Ja 461 — Dasaratha 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

“Let Lakkhana,” etc.—This story the Master told in Jetavana about a landowner whose father was dead. This man on his father’s death was overwhelmed with sorrow: leaving all his duties undone, he gave himself up to his sorrow wholly. The Master at dawn of day looking out upon mankind, perceived that he was ripe for attaining the fruit of the First Path. Next day, after going his rounds for alms in Savatthi, his meal done, he dismissed the Brethren, and taking with him a junior Brother, went to this man’s house, and gave him greeting, and addressed him as he sat there in words of honey sweetness. “You are in sorrow, lay Brother?” said he. “Yes, Sir, afflicted with sorrow for my father’s sake.” Said the Master, “Lay Brother, wise men of old who exactly knew the eight conditions of this world , felt at a father’s death no grief, not even a little.” Then at his request he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time, at Benares, a great king named Dasaratha renounced the ways of evil, and reigned in righteousness. Of his sixteen thousand wives, the eldest and queen-consort bore him two sons and a daughter; the elder son was named Rama-pandita, or Rama the Wise, the second was named Prince Lakkhana, or Lucky, and the daughter’s name was the Lady Sita.

In course of time, the queen-consort died. At her death the king was for a long time crushed by sorrow, but urged by his courtiers he performed her obsequies, and set another in her place as queen-consort. She was dear to the king and beloved. In time she also conceived, and all due attention having been given her, she brought forth a son, and they named him Prince Bharata.

The king loved his son much, and said to the queen, “Lady, I offer you a boon: choose.” She accepted the offer, but put it off for the time. When the lad was seven years old, she went to the king, and said to him, “My lord, you promised a boon for my son. Will you give it me now?” “Choose, lady,” said he. “My lord,” quoth she, “give my son the kingdom.” The king

snapt his fingers at her; “Out, vile jade!” said he angrily, “my other two sons shine like blazing fires; would you kill them, and ask the kingdom for a son of yours?” She fled in terror to her magnificent chamber, and on other days again and again asked the king for this. The king would not give her this gift. He thought within himself: “Women are ungrateful and treacherous. This woman might use a forged letter or a treacherous bribe to get my sons murdered.” So he sent for his sons, and told them all about it, saying: “My sons, if you live here some mischief may befall you. Go to some neighbouring kingdom, or to the woodland, and when my body is burnt, then return and inherit the kingdom which belongs to your family.” Then he summoned soothsayers, and asked them the limits of his own life. They told him he would live yet twelve years longer. Then he said, “Now, my sons, after twelve years you must return, and uplift the umbrella of royalty.” They promised, and after taking leave of their father, went forth from the palace weeping. The Lady Sita said, “I too will go with my brothers:” she bade her father farewell, and went forth weeping.

These three departed amidst a great company of people. They sent the people back, and proceeded until at last they came to Himalaya. There in a spot well-watered, and convenient for the getting of wild fruits, they built a hermitage, and there lived, feeding upon the wild fruits.

Lakkhana-pandita and Sita said to Rama-pandita, “You are in place of a father to us; remain then in the hut, and we will bring wild fruit, and feed you.” He agreed: thenceforward Rama-pandita stayed where he was, the others brought the wild fruit and fed him with it.

Thus they lived there, feeding upon the wild fruit; but King Dasaratha pined after his sons, and died in the ninth year. When his obsequies were performed, the queen gave orders that the umbrella should be raised over her son, Prince Bharata. But the courtiers said, “The lords of the umbrella are dwelling in the forest,” and they would not allow it. Said Prince Bharata, “I will fetch back my brother Ramapandita from the forest, and raise the royal umbrella over him.” Taking the five emblems of royalty, he proceeded with a complete host of the four arms to their dwelling-place. Not far away he caused camp to be pitched, and then with a few courtiers he visited the hermitage, at the time when Lakkhana-pandita and Sita were away in the woods. At the door of the hermitage sat Rama-pandita, undismayed and at ease, like a figure of fine gold firmly set. The prince approached him with a greeting, and standing on one side, told him of all that had happened in the kingdom, and falling at his feet along with the courtiers, burst into weeping. Rama-pandita neither sorrowed nor wept; emotion in his mind was none. When Bharata had finished weeping, and sat down, towards evening the other two returned with wild fruits. Rama-pandita thought—“These two are young: all-comprehending wisdom like mine is not theirs. If they are told on a sudden that our father is dead, the pain will be greater than they can bear, and who knows but their hearts may break. I will persuade them to go down into the water, and find a means of disclosing the truth.” Then pointing out to them a place in front where there was water, he said, “You have been out too long: let this be your penance—go into that water, and stand there.” Then he repeated a half-stanza:

“Let Lakkhana and Sita both into that pond descend.”

