

Enlightenment for the Dear Animals

Tibetan Buddhist Animal Liberation Practices at the Kopan Monastery in Nepal

Bettina Torgersen



M.A. Thesis (60 Credits), History of Religions REL 4990

Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

03.06.2019

Enlightenment for the Dear Animals

Tibetan Buddhist Animal Liberation Practices at the Kopan Monastery in Nepal

Bettina Torgersen

M.A. Thesis (60 Credits), History of Religions REL 4990

Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

Spring 2019

© Bettina Torgersen

2019

Enlightenment for the Dear Animals

Bettina Torgersen

<http://www.duo.uio.no/>

Print: Reprosentralen, Universitetet i Oslo

Abstract

Animal liberation practices are common among Buddhists across Asia. How these practices are performed and what they signify varies from place to place. This thesis explore how animal liberation rituals are performed at the Animal Liberation Sanctuary (ALS) at the Kopan Monastery in Nepal, Kathmandu. The Kopan monastery is directed under The Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), an organization in the Gelug Tibetan Buddhist tradition. This thesis reviews how Tibetan Buddhist informants view animals' potential for enlightenment and spiritual advance. It also considers clashes between idealism and practicalities, in regard to Tibetan Buddhists keeping animals, such as euthanasia and sterilization, use of insect repellents and deworming. At the ALS the goal is not only to liberate the resident animals, that mostly consists of goats and cows, from death by slaughter. The main goal is to liberate the animals from *samsāra* – the cycle of repeated rebirths and redeaths all unenlightened beings are seen as being trapped in by helping the animals start their path towards *nirvāṇa*. The founder of the Kopan Monastery, the ALS and the FPMT, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, states that he wants to challenge which animals our society consider precious and worthy of long-term care. At the ALS the animals are not just liberated, they are kept and continually exposed to the Dharma for the rest of their lives. At the ALS the animals are taken around a stūpa in the their paddock, and recited or played mantras for. They are also head-bopped with holy objects blessed by Lama Zopa Rinpoche. When an animal dies, local monks perform puja's for the animals. In many of the animal liberation practices the animals seem like passive receivers of these rituals and practices. The Tibetan Buddhist informants did, for the most part, not believe animals can get enlightened or practice meditation, unless the animal is a *bodhisattva*, an enlightened being in disguise, and thus not really an animal. “Regular” animals are not seen as capable of reaching enlightenment without incarnating as humans first. The aim at the ALS is not to get the animals to meditate or practice Buddhism in an intellectual way, rather the practices are aimed at improving the chance of the animal of obtaining a beneficial rebirth. Still, nothing was completely certain regarding the spiritual abilities or status of animals.

The Tibetan Buddhists informants liberated animals for various reasons. The benefit or merit of Animal Liberation practices are always dedicated. Improving human health seemed to be a key motivating factor, based on a belief that when one liberate an animal from death the merit of this practice can cure the recipient of the dedication from various diseases, such as HIV, cancer or various psychological problems.

Acknowledgments

Several of the people I have met during the process of writing this master thesis has not only opened my eyes and inspired me in a professional way but also in life more generally. Among them are Tania Duratovic who tirelessly work for the best interest of animals across the world. I am very grateful for all the information she shared during the field research.

Another person who continuously lighten up my mood and enlighten me through talks and discussions, is Simon Bergersen. Thank you for all the encouragement and interesting viewpoints you have provided from the beginning to the end of this master study, it has been invaluable.

I owe a big thanks to Kopan monastery for lending me a room, and generously offering me help with gathering information for this thesis while I was conducting field research. I also want to thank Tilo for keeping me company in Kathmandu, as well as Phüntsook and all the other animals I was lucky to meet and get to know at the Animal Liberation sanctuary.

Additionally, I want to thank friends and family members who have helped me by being sparring partners while I was developing the idea, for proof-reading my thesis, and just generally being supportive and patient with me throughout the research and writing process.

Last but not least, I want to thank my supervisor Dag Øistein Endsjø for helpful guidance, enthusiasm and encouragement.

