Ja 77 — Mahasupina Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

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Edited by E. B. Cowell

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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

“Bulls first, and trees.”—This story was told by the Master while at Jetavana about sixteen wonderful dreams. For in the last watch of one night (so tradition says) the King of Kosala, who had been asleep all the night, dreamed sixteen great dreams, and woke up in great fright and alarm as to what they might portend for him. So strong was the fear of death upon him that he could not stir, but lay there huddled up on his bed. Now, when the night grew light, his brahmins and chaplains came to him and with due obeisance asked whether his majesty had slept well.

“How could I sleep well, my directors?” answered the king. “For just at daybreak I dreamed sixteen wonderful dreams, and I have been in terror ever since! Tell me, my directors, what it all means.”

“We shall be able to judge, on hearing them.”

Then the king told them his dreams, and asked what those visions would entail upon him.

The brahmins fell a-wringing their hands! “Why wring your hands, brahmins?” asked the king. “Because, sire, these are evil dreams.” “What will come of them?” said the king. “One of three calamities,—harm to your kingdom, to your life, or to your riches.” “Is there a remedy, or is there not?” “Undoubtedly these dreams in themselves are so threatening as to be without remedy; but none the less we will find a remedy for them. Otherwise, what boots our much study and learning?” “What then do you propose to do to avert the evil?” “Wherever four roads meet, we would offer sacrifice, sire.” “My directors,” cried the king in his terror, “my life is in your hands; make haste and work my safety.” “Large sums of money, and large supplies of food of every kind will be ours,” thought the exultant brahmins; and, bidding the king have no fear, they departed from the palace. Outside the town they dug a sacrificial pit and collected a host of fourfooted creatures, perfect and without blemish, and a multitude of birds. But still they discovered something lacking, and

back they kept coming to the king to ask for this that and the other. Now their doings were watched by Queen Mallika, who came to the king and asked what made these brahmins keep coming to him.

“I envy you,” said the king; “a snake in your ear, and you not to know of it!” “What does your majesty mean?” “I have dreamed, oh such unlucky dreams! The brahmins tell me they point to one of three calamities; and they are anxious to offer sacrifices to avert the evil. And this is what brings them here so often.” “But has your majesty consulted the Chief Brahmin both of this world and of the world of devas?” “Who, pray, may he be, my dear?” asked the king. “Know you not that chiefest personage of all the world, the all-knowing and pure, the spotless master-brahmin? Surely, he, the Blessed One, will understand your dreams. Go, ask him.” “And so I will, my queen,” said the king. And away he went to the monastery, saluted the Master, and sat down. “What, pray, brings your majesty here so early in the morning?” asked the Master in his sweet tones. “Sir,” said the king, “just before daybreak I dreamed sixteen wonderful dreams, which so terrified me that I told them to the brahmins. They told me that my dreams boded evil, and that to avert the threatened calamity they must offer sacrifice wherever four roads met. And so they are busy with their preparations, and many living creatures have the fear of death before their eyes. But I pray you, who are the chiefest personage in the world of men and devas, you into whose ken comes all possible knowledge of things past and present and to be,—I pray you tell me what will come of my dreams, O Blessed One.”

“True it is, sire, that there is none other save me, who can tell what your dreams signify or what will come of them. I will tell you. Only first of all relate to me your dreams as they appeared to you.”

“I will, sir,” said the king, and at once began this list, following the order of the dreams’ appearance—

Bulls first, and trees, and cows, and calves,

Horse, dish, she-jackal, waterpot,

A pond, raw rice, and sandal-wood,

And gourds that sank, and stones that swam,

With frogs that gobbled up black snakes,

A crow with gay-plumed retinue,

And wolves in panic-fear of goats!

“How was it, sir, that I had the following one of my dreams? Methought, four black bulls, like collyrium in hue, came from the four cardinal directions to the royal courtyard with avowed intent to fight; and people flocked together to see the bull-fight, till a great crowd

had gathered. But the bulls only made a show of fighting, roared and bellowed, and finally went off without fighting at all. This was my first dream. What will come of it?"

