Pahankanuwa Sermon #154

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

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(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.106)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

Pali Stanza:

"Pamādam anuyuñjanti, bālā dummedhino janā;

Appamādañca medhāvī, dhanaṃ seṭṭhaṃ va rakkhati.

Mā pamādam anuyuñjetha, mā kāmaratisanthavaṃ;

Appamatto hi jhāyanto, pappoti vipulaṃ sukhaṃ."

From:

Dhammapada Verses 26 and 27 (Appamāda Vagga)

Dear Listeners,

In Jambudvīpa during the Buddha's time, festivals like our recently held Sinhala New Year were referred to as "constellation-festivals" (*nakkatta-keḷi*). While you celebrate the Sinhala New Year by choosing auspicious times (astrological constellations) to perform wholesome deeds that bring about your progress and well-being, there are also festivals in the world where people use auspicious times to perform bad deeds that lead to one's downfall. It was in connection with such a festival, a certain constellation-festival of that nature, that the Buddha delivered these two thematic verses at the Jetavana Monastery.

On one occasion in the city of Sāvatthī, a constellation-festival named *Bālanakkhatta* (the Fools' Festival) was announced. What was the nature of this festival? Extremely foolish and ignorant people, smearing ashes and cow dung on their bodies, wandered through the city streets uttering obscene words. Everyone knows that obscene words mean vulgarities. Thus uttering, they would roam about for an entire week. Even upon seeing their relatives or monastics, they behaved without any shame or fear, uttering vulgar words. This was the characteristic of this festival. Therefore, before the festival commenced, the Buddhist lay disciples (*upāsakas* and *upāsikās*) in Sāvatthī sent word to the Buddha: "A constellation-festival like this is about to take

place. During this period, we will prepare and offer alms and other requisites to the Buddha and the Saṅgha right within the monastery itself. Even we will not step out of our houses." Having made such arrangements, they provided alms and other requisites to the Buddha and the Saṅgha.

During that period, those foolish people would come to the streets in front of the houses and shout abuses in vulgar language, creating a terrible din. To escape from this, the residents of the houses would give them a small sum of money, like a coin or two (*kahāpanas*), like a donation—a sort of vulgarity-extortion donation. So, this festival is conducted in order to collect some money in this manner. The fools collect it and move on. Having spent those seven days with great difficulty, the faithful devotees, once the seven days had passed, invited the Saṅgha led by the Buddha to the city, held a grand alms-giving ceremony, and at the end, during the sharing of merits, said: "Venerable Sir, a group of fools behaved in this manner under the name of *Bālanakkhatta*, speaking vulgarities to the point of bursting our ears. We spent these seven days with great difficulty. That is why we requested the Blessed One and the Saṅgha not to enter the city." Then the Buddha declared: "That is how it is, devotees. Foolish people, having fallen into negligence, behave in this manner. But wise devotees guard heedfulness like their most precious wealth." Expressing this idea, He uttered the two thematic verses.

"Pamādamānuyunjanti bālā dummedhino janā" — Foolish, ignorant human beings indulge in negligence. *"Appamādañca medhāvī dhanaṁ seṭṭhaṁva rakkhati"* — But the wise individual, the person of wisdom, guards heedfulness like a supreme treasure; he guards the practice of heedfulness. What is said in the next verse is:

"Mā pamādamānuyunjetha mā kāmaratisanthavaṁ" — Do not indulge in negligence! Do not associate with the delight in sensual pleasures, with attachment to the fivefold cords of sensual pleasure, with attachment to objective sensuality (*vatthu-kāma*) and subjective sensuality (*kilesa-kāma*)!

"Appamatto hi jhāyanto pappoti vipulaṁ sukhaṁ" — The heedful person, establishing himself in that heedfulness, develops absorption (*jhāna*) and realizes the supreme bliss of Nibbāna. This is the very idea expressed in those verses.

