

## FOREWORD

At a time when Buddhism is spreading fast across the globe, it is our intention to make the general public acquainted with the great teachings of the Lord Buddha.

Whilst listening to a sermon is the ideal way of going forward in the path of Dhamma, some may prefer to read it at their leisure and comprehend the teachings at their own pace and time. Then there may be those who are weak in their faculty of listening, so the only way they can understand it is by reading a text or a Dhamma book.

These transliterations are available for all those who wish to have an understanding of the Lord Buddha's teachings in order to find true salvation.

**\*\* This work is a transcription of a sermon held in 2018-11-11. There may be the odd omission or inclusion inadvertently due to quality issues of the audio or deliberate editing to make the text more readable.**

*This sermon goes on to explain the value behind observing the five precepts, worshipping parents and transferring merits to all beings. In addition, it also explains the profound meaning behind offering flowers, incense sticks and oil lamps.*

## CONTENTS

1. Why observe the five precepts at the beginning of a sermon?
2. Prepare your mind for the dhamma
3. Contract of life
4. Consider before you discard
5. No blind faith in Buddhism
6. Value-o-meter
7. Worshipping parents
8. Good and bad qualities
9. Sunàtha dhàrètha charàtha
10. Who is a disciple of the Buddha?
11. Being grateful
12. Transferring merits
13. All are equal in the Buddha shàsanaya
14. Pin and pau (Merits and Demerits)
15. Why do we offer flowers to The Buddha?
16. Consumers and suppliers
17. Kàma world
18. Stanza for offering flowers
19. Profound meaning behind the precept *màlà gandha vilèpana dàrana.....*
20. Dhamma behind offering incense sticks - 1
21. Dhamma behind offering incense sticks - 2
22. Dhamma behind offering incense sticks - 3
23. Are you an upright person?
24. 'Sila' - Having virtues
25. Offering of oil lamps to the Buddha
26. Kamma and vipàka
27. Association of ignoble & immoral people

## **KEY WORDS**

observe

five precepts

offer

flower

incense

oil lamp

profound

sunàtha

dharètha

charàtha

transfer

merits

demerits

virtue

worship

parents

gatha, stanza

Anathapindika, Anàthapindika

Ignoble

immoral

## Why observe the five precepts at the beginning of a sermon?

All these nonsenses we spit out at the beginning of a sermon, observing five precepts, all that malarkey;

***'Namò Tassa Bhagawatò Arahatò Sammà Sam Buddhassa ....***

*Let's just get to the meat. We don't need all the stuff, just get to the juicy stuff. Inviting the dèvas and the Brahmas before a sermon; what a waste of time; seeking forgiveness from the noble ones'...*

Did you ever feel that way? Countless times I have reminded you that we need a really good and solid foundation on which this palace of dhamma that we build in our hearts can be built on. Doesn't matter what size or shape this palace is going to be eventually, but if you don't have a good foundation, then it's not going to stand the test of time. When bad weather comes, when the rains come and the storms come, it's all going to come crashing down, and then, you are going to regret. That might be several years from now. In our ignorance we might think it as a waste of time. Why do we have to pay homage to The Buddha, invite the dèvas. I can't even see them. Why do I bother? Let's just get to the dhamma study. People might feel that way. Some people might even ask you;

*'why does the Swaminwahanse do all that preamble, before he gets to the sermon'?*

This is all to do with setting the foundation. Before I ask you to observe the 5 precepts, I remind you why we have to observe these precepts. It's one thing for us to just sit down for a sermon and chant the five precepts. We have done it so many times now, more than the number of hairs on your head. It has become the "done thing" now, before the beginning of a sermon or any meritorious deed, chant the '*namaskàra*', then '*Buddhan saranan - dhamman saranan - dutiyampi - tatiyampi .....*', and then the five precepts. It's just the done thing. That's how we do things here. We mustn't fall into that trap. We must always remind ourselves that these are things we are still having to do. The day that you have completed this journey, you wouldn't even need to listen to a sermon.

## **Prepare your mind for the Dhamma**

Once we complete this journey, then you will no longer have to do these acts. You will no longer have to do merit. This is a long journey. On the way you are going to refuel. We need fuel to get through our journey. We need to check our tyres before we set forth. What happens if you get a flat tyre on the way? Now it's a lot of trouble. But if you check, you would know you haven't got good tyres, then you can change your tyres or pick a different vehicle to start your journey. In the driving test don't they check out to make sure that your indicators work, before you set forth? When do they ask you to check your brakes? Before. Not after the fact. Then it's too late.

Likewise, on our path in the dhamma, we have to make sure that our brakes are good, our tyres are good, our indicators are good, our wiper blades are solid and that we've got a good perfect vehicle to take us through. That is not talking about this body. That's one sense of the word 'vehicle', but this is talking about the state of mind. This is talking about how much merit we have. This is talking about how much we owe to all other beings, who are just waiting for the right opportunity to come and ask for us to settle the bills that we owe them. There are beings we can see with our muscular eyes and there are those that we cannot. Whether you believe it or not doesn't matter. It doesn't matter whether you believe in radio waves or ultrasound or not, it's just there. It doesn't even matter whether you like it or not.

## **Contract of life**

There are certain things in the universe, in this cosmos that we have to accept. There is a really good saying in Sinhalese: if you jump into a well, you have to come out of the mouth through which you jumped in. We've all come to play this game. We all signed the contract. You didn't read the terms of the contract. Whose fault is that, the one who got you to sign or the fact that you signed it? How many times have you regretted signing the contract and then looked back and you thought, '*what did I do*'? Those contracts come in all shapes, sizes and forms. You know what I'm talking about. If you don't read the terms, then you are going to regret later on. But regretting does not solve the problem.

