Ja 276 — Kurudhamma Jātaka

English translation by W. H. D. Rouse.

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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

“Knowing thy faith,” etc.—This. story the Master told whilst dwelling in Jetavana, about a Brother that killed a wild goose. Two Brothers, great friends, who came from Savatthi, and had embraced the religious life, after taking the higher orders used generally to go about together. One day they came to Aciravati. After a bath, they stood on the sand, basking in the sunlight and talking pleasantly together. At this moment two wild geese flew over their heads. One of the young fellows picked up a stone. “I’m going to hit that goose bird in the eye!” says he. “You can’t,” says the other. “That I can,” says the first, “and not only that—I can hit either this eye or that eye, as I please.” “Not you!” says the other. “Look here, then!” says the first; and picking up a three-cornered stone, threw it after the bird. The bird turned its head on hearing the pebble whizz through the air. Then the other, seizing a round pebble, threw it so that it hit the near eye and came out of the other. The goose with a loud cry turned over and over and fell at their very feet.

The Brothers who were standing about saw what had occurred, and ran up, reproaching him. “What a shame,” said they, “that you, who have embraced such a doctrine as ours, should take the life of a living creature!” They made him go before the Tathagata with them. “Is what they say true?” asked the Master. “Have you really taken the life of a living creature?” “Yes, Sir,” replied the Brother. “Brother,” said he, “how is it that you have done this thing, after embracing so great salvation? Wise men of old, before the Buddha appeared, though they lived in the world, and the worldly life is impure, felt remorse about mere trifles; but you, who have embraced this great doctrine, have no scruples. A Brother ought to hold himself in control in deed, word, and thought.” Then he told a story.

Once upon a time, when Dhananjaya was king of Indapatta City, in the Kuru kingdom, the Bodhisatta was born as a son of his Queen Con-sort. By and bye he grew up, and was educated at Takkasila. His father made him Viceroy, and afterwards on his father’s death he became king, and grew in the Kura righteousness, keeping the ten royal duties. The Kuru righteousness means the Five Virtues; these the Bodhisatta observed, and kept pure;

as did the Bodhisatta, even so did queen-mother, queen-consort, younger brother, viceroy, family priest, brahmin, driver, courtier, charioteer, treasurer, master of the granaries, noble, porter, courtesan, slave-girl—all did the same.

King, mother, consort, viceroy, chaplain too,

Driver and charioteer and treasurer,

And he that governed the king's granaries,

Porter, and courtesan, eleven in all,

Observed the rules of Kuru righteousness.

Thus all these did observe the Five Virtues, and kept them untarnished. The king built six Almonries,—one at each of the four city gates, one in the midst of the city, and one at his own door; daily he distributed 600,000 pieces of money in alms, by which he stirred up the whole of India. All India was overspread by his love and delight in charity.

At this period there was in the city of Dantapura, in the kingdom of Kalinga, a king named King Kalinga. In his realms the rain fell not, and because of the drought there was a famine in the land. The people thought that lack of food might produce a pestilence; and there was fear of drought, and fear of famine—these three fears were ever present before them. The people wandered about destitute hither and thither, leading their children by the hand. All the people in the kingdom gathered together, and came to Dantapura; and there at the king's door they made outcry.

As the king stood, by the window, he heard the noise, and asked why the people were making all that noise.

"Oh, Sire," was the reply, "three fears have seized upon all your kingdom: there falls no rain, the crops fail, there is a famine. The people, starving, diseased, and destitute, are wandering about with their little ones by the hand. Make rain for us, O king!"

Said the king, "What used former monarchs to do, if it would not rain?"

"Former monarchs, O king, if it would not rain, used to give alms, to keep the holy day, to make vows of virtue, and to lie down seven days in their chamber on a grass pallet: then the rain would fall."

"Very good," the king said; and even so did he. Still even so there came no rain. The king said to his court,

"As you bade me, so I have done; but there is no rain. What am I to do?"

"O king, in the city of Indapatta, there is a state elephant, named Anjana-vasabho, the Black Bull. It belongs to Dhananjaya, the Kura king. This let us fetch; then the rain will

come."

"But how can we do that? The king and his army are not easy to overcome."

"O king, there is no need to fight him. The king is fond of giving, he loves giving: were he but asked, he would even cut off his head in all its magnificence, or tear out his gracious eyes, or give up his very kingdom. There will be no need even to plead for the elephant. He will give it without fail."

