Ja 509 — Hatthi-Pala 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/ja509.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

"At last we see," etc.—This story the Master told, while dwelling at Jetavana, about the Renunciation. Then with these words,—"It is not the first time, Brethren, that the Tathagata made the Renunciation, but it was so before,"—the Master told them a story of the past.

Once upon a time there reigned in Benares a king named Esukari. His chaplain had been from the days of his youth his favourite companion. They were both childless. As the two were sitting together one day in a friendly manner, they thought, "We have great glory, but never a son or a daughter: now what is to be done?" Then the king said to the chaplain, "Friend, if a son is born in your house, he shall be lord of my kingdom; but if I have a son, he shall be master of your wealth." The two made a bargain of it on these terms.

One day, as the chaplain approached his revenue-village, and entered by the southern gate, outside the gate he saw a wretched woman who had many sons: seven sons she had, all hale and hearty; one held pot and plate for cooking, one mat and bedding, one went on before and one followed behind, one held a finger of her, one sat on her hip and one on her shoulder. "Where," asked the chaplain, "is the father of these lads?" "Sir," she replied, "the lads have no father at all for certain." "Why then," said he," how did you get seven fine sons like that?" Disregarding the rest of the jungle, she points out a banyan tree that stood by the city gate, and quoth she, "I offered prayer, Sir, to the deity which inhabits this tree, and he answered me by giving these lads." "You may go, then, "said the chaplain; and descending from his chariot, he went up to the tree and taking hold of a branch shook it, saying, "O divinity, what has the king failed to give thee? Year by year he offers thee tribute of a thousand pieces of money, and thou givest him no son. What has this beggar wife done for thee, that thou givest her seven? Thou shalt grant the king a son within seven days, or I will have thee cut down by the roots and chopt up piecemeal." Thus upbraiding the deity of the banyan tree, he went away. Day after day for six days he did the same, and on the sixth, grasping the branch he said—"Only one night is left, tree-god; if you do not

grant a son to my king, down you come!"

The deity of the tree reflected, till she knew exactly what was the matter. "Yon brahmin," thought she, "will destroy my home if he gets no son: well, by what means can I get him a son?" Then she went before the four great kings, and told them. "Well," said they, "we cannot give the man a son." To the eight-and-twenty war-lords of the Goblins she went next, and all they said was the same. To Sakka king of the gods she came, and told him. He pondered within himself: "Shall the king get sons worthy of him, or no?" Then he looked about and saw four meritorious sons of the gods. These, it is said, had been in a former existence weavers of Benares; and all their winnings by that trade they would divide into five heaps; of these four were their own shares, but the fifth they gave away in common. When born anew from that place they came to the Heaven of the Thirty-three, thence again they were born into the Yama world, thence in due succession they past up and down through the six celestial worlds and enjoyed much glory. Just then the time was when they were due to go from the Heaven of the Thirty-three to the Yama Heaven. Sakka went to seek them, and summoned them, and said, "Holy sirs, you must go to the world of men, to be conceived in the womb of King Esukari's chief consort." "Good, my lord," said they to these words, "we will go. But we do not want anything to do with a royal house: we will be born in the chaplain's family, and while yet young we will renounce the world." Then Sakka approved them for their promise, and returned, and told all to the deity that lived in the tree. Much pleased, the tree-god took leave of Sakka, and went to her dwelling place.

But next day up came the chaplain, and with him strong men whom he had gathered, having each a razor-adze or the like. The chaplain approached the tree, and seizing a branch, cried out—"What ho, god of the tree! This is now the seventh day. since I begged a favour of you: the time of thy destruction is come!" The tree-deity by her great power cleft the tree-trunk and came forth, and in a sweet voice addressed him thus: "One son, brahmin? pooh! I will give you four." Said he, "I want no sons; give one to my king." "No," she said, "I will give only to you." "Then give two to the king and two to me." "No, the king shall have none, you shall have all four; but they shall be only given to you, for they will not live in a worldly household: in the days of their youth they will renounce the world." "Just give me the sons, and I will see to it they do not renounce the world," said he. Thus the deity granted his prayer for children, and returned to her dwelling place. Ever afterwards that deity was held in high honour.

Now the eldest god came down, and was conceived by the brahmin's wife. On his name day they called him Hatthipala, the Elephant Driver; and to hinder him from renouncing the world, they entrusted him to the care of some keepers of elephants, amongst whom he grew up. When he was old enough to walk on his feet, the second was born of the same woman. At his birth they named him Assapala, or Groom, and he grew up amongst those who kept horses. The third at his birth was called Gopala, the Cowherd, and he grew up amongst the cattle-breeders. Ajapala, or Goatherd, was the name given to the fourth, when he also was born; and he grew up among the goat-herds. When they grew older they were lads of auspicious omen.

