Pahankanuwa Sermon #153

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

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(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.77)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

Pali Stanza:

"Carañce nādhigaccheyya,

seyyaṃ sadisamattano;

Ekacariyaṃ daḷhaṃ kayirā,

natthi bāle sahāyatā."

From:

Dhammapada Verse 61 (Bāla Vagga)

Dear Listeners,

Not being able to associate with fools and simpletons is identified in the *Mahamangala Sutta* as a supreme blessing. The reason for this is that through the association of such fools, one is liable to encounter various forms of harassment, adversity, and disaster. Getting angry at advice is a characteristic of a fool. It is because of such an angry, stubborn pupil who brought trouble and disaster upon Ven. Maha Kassapa—who is regarded as one of the most noble disciples in this Dispensation—that the Buddha uttered the verse we have chosen as our theme. The story unfolds as follows:

When Ven. Maha Kassapa was residing at Pipphali Cave in Rajagaha, two pupils attended on him. Although we say two pupils, in reality, only one attended on him properly. The other did so deceitfully. When the pupil who performed his duties well prepared water for washing the face and bathing, the deceitful one, seeing these preparations, would quickly go and bow to Ven. Maha Kassapa, saying, “Venerable Sir, the water is ready. Please bathe and wash your face.” Thus, the Thera thought that it was this pupil who had done it, and went to bathe and wash. As this went on, the other pupil thought, “What this fellow is doing is deceiving the teacher by claiming the duties I perform as his own. Let me play a trick on him.” One evening,

while that disobedient one was asleep, the good pupil boiled water for Ven. Maha Kassapa's bath, kept most of the hot water in a vessel behind the bathhouse, and left only a tiny amount of water on the hearth. When the lazy pupil woke up and saw steam rising from the vessel on the hearth, he thought the water was ready. As usual, he went, bowed to Ven. Maha Kassapa, and invited him, saying, "Venerable Sir, the water is ready."

He came with the Venerable Sir to the bathhouse. When the Venerable Sir looked, there was no water. When this was pointed out, the lazy pupil thought, "Ah, look at what this wicked fellow has done to deceive me!" and taking a pitcher, went to the water-source to fetch water. Ven. Maha Kassapa was left wondering what had happened. Meanwhile, the other pupil brought the hot water from the vessel kept behind the bathhouse and let the Venerable Sir bathe. Thus, Ven. Maha Kassapa understood the situation—that all this time, the deceitful pupil had been taking credit for everything the good pupil did. Understanding this, when the deceitful pupil came to pay respects that evening, the Thera advised him, "This kind of conduct is not good. It is not proper to present other people's work as your own."

Hearing this advice, that pupil became extremely angry. "Look at this monk, making such a big deal out of a little water and blaming me like this!" He harbored resentment. To such an extent that he stopped going for alms with the Thera. So, Ven. Maha Kassapa went for alms with the obedient pupil to a certain house. While they were away, what did this bad pupil do? He went to the house of a close lay supporter of Ven. Maha Kassapa. They asked, "Where is the Chief Venerable Sir?" He replied, "The Venerable Sir is a bit unwell." Then, as devout devotees, they asked, "What food is suitable for him?" The pupil named some fine food that suited his own taste. The devotees prepared and gave it. The pupil ate it on the way and quietly returned to his hut.

Furthermore, where Ven. Maha Kassapa had gone for alms, he received a fine, soft robe as an offering. He gave it to that good pupil. The good pupil dyed it well and began wearing it. This was also regarded with envy by the other pupil. On the second day, Ven. Maha Kassapa went for alms to that same devotee's house. When he arrived, they said, "We heard yesterday that the Venerable Sir was unwell. We prepared and sent the special food the pupil requested. How is the Venerable Sir now, is he well?" The Venerable Sir remained silent, and after returning, that evening he said to the pupil, "Friend, this is indeed improper. It is not the way of the Sangha to inform laypeople beforehand and take food. This is an improper act." He censured him. This made the pupil even angrier. "Look at this, yesterday he blamed me because of a little water. Today he blames me because of a little almsfood. He also gave the robe to his favorite pupil..." Thinking thus, the next day, this pupil did not go for alms.

While Ven. Maha Kassapa went for alms with the other monk, what did this pupil do? He took a stick, smashed all the utensils in the hut, pulverized them completely, and then set fire to the hut itself! He destroyed whatever was not burnt by beating

them with the stick and fled. It is said that later—it is not mentioned exactly when or in which context—he died and was reborn in hell, specifically in the Avici Great Hell. This event brought great sorrow to the lay devotees, and the news spread: “A pupil of Ven. Maha Kassapa became angry over a small piece of advice and caused such destruction!”

