Ja 31 — Kulavaka Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

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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

“Let all the forest’s nestlings.”—This story was told by the Master while at Jetavana, about a brother who drank water without straining it.

Tradition says that two young Brothers who were friends went from Savatthi into the country, and took up their abode in a pleasant spot. After staying here as long as they wanted, they departed and set out for Jetavana in order to see the Perfect Buddha.

One of them carried a strainer; the other had none; so both of them used the same strainer before drinking. One day they fell out. The owner of the strainer did not lend it to his companion, but strained and drank alone by himself.

As the other was not allowed the strainer, and as he could not endure his thirst, he drank water without straining it. In due course both reached Jetavana and with respectful salutation to the Master took their seats. After friendly words of greeting, he asked whence they had come.

“Sir,” said they, “we have been living in a hamlet in the Kosala country, whence we have come in order to see you.” “I trust you have arrived as good friends as you started?” Said the brother without a strainer, “Sir, he fell out with me on the road and would not lend me his strainer.”, Said the other, “Sir, he didn’t strain his water, but—wittingly—drank it down with all the living things it contained.” “Is this report true, Brother, that you wittingly drank off water with all the living things it contained?” “Yes, sir, I did drink unstrained water,” was the reply. “Brother, the wise and good of bygone days, when flying in rout along the deep in the days of their sovereignty over the City of the Devas, thought scorn to slay living-creatures in order to secure power for themselves. Rather, they turned their chariot back, sacrificing great glory in order to save the lives of the young of the Garulas.” And, so saying, he told this story of the past.

Once on a time there was a king of Magadha reigning at Rajagaha in the laud of Magadha. And just as he who is now Sakka came to life in his preceding birth in the hamlet of Macala in the land of Magadha, even so was it in the selfsame hamlet that the Bodhisatta came to life in those days as a young noble. When the day for his naming came, he was named 'Prince Magha,' but when he grew up, it was as 'Magha the young Brahmin' that he was known. His parents took a wife for him from a family of equal rank with their own; and he, with a family of sons and daughters growing up round him, excelled in charity, and kept the Five Commandments.

In that village there were just thirty families, and one day the men were standing in the middle of the village transacting the affairs of the village. The Bodhisatta had kicked aside the dust from where he was standing, and was standing there in comfort, when up came another and took his stand there. Then the Bodhisatta made himself another comfortable standing-place,—only to have it taken from him like the first. Again and again the Bodhisatta began afresh until he had made comfortable standing-places for every man there. Another time he put up a pavilion,—which later on he pulled down, building a hall with benches and a jar of water inside. Another time these thirty men were led by the Bodhisatta to become like-minded with himself; he established them in the Five Commandments, and thenceforth used to go about with them doing good works. And they too doing good works, always in the Bodhisatta's company, used to get up early and sally forth, with razors and axes and clubs in their hands. With their clubs they used to roll out of the way all stones that lay on the four highways and other roads of the village; the trees that would strike against the axles of chariots, they cut down; rough places they made smooth; causeways they built, dug water-tanks, and built a hall; they shewed charity and kept the Commandments. In this wise did the body of the villagers generally abide by the Bodhisatta's teachings and keep the Commandments.

Thought the village headman to himself, "When these men used to get drunk and commit murders and so forth, I used to make a lot of money out of them not only on the price of their drinks but also by the fines and dues they paid. But now here's this young brahmin Magha bent on making them keep the Commandments; he is putting a stop to murders and other crime." And in his rage he cried, "I'll make them keep the Five Commandments!" And he repaired to the king, saying, "Sire, there is a band of robbers going about sacking villages and committing other villainies." When the king heard this, he bade the headman go and bring the men before him. And away went the man and hauled up as prisoners before the king every one of those thirty men, representing them to be the rascals. Without enquiry into their doings, the king commanded offhand that they should be trampled to death by the elephant. Forthwith they made them lie down in the king's court-yard and sent for the elephant. The Bodhisatta exhorted them, saying, "Bear in mind the Commandments; love the slanderer, the king and the elephant as yourselves." And they did so.

Then the elephant was brought in to trample them to death. Yet lead him as they might, he would not approach them, but fled away trumpeting loudly. Elephant after elephant was brought up; but they all fled away like the first. Thinking that the men must have some drug about their persons, the king ordered them to be searched. Search was made

accordingly, but nothing was found; and so they told the king. “Then they must be muttering some spell,” said the king; “ask them whether they have got a spell to mutter.”

The question being put to them, the Bodhisatta said they had got a spell. And this the king’s people told his majesty. So the king had them all summoned to his presence and said, “Tell me your spell.”

The Bodhisatta made answer, “Sire, we have no other spell than this, that not a man among the whole thirty of us destroys life, or takes what is not given, or misconducts himself, or lies; we drink no strong drink; we abound in lovingkindness; we shew charity; we level the roads, dig tanks, and build a public hall; this is our spell, our safeguard, and our strength.”

