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NARRATING THE ACT OF TRUTH IN THE JATAKA AND AVADANA RELIEFS AT CANDI BOROBUDUR

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ABSTRACT
This paper analyzes the Act of Truth in nine Jataka and Avadana stories depicted in Candi Borobudur, Central Java, aiming to identify its key factors and purpose in the allegories. Through content analysis and comparative analysis, the study finds that merit, right speech, and intention are the primary contributing factors to the Act of Truth. A beneficial Act of Truth involves taking a firm stance on truth, driven by compassion to benefit others and attain one's highest potential. The findings suggest that the acts in these stories form a part of the bodhisattva’s path to achieving perfect awakening. This study also offers insights into the beneficial acts represented in ancient Javanese reliefs.

KEYWORDS
Act of Truth, Jataka-and-Avadana reliefs, merit, right intention, right speech.

1. INTRODUCTION
The narrative reliefs at Candi Borobudur recount Buddhist sutras and stories that have an educational or didactic function. Among the themes that are replete with ethical values at Candi Borobudur are the Jatakas and Avadanas preserved in 720 panels. The Jatakas and Avadanas qualify as allegories because they convey moral messages that aim to educate or elucidate an idea of virtue or life values. Jatakas (birth-stories) and Avadanas (glorious deeds, accomplished acts, or heroic achievement) are both collections of teachings in the form of stories about a character’s life or other prominent figures. The Jatakas focus more on the past lives of historical Buddhas, especially Sakyamuni/Gautama Buddha, and contain various acts of giving and sacrificing that are motivated by compassion and altruism. The Jatakas teach mercy, truthfulness, charity, the non-killing of sentient beings, correct ways of life, and other virtues (Fontein 1981, 104). The content of Avadanas are wider and varied, it includes the Buddha’s past lives, biographies of Buddha and biographies of monks, nuns, or lay disciples regarding the fruits or consequences of an action (karma), the importance of faith and devotion, the benefits of making offerings to the Buddhas, Buddhist community (Sangha), holy objects, and so on (Tatelman 2004, 36; Strong 1983, 16–17).
Among the sub-topics in the Jatakas and Avadanas is the Act of Truth (Pali. saccakiriya; Sanskrit. satya-adhisthana), a truth-act performed either by a bodhisattva (a Buddha to-be) or by others that by the truth of their conduct or by the truth of their speech, their wish may be actualized (Burlingame 1917, 429; Kong 2005, 124; Kaufmann, n.d). Act of Truth in the Buddhist contexts, aside from being present in Jatakas and Avadanas, can also be found in various Mahayana sutras as well as in the Pali prayers (parittas). Among the sutras containing Act of Truth are the Questions of King Milinda (Pali. Milindapanha), the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in Eight Thousand Lines (Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita), the White Lotus of the Good Dharma Sutra (Saddharmapundarikasutra), the King of Samadhis Sutra (Samadhirajasutra) (Kaufmann n.d). Meanwhile, Act of Truth in Vedic or Hindu contexts are found in the Rgveda, Artharvaveda, Upanisads, Bhagavadgita, and Mahabharata (Kong 2005; Thompson 1998; Brown 1972).

Eugene Watson Burlingame, one of the pioneering researchers on this subject, defined Act of Truth as “a formal declaration of fact, accompanied by a command or resolution or prayer that the purpose of the agent shall be accomplished” (1917, 429). Act of Truth refers to some such facts as that the agents, or the persons in whose behalf the acts are performed, posses certain good qualities or are free from certain bad qualities; that they have done certain things they ought to have done, or that they have left undone certain things they ought not to do (Burlingame 1917, 431). Based on Burlingame’s definition, Paulus Kaufmann observed that there are two components involved, that is, declaration of fact and a command or resolution or prayer. Therefore, the performers do not simply speak out the truth, but they also state what they wish to achieve.

Jayarava (2013, Section the Power of Truth) proposed that in Act of Truth, “one states a truth or reality or, in fact, one states that one is, oneself, in harmony with truth, in order to restore order external to oneself” and that Act of Truth allows one individual to be “in tune” or to “go with” (samyanc) instead of “going against” (mithya) with respect to the nature of experience. Kong Choy Fah asserted that an utterance of truth will prompt a response or an action or operation or effect as true speech reflects the total agreement between spoken words and fact (2005, 19, 80).

Some researchers posited that there is an element of virtue in it, so Act of Truth is a solemn asseveration about a person’s righteousness or virtues (Gombrich 1995, 263; Harvey 1993, 70–71) although some cases were almost morally neutral or may be based on motive (Harvey 1993, 71, 74). Others indicated that the central characteristic of the Act of Truth is the assertion of personal authority and that this assertion rests on the power of the performer to accomplish remarkable things by the mere utterance of certain words, and in a recognizable regular and formal way (Thompson 1998, 125–126). In the Vedic sense, W. Norman Brown is of the opinion that the Act of Truth is the fulfillment of personal obligations and duties (vrata) according to Rgveda (1972, 261–262).

