# Ja 257 — Gamani-Canda 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

“It is not a clever builder,” etc.—This story the Master told while sojourning at Jetavana, about the praise of wisdom. In the Hall of Truth sat the Brethren, praising the wisdom of the Buddha: “The Blessed One has wisdom great and wide, wisdom witty and quick, wisdom sharp and penetrating. He excels this world and the world of gods in wisdom.”

The Master entered, and asked what they were talking of now as they sat there. They told him. He answered, “This is not the first time, Brethren, that the Blessed One has been wise; he was the same before.” And he told an old-world tale.

Once upon a time, Brethren, when Janasandha was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta came to life as the son of his chief queen. His face was resplendent, wearing a look of auspicious beauty, like a golden mirror well polished. On the day of his naming they called him Adasa-mukha, Prince Mirror-face.

Within the space of seven years his father caused him to be taught the Three Vedas, and all the duties of this world; and then he died, when the lad was seven years old. The courtiers performed the king’s obsequies with great pomp, and made the offerings for the dead; and on the seventh day they gathered together in the palace court, and talked together. The prince was very young, they thought, and he could not be made king.

Before they made him king, they would test him. So they prepared a court of justice, and set a divan. Then they came into the prince’s presence, and said they, “You must come, my lord, to the law-court.” To this the prince agreed; and with a great company he repaired thither, and sat upon the dais.

Now at the time when the king sat down for judgement, the courtiers had dressed up a monkey, in the garb of a man who is skilled in the lore which tells what are good sites for a building. They made him go upon two feet, and brought him into the judgement hall.

“My lord,” said they, “in the time of the king your father this man was one who divined by magic as to desirable sites, and well did he know his art. Down in the earth as deep as seven cubits he can see a fault. By his help there was a place chosen for the king’s house; let the king provide for him, and give him a post.”

The prince scanned him from head to foot. “This is no man, but a monkey,” he thought; “and monkeys can destroy what others have made, but of themselves can neither make anything nor carry out such a thing.” And so he repeated the first stanza to his court—

“It is not a clever builder, but an ape with a wrinkled face;

He can destroy what others make; that is the way of his race.”

“It must be so, my lord!” said the courtiers, and took him away. But after a day or two they dressed this same creature in grand clothes, and brought him again to the judgement hall. “In the king your father’s time, my lord, this was a judge who dealt justice. Him should you take to help you in the awarding of justice.”

The prince looked at him. Thought he, “A man with mind and reason is not so hairy as all that. This witless ape cannot dispense justice;” and he repeated the second stanza—

“There’s no wit in this hairy creature; he breeds no confidence;

He knows nought, as my father taught: the animal has no sense!”

“So it must be, my lord!” said the courtiers, and led him away. Yet once again did they dress up the very same monkey, and bring him to the hall of judgement. “Sire,” said they, “in the time of the king your father this man did his duty to father and mother, and paid respect to old age in his family. Him you should keep with you.”

Again the prince looked at him, and thought—“Monkeys are fickle of mind; such a thing they cannot do.” And then he repeated the third stanza—

“One thing Dasaratha has taught me: no help such a creature would send

To father or mother, to sister or brother, or any who call him friend!”

“So must it be, my lord!” answered they, and took him away again. And they said amongst themselves, “‘Tis a wise prince; he will be able to rule”; and they made the Bodhisatta king; and throughout the city by beat of drum they made proclamation, saying, “The edicts of king Mirror-face!”

From that time the Bodhisatta reigned righteously; and his wisdom was noised abroad throughout all India. To show forth the matter of this wisdom of his, these fourteen problems were brought to him to decide—

“An ox, a lad, a horse, a basket-knight,

A squire, a light-o’-love, and a young dame,

A snake, a deer, a partridge, and a sprite,

A snake, ascetics, a young priest I name.”

This happened as we shall now explain. When the Bodhisatta was inaugurated king, a certain servant of king Janasandha, named Gamani-canda, thus considered within himself: “This kingdom is glorious if it be governed by aid of those who are of an age with the king. Now I am old, and I cannot wait upon a young prince: so I will get me a living by farming in the country.” So he departed from the city a distance of three leagues, and abode in a certain village. But he had no oxen for farming. And so, after rain had fallen, he begged the loan of two oxen from a friend; all day long he ploughed with them, and then he gave them grass to eat, and went to the owner’s house to give them back again. At the moment it happened that the owner sat at meat with his wife; and the oxen entered the house, quite at home. As they entered, the master was raising his plate, and the wife putting hers down. Seeing that they did not invite him to share the meal, Gamani-canda departed without formally making over the oxen. During the night, thieves broke into the cow-pen, and stole the oxen away.

