Ja 527 — Ummadanti Jātaka

English translation by H. T. Francis.

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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

“Whose house is this,” etc. This story the Master, while residing at Jetavana, told about a back-sliding Brother. The story runs that one day, as he was going his rounds in Savatthi for alms, he saw a woman of surpassing beauty, magnificently attired, and fell in love with her, and on returning home to his monastery he was unable to divert his thoughts from her. From that time, as it were, pierced with love’s shafts and sick with desire he became as lean as a wild deer, with his veins standing out on his body, and as sallow as sallow could be. He no longer took delight in any one of the Four Postures, or found pleasure in his own thoughts, but giving up all the services due to a teacher he abandoned the use of instruction, inquiry and meditation. His fellow-monks said, “Sir, once you were calm in mind and serene of countenance, but now it is not so. What can be the cause?” they asked. “Sirs,” he answered, “I have no pleasure in anything.” Then they bade him be happy, saying, “To be born a Buddha is a hard matter: so also is the hearing of the True Faith, and the attaining to birth as a human being. But you have attained to this, and, yearning to put an end to sorrow, you left your weeping kinsfolk and becoming a believer adopted the ascetic life. Why then do you now fall under the sway of passion? These evil passions are common to all ignorant creatures, from live worms upwards, and such of these passions as are material in their origin, they too are insipid. Desires are full of sorrow and despair: misery in this case ever increases more and more. Desire is like a skeleton or a piece of meat. Desire is like a torch made of a wisp of hay or a light from embers. Desire vanishes like a dream or a loan, or the fruit of a tree. Desire is as biting as a sharp-pointed spear, or as a serpent’s head. But you, verily, after embracing so glorious a faith as this and becoming an ascetic, have now fallen under the sway of such harmful passions.” When by their admonitions they failed to make him grasp their teaching, they brought him before the Master in the Hall of Truth. And when he said, “Why, Brethren, have you brought this Brother here against his will?” they answered, “They tell us, he is a backslider.” The Master asked if it were true, and on his confessing that it was so, the Master said, “Brother, sages of old, though ruling a kingdom, whenever lust sprang up in their hearts, passed under its sway for a time, but checked their roving thoughts and were guilty of no improper

conduct." And with these words he related a story of the past.

Once upon a time in the city of Aritthapura in the kingdom of the Sivis reigned a king named Sivi. The Bodhisatta came to life as the son of his chief queen, and they called him prince Sivi. His commander-in-chief also had a son born to him, and they named him Ahiparaka. The two boys grew up as friends and at the age of sixteen they went to Takkasila, and, after completing their education, they returned home. The king made over his kingdom to his son, who appointed Ahiparaka to the post of commander-in-chief, and ruled his kingdom righteously. In that same city dwelt a rich merchant, named Tiritavaccha, worth eighty crores, and he had a daughter, a very fair and gracious lady, bearing on her person every mark of auspicious fortune, and on her naming-day she was called Ummadanti. When sixteen years old she was as beautiful as a heavenly nymph, of more than mortal loveliness. All worldlings who beheld her could not contain themselves, but were intoxicated with passion, as it were with strong drink, and were quite unable to recover their self-control. So her father, Tiritavaccha, drew nigh to the king and said, "Sire, at home I have a treasure of a daughter, a fit mate even for a king. Send for your fortune-tellers, who can read the lineaments of the body, and have her tested by them and then deal with her according to your good pleasure." The king agreed and sent his Brahmins, and they repaired to the merchant's house, and being received with great honour and hospitality partook of some rice-milk. At this moment Ummadanti came into their presence, magnificently attired. On catching sight of her they completely lost their self-control, just as if they were intoxicated with passion, and forgot that they had left their meal unfinished. Some of them took a morsel and thinking they would eat it put it on their heads. Some let it fall on their hips. Others threw it against the wall. Every one was beside himself. When she saw them thus, she said, "They tell me, these fellows are to test the character of my marks," and she ordered them to be taken by the scruff of their neck and thrust out. And they were sorely annoyed and returned to the palace in a great rage with Ummadanti, and they said, "Sire, this woman is no mate for you: she is a witch." The king thought, "They tell me, she is a witch," and he did not send for her. On hearing what had happened she said, "I am not taken to wife by the king, because they say I am a witch: witches forsooth are just like me. Very well, should I ever see the king, I shall know what to do." And she conceived a grudge against him. So her father gave her in marriage to Ahiparaka, and she was her husband's darling and delight. Now as the result of what act of hers had she become so beautiful? By the gift of a scarlet robe. Once upon a time, they say, she was born in a poor family in Benares and on some festal day seeing certain holy women, magnificently clad in robes dyed scarlet with safflower and disporting themselves, she told her parents that she too would like to wear a similar robe and take her pleasure. And when they said, "My dear, we are poor people: whence are we to get you such a robe?" "well then," said she, "suffer me to earn wages in a wealthy household, and as soon as they recognise my merit, they will make me a present of a robe." And having gained their consent she approached a certain family and proposed to let her service to them for a scarlet robe. They said, "After you have worked three years for us, we will recognise your merits by giving you one." She readily agreed, and set about her work. Recognising her merit before the three years had expired, they gave her together with a thick safflower-dyed robe yet another garment, and sent her off, saying, "Go with your companions, and, after bathing, dress yourself in these robes." So she went with her

