Ja 541 — Nimi Jātaka

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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

“Lo these grey hairs,” etc. This story the Master told while dwelling in Makhadeva’s mango park, near Mithila, about a smile. One day at eventide, the Master with a large company of Brethren was walking up and down in this mango park, when he espied a pleasant spot. Being desirous of telling his behaviour in former times, he allowed a smile to be seen on his face. When asked by the Reverend Ananda why he smiled, he answered, “In yonder spot, Ananda, I once dwelt, deep in ecstatic meditation, in the time of King Makhadeva.” Then at his request, he sat down upon an offered seat, and told a story of the past.

Once upon a time, in the kingdom of Videha, and in the city of Mithila, a certain Makhadeva was king. Four and eighty thousand years he took his pleasure as a young man, four and eighty thousand years he was viceroy, eighty and four thousand years he was king.

Now he told his barber to be sure to inform him as soon as ever he should see grey hairs on his head. When by and by the barber saw grey hairs, and told him, he made the man pull them out with a pair of tongs, and to lay them upon his hand, and seeing death as it were clinging to his forehead, “now,” thinks he, “is the time for me to leave the world.” So he gave the barber his choice of a village, and sending for his eldest son, he told him to undertake the government, since he was himself about to renounce the world. “Why, my lord?” asked he. The king replied:

“Lo these grey hairs that on my head appear

Take of my life in passing year by year:

They are God’s messengers, which bring to mind

The time I must renounce the world is near.”

With these words he made his son king with the ceremonial sprinkling, and leaving him directions to act thus and thus, he left the city; and embracing the life of a Brother, through eighty-four thousand years he fostered the Four Excellencies, and he was then reborn in Brahma's heaven.

His son also, in like manner, renounced the world, and became destined to Brahma's heaven. So also his son again; and so one royal prince after another, to the number of eighty and four thousand less two— each as he saw a white hair in his head became an ascetic in this mango park, and fostered the Four Excellencies, and was born in Brahma's heaven. The first of all this line to be there born, King Makhadeva, standing in Brahma's heaven looked down upon the fortunes of his family, and was glad at heart to see that four and eighty thousand princes less two had renounced the world. He pondered: "Will there be nirvana now, or not?" Seeing that there would not, he resolved that he and no other must round off his family. Accordingly, he came from thence and was conceived in the womb of the king's consort in Mithila city. On his name-day, the soothsayers looking at his marks, said, "Great king, this prince is born to round off your family. This your family of hermits will go no further." Hearing this, the king said, "The boy is born to round off my family like the hoop of a chariot-wheel!" so he gave him the name of Nemi -Kumara, or Prince Hoop.

From his childhood upwards, the boy was devoted to giving, to virtue, to keeping the sabbath vow. Then his father, as usual, saw a white hair, gave a village to his barber, made his son king, became a hermit in the mango park, and was destined for Brahma's heaven. King Nimi, in his devotion to almsgiving, made five almshalls, one at each of the four gates of the city, and one in the midst of it, and distributed great gifts: in each of the almshalls he distributed a hundred thousand pieces of money, that is five hundred thousand each day; continually he kept the Five Precepts; on the moon-days he observed the sabbath; he encouraged the multitude in almsgiving and good works; he pointed out the road to heaven, and affrighted them with the fear of death, and preached the Law. They abiding by his admonitions, giving gifts and doing good, passed away one after another and were born in the world of gods: that world became full, hell was as it were empty. Then in the Heaven of the Thirty-three, the company of gods assembled in Sudhamma the divine hall of assembly, crying aloud—"Hail to our teacher, King Nimi! By his doing, by the knowledge of a Buddha, we have attained to this divine enjoyment infinite!" Thus they sang the virtues of the Great Being. Even in the world of men that sound of praise was spread, as oil spreads over the surface of the great deep.

The Master explained this to the assembled Brethren in the following lines:

"It was a marvel in the world how good men did arise

In the days of good King Nimi, the worthy and the wise.

Alms gave Videha's monarch, the conqueror of his foes;

And as he gave in charity, this thought in him arose:

“Which is more fruitful—holy life or giving alms? who knows ?”

At that moment Sakka’s throne became hot. Sakka pondering the reason, saw him reflecting there. “I will solve the question,” he said; and going about, and swiftly, he made the palace one blaze of light, and entering the chamber, stood there glowing; and at the king’s request, made all clear.

