

5

Dhona,sākha Jātaka

The “Spreading Branch” Birth-story¹ | J 353

Be Ce Se **Vena,sākha Jātaka**

Theme: Who sows violence reaps its fruits

Translated by Piya Tan ©2019

1 Story summary

1.1 STORY SUMMARY. The **Dhona,sākha Jātaka**, also called the **Vena,sākha Jātaka**—the “Spreading Branch” Birth-story—is told by the Buddha in reference to prince Bodhi, who, according to the story introduction, blinds the builder of his palace, Kokanada, so that he would not build another that is just as fabulous. The Buddha recounts how even in a past life, as the cruel king Brahmadatta of Benares, disregards his own teacher’s advice against violence, follows the bad counsel of his purohit, Piṅgiya, to conquer a thousand kingdoms.

Again, following Piṅgiya’s bad advice, kills, blinds and bleeds these thousand kings to offer a great blood sacrifice to a banyan tree dryad, in the belief this will bring his victory over Takkasilā. Brahmadatta, on account of his cruel deeds, is himself blinded in both eyes. In this tragic moment, he laments not heeding his teacher’s words, before, dying painfully and finally being swallowed up by the earth.

1.2 SYNOPSIS SUMMARY. Once, says the Jātaka, a prince of Benares, named **Brahma,datta**, learned the arts from **Pārāsariya** (the Bodhisattva), a famous teacher of **Takkasilā**. The teacher, noticing his student’s violent nature, warned him of the karmic dangers of violence. In due course, Brahmadatta became king, and on the ill advice of his purohit, **Piṅgiya**, went out with a large army and conquered a thousand kingdoms.

Despite his larger army, however, he failed to take **Takkasilā**, just northwest of India. Piṅgiya suggested that a great blood sacrifice be offered to the banyan tree deity. However, after this was done; a yaksha tore out his right eye and, as he was recovering on a couch under the banyan tree, a sharp-pointed bone, dropped by a vulture, blinded his left eye. He died totally blind, in agony and fell into hell.

Bodhi is identified as Brahmadatta; Devadatta as Piṅgiya; and the Buddha was the teacher Pārāsariya.

1.3 THE TITLE

1.3.1 Dhona,sākha

1.3.1.1 All the manuscripts (Be Ce Se) give the title as **vena,jataka** [§28a], but the word *vena* is unattested: it is found neither in the suttas nor the Commentaries [1.3.2]. Both the readings—*dhona* and *vena*—are found in the Jātaka’s respective Commentaries.

They all give the same gloss for both *dhona,sākha* and *vena,sākha*, that is, *patthaṭa,sākha*, “spreading (or extended) branch” (JA 3:161,5). The word **patthaṭa** is the present participle of *pattharati*, “to spread out.” Hence, *patthaṭa* means, literally, “stretched, spread, extended (as of a branch).”² It also has a figurative sense of “widely known.”

Apparently, at the time of the compilation of the Jātaka Commentary—at least, the commentary related to **J 353**—*dhona* is taken in its literal sense of “stretched.” However, in the older texts, including the canonical commentary on the Sutta Nipāta, the Mahā,niddesa, it retains its old senses of “purified;

¹ Ee *dhona*; Be Ce Se Comys *vena,sākho* [1.3].

² J 1:336; Vism 364; DA 1:311.

shaken off,” that is, of the unwholesome, and thus has the sense of “wisdom.” These old senses, however, do not *seem* to apply here in the commentarial story. [1.3.1.2 f]

1.3.1.2 The word **dhona** is well attested: it is found in the verses of some of the oldest layers of the early Buddhist texts, that is, in the Sutta Nipāta and the Thera,gāthā, in the following contexts:

- **Vaṅgīsa Sutta** (Sn 2.12): “Having overcome birth and death without remains, | purified (is he), I will ask him to teach the Dhamma” (*pahīna,jāti,marañam asesam | niggayha dhonam vadessāmi dhammam*, Sn 351ab = Tha 1271ab).

- **Duṭṭh’atṭhaka Sutta** (Sn 4.3): “For one (mentally) purified, there is no fabrication whatever of any view in the world in terms of becoming and non-becoming” (*dhonassa hi n’atthi kuhiñci loke | pakappitā diṭṭhi bhavābhavesu*, Sn 786ab).

- **Jarā Sutta** (Sn 4.6): “For one purified, there is no imagining that | it³ is through the seen, the heard, or the sensed | nor does he desire purity in any other way” (*dhono na hi tena maññati | yad idam diṭṭha,-sutam,mutesu vā | na aññena visuddhim icchati*, Sn 813abc).

