Ja 178 — Kacchapa 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/ja178.html

Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

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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

“Here was I born,” etc.—This story the Master told in Jetavana, how a man got rid of malaria.

It is said that malarial fever once broke out in a family of Savatthi. The parents said to their son: “Don’t stay in this house, son; make a hole in the wall and escape somewhere, and save your life. Then come back again—in this place a great hoard is buried; dig it up, and restore the family fortunes, and a happy life to you!” The young fellow did as he was bid; he broke through the wall, and made his escape. When his complaint was cured, he returned and dug the treasure up, with which he set up his household.

One day, laden with oil and ghee, clothes and raiment, and other offerings, he repaired to Jetavana, and greeted the Master, and took his seat. The Master entered into converse with him. “We hear,” said he, “that you had cholera in your house. How did you escape it?” He told the Master all about it. Said he, “In days of yore, as now, friend layman, when danger arose, there were people who were too fond of home to leave it, and they perished thereby; while those who were not too fond of it, but departed elsewhere, saved themselves alive.” And then at his request the Master told an old-world story.

Once on a time, when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born in a village as a potter’s son. He plied the potter’s trade, and had a wife and family to support.

At that time there lay a great natural lake close by the great river of Benares. When there was much water, river and lake were one; but when the water was low, they were apart. Now fish and tortoises know by instinct when the year will be rainy and when there will be a drought. So at the time of our story the fish and tortoises which lived in that lake knew there would be a drought; and when the two were one water, they swam out of the lake into the river. But there was one Tortoise that would not go into the river, because, said he, “here I was born, and here I have grown up, and here is my parents’ home: leave it I

cannot!”

Then in the hot season the water all dried up. He dug a hole and buried himself, just in the place where the Bodhisatta was used to come for clay. There the Bodhisatta came to get some clay; with a big spade he dug down, till he cracked the tortoise’ shell, turning him out on the ground as though he were a large piece of clay. In his agony the creature thought, “Here I am, dying, all because I was too fond of my home to leave it!” and in the words of these verses following he made his moan:

“Here was I born, and here I lived; my refuge was the clay;

And now the clay has played me false in a most grievous way;

Thee, thee I call, O Bhaggava; hear what I have to say!

“Go where thou canst find happiness, where’er the place may be;

Forest or village, there the wise both home and birthplace see;

Go where there’s life; nor stay at home for death to master thee.”

So he went on and on, talking to the Bodhisatta, till he died. The Bodhisatta picked him up, and collecting all the villagers addressed them thus: “Look at this tortoise. When the other fish and tortoises went into the great river, he was too fond of home to go with them, and buried himself in the place where I get my clay. Then as I was digging for clay, I broke his shell with my big spade, and turned him out on the ground in the belief that he was a large lump of clay. Then he called to mind what he had done, lamented his fate in two verses of poetry, and expired. So you see he came to his end because he was too fond of his home. Take care not to be like this tortoise. Don’t say to yourselves, ‘I have sight, I have hearing, I have smell, I have taste, I have touch, I have a son, I have a daughter, I have numbers of men and maids for my service, I have precious gold’; do not cleave to these things with craving and desire. Each being passes through three stages of existence.” Thus did he exhort the crowd with all a Buddha’s skill. The discourse was bruited abroad all over India, and for full seven thousand years it was remembered. All the crowd abode by his exhortation; and gave alms and did good until at last they went to swell the hosts of heaven.

When the Master had made an end, he declared the Truths, and identified the Birth—at the conclusion of the Truths the young man was established in the Fruit of the First Path—saying, “Ananda was then the Tortoise, and the Potter was I thyself.”

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.