



Ratṭhapāla Sutta

A Discourse from the Majjhima Nikāya

Majjhima Nikāya No. 82

This version has been adapted
from an unpublished translation by the late

Venerable Ñāṇamoli Thera.

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Introduction

The story of Raṭṭhapāla, the young aristocrat of the Kuru clan who vowed that he would die if his parents refused him permission to go forth into the homeless life under the Enlightened One, is told with a simplicity and directness that come straight from the heart of the Buddhist experience. Himself a stranger to the world of suffering, he understood the perils inherent in sensory attachments and material possessions on hearing the Master's Teaching alone. By strenuous effort he gained Arahantship, and it was only then that he revisited his parents' home—a solitary bhikkhu unknown to all but the slave woman who had been his nurse. There is a curious parallel between her recognition of him by his hands, feet and voice, and the way in which Odysseus was recognized by his old nurse when she washed his feet.

This is an Odyssey of the spirit in brief; a tale of heroic renunciation without any of the conventional panoply of heroism. In Raṭṭhapāla's testimony we feel the depth of the realization that moved him to hold the world as nothing, and the peace and assurance he found in his attainment of the Further Shore beyond the perilous ocean of saṃsāra. His words to the aged king speak to us across the centuries with an extraordinary power. They carry a vital message for the pleasure-intoxicated yet fear-haunted world of today.

Ratṭhapāla Sutta

1. Thus I heard. On one occasion when the Blessed One was wandering in the Kuru country together with a large community of bhikkhus, he eventually arrived at Thullakoṭṭhita, a town of the Kurus.

2. The Brahmin householders of Thullakoṭṭhita heard this: “The ascetic Gotama, a son of the Sākyans who went forth from a Sākyan clan, it seems has been wandering in the Kuru country with a large community of bhikkhus and has come to Thullakoṭṭhita. Now a good report of Master Gotama has been spread to this effect: ‘That Blessed One is such since he is accomplished (*araham*) and fully enlightened, perfect in true knowledge and conduct, sublime, knower of worlds, incomparable guide of men to be tamed, teacher of gods and men, enlightened, blessed. He describes this world with its gods, its Māras, and its Brahma divinities, this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, with its princes (by divine right) and its men, which he himself realized through direct knowledge. He teaches a doctrine (*dhamma*) that is good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end, both in the spirit and in the letter. He proclaims the Holy Life, altogether perfect and pure.’ It is good indeed to see such Accomplished Ones.”

3. Then the Brahmin householders of Thullakoṭṭhita went to the Blessed One, and drawing near, some respectfully saluted Him and sat on one side; some exchanged friendly greetings with the Blessed One, and after the customary words of friendship and civility, sat aside; some, before taking their seats, extended their hands with palms together towards the Blessed One; some announced their names and families to Him before sitting down; whilst others sat down in silence.

4. When they were seated, the Blessed One instructed, urged, roused and encouraged them with talk on the Teaching (Dhamma).

5. Now, at that time a clansman called Ratṭhapāla,¹ the son of the leading clan in that same Thullakoṭṭhita, was sitting in the assembly. Then it occurred to him: “As I understand the Teaching given by the Blessed One, it is not possible, while living in a household, to lead the Holy Life as utterly perfect and pure as a polished shell. Suppose I were to shave off my hair and beard, put on the yellow cloth, and go forth from the home life into homelessness?”

6. Then the Brahmin householders of Thullakoṭṭhita, having been instructed, urged, roused and encouraged by the Blessed One with talk on the Teaching, and delighting in his words and agreeing, rose from their seats and after paying homage to him, they departed, keeping their right sides towards him.

7. Soon after they had gone,² Ratṭhapāla, the clansman, went to the Blessed One, and after paying homage to him, sat down at one side. Then he said to the Blessed One, “Venerable Sir, as I understand the Teaching given by the Blessed One, it is not possible, while living in a household, to lead the Holy Life as utterly perfect and pure as a polished shell. Venerable Sir, I want to cut off my hair and beard, put on the yellow cloth, and go forth from the home life into

¹ Ratṭhapāla was later included by the Buddha in the roll of his foremost disciples (*etad agga*: see Aṅguttara Nikāya, Ekaka Nipāta. (The Ones).