"Sire, that dream shall have no issue in your days or in mine. But hereafter, when kings shall be niggardly and unrighteous, and when folk shall be unrighteous, in days when the world is perverted, when good is waning and evil waxing apace,—in those days of the world's backsliding there shall fall no rain from the heavens, the feet of the storm shall be lamed, the crops shall wither, and famine shall be on the land. Then shall the clouds gather as if for rain from the four quarters of the heavens; there shall be haste first to carry indoors the rice and crops that the women have spread in the sun to dry, for fear the harvest should get wet; and then with spade and basket in hand the men shall go forth to bank up the dykes. As though in sign of coming rain, the thunder shall bellow, the lightning shall flash from the clouds,—but even as the bulls in your dream, that fought not, so the clouds shall flee away without raining. This is what shall come of this dream. But no harm shall come therefrom to you; for it was with regard to the future that you dreamed this dream. What the brahmins told you, was said only to get themselves a livelihood." And when the Master had thus. told the fulfilment of this dream, he said, "Tell me your second dream, sire."

"Sir," said the king, "my second dream was after this manner—Methought little tiny trees and shrubs burst through the soil, and when they had grown scarce a span or two high, they flowered and bore fruit! This was my second dream; what shall come of it?"

"Sire," said the Master, "this dream shall have its fulfilment in days when the world has fallen into decay and when men are shortlived. In times to come the passions shall be strong; quite young girls shall go to live with men, and it shall be with them after the manner of women, they shall conceive and bear children. The flowers typify their issues, and the fruit their offspring. But you, sire, have nothing to fear therefrom. Tell me your third dream, O great king."

"Methought, sir, I saw cows sucking the milk of calves which they had borne that selfsame day. This was my third dream. What shall come of it?"

"This dream too shall have its fulfilment only in days to come, when respect shall cease to be paid to age. For in the future men, shewing no reverence for parents or parents-in-law, shall themselves administer the family estate, and, if such be their good pleasure, shall bestow food and clothing on the old folks, but shall withhold their gifts, if it be not their pleasure to give. Then shall the old folks, destitute and dependent, exist by favour of their own children, like big cows suckled by calves a day old. But you have nothing to fear therefrom. Tell me your fourth dream."

"Methought, sir, I saw men unyoking a team of draught-oxen, sturdy and strong, and setting young steers to draw the load; and the steers, proving unequal to the task laid on them, refused and stood stock-still, so that wains moved not on their way. This was my fourth dream. What shall come of it?"

“Here again the dream shall not have its fulfilment until the future, in the days of unrighteous kings. For in days to come, unrighteous and niggardly kings shall shew no honour to wise lords skilled in precedent, fertile in expedient, and able to get through business; nor shall appoint to the courts of law and justice aged councillors of wisdom and of learning in the law. Nay, they shall honour the very young and foolish, and appoint such to preside in the courts. And these latter, ignorant alike of state-craft and of practical knowledge, shall not be able to bear the burthen of their honours or to govern, but because of their incompetence shall throw off the yoke of office. Whereon the aged and wise lords, albeit right able to cope with all difficulties, shall keep in mind how they were passed over, and shall decline to aid, saying—‘It is no business of ours; we are outsiders; let the boys of the inner circle see to it.’ Hence they shall stand aloof, and ruin shall assail those kings on every hand. It shall be even as when the yoke was laid on the young steers, who were not strong enough for the burthen, and not upon the team of sturdy and strong draught-oxen, who alone were able to do the work. Howbeit, you have nothing to fear therefrom. Tell me your fifth dream.”

“Methought, sir, I saw a horse with a mouth on either side, to which fodder was given on both sides, and it ate with both its mouths. This was my fifth dream. What shall come of it?”

“This dream too shall have its fulfilment only in the future, in the days of unrighteous and foolish kings, who shall appoint unrighteous and covetous men to be judges. These base ones, fools, despising the good, shall take bribes from both sides as they sit in the seat of judgment, and shall be filled with this two-fold corruption, even as the horse that ate fodder with two mouths at once. Howbeit, you have nothing to fear therefrom. Tell me your sixth dream.”

