Ja 489 — Suruci Jātaka

English translation by W. H. D. Rouse.

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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

“I am,” etc. This story the Master told while dwelling hard by Savatthi in the mansion of Migara’s mother, how she, Visakha the great lay Sister, received Eight Boons. One day she had heard the Law preached in Jetavana, and returned home after inviting the Buddha with his followers for the next day. But late in that night a mighty tempest deluged the four continents of the world. The Blessed One addressed the Brethren as follows. “As the rain falls in Jetavana, so, Brethren, falls the rain in the four continents of the world. Let yourselves be drenched to the skin: this is my last great world-storm!” So with the Brethren, whose bodies were already drenched, by his supernatural power he disappeared from Jetavana, and appeared in a room of Visakha’s mansion. She cried, “A marvel indeed! a thing mysterious! O the miracle done by the power of the Tathagata! With floods running knee deep, aye, with floods running waist-deep, not so much as the foot or the robe of a single Brother will be wet!” In joy and delight she waited upon the Buddha and all his company. After the meal was done, she said to the Buddha, “Verily I crave boons at the hands of the Blessed One.” “Visakha, the Tathagatas have boons beyond measure.” “But such as are permitted, such as are blameless?” “Speak on, Visakha.” “I crave that all my life long I may have the right to give to the Brethren clokes for the rainy season, food to all that come as guests, food to travelling priests, food to the sick, food to those who wait on the sick, medicine to the sick, a continual distribution of rice gruel; and to the Sisters all my life long robes for bathing in.” The Master replied, “What blessing have you in view, Visakha, when you ask these eight boons of the Tathagata?” She told him the benefit she hoped for, and he said, “It is well, it is well, Visakha, it is well indeed, Visakha, that this is the benefit you hope for in asking the eight boons of the Tathagata.” Then he said, “I grant you the eight boons, Visakha.” Having granted her the eight boons and thanked her he departed.

One day when the Master was dwelling in the Eastern park, they began to talk of it in the Hall of Truth: “Brother, Visakha the great lay Sister, notwithstanding her womanhood, received eight boons at the Dasabala’s hands. Ah, great are her virtues!” The Master came

in and asked what they spoke of. They told him. Said he, “It is not now the first time this woman has received boons from me, for she received such before”; and he told them a story of the past.

Once upon a time, there reigned a king Suruci in Mithila. This king, having a son born to him, gave him the name of Suruci-Kumara, or Prince Splendid. When he grew up, he determined to study at Takkasila; so thither he went, and sat down in a hall at the city gate. Now the son of the king of Benares also, whose name was Prince Brahmadatta, went to the same place, and took his seat on the same bench where Prince Suruci sat. They entered into converse together, and became friends, and went both together to the teacher. They paid the fee, and studied, and ere long their education was complete. Then they took leave of their teacher, and went on their road together. After travelling thus a short distance, they came to a stop at a place where the road parted. Then they embraced, and in order to keep their friendship alive they made a compact together: “If I have a son and you a daughter, or if you have a son and I a daughter, we will make a match of it between them.”

When they were on the throne, a son was born to king Suruci, and to him also the name of Prince Suruci was given. Brahmadatta had a daughter, and her name was Sumedha, the Wise Lady. Prince Suruci in due time grew up, went to Takkasila for his education, and that finished returned. Then his father, wishing to mark out his son for king by the ceremonial sprinkling, thought to himself, “My friend the king of Benares has a daughter, so they say: I will make her my son’s consort.” For this purpose he sent an ambassade with rich gifts.

But before they had yet come, the king of Benares asked his queen this question: “Lady, what is the worst misery for a woman?” “To quarrel with her fellow-wives.” “Then, my lady, to save our only daughter the Princess Sumedha from this misery, we will give her to none but him that will have her and no other.” So when the ambassadors came, and named the name of his daughter, he told them, “Good friends, indeed it is true I promised my daughter to my old friend long ago. But we have no wish to cast her into the midst of a crowd of women, and we will give her only to one who will wed her and no other.” This message they brought back to the king. But the king was displeased. “Ours is a great kingdom,” said he, “the city of Mithila covers seven leagues, the measure of the whole kingdom is three hundred leagues. Such a king should have sixteen thousand women at the least.” But Prince Suruci, hearing the great beauty of Sumedha, fell in love from hearing of it only. So he sent word to his parents, saying, “I will take her and no other: what do I want with a multitude of women? Let her be brought.” They did not thwart his desire, but sent a rich present and a great ambassade to bring her home. Then she was made his queen consort, and they were both together consecrated by sprinkling.

