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(Hatthaka) Āḷavaka Sutta

Discourse to Hatthaka of Āḷavī | A 3.34/1:136-138

Theme: The bases of conciliation, true happiness

Translated by Piya Tan ©2003

Introduction

Hatthaka, called Āḷavaka (the one from Āḷavī), was the son of the king of Āḷavī, and who as a child was saved by the Buddha from being devoured by the yaksha Āḷavaka. He was called Hatthaka because he was handed to the Buddha by the yaksha after the latter's conversion, and then handed over to the king's messengers. As such, he was "passed from one hand to another" (*hatthato hattham gatattā*).¹

He is declared by the Buddha as a model for laymen and the foremost of lay disciples who win a following through the four bases of welfare (*saṅgaha,vatthu*).² He is one of seven laymen³ who is always accompanied by 500 lay followers (A 4:218) who are all noble disciples of the path (*ariya,sāvaka upāsakā*) (AA 1:392).

Once the Buddha asks Hatthaka how he (Hatthaka) could command the allegiance of such a large following. He answers, "By the four bases of conciliation: by giving, by pleasant speech, by beneficent conduct, and by impartiality."⁴ When Hatthaka has left, the Buddha praises him saying that he has eight remarkable qualities: faith, moral virtuous, moral shame, moral fear, great learning, charity, wisdom, fewness of wishes (A 8.24).⁵ His fewness of wishes (*appicchā*) is especially mentioned in **the (Saṅgaha) Hatthaka Sutta 2** (A 8.23).⁶ Together with Citta Gahapati, Hatthaka is often held up as an exemplary layman to be emulated by others.⁷ The **Buddha.vamsa** mentions Citta and Hatthak'āḷavaka as the chief lay patrons (*agg'upaṭṭhākā*) of Gotama Buddha (B 26.19).

One day, while listening to the Buddha teaching, Hatthaka became a non-returner. When he died he was reborn in Avihā.⁸ Once he tried to meet the Buddha and stand in his presence, but he could not remain upright, but collapsed. The Buddha then instructed him to create a gross emanation, by which he was able to stand before the Buddha. He told the Buddha that in Avihā he was constantly surrounded by devas wishing to learn the Dharma from him and confessed that he had three regrets: not having seen enough of the Buddha, not having heard enough of the Dharma, and not having served enough of the Sangha (A 1:278 f). His caring attitude is evident in this (Hatthaka)Āḷavaka Sutta, as we shall see.

The Buddha's closing remark in **the Cūḷa Dukkha-k,khandha Sutta** (M 14) that he "dwells more happily than Seniya Bimbisāra" marks the climax of this Sutta.⁹

¹ AA 1:391 f, 2:224; SA 1:336; SnA 1:240.

² A 1:26; SA 1:337; AA 1:389. *Saṅgaha,vatthu*, also "conditions of welfare." See its spiritually novel interpretation in **Paññā Bala S** (A 9.5.6/4:364). See D 3:152, 190, 222; A 2:32, 248; J 5:330.

³ The 7 laymen are Dhamma,dinna,Visākha, Ugga, Citta, Hatthaka Āḷavaka, Cūḷa Anātha,piṇḍika, Mahā Anātha,-piṇḍika (AA 3:291).

⁴ See **Spiritual friendship: A textual study** = SD 34.1 (4.2).

⁵ A 8.24/4:220.

⁶ A 8.23/4:216.

⁷ S 2:235; A 1:88, 2:164, 3:451.

⁸ That is, he is reborn in the Pure Abodes (*suddh'āvāsa*), the five highest heavens of the form world (*rūpa,loka*) inhabited only by non-returners who assume their last birth to become arhats and attain nirvana. These worlds are Āviha ("Non-declining"), Ātappa ("Unworried"), Sudassā ("Clearly Visible"), Sudassī ("Clear-visioned") and Akaṇiṭṭhā ("Highest") (D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46). For cosmological diagram, see **Kevaddha S** (D 11) = SD 1.7 (Table 1.7).

⁹ M 14.21 f/1:94 = SD 4.7.

The Discourse to Hatthaka of Ālavī

A 3.34/1:136-138

[1:136]

1 Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed One was dwelling on a spread of leaves beside a cattle track in a sesam¹⁰ forest in Ālavī country.

The Buddha dwells happily

2 Then Hatthaka Ālavaka while walking about on a stroll,¹¹ saw the Blessed One dwelling on a spread of leaves beside a cattle track in a sesam forest. Having approached the Blessed One, he saluted him and sat down at one side. Thus seated at one side, Hatthaka Ālavaka said this to the Blessed One:

3 “Bhante, does the Blessed One dwell well [do you sleep happily]?”¹²

4 “Yes, prince, I dwell well [I sleep happily]. Indeed, I am one of those who dwell happily in the world.”

5 “But, bhante, the winter nights are cold. This is the fortnight between the eighth days of the month,¹³ the snow-fall season. The hard ground is rough, trampled by cattle hoofs.¹⁴ The leave you have spread is thin. [137] The tree is almost bare of leaves. Cold are your saffron robes. And the cold high wind blows.¹⁵

6 Yet the Blessed One says thus: ‘Yes, prince, I dwell happily. Indeed, I am one of those who dwell happily in the world.’”

The mansion

7 “In this connection, prince, I will ask you a question in return.¹⁶ Answer it as you please. What do you think, prince?

