Ja 512 — Kumbha Jātaka

English translation by H. T. Francis.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol5/ja512.html

Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

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Edited by E. B. Cowell

Original edition: Cambridge University Press, volume 5, 1905

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 art thou,” etc.—This story the Master, while dwelling at Jetavana, told concerning five hundred women, friends of Visakha, who were drinkers of strong drink. Now the story goes that a drinking festival was proclaimed at Savatthi, and these five hundred women, after providing fiery drink for their masters, at the end of the festival thought, “We too will keep the feast,” and they all went to Visakha and said, “Friend, we will keep the feast.” She replied, “This is a drinking festival. I will drink no strong drink.” They said, “Do you then give an offering to the supreme Buddha: we will keep the feast.” She readily assented and sent them away. And after entertaining the Master, and making him a large offering, set out at eventide for Jetavana, with many a scented wreath in her hand, to hear the preaching of the Law, attended by these Women. Now they were eager for drink, when they started with her, and, when they stood in the gabled chamber, they took strong drink, and then accompanied Visakha into the presence of the Master. Visakha saluted the Master and sat respectfully on one side. Some of the other women danced even before the Master; some sang; others made improper movements with their hands and feet; others quarrelled. The Master, in order to give them a shock, emitted a ray of light from his eyebrow; and this was followed by blinding darkness. These women were terrified and frightened with the fear of death, and so the effect of the strong drink wore off The Master, disappearing from the throne on which he was seated, took his stand on the top of Mount Sineru, and emitted a ray of light from the hairs between his eyebrows, like as if it had been the rising of a thousand moons. The Master, just as he stood there, to produce a sensation amongst these women, spoke this stanza:

No place for laughter here, no room for joy,

The flames of passion suffering worlds destroy.

Why overwhelmed in darkest night, I pray,

Seek ye no torch to light you on your way?

At the end of the stanza all the five hundred women were established in the fruition of the First Path. The Master came and sat down on the Buddha seat, in the shade of the Perfumed Chamber. Then Visakha saluted him and asked, “Holy sir, whence has arisen this drinking of strong drink, that does violence to a man’s honour and to a tender conscience?” And telling her he related a story of the past.

Once upon a time when Brahmadatta was ruling in Benares, a forester, named Sura, who dwelt in the kingdom of Kasi, went to the Himalayas, to seek for articles of merchandise. There was a certain tree there that sprang up to the height of a man with his arms extended over his head, and then divided into three parts. In the midst of its three forks was a hole as big as a wine jar, and when it rained this hole was filled with water. Round about it grew two myrobalan plants and a pepper shrub; and the ripe fruits from these, when they were cut down, fell into the hole. Not far from this tree was some self-sown paddy. The parrots would pluck the heads of rice and eat them, perched on this tree. And while they were eating, the paddy and the husked rice fell there. So the water, fermenting through the sun’s heat, assumed a blood-red colour. In the hot season flocks of birds, being thirsty, drank of it, and becoming intoxicated fell down at the foot of the tree, and after sleeping awhile flew away, chirping merrily. And the same thing happened in the case of wild dogs, monkeys and other creatures. The forester, on seeing this, said, “If this were poison they would die, but after a short sleep they go away as they list; it is no poison.” And he himself drank of it, and becoming intoxicated he felt a desire to eat flesh, and then making a fire he killed the partridges and cocks that fell down at the foot of the tree, and roasted their flesh on the live coals, and gesticulating with one hand, and eating flesh with the other, he remained one or two days in the same spot. Now not far from here lived an ascetic, named Varuna. The forester at other times also used to visit him, and the thought now struck him, “I will drink this liquor with the ascetic.” So he filled a reed-pipe with it, and taking it together with some roast meat he came to the hut of leaves and said, “Holy sir, taste this liquor,” and they both drank it and ate the meat. So from the fact of this drink having been discovered by Sura and Varuna, it was called by their names (sura and varuni). They both thought, “This is the way to manage it,” and they filled their reed-pipes, and taking it on a carrying-pole they came to a neighbouring village, and sent a message to the king that some wine merchants had come. The king sent for them and they offered him the drink. The king drank it two or three times and got intoxicated. This lasted him only one or two days. Then he asked them if there was any more. “Yes, sir,” they said. “Where?” “In the Himalayas, sir.” “Then bring it here.” They went and fetched it two or three times. Then thinking, “We can’t always be going there,” they took note of all the constituent parts, and, beginning with the bark of the tree, they threw in all the other ingredients, and made the drink in the city. The men of the city drank it and became idle wretches. And the place became like a deserted city. Then these wine merchants fled from it and came to Benares, and sent a message to the king, to announce their arrival. The king sent for them and paid them money, and they made wine there too. And that city also perished in the same way. Thence they fled to Saketa, and from Saketa they came to Savatthi. At that time there was a king named Sabbamitta in Savatthi. He shewed favour to these men and asked them what they wanted. When they said, “We want the chief ingredients and ground rice and five

