Ja 402 — Sattubhasta Jātaka

English translation by H. T. Francis and R. A. Neil.

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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

“Thou art confused,” etc.—The Master told this when staying in Jetavana, concerning the Perfection of Wisdom. The occasion of the story will appear in the Ummagga-Birth.

Once upon a time a king called Janaka was reigning in Benares. At that time the Bodhisatta was born in a brahmin family, and they called his name young Senaka. When he grew up he learned all the arts at Takkasila, and returning to Benares saw the king. The king set him in the place of minister and gave him great glory. He taught the king things temporal and spiritual. Being a pleasant preacher of the law he established the king in the five precepts, in alms-giving, in keeping the fasts, in the ten ways of right action, and so established him in the path of virtue. Throughout the kingdom it was as it were the time of the appearing of the Buddhas. On the fortnightly fast the king, the viceroys and others would all assemble and decorate the place of meeting. The Bodhisatta taught the law in a decorated room in the middle of a deer-skin-couch with the power of a Buddha, and his word was like the preaching of Buddhas. Then a certain old brahmin begging for money-alms got a thousand pieces, left them in a brahmin family and went to seek alms again. When he had gone, that family spent all his pieces. He came back and would have his pieces brought him. The brahmin, being unable to give them to him, gave him his daughter to wife. The other brahmin took her and made his dwelling in a brahmin village not far from Benares. Because of her youth his wife was unsatisfied in desires and sinned with another young brahmin. There are sixteen things that cannot be satisfied: and what are these sixteen? The sea is not satisfied with all rivers, nor the fire with fuel, nor a king with his kingdom, nor a fool with sins, nor a woman with three things, intercourse, adornment and child-bearing, nor a brahmin with sacred texts, nor a sage with ecstatic meditation, nor a sekha with honour, nor one free from desire with penance, nor the energetic man with energy, nor the talker with talk, nor the politic man with the council, nor the believer with serving the church, nor the liberal man with giving away, nor the learned with hearing the law, nor the four congregations with seeing the Buddha. So this brahmin woman , being unsatisfied with intercourse, wished to put her husband away and

do her sin with boldness. So one day in her evil purpose she lay down. When he said, “How is it, wife?” she answered, “Brahmin, I cannot do the work of your house, get me a maid.” “Wife, I have no money, what shall I give to get her?” “Seek for money by begging for alms and so get her.” “Then, wife, get ready something for my journey.” She filled a skin-bag with baked meal and unbaked meal, and gave them to him. The brahmin, going through villages, towns and cities, got seven hundred pieces, and thinking, “This money is enough to buy slaves, male and female,” he was returning to his own village: at a certain place convenient for water he opened his sack, and eating some meal he went down to drink water without tying the mouth. Then a black snake in a hollow tree, smelling the meal, entered the bag and lay down in a coil eating the meal. The brahmin came, and without looking inside fastened the sack and putting it on his shoulder went his way. Then a spirit living in a tree, sitting in a hollow of the trunk, said to him on the way, “Brahmin, if you stop on the way you will die, if you go home to-day your wife will die,” and vanished. He looked, but not seeing the spirit was afraid and troubled with the fear of death, and so came to the gate of Benares weeping and lamenting. It was the fast on the fifteenth day, the day of the Bodhisatta’s preaching, seated on the decorated seat of the law, and a multitude with perfumes and flowers and the like in their hands came in troops to hear the preaching. The brahmin said, “Where are ye going?” and was told, “O brahmin, to-day wise Senaka preaches the law with sweet voice and the power of a Buddha: do you not know?” He thought, “They say he is a wise preacher, and I am troubled with the fear of death: wise men are able to take away even great sorrow: it is right for me too to go there and hear the law.” So he went with them, and when the assembly and the king among them had sat down round about the Bodhisatta, he stood at the outside, not far from the seat of the law, with his mealsack on his shoulder, afraid with the fear of death. The Bodhisatta preached as if he were bringing down the river of heaven or showering ambrosia. The multitude became well pleased, and making applause listened to the preaching. Wise men have far sight. At that moment the Bodhisatta, opening his eyes gracious with the five graces, surveyed the assembly on every side and, seeing that brahmin, thought, “This great assembly has become well pleased and listens to the law, making applause, but that one brahmin is ill pleased and weeps: there must be some sorrow within him to cause his tears: as if touching rust with acid, or making a drop of water roll from a lotus leaf, I will teach him the law, making him free from sorrow and well pleased in mind.” So he called him, “Brahmin, I am wise Senaka, now will I make thee free from sorrow, speak boldly,” and so talking with him he spoke the first stanza—

Thou art confused in thought, disturbed in sense,

Tears streaming from thine eyes are evidence;

What hast thou lost, or what dost wish to gain

By coming hither? Give me answer plain.

