Pahankanuwa Sermon #157

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

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(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.109)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

Pali Stanza:

"Yassa pure ca pacchā ca,

majjhe ca natthi kiñcanaṃ;

Akiñcanaṃ anādānaṃ,

tamahaṃ brūmi brāhmaṇaṃ."

From:

Dhammapada Verse 421 (Brāhmaṇa Vagga)

Dear Listeners,

As the Middle Path (*majjhimā paṭipadā*) to escape the *Dukkha* (Suffering) of *saṃsāra*, the Teacher of the Three Worlds, the Buddha, placed before the world the Noble Eightfold Path on an Esala Full Moon Poya day like today. This path and practice, followed by everyone who aspires for Nibbāna without distinction between lay and ordained, is none other than this Noble Eightfold Path. The background story to the verse we have selected as our theme today is an exemplary account of how *nekkhamma-saṅkappa* (the thought of renunciation)—which is a primary component of *sammā-saṅkappa* (Right Resolution)—matured within a lay household.

The Buddha preached this Dhamma verse at the Veluvana Monastery in Rājagaha concerning a bhikkhunī named Dhammadinnā. During her lay life, Dhammadinnā's husband was the lay devotee Visākha. One day, after listening to the Dhamma from the Buddha, the lay devotee Visākha attained the stage of Non-returner (*anāgāmi-phala*). On his way back home, he reflected: "I must hand over all my wealth and possessions to my wife, Dhammadinnā, and set myself free."

Usually, Dhammadinnā would wait by the window, watching for her husband to return from outside. As the husband approached, they would greet each other with smiles; such was their custom. On this particular day, however, the lay devotee Visākha entered the house calmly without even looking toward the window. Dhammadinnā was somewhat perplexed by this, wondering why today was different. Furthermore, when the meal was prepared, whereas Visākha would normally invite his wife, saying, "Come, let us eat together," this time he ate in silence. Thus, Dhammadinnā further pondered whether his mind was upset or if he had become angry due to some matter.

Later, when the lay devotee Visākha was sitting quietly, he called his wife and said, "Dhammadinnā, please take charge of all these riches and comforts." At this, Dhammadinnā thought, "People who are angry do not hand over wealth in this manner. What could this be?"

Then she asked, "My lord, what will you do?" When he explained the situation, Dhammadinnā replied, "I do not wish to pick up the lump of spit that you have spat out. Please grant me permission to ordain." From this, we can infer that even by that time, Dhammadinnā must have been a woman of great faith (*saddhā*) who had also practiced meditation. Visākha, the lay devotee, escorted Dhammadinnā to a nunnery and facilitated her ordination. Since Theri Dhammadinnā delighted in solitude, after her higher ordination (*upasampadā*), she went to a remote province with a group of other bhikkhunīs to dwell in seclusion. Not long after going into seclusion to meditate after her higher ordination, she attained Arahatship with the four analytical knowledges (*paṭisambhidā*). She then thought, "I must give my relatives the opportunity to accumulate merit through me," and returned to Rājagaha.

When the lay devotee Visākha heard that she had returned to her nunnery, he thought, "Perhaps she has returned so quickly because she has become dissatisfied with the holy life for some reason." Thus, Visākha went to the hermitage and paid his respects. However, he could not directly ask Theri Dhammadinnā, "Why is this? Have you returned because your mind has turned away from ordination?" Instead, what did he do? He asked a question pertaining to the path of Stream-entry (*sotāpatti-magga*). She answered that question directly and correctly. Next, he asked question after question, rising to the path of Once-returning (*sakadāgāmi-magga*) and the path of Non-returning (*anāgāmi-magga*). The answers came in an extraordinary manner—only the question and the answer, with no irrelevant chatter. Sensing that the final question, concerning the path of Arahatship, went beyond the boundary of the lay devotee Visākha's own level of Dhamma-realization as an Anāgāmi, Theri Dhammadinnā said: "O lay devotee, you have overstepped the limits of questioning. You have failed to recognize the boundary of this question. If you wish, you may go and report this discussion to the Blessed One as it transpired."

Accordingly, the lay devotee went to the Buddha and related the entire discussion. The Buddha praised her and said: "My daughter Dhammadinnā's analysis of the Dhamma is absolutely correct. Even if you had asked me, I would have given these

very same answers to those questions. She is a woman of great wisdom." Elsewhere in the Tipiṭaka, it is mentioned that when the Buddha declared the foremost positions among the disciples, he declared Theri Dhammadinnā foremost among the bhikkhunīs who are Dhamma-speakers (*dhammakathikā*) in the entire Bhikkhunī Sāsana.

That very Dhamma discussion can still be found today in the *Cūḷavedalla Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*. It is an extremely profound discourse that draws the attention of both great scholars and meditators alike. There is no extraneous elaboration in it—it is simply question and answer, question and answer. A highly valuable compilation of Dhamma is found there. Through this, we see the miracle of the Dhamma. Not only that, but after doing so, the Buddha also uttered a certain verse in praise of Theri Dhammadinnā. It is that verse we have taken as our theme today:

Yassa pure ca pacchā ca, majjhe ca natthi kiñcanaṃ, akiñcanaṃ anādānaṃ, tamahaṃ brūmi brāhmaṇaṃ.

