Ja 480 — Akitta Jātaka

English translation by W. H. D. Rouse.

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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

“Sakka, the lord of beings,” etc.—This story the Master told while dwelling in Jetavana, about a generous donor who lived in Savatthi. This man, so it is said, invited the Master, and for seven days gave many gifts to the company which followed with him; on the last day he presented the company of the Saints with all things necessary for them. Then said the Master, rendering thanks to him, “Lay Brother, great is thy generosity: a thing most difficult thou hast done. This custom of giving is the custom of wise men of old. Gifts must be given, be ye in the world, be ye in retirement from the world; the wise men of old, even when they had left the world and dwelt in the woodland, when they had to eat but Kara leaves sprinkled with water, without salt or spice , yet gave to all beggars that passed by to serve their need, and themselves lived on their own joy and blessedness.” The man answered, “Sir, this giving of all necessary things to the company is clear enough, but what you say is not clear. Will you not explain it to us?” Then the Master at his request told a story of the past.

Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta was king in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born in the family of a Brahmin magnate, whose fortune amounted to eighty crores. They named him Akitti. When the time came he was able to walk, a sister was born, and they gave her the name Yasavati. The Great Being proceeded at the age of sixteen years to Benares, where he completed his education and then returned. After that his mother and father died. He had performed all that behoves for the spirits of the dead, and was inspecting his treasure : “So and so,” ran the catalogue, “laid up so much and died, such another so much.” Hearing this he was disturbed in his mind, and thought, “This treasure is here for all to see, but they that gathered it are no more seen: they have all gone and left the treasure behind them, but when I pass away I will take it with me.” So sending for his sister, he said, “Take charge of this treasure.” “What is your own intent?” she asked. He replied, “To become an ascetic.” “Dear one,” she answered, “I will not take on my head that which you have spewed out of your mouth; I will have none of it, but I also will become an ascetic.” Then having asked leave of the king, he caused the drum to beat all about the city, and proclamation to

be made: “Oyez! Let all those who wish for money repair to the wise man’s house!” For seven days he distributed great store of alms, and yet the treasure did not come to an end. Then he thought to himself, “The elements of my being waste away, and what do I want with this treasure-game? Let those who desire it, take.” Then he opened wide the doors of the house, saying, “‘Tis a gift; let the people take it.” So leaving the house with all its gold and precious metal, with his kinsfolk weeping around, he and his sister departed. And the gate of Benares by which they went was called Akitti’s Gate, and the landing-stage by which they went down to the river, this also was called the Quay of Akitti.

Three leagues he traversed, and there in a pleasant spot made a hut of leaves and branches, and with his sister lived in it as an ascetic . After the time of his retiring from the world, many others also did the same, villagers, townsfolk, citizens of the royal city; great was the company of them, great the gifts and the honour they received; it was like to the arising of a Buddha. Then the Great Being thought within himself, “Here is great honour and store of alms, here is a great company, yea passing great, but I ought to dwell alone.” So at a time when no man expected, without even warning his sister, alone he departed, and by and by came to the kingdom Damila, where dwelling in a park over against Kavirapattana, he cultivated a mystic ecstasy and the supernatural Faculties. There also he received much honour and great store of gifts. This liked him not, and he forsook it, and passing through the air descended at the isle of Kara, which is over against the island of Naga. At that time, Karadipa was named Ahidipa, the Isle of Snakes. There he built him an hermitage beside a great kara-tree, and dwelt in it. But that he dwelt there no man knew.

Now his sister went searching for her brother, and in due course came to the kingdom of Damila, saw him not, yet dwelt in the very place where he dwelt, but could not induce the mystic ecstasy. The Great Being was so contented that he went no whither, but at the time of fruit fed upon the fruit of that tree, and at time of putting forth of leaves fed on its leaves sprinkled with water. By the fire of his virtue Sakka’s marble throne became hot. “Who would bring me down from my place?” thought Sakka, and considering, he beheld the wise man. “Why is it,” thought he, “yon ascetic guards his virtue? Is it that he aspires to Sakka-hood, or for some other cause? I will test him. The man lives in misery, eats kara-leaves sprinkled with water: if he desires to become Sakka, he will give me his own sodden leaves; but if not, then he will not give them.” Then in the guise of a brahmin he went to the Bodhisatta.