Meanwhile, a certain monk from Rajagaha went to Jetavana Monastery to see the Buddha. When the Buddha asked where he came from, he said, “From Rajagaha.” When the Buddha asked, “Is my son Maha Kassapa well and healthy?”, the monk replied, “He has no other trouble, but this happened: a pupil got angry over a small piece of advice, set fire to his hut, and left.” The Buddha explained that acting in such a wicked manner was a habitual past tendency (*saṁsāra* habit) of this person, and delivered a sorrowful Dharma discourse. Expressing the idea, “Rather than associating with such fools and simpletons, it is better for my son Kassapa to live alone,” the Buddha uttered the verse we took as our theme. Its meaning is as follows:

Seyyaṁ sadisamattano... If, when searching with the mind, one does not find someone better than or equal to oneself, what should one do? *Ekacariyaṁ daḷhaṁ kayirā, natthi bāle sahāyatā*. *Ekacariya* means living alone, being established in that practice. Wandering alone is far more valuable. *Natthi bāle sahāyatā* - “There is no companionship with a fool.” The Buddha declared through this verse that living alone is better than associating or partnering with fools and simpletons. So, that is the story.

From the behavior of that disobedient pupil, we can see how much destruction was caused by hatred (ill-will / *dosa*) that arose in a single moment. Because he could not conquer that hatred, he brought about a terrible disaster upon himself and was reborn in hell. The characteristics of a good pupil are humility and obedience. Words like “compliant, refined, obedient” describe the conduct a pupil should possess. For a pupil who lacks humility, the very advice given by the teacher is enough to drive them to commit terrible crimes, such as destroying property. Through this character, we see the characteristic of a “fool” (*bāla*). In Pali, *bāla* is used for what we now refer to as young in age, but the Buddha used *bāla* to mean an ignorant person, a fool.

The Buddha has shown three characteristics of a fool on various occasions. What are they? *Duccintitacintī, dubbhāsitabhāsī, dukkaṭakammakārī*—the thoughts of a fool are bad; they think bad thoughts, speak bad words, and do bad deeds. This is exactly what we see in the character of this disobedient pupil. He harbored hatred toward his teacher and defiled his mind. Next, he harbored envious thoughts and great hatred toward his fellow monk, and accordingly, deceived the lay family with false, cunning, and deceitful words. Finally, in a destructive manner, he set fire to and destroyed the hut of such a noble Elder. Through this, we can understand the characteristics of a disobedient pupil, which is called the characteristic of a fool. Such is the way of disobedient, untamed, violent, and rogue pupils in this Dispensation. But there were

also valuable pupils in this Dispensation from whom we can draw examples. You might have heard of them.

In that regard, the monk whose life reveals the most valuable heap of virtues is the young Ven. Rahula. Ven. Rahula had plenty of reasons to be proud. The young Ven. Rahula could have said, “The Buddha is my father, not yours.” He could have harbored pride regarding the Buddha. Instead, the Dhamma records that even at the age of seven, Ven. Rahula behaved with great obedience, discipline, submissiveness, and humility, not only towards the Buddha but also towards other teachers and elders. It is also mentioned that just like small children play with sand, every morning this young Ven. Rahula would take a handful of sand in his palms and wish: “May I receive as many pieces of advice from the Buddha, the Sangha, and the elder monks as there are grains of sand in my hands.” Another valuable aspect of Ven. Rahula's conduct is mentioned in the Vinaya Pitaka.

We started with the side of bad pupils in the Dispensation, but we mention this so that the good side is also revealed. The story in the Vinaya Pitaka is as follows: On one occasion, the Buddha laid down a Vinaya rule that it is not proper for an ordained monk (*upasampanna*) to sleep under the same roof as an unordained person (*anupasampanna*), such as a novice (*sāmaṇera*) or a layman. He enacted this as a law. Sometime after enacting this rule, the Buddha journeyed to Kosambi and resided at Badarikarama. On the very day of his arrival, the monks told Ven. Rahula, “The Buddha has laid down such a Vinaya rule that a monk should not sleep or lie down with an unordained person. Therefore, find yourself another place to sleep, find another hut.”

Although Ven. Rahula tried, he could not find a place to spend the night. He went and spent the entire night in the restroom (latrine). At dawn, the Buddha went to the restroom. There is a custom among the monks—a valuable custom that even Buddhist lay devotees should follow—where a person preparing to use the restroom makes a signal, like coughing or clearing the throat. If there is someone inside, that person also coughs gently, giving a signal that “I am inside.” This is a polite tradition. When the Buddha cleared his throat in this manner, Ven. Rahula, who was inside, made the same sound. When the Buddha asked, “Who is inside?”, he replied, “It is I, Rahula.” When asked, “Why are you here?”, he told the story. On that occasion, the Buddha used this as an opportunity to deliver a sermon to the monks and made a small amendment to the Vinaya rule as a concession, stating that an ordained monk cannot stay under the same roof with an unordained person for more than two or three nights. This brought some relief, as they could stay for two or three days.