Previous studies defined the Act of Truth based on various aspects in the stories they researched. However, not much discussion has been about what contributes to the workings of the Act of Truth and how the key concepts in the stories signify a more ultimate goal. The aim of this research is to identify the key contributing factors in the Act of Truth and the purpose of the Act of truth in the Jatakas and Avadanas in relation to Buddhist ultimate aim.

2. RESEARCH METHOD
This research employed both artifactual and textual data—the reliefs and the manuscripts. The artifactual data are the nine stories of Jatakas and Avadanas carved on the first level of three series, namely the main wall lower series, the balustrade upper series, and the balustrade lower series of Candi Borobudur. The textual
sources for the nine stories of the *Jatakas and Avadanas* are the *Divine Stories or Divya-avadana* (Rotman 2008), *One Hundred Stories or Avadanasataka* (Appleton 2014), the *Jatakamala of Aryasura* (Khoroch 1989) and the *Elucidation of the Meaning of the Jataka or Jatakathavannana* (Cowell 1895–1907). The Sanskrit manuscripts of the *Jatakas and Avadanas* were consulted for the key terms (Vaidya 1959a; 1959b).

The method used in this research constitutes qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff 2004; Mayring 2019; Hsieh and Shannon 2005) combined with comparative analysis (Freiberger 2018). Content analysis is applied to the *Jatakas and Avadanas* manuscripts to identify the keywords or key concepts and variables (Krippendorff 2004, 34–35; Hsieh and Shannon 2005, 1281) that form the contributing factors for the Act of Truth to work. The next step entails the identification of the relationship of those key concepts and variables based on their concurrence, antecedents, or consequences (Hsieh and Shannon 2005, 1279). This is conducted by analyzing the motivation of the performers before the actions are performed, the utterance during their Act of Truth, the concluding phrases after the actions are performed, and the impact of their actions. The comparative analysis was used to compare the reliefs with the *Jatakas and Avadanas* manuscripts. In the cases that the themes are not explicitly mentioned, they are constructed based on the patterns and relationship (Vaismoradi and Snelgrove 2019).

3. ACT OF TRUTH IN THE JATAKAS AND AVADANAS AT CANDI BOROBUDUR


3.1. The Story of Mandhata (*Mandhata-avadana*)

The story of Mandhata or Murdhata (both names are being used alternatively in the manuscript) is recorded in the collection of the *Divine Stories (Divya-avadana).*\(^1\) It tells the story about King Mandhata who due to his past merit, possessed the miracle power of manifesting anything he said or wished for, but later he became arrogant and lost his miraculous power. The story is carved on twenty panels\(^2\) at Candi Borobudur, among them five reliefs will be discussed here.

Due to the great good deeds and excellent aspirations he made in the past, Mandhata, a prince who later became a king, possessed the miracle power of manifesting anything he uttered or wished for. When the prince went off to the countryside, he received a message that his father passed away and the ministers sent him messages to return to the palace to receive the coronation. Mandhata said that if what he does is in accordance with Dharma, then the coronation will take place where he is. His attendant, an ogre (yaksa) named Divaukasa helped with the preparations by bringing a jeweled mosaic and royal palanquin. As the coronation was to take place in a palace, Mandhata thought and said “then may the palace come here”. The palace then appeared on its own accord. Mandhata also had a thought about the seven treasures that often accompany a Universal Monarch, namely wheel (cakra), elephant, horse, jewel, wife, steward, and general—so these also appeared to him. At first, the king used his miracle powers to benefit his people. While touring the countryside, the king saw people working in the fields. Knowing that those people were cultivating the fields to harvest grain, the king caused a rain of 27 kinds of seeds simply by saying “let so and so happen”.

\(^{1}\) It is story no. 17 out of a total of 38 stories in the *Divya-avadana*.

\(^{2}\) It is carved on the first level, main wall, lower series (I.b.), relief no. 31–50.
Similarly, when he saw that people were cultivating fields of karsapa cotton, the king expressed his wish for a rain of cotton, thread, then a rain of clothing. When the king asked the people in the countryside, by whose virtue all these were made possible, the king was not satisfied when they replied, “because of Your Majesty’s benevolence and our own actions.” To show them that it is he alone that has the power, the king had the thought that may a rain of gold fall for a week inside his harem, but not anything outside of it. This again exactly happened. Later, the king became full of ambition and used his powers to conquer four continents one by one. He then took over Mount Sumeru along with the seven mountains around it. When Mandhata was welcomed to the realm of Sakra, the king of the gods (devas), he wished that Sakra should share his throne with him. As soon as Mandhata had such a thought in mind, Sakra offered half of his throne and invited him to sit with him. Mandhata then led an army of devas to conquer the titans (asuras). His successive wins and achievement made Mandhata so conceited that he declared himself as the sole victor. It was at that moment that his arrogance and conceit peaked, Mandhata felt that Sakra should step down and that only he was fit to sit on the throne of the king of the devas. When this malicious thought occurred to Mandhata, his magical powers vanished and he fell down on earth. There he suffered from a severe affliction, experiencing the painful sensation of the imminence of death. Just before his death did he only realize that even though he possessed the seven treasures, exercised four magical powers that humans can attain, established kingship, lordship, and dominion over the continents and surmounted the Trayastrimsa devas, yet, he was still unsatisfied with the objects of the five senses (Rotman 2008, 337–371).

