BUDDHISM AND ANIMAL RIGHTS

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In the wake of alarming degradation of the environment and the destruction of a large number of species of animals it has become imperative for humankind to reevaluate its attitude towards ecology. Well-documented scientific studies have now clearly established that each living creature has its place in the biosphere, playing its own role and being part of a collective balance. The egalitarianism of rights to life is therefore based on scientific realities: these are the unity of the living world, its vast diversity, a key factor in evolution, and the complementary nature of the different components. A civilization in which we must kill and exploit other forms of life in order to live is not a civilization of mentally healthy people. Modern research has shown that animals experience conscious thoughts and feelings and the picture of animal life as unconscious, sleepwalker existence is no more sustainable. It is becoming increasingly non-credible and antediluvian to regard subjective mental experiences as the exclusive province of one species or even as the exclusive province of a few species with large brains. The ability of the animals to respond appropriately to changes or challenges exemplifies the reasonableness or practical rationality of their actions. This *versatility* is manifest not only in extraordinary or insightful behaviour, but also in mundane activities that are known to be strongly inherited. Although we may not find a structured moral code among animals, they seem to express certain deeply valued virtues. Animals have been observed not only to be devoted to their young ones, sympathetic to their kindred and affectionate to their mates but also self-subordinating in their community and courageous beyond praise. In this paper, an attempt is made to show that Buddhism views animals not as the ones who are simply driven about by impulses beyond their control but as those who are capable of both passion and voluntary motion. It is also shown here that Buddhism has many importance lessons to offer to the Animal Rights/ Welfare Movement that is growing stronger by the day.

In social sciences, which are blatantly anthropocentric, it is taken as a matter of fact to pay little or no attention to animal. The reason for this is the commonly held view that animals in themselves have nothing to offer as according to them sociality and culture do not exist outside the human realm. On the whole, animals figure in social sciences not only as objects for human subjects to act upon but also as antitheses of all that according to social sciences makes humans human. Animals are viewed as an integrated part of human-centred ecosystem and through speciesism— the hierarchy established by man for his own purposes and with his own criteria— man discriminates against animals and exploits them (Nouët, 1998: 11). Thus, animals are depicted as mechanical, who far from being considered agents or subjects in their own right, are themselves treated virtually as unworthy of interest by social scientists. We need to address ourselves to the main question as to whether or not various human practices with animals are morally or ecologically rational (seen from the human point of view). Another problem is that social scientists have been jealously guarding what they see as the human domain and so tend to applaud the biologists' fear of anthropomorphism. What is currently denounced as anthropomorphism are those characterizations which social scientists are keen to reserve for humans. In their critique of biological determinism social scientists point an accusing finger at anyone who credits animals with personhood. However, there is no denying the fact that animals are more human-like and less object-like.

Buddhism does not distinguish as sharply as the Judaic-Christian faiths between animals and human beings. Buddhist deities are often depicted in animal form. The overwhelming number of animal Bodhisattas is a proof of this. Animals such as lion, bull, elephant, horse and monkey remain associated with the Buddha directly. The literary evidence seems to suggest that the lion, elephant, horse and, to a lesser extent, the bull, had come to acquire specific Buddhist meanings in early Buddhist thought. The lion symbolized aspects of the Buddha's personality and preaching. The elephant stood for the conception of the Bodhisattva by Māyādevī and symbolized a miraculous-cum-historical event of great significance in the history of Buddhism. The horse was used as a symbol of the Bodhisattva's Great Departure in search of *Nibbāna*; while the bull signified in similes and

metaphors the pre-eminent position of the Buddha among the teachers of his age (Gokhale, 1974: 111-120). The Buddha stood for an ethically based relationship between humans and animals. Buddhism propounded important oral precepts that affirmed that killing other sentient beings was a violation of the most basic moral norms of the universe. The first precept in the Buddhist tradition is "I undertake to abstain from the destruction of life." This is an ethical commitment that the tradition has from its very beginnings identified as part of the core of religious living. We are told in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* that "the bhikkhu, putting away the killing of living beings holds aloof from the destruction of life. The cudgel and the sword he has laid aside, and ashamed of roughness, and full of mercy, he dwells compassionate and kind to all creatures that have life" (D.I.79). Society for a Buddhist, then, is not to be taken in the narrow sense of human society, but in a broader sense of a community comprising all living beings or sentient beings. Early Buddhists generally accepted the view that animals belong to a realm that is lower and unhappier than that of humans, that they lack the faculty of insight (*prajña*) and are morally inferior on account of promiscuity and incest (Schmithausen, 1991: 14f). Though on the whole, Buddhism gives the impression that human beings are a model of what biological life should be, it does recognize two important things. First, Buddhism may not see animals at par with humans in the biological sense, it does accords egalitarianism to them along with humankind. The most important concern in contemporary animal rights/ welfare movements is the fact of animal suffering and the cruelty that is inflicted by humans on animals. Buddhism very much recognizes this fact and vehemently opposes mistreatment of animals. Second, the fact that like humans animals are also subject to suffering and that humans form a continuum with the animals. The other important thing to be taken into consideration is the belief that any living being's current position in the cycle of life (created by repeated births) is determined by the law of kamma. The Buddha's frequent reference to the migration of *saṃskāras* and rebirth across species lines reduces the psychic space between humans and other beings. The idea of continuation of life between human and animal life is implicit in basic Buddhist concepts such as that of kamma and rebirth. The Buddha pointed out that "beings are inferior, exalted beautiful, ugly, well-faring, ill-faring, according to their kamma" (A.I.164; III.18; M.I.23, 183, 483; II.31; III.99). Beings pass from existence to existence being reborn in accordance with the nature of their deeds (M.I.22; II.21). A being's kamma leads it to pass from one existence to another depending whether it is wholesome or unwholesome. After death the body breaks up and an individual is reborn in a satisfactory state of existence (*sugati*) such as a human if its conduct has been comparatively good or a miserable state of existence (*duggati*) such as an animal or even worse if its conduct had been bad (M.III.178f.). Thus, individuals who creep or slink along in this life, be they bloody-handed hunters, or robbers, or whatever, are most likely to be reborn in the form of a sneaky or creeping creature as a "snake, a scorpion, a centipede, a mongoose, a cat, a mouse, an owl" and so on (A.V.289). It is also true the other way round i.e. an animal can be reborn as a human. Animals are also seen by Buddhism as subject to their kamma. A large number of the *Jātakas* revolve around the good and bad deeds done in the past by different kinds of animals. These are then linked up with the present, the good creatures being identified through the process of rebirth with the Buddha and his followers, and the wicked with Devadatta and the like. It is, therefore, possible for a human to be reborn as an animal or vice-versa depending upon the kamma. Animals have used liberally as examples of ideal behaviour on which monks are advised to pattern their lives (Vin.II.161). Thus, Buddhism considers animals and humans as part of the same chain of becoming, the same universal flux in the Buddhist view constitutes phenomenal existence. This is clearly clinched in a statement of the Buddha when he says that it is not easy "to find out any being who has not been mother, father, brother, sister, son, or daughter to us… (due to)… repetition of rebirths" (S.II.189f). However, animals as such are not treated to be capable of growth in the dhamma. For this reason, the *Parivāra* and the *Mahāvagga* of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* both declare the ordination of animals into the monastic order to be an invalid practice (Vin.I.86; V.222). Similarly, it is forbidden to ordain a man who had an animal as a preceptor and to recite the *Pāṭimokkha* in the presence of an animal is reckoned an offence of the class of wrong-doing (Vin.I.88, 135). This indicates to low estimation by Buddhism of the spiritual qualifications of animals and it may be said that although animals on the whole are