## Consider before you discard

If we are to walk this journey wisely, we can't do this blindly. We need to open our eyes. We have to be able to consider. You don't necessarily have to accept, at least be open to consideration. You don't have to accept that there are *dèvas*, *Brahmas*, spirits, demons and the dead. But at least be willing to consider. Because the moment you stop willing to consider, then you've dug yourself a hole. What if they really do exist? During the time of Socrates, people were not willing to accept that the world was round. They thought the world was flat and in their haste, they got rid of a great scientist, a great philosopher. They got him to drink poison. What a shame, what a waste. How much more could he have done to serve the humankind, if he were to live a bit longer. One could easily think there are no *dèvas*; there are no *Brahmas*; there are no hells; there are no heavens. You don't believe in '*karma - vipàka*'. You don't believe in good and bad ....

***natti ayan lòkò - natti parò lòkò - natti ittan - natti hutan  
natti dukata dukkànan ayan.....***

*'I don't believe in giving. What's the point of charity? What's the point of fulfilling duties and responsibilities; I'm just a human being, that is another human being. You know, I live my life; you live your life. There is no such thing as fulfilling duties and responsibilities.*

What happens then? The things that we've done, not just in previous lives, but in this life too, not knowing what we've done; that can come back to bite us on our backs, and when it bites, it bites hard. It doesn't matter whether you are prepared to accept it or not. Sometimes some of you may come from very materialistic backgrounds, just as much as I was, once. When I was first introduced to the dhamma, my life was completely different to what it is now. My state of mind, the way I looked at the world, was very different. My perspective of life and the world was very different, unimaginably so. You wouldn't believe it was me, if you spoke to me 10 years ago. I didn't even believe in The Buddha. I didn't believe in *karma - vipàka* or hells and heavens. '*Show me if it's there and then I'll believe*'. That's what I thought.

## **No blind faith in Buddhism**

It's okay if you don't accept it. But be prepared, be willing to consider. Because if you are willing to consider you are never going to throw away a good book. A friend might come and offer you a good book.

*'No, I don't read that kind of stuff. I read fiction. I don't like poetry. Throw it in the bin'.*

What a waste. What if that was the greatest book in poetry that was ever written? What if that was by William Wordsworth? You had thrown it in the bin. Now you have to go around knocking on people's doors, finding book shops to find these valuable books that you discarded. What a shame. What a waste. Because when the need arises it is not going to be there if you are not willing to consider. You don't have to accept but be prepared to consider. There is no room for blind faith in Buddhism at least not in Buddhist philosophy. *'With faith you have to accept'...* not in Buddhism. In Buddhism, be willing to consider. If it doesn't seem appropriate right now, don't throw it. Just put it on the shelf. You are not wasting space by putting another book in there. One day it'll all start to make sense. Then you'll start to join the dots. Then everything will become clear. Until then don't discard them. Just put them away. Be willing to consider.

## **Value-o-meter**

At the beginning of a sermon, the *Swaminwahanse* says;

*'let's take a moment to pay homage to The Lord Buddha'.*

It is because of that Great Being that we have this gift of dhamma. When you do not respect your teachers, the art or the science that you are trying to learn, will never be something that you will comprehend. That's just the way of the world. If you don't have any reverence, if you don't have any regard for your teacher, then you will not be able to understand. These are all great values that we used to have in our society. I remember when I first went to the UK and I went for my first lesson at college, when my maths teacher turned up, I stood up from my seat. Everyone looked at me awkwardly.

*'What are you doing mate'?* they asked me.

*'Well, that's my teacher walking in. I must stand up and pay respect'.* I replied. *'What do you mean pay respect? Sit down, sit down'.* they said.

That was the last time I actually stood up physically. But the value of respecting my teachers was something my parents taught me from a very young age. It was a value that I will never forget because that is what made me who I am today. It is what paved this path for me to be where I am right now, to have donned the robe, to be able to receive the gift of the dhamma from the greatest teacher ever. If I had not paid respect to those teachers who taught me maths and science and English and whatever subjects I learnt at school, I would not have been in a state of mind to receive the greatest gift ever, the greatest teaching ever, from the greatest teacher ever.

Where are you all on the value-o-meter? I remind you all, to make sure we have a really good and solid foundation in values. Particularly to the Asians, these values are a fundamental part of who we are. That's not to say people who come from the Western world do not have values. That's not what I'm trying to imply. But in the Asian culture, we have a lot of values and these were passed down to us from our ancestors, who were Arahants going many thousands of years back, this is where some of those values started.

Why do we offer flowers to the Buddha? What's the point of offering incense? Why do we offer an oil lamp? What's the point when The Buddha is not here? Really good questions. These were all the things that our ancestors used to do but not just because. They had meaning behind them. Respecting our elders, respecting our teachers, respecting our parents, all fundamental, intricately bound, woven part of our fabric of who we are. So, make sure we don't forget them. Make sure you always teach your children about them. Show them by example.

Do you worship your parents before you go to bed at night? Do you let your children see how you do that? Perhaps your parents are not among the living right now. But that's okay. Once you have worshipped The Buddha, then it's time to worship your parents;

### **Worshipping parents**

**Dasa màse urè katwà - pòsèsi uddi kàranan -  
àyu deegan wassa satan - màtu pàdan namà mahan.** (Stanza worshipping the Mother)



**Uddhi kàro alin gitwà - chum bitwà piya puttakan  
ràja majjan supatittan - pìtu pàdan namà mahan (Stanza worshipping the Father)**

Let your children see you worshipping your parents. Then they'll ask you,

*"Mother, what did you just do"?*

*"This is how I worship my parents".*

*"But they are dead. Why do you have to worship them now"?*

*"Because it's not the person we are worshipping. It's not the physical body of this person that we worship. It's the qualities. It's those qualities that my parents had, that they passed down to me. Who am I, if not the qualities that I portray? Who are you, if you are not the qualities that you portray"?*

### **Good and bad qualities**

Ask your friends why do you like me or ask your enemies why they hate you. They may say,

*'I like you because you are nice to me'.... 'because I see you helping people'....'because you are very kind'..... 'because you are very respectful to others'..... 'you are very generous'.*

These are your qualities, values. Ask someone why they don't like you very much.