What we must extract from this story is Ven. Rahula's amazing character. If it were someone else, they might have blamed the monks, or gone to the Buddha complaining, “Where am I to sleep tonight?” There was none of that; through his conduct, he demonstrated the noble quality of humility. Such incidents are proof of the virtuous nature of pupil monks. We must reflect on the matter of association (*āsevanā*) taught by the Buddha here. Some might wonder: “What has the Buddha

said here? He has told us to live alone if there is no better or equal companion. If so, how can a teacher accept a pupil?" This is a question that may arise. But there is a different meaning in the teacher-pupil relationship. What is expected of a pupil is to obediently learn something from the teacher. The teacher knows that the pupil does not possess the same capacity of understanding as himself, but that does not make the pupil a fool.

In the Dhamma, the Buddha himself shows that if a person knows their own foolishness or ignorance, that very recognition of ignorance is itself a form of wisdom (*paṇḍita*). The one who does not know their own ignorance and thinks they are wise is the greatest fool. The Buddha shows how a pupil who associates with a teacher or a spiritual friend (*kalyāṇamitta*) should always think; the attitude of a faithful pupil should be: "The Teacher is my master. The Teacher knows, I do not know." They should maintain this extremely humble attitude in their conduct.

This teacher-pupil relationship in the Dispensation is referred to as *saddhivihārika*. *Saddhivihārika* means one who dwells together. You have heard in ancient stories, like those of the Disapamokha teachers, how pupils and teachers associated and lived together. Especially after entering the monastic life, after ordination, the pupil associates with the teacher just like a son with a father. The Buddha describes this as a father-son relationship. Performing the duties and obligations obediently, learning the Dhamma, and properly learning the Vinaya and other matters is the duty of a pupil. The idea is that by staying in the association of the teacher, that person will grow in spiritual virtues.

But if, at any point, a pupil acts disobediently in that manner, or rejects the teacher by not accepting advice, then the teacher has to abandon that person. It is with this very idea that the Buddha stated here that it is better to live alone than to be with such stubborn pupils. We must constantly reflect on this matter. One of the main problems in this world is association (*āsevanā*). It is precisely because various problems arise from association that in the *Mahamangala Sutta*, the very first blessing is mentioned as *asevanā ca bālānaṁ*—not associating with fools and simpletons. Similarly, it states *paṇḍitānañca sevanā*—associating with the wise. Some people might take this to mean associating with the wise (*paṇḍita*) or a spiritual friend (*kalyāṇamitta*) with the intention of taking something valuable from them.

Here, keeping a respectful distance, while engaging in duties and observances, one can properly receive what should be received from a teacher. In any case, because association is something that greatly affects a person's life, it is shown as the first blessing, since associating with fools can lead to terrible destruction. As the Buddha declared: "A person who associates with the low becomes low" (*nihīyati puriso nihīnasevī*), meaning that associating with a degraded person leads to one's own downfall.

On another occasion, it is illustrated that kusa grass is a valuable and fragrant plant. But if one wraps rotting fish in kusa grass, the grass itself will begin to smell foul. Various similes are used to show that associating with fools, associating with such foolish people, brings disaster upon oneself. Next, the conduct of a true pupil is shown: when their faults are pointed out, they think of it as if a treasure-revealer is pointing out a hidden treasure. The Buddha stated in a Dhammapada verse:

Nidhīnaṁ va pavattāraṁ – yaṁ passe vajjadassinaṁ

Niggayhavādiṁ medhāviṁ – tādisaṁ paṇḍitaṁ bhaje

Tādisaṁ bhajamānassa – seyyo hoti na pāpiyo

The person who points out one's fault is like someone pointing out a hidden treasure. Why? Because when the fault is corrected, that person's valuable virtues can emerge. Regarding them in this way, the wise person should be associated with. This does not mean completely discarding pupils with bad qualities, or discarding fools altogether. If a fool, an ignorant person, understands the value of associating with a spiritual friend (*kalyāṇamitta*) and is ready to practice properly and benefit from it, it is the duty of the wise person to assist them. This is why Mahapajapati Gotami on one occasion praised the Buddha's spiritual friendship (*kalyāṇamittatā*) in this manner:

Kalyāṇamittatā muninā – lokaṁ uddissa vaṇṇitā

Kalyāṇamittaṁ bhajamāno – api bālo paṇḍito assa

The Buddha, that Sage, out of concern for the world, has constantly praised the value of spiritual friendship (*kalyāṇamittatā*). Why? "By associating with a spiritual friend, even a fool can become wise." If one properly associates with a spiritual friend, even a fool can become wise. Thus, what is meant by the word "fool" (*bāla*) here is that if that person practices properly, they can rise from that foolish state and reach the status of a wise person (*paṇḍita*) through that very association with a spiritual friend. These are the things we must understand correctly. Just as this matter is placed at the beginning of the *Mangala Sutta*, the attitude one should possess is shown in the *Parabhava Sutta* in this manner:

