

## (Hatthaka) Ālavā Sutta

### Discourse to Hatthaka of Ālavā

[The bases of solidarity, true happiness]

(Aṅguttara Nikāya 3.34/1:136-138)

Translated by Piya Tan ©2003

#### Introduction

Hatthaka, called Ālavāka (the one from Ālavā), was the son of the king of Ālavā, and who as a child was saved by the Buddha from being devoured by the yaksha Ālavāka. 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*, AA 1:391 f, 2:224; SA 1:336; SnA 1:240)

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 (*saṅgha, vatthu*) (A 1:26; SA 1:337; AA 1:389)<sup>1</sup> He is one of seven laymen<sup>2</sup> who are 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 solidarity: by giving, by pleasant speech, by beneficent conduct, and by impartiality." 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).<sup>3</sup> His fewness of wishes (*appicchā*) is especially mentioned in **the (Saṅgha) Hatthaka Sutta 2** (A 8.23).<sup>4</sup> Together with Citta Gahapati, Hatthaka is often held up as an exemplary layman to be emulated by others.<sup>5</sup> The **Buddha.vaṁsa** mentions Citta and Hatthak'ālavāka 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.<sup>6</sup> 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 Ālavāka Sutta, as we shall see.

The Buddha's closing remark in **the Cūḷa Dukkh-k, khandha Sutta** that he "dwells more happily than Seniya Bimbisāra" (M 14.22/1:94) marks the climax of this sutta.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Saṅgha, 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.

<sup>2</sup> The 7 laymen are Dhamma, dinna, Visākha, Uggā, Citta, Hatthaka Ālavāka, Cūḷa Anātha, piṇḍika, Mahā Anātha, piṇḍika (AA 3:291).

<sup>3</sup> A 8.24/4:220.

<sup>4</sup> A 8.23/4:216.

<sup>5</sup> S 2:235; A 1:88, 2:164, 3:451.

<sup>6</sup> 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"), Atappa ("Unworried"), Sudassā ("Clearly Visible"), Sudassī ("Clear-visioned") and Akanitthā ("Highest") (D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46).

<sup>7</sup> A similar note, see **Cūḷa Dukkh-k, khandha S** (M 14.21 f/1:94).

## 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 sesam (*simsapā*)<sup>8</sup> forest in Ālavī country.

### The Buddha dwells happily

2 Then Hatthaka Ālavaka while walking about on a stroll,<sup>9</sup> 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 happily [did you sleep well]?”<sup>10</sup>

4 “Yes, prince, I dwell happily [I have slept well]. 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,<sup>11</sup> the snow-fall season. The hard ground is rough, trampled by cattle hoofs.<sup>12</sup> (Your) spread of leaves is sparse. Few are [137] the leaves on (this) tree. And cold are your saffron robes. The cold wild winds blows.<sup>13</sup>

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.<sup>14</sup> Answer it as you please.

What do you think, prince? Suppose, prince, there were a gabled house’s upper chamber, belonging to a householder or a householder’s son, with walls plastered within and without, protected from the wind, secured with bars, with windows shuttered,<sup>15</sup> and in it are 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].<sup>16</sup> And there too an oil lamp is burning and four wives wait upon him with all their charms.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>8</sup> “Simsapā” (Skt *simsapā*), *Dalbergia sisu*, the Indian rosewood, locally called “sesam” or “shisham.” See D 2:316; A 1:136.

<sup>9</sup> “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.

<sup>10</sup> “Did the Blessed One sleep well?” *kacci bhante Bhagavā sukhaṃ asayitthā ‘ti*. The verb *asayittha*, “he slept” is the aor 3<sup>rd</sup> sg of *seti* or *sayati*, “he sleeps, he lies (down)”; however, it obliquely means “to live, to dwell, to be-have.” For example *dharmma, cārī sukhaṃ seti*, “The Dharmafarer dwells happy/happily” (Dh 169).

<sup>11</sup> “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).

<sup>12</sup> *Kharā gokaṅṅaka, hatā bhūmi*, lit “hard is the ground trampled by cattle.” *Khara* means “solid, hard, rough.”

<sup>13</sup> “The cold wild winds blows,” *verambha, vāto vāti*.

<sup>14</sup> “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).

<sup>15</sup> 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 Sīha, nāda S** (M 12.41/1:76) = SD 49.1 n.

<sup>16</sup> *Ubhato, lohita kūpadhāno*, alt tr “crimson rests at both ends (of the couch).” See parallel at M 12.41/1:76.

<sup>17</sup> “With all their charms,” *manāpa, manāpena*, lit “with pleasure after pleasure.”

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 householder or the householder's son the feverish pains<sup>18</sup> of body or of mind caused by lust, burning him so that he dwells in pain?"

"Yes, bhante."

**10** "...the feverish pains of body or of mind caused by hatred, burning him so that he dwells in pain?"

"Yes, bhante."

**11** "...the feverish pains of body or of mind caused by delusion, burning him so that he dwells in pain?"

"Yes, bhante."

**12** "Now, prince, the feverish pains of lust burning him, ... the feverish pains of hate burning him, ... 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.

The brahmin who is quenched ever dwells happily,  
Who clings not to lust, who is cooled, whose life-fuel is gone.<sup>19</sup>  
Having cut all straps [of attachment], the heart's pain is removed,  
The peaceful one dwells happily whose mind has won peace.

— evaṃ —

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<sup>18</sup> "Feverish pains," *pariḷāhā*.

<sup>19</sup> "Whose life-fuel is gone," *nirūpadhi*.