Ja 454 — Ghata Jātaka

English translation by W. H. D. Rouse.

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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

“Black Kanha, rise,” etc. This story the Master told in Jetavana about a son’s death. The circumstances are like those in the Mattha-Kundali Birth. Here again the Master asked the lay brother, “Are you in grief, layman?” He replied, “Yes, Sir.” “Layman,” said the Master, “long ago wise men listened to the bidding of the wise, and did not grieve for the death of a son.” And at his request, he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time, a king named Mahakamsa reigned in Uttarapatha, in the Kamsa district, in the city of Asitanjana. He had two sons, Kamsa and Upakamsa, and one daughter named Devagabbha. On her birthday the brahmins who foretold the future said of her: “A son born of this girl will one day destroy the country and the lineage of Kamsa.” The king was too fond of the girl to put her to death; but leaving her brothers to settle it, lived his days out, and then died. When he died Kamsa became king, and Upakamsa was viceroy. They thought that there would be an outcry were they to put their sister to death, so resolved to give her in marriage to none, but to keep her husbandless, and watch; and they built a single round-tower, for her to live in.

Now she had a serving-woman named Nandagopa, and the woman’s husband, Andhakavenhu, was the servant who watched her. At that time a king named Mahasagara reigned in Upper Madhura, and he had two sons, Sagara and Upasagara. At their father’s death, Sagara became king, and Upasagara was viceroy. This lad was Upakamsa’s friend, brought up together with him and trained by the same teacher. But he intrigued in his brother’s zenana, and being detected, ran away to Upakamsa in the Kamsa estate. Upakamsa introduced him to king Kamsa, and the king had him in great honour.

Upasagara while waiting upon the king observed the tower where dwelt Devagabbha; and on asking who lived there, heard the story, and fell in love with the girl. And Devagabbha one day saw him as he went with Upakamsa to wait upon the king. She asked who that was; and being told by Nandagopa that it was Upasagara, son of the great king Sagara,

she too fell in love with him. Upasagara gave a present to Nandagopa, saying, “Sister, you can arrange a meeting for me with Devagabbha.” “Easy enough,” quoth Nandagopa, and told the girl about it. She being already in love with him, agreed at once. One night Nandagopa arranged a tryst, and brought Upasagara up into the tower; and there he stayed with Devagabbha. And by their constant intercourse, Devagabbha conceived. By and bye it became known that she was with child, and the brothers questioned Nandagopa. She made them promise her pardon, and then told the ins and outs of the matter. When they heard the story, they thought, “We cannot put our sister to death. If she bears a daughter, we will spare the babe also; if a son, we will kill him.” And they gave Devagabbha to Upasagara to wife.

When her full time came to be delivered, she brought forth a daughter. The brothers on hearing this were delighted, and gave her the name of the Lady Anjana. And they allotted to them a village for their estate, named Govaddhamana. Upasagara took Devagabbha and lived with her at the village of Govaddhamana.

Devagabbha was again with child, and that very day Nandagopa conceived also. When their time was come, they brought forth on the same day, Devagabbha a son and Nandagopa a daughter. But Devagabbha, in fear that her son might be put to death, sent him secretly to Nandagopa, and received Nandagopa’s daughter in return. They told the brothers of the birth. “Son or daughter?” they asked. “Daughter,” was the reply. “Then see that it is reared,” said the brothers. In the same way Devagabbha bore ten sons, and Nandagopa ten daughters. The sons lived with Nandagopa and the daughters with Devagabbha, and not a soul knew the secret.

The eldest son of Devagabbha was named Vasu-deva, the second Baladeva, the third Canda-deva, the fourth Suriya-deva, the fifth Aggi-deva, the sixth Varuna-deva, the seventh Ajjuna, the eighth Pajjuna, the ninth Ghata-pandita, the tenth Amkura. They were well known as the sons of Andhakavenhu the servitor, the Ten Slave-Brethren.

