Pahankanuwa Sermon #21

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

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(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

Pali Stanza:

Ārogā paramā lābhā, santuṭṭhi paramaṃ dhanaṃ;

Vissāsaparamā ñātī, nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ.

From:

Verse 204 from the Sukhavagga (Chapter on Happiness) of the Dhammapada

Dear Listeners,

Every person strives throughout their entire life to attain happiness, relief, and peace. However, through the very efforts they make, it is frequently seen that they only acquire suffering (*dukkha*), unease, and ruin. This happens because of following wrong principles and courses of action. If one correctly understands the values highlighted by the Blessed One, one will be able to attain happiness, relief, and peace. Today, the stanza (*gāthā*) we have chosen as our theme mentions four such values. This stanza was preached to King Pasenadi of Kosala.

This King of Kosala was accustomed to eating a large quantity of food daily. A *droṇa* is said to be a large measure of grain used in those days. It is recorded that he consumed boiled rice prepared from a *droṇa* of raw rice for a single meal. One morning, having consumed such a vast amount of food, he came to the Blessed One, and being unable even to sit up straight, rolling from side to side, and nodding off in a stupor from a food-coma, he sat there. Then the Blessed One asked him, "Why, Great King? Did you not come after taking some rest?" The King replied, "Venerable Sir, I came immediately after having my meal. Ever since I took food, my body has felt very heavy." Then the Blessed One stated, "Yes, Great King, by consuming food beyond measure, suffering (*dukkha*) arises in this manner," and as a slightly humorous or sarcastic advice to the King, he uttered a certain stanza of Dhamma:

Yadā hotī mahagghaso niddāyitā

mahāvarāho va nivāpapuṭṭho,

punappunaṃ gabbhamupeti mando.

The meaning of that stanza is: The foolish person who eats excessively and sleeps, rolling from side to side in drowsiness, is just like a pig fattened on various foods for slaughter, returning again and again to a mother's womb. Having uttered this stanza, the Blessed One further stated, "Great King, food is something that must be eaten knowing the proper measure. Only when one eats knowing the proper measure does the body feel comfortable." Then, to help him remember this advice, He uttered another stanza:

Manujassa sadā satīmato,

mattaṃ jānato laddhabhojane;

tanu tassa bhavanti vedanā,

saṇikaṃ jīrati āyupālayaṃ.

The meaning of that stanza is: For a human who is always mindful, knowing the proper measure in the food obtained, his feelings (*vedanā*) become mild; he ages slowly, preserving his life-span. Thus, He declared the benefit of eating less food.

But even though this stanza was proclaimed, the King could not memorize it. He was that drowsy. So, the King said to the young man named Sudassana, his nephew who had accompanied him, "Memorize this on my behalf." The youth Sudassana memorized the stanza and asked the Blessed One, "Venerable Sir, what should be done with this stanza?" The Blessed One instructed him: "When this King is taking his meals, stand nearby, and just as he is about to put the very last morsel of rice into his mouth, recite this stanza. Then, considering the meaning of the stanza, the King will put that morsel of rice aside. The next day, prepare the meal by reducing the amount of raw rice by the number of rice grains in that discarded morsel. In this manner, gradually accustom the King to the practice of reducing his food intake."

So, the youth Sudassana acted in that very manner. Not only that, but whenever the stanza was recited, the King even gave a gift of a thousand coins to the youth Sudassana. As this went on for several days, the King reached a state where he could subsist on just one *nāḷi* (a much smaller measure) of food. Along with this, as a benefit of that practice, the King experienced great physical comfort, lightness, and strength.

Seeing these benefits, one day the King came to the Blessed One in great joy and declared: "Venerable Sir, now my body has so much strength that I can chase and catch a deer or a horse. My body is now very light, and that obesity I had earlier is gone. I feel very healthy. This has been a source of great happiness to me." At that moment, he also expressed several other matters that had brought him happiness: "In recent days, I had battles with my nephew, King Ajātasattu. Now, I have settled

those battles by giving my daughter, Princess Vajirā, in marriage to that king. Furthermore, the battle had arisen over the ownership of the village of Kāsi. I have gifted that village of Kāsi to my daughter as bath-powder money—which we could call a soap allowance in modern terms—this was a custom among kings. Since I handed over that village as a dowry to my daughter, the conflict has ceased, and that is also a source of great joy to me." He mentioned another reason for his joy: "Recently, a family heirloom gem in our palace was lost and could not be found. That too was suddenly recovered. That is also a cause of happiness for me." Then, fourthly, he presented another matter: "To make myself more trustworthy and pleasing to the Blessed One's disciples, and considering it a significant matter, I have taken a relative-daughter of the Blessed One in marriage"—here he was referring to Princess Vāsabhakhattiyā of the Sakyan clan. "I have wedded this relative-daughter. Thus, in these several ways, I now possess great happiness and joy." When the King declared this, it was in relation to these statements that the Blessed One uttered this stanza:

Indeed, Great King, among gains, health is the greatest gain. Among riches, contentment with what one has is the greatest wealth, the ultimate wealth. Among relatives, trust is the supreme relative. And when considering happiness, the ultimate happiness is Nibbāna. Giving this meaning, He uttered this stanza—the one we mentioned earlier:

Ārogāparamā lābhā, santuṭṭhiparamam dhanaṃ,

vissāsaparamā ñātī, nibbānaparamam sukham.

Now, this stanza, as well as the stories surrounding it, provide us with wonderful examples. The first point is clearly visible to us. Health was declared in relation to the King's situation, which was the issue of eating food. When we contemplate this, we see what a valuable Dhamma the Blessed One brought to light through the King's eating habits. First of all, let alone other things, even the simile used—the simile of the pig in that stanza—shows this. The Blessed One was not afraid to speak in a sarcastic manner even to a king. To that extent, the King also had immense respect for the Blessed One. Now, you all know that a pig is an animal with a mouth made for eating, a large mouth, and a large belly that drags along the ground. In houses, they feed it all kinds of waste at the back of the house, not out of love for the pig, nor to get milk from it—you know this very well. In the end, the fatter it gets, the quicker its death approaches. That was an excellent simile for the King to keep in mind.