- **Pasūra Sutta** (Sn 4.8):

<p><i>Atha tvam pavitakkam āgama manasā diṭṭhi,gatāni cintayanto dhone na yugam samāgamā na hi tvam sagghasi sampayātave</i> (Sn 834)</p>	<p>But you have come speculating, thinking over views in your mind. You are now engaged with the pure: you will surely not be able to go on (this way).</p>
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1.3.1.3 The **Mahā,niddesa**,⁴ the canonical Commentary on the oldest sections of the Sutta Nipāta, commenting on **Sn 786**, simply says that *dhona* is a word for “wisdom” (*dhonā vuccati paññā*, Nm 77,22). The Sutta Nipāta Commentary (Param’attha,jotika 2) also gives the same explanation but that “the arhat has shaken off all bad” (*dhuta,sabba,pāpassa arahato*, SnA 522,25 f). The same gloss, too, is given by the commentaries on **Sn 351 = Tha 1271** (*dhonan’ti dhuta,sabba,pāpam* SnA 349,25 = ThaA 3:201,4).⁵

1.3.1.4 From the gloss *dhonan’ti dhuta,sabba,pāpam* [1.3.1.3], it is possible to take *dhona* as the agent-noun from *dhunāti*, “to shake, toss”; hence, “remove, destroy.”⁶ However, grammatically, it is possible, even more likely, to be derived from *dhovati*⁷ (to wash, rinse, cleanse, purify),⁸ where *dhona* is a past participle (washed clean, purified) with *-na* instead of the more usual *-ta*.⁹

We may conclude then that **dhona**, in the early texts, usually mean “purified,” that is, a mental purity related to “wisdom” [1.3.1.3]. However, *dhona* sometimes takes a literal sense of “shaking, tossing, trembling” (as of a tree-branch), imaginably, of the branch on which sits the vulture in **the Dhona,sākhā Jātaka** (J 353,24), SD 55.5.

1.3.1.5 In **§28a** (J v3.17a), however, the sense of “shaking” does not fit the context well. It is more likely that the huge banyan branches under which Brahmadata killed the 1000 kings were “spreading”

³ Purification, ie, awakening.

⁴ **Mahā,niddesa** (Nm) or Niddesa 1 comments on Atṭhaka,vagga (Sn 766-975), while **Culla,niddesa** (or Cūḷa,niddesa) or Niddesa 2, on Pārāyana,vagga (Sn 976-1149) and Khagga,visāṇa S (Sn 35-75). See Hinüber 1996 §II.2.5.11 (pp58 f).

⁵ For philological details on *dhona*, see Sn:N 234 n351 + Tha:N 298 n1271.

⁶ Eg Thī:F 409 n4.

⁷ Also as *dhāvati*² (PED).

⁸ V 2:208, 210, 214; Sn p104; J 1:8, 5:297.

⁹ Cf Skt *dhūna* and *dhūta* from √DHŪ, to shake. See Tha:N 209 n1271.

widely like a giant banyan would. However, the related Pali phrase here is singular, *ayam ... dhona,sākho*, literally, “this spreading branch.”

This is not strictly a grammatical issue, but one of idiom, how Pali “works” (how it is used and that makes it a beautiful and effective vehicle of the Buddha Dhamma). Furthermore, there is a simple explanation for this. The compound *dhona,sākho* is a collective noun: when Brahmadata points to any branch of the spreading banyan, he is effectively pointing to the tree itself. Hence, we can also explain this interesting idiom as a synecdoche, where a part of something represents the whole of it: the branch is the tree.

1.3.2 Vena,sākha

1.3.2.1 Although *vena,sākha* is the reading found in all the Pali texts (Be Ce Se), except for the PTS (Ee) edition, this form is harder to explain, for the simple reason that it is unattested: it does not exist in any Pali texts, except here in the manuscripts of both the Jātaka verses [J v3.17a of J:Be, J:Ce and J:Se] (which are canonical) and its Commentary. We can only conjecture how this came about.

The usual scapegoat for such an aberration (if it were one)—the reading *vena,sākha*—is due to scribal error. But for such a reading to be preserved in all the extant Asian Pali manuscripts suggests that possibly their scribes or sutta authorities see *vena* as having a sense that faithfully and dramatically reflects that truth of the story. From the texts as we have them, we cannot decide for certain what this meaning is.

1.3.2.2 However, by some stretch of imagination—and careful searches in the dictionaries of Pali, Prakrit and Sanskrit—the best lead we have seems to be that of *vena*, as listed in Monier Williams’ *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (SED). SED defines *vena* (adj) as “yearning, longing, eager, anxious loving.” This certainly reflects the mind of Brahmadata when he agrees to Piṅgiya’s proposal that he becomes some kind of world-monarch [§14]. This is, of course, purely coincidental, but it consoles us with the idea that such a word does exist in the ancient Indian vocabulary.

Then, there is a Pali word, *veṇa*, which, however, has a cerebral nasal *ṇ* rather than the dental *n* of the Jātaka *vena*. Allowing the possibility of either of these words to be a dialect form, even a misspelling, we may have another possible clue to this mystery word. *Veṇa* (Skt *vaiṇa*, dialectic) means: (1) (an outcaste) worker in bamboo; (2) a member of a despised class, an outcaste.¹⁰ As **the Vasala Sutta** (Sn 1.7) says: “Who kills, lays siege to villages and towns; who has earned the reputation of being a pillager—him one should know as an outcaste” (Sn 118).¹¹

Whichever of these conjectured words or senses we choose to apply to the translation, we must, of course, see it as being a compound with the element, *sākhā*, “branch.” If our task is less of philological or technical exactitude, but more of understanding our attitudes and taming our mind for the sake of seeing the path: these explanations are helpful in the abhorring and avoiding of **the violence** as exemplified by Brahmadata (and prince Bodhi), and of discerning and avoiding of **the bad friendship** as exemplified by his purohit Piṅgiya.

