Ja 483 — Sarabha-Miga 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/ja483.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

“Toil on, O man,” etc.—This story the Master told while dwelling in Jetavana, to explain fully a question concisely put by himself to the Commander of the Faith.

At that time the Master put a question concisely to that Elder. This is the full story, put briefly, of the descent from the world of gods. When the Reverend Pindola-Bharadvaja had by his supernatural power gained the sandal-wood bowl in the presence of the great merchant of Rajagaha, the Master forbade the Brethren to use their miraculous powers.

Then the schismatics thought, “The ascetic Gotama has forbidden the use of miraculous power: now he will do no miracle himself.” Their disciples were disturbed, and said to the schismatics, “Why didn’t you take the bowl by your supernatural power?” They replied: “This is no hard thing for us, friend. But we think, Who will display before the laity his own fine and subtile powers for the sake of a paltry wooden bowl? and so we did not take it. The ascetics of the Sakya class took it, and showed their supernatural power for sheer foolish greed. Do not imagine it is any trouble to us to work miracles. Suppose we leave out of consideration the disciples of Gotama the ascetic: if we like, we too will show our supernatural powers with the ascetic Gotama himself: if the ascetic Gotama works one miracle, we will work one twice as good.”

The Brethren who heard this told the Blessed One of it: “Sir, the schismatics say they will work a miracle.” Said the Master, “Let them do it, Brethren; I will do the like.” Bimbisara, hearing this, went and asked the Blessed One: “Will you work a miracle, Sir?” “Yes, O king.” “Was there not a command given on this matter, Sir?” “The command, O king, was given to my disciples; there is no command which can rule the Buddhas. When the flowers and fruit in your park are forbidden to others, the same rule does not apply to you.” “Then where will you work this miracle, Sir?” “At Savatthi, under a knot-mango tree.” “What have I to do, then?” “Nothing, Sire.”

Next day, after breaking his fast, the Master went to seek alms. “Whither goes the Master?” asked the people. The Brethren answered to them, “At the gate of the city of Savatthi, beneath a knot-mango tree, he is to work a twofold miracle to the confounding of the schismatics.” The crowd said, “This miracle will be what they call a masterpiece; we will go see it:” leaving the doors of their houses, they went along with the Master. Some of the schismatics also followed the Master, with their disciples: “We too,” they said, “will work a miracle, in the place where the ascetic Gotama shall work his.”

By and bye the Master arrived at Savatthi. The king asked him, “Is it true, Sir, you are about to work a miracle, as they say?” “Yes, it is true,” he said. “When?” asked the king. “On the seventh day from now, at the full moon of the month of June.” “Shall I set up a pavilion, Sir?” “Peace, great king: in the place where I shall work my miracle Sakka will set up a pavilion of jewels twelve leagues in compass.” “Shall I proclaim this thing through the city, Sir?” “Proclaim it, O king.” The king sent forth the Crier of the Truth on an elephant richly caparisoned, to proclaim thus: “News! the Master is about to perform a miracle, for the confounding of the schismatics, at the Gate of Savatthi, under a knot-mango tree, seven days from now!” Each day was this proclamation made. When the schismatics heard this news, that the miracle will be done under a knot-mango tree, they had all the mango trees near to Savatthi cut down, paying the owners for them.

On the night of the full moon the Crier of the Truth made proclamation, “This day in the morning the miracle will take place.” By the power of the gods it was as though all India was at the door and heard the proclamation; whosoever had it in his heart to go, they all beheld themselves at Savatthi: for twelve leagues the crowd extended.

