Ja 530 — Samkicca Jātaka

English translation by H. T. Francis.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol5/ja530.html

Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

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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

“At sight of Brahmadatta,” etc. This story the Master, while dwelling in the mango grove of Jivaka, told concerning the murder of his own father by Ajatasattu. For owing to Devadatta and at his instigation he had his father put to death. But when sickness arose in the schismatic congregation following upon the division in the Order, Devadatta resolved to go and ask pardon of the Tathagata, and, as he was journeying in a litter to Savatthi he was swallowed up by the earth at the gate of Jetavana. On hearing this Ajatasattu thought, “Because Devadatta was an enemy of the supreme Buddha, he has disappeared into the earth and is destined to the Avici hell. It was owing to him that I murdered my holy father, that king of Righteousness. I too shall surely be swallowed up by the earth.” And he was so terrified that he found no enjoyment in his royal splendour, and thinking he would rest awhile, he had no sooner fallen asleep than he seemed to be dropped into a world of iron nine leagues thick, and beaten as it were with iron spikes and devoured by dogs continually snapping at him, and with a terrible cry he rose up. So one day at full moon during the caturmasya festival, when surrounded by a great retinue of courtiers he reflected on his own glory, he bethought him that his father’s glory was far greater than this, and that owing to Devadatta he had slain so excellent a king of Righteousness, and while he thought on this a fever sprang up in his limbs and his whole body was bathed in sweat. And considering who could drive away this fear from him he concluded that except Dasabala there was no one, and thinking, “I have sinned greatly against the Tathagata: who verily will take me into his presence?” and concluding there was no one but Jivaka, he considered some way of getting him to go with him, and uttering a joyous cry, “O sir, what a lovely clear night it is,” he said, “what if to-day we were to pay our respects to some priest or brahmin?” And when the virtues of Purana and other teachers had been sung by their respective disciples, without attending to what they said he cross-questioned Jivaka, and on his telling of the virtues of the Tathagata and crying, “Let his Majesty pay his respects to the Blessed One,” he ordered elephant cars to be got ready and went to the mango grove of Jivaka. And approaching the Tathagata with an obeisance and being kindly greeted by him, he inquired of the reward of asceticism in this present life, and after listening to a

sweet discourse on this topic from the Tathagata, at the end of the sermon he announced his discipleship, and having been reconciled to the Tathagata he went his ways. Thenceforth distributing alms and keeping the moral law he associated with the Tathagata, and listening to his sweet discourse on the Law and consorting with a virtuous friend, his fears abated and his feeling of horror disappeared, and he recovered his peace of mind and happily cultivated the four Ways of Deportment. Then one day they started a discussion in the Hall of Truth, saying, "Sirs, Ajatasattu after slaying his father was terror-stricken and finding no enjoyment in his regal splendour he experienced pain in every posture. Then he went to the Tathagata and by associating with a virtuous friend he lost his fears and enjoyed the happiness of lordship." The Master came and asked, saying, "What topic, Brethren, are you now engaged in discussing in conclave?" and on their telling him what it was, he said, "Not now only, but of old too, this man, after murdering his father, through me recovered his peace of mind," and he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time in Benares Brahmadatta begat a son, prince Brahmadatta. At the same time the Bodhisatta was conceived in the house of the family priest. And at his birth they named him young Samkicca. The two lads grew up together in the palace and were great friends. And when they came of age, after acquiring all learning at Takkasila, they returned home. Then the king appointed his son to be viceroy and the Bodhisatta still lived with him. Now one day the viceroy, when his father was gone to disport himself in the pleasure garden, beheld his great glory and conceived a longing for it, thinking, "My father is more like a brother; if I shall wait for his death, I shall be an old man before I succeed to the crown. What good will it do me to get the kingdom then? I will kill my father and make myself king," and he told the Bodhisatta what he thought of doing. The Bodhisatta rejected the idea, saying, "Friend, the murder of a father is a serious matter. That way lies the road to hell. You must not do this deed. Pray do not kill him." But he spoke of it again and again and was opposed by his friend for the third time. Then he consulted with his attendants and they fell in with the idea and devised a plot to kill the king. But the Bodhisatta hearing of it thought, "I will not consort with people like these," and without taking leave of his father and mother he escaped by a house-door and hid himself in the Himalaya country. There he embraced the ascetic life and entered upon the supernatural powers arising from ecstatic meditation, living on roots and wild berries. But the prince, when his friend was gone away, put his father to death and enjoyed great glory. Hearing it said that young Samkicca had adopted the ascetic life, many youths of good family gave up the world and were ordained by him to the ascetic life. And he dwelt there surrounded by a great company of ascetics, all of whom had already reached the Attainments. The king, after killing his father, for a very short time enjoyed the pleasure of kingship, and then was terror-stricken and lost his peace of mind and was like to one who had found his punishment in hell. Then calling to mind the Bodhisatta he thought, "My friend tried to stop me, saying the murder of one's father was a grievous thing, but failing to persuade me he ran away to keep himself free from guilt. If he had been here, he would not have let me slay my father and he would free me from this terror. Where in the world can he be living? If I knew where he was dwelling, I would send for him. Who can tell me his place of abode?" Thenceforth both in the harem and in the court he was ever singing the praises of the Bodhisatta. A long time afterwards, when he had lived fifty years in the Himalayas, the Bodhisatta thought, "The king remembers me. I must go to him and teach him the Law and