To explain this, the Master said:

“The mighty monarch of the gods, he of the thousand eyes,

Perceives his thought; before his light away the darkness flies.

Great Nimi spake to Vasava, and all his flesh did creep:

“Who art thou? or a demigod or Sakka’s self must be:

For I have never seen or heard such glory as I see.”

Then Vasava to Nimi spake, knowing his flesh did creep:

Sakka, the king of gods, I am; to visit you I’m here;

Ask what you will, O king, and let your flesh not creep for fear.”

Then Nimi spake to Vasava, this invitation made:

“Most puissant lord of all that breathe, this question solve for me:

Holy to live, or alms to give, which should more fruitful be?”

Then Vasava to Nimi spake, solving his question so,

And told the fruit of holy life to him who did not know:

“He’s born a Khattiya, who lives holy in the third degree:

A god, the middle; and the first brings perfect purity.”

Not easy are these states to win by any charity,

Which hermits who have left the world win by austerity.”

By these verses he illustrated the great fruitfulness of a holy life, and then recited others, naming the kings who in times past had been unable to get beyond the domain of sense by giving great gifts:

“Dudipa, Sagara, Sela, Mucalinda, Bhagirasa,

Usinara and Atthaka, Assaka, and Puthujjana,

Yea, kings and brahmins, Khattiya chiefs, many and many a one,

For all their sacrifice, beyond the Peta world came none.”

Having thus explained how much greater was the fruitfulness of holy life than that of almsgiving, he described those ascetics who by the holy life had passed the Peta world to be born in Brahma’s heaven, and said:

“These holy hermits who had left the world,

Seven sages, passed beyond: Yamahanu,

Somayaga, Manojava, Samudda,

Magha, and Bharata, and Kalikara:

Four others: Kassapa, Angirasa,

Akitti, Kisavaccha, these besides.”

So far, he described by tradition the great fruit of a holy life; but now he went on, declaring what he had himself seen:

“Sida’s a river in the north, unnavigable, deep:

About it, like a fire of reeds, blaze golden mountains steep,

With creepers filled and fragrant plants river and hills as well.

Thereby ten thousand eremites once on a time did dwell.

Noble am I, who kept the vow of temperance, self-control,

Almsgiving: solitary then tended each stedfast soul.

Caste or no caste, the upright man I would attend at need:

For every mortal man is bound by his own act and deed.

Apart from righteousness, all castes are sure to sink to hell:

All castes are purified if they are righteous and act well.”

After this, he said: “But, great king, although holy living is more fruitful by far than almsgiving, yet both these are the thoughts of great men: do you be watchful in both, give alms and follow virtue.” With this advice, he went to his own place.

Then the company of gods said: “Sire, we have not seen you lately; where have you been?” “Sirs, a doubt arose in the mind of King Nimi at Mithila, and I went to resolve the question, and to place him beyond doubt.” And then he described the occurrence in verse:

“Listen to me, Sirs, one and all that here assembled be:

Men who are righteous differ much in caste and quality.

There is King Nimi, wise and good, the better part who chose—

King of Videha, gave great gifts, that conqueror of his foes;

And as these bounteous gifts he gave, behold this doubt arose:

Which is more fruitful—holy life or giving alms? who knows?”

So he spoke, without omission, telling the king’s quality. This made the deities long to see that king; and they said, “Sire, King Nimi is our teacher; by following his admonitions, by his means, we have attained to the joy of godhood. We wish to see him—send for him, Sire, and show him to us!” Sakka consented, and sent Matali: “Friend Matali, yoke my royal car, go to Mithila, place King Nimi in the divine chariot and bring him here.” Matali obeyed and departed. Whilst Sakka was talking with the gods, and giving his orders to Matali, and sending his chariot, one month had past by men’s reckoning. So it was the holy day of the full moon: King Nimi opening the eastern window was sitting on the upper floor, surrounded by his courtiers, contemplating virtue; and just as the moon’s disk rose in the east this chariot appeared. The people had eaten their evening meal, and sat at their doors talking comfortably together. “Why, there are two moons to-day!” they cried. As they gossiped, the chariot became plain to their view. “No, it is no moon,” they said, “but a chariot!” In due course there appeared Matali’s team of a thousand thoroughbreds, and the car of Sakka, and they wondered whom that could be for? Ah, their king was righteous; for him Sakka’s divine car must be sent; Sakka must wish to see their king. So in delight they cried out:

“A marvel in the world, to make one shiver with delight:

For glorious Videha comes the car divine in sight!”