Early in the morning the Master went on his rounds seeking alms. The king’s gardener, Ganda or Knot by name, was just taking to the king a fine ripe mango fruit; thoroughly ripe, big as a bushel, when he espied the Master at the city gate..”This fruit is worthy of the Master,” said he, and gave it to him. The Master took it, and sitting down then and there on one side, ate the fruit. When it was eaten, he said, “Ananda, give the gardener this stone to plant here on the spot; this shall be the knot-mango tree.” The Elder did so. The gardener dug a hole in the earth, and planted it. On the instant the stone burst, roots sprouted forth, up sprang a red shoot tall as a plough-pole; even as the crowd stared it grew into a mango tree of a hundred cubits, with a trunk fifty cubits and branches of fifty cubits in height; at the same time flowers bloomed, fruit ripened; the tree stood filling the sky, covered with bees, loaden with golden fruit; when the wind blew on it, sweet fruits fell; then the Brethren came up and ate of the fruit, and retired. In the evening time the king of the gods, reflecting, perceived that it was a task laid on him to make a pavilion of the seven precious things. So he sent Vissakamma, and caused him to make a pavilion of the seven precious things, twelve leagues in compass, covered all over with blue lotus. Thus the gods of ten thousand spheres were gathered together. The Master, having for the confounding of the schismatics performed a twofold miracle passing marvellous among his disciples, caused faith to spring up in multitudes, then arose and, sitting in the Buddha’s seat, declared the Law. Twenty crores of beings drank of the waters of life. Then, meditating to see whither it was that former Buddhas went when they had done a miracle, and perceiving that it was to the Heaven of the Thirty-three, up he rose from the Buddha’s seat,

the right foot he placed on the top of Mount Yugandhara, and with his left strode to the peak of Sineru, he began the season of rains under the great Coral Tree, seated upon the yellow-stone throne; for the space of three months he discoursed upon transcendental doctrine to the gods.

The people knew not the place whither the Master had gone; they looked, and said, “Let us go home,” and abode in that place during the rainy season. When the lenten season was near to its end, and the feast was at hand, the great Elder Moggallana went and announced it to the Blessed One. Thereupon the Master asked him, “Where is Sariputta now?” “He, Sir, after the miracle which delighted him, remained with five hundred Brethren in the city of Samkassa, and is there still.” “Moggallana, on the seventh day from now I shall descend by the gate of Samkassa. Let those who desire to behold the Tathagata assemble in the city of Samkassa.” The Elder assented, went and told the people: the whole company he transported from Savatthi to Samkassa, a distance of thirty leagues, in the twinkling of an eye. Lent over, and the feast celebrated, the Master told king Sakka that he was about to return to the world of men. Then Sakka sent for Vissakamma, and said to him, “Make a stairway for the Dasabala to descend into the world of men.” He placed the head of the stairway upon the peak of Sineru, and the foot of it by the gate of Samkassa, and between he made three descents side by side: one of gems, one of silver, and one of gold: the balustrade and cornice were of the seven things of price. The Master, having performed a miracle for the world’s emancipation, descended by the midmost stair made out of gems. Sakka carried the bowl and robe, Suyama a yak’s-tail fan, Brahma Lord of all beings bore a sunshade, and the deities of ten thousand spheres did worship with divine garlands and perfumes. When the Master stood at the foot of the staircase, first Elder Sariputta gave him greeting, afterwards the rest of the company.

Amidst this assembly the Master thought, “Moggallana has been shown to possess supernatural power, Upali as one who is versed in the sacred law, but the quality of high wisdom possessed by Sariputta has not been shown. Save and except me, no other possesses wisdom so full and complete as his; I will make known the quality of his wisdom.” First of all he asked a question which is put to ordinary persons, and the ordinary persons answered it. Then he asked a question within the scope of those of the First Path, and this they of the First Path answered, but the ordinary folk knew nought of it. In the same way he asked questions in turn within the scope of those of the Second and Third Paths, of the Saints, of the Chief Disciples; and in each case those who were below each grade in turn were unable to answer, but they who were above could answer. Then he put a question within the power of Sariputta, and this the Elder could answer, but the others not so. The people asked, “Who is this Elder who answered the Master?” They were told, it was the Captain of the Faith, and Sariputta was his name. “Ah, great is his wisdom!” they said. Ever afterwards the quality of the Elder’s great wisdom was known to men and to gods. Then the Master said to him,

“Some have probations yet to pass, and some have reached the goal:

Their different deportments say, for thou dost know the whole.”

