Pahankanuwa Sermon #151

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

Author: Ven. Katukurunde Nanananda Thero

(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.46)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

Pali Stanza:

"Hanti bhogā dummedhaṃ,

no ca pāragavesino;

Bhogataṇhāya dummedho,

hanti aññe'va attanaṃ."

From:

Dhammapada Verse 355 (Taṇhā Vagga)

Dear Listeners,

The acquisition of worldly wealth and prosperity is generally considered in the world as a stroke of luck, a great fortune. However, the foolish person, overcome by craving (*taṇhā*) for material possessions, brings about disaster from within that very prosperity. A person whose mind is possessed by craving (*taṇhā*) for possessions and the rust of stinginess is driven to the brink of self-destruction due to that very miserliness, just as if he were being destroyed by others. That is why in the Dhamma, stinginess is described as a "rust." Through rust, the mind becomes impure and inactive. Thus, a story of a person who destroyed his life and ruined his own progress through such stinginess is presented as the origin story (*nidāna kathā*) for the verse chosen as today's theme.

On one occasion, when the Buddha was residing at the Jetavana monastery, King Pasenadi of Kosala came to see him at midday. The Buddha asked, "Why, Great King, have you come at this midday hour, an unusual time? From where have you come?" Then the king replied, "The treasurer (*seṭṭhi*) of Sāvatthi has passed away. Since he died childless, I have spent the day organizing the confiscation of his wealth to the royal treasury, and I am coming straight from there." The king also shared some details about the treasurer's life: "That treasurer possessed nearly ten million in gold

coins alone; there is no need to even speak of silver. Despite possessing such vast wealth, this treasurer daily ate only broken rice and sour gruel. For clothing, he wore a coarse hempen garment made of three pieces stitched together. He traveled in a dilapidated chariot under a canopy of leaves. He lived such a miserable and wretched life." Hearing this, the Buddha explained, one by one, the past kamma that caused this treasurer's anomalous lifestyle as follows:

"Great King, in a past life, when this treasurer was also a wealthy householder, a Pacceka Buddha named Tagarasikhi arrived at his residence. The householder ordered his household members, 'Give alms-food to this ascetic,' and then rose from his seat and went away. After the alms-food was given, a sense of regret arose in his mind: 'If I had given this food to a servant or a laborer, I could have gotten some work done. By giving it to this ascetic, it was wasted in vain.' The Buddha also revealed another incident that occurred in that same past life. He murdered his brother's only son to acquire his brother's wealth—that is, after the brother passed away, only that child remained, and he killed the child to make the entire estate his own. That was a grave unwholesome act. Yet, so powerful was the merit-energy (*ānisaṃsa*) of his mere word ordering that alms-food be given to the Pacceka Buddha, that he was born seven times in the heavenly worlds, and seven times held the post of treasurer in this very city of Sāvatthi, solely due to the wholesome potential of that brief instruction. However, because of his subsequent regret, that wholesome deed was defiled. As a result, although he attained the status of a treasurer, his mind would not lean toward enjoying those riches; he could not bring himself to enjoy good food, clothing, or vehicles, and his mind was not inclined toward the five cords of sensual pleasure, precisely due to that lingering stinginess."

Furthermore, as a result of murdering his brother's young son, he boiled in hell for hundreds of thousands of years, and as a residual consequence (*vipāka*) of that deed, he lived seven lifetimes completely childless—such that all his vast treasures eventually went to the royal treasury upon his death. The Buddha declared this. Next, the Buddha revealed that the merit this treasurer had accumulated in the past is now completely exhausted. Since he did not accumulate any new merit, he is at this very moment boiling in the Mahāroruva hell. When the Buddha described this terrifying destiny in accordance with kamma, the King exclaimed, "Bhante, how tragic this is! Even though he possessed such enormous wealth, he did not enjoy it himself, nor did he use it for meritorious deeds when the Buddha was living so close to him." It was at that moment that the Buddha spoke the aforementioned verse containing the message: "Yes, Great King, a person with craving (*taṇhā*) for wealth destroys himself in this manner, and does not direct his mind toward Nibbāna."

“Bhogā dummedhaṃ hanti, no ca pāragavesino”

Dummedha means the foolish person. Worldly wealth and possessions destroy the foolish person; they are ruined by those very riches. *“No ca pāragavesino”*—but

those who seek the further shore, who seek Nibbāna, are not destroyed by wealth and prosperity in this way. Next,

“Bhogataṇhāya dummedho, hanti aññeva attanaṃ”