Therefore, if we think of the result of over-eating in terms of the Dhamma, because of drowsiness, laziness, and physical inactivity, one's inclination toward the Dhamma decreases. Consequently, *saṃsāra* is prolonged further and further. That is to say, one falls prey to Māra and undergoes death again and again by consuming excessive food in that manner. Thus, in addition to that simile, the practical method the Blessed One gave to the King to reduce his food intake is of extraordinary practical value. What is it? It is the practice of knowing the proper measure in consuming food (*bhojane mattaññutā*). Whose measure is it? It is the measure of the person who

eats. Therefore, only the person who eats knows their own measure; no one else can measure it for them. Thus, fittingly, the Blessed One next uttered a stanza that serves like a reflection (*paccavekkhaṇā*) for the King. We have already explained its meaning.

When the youth Sudassana recited that stanza, the King remembered the beneficial aspect of eating less food: that feelings (*vedanā*) decrease when food is consumed in moderation. Just as the last morsel of rice was about to go in, he would discard it. By letting go in this manner, he gradually understood the precise amount necessary for his sustenance. The King, who used to eat a huge quantity of food amounting to a *droṇa*, was eventually able to be satisfied with a single *nāḷi*. Here too, we can see the wonderful quality of the Blessed One as the "incomparable leader of persons to be tamed" (*purisadamma sārathi*). He showed a method suited to taming a person.

Next, when we think generally, we see that this weakness regarding food is also present among lay devotees, who over-eat at banquets and feasts. In an era where food is often used as an ostentatious display of status and wealth on the dining table, it shows us that we must be careful with food. Just like lay devotees, the Saṅgha also has to be careful regarding this matter at *saṅghika dānas* (almsgivings to the community). Because if one does not eat in moderation, not only do various diseases arise, but the body also becomes sluggish. Drowsiness and laziness set in. Consequently, many disadvantages arise, and the body decays rapidly.

"Slowly he ages, preserving his life-span" (*saṇikaṃ jīrati āyupālayaṃ*). Why is it said that one ages slowly when food is reduced? It is because undigested food is often what hastens decay, speeds up old age, and multiplies diseases. Thus, this point is also worth remembering. This is actually in agreement with medical science. In medical science, too, there are two important principles regarding food: *hita-bhuk* (eating what is beneficial) and *mita-bhuk* (eating in moderation). *Hita-bhuk*, dear devotees, means eating wholesome food—nutritious food that is beneficial to one's health. Next, *mita-bhuk* means knowing the measure of that food.

If we express this in dispensation (*sāsana*) terms, this *hita-bhuk* principle itself is denoted by the words *sappāya* (suitable) and *asappāya* (unsuitable). *Sappāya* refers to consuming wholesome, nutritious food. By discarding what is unwholesome and knowing what is suitable for oneself, one removes the unsuitable and takes the suitable. Then, corresponding to *mita-bhuk* is "moderation in eating" (*bhojane mattaññutā*). The Blessed One has pointed out to the Saṅgha, and particularly to yogis—not only to monastics but also to lay practitioners—to eat knowing the proper measure. It is through this that one can successfully practice Dhamma and meditation. By removing drowsiness and laziness, it helps to keep the body and mind active and awake, without succumbing to craving (*taṇhā*) for taste.

For the Saṅgha, this principle regarding food is even stricter. That is what is called reflection (*paccavekkhaṇā*). There is an old phrase, "consuming by reflecting" (*pasvikā vaḷandanavā*), used in reference to monastics. It does not carry the

colloquial meaning used nowadays; "consuming by reflecting" means eating with wise consideration and reflection. The Blessed One has even laid down a specific passage for monastics to recite when eating, just as He gave that special stanza to King Kosala. It reminds them that this food is not taken for physical strength or beautification of the body like laypeople do. It is taken solely—and the word "solely" is specifically used—for the maintenance of this body, for keeping it going, and for leading this noble holy life (*brahmacariya*). Furthermore, it is to appease the old feeling (*vedanā* of hunger) and to prevent new feeling (*vedanā* of over-eating) from arising, so that one can practice Dhamma and meditation in comfort. In this way, the Blessed One has prescribed that they consume food by turning the act itself into a meditation.

Thus, through this principle concerning food, whether lay or ordained, everyone can attain that health, the blessing of physical well-being. Indeed, why was health declared as the ultimate gain? Because no matter what other gains one has, no matter what wealth or grain one possesses, if one is sick, one cannot enjoy them. It is said of certain multi-millionaires in this world that sometimes they were in a state where they could not even subsist on a single slice of bread, perhaps due to diseases born of karma. Even today, lay devotees living urban lives, sometimes due to karma created in this very life—not some ancient karma—eat inappropriately at banquets just like King Kosala did in his early days, and in their final years, they are forced to subsist on a slice of bread, perhaps even stale bread. They fall into such a state. That becomes the cause of their illness. The Blessed One has stated that various diseases arise from over-eating.

Therefore, this is an extremely valuable message for the world. Not only for ordinary devotees living their day-to-day lives, but also for everyone practicing Dhamma and meditation, striving for Nibbāna. If this principle is broken, what happens is exactly what happened to that pig. Although they may look stout externally, they not only meet an early death but also pave the way for numerous deaths throughout *saṃsāra* due to greed for food and taste. Because of this, the Blessed One has presented the principle of food to the Saṅgha using most extraordinary similes, instructing them to consume food as if it were medicine for an illness. What is the illness? They are told to treat food as a medicine for this self-groaning disease of hunger that everyone has. Not as a form of entertainment, but in a way that sometimes evokes a sense of urgency (*saṃvega*), the Blessed One has described food to practitioners so that it directly aids in attaining Nibbāna.