The Bodhisatta sat at the door of his leaf-hut, having sodden the leaves and laid them down: “When they are cool,” thought he, “I will eat them.” At that moment Sakka stood before him, craving an alms. When the Great Being beheld him, he was glad at heart; “A blessing for me,” he thought, “I see a beggar; this day I shall attain the desire of my heart , and I shall give an alms.” When the food was ready, he took it in his bowl at once, and advancing towards Sakka, said to him, “This is my gift: be it the means of my gaining omniscience!” Then without leaving any for himself, he laid the food in the other’s bowl. The brahmin took it, and moving a short way off disappeared. But the Great Being, having given his gift, cooked no more again, but sat still in joy and blessedness. Next day he cooked again, and sat as before at the entering in of the hut. Again Sakka came in the semblance of a brahmin, and again the Great Being gave him the meal, and continued in

joy and blessedness. On the third day again he gave as before, saying, “See what a blessing for me! A few kara-leaves have begotten great merit for me.” Thus in heartfelt joy, weak as he was for want of food for three days, he came out of his hut at noontide and sat in the door, reflecting upon the gift which he had given. And Sakka thought: “This brahmin fasting for three days, weak as he is, yet gives to me, and takes joy in his giving. There is no other meaning in his thoughts; I do not understand what it is he desires and why he gives these gifts, so I must ask him, and find out his meaning, and learn the cause of his giving.” Accordingly he waited till past midday, and in great glory and magnificence came to the Great Being blazing like the young sun; and standing before him, put to him the question: “Ho, ascetic! why do you practise the ascetic life in this forest, surrounded by the salt sea, with hot winds beating upon you?”

To make clear this matter, the Master repeated the first stanza:

“Sakka, the lord of beings, saw Akitti honoured:

“Why, O great Brahmin, do you rest here in the heat?” he said.”

When the Great Being heard this, and perceived that it was Sakka, he answered and said to him, “Those Attainments I do not crave; but craving for omniscience I live the life of a recluse.” To make this clear, he recited the second stanza:

“Re-birth, the body’s breaking up, death, error—all is pain:

Therefore, O Sakka Vasava! I here in peace remain.”

Hearing these words, Sakka was pleased in his heart, and thought “He is dissatisfied with all kinds of being, and for Nirvana’s sake dwells in the forest. I will offer him a boon.” Then he invited him to choose a boon in the words of the third stanza:

“Fair spoken, Kassapa, well put, most excellently said:

Choose now a boon—as bids your heart, so let the choice be made.”

The Great Being repeated the fourth stanza, choosing his boon:

“Sakka, the lord of beings all, has offered me a boon,

Son, wife or treasure, grain in store, content not tho’ possessed:

I pray no lust for such as these may harbour in my breast.”

Then Sakka, much pleased, offered yet other boons, and the Great Being accepted them, each in turn repeating a stanza as follows:

“Fair spoken, Kassapa, well put, most excellently said:

Choose now a boon—as bids your heart, so let the choice be made."

"Sakka, the lord of beings all, has offered me a boon.

Lands, goods, and gold, slaves, horse, and kine, grow old and pass away:

May I be not like them, nor be this fault in me, I pray."

"Fair spoken, "etc.

"Sakka, the lord of all the world, has offered me a boon.

May I not see or hear a fool, nor no such dwell with me,

Nor hold no converse with a fool, nor like his company."

"What has a fool e'er done to you, O Kassapa, declare!

Come tell me why fools' company is more than you can bear?"

"The fool does wickedly, binds loads on him that none should bear,

Ill-doing is his good, and he is wroth when spoken fair,

Knows not right conduct; this is why I would have no fool there."

"Fair spoken, Kassapa," etc.

"Sakka, the lord of beings all, has offered me a boon.

Be it mine the wise to see and hear, and may he dwell with me,

May I hold converse with the wise, and love his company."

"What has the wise man done to you, O Kassapa, declare!

Why do you wish that where you are, the wise man should be there?

The wise does well, no burden binds on him that none should bear,

Well-doing is his good, nor is he wroth when spoken fair,

Knows well right conduct; this is why 'Tis well he should be there."

"Fair spoken, Kassapa," etc.

Sakka, the lord of beings all, has offered me a boon.

May I be free from lusts, and when the sun begins to shine

May holy mendicants appear, and grant me food divine;

“May this not dwindle as I give, nor I repent the deed,

But be my heart in giving glad: this choose I for my meed.”

“Fair spoken, Kassapa, well put, most excellently said:

Choose now a boon—as bids your heart, so let the choice be made.”

“Sakka, the lord of beings all, to me a boon he gave—

O Sakka, visit me no more: this boon is all I crave.”

“But many men and women too of those who live aright

Desire to see me: can there be a danger in the sight?”

“Such is thy aspect all divine, such glory and delight,

This seen, I may forget my vows: this danger has the sight.”

“Well, Sir,” said Sakka, “I will never visit you more”; and so saluting him, and craving his pardon, Sakka departed. The Great Being then dwelt all his life long, cultivating the Excellences, and was born again in the world of Brahma.

The Master, having completed this discourse, identified the Birth: “At that time Anuruddha was Sakka, and I myself was the wise Akitti.”

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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