MN 82 — With Raṭṭhapāla

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Text

Middle Discourses 82

With Raṭṭhapāla

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was wandering in the land of the Kurus together with a large Saṅgha of mendicants when he arrived at a town of the Kurus named Thullakoṭṭhika.

The brahmins and householders of Thullakoṭṭhika heard:

“It seems the ascetic Gotama—a Sakyan, gone forth from a Sakyan family—has arrived at Thullakoṭṭhika, together with a large Saṅgha of mendicants. He has this good reputation: ‘That Blessed One is perfected, a fully awakened Buddha, accomplished in knowledge and conduct, holy, knower of the world, supreme guide for those fit for training, teacher of gods and humans, awakened, blessed.’ He has realized with his own insight this world—with its gods, Māras, and divinities, this population with its ascetics and brahmins, gods and humans—and he makes it known to others. He teaches Dhamma that’s good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end, meaningful and well-phrased. And he reveals a spiritual practice that’s entirely full and pure. It’s good to see such perfected ones.”

Then the brahmins and householders of Thullakoṭṭhika went up to the Buddha. Before sitting down to one side, some bowed, some exchanged greetings and polite conversation, some held up their cupped palms toward the Buddha, some announced their name and clan, while some kept silent. When they were seated, the Buddha educated, encouraged, fired up, and inspired them with a Dhamma talk.

Now at that time a gentleman named Raṭṭhapāla, the son of the leading clan in Thullakoṭṭhika, was sitting in the assembly. He thought, “As I understand the Buddha’s teaching, it’s not easy for someone living at home to lead the spiritual life utterly full and pure, like a polished shell. Why don’t I shave off my hair and beard, dress in ocher robes, and go forth from lay life to homelessness?”

Then, having approved and agreed with what the Buddha said, the brahmins and householders of Thullakoṭṭhika got up from their seat, bowed and respectfully circled the Buddha, keeping him on their right, before leaving.

Soon after they left, Raṭṭhapāla went up to the Buddha, bowed, sat down to one side, and said to him, “Sir, as I understand the Buddha’s teaching, it’s not easy for someone living at home to lead the spiritual life utterly full and pure, like a polished shell. I wish to shave off

my hair and beard, dress in ocher robes, and go forth from the lay life to homelessness. Sir, may I receive the going forth, the ordination in the Buddha's presence? May the Buddha please give me the going forth!"

"But, Raṭṭhapāla, do you have your parents' permission?"

"No, sir."

"Raṭṭhapāla, Buddhas don't give the going forth to the child of parents who haven't given their permission."

"I'll make sure, sir, to get my parents' permission."

Then Raṭṭhapāla rose from his seat, bowed, and respectfully circled the Buddha. Then he went to his parents and said, "Mum and dad, as I understand the Buddha's teachings, it's not easy for someone living at home to lead the spiritual life utterly full and pure, like a polished shell. I wish to shave off my hair and beard, dress in ocher robes, and go forth from the lay life to homelessness. Please give me permission to go forth."

When he said this, Raṭṭhapāla's parents said to him, "But, dear Raṭṭhapāla, you're our only child. You're dear to us and we love you. You're pampered and raised in comfort. You know nothing of suffering. Even when you die we will lose you against our wishes. So how can we allow you to go forth while you're still alive?"

For a second time … For a third time, Raṭṭhapāla asked his parents for permission, but got the same reply.

Then Raṭṭhapāla thought, "My parents don't allow me to go forth." He laid down right there on the bare ground, saying, "I'll either die right here or go forth." And he refused to eat, up to the seventh meal.

Then Raṭṭhapāla's parents said to him, "Dear Raṭṭhapāla, you're our only child. You're dear to us and we love you. You're pampered and raised in comfort. You know nothing of suffering. When you die we will lose you against our wishes. So how can we allow you to go forth from lay life to homelessness while you're still living? Get up, Raṭṭhapāla! Eat, drink, and amuse yourself. While enjoying sensual pleasures, delight in making merit. We don't allow you to go forth. When you die we will lose you against our wishes. So how can we allow you to go forth while you're still alive?"

When they said this, Raṭṭhapāla kept silent.

For a second time, and a third time, Raṭṭhapāla's parents made the same request.

And for a third time, Raṭṭhapāla kept silent. Raṭṭhapāla's parents then went to see his friends. They told them of the situation and asked for their help.

