

Protecting Family with Wisdom and Pervading Virtues to Benefit Sentient Beings

This is an event recorded in *The Six-Paramitas Collection Sutra* 《六度集經》 about how the Buddha, before he attained Buddhahood, practiced charitable giving in The Bodhisattva Way.

Once there was a deer king. He had towering height, fur of five different colors, unique and graceful horns and hooves. He was the leader of a herd of a few thousand deer.

One day, during a human king's hunting excursion, the herd of deer dispersed in panic; some jumped off a cliff, some fell into holes, some hung by tree branches, some were pierced by branches and many died. Looking at the carnage, Deer King wept with grief and said, "As a leader, I should have made an intelligent choice and selected a secure location to feed, but I carelessly picked this rich meadow to dwell and caused the whole herd to be massacred. It's all my fault!"

Deer King decided to go meet Human King. People of the kingdom were amazed by the majestic Deer King and exclaimed, "It must be the benevolence of our king that brings this majestic deer to us! It's our kingdom's auspicious omen!" No one dared to block Deer King, so he arrived at the palace, knelt down in front of Human King and pleaded, "We are but a herd of lowly beasts taking refuge on the land of your respectable kingdom. Suddenly,

we were hunted and driven away like ants and flies. Families were dismantled, some were injured and many died miserably; even the heavens weep! We volunteer to have representatives come to the palace chef every day. May I know how much deer meat is needed for consumption every day? We will never deceive your Majesty.” Human King was alarmed and stated, “All that’s needed for consumption does not exceed one deer per day yet it has caused so much destruction! If what you said is true, I vow to not ever hunt again!” Deer King returned to the meadow, informed the herd of Human King’s promise and discussed the pros and cons. Understanding and convinced, the herd arranged the order of the proceeding. Before leaving for the palace, they would bid farewell to Deer King. With deep sorrow, Deer King taught “Every life inevitably comes to an end, with no exception. On the way to the palace, do remember Buddha’s benevolent teaching; while facing Human King, don’t hold hatred in your heart.” Thus, this was how the herd spent every day.

One day, it was the turn for a female deer who was ready to give birth. She pleaded: “I would not retreat even facing death; however, please send the next one in line in my place, only so that I can give birth to my baby before my death!” As the next deer in line heard it, he laid his head on the ground and cried: “I will certainly attend to my death, but I still have one day and night to live. Although it’s short lived, but if I am given my time, I will not die with resentment. “Deer King didn’t have the heart to make him lose a day of his life. The next day, Deer King evaded everyone and went to see the chef. The chef recognized Deer King and immediately reported to Human King. Upon inquiring, Deer King explained what had happened. The king was so touched he broke down with tears and stated: “This beast has the

compassionate heart that can embrace heaven and earth! He sacrifices himself to save others, yet as a king of humans, I slaughter deer just to nourish my body, I am really not as worthy as the beast!" Consequently, Human King sent Deer King back where he came from, and announced to his subjects: "from now on, anyone who violates the deer herd will be punished as though he has violated another citizen!" From then on, Human King and his officers abided by the rules, the citizens practiced compassion and non-killing; consequently, the kingdom was rich and peaceful. The deer king was Buddha in his previous life, and the human king was Scriptura's previous life.

This is the way of the Bodhisattvas: life after life, sacrificing themselves to protect all beings, always giving, always accumulating indefinite virtue and merit, thus expedited on the way to Buddhahood.