Figure 1 depicts the coronation with Mandhata sitting on a large pavilion, facing those who are kneeling and sitting before him and offering something. On the left and right of the king, attendants pay homage while bringing gifts, trays of flowers, and clothes. Two of the seven treasures of a Universal Monarch (cakravartin)—horse and elephant are carved on the left (Krom 1927, 269).

The rain of grain occurs on the left, where farmers are harvesting grain (Figure 2). In the middle of the relief, maize is depicted among its types. The grain is partly bound up and to another part carried away. King Mandhata is standing and his attendants are kneeling on the right, where in front of him are several people sitting, who are undoubtedly his ministers and advisors (Krom 1927, 270).
The rain of cloth takes place on the left of the relief in Figure 3, where the clothes are falling and people are trying to grab them and hang them over their arms and one is busy gathering the clothes in a bundle (Krom 1927, 271). On the right side of the relief, the king is accompanied by his ministers and attendants.

Figure 4 shows a rain of gold falling inside the king's harem, and nothing outside of it as Mandhata wanted to prove that his virtue was the only cause of this miracle. He is sitting in the middle under a canopy, and on the right and left, people appear to be busy collecting the falling chains of jewels, gold rings, and other valuables into various containers and spreading out fabrics they had prepared (Krom 1927, 271).
This relief (Figure 5) shows that when Mandhata had a thought to sit on Sakra's throne, the king of devas offered half of his throne and invited Mandhata to sit with him (Krom 1927, 272–273).

In the story of Mandhata, in some sections he indeed uttered “let there be so and so!” (verbally) followed by phrases “as soon he had the thought” (sahacittotpada), then the miracles happen. The cases applied for the appearance of the palace, the seven treasures, the rain of grain, the rain of cotton, thread, and cloth and the rain of gold. However, in the rest of the manuscript, there are several more incidents with similar miracles happening by the power of his thought alone without even speaking it out, and the performer does not explicitly express what he wishes for.

The end of the story reveals that such powers possessed by Mandhata was due to his previous meritorious deeds towards the past Buddhas. In reflecting the incidents, the Buddha told the audiences about two occasions in the two previous lives of Mandhata as a guild master’s son and as merchant. When a guild master’s son encountered Buddha Sarvabhibhu, faith arose in him and he offered flowers made of four kinds of jewels with strong aspiration to achieve highest awakening. As a result of that, in this life, by his thought and utterance, Mandhata caused a shower of gold that continued falling for a week. Another event took place during Buddha Vipasyin’s time when a merchant named Otkarika, upon seeing the Buddha, deep faith arose in him so that he took a handful of mung beans and tossed them in Vipasyin’s bowls, while making a vow that by this virtue, may he become a Buddha and help masses of people to cross over. This resolve and deed later yielded a great result whereby Mandhata was able to establish his lordship and dominion over the four
continents. At the end of the story, Buddha identified Mandhata as being none other than himself (Rotman 2008, 366–371).

3.2. The Story of Padmaka (Padmaka-avadana)

*Padmaka-avadana* relates a story about a high-minded king who voluntarily made a resolve to become a medicinal fish in order to cure his citizens.3

When King Padmaka was reigning in Benares, a devastating yellow fever epidemic broke out in the kingdom. Although the king commanded his team of doctors to help, it did not bring about any results. The king was told that the epidemic could only be cured by consuming *rohita* fish meat. Witnessing more and more of his subjects suffer from the disease, the king was deeply moved by compassion. Realizing that under his current condition he was powerless to help them, he decided to sacrifice himself and deliberately made a vow to be reborn as a *rohita* fish for the sake of helping his people. The king gave away his wealth and crowned his son as king. He climbed up the roof of his palace, and made a solemn vow: “Having seen these beings tormented by illness and experiencing a severe plight, I am voluntarily abandoning my own life! By this truth, by this declaration of truth, may I arise as a great *rohita* fish in this sandy river.” Throwing himself off the palace, he was immediately reborn as a gigantic rohita fish. He fed his people with his own flesh for 12 years until the outbreak subsided. When the plague finally ended, he declared himself King Padmaka who had sacrificed himself to help them. He also pledged that when he became Buddha, he would free them from the terrible sickness and lead them to the state of nirvana. Upon hearing that, faith arose in everyone present and they aspired to become his disciples (Appleton 2014, 2–4).

In Figure 6, the right side of the relief depicts the king sitting in meditation posture. The left side of the relief shows a number of the courtiers, joining their palms in a *sembah* gesture. On the right side of the king, a flower is falling, symbolizing the homage expressed by the devas over the king’s altruistic and heroic decision (Krom 1927, 458–459).

