Ja 450 — Bilari-Kosiya Jātaka

English translation by W. H. D. Rouse.

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Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

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Edited by E. B. Cowell

Original edition: Cambridge University Press, volume 4, 1901

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

“When food is not,” etc. This story the Master told, while dwelling at Jetavana, about a Brother who was devoted to giving.

This man, we are told, having heard the preaching of the Law, from the time when he embraced the Doctrine was devoted to giving, eager for giving. Never a bowl-full he ate unless he shared it with another; even water he would not drink, unless he gave of it to another: so absorbed was he in giving.

Then they began to talk of his good qualities in the Hall of Truth. Entered the Master, and asked what they talked of as they sat there. They told him. Sending for the Brother, he asked him, “Is it true, what I hear, Brother, that you are devoted to giving, eager to give?” He replied, “Yes, Sir.” Said the Master, “Long ago, Brethren, this man was without faith and unbelieving; not so much as a drop of oil on the end of a blade of grass did he give to any one; then I humbled him, and converted him and made him humble, and taught him the fruit of giving; and this gift-lief heart of his does not leave him even in another life. “So saying, he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born in a rich man’s family; and coming of age, he acquired a property, and at his father’s death received his father’s station as merchant.

One day, as he reviewed his wealth, thought he, “My wealth is here, sure enough, but where are those who gathered it? I must disperse my wealth, and give alms. “So he built an almonry, and while he lived distributed much alms; and when his days were drawing to a close, charging his son not to discontinue the practice of almsgiving, he was born again as Sakka in the Heaven of the Thirty-three. And the son gave alms as his father had given, and with the like charge to his son, was born as Canda, the Moon, among the gods. And his son became Suriya, the Sun, who begat another that became Matali the Charioteer, and his

son was born again as Pancasikha, one of the Gandhabbas, or celestial musicians. But the sixth of the line was without faith, hardhearted, loveless, niggardly; and he demolished the almonry, burnt it, beat the beggars and sent them about their business; gave no one so much as an oildrop on the end of a blade of grass.

Then Sakka, king of the gods, looked back over his doings in the past, wondering, “Does my tradition of almsgiving continue or no?” Pondering he perceived this: “My son continued the giving, and he is become Canda; and his son is Suriya, and his son is Matali, and his son has been born as Pancasikha; but the sixth in line has broken the tradition.” Then this thought occurred to him; he would go humble that man of sin, and teach him the fruit of giving. So he summoned to him Canda, Suriya, Matali, Pancasikha, and said, “Sirs, the sixth in our line has broken our family tradition; he has burnt the almonry, the beggars he has driven away; he gives nothing to any one. Then let us humble him!” So with them he proceeded to Benares.

At that moment the merchant had been to wait upon the king, and having returned, was walking to and fro under the seventh gate-tower, looking along the road. Sakka said to the others, “Do you wait until I go in, and then follow one after another.” With these words he went forward, and standing before the rich merchant, said to him, “Ho, Sir! give me to eat!”—“There is nothing to eat for you here, brahmin; go elsewhere.”—“Ho, great Sir! when brahmins ask for food, it must not be refused them!”—“In my house, brahmin, is neither food cooked nor food ready for cooking; away with you!”—“Great Sir, I will repeat to you a verse of poetry,—listen.” Said he, “I want none of your poetry; get you gone, and do not keep standing here.” But Sakka, without attending to his words, recited two stanzas:

“When food is not within the pot, the good would get, and not deny:

And thou art cooking! ’twere not good, if thou wouldst now no food supply

“He who remiss and niggard is, ever to give denies;

But he who virtue loves, must give, and he whose mind is wise.”

When the man had heard this, he answered, “Well, come in and sit down; and you shall have a little.” Sakka entered, repeating these verses, and sat down.

Next came Canda up, and asked for food. “There’s no food for you,” said the man, “go away!” He replied, “Great Sir, there is one brahmin seated within; there must be a free meal for a brahmin, I suppose, so I will enter too.” “There is no free meal for a brahmin!” said the man; “be off with you!” Then Canda said, “Great Sir, please do listen to a verse or two,” and repeated two stanzas: (whenever a terrified niggard gives to none, that very thing that he fears comes to him as he gives not :)—

“When fear of hunger or of thirst makes niggard souls afraid,

In this world and the next those fools shall fully be repaid.

“Therefore give alms, flee covetise, purge filth of greed away,

In the next world men’s virtuous deeds shall be their surest stay.”

Having listened to these words also, the man said, “Well, come in, and you shall have a little.” In he came, and took a seat with Sakka. After waiting a little while, Suriya came up, and asked for food by repeating two stanzas:

“‘Tis hard to do as good men do, to give as they can give,

Bad men can hardly imitate the life that good men live.

“And so, when good and evil go to pass away from earth,

The bad are born in hell below, in heaven the good have birth.”

The rich man, not seeing any way out of it, said to him, “Well, come in and sit down with these brahmins, and you shall have a little.” And Matali, after waiting a little while, came up and asked for food; and when he was told there was no food, as soon as the words were spoken, repeated the seventh stanza:

“Some give from little, some give not though they have plenteous store:

Who gives from little, if he gave a thousand, twere no more.”

