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(Hatthaka) Ālavaka SuttaDiscourse to Hatthaka of Ālavī | **A 3.34**or, **(Tika Hatthaka) Ālavaka Sutta**, The (Threes) Discourse on Hatthaka of Ālavī

Theme: The bases of conciliation, true happiness

Translated by Piya Tan ©2003

Introduction

1.1 Hatthaka, called Ālavaka (the one from Ālavī), was the son of the king of Ālavī, and who, as a child, was saved by the Buddha from being devoured by the yaksha Ālavaka. He is called Hatthaka (“passed from one hand to another,” *hatthato hattham gatattā*)¹ because he is first handed to the Buddha by the yaksha after the latter’s conversion, and thereafter handed over to the king’s messengers.

1.2 He is declared by the Buddha as a model for laymen and the foremost of lay disciples who win a following through the 4 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).

1.3 Once the Buddha asks Hatthaka how he (Hatthaka) is able command the allegiance of such a large following. He answers, “By the 4 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

1.4 His fewness of wishes (*app’icchā*) 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.vaṃsa** mentions Citta and Hatthak’ālavaka as the chief lay patrons (*agg’upatthākā*) of Gotama Buddha (B 26.19).

1.5 One day, while listening to the Buddha teaching, Hatthaka becomes a non-returner. Upon dying, he is reborn in Avihā.⁸ Once he tries to meet the Buddha and stand in his presence, but he is unable to remain upright and collapses. The Buddha then instructs him to create a mind-made gross bodily form, by which he is able to stand before the Buddha.

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 Ālavaka, Cūḷa Anātha,piṇḍika, Mahā Anātha,-piṇḍika (AA 3:291).

⁴ See **Spiritual friendship: A textual study**, SD 34.1 (6.2.1).

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 5 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 Akañiṭṭhā (“Highest”) (D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46). For cosmological diagram, see **Kevalāḍḍha S** (D 11), SD 1.7 (Table 1.7).

He tells the Buddha that in Avihā he is constantly surrounded by devas wishing to learn the Dharma from him. He confesses that he has 3 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.

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

(Hatthaka) Āḷavaka Sutta The Discourse to Hatthaka of Āḷavī

A 3.34

[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 simsapa [sesam]¹⁰ forest in Āḷavī country.

The Buddha sleeps happily

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

3 “I hope, bhante, the Blessed One slept well.”¹²

4 “Yes, prince [*kumāra*], I have slept well. Indeed, I am one of those who sleep well in the world.”

5 “But, bhante, the winter nights are cold. These are the eight intermonth days of the the snow-fall season.¹³ The hard ground is rough, trampled by cattle hoofs.¹⁴ The leaves you have spread are thin.

⁹ M 14,21 f/1:94 @ SD 4.7.

¹⁰ *Simsapā* (Skt *śimśapā*), Dalbergia sisu, the Indian rosewood or asoka tree, locally called “sesam” or “shisham.” See D 2:316; S 56.31/5:437 f + SD 21.7; 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. For stock refs & nn, see M 18,2 n (SD 6.14).

¹² *Kacci bhante bhagavā sukhaṃ asayitthāti*. 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 *dhama, cārī sukhaṃ seti*, “The Dharmafarer dwells happily” (Dh 169). On the Buddha’s dhyana as his “great high heavenly couch,” see **Venāga, pura S** (A 3.63,5), SD 21.1.

¹³ “The 8 intermonth days of the snow-fall season,” *antar’atṭhaka hima, pāta, samaya* (V1:31, 288; M 1:79; A 1:136; U 6; Miln 396). Comys say that these are the last 4 days of the month of Māgha and the first 4 days of the month of Phagguna, between them totalling 8 nights (*māgha, māsassā avasāne catasso, phaggunassa, māsassā ādimhi catassōti evaṃ ubhinnaṃ antare atṭha rattī*, MA 2:48,10 ad M 1:79); similarly at VA 1128 :: V 1:31; AA 2:225 :: A 1:136 & UA 74 :: U 6,18. See V:B 4:41 n3 & UA:M 1:235 n1152.