“Methought, sir, I saw people holding out a well-scoured golden bowl worth a hundred thousand pieces, and begging an old jackal to stale therein. And I saw the beast do so. This was my sixth dream. What shall come of it?”

“This dream too shall only have its fulfilment in the future. For in the days to come, unrighteous kings, though sprung of a race of kings, mistrusting the scions of their old nobility, shall not honour them, but exalt in their stead the low-born; whereby the nobles shall be brought low and the law-born raised to lordship. Then shall the great families be brought by very need to seek to live by dependence on the upstarts, and shall offer them their daughters in marriage. And the union of the noble maidens with the low-born shall be like unto the staling of the old jackal in the golden bowl. Howbeit, you have nothing to fear therefrom. Tell me your seventh dream.”

“A man was weaving rope, sir, and as he wove, he threw it down at his feet. Under his bench lay a hungry she jackal, which kept eating the rope as he wove, but without the man knowing it. This is what I saw. This was my seventh dream. What shall come of it?”

“This dream too shall not have its fulfilment till the future. For in days to come, women shall lust after men and strong drink and finery and gadding abroad and after the joys of this world. In their wickedness and profligacy these women shall drink strong drink with

their paramours; they shall flaunt in garlands and perfumes and unguents; and heedless of even the most pressing of their household duties, they shall keep watching for their paramours, even at crevices high up in the outer wall; aye, they shall pound up the very seed-corn that should be sown on the morrow so as to provide good cheer; in all these ways shall they plunder the store won by the hard work of their husbands in field and byre, devouring the poor men's substance even as the hungry jackal under the bench ate up the rope of the rope-maker as he wove it. Howbeit, you have nothing to fear therefrom. Tell me your eighth dream."

"Methought, sir, I saw at a palace gate a big pitcher which was full to the brim and stood amid a number of empty ones. And from the four cardinal points, and from the four intermediate points as well, there kept coming a constant stream of people of all the four castes, carrying water in pipkins and pouring it into the full pitcher. And the water overflowed and ran away. But none the less they still kept on pouring more and more water into the over-flowing vessel, without a single man giving so much as a glance at the empty pitchers. This was my eighth dream. What shall come of it?"

"This dream too shall not have its fulfilment until the future. For in days to come the world shall decay; the kingdom shall grow weak, its kings shall grow poor and niggardly; the foremost among them shall have no more than 100,000 pieces of money in his treasury. Then shall these kings in their need set the whole of the country-folk to work for them; for the kings' sake shall the toiling folk, leaving their own work, sow grain and pulse, and keep watch and reap and thresh and garner; for the kings' sake shall they plant sugar-canes, make and drive sugar-mills, and boil down the molasses; for the kings' sake shall they lay out flower-gardens and orchards, and gather in the fruits. And as they gather in all the divers kinds of produce they shall fill the royal garners to overflowing, not giving so much as a glance at their own empty barns at home. Thus it shall be like filling up the full pitcher, heedless of the quite-empty ones. Howbeit, you have nothing to fear therefrom. Tell me your ninth dream."

"Methought, sir, I saw a deep pool with shelving banks all round and over-grown with the five kinds of lotuses. From every side two-footed creatures and four-footed creatures flocked thither to drink of its waters. The depths in the middle were muddy, but the water was clear and sparkling at the margin where the various creatures went down into the pool. This was my ninth dream. What shall come of it?"

"This dream too shall not have its fulfilment till the future. For in days to come kings shall grow unrighteous; they shall rule after their own will and pleasure, and shall not execute judgment according to righteousness. These kings shall hunger after riches and wax fat on bribes; they shall not shew mercy, love and compassion toward their people, but be fierce and cruel, amassing wealth by crushing their subjects like sugar-canes in a mill and by taxing them even to the uttermost farthing. Unable to pay the oppressive tax, the people Shall fly from village and town and the like, and take refuge upon the borders of the realm; the heart of the land shall be a wilderness, while the borders shall teem with people,—even as the water was muddy in the middle of the pool and clear at the margin. Howbeit, you have nothing to fear therefrom. Tell me your tenth dream."