As the people talked and talked, swift as the wind came Matali, who turned the chariot, and brought it to rest out of the way by the sill of the window, and called on the king to enter.

Explaining this, the Master said:

“The mighty Matali, the charioteer

Of heaven, summoned now Videha’s king

Who lived in Mithila: “Come, noble king,

Lord of the world, upon this chariot mount:

Indra and all the gods, the Thirty-three,

Would see you, waiting in Sudhamma Hall.”

The king thought, “I shall see the gods’ dwelling-place, which I never have seen; and I shall be showing kindness to Matali,” so he addressed his women and all the people, and said—“In a short time I shall return: you must be watchful, do good and give alms.” Then he got into the car.

The Master said, to explain this :

“Then with all speed, Videha’s king arose,

And went towards the chariot, and got in.

When he was in it, Matali thus spoke:

“By which road shall I take you, noble king?

Where dwell the wicked, or where dwell the good?”

At this the king thought—“I have never seen either of these places before, and I should like to see both.” He answered:

“Matali, charioteer divine, both places I would see:

Both where the righteous men abide, and where the wicked be.”

Matali thinking, “One cannot see both at once; I will question him,” recited a stanza:

“Which first, great monarch, noble king—which place first would you see,

That where the righteous men abide, or where the wicked be?”

Then the king, thinking that go to heaven he would in any case, and that he might as well choose to see hell, recited the next stanza:

“I’d see the place of sinful men; please let me go to hell;

Where they who once did cruel deeds and where the wicked dwell."

Then he just showed him Vetarani, the river of hell.

To explain this, the Master said;

"Matali showed the king Vetarani,

A river stinking, full of corrosive brine,

Hot, covered all with burning flames of fire."

The king was terrified when he saw creatures thus sorely tormented in Vetarani, and he asked Matali what sins they had done. Matali told him.

This the Master explained:

"Then Nimi, when he saw the people fall

In this deep river-flood, asked Matali

"Fear comes on me to see it, charioteer:

Tell me, what is the sin these mortals did

Who are cast in the river?" He replied,

Describing how sin ripens and bears fruit:

"Who in the world of life are strong themselves,

Yet hurt the weak, oppress them, doing sin,

These cruel creatures begat sin, and they

Are cast into the stream Vetarani."

Thus did Matali answer his question. And when the king had seen the hell Vetarani, he caused this place to disappear, and driving the chariot onwards showed him the place where they are torn by dogs and other beasts. He answered the, king's question as follows.

This the Master explained:

"Black dogs and speckled vultures, flocks of crows

Most horrid, prey upon them. When I look,

Fear seizes on me. Tell me, Matali,

What sin have these committed, charioteer,

Whom ravens prey on?" Matali replied,

Describing how sin ripens and bears fruit:

"These are the churls, the misers, foul of tongue

To brahmins and ascetics, that do hurt;

These cruel creatures begat sin, and they

Are those you see of ravens here the prey."

His other questions are answered in the same way.

"Their bodies all ablaze they lie prostrate,

Pounded with red-hot lumps: when I behold,

Fear seizes on me. Tell me, Matali,

What sins have these committed, charioteer,

Who lie there beaten with the red-hot lumps?"

Then Matali the charioteer replied,

Describing how sin ripens and bears fruit:

"These in the world of life were sinful men,

Who hurt and did torment those without sin,

Both men and women, sinful as they were.

These cruel creatures begat sin, and they

Now lie there beaten with the red-hot lumps."

"Others lie struggling in a pit of coals,

Roaring, their bodies charred: when I behold,

Fear seizes on me: tell me, Matali,

What sin have these committed, charioteer,

Who lie there struggling in the fiery pit?”

Then Matali the charioteer replied,

Describing how sin ripens and bears fruit:

“These are they who before a crowd of men

Suborned a witness and forswore a debt;

And thus destroying people, mighty king,

These cruel creatures begat sin, and they

Lie there now struggling in the pit of coals.”

