Pahankanuwa Sermon #161

English Translation

Translated from Sinhala

Author: Ven. Katukurunde Nanananda Thero

(Pahankaṇuwa Sinhala Audio Dhamma Sermon No.6)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

Pali Stanza:

"Taṃ puttapasamattānaṃ,

byāsattamanasaṃ naraṃ,

Suttaṃ gāmaṃ mahogho'va,

maccu ādāya gacchati."

From:

Dhammapada Verse 287 (Magga Vagga)

Dear Listeners,

That Buddhahood which took place at the foot of the Bodhi tree of our Buddha was an understanding, and also a certain awakening. A waking up. An awakening from a long, deep sleep of defilements (*kilesa*) in *saṃsāra*. It was because the Buddha first woke up from that long sleep and wished to awaken all of us as well, that on a full-moon poya day of Esala like today, He set in motion the Wheel of Dhamma (*dhamma-cakka*), preaching the Dhamma to the world for the first time.

To awaken the worldly beings sleeping, intoxicated by defilements in the thick darkness of ignorance (*avijjā*) throughout this long *saṃsāra*, is no easy task. It is to generate the great wisdom and great compassion necessary to accomplish this task that the Fully Self-Awakened One fulfilled the perfections (*pāramīs*) for an extremely long period of four incalculable aeons (*asankheyya*) and a hundred thousand cosmic cycles (*kalpas*), giving away His eyes, head, flesh, blood, and so on. If worldly beings, who sleep intoxicated by these defilements, are to awaken, their eyes must be opened in some way or other.

Some, hearing the sound of the virtues and the sound of the Dhamma of the Buddha, came directly to the Buddha, listened to the Dhamma, and awakened by attaining the

Dhamma-eye. Others, having awakened somewhat due to various shocks and bitter experiences occurring at different points in their lives, managed to come to the Buddha and, with the help of the light of His wisdom and the coolness of His compassion, awakened and opened their eyes. In the background story corresponding to the stanza we have chosen as our theme, what is mentioned is such an awakening, which occurred when a person was led to the Buddha through a shock, a bitter experience in life, and awakened with His help.

At that time, in the city of Sāvatthi, there lived a merchant's daughter named Kisāgotamī. She was a woman from a wealthy family. Having married, her first-born child died suddenly during his playful infancy, the crawling stage. The members of that household tried to perform the final rites for this corpse. But this mother, this merchant's daughter, due to her intense attachment and her belief that the child was not dead, did not allow it. Because of her strong attachment to the child, she could not believe that the child had died. Therefore, carrying the child on her hip, she went from house to house asking if there was anyone who could give medicine for this child, or recommend a remedy.

Then, although her neighbors said, "What madness is this? Where is there medicine for a corpse? What medicine?" and even scolded her, she did not understand. One mature and wise man said, "I do not know of a medicine myself. But I know someone who knows the remedy. I know a physician." She asked, "Who is that?" He replied, "There, residing in the Jetavana monastery, is the Teacher, the Buddha. He indeed knows the exact medicine for this." This woman also went to the Buddha and requested, "Please tell me a medicine for my child." She asked, "Do you know a medicine?" "Yes, Gotamī, I know a medicine." When she asked, "What is required for the medicine?" He said, "Only a handful of mustard seeds from a house where no son, daughter, or anyone has died."

This woman then, quickly taking the child, first went to the village near the Jetavana monastery. Going to the very first house, she asked, "Oh, is there some mustard seed to be had for a medicine? Is there a handful of mustard seed?" They said, "Of course!" and quickly ran inside the house to bring some mustard seeds. After they brought it, she asked, "By the way, has any son or daughter or anyone else died in this house?" They replied, "Oh, what are you saying? In this house, the dead are far more numerous. We who are alive are only a few." "Then keep those mustard seeds. This is not the medicine for my child," she said, and went to the next house. In that house too, there were mustard seeds as before. Mustard seeds were common. But a house where no one had died was what could not be found. In this manner, she went from house to house until evening, with the hope that she would find such mustard seeds. When she looked, the people of every single house in the entire village said, "Those who are alive are few; those who have died from this house are far more." Then, she began to reflect gradually: "Why is it that I cannot understand that my child has died? In this entire village, in all these houses, it is only about death." Having thrown the corpse away in the forest, she went back to the Buddha, paid

homage to Him, and stood to one side. The Buddha asked, "How is it? Did you obtain the dose of medicine?"

