

# Jataka Tales of the Buddha

## Part I

Retold by

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*Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhassa*

### **Apannaka Jataka (Jataka No. 1)**

#### **Crossing the Wilderness**

While the Buddha was staying at Jetavana Monastery near Savatthi, the wealthy banker, Anathapindika, went one day to pay his respects. His servants carried masses of flowers, perfume, butter, oil, honey, molasses, cloths, and robes. Anathapindika paid obeisance to the Buddha, presented the offerings he had brought, and sat down respectfully. At that time, Anathapindika was accompanied by five hundred friends who were followers of heretical teachers. His friends also paid their respects to the Buddha and sat close to the banker. The Buddha's face appeared like a full moon, and his body was surrounded by a radiant aura. Seated on the red stone seat, he was like a young lion roaring with a clear, noble voice as he taught them a discourse full of sweetness and beautiful to the ear.

After hearing the Buddha's teaching, the five hundred gave up their heretical practices and took refuge in the Triple Gem: the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. After that, they went regularly with Anathapindika to offer flowers and incense and to hear the teaching. They gave liberally, kept the precepts, and faithfully observed the Uposatha Day.<sup>[1]</sup> Soon after the Buddha left Savatthi to return to Rajagaha, however, these men abandoned their new faith and reverted to their previous beliefs.

Seven or eight months later, the Buddha returned to Jetavana. Again, Anathapindika brought these friends to visit the Buddha. They paid their respects, but Anathapindika explained that they had forsaken their refuge and had resumed their original practices.

The Buddha asked, "Is it true that you have abandoned refuge in the Triple Gem for refuge in other doctrines?" The Buddha's voice was incredibly clear because throughout myriad aeons He had always spoken truthfully.

When these men heard it, they were unable to conceal the truth. "Yes, Blessed One," they confessed. "It is true."

"Disciples," the Buddha said "nowhere between the lowest of hells below and the highest heaven above, nowhere in all the infinite worlds that stretch right and left, is there the equal, much less the superior, of a Buddha. Incalculable is the excellence which springs from obeying the Precepts and from other virtuous conduct."

Then he declared the virtues of the Triple Gem. "By taking refuge in the Triple Gem," He told them, "one escapes from rebirth in states of suffering." He further explained that meditation on the Triple Gem leads through the four stages to Enlightenment.

"In forsaking such a refuge as this," he admonished them, "you have certainly erred. In the past, too, men who foolishly mistook what was no refuge for a real refuge, met disaster. Actually, they fell prey to yakkhas -- evil spirits -- in the wilderness and were utterly destroyed. In contrast, men who clung to the truth not only survived, but actually prospered in that same wilderness."

Anathapindika raised his clasped hands to his forehead, praised the Buddha, and asked him to tell that story of the past.

"In order to dispel the world's ignorance and to conquer suffering," the Buddha proclaimed, "I practiced the Ten Perfections for countless aeons. Listen carefully, and I will speak."

Having their full attention, the Buddha made clear, as though he were releasing the full moon from behind clouds, what rebirth had concealed from them.

Long, long ago, when Brahmadata was reigning in Baranasi, the Bodhisatta was born into a merchant's family and grew up to be a wise trader. At the same time, in the same city, there was another merchant, a very stupid fellow, with no common sense whatsoever.

One day it so happened that the two merchants each loaded five hundred carts with costly wares of Baranasi and prepared to leave in the same direction at exactly the same time. The wise merchant thought, "If this silly young fool travels with me and if our thousand carts stay together, it will be too much for the road. Finding wood and water for the men will be difficult, and there won't be enough grass for the oxen. Either he or I must go first."

"Look," he said to the other merchant, "the two of us can't travel together. Would you rather go first or follow after me?"

The foolish trader thought, "There will be many advantages if I take the lead. I'll get a road which is not yet cut up. My oxen will have the pick of the grass. My men will get the choicest wild herbs for curry. The water will be undisturbed. Best of all, I'll be able to fix my own price for bartering my goods." Considering all these advantages, he said, "I will go ahead of you, my friend."

The Bodhisatta was pleased to hear this because he saw many advantages in following after. He reasoned, "Those carts going first will level the road where it is rough, and I'll be able to travel along the road they have already smoothed. Their oxen will graze off the coarse old grass, and mine will pasture on the sweet young growth which will spring up in its place. My men will find fresh sweet herbs for curry where the old ones have been picked. Where there is no water, the first caravan will have to dig to supply themselves, and we'll be able to drink at the wells they have dug. Hagglng over prices is tiring work; he'll do the work, and I will be able to barter my wares at prices he has already fixed."

"Very well, my friend," he said, "please go first."

"I will," said the foolish merchant, and he yoked his carts and set out. After a while he came to the outskirts of a wilderness. He filled all of his huge water jars with water before setting out to cross the sixty yojanas<sup>[2]</sup> of desert which lay before him.

The yakkha who haunted that wilderness had been watching the caravan. When it had reached the middle, he used his magic power to conjure up a lovely carriage drawn by pure white young bulls. With a retinue of a dozen disguised yakkhas carrying swords and shields, he rode along in his carriage like a mighty lord. His hair and clothes were wet, and he had a wreath of blue lotuses and white water lilies around his head. His attendants also were dripping wet and draped in garlands. Even the bulls'

hooves and carriage wheels were muddy.

As the wind was blowing from the front, the merchant was riding at the head of his caravan to escape the dust. The yakkha drew his carriage beside the merchant's and greeted him kindly. The merchant returned the greeting and moved his own carriage to one side to allow the carts to pass while he and the yakkha chatted.

"We are on our way from Baranasi, sir," explained the merchant. "I see that your men are all wet and muddy and that you have lotuses and water lilies. Did it rain while you were on the road? Did you come across pools with lotuses and water lilies?"

"What do you mean?" the yakkha exclaimed. "Over there is the dark-green streak of a jungle. Beyond that there is plenty of water. It is always raining there, and there are many lakes with lotuses and water lilies." Then, pretending to be interested in the merchant's business, he asked, "What do you have in these carts?"

"Expensive merchandise," answered the merchant.

"What is in this cart which seems so heavily laden?" the yakkha asked as the last cart rolled by.

"That's full of water."

"You were wise to carry water with you this far, but there is no need for it now, since water is so abundant ahead. You could travel much faster and lighter without those heavy jars. You'd be better off breaking them and throwing the water away. Well, good day," he said suddenly, as he turned his carriage. "We must be on our way. We have stopped too long already." He rode away quickly with his men. As soon as they were out of sight, he turned and made his way back to his own city.

The merchant was so foolish that he followed the yakkha's advice. He broke all the jars, without saving even a single cupful of water, and ordered the men to drive on quickly. Of course, they did not find any water, and they were soon exhausted from thirst. At sunset they drew their carts into a circle and tethered the oxen to the wheels, but there was no water for the weary animals. Without water, the men could not cook any rice either. They sank to the ground and fell asleep. As soon as night came, the yakkhas attacked, killing every single man and beast. The fiends devoured the flesh, leaving only the bones, and departed. Skeletons were strewn in every direction, but the five hundred carts stood with their loads untouched. Thus the heedless young merchant was the sole cause of the destruction of the entire caravan.

Allowing six weeks to pass after the foolish trader had left, the Bodhisatta set out with his five hundred carts. When he reached the edge of the wilderness, he filled his water jars. Then he assembled his men and announced, "Let not so much as a handful of water be used without my permission. Furthermore, there are poisonous plants in this wilderness. Do not eat any leaf, flower, or fruit which you have never eaten before, without showing it to me first." Having thus carefully warned his men, he led the caravan into the wilderness.

When they had reached the middle of the wilderness, the yakkha appeared on the path just as before. The merchant noticed his red eyes and fearless manner and suspected something strange. "I know there is no water in this desert," he said to himself. "Furthermore, this stranger casts no shadow. He must be a yakkha. He probably tricked the foolish merchant, but he doesn't realize how clever I am."

"Get out of here!" he shouted at the yakkha. "We are men of business. We do not throw away our water before we see where more is to come from!"

Without saying any more, the yakkha rode away.

As soon as the yakkhas had left, the merchant's men approached their leader and said, "Sir, those men were wearing lotuses and water lilies on their heads. Their clothes and hair were wringing wet. They told us that up ahead there is a thick forest where it is always raining. Let us throw away our water so that we can proceed quicker with lightened carts."

The merchant ordered a halt and summoned all his men. "Has any man among you ever heard before today," he asked, "that there was a lake or a pool in this wilderness?"

"No, sir," they answered. "It's known as the 'Waterless Desert.' "

"We have just been told by some strangers that it is raining in the forest just ahead. How far does a rain-wind carry?"

"A yojana, sir."

"Has any man here seen the top of even a single storm-cloud?"

"No, sir."

"How far off can you see a flash of lightning?"

"Four or five yojanas, sir."

"Has any man here seen a flash of lightning?"

"No, sir."

"How far off can a man hear a peal of thunder?"

"Two or three yojanas, sir."

"Has any man here heard a peal of thunder?"

"No, sir."

"Those were not men, but yakkhas," the wise merchant told his men. "They are hoping that we will throw away our water. Then, when we are weak and faint, they will return to devour us. Since the young merchant who went before us was not a man of good sense, most likely he was fooled by them. We may expect to find his carts standing just as they were first loaded. We will probably see them today. Press on with all possible speed, without throwing away a drop of water!"