Early on the morrow, the owner of these oxen entered the cow-shed, but cattle there were none; he perceived that they had been stolen away by thieves. “I’ll make Gamani pay for it!” thought he, and to Gamani he went.

“I say, return me my oxen!” cried he.

“Are not they in their stall?”

“Now did you return them to met”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Here’s the king’s officer: come along.”

Now this people have a custom that they pick up a bit of stone or a potsherd, and say—“Here’s the king’s officer; come along! “If any man refuses to go, he is punished. So when Gamani heard the word “officer,” he went along.

So they went together towards the king’s court. On the way, they came to a village where dwelt a friend of Gamani’s. Said he to the other,

“I say, I’m very hungry. Wait here till I go in and get me something to eat!” and he entered his friend’s house.

But his friend was not at home. The wife said,

“Sir, there is nothing cooked. Wait but a moment; I will cook at once and set before you.”

She climbed a ladder to the grain store, and in her haste she fell to the ground. And as she was seven months gone with child, a miscarriage followed.

At that moment, in came the husband, and saw what had happened. “You have struck my wife,” cried he, “and brought her labour upon her untimely! Here’s a king’s officer for you—come along!” and he carried him off. After this they went on, the two of them, with Gamani between.

As they went, there was a horse at a village gate; and the groom could not stop it, but it ran along with them. The horsekeeper called out to Gamani—

“Uncle Candagamani, hit the horse with something, and head him back!” Gaillard picked up a stone, and threw it at the horse. The stone struck his foot, and broke it like the stalk of a castor-oil plant. Then the man cried,

“Oh, you’ve broken my horse’s leg! Here’s a king’s officer for you!” and he laid hold of him.

Gamani was thus three men’s prisoner. As they led him along, he thought: “These people will denounce me to the king;’ I can’t pay for the oxen; much less the fine for causing an untimely birth; and then where shall I get the price of the horse? I were better dead.” So, as they went along, he saw a wood hard by the road, and in it a hill with a precipice on one side of it. In the shadow of it were two basket-makers, father and son, weaving a mat. Said Gamani,

“I say, I want to retire for a moment: wait here, while I go aside”; and with these words he climbed the hill, and threw himself down the precipice. He fell upon the back of the elder basket-maker, and killed him on the spot. Gamani got up, and stood still.

“Ah, you villain! you’ve murdered my father!” cried the younger basket-maker; “here’s the king’s officer!” He seized Gamani’s hands, and came out of the thicket.

“What’s this?” asked the others.

“The villain has murdered my father!”

So on they went, the four of them, with Gamani in the middle.

They came to the gate of another village. The headman was there, who hailed Gamani: “Uncle Canda, whither away?”

“To see the king,” says Gamani.

“Oh indeed, to see the king. I want to send him a message; will you take it?”

“Yes, that I will.”

“Well—I am usually handsome, rich, honoured, and healthy; but now I am miserable and have the jaundice too. Ask the king why this is. He is a wise man, so they say; he will tell you, and you can bring me his message again.”

To this the other agreed.

At another village a light-o’-love called out to him—“Whither bound, Uncle Canda 4”

“To see the king,” says he.

“They say the king is a wise man; take him a message from me,” says the woman. “Aforetime I used to make great gains; now I don’t get the worth of a betel-nut, and nobody courts me. Ask the king how this may be, and then you can tell me.”

At a third village, there was a young woman who told Gamani, “I can live neither with my husband nor with my own family. Ask the king how this is, and then tell me.”

A little further on there was a snake living in an ant-hill near the road. He saw Gamani, and called out,

“Whither away, Canda?”

“To see the king.”

“The king is wise; take him a message from me. When I go out to get my food, I leave this ant-hill faint and famishing, and yet I fill the entrance hole with my body, and I get out with difficulty, dragging myself along. But when I come in again, I feel satisfied, and fat, yet I pass quickly through the hole without touching the sides. How is this? ask the king, and bring me his answer.”

And further on a deer saw him, and said—“I can’t eat grass anywhere but underneath this tree. Ask the king the reason.” And again a partridge said, “When I sit at the foot of this ant-heap, and utter my note, I can make it prettily; but nowhere else. Ask the king why.” And again, a tree spirit saw him, and said,

“Whither away, Canda?”

