Ja 516 — Mahakapi Jātaka

English translation by H. T. Francis.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol5/ja516.html

Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

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

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

“A king of Kasi,” etc.—This story was told by the Master, when dwelling in the Bamboo Grove, about Devadatta’s hurling a stone at him. So when the Brethren blamed Devadatta for having suborned archers to shoot the Buddha and afterwards hurled a stone at him, the Master said, “Not now only, but formerly also, Devadatta flung a stone at me,” and so saying he related a story of the past.

Once upon a time when Brahmadatta reigned in Benares, a Brahmin husbandman in a village of Kasi, after ploughing his fields, loosened his oxen and began to work with a spade. The oxen, while cropping leaves in a clump of trees, little by little escaped into the forest. The man, discovering that it was late, laid aside his spade to look for his oxen, and not finding them he was overcome with grief and wandered about the forest, seeking them, till he had entered the Himalaya region. There having lost his bearings he roamed about for seven days fasting, but seeing a tinduka tree he climbed up it to eat the fruit. Slipping off the tree he fell sixty cubits into a hell-like abyss, where he passed ten days. At that time the Bodhisatta was living in the shape of a monkey, and while eating wild fruits he caught sight of the man, and after practising with a stone he hauled the fellow out. While the monkey was asleep, the man split his head open with a stone. The Great Being, becoming aware of his action, sprang up and perched on a branch of the tree and cried, “Ho! Sirrah, you walk on the ground; I will just point out to you the way from the top of the tree and then will be off.” So he rescued the fellow from the forest, set him on the right road and then himself disappeared in the mountainous region. The man, because he had sinned against the Great Being, became a leper, and even in this world appeared as a preta in human form. For seven years he was overwhelmed with pain, and in his wanderings to and fro he found his way into the Migacira park in Benares, and spreading a plantain leaf in the enclosure he lay down, half maddened by his sufferings. At that moment the king of Benares came to the park and as he walked about he saw the man and asked him, “Who are you, and what have you done to bring this suffering upon you?” And he told the king the whole story at length.

The Master, to make the matter clear, said:

A king of Kasi who, they say,

O’er great Benares once held sway,

With courtier friends the road to ch

Unto Migacira drew near.

A brahmin there the king did see

—A walking skeleton was he—

His skin was white with leprous blood

And rough like gnarled ebon wood.

Astonied at the piteous sight

Of this sore troubled, luckless wight,

“Alas! poor wretch,” he cried, “declare

What name ‘mongst ogres thou dost bear.”

“Thy hands and feet are white as snow,

Thy head is whiter still, I trow,

Thy frame with leprous spots o’ergrown,

Disease has marked thee for its own.

“Thy back like spindles in a row

A long unequal curve doth show;

Thy joints are as black knots; I ween,

Thy like before was never seen.

“Whence cam’st thou then, so travel-worn,

Mere skin and bones, a wretch forlorn,

By heat of blazing sun opprest,

By thirst and hunger sore distrest?

“With frame so marred, an awful sight,

Scarce fit to look upon the light,

Thy very mother—no, not she

Would care her wretched son to see.

“What sinful deed was thine, I pray,

Or wrongfully whom didst thou slay?

What the offence I fain would know,

Reduced thee to this state of woe?”

Then the brahmin said:

I’ll tell thee, Sir, and tell thee true

E’en as a good man aye should do:

For one that never speaketh lies

Is praised in this world by the wise.

Once in a lonely wood I took my way,

Seeking my kine that late had gone astray;

Through pathless tracts of jungle, fitting home

For the wild elephant, I heedless roam.

Lost in the maze of this vast wilderness,

From thirst and hunger suffering sore distress,

For seven long days I wander thro’ the wood

Where the fell tiger rears his savage brood.

E’en rankest poison I was fain to eat

When lo! a lovely tree my gaze doth meet;

O’er a sheer precipice it pendent swung,

And fragrant fruit from all its branches hung.

Whate’er had fallen to the wind’s cold touch

I greedily devoured and relished much,

Then, still unsated, I climbed up the tree,

“That way,” methought, “lies full satiety.”

I ne’er had tasted such ripe fruit before,

And stretching forth my hand to gather more,

The branch, on which my body rested, broke,

As though clean severed by the woodman’s stroke.