companions and bathed, leaving the scarlet robe on the bank. At this moment a disciple of the Kassapa Buddha, who had been robbed of his garments and had put on pieces of a broken bough to serve as outer and inner robes, arrived at this spot. On seeing him she thought, “This holy man must have been robbed of his garment. In former times I too, from not having a robe offered to me, found it difficult to procure one,” and she determined to divide the garment in two and give him the half of it. So she went up out of the water and put on her old dress and saying, “Stay, holy sir,” she saluted the elder, and tearing her robe in two gave the half of it to him. Then he stood on one side in a sheltered spot and, throwing away his branch-garment, he made himself with one side of the robe an inner garment and with the other side an outer garment and stepped out into the open, and his whole person by the splendour of the robe was all ablaze, like the newly-risen sun. On seeing this she thought, “This holy man at first was not radiant, but now he shines like a newly-risen sun. I will give him this too.” So she gave him the other half of the robe, and put up this prayer, “Holy sir, I would fain in some future stage of existence be of such surpassing beauty, that no one who sees me may have power to control himself, and that no other woman may he more beautiful.” The elder returned her his thanks and went his way. After a period of transmigration in the world of gods, she was at this time born in Aritthapura and was as beautiful as she was described. Now in this city they proclaimed the Kattika festival, and on the day of full moon they decorated the city. Ahiparaka, on setting out for the post he had to guard, addressing her, said, “Lady Ummadanti, to-day is the Kattika festival; the king, in marching in solemn procession round the city, will first of all come to the door of this house. Be sure you do not shew yourself to him, for on seeing you he will not be able to control his thoughts.” As he was leaving her, she said to him, “ I will see to it.” And as soon as he was off, she gave an order to her handmaid to let her know when the king came to the door. So at sunset, when the full moon had risen and torches were blazing in every quarter of the city, which was decorated as it were some city of the gods, the king arrayed in all his splendour, mounted on a magnificent car drawn by thoroughbreds and escorted by a crowd of courtiers, making a circuit of the city with great pomp, came first of all to the door of Ahiparaka’s house. Now this house enclosed by a wall in colour like vermilion, furnished with gates and tower, was a beautiful and charming place. At this moment the maid brought her mistress word of the king’s arrival, and Ummadanti bade her take a basket of flowers, and standing near the window she threw the flowers over the king with all the charm of a sylph. And looking up at her the king was maddened with passion and quite unable to control his thoughts, and he failed to recognise the house as that of Ahiparaka. So addressing his charioteer, he repeated two stanzas in the form of a question:

Whose house is this, Sunanda, tell me true,

All girt about with wall of golden hue?

What vision fair is this, like meteor bright,

Or sunbeam striking on some mountain height?

A daughter of the house perchance is she,

Herself its mistress, or son’s wife maybe?

Your answer quickly in a single word—

Is she unwed. or owns she still a lord?

Then, in answering the king, he repeated two stanzas:

All that your Highness asks I know full well,

And of her parents on both sides can tell:

As to her husband, night and day, O king,

He serves thy cause with zeal in everything.

