Ja 442 — Sankha 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

“O learned brahmin,” etc.—This story the Master told in Jetavana, about the giving of all the requisites.

At Savatthi, it is said, a certain lay brother having heard the Tathagata’s discourse, being pleased at heart, gave an invitation for the morrow; at his door he set up a pavilion, richly dight, and sent to say that it was time. The Master came attended by five hundred Brethren, and sat in the gorgeous seat appointed for him. The layman, having made rich presents to the company of Brethren headed by the Buddha, bade them again for the morrow; and so for seven days he invited them, and offered gifts, and on the seventh gave them all a Brother’s requisites. In this presentation he offered a special gift of shoes. The pair of shoes offered to the Buddha were worth a thousand pieces of money, those offered to the two Chief Disciples were worth five hundred, and shoes to the value of an hundred were given to each of the five hundred Brethren who remained. And after this presentation made of all that the Brethren need, he sat down before the Blessed One, along with his company. Then the Master returned thanks in a voice of much sweetness: “Layman, most munificent is thy gift; be joyful. In olden days, ere the Buddha came into the world, there were those who by giving one pair of shoes to a Pacceka Buddha, in consequence of that gift found a refuge on the sea where refuge there is none; and thou hast given to the whole of Buddha’s company all that a Brother can need—how can it be, but that thy gift of shoes should prove a refuge to thee?” and at his request, he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time, this Benares was named Molini. While Brahmadatta reigned in Molini as king, a certain brahmin Sankha, rich, of great wealth, had built almshalls in six places, one at each of the four city gates, one in the midst of it, one by his own door. Daily he gave in alms six hundred thousand pieces of money, and to wayfarers and beggars he did much bounty.

One day he thought to himself, “My store of wealth once gone, I shall have nothing to give. Whiles it is still unexhausted I will take ship, and sail for the Gold Country , whence I will bring back wealth.” So he caused a ship to be built; filled it with merchandise; and said he, as he bade farewell to wife and child, “Until I come again, see that you make no stay in distributing of alms.” This said, he took up his sunshade, donned his shoes, and with his servants about him, setting his face towards the seaport, at midday he departed.

At that moment, a Pacceka Buddha on Mount Gandha-madana, meditating, saw him on his way to get wealth, and thought he, “A great man is journeying to get wealth: will there be aught on the sea to hinder him, or no?—There will.—If he sees me he will present me with shoes and sunshade; and in consequence of this gift of shoes, he will find refuge when his vessel is wrecked upon the sea. I will help him.” So passing through the air, he alighted not far from the traveller, and moved to meet him, treading the sand hot as a layer of burning embers in the fierce wind and sunshine. “Here,” thought the brahmin, “is a chance of gaining merit; here I must sow a seed this day.” In high delight he made haste to meet and greet him. “Sir,” says he, “be so kind as to come aside from the road awhile, under this tree.” Then as the man came in beneath the tree, he brushed up the sand for him, and spread his upper robe, and made him sit down; with water perfumed and purified he washed his feet, anointed him with sweet scented oil; from his own feet he took off the shoes, wiped them clean and anointed them with scented oil, and put them on him, and presented him with shoes and sunshade, bidding him wear the one, and spread the other overhead as he went his ways. The other, to please him, took the gift, and as the brahmin gazed upon him for the increase of his faith, flew up and went on his way again to Gandha-madana.

The Bodhisatta on his part, glad at heart, proceeded to the harbour, and took ship.

When they were come to the high seas, on the seventh day the ship sprang a leak, and they could not bale the water clear. All the people in fear for their lives made a great outcry, calling each upon his own god. The Great Being chose him one servitor, and anointing all his body with oil, ate a mess of powdered sugar with ghee as much as he desired, and giving the man to eat also, he climbed up the mast. “In that direction,” said he, “lies our city”; pointing out the direction, and casting off all fear of the fish and turtles, he dived off with the man to a distance of more than a hundred and fifty cubits. A multitude of men perished; but the Great Being, with his servant, began to make his way over the sea. For seven days he kept on swimming. Even then he kept the holy fast day, washing his mouth with the salt water.