"But who is able to ask him?" said the king.

"The Brahmins, great king!"

The king summoned eight Brahmins from a Brahmin village, and with all honour and respect sent them to ask for the elephant. They took money for their journey, and donned travelling garb, and without resting past one night in a place, travelled quickly until after a few days they took their meal at the almshall in the city gate. When they had satisfied their bodily wants, they asked, "When does the king come to the Almonry?"

The answer was, "On three days in the fortnight—fourteenth, fifteenth, and eighth; hut to-morrow is the full moon, so he will come to-morrow also."

So early the next morning, the brahmins went, and entered by the eastern gate. The Bodhisatta also, washed and anointed, all adorned and rarely arrayed, mounted upon a fine elephant richly caparisoned, came with a great company to the Almshall at the eastern gate. There he dismounted, and gave food to seven or eight people with his own hand. "In this manner give," said he, and mounting his elephant departed to the south gate. At the eastern gate the brahmins had had no chance, owing to the force of the royal guard; so they proceeded to the south, and watched when the king should come. When the king reached a rising ground not far from the gate, they raised their hands, and hailed the king victorious. The king guided his animal with the sharp goad to the place where they were. "Well, Brahmins, what is your wish?" asked he. Then the brahmins declared the virtues of the Bodhisatta in the first stanza:

"Knowing thy faith and virtue, Lord, we come;

For this beast's sake our wealth we spent at home.

To this the Bodhisatta made answer, "Brahmins, if all your wealth has been exhausted in getting this elephant, never mind—I give him to you with all his splendour." Thus comforting them, he repeated these two verses:

"Whether or no ye serve for livery,

Whatever creature shall come here to me,

As my preceptors taught me long ago,

All that come here shall always welcome be.

“This elephant to you for gift I bring:

’Tis a king’s portion, worthy of a king!

Take him, with all his trappings, golden chain,

Driver and all, and go your ways again.”

Thus spake the great Being, mounted upon his elephant’s back; then, dismounting, he said to them—“If there is a spot on him unadorned, I will adorn it and then give him to you.” Thrice he went about the creature, turning towards the right, and examined him; but he found no spot on him without adornment. Then he put the trunk into the brahmins’ hands; he besprinkled him with scented water from a fine golden vase, and made him over to them. The brahmins accepted the elephant with his belongings, and seating themselves upon his back rode to Dantapura, and handed him over to their king. But although the elephant was come, no rain fell yet.

Then the king asked again—“What can be the reason?”

They said, “Dhananjaya, the Kuru King, observes the Kuru righteousness; therefore in his realms it rains every ten or fifteen days. That is the power of the king’s goodness. If in this animal there is any good, how little it must be!” Then said the king, “Take this elephant, caparisoned as he is, with all his belongings, and give it hack to the king. Write upon a golden plate the Kuru righteousness which he observes, and bring it hither.” With these words he despatched the brahmins and courtiers.

These came before the king, and restored his elephant, saying, “My lord, even when your elephant came, no rain fell in our country. They say that you observe the Kuru righteousness. Our king is wishful himself to observe it; and he has sent us, bidding us write it upon a golden plate, and bring it to him. Tell us this righteousness!”

“Friends,” says the king, “indeed I did once observe this righteousness; but now I am in doubt about this very point. This righteousness does not bless my heart now: therefore I cannot give it you.”

Why, you may ask, did not virtue bless the king any longer? Well, every third year, in the month of Kattika the kings used to hold a festival, called the Kattika Feast. While keeping this feast, the kings used to deck themselves out in great magnificence, and dress up like gods; they stood in the presence of a goblin named Cittaraja, the King of Many Colours, and they would shoot to the four points of the compass arrows wreathed in flowers, and painted in divers colours. This king then, in keeping the feast, stood on the bank of a lake, in the presence of Cittaraja, and shot arrows to the four quarters. They could see whither

three of the arrows went; but the fourth, which was shot over the water, this they saw not. Thought the king, “Perchance the arrow which I have shot has fallen upon some fish!” As this doubt arose, the sin of life-taking made a flaw in his virtue; that is why his virtue did not bless him as before. This the king told them; and added, “Friends, I am in doubt about myself, whether or no I do observe the Kuru righteousness; but my mother keeps it well. You can get it from her.”

“But, O king,” said they, “you had no intent to take life. Without the intent of the heart there is no taking of life. Give us the Kuru righteousness which you have kept!”