At first glance, it is almost like a riddle-verse. "He who has nothing before, after, or in the middle—who is possessionless, who grasps at nothing—him I call a Brahmin."

This *Dhammapada* verse is very simple. On this occasion, I will explain it very briefly. The Buddha often used the word "Brahmin" to refer to an Arahant. What is revealed here is that Theri Dhammadinnā had attained Arahatship. Thus, the nature of an Arahant's mind is shown by those words. For now, we will mention it briefly and elaborate later. "Before" (*pure*) refers to the past. There is no aspiration, no desire regarding the past five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*). Similarly, there is no aspiration or desire regarding the future five aggregates. There are no special desires regarding the past aggregates, nor is there any desire regarding the future aggregates.

Next, "middle" (*majjhe*) here refers to the present. Likewise, there is no attachment to the present five aggregates. It is in the *Brāhmaṇa Vagga* of the *Dhammapada*, which describes the Arahants, that this verse is found, saying: "Him I call a Brahmin, who has nothing of his own, who grasps at nothing." If we first consider the story, as we mentioned earlier, it demonstrates the transformation brought about by the emergence of *nekkhamma-saṅkappa* (the thought of renunciation) within a lay household. From this, lay devotees of today can learn many lessons. After turning toward the Dhamma, lay devotees can find excellent examples in this story for the various problems they encounter at home. Looking even at daily life, the harmonious relationship that existed between the lay devotee Visākha and Dhammadinnā as husband and wife can be called exemplary.

The wife would watch from the window for her husband returning from outside. Then, as soon as the husband arrived, she would welcome him warmly. The husband, too, was a very gentle-natured person. When taking meals, he would call his wife to eat together. They were two people who lived such a friendly and affectionate life. However, due to a sudden transformation brought about by the Dhamma, the lay

devotee Visākha decided: “Now I need freedom for my Dhamma study and meditation. Let me hand over the management of all these resources to my wife.” In the stories of the past, Dhammadinnā is depicted as a highly meritorious lady who had fulfilled her perfections (*pāramīs*) and come aspiring for such a position. Therefore, as soon as her husband spoke those words, instead of desiring those riches, she regarded them as a lump of spit and, saying, “What use is the lump of spit spat out by you to me?”, she renounced them even before her husband did. Indeed, it is mentioned that while the lay devotee remained a lay devotee, his wife became highly renowned in this Sāsana as Theri Dhammadinnā.

When this Dhamma leading to Nibbāna enters a person's heart, that transformation is difficult for many to understand. Especially for those bound by various ties of lay life, being unable to understand what occurs in another's mind-stream leads to various kinds of friction and displeasure. However, we are all temporarily met in this *saṃsāra*, in this wayside resting house of the world, due to certain past connections. Yet, this path to Nibbāna is a journey that must be made individually. It is the journey through *saṃsāra*, the journey of crossing over *saṃsāra*. Thus, supporting those who step forward with the necessary qualifications for it in a friendly manner is exactly what the lay devotee Visākha did. He went and handed over his wife to the nunnery. Next, let us look into analyzing these deep matters of the Dhamma.

Now, the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*) were mentioned here. You, lay devotees, have heard this word “five aggregates”. Most of you know that they are the five: form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), Preparations (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). These aggregates (*khandha*) mean heaps or piles; thus, there are five heaps. These five heaps are analyzed in this way: they are divided into past, future, and present, and are also seen both internally (*ajjhatta*) and externally (*bahiddha*). Internal refers to oneself—the heap of form regarding oneself—and external refers to others—the heap of form regarding others. Let us understand it thus. Furthermore, it can be gross form or subtle form, superior form or inferior form, near form or far form. In this way, all various forms are gathered into this aggregate of form (*rūpakkhandha*). It is because of grasping these with *Taṇhā* (Craving) that they are called *Upādāna* (Grasping)—the five aggregates of grasping (*pañcupādānakkhandha*). So, how does one recall the past five aggregates? Sometimes one thinks like this:

Let us say an elderly person thinks about their youth: “I used to be beautiful in such-and-such a way. Alas! Now look what has happened to me,” and thus develops an attachment to that past form. This is called *nandirāga* (delight and lust). Terms like *nandi* (delight), *rāga* (lust), and *chanda* (desire) are presented as synonyms of *Taṇhā* (Craving)—words equivalent to craving. Thinking of the past, they create a regret or a desire for it and suffer, saying, “We no longer have this now.” Next is the opposite side, which is about the future. They form future aspirations: “I must become someone with great physical beauty, a beautiful person, a strong person,” and thus remain clinging to thoughts and wishes regarding the future. That is what

was meant by “before” and “after”—regarding the past five aggregates and the future five aggregates.

