Ja 423 — Indriya 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/ja423.html

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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

“Who through desire,” etc. The Master told this tale while dwelling in Jetavana, concerning temptation by the wife of one’s former days. The story is that a young man of good family at Savatthi heard the Master’s preaching, and thinking it impossible to lead a holy life, perfectly complete and pure, as a householder, he determined to become an ascetic under the saving doctrine and so make an end of misery. So he gave up his house and property to his wife and children, and asked the Master to ordain him. The Master did so. As he was the junior in his going about for alms with his teachers and instructors, and as the Brethren were many, he got no chair either in laymen’s houses or in the refectory, but only a stool or a bench at the end of the novices, his food was tossed him hastily on a ladle, he got gruel made of broken lumps of rice, solid food stale or decaying, or sprouts dried and burnt; and this was not enough to keep him alive. He took what he had got to the wife he had left: she took his bowl, saluted him, emptied it and gave him instead well-cooked gruel and rice with sauce and curry. The Brother was captivated by the love of such flavours and could not leave his wife. She thought she would test his affection. One day she had a countryman cleansed with white clay and set down in her house with some others of his people whom she had sent for, and she gave them something to eat and drink. They sat eating and enjoying it. At the house-door she had some bullocks bound to wheels and a cart set ready. She herself sat in a back room cooking cakes. Her husband came and stood at the door. Seeing him, one old servant told his mistress that there was an elder at the door. “Salute him and bid him pass on.” But though he did so repeatedly, he saw the priest remaining there and told his mistress. She came, and lifting up the curtain to see, she cried, “This is the father of my sons.” She came out and saluted him: taking his bowl and making him enter she gave him food: when he had eaten she saluted again and said, “Sir, you are a saint now: we have been staying in this house all this time; but there can be no proper householder’s life without a master, so we will take another house and go far into the country: be zealous in your good works, and forgive me if I am doing wrong.” For a time her husband was as if his heart would break. Then he said, “I cannot leave you: do not go, I will come back to my worldly life: send a layman’s garment to such and such a place, I

will give up my bowl and robes and come back to you." She agreed. The Brother went to his monastery, and giving up his bowl and robes to his teachers and instructors he explained, in answer to their questions, that he could not leave his wife and was going back to worldly life. Against his will they took him to the Master and told him that he was backsliding and wished to go back to worldly life. The Master said, "Is this tale true?" "It is, Lord." "Who causes you to backslide?" "My wife." "Brother, that woman is the cause of evil to you: formerly also through her you fell from the four stages of mystic meditation and became very miserable: then through me you were delivered from your misery and regained the power of meditation you had lost," and then he told the tale of old.

Once upon a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born as the son of the king's family priest and his brahmin wife. On the day of his birth there was a blazing of weapons all over the city, and so they called his name young Jotipala. When he grew up, he learned all the arts at Takkasila and showed his skill in them to the king: but he gave up his position, and without telling anyone he went out by the back door, and entering a forest became an ascetic in the Kavitthaka hermitage, called Sakkadattiya. He attained perfection in meditation. As he dwelt there many hundreds of sages waited on him. He was attended by a great company and had seven chief disciples. Of them the sage Salissara left the Kavitthaka hermitage for the Surattha country, and dwelt on the banks of the river Satodika with many thousand sages in his company: Mendissara with many thousand sages dwelt near the town of Lambaculaka in the country of king Pajaka: Pabbata with many thousand sages dwelt in a certain forest-country: Kaladevala with many thousand sages dwelt in a certain wooded mountain in Avanti and the Deccan: Kisavaccha dwelt alone near the city of Kumbhavati in the park of king Dandaki: the ascetic Anusissa was attendant on the Bodhisatta and stayed with him: Narada, the younger brother of Kaladevala, dwelt alone in a cave-cell amid the mountainous country of Aranjara in the Central Region. Now not far from Aranjara there is a certain very populous town. In the town there is a great river, in which many men bathe: and along its banks sit many beautiful courtesans tempting the men. The ascetic Narada saw one of them and being enamoured of her, forsook his meditations and pining away without food lay in the bonds of love for seven days. His brother Kaladevala by reflection knew the cause of this, and came flying through the air into the cave. Narada saw him and asked why he had come. "I knew you were ill and have come to tend you." Narada repelled him with a falsehood, "You are talking nonsense, falsehood, and vanity." The other refused to leave him and brought Salissara, Mendissara, and Pabbatissara. He repelled them all in the same way. Kaladevala went flying to fetch their master Sarabhanga and did fetch him. When the Master came, he saw that Narada had fallen into the power of the senses, and asked if it were so. Narada rose at the words and saluted, and confessed. The Master said, "Narada, those who fall into the power of the senses waste away in misery in this life, and in their next existence are born in hell:" and so he spoke the first stanza—

Who through desire obeys the senses' sway,

Loses both worlds and pines his life away.

