

429. Mahasuka Jātaka  
The Great Parrot Jātaka

translated by H.T. Francis and R.A. Neil, 1897  
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Once upon a time a myriad of parrots lived in the Himalaya country on the banks of the Ganges in a grove of fig-trees. There the king of the parrots, when the fruit of the tree in which he dwelt had come to an end, ate whatever was left, whether shoot or leaf or bark or rind, and drank water from the Ganges. Being very happy and contented he kept where he was. Owing to his happy and contented state the abode of Sakka was shaken. Sakka reflecting on the cause saw the parrot, and to test his virtue, by his supernatural power he withered up the tree, which became a mere stump perforated with holes, and stood to be buffeted by every blast of wind, and from the holes dust came out. The parrot king ate this dust and drank the water of the Ganges, and going nowhere else sat perched on the top of the fig-stump, reeking of nothing but wind and sun.

Sakka noticed how very contented the parrot was, and said, “After hearing him speak of the virtue of friendship, I will come and give him his choice of a boon, and cause the fig-tree to bear ambrosial fruit.” So he took the form of a royal goose, and preceded by Sujā in the shape of an Asura nymph, he went to the grove of fig-trees, and perching on the bough of a tree close by, he entered into conversation with the parrot and spoke the first stanza:

Wherever fruitful trees abound,  
A flock of hungry birds is found:  
But should the trees all withered be,  
Away at once the birds will flee.

And after these words, to drive the parrot away, he spoke the second stanza:

Make haste, O Redbeak, to be gone;  
Why do you sit and dream alone?  
Come tell me, now, bird of spring,  
To this dead stump why dost thou cling?

Then the parrot said, “O goose, from a feeling of gratitude, I forsake not this tree,” and he repeated two stanzas:

They who have been close friends from youth,  
Mindful of goodness and of truth,  
In life and death, in pleasure and woe  
The claims of friendship never forego.

I am obliged be kind and good  
To one that long my friend has stood;  
I wish to live, but have no heart  
From this old tree, though dead, to part.

Sakka, on hearing what he said was delighted. Praising him, he wished to offer him a choice, and uttered two stanzas:

I know your friendship and your grateful love,  
Virtues that wise men surely must approve.

I offer you whatever you want for choice;  
Parrot, what boon would most your heart rejoice?

On hearing this, the king parrot making his choice spoke the seventh stanza:

If you, O goose, what most I crave would give,  
Grant that the tree I love, again may live.

Let it once more with its old vigour shoot,  
Gather fresh sweetness and bear goodly fruit.

Then Sakka, granting the boon, spoke the eighth stanza:

Here friend, a fruitful and right noble tree,  
Well fitted for your dwelling-place to be.  
Let it once more with its old vigour shoot,  
Gather fresh sweetness and bear goodly fruit.

With these words Sakka left his present form, and manifesting the supernatural power of himself and Sujā, he took up water from the Ganges in his hand and dashed it against the fig-tree stump. Straightway the tree rose up rich in branch, and stem, and with honey-sweet fruit, and stood a charming sight, like unto the bare Jewel-Mount.

The Parrot King on seeing it was highly pleased, and singing the praises of Sakka he spoke the ninth stanza:

May Sakka and all loved by Sakka blessed be,  
As I today am blest this goodly sight to see!

Sakka, after granting the parrot his choice, and causing the fig-tree to bear ambrosial fruit, returned with Sujā to his own abode.