Ja 440 — Kanha Jātaka

English translation by W. H. D. Rouse.

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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

“Behold yon man,” etc.—This story the Master told at Kapilavatthu, in the Banyan Park, about smiling.

At that time they say that the Master, wandering afoot with his band of Brethren in the Banyan Park at evening time, at a certain spot gave a smile. Said Elder Ananda, “What can be the cause, what the reason, that the Blessed One should smile? Not without cause do the Tathagatas smile. I will ask him, then.” So with a gesture of obeisance he asked of this smile. Then the Master said to him, “In days of yore, Ananda, there was a certain sage, named Kanha, who on this spot of earth lived, meditative, in meditation his delight; and by power of his virtue Sakka’s abode was shaken.” But as this speech about the smile was not quite clear, at the Elder’s request he told this story of the past.

Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta ruled in Benares, there was a certain childless Brahmin, having wealth to the amount of eighty crores, who took upon him the vows of virtue, and prayed for a son; in the womb of this brahmin’s wife was conceived the Bodhisatta, and from his black colour they gave him on his nameday the name of Kanha-kumara, young Blackie. He at the age of sixteen years, being full of splendour, as it were an image of some precious stone, was sent by his father to Takkasila, where he learnt all the liberal arts, and returned again. Then his father provided a wife meet for him. And by and bye he came in for all his parents’ property.

Now one day, after inspecting his treasure houses, as he sat on his gorgeous divan, he took in his hand a golden plate, and reading upon the golden plate these lines inscribed by his kinsmen of former days, “So much of the property gained by such an one, so much by another,” thought he, “Those who won this wealth are seen no more, but the wealth is still seen; not one of them could take it where he is gone; we cannot tie our wealth in a bundle and take it with us to the next world. Seeing that it is connected with the Five Sins, to distribute in alms this vain wealth is the better part; seeing that this vain body is connected

with much disease, to show honour and kindness to the virtuous is the better part; seeing that this transient and vain life is but transient, to strive after spiritual insight is the better part. Therefore these vain treasures I will distribute in alms, that by so doing I may gain the better part." So he uprose from his seat, and having asked the king's consent, he gave alms bounteously.

Up to the seventh day seeing no diminution in his wealth, he thought, "What is wealth to me? While I am yet unmastered by old age, I will even now take the ascetic vow, I will cultivate the Faculties and the Attainments, I will become destined for Brahma's heaven!" So he caused all the doors of his dwelling to be set open, and bade them take it all as freely given; and spurning it as a thing unclean, he forsook all desire of the eyes, and amid the lamentations and tears of a great multitude, went forth from the city, even unto the Himalaya region. There he embraced the solitary life; and seeking out for a pleasant place to dwell in, he found this place, and there he resolved to dwell; and choosing a gourd tree for his place of feeding, there he did abide, and lived at the root of that tree; lodging never within a village he became a dweller in the woods, never a hut of leaves he made, but abode at the foot of this tree, in the open air, sitting ever, or if he desired to lie, lying upon the ground, not a pestle but only teeth to grind his food with, eating only things uncooked by the fire, and never even a grain in the husk passed his lips, eating once in the day, and at one sitting. On the ground, as though he were one with the four elements, he lived, taking upon him the ascetic virtues. In that Birth the Bodhisatta, as we learn, had very few wants.

Thus ere long he attained the Faculties and the Attainments, and lived in that spot in the ecstasy of ecstatic meditation. For wild fruits he went no further afield; when fruit grew upon the tree, he ate the fruit; in time of flowers, he ate flowers; when the leaves grew, he ate leaves; when leaves there were none, he ate the bark of trees. Thus in the highest contentment he lived a long time in that place. As in the morning he used to pick up the fruits of that tree, never once even did he from greediness rise up and pick fruit in any other place. In the place where he sat, he stretched out his hand, and gathered all the fruit there was within the handsweep; these he would eat as they came, making no distinction between nice and nasty. As he continued to take pleasure in this, by the power of his virtue the yellowstone throne of Sakka grew hot. (This throne, they say, grows hot when Sakka's life draws towards its end, or when his merit is exhausted and worked out, or when some mighty Being prays, or through the efficacy of virtue in priests or brahmins full of potency.)

Then Sakka thought, "Who is it would dislodge me now?" Surveying all around, he saw, living in a forest, in a certain spot, the sage Kanha, picking up fruit, and knew that yonder was the sage of dread austerity, all sense subdued; "To him will I go," thought he, "I will cause him to proclaim the Law in trumpet tones, and having heard the preaching that gives peace, I will satisfy him with a boon, and make his tree bear fruit unceasingly, and then I will return hither." Then by his mighty power quickly descending, and taking his stand at the root of that tree behind the sage, he said, by way of testing whether or no the sage would be angry at mention of his ugliness, the first stanza:

“Behold yon man, all black of hue, that dwells on this black spot,

Black is the meat that he doth eat—my spirit likes him not!”