Now, if we reflect on this *Bālanakkhatta* festival, the word *bāla* is used in our contemporary times to refer to a person of young age, such as a "young child" (*bāla daruvā*). However, in our Dhamma, the word *bāla* is used in the sense of a fool, an ignorant person. Indeed, an ignorant person is like a small child who does not understand things. Some explain the Sinhala idiom "not knowing six or four" in a dispensation-based sense as "fools who do not believe in the six heavenly worlds and the four states of misery (*apāyas*)." It can be understood that way too. In any case, through the conduct of these fools, it appeared as though the city had fallen under the control of these ignorant people during those seven days. How much Dukkha (Suffering) must have been caused? Behaving in that manner, speaking obscene words. Beneath that obscene language, there must have also been intoxicants. It is

not mentioned in the text. We can assume that they must have used some form of intoxicant to fuel their obscene language. We mentioned this constellation-festival not for anyone to take as an example.

Next, let us turn our attention to the Sinhala New Year festival that fell recently. This Sinhala New Year, which was born out of our ancient Buddhist Sinhala customs handed down from time immemorial, holds deep meanings, both socially and religiously. The devotees must reflect on these in this day and age. Otherwise, due to certain social transPreparations that have occurred today, it too might fall to the level of that foolish *Bālanakkhatta*. In the past, what was designated as the "New Year" was the moment when, according to astronomy, twelve months had passed and a new year dawned. This cycle of life, which spins uniformly throughout the year, is halted for a brief moment, and the *no-nakata* (the non-constellation period / inauspicious time) must have been designed to provide an opportunity to lubricate, clean, and repair the rusted parts of this machinery. Generally, lay devotees do every important task by finding an auspicious constellation (*nakata*). Thus, when it is said there is no constellation, they are forced to take a short break. It was to show the benefit to be derived from that break that the elders referred to that very *no-nakata* period as the "meritorious period" (*puṇya kālaya*).

By designating it as the "meritorious period," the intention is to repair this rotating cycle of life, removing the accumulated rust and so on. We must take refuge in the Dhamma there. It is through the Dhamma that we must understand what "rust" is. Personally, there may be various shortcomings in our individual lives, and socially, there may be misunderstandings, disputes, and other shortcomings between parents and children, or among neighbors. Reflecting on these and applying mindfulness and wisdom, we correct these shortcomings. Next, without letting the auspicious constellation pass, the customs of partaking of meals, engaging in work, and making transactions are there to allow us to look towards the coming year and the future with new determinations, having corrected those past shortcomings. If there is any depth to the Sinhala New Year customs, this is indeed its meaning. In fact, because this cycle of life rotates uniformly, if it is not cleaned once in a while, it gradually degenerates. But instead of using the Dhamma for this purpose, if one uses intoxicants in that manner, then indeed one falls into a very dangerous state. Instead of removing the rust, rust begins to accumulate on the machine.

So, if we briefly mention the Sinhala New Year, that is where its value lies for us. During the Sinhala New Year, you acted right on time, not letting the auspicious constellation pass, in order to be heedful regarding your worldly progress. But if we look at it from the perspective of the Dispensation, heedfulness (*appamāda*) is not such a narrow concept, but a much broader one. This human existence, human birth obtained during the period of a Buddha's appearance, is itself shown as the single auspicious constellation. It is shown as the "fortune of the opportune moment" (*khaṇa-sampatti*). The Buddha constantly reminds us: *"khaṇo ve mā upaccagā"* — "Let not the proper moment, the right instant, slip away!" Thus, if one has obtained

human existence during the period of a Buddha's appearance, one must be heedful. Therefore, this heedfulness, the practice of heedfulness, is an extremely valuable concept in this Dispensation. To what extent? The Buddha explains the value of the term "heedfulness" through three simple similes. On one occasion, He declares: "Monks, whatever footless, two-footed, four-footed, or multi-footed beings there may be, whether with form or formless, percipient, non-percipient, or neither-percipient-nor-non-percipient—among all these classes of beings, the Tathāgata, the Worthy One, the Fully Self-Awakened One is supreme. In the same way, among whatever wholesome states there are, heedfulness is the foremost; heedfulness is supreme."