![Image of King Padmaka Sacrificing Himself](image_url)

*Figure 6. King Padmaka Who is about to Sacrifice Himself. First Level, Balustrade, Lower Series (I.B.b.) No. 75ab.*

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3 Story no. 31 out of 100 in *Avadanasataka*. It is depicted on the first level, balustrade, lower series (I.B.b.) relief no. 74–76.
In the center of the relief in Figure 7 is a large fish swimming towards the left. Flowers are seen falling from the sky and floating on the water. On the left side there are three persons: one kneeling, one standing and another one in the water up to his ankles. It appears that the people are expressing homage and gratitude (Krom 1927, 459).

Figure 7. The King is Reborn as a Large Rohita Fish. First Level, Balustrade, Lower Series (I.B.b.) No. 76.

In the story of Padmaka, the king’s Act of Truth was driven by an ultimate wish and benefits, namely his resolve to become a Buddha and to continue guiding his subjects until they achieve liberation. The king now benefits his people with his body, but in the long run he vows to bring them benefit in an ultimate way. In this case, the Act of Truth is not the mere act of physical sacrifice, but is driven by an ultimate resolution.

3.3 The Story of the Hare (Sasa)
This version of the story of the hare tells of a hare, who knowing the difficulties faced by his hermit friend in obtaining food due to drought, intended to offer itself as food, and then uttered words of truth that prompt rain falls to revegetate the land.4

In a remote, uninhabited foothill of the Himalayas, there lived a sage (rṣi) together with his friend, a hare. Once, a severe drought hit the land so that the trees did not bear fruit. Since the sage could no longer support himself with food scarcity, he planned to leave the forest and live in the inhabited area so as to find food to support himself. However, the hare thought that living in the forest would be more conducive for the sage’s practice. Wishing the sage to subsist on its body at least for some time, the hare jumped into a pit of fire to offer himself as food. Moved by the kindness of the hare, the sage immediately pulled him out of the fire. Knowing the wish of his friend, the sage promised to not go to the village. This pleased the hare who then uttered words of truth: “Having come to the forest, my heart delights in solitude! By this statement of truth, may the deva rain down the rains of Great Indra!” The rain immediately fell and the entire area became fertile and abundant with plants and fruits (Appleton 2014, 18–22).

4 Story no. 37 in the Avadanasataka and is carved on a single relief on the first level, balustrade, lower series, relief no. 79. There is another story of the hare in Jatakamala no. 6, that is, Sasa-jataka. In the latter which is parallel with story no. 316 in Jatakathavannana, the hare, out of kindness jumps into the bonfire to offer himself as a meal for a Brahmin, Sakra in disguise, who wished to test the generosity of the hare and his friends—an otter, a jackal, and a monkey (Khoroch 1989, 32–38).
The sculptor decided to illustrate this story in a single panel that at least captures three episodes (Figure 8). On the left side sits the sage and the hare facing each other and conversing. In the center is a bonfire that the hare jumped into to offer himself as food. The right side depicts the events after the Act of Truth, that is, the rainfalls with the hare sitting on a rock and to the right of the hare, two peacocks rejoicing over the rain (Krom 1927, 460).

![Figure 8. The Hare is about to Offer Himself to the Sage and His Truth Utterance. First Level, Balustrade, Lower Series (I.B.b.) No. 79.](image)

The hare first declared that he was truly rejoicing in the solitude of the forest and by this truth, he requested the rain to fall. When he was asked why he intended to sacrifice himself, the hare said, “To be a Buddha in this dark world that is leaderless and lacking a guide, to carry across those beings who have not crossed over, to liberate those who are not liberated, console those in need of consolation, bring to complete nirvana those who have not entered complete nirvana” (Appleton 2014, 21). This shows that his Act of Truth is accompanied by an ultimate wish, namely to attain awakening and to lead others to the liberation of nirvana.

3.4. The Story of the King of the Sibis (Sibi-jataka)

The story recounts one of the births of the bodhisattva as a benevolent king of the Sibis who gave eyes to the blind Brahmin, Sakra in disguise.⁵

The bodhisattva was born as the king of the Sibis who are noble-hearted, compassionate, immensely generous, and exercising all kinds of charity to the mendicants and his subjects. To test the king’s generosity and his commitment, Sakra, the king of the devas disguised himself as an elderly blind Brahmin. Approaching the king, he said he was sent by Sakra and asked if the king would grant him one of his eyes. His request was granted by the king since he felt that was what was asked for and what the blind Brahmin needed. King Sibi gave not only one eye, but both eyes to him. Later, when the king who had lost his sight was sitting cross-legged in the park, Sakra appeared to him. Sakra expressed to the king that the mendicants had caused the king to lose his sight and asked why the king was still having concerns or thinking about them. The king of the Sibis replied in the form of an Act of Truth: “If it is true that the sound of beggars’ voices, earnestly asking favors, is now and always has been as pleasant to me as if they were blessings, then may an eye materialize for me.” Happy with the recovery of one eye, the king then uttered the second words of truth: “Just as I gladly gave both my eyes to him who only asked for one, and felt nothing but joy and love, so may I in turn receive another eye.” With his Act of Truth, both eyes appeared to the king. Pleased with the king’s loftiness and purity, Sakra granted him divine eyesight (Khoroch 1989, 10–17).