“Methought, sir, I saw rice boiling in a pot without getting done. By not getting done, I mean that it looked as though it were sharply marked off and kept apart, so that the cooking went on in three distinct stages. For part was sodden, part hard and raw, and part just cooked to a nicety. This was my tenth dream. What shall come of it?”

“This dream too shall not have its fulfilment till the future. For in days to come kings shall grow unrighteous; the people surrounding the kings shall grow unrighteous too, as also shall brahmins and householders, townsmen, and countryfolk; yes, all people alike shall grow unrighteous, not excepting even sages and brahmins. Next, their very tutelary deities—the spirits to whom they offer sacrifice, the spirits of the trees, and the spirits of the air—shall become unrighteous also. The very winds that blow over the realms of these unrighteous kings shall grow cruel and lawless; they shall shake the mansions of the skies and thereby kindle the anger of the spirits that dwell there, so that they will not suffer rain to fall—or, if it does rain, it shall not fall on all the kingdom at once, nor shall the kindly shower fall on all tilled or sown lands alike to help them in their need. And, as in the kingdom at large, so in each several district and village and over each separate pool or lake, the rain shall not fall at one and the same time on its whole expanse; if it rain on the upper part, it shall not rain upon the lower; here the crops shall be spoiled by a heavy downpour, there wither for very drought, and here again thrive apace with kindly showers to water them. So the crops sown within the confines of a single kingdom—like the rice in the one pot—shall have no uniform character. Howbeit, you have nothing to fear therefrom. Tell me your eleventh dream.”

“Methought, sir, I saw sour buttermilk bartered for precious sandal-wood, worth 100,000 pieces of money. This was my eleventh dream. What shall come of it?”

“This dream too shall not have its fulfilment till the future—in the days when my doctrine is waning. For in days to come many greedy and shameless Brethren shall arise, who for their belly’s sake shall preach the very words in which I inveighed against greed! Because they have deserted by reason of their belly and have taken their stand on the side of the sectaries, they shall fail to make their preaching lead up to Nirvana. Nay, their only thought, as they preach, shall be by fine words and sweet voices to induce men to give them costly raiment and the like, and to be minded to give such gifts. Others again seated in the highways, at the street-corners, at the doors of kings’ palaces, and so forth, shall stoop to preach for money, yea for mere coined kahapanas, half-kahapanas, padas, or masakas! And as they thus barter away for food or raiment or for kahapanas and half-kahapanas my doctrine the worth whereof is Nirvana, they shall be even as those who bartered away for soar buttermilk precious sandal-wood worth 100,000 pieces. Howbeit, you have nothing to fear therefrom. Tell me your twelfth dream.”

“Methought, sir, I saw empty pumpkins sinking in the water. What shall come of it?”

“This dream also shall not have its fulfilment till the future, in the days of unrighteous kings, when the world is perverted. For in those days shall kings shew favour not to the scions of the nobility, but to the low-born only; and these latter shall become great lords, whilst the nobles sink into poverty. Alike in the royal presence, in the palace gates, in the

council chamber, and in the courts of justice, the words of the low-born alone (whom the empty pumpkins typify) shall be stablished, as though they had sunk down till they rested on the bottom. So too in the assemblies of the Brotherhood, in the greater and lesser conclaves, and in enquiries regarding bowls, robes, lodging, and the like,—the counsel only of the wicked and the vile shall be considered to have saving power, not that of the modest Brethren. Thus everywhere it shall be as when the empty pumpkins sank. Howbeit, you have Nothing to fear therefrom. Tell me your thirteenth dream."

Hereupon the king said, "Methought, sir, I saw huge blocks of solid rock, as big as houses, floating like ships upon the waters. What shall come of it?"

