Ja 418 — Atthasadda Jātaka

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

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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 pool so deep,” etc.—The Master told this tale while dwelling in Jetavana, concerning an indistinguishable terrific sound heard at midnight by the king of Kosala. The occasion is like that already described in the Lohakumbhi Birth. At this time however, when the king said, “Lord, what does the hearing of these sounds import to me?” the Master answered, “Great king, be not afraid: no danger shall befal you owing to these sounds: such terrible indistinguishable sounds have not been heard by you alone: kings of old also heard like sounds, and meant to follow the advice of brahmins to offer in sacrifice four animals of each species, but after hearing what wise men had to say, they set free the animals collected for sacrifice and caused proclamation by drum against all slaughter”: and at the king’s request, he told the old tale.

Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born in a brahmin family worth eighty crores. When he grew up he learned the arts at Takkasila. After his parents’ death he reviewed all their treasures, got rid of all his wealth by way of charity, forsook desires, went to the Himalaya and became an ascetic and entered on mystic meditation. After a time he came to the haunts of men for salt and vinegar, and reaching Benares dwelt in a garden. At that time the king of Benares when seated on his royal bed at midnight heard eight sounds—first, a crane made a noise in a garden near the palace; second, immediately after the crane, a female crow made a noise from the gateway of the elephant-house; third, an insect settled on the peak of the palace made a noise; fourth, a tame cuckoo in the palace made a noise; fifth, a tame deer in the same place; sixth, a tame monkey there; seventh, a gnome living in the palace; eighth, immediately after the last, a paccekabuddha, passing along the roof of the king’s habitation to the garden, uttered a sound of ecstatic feeling. The king was terrified at hearing these eight sounds, and next day consulted the brahmins. The brahmins said, “Great king, there is danger for you: let us offer sacrifice out of the palace;” and getting his leave to do their pleasure, they came in joy and delight and began the work of sacrifice. Now a young pupil of the oldest sacrificial brahmin was wise and learned: he said to his master, “Master, do

not cause such a harsh and cruel slaughter of so many creatures." "Pupil, what do you know about it? even if nothing else happens, we shall get much fish and flesh to eat." "Master, do not, for the belly's sake, an action which will cause rebirth in hell." Hearing this, the other brahmins were angry with the pupil for endangering their gains. The pupil in fear said, "Very well, devise a means then of getting fish and flesh to eat," and left the city looking for some pious ascetic able to prevent the king from sacrificing. He entered the royal garden and seeing the Bodhisatta, he saluted him and said, "Have you no compassion on creatures? The king has ordered a sacrifice which will bring death on many creatures: ought you not to bring about the release of such a multitude?" "Young brahmin, I do not know the king of this land, nor he me." "Sir, do you know what will be the consequence of those sounds the king heard?" "I do." "If you know, why do you not tell the king?" "Young brahmin, how can I go with a horn fastened on my forehead to say, "I know?" If the king comes here to question me, I will tell him." The young brahmin went swiftly to the king's court, and when he was asked his business, he said, "Great king, a certain ascetic knows the issue of those sounds you heard: he is sitting on the royal seat in your garden, and says he will tell you if you ask him: you should do so." The king went swiftly, saluted the ascetic, and after friendly greeting he sat down and asked, "Is it true that you know the issue of the sounds I have heard?" "Yes, great king." "Then pray tell me." "Great king, there is no danger connected with those sounds: there is a certain crane in your old garden; it was without food, and half dead with hunger made the first sound:" and so by his knowledge giving precisely the crane's meaning he uttered the first stanza—

A pool so deep and full of fish they called this place of yore,

The crane-king's residence it was, my ancestors' before:

And though we live on frogs to-day, we never leave its shore.

"That, great king, was the sound the crane made in the pangs of hunger: if you wish to set it free from hunger, have the garden cleaned and fill the tank with water." The king told a minister to have this done. "Great king, there is a female crow who lives in the doorway of your elephant house: she made the second sound, grieving for her son: you need have no fear from it," and so he uttered the second stanza—

Oh! who of wicked Bandhura? the single eye will rend

My nest, my nestlings and myself oh! who will now befriend?

Then he asked the king for the name of the chief groom in the elephant-house. "His name, sir, is Bandhura." "Has he only one eye, O king?" "Yes, sir." "Great king, a certain crow has built her nest over the doorway of your elephant-house; there she laid her eggs, there her young in due time were hatched: every time the groom enters or leaves the stable on his elephant, he strikes with his hook at the crow and her nestlings, and destroys the nest: the crow in this distress wishes to tear his eye and spoke as she did. If you are well-disposed to her, send for Bandhura and prevent him from destroying the nest." The king sent for him, rebuked and removed him, and gave the elephant to another.

