Ja 73 — Saccamkira Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

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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

“They knew the world.”—This story was told by the Master while at the Bamboo-grove, about going about to kill. For, seated in the Hall of Truth, the Brotherhood was talking of Devadatta’s wickedness, saying, “Sirs, Devadatta has no knowledge of the Master’s excellence; he actually goes about to kill him!” Here the Master entered the Hall and asked what they were discussing. 323] Being told, he said, “This is not the first time, Brethren, that Devadatta has gone about to kill me; he did just the same in bygone days also.” And so saying, he told this story of the past.

Once on a time Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares. He had a son named Prince Wicked. Fierce and cruel was he, like a scotched snake; he spoke to nobody without abuse or blows. Like grit in the eye was this Prince to all folk both within and without the palace, or like a ravening ogre,—so dreaded and fell was he.

One day, wishing to disport himself in the river, he went with a large retinue to the water side. And a great storm came on, and utter darkness set in. “Hi there!” cried he to his servants; “take me into mid-stream, bathe me there, and then bring me back again.” So they took him into mid-stream and there took counsel together, saying, “What will the king do to us? Let us kill this wicked wretch here and now! So in you go,. you pest!” they cried, as they flung him into the water. When they made their way ashore, they were asked where the prince was, and replied, “We don’t see him; finding the storm come on, he must have come out of the river and gone home ahead of us.”

The courtiers went into the king’s presence, and the king asked where his son was. “We do not know, sire,” said they; “a storm came on, and we came away in the belief that he must have gone on ahead.” At once the king had the gates thrown open; down to the riverside he went and bade diligent search be made up and down for the missing prince. But no trace of him could be found. For, in the darkness of the storm, he had been swept away by the current, and, coming across a tree-trunk, had climbed on to it, and so floated down

stream, crying lustily in the agony of his fear of drowning.

Now there had been a rich merchant living in those days at Benares, who had died, leaving forty crores buried in the banks of that same river. And because of his craving for riches, he was reborn as a snake at the spot under which lay his dear treasure. And also in the selfsame spot another man had hidden thirty crores, and because of his craving for riches was re-born as a rat at the same spot. In rushed the water into their dwelling-place; and the two creatures, escaping by the way by which the water rushed in, were making their way athwart the stream, when they chanced upon the tree-trunk to which the prince was clinging. The snake climbed up at one end, and the rat at the other; and so both got a footing with the prince on the trunk.

Also there grew on the river's bank a Silk-cotton tree, in which lived a young parrot; and this tree, being uprooted by the swollen waters, fell into the river. The heavy rain beat down the parrot when it tried to fly, and it alighted in its fall upon this same tree-trunk. And so there were now these four floating down, stream together upon the tree.

Now the Bodhisatta had been re-born in those days as a brahmin in the North-West country. Renouncing the world for the hermit's life on reaching manhood, he had built himself a hermitage by a bend of the river; and there he was now living. As he was pacing to and fro, at midnight, he heard the loud cries of the prince, and thought thus within himself—"This fellow-creature must not perish thus before the eyes of so merciful and compassionate a hermit as I am. I will rescue him from the water, and save his life." So he shouted cheerily, "Be not afraid! Be not afraid!" and plunging across stream, seized hold of the tree by one end, and, being as strong as an elephant, drew it in to the bank with one long pull, and set the prince safe and sound upon the shore. Then becoming aware of the snake and the rat and the parrot, he carried them to his hermitage, and there lighting a fire, warmed the animals first, as being the weaker, and afterwards the prince. This done, he brought fruits of various kinds and set them before his guests, looking after the animals first and the prince afterwards. This enraged the young prince, who said within himself, "This rascally hermit pays no respect to my royal birth, but actually gives brute beasts precedence over me." And he conceived hatred against the Bodhisatta!

A few days later, when all four had recovered their strength and the waters had subsided, the snake bade farewell to the hermit with these words, "Father, you have done me a great service. I am not poor, for I have forty crores of gold hidden at a certain spot. Should you ever want money, all my hoard shall be yours. You have only to come to the spot and call 'Snake.' Next the rat took his leave with a like promise to the hermit as to his treasure, bidding the hermit come and call out 'Rat.' Then the parrot bade farewell, saying, "Father, silver and gold have I none; but should you ever want for choice rice, come to where I dwell and call out 'Parrot;' and I with the aid of my kinsfolk will give you many waggon-loads of rice." Last cane the prince. His heart was filled with base ingratitude and with a determination to put his benefactor to death, if the Bodhisatta should come to visit him. But, concealing his intent, he said, "Come, father, to me when I am king, and I will bestow on you the Four Requisites." So saying, he took his departure, and not long after succeeded to the throne.