Then the brahmin, declaring his cause of sorrow, spoke the second stanza—

If I go home my wife it is must die,

If I go not, the yakkha said, 'Tis I;

That is the thought that pierces cruelly:

Explain the matter, Senaka, to me.

The Bodhisatta, hearing the brahmin's words, spread the net of knowledge as if throwing a net in the sea, thinking, "There are many causes of death to beings in this world: some die sunk in the sea, or seized therein by ravenous fish, some falling in the Ganges, or seized by crocodiles, some falling from a tree or pierced by a thorn, some struck by weapons of divers kinds, some by eating poison or hanging or falling from a precipice or by extreme cold or attacked by diseases of divers kinds, so they die: now among so many causes of death from which cause shall this brahmin die if he stays on the road to-day, or his wife if he goes home?" As he considered, he saw the sack on the brahmin's shoulder and thought, "There must be a snake who has gone into that sack, and entering he must have gone in from the smell of the meal when the brahmin at his breakfast had eaten some meal and gone to drink water without fastening the sack's mouth: the brahmin coming back after drinking water must have gone on after fastening and taking up the sack without seeing that the snake had entered: if he stays on the road, he will say at evening when he rests, "I will eat some meal," and opening the sack will put in his hand: then the snake will bite him in the hand and destroy his life: this will be the cause of his death if he stays on the road: but if he goes home the sack will come into his wife's hand; she will say, "I will look at the ware within," and opening the sack put in her hand, then the snake will bite her and destroy her life, and this will be the cause of her death if he goes home to-day." This he knew by his knowledge of expedients. Then this came into his mind, "The snake must be a black snake, brave and fearless; when the sack strikes against the brahmin's broadside, he shows no motion or quivering; he shows no sign of his being there amidst such an assembly: therefore he must be a black snake, brave and fearless:" from his knowledge of expedients he knew this as if he was seeing with a divine eye. So as if he had been a man who had stood by and seen the snake enter the sack, deciding by his knowledge of expedients, the Bodhisatta answering the brahmin's question in the royal assembly spoke the third stanza—

First with many a doubt I deal,

Now my tongue the truth declares;

Brahmin, in your bag of meal

A snake has entered unawares.

So saying, he asked, "O brahmin, is there any meal in that sack of yours?" "There is, O sage." "Did you eat some meal to-day at your breakfast time?" "Yes, O sage." "Where were you sitting?" "In a wood, at the root of a tree." "When you ate the meal, and went to drink water, did you fasten the sack's mouth or not?" "I did not, O sage." "When you drank water and came back, did you fasten the sack after looking in?" "I fastened it without looking in, O

sage." "O brahmin, when you went to drink water, I think the snake entered the sack owing to the smell of the meal without your knowledge: such is the case: therefore put down your sack, set it in the midst of the assembly and opening the mouth, stand back and taking a stick beat the sack with it: then when you see a black snake coming out with its hood spread and hissing, you will have no doubt:" so he spoke the fourth stanza—

Take a stick and beat the sack,

Dumb and double-tongued is he;

Cease your mind with doubts to rack;

Ope the sack, the snake you'll see.

The brahmin, hearing the Great Being's words, did so, though alarmed and frightened. The snake came out of the sack when his hood was struck with the stick, and stood looking at the crowd.

The Master, explaining the matter, spoke the fifth stanza:

Frightened, 'midst the assembled rout,

String of meal-sack he untied;

Angry crept a serpent out,

Hood erect, in all his pride.

