Ja 460 — Yuvanjaya Jātaka

English translation by W. H. D. Rouse.

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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

“I greet the lord,” etc. This story the Master told while dwelling in Jetavana, about the Great Renunciation. One day the Brethren had assembled in the Hall of Truth. “Brother,” one would say to his fellow, “the Dasabala might have dwelt in a house, he might have been an universal monarch in the centre of the great world, possessed of the Seven Precious Things, glorious with the Four Supernatural Faculties, surrounded with sons more than a thousand! Yet all this magnificence he renounced when he perceived the bane that lies in desires. At midnight, with Channa in company, he mounted his horse Kanthaka, and departed: on the banks of Anoma, the River Glorious, he renounced the world, and for six years he tormented himself with austerities, and then attained to perfect wisdom.” Thus talked they of the Buddha’s virtues. The Master entering, asked, “What are you speaking of now, Brethren, as ye sit here?” They told him. Said the Master, “This is not the first time, Brethren, that the Tathagata has made the Great Renunciation. In days of yore he retired and gave up the kingdom of Benares City, which was twelve leagues in extent.” So saying, he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time a king named Sabbadatta reigned in the city of Ramma. The place which we now call Benares is named Surundhana City in the Udaya Birth, and Sudassana in the Cullasutasoma Birth, and Brahmavaddhana in the Sonandana Birth, and Pupphavati in the Khandahala Birth: but in this Yuvanjaya Birth it is named Ramma City. In this manner its name changes on each several occasion. At that time the king Sabbadatta had a thousand sons; and to his eldest son Yuvanjana he gave the viceroyalty.

One day early in the morning he mounted his splendid chariot, and in great pomp went to disport him in the park. On the tree-tops, on the grass-tips, at the ends of the branches, on all the spiders’ webs and threads, on the points of the rushes, he saw the dew-drops hanging like so many strings of pearls. “Friend charioteer,” quoth he, “what is this?” “This, my lord,” he replied, “is what falls in the cold weather, and they call it dew.” The prince took his pleasure in the park for a portion of the day. In the evening, as he was returning home,

he could see none of it. “Friend charioteer,” said he, “where are the dew-drops? I do not see them now.” “My lord,” said the other, “as the sun rises higher, they all melt and sink into the ground.” On hearing this, the prince was distressed, and said, “The life of us living beings is fashioned like dew-drops on the grass. I must be rid of the oppression of disease, old age, and death; I must take leave of my parents, and renounce the world.” So because of the dew-drops, he perceived the Three modes of Existence as it were in a blazing fire. When he came home, he went into the presence of his father in his magnificent Hall of Judgement, and greeting his father, he stood on one side, and repeated the first stanza, asking his leave to renounce the world:

“I greet the lord of charioteers with friends and courtiers by:

The world, O King! I would renounce: let not my lord deny.”

Then the king repeated the second stanza, dissuading him:

“If aught thou crave, Yuvanjana, I will fulfil it quite:

If any hurt thee, I protect: be thou no eremite.”

Hearing this, the prince recited the third stanza:

“No man there is that does me harm: my wishes nothing lack:

But I would seek a refuge, where old age makes no attack.”

By way of explaining this matter, the Master uttered a half-stanza:

“The son speaks to his father thus, the father to his son”:

The remaining half-stanza was uttered by the king:

“Leave not the world, O prince! so cry the townsfolk every one.”

The prince again repeated this stanza:

“O do not from the unworldly life, great monarch, make me stay,

Lest I, intoxicate with lusts, to age become a prey!”

This said, the king hesitated. Then the mother was told, “Your son, my lady, is asking his father’s leave to renounce the world.” “What do you say?” she asked. It took her breath away. Seated in her litter of gold she went swiftly to the Hall of Judgement, and repeating the sixth stanza, asked:

“I beg thee, it is I, my dear, and I would make thee stay!

Long wish I thee, my son, to see: O do not go away!”

On hearing which the prince repeated the seventh stanza:

“Like as the dew upon the grass, when the sun rises hot,

So is the life of mortal men: O mother, stay me not!”

When he had said this, she begged him again and again to the same effect. Then the Great Being addressed his father in the eighth stanza:

“Let those that bear this litter, lift: let not my mother stay

Me, mighty king! from entering upon my holy way.”

When the king heard his son’s words, he said, “Go, lady, in your litter, back to our palace of Perennial Delight.” At his words her feet failed her: and surrounded with her company of women, she departed, and entered the palace, and stood looking towards the Hall of Judgement, and wondering what news of her son. After his mother’s departure the Bodhisatta again asked leave of his father. The king could not refuse him, and said, “Have thy will, then, dear son, and renounce the world.”

When this consent was gained, the Bodhisatta’s youngest brother, Prince Yudhitthila, greeted his father, and likewise asked leave to follow the religious life, and the king consented. Both brothers bade their father farewell, and having now renounced worldly lusts departed from the Hall of Judgement, amidst a great company of people. The queen looking upon the Great Being cried weeping, “My son has renounced the world, and the city of Ramma will be empty!” Then she repeated a couple of stanzas:

“Make haste, and bless thee! empty now is Rammaka, I trow:

King Sabbadatta has allowed Yuvanjana to go.

“The eldest of a thousand, he, like gold to look upon,

This mighty prince has left the world the yellow robe to don.”

The Bodhisatta did not at once embrace the religious life. No, he first bade farewell to his parents; then taking with him his youngest brother, Prince Yudhitthila, he left the city, and sending back the great multitude which followed them, they both made their way to Himalaya. There in a delightsome spot they built a hermitage, and embraced the life of a holy sage, and cultivating the transcendent rapture of meditation, they lived all their lives long upon the fruits and roots of the forest, and became destined for the world of Brahma.

This matter is explained in the stanza of perfect wisdom which comes last:

“Yuvanjana, Yudhitthila, in holy life remain:

Their father and their mother left, they break in two death's chain."

When the Master had ended this discourse, he said, "This is not the first time, Brethren, that the Tathagata renounced a kingdom to follow the religious life, but it was the same before;" then he identified the Birth—"At that time members of the present king's family were the father and mother, Ananda was Yudhitthila, and I was Yuvanjana myself."

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

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