Ja 499 — Sivi 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

“If there be any human,” etc.—This story the Master told while dwelling at Jetavana, about the gift incomparable. The circumstances have been fully told in Book Viii. under the Sovira Birth. But here the king, on the seventh day, gave all the requisites and asked for thanks; but the Master went away without thanking him. After breakfast the king went to the monastery, and said, “Why did you return no thanks, Sir?” The Master said, “The people were unpurified, your majesty.” He went on to declare the Law, reciting the stanza that begins “To heaven the avaricious shall not go.” The king, pleased at heart, did reverence to the Tathagata by presenting an outer robe of the Sivi country, worth a thousand pieces of money; then he returned to the city.

Next day they were talking of it in the Hall of Truth: “Sirs, the king of Kosala gave the gift incomparable: and, not content with that, when the Dasabala had discoursed to him, the king gave him a Sivi garment worth a thousand pieces! How insatiate the king is in giving, sure enough!” The Master came in, and asked what they talked of as they sat there: they told him. He said, “Brothers, things external are acceptable, true: but wise men of old, who gave gifts till all India rang again with the fame of it, each day distributing as much as six hundred thousand pieces, were unsatisfied with external gifts; and, remembering the proverb, Give what you prize and love will arise, they even pulled out their eyes and gave to those that asked.” With these words, he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time, when the mighty King Sivi reigned in the city of Aritthapura in the kingdom of Sivi, the Great Being was born as his son. They called his name Prince Sivi. When he grew up, he went to Takkasila and studied there; then returning, he proved his knowledge to his father the king, and by him was made viceroy. At his father’s death he became king himself, and, forsaking the ways of evil, he kept the Ten Royal Virtues and ruled in righteousness. He caused six alms-halls to be builded, at the four gates, in the midst of the city, and at his own door. He was munificent in distributing each day six hundred thousand pieces of money. On the eighth, fourteenth, and fifteenth days he never

missed visiting the alms-halls to see the distribution made.

Once on the day of the full moon, the state umbrella had been uplifted early in the morning, and he sat on the royal throne thinking over the gifts he had given. Thought he to himself, “Of all outside things there is nothing I have not given; but this kind of giving does not content me. I want to give something which is a part of myself. Well, this day when I go to the alms-hall, I vow that if any one ask not something outside me, but name what is part of myself,—if he should mention my very heart, I will cut open my breast with a spear, and as though I were drawing up a water-lily, stalk and all, from a calm lake, I will pull forth my heart dripping with blood-clots and give it him: if he should name the flesh of my body, I will cut the flesh off my body and give it, as though I were graving with a graving tool: let him name my blood, I will give him my blood, dropping it in his mouth or filling a bowl with it: or again, if one say, I can’t get my household work done, come and do me a slave’s part at home, then I will leave my royal dress and stand without, proclaiming myself a slave, and slave’s work I will do: should any men demand my eyes, I will tear out my eyes and give them, as one might take out the pith of a palm-tree.” Thus he thought within him:

“If there be any human gift that I have never made,

Be it my eyes, I’ll give it now, all firm and unafraid.”

Then he bathed himself with sixteen pitchers of perfumed water, and adorned him in all his magnificence, and after a meal of choice food he mounted upon an elephant richly caparisoned and went to the alms-hall.

Sakka, perceiving his resolution, thought, “King Sivi has determined to give his eyes to any chance comer who may ask. Will you be able to do it, or no?” He determined to try him; and, in the form of a brahmin old and blind, he posted himself on a high place, and when the king came to his alms-hall he stretched out his hand and stood crying, “Long live the king!” Then the king drove his elephant towards him, and said, “What do you say, brahmin?” Sakka said to him, “O great king! in all the inhabited world there is no spot where the fame of your munificent heart has not sounded. I am blind, and you have two eyes.” Then he repeated the first stanza, asking for an eye:

“To ask an eye the old man comes from far, for I have none:

O give me one of yours, I pray, then we shall each have one.”

When the Great Being heard this, thought he, “Why that is just what I was thinking in my palace before I came! What a fine chance! My heart’s desire will be fulfilled to-day; I shall give a gift which no man ever gave yet.” And he recited the second stanza:

“Who taught thee hitherward to wend thy way,

O mendicant, and for an eye to pray?

The chiefest portion of a man is this,

And hard for men to part with, so they say.”

(The succeeding stanzas are to be read two and two, as may easily be seen.)

“Sujampati among the gods, the same

Here among men called Maghava by name,

He taught me hitherward to wend my way,

Begging, and for an eye to urge my claim.

“‘Tis the all-chiefest gift for which I pray.

Give me an eye! O do not say me nay!

Give me an eye, that chiefest gift of gifts,

So hard for men to part with, as they say!”

“The wish that brought thee hitherward, the wish that did arise

Within thee, be that wish fulfilled. Here, brahmin, take my eyes.

“One eye thou didst request of me: behold, I give thee two!