Due to craving (*taṇhā*) for wealth, craving for worldly prosperity, that foolish person brings about his own destruction, just as if others were destroying him. This is the meaning of that Dhamma verse. Based on this story, we can extract many highly valuable lessons. All these devout, merit-seeking Buddhists should reflect on why one is called a *'pinvatā'* (a fortunate or merit-endowed person). This is a common idiom in our language. A *'pinvatā'* is defined as someone who possesses merit (*puñña*). Among the meritorious deeds mentioned in this Dispensation, the very first to be enumerated is the meritorious act of giving (*dāna*). You all know well that when the bases of meritorious activity (*puñña-kiriya-vatthu*) are shown, they are giving (*dāna*), virtue (*sīla*), and mental development (*bhāvanā*). Where the four bases of sympathy (*saṅgaha-vatthu*) are shown, they are giving, kindly speech, useful conduct, and impartiality. Among the perfections (*pāramitā*), giving is foremost. Among the ten bases of meritorious action (*dasa-puñña-kiriya-vatthu*), giving is at the beginning. In all these contexts, giving is presented as the primary discipline. You have often heard that for a gift to yield great fruit and great benefit (*mahatphala mahānisaṃsa*), one must give with the 'threefold mind' (the three thoughts). The threefold mind refers to: the intention (*cetanā*) generated before giving, the state of mind and thought prevailing at the moment of giving, and one's attitude and thought regarding it after having given. When all three are complete, only then can it be considered an entirely complete gift of great fruit and great benefit. This concept of the 'threefold mind' is explained in the Dhamma through a verse:

Pubbeva dānā sumano, dadaṃ cittaṃ pasādaye;

Datvā attamano hoti, esā yaññassa sampadā.

Here, *yañña* means sacrifice or giving (*dāna*). Three factors required to perfect the achievement of giving are presented there. Before giving, a sense of joy (*somanassa*) arises. One gives something with a sense of joy and happiness; before giving, that joy is present. *“Dadaṃ cittaṃ pasādaye”*—while giving, there is confidence or clarity of mind. One arouses a certain inspiration and clarity regarding the recipient. *“Datvā attamano hoti”*—having given, there is gladness. But for that treasurer, instead of that gladness, there arose the regret called remorse (*vipiṭisāra*). He regarded it as a loss to himself. Because of that, the merit was defiled. The Dhamma analyzes and highlights the value of safeguarding the mind in terms of the preliminary volition (*pūrva-cetanā*), the volition at the moment of relinquishment (*muñcana-cetanā*), and the subsequent volition (*apara-cetanā*). In performing meritorious deeds like giving or any other, rather than merely staring at the object offered and measuring the value of one's gift by its material worth, one must be mindful of this mind, which is invisible both to oneself and to others.

Now, from this story we see that it was because of some slight, yet real, joy that the treasurer gave the command to offer the alms-food. He did not give it with his own hands, yet he ordered that the alms-food be given. How immense the fruits (*ānisaṃsa*) of that act were is evident from his attainment of heavenly bliss and his status as a treasurer. Furthermore, three factors are frequently explained regarding the success of a gift: the excellence of the giver (*dāyaka-sampatti*), the excellence of the gift (*deyya-dhamma-sampatti*), and the excellence of the recipient (*paṭigrāhaka-sampatti*). Here too, there must be purity in the giver's intention and conviction (*saddhā*). The object of charity, too, should be something of fine quality.

Next, the excellence of the recipient (*paṭigrāhaka-sampatti*) refers to the spiritual virtue of the receiving party. Accordingly, when we consider that merely ordering the gift to be given to a Pacceka Buddha led to seven births in the heavens and seven appointments as a treasurer, we can see how exceptionally powerful the excellence of the recipient is in making a gift bear great fruit and great benefit. The object of charity may be massive; however, if it is offered with a narrow mind, a petty mind, or with a wrong intention and wrong expectations, it does not become a truly wholesome deed (*kusala*).

We can learn much from this regarding being mindful of the mind when performing meritorious deeds like giving. The phrase "the rust of stinginess" described in the Dhamma is also well worth reflecting upon. The Buddha has pointed out the moment this rust of stinginess enters minds, stating: *“Maccheraṃ dadataṃ malaṃ”*—stinginess is the rust of those who give. Why is it called a "rust"? We know that a metal object is destroyed by rust. When rust forms on a metal object, if it is not cleaned regularly, it eventually turns into a heap of rust. Similarly, we know that if the hinges of a door are eaten by rust, that door cannot be swung back and forth properly. It cannot be opened or closed; it is incapacitated and cannot be operated. In the same way, the mind becomes incapacitated. Simply put, when stinginess sets in, neither the hand nor the mind inclines or bends toward giving. That is what the "rust of stinginess" means. Through this, the brilliance of the mind is lost. The mind becomes narrow, regardless of how wealthy one is considered in society. We usually measure wealth and richness based on a person’s material assets. But if one looks inside that person, due to that rust, the stingy person possesses a mind akin to that of an extremely destitute beggar. Wealth means capability, the power to do. Being poor or 'incapable' means the inability to do.

Therefore, wealth is not measured by material riches alone, but by that quality of relinquishment, the virtue of generosity—the extent to which the mind bends toward giving. Just because wealth is present—which is indeed received due to past merit—one can still become an absolute pauper in utilizing it if that dangerous rust called the "rust of stinginess" enters the mind. Thus, this story makes it clear to us how necessary it is to protect ourselves from it. By freeing oneself from this rust of stinginess and giving, a meritorious deed is perfected. As the fruit of that merit, one receives heavenly rebirth, human prosperity, and the status of a treasurer. Not only

that, the deepest benefit of giving is the growth of the quality of generosity (*cāga*). You have heard of the Seven Noble Treasures (*sapta āriya-dhana*). These represent seven types of wealth possessed by those who have attained supramundane states:

Saddhā-dhanaṃ sīla-dhanaṃ, hiri-ottappiyaṃ dhanaṃ;

Suta-dhanaṃ ca cāgo ca, paññā ve sattamaṃ dhanaṃ.

