Ja 6 — Devadhamma Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

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Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

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Edited by E. B. Cowell

Original edition: Cambridge University Press, volume 1, 1895

Pinned source revision: https://github.com/suttacentral/sc-data/commit/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

Scope: Complete numbered source article from the traditional Jātaka commentary; canonical verses appear in story context. This is not a verse-only edition.

Changes: Converted the pinned SuttaCentral HTML article to plain text; removed inline print page-reference labels and normalized whitespace. The original source retains references.

Text

“Those only ‘godlike’ call.”—This story was told by the Blessed One while at Jetavana, about a wealthy Brother.

Tradition tells us that, on the death of his wife, a squire of Savatthi joined the Brotherhood. When he was joining, he caused to be built for himself a chamber to live in, a room for the fire, and a store-room; and not till he had stocked his store-room with ghee, rice, and the like, did he finally join. Even after he had become a brother, he used to send for his servants and make them cook him what he liked to eat. He was richly provided with the requisites,—having an entire change of clothing for night and another for day; and he dwelt aloof on the outskirts of the monastery.

One day when he had taken out his cloths and bedding and had spread them out to dry in his chamber, a number of Brethren from the country, who were on a pilgrimage from monastery to monastery, came in their journeying to his cell and found all these belongings.

“Whose are these?” they asked. “Mine, sirs,” he replied. “What, sir?” they cried; “this upper-cloth and that as well; this under-cloth as well as that; and that bedding too, is it all yours?” “Yes, nobody’s but mine.” “Sir,” said they, “the Blessed One has only sanctioned three cloths; and yet, though the Buddha, to whose doctrine you have devoted yourself, is so simple in his wants, you forsooth have amassed all this stock of requisites. Come! we must take you before the Lord of Wisdom.” And, so saying, they went off with him to the Master.

Becoming aware of their presence, the Master said, “Wherefore is it, Brethren, that you have brought the Brother against his will?” “Sir, this Brother is well-off and has quite a stock of requisites.” “Is it true, Brother, as they say, that you are so well-off?” “Yes, Blessed One.” “But why, Brother, have you amassed these belongings? Do not I extol the virtues of

wanting little, contentment, and so forth, solitude, and determined resolve?"

Angered by the Master's words, he cried,—"Then I'll go about like this!" And, flinging off his outer clothing, he stood in their midst clad only in his waist-cloth.

Then, as a moral support to him, the Master said, "Was it not you, Brother, who in bygone days were a seeker after the shamefacedness that fears to sin, and even when you were a water-demon lived for twelve years seeking after that shamefacedness? How then comes it that, after vowing to follow the weighty doctrine of the Buddha, you have flung off your outer robes and stand here devoid of shame?"

At the Master's word, his sense of shame was restored; he donned his robes again, and, saluting the Master, seated himself at the side.

The Brethren having asked the Blessed One to explain to them the matter he had mentioned, the Blessed One made clear what had been concealed from them by re-birth.

Once on a time Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares in Kasi. The Bodhisatta, having come to birth in those days as the king's son by the queen, was duly named Prince Mahimsasa. By the time he could run about, a second son was born to the king, and the name they gave this child was Prince Moon; but by the time he could run about, the Bodhisatta's mother died. Then the king took another queen, who was his joy and delight; and their love was crowned with the birth of yet another prince, whom they named Prince Sun. In his joy at the birth of the boy, the king promised to grant her any boon she might ask on the child's behalf. But the queen treasured up the promise to be fulfilled at her own good time hereafter. Later, when her son had grown up, she said to the king, "Sire, when my boy was born, you granted me a boon to ask for him. Let him be king."

"Nay," said the king; "two sons have I, radiant as flaming fires; I cannot give the kingdom to your son." But when he saw that, undaunted by this refusal, the queen kept plaguing him time after time, to grant her request, the king, fearing lest the woman should plot evil against his sons, sent for them and said, "My children, when Prince Sun was born, I granted a boon; and now his mother wants the kingdom for him. I have no wish to give him the kingdom; but women are naturally wicked, and she will be plotting evil against you. You had better retire to the forest, to return at my death to rule in the city which belongs by right to our house." So saying, with tears and lamentations, the king kissed his two sons on the head and sent them forth.

As the princes were leaving the palace after their adieux to their father, who should see them but Prince Sun himself, who was playing in the courtyard? And no sooner did he learn what was the matter than he made up his mind to go with his brothers. So he too went off in their company.

The three came to the region of the Himalayas; and here the Bodhisatta, who had turned aside from the road and was sitting at the foot of a tree, said to Prince Sun, "Run down to the pool yonder, Sun dear; drink and bathe there; and then bring us too some water back

in a lotus-leaf."

