

# COW DHAMMA

*from the*

GOṄASŪRA DĪPANĪ

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Aggamahāpaṇḍita, D.Litt.



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## Editor's Foreword

This unique work by the late Venerable Ledi Sayādaw puts a strong case for vegetarianism, though the Sayādaw points out that the Buddha did not prohibit the eating of meat by monks. Had the Buddha done this, as Devadatta demanded, it would have caused an obstruction to the propagation of Buddhism wherever meat-eating was common. The overriding consideration for a monk is gratitude and contentment — so if people offer meat or fish he should accept it graciously. He need not eat it, if he does not wish to. If he eats it, reflecting wisely, he will be free from blame.

The Sayādaw stresses that ingratitude is the really harmful factor in eating meat. Beef-eating is especially blameworthy because cattle provide both labour and milk for mankind. Cattle are not used as draught animals in the West, but the practice is still common in Asia. Nevertheless, we do use a lot of dairy products, so the factor of gratitude is important here too.

During the time of the Buddha, the large scale trade in meat would not have been feasible without modern transport and refrigeration. Modern technology has given man unprecedented power over nature, and the consequent growth of ingratitude towards animals, trees, the environment, and material things is obvious. The BSE crisis was a stark reminder of the evil nature of the modern beef-trade. There is no trace of humanity in a system that can feed animal remains to cattle just to increase their body weight for slaughter.

If the Buddhadhamma is rightly understood and practised, people will surely become much more sensitive to the effect that they have on other living beings, and on their environment. The Buddha praised restraint and moderation in all things. He taught his disciples to take proper care of their bowl and robes, to eat almsfood respectfully, to clean and repair their dwellings, and not to damage trees or plants.

A Buddhist monastery or a Buddhist's home should be a shrine to simplicity, cleanliness, beauty, serenity, harmony, thrift, and self-discipline. Though meat or fish may be taken in moderation, alcohol has no place in the home of a Buddhist. The *Āmagandha Sutta*, from the *Suttanipāta*, makes it clear that unwholesome kamma is stench, and not the eating of meat. However, monks have not reflected properly on their almsfood if they look down on vegetarian meals as inferior.

Our debt to cows is immeasurable, even in this modern age. Perhaps we should outlaw the killing of cows as well as the hunting of foxes. It would make for a more caring society.

Bhikkhu Pesala  
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# Cow Dhamma in Brief

*Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa*

To teach the Dhamma on the virtues of cows, in line with the Sutta Piṭaka, to all the devotees in Upper and Lower Burma, I have translated the Pāli Text.

The Brāhmaṇadhammika Sutta from the Suttanipāta (vv 286-317) describes the good conduct of a Brahmin.

1. Draught animals, such as cows and buffalos, are likened to the parents of human beings. Because they give service to mankind, they resemble man's mother and father. In fact they are man's parents, brothers, sons and daughters. The Buddha declares them to be man's own relatives.
2. Human beings depend on the labour of cows and buffalos for food. With the service of these animals man sustains his life. Since agricultural work is done by them they give life, beauty, happiness, and strength to human beings every day. With four great benefits for human beings, their help is inestimable, the Buddha declares.
3. When respect is paid to these life-giving animals as parents and relatives, all the good deities look after human beings. The deities regard them as their relatives as they show love to animals. Thus the deities protect them from disease, danger, and calamity. They also protect the cows and buffalos from these dangers. This is the teaching of the Buddha.
4. When gratitude, love, and compassion are weak or absent, men use animals for their needs without compunction. They strike or whip them hard, torturing them in various ways. Finally, they kill and eat them.

Due to that ingratitude and unrestrained greed, deities hate human beings because they lack love and compassion. Individual guardian deities hate individuals. Village deities hate villagers. Town deities hate town dwellers. National deities hate nations. As a result they do not look after the welfare of human beings, and fail to protect them. The opportunity is ripe for the work of demons. New diseases, epidemics, and dangers appear among mankind. All sorts of calamities bring disaster to many people. This is the teaching of the Buddha.

The above explanation is based on the Suttanipāta with direct and inferred meanings.

5. The Buddha taught in the Nārada Jātaka that, while cows and buffalos may be used for service when they are strong, when they are old and feeble they must be cared for properly. During their working lives

they must be well-fed, and treated with love and compassion. They must not be killed when they are no longer useful.