A powerful minister of thine is he,

Vast wealth he owns and great prosperity;

She’s wife of Ahiparaka the famed,

And at her birth was Ummadanti named.

On hearing this the king, in praising her name, repeated yet another stanza:

Alas! how ominous a name is here

Given to this maiden by her parents dear;

Since Ummadanti fixed her gaze on me,

Lo! a mad haunted man I grew to be.

On seeing how agitated he was she closed the window and went straight to her fair chamber. And from the moment when the king set eyes on her, he had no more thought of making solemn procession round the city. Addressing his charioteer he said, “Friend Sunanda, stop the chariot; this is not a festival suitable for us; it is fit only for Ahiparaka, my commander-in-chief, and the throne also is better suited for him,” and stopping the chariot he climbed up to his palace and, as he lay chattering upon the royal couch, he said,

A lily maid, with eyes soft as a doe’s,

In the full moon’s clear light before me rose,

Beholding her in robe of dove-like hue,

Methought two moons at once came into view.

Darting one glance from her bright, lovely eyes,

The temptress took me captive by surprise,

Like woodland elf upon some mountain height,

Her graceful motion won my heart at sight.

So dark and tall and fair the maid, with jewels in her ears,

Clad in a single garment, like a timid doe, appears.

With long-tressed hair and nails all stained red,

O’er her soft arms rich sandal essence shed,

With tapering fingers and a gracious air,

When will she smile on me, my charmer fair?

When will Tiriti’s slender-waisted maid,

A gold adornment on her breast displayed,

With her soft arms embracing cling to me,

E’en as a creeper to some forest tree?

When will she stained with dye of lac so bright,

With swelling bosom, maiden lily-white,

Exchange a kiss with me, as oft a glass

Will from one toper to another pass?

Soon as I saw her standing thus, so fair to outward view,

No longer master of myself, reason away I threw.

When Ummadanti I beheld, with jewelled ear-rings bright,

Like one amerced right heavily, I slept not day nor night.

Should Sakka grant a boon to me, my choice were quickly ta’en,

I would be Ahiparaka one night or haply twain,

And Ummadanti thus enjoyed, he might o'er Sivi reign.

Then those councillors told Ahiparaka, saying, "Master, the king on making a solemn procession around the city went to the door of your house and then turning back climbed up to his palace." So Ahiparaka went home and addressing Ummadanti asked her if she had shown herself to the king. "My lord," she said, "a certain pot-bellied fellow with huge teeth, standing up in his chariot, came here. I do not know whether he was a king or a prince, but I was told he was a lord of some kind, and standing at the open window I threw flowers over him. Meanwhile he turned back and went off." On hearing this he said, "You have ruined me," and early next morning ascending to the king's house he stood at the door of the royal chamber and, hearing the king rambling about Ummadanti, he thought, "He has fallen in love with Ummadanti; if he does not get her, he will die: it is my duty to restore him to life, if it can be done without sin on the part of the king or myself." So he went home and summoned a stout-hearted knave or a serving-man and said, "Friend, in such and such a place is a hollow tree that is a sacred shrine. Without saying a word to anyone, go there at sunset and seat yourself inside the tree. Then I shall come and make an offering there, and in worshipping the deities I shall put up this prayer; "O king of heaven, our king, while a festival was going on, without taking any part in it, has gone into his royal closet and lies there chattering idly; we do not know why he does so. The king has been a great benefactor of the gods and year by year has spent a thousand pieces of money in sacrifices. Tell us why the king talks thus foolishly and grant us the boon of the king's life." Thus will I pray and at this moment you are to remember to repeat these words, "O commander-in-chief, your king is not sick, but he is infatuated with your wife Ummadanti. If he shall get her, he will live; otherwise he will die. If you wish him to live, give up Ummadanti to him." This is what you are to say." And having thus schooled him he sent him away. So the servant went next day and seated himself inside the tree and when the general came to the place and put up his prayer, he repeated his lesson. The general said, "It is well," and with an obeisance to the deity he went and told the king's ministers, and entering the city he climbed up to the palace and knocked at the door of the royal closet. The king having recovered his senses asked who it was. "It is I, Ahiparaka, my lord." Then he opened the king's door and going in he saluted the king and repeated a stanza:

While kneeling at a sacred shrine, O king,

A yakkha came and told me a strange thing,

How Ummadanti had enslaved thy will:

Take her and so thy heart's desire fulfil.

