

A Naughty Jataka



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Essays on Buddhist Doctrines

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The Kacchapa Jataka is one of several rude stories in the Jataka and has, I think, never been translated into English before. Like several other risqué stories in the collection, Professor E. B. Cowell who edited the first complete English translation of the Jataka, thought it best to render it into Latin so that only scholars could read it. The purpose of the story is to highlight the Bodhisattva's equanimity and non-retaliation. But the author or authors also uses the opportunity to poke fun at greedy brahmins who carry away more food than they can eat from various festivals and rituals, the tortoise's shell looking something like a begging bowl. A ribald element is included to add to the fun and the tone of the story is generally light-hearted. In keeping with this ribald light-heartedness I have translated *angajata* as 'dick'. The Kacchapa (Tortoise) and the Kondannas were the totems of two clans or tribes that usually did not intermarry. The monkey (*makkata*) in this story is a Rhesus Macaque, the most aggressive and mischievous of the several species of primates found in northern India. Interestingly, while the Bodhisattva is often depicted in Jataka stories as being reborn as one of these other types of monkeys, he is never reborn as a Macaque. One can well imagine village people roaring with laughter as a monk or learned lay person related this story to them at a religious festival or on a full-moon night. I would like to thank Anandajoti Bhikkhu for helping me with this translation.

Kacchapa Jataka, Once, when Brahmadata was king of Banaras, the Bodhisattava was reborn into a brahman family in Kasi. After finishing his education at Taxila, he decided to give up sense pleasures and ordain as an ascetic. He established an ashram in the Himalayas on the banks of the Ganges and there attained spiritual powers and the *jhanas*. In this birth, it seems, the Bodhisattva was exceptionally impartial, having developed equanimity to perfection. One day, while he was sitting at the door of his leaf hut, a mischievous and naughty monkey crept up on him and tried to put its dick in his ear. The Bodhisattva resisted this and being equanimous continued to just calmly sit there. Then on another day, it happened that a tortoise, having come out of the water onto the bank of the river, went to sleep in the sun with its mouth open. Spying this, that lusty monkey stuck his dick in the tortoise's mouth. Waking up, the tortoise snapped its mouth shut like someone banging the lid of a chest, causing the monkey great pain so that he gripped his dick tightly. Unable to bear the pain the monkey thought: "Who can free me from this agony? Only that ascetic. I will go to him." Carrying the tortoise in his hands the monkey approached the Bodhisattva and he, teasing the naughty monkey, spoke this first verse –

"You have such a great meal (in that bowl),
Like a brahman with a big handful of rice.
Where did you go for alms?
What funeral did you attend?"

On hearing this, the naughty monkey spoke the second verse –

"I am truly a foolish monkey,
In that I have touched the untouchable.
If you can release me
I will go back to the mountains."

The Bodhisattva, having compassion for him and addressing the tortoise, spoke this third verse

"The Kassapa tribe are tortoises.
The Kondanna are monkeys.
Kassapa, please free Kondanna,
From having sex with you."

The tortoise, having heard the Bodhisattva's words and pleased with his reasoning, let go of the monkey's dick. The moment the monkey was free, he bowed to the Bodhisattva, then ran away so fast he didn't even

look back. The tortoise worshiped the Bodhisattva and returned to his own place. As for the Bodhisattva, without ever having fallen from the *jhanas*, he eventually passed away and was reborn in the Brahma world.