6. The **Sarabhaṅga Jātaka**. Everybody is expected to observe the five moral precepts (not to kill sentient beings, not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to lie, not to take intoxicants and drugs). Every bhikkhu must observe 227 Vinaya rules scrupulously. All Buddhists, by this observance of morality, become pure in body and speech, which is the main function of morality. One becomes a moral person by leading a moral life.

The characteristic of wisdom is the ability to teach others in accordance with the Dhamma as taught by the Buddha. The aim of teaching Dhamma is to develop civility, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. He who obtains this qualification is called a wise man (*pañḍita*). A wise man, who is learned in the texts and able to teach others, obtains wisdom — a necessary factor of a good man.

The characteristics of a good man (*sappurisa*) include the open acknowledgment of gratitude owed to others, and revering the good qualities of others. This qualification makes one a good person. Besides these two fundamental qualifications, a third one is the need for a soft and gentle mind, or a good heart. These are the basic qualities of a good man.

In the teaching of the Buddha, the Vinaya concerns morality, the Abhidhamma pertains to wisdom, and the Suttanta concerns the qualities of a good person (*sappurisa*). Thus we can classify three basic aspects of life. However, they may not be coexistent as one would wish them to be. Some individuals may possess morality, but they may lack wisdom and goodness. So they may not be wise persons or good persons. Some persons are wise, but because they lack morality, they are not good. Others are good, but they may lack morality and wisdom. Some possess both morality and wisdom, but they are not good-natured. Some persons are blessed with morality and goodness, but they lack wisdom. Others possess wisdom and goodness, but they do not have morality.

Some people possess all three basic qualifications: morality, wisdom, and goodness. A few individuals lack all three good qualities. Those who possess all three good qualities are very rare.

7. The **Temiya Jātaka** mentions that those who take shelter and sleep under a tree must not break its branches with bad intention. For the tree becomes his best friend, a helper deserving gratitude. If one destroys the branches of the tree, one violates the duty of friendship,

harming one's benefactor. One lacks the basic requirement of a good man. This is the teaching of the Buddha in the Temiya Jātaka.

Breaking branches and felling trees, even with an evil, ungrateful mind, is not the evil deed of killing, because trees are not sentient beings. However, the evil mental state of ingratitude prevails. Hence the transgressor commits an evil deed. To maintain the virtues of a good person, gratitude must be shown even to lifeless things. One must show reverence and respect even to trees, which gives rest, protection, *etc.* The maintenance of gratitude for all living beings, and even for lifeless things, is too important to ignore. A tree should not be regarded as inferior, because ingratitude is always a serious defect in the eyes of a good person. One must always maintain gratitude because ingratitude means to adopt a wicked person's attitude. As regards living beings, even more regard must be given to the acknowledgement of gratitude.

8. In the **Mahābodhi Jātaka** (Jā. 528) a heresy known as *Khattavijjāvādiṃ* is mentioned. This wrong view says that those who take shelter or sleep under a tree may uproot that tree if they derive benefit from doing so. It means the end justifies the means. Since ingratitude is present it expresses a wrong view. This belief acknowledges no indebtedness.

### Gratitude

Appreciation of benefit obtained from others is called gratitude (*kataññutā*). It means acknowledgment of benefits received, or sincere appreciation. Benefits may be obtained from persons or things. There are two classes of benefactors: well-known or high class persons; unknown or low class persons, or beings of low dignity, power, and status.

Most people exaggerate the benefit received from well-known or high class persons. They will acknowledge a benefit of one hundred pounds for one pound, one thousand for one hundred, because the status of their benefactor is high. However, a low class person's gift or service usually remain undeclared. If the beneficiaries do acknowledge any indebtedness, they seldom tell the whole truth. One thousand pounds benefit is mentioned as only one pound. This is the attitude of wicked or cunning people. They are not good Buddhists.

All sincere persons of good-will acknowledge their gratitude in the following way: the benefit received from well-known persons is a hundred-fold whereas that of ordinary persons is a thousandfold. Since they emphasise gratitude, they speak in glowing terms for services received from ordinary people. This is the nature of Bodhisattas and other good persons.

# **Cow Dhamma in Detail**

## **Comparison of Cows to Parents or Relatives**

Soon after a child is born, soft pressed rice is given with cow's milk. So cows give life twice a day. Since then a human being's life is dependent on cows and buffalos. As draught animals, they help to produce rice and other food so that a man becomes wealthy. A wealthy man can donate schools and monasteries, or build pagodas. These charitable deeds are possible with the aid of draught animals. Cows give both life and wealth to human beings.