Table of Contents

1 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Research Questions.....	2
1.2 Scope, Significance and Limitations of the Research.....	3
1.3 Structure of the Thesis.....	5
1.4 Research Overview.....	6
2 Method:.....	8
2.1 Qualitative Method.....	8
2.2 Participant Observation.....	10
2.3 Interviews.....	10
2.4 Content Analysis.....	11
2.5 Triangulation.....	13
2.6 Reflexivity.....	13
2.7 Ethical Considerations.....	14
3 Context.....	15
3.1 Buddhism in Nepal.....	15
3.2 Animal issues in Nepal.....	15
3.3 Kopan Monastery, FPMT and the founders.....	20
3.3.1 FPMT’s Vast Visions.....	22
3.4 The Animal Liberation Sanctuary.....	23
4 The Position of Animals in a Tibetan Buddhist Worldview.....	24
4.1 Animals in Tibetan Buddhism – Research History.....	24
4.2 Animals in the Buddhist Cosmology.....	28
4.3 Compassion for Animals in Tibetan Buddhism.....	30
4.4 The First Precept – Ahimsā.....	33
4.5 Hells of Repetition.....	35
4.6 Animals in the Jātaka tales and other early Buddhist texts.....	37
4.7 Anthropocentrism and Speciesism in Tibetan Buddhism.....	38
5 Animal Liberation in a Tibetan Buddhist context.....	42
5.1 Giving the Gift of Fearlessness.....	42
5.2 Animal Liberation in Buddhism.....	43
5.3 Animal Liberation and Material Well-being.....	45
5.4 Ecological Consequences of Animal Liberation Practices.....	45
5.5 Focus on Individuals in Buddhism.....	48
6 Animal Liberation Practices at the ALS.....	52
6.1 108 Yaks.....	52
6.2 The Animal Liberation Sanctuary at Kopan.....	56
6.3 Who are Involved?.....	56
6.4 Animal Liberation Practices Performed at the ALS.....	57
6.5 A Day in the Life of an ALS Resident.....	57
6.6 Liberating Animals from the Butcher.....	58
6.7 Circumambulation – Practicing Buddhism with the Body.....	59
6.8 Head-bopping.....	62
6.9 Dharma Names.....	63
6.10 Mantras and Prayers – Hearing the Dharma.....	64
6.11 Death and Dying, Funeral Pujas.....	66
6.12 Benefitting Insects.....	68
6.13 Stickers, Boats, Cars, Shoes and Hats, :.....	70
6.14 Mantra Water.....	71

7 Ideal versus Real.....	72
7.1 Sterilization/Neutering.....	72
7.2 De-worming and Removing Insect-eggs.....	73
7.3 Euthanasia.....	74
8 Why are the Animals Liberated at the ALS?.....	78
8.1 The Bodhisattva Ideal and Responsibility to Alleviate Animal Suffering.....	78
8.2 Karma Purification and Compassion.....	78
8.3 Animal Liberation and Material Well-being at the ALS.....	82
8.4 Animal Liberation and Quantity? Size or Numbers?.....	83
8.5 Taking Care of Animals for their Sake and on their Terms.....	84
9 Animals, Passive Receivers of Buddhism or Ethical Agents?.....	86
9.1 Teaching Animals to Meditate.....	88
9.2 The Karmic Mobility of Animals.....	91
9.3 Can Animals reach Enlightenment from their Animal Incarnation?.....	92
9.4 Bodhisattvas as Animals.....	93
9.5 Nothing is certain.....	95
10 Summary.....	96
11 Postscript - Circles of Humans and Animals.....	99
12 Bibliography.....	101
12.1 Primary Sources.....	101
12.2 Secondary Sources.....	104
13 Appendix.....	108
13.1 Glossary.....	108
13.2 Posters at the ALS and Kopan Monastery.....	114

Illustration Index

Illustration 1: The goats at the ALS are taken around the stūpa in their area.....	60
Illustration 2: Duratovic circumambulates a worm. A small replica of a stūpa is often used as a reliquary.....	61
Illustration 3: Head-bopping bag, the blessed box inside the bag and Norbu being head-bopped by Michael Lobsang Yeshe.....	62
Illustration 4: Lama Zopa Rinpoche blesses a cat by head-bopping, Moscow Russia. May 2017. Photo by Ven. Lobsang Sherab.....	63
Illustration 5: Poster in the ALS medicine room.....	114
Illustration 6: Poster for the ALS at the Kopan dining hall August 2018.....	115

Photo credits:

Illustration 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7 are my private photos taken at the Animal Liberation Sanctuary and at the Kopan Monastery in July and August 2018.

Illustration 4 : I have been granted permission to use for this thesis from the FPMT.

1 Introduction

In this thesis, I will investigate Gelug Tibetan Buddhist animal liberation practices at the Animal Liberation Sanctuary (from now on referred to as the ALS), located at the Kopan monastery in Kathmandu, Nepal. I will examine how the practices for animals at the ALS and among the followers of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (from now on referred to as FPMT) reflect views on animals in Tibetan Buddhism. The data for this thesis is based on information collected during a field research I conducted at the ALS, as well as content from the websites and e-books from FPMT that deals with animal views. The ALS and the Kopan Monastery are directed under the FPMT.

