Pahankanuwa Sermon #148

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

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(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.98)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

Pali Stanza:

"Sabbābhibhū sabbavidūhamasmi,

Sabbesu dhammesu anūpalitto;

Sabbañjaho taṇhākkhaye vimutto,

Sayaṃ abhiññāya kamuddiseyyaṃ.

Na me ācariyo atthi,

Sadiso me na vijjati;

Sadevakasmiṃ lokasmiṃ,

Natthi me paṭipuggalo.

Ahaṃ hi arahā loke,

Ahaṃ satthā anuttaro;

Ekomhi sammāsambuddho,

Sītibhūto'smi nibbuto.

Dhammacakkaṃ pavattetuṃ,

Gacchāmi kāsinam puraṃ;

Andhabhūtasmiṃ lokasmiṃ,

Āhañchiṃ amatadundubhin-ti."

From:

"Majjhima Nikāya 26 (Ariyapariyesana Sutta)

Dhammapada Verses 353"

Dear Listeners,

Meeting a true noble friend (*kalyāṇamitta*) is a memorable occasion in one's life. Through meeting a noble friend, an opportunity is afforded to guide even a life that has gone astray back to the correct path. The greatest noble friend who ever appeared in this world is our Fully Self-Enlightened Buddha. Recalling the memorable occasion of meeting Him, we intend to present, through the guidance of these verses, how a certain helpless individual came to a firm decision regarding putting an end to the Suffering (*dukkha*) of saṃsāra.

After attaining Supreme Enlightenment, while the Buddha was traveling to Benares to preach the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, He met an Ājīvaka named Upaka on the way. An Ājīvaka means someone who lived according to a certain religious philosophy at that time. Seeing the serene nature of the Buddha's faculties and the gentle, radiant quality of His physical complexion, this Ājīvaka Upaka was pleased and said, 'Friend, your faculties are extremely serene. Your complexion and physical color are exceedingly pure. On whose account have you gone forth? Who is your teacher? What Dhamma do you follow?' It was then that the Buddha expounded the verses we recited earlier, as an introduction of Himself.

'*Sabbābhibhū*'—I am one who has conquered everything. '*Sabbavidūhamasmi*'—I am one who has known everything. '*Sabbesu dhammesu anūpalitto*'—with regard to all phenomena (*dhammas*), with regard to all things, I am untainted. '*Sabbañjaho vimutto*'—I am liberated by abandoning everything and through the destruction of Craving (*taṇhā*). '*Sayaṃ abhiññāya kamuddiseyyaṃ*'—having understood this Dhamma thoroughly by myself, whom should I point to as my teacher? '*Na me ācariyo atthi*'—I have no teacher. '*Sadiso me na vijjati*'—there is no one equal to me. '*Sadevakasmiṃ lokasmiṃ na atthi me paṭipuggalo*'—in the world together with its devas, there is no counterpart who can equal me or approach me.

'*Ahaṃ hi arahā loke ahaṃ satthā anuttaro*'—I indeed am the Arahant in the world, the incomparable, supreme Teacher. I am the one who has attained perfect self-awakening (*Sammāsambodhi*) all alone. '*Sītibhūtosmi nibbuto*'—I have become cooled, I am extinguished/stilled (Nibbāna). '*Dhammacakkaṃ pavattetuṃ gacchāmi kāsinam puraṃ*'—To set the Wheel of Dhamma in motion, I am going to the city of Kāsī. In this blinded world, I shall beat the drum of the Deathless. Beating the drum of the Deathless means sounding the great drum of the deathless state of Nibbāna. In this manner, the Buddha made an introduction of Himself. Then Upaka the Ājīvaka said, 'Now, according to what you say, you deserve the name *Anantajina*.' *Anantajina* means one who has conquered all things. Thereupon, the Buddha declared in another verse, 'Yes, that is true. Because I have destroyed the defilements (*āsavas*) and conquered all unwholesome actions, it is fitting to use the name *Jina*

(Conqueror) for me.' Hearing this, Upaka the Ājīvaka said, 'It may be so, friend,' shook his head, and went his own way.

Next, the story of this Ājīvaka Upaka is recorded as follows. He went to a province called Vaṅgahāra. Having gone to a village of deer-hunters in that province, he began to live there. The chief hunter of those deer-hunters was pleased with this Ājīvaka, developed faith in him, and, believing him to be an Arahant, began to support him by offering daily alms food and other requisites. While they were living in this manner, on one occasion, this deer-hunter had to go hunting in a distant village. At that time, he told his daughter named Cāpā, as well as his other children and relatives, 'Look after my Arahant well while I am away.' After the deer-hunter left, the next day when this Ājīvaka Upaka came to the hunter's house, the daughter named Cāpā came forward to offer him alms. Upon seeing her, a mind of lust (*rāga*) arose in this Ājīvaka Upaka; without even consuming the alms food he had received, he set it aside and lay down starving, without taking any food, thinking, 'If I get this woman Cāpā, I will live. Otherwise, I shall die.' Thus, seven days passed. After seven days, as soon as the deer-hunter returned home, he asked, 'How is it? Did you attend to my Arahant?' Then the daughter said, 'He came for alms food only on one day.'

