Ja 487 — Uddalaka Jātaka

English translation by W. H. D. Rouse.

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Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

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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

“With uncleansed teeth,” etc.—This story the Master told, while dwelling in Jetavana, about a dishonest man. This man, even though dedicate to the faith that leads to salvation, notwithstanding to gain life’s necessaries fulfilled the threefold practice of knavery. The Brethren brought to light all the evil parts in the man as they conversed together in the Hall of Truth: “Such a one, Brethren, after he had dedicated himself to this great faith of Buddha which leads to salvation, yet lives in deceit!” The Master came in, and would know what they talked of there. They told him. Said he, “This is not now the first time; he was deceitful before,” and so saying he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta was king in Benares, the Bodhisatta was chaplain, and a wise, learned man was he. On a certain day, he went into his park to disport him, and seeing a beauteous light-skirts fell in love with her, and took up his abode with her. He got her with child, and when she perceived it she said to him: “Sir, I am with child; when he is born, and I am to name him, I will give him his grandfather’s name.” But he thought, “It can never be that the name of a noble family should be given to a slave-girl’s bastard.” Then he said to her, “My dear, this tree here is called Uddala, and you may name the child Uddalaka because he was conceived here.” Then he gave her a seal-ring, and said, “If it be a girl use this to help bring her up; but if a boy, bring him to me when he grows up.”

In due time she brought forth a son, and named him Uddalaka. When he grew up, he asked his mother, “Mother, who is my father?”—“The chaplain, my boy.”—“If that is so, I will learn the holy books.” So receiving the ring from his mother, and a teacher’s fee, he journeyed to Takkasila and learnt there of a world-renowned teacher. In the course of his studies he saw a company of ascetics. “These must surely have the perfect knowledge,” thought he, “I will learn of them.” Accordingly he renounced the world, so eager he was for knowledge, and did menial service for them, begging them in return to teach him their own wisdom. So they taught him all they knew; but among the whole five hundred of them not one there was outdid him in knowledge, he was the wisest of them all. Then they

gathered together and appointed him to be their teacher. He said to them, “Venerable sirs, you always live in the woodland eating of fruits and roots; why do you not go in the paths of men?” “Sir,” they said, “men are willing to give us gifts, but they make us show gratitude by declaring the law, they ask us questions: for fear of this we go not ever among them.” He answered, “Sirs, if you have me, let a universal monarch ask questions, leave me to settle them, and fear nothing.” So he went on pilgrimage with them, seeking alms, and at last came to Benares, and stayed in the king’s park. Next day, in company with them all, he sought alms in a village before the city gate. The folk gave them alms in plenty. On the day following the ascetics traversed the city, the folk gave them alms in plenty. The ascetic Uddalaka gave thanks, and blest them, and answered questions. The people were edified, and gave all they had need of in great abundance. The whole city buzzed with the news, “A wise teacher is come, a holy ascetic,” and the king got wind of it.” Where do they live?” asked the king. They told him, “In the park.” “Good,” quoth he, “this day I will go and see them.” A man went and told it to Uddalaka, saying, “The king is to come and see you to-day.” He called the company together, and said, “Sirs, the king is coming: win favour in the eyes of the great for one day, it is enough for a lifetime.” “What must we do, teacher?” they asked. Then he said, “Some of you must be at the swinging penance, some squat on the ground, some lie upon beds of spikes, some practise the penance of the five fires, others go down into the water, others again recite holy verses in this place or that.” They did as he bade. Himself with wise men eight or ten sat upon a prepared seat with a head-rest disputing, a fair volume beside him laid upon a beautiful standish, and listeners all around. At that moment the king with his chaplain and a great company came into the park, and when he saw them all deep in their sham austerities, he was pleased and thought, “They are free from all fear of evil states hereafter.” Approaching Uddalaka, he greeted him graciously and sat down on one side; then in the delight of his heart began speaking to the chaplain, and recited the first stanza :

“With uncleansed teeth, and goatskin garb and hair

All matted, muttering holy words in peace:

Surely no human means to good they spare,

Surely they know the Truth, have won Release.”

Hearing this, the chaplain replied, “The king is pleased where he should not be pleased, and I must not be silent.” Then he repeated the second stanza:

“A learned sage may do ill deeds, O king:

A learned sage may fail to follow right.