Then Raṭṭhapāla's friends went to him and said, "Our dear Raṭṭhapāla, you are your parents' only child. You're dear to them and they love you. You're pampered and raised in comfort. You know nothing of suffering. When you die your parents will lose you against their wishes. So how can they allow you to go forth while you're still alive? Get up, Raṭṭhapāla! Eat, drink, and amuse yourself. While enjoying sensual pleasures, delight in

making merit. Your parents will not allow you to go forth. Even when you die your parents will lose you against their wishes. So how can they allow you to go forth while you're still alive?"

When they said this, Raṭṭhapāla kept silent.

For a second time … For a third time, Raṭṭhapāla's friends made the same request. And for a third time, Raṭṭhapāla kept silent.

Then Raṭṭhapāla's friends went to his parents and said, "Mum and dad, Raṭṭhapāla is lying there on the bare ground saying: 'I'll either die right here or go forth.' If you don't allow him to go forth, he'll die there. But if you do allow him to go forth, you'll see him again afterwards. And if he doesn't enjoy the renunciate life, where else will he have to go? He'll come right back here. Please give Raṭṭhapāla permission to go forth."

"Then, dears, we give Raṭṭhapāla permission to go forth. But once gone forth he must visit his parents."

Then Raṭṭhapāla's friends went to him and said, "Get up, Raṭṭhapāla! Your parents have given you permission to go forth from lay life to homelessness. But once gone forth you must visit your parents."

Raṭṭhapāla got up and regained his strength. He went to the Buddha, bowed, sat down to one side, and said to him, "Sir, I have my parents' permission to go forth from the lay life to homelessness. May the Buddha please give me the going forth."

And Raṭṭhapāla received the going forth, the ordination in the Buddha's presence. Not long after Venerable Raṭṭhapāla's ordination, a fortnight later, the Buddha—having stayed in Thullakoṭṭhika as long as he pleased—set out for Sāvatthī. Traveling stage by stage, he arrived at Sāvatthī, where he stayed in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery.

Then Venerable Raṭṭhapāla, living alone, withdrawn, diligent, keen, and resolute, soon realized the supreme culmination of the spiritual path in this very life. He lived having achieved with his own insight the goal for which gentlemen rightly go forth from the lay life to homelessness.

He understood: "Rebirth is ended; the spiritual journey has been completed; what had to be done has been done; there is nothing further for this place." And Venerable Raṭṭhapāla became one of the perfected.

Then he went up to the Buddha, bowed, sat down to one side, and said to him, "Sir, I would like to visit my parents, if the Buddha allows it."

Then the Buddha focused on encompassing Raṭṭhapāla's mind. When he knew that it was impossible for Raṭṭhapāla to resign the training and return to a lesser life, he said, "Please, Raṭṭhapāla, go at your convenience."

And then Raṭṭhapāla rose from his seat, bowed, and respectfully circled the Buddha, keeping him on his right. Then he set his lodgings in order and, taking his bowl and robe, set out for Thullakoṭṭhika. Traveling stage by stage, he arrived at Thullakoṭṭhika, where he stayed in King Koravya's deer range. Then Raṭṭhapāla robed up in the morning and, taking

his bowl and robe, entered Thullakoṭṭhika for alms. Wandering indiscriminately for almsfood, he approached his own father's house.

Now at that time Raṭṭhapāla's father was having his hair dressed in the hall of the middle gate. He saw Raṭṭhapāla coming off in the distance and said,

"Our dear and beloved only son was made to go forth by these shavelings, these fake ascetics!" And at his own father's home Raṭṭhapāla received neither alms nor a polite refusal, but only abuse.

Now at that time a family bondservant wanted to throw away the previous night's porridge. So Raṭṭhapāla said to her, "If that's to be thrown away, sister, pour it here in my bowl." As she was pouring the porridge into his bowl, she recognized the features of his hands, feet, and voice.

She then went to his mother and said, "Please, madam, you should know this. Master Raṭṭhapāla has arrived."

"If you speak the truth, wench, I'll make you a free woman!"

Then Raṭṭhapāla's mother went to his father and said, "Please householder, you should know this. It seems our son Raṭṭhapāla has arrived."

Now at that time Raṭṭhapāla was eating last night's porridge by a wall. Then Raṭṭhapāla's father went up to him and said, "Dear Raṭṭhapāla! How can you be eating last night's porridge? Why not go to your own home?"

"Householder, how could those of us who have gone forth from the lay life to homelessness have a house? We are homeless, householder. I came to your house, but there I received neither alms nor a polite refusal, but only abuse."

"Come, dear Raṭṭhapāla, let's go to the house."

"Enough, householder. My meal is finished for today."