Having thus asked a question which comes within a Buddha's scope, he added, "Here is a point put with brevity, Sariputta; what is the meaning of the matter in all its bearings?" The Elder considered the problem. Thought he, "The Master asks of the proper deportment with which the Brethren attain progress, both those who are in the lower Paths and those who are Saints?" As to the general question, he had no doubt. But then he considered, "The proper manner of deportment may be described in many ways of speaking according to the essential elements of being, and so forth from that beginning; now in what fashion can I hit the Master's meaning?" He was doubtful about the meaning. The Master thought, "Sariputta has no doubt of the general question, but doubts what particular side of it I have in view. If I give no clue, he will never be able to answer, so a clue I will give him." This clue he gave by saying, "See here, Sariputta: you grant this to be true?" (mentioning some point). Sariputta granted the point.

The hint thus given, he knew that Sariputta had taken his meaning, and would answer fully, starting from the very elements of being. Then the question stood out clear before the Elder, as with a hundred hints, nay, a thousand; and he, at the Master's hint given, answered the question which belonged to a Buddha's scope.

The Master declared the Law to this company which covered twelve leagues of ground: thirty crores of beings drank of the waters of life.

The company was dismissed, and the Master, going on pilgrimage for alms, came by and bye to Savatthi. Next day, after seeking alms in Savatthi, he came back from his rounds, and told the Brethren of their duty, and entered his Perfumed Chamber. At evening time, the Brethren talked of the high worth of the Elder as they sat in the Hall of Truth. "Great in wisdom, Sirs, is Sariputta; he has wisdom wide, wisdom swift, wisdom sharp, wisdom keen. The Master put a question in brief, and he answered it fully at large." The Master entering asked what they talked of as they sat there. They told him. "This is not the first time, Brethren," said he, "that he answered at large a question briefly put, but he has done so before;" and he told them a story of the past.

Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta was king of Benares, the Bodhisatta lived in the forest, having been born as a stag. Now the king much delighted in hunting, and a mighty man was he: he reckoned no other man worthy of the name of man. One day as he went a-hunting he said to his courtiers, "Whoever lets a deer go by him, such and such shall be his punishment." They thought, "One may stand in the house and not find the granary. When a deer is put up, by hook or by crook we must drive him to the place where the king is." They made a pact among them to this effect, and posted the king at the end of the path. Then they surrounded a great covert and began to beat on the ground with cudgels and the like. The first to be put up was our stag. Thrice he went round the thicket, looking for a chance of escape: on all other sides he saw men standing without a break, arm jostling arm and bow bow; only where the king was could he see a chance. With eyes glaring, he rushed at the king, dazzling him as though he cast sand in his eyes. Quickly the king saw him, shot an arrow, and missed. You must know these deer are clever to keep clear of arrows. When the shafts come straight at them, the deer stand still and let them fly; let them come from behind, the deer outfly them faster; if they fall from above, they

