

Raṭṭhapāla Sutta

“Raṭṭhapāla”

Translated by Bhikkhu Candana

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I have personally heard this.

At one time, The Blessed One was walking through the Kuru country with a large Sangha of Bhikkhus, when He arrived at the town of Kurus named Thullakoṭṭhita.

Then, the news quickly spread, as the brahmin householders of Thullakoṭṭhita heard that The Blessed One having walked through the Kuru country, has now arrived with a large Sangha of Bhikkhus at their town of Thullakoṭṭhita.

Further, they discussed how a good report has spread about the Recluse Gautama, that The Blessed One, being the Son of the Sākyans, and having gone forth from the Royal Sākyan clan, has already gained the delightful reputation for:

‘Being an Arahant, The Perfectly Awakened One, endowed with Sublime Knowledge and Supremely Pure Conduct; the Well-Gone, the Knower of worlds, the Incomparable Tamer of those to be tamed, the Teacher of gods and humans, Enlightened and Blessed.

And having realized and understood this world with direct knowledge, together with its gods and humans, Māras, Brahmās, as well as the community of recluses and brahmins, He reveals it, making it known for everyone. He teaches the Dhamma that is beautiful in its beginning, beautiful in its middle, and beautiful in its end. He does this while giving its full and correct meaning and phrasing, clearly revealing thus, the spiritual life that is utterly perfect and pure. Therefore, it would be wonderful indeed, to be able to see such Arahants!’

In this manner, the householders of Thullakoṭṭhita went and approached The Blessed One. Once there, some of these householders paid homage to The Blessed One, and after exchanging cordial and friendly greetings with Him, they sat to one side. Others extended their joint palms greeting The Blessed One while still standing, and then sat to one side. Still others announced who they were, as well as their clan’s name, and then quietly went and sat to one side.

Once everyone was seated, The Blessed One instructed them with His encouraging words, as He inspired them, by gladdening and lightening up the hearts and minds of the householders of Thullakoṭṭhita, with His moving discourse on the Dhamma.

Meanwhile, the son of the clan’s chief, Raṭṭhapāla, was there seated with them in that gathering, and it suddenly occurred to him:

‘The way I see and understand the Dhamma instructed by The Blessed One, it is not easy to lead the Holy Life in its completeness, in all its purity, living a blameless and stainless life, while I still continue being a householder!

Now, what if I go ahead and shave my head and beard, put on the Bhikkhu’s maroon robes and go forth by leaving the household life and becoming homeless?’

Then, the brahmin householders of Thullakoṭṭhita, having been instructed by The Blessed One with His encouraging words which inspired them, while gladdening and lightening up their hearts and minds, arose from their seats and delightedly paid their respect to Him. And after circumambulating The Blessed One while keeping Him to their right side, they left.

Soon after the brahmin householders of Thullakoṭṭhita had gone, the chief clansman’s son, the householder Raṭṭhapāla, approached The Blessed One, and after worshipping Him with his head at the Teacher’s feet, he sat on one side, and addressed The Blessed One by saying:

“Bhante, the way I see and understand the Dhamma instructed by The Blessed One, it is not easy to lead the Holy Life in its completeness, in all its purity, living a blameless and stainless life, while I still continue being a householder!

“Now, I desire to go ahead and shave my head and beard, put on the Bhikkhu’s maroon robes, and go forth by leaving the household life and becoming homeless! Therefore, Bhante, I kindly ask to be given the Going Forth and the Higher Ordination!”

“Raṭṭhapāla, have you already obtained the permission to Go Forth from home life into homelessness from your mother or father?”

“Bhante, I have not obtained the permission to Go Forth from home life into homelessness from either my mother or father.”

“Raṭṭhapāla, the Tathāgata does not give the Going Forth from home life into homelessness without the permission of mother or father.”

“In that case, Bhante, I will go and obtain my parents’ permission for the going forth.”

Then, the householder’s son Raṭṭhapāla arose from his seat and paid homage to The Blessed One, as he then circumambulated Him and left to go speak with his parents.

Once there, he approached both his mother and father, and said:

“Mother and father, the way I see and understand the Dhamma instructed by The Blessed One, it is not easy to lead the Holy Life in its completeness, in all its purity, living a blameless and stainless life, while I still continue being a householder!

“Now, I desire to go ahead and shave my head and beard, put on the Bhikkhu’s maroon robes and go forth by leaving the household life and becoming homeless!”

Then, having expressed his desire to his parents thus, the clansman Ratṭhapāla's parents turned to him and said:

“Dearest Ratṭhapāla, you are our only son, and you are very precious to us and we love you very much! You have been a cause for much delight for us, bringing us so much joy and pleasure, as we raised you with such happiness as well as comfort. Therefore, our dear Ratṭhapāla, you have no idea about suffering and the absence of pleasure and delight!

“So, please come, Ratṭhapāla! Continue partaking of these pleasures, enjoying all the delight that sensual pleasures could offer you, while you can still go ahead and engage as much as you like in merit-building actions. We do not give you our permission to Go Forth. After all, already we dread the day that we will lose each other and not see you anymore; so how could we even tolerate you going forth from home life into homelessness while we are still alive?”

For the second time, and up to a third time, Ratṭhapāla addressed his mother and father, while requesting:

“Mother and father, the way I see and understand the Dhamma instructed by The Blessed One, it is not easy to lead the Holy Life in its completeness, in all its purity, living a blameless and stainless life, while I still continue being a householder!

“Now, I desire to go ahead and shave my head and beard, put on the Bhikkhu's maroon robes and go forth by leaving the household life and becoming homeless!”

Thus, having expressed his desire to his parents for a second and a third time, the clansman Ratṭhapāla's parents turned to him and said for a second and a third time:

“Dearest Ratṭhapāla, you are our only son, and you are very precious to us and we love you very much! You have been a cause for much delight for us, bringing us so much joy and pleasure, as we raised you with such happiness as well as comfort. Therefore, our dear Ratṭhapāla, you have no idea about suffering and the absence of pleasure and delight!

