Ja 463 — Supparaka 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/ja463.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

“Men with razor pointed,” etc. This story the Master told while dwelling at Jetavana, about the Perfection of Knowledge. One day, we are told, at evening, the Brethren were awaiting the coming of the Tathagata to preach to them, and as they sat in the Hall of Truth, they were saying one to another, “Verily, Brother, the Master has great wisdom! wide wisdom! ready wisdom! swift wisdom! sharp wisdom! penetrating wisdom! His wisdom hits on the right plan for the right moment; wide as the world, like a mighty ocean unfathomable, as the heavens spread abroad: in all India no wise man exists who can match the Dasabala. As a billow that rises upon the great sea cannot reach the shore, or if it reaches the shore it breaks; so no man can reach the Dasabala in wisdom, or if he comes to the Master’s feet he is broken.” In these words they sang the praises of the Dasabala’s Perfect Wisdom. The Master came in, and asked, “What are you talking of, Brethren, as you sit here?” They told him. He said, “Not now only is the Tathagata full of wisdom. In former days, even when his knowledge was immature, he was wise. Blind though he was, he knew by the signs of the ocean that in the ocean such and such a jewel was hid.” Then he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time, a king named Bharu reigned in the kingdom of Bharu. There was a seaport town named Bharukaccha, or the Marsh of Bharu. At that time the Bodhisatta was born into the family of a master mariner there; amiable he was, and of complexion a golden brown. They gave him the name of Supparaka-kumara. He grew up with great distinction; and even when he was no more than sixteen years old, he had gained a complete mastery over the art of seamanship. Afterwards when his father died he became the head of the mariners and plied the mariner’s calling: wise he was, and full of intelligence; with him aboard, no ship came ever to harm.

In time it so happened that injured by the salt water both his eyes lost their sight. After which, head of the mariners though he was, he plied no more the mariner’s trade; but resolved to live in the king’s service, he approached the king to that end. And the king appointed him to the office of valuer and assessor. From that time he assessed the worth

of valuable elephants, valuable horses, choice pearls and gems.

One day an elephant was brought to the king, of the colour of a black rock, that he might be the state elephant. The king gave him a glance, and commanded that he be shown to the wise man. They led the creature before him. The man passed his hand over the elephant's body, and said, "This elephant is not fit to be the elephant of state. This has the qualities of an elephant that is deformed behind. When his dam brought him forth, she could not take him on her shoulder; so she let him fall on the ground, and thus he became deformed in his hind feet." They questioned those who had brought the elephant; and they replied that the wise man spoke the truth. When the king heard of this, he was pleased, and ordered eight pieces of money to be given him.

On another day, a horse was brought for the king's horse of state. This too was sent to the wise man. He felt it all over with his hand, and then said, "This is not fit to be the king's state charger. On the day this horse was born, his dam died, and so for lack of the mare's milk he did not grow properly." This saying of his was true also. When the king heard of it, he was pleased, and caused him to be presented with eight pieces more.

Another day, a chariot was brought, to be the king's state chariot. This too the king sent to him. He felt it over with his hand and said, "This chariot was made out of a hollow tree, and therefore it is not fit for the king." This saying of his was true like the others. The king was pleased again when he heard of it, and gave him other eight pieces.

Then again they brought him a precious rug of great price, which the king sent to the man as before. He felt it all over, and said, "There is one place here where a rat has bitten a hole." They examined and found the place, and then told the king. Pleased was the king, and ordered eight pieces to be given him again.

Now the man thought, "Only eight pieces of money, with such marvels as these to see! This is a barber's gift; this king must be a barber's brat. Why should I serve such a king? I will return to my own home." So back he went to the seaport of Bharukaccha, and there he lived.

It happened that some merchants had got ready a ship, and were casting about for a skipper. "That clever Supparaka," thought they, "is a wise and skilful man; with him aboard no ship comes to harm. Blind though he be, the wise Supparaka is the best." So to him they repaired, and asked him to be their skipper. "Blind am I, friends," he replied, "and how can I sail your ship?" "Blind you may be, master," said the merchants, "but you are the best." As they pressed him unceasingly, he at length consented: "As you put it to me," says he, "I will be your skipper." Then he went aboard their vessel.

They sailed in their ship upon the high seas. For seven days the ship sailed without mishap: then an unseasonable wind arose. Four months the vessel tost about on a primeval ocean, until she arrived at what is called the Khuramala Sea. Here fish with bodies like men, and sharp razor-like snouts, dive in and out of the water. The merchants observing these asked the Great Being what that sea was named, repeating the first stanza:

“Men with razor-pointed noses rising up and diving down!

Speak, Supparaka, and tell us by what name this sea is known?”

The Great Being, at this question, conning over in mind his mariner’s lore, answered by repeating the second stanza:

“Merchants come from Bharukaccha, seeking riches to purvey,

This is Khuramali ocean where your ship has gone astray.”

