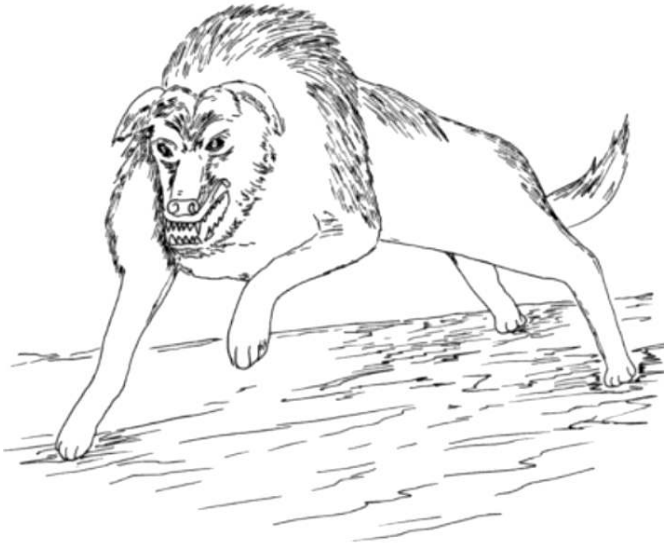


The Great Black Hound *Mah -Kanha J taka*



It was while staying at Jetavana that the Buddha told this story about living for the benefit of the world.

One day, in the Hall of Truth, some bhikkhus were talking about the great efforts the Buddha had made for the welfare of the world. "The Buddha has given up his own comfort and lives for the good of others. He often takes his robe and bowl and goes on a journey for the sake of just one person," one bhikkhu said. One by one, the bhikkhus enumerated some of the great feats the Buddha had accomplished to this end.

"He set in motion the Wheel of the Law when he taught the five ascetics¹, and, by

teaching the Anattalakkhana Sutta, he led them all to arahatship."

"He went to Uruvel , where he performed three thousand five hundred miracles and ordained one thousand ascetics with matted hair. Then, when he delivered the Adittapariyaya Sutta (Fire Sermon)², at Gay sisa, he led them all to arahatship."

"He walked three gavutas to meet Mah -Kassapa and to give him higher ordination."

"He traveled two hundred yojanas to meet Mah -Kappina and to establish him in arahatship."

"He walked thirty yojanas to convert that cruel murderer, Angulim la, and to give him ordination."

"At another time he walked thirty yojanas, to teach lavaka, to establish him in the first path, and to save the life of the prince.

"He spent three months in T vatimsa to teach eight hundred million devas."

"He went to the Brahma heavens to cure Baka-Brahm of his false views and taught innumerable devas there."

"Every year, he travels from kingdom to kingdom, giving the refuges and precepts to all who ask."

"Neglecting neither n gas nor garulas, he teaches all who are capable of understanding virtue."

When the Buddha heard what they were discussing, he said, "It is no wonder, Bhikkhus, that I, who now have perfect wisdom, do so much for the benefit of the world. Long ago, also, before I attained enlightenment, I made great efforts for the benefit of the world." Then he told this story of the past.

Long, long ago, a king named Usinara was reigning in B r nasi. A long time had passed after Kassapa Buddha had declared the Four Noble Truths, liberating multitudes from bondage, but the

¹During his quest for Enlightenment, Gotama had been joined by five ascetics. In Uruvel , shortly before beginning meditation under the Bodhi tree, he accepted a meal from a young woman named Suj t . When the five ascetics saw this, they assumed that, by breaking his fast, he was giving up his quest, and they abandoned him. After Enlightenment, the Buddha walked to Isipatana, near B r nasi, where they had gone, and taught his first sermon, the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, the Discourse Setting the Wheel

² Samyutta Nik ya, Sal yatana Vagga, Sal yatana Samyutta, 35, 28.

Teaching had been forgotten, and the religion had fallen into decay. Bhikkhus were indulging in the twenty-one wrong means of livelihood. Bhikkhus had abandoned celibacy and were fathering children with bhikkhunis. Laypeople had also forsaken their religious duties. Everyone was pursuing the ten courses of unwholesome action, and, when they died, they were being reborn in the realms of suffering.

Sakka noticed that no new deities were being born in the various heavens. As soon as he had surveyed the world, he realized what was happening. “What can I do about this?” he mused. “How can I restore the religion so that it will last another one thousand years? Ah, I have it!” he declared. “I must scare mankind. Then I can remind them of the Teaching.”

Sakka summoned his charioteer, M tali, and transformed him into Mah -Kanha, a gigantic black hound with four formidable fangs as big as plantains. Around the fierce-looking beast’s neck was a five-chain collar, to which Sakka attached a long, stout leash. Sakka himself took the guise of a powerful forester wearing yellow garments and a red garland. He also put a red garland on Mah -Kanha. Sakka was carrying a mighty bow, fitted with a coral-colored bowstring, and, with his fingers, he was twirling a diamond-tipped arrow. Firmly grasping Mah -Kanha’s leash, Sakka descended from T vatimsa to a place about a yojana away from B r nasi.

