grasping)."

Then he asked, "What is the purpose of liberation?" "Liberation is for the sake of Nibbāna—that is, for the sake of extinguishment." Then he asked, "What is the purpose of Nibbāna?" At that point, the Supreme Buddha declared: "Rādha, you have gone beyond the limit of questioning. Nibbāna is the final goal. There is nothing beyond it."

So, what we see from this is that each one of these—form, *Vedanā* (Feeling), and so forth—which we refer to as "I" and "mine," is indeed Māra. The oppression arising from this is not realized by us in the ordinary world. In our day-to-day lives, we hold onto these with attachment, unaware that they are Māra.

If we think a little about how a day is spent on this thing called "form" (the physical body): Let us consider the hardships we receive all day long because of this form. Even before the sun rises on the earth, must we not lift this form from where it fell the previous day, wash it, bathe it, feed it, give it drink, dress it, apply perfume and powder, and drag it to the place where we earn our livelihood? Next, we must provide it with lodging and shelter. When it falls ill, we must provide it with medicine. In this way, there is a mountain of trouble because of this form. There is Māra. Even before actual death, this form troubles us to the point of killing us.

So, at the moment of death, the very mental agony created by the unwillingness to leave this cage is what is called the fear of death. But if someone, while still alive, abandons the attachment they have to this form, then when Māra drags them away, they can let go without fear. Letting go is what the Supreme Buddha points to as the eradication of *Taṇhā* (Craving). Finally, to Ven. Rādha too, the Supreme Buddha declared: "Through this right seeing, walk on the path to Nibbāna, which is the destruction of *Taṇhā*." He invited Rādha to enter upon that path. So, this is the path: training one's thinking in such a way that disillusionment arises regarding each and

every aggregate. Recognizing their troublesome nature and that they are Māra, some might even feel afraid, thinking, "Then nothing will be left for us after we let go of all these." But what is the problem? The problem is the fear of death.

The Supreme Buddha points out: "I teach that this entire world is only *Dukkha* (Suffering)." In reality, there is no such being or person. There is no self. But in the world, there exists this fear of death. Due to the inability to leave this cage of a body, and due to the attachment to it, a great tremor occurs at the moment of death. So, the Supreme Buddha points out that, in truth, one must abandon attachment to each and every aggregate as Māra. There is no being or person in any of these. There is only a perverted view. A perception of self exists in the world, thinking "I" and "mine." This is called *Sakkāya-diṭṭhi* (View of existing group/body). One conceives the heap of form as one unit. One conceives the heap of *Vedanā* (Feeling) as one unit. One conceives the heap of perception as one unit, and having conceived them so, grasps them. One holds onto them. Within that very grasping lies the tremor that occurs when one has to let them go. But *sakkāya* means seeing all these heaps as one. Normally, even when we take a photograph, we say, "This is my form." But this changes from moment to moment in an extremely subtle way. Every single one of these is subject to the law of impermanence (*Anicca*). It is when this is let go that there exists that liberation, the cooling, Nibbāna, which the Supreme Buddha points to.

This is why Nibbāna is called the state of the Deathless (*amata*). But in the world, there is generally a fear: "If that happens, nothing will be left for us here, will it?" This is a perverted view. A good answer to this can also be drawn from a question asked by Ven. Rādha himself.

On another occasion, Ven. Rādha asks the Supreme Buddha: "Venerable Sir, it is said 'a being' (*satta*). In what sense is this said, or to what extent does one become a being?" He is expecting an analysis, a definition of that word. The Supreme Buddha analyzes it: "Rādha, if there is any passion, attachment, desire, *Taṇhā* (Craving), or feverish longing for form, it is because of that attachment to form that the concept of 'a being' arises."