One word sufficed, into the water they went, and stood there. Then he told them the news by repeating the other half-stanza:

“Bharata says, king Dasaratha’s life is at an end.”

When they heard the news of their father’s death, they fainted. Again he repeated it, again they fainted, and when even a third time they fainted away, the courtiers raised them and brought them out of the water, and set them upon dry ground. When they had been comforted, they all sat weeping and wailing together. Then Prince Bharata thought: “My brother Prince Lakkhana, and my sister the Lady Sita, cannot restrain their grief to hear of our father’s death; but Rama-pandita neither wails nor weeps. I wonder what can the reason be that he grieves not? I will ask.” Then he repeated the second stanza, asking the question:

“Say by what power thou grievest not, Rama, when grief should be?

Though it is said thy sire is dead grief overwhelms not thee!”

Then Rama-pandita explained the reason of his feeling no grief by saying,

“When man can never keep a thing, though loudly he may cry,

Why should a wise intelligence torment itself thereby?

“The young in years, the older grown, the fool, and eke the wise,

For rich, for poor one end is sure: each man among them dies.

As sure as for the ripened fruit there comes the fear of fall,

So surely comes the fear of death to mortals one and all.

“Who in the morning light are seen by evening oft are gone,

And seen at evening time, is gone by morning many a one.

“If to a fool infatuate a blessing could accrue

When he torments himself with tears, the wise this same would do.

“By this tormenting of himself he waxes thin and pale;

This cannot bring the dead to life, and nothing tears avail.

“Even as a blazing house may be put out with water, so

The strong, the wise, the intelligent, who well the scriptures know,

Scatter their grief like cotton when the stormy winds do blow.

“One mortal dies—to kindred ties born is another straight:

Each creature’s bliss dependent is on ties associate.

“The strong man therefore, skilled in sacred text,

Keen-contemplating this world and the next,

Knowing their nature, not by any grief,

However great, in mind and heart is vext.

“So to my kindred I will give, them will I keep and feed,

All that remain I will maintain: such is the wise man’s deed.”

In these stanzas he explained the Impermanence of things.

When the company heard this discourse of Rama-pandita, illustrating the doctrine of Impermanence, they lost all their grief. Then Prince Bharata saluted Rama-pandita, begging him to receive the kingdom of Benares. “Brother,” said Rama, “take Lakkhana and Sita with you, and administer the kingdom yourselves.” “No, my lord, you take it.” “Brother, my father commanded me to receive the kingdom at the end of twelve years. If I go now, I shall not carry out his bidding. After three more years I will come.” “Who will carry on the government all that time?” “You do it.” “I will not.” “Then until I come, these slippers shall do it,” said Rama, and doffing his slippers of straw he gave them to his brother. So these three persons took the slippers, and bidding the wise man farewell, went to Benares with their great crowd of followers.

For three years the slippers ruled the kingdom. The courtiers placed these straw slippers upon the royal throne, when they judged a cause. If the cause were decided wrongly, the slippers beat upon each other, and at that sign it was examined again; when the decision was right, the slippers lay quiet.

When the three years were over, the wise man came out of the forest, and came to Benares, and entered the park. The princes hearing of his arrival proceeded with a great company to the park, and making Sita the queen consort, gave to them both the ceremonial sprinkling. The sprinkling thus performed, the Great Being standing in a magnificent chariot, and surrounded by a vast company, entered the city, making a solemn circuit right-wise; then mounting to the great terrace of his splendid palace Sucandaka, he reigned there in righteousness for sixteen thousand years, and then went to swell the hosts of heaven.

This stanza of Perfect Wisdom explains the upshot:

“Years sixty times a hundred, and ten thousand more, all told,

Reigned strong-armed Rama, on his neck the lucky triple fold.”

The Master having ended this discourse, declared the Truths, and identified the Birth: (now at the conclusion of the Truths, the land-owner was established in the fruit of the First Path:) “At that time the king Suddhodana was king Dasaratha, Mahamaya was the mother, Rahula’s mother was Sita, Ananda was Bharata, and I myself was Rama-pandita.”

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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