Ja 141 — Godha Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol1/ja141.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

“Bad company.”—This story was told by the Master while at the Bamboo-grove, about a traitorous Brother. The introductory incident is the same as that told in the Mahila-mukha jataka.

Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born an iguana. When he grew up he dwelt in a big burrow in the river bank with a following of many hundreds of other iguanas. Now the Bodhisatta had a son, a young iguana, who was great friends with a chameleon, whom he used to clip and embrace. This intimacy being reported to the iguana king, he sent for his young son and said that such friendship was misplaced, for chameleons were low creatures, and that if the intimacy was persisted in, calamity would befall the whole of the tribe of iguanas. And he enjoined his son to haw no more to do with the chameleon. But the son continued in his intimacy. Again and again did the Bodhisatta speak with his son, but finding his words of no avail, and foreseeing danger to the iguanas from the chameleon, he had an outlet cut on one side of their burrow, so that there might be a means of escape in time of need.

Now as time went on, the young iguana grew to a great size, whilst the chameleon never grew any bigger. And as these mountainous embraces of the young giant grew painful indeed, the chameleon foresaw that they would be the death of him if they went on a few days longer, and he resolved to combine with a hunter to destroy the whole tribe of iguanas.

One day in the summer the ants came out after a thunder-storm, and the iguanas darted hither and thither catching them and eating them. Now there came into the forest an iguana trapper with spade and dogs to dig out iguanas; and the chameleon thought what a haul he would put in the trapper’s way. So he went up to the man, and, lying down before him, asked why he was about in the forest. “To catch iguanas,” was the reply. “Well, I know where there’s a burrow of hundreds of them,” said the chameleon; “bring fire and

brushwood and follow me." And he brought the trapper to where the iguanas dwelt. "Now," said the chameleon, "put your fuel in there and smoke the iguanas out. Meantime let your dogs be all round and take a big stick in your hand. Then as the iguanas dash out, strike them down and make a pile of the slain." So saying, the treacherous chameleon withdrew to a spot hard by, where he lay down, with his head up, saying to himself,—"This day I shall see the rout of my enemy."

The trapper set to work to smoke the iguanas out; and fear for their lives drove them helter-skelter from their burrow. As they came out, the trapper knocked them on the head, and if he missed them, they fell a prey to his dogs. And so there was great slaughter among the iguanas. Realising that this was the chameleon's doing, the Bodhisatta cried, "One should never make friends of the wicked, for such bring sorrow in their train. A single wicked chameleon has proved the bane of all these iguanas." So saying, he escaped by the outlet he had provided, uttering this stanza—

Bad company can never end in good.

Through friendship with one sole chameleon

The tribe of iguanas met their end.

His lesson ended, the Master identified the Birth by saying, "Devadatta was the chameleon of those days; this traitorous Brother was the disobedient young iguana, the son of the Bodhisatta; and I myself the king of the iguanas."

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.