generally seen to be more violent, less wise (Mil.32), and their existence less satisfactory than that of humans. However, animals such as sheep, goats, oxen, buffaloes etc. are accepted as having the power of reasoning (Mil.32). But, it can still be said that within the *saṃsāric* scheme there is no permanent or ultimate distinction between beings within these two courses of existence (Horner, 1967: 18). This being the case, it becomes incumbent upon humans to relate to animals on the basis of the same ethical principles that govern their relationship with other people (McDermott, 1989: 270). Thus, humans are advised not to direct harsh speech in human-animal relationship (Vin.IV.5).

In the rules of the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, the precept against taking life is broken down in a significant way. The taking of human life is listed here as a third of the *pārājikas*, the most serious class of offences, leading to expulsion from the Saṃgha for its violation. This is distinguished from the destruction of non-human sentient life, which is classified among the less serious *pācittiya* forbidding monks the use (*paribhoga*) of water containing living beings which might thereby be destroyed makes clear the intent to apply the rule against the destruction of life even to insects and the smallest of one-celled creatures. A number of post-canonical texts go to great lengths to assign those who have destroyed various types of animal life under diverse circumstances to appropriate hells. *The Saddharmasmṛtyupasthāna Sūtra (Sūtra of the Remembrance of the True Law),* a Hīnayāna *Abhidharma* text (in Sanskrit with strong Mahāyāna influence) from the fourth-fifth century AD, which is generally ascribed to Gautama Prajñāruci, is an early example of this pattern (McDermott, 1989: fn23). According to this text, those who kill birds or deer without remorse are destined for a sub-hell known as the Place of Excrement; those who boil alive camels, boars, sheep, rabbits, bears, and the like suffer retribution in the Place of Cooking Pot; those who smash turtles or smother sheep are doomed to the Place of Darkness (See, D. & A. Matsunaga, 1972: 81-85, 107-109). Even to injure an animal is unacceptable behaviour. It is prescribed that if a monk digs a pit and an animal falls in it, there is an offence of wrong doing. In case the animal dies as a result, the offence requires expiation (Vin.III.76).

The Buddhist *Jātaka* stories present an anthropomorphic view of animals, showing their truly *human qualities*, both good and bad, heroic and evil. The *Jātakas* contain many kinds and levels of tales from monkish moralizing and simple animal fables, to moving compassionate animal birth stories and fragments of larger heroic epics. In both the *Pālijātaka* and the *Jātakamālā* of Ariya□ūra, the Bodhisatta is shown not as withdrawing from the world but as acting with compassion and wisdom for the benefit of all living beings. In the *Jātakas*, we discover the essence of the Buddhist attitude brought to life- the attitude of universal compassion which is the spontaneous urge to help others flowing from the knowledge of inner oneness. In the *Jātakas*, we learn that long ago, as a deer king, the Bodhisatta risked his own life to free all creatures from danger; as a monkey he saved an ungrateful hunter; as a lion he saved all the frightened beasts from their own fears; as a parrot he flew selflessly through flames to save all those trapped in a burning forest, as an elephant he offered his life so that starving men might live; as a king he offered his own flesh to save a dove; as a prince he gave his life so that a starving tigress and her cubs might live. The *Jātakas*, in short, dramatically express the actions, in the world, of one liberated from all self-concern. They demonstrate the natural workings of the Bodhisatta mind and heart, and by so doing, turn all of existence into a vast field of spiritual effort in which no life form, no matter how seemingly insignificant, is outside the Path. All beings are revealed as potential Buddhas and Bodhisattas. Microbe, sparrow, dog, monkey, horse, dolphin, man: each at its own level can feel compassion for the sufferings of others and act selflessly to ease the pain of all beings. At some moment in life, it seems, each is offered an opportunity and a choice. Besides revealing the character of the Buddha in his own Path to Buddhahood, the *Jātakas* simultaneously validate and give credence to our own natural feelings of compassion and our own spontaneous acts of selflessness. These tales ideally show us how to live in a suffering world, as well as offer us a viable and deeply spiritual vision of the nature of the universe.

