Ja 164 — Gijjha 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/ja164.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

“A vulture sees a corpse,” etc.—This story the Master told about a Brother who had his mother to support. The circumstances will be related under the Sama Birth. The Master asked him whether he, a Brother, was really supporting persons who were still living in the world. This the Brother admitted, “How are they related to you?” the Master went on. “They are my parents, Sir.” “Excellent, excellent,” the Master said; and bade the Brethren not be angry with this Brother. “Wise men of old,” said he, “have done service even to those who were not of kin to them; but this man’s task has been to support his own parents.” So saying, he told them this story of bygone days.

Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta was king of Benares, the Bodhisatta came to life as a young Vulture on the Vulture Hill, and had his mother and father to nourish.

Once there came a great wind and rain. The Vultures could not hold their own against it; half frozen, they flew to Benares, and there near the wall and near the ditch they sat, shivering with the cold.

A merchant of Benares was issuing from the city on his way to bathe, when he spied these miserable Vultures. He got them together in a dry place, made a fire, sent and brought them some cowflesh from the cattle’s burning-place, and put some one to look after them.

When the storm fell, our Vultures were all right and flew off at once among the mountains. Without delay they met, and thus took counsel together. “A Benares merchant has done us a good turn; and one good turn deserves another, as the saying is : so after this when any of us finds a garment or an ornament it must be dropt in that merchant’s courtyard.” So thenceforward if they ever noticed people drying their clothes or finery in the sun, watching for an unwary moment, they snatched them quickly, as hawks swoop on a bit of meat, and dropt them in the merchant’s yard. But he, whenever he observed that they were bringing him anything, used to cause it to be laid aside.

They told the king how vultures were plundering the city. “Just catch me one vulture,” says the king, “and I will make them bring it all back.” So snares and gins were set everywhere; our dutiful Vulture was caught. They seized him with intent to bring him to the king. The Merchant aforesaid, on the way to wait upon his majesty, saw these people walking along with the Vulture. He went in their company, for fear they might hurt the Vulture.

They gave the Vulture to the king, who examined him.

“You rob our city, and carry off clothes and all sorts of things,” he began.—“Yes, Sire.”—“Whom have they been given to?”—“A merchant of Benares.”—“Why?”—“Because he saved our lives, and they say one good turn deserves another; that is why we gave them to him.”

“Vultures, they say,” quoth the king, “can spy a corpse an hundred leagues away; and can’t you see a trap set ready for you?” And with these words he repeated the first stanza—

“A vulture sees a corpse that lies one hundred leagues away:

When thou alightst upon a trap dost thou not see it, pray?”

The Vulture listened, then replied by repeating the second stanza—

“When life is coming to an end, and death’s hour draws anigh,

Though you may come close up to it, nor trap nor snare you spy.”

After this response of the Vulture, the king turned to our Merchant. “Have all these things really been brought to you, then, by the Vultures?” “Yes, my lord.” “Where are they?” “My lord, they are all put away; each shall receive his own again—only let this Vulture go!” He had his way; the Vulture was set at liberty, and the Merchant returned all the property to its owners.

This lesson ended, the Master declared the Truths, and identified the Birth—at the conclusion of the Truths the dutiful Brother was established in the fruition of the First Path—“Ananda was the king of those days; Sariputta was the Merchant; and I myself was the Vulture that supported his parents.”

The Jātaka, or Stories of the Buddha’s Former Births, edited by E.B. Cowell, published by The Cambridge University Press.

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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.