Ja 120 — Bandhanamokkha Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

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Edited by E. B. Cowell

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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

"Whilst folly's speech"—This story was told by the Master while at Jetavana, about the brahmin-girl Cinca, whose history will be given in the Twelfth Book in the Mahapaduma-jataka. On this occasion the Master said, "Brethren, this is not the first time Cinca has laid false accusations against me. She did the like in other times." So saying he told this story of the past.

Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born into the chaplain's family, and on his father's death succeeded to the chaplaincy.

Now the king promised to grant whatsoever boon his queen should ask of him, and she said,—"The boon I ask is an easy one; henceforth you must not look on any other woman with eyes of love." At first he refused, but, wearied by her unceasing importunity, was obliged to give way at last. And from that day forward he never cast a glance of love at any one of his sixteen thousand nautch-girls.

Now a disturbance arose on the borders of his kingdom, and after two or three engagements with the robbers, the troops there sent a letter to the king saying that they were unable to carry the matter through. Then the king was anxious to go in person and assembled a mighty host. And he said to his wife, "Dear one, I go to the frontier, where battles will rage ending in victory or defeat. The camp is no place for a woman, and you must stay behind here."

"I can't stop if you go, my lord," said she. But finding the king firm in his decision she made the following request instead,—"Every league, send a messenger to enquire how I fare." And the king promised to do so. Accordingly, when he marched out with his host, leaving the Bodhisatta in the city, the king sent back a messenger at the end of every league to let the queen know how he was, and to find out how she fared. Of each man as he came she asked what brought him back. And on receiving the answer that he was come to learn how

she fared, they queen beckoned the messenger to her and sinned with him. Now the king journeyed two and thirty leagues and sent two and thirty messengers , and the queen sinned with them all. And when he had pacified the frontier, to the great joy of the inhabitants, he started on his homeward journey, despatching a second series of thirty-two messengers. And the queen misbehaved with each one of these, as before. Halting his victorious army near the city, the king sent a letter to the Bodhisatta to prepare the city for his entry. The preparations in the city were done, and the Bodhisatta was preparing the palace for the king's arrival, when he came to the queen's apartments. The sight of his great beauty so moved the queen that she called to him to satisfy her lust. But the Bodhisatta pleaded with her, urging the king's honour, and protesting that he shrank from all sin and would not do as she wished. "No thoughts of the king frightened sixty-four of the king's messengers," said she; "and will you for the king's sake fear to do my will?"

Said the Bodhisatta, "Had these messengers thought with me, they would not have acted thus. As for me that know the right, I will not commit this sin."

"Don't talk nonsense," said she. "If you refuse, I will have your head chopped off."

"So be it. Cut off my head in this or in a hundred thousand existences; yet will I not do your bidding."

"All right; I will see," said the queen menacingly. And retiring to her chamber, she scratched herself, put oil on her limbs, clad herself in dirty clothes and feigned to be ill. Then she sent for her slaves and bade them tell the king, when he should ask after her, that she was ill.

Meantime the Bodhisatta had gone to meet the king, who, after marching round the city in solemn procession, entered his palace. Not seeing the queen, he asked where she was, and was told that she was ill. Entering the royal bed-chamber, the king caressed the queen and asked what ailed her. She was silent; but when the king asked the third time, she looked at him and said, "Though my lord the king still lives, yet poor women like me have to own a master."

"What do you mean?"

"The chaplain whom you left to watch over the city came here on pretence of seeing after the palace; and because I would not yield to his will, he beat me to his heart's content and went off."

Then the king fumed with rage, like the crackling of salt or sugar in the fire; and he rushed from the chamber. Calling his servants, he bade them bind the chaplain with his hands behind him, like one condemned to death, and cut off his head at the place of execution. So away they hurried and bound the Bodhisatta. And the drum was beaten to announce the execution.

Thought the Bodhisatta, “Doubtless that wicked queen has already poisoned the king’s mind against me, and now must I save myself from this peril.” So he said to his captors, “Bring me into the king’s presence before you slay me.” “Why so?” said they. “Because, as the king’s servant, I have toiled greatly on the king’s business, and know where great treasures are hidden which I have discovered. If I am not brought before the king, all this wealth will be lost. So lead me to him, and then do your duty.”

Accordingly, they brought him before the king, who asked why reverence had not restrained him from such wickedness.

“Sire,” answered the Bodhisatta, “I was born a brahmin, and have never taken the life so much as of an emmet or ant. I have never taken what was not my own, even to a blade of grass. Never have I looked with lustful eyes upon another man’s wife. Not even in jest have I spoken falsely, and not a drop of strong drink have I ever drunk. Innocent am I, sire; but that wicked woman took me lustfully by the hand, and, being rebuffed, threatened me, nor did she retire to her chamber before she had told me her secret evil-doing. For there were sixty-four messengers who came with letters from you to the queen. Send for these men and ask each whether he did as the queen bade him or not.” Then the king had the sixty-four men bound and sent for the queen. And she confessed to having had guilty converse with the men. Then the king ordered off all the sixty-four to be beheaded.

But at this point the Bodhisatta cried out, “Nay, sire, the men are not to blame; for they were constrained by the queen. Wherefore pardon them. And as for the queen—she is not to blame, for the passions of women are insatiate, and she does but act according to her inborn nature. Wherefore, pardon her also, O king.”

Upon this entreaty the king was merciful, and so the Bodhisatta saved the lives of the queen and the sixty-four men, and he gave them each a place to dwell in. Then the Bodhisatta came to the king and said, “Sire, the baseless accusations of folly put the wise in unmerited bonds, but the words of the wise released the foolish. Thus folly wrongfully binds, and wisdom sets free from bonds.” So saying, he uttered this stanza—

Whilst folly’s speech doth bind unrighteously,

At wisdom’s word the justly bound go free.

When he had taught the king the Truth in these verses, he exclaimed, “All this trouble sprang from my living a lay life. I must change my mode of life, and crave your permission, sire, to give up the world.” And with the king’s permission he gave up the world and quitted his tearful relations and his great wealth to become a recluse. His dwelling was in the Himalayas, and there he won the Higher Knowledges and the Attainments and became destined to rebirth in the Brahma Realm.

His teaching ended, the Master identified the Birth by saying, “Cinca was the wicked queen of those days, Ananda the king, and I his chaplain.”

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.

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

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