As the *Jātakas* suggest, among the very animals which we now maim, torment, slaughter, and devour are sensitive and aspiring beings, the Bodhisattas and future Buddhas. The *Jātakas*, once taken to heart, transform our own sensibilities and imaginations. After entering the

world of the *Jātakas*, it becomes impossible not to feel more deeply for animals. It also becomes harder to believe that they are below us- that they are here for our own enjoyment and use. The *Jātakas* help us sense that animals have their own lives, their own kamma, tests, purposes, and aspirations. As often brief and painful, as their lives may be, they are also graced with purity and a clarity which we can only humbly respect, and perhaps even occasionally envy. The *Jātakas* validate our deepest feelings and keep alive for us today knowledge of the wisdom inherent in all life forms. To lose respect for all other species, and the fundamental wisdom they too embody is, after all, to weaken the first and most fundamental of the precepts- not to kill but to cherish all life. The most famous is the *Sasa Jātaka* (J.III.34-38) about the hair who lived in the woods with a monkey, a jackal, and an otter. The story concerns their decision to observe the holy days and the moral law by giving alms. Recognizing the full moon they decided to consider the next day as a fast day and feed any beggar. While the monkey, the jackal and the otter collected food to be given to anyone in need of it, the hare was unable to collect any food and offered his own flesh. The hare was rewarded for having supernaturally imposed its form on the face of the moon. The animal hero here is considered as having been a Bodhisatta in a previous life. The story offers a very humane picture of its animal characters. The *Nandimagga Jātaka* (J.III.171-174) is the story of a deer who fearlessly faced a king who was hunting; by his steadfast gaze, he changed the mind of the king and saved the other animals. In the *Dhammapada* we find the story of Dhanapalaka, an elephant who suffered from homesickness after being separated from his mother. The captive elephant refused food. In the *Mahākapi Jātaka*, a monkey saves his tribe by using his body as part of a bridge for them to cross the Gaṅgā. While some *Jātakas* depict superhuman qualities expressing the life of the Bodhisatta, they also reflect a capacity for affection, which is as important as the heroic qualities of courage and sacrifice.

Abhaya-dāna (offer of fearlessness) is an integral part of Buddhist culture. It means providing one a sense of security by taking away one's fear. According to one tradition, the *Abhaya-mudra* is said to have originated from the gesture made by the Buddha when he was confronted by the drunken elephant Nāḷāgiri who was set loose on the highway at the instigation of Devadatta. *Abhaya-dāna* was given concrete expression by several kings and the *Jātakas* refer to the drum of non-killing being sounded and heard by the kings of yore (J.III.428, 434) and landlords laying interdiction upon the slaughter of animals (J.IV.115). We have instances from the inscriptions of Asoka such as the Pillar Edicts # VII, V, and II, which are devoted to the same idea which in modern times is known as the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* (CII.vol.I: 127, 212). Though the 5th Pillar Edict does not altogether prohibit the slaughter of animals and only takes a realistic view of the subject, yet, in effect, there is no question that it is a positive case of *Abhaya-dāna*. So also is it evident from the contents of Asoka's bilingual inscription (Greek-Aramaic) recently found in Afghanistan (EW, New Series, IX.1, 3). King Asoka repeatedly appealed to his subjects to treat animals with kindness and care, and claimed to have made arrangements for their medical treatment (Rock Edict # II; Pillar Edict # VII). In one of his edicts, Asoka prohibited animal sacrifice and festive gatherings (Rock Edict # I), in another exempted certain species of animals from slaughter:

> When I had been consecrated for twenty-six years I forbade the killing of the following species of animals: parrots, *mainās*, red-headed ducks, *cakravāka*-geese, swans, *nandīmukhas*, pigeons, bats, ants, tortoises, boneless fish, *vedaveyakas*, *pupuṭas* of the Gaṅgā, skate, procupines, squirrels, deer, lizards, domesticated animals, rhinoceros, white pigeons, domestic pigeons, and all quadrupeds which are of no utility and are not eaten. She-goats, ewes, and sows which are with young or are giving suck are not to be killed, neither are their young up to the age of six month (Pillar Edict # V).

This imperial order bears a testimony to Asoka's compassion for animals and the establishment of animal homes (Lodrick, 1981: 57f). Like Asoka, the Indian king Harṣavardhana in the 7th century also "forbade the slaughter of any living thing or flesh as food throughout the Five Indies on pain of death without pardon" (Beal, 1884:214). *The Mahāvaṃsa* mentions that some kings of Sri Lanka had forbidden the slaughter of animals, sometimes wholly and at other times in certain circumstances.

Amaṇḍagāmaṇi Abhaya (1st century AD) and Kassapa V (10th century AD) may be cited as examples (XXX, v.6; LXI, v.15). In later times, we have inscriptional records, like those of Nissaṅka Malla of the 12th century, who gave *abhaya-dāna* to animals such as fishes in tanks, birds and forest animals (EZ.II.110, 155).

Buddhist literature is full of interesting incidents and stories relating to animal protection. In one such story (S.I.224), Sakka, while being chased by his enemies (*asuras*), advised his charioteer:

> See that the chariot pole, O Mātali,
> Keeps clear of nests among the silk-cotton trees,
> Let us choose to give up our lives to Asuras,
> Rather than make these birds nestless.

Thus, in order to avoid injuring the birds or damaging their nests, Mātali turned the chariot around. Seeing the chariot suddenly reverse its direction, the *asuras* panicked in the face of what they thought was an impending attack and took to their heels. The story concludes by noting that in this instance Sakka was saved by his righteous concern for the birds, implying that the monks to whom the story is addressed should show a similar concern for the well-being of such creatures.