Well-pleased with them, the king gave them all the wealth in the slanderer’s house and made him their slave; and he gave them the elephant and the village to boot.

Thenceforward, doing good works to their hearts’ content, they sent for a carpenter and caused him to put up a large hall at the meeting of the four highways; but as they had lost all desire for womankind, they would not let any woman share in the good work.

Now in those days there were four women in the Bodhisatta’s house, whose names were Goodness, Thoughtful, Joy, and Highborn. Of these Goodness, finding herself alone with the carpenter, gave him a douceur, saying,—“Brother, contrive to make me the principal person in connexion with this hall.”

“Very good,” said he. And before doing any other work on the building, he had some pinnacle-wood dried, which he fashioned and bored and made into a finished pinnacle. This he wrapped up in a cloth and laid aside. When the hall was finished, and it was time to put on the pinnacle, he exclaimed, “Alas, my masters, there’s one thing we have not made.” “What’s that?” “Why, we ought to have a pinnacle.” “All right, let one be got.” “But it can’t be made out of green wood; we ought to have a pinnacle which had been cut some time ago, and fashioned, and bored, and laid by.” “Well, what is to be done now?” “Why, have a look round to see if anybody has got such a thing in his house as a ready-made pinnacle for sale.” As they. looked round accordingly, they found one in the house of Goodness, but could not buy it of her for any money. “If you will make me a partner in the good work,” said she, “I will give it you for nothing.”

“No,” was the reply, “we do not let women have a share in the good work.”

Then said the carpenter to them, “My masters, what is this you say? Save the Realm of Brahma, there is no place from which women are excluded. Take the pinnacle, and our work will be complete.”

Consenting, they took the pinnacle and completed their hall. They had benches put up, and jars of water set inside, providing also a constant supply of boiled rice. Round the hall they built a wall with a gate, strewing the space inside the wall with sand and planting a

row of fan-palms outside. Thoughtful too caused a pleasaunce to be laid out at this spot, and not a flowering or fruit-bearing tree could be named which did not grow there. Joy, too, caused a water-tank to be dug in the same place, covered over with the five kinds of lotuses, beautiful to behold. High-born did nothing at all.

The Bodhisatta fulfilled these seven injunctions,—to cherish one's mother, to cherish one's father, to honour one's elders, to speak truth, to avoid harsh speech, to eschew slander, and to shun niggardliness—

Whoso supports his parents, honours age,

Is gentle, friendly-spoken, slandering not,

Unchurlish, truthful, lord—not slave—of wrath,

—Him e'en the Thirty Three shall hail as Good.

Such was the praiseworthy state to which he grew, and at his life's close he passed away to be reborn in the Realm of the Thirty-three as Sakka, king of Devas; and there too were his friends reborn.

In those days there were Asuras dwelling in the Realm of the Thirty-three. Said Sakka, King of Devas, "What good to us is a kingdom which others share?" So he made the Asuras drink the liquor of the Devas, and when they were drunken, he had them hurled by the feet on to the steeps of Mount Sineru. They tumbled right down to 'The Asura Realm,' as it is called,—a region on the lowest level of Mount Sineru, equal in extent to the Realm of the Thirty-three. Here grows a tree, resembling the Coral Tree of the Devas, which lasts for an aeon and is called the Pied Trumpet-flower. The blossoms of this tree shewed them at once that this was not the Realm of Devas, for there the Coral Tree blooms. So they cried, "Old Sakka has made us drunk and cast us into the great deep, seizing on our heavenly city." "Come," they shouted, "let us win back our own realm from him by force of arms." And up the sides of Sineru they climbed, like ants up a pillar.

Hearing the alarm given that the Asuras were up, Sakka went out into the great deep to give them battle, but being worsted in the fight turned and fled away along crest after crest of the southern deep in his 'Chariot of Victory,' which was a hundred and fifty leagues long.

Now as his chariot sped along the deep, it came to the Forest of the Silk-Cotton Trees. Along the track of the chariot these mighty trees were mowed down like so many palms, and fell into the deep. And as the young of the Garulas hurtled through the deep, loud were their shrieks. Said Sakka to Matali, his charioteer, "Matali, my friend, what manner of noise is this? How heartrending it sounds." "Sire, it is the united cry of the young Garulas in the agony of their fear, as their forest is uprooted by the rush of your chariot." Said the Great Being, "Let them not be troubled because of me, friend Matali. Let us not, for empire's sake, so act as to destroy life. Rather will I, for their sake, give my life as a sacrifice

to the Asuras. Turn the car back." And so saying, he repeated this stanza

Let all the forest's nestlings, Matali,

Escape our all-devouring chariot.