Just as the merchant had predicted, his caravan soon came upon the five hundred carts with the skeletons of men and oxen strewn in every direction. He ordered his men to arrange his carts in a fortified circle, to take care of the oxen, and to prepare an early supper for themselves. After the animals and men had all safely bedded down, the merchant and his foremen, swords in hand, stood guard all through the night.

At daybreak the merchant replaced his own weak carts for stronger ones and exchanged his own common goods for the most costly of the abandoned merchandise. When he arrived at his destination, he was able to barter his stock of wares at two or three times their value. He returned to his own city without losing a single man out of all his company.

This story ended, the Buddha said, "Thus it was, laymen, that in times past, the foolish came to utter destruction, while those who clung to the truth escaped from the yakkhas' hands, reached their goal in safety, and returned to their homes again.

"This clinging to the truth not only endows happiness even up to rebirth in the Realm of Brahma,<sup>[3]</sup> but also leads ultimately to Arahatsip. Following untruth entails rebirth either in the four states of punishment or in the lowest conditions of mankind." After the Buddha had expounded the Four Truths, those five hundred disciples were established in the Fruit of the First Path.

The Buddha concluded his lesson by identifying the Birth as follows: "The foolish young merchant was Devadatta,<sup>[4]</sup> and his men were Devadatta's followers. The wise merchant's men were the followers of the Buddha, and I myself was that wise merchant."

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## Serivavanija Jataka (Jataka No. 3)

### The Traders of Seriva

So that a disheartened bhikkhu would have no regrets in the future, the Buddha told him this story at Savatthi to encourage him to persevere. "If you give up your practice in this sublime teaching which leads to Nibbana," the Buddha told him, "you will suffer long, like the trader of Seriva who lost a golden bowl worth a hundred thousand pieces."

When asked to explain, the Buddha told this story of the distant past.

Five long aeons ago, the Bodhisatta was an honest trader selling fancy goods in the kingdom of Seriva. Sometimes he traveled with another trader from the same kingdom, a greedy fellow, who handled the same wares.

One day the two of them crossed the Telavaha river to do business in the bustling city of Andhapura. As usual, to avoid competing with each other, they divided the city between them and began selling their goods from door to door.

In that city there was a ramshackle mansion. Years before the family had been rich merchants, but by the time of this story their fortunes had dwindled to nothing, and all the men of the family had died. The sole survivors were a girl and her grandmother, and these two earned their living by working for hire.

That afternoon, while the greedy peddler was on his rounds, he came to the door of that very house, crying, "Beads for sale! Beads for sale!"

When the young girl heard his cry, she begged, "Please buy me a trinket, Grandmother."

"We're very poor, dear. There's not a cent in the house and I can't think of anything to offer in exchange."

The girl suddenly remembered an old bowl. "Look!" she cried. "Here's an old bowl. It's of no use to us. Let's try to trade it for something nice."

What the little girl showed her grandmother was an old bowl which had been used by the great merchant, the late head of the family. He had always eaten his curries served from this beautiful, expensive bowl. After his death it had been thrown among the pots and pans and forgotten. Since it hadn't been used for a very long time, it was completely covered with grime. The two women had no idea it was gold.

The old woman asked the trader to come in and sit down. She showed him the bowl and said, "Sir, my granddaughter would like a trinket. Would you be so kind as to take this bowl and give her something or other in exchange?"

The peddler took the bowl in his hand and turned it over. Suspecting its value, he scratched the back of it with a needle. After just one covert look, he knew for certain the bowl was real gold.

He sat there frowning and thinking until his greed got the better of him. At last he decided to try to get the bowl without giving the woman anything whatever for it. Pretending to be angry, he growled, "Why did you bring me this stupid bowl? It isn't worth half a cent!" He threw the bowl to the floor, got up, and stalked out of the house in apparent disgust.

Since it had been agreed between the two traders that the one might try the streets which the other had already covered, the honest peddler came later into that same street and appeared at the door of the house, crying, "Beads for sale!"

Once again the young girl made the same request of her grandmother, and the old woman replied, "My dear, the first peddler threw our bowl on the ground and stormed out of the house. What have we got left to offer?"

"Oh, but that trader was nasty, Grandmother. This one looks and sounds very kind. I think he will take it."

"All right, then. Call him in."

When the peddler came into the house, the two women gave him a seat and shyly put the bowl into his hands. Immediately recognizing that the bowl was gold, he said, "Mother, this bowl is worth a hundred thousand pieces of silver. I'm sorry but I don't have that much money."

Astonished at his words, the old woman said, "Sir, another peddler who came here a little while ago said that it was not worth half a cent. He got angry, threw it on the floor, and went away. If it wasn't valuable then, it must be because of your own goodness that the bowl has turned into gold. Please take it, and just give us something or other for it. We will be more than satisfied."

At that time the peddler had only five hundred pieces of silver and goods worth another five hundred. He gave everything to the women, asking only to keep his scales, his bag, and eight coins for his return fare. Of course, they were happy to agree. After profuse thanks on both sides, the trader hurried to the river with the golden bowl. He gave his eight coins to the boatman and got into the boat.

Not long after he had left, the greedy peddler returned to the house, giving the impression of having reluctantly reconsidered their offer. He asked them to bring out their bowl, saying he would give them something or other for it after all.

The old woman flew at him. "You scoundrel!" she cried. "You told us that our golden bowl was not worth even half a cent. Lucky for us, an honest trader came after you left and told us it was really worth a hundred thousand pieces of silver. He gave us a thousand for it and took it away, so you are too late!"

When the peddler heard this, an intense pain swept over him. "He robbed me! He robbed me!" he cried. "He got my golden bowl worth a hundred thousand!" He became hysterical and lost all control. Throwing down his money and merchandise, he tore off his shirt, grabbed the beam of his scales for a club, and ran to the riverside to catch the other trader.

By the time he got to the river, the boat was already in midstream. He shouted for the boat to return to shore, but the honest peddler, who had already paid, calmly told the ferryman to continue on.

The frustrated trader could only stand there on the river-bank and watch his rival escape with the bowl. The sight so infuriated him that a fierce hate swelled up inside him. His heart grew hot, and blood gushed from his mouth. Finally, his heart cracked like the mud at the bottom of a pond dried up by the sun. So intense was the unreasoning hatred which he developed against the other trader because of the golden bowl, that he perished then and there.

The honest trader returned to Seriva, where he lived a full life spent in charity and other good works, and passed away to fare according to his deserts.

When the Buddha finished this story, he identified himself as the honest trader, and Devadatta as the greedy trader. This was the beginning of the implacable grudge which Devadatta held against the Bodhisatta through innumerable lives.

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## **Matakabhata Jataka (Jataka No. 18)**

### **The Goat That Laughed and Wept**

One day, while the Buddha was staying in Jetavana, some bhikkhus asked him if there was any benefit in sacrificing goats, sheep, and other animals as offerings for departed relatives.

"No, bhikkhus," replied the Buddha. "No good ever comes from taking life, not even when it is for the purpose of providing a Feast for the Dead." Then he told this story of the past.

Long, long ago, when Brahmadata was reigning in Baranasi, a brahman decided to offer a Feast for

the Dead and bought a goat to sacrifice. "My boys," he said to his students, "take this goat down to the river, bathe it, brush it, hang a garland around its neck, give it some grain to eat, and bring it back."

"Yes, sir," they replied and led the goat to the river.

While they were grooming it, the goat started to laugh with a sound like a pot smashing. Then, just as strangely, it started to weep loudly.

The young students were amazed at this behavior. "Why did you suddenly laugh," they asked the goat, "and why do you now cry so loudly?"

"Repeat your question when we get back to your teacher," the goat answered.

The students hurriedly took the goat back to their master and told him what had happened at the river. Hearing the story, the master himself asked the goat why it had laughed and why it had wept.

"In times past, brahman," the goat began, "I was a brahman who taught the Vedas like you. I, too, sacrificed a goat as an offering for a Feast for the Dead. Because of killing that single goat, I have had my head cut off 499 times. I laughed aloud when I realized that this is my last birth as an animal to be sacrificed. Today I will be freed from my misery. On the other hand, I cried when I realized that, because of killing me, you, too, may be doomed to lose your head five hundred times. It was out of pity for you that I cried."

"Well, goat," said the brahman, "in that case, I am not going to kill you."

"Brahman!" exclaimed the goat. "Whether or not you kill me, I cannot escape death today."

"Don't worry," the brahman assured the goat. "I will guard you."

"You don't understand," the goat told him. "Your protection is weak. The force of my evil deed is very strong."

The brahman untied the goat and said to his students, "Don't allow anyone to harm this goat." They obediently followed the animal to protect it.

After the goat was freed, it began to graze. It stretched out its neck to reach the leaves on a bush growing near the top of a large rock. At that very instant a lightning bolt hit the rock, breaking off a sharp piece of stone which flew through the air and neatly cut off the goat's head. A crowd of people gathered around the dead goat and began to talk excitedly about the amazing accident.