Thereupon, running in a hurry to see him, the hunter found this Ājīvaka lying down, massaged his feet, and asked, 'Venerable sir, what is your illness?' But he did not answer; he just tossed and turned from side to side. When the hunter repeatedly pleaded, 'Please tell me, tell me. I will do everything I can for you,' Upaka eventually indicated his intention. Then this deer-hunter asked, 'Do you know any craft, science, or trade that you can practice?' Upaka replied, 'I have not learned anything like that.' The hunter said, 'Then it will be difficult to lead a household life.' Upaka replied, 'In that case, I will carry your carrying-pole of meat, take it to the market, and sell it; I will do that job.' The hunter said, 'Very well.' Since this Ājīvaka was weak, the deer-hunter kept him at a friend’s house for a few days, and then brought him home and gave his daughter in marriage to him. In the course of time, a child named Subhadda was born to them. This woman named Cāpā would lull the baby to sleep, saying mockingly, 'Son of the Ājīvaka, son of the meat-seller, do not cry, do not cry,' lulling the child in a way that hurt Upaka's feelings. When she repeated this for several days, this Ājīvaka became angry and said, 'Do not think that I am a helpless person. I have a friend named Anantajina. If you abuse me in this way, I will go to my friend!'

As this went on continuously, one day he got extremely angry and prepared to leave. At that time Cāpā—who, after he became a householder, addressed this Ājīvaka Upaka by the name 'Kāla'—tried to stop him, saying, 'Kāla, do not go. Do not be angry like that. Both I and my relatives are very submissive to you.' But when Kāla firmly held onto his decision and prepared to leave, she began to describe her own beauty and asked, 'Where are you going, abandoning a beautiful woman like me?' Then Upaka said, 'Even a little of what you say is enough for someone who has affection for you. But you cannot stop me like that. You are trying to stop me just as a bird-catcher tries to catch a bird. I will definitely go!' Next Cāpā said, 'What about

your son? How can you leave a child like this and go?' Upaka replied, 'Wise people abandon their children, wives, relatives, and wealth, and go forth to ordain.' She threatened him, saying, 'Then if you go, I will beat this child to death; I will throw him on the ground.' Thereupon, Upaka said, 'Even if you feed this child to dogs and jackals, I will not turn back!' and prepared to leave. Finally, Cāpā asked, 'Very well then, to whom are you going? In which direction? To which city are you going?' He then replied, 'Far beyond the Neranjara river lives my friend named Anantajina, the Blessed, Fully Self-Enlightened Buddha. He expounds the Dhamma to bring an end to all Suffering (*dukkha*). I am going to Him. He is my Teacher!'

At that moment, for some reason, a certain faith arose in Cāpā, and she said, 'Very well then, if you are going, pay homage to the Tathāgata on my behalf, and circumambulate Him.' Upaka replied, 'I will certainly do that,' and departed in search of the Buddha. By that time, the Buddha was residing in the Jetavana Monastery in Sāvatthī. The Buddha foresaw this occasion. Having seen it, He told the Saṅgha beforehand, 'If anyone comes and asks, "Where is Anantajina?", bring that person to Me.' So, Upaka traveled from place to place, searching and calling out, 'Where is Anantajina? Where is Anantajina?' He arrived at Jetavana, sat in the middle of the monastery, and said, 'I need to see the Venerable Anantajina.' The Saṅgha then escorted him to the Buddha. Upaka asked, 'Can the Blessed One recognize me?' The Buddha replied, 'Yes, I remember you. Where have you been all this time?' He answered, 'In the province of Vaṅgahāra.'

'You are old now, aren't you? Wouldn't it be good to ordain?' the Buddha asked. Upaka replied, 'I would like very much to ordain.' The Buddha assigned a monk to ordain him. After he was ordained, the Buddha gave him meditation topics (*kammaṭṭhāna*). Meditating intensely, before long, Upaka attained the stage of Non-returner (*Anāgāmī*). Having attained the state of a Non-returner, as mentioned in the Dhamma, when he passed away, he was reborn in the Brahma realm called Aviha—which is one of the Pure Abodes (*Suddhāvāsa*) where Non-returners are born—and attained Arahantship immediately upon birth. The Dhamma records the names of seven monks, including Upaka, who attained Arahantship immediately upon being born in the Aviha Brahma realm and in due course attained final extinguishment (*parinibbāna*). That is the special event recorded there. Furthermore, it is said that after Upaka left, due to the grief and sorrow caused by it, Cāpā also followed the very path Upaka had taken, met the Buddha, ordained in the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha, became an Arahant Bhikkhunī, and attained final extinguishment (*parinibbāna*).

If we take this Dhamma story in brief, there is immense value in it. We usually consider the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* as the first Dhamma sermon of the Buddha. Yet, even in these few short verses, to a certain extent, we can see the Buddha declaring His Buddhahood to the world. It is apparent that ancient teachers also paid attention to this. They say, 'Even so, why is this not considered the first Dhamma sermon? It is because Upaka, who listened to it, did not attain any path or

fruit (*magga-phala*) merely by hearing it. It only became a supportive potentiality (*vāsanā-sampatti*) for the Ājīvaka Upaka.' That is to say, it served as a help. We thought of paying some attention to the way it helped. In this day and age, some who attempt to analyze such events using modern critical concepts develop views that are disparaging of the Buddha. In these verses delivered by the Buddha, His Buddhahood and His unique spiritual powers were proclaimed. Some consider this to be self-praise. They ask, 'When Upaka asked, "Who are you?", why did the Buddha give such a long self-description, only for Upaka the Ājīvaka to say, "It may be so," and walk away?' Why the Buddha gave such a lengthy introduction is a question for some, since it appeared to yield no immediate result. However, from the subsequent events, we can infer that since the Buddha possessed clear knowledge of the past, future, and the flow of time, He made this declaration about His Buddhahood to the Ājīvaka Upaka knowing this full well.

