Ja 534 — Mahahamsa 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

“There go the birds,” etc. This story the Master, while residing in the Bamboo Grove, told concerning the elder Ananda’s renunciation of life. The introductory story is exactly like one already given, but on this occasion the Master in telling a story of the past related the following tale.

Once upon a time at Benares a king named Samyama had a chief consort named Khema. At that time the Bodhisatta with a following of ninety thousand geese dwelt on mount Cittakuta. Now one day at daybreak queen Khema saw a vision. Some gold-coloured geese came and perching upon the royal throne with a sweet voice preached the Law. While the queen was listening and applauding and had not yet had her fill of the exposition of the Law, it became broad daylight, and the geese finished their discourse and departed by the open window. The queen, rising in haste, cried, “Catch them, catch the geese, before they escape,” and in the act of stretching forth her hand she awoke. Hearing her words her handmaids said, “Where are the geese?” and softly laughed. At this moment the queen knew that it was a dream, and thought, “I do not see the thing that is not: surely there must be golden geese in this world, but if I should say to the king, “I am anxious to hear the preaching of the Law by golden geese,” he will say, “We have never yet seen any golden geese; there is no such thing as preaching by geese,” and he will take no pains in the matter: but if I say, “It is a pregnant longing on my part,” he will search for them in every possible way and so will the desire of my heart be fulfilled.” So pretending to be sick she gave instructions to her servants and lay down. The king, when he had taken his seat upon his throne, not seeing her at the usual time of her appearance, inquired where queen Khema was, and, hearing she was sick, he went to her and sitting on one side of the bed he chafed her back and inquired if she were ill. “My lord,” she said, “I am not ill but the longings of a pregnant woman have come upon me.” “Say, lady, what you would have, and I will soon fetch it you.” “Sire, I long to listen to the preaching of the Law by a golden goose, while it sits upon the royal throne, with a white umbrella spread over it, and to pay homage to it with scented wreaths and such like marks of honour, and to express my

approval of it. If I should attain to this, it is well: otherwise there is no life in me." Then the king comforted her and said, "If there is such a thing in the world of men, you shall have it: do not vex yourself." And going forth from the queen's chamber he took counsel with his ministers, saying, "Mark you, queen Khema says, "If I can hear a golden goose preach the Law, I shall live, but otherwise I shall die"; pray, are there any golden geese? "Sire," they answered, "we have never either seen or heard of them." "Who would know about it?" "The brahmins, sire," The king summoned the brahmins and asked them, saying, "Are there such things as golden geese who teach the Law ?" "Yes, sire, it has come down by tradition to us that fish, crabs, tortoises, deer, peacocks, geese, all these are found of a golden colour. Amongst them, they say, the family of Dhatarattha geese are wise and learned. Including men there are seven creatures that are gold-coloured." The king was greatly pleased and asked, "Where dwell these scholarly ruddy geese?" "We do not know, sire." "Then who will know?" And when they answered, "The tribe of fowlers," he gathered together all the fowlers in his dominion and asked them, saying, "My friends, where dwell gold-coloured geese of the Dhatarattha family?" Then a certain fowler said, "People tell us, sire, by tradition from one generation to another, that they dwell in the Himalayas, on mount Cittakuta." "Do you know how to catch them?" "I do not know, sire." He summoned his wise brahmins and after telling them that there were golden geese on Cittakuta, he asked if they knew any way to catch them. They said, "Sire, what need for us to go and catch them? By a stratagem we will bring them down close to the city and catch them." "What is this stratagem?" "On the north of the city, sire, you are to have a lake dug, three leagues in extent, a safe and peaceful spot, and filling it with water, plant all manner of grain and cover the lake with the five kinds of lotus. Then hand it over to the care of a skilful fowler and suffer no one to approach it, and by means of men stationed at the four corners have it proclaimed as a sanctuary lake, and on hearing this all manner of birds will alight there. And these geese, hearing one from another how safe this lake is, will visit it and then you can have them caught, trapping them with hair nooses." The king, on hearing this, had a lake such as they described formed in the place they mentioned, and summoning a skilled fowler he presented him with a thousand pieces of money and said, "Henceforth give up your occupation: I will support your wife and family. Carefully guarding this peaceful lake and driving everyone away from it, have it proclaimed at the four corners as a sanctuary, and say that all the birds that come and go are mine, and when the golden geese arrive you shall receive great honour." With these words of encouragement the king put him in charge of the sanctuary lake. From that day the fowler acted just as the king bade him and watched over the place, and as one that kept the lake in peace he came to be known as the fowler Khema (Peace). Thenceforth all manner of birds alighted there, and from its being proclaimed from one to another that the lake was peaceful and secure, different kinds of geese arrived. First of all came the grass-geese, then owing to their report came the yellow geese, followed in like manner by the scarlet geese, the white geese and the Oka geese. On their arrival Khemaka thus reported to the king: "Five kinds of geese, sire, have come, and they are continually feeding in the lake. Now that the paka geese have arrived, in a few days the golden geese will be coming: cease to be anxious, sire." The king on hearing this made proclamation in the city by beat of drum that no one was to go there, and whosoever should do so should suffer mutilation of hands and feet and spoliation of his household goods; and from that time no one went there. Now the paka geese dwell not far from Cittakuta in Golden Cave. They are very

