Ja 97 — Namasiddhi Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol1/ja97.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

“Seeing Quick dead.”—This story was told by the Master while at Jetavana, about a Brother who thought luck went by names. For we hear that a young man of good family, named ‘Base,’ had given his heart to the Faith, and joined the Brotherhood. And the Brethren used to call to him, “Here, Brother Base!” and “Stay, Brother Base,” till he resolved that, as ‘Base’ gave the idea of incarnate wickedness and ill-luck, he would change his name to one of better omen. Accordingly he asked his teachers and preceptors to give him a new name. But they said that a name only served to denote, and did not impute qualities; and they bade him rest content with the name he had. Time after time he renewed his request, till the whole Brotherhood knew what importance he attached to a mere name. And as they sat discussing the matter in the Hall of Truth, the Master entered and asked what it was they were speaking about. Being told, he said “This is not the first time this Brother has believed luck went by names; he was equally dissatisfied with the name he bore in a former age.” So saying he told this story of the past.

Once on a time the Bodhisatta was a teacher of world-wide fame at Takkasila, and five hundred young brahmins learnt the Vedas from his lips. One of these young men was named Base. And from continually hearing his fellows say, “Go, Base” and “Come, Base,” he longed to get rid of his name and to take one that had a less ill-omened ring about it. So he went to his master and asked that a new name of a respectable character might be given him. Said his master, “Go, my son, and travel through the land till you have found a name you fancy. Then come back and I will change your name for you.”

The young man did as he was bidden, and taking provisions for the journey wandered from village to village till he came to a certain town. Here a man named Quick had died, and the young brahmin seeing him borne to the cemetery asked what his name was.

“Quick,” was the reply. “What, can Quick be dead?” “Yes, Quick is dead; both Quick and Dead die just the same. A name only serves to mark who’s who. You seem a fool.”

Hearing this he went on into the city, feeling neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with his own name.

Now a slave-girl had been thrown down at the door of a house, while her master and mistress beat her with rope-ends because she had not brought home her wages. And the girl's name was Rich. Seeing the girl being beaten, as he walked along the street, he asked the reason, and was told in reply that it was because she had no wages to shew.

"And what is the girl's name?"

"Rich," said they. "And cannot Rich make good a paltry day's pay?" "Be she called Rich or Poor, the money's not forthcoming any the more. A name only serves to mark who's who. You seem a fool."

More reconciled to his own name, the young brahmin left the city and on the road found a. man who had lost his way. Having learnt that he had lost his way, the young man asked what his name was. "Guide," was the reply. "And has Guide lost his way?" "Guide or Misguide, you can lose your way just the same. A name only serves to mark who's who. You seem a fool."

Quite reconciled now to his name, the young brahmin came back to his master.

"Well, what name have you chosen?" asked the Bodhisatta. "Master," said he, "I find that death comes to 'Quick' and 'Dead' alike, that 'Rich' and 'Poor' may be poor together, and that 'Guide' and 'Misguide' alike miss their way. I know now that a name serves only to tell who is who, and does not govern its owner's destiny. So I am satisfied with my own name, and do not want to change it for any other."

Then the Bodhisatta uttered this stanza, combining what the young brahmin had done with the sights he had seen—

Seeing Quick dead, Guide lost, Rich poor,

Base learned content nor travelled more.

His story told, the Master said "So you see, Brethren, that in former days as now this Brother imagined there was a great deal in a name." And he identified the Birth by saying, "This Brother who is discontented with his name was the discontented young brahmin of those days; the Buddha's disciples were the pupils; and I myself their master."

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.

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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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