¹⁰ On *veṇa* as “a bamboo-worker,” see PvA 175; the 2nd sense is found V 4:6; S 1:93; A 2:85, 3:385; Pug 51; fem *veṇī* (J 5:306; Pv 3,1,13).

¹¹ *Yo hanti parirundhati | gāmanī nigamanī ca || niggaḥako samaññako | taṃ jaññā vasalo iti ||* (Sn 1.7/118/p22).

2 Story significance

2.1 THE MOST DRAMATIC, THE DARKEST

2.1.1 Story structure

2.1.1.1 Of the 4 accounts about **prince Bodhi**—the Bodhi Rāja, *kumāra Sutta* (M 85), the *Cela, pattikā Vatthu* (Cv 5.21.1-4), the Bodhi Rāja, *kumāra Vatthu* (DhA 12.1) and **the Dhona,śākha Jātaka** (J 353)—the last-named is the most dramatic and darkest, of them. This Jātaka is different from the other three accounts in being narratively the most violent of them. It also contains some details that differ from the other accounts to highlight the extent of violence when it is driven by the lust for power, which, in turn, arises from bad counsel. It also has a subtheme of ingratitude and disrespect for a wise teacher. The fruits of such unwholesomeness can only be most dire.

2.1.1.2 Following the traditional Jātaka structure, **the Dhona,śākha Jātaka** has two interconnected parts: the present story and the past story. In contrast to the Dhammapada-based **Bodhi Rāja, kumāra Vatthu** (DhA 12.1), which has a longer present story followed by a shorter revelatory past story, **the Dhona,śākha Jātaka** has just *the reverse*: a shorter present story followed by a longer past story. Otherwise, their narrative structure is the same: a present event that prompts the Buddha to relate a connected past story.

2.1.1.3 This narrative pattern comprises **2 important motifs**: karma and rebirth. The former is a popular notion of karma where the fruits of our past dog us even in our present and hereafter. This is based on a consequentialist theory of karma, that is, “whatever the seed that one sows, that kind of fruit one harvests” (*yādisaṃ vapate bījaṃ | tādisaṃ harate phalaṃ*), or, in modern English idiom: “as one sows so one reaps” (§12). This theme is again famously depicted as empowering the seers’ curse against the violent asuras in **the Isayo Samuddaka Sutta** (S 11.10).¹²

2.1.2 Motifs and themes¹³

2.1.2.1 In **the Dhona,śākha Jātaka** (J 353), prince Bodhi, in the present story, actually plucks out the eyes of the builder of his fabulous palace, so that he will not build another such masterpiece. There is here no Sañikā,putta who values the builder’s craft and genius, neither is he present to warn the builder.

However, Brahmadata (Bodhi’s avatar¹⁴ in the Jātaka story) does have a wise counsellor in the person of his Takkasilā teacher, whose name, **Pārāsariya**, is mentioned in one of the Jātaka’s closing verses [§27b]. Pārāsariya’s warning—indeed, prophecy—to the young Brahmadata of the terrible fruits of violence and cruelty, fall on deaf ears.

This is Brahmadata’s first **failure** with his teacher—that of not heeding his warning. Later, following the bad counsel of Piṅgiya, he fails his teacher again, in a more devastating manner: he actually tries to

¹² S 11.10/1:227 f (SD 39.2).

¹³ For a study on the subject-matter and motifs of the Dhammapada stories, see DhA:B 1:29-34.

¹⁴ The well known anglicized word “avatar” is used here (and in connection with early Buddhism) with neither docetic nor theological connotations, but simply as a convenient word for “rebirth, manifestation,” esp a past-life counterpart of someone in the present (like the Buddha, an elder, etc) or in a different life. “Incarnation” properly has a limiting sense of a being that has taken physical or “carnal” form, but “avatar” is broader, not limited to sense-based existence, but may also be a form-based being or a formless being in the early Buddhist sense.

conquer Takkasilā, whose walls Pārasariya has strengthened, clearly foreseeing and forestalling Brahma-datta's ambition of violent conquest.

2.1.2.2 Clearly, **Sañjikā,putta**'s absence accentuates the role of Brahmadata's similarly violent pro-hit, **Piṅgiya**—showing how bad counsel and evil friendship only bring upon the violent young king Brahma-datta another fruit of dark karma: that of **ingratitude**. On Piṅgiya's advice, Brahmadata kills, blinds and bleeds a thousand kings for a great blood-offering to the banyan dryad [§20], praying for the subjugation of Takkasilā, the kingdom of his own teacher, **Pārāsariya** [§27b]. Thus, as we have noted, Brahmadata fails his own teacher *twice* [1.2.1.2].

