Ja 25 — Tittha Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

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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

“Change thou the spot.”—This story was told by the Master while at Jetavana, about an ex-goldsmith, who had become a Brother and was co-resident with the Captain of the Faith (Sariputta).

Now, it is only a Buddha who has knowledge of the hearts and can read the thoughts of men; and therefore through lack of this power, the Captain of the Faith had so little knowledge of the heart and thoughts of his co-resident, as to prescribe impurity as the theme for meditation. This was no good to that Brother. The reason why it was no good to him was that, according to tradition, he had invariably been born, throughout five hundred successive births, as a goldsmith; and, consequently, the cumulative effect of seeing absolutely pure gold for so long a time had made the theme of impurity useless. He spent four months without being able to get so much as the first inkling of the idea. Finding himself unable to confer Arahatship on his co-resident, the Captain of the Faith thought to himself, “This must certainly be one whom none but a Buddha can. convert; I will take him to the Buddha.” So at early dawn he came with the Brother to the Master.

“What can it be, Sariputta,” said the Master, “that has brought you here with this Brother?” “Sir, I gave him a theme for meditation, and after four months he has not attained to so much as the first inkling of the idea; so I brought him to you, thinking that here was one whom none but a Buddha can convert.” “What meditation, Sariputta, did you prescribe for him?” “The meditation on impurity, Blessed One.” “Sariputta, it is not yours to have knowledge of the hearts and to read the thoughts of men. Depart now alone, and in the evening come back to fetch your co-resident.”

After thus dismissing the Elder, the Master had that Brother clad in a nice under-cloth and a robe, kept him constantly at his side when he went into town for alms, and saw that he received choice food of all kinds. Returning to the Monastery once more, surrounded by the Brethren, the Master retired during the daytime to his perfumed chamber, and at

evening, as he walked about the Monastery with that Brother by his side, he made a pond appear and in it a great clump of lotuses out of which grew a great lotus-flower. “Sit here, Brother,” he said, “and gaze at this flower.” And, leaving the Brother seated thus, he retired to his perfumed chamber.

That Brother gazed and gazed at that flower. The Blessed One made it decay. As the Brother looked at it, the flower in its decay faded; the petals fell off, beginning at the rim, till in a little while all were gone; then the Stamens fell away, and only the pericarp was left. As he looked, that Brother thought within himself, “Even now, this lotus-flower was lovely and fair; yet its colour is departed, and only the pericarp is left standing. Decay has come upon this beautiful lotus; what may not befall my body? Transitory are all compounded things!” And with the thought he won Insight.

Knowing that the Brother’s mind had risen to Insight, the Master, seated as he was in his perfumed chamber, emitted a radiant semblance of himself, and uttered this stanza—

Pluck out self-love, as with the hand you pluck

The autumn water-lily. Set your heart

On naught but this, the perfect Path of Peace,

And that Extinction which the Buddha taught.

At the close of this stanza, that Brother won Arahatship. At the thought that he would never be born again, never be troubled with existence in any shape hereafter, he burst into a heartfelt utterance beginning with these stanzas He who has lived his life, whose thought is ripe;

He who, from all defilements purged and free,

Wears his last body; he whose life is pure,

Whose subject senses own him sovereign lord;

He, like the moon that wins her way at last

From Rahu’s jaws, has won supreme release.

The foulness which enveloped me, which wrought

Delusion’s utter darkness, I dispelled;

—As, tricked with thousand rays, the beaming sun

Illumines heaven with a flood of light.

After this and renewed utterances of joy, he went to the Blessed One and saluted him. The Elder, too, came, and after due salutation to the Master, went away with his co-resident.

When news of all this spread among the Brethren, they gathered together in the Hall of Truth and there sat praising the virtues of the Lord of Wisdom, and saying, “Sirs, through not knowing the hearts and thoughts of men, the Elder Sariputta was ignorant of his co-resident’s disposition. But the Master knew, and in a single day bestowed on him Arahatship together with perfected scholarship. Oh, how great are the marvellous powers of a Buddha!”

Entering and taking the seat set ready for him, the Master asked, saying, “What is the theme of your discourse here in conclave, Brethren?”

“Naught else, Blessed One, than this,—that you alone had knowledge of the heart, and could read the thoughts, of the co-resident of the Captain of the Faith.”

“This is no marvel, Brethren; that I, as Buddha, should now know that Brother’s disposition. Even in bygone days I knew it equally well.” And, so saying, he told this story of the past.

Once on a time Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares. In those days the Bodhisatta used to be the king’s director in things temporal and spiritual.

At this time folk had washed another horse, a sorry beast, at the bathing-place of the king’s state-charger. And when the groom was for leading the state-charger down into the same water, the animal was so affronted that he would not go in. So the groom went off to the king and said, “Please your Majesty, your state-charger won’t take his bath.”

Then the king sent the Bodhisatta, saying, “Do you go, sage, and find out why the animal will not go into the water when they lead him down.” “Very good, sire,” said the Bodhisatta, and went his way to the waterside. Here he examined the horse; and, finding it was not ailing in any way, he tried to divine what the reason could be. At last he came to the conclusion that some other horse must have been washed at that place, and that the charger had taken such umbrage thereat that he would not go into the water. So he asked the grooms what animal they had washed first in the water. “Another horse, my lord,—an ordinary animal.” “Ah, it’s his self-love that has been offended so deeply that he will not go into the water,” said the Bodhisatta to himself; “the thing to do is to wash him elsewhere.” So he said to the groom, “A man will tire, my friend, of even the daintiest fare, if he has it always. And that’s how it is with this horse. He has been washed here times without number. Take him to other waters , and there bathe and water him.” And so saying, he repeated this stanza—

Change thou the spot, and let the charger drink

Now here, now there, with constant change of scene.

For even milk-rice cloys a man at last.

After listening to his words, they led the horse off elsewhere, and there watered and bathed him all-right. And while they were washing the animal down after watering him, the Bodhisatta went back to the king. “Well,” said the king; “has my horse taken his drink and bath, my friend?” “He has, sire.” “Why would he not do so at first?” “For the following reason,” said the Bodhisatta, and told the king the whole story. “What a clever fellow he is,” said the king; “he can read the mind even of an animal like this.” And he gave great honour to the Bodhisatta, and when his life closed passed away to fare according to his deserts. The Bodhisatta also passed away to fare likewise according to his deserts.

When the Master had ended his lesson and had repeated what he had said as to his knowledge, in the past as well as the present, of that Brother’s disposition, he shewed the connexion, and identified the Birth by saying, “This Brother was the state-charger of those days; Ananda was the king and I myself the wise minister.”

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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