“The world is doomed to destruction!” he called out three times in a sonorous voice, frightening all who heard, as he and Mah -Kanha walked toward the city. Though restrained by the leash, Mah -Kanha terrified everyone they passed as he snarled and snapped. People rushed to the palace for safety. The king immediately ordered the city gates closed. When Sakka and Mah -Kanha arrived at the gate, Sakka repeated his cry, and they leaped over the wall, eighteen hatthas high. As the pair proceeded to the palace, Sakka still shouting, “The world is doomed to destruction!” and Mah -Kanha still growling fiercely, townspeople ran into their houses and bolted their doors. When they reached the palace, the courtyard was filled with people, and the great doors were tightly shut. The king was watching from the terrace with the ladies of the palace. Mah -Kanha jumped up, put his front paws on the window sill, and gave a great howl. The sound of that howl resounded throughout the universe, from hell to the highest heaven.³ Everyone was petrified with fear and rendered speechless.

Finally, the king gathered up his courage. He looked down at the street and shouted, “Forester! Why did your hound howl?”

“He is hungry,” Sakka answered,

“All right,” said the king. “He will be fed.” He ordered servants to send out not only his own breakfast, but all the food from his entire household. The hound made one mouthful of it and howled again.

“Forester! Why does your hound continue to howl?” asked the king.

“He is still hungry,” Sakka replied.

The king ordered that the day’s ration of fodder and grain for all the royal horses and elephants be given to the hound. Mah -Kanha finished that also in one gulp and howled again.

“Forester! Why does your hound continue to howl?” asked the king.

“He is still hungry!” Sakka replied.

The king ordered that all the food rice, curries, meat, bread, fruit, and sweets that had been prepared that day throughout the city be given to the hound. Townspeople quickly ran to their houses and returned with all the food they could find. It was dumped in a gigantic pile in the courtyard. The ravenous hound devoured every bit of the food and howled again.

³ Four great sounds that were heard throughout Jambudīpa were made by Mah -Kanha, lavaka (q.v. in Glossary of Personal Names in Volume III), Kusa (Tale 206), and Punnaka (Tale 215).

“This is no dog!” the king thought. “He must be a yakkha. I wonder where he is from and why he has come.” His voice quaking with fear, the king called down, “Forester, your hound is mighty, fierce, and as black as night! His pure white fangs are razor-sharp. Around his neck is a heavy chain collar. Tell me, why is he here with you?”

“Mah -Kanha has not come here to hunt game, Your Majesty,” Sakka replied. “His job is to punish men when I turn him loose!”

“What do you mean, Forester?” the king asked, stricken with terror. “Will the hound devour all of us or only your enemies?”

“Only my enemies, Your Majesty.”

“Well then, who are your enemies?” asked the king.

“Those, Sire, who love unrighteousness and live wickedly.”

“Describe them to us, said the king apprehensively.

“When men who call themselves bhikkhus,” Sakka began, “forgetting how to wear their robes and why they carry a bowl, seek their livelihood by proscribed means, I will release Mah -Kanha.

“When bhikkhunis behave loosely in the world and follow their own pleasure, I will release Mah -Kanha. “When ascetics become moneylenders and charge usurious rates, I will release Mah -Kanha.

“When teachers, who have preserved the wisdom of the ancients, use their knowledge simply for trickery, I will release Mah -Kanha.

“When children neglect their aged parents, I will release Mah -Kanha.

“When children call their aged parents fools and show them no respect, I will release Mah -Kanha.

“When men commit adultery and seduce young defenseless girls, I will release Mah -Kanha.

“When men arm themselves and commit robbery and murder wantonly, I will release Mah -Kanha.

“When men, with evil in their hearts, tell lies to deceive and cheat their friends and neighbors, I will release Mah -Kanha.

“These, Your Majesty, are my enemies! It is these wicked sinners whom Mah -Kanha will devour!” As he allowed a little slack on the leash, the great hound sprang forward and barked ferociously. Everyone in the palace recoiled in terror.

Suddenly, Sakka and M tali assumed their heavenly forms. Blazing with beauty and glory, they stood in the splendid chariot, suspended in mid-air above the palace. “Your Majesty, I am Sakka!” Sakka proclaimed. “Seeing that the world was about to be destroyed, I came here to warn you. Mankind has forsaken the paths of virtue taught by Kassapa Buddha! Everywhere, men are following evil ways. As they die, because of their evil deeds, they are being reborn in the realms of suffering. Heaven is almost empty! Do not allow yourselves to fall into hell! Be vigilant!”

As Sakka continued his exhortation, he repeated the teaching of Kassapa Buddha, established the multitude in the five precepts, and encouraged them to practice righteousness and generosity. Satisfied that he had accomplished his mission, Sakka returned with M tali in the chariot to T vatimsa. The people paid heed to his lesson, and the religion continued for one thousand more years.

Having concluded his story, the Buddha identified the birth: “At that time, nanda was M tali, and I was Sakka.”

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