Then this woman said, "In this entire village, the dead are far more than those who are alive. There are indeed mustard seeds, but the required kind of mustard seed is not there." Then the Buddha declared, "That is indeed so, Gotamī; this death belongs to everyone. It is the natural fate. Those who have not understood this matter correctly—intoxicated by the fortune of children, thinking 'I have sons,' intoxicated by conceit (*māna*), intoxicated by that attachment, and likewise intoxicated by their cattle, wealth, and so forth—continue to live. Māra comes and drags away such a person who is living thus, Death comes and drags them away, just as a great flood sweeping over a sleeping village carries away all the people in that village." Thus He uttered the Dhamma stanza we mentioned earlier.

Taṃ puttapsumattānaṃ,

byāsattamanasaṃ naraṃ,

suttaṃ gāmaṃ mahoghova,

maccu ādāya gacchati.

He uttered this Dhamma stanza found in the *Magga Vagga* of the *Dhammapada*. *Taṃ puttapsumattānaṃ* means that humans generate various kinds of strong attachments, pride, and intoxication regarding their own children, thinking, "My children are beautiful, powerful, strong, and hold very high positions," and so on. That is why it speaks here of *sammattaṃ*, an intoxication. Likewise, in those days, wealth was often measured by the size of one’s herd of cattle. That is why cattle are mentioned here.

Because of one's wealth, resources like crops, and the herd of cattle, thinking "I have very healthy cows, a large dairy herd," and so on, one develops pride and intoxication regarding one's possessions in various ways. One forgets that one is to die. When death arrives, that person is overwhelmed by it just as a sleeping village is submerged by a flood. Now, we often hear of such incidents. While people are asleep in the middle of the night, without any warning, a great flood comes and sweeps everything away without leaving even a dog behind. The Buddha expressed through that Dhamma stanza that when Māra comes in such a terrifying situation, that person laments and falls into disaster. Upon hearing this, due to that sense of urgency (*saṃvega*) and that realization, the mother Kisāgotamī was established in the noble fruit of Stream-entry (*sotāpatti-phala*). Through that first path-knowledge, she realized the great deathless Nibbāna: the Mind Stilled.

Precisely due to that sense of urgency (*saṃvega*) that arose in her, she requested the Buddha to be ordained in this Dispensation (*sāsana*). The Buddha sent her to the nunnery and had her ordained. According to this story, we can see that the Buddha is indeed a physician. Our past poets have also expressed about the Buddha: "He is the

physician for the suffering of becoming (*bhava*) that occurs to beings." The Buddha is indeed the physician-teacher for the suffering (*dukkha*) of *saṃsāra* and becoming (*bhava*). The same is true of the truth preached by the Buddha. Within the Four Noble Truths is the method a physician adopts regarding a patient. Firstly, the Truth of Suffering is the disease. Next, the Truth of Origin (*samudaya*) is craving (*taṇhā*). That is the source of the disease. A skilled physician treats not the symptoms of the disease, but its source, the cause of the disease. Thus, the cause of this suffering (*dukkha*) is craving (*taṇhā*). Next, the physician determines whether this craving, this illness, can be cured or not. Health, the state of being free of disease, is the goal. That is Nibbāna: the Mind Stilled. Then, the path that helps to achieve this is the Noble Eightfold Path found in the Dhamma. The very same method is present here in the medical treatment given to Kisāgotamī.

Now, an ordinary doctor would prescribe a medicine only when the medicinal ingredients are brought. Here, the Buddha performed the treatment using the very medicinal ingredient that could not be found! Likewise, this mother stated the child's death as the symptom of the illness. She asked for medicine for the child. But the Buddha gave the medicine to the mother instead. When the medicine was given to the mother, the illness was cured right there. This miracle shown by the Buddha is entirely a miracle of this Dhamma. Here, the Buddha, out of His great wisdom and great compassion, gave Kisāgotamī a medicine in this way through a rare handful of mustard seeds—or rather, a handful of mustard seeds to be obtained from a house where no one had died.

We can see that this medicine actually became a certain meditation subject (*kammaṭṭhāna*). It became a theme for meditation. As Kisāgotamī went from house to house, her mind must have gradually turned toward that meditation subject. That is what is called the meditation subject of mindfulness of death (*maraṇassati*). Mindfulness of death means constantly recollecting death. She went to every house inquiring about the story of death while searching for mustard seeds. In the end, what everyone spoke of was the story of death. Consequently, based on this, the understanding arose in her: "In this manner, my child dies, and I too will die; this is the Dhamma-nature (*dhammatā*)." It was because her mind turned toward the mindfulness of death in that way, and a powerful sense of urgency (*saṃvega*) was aroused, that she attained Stream-entry (*sotāpatti*) at that very moment upon hearing that Dhamma stanza of the Buddha, and her mind was even inclined toward ordination.