“Write, then,” said he. And he caused them to write upon the plate of gold: “Slay not the living; take not what is not given; walk not evilly in lust; speak no lies; drink no strong drink.” Then he added,

“Still, it does not bless me; you had better learn it from my mother.”

The messengers saluted the king, and visited the Queen-mother. “Lady,” said they, “they say you keep the Kuru righteousness: pass it on to us!”

Said the Queen-mother, “My sons, indeed I did once keep this righteousness, but now I have my doubts. This righteousness does not make me happy, so I cannot give it to you.” Now we are told that she had two sons, the elder being king, and the younger viceroy. A certain king sent to the Bodhisatta perfumes of fine sandal wood worth an hundred thousand pieces, and a golden neckband worth an hundred thousand. And he, thinking to do his mother honour, sent the whole to her. Thought she: “I do not perfume myself with sandal-wood, I do not wear necklets. I will give them to my sons’ wives.” Then the thought occurred to her—“My elder son’s wife is my lady; she is the chief queen: to her will I give the gold necklet; but the wife of the younger is a poor creature,—to her I will give the sandal perfume.” And so to the one she gave the necklet, and the perfume gave she to the other. Afterward she bethought her, “I keep the Kuru righteousness; whether they be poor or whether they be not poor is no matter. It is not seemly that I should pay court to the elder. Perchance by not doing this I have made a flaw in my virtue!” And she began to doubt; that is why she spoke as she slid.

The messengers said, “When it is in your hands, a thing is given even as you will. If you have scruples about a thing so small as that, what other sin would you ever do? Virtue is not broken by a thing of that kind. Give us the Kuru righteousness!” And from her also they received it, and wrote it upon the golden plate.

“All the same, my sons,” said the Queen-mother, “I am not happy in this righteousness. But my daughter-in-law observes it well. Ask her for it.”

So they took their leave respectfully, and asked the daughter in the same way as before. And, as before, she replied, “I cannot, for I keep it myself no longer!”—Now one day as she sat at the lattice, looking down she saw the king making a solemn procession about the city; and behind him on the elephant’s back sat the viceroy. She fell in love with him, and

thought, “What if I were to strike up a friendship with him, and his brother were to die, and then he were to become king, and take me to wife!” Then it flashed across her mind—“I who keep the Kuru righteousness, who am married to a husband, I have looked with love upon another man! Here is a flaw in my virtue!” Remorse seized upon her. This she told the messengers.

Then they said, “Sin is not the mere uprising of a thought. If you feel remorse for so small a thing as this, what transgression could you ever commit? Not by such a small matter is virtue broken; give us this righteousness!” And she likewise told it to them, and they wrote it upon a golden plate. But she said, “However, my sons, my virtue is not perfect. But the viceroy observes these rules well; go ye and receive them from him.”

Then again they repaired to the viceroy, and as before asked him for the Kuru righteousness.—Now the viceroy used to go and pay his devoirs to the king at evening; and when they came to the palace courtyard, in his car, if he wished to eat with the king, and spend the night there, he would throw his reins and goad upon the yoke; and that was a sign for the people to depart; and next morning early they would come again, and stand awaiting the viceroy’s departure. And the charioteer would attend the car, and come again with it early in the morning, and wait by the king’s door. But if the viceroy would depart ht the same time, he left the reins and goad there in the chariot, and went in to wait upon the king. Then the people, taking it for a sign that he would presently depart, stood waiting there at the palace door. One day he did thus, and went in to wait upon the king. But as he was within, it began to rain; and the king, remarking this, would not let him go away, so he took his meal, and slept there. But a great crowd of people stood expecting him to come out, and there they stayed all night in the wet. Next day the viceroy came out, and seeing the crowd standing there drenched, thought he—“I, who keep the Kuru righteousness, have put all this crowd to discomfort! Surely here is a flaw in my virtue!” and he was seized with remorse. So he said to the messengers: “Now doubt has come upon me if indeed I do keep this righteousness; therefore r cannot give it to you;” and he told them the matter.

“But,” said they, “you never had the wish to plague those people. What is not intended is not counted to one’s score. If you feel remorse for so small a thing, in what would you ever transgress?” So they received from him too the knowledge of this righteousness, and wrote it on their golden plate. “However,” said he, “this righteousness is not perfected in me. But my chaplain keeps it well; go, ask him for it.” Then again they went on to the chaplain.