Regarding the present five aggregates, what is currently here is also grasped as a self. They say: “This form is myself; this is my soul. There is a soul in form, form is in the soul, form is possessed of a soul.” In this way, they regard this form as a self, as “me”. This is how one develops attachment to the present form. Now, as described here, what is indicated is that the Arahant has freed themselves from those conceptualizations. For such a person, there is no attachment to the past five aggregates, nor are there any aspirations for a future five aggregates. The attachment and desire for the present five aggregates have been abandoned. For this very reason, they are *akiñcana* (possessionless / having nothing).

The meaning of the word *akiñcana* is “owning nothing”. Usually, when we say “owning nothing”, we think of material wealth and so on. In the Dhamma, it is presented much more deeply. *Kiñcana* means “something” or “anything”. Greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*) are designated as *kiñcana* (obstructions/possessions/attachments). Therefore, where greed, hatred, and delusion are absent, there is *akiñcana*. What is the reason for this? For us, a thing becomes “a thing” either because we like it, or because we are opposed to it, or because we are deluded by it—having a curiosity or doubt about what it is. It is through greed, hatred, and delusion in this manner that things in the world become “things” to us. If we take *kiñcana* deeply, “anything” refers to those three: greed, hatred, and delusion. Thus, because the Arahant is freed from them, they are *akiñcana*—owning nothing. Likewise, they are *anādāna*. *Ādāna* means “grasping” or “holding”—the nature of clutching. *Anādāna* means they do not grasp at any of those things either.

This is how the liberated mind is expressed in this verse. Now, we must indeed pay special attention to what was said here about the “middle” (the present). Meditators practicing insight (*vipassanā*) know that past Preparations (*saṅkhāra*) are “past”, meaning they have gone by. It is easy to realize that they have gone by. Sometimes, one spends a little time thinking about past things, but then realizes “this is no longer here”. Even if future thoughts arise, one can sometimes escape them. “Future” means what has not yet come—things that have not arrived. But the present is the deepest point, the hardest place to grasp.

If we apply this to the practice of mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*), some lay devotees when starting the practice send their minds out in anticipation of the incoming breath. Or, after the exhalation goes out, they send the mind out following that exhalation. However, teachers have instructed us not to send the mind to the past or to the future, but to anchor the mind at the point where the inhalation and exhalation make contact—such as the nose or the upper lip. That is what is meant by *parimukhaṃ satiṃ upaṭṭhapetvā* (establishing mindfulness in front). Even in the canonical discourses, it is mentioned that when sitting down for *ānāpāna*, one

should not watch where the breath comes from in the distance, nor should one chase the breath after it has gone.

Ordinary people usually regret while thinking about the past, letting their minds run after the past, and they wish for the future. What results from this is a loss of mindfulness. The Buddha constantly reminds us that we have to reach this truth through the present moment. Therefore, we must anchor the mind in the present. Ancient teachers give two similes regarding *ānāpānasati* to demonstrate this point.

Nowadays, the methods of sawing wood are very different. In the past, logs were placed on a trestle and sawn using a two-handed saw. If the person sawing the wood directs their eyes toward the other person or toward the two ends of the saw, they will make a mistake. Instead, to do it correctly, they must focus their attention right at the point where the log is being cut—exactly where the saw teeth make contact—without letting the mind drift to the far ends. Similarly, it is stated regarding *ānāpānasati* that the breath must be anchored at the tip of the nose or near the upper lip.

Another simile describes pushing a swing. The person standing in the middle often directs their eyes this way and that. However, what actually needs to be done is to anchor the eyes in the middle, without directing them this way and that. While swinging, there is no need to specially watch the two ends. It is just like that. Yet, the mind is tempted to send the eyes toward those two ends. Similarly, in *ānāpānasati*, it is when the mind is anchored in the middle that one catches the point of contact, which is the *ānāpāna-nimitta* (the sign of breathing). From that point onward lies the progress of insight (*vipassanā*). It is from there that one can elevate to insight the elemental nature (*dhātu*) or the subtle heap-like nature within the wave of breath, thereby attaining liberation (*vimutti*). We can understand this discussion of the "middle" in that manner through the medium of a meditation subject (*kammaṭṭhāna*).

In that Dhamma discussion, there was a certain shortcoming in the question asked by the lay devotee Visākha. We are obliged to present that question here at least briefly. Indeed, there is insufficient time to present that entire Dhamma dialogue. The question we intend to bring out now is precisely the one where Theri Dhammadinnā said, "You have overstepped the limit of asking questions." Visākha, the lay devotee, was asking about pleasant feeling (*vedanā*). In Pali, it is stated as *sukha, dukkha, adukkhamasukha*, meaning pleasant, painful, and neither-painful-nor-pleasant. Pleasant feeling and painful feeling are at the two extremes. In the middle lies neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling. Neither-painful-nor-pleasant means neutral feeling. Let us think for a moment. People in this world are riding a seesaw between pleasure and pain. When pain comes, they seek pleasure to escape that pain. But then, that pleasure is also not permanent (*anicca* - impermanent / inconstant). Theri Dhammadinnā spoke about this as well: underlying pleasant feeling is lust, the underlying tendency of lust (*rāgānusaya*). Underlying painful feeling is the underlying tendency of aversion (*paṭighānusaya*), which is hatred (*dosa*). Next,

