Ja 488 — Bhisa 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/ja488.html

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Edited by E. B. Cowell

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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

“May horse and kine,” etc. This story the Master told whilst dwelling in Jetavana, about a backsliding Brother. The circumstances will appear under the Kusa Birth. Here again the Master asked—“Is it true, Brother, that you have backslidden?” “Yes, Sir, it is true.” “For what cause?” “For sin’s sake, Sir.” “Brother why do you backslide, after embracing such a faith as this which leads to salvation; and all for sin’s sake? In days of yore, before the Buddha arose, wise men who took to the religious life, even they who were outside the pale, made an oath, and renounced a suggested idea connected with temptations or desires!” So saying, he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta was king in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born as the son of a great brahmin magnifico who owned a fortune of eighty crores of money. The name they gave him was my lord Maha-Kancana, the Greater Lord of Gold. At the time when he could but just go upon his feet, another son was born to the brahmin, and they called him my lord Upa-Kancana, the Lesser Lord of Gold. Thus in succession seven sons came, and youngest of all came a daughter, whom they named Kancana-devi, the Lady of Gold.

Maha-Kancana, when he grew up, studied at Takkasila all the arts and sciences, and returned home. Then his parents desired to establish him in a household of his own. “We will fetch you,” said they, “a girl from a family to be a fit match for you, and then you shall have your own household.” But he said, “Mother and father, I want no household. To me the three kinds of existence are terrible as fires, beset with chains like a prison-house, loathsome as a dunghill. Never have I known of the deed of kind, not so much as in a dream. You have other sons, bid them be heads of families and leave me alone.” Though they begged him again and again, sent his friends to him and besought him by their lips, yet he would none of it. Then his friends asked him, “What do you wish, my good friend, that you care nothing for the enjoying of love and desire?” He told them how he had renounced all the world. When the parents understood this, they made the like proposal to

the other sons, but none of them would hear of it; nor yet again did the Lady Kancana. By and bye the parents died. The wise Maha-Kancana did the obsequies for his parents; with the treasure of eighty crores he distributed alms munificently to beggars and wayfaring men; then taking with him his six brothers, his sister, a servant man and handmaiden, and one companion, he made the great retirement and retired into the region of Himalaya. There in a delightsome spot near a lotus-lake they built them an hermitage, and lived a holy life eating of the fruits and roots of the forest. When they went into the forest, they went one by one, and if ever one of them saw a fruit or a leaf he would call the rest: there telling all they had seen and heard, they picked up what there was—it seemed like a village market. But the teacher, the ascetic Maha-Kancana, thought to himself: "We have cast aside a fortune of eighty crores and taken up the religious life, and to go about greedily seeking for wild fruits is not seemly. From henceforth I will bring the wild fruits by myself." Returning then to the hermitage, in the evening he gathered all together and told them his thought. "You remain here," said he, "and practise the life of the recluse, I will fetch fruit for you." Thereat Upa-Kancana and all the rest broke in, "We have become religious under your wing, it is you should stay behind and practise the life of the recluse. Let our sister remain here also, and the maid be with her: we eight will take turns to fetch the fruit, but you three shall be free from taking a turn." He agreed. Thenceforward these eight took a turn to bring in fruit one at a time: the others each received his share of the find, and carried it off to his dwelling-place and remained in his own leaf-hut. Thus they could not be together without cause or reason. He whose turn it was would bring in the provender (there was one enclosure), and laying it on a flat stone would make eleven portions of it; then making the gong sound he would take his own portion and depart to his place of dwelling; the others coming up at the gong-sound, without hustling, but with all due ceremony and order, would take each his allotted portion of the find, then returning to his own place there would eat it, and resume his meditation and religious austerity. After a time they gathered lotus fibres and ate them, and there they abode, mortifying themselves with scorching heat and other kind of torments, their senses all dead, striving to induce the ecstatic trance.