*'Because you speak harsh words, that's why I don't like you'.... 'Because you always lie, that's why I don't like you'.... 'Because you are always complaining and moaning about something or the other. That's why I don't like you'.*

Again, what are they complaining about? The qualities, bad qualities. Good qualities and bad qualities always existed in the world. Who you are is nothing but an amalgamation of those qualities, good and bad? One might think of trying to become an *Arahant*. Others might want to attain *Nibbàna*. Then let's instil these values within us. When you instil these values, the rest will happen automatically.

Before we start the sermon, we always pay respect to our teacher. That is the supremely enlightened Buddha. It was those qualities that sprang in His mind; that infinite compassion, how much wisdom did He have, how much concentration did He have, how generous or kind He was. How kind was The Buddha? Give me an answer, if you dare. When you speak of The Buddha, what springs to mind? Is it just a figure? We speak of the 32 physical attributes of The Buddha; *detis mahà purusha lakshana*. But, is that what immediately springs to mind? Is that how you see The Buddha? What was The Buddha's instruction to Wakkali?

***Yo dhamman passati - so man passati;*** When you see the dhamma, you see me.

In other words what He is saying is, once you've seen the dhamma, you have seen the qualities of The Buddha. This is why acquiring, accumulating and instilling these values and trying to comprehend the dhamma are not two different things. They are one and the same.

***Buddhan saranan gaccàmi***

***Dhamman saranan gaccaàmi***

***Sanghan saranan gaccaàmi***

then we recite;

***Dutiyampi - tatiyampi;*** for the second and third time, I seek homage. What do we seek homage for? Who seeks homage? Let's start there. Refugees seek homage. Who are refugees? People who are destitute, who are helpless, who need support, who need looking after, who need taken care of. Because they have lost everything. And then you are thinking;

*'what do you mean? I drove here in my 7series BMW. What do you mean I've lost everything? You should come round Bhantè and see my house. I've got seven bedrooms. What do you mean I've lost everything? Look at everything I have got, check my bank account, I am loaded. What do you mean I have lost everything?'*

Do you really feel like refugees? Are you really lost? Are you destitute? Are you in despair? Where are you lost? You are lost in *sansàra*. How much money in your bank account will show you the way out of *sansàra*? How many houses you have in Colombo Seven will show you the way out of *sansàra*? You can ask yourself, *'am I destitute? Am I in despair? Am I lost in sansàra'*? Only you know the answer to that. We can't make that call for somebody else. But what we can say for certain is, it's not the material wealth, the material possessions or the amount of stuff that we have that liberates us from *sansàra*. We need to unlock this lock that we ourselves have firmly put a lock on, nobody else. We put that lock on and then what did we do? We threw the key away. Now we are looking for the key in darkness. You are feeling around trying to find the key, but with your eyes closed.

### **Sunàtha Dharètha Charàtha**

On this journey there are lots of things on the ground where you threw the key. There are also keys that look like the right key. But it is the wrong key. There are also fake keys. Then there are key holes into which the key that you threw away might have fitted. Now how are

you going to find it by feeling in the dark. This is certainly not something that we can do in the dark.

***Sunàtha dharètha charàtha***... Buddha said.

***Sunàtha***: listen. Listen to what? The dhamma. What is the dhamma? The Buddha knows so much, He is omniscient. If there was anything to know, The Buddha knew it. The limit of His knowledge is everything there is to know. It works both ways. There is nothing else that needs to be known, that can be known. So, He was omniscient. In his omniscience, when he knew everything about the universe, why did He focus His teaching on just four things? 84,000 *suttas*, all focused on four things. **The Four Noble Truths**. When he knew so much and He focuses his teaching on these Four Noble Truths, because that is the key that we need to unlock this lock. Everything else is a key, but not the right key. Sometimes there are look-alikes, but they are not the real thing.

### **Who is a disciple of the Buddha?**

***Sunàtha***: listen; listen to it from someone who has seen it before. It has to be either The Buddha or a disciple of The Buddha. Who is a disciple of the Buddha? The one who is in robes? No. The one who has seen the dhamma for himself or herself. *Sunàta* can only happen from someone who is a Buddha, or a disciple of The Buddha.

***Dharèta***: to bear. Bear the dhamma. What kind of dhamma? *Dhamman saranan gaccàmi* : I have no other refuge than the dhamma. '*Buddhan saranan gaccàmi*'; I have no refuge other than The Buddha, because it's only The Buddha who taught us the way out of *sansàra*. There is no other teacher, no other philosopher who came into the universe to give the Four Noble Truths. There is no other teacher who showed us the key that unlocks this door to mental happiness. Everyone else gave the key to mental relief. Not for redemption. It was only The Lord Buddha who showed us that this is the cause for all suffering. Because He went down every single avenue and then came back and said, '*this is the only way it works*'. Now that He has given us this gift of dhamma, now we seek homage, we take refuge in the dhamma. That is what we mean when we say *dhamman saranan gaccàmi*.

***Saranan***: *sara nasanna*. Stop going round this wheel of *sansàra*, this *sansàric* circle. *sari sarana* is to keep going around. Stop it. How? There is no other way other than the Buddha, other than the dhamma.

**Charàta:** is to practice; practice the path. Practice what you have learnt from The Buddha. Put it into effect. Reap the reward.

When does one become a successful farmer? When he goes to farming or agriculture school and learned the theory or once he puts into practice and reap the reward? It is only when he reaps the fruit of the seed that he sowed.

