Ja 37 — Tittira Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol1/ja37.html

Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

License: Public Domain (original English edition, published 1895–1907)

Edited by E. B. Cowell

Original edition: Cambridge University Press, volume 1, 1895

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

“For they who honour age.”—This story was told by the Master whilst on his way to Savatthi, about the way in which the Elder Sariputta was kept out of a night’s lodging.

For, when Anatha-pindika had built his monastery, and had sent word that it was finished, the Master left Rajagaha and came to Vesali, setting out again on his journey after stopping at the latter place during his pleasure. It was now that the disciples of the Six hurried on ahead, and, before quarters could be taken for the Elders, monopolized the whole of the available lodgings, which they distributed among their superiors, their teachers, and themselves. When the Elders came up later, they could find no quarters at all for the night. Even Sariputta’s disciples, for all their searching, could not find lodgings for the Elder. Being without a lodging, the Elder passed the night at the foot of a tree near the Master’s quarters, either walking up and down or sitting at the foot of a tree.

At early dawn the Master coughed as he came out. The Elder coughed too. “Who is that?” asked the Master. “It is I, Sariputta, sir.” “What are you doing here at this hour, Sariputta?” Then the Elder told his story, at the close of which the Master thought, “Even now, while I am still alive, the Brethren lack courtesy and subordination; what will they not do when I am dead and gone?” And the thought filled him with anxiety for the Truth. As soon as day had come, he had the assembly of the Brethren called together, and asked them, saying, “Is it true, Brethren, as I hear, that the adherents of the Six went on ahead and kept the Elders among the Brethren out of lodgings for the night?” “That is so, Blessed One,” was the reply. Thereupon, with a reproof to the adherents of the Six and as a lesson to all, he addressed the Brethren, and said, “Tell me, who deserves the best lodging, the best water, and the best rice, Brethren?”

Some answered, “He who was a nobleman before he became a Brother.” Others said, “He who was originally a brahmin, or a man of means.” Others severally said, “The man versed in the Rules of the Order; the man who can expound the Law; the men who have won the

first, second, third, or fourth stage of mystic ecstasy." Whilst others again said, "The man in the First, Second, or Third path of Salvation, or an Arahat; one who knows the Three Great Truths; one who has the Six Higher Knowledges."

After the Brethren had stated whom they severally thought worthiest of precedence in the matter of lodging and the like, the Master said, "In the religion which I teach, the standard by which precedence in the matter of lodging and the like is to be settled, is not noble birth, or having been a brahmin, or having been wealthy before entry into the Order; the standard is not familiarity with the Rules of the Order, with the Suttas, or with the Metaphysical Books; nor is it either the attainment of any of the four stages of mystic ecstasy, or the walking in any of the Four Paths of salvation. Brethren, in my religion it is seniority which claims respect of word and deed, salutation, and all due service; it is seniors who should enjoy the best lodging, the best water, and the best rice. This is the true standard, and therefore the senior Brother ought to have these things. Yet, Brethren, here is Sariputta, who is my chief disciple, who has set rolling the Wheel of Minor Truth, and who deserves to have a lodging next after myself. And Sariputta has spent this night without a lodging at the foot of a tree! If you lack respect and subordination even now, what will be your behaviour as time goes by?"

And for their further instruction he said, "In times past, Brethren, even animals came to the conclusion that it was not proper for them to live without respect and subordination one to another, or without the ordering of their common life; even these animals decided to find out which among them was the senior, and then to shew him all forms of reverence. So they looked into the matter, and having found out which of them was the senior, they shewed him all forms of reverence, whereby they passed away at that life's close to people heaven." And so saying, he told this story of the past.

Once on a time, hard by a great banyan-tree on the slopes of the Himalayas, there dwelt three friends,—a partridge, a monkey, and an elephant. And they came to lack respect and subordination one to another, and had no ordering of their common life. And the thought came to them that it was not seemly for them to live in this way, and that they ought to find out which of their number was the senior and to honour him.

As they were engaged thinking which was the oldest, one day an idea struck them. Said the partridge and the monkey to the elephant as they all three sat together at the foot of that banyan-tree, "Friend elephant, how big was this banyan when you remember it first?" Said the elephant, "When I was a baby, this banyan was a mere bush, over which I used to walk; and as I stood astride of it, its topmost branches used just to reach up to my belly. I've known the tree since it was a mere bush."

Next the monkey was asked the same question by the other two; and he replied, "My friends, when I was a youngling, I had only to stretch out my neck as I sat on the ground, and I could eat the topmost sprouts of this banyan. So I've known this banyan since it was very tiny."

Then the partridge was asked the same question by the two others; and he said, “Friends, of old there was a great banyan-tree at such and such a spot; I ate its seeds, and voided them here; that was the origin of this tree. Therefore, I have knowledge of this tree from before it was born, and am older than the pair of you.”

Hereupon the monkey and the elephant said to the sage partridge, “Friend, you are the oldest. Henceforth you shall have from us acts of honour and veneration, marks of obeisance and homage, respect of word and deed, salutation, and all due homage; and we will follow your counsels. You for your part henceforth will please impart such counsel as we need.”

Thenceforth the partridge gave them counsel, and established them in the Commandments, which he also undertook himself to keep. Being thus established in the Commandments, and becoming respectful and subordinate among themselves, with proper ordering of their common life, these three made themselves sure of rebirth in heaven at this life’s close.

“The aims of these three”—continued the Master—“came to be known as the ‘Holiness of the Partridge,’ and if these three animals, Brethren, lived together in respect and subordination, how can you, who have embraced a Faith the Rules of which are so well-taught, live together without due respect and subordination? Henceforth I ordain, Brethren, that to seniority shall be paid respect of word and deed, salutation, and all due service; that seniority shall be the title to the best lodging, the best water, and the best rice; and nevermore let a senior be kept out of a lodging by a junior. Whosoever so keeps out his senior commits an offence.”

It was at the close of this lesson that the Master, as Buddha, repeated this stanza—

For they who honour age, in Truth are versed;

Praise now, and bliss hereafter, is their meed.

When the Master had finished speaking of the virtue of reverencing age, he wade the connexion and identified the Birth by saying, “Moggallana was the elephant of those days, Sariputta the monkey, and I myself the sage partridge.”

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.

These translations are in the public domain. You are free to do whatever you like with them.

Scanned, proofed and formatted at sacred-texts.com, January 2006–February 2010, by John Bruno Hare and others. Thanks to the Sacred Texts Archive for making these texts available in digital form.

Prepared for SuttaCentral by Bhikkhu Sujato.