Ja 78 — Illisa Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

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Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

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Edited by E. B. Cowell

Original edition: Cambridge University Press, volume 1, 1895

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

“Both squint.”—This story was told by the Master while at Jetavana, about a miserly Lord High Treasurer. Hard by the city of Rajagaha, as we are told, was a town named Jagghery, and here dwelt a certain Lord High Treasurer, known as the Millionaire Miser, who was worth eighty crores! Not so much as the tiniest drop of oil that a blade of grass will take up, did he either give away or consume for his own enjoyment. So he made no use of all his wealth either for his family or for sages and brahmins: it remained unenjoyed,—like a pool haunted by demons. Now, it fell out on a day that the Master arose at dawn moved with a great compassion, and as he reviewed those ripe for conversion throughout the universe, he became aware that this Treasurer with his wife some four hundred miles away were destined to tread the Paths of Salvation.

Now the day before, the Lord High Treasurer had gone his way to the palace to wait upon the king, and was on his homeward way when he saw a country-bumpkin, who was quite empty within, eating a cake stuffed with gruel. The sight awoke a craving within him! But, arrived at his own house, be thought to himself,—“If I say I should like a stuffed cake, a whole host of people will want to share my meal; and that means getting through ever so much of my rice and ghee and sugar. I mustn’t say a word to a soul.” So he walked about, wrestling with his craving. As hour after hour passed, he grew yellower and yellower, and the veins stood out like cords on his emaciated frame. Unable at last to bear it any longer, he went to his own room and lay down hugging his bed. But still not a word would he say to a soul for fear of wasting his substance! Well, his wife came to him, and, stroking his back, said: “What is the matter, my husband?”

“Nothing,” said he. “Perhaps the king has been cross to you?” “No, he has not.” “Have your children or servants done anything to annoy you?” “Nothing of that kind, either.” “Well, then, have you a craving for anything?” But still not a word would he say,—all because of his preposterous fear that he might waste his substance; but lay there speechless on his bed. “Speak, husband,” said the wife; “tell me what you have a craving for.” “Yes,” said he

with a gulp, “I have got a craving for one thing.” “And what is that, my husband?” “I should like a stuffed cake to eat!” “Now why not have said so at once? You’re rich enough! I’ll cook cakes enough to feast the whole town of Jagghery.” “Why trouble about them? They must work to earn their own meal.” “Well then, I’ll cook only enough for our street.” “How rich you are!” “Then, I’ll cook just enough for our own household.” “How extravagant you are!” “Very good, I’ll cook only enough for our children.” “Why bother about them?” “Very good then, I’ll only provide for our two selves.” “Why should you be in it?” “Then, I’ll cook just enough for you alone,” said the wife.

“Softly,” said the Lord High Treasurer; “there are a lot of people on the watch for signs of cooking in this place. Pick out broken rice,—being careful to leave the whole grain,—and take a brazier and cooking-pots and just a very little milk and ghee and honey and molasses; then up with you to the seventh story of the house and do the cooking up there. There I will sit alone and undisturbed to eat.”

Obedient to his wishes, the wife had all the necessary things carried up, climbed all the way up herself, sent the servants away, and despatched word to the Treasurer to come. Up he climbed, shutting and bolting door after door as he ascended, till at last he came to the seventh floor, the door of which he also shut fast. Then he sat down. His wife lit the fire in the brazier, put her pot on, and set about cooking the cakes.

Now in the early morning, the Master had said to the Elder Great Moggallana,—“Moggallana, this Miser Millionaire in the town of Jagghery near Rajagaha, wanting to eat cakes himself, is so afraid of letting others know, that he is having them cooked for him right up on the seventh story. Go thither; convert the man to self-denial, and by transcendental power transport husband and wife, cakes, milk, ghee and all, here to Jetavana. This day I and the five hundred Brethren will stay at home, and I will make the cakes furnish them with a meal.”

