Ja 474 — Amba 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/ja474.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

“Young student, when,” etc. This story the Master told while dwelling in Jetavana, about Devadatta. Devadatta repudiated his teacher, saying, “I will be Buddha myself, and Gotama the ascetic is no teacher or monitor of mine!” So, aroused from his mystic meditation, he made a breach in the Order. Then step by step he proceeded to Savatthi, and outside Jetavana, the earth yawned, and he went down into the hell Avici.

Then they were all talking of it in the Hall of Truth—“Brother, Devadatta deserted his Teacher, and came to dire destruction, being born to another life in the deep hell Avici!” The Master, entering, asked what they spoke of, and they told him. Said he,—“Not now only, but in former days, as now, Devadatta deserted his teacher, and came to dire destruction.” So saying, he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta was King of Benares, his chaplain’s family was destroyed by malarial fever. One son only broke through the wall and escaped. He came to Takkasila, and under a world-renowned teacher learnt all the arts and accomplishments. Then he bade his teacher farewell, and departed, with the intent to travel in different regions; and on his travels he arrived at a frontier village. Near to this was a great village of low-caste Candalas. Then the Bodhisatta abode in this village, a learned sage. A charm he knew which could make fruit to be gathered out of due season. Early of a morning he would take his carrying pole, forth from that village he would go, until he reached a mango tree which grew in the forest; and standing seven foot off, he would recite that charm, and throw a handful of water so as to strike on that tree. In a twinkling down fall the sere leaves, sprout forth the new, flowers blow and flowers fall, the mango fruits swell out: but one moment—they are ripe, they are sweet and luscious, they grow like fruit divine, they drop from the tree! The Great Being chooses and eats such as he will, then fills the baskets hung from his pole, goes home and sells the fruit, and so finds a living for wife and child.

Now the young brahmin saw the Great Being offer ripe mangoes for sale out of season. “Without doubt,” thought he, “it must be by virtue of some charm that these are grown. This man can teach me a charm which has no price.” He watched to see the manner in which the Great Being procured his fruit, and found it out exactly. Then he went to the Great Being’s house at the time when he was not yet returned from the forest, and making as though he knew nothing, asked the wise man’s wife, “Where is the Teacher?” Quoth she, “Gone to the woods.” He stood waiting until he saw him come, then went to him, and taking the pole and baskets from him, carried them into the house and there set them. The Great Being looked at him, and said to his wife, “Lady, this youth has come to get the charm; but no charm will stay with him, for no good man is he.” But the youth was thinking, “I will get the charm by being my teacher’s servant;” and so from that time he did all that was to be done in the house: brought wood, pounded the rice, did the cooking, brought all that was needed for washing the face, washed the feet.

One day when the Great Being said to him, “My son, bring me a stool to support my feet,” the youth, seeing no other way, kept the Great Teacher’s feet on his own thigh all night. When at a later season the Great Being’s wife brought forth a son, he did all the service that has to be done at a childbirth. The wife said one day to the Great Being: “Husband, this lad, well-born though he is, for the charm’s sake performs menial service for us. Let him have the charm, whether it stays with him or no.” To this he agreed. He taught him the charm, and spoke after this fashion: “My son, ’Tis a priceless charm; and you will get great gain and honour thereby. But when the king, or his great minister, shall ask you who was your teacher, do not conceal my name; for if you are ashamed that a low-caste man taught you the charm, and say your teacher was a great magnate of the brahmins, you will have no fruit of the charm.” “Why should I hide your name?” quoth the lad. “Whenever I am asked, I shall say it is you.” Then he saluted his teacher, and from the low-caste village he departed, pondering on the charm, and in due time came to Benares. There he sold mangoes, and gained much wealth.

Now on a day the keeper of the park presented to the king a mango which he had bought from him. The king, having eaten it, asked whence he procured so fine a fruit. “My lord,” was the answer, “there is a young man who brings mangoes out of season, and sells them: from him I procured it.” “Tell him,” says the king,” from henceforth to bring the mangoes hither to me.” This the man did; and from that time the young man took his mangoes to the king’s household. The king, inviting him to enter his service, he became a servant of the king; and gaining great wealth, by degrees he grew into the king’s confidence.

One day the king asked him, and said—“Young man, where do you get these mangoes out of season, so sweet and fragrant and of fine colour? Does some serpent or garula give them to you, or a god, or is this the power of magic?” “No one gives them to me, O mighty king!” replied the young man, “but I have a priceless charm, and this is the power of the charm.” “Well, what do you say to showing me the power of the charm one of these days?” “By all means, my lord, and so I will,” quoth he. Next day the king went with him into the park, and asked to be shown this charm. The young man was willing, and approaching a mango tree, stood at a distance of seven foot from it, and repeated the charm, throwing water against the tree. On the instant the mango tree had fruit in the manner above

described: a shower of mangoes fell, a very storm; the company showed great delight, waving their kerchiefs; the king ate of the fruit, and gave him a great reward, and said, “Young man, who taught you this charm so marvellous?” Now thought the young man, If I say a low-caste candala taught me, I shall be put to shame, and they will flout at me; I know the charm by heart, and now I can never lose it; well, I will say it was a world-renowned teacher. So he lied, and said, “I learnt it at Takkasila, from a teacher renowned the wide world over.” As he said the words, denying his teacher, that very instant the charm was gone. But the king, greatly pleased, returned with him into the city.

