



Stories about Buddha's origins, called Jataka tales, explore universal truths and virtues. Animals are characters in some stories, expressing Buddhism's respect for all creatures. In some Jataka tales, Buddha appears in the form of an animal, as in this story about a rare deer.

Deep in a forest in India, there lived a lone deer with fur as rich as gold. It shone with patches of ruby red and emerald green. His eyes were as blue as the sky. This amazing deer was called Ruru. Though he had the power to speak, he hid in the woods, far from people.

One day, Ruru heard fearful cries. A man had fallen into the rushing river and was struggling to survive! Ruru hesitated to show himself, but his good heart overcame his concern for his own life. He leaped into the water. The drowning man grabbed Ruru's neck, and the deer pulled him to safety.

Gasping for breath, the man cried, "Thank you, thank you! How can I repay you?"

He was startled when Ruru answered, "I ask only that you tell no one about me. If you do, hunters will surely kill me." The man vowed that he would tell no one.

Then one night, the queen of the great land dreamed of a magical deer. She longed to see this creature and asked the king to find him. So the king sent the news far and wide—a large reward of gold would go to whoever could help find such a magnificent deer.

Now, the man Ruru had rescued wanted to keep his promise, but he was also very poor. After hearing of the reward many times, he couldn't resist. He led the king straight to Ruru's hidden home.

The deer's shining beauty was just as the queen

had described. The king aimed his arrow to wound the deer just enough to capture him.

Ruru quickly called, "King, how did you know where to find me?" Amazed that the deer had spoken, the king pointed to the poor man.

Ruru scolded the culprit, "You harm yourself by breaking your promise and being ungrateful." Ruru then told the king what had happened in the river.

The poor man fell to his knees, sobbing, "Please forgive me, Ruru."

"Such betrayal!" the king roared at the man. "The only reward you'll receive from me is a prison cell."

Ruru spoke again. "Wait. Have mercy on him. Humans can be blinded by wealth. This man was overcome by his greed. But he has learned the greater wealth of integrity."



The king was moved by Ruru's kindness, and he followed the deer's wishes. "Please be a visitor in my home," the king pleaded. "My queen will be delighted to meet you. And my people can learn much from you. I promise you my full protection."

Ruru agreed. He brought wise teachings to the people. And in gratitude for his service, the king proclaimed that all animals in the land would be protected from that time forward.