“Blazing and flaming, all one mass of fire,

I see an iron cauldron, huge and great:

Fear comes upon me, as I look upon it.

Matali, tell me, charioteer divine—

What sin these mortals did, that here headfirst

They’re cast into the iron cauldron huge?”

Then answered Matali the charioteer,

Describing how sin ripens and bears fruit:

“Whoso has hurt a brahmin or ascetic,

Foul men of sin, and he a virtuous man,

Those cruel creatures begat sin, and they

Now headlong fall into the iron bowl.”

“They wring them by the neck and cast them in,

Filling the cauldron full of boiling water!

Fear seizes on me: tell me, Matali,

What sin has been committed by those mortals,

That with their heads all battered, there they lie?”

Then answered Matali the charioteer,

Describing how sin ripens and bears fruit:

“These are the wicked men who in the world

Caught birds, and did destroy them, mighty king;

And thus, destroying other creatures, they

By these their cruel acts gave rise to sin,

And they lie yonder, with their own necks wrung.”

“There flows a river, deep, with shallow banks,

Easy of access: thither go the men,

Scorcht with the heat, and drink: but as they drink,

The water turns to chaff; which when I see,

Fear seizes on me. Tell me, Matali,

What sin has been committed by those mortals,

That as they drink, the water turns to chaff?”

Then answered Matali the charioteer,

Describing how sin ripens and bears fruit:

“These men are they who mixt good grain with chaff,

And sold it to a buyer, doing ill;

Therefore now scorcht with heat and parcht with thirst,

Even as they drink, the water turns to chaff.”

“With spikes and spears and arrowheads they pierce

Those loudly-wailing folk on either side:

Fear seizes on me: tell me, Matali,

What sin has been committed by those mortals,

That they lie yonder riddled with the spears?”

Then answered Matali the charioteer,

Describing how sin ripens and bears fruit:

“These in the world of life were wicked men

Who took what was not theirs, and lived upon it—

Goats, sheep, kine, bulls, corn, treasure, silver, gold:

These cruel creatures begat sin, and they

Now yonder lie all riddled with the spears.”

“Who are these fastened by the neck I see,

Some cut to pieces, others all to-torn:

Fear seizes on me: tell me, Matali,

What sin has been committed by those mortals,

That they lie yonder torn in little bits?”

Then answered Matali the charioteer,

Describing how sin ripens and bears fruit:

“Fishers and butchers, hunters of the boar,

Slayers of cattle, bulls, and goats, who slew

And laid the corpses in the slaughter-house,

These cruel creatures begat sin, and they

Are lying yonder torn in little bits.”

“Yon lake of filth and ordure, stinking foul,

With evil scent unclean, where starving men

Eat of the contents! this when I behold,

Fear seizes on me: tell me, Matali,

What sin has been committed by those mortals,

Whom there I see devouring dirt and filth?”

Then answered Matali the charioteer,

Describing how sin ripens and bears fruit:

“These are malicious persons, who, for hurt

Of others, lived with them, and harmed their friends:

These cruel creatures begat sin, and now,

Poor fools, they have ordure and filth to eat.”

“Yon lake is full of blood, and stinking foul,

With evil scent unclean, where scorcht with heat

Men drink the contents! which when I behold,

Fear seizes on me; tell me, Matali,

What sin has been committed by those mortals,

That they must now drink of the draught of blood?”

Then answered Matali the charioteer,

Describing how sin ripens and bears fruit:

“They who have slain a mother or a father,

Whom they should reverence; excommunicate

These cruel creatures begat sin, and they

Are those who yonder drink the draught of blood.”

“That tongue see, pierced with a hook, like as a shield

Stuck with a hundred barbs; and who are those

Who struggle leaping like a fish on land,

And roaring, drabble spittle? when I see it,

Fear seizes on me: tell me, Matali,

What sin has been committed by those mortals,

Whom I see yonder swallowing the hook?”

Then answered Matali the charioteer,

Describing how sin ripens and bears fruit:

“These men are they who in the market-place

Haggling and cheapening from their greed of gain

Have practised knavery, and thought it hidden,

Like one that hooks a fish: but for the knave

There is no safety, dogged by all his deeds:

These cruel creatures begat sin, and they

Are lying yonder swallowing the hook.”

