Ja 522 — Sarabhanga Jātaka

English translation by H. T. Francis.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol5/ja522.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

“Beringed and gallantly,” etc.—This was a story the Master, while dwelling in the Bamboo Grove, told concerning the death of the Elder, the Great Moggallana. The Elder Sariputta, after gaining the consent of the Tathagata when he was living at Jetavana, went and died in the village of Nala, in the very room where he was born. The Master, on hearing of his death, went to Rajagaha and took up his abode in the Bamboo Grove. An Elder dwelt there on the slopes of Isigili (Mount of Saints) at the Black Rock. This man, by attaining perfection in supernatural power, was able to make his way into heaven and hell. In the god world he beheld one of the disciples of Buddha enjoying great power, and in the world of men he saw one of the disciples of the heretics suffering great agony, and on returning to the world of men he told them how in a certain god-world such and such a lay Brother or Sister was re-born and enjoying great honour, and amongst the followers of the heretics such and such a man or woman was re-born in hell or other states of suffering. People gladly accepted his teaching and rejected that of the schismatics. Great honour was paid to the disciples of Buddha, while that paid to the schismatics fell away. They conceived a grudge against the Elder, and said: “As long as this fellow is alive, there are divisions amongst our followers, and the honour paid to us falls away: we will put him to death”; and they gave a thousand pieces of money to a brigand who guarded the ascetics to put the Elder to death. He resolved to kill the Elder, and came with a great following to Black Rock. The Elder, when he saw him coming, by his magic power flew up into the air and disappeared. The brigand, not finding the Elder that day, returned home and came back day after day for six successive days. But the Elder, by his magic power, always disappeared in the same way. On the seventh day an act committed of old by the Elder, carrying with it consequences to be recognised on some future occasion, got its chance for mischief. The story goes that once upon a time, hearkening to what his wife said, he wanted to put his father and mother to death; and, taking them in a carriage to a forest, he pretended that they were attacked by robbers, and struck and beat his parents. Through feebleness of sight being unable to see objects clearly, they did not recognise their son, and thinking they were robbers said: “Dear son, some robbers are killing us: make your escape,” and lamented for

him only. He thought, “Though they are being beaten by me, it is only on my account they make lamentation. I am acting shamefully.” So he reassured them and, pretending that the robbers had been put to flight, he stroked their hands and feet, saying, “Dear father and mother, do not be afraid, the robbers have fled,” and brought them again to their own house. This action for ever so long not finding its opportunity but ever biding its time, like a core of flame hidden under ashes, caught up and seized upon the man when he was re-born for the last time, and the Elder, in consequence of his action, was unable to fly up into the air. His magic power that once could quell Nanda and Upananda and cause Vejayanta to tremble, as the result of his action became mere feebleness. The brigand crushed all his bones, subjecting him to the “straw and meal” torture, and, thinking he was dead, went off with his followers. But the Elder, on recovering consciousness, clothed himself with Meditation as with a garment, and flying up into the presence of the Master, saluted him and said, “Holy Sir, my sum of life is exhausted: I would die,” and having gained the Master’s consent, he died then and there. At that instant the six god-worlds were in a general state of commotion. “Our Master,” they cried, “is dead.” And they came, bringing incense and perfume and wreaths breathing divine odours, and all kinds of wood, and the funeral pile was made of sandalwood and ninety-nine precious things. The Master, standing near the Elder, ordered his remains to be deposited, and for the space of a league all round about the spot where the body was burned flowers rained down upon it, and men and gods stood mingled together, and for seven days held a sacred festival. The Master had the relics of the Elder gathered together, and erected a shrine in a gabled chamber in the Bamboo Grove. At that time they raised the topic in the Hall of Truth, saying, “Sirs, Sariputta, because he did not die in the presence of the Tathagata, has not received great honour at the hands of the Buddha, but the Great Elder Moggallana, because he died near the Master, has had great honour paid to him.” The Master came up, and asking the Brethren what they were sitting in conclave to discuss, on hearing what it was, said: “Not now only, Brethren, but formerly also Moggallana received great honour at my hands”; and, so saying, he related a story of the past.

Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was conceived by the brahmin wife of the royal chaplain, and at the end of ten months was born early in the morning. At that moment there was a blaze of all kinds of arms in the city of Benares for the space of twelve leagues. The priest, on the birth of the boy, stepped out of doors and looked up to the sky for the purpose of divining his son’s destiny, and knew that this boy, because he was born under a certain conjunction in the heaven, would surely be the chief archer in all India. So he went betimes to the palace and inquired after the king’s health. On his replying, “How, my master, can I be well: this day there is a blaze of weapons throughout my dwelling-place,” he said, “Fear not, Sire; not merely in your house, but throughout all the city is this blaze of arms to be seen. This is due to the fact that a boy is born to-day in our house.” “What, master, will be the result of the birth of a boy under these conditions?” “Nothing, Sire, but he will prove to be the chief archer in all India.” “Well, master, do you then watch over him, and when he is grown up, present him to us.” And so saying, he ordered a thousand pieces of money to be given him as the price of his nurture. The priest took it and went home, and on the naming-day of his son, on account of the blaze of arms at the moment of his birth, he called him Jotipala. He was reared in great state, and at the age of sixteen he was extremely handsome. Then his father, observing his

personal distinction, said, “Dear son, go to Takkasila and receive instruction in all learning at the hands of a world-famous teacher.” He agreed to do so and, taking his teacher’s fee, he bade his parents farewell and repaired thither. He presented his fee of one thousand pieces of money and set about acquiring instruction, and in the course of seven days he had reached perfection. His master was so delighted with him that he gave him a precious sword that belonged to him, and a bow of ram’s-horn and a quiver, both of them deftly joined together, and his own coat of mail and a diadem, and he said, “Dear Jotipala, I am an old man, do you now train these pupils”; and he handed over to him five hundred pupils. The Bodhisatta, taking everything with him, said good-bye to his teacher and, returning to Benares, went to see his parents. Then his father, on seeing him standing respectfully before him, said, “My son, have you finished your studies?” “Yes, sir.” On hearing his answer he went to the palace and said, “My son, Sire, has completed his education: what is he to do?” “Master, let him wait on us.” “What do you decide, Sire, about his expenses?” “Let him receive a thousand pieces of money daily.” He readily agreed to this, and returning home he called his boy to him and said, “Dear son, you are to serve the king.” Thenceforth he received every day a thousand pieces of money and attended on the king. The king’s attendants were offended; “We do not see that Jotipala does anything, and he receives a thousand pieces of money every day. We should like to see a specimen of his skill.” The king heard what they said and told the priest. He said, “All right, Sire,” and told his son. “Very well, dear father,” he said, “on the seventh day from this I will show them: let the king assemble all the archers in his dominion.” The priest went and repeated what he said to the king. The king, by beat of drum through the city, had all his archers gathered together. When they were assembled, they numbered sixty thousand. The king, on hearing that they were assembled, said: “Let all that dwell in the city witness the skill of Jotipala.” And making proclamation by beat of drum, he had the palace yard made ready, and, followed by a great crowd, he took his seat on a splendid throne, and, when he had summoned the archers, he sent for Jotipala. He put the bow and quiver and coat of mail and diadem, which had been given to him by his teacher, beneath his under garment, and had the sword carried for him, and then came before the king in his ordinary garb and stood respectfully on one side. The archers thought, “Jotipala, they say, has come to give us a specimen of his skill, but from his coming without a bow he will evidently want to receive one at our hands,” but they all agreed they would not give him one. The king, addressing Jotipala, said, “Give us proof of your skill.” So he had a tent-like screen thrown round about him, and taking his stand inside it, and doffing his cloak, he girt on his armour, and got into his coat of mail and fastened the diadem on his head. Then he fixed a string of the colour of coral on his ram’s-horn bow, and binding his quiver on his back and fastening his sword on his left side, he twirled an arrow tipt with adamant on his nail, and threw open the screen and sallied forth like a Naga prince bursting out of the earth, splendidly equipped, and stood making an obeisance to the king. The multitude, on seeing him, jumped about and shouted and clapped their hands. The king said, “Jotipala, give us a specimen of your skill.” “Sire,” he said, “amongst your archers are men who pierce like lightning, able to split a hair, and to shoot at a sound (without seeing) and to cleave a (falling) arrow. Summon four of these archers.” The king summoned them. The Great Being set up a pavilion in a square enclosure in the palace yard, and at the four corners he stationed the four archers, and to each of them he had thirty thousand arrows allotted, assigning men to hand the arrows to each, and he himself taking an arrow tipt with