On another day the king desired mangoes to eat; and going into the park, and taking his seat upon a stone bench, which was used on state occasions, he bade the youth get him mangoes. The youth, willing enough, went up to a mango tree, and standing at a distance of seven foot from the tree, set about repeating the charm; but the charm would not come. Then he knew that he had lost it, and stood there ashamed. But the king thought, “Formerly this fellow gave me mangoes even in the midst of a crowd, and like a heavy shower the fruit rained down. Now there he stands like a stock: what can the reason be?” Which he enquired by repeating the first stanza:

“Young student, when I asked it you of late,

You brought me mango fruit both small and great:

Now no fruit, brahmin, on the tree appears,

Though the same charm you still reiterate!”

When he heard this, the young man thought to himself, if he should say this day no fruit was to be had, the king would be wroth; wherefore he thought to deceive him with a lie, and repeated the second stanza:

“The hour and moment suit not: so wait I

Fit junction of the planets in the sky.

The due conjunction and the moment come,

Then will I bring you mangoes plenteously.”

“What is this?” the king wondered. “The fellow said nothing of planetary conjunctions before!” To resolve which questions, he repeated two stanzas:

“You said no word of times and seasons, nor

Of planetary junctions heretofore:

But mangoes, fragrant, delicate in taste,

Of colour fine, you brought in plenteous store.

“Aforetime, brahmin, you produced so well

Fruit on the tree by muttering of your spell:

To-day you cannot, mutter as you may.

What means this conduct, I would have you tell?”

Hearing this, the youth thought, “There is no deceiving the king with lies. If, when the truth is told, he punishes me, let him punish me: but the truth I will tell.” Then he recited two stanzas:

“A low-caste man my teacher was, who taught

Duly and well the charm, and how it wrought:

Saying, “If you are asked my name and birth,

Hide nothing, or the charm will come to nought.”

“Asked by the Lord of Men, though well I knew,

Yet in deceit I said what was not true;

“A brahmin’s spells,” I lying said; and now,

Charm lost, my folly bitterly I rue.”

This heard, the king thought within himself, “The sinful man to take no care of such a treasure! When one has a treasure so priceless, what has birth to do with it?” And in anger he repeated the following stanzas:

“Nimb, castor oil, or plassey tree, whatever be the tree

Where he who seeks finds honeycombs, ’Tis best of trees, thinks he.

“Be it Khattiya, Brahmin, Vessa, he from whom a man learns right—

Sudda, Candala, Pukkusa—seems chiefest in his sight.”

“Punish the worthless churl, or even slay,

Hence hale him by the throat without delay,

Who having gained a treasure with great toil,

Throws it with overweening pride away!”

The king’s men so did, saying, “Go back to your teacher, and win his forgiveness; then, if you can learn the charm once more, you may come hither again, but if not, never more may you set eyes on this country.” Thus they banished him.

The man was all forlorn. “There is no refuge for me,” he thought, “except my teacher. To him I will go, and win his pardon, and learn the charm again.” So lamenting he went on his way to that village. The Great Being perceived him coming, and pointed him out to his wife, saying, “See, lady, there comes that scoundrel again, with his charm lost and gone!” The man approached the Great Being, and greeted him, and sat on one side. “Why are you here?” asked the other. “O my teacher!” the man said, “I uttered a lie, and denied my teacher, and I am utterly ruined and undone!” Then he recited his transgression in a stanza, asking again for the charms:

“Oft he who thinks the level ground is lying at his foot,

Falls in a pool, pit, precipice, trips on a rotten root;

Another treads what seems a cord, a jet-black snake to find;

Another steps into the fire because his eyes are blind:

So I have sinned, and lost my spell; but you, O teacher wise,

Forgive! and let me once again find favour in your eyes!”

Then his teacher replied, “What say you, my son? Give but a sign to the blind, he goes me clear of pools and what not; but I told it to you once, and what do you want here now?” Then he repeated the following stanzas:

“To you in right due manner I did tell,

You in due manner rightly learnt the spell,

Full willingly its nature I explained:

Ne’er had it left you, had you acted well.

“Who with much toil, O fool! hath learnt a spell

Full hard for those who now in this world dwell,

Then, foolish one! a living gained at last,

Throws all away, because he lies will tell,

“To such a fool, unwise, of lying fain,

Ungrateful, who can not himself restrain,—

Spells, quotha! mighty spells we give not him:

Go hence away, and ask me not again!”

Thus dismissed by his teacher, the man thought, “What is life to me?” and plunging into the woods, died forlorn.

The Master having made an end of this discourse, said, “Not now only, Brother, has Devadatta denied his teacher, and come to dire destruction;” and so saying, he identified the Birth: “At that time Devadatta was the ungrateful man, Ananda was the king, and I was the low caste man.”

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.