“So, please come, Ratṭhapāla! Continue partaking of these pleasures, enjoying all the delight that sensual pleasures could offer you, while you can still go ahead and engage as much as you like in merit-building actions. We do not give you our permission to Go Forth. After all, already we dread the day that we will lose each other and not see you anymore; so how could we even tolerate you going forth from home life into homelessness while we are still alive?”

Then, not having obtained his parents' permission, the householder Ratṭhapāla thought to himself: *‘Well, it seems that my parents are set on their decision to not give their permission!’*

So, he decided to just lay down on the floor, refusing to eat or drink, as he exclaimed to them:

“Either I go forth from home life into homelessness, or I die right here in front of you! Because, if you don't give me the permission to go forth, you will **only** have my dead body left for you: the only way for you to remove me from here!”

Then, the householder Ratṭhapāla's parents again said:

“Dearest Ratṭhapāla, you are our only son, and you are very precious to us and we love you very much! You have been a cause for much delight for us, bringing us so much joy and pleasure, as we raised you with such happiness as well as comfort. Therefore, our dear Ratṭhapāla, you have no idea about suffering and the absence of pleasure and delight!

“So, please come, Ratṭhapāla! Continue partaking of these pleasures, enjoying all the delight that sensual pleasures could offer you, while you can still go ahead and engage as much as you like in merit-building actions. We do not give you our permission to Go Forth. After all, already we dread the day that we will lose each other and not see you anymore; so how could we even tolerate you going forth from home life into homelessness while we are still alive?

“So, please, get up from the floor, dear Ratṭhapāla! Come and eat, drink, and enjoy yourself to the fullest, and just stop this!

Having heard his parents' refusal again, Ratṭhapāla became quiet and said no more.

Then, for a second and a third time, both his mother and father said to him:

“Dearest Ratṭhapāla, you are our only son, and you are very precious to us, and we love you very much! You have been a cause for much delight for us, bringing us so much joy and pleasure, as we raised you with such happiness as well as comfort. Therefore, our dear Ratṭhapāla, you have no idea about suffering and the absence of pleasure and delight!

“So, please come, Ratṭhapāla! Continue partaking of these pleasures, enjoying all the delight that sensual pleasures could offer you, while you can still go ahead and engage as much as you like in merit-building actions. We do not give you our permission to Go Forth. After all, already we dread the day that we will lose each other and not see you anymore; so how could we even tolerate you going forth from home life into homelessness while we are still alive?

“So, please, get up from the floor, dear Ratṭhapāla! Come and eat, drink, and enjoy yourself to the fullest, and just stop this!

But the householder Ratṭhapāla continued to remain silent and said nothing to them, while lying down on the floor motionless.

Then, getting desperate, both mother and father of the householder Ratṭhapāla, decided to go and see their son's friends, beseeching them to talk to Ratṭhapāla in an attempt to have him change his mind, while telling them:

“Your dear friend Ratṭhapāla has now thrown himself onto the floor, lying down and refusing to get up! He is telling us:

*‘Either I go forth from home life into homelessness, or I die right here in front of you! Because, if you don’t give me the permission to go forth, you will **only** have my dead body left for you: the only way for you to remove me from here!’*

“So, please, good sirs! Come and talk to your dear friend Raṭṭhapāla, by telling him:

‘Our dear friend, Raṭṭhapāla, you are the only son your parents have! You are very precious to them and they love you very much! You have been a cause for much delight for them, as you have brought them so much joy and pleasure, and they have raised you with such happiness as well as comfort. Therefore, dear Raṭṭhapāla, you have no idea about suffering and the absence of pleasure and delight!’

‘So, please come, Raṭṭhapāla! Continue partaking of these pleasures, enjoying all the delight that sensual pleasures could offer you, while you can still go ahead and engage as much as you like in merit-building actions. But they will not be giving you permission to Go Forth. After all, already they dread the day when they will lose each other and not see you anymore; so how could they even tolerate you going forth from home life into homelessness while they are still alive?’

‘So, please, get up from the floor, dear Raṭṭhapāla! Come and eat, drink, and enjoy yourself to the fullest, and just stop this!’”

Then, Raṭṭhapāla’s friends, all agreeing to help their friend’s parents, quickly went and approached Raṭṭhapāla and said:

“Our dear friend, Raṭṭhapāla, you are the only son your parents have! You are very precious to them and they love you very much! You have been a cause for much delight for them, as you have brought them so much joy and pleasure, and they have raised you with such happiness as well as comfort. Therefore, dear Raṭṭhapāla, you have no idea about suffering and the absence of pleasure and delight!

‘So, please come, Raṭṭhapāla! Continue partaking of these pleasures, enjoying all the delight that sensual pleasures could offer you, while you can still go ahead and engage as much as you like in merit-building actions. But they will not be giving you permission to Go Forth. After all, already they dread the day when they will lose each other and not see you anymore; so how could they even tolerate you going forth from home life into homelessness while they are still alive?’

“So, please, get up from the floor, dear Raṭṭhapāla! Come and eat, drink, and enjoy yourself to the fullest, and just stop this!”

But the householder Raṭṭhapāla continued to remain silent and said nothing to them, while lying down on the floor motionless, refusing to eat or drink.

Then, for a second and a third time, Raṭṭhapāla’s friends repeated their plea to him, by saying:

“Our dear friend, Raṭṭhapāla, you are the only son your parents have! You are very precious to them and they love you very much! You have been a cause for much delight for them, as you have brought them so much joy and pleasure, and they have raised you with such happiness as well as comfort. Therefore, dear Raṭṭhapāla, you have no idea about suffering and the absence of pleasure and delight!