Suvijāno bhavaṁ hoti – suvijāno parābhavo

Dhammakāmo bhavaṁ hoti – dhammaddessī parābhavo

When invited to explain the causes of a person's ruin, the first thing mentioned is the factor that leads to both progress and ruin. This is the cause of progress: *Dhammakāmo bhavaṁ hoti*—loving the Dhamma is the path to progress, the cause of progress. Next, *Dhammaddessī parābhavo*—hating the Dhamma leads to one's ruin. If we connect this idea to the story, indeed, it was not Dhamma but an attitude akin to hatred of the Dhamma (*dhammaddesa*) that existed in that pupil. That is why he behaved in that terrible manner, bringing disaster upon himself and ultimately

being reborn in hell. The Buddha also gave a striking simile to show that if a pupil lacks the proper attitude, even if they associate with a teacher for their whole life, they cannot acquire the Dhamma. When a spoon is placed in a pot of curry or soup, no matter how long it remains there, the spoon does not taste the flavor of the soup. In the same way, it is said that if a fool, a stubborn, disobedient fool, associates with a wise person for a long time—even for their whole life—they will not be able to understand the Dhamma. This is about improper, wrong association. Instead, the Buddha shows that the teacher-pupil relationship should exist in the Dispensation with respect for the teacher through proper duties and observances, mutual respect, similar to a father-son relationship.

Indeed, if people were to shape their lives according to the advice of the Buddha, the stubborn behaviors seen in today's society, especially in the field of education (without going into too much detail), are due to a lack of correct understanding of these basic principles. Sometimes teachers do not treat pupils as their children. Sometimes children do not treat teachers as their fathers. There may be shortcomings on both sides. In any case, going to such stubborn extremes is due to the presence of a “hater of Dhamma” (*dhammaddesī*) nature, or the absence of Dhamma. If there is at least some Dhamma, one would reflect accordingly, refrain from stubborn actions, and resolve those issues peacefully and cooperatively through discussion. This is the state of things in society. Indeed, a person entering society must know to associate carefully with those characters that lead to downfall, so that they are not dragged down by them. If one has the ability to turn that person towards the Dhamma, there is room for that, but one must associate with them carefully. As you all know, there are various viruses/germs in society. When we think of physical association, you know that physical contact can transmit germs, leading to various diseases. To escape these, we use vaccinations and immunizations. That is to escape the germs arising from physical social contact. But many do not realize that various mental diseases can also arise through social association. These diseases arise due to the mental germs spreading in this society. These days, most people talk about environmental pollution and waste.

But some do not reflect with wisdom on how a vast amount of waste that pollutes the mental environment flows in daily through various media, and how their own children fall victim to it. Due to the vast amount of mental environmental pollution and waste flowing through these media, people are driven mad. Ultimately, the mind is defiled by various defilements (*kilesa*) in that manner, leading to terrible destruction. For this, just like physical vaccination, there must be a vaccination of the mind. It is the Buddha’s Dhamma that helps vaccinate the mind. The five precepts (*pañcasīla*) can be shown as such a vaccination of the mind, a method of immunization. The determination to abstain from sins like killing living beings, stealing, etc., becomes a strength and a help to protect oneself from those germs in a society filled with bad friends (*pāpamitta*). That is what is meant by vaccinating the mind. Furthermore, this is reinforced if a person strengthens their mind by practicing a meditation object (*kammaṭṭhāna*), such as loving-kindness (*mettā*)

meditation; that is true immunization. Then, one is further able to live escaping the waste of society, avoiding those mental epidemics. These things must be reflected upon with wisdom.

What do we mean by life? Life means protecting two continua (*santāna*). What are the two continua? We use the word *santāna* in the sense of a continuous, uninterrupted flow. There are two continua within what we call life. What are the two continua? There is the material continuum (*rūpa-santāna*) and the mental continuum (*citta-santāna*). As soon as the functioning of our material continuum (*rūpa-santāna*) stops, the body dies. That is death. Through food, drink, and especially inhalation and exhalation, this material continuum continues without interruption. The material continuum that begins in the mother's womb ends in the cemetery. But, devout devotees, we must constantly reflect that the mental continuum (*citta-santāna*) goes much further. This mental continuum goes on towards final liberation / Nibbāna. It flows without interruption. It is this mental continuum that connects from life to life. We think about the physical diseases that can arise from the waste and environmental pollution mentioned before, and we make great efforts to protect ourselves from them. Scholars often take that as their theme. But some do not pay the same attention to the pollution arising in the mental environment. To escape that waste, the vaccinations and immunizations mentioned here are necessary.

