# Ja 511 — Kimchanda Jātaka

English translation by H. T. Francis.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol5/ja511.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

"Why dost thou," etc.—This story the Master told, while dwelling at Jetavana, about the observance of fast-days.

Now one day when a number of lay Brothers and Sisters, who were keeping a fast-day, came to hear the Law, and were seated in the Hall of Truth, the Master asked them if they were keeping fast-days, and on their saying that they were, he added, "And ye do well to observe fast-days: men of old, in consequence of keeping half a fast-day, attained to great glory," and at their request he told a tale of the past.

Once upon a time at Benares Brahmadatta ruled his kingdom righteously, and being a believer he was zealous in the observance of the duties of the fast-day, in the keeping of the commandments and in almsgiving. He also induced his ministers and the rest to take upon them vows of charity and the like. But his family priest was a backbiter, greedy of bribes, and a giver of unrighteous judgments. The king on a fast-day summoned his councillors and bade them keep the fast. The priest did not take upon himself the duties of the fast-day; so when he had in the day been taking bribes and giving false judgments, and then had come to court to pay his respects, the king, after first asking each of his ministers if he were keeping the fast, questioned the priest, saying, "And are you, Sir, fasting?" He told a lie and said "Yes," and left the palace. Then a certain minister rebuked him, saying, "Surely you are not keeping the fast?" He said, "I took food early in the day, but when I go home I shall rinse my mouth and taking upon myself the duties of the fast-day, I will eat nothing in the evening, and all night I will keep the moral law, and in this way I shall have kept half the fast-day." "Very good, Sir," they said. And he went home and did so. Now one day as he was seated at judgment, a certain woman, who kept the moral precepts, had a case on, and not being able to go home, she thought, "I will not transgress the observance of the fast-day," and as the time drew near, she began to rinse her mouth. At that moment a lump of ripe mangoes was brought to the brahmin. He perceived that the woman was keeping the fast and said, "Eat this and so keep the fast." She did so. So much for the action

of the brahmin. By and bye he died and was born again in the Himalaya country, in a lovely spot on the bank of the Kosiki branch of the Ganges, in a mango-grove, three leagues in extent, on a splendid royal couch in a golden palace. He was born again like one just awakened from sleep, well dressed and adorned, of exceeding beauty of form, and accompanied by sixteen thousand nymphs. All night long he enjoys this glory, for by being born as a Spirit in a phantom palace his reward is corresponding to his deed. So at the approach of dawn he enters a mango-grove, and at the moment of his entrance his divine body disappears, he assumes a form as big as a palm tree, eighty cubits high, and his whole body is ablaze like a judas-tree in full flower. He has but one finger on each hand, while his nails are as big as spades, and with these nails he digs into the flesh on his back and tearing it out eats it, and mad with the pain he suffers, he gives utterance to a loud cry. At sunset this body vanishes and his divine form reappears. Heavenly dancing girls, with various musical instruments in their hands, attend upon him, and in the enjoyment of great honour he ascends to a divine palace in a charming mango-grove. Thus did he, as the result of giving a mango fruit to a woman who was keeping a fast, acquire a mango-grove, three leagues in extent, but, in consequence of receiving bribes and giving false judgments, he tears and eats the flesh from off his own back, whilst, owing to the fact of his having kept half the fast, he enjoys glory every night, surrounded by an escort of sixteen thousand dancing nymphs.

About this time the king of Benares, conscious of the sinfulness of desires, adopted the ascetic life and took up his abode in a hut of leaves, in a pleasant spot on the lower Ganges, subsisting on what he could pick up. Now one day a ripe mango from that grove, the size of a large bowl, fell into the Ganges and was carried by the stream to a spot opposite the landing place used by this ascetic. As he was rinsing his mouth, he saw the mango floating in mid-stream, and crossing over he took and brought it to his hermitage and placed it in the cell where his sacred fire was kept. Then, splitting it up with a knife, he ate just enough to support life, and covering up the rest with the leaves of the plantain tree, he repeatedly day by day ate of it, as long as it lasted. And when it was all consumed, he could not eat any other kind of fruit, but being a slave to his appetite for dainties, he vowed he would eat only ripe mango, and going down to the river bank he sat looking at the stream, determined never to get up till he had found a mango. So he fasted there for six consecutive days, and sat looking for the fruit, till he was dried up by the wind and heat. Now on the seventh day a goddess of the river, by reflecting on the matter, found out the reason of his action, and thinking, “This ascetic, being the slave of his appetite, has sat fasting seven days, looking at the Ganges: it is wrong to deny him a ripe mango: for without it he will perish; I will give him one.” So she came and stood in the air above the Ganges, and conversing with him uttered the first stanza:

Why dost thou on this river bank through summer heat remain?

Brahmin, what is thy secret hope? What purpose would’st thou gain?

The ascetic on hearing this repeated nine stanzas:

Afloat upon the stream, fair nymph, a mango I did see;

With outstretched hand I seized the fruit and brought it home with me.

So sweet it was in taste and smell, I deemed it quite a prize;

Its comely shape might vie with biggest water-jar in size.

I hid it mid some plantain leaves, and sliced it with a knife;

A little served as food and drink to one of simple life.

My store is spent, my pangs appeased, but still I must regret,

In other fruits that I may find, no relish I can get.

