Ja 146 — Kaka Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol1/ja146.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

“Our throats are tired.”—This story was told by the Master while at Jetavana, about a number of aged Brethren. Whilst they were still of the world, they were rich and wealthy squires of Savatthi, all friends of one another; and tradition tells us that while they were engaged in good works they heard the Master preach. At once they cried, “We are old; what to us are house and home? Let us join the Brotherhood, and following the Buddha’s lovely doctrine make an end of sorrow.”

So they shared all their belongings amongst their children and families, and, leaving their tearful kindred, they came to ask the Master to receive them into the Brotherhood. But when admitted, they did not live the life of Brethren; and because of their age they failed to master the Truth. As in their life as householders, so now too when they were Brethren they lived together, building themselves a cluster of neighbouring huts on the skirts of the Monastery. Even when they went in quest of alms, they generally made for their wives’ and children’s houses and ate there. In particular, all these old men were maintained by the bounty of the wife of one of their number, to whose house each brought what he had received and there ate it, with sauces and curries which she furnished. An illness having carried her oft; the aged Brethren went their way back to the monastery, and falling on one another’s necks walked about bewailing the death of their benefactress, the giver of sauces. The noise of their lamentation brought the Brethren to the spot to know what ailed them. And the aged men told how their kind benefactress was dead, and that they wept because they had lost her and should never see her like again. Shocked at such impropriety, the Brethren talked together in the Hall of Truth about the cause of the old men’s sorrow, and they told the Master too, on his entering the Hall and asking what they were discussing. “Ah, Brethren,” said he, “in times past, also, this same woman’s death made them go about weeping and wailing; in those days she was a crow and was drowned in the sea, and these were toiling hard to empty all the water out of the sea in order to get her out, when the wise of those days saved them.”

And so saying he told this story of the past.

Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was a sea-sprite. Now a crow with his mate came down in quest of food to the sea-shore where, just before, certain persons had been offering to the Nagas a sacrifice of milk, and rice, and fish, and meat and strong drink and the like. Up came the crow and with his mate ate freely of the elements of the sacrifice, and drank a great deal of the spirits. So they both got very drunk. Then they wanted to disport themselves in the sea, and were trying to swim on the surf, when a wave swept the hen-crow out to sea and a fish came and gobbled her up.

“Oh, my poor wife is dead,” cried the crow, bursting into tears and lamentations. Then a crowd of crows were drawn by his wailing to the spot to learn what ailed him. And when he told them how his wife had been carried out to sea, they all began with one voice to lament. Suddenly the thought struck them that they were stronger than the sea and that all they had to do was to empty it out and rescue their comrade! So they set to work with their bills to empty the sea out by mouthfuls, betaking themselves to dry land to rest so soon as their throats were sore with the salt water. And so they toiled away till their mouths and jaws were dry and inflamed and their eyes bloodshot, and they were ready to drop for weariness. Then in despair they turned to one another and said that it was in vain they laboured to empty the sea, for no sooner had they got rid of the water in one place than more flowed in, and there was all their work to do over again; they would never succeed in baling the water out of the sea. And, so saying, they uttered this stanza—

Our throats are tired, our mouths are sore;

The sea refilleth evermore.

Then all the crows fell to praising the beauty of her beak and eyes, her complexion, figure and sweet voice, saying that it was her excellencies that had provoked the sea to steal her from them. But as they talked this nonsense, the sea-sprite made a bogey appear from the sea and so put them all to flight. In this wise they were saved.

His lesson ended, the Master identified the Birth by saying, “The aged Brother’s wife was the hen-crow of those days, and her husband the male crow; the other aged Brethren were the rest of the crows, and I the sea-sprite.”

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.