"Well then, dear Raṭṭhapāla, please accept tomorrow's meal from me." Raṭṭhapāla consented with silence.

Then, knowing that Raṭṭhapāla had consented, his father went back to his own house. He made a heap of gold, both coined and uncoined, and hid it under mats. Then he addressed Raṭṭhapāla's former wives, "Please, daughters-in-law, adorn yourselves in the way that our son Raṭṭhapāla found you most adorable."

And when the night had passed Raṭṭhapāla's father had delicious fresh and cooked foods prepared in his own home, and announced the time to the Venerable Raṭṭhapāla, saying, "Sir, it's time. The meal is ready."

Then Raṭṭhapāla robed up in the morning and, taking his bowl and robe, went to his father's home, and sat down on the seat spread out. Raṭṭhapāla's father, revealing the heap of gold, both coined and uncoined, said to him, "Dear Raṭṭhapāla, this is your maternal fortune. There's another paternal fortune, and an ancestral one. You can both enjoy your wealth and make merit. Come, return to a lesser life, enjoy wealth, and make

merit!”

“If you’d follow my advice, householder, you’d have this heap of gold, both coined and uncoined, loaded on a cart and carried away to be dumped in the middle of the Ganges River. Why is that? Because this will bring you nothing but sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress.”

Then Raṭṭhapāla’s former wives each clasped his feet and said, “What are they like, master, the nymphs for whom you lead the spiritual life?”

“Sisters, I don’t lead the spiritual life for the sake of nymphs.”

Saying, “Our master Raṭṭhapāla addresses us as sisters!” they fainted right away.

Then Raṭṭhapāla said to his father, “If there is food to be given, householder, please give it. But don’t harass me.”

“Eat, dear Raṭṭhapāla. The meal is ready.” Then Raṭṭhapāla’s father served and satisfied Venerable Raṭṭhapāla with his own hands with delicious fresh and cooked foods.

When he had eaten and washed his hand and bowl, he spoke this verse while standing right there:

“See this fancy puppet,

a body built of sores,

diseased, obsessed over,

in which nothing lasts at all.

See this fancy figure,

with its gems and earrings;

it is bones swathed in skin,

made pretty by its clothes.

Rouged feet

and powdered face

may be enough to beguile a fool,

but not a seeker of the far shore.

Hair in eight braids

and eyeshadow

may be enough to beguile a fool,

but not a seeker of the far shore.

A rotting body all adorned

like a freshly painted makeup box

may be enough to beguile a fool,

but not a seeker of the far shore.

The hunter laid his snare,

but the deer didn't spring the trap.

I've eaten the bait and now I go,

leaving the trapper to lament."

Then Raṭṭhapāla, having spoke this verse while standing, went to King Koravya's deer range and sat at the root of a tree for the day's meditation.

Then King Koravya addressed his gamekeeper, "My good gamekeeper, tidy up the park of the deer range. We will go to see the scenery."

"Yes, Your Majesty," replied the gamekeeper. While tidying the deer range he saw Raṭṭhapāla sitting in meditation. Seeing this, he went to the king, and said, "The deer range is tidy, Your Majesty. And the gentleman named Raṭṭhapāla, the son of the leading clan in Thullakoṭṭhika, of whom you have often spoken highly, is meditating there at the root of a tree."

"Well then, my good gamekeeper, that's enough of the park for today. Now I shall pay homage to the worthy Raṭṭhapāla."

And then King Koravya said, "Distribute the fresh and cooked foods that have been prepared there." He had the finest carriages harnessed. Then he mounted a fine carriage and, along with other fine carriages, set out in full royal pomp from Thullakoṭṭhika to see Raṭṭhapāla. He went by carriage as far as the terrain allowed, then descended and approached Raṭṭhapāla on foot, together with a group of eminent officials. They exchanged greetings, and, when the greetings and polite conversation were over, he stood to one side and said to Raṭṭhapāla:

"Here, worthy Raṭṭhapāla, sit on this elephant rug."

"Enough, Great King, you sit on it. I'm sitting on my own seat."

So the king sat down on the seat spread out, and said:

"Worthy Raṭṭhapāla, there are these four kinds of decay. Because of these, some people shave off their hair and beard, dress in ocher robes, and go forth from the lay life to homelessness. What four? Decay due to old age, decay due to sickness, decay of wealth, and decay of relatives.

And what is decay due to old age? It's when someone is old, elderly, and senior, advanced in years, and has reached the final stage of life. They reflect: 'I'm now old, elderly, and senior. I'm advanced in years and have reached the final stage of life. It's not easy for me to acquire more wealth or to increase the wealth I've already acquired. Why don't I shave off my hair and beard, dress in ocher robes, and go forth from the lay life to homelessness?'