powerful birds and as with the Dhatarattha family of geese the colour of their body is distinctive, but the daughter of the king of the paka geese is gold-coloured. So her father, thinking she was a fitting match for the Dhatarattha king, sent her to be his wife. She was dear and precious in her lord's eyes, and owing to this the two families of geese became very friendly. Now one day the geese that were in attendance on the Bodhisatta inquired of the paka geese, "Where are you getting your food just now?" "We are feeding near Benares, on a safe piece of water; but where are you roaming?" "To such and such a place," they answered. "Why do you not come to our sanctuary? It is a charming lake, teeming with all manner of birds, covered over with five kinds of lotus, and abounding with various grains and fruits, and buzzing with swarms of many different bees. At its four corners is a man to proclaim perpetual immunity from danger. No one is allowed to come near: much less to injure another." After this manner did they sing the praises of the peaceful lake. On hearing what the paka geese said, they told Sumukha, saying, "They tell us, near Benares is a peaceful lake of such and such a kind: thither the paka geese go and feed. Do you tell the Dhatarattha king, and, if he allows us, we too will go and feed there." Sumukha told the king, who thought, "Men, verily, are full of wiles and skilled in expedients: there must be some reason for this. All this long time past there was no such lake: it must have been made now to catch us." And he said to Sumukha, "Let not this going there meet with your approval. This lake was not constructed by them in good faith; it was made to catch us. Men surely are cruelly minded and versed in expedients: keep still in your own feeding grounds." The golden geese a second time told Sumukha they were anxious to visit the Lake of Peace and he reported their wishes to the king. The Great Being thought, "My kinsfolk must not be vexed by reason of me: we will go there." So accompanied by ninety thousand geese he went and browsed there, disporting himself after the manner of geese and then returned to Cittakuta. Khemaka, after they had fed and taken their departure, went and reported their arrival to the king of Benares. The king was highly pleased and said, "Friend Khemaka, try and catch one or two geese and I will confer great honour on you." With these words he paid his expenses and sent him away. Returning there the fowler seated himself in a skeleton pot and watched the movements of the geese. Bodhisattas verily are free from all greed. Therefore the Great Being, starting from the spot where he alighted, went on eating the paddy in due order. All the others wandered about, eating here and there. So the fowler thought, "This goose is free from greed: this is the one I must catch." The next day before the geese had alighted on the lake, he went to the place hard by and concealing himself in the framework of his pot he remained there sitting in it and looking through a chink in the frame. At that moment the Great Being escorted by ninety thousand geese came down on the same spot where he had alighted the day before, and sitting down at the limit of yesterday's feeding ground he went on browsing. The fowler, looking through a chink in his cage and marking the extraordinary beauty of the bird, thought, "This goose is as big as a waggon, gold-coloured and with its neck encircled with three stripes of red. Three lines running down the throat pass along the middle of the belly, while other three stripes run down and mark off the back, and its body shines like a mass of gold poised on a string made of the thread of red wool. This must be their king, and this is the one I will seize." And the goose-king, after feeding over a wide field, disported himself in the water and then surrounded by his flock returned to Cittakuta. For six days he fed after this manner. On the seventh day Khemaka twisted a big stout cord of black horse-hair and fixed a noose upon a stick, and, knowing for certain the

