# Ja 515 — Sambhava Jātaka

English translation by H. T. Francis.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol5/ja515.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

“This rule,” etc.—This story the Master when residing at Jetavana told concerning the Perfection of Wisdom. The circumstances leading to the introductory story will be set forth in the Mahaummagga Birth.

Once upon a time a king called Dhananjaya Korabya reigned in the city of Indapatta in the Kuru kingdom. A brahmin named Sucirata was his priest and adviser in things temporal and spiritual. The king ruled his kingdom righteously, in the exercise of almsgiving and other good works. Now one day he prepared a question about the service of Truth, and having seated the brahmin Sucirata and paid him due honour, he put his question to him in the form of four stanzas:

This rule and lordship I disdain,

Sucirata, for I would fain

Be great, and o’er the wide world reign.

By right alone—wrong I eschew—

For whatsoe’er is good and true

Kings above all men should pursue.

By this for ever free from blame,

Here and hereafter, we may claim

Midst gods and men a glorious name.

Know, brahmin, that I fain would do

Whate’er is deemed both good and true,

So pray, when asked, declare to me

The Good and True, what they may be.

Now this was a profound question, falling within the range of a Buddha. This is a question one should put to an Omniscient Buddha, and, failing him, to a Bodhisatta who is seeking the Gift of Omniscience. But Sucirata, by reason of his not being a Bodhisatta, could not solve the question, and, so far from assuming an air of wisdom, he confessed his incompetency in the following stanza:

No one but Vidhura, O king,

Hath power to tell this wondrous thing,

What is, my lord, the Good and True,

That thou art ever fain to do.

The king on hearing his words said, “Go then, brahmin, at once,” and he gave him a present to take with him, and in his eagerness to get him off, he repeated this stanza:

Lo! straight this weight of gold, my friend,

By thee to Vidhura I send;

Meet gift for sage who best can show

The Good and True that I would know.

And with these words he gave him a tablet of gold, worth a hundred thousand pieces of money, on which to write the answer to the question, a chariot to travel in, an army to escort him, and a present to offer, and straightway despatched him. Issuing from the city of Indapatta, not going straight to Benares, he first visited all places wheresoever sages dwell, and, not finding any one in all India to solve the question, he gradually approached Benares. Taking up his abode there, he went with a few followers to the house of Vidhura, at the time of the early meal, and having announced his arrival, he was invited in and found Vidhura at breakfast in his own house.

The Master, to make the matter clear, repeated the seventh stanza:

Then straight in haste did Bharadvaja wend

His way to Vidhura, and found his friend

Sitting at home, and ready to partake

Of simple fare, his early fast to break.

Now Vidhura was a friend of his youth, and had been educated in the family of the same master, so after partaking of the meal with him, when breakfast was over, and Sucirata was comfortably seated, on being asked by Vidhura, "What brings you here, friend?" he told him why he had come and repeated the eighth stanza:

I come at far-famed Kuru king's behest,

Sprung from Yudhitthila, and this his quest,

To ask thee, Vidhura, to tell to me

The True and Good, what it may surely be.

At that time the brahmin thinking to collect the ideas of a number of people pursues his quest, like to one piling up as it were a very Ganges flood, and there is no time for solving the problem. So stating the case he repeated the ninth stanza:

O'erwhelmed by such a mighty theme

As 'twere by Ganges' flooded stream,

I cannot tell what this may be,

The Good and True you seek from me.

And so saying he added: "I have a clever son, far wiser than I am: he will make it clear to you. Go to him." And he repeated the tenth stanza:

A son I have, my very own,

'Mongst men as Bhadrakara known;

Go seek him out, and he'll declare

To thee what Truth and Goodness are.

On hearing this Sucirata leaving Vidhura's house went to the dwelling of Bhadrakara, and found him seated at breakfast in the midst of his people.