“Yon women, bent and broken, stretching their arms

And wailing, wretched, smeared with stains of blood,

Like cattle in the shambles, stand waist-deep

Buried in earth, the upper trunk ablaze!

Fear seizes on me: tell me, Matali,

What sin has been committed by those women,

That now they stand all buried in the earth

Waist-deep, the upper trunk a mass of flame?”

Then answered Matali the charioteer,

Describing how sin ripens and bears fruit:

“They were of noble birth when in the world,

Lived lives unclean, did deeds of wickedness,

Were traitors, left their husbands, and besides

Did other things to satisfy their lust;

They spent their lives in dalliance; therefore now

Stand blazing, waist-deep buried in the earth.”

“Why do they seize yon persons by the legs

And cast them headlong into Naraka ?

Fear seizes on me: tell me, Matali,

What sin has been committed by those men,

That they are so hurled headlong into Naraka?”

Then answered Matali the charioteer,

Describing how sin ripens and bears fruit:

“These in the world did evil, did seduce

Another’s wife, stole his most precious thing,

So now are headlong cast in Naraka.

They suffer misery for countless years

In hell; there is no safety for the sinner,

But he is ever dogged by his own deeds.

These cruel creatures begat sin, and they

Are now cast headlong into Naraka.”

With these words, Matali the charioteer made this hell to disappear also, and driving the chariot onwards, showed him the hell of torment for heretics. On request he explained it to him.

“Many and various causes I have seen

Most terrible, amongst these hells: to see them

Fear seizes on me: tell me, Matali,

What sin has been committed by those mortals,

Why they must suffer this excessive pain,

So sharp, so cruel, so intolerable?"

Then answered Matali the charioteer,

Describing how sin ripens and bears fruit:

"Who in the world were wicked heretics,

Who put their faith in false delusion,

Made proselytes of others to their heresy,

They by their heresy begetting sin

Must therefore suffer this excessive pain,

So sharp, so cruel, so intolerable."

Now in heaven the gods were sitting in Sudhamma. Hall, looking for the king's coming. "Matali is a long time away," thought Sakka; and he perceived the reason, so he said, "Matali is going the round as guide, showing all the different hells to the king and telling him what sin led to each hell. So calling to him a young god, very swift, he said to him—"Go tell Matali to bring the king quickly hither. He is using up King Nimi's life; he must not go round all the hells." With speed the young god went, and gave his message. When Matali heard it, he said, "We must not delay"; then showing to the king at one flash all the great hells in the four quarters, he recited a stanza:

"Now, mighty monarch, thou hast seen the place

Of sinners, and where cruel men are sent,

And where the wicked go: now, royal sage,

Come let us hasten to the king of heaven."

With this speech he turned the chariot towards heaven. As the king went towards heaven he beheld in the air the mansion of a goddess, Birani, with pinnacles of jewels and gold, ornamented in great magnificence, having a park and a lake covered with lilies, and

surrounded with trees worthy of the place: and there was this goddess seated upon a divan in a gabled chamber towards the front, and attended by a thousand nymphs, looking out through an open window. He asked Matali who she was, and Matali explained it to him.

“Behold yon mansion with five pinnacles:

There, deckt with garlands, lies upon a. couch

A most puissant woman, who assumes

All kinds of majesty and wondrous power.

Joy comes on me to see it, charioteer:

But tell me, Matali, what her good deeds,

That she is happy in this heavenly mansion.”

Then answered Matali the charioteer,

Describing how good ripens and bears fruit:

“Heard you ever in the world of Birani?

A brahmin’s home-born slave, who once received

A guest at the right moment, welcomed him

As mother might her son.; and therefore now,

Generous and chaste, lives happy in this mansion.”

With these words, Matali drove the chariot onwards and showed him the seven golden mansions of the god Sonadinna. The other, when he saw these and the glory of the god, asked an explanation, which Matali gave.

“There are seven mansions, shining clear and bright,

Where dwells a mighty being, richly dight,

Who with his wives inhabits them. Delight

Moves me, to see it: tell me, Matali,

What is the good this mortal did, that he

Dwells happy in this mansion heavenly?”

