Ja 482 — Ruru 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/ja482.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

“I bring you tidings,” etc. This story the Master told while dwelling in the Bamboo-grove, about Devadatta. One might say to him, “The Master is most useful to you, friend Devadatta. You received holy orders from the Tathagata, from him you learnt the Three Baskets, you obtained gifts and honour.” When such things were said, it is credibly reported he would reply, “No, friend; the Master has done me no good, not so much as a blade of grass is worth. Of myself I received holy orders, myself I learned the Three Baskets, by myself I gained gifts and honour.” In the Hall of Truth the Brethren talked of all this: “Ungrateful is Devadatta, my friend, and forgets a kindness done.” The Master came in, and would know what they talked of sitting there. They told him. Said he, “It is not now the first time, Brethren, that Devadatta is ungrateful, but ungrateful he was before; and in days long gone by his life was saved by me, yet he knew not the greatness of my merit.” So saying, he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta was king of Benares, a great merchant who possessed a fortune of eighty crores, had a son born to him; and he gave him the name of Maha-dhanaka, or Moneyman. But never a thing he taught him; for said he, “My son will find study a weariness of the flesh.” Beyond singing and dancing, eating and feasting, the lad knew nothing. When he came of age, his parents provided him with a wife meet for him, and afterwards died. After their death, the youth surrounded by profligates, drunkards, and dicers, spent all his substance with all manner of waste and profusion. Then he borrowed money, and could not repay it, and was dunned by his creditors. At last he thought, “What is my life to me? In this one existence I am as it were already changed into another being; to die is better.” Whereupon he said to his creditors, “Bring your bills, and come hither. I have a family treasure laid up and buried on the bank of the Ganges, and you shall have that.” They went along with him. He made as though he were pointing out here and there the hiding place of his treasure (but all the while he intended to fall into the river and drown), and finally ran and threw himself into the Ganges. As the torrent bore him away, he cried aloud with a pitiful cry.

Now at that time the Great Being had been born as a Deer, and having abandoned the herd, was dwelling near a bend of the river all by himself, in a clump of sal trees mixt with fair-flowering mangoes: the skin of his body was of the colour of a gold plate well burnished, forefeet and hindfeet seemed as it were covered with lac, his tail like the tail of a wild ox, the horns of him were as spirals of silver, eyes had he like bright polished gems, when he turned his mouth in any direction it seemed like a ball of red cloth. About midnight he heard this sad outcry, and thought, "I hear the voice of a man. While I live let him not die! I will save his life for him." Arising from off his resting place in the bush, he went down to the river bank, and called out in a comfortable voice, "Ho man! have no fear, I will save you alive." Then he cleft the current, and swam to him, and placed him upon his back, and bore him to the bank and to his own dwelling-place; where for two or three days he fed him with wild fruits After this he said to the man, "O man, I will now convey you out of this wood, and set you in the road to Benares, and you shall go in peace. But I pray you, be not led away by greed of gain to tell the king or some great man, that in such a place is a golden deer to be found." The man promised to observe his words; and the Great Being, having received his promise, took him upon his back and carried him to the road to Benares, and went his way.

On the day when he reached Benares, the Queen Consort, whose name was Khema, saw at morning in a dream how a deer of golden colour preached the Law to her; and she thought, "If there were no such creature as this, I should not have seen him in my dream. Surely there must be such a one; I will announce it to the king."

Then she went to the king, and said, "Great king! I am anxious to hear the discourse of a golden deer. If I may, I shall live, but if not there is no living for me." The king comforted her, saying, "If such a creature exists in the world of men, you shall have it." Then he sent for the brahmins, and put the question—"Are there such things as gold-coloured deer?" "Yes, there are, my lord." The king laid upon the back of an elephant richly caparisoned a purse of a thousand pieces of money enclosed within a casket of gold: whoso should bring word of a golden deer, the king was willing to give him the purse with a thousand pieces, the casket of gold, and that elephant withal or a better. He caused a stanza to be engraved upon a tablet of gold, and delivered this to one of his court, bidding him cry the stanza in his name among all the townsfolk. Then he recited that stanza which comes first in this Birth:

"Who brings me tidings of that deer, choicest of all the breed?

Fair women and a village choice who wins him for his meed?"

The courtier took the golden plate, and caused it to be proclaimed throughout all the city. Just then this young merchant's son was entering Benares; and on hearing the proclamation, he approached the courtier, and said, "I can bring the king news of such a deer; take me into his presence." The courtier dismounted from his elephant, and led him before the king, saying, "This man, my lord, says he can tell you tidings of the deer." Quoth the king, "Is this true, man?" He answered, "It is true, O great king! you shall give me that honour." And he recited the second stanza:

“I bring you tidings of that deer, choicest of all the breed:

Fair women and a village choice then give me for my meed.”

The king was glad when he heard these words of the treacherous friend. “Come now,” said he, “where is this deer to be found?” “In such a place, my lord,” he replied, and declared the way they should go. With a great following he made the traitor guide him to the place, and then he said, “Order the army to halt.” When the army was brought to a halt, he went on, pointing with his hand, “There is the golden deer, in that place yonder:” and he repeated the third stanza:

“Within yon clump of flowering sal and mango, where the ground

Is all as red as cochineal, this deer is to be found.”