² Ratṭhapāla waited until the others had left as he feared that the relatives and friends of his family, who were among the visitors, would disapprove of his wish for ordination and try to prevent it, because he was the only son of his parents. (Comy.)

homelessness. May I receive the Going Forth³ under the Blessed One? May I receive the Full Admission?⁴

“Have you your parents’ permission, Raṭṭhapāla, to go forth from the home life into homelessness?”⁵

“No, Venerable Sir, I have not.”

“Perfect Ones (Tathāgatas) do not give the Going Forth to a son without the parents’ permission, Raṭṭhapāla.”

“Venerable Sir, I shall see to it that my parents permit me to go forth from the home life into homelessness.”

8. Then the clansman, Raṭṭhapāla rose from his seat, and after paying homage to the Blessed One, left keeping his right side towards him. He went to his parents and said to them, “Mother and Father, as I understand the Teaching of the Blessed One, it is impossible, while living in a household, to lead the Holy Life as utterly perfect and pure as a polished shell. I want to shave off my hair and beard, put on the yellow cloth, and go forth from the home life into homelessness. Give me permission to go forth from the home life into homelessness.”

When he had said this, his parents replied, “Dear Raṭṭhapāla, you are our only son, dear and beloved. You have been nurtured in comfort, brought up in comfort. You know nothing of suffering, dear Raṭṭhapāla.⁶ Even in case of your death, only unwillingly we should lose you. But while you are still living, how should we give you our permission to go forth from the home life into homelessness?”

For the second time ... For the third time, the clansman, Raṭṭhapāla, said to his parents, “Mother and Father, give me permission to go forth from the home life into homelessness.”

For the third time his parents replied, “Dear Raṭṭhapāla, but while you are still living, how should we give you our permission to go forth from the home life into homelessness?”

9. Then, not receiving his parents’ permission for the Going Forth, the clansman, Raṭṭhapāla lay down there on the bare floor and said, “Right here I shall either die or get the Going Forth.”

10. Then the clansman, Raṭṭhapāla’s parents said to him, “Dear Raṭṭhapāla, you are our only son, dear and beloved; you have been nurtured in comfort, brought up in comfort. You know nothing of suffering, dear Raṭṭhapāla. Get up, dear Raṭṭhapāla, eat, drink and amuse yourself. While eating, drinking and amusing yourself, you can enjoy sense-pleasure and do meritorious deeds. Even in case of your death, only unwillingly we should lose you. But while you are still living, how should we give you our permission to go forth from the home life into homelessness?”

When this was said that clansman, Raṭṭhapāla, was silent.

³ The ‘Going Forth’ (*pabbajjā*) is the entry into monk life by receiving the first ordination as a novice (*sāmaṇera*).

⁴ ‘Full Admission’ (*upasampadā*) is the higher ordination as a Bhikkhu.

⁵ After the ordination of his son, Rāhula, the Buddha, at his father’s request, did not give ordination without the parents’ consent.

⁶ Here, many editions of the Pali text insert the following: “Come, dear Raṭṭhapāla, eat, drink and amuse yourself! While eating, drinking and amusing yourself, you can enjoy sense-pleasures and do meritorious deeds.”

Replacing the first word, “Come” by “Get up,” this sentence appears in the §§10 and 11. The Burmese Saṅgāyana Edition omits it in §8 and motivates that omission by pointing out (1) that the commentary does not give an explanation of this sentence at §8, but only at §10, (2) that this sentence is likewise omitted here in the close parallel to our passage in the story of Sudinna, in the Pārājikā Pali of the Vinaya.

For the second time ... For the third time his parents said to him, "Dear Raṭṭhapāla, you are our only son ... how should we give you our permission to go forth ...?"

For the third time Raṭṭhapāla was silent.

11. Then the clansman, Raṭṭhapāla's friends went to him and said, "Dear Raṭṭhapāla, you are the only son of your parents, dear and beloved; you have been nurtured in comfort, brought up in comfort. You know nothing of suffering, dear Raṭṭhapāla. Get up, dear Raṭṭhapāla, eat, drink and amuse yourself. While eating, drinking and amusing yourself, you can enjoy sense-pleasures and do meritorious deeds. Your parents do not permit you to go forth from the home life into homelessness. Even in case of your death, your parents would lose you only unwillingly. But while you are still living, how should they give you their permission to go forth from the home life into homelessness?"

