

Song of Advice for Giving Up Meat Eating

by *Nyala Pema Dündul*

When I think of the suffering that meat eating brings,
I cannot bear the pain and anguish I feel within my heart.

Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ hrīḥ!

From a state of emptiness and compassion, you guide beings —
Noble Avalokiteśvara, to you I pay homage.

Without having trained in love and compassion myself,
I ate the flesh of my mothers while lecturing others about cause and effect.
Without realizing the absolute, I wandered along the path of empty words.
I, the parrot-like beggar of White Rock,
Was practicing austerities and ‘extracting the essence’,¹
When, one day, while meditating on Lord Avalokiteśvara,
According to the union of stages from *Self-Liberation Equal to Space*,²
My own body and everything around me suddenly disappeared
And transformed into a luminous body like that of the Great Compassionate One,
Seemingly floating in space.

As I looked around while experiencing luminous awareness,
I saw the inconceivable miseries of the lower realms.
And, in particular, the vast sufferings of the Reviving Hell.
One of its quarters, I saw, was completely filled
With men and women, naked and helpless, before each of whom
Stood throngs of evil-looking servants with heads
Like birds, wild and domesticated animals, and ferocious beasts.
Many of the servants held sharp weapons in their hands,
With which to slice apart and devour the flesh of their victims.
Time and again they cut, and time and again flesh grew back.
Victims did not expire until their karma was fully exhausted,
And habitual tendencies did not diminish, but only increased.
For those who had performed ‘red offerings’ it was even worse.
Loudly, they all screamed in terrible pain and agony.
When I had seen this external manifestation of my own perception,
I wondered what might be done to stop such suffering.

And, in that very instant, in the sky before me,
The Great Compassionate One appeared, and said:

“*Emā!* My son, who has been close to me throughout many lives,

Listen well now, you who are diligent and determined!
 You have gained stability in the generation stage of deity yoga,
 And have even developed a few qualities,
 But the root of Dharma lies in loving kindness and compassion.
 Do you have real love and compassion within yourself?
 How could anyone trained in compassion ever eat flesh?
 Just look at how eating meat brings such suffering!
 The results of our own actions will ripen on us alone;
 There is nothing the buddhas of the three times may do.
 Eating meat has no virtue whatsoever but entails many faults.
 It is the source of 400 forms of disease and 80,000 obstructing forces,
 And it naturally brings about the 84,000 afflictive emotions.
 Other than as part of the fearless conduct of benefitting all one encounters,
 Or as a medicine or sacred substance of the supreme Secret Mantra,
 Consumption of flesh involves not the tiniest trace of virtue.
 Eating flesh is a sign of being either a *māra* or *rākṣasa* demon.
 It causes discipline to degenerate and negative emotions to increase.
 Without the cause, which is altruistic love and compassion,
 You will find it hard to gain the fruit, the essence of awakening.
 Meat eaters are not accompanied by the wisdom deities.
 They lack blessings, accomplishment, auspiciousness and activity.
 The substance of altruism does not develop in eaters of flesh,
 Whom gods, *nāgas* and others regard as demons.
 Meat eaters are plagued by *gandharvas*, *rākṣasas*, *māras*,
Yamas, ghosts, spirits, *gyalpo*, *gongpo*, and samaya-breaking demons.
 The result of eating meat is rebirth in the hells,
 Or as a bird, a jackal, a cannibal demon, or the like.
 Meat eating thus brings suffering beyond measure.
 But by renouncing it, you are freed from all these faults,
 And will always be revered by non-human beings,
 Who will see you as a pure, authentic brahmin or god.
 All the buddhas and bodhisattvas, together with their retinues, throughout the ten
 directions,
 Gurus, *vidam* deities and *ḍākinīs* will gather around you like clouds,
 And you will be accompanied by male and female bodhisattvas.
 Quite naturally, you will possess the cause of loving kindness and compassion,
 And swiftly reach the fruit, which is the essence of awakening.
 These are just some of the inconceivable virtues to be gained.”

Thus he spoke; and then, once my own perception had returned,
 I felt as if I had awakened from a lucid dream.
 My body and mind were tormented as if I had swallowed poison,
 And I shook with fear and panic.
 Just thinking of the terrible sufferings of the Reviving Hell,

I wished only to exchange my happiness for others' pain.
So utterly overwhelmed was my mind, I wept profusely.
And I felt intense, unbearable compassion.
Then, to take upon myself the sufferings of others,
And to purify their faults and obscurations caused by eating meat,
For every mother sentient being, as infinite in number as space is vast,
I made the following vow, true according to the two levels of reality:

“*Aho!* Mighty sage Śākyamuni and all buddhas and bodhisattvas throughout the
whole of space and time,
Have compassion for this child who knew nothing of cause and effect!
Hosts of gracious root and lineage masters, care for me!
Have compassion for this child who knew nothing of cause and effect!
Supreme *yidam* deity, mighty Avalokiteśvara, care for me!
Have compassion for this child who knew nothing of cause and effect!