The Buddha fervently argued the importance of making ethical treatment of *all* sentient beings a theological priority. The Buddha was strongly critical of the practice of animal sacrifices as well as hunting enjoyed by the royalty. He paid special attention to the important task of building up an ethical system in which justice for animals is regarded as the norm rather than the exception. He discouraged war as a method of settling disputes and demonstrated its utter futility. This sensitivity was extended to the minutest of the creatures. The rule for the monks that prohibits the cutting of trees (Vin.III.126). Destroying plants, digging the soil, and so forth may be interpreted as a warning that the minute forms of life may be destroyed by such actions. A certain form of life called *one-facultied* (*ekindriya jīva*) inhabits plants, trees and the soil, and even water may have creatures or *breathers* (*sappanaka udaka*) in it (Vin.IV.49). An ideal king, as mentioned in the *Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta*, should provide protection not only to human beings, but also to the beasts of the forests and the birds of the air (*miga-pakkhisu*) (*Further Dialogues*.III.126).

The Buddha's concern about the value of life emerges from compassion, which is why he was critical of capital punishment, warfare, hunting, animal sacrifices, suicide and callousness of a physical or psychological nature toward living creatures. Agni, the Vedic god of fire, is perhaps the most contemptuously treated of the Vedic deities referred to in the Pāli Buddhist literature of early times, and, unlike other gods like Indra (Sakka) and Brahmā, who has not been admitted into the pantheon in any form. The early Buddhist writers make no mistake as to the identification or association of this deity by the brāhmaṇas with the Vedic fire ritual, which, particularly with regard to animal sacrifice, the Buddhists have always totally condemned. Their scorn for this ritual is perhaps associated with the fact that the Vedic Agni shared characteristics in common with the brāhmaṇical priest, for whom the monastic writers of early Buddhism seem to have nothing but ridicule and contempt. In the Vedic pantheon Agni, being the sacrificial priest of the gods, was the divine representative or symbol of the brāhmaṇical priest. An attitude of condemnation runs throughout all references to Agni in Pāli Buddhist literature. The reason for this was that the ritual was associated in the Buddhist mind with the sacrifice of animal life. The orgies of the sacrifice are described with much emphasis and exaggeration in the *Aggi Sutta*. The Buddha vehemently opposed animal sacrifices which were a prominent feature of the Brāhmaṇical faith before and at the time of the Buddha. The Buddha pointed out that sacrifices like the *Assamedhayañña* (horse sacrifice), *mahā-yañña* (grand sacrifice), *sabba-catukkayañña* (sacrifice of tatrads) bring great calamities. The Buddha outrightly rejected such evil practices (D.I.127ff; A.II.42ff; IV.152; M.II.204; S.I.76; Sn.295ff; Sn.303; Itv.21; J.I.335, III.44f, 518, VI.211). Regarding his abhorrence of animal sacrifices, the Buddha once told a brāhmaṇa called Udāyin:

> In whatever sacrifice, brāhmaṇa, cows are slaughtered, goats and sheep are slaughtered, poultry and pigs are slaughtered and divers living creatures come to destruction,-- such sacrifice, brāhmaṇa, which involves butchery I do not praise. Why is that?
>
> To such a sacrifice, brāhmaṇa, involving butchery neither the worthy ones nor those who have entered on the worthy way draw near(A.II,42f).

The Buddha further goes on to point out that

> The sacrifice of horse and human life,
> Have little fruit. Where goats and sheep and kine
> Of divers sorts are sacrificed, go not
> Those sages great who've travelled the right way.
> But sacrifices free from cruelty
> Which men keep up for profit of the clan,
> Where goats and sheep and kine of divers sorts
> Are never sacrificed-- to such as these
> Go sages great who've travelled the right way.
> Such should the thoughtful celebrate: and great
> The fruit of such; profit they bring, not loss.
> Lavish the offering, devas therewith are pleased (A.II.43).

In the *Sutta-Nipāta* is recorded the story that several old and brāhmaṇas once visited the Buddha to ask him whether their practices were in conformity with those of earlier times. To this the Buddha replied in the negative and pointed out that cattle should not be killed in sacrifices; because like our parents and other relatives, cattle are our great friends and give us food, strength, beauty, and happiness (Sn.58). Thereafter these brāhmaṇas are said to have given up the practice of killing cattle (Sn.58ff). In the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the story of a Mahāsāḷa brāhmaṇa called Uggatasarīra is related. This brāhmaṇa had made preparations for a sacrifice in which numerous animals were to be killed. However, in the advice of the Buddha, he released all the animals (A.IV.41-46). In the same text, at another place, we come across two brāhmaṇas called Ujjaya and Udāyī, asking the Buddha whether he thought well of sacrifice. The Buddha told them that he did not commend sacrifices that involved butchery (A.II.43f). In the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, another story is related of the Kosalan king Prasenajit having abandoned the idea of sacrificing 500 oxen, 500 male calves, 500 female calves and 400 sheep in a great sacrifice on the advice of the Buddha (S.I.74).

Stealing an animal is seen by Buddhism as a serious offence (Vin.III.46ff). A group of cases where monks release certain animals from traps throws important light on the Buddhist attitude towards animals. Where a monk releases an entrapped pig, deer, or fish intending to steal it, there is an offence entailing defeat and warranting expulsion from the order. However, if a monk releases such an animal out of compassion, there is no offence at all. Thus, motive is central to Buddhist ethics. In the list of five trades that all Buddhists are explicitly prohibited from engaging in, two related to animals and they are: trade in flesh; and trade in living beings (A.III.208). The work of sheep-butchers, hog-butchers, fishermen, animal trappers is considered so heinous that they are lumped together with thieves and executioners (Thī.241f). Buddhism advises its followers to treat animals with the same universal, positive virtues (the *brahma vihāras*) that govern human inter-relationship i.e. these virtues including loving kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) are intended to be applied to all living beings (D.I.235ff; Sn.143ff). Buddhism is replete with examples of the co-existence of humans with other animals and environmentally sensitive ways of living.