Let us take a small illustration to make it easier for people of today to understand. Let us suppose a specialist doctor sees that someone is likely to fall ill. So, beforehand, the doctor gives him a card containing his list of medical degrees—what is called a 'visiting card' these days—saying, 'If you fall seriously ill, come to my clinic.' The Buddha did something similar. The Buddha has also introduced Himself in various places in the Dhamma as '*sallakatto anuttaro*'—the incomparable surgeon. What does this surgeon do? The Buddha pulls out the dart of Craving (*taṇhā*) that is pierced in the heart; He pulls out that poisoned arrow. Thus, what was done here was pulling out the dart that was pierced in the Ājīvaka Upaka. Truly, the dart was of two kinds. Here, in the word 'Cāpā,' we are not speaking according to symbolism, yet there is a wonderful coincidence. The meaning of the word 'Cāpā' is 'bow.' Thus, Upaka the Ājīvaka was one who suffered from both the flower-arrow and the stone-arrow shot from that bow. He came to receive medicine for this, not to the clinic of that incomparable surgeon, but to His dispensation (*sāsana*). That is the only difference. Having entered the dispensation of the Buddha, he cured that wound. From this, we can see the greatness of the Buddha. It was out of compassion for Upaka that He described so much about Himself, about the Supreme Enlightenment He had attained, about having eradicated the defilements, and even declared where He was heading. Why did He declare, 'I am going to the city of Benares, to the country of the Kāsī people, to beat the great drum of the Deathless, to sound the drum of the deathless state of Nibbāna in the blinded world'? It was to provide Upaka with an opportunity to meet Him when the time was ripe. It is this natural lawfulness (*dhammatā*) that we must see there.

Furthermore, through that story, we can understand how this Suffering (*dukkha*) of saṃsāra manifests to each individual. As an Ājīvaka, he was one who spent such a spiritual life, practicing extremely difficult ascetic vows. Yet, he underwent an extraordinary life transformation by getting caught up in the defilements. The Buddha must have seen this due to some entanglement of kamma. Ultimately, having developed an attachment for Cāpā, he entered household life, and through that, he developed weariness (*nibbidā*), which is disenchantment with saṃsāra. Because of

that intense weariness, even though Cāpā reminded him of her beauty as well as of their child and made various attempts, he did not listen to any of it. According to the firm decision he had made, he went in search of the Buddha to put an end to Suffering (*dukkha*). Not only that, the other outcome was that finally, Cāpā also came and became an Arahant Bhikkhunī. The dispensation was nourished by the arrival of those two. It was in view of such events that the Buddha presented His powers, like a list of degrees, to afford someone the opportunity to put an end to Suffering (*dukkha*).

Through that story too, we can understand the value of the Buddha's knowledge; by that very token, we can understand how a person is transformed through the very trials and Suffering (*dukkha*) of life. In this entire saṃsāra, there are only three aspects: gratification (*assāda*), danger (*ādīnava*), and escape (*nissaraṇa*). The aspect of gratification relates to the five-fold sensual pleasures. The Buddha states that indeed, if there were no gratification in this world, beings would not be attached to these five-fold sensual pleasures. He acknowledges that it exists. Yet, it is little; mostly there is danger. When one understands this, a weariness arises through that itself. Through that weariness, thinking deeply about a solution to this, escape (*nissaraṇa*)—which is departure—arises. This person who went as far as (becoming an Ājīvaka) was someone who spent a religious life. Having reflected on the manner of his downfall and realized, 'Such a thing happened to me because I was deceived by this female form,' he abandoned everything, fled, and having revived (his spiritual potential), attained that (liberation). So, from this, we can understand the factors that help a human life to incline toward Nibbāna. Indeed, not only through such external events, but the Buddha points out that for a wise person, merely reflecting on these five aggregates is enough to abandon five-fold sensuality or to flee, in order to put an end to the Suffering (*dukkha*) of saṃsāra.

The Buddha once presented that matter to the Saṅgha through a deep and meaningful allegorical story. This is how the story goes: 'Monks, suppose there are four snakes of highly virulent poison. A man comes there who dislikes Suffering (*dukkha*), desires happiness, wishes to live, and dislikes death. The people standing nearby tell him, "Here are four snakes of highly virulent poison. Now, you must wake these snakes up at the right time, bathe them, feed them, and put them to sleep. This is the daily routine you have to perform for these snakes. If even one of these snakes becomes angry, you will meet either death or Suffering (*dukkha*) equal to death. Do as you please." Then this man does not accept that task; he runs away in fear. He runs away in fear of these four snakes.'

