

THE STORY ABOUT A SANDY PLACE



VANŪPĀTHAJĀTAKA, JA 2

TRANSLATED BY

ĀNANDAJOTI BHIKKHU

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Note

This second Jātaka has lots of interest for the student, and again displays something on an anomaly. Part of the interest is again in the quotations in the word commentary from the discourses. Here we see a versification of a popular and often used passage, which then borders on being canonical.

The problem in the story is that it hardly fits the moral being inculcated. The Buddha speaks to a monk who has given up his efforts, and tells him of his perseverance in a previous life. But the story, rather than emphasising his effort, which it easily could have done, simply relates that, when asked, he descended into a well, and broke a stone which released a torrent of water. The way the story is told it seems to have taken some – but no great – effort to achieve.

Again the verse is given in the conclusion, and not in the story itself, and is spoken by the Buddha after his Awakening.

Overview

In the present a monk gives up easily on his quest for insight. He is brought to the Buddha who points out that in an earlier life he had saved a caravan by his perseverance, and he then told the story of a caravan that became lost during the night, and was saved when a young boy followed his master's orders and struck water.

The Bodhisatta = the caravan elder (satthavāhajeṭṭhaka),
the monk who gave up striving = the serving lad (cullūpaṭṭhāka),
the Buddha’s disciples = the rest of the cast (avasesaparisa).

Keywords: Perseverance, Effort

The Story of the Present

“*Untiring,*” {1.106} this Dhamma teaching the Fortunate One taught while living at Sāvatti.

But what was the occasion? One monk who had given up effort.

It seems that while the Realised One was living at Sāvatti one man of good family who lived in Sāvatti went to Jeta’s Wood, heard a Dhamma teaching in the presence of the Teacher and gained confidence. Seeing the danger in sensual desires, he took lower and higher ordination and, after spending five Rains Retreats, (during which time) he learned the two matrixes,¹ and trained in the practice of insight. He received a meditation subject pleasing to his mind in the presence of the Teacher, entered into a wilderness, and undertook the Rains Retreat. But even after three months had passed he was unable to give rise to the light or the sign.

¹ i.e. the two Pātimokkhas, or the Book of Regulations for the monks and nuns.

Then this occurred to him: “The Teacher has spoken about four types of person,² and of those I will be one who knows the words only, I think there will not be Path or Fruit for me in this existence. Why should I live in a wilderness? Having gone into the presence of the Teacher, while gazing on the beauty of body attained by the Buddha’s body, I can dwell listening to the sweet Dhamma teachings.”

He returned again to Jeta’s Wood.

Then his friends and companions said: “Venerable sir, you took a meditation subject from the Teacher, and went away thinking: ‘I will do ascetic practice.’ Now having returned, you are going around socializing. Is it that you have attained the summit of the work of one gone forth, and will never be reborn again?”

“Venerable sir, I have not gained Path or Fruit, but thinking: ‘I may be a person who never attains,’ I gave up my effort, and returned.”

“You are without a proper reason, venerable sir! After going forth in this Teacher’s Dispensation, and making strong effort, you have given up your effort, and done something unsuitable. Come, we will present you to the Realised One,” {1.107} and taking him they went into the presence of the Teacher.

² AN 4.133. *there are these four persons found in the world... one who understands after a brief explanation, one who understands after a detailed explanation, one who needs to be taught further, one who knows the words only.*

The Teacher, after seeing him, said: “Monks, you have brought this monk here against his will, what has he done?”

They said: “Reverent sir, this monk, after going forth in this Dispensation which leads out (of saṃsāra), and doing ascetic practice, has given up his effort, and returned.”

Then the Teacher said to him: “Is it true, as it seems, monk, that you have given up your effort?”

“It is true, Fortunate One.”

“But why did you, monk, after going forth in such a Dispensation, not make yourself known as one who is wanting little, content, secluded, and making effort, but you make yourself known as one who has given up effort?

Formerly you were energetic, and because of your effort in a deadly wildness five hundred men and oxen received water, and were comforted, and why now are you giving up your effort?”

That monk was encouraged by these words.

But having heard what was said, those monks begged the Fortunate One, saying: “Reverent sir, this monk giving up his effort is clear to us. But formerly, how, because of his effort, in a deadly wilderness, men and oxen received water, and were comforted, is concealed. It is clear to you who are omniscient, please explain this deed to us.”