Obedient to the Master’s bidding, the Elder by supernatural power passed to the town of Jagghery, and rested in mid-air before the chamber-window, duly clad in his under and outer cloths, bright as a jewelled image. The unexpected sight of the Elder made the Lord High Treasurer quake with fear. Thought he to himself, “It was to escape such visitors that I climbed up here: and now there’s one of them at the window!” And, failing to realise the comprehension of that which he must needs comprehend, he sputtered with rage, like sugar and salt thrown on the fire, as he burst out with—“What will you get, sage, by your simply standing in mid-air? Why, you may pace up and down till you’ve made a path in the pathless air,—and yet you’ll still get nothing.”

The Elder began to pace to and fro in his place in the air! “What will you get by pacing to and fro?” said the Treasurer! “You may sit cross-legged in meditation in the air,—but still you’ll get nothing.” The Elder sat down with legs crossed! Then said the Treasurer, “What will you get by sitting there? You may come and stand on the window-sill; but even that won’t get you any-thing!” The Elder took his stand on the window-sill. “What will you get by standing on the window-sill? Why, you may belch smoke, and yet you’ll still get nothing!” said the Treasurer. Then the Elder belched forth smoke till the whole palace was filled with

it. The Treasurer's eyes began to smart as though pricked with needles; and, for fear at last that his house might be set on fire, he checked himself from adding—"You won't get anything even if you burst into flames." Thought he to himself, "This Elder is most persistent! He simply won't go away empty-handed! I must have just one cake given him." So he said to his wife, "My dear, cook one little cake and give it to the sage to get rid of him."

So she mixed quite a little dough in a crock. But the dough swelled and swelled till it filled the whole crock, and grew to be a great big cake! "What a lot you must have used!" exclaimed the Treasurer at the sight. And he himself with the tip of a spoon took a very little of the dough, and put that in the oven to bake. But that tiny piece of dough grew larger than the first lump; and, one after another, every piece of dough he took became ever so big! Then he lost heart and said to his wife, "You give him a cake, dear." But, as soon as she took one cake from the basket, at once all the other cakes stuck fast to it. So she cried out to her husband that all the cakes had stuck together, and that she could not part them.

"Oh, I'll soon part them," said he,—but found he could not!

Then husband and wife both took hold of the mass of cakes at the corner and tried to get them apart. But tug as they might, they could make no more impression together than they did singly, on the mass. Now as the Treasurer was pulling away at the cakes, he burst into a perspiration, and his craving left him. Then said he to his wife, "I don't want the cakes; give them, basket and all, to this ascetic." And she approached the Elder with the basket in her hand. Then the Elder preached the truth to the pair, and proclaimed the excellence of the Three Gems. And, teaching that giving was true sacrifice, he made the fruits of charity and other good works to shine forth even as the full-moon in the heavens. Won by the Elder's words, the Treasurer said, "Sir, come hither and sit on this couch to eat your cakes."

"Lord High Treasurer," said the Elder, "the All-Wise Buddha with five hundred Brethren sits in the monastery waiting a meal of cakes. If such be your good pleasure, I would ask you to bring your wife and the cakes with you, and let us be going to the Master." "But where, sir, is the Master at the present time?" "Five and forty leagues away, in the monastery at Jetavana." "How are we to get all that way, sir, without losing a long time on the road?" "If it be your pleasure, Lord High Treasurer, I will transport you thither by my transcendental powers. The head of the staircase in your house shall remain where it is, but the bottom shall be at the main-gate of Jetavana. In this wise will I transport you to the Master in the time which it takes to go downstairs." "So be it, sir," said the Treasurer.

Then the Elder, keeping the top of the staircase where it was, commanded, saying,—"Let the foot of the staircase be at the main-gate of Jetavana." And so it came to pass! In this way did the Elder transport the Treasurer and his wife to Jetavana quicker than they could get down the stairs.

Then husband and wife came before the Master and said meal-time had come. And the Master, passing into the Refectory, sat down on the Buddha-seat prepared for him, with the Brotherhood gathered round. Then the Lord High Treasurer poured the Water of Donation over the hands of the Brotherhood with the Buddha at its head, whilst his wife placed a cake in the alms-bowl of the Blessed One. Of this he took what sufficed to support life, as also did the five hundred Brethren. Next the Treasurer went round offering milk mixed with ghee and hooey and jagghery; and the Master and the Brotherhood brought their meal to a close. Lastly the Treasurer and his wife ate their fill, but still there seemed no end to the cakes. Even when all the Brethren and the scrap-eaters through-out the monastery had all had a share, still there was no sign of the end approaching. So they told the Master, saying, “Sir, the supply of cakes grows no smaller.”

