



Twenty Jataka Tales

Retold by Noor Inayat Khan

Illustrated by H. Willebeek Le Mair



Inner Traditions International
Rochester, Vermont

BQ1462
E5
K47
1991

Inner Traditions International
One Park Street
Rochester, Vermont 05767
www.InnerTraditions.com

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Fundatie Sirdar, The Hague.

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA
Khan, Noor Inayat.

Twenty Jātaka tales / retold by Noor Inayat Khan : illustrated by
H. Willebeek Le Mair.
p. cm.

Summary: Recounts how Buddha came once as a monkey among the monkeys and gave his life to save them, and nineteen other Jātaka stories which recount events in his different lives.

ISBN 0-89281-323-7

1. Jātaka stories, English. [1. Jātaka stories.] I. Willebeek le
Mair, H. (Henriëtte), 1889-1966, ill. II. Title.

[BQ1462.E5K47 1991]

294.3'823—dc20

91-8318

CIP

Printed and bound in the United States

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

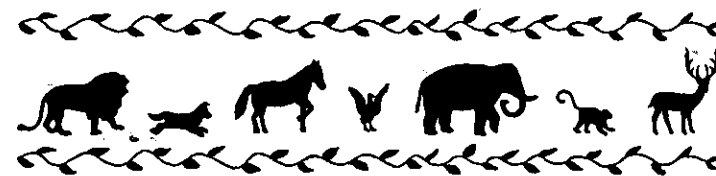
Text design by Randi Jenkins

The author has drawn upon the following standard books in retelling these tales, and she gratefully acknowledges the permission given by their publishers: *The Gātakamâlâ* or *Garland of Birth-stories* by Āyre Sūra, translated from the Sanskrit by J. S. Speyer (Oxford University Press), and *Jātaka* or *Stories of Buddha's Former Births*, translated from the Pali (Cambridge University Press).

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Banyan





"Return to your little one," said Banyan

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hose are those jewel eyes, piercing the shadows of the forest? Those horns bright as silver crescents? Watch, my children, how swiftly those pearl hoofs

pass through the bushes! Have you not heard about the golden deer, my little ones? 'Banyan,' the King of the deer, he is called.

But Banyan was not the only monarch in the forest of Benares. He reigned over five hundred deer and another king, 'Branch,' ruled another five hundred.

It was the habit of the King of Benares to hunt the deer each day. Before reaching the forest there were numberless fields to cross, and the rice, the corn, and the tender plants which the peasants cultivated were trampled by the horses of the King and his noblemen. "Mercy," cried the peasants, but the trumpets blew and their poor voices were lost in the fields.

"How can we change this?" thought the peasants. "Let us chase all the deer into the King's own gardens, then he will no more pass through our fields to hunt."

Thus the peasants, after sowing grass and

digging ponds in the palace woods, called the men of the city, and with sticks and spears they went to the forest to chase the deer. The men first surrounded the forest, that from no side the deer might escape, and then clashing their spears and weapons they drove the deer into the woods of the palace and closed the gates behind them. Then they went to the King and said: "Sire, we could no longer work. Alas! when you and your noblemen went hunting our fields were trampled by the horses; therefore have we driven the deer into the palace woods; we have sown grass and dug ponds that they may eat and drink. Thus you need no longer cross our fields."

From that time the King went no farther than his woods to hunt. Each day he watched the beautiful herd, and he saw that among them were two golden ones. "The golden deer must not be killed," he said to his men; thus Banyan Deer and Branch Deer were never touched by the piercing arrows. But of the others one was killed each day for the feast of the King, after having been wounded over and over

again. And some deer were wounded a thousand times before at last they fell to the arrow of the hunters.

Branch, therefore, went one day to Banyan, and said: "Friend of the woods, take heed of my words. Our subjects are not only being killed but wounded uselessly. Alas! one must be killed each day, such is the wish of the King, but why should so many be wounded before one alone is caught? Would it not be wiser if each day one of our subjects went to the palace to be killed?"

Banyan agreed, and so it was ordered. Each day in turn a deer went to the palace and placed its pure white forehead on the stone before the door. One day one of Banyan's herd, and the next day one of Branch's.

Now one day a young doe of the herd of Branch, mother of a small baby-deer, was told that her turn had come. Upon hearing the news she ran to Branch and said: "Lord, this day my turn has come to go to the palace, but my little one is weak and still needs a mother's care. May I not go later when he is older?"

"Go," said Branch; "another cannot take your turn; go to the palace as it has been ordered you to do."

Her little heart trembling with sorrow, the doe ran to Banyan and said: "O King Banyan, my turn has come to go to the palace, but I have a little one who needs me still. Can I not go a little later when he is older?"

"Return to your little one," said Banyan; "I will see that another takes your turn." And as lightning pierces the clouds, he ran through the trees and the bushes and bent his forehead to the stone before the palace door.

"O golden one! Here on this stone to be killed! Oh, what does it mean?" exclaimed the man who each day killed a deer for the feast of the King. His knife fell to the ground, and, spellbound, he ran to the King to tell him what he had seen. Just as you, my little one, would run to the brother who is dear to you, thus the King ran to Banyan. "O beautiful one," he exclaimed, "what has brought you to this stone of pain? Did you not know I ordered that you must never be killed? Golden deer, tell me what has brought you here?"

"Lord," replied Banyan, "today was the turn of a white doe, mother of a small deer; I came in her place, for her little one is yet too young to be alone."

Tears streamed down the cheeks of the King and fell on the golden head of Banyan, which he held between his hands. And bending over Banyan, he said: "Your life, O divine one, and the life of the doe shall be spared. Arise, and run into the woods again."

"Lord," answered Banyan, "our lives are to be spared, but what of our kindred who run within the woods?"

"Their lives shall also be spared," replied the King.

"Thus the deer in the woods of the palace are saved, but what of all the other deer in your kingdom, Lord?"

"They, too, shall all be spared," answered the King.

"O King," said Banyan, "you will spare the deer, but what of the lives of all other four-footed creatures?"

"O merciful one," said the King, "they shall all be free."

"Lord, they shall all be free, but what of the birds that fly through space?"

"They shall be spared also," said the King.

"Lord," said Banyan, "you will spare the lives of the four-footed creatures and of the birds, but what of the fish that live in the water?"

"They shall be spared also," said the King.

Love had entered into the heart of the King. And he reigned with love over his people, and all the living creatures in his realm were happy ever after.



The Tortoise and the Geese