The immense debt of gratitude must be seen in the labour and service of cows. Their help resembles that of our parents. Since one readily acknowledges the immeasurable debt of gratitude due to one's father and mother, one should be able to declare the same thing regarding cows. The debt one owes to them is obvious. So the Pāli text states, "Cattle are like a man's father and mother." The Buddha also declares that "... cattle resemble brothers, sons, daughters, and relatives." No good man will kill or torture his own relatives. Nor will he allow others to kill or torture them. He cannot bear to see them killed, because he loves his relatives.

Likewise a good person, knowing the power or debt of gratitude one owes to others, will not torture his draught animals. If news of torture and killing is known, he will feel sad. He may become angry. One would not eat the flesh of one's relatives if they are killed by others — one will not relish eating their meat at all. One will feel sorry for the dead animals. The habit of gratitude and compassion suppresses any pleasure of eating beef. Compassion will also arise. One's indebtedness is acknowledged by thoughts, words, and deeds.

## **Providers of Life, Beauty, Bliss, and Strength**

No explanation is necessary as the meaning is obvious.

## **Deities Protect Good People**

As explained earlier, the qualities of a good person include gratitude. Gratitude is revered by deities such as Sakka, the king of gods. They always appreciate this noble quality. They know that cows resemble one's own parents. Cows possess honourable features and human beings owe them a great debt of gratitude. Those who kill them and eat their meat violate the essential virtue of a good man. This transgression of virtue is subtle and deep. It destroys the deepest ethical rule, which is hard to understand by superficial thinking. The deities, being of higher nature, know the importance of gratitude. Killers of draught animals and eaters of their flesh attract the hatred of good deities. Man exhibits callousness because of intense greed and delusion.



Every country needs a government. A country that lacks a government suffers from anarchic chaos. Robbers, murderers, and rebels gain supremacy and wreak havoc in various parts of the country. When a stable, strong government is duly established, disruptive elements have no chance to make mischief. They therefore remain at peace. Whenever authority is absent, miscreants rob and kill as they like. A strong government means peace and security. Likewise, when a country is looked after by good deities, demons and ghosts cannot do evil to the population. Bad deities have no chance to wreak havoc among the people. In times when people show no gratitude, even good deities are displeased, and they neglect to look after the world. Then demons, ghosts, and bad deities take their chance for evil-doing. They spread disease, epidemics, calamities, *etc.*, and when the victims die they suck their blood and eat their flesh.

### **Deities Fail to Protect Ungrateful People**

The fourth point indicates the neglect of good deities, such as personal deities, home deities, village deities, city deities, *etc.*, who neglect their duty to protect the welfare of human beings. Then demons spread old and new diseases among men and animals. This is the detailed explanation for third point too. Man's ingratitude makes the world a bleak place.

Villagers and farmers usually earn their livelihood with the labour of cows and buffalos. So one can say that half of the wealth derived from the land belongs to animals. If a single field produces one hundred baskets of paddy, half of this is owed to animals. If a person earns one pound by fast conveyance, half of this is the property of the oxen. Therefore owners must feed their animals properly and treat them kindly. They must use the labour of animals only after treating them with due consideration. They must treat them as if they are their friends, brothers, or sons. In short, in earning a livelihood, love and kindness must prevail so that the half-share due to them can be used by the owners themselves. Otherwise owners do not have the right to use their own half of the money earned. When old, animals must be left in peace and rest so that their debts to man are repaid. They must be properly fed in old age.

We have shown the teaching of the Nārada Jātaka in the sense indicated above. Without this good procedure, those who use all the money for themselves incur debts due to animals. It means that the owners and users must suffer in their countless future lives, to repay their burden of debt. These debts can multiply in countless ways through the long journey in saṃsāra. Fools who do not believe in future existences, brazenly torture

and eat draught animals. They mercilessly abuse the labour of cows and buffalos so that the animals suffer as if in hell. Far-sighted persons should take this warning with all due seriousness.

