Ja 497 — Matanga 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

“Whence comest thou,” etc.—This story the Master told while dwelling in Jetavana, about the hereditary king Udena. At that time, the reverend Pindola-bharadvaja passing from Jetavana through the air, used generally to pass the heat of the day in king Udena’s park at Kosambi. The Elder, we are told, had in a former existence been king, and for a long time had enjoyed glory in that very park with his retinue. By virtue of the good then by him performed, he used to sit there in the heat of the day, enjoying the bliss of Attainment which was its fruit.

One day he was in that place, and sitting under a sal-tree in full flower, when Udena came into the park with a large number of followers. For seven days he had been drinking deep, and he wished to take his pleasure in the park. He lay down on the royal seat in the arms of one of his women, and being foxed soon fell asleep. Then the women who sat singing around threw down their instruments of music, and wandered about the pleasance gathering flowers and fruit. By and by they saw the Elder, and came up, and saluting him sat down. The Elder sat where he was and discoursed to them. The other woman by shifting her arms awoke the king, who said, “Where are those drabs gone?” She replied, “They are sitting in a ring round an ascetic.” The king grew angry, and went to the Elder, abusing and reviling: “Out on it, I’ll have the fellow devoured by red ants!” So in rage he caused a basket full of red ants to be broken over the Elder’s body. But the Elder rose up in the air, and admonished the king; then to Jetavana he went, and alighted at the gateway of the Perfumed Chamber. “Whence have you come?” asked the Tathagata: and he told him the fact. “Bharadvaja,” quoth he, “this is not the first time Udena has done despite to a religious man, but he did the same before.” Then at the Elder’s request, he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta was king of Benares, the Great Being was born outside the city, as a Candala’s son, and they gave him the name of Matanga, the Elephant. Afterwards he attained wisdom, and his fame was blown abroad as the Wise Matanga.

Now at that time one Dittha-mangalika, daughter of a Benares merchant, every month or two used to come and disport her in the park with a crowd of companions. One day, the Great Being had gone to town on some business, and as he was entering the gate met Dittha-mangalika. He stept aside, and stood quite still, From behind her curtain Dittha-mangalika spied him, and asked, “Who is that?” “A Candala, my lady.” “Bah,” says she, “I have seen something that brings bad luck,” and washing her eyes with scented water she turned back. The people with her cried out, “Ah, vile outcast, you have lost us free food and liquor to-day!” In rage they pummelled Matanga the wise with hands and feet, and made him senseless, and went away. After a while he recovered consciousness, and thought, “The crowd around Dittha-mangalika beat me for no reason, an innocent man. I will not budge till I get her, not a moment before.” With this resolve, he went and lay down at the door of her father’s house. When they asked him why he lay there, his reply was, “All I want is Dittha-mangalika.” One day passed, then a second, a third, fourth, fifth, and sixth. The resolve of the Buddhas is immovable; therefore on the seventh day they brought out the girl and gave her to him. Then she said, “Rise up, master, and let us go to your house.” But he said, “Lady, I have been well pummelled by your people, I am weak, take me up on your back and carry me.” So she did, and in full view of the citizens went forth from the city to the Candala settlement.

There for a few days the Great Being kept her, without transgressing in any way the rules of caste. Then he thought, “Only by renouncing the world, and in no other way, shall I be able to show this lady the highest honour and give her the best gifts.” So he said to her, “Lady, if I fetch nothing out of the forest, we cannot live. I will go into the forest; wait till I return, but do not worry.” He laid injunctions upon the household not to neglect her, and went into the forest, and embraced the life of a religious ascetic, with all diligence; so that in seven days he developed the Eight Attainments and the Five Supernatural Faculties. Then he thought, “Now I shall be able to protect Dittha-mangalika.” By his supernatural power he went back, and alighted at the gate of the Candala village, whence he proceeded to the door of Dittha-mangalika’s house. She, when she heard of his return, came out, and began to weep, saying, “Why have you deserted me, master, and become an ascetic?” He said, “Never mind, lady, now I will make you more glorious than your former glory. Will you be able to say in the midst of the people just this: “My husband is not Matanga, but the Great Brahma?” “Yes, master, I can say it.” “Very well, when they ask you where is your husband, you must reply, He is gone to Brahma’s heaven. If they ask, when he will come back, you must say, In seven days he will come, breaking the moon’s disk when she is at the full.” With these words, he went away to Himalaya.