“Then throw them down by the great gate of the monastery.”

So they threw them away in a cave not far from the gateway; and to this day a spot called ‘The Crock-Cake,’ is shown at the extremity of that cave.

The Lord High Treasurer and his wife approached and stood before the Blessed One, who returned thanks; and at the close of his words of thanks, the pair attained Fruition of the First Path of Salvation. Then, taking their leave of the Master, the two mounted the stairs at the great gate and found themselves in their own home once more. Afterwards, the Lord High Treasurer lavished eighty crores of money solely on the Faith the Buddha taught.

Next day the Perfect Buddha, returning to Jetavana after a round for alms in Savatthi, delivered a Buddha-discourse to the Brethren before retiring to the seclusion of the Perfumed Chamber. At evening, the Brethren gathered together in the Hall of Truth, and exclaimed, “How great is the power of the Elder Moggallana! In a moment he converted a miser to charity, brought him with the cakes to Jetavana, set him before the piaster, and stablished him in salvation. How great is the power of the Elder!” As they sat talking thus of the goodness of the Elder, the Master entered, and, on enquiry, was told of the subject of their talk. “Brethren,” said he, “a Brother who is the converter of a household, should approach that household without causing it annoyance or vexation,—even as the bee when it sucks the nectar from the flower; in such wise should he draw nigh to declare the excellence of the Buddha.” And in praise of the Elder Moggallana, he recited this stanza—

Like bees, that harm no flower’s scent or hue

But, laden with its honey, fly away,

So, sage, within thy village walk thy way.

Then, to set forth still more the Elder’s goodness, he said,—“This is not the first time, Brethren, that the miserly Treasurer has been converted by Moggallana. In other days too the Elder converted him, and taught him how deeds and their effects are linked together.” So saying, he told this story of the past.

Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, there was a Treasurer, Illisa by name, who was worth eighty crores, and had all the defects which fall to the lot of man. He was lame and crook-backed and had a squint; he was an unconverted infidel, and a miser, never giving of his store to others, nor enjoying it himself; his house was like a pool haunted by demons. Yet, for seven generations, his ancestors had been bountiful, giving freely of their best; but, when he became Treasurer, he broke through the traditions of his house. Burning down the almonry and driving the poor with blows from his gates, he hoarded his wealth.

One day, when he was returning from attendance on the king, he saw a yokel, who had journeyed far and was a-weary, seated on a bench, and filling a mug from a jar of rank spirits, and drinking it off, with a dainty morsel of stinking dried-fish as a relish. The sight made the Treasurer feel a thirst for spirits, but he thought to himself, "If I drink, others will want to drink with me, and that means a ruinous expense." So he walked about, keeping his thirst under. But, as time wore on, he could do so no longer; he grew as yellow as old cotton; and the veins stood out on his sunken frame. On a day, retiring to his chamber, he lay down hugging his bed. His wife came to him, and rubbed his back, as she asked, "What has gone amiss with my lord?"

(What follows is to be told in the words of the former story.) But, when she in her turn said, "Then I'll only brew liquor enough for you," he said, "If you make the brew in the house, there will be many on the watch; and to send out for the spirits and sit and drink it here, is out of the question." So he produced one single penny, and sent a slave to fetch him a jar of spirits from the tavern. When the slave came back, he made him go from the town to the riverside and put the jar down in a remote thicket. "Now be off!" said he, and made the slave wait some distance off, while he filled his cup and fell to.

