Ja 96 — Telapatta Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

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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

“As one with care.”—This story was told by the Master while dwelling in a forest near the town of Desaka in the Sumbha country, concerning the Janapada-Kalyani Sutta. For on that occasion the Blessed One said—“Just as if, Brethren, a great crowd were to gather together, crying ‘Hail to the Belle of the Land! Hail to the Belle of the Land!’ and just as if in like manner a greater crowd were to gather together, crying ‘The Belle of the Land is singing and dancing’; and then suppose there came a man fond of life, fearful of death, fond of pleasure, and averse to pain, and suppose such an one were addressed as follows,—‘Hi, there! you are to carry this pot of oil, which is full to the brim, betwixt the crowd and the Belle of the Land; a man with a drawn sword will follow in your footsteps; and if you spill a single drop, he will cut off your head’; what think you, Brethren? Would that man, under these circumstances, be careless, and take no pains in carrying that pot of oil?” “By no manner of means, sir.” “This is an allegory , which I framed to make my meaning clear, Brethren; and here is its meaning—The brimming pot of oil typifies a collected state of mind as regards things concerning the body, and the lesson to be learnt is that such mindfulness should be practised and perfected. Fail not in this, Brethren.” So saying, the Master gave forth the Sutta concerning the Belle of the Land, with both text and interpretation. Then, by way of application, the Blessed One went on to say,—“A Brother desirous of practising right mindfulness concerning the body, should be as careful not to let his mindfulness drop, as the man in the allegory was not to let drop the pot of oil.”

When they had heard the Sutta and its meaning, the Brethren said—“It was a hard task, sir, for the man to pass by with the pot of oil without gazing on the charms of the Belle of the Land.” “Not hard at all, Brethren; it was quite an easy task,—easy for the very good reason that he was escorted along by one who threatened him with a drawn sword. But it was a truly hard task for the wise and good of bygone days to preserve right mindfulness and to curb their passions so as not to look at celestial beauty in all its perfection. Still they triumphed, and passing on won a kingdom.” So saying, he told this story of the past.

Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was the youngest of the King's hundred sons, and grew up to manhood. Now in those days there were Pacceka Buddhas who used to come to take their meals at the palace, and the Bodhisatta ministered to them.

Thinking one day of the great number of brothers he had, the Bodhisatta asked himself whether there was any likelihood of his coming to the throne of his fathers in that city, and determined to ask the Pacceka Buddhas to tell him what should come to pass. Next day the Buddhas came, took the water-pot that was consecrated to holy uses, filtered the water, washed and dried their feet, and sate down to their meal. And as they sat, the Bodhisatta came and seating himself by them with a courteous salutation, put his question. And they answered and said, "Prince, you will never come to be king in this city. But in Gandhara, two thousand leagues away, there stands the city of Takkasila. If you can reach that city, in seven days you will become king there. But there is peril on the road thither, in journeying through a great forest. It is double the distance round the forest that it is to pass through it. Ogres have their dwelling therein, and ogresses make villages and houses arise by the wayside. Beneath a goodly canopy embroidered with stars overhead, their magic sets a costly couch shut in by fair curtains of wondrous dye. Arranged in celestial splendour the ogresses sit within their abodes, seducing wayfarers with honied words. 'Weary you seem,' they say; 'come hither, and eat and drink before you journey further on your way.' Those that come at their bidding are given seats and fired to lust by the charm of their wanton beauty. But scarce have they sinned, before the ogresses slay them and eat them while the warm blood is still flowing. And they ensnare men's senses; captivating the sense of beauty with utter loveliness, the ear with sweet minstrelsy, the nostrils with heavenly odours, the taste with heavenly dainties of exquisite savour, and the touch with red-cushioned couches divinely soft. But if you can subdue your senses, and be strong in your resolve not to look upon them, then on the seventh day you will become king of the city of Takkasila."

"Oh, sirs; how could I look upon the ogresses after your advice to me?" So saying, the Bodhisatta besought the Pacceka Buddhas to give him something to keep him safe on his journey. Receiving from them a charmed thread and some charmed sand, he first bade farewell to the Pacceka Buddhas and to his father and mother; and then, going to his own abode, he addressed his household as follows—"I am going to Takkasila to make myself king there. You will stop behind here." But five of them answered, "Let us go too."

"You may not come with me," answered the Bodhisatta; "for I am told that the way is beset by ogresses who captivate men's senses, and destroy those who succumb to their charms. Great is the danger, but I will rely on myself and go."

"If we go with you, prince, we should not gaze upon their baleful charms. We too will go to Takkasila." "Then shew yourselves steadfast," said the Bodhisatta, and took those five with him on his journey.

The ogresses sat waiting by the way in their villages. And one of the five, the lover of beauty, looked upon the ogresses, and being ensnared by their beauty, lagged behind the

rest. “Why are you dropping behind?” asked the Bodhisatta. “My feet hurt me, prince. I’ll just sit down for a bit in one of these pavilions, and then catch you up.” “My good mall, these are ogresses; don’t hanker after them.” “Be that as it may, prince, I can’t go any further.” “Well, you will soon be shewn in your real colours,” said the Bodhisatta, as he went on with the other four.