Here, the Supreme Buddha, as He sometimes does, uses a single word in two different senses. Indeed, only someone who knows the language well can understand this. The word *satta* (or *satto*) can be understood in two ways. *Satta* can mean "an existing thing" or "truth/reality" (from *sat*). On the other hand, if taken as a past participle (from the root *sañj/saj*), *satta* means "one who is attached/clinging." That word comes from a completely different verbal root. When you look at it, it is one phonetic word, but with two meanings. The Supreme Buddha uses this word-play to analyze the term here. It is in the sense of being attached to form. A "being" does not exist because there is some invisible self, about the size of a thumb, as the Brahmins think, or something hidden in the heart or in *Viññāṇa* (Consciousness). As long as there is attachment to form, the conventional designation of a "being" remains.

This must not be misunderstood. This is a pitfall where many scholars stumble when trying to understand this Sutta. If we were to assume that the Supreme Buddha accepted the existence of a "being," this is all it means: as long as there is attachment to form, there is a being. As long as there is attachment to *Vedanā* (Feeling), if one is stuck in it, then *satta* means being stuck. In the sense of being attached to form, in the sense of being attached to *Vedanā*, there is a being. The same applies to perception, *Saṅkhāra* (Preparations), and *Viññāṇa* (Consciousness). Having taught this, the Supreme Buddha did not stop there. He gave a wonderful simile for this. That is something we must ponder very deeply.

What is that simile? "Rādha, imagine young boys or girls playing, building toy houses out of sand or clay. They are called *paṃsu-kīḷā* (dirt playhouses). As long as those young boys and girls maintain attachment, *Taṇhā* (Craving), desire, and longing for those toy houses, they undergo distress and oppression on account of them. They treat those playhouses as real. They treat those playhouses as actual houses. They play with them. They call them 'mine.' They highly prize them as their wealth. If mothers or fathers come and, seeing these children building houses out of mud or dirt, say, 'What a nuisance! What are you doing handling dirt?' and kick and smash them down, those young children will start to cry. They build them thinking of them as their wealth, as their houses. Thinking of them as houses, they even fight over them. But once these children reach an age where their wisdom matures, their desire for those toy houses they made vanishes. Thereafter, no one else has to do it; they themselves smash and destroy them." The Supreme Buddha points out that at some point, when their attachment to them is gone, those boys or girls will scatter, smash, demolish, and turn those dirt playhouses to dust with their hands and feet.

Next, connecting to the simile, He makes a statement that is quite frightening to think about. "In the same way, Rādha, just as those young children, once their understanding and wisdom have matured, kick and smash with their hands and feet and demolish those dirt houses they made, so too you must scatter form. Destroy it. Break it down. Blow it away. Destroy *Vedanā* (Feeling) too. Blow it away." In this manner, the Supreme Buddha speaks about all five aggregates, these five heaps. Sometimes, it makes one afraid: "Is this something that can be done? What is the Supreme Buddha saying here? Is He telling us to commit suicide? How can we destroy form? How can we scatter form? How do we break it down?" Right there lies the portion relevant to meditation.

As long as there is the perception of compactness (*ghana-saññā*) regarding this form, the attachment to form remains. Those of you who practice meditation might have heard that in insight meditation (*vipassanā*), there is a term called "perception of compactness." Opposed to it is the "perception of a heap" (*rāsi-saññā*) or analytical perception. What exists in the world is the perception of compactness—taking form as a single solid unit. That is what is called *Sakkāya-diṭṭhi* (View of existing group/body). Taking *Vedanā* (Feeling) too as a single unit. For example, a person might say, "I have had this pain (*Vedanā*) in my knee since yesterday, and it

has not left me yet." Then, if the teacher says, "Direct your mind to it a little. Apply attention—contemplation—to that pain," it does not mean crying out "pain, pain." It means applying attention (*manasikāra*).