adamant stood in the middle of the pavilion and cried, “O king, let these four archers all at once shoot their arrows to wound me; I will ward off the arrows shot by them.” The king gave the order for them to do so. “Sire,” they said, “we shoot as quick as lightning, and are able to split a hair, and to shoot at the sound of a voice (without seeing), and to cleave a (falling) arrow, but Jotipala is a mere stripling; we will not shoot him.” The Great Being said, “If you can, shoot me.” “Agreed,” they said, and with one accord they shot their arrows. The Great Being, striking them severally with his iron arrow, in some way or other, made them drop on the ground, and then throwing a wall round them, he piled them together and so made a magazine of arrows, fitting each arrow, handle level with handle, stock with stock, feathers with feathers, till the bowmen’s arrows were all spent, and when he saw that it was so, without spoiling his magazine of arrows, he flew up into the air and stood before the king. The people made a great uproar, shouting and dancing about and clapping their hands, and they threw off their garments and ornaments, so that there was treasure lying in a heap to the amount of eighteen crores. Then the king asked him, “What do you call this trick, Jotipala?” “The arrow-defence, Sire.” “Are there any others that know it?” “No one in all India, except myself, Sire.” “Show us another trick, friend.” “Sire, these four men stationed at four corners failed to wound me. But if they are posted at the four corners, I will wound them with a single arrow.” The archers did not dare to stand there. So the Great Being fixed four plantains at the four corners, and fastening a scarlet thread on the feathered part of the arrow, he shot it, aiming at one of the plantains. The arrow struck it and then the second, the third and the fourth, one after another, and then struck the first, which it had already pierced, and so returned to the archer’s hand; while the plantains stood encircled with the thread. The people raised myriad shouts of applause. The king asked, “What do you call this trick, friend?” “The pierced circle, Sire.” “Show us something more.” The Great Being showed them the arrow-stick, the arrow-rope, the arrow-plait, and performed other tricks called the arrow-terrace, arrow-pavilion, arrow-wall, arrow-stairs, arrow-tank, and made the arrow-lotus to blossom and caused it to rain a shower of arrows.

Thus did he display these twelve unrivalled acts of skill, and then he cleft seven incomparably huge substances. He pierced a plank of fig-wood, eight inches thick, a plank of asana-wood, four inches thick, a copper plate two inches thick, an iron plate one inch thick, and after piercing a hundred boards joined together, one after another, he shot an arrow at the front part of waggons full of straw and sand and planks, and made it come out at the back part; and, shooting at the back of the waggons, he caused the arrow to come out at the front. He drove an arrow through a space of over a furlong in water and more than two furlongs of earth, and he pierced a hair, at the distance of half a furlong, at the first sign of its being moved by the wind. And when he had displayed all these feats of skill, the sun set. Then the king promised him the post of commander-in-chief, saying, “Jotipala, it is too late to-day; to-morrow you shall receive the honour of the chief command. Go and have your beard trimmed and take a bath,” and that same day he gave him a hundred thousand pieces of money for his expenses. The Great Being said, “I have no need of this,” and he gave his lords eighteen crores of treasure and went with a large escort to bathe; and, after he had had his beard trimmed and had bathed, arrayed in all manner of adornments, he entered his abode with unparalleled pomp. After enjoying a variety of dainty viands, he got up and lay down on a royal couch, and when he had slept through two watches, in the last watch he woke up and sat cross-legged on his couch,