"This dream also shall not have its fulfilment before such times as those of which I have spoken. For in those days unrighteous kings shall shew honour to the low-born, who shall become great lords, whilst the nobles sink into poverty. Not to the nobles, but to the upstarts alone shall respect be paid. In the royal presence, in the council chamber, or in the courts of justice, the words of the nobles learned in the law (and it is they whom the solid rocks typify) shall drift idly by, and not sink deep into the hearts of men; when they speak, the upstarts shall merely laugh them to scorn, saying, 'What is this these fellows are saying?' So too in the assemblies of the Brethren, as afore said, men shall not deem worthy of respect the excellent among the Brethren; the words of such shall not sink deep, but drift idly by,—even as when the rocks floated upon the waters. Howbeit, you have nothing to fear therefrom. Tell me your fourteenth dream."

"Methought, sir, I saw tiny frogs, no bigger than minute flowerets, swiftly pursuing huge black snakes, chopping them up like so many lotus-stalks and gobbling them up. What shall come of this?"

"This dream too shall not have its fulfilment till those days to come such as those of which I have spoken, when the world is decaying. For then shall men's passions be so strong, and their lusts so hot, that they shall be the thralls of the very youngest of their wives for the time being, at whose sole disposal shall be slaves and hired servants, oxen, buffalos and all cattle, gold and silver, and everything that is in the house. Should the poor husband ask where the money (say) or a robe is, at once he shall be told that it is where it is, that he should mind his own business, and not be so inquisitive as to what is, or is not, in her house. And therewithal in divers ways the wives with abuse and goading taunts shall establish their dominion over their husbands, as over slaves and bond-servants. Thus shall it be like as when the tiny frogs, no bigger than minute flowerets, gobbled up the big black snakes. Howbeit, you have nothing to fear therefrom. Tell me your fifteenth dream."

"Methought, sir, I saw a village crow, in which dwelt the whole of the Ten Vices, escorted by a retinue of those birds which, because of their golden sheen, are called Royal Golden Mallards. What shall come of it?"

"This dream too shall not have its fulfilment till the future, till the reign of weakling kings. In days to come kings shall arise who shall know nothing about elephants or other arts, and shall be cowards in the field. Fearing to be deposed and cast from their royal estate,

they shall raise to power not their peers but their footmen, bath-attendants, barbers, and such like. Thus, shut out from royal favour and unable to support themselves, the nobles shall be reduced to dancing attendance on the upstarts,—as when the crow had Royal Golden Mallards for a retinue. Howbeit, you have nothing to fear therefrom. Tell me your sixteenth dream."

"Heretofore, sir, it always used to be panthers that preyed on goats; but methought I saw goats chasing panthers and devouring them—munch, munch, munch!—whilst at bare sight of the goats afar off, terror-stricken wolves fled quaking with fear and hid themselves in their fastnesses in the thicket. Such was my dream. What shall come of it?"

"This dream too shall not have its fulfilment till the future, till the reign of unrighteous kings. In those days the low-born shall be raised to lordship and be made royal favourites, whilst the nobles shall sink into obscurity and distress. Gaining influence in the courts of law because of their favour with the king, these upstarts shall claim perforce the ancestral estates, the raiment, and all the property of the old nobility. And-when these latter plead their rights before the courts, then shall the king's minions have them cudgelled and bastinadoed and taken by the throat and cast out with words of scorn, such as—'Know your place, fools! What? do you dispute with us? The king shall know of your insolence, and we will have your hands and feet chopped off and other correctives applied!' Hereupon the terrified nobles shall affirm that their own belongings really belong to the overbearing upstarts, and will tell the favourites to accept them. And they shall hie them home and there cower in an agony of fear. Likewise, evil Brethren shall harry at pleasure good and worthy Brethren, till these latter, finding none to help them, shall flee to the jungle. And this oppression of the nobles and of the good Brethren by the low-born and by the evil brethren, shall be like the scaring of wolves by goats. Howbeit, you have nothing to fear therefrom. For this dream too has reference to future times only. It was not truth, it was not love for you, that prompted the brahmins to prophesy as they did. No, it was greed of gain, and the insight that is bred of covetousness, that shaped all their self-seeking utterances."