2.1.2.3 Both the **Dhona,sākha Jātaka** and the **Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Vatthu** (DhA 12.1) have the same motif of *karma* and *rebirth*. In fact, they also share the same theme, that of **killing**. In the Dhammapada story, Bodhi's avatar and his wife, marooned on an island eats fertilized eggs, and also kills the birds, young and old (a kind of avian genocide!).¹⁵ In the Jātaka story, he is depicted as killing, blinding and bleeding a thousand kings—besides the “collateral” murders of countless innocents in his campaigns.

In the Dhammapada story, Bodhi's avatar, on account of killing countless helpless birds, has to bear the bitter fruit of being childless in his present life. The Jātaka story depicts his greater crimes of killing, violence and cruelty, for which he himself suffers blindness and falls into hell. [§29]. This is a classic case of the fruits of karma in terms of **consequentialist ethics**.¹⁶

2.2 VIRTUE ETHICS IN THE BODHI RĀJA,KUMĀRA SUTTA (M 85)

2.2.1 Lack of consequentialist themes

2.2.1.1 The **Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Sutta** (M 85) differs from the other three accounts—(1) the **Cela,pattikā Vatthu** [3.2], (2) the **Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Vatthu** [3.3] and (3) the **Dhona,sākha Jātaka** [3.4]—in a number of significant ways, thus:

- **M 85** shows prince Bodhi as having **great faith** in the Buddha—and also shows respect to his servant Sañjikā,putta—and at the close of the Sutta he goes for refuge (a third time). The Buddha only relates the stories (2)+(3) from which he is actually absent.
- While these two stories depict a violent and cruel avatar of prince Bodhi, **M 85** presents him as a tragic figure who merely **desires to have a child**. M 85, however, gives no explanation for prince Bodhi's childlessness. The Sutta Commentary only briefly states the karmic reason for this: he habitually killed birds in a past life.¹⁷
- While (2) and (3) are mainly based on the theme of consequential ethics [2.1.2.3], M 85 highlights **virtue ethics**. This last point is of special significance [2.2.1.2].

2.2.1.2 The **Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Sutta** (M 85) depicts neither violence nor cruelty, both of which characterize prince Bodhi and his avatars in the Dhammapada story (**DhA 12.1**) and the Jātaka (**J 353**), as discussed above [2.1.1]. There is also no past life story in M 85—except for the Buddha relating his past experiences with the pains of self-mortification by way of an autobiography (his present and last life).

In short, there is almost no trace of the *consequentialist* idea of karma in M 85, as highlighted in DhA 12.1 and J 353. The Sutta does not dwell on the notion of *good begets good, bad begets bad*—which is

¹⁵ For a list of Dhammapada stories featuring the dire fruits of killing animals, see DhA:B 1:33.

¹⁶ On consequentialism or consequentialist ethics, see **Isayo Samuddaka S** (S 903*) + SD 39.2 (2); SD 3.5 (1); SD 4.16 (2.5). Cf SD 20.12 (3.1).

¹⁷ See SD 55.2 (2.3.1; 2.4.2).

the way the world works. Merely living by this consequentialist ethics brings us happiness here and hereafter—but this still keeps us in the loop: karma holds us down in samsara.

It is **virtue ethics** that is the basis for reaching the path that frees us from samsara.¹⁸

2.2.2 Virtue ethics in the Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Sutta (M 85)

2.2.2.1 If we see **the 3 trainings** in *philosophical* terms—meaning how they work *on* our mind—then, moral training deals with the *right*; meditation with the *good*; and wisdom training with the *real*. **Moral training** concerns right action (body and speech), which is basically keeping to the 5 precepts. **Meditation training** is about keeping a good mind (one that is calm and clear). And **wisdom training** is the ability to see beyond our senses *directly* into true reality.

In this philosophical structure of Buddhist training, moral training may be said to comprise largely of **consequential ethics**. Here, we are guided by right efforts in not doing bad, keeping it that way, doing good, cultivating that good. This ethical conduct is guided by the understanding that our actions (karma) have consequences. Hence, we must avoid bad karma and its negative consequences, and cultivate good karma and its fruits. This is the kind of ethics that underlie the teachings of **the Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Vatthu** (DhA 12.1) and **the Dhona,sākhā Jātaka** (J 353).

2.2.2.2 In the case of meditation training, we go beyond merely working with karma (body and speech). We work deeper into the roots of karma, that is, *the mind* (specifically, intention). We can take **mindfulness** as “good intention” (as an uncountable noun). With mindfulness, we diligently remove unwholesome thoughts and cultivate wholesome ones. When our mind is wholesome (*kusala*), our actions and speech are also wholesome. In essence, this is **virtue ethics** in early Buddhism.¹⁹

Once again, we should remember that moral training (mainly consequentialist ethics) is the foundation of mental training (mostly virtue ethics). The qualifier “mostly” here means that neither of these trainings are mere philosophical categories, but work together, to mutually raise, *pari passu*, the quality of both trainings. They are like two hands working together to clap or hold in *anjali*.