Next, employing that same truth, He illustrates the value of the term heedfulness through another simile. Just as the footprints of all land-dwelling animals can be contained within the footprint of the elephant, and the footprint of the elephant is supreme among them all, even so, among all wholesome states, the term heedfulness is the greatest, the foremost. He also shows another simile. Just as in a peaked house, all the rafters meet at the roof-peak, and the roof-peak is supreme among all the rafters, even so, among all wholesome states, the term heedfulness is supreme. In every way, the Buddha praised the value of heedfulness. Furthermore, you must have often heard a very famous Dhammapada verse in the Dhamma:

Appamādo amatapadaṁ

pamādo maccuno padaṁ

appamattā na mīyanti

ye pamattā yathā matā

If we render this into English verse, we can express it as:

Heedfulness is the path to the Deathless;

Negligence is the path of Death.

The heedful do not die;

Those who are negligent are as if already dead.

What is shown through this? Heedfulness is the path to Nibbāna, which is called the Deathless. Why is it called Nibbāna? Nibbāna means liberation from Saṁsāra. Saṁsāra means repeated Jāti (Birth). Repeated birth means repeated death. Then, what does Nibbāna do? What is the meaning within Nibbāna? What is the purpose of attaining the fortune of Nibbāna? It is the liberation from this Saṁsāra in which we have been born and died for an infinite period of time. That is why it is called liberation from death. Experiencing the realization of liberation from death right in this life is what is meant by realizing Nibbāna. On the other side is Saṁsāra. Thus, heedfulness helps to transcend Saṁsāra; the practice of heedfulness can be understood in this manner.

If we think deeper, heedfulness (*appamāda*) is often explained by the single term *upaṭṭhitasati*—established mindfulness, being mindful, dwelling with good mindfulness. The term "established mindfulness" is often shown as synonymous in meaning to the word "heedfulness." Conversely, *muṭṭhassati*—muddled mindfulness, forgetfulness of mind—is negligence (*pamāda*). Therefore, *"appamādo amatapadaṁ"*—heedfulness is the path to the Deathless, *"pamādo maccuno padaṁ"*—negligence is the path of Death. Thus, when we look at the meaning of the word "heedfulness," it is established mindfulness, whereas "negligence" is the muddled state of mind. Next, if we contemplate a bit more deeply, the Buddha has shown heedfulness as a practice. What is shown as the practice of heedfulness is the fourfold *Satipaṭṭhāna* (four foundations of mindfulness).

You have heard of the four *Satipaṭṭhānas*—establishing mindfulness on these four objects: our body (*kāya*), Feeling / Sensation (*vedanā*), mind (*citta*), and mental objects (*dhamma*). It is the mindfulness properly established in them, the established mindfulness anchored in them. On the other hand, what is the practice of negligence? It is being drawn towards the five cords of sensual pleasure. That is why it was said in the verse, *"mā kāmaratisanthavaṁ"*. Sensual delight, the relationship with objective sensuality and subjective sensuality, is negligence. That is the realm of Māra. On another occasion, the Buddha, speaking to the Bhikkhus about this *Satipaṭṭhāna* which is heedfulness, says: "Monks, this is your father's pastureland, your ancestral domain. Roam within your father's domain." What is it? The four *Satipaṭṭhānas*. Departing from that ancestral pasture is indeed submitting to the five cords of sensual pleasure. That is Māra's pastureland. To convey this matter, the Buddha has used wonderful, simple yet striking similes on various occasions. Indeed, the similes used by the Buddha, though sometimes very long, have components that fit perfectly with the Dhamma points. Rather than the knowledge you gain from reading a lengthy explanation in a large book, a heart-touching simile helps greatly when putting the teachings into practice. Sometimes, a single simile is like an entire book of Dhamma.

Let us try to present this simile just as the Buddha told it. On one occasion, the Buddha declared: "Monks, in the past, a certain hawk swooped down swiftly and seized a quail. While being carried away, the quail cried out: 'Oh, what misfortune is mine! It is because I wandered out of my father's pastureland that this hawk caught me. If I had stayed in my father's ancestral domain, this hawk would have stood no chance of fighting with me.' Hearing this, the hawk asked: 'What is your father's ancestral domain?' The quail replied: 'A ploughed field with clods of earth is my father's pastureland.' The hawk then said: 'Very well, go there. Go and see if you can escape me!' and released the quail. The quail flew back, perched upon a large clod of earth in a ploughed field, and challenged the hawk: 'Hey hawk! Come on now! Come and get me!'"