Now Dittha-mangalika said what she had been told here and there in Benares, amidst a great crowd. The people believed, saying, “Ah, he is Great Brahma, and therefore does not visit Dittha-mangalika, but thus and thus it will be.” On the night of full moon, at the time when the moon stands still in mid-course, the Bodhisatta assumed the appearance of Brahma, and amidst a blaze of light which filled all the kingdom of Kasi, and the city of Benares twelve leagues in extent, broke through the moon and came down: thrice he made circuit above the city of Benares, and received the worship of the great crowd with perfumed garlands and such like, and then turned his face towards the Candala village. The devotees of Brahma gathered together, and went to the Candala village. They covered

Dittha-mangalika's house with white cloths, swept the ground with four manner of sweet smelling things, scattered flowers, burnt incense, spread an awning, prepared a splendid seat, lit a lamp of scented oil, laid at the door sand white and smooth as a silver plate, scattered flowers, put up banners. Before the house thus decorated the Great Being came down, and entered, and sat a little while on the seat. At that time Dittha-mangalika was in her monthly terms. His thumb touched her navel, and she conceived. Then the Great Being said to her, "Lady, you are with child, and you shall bring forth a son; you and your son shall receive the highest honour and tribute; the water that washes your feet shall be used by kings for the ceremonial sprinkling throughout all India, the water you bathe in shall be an elixir of immortality, those who sprinkle it on their heads shall be set free from all disease and shall not know ill luck, they who lay the head on your feet and salute you shall give a thousand pieces of money, they who stand within your hearing and salute you shall give a hundred, they who stand in your sight and salute you shall give one rupee each. Be vigilant!" With this admonition, in view of the crowd, he rose up and re-entered the moon.

The devotees of Brahma collected, and stood there through the whole night; in the morning they caused her to enter a golden palanquin, and taking it upon their heads, bore her into the city. A great concourse came to her, crying aloud, "The wife of Great Brahma!" and did worship with scented garlands and other such things; those who were allowed to lay the head on her feet and salute her gave a purse of a thousand pieces, those who might salute her within hearing gave a hundred, those who might salute her standing within her sight gave one rupee each. Thus they included in their progress the whole city of Benares, twelve leagues in extent, and received a sum of eighteen crores.

Having thus made the circuit of that city, they brought her to the centre of it, and there built a great pavilion, and set curtains about it, and caused her to dwell there amidst much glory and prosperity. Before the pavilion, they began to build seven great entrance gates, and a palace with seven storeys: much new merit was set to their account.

In that same pavilion, Dittha-mangalika brought forth a son. On his name-day, the brahmins gathered together, and named him Mandavya-kumara, the Prince of the Pavilion, because he was born there. In ten months the palace was finished: from that time she dwelt in it, highly honoured. And Prince Mandavya grew up amid great magnificence. When he was seven or eight years old, the best teachers in the length and breadth of India gathered together, and they taught him the three Vedas. From the age of sixteen he provided food for the brahmins, and sixteen thousand brahmins were fed continually; at the fourth embattled gateway the alms were distributed to the brahmins.

Now on one great day of festival they prepared a quantity of rice porridge, and sixteen thousand brahmins sat by the fourth embattled gateway and partook of this food, accompanied with fresh ghee of a golden yellow, a decoction of honey and lump sugar; and the prince himself, brilliantly adorned with jewels, with golden slippers upon his feet, and a staff of fine gold in his hand, was walking about and giving directions, "Ghee here, honey here." At that time, the wise Matanga seated in his hermitage in the Himalayas, turned his thoughts to see what news there was of Dittha-mangalika's son. Perceiving that he was going in the wrong way, he thought, "To-day I will go, and convert the young man,

and I will teach him how to give so that the gift shall bring much fruit." He went through the air to Lake Anotatta, and there washed his mouth, and so forth; standing in the district of Manosila, he donned the pair of coloured garments, girt his girdle about him, put on the ragged robe, took his earthen bowl, and went through the air to the fourth gateway, where he alighted just by the alms-hall, and stood on one side. Mandavya, looking this way and that, espied him. "Where do you come from," cried he, "you ascetic, you misbegotten outcast, a goblin and no man?" and he repeated the first stanza:

"Whence comest thou, in filthy garments drest,

A creature vile and goblin-like, I vow,

A robe of refuse-rags across thy breast,

Unworthy of a gift—say, who art thou?"

The Great Being listened, then with gentle heart addressed him in the words of the second stanza:

"The food, O noble sir! is ready set,

The people taste, and eat, and drink of it:

You know we live on what we chance to get;

Rise! let the low-caste churl enjoy a bit."

Then Mandavya recited the third stanza:

"For brahmins, for my blessing, by my hand

This food is got, the gift of faithful heart.

Away! what boots it in my sight to stand?

'Tis not for such as thou: vile wretch, depart!"

Thereupon the Great Being repeated a stanza:

"They sow the seed on high ground and on low,

Hoping for fruit, and on the marshy plain:

In such a faith as this thy gifts bestow;

Worthy recipients so thou shalt obtain."

Then Mandavya repeated a stanza:

“I know the lands wherein I mean to sow,

The proper places in this world for seed,

Brahmins highborn, that holy scriptures know:

These are good ground and fertile fields indeed

Then the Great Being repeated two stanzas:

“The pride of birth, o’erweening self-conceit,

Drunkenness, hatred, ignorance, and greed,—

Those in whose hearts these vices find their seat,—

They all are bad and barren fields for seed.

“The pride of birth o’erweening, self-conceit,

Drunkenness, hatred, ignorance, and greed,—

Those in whose hearts these vices find no seat,

They all are good and fertile fields for seed.”

These words the Great Being repeated again and again; but the other grew angry, and cried—“The fellow prates overmuch. Where are my porters gone, that they do not cast out the churl?” Then he repeated a stanza:

“Ho Bhandakucchi, Upajjhaya ho!

And where is Upajotiya, I say?

Punish the fellow, kill the fellow, go—

And by the throat hale the vile churl away!”

The men hearing his call, came up at a run, and saluting him, asked, “What are we to do, my lord?” “Did you ever see this base outcast?” “No, Sire, we did not know he had come in at all: some juggler he is doubtless, or cunning rogue.”—“Well, why do you stand there?”—“What are we to do, my lord?”—“Why, strike the fellow’s mouth, break his jaw, tear his back with rods and cudgels, punish him, take the wretch by the throat, knock him down, away with him out of this place!” But the Great Being, ere they could come at him, rose up in the air, and there poised, repeated a stanza:

“Revile a sage! to swallow blazing fire as much avails,

Or bite hard iron, or dig down a mountain with your nails.”

Having uttered these words, the Great Being rose high in the air, while the youth and the brahmins gazed at the sight.

Explaining this, the Master recited a stanza:

“So spake the sage Matanga, champion of truth and right,

Then in the air he rose aloft before the brahmins’ sight.”

He turned his face to the eastwards, and coming down in a certain street, with intent that his footsteps might be visible, he begged alms near the eastern gate; then, having collected a quantity of mixt victuals, he sat him down in a certain hall and began to eat. But the deities of the city came up, finding it intolerable that this king should so speak as to annoy their sage. So the eldest goblin among them seized hold of Mandavya by the neck, and twisted it, and the others seized the other brahmins and twisted their necks. But through pity for the Bodhisatta, they did not kill Mandavya: “he is his son,” they said, and only tormented him. Mandavya’s head was twisted so that it looked backwards over his shoulders; hands and feet were stiff and stark; his eyes were turned up, as though he were a dead man: there he lay stark. The other brahmins turned round and round, drabbling spittle at the mouth. People went and told Dittha-mangalika, “Something has happened to your son, my lady!” She made all haste thither, and seeing him cried, “Oh, what is this!” and recited a stanza:

“Over the shoulder twisted stands his head;

See how he stretches out a helpless arm!

