

Let Us Stop Killing and Begin to Liberate the Living!

-by Bhikshuni Heng Chü

The twentieth Minor Precept prohibits failure to liberate beings. A disciple of the Buddha must maintain a mind of kindness and cultivate the practice of liberating beings. He should reflect thus: "All male beings have been my father and all female beings have been my mother. There is not a single being who has not given birth to me during my previous lives, hence all beings of the six destinies are my parents. Therefore, when a person kills and eat any of these beings, he kills a body that was once my own, for all elemental earth and water have previously served as part of my body and all elemental fire and air have served as my basic substance. Therefore, I shall always cultivate the practice of liberating beings and in every life be reborn in the eternally-abiding Dharma and teach others to liberate beings as well.

Whenever a Bodhisattva sees a person preparing to kill an animal he should devise a skillful method to rescue and protect it, freeing it from its suffering and difficulties. Furthermore, he should use the Bodhisattva Precepts and explain them in order to teach and transform beings and to rescue and deliver those beings. On the day that one's father, mother, sister, or brother dies, one should request a Dharma Master to lecture the Bodhisattva Precepts, Sutras, and moral codes to generate blessings for the deceased and lead him to see the Buddhas and secure rebirth among humans and gods. Hence, if a Bodhisattva fails to act accordingly, he thereby violates this Minor Precept and commits a defiling offense.

The twentieth Minor Bodhisattva Precept which prohibits failure to liberate living beings in one that I constantly turn my attention to. I find that in my own mind, when I hear about the cruel things that are done to other living creatures, I rationalize to myself and say, "I would never do something like that. It's just those crazy people out there in the world who do cruel things like that." But recently, when I heard this subject discussed, I deeply realized that I am a part of it. All of us, myself included, have contributed to this sad state of affairs. Because we keep walking farther and farther down the wrong road, the situation keeps getting worse and worse as time goes on. We have been drilled to think that it's okay to kill animals. We rationalize that they don't have the same kinds of feelings that humans do. We've become so covered over by this kind of delusion that we don't even think of what is being done as killing and torture. We have gotten to the point that we no longer even consider that there may be something inhumane in what goes on around us all the time. We've been raised to think that all creatures are here for human beings to use as they please. It is now possible to purchase a variety of different films to teach students how to raise the best kinds of beef cattle, how to raise plump "marketable" chickens, and how to do poultry autopsies. The film graphically shows methods of slaughter and degutting, chopping and cutting, and

so forth. It tells what kinds of nutrients can be, given pigs so that by calculating feed efficiency and average daily gain one can discover how fast one's pigs are converting their feed into marketable pork.

This is just a small example of the extent to which we have gone in accepting as matters of fact all the kinds of inhumane behavior we teach our children to engage in. I remember as a child watching my elders pluck and gut the wild birds they shot. They would show me the different internal organs after they had pulled them out of the bird's bodies. The sight revolted me but when one is young, one tends to believe that one's elders can do no wrong. So we never questioned the meat that appeared daily on our tables.

The twentieth Minor Precept says that there is not a single being who has not given birth to me during my previous lives. Every time I hear those words, it sends a jolt through my body and deep within me I remember, "Oh, that's right. That's how it really is!" Since that is how it really is, why is it that we no longer can recognize this truth? How is it possible that we can kill other living beings and think nothing of it? What has caused us to go so far astray?

I think if we use the Ten Treasuries Chapter of the FLOWER APORNMEWT SUTRA, we may be able to understand a bit more clearly what has happened. In the Treasury of Shame, the Bodhisattvas contemplate:

"From beginningless time onward, we and all living beings have mutually been one another's father, mother, older brother, younger brother, older sister, younger sister, son, and daughter. But because we are filled with greed, hatred, and stupidity, arrogance and deceptiveness, and all sorts of other afflictions, we have mutually hurt one another and reciprocally exploited one another. We have lusted, raped, injured, and killed. There is no evil we have not committed.

"For this reason, among everyone there is no mutual respect, no mutual veneration, no mutual compliance, no mutual humility, no mutual guidance, and no mutual regard. Rather, there is a furthering of mutual killing and harming, so that everyone becomes revengeful enemies.

We no longer have a sense of shame about what we do. We have grown calloused and are covered over by a thick fog of deviant views and don't see where we are headed. We have taken up the false notion that we are superior and therefore privileged to exploit other beings in order to benefit ourselves. Just that one thought of superiority solidifies the distinction between self and others. We believe we have the right to do and act as we please toward other creatures.

The twentieth Minor Bodhisattva Precept says that when we see someone about to kill an animal we should think of a way to prevent that person from doing so. So then the question arises, "What can I do? I can't possibly go out and buy all the animals that are destined to be slaughtered and liberate them."

No, that is not possible, but there are lots of other ways in which we can help.

1. We can work to deeply understand the source of the problem and then change our own faults and deviant views. In order to effectively do this, we must remove our own greed, hatred, and stupidity, and wake up to an understanding of true principle.

2. We can find constructive ways to help all human beings wake up. We can do this by publishing books such as *CHERISHING LIFE* (see picture story this issue) and *LIFE-SOURCE OF HUMAN BEINGS* (forthcoming from BTTS). We can also explore many different approaches and use a variety of methods to gradually change the views that people have held for so long.

3. We can cultivate with true hearts and real determination. Because we have created so much heavy killing karma, we also need to liberate the living beings right within us. The only way to do this is to cultivate all good deeds and stop doing all bad deeds. The living beings within us can only be saved if we can change our deeply embedded deviant knowledge and views. We need to become totally new people.

4. We can help people realize what a pure and auspicious place the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas is. In our practice here at the City, every part of our daily life is a method for liberating living beings on a large scale. Every mantra we recite, every ceremony we do, every Buddha's or Bodhisattva's name we are mindful of, every bow we make, every Sutra we translate, every child we teach is part of the process of liberating the living. We must expand our vision and remember what it is we are doing. We should widen our scope to go beyond just a vision of our own selves and our own families to an encompassing view of and regard for all other living beings in the world. Remembering that in this Precept it says very clearly that all males have been our father and all females have been our mother, we can increase our compassion until we come to have the same regard and desire to save and rescue all other living beings as we have to care for our own families. If we can be this way, then there may be a chance that we can turn the tide of killing karma which threatens to engulf the entire world.