Then the king asked, "Friend Ahiparaka, do even the yakkhas know that I have been talking foolishly owing to my infatuation for Ummadanti?" "Yes, my lord," he said. The king thought, "My vileness is known throughout the world," and he felt ashamed. And taking his stand in righteousness he uttered another stanza:

Fallen from grace no godhead shall I win,

And all the world will hear of my great sin:

Think too how great thy grief of mind would be,

Shouldst thou no more thy Ummadanti see.

The remaining stanzas are repeated by the two alternately.

Except thyself and me, O king, no one

In the whole world will know the deed that's done:

Lo! Ummadanti is my gift to thee,

Thy passion sated, send her back to me.

The sinner thinks, "No mortal man has been

A witness of my guilty deed, I ween,"

Yet all he does will fall within the ken

Of ghostly beings and of holy men.

Who in this world, supposing thou shouldst say,

"I loved her not," would any credence pay?

Think too how great thy grief of mind would be,

Shouldst thou no more thy Ummadanti see.

She was, great king, as dear to me as life,

In very sooth a well-beloved wife;

Yet, sire, to Ummadanti straight repair,

E'en as a lion to his rocky lair.

The sage howe'er oppressed by his own woe,

Will scarce an act that wins him bliss forego,

E'en the dull fool intoxicate with bliss

Would ne’er be guilty of a sin like this.

A fostering parent, king, I own in thee,

Husband and lord, yea god art thou to me,

Thy slaves my wife and child, and I thy thrall,

O Sivi, do thy pleasure with us all.

Whoso shall wrong his neighbour nor repent,

Saying, “See here a lord omnipotent,”

Will ne’er be found to live out half his days,

And gods will view his conduct with dispraise.

Should righteous men accept as gift a thing

Freely bestowed by others, then, O king,

They who receive and they who grant have done

A deed whereby the fruit of bliss is won.

Who in this world, supposing thou shouldst say,

“I love her not,” would any credence pay?

Think too how great thy grief of mind would be,

Shouldst thou no more thy Ummadanti see.

She was, great king, as dear to me as life,

In very sooth a well-beloved wife;

Lo! Ummadanti is my gift to thee,

Thy passion sated, send her back to me.

Who rids himself of pain at others’ cost,

Rejoicing still though others’ joy be lost,

Not he, but one that feels another’s woe

As ’twere his own, true righteousness can know.

She was, great king, as dear to me as life,

In very sooth a well-beloved wife,

I give what most I prize, nor give in vain,

They that thus give receive as much again.

I might destroy myself for fleshly appetite,

Yet would I never dare by wrong destroy the right.

Shouldst thou, O noble prince, thy love foreswear

Because she is my wife, to! I declare

Henceforth she is divorced and free to all,

Thy slave to summon at thy beck and call.

If thou, mine Ancient, to thy detriment,

Shouldst put away thy wife, though innocent,

Thou wouldst, methinks, have heavy blame to bear

And ne’er a single soul to speak thee fair.

With all such blame, my king, I could away,

With censure, praise, or be it what it may,

Let it fall on me, Sivi, as it will,

Only do thou thy pleasure first fulfil.

He who esteem or blame regardeth not,

For praise or censure careth not a jot—

From him will glory and good fortune fly,

As floods subside, leaving land high and dry.

Whate’er of bliss or pain from hence may spring,

O’erstepping right, or fit one’s heart to wring,

I’ll welcome, if it joyous be or sad,

As Earth puts up with all, both good and bad.

I would not have another suffering

From wrongful act that may his bosom wring,

I’ll bear the burden of my griefs alone,

Steadfast in right, vexing the peace of none.

A meritorious act to heaven will lead,

Be thou no obstacle to such a deed;

I Ummadanti a free offering send,

As kings on brahmin priests much treasure spend.

Truly to me great kindness hast thou shown,

Thy wife and thou are both my friends, I own,

Brahmins and gods alike would blame me sore,

And curses rest on me for evermore.

