Ja 466 — Samudda-Vanija 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/ja466.html

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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

“Others sow,” etc.—This story the Master told while dwelling at Jetavana, about Devadatta, when he had gone down into Hell, taking with him five hundred families.

Now Devadatta, when the Chief Disciples had gone away, taking his followers with them, being unable to swallow his pain, spat up hot blood from his mouth, and departed; then tormented by great agony, as he remembered the virtues of the Tathagata, he said to himself, “I for nine months have thought evil of the Tathagata, but in the Master’s heart is never a sinful thought for me; in the eighty chief elders is no malice towards me; by my own deeds that I have done I am become all forlorn, and I am renounced by the Master, by the great Elders, by Elder Rahula chief of my family, and by all the royal clans of the Sakyas. I will go to the Master, and reconcile myself with him.” So beckoning to his followers, he caused himself to be carried in a litter, and travelling always by night made his way to the city of Kosala.

Ananda the Elder told the Master, saying, “Devadatta is coming, they say, to make his peace with you.”—“Ananda, Devadatta shall not see me.” Again when he had arrived at the city of Savatthi, the Elder told it to the Master; and the Blessed One replied as before. When he was at the gate of Jetavana, and moving towards the Jetavana lake, his sin came to a head: a fever arose in his body, and desiring to bathe and drink, he commanded them to let him out of the litter, that he might drink. No sooner had he alighted, and stood upon the ground, than before he could refresh himself the great earth gaped, a flame arose from the nethermost hell of Avici and surrounded him. Then he knew that his deeds of sin had come to a head, and remembering the virtues of the Tathagata, he repeated this stanza :

“With these my bones to that supremest Being,

Marked with an hundred lucky marks, all-seeing,

God, more than God, who man's bull-spirit tames,

With all my soul to Buddha I am fleeing!"

But in the very act of taking refuge, he was doomed to the Hell Avici. And there were five hundred families of his attendants, which families following him reviled the Dasabala, and abused him, and in the Avici hell were born, they also. Thus he went to Avici, taking with him five hundred families.

So one day they were talking in the Hall of Truth: "Brother, the sinful Devadatta, through greed of gain, set his anger causelessly against the Supreme Buddha, and with no regard for the terrors of the future, with five hundred families was doomed to hell." The Master entering asked of what they were speaking: they told him. Said he, "Brethren, Devadatta being greedy of gain and honour had no eye for the terrors of the future; and in former times, as now, regarding not the terrors of the future, he with his followers through greed of present happiness came to utter ruin." So saying, he told them a story of the past.

Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta was king of Benares, there stood near Benares a great town of carpenters, containing a thousand families. The carpenters from this town used to profess that they would make a bed, or a chair, or a house, and after receiving a large advance from men's hands, they proved able to make nothing whatever. The people used to upbraid every carpenter they met with, and interfered with them. So those debtors were so much harassed that they could live there no longer. "Let us go into some foreign land," said they, "and find some place or other to dwell in;" so to the forest they went. They cut down trees, they built a mighty ship, and launched her in the river, and took her away from that town, and at a distance of some three-quarters of a league they laid her up. Then in the middle of the night they returned to the town to fetch their families, whom they conveyed on board ship, and then proceeded in due course to the ocean. There they sailed at the wind's will, until they reached an island that lay in the midst of the sea. Now in that island grew wild all manner of plants and wild fruit-trees, rice, sugar-cane, banana, mango, rose-apple, jack, cocoanut, and what not. There was another man who had been shipwrecked and had taken possession of that island before them, and lived therein, eating the rice and enjoying the sugar-cane and all the rest, by which he had grown stout and sturdy; naked he went, and his hair and beard were grown long. The carpenters thought, "If yonder island is haunted of demons, we shall all perish; so we will explore it." Then seven brave men and strong, arming them with the five kinds of weapons, disembarked and explored that island.

At that moment the castaway had just broken his fast, and drunk of the juice of the sugar-cane, and in high contentment was lying on his back in a lovely spot, cool in the shade on some sand which glistered like silver plate; and he was thinking, "No such happiness as this have they who dwell in India, that plough and sow; better to me is this island than India!" He sang for joy, and was at the height of bliss.

The Master, to explain how this castaway sang for joy and bliss, repeated the first stanza:

“Others sow and others plough,

Living by the sweat o’ the brow;

In my realm they have no share:

India? this is better far!”

The scouts who were exploring the isle caught the sound of his singing, and said, “It seems the voice of man that we hear; let us make acquaintance with him.” Following the sound, they came upon the man, but his aspect horrified them. “’Tis a goblin!” they cried, and put arrow to bow. When the man saw them, he was in fear of being wounded, so he called out—“I am no goblin, sirs, but a man: spare my life!”—“What!” said they, “do men go all naked and defenceless like you?” and asked him again and again, only to receive the same answer, that he was a man. At last they approached him, and all began to talk pleasantly together, and the new-comers asked how he came thither. The other told them the truth of it. “As a reward for your good deeds you have come hither,” said he, “this is a first-rate island. No need here to work with your hands for a living; of rice and sugar-cane, and all the rest, there is no end here, and all growing wild; you may live here without anxiety.” “Is there nothing else,” they asked, “to hinder our living here?” “No fear is there but this: the isle is haunted by demons, and the demons would be incensed to see the excretions of your bodies; so when you would relieve yourselves, dig a hole in the sand and hide it there. That is the only danger; there is no other; only always be careful on this point.”

Then they took up their abode in the place.

But among these thousand families there were two master workmen, one at the head of each five hundred of them; and one of these was foolish and greedy of the best food, the other wise and not bent on getting the best of everything.

