Ja 496 — Bhikkha-Parampara Jātaka

English translation by W. H. D. Rouse.

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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

“I saw one sitting,” etc.—This story the Master told, whilst dwelling in Jetavana, about a certain landowner. He was a true and faithful believer, and showed honour continually to the Tathagata and the Order. One day these thoughts came to him. “I show honour constantly to the Buddha, that precious jewel, and the Order, that precious jewel, by bestowing upon them delicate food and soft raiment. Now I should like to do honour to that precious jewel the Law: but how is one to show honour to that?” So he took plenty of perfumed garlands and such like things, and proceeded to Jetavana, and greeting the Master, asked him this question: “My desire is, Sir, to show honour to the jewel of the Law: how is a man to set about it?” The Master replied, “If your desire is to honour the jewel of the Law, then show honour to Ananda, the Treasurer of the Law.” “It is well,” he said, and promised to do so. He invited the Elder to visit him, and brought him next day to his house in great pomp and splendour; he placed the Elder upon a magnificent seat, and worshipt him with perfumed garlands and so forth, gave him choice food of many kinds, presented cloth of great price sufficient for the three robes. Thought the Elder, “This honour is done to the jewel of the Law; it befits not me, but it befits the chief Commander of the Faith.” So the food placed in the bowl, and the cloths, he took to the monastery, and gave it to Elder Sariputta. He thought likewise, “This honour is done to the jewel of the Law; it befits simply and solely the Supreme Buddha, lord of the Law,” and he gave it to the Dasabala. The Master, seeing no one above himself, partook of the food, accepted the cloth for robes. And the Brethren chatted about it in the Hall of Truth: “Brethren, so and so the landowner, meaning to show honour to the Law, made a gift to Elder Ananda, Treasurer of the Law; he thought himself unworthy of it, and gave it to the Commander of the Faith; and he, thinking himself not worthy, to the Tathagata. But the Tathagata, seeing no one above himself, knew that he was worthy of it as Lord of the Law, and ate of the food, and took that cloth for robes. Thus the gift of food has found its master, by going to him whose right it was.” The Master entering, asked them what they talked of as they sat there. They told him. “Brethren,” said he, “this is not the first time that food given has fallen to the lot of the worthy by successive steps; so it did long ago, before the Buddha’s day.” With these words,

he told them a story of the past.

Once upon a time Brahmadatta ruled righteously in Benares, having renounced the ways of sin, and he kept the Ten Royal Virtues. This being so, his court of justice became so to say empty. The king, by way of searching out his own faults, questioned every one, beginning with those who dwelt about him; but not in the women's apartments, nor in the city, nor in the near villages, could he find any one who had a fault to tell of him. Then he made up his mind to try the country folk. So handing over the government to his courtiers, and taking the chaplain with him, he traversed the kingdom of Kasi in disguise; yet he found no one with a fault to tell of him.

At last he came to a village on the frontier, and sat down in a hall without the gate. At that time, a landowner of that village, a rich man worth eighty crores, in going down with a great following to the bathing place, saw the king seated in the hall, with his dainty body and skin of a golden colour. He took a fancy to him, and entering the hall, said, "Stay here awhile." Then he went to his house, and had got ready all manner of dainty food, and returned with his grand retinue carrying vessels of food. At the same time, an ascetic from Himalaya came in and sat down there, a man who had the Five Transcendent Faculties. And a Pacceka Buddha also, from a cave on Mount Nanda, came and sat there. The landowner gave the king water to wash his hands, and prepared a dish of food with all manner of fine sauces and condiments, and set before the king. He received it and gave it to the brahmin chaplain. The chaplain took it and gave to the ascetic. The ascetic walked up to the Pacceka Buddha, in his left hand holding the vessel of food, and in his right the waterpot, first offered the water of gift, and then placed the food in the bowl. He proceeded to eat, without inviting any to share, or asking leave. When the meal was done, the landowner thought: "I gave this food to the king, and he to his chaplain and the chaplain to the ascetic, and the ascetic to the Pacceka Buddha; the Pacceka Buddha has eaten it without leave asked. What means this manner of giving? Why did the last eat without with your leave or by your leave? I will ask them one by one." Then he approached each in turn, and saluting them, asked his question, while they made answer:

"I saw one worthy of a throne, who from a kingdom came

To deserts bare from palaces, most delicate of frame.

"On him in kindness I bestowed picked paddy-grains to eat,

A mess of rice all cooked so nice such as men pour on meat.

"You took the food, and gave it to the brahmin, eating none:

With all due deference I ask, what is it you have done?"

"My teacher, pastor, zealous he for duties great and small,

I ought to give the food to him, for he deserves it all."

“Brahmin, whom even kings respect, say why did you not eat

The mess of rice, all cooked so nice, which men pour over meat.

“You knew not the gift’s scope, but to the sage you past it on:

With all due deference I ask, what is it you have done?”

“I keep a wife and family, in houses too I dwell,

I rule the passions of a king, my own indulge as well.

“Unto a wise ascetic man long dwelling in the wood,

Old, practised in religious lore, I ought to give the food.

“Now the thin sage I ask, whose skin shows all the veins beneath,

With nails grown long, and shaggy hair, and dirty head and teeth:

“Have you no care for life, O lonely dweller in the wood?

How is this monk a better man to whom you gave the food?”

“Wild bulbs and radishes I dig, catmint and herbs seek I,

Wild rice, black mustard shake or pick, and spread them out to dry,

“Jujubes, herbs, honey, lotus-threads, myrobolan, scraps of meat,

This is my wealth, and these I take and make them fit to eat.

“I cook, he cooks not: I have wealth, he nothing: I’m bound tight

To worldly things, but he is free: the food is his by right.”

“I ask the Brother, sitting there, with cravings all subdued;

—This mess of rice, all cooked and nice, which men pour on their food,

“You took it, and with appetite eat it, and share with none;

With all due deference I ask, what is it you have done?”

“I cook not, nor I cause to cook, destroy nor have destroyed;

He knew that I possess no wealth, all sins I do avoid.

“The pot he carried in his right, and in his left the food,

Gave me the broth men pour on meat, the mess of rice so good;

“They have possessions, they have wealth, to give their duty is:

Who asks a giver to partake, he is a foe, y-wis.”

On hearing these words, the landowner in high delight repeated the last two stanzas:

“It was a happy chance for me to-day that brought the king:

I never knew before how gifts abundant fruit would bring.

“Kings in their kingdoms, brahmins in their work, are full of greed,

Sages in picking fruits and roots: Brethren from sin are freed.”

The Pacceka Buddha having discoursed to him, then departed to his own place, and the ascetic likewise. And the king, after remaining a few days with him, went away to Benares.

When the Master had ended this discourse, he said: “It is not the first time, Brethren, that food went to him who deserved it, for the same thing has happened before.” Then he identified the Birth: “At that time, the landowner who did honour to the Law was the landowner in the story, Ananda was the king, Sariputta the chaplain, and I myself was the ascetic who lived in Himalaya.”

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.

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

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