

Words to Increase Virtue

Composed by Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö¹
Translated by Geoffrey Barstow

I bow to the Noble Avalokiteśvara.

These days, we of the Snow Land butcher our cattle, sheep and other animals for their warm meat, without even a trace of compassion. The killing has gone so far that some breeds have even become scarce in some areas. Domestic animals are sent to butchers, where they experience untold suffering, not just because of the need for food and clothes, but also for the sake of guns and other unnecessary things. Without anyone noticing, these sufferings are becoming more and more established, a situation that makes me very sad. Such suffering is indeed spreading. These actions, which cause the decline of both the humans and cattle of Tibet, are indeed very frightful. This much goes without saying.

Therefore, some years ago, we quit performing all such activities [at Larung Gar]. The minds of many wise people were affected by [Khenpo Jikmé Püntsock's] request, and we could not help but abandon these activities.² At the same time, however, most people of this region continue to act as they did before. There has, therefore, recently been another appeal, offered to all those who have not thought it through, and, therefore, have not eliminated their misconceptions.

Forcing such cruel sufferings on animals [192]³ is very improper. We are all the same in wanting pleasure and not wanting suffering. Those here in this crowd have all experienced both suffering and happiness.⁴ Everyone, without a single exception, has experienced happiness and suffering. This reasoning is enough for us [at Larung Gar]. As for others, anyone who simply sees [this suffering] with their own eyes will understand clearly.

Our tongues are as delicious [as an animal's], so when you wonder about the appropriateness of subjecting animals to such suffering, you should also think about letting other beings enjoy your body!⁵ The implications are clear. If someone examines this issue in

¹ Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö (*mkhan po tshul khrims blo gros*) is one of the most important lamas currently active in the Kham (*kham*) region of Tibet. He is the dharma heir of the Buddhist luminary Khenpo Jikmé Püntsock (*mkhan po 'jigs med phun tshogs*, 1933-2004), and abbot of the Larung Gar Buddhist Academy (*bla rung sgar slob gling*).

² In the mid 1990s, Khenpo Jikmé Püntsock began asking people to stop slaughtering their animals.

³ Page numbers refer to the edition found in *sha chang tha ma kha sogs kyi nyes dmigs phyogs bsdus bzbugy so*, an anthology of texts opposing meat and alcohol that was compiled by Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö, and published at Larung Gar.

⁴ This text was originally presented orally, to a crowd, and later transcribed.

⁵ For Tibetans, a yak's tongue is considered to be the most delicious part of the animal.

detail, how could they fail to see that brutal actions such as these are unnecessary? [This is true] even if that person does not believe in, or is unclear about, the certainty of karmic repercussions.

There are some difficulties that arise with this. Some personal comfort comes from taking the lives of others, such as a higher lifestyle, an increase in wealth or a famous name. In truth, however, the price of our pleasant livelihood is the blood, tears and lives of other beings. For the sake of minor pleasures for ourselves, we trample the pleasures of others, totally obliterating them. Thinking of our own minor hardships, we do not consider the grievous suffering of others. Such ways of thought [193] are humanity's delusions. Quarrelsome, tyrannical and malicious thoughts should all be expelled. You must, therefore, fill your ears with advice on how to make progress with base thoughts such as these.

Cruel actions are motivated by base thoughts such as these. Therefore, in earning a living, be very afraid of wrong livelihood. Every morsel of food and every item of clothing are, at their root, derived from the tears of many animals. Worldly livelihoods, therefore, are achieved through cruelty and viciousness. Dying for the sake of kindness and gentleness would be a great joy!

These days, given that we live as humans in the world, it is not necessary to kill animals. If you think about it, we all have other means of finding food and clothes, so how could [killing animals] be reasonable? Some take the perspective that if we don't kill them, animals' lives will be full of suffering. Animals, however, will accept a little difficulty for the sake of life and happiness, so who can say what is suitable or reasonable?

Specifically, our domestic animals have been very kind to us. In the spring, they plow the fields for farmers, amassing sins by killing insects. In the autumn, they help with the harvest. They continuously experience fear and anxiety, without a moment's leisure. [194] We all bear burdens because of our need to live. If we didn't need to live, we could loan [our life] to others. [Animals] experience the innumerable sufferings of servitude. They perform domestic labor until they are too old to carry a burden. Throughout our lives, female yaks and hybrids nourish us with their milk, butter and curd. As long as it is not dead, a sheep's products, such as wool and dung, provide nothing but benefit to people. They don't bring even the slightest harm.

People, however, don't help these animals at all. Instead, they do nothing but harm them. When they get old and weak, so that their bodies are like one big sore, people do not wait for death to act on its own, but tie up their mouths and kill them.⁶ People who oppress and destroy animals like this are evil butchers, even though they think they have to do it. All their lives animals slave without wages, and at the end, they can do nothing but be killed.