Now it happens that in this ocean diamonds are to be found. The Great Being reflected, that if he told them this was a diamond sea, they would sink the ship in their greed by collecting the diamonds. So he told them nothing; but having brought the ship to, he got a rope, and lowered a net as if to catch fish. With this he brought in a haul of diamonds, and stored them in the ship; then he caused the wares of little value to be cast overboard.

The ship past over this sea, and came to another called Aggimala. This sea sent forth a radiance like a blazing bonfire, like the sun at midday. The merchants questioned him in this stanza:

“Lo! an ocean like a bonfire blazing, like the sun, we see!

Speak, Supparaka, and tell us what the name of this may be?”

The Great Being replied to them in the stanza next following:

“Merchants come from Bharukaccha, seeking riches to purvey,

This is Aggimali ocean where your ship has gone astray.”

Now in this sea was abundance of gold. In the same manner as before, he got a haul of gold from it, and laid it aboard. Passing over this sea, the ship next came to an ocean called Dadhimala, gleaming like milk or curds. The merchants enquired its same in a stanza:

“Lo! an ocean white and milky, white as curds we seem to see!

Speak, Supparaka, and tell us what the name of this may be?”

The Great Being answered them by the stanza next following:

“Merchants come from Bharukaccha, seeking riches to purvey,

This is Dadhimali ocean where your ship has gone astray.”

In this sea there was abundance of silver. He procured it in the same way as before, and laid it aboard. Over this sea the ship sailed, and came to an ocean called Nilavannakusa-mala, which had the appearance of a stretch of dark kusa-grass, or a field of corn. The merchants enquired its name in a stanza:

“Lo! an ocean green and grassy, like young corn we seem to see!

Speak, Supparaka, and tell us what the name of this may be?”

He replied in the words of the stanza next following:

“Merchants come from Bharukaccha, seeking riches to purvey,

This is Kusamali ocean where your ship has gone astray.”

Now in this ocean was a great quantity of precious emeralds. As before, he made a haul of them, and stored them on board. Passing over this sea, the ship came to a sea called Nalamala, which had the aspect of an expanse of reeds or a grove of bamboos. The merchants asked its name in a stanza:

“Lo! an ocean like a reed-bed, like a bamboo-grove we see!

Speak, Supparaka, and tell us what the name of this may be?”

The Great Being replied by the following stanza:

“Merchants come from Bharukaccha, seeking riches to purvey,

This is Nalamali ocean where your ship has gone astray.”

Now this ocean was full of coral of the colour of bamboos. He made a haul of this also and got it aboard.

After passing the Nalamali Sea, the merchants came to a sea named Valabhamukha. Here the water is sucked away and rises on every side; and the water thus sucked away on all sides rises in sheer precipices leaving what looks like a great pit. A wave rises on one side like a wall: a terrific roar is heard, which seems as it would burst the ear and break the heart. On sight of this the merchants were terrified, and asked its name in a stanza:

“Hear the awful sound terrific of a huge unearthly sea!

Lo a pit, and to the waters in a steep declivity!

Speak, Supparaka, and tell us what the name of this may be?”

The Bodhisatta replied in this following stanza, “Merchants,” etc., ending—“This Valabhamukhi ocean,” etc.

He went on, “Friends, once a ship has got into the Valabhamukha Sea there is no returning. If this ship gets there, she will sink and go to destruction.” Now there were seven hundred souls aboard this ship, and they were in fear of death; with one voice they uttered a very bitter cry, like the cry of those who are burning in the lowest hell. The Great Being thought, “Except me, no other can save those; I will save them by an Act of Truth.” Then he said aloud, “Friends, bathe me speedily in scented water, and put new garments upon me, prepare a full bowl, and set me in front of the ship.” They quickly did so. The Great Being took the full bowl in both hands, and standing in the front of the ship, performed an Act of Truth, repeating the final stanza:

“Since I can myself remember, since intelligence first grew,

Not one life of living creature have I taken, that I knew:

May this ship return to safety if my solemn words are true!”

Four months the vessel had been voyaging in far distant regions; and now as though endued with supernatural power, it returned in one single day to the seaport town of Bharukaccha, and even upon the dry land it went, till it rested before the mariner’s door, having sprung over a space of eleven hundred cubits. The Great Being divided amongst the merchants all the gold and silver, jewels, coral, and diamonds, saying, “This treasure is enough for you: voyage on the sea no more.” Then he discoursed to them; and after giving gifts and doing good his life long, he went to swell the hosts of heaven.

The Master, having ended this discourse, said, “Then, Brethren, the Tathagata was most wise in former days, as he is now,” and identified the Birth: “At that time the Buddha’s company were the company (of merchants), and I myself was the wise Supparaka.”

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.