Then answered Matali the charioteer,

Declaring how good ripens and bears fruit:

“This once was Sonadinna, one who gave

With royal bounty, and for hermits wrought

Seven hermitages: all their needs did crave

He faithfully provided. Food he brought,

Bedding to lie on, clothes to wear, and light,

Contented with those men of life upright,

He kept the sabbath day, and each fortnight

The eighth, the fourteenth and the fifteenth days;

Generous, controlled, he walked in holy ways,

So now dwells in this mansion of delight.”

Thus he described the deeds of Sonadinna; then driving onwards his chariot, he showed a mansion of crystal: in height it was five and twenty leagues, it had hundreds of columns made of the seven precious things, hundreds of pinnacles, it was set about with lattices and little bells, a banner of gold and silver flew, beside it was a park and grove full of many bright flowers, with a lovely lake of lilies, nymphs cunning to sing and to make music were there in plenty. Then the king seeing this asked what were the deeds of these nymphs, and the other told him.

“Yon mansion built of crystal, shining bright,

With pinnacles uplifted in the height,

With food and drink in plenty, and a throng

Of goodly women skilled in dance and song!

Joy seizes on me: tell me, Matali,

What good these women did, that now in heaven

They dwell within this palace of delight?”

Then answered Matali the charioteer,

Describing how good ripens and bears fruit:

“These women ever walked in holy ways,

Faithful lay sisters, kept the holy days,

Generous, controlled, and watchful, heart-serene,

Now happy in the mansion you have seen.”

He drove the chariot on, and showed a mansion of gems: it stood on a level spot, lofty, like a mountain of gems, bright shining, full of gods that played and sang divine music. Seeing this, the king asked what were the deeds of these gods, and the other replied.

“Yon mansion built of jewels, shining bright,

Symmetrical, proportioned, a fair sight,

Where in divinest melody around,

Songs, dances, drums and tabours do resound:

I never have beheld a sight so fair,

Nor sounds so sweet have ever heard, I swear!

Joy seizes on me: tell me, Matali,

What good these mortals did, that now I see

Happy in this heavenly mansion of delight?”

Then answered Matali the charioteer,

Describing how good ripens and bears fruit:

“These were lay Brethren in the world of men:

Provided parks and wells, or water drew

In the well-shed, and tranquil saints did feed,

Found clothes, food, drink and bedding, every need,

Contented with these men of life upright,

Who kept the sabbath day, and each fortnight

The eighth, the fourteenth and the fifteenth days;

Generous, controlled, they walked in holy ways,

And now dwell in this mansion of delight."

Thus having described the deeds of these persons, he drove on and showed him another crystal mansion: with many a pinnacle, and all manner of flowers all about, and fine trees, echoing with the songs of birds of all kinds, by which flowed a river of pure water, become the dwelling-place of a virtuous person surrounded by a company of nymphs. Seeing this the king asked what his deeds were; and the other told him.

"Yon mansion built of crystal, shining bright,

Its pinnacles uplifted in the height,

With food and drink in plenty, and a throng

Of goodly women skilled in dance and song,

And rivers, fringed with many a flower and tree—

Joy seizes on me: tell me, Matali,

What good this mortal did in life, that he

Rejoices in this mansion heavenly?"

Then answered Matali the charioteer,

Describing how good ripens and bears fruit:

"At Kimbila a householder was he,

Bounteous, gave parks and wells, and faithfully

Drew water, and the tranquil saints did feed,

Found clothes, food, drink and bedding, every need,

Contented with these men of life upright,

He kept the sabbath day, and each fortnight

The eighth, the fourteenth and the fifteenth days;

Generous, controlled, he walked in holy ways,

And now dwells in this mansion of delight."

Thus he described the deeds of this man, and drove on. Then he showed another crystal mansion: this even more than the last was grown about with all manner of fruit and flowers and clumps of trees. This seen, the king asked what were the deeds of this man who was so fortunate, and the other told him.

"Yon mansion, built of jewels, shining bright,

Its pinnacles uplifted in the height,

With food and drink in plenty, and a throng

Of goodly women skilled in dance and song,

And rivers, fringed with many a tree and flower,

Royal and elephant trees, and mango, sal,

Roseapple sweet, and tindook, piyal bower,

And orchard-trees fruit-bearing one and all—

Joy seizes on me: tell me, Matali,

What good this mortal did in life, that he

Rejoices in this mansion heavenly?"