To him also the man said, “Well, come in and sit down.” Then after waiting a little while, Pancasikha came up and asked for food. “There’s none, go away,” was the reply. Said he, “What a number of places I have visited! There must be a free meal for brahmins here, methinks!” And he began to hold forth to him, repeating the eighth stanza:

“Even he who lives on scraps should righteous be,

Giving from little store, though sons have he;

The hundred thousand which the wealthy give,

Are worth not one small gift from such as he.”

The rich man pondered, on hearing the speech of Pancasikha. Then he repeated the ninth stanza, to ask an explanation of the little worth of such gifts:

“Why is a rich and generous sacrifice

Not equal to a righteous gift in price,

How is a thousand, which the wealthy gives,

Not worth a poor man’s gift, tho’ small in size?”

In reply, Pancasikha recited the concluding stanza:

“Some who in evil ways do live

Oppress, and slay, then comfort give:

Their cruel sour-faced gifts are less

Than any given with righteousness.

Thus not a thousand from the wealthy can

Equal the little gift of such a man.”

Having listened to the admonition of Pancasikha, he replied, “Well, go indoors and be seated; you shall have a little.” And he too entered, and sat with the rest.

Then the rich merchant Bilarikosiya, beckoning to a maidservant, said to her, “Give yonder Brahmins a measure apiece of rice in the husk.” She brought the rice, and approaching them, bade them bake it, and get it cooked somewhere, and eat. “We never touch rice in the husk,” said they.—“Master, they say that they never touch rice in the husk!”—“Well, give them husked rice.” She brought them husked rice, and bade them take it. Said they, “We accept nothing that is uncooked.” “Master, they accept nothing that is uncooked!”—“Then cook them some cows’ food in a pot, and give them that.” She cooked in a pot a mess of cows’ food, and brought it to them. All the five of them took up each a mouthful, and put it into their mouths, but let it stick in the throat; then rolling their eyes, they became unconscious, and lay as though dead. The serving-maid seeing this thought they must be dead, and much afraid went and told the merchant, saying, “Master, those brahmins could not swallow the cows’ food, and they are dead!” Thought he, “Now people will upbraid me, saying, This lewd fellow gave a mess of cows’ food to delicate brahmins, which they could not swallow, and they died!” Then he said to the maid, “Go quickly, take away the food from their bowls, and cook them a mess of all sorts of the finest rice.” She did so. The merchant fetched in the passers-by from the road within, and when he had gathered a number of them together he said, “I gave these brahmins food after my own manner of eating, and they were greedy and made great lumps, and so as they ate, the food stuck in the throat, and they are dead. I call you to witness that I am guiltless.” Before the crowd thus gathered together the brahmins arose, and said, looking upon the multitude, “Behold the deceitfulness of this merchant! He gave us of his own food, quoth he! A mess of cow’s food is all he gave us at first, and then while we lay as dead, he caused this food to be prepared.” And they cast forth from their mouths the food which they had taken, and showed it. The crowd upbraided the merchant, crying, “Blind fool! you have broken the custom of your family; you have burnt the alms-hall; the beggars you have taken by the throat and cast forth; and now when you were giving food to these delicate brahmins, all you gave was a mess of cows’ food! As you go to the other world, I suppose you will carry

the wealth of your house fast about your neck!"

At this moment, Sakka asked the crowd, "Do you know whose is the wealth of this house?" "We know not," they replied. Said he, "You have heard tell of a great merchant of Benares, who lived in this city once upon a time, and built halls of almonry, and in charity gave much?" "Yes," said they," "we have heard of him." "I am that merchant," he said, "and by those gifts I am now become Sakka, king of the gods; and my son, who did not break my tradition, has become a god, Canda; and his son is Suriya, and his son is Matali, and his son is Pancasikha; of these, yonder is Canda, and that is Suriya, and this is Matali the charioteer, and this again is Pancasikha, now a heavenly musician, once father of yonder lewd fellow! Thus potent is giving of gifts; therefore wise men ought to do virtuously." Thus speaking, with a view to dispelling the doubts of the people there assembled, they rose up in the air, and remained poised, by their mighty power surrounding themselves with a great host, their bodies all ablaze, so that the whole city seemed to be on fire. Then Sakka addressed the crowd: "We left our heavenly glory in coming hither, and we came on account of this sinner Bilarikosiya, this last of his race, the devourer of all his race. In pity for him are we come, because we knew that this sinner had broken the tradition of his family, and burnt the almonry, and haled forth the beggars by the throat, and had violated our custom, and that by ceasing to give alms he would be born again in hell." Thus did he discourse to the crowd, telling the potency of almsgiving. Bilarikosiya put his hands together in supplication, and made a vow; "My lord, from this time forth I will no more break the family custom, but I will distribute alms; and beginning from this very day, I will never eat, without sharing with another my own supplies, even the water I drink and the tooth-cleaner which I use."

Sakka having thus humbled him, and made him self-denying, and established him in the Five Virtues, went away to his own place, taking the four gods with him. And the merchant gave alms as long as he lived, and was born in the heaven of the Thirty-Three.

The Master, having finished this discourse, said, "Thus, Brethren, this Brother in former times was unbelieving, and never gave jot or tittle to any one, but I humbled him, and taught him the fruit of almsgiving; and that mind leaves him not, even when he enters another life." Then he identified the Birth: "At that time, the generous Brother was the rich man, Sariputta was Canda, Moggallana was Suriya, Kassapa was Matali, Ananda was Pancasikha, and I myself was Sakka."

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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