I first heard about the ALS during a trip to Kathmandu in 2008. Students I met in Kathmandu at that time told me about some Buddhists that were taking animals around the stūpas in Kathmandu. They had learned about this from flyers that had been handed out around the Boudhanath Stūpa, not far from the Kopan monastery. Stūpas are Buddhist religious monuments, and they were originally built to commemorate a Buddha or other enlightened person. Stūpas often contain sacred objects such as texts or relics. Circumambulating a stūpa is considered very beneficial in Buddhism. I was intrigued by the Buddhists that performed Buddhist rituals with and for animals, but didn't think much more about it until I decided to write a master thesis History of Religions on the topic of Buddhism and animals almost ten years later. I chose to write about these "Buddhists taking animals around *stūpas*" in Nepal. I was curious about the Buddhist's motivations and how the religious practices done for animals might reflect the view on animals among Tibetan Buddhists.

In 2008 the ALS had recently been established. The planning started in 2004, and it was established in 2006. The ALS buy animals from the local butcher,¹ to avert them from being slaughtered for food, and thereafter shelter them for the rest of their lives. At the ALS the animals are exposed to Buddhist rituals and the Buddhist teaching - the *Dharma*, until they die of natural causes. Buddhist animal liberation practice (tib: *tshe thar*) involves saving an animal from death, usually from being slaughtered, but furthermore and most importantly "liberation" refers to liberation from *samsāra*. *Samsāra* is the cycle of repeated births and deaths that sentient beings are trapped in until they reach enlightenment, according to Buddhism. Animal liberation is a practice that is usually dedicated, meaning that the liberator dedicates the *merit* – the karmic benefit gained

¹ Some of the calves were left outside the Kopan monastery, probably by people wanting the monastery to take care of them, according to my informants.

from this prosperous action to someone else. Often, the merit is dedicated to a teacher or someone else who needs good fortune, like a sick friend or family member. The ALS is a pilot project according to Geshe Thubten Jinpa, a Sherpa monk and one of my informants at the Kopan monastery. According to Geshe Thubten Jinpa, Lama Zopa Rinpoche,² the director and founder of the Kopan monastery and the FPMT, wants similar sanctuaries to be opened all across the world.³

For this project, I have conducted field research in Kathmandu, Nepal during July and August 2018. The objective has been to observe the rituals and daily lives of the animals at the ALS, but additionally, I have conducted structured and semi-structured interviews and participated in informal conversations about the topic of animal liberation with Buddhists that are Nepali, Australian, Tibetan and European or a mix of these. Because of its relevance to the theme, I will also analyze information from Geshe Thubten Jinpa's 2012 documentary movie; *108 yaks*.

For the sake of reader-friendliness, I have decided to use the conventional dichotomy human-animal in this thesis. In other words, I will use the term animal, when I refer to all non-human animals, and the word human to refer to human beings.

The scholar Geoffrey Barstow has pointed out that a lot of research has been done on pan-Buddhist views on animals, but more in-depth local studies on the topic are still needed. I have chosen to look at contemporary animal liberation practices at the ALS in Nepal, and I will describe and analyze rituals that are being done for animals by Tibetan Buddhists there. I will also take into account rituals for animals that are recommended by Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

1.1 Research Questions

I tried to keep an open mind when going to Nepal, and my research questions grew out of my field research. For the purpose of structure, I have roughly sorted the research questions into chapters. However, there are no strict boundaries between these topics, and to a certain degree they blend into each other throughout the thesis:

1. Through my material I attempt to get a better understanding of what kind of Tibetan Buddhist rituals are being performed for the animals at the ALS. What sort of Dharma are

² Throughout this paper I will refer to Lama Zopa Rinpoche as Lama Zopa Rinpoche. On the FPMT websites and by his followers he is sometimes referred to as Lama Thubten (meaning: the Buddha's teaching) Zopa Rinpoche or as Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche. *Kyabje* is a mark of respect reserved for the most senior lamas, whose realization and powers are extraordinary. The term means lord (*jé*) of refuge (*kyab*), signifying someone who, on account of his or her extraordinary realization, has the capacity to protect their followers from the suffering of *samsāra* and its causes, the disturbing emotions.