Now for fear of their renouncing the world, all the ascetics who had so done were banished from the kingdom: in the whole realm of Kasi not one was left. The lads were rough: in what way soever they went, they plundered those gifts of ceremony which were sent here or there.

When Hatthipala was sixteen years old, the king and the chaplain seeing his bodily perfection, thought thus within them. “The lads are grown big. When the umbrella of royalty is uplifted, what shall be done with them?—As soon as the ceremony of sprinkling is done upon them, they will grow very masterful: ascetics will come, they will see them and will become ascetics also; once they have done this, the whole country will be in confusion. First let us test them, and afterwards have the ceremonial sprinkling.” So they both dressed themselves up like ascetics, and went about seeking alms until they came to the door of the house where Hatthipala lived. The lad was pleased and delighted to see them; approaching, he greeted them with respect, and recited three stanzas:

“At last we see a brahmin like a god, with top-knot great,

With teeth uncleansed, and foul with dust, and burdened with a weight.

“At last we see a sage, who takes delight in righteousness,

With robes of bark to cover him, and with the yellow dress.

“Accept a seat, and for your feet fresh water; it is right

To offer gifts of food to guests—accept, as we invite.”

Thus he addressed them one after the other. Then the chaplain said to him: “Hatthipala my son, you say this because you do not know us. You think we are sages from the Himalayas, but such we are not, my son. This is King Esukari, and I am your father the chaplain.” “Then,” said the lad, “why are you dressed like sages?” “To try you,” said he. “Why try me?” he asked. “Because, if you see us without renouncing the world, we are ready to perform the ceremony of sprinkling, and make you king.” “Oh, my father,” quoth he, “I want no royalty; I will renounce the world.” Then his father replied, “Son Hatthipala, this is not a time for renouncing the world;” and he explained his intent in the fourth stanza:

“First learn the Vedas, get you wealth and wife

And sons, enjoy the pleasant things of life,

Smell, taste, and every sense: sweet is the wood

To live in then, and then the sage is good.”

Hatthipala replied with a stanza:

“Truth comes not by the Vedas nor by gold;

Nor getting sons will keep from getting old;

From sense there is release, as wise men know;

In the next birth we reap as now we sow."

In answer to the young man, the king now recited a stanza:

"Most true the words that from thy lips do go:

In the next birth we reap as now we sow,

Thy parents now are old: but may they see

A hundred years of health in store for thee."

"What do you mean, my lord?" asked the prince, and repeated two stanzas:

"He who in death, O King, a friend can find,

And with old age a covenant hath signed;

For him that will not die be this thy prayer,

A hundred years of life to be his share.

"As one who on a river ferries o'er

A boat, and journeys to the other shore,

So mortals do inevitably tend

To sickness and old age, and death's the end."

In this manner he showed these persons how transient are the conditions of mortal life, adding this advice: "As you stand there, O great king, and as I speak with you, even now sickness, old age, and death are drawing nearer to me. Then be vigilant!" So saluting the king and his father, he took with him his own attendants, and forsook the kingdom of Benares, and departed with the intent to embrace the religious life. And a great company of people went with the young man Hatthipala; "for," said they, "this religious life must be a noble thing." The company extended a league long. He with this company proceeded until he came to the Ganges bank. There he induced the mystic trance by gazing at the water of the Ganges. "There will be a great concourse here," thought he. "My three younger brothers will come, my parents, king, queen, and all, they with their attendants will embrace the religious life. Benares will be empty. Until they come I will remain here." So he sat there, exhorting the crowd assembled.

Next day the king and his chaplain thought, “And so Prince Hatthipala has really renounced his claim on the kingdom, and is sitting on the Ganges bank, whither he went to follow the religious life, and took a great multitude with him. But let us try Assapala, and sprinkle him to be king.” So as before in the dress of ascetics they went to his door. Pleased he was when he saw them, and went up to them, and repeating the lines “At last,” and so forth, he did as the other had done. The others did as before, and told him the cause of their coming. He said, “Why is the White Umbrella offered first to me, seeing I have a brother Prince Hatthipala?” They answered, “Your brother has gone away, my son, to embrace the religious life; he would have nothing to do with royalty.” “Where is he now?” asked the lad. “Sitting on the bank of the Ganges.” “Dear ones,” he said, “I care not for that which my brother has spewed out of his mouth. Fools and they who are scant of wisdom cannot renounce this sin, but I will renounce it.” Then he declared the Law to father and king in two stanzas which he recited:

“Pleasures of sense are but morass and mire;

The heart’s delight brings death, and troubles sore.

