Ja 87 — Mamgala Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol1/ja87.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

“Whoso renounces.”—This story was told by the Master while at the Bamboo-grove about a brahmin who was skilled in the prognostications which can be drawn from pieces of cloth. Tradition says that at Rajagaha dwelt a brahmin who was superstitious and held false views, not believing in the Three Gems. This brahmin was very rich and wealthy, abounding in substance; and a female mouse gnawed a suit of clothes of his, which was lying by in a chest. One day after bathing himself all over, he called for this suit, and then was told of the mischief which the mouse had done. “If these clothes stop in the house,” thought he to himself, “they’ll bring ill-luck; such an ill-omened thing is sure to bring a curse. It is out of the question to give them to any of my children or servants; for whosoever has them will bring misfortune on all around him. I must have them thrown away in a charnel-ground; but how? I cannot hand them to servants; for they might covet and keep them, to the ruin of my house. My son must take them.” So he called his son, and telling him the whole matter bade him take his charge on a stick, without touching the clothes with his hand, and fling them away in a charnel-ground. Then the son was to bathe himself all over and return. Now that morning at dawn of day the Master looking round to see what persons could be led to the truth, became aware that the father and son were predestined to attain salvation. So he betook himself in the guise of a hunter on his way to hunt, to the charnel-ground, and sate down at the entrance, emitting the six-coloured rays that mark a Buddha. Soon there came to the spot the young brahmin, carefully carrying the clothes as his father had bidden him, on the end of his stick, just as though he had a house-snake to carry.

“What are you doing, young brahmin?” asked the Master.

“My good Gotama,” was the reply, “this suit of clothes, having been gnawed by mice, is like ill-luck personified, and as deadly as though steeped in venom; wherefore my father, fearing that a servant might covet and retain the clothes, has sent me with them. I promised that I would throw them away and bathe afterwards; and that’s the errand that

has brought me here." "Throw the suit away, then," said the Master; and the young brahmin did so. "They will just suit me," said the Master, as he picked up the fate-fraught clothes before the young man's very eyes, regardless of the latter's earnest warnings and repeated entreaties to him not to take them; and he departed in the direction of the Bamboo-grove.

Home in all haste ran the young brahmin, to tell his father how the Sage Gotama had declared that the clothes would just suit him, and had persisted, in spite of all warnings to the contrary, in taking the suit away with him to the Bamboo-grove. "Those clothes," thought the brahmin to himself, "are bewitched and accursed. Even the sage Gotama cannot wear them without destruction befalling him; and that would bring me into disrepute. I will give the Sage abundance of other garments and get him to throw that suit away." So with a large number of robes he started in company of his son for the Bamboo-grove. When he came upon the Master he stood respectfully on one side and spoke thus,—"Is it indeed true, as I hear, that you, my good Gotama, picked up a suit of clothes in the charnel-ground?" "Quite true, brahmin." "My good Gotama, that suit is accursed; if you make use of them, they will destroy you. If you stand in need of clothes, take these and throw away that suit." "Brahmin," replied the Master, "by open profession I have renounced the world, and am content with the rags that lie by the roadside or bathing-places, or are thrown away on dustheaps or in charnel-grounds. Whereas you have held your superstitions in bygone days, as well as at the present time." So saying, at the brahmin's request, he told this story of the past.

Once on a time there reigned in the city of Rajagaha, in the kingdom of Magadha, a righteous King of Magadha. In those days the Bodhisatta came to life again as a brahmin of the North-west. Growing up, he renounced the world for the hermit's life, won the Knowledges and the Attainments, and went to dwell in the Himalayas. On one occasion, returning from the Himalayas, and taking up his abode in the King's pleasaunce, he went on the second day into the city to collect alms. Seeing him, the King had him summoned into the palace and there provided with a seat and with food,—exacting a promise from him that he would take up his abode in the pleasaunce. So the Bodhisatta used to receive his food at the palace and dwell in the grounds.

Now in those days there dwelt in that city a brahmin known as Cloth-omens. And he had in a chest a suit of clothes which were gnawed by mice, and everything came to pass just as in the foregoing story. But when the son was on his way to the charnel-ground the Bodhisatta got there first and took his seat at the gate; and, picking up the suit which the young brahmin threw away, he returned to the pleasaunce. When the son told this to the old brahmin, the latter exclaimed, "It will be the death of the King's ascetic"; and entreated the Bodhisatta to throw that suit away, lest he should perish. But the ascetic replied, "Good enough for us are the rags that are flung away in charnel-grounds. We have no belief in superstitions about luck, which are not approved by Buddhas, Pacceka Buddhas, or Bodhisattas; and therefore no wise man ought to be a believer in luck." Hearing the truth thus expounded, the brahmin forsook his errors and took refuge in the Bodhisatta. And the Bodhisatta, preserving his Insight unbroken, earned re-birth thereafter in the Brahma Realm.

Having told this story, the Master, as Buddha, taught the Truth to the brahmin in this stanza—

Whose renounces omens, dreams and signs,

That man, from superstition’s errors freed,

Shall triumph o’er the paired Depravities

And o’er Attachments to the end of time.

When the Master had thus preached his doctrine to the brahmin in the form of this stanza, he proceeded further to preach the Four Truths, at the close whereof that brahmin, with his son, attained to the First Path. The Master identified the Birth by saying, “The father and son of to-day were also the father and son of those days, and I myself the ascetic.”

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.