Ja 234 — Asitabhu 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/ja234.html

Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

License: Public Domain (original English edition, published 1895–1907)

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

“Now desire has gone,” etc.—This story the Master told while staying at Jetavana, about a young girl.

Tradition tells us that a certain man at Savatthi, a servant of the Master’s two chief disciples, had one beautiful and happy daughter. When she grew up, she married into a family as good as her own. The husband, without consulting anybody, used to enjoy himself elsewhere at his own sweet will, She took no notice of his disrespect; but invited’ the two chief disciples, made them presents, and listened to their preaching, until she reached the Fruit of the First Path. After this she spent all her time in the enjoyment of the Path and the Fruit; at last, thinking that as her husband did not want her, there was no need for her to remain in the household, she determined to embrace the religious life. She informed her parents of her plan, carried it out, and became a saint.

Her story became known amongst the Brotherhood; and one day they were discussing it in the Hall of Truth. “Friend, the daughter of such and such a family strives to attain the highest good. Finding that her husband did not care for her, she made rich presents to the chief disciples, listened to their preaching, and gained the Fruit of the First Path; she took leave of her parents, became a religious, and then a saint. So, friend, the girl sought the highest good.”

While they were talking, the Master came in and asked what it was all about. They told him. He said, “This is not the first time, Brethren, that she seeks the highest; she did so in olden days as well.” And he told an old-world tale.

Once on a time, when Brahmadatta was king in Benares, the Bodhisatta was living as an ascetic, in the Himalaya region; and he had cultivated the Faculties and the Attainments. Then the king of Benares, observing how magnifical was the pomp of his son Prince Brahmadatta, was filled with suspicion, and banished his son from the realm.

The youth with his wife Asitabhu made his way to Himalaya, and took up his abode in a hut of leaves, with fish to eat, and all manner of wild fruits. He saw a woodland sprite, and became enamoured of her. “Her will I make my wife!” said he, and nought reeking of Asitabhu, he followed after her steps. His wife seeing that he followed after the sprite, was wroth. “The man cares nought for me,” she thought; “what have I to do with him?” So she came to the Bodhisatta, and did him reverence: she learnt what she must needs do to be initiated, and gazing at the mystic object, she developed the Faculties and the Attainments, bade the Bodhisatta farewell, and returning stood at the door of her hut of leaves.

Now Brahmadatta followed the sprite, but saw not by what way she went; and baulked of his desire he set his face again for the hut. Asitabhu saw him coming, and rose up in the air; and poised upon a plane in the air of the colour of a precious stone, she said to him—“My young lord! ’Tis through you that I have attained this ecstatic bliss!” and she uttered the first stanza—

“Now desire has gone,

Thanks to you, and found its ending:

Like a tusk, once sawn,

None can make it one by mending.”

So saying, as he looked, she rose up and departed to another place. And when she had gone, he uttered the second stanza, lamenting—

“Greed that knows no stay,

Lust, the senses all confusing,

Steals our good away,

Even as now my wife I’m losing.”

And having made his moan in this stanza, he dwelt alone in the forest, and at his father’s death he received the sovereignty.

After this discourse was ended, the Master identified the Birth—“These two people were then the prince and princess, and I was the hermit.”

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.

These translations are in the public domain. You are free to do whatever you like with them.

Scanned, proofed and formatted at sacred-texts.com, January 2006–February 2010, by John Bruno Hare and others. Thanks to the Sacred Texts Archive for making these texts available in digital form.

Prepared for SuttaCentral by Bhikkhu Sujato.