underlying the neutral feeling called *adukkhamasukha* is ignorance (*avijjā*) or non-knowing. Why? Because the neutral feeling is not realized by the ordinary mind; it is only recognized by a meditative mind. Worldly beings remain between those two: pleasure and pain, pleasure and pain. They keep rolling along, saying, "Pain and pleasure constantly turn." Thus, ordinary worldly people have no regard for the middle in this way, because they lack sufficient mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*), and understanding.

Even the ancient achievers of absorptions (*jhānas*) and sages (*rishis*) who understood this, developed their meditative powers and gradually approached that neutral state of *adukkhamasukha*, which the ordinary world calls equanimity (*upekkhā*). The attitude of equanimity exists near the middle of that neither-painful-nor-pleasant seesaw, and they remained there. But how is it explained next? Theri Dhammadinnā says that the counterpart of pleasant feeling is painful feeling, and the counterpart of painful feeling is pleasant feeling. There is a constant, mutual relationship between those two.

However, underlying neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling is the non-knowing of ignorance (*avijjā*), a failure to understand. Once this is understood, that neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling turns into a form of happiness. As long as delusion remains, the peaceful and sublime nature of neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling is not understood. When realization arises, neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling is directly experienced as an extremely valuable experience, far superior to the coarse, rough pleasure and pain of worldly pleasures. For those achievers of *jhānas*, by the time they reach the fourth *jhāna*, *upekkhā* (equanimity) becomes pure.

Next, when viewed through insight (*vipassanā*), it is revealed that underlying neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling are ignorance and non-knowing. When ignorance is removed, true knowledge (*vijjā*) arises, which is realization. It is through that knowledge that liberation (*vimutti*) comes. Because of liberation, there is extinguishment, Nibbāna. It was when Theri Dhammadinnā declared this that the lay devotee Visākha asked: "What lies beyond Nibbāna?" That was when Dhammadinnā said: "O lay devotee, you have questioned beyond the limit." Let us strive to understand this matter. The Buddha showed that we must abandon attachment not only to past Preparations (*saṅkhāra*), not only to future Preparations, but also to present Preparations. This is accomplished through insight—by practicing insight with a well-concentrated mind.

The more one contemplates subtly, the more one understands that this existence is something that is constantly wearing away, constantly breaking apart. Existence means progression, rolling on. Indeed, what is thought of as "the present" is something that is constantly rolling on, like a flowing river. Thus, one cannot find a stable footing here. Yet, the tendency to seek a stable footing is what exists in the world. What is that stable footing? It is the notion "I am" (*asmi*).

Even if everything else is absent, there remains the concept of "I am", assuming that "I" exist. In Dhamma language, this is called the conceit "I am" (*asmi-māna*). At the stage of Non-returner (*anāgāmi*), the lay devotee Visākha did not recognize the subtle defiled nature of this *asmi-māna*. That is why he asked what lies beyond Nibbāna. But the Buddha points out here that even this *asmi-māna*, this "I am", is merely a conceit—just a measurement. This happens because of the changes in the Preparations (*saṅkhāra*) that are changing subtly and extremely rapidly in the present. It is like a section of a flowing river. Therefore, for that understanding to arise, one must see it with wisdom (*paññā*); one must see it through insight (*vipassanā*).

Mindfulness (*sati*) and concentration (*samādhi*) support this. When one contemplates the Preparations of *nāmarūpa* (Name-and-Form) in that manner, even what was taken as the "present" is seen to change extremely rapidly. This is just like swordplay. Indeed, if we use a simile, the entire existence of life is like a sword fight. Our living is entirely a continuous battle with Māra (Death/the Evil One).

Let us take a brief simile. A person who holds only a sword is fighting another person who also has a sword. In this fight, both attacking and defending are done with the sword. Both attacking and defending are done with the sword. Then, how rapid is this sword fight? This swordplay? Life is exactly like that. Whether we look at the inhalation and exhalation, or look at our efforts to maintain this life, there is a sword fight being waged with Māra. We take the blows dealt by Māra on one side, while hitting back at Māra, trying to defeat him. This is what is found in every single breath. This is what is found in every life-effort. When we seem to be winning that sword fight, that is when the pride of youth arises in us. We think we have won. As we watch, the body grows. "Now, death is nowhere near me"—that is where it appears as though the sword is winning. But when middle age is passed and illnesses arrive, it is then that the inability, the aging, and the helplessness in the swordplay are realized.