hundred jars," he gave them everything they asked for. So they stored the liquor in the five hundred jars, and, to guard them, they bound cats, one to each jar. And, when the liquor fermented and began to escape, the cats drank the strong drink that flowed from the inside of the jars, and getting intoxicated they lay down to sleep; and rats came and bit off the cats' ears, noses, teeth and tails. The king's officers came and told the king, "The cats have died from drinking the liquor." The king said, "Surely these men must be makers of poison," and he ordered them both to be beheaded and they died, crying out, "Give us strong drink, give us mead." The king, after putting the men to death, gave orders that the jars should be broken. But the cats, when the effect of the liquor wore off, got up and walked about and played. When they saw this, they told the king. The king said, "If it were poison, they would have died; it must be mead; we will drink it." So he had the city decorated, and set up a pavilion in the palace yard and taking his seat in this splendid pavilion on a royal throne with a white umbrella raised over it, and surrounded by his courtiers, he began to drink. Then Sakka, the king of heaven, said, "Who are there that in the duty of service to mother and the like diligently fulfil the three kinds of right conduct?" And, looking upon the world, he saw the king seated to drink strong drink and he thought, "If he shall drink strong drink, all India will perish: I will see that he shall not drink it." So, placing a jar full of the liquor in the palm of his hand, he went, disguised as a brahmin, and stood in the air, in the presence of the king, and cried, "Buy this jar, buy this jar." King Sabbamitta, on seeing him standing in the air and speaking after this manner, said, "Whence can this brahmin come?" and conversing with him he repeated three stanzas:

Who art thou, Being from on high,

Whose form emits bright rays of light,

Like levin flash athwart the sky,

Or moon illuming darkest night?

To ride the pathless air upon,

To move or stand in silent space—

Real is the power that thou hast won,

And proves thou art of godlike race.

Then, brahmin, who thou art declare,

And what within thy jar may be,

That thus appearing in mid air,

Thou fain wouldst sell thy wares to me.

Then Sakka said, “Hearken then to me,” and, expounding the evil qualities of strong drink, he said:

This jar nor oil nor ghee doth hold,

No honey or molasses here,

But vices more than can be told

Are stored within its rounded sphere.

Who drinks will fall, poor silly fool,

Into some hole or pit impure,

Or headlong sink in loathsome pool

And eat what he would fain abjure.

Buy then, O king, this jar of mine,

Full to the brim of strongest wine.

Who drinks, with wits distracted quite,

Like grazing ox that loves to stray,

Wanders in mind, a helpless wight,

And sings and dances all the day.

Buy then etc.

Who drinks will run all shamelessly,

Like nude ascetic thro’ the town,

And late take rest—so dazed is he—

Forgetting when to lay him down.

Buy then etc.

Who drinks, like one moved with alarm,

Totters, as tho’ he could not stand,

And trembling shakes his head and arm,

Like wooden puppet worked by hand.

Buy then etc.

Who drink are burned to death in bed,

Or else a prey to jackals fall,

To bondage or to death are led,

And suffer loss of goods withal.

Buy then etc.