The Master, to clear up the matter, repeated the eleventh stanza:

Then Bharadvaja hastily

To Bhadrakara's home did hie,

Where amidst friends, all gathered round,

Seated at ease the youth was found.

On his arrival there he was hospitably received by the youth Bhadrakara with the offer of a chair and gifts, and taking his seat, on being asked why he had come, he repeated the twelfth stanza:

I come at far-famed Kuru king's behest,

Sprung from Yudhitthila, and this his quest,

To ask thee, Bhadrakara, to show me

Goodness and Truth, what they may surely be.

Then Bhadrakara said to him, "Just now, Sir, I am intent on an intrigue with another man's wife. My mind is ill at ease, so I cannot answer your question, but my young brother Sanjaya has a clearer intellect than I have. Ask him: he will answer your question." And in order to send him there, he repeated two stanzas:

Good venison I leave, a lizard to pursue:

How then should I know aught about the Good and True?

I've a young brother, you must know,

Named Sanjaya. So, brahmin, go

And seek him out, and he'll declare

To thee what Truth and Goodness are.

He at once set out for the house of Sanjaya, and was welcomed by him and on being asked why he had come he told him the reason.

The Master, to make the matter clear, uttered two stanzas:

Then Bharadvaja hastily

To home of Sanjaya did hie,

Where amidst friends, all gathered round,

Seated at ease the youth was found.

I come at far-famed Kuru king's behest,

Sprung from Yudhitthila, and this his quest,

To ask thee, Sanjaya, to show to me

Goodness and Truth, what they may surely be.

But Sanjaya also was engaged in an intrigue and said to him, "Sir, I am in pursuit of another man's wife, and going down to the Ganges I cross over to the other side. Evening and morning as I cross the stream, I am in the jaws of death: therefore my mind is disturbed, and I shall not be able to answer your question, but my young brother Sambhava, a boy of seven years, is a hundred thousand times superior to me in knowledge. He will tell you: go and ask him."

The Master, to make the matter clear, repeated two stanzas:

Death opens wide his jaws for me,

Early and late. How tell to thee

Of Truth and Goodness, what they be?

I've a young brother, you must know,

Called Sambhava. So, brahmin, go,

And seek him out. He will declare

To thee what Truth and Goodness are.

On hearing this Sucirata thought, "This question must be the most wonderful thing in the world. I fancy no one is equal to answering it," and so thinking he repeated two stanzas:

This marvel strange misliketh me,

Nor sire nor sons, none of the three,

Knows how to solve this mystery.

If ye thus fail, can this mere youth

Know aught of Goodness and of Truth?

On hearing this Sanjaya said, “Sir, do not regard young Sambhava as a mere boy. If there is no one that can answer your question, go and ask him.” And, describing the qualities of the youth by similes that illustrated, the case, he repeated twelve stanzas:

Ask Sambhava nor scorn his youth,

He knows right well and he can tell

Of Goodness and of Truth.

As the clear moon outshines the starry host,

Their meaner glories in his splendour lost,

E’en so the stripling Sambhava appears

To excel in Wisdom far beyond his years;

Ask Sambhava nor scorn his youth,

He knows right well and he can tell

Of Goodness and of Truth.

As charming April doth all months outvie

With budding flowers and woodland greenery,

E’en so the stripling Sambhava appears etc.

As Gandhamadana, its snowy height

With forest clad and heavenly herbs bedight,

Diffusing light and fragrance all around,

For myriad gods a refuge sure is found,

E’en so the stripling etc.

As glorious fire, ablaze thro’ some morass

With wreathing spire, insatiate, eats the grass

Leaving a blackened path, where’er it pass,

Or as a ghee-fed flame in darkest night

On choicest wood doth whet its appetite,

Shining conspicuous on some distant height,

E'en so the stripling etc.

An ox by strength, a horse by speed,

Displays his excellence of breed,

A cow by milk in copious flow,

A sage by his wise words we know.

