Ja 408 — Kumbhakara 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/ja408.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

“A mango in a forest,” etc. The Master told this when dwelling in Jetavana, concerning rebuke of sin. The occasion will appear in the Paniya Birth. At that time in Savatthi five hundred friends, who had become ascetics, dwelling in the House of the Golden Pavement, had lustful thoughts at midnight. The Master regards his disciples three times a night and three times a day, six times every night and day, as a jay guards her egg, or a yak-cow her tail, or a mother her beloved son, or a one-eyed man his eye; so in the very instant he rebukes a sin which is beginning. He was observing Jetavana on that midnight and knowing the Brethren’s conduct of their thoughts, he considered, “This sin among these brethren if it grows will destroy the cause of Sainthood. I will this moment rebuke their sin and show them Sainthood”: so leaving the perfumed chamber he called Ananda , and bidding him collect all the brethren dwelling in the place, he got them together and sat down on the seat prepared for Buddha. He said, “Brethren, it is not right to live in the power of sinful thoughts; a sin if it grows brings great ruin like an enemy: a Brother ought to rebuke even a little sin: wise men of old seeing even a very slight cause, rebuked a sinful thought that had begun and so brought about paccekabuddha-hood”: and so he told an old tale.

Once upon a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born in a potter’s family in a suburb of Benares: when he grew up he became a householder, had a son and daughter, and supported his wife and children by his potter’s handicraft. At that time in the Kalinga kingdom, in the city of Dantapura, the king named Karandu, going to his garden with a great retinue, saw at the garden-gate a mango tree laden with sweet fruit: he stretched out his hand from his seat on the elephant and seized a bunch of mangoes: then entering the garden he sat on the royal seat and ate a mango, giving some to those worthy of favours. From the time when the king took one, ministers, brahmins, and householders, thinking that others should also do so, took down and ate mangoes from that tree. Coming again and again they climbed the tree, and beating it with clubs and breaking the branches down and off, they ate the fruit, not leaving even the unripe.

The king amused himself in the garden for the day, and at evening as he came by on the royal elephant he dismounted on seeing the tree, and going to its root he looked up and thought, “In the morning this tree stood beautiful with its burden of fruit and the gazers could not be satisfied: now it stands not beautiful with its fruit broken down and off.” Again looking from another place he saw another mango tree barren, and thought, “This mango tree stands beautiful in its barrenness like a bare mountain of jewels; the other from its fruitfulness fell into that misfortune: the householder’s life is like a fruitful tree, the religious life like a barren tree: the wealthy have fear, the poor have no fear: I too would be like the barren tree.” So taking the fruit-tree as his subject, he stood at the root; and considering the three properties and perfecting spiritual insight, he attained paccekabuddha-hood, and reflecting, “The envelop of the womb is now fallen from me, re-birth in the three existences is ended, the filth of transmigration is cleansed, the ocean of tears dried up, the wall of bones broken down, there is no more re-birth for me,” he stood as if adorned with every ornament. Then his ministers said, “You stand too long, O great king.” “I am not a king, I am a paccekabuddha.” “Paccekabuddhas are not like you, O king.” “Then what are they like?” “Their hair and beards are shaved, they are dressed in yellow robes, they are not attached to family or tribe, they are like clouds torn by wind or the moon’s orb freed from Rahu, and they dwell on Himalaya in the Nandamula cave: such, O king, are the paccekabuddhas.” At that moment the king threw up his hand and touched his head, and instantly the marks of a householder disappeared, and the marks of a priest came into view—

Three robes, bowl, razor, needles, strainer, zone,

A pious Brother those eight marks should own,

the requisites, as they are called, of a priest became attached to his body. Standing in the air he preached to the multitude, and then went through the sky to the mountain cave Nandamula in the Upper Himalaya.

In the kingdom of Gandhārā in the city Takkasila, the king named Naggaji on a terrace, in the middle of a royal couch, saw a woman who had put a jewelled bracelet on each hand and was grinding perfume as she sat near: he thought, “These jewelled bracelets do not rub or jingle when separate,” and so sat watching. Then she, putting the bracelet from the right hand on the left hand and collecting perfume with the right, began to grind it. The bracelet on the left hand rubbing against the other made a noise. The king observed that these two bracelets made a sound when rubbing against each other, and he thought, “That bracelet when separate touched nothing, it now touches the second and makes a noise: just so living beings when separate do not touch or make a noise, when they become two or three they rub against each other and make a din: now I rule the inhabitants in the two kingdoms of Cashmere and Gandhārā, and I too ought to dwell like the single bracelet ruling myself and not ruling another “: so making the rubbing of the bracelets his topic, seated as he was, he realised the three properties, attained spiritual insight, and gained paccekabuddha-hood. The rest as before.

In the kingdom of Videha, in the city of Mithila, the king, named Nimi, after breakfast, surrounded by his ministers, stood looking down at the street through an open window of the palace. A hawk, having taken some meat from the meat-market, was flying up into the air. Some vultures or other birds, surrounding the hawk on each side, went on pecking it with their beaks, striking it with their wings and beating it with their feet, for the sake of the meat. Not enduring to be killed, the hawk dropt the flesh, another bird took it: the rest leaving the hawk fell on the other: when he relinquished it, a third took it: and they pecked him also in the same way. The king seeing those birds thought, "Whoever took the flesh, sorrow befel him: whoever relinquished it, happiness befel him: whoever takes the five pleasures of sense, sorrow befals him, happiness the other man: these are common to many: now I have sixteen thousand women: I ought to live in happiness leaving the five pleasures of sense, as the hawk relinquishing the morsel of flesh." Considering this wisely, standing as he was, he realised the three properties, attained spiritual insight, and reached the wisdom of paccekabuddha-hood. The rest as before.

