Ja 359 — Suvannamiga 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/ja359.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

“O Golden foot,” This was a story told by the Master while in residence at Jetavana, about a maiden of gentle birth in Savatthi. She was, they say, the daughter in the household of a servitor of the two chief disciples at Savatthi, and was a faithful believer, fondly attached to Buddha, the Law, and the Church, abounding in good works, wise unto salvation, and devoted to almsgiving and such like deeds of piety. Another family in Savatthi of equal rank but of heretical views chose her in marriage. Then her parents said, “Our daughter is a faithful believer, devoted to the Three Treasures, given to alms and other good works, but you hold heretical views. And as you will not allow her to give alms, or to hear the Truth, or to visit the monastery, or to keep the moral law, or to observe holy days, as she pleases, we will not give her to you in marriage. Choose ye a maiden from a family of heretical views like yourselves.” When their offer was rejected, they said, “Let your daughter when she comes to our house do everything of this kind, as she pleases. We will not prevent her. Only grant us this boon.” “Take her then,” they answered. So they celebrated the marriage festivity at an auspicious season and led her home. She proved faithful in the discharge of her duties, and a devoted wife, and rendered due service to her father-in-law and mother-in-law. One day she said to her husband, “I wish, my lord, to give alms to our family priests.” “Very well, my dear, give them just what you please.” So one day she invited these priests, and making a great entertainment, she fed them with choice food, and taking a seat apart from them she said, “Holy Sirs, this family is heretical and unbelieving. They are ignorant of the value of the Three Treasures. Well then, Sirs, until this family understands the value of the Three Treasures, do you continue to receive your food here.” The priests assented and continually ate their meals there. Again she addressed her husband, “Sir, the priests constantly come here. Why do you not see them?” On hearing this he said, “Very well, I will see them.” On the morrow she told him when the priests had finished their meal. He came and sat respectfully on one side, conversing affably with the priests. Then the Captain of the Faith preached the Law to him. He was so charmed with the exposition of the faith, and the deportment of the priests, that from that day forward he prepared mats for the elders to sit on, and strained water for them, and

during the meal listened to the exposition of the faith. By and bye his heretical views gave way. So one day the elder in expounding the faith declared the Truths to the man and his wife, and when the sermon was ended, they were both established in the fruition of the First Path. Thenceforth all of them, from his parents down to the hired servants, gave up their heretical views, and became devoted to the Buddha, his Law, and the Church. So one day this young girl said to her husband, “What, Sir, have I to do with the household life? I wish to adopt the religious life.” “Very well, my dear,” he said, “I too will become an ascetic.” And he conducted her with great pomp to a sisterhood, and had her admitted as a novice, and himself too went to the Master and begged to be ordained. The Master admitted him first to deacon’s and afterwards to priest’s orders. They both received clear spiritual vision, and shortly attained to Sainthood. One day they raised a discussion in the Hall of Truth, saying, “Sirs, a certain woman by reason of her own faith and that of her husband became a novice. And both of them having adopted the religious life, and gained clear spiritual vision, attained to Sainthood.” The Master, when he came, inquired what was the topic the Brethren were sitting in council to discuss, and on hearing what it was, he said, “Brethren, not now only, did she set her husband free from the bonds of passion. Formerly too she freed even sages of old from the bonds of death.” And with these words he held his peace, but being pressed by them he related a story of the past.

Once upon a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta came to life as a young stag, and grew up a beautiful and graceful creature, of the colour of gold. His fore and hind feet were covered, as it were, with a preparation of lac. His horns were like a silver wreath, his eyes resembled round jewels, and his mouth was like a ball of crimson wool. The doe that was his mate was also a handsome creature, and they lived happily and harmoniously together. Eight myriads of dappled deer followed in the train of the Bodhisatta. While they were thus living there, a certain hunter set a snare in the deer drives. So one day the Bodhisatta, while leading his herd, entangled his foot in the snare, and thinking to break the noose he tugged at it and cut the skin of his foot. Again he tugged it, and hurt the flesh, and a third time and injured the tendon. And the noose penetrated to the very bone. Not being able to break the snare, the stag was so alarmed with the fear of death that he uttered a succession of cries. On hearing it the herd of deer fled in a panic. But the doe, as she fled, looking amongst the deer, missed the Bodhisatta, and thought, “This panic must certainly have something to do with my lord,” and flying in haste to him, with many tears and lamentations she said, “My lord, you are very strong. Why can you not get the better of the snare? Put forth your strength and break it.” And thus stirring him up to make an effort, she uttered the first stanza—

O Golden-foot, no effort spare

To loose thyself from thonged snare.

How could I joy, bereft of thee,

To range amidst the woodland free?

The Bodhisatta, on hearing this, responded in a second stanza—

I spare no effort, but in vain,

My liberty I cannot gain.

The more I struggle to get loose,

The sharper bites the thonged noose.

Then the doe said: “My lord, fear not. By my own power will I entreat the hunter, and by giving up my own life I will gain yours in exchange.” And thus comforting the Great Being, she continued to embrace the blood-stained Bodhisatta. But the hunter approached, with sword and spear in hand, like to the destroying flame at the beginning of a cycle. On seeing him, the doe said, “My lord, the hunter is coming. By my own power I will rescue you. Be not afraid.” And thus comforting the stag, she went to meet the hunter, and standing at a respectful distance, she saluted him and said, “My lord, my husband is of the colour of gold, and endued with all the virtues, the king of eight myriads of deer.” And thus singing the praises of the Bodhisatta, she begged for her own death, if only the king of the herd might remain intact, and she repeated the third stanza—

Let on the earth a leafy bed,

Hunter, where we may fall, be spread:

And drawing from its sheath thy sword,

Slay me and afterwards my lord.

The hunter, on hearing this, was struck with amazement and said, “Even human beings give not up their lives for their king; much less the beasts. What can this mean? This creature speaks with a sweet voice in the language of men. This day will I grant life to her and to her mate.” And greatly charmed with her, the hunter uttered the fourth stanza—

A beast that speaks with voice of men,

Ne’er came before within my ken.

Rest thou in peace, my gentle deer, And cease,

O Golden-foot, to fear.

The doe seeing the Bodhisatta set at his ease, was highly delighted and returning thanks to the hunter, repeated the fifth stanza—

As I to-day rejoice to see

This mighty beast at liberty,

So, hunter, that didst loose the gin,

Rejoice with all thy kith and kin.

And the Bodhisatta thought, “This hunter has granted life to me and this doe, and to eight myriads of deer. He has been my refuge, and I ought to be a refuge to him.” And in his character of one supremely virtuous he thought, “One ought to make a proper return to one’s benefactor,” and he gave the hunter a magic jewel which he had found in their feeding ground and said: “Friend, henceforth take not the life of any creature, but with this jewel set up a household and maintain a wife and children, and give alms and do other good works.” And thus admonishing him, the stag disappeared in the forest.

The Master here ended his lesson and identified the Birth: “At that time Channa was the hunter, this female novice was the doe, and I myself was the royal stag.”

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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