Ja 484 — Salikedara Jātaka

English translation by W. H. D. Rouse.

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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

“The crop of rice,” etc.—This was a story the Master told while dwelling at Jetavana, about a Brother who supported his mother. The occasion will be explained in the Sama Birth. Then the Master sent for this Brother, and asked him, “Is what I hear true, Brother, that you support lay folks?” “It is true, Sir.” “Who are they?” “My mother and father, Sir.” Said the Master, “Well done, Brother! Wise men of old, even when embodied as the lower animals, having been born as parrots even, when their parents grew old laid them in a nest and fed them with food which they brought in their own beaks.” So saying, he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time, a king named King Magadha reigned in Rajagaha. At that time there stood a brahmin village, named Salindiya, towards the north-east as you go out of the city. In this north-eastern district was property belonging to Magadha. There was a brahmin who lived in Salindiya, whose name was Kosiyagotta, and he held an estate of one thousand acres, where he grew rice. When the crop was standing, he made a stout fence, and gave the land in charge to his own men, to one fifty acres, to another sixty, and so he distributed among them some five hundred acres of his estate. The other five hundred he delivered to a hired man for a wage, and the man made a hut there and dwelt there day and night. Now to the north-east of this estate was a certain great wood of silk-cotton trees, growing upon the flat top of a hill, and in this wood lived a great number of parrots.

At that time the Bodhisatta was born among this flock of parrots, as the son of the king of the parrots. He grew up handsome and strong, big his body was as the nave of a cart-wheel. His father now grown old said to him, “I am able no longer to go far afield; do you take care of this flock,” and committed the lordship of it to his son. From the next day onwards he refused to permit his parents to go foraging; but with the whole flock away he flew to the Himalaya hills, and after eating his fill of the clumps of rice that grew wild there, on his return brought food sufficient for his mother and father, and fed them with it.

One day the parrots asked him a question. “Formerly,” they said, “the rice was ripe by this time on the Magadha farm; is it grown now or not?” “Go and see,” he replied, and then sent two parrots to find out. The parrots departed, and alighted in the Magadha lands, in that part which was guarded by the hired man; rice they ate, and one head of rice they took back with them to their wood, and dropt it before the Great Being’s feet, saying, “Such is the rice which grows there.” He went next day to the farm, and alighted, with all his flock. The man ran this way and that, trying to drive off the birds, but drive them away he could not. The rest of the parrots ate, and departed with empty beaks; but the parrot king gathered together a quantity of rice, and brought it back to his parents. Next day the parrots ate the rice there again, and so afterwards. Then the man began to think, “If these creatures go on eating for another few days, there will not be a bit left. The brahmin will have a price put on the rice, and fine me in the sum. I will go tell him.” Taking a handful of rice, and a gift with it, he went to see the brahmin, and greeted him, and stood on one side. “Well, my good man,” said the master, “is there a good crop of rice?” “Yes, brahmin, there is,” he replied, and repeated two stanzas:

“The crop of rice is very nice, but I would have you know,

The parrots are devouring it, I cannot make them go.

“There is one bird, of all the herd the finest, who first feeds,

Then takes a bundle in his beak to meet his future needs.”

When the brahmin heard this, he conceived an affection for the parrot king. “My man,” quoth he, “do you know how to set a snare?” “Yes, I know.” The master then addressed him in this stanza:

“Then set a snare of horse’s hair that captured he may be;

And see thou take the bird alive and bring him here to me.”

The farm watchman was much pleased that no price had been put upon the rice, and no debt spoken of. He went straight and made a snare of horsehair. Then he found out when they were like to descend that day; and spying out the place where the parrot king alighted, next day very early in the morning he made a cage about the size of a water-pot, and set the snare, and sat down in his hut looking for the parrots to come. The parrot king came amidst all his flock; and he being by no means greedy, came down in the same place as yesterday, with his foot right in the noose. When he found his foot fast he thought, “Now if I cry out the cry of the captured, my kinsfolk will be so terrified, they will fly away foodless. I must endure until they have finished their food.” When at last he perceived that they had taken their fill, being in fear of his life, he thrice cried the cry of the captured. All the birds flew off. Then the king of the parrots said, “All these my kith and kin, and not one to look back at me! What sin have I done?” And upbraiding them he uttered a stanza:

“They ate, they drank, and now away they hasten every one,

I only caught within a snare: what evil have I done?”