bend the back; from the side, they swerve a little; if the shafts are aimed at the belly, they roll right over, and when they have gone by, off go the deer swift as a cloud which the wind scatters. Thus the king, when he saw this stag roll over, thought he was hit and gave the halloa. Up rose the stag, swift as the wind he was off, breaking the circle of men. The courtiers on both sides who saw the stag get away collected together, and asked, “Whose post did the stag make for?” “The king’s!” “But the king is shouting, I’ve hit him! What has he hit? Our king has missed, I tell you! He has hit the ground!” Thus they made sport of the king, and no stint. “These fellows are laughing at me,” thought the king; “they know not my measure.” Then girding up his loins, on foot, and sword in hand, he set off at speed crying, “I will catch the stag!” He kept him in sight and chased him for three leagues. The stag plunged into the forest, in plunged the king also. Now in the stag’s way was a pit, a great hole where a tree had rotted away, sixty cubits deep, and full of water to a depth of thirty cubits, yet covered over with weeds. The stag sniffed the smell of the water, and perceiving that it was a pit, swerved aside somewhat from his course. But the king went straight on, and fell in. The stag, no longer hearing the sound of his footsteps, turned him about; and seeing no man, understood that he must have fallen into the pit. So he went and looked, and saw him in dire straits, struggling in the deep water; for the evil he had done the stag bore no malice, but pitifully thought, “Let not the king perish before my eyes: I will set him free from this distress.” Standing upon the edge of the pit, he cried out, “Fear nothing, O king, for I will deliver you from your distress.” Then with an effort, as earnest as though he would save his own beloved son, he supported himself upon the rock; and that king who had come after him to slay, him he drew up from out of the pit, sixty cubits in depth, and comforted him, and set him upon his own back, and led him forth from the forest, and set him down not far from his army. Then he admonished the king, and established him in the Five Virtues. But the king could not leave the Great Being, but said to him: “My lord king of the stags, come with me to Benares, for I give thee the lordship over Benares, a city that spreads over twelve leagues, that you may rule over it.” But he said, “Great king, I am one of the animals, and I want no kingdom. If you have any care for me, keep the good precepts I have taught you, and teach your subjects to keep them too.” With this advice, he returned into the forest. And the king returned to his army, and as he remembered the noble qualities of the stag his eyes filled with tears. Surrounded by a division of his army, he went through the city, while the drum of the Law was beat, and caused this proclamation to be made: “From this day forward, let all the dwellers in this city observe the five virtues.”

But he told no one of the kindness done to him by the Great Being. After eating many choice meats, in the evening time, he reclined upon his gorgeous couch, and at daybreak remembering the noble qualities of the Great Being, he rose up and sat on the couch cross-legged, and with heart full of joy chanted his aspirations in six stanzas:

“Hope on O man, if thou be wise, nor let thy courage tire:

Myself I see, who now have won the goal of my desire.

“Hope on O man, if thou be wise, tire not though harassed sore:

Myself I see, who from the waves have fought my way ashore.

“Toil on O man, if thou be wise, nor let thy courage tire:

Myself I see, who now have won the goal of my desire.

“Toil on O man, if thou be wise, tire not though harassed sore:

Myself I see, who from the waves have fought my way ashore.

“He that is wise, though overcome with pain,

Would never cease to hope for bliss again.

Many are men’s feelings, both of joy and woe:

They think not of it, yet to death they go.”

“That comes to pass which is not thought; and that is thought of, fails:

For man or woman’s happiness not thought alone avails.”

As the king was in the act of chanting these lines, the sun uprose. His chaplain had come thus early to enquire after the king’s welfare, and as he stood at the door he heard the sound of this chant, and thought to himself: “Yesterday the king went a-hunting. Doubtless he missed the stag, and being derided by his courtiers declared that he would catch and kill the quarry himself. Then no doubt he chased him, being pricked in his pride as a warrior, and fell into a sixty-cubit pit; and the merciful stag must have pulled him out without a thought of the king’s offence against him. That is why the king is chanting this hymn, methinks.” Thus the brahmin heard every word of the king’s chant; and that which fell out betwixt the king and the stag became clear as a face reflected in a well-polished mirror. He knocked at the door with his finger-tips. “Who is there?” the king asked. “It is I, my lord, your chaplain.” “Come in, teacher,” quoth the king, and opened the door. He entered, and prayed victory for the king, and stood on one side. Then he said, “O great king! I know what happened to you in the forest. As you chased a stag you fell into a pit, and the stag resting upon the stone sides of the pit, . drew you out of it. So you remembering his magnanimity chanted a hymn.” Then he recited two stanzas:

“The stag that on a mountain steep thy quarry was of late,

He bravely gave thee life, for he was free from greed and hate.

