Ja 505 — Somanassa Jātaka

English translation by W. H. D. Rouse.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol4/ja505.html

Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

License: Public Domain (original English edition, published 1895–1907)

Edited by E. B. Cowell

Original edition: Cambridge University Press, volume 4, 1901

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

“Who does thee harm, etc.”—This story the Master told while dwelling at Jetavana, how Devadatta went about to slay him. Then the Master said, “This is not the first time, Brethren, that Devadatta has sought to slay me, but he did the same thing before.” Then he told them a story of the past.

Once upon a time, in the kingdom of Kuru and the city of Uttarapancala, a king reigned whose name was Renu. At that time there was an ascetic Maharakkhita, who dwelt in Himalaya with a company of five hundred other ascetics. While visiting the country to get salt and seasoning, he came to Uttarapancala, and then abode in the royal park. Seeking alms with his people, he came to the king’s door, and the king beholding the sages and being pleased with their manners, invited them to be seated upon a magnificent dais, and gave them good food to eat. He then asked them to remain in his park for the rain-season. He accompanied them into the park, and provided places to dwell in, gave them the things necessary for the religious life, and took leave of them. After that they all received their meals in the palace. Now the king was childless, and desired sons, but no sons were born to him.

When the season of rains was over, Maharakkhita said, “Now the Himalaya region is pleasant; let us return thither.” Then he took leave of the king, who showed them all honour and bounty, and departed. On the journey at noontide he left the high road, and with his people sat down on the soft grass beneath a shady tree. The ascetics began to talk. “There is no son,” they said, “in the palace to keep up the royal line. It would be a blessing if the king could get a son, and continue the succession.” Maharakkhita hearing their talk, pondered: “Will the king have a son, or no?” He perceived that the king would have a son, and said, “Do not be anxious, sirs; this night at dawn a son of the gods will come down, and will be conceived by the queen consort.” A sham ascetic heard it, and thought—“Now I will become a confidant of the royal house.” When the time came for the ascetics to leave, he lay down and made as though he were sick. “Come, let us go,” they

said. “I cannot,” said he. Maharakkhita learnt why the man lay still. “Follow us when you can,” he said, and with the rest of the sages went on to Himalaya.

Now the cheat ran back as fast as he could, and standing at the palace door, sent in a message that one of Maharakkhita’s attendants was come. He was summoned at once by the king, and going up to the terrace, sat in a seat which they showed him. The king greeted him, and sitting on one side, asked after the health of the sages. “You have come back very soon,” he said; “what is the cause of your so speedy return?” “O mighty king,” he replied, “as the sages were all sitting comfortably together, they began to say how great a blessing it would be if the king could have a son to keep up his line. When I heard it, I pondered whether the king should get a son or no; and by divine vision I beheld a mighty son of the gods, and saw that he was about to descend, that he might be conceived by your queen consort Sudhamma. Then I thought, If they know not, they may perchance destroy the life conceived, so I must tell them; and to tell you the news, O king, I am come. Now I have told it, let me depart again.” “No, no, friend,” quoth the king, “that must not be”; and highly delighted he brought the cheat into his park, and assigned him a place to dwell in. Thenceforward he lived in the king’s household, and got his food there, and his name was Dibbacakkhuka, the man of Divine Vision.

Then the Bodhisatta came down from the heaven of the Thirty-three, and was conceived there; and when he was born they gave him the name of Somanassa Kumara, Prince Delight, and he was reared after the manner of princes.

Now the false ascetic in a corner of the park used to plant vegetables and pot-herbs and runners, and by selling these to the market gardeners he amassed much wealth. When the Bodhisatta was seven years old, there was a rebellion on the frontier. The king went out to quell it, giving the ascetic Dibbacakkhuka into the prince’s charge, with orders not to neglect him. One day the prince went out to see the ascetic. He found him with both yellow robes, upper and under, knotted up, holding a water jar in each hand, and watering his plants. “This false ascetic,” thought he, “instead of doing the ascetic’s duty, does the work of a gardener.” Then he asked—“What are you doing, gardener, worldling?” So he put him to shame, and left him without salute. “Now I have made an enemy of this fellow,” thought the man. “Who knows what he will do? I must make an end of him at once.”

About the time when the king was to return, the man threw his stone bench on one side, broke his waterpot to bits, scattered grass about in his hut, smeared all his body with oil, went into the hut and lay down on his pallet, wrapped up head and all, making as though he were in much pain. The king returned, and made a circuit about the city right-wise. But before he would enter his own house, he went to see his friend Dibbacakkhuka. Standing by the door of the hut, he saw all in disorder, and entered wondering what was the matter. There was the man lying down. The king chafed his feet, repeating the first stanza:

“Who does thee harm or scorn?

Why dost thou sorrow sore?

Whose parents now must mourn?

Who lies here on the floor?”

At this the impostor rose up groaning, and said the second stanza:

“Thee I rejoice to see

O King, though absent long!

Your son, who came to me,

Wrought unprovoked this wrong.”

The connexion of the following verses is clear; they are arranged in due succession.

“Executioners, what ho!

Servants, take your swords and go,

Strike Prince Somanassa dead,

Hither bring his noble head!’

“The royal messengers went forth, and to the prince they cry—

“His majesty has cast thee off; and thou O prince must die!”

“There the prince lamenting stands,

Craving grace with folded hands:

“Spare me yet awhile, and bring

Me alive to see the King!”

“They heard his prayer, and to the King his son the servants led.

He saw his father from afar, and thus to him he said:

“Let thy men take sword and slay,

Only hear me first, I pray!