A tree deva<sup>[5]</sup> had observed everything from the goat's purchase to its dramatic death, and drawing a lesson from the incident, admonished the crowd: "If people only knew that the penalty would be rebirth into sorrow, they would cease from taking life. A horrible doom awaits one who slays." With this explanation of the law of kamma the deva instilled in his listeners the fear of hell. The people were so frightened that they completely gave up the practice of animal sacrifices. The deva further instructed the people in the Precepts and urged them to do good.

Eventually, that deva passed away to fare according to his deserts. For several generations after that, people remained faithful to the Precepts and spent their lives in charity and meritorious works, so that many were reborn in the heavens.

The Buddha ended his lesson and identified the Birth by saying, "In those days I was that deva."

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## **Kuhaka Jataka (Jataka No. 89)**

### **The Straw Worth More Than Gold**

The Buddha told this story at Jetavana about a conniving bhikkhu, who was the source of much trouble to other bhikkhus.

Long, long ago, when Brahmadata was reigning in Baranasi, a shifty ascetic with long, matted hair, lived near a certain little village. The landowner had built a modest hermitage in the forest for him, and daily provided him with excellent food in his own house.

The landowner had a great fear of robbers and decided that the safest course to protect his money was to hide it in an unlikely place. Believing the matted-haired ascetic to be a model of sainthood, he brought a hundred pieces of gold to the hermitage, buried them there, and asked the ascetic to keep watch over the treasure.

"There's no need to say more, sir, to a man like me who has renounced the world. We hermits never covet what belongs to others."

"That's wonderful," said the landowner, who went off with complete confidence in the hermit's protestations.

As soon as the landowner was out of sight, the ascetic chuckled to himself, "Why, there's enough here to last a man his whole life!"

Allowing a few days to elapse, the hermit dug up the gold and reburied it conveniently by the road. The following morning, after a meal of rice and succulent curries at the landowner's house, the ascetic said, "My good sir, I've been staying here, supported by you, for a long time. Frankly, living so long in one place is like living in the world, which is forbidden to ascetics like me. I really cannot remain here any longer; the time has come for me to leave."

The landowner urged him to stay, but nothing could overcome the hermit's determination.

"Well, then," said the landowner, "if you must go, good luck to you." Reluctantly, he escorted the ascetic to the outskirts of the village and returned home.

After walking a short way by himself, the ascetic thought it would be a good thing to cajole the landowner. Sticking a straw in his matted hair, he hurried back to the village.

"What brings you back again?" asked the surprised landowner.

"I just noticed that a straw from your roof got stuck in my hair. We hermits must not take anything which has not been given to us, so I have brought it back to you."

"Throw it down, sir, and go your way," said the landowner. "Imagine!" he said to himself. "This ascetic is so honest he won't even take a straw which does not belong to him. What a rare person!" Thus, greatly impressed by the ascetic's honesty, the landowner bid him farewell again.

At that time the Bodhisatta, reborn as a merchant, was traveling to the border on business and happened to stop at that same little village, where he witnessed the ascetic's return with the piece of straw. Suspicion grew in his mind that the hermit must have robbed the landowner of something. He asked the rich man whether he had deposited anything in the ascetic's care.

"Yes," the landowner answered rather hesitantly, "a hundred pieces of gold."

"Well, why don't you just go and see if it's still safe?" the merchant suggested.

The landowner went to the deserted hermitage, dug where he had left his money, and found it gone. Rushing back to the merchant, he cried, "It's not there!"

"The thief is certainly that long-haired rascal of an ascetic," said the merchant. "Let's catch him."

The two men ran after the rogue and quickly caught him. They kicked him and beat him until he showed them where he had hidden the gold. After they had gotten back the money, the merchant looked at the coins and scornfully asked the ascetic, "Why didn't this hundred pieces of gold trouble your conscience as much as that straw? Take care, you hypocrite, never to play such a trick again!"

When his life ended, the merchant passed away to fare according to his deserts.

When he had ended his lesson, the Buddha said, "Thus you see, monks, that this monk was as conniving in the past as he is today." Then he identified the Birth by saying, "This monk was the scheming ascetic of those days, and I was the wise and good merchant."

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## Notes

1. The Uposatha is the full, new, and half-moon days, when many Buddhists observe the Eight Precepts. [[Go back](#)]
  2. *Yojana*: a unit of distance, about seven miles. [[Go back](#)]
  3. The Realm of Brahma refers to the highest heavens, where beings enjoy radiant bliss. [[Go back](#)]
  4. Devadatta was a cousin of the Buddha. He tried to kill the Master several times, but always failed. See [Jataka No.3](#), immediately below. [[Go back](#)]
  5. Devas are celestial beings, ranging from the highest gods to simple tree spirits. [[Go back](#)]
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### **Illisa Jataka (Jataka No. 78) The Miserly Treasurer**

This story was told by the Buddha while at Jetavana Monastery, about a tremendously rich royal treasurer, who lived in a town called Sakkara near the city of Rajagaha. He had been so tightfisted that he never gave away even the tiniest drop of oil you could pick up with a blade of grass. Worse than that, he wouldn't even use that minuscule amount for his own satisfaction. His vast wealth was actually of no use to him, to his family, or to the deserving people of the land.

Moggallana, however, led this miser and his wife to Jetavana, where they served a great meal of cakes to the Buddha and five hundred bhikkhus. After hearing words of thanks from the Buddha, the royal treasurer and his wife attained stream-entry.

That evening the bhikkhus gathered together in the Hall of Truth. "How great is the power of the Venerable Moggallana!" they said. "In a moment he converted the miser to charity, brought him to Jetavana, and made possible his attainment. How remarkable is the elder!" While they were talking, the Buddha entered and asked the subject of their discussion.

When they told him, the Buddha replied, "This is not the first time, bhikkhus, that Moggallana has converted this miserly treasurer. In previous days too the elder taught him how deeds and their effects are linked together." Then the Buddha told this story of the past.

Long, long ago, when Brahmadata was reigning in Baranasi, there was a treasurer named Illisa who was worth eighty crores of wealth. This man had all the defects possible in a person. He was lame and hunchbacked, and he had a squint. He was a confirmed miser, never giving away any of his fortune to others, yet never enjoying it himself.

Interestingly enough, however, for seven generations back his ancestors had been bountiful, giving

freely of their best. When this treasurer inherited the family riches, he broke that tradition and began hoarding his wealth.

One day, as he was returning from an audience with the king, he saw a weary peasant sitting on a bench and drinking a mug of cheap liquor with great gusto. The sight made the treasurer thirsty for a drink of liquor himself, but he thought, "If I drink, others will want to drink with me. That would mean a ruinous expense!" The more he tried to suppress his thirst, the stronger the craving grew.

The effort to overcome his thirst made him as yellow as old cotton. He became thinner and thinner until the veins stood out on his emaciated frame. After a few days, still unable to forget about the liquor, he went into his room and lay down, hugging his bed. His wife came in, rubbed his back, and asked, "Husband, what is wrong?"

"Nothing," he said.

"Perhaps the king is angry with you," she suggested.

"No, he is not."

"Have your children or servants done anything to annoy you?" she queried.

"Not at all."

"Well, then, do you have a craving for something?"

Because of his preposterous fear that he might waste his fortune, he still would not say a word.

"Speak, husband," she pleaded. "Tell me what you have a craving for."

"Well," he said slowly, "I do have a craving for one thing."

"What is that, my husband?"

"I want a drink of liquor," he whispered.

"Why didn't you say so before?" she exclaimed with relief. "I'll brew enough liquor to serve the whole town."

"No!" he cried. "Don't bother about other people. Let them earn their own drink!"

"Well then, I'll make just enough for our street."

"How rich you are!"

"Then, just for our household."

"How extravagant!"

"All right, only us and our children."

"Why fuss about them?"

"Very well, let it be just enough for the two of us."

"Do you need any?"

"Of course not. I'll brew a little liquor only for you."

"Wait! If you brew any liquor in the house, many people will see you. In fact, it's out of the question to drink any here at all." Producing one single penny, he sent a slave to buy a jar of liquor from the tavern.

When the slave returned, Illisa ordered him to carry the liquor out of town to a remote thicket near the river. "Now leave me alone!" Illisa commanded. After the slave had walked some distance away, the treasurer crawled into the thicket, filled his cup, and began drinking.

At that moment, the treasurer's own father, who had been reborn as Sakka, king of the devas, happened to be wondering whether the tradition of generosity was still kept up in his house and became aware of his son's outrageous behavior. He realized that his son had not only broken with the customary magnanimity of his family, but that he had also burned down the alms houses and beaten the poor to drive them away from his gate. Sakka saw that his son, unwilling to share even a drop of cheap liquor with anyone else, was sitting in a thicket drinking by himself.

When he saw this, Sakka cried, "I must make my son see that deeds always have their consequences. I will make him charitable and worthy of rebirth in the realm of the devas."

Instantly, Sakka disguised himself as his son, complete with his limp, hunchback, and squint, and entered the city of Baranasi. He went directly to the palace gate and asked to be announced to the king.

"Let him approach," said the king.

Sakka entered the king's chamber and paid his respects.

"What brings you here at this unusual hour, my lord high treasurer?" asked the king.

"I have come, sire, because I would like to add my eighty crores of wealth to your royal treasury."