Overwhelmed by ignorance and the two obscurations,
I have often spoken of how all infinite beings have been our parents,
And while living off their flesh, lectured about cause and effect.
I had no idea that the suffering involved was so great!
Often have I heard it said that eating meat with threefold purity³
Is sanctioned by the Buddha and does not count as sin.
But this applies only to saints who benefit all they encounter,
Like pure lotus flowers, unstained by negative emotions,
And to practitioners of the profound path of Secret Mantra.
For my part, I have no instruction more profound
Than altruistic love and compassion,
And the infallibility of cause and effect.
To purify all the faults and obscurations of eating flesh
Among all sentient beings, who extend throughout the whole of space,
From this moment on, I completely renounce the eating of flesh.
This is my unfailing commitment, which I shall never forsake.
Even if all the animals upon this earth were to be devoured,
There would still be no satisfaction; hunger would only continue to increase.
Deprived of food or drink for just a few days,
We feel as if we have never tasted even so much as a single morsel or drop before.
Now is the time to escape this demon, hunger.
What, after all, is the cause of this flesh?
It springs only from self-clinging and attachment.
Merely to think of it makes me weary, nauseated.
This utterly unappetizing mound of mess and filth,
Bound up with the thirty-six impure substances,
A body of habitual patterns and aggregates, is the basis for all suffering.
Each animal has its own negative actions,

And whoever eats the flesh of such beings will find it hard to win liberation.
 Meat and alcohol are impure substances,
 And to offer them does not count as generosity, the Buddha said.
 Who, therefore, would eat this food of the afflictions?
Pretas must live for many thousands of human years
 Without seeing food or drink, enduring only suffering.
 But we human beings gladly drink even ice-cold water,
 And have plenty to sustain us besides meat and alcohol.
 If we are still not satisfied by such delights,
 How could we repay past kindnesses so unfairly?
 Throughout the course of countless aeons past
 In every world within this universe so vast,⁴
 There's not a single being who has not been our mother.
 And the milk we drank from maternal breasts would fill a billion seas.
 I abandon all pretence; let the Three Jewels be my witness!
 In the past, under the sway of ignorance and habit,
 I ate my parents' flesh and did not remorsefully confess.
 Now with pure motivation and the four powers complete,
 As in the saying, "I was not, am not, and will not be attached,"
 Henceforth, may the thought of eating meat never even cross my mind.
 Should I ever fail, let the Three Jewels send their punishment.
 May the protectors and guardians constantly keep watch.
 Were I now to eat the flesh of my past mothers,
 There would be no greater transgressor in all the three realms!
 The Buddha said that harming others even slightly impairs one's vows.
 So what need is there to mention flesh eating which involves taking life?
 In the *Parinirvāṇa Sūtra*, *Laṅkāvatāra* and elsewhere, it is said
 That eating meat is tantamount to killing.
 It is forbidden in both the greater and lesser vehicles,
 But is particularly unacceptable for bodhisattvas.
 Our Teacher himself, when he appeared as a partridge's young,
 And as a ferocious beast⁵ in the wild, would not eat meat.
 How then could we, his followers, ever do so?
 In accordance with the guidance of the Victorious One,
 There were many great masters in India and Tibet who gave up meat.
 As all this shows, the faults of meat eating are unimaginably vast.
 Not cultivating negativity is itself genuine Dharma.
 So may I always comply with the authentic teaching!"

Having seen the boundless faults that come from eating meat,
 Even the thought of it is as nauseating as poison.
 And so, I, the great beggar with the name of Dündül,
 Composed these words of advice to encourage my own renunciation

In the Sky Fortress hermitage of White Rock.
As a result of this virtue, may all sentient beings
Purify all the faults and obscurations that come from eating meat,
So that they may see the thousand buddhas face to face!

| Translated by Adam Pearcey, with many thanks to Ringu Tulku Rinpoche for his clarifications.
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1. *bcud len*. Nyala Pema Dündül was renowned for his mastery of this practice. In his writings, he even refers to himself on occasion as a ‘stone-eating yogin’ (*rnal ’byor rdo zan*) – a reference to his time spent imbibing the essence of rocks and minerals in the form of pills. ↩
2. *Self-Liberation Equal to Space* (*mkha' mnyam rang grol*) is a treasure revelation of Nyala Pema Düdül. ↩
3. This means that you have not seen or heard anything to indicate that the meat has been butchered specifically for you, and not only that, you do not even have any doubt that this might be the case. ↩
4. Literally, "in all seven worlds" (*'jig rten bdun po*), meaning the six classes of beings (hell, *preta*, animal, human, *asura* and *deva*) plus the *bardo* realm. ↩
5. These are references to Buddha’s previous lives, as recounted in the so-called *Birth Stories*, or *Jātaka*. ↩



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