goose-king would alight to-morrow on the same spot, he set the stick on which the snare was mounted in the water. The next day the goose-king coming down stuck its foot, as it alighted, into the snare, which grasping the bird's foot as it were with a band of iron held it fast in its grip. The bird, thinking to sever the snare, dragged at it and struck it with all its force. First its gold-coloured skin was bruised, next its flesh of the colour of red wool was cut, then the sinew was severed and last of all its foot would have been broken, but thinking a maimed body was unbefitting a king, it ceased to struggle. As severe pains set in, it thought, "If I should utter a cry of capture, my kinsfolk would be alarmed and without feeding properly they would fly away, and being half-starved they would drop into the water." So putting up with the pain it remained in the power of the snare, pretending to be feeding on the paddy, but when the flock had eaten their fill, and were now disporting themselves after the manner of geese, it uttered a loud cry of capture. The geese on hearing it flew away, just as previously described. Sumukha, too, considering the matter, just as related before, searched about and not finding the Great Being in the three main divisions of the geese, thought, "Verily this must be something terrible that has come upon the king," and he turned back, saying, "Fear not, sire, I will release you at the sacrifice of my own life," and sitting down on the mud he comforted the Great Being. The Great Being thought, "The ninety thousand geese have forsaken me and fled and this one alone has returned. I wonder, when the fowler comes up, whether or not Sumukha too will forsake me and flee." And by way of testing him, stained with blood as he was, and resting against the stick fastened to the snare, he repeated three stanzas:

There go the birds, the ruddy geese, all overcome with fear,

O golden-yellow Sumukha, depart! What wouldst thou here?

My kith and kin deserted me, away they all have flown;

Without a thought they fly away. Why art thou left alone?

Fly, noble bird, with prisoners what fellowship can be?

Sumukha, fly! nor lose the chance, while thou mayst yet be free.

On hearing this, Sumukha thought, "This goose-king is ignorant of my real nature; he fancies I am a friend that speaks words of flattery. I will show him how loving I am," and he repeated four stanzas:

No, I'll not leave thee, royal goose, when trouble draweth nigh,

But stay I will, and by thy side will either live or die.

I will not leave thee, royal bird, when trouble draweth nigh,

Nor join in such ignoble act with others, no, not I.

I’m one in heart and soul with thee, playmate and friend of old,

Of all thy host, O noble king, famed as the leader bold.

Returning to thy kith and kin what could I have to say,

If I shall leave thee to thy fate and heedless fly away?

Nay, I would rather die than live, so base a part to play.

When Sumukha had thus in four stanzas uttered as it were a lion’s note, the Great Being, making known his merits, said:

Thy nature ’Tis, O Sumukha, abiding in the Right,

Ne’er to forsake thy lord and friend or safety seek in flight.

Looking on thee no thought of fear arises in my mind,

E’en in this sorry plight some way to save me thou wilt find.

While they were thus conversing, the fowler standing on the edge of the lake saw the geese flying off in three divisions and wondering what this could possibly mean he looked at the spot where he had set the snare and beheld the Bodhisatta leaning on the stick to which the noose was fastened. Overjoyed he girt up his loins and taking a club he hastily drew nigh and stood before the birds, like the fire at the beginning of a cycle, with head towering above them and his heel planted in the mud.

The Master, to make the matter clear, said:

As thus these noble birds exchanged high thoughts, to them, behold!

All in hot haste, with staff in hand drew nigh this fowler bold.

Seeing him trusty Sumukha stood up before the king,

His anxious lord in his distress stoutly encouraging.

Fear not, O noble bird, for fears become not one like thee,

An effort I will duly make with justice as my plea,

And soon by my heroic act once more thou shalt be free.

Thus did Sumukha comfort the Great Being, and going, up to the fowler and speaking with a sweet human voice he asked, “What is thy name, friend?” Then he answered, “O king of the gold-coloured geese, I am called Khemaka.” Sumukha said, “Do not imagine, friend, a