considering the beginning, the middle and the end of his feats of skill. “My skill,” he thought, “in the beginning is evidently death, in the middle it is the enjoyment of sin, and in the end it is re-birth in hell: for the destruction of life and excessive carelessness in sinful enjoyment causes re-birth in hell. The post of commander-in-chief is given me by the king, and great power will accrue to me, and I shall have a wife and many children; but if the objects of desire are multiplied, it will be hard to get rid of desire. I will go forth from the world alone and enter the forest: it is right for me to adopt the life of an ascetic.” So the Great Being arose from his couch, and without letting anybody know, he descended from the terrace, and going out by the house-door he went into the forest all alone, and repaired to a spot on the banks of the Godhavari, near the Kavittha forest, three leagues in extent. Sakka, hearing of his renunciation of the world, summoned Vissakamma and said, “Friend, Jotipala has renounced the world; a great company will gather round him. Build a hermitage on the banks of the Godhavari in the Kavittha forest and provide them with everything necessary for the ascetic life.” Vissakamma did so. The Great Being, when he reached the place, saw a road for a single foot-passenger and thought, “This must be a place for ascetics to dwell in,” and travelling by this road and meeting with no one, he entered the hut of leaves. On seeing the requisites for ascetic life he said, “Sakka, king of heaven, methinks, knew that I had renounced the world”; and, doffing his cloak, he put on an inner and outer robe of dyed bark and threw an antelope’s skin over one shoulder. Then be bound up his coil of matted locks, shouldered a pingo of three bushels of grain, took a mendicant’s staff and sallied forth from his hut, and climbing up the covered walk, he paced up and down it several times. Thus did he glorify the forest with the beauty of asceticism, and after performing the Kasina ritual, on the seventh day of his religious life he developed the eight Attainments and the five Faculties, and lived quite alone, feeding on what he could glean and on roots and berries. His parents and a crowd of friends and kinsfolk and acquaintances, not seeing him, wandered about disconsolate. Then a certain forester, who had seen and recognised the Great Being in the Kavittha hermitage, told his parents and they informed the king of it. The king said, “Come, let us go and see him,” and taking the father and mother, and accompanied by a great multitude, he arrived at the bank of the Godhavari by the road which the forester pointed out to him. The Bodhisatta, on coming to the river-bank, seated himself in the air, and after teaching them the Law, he brought them all into his hermitage, and there too, seated in the air, he revealed to them the misery involved in sensual desires and taught them the Law. And all of them, including the king, adopted the religious life. The Bodhisatta continued to dwell there, surrounded by a band of ascetics. And the news that he was dwelling there was blazed abroad throughout all India. Kings with their subjects came and took orders at his hands, and there was a great assembly of them till they gradually numbered many thousands. Whoever reflected on thoughts of lust, or the wish to hurt or injure others, to him came the Great Being, and seated in the air before him, he taught him the Law and instructed him in the Kasina ritual. His seven chief pupils were Salissara, Mendissara, Pabbata, Kaladevala, Kisavaccha, Anusissa, and Narada. And they, abiding in his admonition, attained to ecstatic meditation and reached perfection. By and bye the Kavittha hermitage became crowded, and there was no room for the multitude of ascetics to dwell there. So the Great Being, addressing Salissara, said, “Salissara, this hermitage is not big enough for the crowd of ascetics; do you go with this company of them and take up your abode near the town of Lambaculaka in the province of king Candapajjota.” He agreed to do so and, taking a