'While he is running to escape, several people on the way tell him, "Five hostile executioners are coming behind you to kill you. They will kill you wherever they catch you; do what you must." This man, in even greater fear, runs even further away. As he runs, another group of people tell him, "Now a sixth one is coming in the guise of a friend, showing himself as an intimate companion, but carrying a raised sword. Prepared to cut off your neck the moment (he catches you), a sixth executioner is also

coming behind you." Then this person runs faster and faster in extreme fear. As he goes, he comes across an empty village. He enters the houses in that empty village. Upon entering, every single house is vacant. Even the vessels in the houses are empty. Then those nearby tell him, "Look, a band of village-plundering bandits is coming to raid this village, to enter this empty village. Do what you can." So, this man runs away from there too. Running on and on, he encounters a body of water. He encounters a great body of water. There, this person realized: "This near shore is full of fear, extremely dangerous. The far shore is free of fear, safe. But there is neither a ship nor a bridge. So, what is to be done?" He breaks branches of trees nearby, binds them into a raft, and with the help of that raft, putting forth the energy and effort of his hands and feet, he crosses over to the far shore using the raft. Indeed, the person who has gone to the far shore is called a Brahmin. He reaches (safety).'

Having presented this allegorical story, the Buddha then explains the simile. He explains to the Saṅgha what this simile referred to, analyzing its respective components. The four snakes are explained as the four great elements: earth (*paṭhavī*), water (*āpo*), fire (*tejo*), and air (*vāyo*). These are the four great elements of which our body is composed. Thus, these four great elements are presented as four snakes. What everyone does in their life, day after day, is to wake these four up at the right time, bathe them, feed them, and put them to sleep. This body is indeed made of these four elements. Furthermore, these snakes suddenly become provoked. That is what is called the provocation of wind, provocation of bile/phlegm, etc. Due to imbalances of these four elements, they become provoked, and sometimes one dies, or else falls prey to disorders and diseases equal to death. It was to state this that the Buddha gave the simile of the four highly venomous snakes. Then he flees from them. Fleeing means turning one's mind away. That is the meaning intended here. It is not something that happens through external events. Looking at one's own body, one sees these four elements as four snakes. Knowing that 'I must wake them up, bathe them, feed them, and after doing all that, the moment one gets angry, I will fall into trouble,' that person runs. He runs away from there.

While running, those people tell him, 'You cannot escape by running. Look, five executioners, hostile executioners, are coming behind you to kill you the moment they catch you.' Who are these five? The Buddha explains that they are the five aggregates of Grasping / Holding / Fuel (*pañcupādānakkhandha*): material form (*rūpa*), Feeling / Sensation (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), Preparations / Preparations / Volitional activity (*saṅkhāra*), and Consciousness (*viññāṇa*). As we all know, the Buddha does not analyze a person as someone who possesses a soul or self. Instead, He explains them as these five aggregates, five heaps, which are constantly changing, of an Impermanent / Inconstant (*anicca*) nature, of a nature of Suffering (*dukkha*), and of a Not-self / Non-self / Unsubstantial (*anattā*) nature. These five heaps are indeed represented as the executioners. In other places, the Buddha has explained this further. Why are these called executioners? It is only as long as material form, Feeling / Sensation, etc., exist that there is death or the fear of

death for a person. The concept of 'one who dies' arises in dependence on these five aggregates, not outside of them. That is why they are called executioners. As long as we grasp these five, the fear of death remains. What is being said there is that as long as we hold onto the five aggregates of Grasping / Holding / Fuel (*pañcupādānakkhandha*)—rūpa, vedanā, saññā, saṅkhāra, and viññāṇa—and as long as there is attachment to them, we have the fear of death. Therefore, the next part describes running away, abandoning them as well.

Next, the sixth one mentioned is a somewhat deep matter. While those five are overt enemies, this executioner comes in the guise of a friend, like a spy. The Buddha has identified him as *nandirāga* (delight and lust). In the Dhamma, *nandirāga* means delighting and lusting, delight and attachment. This is a very subtle thing. Delighting and attaching appear as a friend. To the Ājīvaka Upaka too, that feeling appeared as a friend. The disaster that came out of it was that ultimately he got caught in that bondage and entangled in a huge heap of Suffering (*dukkha*). In the end, he had to carry the load of meat for Māra. It is something like that. That is to say, the sixth executioner. When told that he too is coming, running in even greater fear, next he encounters an empty village, as it is said.

As the empty village, the Buddha points to the six-fold sense-base (*saḷāyatana*), which are taught in the Dhamma as the six internal bases: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Why are they called 'empty' here? Because there is no self (*attā*) in any of them. The eye is Not-self / Non-self / Unsubstantial (*anattā*). There is no such thing as a self inside the eye, even though in conventional terms we use 'I' and 'mine.' The ear is the same. The view of self (*atta-diṭṭhi*) mostly lingers in dependence on these: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Yet the Buddha says they are empty (*suñña*). There is nothing here to be taken as a self. These are like empty villages.

Next, the village-plundering bandits are shown as the external sense-bases (*bāhirāyatana*). That is to say, forms (*rūpa*) come to plunder the eye; sounds (*sadda*) come to plunder the ear. Plundering means looting or exploiting. It is because of this obstruction to the eye that they are called plundering bandits. When you go to a city, how many things come before this eye as if saying, 'look at me, look at me!' To the ear, too, similar sounds come. These are just like plundering bandits. Finally, the thoughts that come to the mind—that too is a great nuisance. That is what the Buddha is conveying to the world through these similes. Thus, in the end, one flees even from these six sense-bases (*saḷāyatana*). When that person runs on and on, abandoning that as well, he sees a great body of water. The Buddha also explains that body of water according to the Dhamma. What is that body of water? He explains it as the four torrents (*oghas*): sensuality (*kāma*), Becoming / Existence (*bhava*), views (*diṭṭhi*), and ignorance (*avijjā*). This torrent of sensuality (*kāmogha*) is the longest river in saṃsāra, in which the entire world is swept away. Just as a great torrent of water rushes, breaking and sweeping away everything in streams and rivers after a rain, in the same way, the torrent of sensuality flows. Similarly, *bhava* means Becoming / Existence, the desire for existence. Views (*diṭṭhi*) and ignorance

(*avijjā*) are the same. It is by getting caught in these torrents that beings experience Suffering (*dukkha*) for a long time in saṃsāra.