When this was said, the clansman, Raṭṭhapāla, was silent.

For the second time ... For the third time his friends said to him, "Dear Raṭṭhapāla, you are the only son ... how would they give you their permission to go forth from the home life into homelessness?"

For the third time Raṭṭhapāla was silent.

12. Then Raṭṭhapāla's friends went to his parents and said to them, "Mother and Father, this clansman, Raṭṭhapāla, has lain down there on the bare floor (thinking), 'Right here I shall either die or get the Going Forth.' Now if you do not give him your permission to go forth from the home life into homelessness, he will die there. But if you give him your permission, you will see him after he has gone forth. And if he does not enjoy the Going Forth, what else will he do than return here? So give him your permission to go forth from the home life into homelessness."

13. "Then we give the clansman Raṭṭhapāla our permission to go forth from home life into homelessness. But when he has gone forth, he must visit his parents."

So Raṭṭhapāla's friends went to him and told him, "Get up dear Raṭṭhapāla, your parents have given you their permission to go forth from the home life into homelessness. But when you have gone forth, you must visit your parents."

14. The clansman, Raṭṭhapāla, then got up, and when he had regained strength, he went to the Blessed One, and after paying homage to him, sat down at one side. When he had done so, he said, "Venerable Sir, I have my parents' permission to go forth from the home life into homelessness. May the Blessed One let me go forth." So the clansman, Raṭṭhapāla, received the Going Forth under the Blessed One, and he received the Full Admission.

15. Then soon after the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla's Full Admission, when he had been fully admitted a fortnight, the Blessed One, having stayed at Thullakoṭṭhita as long as he chose, set out on tour to Sāvattthī. Wandering by stages, he arrived at Sāvattthī and stayed there in Jeta's Grove, in Anāthapiṇḍika's Park.

16. Meanwhile the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla lived alone and secluded, diligent, ardent and resolute. And the goal, for the sake of which clansmen go forth from the home life into homelessness, that highest perfection of the Holy Life, before long he came to know directly, in that very life, realizing it for himself, entering upon it and abiding in it. "Birth has ceased, the Holy life has been lived, completed is the task and nothing further remains after this." Thus he knew.

And the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla was one of the Accomplished Ones (Arahant).⁷

⁷ The Commentary says that it was after twelve years that Raṭṭhapāla attained Saintship (*arahatta*) and then asked for permission to visit his parents. The Discourse itself does not mention any period of time,

17. Then the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla went to the Blessed One, and after paying homage to him, sat down at one side. Then he said “Venerable Sir, I wish to see my parents, if I have the Blessed One’s permission.”

Then the Blessed One, penetrating mentally the mind of the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla knew thus: “The clansman Raṭṭhapāla is incapable of forsaking the training and reverting to what he has abandoned,” and he told him, “Do now, Raṭṭhapāla, what you think fit at this time.”

18. The Venerable Raṭṭhapāla rose from his seat, and after paying homage to the Blessed One, he departed, keeping his right side towards him. Then he set his resting place in order, and taking his bowl and (outer) robe, he set out to go to Thullakoṭṭhita. Wandering by stages, he eventually arrived at Thullakoṭṭhita. There he lived in King Koravya’s Migacira Garden.⁸ Then when it was morning, he dressed, and taking his bowl and (outer) robe, went into Thullakoṭṭhita for alms. As he was wandering from house to house he came to his own father’s house.

19. Now on that occasion the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla’s father was sitting in the hall of the central door⁹ having his hair dressed. He saw the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla coming in the distance, and seeing him, he said, “Our only son, so dear and precious to us, was made to go forth by these monkish shavelings.”¹⁰ Then the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla received neither alms nor polite refusal¹¹ at his own father’s house, and instead he got only abuse.

20. Now, at that time a slave woman belonging to one of the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla’s relations¹² was about to throw away some stale porridge. (Seeing this), the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla spoke to her: “Sister, if that is to be thrown away, then pour it in my bowl here.”

