Ja 525 — Culla-Sutasoma Jātaka

English translation by H. T. Francis.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol5/ja525.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

“Good friends,” etc. This story the Master while residing at Jetavana told concerning the perfect exercise of self-abnegation. The introductory story corresponds with that of the Mahanaradakassapa Birth.

Once upon a time what is now Benares was a city called Sudassana and in it dwelt king Brahmadatta. His chief consort gave birth to the Bodhisatta. His face was glorious as the full moon, and therefore he was named Somakumara. When he arrived at years of discretion, owing to his fondness for Soma juice and his habit of pouring libations of it, men knew him as Sutasoma (Soma-distiller). When he was of age, he was instructed in the liberal arts at Takkasila, and on his return home be was presented with a white umbrella by his father and ruled his kingdom righteously and owned a vast dominion, and he had sixteen thousand wives with Candadevi as chief consort. By and bye when he was blest with a numerous family, he grew discontented with domestic life and retired into a forest, desiring to embrace the ascetic rule. One day he summoned his barber and thus addressed him, “When you see a grey hair on my head, you are to tell me.” The barber agreed to do so and by and bye he espied a grey hair and told him of it. The king said, “Then, sir barber, pull it out and place it in my hand.” The barber plucked it out with a pair of golden tweezers and laid it in his hand. The Great Being, when he saw it, exclaimed, “My body is a prey to old age,” and in a fright he took the grey hair and descending from the terrace he seated himself on a throne placed in the sight of the people. Then he summoned eighty thousand councillors headed by his general and sixty thousand brahmins headed by his chaplain and many others of his subjects and citizens and said to them, “A grey hair has appeared on my head; I am an old man, and you are to know that I am become an ascetic,” and he repeated the first stanza:

Good friends and citizens assembled here,

Hearken, my trusty counsellors, to me,

Now that grey hairs upon my head appear,

Henceforth it is my will a monk to be.

On hearing this each one of them in a fit of dejection repeated this stanza:

Such random words as these in uttering

Thou mak'st an arrow quiver in my heart:

Remember thy seven hundred wives, O king;

What will become of them, shouldst thou depart?

Then the Great Being spoke the third stanza:

Their sorrows soon another will console,

For they are young in years and fair to see,

But I am bent upon a heavenly goal

And so right fain am I a monk to be.

His counsellors, being unable to answer the king, went to his mother and told her about it. She came in hot haste and asking him, "Is this true what they say, dear son, that you long to be an ascetic?" she repeated two stanzas:

Ill-fated was the day, alas! that I

Was hailed as mother to a son like thee,

For heedless of my tears and bitter cry,

Thou art resolved, O king, a monk to be.

Accursed was the day, alas! that I,

O Sutasoma dear, gave birth to thee,

For heedless of my tears and bitter cry,

Thou art resolved, O king, a monk to be.

While his mother thus lamented, the Bodhisatta uttered not a word. She remained apart all by herself, weeping. Then they told his father. And he came and repeated a single stanza:

What is this Law that leads thee to become

Eager to quit thy kingdom and thy home?

With thy old parents left behind to dwell

Here all alone, seek'st thou a hermit's cell?

On hearing this the Great Being held his peace. Then his father said, "My dear Sutasoma, even though you have no affection for your parents, you have many young sons and daughters. They will not be able to live without you. At the very moment when they are grown up, will you become an ascetic?" and he repeated the seventh stanza:

But thou hast many a child, I ween,

And all of tender years,

When thou no longer mayst be seen,

What sorrow will be theirs!

Hearing this the Great Being repeated a stanza:

Yes, I have many a child, I ween,

Of tender years are they,

With them full long though I have been,

I now must part for aye.

Thus did the Great Being declare the Law to his father. And when he heard his exposition of the Law, he held his peace. Then they told his seven hundred wives. And they, descending from the palace tower, came into his presence, and embracing his feet they made lamentation and repeated this stanza:

Thy heart in sorrow, sure, must break

Or pity is to thee unknown,

That thou canst holy orders take,

And leave us here to weep alone.

The Great Being, on hearing their lamentation as they threw themselves at his feet and cried aloud, repeated yet another stanza:

My heart in sorrow may not break,

Though I feel pity for your pain,

But holy orders I must take,

That I may heavenly bliss attain.

Then they told his queen consort, and she being heavy with child, though her time was well nigh come, approached the Great Being and saluting him stood respectfully on one side and repeated three stanzas:

Ill-fated was the day, alas! that I

O Sutasoma dear, espoused thee,

For heedless of my tears and bitter cry

Thou art resolved, O king, a monk to be.

Accursed was the day, alas! that I

O Sutasoma dear, espoused thee,

For thou wouldst leave me in my throes to die,

Determined as thou art a monk to be.

The hour of my delivery is nigh,

And I would fain my lord should stay with me

Until my child is born, before that I

See the sad day that I am reft of thee.