‘So, please come, Raṭṭhapāla! Continue partaking of these pleasures, enjoying all the delight that sensual pleasures could offer you, while you can still go ahead and engage as much as you like in merit-building actions. But they will not be giving you their permission to Go Forth. After all, already they dread the day when they will lose each other and not see you anymore; so how could they even tolerate you going forth from home life into homelessness while they are still alive?

“So, please, get up from the floor, dear Raṭṭhapāla! Come and eat, drink, and enjoy yourself to the fullest, and just stop this!”

And for a second and a third time, the householder Raṭṭhapāla continued to remain silent and said nothing to them, while lying down on the floor motionless, refusing to eat or drink.

Then, on witnessing this, Raṭṭhapāla’s friends went back to his mother and father and reported:

“Mother, father, the clansman Raṭṭhapāla is still lying on the floor refusing to eat, as he continues insisting:

*‘Either I go forth from home life into homelessness, or I die right here in front of you! Because, if you don’t give me the permission to go forth, you will **only** have my dead body left for you: the only way for you to remove me from here!’*

“So, the way we see it, if you insist on not giving him your permission to go forth from home life into homelessness, then surely, he will indeed die right there on the spot!

“However, if you do give him your permission to go forth from home life into homelessness, then, at the very least, you will still get to see him again, albeit in the form of a recluse; still your son, but one who has gone forth.

“But, if one day Raṭṭhapāla were to become displeased and unhappy with living the holy life, dissatisfied with living the life of a recluse, and not knowing what to do, he would then know where to come back to, for you would still be there for him, still being his parents!

“So, you see, given the situation, it would be much better if you could just give him your permission to go forth from home life into homelessness.”

“In that case, dear ones, we do give Raṭṭhapāla our permission to go forth from home life into homelessness. But he should come and visit us, often!”

Then, Raṭṭhapāla’s friends quickly went back to their friend and reported:

“Rise up, Raṭṭhapāla, dear friend! You have it! Your parents have now given you the permission to go forth from home life into homelessness! But once you have ordained and become a recluse, you *must* come back and see them, often.”

Then, the householder Raṭṭhapāla delightedly got up, and after nourishing and regaining back his energy, he quickly went and approached The Blessed One, and after paying homage to Him, sat to one side and said:

“Bhante, I have now received the permission from both my parents to go forth from home life into homeless!”

Thus, Raṭṭhapāla was able to receive the going forth, as well as the Higher Ordination, in the presence of The Blessed One.

Two weeks after conferring the higher ordination to the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla, and having lived as long as he liked in Thullakoṭṭhita, The Blessed One left the monastery on a tour in the direction of Sāvattḥī, which He did in stages.

Once there, The Blessed One lived in the monastery offered by Anāthapiṇḍika, in Jeta’s Park. It was there, that the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla, while living secluded, withdrawn from all things offered by the world and fully attentive, kept resolute in his practice. And before long, through his equally diligent dedication, he soon realized for himself the very Truth, the very Freedom, for the sake of which many good sons of families leave the home life, for the correct reason, and rightfully go forth into homelessness.

Thus, he attained to the Noble End of the Holy Life, as he finally understood it for himself, in this very birth, in the here and now, knowing for sure, with direct understanding:

*Birth is now finally destroyed.
The Holy Life has been fully lived, with its Goal achieved.
There is no more coming back to any state of becoming.*

And in this way, the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla became one of the perfect ones.

Then, the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla went and approached The Blessed One, and after paying homage to Him, he sat to one side and said:

“Bhante, I wish to visit my mother and father, if The Blessed One gives me permission to do so.”

Then, The Blessed One looked into the heart of Raṭṭhapāla, to see if there could be any chance that the situations, he was to encounter on his journey by visiting his parents, might in any way come to cloud the purity of the Dhamma in his heart.

Thus, having seen for certain that there would be no possibility whatsoever for Raṭṭhapāla to ever fall back by giving up the robes, by returning to lead a household life, He instructed Raṭṭhapāla by saying:

“Raṭṭhapāla, you may now go and do whatever you deem appropriate.”

Then, the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla got up from his seat, and after paying his respect by circumambulating The Blessed One, he went and put his living quarters into order, and then took the alms bowl along with his outer robe, as he left on a journey towards his hometown of Thullakoṭṭhita.

After having traveled in stages, the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla finally arrived there, as he went and chose King Koravya’s deer hunting grounds of Thullakoṭṭhita, as his place of dwelling.

When it was morning, having put on his robes and taking his alms bowl and outer robe with him, the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla entered Thullakoṭṭhita to collect his meal.

As he approached his family’s home, his father was at the main entrance to the hall of their mansion, combing his hair.

Now, when the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla’s father saw him coming in the distance, he shouted with resentment:

“Ah, it is because of you shaven headed ones, that I lost my one and only dear son, as you made him go forth!”

In this manner, and at his own family home, the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla was not provided with any morsels of food, and instead of being given an indifferent rejection or a polite refusal, he became the object of insults by none other than his own father.

Meanwhile, on seeing one of the female slaves of his earlier home in the process of throwing away some leftover food and stale bread, the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla addressed her by saying:

“Sister, if you are going to throw away that food, you could instead put it in my bowl.”

Now, as that female slave was putting the leftover food and stale bread into the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla’s bowl, she kept looking at the features of his hands and feet, and in hearing his voice, she suddenly recognized that it was in fact, her old master, now the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla, who had come back. She then quickly rushed back into the house to her mistress, the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla’s mother, and exclaimed:

“My noble lady, your noble son Raṭṭhapāla is here! He has indeed come back!”
And the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla’s mother then expressed her joy by telling her:

“My child, if you are *indeed* telling me the truth, then I will make you a free woman and release you from slavery!”

Then, the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla’s mother rushed outside and approached her husband, the Venerable’s father, and told him:

“Householder, do you know that our noble son Raṭṭhapāla has come back? He is here!”