A thousand Vedas will not safety bring,

Failing just works, or save from evil plight.”

Uddalaka, when he heard these words thought to himself, “The king was pleased with the ascetics, be they what you will; but this man comes a clap over the snout of the ox when he goes too fast, drops dirt in the dish all ready to eat: I must talk to him.” So he addressed to him the third stanza:

“A thousand Vedas will not safety bring

Failing just works, or save from evil plight:

The Vedas then, must be a useless thing:

True doctrine is—control yourself, do right.”

At this the chaplain recited the fourth stanza:

“Not so: the Vedas are no useless thing:

Though works with self-control, true doctrine is.

To study well the Vedas fame will bring,

But by right conduct we attain to bliss.”

Now thought Uddalaka, “It will never do to be on ill terms with this man. If I tell him I am his son, he needs must love me; I will tell him I am his son.” Then he recited the fifth stanza:

“Parents and kinsmen claim one’s care;

A second self our parents are:

I’m Uddalaka, a shoot,

Noble brahmin, from thy root.”

“Are you indeed Uddalaka?” he asked. “Yes,” said the other. Then he said, “I gave your mother a token, where is it?” He said, “Here it is, brahmin,” and handed him the ring. The brahmin knew the ring again, and said, “Without doubt you are a brahmin; but do you know the duties of a brahmin?” He enquired concerning these duties in the words of the sixth stanza:

“What makes the brahmin? how can he be perfect? tell me this:

What is a righteous man, and how wins he Nirvana’s bliss?”

Uddalaka explained it in the seventh stanza:

“The world renounced, with fire, he worship pays,

Pours water, lifts the sacrificial pole:

As one who does his duty men him praise,

And such a brahmin wins him peace of soul.”

The chaplain listened to his account of the brahmin’s duties, but found fault with it, reciting the eighth stanza as follows:

“Not sprinkling makes the brahmin pure, perfection is not this,

Nor peace nor kindness thus he wins nor yet Nirvana’s bliss.”

Hereupon Uddalaka asked, “If this does not make the brahmin, then what does?” reciting the ninth stanza:

“What makes the brahmin? how can he be perfect? tell me this:

What is a righteous man? and how wins he Nirvana’s bliss?”

The chaplain answered by reciting another stanza:

“He has no field, no goods, no wish, no kin,

Careless of life, no lusts, no evil ways:

Even such a brahmin peace of soul shall win,

So as one true to duty men him praise.”

After this Uddalaka recited a stanza:

“Khattiya, Brahmin, Vessa, Sudda, and Candala, Pukkusa,

All these can be compassionate, can win Nirvana’s bliss:

Who among all the saints is there who worse or better is?”

Then the brahmin recited a stanza, to show that there is no higher or lower from the moment sainthood is won:

“Khattiya, Brahmin, Vessa, Sudda, and Candala, Pukkusa,

All these can be compassionate, can win Nirvana’s bliss:

None among all the saints is found who worse or better is."

But Uddalaka found fault with this, reciting a couple of stanzas:

"Khattiya, Brahmin, Vessa, Sudda, and Candala, Pukkusa,

All these can virtuous be, and all attain Nirvana's bliss:

None among all the saints is found who worse or better is.

You are a brahmin, then, for nought: vain is your rank, I wis."

Here the chaplain recited two stanzas more, with a similitude:

"With canvas dyed in many a tint pavilions may be made:

The roof, a many-coloured dome: one colour is the shade.

"Even so, when men are purified, so is it here on earth:

The good perceive that they are saints, and never ask their birth."

Now Uddalaka could not say nay to this, and so he sat silent. Then the brahmin said to the king, "All these are knaves, O king, all India will come to ruin through knavery. Persuade Uddalaka to renounce his asceticism, and to be chaplain under me; let the rest leave their asceticism, give them shield and spear and make them your men." The king consented, and did so, and they all entered the service of the king.

When the Master had ended this discourse, he said, "This is not the first time, Brethren, that the man was a knave." Then he identified the Birth: "At that time the dishonest Brother was Uddalaka, Ananda was the king, and I was the chaplain."

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.

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