He became king Suruci, and ruling in justice lived a life of high happiness with his queen. But although she dwelt in his palace for ten thousand years, never son nor daughter she had of him.

Then all the townsfolk gathered together in the palace courtyard, with upbraidings. “What is it?” the king asked. “Fault we have no other to find,” said they, “but this, that you have no

son to keep up your line. You have but one queen, yet a royal prince should have sixteen thousand at the least. Choose a company of women, my lord: some worthy wife will bring you a son." "Dear friends, what is this you say? I passed my word I would take no other but one, and on those terms I got her. I cannot lie, no host of women for me." So he refused their request, and they departed. But Sumedha heard what was said. "The king refuses to choose him concubines for his truth's sake," thought she; "well, I will find him some one." Playing the part of mother and wife to the king, she chose at her own will a thousand maidens of the warrior caste, a thousand of the courtiers, a thousand daughters of householders, a thousand of all kinds of dancing girls, four thousand in all, and delivered them to him. And all these dwelt in the palace for ten thousand years, and never a son or daughter they brought between them. In this way she three times brought four thousand maidens but they had neither son nor daughter. Thus she brought him sixteen thousand wives in all. Forty thousand years went by, that is to say, fifty thousand in all, counting the ten thousand he had lived with her alone. Then the townsfolk again gathered together with reproaches. "What is it now?" the king asked. "My lord, command your women to pray for a son." The king was not unwilling, and commanded so to pray. Thenceforward praying for a son, they worship all manner of deities and offer all kinds of vows; yet no son appeared. Then the king commanded Sumedha to pray for a son. She consented. On the fast of the fifteenth day of the month, she took upon her the eightfold sabbath vows, and sat meditating upon the virtues in a magnificent room upon a pleasant couch. The others were in the park, vowing to do sacrifice with goats or kine. By the glory of Sumedha's virtue Sakka's dwelling place began to tremble. Sakka pondered, and understood that Sumedha prayed for a son; well, she should have one. "But I cannot give her this or that son indifferently; I will search for one which shall be suitable." Then he saw a young god called Nalakara, the Basket-weaver. He was a being endowed with merit, who in a former life lived in Benares, when this befel him. At seed-time as he was on his way to the fields he perceived a Pacceka Buddha. He sent on his hinds, bidding them sow the seed, but himself turned back, and led the Pacceka Buddha home, and gave him to eat, and then conducted him again to the Ganges bank. He and his son together made a hut, trunks of fig-trees for the foundation and reeds interwoven for the walls; a door he put to it, and made a path for walking. There for three months he made the Pacceka Buddha dwell; and after the rains were over, the two of them, father and son, put on him the three robes and let him go. In the same manner they entertained seven Pacceka Buddhas in that hut, and gave them the three robes, and let them go their ways. So men still tell how these two, father and son, turned basket-weavers, and hunted for osiers on the banks of the Ganges, and whenever they spied a Pacceka Buddha did as we have said. When they died, they were born in the heaven of the Thirty-Three, and dwelt in the six heavens of sense one after the other in direct and in reverse succession, enjoying great majesty among the gods. These two after dying. in that region were desirous of winning to the upper god-world. Sakka perceiving that one of them would be the Tathagata, went to the door of their mansion, and saluting him as he arose and came to meet him, said, "Sir, you must go into the world of men." But he said, "O king, the world of men is hateful and loathsome: they who dwell there do good and give alms longing for the world of the gods. What shall I do when I get there?" "Sir, you shall enjoy in perfection all that can be enjoyed in that world; you shall dwell in a palace made with stones of price, five and twenty leagues in height. Do consent." He consented. When Sakka had received his promise, in the guise of a sage he descended into the king's