"No, my lord high treasurer," answered the king. "I have ample treasure. I have no need of yours."

"Sire, if you will not take it, I will give it all away to others."

"By all means, treasurer, do as you wish."

"So be it, sire," Sakka said. Then, bowing again to the king, he went to the treasurer's house. None of the servants could tell that he was not their real master. He sent for the porter and ordered, "If anybody resembling me should appear and claim to be master of this house, that person should be severely beaten and thrown out." Then he went upstairs, sat down on a brocaded couch, and sent for Illisa's wife. When she arrived, he smiled and said, "My dear, let us be bountiful."

When his wife, his children, and all the servants heard this, they thought, "We have never seen the treasurer in this frame of mind! He must have drunk a lot to have become so good-natured and generous."

His wife answered, "Be as charitable as you please, my husband."

"Send for the town crier," Sakka ordered. "I want him to announce to all the citizens of the city that anybody who wants gold, silver, diamonds, pearls, or other gems should come to the house of Illisa the treasurer."

His wife obeyed him, and a large crowd of people carrying baskets and sacks soon gathered. Sakka instructed the servants to open the doors to the store rooms and announced to the people, "These are my gifts to you! Take what you like! Good luck to you!"

Townspople filled their bags and carried away all the treasure they could manage. One farmer yoked two of Illisa's oxen to a beautiful cart, filled it with valuable things, and drove out of the city. As he rode along, humming a tune in praise of the treasurer, he happened to pass near the thicket where Illisa was hiding. "May you live to be a hundred, my good lord Illisa!" sang the farmer. "What you have done for me this day will enable me to live without ever toiling again. Who owned these oxen? You did! Who gave me this cart? You did! Who gave me the wealth in the cart? Again it was you! Neither my father nor my mother gave me any of this. No, it came solely from you, my lord."

These words chilled the treasurer to the bone. "Why is this fellow mentioning my name?" he wondered

to himself. "Has the king been giving away my wealth?" He peeped out of the thicket and immediately recognized his own cart and oxen.

Scrambling out of the bushes as fast as he could, he grabbed the oxen by their nose rings and cried, "Stop! These oxen belong to me!"

The farmer leaped from the cart and began beating the intruder. "You rascal!" he shouted. "This is none of your business. Illisa the treasurer is giving his wealth away to all the city." He knocked the treasurer down, climbed back on the cart, and started to drive away.

Shaking with anger, Illisa picked himself up, hurried after the cart, and seized hold of the oxen again. Once more the farmer jumped down, grabbed Illisa by the hair, and beat him severely. Then he got back on the cart and rumbled off.

Thoroughly sobered up by this rough handling, Illisa hurried home. When he arrived, he saw the people carrying away his treasure. "What are you doing?" he shouted. "How dare you do this?" He seized first one man then another, but every man he grabbed knocked him down.

Bruised and bleeding, he tried to go into his own house, claiming that he was Illisa, but the porters stopped him. "You villain!" they cried. "Where do you think you are going?" Following orders, they beat him with bamboo staves, took him by the neck, and threw him down the steps.

"Only the king can help me now," groaned Illisa, and he dragged himself to the palace.

"Sire!" he cried. "Why, oh why, have you plundered me like this?"

"I haven't plundered you, my lord high treasurer," said the king. "You yourself first offered me your wealth. Then you yourself offered your property to the citizens of the town."

"Sire, I never did such a thing! Your majesty knows how careful I am about money. You know I would never give away so much as the tiniest drop of oil. May it please your majesty to send for the person who has squandered my riches. Please interrogate him about this matter."

The king ordered his guards to bring Illisa, and they returned with Sakka. The two treasurers were so exactly alike that neither the king nor anyone else in the court could tell which was the real treasurer. "Sire!" pleaded Illisa. "I am the treasurer! This is an imposter!"

"My dear sir," replied the king. "I really can't say which of you is the real Illisa. Is there anybody who can distinguish for certain between the two of you?"

"Yes, sire," answered Illisa, "my wife can."

The king sent for Illisa's wife and asked her which of the two was her husband. She smiled at Sakka and went to stand beside him. When Illisa's children and servants were brought and asked the same question, they all answered that Sakka was the real treasurer.

Suddenly, Illisa remembered that he had a wart on the top of his head, hidden under his hair, known only to his barber. As a last resort, he asked that his barber be called. The barber came and was asked if he could distinguish the real Illisa from the false.

"Of course, I can tell, sire," he said, "if I may examine their heads."

"By all means, look at both their heads," ordered the king.

The barber examined Illisa's head and found the wart. As he started to examine Sakka's head, the king of the devas quickly caused a wart to appear on his own head, so that the barber exclaimed, "Your Majesty, both squint, both limp, and both are hunchbacks, too! Both have warts in exactly the same place on their heads! Even I cannot tell which is the real Illisa!"

When Illisa heard this, he realized that his last hope was gone, and he began to quake at the loss of his

beloved riches. Overpowered by his emotions, he collapsed senseless on the floor. At this, Sakka resumed his divine form and rose into the air. "O king, I am not Illisa," he announced. "I am Sakka!"

The king's courtiers quickly splashed water on Illisa's face to revive him. As soon as he had recovered his wits, the treasurer staggered to his feet and bowed before Sakka.

"Illisa!" Sakka shouted. "That wealth was mine, not yours. I was your father. In my lifetime I was bountiful towards the poor and rejoiced in doing good. Because of my charity, I was reborn in this great grandeur. But you, foolish man, are not walking in my footsteps. You have become a terrible miser. In order to hoard my riches, you burned my alms houses to the ground and drove away the poor. You are getting no enjoyment from your wealth; nor is it benefiting any other human being. Your treasury is like a pool haunted by demons, from which no one may satisfy his thirst.

"If you rebuild my alms houses, however, and show charity to the poor, you will gain great merit. If you do not, I will take away everything you have, and I will split your head with my thunderbolt."

When Illisa heard this threat, he shook with fear and cried out, "From now on I will be bountiful! I swear it!"

Accepting this promise, Sakka established his son in the precepts, preached the Dhamma to him, and returned to the realm of the devas.

True to his word, Illisa became diligent in charity and performed many good works. He even attained rebirth in heaven.

"You see, bhikkhus," the Buddha said, "this is not the first time that Moggallana has converted this miserly treasurer. At that time, the treasurer was Illisa; Moggallana was Sakka, king of the devas; Ananda was the king; and I myself was the barber."

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## **Kalakanni Jataka (Jataka No. 83)**

### **What's in a Name?**

The Buddha told this story while at Jetavana, about one of Anathapindika's friends, a man named "Curse." The two had played together as children and had gone to the same school. As the years passed, however, the friend became extremely poor and could not make a living for himself no matter what he did. In desperation, he approached Anathapindika, who welcomed him kindly and employed him to look after his property and to manage all of his business for him. From that time on, it was a common thing to hear someone shouting, "Curse!" each time a member of the household spoke to him.

One day some of Anathapindika's friends and acquaintances came and said, "Treasurer, don't let this sort of thing go on in your house! It's enough to scare an ogre to hear such inauspicious speech as 'Come here, Curse,' 'Sit down, Curse,' or 'Have your dinner, Curse.' The man is a miserable wretch, dogged by misfortune. He's not your social equal. Why do you have anything to do with him?"

"Nonsense," replied Anathapindika, firmly rejecting their advice. "A name only denotes a man. The wise do not measure a man by his name. It is useless to be superstitious about mere sounds. I will never abandon the friend with whom I made mud-pies as a child, simply because of his name."

Not long after that, Anathapindika went with many of his servants to visit a village of which he was headman. He left his old friend in charge. Hearing of his departure, a band of robbers decided to break into the house. That night, they armed themselves to the teeth and surrounded it.

Curse had suspected that burglars might try something so he stayed awake. As soon as he knew that the robbers were outside, he ran about noisily as though he were rousing the entire household. He shouted for one person to sound the conch and for another to beat the drum. Soon it seemed that the house contained a whole army of servants.

When the robbers heard the din, they said to one another, "The house is not as empty as we thought it would be.

The master must still be at home after all." They threw down their clubs and other weapons and fled.

In the morning, the discarded weapons were found lying scattered outside the house. When the townspeople realized what had happened, they lauded Curse to the skies. "If such a wise man hadn't been guarding the house," they said, "those robbers would have walked in and plundered as they pleased. Anathapindika owes this good luck to his staunch friend, Curse." As soon as Anathapindika returned from his trip, they told him the whole story.

"My friends," Anathapindika answered, "this is the trusty guardian I was urged to get rid of. If I had taken your advice and sent him away, I would be a poorer man today. It's not the name but the heart within that makes the man!" In appreciation of his friend's services, he even raised his wages. Thinking that this was a good story to tell the Buddha, Anathapindika went to the Master and gave him a complete account.

"This is not the first time, sir," the Buddha said, "that a man named Curse has saved his friend's wealth from robbers. The same thing happened in bygone days as well." Then, at Anathapindika's request, the Buddha told this story of the past.

Long, long ago, when Brahmadata was reigning in Baranasi, the Bodhisatta was the treasurer. He was very famous and had a friend named Curse. At that time everything was the same as in the story of Anathapindika. When the treasurer returned from the village and heard the news, he said to his friends, "If I had taken your advice and had gotten rid of my trusty friend, I would have been a beggar today. A friend is one who goes seven steps to help. He who goes twelve can be called a comrade. Loyalty for a fortnight or a month makes one a relative; long and steady dependability, a second self. How could I forsake my friend Curse who has always been so true?"