“Then listen, monks.”

The Fortunate One, having made their mindfulness arise, made clear the deeds that had been concealed by the gap between existences.

The Story of the Past

In the past, when Brahmadata was reigning in Benares, in the Kāsi country, the Bodhisatta took rebirth linking in a family of caravan merchants, and after growing up he travelled around as a caravan merchant with five hundred carts.

One day he entered a deadly, sixty league, wilderness. In that wilderness the sand was so fine no one was able to hold it in his hand. Once the sun had begun to rise it became hot like a heap of coals, and no one could walk on it.

Therefore those who entered it took carts with firewood, water, oil, rice and so on, and only proceeded at night. When dawn arose they gathered the carts round, made an awning over their heads, and after finishing their meal duty at the right time, and letting the day come to an end in the shade, when the sun went down, they ate their evening meal, and when the ground had cooled they yoked their carts and proceeded.

The journey being like an ocean-going journey, the one who received the name ‘dry-land pilot’ led the caravan across the desert by the signs of the stars. {1.108} At that time the caravan merchant was proceeding across the wilderness being led in this way.

After traveling for fifty-nine leagues, he thought: “Now in one more night this deadly wilderness will be finished.”

When the evening meal had been eaten he threw all the wood and water away, and after yoking the carts he started out.

The pilot, having spread his seat on the front cart, and watching the stars in the sky, while saying: “Go forward from here, go forward from here,” lay down. For a long time he had been without sleep, and wearied, he fell asleep, and the oxen, having turned round, took the wrong path without him knowing. The oxen all night went on.

The pilot at the time of dawn woke up, and after seeing the stars, said: “Turn the carts round, turn them!” And after they had turned the carts round and made them into a line again the dawn came up. The men said: “Yesterday we camped right here in this place, but now our wood and water is finished, and we are lost!”

Having unyoked the carts and placed them in a circle, they made an awning above their heads, and they lay down grieving underneath their carts.

The Bodhisatta thought: “If I give up my effort everyone will be destroyed.” So he wandered around in the morning while the sand was still cool until he saw a tangle of trees and grass, then thinking: “Below this grass, water and moisture must be found,” he took a spade and dug in that place, and they dug down for sixty feet. So far they dug in that place, until the spade struck a stone below, and at that point they all gave up their efforts.

But the Bodhisatta thinking: “Under this stone there will be water,” descended and standing on the stone, bent down his ear, and listening for a sound, he heard the sound of water running below,

and coming back out he said to a serving lad: “My dear, if you give up your effort, everyone will be destroyed, without giving up effort, take this iron hammer, descend into this trench, and give this stone a blow.”

Accepting his advice, where everyone else {1.109} had given up their effort, without giving up effort in that place, he descended and gave the stone a blow.

Having broken the stone in the middle, it fell in below, and the stream was no longer impeded, and up rose a jet of water as high as a palm tree.

Everyone, drank the water and bathed. After breaking up the rest of the wheels and yokes, and cooking and eating their rice meal, and feeding the oxen, as the sun was going down, they set up a flag near the waterhole, and went on to the places they had hoped for. There, having sold their wares for two or three or four times what they had paid for them, they returned to their own dwelling places.

There, after living out the rest of their lives, they passed on according to their deeds.

The Bodhisatta also, giving gifts and so on and doing other meritorious deeds, passed on according to his deeds.

The Conclusion 1

The Perfect Sambuddha, after teaching this Dhamma discourse, becoming Fully Awakened, spoke this verse:

The Verse and Word Commentary

“Akilāsuno, vaṇṇupathe khaṇantā,

“Untiring, digging in a sandy place,

Udaṅgaṇe tattha papaṃ avindum,

In the open, he found drinking water,

Evaṃ munī viriyabalūpapanno,

So the sage, endowed with strength of effort,

Akilāsu vinde hadayassa santin.”-ti

Untiring, finds peace (right here) in his heart.”

Herein, *untiring* means not being lazy, having made an effort.

In a sandy place is said to be sandy, having sand; on a sandy path is the meaning.

Digging means digging the ground.

In the open, an open space, wandering about with his men on an open piece of land, is the meaning.