"Then the hawk, full of pride and angered by this challenge, folded his wings and swooped down with great speed to seize the quail. Waiting until the hawk got close,

the quail instantly hid under the clod of earth. The hawk, diving at high speed, struck his breast against the hard earth, crushed his chest, and died." By this simile, the Buddha declared: "Even so, monks, if you wander outside of your father's pastureland, you will fall into the hands of Māra." That is to say, because the quail first abandoned its ancestral domain, it was caught by the hawk and came close to death. But when the quail was in its proper ancestral pastureland and the hawk came to catch it, it was the hawk that fell into trouble. Based on that simile, the Buddha explains: "What, monks, is your father's pastureland? From the perspective of the Dhamma, it is the four foundations of mindfulness (*Satipaṭṭhāna*)." One dwells contemplating the body in the body, ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful, having removed covetousness and displeasure regarding the world, with the hope of understanding the body. Likewise regarding feelings, likewise regarding the mind, and likewise regarding mental objects. This, in brief, is the four foundations of mindfulness. So, it was to the four foundations of mindfulness that this simile was connected.

Next, there is another similar simile. The Buddha knew that the Saṅgha, as well as you lay devotees, like listening to stories. Perhaps that is why He told another story. "Monks, there are regions in the Himalayas where neither monkeys nor humans can go. There are other regions where monkeys can go, but humans cannot. And there are other regions where both monkeys and humans can go. In such a region, in a beautiful, delightful, level ground, monkey-hunters set a trap using a kind of monkey-glue. Now, when this monkey-glue is set, those monkeys who have some understanding and are not very greedy, seeing it, keep their distance from it, realizing it must be some kind of trap. But a foolish, greedy monkey comes along and touches the glue with one paw. His paw gets stuck. He brings his other paw close to free the first one. That too gets stuck. Next, he brings a foot close to free the two paws. That foot gets stuck. He brings his other foot close. That too gets stuck. Finally, what is left is the mouth—what we call the snout. He brings his snout close. That too gets stuck. Thus, stuck in five places, while the monkey lies there suspended, the monkey-hunter comes, pierces the monkey with something, kills him, and carries him away as prey."

At that point, the Buddha explains this simile according to the Dhamma. What are these glues stuck in five places? They are agreeable and pleasant forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches—the matter of being attached to these agreeable, pleasant things that become objects of prey. This is what the Buddha presents through this simile, as in the thematic verse. Thus, it is falling prey to Māra. The Buddha shows through this simile that by being greedy for the five cords of sensual pleasure, the same fate that befell the monkey will befall oneself.

Then He gives another simile, one that carries an even deeper meaning. Earlier we mentioned the word "heedfulness" (*appamāda*). *Upaṭṭhitasati*, established mindfulness, means this very same concept. Established mindfulness means constantly, continuously maintaining mindfulness in the present moment. What is

meant there is the power to see a thing right then and there. Muddled mindfulness is the opposite. The Buddha shows a very wonderful simile, also through a beautiful story. You may know that there are special performances, like spinning rabana drums, which demonstrate exceptional skills. Similarly, here too, there is a balancing act; that is what the story is about. It is the story of the acrobat's bamboo pole (*caṇḍāla-vaṁsa*). The acrobat's bamboo pole might have been a performance of the outcaste (*caṇḍāla*) people. This is how the story begins.

The master and the apprentice who performed the acrobat's bamboo pole act once set out to perform this sport. The master placed the bamboo pole on his chin and, balancing it, said to his apprentice—whose name was Medakathālikā. A very strange name. Perhaps they gave names with some meaning, or maybe it was a nickname given by the apprentice's friends. To this day, the name is recorded as Medakathālikā. Literally, *Medakathālikā* means "a bowl of fat." Be that as it may, the master said to the apprentice Medakathālikā: "Medakathālikā, climb up onto my shoulders and get onto this bamboo pole. Climb the bamboo pole and stand on it."