When the snake came out with hood erect, there was a forecast of the Bodhisatta as the omniscient Buddha. The multitude began waving cloths and snapping fingers in thousands, the showers of the seven precious stones were as showers from a thick cloud, cries of "good" were raised in hundreds of thousands, and the noise was like the splitting of the earth. This answering of such a question with the power of a Buddha is not the power of birth, nor the power of men rich in gifts and high family: of what is it the power then? Of knowledge: the man of knowledge makes spiritual insight to increase, opens the door of the noble Paths, enters the great and endless nirvana and masters the perfection of disciple-hood, pacceka-buddha-hood, and perfect buddha-hood: knowledge is the best among the qualities that bring the great and endless nirvana, the rest are the attendants of knowledge: and so it is said—

"Wisdom is best," the good confess,

Like the moon in starry skies;

Virtue, fortune, righteousness,

Are the handmaids of the wise.

When the question had been so answered by the Bodhisatta, a certain snake-charmer made a mouth-band for the snake, caught him and let him loose in the forest. The brahmin, coming up to the king, saluted him and made obeisance, and praising him spoke half a stanza—

Great, king Janaka, thy gain,

Seeing Senaka the wise.

After praising the king, he took seven hundred pieces from the bag and praising the Bodhisatta, he spoke a stanza and a half wishing to give a gift in delight—

Dread thy wisdom; veils are vain,

Brahmin, to thy piercing eyes.

These seven hundred pieces, see,

Take them all, I give them thee;

'Tis to thee I owe my life,

And the welfare of my wife.

Hearing this, the Bodhisatta spoke the eighth stanza—

For reciting poetry

Wise men can't accept a wage;

Rather let us give to thee,

Ere thou take the homeward stage.

So saying, the Bodhisatta made a full thousand pieces to be given to the brahmin, and asked him, "By whom were you sent to beg for money?" "By my wife, O sage." "Is your wife old or young?" "Young, O sage." "Then she is doing sin with another, and sent you away thinking to do so in security: if you take these pieces home, she will give to her lover the pieces won by your labour: therefore you should not go home straight, but only after leaving the pieces outside the town at the root of a tree or somewhere:" so he sent him away. He, coming near the village, left his pieces at the root of a tree, and came home in the evening. His wife at that moment was seated with her lover. The brahmin stood at the door and said, "Wife." She recognise his voice, and putting out the light opened the door: when the brahmin came in, she took the other and put him at the door: then coming back and not seeing anything in the sack she asked, "Brahmin, what alms have you got on your journey?" "A thousand pieces." "Where is it?" "It is left at such and such a place: never mind,

we will get it to-morrow." She went and told her lover. He went and took it as if it were his own treasure. Next day the brahmin went, and not seeing the pieces came to the Bodhisatta, who said, "What is the matter, brahmin?" "I don't see the pieces, O sage." "Did you tell your wife?" "Yes, O sage." Knowing that the wife had told her lover, the Bodhisatta asked, "Brahmin, is there a brahmin who is a friend of your wife's?" "There is, O sage." "Is there one who is a friend of yours?" "Yes, O sage." Then the Great Being caused seven days' expenses to be given him and said, "Go, do you two invite and entertain the first day fourteen brahmins, seven for yourself and seven for your wife: from next day onwards take one less each day, till on the seventh day you invite one brahmin and your wife one: then if you notice that the brahmin your wife asks on the seventh day has come every time, tell me." The brahmin did so, and told the Bodhisatta, "O sage, I have observed the brahmin who is always our guest." The Bodhisatta sent men with him to bring that other brahmin, and asked him, "Did you take a thousand pieces belonging to this brahmin from the root of such and such a tree?" "I did not, O sage." "You do not know that I am the wise Senaka; I will make you fetch those pieces." He was afraid and confessed, saying, "I took them." "What did you do?" "I put them in such and such a place, O sage." The Bodhisatta asked the first brahmin, "Brahmin, will you keep your wife or take another?" "Let me keep her, O sage." The Bodhisatta sent men to fetch the pieces and the wife, and gave the brahmin the pieces from the thief's hand; he punished the other, removing him from the city, punished also the wife, and gave great honour to the brahmin, making him dwell near himself.

After the lesson, the Master declared the Truths, and identified the Birth—At the end of the Truths, many attained the fruition of the First Path—"At that time the brahmin was Ananda, the spirit Sariputta, the assembly was the church of Buddha, and 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.

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