In this way, both trainings work to bring about wisdom training, the direct vision of true reality that leads to self-awakening (like the Buddha and the arhats). For the sake of linguistic convenience, we can call the third training **teleological ethics**, in the sense of being *the goal* of the two earlier trainings. We see a lot of virtue ethics and teleological ethics in action in **the Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Sutta** (M 85).

3 The prince Bodhi story set

3.0 The Dhona,sākhā Jātaka (J 353) is the last story in a set of 4 stories, canonical and commentarial about prince Bodhi. These are the 4 stories:

SD 55.2	Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Sutta	M 85	Happiness cannot really come from pain
SD 55.3	Cela,pattikā Vatthu	Cv 5.21.1-4	Monastics should inspire faith and happiness in others
SD 55.4	Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Vatthu	DhA 12.1	Guard our actions in childhood, youth and maturity
SD 55.5	Dhona,sākhā Jātaka	J 353	Who sows violence reaps its fruits

¹⁸ See SD 55.2 (2.4.1).

¹⁹ On virtue ethics, see **Virtue ethics**, SD 18.11; also SD 4.13 (2.2).

3.1 BODHI RĀJA,KUMĀRA SUTTA (M 85/2:91-97)

3.1.1 The Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Sutta (M 85) gives the longest canonical account of prince Bodhi. To celebrate the completion of his fabulous palace, Kokanada, Bodhi invites the Buddha and his monks to be its first occupants by accepting an alms-offering. Bodhi has spread white cloth over the palace floor right down to the bottom of the palace stairway. He hopes that the Buddha will step on it, thus affirming that he will have a child. The Buddha refrains from stepping on the cloth. Ānanda explains to Bodhi that the Buddha does not want to set a precedent of such a ritual.²⁰

3.1.2 At the end of the alms-offering, Bodhi confides in the Buddha his view that **happiness comes only from pain**. The rest of the Sutta is a detailed account of the Buddha's **rebuttal** of this wrong view by way of an autobiographical recount of his search and struggle for the middle way, his awakening and the first teaching. The Sutta closes with an account of **spiritual training** by way of the 5 limbs of striving, and how *quickly* awakening can be attained. Instigated by his dutiful companion, **Sañjikā,putta**, Bodhi reveals that he has *gone for refuge* twice before, and does again for a third time.

3.1.3 Significance of the Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Sutta

3.1.3.1 The Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Sutta's main theme is **the Buddha's rebuttal** of prince Bodhi's wrong view that happiness only comes from pain. To correct this serious wrong view, the Buddha relates his own experience of how suffering—even in its extreme form of self-mortification—does not bring any true happiness. On the contrary, declares the Buddha, there is *pleasure or happiness that actually benefits spiritual growth*, that is, meditative bliss.

3.1.3.2 To highlight the real dangers of seeing pain, even self-mortification, as a virtue, and the true benefits of using meditative joy as the basis for spiritual progress and awakening, the Buddha relates his own autobiography: how he experienced near-death with self-mortification, how meditative joy led him to awaken as the Buddha, and to declare the liberating Dharma to the world. In short, this Sutta is valuable testimony on **the life of the Buddha**, of which we have little canonical record. This is one of those rare sources of the Buddha's life in his own words. Hence, the Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Sutta is valuable to us both as a *narrative* as well as an *instructive* Dharma document.

3.2 CELA,PATTIKĀ VATTHU (Cv 5.21.1-4 @ V 2:127-129)

3.2.1 The Cela,pattikā Vatthu (Cv 5.21.1-4) is a Vinaya account of the rules introduced by the Buddha in connection with the lay ritual of monastics stepping on white cloth as a portent of being blessed with a child, that is, as a fertility rite. The Buddha *forbids* such a practice. In due course, a woman who had suffered a miscarriage is unable to get the monks to consent to this ritual, she accuses the monks of being callous and uncompassionate.

The Buddha then allows monks to acquiesce to such a request (if they should wish to). The rationale here is to inspire the laity to keep faith. The Buddha then gives a third allowance, merely a practical one, that is, monks may use such white cloth for drying their feet when the occasion arises, should they wish to.

²⁰ For details on the white-cloth incident, see SD 55.2 (2.3).

3.2.2 Technically, **the Cela,pattikā Vatthu** is a set of Vinaya or legal “case-histories,” that is, background stories behind the ecclesiastical rules relating to monastics stepping on white cloth. There are 3 significant points to remember in this connection:

(1) The Buddha, by not stepping on the white cloth that prince Bodhi has spread out in his newly finished palace, prevents the precedent of a “cloth-stepping” fertility ritual for those who wrongly perceive monastics as having the power to cancel the negative effects of past bad karma or granting children to childless couples or individuals. The Buddha’s purpose is *not* that of bringing beings to suffer in samsara (we are ourselves capable of doing that in various ways): the purpose of Buddhism is to bring beings out of samsara and its sufferings.²¹

(2) Despite being uncompromising in terms of the spirit of the Dharma—that of liberating beings from suffering—the Buddha does give some latitude in the spirit of the Vinaya—that of preventing monastics from exploiting the laity and of inspiring faith in them—he gives monastics (using their wisdom or common sense) the latitude to decide whether or not to respond to the faithful laity’s request for some kind of blessing. He also has no objection when white cloth is used in a practical manner for drying the feet of monastics. Incidentally, this Vinaya ruling is the root of the religious ritual of washing monks’ feet, especially in the Sinhala Theravāda tradition.