company of many thousands, went and dwelt there. But as people still came and joined the ascetics, the hermitage was full again. The Bodhisatta, addressing Mendissara, said, “On the borders of the country of Surattha is a stream called Satodika. Take this band of ascetics and dwell on the borders of that river.” And he sent him away. In the same way on a third occasion he sent Pabbata, saying, “In the great forest is the Anjana mountain: go and settle near that.” On the fourth occasion he sent Kaladevala, saying, “In the south country in the kingdom of Avanti is the Ghanasela mountain: settle near that.” The Kavittha hermitage again overflowed, though in five different places there was a company of ascetics numbering ninny thousands. And Kisavaccha, asking leave of the Great Being, took up his abode in the park near the commander-in-chief, in the city of Kumbhavati in the province of king Dandaki. Narada settled in the central province in the Aranjara chain of mountains, and Anusissa remained with the Great Being. At this time king Dandaki deposed from her position a courtezan whom he had greatly honoured, and, roaming about at her own will, she came to the park, and seeing the ascetic Kisavaccha, she thought, “Surely this must be Ill Luck. I will get rid of my sin on his person and will then go and bathe.” And first biting her tooth-stick, she spat out a quantity of phlegm, and not only spat upon the matted locks of the ascetic, but also threw her tooth-stick at his head and went and bathed. And the king, calling her to mind, restored her to her former position. And infatuated by her folly, she came to the conclusion that she had recovered this honour because she had got rid of her sin on the person of Ill Luck. Not long after this the king deposed his family priest from his office, and he went and asked the woman by what means she had recovered her position. So she told him it was from having got rid of her offence on the person of Ill Luck in the royal park. The priest went and got rid of his sin in the same way, and him too the king reinstated in his office. Now by and bye there was a disturbance on the king’s frontier, and he went forth with a division of his army to fight. Then that infatuated priest asked the king, saying, “Sire, do you wish for victory or defeat?” When he answered, “Victory,” he said, “Well, Ill Luck dwells in the royal park; go and convey your Sin to his person.” He approved of the suggestion and said, “Let these men come with me to the park and get rid of their sin on the person of Ill Luck.” And going into the park, he first of all nibbled his tooth-stick and let his spittle and the stick fall on the ascetic’s matted locks and then bathed his head, and his army did likewise. When the king had departed the commander-in-chief came, and seeing the ascetic, he took the tooth-stick out of his locks and had him thoroughly washed and then asked, “What will become of the king?” “Sir, there is no evil thought in my heart, but the gods are wroth and on the seventh day from this all his kingdom will be destroyed: do you flee with all speed and go elsewhere.” He was terribly alarmed, and went and told the king. The king refused to believe him, So he returned to his own house, and taking his wife and children with him, he fled to another kingdom. The master Sarabhanga, hearing about it, sent two youthful ascetics and had Kisavaccha brought to him in a palanquin through the air. The king fought a battle, and taking the rebels prisoners returned to the city. On his return the gods first caused it to rain from heaven, and when all the dead bodies had been washed away by the flood of rain, there was a shower of heavenly flowers on the top of the clean white sand, and on the flowers there fell a shower of small coins, and after them a shower of big pieces of money, and this was followed by a shower of heavenly ornaments. The people were highly delighted and began to pick up ornaments of gold, even fine gold. Then there rained upon their persons a shower of all manner of blazing weapons, and the people

were cut piece-meal. Then a shower of blistering embers fell on them, and over these huge blazing mountain peaks, followed by a shower of fine sand filling a space of sixty cubits. Thus was a part of his realm sixty leagues in extent destroyed, and its destruction was blazed abroad throughout all India. Then the lords of subordinate kingdoms within his realm, the three kings, Kalinga, Atthaka, Bhimaratha, thought, “Once upon a time in Benares, Kalabu, king of Kasi, having sinned against the ascetic Khantivadi, it is reported he was swallowed up in the earth, and Nalikira in like manner having given ascetics to be devoured by dogs, and Ajjuna of the thousand arms who sinned against Angirasa likewise perished, and now again king Dandaki, having sinned against Kisavaccha, report says, is destroyed, realm and all. We know not the place where these four kings are re-born: no one except Sarabhanga, our master, is able to tell us this. We will go and ask him.” And the three kings went forth with great pomp to ask this question. But though they heard rumours that so and so was gone, they did not really know it, but each one fancied that he alone was going, and not far from Godhavari they all met, and alighting from their chariots, they all three mounted upon a single chariot and journeyed together to the banks of Godhavari. At this moment Sakka, sitting on his throne of yellow marble, considered the seven questions and said to himself, “Except Sarabhanga, the master, there is no one else in this world or the god-world that can answer these questions: I will ask him these questions. These three kings have come to the banks of Godhavari to make inquiry of Sarabhanga, the master. I will also consult him about the questions they ask.” And, accompanied by deities from two of the god-worlds, he descended from heaven. That very day Kisavaccha died, and to celebrate his obsequies, innumerable bands of ascetics, who dwelt in four different places, raised a pile of sandal-wood and burned his body, and in a space of half a league round about the place of his burning there fell a shower of celestial flowers. The Great Being, after seeing to the depositing of his remains, entered the hermitage and, attended by these bands of ascetics, sat down. When the kings arrived on the banks of the river there was a sound of martial music. The Great Being, on hearing it, addressed the ascetic Anusissa and said, “Go and learn what this music means”; and taking a bowl of drinking-water, he went there, and seeing these kings, he uttered this first stanza in the form of a question:

Beringed and gallantly arrayed,

All girt with jewel-hilted blade,

Halt ye, great chiefs, and straight declare

What name ‘midst world of men ye bear?

