# Ja 92 — Mahasara 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

“For war men crave.”—This story was told by the Master while at Jetavana, about the venerable Ananda.

Once the wives of the King of Kosala thought among themselves, as follows, “Very rare is the coming of a Buddha; and very rare is birth in a human form with all one’s faculties in perfection. Yet, though we have happened on a human form in a Buddha’s lifetime, we cannot go at will to the Monastery to hear the truth from his own lips, to do obeisance, and to make offerings to him. We live here as in a box. Let us ask the King to send for a fitting Brother to come here and teach us the truth. Let us learn what we can from him, and he charitable and do good works, to the end that we may profit by our having been born at this happy juncture.” So they all went in a body to the King, and told him what was in their minds; and the King gave his consent.

Now it fell out on a day that the King was minded to take his pleasure in the royal pleasaunce, and gave orders that the grounds should be made ready for his coming. As the gardener was working away, he espied the Master seated at the foot of a tree. So he went to the King and said, “The pleasaunce is made ready, sire; but the Blessed One is sitting there at the foot of a tree.” “Very good,” said the King, “we will go and hear the Master.” Mounting his chariot of state, he went to the Master in the pleasaunce.

Now there was then seated at the Master’s feet, listening to his teaching, a lay-brother named Chattapani, who had entered the Third Path. On catching sight of this lay-brother, the King hesitated; but, on reflection that this must be a virtuous man, or he would not be sitting by the Master for instruction, he approached and with a bow seated himself on one side of the Master. Out of reverence for the supreme Buddha, the lay-brother neither rose in the King’s honour nor saluted his majesty; and this made the King very angry. Noticing the King’s displeasure, the Master proceeded to extol the merits of that lay-brother, saying, “Sire, this lay-brother is master of all tradition; he knows by heart the scriptures that have

been handed down; and he has set himself free from the bondage of passion." "Surely," thought the King, "he whose praises the Master is telling can be no ordinary person." And he said to him, "Let me know, lay-brother, if you are in need of anything." "Thank you," said the man. Then the King listened to the Master's teaching, and at its close rose up and ceremoniously withdrew.

Another day, meeting that same lay-brother going after breakfast umbrella in hand to Jetavana, the King had him summoned to his presence and said, "I hear, lay-brother, that you are a man of great learning. Now my wives are very anxious to hear and learn the truth; I should be glad if you would teach them." "It is not meet, sire, that a layman should expound or teach the truth in the King's harem; that is the prerogative of the Brethren."

Recognising the force of this remark, the King, after dismissing the layman, called his wives together and announced to them his intention of sending to the Master for, one of the Brethren to come as their instructor in the doctrine. Which of the eighty chief disciples would they have? After talking it over together, the ladies with one accord chose Ananda the Elder, surnamed the Treasurer of the Faith. So the King went to the Master and with a courteous greeting sat down by his side, after which he proceeded to state his wives' wish, and his own hope, that Ananda might be their teacher. The Master, having consented to send Ananda, the King's wives now began to be regularly taught by the Elder and to learn from him.

One day the jewel out of the King's turban was missing. When the King heard of the loss he sent for his ministers and bade them seize everyone who had access to the precincts and find the jewel. So the Ministers searched everybody, women and all, for the missing jewel, till they had worried everybody almost out of their lives; but no trace of it could they find. That day Ananda came to the palace, only to find the King's wives as dejected as they had hitherto been delighted when he taught them. "What has made you like this to-day?" asked the Elder. "Oh, sir," said they, "the King has lost the jewel out of his turban; and by his orders the ministers are worrying everybody, women and all, out of their lives, in order to find it. We can't say what may not happen to anyone of us; and that is why we are so sad." "Don't think any more about it," said the Elder cheerily, as he went to find the King. Taking the seat set for him, the Elder asked whether it was true that his majesty had lost his jewel. "Quite true, sir," said the King. "And can it not be found?" "I have had all the inmates of the palaces worried out of their lives, and yet I can't find it." "There is one way, sire, to find it, without worrying people out of their lives." "What way is that, sir?" "By wisp-giving, sire." "Wisp-giving? What may that be, pray?" "Call together, sire, all the persons you suspect, and privately give each one of them separately a wisp of straw, or a lump of clay will do, saying, 'Take this and put it in such and such a place to-morrow at daybreak.' The man that took the jewel will put it in the straw or clay, and so bring it back. If it be brought back the very first day, well and good. If not, the same thing must be done on the second and third clays. In this way, a large number of persons will escape worry, and you will get your jewel back." With these words the Elder departed.