White are his eyes as though he were quite dead:

O who is it has wrought my son this harm?”

Then the bystanders repeated a stanza, telling her about it:

“A hermit came, in filthy garments drest,

A creature vile and goblin-like to see,

With robe of refuse-rags across his breast:

The man who treated thus thy son, is he.”

On hearing this, she thought: “No other has the power, the wise Matanga without doubt it must be! But one who is stedfast, and full of goodwill to all creatures, will never go away and leave all these folk to torment. Now in what direction can he have gone?” which question she put in the following stanza:

“In what direction went the wise one hence?

O noble youths, pray answer me this thing!

Come let us make atonement for the offence,

Our son to life again that we may bring.”

The young men answered her in this manner:

“That wise one, up into the air rose he,

Like moon in mid-career the fifteenth day:

The sage, truth-consecrated, fair to see,

Towards the east moreover bent his way.”

This answer given, she said, “I will seek my husband!” and bidding take with her pitchers of gold and cups of gold, surrounded with a company of waiting women, she went and found the place where his footsteps had touched the ground; these she followed, until she came to him sitting upon a seat, and eating his meal. Approaching she saluted him, and stood still. On seeing her he placed some boiled rice in his bowl. Dittha mangalika poured water for him from a golden pitcher; he at once washed his hands and rinsed out his mouth. Then she said, “Who has done this cruel thing to my son?” repeating this stanza:

“Over the shoulder twisted stands his head;

See how he stretches out a helpless arm!

White are his eyes, as though he were quite dead:

O who is it has wrought my son this harm?”

The stanzas which follow are said by the two alternately:

“Goblins there are, whose might and power is great,

Who follow sages, beautiful to see:

They saw thy son ill-minded, passionate,

And they have treated thus thy son for thee."

"Then it is goblins who this thing have done:

Do not be wroth, O holy man, with me!

O Brother! full of love towards my son

Hither for refuge to thy feet I flee!"

"Then let me tell thee that my mind doth hide

Nor then nor now a thought of enmity:

Thy son, through fancied knowledge, drunk with pride,

Knows not the meaning of the Vedas three."

"O Brother! verily a man may find

All in a trice his sense quite gone blind.

Forgive me my one error, O wise sage!

They who are wise are never fierce in rage."

The Great Being, thus pacified by her, replied, "Well, I will give you the elixir of immortal life, to make the goblins depart"; and he recited this stanza:

"This fragment of my leavings take with thee,

Let the poor fool Mandavya eat a piece:

Thy son shall be made whole, restored to thee,

And so the goblins shall their prey release."

When she heard the words of the Great Being, she held out a golden bowl, saying, "Give me the elixir of immortality, my lord!" The Great Being dropt in it some of his rice gruel, and said, "First put the half of this into your son's mouth; the rest mix with water in a vessel, and put it in the mouths of the other brahmins: they shall all be made whole." Then he arose and departed to Himalaya. She carried off the pitcher upon her head, crying, "I have the elixir of immortality!" Arrived at the house, she first put some of it in her son's mouth. The Goblin fled away; the king got up, and brushed off the dust, asking, "What is this, mother?"—"You know well enough what you have done; now see the miserable plight of your dolesmen!" When he looked at them, he was filled with remorse. Then his mother said, "Mandavya, my dear son, you are a fool, and you do not know how to give so that the

gift may bear fruit. Such as these are not fit for your bounty, but only such as are like the wise Matanga. Henceforward give nothing to evil men like these, but give to the virtuous." Then she said—

"Thou art a fool, Mandavya, small of wit,

Not knowing when to do good deeds is fit:

Thou givest to those whose sinfulness is great,

To evildoers and intemperate.

"Garments of skin, a mass of shaggy hair,

Mouth like an ancient well with grass o'ergrown,

And see what ragged clouts the creatures wear!

But fools are saved not by such things alone.

"When passion, hate, and ignorance, afar from men are driven,

Give to such calm and holy men: much fruit for this is given."