Hearing his words, they alighted from the chariot and stood saluting him. Amongst them king Atthaka, falling into talk with him, spoke the second stanza:

Bhimaratha, Kalinga famed,

And Atthaka—thus are we named—

To look on saints of life austere

And question them, are we come here.

Then the ascetic said to them, “Well, sire, ye have reached the place where ye would fain be: therefore, after bathing take a rest, and entering the hermitage, pay your respects to the band of ascetics, and put your question to the master”; and thus, holding friendly converse with them, he tossed up the jar of water and wiping up the drops that fell he looked up to the sky and beheld Sakka, the lord of heaven, surrounded by a company of gods, and descending from heaven, mounted on the back of Eravana, and conversing with him, he repeated the third stanza:

Thou in mid-heaven art fixed on high

Like full-orbed moon that gilds the sky,

I ask thee, mighty spirit, say

How art thou known on Earth, I pray.

On hearing this, Sakka repeated the fourth stanza:

Sujampati in heaven proclaimed

As Maghava on Earth is named;

This king of gods to-day comes here

To see these saints of life austere.

Then Anusissa said to him: “Well, sire, do you follow us”; and taking the drinking-vessel, he entered the hermitage, and after putting away the jar of water, he announced to the Great Being that the three kings and the lord of heaven had arrived to ask him certain questions. Surrounded by a band of ascetics, Sarabhanga sat in a large, wide enclosed space. The three kings came, and, saluting the band of ascetics, sat down on one side. And Sakka, descending from the sky, approached the ascetics, and saluting them with folded hands, and singing their praises, repeated the fifth stanza:

Wide known to fame this saintly band,

With mighty powers at their command:

I gladly bid you hail: in worth

Ye far surpass the best on earth.

Thus did Sakka salute the band of ascetics, and guarding against the six faults in sitting, he sat apart. Then Anusissa, on seeing him seated to leeward of the ascetics, spoke the sixth stanza:

The person of an aged saint

Is rank, the very air to taint.

Great Sakka, beat a quick retreat

From saintly odours, none too sweet.

On hearing this, Sakka repeated another stanza:

Though aged saints offend the nose

And taint the sweetest air that blows:

Gay flowerets' fragrant wreath above

This odour of the saints we love;

In gods it may no loathing move.

And having so spoken, he added, "Reverend Anusissa, I have made a great effort to come here and ask a question: give me leave to do so." And on hearing Sakka's words Anusissa rose from his seat, and granting him permission, he repeated a couple of stanzas to the company of ascetics:

Famed Maghava, Sujampati

—Almsgiver, lord of sprites is he—

Queller of demons, heavenly king,

Craves leave to put his questioning.

Who of the sages that are here

Will make their subtle questions clear

For three who over men hold sway,

And Sakka whom the gods obey?

On hearing this the company of ascetics said, "Reverend Anusissa, you speak as though you saw not the earth on which you stand: except our teacher Sarabhanga, who else is

competent to answer these questions?" and so saying, they repeated a stanza:

'Tis Sarabhanga, sage and saint,

So chaste and free from lustful taint,

The teacher's son, well disciplined,

Solution of their doubts will find.

And so saying, the company of ascetics thus addressed Anusissa "Sir, do you salute the teacher in the name of the company of saints and find an opportunity to tell him of the question proposed by Sakka." He readily assented and, finding his opportunity, repeated another stanza:

The holy men, Kondanna, pray

That thou wouldst clear their doubts away;

This burden lies, as mortals hold,

On men in years and wisdom old.