mere ordinary goose has been caught in the horse-hair noose you set. The chief of ninety thousand geese, the Dhatarattha king, is caught in your snare. Wise is he and virtuous and he is ranged on the side of conciliation. He ought not to be put to death. I will do whatever he was to have done for you. I too am gold-coloured and for his sake will lay down my life. If you are anxious to take his feathers, take mine; or, if you would have anything else of his, skin, flesh, sinew or bone, take it from my body. Again, supposing you wish to make a tame bird of him, make a tame bird of me, selling me while still alive, or if you would make money, make it by selling me: do not slay him, endowed as he is with wisdom and such like virtues. If you shall kill him, you will never escape from hell and similar states of suffering." After thus terrifying the fowler with the fear of hell and making him give ear to his sweet discourse, Sumukha once more drew near and took his stand by the Bodhisatta, comforting him. The fowler, hearing his words, thought, "Being a mere bird, as he is, he can do what for men is impossible. For they cannot remain constant in friendship. Oh! what a wise, eloquent, and holy creature is this!" His whole body thrilling with joy and ecstasy, and his hair standing erect with wonder, he dropped his stick and raising his joined hands to his forehead, like one worshipping the sun, he stood proclaiming the virtues of Sumukha.

The Master, to make the matter clear, said:

The fowler hearing what the bird so eloquently said,

With hair erect and folded hands his homage duly paid.

Ne'er was it heard or seen before that, using human speech,

To man in his own tongue a goose sublimest truth should preach.

What is this bird to thee, that when the rest are fled and gone,

Though free, beside the captive bird thou here art left alone?

Sumukha, on being asked this question by the evil-minded fowler, thought, "He is relenting: to soften his heart still more I will now show him my quality," and he said:

He is my king, O foe to birds, his captain chief am I;

I cannot leave him to his fate, while I to safety fly.

Let not this lord of mighty hosts here perish all alone;

Near him my happiness I find: him as my lord I own.

On hearing this sweet discourse of his treating of duty, the fowler, overjoyed and with hair erect in wonder, thought, " If I should kill this royal goose endowed with virtue and the like good qualities, I shall never escape from the four states of suffering: let the king of

Benares do what he will with me; I shall make over this captive as a free gift to Sumukha and let him go," and he spake this stanza:

Noble art thou, to honour one through whom thou still dost live;

Fly where ye list: to thy good lord his freedom now I give.

So saying, the fowler with kindly purpose drew nigh to the Great Being and bending the stick he laid the bird on the mud, and pulling up the stick he set it free from the noose. Then he drew forth the bird from the lake and laying him on some young kus'a grass he gently loosed the snare that bound his foot. Conceiving a strong affection for the Great Being, with kindly thought he took some water and washed off the blood, repeatedly wiping it. Then by the power of his charity nerve was united to nerve, flesh to flesh, and skin to skin, and the foot became just as before, not to be distinguished from the other one, and the Bodhisatta sat rejoicing in his original state. Sumukha, seeing how happy the king was all owing to his action, was highly delighted and thought, "This man has rendered us a great service, but we have done nothing for him. If he caught us for the king's ministers of state and took us to them, he would receive a large sum of money, and if he caught us for himself, he could sell us and still make great gain: I will question him somewhat." So in his desire to render him a service he put this question and said

If thou for thine own purposes didst set for us this snare,

Our freedom we accept from thee without a thought or care.

But otherwise, O fowler bold, in letting us go free,

Without the king's permission, sure, 'twere nought but robbery.

The fowler on hearing this said, "I did not catch you for myself, I was employed by Samyama, king of Benares," and he then told them the whole story, beginning from the time of the queen's seeing a vision down to the time when the king heard of the arrival of the geese, and said, "Friend Khemaka, try and catch one or two geese, and I will confer great honour on you," and despatched him with a provision for his journey.

On hearing this Sumukha thought, "This fowler, taking no account of his own livelihood, in setting us free has wrought a difficult thing. But if we shall return hence to Cittakuta, neither the supernatural wisdom of the Dhatarattha king nor my act of friendship will be revealed, the fowler will not receive great honour, the king will not be established in the five moral laws, nor will the queen's desire be fulfilled." And he answered, "Friend, it being so, you cannot let us go: present us to the king and he shall deal with us according to his pleasure."

To make this clear, he spoke this stanza:

Thou art the servant of the king; his wishes then fulfil;

King Samyama shall deal with us according to his will.