(Now that pool had been delivered over to a certain water-sprite by Vessavana, who said to him, "With the exception of such as know what is truly god-like, all that go down into this pool are yours to devour. Over those that do not enter the waters, you have no power granted to you." And thenceforth the water-sprite used to ask all who went down into the pool what was truly godlike, devouring everyone who did not know.)

Now it was into this pool that Prince Sun went down, quite unsuspiciously, with the result that he was seized by the water-sprite, who said to him, "Do you know what is truly godlike?" "O yes," said he; "the sun and moon." "You don't know," said the monster, and hauling the prince down into the depths of the water, imprisoned him there in his own abode. Finding that his brother was a long time gone, the Bodhisatta sent Prince Moon. He too was seized by the water-sprite and asked whether he knew what was truly godlike. "Oh yes, I know," said he; "the four. quarters of heaven are." "You don't know," said the water-sprite as he hauled this second victim off to the same prison-house.

Finding that this second brother too tarried long, the Bodhisatta felt sure that something had happened to them. So away he went after them and tracked their footsteps down into the water. Realising at once that the pool must be the domain of a water-sprite, he girded on his sword, and took his bow in his hand, and waited. Now when the demon found that the Bodhisatta had no intention of entering the water, he assumed the shape of a forester, and in this guise addressed the Bodhisatta thus: "You're tired with your journey, mate; why don't you go in and have a bathe and a drink, and deck yourself with lotuses? You would travel on comfortably afterwards." Recognising him at once for a demon, the Bodhisatta said, "It is you who have seized my brothers." "Yes, it was," was the reply. "Why?" Because all who go down into this pool belong to me." "What, all?" "Not those who know what is truly godlike; all save these are mine." "And do you want to know the godlike?" "I do." "If this be so, I will tell you what is truly godlike." "Do so, and I will listen."

"I should like to begin," said the Bodhisatta, "but I am travel-stained with my journey." Then the water-sprite bathed the Bodhisatta, and gave him food to eat and water to drink, decked him with flowers, sprinkled him with scents, and laid out a couch for him in the midst of a gorgeous pavilion. Seating himself on this couch, and making the water-sprite sit at his feet, the Bodhisatta said, "Listen then and you shall hear what the truly godlike is." And he repeated this stanza—

Those only 'godlike' call who shrink from sin,

The white-souled tranquil votaries of Good.

And when the demon heard this, he was pleased, and said to the Bodhisatta, "Man of wisdom, I am pleased with you, and give you up one of your brothers. Which shall I bring?" "The youngest." "Man of wisdom, though you know so well what the truly godlike is, you don't act on your knowledge." "How so?" "Why, you take the younger in preference to the elder, without regard to his seniority." "Demon, I not only know but practise the godlike. It

was on this boy's account that we sought refuge in the forest; it was for him that his mother asked the kingdom from our father, and our father, refusing to fulfil her demand, consented to our flight to the refuge of the forest. With us came this boy, nor ever thought of turning back again. Not a soul would believe me if I were to give out that he had been devoured by a demon in the forest; and it is the fear of odium that impels me to demand him at your hands."

"Excellent! excellent! O man of wisdom," cried the demon in approval; "you not only know but practise the godlike." And in token of his pleasure and approval he brought forth the two brothers and gave them both to the Bodhisatta.

Then said the latter to the water-sprite, "Friend, it is in consequence of your own evil deeds in times past that you have now been born a demon subsisting on the flesh and blood of other living creatures; and in this present birth too you are continuing to do evil. This evil conduct will for ever bar you from escaping re-birth in hell and the other evil states. Wherefore, from this time forth renounce evil and live virtuously."

Having worked the demon's conversion, the Bodhisatta continued to dwell at that spot under his protection, until one day he read in the stars that his father was dead. Then taking the water-sprite with him, he returned to Benares and took possession of the kingdom, making Prince Moon his viceroy and Prince Sun his generalissimo. For the water-sprite he made a home in a pleasant spot and took measures to ensure his being provided with the choicest garlands, flowers, and food. He himself ruled in righteousness until he passed away to fare according to his deeds.

His lesson ended, the Master preached the Truths, at the close whereof that Brother won the Fruit of the First Path. And the All-knowing Buddha, having told the two stories, made the connexion linking the two together, and identified the Birth, by saying, "The well-to-do Brother was the water-demon of those days; Ananda was Prince Sun, Sariputta Prince Moon, and I myself the eldest brother, Prince Mahimsasa."

The Jātaka, or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births, edited by E.B. Cowell, published by The Cambridge University Press.

Vol. 1, translated by Robert Chalmers, 1895.

Vol. 2, translated by W.H.D. Rouse, 1895.

Vol. 3, translated by H.T. Francis and R.A. Neil, 1897.

Vol. 4, translated by W.H.D. Rouse, 1901.

Vol. 5, translated by H.T. Francis, 1905.

Vol. 6, translated by E.B. Cowell and W.H.D. Rouse, 1907.

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