So because of that decay due to old age they go forth. This is called decay due to old age. But worthy Raṭṭhapāla is now a youth, young, with pristine black hair, blessed with youth, in the prime of life. You have no decay due to old age. So what did you know or see or hear that made you go forth?

And what is decay due to sickness? It's when someone is sick, suffering, gravely ill. They reflect: 'I'm now sick, suffering, gravely ill. It's not easy for me to acquire more wealth or to increase the wealth I've already acquired. Why don't I go forth from the lay life to homelessness?' So because of that decay due to sickness they go forth. This is called decay due to sickness. But worthy Raṭṭhapāla is now rarely ill or unwell. Your stomach digests well, being neither too hot nor too cold. You have no decay due to sickness. So what did you know or see or hear that made you go forth?

And what is decay of wealth? It's when someone is rich, affluent, and wealthy. But gradually their wealth dwindles away. They reflect: 'I used to be rich, affluent, and wealthy. But gradually my wealth has dwindled away. It's not easy for me to acquire more wealth or to increase the wealth I've already acquired. Why don't I go forth from the lay life to homelessness?' So because of that decay of wealth they go forth. This is called decay of wealth. But worthy Raṭṭhapāla is the son of the leading clan here in Thullakoṭṭhika. You have no decay of wealth. So what did you know or see or hear that made you go forth?

And what is decay of relatives? It's when someone has many friends and colleagues, relatives and kin. But gradually their relatives dwindle away. They reflect: 'I used to have many friends and colleagues, relatives and kin. But gradually they've dwindled away. It's not easy for me to acquire more wealth or to increase the wealth I've already acquired. Why don't I shave off my hair and beard, dress in ocher robes, and go forth from the lay life to homelessness?' So because of that decay of relatives they go forth. This is called decay of relatives. But worthy Raṭṭhapāla has many friends and colleagues, relatives and kin right here in Thullakoṭṭhika. You have no decay of relatives. So what did you know or see or hear that made you go forth?

There are these four kinds of decay. Because of these, some people shave off their hair and beard, dress in ocher robes, and go forth from the lay life to homelessness. Worthy Raṭṭhapāla has none of these. So what did you know or see or hear that made you go forth?"

"Great king, the Blessed One who knows and sees, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha has taught these four summaries of the teaching for recitation. It was after knowing and seeing and hearing these that I went forth from the lay life to homelessness.

What four?

'The world is unstable and swept away.' This is the first summary.

'The world has no shelter and no savior.' This is the second summary.

'The world has no owner—you must leave it all behind and pass on.' This is the third summary.

'The world is wanting, insatiable, the slave of craving.' This is the fourth summary.

The Blessed One who knows and sees, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha taught these four summaries of the teaching. It was after knowing and seeing and hearing these that I went forth from the lay life to homelessness."

"'The world is unstable and swept away.' So the worthy Raṭṭhapāla said. How should I see the meaning of this statement?"

"What do you think, Great King? When you were twenty or twenty-five years of age, were you well-versed at riding elephants, horses, and chariots, and at archery and swordsmanship? Were you strong in thigh and arm, capable, and battle-hardened?"

"I was, worthy Raṭṭhapāla. Sometimes it seems as if I had superpowers then. I don't see anyone who could have equaled me in strength."

"What do you think, Great King? These days are you just as strong in thigh and arm, capable, and battle-hardened?"

"No, worthy Raṭṭhapāla. For now I am old, elderly, and senior, I'm advanced in years and have reached the final stage of life. I am eighty years old. Sometimes I intend to step in one place, but my foot goes somewhere else."

"This is what the Buddha was referring to when he said: 'The world is unstable and swept away.'"

"It's incredible, worthy Raṭṭhapāla, it's amazing, how well said this was by the Buddha. For the world is indeed unstable and swept away.

In this royal court you can find divisions of elephants, cavalry, chariots, and infantry. They will serve to defend us from any threats. Yet you said: 'The world has no shelter and no savior.' How should I see the meaning of this statement?"

"What do you think, Great King? Do you have any chronic ailments?"

"Yes, I do. Sometimes my friends and colleagues, relatives and kin surround me, thinking: 'Now the king will die! Now the king will die!'"

"What do you think, Great King? Can you get your friends and colleagues, relatives and kin to help: 'Please, my dear friends and colleagues, relatives and kin, all of you here share my pain so that I may feel less pain.' Or must you alone feel that pain?"

