

The Talkative Tortoise

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Indian

Intermediate

3 min read

The future Buddha was once born in a minister's family, when Brahma-datta was reigning in Benares; and when he grew up, he became the king's adviser in things temporal and spiritual.

Now this king was very talkative; while he was speaking, others had no opportunity for a word. And the future Buddha, wanting to cure this talkativeness of his, was constantly seeking for some means of doing so.

At that time there was living, in a pond in the Himalaya mountains, a tortoise. Two young hamsas, or wild ducks, who came to feed there, made friends with him. And one day, when they had become very intimate with him, they said to the tortoise:

"Friend tortoise! the place where we live, at the Golden Cave on Mount Beautiful in the Himalaya country, is a delightful spot. Will you come there with us?"

"But how can I get there?"

"We can take you, if you can only hold your tongue, and will say nothing to anybody."

"Oh! that I can do. Take me with you."

"That's right," said they. And making the tortoise bite hold of a stick, they themselves took the two ends in their

teeth, and flew up into the air.

Seeing him thus carried by the hansas, some villagers called out, "Two wild ducks are carrying a tortoise along on a stick!" Whereupon the tortoise wanted to say, "If my friends choose to carry me, what is that to you, you wretched slaves!" So just as the swift flight of the wild ducks had brought him over the king's palace in the city of Benares, he let go of the stick he was biting, and falling in the open courtyard, split in two! And there arose a universal cry, "A tortoise has fallen in the open courtyard, and has split in two!"

The king, taking the future Buddha, went to the place, surrounded by his courtiers; and looking at the tortoise, he asked the Bodisat, "Teacher! how comes he to be fallen here?"

The future Buddha thought to himself, "Long expecting, wishing to admonish the king, have I sought for some means of doing so. This tortoise must have made friends with the wild ducks; and they must have made him bite hold of the stick, and have flown up into the air to take him to the hills. But he, being unable to hold his tongue when he hears any one else talk, must have wanted to say something, and let go the stick; and so must have fallen down from the sky, and thus lost his life." And saying, "Truly, O king! those who are called chatter-boxes— people whose words have no end—come to grief like this," he uttered these Verses:

"Verily the tortoise killed himself

Whilst uttering his voice;

Though he was holding tight the stick,

By a word himself he slew.

"Behold him then, O excellent by strength!

And speak wise words, not out of season.

You see how, by his talking overmuch,

The tortoise fell into this wretched plight!"

The king saw that he was himself referred to, and said, "O Teacher! are you speaking of us?"

And the Bodisat spake openly, and said, "O great king! be it thou, or be it any other, whoever talks beyond measure meets with some mishap like this."

And the king henceforth refrained himself, and became a man of few words.

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