Meanwhile, the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla had already gone away and found the shade of a wall, and while seated under it, he was eating the leftover food with stale bread, in seclusion.

Then, the venerable Raṭṭhapāla’s father came and found his son, as he addressed the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla by saying:

“My dearest Raṭṭhapāla, why are you eating that leftover food and stale bread? You do have a home you could return to, where you will be served the best of foods!”

“And where, householder, would this home for the homeless be, that you speak of? After all, we just came to your house, yet not only did we not receive any morsels of food, or even an indifferent rejection or a polite refusal, but instead we were subjected to insults and abuse, by none other than you, householder, my father.

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

“Enough, householder! I have already finished my meal for today.”

“Then, my dear Raṭṭhapāla, please accept tomorrow’s meal at our house.”

And the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla accepted the invitation for the meal dāna, through his silence.

On seeing that the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla had accepted his invitation for the next day’s meal, his father went back to the house. Once there, he gathered all the gold in their treasure house and piled them into separate mounds, inside the home, covering them all up with mats.

Then, he called to him the previous wives of then clansman Raṭṭhapāla, advising them to adorn and prepare themselves to look beautiful and seductive, whereby his son would find them attractive and irresistible.

Next, he went and began seeing to it that the preparations were under way for the next day’s meal, while making sure there would be all kinds of nourishing foods and drinks too, to be offered at his home.

When it was already morning, the father went and approached the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla, and informed him:

“My dear Raṭṭhapāla, the food is now ready.”

Then, having put on his robes and by taking his alms bowl and outer robe with him, the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla entered his father’s house, his old home, and sat on the prepared seat.

Meanwhile, his father reached over and pulled away the mats to reveal to the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla the mounds of gold hidden underneath it, and said:

“My dear son, Raṭṭhapāla, this is the wealth you have inherited from your mother, and this is the wealth you have inherited from your father, and this is the wealth that you have inherited from your grandfather.

“Dear Raṭṭhapāla, you can enjoy all this wealth and make merits at the same time! Come, my son Raṭṭhapāla, give up these robes already, take all this wealth that is yours, and make as much merits as you like!”

“Householder, if you were to ask me, I would say take all this gold you have amassed, put them into carts and just dump them in a whirlpool in the middle of the Ganges. And why do I say this? Because, householder, gathering all this wealth has already caused you so much pain and grief, along with sorrow, lamentation, suffering, depression and anguish.”

Then, the previous wives of the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla, disguising and having adorned themselves in various ways, came out and said:

“Noble son, what are those celestial nymphs like, for whom you have given up everything, to go and lead the celibate holy life?”

“Sisters, I did not go forth to lead the Holy Life on account of some celestial nymphs.”

On hearing how he addressed them as “sisters,” the former wives of the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla from when he was a householder, exclaimed:

“Our lord has just called us ‘sisters!’ as they fell down and fainted.

Then, the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla said to his father:

“Householder, if there is food you intend to offer, then simply offer it, and do not trouble us any further.”

And his father said:

“Please eat, my dear son Raṭṭhapāla!” and with his own hands, his father served and satisfied the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla with nourishing foods and drinks.

Later, having finished his meal, the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla put aside his bowl, and by getting up from his seat, he uttered these verses:

*“Behold this fathom long body, all decked, standing upright,
Yet, it is nothing but a collection of abscesses and sores.
Always subject to disease and sickness,
A bundle of unending concerns and worries,
Always facing the reality of unavoidable and ceaseless instability.*

*Look at the comely form you try to decorate,
By putting on shiny jewelry, and your golden earrings
When all the while, you secretly try to hide the skeleton underneath.
Adorning yourselves with attractive and seductive clothes.*

*Painting your feet with red henna,
While smearing your face with all kinds of powders and creams;
All that may be effective to sell yourselves to deluded fools
But not for those, who go searching
For what lies beyond, on the farther shore.*

*Weaving your hair into eight separate braids,
Smeared with eyeliners, mascaras, and different shades to seduce with the eyes;
All that may be effective to sell yourselves to deluded fools
But not for those, who go searching
For what lies beyond, on the farther shore.*

*Despite all these ornaments you wear,
Trying to make it seem like a decorated box of fine ointments,
This rotting body of filth, nevertheless, continues to decay;
All that may be effective to sell yourselves to deluded fools
But not for those, who go searching
For what lies beyond, on the farther shore.*

*The hunter set up his noose,
But the deer, despite having eaten the bait,
Neither set off the trap, nor was caught in its snare.
And now I leave,
Leaving the hunter who tried to trap me behind,
Weeping, in disarray.”*

Then, the Venerable Ratṭhapāla, having spoken these verses as he stood in his old family home, left and went back to where his temporary dwelling was, on the deer hunting grounds of King Koravya of Thullakoṭṭhita. Once there, he sat under a tree, eager to spend the rest of the day in seclusion.

Meanwhile, King Koravya instructed his grounds’ keeper by saying:

“Friend groundskeeper, clear, tidy up, and prepare the hunting grounds, for we would like to come and spend the day at the park, enjoying its lovely and quiet scenery.”

And the deer park’s groundskeeper quickly went to work cleaning the hunting grounds, and while doing so, he saw the Venerable Ratṭhapāla seated under a tree, spending the day meditating. So, the deer park’s groundskeeper went and approached King Koravya and informed him by saying:

“Great King, as you have requested, the deer hunting grounds are all cleared and ready for your visit. However, there is the clansman Raṭṭhapāla’s son who has been sitting there under a tree, spending the day in meditation. He is the son of the chief clansman of Thullakoṭṭhita, whom you have often praised and spoken so highly of.”

And the king replied:

“In that case, friend groundskeeper, we will postpone our planned leisurely excursion to the park for the day and rearrange it for another time. Instead, today we will go and associate with our good master Raṭṭhapāla.”