Conviction (*saddhā*), virtue (*sīla*), moral shame (*hiri*) and moral dread (*ottappa*) which are shame and fear toward sin, then the understanding acquired through hearing the Dhamma (*suta*), then relinquishment (*cāga*). Generosity, too, is shown as a Noble Treasure. Finally, the treasure of wisdom (*paññā*). Why is relinquishment considered a treasure? If a person has not developed the volition of relinquishment, when some mishap or disaster occurs in daily life, or if one's property is lost or destroyed through thieves or by other means, they cannot compose their mind. They lack the strength to reconcile their mind. But one who has cultivated this virtue can compose their mind. Through the strength of letting go cultivated via the volition of giving, they can reconcile their mind. That is why, ultimately, the benefit one receives from giving, both in this world and throughout the round of rebirths, is designated as "wealth."

These days, many people ask, "Even if you say we have given alms, who sees their results (*vipāka*)? Can you prove that there is a fruit to giving?" In an era where such diverse opinions exist, including the view that "performing these meritorious deeds only prolongs the round of rebirths," one must reflect on how giving purifies one's own mind. Lay devotees spend their lives surrounded by money and a mountain of possessions. Living amongst these, defilement is bound to arise in the mind. We refer to things like greed, stinginess, and miserliness as belonging to the very word craving (*taṇhā*). It is a very low, wretched form of craving. There is a risk of sliding into that state if one does not regularly practice giving. Giving is not something to be done for worldly pride or show. It must be done by clarifying the mind at all three stages—the preliminary volition (*pūrva-cetanā*), the volition of relinquishment (*muñcana-cetanā*), and the subsequent volition (*apara-cetanā*)—so that those aforementioned factors are fulfilled. Moreover, you must give as a true benefactor, endowed with virtue (*sīla*) and conviction (*saddhā*), and the gift being offered should not be thrown away carelessly, but prepared and presented in a fitting manner.

Next is the other factor regarding the receiving party (*paṭigrāhaka*). Many people say, "Due to economic hardships, we have nothing to give." It is indeed very difficult when there is nothing to give. However, the absence of a worthy recipient to whom one can offer a good, highly fruitful gift is another dangerous situation. This is a moral decline, parallel to economic decline. For a gift to yield great fruit and great benefit, it is also necessary for the recipient to be developed in virtuous qualities.

Excellence of virtue means growth in supramundane virtues. The Pacceka Buddha mentioned in this story is the second most noble person in the world. From this, we

can understand that those who receive gifts should be mindful of cultivating such virtue, to the best of their ability, to become fields of merit (*puññakkhetta*) for the world. Usually, the Dhamma states, *"Anuttaraṃ puññakkhettaṃ lokassa"*—"an unsurpassed field of merit for the world"—in reference to the Saṅgha. The Saṅgha does not refer to the external appearance, but to that aforementioned spiritual mass of virtue. Where that mass of virtue is degraded, that nature of being a field of merit is also absent. Therefore, whether one is a layperson or a monastic, it is by drawing closer to those supramundane virtues that one develops the capacity to make the success of others' giving yield great fruit and great benefit. The Buddha stated here that the treasurer had completely finished experiencing the results of his past meritorious deeds. He did not make any effort to gather new merit. You can understand this through the analogy of a farmer who squanders all the seed-paddy in his barn; he has no seed left to sow for the next harvest. In the same way, what happened here is that he merely enjoyed the benefits of past merits. He did not gather merit that would support him further in this long round of rebirths (*saṃsāra*). The terrifying nature of its result is clear from the story of his rebirth in hell. From that, we can learn a very valuable lesson.

The great female lay disciple Visākhā, who was highly eminent in wisdom within this Dispensation during the Buddha's time, taught her own father-in-law a fine lesson. You have heard that the treasurer was Visākhā's father-in-law. Visākhā had to be married into a family holding wrong views. Treasurer Migāra held wrong views and ministered to the Niganṭhas (Jain ascetics). In the early days after her marriage, one day, Treasurer Migāra was eating rich milk-rice—a highly delicious milk-rice—served in a golden bowl while seated on a very valuable seat. While he was eating, his new daughter-in-law was fanning him. At that moment, a monk on an alms-round arrived there. When he entered the house, Visākhā thought wisely, 'It is not fit to say in words to my father-in-law that a monk has arrived.' Instead, she stepped aside slightly so that the monk would be clearly visible to him. The treasurer raised his head, looked, but showed no reaction whatsoever; pretending not to see, he looked down and resumed eating his food. Visākhā then spoke to the monk—when there is nothing to offer to monks on their alms-round, there is a certain phrase used on such occasions: *"Atikkamatha, bhante"* (Please pass on, Venerable Sir). This is a phrase conveying the meaning, "Seek satisfaction elsewhere, we have nothing to offer here." Visākhā said, "Venerable Sir, please pass on. Obtain it from elsewhere. My father-in-law is eating stale food (*purāṇa*). Therefore, Venerable Sir, please be compassionate and go elsewhere."