'*I know a lot about farming*'. Does that make me a good farmer? No, it makes me a very knowledgeable farmer, not a good farmer. For me to say boldly, '*look at me, I'm a good farmer*', what do you expect of me? Experience in farming, right? How many times will you go to a surgeon who is doing his operation for the first time? He has not even tried it at Medical College. Not even on corpses. He is doing it literally for the first time on a human body. Who is willing to go under the knife? What makes a good surgeon is one who has practiced and perfected it. So *charàta* is to practice. That's when you instil the values of the sangha within yourself.

### **Being grateful**

We've spoken about the Noble Eightfold Path in previous discussions. *Sammà ditti - sammà sankappa - sammà vācā - sammà kammanta*. *Sanka*: 'San' is the problem; that is ignorance and attachment. 'Ka': *gasanna*: is to dispel, to discard, to throw away.

*Sanghan saranan gaccāmi*: I seek homage in the sangha. Once we've done that now it's our time to invite the *dēvas*, *Brahmas*, spirits, demons and the dead. Having sought refuge in the sangha, in the dhamma and in The Buddha, we are aware that we've come through a long time in *sansāra* and there are lots of beings who would have helped me to be where I am today. In our previous lives there may have been many people who sacrificed themselves for our betterment, for our good, for our benefit. Think about your parents, how much bad, unwholesome and unmeritorious deeds might they have done, just to keep you safe? How many cockroaches might they have killed? How many mosquitoes, how many flies might they have swatted, just to keep you safe? How many people might they have shouted at, how many people might they have attacked and hit, just to keep you safe? That's just in this life. What about in previous lives? We can't be forgetful of that. We can't be ungrateful. Ungratefulness is not a good foundation on which to build the palace of *Nibbāna*. It's just not going to work. The walls are going to start cracking pretty soon. Because what we are trying

to do is to instil values within. Gratefulness is a critically important value. The Buddha showed that by example. He was exemplary. What did he do for a whole week after having attained Buddha-hood? He reflected on every one who had helped Him. He achieved enlightenment by Himself. No one really helped Him to get there. Not in that sense. But there were people who gave Him alms when He was a *Bòdhisatva*, teachers who taught him the best that they could, such as Àlàrakàlàma and Uddakaràma Putra. Why do you think The Buddha looked back and checked where his teachers were? This is to be grateful. He is now The Buddha. There is no one above him. There is nowhere else to go. Nothing more to achieve. Whatever there is to achieve he has now achieved. So, does He need anybody else's help from that point forward? No. For alms and other requisites, yes. But what he did was reflect and look at everyone who had helped him and thought of an opportunity to pay back. Like I said at the start, whether you are willing to accept or not, those beings to whom we might have done disservice, harmed, abused or slandered are looking for the right opportunity to come and attack us. Some of you may have had experiences in your own lives. Do you not go to *kòvil* and *dèvàlas* to do *bòdhi pùjas* and make offerings because you are troubled by these beings that you cannot see? But you are not willing to accept that they exist.

### **Transferring merits**

Why do you offer alms to the temple every year, in memory of your deceased parents and transfer merits to them? Why do your parents need merit if they are now born in the heavens? They've got more than you have. Think about it. A man walks up to your door; *knock-knock* - you open the door. You are a poor person. But you look out and a man gets out of his BMW and asks for Thousand Rupees. He is smartly dressed, in a nice shirt and boots and asking you for a thousand rupees. What are you going to say?

*'Hey mister, I don't think you need my money. Quite the contrary. I think you could help me out. Between the two of us I am the one who needs help, not you.'*

If we are transferring merits to our parents who have now left us, if they are in the heavens, all they have to do is wish for it and it appears in front of them, whether its food or clothing or whatever kind of divine pleasure that they need. It's like rubbing the Aladdin's lamp, they open their eyes and it's right in front of them. Can you do that? No. So, who is in a better

place? Them, obviously. Who needs it more really? We need it more. So, why do we then transfer merits to them? Because we are not sure of where they might be. What does that indicate? What if they are in the woeful planes? Even people who are so adamant that there is no afterlife, go to temples and offer alms and transfer merits.

So, we have to pay back for those things that we have received from them, whatever help that might have been. It might have been just a glass of water; might have been a grain of sand. Whilst you and I are on a path to *Nirvāna*, and our quest in life is to let go, our ancestors may not feel the same way. Just think about your life before you understood the dhamma, before you began to walk this path. If someone borrowed money from you, were you not keen on making sure that they paid it back on time? And if they delayed, did you not go and ask for a bit more interest, made sure everyone paid back every penny of it. Maybe now you are not so fussed. You may ask for it once, twice, three times, then say;

*'ah, forget it, might have been a sansàric debt that I owed them'.*

But before you understood the dhamma, it was by hook or by crook;

*'I will ask once nicely. I will ask a second time politely. I will ask a third time finally and the next time it's not using my mouth that I'm going to ask for that money. I've got arms and legs; they have to be put to good use'.*

Although today your lives might have transformed, you can't expect everyone else in the world to have changed like that. They will have given you debts not just in this birth, but in previous births. Again, irrespective of whether you like to accept this or not, today they come back looking for you to pay back and with interest. So, the gift that excels all gifts is the dhamma. Today we are able to do meritorious deeds, thanks to the Buddha *sàsanaya*. Everyone has a chance now, which is a great thing about the Buddha *sàsanaya*. Whether you are rich or poor the Buddha *sàsanaya* does not discriminate. Everyone's equal.

### **All are equal in the Buddha Shàsanaya**

***Najajjà vasalò hòti - najajjà hòti bràhmanò***

***kammanà vasalò hòti - kammanà hòti bràhmanò.***

It is not your descent that determines whether you are a '*vasala*' (one who comes from a low background or caste, the scum of the earth) or a '*bràhmana*' (upper caste). It's not how much money you have in your pocket that makes you a great, evil or a bad person. It's your state

of mind. The story of Anàthapindika offering the Jètavanàrama to The Buddha is one of the best examples. As a reward, he received a silver palace in the heavens. What did the person who had nothing in his pocket, just witnessing that deed, putting his palms together and said, 'sàdu.. sàdu...sàdu' get? He received a golden palace. This shows that the Buddha *sàsanaya* does not discriminate. Everyone's equal. Like the *mahà sangha*, everyone's equal. It does not matter which background each monk comes from. Once they have donned robes, they are all equal. From that point onward what makes them differ is the state of mind that they have and their understanding of the dhamma.