Next, He gives another simile: just as oil is applied to the axle of a moving cart to make it run, so should food be regarded. Maintaining this body in the four postures is like driving this vehicle of the body. Food is like the lubricating oil that assists this. They are told to think in that manner. There are other even more striking, urgency-inducing (*saṃvega*) similes. You might even feel frightened upon hearing them. The Blessed One describes the consuming of food—which is unavoidable if one is to cross over the desert of *saṃsāra*—through a unique allegorical story.

Parents who set out with their only child to cross a desert ran out of food midway. Having no other alternative, they killed and ate their own child. However the child died—various details are given by different commentators—let us understand that it was done for nothing other than to keep themselves alive. When they ate that food, eating their own child's flesh, they did not do so for entertainment. Beating their breasts, crying, "Alas, our only child!", they ate it simply to cross over the desert. The Blessed One presented such a perspective on food, urging one to view food in that heart-rending, urgency-evoking manner, so that it leads directly to Nibbāna.

Through these various similes, the Blessed One showed that food is indeed necessary for life. One cannot live without eating and drinking like the Nigaṇṭhas. According to the Middle Path, it is something to be used as an aid for one's Dhamma practice, for maintaining this life, and for realizing Nibbāna. So, even from that perspective, this *mita-bhuk* principle regarding food—eating while knowing one's measure—is a highly valuable practice.

Next, if we contemplate the phrase "contentment is the greatest wealth" (*santuṭṭhiparamam dhanaṃ*), being content with what one has, we see that it is also an extremely valuable virtue in society. The reason is that no matter how much of a millionaire someone is, if they are miserly, envious, and not satisfied with what they have, they are always mentally poor. They are not rich in mind, but poor in mind. That is why contentment with what one has is considered the greatest wealth. "Contentment is the greatest wealth"—a person who lacks the virtue of being content with what they have is poor and destitute, no matter how much wealth they possess. To put it briefly, this also has a connection to the story of King Kosala. Why is that? We must relate the account of the battle with King Ajātasattu, which corresponds to the brief statement made by the King.

What was this issue regarding the village of Kāsi? These matters are shown by piecing together facts mentioned in various places in the Sutta discourses. First, it must be said that King Mahā Kosala—that is, the father of King Pasenadi of Kosala—gave his daughter in marriage to King Bimbisāra. That daughter was King Pasenadi's sister, and she was known as Queen Kosala Devī. Her son was Ajātasattu. Ajātasattu killed his father while still a prince and usurped the throne. After Bimbisāra was killed, King Pasenadi of Kosala, out of the grief he felt over this, decided that this patricide did not deserve a land belonging to their clan, and took back the village of Kāsi. In fact, that village of Kāsi had been given by King Mahā Kosala as a dowry—as mentioned, like a soap allowance—but King Kosala repossessed it. It was on this account that King Ajātasattu went to war with King Pasenadi of Kosala.

In that war, King Kosala was defeated the first time. The second time, King Kosala captured King Ajātasattu alive, caught him red-handed, and took possession of his fourfold army, taking them into custody. When the Blessed One came to know of this, He uttered a series of stanzas. Those stanzas did not convey praise for King Kosala. Rather, they showed how disadvantageous plunder is. The general idea of those stanzas is: some people plunder others at will, but they only understand when

others come forward and plunder them in turn. Several other valuable, instructive points are mentioned in that series of stanzas:

"The slayer gets a slayer; the conqueror gets a conqueror; the abuser gets abused; the annoyer gets annoyed; the plunderer gets plundered."

This means that if someone kills, they too will meet death—either by that person or by someone else. You can understand the other points mentioned as well; they are the results of action. Once that karma rotates back to the plunderer, he himself becomes subject to having his own property plundered. Even though it was not said directly to King Kosala, he must have heard about this instructive stanza uttered by the Blessed One. Having heard it, King Kosala must have abandoned his earlier stance. Previously, when he captured King Ajātasattu, he had let him go simply out of familial consideration because he was his nephew, but he had confiscated his fourfold army. What did he do this time? He handed all of that back, gave his daughter in marriage to him, making him his son-in-law for the second time, and donated that village of Kāsi as bath-powder money. Thus, King Kosala adopted a very generous and valuable course of action there, instead of plundering. Within that lies "contentment is the greatest wealth" (*santuṭṭhiparamam dhanaṃ*)—not expanding one's wealth by grabbing other people's possessions. Based on this, we can understand that King Kosala had received some guidance from the Blessed One, and that this principle of contentment was connected to the King's life.

Next, let us come to the third line: "Trust is the supreme relative" (*vissāsaparamā ñātī*). When you first think about it, it might not be immediately clear. What does this mean? Even when we think of relatives, our parents are the first who come to mind. But if there is no trust, if there is distrust, then there is no real relationship. Conversely, even if there is no blood relationship or any other kinship, if there is trust in someone, if there is mutual trust, that person is the true relative. That is what the Blessed One highlights. This fits here as well. King Ajātasattu was already a relative, a nephew. But despite being a relative, because there was no mutual trust, they went to war. Furthermore, that trust would have been further eroded if King Kosala had kept the fourfold army in his custody. Instead, understanding this, King Kosala handed all of that back, gave his daughter in marriage, and established trust in the truest sense. That trust is the true relationship. This holds true from that perspective. Next, the King stated another additional point. Thinking of making himself more trustworthy to the Saṅgha—believing that the monastics would respect him even more—what did he do? He wedded Princess Vāsabhakhattiyā of the Sakyan clan. Now, looking at this realistically, it is not that the Blessed One approved of this; whether he married her or not, the truth is that mutual trust itself is the real relative, the greatest relative. We can understand that this is something applicable to the life of King Kosala as well as to the lives of every one of you, dear devotees.