I pine away; that mango sweet I rescued from the wave

Will bring about my death, I fear. No other fruit I crave.

I've told you why it is I fast, though dwelling by a stream

Whose broadening waves with every fish that swims are said to teem.

And now I pray thee tell to me, and flee thou not in fear,

O lovely maiden, who thou art, and wherefore thou art here.

Fair are the handmaids of the gods, like burnished gold are they,

Graceful as tiger brood along their mountain slopes that play.

Here also in the world of men are women fair to see,

But none amongst or gods or men may be compared to thee.

I ask thee then, O lovely nymph, endowed with heavenly grace,

Declare to me thy name and kin and whence derived thy race.

Then the goddess uttered eight stanzas:

O'er this fair stream, by which thou sitst, O brahmin, I preside,

And dwell in vasty depths below, 'neath Ganges' rolling tide.

All clad with forest growth I own a thousand mountain caves,

Whence flow as many flooded streams to mingle with my waves.

Each wood and grove, to Nagas dear, sends forth full many a rill,

And yields its store of waters blue, my ample course to fill.

Oft borne upon these tribute streams are fruits from every tree,

Rose-apples, bread-fruit, dates and figs, with mangoes one may see.

And all that grows on either bank and falls within my reach,

I claim as lawful prize, and none my title may impeach.

Well knowing this, hearken to me, O wise and learned king,

Cease to indulge thy heart's desire—renounce the cursed thing.

O ruler erst of broad domains, thy act I cannot praise,

To long for death, in prime of youth, great folly, sure, betrays.

Brahmins and angels, gods and men, all know thy deed and name,

And saints who by their holiness attain on earth to fame—

Yea, all that wise and famous are, thy sinful act proclaim.

Then the ascetic uttered four stanzas:

One who knows how frail our life is, and how transient things of sense,

Never thinks to slay another, but abides in innocence.

Honoured once by saints in council, owner of a virtuous name,

Now with sinful men conversing, thou dost win an evil fame.

Were I on thy banks to perish, nymph with comely form endowed,

Ill repute would rest upon thee, like the shadow of a cloud.

Therefore, goddess fair, I pray thee, every sinful deed eschew,

Lest, a bye-word of the people, thou have cause my death to rue.

On hearing him, the goddess replied in five stanzas:

Well I know the secret longing, thine to bear so patiently,

And I yield myself thy servant and the mango give to thee.

Lo! foregoing sinful pleasures, pleasures hard to be resigned,

Thou hast gained, to keep for ever, holiness and peace of mind.

He that, freed from early bondage, hugs the chains he once forswore,

Rashly treading ways unholy, ever sinneth more and more.

I will grant thy earnest craving, and will bid thy troubles cease,

Guiding thee to cool recesses, where thou mayst abide in peace.

Herons, maynah birds and cuckoos, with the ruddy geese that love

Nectar from the bloom to gather, swans aloft in troops that move,

Paddy-birds and lordly peacocks, with their song awake the grove.

Saffron and kadamba blossoms lie as chaff upon the ground,

Ripest dates, the palms adorning, hang in clusters all around,

And, amidst the loaded branches, see how mangoes here abound!

And singing the praises of the place she transported the ascetic thither, and, bidding him eat mangoes in this grove till he had satisfied his hunger, she went her way. The ascetic, eating mangoes till he had appeased his appetite, rested awhile. Then, as he wandered in the grove, he spied this Spirit in a state of suffering and he had not the heart to utter a word to him, but at sunset he beheld him attended by nymphs and in the enjoyment of heavenly glory and addressed him in three stanzas:

All the night anointed, feted, with a crown upon thy brow,

Neck and arms bedecked with jewels—all the day in anguish thou!

Many thousand nymphs attend thee. What a magic power is this!

How amazing thus to vary from a state of woe to bliss!

What has led to thy undoing? What the sin that thou dost rue?

Why from thine own back dost ever eat the flesh each day anew?

The Spirit recognized him and said, “You do not recognize me, but I was once your chaplain. This happiness that I enjoy in the night is due to you, as the result of my keeping half the fast-day; while the suffering I experience by day is the result of the evil that I wrought. For I was set by you on the seat of judgment, and I took bribes and gave false decisions, and was a backbiter, and in consequence of the evil that I wrought by day, I now undergo this suffering,” and he uttered a couple of stanzas:

Once in holy lore delighting I in sinful toils was cast,

Working evil for my neighbour, through the lengthening years I passed.

He that shall, backbiting others, love on their good name to prey,

Flesh from his own back will ever rend and eat, as I to-day.

And so saying, he asked the ascetic why he had come here. The ascetic told all his story at length. “And now, holy sir,” the Spirit said, “will you stay here or go away?” “I will not stay, I will return to my hermitage.” The Spirit said, “Very well, holy sir, I will constantly supply you with a ripe mango,” and by an exercise of his magic power he transported him to his hermitage, and, bidding him dwell there contentedly, he exacted a promise from him and went his way. Thenceforth the Spirit constantly supplied him with the mango fruit. The ascetic, in the enjoyment of the fruit, performed the preparatory rites to induce mystic meditation and was destined to the Brahma-world.

The Master, having finished his lesson to the lay folk, revealed the Truths and identified the Birth—At the conclusion of the Truths, some attained to the First Path, some to the Second, and others to the Third Path—“At that time the goddess was Uppalavanna, the ascetic was myself.”

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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