### **Pin and pau (Merits and Demerits)**

Now that we have the gift of this dhamma, it is our time to offer this gift back to those beings who are looking for us to pay back what we owe them. The only thing of value in those worlds is merit. These are worlds that are primarily composed of karma. And the karma comes in two forms; good and bad; pin and pau. The reason that they have been born in the woeful planes is because they have done more bad than good. Now they just live on the merits that they acquire. So, this is why we transfer merits. This is also why we invite those beings to join us, to witness those meritorious deeds. Let them witness you offering flowers to the Buddha. Just the sight of the Buddha is enough for them to acquire merit. That merit might then help them to be born in the blissful plains, as a human or a *dèva* or a *Brahma*. Once they are there, provided they have the power of hearing, we finally say,

*'may they now be able to listen to this sermon, understand what it is that we speak of and be able to comprehend the dhamma'.*

So, was that a wasted ten minutes? If you knew for certain that your parents have been born in the woeful plane, I guarantee that you would prefer if I spend two hours of a sermon inviting them and making sure that they have every opportunity to receive the merits and spend only the last half an hour to deliver the sermon. Because in there, it is not the lack of dhamma that is the problem. In the woeful planes what is the point in having the dhamma, if you can't understand it? Blissful planes are the lowest plane where someone can listen to the dhamma and understand it.

## Why do we offer flowers to The Buddha?

Then, the things that we do like offering flowers have very profound meanings behind them. Why do trees and plants need flowers? It's for reproduction. Flowers are a magnet for bees and other insects. Now the tree is ready to reproduce; beautiful flowers are in bloom and their fragrance is spread all over. The insects don't know the purpose behind this. The bee thinks the flowers are there for honey. But for the tree, its whole purpose of blooming flowers with vibrant colours and fragrances is the reproduction process. It wants to grow more plants. This is all an invitation to the bees and the insects. It attracts the insect who feasts on the pollinated flowers, and start the process of germination as a result.

Why does someone go through the trouble to make something a little bit better, a little more beautiful, a bit more exciting than the one that was there before? It is to foster the 'self'. Because someone's self depends on you. Its consumers and suppliers ultimately. A guy finds a girl attractive, in the same way the bee finds the flower attractive. The tree doesn't care one bit about the bee. All it's doing is using the bee for its reproduction. Likewise, sometimes we don't know that we've become consumers. That could be dangerous. If the bee falls for the trap that this flower is there purely for its existence, the reason this flower came into the world is for me, now there's a strong bond that is created; *'this is for me and it is mine'*. That's the notion it creates. This is one aspect that we have to realise. Why are flowers beautiful? We need to understand, we need to reflect on this. Look at nature, look at the world around you and try to understand the dhamma by looking at them and contemplating. This is the Buddhist teaching. Looking at a flower with its vivid colour and lovely fragrance, now reflect on yourselves. Think about yourselves. Am I not like this flower? Right now, I'm quite attractive. People admire my beauty just as much as I admire the beauty of this flower. But the reason that people say so is really not because they love me. It is because they are able to receive the *rùpa, shabda, gandha, rasa, sparsha* (sights, sounds, smells, taste and contact) that they like. That's why one guy does not look at two girls and say they are both pretty. One is always prettier than the other. Because, one is able to provide what this guy likes to consume better than the other.



## Consumers and suppliers

Likewise, when we make offerings to the Buddha, when we lay that flower on the altar, come to your senses, understand that;

*'this flower looks pretty to me, that's not because the flower is pretty. Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder'.*

When you make that offering either to the Buddha or wherever, please contemplate;

*'When I look in the mirror, I see a pretty image. People say I am pretty. My boyfriend texts me every morning, 'hey gorgeous'. He finds me gorgeous, not because I am gorgeous. He finds me gorgeous because beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder. Beauty is not an attribute of this figure. It's a very subjective thing. If that is the true nature of this rūpa, then aren't I foolish to fall into the trap to think that I am pretty, I am beautiful'?*

This is what we ought to think. The tree bears flowers not for the benefit of the bee. Think about this in a very subtle way. If you think you look pretty in a conventional sense, that's because it's the reward of good merits that you have done in the past. Now, isn't merit something that helps us to relieve ourselves from suffering? If you've done good in the past, then you will receive your dues. If beauty is a reward for good deeds you have done in the past, this beauty you have received is to help you to relieve yourself from suffering quicker. How so? People now find you attractive. It's now easier to find suppliers. That's all it is. You just made a good product that you can now sell. Someone is consuming what you are supplying. It works both ways. If you are ugly then no one might be interested in abusing you. That will be the bad deeds that you've done in the past paying rewards. When you begin to consider this, you begin to realize what is the point of my beauty? All this is just to relieve myself from suffering. Does having good looks have any relation to how quickly you can attain *Nibbàna*? No. But in terms of how successful you can be in this world, then, yes. This is the truth. This is reality.

## Why are flowers offered at Buddha's feet?

In offering flowers at the feet of the Buddha, you see a lot of dhamma. Why at His feet though? Why do you not put it on His hand? What do we do with our feet? We step. When you throw something that you really don't like the look of, you step on it and break it, you crush it and you throw it away. It's a mark of disgust. When we make that offering at the

Buddha's feet, we contemplate on the fact that the Buddha was someone who realised that this is a sensual (*kàma*) world - *rùpa kàma, shabda kàma, gandha kàma, rasa kàma, pottabba kàma, dhamma kàma* - the dhammas, you equate with sensuality; you equate it to the beauty and the fragrance of the flower. He discarded them. He didn't praise them. He dispelled them. He said discard them, throw away because sensuality is not something that is worth having. It's something that has to be discarded, shunned. That's why we make that offering at His feet.

