Ja 449 — Matta-Kundali 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/ja449.html

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Edited by E. B. Cowell

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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

“Why in the woodland,” etc. This story the Master told while sojourning in Jetavana, about a landowner whose son had died. At Savatthi, we learn that death took a beloved son of a certain landowner who used to wait upon the Buddha. Afflicted with grief for his son, the man washed not and ate not, and neither went about his own business nor waited upon the Buddha, only cried, “O my beloved son, thou hast left me, and gone before!”

As in the morning time the Master was looking abroad upon the world, he perceived that this man was ripe for attaining the Fruit of the First Path. So next day, having led his followers through the city of Savatthi in search of alms, after his meal was done, he sent the Brethren away, and attended by Elder Ananda walked to the place where this man lived. They told the landowner that the Master had come. Then they of his household prepared a seat, and made the Master sit down upon it, and led the landowner into the Master’s presence. Him after greeting, as he sat on one side, the Master addressed in a voice tender with compassion: “Do you mourn, lay Brother, for an only son?” He answered, “Yes, Sir.” Said the Master, “Long, long ago, lay Brother, wise men who went about afflicted with grief for a son’s death, listened to the words of the wise, and clearly discerning that nothing could bring back the lost, yet felt no grief, no not even a little.” So saying, at his request the Master told a story of the past.

Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the son of a very wealthy brahmin, at the age of fifteen or sixteen years, was smitten by a disease, and dying came to being again in the world of the gods. From the time of his son’s death, the brahmin would go to the cemetery, and make his moan, walking around the heap of ashes; and leaving undone all his duties, he walked about smitten with woe. A son of the gods, as he went about, saw the father, and devised a plan for consoling his misery. He went to the cemetery at the time of his mourning, taking upon himself the semblance of the man’s very son, and adorned with all sorts of ornaments, he stood on one side, holding his head in both hands, and lamenting with a loud voice. The brahmin heard the sound, and looked,

and full of the love which he bore his son, stopt before him, saying, “My son, dear lad, why do you stand mourning in the midst of this cemetery?” Which question he put in the words of the following stanza:

“Why in the woodland art thou standing here,

Begarlanded, with earrings in each ear,

Fragrant of sandal, holding out thy hands?

What sorrow makes thee drop the falling tear?”

And then the youth told his tale by repeating the second stanza:

“Made of fine gold, and shining brilliantly

My chariot is, wherein I use to lie:

For this a pair of wheels I cannot find;

Therefore I grieve so sore that I must die!”

The brahmin listened, and repeated the third stanza:

“Golden, or set with jewels, any kind,

Brazen or silvern, that thou hast in mind,

Speak but the word, a chariot shall be made,

And I thereto a pair of wheels will find!”

Now the Master himself, in his perfect wisdom, having heard the stanza repeated by the young man, repeated the first line of another—

“The brahmin youth replied, when he had done”;

while the young man repeats the remainder:

“Brothers up yonder are the moon and sun!

By such a pair of wheels as yonder twain

My golden car new radiance hath won!”

And immediately after:

“Thou art a fool for this that thou hast done,

To pray for that which should be craved by none;

Methinks, young sir, thou needs must perish soon,

For thou wilt never get or moon or sun!”

Then—

“Before our eyes they set and rise, colour and course unfailing:

None sees a ghost: then which is now more foolish in his wailing?”

So said the youth; and the brahmin, comprehending, repeated a stanza:

“Of us two mourners, O most sapient youth,

I am the greater fool—thou sayest truth,

In craving for a spirit from the dead,

Like a child crying for the moon, in sooth!”

Then the brahmin, consoled by the youth’s words, rendered thanks to him by reciting the remaining stanzas:

“Blazing was I, as when a man pours oil upon a fire:

Thou didst bring water, and didst quench the pain of my desire.

“Grief for my son—a cruel shaft was lodged within my heart;

Thou hast consoled me for my grief, and taken out the dart.

“That dart extracted, free from pain, tranquil and calm I keep;

Hearing, O youth, thy words of truth no more I grieve, nor weep.”

Then said the youth, “I am that son, brahmin, for whom you weep; I have been born in the world of gods. Henceforward grieve not for me, but give alms and observe virtue, and keep the holy fast-day.” With this admonition, he departed to his own place. And the brahmin abode by his advice; and after much almsgiving and other good deeds, he died, and was born in the world of gods.

The Master, having ended this discourse, declared the Truths and identified the Birth: (now at the conclusion of the Truths, the landowner was established in the fruit of the First

Path:) “At that time, I was myself the son of the gods who uttered this admonition.”

The Jātaka, or Stories of the Buddha’s Former Births, edited by E.B. Cowell, published by The Cambridge University Press.

Vol. 1, translated by Robert Chalmers, 1895.

Vol. 2, translated by W.H.D. Rouse, 1895.

Vol. 3, translated by H.T. Francis and R.A. Neil, 1897.

Vol. 4, translated by W.H.D. Rouse, 1901.

Vol. 5, translated by H.T. Francis, 1905.

Vol. 6, translated by E.B. Cowell and W.H.D. Rouse, 1907.

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Prepared for SuttaCentral by Bhikkhu Sujato.