21. While she was doing so, she recognized the characteristic features of his hands and feet and of his voice. Thereupon she went to his mother and said, “If it pleases you, my lady, you should know that my lord’s son, Raṭṭhapāla, is back.”

“Oh, indeed? If you speak the truth, you are a slave woman no more!”

Then the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla’s mother went to his father¹³ and said, “If it pleases you, householder, you should know that they say the clansman, Raṭṭhapāla is back!”

except saying, as always in this stock passage, that he realized the goal “before long” (*na cirass’ eva*). But the fact that the servant woman (see §50) did not recognize him by his appearance and face but only from certain characteristics and his voice, may well support the commentator’s statement.

⁸ This garden (possibly a deer park) had been given by the king for the use of ascetics and monks who arrived at the place too late to proceed to a monastery. Raṭṭhapāla not wish to inform his parents of his arrival as he wanted to avoid any elaborate welcome, and therefore he preferred to stay the night at that garden.

⁹ “In the hall of the central door”: so also in the Upali Sutta; see *The Wheel* No. 98/99, p. 68, note 38.

¹⁰ The commentary says that he felt resentment against the bhikkhus because he wrongly believed that they had callously prevented his son from visiting his parents for so many years.

¹¹ On receiving a refusal, the bhikkhu, without waiting longer, could pass on to another house on his alms round.

¹² According to the commentary, she had been Raṭṭhapāla’s wet-nurse. As a slave woman, however, she did not dare to speak to Raṭṭhapāla directly, but told her mistress about Raṭṭhapāla’s arrival.

¹³ Commentary: “In these high-class families it was regarded as unbecoming if ladies went outside the house alone. Hence Raṭṭhapāla’s mother did not do so but went to see her husband.”

22. Just then the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla was eating the stale porridge by the wall of a certain (shelter). His father went to him and said, “Raṭṭhapāla, my dear, surely there is ...¹⁴ and you will be eating stale porridge! Is there not your own home to go to?”

“Where, householder, is there a home for us who have gone forth from the home life into homelessness? We are homeless ones, householder. We did come to your home, householder, but we got neither alms nor polite refusal, only abuse we got.”

“Come, Raṭṭhapāla dear, let us go to the house.”

“Enough, householder, I have finished my meal for the day.”

23. “Then, Raṭṭhapāla dear, accept to-morrow’s meal.”

The Venerable Raṭṭhapāla accepted in silence.

24. Knowing that his son had accepted the invitation, Raṭṭhapāla’s father went back to his own house. There he had a large heap made of gold coins and bullion and had it hidden by screens. Then he told the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla’s former wives “Come, daughters-in-law, dress yourselves up in the way in which Raṭṭhapāla used to hold you most dear and beloved.”

25. When the night was ended, the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla’s father had good food of various kinds prepared in his own house, and he had the time announced to the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla. “It is time, dear Raṭṭhapāla, the meal is ready.”

26. Then, in the morning, the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla dressed, and taking his bowl and (outer) robe, he went to his father’s house, and sat down on the seat made ready.

27. Then his father had the pile of gold coins and bullion uncovered and said, “This, Raṭṭhapāla dear, is your mother’s wealth, this other your father’s, and that is your ancestral wealth. “Raṭṭhapāla dear, you can use the wealth and make merit. Come then, renounce the training, return to what you have abandoned, use the wealth and make merit!”

28. “Householder, if you would do my bidding, then have this pile of gold coins and bullion loaded on carts and carried away to be dumped in the River Ganges in mid-stream. And why (should you do so)? Because, householder, it will be for you a source of sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair.”

29. Then the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla’s former wives clasped both his feet, saying to him, “What are they like, young master, the nymphs for the sake of whom you lead the Holy Life?”

“We do not lead the Holy Life for the sake of nymphs, sisters.”

“The young master, Raṭṭhapāla, calls us ‘Sisters’ they cried, and they fell down fainting on the spot.

30. Then the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla told his father. “Householder, if there is a meal to be given, then give it. Do not harass us.”

“Eat then, dear Raṭṭhapāla, the meal is ready.”