Therefore, we should all contemplate this. Those of you who are dharma practitioners, examine this carefully with sound arguments, and reject [such actions]. At the

⁶ Refers to a type of slaughtering practice where an animal's muzzle is bound so that it cannot breathe, causing it to suffocate. First, the feet are tied together, and the animal is laid on its side. For yaks, the horns are inserted into the ground to immobilize the head, after which the muzzle is tied tightly closed until the animal suffocates. Meat slaughtered in this manner is generally held to be richer and tastier than other types of meat.

least, when your domestic animals have reached the end of their useful lives, grant them permission for a natural death. This would not be a small kindness.

If we explain according the holy Dharma, [we see that], with absolutely no doubt, all of these beings [195] were your parents in a previous life. These parents of ours lack the roots of virtue required to obtain either release, birth in a pure land or a human birth. For the time being, they also have not been born in the hells. By the power of attachment to our previous land, children and wealth we have taken birth [as humans in Tibet], yet our knowledge of the past is minimal. In the same way, these animals once killed and slaughtered us. This [karma] is the only reason that we now kill and slaughter our own parents.

Even if we only think in terms of our own benefit, killing like this is a great sin whose karmic repercussion is birth in the hells and great suffering that can only be escaped at the end of a long period of time. If we do achieve a human birth, it will be short and plagued by disease. Even after that disease-ridden life ends, we will not be released: our children will have died young, and we will be reborn in a very unpleasant land. Beings in this land kill each other, and we will meet with five hundred blood-debts [that must be paid]. What we do ripens upon ourselves. The karmic fruition falls on our own heads. Is there anyone who has not created [their own situation]?

We have caused animals to suffer greatly, and by the power of this we ourselves will suffer in hell. Because of killing animals, we will have a short life. If you do not uphold the beauty of life, [196] your own lands will become an uncomfortable place to be born. Karmic repercussions never deceive, so even though these animals do not seem strong today, be careful from now on, while you have [a human body capable of] controlling your actions.

This is not only about slaughtering for profit. It is also great if families abandon their personal slaughtering, either permanently or temporarily. If even this is not possible, you must definitely reduce the killing a little. Further, if it is not possible to avoid slaughtering, you absolutely must not use such horrible methods as binding the nose or beheading. For such animals, suffering is unavoidable, and therefore the killer's sin is also particularly large. If there were no malice between us and these animals, why would there be a need for such cruel practices? Think about a person. They would be happy to die several times with less pain than to die a single horrible death like that. Since animals are the same, it is very important to use a method that is quick and does not inflict much suffering at the time of death. Do not become indifferent!

These days, many animals die after having experienced immeasurable suffering. The reason for this is that people have the habit of meat eating. If people didn't eat meat, there would be no need for animals [197] to die while experiencing such horrible suffering. Many Sūtras and Tantras explain that eating meat is a great evil.

Through the power of previous karmic tendencies, [meat eaters] will be born as carnivorous animals and will again kill many animals every day. Since birth in an infernal realm is certain for such people, it is very important for both ordained and lay people to guide their next birth by taking a vow to never eat meat again, if at all possible. Let these

activities be the earnest concern of those lords of compassion who uphold the teachings, and those who are among the Sangha!

As for this talk about Tibet, I have only spoken so that animals, especially those in our land, will have happiness throughout this and future lives. Therefore, I ask both the ordained and lay people residing in the Dharma upholding land of Tibet to please keep it in your hearts.

This was offered on Saga Dawa Düchen, in the water-sheep year of the seventeenth rabjung cycle [June 14, 2003], at Lamarung Five Sciences Dharma College in the town of Serta. May it benefit those destitute beings who are helpless and protectorless!

Translated in 2012 by the foreign vagabond Geoffrey Barstow, with apologies for the many inaccuracies and a hope that, despite its flaws, this translation might somehow benefit beings.

For more information on Larung Gar and Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö, please see:

Gayley, Holly. “The Ethics of Cultural Survival: A Buddhist Vision of Progress in Mkhan Po ‘Jigs Phun’s Heart Advice to Tibetans for the 21st Century.” *Mapping the Modern in Tibet*. Ed. Gray Tuttle. International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, 2011. 435–502.

Germano, David. “Re-membering the Dis-membered Body of Tibet.” *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity*. Ed. Melvyn C. Goldstein & Matthew T. Kapstein. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. 53–94.

Terrone, Antonio. “Tibetan Buddhism Beyond the Monastery: Revelation and Identity in rNying Ma Communities of Present-day Kham.” *Images of Tibet in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. Ed. Monica Esposito. Paris: École Française d’Extrême-Orient, 2008. 746–779.