Ja 314 — Lohakumbhi Jātaka

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

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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

“Due share of wealth,” etc.—This story the Master, while living at Jetavana, told concerning a king of Kosala. The king of Kosala of those days, they say, one night heard a cry uttered by four inhabitants of Hell—the syllables du, sa, na, so, one from each of the four. In a previous existence, tradition says, they had been princes in Savatthi, and had been guilty of adultery. After misconducting themselves with their neighbours’ wives, however carefully guarded they might be, and indulging their amorous propensities, their evil life had been cut short by the Wheel of Death, near Savatthi. They came to life again in Four Iron Cauldrons. After being tortured for sixty thousand years they had come up to the top, and on seeing the edge of the Cauldron’s mouth they thought to themselves, “When shall we escape from this misery?” And then all four uttered a loud cry, one after another. The king was terrified to death at the noise, and sat waiting for break of day, unable to stir.

At dawn the brahmins came and inquired after his health. The king replied, “How, my Masters, can I be well, who to-day have heard four such terrible cries.” The brahmins waved their hands. “What is it, my Masters?” said the king. The brahmins assure him that the sounds are ominous of great violence. “Do they admit of remedy, or not?” said the king. “You might say not,” said the brahmins, “but we are well-trained in these matters, Sire.” “By what means,” said the king, “will you avert these evils?” “Sire,” they replied, “there is one great remedy in our power, and by offering the fourfold sacrifice of every living creature we will avert all evil.” “Then be quick,” said the king, “and take all living creatures by fours—men, bulls, horses, elephants, down to quails and other birds—and by this fourfold sacrifice restore my peace of mind.” The brahmins consented, and taking whatever they required, they dug a sacrificial pit and fastened their numerous victims to their stakes, and were highly excited at the thought of the dainties they were to eat, and the wealth they would gain, and went about backwards and forwards, saying, “Sir, I must have so and so.”

The queen Mallika came and asked the king, why the brahmins went about so delighted and smiling. The king said, “My queen, what have you to do with this? You are intoxicated

with your own glory, and you do not know how wretched I am." "How so, Sire?" she replied. "I have heard such awful noises, my queen, and when I asked the brahmins what would be the result of my hearing these cries, they told me I was threatened with danger to my kingdom or my property or my life, but by offering the fourfold sacrifice they would restore my peace of mind, and now in obedience to my command, they have dug a sacrificial pit and are gone to fetch whatever victims they require." The queen said, "Have you, my lord, consulted the chief brahmin in the Deva-world as to the origin of these cries?" "Who, lady," said the king, "is the chief brahmin in the Deva-world?" "The Great Gotama," she replied, "the Supreme Buddha." "Lady," he said, "I have not consulted the Supreme Buddha." "Then go," she answered, "and consult him."

The king hearkened to the words of the queen and after his morning meal he mounted his state chariot and drove to Jetavana. Here after saluting the Master he thus addressed him: "Reverend Sir, in the night season I heard four cries and consulted the brahmins about it. They undertook to restore my peace of mind, by the fourfold sacrifice of every kind of victim, and are now busy preparing a sacrificial pit. What does the hearing of these cries betoken to me?"

"Nothing whatever," said the Master. "Certain beings in Hell, owing to the agony they suffer, cried aloud. These cries," he added, "have not been heard by you alone. Kings of old heard the same. And when they too, after consulting their brahmins, were anxious to offer sacrifices of slain victims, on hearing what wise men had to say, they refused to do so. The wise men explained to them the nature of these cries, and bade them let loose the crowd of victims and thus restored their peace of mind." And at the request of the king he told a story of bygone days.

Once upon a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born in a brahmin family, in a certain village of Kasi. And when he was of mature years, renouncing the pleasures of sense and embracing the ascetic life he developed the supernatural powers of mystic meditation, and enjoying the delights of Contemplation took up his abode in a pleasant grove in the Himalaya country.

