Ja 490 — Panc-Uposatha 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

“Thou art content,” etc. This story the Master told while dwelling at Jetavana, about five hundred lay Brethren who were under the Sabbath vows. At that time they say that the Master, seated upon the Buddha’s glorious seat, in the Hall of Truth, in the midst of folk of all the four kinds, looking around upon the gathering with a gentle heart, perceived that this day the teaching would turn on the tale of the lay Brethren. Then he addressed these, and said, “Have the lay Brethren taken upon them the Sabbath vows?” “Yes, Sir, they have,” was the answer. “It was well done, this sabbath celebration was the practice of wise men of old: the wise men of old, I say, kept the sabbath celebration in order to subdue the sins of passion and lust.” Then at their request he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time there was a great forest which separated the kingdom of Magadha from the two kingdoms that marched with it. The Bodhisatta was born in Magadha, as one of a great brahmin family. When he grew up, he renounced his desires, and departed, and went into that forest, where he made him an hermitage and dwelt there. Now not very far from this hermitage, in a clump made of bamboos, lived a Wood-pigeon with his mate; in a certain ant-hill lived a Snake; in one thicket a Jackal had his lair, in another a Bear. These four creatures used to visit the sage from time to time, and listened to his discourse.

One day the Pigeon and his mate left their nest and went a-foraging for food. The hen went behind, and as she went, a Hawk pounced on her and carried her off. Hearing her outcry the cock turned and looked, and beheld him bearing her away! The Hawk killed her in the midst of her cries, and devoured her. Now burned the cock-bird with the fire of love for his mate thus torn from him. Then thought he, “This passion torments me exceedingly; I will not go seek my food until I have found how to subdue it.” So cutting short his quest, away he went to the ascetic, and taking upon him the vow for the subduing of desire, he lay down on one side.

The Snake also thought he would seek for food; so out of his hole came he, and sought something to eat on a cow-track near one of the frontier villages. Just then there was a bull belonging to the village headman, a glorious creature white all over, which after feeding went down on his knees at the foot of a certain ant-hill, and tossed the earth with his horns in sport. The Snake was terrified at the noise of the bull's hooves, and darted forward to hide in the ant-hill. The bull happened to tread on him, whereupon the Snake was angry and bit the bull; and the bull died then and there. When the villagers found out that the bull was dead, they all ran together weeping, and honoured the dead with garlands, and buried him in a grave, and returned to their homes. The Snake came forth when they had departed, and thought, "Through anger I have deprived this creature of life, and I have caused sorrow to the hearts of many. Never again will I go out to get food until I have learnt to subdue it." Then he turned and went to the hermitage, and taking upon him the vow for the subduing of anger, lay down on one side.

The Jackal likewise went to seek food, and found a dead elephant. He was delighted: "Plenty of food here!" cried he, and went and took a bite of the trunk—it was as though he bit on a tree-trunk. He got no pleasure of that, and bit by the tusk—he might have been biting a stone. He tried the belly—it might have been a basket. So he fell on to the tail, it was like an iron bowl. Then he attacked the rump, and lo! it was soft as a cake of ghee. He liked it so well that he ate his way inside. There he remained, eating when he was hungry, and when he was athirst drinking the blood; and when he lay down, spreading the beast's inwards and lungs as a bed to lie on. "Here," thought he, "I have found me both food and drink, and my bed; what is the use of going elsewhere?" So there he stayed, well content, in the elephant's belly, and never came out at all. But by and bye the corpse grew dry in the wind and the heat, and the way out by the rear was closed. The Jackal tormented within lost flesh and blood, his body turned yellow, but how to get out he could not see. Then one day came an unexpected storm; the duct was drenched and grew soft, and began to gape open. When he saw the chink, the Jackal cried, "Too long have I been here in torment, and now I will out by this hole." Then he went at the place head first. Now the passage was narrow, and he went fast, so his body was bruised and he left all his hair behind him. When he got out he was bare as a palm-trunk, not a hair to be seen on him. "Ah," thought he, "it is my greed has brought all this trouble upon me. Never again will I go out to feed, until I have learnt how to subdue my greed." Then he went to the hermitage, and took on him the vow for subduing of greed, and lay down on one side.

The Bear too came out of the forest, and being a slave to greediness, went to a frontier village of the kingdom of Mala. "Here is a bear!" cried the villagers all; and out they came armed with bows, sticks, staves, and what not, and surrounded the thicket wherein he lay. He finding himself encompassed with a crowd, rushed out and made away, and as he went they belaboured him with their bows and cudgels. He came home with a broken head and running with blood. "Ah," thought he, "it is my exceeding greed which has brought all this trouble upon me. Never again will I go out for food until I have learnt how to subdue it." So he went to the hermitage, and took on him the vow for subduing of greediness, and lay down on one side.