park, and showed himself soaring above those women to and fro in the air, while he chanted, “To whom shall I give the blessing of a son, who craves the blessing of a son?” “To me, Sir, to me!” thousands of hands were uplifted. Then he said, “I give sons to the virtuous: what is your virtue, what your life and conversation?” They drew down their uplifted hands, saying, “If you would reward virtue, go seek Sumedha.” He went his ways through the air, and stayed at the window of her bedchamber. Then they went and told her, saying, “See, my lady, a king of the gods has come down through the air, and stands at your bedchamber window, offering you the boon of a son!” With great pomp she proceeded thither, and opening the window, said, “Is this true, Sir, that I hear, how you offer the blessing of a son to a virtuous woman?” “It is, and so I do.” “Then grant it to me.” “What is your virtue, tell me; and if you please me, I grant you the boon.” Then declaring her virtue she recited these fifteen stanzas.

“I am king Ruci’s consort-queen, the first he ever wed;

With Suruci ten thousand years my wedded life I led.

“Suruci king of Mithila, Videha’s chiefest place,

I never lightly held his wish, nor deemed him mean or base,

In deed or thought or word, behind his back, nor to his face.

“If this be true, O holy one, so may that son be given:

But if my lips are speaking lies, then burst my head in seven.

“The parents of my husband dear, so long as they held sway,

And while they lived, would ever give me training in the Way.

“My passion was to hurt no life, and willingly do right:

I served them with extremest care unwearied day and night.

“If this be true, etc.

“No less than sixteen thousand dames my fellow-wives have been:

Yet, brahmin, never jealousy nor anger came between.

“At their good fortune I rejoice; each one of them is dear;

My heart is soft to all these wives as though myself it were.

“If this be true, etc.

“Slaves, messengers, and servants all, and all about the place,

I give them food, I treat them well, with cheerful pleasant face.

“If this be true, etc.

“Ascetics, brahmins, any man who begging here is seen,

I comfort all with food and drink, my hands all washen clean.

“If this be true, etc.

“The eighth of either fortnight, the fourteenth, fifteenth days,

And the especial fast I keep, I walk in holy ways.

“If this be true, O holy one, so may that son be given:

But if my lips are speaking lies, then burst my head in seven.”

Indeed not a hundred verses, nor a thousand, could suffice to sing the praise of her virtues: yet Sakka allowed her to sing her own praises in these fifteen stanzas, nor did he cut the tale short though he had much to do elsewhere; then he said “Abundant and marvellous are your virtues”; then in her praise he recited a couple of stanzas:

“All these great virtues, glorious dame, O daughter of a king,

Are found in thee, which of thyself, O lady, thou dost sing.

“A warrior, born of noble blood, all glorious and wise,

Videha’s righteous emperor, thy son, shall soon arise.”

When these words she heard, in great joy she recited two stanzas, putting a question to him:

“Unkempt, with dust and dirt begrimed, high-poised in the sky,

Thou speakest in a lovely voice that pricks me to the heart.

“Art thou a mighty god, O sage and dwellst in heaven on high?

O tell me whence thou comest here, O tell me who thou art!”

He told her in six stanzas:

“Sakka the Hundred-eyed thou seest, for so the gods me call

When they are wont to assemble in the heavenly judgement hall.

“When women virtuous, wise, and good here in the world are found,

True wives, to husband’s mother kind even as in duty bound,

“When such a woman wise of heart and good in deed they know,

To her, though woman, they divine, the gods themselves will go.

“So lady, thou, through worthy life, through store of good deeds done,

A princess born, all happiness the heart can wish, hast won.

“So thou dost reap thy deeds, princess, by glory on the earth,

And after in the world of gods a new and heavenly birth.

“O wise, O blessed! so live on, preserve thy conduct right:

Now I to heaven must return, delighted with thy sight.”

“I have business to do in the world of gods,” quoth he, “therefore I go; but do thou be vigilant.” With this advice he departed.