3.3 BODHI RĀJA,KUMĀRA VATTHU (DhA 12.1/3:134-139)

3.3.1 The Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Vatthu, the story of prince Bodhi, is a Dhammapada story centering on **Dh 157**, on being vigilant throughout our life, which serves as the moral of the whole story. The story itself has two unequal parts: the shorter (1) a narrative about the builder [3.3.1.1] and the longer (2) a teaching to Bodhi on karma [3.3.1.2].

3.3.1.1 Like **the Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Sutta** (M 85) [3.1], **the Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Vatthu** opens with the fact that Bodhi has built a fabulous palace, Kokanada. The story takes a dark turn: Bodhi wants to kill the builder so that he will not build a similar palace for anyone else. He confides his terrible plan to his trusted companion and servant, Sañjikā,putta, who, deeply valuing the builder’s rare talent, warns him of his impending death. The builder secretly builds a flying machine, flees with his family to the Himalayas where he builds his own city and kingdom, over which he rules as king Kaṭṭha,vāhana.²²

3.3.1.2 The 2nd part of **the Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Vatthu** relates Bodhi celebrating a house-warming for the newly finished palace by inviting the Buddha and his monks for an alms-meal so that they are its first occupants, thus blessing it. The story of the Buddha *not stepping on the cloth* is repeated here. The Buddha explains to Bodhi why he was unable to have children. Both Bodhi and his queen had, in a past life, habitually destroyed numerous lives, eating eggs (presumably fertilized) of birds and killing them, too. The teaching had a wholesome effect on Bodhi and he attains streamwinning.

3.3.2 The Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Vatthu—the Dhammapada story about prince Bodhi—is the happiest, even most exciting, of the 4 stories about prince Bodhi—for these reasons:

(1) Although the story shows a dark side of prince Bodhi, he is *not* depicted as actually carrying out his bad deed—thanks to the intercession of his compassionate servant, **Sañjika,putta**, who saves the

²¹ On the significance of Uttarā’s remark on her 2 fathers: SD 55.2 (2.4.2.2), also (2.4.1).

²² See [3.3.2 (1)] and SD 55.4 (1.2.2) n on Kaṭṭha,vahana.

lives of the builder and his family. Significantly, the builder—elsewhere known as **Kaṭṭha,vāhana**—starts his own kingdom.²³

(2) Despite committing the karma of habitually killing birds (and eating their fertilized eggs), **Bodhi**—and presumably his queen—hearing the Dharma (on Dh 157) from the Buddha, is able to create *new good karma* by attaining streamwinning.

(3) **The Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Vatthu**—through the Buddha’s teaching on **Dh 157**—reminds us, as Dharma-practitioners, not to be discouraged by our unwholesome karmic habits but to be inspired by our wholesome ones. Reflecting on our wholesome acts, no matter how small they may seem, we habitually strengthen our wholesomeness. We should, in this connection, also study **the Sotānugata Sutta** (A 4.191), which shows how Dharma-listening helps in our attaining the path (SD 58.2).

3.4 DHONA,SĀKHA JĀTAKA (J 353/3:157-161): see (2).

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Dhona,sākha Jātaka

The “Spreading Branch” Birth-story

J 353

The occasion

1 *Na-y-idam niccam bhavitabban’ti*. The Teacher said this while staying in the Bhesakalā forest, depending on²⁴ (the village of) Sumsumāra,giri (Crocodile Hill), in Bhagga country, in connection with prince Bodhi.²⁵

2 The son of Udena, named **prince Bodhi**, at that time dwelt in Sumsumāra,giri. Now, he commissioned a very skillful builder to build him a palace called **Kokanada**, and to make it unlike that of any other king. **[158]**

3 Then, avusos, he thought: “This builder may build a similar palace for some other king!” Being envious, he had the builder’s eyes plucked out.

4 The community of monks came to know about his eyes being plucked out.

On that account, a talk arose in the Dharma-hall, thus:

“Avusos, prince Bodhi has had the builder’s eyes plucked out in this manner! O how cruel, how harsh, how savage!”²⁶

5 The Teacher, having come along, asked:

“What now, bhikshus, are you sitting together discussing?”

They answered the Teacher, thus: “It is about this matter.”

²³ On King Kaṭṭha,vāhana, see under SD 55.4 (1.2.2).

²⁴ “Dependent on” (*nissāya*) refer to the village or community that the Buddha (or the monks) resort to for alms.