Suppose, prince, there were a gabled house’s upper chamber, belonging to a houselord or a houselord’s son, with walls plastered within and without, protected from the wind, secured with bars, with

¹⁰ *Simsapā* (Skt *śimśapā*), *Dalbergia sisu*, the Indian rosewood, locally called “sesam” or “shisham.” See D 2:316; A 1:136.

¹¹ “Walking about on a stroll,” *jaṅghā, vihāraṃ anucaṅkamāno anuvicaramāno*, lit “wandering to and fro on foot and walking up and down” (KR Norman, *Group of Discourses II*, 1992: 63). See D 1:235; M 1:108, 227, 2:118, 3:128; A 1:138, 3:76; Sn p105, p115.

¹² “Did the Blessed One sleep well?” *kacci bhante Bhagavā sukhaṃ asayitthā ‘ti*. The verb *asayittha*, “he slept” is the aor 3rd sg of *seti* or *sayati*, “he sleeps, he lies (down)”; however, it obliquely means “to live, to dwell, to behave.” For example *dhamma, cārī sukhaṃ seti*, “The Dharmafarer dwells happy/happily” (Dh 169).

¹³ “The fortnight between the eighth days of the month,” *antar’atṭhaka*, ie the week before and the week after the full moon. Comy says this is the period between the eight days of (the full moon of) Māgha and Phagguna (ie February) (AA 2:225).

¹⁴ *Kharā gokaṅṭaka, hatā bhūmi*, lit “hard is the ground trampled by cattle.” *Khara* means “solid, hard, rough.”

¹⁵ *Verambha, vāto vātī*. *Veramba-* (also *verambha-*) (S 2:231; A 1:137; Tha 597; J 3:255, 484, 6:326; Nc 562; Vbh 84 (a list of winds, where it prob means “cold winds”); MA 1:30 f; SA 2:209 (“The name of a strong wind, arising at a height from which the four continents appear to be the size of lotus leaves”); DhA 1:200; VbhA 71 (*yojanato upari vāyana, vātā*, “a wind blowing from a yojana high”); cf BHS *vairambhaka*, Divy) is prob dialectical (ie regional) and qualifies a wind (PED; BHSD, svv). At Tha 597, it seems to be a place-name, *Verañjā* (ThaA 2:255; see BHSD sv; Tha:N 215 n597). VbhA says that it is a high-altitude wing (VbhA 71).

¹⁶ “I will ask a question in return,” *paṭipucchissāmi*, ie ask a counter-question. For the 4 ways of answering a question, see **Abhaya Rāja, kumāra S** = SD 7.12 Intro (4), under **Pañha S** (A 4.42/2:46).

windows shuttered,¹⁷ and in it is a couch spread with long-furred rugs, embroidered white woollen sheets, choice spreads of antelope hide, a red canopy and crimson double rests [pillows and bolsters].¹⁸ And there too an oil lamp is burning and four wives wait upon him with all their charms.¹⁹

The three unwholesome roots

What do you think, prince, would this person dwell happily? What do you think of this?"

8 "Bhante, he would dwell happily."

9 "What do you think, prince? Would there not arise in the houselord or the houselord's son the feverish pains²⁰ of body or of mind caused by lust, burning him so that he dwells in pain?"

"Yes, bhante."

10 "What do you think, prince? Would there not arise in the houselord or the houselord's son the feverish pains of body or of mind caused by hatred, burning him so that he dwells in pain?"

"Yes, bhante."

11 What do you think, prince? Would there not arise in the houselord or the houselord's son the feverish pains of body or of mind caused by delusion, burning him so that he dwells in pain?"

"Yes, bhante."

The three roots abandoned

12 "Now, prince, the feverish pains of *lust* burning him, so that he dwells in pain, have been abandoned by the Tathāgata [thus come], cut them off at the root, made them like a palm-tree stump, done away with them so that they are not subject to further growth.

The feverish pains of *hate* burning him, so that he dwells in pain, have been abandoned by the Tathāgata [thus come], cut them off at the root, made them like a palm-tree stump, done away with them so that they are not subject to further growth.

The feverish pains of *delusion* burning him, so that he dwells in pain, have been abandoned by the Tathāgata [thus come], cut them off at the root, made them like a palm-tree stump, [138] done away with them so that they are not subject to further growth.

Therefore, prince, I dwell happily.²¹

The brahmin who is quenched ever dwells happily,
Who clings not to lust, who is cooled, whose life-fuel is gone.²²
Having cut all straps [of attachment], the heart's pain is removed,
The peaceful one dwells happily whose mind has won peace.

— evaṃ —

040301; rev 051129; 081214; 091229; 100812; 120301; 120504; 120612

¹⁷ As in (**Mahā,purisa,vitakka**) **Anuruddha S** (A 8.30/4:230 = SD 19.4), the imagery forms two separate ones: the first (A 8.30.10) ends here, and the rest of the sentence forms the second imagery (A 8.30.11). See **Mahā Siha,-nāda S** (M 12.41/1:76) = SD 49.1 n.

¹⁸ *Ubhato,lohitaḥpadhāno*, alt tr "crimson rests at both ends (of the couch)." See parallel at M 12.41/1:76.

¹⁹ "With all their charms," *manāpa,manāpena*, lit "with pleasure after pleasure."

²⁰ "Feverish pains," *pariḷāhā*.

²¹ Cf **Cūḷa Dukkha-k,khandha S** (M 14.21 f/1:94) = SD 4.7.

²² "Whose life-fuel is gone," *nirūpadhi*.