### Stanza for offering flowers

What is the stanza you recite when you offer flowers?

***Wanna gandha gunòpèthan - Èthan kusuma santatin  
Pùjayàmi munindassa - Siripàda saròruhè***

... ***wanna*** is colour, ***gandha*** fragrance, ***gunòpèthan*** is a guna upamàwa, a simile - like the colours and the fragrance, I use these two as a simile;

... ***èthan kusuma***; 'ku' is evil, bad. 'Sum' is to dispel, to throw away. '***Santatin***' is chitta santhànyaya; with the mind.

... ***pùjayàmi munindassa*** ... I offer to the Buddha

... ***Siripàda***; at his feet. ***saròruhe***; flowers that grow in the lake

*'In my mind, I get rid of the defilements. I rid my mind of the cankers, of the ten unwholesome deeds. Like the fragrance and beauty of the Buddha's qualities, I try to instil those values in my mind, by discarding, shunning and ridding the defilements and cankers'.*

This is the contemplation to do when you make that offering;

*'I recognize that in my mind there are defilements that incline me towards evil deeds, evil thoughts and evil actions. Through the merit that I acquire from this offering, may I be able to shun those defilements, those cankers which take over my mind and be able to beautify my mind, make my mind fragrant with great qualities'.*

That is the true offering of flowers in the *àrya* way. In the conventional sense you think,

*'these beautiful flowers are going to die in a moment. Likewise, I am going to pass away, my body is going to wither just like these flowers'.*

Nothing wrong in this contemplation. You can do that as well. But remember, we are not just talking about the physicality here. In the *àrya* way, we talk about the mind. Because you don't need to fix the physical problem. That will fix itself. But we need to fix the mental problems.

### **Profound meaning behind the precept *màlà gandha vilèpana dhàrana...***

When you offer incense or joss sticks, there is a very profound meaning behind that. When you observe '*atasil*' (eight precepts) there is a precept that says;

***màlà gandha vilèpana dhàrana mandana vibhùsanattànà vèramanì sikkhàpadan samàdiyàmì*** - '*màlà* (flower) *gandha* (incense) *vilèpana* (perfumes) *dhàrana mandana* (things you wear, such as jewellery and ornaments) *vibhùsanattànà vèramanì* (I discard them because they are not worthwhile). One might think;

*'why does The Buddha restrict our freedom like this? I'm not even a monk. I've just come to observe the eight precepts, and He has given me a precept that says I shouldn't smell good, I shouldn't wear nice jewellery. Why did The Buddha say that I shouldn't dance or sing? Isn't that restricting my freedom, when He is the leader of liberation, the epitome of liberation?'*

If you wear jewellery, say a necklace, who enjoys the beauty of that necklace? It is the people who look at you. Who observes the beauty of your earrings? The people who look at you. If you are a dancer, you may practice endlessly for a performance. Then finally the event day comes and you are on stage dancing. You are doing the hard work, but who is sitting there and enjoying it? Whom did you just make happy? Yourself or the world? It is the world. Just like the jewellery. You are doing it, but someone else is enjoying its beauty.

What the Buddha really says is, not to sacrifice your freedom for somebody else. Don't sacrifice your happiness, don't exert yourself uselessly for somebody else. Because ultimately what you are giving them is *rùpa, shabda, gandha, rasa, sparsha*. Are they going to redeem yourself from suffering? No. Preach as much dhamma as you like. That will help to redeem yourself of suffering. But is listening to music or watching dances or looking at jewellery a true way to redeem oneself from suffering? It is relief from suffering, not redemption from suffering. It's not going to cure the problem. That's why The Buddha says to stop doing that,

it is pointless. It's not really restricting your freedom. It's saying, think about what you are doing. You are here to observe the Noble Eightfold Path and walk the Noble Eightfold Path. How is wearing fragrance or flowers or jewellery or dancing or singing going to help you.? It will not.

### **Dhamma behind offering incense sticks - 1**

The question must come to your mind, that for The Buddha to come up with a precept, '*màlà gandha vilèpana dhàrana mandana vibhùsanattànà vèramani*' - remove yourself from that. Why then, does He expect you to go and offer incense to Him? That's also '*gandha*'. '*Vèramani*' - it is pointless. For someone as The Buddha, who realises that there is no happiness to be sought in sights or smells, what is the point in us offering the smell of an incense to Him? What we really should be doing is reflecting on how is it that an incense stick helps me to progress on this noble path. What is the profundity of His teaching. What is the profoundness of this act that I'm doing?

When you light incense, it spreads a nice, sweet fragrance. This incense is really having a dialogue with you. It is asking you a series of questions. It says,

*'look at me. From the moment I was lit, I spread nothing but a sweet fragrance to all around me. No one complains of the smell that comes from an incense stick. It's very sweet, it's very nice, it's very enjoyable. Are you like that? The words that flow freely out of your mouth; are they harsh words or are they words that people like to hear? When you speak, do people close their ears or are they happy to listen to you? Are they always looking to see what else you might say or are people wishing that's the last thing you are going to say? Are you like me?'*

The incense stick asks. Now it's time for you to answer. Are you one who has refrained from the unwholesome deeds that happen through speech? *musà vādà, pisunà vādà, parusà vādà, samprapplāpà*; lying, harsh words, backstabbing, frivolous speech. Have you abstained from them or do you still indulge in them? If you say,

*'yes, I still indulge in them',*

*'then you and I, we are very different. Aren't we?'* The incense stick asks.