The meditation subject called mindfulness of death (*maraṇassati*) is a meditation subject highly praised, considered supreme, and extolled by the Buddha. So much so, that on one occasion He addressed the Sangha:

"Maraṇassati, bhikkhave, bhāvitā bahulīkatā mahapphalā hoti mahānisaṃsā amatogadhā amatapariyosānā"

"Monks, this mindfulness of death, this meditation subject of recollecting death, when developed and frequently practiced, is of great fruit and great benefit. It is highly advantageous." Likewise, *amatogadhā amatapariyosānā*: *Amata* means the Deathless state, freedom from death. The word *Amata* (Deathless) is used here to refer to the great deathless Nibbāna: the Mind Stilled.

When we speak of the great deathless Nibbāna, we utter "Sādhu" because in this *saṃsāra* we have been dying over and over again for an infinite period of time. It is freedom from this death that is the meaning of Nibbāna. Thus, the meditation on the mindfulness of death draws us directly toward that Nibbāna called the Deathless state. It leads us right there. Likewise, *amatapariyosānā*: that journey culminates in Nibbāna itself. On the face of it, this seems like a contradictory statement. By constantly thinking about death, one is freed from death. Looking at it, it seems like a paradoxical statement—how one is freed from death, how one attains the Deathless state, by constantly thinking about death.

In society nowadays, there is vaccination. There is vaccination for epidemic diseases and the like. There are also various medical systems such as homeopathy. In these, they act according to a certain principle, a certain theory. What is that? It is the very pathogen or toxin of a disease that is injected into this body. Through that vaccination, when that pathogen is processed in a specific way and introduced into the body, the body fights against that pathogen and develops an immunity, a disease-preventing capacity. In the exact same way, through the constant contemplation of death, one can be led to the Deathless state, which is freedom from death. According to that principle, we can now understand how Sister Kisāgotamī eventually relied on this mindfulness of death meditation to attain even Arahantship. That story is also mentioned as a background story relevant to another stanza in the *Dhammapada* itself. Sister Kisāgotamī attained the fruit of Stream-entry at the very beginning. The occasion of her attaining Arahantship after becoming a nun is shown there.

How was that? On one Uposatha (poya) day, it was Sister Kisāgotamī's turn to perform the duties of the Uposatha hall, to do the preparations according to the monastic duties. So, Sister Kisāgotamī lit a lamp, stilled her mind, and stood looking at the lamp. While looking at that lamp, Sister Kisāgotamī realized: there is not just one thing here. When we say "lamp-flame", at first glance it appears to us as one single thing. But it is not one; here, lamp-flames seem to ignite and extinguish continuously. It was understood as a series of occurrences. This is a certain deep realization that leads to insight (*vipassanā*) meditation.

When one reflects deeply while looking at these lamps, through that reflection a deep understanding arises. At first glance, every object in this world appears to us as something permanent, as a single unit. It is only when we look with careful attention that we begin to see the vibrations, movements, and changes within it; we begin to see impermanence (*aniccata*). Likewise, this lamp-flame is a series of ignitions and extinctions. This became visible to her. Through that, in relation to the meditation on mindfulness of death she was practicing, the thought arose: "Is it not just like this

lamp-flame that human beings are born and die, over and over again? Is it not only those who have realized Nibbāna that are freed from this?"

At that very moment, while residing in His Fragrant Chamber (*gandha-kuṭi*), the Buddha, projecting a light as if He were standing right in front of Sister Kisāgotamī, uttered another Dhamma stanza—another Dhamma stanza currently found in the *Sahassa Vagga* of the *Dhammapada*. In order to further mature Kisāgotamī's insight-knowledge (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*), He declared: "Yes, Gotamī, those lamp-flames are indeed the lives of these humans. They are born and they die, over and over. Only the person who has seen Nibbāna is freed from this." Then, showing the value of Nibbāna, He uttered this stanza:

Yo ca vassasataṃ jīve,

apassaṃ amataṃ padaṃ;

Ekāhaṃ jīvitaṃ seyyo,

passato amataṃ padaṃ.

He uttered this Dhamma stanza, meaning: "Better is a single day's life of one who perceives the Deathless State than a hundred years of life of one who does not perceive the Deathless State." Having heard that stanza, through the insight-knowledges (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*) that matured within her mind, Sister Kisāgotamī bypassed the stages of Once-Returner (*sakadāgāmī*) and Non-Returner (*anāgāmī*), and realized the supreme, noble Arahantship, the great deathless Nibbāna: the Mind Stilled.