On hearing this the fowler said, “O sirs, let it not be your pleasure to see the king. Kings verily are dangerous beings. They will either make tame geese of you or put you to death.” Then Sumukha said, “Friend fowler, do not trouble yourself about us. By my preaching of the Law I made a cruel fellow like you soft-hearted. Why should I not do the same in the case of the king? Kings are wise and understand goodly words: quick and take us to the king. And in taking us do not carry us as captives, but put us in a cage of flowers and take us thus. For the Dhatarattha king make a big cage shaded with white lotus, and for me a small cage covered with red lotus, and put him in front and me behind, somewhat lower, and take us with all speed and present us to the king.” The fowler, hearing the words of Sumukha, thought, “Sumukha, in seeing the king, must be desirous of conferring great honour on me,” and being highly delighted he fashioned cages of soft osiers and covering them with lotuses set out with the birds in the way already described.

To make the matter clear, the Master said:

The fowler grasping them with both his hands, as he was told,

Placed in their cage these ruddy geese with skin of yellow gold.

The goose-king now and Sumukha with plumage bright to see,

Safe in their cage the fowler took and off with them marched he.

As soon as the fowler had set off with them the Dhatarattha goose called to mind his wife, the daughter of the paka goose-king, and addressing Sumukha under the influence of his passion he thus lamented.

To make the matter clear, the Master said:

The king on being carried off to Sumukha thus spake;

“My fair and gracious spouse, methinks, now grieving for my sake,

If she should hear that I am dead, her life, I fear, might take.

Like heron mourning for its mate by lonely ocean’s shore,

Suhema—bright as gold her skin—her lord will still deplore.”

On hearing this Sumukha thought, “This goose, though ready to admonish others, all for a female’s sake, under the sway of passion babbles just as when water is heated, or as when (birds) rise up from a bank and devour a field of grain. What if I were by my own wisdom to make clear to him the vices of the female sex and to bring him to his senses?” and he said:

That one so great and peerless thought, a leader of his kind,

Should grieve for bird of female sex shows little strength of mind,

As wind will carry any scent, be it or bad or good,

Or greedy child, as if 'twere blind eats raw or well-cooked food,

Without true judgement in affairs, poor fool, thou canst not see,

What to avoid or what to do in each emergency.

Half mad thou speakst of womankind as blest with every grace,

Yet most as common are to men as toper's drinking place.

Sorrow, disease, calamity, like harshest chains to bind,

Mirage, and fraud, the snare of death deep-seated in the mind—

Such women are: who trusts in them is vilest of his kind.

Then the Dhatarattha goose, in his infatuation for the female sex, said, "You know not the virtues of womankind, but the sages know: they are not deserving of censure." And by way of explanation he said:

Truth that sages ascertained, who is there that dares to blame?

Women in this world are born, destined to great power and fame.

They for dalliance are formed, joys of love for them ordained,

Seeds within them germinate, source from whence all life's sustained,

They from whom man draws his breath scarce by man may be disdained.

Art thou, Sumukha, alone versed in ways of womankind?

Didst thou only, moved by fear, this belated wisdom find?

Meeting danger every man bears up bravely 'midst alarm,

In a crisis sages all strive to shelter us from harm.

Princes then to counsel them fain would have a hero brave,

'Gainst the shock of adverse fate, apt to counsel, strong to save.

Let not royal cooks, I pray, roast our mangled limbs to-day,

As its fruit the bamboo kills, us too golden plumes might slay.

Free thou wouldst not fly from me, captive of thy own free will,

Cease from words in danger's hour, up, a manly part fulfil.

The Great Being by singing the praises of womankind reduced Sumukha to silence, but on seeing how distressed he was, he now, to conciliate him, repeated this stanza:

An effort make such as is due, with justice as thy plea,

And by heroic act, dear friend, restore my life to me.

Then Sumukha thought, "He is greatly terrified by fear of death; he does not know my powers. After seeing the king of Benares and having a little talk with him, I shall know what to do: meanwhile I will comfort my king," and he spoke this stanza:

Fear not, O noble bird, for fears become not one like thee,

An effort I will duly make, with justice as my plea,

And soon by my heroic act thou shalt once more be free.

While they were thus conversing in the language of birds, the fowler did not understand a single word they said, but carrying them on his pole he entered Benares, followed by a multitude of people, who, filled with wonder and amazement, stretched forth their hands in suppliant attitude. On reaching the door of the palace, the fowler had his arrival made known to the king.

The Master, to make the matter clear, said:

The fowler with his burden to the palace gate drew near;

"Announce me to the king," he cried, "the ruddy goose is here."