Go with good sight, in all the people’s view;

So be thy wish fulfilled and now come true.”

So much the king said. But, thinking it not meet that he should root out his eyes and bestow them there and then, he brought the brahmin indoors with him, and sitting on the royal throne, sent for a surgeon named Sivaka. “Take out my eye, “he then said.

Now all the city rang with the news, that the king wished to tear out his eyes and give them to a brahmin. Then the commander-in-chief, and all the other officials, and those beloved of the king, gathered together from city and harem, and recited three stanzas, that they might turn the king from his purpose:

“O do not give thine eye, my lord; desert us not, O king!

Give money, pearls and coral give, and many a precious thing:

“Give thorobreds caparisoned, forth be the chariots rolled,

O king, drive up the elephants all fine with cloth of gold:

“These give, O king! that we may all preserve thee safe and sound,

Thy faithful people, with our cars and chariots ranged around.”

Hereupon the king recited three stanzas:

“The soul which, having sworn to give, is then unfaithful found,

Puts his own neck within a snare low hidden on the ground.

“The soul which, having sworn to give, is then unfaithful found,

More sinful is than sin, and he to Yama’s house is bound.

“Unasked give nothing; neither give the thing he asketh not,

This therefore which the brahmin asks, I give it on the spot.”

Then the courtiers asked, “What do you desire in giving your eyes?” repeating a stanza:

“Life, beauty, joy, or strength—what is the prize,

O king, which motive for your deed supplies?

Why should the king of Sivi-land supreme

For the next world’s sake thus give up his eyes?”

The king answered them in a stanza:

“In giving thus, not glory is my goal,

Not sons, not wealth, or kingdoms to control:

This is the good old way of holy men;

Of giving gifts enamoured is my soul.”

To the Great Being’s words the courtiers answered nothing; so the Great Being addressed Sivaka the surgeon in a stanza:

“A friend and comrade, Sivaka, art thou:

Do as I bid thee—thou hast skill enow—

Take out my eyes, for this is my desire,

And in the beggar's hands bestow them now."

But Sivaka said, "Bethink you, my lord! to give one's eyes is no light thing."—"Sivaka, I have considered; don't delay, nor talk too much in my presence." Then he thought, "It is not fitting that a skilful surgeon like me should pierce a king's eyes with the lancet," so he pounded a number of simples, rubbed a blue lotus with the powder, and brushed it over the right eye: round rolled the eye, and there was great pain. "Reflect, my king, I can make it all right."—"Go on, friend, no delay, please." Again he rubbed in the powder, and brushed it over the eye: the eye started from the socket, the pain was worse than before. "Reflect, my king, I can still restore it."—"Be quick with the job!" A third time he smeared a sharper powder, and applied it: by the drug's power round went the eye, out it came from the socket, and hung dangling at the end of the tendon. "Reflect, my king, I can yet restore it again."—"Be quick." The pain was extreme, blood was trickling, the king's garments were stained with the blood. The king's women and the courtiers fell at his feet, crying, "My lord, do not sacrifice your eyes!" loudly they wept and wailed. The king endured the pain, and said, "My friend, be quick." "Very well, my lord," said the physician; and with his left hand grasping the eyeball took a knife in his right, and severing the tendon, laid the eye in the Great Being's hand. He, gazing with his left eye at the right and enduring the pain, said, "Brahmin, come here." When the brahmin came near, he went on—"The eye of omniscience is dearer than this eye a hundred fold, aye a thousand fold: there you have my reason for this action," and he gave it to the brahmin, who raised it and placed it in his own eye socket. There it remained fixt by his power like a blue lotus in bloom. When the Great Being with his left eye saw that eye in his head, he cried—"Ah, how good is this my gift of an eye!" and thrilled straightway with the joy that had arisen within him, he gave the other eye also. Sakka placed this also in the place of his own eye, and departed from the king's palace, and then from the city, with the gaze of the multitude upon him, and went away to the world of gods.

The Master, explaining this, repeated a stanza and a half:

"So Sivi spurred on Sivaka, and he fulfilled his mind.

He drew the king's eyes out, and to the brahmin these consigned:

And now the brahmin had the eyes, and now the king was blind."

In a short while the king's eyes began to grow; as they grew, and before they reached the top of the holes, a lump of flesh rose up inside like a ball of wool, filling the cavity; they were like a doll's eyes, but the pain ceased. The Great Being remained in the palace a few days. Then he thought, "What has a blind man to do with ruling? I will hand over my kingdom to the courtiers, and go into my park, and become an ascetic, and live as a holy man." He summoned his courtiers, and told them what he intended to do. "One man," said he, "shall be with me, to wash my face, and so forth, and to do all that is proper, and you must fasten a cord to guide me to the retiring places." Then calling for his charioteer, he

bade him prepare the chariot. But the courtiers would not allow him to go in the chariot; they brought him out in a golden litter, and set him down by the lake side, and then, guarding him all around, returned. The king sat in the litter thinking of his gift.

