Ja 251 — Samkappa Jātaka

English translation by W. H. D. Rouse.

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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

“No archer,” etc.—This story the Master told at Jetavana, about a backsliding Brother.

A young nobleman, living in Savatthi, gave his heart to the doctrine of the Treasures, and embraced the religious life. But one day, as he went his rounds in Savatthi, he happened to see a woman dressed in gay apparel. Passion sprang up in his heart; he became disconsolate. When his teachers, counsellors and friends saw him thus, they at once asked him the cause. Seeing that he longed to return to the world, they said to one another, “My friend, the Master can remove the sins of those who are tormented by the sin of lust and the like, and by declaring the Truths, he brings them to enjoy the fruition of sanctity. Come, let us lead him to the Master.” So to the Master they brought him. Said he, “Why do you bring me this youth against his will, Brothers? They told him the reason. “Is this true,” he asked, “that you are a backslider, as they say?” He assented. The Master asked the reason, and he recounted what had happened. Said he, “O Brother, it has happened before that these women have caused impurity to spring up even in pure beings whose sins have been stayed by the power of ecstasy. Why should not vain men like you be defiled, when defilement comes even to the pure? Even men of the highest repute have fallen into dishonour; how much more the unpurified! Shall not the wind that shakes Mount Sineru also stir a heap of old leaves? This sin has troubled the enlightened Buddha himself, sitting on his throne, and shall it not trouble such an one as you?” and at their request he told them an old-world tale.

Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta was king of Benares, the Bodhisatta was born into a great brahmin family, which had wealth to the amount of eight hundred millions of money. He grew up, and received his education at Takkasila, and returned to Benares. There he married a wife; and on his parents’ death, he performed their obsequies. Then, as he inspected his treasure, he reflected—“The treasure is still here, but they who gathered it are here no more!” He was overcome with grief, and the sweat poured from his body.

He lived a long time at home, and gave much in alms; he mastered his passions; then he left his weeping friends, and went into the Himalayas, where he built a hut in a delightful spot, and lived upon the wild fruits and roots of the forest, which he found in his goings to and fro. Ere long he cultivated the Faculties and the Attainments, and lived awhile in the bliss of joyous meditation.

Then a thought came to him. He would go amongst mankind, to buy salt and seasoning; thus his body would grow strong, and he would wander about on foot. “All that shall give alms to a virtuous man like me,” thought he, “and greet me with respect, shall fill the heavenly regions.” So down he came from Himalaya, and by and bye, as he tramped onwards, he came to Benares at the time of the sun setting. He looked about for a place to bide in, and spied the royal park. “Here,” said he, “is a place fit for retirement; here will I dwell.” So he entered the park, and sat at the foot of a tree, and spent the night in the joy of meditation.

Next day in the forenoon, having seen to his bodily needs, and adjusted his matted hair, his skin and robes of bark, he took up his alms-bowl; all his senses were quiet, his pride was calmed, he bore himself nobly, looking no more than a plough’s length before him; by the glory of his appearance, which was perfect in every way, he drew upon him the eyes of the world. In this fashion he entered the city, and begged from door to door, till he came to the king’s palace.

Now the king was upon his terrace, walking to and fro. He spied the Bodhisatta through a window. He was pleased with his bearing; “If,” thought he, “there is such a thing as perfect quietude, it must be found in this man.” So he sent one of his courtiers, bidding him fetch the ascetic. The man came up with a greeting, and took his alms-bowl, saying, “The king sends for you, Sir.”

“Noble friend,” replied the Bodhisatta, “the king does not know me!”

“‘Then, Sir, please remain here until I return.” So he told the king what the beggar had said. Then said the king,

“We have no confidential priest: go, fetch him;” and at the same time he beckoned out of the window, calling to him—“Here, come in, Sir!”

The Bodhisatta gave up his alms-bowl to the courtier, and mounted upon the terrace. Then the king greeted him, and set him upon the king’s couch, and offered him all the foods and meats prepared for himself. When he had eaten, he put a few questions to him; and the answers which were given pleased him ever more and more, so that with a word of respect, he asked,

“Good Sir, where do you live? whence did you come hither?”

“I dwell in Himalaya, mighty king, and from Himalaya have I come.”

The king asked, “Why?”

“In the rainy season, O king, we must seek a fixed abode.”