31. Then with his own hands the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla’s father served and satisfied him with sumptuous food, solid and soft, to his satisfaction. When the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla had eaten and had withdrawn his hand from the bowl, he stood up and uttered these stanzas:

¹⁴ “Surely there is ...” (*atthi nāma*). According to the commentary, Raṭṭhapāla’s father was so overcome with grief that he could not complete his sentence and only exclaimed “Surely, there is...!” He may have wanted to say: “Surely there is enough food and wealth in our house... and you... will be eating stale porridge!”

32.

“Behold a puppet here pranked out,
A body built up out of sores,
Sick, and much object for concern,
Where no stability abides.

Behold a figure here pranked out,
With jewelry and earrings too.
A skeleton wrapped up in skin,
Made creditable in its clothes.

Its feet adorned with henna dye
And powder smeared upon its face,
It may beguile a fool, but not
A seeker of the Further Shore.

A filthy body, decked without,
Like a new-painted unguent pot;
It may beguile a fool, but not
A seeker of the Further Shore.

The deer-hunter sets well the snare,
But yet the deer springs not the trap;
We ate the bait; and we depart,
Leaving the hunters to lament.”

33. When the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla had spoken these stanzas while standing, he then went to the King Koravya’s Migacira Garden and sat at the root of a tree to pass the day.

34. Then King Koravya addressed his gamekeeper: “Good gamekeeper, get the Migacira Garden tidied up, so that we may go to the pleasure garden to find a pleasing spot.”

“Yes, Sir,” the gamekeeper replied.

35. Now while he was having the Migacira Garden tidied up, he saw the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla seated at the root of a tree to pass the day. On seeing him he went to King Koravya and told him, “Sir, the Migacira Garden has been tidied up. But a clansman called Raṭṭhapāla is there, the son of the leading clan in this same Thullakoṭṭhita, of whom you have always spoken highly. He is seated at the root of a tree to pass the day.”

“Then, good gamekeeper, enough of the pleasure garden for today. We shall now pay our respects to that Master Raṭṭhapāla.”

36. He further said, “Give away all the solid and soft food that has been prepared!” Then King Koravya had a number of state carriages got ready, and mounting one of them, he drove out from Thullakoṭṭhita with the full pomp of royalty to see the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla. He drove thus as far as the road was passable for carriages, and then he got down from his carriage and with a following of the highest officials he went on foot to where the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla was. He exchanged greetings with the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla, and when the courteous and amiable talk was finished, he stood at one side. Then he said, “Here is an Elephant rug. Let Master Raṭṭhapāla be seated on it.”

“There is no need, great king. Sit down. I am sitting on my own mat.”

King Koravya sat down on a seat made ready, and having done so, he said:

37. “Master Raṭṭhapāla, there are four kinds of loss. After undergoing these losses, some people here shave off hair and beard, put on the yellow cloth and go forth from the home life

into homelessness. What are the four? They are loss through ageing, loss through sickness, loss of property, and loss of relatives.”

38. “And what is loss through ageing? Here someone is old, aged, burdened with years, advanced in life, and come to the last stage. He considers thus:

‘I am old-aged, burdened with years, advanced in life, and come to the last stage. It is no more possible for me to acquire unacquired possessions or to increase possessions already acquired. Suppose I were to shave off my hair and beard, put on the yellow cloth and go forth from the home life into homelessness?’

So he who has undergone that loss through ageing, shaves off hair and beard, puts on the yellow cloth and goes forth from the home life into homelessness. This is called the loss through ageing.

But Master Raṭṭhapāla is still young, black-haired, endowed with the blessing of youth, in the prime of life. There is none of this loss through ageing for Master Raṭṭhapāla. What has Master Raṭṭhapāla known or seen or heard that lie has gone forth from the home life into homelessness?”

39. “And what is loss through sickness? Here someone is afflicted with sickness, is suffering and gravely ill. He considers thus:

‘I am afflicted with sickness, I am suffering and gravely ill. It is no more possible for me to acquire... Suppose ... I were to go forth from the home life into homelessness?’

So he who has undergone this loss through sickness ... goes forth from the home life into homelessness. This is called the loss through sickness.

But Master Raṭṭhapāla has now no affliction or ailment, having a good digestion that is neither too cool nor too warm but medium. There is none of this loss through sickness for Master Raṭṭhapāla, known or seen or heard, that he has gone forth from the home life into homelessness?”