Who sink in these morasses come no nigher

In witless madness to the further shore.

“Here’s one who once inflicted grief and pain:

Now he is caught, and no release is found.

That he may never do such things again

I’ll build impenetrable walls around.”

“There you stand, and even as I speak with you, sickness, old age, and death are approaching nearer.” With this admonition, and followed by a company of people a league long, he went to his brother Prince Hatthipala. Who declared the Law to him, being poised in the air, and said, “Brother, there will be a great concourse to this place; let us both stay here together.” The other agreed to stay there.

Next day king and chaplain went in the same manner to the house of Prince Gopala: and by him being greeted with the same gladness, they explained the cause of their coming. He like Assapala refused their offer. “For a long time,” said he, “I have desired to embrace the religious life; like a cow gone astray in the forest, I have been wandering about in search of this life. I have seen the path by which my brothers have gone, like the track of a lost cow; and by that same path I will go.” Then he repeated a stanza:

“Like one who seeks a cow has lost her way,

Who all perplext about the wood doth stray.

So is my welfare lost; then why hang back,

King Esukari, to pursue the track?"

"But," they replied, "come with us for a day, son Gopalaka, for two or three days come with us; make us happy and then you shall renounce the world." He said, "O great king! never put off till the morrow what ought to be done to-day; if you want luck, take to-day by the forelock." Then he recited another stanza:

"To-morrow! cries the fool; next day! he cries.

No freehold in the future! says the wise;

The good within his reach he'll ne'er despise."

Thus spake Gopala, declaring the Law in the two stanzas; and added, "There you stand, and even as I talk with you, are approaching disease, old age, and death." Then followed by a company of people a league in length, he made his way to his two brothers. And Hatthipala poised in the air declared the Law to him also.

Next day in the same manner king and chaplain repaired to the house of Prince Ajapala, who greeted them with joy as the others had done. They told the cause of their coming, and proposed to upraise the umbrella of royalty. The prince said: "Where are my brothers?" They answered, "Your brothers will have nothing to do with the kingdom; they have renounced the White Umbrella, and with a company that covers three leagues they are sitting upon the Ganges bank." "I will not put upon my head that which my brothers have spewed out of their mouths, and so live; but I too will undertake the religious life." They said, "My son, you are very young; your welfare is our care; grow older, and you shall embrace the religious life." But the lad said, "What is this you say? Surely death comes in youth as in age! No one has a mark in hand or foot to show whether he will die young or die old. I know not the time of my death, and therefore I will now renounce the world altogether." He then recited two stanzas:

"Oft have I seen a maiden young and fair,

Bright-eyed, intoxicate with life, her share

Of joy untasted yet, in youth's first spring:

Death came and carried off the tender thing.

"So noble, handsome lads, well-made and young,

Round whose dark chins the beard in clusters clung—

I leave the world and all its lusts, to be

A hermit: go thou home, and pardon me."

Then he went on, "There you stand, and even as I talk with you disease, old age, and death are approaching me." He saluted them both, and at the head of a league-long company he repaired to the Ganges bank. Hatthipala poised in the air declared the Law to him also, and sat down to wait for the great gathering which he expected.

Next day the chaplain began to meditate as he sat upon his couch. "My sons," thought he; "have embraced the religious life; and now I am alone the withered stump of a man. I will follow the religious life also." Then he addressed this stanza to his wife:

"That which has branching boughs a tree they call:

Disbranched, it is a trunk, no tree at all.

So is a sonless man, my high-born wife:

'Tis time for me to embrace the holy life."

This said, he summoned the brahmins before him: sixty thousand of them came. Then he asked them what they meant to do. "You are our teacher," they said. "Well," quoth he, "I shall seek out my son and embrace the religious life." They answered, "Hell is not hot for you alone; we will do likewise." He handed over his treasure, eighty crores, to his wife, and at the head of a league-long train of brahmins departed to the place where his sons were. And unto this company as before Hatthipala declared the Law, poised on high in the air.

Next day thought the wife to herself, "My four sons have refused the White Umbrella to follow the life of the religious; my husband has left his fortune of eighty thousand, and his position of royal chaplain to boot, and gone to join his sons—what am I to do all by myself? By the way my son has gone I will go also." And quoting an ancient saw she recited this stanza of aspiration:

"The rain-months past, the geese break net and snare,

With a free flight like herons through the air;

So by the path of husband and of son

I'll seek for knowledge as they two have done."