The desire came on the Bodhisatta to put their professions to the test; and first of all he went to the snake and standing hard by its abode, called out ‘Snake.’ At the word the snake darted forth and with every mark of respect said, “Father, in this place there are forty crones in gold. Dig them up and take them all.” “It is well,” said the Bodhisatta; “when I need them, I will not forget.” Then bidding adieu to the snake, he went on to where the rat lived, and called out ‘Rat.’ And the rat did as the snake had done. Going next to the parrot, and calling out ‘Parrot,’ the bird at once flew down at his call from the tree-top, and respectfully asked whether it was the Bodhisatta’s wish that he with the aid of his kinsfolk should gather paddy for the Bodhisatta from the region round the Himalayas. The Bodhisatta dismissed the parrot also with a promise that, if need arose, he would not forget the bird’s offer. Last of all, being minded to test the king in his turn, the Bodhisatta came to the royal pleasaunce, and on the day after his arrival made his way, carefully dressed, into the city on his round for alms. Just at that moment, the ungrateful king, seated in all his royal splendour on his elephant of state, was passing in solemn Procession round the city followed by a vast retinue. Seeing the Bodhisatta from afar, he thought to himself, “Here’s that rascally hermit come to quarter himself and his appetite on me. I must have his head off before he can publish to the world the service he rendered me.” With this intent, he signed to his attendants, and, on their asking what was his pleasure, said, “Methinks yonder rascally hermit is here to importune me. See that the pest does not come near my person, but seize and bind him; flog him at every street-corner; and then march him out of the city, chop off his head at the place of execution, and impale his body on a stake.”

Obedient to their king’s command, the attendants laid the innocent Great Being in bonds and flogged him at every street-corner on the way to the place of execution. But all their floggings failed to move the Bodhisatta or to wring from him any cry of “Oh, my mother and father!” All he did was to repeat this Stanza—

They knew the world, who framed this proverb true—

‘A log pays better salvage than some men.’

These lines he repeated wherever he was flogged, till at last the wise among the bystanders asked the hermit what service he had rendered to their king. Then the Bodhisatta told the whole story, ending with the words,—“So it comes to pass that by rescuing him from the torrent I brought all this woe upon myself. And when I bethink me how I have left unheeded the words of the wise of old, I exclaim as you have heard.”

Filled with indignation at the recital, the nobles and brahmins and all classes with one accord cried out, “This ungrateful king does not recognise even the goodness of this good man who saved his majesty’s life. How can we have any profit from this king? Seize the tyrant!” And in their anger they rushed upon the king from every side, and slew him there and then, as he rode on his elephant, with arrows and javelins and stones and clubs and any weapons that came to hand. The corpse they dragged by the heels to a ditch and flung it in. Then they anointed the Bodhisatta king and set him to rule over them.

As he was ruling in righteousness, one day the desire came on him again to try the snake and the rat and the parrot; and followed by a large retinue, he came to where the snake dwelt. At the call of ‘Snake,’ out came the snake from his hole and with every mark of respect said, “Here, my lord, is your treasure; take it.” Then the king delivered the forty crores of gold to his attendants, and proceeding to where the rat dwelt, called, ‘Rat.’ Out came the rat, and saluted the king, and gave up its thirty crores. Placing this treasure too in the hands of his attendants, the king went on to where the parrot dwelt, and called ‘Parrot.’ And in like manner the bird came, and bowing down at the king’s feet asked whether it should collect rice for his majesty. “We will not trouble you,” said the king, “till rice is needed. Now let us be going.” So with the seventy crores of gold, and with the rat, the snake, and the parrot as well, the king journeyed back to the city. Here, in a noble palace, to the state-story of which he mounted, he caused the treasure to be lodged and guarded; he had a golden tube made for the snake to dwell in, a crystal casket to house the rat, and a cage of gold for the parrot. Every day too by the king’s command food was served to the three creatures in vessels of gold,—sweet parched-corn for the parrot and snake, and scented rice for the rat. And the king abounded in charity and all good works. Thus in harmony and goodwill one with another, these four lived their lives; and when their end came, they passed away to fare according to their deserts.

Said the Master, “This is not the first time, Brethren, that Devadatta has gone about to kill me; he did the like in the past also.” His lesson ended, he chewed the connexion and identified the Birth by saying, “Devadatta was King Wicked in those days, Sariputta the snake, Moggallana the rat, Ananda the parrot, and I myself the righteous King who won a kingdom.”

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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Vol. 2, translated by W.H.D. Rouse, 1895.

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