Thus did the Master expound the import of these sixteen great dreams, adding,—"You, sire, are not the first to have these dreams; they were dreamed by kings of bygone days also; and, then as now, the brahmins found in them a pretext for sacrifices; whereupon, at the instance of the wise and good, the Bodhisatta was consulted, and the dreams were expounded by them of old time in just the same manner as they have now been expounded." And so saying, at the king's request, he told this story of the past.

Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born a brahmin in the North country. When he came to years of discretion he renounced the world for a hermit's life; he won the higher Knowledges and the Attainments, and dwelt in the Himalaya country in the bliss that comes from Insight.

In those days, in just the same manner, Brahmadatta dreamed these dreams at Benares, and enquired of the brahmins concerning them. And the brahmins, then as now, set to work at sacrifices. Amongst them was a young brahmin of learning and wisdom, a pupil of

the king's chaplain, who addressed his master thus—"Master, you have taught me the Three Vedas. Is there not therein a text that says 'The slaying of one creature giveth not life to another'?" "My son, this means money to us, a great deal of money. You only seem anxious to spare the king's treasury!" "Do as you will, master," said the young brahmin; "as for me, to what end shall I tarry longer here with you?" And so saying, he left him, and betook himself to the royal pleasaunce.

That selfsame day the Bodhisatta, knowing all this, thought to himself: "If I visit to-day the haunts of men, I shall work the deliverance of a great multitude from their bondage." So, passing through the air, he alighted in the royal pleasaunce and seated himself, radiant as a statue of gold, upon the Ceremonial Stone. The young brahmin drew near and with due obeisance seated himself by the Bodhisatta in all friendliness. Sweet converse passed; and the Bodhisatta asked whether the young brahmin thought the king ruled righteously. "Sir," answered the young man, "the king is righteous himself; but the brahmins make him side with evil. Being consulted by the king as to sixteen dreams which he had dreamed, the brahmins clutched at the opportunity for sacrifices and set to work thereon. Oh, sir, would it not be a good thing that you should offer to make known to the king the real import of his dreams and so deliver great numbers of creatures from their dread?" "But, my son, I do not know the king, nor he me. Still, if he should cone here and ask me, I will tell him." "I will bring the king, sir," said the young brahmin; "if you will only be so good as to wait here a minute till I come back." And having gained the Bodhisatta's consent, he went before the king, and said that there had alighted in the royal pleasaunce an air-travelling ascetic, who said he would expound the king's dreams; would not his majesty relate them to this ascetic?

When the king heard this, he repaired at once to the pleasaunce with a large retinue. Saluting the ascetic, he sat down by the holy man's side, and asked whether it was true that he knew what would come of his dreams. "Certainly, sire," said the Bodhisatta; "but first let me hear the dreams as you dreamed them." "Readily, sir," answered the king; and he began as follows—

Bulls first, and trees, and cows, and calves,

Horse, dish, she-jackal, waterpot,

A pond, raw rice, and sandal-wood,

And gourds that sank, and stones that swam,

and so forth, ending up with

And wolves in panic-fear of goats.

And his majesty went on to tell his dreams in just the same manner as that in which King Pasenadi had described them.

“Enough,” said the Great Being; “you have nothing to fear or dread from all this.” Having thus reassured the king, and having freed a great multitude from bondage, the Bodhisatta again took up his position in mid-air, whence he exhorted the king and established him in the Five Commandments, ending with these words—“Henceforth, O king, join not with the brahmins in slaughtering animals for sacrifice.” His teaching ended, the Bodhisatta passed straight through the air to his own abode. And the king, remaining stedfast in the teaching he had heard, passed away after a life of alms-giving and other good works to fare according to his deserts.

His lesson ended, the Master said, “You have nothing to fear from these dreams; away with the sacrifice!” Having had the sacrifice removed, and having saved the lives of a multitude of creatures, he shewed the connexion and identified the Birth by saying, “Ananda was the king of those days, Sariputta the young Brahmin, and I the ascetic.”

(Pali note. But after the passing of the Blessed One, the Editors of the Great Redaction put the three first lines into the Commentary, and making the lines from ‘And gourds that sank’ into one Stanza (therewith), put the whole story into the First Book.)

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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