When attention is applied, that *Vedanā* (Feeling) which was taken as one unit is understood to be not a single thing, but a series of throbbing sensations, a heap of feelings, a multitude of feelings. Here there is a heap of *Vedanā*; that is what is seen through attention. This is what is called *Yoniso manasikāra* (Wise attention). Thus, the person who, through unwise attention, took *Vedanā* as a single unit, understands it as a heap of feelings when applying *Yoniso manasikāra*.

The same applies to form. When one applies mindfulness and clear comprehension (*sati-sampajañña*) based on a certain meditation object (*kammaṭṭhāna*), this form which appears as a single unit to others—and not just one's own form, but as the meditation develops, even external things—is understood by the meditating devotee to be not one solid thing, but a heap (*rāsi*). A "heap" means a mass of arisings and passings away. It is then that one realizes that a lamp flame is not a single unit, a stream of water is not a single unit. Every single one of these is understood by the meditator, as direct experiential knowledge, to be a heap. Just as one builds dirt houses by soaking heaps of dirt with water because of *Taṇhā* (Craving)—the word *sineha* (moisture/affection) is also used for *Taṇhā*—by pouring the moisture of *Taṇhā*, we make this form into a single unit to make it easy for the mind to grasp it as *Upādāna* (Grasping). We make *Vedanā* (Feeling) into one unit. We make perception into one unit. We make *Saṅkhāra* (Preparations) into one unit. We make *Viññāṇa* (Consciousness) or the mind into one unit.

But the Supreme Buddha points out that here is a heap. A "heap" means that next, each of these begins to be understood as *Nāmarūpa* (Name-and-Form). Here there is only Name and Form. These change with such an astonishing speed that it cannot be described. Even the changing of form is extremely rapid. The Supreme Buddha states that the mind changes with a speed so great that no comparison can even be given to describe it.

So, that is how it is. Then, when the perception of a heap (*rāsi-saññā*) arises, form is scattered. Just now we mentioned that the Supreme Buddha said to scatter form. "Scattering form" does not mean breaking it into pieces and throwing it away. It does not mean tearing off arms and legs and throwing them aside, or throwing away the head. This does not refer to committing suicide. When reflecting in accordance with the Dhamma, to scatter form, one must cultivate one's wisdom—insight wisdom (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*). When *Yoniso manasikāra* (Wise attention) is applied correctly, and mindfulness and clear comprehension are applied, and the meditation attention is maintained in that proper manner, that person sees not only their own body but even the parts of others' bodies as a heap. Even when looking at a tree, it is no longer the previous perception of "a tree." There are times when it appears as if a heap of leaves has been gathered and hung on a tree. Even when looking at a waterfall, in

that same way, the perception of a heap arises regarding everything. That is when form is scattered.

Regarding *Vedanā* (Feeling), the simile we just mentioned is sufficient. Perception (*saññā*) is also like that. Perception is shown to be like a mirage. This is a simile we frequently use. Why is the deer deceived by the mirage? There is a heap of layers of perception here. That which is seen in the distance changes little by little as one gets closer to it. But based on the perception previously formed, one thinks: "What I am seeing here is exactly the same thing." Something is seen in the distance; it looks beautiful. Let us say a beautiful mountain is seen over there. So, with great effort, one goes there. With every step taken, the levels of perception change even faster. But due to ignorance (*avijjā*) and delusion (*moha*), this is not understood. So, one goes and looks, and foolishly returns, thinking, "Ah, I am seeing the same mountain and the same scenery that I saw from over there." But this scenery seen from here is like a mirage. One cannot go there and see it again. When one gets there, it is different. This is how everything is.

