Ja 41 — Losaka Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

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Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

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Edited by E. B. Cowell

Original edition: Cambridge University Press, volume 1, 1895

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 headstrong man.”—This story was told by the Master while at Jetavana about the Elder Losaka Tissa.

'Who,' you ask, ‘was this Elder Losaka Tissa?’ Well; his father was a fisherman in Kosala, and he was the bane of his family; and, when a Brother, never had anything given to him. His previous existence ended, he had been conceived by a certain fisherman’s wife in a fishing-village of a thousand families in Kosala. And on the day he was conceived all those thousand families, net in hand, went fishing in river and pool but failed to catch one single fish; and the like bad fortune dogged them from that day forward. Also, before his birth, the village was destroyed seven times by fire, and visited seven times by the king’s vengeance. So in time it came to pass that the people fell into a wretched plight. Reflecting that such had not been their lot in former clays, but that now they were going to rack and ruin, they concluded that there must be some breeder of misfortune among them, and resolved to divide into two bands. This they did; and there were then two bands of five hundred families each. Thence-forward, ruin dogged the band which included the parents of the future Losaka, whilst the other five hundred families throve apace. So the former resolved to go on halving their numbers, and did so, until this one family was parted from all the rest. Then they knew that the breeder of misfortune was in that family, and with blows drove them away. With difficulty could his mother get a livelihood; but, when her time was come, she gave birth to her son in a certain place. (He that is born into his last existence cannot be killed. For like a lamp within a jar, even so securely within his breast burns the flame of his destiny to become an Arahat.) The mother took care of the child till he could run about, and when he could run about then she put a potsherd in his hands, and, bidding him go into a house to beg, ran away. Thenceforward, the solitary child used to beg his food thereabouts and sleep where he could. He was unwashed and unkempt, and made a living after the fashion of a mud-eating goblin. When he was seven years old, he was picking. up and eating, like a crow, lump by lump, any rice he could find outside a house door where they flung away the rinsings of the rice-pots.

Sariputta, Captain of the Faith, going into Savatthi on his round for alms, noticed the child, and, wondering what village the hapless creature came from, was filled with love for him and called out “Come here.” The child came, bowed to the Elder, and stood before him. Then said Sariputta, “What village do you belong to, and where are your parents?”

“I am destitute, sir,” said the child; “for my parents said they were tired out, and so forsook me, and went away.”

“Would you like to become a Brother?” “Indeed I should, sir; but who would receive a poor wretch like me into the Order?” “I will.” “Then, pray let me become a Brother.”

The Elder gave the child a meal and took him to the monastery, washed, him with his own hands, and admitted him a Novice first and a full Brother afterwards, when he was old enough. In his old age he was known as Elder Losaka Tissa; he was always unlucky, and but little was given to him. The story goes that, no matter how lavish the charity, he never got enough to eat, but only just enough to keep himself alive. A single ladle of rice seemed to fill his alms-bowl to the brim, so that the charitable thought his bowl was full and bestowed the rest of their rice on the next. When rice was being put into his bowl, it is said that the rice in the giver’s dish used to vanish away. And so with every kind of food. Even when, as time went by, he had developed Discernment and so won the highest Fruit which is Arahatship, he still got but little.

In the fullness of time, when the materials which determined his separate existence were outworn, the day came for him to pass away. And the Captain of the Faith, as he meditated, had knowledge of this, and thought to himself, ‘Losaka Tissa will pass away to-day; and to-day at any rate I will see that he has enough to eat.’ So he took the Elder and came to Savatthi for alms. But, because Losaka was with him, it was all in vain that Sariputta held out his hand for alms in populous Savatthi; not so much as a bow was vouchsafed him. So he bade the Elder go back and seat himself in the sitting-hall of the Monastery, and collected food which he sent with a message that it was to be given to Losaka. Those to whom he gave it took the food and went their way, but, forgetting all about Losaka, ate it themselves. So when Sariputta rose up, and was entering the monastery, Losaka came to him and saluted him. Sariputta stopped, and turning round said, “Well, did you get the food, brother?”

“I shall, no doubt, get it in good time,” said the Elder. Sariputta was greatly troubled, and looked to see what hour it was. But noon was passed. “Stay here, Brother,” said Sariputta; “and do not move”; and he made Losaka Tissa sit down in the sitting-hall, and set out for the palace of the king of Kosala. The king bade his bowl be taken, and saying that it was past noon and therefore not the time to eat rice, ordered his bowl to be filled with the four sweet kinds of food. With this he returned, and stood before him, bowl in hand, bidding the sage eat. But the Elder was ashamed, because of the reverence he had towards Sariputta, and would not eat. “Come, brother Tissa,” said Sariputta, “‘Tis I must stand with the bowl; sit you down and eat. If the bowl left my hand, everything in it would vanish away.”

So the venerable Elder Losaka Tissa ate the sweets, whilst the exalted Captain of the Faith stood holding the bowl; and thanks to the latter's merits and efficacy the food did not vanish. So the Elder Losaka Tissa ate as much as he wanted and was satisfied, and that selfsame day passed away by that death whereby existence ceases for ever.

