Ja 446 — Takkala Jātaka

English translation by W. H. D. Rouse.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol4/ja446.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

“No bulbs are here,” etc.—This story the Master told at Jetavana about a layman who supported his father.

This man we learn was re-born in a needy family. After his mother’s death, he used to rise up early in the morning, and prepare the tooth-twigs and water for cleansing the mouth; then by working for hire or ploughing in the fields, he used to procure rice gruel, and thus fed his father in a manner suiting his station in life. Said his father to him, “My son, whatever is to be done indoors and out you do alone. Let me find you a wife, and she shall do the household work for you.”—“Father,” says he, “if women come into the house they will bring no peace of mind for me or for you. Pray do not dream of such a thing! While you live, I will support you; and when you pass away, I shall know what to do.”

But the father sent for a girl, much against his son’s wish; and she looked after her husband and his father; but a low creature she was. Now her husband was pleased with her, for attending upon his father; and whatever he could find to please her, that he brought and gave her; and she presented it to her father-in-law. And there came a time when the woman thought, “Whatever my husband gets, he gives to me, but nothing to his father. It is clear that for his father he cares nothing. I must find some way of setting the old man at variance with my husband, and then I shall get him out of the house.” So from that time she began to make the water too cold or too hot for him, and the food she salted too much or not at all, and the rice she served up all hard or else soaking wet; and by this kind of thing did all she could to provoke him. Then, when he grew angry, she scolded: “Who can wait on an old creature like this!” said she, and stirred up strife. And all over the ground she would spit, and then stir up her husband—“Look there!” would she say, “that’s your father’s doing! I am constantly begging him not to do this and that, and he only gets angry. Either your father must leave this house, or I!” Then the husband answered, “Lady, you are young, and you can live where you will; but my father is an old man. If you don’t like him, you can leave the house.” This frightened her. She fell at the old man’s feet, and

craved pardon, promising to do so no more; and began to care for him as before.

The worthy layman was so worried at first by her goings-on that he omitted visiting the Master to hear his discourse; but when she had come to herself again, he went. The Master asked why he had not been to hear his preaching this seven or eight days. The man related what had happened. “This time,” said the Master, “you refused to listen to her, and to turn out your father; but in former times you did as she bade; you took him to a cemetery, and dug him a pit. At the time when you were about to kill him I was a seven-year-old, and I by recounting the goodness of parents, held you back from parricide. At that time you listened to me; and by tending your father while he lived became destined for paradise. I admonished you then, and warned you not to forsake him when you should come into another life; for this cause you have now refused to do as the woman bade you, and your father has not been killed.” Thus saying, at the man’s request, he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta was King of Benares, there was in a family of a certain village of Kasi an only son named Vasitthaka. This man supported his parents, and after his mother’s death, he supported his father as has been described in the introduction. But there is this difference. When the woman said, “Look there! that is your father’s doing! I am constantly begging him not to do this and that, and he only gets angry!” she went on, “My lord, your father is fierce and violent, for ever picking quarrels. A decrepit old man like that, tormented with disease, is bound to die soon; and I can’t live in the same house with him. He will die of himself before many days are out; well, take him to a cemetery, and dig a pit, throw him in and break his head with the spade; and when he is dead, shovel the earth upon him, and leave him there.” At last, by dint of this dinning in his ears, said he, “Wife, to kill a man is a serious matter: how can I do it?” “I will tell you of a way,” quoth she.—“Say on, then.”—“Well, my lord, at break of day, go to the place where your father sleeps; tell him very loud, that all may hear, that a debtor of his is in a certain village, that you went and he would not pay you, and that if he dies the man will never pay at all; and say that you will both drive there together in the morning. Then at the appointed time get up, and put the animals to the cart, and take him in it to the cemetery. When you get there, bury him in a pit, make a noise as if you had been robbed, wound and wash your head, and return.” “Yes, that plan will do,” said Vasitthaka. He agreed to her proposal, and got the cart ready for the journey.

Now the man had a son, a lad of seven years, but wise and clever. The lad overheard what his mother said, “My mother, “thought he, “is a wicked woman, and is trying to persuade father to murder his father. I will prevent my father from doing this murder.” He ran quickly, and lay down beside his grandsire. Vasitthaka, at the time suggested by the wife, prepared the cart. “Come, father, let us get that debt!” said he, and placed his father in the cart. But the boy got in first of all. Vasitthaka could not prevent him, so he took him to the cemetery with them. Then, placing his father and his son together in a place apart, with the cart, he got down, took spade and basket, and in a spot where he was hidden from them began to dig a square hole. The boy got down, and followed him, and as though ignorant what was afoot, opened a conversation by repeating the first stanza:

“No bulbs are here, no herbs for cooking meet,

No catmint, nor no other plant to eat.

