Ja 150 — Sanjiva 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

“Befriend a villain.”—This story was told by the Master when at the Bamboo-grove, about King Ajatasattu’s adherence to false teachers. For he believed in that rancorous foe of the Buddhas, the base and wicked Devadatta, and in his infatuation, wishing to do honour to Devadatta, expended a vast sum in erecting a monastery at Gayasisa. And following Devadatta’s wicked counsels, he slew the good and virtuous old King his father, who had entered on the Paths, thereby destroying his own chance of winning like goodness and virtue, and bringing great woe upon himself.

Hearing that the earth had swallowed up Devadatta, he feared a like fate for himself. And such was the frenzy of his terror that he reeked not of his kingdom’s welfare, slept not upon his bed, but ranged abroad quaking in every limb, like a young elephant in an agony of pain. In fancy he saw the earth yawning for him, and the flames of hell darting forth; he could see himself fastened down on a bed of burning metal with iron lances being thrust into his body. Like a wounded cock, not for one instant was he, at peace. The desire came on him to see the All-Wise Buddha, to be reconciled to him, and to ask guidance of him; but because of the magnitude of his transgressions he shrank from coming into the Buddha’s presence. When the Kattika festival came round, and by night Rajagaha was illuminated and adorned like a city of the gods, the King, as he sat on high upon a throne of gold, saw Jivaka Komarabhacca sitting near. The idea flashed across his mind to go with Jivaka to the Buddha, but he felt he could not say outright that he would not go alone but wanted Jivaka to take him. No; the better course would be, after praising the beauty of the night, to propose sitting at the feet of some sage or brahmin, and to ask the courtiers what teacher can give the heart peace. Of course, they would severally praise their own masters; but Jivaka would be sure to extol the All-Enlightened Buddha; and to the Buddha the King with Jivaka would go. So he burst into fivefold praises of the night, saying—“How fair, sirs, is this clear cloudless night! How beautiful! How charming! How delightful! How lovely ! What sage or brahmin shall we seek out, to see if haply he may give our hearts peace?”

Then one minister recommended Purana Kassapa, another Makkhali Gosala, and others again Ajita Kesakambala, Kakudha Kaccayana, Sanjaya Belatthiputta, or Nigantha Nataputta. All these names the King heard in silence, waiting for his chief minister, Jivaka, to speak. But Jivaka, suspecting that the King's real object was to make him speak, kept silence in order to make sure. At last the King said, "Well, my good Jivaka, why have you nothing to say?" At the word Jivaka arose from his seat, and with hands clasped in adoration towards the Blessed One, cried, "Sire, yonder in my mango-grove dwells the All-Enlightened Buddha with thirteen hundred and fifty Brethren. This is the high fame that has arisen concerning him." And here he proceeded to recite the nine titles of honour ascribed to him, beginning with 'Venerable. ' When he had further shewn how from his birth onwards the Buddha's powers had surpassed all the earlier presages and expectations, Jivaka said, "Unto him, the Blessed One, let the King repair, to hear the truth and to put questions."

His object thus attained, the King asked Jivaka to have the elephants got ready and went in royal state to Jivaka's mango-grove, where he found in the perfumed pavilion the Buddha amid the Brotherhood which was tranquil as the ocean in perfect repose. Look where he would, the King's eye saw only the endless ranks of the Brethren, exceeding in numbers any following he had ever seen. Pleased with the demeanour of the Brethren, the King bowed low and spoke words of praise. Then saluting the Buddha, he seated himself, and asked him the question, 'What is the fruit of the religious life?' And the Blessed One gave utterance to the Samannaphala Sutta in two sections. Glad at heart, the King made his peace with the Buddha at the close of the Sutta, and rising up departed with solemn obeisance. Soon after the King had gone, the Master addressed the Brethren and said, "Brethren, this King is uprooted; had not this King slain in lust for dominion that righteous ruler his father, he would have won the Arahat's clear vision of the Truth, ere he rose from his seat. But for his sinful favouring of Devadatta he has missed the fruit of the first path."

Next day the Brethren talked together of all this and said that Ajatasattu's crime of parricide, which was due to that wicked and sinful Devadatta whom he had favoured, had lost him salvation; and that Devadatta had been the King's ruin. At this point the Master entered the Hall of Truth and asked the subject of their converse. Being told, the Master said, "This is not the first time, Brethren, that Ajatasattu has suffered for favouring the sinful; like conduct in the past cost him his life." 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 family of a wealthy brahmin. Arriving at years of discretion, he went to study at Takkasila, where he received a complete education. In Benares as a teacher he enjoyed world-wide fame and had five hundred young brahmins as pupils. Among these was one named Sanjiva, to whom the Bodhisatta taught the spell for raising the dead to life. But though the young man was taught this, he was not taught the counter charm. Proud of his new power, he went with his fellow-pupils to the forest wood-gathering, and there came on a dead tiger.

"Now see me bring the tiger to life again," said he.

“You can’t,” said they.

“You look and you will see me do it.”

“Well, if you can, do so,” said they and climbed up a tree forthwith.

Then Sanjiva repeated his charm and struck the dead tiger with a potsherd. Up started the tiger and quick as lightning sprang at Sanjiva and bit him on the throat, killing him outright. Dead fell the tiger then and there, and dead fell Sanjiva too at the same spot. So there the two lay dead side by side.

The young brahmins took their wood and went back to their master to whom they told the story. “My dear pupils,” said he, “mark herein how by reason of showing favour to the sinful and paying honour where it was not due, he has brought all this calamity upon himself.” And so saying he uttered this stanza—

Befriend a villain, aid him in his need,

And, like that tiger which Sanjiva raised

To life, he straight devours you for your pains.

Such was the Bodhisatta’s lesson to the young brahmins, and after a life of almsgiving and other good deeds he passed away to fare according to his deserts.

His lesson ended the Master identified the Birth by saying, “Ajatasattu was the young brahmin of those days who brought the dead tiger to life, and I the world-famed teacher.”

End Of The First Book.

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