Ja 352 — Sujata 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/ja352.html

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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

“Why haste to bring,” etc.—This story the Master, while dwelling at Jetavana, told concerning a landowner who had lost his father. On the death of his father, they say, he went about lamenting, quite unable to shake off his grief. The Master perceived in the man a capacity to attain to the Fruit of Salvation, and when he went his rounds in Savatthi for alms, accompanied by an attendant priest, he came to his house and sitting down on the seat prepared for him he bowed to his host, who was also seated, and said, “Lay Brother, art thou grieving?” and on his replying, “Yes, Reverend Sir, I am,” he said, “Friend, sages of old hearkened to the words of Wisdom, and when they lost a father, they did not grieve.” And at the request of his host he told a story of the olden time.

Once upon a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta came to life in the house of a landowner. And they called him young Sujata. When he was grown up, his grandsire died. Then his father from the day of the old man’s death was filled with sorrow, and taking his bones from the place of cremation he erected an earth-mound in his pleasure-garden, and depositing the remains there, whenever he visited the place, adorned the tope with flowers and studiously lamented, neither bathing nor anointing himself nor eating. Neither did he attend to his business. The Bodhisatta, on observing this, thought, “My father ever since the death of my grandfather goes about overwhelmed with grief. And no one, I am sure, except myself has power to console him. I will find a way to deliver him from his sorrow.”

So seeing a dead ox lying outside the city, he brought grass and water and placing them before it said, “Eat and drink, eat and drink.” All that passed by on seeing this said, “Friend Sujata, are you mad? Do you offer grass and water to a dead ox?” But he answered not a word.

So they went to his father and said, “Your son has become mad. He is giving grass and water to a dead ox.” On hearing this the landowner ceased to grieve for his father, and

began to grieve for his son. And he went in haste and cried, “My dear Sujata, are you not in your sober senses? Why do you offer grass and water to the carcase of an ox?” And hereupon he spoke two stanzas—

Why haste to bring thy new-mown grass so sweet,

And cry to lifeless beast, “Arise and eat”?

No food may raise to life an ox that’s dead,

Thy words are idle and of folly bred.

Then the Bodhisatta uttered two stanzas—

Methinks this beast may come to life again,

Both head and tail and its four feet remain.

But of my grandsire head and limbs are gone:

No fool weeps o’er his grave, but thou alone.

On hearing this the father of the Bodhisatta thought: “My son is wise. He knows the right thing to be done both for this world and for the next. He did this to console me.” And he said, “My dear and wise son Sujata, it is known to me that all existing things are impermanent. Henceforth I will not grieve. Such a son as this must be every one that would remove a father’s grief.” And singing the praises of his son he said. —

As ghee-fed flame that blazes out amain

Is quenched with water, so he quenched my pain.

With sorrow’s shaft my heart was wounded sore,

He healed the wound and did my life restore.

The barb extracted, full of peace and joy,

I cease to grieve and hearken to my boy.

Thus kindly souls wean mortals from their grief,

As wise Sujata brought his sire relief.

The Master having ended his discourse revealed the Truths and identified the Birth—At the conclusion of the Truths the landowner attained fruition of the First Path—“At that time I myself was Sujata.”

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.