

# The Parable Sūtra

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Thus have I heard. One time, the Bhagavat was staying in the Jetāvana grove near the city of Śrāvastī.

At that time, the World Honored One was among a great congregation and addressed the King named Brilliance, "Great king, I will now for his majesty briefly discuss a parable about the beings of *saṣsāra* who [suffer] feelings, clingings, mistakes, and troubles. Your majesty should now listen closely, and well think about it.

"Going back in the past an immeasurable aeon (*kalpa*), there was a person who went into the wilderness and was chased by an evil elephant. Fearfully, he fled without any refuge. Then he saw an empty well. And dangling into it was a tree's root. Thereupon, he quickly went down the root and hid himself inside the well. There were two rats, dark and light, that together gnawed on tree root above him. And in the well, its four sides had four poisonous snakes that desired to bite that person. And below there was a poisonous serpent. His mind was terrified by the snakes and serpent, and he was apprehensive about tree root breaking. The tree roots had in them the honey of bees, five drops of which fell into his mouth. When the tree shook, bees swarmed down to sting the person. And brush fires came repeatedly to burn the tree."

The king said, "How is it that this person should undergo such endless distress, craving so little feeling?"

At that time, the World Honored One addressed the great king, "The wilderness is a metaphor for that long night under ignorance that is vast and distant. The words 'that person' is a metaphor for a being in yet another life. The elephant is a metaphor for impermanence. The well is a metaphor for *saṣsāra*. The dangerous crossing of the tree roots is a metaphor for life. The dark and light pair of rats is a metaphor for day and night. Them gnawing the tree root is a metaphor for thoughts begetting thoughts until death. Those four snakes are a metaphor for being in the four elements. The honey is a metaphor for the five desires and the bees are a metaphor for false thinking. The fire is a metaphor for old age and illness. And the poisonous serpent is a metaphor for death.

"This is why, great king, you should know that birth, old age, illness, and death are quite terrible. Always should you think and be mindful of them. Do not make yourself subject to the slavery of the five desires."

Thereupon, the World Honored One gravely spoke in verse,

"The wilderness is the path of ignorance,  
The person fleeing is a metaphor for the ordinary man,  
The great elephant is a simile for impermanence,  
And the well is a metaphor for the shore of *saṣsāra*.

The tree roots are a metaphor for being in this life,  
The two rats are the same as night and day,  
The gnawed root is the decay of thought upon thought,  
And the four snakes are the same as the four elements.

The dripping honey is a metaphor for the five desires,  
The bee stings a simile for false thinking,  
The fire is the same as having old age and illness,

And the poisonous serpent is the way to the suffering of death.

The wise regard these matters thus:  
The elephant can weary a being's crossing,  
The five desires can lead the mind to detachment,  
And the way is called the liberated person.

An oppressive place is the ocean of ignorance,  
Always is death the ruler chasing us.  
One must know that the love of sound and form  
Is not pleasant when they leave the ordinary man."

At that time, the great king Brilliance heard the Buddha give this talk on birth and death being a passage through troubles and attained an unprecedentedly deep birth of disillusionment [with the world]. With his palms together reverently and single-mindedly gazing respectfully, he said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, it is greatly compassionate for the Tathāgata to give a talk on such a subtle and wondrous meaning of the Dharma. I now am crowned."

The Buddha said, "Excellent, excellent. Great king, you should practice as it has been propounded and not go about unrestrained."

Then King Brilliance and those of the great congregation were all elated. They faithfully received, transmitted, and upheld it.