So now, in this way, we have three points that are useful even for our daily lives—when people speak of "daily life," they mostly think of the worldly side. First is the valuable principle of health. The food we consume, which we take to live, should not

be used to aid death. It should not be used to bring death closer. But nowadays in society, a person is often measured by the food they eat. Such a concept has developed. Or they are measured by the number of stars of the place where they eat. Due to such hollow values, people die untimely deaths. They bring diseases upon their bodies prematurely. Consuming food and drink without any regard for what is suitable (*sappāya*) or unsuitable (*asappāya*), or for the beneficial or harmful quantity, they turn what should be a medicine into a poison. They make it a toxic poison. Such is the era we live in. Therefore, what the Blessed One presented through "health is the ultimate gain" is helpful not only to King Kosala but to us as well.

Next, if we briefly consider these few points, even the principle of being content with what one has applies to daily life. Looking around nowadays, we see a custom in society where people measure their wealth by looking at the appliances and items used by their neighbors. They do not follow the concept of "simple living and high thinking" that we frequently mention. Instead, they think, "If I do not have the latest luxury item that my neighbor uses, I am poor," and they fall into disastrous situations such as getting into debt to acquire it. Today's society is in such a plight.

Thus, everyone lives their daily lives mentally poor, no matter how many millions they possess in terms of money. This is because they lack contentment with what they have. On the other hand, there may be someone with little wealth, perhaps considered poor by society. If they possess this virtue of being content with what they have—and being content with what one has does not mean one stops earning and just remains satisfied with that—they live in a way that fits what they currently have. If one tries to live today according to a plan targeted for several years in the future, what happens? One gets into debt. One should live with the wealth one has today. When it increases slightly, one adjusts accordingly, but one must still practice saving and living within one's means. Even if we do not speak of these things, you, dear devotees, will contemplate them. You surely get to hear many sermons on these matters. However, what we have to say in connection with this is about those very values. Often, these are confused because of a wrong understanding of life values. If we remember this principle highlighted by the Blessed One, "contentment is the greatest wealth" (*santuṭṭhiparamam dhanaṃ*), in our daily households, then without sighing in regret like those people, we can live happily with our children, subsisting on what we have, thinking, "Let us subsist on what is available; this is enough for us." One can lean toward such a practice.

Similarly, regarding relatives—many people make various efforts to build connections and establish relationships with influential people in order to gain high status in society. No matter how many relationships they build, whether blood relations or any other connections, if that trust is absent, if there is no trust, if there are grievances such that they cannot even look at each other's faces, if there is distrust, suspicion, and envy, then there is no real relationship. Therefore, the true relationship is that trust. If one has a good friend, that person is the best relative; no other relationship is needed. This too is an extremely valuable principle for society.

Now we come to the deepest part of the Dhamma. Do not let the word "deepest" frighten you. Although we cannot do so to the extent of the Blessed One, we always try to present this Dhamma in simple ways so that you can approach that depth. Why is it said, "Extinguishment is the ultimate happiness" (*nibbānaparamam sukham*)? Why is Nibbāna called the greatest happiness? Let us consider that for a moment. Generally, we all associate happiness with pleasant feeling (*vedanā*). But the Blessed One declared something very extraordinary: *yaṃ kiñci vedayitaṃ taṃ dukkhasmiṃ*—that is, "whatever is felt is in suffering (*dukkha*)." The Blessed One realized and declared that whatever can be taken as a feeling (*vedanā*) is all suffering (*dukkha*). When we speak of feelings (*vedanā*), there are three kinds of feelings, which you may have heard of: pleasant feeling, painful feeling, and neutral feeling. In the Dhamma, they are termed *sukha*, *dukkha*, and *adukkhamasukha*. If we translate them into Sinhala, painful feeling, pleasant feeling, and neutral feeling can be described as "neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling." "Neither-painful-nor-pleasant"—that is the dispensation term. It is neutral feeling (*vedanā*).

An ordinary person has no awareness of this neutral feeling (*vedanā*). In fact, the Blessed One states: What is the nature of a worldling (*puthujjana*) in this world? When afflicted by painful feeling, the worldling, hoping for pleasant feeling, inclines toward pleasant feeling, because the worldling knows no other way to escape painful feeling. As soon as painful feeling arises, the worldling grasps at pleasant feeling, because he has no clear understanding of neutral feeling. The teachers of old explain this through a simile. When a deer walks over a rocky mountain, the path by which the deer approached the mountain is visible, and the path by which it descended is also visible, but the footprints left on top of the rock are not visible. Similarly, an ordinary person generally does not perceive neutral feeling; it is a subtle thing. That subtle feeling (*vedanā*) is felt only by a meditative mind, by those who develop absorption (*jhāna*) meditation. Thus, here we have the "neither-painful-nor-pleasant" situated right between pain and pleasure.

If we direct our attention a bit more to this point, let us bring in a small simile. In villages, children play a small game called riding on coconut petioles. They sit on a coconut petiole and swing this way and that. For this same game, they sometimes construct a small plaything. They place a plank over a wooden log or some pivot, and two children sit on either end and swing up and down, back and forth. This is a small game called "seesaw, seesaw, seesaw." In fact, "seesaw" is the foreign name for this play equipment. This may also have come into common use now. They make a seesaw. Now, what happens on a seesaw is a continuous swinging. In truth, existence is also just like this. This *saṃsāric* existence is exactly like this. It is a swinging between suffering (*dukkha*) and pleasure. Like swinging on a swing, it is a kind of oscillation. It is between these two extremes that this entire *saṃsāric* existence lies. They go on swinging, saying "seesaw, seesaw." But the Blessed One saw the risk and danger inherent in this. This never comes to an end. Within this, one only falls into suffering (*dukkha*). Thinking of escaping painful feeling, one goes to pleasant feeling;

but when one gets there and looks, it is not permanent (*anicca*). When it ends there, this side sinks down again. That is how it is.