What are the examples we should take from this story? Many people may have heard this story, but we should look not for the mere flavor of an ordinary story, but for the lesson, the practical example we can extract from all of this for our own lives. Now, let us reflect a little on this account of death mentioned here. What actually took place here? Mindfulness of death as a meditation subject, the meditation on mindfulness of death (*maraṇassati*), means looking at death with a certain unique perspective. It is a contemplation with radical attention (*yoniso manasikāra*), with wisdom.

Most people do not like even the word "death". If they do tolerate it, they do so regarding the death of others. Many people think of death as something that happens to others for the sake of their own survival. The idea that this is something that belongs to themselves, something that could come upon them at any moment, is absent in most people. But mindfulness of death meditation means that "life is inconstant, death is constant." The feeling that "I do not know when my life will end" must constantly arise. Let us consider the disadvantageous side of not remembering death. Contemplating that death will come to oneself might sometimes be thought of as a nuisance. But the Buddha points it out here as something that must be constantly brought to mind, something to be recollected. Its advantageous side is

expressed in the very passage we quoted earlier: it is of great fruit, of great benefit. It is stated here that when this mindfulness of death is developed, when it is cultivated, when it is frequently practiced, it is of great fruit and great benefit, leading straight to Nibbāna.

Instead, let us consider the state of the person who does not recollect death. As described in the first stanza, the person who does not think about death spends their time thinking about their possessions, or their children, their fortune of children, their cattle, and their wealth. How does that person's life pass? That person does not think about wholesome and unwholesome deeds (*kusala-akusala*), of merit and demerit. They do not think of giving (*dāna*), virtue (*sīla*), or meditation (*bhāvanā*); they amass wealth whether through righteous or unrighteous means. They do what must be done for their children, earning unrighteously.

We get to hear about the end of such lives. At the final stage, when confined to their deathbed, they regret. Many who have committed terrible evil deeds (*pāpa-kamma*) end their lives in a terrifying manner at the final moment, in accordance with those evil deeds. It is observed that some people are terrified when dying. Some might think that the fear that arises at death is not common to most. Yet, sometimes we hear that even a person who jumped into a river intending to commit suicide waves their hand the moment they surface, crying, "Oh, please save me!" The world thinks, "But that person jumped because they were tired of life!" Likewise, we cannot see the minds of those who die instantly or suddenly. But indeed, the Buddha has declared that everyone—everyone who is not an Arahant—is afraid of death. No matter how brave or courageous they claim to be, at the final moment, the mind wavers and becomes terrified. Because at the moment of death, one sees where one is going; some sign (*nimitta*) comes to the mind.

Furthermore, because of the craving (*taṇhā*) of wondering "How can I separate from these fortunes of children and wealth that I have grasped, that I am clinging to through craving?", and because of the holding (*upādāna*) which is grasping, a great shock and fear arise in a person. Therefore, no matter how courageous or brave we claim to be, every non-Arahant dies with great mental agitation, intense pain, and distress. Not only that, having died in this way, where do they take birth? Sometimes, due to the attachment to the children in their own homes, they are born in those very homes as frogs, rat-snakes, dogs, or cats. Or else, due to the evil deeds (*pāpa-kamma*) they committed, they are born as demons (*yakkhā*), hungry ghosts (*petā*), or spirits, and trouble their relatives asking for merit. Such situations exist in the world. This is terrifying.

In short, the Buddha has pointed out death as an object of urgency (*saṃvega*). There is a certain momentum that helps one to travel this path of the Dispensation (*sāsana*), this journey to Nibbāna. That is called urgency (*saṃvega*). Just like the speed every vehicle must have, the momentum one must have is urgency (*saṃvega*). If there is no sense of urgency, one delays in engaging in wholesome practices and

falls into negligence (*pamāda*). Diligence (*appamāda*) is what the Buddha has pointed out as the path to Nibbāna. Negligence is a surrender to Māra. Therefore, in order not to fall into negligence, one must constantly recollect death—as something extremely close to oneself, as something imminent, not knowing when death will strike. Then, one does not postpone performing meritorious deeds, thinking "I will engage in sermons and meditation only after I grow old and retire." In that way, we can see the disadvantageous side of this.

On the other hand, we must carefully consider what the Buddha declared about the advantages. The person who constantly contemplates death does not postpone giving and meritorious deeds. At whatever stage of life they may be, they reflect on *saṃsāra* according to the word of the Buddha. We have traveled through this *saṃsāra* for an unspeakably long period of time under the conditions of birth (*jāti*), decay (*jarā*), illness, and death (*maraṇa*). Likewise, in this life, some people say, "We lived well." Yet, they have no understanding of the wholesome and unwholesome deeds (*kusala-akusala*) performed in this infinite past. What does it matter if one lives a good life in this present time, when due to evil deeds (*pāpa-kamma*) committed in the past, one's next birth might be in a bad place? Because of this situation, one must strive to escape swiftly from this *saṃsāra*, from this terrifying state, from this wheel of kamma (*kamma-cakka*).