Following the above counsel, the King caused the straw and clay to be dealt out for three successive days; but yet the jewel was not recovered. On the third day the Elder came

again, and asked whether the jewel had been brought back. “No, sir,” said the King. “Then, sire, you must have a large water-pot set in a retired corner of your courtyard, and you must have the pot filled with water and a screen put up before it. Then give orders that all who frequent the precincts, men and women alike, are to put off their outer-garments, and one by one wash their hands behind the screen and then come back.” With this advice the Elder departed. And the King did as he bade.

Thought the thief, “Ananda has seriously taken the matter in hand; and, if he does not find the jewel, he’ll not let things rest here. The time has really come to give the jewel up without more ado.” So he secreted the jewel about his person, and going behind the screen, dropped it in the water before he went away. When everyone had gone, the pot was emptied, and the jewel found. “It’s all owing to the Elder,” exclaimed the King in his joy, “that I have got my jewel back, and that without worrying a host of people out of their lives.” And all the persons about the precincts were equally grateful to Ananda for the trouble he had saved them from. The story how Ananda’s marvellous powers had found the jewel, spread through all the city, till it reached the Brotherhood. Said the Brethren, “The great knowledge, learning, and cleverness of the Elder Ananda have been the means at once of recovering the lost jewel and of saving many persons from being worried out of their lives.” And as they sate together in the Hall of Truth, singing the praises of Ananda, the Master entered and asked the subject of their conversation. Being told, he said, “Brethren, this is not the first time that what had been stolen has been found, nor is Ananda the only one who has brought about such a discovery. In bygone days too the wise and good discovered what had been stolen away, and also saved a host of people from trouble, sheaving that the lost property had fallen into the hands of animals.” So saying, he told this story of the past.

Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta, having perfected his education, became one of the King’s ministers. One day the King with a large following went into his pleasaunce, and, after walking about the woods, felt a desire to disport himself in the water. So he went down into the royal tank and sent for his harem. The women of the harem, removing the jewels from their heads and necks and so forth, laid them aside with their upper garments in boxes under the charge of female slaves, and then went down into the water. Now, as the queen was taking off her jewels and ornaments, and laying them with her upper robe on a box, she was watched by a female monkey, which was hidden in the branches of a tree hard by. Conceiving a longing to wear the queen’s pearl necklace, this monkey watched for the slave in charge to be off her guard. At first the girl kept looking all about her in order to keep the jewels safe; but as time wore on, she began to nod. As soon as the monkey saw this, quick as the wind she jumped down, and quick as the wind she was up the tree again, with the pearls round her own neck. Then, for fear the other monkeys should see it, she hid the string of pearls in a hole in the tree and sat on guard over her spoils as demurely as though nothing had happened. By and by the slave awoke, and, terrified at finding the jewels gone, saw nothing else to do but to scream out, “A man has run off with the queen’s pearl necklace.” Up ran the guards from every side, and hearing this story fold it to the King. “Catch the thief,” said his majesty; and away went the guards searching high and low for the thief in the pleasaunce. Hearing the din, a poor superstitious rustic took to his heels in alarm.

“There he goes,” cried the guards, catching sight of the runaway; and they followed him up till they caught him, and with blows demanded what he meant by stealing such precious jewels.

Thought he, “If I deny the charge, I shall die with the beating I shall get from these ruffians. I’d better say I took it.” So he confessed to the theft and was hauled off a prisoner to the King. “Did you take those precious jewels?” asked the King. “Yes, your majesty.” “Where are they now?” “Please your majesty, I’m a poor man; I’ve never in my life owned anything, even a bed or a chair, of any value,—much less a jewel. It was the Treasurer who made me take that valuable necklace; and I took it and gave it to him. He knows all about it.”

Then the King sent for the Treasurer, and asked whether the rustic had passed the necklace on to him. “Yes, sire,” was the answer. “Where is it then?” “I gave it to your majesty’s Chaplain.” Then the Chaplain was sent for, and interrogated in the same way. And he said he had given it to the Chief Musician, who in his turn said he had given it to a courtesan as a present. But she, being brought before the King, utterly denied ever having received it.