remove his fears." So attended by five hundred ascetics he passed through the air and alighted in the garden called Dayapassa, and surrounded by his band of ascetics he seated himself on the stone slab. The keeper of the garden on seeing him asked, saying, "Holy sir, who is the leader of this company of ascetics?" And hearing it was the sage Samkicca and himself recognising him he said, "Sir, stay here until I bring the king. He is anxious to see you." And making an obeisance he went with haste to the palace and told the king of his friend's arrival. The king came to see him, and after offering all due civility he put a question to him.

The Master, to make the matter clear, said:

At sight of Brahmadatta thus enthroned in royal state,

He said, "O king, the friend for whom thou art compassionate,

Samkicca, lo! is here—of saints the chief in fame is he

Set out in haste and tarry not this holy sage to see."

So quickly mounting on the car prepared at his behest,

The king begirt with courtier friends set forth upon his quest.

The emblems five of royal pomp straight doffed the Kasi lord,

Umbrella, turban, yak-tail fan, with shoes and eke his sword.

Then stepping from his car the king, stripped of his bright array,

To Dayapassa park, where sat Samkicca, took his way.

The king drew nigh and greeting him with words of courtly phrase,

Recalled the converse they had held together in old days.

And as he sat beside him, when occasion fit arose,

A question as to sinful deeds he hastened to propose.

"Samkicca, lord of saintly band, great sage, whom here I see

Sitting in Dayapassa park, I fain would question thee.

How fare transgressors after death? Born to what state are they?

I too have erred from righteousness. Thy answer quick, I pray."

The Master, to make the matter clear, said:

Samkicca thus addressed the king who ruled o’er Kasi land,

Sitting in Dayapassa glades: “Mark, sire, and understand:

Shouldst thou point out the road to one gone hopelessly astray,

And he should follow thy advice, no thorns beset his way.

But he that walks in evil ways, shouldst thou direct aright,

And he should follow thy advice, escapes from woeful plight.”

Thus did he admonish the king, and moreover taught him the Faith, saying,

Right is like the high road,

Wrong is but a bye-road.

Right to heaven aye wins its way,

Wrong to hell leads men astray.

Men that transgress the law, O sire, and live unrighteously,

What fate they suffer after death in hell, now hear from me.

Sanjiva, Kalasutta and Roruva, great and small,

Sanghata, Great Avici, are names that may well appal,

With Tapana and Patapana, eight major hells in all.

Escape from hence is hopeless, and of Ussadas they tell,

Twice eight times more in number, a kind of minor hell—

Dread flames here torture sinful men, all cruel deeds abound,

Horror, amazement, anguish, woe and terror reign around.

Four square with fourfold doors is each, in due proportion spaced,

With dome of iron ’twas o’erarched, by iron wall embraced,

Its base of iron wrought is such no raging flame may melt,

Though e’en a hundred leagues around its mighty power is felt.

All that have outrage done to saints or injured holy men

Fall headlong into hell’s abyss, no more to rise again.

In evil plight their mangled frames, piece-meal like fish on toast,

For their misdeeds through countless years in hell are doomed to roast.

Their limbs consumed with burning heat, to torture dread a prey,

Though eager to escape from hell they never find a way.

Seeking an outlet to and fro to east or west they fly,

Or baffled hurry north or south, a hopeless quest to ply,

For gods are there to bar the way, whichever door they try.

Poor souls, for many thousand years they dwell in hell’s domain,

With arms outstretched they sore lament their overwhelming pain.

Like deadly poison-snake whose wrath ’twere fatal to arouse,

Shun to attack the saints that live bound by ascetic vows.

Ajjuna, lord of Kekakas, great archer, who annoyed

Gotama, was despite his bulk and thousand arms destroyed.

So Dandaki defiling Kisavaccha, sinless one,

Like palm tree from the roots cut down, was utterly undone.

Mejjha for famed Matanga’s sake fell from its place of pride,

The land became a wilderness and king and people died.

Assailing black Dipayana the men of Vishnu race

With Andhakas sought Yama’s realm, each slain by other’s mace

Cursed by a sage, Cecca who once could tread the air, they say,

Was lost and swallowed by the earth on his appointed day.

The self-willed fool can never gain the approval of the wise,

But guileless souls, equipped with truth, are slow to utter lies.

Whoso would lie in wait to catch some wise and holy man,

Hurled down to hell will quickly learn to rue his wicked plan.