Then, King Koravya gave away the food that had been prepared to be taken and enjoyed for the day, having all the nourishing and delicious foods and drinks be distributed among all those gathered there. By mounting his royal chariot and while being accompanied by other members of his court and entourage in their own carriages, he set off from the capital of Thullakoṭṭhita to go and see the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla at the deer hunting grounds.

Thus, accompanied by his royal retinue in all its royal splendor, King Koravya went as far as they could travel by chariots, and then dismounted and carried on the rest of the way on foot, as they approached the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla, and with great haste.

In seeing the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla, King Koravya exchanged friendly greetings with him and then stood to one side and said to the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla:

“Good sir, Master Raṭṭhapāla, please sit on this elephant rug,” as he offered his own seat to him.

“That won’t be necessary, Great King,” replied the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla, while adding, “You go ahead and sit on it. I am already seated.”

Then, the king sat on the prepared seat with the elephant rug, and said to the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla:

“Master Raṭṭhapāla, when people are faced with these four kinds of deterioration in life, it is then, that they go off and shave their head and beard, put on the maroon robes, and go forth from home life into homelessness. Now, what are these four?

“Master Raṭṭhapāla, it is deterioration or falling-off as a result of aging; deterioration due to loss of health and the coming on of illnesses; deterioration due to loss of wealth; and deterioration due to the loss of relations and companionships.

a) “Now, Master Raṭṭhapāla, the deterioration or falling-off as a result of aging comes when one advances in years, while getting nearer and closer to death, as one reaches the end of one’s life. It takes place when one starts reflecting:

‘I have now become old, aged, and decayed, having come to the end of life. It is not easy for me to make more money, or to accumulate wealth that has not yet been accumulated, nor to increase

upon the wealth that I have already worked to accumulate. What if, instead of all this pursuit after worldly gains, I was to shave off my head and beard, put on the maroon robes, and go forth from home life into homelessness?’

“Then, while overcome by old age and all the effects of decay that come along with getting older, one decides to shave one’s head and beard, puts on the maroon robes, and goes forth from home life into homelessness. This, therefore, is seen as a deterioration or falling off as a result of aging.

“Now, Master Raṭṭhapāla is still quite young, very much in the prime of youth, endowed with his black hair, thus in the first stage of life. So, the way I observe it, Master Raṭṭhapāla has not yet undergone any of the deterioration or falling-off spoken of, that comes as a result of aging. Now, if someone were to see or witness that to be the case, then one would have understood why Master Raṭṭhapāla has chosen to go forth from home life into homelessness. Yet, that is not the case here.

b) “And what, Master Raṭṭhapāla, is the deterioration due to loss of health and the coming on of illnesses?

“When someone becomes gravely ill, they then start reflecting:

‘I am now afflicted with illnesses and overcome by disease. It is not easy for me to make more money, or to accumulate wealth that has not yet been accumulated, nor to increase upon the wealth that I have already worked to accumulate. What if, instead of all this pursuit after worldly gains, I was to shave off my head and beard, put on the maroon robes, and go forth from home life into homelessness?’

“Then, while being afflicted and overcome by disease and illness, one decides to shave one’s head and beard, puts on the maroon robes, and goes forth from home life into homelessness. This, therefore, is seen as a deterioration due to loss of health and the coming on of illnesses.

“But Master Raṭṭhapāla is still quite young and free from illness, nor is he afflicted by any disorders, as far as I can observe. He is very much in the prime of youth, endowed with a healthy digestion, that is neither too hot nor too cold. So, the way I observe it, Master Raṭṭhapāla is not yet experiencing the deterioration or falling-off spoken of as a result of some disease, illness, or health issues. Now, if someone were to see or witness that to be the case, then one would have understood why Master Raṭṭhapāla has chosen to go forth from home life into homelessness. Yet, that is not the case here.

c) “And what, Master Raṭṭhapāla, is the deterioration due to loss of wealth?

“When someone is rich and wealthy, with the financial resources and the security that comes along with it, yet whether gradually or suddenly, he comes to lose all the wealth he had, they then start reflecting:

‘In the past, I used to be very rich, affluent, and possessing much financial resources, but now I am bankrupt, having lost it all. It is no longer easy for me to make more money, or to accumulate wealth that has not yet been accumulated, nor to increase upon the wealth that I have already worked to accumulate. What if, instead of all this pursuit after worldly gains, I was to shave off my head and beard, put on the maroon robes, and go forth from home life into homelessness?’

“Then, while afflicted and overcome by loss of wealth, one decides to shave one’s head and beard, puts on the maroon robes, and goes forth from home life into homelessness. This, therefore, is seen as a deterioration due to loss of wealth.

“But Master Ratṭhapāla comes from a prestigious and affluent family in our society, being the only son of the clan chief of Thullakoṭṭhita. After all, your family enjoys much wealth and the financial security that is the envy of all other clans. So, the way I observe it, Master Ratṭhapāla is not experiencing the loss of wealth, let alone being bankrupt of one’s ancestral inheritance. But if one were to see or witness such a thing, then one would have understood why Master Ratṭhapāla has chosen to go forth from home life into homelessness. Yet, that is not the case here.

d) “And what, Master Ratṭhapāla, is the deterioration due to the loss of relations and companionships?

“When someone has many friends, relatives, and numerous meaningful companionships established in his life, yet whether gradually or suddenly, he comes to lose them, for one reason or other, as they dwindle and fade away. Then, they start reflecting:

‘In the past, I used to have so many friends, relatives, and numerous meaningful companionships established in my life, but now, I have lost them all, as they all disappeared from my life for one reason or other. Also, it is no longer easy for me to make more money, or to accumulate wealth that has not yet been accumulated, nor to increase upon the wealth that I have already worked to accumulate. What if, instead of all this pursuit after worldly gains, I was to shave off my head and beard, put on the maroon robes, and go forth from home life into homelessness?’