Then the Great Being, giving his consent, repeated the following stanza:

I give you leave to ask whate'er

Ye most at heart are fain to hear;

I know both this world and the next;

No question leaves my mind perplext.

Sakka, having thus obtained his permission, put a question which he had himself prepared:

The Master, to make the matter clear, said:

Sakka, to cities bountiful, that sees the Truth of things,

To learn what he was fain to know, began his questionings.

What is it one may slay outright and never more repent?

What is it one may throw away, with all good men's consent

From whom should one put up with speech, however harsh it be?

This is the thing that I would have Kondanna tell to me.

Then explaining the question, he said:

Anger is what a man may slay and never more repent;

Hypocrisy he throws away with all good men's consent;

From all he should put up with speech, however harsh it be,

This form of patience, wise men say, is highest in degree.

Rude speech from two one might with patience hear,

From one's superior, or from a peer,

But how to bear from meaner folk rude speech

Is what I fain would have Kondanna teach.

Rude speech from betters one may take through fear

Or, to avoid a quarrel, from a peer,

But from the mean to put up with rude speech

Is perfect patience, as the sages teach.

Verses such as these one must understand to be connected in the way of question and answer.

When he had thus spoken, Sakka said to the Great Being, "Holy sir, in the first instance you said, "Put up with harsh speech from all; this, men say, is the highest form of patience," but now you say, "Put up here with the speech of an inferior; this, men say, is the highest form of patience"; this latter saying does not agree with your former one." Then the Great Being said to him, "Sakka, this last utterance of mine is in respect of one who puts up with harsh speech, because he knows the speaker to be his inferior, but what I said first was because one cannot by merely looking on the outward form of people know for certain their condition, whether superior to oneself or not," and to make it clear how difficult it is by merely regarding the outward form to distinguish the condition of persons, whether inferior or not, except by means of close intercourse, he spoke this stanza:

How hard it is to judge a man that's polished in exterior

Be he one's better, equal or, it may be, one's inferior.

The best of men pass through the world ofttimes in meanest form disguised;

So then bear with rough speech from all, if thou, my friend, be well advised.

On hearing this Sakka full of faith begged him, saying, “Holy sir, declare to us the blessing to be found in this patience,” and the Great Being repeated this stanza:

No royal force, however vast its might,

Can win so great advantage in a fight

As the good man by patience may secure:

Strong patience is of fiercest feuds the cure.

When the Great Being had thus expounded the virtues of patience, the kings thought, “Sakka asks his own question; he will not allow us an opportunity of putting ours.” So seeing what their wish was he laid aside the four questions he had himself prepared and propounding their doubts he repeated this stanza:

Thy words are grateful to mine ear,

But one thing more I fain would hear;

Tell us the fate of Dandaki

And of his fellow-sinners three,

Destined to suffer what re-birth

For harassing the saints on earth.

Then the Great Being, answering his question, repeated five stanzas:

Uprooted, realm and all, erewhile

Who Kisavaccha did defile,

O’erwhelmed with fiery embers, see,

In Kukkula lies Dandaki.

Who made him sport of priest and saint

And preacher, free from sinful taint,

This Nalikira trembling fell

Into the jaws of dogs in hell.

So Ajjuna, who slew outright

That holy, chaste, long-suffering wight,

Angirasa, was headlong hurled

To tortures in a suffering world.

Who once a sinless saint did maim

—Preacher of Patience was his name—

Kalabu now doth scorch in hell,

Midst anguish sore and terrible.

The man of wisdom that hears tell

Of tales like these or worse of hell,

Ne’er against priest or brahmin sins

And heaven by his right action wins.

When the Great Being had thus pointed out the places in which the four kings were re-born, the three kings were freed from all doubt. Then Sakka in propounding his remaining four questions recited this stanza:

Thy words are grateful to mine ear,

But one thing more I fain would hear:

Whom does the world as “moral” name,

And whom does it as “wise” proclaim?

Whom does the world for “pious” take,

And whom does Fortune ne’er forsake?

Then in answering him the Great Being repeated four stanzas:

Whoso in act and word shows self-restraint,

And e’en in thought is free from sinful taint,

Nor lies to serve his own base ends—the same

All men as “moral” evermore proclaim.

