Ja 81 — Surapana Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol1/ja81.html

Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

License: Public Domain (original English edition, published 1895–1907)

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

"We drank."—This story was cold by the Master about the Elder Sagata, while he was dwelling in the Ghosita-park near Kosambi.

For, after spending the rainy season at Savatthi, the Master had come on an alms-pilgrimage to a market-town named Bhaddavatika, where cowherds and goatherds and farmers and wayfarers respectfully besought him not to go down to the Mango Ferry; "for," said they, "in the Mango Ferry, in the demesne of the naked ascetics, dwells a poisonous and deadly Naga, known as the Naga of the Mango Ferry, who might harm the Blessed One." Feigning not to hear them, though they repeated their warning thrice, the Blessed One held on his way. Whilst the Blessed One was dwelling near Bhaddavatika in a certain grove there, the Elder Sagata, a servant of the Buddha, who had won such supernatural powers as a worldling can possess, went to the demesne, piled a couch of leaves at the spot where the Naga-king dwelt, and sate himself down cross-legged thereon. Being unable to conceal his evil nature, the Naga raised a great smoke. So did the Elder. Then the Naga sent forth flames. So too did the Elder. But, whilst the Naga's flames did no harm to the Elder, the Elder's flames did do harm to the Naga, and so in a short time he mastered the Naga-king and established him in the Refuges and the Commandments, after which he repaired back to the Master. And the Master, after dwelling as long as it pleased him at Bhaddavatika, went on to Kosambi. Now the story of the Naga's conversion by Sagata, had got noised abroad all over the countryside, and the townsfolk of Kosambi went forth to meet the Blessed One and saluted him, after which they passed to the Elder Sagata and saluting him, said, "Tell us, sir, what you lack and we will furnish it." The Elder himself remained silent; but the followers of the Wicked Six made answer as follows—"Sirs, to those who have renounced the world, white spirits are as rare as they are acceptable. Do you think you could get the Elder some clear white spirit?" "To be sure we can," said the townsfolk, and invited the Master to take his meal with them next clay. Then they went back to their own town and arranged that each in his own house should offer clear white spirit to the Elder, and accordingly they all laid in a store and invited the Elder in and plied

him with the liquor, house by house. So deep were his potations that, on his way out of town, the Elder fell prostrate in the gateway and there lay hiccoughing nonsense. On his way back from his meal in the town, the Master came on the Elder lying in this state, and bidding the Brethren carry Sagata home, passed on his way to the park. The Brethren laid the Elder down with his head at the Buddha's feet, but he turned round so that he came to lie with his feet towards the Buddha. Then the Master asked his question, "Brethren, does Sagata shew that respect towards me now that he formerly did?" "No, sir." "Tell me, Brethren, who it was that mastered the Naga-king of the Mango Ferry?" "It was Sagata, sir." "Think you that in his present state Sagata could piaster even a harmless water-snake?" "That he could not, sir." "Well now, Brethren, is it proper to drink that which, when drunk, steals away a man's senses?" "It is improper, sir." Now, after discoursing with the Brethren in dispraise of the Elder, the Blessed One laid it down as a precept that the drinking of intoxicants was an offence requiring confession and absolution; after which he rose up and passed into his perfumed chamber.

Assembling together in the Hall of Truth, the Brethren discussed the sin of spirit-drinking, saying, "What a great sin is the drinking of spirits, sirs, seeing that it has blinded to the Buddha's excellence even one so wise and so gifted as Sagata." Entering the Hall of Truth at this point, the Master asked what topic they were discussing; and they told him. "Brethren," said he, "this is not the first time that they who had renounced the world have lust their senses through drinking spirits; the very same thing took place in bygone days." And so saying, he told this story of the past.

Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born into a northern Brahmin-family in Kasi; and when he grew up, he renounced the world for the hermit's life. He won the Higher Knowledges and the Attainments, and dwelt in the enjoyment of the bliss of Insight in the Himalayas, with five hundred pupils around him. Once, when the rainy season had come, his pupils said to him, "Master, may we go to the haunts of men and bring back salt and vinegar?" "For my own part, sirs, I shall remain here; but you may go for your health's sake, and come back when the rainy season is over."

"Very good," said they, and taking a respectful leave of their master, came to Benares, where they took up their abode in the royal pleasaunce. On the morrow they went in quest of alms to a village just outside the city gates, where they had plenty to eat; and next day they made their way into the city itself. The kindly citizens gave alms to them, and the king was soon informed that five hundred hermits from the Himalayas had taken up their abode in the royal pleasaunce, and that they were ascetics of great austerity, subduing the flesh, and of great virtue. Hearing this good character of them, the king went to the pleasaunce and graciously made them welcome to stay there for four months. They promised that they would, and thenceforth were fed in the royal palace and lodged in the pleasaunce. But one day a drinking festival was held in the city, and the king gave the five hundred hermits a large supply of the best spirits, knowing that such things rarely come in the way of those who renounce the world and its vanities. The ascetics drank the liquor and went back to the pleasaunce. There, in drunken hilarity, some danced, some sang, whilst others, wearied of dancing and singing, kicked about their rice-hampers and other belongings,—after which they lay down to sleep. When they had slept off their

drunkenness and awoke to see the traces of their revelry, they wept and lamented, saying, “We have done that which we ought not to have done. We have done this evil because we are away from our master.” Forthwith, they quitted the pleasaunce and returned to the Himalayas. Laying aside their bowls and other belongings, they saluted their master and took their seats. “Well, my sons,” said he, “were you comfortable amid the haunts of men, and were you spared weary journeyings in quest of alms? Did you dwell in unity one with another?”

“Yes, master, we were comfortable; but we drank forbidden drink, so that, losing our senses and forgetting ourselves, we both danced and sang.” And by way of setting the matter forth, they composed and repeated this stanza—

We drank, we danced, we sang, we wept; ’twas well

That, when we drank the drink that steals away

The senses, we were not transformed to apes.

“This is what is sure to happen to those who are not living under a master’s care,” said the Bodhisatta, rebuking those ascetics; and he exhorted them saying, “Henceforth, never do such a thing again.” Living on with Insight unbroken, he became destined to rebirth thereafter in the Brahma Realm.

His lesson ended, the Master identified the Birth (and henceforth we shall omit the words ‘shewed the connexion ‘), by saying,—“My disciples were the band of hermits of those days, and I their teacher.”

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.

These translations are in the public domain. You are free to do whatever you like with them.

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.