In some forms of Buddhism, eating of meat is totally prohibited. In Theravāda, meat-eating is allowed only under certain conditions (See, for details, Sarao, 1999: Chapter 4). In any case, even Theravāda Buddhism recognizes, as pointed out in the *Puttamaṃsa Sutta*, that material food (*kabalinkāra āhāra*) should be taken not for pleasure (*davāya*), or indulgence (*madāya*), or personal

charm (*maṇḍanāya*), or for comeliness (*vibhūsanāya*), but for sheer necessity of living (S.II.98-100). While it is admitted that food is the main prerequisite for existence, it is also acknowledged as a principal source of temptation, as an object through which the sense of taste develops into craving. Hence, on numerous occasions temperance with regard to food is advocated, although never to the extent of self-mortification (*attakilamatha*). The ideal monk is described as controlled in deed and word, restrained in food for the stomach (*kāyagutto, vacīgutto, āhāre dare yato*) (S.I.172; Sn.78); with light stomach, moderate in food, easily satisfied, and undisturbed (*ūnūdaro, mitāhāro, appicch'assa alolupo*) (Sn. 707). On the other hand, a person who is immoderate as to food is described as one who thoughtlessly and unwisely takes food for the sake of amusement, pride, decoration, ornamentation, insatiability, immoderation and thoughtlessness as to food (Pu.21).

In Buddhism, killing or injuring living beings is regarded as both unwholesome and fundamentally immoral; for, on the one hand, killing or injuring them is bad kamma entailing evil consequences for the perpetrator after his death, and on the other all living, sentient beings are afraid of death and recoil from pain just like oneself (A.III.204f, 212f; V.264f; M.I.285, 313, 489). Time and again, Buddhism declares spiritual attitudes like benevolence as well as actual abstention from killing or injuring animate beings to be the right attitude or behaviour for monks as well as lay people (Sn.146; 394, 704).

Buddhism does not see humans as a special creation by 'God', or as having been given either 'dominion' or 'stewardship' over animals etc. Though humans have a greater freedom and capacity for understanding than animals, like all the other sentient beings, humans also wander in the limited, conditioned realm of *saṃsāra*, the round of rebirths. The greater capacity and understanding of humans, however, does not imply exploitation, but an attitude of kindness to lesser beings, an ideal of *oblesse oblige* (Hall, 1902: 229-47). This is backed up by the reflection that one's present fortunate position as a human is only a temporary state of affairs, dependent on past good kamma. One cannot isolate oneself from the plight of animals, as one has oneself experienced it (S.II.186), just as animals have had past rebirths as humans. Moreover, in the ancient round of rebirths, every being one comes across, down to an insect, will at some time have been a close friend or relative, and had been very good to one (S.II.189-90). Bearing this in mind, one should return the kindness in the present.

In its treatment of the animals, the Buddhist is guided by such ethical principles as those of right speech and right action (McDermott, 1989: 269ff). The application of the principle of right speech is seen in the case of the ox Nandivisāla who protested against the abusive language used by his brāhmaṇa master (J.I.191). The tenet of right action in the context of animal-human relationships meant 'abstinence from conscious destruction of any sentient being from human to smallest animalcule' (McDermott, 1989: 271).

Buddhist concept of ahiṃsā presumes that another being is, in a fundamental sense, not different from oneself and therefore, it requires a personal commitment to respect life in its myriad forms. Philosophically, non-difference of self and others provides a theoretical basis for performing ahiṃsā. In this way, ahiṃsā provides an important step towards the direct perception of the sacredness of all life. It serves to free one from restricted notions of self and to open one more fully to an awareness of and sensitivity toward the wants and needs of other persons, animals, and the world of the elements, all of which exist in reciprocal dependence. In Buddhism there is no creator god, only a continuation of what has been: time is beginningless, as is life itself. Each life state is interrelated and interchangeable, constantly taking new birth after the death of each particular form. The human condition is the highest, most desirable form of life, but is viewed in context as relating to and dependent upon virtually all other life forms. There is a continuity of substance between one's old body and a future embodiment. Given that all life forms are part of the same continuum, the consequences of one's actions require great consideration. The law of kamma states that as you have done to others, so will be done to you, succinctly expressed by the Buddha in the *Dhammapada*:

> If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, evil follows him even as the wheel follows the foot of the ox which draws the cart (Dh.1).
> If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him like a shadow that never

leaves him (Dh.5).

Kamma in the present will make its presence felt in the future. Through accumulation of merits, one can avoid painful experience in the future. The most obvious painful act is one of violence; by abstaining from violent acts, one can avoid incurring a kammic deposit which will require retribution in the future. All those following "a bloody calling" like a butcher, fowler, hunter, fisherman, bandit, executioner or a jailer, are seen by Buddhism with a distinct disfavour (KS.II.171). "One neither sees nor hears of a butcher slaughtering and selling cattle— rams, pigs… or beasts of the forest and living in the abundance of great wealth" (GS.III.273). A cattle-butcher is punished for "many hundred thousands of years in purgatory" (KS.II.170). Some of the *kammic* results, which a man brings upon himself by committing injury to a life are "suffering in an unpleasant state for a long period, and rebirth in some lower form of being. If born again as man, he may be infirm, ugly, unpopular, cowardly, divested of compassion, subject to disease, dejected and mournful, separated from the company of loved ones, and unable to attain to ripe age" (Siddhatissa: 1970: 89).

Though in many ways only a partial assertion of animal rights, the inscriptions of Asoka nonetheless reveal a highly unusual compassion on the part of a temporal ruler towards his subjects, both human and natural. It should be noted here that animal protection did not necessarily require vegetarianism on the part of the early Buddhists, nor is it observed universally by all Buddhist monks of today. Though Buddhism in China clearly mandated a vegetarian diet, in Southeast Asia and Tibet, a less stringent interpretation was given to non-killing. In many instances, any food given to a monk is to be graciously accepted, as long as the food was not especially prepared. The fact of giving on the part of the layperson serves to increase that person's merit. In a certain sense, the welfare of the recipient monk is secondary, both in terms of his or her sustenance and in terms of the violence indirectly committed. Giving (*dāna*) takes precedence over non-injury (*avihiṃsā*) (Ruegg, 1980). With the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism and the rise of compassion as the primary virtue, vegetarianism increased in popularity, to the extent that all Buddhist food in China is vegetarian.