The doorkeeper went and announced his arrival. The king was highly delighted and said, "Let him come hither at once," and attended by a crowd of courtiers and seated upon the throne with a white umbrella held over him he saw Khemaka ascend to the dais with his burden, and looking at the gold-coloured geese, he said, "My heart's desire is fulfilled," and he gave an order to his courtiers that all due service should be rendered to the fowler.

To make the matter clear, the Master said:

Seeing these birds with holy looks and marks auspicious blest,

King Samyama with words like these his councillors addressed:

“Give to the fowler meat and drink, soft food, apparel brave,

And store of ruddy gold as much as heart of man can crave.”

Being highly elated with joy, he in this way showed his pleasure and said, “Go and array the fowler and bring him back to me.” So the courtiers, taking him down from the palace, had his hair and beard trimmed, and when he had taken a bath and had been anointed and was sumptuously arrayed they brought him into the presence of the king. Then the king conferred on him twelve hamlets, yielding annually a hundred thousand pieces of money, a chariot yoked with thoroughbreds, a large well-equipped house and very great honour. On receiving so great honour, the fowler, to explain what he had done, said, “This, sire, is no ordinary goose that I have brought you; this is the king of ninety thousand geese, Dhatarattha by name, and this is the chief captain, Sumukha.” Then the king asked, “How, friend, did you catch them?”

The Master, to make the matter clear, said:

Seeing the fowler highly pleased, the king of Kasi said,

“If, Khemaka, on yonder lake geese in their thousands fed,

Amidst the throng of kindred fowl, pray, how didst thou contrive

To single out this lovely bird and capture him alive?”

The fowler answering him said:

Through seven long days with anxious care in vain I marked the spot,

Searching for that fair goose’s track, concealed within a pot.

To-day I found the feeding-ground to which the goose repaired,

And there straightway I set a trap and lo! he soon was snared.

On hearing this the king thought, “This fellow standing at the door and telling his story spoke only of the arrival of the Dhatarattha king and now too he speaks of this one only. What can be the meaning of this?” and he spoke this stanza:

Fowler, thou speakst of only one, yet here two birds I see;

’Tis some mistake, why wouldst thou bring this second bird to me?

Then the fowler said, “There was no change of purpose on my part, nor am I anxious to present the second goose to some one else: moreover only one was caught in the snare I set,” and in explanation he said:

The goose with lines like ruddy gold all running down his breast,

Caught in my snare I hither bring, O king, at thy behest.

This splendid bird himself still free sat by the captive’s side,

The while with kindly human speech his friend to cheer he tried.

And he then after this manner proclaimed the virtues of Sumukha. “As soon as he knew that the Dhatarattha goose was caught, he stayed and consoled his friend and on my approach he came to meet me and remained poised in the air, conversing pleasantly with me in human language and telling of the virtues of the Dhatarattha, and after thus softening my heart he once more took his stand in front of his friend. Then I, sire, on hearing the eloquence of Sumukha was converted and let the Dhatarattha loose. Thus was the release of Dhatarattha from the snare and my coming here with these geese all owing to Sumukha.” On being told this the king was anxious to hear a sermon from Sumukha, and while the fowler was still paying honour to him, the sun set, lamps were lighted, and a crowd of warrior chiefs and others gathered together and queen Khema with an escort of divers bands of dancers took her seat on the right of the king, and at this moment the king, desiring to persuade Sumukha to speak, uttered this stanza:

Why, Sumukha, dost hold thy tongue? Is it from awe, I pray,

That in my royal presence thou hast not a word to say?

Hearing this, Sumukha, to show he was not afraid, said:

I fear not, Kasi lord, to speak amidst thy royal train,

Nor, should occasion fit arrive, would I from words refrain.

Hearing this, the king, desirous to make him speak at greater length, reviling him, said:

No archers clad in mail, no helm, no leather shield I see,

No escort bold of horse or foot, no cars, no infantry.

I see no yellow gold, no town with goodly buildings crowned,

No watch tower made impregnable with moat encircling round,

Entrenched wherein by Sumukha will nought to fear be found.

When the king had in this wise asked why he was not terrified, Sumukha replied in this stanza:

No escort for a guard I want, no town or wealth need I,

‘Midst pathless air we find a way and travel through the sky.

If thou wert stablished in the truth, we fain to thee would teach

Some useful lesson for thy good in wise and subtle speech.

But if thou art a liar, false, one of ignoble strain,

This fowler’s words of eloquence appeal to thee in vain.