### The Teaching in the Nārada Jātaka

A tree, under which we shelter, becomes our benefactor, though it is an insentient thing. Having enjoyed protection from a tree, one must not destroy its branches or leaves. Wanton destruction means ingratitude just like using our best friend. Moreover, one commits the fault of breaking the virtue of a good person. This teaching of the Buddha<sup>1</sup> is as well-known as the sun and the moon. All persons should, therefore, treat draught animals with kindness, remembering their virtues and services. One should abstain from eating their meat, to fulfil the duty of gratitude. This factor of a good person must be maintained at all costs. Wherever human beings kill and eat their benefactors, they originate wars, conflicts, and atrocities. The calamity of war is due to this serious evil called ingratitude.

The term “*Satthantara Kappa*” means the calamity of war. A single slaughter-house kills at least one thousand cows each day, and over thirty thousand cows are butchered every month. In a year, more than three hundred thousand cows are slaughtered — over three million in ten years. In the whole country, the appalling slaughter of cows, each day, month, and year should be considered. For the animals, the greatest calamity befalls them without respite, day and night.

The butcher’s money becomes capital for the meat-traders and slaughter-houses. The consumer’s money also goes to them. With this huge income, meat-traders again buy animals for slaughter. They establish more and more slaughter-houses. In a single country there may be more than one thousand slaughter-houses. With the financial-support of meat-traders and consumers, the slaughter of animals is supported by meat-eaters everywhere. So the calamity of a single cow’s death is caused by man. Man seldom considers the fact of indebtedness.

On the other hand, cows and buffalos give rice, wheat, barley, *etc.*, to mankind. Farmers rely on them. With their labour, they sustain the life of man every day. Yet callous human beings exploit them by creating slaughter-houses, and devise all ways of killing them for their meat. So these animals suffer the calamity of death due to the ingratitude of man. In the entire world, millions of cows are butchered for food every day.

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<sup>1</sup> This teaching is from the *Temiya Jātaka*. Neither of the two versions of the Nārada Jātaka seem relevant: the *Cūḷanārada Jātaka* (Jā 477), and the *Mahānārada-kassapa Jātaka* (Jā 545) (ed.)

## **Morality, Wisdom, and Goodness**

In the Vinaya Piṭaka there is no prohibition to refrain from eating meat. For the monks, if they have not seen, heard, or suspected that the meat was killed for them, they can eat it. They are free from any offence. However, mere freedom from offence does not make a good monk. The essential factors of a good monk must be observed. The Vinaya rules do not forbid meat or beef as long as the above three factors are absent. However, the Vinaya rules only govern impurities of the bodily and vocal spheres. They concern only one of the four types of purification. A bhikkhu also has to follow the remaining three *Pārisuddhi Sila*. As these three — controlling the senses, purity of livelihood, and reflection on the use of requisites — belong to the Sutta Dhamma, a monk should conform to it so that all four kinds of purity are attained.

Here, it is important to relate morality to goodness. A bhikkhu, when he observes all four purities, attains only the qualification of a moral person. He also needs to enrich his mind with a liberal spirit such as appreciation and acknowledgement of gratitude. This enrichment of the mind or mental sphere ensures that a good heart emerges along with good conduct. Many individuals lack this mental factor although they possess morality. The qualities of a good person must be cultivated.

A further explanation of this point may be helpful. If a monk is well-versed in Vinaya and observes the discipline, he is classified as a moral monk. Yet he may be of rough mind, full of pride, stubborn, rebellious against his teachers, giving no support to the needy and no help to his elderly parents. He is always scolding and complaining. Jealousy and envy prevail in his heart. He exhibits egoism and conceit, wallowing in fame and wealth.

From his practice of the *Pātimokkha Sila*, he is a moral person in this respect. However, he is very far from the basic characteristics of goodness as mentioned in the Metta Sutta (the fifteen points of becoming a good person). So, though moral, he is not good. Those types of monks, learned in the scriptures but proud and conceited, can only be called learned bhikkhus. However, they are not good in the sense indicated above.

This standard can also be applied to the laity. Those laymen who observe five precepts can only be classified as moral persons. For example, they observe the 'non-killing' precept by refraining from killing sentient beings, not having any intention to kill. Although by his acts some insects, pests, and other animals may suffer death, he escapes from the transgression of this precept as his intention is not based on killing. There is in this case, no evil deed even though

death occurs to pests and animals. With other intentions he perpetrates a deed that involves death to others, such as clearing fields, burning rubbish and groves. By so doing, small pests are killed, but his aim is to clear the jungle or overgrowth, so he escapes evil in this act. He burns the fields, causing death to some sentient beings, but having a different intention, he escapes the evil of killing. Although thousands of insects may die, he has no responsibility for their death as his aim is to clear the fields or rubbish. It is right. He does not violate the first precept. He is still a moral person, because he has no intention to kill. However, if he knows that burning his fields or groves entails death to small animals, if he does this, he lacks love and compassion. So he is not a good person.