"Since this I knew," she said to herself, "why should I not renounce the world?" With this purpose she summoned the brahmin women, and said to them: "What do you mean to do with yourselves?" They asked, "What do you?"—"As for me, I shall renounce the world."—"Then we will do the same." So leaving all her splendour, she went after her sons, taking with her a league-long company of women. To this company also Hatthipala declared the Law, sitting poised in the air.

Next day the king asked, “Where is my chaplain?” “My lord,” they replied, “the chaplain and his wife have left all their wealth behind, and have gone after their sons with a company that covers two or three leagues.” Said the king, “Masterless money comes to me,” and sent to fetch it from the chaplain’s house. The chief queen now wanted to know what the king was doing. He is fetching the treasure,” she was told, “from the chaplain’s house.” “And where is the chaplain?” she asked. “Gone to be a religious, wife and all.” “Why,” thought she, “here is the king fetching into his own house the dung and the spittle dropt by this brahmin and his wife and his four sons! Infatuate fool! I will teach him by a parable.” She got some dog’s-flesh, and made a heap of it in the palace courtyard. Then she set a snare round it, leaving the way open straight upwards. The vultures seeing it from afar swooped down. But the wise among them noticed that a snare had been set around it; and feeling they were too heavy to rise up straight, they disgorged what they had eaten, and without being caught in the snare rose up and flew away. Others blind with folly devoured the vomit of the first, and being heavy could not get clear away but were caught in the snare. They brought one of the vultures to the queen, and she carried it to the king. “See, O king!” said she, “there is a sight for us in the courtyard.” Then opening a window, “Look at those vultures, your majesty!” Then she repeated two stanzas:

“The birds that ate and vomited in the air are flying free:

But those which ate and kept it down are captured now by me.

“A brahmin vomits out his lusts, and wilt thou eat the same

A man who eats a vomit, sire, deserves the deepest blame.”

At these words the king repented; the three states of existence seemed as blazing fires; and he said, “This very day I must leave my kingdom and embrace the religious life.” Full of grief, he lauded his queen in a stanza:

“Like as a strong man lends a helping hand

To weaker, sunk in mire or in quicksand:

So, Queen Pancati, thou hast saved me here,

With verses sung so sweetly in mine ear.”

No sooner had he thus said, than on the instant he sent for his courtiers, eager to undertake the religious life, and said to them, “And what will you do?” They answered, “What will you?” He said,” I will seek Hatthipala and become a religious.” “Then,” said they, “we, my lord, will do the same.” The king left his sovranty over Benares, that great city, twelve leagues in extent, and said, “Let who will upraise the White Umbrella.” Then surrounded by his courtiers, at the head of a column three leagues in length, he went to the presence of the young man. To this body also Hatthipala declared the Law, sitting high in the air.

The Master repeated a stanza which told how the king renounced this world.

“Thus Esukari, mighty king, the lord of many lands,

From King turned hermit, like an elephant that bursts his bands.”

Next day the people who were left in the city gathered before the palace door, and sent in word to the queen. They entered, and saluting the queen, stood on one side, repeating a stanza:

“It is the pleasure of our noble king

To be a hermit, leaving everything.

So in the king’s place now we pray thee stand;

Cherish the realm, protected by our hand.”

She listened to what the crowd said, and then repeated the remaining stanzas:

“It is the pleasure of the noble king

To be a hermit, leaving everything.

Now know that I will walk the world alone,

Renouncing lusts and pleasures every one.

“It is the pleasure of the noble king

To be a hermit, leaving everything.

Now know that I will walk the world alone,

Where’er they be, renouncing lusts each one.

“Time passes on, night after night goes by,

Youth’s beauties one by one must fade and die:

Now know that I will walk the world alone,

Renouncing lusts and pleasures every one.

“Time passes on, night after night goes by,

Youth’s beauties one by one must fade and die:

Now know that I will walk the world alone,

Where'er they be, renouncing lusts each one.

"Time passes on, night after night goes by,

Youth's beauties one by one must fade and die:

Now know that I will walk the world alone,

Each bond thrown off, nor passion's power I own."

In these stanzas she declared the Law to the great crowd; then summoning the courtier's wives said to them, "And what will you do?" "Madam," say they, "what will you?"—"I will embrace the religious life."—"Then so will we do." So the queen set open the doors of all the storehouses of gold in the palace, and she caused to be engraved on a golden plate, "In such a place is a great treasure hidden"; any one who chose might have it. This gold plate she fastened to a pillar upon the great dais, and sent the drum beating the proclamation about the city. Then leaving all her magnificence she departed from the city. Then was the whole city in a garboil: the cry was, "Our king and queen have left the city to join the religious; what are we to do now?" Thereupon the people all left their houses, and all that was in them, and went out, taking their sons by the hand; all the shops stood open, but no one so much as turned to look at them: the whole city was empty.