“Then, while overcome by being alone, without any friends, relatives or companionships left for him to fall back on, one decides to shave one’s head and beard, puts on the maroon robes, and goes forth from home life into homelessness. This, therefore, is seen as a deterioration due to the loss of relations and companionships.

“But Master Ratṭhapāla comes from a family that has many relatives, with numerous friends and companionships that you have established, especially being the only son of the clan chief of Thullakoṭṭhita. So, the way I observe it, Master Ratṭhapāla is not experiencing the loss of friends and companionships, let alone of family and relatives. But if one were to see or witness such a thing, then one would have understood why Master Ratṭhapāla has chosen to go forth from home life into homelessness. Yet, that is not the case here.

“Therefore, Master Ratṭhapāla, these are the four deteriorations, which if one were to face in life, any one of them, then they might choose to shave their head and beard, put on the maroon robes, and go forth from home life into homelessness.

“But Master Raṭṭhapāla, none of these deteriorations are to be seen at present in your case. And this leads me to ask, Master Raṭṭhapāla, what was it that you witnessed, saw, or understood, that led you to go forth from home life into homelessness?”

“Great King, The Blessed One who knows and sees it all, having attained to the Dhamma and thus being the Perfectly Awakened One, has rightfully taught the Dhamma, while delineating the four aspects of existence, which as I came to listen to Him explain, I began seeing, witnessing, and understanding the truth in them, whereupon I decided to simply go forth from home life into homelessness. Now, what are these four?

A) *‘Living in any world is always going to be unstable; situations inevitably go through unexpected changes, while being constantly swept away.’*

“This, Great King, is the teaching on the first aspect of existence given by The Blessed One, who knows and sees, for He is the Accomplished and Perfectly Awakened One. Therefore, in seeing, witnessing, and understanding its truth, I decided to simply go forth from home life into homelessness.

B) *‘There is no substantial self (be it great or small), that could wield power (in any capacity) in existence, or to serve as a refuge or savior for anyone, in any world.’*

“This, Great King, is the teaching on the second aspect of existence given by The Blessed One, who knows and sees, for He is the Accomplished and Perfectly Awakened One. Therefore, in seeing, witnessing, and understanding its truth, I decided to simply go forth from home life into homelessness.

C) *‘No matter what has been acquired in any world, ultimately one can own or possess nothing, becoming destitute, for one is bound to leave it all behind, and depart empty handed.’*

“This, Great King, is the teaching on the third aspect of existence given by The Blessed One, who knows and sees, for He is the Accomplished and Perfectly Awakened One. Therefore, in seeing, witnessing, and understanding its truth, I decided to simply go forth from home life into homelessness.

D) *‘Existence is always engaged with wanting, for one is always in the quest for more, enslaved to ceaseless craving, never to be satiated.’*

“This, Great King, is the teaching on the fourth aspect of existence given by The Blessed One, who knows and sees, for He is the Accomplished and Perfectly Awakened One. Therefore, in seeing, witnessing, and understanding its truth, I decided to simply go forth from home life into homelessness.

“Hence, Great King, when The Blessed One, who knows and sees it all, having attained to the Dhamma and thus being the Perfectly Awakened One, while rightfully teaching the Dhamma, delineated these four aspects of life, I came to listen to Him explain each of them one by one.

There, I began to see, witness, and understand their truth, at which point I decided to simply go forth from home life into homelessness.

a) “Master Ratṭhapāla said, ‘*Living in any world is always going to be unstable; situations inevitably go through unexpected changes, while being constantly swept away.*’

“What is the correct way of understanding the full meaning of this statement?”

“Great King, was there a time when you were twenty or even twenty-five years of age? A time when you found yourself quite skilled at riding elephants, horses, chariots; a master at handling the bow and shooting an arrow; sharp and deadly in fighting with the sword? A period in your life when you had strong arms and legs and firmly believed in and enjoyed going into battle?”

“Ah, Master Ratṭhapāla, there was indeed such an amazing time in my life, when I was twenty or twenty-five years of age, when I was very skilled at riding elephants, horses, chariots, a master at handling the bow and shooting an arrow, sharp and deadly in fighting with the sword!

“At that time, I also had strong arms and legs and firmly believed that the best and most important thing for me would be to march into the battle. There was a time, indeed, when I thought I was invincible, and that there could be no one as powerful, let alone more powerful than me!”

“And how about now, Great King, do you still have that strength in your arms and legs, or even the ability to go into the battle, presently?”

“Oh no, dear Master Ratṭhapāla, I am already withered and weak, having aged and grown old, and now reached to the end of life. Presently, I am in my eightieth year and can barely stand, because whenever I take a step by putting my foot down, I realize it is not where it is supposed to be.’

“It is just for that reason, Great King, that The Blessed One, who knows and sees, being the Accomplished and Perfectly Awakened One, gave us the teaching on this first aspect of existence, by declaring: ‘*Living in any world is always going to be unstable; situations inevitably go through unexpected changes, while being constantly swept away.*’

“Therefore, in seeing, witnessing, and understanding this truth, I decided to simply go forth from home life into homelessness.

“These words are so true indeed, Master Ratṭhapāla, spoken by The Blessed One, who knows and sees, being the Accomplished and Perfectly Awakened One, when He declares: ‘*Living in any world is always going to be unstable; situations inevitably go through unexpected changes, while being constantly swept away,*’

“Such powerful and wonderfully spoken words, indeed! Because, after all, the world truly goes on changing and thus always remains unstable and never the same.

“But, Master Ratṭhapāla, in our royal court, we have entire armies of elephants, cavalries of horses, fleets of chariots and countless squadrons of army foot soldiers. They are always there ready to protect us from any kind of threats, to ensure safety for us, always standing by us in times of difficulty or peace.

b) “So, when Master Ratṭhapāla said, *‘There is no substantial self (be it great or small), that could wield power (in any capacity) in existence, or to serve as a refuge or savior for anyone, in any world.’*

“What is the correct way of understanding the full meaning of this statement?”