Who drinks is lost to decency

And talks of things that are obscene,

Will sit undressed in company,

Is sick and every way unclean.

Buy then etc.

Uplifted is the man that drinks,

His vision is by no means clear,

The world is all my own, he thinks,

I own no earthly lord as peer.

Buy then etc.

Wine is a thing of boastful pride,

An ugly, naked, cowardly imp,

To strife and calumny allied,

A home to shelter thief and pimp.

Buy then etc.

Tho’ families may wealthy be,

And countless treasures may enjoy,

Holding earth’s richest gifts in fee,

This will their heritage destroy.

Buy then etc.

Silver and gold and household gear,

Oxen and fields and stores of grain—

All, all is lost: strong drink, I fear,

Has proved of wealthy home the bane.

Buy then etc.

The man that drinks is filled with pride,

And his own parents will revile,

Or, ties of blood and kin defied,

Will dare the marriage bed defile.

Buy then etc.

She too that drinks will in her pride

Her husband and his sire revile,

And, dignity of race defied,

A slave to folly will beguile.

Buy then etc.

The man that drinks will dare to slay

A righteous priest or brahmin true,

And then in suffering worlds for aye

The sinful deed will have to rue.

Buy then etc.

Who drink will sin in triple wise,

In word, in action, and in thought,

Then sink to Hell, to agonize

For all the evil they have wrought.

Buy then etc.

The man from whom men beg in vain,

E’en at the cost of heaps of gold,

From him when drunk their point they gain

And readily the lie is told.

Buy then etc.

Should one that drinks a message bear

And lo! some great emergency

Should suddenly arise, he’ll swear

The thing has slipped his memory.

Buy then etc.

E’en modest folk, intoxicate

With wine, will most indecent be,

And wisest men, when drunk, will prate

And babble very foolishly.

Buy then etc.

Thro’ drink men, fasting, lie about,

The hard bare ground their resting place,

Huddled like swine, a shameless rout,

They undergo most foul disgrace.

Buy then etc.

Like oxen smitten to the ground

Collapsing, in a heap they lie;

Such fire is in strong liquor found,

No power of man with it can vie.

Buy then etc.

When all men, as from deadly snake,

In terror from the poison shrink,

What hero bold enough to slake

His thirst from such a fatal drink?

Buy then etc.

'Twas after drinking this, I ween,

The Andhakas and Vrishni race,

Roaming along the shore, were seen

To fall, each by his kinsman's mace.

Buy then etc.

Angels infatuate with wine

Fell from eternal heaven, O king,

With all their magic power divine:

Then who would taste the accursed thing?

Buy then etc.

Nor curds nor honey sweet is here,

But evermore remembering

What's stored within this rounded sphere,

Buy, prithee, buy my jar, O king.

On hearing this the king, recognizing the misery caused by drink, was so pleased with Sakka that he sang his praises in two stanzas:

No parents had I sage to teach, like thee,

But thou art kind and merciful, I see;

A seeker of the Highest Truth alway;

Therefore I will obey thy words to-day.

Lo! five choice villages I own are thine,

Twice fifty handmaids, seven hundred kine,

And these ten cars with steeds of purest blood,

For thou hast counselled me to mine own good.

Sakka on hearing this revealed his godhead and made himself known, and standing in the air he repeated two stanzas:

These hundred slaves, O king, may still be thine,

And eke the villages and herds of kine;

No chariots yoked to high-bred steeds I claim;

Sakka, chief god of Thirty Three, my name.

Enjoy thy ghee, rice, milk and sodden meat,

Still be content thy honey cakes to eat.

Thus, king, delighting in the Truths I've preached,

Pursue thy blameless path, till Heaven is reached.

Thus did Sakka admonish him and then returned to his abode in Heaven. And the king, abstaining from strong drink, ordered the drinking vessels to be broken. And undertaking to keep the precepts and dispensing alms, he became destined to Heaven. But the drinking of strong drink gradually developed in India.

The Master here ended his lesson and identified the Birth: “At that time Ananda was the king, and I myself was Sakka.”

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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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.