In course of time they grew big, and being very strong, and withal fierce and ferocious, they went about plundering, they even went so far as to plunder a present being conveyed to the king. The people came crowding in the king’s court yard, complaining, “Andhakavenhu’s sons, the Ten Brethren, are plundering the land!” So the king summoned Andhakavenhu, and rebuked him for permitting his sons to plunder. In the same way complaint was made three or four times, and the king threatened him. He being in fear of his life craved the boon of safety from the king, and told the secret, that how these were no sons of his, but of Upasagara. The king was alarmed. “How can we get hold of them?” he asked his courtiers. They replied, “Sire, they are wrestlers. Let us hold a wrestling match in the city, and when they enter the ring we will catch them and put them to death.” So they sent for two wrestlers, Canura and Mutthika, and caused proclamation to be made throughout the city by beat of drum, “that on the seventh day there would be a wrestling match.”

The wrestling ring was prepared in front of the king’s gate; there was an enclosure for the games, the ring was decked out gaily, the flags of victory were ready tied. The whole city

was in a whirl; line over line rose the seats, tier above tier. Canura and Mutthika went down into the ring, and strutted about, jumping, shouting, clapping their hands. The Ten Brethren came too. On their way they plundered the washer men's street, and clad themselves in robes of bright colours, and stealing perfume from the perfumers' shops, and wreaths of flowers from the florists, with their bodies all anointed, garlands upon their heads, earrings in their ears, they strutted into the ring, jumping, shouting, clapping their hands.

At the moment, Canura was walking about and clapping his hands. Baladeva, seeing him, thought, "I won't touch yon fellow with my hand!" so catching up a thick strap from the elephant stable, jumping and shouting he threw it round Canura's belly, and joining the two ends together, brought them tight, then lifting him up, swung him round over his head, and dashing him on the ground rolled him outside the arena. When Canura was dead, the king sent for Mutthika. Up got Mutthika, jumping, shouting, clapping his hands. Baladeva smote him, and crushed in his eyes; and as he cried out—"I'm no wrestler! I'm no wrestler!" Baladeva tied his hands together, saying, "Wrestler or no wrestler, it is all one to me," and dashing him down on the ground, killed him and threw him outside the arena.

Mutthika in his death-throes, uttered a prayer—"May I become a goblin, and devour him!" And he became a goblin, in a forest called by the name of Kalamattiya. The king said, "Take away the Ten Slave-Brethren." At that moment, Vasudeva threw a wheel, which lopped off the heads of the two brothers. The crowd, terrified, fell at his feet, and besought him to be their protector.

Thus the Ten Brethren, having slain their two uncles, assumed the sovereignty of the city of Asitanjana, and brought their parents thither.

They now set out, intending to conquer all India. In a while they arrived at the city of Ayojjha, the seat of king Kalasena. This they encompassed about, and destroyed the jungle around it, breached the wall and took the king prisoner, and took the sovereignty of the place into their hands. Thence they proceeded to Dvaravati. Now this city had on one side the sea and on one the mountains. They say that the place was goblin-haunted. A goblin would be stationed on the watch, who seeing his enemies, in the shape of an ass would bray as the ass brays. At once, by goblin magic the whole city used to rise in the air, and deposit itself on an island in the midst of the sea; when the foe was gone, it would come back and settle in its own place again. This time, as usual, no sooner the ass saw those Ten Brethren coming, than he brayed with the bray of an ass. Up rose the city in the air, and settled upon the island. No city could they see, and turned back; then back came the city to its own place again. They returned—again the ass did as before. The sovereignty of the city of Dvaravati they could not take.

So they visited Kanha-dipayana, and said: "Sir, we have failed to capture the kingdom of Dvaravati; tell us how to do it." He said: "In a ditch, in such a place, is an ass walking about. He brays when he sees an enemy, and immediately the city rises in the air. You must clasp hold of his feet, and that is the way to accomplish your end." Then they took leave of the ascetic; and went all ten of then to the ass, and falling at his feet, said, "Sir, we have no help

but thee! When we come to take the city, do not bray!" The ass replied, "I cannot help braying. But if you come first, and four of you bring great iron ploughs, and at the four gates of the city dig great iron posts into the ground, and when the city begins to rise, if you will fix on the post a chain of iron fastened to the plough, the city will not be able to rise." They thanked him; and he did not utter a sound while they got ploughs, and fixed the posts in the ground at the four gates of the city, and stood waiting. Then the ass brayed, the city began to rise, but those who stood at the four gates with the four ploughs, having fixed to the posts iron chains which were fastened to the ploughs, the city could not rise. Thereupon the Ten Brethren entered the city, killed the king, and took his kingdom.