The Buddha has primarily shown the restraint of body and speech through moral precepts (*sīla*). The five precepts (*pañcasīla*) exist for this purpose. It is abstaining (*viratī*). *Pāṇātīpātā veramaṇī—veramaṇī* means abstaining. Abstaining is stepping back/refraining. *Adinnādānā veramaṇī...* Thus, instead of physical vaccination, by keeping those precepts like a mental vaccination, one becomes strong. To strengthen this further, one must constantly engage in some form of meditation and develop a special attitude. As the benefit of this meditation in daily society, we expect the development of a good attitude that supports life.

A person who practices loving-kindness meditation (*mettā bhāvanā*) well possesses an attitude of loving-kindness. When a problem arises, a person with an attitude of loving-kindness resolves it with a mind of loving-kindness foremost. On the contrary, if there is an attitude of hatred (*dosa*), everything appears to that person as a challenge, leading to arson, destruction, sabotage, and murder. Just as a person with a physical wound thinks they have been hurt even by a gentle touch, everything appears bad to a person with thoughts of hatred.

Due to the advice given for his own good, that pupil harbored hatred and resentment. If the stick used to break those utensils had been aimed at Ven. Maha Kassapa or the other monk, it would have led to murder or an even more terrible crime. Indeed, for someone who has taken a weapon in hand, there is no limit. It is clear that the cause of all this is that attitude. That student's attitude was wrong.

In such sudden moments—what is called sudden anger—the strength to control oneself when such situations arise is first given by the moral virtue (*sīla*) one undertook in the morning. The moral virtue undertaken is a determination—a determination established in the mind, a command given to wisdom: "Today, I will live in this manner, based on these principles." Reflecting on those principles becomes a protection at that moment. This is further strengthened if one spends the day with an attitude of loving-kindness. As the way to appease resentment, the hateful person considers sabotage, murder, etc. That pupil found satisfaction by destroying those things and fleeing, like someone breaking pots in an empty house. Thus, the hateful person seeks relief and happiness through revenge.

Instead, when such a situation arises, a person with an attitude of loving-kindness uses it as a challenge to appease their own anger. That person finds happiness and peace by bringing forth loving-kindness again and calming the agitated mind. Thus, you, devout devotees, can understand the two sides. That is what is called unwise attention—the opposite of *Yoniso manasikāra* (Wise attention)—in the Dhamma. That person takes revenge to satisfy resentment. But the true, Dhamma-conforming method is to appease resentment internally; it is an internal occurrence. They appease it internally, thinking, "I must conquer this through the power of loving-kindness." Where there is no such attitude, especially through the association of bad friends (*pāpamitta*), one falls into trouble. That is why the Buddha declared: *Dhammakāmo bhavaṁ hoti, dhammaddessī parābhavo*.

We must possess this noble attitude. The main lesson we should draw from this story is not the example of that bad character. We spoke about Ven. Rahula to highlight that there were also extremely disciplined and exemplary monks in this Dispensation, not only wise but also deeply practical. Their lives are wonderful and valuable examples that one should take to heart even in this day and age. These are what we should bring forward. Next, you must understand the danger (*ādīnava*). The harm caused to the world and to oneself in future *saṁsāric* lives through such attitudes and such conduct. The question of association is indeed what is shown here. The Buddha is not completely rejecting and banishing a group of people called "fools." If a fool understands that foolishness, and to that extent becomes wise, wishing to benefit from a wise person and seek help through the association of a spiritual friend (*kalyāṇamitta*), the Buddha has shown the teacher-pupil relationship in the Dispensation to assist that person.

In society, as well as in educational institutions and other organizations, when such problems arise, hasty actions often occur because these virtues are not established within oneself. It is this shortcoming that prevails. We must constantly reflect on this. If we think we can live happily merely by organizing the external environment and removing the waste from the external environment, that is a mistake, a wrong view. No matter how high a level we elevate the external environment, if the internal, mental environment is polluted, only destruction will arise from it. That is what is happening now. Therefore, rather than protecting the material continuum (*rūpa-*

santāna), we must focus our attention on protecting the mental continuum (*citta-santāna*) and strive to spend our lives in a way that the mental continuum grows. It is for this that the Buddha has shown this path of Dhamma. You too, just like the moral virtue (*sīla*) you undertook at this moment, some have undertaken the eight precepts on this Full Moon day. Through each of these practices, you should think that you receive the strength to assist others from the position of a spiritual friend (*kalyāṇamitta*) in your social life.

