Ja 362 — Silavimamsa 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/ja362.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

“Virtue and learning,” etc.—This story the Master, while residing at Jetavana, told concerning a brahmin who would test the power of virtue. The king, they say, owing to his reputation for virtue, regarded him with special honour, beyond what was paid to other brahmins. He thought, “Can it be that the king regards me with special honour, because I am endowed with virtue, or as one devoted to the acquisition of learning? I will just test the comparative importance of virtue and learning.”

So one day he abstracted a coin from the royal treasury board. The treasurer, such was his respect for him, did not say a word. It occurred a second time, and the treasurer said nothing. But on the third occasion he had him arrested as one who lived by robbery, and brought him before the king. And when the king asked what his offence was, he charged him with stealing the king’s property.

“Is this true, brahmin?” said the king.

“I am not in the habit of stealing your property, Sire,” he said, “but I had my doubts as to the relative importance of virtue and learning, and in testing which was the greater of the two, I thrice abstracted a coin, and then I was given into custody and brought before you. Now that I know the greater efficacy of virtue compared with learning, I no longer wish to live a layman’s life. I will become an ascetic.”

On obtaining leave to do so, without so much as looking back on his house door, he went straight to Jetavana and begged the Master to ordain him. The Master granted him both deacon’s and priest’s orders. And he had been no long time in orders, before he attained to spiritual insight and reached the highest fruition. The incident was discussed in the Hall of Truth, how that a certain brahmin, after proving the power of virtue, took orders and obtaining spiritual insight reached Sainthood. When the Master came and inquired of the Brethren what was the nature of the topic they were sitting to discuss, on hearing what it

was, he said, “Not this man now only, but sages of old also put virtue to the proof, and by becoming ascetics worked out their own salvation.” And herewith he told a story of the past.

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 acquired every liberal art at Takkasila, and on his return to Benares he went to see the king. The king offered him the post of family priest, and as he kept the five moral precepts, the king looked upon him with respect as a virtuous man. “Can it be,” he thought, “that the king regards me with respect as a virtuous man, or as one devoted to the acquisition of learning?” And the whole story corresponds exactly with the modern instance, but in this case the brahmin said, “Now I know the great importance of virtue compared with learning.” And hereupon he spoke these five stanzas:

Virtue and learning I was fain to test;

Henceforth I doubt not virtue is the best.

Virtue excels vain gifts of form and birth,

Apart from virtue learning has no worth.

A prince or peasant, if to sin enslaved,

In neither world front misery is saved.

Men of high caste with those of base degree,

If virtuous here, in heaven will equal be.

Not birth, nor lore, nor friendship aught avails,

Pure virtue only future bliss entails.

Thus did the Great Being sing the praises of virtue, and having gained the consent of the king, that very day he betook himself to the Himalaya region, and adopting the religious life of an ascetic he developed the Faculties and Attainments, and became destined to birth in the Brahma-world.

The Master here ended this lesson and identified the Birth: “At that time it was I myself that put virtue to the test and adopted the religious life of an 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.