Now at that time a divinity named Mani-mekhala, which by interpretation is Jewel-zone, had been commanded by the four lords of the world, “If by shipwreck any ill befall men who have gone to the Three Refuges, or are endued with virtue, or who worship their parents, you should save them”; and to protect any such, the deity took station upon the sea. In her divine power she kept no outlook for seven days, but on the seventh day, scanning the sea, she saw the virtuous brahmin Sankha, and thought she, “‘Tis now the seventh day since yon man was cast into the sea: were he to die, great would be my blame.” So troubled at heart the deity filled a golden plate full of all manner of divine

meats, and hastening wind-swift towards him, came to a stop before him in mid-air, saying, “Seven days, brahmin, hast thou taken no food: eat this!” The brahmin looked at her, and replied, “Take thy food away, for I am keeping fast.”

His attendant, who came behind, saw not the deity, but heard only the sound; and thought he, “The brahmin babbles, methinks, being of tender frame, and from his seven days’ fasting, being in pain and in fear of death: I will comfort him.” And he repeated the first stanza:

“O learned brahmin, full of sanctity,

Pupil of many a holy teacher, why

All out of reason dost vain babbling use,

When none is here, save me, to make reply?”

The brahmin heard, and knowing that he had not seen the deity, he said, “Good fellow, ’Tis no fear of death; but I have another here to converse with me”; and he repeated the second stanza:

“’Tis a fair radiant presence, gold-besprent,

That offers me food for my nourishment,

All bravely set upon a plate of gold:

To her I answer No, with heart content.”

Then the man repeated the third stanza:

“If such a wondrous being one should see,

A man should ask a blessing hopefully.

Arise, beseech her, holding up claspt hands:

“Say, art thou human, or a deity?”

“You say well,” said the brahmin, and asked his question by repeating the fourth stanza:

“As thou beholdest me in kindly way

And “Take and eat this food” to me dost say,

I ask thee, lady, excellent in might,

Art thou a goddess, or a woman, pray?”

Thereupon the deity repeated two stanzas:

“A goddess excellent in might am I;

And to mid-ocean hitherward did hie,

Full of compassion and in heart well-pleased,

For thy sake come in this extremity.

“Here food, and drink, and place of rest behold,

Vehicles various and manifold;

Thee, Sankha, I make lord of every thing

Which for desirable thy heart may hold.”

On hearing this the Great Being thought it over. “Here is this deity (thought he), in the middle of the ocean, offering me this thing and that thing. Why does she wish to offer them to me? Is it for any virtuous act of mine, or by her own power, she does it? Well, I will ask the question.” And he asked it in the words of the seventh stanza:

“Of all my sacrifice and offering

Thou art the queen, and thine the governing;

Thou of fair slender waist, thou beauteous-browed:

What deed of mine hath brought to fruit this thing?”

The deity listened to him, thinking, “This brahmin has put his question, I suppose, because he imagines I know not what good deed he has done. I will just tell him.” So she told him, in the words of the eighth stanza:

“A solitary, on the burning way,

Weary and footsore, thirsty, thou didst stay,

O brahmin Sankha, for a gift of shoon:

That gift thy Cow of Plenty is this day.”

When the Great Being heard this, he thought to himself, “What! in this impracticable ocean the gift of shoes given by me has become a give-all to me! Ah, lucky was my gift to the

Pacceka Buddha!” Then, in great contentment, he repeated the ninth stanza:

“A ship of planks well builded let there be,

Sped by fair winds, impervious to the sea;

No place is here for other vehicle;

This very day take me to Molini.”

The deity, well pleased at hearing these words, caused a ship to appear, made of the seven things of price; in length it was eight hundred cubits, in width six hundred cubits, twenty fathoms in depth; it had three masts made of sapphire, cordage of gold, silver sails, and of gold were also the oars and the rudders. This vessel the deity filled with the seven precious things; then embracing the brahmin, set him aboard the gorgeous ship. She did not notice the attendant; howbeit the brahmin gave him a share of his own good fortune; he rejoiced, the deity embraced him also, and set him in the ship. Then she guided the ship to the city of Molini, and having stored all this wealth in the brahmin’s house, returned to her place of dwelling.

The Master, in his Perfect Wisdom, uttered the final stanza:

“She pleased, delighted, with a happy cheer,

A vessel marvellous caused to appear;

Then, taking Sankha with his serving man,

To that most lovely city brought them near.”

And the brahmin all his life long dwelt at home, distributing bounty without end, and observing virtue; and at the end of his days he with his man went to swell the host of heaven.

When the Master had made an end of this discourse he declared the Truths—now at the conclusion of the Truths the layman entered upon the First Path—and he thus identified the Birth; “At that time Uppalavanna was the deity, Ananda was the attendant, and I myself was the Brahmin Sankha.”

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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