The All-Enlightened Buddha stood by, and saw the body burned; and they built a shrine for the collected ashes.

Seated in conclave in the Hall of Truth, the Brethren said, "Brethren, Losaka was unlucky, and little was given to him. How came he with his unluck and his neediness to win the glory of Arahatship?"

Entering the Hall, the Master asked what they were talking about; and they told him. "Brethren," said he, "this Brother's own actions were the cause both of his receiving so little, and of his becoming an Arahat. In bygone days he had prevented others from receiving, and that is why he received so little himself. But it was by his meditating on sorrow, transitoriness, and the absence of an abiding principle in things, that he won Arahatship for himself." And so saying, he told this story of the past.

Once upon a time, in the days of the Buddha Kassapa, there was a Brother who lived the village life and was maintained by a country squire. He was regular in his conduct as a Brother, virtuous in his life, and was filled to overflowing with insight. There was also an Elder, an Arahat, who lived with his fellows on terms of equality, and at the time of the story paid a first visit to the village where lived the squire who supported this Brother. So pleased was the squire with the very demeanour of the Elder that, taking his bowl, he led him into the house and with every mark of respect invited him to eat. Then he listened to a short discourse by the Elder, and at its close said, with a bow, "Sir, pray do not journey further than our monastery close by; in the evening I will come and call upon you there." So the Elder went to the monastery, saluting the resident Brother on his entrance; and, first courteously asking leave, took a seat by his side. The Brother received him with all friendliness, and asked whether any food had been given him as alms.

"Oh yes," replied the Elder. "Where, pray?" "Why, in your village close by, at the squire's house." And so saying, the Elder asked to be shewn his cell and made it ready. Then laying aside his bowl and robe, and seating himself, he became absorbed in blissful Insight and enjoyed the bliss of the Fruits of the Paths.

In the evening came the squire, with servants carrying flowers and perfumes and lamps and oil. Saluting the resident Brother, he asked whether a guest had appeared, an Elder. Being told that he had, the squire asked where he was and learned which cell had been given him. Then the squire went to the Elder and, first bowing courteously, seated himself by the Elder's side and listened to a discourse. In the cool of the evening the squire made his offerings at the Tope and Bo-Tree, lit his lamp, and departed with an invitation to both Elder and Brother to come up to his house next day for their meal.

“I’m losing my hold on the squire,” thought the Brother. “If this Elder stops, I shall count for nothing with him.” So he was discontented and fell a-scheming how to make the Elder see that he must not settle down there for good. Accordingly, when the Elder came to pay his respects in the early morning, the Brother did not open his lips. The Arahat read the other’s thoughts and said to himself, “This Brother knows not that I shall never stand in his light either with the family that supports him or with his Brotherhood.” And going back to his cell, he became absorbed in the bliss of Insight, and in the bliss of the Fruits.

Next day, the resident Brother, having first knocked gingerly on the gong, and having tapped on the gong with the back of his nail, went off alone to the squire’s house. Taking from him his alms-bowl, the squire bade him be seated and asked where the stranger was.

“I know no news of your friend,” said the Brother. “Though I knocked on the gong and tapped at his door, I couldn’t wake him. I can only presume that his dainty fare here yesterday has disagreed with him and that he is still a-bed in consequence. Possibly such doings may commend themselves to you.”

(Meantime the Arahat, who had waited till the time came to go his round for alms, had washed and dressed and risen with bowl and robe in the air and gone elsewhere.)

The squire gave the Brother rice and milk to eat, with ghee and sugar and honey in it. Then he had his bowl scoured with perfumed chunam powder and filled afresh, saying, “Sir, the Elder must be fatigued with his journey; take him this.” Without demur the Brother took the food and went his way, thinking to himself, “If our friend once gets a taste of this, taking him by the throat and kicking him out of doors won’t get rid of him. But how can I get rid of it? If I give it away to a human being, it will be known. If I throw it into the water, the ghee will float on top. And as for throwing it away on the ground, that will only bring all the crows of the district flocking to the spot.” In his perplexity his eye fell on a field that had been fired, and, scraping out the embers, he flung the contents of his bowl into the hole, filled in the embers on the top, and went off home. Not finding the Elder there, he thought that the Arahat had understood his jealousy and departed. “Woe is me,” he cried, “for my greed has made me to sin.”

And thenceforth sore affliction befell him and he became like a living ghost. Dying soon after, he was re-born in hell and there was tormented for hundreds of thousands of years. By reason of his ripening sin, in five hundred successive births he was an ogre and never had enough to eat, except one day when he enjoyed a surfeit of offal. Next, for five hundred more existences he was a dog, and here too, only on one single day had his fill—of a vomit of rice; on no other occasion did he have enough to eat. Even when he ceased to be a dog, he was only born into a beggar family in a Kasi village. From the hour of his birth, that family became still more beggared, and he never got half as much water-gruel as he wanted. And he was called Mitta-vindaka .