“To the king.”

“The king’s a wise man, they say. In former times I was highly honoured; now I don’t receive so much as a handful of twigs. Ask the king what the reason is.”

And further on again he was seen by a serpent-king, who spoke to him thus: “The king is said to be a wise man: then ask him this question. Heretofore the water in this pool has been clear as crystal. Why is it that now it has become turbid, with scum all over it?”

Further on, not far from a town, certain ascetics who dwelt in a park saw him, and said, in the same way, “They say the king is wise. Of yore there were in this park sweet fruits in plenty, now they have grown tasteless and dry. Ask him what the reason is.” Further on again, he was accosted by some brahmin students who were in a hall at the gate of a town. They said to him,

“Where are you going, Canda, eh?”

“To the king,” says Canda.

“Then take a message for us. Till now, whatever passage we learnt was bright and clear; now it does not stay with us, it is not understood, but all is darkness,—it is like water in a leaky jar. Ask the king what the reason is.”

Gamani-canda came before the king with his fourteen questions. When the king saw him, he recognised him. “This is my father’s servant, who used to dandle me in his arms. Where has he been living all this time?” And “Canda,” said he, “where have you been living all this time? We have seen nothing of you for a long while; what brings you here?”

“Oh, my lord, when my lord the late king went to heaven, I departed into the country and kept myself by farming. Then this man summoned me for a suit regarding his cattle, and here he has brought me.”

“If you had not been brought here, you had never come; but I’m glad that you were brought anyhow. Now I can see you. Where is that man?”

“Here, my lord.”

“It is you that summoned our friend Canda?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Why?”

“He refuses to give back my pair of oxen!”

“Is this so, Canda?”

“Hear my story too, my lord!” said Canda; and told him the whole. When he had heard the tale, the king accosted the owner of the oxen. “Did you see the oxen,” said he, “entering the stall?”

“No, my lord,” the man replied.

“Why, man, did you never hear my name? They call me king Mirror-face. Speak out honestly.”

“I saw them, my lord!” said he.

“Now, Canda,” said the king, “you failed to return the oxen, and therefore you are his debtor for them. But this man, in saying that he had not seen them, told a direct lie. Therefore you with your own hands shall pluck his eyes out, and you shall yourself pay him twenty-four pieces of money as the price of the oxen.” Then they led the owner of the oxen out of doors.

“If I lose my eyes, what do I care for the money?” thought he. And he fell at Gamani’s feet, and besought him—“O master Canda, keep those twenty-four pieces, and take these too!” and he gave him other pieces, and ran away.

The second man said, “My lord, this fellow struck my wife, and made her miscarry.” “Is this true, Canda?” asked the king. Canda begged for a hearing, and told the whole story.

“Did you really strike her, and cause her to miscarry?” asked the king.

“No, my lord! I did no such thing.”

“Now, can you”—to the other—“can you heal the miscarriage which he has caused?”

“No, my lord, I cannot.”

“Now, what do you want to do?”

“I ought to have a son, my lord.”

“Now then, Canda—you take the man’s wife to your house; and when a son shall be born to you, hand him over to the husband.”

Then this man also fell at Canda’s feet, crying, “Don’t break up my home, master!” threw down some money, and made off.

The third man then accused Canda of laming his horse’s foot. Canda as before told what had happened. Then the king asked the owner, “Did you really bid Canda strike the horse, and turn him back?”

“No, my lord, I did not.” But on being pressed, he admitted that he had said so.

“This man,” said the king, “has told a direct lie, in saying that he did not tell you to head back the horse. You may tear out his tongue; and then pay him a thousand pieces for the horse’s price, which I will give you.” But the fellow even gave him another sum of money, and departed.

Then the basket-maker’s son said,

“This fellow is a murderer, and he killed my father!”

“Is it so, Canda?” asked the icing. “Hear me, my lord,” said Canda, and told him about it.

“Now, what do you want?” asked the king.

“My lord, I must have my father.”

“Canda,” said the king, “this man must have a father. But you cannot bring him back from the dead. Then take his mother to your house, and do you be a father to him.”

“Oh, master!” cried the man, “don’t break up my dead father’s home!” He gave Gamani a sum of money, and hurried away.

Thus Gamani won his suit, and in great delight he said to the king, “My lord, I have several questions for you from several persons; may

I tell you them?”

“Say on,” said the king.

