Ja 98 — Kutavanija Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol1/ja98.html

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

“Wise rightly, Wisest wrongly.”—This story was told by the Master while at Jetavana, about a cheating merchant. There were two merchants in partnership at Savatthi, we are told, who travelled with their merchandise and came back with the proceeds. And the cheating merchant thought to himself, “My partner has been badly fed and badly lodged for so many days past that he will die of indigestion now he has got home again and can feast to his heart’s content on dainties manifold. My plan is to divide what we have made into three portions, giving one to his orphans and keeping two for myself.” And with this object he made some excuse day by day for putting off the division of the profits.

Finding that it was in vain to press for a division, the honest partner went to the Master at the monastery, made his salutation, and was received kindly. “It is a very long time,” said the Buddha, “since you came last to see me.” And hereupon the merchant told the Master what had befallen him.

“This is not the first time, lay-follower,” said the Master, “that this man has been a cheating merchant; he was no less a cheat in times past. As he tries to defraud you now, so did he try to defraud the wise and good of other days.” So saying, at the merchant’s request, the Master told this story of the past.

Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born into a merchant’s family and on name-day was named ‘Wise.’ When he grew up he entered into partnership with another merchant named ‘Wisest,’ and traded with him. And these two took five hundred waggons of merchandise from Benares to the country-districts, where they disposed of their wares, returning afterwards with the proceeds to the city. When the time for dividing came, Wisest said, “I must have a double share.” “Why so?” asked Wise. “Because while you are only Wise, I am Wisest. And Wise ought to have only one share to Wisest’s two.” “But we both had an equal interest in the stock-in-trade and in the oxen and waggons. Why should you have two shares?” “Because I am Wisest.” And so they talked

away till they fell to quarrelling.

“Ah!” thought Wisest, “I have a plan.” And he made his father hide in a hollow tree, enjoining the old man to say, when the two came, “Wisest should have a double portion.” This arranged, he went to the Bodhisatta and proposed to him to refer the claim for a double share to the competent decision of the Tree-Sprite. Then he made his appeal in these words: “Lord Tree-Sprite, decide our cause!” Hereupon the father, who was hidden in the tree, in a changed voice asked them to state the case. The cheat addressed the tree as follows: “Lord, here stands Wise, and here stand I Wisest. We have been partners in trade. Declare what share each should receive.”

“Wise should receive one share, and Wisest two,” was the response.

Hearing this decision, the Bodhisatta resolved to find out whether it was indeed a Tree-Sprite or not. So he filled the hollow trunk with straw and set it on fire. And Wisest’s father was half roasted by the rising flames and clambered up by clutching hold of a bough. Falling to the ground, he uttered this stanza—

Wise rightly, Wisest wrongly got his name;

Through Wisest, I’m nigh roasted in the flame.

Then the two merchants made an equal division and each took half, and at their deaths passed away to fare according to their deserts.

“Thus you see,” said the Master, “that your partner was as great a cheat in past times as now.” Having ended his story, he identified the Birth by saying, “The cheating merchant of to-day was the cheating merchant in the story, and I the honest merchant named Wise.”

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.