Then answered Matali the charioteer,

Describing how good ripens and bears fruit:

"At Mithila a householder was he,

Bounteous, gave parks and wells, and faithfully

Drew water, and the tranquil saints did feed,

Found clothes, food, drink and bedding, all their need,

Contented with these men of life upright,

He kept the sabbath day, and each fortnight

The eighth, the fourteenth and the fifteenth days;

Generous, controlled, he walked in holy ways,

And now dwells in this mansion of delight."

Thus he described the deeds of this man also, and drove on. Then he showed another mansion of jewels, like the first, and at the king's request told him the deeds of a god who was happy there.

"Yon mansion built of jewels, shining bright,

Symmetrical, proportioned, a fair sight,

Where in divinest melody around,

Songs, dances, drums and tabours do resound:

I never have beheld a sight so fair,

Nor sounds so sweet have ever heard, I swear!

Joy seizes on me: tell me, Matali,

What good these mortals did, whom now I see

Happy in this heavenly mansion of delight?"

Then answered Matali the charioteer,

Describing how good ripens and bears fruit:

"Once a Benares householder was he,

Bounteous, gave parks and wells, and faithfully

Drew water, and the tranquil saints did feed,

Found clothes, food, drink and bedding, all their need,

Contented with these men of life upright,

He kept the sabbath day, and each fortnight

The eighth, the fourteenth and the fifteenth days;

Generous, controlled, he walked in holy ways,

And now dwells in this mansion of delight."

Again driving on, he showed a mansion of gold, like the sun in his strength, and at the king's request told him the deeds of the god who dwelt there.

"Behold yon mansion made of flaming fire,

Red like the sun whereas he riseth higher!

Joy seizes on me: tell me, Matali,

What good this mortal did in life, that he

Rejoices in this mansion heavenly?"

Then answered Matali the charioteer,

Describing how good ripens and bears fruit:

"Once a Savatthi householder was he,

Bounteous, gave parks and wells, and faithfully

Drew water, and the tranquil saints did feed,

Found clothes, food, drink and bedding, all their need,

Contented with these men of life upright,

He kept the sabbath day, and each fortnight

The eighth, the fourteenth and the fifteenth days;

Generous, controlled, he walked in holy ways,

And now dwells in this mansion of delight."

As he thus described these eight mansions, Sakka, king of the gods, thinking that Matali was a long time in coming, sent another swift god with a message. Matali, on hearing the message, saw that there must be no more delay; so at one flash he showed many mansions, and described to the king what were the deeds of those who dwelt in then.

"See many fiery mansions in the air,

As in a bank of cloud the lightning's flare!

Joy seizes on me: tell me, Matali,

What good these mortals did, whom now I see

Rejoicing in the heavenly mansion there?”

Then answered Matali the charioteer,

Describing how good ripens and bears fruit:

“Good-living, well-instructed, full of faith,

They acted as the Master’s teaching saith;

By living as the Allwise Buddha told

They came to these abodes you now behold.”

Having thus shown him these mansions in the sky, he set out to come before Sakka with these words:

“Thou’st seen the places of the good and wicked in the air;

Unto the monarch of the gods come let us now repair.”

With these words he drove on, and showed him the seven hills which make a ring about Sineru; to explain how the king questioned Matali on seeing these, the Master said:

“As the king journeyed on his way in the celestial car

Drawn by a thousand steeds, he saw the mountain peaks afar

In Sida ocean, and he asked, “Tell me what hills these are.”

At this question of Nimi the god Matali replied:

“The mighty hills Sudassara, Karavika, Isadhara,

Yugandhara, Nemindhara, Vinataka, Assakanna.

These hills are in Sidantara, in order there they be,

Which high-upstanding in the air thou, mighty king, dost see.”

Thus he showed the Heaven of the Four Great Kings, and drove on until he could show the statues of Indra which stood around the great Cittakuta gateway of the Heaven of the Thirty-three. At this sight the king asked, and the other answered.

“This place so fine, elaborate, adorned,

Set round with Indra’s statues, as it were

By tigers guarded— as I see this sight,

Joy comes upon me: tell me, Matali,

What is the name of this that I behold?”

Then answered Matali the charioteer,

Describing how good ripens and bears fruit:

“This place is Cittakuta which you see,

The entrance to the place of heaven’s king,

The doorway of the Mountain Beautiful:

Elaborate, adorned, and set about

With Indra’s statues, as by tigers guarded.

