

Adapted by Isara Argent

The Language of Animals

- 1 Once upon a time a king named Senaka ruled in Benares.
- 2 King Senaka was friendly with a certain naga king.
- 3 This naga king left the naga world and searched the earth for food.
- 4 The village boys saw him and said, "This is a snake."
- 5 They hit him with clods and other things.
- 6 The king went to relax in his garden and saw them. He said, "Don't let them beat the naga king. Drive them away!" And this was done.
- 7 So the naga king got his life, and he went back to the naga world.
- 8 He took many jewels, and came at midnight to the king's bedroom.
- 9 He gave them to the king, saying, "I got my life through you."
- 10 So he made friendship with the king and came again and again to see him.
- 11 He appointed one of his naga girls to be near the king and protect him. He gave the king a charm (a spell), saying, "If ever you do not see her, repeat this charm."
- 12 One day the king went to the garden with the naga girl and was enjoying the lotus tank.

- 13 The naga girl saw a water snake. She quit her human shape and went to play with him.
- 14 The king, not seeing the girl, said, "Where has she gone?" and repeated the spell (the charm). Then he saw her in her misbehavior and struck her with a piece of bamboo.
- 15 She went in anger to the naga world. She was asked, "Why have you come?"
- 16 She said, "Your friend struck me on the back because I did not do his bidding," and showed the mark of the blow.
- 17 The naga king, not knowing the truth, called four young nagas.
- 18 He sent them with orders to enter King Senaka's bedchamber and destroy him like chaff by the breath of their nostrils.
19. They entered the chamber at the royal bedtime.
- 20 As they came in, the king was saying to the queen, "Lady, do you know where the naga girl has gone?"
- 21 "King, I do not."
- 22 "Today when we were bathing in the tank, she quit her shape and misbehaved with a water snake. I said, 'Don't do that,' and struck her with a piece of bamboo to give her a lesson.
- 23 Now I fear she may have gone to the naga world and told some lie to my friend, destroying his goodwill to me."

- 24 The young nagas heard this and turned back at once to the naga world to tell their king. He went instantly to the king's chamber, told him all, and was forgiven.
- 25 Then he said, "In this way I make amends," and gave the king a charm giving him knowledge of all sounds. "This, O king, is a priceless spell."
- 26 The king said, "This is good," and accepted it. From that time he understood the voices of all animals, even of ants.

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- Source: *The Jataka; or, Stories of the Buddha's Former Births* (Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 1897), no. 386, vol. 3. pp. 174-177. Translated from the Pali by H. T. Francis and R. A. Neil.

<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/jataka.html#about>