The watchman heard the cry of the parrot king, and the sound of the other parrots flying through the air. “What is that?” thought he. Up he got from his hut, and went to the place of his snare, and there he saw the king of the parrots. “The very bird I set the snare for is caught!” he cried, in high delight. He took the parrot out of the snare, and tied both his feet together, and making his way to Salindiya village, he delivered the bird to the brahmin. The brahmin in his strong affection for the Great Being, caught hold of him tight in both hands, and seating him on his hip, bespoke him in these two stanzas:

“The bellies of all others are outbellied far by you:

First a full meal, then off you fly with a good beak-full too

“Have you a granary there to fill? or do you hate me sore?

I ask it you, come tell me true—where do you put your store?

On hearing this, the parrot king answered, repeating in a human voice sweet as honey the seventh stanza:

“I hate thee not, O Kosiya! no granary I own;

Once in my wood I pay a debt, and also grant a loan,

And there I store a treasure up: so be my answer known.”

Then the brahmin asked him:

“What is that loan the which you grant? what is the debt you pay?

Tell me the treasure you store up, and then fly free away.”

To this request of the brahmin the parrot king made reply, explaining his intent in four stanzas:

“My callow chicks, my tender brood, whose wings are still ungrown,

Who shall support me by and bye: to them I grant the loan.

“Then my old ancient parents, who far from youth’s bounds are set,

With that within my beak I bring, to them I pay my debt.

“And other birds of helpless wing, and weak full many more,

To these I give in charity: this sages call my store.

“This is that loan the which I grant, this is the debt I pay,

And this the treasure I store up: now I have said my say.”

The brahmin was pleased when he heard this pious discourse from the Great Being; and he repeated two stanzas:

“What noble principles of life! how blessed is this bird!

From many men who live on earth such rules are never heard.

“Eat, eat your fill whereas you will, with all your kindred too;

And, parrot! let us meet-again: I love the sight of you.”

With these words, he looked upon the Great Being with a soft heart, as though it were his liefest son; and loosing the bonds from his feet, he rubbed them with oil an hundred times refined, and seated him on a seat of honour, and gave him to eat sweetened corn upon a golden dish, and gave him sugar-water to drink. After this the king of the parrots warned the brahmin to be careful, reciting this stanza:

“O Kosiya! within thy dwelling here

I had both food and drink and friendship dear.

Give thou to those whose burden is laid down,

Support thy parents when they old are grown.”

The brahmin then delighted in heart uttered his ecstasy in this stanza:

“Surely Luck’s goddess came herself to-day

When I set eyes upon this peerless bird!

I will do kindly deeds and never stay,

Now that the parrot’s sweet voice I have heard.”

But the Great Being refused to accept the thousand acres which the brahmin offered him, but took only eight acres. The brahmin set up boundary stones, and made over this property to him; and then, raising his hands to his head in reverence, he said, “Go in peace, my lord, and console your weeping parents,” and then let him go. Much pleased, he took a head of rice, and carried it to his parents, and dropt it before them, saying, “Arise now, my dear parents!” They arose at his word, with blubbered faces. Then flocks of parrots began

together, asking," How did you get free, my lord?" He told them the whole story from beginning to end. And Kosiya followed the advice of the king of the parrots, and distributed much alms to the righteous men, and ascetics, and brahmins.

The last stanza was repeated by the Master explaining this:

"This Kosiya with joy and great delight

Common and plentiful made drink and food:

With food and drink he satisfied aright

Brahmins and holy men, himself all good."

When the Master had ended this discourse, he said, "Thus, Brethren, to support one's parents is the traditional way of the wise and good." Then, having declared the Truths, he identified the Birth—(now at the conclusion of the Truths that Brother became established in the fruit of the First Path:)—"At that time the Buddha's followers were the flock of parrots, two of the king's family were the father and mother, Channa was the watchman, Ananda the brahmin, and I was myself the king of the parrots."

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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