Ja 201 — Bandhanagara 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/ja201.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

“Not iron fetters,” etc.—This story the Master told whilst staying in Jetavana, about the prison-house.

At the time of this story we hear that a gang of burglars, highwaymen, and murderers had been caught and haled before the king of Kosala. The king ordered them to be made fast with chains, and ropes, and fetters. Thirty country Brothers, desirous of seeing the Master, had paid him a visit and offered their salutations. Next day, as they were seeking alms, they passed the prison and noticed these rascals. In the evening, after their return from the day’s rounds, they approached the Buddha: “Sir,” they said, “to-day, as we were seeking alms, we saw in the prison-house a number of criminals bound fast in chains and fetters, being in great misery. They could not break these fetters, and run away. Is there any fetter stronger than these?”

The Master replied, “Brethren, those are fetters, it is true; but the fetters which consist of a craving for wealth, corn, sons, wives and children are stronger than they are an hundred-fold, nay a thousand-fold. Yet even those fetters, hard to break as they are, have been broken by wise men of the olden time, who went to Himalaya and became anchorites.” Then he told them an old-world tale.

Once upon a time, while Brahmadatta ruled over Benares, the Bodhisatta was born into a poor man’s family. When he grew up, his father died. He earned wages, and supported his mother. His mother, much against his will, brought a wife home for him, and soon after died. Now his wife conceived. Not knowing that she had conceived, he said to her, “Wife, you must earn your living; I will renounce the world.” Then said she, “Nay, for I am with child. Wait and see the child that is born of me, and then go and become a hermit.” To this he agreed. So when she was delivered, he said, “Now, wife, you are safely delivered, and I must turn hermit.” “Wait,” said she, “till the time when the child is weaned.” And after that she conceived again.

“If I agree to her request,” thought the Bodhisatta, “I shall never get away at all. I will flee without saying a word to her, and become a hermit.” So he told her nothing, but rose up in the night, and fled away.

The city guards seized him. “I have a mother to support,” said he—“let me go!” thus he made them let him go free, and after staying in a certain place, he passed out by the chief gate and made his way to the Himalayas, where he lived as a recluse; and caused the Supernatural Faculties and the Attainments to spring up within him, as he dwelt in the rapture of meditation. As he dwelt there, he exulted, saying—“The bond of wife and child, the bond of passion, so hard to break, is broken!” and he uttered these lines—

“Not iron fetters—so the wise have told—

Not ropes, or bars of wood, so fast can hold

As passion, and the love of child or wife,

Of precious gems and earrings of fine gold.

“These heavy fetters—who is there can find

Release from such?—these are the ties that bind:

These if the wise can burst, then they are free,

Leaving all love and all desire behind!”

And the Bodhisatta, after uttering this aspiration, without breaking the charm of his ecstasy attained to Brahma’s world.

When the Master had ended this discourse, he declared the Truths—at the conclusion of the Truths, some entered the First Path, some the Second, some the Third, and some the Fourth—“In the story, Mahamaya was the mother, King Suddhodana was the father, Rahula s mother was the wife, Rahula himself the son, and I was the man who left his family and became an anchorite.”

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.