Ja 466 — The Sea Merchants: a past life story

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Text

Stories of Past Lives 466

The Book of the Twelves

The Chapter With Cūḷakuṇāla

The Sea Merchants: a past life story

“Those folk sow and reap,

men living on the fruit of their work.

They have no share of this island.

This is better far than India!”

“When the fifteenth day full moon has risen,

there will be a great flood from the sea,

drowning this splendid isle.

Let it not destroy you all! Go to some other haven!”

“Never shall a mighty flood of water from the sea

drown this splendid isle—

I have seen that through many a sign.

Don’t fear! Why worry? Celebrate!

You’ve come to this splendid abode,

full of food and drink.

I see no danger for you at all.

Celebrate, even unto the sons of sons!”

“This god in the southern quarter

crying, ‘It is safe!’: his is the truth!

The northern doesn’t know if there’s a danger or not.

Don’t fear! Why worry? Celebrate!”

“As these spirits argue,

one reporting danger, one safety,

please heed my advice,

lest we perish swift and fleet.

Let all join together to build a boat,

a strong vessel fully equipped.

If this southern one speaks true,

and is falsely rejected by the northern,

it shall serve us in time of need,

and we would not give up the island.

But if the northern speaks true,

and is falsely rejected by the southern,

then having all boarded the boat,

we shall cross safely to the far shore.

Truly, best not accept the last word that came your way,

when what was spoken by the first was best.

Who here accepts the truth after examination,

that man goes to the best place.”

Just as, in the middle of the watery sea,

the merchants fled to safety by their own efforts,

so, realizing his future welfare,

he of vast wisdom transgresses not at all.

Fools deluded by desire for tastes,

not realizing their future welfare,

sink down in face of present need,

like those people in mid-ocean.

Prepare what must be done for the future, thinking,

“Let what must be done not harm me on the day the duty ripens.”

The kind who acts to prepare what must be done,

is not harmed by what must be done on the day the duty ripens.