Having escaped from the wheel of kamma, the Wheel of Dhamma (*dhamma-cakka*) presented by the Buddha is something everyone must set in motion within their own mental continuum (*citta-santāna*). It is by setting that Wheel of Dhamma in motion that one sequentially attains the paths and fruits of Stream-entry (*sotāpatti*), Once-returning (*sakadāgāmitā*), Non-returning (*anāgāmitā*), and Arahantship, thereby realizing even Arahantship itself. To be diligent in setting that Wheel of Dhamma in motion, one must bring to the forefront the awareness: "When will my life be destroyed? Life is inconstant, death is constant." Often, similes have been given for this.

For someone who develops the meditation subject of mindfulness of death (*maraṇassati*), deep realizations arise even through the things seen in daily life. For Sister Kisāgotamī, insight-knowledges (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*) emerged through those lamps. Similarly, for someone who practices mindfulness of death, through a flower that blooms and fades, or a fruit that ripens and falls, or a leaf that drops, and—what is more—through the breath one inhales and exhales, and through a lamp that is lit and extinguished, through all of these, mindfulness of death is recollected. One constantly thinks, "Is my life not just like this?" In the instructions on this mindfulness of death meditation, it is shown how one should think of life: like a dewdrop glistening on the tip of a blade of grass in the morning. In a very short time, as the sun rises, it vanishes. Or like a water bubble that arises during heavy rain and bursts right there and then, this life vanishes. Or like a line drawn on water. Various similes are shown. When one looks at them, they might appear as exaggerations to some, but to the meditator, the impermanence (*aniccatā*) of this life is understood

very deeply. The Three Characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*)—impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*)—are all contained within this mindfulness of death. When contemplating death, very deep realizations arise.

Sister Kisāgotamī attained such a profound understanding through the lamp-flame. When the mind became concentrated on the lamps, what is actually present within that which we take as a single unit called a "lamp-flame"? It is a series of efforts to remain burning. A series of exertions. As long as there is oil and a wick in the lamp, it leaps up and struggles to remain burning, trying to appear as a single lamp-flame. It is the same with this life of ours; if we reflect deeply on the statement "I am living," if we think of of it from the standpoint of insight (*vipassanā*), what is present here? With every single heartbeat, with every breath inhaled and exhaled, with every action performed by body, speech, and mind, what is present here is a series of arisings and passings away. "Living" is also merely an effort to display a life. In truth, what is present here is a series of fabrications, a series of readynings. These are what are called preparations (*saṅkhāra*).

This is a heap of constructions, or rather a heap of fabrications, a heap of makings, a heap of readynings throughout the entirety of life. Thus, up until death, we are making a series of these preparations (*saṅkhāra*). Until death, we strive to live, we make preparations, we make up. But there is no end to this. Who pushes us toward this? It is craving (*taṇhā*). This craving. That is why the Buddha declared that underlying the entirety of *saṃsāra* is craving (*taṇhā*). It was due to her attachment, her intense attachment to her child, that Kisāgotamī could not see the truth. In the same way, because of this craving, taking this series of constantly existing movements, this heap of events characterized by arisings and passings away, as one single thing, we maintain the usage of "I" and "mine". To see this, the Eye of Dhamma must arise. To attain that Dhamma-knowledge called the arising of the Eye of Dhamma, that deep path of Stream-entry (*sotāpatti*) and so forth, one must strive to constantly contemplate this mindfulness of death.

We can take another valuable lesson from this story of Kisāgotamī. To bring about a decisive transformation in one's life, a grand thing is not necessary. One need not wait for grand things or wondrous miracles to happen to bring about a life transformation. A grand thing is not required at all. Sometimes, even a mustard seed is enough. To transform Kisāgotamī, a mother who went from house to house carrying a dead child on her hip, into an Arahant nun worshipped by gods and humans, the Great Compassionate Buddha made use of a mustard seed. In the same way, we must think of bringing about a transformation in our own lives through the very things we see and hear in our daily lives. In this day and age, in this era of terror, we hear of this thing called death not occasionally, but daily, constantly. We hear not only of occasional deaths, but constantly of deaths in bulk.