With broken bough head over heels I went,

With nought to check me in my swift descent

Over the side of rocky precipice,

Without escape from bottomless abyss.

The depth of water in the pool beneath

Saved me from being rudely crushed to death,

So there, poor luckless wight, without a ray

Of hope to cheer me, ten long nights I lay.

At length a monkey came—long-tailed was he

And made his home in some rock cavity

And as he stept from bough to bough, the brute

Did ever pluck and eat the dainty fruit.

But when my thin and pallid form he spied,

Touched with compassion for my woes, he cried,

“Alas! poor wretch, whom I see lying there

Thus overwhelmed with anguish and despair,

If man or goblin, who thou art, declare.”

Then with due reverence I made reply;

“A man and doomed without escape am I:

But this I say, “All blessings light on thee,

If thou canst find a way of saving me.”

The monkey stepping on the height above

Carried a heavy stone, his strength to prove,

And when by practice he was perfect grown,

The mighty one his purpose thus made known.

“Climb thou, good sir, upon my back and cast

Thy arms about my neck and hold me fast;

Then will I with all speed deliver thee

From the stone walls of thy captivity.’

I hearkened gladly, well remembering

The counsels of the glorious monkey-king,

And, climbing on his back, my arms I cast

Round the wise creature’s neck and held him fast.

The monkey then,—so brave and strong was he—

Exhausted by the effort though he be,

From rocky fastness soon uplifteth me.

And having haled me out, the hero cried,

“I’m weary: stand as guard, Sir, by my side,

While I anon in peaceful sleep abide.

“Lion and tiger, panther eke and bear,

If they should ever take me unaware,

Would kill me straight. To watch shall be thy care.”

While, as I watched, he took a moment’s rest,

An ugly thought was harboured in my breast.

“Monkeys and such like deer are good to eat;

What if I kill him and my hunger cheat?

The beast if slain would furnish savoury meat.

“When sated, here no longer will I stay

But well provisioned for full many a day

Out from this forest I will find a way.”

Taking a stone his skull I well nigh broke,

But a lame hand put forth a feeble stroke.

The monkey quickly bounded up a tree,

And all bestained with blood regarded me

From far, with tearful eyes, reproachfully.

“God bless thee, act not thus, I pray, good sir,

For otherwise thy fate, I dare aver,

Will long all others from such deeds deter.

“Alas! for shame. What a return is this

For having saved thee from that dread abyss!

“Rescued from death thou playedst a treacherous part

And evil hast devised with evil heart.

“Vile wretch, beware lest sharpest agony

Springing from evil deed bring death to thee,

E’en as its fruit destroys the bamboo tree.

“I trust thee not, for thou wouldst work me ill:

Walk well in front that I may see thee still.

“From ravening beast escaped, thou mayst regain

The haunts of men: the path that stretches plain

Before thine eyes, follow as thou art fain.”

At this the monkey dried his tears, and sped

Up to a mountain tarn, and bathed his head

From stain of blood—by me alas! ’twas shed—

There too, with burning pains through him accursed,

I dragged my tortured frame, to quench my thirst,

But when to that blood-stained lake I came,

The crimson flood appeared one mass of flame.

Each liquid drop from it that did bedew

My body, straight into a pustule grew,

Like a cleft vilva-fruit, in size and hue.

The sores discharging yield a loathsome smell,

And whereso’er I fain would gladly dwell

In town and country-side, all fly pell mell.

Scattered by odours foul, the while they ply

Their sticks and stones, and “Come not thou too nigh

To us, poor wretch,’ all men and women cry.

Such is the pain for seven long years I bear;

According to his deeds each man doth fare.

May good be with you all that here I see:

Betray ye not your friends. How vile is he

That sins against a friend with treachery.

All who on earth to friends have proved untrue,

As lepers here their sin must ever rue,

And when the body fails, in Hell are born anew.

And while the man was speaking with the king, even as he spoke, the earth opened its mouth, and at that very moment the man disappeared and was reborn in Hell. The king, when the man was swallowed up in the earth, came forth from the park and entered the city.

The Master here ending his lesson said, “Not only now, Brethren, but formerly too, Devadatta flung a stone at me,” and he identified the Birth: “At that time the treacherous friend was Devadatta, I myself was the monkey-king.”

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.