The apprentice did so. Then the teacher said: "Now, Medakathālikā, you look after me, and I will look after you. By doing so, we can earn income from this performance and come down from this bamboo pole safely without any harm." Then the apprentice said: "That is not the way to do it, teacher. That is not the method. You protect yourself, and I will protect myself. In that way, by each protecting ourselves, we can perform this sport properly, make a good profit, and jump down from this bamboo pole without any mishap." Having given this simile, the Buddha said: "Monks, the method proposed by the apprentice, not the teacher's words, is the correct principle (the true method)." Think about it a little: even for you, in a balancing exercise like that, if the teacher is constantly thinking only about the apprentice, there is no mindfulness there. If the teacher, without paying attention to the bamboo pole balanced under his chin, keeps worrying about what the apprentice might do or whether he will do it right, there is no mindfulness. Similarly, if the apprentice on top of the pole is thinking, "Will the teacher drop me now?" it won't work. Each protecting oneself is all that is there. There is a deep meaning in this.

Then the Buddha connects this to *Satipaṭṭhāna*. "In the same way, monks, thinking, 'I shall protect myself,' the foundations of mindfulness should be practiced. Thinking, 'I shall protect others,' the foundations of mindfulness should be practiced. Protecting oneself, one protects others; protecting others, one protects oneself." Having presented this Dhamma principle, He further explains it. Indeed, this is an extremely deep discourse. A meaning so deep that it cannot be fully explained in a short time is detailed here. Next, how does one protect others by protecting oneself? The Buddha explains it briefly there: by thoroughly practicing *Satipaṭṭhāna* through repetition, development, and cultivation (*āsevana, bhāvanā, bahulīkaraṇa*). By properly developing *Satipaṭṭhāna*, one sets an example for others. Not only that, if one reaches the highest state through it, its benefits are shared by the entire world. It is due to various such reasons that it was said that by protecting oneself, others are

automatically protected. Next, protecting oneself by protecting others is also shown in connection with *Satipaṭṭhāna*. How is that done? Virtues such as patience, harmlessness, a mind of loving-kindness, and compassion (*anuddayatā*) are developed through this. Because of these virtues, the other person is protected. While doing so, oneself is also protected. This might seem like a riddle to you. But there is a very deep meaning there. We can give a small clue to this.

There is a certain verse associated with overcoming anger. We bring this close to highlight this very idea:

Ubhonnaṁ carati atthaṁ,

attano ca parassa ca;

Paraṁ saṅkupitaṁ ñatvā,

yo sato upasammati.

"He practices for the welfare of both, of himself and of the other, who, knowing the other to be angry, mindfully maintains peace (calms down)." This is a verse from another context, which we presented to help understand this concept. To state it again, when someone knows that the other person is angry—and one knows that the other is angry by understanding the other's mind. If we connect *Satipaṭṭhāna* to this, something that remains a problem for some is the idea of oneself and others when practicing *Satipaṭṭhāna*. There are two aspects: *ajjhatta* (internal/oneself) and *bahiddhā* (external/others), and they are also shown combined. Now, practicing *Satipaṭṭhāna* here does not mean thinking, "I do not need to care about how the other person's mind behaves." One understands through the behavior of one's own mind that others also possess a similar mind. Through their behavior or words, one understands: "This person is angry now." Knowing that they are angry, *yo sato*, if one establishes mindfulness and calms oneself, or pacifies the anger within oneself, then this anger does not proliferate further. This is the idea we have to grasp.

Some might think that practicing the four foundations of mindfulness is a selfish act done solely for one's own Nibbāna. But when one contemplates deeply on this simile given by the Buddha, and the simile concerning Medakathālikā, it becomes clear that within *Satipaṭṭhāna* lies the dynamic of protecting others while protecting oneself. That is what we have just explained as an additional analysis. Thus, through the way one's own mind behaves, one understands the universal truth that the minds of others also behave in this way. When practicing *Kāyānupassanā Satipaṭṭhāna* (contemplation of the body), sometimes the nature of one's own body is understood through another person's body discarded in a cemetery. It might be the body of someone one does not even know. Yet, one understands that Dhamma-nature: "As this body is, so is that body; as that body is, so is this body" (*yathā idaṁ tathā etaṁ, yathā etaṁ tathā ïdaṁ*). It is shown in this way for *bahiddhā* (externally) too. This is how *Satipaṭṭhāna* extends both internally and externally. Thus, as one's own body is,

so is another's body; as another's body is, so is one's own body. As one's own Feeling / Sensation (*vedanā*) is, so is another's Feeling / Sensation (*vedanā*). If one believes that only oneself feels pain, how much might one hurt others?

