Ja 455 — Mati-Posaka 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/ja455.html

Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

License: Public Domain (original English edition, published 1895–1907)

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

“Though far away,” etc. This story the Master told, while dwelling in Jetavana, about an Elder who had his mother to support. The circumstances of the event are like those of the Sama Birth. On this occasion also the Master said, addressing the Brethren, “Be not wroth, Brethren, with this man; wise men there have been of old, who even when born from the womb of animals, being parted asunder from their mothers, refused for seven days to take food, pining away; and even when they were offered food fit for a king, did but reply, Without my mother I will not eat; yet took food again when they saw the mother.” So saying, he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta reigned in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born as an Elephant in the Himalaya region. All white he was, a magnificent beast, and a herd of eighty thousand elephants surrounded him; but his mother was blind. He would give his elephants the sweet wild fruit, so sweet, to convey to her; yet to her they gave none, but themselves ate all of it. When he made enquiry, and heard news of this, said he, “I will leave the herd, and cherish my mother.” So in the night season, unknown to the other elephants, taking his mother with him, he departed to Mount Candorana; and there he placed his mother in a cave of the hills, hard by a lake, and cherished her.

Now a certain forester, who dwelt in Benares, lost his way; and being unable to get his bearings, began to lament with a great noise. Hearing this noise, the Bodhisatta thought to himself, “There is a man in distress, and it is not meet that he come to harm while I am here.” So he drew near to the man; but the man fled in fear. Seeing which, the Elephant said to him, “Ho man! you have no need to fear me. Do not flee, but say why you walk about weeping?”

“My lord,” said the man, “I have lost my way, this seven days gone.”

Said the Elephant, “Fear not, O man; for I will put you in the path of men.” Then he made the man sit on his back, and carried him out of the forest, and then returned.

This wicked man determined to go into the city, and tell the king. So he marked the trees, and marked the hills, and then made his way to Benares. At that time the king’s state elephant had just died. The king caused it to be proclaimed by beat of drum, “If any man has in any place seen an elephant fit and proper for the king’s riding, let him declare it!” Then this man came before the king, and said, “I, my lord, have seen a splendid elephant, white all over and excellent, fit for the king’s riding. I will show the way; send but with me the elephant trainers, and you shall catch him.” The king agreed, and sent with the man a forester and a great troop of followers.

The man went with him, and found the Bodhisatta feeding in the lake. When the Bodhisatta saw the forester, he thought, “This danger has doubtless come from none other than that man. But I am very strong; I can scatter even a thousand elephants; in anger I am able to destroy all the beasts that carry the army of a whole kingdom. But if I give way to anger, my virtue will be marred. So to-day I will not be angry, not even though pierced with knives.” With this resolve, bowing his head he remained immovable.

Down into the lotus-lake went the forester, and seeing the beauty of his points, said, “Come, my son!” Then seizing him by the trunk (and like a silver rope it was), he led him in seven days to Benares.

When the Bodhisatta’s mother found that her son came not, she thought that he must have been caught by the king’s nobles. “And now,” she wailed, “all these trees will go on growing, but he will be far away”; and she repeated two stanzas:

“Though far away this elephant should go,

Still olibane and kutaja will grow,

Grain, grass, and oleander, lilies white,

On sheltered spots the bluebells dark still blow.

“Somewhere that royal elephant must go,

Full fed by those whose breast and body show

All gold-bedeckt, that King or Prince may ride

Fearless to triumph o’er the mailclad foe.”

Now the trainer, while he was yet in the way, sent on a message to tell the king. And the king caused the city to be decorated. The trainer led the Bodhisatta into a stable all adorned and decked out with festoons and with garlands, and surrounding him, with a

screen of many colours, sent word to the king. And the king took all manner of fine food and caused it to be given to the Bodhisatta. But not a bit would he eat: “Without my mother, I will eat nothing,” said he. The king besought him to eat, repeating the third stanza:

“Come, take a morsel, Elephant, and never pine away:

There’s many a thing to serve your king that you shall do one day.”

Hearing this, the Bodhisatta repeated the fourth stanza:

“Nay, she by Mount Candorana, poor blind and wretched one,

Beats with a foot on some tree-root, without her royal son.”

The king said the fifth stanza to ask his meaning:

“Who is’t by Mount Candorana, what blind and wretched one,

Beats with a foot on some tree-root, without her royal son?”

To which the other replied in the sixth stanza:

“My mother by Candorana, ah blind, ah wretched one!

Beats with her foot on some tree-root for lack of me, her son!”

And hearing this, the king gave him freedom, reciting the seventh stanza:

“This mighty Elephant, who feeds his mother, let go free:

And let him to his mother go, and to all his family.”

The eighth and ninth stanzas are those of the Buddha in his perfect wisdom:

“The Elephant from prison freed, the beast set free from chain,

With words of consolation went back to the hills again.

“Then from the cool and limpid pool, where Elephants frequent,

He with his trunk drew water, and his mother all besprent.”

But the mother of the Bodhisatta thought it had begun to rain, and repeated the tenth stanza, rebuking the rain:

“Who brings unseasonable rain—what evil deity?

For he is gone, my own, my son, who used to care for me."

Then the Bodhisatta repeated the eleventh stanza, to reassure her:

"Rise mother! why should you there lie? your own, your son has come!

Vedeha, Kasi's glorious king, has sent me safely home."

And she returned thanks to the king by repeating the last stanza:

"Long live that king! long may he bring his realms prosperity,

Who freed that son who ever hath done so great respect to me!"

The king was pleased with the Bodhisatta's goodness; and he built a town not far from the lake, and did continual service to the Bodhisatta and to his mother. Afterwards, when his mother died, and the Bodhisatta had performed her obsequies, he went away to a monastery called Karandaka. In this place five hundred sages came and dwelt, and the king did the like service for them. The king had a stone image made in the figure of the Bodhisatta, and great honour he paid to this. There the inhabitants of all India year by year gathered together, to perform what was called the Elephant Festival.

When the Master had ended this discourse, he declared the Truths, and identified the Birth: (now at the conclusion of the Truths the Brother who supported his mother was established in the fruit of the First Path:) "At that time, Ananda was the king, the lady Mahamaya was the she-elephant, and I was myself the elephant that fed his mother."

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.

These translations are in the public domain. You are free to do whatever you like with them.

Scanned, proofed and formatted at sacred-texts.com, January 2006–February 2010, by John Bruno Hare and others. Thanks to the Sacred Texts Archive for making these texts available in digital form.

Prepared for SuttaCentral by Bhikkhu Sujato.