⁵ Story no. 2 in the Jatakamala of Aryasura and is carved on the first level, balustrade, upper series (I.B.a.), reliefs no. 5–9. Its parallel in Pali sources are Sivi-jataka, no. 499 in Jatakathavannana and Siviraja-cariya, no. 8 in Cariyapitaka.
In Figure 9, the now blind king is sitting cross-legged in a meditative posture. While in dialogue with Sakra who appeared as a Brahmin, the king of the Sibis uttered words of truth that made his eyes recover one after the other, so that the king could see again. The story is not about true statements alone, as the manuscript states that the king was able to regain his eyesight after his utterance of words of truth due to the power of his stand on truth (satya-adhisthanabala) and his exceptional accumulation of merit. When his counselors and ministers dissuaded the king from giving his eyes, they asked the king why he would engage in this difficult task, since all glory and majesty is already possessed by him? The king replied that it was neither done for world dominion nor for fame, nor rebirth in the divine realm nor attainment of final liberation, but to save the world and for the realization of perfect awakening (sambodhi) (Khoroe 1989, 14–15). Accordingly, the king’s action was driven by his ultimate intention, the resolve to be a Buddha and to bring most benefits to others.

Figure 9. The king of the Sibis declares the Act of Truth. First Level, Balustrade, Upper Series (I.B.a.) No. 8.

3.5. The Story of Ship Captain Suparaga (Suparaga-jataka)

Suparaga-jataka narrates a story about the bodhisattva as an old and former ship’s navigator who saved the entire ship crew from a violent storm.\(^6\)

The bodhisattva was once a proficient ship captain named Suparaga who had extensive knowledge of the constellations and seafaring. Due to his knowledge and his reputation as a bringer of good luck, a group of merchants requested him to helm their vessel and out of compassion, he agreed. During the voyage, they encountered a terrible storm where their ship was blown through many seas and eventually, they reached close to the deep abyss, the end of the ocean, the mouth-like entrance of death. At that point, out of compassion for all the merchants who are in terror of death, Suparaga declared words of truth: “Ever since I have been aware of myself, ever since I have been able to discriminate, I do not recall ever having intentionally harmed a living thing. On the strength of this truth and own store of merit, let the ship turn back safe, before reaching the mare’s mouth.” The current and wind indeed altered, so the vessel shifted course accordingly (Khoroe 1989, 96–102).

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\(^6\) Story no. 14 in the *Jatakamala* of Aryasura. It is carved on the first level, balustrade, upper series, reliefs no. 53–55. Its Pali’s parallel is *Supparaka-jataka*, no. 463 in *Jatakatthavannana*. 
The culmination of the story is well executed on the relief in Figure 10. The crew members are busy setting the sail. The left corner of the relief shows storm-clouds gathering and the lower part portrays large waves. On the deck of the ship, Suparaga is standing and pouring water from a jug into the sea, declaring his words of truth. The mare’s mouth or “the jaws of the mare” (vadabamukha)—an abyss in the ocean, is represented on the relief by a sea-monster with its jaws wide open on the lower right (Krom 1927, 347).

Figure 10. The Ship Captain Suparaga Performs the Act of Truth. First Level, Balustrade, Upper Series (I.B.a.) No. 54.

The ship captain declared that he has maintained the ethical discipline of not harming others, so by speaking truthfully (satyavakya) and by the power of his merit (punyabala), the course of the vessel was redirected. The following passages after the statement of the truth mention that this was due to the power of his stand on truth combined with the power of his merit. The story concludes with an encouragement that speaking the truth (satyavacana) on the grounds of Dharma is sufficient to dispel calamity, let alone the good results gained from practicing the Dharma (Khoroche 1989, 102).

3.6. The Story of the Chief of the Fish (Matsya-jataka)

This story relates the king of the fish who saved his flock from the dangers of drought and prey by prompting rain through his virtuous actions and truthful words.8

A long drought once caused the lake water to dry up, threatening the lives of the fish. Around the lake, crows and birds were ready to prey on the fish once the water receded. Moved by compassion and upon pondering, the chief of the fish was determined to help by performing his Act of Truth. He then gazed up at the sky and spoke the following words: “As surely as I do not recall ever having intentionally killed a living creature, even in the most desperate situation, so, by the power of this truth, may the lord of gods send rain and fill the lakes with water.” As soon as the chief of fish pronounced these words, by the power of his stand on truth, coupled with the store of his merit and favor of the devas, dragons (nagas), and yaksas, at once the sky was filled with thick clouds accompanied by thunder and rain began to fall (Khoroche 1989, 103–106).