To describe this event in modern terms, what happens during our youth? New cells are born faster than the dying cells; so they say in medical science. But as we age, when Māra wins, the rate of regenerating cells decreases, and thus the body wears away. In short, what is here is a stream of arising and passing away, and this stream of arising and passing away constantly exists within this body built from food and drink. However, this stream of arising and passing away is not grasped by the mind. Instead, due to the perception of compactness (*ghana-saññā*), it takes it as one solid thing, grasping: "This is me." Leave alone that, even a photograph that is taken is thought of as "This is mine." Such is the delusion that exists. It is due to this delusion that there is attachment to these things. The point where this attachment ceases is called revulsion (*nibbidā*), cessation (*nirodha*). Weariness with *saṃsāra* (disenchantment) is produced by that aforementioned vision.

If at any point, contemplation with mindfulness and concentration is correctly applied to those respective Preparations (*saṅkhāra*), perhaps through a meditation subject (*kammaṭṭhāna*), then indeed one begins to see how these rapidly arise and cease. It is also through the mind that it gradually dawns that there is nothing here even to be taken as "I am". In the middle, too, there is nothing. Therefore, what was called *akiñcana* is the non-attachment toward them. When weariness with *saṃsāra* arises, there is nothing to be taken as greed, nothing to be taken as hatred, and nothing over which to be deluded. The realization arises that here there is entirely and solely a heap of Preparations (*saṅkhāra*).

Preparations (*saṅkhāra*) mean a heap of preparations or constructions. What is here is a heap of continuously occurring preparations. Thus, within that heap of preparations, one sees the nature of *Anattā* (Not-self). The Three Characteristics—*Anicca* (Impermanent), *Dukkha* (Suffering), and *anattā*—are seen. As impermanence (*aniccatā*) is realized deeper and deeper, the painful nature involved in building and compiling these is realized. The very construction of Preparations is *dukkha*. That is why it is said: *saṅkhārā paramā dukkhā* (Preparations are the supreme suffering). The deepest, most subtle suffering in the world is these Preparations; that is why Nibbāna is presented as the stilling of all Preparations.

This preparation is done through ignorance (*avijjā*). Ignorance means the feeling of "I" and "mine". As long as the feeling of "I" and "mine" exists, various Preparations (*saṅkhāra*) are made, preparations are constructed. Every single one of those preparations breaks apart extremely rapidly. In insight (*vipassanā*), impermanence (*aniccatā*) is first manifested to the meditator as arising and passing away—coming and going, coming and going. In the meditation on mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*), when contact is made at the touch-point at the tip of the nose, if attention (*manasikāra*) is well-applied, one understands how these waves of breath break apart extremely rapidly. They arise and break. In the end, what remains through that attention is only subtle contacting; there is no grasping (*upādāna* - grasping / holding / fuel).

This is mentioned in the Dhamma: *phussa phussa vayaṃ passaṃ evaṃ taṃ virajjati*. This means: contacting again and again, seeing their passing away, and it is precisely by seeing their passing away in that manner that fading of lust (*virāga*) arises, weariness (disenchantment) arises. When one sees every single one of these wearing away, there is nothing to grasp. When that which was previously taken as one solid thing due to the perception of compactness (*ghana-saññā*) breaks apart, there is no place to grasp. In ordinary worldly people, there is the grasping called handling (*parāmāsa*). Instead, in insight (*vipassanā*), there is comprehension (*sammasana*). One watches how they arise and pass away at that very spot. That is what was meant by *phussa phussa* (contacting again and again). The moment there is contact (*phassa* - contact), it is gone.

To use a simile, what is done at those police checkpoints? They do not chase after those who have passed, nor do they look back. They remain right there. They do not look back at those who have already gone. But they thoroughly inspect those who arrive at the checkpoint; they engage in maximum scrutiny. Exactly such a thing is done in insight (*vipassanā*). One does not run after past Preparations (*saṅkhāra*), nor does one chase after future Preparations. Instead, one contemplates the present Preparations at that very spot with subtle insight. It is then that their true nature becomes manifest. Just as whatever is hidden is caught at that checkpoint, as insight develops, one realizes: “Haven't we been playing this game with Māra all this time?”

There is another excellent story relevant to this, found in a series of questions asked by a monk named Rādha. In those questions, one can see the same pattern as the questions asked by the lay devotee Visākha. On one occasion, Ven. Rādha came to the Buddha and asked: “Venerable Sir, it is said, 'Māra, Māra.' Who is this Māra?” Then the Buddha declared: “Form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), Preparations (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*)—these themselves are Māra.” What is the reason for this? If there is death or dying due to something, if there is a concept of 'one who is dead' or 'one who dies,' that is it. Thus, because form exists, where form is taken as a single thing, there is dying—the concept that “form is dead”. It is the same regarding feeling. According to the Buddha's definition, there is no other Māra here. There may be other concepts of Māra, but in relation to this question, the Buddha showed: “Rādha, look at form itself as Māra,” because it is form itself that is said to die. What is dead is also form. Feeling is the same, perception is the same, Preparations are the same, and consciousness is the same.

