

## The Case of the Eight Sounds

### Atthasadda Jataka



*It was while staying at Jetavana that the Buddha told this story about the king of Kosala.<sup>1</sup>*

*At one time, King Pasenadi became infatuated with a beautiful woman and threatened her husband with death in order to secure her for himself. Shortly after that, in the middle of the night, the king heard four very loud and plaintive cries. They so frightened him that he could sleep no more. When dawn came, he asked his brahmins about the sounds, and they told him that the sounds foretold great danger, from which the only escape was a great sacrifice of living beings. The king immediately told them to prepare the sacrifice. When his queen, Mallika, heard about this, she suggested that the king seek advice from the Buddha. Thus, the king went to Jetavana and asked the Buddha whether these sounds betokened any danger to him or to his kingdom.*

*“Sire, do not be afraid!” the Buddha replied. “No danger will befall you or your kingdom because of those sounds. Long ago, similar dreadful sounds were heard by a great king. Then, as now, brahmins prepared the fourfold sacrifice, but after seeking advice from a wise man, that king canceled the sacrifice and set free all the tethered animals.” At the king’s request, the Buddha told this story of the past.*

Long, long ago, when Brahmadata was reigning in Baranasi, he was terrified one night by eight different, mysterious, and fearful sounds in rapid succession. Not having slept a wink afterwards, as soon as the sun was up, he consulted his brahmin advisors, who gravely announced that the sounds foretold that at least one of three great dangers—to his kingdom, to his property, or to his life—would befall him unless he agreed to perform the fourfold sacrifice. His chief advisor, one of those brahmins, got busy overseeing the preparation of a sacrificial pit and the collection of a great number of creatures to be slain, which he had tied to stakes nearby.

At that time, there was, in the Himavat, an ascetic, who had developed psychic powers through his long practice of jhanic meditation. From his hermitage, this ascetic surveyed the world with his divine eye and saw what was happening in Baranasi. Guided by compassion, he resolved to prevent the sacrifice and to save the lives of all those helpless beings. He immediately transported himself to the king’s royal park, sat down on the stone seat, and waited.

As the chief advisor was bustling about the palace, arranging everything for the sacrifice, one

---

<sup>1</sup> The occasion for this story is told in detail in Tale 119.

of his young students approached him and asked, “Master, is it not written in the ancient texts that there is no happiness for those who take the life of another creature?”

“Hold your tongue!” the advisor hissed. “Just bring me the things I need! Soon we’ll be eating the finest delicacies and the most delicious meat imaginable. Tomorrow, we will be rich! Just keep your mouth shut, and do what you’re told! Now go!”

“I will take no part in this sacrifice!” the student declared to himself. “It is wrong!” He left the palace and went to the royal park, where he saw the ascetic, looking like a golden image. He approached the stone seat, saluted the ascetic in a friendly manner, and took a seat at a respectful distance.

“Young man,” the ascetic asked, “does the king rule righteously?”

“Yes, Venerable Sir, he does,” answered the student, “but, last night, he heard eight sounds, and the brahmins have convinced him that they must perform the fourfold sacrifice. The king is so upset that he is going ahead with the sacrifice, and a vast number of victims are already tethered near the sacrificial pit. I would hope that a holy man like you might explain the cause of these noises and save those victims from death.”

“Young man,” the ascetic replied, “the king does not know me, nor do I know the king. I know the origin of these cries, however, and, if the king were to come and ask me, I would gladly resolve his doubts for him.”

“Excellent, Venerable Sir. Please wait here, and I will bring the king.”

The ascetic silently agreed, and the youth ran to the king’s chamber. A few minutes later, he returned to the park with the king. The king respectfully greeted the ascetic, sat on one side, and asked him whether it was true that he knew the origin of these noises.

“Tell me exactly what you heard, Your Majesty,” replied the ascetic.

“I heard eight distinctly different sounds,” the king replied. “I could not tell where they were coming from, but each seemed to emanate from a different place. I couldn’t identify what sort of sounds they were or who or what might have made them. I was mystified. Each sound filled me with more fear.”

“Sire, there is no danger whatsoever connected with these sounds. They were made by eight different beings in your palace grounds, each one seeking your assistance.

“So they weren’t all caused by the same thing?” asked the king. “No, Sire. Let me explain them to you one by one so that you can deal with each appropriately.

“The first sound you heard was a crane, crying, ‘This pond, where my ancestors resided, was once deep and full of fish. Even though I’m reduced to eating frogs, I will never leave my home!’

“Sire, do you have an old, unused, royal garden?” the ascetic asked. “Yes, I do,” replied the king.

“In that old garden, there is a crane who is half-dead from hunger because the pond where he lives is dried up. That crane cried out in hunger because there is neither water nor fish in the pond.”

The king ordered his gardener not only to clean the pond, refill it with water, and restock it with fish, but to return the entire garden to its original beauty.