One must understand: "Just as it hurts me, it hurts others too." Just like in my mind, such defilements also arise in the minds of others. The four foundations of mindfulness, being a profound Dhamma, is entirely devoid of selfishness. A deep understanding of this is extremely beneficial for the devotees engaged in practicing *Satipaṭṭhāna*. The Buddha shows that the apprentice's statement, "You protect yourself, I will protect myself," was correct, pointing to the concept of *bahiddhā* (external) within *Satipaṭṭhāna*. It is when both sides are complete that it is understood in the world. To give further examples of this, individuals like Rūpanandā and Khemā, who were proud of their physical beauty, were led to *Satipaṭṭhāna* by the Buddha. He created through psychic power a beautiful female form and caused it to decay before their eyes. Reflecting, "Ah, indeed, my body is also of such a nature," those who were proud of their body and physical beauty witnessed the decay of the external beauty and applied it (projected it) to themselves. This idea is constantly seen in every section of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. One maintains mindfulness in this way: *ajjhatta*, regarding one's own body, and *bahiddhā*, regarding the external body; regarding internal Feeling / Sensation (*vedanā*), and regarding external Feeling / Sensation (*vedanā*). There are some who think: "If we are to do this in this manner, wouldn't we have to keep looking at others all the time?"

What is present here is that, in understanding the reality of the world as it really is (*yathābhūta*), we ultimately realize that any body, anyone's body, is one and the same. Because Rūpanandā and others had a strong attachment to their own bodies and their physical beauty, they were unable to acquire the feeling, the understanding, that this body is bound to decay. To address this, the Buddha showed an external body. Having shown that first, He then caused them to apply it to themselves. For some people, it is easier to direct the mind to their own body. Directing the mind to one's own body, one must be able to understand at some point: "Isn't the other body just like this body?" No matter how much one practices *Satipaṭṭhāna* on one's own body, at some point, upon seeing a beautiful person with a very attractive body, one might be deceived into thinking, "This is a flawless, ageless luster, untouched by sickness or pain," and from that point onwards, something like what happened to the monkey occurs. We must understand this matter as a universally applicable Dhamma-truth: other bodies are just like this body. *Yathā idaṁ tathā etaṁ, yathā etaṁ tathā ïdaṁ* (As this is, so is that; as that is, so is this). Ancient teachers point out that in completing *Satipaṭṭhāna*, some individuals, according to their temperament, enter *Satipaṭṭhāna* meditation from the spiritual/internal side and complete it through the external side. Others start *Satipaṭṭhāna* from the external side, like Rūpanandā, and complete it by applying it to the internal. Ultimately, both merge wonderfully; they blend. It is at that point indeed that *ajjhatta* and *bahiddhā* lose their distinction. There is no difference; the body is just a body. There is no

sense of "me-ness" (*mamatta*) thinking "this is my body," nor is there any distinction thinking "this is another's body." When looked at as a body, the body is just a body. That is precisely what is meant by *"kāye kāyānupassī"* (contemplating the body in the body).

The phrasing in the text of *Satipaṭṭhāna*, *"kāye kāyānupassī viharati"* (dwells contemplating the body in the body), is a major problem for many. It is stated in a very peculiar sentence. "He dwells contemplating the body in the body." What does it mean to contemplate "the body in the body"? When there is attachment and so on towards the body, it is not understood as it really is (*yathābhūta*). It is not understood in that way. Instead, one strives to see it as it really is, as a body in the body, as far as possible without falling into bias. For that reality-based understanding, sometimes the external body also helps. That is why we mentioned at the very beginning the stories of Rūpanandā and others. Let us consider death. Without waiting until one dies, one applies the example of a dead person to oneself: "This too will come to me." Thus, we do not learn certain things about the world through our body alone. We also shape our knowledge based on what we see and hear. In the same way, it helps in direct realization too. There is such a Middle Path within *Satipaṭṭhāna*. That is what is highlighted here.