At that moment Sakka's throne became hot; and he pondering perceived the reason. "I will offer the king a boon," thought he, "and make his eye well again." So to that place he came; and not far off from the Great Being, he walked up and down, up and down.

To explain this the Master recited these stanzas:

"A few days past; the eyes began to heal, and sound to appear:

The fostering king of Sivi then sent for his charioteer.

"Prepare the chariot, charioteer; to me then make it known:

I go to park and wood and lake with lilies overgrown."

"He sat him in a litter by the waterside, and here

Sujampati, the king of gods, great Sakka, did appear."

"Who is that?"cried the Great Being, when he heard the sound of the footsteps. Sakka repeated a stanza:

"Sakka, the king of gods, am I; to visit thee I came:

Choose thou a boon, O royal sage! whate'er thy wish may name."

The king replied with another stanza:

"Wealth, strength, and treasure without end, these I have left behind:

O Sakka, death and nothing more I want: for I am blind."

Then Sakka said, "Do you ask death, King Sivi, because you wish to die, or because you are blind?"—"Because I am blind, my lord."—"The gift is not everything in itself, your majesty, it is given with an eye to the future. Yet there is a motive relating to this visible world. Now you were asked for one eye, and gave two; make an Act of Truth about it." Then he began a stanza:

"O warrior, lord of biped kind, declare the thing that's true:

If you the truth declare, your eye shall be restored to you."

On hearing this, the Great Being replied, "If you wish to give me an eye, Sakka, do not try any other means, but let my eye be restored as a consequence of my gift." Sakka said,

“Though they call me Sakka, king of the gods, your majesty, yet I cannot give an eye to any one else; but by the fruit of the gift by thee given, and by nothing else, your eye shall be restored to you.” Then the other repeated a stanza, maintaining that his gift was well given:

“Whatever sort, whatever kind of suitor shall draw near,

Whoever comes to ask of me, he to my heart is dear:

If these my solemn words be true, now let my eye appear!”

Even as he uttered the words, one of his eyes grew up in the socket. Then he repeated a couple of stanzas to restore the other:

“A brahmin came to visit me, one of my eyes to crave:

Unto that brahmin mendicant the pair of them I gave.

“A greater joy and more delight that action did afford.

If these my solemn words be true, be the other eye restored!”

On the instant appeared his second eye. But these eyes of his were neither natural nor divine. An eye given by Sakka as the brahmin, cannot be natural, we know; on the other hand, a divine eye cannot be produced in anything that is injured. But these eyes are called the eyes of Truth Absolute and Perfect. At the time when they came into existence, the whole royal retinue by Sakka’s power was assembled; and Sakka standing in the midst of the throng, uttered praise in a couple of stanzas:

“O fostering King of Sivi land, these holy hymns of thine

Have gained for thee as bounty free this pair of eyes divine.

“Through rock and wall, o’er hill and dale, whatever bar may be,

A hundred leagues on every side those eyes of thine shall see.”

Having uttered these stanzas, poised in the air before the multitude, with a last counsel to the Great Being that he should be vigilant, Sakka returned to the world of gods. And the Great Being, surrounded by his retinue, went back in great pomp to the city, and entered the palace called Candaka, the Peacock’s Eye. The news that he had got his eyes again spread abroad all through the Kingdom of Sivi. All the people gathered together to see him, with gifts in their hands. “Now all this multitude is come together,” thought the Great Being, “I shall praise my gift that I gave.” He caused a great pavilion to be put up at the palace gate, where he seated himself upon the royal throne, with the white umbrella spread above him. Then the drum was sent beating about the city, to collect all the trade guilds. Then he said, “O people of Sivi! now you have beheld these divine eyes, never eat

food without giving something away!” and he repeated four stanzas, declaring the Law:

“Who, if he’s asked to give, would answer no,

Although it be his best and choicest prize?

People of Sivi thronged in concourse, ho!

Come hither, see the gift of God, my eyes!

“Through rock and wall, o’er hill and dale, whatever bar may be,

A hundred leagues on every side these eyes of mine can see.

“Self-sacrifice in all men mortal living,

Of all things is most fine:

I sacrificed a mortal eye; and giving,

Received an eye divine.

“See, people! see, give ere ye eat, let others have a share.

This done with your best will and care,

Blameless to heaven you shall repair.”

In these four verses he declared the Law; and after that, every fortnight, on the holy day, even every fifteenth day, he declared the Law in these same verses without cessation to a great gathering of people. Hearing which, the people gave alms and did good deeds, and went to swell the hosts of heaven.

When the Master had ended this discourse, he said, “Thus Brethren, wise men of old gave to any chance comer, who was not content with outside gifts, even their own eyes, taken out of their head.” Then he identified the Birth: “At that time Ananda was Sivaka the physician, Anaruddha was Sakka, the Buddha’s followers were the people, and I myself was King Sivi.”

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