40. “And what is loss of property? Here someone is rich, with great wealth and great property. Gradually these properties of his dwindle away. He considers thus:

‘Formerly I was rich with great wealth and great property. Gradually those properties of mine have dwindled away. It is no more possible for me to acquire unacquired possessions or to increase possessions already acquired. Suppose ... I were to go forth from the home life into homelessness?’

So he who has undergone this loss of property ... goes forth from the home life into homelessness. This is called loss of property.

But Master Raṭṭhapāla is the son of the leading clan in this same Thullakoṭṭhita. There is none of this loss of property for Master Raṭṭhapāla. What has Master Raṭṭhapāla known or seen or heard that he has gone forth from the home life into homelessness?”

41. “And what is loss of relations? Here someone has many friends and companions, relatives and kin. Gradually these relatives of his dwindle away. He considers thus:

‘Formerly I had many friends and companions, relatives and kin. Gradually those relatives of mine have dwindled away. It is no more possible for me to acquire unacquired possessions or to increase possessions already acquired. Suppose I were to cut off my hair and beard, put on the yellow cloth and go forth from the home life into homelessness?’

So he who has undergone that loss of relatives, shaves off hair and beard, puts on the yellow cloth and goes forth from the home life into homelessness. This is called loss of relatives.

But Master Raṭṭhapāla has many friends and companions, relatives and kin in this same Thullakoṭṭhita. There is none of this loss of relatives for Master Raṭṭhapāla. What has Master Raṭṭhapāla known or seen or heard that he has gone forth from the home life into homelessness?"

42. "These, Master Raṭṭhapāla, are the four kinds of loss, undergoing which some people here shave off hair and beard, put on the yellow cloth and go forth from the home life into homelessness. Master Raṭṭhapāla has none of these. What has he known or seen or heard that he has gone forth from the home life into homelessness?"

43. "Great King, there are four Summaries of the Teaching (*dhammuddesa*), which have been given by the Blessed One, who knows and sees, who is accomplished and fully enlightened. Knowing and seeing and hearing them, I went forth from the home life into homelessness. What are the four?"

44. "'(Life in any) world is unstable; it is swept away': this is the first Summary of the Teaching given by the Blessed One who knows and sees, who is accomplished and fully enlightened. Knowing and seeing and hearing it, I went forth from the home life into homelessness."

45. "'(Life in any) world has no shelter and no protector': this is the second Summary of the Teaching given ..."

46. "'(Life in any) world has nothing of its own; it has to leave all and pass on': this is the third Summary of the Teaching given ..."

47. "'(Life in any) world is incomplete, is insatiate and the slave of craving': this is the fourth Summary of the Teaching given by the Blessed One who knows and sees, who is accomplished and fully enlightened. Knowing and seeing and hearing it, I went forth from the home life into homelessness."¹⁵

48. "These, great King, are the four Summaries of the Teaching given by the Blessed One who knows and sees, who is accomplished and fully enlightened. Knowing and seeing and hearing them, I went forth from the home life into homelessness."

49. "'(Life in any) world is unstable; it is swept away,' was what Master Raṭṭhapāla said. But how should the meaning of that statement be understood?"

"What do you think about this, Great King: when you were twenty years old and twenty five years old, were you an expert rider of elephants, an expert horseman, an expert charioteer, an expert bowman, an expert swordsman, strong in thigh and arm, sturdy and proficient in warfare?"

"Certainly, Master Raṭṭhapāla, at the age of twenty and twenty five years, I was an expert rider of elephants, sturdy and proficient in warfare; sometimes I thought that I had superhuman strength.¹⁶ I saw none who could equal me in strength."

"And now, great King, what do you think: are you still so strong in thigh and arm, sturdy and proficient in warfare?"

¹⁵ "Summaries of the Teaching" (*dhammuddesa*). The Pali text of these four terse maxims is as follows:

1. *Upanīyati loko addhuvō'ti*
2. *Attāno loko anabhissaro'ti*
3. *Assako loko, sabbaṃ pahāya gamanīyan'ti.*
4. *Uṇo loko atitto taṇhādāso'ti.*

¹⁶ *Iddhimā'va*, lit. "as if possessed of magical power."

