

# The Banyan Deer

— A PARABLE OF COURAGE & COMPASSION —



by Rafe Martin

ILLUSTRATED BY RICHARD WEHRMAN

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The Banyan Deer is a recreation of the traditional Buddhist “Nigrodhamiga-jataka,” a story of one of the Buddha’s earlier lifetimes, or “births.” The original tale is No. 12 in the Pali Jataka, a collection of 550 such stories.

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“**M**OTHER,” said the young deer. “Is that King Banyan?”

“Yes, child. That is the king. His likeness was carved atop this stone pillar by order of a human king. And the story of this pillar is the story of how you were born.”

“Me? My birth? Oh, please tell me the story!”

“That is why I brought you here. You are old enough now. We stand in the very spot it all took place.

“It was like this:

“Back when I still carried you within my body, before you were born, that same human king I mentioned loved to hunt.”

“What did he hunt?” asked the young deer.

“He hunted animals, living creatures like us,” answered his mother.





“Like us? But why?”

“He liked the chase. And he liked to eat meat.”

“Meat?”

“Our bodies.”

“Oh,” said the young deer with a shudder.

“Yes, the king loved to hunt...”



...but the shopkeepers, teachers, wheelwrights, potters, tailors, carpenters, and farmers of his kingdom were not happy about it, not at all. For the king made all his subjects join him. He insisted that they help drive the forest animals toward his huntsmen's bows.





Because of this, fields lay idle. Children were not well schooled. The potters' clay was not dug. Tailors didn't cut and sew. Homes stood half built.

And so people decided to take matters into their own hands. To solve their problem they joined together and built a stockade deep in the forest. Then they drove two herds of deer inside. “Now,” they said, “the king won’t need us for his hunts. He can hunt whenever he wants, to his heart’s content, and we can get back to our lives and work.”

“And one of those herds was our herd?” asked the young deer. “And the Banyan Deer was our king?”

“Yes, one of the herds was our herd. But the Banyan Deer was not our king. Not then. He was the leader of the other herd.”