But we must reflect wisely and look at our own minds: is there actually such a thing as mindfulness of death (*maraṇassati*) within us? Is there a mindfulness of death in

our minds as described by the Buddha? We hear about death every day. But there is a highly important point here. Even though death is heard of, why is it that mindfulness of death does not arise in a person by that alone? The reason for that is that this radical attention (*yoniso manasikāra*), this wise reflection, is absent in that person.

In the Dhamma, there are two things: unwise attention (*ayoniso manasikāra*) and radical attention (*yoniso manasikāra*). Unwise attention means inappropriate reflection, or rather improper reflection. It is reflecting in the wrong way. Radical attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) means reflecting with wisdom, reflecting in the proper way. What is that inappropriate or improper reflection? If one begins to think of death as something that should be inflicted on others for the sake of one's own survival, or if, without thinking of this *saṃsāra*, one thinks of this life in a short-sighted way, believing "I must destroy others for my own survival," then there is no mindfulness of death there. Instead, one must reflect: "Death is something common to all of us. I do not know when my life in this *saṃsāra* will end." The Buddha has pointed out what actually belongs to oneself, who one's relative is, what one's inheritance is, and who one's refuge is.

It is pointed out as:

"Kammassakā sattā, kammadāyādā, kammayonī, kammabandhū, kammapaṭisaraṇā"

It is kamma (*kamma*) that actually belongs to oneself. It is the wholesome and unwholesome deeds (*kusala-akusala kamma*) one performs that belong to oneself. *Kammadāyādā* means kamma is one's inheritance; when one dies and passes to the next world, what one takes along is not these lands, estates, and money, but the kamma one has performed. Likewise, one's kinsman (*kammabandhū*) is also kamma. One cannot take these relatives along.

No matter what high or low positions one has in this life, it is according to one's kamma that the next birth is received. *Kammayonī* determines and decides where one is born. Next, what stands as one's relative is indeed that state of existence (*ātmabhāva*) in the next life. Thus, when looking at one's saṃsāric existence as a series of states of existence, one's kinsman is indeed that state of existence born according to kamma. Therefore, it is that relative which is carried forward in this *saṃsāra*. If so, we must reflect: the Buddha has pointed out that this wheel of kamma is extremely terrifying. We do not know what kind of past kammas are there. There is no end to exhausting these kammas. One cannot escape this *saṃsāra* even by performing good kammas alone. It is that terrifying. There is no end to it.

Instead, the Buddha pointed out the Wheel of Dhamma (*dhamma-cakka*) to cut through this wheel of kamma. That Wheel of Dhamma is activated through wisdom, through intellect. We must develop that wisdom. We must develop our minds. We must change the way we look at this world. We must change our thoughts and

wishes. In the Noble Eightfold Path, what is first shown is Right View (*sammā-diṭṭhi*), right vision. That right vision must be established first: that this saṃsāric existence is suffering (*dukkha*), and the cause for this is craving (*taṇhā*); and the escape from this *saṃsāra*, the destruction of craving, is Nibbāna: the Mind Stilled. This Noble Eightfold Path consists of eight factors. There is a path consisting of these eight factors: *sammā-diṭṭhi* (Right View), *sammā-saṅkappa* (Right Intention), *sammā-vācā* (Right Speech), *sammā-kammanta* (Right Action), *sammā-ājīva* (Right Livelihood), *sammā-vāyāma* (Right Effort), *sammā-sati* (Right Mindfulness), and *sammā-samādhi* (Right Concentration).

We spoke about physicians just now. Similarly, just like a decoction made of eight medicinal ingredients—or as some physicians say, "boil these eight measures down to one and drink"—the state where the eight factors of the Noble Eightfold Path are boiled down together is what is called the path-knowledge of Stream-entry (*sotāpatti-magga-ñāṇa*). That Noble Eightfold Path is not to be developed in a superficial, piecemeal fashion in daily life.

If, at some point, Right View is stabilized, and according to that Right View, the thoughts and intentions, the words spoken accordingly, the course of action taken accordingly, the livelihood and life-conduct lived accordingly, the effort made accordingly—the effort to develop the wholesome and eliminate the unwholesome—and the mindfulness and concentration maintained accordingly, are aligned straight within the mental continuum, that moment is just like a decoction where eight measures are boiled down into one. Realizing Nibbāna is exactly like taking four doses of such a decoction—we explained this using the medical simile. We have received an extremely rare period of a Buddha's appearance (*buddhōtpāda*). We have received a highly rare human state of existence. We must constantly generate a sense of urgency (*saṃvega*) regarding this. During periods when no Buddha appears (*abuddhōtpāda*), even kings—not people like us, but great kings—having understood the suffering of this *saṃsāra*, go to the Himalayas and practice asceticism. At most, they might only be able to fly through the air. Even if they perform such feats, they cannot escape from this *saṃsāra*. Why? Because it is not a period of a Buddha's appearance. A Buddha Himself must be present to declare this truth, this path.