Regarding the mind, it is even more subtle. Until the Dhamma of the Supreme Buddha finally penetrated among beings, not only Brahmins but everyone thought either that the mind is the self, or that *Vedanā* (Feeling) is the self. If someone accepted that there is no self in form, they next grasped *Vedanā*. If they said there is no self in *Vedanā*, they grasped perception. Thus, step by step, they finally got stuck in *Viññāṇa* (Consciousness), thinking that *Viññāṇa* is indeed the self. And no one else can disprove it either. So, they grasp that. But the Supreme Buddha points out that there is a certain way to understand even the *Anattā* (Not-self) nature of this *Viññāṇa*, and that is what is called *Yoniso manasikāra* (Wise attention). Through the proper method, at some point, even this *Viññāṇa* can be understood. It is through that understanding that *Viññāṇa* ceases. The terms "scattering," "breaking down," and "destroying" *Viññāṇa* are used to refer to the cessation of consciousness (*viññāṇa-nirodha*). The state where *Viññāṇa* is finally ceased is what is called Nibbāna.

So, in one sense, this Nibbāna is right here. "Right here" means within the five aggregates. That is why the Supreme Buddha declared: "Within this very fathom-long body, I point out the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world which is Nibbāna, and the path leading to it." From this, we see that what the Supreme Buddha pointed to is the eye of wisdom (*paññā-cakkhu*). The ordinary worldly person possesses only the physical eye. Looking with the physical eye, people grasp this world through the perception of compactness. Going a little further than that, obtaining various levels of absorption (*jhāna*) and supernormal knowledges (*abhiññā*), they still get stuck in the Brahma worlds. Even then, they cannot remove the perception of self. This is a result of the ignorance (*avijjā*) present in the world, due to ignorance and *Taṇhā* (Craving). But when one acts in accordance with the Dhamma—the Noble Eightfold Path, the four foundations of mindfulness

(*satipaṭṭhāna*), etc., taught by the Supreme Buddha—at some point, the yogi realizes that these houses they are grasping are indeed only toy houses, not real houses.

Then, if they are not real houses, some might use the word "annihilation" (*uccheda*). Some think that the Dhamma preached by the Supreme Buddha is annihilationism (*uccheda-vāda*). They think of annihilationism as a destruction akin to committing suicide. But it is nothing of the sort here. It is seeing things as they really are (*yathā-bhūta*). No one can object to seeing things as they really are. Why does one see this? To eliminate this suffering. Why? Because the problem of *Dukkha* (Suffering) is what the world faces. On certain occasions, those Brahmins accused the Supreme Buddha: "This ascetic Gotama teaches a path that destroys an existing self, a self that truly exists. It is a destructive teaching that destroys families," they accused the Buddha. The Supreme Buddha declared: "They make this false accusation against me for something I do not say. For in the past, as also now, I lay down only *Dukkha* and the cessation of *Dukkha*. The problem before me is the problem of suffering. I have given a solution to eliminate suffering. So, you cannot blame me." Next, what was shown as suffering? We come back to that story of Māra. "This form too is suffering (*Dukkha*). This form is Māra. *Vedanā* (Feeling) too is Māra."

Although not directly relevant at this moment, since the story of Sopāka was mentioned, let us bring it in. The child Sopāka was bound to a corpse. A corpse is something that does not belong to oneself. Consequently, it caused great suffering to the child Sopāka. When we observe this in light of what was said about form, we see that every one of us is bound to form. We have to go along with this form. As mentioned before, it must be lifted up, fed, given drink, dressed, and applied with perfume and powder. This is the trouble of this form. The same applies to the others too. That is why the Supreme Buddha called this Māra. Something that does not belong to us has been bound and tied to us. That bond is *Taṇhā* (Craving) and *Upādāna* (Grasping). Due to ignorance, a division is created. Going a little deeper, what exists here? Here too, we must return to the story of the dirt houses. Ultimately, what exists here is only a heap of dirt. Only a heap of dirt.