Buddhism upholds the notion that life must be protected. The treatment of animals is included in the first Buddhist precept: not to injure living things (*pāṇātipātā*). In the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, the Buddha proclaims: "a monk who has received ordination ought not intentionally to destroy the life of any living being down to a worm or an ant" (Vin.I.78). This concern for animal and plant life. In the early days of the Saṃgha, the monks travelled during all three seasons, winter, summer, and the rainy season. The public, however, protested that "they crush the green herbs, they hurt vegetable life, they destroy the life of many small living beings," particularly when travelling during the rainy season (Vin.III.1). Subsequently, the Buddha required that all the monks enter retreats and stop wandering during the monsoons. This public protest clearly indicates that the practice of *ahiṃsā* had by that time exerted broad influence, sufficient for people to advocate the adoption of this ethic by members of a religious order. One indicator of the Buddhist commitment to the ethic of not injuring life forms is found in the abundant references to animals in the teachings of both the Buddha and the later Buddhists. For instance, in the *Jātakamālā*, didactic tales told by the Buddha drawn from his past lives, he portrays himself as a rabbit, a swan, a fish, a quail, an ape, a woodpecker, an elephant, and a deer. Animals are said to have contributed to his desire for nibbāna, seeing animals and humans suffer caused the Buddha to seek enlightenment. In one such story, the future Buddha nursed back to health a goose that had been shot by his cousin Devadatta. In another anecdote, he feels compassion when he sees a tired farmer plowing the earth, a bird eating a worm dredged up by the plow, and the welts inflicted on the back of the ox by the farmer, the weariness of both beast and man helped initiate his quest for total awakening. In the Buddhist tradition, the teaching of rebirth states that humans can be reborn as animals if they commit heinous deeds, and that animals can be reborn as humans if they exert effort to act meritoriously (McDermott, 1989: 269).

In the early texts, great care is taken not to harm animals for fear that other members of the offended species might take retribution (Vin.III.274), or that one might be reborn as that same sort of animal. Animals are depicted as being capable of meritorious behaviour. In one passage from

the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, an instance of amity among a partridge, a monkey, and a elephant is cited as exemplary for Buddhist monks (Vin.III.270). In the *Nigrodhamiga-Jātaka*, a prior incarnation of the Buddha in the form of a deer offers his own life to replace that of a pregnant doe headed for slaughter. The deer's generosity appealed to the reigning king's sense of compassion, who then granted "guarantees for the protection of all deer in the park, and ultimately for all animals, birds, and fish in the realm" (J.IV.37-43). Animals are also deemed receptive to hearing and learning the teachings of the Buddha. In some instances in the Buddhist literature, animals are portrayed as sacrificing their lives for the sake of human beings. In other cases, humans are seen as giving up their own flesh and sometimes their lives so that animals may survive. The *Avadāna-Kapalatā* tells of an elephant who throws himself off a rock in the desert to rescue starving travellers. A lion and an elephant rescue some men from a dragon, sacrificing their lives in the process (Dayal, 1931: 187). In the *Sasa Jātaka* (#316), a rabbit offers his body to a brāhmaṇa for food, jumping into fire piled up by the rabbit himself. The brāhmaṇa was, in fact, the god Indra in disguise, who then placed the figure of the rabbit on the moon. But these stories are only half the picture. Several parables and birth stories tell of humans sacrificing their flesh so that animals may keep living. In the *Jātakamālā,* the *Suvarṇaprabhāṣa*, and the *Avadāna-Kalpalatā*, a story is told in which a Buddhist throws himself before a hungry tigress so that she may feed her cubs (Dayal, 1931: 182). Such stories include multiple facets of Buddhist teachings, including kamma, rebirth, non-injury, and compassion.

The geographical spread of ideas is one of the most intriguing and elusive concepts to pursue, regardless of discipline. Buddhist ideas and practices travelled via ship and overland into China, Southeast Asia and Indonesia; Hinduism likewise continues to assert its presence as far east as Bali. Victor H. Mair has attempted to show how the Indian tradition of picture recitation (telling stories with the assistance of large, transportable illustrations) travelled from its home in India to central Asia, Indonesia, China, the Middle East, and even Europe (Muir, 1988). Citing Brāhmaṇical, Jaina, and Buddhist precedents, he traces its spread during the 7th century into China as part of a number of cultural "transformations" that also include the entry of manichaeanism (Muir, 1988: 51). As noted by D. Seyfort Ruegg (1980), the drive toward active animal compassion and vegetarianism was promoted especially by the Mahāyāna school. In the Mahāyāna version of the *Brahmajāla Sūtra* and the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* meat eating has been prohibited completely. The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* which belongs to 3rd-4th century AD, one of the early texts of the Mahāyāna school (and especially linked to Zen Buddhism), devotes an entire chapter (# VIII) on arguments against flesh eating: "… in this long course of transmigration here, there is not one living being that, having assumed the form of a living being, has not been your mother, or father, or brother, or sister, or son, or daughter, or the one or the other, in various degrees of kinship; and when acquiring another form of life may live as a beast, as a domestic animal, as a bird, or as a womb-born, or as something standing in some relationship to you; [this being so] how can the Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva who desires to approach all living beings as if they were himself and to practise the Buddha-truths, eat the flesh of any living being that is of the same nature as himself? … Thus, Mahāmati, wherever there is the evolution of living beings, let people cherish the thought of kinship with them, and, thinking that all beings are [to be loved as if they were] an only child, let them refrain from eating meat… Mahāmati, meat which is liked by unwise people is full of bad smell and its eating gives one a bad reputation which turns wise people away… The food of the wise, Mahāmati, is… does not consist of meat and blood… (245ff)." The viewpoint that all life is interrelated was used to promote the abstention from meat, and within a Buddhist context serves as a basis for protesting all maltreatment of animals. The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* also includes stories to emphasize the need for vegetarianism. The text states that "even Indra who had obtained sovereignty over the gods had once to assume the form of a hawk owing to his habit-energy of eating meat for food in a previous existence" (Suzuki, 1930: 216). Chapter VIII contains perhaps the strongest advocacy of vegetarianism in the Buddhist tradition, and helped shape strict adherence to this practice in the Chinese monastic tradition.