“Out of the horrid pit, out of death’s jaws,

Leaning upon a rock (a friend-at need)

The great stag saved thee: so thou saidst with cause,

His mind is far aloof from hate or greed."

"What!"thought the king, on hearing this—"the man did not go a-hunting with me, yet he knows the whole matter! How can he know it? I will ask him"; and he repeated the ninth stanza:

"O brahmin! wast thou there upon that day?

Or from some other witness didst thou hear?

The veil of passion thou hast rolled away:

Thou seest all: thy wisdom makes me fear."

But the brahmin said, "I am no Buddha all-knowing; only I overheard the hymn that you sang, without missing the meaning, and so the fact became clear before me." To explain which he repeated the tenth stanza:

"O lord of men! I neither heard that thing,

Nor was I there to see that day:

But from the verses thou didst sweetly sing

Wise men can gather how the matter lay."

The king was delighted, and gave him a rich present.

From thenceforward the king was devoted to almsgiving and good deeds, and his people being also devoted to good deeds as they died went to swell the hosts of heaven.

Now one day it happened that the king went into his park with the chaplain to shoot at a mark. At that period Sakka had been pondering whence came all the new sons and daughters of the gods, whom he beheld so numerous about him. Pondering, he perceived the whole story: how the king had been rescued from the pit by that stag, and how he had become stablished in virtue, and how by the power of this king, multitudes did good deeds and heaven was being filled; and now the king had gone into his park to shoot at a mark. Then he also went thither, that with the voice of a lion he might proclaim the nobleness of the stag, and make known that himself was Sakka, and poised in the air might discourse on the Law, and declare the goodness of mercy and the Five Virtues, and then return. Now the king intending to shoot at his mark, strung a bow and fitted an arrow to the string. At that moment Sakka by his power made the stag to appear betwixt the king and the mark; the king seeing it did not let fly. Then Sakka, entering into the body of the chaplain, repeated by him to the king the following stanza:

"Thy shaft is death to many a mighty thing:

Why dost thou hold it quiet on the string?

Let the shaft fly and kill the stag forthwith:

'Tis meat for monarchs, O most sapient king!"

Thereto the king answered in a stanza:

"I know it, brahmin, no less sure than thou:

The stag is meat for warrior men, I vow,

But I am grateful for a service done,

And therefore hold my hand from killing now.

Then Sakka repeated a couple of stanzas:

"'Tis no stag, O mighty monarch! but a Titan is this thing,

Thou art king of men; but kill it—of the gods thou shalt be king.

"But if thou hesitate, O valiant king!

To kill the stag, because he is thy friend:

To death's cold river and to death's dread king

Thou and thy wife and children shall descend."

At this the king repeated two stanzas:

"So be it: to death's river and death's king

Send me, my wives and children, all my train

Of friends and comrades; I'll not do this thing,

And by my hand this stag shall not be slain.

"Once in a grisly forest full of dread

That very stag saved me from hopeless woe.

How can I wish my benefactor dead

After such service done me long ago?"

Then Sakka came forth from the chaplain's body, and put on his own shape, and poised in the air recited a couple of stanzas which showed forth the noble worth of the king:

"Live long on earth, O true and faithful friend!

Comfort with truth and goodness this domain;

Then hosts of maidens round thee shall attend

While thou as Indra mid the gods shalt reign.

"From passion free, with ever-peaceful heart,

When strangers crave, supply their weary need;

As power is given thee, give, and play thy part,

Blameless, till heaven shall be thy final meed."

Thus saying, Sakka king of the gods continued as follows: "I came hither to try you, O king, and you have given me no hold. Only be vigilant." And with this advice he returned to his own place.

When the Master had ended this discourse, he said: "This is not the first time, Brethren, that Sariputta knew in detail what was said only in general terms; but the same thing happened before." Then he identified the Birth: "At that time Ananda was the king, Sariputta was the chaplain, and I myself the stag."

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.