“Great King, do you have any chronic illnesses?”

“Yes, Master Ratṭhapāla, I do have a chronic illness related to the wind element as well as rheumatoid arthritis. In fact, on certain days the pain is so intense that it is too much for me to bear, where my friends, companions, court advisors, and blood relations, all become worried and exclaim to each other: *‘Our beloved King Koravya will surely die from all that pain!’*

“Now, Great King, is it possible for you to share or give away some of those horribly painful feelings you experience, with any of your friends, companions, court advisors, or blood relations, so that you may end up feeling less of that intense pain? Or are you the only one who experiences those intense painful feelings, all by yourself?”

“Oh no, Master Ratṭhapāla, it is impossible to share or give away some of those horribly painful feelings that I experience with any of my friends, companions, court advisors, or blood relations, so that I may end up feeling less of that intense pain. For, I am the only one who experiences those intense painful feelings, all by myself!

“So, you see, Great King, it is just for that reason, that The Blessed One, who knows and sees, being the Accomplished and Perfectly Awakened One, gave us the teaching on this second aspect of existence, by declaring: *‘There is no substantial self (be it great or small), that could wield power (in any capacity) in existence, or to serve as a refuge or savior for anyone, in any world.’*

“Therefore, in seeing, witnessing, and understanding this truth, I decided to simply go forth from home life into homelessness.”

“These words are so true indeed, Master Ratṭhapāla, spoken by The Blessed One, who knows and sees, being the Accomplished and Perfectly Awakened One, when He declares: *‘There is no substantial self (be it great or small), that could wield power (in any capacity) in existence, or to serve as a refuge or savior for anyone, in any world.’*

“Such powerful and wonderfully spoken words, indeed! Because, after all, there is no true safety or security in this world for painful experiences; therefore, no one could ever truly share the intensity of pain that one must bear alone, having to bear and endure the suffering of chronic illnesses, all on one’s own.

“But Master Ratṭhapāla, in our royal court we have limitless wealth with countless amounts of gold, stored into numerous treasure houses, where some are opened and used often, while others are still sealed shut, with no need to be tapped into.

c) “So, when Master Ratṭhapāla said, ‘*No matter what has been acquired in any world, ultimately one can own or possess nothing, becoming destitute, for one is bound to leave it all behind, and depart empty handed.*’

“What is the correct way of understanding the full meaning of this statement?”

“Great King, at present you are well provided for, as you have full access and availability to all sensual enjoyments that you could possibly have and indulge in through this body, with its five strands of sensual pleasures.

“Now, would you say that you are certain that in your next or future existence also, you will be able to have access to all those enjoyments of the five strands of sensuality, which you currently have?

“Or, would you have to give away all that you now possess, when you are dead and gone to face the consequences of your intentionally committed actions, *while* letting others take over those resources you once had, this time though, for *their* own sensory stimulation that *they* would enjoy and experience through *their* body?”

“Indeed, Master Ratṭhapāla, at present I am well provided for, as I have full access and availability to all sensual enjoyments that I can possibly have and indulge in through this body, with its five strands of sensual pleasures.

“Absolutely, therefore, I cannot be certain that in my next or future existence also, I would be able to have access to all those enjoyments of the five strands of sensuality, which I currently have.

“So, there is a far greater chance, if not a guarantee, that I *will* most certainly have to give away all that I now possess when I am dead and gone, to face the consequences of my intentionally committed actions, *while* letting others take over those resources I once had, this time though, for *their* own sensory stimulation that *they* would enjoy and experience through *their* body.”

“It is just for that reason, Great King, that The Blessed One, who knows and sees, being the Accomplished and Perfectly Awakened One, gave us the teaching on this third aspect of existence, by declaring: ‘*No matter what has been acquired in any world, ultimately one can own or possess nothing, becoming destitute, for one is bound to leave it all behind, and depart empty handed.*’

“Therefore, in seeing, witnessing, and understanding this truth, I decided to simply go forth from home life into homelessness.”

“These words are so true indeed, Master Ratṭhapāla, spoken by The Blessed One, who knows and sees, being the Accomplished and Perfectly Awakened One, when He declares: *‘No matter what has been acquired in any world, ultimately one can own or possess nothing, becoming destitute, for one is bound to leave it all behind, and depart empty handed.’*”

“Such powerful and wonderfully spoken words, indeed! Because, after all, destitute is the world! There can be no owner, for all that one owns or possesses, one has to leave it all behind, and continue to face alone whatever waits for him beyond death.”

d) “And when Master Ratṭhapāla said, *‘Existence is always engaged with wanting, for one is always in the quest for more; enslaved to ceaseless craving, never to be satiated.’*”

“What is the correct way of understanding the full meaning of this statement?”

“Great King, the vast Kuru country, which is under your rulership, is it prosperous?”

“Yes, Master Ratṭhapāla, the Kuru country that is under my sole rulership, is prosperous indeed.”

“Now imagine, Great King, that someone whose word you trust, comes to you from the east and informs you:

‘Great King, you must know this - in the east there is a state that is very prosperous, abundant in resources and densely populated. It has a large army of elephants, a vast fleet of horses, a great fleet of chariots, a large squadron of army foot soldiers! There is a great possibility for you to turn it into your loot, ready for the taking, along with its vast resources of gold and silver, as well as the women you can capture and make part of your harem.

‘Further, my Great King, I can tell you with certainty, therefore, how it is highly plausible that you could easily make that country your own with the available army and military might you currently possess.’

“Now, Great King, if you heard all this from a highly reliable source, one that you fully trust, what would you do?”

“Oh, Master Ratṭhapāla, I would surely strike and take over that country, and become its ruler as well!”