By the glory of their virtue Sakka's throne trembled. "Are these released from desire only," said he, "or are they sages? Are they sages? I will find out now." So by his supernatural power for three days he caused the Great Being's share to disappear. On the first day, seeing no share for him, he thought, "My share must have been forgotten." On the second day," There must be some fault in me: he has not provided my share in the way of due respect." On the third, "Why can it be they provide no share for me? If there be fault in me I will make my peace." So at evening he sounded upon the gong. They all came together, and asked who had sounded the gong. "I did, my brothers." "Why, good master?" "My brothers, who brought in the food three days ago?" One uprose, and said, "I did," standing in all respect. "When you made the division did you set apart a share for me?" "Why yes, master, the share of the eldest." "And who brought food yesterday?" Another rose, and said, "I did," then stood respectfully waiting. "Did you remember me?" "I put by for you the share of the eldest." "To-day who brought the food?" Another arose, and stood respectfully waiting. "Did you remember me in making the division?" "I set aside the share of the eldest for you." Then he said, "Brothers, this is the third day I have had no share. The first day when I saw none, I thought, Doubtless he that made the division has forgotten my share.

The second day, I thought there must be some fault in me. But to-day I made up my mind, that if fault there were, I would make my peace, and therefore I summoned you by the sound of this gong. You tell me you have put aside for me these portions of the lotus fibres: I have had none of them. I must find out who has stolen and eaten these. When one has forsaken the world and all the lusts thereof, theft is unseemly, be it no more than a lotus-stalk." When they heard these words, they cried out, "Oh what a cruel deed!" and they were all much agitated.

Now the deity which dwelt in a tree by that hermitage, the chiefest tree of the forest, came out and sat down in their midst. There was likewise an elephant, which had been unable under his training to be impassible, and brake the stake he was bound to, and escaped into the woods: from time to time he used to come and salute the band of sages, and now he came also and stood on one side. A monkey also there was, that had been used to make sport with serpents, and had escaped out of the snake-charmer's hands into the forest: he dwelt in that hermitage, and that day he also greeted the band of ascetics, and stood on one side. Sakka, resolved to test the ascetics, was there also in a shape invisible beside them. At that moment the Bodhisatta's younger brother, the recluse Upa-Kancana, arose from his seat, and saluting the Buddha, with a bow to the rest of the company, said as follows: "Master, setting aside the rest, may I clear myself from this charge?" "You may, brother." He, standing in the midst of the sages, said, "If I ate those fibres of yours, such and such am I," making a solemn oath in the words of the first stanza:

"May horse and kine be his, may silver, gold,

A loving wife, these may he precious hold,

May he have sons and daughters manifold,

Brahmin, who stole thy share of food away."

On this the ascetics put their hands over their ears, crying, "No, no, sir, that oath is very heavy!" And the Bodhisatta also said, "Brother, your oath is very heavy: you did not eat the food, sit down on your pallet." He having thus made his oath and sat down, up rose the second brother, and saluting the Great Being, recited the second stanza to clear himself:

"May he have sons and raiment at his will,

Garlands and sandal sweet his hands may fill,

His heart be fierce with lust and longing still,

Brahmin, who stole thy share of food away."

When he sat down, the others each in his turn uttered his own stanza to express his feeling:

“May he have plenty, win both fame and land,

Sons, houses, treasures, all at his command,

The passing years may he not understand,

Brahmin, who stole thy share of food away.”

“As mighty warrior chief may he be known,

As king of kings set on a glorious throne,

The earth and its four corners all his own,

Brahmin, who stole thy share of food away.”

“Be he a brahmin, passion unsubdued,

With faith in stars and lucky days imbued,

Honoured with mighty monarchs’ gratitude,

Brahmin, who stole thy share of food away.”

“A student in the Vedic lore deep-read,

Let all men reverence his holihead,

And of the people be he worshipped,

Brahmin, who stole thy share of food away.”

“By Indra’s gift a village may he hold,

Rich, choice, possest of all the goods fourfold,

And may he die with passions uncontrolled,

Brahmin, who stole thy share of food away.”