E'en so the stripling etc.

While Sanjaya was singing the praises of Sambhava, Sucirata thought, "I will find out by putting the question to him," so he asked, "Where is your young brother?" Then he opened the window and stretching forth his hand, he said, "You see yonder boy with a complexion like gold, playing with other youths in the street before the door of the mansion: that is my young brother. Go up to him and ask him; he will answer your question with all the charm of a Buddha." Sucirata, on hearing his words, descended from the mansion, and drew nigh to the boy at the very moment that he was standing with his garment loose and thrown over his shoulder, and picking up some dirt with both hands.

The Master, to explain the matter, repeated a stanza:

Then Bharadvaja hastily

To home of Sambhava did hie,

And there out in the public way

The little boy was found at play.

The Great Being, when he saw the brahmin come and stand before him, asked, "Friend, what brings you here?" He replied, "Dear youth, I am wandering through all India, and not finding any one competent to answer the question I put to him, I have come to you." The boy thought, "There is a question, they say, that has not been decided in all India. He has come to me. I am old in knowledge." And becoming ashamed he dropped the dirt that he held in his hand, readjusted his garment and said, "Brahmin, ask on, and I will tell you with the fluent mastery of a Buddha," and in his omniscience he invited him to choose what he would ask. Then the brahmin asked his question in the form of a stanza:

I come at far-famed Kuru king's behest,

Sprung from Yudhitthila, and this his quest,

To ask thee, Sambhava, to show to me

Goodness and Truth, what they may surely be.

What he wanted became clear to Sambhava, as it were the full moon in the middle of the sky. “Then listen to me,” he said, and answering the question as to the Service of Truth he uttered this stanza:

I’ll tell thee, Sir, and tell aright,

E’en as a man of wisdom might,

The king shall know the Good and True,

But who knows what the king will do?

And as he stood in the street and taught the Truth with a voice sweet as honey, the sound spread over the whole of the city of Benares, to twelve leagues on every side Then the king and all his viceroys and other rulers assembled together, and the Great Being in the midst of the multitude set forth his exposition of the Truth.

Having thus promised in this stanza to answer the question, he now gave the answer as to the Service of Truth:

In answer to the king, Sucirata, proclaim,

“To-morrow and To-day are never quite the same;

I bid thee then, O king Yudhitthila, be wise

And prompt to seize whate’er occasion may arise.”

I fain would have thee too, Sucirata, suggest

A thought in which his mind may profitably rest,

“A king all wicked ways should carefully eschew,

Nor, like bewildered fool, an evil course pursue.”

To loss of his own soul he never should transgress,

Nor e’er be guilty of deeds of unrighteousness,

Himself ne’er be engaged in any evil way,

Nor ever in wrong path a brother lead astray.

These points to carry out whoso doth rightly know,

Like waxing moon, as king in fame doth ever grow.

A shining light to friends and dear unto his kin,

And, when his body fails, the sage to heaven will win.

The Great Being thus, like to one making the moon to rise in the sky, answered the brahmin's question with all the mastery of a Buddha. The people roared and shouted and clapped their hands. And there arose a thousand cries of applause with great wavings of cloths and snapping of fingers. And they cast off the trinkets on their hands. And the value of what they threw down amounted to about a crore. And the king of Benares in his joy paid him great honour. And Sucirata, after offering him a thousand weight of gold, wrote down the answer to the question with vermilion on a golden tablet, and on coming to the city of Indapatta he told the king the answer as to the Service of Truth. And the king abiding steadfast in righteousness attained to heaven.

At the end of the lesson the Master said, "Not merely now, Brethren, but formerly too, the Tathagata was great in answering questions," and he identified the Birth: "At that time Ananda was king Dhananjaya, Anuruddha was Sucirata, Kassapa Vidhura, Moggallana Bhadrakara, Sariputta the youth Sanjaya, and I myself was the wise Sambhava."

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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