Upon hearing this, Treasurer Migāra flew into a great rage. What was the reason? The Pāli word *purāṇa* (old/ancient) also has another connotation in some contexts, meaning excrement or refuse. Thus, the treasurer thought, 'I am eating this milk-rice, yet my daughter-in-law has placed me in such a degrading position. She said such a thing about what I am eating!' He ordered his servants, 'Take this milk-rice away, and drive this woman out of this house!' Then Visākhā said, 'I am not someone who can be driven out so easily like a slave-girl. I was brought here from an

honorable family. Furthermore, when my parents married me off, they sent eight noble clan-leaders to judge any such issues that might arise. Present this case to them.' The treasurer then summoned those eight judges and made his complaint: 'While I was eating my food in this manner, my daughter-in-law said such a thing.' Then Visākhā explained her statement: 'I said it with this meaning: my father-in-law is eating stale food (*purāṇa*) in the sense that he is consuming his past merit, and is not accumulating new merit. I said it with that intention, and not as some talk about refuse.'

There may be many people in this society who are like Visākhā's father-in-law. Everyone must reflect that meritorious deeds like giving are what support one's long journey through the round of rebirths (*saṃsāra*). Shortcomings in these are what manifest in one's day-to-day life. Even performing meritorious deeds must be done correctly. One must be mindful of how one's mind fluctuates. One must train to observe this. Furthermore, as stated in the Dhamma, the value of a gift does not depend on the size of the object given, but on the thought with which it is given: *"Appampi ce saddahano dadāti, teneva so hoti sukhī parattha."* Even if one is extremely poor, if they give even a tiny thing with a large mind, with deep conviction (*saddhā*), and with a great volition of relinquishment without a stingy mind, that is what yields great fruit and great benefit. Thus, the benefit of giving by removing the rust of stinginess is highlighted. Among meritorious deeds, the meritorious act of giving is presented as fundamental. So much so, as you well know, among the perfections (*pāramitā*) of the Buddha, the perfection of giving (*dāna-pāramitā*) is paramount. The perfection of giving means going to the absolute limit of giving. The Bodhisatta is one who approaches this concept of giving with a depth that is hard for an ordinary human to even conceive. The perfection of giving is not confined to external objects, but extends to internal things—yielding even his own body, head, flesh, and blood. With this background of the Bodhisatta's life, the Buddha once declared to the monks: "Monks, if these people knew the benefits of giving as I do, they would never eat without sharing. Even if it were their very last morsel of rice, their final mouthful, they would not eat it without sharing, if there were someone present to receive it." This means, suppose someone has only one morsel of rice left, their final mouthful. Just as they lift it, a beggar arrives and asks for it. They give it. Even if it is the very food about to enter their mouth, if it can sustain another, they would give it away. The Buddha declared that the benefit of giving is that great. He also stated that it is because people do not know this that their minds are covered by the rust of stinginess.

Over the past few days, we celebrated the New Year festival. This giving, the quality of relinquishment, is a heritage our nation has received through Buddhist customs and traditions. This is visible even during the New Year festival. In the month of Bak (April), which is heavy with harvest, there is an opportunity within the New Year customs to share that fortune among relatives, friends, neighbors, as well as the poor, travelers, and beggars. Similarly, in the upcoming month of Vesak, there are the alms-stalls (*dansäl*). All of these are valuable qualities integrated into our

national character based on that concept of giving. It is by developing these virtues, such as hospitality to guests, that one can make one's life in the round of rebirths (*saṃsāra*) fruitful, while simultaneously subduing and gradually cutting away that dangerous disease of the mind, the defilement (*kilesa*) called craving (*taṇhā*).

You know that discourses like the Mahāmaṅgala Sutta, which were preached to deities, were often delivered during the night as answers to questions asked by devas who came to visit the Buddha. On one such occasion, a young deity named Sērī came to visit the Buddha. In reply to a question asked by this deity, the Buddha stated:

Ye naṃ dadanti saddhāya, vippasannena cetasā;

Tameva annaṃ bhajati, asmiṃ loke paramhi ca.

Those who give gifts with conviction (*saddhā*) and with a clear, confident mind, never experience a shortage of food and drink, both in this world and the next. Just as if food and drink come searching for them, they suffer no lack.

Tasmā vineyya maccheraṃ, dajjā dānaṃ malābhibhū;

Puññāni paralokasmiṃ, patiṭṭhā honti pāṇinaṃ.

Therefore, conquering this rust of stinginess, overcoming and removing stinginess, one should give gifts. Why? Because for living beings, this thing called merit (*puñña*) becomes a support in the world beyond. When the Buddha spoke thus, the deity named Sērī shared his own experience: "Bhante, I see how well-spoken (*subhāsita*) and true your words are. When I was in the human world, I was a king by the very name Sērī. I was someone who practiced this giving at the highest level. That is, the world knew me as a *dāyako* (giver), a *dānapati* (lord of giving), and a *dānassa vaṇṇavādī* (one who praises giving). There is great depth in these three terms. *Dāyaka* means one who gives. *Dānapati* means one who gives on such a grand scale that he masterfully controls those acts of giving. *Dānassa vaṇṇavādī* means one who praises giving to others, explaining its value. That is the highest thing a giver can do. That is how I gave when I was a king," he declared to the Buddha.