O great monarch! tell me this—

What is it I’ve done amiss?”

The king answered, “High estate is fallen very low: your error is very great,” and explained it in this stanza:

“Water morn and eve he draws,

Tends the fire without a pause.

Dare you call this holy man

Worldling? answer if you can!”

“My lord,” said the prince, “if I call a worldling a worldling, what harm is done!” and he repeated a stanza:

“He possesses trees and fruits,

And, my lord, all kinds of roots,

Tends them with incessant care:

Then he’s worldly, I declare.”

“And that is the reason,” he went on, “why I called him a worldling. If you do not believe me, enquire of the market gardeners at the four gates.” The king made enquiry. They said, “Yes, we buy from him vegetables and all sorts of fruit.” When he found out this greengrocery business, he made it known. The prince’s people went into the man’s hut, and ferreted out a bundle of rupees and small coins, the price of the green food, which they showed to the king. Then the king knew the Great Being was guiltless, and said a stanza:

“True it was that trees and roots

He possessed, with many fruits,

Tending with incessant care,

Worldly, as thou didst declare.”

Then the Great Being thought, “While an ignorant fool like this is of the king’s household, the best thing to do is to go to Himalaya and embrace the religious life. First I will proclaim his sin before the company here assembled, and then this very day I will go and become a religious.” So with a bow to the company, he cried,

“Hear ye people as I call,

Country folk and townsmen all:

By this fool’s advice the King

Guiltless men to death would bring.”

This said, he asked leave to do it in the next stanza:

“Thou a strong wide spreading tree,

I an offshoot fixt in thee,

Here beseech thee, bending low,

Leave to quit the world and go!”

The following stanzas give the conversation of the king with his son.

“Prince, enjoy the wealth you own,

And ascend the Kuru throne.

Do not leave the world, to bring

Sorrow on yourself—be King!”

“What of joy can this world give?

When in heaven I used to live

There were sights and sounds and smell,

Taste and touch, the heart loves well!

“Joys of heaven, and nymphs divine,

I renounced, that once were mine.

With a King so weak as thou

I will stay no longer now.”

“If I am foolish-weak, my son,

This once forgive me what I’ve done.

And if I do the same again,

Do what thou wilt, I’ll not complain.”

The Great Being then repeated eight stanzas, admonishing the king.

“A thoughtless act, or done without premeditation had,

Like the miscarriage of a drug, the issue must be bad.

“A thoughtful act, wherein is careful policy pursued,

Like a successful medicine, the issue must be good.

“The idle sensual layman I detest,

The false ascetic is a rogue contest;

A bad King will a case unheard decide;

Wrath in a sage can ne’er be justified.

“The warrior prince takes careful thought, and well-weighed judgement gives:

When Kings their judgement ponder well, their fame for ever lives.

“Kings should give punishment with careful measure:

Things done in haste they will repent at leisure.

Are there good resolutions in the heart,

No late repentance brings her bitter smart.

“They who do deeds which no repentance bring,

Carefully weighing every single thing,

Gain what is good, and do what satisfies

The holy, win the approval of the wise.

“What ho, my executioners!” you cried,

“Go seek my son, and where you find him, slay!”

Where I was sitting by my mother’s side

They found me, dragged me cruelly away.

“A tender nursling, treated in this way,

I felt their cruel handling very sore.

Delivered from a cruel doom to-day

I'll leave the world, and live in it no more."

When the Great Being had thus discoursed, the king said to his queen,

"So my young son, Sudhamma, says me nay,

Prince Somanassa, delicate and kind.

Now since I cannot gain my end to-day,

Thyself must see if thou canst turn his mind."

But she urged him to renounce the world in this stanza:

"O be the holy life thy pleasure, son!

Renounce the world, to righteousness stick fast:

Who of all creatures cruel is to none,

Blameless to Brahma's world will come at last."

Then the king repeated a stanza:

"This is a marvel which I hear from thee,

Sorrow to sorrow heaping up on me.

I asked thee to persuade our son to stay,

Thou dost but urge him more to haste away."

Again the queen repeated a stanza:

"There are who live from sin and sorrow free,

Blameless, and who Nirvana's height attain:

If of their noble path the prince would be

A partner, to withhold him is in vain."

In reply the king recited the last stanza:

“Surely ’Tis good to venerate the wise,

In whom deep wisdom and high thoughts arise.

The queen has heard their words and learned their lore,

She feels no pain and has no longing more.”

The Great Being then saluted his parents, asking them to pardon him if he did amiss, and with a reverent obeisance to the company set his face towards Himalaya. When the people had returned, he, with the deities who had come thither in human shape, traversed the seven ranges of hills and arrived at Himalaya. In a leaf-hut made by the heavenly architect Vissakamma he entered upon the religious life, and there he was waited upon by deities in the shape of a princely retinue until his sixteenth year. But the deceitful ascetic was set upon by the crowd and beaten to death. The Great Being cultivated the Faculty of Ecstasy, and became destined to Brahma’s heaven.

This discourse ended, the Master said, “Thus Brethren, he went about to slay me in former days, as now,” and then he identified the Birth: “At that time Devadatta was the impostor, Mahamaya was the mother, Sariputta was Rakkhita, and I myself was Prince Somanassa.”

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.

These translations are in the public domain. You are free to do whatever you like with them.

Scanned, proofed and formatted at sacred-texts.com, January 2006–February 2010, by John Bruno Hare and others. Thanks to the Sacred Texts Archive for making these texts available in digital form.

Prepared for SuttaCentral by Bhikkhu Sujato.