Some people carefully observe all five precepts, but they neglect to support their parents. They fail to pay respect to them. They scold learned men. They decide cases in a partial way. They oppress their inferiors. As they keep five precepts they are called "moral." However, since they lack gratitude, humility, dutiful conduct, *etc.*, they are not good persons at all. They lack the important factors of love and compassion.

If one knows that meat is served for one's enjoyment, without seeing the act of killing, without suspicion or without direct involvement, ethical conduct is not sullied. So meat-eaters, although they know that cows are killed for food and that butchers prosper with the increasing demand, do not break the five precepts. It is just like the persons who, wishing to clear the jungle, burn bushes, trees, and groves, killing insects and animals in the process. Since they have no intention to kill, they are innocent.

Meat-eaters do not possess the factors of gratitude and compassion, and they are far from becoming good persons. The deed of eating is not a profound act. What is significant though, with grave consequences, is the financial help given to the slaughter-houses and meat-suppliers. The suppliers can maintain their businesses due to the purchasing power of the meat-eaters. Butchers kill more and more animals to meet the increasing demand, day and night. This fact is known to all.

The above case resembles the case of a moral farmer, who supports five people and who burns the fields and groves, thereby killing thousands of pests and animals. One is ethical, but at the same time one is not good.

Monks who try to observe the Vinaya rules, only gain purity of body and speech. They must observe the Vinaya rules since the Buddha alone is competent to promulgate them. The Vinaya rules are issued from the Buddha's authority, that is the power of command. Monks breaking the Vinaya rules incur the guilt known as rebellion against the Buddha's

command (*nāvītikamma*). This danger is always present. So when the Buddha allows meat with the three-fold purity to be taken by the monks, the monks have to obey. Moreover, the monks have to beg for food, relying on the help of the laity. They cannot refuse what has been offered on their daily almsround.

### Impracticability of Vegetarianism

Everywhere, vegetarians constitute a small minority. If the Buddha prohibited meat for the monks, the majority of monks would unavoidably violate this Vinaya rule. Then transgressions would increase in the course of earning a livelihood. Those monks who insist on vegetarian food would be opposed by the populace, and their livelihood would become restricted. People will find difficulty to meet their requirements. Its impracticability prevented the Buddha from promulgating vegetarianism in the Vinaya Piṭaka.

In the Vinaya Piṭaka, meat-eating is allowed if the right kind of meat is given. The observance of the Vinaya rules<sup>1</sup> is limited for it purifies only bodily and vocal misconduct. It does yet reach the sphere of purification of mental evils which encompass a wide range. In the Sutta Piṭaka, ethical precepts and practices reach the mental realm. It covers all mental evils. Only when mental evils are purified, goodness arises. A person now becomes good, not merely moral or ethical. This attainment is possible because the factors of gratitude, loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic-joy, and equanimity prevail in the heart. The heart must be cleansed of evil things to become good.

The above explanations have been briefly made in the first point also. Right understanding is necessary regarding the gratitude owed to cows and buffalos. Morality alone is not enough — mental purity must be the goal.

### Thirty-Eight Blessings

To acknowledge indebtedness or gratitude is to follow the *Maṅgala Dhammā* (the thirty-eight blessings). When these *Maṅgala Dhammā* are known and understood, craving for meat, such as beef, *etc.*, will diminish in due course. Everyone should try to avoid eating the flesh of animals, especially that of cows and buffalos. One should study the Suttanipāta, Temiya Jātaka, and Nārada Jātaka in which the importance of gratitude is taught by the Buddha, even towards trees and animals, so that this moral precept is not violated by wrong view. Magnanimity must prevail in the world. Indebtedness must be seen everywhere.

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<sup>1</sup> The original has “Abstaining from the ten evil kammās (*dasa akusala*).” This is an error as it *does* include kammās of the mental sphere: covetousness, ill-will, and wrong view (ed.)