"I built alms-halls at all four gates of the city and regularly gave alms to ascetics, brahmins, the poor, travelers, and beggars. As this went on, one day the women of the harem—the queens—came to me and said, 'Only the King gives alms; we have no opportunity to do so. It would be wonderful if we too were given an opportunity.' Then I thought, 'I, this Sērī, am a giver, a lord of giving, and one who praises giving. Therefore, when such a request is made, I cannot refuse it.' So I permitted the women of the harem to organize the giving at the first gate. The King's own alms-giving at that gate was discontinued. After some time, the princes and the royal khattiyas came with the next request: 'Your Majesty gives alms, and the women of the harem also give alms. But we have no opportunity.' The King thought in the same way, 'I cannot reject this request,' and allowed those princes and khattiyas to give alms at the second gate."

"After some time, the military forces—the soldiers under the commander-in-chief—came and made the same request: 'Your Majesty gives alms, the queens of the harem give alms, and the khattiya princes give alms. Only we have no opportunity.' On that occasion, the third gate was granted to those royal soldiers to give alms. Next, fourthly, came the brahmin householders. They made the same request. The King had to hand over the management of the alms-hall at the fourth gate to those brahmins. There was no longer any alms-giving directly from the King. The royal officers came to the King and said, 'Now, there seems to be no alms-giving at all from Your Majesty.' The deity Sērī said, 'At that point, this is what I did: "Then, my men, go and send only half of the taxes collected from outside the city—from the distant provinces—to the palace. Let the other half be distributed right there as alms to ascetics, brahmins, the poor, travelers, and beggars..." By giving alms on such a massive scale, I now enjoy this heavenly bliss. So much so, I cannot even measure how long I will remain in this heaven, or how much merit I still have left. How true are the words of the Buddha!' declared the deity Sērī."

In this giving, in the distribution of gifts (*dāna-saṃvibhāga*), and in providing opportunities for others to give—in all of these, one has the capacity to accumulate a vast store of merit. Yet, more valuable than all of these is directing it toward Nibbāna. When speaking of a gift that yields great fruit and great benefit, it was mentioned earlier that the volition (*cetanā*) behind the act of giving is what governs it. One can give out of a specific personal preference, or out of fear, or with the expectation of a heavenly rebirth, and so forth, under various kinds of volitions.

However, these are not the highest purposes. The Buddha has stated that the deep purpose of giving is: *"Cittālaṅkāraṃ dānaṃ deti"*—one gives a gift for the adornment of the mind, and to fulfill the factors necessary for the growth of the mind. That is what is called "requisites for the mind." It is for this that one gives. Such is the purpose of giving that in accordance with the Dhamma supports Nibbāna. Here, *cittālaṅkāra* means the adornment of the mind. Through this giving, we can develop a certain degree of concentration (*samādhi*). In the Dhamma, this is designated as *cāgānussati*—recollection of generosity. Recollections (*anussati*) as meditation subjects (*kammaṭṭhāna*) mean constant reflection. You know the recollection of the Buddha (*buddhānussati*) well—reflecting deeply on the qualities of the Buddha. Recollection of the Dhamma (*dhammānussati*) is reflecting on the qualities of the Dhamma. Recollection of the Saṅgha (*saṅghānussati*) is reflecting on the qualities of the Saṅgha. Similarly, there is also the recollection of generosity (*cāgānussati*).

The Buddha has shown meditations that can be practiced. Among people of the world whose minds are choked by the rust of stinginess, I live in this manner. How is this described in the Dhamma? *"Vigatamalamaccherena cetasā"*—with a mind free from the rust of stinginess, *"agāraṃ ajjhāvasati, mutta-cāgo payata-pāṇi vossagga-rato yācayogo dāna-saṃvibhāga-rato"* and so forth. One dwells at home with a mind free from stinginess, liberal, open-handed, delighting in relinquishment,

devoted to charity, and rejoicing in sharing. One is always ready and prepared to give, experiencing a special joy in letting go.

Furthermore, one makes oneself accessible to beggars (*yācayogo*), and takes pleasure in distributing gifts (*dāna-saṃvibhāgo*). When one constantly maintains the thought, "I live in this generous manner," the mind becomes composed through that reflection. The Buddha has pointed out that hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) are discarded and one enters a certain state of concentration (*samādhi*). In this way, through the recollection of generosity (*cāgānussati*), even concentration can be developed. That is what is meant by "the adornment of the mind" (*cittālaṅkāra*). A mind is adorned when it becomes concentrated, when it becomes calm. Next, "requisites for the mind" refers to the practice in a deep, insight-oriented (*vipassanā*) manner. Giving is the primary training in letting go. Among the things the world considers "mine," the most fundamental is one's heap of possessions—external assets like gold, silver, pearls, gems, and lands. In the Bodhisatta conduct of the Buddha, this letting go is illustrated even to the extent of giving away wife and children.