If the answer to that is 'yes', then you will have to feel quite shameful. Here is an inanimate object asking, are you or am I better than you? It's has no life and it's asking you a question and you are saying;

*'you are better than me. You are just cow dung rolled up around the stick. I am a living, breathing, human being and I am no better than you'.*

That would be shameful to answer like that. The incense stick says;

*'well, I spread this fragrance all over me. The thoughts that I think are always pleasant ones. I wish happiness on everybody. But, what about you? What are your thoughts like? Do you wish harm or evil on others? Are you kind or generous to others? Is your presence welcome or unwelcome'?*

What answers do you have to give?

## **Dhamma behind offering incense sticks - 2**

And then there is more. To light an incense stick, you need to hold it to a fire. It cannot light by itself. It needs help. It needs that fire from something else. Just like the light of wisdom that has to come from somebody else. So, holding that incense stick to the fire you light it up. But the moment it is lit, that's the moment at which the fragrance starts to disperse in the air. Before that there was no fragrance coming from it. You had to hold it against your nose, then you might have been able to smell the fragrance that comes from it. But standing away you wouldn't be able to smell it.

Likewise, as humans, you all have good qualities within yourselves. But so far it might be that you didn't have the right channel to direct it. Once you start to associate a noble person and the light of wisdom is lit within your minds, now you begin to disperse that aroma, that sweet smell all over the world. Because now you are an *àrya*. Before this you were a good person. Now you are a great person. Now you have started to walk the path to *Nibbàna*.

## **Dhamma behind offering incense sticks - 3**

So, from the moment this incense stick was lit, it's burning away. As it burns, the fragrance spreads everywhere and we are able to enjoy that sweet smell. It pleases everybody. But as it burns, what's left over are ashes. As it burns away, this incense stick asks you a question;

*'As I am now burning and spreading this fragrant smell all over, I'm becoming shorter. Is there something in you that is reducing with every passing moment'?*

Since the moment that this fire was lit, what is burning away? *Ràga, dwèsha* and *mòha*. On the incense it is cow dung, stuff that you have to discard. There is so much to think about. If you want to properly offer flowers and incense or an oil lamp, you could spend a couple of hours easily, just sitting down after you've made the offering, to contemplate on what you have done; *'am I like that'?*

### **Are you an upright person?**

In the Buddha *shàsanaya* (Buddha's Ministry) everything is about *pratipatti*. In the Buddha *shàsanaya* there is no *àmisa pùja*. What we do is practice. If you can say that you are burning away *ràga, dvèsha* and *mòha* as much as the incense is burning out, then great. What's left over from the stick are the ashes. These are the defilements that you shed away never to come back because the moment you become a *Sòtàpanna*, that's the moment that incense stick is lit. That is the moment you become an *àrya*. Three of the *dasa sanyòjana; sathkàya ditti, vicikiccà, silabbata paràmàsa* goes away, never to come back again, like the ashes that have burnt away never to come back. It keeps burning *kàma ràga, vyàpàda* and *patigha*. Then again, the incense stick says;

*'I'm giving this lovely fragrance to everybody and pleasing everybody around me. But I'm not here to stay. The purpose I went and lit myself was so that I could bring my stay to an end'.*

How many people have really forgotten that? Lay as well as clergy, a lot of people once they receive the dhamma, their purpose in life becomes to spread the dhamma, not taking much for themselves. What a pity. That was not why The Buddha gave his teaching. It was for self-liberation before the liberation of others. As the incense stick says;

*'look at me, I am NOT just giving away fragrance and being there forever. I am burning myself away every moment. Are you doing the same'?*

Are you burning away these defilements so that you ultimately come to the end of that little bit of stick that's at the end of it and then all that's left over is a dead body? Or is your ambition to be here forever? If your answer is;

*'well, I'm quite fragrant and people are quite nice to me and I'm quite nice to them. This is a really good way to be, isn't it? Because I'm not doing any harm to anybody. So, I might as well hang around for as long as I can'.*

The incense sticks says;

*'oh! you've got it all wrong mister. How much time can you spend in front of an incense stick? All that to think about. All that to contemplate on'.*

The incense stick is upright. There are no bends or curves in an incense stick. It asks you the question;

*'Is your Samadhi like mine, upright? Have you done away with all your bad deeds, your defilements? Are you a 'ridgu' person or a 'vanka' person? Are you inclined towards unwholesome deeds? Then you are not upright, but bent downwards. Are you an 'avanka' - upright, forthright person? Are you like me, being sensible? How can you stand in front of me having done unwholesome deeds? Be honest to yourself and answer 'yes' when you do that. You should feel ashamed if you have lied, if you have stolen, if you have engaged in sensual misconduct'.*

### **'Sila' - Having virtues**

When offering flowers, through that process, through that activity you recognize the importance of 'sila'; having virtues within you. Because this is about recognizing that the *kàma world* is pointless, useless, essence less, meaningless. It's not there for my benefit. It is there to fulfil a purpose. All of these are rewards that I am able to reap, because of merits I've done in the past. But I should not be foolish to think that;

*'oh, look at me. I'm so beautiful. I might as well make the most of it'.*

When people fall into that frame of mind, they begin to abuse their own beauty, abuse themselves and abuse others. Think of how some people use their beauty to trap others, beauty they have been gifted with as a reward for merits they have done in the past. How many people use that as an arm against others to lure other people into traps, to ignite the fires of desire in them? People don't recognise these. They don't realise how much demerit they acquire by doing these. It could be a *swàminwahanse*, it could be a yogi, a recluse or an ascetic who has sought solitude from the world, spending his time trying to fight these defilements in his mind, trying to conquer his mind and do away with *ràga*, *dvèsha* and *mòha*. Just to use an example; a young lady comes along and uses her assets to lure this yogi, to lure this *swàminwahanse* into a trap deliberately. Of course, the intention has to be there, otherwise it is not a bad deed. But if there is intention, exposing themselves in inappropriate ways to lure the yogi, to lure that *swàminwahanse* into a trap, isn't that abusing what you

have received, for no other reason than relieving yourself from suffering? To relieve yourself from suffering, what are you doing to the other person? Putting them into the fires, into the pangs of suffering. Parents! show the reality of this to your children, because without realizing what they do is cause harm to themselves and everyone else.