Thus, through that concept of Māra, we can realize that the effort to maintain each of these is like a battle with Māra, similar to the swordplay described earlier. We try to protect form carefully; that is a battle with Māra. We try to maintain the pleasant feelings (*vedanā*) we like; those too are battles with Māra. When one understands at some point that all of these, when actually looked at, are like a heap of waves moving extremely rapidly, or like a river flowing on, that is Right View (*sammā-dassana*). In the end, even in this discourse, the Buddha tells Ven. Rādha: “If someone sees form as Māra, sees feeling as Māra, sees perception as Māra, sees Preparations as Māra, and sees consciousness as Māra—that is Right View.” This is the Buddha's word.

Next, Ven. Rādha asks: “Venerable Sir, what is the purpose of that Right View?” “Right View is needed for revulsion (*nibbidā*) toward *saṃsāra*.” *Nibbidā* means weariness/revulsion toward *saṃsāra*. It is called “Right” (*sammā*) View because it assists in revulsion. In modern times, people call other things “good”. Why is this called “Right” View? Because it assists in revulsion. Seeing form as Māra, seeing feeling as Māra, seeing perception as Māra, seeing Preparations as Māra, and seeing consciousness as Māra assists in one's revulsion toward *saṃsāra*. Then he asks, what is that Right View for? “Why should one feel revulsion toward *saṃsāra*?” Ven. Rādha asks this as well. “Revulsion toward *saṃsāra* is needed for dispassion (*virāga*), which is non-attachment.” Without non-attachment, one cannot escape this

saṃsāra. One cannot escape the suffering (*dukkha*) of *saṃsāra* while maintaining attachment to *saṃsāra*. One wants to escape from *saṃsāra* and suffering, yet one also has attachment to *saṃsāra*. How can that be done? It cannot be done. That is why the Buddha says that revulsion toward *saṃsāra* is necessary.

Thus, as we have been explaining, Right View is needed for revulsion toward *saṃsāra*. Revulsion toward *saṃsāra* is needed for dispassion (*virāga*), which is non-attachment. What is dispassion needed for? Dispassion is needed for liberation (*vimutti*), for release. Release from what? It is by going along grasping this five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*) that one suffers for a long time in this *saṃsāra*. One must let go of this. How does one let go of it? Does one throw it away physically? No. One is holding onto this with the mind. Grasping (*upādāna* - grasping / holding / fuel) means that holding by the mind. We hold onto these—form, feeling (*vedanā*), perception, Preparations (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness—as *upādāna* because of our *Taṇhā* (Craving) for them. Various words like *nandi* (delight) and *chandarāga* (desire-and-lust) are used as synonyms for craving. In whatever word it is expressed, there is a grasping due to craving. This grasping is done by the mind.

Thus, it is by the mind that these attachments arise. It is by the mind that one is bound. Therefore, it is by the mind itself that one must be liberated—that is liberation (*vimutti*). Then, dispassion (*virāga*) means non-attachment. To put it another way, the colors of those things that appeared beautiful until now have faded; the paint of that beautifully attractive form has run. When insight (*vipassanā*) arises, even in a very beautiful form, that paint runs. The paint on other things runs as well. The realization comes that they have no value. Thus, from that dispassion comes liberation. Next, from liberation comes extinguishment, Nibbāna. But, just as the lay devotee Visākha asked, Ven. Rādha also asks: “What is Nibbāna for?” Then the Buddha says: “Rādha, now you have overstepped the limit of questioning. There is nothing beyond Nibbāna. Nibbāna is the culmination of this holy life (*brahmacariya*) in the Sāsana; everything ends with Nibbāna.” What is the reason for this? Why was it said so?

Usually, many people think of Nibbāna as “a thing”. They think of it as a different world, uttering beautiful sentences like “attaining eternal peace in the deathless, great Nirvāṇa of everlasting bliss,” believing there is some place where the dead go and gather. That is the concept they hold. Let us think a little about this word “extinguishment” (*nivīma*). When we explained the word *akiñcana*, we said that those three—lust (*rāgā*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*)—are what are called “things”. It is because of those things that everything becomes a sign (*nimitta*) to us. When looking around with lust, things that were not signs before can become signs to us. When looking around with hatred, things we did not notice before begin to appear as signs. There are endless things to cling to when lust arises. There are endless things to clash with when hatred arises. There are endless things over which to be deluded—running after curiosity and perplexity—when delusion arises.

Now understand why lust, hatred, and delusion are called *kiñcana* (obstructions/possessions/attachments)—why they are called “anything” or “something”. You, lay devotees, know how everyone runs after fancy fashions popular among the youth for a short time. Then, as soon as a different fashion arrives, those previous ones fade away. Their paint runs out, their value drops, and eventually, they cannot even be sold—all those fancy things. From that, we can understand that lust, hatred, and delusion are the real “things” in the world. Other things are merely symbolized by them. There is what we call a symbol. Taking something as a beautiful thing, as a valuable thing, is a symbol of lust—that is greed. If most people covet it, then it becomes a highly valued item that can be sold at a high price, praised by everyone.

