



**Patrul Rinpoche's
The Words of My Perfect Teacher
ON FOOD & TAKING LIFE**



Craving meat and consuming flesh and blood

... Fire, water, poisons, precipices, savages, wild beasts - all manner of mortal dangers abound, but only very few things can prolong life. Even food, clothing and other things usually considered life sustaining can at times turn into causes of death. Many fatalities occur as a result of eating – the food might be contaminated; or it may be something eaten for its beneficial properties but becoming toxic under certain circumstances; or might be the wrong food for a particular individual.

Especially, nowadays most people crave meat and consume flesh and blood with a second thought, completely oblivious to all the diseases caused by old meat or harmful meat spirits. Unhealthy diets and lifestyles can also give rise to tumours, disorders of phlegm, dropsy and other diseases, causing innumerable deaths.

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Hell and animal sacrifice

... One day the siddha Tangtong Gyalpoo was practising the yoga exercises of the channels and energies on a big rock. The rock split in two. Inside there was a huge frog. Innumerable small creatures had attached themselves to it and were eating it alive, making it open and close its black mouth in unbearable pain. When his companions asked why this had come about, Tantong Gyalpo explained that the being who had been reborn in that form had been a priest who sacrificed animals.

Hell and lamas eating meat

Look at the lamas of today! Each time a patron kills a nice fat sheep and cooks up the gullet, kidneys and other organs along with the meat and blood, serving it piled up with the still

quivering ribs of a yak, our lamas pull the shawl of their robes over their heads and suck away at the entrails like babies at their mother's breast. Then they cut themselves slices of the outer meat with their knives and munch them in a leisurely fashion. Once they have finished, their heads emerge again, hot and steaming. Their mouths gleam with grease and their whiskers have acquired a reddish tinge. But they will have a big problem in their next life, in one of the ephemeral hells, when they have to pay back with their own bodies all that they have eaten so many times in this life.

Hell and killing animals

At the time of the Buddha, there was a village butcher who made a vow never to kill animals at night. He was reborn in an ephemeral hell. At night his pleasure knew no bounds. He lived in a beautiful mansion, with four lovely women plying him with food and drink and other pleasures. During the day, however, the walls of the house would transform into blazing hot metal and the four women into terrifying brown dogs who fed on his body.

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Taking life

Taking life means doing anything intentionally to end the life of another being, whether human, animal or any other living creature.

A warrior killing an enemy in battle is an example of killing out of hatred. Killing a wild animal to eat its flesh or wear its skin is killing out of desire. Killing without knowing the consequences of right or wrong - or, like certain tirthikas, in the belief that it is virtuous thing to do - is killing out of ignorance.

There are three instances of killing that are called acts with immediate retributions, because they bring about immediate rebirth in the hell of Ultimate Torment without passing through the intermediate state: killing one's father, killing one's mother and killing an Arhat.

Some of us, thinking only of the specific act of killing with our own hands, might imagine that we are innocent of ever having taken life. But to start with, there is no one, high or low, powerful or feeble, who is not guilty of having crushed countless tiny insects underfoot while walking around.

More specifically, lamas and monks visiting their benefactors' houses are served the flesh and blood of animals that have been slaughtered and cooked for them, and such is their predilection for the taste of meat that without the least remorse or compassion for the slaughtered beasts they wolf it all down with great gusto. In such cases, the negative karmic effect of the slaughter falls on both benefactor and guest without distinction.

When important people and government officials travel about, wherever they go, innumerable innumerable animals are killed for their tea parties and receptions. The rich as a rule kill countless animals. Of all their livestock, apart from the odd beast here and there, they allow none to die a natural death but have them slaughtered one by one as they age. What is more, in summer these very cattle and sheep, as they graze, kill innumerable insects, flies, ants and even little fish and frogs, swallowed down with the grass, crushed under their hooves or swamped in their dung. The negative karmic result of all these acts comes to the owner as well as the beast. Compared to horses, cattle and other livestock, sheep are a particularly prolific source of harm. As they graze they eat all sorts of little animals-frogs, snakes, baby birds, and so on. In summer at shearing time, hundreds of thousands of insects carried by each sheep in its fleece all die. In winter at lambing time, no more than half the lambs are kept; the rest are killed at birth. The mother ewes are used for their milk and to produce lambs until they become too old and exhausted, at which point they

are then slaughtered for their meat and skins. And not a single ram, whether castrated or not, reaches maturity without being slaughtered straight away. Should the sheep have lice, millions of them are killed at a time on each sheep. Anyone who owns a flock of a hundred or more sheep can be sure of at least one rebirth in hell.