"I can't get my friends to share my pain. Rather, I alone must feel it."

"This is what the Buddha was referring to when he said: 'The world has no shelter and no savior.'"

"It's incredible, worthy Raṭṭhapāla, it's amazing, how well said this was by the Buddha. For the world indeed has no shelter and no savior.

In this royal court you can find abundant gold, both coined and uncoined, stored above and below ground. Yet you said: 'The world has no owner—you must leave it all behind and pass on.' How should I see the meaning of this statement?"

“What do you think, Great King? These days you amuse yourself, supplied and provided with the five kinds of sensual stimulation. But is there any way to ensure that in the next life you will continue to amuse yourself in the same way, supplied and provided with the same five kinds of sensual stimulation? Or will others make use of this property, while you pass on according to your deeds?”

“There’s no way to ensure that I will continue to amuse myself in the same way. Rather, others will take over this property, while I pass on according to my deeds.”

“This is what the Buddha was referring to when he said: ‘The world has no owner—you must leave it all behind and pass on.’”

“It’s incredible, worthy Raṭṭhapāla, it’s amazing, how well said this was by the Buddha. For the world indeed has no owner—you must leave it all behind and pass on.

You also said this: ‘The world is wanting, insatiable, the slave of craving.’ How should I see the meaning of this statement?”

“What do you think, Great King? Do you reign over the prosperous land of Kuru?”

“Indeed I do.”

“What do you think, Great King? Suppose a trustworthy and dependable man were to come from the east. He’d approach you and say: ‘Please, Great King, you should know this. I come from the east. There I saw a large country that is successful and prosperous, populous and full of people. They have many divisions of elephants, cavalry, chariots, and infantry. And there’s plenty of money and grain, plenty of gold, coined and uncoined, worked and unworked, and plenty of women for the taking. With your current forces you can conquer it. Conquer it, Great King!’ What would you do?”

“I would conquer it and reign over it.”

“What do you think, Great King? Suppose a trustworthy and dependable man were to come from the west, north, south, or from over the ocean. He’d approach you and say the same thing. What would you do?”

“I would conquer it and reign over it.”

“This is what the Buddha was referring to when he said: ‘The world is wanting, insatiable, the slave of craving.’ And it was after knowing and seeing and hearing this that I went forth from the lay life to homelessness.”

“It’s incredible, worthy Raṭṭhapāla, it’s amazing, how well said this was by the Buddha. For the world is indeed wanting, insatiable, the slave of craving.”

That is what Venerable Raṭṭhapāla said. Then he went on to say:

“I see rich humans in the world who,

because of delusion, give not the wealth they’ve earned.

Greedily, they hoard their riches,

yearning for ever more sensual pleasures.
A king who conquered the earth by force,
ruling the land from sea to sea,
unsatisfied with the near shore of the ocean,
would still yearn for the further shore.
Not just the king, but others too,
reach death not rid of craving.
They leave the body still wanting,
for in this world sensual pleasures never satisfy.
Relatives lament, their hair disheveled,
saying ‘Ah! Alas! They’re not immortal!’
They take out the body wrapped in a shroud,
heap up a pyre, and burn it there.
It’s poked with stakes while being burnt,
in just a single cloth, all wealth gone.
Relatives, friends, and companions
can’t help you when you’re dying.
Heirs take your riches,
while beings fare on according to their deeds.
Riches don’t follow you when you die;
nor do children, wife, wealth, nor kingdom.
Longevity isn’t gained by riches,
nor does wealth banish old age;
for the attentive say this life is short,
it’s perishable and not eternal.
The rich and the poor feel its touch;
the fool and the attentive one feel it too.
But the fool lies stricken by their own folly,
while the attentive don’t tremble at the touch.

Therefore wisdom’s much better than wealth,
since by wisdom you reach consummation in this life.
But if because of delusion you don’t reach consummation,
you’ll do evil deeds in life after life.
One who enters a womb and the world beyond,
will transmigrate from one life to the next.
While someone of little wisdom, placing faith in them,
also enters a womb and the world beyond.
As a bandit caught in a window
is punished for his own bad deeds;
so after departing, in the world beyond,
people are punished for their own bad deeds.
Sensual pleasures are diverse, sweet, delightful;
appearing in disguise they disturb the mind.
Seeing danger in sensual stimulations,
I went forth, O King.
As fruit falls from a tree, so the sons of Manu fall,
young and old, when the body breaks up.
Seeing this, too, I went forth, O King;
it’s a sure bet that the ascetic life is better.”