Similarly, by giving away parts of one's own body—eyes, head, flesh, and blood—one gradually imprints the truth of not-self (*anattā*), the realization that "these are not mine," onto the mind. Even when giving a small thing, if one reflects in terms of insight (*vipassanā*): "By giving this object—which I previously regarded as 'mine'—to someone else, it has become an exercise for me to remove greed towards it." That is precisely where the quality of relinquishment (*cāga*), of letting go, lies. When regarded as an exercise in letting go, it supports the growth of the mind from the perspective of insight. Even if one performs meritorious deeds, if one does not know the factors that help make that merit yield great fruit and great benefit, it cannot be considered a wise offering. That is why one must be mindful of these factors. Countless acts of charity are performed in the world, yet whether they are given with a pure mind as described is sometimes doubtful. Moreover, at the moment of giving, there is a possibility of the mind weakening.

Now, giving is essentially prompted by two causes: conviction (*saddhā*) or compassion (*karuṇā*). Monastic alms within the Dispensation are given with conviction in the Triple Gem. Giving to the poor, travelers, and beggars is done out of compassion. Whichever cause it may be, at the moment of giving, one must compose the mind and give in such a way that no subsequent regret arises—not with a mind that, as it were, runs back to reclaim what was given. One should give in a manner that allows one to be happy and rejoice over the deed.

Furthermore, like the story of the morsel of rice, the Buddha has shown that even an extremely poor person giving some small thing of theirs can yield great fruit and great benefit according to the excellence of the recipient. Indeed, one should give to everyone. One should give even to an animal. Yet, according to the natural law (*dhammatā*) of the world, a gift yields great fruit and great benefit depending on the

spiritual virtue of the recipient. In agriculture, it is the crop sown in a fertile field that yields the greatest results, the highest harvest. It is the same when considering business investments. However, this is not like a transaction of the ordinary world. This is an act done by joining one's mind, connecting one's mind, and engaging the mind. Giving is not something that is merely visible externally.

Ultimately, we will have to let go not only of these external objects, but also of this very five-aggregate bundle (*pañcakkhandha*) that we have assumed to be "mine." This means that this concept of giving (*dāna*) extends to the capacity to let go of everything we have grasped with the mind and regarded as self-identity—namely, form (*rūpa*), sensation (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), Preparations (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). That is why the path begins with giving (*dāna*) in the perfections, merges with the others, and finally culminates in wisdom (*paññā*) itself—through the development of insight-wisdom (*vipassanā-paññā*). The quality of giving, which is embedded within our very identity as Buddhists, our culture, and all our customs, is shown to be a support and a foundation in this long round of rebirths (*saṃsāra*), as made clear by the passage: *"Puññāni paralokasmiṃ patiṭṭhā honti pāṇinaṃ"* (Meritorious deeds are the support for living beings in the world beyond). Even if one becomes an Arahant, if they have not performed acts of giving and the like, they might not even receive the basic requisites necessary to live their life comfortably. The Dhamma even mentions monastics who fell into miserable conditions due to past stinginess and jealousy.

Furthermore, one should reflect on the lightness of mind experienced when performing meritorious deeds of giving during times of personal disaster. One gains the strength of mind to reconcile oneself without regret or grief, thinking, "In this disaster, I must reflect in terms of kamma. This is something that was bound to happen to me." In this way, we can enrich our lives through this concept of giving. This society is moving in a dangerous direction, with no regard for merit or righteousness. Not only through past stories, but also through events unfolding in the present era, we can see the connection between kamma and its result (*vipāka*) taught by the Buddha. The things we consider as luck and fortune do not happen by chance. Though we receive them due to past merit, if we become intoxicated by them, breed pride, harbor improper greed and stinginess, and squander them, we can fall into extremely dangerous states in the future. Instead, what must be done is as expressed in *"no ce pāragavesino"*—the person who seeks the further shore of Nibbāna always utilizes the wealth they have received in a way that supports Extinguishment.

To support Nibbāna means to prevent rebirth in miserable realms, to head towards happy realms, to lean towards the wholesome, and deeply, by reflecting on the craving (*taṇhā*) within one's own mind and studying it from the perspective of insight (*vipassanā*), to cultivate the wisdom necessary for Extinguishment. We must utilize these possessions in a way that helps shorten our journey through the round of rebirths (*saṃsāra*), or at least saves us from the terrifying abysses of that journey,

such as hell and the ghost realm (*peta-loka*). It is precisely those with an abundance of the rust of stinginess, greed, and miserliness who are born in the ghost realms. Or, those who die with an intense craving (*taṇhā*) and greed for their possessions are born in the ghost realms and suffer terribly, finding themselves in states without food, water, or clothing. These are not things that happen to just one or two people. Even immensely wealthy people, like that treasurer, by ignoring this concept of giving and treating it as a trivial matter, neither enjoy the wealth they daily receive nor give it to others, and are destroyed along with it. That is why the Buddha declared that just as others would destroy him, the foolish person destroys himself. The Buddha's teaching is one where the journey to cross over this round of rebirths begins right where one stands and goes deep. We must reflect on why giving is placed at the very beginning of the perfections, the bases of meritorious activity, and the bases of sympathy. This is because, starting from where one is capable, and utilizing one's wealth according to the path taught by the Buddha, the very next step after generating conviction (*saddhā*) is giving. That is why, when someone asked the Buddha what kind of person a person of conviction is, he gave this reply:

Dassanakāmo sīlavataṃ, saddhammaṃ so sumicchati;

Vineyya macchera-malaṃ, sa ve saddhoti vuccati.