Unable at last to endure the pangs of hunger that now beset them, his father and mother beat him and drove him away, crying, “Begone, you curse!”

In the course of his wanderings, the little outcast came to Benares, where in those days the Bodhisatta was a teacher of world-wide fame with five hundred young Brahmins to teach. In those times the Benares folk used to give day by day commons of food to poor lads and had them taught free, and so this Mitta-vindaka also became a charity scholar under the Bodhisatta. But he was fierce and intractable, always fighting with his fellows and heedless of his master's reproofs; and so the Bodhisatta's fees fell off. And as he quarrelled so, and would not brook reproof, the youth ended by running away, and came to a border-village where he hired himself out for a living, and married a miserably poor woman by whom he had two children. Later, the villagers paid him to teach them what was true doctrine and what was false, and gave him a hut to live in at the entrance to their village. But, all because of Mitta-vindaka's coming to live among them, the king's vengeance fell seven times ou those villagers, and seven times were their homes burned to the ground; seven times too did their water-tank dry up.

Then they considered the matter and agreed that it was not so with them before Mitta-vindaka's coming, but that ever since he came they had been going from bad to worse. So with blows they drove him from their village; and forth he went with his family, and came to a haunted forest. And there the demons killed and ate his wife and children. Fleeing thence, he came after many wanderings to a village on the coast called Gambhira, arriving on a day when a ship was putting to sea; and he hired himself for service aboard. For a week the ship held on her way, but on the seventh day she came to a complete standstill in mid-ocean, as though she had run upon a rock. Then they cast lots, in order to rid them of their bane; and seven times the lot fell on Mitta-vindaka. So they gave him a raft of bamboos, and laying hold of him, cast him over-board. And forthwith the ship made way again .

Mitta-vindaka clambered on to his bamboos and floated on the waves. Thanks to his having obeyed the commandments in the times of the Buddha Kassapa, he found in mid-ocean four daughters of the gods dwelling in a palace of crystal, with whom he dwelt happily for seven days. Now palace-ghosts enjoy happiness only for seven days at a time; and so, when the seventh day came and they had to depart to their punishment, they left him with an injunction to await their return. But no sooner were they departed, than Mitta-vindaka put off on his raft again and came to where eight daughters of the gods dwelt in a palace of silver. Leaving them in turn, he came to where sixteen daughters of the gods dwelt in a palace of jewels, and thereafter to where thirty-two dwelt in a palace of gold. Paying no regard to their words, again he sailed away and came to a city of ogres, set among islands. And there an ogress was ranging about in the shape of a goat. Not knowing that she was an ogress, Mitta-vindaka thought to make a meal off the goat, and seized hold of the creature by the leg. Straightway, by virtue of her demon-nature, she hurled him up and away over the ocean, and plump he fell in a thorn-brake on the slopes of the dry moat of Benares, and thence rolled to earth.

Now it chanced that at that time thieves used to frequent that moat and kill the King's goats; and the goatherds had bidden themselves hard by to catch the rascals.

Mitta-vindaka picked himself up and saw the goats. Thought he to himself, “Well, it was a goat in an island in the ocean that, being seized by the leg, hurled me here over seas. Perhaps, if I do the same by one of these goats, I may get hurled back again to where the daughters of the gods dwell in their ocean palaces.” So, without thinking, he seized one of the goats by the leg. At once the goat began to bleat, and the goatherds came running up from every side. They laid hold of him at once, crying, “This is the thief that has so long lived on the King’s goats.” And they, beat him and began to haul him away in bonds to the King.

Just at that time the Bodhisatta, with his five hundred young Brahmins round him, was coming out of the city to bathe. Seeing and recognising Mitta-vindaka, he said to the goatherds, “Why, this is a pupil of mine, my good men; what have you seized him for?” “Master,” said they, “we caught this thief in the act of seizing a goat by the lag, and that’s why we’ve got hold of him.” “Well,” said the Bodhisatta, “suppose you hand him over to us to live with us as our slave.” “All right, sir,” replied the men, and letting their prisoner go, they went their way. Then the Bodhisatta asked Mitta-vindaka where he had been all that long time; and Mitta-vindaka told him all that he had done.

“’Tis through not hearkening to those who wished him well,” said the Bodhisatta, “that he has suffered all these misfortunes.” And he recited this stanza—

The headstrong man who, when exhorted, pays

No heed to friends who kindly counsel give,

Shall come to certain harm,—like Mittaka,

When by the leg he seized the grazing goat.

And in those times both that Teacher and Mitta-vindaka passed away, and their after-lot was according to their deeds.

Said the Master, “This Losaka was himself the cause both of his getting little and of his getting Arahatship.” His lesson ended, he shewed the connexion and identified the Birth by saying, “The Elder Losaka Tissa was the Mitta-vindaka of those days, and I the Teacher of world-wide fame.”

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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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.