Ja 401 — Dasannaka 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/ja401.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

“Dasanna’s good sword,” etc.—The Master told this, when living in Jetavana, concerning the temptation of a Brother by his wife when a layman. The Brother confessed that he was backsliding for this reason. The Master said, “That woman does you harm: formerly too you were dying of mental sickness owing to her, and got life owing to wise men,” and so he told a tale of old.

Once upon a time when the great king Maddava was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta wan born in a brahmin household. They called his name young Senaka. When he grew up he learned all the sciences at Takkasila, and coming back to Benares he became king Maddava’s counsellor in things temporal and spiritual, and being called wise Senaka he was looked upon in all the city as the sun or the moon. The son of the king’s household priest came to wait on the king and seeing the chief queen adorned with all ornaments and exceedingly beautiful, he became enamoured, and when he went home lay without taking food. His comrades enquired of him and he told them the matter. The king said, “The household priest’s son does not appear, how is this?” When he heard the cause, he sent for him and said, “I give her to you for seven days, spend those days at your house and on the eighth send her back.” He said, “Very well,” and taking her to his house took delight with her. They became enamoured of each other, and keeping it secret they fled by the house door and came to the country of another king. No man knew the place they went to, and their path was like the way of a ship. The king made proclamation by drum round the city, and though he sought in many ways he did not find the place whither she had gone. Then great sorrow for her fell upon him: his heart became hot and poured out blood: after that blood flowed from his entrails, and his sickness became great. The great royal physicians could not cure him. The Bodhisatta thought, “The disease is not in the king, he is touched by mental sickness because he sees not his wife: I will cure him by a certain means”; so he instructed the king’s wise counsellors, Ayura and Pukkusa by name, saying, “The king has no sickness, except mental sickness because he sees not the queen: now he is a great helper to us and we will cure him by a certain means: we will have a

gathering in the palace-yard and make a man who knows how to do it swallow a sword: we will put the king at a window and make him look down on the gathering: the king seeing the man swallow a sword will ask, “Is there anything harder than that?” Then, my lord Ayura, you should make answer, “It is harder to say “I give up so and so”: then he will ask you, my lord Pukkusa, and you should make answer, “O king, if a man says, “I give up so and so” and does not give it, his word is fruitless, no men live or eat or drink by such words; but they who do according to that word and give the thing according to their promise, they do a thing harder than the other: then I will find what to do next.” So he made a gathering. Then these three wise men went and told the king, saying, “O great king, there is a gathering in the palace-yard; if men look down on it their sorrow becomes joy, let us go thither”: so they took the king, and opening a window made him look down on the gathering. Many people were showing off each his own art which he knew: and a man was swallowing a good sword of thirty-three inches and sharp of edge. The king seeing him thought, “This man is swallowing the sword, I will ask these wise men if there is anything harder than that”: so he asked Ayura, speaking the first stanza—

Dasanna’s good sword thirsts for blood, its edge is sharpened perfectly:

Yet ‘midst the crowd he swallows it: a harder feat there cannot be:

I ask if anything is hard compared to this: pray answer me.

Then he spoke the second stanza in answer—

Greed may lure a man to swallow swords though sharpened perfectly:

But to say, “I give this freely,” that a harder feat would be;

All things else are easy; royal Magadha, I’ve answered thee.

When the king heard wise Ayura’s words, he thought, “So then it is harder to say, “I give this thing,” than to swallow a sword: I said, “I give my queen to the priest’s son”: I have done a very hard thing”: and so his sorrow at heart became a little lighter. Then thinking, “Is there anything harder than to say, “I give this thing to another”?” he talked with wise Pukkusa and spoke the third stanza—

Ayura has solved my question, wise in all philosophy:

Pukkusa I ask the question now, if harder feat there be:

Is there aught that’s hard compared to this? pray answer me.

The wise Pukkusa in answer to him spoke the fourth stanza—

Not by words men live, and not by language uttered fruitlessly:

But to give and not regret it, that a greater feat would be:

All things else are easy; royal Magadha, I've answered thee.

The king, hearing this, considered, "I first said, "I will give the queen to the priest's son," and then I did according to my word and gave her: surely I have done a hard thing": so his sorrow became lighter. Then it came into his mind, "There is no one wiser than wise Senaka, I will ask this question of him": and asking him he spoke the fifth stanza—

Pukkusa has solved my question, wise in all philosophy:

Senaka I ask the question now, if harder feat there be:

Is there aught that's hard compared to this? pray answer me.

So Senaka spoke the sixth stanza in answer to him—

If a man should give a gift, or small or great, in charity,

Nor regret the giving after: that a harder feat would be:

All things else are easy: royal Magadha, I've answered thee.

The king, hearing the Bodhisatta's words, reflected: "I gave the queen to the priest's son of my own thought: now I cannot control my thought, I sorrow and pine: this is not worthy of me. If she loved me she would not forsake her kingdom and flee away: what have I to do with her when she has not loved me but fled away?" As he thought thus, all his sorrow rolled away and departed like a drop of water on a lotus leaf. That instant his entrails were at rest. He became well and happy, and praised the Bodhisatta, speaking the final stanza—

Ayura answered question, good Pukkusa as well:

The words of Senaka the wise all answers do excel.

And after this praise he gave him much wealth in his delight

After the lesson, the Master declared the Truths, and identified the Birth—after the Truths, the backsliding Brother was established in the fruition of the First Path—"At that time the queen was the wife of his layman days, the king the backsliding Brother, Ayura was Moggallana, Pukkusa was Sariputta, and the wise Senaka 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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