Let us look at what a gem is. In the final analysis, a gem is also something like a piece of charcoal. Yet, the world highly regards it. What is gold? The value of all such things is connected to our greed. It is the same regarding hatred; when our hatred arises, we clash with anything. Delusion is the same; if there is some strange, unknown thing, a miraculous thing, we stand with our mouths open, staring at it because looking with just our eyes is not enough. You, lay devotees, have heard of the fires shown by the Buddha: they are *Jāti* (Birth), *jarā* (decay/aging), and *maraṇa* (death). Thus, if the existence of this *saṃsāra* is those three fires, what is extinguishment, Nibbāna? It is the extinguishing of those fires. Once the fire is extinguished, what else is needed? While burning in the fire called suffering (*dukkha* - suffering / unsatisfactoriness / stress), one says: “This is suffering.” It was to eliminate that suffering that the Buddha preached this Dhamma.

During the Buddha's time, the Brahmins made various accusations against the Buddha. The idea held by the Brahmins was that there is something called a self, there is an eternal existence, there is a state of Brahma—those who held a firm view of self. They accused the Buddha's teaching of being annihilationist (*uccheda*), a destruction, and accused him of being an annihilationist. The Buddha said: “They accuse me of something I did not say. What I declared then, and what I declare now, is only suffering (*dukkha*) and the cessation (*nirodha*) of suffering.” If suffering is the existence of *saṃsāra*, if it is suffering, if holding onto these five aggregates is suffering, then it is when these five aggregates are abandoned that there is happiness.

That is what is called the bliss of Nibbāna. If we take the simile of the fire, the bliss of Nibbāna experienced in this very life is the point where that fire is extinguished. That very story of the extinguishing of the fire is what we remind you of on many occasions. The word *Upādāna* (Grasping) or clutching is often used for firewood and so on. When a fire spreads, whatever it grasps, whatever it clutches, burns away. We do not realize this. We may have a lot of wealth. When we go on a shopping trip, in accordance with our desire, by the time we return, we do not have even a single cent; all the money is gone. It went to that fire. It is just like that here; we must realize that due to greed, hatred, and delusion, not only this body but everything captured by our thinking gets caught in that fire and burns away. That is what this *saṃsāric* existence

is. If at any point those aforementioned fires are extinguished within, that very extinguishment is Nibbāna. That is the supreme peace, a peace to be realized in this very life. There is nothing beyond that. Why is it said there is nothing beyond?

When speaking of *saṃsāra*, the Buddha declared that if someone has *Taṇhā* (Craving) at the moment of death, whether regarding their household members or anything else, they might be born even as a hungry ghost (*peta*). Thus, there is a grasping because of that craving. That grasping is done by the mind. Indeed, after death, the physical body is cremated or buried. However, that grasping mind has clutched. That clutching goes as a rebirth into a mother's womb or elsewhere. Therefore, *saṃsāra* is a certain distorted, perverted state brought about by craving and *Upādāna* (Grasping). Thus, the Buddha shows how to calm this right here.

That is what has been explained so far. Although the five aggregates we grasp are taken as five heaps, by realizing that each of these is constantly breaking apart, when one deeply develops the insight into arising and passing away, the breaking up of everything is seen. This is called the knowledge of dissolution (*bhaṅga-ñāṇa*). In a highly alarming manner, it appears to the insight-practitioner that the speed of breaking up is far greater than the speed of arising. It is at that point that a deep weariness (revulsion) arises. How can we maintain something that is constantly breaking apart eternally, day after day? Therefore, if it is breaking apart, it is not for grasping, but for letting go. Letting go is what must be done. There is no substance in it, no core. That is what is presented in the Dhamma regarding Nibbāna by three terms: *animitta* (signless), *appaṇihita* (desireless/undirected), and *suññata* (void/empty).

Animitta means the absence of signs. Where there is greed, a sign is caught; where there is greed, something becomes a thing. Where there is hatred, a sign is caught. Where there is delusion, a sign is caught. Where greed, hatred, and delusion are absent, there are no signs for the mind. As signs keep coming, the mind runs after those signs. The moment a sign comes to the mind, the mind runs after that sign. Because of this, it sometimes becomes exhausted, whether through greed or hatred. Thus, the wondrous state of liberation without signs is what is indicated here by the word *animitta*. Next, *appaṇihita*: *praṇidhi* means aspirations or desires. There exist various kinds of aspirations. Being unable to fulfill those aspirations, people sometimes ruin their lives, carrying them over to the next life as well. Yet, there is never any satisfaction. Thus, when one sees the defects in those aspirations and at some point frees the mind from them, at that moment, there is no aspiration either.