### **Importance of Gratitude**

Even animals have gratitude for their mothers and feeders. They show love and gratitude when food is given to them. Even wild animals become tame if people feed them with kindness. They love their benefactors and show loyalty and devotion. It is strange that meat-eaters do not love cows — showing them no civility. It is remarkable that meat-eaters do not show gratitude even though they eat the flesh of animals. Yet animals show love and gratitude to human-beings. They do not receive kindness and gratitude in return, even though they serve the people. Human beings do not show much humanity.

The factors of gratitude, love, and compassion can arise even in fierce animals such as lions, tigers, snakes *etc.*, who live in the wild. Those who live in the villages become tame and show gratitude toward human beings. Yet these three virtues are often absent among the people. Buddhists should display these three factors of goodness. Those who live by the labour of animals must cultivate the three good factors habitually.

Those who have little faith but plenty of delusion, differentiate between high and low-class persons in the matter of gratitude for benefits received. Their minds are not clear and steady. Thus they will often acknowledge and speak in praise of gratitude received from high-class persons, though the amount is small. They exaggerate the facts to honour people in high positions in an ingratiating way. The high-ranking person is praised out of all proportion. A dignified person is acknowledge with thanks a thousand-fold, although the deed is small, wild hyperboles are made by fools to those of high-status.

Fools do not show any appreciation when they receive help from low-class persons and beings, even though the benefit is great. They belittle the amount of benefit received. A thousand pounds worth of benefit is reduced to only twenty-five. Sometimes they totally ignore the help received from others. If their benefactors lack position, power, wealth, *etc.*, they show even less gratitude. They dismiss the debt of gratitude that is due, concealing the benefit received. They do not help their benefactors when they are in need. They now shun them. They are glad when their benefactor dies because they do not want to repay their debt.

So the gratitude owed to animals is often denied. One seldom reflects on or acknowledges one's debts to animals, not even to the smallest extent. As cows have no status, being dumb animals, people neglect to show any gratitude. The virtue of gratitude therefore diminishes, promoting vanity and folly among mankind, and callousness spreads. People become partial towards the upper

class and biased against those of lower class. Dignified persons receive undeserved praise and exaggerated gratitude, while low-class benefactors are belittled, or totally ignored. Because it imparts righteousness, the importance of gratitude even towards trees was taught by the Buddha. The Pāḷi text “*Yassa rukkhassa chāyāya*” teaches us to preserve gratitude even for non-sentient things like trees. People should not destroy trees, because they enjoy shelter under them. People should not say unkind words. This is the teachings of the Bodhisattas and the Buddhas. They habitually practise this virtue.

Among the various good deeds deserving gratitude, the giving of sustenance ranks in the highest class. So man owes gratitude to cows in the same way as to parents. Cows are like our fathers and mothers. It is very strange that man, having enjoyed the services of animals at will, still delights in eating their flesh. Old cows are killed or sent to slaughter-houses. The gratitude that is prevalent among animals is absent among mankind. People lack genuine faith, and hold wrong views to the fullest extent. It is hard to realise the truth of gratitude. Seeing meat-eaters, one can know their lack of loving-kindness and compassion. Lacking loving-kindness and compassion, they discard also a sense of gratitude, a fundamental characteristic to become a good person.

### **Love and Compassion**

When gratitude arises, love and compassion are sure to follow in its wake. Seeing meat, one will see the flesh of ones’ own parents. Cows’ flesh is comparable to the flesh of one’s own brothers and sisters, sons and daughters. Visions of one’s parents will appear in the mind. So instead of eating, one will certainly cry. One will not touch beef. Since past thankfulness reappear now. This is the way of a good person’s heart and conduct.

On the other hand, if owners use the labour of draught animals, and then eat their flesh, the honour and dignity of animals is reduced to the lowest order. Although man owes limitless gratitude to cows, not the least acknowledgement appears. Man’s lust for eating meat overwhelms all gratitude. When one remembers how the Buddha honoured the Tree of Enlightenment for seven days by showing his gratitude, such behaviour towards cows becomes incomprehensible. The depth of folly is unfathomable, if ingratitude reigns supreme.

### **The End Justifies the Means**

Those who hold *Khattavijjā Ditṭhi* think that the end justifies the means. They have a selfish outlook, and only pragmatic considerations of usefulness or benefit prevail. Meat-eaters also belong to this group. The Buddha’s teaching

is based on love and compassion, which are the outcome of gratitude. It cannot discard the outlook and behaviour of indebtedness. The right attitude must not be lost. Everyone should consider the service rendered by cows. The next consideration must be based on the following thought: "If cows were high-status persons or honourable, how one's gratitude would multiply! Though they derive great service and milk from them, people do not rate them highly, let alone speaking in praise of cows. If only cows had rank and position!"