“On the peak of your palace-roof, great king, there is a wood-insect; it bad eaten all the fig-wood there and could not eat the harder wood: lacking food and unable to get away, it made the third sound in lamentation: you need have no fear from it:” and so by his knowledge giving precisely the insect’s meaning he spoke the third stanza—

I’ve eaten all the fig-wood round as far as it would go:

Hard wood a weevil liketh not, though other food runs low.

The king sent a servant and by some means had the weevil set free.

“In your habitation, great king, is there a certain tame cuckoo?” “There is, sir.” “Great king, that cuckoo was pining for the forest when it remembered its former life, “How can I leave this cage, and go to my dear forest?” and so made the fourth sound: you need have no fear from it: “ and so he spoke the fourth stanza—

Oh to leave this royal dwelling! oh to gain my liberty,

Glad at heart to roam the wood, and build my nest upon the tree.

So saying, he added, “The cuckoo is pining, great king, set her free.” The king did so.

“Great king, is there a tame deer in your habitation?” “There is, sir.” “He was chief of the herd: remembering his hind and pining for love of her he made the fifth sound: you need have no fear from it:” and he spoke the fifth stanza—

Oh to leave this royal dwelling! oh to gain my liberty,

Drink pure water of the fountain, lead the herd that followed me!

The Great Being caused this deer too to be set free and went on, “Great king, is there a tame monkey in your habitation?” “There is, sir.” “He was chief of a herd in the Himalaya, and he was fond of the society of female monkeys: he was brought here by a hunter named Bharata: pining and longing for his old haunts he made the sixth sound: you need have no fear from it,” and he spoke the sixth stanza—

Filled and stained was I with passions, with desire infatuate,

Bharata the hunter took me; may I bring you happy fate!

The Great Being caused the monkey too to be set free, and went on, “Great king, is there a gnome living in your habitation?” “There is, sir.” “He is thinking of what he did with his sylph and in the pain of desire made the seventh sound. One day he had climbed the peak of a high mountain with her: they plucked and decked themselves with many flowers of choice hue and scent, and never noticed that the sun was setting; darkness fell as they were descending. The sylph said, “Husband, it is dark, come down carefully without

stumbling," and taking him by the hand, she led him down. It was in memory of her words that he made the sound: you need have no fear from it." By his knowledge he stated and made known the circumstance precisely, and spoke the seventh stanza—

When the darkness gathered thickly on the mountain summit lone,

"Stumble not," she gently warned me, "with thy foot against a stone."

So the Great Being explained why the gnome had made the sound, and caused him to be set free, and went on, "Great king, there was an eighth sound, one of ecstasy. A certain paccekabuddha in the Nandamula cave knowing that the conditions of life were now at an end for him came to the abode of man, thinking, "I will enter into Nirvana in the king of Benares' park: his servants will bury me, and hold sacred festival and venerate my relics and so attain heaven:" he was coming by his supernatural power and just as he reached your palace-roof, he threw off the burden of life and sung in ecstasy the song that lights up the entrance into the city of Nirvana:" and so he spoke the stanza uttered by the paccekabuddha:

Surely I see the end of birth,

I ne'er again the womb shall see:

My last existence on the earth

Is o'er, and all its misery.

"With these words of ecstasy he reached your park and passed into Nirvana at the foot of a sal-tree in full flower: come, great king, and perform his funeral rites." So the Great Being took the king to the place where the paccekabuddha entered into Nirvana and shewed him the body. Seeing the body, the king with a great army paid honour with perfumes and flowers and the like. By the Bodhisatta's advice he stopped the sacrifice, gave all the creatures their lives, made proclamation by drum through the city that there should be no slaughter, caused sacred festival to be held for seven days, had the paccekabuddha's body burnt with great honour on a pyre heaped with perfumes and made a stupa where four high roads meet. The Bodhisatta preached righteousness to the king and exhorted him to diligence: then he went to the Himalaya and there did works in the Perfect States, and without a break in his meditations became destined for the Brahma Heaven.

After the lesson, the Master said, "Great king, there is no danger at all to you from that sound, stop the sacrifice and give all these creatures their lives": and having caused proclamation to be made by drum that their lives were spared, he identified the Birth: "At that time the king was Ananda, the pupil was Sariputta, 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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