For every marriage, innumerable sheep are slaughtered when the dowry is sent, when the bride is set off, and when she is seen off, and when she is received by her in-laws. Afterwards, every time the young bride goes back to visit her own family, another animal is sure to be killed. Should her friends and relatives invite her out and serve her anything but meat, she affects a shocked loss of appetite and eats with a pretentious disdain as if she had forgotten how to chew. But kill a fat sheep and set down a big pile of breast meat and tripe before her, and the red faced little monster sits down seriously, pulls out her little knife, and gobbles it all down with much smacking of lips. The next day she sets off loaded down with the bloody carcass, like a hunter returning home-but worse, for every time she goes out she is sure not to come back empty-handed.

Children, too, cause the death of countless animals while they are playing, whether they are aware of it or not. In summer, for instance, they kill many insects just by beating the ground with a willow-wand or leather whip as they walk along.

So all of us humans, in fact, spend our entire time taking life, like ogres. Indeed-considering how we slaughter our cattle to enjoy their flesh and blood when they have spent their whole lives serving for us and feeding us with their milk as if they were our mothers-we are worse than any ogre.

The act of taking life is complete when it includes all four elements of a negative action. Take the example of a hunter killing a wild animal. First of all, he sees an actual stag, or musk-deer, or whatever it might be, and identifies the animal beyond any doubt: his knowing that it is a living creature is the basis for the act. Next, the wish to kill it arises: the idea of killing it is the intention to carry out the act. Then he shoots the animal in a vital point with a gun, bow and arrow or any other weapon: the physical action of killing is the execution of the act. Thereupon the animal's vital functions cease and the conjunction of its body and mind is sundered: that is the final completion of the act of taking a life.

Another example: the slaughter of a sheep raised for meat by its owner. First, the master of the house tells his servant or a butcher to slaughter a sheep. The basis is that he knows that there is a sentient creature involved-a sheep. The intention, the idea of killing it, is present as soon as he decides to have this or that sheep slaughtered. The execution of the actual act of killing takes place when the slaughterer seizes his noose and suddenly catches the sheep that he is going to kill, throws it on its back, lashes its legs together with leather thongs and binds a rope around its muzzle until it suffocates. In the violent agony of death, the animal ceases to breathe and its staring eyes turn bluish and cloud over, streaming tears. Its body is dragged off to the house and the final phase, the ending of its life, reaches completion. In no time at all the animal is being skinned with a knife, its flesh still quivering because the "all-pervading energy" has not yet had time to leave the body; it is as if the animal were still alive. Immediately it is roasted over a fire or cooked on the stove, and then eaten. When you think about it, such animals are practically eaten alive, and we humans are no different from beasts of prey.

Suppose that you intended to kill an animal today, or that you said you would, but did not actually do so. There would already be the basis, the knowledge that there is a sentient being, and the intention, the idea of killing it. Two of the elements of the negative action would therefore have been fulfilled, and although the harm would be hell heavy than if you had in fact completed the act of killing, the stain of a negative act, like a reflection appearing in a mirror, would nevertheless remain.

Some people imagine that only the person who physically carried out the killing is creating a negative karmic effect, and that the person who just gave the orders is not - or, if he is, then only a little. But you should know that the same karmic result comes to everyone involved, even anyone who just felt pleased about it - so there can be no question about the person who actually ordered that the killing be carried out. Each person gets the whole karmic result of killing one animal. It is not as if one act of killing could be divided up among many people.

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