His lesson ended, the Buddha identified the Birth by saying, "At that time Ananda was Curse, and I myself was the treasurer of Baranasi."

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## **Mahasara Jataka (Jataka No. 92)**

### **The Queen's Necklace**

The Buddha told this story at Jetavana Monastery about the Venerable Ananda.

One day the wives of the King of Kosala were talking together, saying, "It is very rare for a Buddha to appear in the world," they said. "It is also rare to be born a human being. We have been born humans during a Buddha's lifetime, but we are not free to go to the monastery to pay our respects, to hear his teaching, and to make offerings to him. We might as well be living in a cage as in this palace. Let's ask the king to allow someone to come here to teach us the Dhamma. We should learn what we can, be charitable, and do good works. In that way we will truly benefit from living at this happy time!" They went to the king and made their request. The king listened and gave his consent.

That same morning, the king decided to enjoy himself in the royal gardens, so he gave orders that the grounds should be prepared. As the gardener was finishing, he saw the Buddha seated at the foot of a tree. He immediately went to the king and reported that everything was ready, but that the Buddha was there sitting under a tree.

"Very good," said the king, "we will go and hear the Master." Then he went to the garden by royal chariot.

When he got there, he found a lay disciple, Chattapani, sitting at the Buddha's feet, listening to his words. When the king saw this lay disciple, he hesitated. Realizing, however, that this must be a virtuous man, or he would not be sitting by the Buddha for instruction, the king approached, bowed, and seated himself on one side.

Out of his profound respect for the Buddha, Chattapani neither rose to honor the king nor saluted him. This made the king very angry.

Aware of the king's displeasure, the Buddha praised the merits of the layman, who had, in fact, entered the path of nonreturning. "Sire," the Buddha said, "this lay disciple knows by heart the scriptures that have been handed down, and he has set himself free from the bondage of passion."

"Surely," the king thought, "this can be no ordinary person who is being so praised by the Buddha." He turned to

Chattapani and said, "Let me know if you are in need of anything."

"Thank you," Chattapani replied.

The king listened to the Master's teaching. When it was time, he rose and left ceremoniously.

A few days later, the king met Chattapani again as he was on his way to Jetavana and had him summoned. "I hear, sir, that you are a man of great learning. My wives are eager to hear the truth. I would be very glad to have you teach them."

"It would not be proper, sire, for a layman to expound the truth in the king's harem. That is the prerogative of the bhikkhus."

The king immediately realized that this was correct, so he called his wives together and announced that he would ask the Buddha to appoint one of the elders to become their instructor in the Doctrine. He asked them which of the eighty chief disciples they would prefer. The women unanimously chose Ananda, the Treasurer of the Doctrine.

The king went to the Buddha, greeted him courteously, sat down, and stated his wives' wish that Ananda might be their teacher. The Buddha assented, and the Venerable Ananda began teaching the king's wives regularly.

One day, when Ananda arrived at the palace as usual, he found that the women, who had always before been so attentive, were all troubled and agitated. "What's wrong?" he asked. "Why do you seem anxious today?"

"Oh, venerable sir," they replied, "the jewel from the king's turban is missing. He has called his ministers and ordered them to apprehend the thief and to find the jewel without fail. They are interrogating and searching everybody, even all of us women. The entire court is in an uproar, and we have no idea what might happen next to any of us. That is why we are so unhappy."

"Don't worry," said Ananda cheerfully, as he went to find the king.

Taking the seat which the king prepared for him, Ananda asked if it was true that his majesty had lost his jewel.

"Quite true, venerable sir," said the king. "I have had everyone in the palace searched and questioned, but I can find no trace of the gem."

"There is a way to find it, sire," Ananda said, "without upsetting people unnecessarily."

"What way is that, venerable sir?"

"By wisp-giving, sire."

"Wisp-giving?" asked the king. "What do you mean?"

"Call everyone you suspect," Ananda instructed, "and give him or her a wisp of straw. Say to each of them, 'Take this and put it in a certain place before daybreak tomorrow.' The person who took the jewel will be afraid of getting caught and will give the gem back with the straw. If it is not returned on the first day, the same thing must be done for one or two more days. You will undoubtedly get your jewel back." With these words, the elder departed.

Following Ananda's advice, the king distributed straw and designated the place where it was to be returned. Even though he did this for three days, the jewel was not recovered. On the third day the elder came again and asked whether the jewel had been returned.

"No, venerable sir," replied the king, "it has not."

"In that case, sire," Ananda said, "have a large waterpot filled with water and placed in a secluded corner of your courtyard. Put a screen around it, and give orders that all who frequent the palace, both men and women, are to take off their outer garments and, one by one, to step behind the screen and wash their hands." Again the king did exactly as Ananda had suggested.

"Ananda has seriously taken charge of the matter," thought the thief. "He is not going to stop until the jewel is found. The time has come to give it up." He concealed the jewel in his underclothes, went behind the screen, and

dropped it in the water. After everyone had finished, the pot was emptied, and the jewel was found.

"Because of the Elder Ananda," exclaimed the king joyfully, "I have gotten my jewel back!"

"Because of the Elder Ananda," exclaimed all the residents of the palace, "we have been saved from a lot of trouble!"

The story of how his wisdom had returned the jewel spread throughout the city and reached Jetavana Monastery.

A few days later, while the bhikkhus were talking together in the Hall of Truth, one of them said, "The great wisdom of the Elder Ananda led to recovering the lost jewel and restoring calm to the palace." While all of them were singing the praises of Ananda, the Buddha entered and asked the subject of their conversation.

"Monks," he said after they had told him, "this is not the first time that stolen gems have been found, nor is Ananda the only one who has brought about such a discovery. In bygone days, too, the wise and good discovered stolen valuables and saved a lot of people from trouble." Then he proceeded to tell this story of the past.

Long, long ago, when Brahmadata was reigning in Baranasi, the Bodhisatta completed his education and became one of the king's ministers. One day the king went with a large retinue to his pleasure garden. After walking about the woods for a while, he decided to enjoy himself in the water and sent for his harem. The women removed their jewels and outer garments, laid them in boxes for their attendants to look after, and joined the king in the royal tank.

As the queen was taking off her jewels and ornaments, a female monkey that was hiding in the branches of a nearby tree watched her intently. The monkey conceived a longing to wear the queen's pearl necklace and waited for a chance to snatch it. At first the queen's attendant stayed alert, looking all around to protect the jewels, but after a while she began to nod. As soon as the monkey saw this, she jumped down as swift as the wind. Then just as swiftly she leaped up into the tree with the pearls around her neck. Fearing that other monkeys would see her treasure, she hid the string of pearls in a hole in the tree and sat demurely keeping guard as though nothing had happened.

By and by the girl awoke and saw that the jewels were gone. Terrified at her own negligence, she shouted, "A man has run off with the queen's pearl necklace!"

Sentries ran up from every side and questioned her. The king ordered his guards to catch the thief, and they rushed around the pleasure garden, searching high and low. A poor timid peasant who happened to be nearby became frightened when he heard the uproar and started to run away.

"There he goes!" cried the guards. They chased the poor man, caught him, began beating him, and asked why he stole such precious jewels.

The peasant thought, "If I deny the charge, these brutes will beat me to death. I'd better say I took them." He immediately confessed to the theft and was hauled off in chains to the king.

"Did you take those precious jewels?" asked the king.

"Yes, your majesty."

"Where are they now?"

"Your majesty, I'm a poor man," he explained. "I've never owned anything of any value, not even a bed or a chair, much less a jewel. It was the treasurer who made me take that expensive necklace. I took it and gave it to him. He knows all about it."

The king sent for the treasurer, and asked whether the peasant had passed the necklace on to him.

Also afraid to deny the charge, the treasurer answered, "Yes, sire."

"Where is it then?"

"I gave it to your majesty's high priest."

The high priest was sent for, and interrogated in the same way. He said he had given it to the chief musician, who in his turn said he had given it as a present to a courtesan. The courtesan, however, utterly denied having received it and the questioning continued until sunset.

"It's too late now," said the king, "we will look into this tomorrow." He handed the suspects over to his officers and went back into the city.

The Bodhisatta began thinking, "These jewels were lost inside the grounds, but the peasant was outside. There was a strong guard at the gate. It would have been impossible for anyone inside to have gotten away with the necklace. I don't see how a person, inside or out, could have stolen it. I don't believe that any of these five had anything to do with it, but I understand why they falsely confessed and implicated the others. As for the necklace, these grounds are swarming with monkeys. It must have been one of the female monkeys that took it."

Having arrived at this conclusion, the minister went to the king and requested that the suspects be handed over to him so that he could look into the matter personally.

"By all means, my wise friend," said the king, "go ahead."

The minister ordered his servants to take charge of the five prisoners. "Keep strict watch over them," he said. "I want you to listen to everything they say and report it all to me."

As the prisoners sat together, the treasurer said to the peasant, "Tell me, you wretch, where you and I have ever met before today. How could you have given me that necklace?"

