Ja 334 — Rajovada 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/ja334.html

Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

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Edited by E. B. Cowell

Original edition: Cambridge University Press, volume 3, 1897

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

“The bull through floods,” etc.—This story was told by the Master when at Jetavana concerning the admonition of a king. The introductory story will be found in full in the Tesakuna Birth. But in this version of it the Master said, “Kings of old, Sire, hearkening to the words of the wise, bare rule justly and attained to the heavenly world.” And at the request of the king he told a story of the olden times.

Once upon a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born in a brahmin family. And when he came of age, he was trained in all the arts, and adopting the ascetic life he developed all the Faculties and Attainments, and took up his abode in a pleasant quarter of the Himalayas, living on wild fruits and roots. At this time the king being anxious to find out his defects, went about inquiring if there was any one who would tell him his faults. And not finding any one to speak to his dispraise, either within doors or without, either within the city or outside it, he wandered about the country side in disguise, thinking, “How will it be in the country?” And not meeting with any one there to speak to his dispraise, and hearing men speak only of his merits, he thought, “How will it be in the Himalaya region?” And he went into the forest and wandered about till he reached the hermitage of the Bodhisatta, where after saluting him, and addressing him in a friendly manner he took a seat on one side. At that moment the Bodhisatta was eating some ripe figs which he had brought front the wood. They were luscious and sweet, like powdered sugar. He addressed the king and said, “Your Excellency, pray eat this ripe fig and drink some water.”

The king did so, and asked the Bodhisatta, “Why, Reverend Sir, is this ripe fig so exceedingly sweet?”

“Your Excellency,” he replied, “the king now exercises his rule with justice and equity. That is why it is so sweet.”

“In the reign of an unjust king, does it lose its sweetness, Sir?”

“Yes, Your Excellency, in the time of unjust kings, oil, honey, molasses and the like, as well as wild roots and fruits, lose their sweetness and flavour, and not these only but the whole realm becomes bad and flavourless; but when the rulers are just, these things become sweet and full of flavour, and the whole realm recovers its tone and flavour.”

The king said, “It must be so, Reverend Sir,” and without letting him know that he was the king, he saluted the Bodhisatta and returned to Benares. And thinking to prove the words of the ascetic, he ruled unjustly, saying to himself, “Now I shall know all about it,” and after the lapse of a short time he went back and saluting the Bodhisatta, sat respectfully on one side. The Bodhisatta using exactly the same words, offered him a ripe fig, which proved to be bitter to his taste. Finding it to be bitter he spat it out, saying, “It is bitter, Sir.”

Said the Bodhisatta, “Your Excellency, the king must be unjust, for when rulers are unjust, everything beginning with the wild fruits in the wood, lose all their sweetness and flavour.” And hereupon he recited these stanzas—

The bull through floods a devious course will take,

The herd of kine all straggling in his wake:

So if a leader tortuous paths pursue,

To base ends will he guide the vulgar crew,

And the whole realm an age of license rue.

But if the bull a course direct should steer,

The herd of kine straight follow in his rear.

So should their chief to righteous ways be true,

The common folk injustice will eschew,

And through the realm shall holy peace ensue.

The king after hearing the Bodhisatta’s exposition of the Truth, let him know he was the king and said, “Holy Sir, formerly it was due to me alone that the figs were first sweet and then bitter, but now I will make them sweet again.” Then he saluted the Bodhisatta and returned home, and ruling righteously restored everything to its original condition.

The Master, having ended his lesson, identified the Birth: “At that time Ananda was the king, and 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.

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.