Then the Great Being repeated a stanza:

The hour of thy delivery is nigh,

Until the babe is born, I'll stay with thee,

Then will I leave the royal imp and fly

Far from the world a holy monk to be.

On hearing his words she was no longer able to control her grief, and holding her heart with both her hands, said, “Henceforth, my lord, our glory is no more.” Then wiping away her tears she loudly lamented. The Great Being to console her repeated a stanza:

My queen, with eye like ebon flower,

Dear Canda, weep not thou for me,

But climb once more thy palace tower:

I go without one care for thee.

Being unable to bear his words she mounted the palace tower and sat there weeping. Then the Bodhisatta’s elder son seeing it said, “Why does my mother sit here weeping?” and he repeated this stanza in the form of a question:

Who has annoyed thee, mother dear,

Why dost thou weep and stare at me?

Whom of my kin that I see here

Must I, all impious, slay for thee?

Then the queen uttered this stanza:

No harm, dear son, may touch his head,

Who lives to work such woe for me:

For know it was thy sire who said,

“I go without one care for thee.”

Hearing her words he said, “Dear mother, what is this that you say? If this be so, we shall be helpless,” and making lamentation he spoke this stanza:

I who once ranged the park to see

Wild elephants engage in fight,

If my dear sire a monk should be,

What should I do, poor luckless wight?

Then his younger brother who was seven years old, when he saw them both weeping, drew nigh to his mother and said, “My dear ones, why do ye weep?” and hearing the cause

he said, “Well, cease to weep; I will not allow him to become an ascetic,” and he comforted them both, and with his nurse, coming down from the palace tower, he went to his father and said, “Dear father, they tell me you are leaving us against our will and say you will be an ascetic; I will not allow you to become an ascetic,” and clasping his father firmly by the neck he uttered this stanza:

My mother, lo! is weeping and

My brother fain would keep thee still,

I too will hold thee by the hand

Nor let thee go against our will.

The Great Being thought, “This child is a source of danger to me; by what means am I to get rid of him?” then looking at his nurse he said, “Good nurse, behold this jewel ornament: this is yours: only take away the child, that he be not a hindrance to me,” and being unable by himself to get rid of the child who held him by the hand, he promised her a bribe and repeated this stanza:

Up nurse and let the little boy

Disport him in some other place,

Lest haply he should mar my joy

And hinder in my heavenward race.

She took the bribe and comforting the child she went with him to another place, and thus lamenting repeated this stanza:

What now if I reject outright

—I need it not—this jewel bright?

For should my lord a hermit be,

What use would jewels be to me?

Then his commander-in-chief thought, “This king, methinks, has come to the conclusion that he has but little treasure in his house; I will let him know he has a great quantity,” so standing up he saluted him and repeated this stanza:

Thy coffers filled with treasure vast,

Great wealth hast thou, O king, amassed:

The world is all subdued by thee,

Take thou thy ease; no hermit be.

Hearing this, the Great Being repeated this stanza:

My coffers filled with treasures vast,

Great wealth has been by me amassed:

The whole world is subdued by me;

I leave it all a monk to be.

When he had departed on hearing this, a rich merchant named Kulavaddhana stood up and saluting the king repeated this stanza:

Great wealth have I, O king, amassed,

Beyond all power of reckoning vast:

Behold I give it all to thee,

Take thou thy ease; no hermit be.

On hearing this the Great Being repeated a stanza:

O Kulavaddhana, I know,

Thy wealth on me thou wouldst bestow,

But I a heavenly goal would win,

So I renounce this world of sin.

As soon as Kulavaddhana had heard this and was gone, he thus addressed his younger brother Somadatta, “Dear brother, I am as discontented as a wild cock in a cage, my dislike to household life gets the better of me; this very day will I become a hermit; do you undertake to rule this kingdom,” and handing it over to him he repeated this stanza:

O Somadatta, sure I feel

Strange loathing o’er my senses steal

At thought of my besetting sins:

To-day my hermit life begins.

On hearing these words Somadatta too longed to be a hermit and to make this clear he repeated another stanza:

Dear Sutasoma, go and dwell

As pleaseth thee in hermit cell;

I too a hermit fain would be,

For life were nought apart from thee.

Then in refusing this Sutasoma repeated a half-stanza:

Thou mayst not go, or through the land

Home life would all come to a stand.

On hearing this the people threw themselves down at the feet of the Great Being and, lamenting, said

Should Sutasoma go away,

What would become of us, we pray?

Then the Great Being said, "Well, grieve not: though I have been long with you, I shall now have to part from you; there is no permanence in any existing thing," and teaching the Law to the people, he said,

Like water through a sieve, our day

So brief alas! fast slips away:

With life thus circumscribed, I ween,

No room for carelessness is seen.

Like water through a sieve, our day

So brief alas! fast slips away:

With life thus circumscribed all round,

Only the fool is careless found.