So, that person thinks: 'This near shore is full of fear.' The Buddha explains 'this near shore' as *sakkāya* (existing group/body). The term *Sakkāya-diṭṭhi* (View of existing group/body) is very common in usage. Its meaning is as follows. When looking at it according to the Dhamma, everything—material form (*rūpa*), Feeling / Sensation (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), Preparations / Preparations / Volitional activity (*saṅkhāra*), and Consciousness (*viññāṇa*)—is an aggregate (*khandha*). The meaning of that word is a heap, a collection. Although it is a heap, to the ordinary person, it does not appear as a heap. Because of this, they take them as a self. The idea of taking them as a self is like this. Let us say someone takes a photograph. Taking the photograph, they say, 'This is me.' Similarly, there is an image that falls on the mind regarding oneself. What is presented as identity is someone's photograph as if it is identical (to a permanent self). It is not identical; it changes moment by moment. Yet, that image captured by the mind is mistakenly thought of as permanent. Similarly, what everyone calls 'I, I' is this body built of those four elements, which is constantly changing—the aggregate of material form (*rūpakkhandha*). Because of not understanding material form as a heap, one takes it as a single unit. To see a heap indeed as a heap, insight (*vipassanā*) is necessary. Special seeing is necessary. Without that, the perception of an ordinary worldling (*puthujjana*) who has not attained path and fruit is that one's body is a permanent thing. That person's idea of 'changing' is something like getting older according to social convention. But inside this cage of a body, there are numerous constantly occurring changes; because this is not understood, one thinks it exists (permanently). *Sat-kāya-diṭṭhi*. The perception that the heap itself exists, remaining unchanged, is what is called the Dogma of self-illusion / View of existing group/body (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*). This is the case with regard to material form, and also with regard to Feeling / Sensation (*vedanā*). Even with Feeling / Sensation, let us say someone goes to a doctor. Going there, they say, 'I have had this pain in my leg in this manner since yesterday.' The doctor asks, 'Is it the very same Feeling / Sensation you had yesterday?' 'Yes, indeed, it is the very same Feeling / Sensation.' But not even for a single moment does Feeling / Sensation remain in the same manner.

From the simile the Buddha gave regarding material form, you must have understood its nature as a collection. The perception of a collection actually arises through insight (*vipassanā*). The ordinary world takes it as a single unit. The simile the Buddha gave for material form is a lump of froth floating down a stream. When there is a large lump of froth on a river, from afar it appears as a white substance, as a solid thing. It is the same with Feeling / Sensation (*vedanā*)—it is like water bubbles. When it rains and water pours from the roof, bubbles rapidly arise and pass away. But the ordinary world does not think of Feeling / Sensation in that manner. Taking Feeling / Sensation as something unchanging, they grasp it as 'I'; that is how they grasp pleasant Feeling / Sensation (*sukha-vedanā*) and clash with Feeling / Sensation of Suffering / Unsatisfactoriness / Stress (*dukkha-vedanā*). They think of

it as something that persists. But the Buddha declares that here there is only a multitude of constant arisings and passings away. Because the rapidly occurring continuity of arising and passing away is not seen, due to the perception of compactness (*ghana-saññā*), one takes it as a single unit.

It is the same with the others. Perception (*saññā*) is compared to a mirage. There too, there is a collection. With that perception of a mirage, holding the feeling that there is something unchanging there, the deer runs after it. What is said about Preparations / Preparations / Volitional activity (*saṅkhāra*) is also very well-known. Why did the Buddha compare them to a plantain (banana) trunk? A person who has no understanding of a plantain trunk thinks it has heartwood. But the Buddha declares that there is no heartwood or core in these Preparations / Preparations / Volitional activity (*saṅkhāra*) either; here there is entirely nothing but a heap of sheaths. It is this volition called Preparations / Preparations / Volitional activity (*saṅkhāra*). Indeed, what most people firmly take as 'I' is this portion of Preparations / Preparations / Volitional activity. Even more subtle is Consciousness (*viññāṇa*). What we call 'my mind' is also not shown by the Buddha as a single unit. There is no self there either; there is only a multitude of thoughts. There is an ancient simile about the mind, which arises and passes away, spinning extremely rapidly like a wheel. How the perception called 'mind' arises is shown by the simile of the whirling firebrand (*alāta-cakka*). That is to say, when a firebrand is whirled around, it appears as a circle. This appearance is created because it moves extremely fast. This mind changes so rapidly that it is impossible to find a simile for it, changing even faster than the body. Next, because Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is not understood by the ordinary world, even great philosophers take Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) as a self. Only the Buddha showed that this too is merely a heap.