On hearing this the king said, “Why speakest thou of me as lying and ignoble? What have I done?” Then Sumukha said, “Well, listen to me,” and he spoke as follows:

At brahmins’ bidding thou didst make this Khema, lake of fame,

And didst to birds at twice five points immunity proclaim.

Within this peaceful pool thus fed with streams serene and pure,

Birds ever found abundant food and lived a life secure.

Hearing this noised abroad we came to visit that fair scene,

And snared by thee we found alas! thy promise false had been.

But under cover of a lie each act of sinful greed

Forfeits rebirth as man or god, and straight to hell must lead.

Thus did he even in the midst of his retinue put the king to shame. Then the king said to him, “I did not have you caught, Sumukha, to kill you and eat your flesh, but hearing how wise you were I was anxious to listen to your eloquence,” and, making the matter clear, he said:

No sin was mine, O Sumukha, nor seized I you through greed,

Your fame for wisdom and deep thought, ’twas this that caused the deed.

“Haply if here they may declare some true and helpful word,”

’Twas so I bade the fowler seize and bring thee here, O bird.

On hearing this Sumukha said, “You have acted wrongly, sire,” and he spoke as follows:

We could not speak the word of truth, awed by approaching death,

Nor when in death’s last agony we draw our parting breath.

Who would a bird with bird decoy, or beast with beast pursue,

Or with a text a preacher trap, nought base would he eschew.

And whoso utters noble words, intent on action base,

Both here and in the next world sinks from bliss to woeful place.

Be not o’erjoyed in glory’s hour, in danger not distrest,

Make good defects, in trouble strive to do thy very best.

Sages arrived at life’s last stage, the goal of death in view,

After a righteous course on earth, to heaven their way pursue.

Hearing this cleave to righteousness, O sire, and straight release

This royal Dhatarattha bird, the paragon of geese.

Hearing this the king said:

Go, fetch ye water for their feet, and throne of solid worth,

Lo! from his cage I have set free the noblest bird on earth,

Together with his captain bold, so able and so wise,

Taught with his king in weal and woe ever to sympathise.

Sure such an one right well deserves e’en as his lord to fare,

Just as he was prepared with him both life and death to share.

Hearing the king’s words they fetched seats for them and as they sat there they washed their feet with scented water and anointed them with oil an hundredfold refined.

The Master, in explaining the matter, said:

The royal bird sat on a throne, eight-footed, burnished bright,

All solid gold, with Kasi cloth o’erspread, a splendid sight.

And next his king sat Sumukha, his trusty captain bold,

Upon a couch with tiger-skin o’erspread, and all of gold.

To them full many a Kasi lord in golden bowls did bring,

Choice gifts of dainty food to eat, the offerings of their king.

When this food had been thus served to them, the Kasi king, to welcome them, himself took a golden bowl and offered it to them, and they from it ate honey and parched grain and drank sugar-water. Then the Great Being, taking note of the king’s offering and the grace with which it was made, entered into friendly converse with him.

The Master, to clear up the matter, said:

Thinking, “How choice the gifts this lord of Kasi offered us,”

The bird, skilled in the ways of kings, made his inquiries thus:

Dost thou, my lord, enjoy good health and is all well with thee?

I trust thy realm is flourishing and ruled in equity.

O king of geese, my health is good and all is well with me;

My realm is very flourishing and ruled in equity.

Hast thou true men to counsel thee, free from all stain and blame,

Ready to die, if need there be, for thy good cause and name?

I have true men to counsel me, free from all stain and blame,

Ready to die, if need there be, for my good cause and name.

Hast thou a wife of equal birth, obedient, kind in word,

With children blest, good looks, fair name, compliant with her lord?

I have a wife of equal birth, obedient, kind in word,

With children blest, good looks, fair name, compliant with her lord.

And is thy realm in happy case, from all oppression free,

Held by no arbitrary sway, but ruled with equity?

My kingdom is in happy case, from all oppression free,

Held by no arbitrary sway, but ruled with equity.

Dost drive bad men out from the land, good men to honour raise,

Or dost thou righteousness eschew, to follow evil ways?

I drive bad men out from the land, good men to honour raise,

All wickedness I do eschew and follow righteous ways.

Dost mark the span of life, O king, how quickly it is sped,

Or drunk with madness dost regard the next world free from dread?