²⁵ *Idam satthā bhaggesu sumsumāra,girim nissāya bhesakalā,vane viharanto bodhi,raja.kumāram ārabha kathesi.*

²⁶ *Aho kakkhalo pharuso sāhasiko*

6 The Teacher replied:

“Bhikshus, this is not the only time, but before, too, that he was cruel, harsh, savage.²⁷ Not only now but before, too, he, having had a thousand kings killed, had their eyes plucked out, and their flesh offered in a sacrifice!”²⁸

7 Having said this, he told them about the past, thus:

The story of the past

PRINCE BRAHMADATTA

8 In the past, when Brahma,datta was ruling in Benares, the Bodhisattva was a world-renowned teacher in Takka,silā. Kshatriya youths and brahmin youths from all over India learned the arts before him. The son of the king of Benares, named **prince Brahma,datta**, too, learned the 3 Vedas in his presence.

9 But he was by nature cruel, harsh, savage. The Great Being (*mahā,satta*), on account of his knowledge of character-analysis by reading the body,²⁹ knew about his cruel, violent, savage nature.

10 “My dear, you are cruel, harsh, savage. Indeed, supremacy harshly won is short-lived. When that supremacy is gone, one is like a wrecked ship at sea, and find no ground to stand on. Therefore, be not of such nature!”³⁰

Admonishing him, he uttered these two verses:

<p>11 <i>Na-y-idam niccam bhavitabham brahma,datta khemam subhikkham suhatā’va kāye atth’accaye māhu sammūlho bhinna,plavo sāgarass’eva majjhe.</i> (J v3.14)</p>	<p>None of this, Brahmadata, will last: security, good food, happiness, the body: be not infatuated—when good is lost, you’ll be as if wrecked afloat in mid-ocean.</p>
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<p>12 <i>Yani karoti puriso tāni attani passati³¹ kalyāṇa,kāri kalyāṇam papa,kāri ca pāpakam yādisam vapate bījam tādisam harate phalan’ti</i> (J v3.15]</p>	<p>What a person does, that he will himself see: good (comes) to the good-doer, and bad to the bad-doer! Whatever seed that one sows, that kind of fruit one harvests.</p>
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[159] [Commentary is omitted.]

²⁷ *Na bhikkhave idān’eva pubbe p’esa kakkhalo pharuso sāhasiko va nā kevalañ ca.*

²⁸ *Idan’eva pubbe’pi esa khattiya,sāhassānam akkhīni uppāṭāpetvā māretvā tesam maṁsena bali,kammam kāre-sīti.*

²⁹ “Knowledge of character-analysis by reading the body,” *aṅga,vijjā*, lit, “the knowledge of limbs,” which differs from that of the 32 marks of the body (*dva-t,timśa lakkhaṇa*), which are of a nobler nature found in the “great man” (*mahā,purisa*). This limb-knowledge is the 1st on the list of wrong livelihood, on account of being a “low art” (*tiracchāna,sippa*), as listed in the “great moralities” (*mahā,sīla*) section of the analysis of moral virtue in each of the 1st 13 suttas of Dīgha Nikāya, eg, in **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1,21/1:9,3), SD 25.2; **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,56/67,14), SD 8.10, etc. However, it seems to be acceptable when merely used as a personal ability (ie, not using it to earn a living, as a life-style or a mark of the “holy life”).

³⁰ *Tāta tvaṁ kakkhalo pharuso sāhasiko, pharusena nama laddham issariyam acira-ṭ,ṭhitikam hoti, so issariye vigate bhinna,nāvo viya samudde patitṭhitam na labhati.* **Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Vatthu** (DhA 12.1) actually relates how a husband and his wife (prince Bodhi and his queen in the past) were ship-wrecked but only they survived, marooned on a bird-inhabited island (DhA 12.1,31), SD 55.4.

³¹ See J 2:202.

BRAHMADATTA'S BAD FRIENDSHIP

13 Having saluted his teacher, he left for **Benares**. His father, having seen his skills, made him vice-roy. With his father's passing, he ascended the throne.

14 His purohit (family priest), named **Piṅgiya**, was cruel and harsh, too. Being greedy of fame, he thought: "Now, what if all the kings of India were brought under this king! Thus will I become the *only* purohit to this *only* king!"

He persuaded the king to accept his words.

15 With a great army, the king besieged a kingdom and seized its king. In this manner, he gained sovereignty of all India. With a thousand kings in his horde, he thought: "I will seize the kingdom of **Takkasilā**!"

16 **The Bodhisattva** had the city-wall repaired, making it impregnable to the enemy.

17 The king of Benares had a canopy raised above him, and a tent-wall surrounded him, at the foot of a giant banyan tree on the Ganges bank.

18 Having battled and conquered a thousand kings on the plains of India, he was still unable to conquer Takkasilā.

19 He asked his purohit:

"Acharya, though we have come with so many kings, we are still unable to take Takkasilā. What shall we do?"