"Honorable sir," said the peasant, "I have never owned anything valuable. Even the stool and the cot I have are rickety. I said what I did because I thought that with your help I would get out of this trouble. Please don't be angry with me, sir."

"Well then," the high priest indignantly asked the treasurer, "how did you pass on to me what this fellow never gave to you?"

"I said that," explained the treasurer, "because I thought that you and I, both being high ranking officials, would be able to get out of trouble together."

"Brahman," the chief musician asked the high priest, "when do you think you gave the jewel to me?"

"I only said I did," answered the chaplain, "because I thought you would help to make the time in prison pass more agreeably."

Finally the courtesan complained, "You wretch of a musician, you have never visited me, and I have never visited you. When could you have given me the necklace?"

"Don't be angry, my dear," said the musician. "I just wanted you to be here to keep us company. Cheer up! Let's all be lighthearted together for a while."

As soon as his servants had reported this conversation to the Bodhisatta, he saw that all his suspicions were correct. He was convinced that a female monkey had taken the necklace.

"Now I must find a way to make her drop it," he said to himself. He ordered his servants to catch some monkeys, to deck them out with strings of beads, and then to release them again in the pleasure garden. The men were to carefully watch every monkey in the grounds. As soon as they saw one wearing the missing pearl necklace, they were to frighten her into dropping it.

The monkeys strutted about with their beads strung around their necks, their wrists, and their ankles. They flaunted their splendor in front of the guilty monkey, who sat quietly guarding her treasure. At last, jealousy overcame her prudence. "Those are only beads!" she screeched, and foolishly put on her own necklace of real pearls. As soon as the servants saw this, they began making loud noises and

throwing things at her. The monkey became so frightened that she dropped the necklace and scampered away. The men took it to their master.

The minister immediately took it to the king. "Here, sire," he said, "is the queen's necklace. The five prisoners are innocent. It was a female monkey in the pleasure garden that took it."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed the king. "But, tell me, how did you find that out? And how did you manage to get it back?"

When he had heard the whole story, the king praised his minister. "You certainly are the right man in the right place!" he proclaimed. In appreciation, the king showered the minister with immeasurable treasure.

The king continued to follow the Bodhisatta's advice and counsel. After a long life of generosity and meritorious acts, he passed away to fare according to his deserts.

His lesson ended, the Buddha again praised Venerable Ananda's merits, and identified the birth. "Ananda was the king of those days," he said, "and I was his wise counsellor."

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# Jataka Tales of the Buddha

## Part III

Retold by

**Ken & Visakha Kawasaki**

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### **Kumbha Jataka (Jataka No. 512) The Fifth Precept**

Once, while the Buddha was staying at Jetavana Monastery in Savatthi, Visakha, the wealthy and devout lay Buddhist, was invited by five hundred women she knew to join in celebrating a festival in the city.

"This is a drinking festival," Visakha replied. "I do not drink."

"All right," the women said, "go ahead and make an offering to the Buddha. We will enjoy the festival."

The next morning, Visakha served the Buddha and the Order of bhikkhus at her house and made great offerings of the four requisites.<sup>[1]</sup>

That afternoon she proceeded to Jetavana to offer incense and beautiful flowers to the Buddha and to hear the teaching. Although the other women were already quite drunk, they accompanied her. Even at the gate of the monastery itself, they continued drinking. When Visakha entered the hall, she bowed reverently to the Buddha and sat respectfully on one side. Her five hundred companions, however, were oblivious to propriety. They seemed, in fact, not to notice where they were. Even in front of the Buddha some of them danced, some sang, some stumbled around drunkenly, and some bickered.

In order to inspire a sense of urgency in them, the Buddha emitted a dark blue radiance from his eyebrows, and everything suddenly became dark. The women were terrified with the fear of death and instantly became sober. The Buddha then disappeared from his seat and stood on top of Mount Meru. From the curl of white hair between his eyebrows he emitted a ray of light as bright as if one thousand moons and suns were rising. "Why are you laughing and enjoying yourselves," he demanded, "you who are always burning and surrounded by darkness? Why don't you seek light?"

The Buddha's words touched their now-receptive minds, and all five hundred women became stream-enterers.

The Buddha then returned and sat down in his chamber. Visakha bowed to him once more and asked, "Venerable sir, what is the origin of this custom of drinking alcohol, which destroys a person's modesty and sense of shame?"

In answer to Visakha's question, the Buddha revealed this story of the distant past.

Long, long ago, when Brahmadata was reigning in Baranasi, a hunter named Sura went to the Himalayas from his hometown in Kasi to look for game. In that remote jungle there was a unique tree whose trunk grew to the height of a man with his arms held up over his head. At that point three branches spread out, forming a hollow about the size of a big water barrel. Whenever it rained, the hollow filled up with water. Around the tree grew a bitter plum tree, a sour plum tree, and a pepper vine. The ripe fruit from the plum trees and the pepper vine fell directly into that hollow. Nearby there was a patch of wild rice. Parrots plucked the heads of the rice and sat on the tree to eat. Some of the seeds fell into the water. Under the heat of the sun, the liquid in the hollow fermented and became blood red.

In the hot season, flocks of thirsty birds went there to drink. Swiftly becoming intoxicated, they wildly spiraled upwards, only to fall drunkenly at the foot of the tree. After sleeping for a short time, they woke up and flew away, chirping merrily. A similar thing happened to monkeys and other tree-climbing animals.

The hunter observed all this and wondered, "What is in the hollow of that tree? It can't be poison, for if it were, the birds and animals would die." He drank some of the liquid and became intoxicated the same as they. As he drank, he felt a strong desire to eat meat. He kindled a small fire, wrung the necks of some of the partridges, fowls, and other creatures lying unconscious at the foot of the tree, and roasted them over the coals. He gesticulated drunkenly with one hand as he stuffed his mouth with the other.

While he was drinking and eating, he remembered a hermit named Varuna who lived near there. Wishing to share his discovery with the hermit, Sura filled a bamboo tube with the liquor, wrapped up some of the roast meat, and set out for the hermit's leaf hut. As soon as he arrived, he offered the hermit some of the beverage, and both of them ate and drank with gusto.

The hunter and the hermit realized this drink could be the way to make their fortune. They poured it into large bamboo tubes which they balanced on poles slung across their shoulders and carried to Kasi. From the first border outpost they sent a message to the king that drink-makers had arrived. When they were summoned, they took the alcohol and offered it to the king. The king took two or three drinks and became intoxicated. After a few days, he had consumed all that the two men had carried and asked if there was any more.

"Yes, sire," they answered.

"Where?" asked the king.

"In the Himalayas."

"Go and fetch it," ordered the king.

Sura and Varuna went back to the forest, but they soon realized how much trouble it was to return to the mountains every time they ran out. They took note of all the ingredients and gathered everything needed, so that they were able to brew the alcohol in the city. The citizens began drinking the liquor, forgot about their work, and became poor. The city soon looked like a ghost town.

At that point the two drink-makers left and took their business to Baranasi, where they sent a message to the king. There, too, the king summoned them and offered them support. As the habit of drinking spread, ordinary business deteriorated, and Baranasi declined in the same way as Kasi had. Sura and Varuna next went to Saketa, and, after abandoning Saketa, proceeded to Savatthi.

At that time the king of Savatthi was named Sabbamitta. He welcomed the two merchants and asked them what they wanted. They asked for large quantities of the main ingredients and five hundred huge jars. After everything had been combined, they put the mixture in the jars and tied a cat to each jar to

guard against rats.

As the brew fermented, it began to overflow. The cats happily lapped up the potent drink that ran down the sides, became thoroughly intoxicated, and lay down to sleep. Rats came and nibbled on their ears, noses, and tails.

The king's men were shocked and reported to the king that the cats tied to the jars had died from drinking the escaping liquor.

"Surely these men must be making poison!" the king concluded, and he immediately ordered them both beheaded. As Sura and Varuna were being executed, their last words were, "Sire, this is liquor! It is delicious!"

After putting the drink merchants to death, the king ordered that the jars be broken. By then, however, the effects of the alcohol had worn off, and the cats were playing merrily. The guards reported this to the king.

"If it had been poison," the king said, "the cats would have died. It may be delicious after all. Let us drink it."

He ordered that the city be decorated and that a pavilion be set up in the courtyard. He took his seat on a royal throne under a white umbrella and, surrounded by his ministers, prepared to drink.

At that moment, Sakka, the king of the gods, was surveying the world and wondering, "Who is dutifully taking care of his parents? Who is conducting himself well in thought, word, and deed?"

When he saw the king seated in his royal pavilion, ready to drink the brew, he thought, "If King Sabbamitta drinks that, the whole world will perish. I will make sure that he does not drink it."

Sakka instantly disguised himself as a brahman and, carrying a jar full of liquor in the palm of his hand, appeared standing in the air in front of the king. "Buy this jar! Buy this jar!" he cried.

King Sabbamitta saw him and asked, "Where do you come from, brahman? Who are you? What jar is that you have?"

"Listen!" Sakka replied. "This jar does not contain butter, oil, molasses, or honey. Listen to the innumerable vices that this jar holds.

"Whoever drinks this, poor silly fool, will lose control of himself until he stumbles on smooth ground and falls into a ditch or cesspool. Under its influence, he will eat things he'd never touch in his right mind. Please buy it. It is for sale, this worst of jars!

