Ja 162 — Santhava Jātaka

English translation by W. H. D. Rouse.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol2/ja162.html

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Edited by E. B. Cowell

Original edition: Cambridge University Press, volume 2, 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

“Nothing is worse,” etc.—This story the Master told while dwelling at Jetavana,. about feeding the sacred fire. The circumstances are the same as those of the Nanguttha Birth related above. The Brethren, on seeing those who kept up this fire, said to the Blessed One, “Sir, here are topknot ascetics practising all sorts of false asceticism. What’s the good of it?” “There is no good in it,” said the Master. “It has happened before that even wise men have imagined some good in feeding the sacred fire, but after doing this for a long time, have found out that there is no good in it, and have quenched it with water, and beat it down, beat it down with sticks, never giving it so much as a look afterwards.” Then he told them a story.

Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta was king of Benares, the Bodhisatta was born in a brahmin family. When he was about sixteen years old, his father and mother took his birth-fire and spoke to him thus: “Son, will you take your birth-fire into the woods, and worship the fire there; or will you learn the Three Vedas, settle down as a married man, and live in the world?” Said he, “No worldly life for me: I will worship my fire in the woodland, and go on the way to heaven.” So taking his birth-fire, he bade farewell to his parents, and entered the forest, where he lived in a hut made of branches and leaves and did worship to the fire.

One day he had been invited to some place where he received a present of rice and ghee. “This rice,” thought he, “I will offer to Great Brahma.” So he took home the rice, and made the fire blaze. Then with the words, “With this rice I feed the sacred flame,” he cast it upon the fire. Scarce had this rice dropt upon it, all full of fat as it was—when a fierce flame leapt up which set his hermitage alight. Then the brahmin hurried away in terror, and sat down some distance off “There should be no dealings with the wicked,” said he; “and so this fire has burnt the hut which I made with so much trouble!” And he repeated the first stanza—

“Nothing is worse than evil company;

I fed my fire with plenteous rice and ghee;

And lo! the hut which gave me such ado

To build it up, my fire has burnt for me."

"I've done with you now, false friend!" he added; and he poured water upon the fire, and beat it out with sticks, and then buried himself in the mountains. There he came. upon a black hind licking the faces of a lion, a tiger, and a panther. This put it into his mind how there was nothing better than good friends; and therewith he repeated the second stanza:

"Nothing is better than good company;

Kind offices of friendship here I see;

Behold the lion, tiger, and the pard—

The black hind licks the faces of all three."

With these reflections the Bodhisatta plunged into the depths of the mountains, and there he embraced the true religious life, cultivating the Faculties and the Attainments, until at his life's end he passed into Brahma's heaven.

After delivering this discourse, the Master identified the Birth: "In those days I was the ascetic of the story."

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.