Thus, the Dogma of self-illusion / View of existing group/body (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), in short, is the view of self. The Buddha states that this view of self, which is the most deep-seated defilement among worldly beings, did not arise without a cause. It did not arise without a reason; it has occurred through misunderstanding. It is because of not seeing this rapid change, this continuity of arising and passing away, that the Dogma of self-illusion / View of existing group/body (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) arises through grasping all five heaps—rūpa, vedanā, saññā, saṅkhāra, and viññāṇa—as 'I' and 'mine.' This is what is called the twenty-fold Dogma of self-illusion / View of existing group/body (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*). Either one says, 'material form is myself,' or 'myself is in material form,' or 'I possess material form,' or 'material form is in myself.' Thinking about material form in these four ways, one firmly holds the view of 'I' and 'mine.' It is the same with Feeling / Sensation (*vedanā*). This is indeed what the Buddha revealed to the world: the ordinary world remains within the Dogma of self-illusion / View of existing group/body (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), bound to saṃsāra. That person realizes that this near shore is dangerous. This near shore of danger is *sakkāya*. The far shore is Nibbāna. The far shore is The Mind Stilled / Extinction / Extinguishment. The term 'far shore' there refers to the supramundane (*lokuttara*).

The raft that this person constructs to go there is compared by the Buddha to the Noble Eightfold Path.

There too, we have many things to contemplate. As said before, there is no ship here. To cross over easily, there should be a ship. Then there is nothing special for one to do. There is no need to prepare anything; the ship is there to go whenever one wants. Or else a bridge—there is no such thing here. There is no pre-constructed, completed path to cross over from this saṃsāra, nor is there any god to carry one to the other side. Rather, it must be done by oneself. To show this, it was said that finally, that person had to construct a raft. Gathering and breaking branches and leaves according to one's own capacity, constructing a raft, and with that raft and one's own effort, putting forth energy with hands and feet—the Buddha refers to this as the arousal of energy (*vīriyārambha*). Wonderful similes are found in the Dhamma regarding this arousal of energy. The comparison of similes and their referents is a highly wondrous aspect of the Buddha's discourses. First, a long story is presented. Captivated by the narrative, the Saṅgha listens to what the Buddha is saying. On closer inspection, what lies ahead is that collection of allegorical stories. Finally, when He explains, one by one, 'I said this in reference to such and such a Dhamma factor,' only then can one understand this.

Nowadays, there are various concepts about roads. There are expressways, and concepts of many other kinds of roads. Many people work hard to build these. If such roads exist, we only have to put our vehicle onto that road. After that, we can go straight ahead without any problem. The Noble Eightfold Path is by no means a path to be traveled in that manner. To show this, the Buddha declared that there is neither a ship nor a bridge; oneself, with difficulty, breaks branches and leaves, constructs a large raft, and using one's own hands and feet, rouses energy with effort. The arousal of energy is also related to that very Noble Eightfold Path. What is meant by the arousal of energy? It is the cultivation of virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*) belonging to the Noble Eightfold Path.

One must make an effort for virtue (*sīla*). One must make an effort for concentration (*samādhi*). One must make an effort for wisdom (*paññā*). One must exert energy. This cannot be obtained easily. That is what is meant by rousing energy with hands and feet. It is through this that the Noble Eightfold Path is completed. The Buddha uses the word 'Brahmin' to designate the person who has completed the Noble Eightfold Path and gone to the other side, the one who has crossed over. He designated that person in the highest sense. You must have heard that the Buddha gave a special meaning to the word 'Brahmin.' If we take the word 'Brahmin' in the dispensation's sense, it applies to the Arahant—the one who has attained the purest, supreme state. Having crossed over, the Brahmin stands freed from that terrifying state mentioned earlier. This is indeed Nibbāna, the Deathless, shown at the very end.

Just as the Buddha promised to the Ājīvaka Upaka, 'I am traveling to the city of Benares to beat the drum of the Deathless in this blinded world,' what He declared

on that occasion was indeed the preaching of the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*. Truly, you have heard how far the sound of that drum of the Deathless, the sound of the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, reverberated. The sound of that great drum of the Deathless, the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, was heard all the way up to the Akaniṭṭha Brahma realm. So, what is accomplished by that? Although the word aggregate (*khandha*) literally means a heap, the ordinary world does not understand its nature as a collection in daily life. Because they do not understand, they firmly hold onto all of them as 'I' and 'mine.' It is within this that Grasping / Holding / Fuel (*upādāna*) in saṃsāra exists. Grasping / Holding / Fuel (*upādāna*) means holding tightly. Letting go is seeing them as a collection; holding tightly is taking them as a single unit. As an illustration, from a wet mud bog, we can fashion a lump of earth and pick it up because of its moisture. Craving (*taṇhā*) is also described as a moisture, called glue (*sineha*). Because of Craving (*taṇhā*), this entire collection is taken as one. Having taken it together, next one can hold onto it. That is Grasping / Holding / Fuel (*upādāna*)—Grasping / Holding / Fuel based on Craving / Thirst (*taṇhā-upādāna*).

That each and every one passes away rapidly when seen as a collection through insight (*vipassanā*) is shown by a simile. According to the meaning of that simile, if one takes a handful of sand in a waterless desert, it does not remain. In ancient texts, it is said, 'A fistful of sand taken into the hand does not stay.' It does not remain in the fist; it simply flows out. In the very same way, when the practitioner of insight (*vipassanā*) understands this nature of a collection, he does not take it as a single unit. Thus, this collection becomes a lump only through that moisture called Craving (*taṇhā*). Because of wanting to hold onto it firmly by way of Grasping / Holding / Fuel (*upādāna*), we bring Craving (*taṇhā*) close to it, and it is apparent that we take it as one. Consequently, because of this, the continuity of arising and passing away is not seen. When looking through insight (*vipassanā*), as Craving (*taṇhā*) becomes distant, as Craving (*taṇhā*) is removed, the nature of this collection is understood—just like being unable to make a lump out of sand taken into the hand in a desert. This is how we must contemplate. From the very beginning of the simile, the Buddha showed the mass of Suffering (*dukkha*) experienced on this near shore by the worldlings who possess this Dogma of self-illusion / View of existing group/body (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*). Thus, that life transformation which the Ājīvaka Upaka underwent in expectation of happiness in this life ultimately became a cause of Suffering (*dukkha*). Wearied through that realization, he ran. Running on and on, he went forth in search of his friend, Anantajina.

