Ja 86 — Silavimamsana Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol1/ja86.html

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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

“Naught can compare.”—This story was told by the Master while at Jetavana, about a brahmin who put to the test his reputation for goodness. This Brother, who was maintained by the King of Kosala, had sought the Three Refuges; he kept the Five Commandments, and was versed in the Three Vedas. “This is a good man,” thought the King, and shewed him great honour. But that Brother thought to himself, “The King shews honour to me beyond other brahmins, and has manifested his great regard by making me his spiritual director. But is his favour due to my goodness or only to my birth, lineage, family, country and accomplishments? I must clear this up without delay.” Accordingly, one day when he was leaving the palace, he took unbidden a coin from a treasurer’s counter, and went his way. Such was the treasurer’s veneration for the brahmin that he sat perfectly still and said not a word. Next day the brahmin took two coins; but still the official made no remonstrance. The third day the brahmin took a whole handful of coins. “This is the third day,” cried the treasurer, “that you have robbed his Majesty;” and he shouted out three times,—“I have caught the thief who robs the treasury.” In rushed a crowd of people from every side, crying, “Ah, you’ve long been posing as a model of goodness.” And dealing him two or three blows, they led him before the King. In great sorrow the King said to him, “What led you, brahmin, to do, so wicked a thing?” And he gave orders, saying, “Off with him to punishment.” “I are no thief, sire,” said the brahmin. “Then why did you take money from the treasury?” “Because you shewed me such great honour, sire, and because I made up my mind to find out whether that honour was paid to my birth and the like or only to my goodness. That was my motive, and now I know for certain (inasmuch as you order me off to punishment) that it was my goodness and not my birth and other advantages, that won me your majesty’s favour. Goodness I know to be the chief and supreme good; I know too that to goodness I can never attain in this life, whilst I remain a layman, living in the midst of sinful pleasures. Wherefore, this very day I would fain go to the Master at Jetavana and renounce the world for the Brotherhood. Grant me your leave, sire.” The King consenting, the brahmin set out for Jetavana. His friends and relations in a body tried to turn him from his purpose, but, finding their efforts of no avail, left him alone. He came to

the Master and asked to be admitted to the Brotherhood. After admission to the lower and higher orders, he won by application spiritual insight and became an Arahat, whereon he drew near to the Master, saying, “Sir, my joining the Order has borne the Supreme Fruit,”—thereby signifying that he had won Arahatship. Hearing of this, the Brethren, assembling in the Hall of Truth, spoke with one another of the virtues of the King’s chaplain who tested his own reputation for goodness and who, leaving the King, had now risen to be an Arahat. Entering the Hall, the Master asked what the Brethren were discussing, and they told him. “Not without a precedent, Brethren,” said he, “is the action of this brahmin in putting to the test his reputation for goodness and in working out his salvation after renouncing the world. The like was done by the wise and good of bygone days as well.” And so saying, he told this story of the past.

Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was his chaplain,—a man given to charity and other good works, whose mind was set on righteousness, always keeping unbroken the Five Commandments. And the King honoured him beyond the other brahmins; and everything came to pass as above.

But, as the Bodhisatta was being brought in bonds before the King, he came where some snake-charmers were exhibiting a snake, which they laid hold of by the tail and the throat, and tied round their necks. Seeing this, the Bodhisatta begged the men to desist, for the snake might bite them and cut their lives short. “Brahmin,” replied the snake-charmers, “this is a good and well-behaved cobra; he’s not wicked like you, who for your wickedness and misconduct are being hauled off in custody.”

Thought the Bodhisatta to himself, “Even cobras, if they do not bite or wound, are called ‘good.’ How much more must this be the case with those who have come to be human beings! Verily it is just this goodness which is the most excellent thing in all the world, nor does aught surpass it.” Then he was brought before the King. “What is this, my friends?” said the King. “Here’s a thief who has been robbing your majesty’s treasury.” “Away with him to execution.” “Sire,” said the brahmin, “I am no thief.” “Then how came you to take the money?” Hereon the Bodhisatta made answer precisely as above, ending as follows—“This then is why I have come to the conclusion that it is goodness which is the highest and most excellent thing in all the world. But be that as it may, yet, seeing that the cobra, when it does not bite or wound, must simply be called ‘good’ and nothing more, for this reason too it is goodness alone which is the highest and most excellent of all things.” Then in praise of goodness he uttered this stanza—

Naught can compare with Goodness;

all the world Can not its equal show. The cobra fell,

If men account it ‘good,’ is saved from death.

After preaching the truth to the King in this stanza, the Bodhisatta, abjuring all Lusts, and renouncing the world for the hermit’s life, repaired to the Himalayas, where he attained to the five Knowledges and the eight Attainments, earning for himself the sure hope of

re-birth thereafter in the Brahma Realm.

His lesson ended, the Master identified the Birth by saying, “My disciples were the King’s following in those days, and I myself the King’s chaplain.”

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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