But who with treacherous cruelty shall aged saints assail,

Shall like a dying palm tree stump, childless and heirless, fail.

Whoso some mighty sage, a priest of life austere, shall slay,

In Kalasutta hell shall suffer torture many a day.

And if a wicked Maga king his realm should overthrow,

He shall when dead in Tapana like sufferings undergo.

A hundred thousand years, as gods count years, he's doomed to dwell,

Clad in a robe of living flame, midst agonies of hell.

Bright jets of fire on every side shoot from his tortured frame,

His very limbs, hair, nails and all, serve but to feed the flame.

And as his body burns apace, racked through and through with pain,

Like a goad-stricken elephant, poor wretch, he roars amain.

Whoso from greed or hatred shall, vile creature, slay his sire,

In Kalasutta hell long time shall agonize in fire.

In iron cauldron boiled till he shall peel,

The parricide is pierced with shafts of steel,

Then blinded and on filth condemned to feed

He's plunged in brine, to expiate his deed.

Then goblins 'twixt his jaws, lest they should close,

Hot iron ball or ploughshare interpose,

These fixed with cords his mouth so firmly prop,

They into it a stream of filth can drop.

Vultures, both black and brown, and ravens too,

And birds with iron beaks, a motley crew,

Rending his tongue to many a fragment small,

Devour the quivering morsel, blood and all.

The goblins flitting to and fro

Assail the wretch with many a blow,

On his charred breast or broken limb

With cruel glee they buffet him.

The joy is theirs, but woes abide

With all that in such hell reside

For earthly crime of parricide.

The son that slays his mother straight to Yama’s realm is sent,

In retribution for his deed to reap due punishment.

There powerful demons seize upon the guilty matricide,

And plough with iron shares his back in furrows deep and wide.

The blood like molten copper from his wounds that flows they take,

And give it to the guilty wretch, his burning thirst to slake.

He stands plunged in a crimson lake as ’twere of clotted blood,

Breathing foul stench of carrion vile or evil smelling mud.

Enormous worms with iron mouths, piercing their victim’s skin,

Devour his flesh right greedily and suck the blood within.

In hell one hundred fathoms deep behold the victim sinks,

While for a hundred leagues around dead carcase like he stinks.

By reason of the stench, O king, such is his sorry plight,

Though once possessed of vision keen he suffers loss of sight.

Past out from Khuradhara hell, grim prison house hard to flee,

Abortion-mongers ‘scape not thy dread stream, Vetarani.

Silk-cotton trees with thorns foot long of iron wrought, ’Tis said,

On either bank, Vetarani, o’erhang thy gloomy bed.

All clothed in flame, one mass of fire, they stand against the sky,

And all ablaze with brilliant light tower a full league on high.

Here fixed upon sharp thorns red-hot in hell appear to view

Unfaithful husbands, guilty wives, the whole adulterous crew.

Beaten with stripes headlong they fall, revolving in their flight,

And there with mangled limbs they lie awake the livelong night.

At dawn they hide themselves in Iron Cauldron, known to fame,

Big as a mountain ’Tis and full of water like to flame.

So clad in folly like a robe these sinners night and day,

For their ill deeds wrought long ago, fit retribution pay.

Whoso as wife bought with his gold her husband shall despise,

Or shall regard his kith and kin with ever scornful eyes,

Her tongue, wrenched out with hook and line, shall suffer agonies.

She sees her tongue drawn out all full of worms, nor may complain,

Silent perforce, in Tapana enduring awful pain.

Slayers of sheep and swine and cows, and followers of the chase,

Fishermen, robbers, cruel all, glozing as fair things base,

Assailed with swords and iron clubs, headlong, these men of blood,

Pursued with spears and arrows fall into a briny flood.

The forger, harried night and day with club of iron forged,

Feeds only on the filthy mess by some poor rogue disgorged.

Crows, ravens, vultures, jackals too, all armed with iron jaw,

Entomb the struggling wretch alive in their insatiate maw.

Who shall with beast hunt beast to death, or bird with bird shall slay,

O'erwhelmed with sin shall sink to hell, to rue the accursed day.

Thus did the king describe all these hells, and now making an opening in the earth he showed the king the angel-worlds and said:

Through virtue stored on earth of old the good to heaven attain,

Here Brahmas, Devas, Indra, lo! ripe fruit of Virtue gain.

This then I say, bear righteous sway throughout thy realm, my king,

For justice done is merit won, nor e'er regret will bring.

On hearing the religious discourse of the Great Being, the king thenceforth was comforted. And the Bodhisatta, after staying some time there, returned to his own place of abode.

The Master here ended his story and said, "Not now only, but of old also was he consoled by me," and he identified the Birth: "At that time Ajatasattu was the king, the followers of Buddha formed the company of the ascetic, and I myself was the sage Samkicca."

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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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.