That is precisely what the Blessed One points out regarding the three feelings (*vedanā*). The nature of painful feeling is that it is painful as long as it lasts, and pleasant when it changes. The nature of pleasant feeling is that it is pleasant while it lasts, and painful when it changes. But the neutral feeling—the feeling in the middle—is a subtle thing. It is painful as long as it is not understood; it is pleasant when it is understood. This is expressed as *aññāṇadukkhā, ñāṇasukhā. Aññāṇa* means not understanding. As long as one does not understand neutral feeling, it is suffering (*dukkha*). But if at some point wisdom, understanding, and comprehension reach it, it can be turned into happiness. Based on this very Dhamma principle, even before the time of the Buddha, those who strived to escape this *saṃsāra* detached themselves from the five cords of sensual pleasure in which the ordinary worldlings are mired, developed absorption (*jhāna*) meditation, and gradually brought their minds to that third level—the neutral state.

If we look at this in terms of Preparations (*saṅkhāra*), there is something in the Dhamma we must recollect: the Blessed One described Nibbāna as the stilling of all Preparations (*sabbasankhārasamatha*). Let us define Preparations (*saṅkhāra*) as "constructs" or "fabrications." This word *saṅkhāra* is an extremely deep term. It is stated: "all Preparations are impermanent" (*sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā*). Throughout this entire *saṃsāric* existence, there is only an accumulation of Preparations (*saṅkhāra*). But because of the impermanent (*anicca*) nature of these Preparations, the Blessed One declared that this entire *saṃsāra* is suffering (*dukkha*). That is why the Blessed One declared: "Preparations are the ultimate suffering" (*saṅkhārā paramā dukkhā*). Even if we eliminate and escape all those gross, coarse forms of suffering that we usually think of, in the end, this very nature of Preparations is suffering (*dukkha*). Preparations (*saṅkhāra*) are the greatest suffering (*dukkha*).

There are three subtle levels of these Preparations (*saṅkhāra*). To a practitioner (*yogāvacara*) developing absorption, the out-breath becomes perceptible. The troubles and distresses of other external activities are indeed suffering (*dukkha*), but when viewed at the minimum level, even this in-breath and out-breath possess the nature of suffering (*dukkha*), though the ordinary world does not understand this. In short, this in-breath and out-breath are identified as bodily Preparations (*kāya-saṅkhāra*), the subtlest level of bodily Preparations. Next, verbal Preparations (*vacī-saṅkhāra*) are the Preparations of speech; at the minimum level, these fabrications of speech are described as *vitakka* (thought-conception) and *vicāra* (discursive thinking)—thoughts within the mind, various kinds of thoughts. When a problem arises, say, on a sleepless night, one can clearly understand what a suffering (*dukkha*) this *vitakka* and *vicāra* can be. One cannot sleep; thoughts keep coming, one after another, and one cannot escape them. It is like being dragged by both hands toward a pit of embers. That is *vitakka* and *vicāra*. As the mind becomes subtler and subtler, moving toward levels of absorption, one realizes that this verbal

formation (*vacī-saṅkhāra*) is also suffering (*dukkha*). Then, beyond that, there is mental formation (*citta-saṅkhāra*).

That is directly connected to the mind itself. There, perception (*saññā*) and feeling (*vedanā*) are indicated. Perception (*saññā*) means recognition. In our minds, there is a certain capacity—a capacity to recognize things, as well as a capacity to experience. This is what we started with when we spoke of pleasure and pain. These two, perception (*saññā*) and feeling (*vedanā*), are extremely subtle Preparations (*saṅkhāra*). They are called mental Preparations (*citta-saṅkhāra*). It was to escape from this level of Preparations (*saṅkhāra*) that the yogis of old strived. By the time the Buddha appeared, they had reached the utmost limit of their efforts. One such person who had gone to that limit was Uddaka Rāmaputta. You have heard that when the Blessed One went in search of teachers, He approached two teachers: Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta. The teacher Āḷāra Kālāma had attained an extremely high state of absorption called the sphere of nothingness (*ākiñcaññāyatana*). Even higher than that, the teacher Uddaka Rāmaputta had attained the state known as the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*).

If we are to understand this sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, we must look at it like this: "perception is neither present nor absent." Now we return to our seesaw. In *nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*, perception is neither absent nor present. Within it, there is a hesitation, a state of double-mindedness, a perturbation, like standing on top of a fence. The yogis of that era, when the Blessed One appeared, had reached such a state. Thus, Uddaka Rāmaputta was the final teacher He approached. When asked, "What do you teach?", he replied, "The sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception." Even before that teacher had finished speaking, the Blessed One had already attained it, having realized such states on countless occasions throughout past *saṃsāra*. However, the Blessed One was not satisfied with it. Why? Because there was still hesitation. Even if one stands at the center of the seesaw, it still oscillates. There is no true peace there. It is impermanent (*anicca*).

That is why the Blessed One declared that painful feeling (*vedanā*) needs no further explanation; it is like a thorn, a great suffering (*dukkha*). As for pleasant feeling (*vedanā*), while it is present, it is pleasant, but when it undergoes change (*vipariṇāma*), its painful nature is realized. Therefore, it too is suffering (*dukkha*). So, painful feeling (*vedanā*) needs no further explanation; it is entirely suffering (*dukkha*), like an embedded thorn. Pleasant feeling (*vedanā*) is suffering (*dukkha*) when it changes. Hence, a wise person knows beforehand: "Here comes a pleasant feeling, and along with its change, I will now have to face suffering (*dukkha*)." Next, there is neither-painful-nor-pleasant (*adukkhamasukha*), which we called the neutral middle ground. That is what those past teachers grasped onto as a great refuge. But the Blessed One pointed out that it too is impermanent (*anicca*). Why? Because even if one attains such absorption states and is reborn in the Brahma worlds, remaining there for eons, one still rotates back.

