

Not Killing And Liberating The Living

by Great Master Lyan Chr

How Shakyamuni Buddha Cut off His Own Flesh to Feed an Eagle

In the past, when Shakyamuni Buddha was practicing the causes of a Bodhisattva, he met up with a bald eagle. The incident took place as follows:

One day, a pigeon was being chased by the eagle, and the pigeon ran to Shakyamuni Buddha seeking protection. The pigeon was a gentle and good little bird. It was terrified of the eagle. When the little pigeon saw the Bodhisattva, who was later to become Shakyamuni Buddha, it scurried to him, flustered and distraught, and burrowed its way to his chest in order to escape danger.

The eagle pursued the bird right to where the Bodhisattva was, but of course was not able to capture it. He circled around, screeching at the Bodhisattva, "Now you are rescuing the little pigeon, but by doing so you allow me to starve!"

The Bodhisattva said, "Well, what do you like to eat?"

The eagle said, "I like to eat meat!"

Hearing that, the Bodhisattva, without saying a word, cut some flesh from his own arm to substitute for the pigeon meat that the eagle was having to forego. However, for some extraordinary reason, the flesh that Shakyamuni Buddha cut off his body kept diminishing, so that no matter how much he cut off, it never equalled the amount of flesh on the pigeon. And so the eagle remained unsatisfied. He wanted the same portion of meat as was on the pigeon's body.

Then the eagle asked the Bodhisattva, "You have cut all the flesh from your body. Now do you hate me?"

The Bodhisattva answered, "I don't have a single thought of resentment or regret." The Bodhisattva wanted to cause the eagle to give rise to faith. He said, "If I am speaking the truth and not speaking falsely, then all the flesh that I cut off my body will come back, and I will be exactly the same as I was before."

As soon as he finished making that vow, all the flesh he had cut off reappeared on his body, and he was just the same as before. The eagle was truly moved, and he felt deep respect for the Bodhisattva. Right then, the eagle resumed his original form. The eagle had been a transformation of the god Shakra, and having changed back, he ascended into the sky and respectfully bowed to and praised the Bodhisattva.



And so, originally the eagle was not an eagle at all, but a god who had come to test the Bodhisattva to see how vast was the measure of his mind.

Dz Cha and the Fish

During the Spring and Autumn Periods in China, there was a high official in the State of Jyang (鄭國) by the name of Gung Sywan Jau (公孫僑). Dz Chan (子產) was his nickname. He was magnanimous and kind. Confucius said in praise of him:

He was endowed with the virtues of humaneness
and kind regard,
As bequeathed by the ancients.
He respected his elders,
And was sympathetic toward the common
people.

During that time, there were territorial wars going on between states. But the state of Jyang was able to maintain order and its people were able to live peacefully and happily due to the efforts of this high official, Ji Chan, who assisted the other officials in governing the state.

Whenever people presented him with live seafood to eat, Ji Chan would refuse to allow the creatures to be killed for the sake of his own indulgence. He could not bear to be the cause of the harm and sacrifice of all those lives, realizing the suffering they would have to experience. And so he never failed to have the aquatic creatures taken to a pool and liberated.

It always warmed his heart to watch the creatures happily swimming in the water. His mind was all-encompassing. Whenever he saw the fish living happily in the pool, he would say with uninhibited delight, "How good it is, how good it is when everyone obtains his wish!"

From this we can see how deep was Ji Chan's sense of humaneness, which extended universally to every kind of living creature, not only including all classes and races of people, but all other living beings as well.

Having learned of this, we should well know how precious life is. Everyone wants to live, animals no less than humans. This public record shows that it is not only Buddhists who promote abstention from killing and furthermore liberating the living; sages, Confucianists, and scholars down through the ages have practiced this conduct as well.