In the morning time, the god Nalakara was conceived within her womb. When she discovered it, she told the king, and he did what was necessary for a woman with child. At the end of ten months she brought forth a son, and they gave him Maha-panada to his name. All the people of the two countries came crying out, “My lord, we bring this for the boy’s milk-money,” and each dropt a coin in the king’s courtyard: a great heap there was of them. The king did not wish to accept this, but they would not take the money back, but said as they departed, “When the boy grows up, my lord, it will pay for his keep.”

The lad was brought up amid great magnificence; and when he came of years, aye, no more than sixteen, he was perfect in all accomplishments. The king thinking of his son’s age, said to the queen, “My lady, when the time comes for the ceremonial sprinkling of our son, let us make him a fine palace for that occasion.” She was quite willing. The king sent for those who had skill in divining the lucky place for a building, and said to them: “My friends, get a master-mason, and build me a palace not far from my own. This is for my son, whom we are about to consecrate as my successor.” They said it was well, and proceeded to examine the surface of the ground. At that moment Sakka’s throne became hot. Perceiving this, he at once summoned Vissakamma, and said, “Go, my good Vissakamma, make for Prince Maha-panada a palace half a league in length and breadth and five and twenty leagues in height, all with stones of price.” Vissakamma took on the shape of a mason, and approaching the workmen said, “Go and eat your breakfast, then return.” Having thus got rid of the men, he struck on the earth with his staff; in that instant

up rose a palace, seven storeys high, of the aforesaid size. Now for Maha-panada these three ceremonies were done together: the ceremony for consecrating the palace, the ceremony for spreading above him the royal umbrella, the ceremony of his marriage. At the time of the ceremony all the people of both countries gathered together, and spent seven years a-feasting, nor did the king dismiss them: their clothes, their ornaments, their food and their drink and all the rest of it, these things were all provided by the royal family. At the seven years' end they began to grumble, and king Suruci asked why. "O king," they said, "while we have been revelling at this feast seven years have gone by. When will the feast come to an end?" He answered, "My good friends, all this while my son has never once laughed. So soon as he shall laugh, we will disperse again." Then the crowd went beating the drum and gathered the tumblers and jugglers together. Thousands of tumblers were gathered, and they divided themselves into seven bands and danced; but they could not make the prince laugh. Of course he that had seen the dancing of dancers divine could not care for such dancers as these. Then came two clever jugglers, Bhandu-kanna and Pandu-kanna, Crop-ear and Yellow-ear, and say they, "We will make the prince laugh." Bhandu-kanna made a great mango tree, which he called Sanspareil, grow before the palace door: then he threw up a ball of string, and made it catch on a branch of the tree, and then up he climbed into the Mango Sanspareil. Now the Mango Sanspareil they say is Vessavana's mango. And the slaves of Vessavana took him, as usual, chopt him up limb-meal and threw down the bits. The other jugglers joined the pieces together, and poured water upon them. The man donned upper and under garments of flowers, and rose up and began dancing again. Even the sight of this did not make the prince laugh. Then Pandu-kanna had some fire-wood piled in the court-yard and went into the fire with his troop. When the fire was burnt out, the people sprinkled the pile with water. Pandu-kanna with his troop rose up dancing with upper and under garments of flowers. When the people found they could not make him laugh, they grew angry. Sakka, perceiving this, sent down a divine dancer, bidding him make prince Maha-panada laugh. Then he came and remained poised in the air above the royal courtyard, and performed what is called the Half-body dance: one hand, one foot, one eye, one tooth, go a-dancing, throbbing, flickering to and fro, all the rest stone still. Maha-panada, when he saw this, gave a little smile. But the crowd roared and roared with laughter, could not cease laughing, laughed themselves out of their wits, lost control of their limbs, rolled over and over in the royal courtyard. That was the end of the festival. The rest of it—

Great Panada, mighty king,

With his palace all of gold,

must be explained in the Maha-panada Birth.

King Maha-panada did good and gave alms, and at his life's end went to the world of gods.

When the Master had ended this discourse, he said, "Thus, brethren, Visakha has received a boon of me before," and then he identified the Birth: "At that time, Bhaddaji was Maha-panada, Visakha the Lady Sumedha, Ananda was Vissakamma, and I myself was Sakka."

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