"Therefore from this time forward give not to wicked men like this; but whoso in this world has reached the eight Attainments, righteous ascetics and brahmins who have gained the Five Transcendent Faculties, Pacceka Buddhas, to these give your gifts. Come my son, let me give these our servants the elixir of immortality, and make them whole." So saying, she had the leavings of the rice gruel taken, and put in a pitcher of water, and sprinkled over the mouths of the sixteen thousand brahmins. Each one got up, and brushed off the dust.

Then these brahmins, having been made to taste the leavings of a Candala, were put out of caste by the other brahmins. In shame they departed from Benares, and went to the kingdom of Mejjha, where they lived with the king of that country. But Mandavya remained where he was.

At that time there was a brahmin named Jatimanta, one of the religious, who lived hard by the city of Vettavati on the banks of the river of that name; and he was a man mightily proud of his birth. The Great Being went thither, resolved to humble the man's pride; and he made his abode near him, but further up stream. One day, having nibbled at a tooth-stick, he let it fall into the river, resolving that it should get entangled in Jatimanta's knot of hair. Accordingly, as he was washing in the water, the stick became entangled in his hair. "Curse the brute!" said he, when he saw it, "where has this come from, with a pest! I will enquire." He proceeded up stream, and finding the Great Being, asked him, "What caste are you of?"—"I am a Candala."—"Did you drop a tooth-stick into the river?"—"Yes, I did."—"You brute! curse you, vile outcast, a murrain on you, don't stay here, but go further

down stream." But even when he went to live down stream, the tooth-sticks he dropt floated against the current, and stuck in Jatimanta's hair. "Curse you!" quoth he, "if you stay here, in seven days your head shall burst into seven pieces!" The Great Being thought, "If I allow myself to be angry with the man, I shall not be keeping my virtue; but I will find a way to break down his pride." On the seventh day, he prevented the sunrise. All the world was put out: they came to the ascetic Jatimanta, and asked, "Is it you, Sir, who prevent the sun from rising?" He said, "That is no doing of mine; but there is a Candala living by the riverside, and his doing it must be." Then the people came to the Great Being, and asked him, "Is it you, Sir, who keep the sun from rising?" "Yes, friends," said he. "Why?" they asked. "The ascetic who is your favourite reviles me, an innocent man; when he comes and falls at my feet to ask for mercy, then I will let the sun go." They went and dragged him along, and cast him down before the Great Being's feet, and tried to appease him, saying, "Sir, pray let the sun go." But he said, "I cannot let him go; if I do so, this man's head will burst into seven pieces." They said, "Then, Sir, what are we to do?" "Bring me a lump of clay." They brought it. "Now place it upon the head of this ascetic, and let the ascetic down into the water." After making these arrangements, he let the sun rise. No sooner was the sun set free, the lump of clay split in seven, and the ascetic plunged under the water. Having thus humbled him, the Great Being pondered: "Where now are those sixteen thousand brahmins?" He perceived they were with the king of Mejjha, and resolved to humble them; by his supernatural power he alighted in the neighbourhood of the city, and bowl in hand tramped the city seeking alms. When the brahmins descried him, they said, "Let him stay here but a couple of days, and he will leave us without a refuge!" In all haste they went to the king, crying, "O mighty king, here is a juggler and mountebank come: take him prisoner!" The king was ready enough. The Great Being, with his mess of mixt victuals, was sitting beside a wall, on a bench, and eating. There, as he was busy partaking of the food, the king's messengers found him, and striking him with a sword, killed him. After his death, he was born in the Brahma world. It is said that in this birth the Bodhisatta was a mongoose-tamer, and in this servile occupation was put to death. The deities were angry, and poured down upon the whole kingdom of Mejjha a torrent of hot ashes, and wiped it out from among kingdoms. Therefore it is said:

"So the whole nation was destroyed of Mejjha, as they say,

For glorious Matanga's death, the kingdom swept away."

When the Master had ended this discourse, he said: "It is not now the first time that Udena has abused religious men, but he did the same before." Then he identified the Birth: "At that time, Udena was Mandavya, and I myself was the wise Matanga."

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