Hearing him, Narada answered, “Teacher, the following of desires is happiness: why do you call such happiness misery?” Sarabhanga said, “Listen, then,” and spoke the second stanza—

Happiness and misery ever on each other’s footsteps press:

Thou hast seen their alternation: seek a truer happiness.

Narada said, “Teacher, such misery is hard to bear, I cannot endure it.” The Great Being said, “Narada, the misery that comes has to be endured,” and spoke the third stanza—

He who endures in troublous time with troubles to contend

Is strong to reach that final bliss where all our troubles end.

But Narada answered, “Teacher, the happiness of love’s desire is the greatest happiness: I cannot abandon it.” The Great Being said, “Virtue is not to be abandoned for any cause,” and spoke the fourth stanza—

For love of lusts, for hopes of gain, for miseries, great and small,

Do not undo your saintly past, and so from virtue fall.

Sarabhanga having thus shown forth the law in four stanzas, Kaladevala in admonition of his younger brother spoke the fifth stanza—

Know the worldly life is trouble, victual should be freely lent.

No delight in gathering riches, no distress when they are spent.

The sixth stanza is one spoken by the Master in his Perfect Wisdom concerning Devala’s admonition of Narada:

So far Black Devala most wisely spoke:

“None worse than he who bows to senses’ yoke.”

Then Sarabhanga spoke in warning, “Narada, listen to this: he who will not do at first what is proper to be done, must weep and lament like the young man who went to the forest,” and so he told an old tale.

Once upon a time in a certain town of Kasi there was a certain young brahmin, beautiful, strong, stout as an elephant. His thoughts were, “Why should I keep my parents by working on a farm, or have a wife and children, or do good works of charity and so forth? I won’t keep anybody nor do any good work; but I will go into the forest and keep myself by killing deer.” So with the five kinds of weapons he went to the Himalaya and killed and ate many deer. In the Himalaya region he found a great defile, surrounded by mountains, on

the banks of the river Vidhava, and there he lived on the flesh of the slain deer, cooked on hot coals. He thought, “I shall not always be strong; when I grow weak I shall not be able to range the forest: now I will drive many kinds of wild animals into this defile, close it up by a gate, and then without roaming the forest I shall kill and eat them at my pleasure:” and so he did. As time passed over him, that very thing came to pass, and the experience of all the world befell him: he lost control over his hands and feet, he could not move freely here and there, he could not find his food or drink, his body withered, he became the ghost of a man, he showed wrinkles furrowing his body like the earth in a hot season; ill-favoured and ill-knit, he became very miserable. In like manner as time passed, the king of Sivi, named Sivi, had a desire to eat flesh roasted on coals in the forest: so he gave over his kingdom to his ministers, and with the five kinds of weapons he went to the forest and ate the flesh of the deer he slew: in time he came to that spot and saw that man. Although afraid, he summoned courage to ask who he was. “Lord, I am the ghost of a man, reaping the fruit of the deeds I have done: who are you?” “The king of Sivi.” “Why have you come hither?” “To eat the flesh of deer.” He said, “Great king, I have become the ghost of a man because I came here with that object,” and telling the whole story at length and explaining his misfortune to the king, he spoke the remaining stanzas—

King, ’Tis with me as if I’d been with foes in bitter strife,

Labour, and skill in handicraft, a peaceful home, a wife,

All have been lost to me: my works bear fruit in this my life.

Worsted a thousandfold I am, kinless and reft of stay,

Strayed from the law of righteousness, like ghost I’m fallen away.

This state is mine because I caused, instead of joy, distress:

Girt as it were with flaming fire, I have no happiness.

With that he added, “O king, through desire of happiness I caused misery to others and have even in this life become the ghost of a man: do not thou commit evil deeds, go to thine own city and do good deeds of charity and the like.” The king did so and completed the path to heaven.

The ascetic was roused by the teacher Sarabhanga’s account of this case. He became agitated, and after saluting and gaining his teacher’s pardon, by the proper processes he regained the power of meditation he had lost. Sarabhanga refused him leave to stay there, and took him back with him to his own hermitage.

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 Narada was the backsliding Brother, Salissara was Sariputta, Mendissara was Kassapa, Pabbata was Anuruddha, Kaladevala was Kaccana, Anusissa was Ananda, Kisavaccha was

Moggallana, and Sarabhanga was myself.”

Good are the cares of household life, ’Tis good to give away,

Not to be proud when riches grow, nor grieved when they decay.

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