Townsmen and countryfolk in this, I trust,

Will ne’er, O Sivi king, call thee unjust,

Since Ummadanti is my gift to thee,

Thy passion sated, send her back to me.

Truly to me great kindness hast thou shown,

Thou and thy wife are both my friends, I own,

Good men’s right acts are famed both far and wide,

Hard to o’erstep is Right, like Ocean’s tide.

Worshipful master, waiting to bestow

Whate’er I crave, kind benefactor, thou

Repayest sevenfold all I offer thee;

Take Ummadanti; my free gift is she.

Mine Ancient, Ahiparaka, in sooth,

Right hast thou followed, even from thy youth;

Who else of living men, I prithee, would

Early and late have striven to do me good?

O noble prince, thou art of peerless fame,

Wise, knowing right and walking in the same,

Shielded by right, mayst thou, O king, live long,

And, lord of right, teach me to shun the wrong.

Come, hearken, Ahiparaka, to these my words and then

I’ll teach thee ways of righteousness as practised by good men.

A king delighting in the law is blest,

And of all men a learned one is best,

Ne’er to betray a friend is good, I wis,

But evil to eschew is perfect bliss.

’Neath the mild sway of righteous king,

Like shade from sun-stroke sheltering,

His subjects all may dwell in peace,

Rejoicing in their wealth’s increase.

No evil deed shall my approval win,

However heedless it remains a sin:

But such as sin ‘gainst knowledge I detest;

List to my parable; mark it and digest.

The bull through floods a devious course will take,

The herd of kine all straggling in his wake.

So if a leader tortuous paths pursue,

To base ends will he guide the vulgar crew,

And the whole realm an age of license rue.

But if the bull a course direct shall steer,

The herd of kine straight follow in his rear.

So should their chief to righteous ways be true,

The common folk injustice will eschew,

And through the realm shall holy peace ensue.

I would not by an unjust act e'en heaven itself attain,

No, not if, Ahiparaka, the whole world I should gain.

Whatever things of price 'mongst men esteemed good,

Oxen and slaves and gold, garments and sandal wood,

Brood mares, rich treasure, jewels bright

And all that sun and moon watch over day and night,

Not for all this would I injustice do,

I amongst Sivis born, a leader true.

Father and chief and guardian of our land,

As champion of its rights I take my stand,

So will I reign on righteousness intent,

To mine own will no more subservient.

Auspicious is thy rule, great king, mayst thou continue long

To guide the state with happy fate and in thy wisdom strong.

Great joy is ours, O king, that thou such zeal for right hast shown,

Princes of might, neglecting right, ere now have lost a crown.

To parents dear, O warrior king, do righteously; and so

By following a righteous line to heaven thou, sire, shalt go.

To wife and children, warrior king, do righteously; and so

By following a righteous line to heaven thou, sire, shalt go.

To friends and courtiers, warrior king, do righteously; and so

By following a righteous line to heaven thou, sire, shalt go.

In war and travel, warrior king, do righteously; and so

By following a righteous line to heaven thou, sire, shalt go.

In town and village, warrior king, do righteously; and so

By following a righteous line to heaven thou, sire, shalt go.

In every land and realm, O king, do righteously; and so

By following a righteous line to heaven thou, sire, shalt go.

To brahmins and ascetics all, do righteously; and so

By following a righteous line to heaven thou, sire, shalt go.

To beasts and birds, O warrior king, do righteously; and so

By following a righteous line to heaven thou, sire, shalt go.

Do righteously, O warrior king; from this all blessings flow;

By following a righteous course to heaven thou, sire, shalt go.

With watchful vigilance, O king, on paths of goodness go:

The brahmins, Indra, and the gods have won their godhead so.

When the king had thus been taught the law by his commander-in-chief Ahiparaka, he got rid of his infatuation for Ummadanti.

The Master, having ended his lesson, revealed the Truth, and identified the Birth. At the end of the Truths the Brother was established in the First Path. At that time Ananda was the charioteer Sunanda, Sariputta was Ahiparaka, Uppalavanna was Ummadanti, the followers of Buddha were the rest of the courtiers, and I myself was king Sivi.

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