Yielding to his senses, the lover of beauty drew near to the ogresses, who tempted him to sin, and killed him then and there. Thereon they departed, and further along the road raised by magic arts a new pavilion, in which they sat singing to the music of divers instruments. And now the lover of music dropped behind and was eaten. Then the ogresses went on further and sat waiting in a bazaar stocked with all sweet scents and perfumes. And here the lover of sweet-smelling things fell behind. And when they had eaten him, they went on further and sat in a provision-booth where a profusion of heavenly viands of exquisite savour was offered for sale. And here the gourmet fell behind. And when they had eaten him, they went on further, and sat on heavenly conches wrought by their magic arts. And here the lover of comfort fell behind. And him too they ate.

Only the Bodhisatta was left now. And one of the ogresses followed him, promising herself that for all his stern resolution she would succeed in devouring him ere she turned back. Further on in the forest, woodmen and others, seeing the ogress, asked her who the man was that walked on ahead.

“He is my husband, good gentlemen.”

“Hi, there!” said they to the Bodhisatta; “when you have got a sweet young wife, fair as the flowers, to leave her home and put her trust in you, why don’t you walk with her instead of letting her trudge wearily behind you?” “She is no wife of mine, but an ogress. She has eaten my five companions.” “Alas! good gentlemen,” said she, “anger will drive men to say their very wives are ogresses and ghouls.”

Next, she simulated pregnancy and then the look of a woman who has borne one child; and child on hip, she followed after the Bodhisatta. Everyone they met asked just the same questions about the pair, and the Bodhisatta gave just the same answer as he journeyed on.

At last he came to Takkasila, where the ogress made the child disappear, and followed alone. At the gates of the city the Bodhisatta entered a Rest-house and sat down. Because of the Bodhisatta’s efficacy and power, she could not enter too; so she arrayed herself in divine beauty and stood on the threshold.

The King of Takkasila was at that moment passing by on his way to his pleasaunce, and was snared by her loveliness. “Go, find out,” said he to an attendant, “whether she has a husband with her or not.” And when the messenger came and asked whether she had a husband with her, she said, “Yes, sir; my husband is sitting within in the chamber.”

“She is no wife of mine,” said the Bodhisatta. “She is an ogress and has eaten my five companions.”

And, as before, she said, “Alas! good gentlemen, anger will drive men to say anything that comes into their heads.”

Then the man went back to the King and told him what each had said. “Treasure-trove is a royal perquisite,” said the King. And he sent for the ogress and had her seated on the back of his elephant. After a solemn procession round the city, the King came back to his palace and had the ogress lodged in the apartments reserved for a queen-consort. After bathing and perfuming himself, the King ate his evening meal and then lay down on his royal bed. The ogress too prepared herself a meal, and donned all her splendour. And as she lay by the side of the delighted King, she turned on to her side and burst into tears. Being asked why she wept, she said, “Sire, you found me by the wayside, and the women of the harem are many. Dwelling here among enemies I shall feel crushed when they say ‘Who knows who your father and mother are, or anything about your family? You were picked up by the wayside.’ But if your majesty would give me power and authority over the whole kingdom, nobody would dare to annoy me with such taunts.”

“Sweetheart, I have no power over those that dwell throughout my kingdom; I am not their lord and master. I have only jurisdiction over those who revolt or do iniquity. So I cannot give you power and authority over the whole kingdom.”

“Then, sire, if you cannot give me authority over the kingdom or over the city, at least give me authority within the palace, that I may have rule here over those that dwell in the palace.”

Too deeply smitten with her charms to refuse, the King gave her authority over all within the palace and bade her have rule over them . Contented, she waited till the King was asleep, and then making her way to the city of the ogres returned with the whole crew of ogres to the palace. And she herself slew the King and devoured him, skin, tendons and flesh, leaving only the bare bones. And the rest of the ogres entering the gate devoured everything as it came in their way, not leaving even a fowl or a dog alive. Next day when people came and found the gate shut, they beat on it with impatient cries, and effected an entrance,—only to find the whole palace strewn with bones. And they exclaimed, “So the man was right in saying she was not his wife but an ogress. In his unwisdom the King brought her home to be his wife, and doubtless she has assembled the other ogres, devoured everybody, and then made off.”

Now on that day the Bodhisatta, with the charmed sand on his head and the charmed thread twisted round his brow, was standing in the Rest-house, sword in hand, waiting for the dawn. Those others, meantime, cleansed the palace, garnished the floors afresh, sprinkled perfumes on them, scattered flowers, hanging nosegays from the roof and festooning the walls with garlands, and burning incense in the place. Then they took counsel together, as follows—

“The man that could so master his senses as not so much as to look at the ogress as she followed him in her divine beauty, is a noble and steadfast man, filled with wisdom. With such an one as king, it would be well with the whole kingdom. Let us make him our king.”

And all the courtiers and all the citizens of the kingdom were one-minded in the matter. So the Bodhisatta, being chosen king, was escorted into the capital and there decked in jewels and anointed king of Takkasila. Shunning the four evil paths, and following the ten paths of kingly duty, he ruled his kingdom in righteousness, and after a life spent in charity and other good works passed away to fare according to his deserts.

His story told, the Master, as Buddha, uttered this stanza—

As one with care a pot of oil will bear,

Full to the brim, that none may overflow,

So he who forth to foreign lands doth fare

O’er his own heart like governaunce should shew.

When the Master had thus led up to the highest point of instruction, which is Arahatship, he identified the Birth by saying, “The Buddha’s disciples were in those days the king’s courtiers, and I the prince that won a kingdom.”

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

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

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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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