Ja 122 — Dummedha Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol1/ja122.html

Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

License: Public Domain (original English edition, published 1895–1907)

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

“Exalted station breeds a fool great woe.”—This story was told by the Master while at the Bamboo-grove, about Devadatta. For the Brethren had met together in the Hall of Truth, and were talking of how the sight of the Buddha’s perfections and all the distinctive signs of Buddhahood maddened Devadatta; and how in his jealousy he could not bear to hear the praises of the Buddha’s utter wisdom. Entering the Hall, the Master asked what was the subject of their converse. And when they told him, he said, “Brethren, as now, so in former times Devadatta was maddened by hearing my praises.” So saying, he told this story of the past.

Once on a time when King Magadha was ruling in Rajagaha in Magadha, the Bodhisatta was born an elephant. He was white all over and graced with all the beauty of form described above. And because of his beauty the king made him his state elephant.

One festal day the king adorned the city like a city of the devas and, mounted on the elephant in all its trappings, made a solemn procession round the city attended by a great retinue. And all along the route the people were moved by the sight of that peerless elephant to exclaim, “Oh what a stately gait! what proportions! what beauty! what grace! such a white elephant is worthy of an universal monarch.” All this praise of his elephant awoke the king’s jealousy and he resolved to have it cast over a precipice and killed. So he summoned the mahout and asked whether he called that a trained elephant.

“Indeed he is well trained, sire,” said the mahout. “No, he is very badly trained.” “Sire, he is well trained.” “If he is so well trained, can you get him to climb to the summit of Mount Vepulla?” “Yes, sire.” “Away with you, then,” said the king. And he got down from the elephant, making the mahout mount instead, and went himself to the foot of the mountain, whilst the mahout rode on the elephant’s back up to the top of Mount Vepulla. The king with his courtiers also climbed the mountain, and had the elephant halted at the brink of a precipice. “Now,” said he to the man, “if he is so well trained as you say, make

him stand on three legs."

And the mahout on the elephant's back just touched the animal with his goad by way of sign and called to him, "Hi! my beauty, stand on three legs." "Now make him stand on his two fore-legs," said the king. And the Great Being raised his hind-legs and stood on his fore-legs alone. "Now on the hind-legs," said the king, and the obedient elephant raised his fore-legs till he stood on his hind-legs alone. "Now on one leg," said the king, and the elephant stood on one leg.

Seeing that the elephant did not fall over the precipice, the king cried, "Now if you can, make him stand in the air."

Then thought the mahout to himself, "All India cannot shew the match of this elephant for excellence of training. Surely the king must want to make him tumble over the precipice and meet his death." So he whispered in the elephant's ear, "My son, the king wants you to fall over and get killed. He is not worthy of you. If you have power to journey through the air, rise up with me upon your back and fly through the air to Benares."

And the Great Being, endowed as he was with the marvellous powers which flow from Merit, straightway rose up into the air. Then said the mahout, "Sire, this elephant, possessed as he is with the marvellous powers which flow from Merit, is too good for such a worthless fool as you: none but a wise and good king is worthy to be his master. When those who are so worthless as you get an elephant like this, they don't know his value, and so they lose their elephant, and all the rest of their glory and splendour." So saying the mahout, seated on the elephant's neck, recited this stanza—

Exalted station breeds a fool great woe;

He proves his own and others' mortal foe.

"And now, goodbye," said he to the king as he ended this rebuke; and rising in the air, he passed to Benares and halted in mid-air over the royal courtyard. And there was a great stir in the city and all cried out, "Look at the state-elephant that has come through the air for our king and is hovering over the royal courtyard." And with all haste the news was conveyed to the king too, who came out and said, "If your coming is for my behoof, alight on the earth." And the Bodhisatta descended from the air. Then the mahout got down and bowed before the king, and in answer to the king's enquiries told the whole story of their leaving Rajagaha. "It was very good of you," said the king, "to come here"; and in his joy he had the city decorated and the elephant installed in his state-stable. Then he divided his kingdom into three portions, and made over one to the Bodhisatta, one to the mahout, and one he kept himself. And his power grew from the day of the Bodhisatta's coming till all India owned his sovereign sway. As Emperor of India, he was charitable and did other good works till he passed away to fare according to his deserts.

His lesson ended, the Master identified the Birth by saying "Devadatta was in those days the king of Magadha, Sariputta the king of Benares, Ananda the mahout, and I the

elephant.”

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.

These translations are in the public domain. You are free to do whatever you like with them.

Scanned, proofed and formatted at sacred-texts.com, January 2006–February 2010, by John Bruno Hare and others. Thanks to the Sacred Texts Archive for making these texts available in digital form.

Prepared for SuttaCentral by Bhikkhu Sujato.