There means there in a sandy place.

He found water means he obtained water.

When water is in a drinkable state *drinking water* is said. A lot of water is *drinking water*, a great deal of water is the meaning.³

So is used (to indicate) the simile.

The sage, sageness is said to be knowledge, or a certain sagacity of body and so on, the person who is endowed with that is said to be a *sage*.

But there are various kinds (of sage): a sage with a home, a sage without a home, a sage in training, a sage beyond training, a sage who is an Independent Buddha, a Sage of Sages.

Herein, a sage with a home means a householder who has attained fruition, one who knows the Dispensation.

A sage without a home, this is appropriate for one gone forth.

A sage in training means in one of the seven trainings.⁴

³ This sounds odd, but it probably means that when there is a lot of water, as in a large river or lake, it will be relatively clean, and therefore drinkable. Whereas a small puddle of water may be muddy and undrinkable.

⁴ I.e. one who has attained Path or Fruit as a Stream-Enterer, a Once-Returner, a Non-Returner, as one who has the Path to Worthiness (*Arahatta*).

A sage beyond training is one who has destroyed the pollutants.⁵

A sage who is an Independent Buddha means an Independent Sambuddha.

A Sage of Sages means a Perfect Sambuddha.

But in this meaning, because of being compassionate to all {1.110} he is reckoned a sage, when endowed with wisdom he is a *sage*, so it should be seen.

Endowed with strength of effort means endowed with effort and strength of body and the strength of knowledge.

Untiring means not being lazy, thinking:

“Willingly, let only flesh, muscle and bones remain,
Let the flesh and blood in the body dry up completely.”⁶

so one who is said to be endowed with the fourfold effort,⁷ is not lazy.

⁵ i.e. one who has Fruit of Worthiness (*Arahatta*).

⁶ This is a versification of a phrase said many times in the discourses, where it appears in this prose phrase: *kāmaṃ taco ca nhāru ca aṭṭhi ca avasissatu, sarīre upassussatu maṃsalohitaṃ*. See MN 70 Kīṭāgirisutta, *passim*.

⁷ I believe this equates *virīya* with the fourfold right effort (*sammāvāyāma*) in the eightfold path: the effort of avoiding or overcoming the unwholesome; and of developing and maintaining the wholesome.

Finds peace (right here) in his heart means by causing a coolness of mind, of the heart, *peace* comes to be reckoned, what is reckoned as the absorptions, insight, deep knowledges, the Path to knowledge of Worthiness, nobility is found, is received, is the meaning.

Therefore the Fortunate One said (SN 2.22):

“The lazy one suffers, monastics,⁸ being full of unskilful wicked thoughts, bringing to ruin his greatest good. One with effort aroused lives happily, monastics, secluded from unskilful wicked thoughts, fulfilling his greatest good. The highest good, monastics, is not attained by the weak.”

Thus in many discourses it is explained in detail that the lazy one has a life of suffering, the one with effort aroused has a life of happiness.

But here the one who has made a resolution to be one with effort aroused, with insight, who attains the strength of effort, and live happily, is being pointed out:

“Evaṃ munī viriyabalūpapanno,

“So the sage, endowed with strength of effort,

Akilāsu vinde hadayassa santin,”-ti āha.

Untiring, finds peace (right here) in his heart,” is said

⁸ SN 2.22 Dutiyadasabalasutta.

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This is what is said: Just as the tradesman who is *untiring, digging in a sandy place*, obtains water, so in this Dispensation, being untiring, the wise monastic who exerts himself obtains peace in his heart, which consists of the absorptions and so on.

“You, monk, previously, just for the purpose of gaining water, made an effort, but now in such a Dispensation that leads out through giving Path and Fruit, why would you give up effort?”

The Conclusion 2

So he presented this Dhamma teaching, and revealed the four truths, and at the end of the truths this monk who had given up effort was established in the highest fruit of Worthiness.

Having told these two stories, he joined them together, and showed the connection of the Jātaka: “At that time, having not given up effort, and having split the stone, this serving lad, who gave water to the people was this monk who has given up effort, the rest of the group were the Buddha’s assembly, and I indeed was the elder caravan merchant,” and so he concluded the teaching.

The Story about a Sandy Place, the Second