Ja 140 — Kaka Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol1/ja140.html

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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

“In ceaseless dread.”—This story was told by the Master while at Jetavana, about a sagacious counsellor. The incidents will be related in the twelfth book in connection with the Bhaddasala-jataka.

Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born a crow. One day the King’s chaplain went out from the city to the river, bathed there, and having perfumed and garlanded himself, donned his bravest array and came back to the city. On the archway of the city gate there sat two crows; and one of them said to his mate, “I mean to foul this brahmin’s head.” “Oh, don’t do any such thing,” said the other; “for this brahmin is a great man, and it is an evil thing to incur the hatred of the great. If you anger him, he may destroy the whole of our kind.” “I really must,” said the first. “Very well, you’re sure to be found out,” said the other, and flew quickly away. Just when the brahmin was under the battlements, down dropped the filth upon him as if the crow were dropping a festoon. The enraged brahmin forthwith conceived hatred against all crows.

Now at this time it chanced that a female slave in charge of a granary spread the rice out in the sun at the granary door and was sitting there to watch it, when she fell asleep. Just then up came a shaggy goat and fell to eating the rice till the girl woke up and drove it away. Twice or three times the goat came back, as soon as she fell asleep, and ate the rice. So when she had driven the creature away for the third time she bethought her that continued visits of the goat would consume half her store of rice and that steps must be taken to scare the animal away for good and so save her from so great a loss. So she took a lighted torch, and, sitting down, pretended to fall asleep as usual. And when the goat was eating, she suddenly sprang up and hit its shaggy back with her torch. At once the goat’s shaggy hide was all ablaze, and to ease its pain, it dashed into a hay-shed near the elephant’s stable and rolled in the hay. So the shed caught fire and the flames spread to the stables. As these stables caught fire, the elephants began to suffer, and many of them were badly burnt beyond the skill of the elephant-doctors to cure. When this was reported

to the King, he asked his chaplain whether he knew what would cure the elephants. “Certainly I do, sire,” said the chaplain, and being pressed to explain, said his nostrum was crows’ fat. Then the King ordered crows to be killed and their fat taken. And forthwith there was a great slaughter of crows, but never was any fat found on them, and so they went on killing till dead crows lay in heaps everywhere. And a great fear was upon all crows.

Now in those days the Bodhisatta had his dwelling in a great cemetery, at the head of eighty thousand crows. One of these brought tidings to him of the fear that was upon the crows. And the Bodhisatta, feeling that there was none but him who could essay the task, resolved to free his kinsfolk from their great dread. Reviewing the Ten Perfections, and selecting therefrom Kindness as his guide, he flew without stopping right up to the King’s palace, and entering in at the open window alighted underneath the King’s throne. Straightway a servant tried to catch the bird, but the King entering the chamber forbade him.

Recovering himself in a moment, the Great Being, remembering Kindness, came forth from beneath the King’s throne and spoke thus to the King; “Sire, a king should remember the maxim that kings should not walk according to lust and other evil passions in ruling their kingdoms. Before taking action, it is meet first to examine and know the whole matter, and then only to do that which being done is salutary. If kings do that which being done is not salutary, they fill thousands with a great fear, even the fear of death. And in prescribing crows’ fat, your chaplain was prompted by revenge to lie; for crows have no fat.”

By these words the King’s heart was won, and he bade the Bodhisatta be set on a throne of gold and there anointed beneath the wings with the choicest oils and served in vessels of gold with the King’s own meats and drink. Then when the Great Being was filled and at ease, the King said, “Sage, you say that crows have no fat. How comes it that they have none?”

“In this wise,” answered the Bodhisatta with a voice that filled the whole palace, and he proclaimed the Truth in this stanza—

In ceaseless dread, with all mankind for foes,

Their life is passed; and hence no fat have crows.

This explanation given, the Great Being taught the King, saying, “Sire, kings should never act without examining and knowing the whole matter.” Well pleased, the King laid his kingdom at the Bodhisatta’s feet, but the Bodhisatta restored it to the King, whom he established in the Five Precepts, beseeching him to shield all living creatures from harm. And the King was moved by these words to grant immunity to all living creatures, and in particular he was unceasingly bountiful to crows. Every day he had six bushels of rice cooked for them and delicately flavoured, and this was given to the crows. But to the Great Being there was given food such as the Bing alone ate.

His lesson ended, the Master identified the Birth by saying, “Ananda was King of Benares in those days, and I myself the king of the crows.’

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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Prepared for SuttaCentral by Bhikkhu Sujato.