20 "Maharajah, pluck out the eyes of the thousand kings **[160]** and rip open their bellies. Taking the 5 sweet kinds of flesh,³² offer a sacrifice to the deity that has arisen in this banyan tree. Immersing your hand into the blood of their bellies, make the 5-finger palm-print in blood³³ all around the banyan tree. In no long time, victory will be yours!"

The king readily agreed.

21 He had some strong wrestlers waiting in his enclosure. Summoning the kings one by one, he had the wrestlers squeeze them senseless. He had their eyes plucked out. Then, having them killed, he took their flesh, casting their carcasses into the Ganges to be carried away by its waters.

22 Having made the sacrifice as described, he had the sacrificial drum beaten, and went forth into battle.

23 Then, a yaksha from his watch-tower came and tore out the king's right eye.

Maddened with pain, he lay down at full-length upon the couch prepared for him at the foot of the banyan tree.

24 At that time, a vulture, perched in the tree-top, was eating a bone. A loose bone fell and its sharp end pierced like an iron-spike into the king's left eye, destroying it.

³² "The 5 sweet kinds of flesh" (*pañca.madhura.maṁsa*): neither the suttas nor commentaries say what they were. The term is mentioned in the same context (a sacrifice to a dryad) in **Mahā Suta,soma J** (J 537/5:472,22, 488,-1); also mentioned in **Vaḍḍhakī Sūkara J** (J 283/2:408,6).

³³ "The 5-finger palm-print in blood," *lohita,pañc'aṅgulikāni*. In **Guttilla J** (J 243) reports how Guttilla (the Bodhisattva) made such a "5-finger palm-print in fragrance" (*gandha,pañc'aṅgulika*) at the shrine of the buddha Kassapa (J 243/2:256,4 f). Further, see SD 49.3 (2.2.3).

25 At that moment, recalling the Bodhisattva’s words, he cried out:

“Now I know, when our teacher said, ‘These beings experience the result of karma like fruits that grow from their seeds,’³⁴ he had all this in mind.”³⁵

26 Lamenting, he uttered these two verses (to Piṅgiya):

27 *Idaṃ tad ācariyo,vaco*
pārāsariyo ya abravi
massu tvaṃ akarā pāpaṃ
yaṃ taṃ pacchā kataṃ tape. (J v3.15)³⁷

This is the word spoken
 by the teacher Pārāsariya.³⁶
 You should do no bad;
 for, suffering will follow you.

28 *Ayam eva so piṅgiya dhona,sākho*³⁸
yahiṃ ghātayiṃ khattiyānaṃ sahaṣsaṃ
alaṅkate candana,sāra,litte
tam eva dukkhaṃ paccāgataṃ mamāti (J v3.17)

Under these spreading branches,³⁹ Piṅgiya,
 having violated a thousand kings,
 those anointed with sandalwood oil,
 that very same pain I must suffer now.

[161]

27 To his queen consort, he, in tears, reflected with this verse:⁴⁰

28 *Sāmā ca kho candana,litta,gattī*
laṭṭhīva sobh’añjanakassa uggatā
adivā kālaṃ karissāmi ubbariṃ
taṃ me tato dukkhataraṃ bhavissantīti (J v3.18)

Your limbs, too, are smeared with sandalwood,
 exalted, fair like a moringa⁴¹ sprout;
 O Ubbarī, I see you not, my time has come:
 yet greater pain awaits me than this!

29 Even as he muttered thus, he died and arose in hell.

The purohit, obsessed with power, was not able to save him with any of his protective prayers.⁴² Nor did he obtain any power for himself.

30 As soon as he (the king) had died, his army broke up and fled.

31 The Teacher then showed the connections in the birth-story:

“At that time, prince Bodhi was the robber-king (*cora,rāja*); Deva,datta was Piṅgiya; and I was the world-famous teacher.

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³⁴ *Ime sattā bījānuṃpaṃ phalaṃ viya kammānurūpaṃ vipākaṃ anubhontīti.*

³⁵ *So ... kathento idaṃ disvā kathesi, maññe’ti.*

³⁶ This seems to be the personal name of the teacher (the Bodhisattva), also mentioned in J 222 (see foll).

³⁷ This verse recurs as **J v2.143** in **Cūḷa Nandiya J** (J 222/2:202,3 f), with a similar ending where the hunter falls into hell. See prec n.

³⁸ “Spreading branch” (*dhona,sākhā*; Be Ce Se *vena,sākhā*), which Comy glosses with *patthata,sākho* (JA 3:161,-5), meaning “spreading or extended branch.” [1.3].

³⁹ On the sg form of *ayaṃ ... dhona,sākho* tr as pl, see (1.3.1.5).

⁴⁰ *So evaṃ paridevamāno agga,mahesiṃ anussaritvā.*

⁴¹ *Sobh’añjana(ka)*, Hyperantherica moringa (J 4:405, 3:161, 6:535). Comy says it also called the “siggu” (cf Ved *śigru*) tree (*siggu,rukka*, JA 3:161,15).

⁴² *Na naṃ issariya,luddho purohito parittānaṃ kātuṃ sakkhi.*