Now the Treasurer's father, who for his charity and other good works had been re-born as Sakka in the Realm of Devas, was at that moment wondering whether his bounty was still kept up or not, and became aware of the stopping of his bounty, and of his son's behaviour. He saw how his son, breaking through the traditions of his house, had burnt the almonry to the ground, had driven the poor with blows from his gates, and how, in his miserliness, fearing to share with others, that son had stolen away to a thicket to drink by himself. Moved by the sight, Sakka cried, "I will go to him and make my son see that deeds must have their consequences; I will work his conversion, and make him charitable and worthy of re-birth in the Realm of Devas." So he came down to earth, and once more trod the ways of men, putting on the semblance of the Treasurer Illisa, with the latter's lameness, and crookback, and squint. In this guise, he entered the city of Rajagaha and made his way to the palace-gate, where he bade his coming be announced to the king. "Let him approach," said the king; and he entered and stood with due obeisance before his majesty.

"What brings you here at this unusual hour, Lord High Treasurer?" said the king. "I am come, Sire, because I have in my house eighty crores of treasure. Deign to have them carried to fill the royal treasury." "Nay, my Lord Treasurer; the treasure within my palace is greater than this." "If you, sire, will not have it, I shall give it away to whom I will." "Do so by

all means, Treasurer," said the king. "So be it, sire," said the pretended Illisa, as with due obeisance he departed from the presence to the Treasurer's house. The servants all gathered round him, but not one could tell that it was not their real master. Entering, he stood on the threshold and sent for the porter, to whom he gave orders that if anybody resembling himself should appear and claim to be master of the house they should soundly cudgel such a one and throw him out. Then, mounting the stairs to the upper story, he sat down on a gorgeous couch and sent for Illisa's wife. When she came he said with a smile, "My dear, let us be bountiful."

At these words, wife, children, and servants all thought, "It's a long time since he was this way minded. He must have been drinking to be so good-natured and generous to-day." And his wife said to him, "Be as bountiful as you please, my husband." "Send for the crier," said he, "and bid him proclaim by beat of drum all through the city that everyone who wants gold, silver, diamonds, pearls, and the like, is to come to the house of Illisa the Treasurer." His wife did as he bade, and a large crowd soon assembled at the door carrying baskets and sacks. Then Sakka bade the treasure-chambers be thrown open, anal cried, "This is my gift to you; take what you will and go your ways." And the crowd seized on the riches there stored, and piled them in heaps on the floor and filled the bags and vessels they had brought, and went off laden with the spoils. Among them was a countryman who yoked Illisa's oxen to Illisa's carriage, filled it with the seven things of price, and journeyed out of the city along the highroad. As he went along, he drew near the thicket, and sang the Treasurer's praises in these words—"May you live to be a hundred, my good lord Illisa! What you have done for me this day will enable me to live without doing another stroke of work. Whose were these oxen?—yours. Whose was this carriage?—yours. Whose the wealth in the carriage?—yours again. It was no father or mother who gave me all this; no, it came solely from you, my lord."

These words filled the Lord High Treasurer with fear and trembling. "Why, the fellow is mentioning my name in his talk," said he to himself. "Can the king have been distributing my wealth to the people?" At the bare thought he bounded from the bush, and, recognizing his own oxen and cart, seized the oxen by the cord, crying, "Stop, fellow; these oxen and this cart belong to me." Down leaped the man from the cart, angrily exclaiming, "You rascal! Illisa, the Lord High Treasurer, is giving away his wealth to all the city. What has come to you?" And he sprang at the Treasurer and struck him on the back like a falling thunder-bolt, and went off with the cart. Illisa picked himself up, trembling in every limb, wiped off the mud, and hurrying after his cart, seized hold of it. Again the countryman got down, and seizing Illisa by the hair, doubled him up and thumped him about the head for some time; then taking him by the throat, he flung him back the way be had come, and drove off. Sobered by this rough usage, Illisa hurried off home. There, seeing folk making off with the treasure, he fell to laying hands on here a man and there a man, shrieking, "Hi! what's this? Is the king despoiling me?" And every man he laid hands on knocked him down. Bruised and smarting, he sought to take refuge in his own house, when the porters stopped him with, "Holloa, you rascal! Where might you be going?" And first thrashing him soundly with bamboos, they took their master by the throat and threw him out of doors. "There is none but the king left to see me righted," groaned Illisa, and betook himself to the palace. "Why, oh why, sire," he cried, "have you plundered me like this?"