In those days, there were open cemeteries (charnel grounds), though they do not exist now. There are many lessons to be learned in an open cemetery. When a body is cast there, after a few days, the body becomes bloated and fat, far fatter than could ever be achieved by eating and drinking. Bloated and swollen, it turns blue and bursts. Having burst, pus and bodily fluids flow out from one side. Meanwhile, wild beasts come, devour it, and tear it into pieces. Finally, only the bones remain. Over time, even those turn to dust. If you go and look at a cemetery or a graveyard, there are many things to learn. Ultimately, it is dust. Only a heap of dust. It finally reduces to those four elements: earth (*paṭhavī*), water (*āpo*), fire (*tejo*), and wind (*vāyo*). Only the story of the four elements exists here. Four elements: earth, water, fire, and wind.

Now, those of you who practice meditation know that the Supreme Buddha has declared, even when taking food, as a meditation: "In this food I consume, there exist only the four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind. Within my body too, the same exists." So, ultimately, what happens is that those four elements merge with these four elements. However, there is a difference. That difference is created by our *Viññāṇa* (Consciousness).

Now, this body, this form, is generally called *upādinna* (clutched/grasped by consciousness). This portion that is firmly grasped is what we guard so closely as our body. What is external is called *anupādinna* (not grasped by consciousness). We do not hold onto that to the same extent. We use it to sustain, protect, and look after this clutched body (*upādinna*). That is why we consume food and drink. Thus, *upādinna* refers to that which, at the beginning of life, whether in a mother's womb or elsewhere, we prepare from those four elements in accordance with karma. We prepare it through the power of *Saṅkhāra* (Preparations) in a manner that yields a certain *Bhava* (Becoming). If there are grave unwholesome deeds, one is born blind or deaf. If there is spiritual merit, one is born with a better form, as a person of capability.

In whatever way, there is that clutched body—next, emerging from the mother's womb, it enters the world as a person. Then, from the moment of birth, it conducts a transaction with the world. The very first transaction is breathing. What is contained within breathing? The surrounding air is taken into this body. But that too cannot be held as "mine"; it must be expelled. That is what is called inhalation and exhalation (*āśvāsa-praśvāsa*), or *ānāpāna*. So, right there, that process is visible. Here there is a competition, a dividing. The primary step to look after this clutched body (*upādinna*) is breathing. Taking in this inhalation, taking in a breath, giving a kind of fresh life to this body, and then expelling the waste.

It is the same with food. It is the same with drink. This very transaction is what is called life. Life is—when expressed in accordance with the Dhamma—the competition between the clutched (*upādinna*) and the non-clutched (*anupādinna*). Or else, it is the guarding of the clutched by utilizing the non-clutched. This cage called "mine" is protected and nourished by gathering those external form-elements. Within this lies *Dukkha* (Suffering). Here lies the entire aggregate, and here also lies fear.

Sometimes, afflicted by various unimaginably terrible illnesses, this cage is barely breathing. Someone might say, "Oh, it would be better for me to die than to suffer like this." But despite saying so, secretly in their heart there remains: "It would be good if some skilled doctor came and saved me. It would be good if I could live for at least one more day." This is exactly what is called *Taṇhā* (Craving) and *Upādāna* (Grasping). The Supreme Buddha declares that as long as this exists, there is no peace for the world. One must direct one's mind deeply to that simile of the toy houses.

In fact, many philosophers view the Supreme Buddha's teaching of *Anattā* (Not-self) as a problem. They ask, "When teaching the Dhamma of *Anattā*, is the Buddha not telling us to destroy these? Is this not a very dangerous philosophy?" But the Supreme Buddha explains that what exists here is *Dukkha* (Suffering), or rather, a disease. Just as we mentioned a tumor—a tumor, a disease. A doctor cures the disease, but he cannot cure the disease while leaving the pus inside. The pus must be pulled out. The thorn is pulled out, and the pus is pulled out to cure the disease. But you cannot cure the disease while keeping all of these. This is the kind of problem the world has.

So, that story of the young children and the toy houses helps us understand this. Indeed, if someone else comes while those young children are playing and smashes and breaks those toy houses, the children will fight and cry. But when understanding comes to those very children, they kick them, strike them with their hands, throw them away, and break them down.