Then father, why this pit, if need be none,

Delve in Death’s acre mid the woods alone?”

Then his father answered by repeating the second stanza:

“Thy grandsire, son, is very weak and old,

Opprest by pain from ailments manifold:

Him will I bury in a pit to-day;

In such a life I could not wish him stay.”

Hearing this, the boy answered by repeating a half-stanza:

“Thou hast done sinfully in wishing this,

And for the deed, a cruel deed it is.”

With these words, he caught the spade from his father’s hands, and at no great distance began to dig another pit.

His father approaching asked why he dug that pit; to whom he made reply by finishing the third stanza:

“I too, when thou art aged, father mine,

Will treat my father as thou treatest thine;

Following the custom of the family

Deep in a pit I too will bury thee.”

To this the father replied by repeating the fourth stanza:

“What a harsh saying for a boy to say,

And to upbraid a father in this way!

To think that my own son should rail at me,

And to his truest friend unkind should be!”

When the father had thus spoken, the wise lad recited three stanzas, one by way of answer, and two as an holy hymn:

“I am not harsh, my father, nor unkind,

Nay, I regard thee with a friendly mind:

But this thou dost, this act of sin, thy son

Will have no strength to undo again, once done.

“Whoso, Vasittha, hurts with ill intent

His mother or his father, innocent,

He, when the body is dissolved, shall be

In hell for his next life undoubtedly.

“Whoso with meat and drink, Vasittha, shall

His mother or his father feed withal,

He, when the body is dissolved, shall be

In heaven for his next life undoubtedly.”

The father, after hearing his son thus discourse; repeated the eighth stanza:

“Thou art no heartless ingrate, son, I see,

But kindly-hearted, O my son, to me;

Twas in obedience to thy mother’s word

I thought to do this horrid deed abhorred.”

Said the lad, when he heard this, “Father, women, when a wrong is done and they are not rebuked, again and again commit sin. You must bend my mother, that she may never again do such a deed as this.” And he repeated the ninth stanza:

“That wife of yours, that ill-conditioned dame,

My mother, she that brought me forth—that same,

Let us from out our dwelling far expel,

Lest she work other woe on thee as well."

Hearing the words of his wise son, well pleased was Vasitthaka, and saying, "Let us go, my son!" he seated himself in the cart with son and father.

Now the woman too, this sinner, was happy at heart; for, thought she, this ill-luck is out of the house now. She plastered the place with wet cowdung, and cooked a mess of rice porridge. But as she sat watching the road by which they would return, she espied them coming. "There he is, back with old ill-luck again!" thought she, much in anger. "Fie, good-for-nothing!" cried she, "what, bring back the ill-luck you took away with you!" Vasitthaka said not a word, but unyoked the cart. Then said he, "Wretch, what is that you say?" He gave her a sound drubbing, and bundled her head over heels out of doors, bidding her never darken his door again. Then he bathed his father and his son, and took a bath himself, and the three of them ate the rice porridge. The sinful woman dwelt for a few days in another house.

Then the son said to his father: "Father, for all this my mother does not understand. Now let us try to vex her. You give out that in such and such a village lives a niece of yours, who will attend upon your father and your son and you; so you will go and fetch her. Then take flowers and perfumes, and get into your cart, and ride about the country all day, returning in the evening." And so he did. The women in the neighbour's family told his wife this; "Have you heard," said they, "that your husband has gone to get another wife in such a place?" "Ah, then I am undone!" quoth she, "and there is no place for me left!" But she would enquire of her son; so quickly she came to him, and fell at his feet, crying—"Save thee I have no other refuge! Henceforward I will tend your father and grandsire as I would tend a beauteous shrine! Give me entrance into this house once more!" "Yes, mother," replied the lad, "if you do no more as you did, I will; be of good cheer!" and at his father's coming he repeated the tenth stanza:

"That wife of yours, that ill-conditioned dame,

My mother, she that brought me forth,—that same,—

Like a tamed elephant, in full control,

Let her return again, that sinful soul."

So said he to his father, and then went and summoned his mother. She, being reconciled to her husband and the husband's father, was thenceforward tamed, and endued with righteousness, and watched over her husband and his father and her son; and these two, stedfastly following their son's advice, gave alms and did good deeds, and became destined to join the hosts of heaven.

The Master, having ended this discourse, declared the Truths: (at the conclusion of the Truths, the dutiful son was established in the fruit of the First Path:) then he identified the Birth—"At that time, father and son and daughter-in-law were the same as they are now,

and the wise boy was I myself.”

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