That is why, when the Buddha set in motion that Wheel of Dhamma on the full-moon poya day of Esala, Ven. Aññā-Kondañña, among the group of five monks, was established in the fruit of Stream-entry (*sotāpatti-phala*). Next, a vast number of deities (*devas*) and Brahmas in the heavenly realms and Brahma realms, who had been waiting for the appearance of a Buddha, realized Nibbāna. In that way, the appearance of a Buddha Himself is necessary to declare this path to Nibbāna.

Therefore, if we have received a human state of existence capable of listening to the Dhamma and understanding it during such a period of a Buddha's appearance, we must arouse a sense of urgency (*saṃvega*) within ourselves. Death, as an object of urgency, supports this. How inconstant is this life of ours! When will it be destroyed?

Even though we make various plans for the future, we do not know at which moment this life will be destroyed.

Under such conditions, managing one's thoughts is something left to oneself. It does not matter in what ways the world lives; this goal of Nibbāna should not be put aside. Sister Kisāgotamī gained a deep understanding of death through the incident concerning her child. Now, this is an era in which parents can very easily arouse that thought of death regarding their own children and their relatives. But one must reflect whether one is making use of that thought of death in the proper way. The proper use is to reflect on this terrifying nature of *saṃsāra*, to reflect on this inconstant nature of life, and constantly impress upon the mind: "Our lives, too, will vanish in this manner." For one who reflects constantly in this way, very deep realizations arise from the things seen day-to-day.

This meditation subject is not something to be developed only while sitting in the cross-legged posture. When this is constantly brought to mind daily as something developed and frequently practiced (*bhāvitā bahulīkatā*), great realizations arise. One's education, lack of education, poverty, or wealth—none of these is required. What is needed here is the desire (*chanda*), a powerful earnestness regarding this task. For that earnestness to arise, there must be a powerful conviction (*saddhā*) in the Triple Gem. One must reflect deeply on the promise, the guarantee given by the Buddha. Recalling the statement uttered by the Buddha: "Monks, this mindfulness of death, when well developed and frequently practiced, is of great fruit and great benefit; it leads directly to Nibbāna, it leads to the Deathless state," one must strive to constantly develop this mindfulness of death meditation.

Therefore, when others talk about news of this kind, one must look inside one's own mind: how should the reaction to this be? One must decide for oneself whether, upon hearing of a death, one ends up with a temporary grief, or with aversion (*dosa*), or with vengeance, or whether one uses this news of death for the development of one's own mind—what we referred to as radical attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) and unwise attention (*ayoniso manasikāra*). One must consider whether one is doing it in the proper way or the improper way. If it is done in the proper way, then indeed it will support one's Nibbāna. It is then that the true benefit is extracted from this life. Reflecting in that manner, these virtuous friends must constantly calculate the accounts of wholesome and unwholesome deeds in their daily lives, not accounts of income. Reflecting on one's own mental continuum, on the daily activities performed through mind, body, and speech, one must constantly examine these accounts.

Now, at this moment, you have undertaken a valuable virtue called *ājīva-aṭṭhamaka-sīla* (virtue with livelihood as the eighth factor). This virtue is the foundation for meditation. Virtue (*sīla*) is not a mere custom. The Buddha has instructed to practice meditation while standing on the foundation of virtue. For any heavy work performed using great strength, the ground on which one stands is always important. Similarly, the Buddha has pointed out that one must establish oneself in this virtue to generate that deep understanding. Therefore, at this moment, according to the *ājīva-*

aṭṭhamaka-sīla mentioned, you too must reflect on how your daily life is spent. You must strive to constantly correct those aspects.

At the same time, this flow of thoughts, this meditation, is not some strange, mystical thing; it is developed by constantly contemplating a certain wholesome mind-state. We know how a river is formed by the dripping of water drop by drop. Sometimes, the origin of a river is a few drops of water falling somewhere. When they accumulate, they form a great force, a torrent of water, and flow as a river through streams and brooks into the ocean, making a great sound. Similarly, in our daily lives, even if we say we have no space or time, we must think of utilizing even the brief moments of leisure we get for this. If a person who has practiced a meditation subject strives to turn their mind toward that subject, their mental continuum (*citta-santāna*) will gradually incline toward meditation in daily life.