³ To my knowledge there is at present time only one other animal sanctuary that operates in more or less the same way as the ALS; Maitri Charitable Trust in Bodhgaya, India. Maitri do charity for humans as well as animals so it is not entirely focused on animals like the ALS in Kathmandu. One of the project directors at the ALS, Phil Hunt is also a project director for Maitri Charitable Trust.

- the animals at the ALS exposed to in their everyday lives, and to what extent are Buddhist rituals a part of their lives? (Chapter 6)
2. Considering that the material I gathered through my informants mostly refer to an idealized version of how animals “should” be liberated and viewed, what kind of issues come into conflict with this idealized vision? (Chapter 7)
 3. Why are the animals being liberated and kept at the ALS? What is the Buddhist’s motivation to help animals in this way? Is the Buddhist ideal of compassion reflected in the practices recommended by the FPMT and the practices conducted at the ALS? (Chapter 8)
 4. In regard to the animals religious/spiritual status in the eyes of Tibetan Buddhists, how do Geshes, caretakers, and directors of the ALS project look at the animals’ possibility to be Buddhist/enlightened/practice Buddhism themselves? For instance, can animals only passively relate to the Buddhist teachings or can they be active agents? Can the animals be Buddhists? What do followers of the FPMT Gelug Tibetan Buddhism think about these questions? (Chapter 9)

I have to see this through the eyes of Buddhist informants, since the animals did not expand on the topic.

1.2 Scope, Significance and Limitations of the Research

The data collected for this thesis is limited to animal liberation practices among followers of the FPMT, Gelug Tibetan Buddhist tradition at the ALS at Kopan. I will also add Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s advice and texts about how his Buddhist followers should treat animals. I hope my material can be a modest contribution to the research on how contemporary Buddhists view animals.

Considering that I only spent one month observing the animals and rituals done for and with them at the ALS, my thesis cannot give a precise picture of the year-long daily lives of the sanctuary dwellers. To give an example, I was at the ALS during the monsoon season. During this season the amount of gastrointestinal parasites such as tapeworms and flukes in the grass increase.⁴ De-worming of the goats, dog, cat and cows must be done regularly, and is crucial since the sanctuary animals will die of these internal worms if the worms are not killed. The conflict between taking care of the ALS animals, but also caring for smaller creatures like internal worms, brought up an ethical dilemma as the worms needed to be cared for too, meaning we had to perform Buddhist

⁴ Radha Putja and Mahendra Maharjan, *Gastro-intestinal Parasites in Goat (Capra hircus) of Puranchaur VDC Pokhara*, 39.

rituals for them. It was particularly urgent to practice these rituals since the worms were dying and needed help getting a better rebirth. During another season at the ALS, it might have been other issues that would have come up.

A limitation that I want to emphasize is that I do not speak nor understand Nepali. This made interviewing the local Nepali caretakers at the ALS difficult. However, some days there were visitors at the ALS that spoke both Nepali and English fluently, and they helped me interpret what the caretakers said and also helped me asking the caretakers questions. The Geshes I interviewed spoke English quite well, but they would probably express themselves more precise in their native language.

When I asked to interview monks I met at Kopan, I would usually be directed towards the specialists, in particular, those who had a *Geshe* title. A Geshe is an academic qualification of Gelug teachers, usually available only to monks and involving 1-3 decades of study. The study entails memorization of texts and rigorous debate. I got the impression most of the monks felt they did not have enough insight to give me proper answers to my questions. Because of the language barrier and the reluctance of many “ordinary” monks at Kopan to being interviewed, my interview-subjects for formal interviews are mostly educated middle-class Nepalis, Tibetans and Australians as well as the Geshes who are Sherpa.⁵ With this in mind, the data I collected from interviews is mostly an idealized view of how animals should be treated by Tibetan Buddhists according to educated followers of the Gelug Tibetan Buddhist tradition, rather than a study of animal views among all Gelug Tibetan Buddhists of all social status. However, practicalities often need to be prioritized over idealism at the ALS and in chapter seven I will give some examples of such compromises from the field research and the FPMT websites. I believe the practices at the ALS are very different from the practical reality of Tibetan Buddhist peasant and Buddhist families in Nepal that keep animals.