“No, Master Raṭṭhapāla. Now I am old, aged, burdened with years, advanced in life, and have come to the last stage. My years have turned eighty. Sometimes I mean to put my foot here and I put it elsewhere.”

“It was on account of this, great King, that the Blessed One, who knows and sees, who is accomplished and fully enlightened, said, ‘(Life in any) world is unstable; it is swept away;’ and when I knew and saw and heard that, I went forth from the home life into homelessness.”

“It is wonderful, Master Raṭṭhapāla, it is marvellous. How well that has been expressed by the Blessed One, who knows and sees, who is accomplished and fully enlightened: ‘(Life in any) world is unstable; it is swept away,’ for so it is indeed!”

50. “Master Raṭṭhapāla, there are in this court elephant troops and cavalry and chariot troops and infantry, which will serve to subdue any threat to us. Now Master Raṭṭhapāla has said that ‘Life, (in any world) has no shelter and no protector.’ How should the meaning of that statement be understood?”

“What do you think about this, great King: have you any chronic illness?”

“I have a chronic wind sickness, Master Raṭṭhapāla. Sometimes my friends and companions, my relatives and kin, stand round me (thinking): ‘Now King Koravya is about to die! Now King Koravya is about to die!’”

“Now, great King, what do you think? Can you have it thus with your friends and companions, your relatives and kin: ‘Come my good friends and companions, my relatives and kin! Let all of you present share out this pain, so that my feeling of pain should be less; or do you have to experience that feeling of pain all by yourself alone?’”

“No, Master Raṭṭhapāla, I cannot have it thus (that my friends and companions, my relatives and kin, share out my feeling of pain), but I have to experience my pain all by myself alone.”

“It was on account of this, great King, that the Blessed One, who knows and sees, who is accomplished and fully enlightened, said, ‘(Life in any) world has no shelter and no protector;’ when I knew and saw and heard that, I went forth from the home life into homelessness.”

“It is wonderful, Master Raṭṭhapāla, it is marvellous! How well that has been expressed by the Blessed One! ‘(Life in any) world has no shelter and no protector;’ for so it is indeed!”

51. “Master Raṭṭhapāla, there is in this court ample gold coin and bullion stored away both in the ground and above it. Now Master Raṭṭhapāla has said that ‘(Life in any) world has nothing of its own; it has to leave all and pass on.’ How should the meaning of this statement be understood?”

“What do you think about this, great King? You are now furnished and endowed with the five fields of sensual desires and enjoy them. But can you have it thus of the life to come: ‘May I be likewise furnished and endowed with these five fields of sensual desires and enjoy them!?’ Or will others take over this property, while you will have to pass on according to your actions?”

“I cannot have it thus, Master Raṭṭhapāla. On the contrary, others will take over this property while I shall have to pass on according to my actions.”

“It was on account of this, great King, that the Blessed One said, ‘(Life in any) world has nothing of its own; it has to leave all and pass on.’ When I knew and saw and heard that, I went forth from the home life into homelessness.”

“It is wonderful, Master Raṭṭhapāla; how well that has been expressed by the Blessed One: ‘(Life in any) world has nothing of its own; it has to leave all and pass on;’ for so it is indeed!”

52. ““(Life in any) world is incomplete, is insatiate and is the slave of craving,’ was what Master Raṭṭhapāla said; but how should the meaning of that statement be understood?”

“What do you think, great King: do you live in this prosperous Kuru country as its ruler?”

Yes, Master Raṭṭhapāla, I do.”

“What do you think about this, great King? If a trust- worthy and reliable man came to you from the east and said, ‘Please to know, great King, that I come from the east, and there I saw a large country, powerful and rich, very populous and crowded with men. There are plenty of elephant troops there, plenty of cavalry, plenty of chariot troops, and plenty of infantry; there is plenty of ivory there, and plenty of gold and bullion both unworked and worked, and there are plenty of women for wives. With such and such a force you can conquer it. Conquer it then, great King!’ What would you do?”

“We should conquer it and live there as its ruler, Master Raṭṭhapāla.”