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7 The particular engraving of Suparaga standing while pouring water into the sea may have been inspired by the Pali version, Supparaka-jataka, as in the Jatakamala of Aryasura, Suparaga kneels on his right knee while speaking words of truth.
8 Story no. 15 in the Jatakamala of Aryasura. It is carved on the first level, balustrade, upper series, reliefs no. 56–57. Their parallels being Maccha-jataka, no. 75 in Jatakathavannana and Maccharaja-cariya, no. 30 in Cariyapitaka.
This story is sculpted on two reliefs that at first glance look similar (Figure 11). However, panel no. 56 seems to depict the moment prior to the rain, marked by the receding water with a school of fish struggling for space, and the chief of fish looking up into the sky, while panel no. 57 shows a more favorable condition in the pond after the rain. At the bottom of the two reliefs, there is a pond with lotus and fish, turtles, and other aquatic animals while on the top of the reliefs are the devas floating in the sky. Krom identified the front figure with a halo in relief no. 56 as Sakra, the king of devas who himself granted his favor, while his attendant is holding a vessel (1927, 348–349).

Figure 11. The Chief of the Fish Utters Words of Truth that Brought Rain. First Level, Balustrade, Upper Series (I.B.a.) No. 56-57.

The chief of fish calls upon his speaking truth (ethical discipline via speech) that he never harmed any sentient beings (ethical discipline via body), then prompted the support from powerful beings such as devas, dragons, and yaksas. The following passages in the manuscript stated that it is due to the power of his stand on truth (satya-adhishthanabala) and store of his merit (punya) as well as the favor of the heavenly beings. After his wish was granted, Sakra came to testify that this was due to the great power generated by his extraordinary Act of Truth (Khoroche 1989, 104–105).

3.7. The Story of the Young Quail (Vartakapitaka-jataka)

Vartakapitaka-jataka tells a young quail who put out the forest fire through his Act of Truth of abandoning killing and speaking true.\(^9\)

The bodhisattva was once a young quail living in a jungle in a nest with his parents and his numerous siblings. Unwilling to eat the living creatures, he would only consume simple vegetation, which did not help his wings to develop or his body to grow properly. When a huge forest fire broke out, all the forest animals fled in terror, including the quail’s family, except for the young quail, whose body was too frail to fly away. As the fire quickly penetrated the jungle and reached close to the nest, the young quail declared his words of truth: “My feet hardly deserve the name of feet, and my wings have not grown. Also, my parents, in awe of you, have taken flight. I have nothing suitable to offer

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\(^9\) Story no. 16 in the Jatakamala of Aryasura. It is carved on a single panel on the first level, balustrade, upper series, relief no. 58. The parallel stories in Pali sources are Vattaka-jataka, no. 35 in Jatakathavannana and Vattapotaka-cariya, no. 29 in Cariyapitaka.
you as a guest. So, Fire, it would be best if you turned back from this spot.” As soon as these words were uttered, the fire subsided, even though it was fanned by sharp wind (Khoroche 1989, 107–109).

This story is summarized in one panel (Figure 12). The brave baby quail in his round-shaped nest, faces the raging fires on the lower left and declares his words of truth. The rest of the panel shows how the raging fire prompts the forest animals such as the birds to flee away and the deers and goats to seek refuge (Krom 1927, 350).

![Figure 12. The Young Quail Stops Forest Fires by Speaking Words of Truth. First Level, Balustrade, Upper Series (I.B.a.) No. 58.](image)

The young quail calls for the fact that neither his feet nor his wings were strong enough to be able to fly and that he had nothing to offer. By this truth, he commanded the fire to turn back. Following the occurrences, several passages in the manuscript emphasize the importance of truth, such as: even fire cannot neglect the command of those who hold truth. Accordingly, one must never desert truth and speak the truth (Khoroche 1989, 108–109). This story is so much cherished that a chant was composed in praising the truth declared by the young quail.10

3.8. The Story of Sutasoma (Sutasoma-jataka)

The story of Sutasoma entails the bodhisattva as Prince Sutasoma who succeeded in transforming and guiding a cannibal on the right path.11

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10 The Baby Quail’s Protection (Vattaka Paritta): “There is in this world the quality of virtue; truth, purity, tenderness. I will make an unsurpassed vow of truth in accordance with this truth. Sensing the strength of the Dhamma, calling to mind the victors of the past, in dependence on the strength of truth, I made an unsurpassed vow of truth: ‘Here are wings with no feathers, here are feet that cannot walk. My mother and father have left me. Fire, go back!’ When I made my vow with truth, the great crested flames avoided the sixteen acres around me as if they had come to a body of water. My truth has no equal: Such is my perfection of truth” (Buddha Haksa Temple 2016, 135-136).

11 Story no. 31 in the Jatakamala of Aryasura. It is carved on the first level, balustrade, upper series, reliefs no. 116-119. Their parallels are Maha-Sutasoma-jataka, no. 537 in Jatakathavannana and Sutasoma-cariya, no. 32 in Cariypitaka.
The bodhisattva was a prince named Sutasoma who possessed many good qualities and was fond of learning. When the prince was staying in a beautiful grove, chaos ensued because of the arrival of a cannibal, Kalmasapada—the son of Sudasa, who is bloodthirsty and craved for human flesh. Prince Sutasoma was not frightened and he set his mind on curing Kalmasapada. The cannibal captured the prince and carried him to a place full of corpses. Sutasoma remembered the Brahmin who had come to his park to offer wise verses and had not been rewarded. The prince asked Kalmasapada to allow him to return to his palace, and afterwards he would come back. Kalmasapada did not believe that after being released he would voluntarily turn himself in again, however, he let the prince go. When the prince returned to him, the cannibal was impressed by how much the prince kept his word. Through his integrity, the prince succeeded in convincing him to free the royal princes that he brought to be victims of his sacrifice, to give up harming living beings, stop eating human flesh, and return to the path of virtue (Khoroche 1989, 221–236).