Thus they conquered all India, and in three and sixty thousand cities they slew by the wheel all the kings of them, and lived at Dvaravati, dividing the kingdom into ten shares. But they had forgotten their sister, the Lady Anjana. So "Let us make eleven shares of it," said they. But Amkura answered, "Give her my share, and I will take to some business for a living; only you must remit my taxes each in your own country." They consented, and gave his share to his sister; and with her they dwelt in Dvaravati, nine kings, while Amkura embarked in trade.

In course of time, they were all increased with sons and with daughters; and after a long time had gone by, their parents died. At that period, they say that a man's life was twenty thousand years.

Then died one clearly beloved son of the great King Vasudeva. The king, half dead with grief, neglected everything, and lay lamenting, and clutching the frame of his bed. Then Ghatapandita thought to himself, "Except me, no one else is able to soothe my brother's grief; I will find some means of soothing his grief for him." So assuming the appearance of madness, he paced through the whole city, gazing up at the sky, and crying out, "Give me a hare! Give me a hare!" All the city was excited: "Ghatapandita has gone mad!" they said. Just then a courtier named Rohineyya, went into the presence of King Vasudeva, and opened a conversation with him by reciting the first stanza:

"Black Kanha, rise! why close the eyes to sleep? why lying there

Thine own born brother—see, the winds away his wit do bear,

Away his wisdom ! Ghata raves, thou of the long black hair!"

When the courtier had thus spoken, the Master perceiving that he had risen, in his Perfect Wisdom uttered the second stanza:

"So soon the long-haired Kesava heard Rohineyya's cry,

He rose all anxious and distrest for Ghata's misery."

Up rose the king, and quickly came down from his chamber; and proceeding to Ghatapandita, he got fast hold of him with both hands; and speaking to him, uttered the

third stanza:

“In maniac fashion, why do you pace Dvaraka all through,

And cry, “Hare, hare!” Say, who is there has taken a hare from you?”

To these words of the king, he only answered by repeating the same cry over and over again. But the king recited two more stanzas:

“Be it of gold, or made of jewels fine,

Or brass, or silver, as you may incline,

Shell, stone, or coral, I declare

I’ll make a hare.

“And many other hares there be, that range the woodland wide,

They shall be brought, I’ll have them caught; say, which do you decide?”

On hearing the king’s words, the wise man replied by repeating the sixth stanza:

“I crave no hare of earthly kind, but that within the moon :

O bring him down, O Kesava! I ask no other boon!”

“Undoubtedly my brother has gone mad,” thought the king, when he heard this. In great grief, he repeated the seventh stanza:

“In sooth, my brother, you will die, if you make such a prayer,

And ask for what no man may pray, the moon’s celestial hare.”

Ghatapandita, on hearing the king’s answer, stood stock still, and said: “My brother, you know that if a man prays for the hare in the moon, and cannot get it, he will die; then why do you mourn for your dead son?”

“If, Kanha, this you know, and can console another’s woe,

Why are you mourning still the son who died so long ago?”

Then he went on, standing there in the street—“And I, brother, pray only for what exists, but you are mourning for what does not exist.” Then he instructed him by repeating two more stanzas:

“My son is born, let him not die!” Nor man nor deity

Can have that boon; then wherefore pray for what can never be?

“Nor mystic charm, nor magic roots, nor herbs, nor money spent,

Can bring to life again that ghost whom, Kanha, you lament.”

The King, on hearing this, answered, “Your intent was good, dear one. You did it to take away my trouble.” Then in praise of Ghatapandita he repeated four stanzas:

“Men had I, wise and excellent to give me good advice:

But how hath Ghatapandita opened this day mine eyes!

“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.”

And lastly:

“Thus do the merciful, and thus they who are wise indeed:

They free from pain, as Ghata here his eldest brother freed.”

This is the stanza of Perfect Wisdom.

