Ja 303 — Ekaraja Jātaka

English translation by H. T. Francis and R. A. Neil.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol3/ja303.html

Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

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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

“O monarch that erst,” etc.—This story the Master told while dwelling at Jetavana, about a courtier of the king of Kosala. The circumstances that suggested the story have been already related in the Seyyamsa Birth. On this occasion the Master said, “You are not the only one who got good out of evil: wise men of old also got good out of evil.” And he told an old-world story.

Once upon a time a minister in attendance on the king of Benares misconducted himself in the royal harem. The king after witnessing his offence with his own eyes banished him from the kingdom. How he took service with the king of Kosala, named Dabbasena, is all told in the Mahasilava Birth.

But in the present story Dabbasena had the king of Benares seized while sitting on the dais in the midst of his councillors, and fastening him by a cord on the lintel of the door suspended him head downwards. The king cultivated feelings of charity towards the rebel prince, and by a process of complete absorption entered upon a state of mystic meditation, and bursting his bonds sat cross-legged in the air. The rebel prince was attacked with a burning pain in the body, and with a cry of “I burn, I burn” he rolled over and over on the ground. When he asked the reason of it, his courtiers replied, “It is because the king whom you suspend head downwards from the lintel of the door is such an innocent and holy man.” Then said he, “Go quickly and release him.” His servants went and found the king sitting cross-legged in the air, and came back and told Dabbasena. So he went with all speed, and bowing before him asked his pardon and repeated the first stanza:

O monarch that erst in thy kingdom didst dwell,

Enjoying such bliss as few mortals have seen,

How is it that lying midst tortures of Hell

Thou still art so calm and so gracious of mien?

On hearing this the Bodhisatta repeated the rest of the stanzas:

Of yore ’twas my one earnest prayer unto Heaven

From the ranks of ascetics no more to be barred,

But now that such glory to me has been given,

O why should the form of my visage be marred?

The end is accomplished, my task is now done,

The prince once my foe is no longer estranged,

But now that the fame I so envied is won,

O why should the form of my visage be changed?

When joy turns to sorrow, and weal becomes woe,

Patient souls even pleasure may wring from their pain,

But no such distinction of feeling they know,

When the calm of Nirvana poor mortals attain.

On hearing this Dabbasena asked forgiveness of the Bodhisatta and said, “Rule over your own people and I will drive out the rebels from amongst you.” And after punishing that wicked councillor he went his way. But the Bodhisatta handed over the kingdom to his ministers, and adopting the ascetic life of a Rishi he became destined to birth in the Brahma-world.

When the Master had finished this discourse, he identified the Birth: “At that time Ananda was Dabbasena, and I myself was the king of Benares.”

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.