The king of Benares at this time was fearfully alarmed by hearing those four sounds uttered by four beings who dwelt in Hell. And when told by brahmins in exactly the same way that one of three dangers must befall him, he agreed to their proposal to put a stop to it by the fourfold sacrifice. The family priest with the help of the brahmins provided a sacrificial pit, and a great crowd of victims was brought up and fastened to the stakes. Then the Bodhisatta, guided by a feeling of charity, regarding the world with his divine eye, when he saw what was going on, said, "I must go at once and see to the well-being of all these creatures." And then by his magic power flying up into the air, he alighted in the garden of the king of Benares, and sat down on the royal slab of stone, looking like an image of gold. The chief disciple of the family priest approached his teacher and asked, "Is it not written, Master, in our Vedas that there is no happiness for those who take the life of any creature?" The priest replied, "You are to bring here the king's property, and we shall have abundant dainties to eat. Only hold your peace." And with these words he drove his pupil away. But the youth thought, "I will have no part in this matter," and went and found

the Bodhisatta in the king's garden. After saluting him in a friendly manner he took a seat at a respectful distance. The Bodhisatta asked him saying, "Young man, does the king rule his kingdom righteously?" "Yes, Reverend Sir, he does," answered the youth, "but he has heard four cries in the night, and on inquiring of the brahmins, he has been assured by them that they would restore his peace of mind, by offering up the fourfold sacrifice. So the king, being anxious to recover his happiness, is preparing a sacrifice of animals, and a vast number of victims has been brought up and fastened to the sacrificial stakes. Now is it not right for holy men like yourself to explain the cause of these noises, and to rescue these numerous victims from the jaws of death?" "Young man," he replied, "the king does not know us, nor do we know the king, but we do know the origin of these cries, and if the king were to come and ask us the cause, we would resolve his doubts for him." "Then," said the youth, "just stay here a moment, Reverend Sir, and I will conduct the king to you."

The Bodhisatta agreed, and the youth went and told the king all about it, and brought him back with him. The king saluted the Bodhisatta and sitting on one side asked him if it were true that he knew the origin of these noises. "Yes, Your Majesty," he said. "Then tell me, Reverend Sir." "Sire," he answered, "these men in a former existence were guilty of gross misconduct with the carefully guarded wives of their neighbours near Benares, and therefore were re-born in Four Iron Cauldrons. Where after being tortured for thirty thousand years in a thick corrosive liquid heated to boiling point, they would at one time sink till they struck the bottom of the cauldron, and at another time rise to the top like a foam bubble, but after those years they found the mouth of the cauldron, and looking over the edge they all four desired to give utterance to four complete stanzas, but failed to do so. And after getting out just one syllable each, they sank again in the iron cauldrons. Now the one of them that sank after uttering the syllable "du" was anxious to speak as follows—

Due share of wealth we gave not; an evil life we led:

We found no sure salvation in joys that now are fled.

And when he failed to utter it, the Bodhisatta of his own knowledge repeated the complete stanza. And similarly with the rest. The one that uttered merely the syllable "sa" wanted to repeat the following stanza—

Sad fate of those that suffer! ah! when shall come release?

Still after countless aeons, Hell's tortures never cease.

And again in the case of the one that uttered the syllable "na," this was the stanza he wished to repeat—

Nay endless are the sufferings to which we're doomed by fate;

The ills we wrought upon the earth 'Tis ours to expiate.

And the one that uttered the syllable "so" was anxious to repeat the following—

Soon shall I passing forth from hence, attain to human birth,

And richly dowered with virtue rise to many a deed of worth.

The Bodhisatta, after reciting these verses one by one, said, “The dweller in Hell, Sire, when he wanted to utter a complete stanza, through the greatness of his sin, was unable to do it. And when he thus experienced the result of his wrong-doing he cried aloud. But fear not; no danger shall come nigh you, in consequence of hearing this cry.” Thus did he reassure the king. And the king proclaimed by beat of his golden drum that the vast host of victims was to be released, and the sacrificial pit destroyed. And the Bodhisatta, after thus providing for the safety of the numerous victims, stayed there a few days, and then returning to the same place, without any break in his ecstasy, was born in the world of Brahma.

The Master, having ended his lesson, identified the Birth: “ Sariputta at that time was the young priest, I myself was the ascetic.”

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.

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