“And imagine further, Great King, that someone else, whose word you also trust, comes to you from the west, and another from the north, and another from the south, and each informs you:

‘Great King, you must know this - in the west, north, and south there is a state that is very prosperous, abundant in resources and densely populated. It has a large army of elephants, a vast fleet of horses, a great fleet of chariots, a large squadron of army foot soldiers! There is a great possibility for you to turn it into your loot, ready for the taking, along with its vast resources of gold and silver, as well as the women you can capture and make part of your harem.

‘Further, my Great King, I can tell you with certainty, therefore, how it is highly plausible that you could easily make that country your own with the available army and military might you currently possess.’

“Now, Great King, if you heard all this from highly reliable sources, ones that you fully trust, what would you do?”

“Oh, Master Raṭṭhapāla, I would surely strike each and every one of them and take over those countries and become their ruler as well!”

“So, you see, Great King, it is just for that reason, that The Blessed One, who knows and sees, being the Accomplished and Perfectly Awakened One, gave us the teaching on this fourth aspect of existence, by declaring: *‘Existence is always engaged with wanting, for one is always in the quest for more; enslaved to ceaseless craving, never to be satiated.’*

“Therefore, in seeing, witnessing, and understanding this truth, I decided to simply go forth from home life into homelessness.”

“These words are so true indeed, Master Raṭṭhapāla, spoken by The Blessed One, who knows and sees, being the Accomplished and Perfectly Awakened One, when He declares: *‘Existence is always engaged with wanting, for one is always in the quest for more; enslaved to ceaseless craving, never to be satiated.’*

“Such powerful and wonderfully spoken words, indeed! Because the world is always craving this or that, with a voracious appetite that cannot be satiated.”

Then, having said these words, the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla uttered these verses:

*“I see people in the world, rich, wealthy and lost in their abundance,
But, being blinded by their greed
They refuse to give anything, living so attached to what they have amassed.*

*“Unwilling to share or part ways with their possessions,
Following their ravenous appetite for more riches,
They look for more ways to indulge themselves in sense pleasures,
Meanwhile, they continue to hoard all they could grab and steal from others.*

*“The ruler who conquers by force,
Occupying and ruling over a vast territory is still not content,
Despite having an empire, spanning from sea to sea.*

*“Full of longing for more, he looks for ways to still expand his domain,
Eyeing those realms, which are beyond his reach,
Coveting more territories, no matter the means.*

*“But it is not just the common folk or regular people that will die,
For death is also the lot of rulers and kings,
Who, sooner or later, will all go to join the caravan of the unsatiated.
The faithful prisoners of unsatisfied craving that continues beating in their hearts.*

*“Yet, they leave all their bodies behind,
With which they had done so much,
In their blind dedication and service to the flesh,
Blindly following their quest for more pleasurable stimulations,
Which could never be fulfilled.*

*“Meanwhile, families and relatives come to wail with disheveled hair,
Seeing them rolled up and wrapped in a single cloth, and now being carried away
On their one-way trip to be placed on some firewood,
To be burned all the way to the bone.*

*“While others stand there in shock, lamenting in grief,
As they realize the bitter truth; those who are now dead,
Despite what they believed, were not immortal, after all... indeed.*

*“Leaving all assets and all that was acquired behind in the unreachable abyss,
Straight to the funeral pyre one goes,
While covered up with nothing but shrouds.*

*“The dead, lying flat on their back,
Have no more possessions or stations of power left for them to seize;
With no loved ones either, relatives, companionships to become one's refuge,
Or friends to find shelter in, no matter how desperately they seek.*

*“The heirs, in the meantime, come and carry away his wealth,
Which has now become their loot,
As he goes, however, being pulled away, never to see or enjoy them again.
After all, the dead will always travel alone,
Unable to take with them anything:
Not their wives, children, kingdom, or name,
Except, of course, the weight of all that they have done.*

*“Long life can never be gained through the wealth one may possess,
Nor can he pay his way to get rid of decay, or eliminate old age,
Meanwhile, the wise teach again and again
How this life we live, is indeed short.
For it truly is impermanent, never eternal, but ever changing.*

*“The truth of this is felt and touched by both rich and poor,
Where the wise and the fool, all feel it, too.
But while the fool gets pulled into it by his idiocy, drowning in its woes,*

No wise sage, however, feels agitated or trembles, at the sight of death.

*“True wealth, therefore, is found
Not in acquiring things, but in gaining wisdom,
Which is the only way one can taste true Freedom.
Yet, due to their persistence in remaining ignorant,
So many refuse to pursue the Path, and instead keep moving and loitering around,
While committing evil in this life, then doing the same in the next.*

*“But the one who reenters the womb, is led by delusion,
Floating in Saṃsāra and moving from one world to another,
Identifying with each one of those existences as his very ‘own’ heritage;
Meanwhile, other fools lacking in wisdom, who gullibly take his words to be true,
Also fall into the trap, just like him, and go from womb to womb,
Caught in the snare of perpetual Saṃsāra.*

*“Much like the robber, who is caught red-handed,
Must face the consequences for his wrongful actions,
So must all those, who while alive though might somehow manage
To get away from facing what they have done, and paying for their evil deeds,
They will surely be made to suffer, and dearly so,
For all they have intentionally committed.
Thus, the evil doer is destroyed by his very own actions, in the next world, if not in this one.*

*“Sensuality is vivid, enticing, and pleasant,
Always comes disguised to win over the heart, disturbing it.
O! Great King, seeing the many dangers of sensuality, I went forth.*

*“Just like fruits on a tree, humans too fall, every single one,
When the body breaks down and death arrives,
Taking with it both the young and the old.
Seeing this too, I went forth, O! King.
Seeing clearly the choice to become a recluse, as the best of all.”*

Sādhū

Sādhū

Sādhū