“The second sound you heard was a crow, crying, ‘Help! That wicked one-eyed Bandhura is going to destroy my nest and my little ones!’ “Sire, do you have a mahout named Bandhura?” the ascetic asked. “Yes, I do,” replied the king.

“Does he have only one eye?” the ascetic asked.

“Yes, that’s right,” replied the king.

“Over the entrance of your elephant stable, Sire, a female crow has repeatedly built her nest and laid her eggs. Each time, as soon as the eggs have hatched out, your chief mahout, Bandhura, who has but one eye, has destroyed the nest with his hook and has killed all the baby crows. That female crow cried out because her babies are in danger.”

The king summoned Bandhura, reprimanded him for destroying the crow’s nest, and dismissed him. The king was careful to promote a kindlier mahout to manage his elephant stable.

“The third sound you heard was a woodworm, crying, ‘I have eaten all the softwood! I cannot eat the hardwood! I’m going to starve to death!’ In the pinnacle of the roof of your palace, Sire, there is a woodworm who has eaten all the softwood of a beam, but, not being able to eat the hardwood, is trapped. That woodworm cried out in fear of dying high up in the pinnacle of your palace.”

The king ordered his carpenter to tear out the ceiling of the palace, to find the beam in the pinnacle where the woodworm was imprisoned, and to release the insect.

“The fourth sound you heard was a cuckoo, crying, ‘Oh, to regain my freedom, to fly in the woods, and to build my nest in a tree!’

“Sire, is there a tame cuckoo in your palace?” the ascetic asked. “Yes, there is,” replied the king.

“That tame cuckoo is yearning for freedom. He cried out when he remembered the joy of flying free in the forest.”

The king ordered that the cuckoo be taken to the forest and released in the same place where he had been captured.

“The fifth sound you heard was a deer, crying, ‘I was the leader of my herd, but now I am confined to this small pen! Would that I could regain my freedom and drink pure water from the mountain spring!’ “Sire, is there a tame stag in your royal park?” the ascetic asked. “Yes, there is,” replied the king.

“That stag is yearning for freedom and longs to be with his doe. He cried out when he remembered the joys he shared with her when he was the king of the deer.”

The king ordered that the deer be taken to the forest and released in the same place where he had been captured.

“The sixth sound you heard was a monkey, crying, ‘My beautiful wives were all my joy as I frolicked in the forest before Bharata carried me away!’

“Sire, do you have a hunter named Bharata?” the ascetic asked. “Yes, I do,” replied the king.

“Is there a tame monkey in the palace, and did he bring it?” the ascetic asked.

“Yes, Bharata recently brought a monkey that I have put in a cage,” the king replied.

“That monkey had many mistresses when he lived in the forest, and he misses them. He cried out when he remembered how happy he was with them in the forest.”

The king summoned Bharata and ordered him to take the monkey back to the forest and to release him in the same place where he had been captured.

“The seventh sound you heard was a kinnara, crying, ‘As it was getting dark on the mountaintop, she warned me, “Be careful, dear, not to stumble on this narrow rocky path!”’”

“Sire, is there a kinnara in your palace?” the ascetic asked. “Yes, there is,” replied the king.

“That kinnara is longing for his mate. Last night, he remembered how he had once gathered flowers with her to make garlands and how she had carefully led him down from the mountaintop. That kinnara cried with the pang of love for his beautiful kinnar~.”

The king ordered that the kinnara be transported back to the Himavat and released in the same place where he had been captured.

“The eighth sound you heard was a Pacceka Buddha, crying, ‘Truly, have I seen my last birth. No more shall I enter a womb. My last existence, with all its misery, is finished!’ Last night, in the Nandamœla cave, a Pacceka Buddha realized that the conditions for his life were at an end, and, knowing that Your Majesty would honor his bodily remains, he decided to enter Parinibbana under a sal tree in full bloom in your royal park. That Pacceka Buddha cried out in ecstasy as he threw off the burden of life.”

The ascetic went with the king to the royal park and showed him the place where the Pacceka Buddha had entered Parinibbana.

The king immediately canceled the fourfold sacrifice and ordered the release of all the creatures which had been tethered to be killed. He made a great proclamation that there should be no more slaughter of animals anywhere in the kingdom.

He then ordered his servants to prepare an elaborate funeral pyre and proclaimed a seven-day festival to honor the Pacceka Buddha. The entire court offered incense and flowers. To enshrine the relics, the king had a cetiya erected at an auspicious intersection in the city.

The ascetic stayed a few more days in Baranasi, preaching righteousness and exhorting the king to be diligent. Then he returned to the Himavat and continued meditating on the Four Brahma Viharas. When he passed away, he was reborn in the Brahma heavens.

*Having concluded his story, the Buddha said to King Pasenadi, “Sire, there is no danger at all to you from those sounds. Stop the sacrifice, and spare these creatures’ lives!” The king immediately did so. Then the Buddha identified the birth: “At that time, Ananda was King Brahmadata, Sariputta was the student, and I was the ascetic.”*