The *Daśabhūmika Sūtra*, another important Mahāyāna text, states that a Buddhist "must not hate any being and cannot kill a living creature even in thought" (Dayal, 1931: 199).

Kṣemendra writes, "I cannot endure the pain even of an ant" (Dayal, 1931: 199). In the *Bodhisattva-bhūmi* discussion on charity (*dāna)*, the first of the six perfections (*pāramitās*), the Buddhist is not allowed to give anything that "may be used to inflict injury on other living beings," nor is one allowed to give "poisons, weapons, intoxicating liquors, and nets for the capture of animals." A Buddhist must "not bestow upon others a piece of land on which the animals may be hunted or killed" (Dayal, 1931: 175). In the *Fan-wang-ching* (*Brahmajāla Sūtra*), the 20th precept declares that

> If one is a son of the Buddha, one must, with a merciful heart, intentionally practice the work of liberating living beings. [All] living beings of the six *gati* [animals, humans, gods, titans, demons, hungry ghosts] are our parents, and if we kill them, we will kill our parents and also our former bodies… Therefore you must always practice liberation of living beings… and cause others to do so; and if one sees a worldly person kill animals, he must by proper means save and protect them and free them from their misery and danger (deVisser, 1935: 198).

The influence of texts such as the *Brahmajāla Sūtra* and the *Suvarṇaprabhāṣa Sūtra* caused Chinese and Japanese leaders to declare the institution of *hojo-e* or "meeting for liberating living beings." In the sixth century, the monk Chi-i reportedly convinced more than 1000 fishermen to give up their work. He also purchased 300 miles of land as a protected area where animals could be released. In 759 the Chinese Emperor Suh-tsung established 81 ponds where fish could be released; this was followed by similar actions on the part of the Emperor Chen-Tsung (1017 AD). As noted by Michael Freeman, by the time of the Sung Dynasty (960-1279 AD), "Buddhism… played a role in everyone's life," with Buddhist dietary practices, including vegetarianism, gaining ascendancy over those of the Taoists (Freeman, 1977: 164). This tradition can still be found in the modern Chinese restaurant, where vegetarian items are generally entitled "Buddhist Delight." In a wonderful story translated by Donald E. Gjertson, a peasant called Chih-tsung, who lived during the Sung dynasty, fell into a sort of coma for an extended period of time. When he finally revived, he told of being bound up and taken away by one hundred men who took him to a Buddhist shrine. In a decidedly shamanistic fashion, he was seized by a monk who stated:

> "You are fond of hunting and fishing and ought now to receive retribution."
>
> He then took Chih-tsung, peeled off his skin, and pared away his flesh the way one would go about dressing down an animal. Next he was placed deep down under water, and then pulled out by hook in his mouth, to be split in two and chopped up into a fine hash, boiled in a caldron, and roasted over a brazier. Reduced to a pulp, he was made whole again and the process repeated with great pain and suffering. After a third time the monk stopped and asked whether or not he would like to live. Chih-tsung then bowed his head to the ground and pleaded for his life…
>
> Seeing several ants, the priest pointed to them and said, "Even though these are very insignificant beings, still they must not be killed. How much the less those that are larger!"
>
> …Chih-tsung then returned to life and after several days was able to get up. Thereafter he ceased his hunting and fishing."

In a similar tale said to have occurred in 758 during the T'ang dynasty, a Keeper of Records called Hsueh Wei lost consciousness for twenty days. When he miraculously revived, his first words urged his family to see if his fellow officials were eating minced fish. Although puzzled by this strange request, a servant was sent and confirmed that Officials of the Judiciary Department were eating a large carp. Amazed at their friend's recovery and intrigued by his telepathy, they went to his bedside where he told them all the details regarding the procurement of the magnificent specimen they had been consuming. When they asked, "But how did you know all this?" He replied, "The carp you killed was I!" He then went on to relate that when he lost consciousness he found himself at the banks of the river. Due to the uncomfortable heat, he pulled off his clothes and jumped in, instantly transforming into a magnificent carp. A fish-headed man then told him that he longed for "complete freedom and leisure," but that he must be wary of fisherman's hook. Eventually, due to hunger, Hsueh Wei

succumbed to temptation and was caught. His protests went unheeded first to his captor, then to the various persons who marvelled at the size of the carp, and then finally to the cook:

> "I said to all of you, 'I am your colleague, and may be killed today. Ignoring my pleas, you do not let me go, but rush me off to my execution. Where is your humanity?'
>
> "I shouted and wept, but you didn't even turn a hair. You just handed me over to the mincemeat maker. Cook Wang, who was just sharpening a knife, was happy to see me and tossed me on to the table.
> "Again I cried out, 'Cook Wang! You've been my mincemeat maker for a long time. How can you kill me? Why don't you attend to my words and relate them to the other officials?'
> "But Cook Wang did not seem to hear. He held my neck firmly on the chopping board, and lopped off my head. As my head fell, I came back to my senses. And then I called you all here."
> Every one of the officials was amazed. They were awakened to a new sense of pity for all living things. For every one of them… had seen the fish's mouth move, but had not heard a thing.
> From then on Wei's three friends gave up minced fish, and never ate it again as long as they lived" (Kao, 1985: 266-69).