In Figure 13, Prince Sutasoma sits on the right, giving a lesson to the now transformed Kalmasapada. He sits with his hand clasped, followed by several people behind him who are probably the royal princes that he captured earlier (Krom 1927, 387).

In the story of Sutasoma, the main character did not explicitly declare an Act of Truth, but there are many passages discussing and praising those who abide in the truth. In the long conversation between Sutasoma and Kalmasapada, many terms related to truth and the benefits of keeping the truth are highlighted in the story, such as how the prince kept up his true word, and his advice to keep the conduct of truth; that many fine things follow from holding the truth, that truthfulness produces merit and it is better than any kind of asceticism (tapa), the entrance-door of the realm of the celestials, and the bridge that leads one across the swamps of cyclic existence (Khoroche 1989, 231–232). The story suggests association with good people as such interaction brings joy.
3.9. The Story of Sambula *(Sambula-jataka)*

*Sambula-jataka* is about a devoted wife who attended to her disease-stricken husband to the forest and healed him through her virtue and her words of truth.\(^\text{12}\)

Prince Sothisena suffered from leprosy and because of his worsening disease, decided to leave the palace and reside in the forest. Sambula, his beautiful and loyal wife, did not want to leave her husband and insisted on accompanying him. A yakṣa who was captivated by Sambula’s beauty, tried to seduce and force her to go with him, but Sambula’s virtue caused Sakra’s throne to tremble so that the king of devas came to the rescue. This incident created distrust and jealousy on the part of the prince with regard to Sambula’s explanation. Although her husband did not believe her, Sambula declared that by virtue of the truth she speaks, she will heal him. While uttering her Act of Truth, she poured water on her husband’s head, and the terrible disease was cured (Cowell 1905, 48–53).

![Figure 14. Sakra’s Rescue and the Truth Utterance. First Level, Main Wall, Lower Series (I.b.) No. 62.](image)

Although the utterance sounds like a mere statement of truth, the manuscript signifies that Sambula’s efficacy of virtue prompted Sakra’s abode to shake, causing the king of the devas to come to the rescue. Therefore, virtue should have contributed in realizing her Act of Truth.

4. **SACCAKIRIYA AND SATYA-ADHISTHANA**

Act of Truth is the translation of *saccakiriya* (*Pali*). The term *saccakiriya* is often found in *Pali* literature and its parallel in Sanskrit would be *satyakirya*. However, instead of using the latter, the Sanskrit texts employ the term *satya-adhisthana*. The reason for not using *satyakirya* in the Buddhist Sanskrit texts or in the *Jatakatthavannana* in particular, according to Kong, is for the reason that the author, Aryasura perhaps considered not to mix up such acts in the Buddhist context with the performance of sacrificial rites (*kriya*) in Hindu (2005, 149–150) as one of its standard meaning of *kriya* is “rite” or performance of rites (Wayman 1984, 392–393).

The term *adhisthana* has a number of meanings, among them are: abiding, basis, firm (mental) basis, determination, resolve, resolution, and vow.\(^\text{13}\) In certain contexts, it is translated as “blessing” or “empowerment” (Roberts 2022; Cleary 1989; Dharmamitra 2022) by the Buddhas or bodhisattvas. In the

\(^{12}\) In *Jatakatthavannana*, story no. 519. The story is carved on the first level, main wall, lower series, reliefs no. 61-63.

contexts of Jatakas, Peter Khoroche translated satya-adhisthana as “stand on truth” or taking a stand on truth (1989, 16, 101, 104, 258). Satya-adhisthana is often use in conjunction with “satyavacana” (speaking the truth, true words) and “satyavakya” (true-speaking, true in speech). Satya (Sanskrit) or sacca (Pali) is usually translated as truth. The connection between “satya” and “sammat” (Sanskrit) or “sacca” and “samma” (Pali) is linked by Jayarava (2013, Section Saccakiriya as Magic) that truth (satya) means “in harmony” (samyanc) with reality.

In the stories of the king of the Sibis, Suparaga, the young quail, Sambula, and Sutasoma, the performers are all calling upon their true speech. In addition, Suparaga and the chief of fish also declared their commitment of not harming others nor depriving others’ life. In the story of Mandhata, the performer simply stated “let it be so”, and even by mere thinking, his wishes manifested of their own accord. Therefore, the Act of Truth can also be performed via mental actions, by directing one’s thought or intention. Such powerful thoughts possessed by Mandhata are due to the merit he accumulated from previous good deeds.