“Then,” the king said, “abide here in my royal park, you shall not lack for the four things needful; I shall acquire the merit which leads to heaven.”

The promise was given; and having broken his fast he went with the Bodhisatta into the grounds, and caused a hut of leaves to be built there. A covered walk he had made, and prepared all the places for his living by night and by day. All the furniture and requisites for an anchorite’s life he had brought, and bidding him be comfortable he gave him in charge to the park-keeper.

For twelve years after this, the Bodhisatta had his dwelling in that place.

Once it so happened that a frontier district rose in rebellion. The king desired to go himself to quell it. Calling his queen, he said—“Lady, either you or I must stay behind.”

“Why do you say that, my lord?” she asked.

“For the sake of the good ascetic.”

“I will not neglect him,” said she. “Mine be it to attend upon the holy father; do you go away without anxiety.”

So the king departed; and then the queen waited attentively upon the Bodhisatta.

Now the king was gone; at the fixed season the Bodhisatta came.

When it pleased him, he would come to the palace, and take his meal there. One day, he tarried a long time. The queen had made ready all his food; she bathed and adorned herself, and prepared a low seat; with a clean robe thrown loosely over her, she reclined, waiting for the Bodhisatta to come. Now the Bodhisatta noted the time of day; he took up his alms-bowl, and passing through the air, came up to the great window. She heard his bark robes rustle, and as she rose hastily, her yellow dress slipped. The. Bodhisatta let this unusual sight penetrate his senses, and looked upon her with desire. Then the evil passion that had been calmed by the power of his ecstasy, rose as a cobra rises spreading his hood, from the basket in which he is kept: he was like a milky tree struck by the axe. As his passion gained force, his ecstatic calm gave way, his senses lost their purity; he was as it were a crow with a broken wing. He could not sit down as before, and take his meal; not though she begged him to be seated, could he take his seat. So the queen placed all the food together in his alms-bowl; but that day he could not do as he used to do after his meal, and go out of the window through the air; taking the food, he went down by the great staircase, and so into the grove.

When he came there, he could eat nothing. He set down the food at the foot of his bench, murmuring, “What a woman! lovely hands, lovely feet! what a waist, what thighs!” and so forth. Thus he lay for seven days. The food all went bad, and was covered with a cloud of black flies.

Then the king returned, having reduced his frontier to order. The city was all decorated; he went round it in solemn procession, keeping it always on the right, and then proceeded to the palace. Next he entered the grove, wishing to see the Bodhisatta. He noticed the dirt and rubbish about the hermitage, and thinking he must be gone, he pushed back the hut door, and stepped in. There lay the anchorite. “He must he ill,” thought the king. So he had the putrid food thrown away, and the hut set in order, and then asked,

“What is the matter, Sir?”

“Sire, I am wounded!”

Then the king thought, “I suppose my enemies must have done this. They could not get a chance at me, so they determined to do a mischief to what I love.” So he turned him over, looking for the wound; but no wound could he see. Then he asked, “Where’s the place, Sir?”

“No one has hurt me,” replied the Bodhisatta, “only I have wounded my own heart.” And he rose, and sat upon a seat, and repeated the following verses:

“No archer drew an arrow to his ear

To deal this wound; no feathered shaft is here

Plucked from a peacock’s wing, and decked out fine

By skilful fletchers—’Tis this heart of mine,

“Once cleansed from passion by my own firm will,

And keen intelligence, which through desire

Hath dealt the wound that bids me fair to kill,

And burns through all the limbs of me like fire.

“I see no wound from which the blood might flow:

My own heart’s folly ’Tis that pierces so.”

Thus did the Bodhisatta explain matters to the king by these three stanzas. Then he made the king retire from the hut, and induced the mystic trance; and so he recovered his interrupted ecstasy. Then he left the hut, and sitting in the air, exhorted the king. After this the declared that he would go up to Himalaya. The king would have dissuaded him, but he

said,

“O king, see what humiliation has come upon me while I dwelt here! I cannot live here.” And although the king entreated him, he uprose in the air, and departed to Himalaya, where he abode his life long, and then went to Brahma’s world.

When the Master had ended this discourse, he declared the Truths and identified the Birth—at the conclusion of the Truths the backsliding Brother became a Saint, and some entered the First Path, some the Second, and some the

Third—“Amanda was the king, 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.

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Prepared for SuttaCentral by Bhikkhu Sujato.