In a variation on this theme, another tale tells of a man called Yu I-lang who "took ill in the year 1192 and was dragged into the wild by two ghost guards." He then confronted the ten kings of the various hells, who questioned Yu about his past activities and "decided to add two years to his life in recognition of the many times he had saved the lives of animals." Yu's life was then restored, to "live out his extended lifespan" (Teiser, 1993: 13).

Stern warnings are given in the *Yu-Li* (*Precious Records*) regarding the fate of those who take the lives of animals.

> Those who kill the ox (which ploughs the field) or the dog (who watches the house), or animals life in general, their souls shall be placed before the mirror of reflection. After suffering the torments of the… hells… a red-haired, black-faced demon shall cut such from the head to the buttocks. The suffering is intense. After healing, they shall be cast for ten years into a great hell, then into the scalding water hell for fifteen years. They shall appear before the judge, who shall condemn them to receive 1,500 calamities in the boundless hell. At the expiration of this ordeal they shall be sent to the wheel of life and be born again as beasts (Clarke, 1898: 259).

If, by chance, such a person has not eaten beef or dog flesh, he/ she would be spared the hell experience; if they have, through their "exhortation caused one hundred persons to refrain from eating beef or dog's flesh, and have given away thirty good boos, they shall be born again in the happy land" (Clarke, 1898: 310).Vegetarianism and noninjury to animals weighs heavily in the nature of one's path after death. Numerous stories are told about persons who have abstained from consuming animal-flesh with wonderous results, as opposed to meat eaters, who suffer certain misfortune. In one, a mother laments that because she is certain the cries of pig being slaughtered are in fact the cries of her own daughter who was reborn as a swine due to her gluttonous consumption of fowl (700 per year) before her untimely death at the age of seventeen (Clarke, 1898: 324). In another, a man called Shiao dreamed that a god told him that if he became vegetarian he would live until the age of 80; the man did so, became a scholar, and died without illness at the age of 95 (Clarke, 1898: 335). Although these stories clearly emerge from a folk milieu and come to form their own genre of fantastic tales, the underlying world view is unmistakably consistent: persons and even animals are held accountable for their actions, even if the punishment or reward does not occur until after death.

Like China, in Japanese history also one comes across many examples of compassion shown to animals. Japanese Emperor Temmu Tenno not only restricted the use of certain hunting devices and the eating of cow, horse, dog, and monkey meat in 675 AD but also ordered that various

provinces “let those living things” the following year. In 741, the Emperor Shomu Tenno ordered prohibition against hunting and fishing on the fast days of the month, and his daughter, the Empress Koken, issued several similar decrees (see, for details, deViser, 1935: 198-212). Fantastic stories similar to those told in China were circulated in Japan to emphasize the importance and efficacy of practising nonviolence to all life forms. In one such tale, a monk advises some people to buy four large sea turtles and then set them free. Later, the same monk is thrown over board from a ship by thieving sailors and is presumed drowned. However, the four turtles that he had helped rescue came to his aid and deliver him to the beach, after nodding to him three times (Nakamura, 1973: 117). In a rather gruesome tale, a man is punished for abusing horses:

> In Kawachi province, there was once a man named Isowake who used to sell melons. He would saddle a horse with an overwhelming burden and, if it failed to move, would whip it angrily and drive it forward. The horse staggered along with its eyes full of tears. When Isowake had sold all of the melons, he would then kill the horse. After he had killed a number of horses in this way, Isowake happened to look into a kettle of boiling water, whereupon his two eyes fell into the kettle and ere boiled.

The story ends with a statement regarding the kammic causality and the need to respect all animals:

> Swift is the penalty of evil deeds. How can we not believe in the lar of karmic causality? Beasts in the present life might have been our parents in a past life. We pass through the six modes of existence (gods, humans, demons, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings) and four manners of birth (from womb, egg, moisture, or heaven or hell). Reflection shows us that we cannot be without mercy (Nakamura, 1973: 132f).

In another story narrated by the monk Kyokai (who incidentally acknowledged that his genre of storytelling imitated similar Chinese texts), a wealthy householder, stricken with illness due to his sacrificial killing of one oxen per year for seven years, then dedicated himself to the practice of buying animals and setting them free. At the end of seven virtuous years he died, but then revived nine days later. He told his family that he had been judged in a subterranean court by seven oxen who prepared to chop him up and devour him. But then ten million men, who had been the creatures he had released, came to his rescue and restored him to earthly life (Nakamura, 1973: 164ff). In each of these tales, the graphic portrayal of violence against animals, and the equally grim retribution, serves a clearly didactic function, evincing a visceral reaction on the part of the one who hears or reads each episode. The release of living beings continues to be practised in the East Asian world, primarily as a ceremonial event (Welch, 1967: 378-382). It has also been practised by Buddhists in North America (Kapleau, 1981; 1983: 1-9).

It may not be out of place to conclude in the words of His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama:

> In our approach to life, be it pragmatic or otherwise, a basic fact that confronts us squarely and unmistakably is the desire for peace, security, and happiness. Different forms of life at different levels of existence make up the teeming denizens of this earth of ours. And, no matter whether they belong to the higher groups such as human beings or to the lower groups such as animals, all beings primarily seek peace, comfort, and security. Life is dear to a mute creature as it is to man. Even the lowliest insect strives for protection against dangers that threaten its life. Just as each one of us wants happiness and fear pain, just as each other one of us wants to live and not to die, so do all other creatures (Tenzin Gyatso, 1980: 78).

Such an approach to animals would certainly support efforts to preserve and maintain species that have come under assault, not out of sentimentality, but out of respect for their own needs and desires. The interconnectedness and interrelatedness of life would here serve as the essential rationale for protection of life. The preservation of individual identity is secondary.

The style of living, including vegetarianism in the modern world, which should not only be traditional, but must be really compassionate and must understand the way animals are bred just to serve human markets. This includes insecticides or vegetables that are really harmful to humankind as well as harmful to the whole ecological environment (Anonymous 1985: 16).

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