If cows were high ranking persons, everyone would show the gratitude due to them. People would show love and kindness to the fullest extent. Torture and killing of cows would not be allowed. Even the sight of their flesh would arouse pity. Considering thus, much gratitude will be heaped on them with love and compassion. With this strong pure mind the teaching of "*Yassa rukkhassa chāyāya*" will be implemented. Hence the factor of a good person is realised.

### The Power of Lust

Lust for food compels some to eat even dogs and crows. At first, no one wishes to eat crows, since they are regarded as unclean. Dogs eat dirty things. Yet one enjoys pork, chicken, *etc.*, though pigs and chickens eat bad things too. Without familiarity, no one will eat human flesh, but once people started, it would become a daily dish. Soon after a child is born, parents feed it beef, chicken, *etc.*, so people enjoy meat, instead of loathing it. Similarly, if there were such a custom, people would eat their own father and mother with relish, or they would enjoy the flesh of their own sons and daughters. Once any food becomes familiar, even the flesh of dogs becomes tasty. The power of lust has no limits. Lust for food, like lust for sensual pleasures, continually wants to try new dishes. Man can become as lustful as a dog. The unrestrained carnal lust for sex and food is obvious in animals. The root cause is lust, with no special distinction between men and animals. So by reflecting on gratitude, one should avoid eating the flesh of cows and buffalos.

### The Blessing of Gratitude

In the Suttanipāta the Buddha teaches: "*Yathā mātā pitā bhātā, aññe vāpi ca ñātakā.*" The meaning is that cows and buffalos, being providers of rice and other food, are givers of life. They are comparable to one's mother and father. If people can eat their parents' flesh, they will also eat meat. If they will not eat their parents' flesh, they should refrain from eating meat. If one heard that a man had eaten his parents, he would be regarded as an inhuman monster, maniac, or cannibal. Similarly, on hearing that people eat the flesh of cows and buffalos,



one can judge that they are monsters, maniacs, or barbarians. Why is this? Because one's parents are one's life-givers and benefactors. So too are cows and buffalos. The flesh of one's benefactors must not be eaten. People would rightly blame those who ate their parents, brothers, or sisters as barbaric cannibals. The same criticism should be levelled at meat-eaters because cows give us life. We owe them a great debt of gratitude, similar to that due to our parents. We should love these animals, considering their services to mankind. They are worthy of our noble love and pity, considering their enormous service for mankind.<sup>1</sup>

## **An Appeal For Cows**

Venerable Ledi Sayādaw wrote this "Appeal for Cows" in 1886, on the request of the elders of Monywa.

This age witnesses brutality and inhumanity due to the maturing of past evil kamma. Catastrophes have arisen just like that suffered by the Buddha's relatives who were murdered by Viṭaṭūbha in revenge. Both the guilty and innocent, old and young, suffered brutal death. The whole Sakyan nation disintegrated. The Buddha appealed three times to Prince Viṭaṭūbha to let them live in peace, but the past evil kamma of the Sakyans was too great to be offset even by the Buddha's repeated intervention. They had done serious kamma in the past, which now had to ripen. The Dhammapada Commentary [to verse forty-seven] relates this story in detail. The moral is that not even God can forgive evil kamma. Only good kamma of the highest type purifies bad kamma.

As for the vengeful prince, he too suffered bad consequences as he was drowned in the river. He became food for fishes and turtles. His anger ruined him at last. Thus to revenge a wrong means both parties have to suffer for their evil deeds. The Buddha teaches that mankind experiences progress and prosperity when it acknowledges the factor of gratitude. Man must develop the four Brahmavihāras — the Divine Abidings — for prosperity and longevity. The Dhamma of gratitude is fundamental for the practice of love, compassion, sympathetic-joy, and equanimity.

Those who harm cows or eat their flesh suffer poverty and downfall. Due to their ingratitude, they face various dangers in the present. The future dangers to be incurred, are determined by their present deeds.