He who revolves deep questions in his mind

Yet perpetrates nought cruel or unkind,

Prompt with good word in season to advise,

That man by all is rightly counted wise.

Who grateful is for kindness once received,

And sorrow’s need has carefully relieved,

Has proved himself a good and steadfast friend—

Him all men as a pious soul commend.

The man with every gift at his command,

True, tender, free and bountiful of hand,

Heart-winning, gracious, smooth of tongue withal—

Fortune from such an one will never fall.

Thus did the Great Being, like as if he were causing the moon to arise in the sky, answer the four questions. Then followed the asking of the other questions and their answers.

Thy kindly words fall grateful on mine ear,

But one thing further I am fain to hear:

Virtue, fair fortune, goodness, wisdom—say

Which of all these do men call best, I pray.

Wisdom good men declare is best by far,

E’en as the moon eclipses every star

Virtue, fair fortune, goodness, it is plain,

All duly follow in the wise man’s train.

Thy kindly words fall grateful on mine ear,

But one thing further I am fain to hear:

To gain this wisdom what is one to do,

What line of action or what course pursue?

Tell us what way the path of wisdom lies

And by what acts a mortal groweth wise.

With clever, old, and learned men consort,

Wisdom from them by questioning extort:

Their goodly counsels one should hear and prize,

For thus it is a mortal man grows wise.

The sage regards the lust of things of sense

In view of sickness, pain, impermanence;

Midst- sorrows, lust, and terrors that appal,

Calm and unmoved the sage ignores them all.

Thus would he conquer sin, from passion free,

And cultivate a boundless charity;

To every living creature mercy show,

And, blameless soul, to world of Brahma go.

While the Great Being was thus still speaking of the sins of sensual desires, these three kings together with their armies got rid of the passion of sensual pleasure by means of the opposite quality. And the Great Being, becoming aware of this, by way of praising them recited this stanza:

Bhimaratha by power of magic came

With thee, O Atthaka, and one to fame

As king Kalinga known, and now all three,

Once slaves to sensuality, are free.

On hearing this, the mighty kings singing the praises of the Great Being recited this stanza:

'Tis so, thou reader of men's thoughts: all three

Of us from sensuality are free,

Grant us the boon for which we are right fain,

That to thy happy state we may attain.

Then the Great Being, granting them this favour, repeated another stanza:

I grant the boon that ye would have of me,

The more that ye from sensual vice are free:

So may ye thrill with boundless joy to gain

That happy state to which ye would attain.

On hearing this they, signifying assent, repeated this stanza:

We will do everything at thy behest,

Whate'er thou in thy wisdom deemst the best;

So will we thrill with boundless joy to gain

That happy state to which we would attain.

Then did the Great Being grant holy orders to their armies and dismissing the band of ascetics repeated this stanza:

Due honour lo! to Kisavaccha came;

So now depart, ye saints of goodly fame,

In ecstasy delighting calmly rest;

This joy of holiness is far the best.

The saints, assenting to his words by bowing to him, flew up into the air and departed to their own places of abode. And Sakka rising from his seat and raising his folded hands and making obeisance to the Great Being, as though he were worshipping the sun, departed together with his company.

The Master on seeing this repeated these stanzas—

Hearing these strains that Highest Truth did teach

Set forth by holy sage in goodly speech,

The glorious Beings to their heavenly home

Once more with joy and gratitude did come.

The holy sage's strains strike on the ear

Pregnant with meaning and in accents clear;

Who gives good heed and concentrates his mind

Upon their special thought will surely find

The path to every stage of ecstasy,

And from the range of tyrant Death is free.

Thus did the Master bring his teaching to a climax in Arhatship and saying, "Not now only, but formerly also, there was a rain of flowers at the burning of the body of Mogallana," he revealed the Truths and identified the Birth: "Salissara was Sariputta, Mendissara was Kassapa, Pabbata Anuruddha, Devala Kaccayana, Anusissa was Ananda, Kisavaccha Kolita, Sarabhanga the Bodhisatta: thus are ye to understand the Birth."

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.