Such is the situation. That is why the Blessed One presented the stilling of all Preparations (*saṅkhāra*) as the greatest attainment. The Blessed One declared that whatever feelings (*vedanā*) exist, whether pleasant, painful, or neither-painful-nor-pleasant, every feeling (*vedanā*) is suffering (*dukkha*). Thus, on one occasion, the Blessed One stated to the Venerable Ānanda that some ascetics of other sects might raise this debate: "This Ascetic Gotama speaks of a unique meditative state, a unique state of concentration called the 'cessation of perception and feeling' (*saññā-vedayita-nirodha*). What is that? What kind of thing is it?" They would then say: "They declare this special absorption state, this state of attainment called 'cessation of perception and feeling' as happiness. How can it be happiness if there is no perception, feeling, or anything else present? How can there be happiness if there is no feeling (*vedanā*)?" Foreseeing that they might raise this argument, the Blessed One told Venerable Ānanda beforehand: "To those who raise such arguments, explain it in this way: The Blessed One does not describe happiness solely in terms of pleasant feeling (*vedanā*). Wherever happiness is found, the Blessed One designates that very place as happiness." What this points to is not worldly happiness, but supramundane happiness. In supramundane happiness, one has escaped even from the level of feeling (*vedanā*). Because all levels of worldly happiness are impermanent (*anicca*). Painful feeling (*vedanā*) needs no further elaboration. Pleasant feeling (*vedanā*) is suffering (*dukkha*) when it changes. And neutral feeling (*vedanā*) is the subtlest form of suffering (*dukkha*) within Preparations (*saṅkhāra*).

If we analyze this further, another valuable concept is shown in the Dhamma. It is deep, but we will mention it briefly for you, wise devotees, to contemplate. The levels of suffering are presented in three modes: *dukkha-dukkhatā* (suffering as pain), *vipariṇāma-dukkhatā* (suffering due to change), and *saṅkhāra-dukkhatā* (suffering due to Preparations). *Dukkha-dukkhatā* refers to painful feeling (*vedanā*)—sheer suffering (*dukkha*) when viewed coarsely, which anyone can recognize. *Vipariṇāma-dukkhatā* refers to pleasant feelings (*vedanā*); because it leads to suffering (*dukkha*) when it changes, pleasant feeling (*vedanā*) is termed suffering due to change. And *saṅkhāra-dukkhatā* refers to that neutral state we mentioned. The mode of suffering due to Preparations (*saṅkhāra-dukkhatā*) is the last one shown. It is experienced only by those who have developed their minds in the manner described. Only they truly understand the danger of this *saṃsāra*—that not a single one of these feelings (*vedanā*) can be grasped, and that this seesaw-swinging must be brought to an end. It is that cessation of existence, rather than existence itself, which is needed. It is for this purpose—for this realization—that the Blessed One preached this supramundane Dhamma.

Thus, what we have here is this: beneath that "neither-painful-nor-pleasant" neutral feeling lies ignorance, lack of knowledge, and lack of comprehension. The moment it is turned into comprehension, there is happiness. That becomes a peaceful, exquisite happiness. That is precisely what the Blessed One ultimately presented as Nibbāna. This "cessation of perception and feeling" (*saññā-vedayita-nirodha*) is a state where both perceptions and feelings are ceased. The Blessed One revealed this; no other

teacher was able to do so. It is the highest state of concentration, a state of attainment, having freed oneself from both perception and feeling. Emerging from it, one stands in Nibbāna. That is to say, one has completely escaped from Preparations (*saṅkhāra*). Escaping from Preparations (*saṅkhāra*) is indeed the highest happiness. That is supramundane happiness, which is designated as Nibbāna.

So, what did the Blessed One present as that realization? Let us return to our seesaw. What is the cause of this seesaw's swinging? It is that pivot placed in the middle, isn't it? It is over that pivot in the middle that the plank is placed. The Blessed One removed that very pivot. What is this pivot? In the Dhamma, it is called the conceit "I am" (*asmimāna*)—the conceit of "I am." Its coarse aspect is what you have heard of as the view of existing group/body (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), which thinks in terms of "I" and "mine." Today, we hear everyone talking about the view of existing group/body (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*): "form is self, feeling is self"—that coarse concept of self. The subtlest level of that is "I am"—the conceit "I am." It exists at an extremely subtle level, remaining all the way up to the stage of the non-returner (*anāgāmī*). As long as it is present, that swinging continues; becoming (*bhava*) remains, existence remains. But the Buddha-eye saw that this is suffering (*dukkha*). Because, driven by the force of karma within that existence, one falls into various states of becoming (*bhava*), wandering in *saṃsāra* for a long time through miserable realms and happy realms. The only solution is to escape from this becoming (*bhava*). That is called the cessation of becoming (*bhava-nirodha*), the stopping of that swinging. What is required for this is to realize the true nature of feelings (*vedanā*), and to see that underlying all these feelings is the conceit "I am" (*asmimāna*), which lies even deeper than the concepts of "I" and "mine." This is not something to be acquired merely through words; it can only be realized by walking this path of Dhamma.

