Ja 377 — Setaketu 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/ja377.html

Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

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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

“Friend, be not angry,” etc.—The Master told this tale at Jetavana, of a deceitful Brother. The occasion of the story will appear in the Uddala Birth.

Once upon a time when Brahmadatta was king in Benares, the Bodhisatta was a far-famed teacher and taught the sacred texts to five hundred pupils. The senior of them, Setaketu by name, was born of a brahmin family from the north, and was very proud on account of his caste. One day he went out of the town with other pupils, and when coming in again he saw a candala. “Who are you?” he said. “I am a candala.” He feared the wind after striking the candala’s body might touch his own body, so he cried, “Curse you, you ill-omened candala, get to leeward,” and went quickly to windward, but the candala was too quick for him and stood to windward of him. Then he abused and reviled him the more, “Curse you, ill-omened one.” The candala asked, “Who are you?” “I am a brahmin student.” “Very well, if you are, you will be able to answer me a question.” “Yes.” “If you can’t, I will put you between my feet.” The brahmin, feeling confident, said, “Proceed.” The candala, making the company understand the case, asked the question, “Young brahmin, what are the quarters? “ “The quarters are four, the East and the rest.” The candala said, “I am not asking about that kind of quarter: and you, ignorant even of this, loathe the wind that has struck my body,” so he took him by the shoulder and forcing him down put him between his feet. The other pupils told their teacher of the affair. He asked, “Young Setaketu, have you been put between a candala’s feet?” “Yes, teacher: the son of a slave put me between his feet, saying, “He doesn’t know even the quarters”; but now I shall know what to do to him,” and so he reviled the candala angrily. The teacher admonished him: “Young Setaketu, be not angry with him, he is wise; he was asking about another kind of quarter, not this: what you have not seen, or heard, or understood is far more than what you have”: and he spoke two stanzas by way of admonition:

Friend, be not angry, anger is not good:

Wisdom is more than you have seen or heard:

By “quarter” parents may be understood,

And teacher is denoted by the word.

The householder who gives food, clothes and drink,

Whose doors are open, he a “quarter” is:

And “quarter” in the highest sense, we think,

Is that last state where misery shall be bliss.

So the Bodhisatta explained the quarters to the young brahmin: but he thinking, “I was put between a candala’s feet,” left that place and going to Takkasila learned all the arts from a far-famed teacher. With that teacher’s permission he left Takkasila, and wandered learning all practical arts. Coming to a frontier village he found five hundred ascetics dwelling near it and was ordained by them. All their arts, texts and practices he learnt, and they accompanied him to Benares. Next day he went to the palace-yard begging. The king, pleased with the ascetics’ deportment, gave them food in the palace and lodging in his garden. One day he said, sending them food, “I will salute your reverences this evening in the garden.” Setaketu went to the garden and collecting the ascetics, said, “Sirs, the king is coming to-day; now by once conciliating kings a man may live happily all the years of his life, so now some of you do the swinging penance, some lie on thorn-beds, some endure the five fires, some practise the mortification by squatting, some the act of diving, some repeat texts,” and after these orders he set himself at the door of the hut on a chair with a head-rest, put a book with a brilliant-coloured wrapping on a painted stand, and explained texts as they were inquired about by four or five intelligent pupils. At that moment the king arrived and seeing them doing these false penances he was delighted: he came up to Setaketu, saluted him and sat on one side: then talking to his family priest he spoke the third stanza:

With uncleansed teeth, and goatskin garb and hair

All matted, muttering holy words in peace:

Surely no human means to good they spare,

They know the Truth, and they have won Release.

The priest heard this and spoke the fourth stanza:

A learned sage may do ill deeds, O king:

A learned sage may fail to follow right:

A thousand Vedas will not safety bring,

Failing just works, or save from evil plight.

When the king heard this, he took away his favour from the ascetics. Setaketu thought: "This king took a liking to the ascetics, but this priest has destroyed it as if he had cut it with an axe: I must talk to him": so talking to him he spoke the fifth stanza:

"A learned sage may do ill deeds, O king:

A learned sage may fail to follow right"

You say: then Vedas are a useless thing:

Just works with self-restraint are requisite.

The priest hearing this, spoke the sixth stanza:

Nay, Vedas are not useless utterly:

Though works with self-restraint true doctrine is:

Study of Vedas lifts man's name on high,

But 'Tis by conduct that he reaches Bliss.

So the priest refuted Setaketu's doctrine. He made them all laymen, gave them shields and weapons, and appointed them to be attendants on the king as Superior Officers: and hence they say comes the race of Superior Officers.

After the lesson the Master identified the Birth: "At that time Setaketu was the cheating priest, the candala was Sariputta, and the King's priest was myself."

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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