"The contents of this jar will distract a man's wits until he behaves like a brute, giving his enemy the fun of laughing at him. It will enable him to sing and dance stupidly in front of an assembly. Please buy this wonderful liquor for the obscene gaiety it brings.

"Even the most bashful will lose all modesty by drinking from this jar. The shyest man can forget the trouble of being dressed and can shamelessly run nude around the town. When he's tired, he'll happily rest anywhere, oblivious to danger or decency. Such is the nature of this drink. Please buy it. It is for sale, this worst of jars!

"When one drinks from this, one loses control of one's body, tottering as if one cannot stand, trembling, jerking, and shaking like a wooden puppet worked by another's hand. Buy my jar. It's full of wine.

"The man who drinks from this is prey to every danger because he loses his senses. One might burn to death in one's bed, stumble into a pack of jackals, drown in a puddle, become reduced to bondage or penury -- there is no misfortune that drinking this may not lead to.

"Having imbibed this, men may lie senseless on the road, soiled with their own vomit and licked by

dogs. A woman may become so intoxicated she will tie her beloved parents to a tree, revile her husband, and in her blindness even abuse or abandon her only child. Such is the merchandise contained in this jar.

"When a man drinks from this jar, he can believe that all the world is his and that he owes respect to no one. Buy this jar. It is filled to the brim with the strongest drink.

"Addicted to this drink, whole families of the highest class will squander their wealth and ruin their name. Buy this jar, sire. It is for sale.

"In this jar is a liquid which makes tongue and feet lose control. It creates irrational laughter and weeping. It dulls the eye and impairs the mind. It makes a man contemptible.

"Drinking this will create strife. Friends will quarrel and come to blows. Even the old gods were susceptible and lost their heaven because of drink.[2] Buy this jar and taste the wine.

"Because of this beverage, falsehoods are spoken with pleasure, and forbidden actions are performed with joy. False courage will lead to danger, and friends will be betrayed. The man who drinks this will dare any deed, unaware that he is dooming himself to hell. Try this drink, sire. Buy my jar.

"The one who drinks this brew will sin in thought, word, and deed. He will see good as evil and evil as good. Even the most modest person will act indecently when drunk. The wisest man will babble foolishly. Buy this lovely liquid and become addicted. You will grow accustomed to evil behavior, to lies, to abuse, to filth, and to disgrace.

"When thoroughly drunk, men are like oxen struck to the ground, collapsing and lying in a heap. No human power can compete with the poisonous power of liquor. Buy my jar.

"In short, drinking this will destroy every virtue. It will banish shame, erode good conduct, and kill good reputation. It will defile and cloud the mind. If you can allow yourself to drink this intoxicating liquor, sire, buy my jar."

When the king heard this, he realized the misery that would be caused by drinking alcohol. Overjoyed at being spared the danger, he wished to express his gratitude. "Brahman," he cried, "you have outdone even my mother and father in caring for me! In gratitude for your excellent words, let me give you five choice villages, a hundred serving women, seven hundred cows, and ten chariots with pure-bred horses. You have been a great teacher."

"As chief of the thirty-three gods," Sakka replied, revealing his identity, "I have no need of anything. You may keep your villages, servants, and cattle. Enjoy your delicious food and be content with sweet cakes. Take delight in the truths I've preached to you. In this way you will be blameless in this world and will attain a glorious heavenly rebirth in the next."

With these words, Sakka returned to his own abode.

King Sabbamitta vowed to abstain from alcohol and ordered that the jars be smashed. From that day on, he kept the precepts and generously dispensed alms. He lived a good life and was indeed reborn in heaven.

Later, however, the habit of drinking alcohol spread across India, and many people were affected.

The Buddha here ended his lesson and identified the Birth: "At that time Ananda was the king, and I myself was Sakka."

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## **Silanisamsa Jataka (Jataka No. 190)**

### **A Good Friend**

The Buddha told this story at Jetavana Monastery about a pious lay follower. One evening, when this faithful disciple came to the bank of the Aciravati River on his way to Jetavana to hear the Buddha, there was no boat at

the landing stage. The ferrymen had pulled their boats onto the far shore and had gone themselves to hear the Buddha. The disciple's mind was so full of delightful thoughts of the Buddha, however, that even though he walked into the river, his feet did not sink below the surface and he walked across the water as if he were on dry land. When, however, he noticed the waves on reaching the middle of the river, his ecstasy subsided and his feet began to sink. But as soon as he again focused his mind on the qualities of the Buddha, his feet rose and he was able to continue walking joyously over the water. When he arrived at Jetavana, he paid his respects to the Master and took a seat on one side.

"Good layman," the Buddha said, addressing the disciple, "I hope you had no mishap on your way."

"Venerable sir," the disciple replied, "while coming here, I was so absorbed in thoughts of the Buddha that, when I came to the river, I was able to walk across it as though it were solid."

"My friend," the Blessed One said, "you're not the only one who has been protected in this way. In olden days pious laymen were shipwrecked in mid-ocean and saved themselves by remembering the virtues of the Buddha." At the man's request, the Buddha told this story of the past.

Long, long ago, at the time of the Buddha Kassapa,<sup>[3]</sup> a lay disciple who had already entered the path booked passage on a ship along with one of his friends, a rich barber. The barber's wife asked this disciple to look after her husband.

A week after the ship left the port, it sank in mid-ocean. The two friends saved themselves by clinging to a plank and were at last cast up on a deserted island. Famished, the barber killed some birds, cooked them, and offered a share of his meal to the follower of the Buddha.

"No, thank you," he answered, "I am fine." Then he thought to himself, "In this isolated place, there is no help for us except the Triple Gem." As he sat meditating on the Triple Gem, a naga king who had been born on that island transformed himself into a beautiful ship filled with the seven precious things.<sup>[4]</sup> The three masts were made of sapphire, the planks and anchor of gold, and the ropes of silver.

The helmsman, who was a spirit of the sea, stood on the deck and cried, "Any passengers for India?"

"Yes," the lay disciple answered, "that's where we are bound."

"Then come on board," the sea spirit said.

The layman climbed aboard the beautiful ship and turned to call his friend the barber.

"You may come," the sea spirit said, "but he may not."

"Why not?" the disciple asked.

"He is not a follower of the holy life," answered the sea spirit. "I brought this ship for you, but not for him."

"In that case," the layman announced, "all the gifts I have given, all the virtues I have practiced, all the powers I have developed -- I give the fruit of all of them to him!"

"Thank you, Master!" cried the barber.

"Very well," said the sea spirit, "now I can take you both aboard."

The ship carried the two men over the sea and up the Ganges River. After depositing them safely at their home in Baranasi, the sea spirit used his magic power to create enormous wealth for both of them. Then, poising himself in mid-air, he instructed the men and their friends, "Keep company with the wise and good," he said. "If this barber had not been in company with this pious layman, he would have perished in the middle of the ocean." Finally, the sea spirit returned to his own abode, taking the naga king with him.

Having finished this discourse, the Buddha identified the Birth and taught the Dhamma, after which the pious layman entered on the fruit of the second path. "On that occasion," the Buddha said, "the disciple attained arahantship. Sariputta was the naga king, and I myself was the spirit of the sea."

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## **Duddubha Jataka (Jataka No. 322)**

### **The Sound the Hare Heard**

One morning while some bhikkhus were on their alms round in Savatthi, they passed some ascetics of different sects practicing austerities. Some of them were naked and lying on thorns. Others sat around a blazing fire under the burning sun.

Later, while the monks were discussing the ascetics, they asked the Buddha, "Lord, is there any virtue in those harsh ascetic practices?"

The Buddha answered, "No, monks, there is neither virtue nor any special merit in them. When they are examined and tested, they are like a path over a dunghill, or like the noise the hare heard."

Puzzled, the monks said, "Lord, we do not know about that noise. Please tell us what it was."

At their request the Buddha told them this story of the distant past.

Long, long ago, when Brahmadata was reigning in Baranasi, the Bodhisatta was born as a lion in a forest near the Western Ocean. In one part of that forest there was a grove of palms mixed with belli trees.<sup>[5]</sup> A hare lived in that grove beneath a palm sapling at the foot of a belli tree.

One day the hare lay under the young palm tree, idly thinking, "If this earth were destroyed, what would become of me?" At that very instant a ripe belli fruit happened to fall and hit a palm leaf making a loud "THUD!"

Startled by this sound, the hare leapt to his feet and cried, "The earth is collapsing!" He immediately fled, without even glancing back.

Another hare, seeing him race past as if for his very life, asked, "What's wrong?" and started running, too.

"Don't ask!" panted the first. This frightened the second hare even more, and he sprinted to keep up.

"What's wrong?" he shouted again.

Pausing for just a moment, the first hare cried, "The earth is breaking up!" At this, the two of them bolted off together.

Their fear was infectious, and other hares joined them until all the hares in that forest were fleeing together. When other animals saw the commotion and asked what was wrong, they were breathlessly told, "The earth is breaking up!" and they too began running for their lives. In this way, the hares were soon joined by herds of deer, boars, elk, buffaloes, wild oxen, and rhinoceroses, a family of tigers, and some elephants.