Therefore, through this acrobat's bamboo pole simile, this balancing simile, we can understand the matter of established mindfulness (*upaṭṭhitasati*). How subtle must that mindfulness be? At that moment, the thought exists entirely in the present. If, during the performance, the apprentice started engaging in *Papañca* (Conceptual proliferation / Prolific conceptualization) about the teacher: "Will the teacher drop me? Or how much profit will I get from this now? How much will the teacher take? How much will I get?"—if he went on proliferating in that manner, he would certainly fall from the bamboo pole. There is none of that; it is through freeing the mind. Those who have directed the faculties of mindfulness and energy, developed even in daily life, towards Nibbāna are the ones who can understand quickly. Therefore, each of us must reflect: in this life, if we act in that right and proper manner, applying mindfulness or energy, those will one day assist us in attaining Nibbāna.

Similarly, there is another simile. Perhaps some might find this even more appealing. It is called the simile of the Belle of the Country (*Janapada-kalyāṇī*), or the simile of the bowl of oil. The Buddha starts it quite abruptly. Just as in these days when a vehicle comes and starts a public announcement, the Buddha also begins: "Monks, crying 'The Belle of the Country! The Belle of the Country!', a huge crowd of people gathers." This Belle of the Country is skilled in dancing and singing. When the news spreads that the Belle of the Country is dancing and singing, even more people gather there. Now, when they have gathered in this manner, there comes a certain helpless man who loves life, does not want to die, desires happiness, and recoils from pain. Someone in that crowd—it is not specified who, perhaps some officials—gives a certain command to that man, like a punishment. What is it? "Here is a bowl of oil filled to the brim. Now, you must carry this on your head. You must walk between the

place where the Belle of the Country is dancing and, on the other side, the crowd of people jostling to watch her. Right behind you will follow a man with a drawn sword. If you spill even a single drop of oil from this bowl, your head will be severed and cast to the ground." This is the threat made to him. Then, the full bowl of oil was placed on that helpless man's head. Behind him followed a man with a drawn sword. If even a drop spilled from that bowl of oil, his neck would be severed right there.

In such a situation, how would that man act? On one side, there is the Belle of the Country, singing and dancing so beautifully. What would happen if he turned his eyes towards that side? On the other side, there is the crowd of people jostling each other. Even a slight collision would cause conflict. If we analyze this simile correctly, it represents attachment and aversion. One has to maintain mindfulness, freeing the mind from both attachment and aversion. If one is even slightly forgetful (muddled in mindfulness), one fails.

Those of you who have read the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* know that it states at the very beginning: *"vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṁ"*—having removed covetousness (strong greed or desire) and displeasure regarding the world. Thus, for the man carrying the bowl of oil, on one side there is a sight that arouses greed, causing him to be greedy and attached. On the other side, there are colliding people, jostling amidst the fire of defilements. What a nuisance this is—displeasure (*domanassa*). Thus, between these two, he carries the bowl of oil. Having said just this much, the Buddha then delves into the Dhamma principle: "Monks, 'a bowl of oil filled to the brim' is a synonym for mindfulness directed to the body (*kāyagatāsati*)." Devotees, mindfulness directed to the body is the mindfulness that follows the body, as explained earlier. Therefore, it is this mindfulness directed to the body that is compared to that bowl of oil.

In this manner, carrying out this practice while developing mindfulness and energy, one must spend one's life inclined toward a simple lifestyle, with the determination to protect the precepts deeply and more broadly. Undertaking these precepts is like a rehearsal for this very realization, or rather, for crossing over from this Saṁsāra. The mental peace we gain through undertaking the precepts, or rather, the freedom from remorse, helps us to concentrate the mind. It becomes difficult for a person to calm the mind when the mistakes they have committed start flooding into their thoughts. Once a person has resolved upon a precept, they are able to protect their mind to a certain extent from those past thoughts that flood the mind with sadness.

