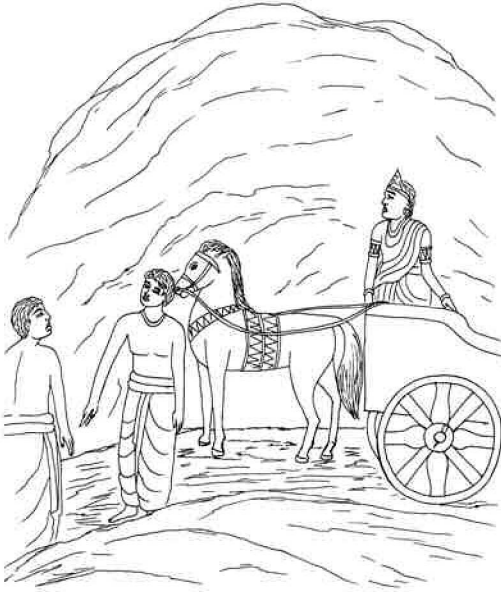


The Kings' Virtues Rajovada Jataka



It was while staying at Jetavana that the Buddha told this story about teaching a king a lesson.

One afternoon, the king of Kosala arrived in his splendid chariot at the monastery. After the king had paid his respects, the Buddha asked why he had come at that time of day.

“Venerable Sir,” the king replied, “I am later than usual because I was sitting on a difficult criminal case. After passing sentence, I ate and came directly here, with my hands hardly dry, to wait upon you.”

“Sire, you are correct in judging such a case with justice and impartiality; that is the way to

heaven. In that you have the advice of a teacher such as I, it is not surprising that you judge your cases fairly. It is remarkable, however, that a king of the past, who had to rely on the advice of mere scholars who were not so wise, was, nevertheless, able to pass judgment fairly and justly, avoiding the four evil courses and observing the ten duties of a king.”

At the king's request, the Buddha told this story of the past.

Long, long ago, when Brahmadata was reigning in Baranasi, the Bodhisatta was born as his son and was named Prince Brahmadata after his father.

At sixteen, he was sent to Takkasila, where he quickly mastered all branches of learning. When, on his father's death, he became king, he ruled with uprightness and administered justice without partiality. Because he ruled justly, his ministers were also just. Because everything was done fairly, no false suits were ever brought to court. All the bustle of litigation stopped. Ministers often sat on their benches for many days without seeing a single plaintiff. The courts were virtually deserted.

One day, the king reflected, “My government is just, and the courts are quiet. I wonder, however, whether I personally have any fault. If I do, I will give it up and live a better life.”

He began asking everyone in the palace, but no one told him of any flaw in his character or behavior. He heard only praise of himself. “Perhaps,” he thought, “they are all so afraid of me that they dare not say anything but good. Let me ask those in the city, outside the palace.” There, too, he heard only praise of his virtues. He extended his quest into the suburbs, inquiring of the citizens at large, but, even there, no one spoke of any fault in the king.

Still not satisfied, he decided to try in the countryside. Before he went into the rural areas, he entrusted the government to his ministers. Mounting his chariot, accompanied only by the driver, the king left the city in disguise. He traveled all over the country, even as far as the very borders of the kingdom, but no matter how he phrased his question, not a single person found any fault in the king. Everywhere he went, he heard himself lauded, even though no one suspected who he really was. Satisfied at last, he turned back to return to the capital.

It just so happened that Mallika, the king of Kosala, had been doing the very same thing. King Mallika, who also ruled fairly, had been searching in exactly the same way for a fault in

himself. He, too, had traveled to the edge of his kingdom, but had heard nothing but praise, and had decided to return to his capital. Riding in his royal chariot, he arrived at the very same spot as King Brahmadata at the very same time.

The place where these two kings met was a narrow passage between two steep cliffs. The road was wide enough for only one chariot.

“Make way!” King Mallika’s charioteer shouted, “Get your chariot out of the way! This is the vehicle of the great King Mallika, king of Kosala! You must make way and let our king pass!”

“My goodness!” King Brahmadata’s driver mused. “Here’s another king! What in the world is to be done?” Then, announcing that his chariot contained the king of Kasi, he asked King Mallika’s age, thinking that the younger should give way. He discovered, however, that the two kings were exactly the same age. When he asked the extent of the other kingdom, he discovered that each of them ruled a country three hundred yojanas long. Furthermore, their wealth, power, and glory, were exactly the same. Then he thought that way might be given to the better man, so he asked the other driver to describe his master’s virtues.

“King Mallika.” the charioteer replied, “gives rough to the rough, and mildness to the mild. He masters the good with goodness and makes the bad suffer.”

“Is that all you have to say about your king’s virtues?” asked King Brahmadata’s charioteer.

“Yes,” the other shouted.

“If these are his virtues, what must his vices be!”

“You call those vices, do you? All right. Let us hear what your king’s virtues are.”

“Listen, my good man! The king of Kasi conquers wrath by mildness, and sways the bad with goodness. He overcomes the miser with generosity and consistently repays lies with the truth.”

When they heard that, both King Mallika and his driver got down from their chariot. The driver unhitched the horses and moved the chariot out of the way so that King Brahmadata could pass.

Before leaving, King Brahmadata advised King Mallika on the ten duties of a king and urged him to rule wisely and with compassion.

King Brahmadata returned to Baranasi and continued giving alms and performing many good deeds all his life, until he went, at last, to swell the hosts of heaven.

King Mallika took Brahmadata’s lessons to heart. Returning to his own city, he ruled wisely, practiced generosity, and performed many good deeds. When he died, he, too, was reborn in heaven.

Having concluded his story, the Buddha identified the birth: “At that time, Moggallana was the driver of King Mallika, Ananda was the king, Sariputta was the driver of the king of Kasi, and I was the young King Brahmadata.”