4.1. Merit

In all the stories above, the role of merit or virtue is stated explicitly or impliedly in the story. Merit (Sanskrit. punya; Pali. punna) is defined as a beneficial and protective force which accumulates as a result of good deeds, acts, or thoughts. Merit brings good and agreeable results, determines the quality of life and contributes to a person’s growth towards awakening. The Sutra of the Absorption that Encapsulates All Merit mentions that merit is obtained by practicing generosity, maintaining ethical discipline, and engaging in learning (Dharmachakra Translation Committee 2021a, 2.12). Practicing generosity abandons attachment and stinginess (Dharmachakra Translation Committee 2021a, 2.28). Maintaining ethical discipline is to not let discipline deteriorate and not to give up the training as well as to abandon the ten non-virtuous deeds: 1) killing, 2) taking what is not given (3) sexual misconduct, 4) lying, 5) slander, 6) harsh words, 7) idle gossip, 8) covetousness, 9) ill-will, and 10) wrong view (Dharmachakra Translation Committee 2021b, 1.17–1.34). Ethical discipline also involves not to praise oneself, to hold grudges and anger, to belittle others as well as not being arrogant or discouraged when encountering gain or loss, fame or disrepute, praise or slander, pleasure or pain, and lead others into the roots of virtue. Meanwhile, engaging in learning with a humble attitude allows one to gain insight and understanding, free from wrong views and engenders the genuine view so one comes to understand the meaning and become invulnerable (Dharmachakra Translation Committee 2021a, 2.56, 2.61).

4.2. Right Speech

The key indicator of the Act of Truth is obviously truth speech, a part of the right speech (Sanskrit. samyak vakya; Pali. samma vaca). Right speech consists of four types, namely: abstaining from lying, divisive speech, abusive speech, and idle chatter. This is aligned with point fourth to seventh about speech in the ten non-virtuous deeds above. Therefore, right speech is not only the absence of telling lies, but also includes the
three other forms of speech such as abandon speech that separates people, harsh speech, and meaningless talk.

Speaking truthfully is much praised in the *sutras*, for example in the *Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita Sutra* that praises the quality of a Buddha or Tathagata (Realized One, One Thus Gone): “The Realized One, Subhuti, speaks truly, the Realized One tells the truth, he tells things as they are, the Realized One does not tell lies” (Harrison 2006, 150). In the *Abhayarajakumara Sutta*, the Buddha addressed a prince about conducting speech in a meaningful and effective way: Tathagata does not utter such speech that is untrue, incorrect, and unbeneficial, while for such speech that is true, correct, and beneficial, but may be unwelcome and disagreeable, the Tathagata knows the time to use such speech (Nanamoli and Bodhi 1995, 498–501).

### 4.3. Right Intention

The role of intention is crucial as this will determine whether it is a virtuous or non-virtuous action. Some *sutras* define right intention by way of thoughts of renunciation, thoughts of non-ill-will, and thoughts of non-harming while wrong intention comprises intention of sensuality, intention of ill-will, and intention of harming (Analayo 2014, 131, 137). In the story of Mandhata, at first his intention was virtuous in helping his subjects so they did not need to undergo hardships to obtain food and clothing, but later on, his intention became directed for his own interest. He was still able to actualize his wishes due the meritorious (*punya*) and virtuous (*kusala*) deeds he had done in the past, while eventually he had to experience the consequences of his non-virtuous intention for gain and fame. Act of Truths that are motivated by an ultimate wish or resolve to become a Buddha in order to liberate others are denoted in the stories of the king of the Sibis, king Padmaka, and the hare.

### 5. CONCLUSION

Three contributing factors appear frequently in the stories studied on the Act of Truth, namely: merit, true speech, and intention. In general, the performers often call upon their adherence to ethical discipline (*sīla*), their merit (*punya*) followed by their stand on truth (*satya-adhisthana*) although the order may vary between stories. The key factors in the Act of Truth is merit or virtue that among others can be obtained by practicing generosity, maintaining ethical discipline, and engaging in learning. Ethical discipline is developed by abandoning non-virtuous actions and cultivating virtuous action through body, speech, and mind. All three gates are involved in the Act of Truth in the *Jatakas and Avadanas* as they highlight the commitment to not harming others (via body), speaking truthfully, skillfully, and meaningfully (via speech), and being vigilant towards intention (via mind).

An Act of Truth is not just a true statement or an exercise of one’s power or authority or simply a performative act. In many *Jatakas and Avadanas*, the Act of Truth is based on one’s stand on truth and motivated by intention to help others. The more ultimate the intention, the more vast and long-lasting the impact will be. This ultimate intention brings more lasting benefits as compared to mere granting of material properties, even sacrificing one’s own life. Therefore, the Act of Truth serves two purposes namely: to help or benefit others especially in times of great need or pressing situations, and to engage one’s ultimate aim for achieving perfect awakening. The former is widely celebrated in the Javanese’s expression “*migunani tumpraping liyan*”—being useful to others. The latter, achieving perfect awakening, is the ultimate goal for those treading the bodhisattva’s path. By representing the stories in narrative form on the reliefs at Candi Borobudur, the acts and the teachings appear to viewers in a more lively and engaging manner.
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