“Nay, it was not I, my Lord Treasurer,” said the king. “Did you not yourself come and declare your intention of giving your wealth away, if I would not accept it? And did you not then send the crier round and carry out your threat?” “Oh sire, indeed it was not I that came to you on such an errand. Your majesty knows how near and close I am, and how I never give away so much as the tiniest drop of oil which a blade of grass will take up. May it please your majesty to send for him who has given my substance away, and to question him on the matter.”

Then the king sent for Sakka. And so exactly alike were the two that neither the king nor his court could tell which, was the real Lord High Treasurer. Said the miser Illisa, “Who, and what, sire, is this Treasurer? I am the Treasurer.”

“Well, really I can’t say which is the real Illisa,” said the king. “Is there anybody who can distinguish them for certain?” “Yes, sire, my wife.” So the wife was sent for and asked which of the two was her husband. And she said Sakka was her husband and went to his side. Then in turn Illisa’s children and servants were brought in and asked the same question; and all with one accord declared Sakka was the real Lord High Treasurer. Here it flashed across Illisa’s mind that he had a wart on his head, hidden among his hair, the existence of which was known only to his barber. So, as a last resource, he asked that his barber might be sent for to identify him. Now at this time the Bodhisatta was his barber. Accordingly, the barber was sent for and asked if he could distinguish the real from the false Illisa. “I could tell, sire,” said he, “if I might examine their heads.” “Then look at both their heads,” said the king. On the instant Sakka caused a wart to rise on his head! After examining the two, the Bodhisatta reported that, as both alike had got warts on their heads, he couldn’t for the life of him say which was the real man. And therewithal he uttered this stanza—

Both squint; both halt; both men are hunchbacks too;

And both have warts alike!

I cannot tell Which of the two the real Illisa is.

Hearing his last hope thus fail him, the Lord High Treasurer fell into a tremble; and such was his intolerable anguish at the loss of his beloved riches, that down he fell in a swoon. Thereupon Sakka put forth his transcendental powers, and, rising in the air, addressed the king thence in these words: “Not Illisa am I, O king, but Sakka.” Then those around wiped Illisa’s face and dashed water over him. Recovering, he rose to his feet and bowed to the ground before Sakka, King of Devas. Then said Sakka, “Illisa, mine was the wealth, not thine; I am thy father, and thou art my son. In my lifetime I was bountiful toward the poor and rejoiced in doing good; wherefore, I am advanced to this high estate and am become Sakka. But thou, walking not in my footsteps, art grown a niggard and a very miser; thou hast burnt my almonry to the ground, driven the poor from the gate, and hoarded thy riches. Thou hast no enjoyment thereof thyself, nor has any other human being; but thy store is become like a pool haunted by demons, whereat no man may slake his thirst. Albeit, if thou wilt rebuild mine almonry and show bounty to the poor, it shall be accounted to thee for righteousness. But, if thou wilt not, then will I strip thee of all that thou hast,

and cleave thy head with the thunderbolt of Indra, and thou shalt die."

At this threat Illisa, quaking for his life, cried out, "Henceforth I will be bountiful." And Sakka accepted his promise, and, still seated in mid-air, established his son in the Commandments and preached the Truth to him, departing thereafter to his own abode. And Illisa was diligent in almsgiving and other good works, and so assured his re-birth thereafter in heaven.

"Brethren," said the Master, "this is not the first time that Moggallana has converted the miserly Treasurer; in bygone days too the same man was converted by him." His lesson ended, he shewed the connexion and identified the Birth by saying, "This miserly Treasurer was the Illisa of those days, Moggallana was Sakka, King of Devas, Ananda was the king, and I myself the barber."

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

Vol. 1, translated by Robert Chalmers, 1895.

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

Vol. 3, translated by H.T. Francis and R.A. Neil, 1897.

Vol. 4, translated by W.H.D. Rouse, 1901.

Vol. 5, translated by H.T. Francis, 1905.

Vol. 6, translated by E.B. Cowell and W.H.D. Rouse, 1907.

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Scanned, proofed and formatted at sacred-texts.com, January 2006–February 2010, by John Bruno Hare and others. Thanks to the Sacred Texts Archive for making these texts available in digital form.

Prepared for SuttaCentral by Bhikkhu Sujato.