Ja 26 — Mahilamukha 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

“Through hearing first.”—This story was told by the Master while at the Bamboo-grove, about Devadatta, who, having secured the adherence of Prince Ajata-sattu, had attained both gain and honour. Prince Ajata-sattu had a Monastery built for Devadatta at Gaya-sisa, and every day brought to him five hundred kettles of perfumed three-year-old rice flavoured with all the choicest flavourings. All this gain and honour brought Devadatta a great following, with whom Devadatta lived on, without ever stirring out of his Monastery.

At that time there were living in Rajagaha two friends, of whom one had taken the vows under the Master, whilst the other had taken them under Devadatta. And these continued to see one another, either casually or by visiting the Monasteries. Now one day the disciple of Devadatta said to the other, “Sir, why do you daily go round for alms with the sweat streaming off you? Devadatta sits quietly at Gaya-sisa and feeds on the best of fare, flavoured with all the choicest flavourings. There’s no way like his. Why breed misery for yourself? Why should it not be a good thing for you to come the first thing in the morning to the Monastery at Gaya-sisa and there drink our rice-gruel with a relish after it, try our eighteen kinds of solid victual, and enjoy our excellent soft food, flavoured with all the choicest flavourings?”

Being pressed time after time to accept the invitation, the other began to want to go, and thenceforth used to go to Gaya-sisa and there eat and eat, not forgetting however to return to the Bamboo-grove at the proper hour. Nevertheless he could not keep it secret always; and in a little while it came out that he used to hie off to Gaya-sisa and there regale himself with the food provided for Devadatta. Accordingly, his friends asked him, saying, “Is it true, as they say, that you regale yourself on the food provided for Devadatta?” “Who said that?” said he. “So-and-so said it.” “It is true, sirs, that I go to Gaya-sisa and eat there. But it is not Devadatta who gives me food; others do that.” “Sir, Devadatta is the foe of the Buddhas; in his wickedness, he has secured the adherence of Ajata-sattu and by unrighteousness got gain and honour for himself. Yet you who have taken the vows

according to this faith which leads to salvation, eat the food which Devadatta gets by unrighteousness. Come; let us bring you before the Master." And, taking with them the Brother, they went to the Hall of Truth.

When the Master became aware of their presence, he said, "Brethren, are you bringing this Brother here against his will?" "Yes, sir; this Brother, after taking the vows under you, eats the food which Devadatta gets by unrighteousness." "Is it true, as they say, that you eat the food which Devadatta gets by unrighteousness?" "It was not Devadatta, sir, that gave it me, but others." "Raise no quibbles here, Brother," said the Master. "Devadatta is a man of bad conduct and bad principle. Oh, how could you, who have taken the vows here, eat Devadatta's food, whilst adhering to my doctrine? But you have always been prone to being led away, and have followed in turn every one you meet." And, so saying, he told this story of the past.

Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, he Bodhisatta became his minister. In those days the king had a state elephant , named Damsel-face, who was virtuous and good, and never hurt anybody.

Now one day some burglars came close up to the elephant's stall by night and sat down to discuss their plans in these words—"This is the way to tunnel into a house; this is the way to break in through the walls; before carrying off the plunder, the tunnel or breach in the walls ought to be made as clear and open as a road or a ford. In lifting the goods, you shouldn't stick at murder; for thus there will be none able to resist. A burglar should get rid of all goodness and virtue, and be quite pitiless, a man of cruelty and violence." After having schooled one another in these counsels, the burglars took themselves off. The next day too they came, and many other days besides, and held like converse together, till the elephant came to the conclusion that they came expressly to instruct him, and that he must turn pitiless, cruel, and violent. And such indeed he became. No sooner did his mahout appear in the early morning than the elephant took the man in his trunk and dashed him to death on the ground. And in the same way he treated a second, and a third, and every person in turn who came near him.

The news was brought to the king that Damsel-face had gone mad and was killing everybody that he caught sight of. So the king sent the Bodhisatta, saying, "Go, sage, and find out what has perverted him."

Away went the Bodhisatta, and soon satisfied himself that the elephant showed no signs of bodily ailment. As he thought over the possible causes of the change, he came to the conclusion that the elephant must have heard persons talking near him, and have imagined that they were giving him a lesson, and that this was what had perverted the animal. Accordingly, he asked the elephant-keepers whether any persons had been talking together recently near the stall by night. "Yes, my lord," was the answer; "some burglars came and talked." Then the Bodhisatta went and told the king, saying, "There is nothing wrong, sire, with the elephant bodily; he has been perverted by overhearing some burglars talk." "Well, what is to be done now?" "Order good men, sages and brahmins, to sit in his stall and to talk of goodness." "Do so, my friend," said the king. Then the Bodhisatta set

good men, sages and brahmins, in the stall , and bade them talk of goodness. And they, taking their seats hard by the elephant, spoke as follows, “Neither maltreat nor kill. The good should be long-suffering, loving, and merciful.” Hearing this the elephant thought they must mean this as a lesson for him, and resolved thenceforth to become good. And good he became.

“Well, my friend,” said the king to the Bodhisatta; “is he good now?” “Yes, your majesty,” said the Bodhisatta; “thanks to wise and

(food men the elephant who was so perverted has become himself again.” And so saying, he repeated this stanza:

Through hearing first the burglars’ wicked talk

Damsel-face ranged abroad to wound and kill;

Through hearing, later, wise men’s lofty words

The noble elephant turned good once more.

Said the king, “He can read the mind even of an animal!” And he conferred great honour on the Bodhisatta. After living to a good old age, he, with the Bodhisatta, passed away to fare according to his deserts.

Said the Master,—“In the past, too, you followed everyone you met, Brother; hearing burglars talk, you followed what they said; and hearing the wise and good talk, you followed what they said.” His lesson ended, he shewed the connexion, and identified the Birth, by saying, “The traitorous Brother was the Damsel-face of those days, Ananda the king, and I myself the 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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Prepared for SuttaCentral by Bhikkhu Sujato.