“A village chief, his comrades all around,

His joy in dances and sweet music’s sound;

May the king’s favour unto him abound:

Brahmin, who stole thy share of food away.”

“May she be fairest of all womankind,

May the high monarch of the whole world find

Her chief among ten thousand to his mind,

Brahmin, who stole thy share of food away.”

“When all the serving handmaidens do meet,

May she all unabashed sit in her seat,

Proud of her gains, and may her food be sweet.

Brahmin, who stole thy share of food away.”

“The great Kajangal cloister be his care,

And may he set the ruins in repair,

And every day make a new window there,

Brahmin, who stole thy share of food away.”

“Fast in six hundred bonds may he be caught,

From the dear forest to a city brought,

Smitten with goads and guiding-pikes, distraught,

Brahmin, who stole thy share of food away.”

“Garland on neck, tin earring in each ear,

Bound, let him walk the highway, much in fear,

And schooled with sticks to serpent kind draw near,

Brahmin, who stole thy share of food away.”

When oath had been taken in these thirteen stanzas, the Great Being thought, “Perhaps they imagine I am lying myself, and saying that the food was not there when it was.” So he made oath on his part in the fourteenth stanza:

“Who swears the food was gone, if it was not,

Let him enjoy desire and its effect,

May worldly death be at the last his lot.

The same for you, sirs, if you now suspect."

When the sages had made their oath thus, Sakka thought to himself, "Fear nothing; I made these lotus fibres disappear in order to test these men, and they all make oath, loathing the deed as if it were a snot of spittle. Now I will ask them why they loathe lust and desire." This question he put by questioning the Bodhisatta in the next stanza, after having assumed a visible form:

"What in the world men go a-seeking here

That thing to many lovely is and dear,

Longed-for, delightful in this life: why, then,

Have saints no praise for things desired of men?"

By way of answer to this question, the Great Being recited two stanzas:

"Desires are deadly blows and chains to bind,

In these both misery and fear we find:

When tempted by desires imperial kings

Infatuate do vile and sinful things.

"These sinners bring forth sin, to hell they go

At dissolution of this mortal frame.

Because the misery of lust they know

Therefore saints praise not lust, but only blame."

When Sakka had heard the Great Being's explanation, much moved in heart he repeated the following stanza:

"Myself to test these sages stole away

That food, which by the lake-side I did lay.

Sages they are indeed and pure and good.

O man of holy life, behold thy food!"

Hearing which the Bodhisatta recited a stanza:

“We are no tumblers, to make sport for thee,

No kinsmen nor no friends of thine are we.

Then why, O king divine, O thousand-eyed,

Thinkst thou the sages must thy sport provide?”

And Sakka recited the twentieth stanza, making his peace with him:

“Thou art my teacher, and my father thou,

From my offence let this protect me now.

Forgive me my one error, O wise sage!

They who are wise are never fierce in rage.”

Then the Great Being forgave Sakka, king of the gods, and on his own part to reconcile him with the company of sages recited another stanza:

“Happy for holy men one night has been,

When the Lord Vasava by us was seen.

And, sirs, be happy all in heart to see

The food once stolen now restored to me.”

Sakka saluted the company of sages, and returned to the world of gods. And they caused the mystic trance and the transcendent faculties to spring up within them, and became destined for Brahma’s world.

When the Master had ended this discourse, he said, “Thus, Brethren, wise men of old made an oath and renounced sin.” This said, he declared the Truths. At the conclusion of the Truths, the backsliding brother was established in the fruit of the First Path. Identifying the Birth, he recited three stanzas:

“Sariputta, Moggallana, Punna, Kassapa, and I,

Anuruddha and Ananda then the seven brothers were.

“Uppalavanna was the sister, and Khujjuttara the maid,

Satagira was the spirit, Citta householder the slave,

“The elephant was Parileyya, Madhuvasettha was the ape,

Kaludayi then was Sakka. Now you understand the Birth.”

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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Vol. 4, translated by W.H.D. Rouse, 1901.

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