Similarly, ordinary people wait for some event to happen to understand this Suffering (*dukkha*). But what the Buddha demonstrates through this simile is that one does not need to wait for some household entanglement or disappointment to flee; when looking at the five aggregates in the manner described by those similes, one is compelled to flee. Fleeing there means abandoning Craving (*taṇhā*). In the very act of the Buddha comparing this body of the four elements—earth, water, fire,

and air—to four highly venomous snakes, there is spiritual urgency (*saṃvega*). It is terrifying to realize, 'Are these four snakes that I am caring for, waking up in the morning, bathing, feeding, and putting to sleep?' Furthermore, to increase that fear, the others said, 'Attending to these four snakes in this manner is your duty. However, if even one gets angry, you will face death or Suffering (*dukkha*) equal to death.' We experience this directly, don't we? When wind, bile, phlegm, etc., are provoked, we go in search of doctors. Even more so, when it reaches a critical state, death is met. Yet, we remain embracing the four snakes. Binding the four snakes together, collecting those four, we carry on this Dogma of self-illusion / View of existing group/body (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) of 'I' and 'mine' through this aggregate of material form (*rūpakkhandha*). It is precisely there that the Buddha shows us to flee from that too. Fleeing there means removing the attachment to it, seeing its terrifying nature, generating spiritual urgency (*saṃvega*), and turning the mind away from it.

But it does not end there. There are still executioners. Going deeper and deeper, it is not merely the worthlessness found in caring for that ordinary body, but the Suffering (*dukkha*) in taking up the five heaps of Grasping / Holding / Fuel (*upādāna*)—material form (*rūpa*), Feeling / Sensation (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), Preparations / Preparations / Volitional activity (*saṅkhāra*), and Consciousness (*viññāṇa*)—with the mind. Taking these five aggregates of Grasping / Holding / Fuel (*pañcupādānakkhandha*) as a self is the cause of all the problems and masses of Suffering (*dukkha*) in the world, as well as the prolongation of saṃsāra; all of this is represented here by the executioners. In some places, the Buddha defines the concept of Māra by saying that each of these aggregates is itself Māra. Because as long as these aggregates exist, the fear called death exists. As long as we hold onto them, there is the fear of death. There is said to be 'one who kills' or 'one who dies.' A monk once asked, 'Venerable Sir, there is this word "Māra, Māra." Who is this Māra?' Then He replied, 'I say, monk, material form is Māra. Because only as long as material form exists is there one who dies or one who kills. Therefore, material form is Māra. Feeling / Sensation (*vedanā*) is the same.' Thus, the entire five aggregates of Grasping / Holding / Fuel (*pañcupādānakkhandha*) have been identified as Māras. That concept is introduced there as the executioners.

Next, *nandirāga* (delight and lust) means attachment coming in the form of a friend; delight and attachment. Delectation and attachment felt toward something. What happened to the Ājīvaka Upaka too was this *nandirāga* (delight and lust) developed toward Cāpā; delight and attachment. Ultimately, through that, he fasted, made an effort, and entered household life. Ultimately, there is a mass of Suffering (*dukkha*) within this. This is *nandirāga*. Next, the six sense-bases (*āyatana*). The ordinary world takes these—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—as a self, treating them as things that remain constantly unchanged. But the Buddha points out that these bases are like empty villages. When knocking on the door and looking inside, there is no one inside them; that is why it was said that when looking at those houses, everything is empty. In the simile, it is said that as that person enters the empty village, every house he enters is empty. When he touches the vessels in the houses,

every single vessel is empty. This shows the empty nature of these sense-bases. They are empty of self—Not-self / Non-self / Unsubstantial (*anattā*). Nowhere is there anyone to be taken as 'I.' When knocking on the door and asking, 'Is anyone home?', there is no one to answer. When the sound of knocking echoes back, one thinks someone is there. Something like that happens. Since they are empty houses, there is no safety there either. To make matters worse, six village-plundering bandits come to those six empty houses. Those bandits are the form-bandit, the sound-bandit, the smell-bandit, the taste-bandit, the touch-bandit, and the thought-bandit. They come to plunder. Thus, one submits to them. It was by submitting to the form-bandit that such a thing happened to the Ājīvaka Upaka. In this manner, six bandits come to plunder the village. Running in fear of that too, that person runs. While running in that manner, that body of water becomes clearly visible: 'Am I not on this side of this body of water?'