Now the chaplain one day had been going to wait upon the king. On the road he saw a chariot; sent to the king by another king, coloured like the young sun. “Whose chariot?” he asked. “Sent for the king,” they said. Then he thought, “I am an old man; if the king were to give me that chariot, how time it would he to ride about in it!” When he came before the king, and stood by after greeting him with the prayer for prosperity, they showed the chariot to the king. “That is a most beautiful car,” said the king; “give it to my teacher.” But the chaplain did not like taking it; no, not though he was begged again and again. Why was this? Because the thought came into his mind—“I, who practise the Kuru righteousness, have coveted another’s goods. Surely this is a flaw in my virtue!” So he told the story to

these messengers, adding, “My sons, I am in doubt about the Kuru righteousness; this righteousness does not bless me now; therefore I cannot teach it to you.”

But the messengers said, “Not by mere uprising of covetise is virtue broken. If you feel a scruple in so small a matter, what real transgression would you ever do?” And from him also they received the righteousness, and wrote it on their golden plate. “Still, this goodness does not bless me now,” said he; “but the royal driver carefully practises it. Go and ask him.” So they found the royal driver, and asked him.

Now the driver one day was measuring a field. Tying a cord to a stick, he gave one end to the owner of the field to hold, and took the other himself. The stick tied to the end of the cord which he held came to a crab’s lurk-hole. Thought he, “If I put the stick in the hole, the crab in the hole will be hurt: if I put it on the other side, the king’s property will lose; and if I put it on this side, the farmer will lose. What’s to be done?” Then he thought again—“The crab ought to be in his hole; but if he were, he would show himself;” so he put the stick in the hole. The crab made a click! inside. Then he thought, “The stick must have struck upon the crab, and it must have killed him! I observe the Kuru righteousness, and now here’s a flaw in it!” So he told them this, and added, “So now I have my doubts about it, and I cannot give it to you.”

Said the messengers, “You had no wish to kill the crab. What is done without intent is not counted to the score; if you feel a scruple about so small a matter, what real transgression would you ever do?” And they took the righteousness from his lips likewise, and wrote it on their golden plate. “However,” said he, “though this does not bless me, the charioteer practises it carefully; go and ask him.”

So they took their leave, and sought out the charioteer. Now the charioteer one day drove the king into his park in the car. There the king took his pleasure during the day, and at evening returned, and entered the chariot. But before he could get back to the city, at the time of sunset a storm cloud arose. The charioteer, fearing the king might get wet, touched up the team with the goad: the steeds sped swiftly home. Ever since, going to the park or coming from it, from that spot they went at speed. Why was this? Because they thought there must be some danger at this spot, and that was why the charioteer had touched them with the goad. And the charioteer thought, “If the king is wet or dry, ’Tis no fault of mine; but I have given a touch of the goad out of season to these well-trained steeds, and so they run at speed again and again till they are tired, all by my doing. And I observe the Kuru righteousness! Surely there’s a flaw in it now!” This he told the messengers, and said, “For this cause I am in doubt about it, and I cannot give it to you.” “But,” said they, “you did not mean to tire the horses, and what is done without meaning is not set down to the score. If you feel a scruple about so small a matter, what real transgression could you ever commit?” And they learnt the righteousness from him also, and wrote it down upon their golden plate. But the charioteer sent them in search of a certain wealthy man, saying, “Even though this righteousness does not bless me, he keeps it carefully.”

So to this rich man they came, and asked him. Now he one day had gone to his paddy field, and seeing a head of rice bursting the husk, went about to tie it up with a wisp of rice; and taking a handful of it, he tied the head to a post. Then it occurred to him—"From this field I have yet to give the king his due, and I have taken a handful of rice from an untithed field! I, who observe the rules of Kuru righteousness! Surely I must have broken them!" And this matter he told to the messengers, saying, "Now I am in doubt about this righteousness, and so I cannot give it to you."

"But," said they, "you had no thought of thieving; without this one cannot be proclaimed guilty of theft. If you feel scruples in such a small matter, when will you ever take what belongs to another man?" And from him too they received the righteousness, and wrote it down on their golden plate. He added, "Still, though I am not happy in this matter, the Master of the Royal Granaries keeps these rules well. Go, ask him for them." So they betook them to the Master of the Granaries.