The Blessed One points to exactly the same thing. Thus, one who has correctly understood the Supreme Buddha's Dhamma and developed right view eliminates those perverted views. We can compare perverted views to looking at a scene while standing on one's head. It is an entirely upside-down view. In short, what is *Anicca* (Impermanent) is truly impermanent, yet one regards it as permanent. What is truly *Dukkha* (Suffering) is regarded as pleasurable. What is truly not-self cannot be kept under one's control as "I" and "mine." Underlying this perception of self is the idea that it can be kept under one's control, that it can be owned, grasped, and that it exists for one's protection.

But the Supreme Buddha points out that one does not even have protection for oneself. There is no protection from those external sources we seek, such as parents and children. Even the doctors sought at the final moment cannot protect us. There is a limit to that as well. Thus, not a single one of these can be guarded in that way. What is real protection? When *Taṇhā* (Craving) and grasping toward every single one of these are abandoned, there lies the peace one hopes for.

For instance, even at home, when we hear a glassware breaking, we suddenly feel disturbed. But if we understand beforehand that it is something already broken, that it is something useless, then the shock is less. Similarly, the Supreme Buddha points out that these are things that are constantly breaking. This form is breaking down rapidly. *Vedanā* (Feeling) is breaking down constantly. But through the perception of compactness, we grasp them, thinking: "This is my form, this is my feeling." Thus, it is because of that wrong understanding, that wrong grasping, that the tremor occurs. If at some point, directing the eye of wisdom, one understands: "This very same thing occurred even while I was alive." That is what is referred to nowadays as momentary death (*khaṇika-maraṇa*). One sees momentary death. From moment to moment, this changes rapidly to a state that is not mine. *Vedanā* also changes in the same way. That happiness comes precisely through that vision.

By "happiness," we do not mean grasping with the perception of compactness, but rather this very vision. That is, it exists based on a relationship of causes and conditions; apart from this causal relationship, there is absolutely no eternally existing self in any of these heaps. These are only five heaps. Because of that understanding, to the extent one sees it, there is peace. That is why the Supreme Buddha declared in the Dhamma:

"*Yato yato sammasati, udayabbayaṃ labhati pīti-pāmojjaṃ, amataṃ taṃ vijānataṃ*."

As mentioned in a verse of the Dhammapada, whenever the yogi, through close contemplation, beholds the arising and passing away of these aggregates, he obtains rapture and joy. A great joy arises in that person. That is an insight-born rapture, not like the joy of shouting, dancing, and drinking alcohol. Some might think, "What a miserable time (*Dukkha*) yogis must undergo, going far into the forest alone among wild beasts!" Yet, in that very situation, rapture and joy arise. Why? Because when one beholds how the five aggregates change from moment to moment, a great happiness arises: "Was this not what I was holding onto for so long?" Now, that grasping, that *Upādāna* (Grasping), keeps breaking down. The state where this understanding is established is what is called Nibbāna. The complete, direct realization of this understanding is what constitutes the knowledge of the fruit of Arahantship (*arahattaphala-ñāṇa*).

Even while alive, what exists here is only a fivefold aggregate of *Upādāna* (Grasping). There is nothing to be taken as "I" or "mine." It is not a single unit, but a heap, a mass. If someone sees that, with respect to each one of these, there is only a collection of arisings and passings away as *Nāmarūpa* (Name-and-Form), that person directs their mind to the causal relationship. Then there is no oppression. The mind is directed to that, to this change. When this change is seen as a natural law (*dhammatā*), there is nothing there to change. Ultimately, only if one takes that form as a single unit does it "change." Now, what is seen is the changing itself. The mind goes to the heap of arisings and passings away. It is then that that rapture and joy arise. That is the Deathless (*amata*). That is why it is called the Deathless. Then, there is no death.

