Ja 50 — Dummedha Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol1/ja50.html

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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

“A thousand evil-doers.”—This story was told by the Master while at Jetavana, about actions done for the world’s good, as will be explained in the Twelfth Book in the Maha-Kanha-jataka.

Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was reborn in the womb of the Queen Consort. When he was born, he was named Prince Brahmadatta on his name-day. By sixteen years of age he had been well educated at Takkasila, had learned the Three Vedas by heart, and was versed in the Eighteen Branches of Knowledge. And his father made him a Viceroy.

Now in those days the Benares folk were much given to festivals to ‘gods,’ and used to shew honour to ‘gods.’ It was their wont to massacre numbers of sheep, goats, poultry, swine, and other living creatures, and perform their rites not merely with flowers and perfumes but with gory carcasses. Thought the destined Lord of Mercy to himself, “Led astray by superstition, men now wantonly sacrifice life; the multitude are for the most part given up to irreligion: but when at my father’s death I succeed to my inheritance, I will find means to end such destruction of life. I will devise some clever stratagem whereby the evil shall be stopped without harming a single human being.” In this mood the prince one day mounted his chariot and drove out of the city. On the way he saw a crowd gathered together at a holy banyan-tree, praying to the fairy who had been reborn in that tree, to grant them sons and daughters, honour and wealth, each according to his. heart’s desire. Alighting from his chariot the Bodhisatta drew near to the tree and behaved as a worshipper so far as to make offerings of perfumes and flowers, sprinkling the tree with water, and pacing reverently round its trunk. Then mounting his chariot again, he went his way back into the city.

Thenceforth the prince made like journeys from time to time to the tree , and worshipped it like a true believer in ‘gods.’

In due course, when his father died, the Bodhisatta ruled in his stead. Shunning the four evil courses, and practising the ten royal virtues, he ruled his people in righteousness. And now that his desire had come to pass and he was king, the Bodhisatta set himself to fulfil his former resolve. So he called together his ministers, the brahmins, the gentry, and the other orders of the people, and asked the assembly whether they knew how he had made himself king. But no man could tell.

“Have you ever seen me reverently worshipping a banyan-tree with perfumes and the like, and bowing down before it?”

“Sire, we have,” said they.

“Well, I was making a vow; and the vow was that, if ever I became king, I would offer a sacrifice to that tree. And now that by help of the god I have come to be king, I will offer my promised sacrifice. So prepare it with all speed.”

“But what are we to make it of?”

“My vow,” said the king, “was this—All such as are addicted to the Five Sins, to wit the slaughter of living creatures and so forth, and all such as walk in the Ten Paths of Unrighteousness, them will I slay, and with their flesh and their blood, with their entrails and their vitals, I will make my offering. So proclaim by beat of drum that our lord the king in the days of his viceroyalty vowed that if ever he became king he would slay, and offer up in a sacrifice, all such of his subjects as break the Commandments. And now the king wills to slay one thousand of such as are addicted to the Five Sins or walk in the Ten Paths of Unrighteousness; with the hearts and the flesh of the thousand shall a sacrifice be made in the god’s honour. Proclaim this that all may know throughout the city. Of those that transgress after this date,” added the king, “will I slay a thousand, and offer them as a sacrifice to the god in discharge of my vow.” And to make his meaning clear the king uttered this stanza—

A thousand evil-doers once I vowed

In pious gratitude to kill;

And evil-doers form so huge a crowd,

That I will now my vow fulfil.

Obedient to the king’s commands, the ministers had proclamation made by beat of drum accordingly throughout the length and breadth of Benares. Such was the effect of the proclamation on the townsfolk that not a soul persisted in the old wickedness. And throughout the Bodhisatta’s reign not a man was convicted of transgressing. Thus, without harming a single one of his subjects, the Bodhisatta made them observe the Commandments. And at the close of a life of alms-giving and other good works he passed away with his followers to throng the city of the devas.

Said the Master, “This is not the first time, Brethren, that the Buddha has acted for the world’s good; he acted in like manner in bygone times as well.” His lesson ended, he shewed the connexion and identified the Birth by saying, “The Buddha’s disciples were the ministers of those days, and I myself was the King of Benares.”

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.

Vol. 3, translated by H.T. Francis and R.A. Neil, 1897.

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

Vol. 5, translated by H.T. Francis, 1905.

Vol. 6, translated by E.B. Cowell and W.H.D. Rouse, 1907.

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Prepared for SuttaCentral by Bhikkhu Sujato.