So Gamani told them all in reverse order, beginning with the young brahmins. The king answered them in turn. To the first question, he answered: “In the place where they lived there used to be a crowing cock that knew the time. When they heard his crow, they used to rise up, and repeat their texts, until the sun rose, and thus they did not forget what they learnt. But now there is a cock that crows out of season; he crows at dead of night, or in broad day. When he crows in the depth of night, up they rise, but they are too sleepy to repeat the text. When he crows in broad day, they rise up, but they have not the chance to repeat their texts. Thus it is, that whatever they learn, they soon forget.”

To the second question, he answered: “Formerly these men used to do all the duties of the ascetic, and they induced the mystic trance. Now they have neglected the ascetic’s duties, and they do what they ought not to do; the fruits which grow in the park they give to their attendants; they live in a sinful way, exchanging their alms. This is why this fruit does not grow sweet. If they once more with one consent do their duty as ascetics, again the fruit will grow sweet for them. Those hermits know not the wisdom of kings; tell them to live the ascetic life.”

He heard the third question, and answered, “Those serpent chiefs quarrel one with another, and that is why the water becomes turbid. If they make friends as before, the water will be clear again.” After hearing the fourth, “The tree-spirit,” said he, “used formerly to protect men passing through the wood, and therefore she received many offerings. Now she gives them no protection, and so she receives no offerings. If she protects them as before, she will receive choice offerings again. She knows not that there are kings in the world. Tell her, then, to guard the men who go up into that wood.” And on hearing the fifth, “Under the ant-hill where the partridge finds himself able to utter a pleasant cry is a

crock of treasure; dig it up and get it." To the sixth he answered, "On the tree under which the deer found he could eat grass, is a great honey-comb. He craves the grass on which this honey has dropped, and so he can eat no other. You get the honeycomb, send the best of it to me, and eat the rest yourself." Then on hearing the seventh, "Under the snake's ant-heap lies a large treasure-crock, and there he lives guarding it. So when he goes out, from greed for this treasure his body sticks fast; but after he has fed, his desire for the treasure prevents his body from sticking, and be goes in quickly and easily. Dig up the treasure, and keep it." Then he replied to the eighth question, "Between the villages where dwell the young woman's husband and her parents lives a lover of hers in a certain house. She remembers him, and her desire is toward him; therefore she cannot stay in her husband's house, but says she will go and see her parents, and on the way she stays a few days with her lover. When she has been at home a few days, again she remembers him, and saying she will return to her husband, she goes again to her lover. Go, tell her there are kings in the land; say, she must dwell with her husband, and if she will not, let her have a care, the king will cause her to be seized, and she shall die." He heard the ninth, and to this he said, "The woman used formerly to take a price from the hand of one, and not to go with another until she was off with him, and that is how she used to receive much. Now she has changed her manner, and without leave of the first she goes with the last, so that she receives nothing, and none seek after her. If she keeps to her old custom, it will be as it was before. Tell her that she should keep to that." On hearing the tenth, he replied, "That village headman used once to deal justice indifferently, so that men were pleased and delighted with him; and in their delight they gave him many a present. This is what made him handsome, rich, and honoured. Now he loves to take bribes, and his judgement is not fair; so he is poor and miserable, and jaundiced. If he judges once again with righteousness, he will be again as he was before. He knows not that there are kings in the land. Tell him that he must use justice in giving judgement."

And Gamani-canda told all these messages, as they were told to him. And the king having resolved all these questions by his wisdom, like Buddha omniscient, gave rich presents to Gamani-canda; and the village where Canda dwelt he gave to him, as a brahmin's gift, and let him go. Canda went out of the city, and told the king's answer to the brahmin youths, and the ascetics, to the serpent and to the tree-spirit; he took the treasure from the place where the partridge sat, and from the tree beneath which the deer did eat, he took the honeycomb, and sent honey to the king; he broke into the snake's ant-hill, and gathered the treasure out of it; and to the young woman, and the light-o'-love, and the village headman he said even as the king had told him. Then he returned to his own village, and dwelt there so long as he lived, and afterward passed away to fare according to his deserts. And king Mirror-face also gave alms, and wrought goodness, and finally after his death went to swell the hosts of heaven.

When the Master had ended this discourse, to show that not now only is the Blessed One wise, but wise he was before, he declared the Truths, and identified the Birth: (now at the conclusion of the Truths many persons entered on the First Path, or the Second, or the Third, or the Fourth:) "At that time Ananda was Gamani-Canda; but king Mirror-face was I myself."

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