Thus, the Deathless pointed out by the Supreme Buddha is that very freedom from the fear of death. The Supreme Buddha describes this as an imaginary fear, like the fear of an anthill. The fear exists only if one conceives that there is a cobra inside the anthill. It is because of the belief that there is a "self-cobra" inside this body that fear exists in the world. But if at some point one sees: "This is just an empty anthill, there is no self inside it"—if that is directly realized by someone, then at that moment, because there is no more *Taṇhā* (Craving), there is no grasping.

The most dangerous thing is the unquenched *Taṇhā* (Craving) within us and the grasping called *Upādāna* (Grasping). As long as these exist, those wishes and expectations that could not be fulfilled in this life are carried over to the next life.

Next, one goes and is born in another place. Even then, it is not as one wishes, but in accordance with the karma one has performed. In this way, one travels in Saṃsāra for a long time. But if someone understands right here that neither within this form called the body, nor within *Vedanā* (Feeling), nor within perception, nor within *Saṅkhāra* (Preparations), nor within any single one of them is there any substance worthy of being taken as "I" or "self" as previously conceived—they see its essenceless nature. You have frequently heard the similes given by the Supreme Buddha for each of these aggregates. Form is like a lump of foam. Is a lump of foam a single solid unit?

Next, *Vedanā* (Feeling) is like a water bubble, rising during a rain shower. Water bubbles keep arising and passing away. Perception is like a mirage, as mentioned earlier. *Saṅkhāra* (Preparations) is like the trunk of a banana tree. A banana trunk has no heartwood; it is completely made up of layer upon layer of sheaths. Next, *Viññāṇa* (Consciousness) is ultimately like an illusion (*māyā*), showing something that is not there as if it exists. That non-existent thing is the "self." It displays it as if it exists, and that is what is grasped as "I" and "mine." Thus, according to the vision of the Supreme Buddha, all this *Dukkha* (Suffering) arises from conceiving that a non-existent self exists. It is through that understanding that everyone obtains the cessation, the peace, the supreme peace, the supreme tranquility, the Deathless that they hope for.

So, you must reflect that on this valuable Poya day, you have observed a certain virtue, such as the Poya Eight Precepts, as a way of joining that path to Nibbāna, that practice. The Supreme Buddha points out that although the child Sopāka attained this understanding quickly because of the power of the perfections (*pāramī*) he had fulfilled over a long period, let no one think that merely by listening to a Dhamma sermon or merely by hearing a verse, this deep direct realization will be obtained. The Supreme Buddha has shown the practice to be undertaken for this, in terms of virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). Thus, in accordance with that step of virtue, by observing the precepts today to some extent, your body and speech have been disciplined. Next, to the best of your ability, through meditation and concentration, by unifying your thoughts, you must develop mindfulness and concentration.

Even more deeply, if you maintain *Yoniso manasikāra* (Wise attention) in a manner that understands the Three Characteristics of *Anicca* (Impermanent), *Dukkha* (Suffering), and *Anattā* (Not-self), establishing right seeing, then, by obtaining the association of true noble friends (*kalyāṇa-mitta*), generating the appropriate perception for these activities, and engaging in them, you will be able to stop running in this wheel of Saṃsāra that you have done for an extremely long time. You will be able to free yourselves from those perverted views and realize the supreme, deathless Nibbāna in this very life through the penetration of the paths and fruits of Stream-entry, Once-returning, Non-returning, and Arahantship. May all these wholesome deeds be a supportive condition for that! I make this wish. May all beings in this

universe, from the Avīci hell up to the Akaniṭṭha heaven, including our departed relatives, who rejoice in these wholesome merits gathered through preaching and listening to the Dhamma, by rejoicing in them, be freed as quickly as possible from all samsaric *Dukkha* (Suffering) such as *Jāti* (Birth), decay, sickness, and death (*Jarāmaraṇa*), and may they find peace in the supreme, deathless Nibbāna. With this wish, let us share these merits by reciting the verses.

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……..*"