In this manner was Vasudeva consoled by Prince Ghata.

After the lapse of a long time, during which he ruled his kingdom, the sons of the ten brethren thought: “They say that Kanhadipayana is possest of divine insight. Let us put him to the test.” So they procured a young lad, and drest him up, and by binding a pillow about his belly, made it appear as though he were with child. Then they brought him into his presence, and asked him, “When, Sir, will this woman be delivered?” The ascetic perceived that the time was come for the destruction of the ten royal brothers; then, looking to see what the term of his own life should be, he perceived that he must die that very day. Then he said, “Young sirs, what is this man to you?” “Answer us,” they replied persistently. He answered, “This man on the seventh day from now will bring forth a knot of acacia wood. With that he will destroy the line of Vasudeva, even though ye should take the piece of wood and burn it, and cast the ashes into the river.” “Ah, false ascetic!” said they, “a man

can never bring forth a child!" and they did the rope and string business, and killed him at once. The kings sent for the young men, and asked them why they had killed the ascetic. When they heard all, they were frightened. They set a guard upon the man; and when on the seventh day he voided from his belly a knot of acacia wood, they burnt it, and cast the ashes into the river. The ashes floated down the river, and stuck on one side by a postern gate; from thence sprung an eraka plant.

One day, the kings proposed that they should go and disport themselves in the water. So to this postern gate they came; and they caused a great pavilion to be made, and in that gorgeous pavilion they ate and drank. Then in sport they began to catch hold of hand and foot, and dividing into two parts, they became very quarrelsome. At last one of them, finding nothing better for a club, picked a leaf from the eraka plant, which even as he plucked it became a club of acacia wood in his hand. With this he beat many people. Then the others plucked also, and the things as they took them became clubs, and with them they cudgelled one another until they were killed. As these were destroying each other, four only—Vasudeva, Baladeva, the lady Anjana their sister, and the chaplain—mounted a chariot and fled away; the rest perished, every one.

Now these four, fleeing away in the chariot, came to the forest of Kalamattika. There Mutthika the Wrestler had been born, having become according to his prayer a goblin. When he perceived the coming of Baladeva, he created a village in that spot; and taking the semblance of a wrestler, he went jumping about, and shouting, "Who's for a fight?" snapping his fingers the while. Baladeva, as soon as he saw him, said, "Brother, I'll try a fall with this fellow." Vasudeva tried and tried his best to prevent him; but down he got from the chariot, and went up to him, snapping his fingers. The other just seized him in the hollow of his hand, and gobbled him up like a radish-bulb. Vasudeva, perceiving that he was dead, went on all night long with his sister and the chaplain, and at sunrise arrived at a frontier village. He lay down in the shelter of a bush, and sent his sister and the chaplain into the village, with orders to cook some food and bring it to him. A huntsman (his name was Jara, or Old Age) noticed the bush shaking. "A pig, sure enough," thought he; he threw a spear, and pierced his feet. "Who has wounded me?" cried out Vasudeva. The huntsman, finding that he had wounded a man, set off running in terror. The king, recovering his wits, got up, and called the huntsman—"Uncle, come here, don't be afraid!" When he came—"Who are you?" asked Vasudeva. "My name is Jara, my lord." "Ah," thought the king, "whom Old Age wounds will die, so the ancients used to say. Without doubt I must die to-day." Then he said, Fear not, Uncle; come, bind up my wound." The mouth of the wound bound up, the king let him go. Great pains came upon him; he could not eat the food that the others brought. Then addressing himself to the others, Vasudeva said: "This day I am to die. You are delicate creatures, and will never be able to learn anything else for a living; so learn this science from me." So saying, he taught them a science, and let them go; and then died immediately.

Thus excepting the lady Anjana, they perished every one, it is said.

When the Master had ended this discourse, he said, "Lay Brother, thus people have got free from grief for a son by attending to the words of wise men of old; do not you think

about it.” Then he declared the Truths (at the conclusion of the Truths the Lay Brother was established in the fruit of the First Path), and identified the Birth: “At that time, Ananda was Rohineyya, Sariputta was Vasudeva, the followers of the Buddha were the other persons, and I myself was Ghatapandita.”

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