When the lion saw this headlong stampede of animals and heard the cause of their flight, he thought, "The earth is certainly not coming to an end. There must have been some sound which they misunderstood. If I don't act quickly they will be killed. I must save them!"

Then, as fast as only he could run, he got in front of them, and roared three times. At the sound of his mighty voice, all the animals stopped in their tracks. Panting, they huddled together in fear. The lion approached and asked why they were running away.

"The earth is collapsing," they all answered.

"Who saw it collapsing?" he asked.

"The elephants know all about it," some animals replied.

When he asked the elephants, they said, "We don't know. The tigers know."

The tigers said, "The rhinoceroses know." The rhinoceroses said, "The wild oxen know." The wild oxen said, "The buffaloes know." The buffaloes said, "The elk know." The elk said, "The boars know." The boars said, "The deer know." The deer said, "We don't know. The hares know."

When he asked the hares, they pointed to one particular hare and said, "This one told us."

The lion asked him, "Is it true, sir, that the earth is breaking up?"

"Yes, sir, I saw it," said the hare.

"Where were you when you saw it?"

"In the forest in a palm grove mixed with belli trees. I was lying there under a palm at the foot of a belli tree, thinking, 'If this earth were destroyed, what would become of me?' At that very moment I heard the sound of the earth breaking up and I fled."

From this explanation, the lion realized exactly what had really happened, but he wanted to verify his conclusions and demonstrate the truth to the other animals. He gently calmed the animals and said, "I will take the hare and go to find out whether or not the earth is coming to an end where he says it is. Until we return, stay here."

Placing the hare on his tawny back, he raced with great speed back to that grove. Then he put the hare down and said, "Come, show me the place you meant."

"I don't dare, my lord," said the hare.

"Don't be afraid," said the lion.

The hare, shivering in fear, would not risk going near the belli tree. He could only point and say, "Over there, sir, is the place of dreadful sound."

The lion went to the place the hare indicated. He could make out where the hare had been lying in the grass, and he saw the ripe belli fruit that had fallen on the palm leaf. Having carefully ascertained that the earth was not breaking up, he placed the hare on his back again and returned to the waiting animals.

He told them what he had found and said, "Don't be afraid." Reassured, all the animals returned to their usual places and resumed their routines.

Those animals had placed themselves in great danger because they listened to rumours and unfounded fears rather than trying to find out the truth themselves. Truly, if it had not been for the lion, those beasts would have rushed into the sea and perished. It was only because of the Bodhisatta's wisdom and compassion that they escaped death.

At the conclusion of the story, the Buddha identified the Birth: "At that time, I myself was the lion."

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## **Mahakapi Jataka (Jataka No. 407)**

### **The Great Monkey King**

One day in Jetavana Monastery bhikkhus began talking about the good that the Buddha did for his relatives. When the Buddha asked them about their subject, and they told him, he said, "Bhikkhus, this is not the first time the Tathagata has done good works to benefit his relatives." Then he told this story of the past.

Long, long ago, when Brahmadata was reigning in Baranasi, the Bodhisatta was born as a monkey in the Himalayas. When he was fully grown, he was extremely strong and vigorous and became the

leader of a troop of eighty thousand monkeys.

On the bank of the Ganges there was an enormous mango tree, with two massive branches so thick with leaves it looked like a mountain. Its sweet fruit was of exquisite fragrance and flavor. One branch spread over the bank of the river, but the other extended over the water. One day, while the monkey king was eating the succulent fruit, he thought, "If any of this fruit ever fell into the river, great danger could come to us." To prevent this, he ordered the monkeys to pick all the mango flowers or tiny fruit from that branch. One fruit, however, was hidden by an ant's nest and escaped the monkeys' attention. When it ripened, it fell into the river.

At that time, the King of Baranasi was bathing and amusing himself in the river. Whenever the king bathed in the river, he had nets stretched both upstream and downstream from where he was. The mango floated down the river and stuck in the net upstream from the king. That evening, as the king was leaving, the fishermen pulled in the net and found the fruit. As they had never seen a fruit like this before, they showed it to the king.

"What is this fruit?" the king asked.

"We do not know, sire," they answered.

"Who will know?"

"The foresters, sire."

The king summoned the foresters, who told him that the fruit was a mango. The king cut it with a knife and, after having the foresters eat some, tasted it himself. He also gave some of the fruit to the ministers and to his wives.

The king could not forget the magnificent flavor of the ripe mango. Obsessed with desire for the new fruit, he called the foresters again and asked where the tree stood. When he learned that it was on the bank of the river, he had many rafts joined together and sailed upstream to find it. In due course, the king and his retinue arrived at the site of the huge tree.

The king went ashore and set up a camp. After having eaten some of the delectable mangoes, he retired for the night on a bed prepared at the foot of the tree. Fires were lit and guards set on each side.

At midnight, after the men had fallen asleep and all was quiet, the monkey king came with his troop. The eighty thousand monkeys moved from branch to branch eating mangoes. The noise woke the king, who roused his archers.

"Surround those monkeys eating mangoes and shoot them," he ordered. "Tomorrow we will dine on mango fruit and monkey's flesh."

The archers readied their bows to obey the king. The monkeys saw the archers and realized that all means of escape had been cut off. Shivering in fear of death, they ran to their leader and cried, "Sire, there are men with bows all around the tree preparing to shoot us. What can we do?"

"Do not fear," he comforted them. "I will save your lives." Then he climbed onto the branch stretching over the river. Springing from the end of it, he jumped a hundred bow-lengths and landed on the opposite bank of the Ganges. Judging the distance he had jumped, he thought, "That is how far I came." Then he found a long vine and cut it, thinking, "This much will be fastened to a tree, and this much will go across the river." He secured one end of the vine to a sturdy tree and the other around his own waist. Then he again leapt across the river with the speed of a cloud blown by the wind. In his calculation, however, he had forgotten to include the length to be tied around his own waist, so he could not reach the trunk of the mango tree. He reached out and grabbed the end of a branch firmly with both hands. He signaled to the troop of monkeys and cried, "Quick! Step on my back and run along this vine to safety. Good luck to you all!"

The eighty thousand monkeys, each in turn, respectfully saluted the monkey king, asked his pardon, and escaped in this way. The last monkey in the troop, however, had long resented the leader and

wished to overthrow him. When he saw the monkey king hanging there, he exulted, "This is my chance to see the last of my enemy!" Climbing onto a high branch, he flung himself down on the monkey king's back with a dreadful blow that broke his heart. Having caused his rival excruciating pain, the wicked monkey triumphantly escaped and left the monkey king to suffer alone.

Having seen all that had happened as he lay on his bed, the king thought, "This noble monkey king, not caring for his own life, has ensured the safety of his troop. It would be wrong to destroy such an animal. I will have him brought down and taken care of." He ordered his men to lower the monkey gently down to a raft on the Ganges. After the monkey had been brought ashore and washed, the king anointed him with the purest oil. Spreading an oiled skin on his own bed and laying the monkey king on it, the king covered him with a yellow robe. After the noble animal had been given sugared water to drink, the king himself took a low seat and addressed him, "Noble monkey, you made yourself a bridge for all the other monkeys to pass over to safety. What are you to them, and what are they to you?" he asked.

The monkey explained, "Great king, I guard the herd. I am their lord and chief. When they were filled with fear of your archers, I leapt a great distance to save them. After I had tied a vine around my waist, I returned to this mango tree. My strength was almost gone, but I managed to hold the branch so that my monkeys could pass over my back and reach safety. Because I could save them, I have no fear of death. Like a righteous king, I could guarantee the happiness of those over whom I used to reign. Sire, understand this truth! If you wish to be a righteous ruler, the happiness of your kingdom, your cities, and your people must be dear to you. It must be dearer than life itself."

After teaching the king in this way, the monkey king died. The king gave orders that the monkey king should be given a royal funeral. He ordered his wives to carry torches to the cemetery with their hair disheveled. The ministers sent a hundred wagon loads of wood for the funeral pyre. When the regal ceremony was over, the ministers took the skull to the king. The king built a shrine at the monkey's burial place, and made offerings of incense and flowers. He had the skull inlaid with gold, raised on a spear, and carried in front of the procession returning to Baranasi. There he put it at the royal gate and paid homage to it with incense and flowers. The whole city was decorated, and the skull was honored for seven days. For the rest of his life the king revered the skull as a relic, offering incense and garlands. Established in the wonderful teaching of the monkey king, he gave alms and performed other good deeds. He ruled his kingdom righteously and became destined for heaven.

After the lesson, the Buddha declared the Truths and identified the Birth: "At that time the king was Ananda, the monkey retinue was this assembly, the wicked monkey was Devadatta, and I myself was the monkey king."

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## Notes

1. Robes, food, lodgings, and medicines. [[Go back](#)]
  2. The asuras, the predecessors of the devas, lost their heaven because Sakka was able to expel them when they were too drunk to fight him. [[Go back](#)]
  3. The Buddha Kassapa was the Buddha immediately preceding Gotama in the lineage of the Buddhas. [[Go back](#)]
  4. Gold, silver, pearls, gems, cat's eyes, diamonds and coral. [[Go back](#)]
  5. The belli (beluva or vilva) is the Bengal quince. [[Go back](#)]
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