But the ascetic was unable to induce the mystic ecstasy, because he was full of pride for his noble birth. A Pacceka Buddha, perceiving that he was possessed with pride, yet recognised that he was no common creature. “The man (thought he) is destined to be a Buddha, and in this very cycle he will attain to perfect wisdom. I will help him to subdue his pride, and I will cause him to develop the Attainments.” So as he sat in his hut of leaves, the Pacceka Buddha came down from the Higher Himalaya, and seated himself on the ascetic’s slab of stone. The ascetic came out and saw him upon his own seat, and in his pride was no longer master of himself. He went up and snapt fingers at him, crying out, “Curse you, vile good-for-naught, bald-pate hypocrite, why are you sitting on my seat?” “Holy man,” said the other, “why are you possessed with pride? I have penetrated the wisdom of a Pacceka Buddha, and I tell you that during this very cycle you shall become omniscient; you are destined to become a Buddha! When you have fulfilled the Perfect Virtues, after the lapse of another such period of time, a Buddha you shall be; and when you have become a Buddha, Siddhattha will be your name.” Then he told him of name and clan and family, chief disciples, and so forth, adding, “Now why are you so proud and passionate? The thing is unworthy of you.” Such was the advice of the Pacceka Buddha. To these words the other said nothing: no salutation even, no question as to when or where or how he should become a Buddha. Then the visitor said, “Learn the measure of your birth and my powers by this: if you can, rise up in the air as I do.” So saying, he arose in the air, and shook off the dust of his feet upon the coil of hair which the other wore on his head, and then returned back to the Higher Himalaya. At his departure the ascetic was overcome with grief. “There is a holy man,” said he, “with a heavy body like that, passes through the air like a cotton-fleck blown by the wind! Such a one, a Pacceka Buddha, and I never kissed his feet, because of my pride of birth, never asked him when I should become Buddha. What can this birth do for me? In this world the thing of power is a good life; but this pride of mine will bring me to hell. Never again will I go out to seek for wild fruits until I have learned bow to subdue my pride.” Then he entered his leaf-hut, and took upon him the vow for subduing pride. Seated upon his pallet of twigs, the wise young noble subdued his pride, induced the mystical trance, developed the Faculties and the Attainments, then came forth and sat down on the stone seat which was at the end of the covered walk.

Then the Pigeon and the others came up, saluted him and sat on one side. The Great Being said to the Pigeon, “On other days you never come here at this time, but you go seeking food: are you keeping a sabbath fast to-day?” “Yes, Sir, I am.” Then he said, “Why so?” reciting the first stanza:

“Thou art content with little, I am sure.

Dost want no food, O flying pigeon, now?

Hunger and thirst why willingly endure?

Why take upon thee, Sir, the sabbath vow?”

To which the Pigeon made answer in two stanzas:

“Once full of greediness my mate and I

Sported like lovers both about this spot.

Her a hawk pounced on, and away did fly:

So, torn from me, she whom I loved was not!

“In various ways my cruel loss I know;

I feel a pang in everything I see;

Therefore to sabbath vows for help I go,

That passion never may come back to me.”

When the Pigeon had thus praised his own action with regard to the vows, the Great Being put the same question to the Snake and all the rest one by one. They declared each one the thing as it was.

“Tree-dweller, coiling belly-crawling snake,

Armed with strong fangs and poison quick and sure,

These sabbath vows why dost thou wish to take?

Why thirst and hunger willingly endure?”

“The headman’s bull, all full of strength and might,

With hump all quivering, beautiful and fair,

He trod on me: in anger I did bite:

Pierced with the pain he perished then and there.

“Out pour the village people every one,

Weeping and wailing for the sight they see.

Therefore to sabbath vow for help I run,

That passion never more come back to me.”

“Carrion to thee is food both rich and rare,

Corpses on charnel-ground that rotting lie.

Why doth a Jackal thirst and hunger bear?

Why take the sabbath vows upon him, why?”

“I found an elephant, and liked the meat

So well, within his belly I did stay.

But the hot wind and the sun’s parching heat

Dried up the passage where I pushed my way.

“All thin and yellow I became, my lord!

There was no path to go by, I must stay.

Then came a storm that vehemently poured,

Damping and softening that postern way.

“Then to get out again not slow was I,

Like the Moon issuing from Rahu’s jaws :

Therefore to sabbath vows for help I fly

That greed may keep far from me: there’s the cause.”

“It was thy manner once to make a meal

Of ants upon the ant-heap, Master Bear:

Why willing now hunger and thirst to feel?

Why willing now the sabbath vow to swear?”

“From greed exceeding scorned I my own home,

To Malata I made all haste to flee.

Out from the village all the folk did come,

With bows and bludgeons they belaboured me.

“With blood besmeared and with a broken head

Back to my dwelling I made haste to flee.

Therefore to sabbath vows I now have fled

That greed may never more come nigh to me."

Thus did they all four praise their own deed in taking of these vows upon them; then rising up and saluting the Great Being, they asked him this question, "Sir, on other days you go out at this time to seek for wild fruits. Why is it to-day you go not, but observe the sabbath vows?" They recited this stanza:

"That thing, Sir, which thou hadst a mind to learn

To our best knowledge we have told it now:

But we would ask a question in our turn:

Why thou, O brahmin, takest the sabbath vow?"

He explained it to them:

"'Twas a Pacceka Buddha, who but came

And stayed a moment in my hut, and showed

My comings and my goings, name and fame,

My family, and all my future road.

"Then eaten up by pride, I did not throw

Myself before his feet; I asked no more.

Therefore to sabbath vows for help I go,

That pride may not come nigh me as of yore."

In this manner the Great Being explained his own keeping of these vows. Then he admonished them, and sent them away, and went into his hut. The others returned each to his own place. The Great Being without interrupting his ecstasy became destined for the World of Brahma, and the others abiding by his admonition, went to swell the hosts of heaven.

The Master, having ended this discourse, said, "Thus, lay Brethren, the sabbath vows were the custom of wise men of old, and must be kept now." Then he identified the Birth. "At that time Anurudha was the Pigeon, Kassapa was the Bear, Moggallana the Jackal, Sariputta the Snake, and I myself was the ascetic."

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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