

The Compassionate Deer King

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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Once upon a time, there was an emperor who loved to eat venison, so he often went hunting with his chancellor. The animals in the jungle all lived in fear everyday, especially the deer population as it experienced the most severe injuries and deaths compared to other animals.

To prevent the animals from being constantly worried, two deer kings pleaded with the emperor, "Since you love venison, we can provide you with a deer everyday. Can you please stop hunting so that we can have some peace in the jungle?"

The emperor agreed. The deers kept their promise too by sending a deer to the emperor's palace everyday. Although the deers were no longer worried of being hunted, they were still anxious of their fate, thinking that, "Even if I am still alive today, will I be sent to the emperor tomorrow?"

The Pregnant Deer Pleads for Her Infant

One day, it was a pregnant deer's turn to be sent to the palace. Being protective of its unborn fawn, the pregnant deer pleaded with the deer king, "Today it is my turn to be sent here and I am willing to sacrifice. However, can I please make the sacrifice after I give birth to my baby?"

The deer king was quite conflicted and replied, "If you are not going to the palace now, who else is willing to replace you?" Therefore, he rejected the pregnant deer's request to delay her sacrifice.

Feeling sad and helpless, the pregnant deer decided to plead with another deer king instead, since he was kinder.

After the kind deer king listened to the pregnant deer's request, he felt very sympathetic towards her. However, he was also troubled as he couldn't think of anyone else willing to replace the pregnant deer for the sacrifice. He hesitated for awhile and replied the pregnant deer, "Don't worry, you can go back first. I can solve this problem for you."

Protecting his deers with his compassionate heart

However, the kind deer king is reluctant to send any other deers to the emperor in advance. At last, he approaches the emperor himself.

"Your Majesty, it's my turn to sacrifice today and I'm here." The emperor looks at the deer king and asks with a puzzled look, "Is there no other deer left in the jungle? Why did you come here yourself?"

The Deer king replied that there are still some.

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“Why are you here today then?”

The deer king replied, “Today, it’s a pregnant deer’s turn to be sent here, but she was pleading with me to delay her sacrifice in order to protect her baby. Who else can I bring to you to replace the pregnant deer? No deer is willing to be sent here in advance! I shall just come here myself then.”

The emperor was very touched after listening to this. He not only released the deer king, but also swore that he would stop hunting for animals just to fulfill his desires.

The pregnant deer cannot bear to see its baby dying, while the deer king also cannot bear to see other deers dying.... This mutual love between the animals had moved the emperor and made him decide not to harm the deers anymore.

All living beings in the world cherish lives. We as human beings appreciate our loved ones and our own lives, so do animals. Therefore, we must not only respect our own lives, but also care for other living beings.

Master Cheng Yen's teachings on May 22, 2003
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Translator: Jia Wen Teo
Editor: Loritta Chan