Enter, wise king! enter this spotless place.”

With these words Matali led the king within; so it is said—

“Journeying in the car celestial,

Drawn by a thousand steeds, the mighty king

Beheld the place where all the gods assemble.”

And as he passed along, standing in the car still, he saw the place of the gods’ assemblage in Sudhamma, and questioned Matali, who replied.

“As in the autumn is the sky all blue,

So is that jewelled mansion to the view.

Joy comes upon me: tell me, Matali,

What is this mansion which I now behold?”

Then answered Matali the charioteer,

Describing how good ripens and bears fruit:

“This is Sudhamma, where the gods assemble,

Supported by fair columns, finely wrought,

Eight-sided, made of gems and jewels rare,

Where dwell the Three-and-thirty, with their chief,

Lord Indra, thinking of the happiness

Of gods and men: enter this lovely place,

O mighty monarch, where the gods abide!”

The gods on their part sat watching for his arrival; and when they heard that the king was come, they went out to meet him with divine flowers and perfumes as far as the great Cittakuta gateway; and presenting him with their flowers and perfumes they brought him to Sudhamma Hall. The king dismounting from the car entered the hall of the gods, and the gods offered him a seat, Sakka the like and all pleasures too.

Explaining this, the Master said :

“The gods beheld the king arrive: and then, their guest to greet,

Cried—“Welcome, mighty monarch, whom we are so glad to meet!

O king! beside the king of gods we pray you take a seat.”

And Sakka welcomed Vedeha, the king of Mithila town,

Ay, Vasava offered him all joys and prayed him to sit down.

“Amid the rulers of the world O welcome to our land:

Dwell with the gods, O king! who have all wishes at command,

Enjoy immortal pleasures, where the Three-and-thirty stand.”

Thus Sakka offered him celestial pleasures; and the king declining made answer :

“As when a chariot, or when goods are given on demand,

So is it to enjoy a bliss given by another’s hand.

I care not blessings to receive given by another’s hand,

My goods are mine and mine alone when on my deeds I stand.

I’ll go and do much good to men, give alms throughout the land,

Will follow virtue, exercise control and self-command:

He that so acts is happy, and fears no remorse at hand.”

Thus did the Great Being discourse to the gods with honeyed sound; and discoursing he stayed seven days by men’s reckoning, and gave delight to the company of the gods. And standing in the midst of the gods he described the virtue of Matali:

“A most obliging personage is Matali the charioteer,

The places where the good abide and where the bad, he showed me clear.”

Then the king took leave of Sakka, saying that he wished to go to the world of men. Then Sakka said, “Friend Matali, take King Nimi at once to Mithila.” He got ready the chariot; the king exchanged friendly greetings with the company of gods, left them and entered the car. Matali drove the car eastwards to Mithila. There the crowd, seeing the chariot, were delighted to know that their king was returning. Matali passed round the city of Mithila rightwise, and put down the Great Being at the same window, took leave, and returned to his own place. A great number of people surrounded the king, and asked him what the gods’ world was like. The king, describing the happiness of the gods and of Sakka their king, exhorted them to give alms and do good, for so they should be born in that divine place.

Afterwards, when his barber found a white hair and told him, he made the barber put aside that white hair; then he gave a village to the barber, and desiring to renounce the world, made his son king in his place. So when asked why he wished to renounce the world, he recited the stanza, “Lo, these grey hairs”; and like the former kings he renounced the world, and dwelt in the same mango grove, developing the Four Excellencies, and became destined to Brahma’s heaven.

It is his renouncing of the world which is described by the Master in the last stanza:

“Thus spake King Nimi, lord of Mithila,

And having made a mighty sacrifice,

Entered upon the path of self-control.”

And his son, named Kalara janaka, also renounced the world, and brought his line to an end.

When the Master had finished this discourse, he said—“So, Brethren, this is not the first time the Tathagata left the world; he did the same before.” Then he identified the Birth: “At that time, Anuruddha was Sakka, Ananda was Matali, the eighty-four kings were the

Buddha’s followers, and King Nimi was I myself.”

The Jātaka, or Stories of the Buddha’s Former Births, edited by E.B. Cowell, published by The Cambridge University Press.

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