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

[137] The tree is almost bare of leaves. Cold are your saffron robes. And the cold wind blows from up high.¹⁵

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

The mansion’s upper chamber

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

7.2 Suppose, prince, there were a mansion belonging to a householder or a householder’s son, and therein is **an upper chamber [a belvedere]**, with walls plastered within and without, protected from the wind, with bolted doors¹⁷ and shuttered windows,¹⁸

7.3 and in it are a couch [divan]¹⁹ spread²⁰ with long-furred rugs, embroidered white woollen sheets, choice rugs of kadalī deer hide, spreads with red canopies, and crimson cushions at both ends [crimson pillows and bolsters].²¹

7.4 And there too an oil lamp is burning and four wives wait upon him with all their charms.²²

The 3 unwholesome roots

What do you think, prince, would this person sleep happily? What do you think of this?”

8 “Bhante, he would sleep happily.”

¹⁵ *Verambha, vāto vāti. 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, by asking a counter-question. For the 4 ways of answering a question, see **Abhaya Rāja, kumāra S** (M 58), SD 7.12 (4), under **Pañha S** (A 4.42/2:46).

¹⁷ “With bolted doors,” *phassit’aggaḷam* (M 3:61; A 1:101, 137). Broadly, *aggaḷa* can mean (1) a bolt (for door or window); (2) a door-leaf or panel, ie, *kavāṭa*. The Comy lemma reads *phussit’aggaḷam* (MA 2:39), which is preferable. Comy also explains that the door-leaves (*kavāṭa*) (by which the opening is closed) is shut tight against the door-posts (*dvāra, bāhāhi saddhiṃ supihita, kavaṭam*, id).

¹⁸ This is stock: (**Mahā, purisa Vitakka**) **Anuruddha S** (A 8.30/4:230 @ SD 19.4), there are two separate imageries: (1) the “brief mansion pericope” [§7,2] (omitting mention of “mansion,” *pāsāda*), as in **Maha Sakul’udāyi S** (M 77,-32.3), SD 49.5, and (2) the rest of the imagery, forming the “fullest mansion pericope” [§7.2-4]. The “fuller mansion pericope” (which omits §17.4), recurs in **Mahā Sīha, nāda S** (M 12,41.3/1:76) n, SD 49.1.

¹⁹ *Pallaṅka*, a word that can refer to a simple mat (for monastics) or an elaborate divan (as here): see V:H 3:271 n3 for details.

²⁰ A longer list of items similar or related to those that follow are given at D 1:7; A 1:181; Mv 5.10.4-7 (V1:192); Cv 6.8 (V 2:163).

²¹ *Ubhato, lohitakūpadhāno*, alt tr “crimson rests at both ends (of the couch).” Here, *upadhāna* refers to a kind of rest, or cushion, pillow. Comy says they are for the head and the feet (MA 2:39). Recurs at M 12,41/1:76 (SD 49.1). See **Brahma, jāla S** (D 1,15/1:7) & **Venāga S** (A 3.63,3.2/1:181), SD 21.1, for a more detailed list. See parallel at M 12,41/1:76 (SD 49.1).

²² “With all their charms,” *manāpa, manāpena*, lit “with pleasure after pleasure.”

9 “What do you think, prince? Would there not arise in the houselord or the houselord’s son the feverish pains²³ of body or of mind caused by lust, burning him so that he sleeps uncomfortably [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 sleeps uncomfortably [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 sleeps uncomfortably [in pain]?”

“Yes, bhante.”

The 3 roots abandoned

12 “Now, prince, the feverish pains of *lust* burning him, so that he sleeps uncomfortably [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 sleeps uncomfortably [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 sleeps uncomfortably [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.

13 Therefore, prince, I sleep happily.²⁴

<i>Sabbadā ve sukhaṃ seti brāhmaṇo parinibbuto</i>	The brahmin fully quenched ever indeed sleeps happily,
<i>Yo na lippati kāmesu sīti,bhūto nirūpadhi</i>	who clings not to sensual pleasures, cool, life-fuel gone. ²⁵
<i>Sabba āsattiyā chetvā vineyya hadaye darāṃ</i>	Cut off are all dependence, the heart’s care removed,
<i>Upasanto sukhaṃ seti santiṃ papuyya cetaso’ti</i>	the peaceful sleeps happily, whose heart has won peace.

— evaṃ —

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²³ “Feverish pains,” *pariḷāhā*.

²⁴ The Buddha utters these same 2 verses to Anātha,piṇḍika at their first meeting: **(Buddho’ti) Sudatta S** (S 10.8), SD 87.10; SD 51.24 (3.1.3.1). Cf **Cūḷa Dukkha-k,khandha S** (M 14,21 f/1:94), SD 4.7.

²⁵ “Life-fuel is gone,” *nirūpadhi*.