Then he realizes that these four great torrents (*oghas*) are flowing on and on: *kāmogha* (torrent of sensuality), *bhavogha* (torrent of Becoming / Existence), *diṭṭhogha* (torrent of views), and *avijjogha* (torrent of ignorance). A highly terrifying flood. Still, this near shore is dangerous. This person sees that the far shore is indeed safe. He realizes that crossing over from this is indeed true happiness. He looks around; there is no bridge, there is no ship. Next, having contemplated, he puts forth his effort and constructs (the raft). Someone might think that this Noble Eightfold Path is something that exists outwardly in the world. The Buddha says that every road in the world is inferior to this Noble Eightfold Path. But where is it? Where does it exist? This is a path that one must generate by oneself within one's own heart. The Buddha declares, '*Eso'va maggo natthañño*'—this indeed is the path, there is no other for liberation. '*Maggānaṭṭhaṅgiko seṭṭho*'—of all paths, the Eightfold Path is the best.

On one occasion, the monks gathered and were talking about roads. It is just like today: 'Look, such and such roads are good; there are expressways, and roads of that nature. One can travel back and forth as one pleases.' The Buddha asked, 'Monks, what are you discussing?' 'About roads.' On that occasion, He said that all those roads are inferior to the Noble Eightfold Path: '*maggānaṭṭhaṅgiko seṭṭho*.' This path of eight factors is indeed the most excellent path. But this path is not something that can be seen externally. It is something that must be prepared by oneself internally. That is why the simile of the raft was given. The Noble Eightfold Path is like that raft. Whether looked at as virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*), or as tranquility (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*), everyone must make a special effort for it. It cannot be done without energy. The arousal of energy (*vīriyārambha*) means that very effort made with hands and feet. This is not a journey where one goes automatically by employing automated machines, as in modern times. With the help of the raft and with the help of his hands and feet, that man crosses over to the far shore with difficulty.

Similarly, this journey with virtue, concentration, and wisdom on the Noble Eightfold Path is not accomplished all at once by pressing a button like operating an electrical machine. It is done with difficulty. One must guard virtue (*sīla*) with difficulty—even while weeping or without eating and drinking. The same applies to meditation and concentration, and next, the effort for wisdom (*paññā*). It was to show this that the Buddha gave the simile of the raft. But after going to the far shore, there is peace, safety. There is no further Birth / Arising (*jāti*) in saṃsāra. The far shore is entirely peace, Nibbāna. That is what is called the Deathless (*amata*). As Buddhists, we must understand the concept of the Deathless. In ancient belief, it was considered a special drink found among the devas in the heaven world, by drinking which one could live eternally. What the Buddha presents as the Deathless is escape from those Māras. Material form is Māra, Feeling / Sensation (*vedanā*) is Māra, perception is Māra, Preparations / Preparations / Volitional activity (*saṅkhāra*) are Māra, Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is Māra. They become Māras because of embracing them in that manner, because of Grasping / Holding / Fuel (*upādāna*). When Grasping / Holding / Fuel (*upādāna*) is abandoned, there is no fear of death. Freedom from the fear of death is realized in this very life at the moment the mind is liberated from those very Grasping / Holding / Fuel (*upādānas*). That is the great deathless Nibbāna. Thus, it was that great drum of deathless Nibbāna conveying the message of the great deathless Nibbāna that the Buddha sounded on the occasion of the *Dhammacakkappavattana*, reaching up to the Akaniṭṭha realm. That was the message given to the Ājīvaka Upaka on that occasion. In accordance with it, the Ājīvaka also achieved his liberation.

Therefore, in reference to that simile, we should contemplate that we do not need to wait for this Suffering (*dukkha*) of saṃsāra and weariness with saṃsāra to be brought about by various external causes. There is no need to wait for weariness with saṃsāra to occur through some external event, thinking, 'Only if some affliction occurs, or if a child is lost, or if marriage breaks down, or if my source of income is lost, will I become weary of saṃsāra.' When looking at one's own body, at the snakes and executioners in this simile, one understands the value of escaping from them. Those who have money can travel on the expressways of the world by paying tolls. This is not that kind of path. With difficulty, constructing it by oneself, like gathering branches and twigs to make a boat, one travels on this path to Nibbāna with difficulty. But even though it is practiced with difficulty, in the end, on the day it succeeds, there is peace.

It is for the sake of that Nibbāna that you, virtuous devotees, on a valuable Poya day like today, have abandoned whatever luxury goods you have in your homes, and in order to draw close to the lives of the Arahants as declared by the Buddha, have undertaken the eight-fold Uposatha virtue (*uposatha-aṭṭhaṅga-sīla*), and possessing that wealth of virtue, are directing your minds as much as possible to the Dhamma and meditation. Today too you have striven to construct that raft in order to travel on this Noble Eightfold Path. Therefore, having fulfilled that effort, and making the spiritual power of this Dhamma sermon you have heard your support, just like the

noble friendship (*kalyāṇamitta*) that the Ājīvaka Upaka received from the Buddha, you must also receive the help from the Dhamma teachers and construct that raft by yourselves.

In order to put an end to this Suffering (*dukkha*) of saṃsāra, by completing the Noble Eightfold Path, may this merit of listening to the Dhamma be a supportive cause for you to escape from all saṃsāric Suffering (*dukkha*) at some point through the realization of the paths and fruits of Stream-entry (*Sotāpatti*), Once-returning (*Sakadāgāmī*), Non-returning (*Anāgāmī*), and Arahantship! Make that aspiration. Likewise, whatever living beings up to the Akaniṭṭha realm are ready to share in these merits of expounding and listening to the Dhamma, may they all, by sharing in these merits, be stilled in the supreme great deathless Nibbāna through their desired path of awakening (*bodhi*)! With this aspiration, recite these verses.

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……*"