A person of conviction (*saddhā*) is one who desires to see the virtuous, wishes to hear the True Dhamma, and is ready to give by removing the rust of stinginess. We see that giving, the concept of giving, is a quality that goes hand-in-hand with conviction. Reflecting from the perspective of the Dispensation, even during times when no Buddha has arisen (*abuddhotpāda*) and supramundane virtues are absent in the world, it is shown that kings and wise, wealthy people established alms-halls and gave to the poor, travelers, beggars, and well-known ascetics and brahmins. Thus, this giving is a valuable, timeless custom in the world. The part that supports our Nibbāna—the very essence of it—is the quality of relinquishment (*cāga*). Sometimes a person gives something, yet grasps it with the mind. That was why the treasurer regretted: "If I had given this even to a laborer, I could have gotten some work done." He grasped it with his mind. It should not be so; when giving something, one must completely remove expectation regarding it, understand its benefits, and give: "Through this letting go, I have comforted and brought happiness to someone." If it is an offering of food within the Dispensation, one should offer it with the thought, "I am giving someone life, beauty, happiness, strength, and wisdom." Craving (*taṇhā*) is compared to the great ocean. No matter how many treasures are poured in, even to overflowing, just as the ocean is never filled, craving is never satisfied.

"Mema haṭa ata itiriya demi yana sita

Hama raṭa raja siri sapa laduvat nata"

As stated in the *Lōvada Saṅgarāva*: "The thought, 'This is enough for me, I will give away the rest,' does not arise naturally in a person, even if they obtain the royal bliss

and comfort of every country." Therefore, it is according to past habituation (*saṃsāra-purudda*) that even the volition to give arises in someone. If one does not cultivate that habit, just as rust accumulates on a metal object, rust will gradually accumulate in one's mind. Once rusted, one eventually destroys oneself. They also drag those they associate with and the world into the mouth of destruction, setting a bad example. Thus, we must be exceptionally mindful of such virtues. No matter how much prominence we give to intellect, if we do not practically incline our lives toward virtue, it unconsciously becomes a deceptive state (*vañcaka-dhamma*). What is the use of speaking of deep things to the world if one does not put them into practice? One's life will fall into an abyss in the round of rebirths (*saṃsāra*).

Therefore, the New Year festival is an excellent opportunity to resolve to conduct one's affairs starting from the very first level of practice taught by the Buddha. It is not an occasion to simply enjoy, squander, dance, eat, and drink without any thought of virtue. Within these New Year customs lies the practice of sharing the wealth and grain one has received over the past twelve months with relatives, friends, and neighbors, helping them, joining with them in hospitality, and fulfilling duties. There too lies the concept of giving (*dāna*). During the Vesak season, there is a custom in this country of giving food, drink, or other things according to one's capacity to the devout, the poor, travelers, and beggars, having aroused conviction (*saddhā*) in the Triple Gem. From all these practices, such as running alms-stalls (*dansäl*), what remains for oneself is that aforementioned quality of relinquishment (*cāga*), the virtue of generosity. One's mind grows. Greed is subdued. It is due to the three unwholesome roots—greed, hatred, and delusion—that we have remained in this round of rebirths (*saṃsāra*) for so long. Therefore, to eradicate greed, to subdue that thirst called craving (*taṇhā*), the primary exercise is to begin by giving away one's external possessions, wealth, grain, and other such things. A Buddha, who aspires to a grand perfection-potential, carries this concept of giving to its absolute, ultimate end—to the extent of giving his own head, flesh, and blood. Thus, we must constantly reflect on the value of that relinquishment. In daily life, without being overly concerned with one's own level of wealth, one should help neighbors or those in distress as opportunities arise, rather than merely performing these acts of charity as mere rituals within the Dispensation. One must reflect wisely and perform a wise act of giving in a manner that develops the wholesome potential of the mind.

In this manner, through the verse and these stories, the Buddha has presented a multitude of valuable virtues for us to integrate into our lives. It is through the meritorious deeds of giving (*dāna*), virtue (*sīla*), and mental development (*bhāvanā*) that one is able to cross over this round of rebirths (*saṃsāra*). The relinquishment of external possessions, which begins with giving, becomes the training of body and speech through virtue. What one is forced to give up in virtue is that which one desires. The mind prompts one to kill living beings, to steal, to commit sexual misconduct, to lie, and to consume intoxicants. In virtue, too, one practices letting go of these. In giving, there is letting go; in virtue, there is letting go. Mental development (*bhāvanā*) goes even deeper; although it is not called 'giving' (*dāna*), it

too is a sacrifice, a relinquishment. What is the sacrifice there? You know how much sacrifice is required to practice meditation. One must withdraw the mind from many things regarded as entertainment and comfort in daily life. One must discard numerous old habits from the mind, remove the mind's tendency to grasp the world, and restrain the mind from running toward the unwholesome, directing it toward the wholesome. There too lies a sacrifice. One must view it as a gift, a sacrifice; the very same process of letting go that was started at the beginning is practiced there as well. Therefore, we must not isolate giving and treat it as something done only by ordinary folk or the foolish. It is the very first step in developing one's spiritual life. Starting with the relinquishment of external possessions, then training one's body and speech, and utilizing that volition of relinquishment—this letting go not only fosters the growth of one's own mind but also brings immense peace to society.

