

The Fourth Paramita — Diligence (Virya)

【The Story of the Nine-Colored Deer】

Countless eons ago, there lived a Deer King covered with a fur of nine colors, rare and unique in the world. One day, he rescued a drowning man from a river. The man was so thankful to the Deer King that he said, “I vow to offer you grass and water, and I shall serve you for the rest of my life.” The Deer King replied, “Return to where you’re from! Never disclose my whereabouts if any one wishes to find me.” The man promised to keep his word or perish.

The king at the time named “Moyin Light” was a simple, sincere and gentle ruler, who instilled his people with humanity and kindness. One day his queen dreamed of a nine-colored deer, and she threatened to die in the king’s presence if she couldn’t possess this rare creature.

So the king sent an imperial order throughout the country to capture the nine-colored deer. When the man who was saved by the Deer King saw the notice, he rushed to the palace and told the king about his encounter. Strangely, by the time he finished his words, his face was filled with scabies, and his mouth with strong, bad breath.

The king led the troops over the river and found the Deer King after a relentless search. The Deer King inquired, “Your highness, how did you find such a small beast like me, especially when you live far away in the palace?” The king pointed at the man and answered, “He, the scabie faced one, told me.”

The Deer King then related their story to the king, and commented, “One would rather bring floating, rotting woods to the bank than rescuing such a capricious person. The sins of robbing and killing are excusable in certain instances. As for those who reciprocate kindness with cruelty, their sins are truly unspeakable.” Hearing the Deer King’s words, the human king was astonished, “What kind of a beast would possess such great compassion, putting himself in great danger to save a human being? Could he actually be a god?”

Hence, the king ordered his people to do their best to protect and supply food to the deer herd; meanwhile, he was more determined to promote benevolence. After the queen heard that the king had released the Deer King, she was so overcome by wanting and resentment she eventually died.

The Deer King was a past life incarnation of Shakyamuni Buddha; the king was Shariputra; the rescued man was Devadatta, and the queen was Devadatta’s wife.