I offer up, a willing sacrifice,

My life to yonder Asuras; these poor birds

Shall not, through me, from out their nests be torn.

At the word, Matali, the charioteer, turned the chariot round, and made for the Realm of Devas by another route. But the moment the Asuras saw him begin to turn his chariot round, they cried out that the Sakkas of other worlds were surely coming up; "it must be his reinforcements which make him turn his chariot back again." Trembling for their lives, they all ran away and never stopped till they came to the Asura Realm. And Sakka entering heaven, stood in the midst of his city, girt round by an angelic host of his own and of Brahma's angels. And at that moment through the riven earth there rose up the 'Palace of Victory,' some thousand leagues high,—so-called because it arose in the hour of victory. Then, to prevent the Asuras from coming back again, Sakka had guards set in five places,—concerning which it has been said—

Impregnable both cities stand! between,

In fivefold guard, watch Nagas, Garulas,

Kumbhandas, Goblins, and the Four Great Kings!

But when Sakka was enjoying as king of Devas the glory of heaven, safely warded by his sentinels at these five posts, Goodness died and was reborn as a handmaiden of Sakka once more. And the effect of her gift of the pinnacle was that there arose for her a mansion—named 'Goodness'—studded with heavenly jewels, five hundred leagues high, where, under a white heavenly canopy of royal state, sat Sakka, king of Devas, ruling men and Devas.

Thoughtful, too, died, and was once more born as a handmaiden of Sakka; and the effect of her action in respect of the pleasaunce was such that there arose a pleasaunce called 'Thoughtful's Creeper-Grove.' Joy, too, died and was reborn once more as one of Sakka's handmaidens; and the fruit of her tank was that there arose a tank called 'Joy' after her. But Highborn, having performed no act of merit, was reborn as a crane in a grotto in the forest.

"There's no sign of Highborn," said Sakka to himself; "I wonder where she has been reborn." And as he considered the matter, he discovered her whereabouts. So he paid her a visit, and bringing her back with him to heaven shewed her the delightful city of the

Devas, the Hall of Goodness, Thoughtful's Creeper-Grove, and the Tank called Joy. "These three," said Sakka, "have been reborn as my handmaidens by reason of the good works they did; but you, having done no good work, have been reborn in the brute creation. Henceforth keep the Commandments." And having exhorted her thus, and confirmed her in the Five Commandments, he took her back and let her go free. And thenceforth she did keep the Commandments.

A short time afterwards, being curious to know whether she really was able to keep the Commandments, Sakka went and lay down before her in the shape of a fish. Thinking the fish was dead, the crane seized it by the head. The fish wagged its tail. "Why, I do believe it's alive," said the crane, and let the fish go. "Very good, very good," said Sakka; "you will be able to keep the Commandments." And so saying he went away.

Dying as a crane, Highborn was reborn into the family of a potter in Benares. Wondering where she had got to, and at last discovering her whereabouts, Sakka, disguised as an old man, filled a cart with cucumbers of solid gold and sat in the middle of the village, crying, "Buy my cucumbers! buy my cucumbers!" Folk came to him and asked for them. "I only part with them to such as keep the Commandments," said he, "do you keep them?" "We don't know what you mean by your 'Commandments'; sell us the cucumbers." "No; I don't want money for my cucumbers. I give them away,—but only to those that keep the Commandments." "Who is this wag?" said the folk as they turned away. Hearing of this, Highborn thought to herself that the cucumbers must have been brought for her, and accordingly went and asked for some. "Do you keep the Commandments, madam?" said he. "Yes, I do," was the reply. "It was for you alone that I brought these here," said he, and leaving cucumbers, cart and all at her door he departed.

Continuing all her life long to keep the Commandments, Highborn after her death was reborn the daughter of the Asura king Vepacittiya, and for her goodness was rewarded with the gift of great beauty. When she grew up, her father mustered the Asuras together to give his daughter her pick of them for a husband. And Sakka, who had searched and found out her whereabouts, donned the shape of an Asura, and came down, saying to himself, "If Highborn chooses a husband really after her own heart, I shall be he."

Highborn was arrayed and brought forth to the place of assembly, where she was bidden to select a husband after her own heart. Looking round and observing Sakka, she was moved by her love for him in a bygone existence to choose him for her husband. Sakka carried her off to the city of the devas and made her the chief of twenty-five millions of dancing-girls. And when his term of life ended, he passed away to fare according to his deserts.

His lesson ended, the Master rebuked that Brother in these words, "Thus, Brethren, the wise and good of bygone days when they were rulers of the Devas, forbore, even at the sacrifice of their own lives, to be guilty of slaughter. And can you, who have devoted yourself to so saving a creed, drink unstrained water with all the living creatures it contains?" And he chewed the connexion and identified the Birth, by saying, "Ananda was then Matali the charioteer, and I Sakka."

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