Ja 366 — Gumbiya 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/ja366.html

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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

“Poison like honey,” etc.—This story was told by the Master while dwelling at Jetavana, about a Brother who regretted taking orders. The Master asked him if it were true that he regretted it. “It is true, Holy Sir,” he said. “What have you seen to cause this feeling?” asked the Master. When the Brother replied, “It was owing to the charms of a woman,” the Master said, “These five qualities of desire are like the honey sprinkled over with deadly poison, and left in the road by one Gumbika.” And hereupon at the request of the Brother he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time in the reign of Brahmadatta, king of Benares, the Bodhisatta came to life in a merchant’s household. And when he was grown up, he set out from Benares with merchandise on five hundred carts for trading purposes. On reaching the high road, at the entrance of a forest, he called together all the members of his caravan and said, “Lo! on this road are leaves, flowers, fruit and the like, that are poisonous. In eating see that you take no strange food, without first asking me about it: for demons set in the road baskets of fresh rice and various sweet wild fruits, and sprinkle poison over them. Be sure not to eat of them without my consent.” And after uttering this warning, he proceeded on his journey.

Then a certain Yakkha, named Gumbiya, strewed leaves on a spot in the middle of the forest, and dropping some pieces of honey, covered them with deadly poison, and himself wandered all about the road, pretending to tap the trees, as if he were looking for honey. In their ignorance men thought, “This honey must have been left here as a meritorious act,” and then through eating it, they met their death. And the demons came and devoured their flesh. The men also belonging to the Bodhisatta’s caravan, some of them being naturally greedy, at the sight of these dainties, could not restrain themselves, and partook of them. But those that were wise said, “We will consult the Bodhisatta before we eat,” and stood holding it in their hands. And when he saw what they had in their hands, he made them throw it away. And those that had already eaten the whole of it died. But to those

who had eaten only half of it, he administered an emetic, and after they had vomited, he gave them the four sweet things, and so by his supernatural power they recovered. The Bodhisatta arrived in safety at the place he wished to reach, and after disposing of his wares, he returned to his own house.

Poison like honey in look, taste, and smell,

Was laid by Gumbiya with purpose fell:

All who as honey ate the noxious food,

Through their own greed did perish in the wood.

But they who wisely from the bait abstained,

Were free from torture and at peace remained.

So lust, like poison-bait, for man is laid;

His heart's desire has oft to death betrayed.

But who, though frail, besetting sins forego,

Escape from bonds of suffering and woe.

The Master, after delivering these verses inspired by Perfect Wisdom, revealed the Truths and identified the Birth— At the conclusion of the Truths the backsliding Brother attained the fruit of the First Path—"At that time I myself was that merchant."

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.