That is what this is about. This is discussed in various ways, and we have illustrated it here using a small simile. Now, we must contemplate why it is said, "Extinguishment is the ultimate happiness" (*nibbānaparamam sukham*). We brought this up because it is relevant to our theme. Why is Nibbāna called the ultimate happiness? King Pasenadi of Kosala presented those four worldly matters as happiness. But the Blessed One did not stop there. He did not say, "Yes, yes, Great King, that is indeed the greatest happiness; and becoming related to us is also the greatest thing." He did not say, "Very well, we too are now relatives." He did not leave it at the worldly level. He took it all the way to Nibbāna. He gave a hint: "These are not the true happiness." Even health is not permanent (*anicca*). *Rogantaṃ hi ārogyaṃ*—health ends in illness. Therefore, although "health is the ultimate gain" (*ārogāparamā lābhā*) holds true as a gain, and health is the highest among gains, it is not the ultimate happiness. "Contentment is the greatest wealth" (*santuṭṭhiparamam dhanaṃ*), being content with what one has; or other kinds of wealth—they are indeed wealth, but ultimate happiness is not found there. "Trust is the supreme relative" (*vissāsaparamā ñātī*)—even if one establishes relationships and maintains trust among relatives, there is no true happiness in any of that. All of these are merely a pile of Preparations (*saṅkhāra*). Every single one of them is a formation (*saṅkhāra*). Therefore, escaping

from Preparations—which is called the stilling of all Preparations (*sabbasankhārasamatha*)—is indeed the highest happiness. That is what the Blessed One highlighted here. Nibbāna is defined as *sabbasankhārasamatha*—the stilling of all Preparations (*saṅkhāra*).

We have briefly mentioned what Preparations (*saṅkhāra*) are. Indeed, the coarse part of Preparations exists as karma. You may have heard of this: if one performs unwholesome karma, as everyone knows, one has to suffer in the realms of misery. If one performs unwholesome deeds, one is first of all afraid of that. Then, because of that, we think, "Let us instead perform meritorious deeds and go to the heavenly worlds." But even if we go there, at the moment of passing away (*cuti*), there is great suffering (*dukkha*). After passing away from there, there is no telling where one will fall next. That is why the Blessed One declared that not only the heavenly worlds but even the Brahma worlds are impermanent (*anicca*). It is said that when the Blessed One preached the Dhamma, even the Brahmas were shaken: "We too are impermanent! All this time we thought we were permanent, but now we see that we too are impermanent," and they became afraid. That is the Lion's Roar (*sīhanāda*). The Buddha roared his Lion's Roar. It is recorded that when He declared *sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā*—"all Preparations are impermanent"—even the Brahmas were shaken. Such is the status of worldly things. Therefore, the Blessed One points out that one must escape from all of them, escaping from the state of Preparations (*saṅkhāra*) to attain Nibbāna, which is unformed (*visankhāra*). That is to say, since Preparations (*saṅkhāra*) arise due to ignorance (*avijjā*), all merit and demerit that cause pleasure and pain are performed based on the ignorance of "I" and "mine." One cannot escape this merely by thinking about it. It must be realized by gradually developing meditation. However, as we have stated on previous occasions, one first turns away from unwholesome actions and sins, inclining the mind toward merit. Then, without stopping there, one gradually engages in meditation to transcend both merit and demerit, gradually practicing insight (*vipassanā*) to see things as impermanent (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*). Seeing the impermanent (*anicca*) nature of these Preparations (*saṅkhāra*), one develops disenchantment with *saṃsāra*, and only then can one escape this cycle. Only then can one directly realize that noble state of Nibbāna in this very life. That state is the end of that seesaw-swinging. In other words, the path leading to that is this entire Buddhist practice.

This is what we frequently remind you, dear devotees. What is the meaning of the practice by which a Buddhist tames himself—whether we look at it briefly as the Noble Eightfold Path or through various other frameworks like the four foundations of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*)? It is to bring the mind to that state. It is to remove that conceit "I am" (*asmimāna*)—even that underlying conceit of "I am"—so that one's life is lived just like the trees and plants around us. Since trees and plants do not possess consciousness (*viññāṇa*), there is no such thing as suffering (*dukkha*) for them. When a rubber tree is tapped, latex flows, but we do not think it experiences painful feeling (*vedanā*). Trees and plants do not have that kind of problem. But it is

for a conscious being—one endowed with consciousness (*viññāṇa*)—that this suffering (*dukkha*) exists. Furthermore, existence does not end here. This was seen not only by the Blessed One, but also by others who could perceive the sequence of past aggregates. Before the Blessed One, there were yogis who could see hundreds of thousands of past births (*jāti*). They too saw this problem of *saṃsāra*. They saw the problem, but they could not find the answer. Only the Blessed One was able to find the true answer.

Thus, what we call accumulating karma is that very coarse level of Preparations (*saṅkhāra*). We generate two types of karma: merit and demerit. We are responsible for them, because we perform merit and demerit based on the premise of "I" and "mine." We emphasize this because many people have confused these matters today. There is a concept called "the right view of ownership of karma" (*kammasakatā sammādiṭṭhi*). Based on that, we turn away from sinful, unwholesome actions and direct the mind toward wholesome karma. Then we perform wholesome actions, thereby securing good states of rebirth in happy realms. But even though that arrangement is made, one does not stop there. When we look at it according to the Middle Path of the Blessed One, we do not grasp onto any of these; we use them all as aids. It is just as we said about food. Everything is used as an aid, even the states of absorption (*jhāna*).

Therefore, using merit and wholesome actions as aids, we can practice meditation. We obtain lives endowed with various blessings of birth (*upadhi-sampatti*) and strong intellectual capacities. But we do not stop there. If we remain satisfied with that, our past bad karma can surface, and without making any further progress, we can fall back into the realms of misery. Instead, we use those assets; having calmed and concentrated the mind through serenity (*samatha*) meditation, and based on that, we contemplate the three characteristics pointed out by the Blessed One: impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*). Taking up specific subjects of meditation (*kammaṭṭhāna*), we must practice meditation and see this within ourselves. Because the Blessed One pointed out that this Dhamma is to be directly realized by oneself. This is not something to be acquired externally from someone else's explanation; it must be seen within one's own five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*).

