

The Second Paramita — Moral Conduct (Sila)

【The Tale of the White Elephant】

In a forest long ago there was a white elephant king with six tusks who led a herd of 500 other elephants. The white elephant took the Three Refuges and vowed to assist all sentient beings to attain enlightenment. He had two wives, one of the wives was jealous of the other receiving more attention from the elephant king. She made a curse to destroy the elephant king in the future. Plagued by jealous and upsetting thoughts she soon passed away and was reborn as a smart and beautiful lady who was soon married to the King.

One day the queen told the king that she had dreamt of a white elephant with 6 spotless tusks, and she would rather die than not owning those tusks. She became so frail from this obsession that the king gathered all the hunters in the kingdom to search for the six-tusked elephant to fulfill the queen's desire.

One of the hunters followed the queen's directions and disguised himself as a monk. Seeing the monk, the elephant paid his respect and let down his guard. The hunter then captured the white elephant in a pit, severely wounding him. Before dying the elephant king asked the hunter why he wanted to kill him, and was told about the queen's order.

Although in great pain, understanding their karma, the elephant king told the hunter: "Take the tusks and leave, I vowed to practice the bodhisattva way and I am committed to it." The hunter retrieved the tusks and followed the instructions from the elephant king to clear his footprint traces so other vengeful elephants wouldn't hunt him. He then collapsed and died. The white elephant king is one of the Buddha's previous incarnations.

