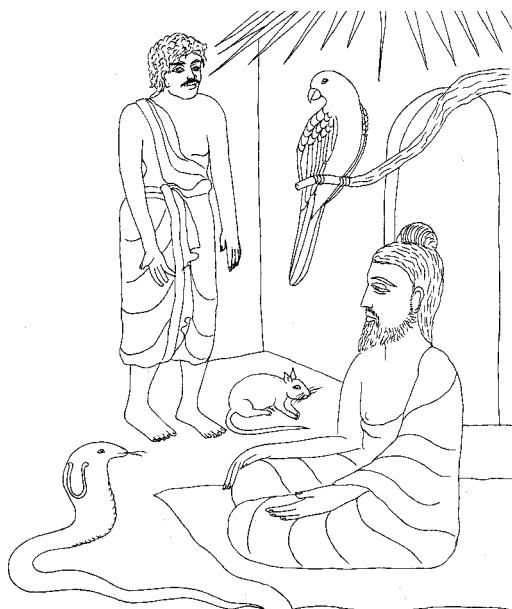


A Log Pays a Better Return

Saccankira Jātaka



It was while staying at Veluvana that the Buddha told this story about Devadatta.

One day, the Buddha heard some bhikkhus talking about how Devadatta was ignorant of the Buddha's excellence and had even tried to kill him. "Bhikkhus," the Buddha said, "this is not the first time that Devadatta has tried to kill me. He did the same thing before." Then he told them this story of the past.

Long, long ago, when Brahmadatta was reigning in Bārānasi, he had a son named Duttha-Kumāra (Prince Duttha or Prince Wicked). This prince was as fierce and vicious as a beaten snake. He never spoke to anyone without abuse or blows. As welcome as grit in the eye, he was detested by everyone in the kingdom.

One day, Prince Duttha went with a large entourage to bathe in the river. Shortly after they reached the bank of the river, the sky turned dark with the approach of a great thunder storm. Expecting the prince to order them to return to the capital, the servants began repacking all the royal paraphernalia. "Hurry up, you lazy scoundrels!" the prince shouted at them. "Why are you so slow! Take me to the middle of the river and bathe me."

After first whispering together, the servants carefully lifted the prince and carried him to the middle of the river. Instead of bathing him, however, they flung him headfirst into the deepest water, shouting, "Good riddance, brute! This is what you deserve!" Knowing that the prince was unable to swim, they watched as he was carried away by the swift current. "After all, what can the king do?" they chortled.

When the servants returned to the palace, the king asked where his son was. "Isn't he here, Your Majesty?" they asked. "We took him to the river to bathe, but a severe storm came up, and we were very busy protecting all the royal trappings we had taken with us. When we didn't see him, we assumed that he returned on his own, so we, also, came back."

The king immediately summoned soldiers and rushed to the riverbank in the driving rain. He ordered the men to search everywhere for his missing son, but they could find no trace of Prince Duttha. Heartbroken, the king returned to the palace.

The prince had, indeed, been carried away by the swift current, but he had not drowned. In the darkness, he happened to strike against a log. Clinging to it, he was able to stay afloat, but the current still bore him rapidly downstream.

Sometime earlier, a wealthy merchant in Bārānasi had died, leaving millions in gold buried on the bank of that river. Because of his attachment to his riches, he had been reborn as a snake at the very spot where his beloved treasure was hidden. Near that same place, another rich man had buried a fortune in gold coins. Because of his craving for his wealth, he was reborn as a rat near his gold. During the great storm, water rushed into the holes in the bank where these two animals lived, and they barely managed to escape with their lives. As they struggled to stay afloat in the flooded river, they came to the same tree trunk to which the prince was clinging. The snake crawled up on one end, and the rat clambered up on the other.

A little further downstream, the storm had uprooted a silk cotton tree which stood on the river bank. When the tree fell, a young parrot who lived in its branches was thrown into the swollen river. Although the bird tried to fly away, the heavy rain beat his wings, and he ended up on the log with the others. The four creatures, more afraid of drowning than of each other, floated downstream together on the log. As the water swirled around him, the prince yelled for help at the top of his lungs.

Further downstream, near a bend in the river, there lived a brahmin, who had renounced the world and become an ascetic. At midnight, as he was walking back and forth, he heard the prince's piteous cries. "Oh, dear," he said to himself, "it sounds like someone is in danger. Having sworn to be compassionate to all, I cannot allow this fellow creature to perish. I must rescue him."

As soon as the ascetic saw the log and the prince, he shouted reassuringly, "Don't be afraid! I'm coming!" He plunged into the water and grabbed the log by one end. Being as strong as an elephant, he pulled it to the riverbank, lifted the prince out of the water, and set him on the ground.

Then the ascetic noticed the three animals who were also clinging to the log. He rescued the poor creatures and carried them to his hermitage, asking the prince to follow. He lit a fire and warmed the animals first, reasoning that they were weaker. When he was sure that the animals were out of danger, he looked after the prince. When all the new arrivals were warm and dry, the ascetic brought out various kinds of fruit, feeding the animals first, before taking care of the prince.

This infuriated Prince Duttha. "This cur of an ascetic pays no respect to my royal birth," he grumbled to himself. "He gives dumb beasts precedence over me!"