Abstaining from the five vices helps the mind grow, purifies the mind, and assists in eliminating the confusion, harm, and destruction that arise in the external world. Next, when reflecting on the aspect of mental development (*bhāvanā*), some people think that sitting in a corner with limbs folded does not serve the world or society. The Buddha has declared that all the meritorious deeds of giving that can be performed in this world are not worth even a sixteenth part of the power of developing the liberation of mind through loving-kindness (*mettā-cetovimutti*), the jhana of loving-kindness. This means that all the grand acts of giving we have spoken of so far are subordinate to a mind of loving-kindness. By radiating loving-kindness from a highly developed mind—what is nowadays referred to in modern terms as 'sending out vibrations'—the peace that the world receives, and the wholesome potential (*kusala-sakti*) within it, defeats all external forms of giving. From this, we can see how much peace a person who has developed their mind through mental development brings to the world through that mind of loving-kindness. The Bodhisatta, and others who developed their minds in this way, were capable of averting great disasters solely through that loving-kindness. It averts not only danger to oneself, but also brings great peace to the world. For that too, that aforementioned strength of relinquishment is required.

What was let go there was one's own mind—a mind freed from the defilements (*kilesa*) that arise as past habits, and cultivated in the virtues taught by the Buddha. Thus, it is the benefits of that liberation of mind through loving-kindness (*mettā-cetovimutti*) that are presented there. All other gifts are defeated by it. Yet all of these are, in turn, defeated by supramundane virtues. Before a Buddha arises in the world—that is, not during a period when no Buddhas can arise, but in the period leading up to the birth of a Buddha—it is said that Pacceka Buddhas arise. This means that through their own efforts, in accordance with their past perfection-potential, they reach the second most noble state in the world. However, the world does not know this. Therefore, when they go on their alms-round clad in rag-like robes, they are treated as ordinary people.

Because of this, some people think wrongly and behave wrongly, showing disrespect and contempt, thereby undergoing the sufferings of hell. On the other hand, some experience immense prosperity simply by generating clarity of mind through giving even a minor gift. In this story, the treasurer merely gave an order to give alms. For those few words, he was born seven times in heaven and seven times obtained the status of treasurer. We can then imagine what kind of result (*vipāka*) and benefit (*ānisaṃsa*) await those who actually give. From this we see, as declared by the Buddha, *"Anuttaraṃ puññakkhettaṃ lokassa"*—the greatest service one can render to the world is to make oneself a field of merit, whether lay or ordained, through that supramundane mass of virtue. This letting go ultimately belongs to oneself; it returns to oneself as a benefit. The benefit of letting go of those minor external objects helps one attain heavenly and human prosperity. Letting go through virtue especially leads to good rebirths. Those who behave like animals go to the animal world. Those who behave like ghosts are born in the ghost realm (*peta-loka*). Those who behave like demons (*yakkhas*) are born in the demon realm. Those who behave like devas and brahmas are born in the heavenly and brahma worlds. From this, it is clear that the ultimate benefits of all these return to us. First, through the giving of external objects, and then through virtues like discipline, we obtain a good rebirth and a civilized life. Even more valuable is mental development (*bhāvanā*). If one develops the mind in a very deep manner through mental development, escapes this entire suffering (*dukkha*) of rebirths, develops supreme supramundane virtues, and through the realization of the paths of Stream-entry (*Sotāpatti*), Once-returning (*Sakadāgāmī*), Non-returning (*Anāgāmī*), and Arahantship, reaches the highest states of a Buddha, a Pacceka Buddha, or a Great Arahant—at that moment, one brings immense peace to the entire world, because one has become a true field of merit. Thinking in this way, one must reflect on how far this journey that begins with letting go in giving goes. That life-trajectory which begins with the perfection of giving (*dāna-pāramitā*) ultimately culminates in the perfection of wisdom (*paññā-pāramitā*), and thereby reaches Buddhahood.

On this valuable Poya day, we have listened to Dhamma principles that help us understand the true value of giving, which everyone performs daily, and help make our giving yield great fruit and great benefit. If you listened with proper attention, you have heard a Dhamma that helps develop the virtues of conviction (*saddhā*), energy (*viriya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). May this store of merit accumulated today support you in this world and, as aspired, lead to the realization of Nibbāna! By completing Dhamma study and mental development, removing obstacles from life, and drawing closer to supportive factors, may this wholesome deed of hearing the Dhamma be a supportive condition (*upanissaya*) to quickly escape all suffering (*dukkha*) of rebirths and find peace in the supreme, deathless, great Nibbāna! May the deities protecting the Dispensation, as well as your own relatives, and all living beings from the Avīci hell to the Akaniṭṭha heaven, rejoice in this store of merit from delivering and hearing the Dhamma! Having rejoiced, may they be freed from miserable states, reach happy states, obtain

the association of noble friends (*kalyāṇa-mitta*), complete all activities of mental development, and may this be a supportive condition to find peace in the supreme, deathless, great Nibbāna! Pray thus, and having made that aspiration, transfer merit by reciting these verses.

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……..*"