When the king heard these words, he said to his courtiers, “Suffer not the deer to escape, but with all speed set a circle about the grove, the men with their weapons in hand.” They did so, and made an outcry. The king with a certain number of others was standing apart, and this man also stood not far off. The Great Being heard the sound, and thought he, “It is the sound of a great host, therefore I must beware of them.” He rose, and spying at all the company perceived the place where the king stood. “Where the king stands,” thought he, “I shall be safe, and thither I must go;” and he ran towards the king. When the king saw him coming, he said, “A creature strong as an elephant would throw down everything in its path. I will put arrow to string and frighten the beast; if he is for running I will shoot him and make him weak, that I may take him.” Then stringing his bow, he stood facing the Bodhisatta.

To explain this matter, the Master repeated a couple of stanzas:

“Forward he went: the bow was bent, the arrow on the string;

When thus from far the deer called out, as he beheld the king:

“O lord of charioteers, great king, stand still! and do not wound:

Who brought the news to you, that here this deer was to be found?”

The king was enchanted with his honey-voice; he let fall his bow, and stood still in reverence. And the Great Being came up to the king, and talked pleasantly with him, standing on one side. All the host also dropt their weapons, and came up and surrounded the king. At that moment the Great Being asked his question of the king with a sweet voice (it was like one tinkling a golden bell): “Who brought the news to you, that here this deer was to be found?” Just then the wicked man came closer, and stood within hearing. The king pointed him out, saying, “There is he that informed me,” and recited the sixth stanza:

“That sinful man, my worthy friend, that yonder stands his ground,

He brought the news to me, that here the deer was to be found."

On hearing this, the Great Being rebuked his treacherous friend, and addressing the king recited the seventh stanza:

"Upon the earth are many men, of whom the proverb's true:

'Twere better save a drowning log than such a one as you."

When he heard this, the king repeated another stanza:

"Who is it you would blame in this, O deer?

Is it some man, or is it beast or bird?

I am possessed with an unbounded fear

At this your human speech which late I heard."

Hereupon the Great Being replied, "O great king, I blame no beast and I blame no bird, but a man:" to explain which he repeated the ninth stanza:

"I saved him once, when like to drown

On the swift swelling tide that bore him down:

And now I am in danger through it.

Go with the wicked, and be sure you'll rue it."

The king when he heard this was wroth with the man. "What?" quoth he, "not to recognise his merit after such a good service! I will shoot him and kill him!" He then repeated the tenth stanza:

"This four-winged flyer I'll let fly,

And pierce him to the heart! So let him perish,

The evil-doer in his treachery,

Who for such kindness done no thanks did cherish!"

Then the Great Being thought, "I would not have him perish on my account," and uttered the eleventh stanza:

"Shame on the fool, O king, indeed!

But no good men approve a killing;

Let the wretch go, and give his meed,

All that you promised him fulfilling:

And I will serve you at your need."

The king was very glad to hear this, and lauding him, uttered the next stanza:

"Surely this deer is good indeed,

To pay back ill for ill unwilling.

Let the wretch go! I give his meed,

All that I promised him fulfilling.

And you go where you will—good speed!"

At this the Great Being said, "O mighty king, men say one thing with their lips, and do another;" to expound which matter he recited two stanzas:

"The cry of jackals and of birds is understood with ease;

Yea, but the word of men, O king, is harder far than these.

"A man may think, "This is my friend, my comrade, of my kin;"

But friendship goes, and often hate and enmity begin."

When the king heard these words, he answered, "O king of the deer! do not suppose that I am one of that kind; for I will not deny the boon I have promised you, not even if I lose my kingdom for it. Trust me." And he gave him choice of a boon. The Great Being accepted this boon at his hands, and chose this: That all creatures, beginning with himself, should be free from danger. This boon the king granted, and then took him back to the city of Benares, and having adorned and decorated the city, and the Great Being also, caused him to discourse to the queen his wife. The Great Being discoursed to the queen, and afterwards to the king and all his court, in a human voice sweet as honey; he admonished the king to hold fast by the Ten Virtues of Kings, and he comforted the great multitude, and then returned to the woodland, where he dwelt among a herd of deer.

The king sent a drum beating about the city, with this proclamation: "I give protection to all creatures!" From that time onwards no one durst so much as raise hand against beast or bird.

Herds of deer devoured the crops of mankind, and no one was able to drive them away. A crowd assembled in the king's courtyard, and complained.

To make this clear, the Master repeated the following stanza:

"The country-folk and townsfolk all straight to the king they went:

"The deer are eating up our crops: this let the king prevent!"

Hearing this, the king recited a couple of stanzas:

"Be it the people's wish or no, e'en if my kingdom cease,

I cannot wrong the deer, to whom I promised life and peace.

"The people may desert me all, my royal power may die,

The boon I gave that royal deer I never will deny."

The people listened to the king's words, and finding themselves unable to say anything, departed. This saying was spread abroad. The Great Being heard of it, and assembling all the deer, laid his bidding on them: "From this time forward you must not devour the crops of men." He then sent a message to men, that each should set up a placard on his own lands. The men did so; and at that sign even to this day the deer do not devour the crops.

When the Master had ended this discourse, he said, "This is not the first time, Brethren, that Devadatta has been ungrateful;" and then he identified the Birth: "At that time, Devadatta was the merchant's son, Ananda was the king, and I myself was the deer."

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.