“What do you think about this, great King? If a trustworthy and reliable man came to you from the west ... from the north ... from the south, and said ‘There I saw a large country. ... Conquer it, great King!’ What would you do?”

“We should conquer it, too, and live there as its ruler, Master Raṭṭhapāla.”

“It was on account of this, great King, that the Blessed One who knows and sees, who is accomplished and fully enlightened, said, ‘(Life in any) world is incomplete, is insatiate and the slave of craving,’ and when I knew and saw and heard that, I went forth from the home life into homelessness.”

‘It is wonderful, Master Raṭṭhapāla, it is marvellous how well that has been expressed by the Blessed One, who knows and sees, who is accomplished and fully enlightened: ‘(Life in any) world is incomplete, insatiate and the slave of craving,’ for so it is indeed!’”

53. That is what the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla said and having thus spoken, he said further:

54.

1. “I see men wealthy in the world who yet
Give not, from ignorance, their gathered riches,
But greedily will hoard away their wealth,
Through longing for still further sensual pleasures.
2. A king who by his force conquered the earth
And even lords the land the ocean bounds,
Is yet unsated with the sea’s near shore
And hungers for its further shore as well.
3. Most other men as well, not just a king,
Encounter death with craving unabated;
With plans still incomplete they leave the corpse,
Desires remain unsated in the world.
4. His relatives lament him, rend their hair,
Crying ‘Ah me! Alas! Our love is dead!’
Then bear away the body wrapped in shrouds,
To place it on a pyre and burn it there.

5. Clad in a single shroud, he leaves behind
His property, impaled on stakes he burns,
And as he died, no relatives or kin
Or friends could offer refuge to him here.
6. The while his heirs annex his wealth, this being
Must now arise according to his deeds;
And as he dies nothing can follow him:
Nor child nor wife nor wealth nor royal estate.
7. Longevity is not acquired with wealth,
Nor can prosperity banish old age;
Short is this life, as all the sages say,
Eternity it knows not, only change.
8. The rich man and the poor man both shall feel
(Death's) touch, as do the fool and sage alike;
But while the fool lies stricken by his folly,
No sage will ever tremble at the touch.
9. Better than wealth is understanding, then,
By which the final goal can here be gained;
For, doing evil deeds in many lives,
Men fail, through ignorance, to reach the goal.
10. As one goes to the womb and to another world,
Renewing the successive round, so others
With no more understanding, trusting him
Go also to the womb and to another world.
11. Just as a robber caught in burglary,
An evil-doer, suffers for his deed,
So people after death, in the next world,
The evil-doers, suffer for their deeds.
12. Sense-pleasures, varied, sweet, delightful,
In many different ways disturb the mind.
Seeing the peril in these sensual joys,
Oh King! I chose to lead the homeless life.
13. As fruits fall from the tree; so also men,
Both young and old, fall when this body breaks
Seeing this too, I have gone forth, O King!
Better by far is the monk's life assured."¹⁷
- 14.

¹⁷ *Apaṇṇakaṃ sāmāññam eva seyyo*. In the commentary to MN 60, the term *apaṇṇaka* is explained as “not contrary (incontradictible, incontrovertible), doubtless, definitely acceptable” (see The Wheel No. 98/99, p. 19).

Ratṭhapāla's Verses

From the *Songs of the Brethren* (Theragāthā). Translated by C. A. F. Rhys Davids

Full of high confidence I left the world
And joined the Order of the Conqueror,
Blameless my going forth has been, and free
From debt I live on my allotted share.

Looking on sense-desires as fire alight,
On gold and silver as a (noxious) knife,
(On life) from entry in the womb as ill,
And on the fearsome perils of the hells:

Seeing, I say, great evils everywhere,
Thereat was I with anguish sore beset.
Then to me, pierced and wounded as I was,
Came fourfold victory: o'er sense-desires,
O'er rebirth, error, ignorance. Victory!

The Master has my fealty and love,
And all the Buddha's bidding has been done.
Low have I laid the heavy load I bore,
Cause for rebirth is found in me no more.

The goal for which I bade the world farewell,
And left the home to dwell where home was not,
That highest Good have I accomplished,
And every bond and fetter is destroyed.

(vv. 789-792)

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