

A Lesson for Kings

A jataka tale from India

The King of Benares and the King of Kosala once met on the road. Each sat erect in his chariot, taking the middle of the road. Each refused to make way for the other.

The charioteer of the King of Benares thought to solve this dilemma by letting the older of the two pass first. But on inquiry he found both to be of the same age.

Next he inquired about the extent of their kingdoms. Both ruled kingdoms of three hundred leagues. In wealth and family they were also matched.

At last he thought, "I will make way for the most righteous." And he asked, "What kind of righteousness has this king of yours?"

The charioteer of the King of Kosala proclaimed his king's virtues thus:

"The strong he overthrows by strength.

The mild by mildness.

The good he conquers by goodness,
and the wicked by wickedness too.

Such is the nature of this king!

Move out of the way, O charioteer!"

But the charioteer of the King of Benares was not impressed.

"If these are his *virtues*, what are his *faults*?" And he began to recite the virtues of the King of Benares.

"Anger he conquers by calmness,
and by goodness the wicked.

The stingy he conquers by gifts,
and by truth the speaker of lies.

Such is the nature of *this* king!

Move out of the way, O charioteer!"

And when the King of Kosala heard this, he and his charioteer came down from their chariot and made way for the King of Benares.



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