In the kingdom of Uttarapancala, in the city of Kampilla, the king, named Dummukha, after breakfast, with all his ornaments and surrounded by his ministers, stood looking down on the palace-yard from an open window. At the instant they opened the door of a cow-pen: the bulls coming from the pen set upon one cow in lust: and one great bull with sharp horns seeing another bull coming, possessed by the jealousy of lust, struck him in the thigh with his sharp horns. By the force of the blow his entrails came out, and so he died. The king seeing this thought, "Living beings from the state of beasts upwards reach sorrow from the power of lust: this bull through lust has reached death: other beings also are disturbed by lust: I ought to abandon the lusts that disturb those beings:" and so standing as he was he realised the three properties, attained spiritual insight and reached the wisdom of paccekabuddha-hood. The rest as before.

Then one day those four paccekabuddhas, considering that it was time for their rounds, left the Nandamula cave, having cleansed their teeth by chewing betel in the lake Anotatta, and having attended to their needs in Manosila, they took the bowl and robe, and by magic flying in the air, and treading on clouds of the five colours, they alighted not far from a suburb of Benares. In a convenient spot they put on the robes, took the bowl, and entering the suburb they went the rounds for alms till they came to the Bodhisatta's house-door. The Bodhisatta seeing them was delighted and making them enter his house he made them sit on a seat prepared, he gave them water of respect and served them with excellent food, hard and soft. Then sitting on one side he saluted the eldest of them, saying, "Sir, your religious life appears very beautiful: your senses are very calm, your complexion is very clear: what topic of thought made you take to the religious life and ordination?" and as he asked the eldest of them, so also he came up to the others and asked them. Then those four saying, "I was so and so, king of such and such a city in such and such a kingdom" and so on, in that way each told the causes of his retiring from the world and spoke one stanza each in order—

A mango in a forest did I see

Full-grown, and dark, fruitful exceedingly:

And for its fruit men did the mango break,

'Twas this inclined my heart the bowl to take.

A bracelet, polished by a hand renowned,

A woman wore on each wrist without sound:

One touched the other and a noise did wake:

'Twas this inclined my heart the bowl to take.

Birds in a flock a bird unfriended tore,

Who all alone a lump of carrion bore:

The bird was smitten for the carrion's sake

'Twas this inclined my heart the bowl to take.

A bull in pride among his fellows paced;

High rose his back, with strength and beauty graced:

From lust he died: a horn his wound did make:

'Twas this inclined my heart the bowl to take.

The Bodhisatta, hearing each stanza, said, "Good, sir: your topic is suitable," and so commended each paccekabuddha: and having listened to the discourse delivered by those four, he became disinclined to a householder's life. When the paccekabuddhas had departed, after breakfast seated at his ease, he called his wife and said, "Wife, those four paccekabuddhas left kingdoms to be Brethren and now live owning nothing, without hindrance, in the bliss of the religious life: while I make a livelihood by earnings. What have I to do with a householder's life? You take the children and stay in the house." And he spoke two stanzas—

Kalnga's king Karandu, Gandhara's Naggaji,

Pancala's ruler Dummukha, Videha's great Nimi,

Have left their thrones and live the life of Brothers sinlessly.

Here their godlike forms they show

Each one like a blazing fire:

Bhaggavi, I too will go,

Leaving all that men desire.

Hearing his words she said, “Husband, ever since I heard the discourse of the paccekabuddhas I too have no content in the house.” And she spoke a stanza—

’Tis the appointed time, I know:

Better teachers may not be:

Bhaggava, I too will go,

Like a bird from hand set free.

The Bodhisatta hearing her words was silent. Deceiving the Bodhisatta, and wishing to take the religious life before him, she said, “Husband, I am going to the water-tank, do you look after the children,” and taking a pot as if she had been going there, she went away. Coming to the ascetics outside the town she was ordained by them. The Bodhisatta, finding that she did not return, attended to the children himself.

Some time later, when they grew up a little and could understand for themselves, in order to teach them , when cooking rice he would cook one day a little hard and raw, one day a little underdone, one day well-cooked, one day sodden, one day without salt, another with too much. The children said, “Father, the rice to-day is not-boiled, to-day it is sodden, to-day well cooked: to-day it is without salt, to-day it has too much salt.” The Bodhisatta said, “Yes, dears,” and thought, “These children now know what is raw and what is cooked, what has salt and what has none: they will be able to live in their own way: I ought to become ordained.” Then showing them to their kinsfolk he was ordained to the religious life, and dwelt outside the city.

Then one day the female ascetic begging in Benares saw him and saluted him, saying, “Sir, it looks like you abandoned the children.” The Bodhisatta said, “I don’t abandon children: when they could understand for themselves I became ordained: you were careless of them and pleased yourself by being ordained”: and so he spoke the last stanza—

Having seen they could distinguish salt from saltless, boiled from raw,

I became a Brother: leave me, we can follow each the law.

So exhorting the female ascetic he took leave of her. She taking the exhortation saluted the Bodhisatta and went to a place that pleased her. After that day they never saw each other. The Bodhisatta reaching supernatural knowledge became destined to the Brahma heaven.

After the lesson, the Master declared the Truths, and identified the Birth: —After the Truths five hundred Brothers were established in Sainthood—“At that time the daughter was Uppalavanna, the son was Rahula, the female ascetic Rahula’s mother, and the ascetic 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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