I mark the span of life, O bird, how quickly it is sped,

And, standing fast in virtues ten, the next world never dread.

Almsgiving, justice, penitence, meek spirit, temper mild,

Peace, mercy, patience, charity, with morals undefiled—

These graces firmly planted in my soul are clear to see,

Whence springs rich harvest of great joy and happiness for me.

But Sumukha though knowing nought of evil we had done,

Right heedlessly gave vent to words in harsh and angry tone.

Things I knew not were to my charge by this bird wrongly laid,

In language harsh. Herein, methinks, scant wisdom was displayed.

On hearing this Sumukha thought, “This virtuous king is angry, because I upbraided him: I will win his forgiveness,” and he said:

I sinned against thee, lord of men, and words of rashness spake,

But when this royal goose was caught my heart was like to break.

As earth bears with all living things, as father with his son,

Do thou, O mighty king, forgive the wrong that we have done.

Then the king took the bird up and embraced him and seating him on a golden stool he accepted his confession of error, and said:

I thank thee, bird, that thou shouldst ne'er thy nature true conceal,

Thou breakest down my stubborn will; upright art thou, I feel.

And with these words the king, being highly pleased with the exposition of the Law by the Great Being, and with the straightforward speech of Sumukha, thought, "When one is pleased, one ought to act so as to show one's pleasure," and yielding his royal splendour to the birds, he said:

Whate'er of silver, gold, and pearls, rich gems and precious gear

In Kasi's royal town is stored within my palace here,

Copper and iron, shells and pearls, and jewels numberless,

Ivory, yellow sandal wood, deer skins and costly dress,

This wealth and lordship over all, I give you to possess.

And with such-like words honouring both birds with the white umbrella he handed over to them his kingdom. Then the Great Being, conversing with the king, said:

Since thou art fain to honour us, be pleased, O lord of men,

To be our Master, teaching us those royal virtues ten.

And then if thy approval and consent we haply win,

We would take formal leave of thee, and go to see our kin.

He gave them leave to go, and, while the Bodhisatta was still preaching the Law, the sun arose.

The Master, to make the matter clear, said:

The livelong night in deepest thought the king of Kasi spent,

Then to that noble bird's request straight yielded his consent.

When he had thus got his permission to depart, the Bodhisatta, saying, "Be vigilant and rule your kingdom in righteousness," established the king in the five moral laws. And the king offered them parched corn with honey and sugar-water in golden dishes, and when

they had finished their meal, after doing them homage with scented wreaths and similar offerings, the king himself lifted the Bodhisatta on high in a golden cage, and queen Khema lifted Sumukha on high. Then at sunrise they opened the window and saying, “Sirs, begone,” they let them loose.

The Master, to make the matter clear, said:

Then as the sun began to rise and break of day was nigh,

Soon from their sight they vanished quite in depths of azure sky.

One of them, the Great Being, flying up from the golden cage, remained poised in the air, and saying, “O sire, be not troubled, but be vigilant and abide in our admonition,” he thus comforted the king, and taking Sumukha with him he made straight for Cittakuta. And those ninety thousand geese issuing forth from the Golden Cave settled on the high table-land, and on seeing the two birds coming they set out to meet them and escorted them home. And thus accompanied by a flock of their kinsfolk they reached the plateau of Cittakuta.

The Master, to make the matter clear, said:

Seeing their chiefs all safe and sound returned from haunts of men,

The winged flock with noisy cries welcomed them back again.

Thus circling round their lord in whom they trust, these ruddy geese

Paid all due honour to their king, rejoiced at his release.

While thus escorting their king, these geese asked him, saying, “How, sire, did you escape?” The Great Being told them of his escape by the help of Sumukha, and of the action of king Samyama and his courtiers. On hearing this, the flock of geese in their joy sang their praises, saying, “Long live Sumukha, captain of our host, and long live the king and the fowler. May they be happy and free from sorrow.”

The Master, to make the matter clear, said:

Thus all whose hearts are full of love succeed in what they do,

E’en as these geese back to their friends once more in safety flew.

This has been fully related in the Cullahamsa Birth.

The Master here ended his story and identified the Birth: “At that time the fowler was Channa, queen Khema was the nun Khema, the king was Sariputta, the king’s retinue the followers of Buddha, Sumukha was Ananda, and the goose-king was I 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.

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