

The Power of Truth

Maccha Jataka

It was while staying at Jetavana during a time of severe drought that the Buddha told this story. At that time, the monsoon had failed in Kosala. Crops had withered in the fields, and ponds, tanks, and lakes had dried up. Even the pond near the gateway of Jetavana was empty, and the fish and turtles had buried themselves in the mud. Crows and hawks came, probed the cracks with their sharp beaks, pulled their victims out, writhing and wriggling, and devoured them.

Early one morning, the Buddha saw the helpless creatures being killed, and his heart was filled with compassion. "Today," he resolved, "I must help them!" At sunrise, he took his bowl and, followed by a large host of bhikkhus, walked into Savatthi for alms. That afternoon, when the Buddha returned to the monastery, he stopped at the steps leading down into the tank.

"Ananda," he said, "bring me a bathing cloth. I wish to bathe in this tank."

"But, Venerable Sir," his attendant objected, "the water has dried up, and only mud remains."

The Buddha calmly replied, "Great is a Buddha's power, Ananda."

Ananda quickly retrieved the Buddha's bathing cloth and gave it to him. The Buddha tied one end of the cloth around his waist and draped the other end over his shoulder to cover his body. Standing on the steps of the tank, he declared, "I wish to bathe in the tank of Jetavana."

At that moment, Sakka's throne grew hot, and the king of the gods wondered why this was happening. Instantly, he understood the reason and summoned the Rain God. "The Buddha," he said, "is standing on the steps of the tank of Jetavana and wishes to bathe. Make haste and pour rain over the entire kingdom of Kosala."

Obedying Sakka's command, the Rain God assumed the form of an enormous rain cloud, created thunder and lightning, and released a welcome deluge of rain over all of Kosala. In no time at all, the tank at Jetavana was full to the topmost step.

The Buddha bathed in the tank, donned his robes, and proceeded to the Perfumed Chamber for the day's abiding.

That evening, the bhikkhus gathered in the Hall of Truth and talked among themselves about the compassion of the Master.

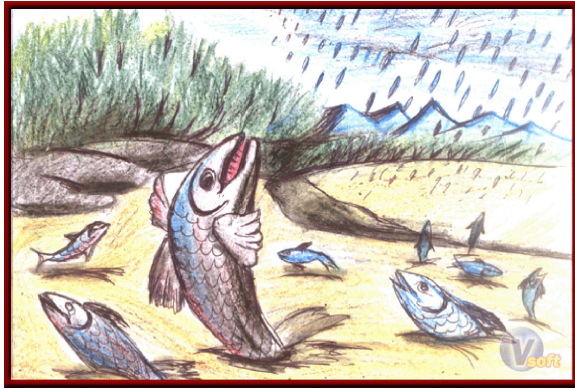
"This morning," one of them began, "the tank near the monastery gate was dry, but the Buddha stood on the steps and prepared to bathe."

"By his power," another remarked, "he made it rain all over Kosala. The kingdom has been refreshed, and all the ponds and tanks are full."

"By the time the Master entered the monastery," a third exclaimed, "he had saved all the water creatures from their plight."

When the Buddha entered the hall, he asked what they were discussing, and they told him.

"Bhikkhus," the Buddha replied, "this is not the first time that the Tathagata has made the rain fall in an hour of great need. He did the same long ago when he was born as a fish. Then, at their request, he told this story of the past."



Long, long ago, in this very kingdom, indeed, right here in Savatthi, exactly where the tank of Jetavana is now, there was a huge pond, surrounded by a tangle of jungle trees and creepers. In that pond, the Bodhisatta had been born as a great fish.

At that time, also, the same as now, there was a dreadful drought in the land. Crops had been destroyed, and all the water sources had dried up. Even that great pond

was dry. The fish and turtles, in their struggle to survive, were burying themselves in the mud. Large flocks of crows and hawks gathered at the pond, and, with their sharp beaks, pulled the poor creatures from the mud and devoured them.

The great fish, who was the chief of the creatures in the pond, realized that he alone could save his followers, kinsfolk, and companions. Arching his powerful and silvery body, now blackened with mud, he pushed himself from the mire, gazed at the heavens with his ruby-colored eyes, and addressed Pajjunna, the Rain God.

“Good Pajjunna,” he declared, “my heart is troubled. How can it be, I pray, that when I, who maintain righteousness, am distressed for the sake of my kith and kin, you send no rain? I hereby make this asseveration of truth! I declare that, although, born as I have been as a great fish, it would be natural for me to prey on other fish, I have never eaten a single one, not even a fish as small as a grain of rice! Furthermore, I swear that I have never deprived a single living creature of its life! By the power of this Truth, I call upon you to send rain and to save all those that are suffering here!”

As soon as Pajjunna heard this declaration, he released heavy rains which relieved innumerable creatures from the fear of death.

After a long and virtuous life, that great fish passed away to fare according to his deserts.

His lesson ended, the Buddha identified the birth. “My disciples were the fishes and turtles of those days, Ananda was Pajjunna, and I was the great fish.”

Jataka 75, Retold by Ken and Visakha Kawasaki

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