Ja 211 — Somadatta 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/ja211.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

“All the year long never ceasing,” etc.—This story the Master told while dwelling at Jetavana, about Elder Laludayi, or Udayi the Simpleton.

This man, we learn, was unable to get out a single sound in the presence of two or three people. He was so very nervous, that he said one thing when he meant another. It happened that the Brethren were speaking of this as they sat together in the Hall of Truth. The Master came in, and asked what they were talking of as they sat there together. They told him. He answered, “Brethren, this is not the first time that Laludayi has been a very nervous man. It was just the same before.” And he told an old-world tale.

Once on a time, while Brahmadatta was king of Benares, the Bodhisatta was born into a certain brahmin family in the kingdom of Kasi. When he came of age, he went to study at Takkasila. On returning he found his family poor; and he bade his parents farewell and set out to Benares, saying to himself, “I will set up my fallen family again!”

At Benares he became the king’s attendant; and he grew very dear to the king and became a favourite.

Now his father lived by ploughing the land, hut he had only one pair of oxen; and one of them died. He came before the Bodhisatta, and said to him, “Son, one of my oxen is dead, and the ploughing does not go on. Ask the king to give you one ox!”

“No, Father,” answered he, “I have but just now seen the king; I ought not to ask him for oxen now—you ask him.”

“My son,” said his father, “you do not know how bashful I am. If there are two or three people present I cannot get a word out. If I go to ask the king for an ox, I shall end by giving him this one!”

“Father,” said the Bodhisatta, “what must be, must be. I cannot ask the king; but I will train you to do it.” So he led his father to a cemetery where there were clumps of sweet grass; and tying up tufts of it, he scattered them here and there, and named them one by one, pointing them out to his father: “That is the King, that is the Viceroy, this is the Chief Captain. Now, Father, when you come before the king, you must first say—‘Long live the king!’ and then repeat this verse, to ask for an ox;” and this is the verse he taught him:

“I had two oxen to my plough, with which my work was done,

But one is dead! O mighty prince, please give me another one!”

For the space of a whole year the man learnt this couplet; and then he said to his son—“Dear Somadatta, I have learnt the lines! Now I can say it before any man! Take me to the king.”

So the Bodhisatta, taking a suitable present, led his father into the king’s presence. “Long live the king!” cried the brahmin, offering his present.

“Who is this brahmin, Somadatta?” the king asked.

“Great king, it is my father,” he answered.

“Why has he come here?” asked the king. Then the brahmin repeated his couplet, to ask for the ox—

“I had two oxen to my plough, with which my work was done,

But one is dead! O mighty prince, please take the other one!”

The king saw that there was some mistake. “Somadatta,” said he, smiling, “you have plenty of oxen at home, I suppose?”

“If so, great king, they are your gift!”

At this answer the king was pleased. He gave the man, for a brahmin’s offering, sixteen oxen, with fine caparison, and a village to live in, and sent him away with great honour. The brahmin ascended a car drawn by Sindh horses, pure white, and went to his dwelling in great pomp.

As the Bodhisatta sat beside his father in the chariot, said he, “Father, I taught you the whole year long, and yet when the moment came you gave your ox to the king!” and he uttered the first stanza—

“All the year long never ceasing with unwearied diligence

Where the sweet grass grows in clusters day by day he practised it:

When he came amid the courtiers all at once he changed the sense;

Practice truly nought availeth if a man has little wit.”

When he heard this, the brahmin uttered the second stanza:

“He that asks, dear Somadatta, takes his chance between the two—

May get more, or may get nothing: when you ask, ’Tis ever so.”

When the Master by this story had shown how Simpleton Udayi had been just as bashful before as he was then, he identified the Birth—“ Laludayi was the father of Somadatta, and I was Somadatta myself.”

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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