Bound fast by lusts, wherein they fell,

Such men enlarge the bounds of Hell,

Crowd the brute world and realm of ghosts,

And multiply the demon hosts.

Thus did the Great Being instruct the people in the Law, and climbing to the top of the Palace of Flowers he stood on the seventh storey, and with a sword he cut off his top-knot and cried, “I am now nothing to you; choose ye a king of your own,” and with these words he threw his top-knot, turban and all, into the midst of the people. The people seized hold of it, and as they rolled over and over on the ground they loudly lamented, and a cloud of dust rose at this spot to a great height, and the people stepping back stood and looked at it, and said, “The king must have cut off his top-knot and thrown it, turban and all, into the midst of the crowd, and therefore it is that a cloud of dust has risen near the palace,” and lamenting they uttered this stanza:

Yon cloud of dust see how it towers

Hard by the royal House of Flowers;

Famed King of Right, methinks, our lord

Has shorn his locks off with a sword.

But the Great Being sent an attendant and had all the requisites for an ascetic brought to him, and had a barber to remove his hair and beard, and throwing his magnificent robe on a couch he cut off strips of dyed cloth, and putting on these yellow patches he fastened an earthen bowl on the top of his left shoulder and with a mendicant staff in his hand he paced backwards and forwards on the topmost storey, and then descending from the palace tower he stepped out into the street, but no one recognised him as he went. Then his seven hundred royal wives ascending the tower and not finding him, but seeing only the bundle of his adornments, came down and told the other sixteen thousand women, saying, “Mighty Sutasoma, your dear lord, has become an ascetic,” and loudly lamenting they went out. At this moment the people learned that he had become an ascetic, and the whole city was greatly stirred, and the people said, “They tell us, our king has become a monk,” and they assembled at the palace door, and crying, “The king must be here or there,” they ran to all the places frequented by him, and not finding the king they wandered to and fro, uttering their lament in these stanzas:

Here are his golden palace-towers

All hung with wreaths of scented flowers,

Where girt with many a lady fair

Our king would oftentimes repair.

Here wreathed with flowers and wrought of gold

His gabled-hall one may behold,

Where, all his kinsfolk by his side,

Our king would range in all his pride.

This is his garden bright with flowers

Through all the season's changing hours,

Where girt, etc.

His lake o'erspread with lotus blue,

Haunt of wild birds, here comes in view,

Where, all his kinsfolk, etc.

Thus did the people utter lamentation in these various places, and then returning to the palace yard they repeated this stanza:

King Sutasoma, sad to tell,

Has left his throne for hermit cell,

And, clad in yellow, goes his way

Like some lone elephant astray.

Then they went forth leaving all their household gear, and taking their children by the hand they repaired to the Bodhisatta, and with them went their parents and young children and sixteen thousand dancing girls. The whole city had the appearance of a deserted place, and behind them followed the country folk. The Bodhisatta with a company covering twelve leagues set out in the direction of the Himalayas. Then Sakka, taking note of his Renunciation of the World, addressing Vissakamma said, "Friend Vissakamma, king Sutasoma is retiring from the world. He ought to have a place to dwell in: there will be a huge gathering of them." And he sent him, saying, "Go and have a hermitage erected, thirty leagues long and five leagues broad, on the banks of the Ganges in the Himalayan country." He did so, and, providing in this hermitage all that was requisite for the ascetic life, he made a foot-path straight to it and then returned to the angel-world. The Great Being entered the hermitage by this path, and, after he himself was first of all ordained, he admitted the rest to orders, and by and bye a great number was ordained, insomuch that a space of thirty leagues was filled with them Now how the hermitage was built by Vissakamma, and how a great number took orders and how the Bodhisatta's hermitage was arranged—all this is to be understood in the way related in the Hatthipala Birth. In this case if a thought of desire or any other false thought sprang up in the mind of

any one whatsoever, the Great Being approached him through the air, and sitting cross-legged in space he by way of admonition addressed him in a couple of stanzas:

Call not to mind love's sports of yore

While still a smiling face you wore,

Lest that Fair City of Delight

Should waken lust and slay you quite.

Indulge without or stint or stay

Good will to men by night and day,

So shall ye win the angel home

Where all that do good deeds shall come.

And this company of saints abiding by his admonition became destined to the Brahma world, and the story is to be told exactly as it is in the Hatthipala Birth.

The Master having concluded this discourse said, "Not only now, Brethren, but formerly also the Tathagata made the Great Renunciation," and he identified the Birth. "At that time the father and mother were members of the Great King's Court, Canda was the mother of Rahula, the elder son was Sariputta, the younger son was Rahula, the nurse was Khujjuttara, Kulavaddhana, the rich merchant, was Kassapa, the commander-in-chief was Moggallana, prince Somadatta was Ananda, King Sutasoma 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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