The four Brahmavihāras are the traditional protectors of the world. They imply loving regard for others, whether men or animals. The world's

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<sup>1</sup> The Goṅsurā Dīpanī here deals with the evils of intoxicants and gambling, *q.v.* see the booklet "A Talk on Intoxicants and Gambling."

situation is getting worse with famine, terrorism, wars, natural disasters, drug use, *etc.* Even in Buddhist countries, harsh treatment of cows, killings of cows, eating of beef, *etc.*, can be seen. Non-Buddhist countries encourage the meat-trade, forsaking the precept of non-killing.

People should avoid occupations such as trading in arms, livestock, meat, poisons, and intoxicants. These moral principles, though well-known throughout the world, are seldom observed. People lack compassion, so they become evil. Their greed for wealth and power ever increases. So they resemble, even now, hungry ghosts (*petas*). Seeking only their selfish ends, they behave like animals. They are too proud. Although their livelihood depends on the services of animals, they kill, torture, and eat them. They even make sport of them. Cows are man's best friends. Butchers and meat-traders go to hell, their ingratitude being so great.

Meat-eaters can incur the same guilt as butchers and meat-traders if they approve of killing. If one praises the prosperity of livestock farmers and meat-traders, one's kamma is just like a butcher's with the attendant evil results. Sometimes approvers and supporters can incur more blame than the perpetrators. It depends on the state of mind. The serious fault here is that one destroys justice and righteousness. One's view is also wrong, which is the greatest error in the world. These facts are explained in the Vibhaṅga and its commentary.

Buyers depend on sellers, who in turn depend on buyers. Buyers help sellers by enjoying their produce. Especially in the matter of food, sellers have to depend on buyers. Money is used for further killing. So some animal species are endangered due to increased killing.

### **Man is Driven by Lust for Meat**

Man enjoys meat eating as he likes without regard for the Dhamma. His greed compels him even to eat cows' flesh, blind to the serious evil of ingratitude. In earning his livelihood he overlooks wrong-doing. For his immoral livelihood he gets serious effects in the lower worlds in future for the sake of benefit in the present life.

Some people maintain that meat improves the human body and brain. Meat is essential for our health, they say. However, the Pāli text says that health is dependent on balanced living, free from excesses. Whether meat is essential is not the point. Those who eat meat without restraint suffer from diseases. Such cases are mentioned in Sutta Piṭaka, Dhammapada Commentary, Jātaka Commentary, *etc.* So one should not make excuses, nor should one follow the

way of gourmets. One's diet should be based on vegetables, ghee, and milk, with a little flesh for protein. Health is improved by moderate eating.

Although one may not avoid eating meat, one should try to practise the virtues of contentment and simple living. All Bodhisattas hold these virtues in highest regard since they lead to supreme enlightenment. The moral for everyone is to curb the passion for tasty food to gain concentration and wisdom. Overindulgence increases mental distraction. The Bodhisatta, even when the king of crows, though by nature he had to eat other animals, tried to limit his eating habits. He expressed vows and good determination to reach a higher state of mind.

### **Dumb Animals Cannot Defend Themselves**

Since animals are dumb they cannot defend themselves, and have to suffer in silence. Wealth is obtained through the labour of cows yet many fail to show any indebtedness. People should remember that paddy, groundnuts, sesame, vegetables, *etc.*, are obtained by tilling the land with cows. Farmers need the cow's help. Lacking a sense of gratitude they willingly eat the cow's flesh. If cows could speak, this barbaric crime would be exposed.

Consider the various ways that cows help to serve the welfare of the country. The cruel nature of meat-eaters also shows the evil of unrighteousness. Unjust people, forsaking gratitude, feed cows with insufficient or poor food. Cows are better off to die in a den of tigers than to live with ungrateful people. The cow's sad fate under unjust men is too painful to describe. While living, excessive labour gives them little rest. When they die, or when they are killed, they become food for mankind. Kindness should be shown to them to maintain justice. Righteousness should be observed by mankind. When evil rules the world, acts of ingratitude become manifest. Through kindness towards animals, especially man's helpers, calamities will be avoided. Right thinking persons have a duty to love cows. We must respect justice in our choice of food. This is not a minor matter. The seriousness of injustice has been shown in the teaching of the Buddha.

Based on right understanding and compassion, man should avoid eating beef. It is vital to acquire the virtues of a good man, not only wisdom and morality. The world is in turmoil and conflict. A sense of indebtedness and gratitude towards the environment and animals must be realised by human beings. Living in harmony with nature is the only way to achieve peace and prosperity.