Next, *suññatā*. Void or empty means there is no substance in these; there is no core of self. There is nothing unchanging here. If we use the seesaw simile, what was done by Āḷāra Kālāma, Uddaka Rāmaputta, and others was like philosophers or meditators who, exhausted by riding the seesaw between pain and pleasure for so long in *saṃsāra*, came to the point where the plank rests on the log and took a small break. They were experiencing a subtle pleasure of neither-painful-nor-pleasant

(*adukkhamasukha*) through subtle meditative states (*jhānas*). However, the Buddha went even beyond that. The Buddha showed that underlying these, there is grave ignorance (*avijjā*) and delusion (*moha*). What is that? It is precisely that conceit "I am" (*asmi-māna*). It is on the basis of the conceit "I am" that everyone rides this seesaw. Thus, if at any point that too is removed, there is no longer a problem. That is why Nibbāna is called *avedayita-sukha* (pleasure unfelt).

For many, it is a great puzzle why this happiness is called *avedayita-sukha* (unfelt pleasure). For us, we call a feeling (*vedanā*) "happiness". However, Ven. Sāriputta pointed out on one occasion that there is happiness even where there is no feeling. Ordinary worldly people think that if there is happiness, there must be a feeling. The Buddha declares that *avedayita-sukha* is a state freed even from feeling. Feeling exists as long as that conceit "I am" (*asmi*) exists—as long as the wedge is there. Therefore, the state freed from feeling, freed from the five aggregates entirely, is supramundane happiness (*lokuttara-sukha*). It is described as a peaceful bliss.

Thus, in the attainment of fruition (*phala-samāpatti*), the Arahants detach from their bodies and the world, and establish a wondrously peaceful bliss that is void (*suññata*), signless (*animitta*), and desireless (*appaṇihita*), without taking any sign whatsoever. If they pass away into final extinguishment (*parinibbāna*) from that state, there is no future rebirth, because there is no sign, no desire, and no substance. Wherever a sign was taken, wherever a desire or aspiration was formed, wherever some place was regarded as having substance—right there, rebirth is obtained, whether in a mother's womb, an animal's womb, or in the realm of hungry ghosts, or in a place like hell, depending on that thought-clutch. Then, just as it is said: *manopubbaṅgamā dhammā manoseṭṭhā manomayā* (mind precedes all mental states, mind is their chief, they are mind-made), everything exists according to this mind. Mind is chief. Therefore, we must indeed protect the mind. It is through the mind itself that we construct these sufferings and travel through this *saṃsāra* for such a long time. Thus, liberation (*vimutti*) also lies right there. That is what the Buddha has shown us here.

The very Middle Path (*majjhimā paṭipadā*) we mentioned at the beginning is what is present here as well. Those who ran after pleasant feeling (*vedanā*) ran toward the extreme of devotion to sensual pleasures (*kāmasukhallikānuyoga*), as described in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*. Seeking liberation and searching for an end, they spent lives of luxury. There was no end to that either. Next, another group, believing that to eliminate *Taṇhā* (Craving) one must inflict pain on the body, went along the path of self-mortification (*attakilamathānuyoga*), inflicting terrible suffering. The Buddha showed that both of these are extremes. Thus, he showed the Middle Path.

We return once again to the Noble Eightfold Path. In the Noble Eightfold Path, Right View (*sammā-diṭṭhi*) is indeed the very first step in eliminating the underlying tendency of ignorance (*avijjānusaya*). In Dhammadinnā's analysis of the Dhamma,

it was also stated that underlying the neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling called *adukkhamasukha* is ignorance (*avijjā*). When ignorance is removed, true knowledge (*vijjā*) emerges. Where knowledge emerges, there is liberation (*vimutti*). Where there is liberation, there is extinguishment (Nibbāna. Thus, in this Noble Eightfold Path starting with Right View, it is the question of the "middle" that is put into action. The two extremes have been abandoned. It is through establishing neutral feeling (*vedanā*) and developing a neutral mind, and thereby practicing insight (*vipassanā*), that we can escape from this *saṃsāra*.

Some of the things explained so far may appear profound. These were declared because they will be of assistance to meditators (*yogāvacaras*). On a valuable Esala Full Moon Poya day like today, we presented a concept of the Middle Path found in discourses such as the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* from another perspective. You, lay devotees, should take advantage of these and, in this age of decline of the Buddha's dispensation, strive hundreds or thousands of times to realize the liberation from *saṃsāra* that you hope for in this very life. If this Dhamma sermon has helped you develop the spiritual faculties (*indriya*) and powers (*bala*) of faith (*saddhā*), energy (*viriya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*), then taking refuge in them, and with the support of noble friendship (*kalyāṇa-mittatā*), may you gain the strength and power to realize the noble, supreme, deathless Nibbāna through the realization of the paths and fruits of Stream-entry (*sotāpatti*), Non-returning (*anāgāmitā*), and Arahatship, and thereby escape the suffering of *saṃsāra*! Strive with this aspiration. Furthermore, may your relatives and all beings from Avīci hell to the Akanistha heaven who wish to rejoice in this merit of preaching and hearing the Dhamma, by so rejoicing, realize the supreme deathless Nibbāna through a Bodhi of their aspiration! Striving with this aspiration, recite these verses:

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……..*"