Now this man, as he sat one day at the door of the granary, causing the rice of the king's tax to be measured, took a grain from the heap which was not yet measured, and put it down for a marker. At that moment rain began to fall. The official counted up the markers, so many, and then swept them all together and dropt them upon the heap which had been measured. Then he ran in quickly and sat in the gate-house. "Did I throw the markers on the measured heap or the unmeasured?" he wondered; and the thought came into his mind— "If I threw them on what was already measured, the king's property has been increased, and the owners have lost; I keep the Kuru righteousness; and now here's a flaw!" So he told this to the messengers, adding that therefore he had his doubts about it, and could not give it to them. But the messengers said, "You had no thought of theft, and without this no one can be declared guilty of dishonesty. If you feel scruples in a small matter like this, when would you ever steal any thing belonging to another?" And from him too they received the righteousness, and wrote it on their golden plate. "But," added he, "although this virtue is not perfect in me, there is the gatekeeper, who observes it well: go and get it from him." So they went off and asked the gatekeeper.

Now it so happened that one day, at the time for closing the city gate, he cried aloud three times. And a certain poor man, who had gone into the woodland a-gathering sticks and leaves with his youngest sister, hearing the sound came running up with her. Says the door keeper—"What! don't you know that the king is in the city'? Don't you know that the gate of this town is shut betimes? Is that why you go out into the woods, making love?" Said the other, "No, master, it is not my wife, but my sister." Then the porter thought, "How unseemly to address a sister as a wife! And I keep the rules of the Kurus; surely I must have broken them now!" This he told the messengers, adding, "In this way I have my doubts whether I really keep the Kuru righteousness, and so I cannot give it to you." But they said, "You said it because you thought so; this does not break your virtue. If you feel remorse on so slight a cause, how could you ever tell a lie with intent?" And so they took down those virtues from him too, and wrote them on their golden plate.

Then he said, "But though this virtue does not bless me, there is a courtesan who keeps it well; go and ask her." And so they did. She refused as the others had done, for the

following reason. Sakka, king of the gods, designed to try her goodness; so putting on the shape of a youth, he gave her a thousand pieces, saying, “I will come by and bye.” Then he returned to heaven, and did not visit her for three years. And she, for honour’s sake, for three years took not so much as a piece of betel from another man. By degrees she got poor; and then she thought—“The man who gave me a thousand pieces has not come these three years; and now I have grown poor. I cannot keep body and soul together. Now I must go tell the Chief Justices, and get my wage as before.” So to the court she came, and said, “There was a man three years ago gave me a thousand pieces, and never came back; whether he be dead I know not. I cannot keep body and soul together; what am I to do, my lord?” Said he, “If he does not come for three years, what can you do? Earn your wage as before.” As soon as she left the court, after this award, there came a man who offered her a thousand. As she held out her hands to take it, Sakka showed himself. Said she, “Here is the man who gave me a thousand pieces three years ago: I must not take your money;” and she drew back her hand. Then Sakka caused his own proper shape to be seen, and hovered in the air, shining like the sun fresh risen, and gathered all the city together. Sakka, in the midst of the crowd, said, “To test her goodness I gave her a thousand pieces three years ago. Be like her, and like her keep your honour;” and with this monition, he filled her dwelling with jewels of seven kinds, and saying, “Henceforth be vigilant,” he comforted her, and went away to heaven. So for this cause she refused, saying, “Because before I had earned one wage I held out my hand for another, therefore my virtue is not perfect, and so I cannot give it to you.” To this the messengers replied, “Merely to hold out the hand is not a breach of virtue: that virtue of yours is the highest perfection!” And from her, as from the rest, they received the rules of virtue, and wrote them on their golden plate. They took it with them to Dantapura, and told the king how they had fared.

Then their king practised the Kuru precepts, and fulfilled the Five Virtues. And then in all the realm of Kalinga the rain fell; the three fears were allayed; the land became prosperous and fertile. The Bodhisatta all his life long gave alms and did good, and then with his subjects went to fill the heavens.

When the Teacher had ended this discourse, he declared the Truths, and explained the Birth-tale. At the conclusion of the Truths, some entered the First Path, some the Second, some entered the Third, and some became saints. And the Birth-tale is thus explained—

“Uppalavanna was the courtesan,

Punna the porter, and the driver was

Kuccana; Kolita, the measurer;

The rich man, Sariputta; he who drove

The chariot, Anuruddha; and the priest

Was Kassapa the Elder; he that was

The Viceroy, now is Nandapandita;

Rahula’s mother has the queen-consort,

The Queen-mother was Maya; and the King

Was Bodhisatta.—Thus the Birth is clear.”

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