A few days later, when all four had recovered their strength and the water had receded, the animals bade farewell to the ascetic. The snake took his leave first. "Father," he said, "you have done me a great service. I am not poor. I have millions in gold hidden away. Should you ever need money, all my hoard will be yours. You have only to come to my place and call, 'Snake!'"

"Father," the rat said next as he took his leave, "you are welcome to my treasure should you ever have need of it. Come to my hole and simply call, 'Rat!'"

Then the parrot bade farewell, saying, "Father, I have no silver or gold, but should you ever want choice rice, come to where I dwell, and call out, 'Parrot!' My relatives and I will give you wagonloads of rice."

The three animals left the hermitage, each going his own way.

The prince observed all of this, but his heart was filled with rancor and ingratitude. He secretly resolved to put his benefactor to death if the ascetic should ever visit him. Disguising his evil intention, however, he said, "Father, come and see me when I am king, and I will give you the four requisites." Having said that, he returned to the palace and, not long afterwards, succeeded to the throne.

One day, the ascetic decided to put the declarations of the four to the test. First, he went to the snake's home and called, "Snake!" The snake immediately emerged from his hole, greeted the ascetic warmly, and said, "Father, buried right here, next to my hole, there are millions in gold. Please dig it up, and take it all."

"Thank you," said the ascetic. "That is fine for now. When I need it, I will not forget."

Next, he went to the rat's hole and called, "Rat!" The rat did exactly as the snake had done, and the ascetic answered in the same way.

When the ascetic called the parrot, the bird immediately flew down from the top of his tree and greeted the ascetic. "Father," he said, "shall my relatives gather paddy from all the regions around the Himavat?"

"Not yet," the ascetic answered, "but when the time comes, I will not forget your offer."

Thoroughly satisfied with these three responses, the ascetic proceeded to Bārānasi and stayed in the royal gardens. The next morning, he carefully arranged his garments and entered the city for alms. The king, who happened to be riding around the city on his royal elephant with a vast entourage, spotted the ascetic and immediately recognized him. "There's that churlish ascetic coming to sponge off me," he grumbled to himself. "I must get rid of him before he tells everyone how he saved my life!"

"Hey, you!" he called to his guards, "that ascetic who is coming to beg from me is a wicked scoundrel. Make sure he does not come near. Seize him, and tie him up. March him to the southern gate, beating him at every crossroads. At the execution ground, chop off his head, and impale his body on a stake."

The guards grabbed the ascetic, bound his arms securely behind his back, and led him through the streets, lashing him with whips at every corner. Despite the harsh flogging, the ascetic remained calm. Though he knew that the guards intended to execute him, he neither cursed them nor begged for mercy. As they led him along, he loudly repeated a single verse, over and over: "They know the world, who spoke this proverb true—'A log pays a better return than some men do.'"

The ascetic repeated his verse each time he was beaten, and, finally, some wise bystanders asked him what good turn he had done for their king. In reply, he related the whole story. "Thus, by rescuing him from drowning," he concluded, "I brought all this trouble upon myself. When I thought how I had ignored those wise words from the past, I couldn't help repeating them as you just heard."

Hearing the ascetic's explanation, not only the citizens but also the soldiers guarding him were outraged. Furious at the injustice, the crowd shouted, "Our king is an ungrateful wretch. The ascetic saved his life, and this is how he rewards him! Down with such a king! Seize the tyrant!" The angry mob rushed toward the procession and dragged the king from his royal elephant. Attacked from all sides, King Duttha died on the spot, and his battered corpse was thrown into a ditch.

Rejoicing to be rid of their ignoble king, the people offered the crown to the wise ascetic, who accepted graciously and ruled in righteousness.

One day, the new king decided once more to test the snake, the rat, and the parrot. Accompanied by a large retinue, he went to the riverbank and called the snake, who immediately came out of his hole, bowed deeply, and said, "Your Majesty, here is your treasure. Please take it."

The king ordered that all the gold be loaded onto carts and invited the snake to accompany him to the rat's hole. Hearing his name, the rat came out, saluted the king, and presented his fortune.

The king ordered that this gold, also, be loaded onto carts, and invited both animals to accompany him to the forest, where he called the parrot. The bird immediately appeared before the king, bowed down at his feet, and asked whether he and his relatives should collect rice for the king.

"Not yet," said the king, "We will not trouble you until rice is needed. Now," he said to the

three animals, “let us return to the city.”

Back in the palace, the king ordered a golden tube for the snake to live in, a crystal house for the rat, and a golden cage for the parrot. Every day, servants prepared special food, which they served in golden dishes to the three creatures—parched corn for the parrot and the snake and scented rice for the rat.

The king excelled in generosity and good deeds, and the four friends lived in harmony and good will. When their ends came, they passed away, each to fare according to his deserts.

Having concluded his story, the Buddha added, “Thus, you see, bhikkhus, this is not the first time that Devadatta has tried to kill me.” Then the Buddha identified the birth: “At that time, Devadatta was King Duttha; Sāriputta was the snake; Moggallāna was the rat; Ānanda was the parrot; and I was the righteous ascetic who won the kingdom.”

From *Jatāka Tales of the Buddha: An Anthology, Volume I*, Retold by Ken and Visakha Kawasaki, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, 2009, ©Ken and Visakha Kawasaki