Ja 387 — Suci 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/ja387.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

“Quickly threaded,” etc.—The Master told this tale while dwelling in Jetavana, concerning the perfection of wisdom. The occasion of the tale will be given in the Mahaummagga. The Master addressed the brethren, “This is not the first time the Tathagata is wise and skilled in devices,” and so he told an old tale.

Once upon a time when Brahmadatta was king in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born in the kingdom of Kasi in a smith’s family, and when he grew up he became excellent in the craft. His parents were poor. Not far from their village was another smith’s village of a thousand houses. The principal smith of the thousand was a favourite of the king, rich and of great substance. His daughter was exceedingly beautiful, like to a nymph of heaven, with all the auspicious marks of a lady of the land. People came from the villages round to have razors, axes, ploughshares and goads made, and generally saw that maiden. When they went back to their own villages, they praised her beauty in the places where men sit and elsewhere. The Bodhisatta, being attracted by merely hearing of her, thought, “I will make her my wife”: so he took iron of the best kind, and made one delicate strong needle which pierced dice and floated on water: then he made a sheath for it of the same kind and pierced dice with it: and in the same way he made seven sheaths: how he made them is not to be told, for such work prospers through the greatness of Bodhisattas’ knowledge. Then he put the needle in a tube and placing it in a case he went to that village and asked for the street where the head-smith’s house was: then standing at the door he said, “Who will buy for money from my hand a needle of this kind?” describing the needle, and so standing by the head-smith’s house he spoke the first stanza—

Quickly threaded, smooth and straight,

Polished with emery,

Sharp of point and delicate,

Needles! who will buy?

After this he praised it again and spoke the second stanza—

Quickly threaded, strong and straight,

Rounded properly,

Iron they will penetrate,

Needles! who will buy?

At that moment the maiden was fanning her father with a palm-leaf as he lay on a little bed to allay discomfort after his early meal, and hearing the Bodhisatta's sweet voice, as if she had been sickened by a fresh lump of meat, and had the discomfort extinguished by a thousand pots of water, she said, "Who is this hawking needles with sweet voice in a village of smiths? For what business has he come? I will find out": so laying down the palm-fan she went out and spoke with him outside, standing in the verandah. The purpose of Bodhisattas prospers: it was for her sake he had come to that village. She speaking with him said, "Young man, dwellers in all the kingdom come to this village for needles and the like: it is in folly you wish to sell needles in a village of smiths; though you declare the praise of your needle all day no one will take it from your hand; if you wish to get a price, go to another village": so she spoke two stanzas—

Our hooks are sold, both up and down,

Men know our needles well:

We all are smiths in this good town:

Needles! who can sell?

In iron-work we have renown,

In weapons we excel:

We all are smiths in this good town:

Needles! who can sell?

The Bodhisatta hearing her words said, "Lady, you say this not knowing and in ignorance ": and so he spoke two stanzas—

Though all are smiths in this good town,

Yet skill can needles sell;

For masters in the craft will own

A first-rate article.

Lady, if once your father know

This needle made by me;

On me your hand he would bestow

And all his property.

The head-smith hearing all their talk called his daughter and asked, “Who is that you are talking to?” “Father, a man selling needles.” “Then call him here.” She went and called him. The Bodhisatta saluted the head-smith and stood by. The head-smith asked, “Of what village are you?” “I am of such a village and son of such a smith.” “Why are you come here?” “To sell needles.” “Come, let us see your needle.” The Bodhisatta, wishing to declare his qualities among them all, said, “Is not a thing seen in the midst of all better than one seen by each singly?” “Quite right, friend.” So he gathered all the smiths together and in their midst said, “Sir, take the needle.” “Master, have an anvil brought and a bronze dish full of water.” This was done. The Bodhisatta took the needle-tube from the wrapper and gave it to them. The head-smith taking it asked, “Is this the needle?” “No, it is not the needle, it is the sheath.” He examining could not see end nor tip. The Bodhisatta, taking it from them, drew off the sheath with his nail and showing it to the people with “This is the needle, this is the sheath,” he put the needle in the master’s hand and the sheath at his feet. Again when the master said, “This is the needle, I suppose,” he answered, “This too is a needle-sheath”: then he struck it off with his nail, and so he laid six sheaths in succession at the head-smith’s feet and saying, “Here is the needle,” laid it on his hand. The thousand smiths snapped their fingers in delight, and the waving of cloths began; then the head-smith asked, “Friend, what is the strength of this needle?” “Master, have this anvil raised up by a strong man and a water-vessel set under the anvil: then strike the needle straight into the anvil.” He had this done and struck the needle by the point into the anvil. The needle piercing the anvil lay across on the surface of the water not moving a hair’s breadth up or down. All the smiths said, “We have never heard all this time even by rumour that there are such smiths as this:” so they snapped their fingers and waved a thousand cloths. The head-smith called his daughter and in the midst of the assembly saying, “This maiden is a suitable match for you,” he poured water on them and gave her away. And afterwards when the head-smith died the Bodhisatta became head-smith in the village.

After the lesson, the Master declared the Truths and identified the Birth: “The smith’s daughter was Rahula’s mother, the clever young smith 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.

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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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