Whilst the five were thus being questioned, the sun set. “It’s too late now,” said the King; “we will look into this to-morrow.” So he handed the five over to his ministers and went back into the city. Here-upon the Bodhisatta fell a-thinking. “These jewels,” thought he, “were lost inside the grounds, whilst the rustic was outside. There was a strong guard at the gates, and it was impossible for anyone inside to get away with the necklace. I do not see how anyone, whether inside or out, could have managed to secure it. The truth is this poor wretched fellow must have said he gave it to the Treasurer merely in order to save his own skin; and the Treasurer must have said he gave it to the Chaplain, in the hope that he would get off if he could mix the Chaplain up. in the matter. Further, the Chaplain must have said he gave it to the Chief Musician, because he thought the latter would make the time pass merrily in prison; whilst the Chief Musician’s object in implicating the courtesan, was simply to solace himself with her company during imprisonment. Not one of the whole five has anything to do with the theft. On the other hand, the grounds swarm with monkeys, and the necklace must have got into the hands of one of the female monkeys.”

When he had arrived at this conclusion, the Bodhisatta went to the King with the request that the suspects might be handed over to him and that he might be allowed to examine personally into the matter. “By all means, my wise friend,” said the King; “examine into it.”

Then the Bodhisatta sent for his servants and told them where to lodge the five prisoners, saying, “Keep strict watch over them; listen to everything they say, and report it all to me,” And his servants did as he bade them. As the prisoners sat together, the Treasurer said to the rustic, “Tell me, you wretch, where you and I ever met before this day; tell me when you gave me that necklace.” “Worshipful sir,” said the other, “it has never been mine to own aught so valuable even as a stool or bedstead that wasn’t rickety. I thought that with your help I should get out of this trouble, and that’s why I said what I did. Be not angry with me, my lord.” Said the Chaplain in his turn to the Treasurer, “How then came you to pass on to me what this fellow had never given to you?” “I only said so because I thought

that if you and I, both high officers of state, stand together, we can soon put the matter right." "Brahmin," now said the Chief Musician to the Chaplain, "when, pray, did you give the jewel to me?" "I only said I did," answered the Chaplain, "because I thought you would help to make the time pass more agreeably." Lastly the courtesan said, "Oh, you wretch of a musician, you know you never visited me, nor I you. So when could you have given me the necklace, as you say?" "Why be angry, my dear?" said the Musician, "we five have got to keep house together for a bit; so let us put a cheerful face on it and be happy together."

This conversation being reported to the Bodhisatta by his agents, he felt convinced the five were all innocent of the robbery, and that a female monkey had taken the necklace. "And I must find a means to make her drop it," said he to himself. So he had a number of bead necklaces made. Next he had a number of monkeys caught and turned loose again, with strings of beads on their necks, wrists and ancles. Meantime, the guilty monkey kept sitting in the trees watching her treasure. Then the Bodhisatta ordered a number of men to carefully observe every monkey in the grounds, till they saw one wearing the missing pearl necklace, and then frighten her into dropping it.

Tricked out in their new splendour, the other monkeys strutted about till they came to the real thief, before whom they flaunted their finery. Jealousy overcoming her prudence, she exclaimed, "They're only beads!" and put on her own necklace of real pearls. This was at once seen by the watchers, who promptly made her drop the necklace, which they picked up and brought to the Bodhisatta. He took it to the King, saying, "Here, sire, is the necklace. The five prisoners are innocent; it was a female monkey in the pleasaunce that took it." "How came you to find that out?" asked the King; "and how did you manage to get possession of it again?" Then the Bodhisatta told the whole story, and the King thanked the Bodhisatta, saying, "You are the right man in the right place." And he uttered this stanza in praise of the Bodhisatta—

For war men crave the hero's might,

For counsel sage sobriety,

Boon comrades for their jollity,

But judgment when in parlous plight.

Over and above these words of praise and gratitude, the King showered treasures upon the Bodhisatta like a storm-cloud pouring rain from the heavens. After following the Bodhisatta's counsels through a long life spent in charity and good works, the King passed away to fare thereafter according to his deserts.

His lesson ended, the Master, after extolling the Elder's merits, identified the Birth by saying, "Ananda was the King of those clays and I his wise counsellor."

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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Prepared for SuttaCentral by Bhikkhu Sujato.