And the queen with an attendant train of three leagues in length went to the same place as the others. To this company also Hatthipala declared the Law, poised in the air above them; and then with the whole train a dozen leagues long he set out for Himalaya.

All Kasi was in an uproar, crying how young Hatthipala had emptied the city of Benares, twelve leagues in extent, and how with a huge company he is off to Himalaya to embrace the religious life; "surely then," said they, "much more should we do it!" In the end this company grew so that it covered thirty leagues; and he with this great company went to Himalaya.

Sakka in his meditation perceived what was afoot. "Prince Hatthipala," he thought, "has made the Renunciation; there will be a great gathering of people, and they must have a place to live in." He gave orders to Vissakamma: "Go, make a hermitage six and thirty leagues long and fifteen broad, and gather in it all that is necessary for the religious." He obeyed; and made on the Ganges bank in a pleasant spot a hermitage of the required size, prepared in the leaf-huts pallets strewn with twigs or strewn with leaves, made ready all things necessary for the religious. Each hut had its doors, each its promenade; there were separate places for night and day living; all was neatly worked over with whitewash; there were benches for rest. Here and there were flowering-trees all laden with fragrant blooms of many colours; at the end of each promenade was a well for drawing water, and beside it a fruit-tree, and each tree bore all manner of fruits. This was all done by divine power. When Vissakamma had finished the hermitage, and provided the leaf huts with all things

needful, he inscribed in letters of vermilion upon a wall “Whoso will embrace the religious life is welcome to these necessary things.” Then by his supernatural power he banished from that place all hideous sounds, all hateful beasts and birds, all unhuman beings, and went back to his own place.

Hatthipala came upon this hermitage, Sakka’s gift, by a footpath, and saw the writing. Then he thought, “Sakka must have perceived that I have made the Great Renunciation.” He opened a door, and entered a hut, and taking those things which mark the ascetic he went out again, and along the promenade, walking up and down a few times. Then he admitted the rest of the company to the religious life, and went to inspect the hermitage. He set apart in the midst a habitation for women with young boys, one next it for the old women, the next for childless women; the other huts all round he allotted to men.

Then a certain king, hearing that there was no king in Benares, went to see, and found the city adorned and decorated. Entering the royal palace, he saw the treasure lying in a heap. “What!” said he, “to renounce a city like this, and to become a religious so soon as the chance came, this is truly a noble thing!” Asking the way of some drunken fellow he went to find Hatthipala. When Hatthipala perceived he was come to the skirt of the forest, he went out to meet him, and poised in the air declared the Law to his company. Then he led them to the hermitage, and received the whole band into the Brotherhood. In the same manner six other kings joined them. These seven kings renounced their wealth. The hermitage, six and thirty leagues in extent, was filling continually. When some great man had thoughts of lust or any such thing, he would declare the Law to him, and teach them the thought of the Perfections and the Ecstasy; these then generally developed the mystic trance; and two-thirds of them were born again in Brahma’s world, while the third being divided into three parts, one part was born in Brahma’s world, one in the six heavens of sense, one having performed a seer’s mission was born in the world of men. Thus they enjoyed each of the three their own merit. Thus Hatthipala’s teaching saved all from hell, from animal birth, from the world of ghosts, and from being embodied as a Titan.

In this island of Ceylon, those who made the Renunciation were: Elder Dhammagutta, who made the earth to quake; Elder Phussadeva, a citizen of Katakandhakara; Elder Mahasamgharakkhita, from Uparimandalakamalaya; Elder Malimahadeva; Elder Mahadeva, from Bhaggiri; Elder Mahasiva, from Vamantapabbhara; Elder Mahanaga, from Kalavallimandapa; those in the company of Kuddala, of Mugapakkha, of Culasutasoma, of Ayoghara the Wise, and last of all Hatthipala. Therefore said the Blessed One, “Make haste, ye happy!” etc., that is, happiness will come only if they use all speed.

When he had ended this discourse, the Master said, “Thus, Brethren, the Tathagata made the Great Renunciation long ago, as now”; which said he identified the Birth: “At that time, King Suddhodana was King Esukari, Mahamaya his queen, Kassapa the chaplain, Bhaddakapilani his wife, Anuruddha was Ajapala, Moggallana was Gopala, Sariputta was Hatthipala, the Buddha’s followers were the rest, and I myself was Hatthipala.”

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.