When one constantly contemplates death as an object of urgency (*saṃvega*), without postponing, one gains the strength to walk diligently on the course of action that helps to destroy the powerful defilements of ignorance (*avijjā*) and craving (*taṇhā*) present within one's mental continuum. Therefore, these virtuous friends should not wait for a great miracle to occur to bring about a decisive change in their lives. This human life we have obtained is extremely rare. Likewise, this period of a Buddha's appearance is extremely rare. We spoke of the lamp just now, we spoke of the lamp-flame; this lamp of the Dispensation (*sāsana*) will not last long. Due to various causes, even this Dhamma can be destroyed, submerged, and lost. A time when we will not get to hear even a word of Dhamma may arise in the future.

Today, we have been fortunate to hear this Dhamma. Next, even if we do not have as much opportunity for sermons and meditation as during the Buddha's time, we can create some opening, some pause, some leisure, if we make an effort. One must make a strong determination to strive for that. There is some lesson to be taken from every Dhamma discussion to shape one's life. As long as that lesson is not taken, no matter how much one listens to this Dhamma, it is of no use. The Buddha has declared that this Dhamma must be seen within one's own mental continuum. Buddhas are teachers. It has been declared that what must be done must be done by oneself.

Therefore, if at some stage in this life, one begins to practice some meditation subject within one's mental continuum, as one develops it for a week, a month, or a year, gradually a great mental strength, power of concentration (*samādhi*), and deep understanding arise. Amidst the stressful conditions in one's life, amidst this stressful society, the person with Dhamma-realization can lead their life peacefully and calmly. Because of this, thinking wisely, you must make a special determination to integrate, to bring close to your life, this mindfulness of death meditation, as a special resolve to escape from this terrifying suffering of *saṃsāra* (*saṃsāra-dukkha*), which is the supreme fruit of this human state of existence you have obtained.

So far, these virtuous friends, having undertaken the valuable virtue of *ājīva-aṭṭhamaka-sīla*, have listened to the Dhamma at this moment with stilled minds and

conviction (*saddhā*). The benefit of listening to the Dhamma (*dhamma-savanānisaṃsa*) is the multitude of wholesome thoughts that arise within one's mental continuum at that very moment, during the very time of listening to the Dhamma. During this hour, if you had been engaged in other daily activities, unwholesome thoughts would have mostly arisen. But when listening to the Dhamma, a multitude of wholesome intentions (*kusala-cetanā*) arise.

Particularly on those occasions of listening to the Dhamma, a certain conviction (*saddhā*) arises in one's mental continuum. In accordance with that conviction, a certain energy (*vīriya*) arises within the mind to walk on this path of Dhamma. Likewise, if the mind is focused on this listening of Dhamma, a good mindfulness (*sati*) is present. Next, during the time of listening to the Dhamma, a certain concentration (*samādhi*), a state of composure and stillness, arises in one's mental continuum. If one reflects wisely according to the Dhamma, a deep understanding, wisdom (*paññā*), arises. Conviction, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom (*saddhā, vīriya, sati, samādhi, paññā*) are the spiritual faculties (*indriya*) we must develop for Nibbāna. Conviction, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom are the powers (*bala*), the strength we must apply for the realization of Nibbāna. Therefore, during this time of listening to the Dhamma, a multitude of extremely peaceful and sublime wholesome thoughts arose in these virtuous friends. Especially, you received the opportunity to deposit those wholesome qualities of conviction, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom within your mental continuum.

As the benefit and blessing of all this, using these as a strong supportive condition (*upanissaya*), may you escape from this extremely terrifying saṃsāric suffering (*saṃsāra-dukkha*) consisting of birth (*jāti*), decay (*jarā*), illness, and death (*maraṇa*), and attain the supreme peace of Nibbāna: the Mind Stilled, the highest bliss of extinguishment! Aspire thus. Likewise, may whatever deities and Brahmas who protect the Dispensation (*sāsana*), including the guardian deities residing in this place, who aspire for Nibbāna and wish to escape this suffering of *saṃsāra*, rejoice in this merit of preaching and listening to the Dhamma!

May they, having rejoiced, be comforted by the great deathless Nibbāna through whichever of the three Bodhis (enlightenments) they have aspired for! Share the merit with those deities in this manner. Likewise, if any deceased relatives of yours are in some woeful state of existence (*dugati*) and are hoping to be freed from this *saṃsāra*, may they all rejoice in this merit of preaching and listening to the Dhamma! May those relatives, and likewise all beings from Avīci up to Akaniṭṭha who desire merit and Nibbāna, rejoice in this noble merit and bring an end to saṃsāric suffering through the peaceful, sublime, and great deathless Nibbāna! With this aspiration, recite these stanzas to share the merit:

"*Ettāvatā ca amhehi……..*"