Swart Kanha heard him. “Who is it speaks to me?—“ by his divine insight he perceived that it was Sakka; and without turning, replied with the second stanza:

“Though black of hue, a brahmin true at heart, O Sakka, see:

Not by the skin, but if he sin, then black a man must be.”

And then, after this, having explained in their several kinds and blamed the sins which make black such beings, and praised the goodness of virtue, he discoursed to Sakka, and it was as though he made the moon to rise in the sky. Sakka at the hearing of his discourse, charmed and delighted, offered the Great Being a boon, and repeated the third stanza:

“Fair spoken, Brahmin, nobly put, most excellently said:

Choose what you will—as bids your heart, so let your choice be made.”

Hearing this the Great Being thought thus within himself. “I know how it must be. He wished to test me, and see should I be wroth at mention of my ugliness; therefore he abused the colour of my skin, my food, my place of dwelling; perceiving that I was not angry, he is pleased, and offers me a boon; no doubt he thinks that I practise this manner of life through a desire for the power of Sakka or of Brahma; and now, to make him certain, I must choose these four boons: that I may be calm, that I may have within me no hatred or malice against my neighbour, and that I may have no greed for my neighbour’s glory or lust towards my neighbour.” Thus pondering, to resolve the doubt of Sakka, the sage uttered the fourth stanza, claiming these four boons:

“Sakka, the lord of all the world, a choice of blessings gave.

From malice, hatred, covetise, deliverance I would have,

And to be free from every lust: these blessings four I crave.”

Hereupon thought Sakka: “The sage Kanha, in choosing his boon, has chosen four most blameless blessings. Now I will ask him what is good or bad with these four things.” And he asked the question by repeating the fifth stanza:

“In lust, in hatred, covetise, in malice, brahmin, say

What evil thing dost thou behold? this answer me, I pray.”

“Hear then,” replied the Great Being, and gave utterance to four stanzas:

“Because hatred, of ill-will bred, aye grows from small to great,

Is ever full of bitterness, therefore I want no hate.

“‘Tis ever thus with wicked men: first word, then touch we see,

Next fist, then staff, and last of all the swordstroke flashing free:

Where malice is, there follows hate—no malice then for me.

“When men make speed egged on by greed, fraud and deceit arise,

And swift pursuit of savage loot—therefore, no covetise.

“Firm are the fetters bound by lust, that thrives abundantly

Within the heart, for bitter smart—no lusting then for me.”

Sakka, his questions thus solved, replied, “Wise Kanha, by you sweetly are my questions answered, with a Buddha’s skill; well pleased with you am I; now choose another boon” : and he repeated the tenth stanza:

“Fair spoken, brahmin, nobly put, most excellently said:

Choose what you will—as bids your heart, so let your choice be made.”

Instantly the Bodhisatta repeated a stanza:

“O Sakka, lord of all the world, a boon thou didst me cry.

Where in the woods I ever dwell, where all alone dwell I,

Grant no disease may mar my peace, or break my ecstasy.”

On hearing this, thought Sakka, “Wise Kanha, in choosing a boon, chooses no thing connected with food; all he chooses bears upon the ascetic life.” Delighted ever more and more, he added thereto yet another boon and recited another stanza:

“Fair spoken, brahmin, nobly put, most excellently said:

Choose what you will—as bids your heart, so let your choice be made.”

And the Bodhisatta, in stating of his boon, declared the law in the concluding stanza:

“0 Sakka, lord of all the world, a choice thou bidst declare:

No creature be aught harmed for me, O Sakka, anywhere,

Neither in body nor in mind: this, Sakka, is my prayer.”

Thus the Great Being, on six occasions making choice of a boon, chose only that which pertained to the life of Renunciation. Well knew he that the body is diseased, and not Sakka can do away the disease of it; not with Sakka lies it to cleanse living beings in the Three Gates; albeit so, he made his choice to the end that he might declare the law to him. And Sakka made that tree bear fruit perennially, and saluting him by touching his head with joined hands, he said, “Dwell here ever free from disease,” and went to his own place. But the Bodhisatta, never breaking his ecstasy, became destined for Brahma’s world.

This lesson ended, the Master said, “This, Ananda, is the place where I dwelt aforetime,” and thus identified the Birth: “At that time Anuruddha was Sakka, and for myself, I was Kanha the Wise.”

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