In course of time as they continued to dwell there, all grew stout and sturdy. Then they thought, “We have not been merry men this long time : we will make some toddy from the juice of the sugar-cane.” So they caused the strong drink to be made, and being drunken, sang, danced, sported, then in thoughtlessness relieved themselves here, there, and everywhere without hiding it, so that they made the island foul and disgusting. The deities were incensed because these men made their playing-place all foul. “Shall we bring the sea over it,” they deliberated, “and cleanse the island?—This is the dark fortnight: now our gathering is broken up. Well, on the fifteenth day from now, at the first of the full moon, at the time of the moon’s rising, we will bring up the sea and make an end of them all.” Thus they fixed the day. At this a righteous deity who was one of them thought, “I would not that these should perish before my eyes.” So in his compassion, at the time when the men were sitting at their doors in pleasant converse, after their evening meal, he made the whole island one blaze of light, and adorned in all splendour stayed poised in the air towards the north, and spoke to them thus: “O ye carpenters! the deities are wroth with you. Dwell no longer in this place, for in half a month from this time, the deities will bring up the sea, and destroy you one and all. Therefore flee from this place.” And he repeated

the second stanza:

“In thrice five days the moon will rise to view:

Then from the sea a mighty flood is due

This mighty island to o’erwhelm: then haste,

Elsewhere take shelter, that it hurt not you.”

With this advice, he returned to his own place. He gone, another comrade of his, a cruel god, thought, “Perhaps they will follow his advice and escape; I will prevent their going, and bring them all to utter destruction.” So adorned in divine splendour, he made a great blaze of light over the whole place, and approaching them, remained poised in the air towards the south, as he asked, “Has there been a god here?” “There has,” was the reply. “What did he tell you?” They answered, “Thus and thus, my lord.” He then said, “This god does not wish you to live here, and in anger speaks. Go not elsewhither, but stay even here.” And with these words, he repeated two stanzas:

“To me by many signs it is made clear,

That mighty ocean flood of which you hear

Shall never this great island overwhelm:

Then take your pleasure, grieve not, never fear.

“Here you have lit upon a wide abode,

Full of all things to eat, of drink and food;

I see no danger for you: come, enjoy

Unto all generations this your good.”

Having thus in these two stanzas offered to relieve their anxiety, he departed. When he was gone, the foolish carpenter lifted up his voice, and paying no heed to the saying of the righteous deity, he cried, “Let your honours listen to me!” and addressed all the carpenters in the fifth stanza:

“That god, who from the southern quarter clear

Cries out, All safe! from him the truth we hear;

Fear or fear not, the northern knows no whit:

Why grieve, then? take your pleasure—never fear!”

On hearing him, the five hundred carpenters who were greedy of good things inclined to the counsel of the foolish carpenter. But then the wise carpenter refused to hearken to his saying, and addressing the carpenters repeated four stanzas:

“While these two goblins gainst each other cry,

One calling fear, and one security,

Come hear my rede, lest soon and out of hand

Ye all together perish utterly.

“Let us join all to build a mighty bark,

A vessel stout, and place within this ark

All fittings: if this southern spoke the truth,

And the other said but folly, off the mark

“This vessel for us good at need shall be;

Nor will we leave this isle incontinent;

But if the northern god spake truthfully,

The southern did but foolishness present—

Then in the ship we all embark together,

And where our safety lies, all hie us thither.

“Take not for best or worst what first you hear;

But whoso lets all pass within the ear,

And then deliberating takes the mean,

That man to safest harbourage will steer.”

After this, he again said: “Come now, let us follow the words of both the deities. Let us build a ship, and then if the words of the first be true, into that ship we will climb and depart; but if the words of the other be true, we will put the ship out of the way, and dwell here.” When he had thus spoken, said the foolish carpenter: “Go to! you see a crocodile in a teacup! you are too-too slow! The first god spake in anger against us, the second in affection. If we leave this choicest of isles, whither shall we go? But if you needs must go,

take your tail with you, and make your ship: we want no ship, we!”

The wise man with those that followed him, built a ship, and put all the fittings aboard, and he and the whole company stood in the ship. Then on the day of the full moon, at the time of moon-rising, up front the ocean a wave arose, and knee-deep it swept over the whole island. The wise man, when he observed the rising of the wave, cast loose the ship. Those of the foolish carpenter’s party, five hundred families they were, sat still, saying to one another, “A wave has arisen, to sweep over the island, but it will be no deeper.” Then the ocean-wave rose waist-deep, man-deep, deep as a palm-tree, as seven palm-trees, and over the whole island it rolled. The wise man, fertile in resource, not snared by greed of good things, departed in safety; but the foolish carpenter, greedy of good things, not regarding the fear of the future, with five hundred families was destroyed.

The other three stanzas, full of instruction, illustrating this matter, are stanzas of the Perfect Wisdom:

As through mid-ocean, by the deeds they did,

The traders scaped away in happiness:

So wise men, comprehending what lies hid

Within the future, will no jot transgress.

“Fools in their folly, eaten up with greed

Who future dangers do not comprehend,

Sink overwhelmed, in face of present need,

As these in middest-ocean found their end.

“Accomplish then the deed before the need,

Let not lack hurt me of the needful thing.

Who timely do the necessary deed

Come time, come never into suffering.”

When the Master had ended this discourse, he said: “Not now for the first time, Brethren, but formerly also, has Devadatta been ensnared by pleasures of the present, and without a look to the future, has come to destruction with all his companions.” So saying, he identified the Birth: “At that time, Devadatta was the foolish carpenter, Kokalika was the unrighteous deity that stood in the southern region, Sariputta was the deity who stood in the northern part, and I was myself the wise carpenter.”

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