First, we must understand this aggregate of form (*rūpakkhandha*), this aggregate of feeling (*vedanākkhandha*)—this heap of form, heap of feelings, heap of perceptions, heap of Preparations (*saṅkhāras*), and heap of consciousnesses—as just heaps. Although we refer to them as the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*), meaning "heaps," an ordinary person does not perceive them as heaps. There is a natural tendency to take them as a single, solid unit. It is only the meditating yogi who can see this. As the mind gradually becomes concentrated and wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) is directed toward this, one sees: "Here is a heap of form, here is a heap of feelings." If it is a heap, each component arises and passes away. What is present here is a vast heap of arisings and passings-away. In the end, as one looks closely, it

is not even a heap of things arising and a heap of things passing away; it is simply a vast heap of passing away. In this manner, it begins to appear in a deep way. Then, one's attachment to this fades. "This is something that decays, something that breaks down. If I grasp onto this, will I not perish along with it?" It is then that the inclination to let go arises; letting go occurs. The primary sign of liberation through letting go appears.

Gradually letting go in this manner—now, what was the mistake made by Āḷāra Kālāma, Uddaka Rāmaputta, and others? As soon as they attained those states of absorption, they immersed themselves in that pleasure and grasped it as self. It was because they took it as self that they were unable to cross over. The Blessed One showed that this existence is something that arises due to a network of causes and conditions. When one correctly sees that network of causes and conditions, the perception of self—the feeling of "I" and "mine"—is gradually removed. The more one sees this, the deeper one sees it, and that is what the three characteristics are about. Whatever is impermanent (*anicca*) is suffering (*dukkha*), because one constantly has to keep constructing what is impermanent.

Preparations (*saṅkhāra*) are a heap of fabrications. We frequently remind you of the simile of the wild banana trunk. Why did the Blessed One compare Preparations (*saṅkhāra*) to a banana trunk? There is no core, no heartwood. What exists here is merely a network of causes and conditions. A foolish person mistakes it for a tree trunk with a solid core of wood. In the same way, we take this aggregate of form (*rūpakkhandha*), give it a name, and take it as "I am so-and-so." The same applies to other things, and ultimately to the mind. That is extremely subtle. The mind grasps it as "I" and "mine." Those past yogis and wrong-view holders ultimately grasped this mind, this consciousness (*viññāṇa*), taking it as self. But the Blessed One pointed out that all of this is a heap of Preparations (*saṅkhāra*). It is upon a heap of Preparations (*saṅkhāra*) that this mind called consciousness (*viññāṇa*) exists. Therefore, to put it briefly, the Blessed One revealed all of this as suffering (*dukkha*). The five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*) are entirely suffering (*dukkha*) as long as one remains in becoming (*bhava*). Contemplating this at the subtlest level, the entirety of becoming (*bhava*) is suffering (*dukkha*).

Now, this is difficult for someone to comprehend. That is why we illustrate it with the medical simile. When presenting the Blessed One as the incomparable physician, the true nature of the illness must be stated. If this illness is to be cured completely, one must escape from the entire heap of Preparations (*saṅkhāra*). By gradually stilling those Preparations (*saṅkhāra*) at their subtlest levels—moving from the in-breath and out-breath, to *vitakka* and *vicāra*, and then to perception and feeling—one ultimately escapes from all feelings (*vedanā*). That is why Nibbāna is called an unfelt happiness (*avedayita-sukha*). You may have heard that everything in this world is the happiness of experiencing (*vedayita-sukha*), whereas Nibbāna is the happiness of stilling (*upasama-sukha*). Everything else is the happiness of experiencing; Nibbāna is the happiness of stilling. Therefore, the journey toward that stilling, that

tranquility, is this path to Nibbāna. It was in reference to this that the Blessed One declared: *nibbānaparamam sukham*—"Extinguishment is the ultimate happiness."

Therefore, we should consider that on this valuable day, this meritorious gathering of people, having contemplated from a worldly perspective on what we call daily worldly life, has received many Dhamma points that will help them live with more peace, happiness, relief, and comfort than before. Furthermore, without stopping there, they have gained some understanding through this short Dhamma sermon regarding Nibbāna, which assists in bringing to an end this entire *saṃsāric* existence—a task we have been unable to accomplish for so long. You should understand that this has been a wonderful opportunity to develop the spiritual faculties and powers of conviction (*saddhā*), energy (*viriya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samadhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*) that aid in attaining Nibbāna. May you make the aspiration: "By developing these strengths, associating with noble friends (*kalyāṇamittas*), and without any other worldly aspirations, may we practice well within this Buddha's dispensation, developing virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*), and by realizing the paths and fruits of Stream-entry (*Sotāpanna*), Once-returning (*Sakadāgāmi*), Non-returning (*Anāgāmi*), and Arahatship, may this meritorious acquisition of hearing the Dhamma surely lead us to escape all *saṃsāric* suffering (*dukkha*) and realize that happiness of stilling, the ultimate happiness!"

In the same way, may you share these merits by reciting stanzas, wishing that all living beings from the lowest hell (*Avīci*) to the highest heaven (*Akaniṭṭha*), including your own deceased relatives who desire merit and seek Nibbāna, may rejoice in this meritorious deed of delivering and hearing the Dhamma, and through one of the three forms of enlightenment they aspire to, may they bring this *saṃsāric* suffering (*dukkha*) to an end as quickly as possible, freeing themselves from all suffering (*dukkha*) such as birth (*jāti*), aging and death (*jarāmaraṇa*), and sickness, and find peace in the supreme, deathless, great Nibbāna.

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……..*"