Because when one reflects starting from the period of this resolution, thinking: "My mind, my conduct, my actions through pure body and speech are pure," the joy that arises from that can be used to concentrate the mind. That is the value of that virtue (*sīla*). Indeed, the Buddha shows the factors that assist the development of these four foundations of mindfulness as: *"sīlañca suvisuddhaṁ diṭṭhī ca ujutā"* (virtue that is well-purified and view that is straight). A well-purified, clean virtue is necessary; pure virtue must be present. A straight view must be present; right view must be

present. One cannot develop the four foundations of mindfulness while holding wrong views. Therefore, the essential requirements for developing the four foundations of mindfulness are shown as: *sīlañca suvisuddhaṁ diṭṭhī ca ujutā*—virtue is well-purified, view is straight. One cannot waver here and there; one cannot proceed with intentions of remaining in this Bhava (Becoming / Existence); one must go on this journey with the deep resolution to cross over from Saṁsāra completely. It is in accordance with this that, by subsequently developing the four foundations of mindfulness, one is gradually able to understand the body, feelings, mind, and the thoughts that arise in the mind.

In the Buddha's Dispensation, the practitioner (*yogāvacara*) is the one engaged in the battle against defilements, the one preparing for the great battle with Māra. The weapon the practitioner possesses is the subject of meditation (*kammaṭṭhāna*). Taking that weapon, the practitioner undergoes training and practice on the ground of the four foundations of mindfulness. The ground of the four foundations of mindfulness is what the Buddha referred to as the "father's pastureland."

Therefore, staying within the father's pastureland, establishing one's pure virtue and taking to heart the supreme determination to liberate oneself from Saṁsāra, one then engages in those four foundations of mindfulness, aided by the meditation subject. That is why it was said: "Do not let this auspicious moment slip away!" Occasions like the Uposatha day—on those occasions, by inclining towards the practice leading to Nibbāna, one can make arrangements to cross over from Saṁsāra. According to the social ethics of lay life, the Sinhala New Year, from a worldly perspective, involves performing tasks at the auspicious moment without letting the constellation pass. But there is a much deeper meaning here. Utilizing this rare opportunity of a Buddha's appearance—this "constellation opportunity" of obtaining a human existence during the period of a Buddha's appearance—to engage in this practice of virtue, concentration, and wisdom (*sīla, samādhi, paññā*); that indeed is what can truly be considered the practice of heedfulness.

You must reflect, as shown by the Buddha, on the suffering we have experienced over this infinite period of time in Saṁsāra—repeated Jāti (Birth) and repeated death. You must resolve to walk the path of the four foundations of mindfulness shown for the liberation from this mass of Dukkha (Suffering). Furthermore, in the future, by continuing to practice and train in these activities even in your lay homes, during this era when the Buddha's Dispensation is facing decline, you should become more spiritually urgent (*saṁvega*) and bring to mind that guiding phrase: "Do not let the noble moment slip away!"

May the store of merit accumulated today through undertaking the precepts and listening to the Dhamma—especially utilizing those wholesome intentions which are shown as the spiritual faculties (*indriya*) of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom that assist in attaining Nibbāna—be a strong supportive condition (*upaniṣraya*) for quickly securing the help of noble friends (*kalyāṇa-*

mitta), completing the study and practice of Dhamma and meditation, and realizing the supreme, great deathless Nibbāna through the penetration of the paths and fruits of Stream-entry (*Sotāpatti*), Once-returning (*Sakadāgāmitā*), Non-returning (*Anāgāmitā*), and Arahatship! May all beings, from the Avīci hell up to the Akaniṭṭha heaven, including your relatives and friends, and whoever wishes to rejoice in these merits of Dhamma-teaching and Dhamma-hearing, by rejoicing in these merits, be liberated very quickly from all saṁsāric Dukkha (Suffering) Jāti (Birth), aging, sickness, and death, and find peace in the supreme, great deathless Nibbāna through their aspired Bodhi (awakening)! Having made this aspiration, please recite these verses:

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……..*"