In these times, during precept campaigns or precept programs, when we say we observe precepts, some might think of this as a selfish, anti-social act done by someone who is isolated. But what is being done here? In this retreat, one strengthens oneself to become a spiritual friend (*kalyāṇamitta*). To be a spiritual friend to the world, to be able to assist a friend, a neighbor, or even an enemy at some point—more valuable than a "hand-exchange" (lending money/material help) is a "mind-exchange" (sharing a wholesome mental state/spiritual comfort). If we have plenty of money, we assist someone in an emergency by giving a loan (hand-exchange). More valuable than that is the "mind-exchange." A "mind-exchange" can be given only by a person who has developed their mind.

At any given moment, when discussing a matter where that person is inclined towards evil or destruction, one can fearlessly say through one's strength: "You should not go down that path; this is the path to take. This is not the principle to adopt, this is not the action to do; this is what should be done." It is by being strong in this manner that one can render a great service in society as a spiritual friend. It is through this very means that a bad friend (*pāpamitta*) can be led to the correct path. We do not segregate someone as a bad friend; some bring polluted behaviors perhaps from the past, or perhaps acquired from society itself.

You have all heard about the character of Angulimala. Indeed, he became a great killer due to an event that occurred in the early part of his life. But the Buddha made Angulimala, that killer, into an Arahant. Such things happen in this Dhamma. Everyone should strive to bring about that transformation within themselves. We must think of the Dhamma preached by the Buddha as an invitation in every way to put it into practice. Indeed, this *saṁsāric* life is completely chaotic. The Buddha describes this as a tangled ball of string. For in the entirety of *saṁsāra*, there is an entanglement of *kamma* (volitional activities / saṅkhāra). We talk about wholesome *kamma*, unwholesome *kamma*, merit (*puñña*), and sin (*pāpa*). This shows that due to the weak or undisciplined nature of our minds, getting entangled with the *kamma* of others, the continuation of *saṁsāra* takes place as a massive web of confusion. Seeing this, the Buddha has pointed out the state of Nibbāna as the complete liberation from this. The path to that is shown as virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*).

So, it begins with this virtue (*sīla*). As the benefit of virtue, one receives the strength to live happily in society. By calming one's mind and restraining body and speech to

that extent, one gains a great saving. Our mental energy is dragged towards external things precisely because of our lack of moral virtues. Because of this, through the association of bad friends (*pāpamitta*) and alcohol, people turn to various wrongs, or destroy their lives through bad habits like drinking and gambling. But when, reflecting according to the Dhamma, one accustoms oneself to a simple life with noble thoughts through the practice of virtue, even from that, a great relief comes.

But one must not stop there. Next is the development of an attitude of loving-kindness, or an attitude of faith (*saddhā*). Although we use a new word like "attitude," what we indicate through this is some form of meditation (*bhāvanā*)—living with a deep understanding of this life through the meditation of loving-kindness (*mettā bhāvanā*), recollection of the Buddha (*buddhānussati*), recollection of death (*maraṇasati*), etc. A person who enters society without understanding the core values of life is like a stake driven into the mud; they are swept away. They are dragged into the great flood (*mahogha*). They are dragged into the new fashions of society and meet destruction. But if one turns to a principled life with a certain practice, properly understanding the core values shown in the Dhamma, one establishes a firm stance in those values. Establishing a firm stance, saying, "This is my practice, I will not break it," and spending one's life according to the Buddha's word, then no matter how strong a torrent comes, it is neutralized. Through this, one can develop the strength of resilience. That is what we called immunization. Developing those virtues of moral conduct and, at an even higher level, the strength to calm the mind internally is what is called concentration (*samādhi*). It is precisely due to the scattered nature of our minds that we are often tempted into various wrongs through the association of bad friends in society. But if a person can obtain the bliss of concentration internally, they are not dragged towards those external things.

When one remembers one's meditation object (*kammaṭṭhāna*), a great peace comes to the mind. The mind can be calmed. Even in a place of great noise and commotion, or when traveling in vehicles, or in crowded places, a person who has developed their meditation can, even for a short moment, and in a small measure according to the degree of their development, bring about some relief by turning to that meditation. That is at the second level. Higher than that, the Buddha shows insight (*vipassanā*). We must develop a correct understanding of our life.

In the meditation objects we specifically mention, such as foulness (*asubha*) and recollection of death (*maraṇasati*), what is involved is correctly understanding the true nature of this life, the true nature of the body. If one thinks of this body as something that does not fall ill, or as something wonderful created by someone or a god, then when diseases and pains arise, that person has to face terrible disappointments. Instead, one must reflect on the foul nature of this body as highlighted by the Buddha—how it decays, subjected to diseases and illnesses. To the person who constantly reflects on this, a mentally resilient nature develops. They can escape that unrest. Similarly, the meditation object called recollection of death

(*maraṇasati*) is a meditation that both laypeople and monastics can practice at a primary level. Constantly reflecting that one will die might be distasteful to some. But what is in it is bringing the mind to reality.

