Ja 396 — Kukku 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/ja396.html

Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

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

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

“The peak’s a cubit,” etc—The Master told this while dwelling in Jetavana, concerning the admonition of a king. The occasion will appear in the Tesakuna-Birth.

Once upon a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was his councillor in things temporal and spiritual. The king was set on the way of the evil courses, ruled his kingdom unrighteously and collected wealth by oppressing the people. The Bodhisatta wishing to admonish him goes about looking for a parable. Now the king’s bedchamber was unfinished and the roof was not complete upon it: the rafters supported a peak but were only just set in position. The king had gone and taken his pleasure in the park: when he came to his house he looked up and saw the round peak: fearing it would fall upon him he went and stood outside, then looking up again he thought “How is that peak resting so? and how are the rafters?” and asking the Bodhisatta he spoke the first stanza—

The peak’s a cubit and a half in height,

Eight spans will compass it in circuit round,

Of simsapa and sara built aright:

Why does it stand so sound?

Hearing him the Bodhisatta thought “I have now got a parable to admonish the king,” and spoke these stanzas—

The thirty rafters bent, of sara wood,

Set equally, encompass it around,

They press it tightly, for their hold is good:

'Tis set aright and sound.

So is the wise man, girt by faithful friends,

By steadfast counsellors and pure:

Never from height of fortune he descends:

As rafters hold the peak secure.

While the Bodhisatta was speaking, the king considered his own conduct, "If there is no peak, the rafters do not stand fast; the peak does not stand if not held by the rafters; if the rafters break, the peak falls: and even so a bad king, not holding together his friends and ministers, his armies, his brahmins and householders, if these break up, is not held by them but falls from his power: a king must be righteous." At that instant they brought him a citron as a present. The king said to the Bodhisatta, "Friend, eat this citron." The Bodhisatta took it and said, "O king, people who know not how to eat this make it bitter or acid: but wise men who know take away the bitter, and without removing the acid or spoiling the citron-flavour they eat it," and by this parable he showed the king the means of collecting wealth, and spoke two stanzas—

The rough-skinned citron bitter is to eat,

If it remain untouched by carver's steel:

Take but the pulp, O king, and it is sweet:

You spoil the sweetness if you add the peel.

Even so the wise man without violence,

Gathers king's dues in village and in town,

Increases wealth, and yet gives no offence:

He walks the way of right and of renown.

The king taking counsel with the Bodhisatta went to a lotus-tank, and seeing a lotus in flower, with a hue like the new-risen sun, not defiled by the water, he said: "Friend, that lotus grown in the water stands undefiled by the water." Then the Bodhisatta said, "O king, so should a king be," and spoke these stanzas in admonition—

Like the lotus in the pool,

White roots, waters pure, sustain it;

In the sun’s face flowering full,

Dust nor mud nor wet can stain it.

So the man whom virtues rule,

Meek and pure and good we style him:

Like the lotus in the pool

Stain of sin cannot defile him.

The king hearing the Bodhisatta’s admonition afterwards ruled his kingdom righteously, and doing good actions, charity and the rest, became destined for heaven.

After the lesson, the Master declared the Truths and identified the Birth: “At that time the king was Ananda, the wise minister 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.

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.