### **Offering oil lamps to the Buddha**

We use a wick to light an oil lamp, which is usually white in colour. Although the wick is white in colour, it looks harmless. What it's used for is to light a fire, a fire that could burn you. There are lots of different meanings you can give to this. I'm just using one here. Then you can think of others. None of that would be wrong as long as the meaning that you derive is inclined towards *ràgakkayò*, *dvèshakkayò*, *mòhakkayò* (eradication of *ràga*, *dvèsha*, *mòha*). Provided that the meanings that you exert out of these are to do with *Nibbàna*, you are fine. So, while the wick is white in colour, that can be deceiving. It would be foolish to think that a wick is harmless, because what is the wick used for? To light a fire that can burn and destroy, bring destruction. But the wick doesn't do that by itself. You need oil and oxygen.

### **Kamma and vipàka**

The air around the lamp is like thoughts that come into our minds. Thoughts that come from everywhere. Thoughts are the results of our past deeds. What brings a sight in front of your eyes? A *kamma* or *vipàka*? This is a result of a past deed; *kamma*. What brings a sound to your ear? *kamma* or *vipàka*? That's *kamma* that was done in the past. It could have been just a moment before, not necessarily in a previous birth. Likewise, what brings a thought to your mind? *Kamma* or *vipàka*? To all these faculties, these outside sights, sounds, smells, taste and contact, they come to us as *vipàka* of deeds that were done in the past. That's like the air. There's plenty of it. But this wick that is in the oil lamp is like the *citta* (thought) that has *avidyà* (ignorance). In fact, the wick is the mind that is clean to begin with. At its root, the mind is free of defilements, clean. But the mind gets wet with *avidyà* and *tanhà*; ignorance and attachment. Now, when those thought objects come from the outside world; the sights, sounds, smells and tastes, they ignite the fires of *ràga*, *dvèsha* and *mòha*. Once you remove



the defilements what you are left with is a clean mind, a taintless mind. Each of us have a clean mind. What we ought to do is remove the defilements that have been put on top of it.

### **Association of ignoble & immoral people**

Likewise, in the oil lamp, the problem is not the wick, the problem is not the air, the problem is the oil that is now wetting this wick that is clean. With every moment that passes, oil is being dragged along the wick. By the way, where did the fire come from to light the lamp? From another source of fire only. It comes from an *asath purushaya*; an ignoble person. It's burning itself. If there wasn't any oil would it have lit this lamp? No, it's not going to happen. Take the meaning behind what I'm trying to explain here. You can't light an entire wick if there's no oil. This is the contemplation you can do when you light an oil lamp. As you light that lamp you can think to yourself, this is what ignoble, immoral people did to me. You are relating your story to The Buddha;

*'Oh! Lord Buddha this is what happened to me. Now I seek refuge in you. I need your help to put out this fire'.*

Now tell me that lighting an oil lamp is a waste of time. Tell me that offering flowers to The Buddha is a waste of time. Why do you offer it to The Buddha? What is the answer to all these problems? Buddha: *bhava-udda*, to uproot this existence at its very source. That is the answer to all these problems. You take your problem to the one who has the answer. Who else are you going to take this problem to? You have to go to the doctor, the one who has been through the course of those problems and has treated himself. This is why you light them in front of The Buddha.

*'You are my only refuge. The dhamma is my only refuge, because the dhamma sprang in your own mind. The dhamma sprang in your heart through the compassion that you had in your heart for all human beings, for all divine beings, for all celestial beings, for every being that ever lived, that lives and going to live. And it is because of you we have the gift of the mahà sangha today.*

Who is the sangha in the absolute sense? *Sòtàpannas, Sakurdàgàmis, Anàgàmis and Arahants - Atta purisa puggalà*, eight pairs of people. It can be men, it can be women, *dèvas* or *Brahmas*. As long as the seed of the Four Noble Truths has been planted in your hearts and

in your minds never to be uprooted again, you are a member of the *mahà sangha*. It doesn't matter whether you are in lay clothes or in robes, in the absolute sense.

Now do you see how much meaning there is in making these offerings to The Buddha?



- 01.14.49 Why observe the five precepts at the beginning of a sermon?
- 00.16.38 Prepare your mind for the dhamma
- 00.19.11 Contract of life
- 00.20.12 Consider before you discard
- 00.23.15 No blind faith in Buddhism
- 00.25.22 Value-o-meter
- 00.29.50 Worshipping parents
- 00.30.43 Good and bad qualities
- 00.38.02 Sunàtha dhàrètha charàtha
- 00.41.40 Who is a disciple of the Buddha?
- 00.48.05 Being grateful
- 00.52.26 Transferring merits
- 00.59.30 All are equal in the Buddha shàsanaya
- 01.01.50 Pin and pau (Merits and Demerits)
- 01.05.53 Why do we offer flowers to The Buddha?
- 01.17.33 Consumers and suppliers
- 01.23.54 Kàma world
- 01.26.11 Stanza for offering flowers
- 01.30.58 Profound meaning behind the precept *màlà gandha vilèpana dàrana.....*
- 01.35.40 Dhamma behind offering incense sticks - 1
- 01:41:40 Dhamma behind offering incense sticks - 2
- 01.42.54 Dhamma behind offering incense sticks - 3
- 01.45.47 Are you an upright person?
- 01.49.57 'Sila' - Having virtues
- 01.54.58 Offering of oil lamps to the Buddha
- 01.57.16 Kamma and vipàka
- 01.59.36 Association of ignoble & immoral people

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