If one has correctly understood the reality of this life, if one has correctly understood that this life is short, then according to the Buddha's word, one understands that the mental continuum (*citta-santāna*) is more important than the material continuum (*rūpa-santāna*). Because if we defile the mental continuum, the next bodily shell we receive might be an animal shell, an animal body, a hungry ghost (*peta*) body, a demon (*yakka*) body, or a body that undergoes suffering in hell. It is on our mental continuum that we must focus greater attention. We must strive to remove the waste belonging to it. To protect ourselves from them, we must be eager to vaccinate our minds. In the Buddha's Dhamma, what is called wholesome (*kusala*) are those things that lead to one's own well-being and the well-being of others. Things that are harmful to oneself and others are called unwholesome (*akusala*). From this, it is seen that the Buddha has not presented this in a one-sided, selfish manner. We have all heard about the Middle Way. Thus, the journey to Nibbāna is also a Middle Path (*majjhimā paṭipadā*). It is not a journey where one goes to Nibbāna while killing others.

Understanding that others who suffer in this *saṁsāra* just like oneself also desire happiness, one assists them at their respective levels with one's mind, body, and speech. Their lives are just like this. One must develop a respect for those lives, knowing that they too depend on food and drink, and depend on inhalation and exhalation. This is what is lacking in many people today. From the incidents we hear in society, we see that destroying a human life is done just like killing a fly or a mosquito. It is regarded as a very trivial thing. All this happens because people are subjected to those germs, and the mental environment is completely polluted. Therefore, we must strive to bring forth again those core values highlighted by the Buddha.

Just as those swimming in an ocean assist one another, the Buddha declares that people in the world should help one another. In fulfilling the perfections (*pāramī*), by donating eyes, head, flesh, and blood, the Buddha made a wonderful sacrifice to the supreme limit for the target of Great Compassion (*mahākāruṇika*) and Great Wisdom (*mahāpaññā*). Other disciples also filled those virtues at their respective levels in this long *saṁsāra* and reached those states. For someone who, wishing for Nibbāna, makes an effort to eradicate the roots of defilements—greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*)—the Middle Path is what is manifested through the virtues of moral conduct. Following a path that does not harm others or oneself is what lies within the practice of virtue. In the same way is the practice of meditations like loving-kindness. Some might think: "What is the use of sitting to one side and thinking, 'May they be well, may they be well!'?"

But the Buddha has shown that the three doors of action that help us are mind, body, and speech. Our responsibilities lie in these three: mind, body, and speech. Or, to put it more systematically, let us take them as mind, speech, and body. Furthermore, some adherents of other religions point out that the mind is something unseen. The mind is not felt as much as the body. Therefore, speech is more valuable, and the coarse, gross physical process seen externally is even more valuable. That is what reigns in the world today. Physical actions are taken as great. But the Buddha showed the exact opposite: indeed, no matter how strong a person is physically, what can be done by the body is limited to a certain extent. It is extremely limited.

Through speech, a much broader service can be rendered if speech is corrected. Furthermore, a service at the highest, supreme level can be rendered if the mind is prepared. That is what many do not understand. That is why some hold a wrong attitude towards these meditations. “What is the meaning of this selfish existence, withdrawing into a forest or some other place? Is it not better to engage physically in what is regarded as social service in society?”

Social services and other such things are not bad. But if they are done with a defiled mind, with envy, anger, hatred, resentment, revenge, and competitiveness foremost, then no matter how high a level of social service is done, there is nothing in it. It is a hollow thing. Instead, if, with a true mind of loving-kindness, one can give one's food to a poor person at a moment of utmost need, or if one can step forward to protect the life of such a person and do such a thing, that indeed is the highest social service. Therefore, the mind is primary there. What is seen physically may be a small thing. That action, when looked at socially, may be a small thing. But because the mind that arises at that moment is noble, that is what the Buddha points out as the power of wholesome merit (*kusala-shaktiya*).

Thinking in this manner, a person with a mind of loving-kindness can render a service to the world at the highest level. It is not that even psychology gives a high place to these, but even psychologists accept that a person who has developed their mind can bring about a much greater service and peace to the world through that thought than ordinary people. Through that thought, a great energy is added to this atmosphere, or to this universe. We worship a Buddha. There, we think of the power of the virtues within him. It is like sharing in that energy that has permeated this universe. From all this, we see that the Buddha declared, *“manopubbaṅgamā dhammā”*, showing that the mind is primary. We must strive to protect our mental environment from germs, develop our minds as much as possible, and create a society with a good mental environment. That indeed is called the association of spiritual friends (*kalyāṇamitta-āsevanā*). Not with any other feeling of increasing numbers or showing off to those who see the benefits of the path of Dhamma, but with the intention of assisting them. Giving them the Dhamma as much as one knows, and showing them how to engage in the practice. In that manner indeed can a true service be rendered to society.

In all this, we are talking about the problem of association. This problem of association indeed affects everyone. Whether one goes to an educational institution or an organization, what happens is falling prey to the behavior of the majority. One is dragged into them. A wonderful force exists now. One submits to group power. But the wise person, through the virtues of wisdom (*paññā*) and others, somehow obtains the strength to protect themselves. There is also something called the power of Dhamma (*Dharma-shaktiya*). For the person who walks according to the Dhamma, there are various internal strengths, just like their acts of truth (*saccakiriya*). Not only that, there are also certain forces in the universe that assist them. They are established at their respective levels for those individuals. Due to the force of our *kamma*, troubles can occur. Even Ven. Maha Kassapa, the most supreme monk in this Dispensation in terms of ascetic qualities, had to face a disastrous situation where he lost and had his hut destroyed because of that pupil. Such disasters can happen. But one must reflect that there is also strength in those virtues.

Through that, those forces can be largely conquered. If one goes on the correct path, without being swept away by the incoming flood or torrent, one establishes a firm stance and gains the strength to show that path to others, to give them leadership, and to explain matters to them. Generally, because there is a group that is swept away, it is normal for them to be swept away, saying that it is impossible not to submit to it. But a person can develop within the Dhamma something called the strength of fortitude (*dhṛti-shaktiya*). The strength of fortitude means not falling prey to those sweeping forces, not being like a stake driven in mud, but acting like an *indakhīla* (indrakhīla). The word used as a simile for the strength of fortitude in the past is *indakhīla*. An *indakhīla* means a great pillar that was planted very deep in the ground in front of a city in those times. This pillar does not shake easily, no matter what kind of storm comes. A person with the strength of fortitude who can be like an *indakhīla* is indeed the one who goes—and should go—to the higher states. The fickle, unstable person is like a stake driven in mud; they have no firm stance, no practice, and no understanding of core values. They submit to the view of the majority and are swept away. Such is what exists in society. This is due to the lack of such association with spiritual friends, the lack of understanding of those virtues and core values, and, as said before, neglecting our mental continuum (*citta-santāna*) while caring only for the material continuum (*rūpa-santāna*), or reflecting only on the pollution of the external physical environment without directing the mind to the pollution of the mental environment.

The truth of the Dhamma declared by the Buddha must be brought forth through our own practice, to the extent that we understand. If, through listening to the Dhamma, reading the Dhamma, and turning to the Dhamma, some peace has been received in daily life, an even higher peace can be received by engaging directly in the practice. For some, when listening to a sermon, when hearing the Dhamma, they can obtain a great joy, a peace, a unique and wonderful experience not received elsewhere—a spiritual joy (*nirāmisa-pīti*). When this is further elevated to practice, when

performing acts of merit like giving (*dāna*), and protecting virtues (*sīla*), an even higher joy is received.

Next, after going to meditation, the absorptions (*jhāna*) and other states obtained through meditation—every single one of them is surpassed by the noble, deathless Nibbāna shown by the Buddha, where one crosses over from Birth / Arising (*jāti*), Decay and Death / Aging and Death (*jarāmaraṇa*), sickness (*vyādhi*), and death (*maraṇa*); the supramundane treasure obtained by ending all saṁsāric Suffering / Unsatisfactoriness / Stress (*dukkha*). What the Buddha showed is not a one-sided journey, or a journey where one goes alone, but a journey of assisting the world according to the Middle Way, assisting at the level of teacher and pupil, or at the level of spiritual friends, understanding that others also desire happiness. The Buddha shows that everyone is stuck in this *saṁsāra*. They are stuck in the mud. Or they are swimming in this ocean of *saṁsāra*. To them, indeed, the Buddha shows that liberation must be achieved by themselves. The Buddha only shows the path. For us too, there is only to remind you of it.

I believe that you too, on this valuable day, have practiced some meditation at your respective levels, in addition to the moral virtues you undertook. Developing those sermons and meditations further, benefiting from the association of spiritual friends, walking quickly on the path of Nibbāna shown by the Buddha, crossing over all saṁsāric Suffering / Unsatisfactoriness / Stress (*dukkha*) such as Birth / Arising (*jāti*), Decay and Death / Aging and Death (*jarāmaraṇa*), sickness (*vyādhi*), and death (*maraṇa*), may this merit of listening to the Dhamma lead to the realization of the noble, great, deathless Nibbāna! May it be a supportive condition! Likewise, from the Avici hell to the Akanittha heaven in this universe, if there are those, including our departed relatives, who expect to share in these merits of preaching the Dhamma and listening to the Dhamma, may they all rejoice in this merit! Through that strength, may they be released from those states of misery, reach happy realms, obtain the association of spiritual friends, bring meditation to its culmination, and through their aspired enlightenment (*bodhi*), realize the noble, great, deathless Nibbāna! Praying thus, recite the verses in this manner.

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……..*"