Last, but not least my topic is animals and their religiosity. Before going to Nepal, I was determined to try to get as close to the animals as I could. That way I hoped I could get a glimpse of their experience if that was at all possible. In the book *Ethnography after Humanism* the sociologists Nik Taylor and Lindsay Hamilton write about how ethnographers often consider what other species mean to humans, rather than seeing how humans and animals alike are subjective beings in the world. Taylor and Hamilton write that in social science the human point of view is usually privileged, and this has led us to see animals as adjuncts to humans rather than seeing them as having meaningful lives of their own. They write that all too often animals are left in the margins

⁵ The Sherpas are one of the ethnic groups native to the mountainous regions of Nepal. Sherpas practise the Nyingma school of Buddhism.

of qualitative research, often objectified and sometimes even ignored entirely. Studies that deal with animals in the social sciences often *silence* the animals, they claim.⁶ Animals naturally cannot participate in research through traditional methods such as interviews and questionnaires and many believe that bringing animals into research is reserved for the natural sciences, such as zoology and ethology. However, Hamilton and Taylor argue that animals should to a greater extent be brought into the social sciences that deal with animal-related topics. That way the animals will not be silenced, and their experience can be taken seriously. Hamilton and Taylor noticed that when they conducted a project in 2013⁷ concerning relations between humans and animals that worked together, they could hardly find any methods that were tailored to understand human-animal relations. Thus, they ended up with material that seemed to privilege the human perspective while they had far less material about the animals' subjectivities. They asked the humans involved to tell them what they thought or suspected about the animals' perspectives but could not find a direct way to listen to the animal's "voices".⁸ As Taylor and Hamilton, I also found that it was hard to gather information from the animals directly. I am not an ethologist or zoologist, which might have made it easier. Furthermore, I did not have any experience with goats or cows beforehand, the kinds of animals I mostly observed at the ALS. I soon realized I needed to ask the caretakers/humans what they thought about the animals' abilities. I could not interview the animals directly and I want to accentuate that my field research is about animals from a human perspective. In chapter 9, I am not researching the animals' abilities to be religious, meditate and so on but rather human Tibetan Buddhist's beliefs about whether animals can be religious, meditate and reach enlightenment. It would be intriguing to see future studies that deal with animal's religious experience more directly.

To conclude, the field research in Nepal was short, and I do not speak Nepali nor Goat so I cannot write a complete ethnography. Nevertheless, I do consider the ALS an example with rich material for studying views on animals among contemporary followers of Tibetan Buddhism. The FPMT and Lama Zopa Rinpoche certainly focus a great deal on animals and animal liberation.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

To give an outline of the thesis I will in this section give a brief introduction to the chapters. Chapter two reviews the methodological framework that has been used to analyze the data. Chapter three presents the context of the thesis, including a short overview of Buddhism in Nepal, as well as

⁶ Lindsay Hamilton and Nik Taylor. *Ethnography after humanism: Power, politics and method in multi-species research*. Springer, 2017, 9.

⁷ Hamilton, Lindsay, and Nik Taylor. *Animals at work: Identity, politics and culture in work with animals*. 2013.

⁸ Hamilton and Taylor, *Ethnography after humanism*, 12.

contemporary animal welfare issues in Nepal. This chapter also includes an introduction and historical background of the Kopan monastery and the FPMT organization, as well as its founders; Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

The fourth chapter deals with the position and status of animals in a Tibetan Buddhist worldview, and gives a short overview of the Buddhist cosmology and animals' place in it. Additionally key Buddhist concepts such as *ahiṃsā* (nonviolence) and *karuṇā* (compassion) are introduced here. These concepts are important to understand the Buddhist view on animals.

Chapter five gives an introduction and overview of what animal liberation means in a Tibetan Buddhist context.

In chapter six, I will present the animal liberation practices I observed at the ALS. First the FPMT documentary movie *108 yaks* will be presented and analyzed, since this documentary deals with animal liberation specifically, and is made by the FPMT. Chapter six will also present material from the field research.

Chapter seven deals with how reality sometimes differ from the ideal of how one should treat animals according to my informants views and the animal views presented in the FPMT text material and at the FPMT websites. I will give examples of such compromises, that I discovered during my field research, but also texts from the FPMT.

Chapter eight explores why the animals are liberated at the ALS. What is the Buddhist's motivation for liberating these animals? How does animal liberation benefit the Buddhists, the animals and others? What and who are most important?

In chapter nine the status of animals according to FPMT and my informants is discussed. Topics like the animals' ability to practice Buddhism and to what degree they are passive receivers of religion or active agents are reviewed.

In the last chapter I summarize what I have disclosed during the research process.

At the end I have added some personal reflections that have sprung out of the work on this thesis.

1.4 Research Overview

Scholars like Paul Waldau, Ian Harris and Bronwyn Finnigan have written about animal views among Buddhists in general, and the scholar Geoffrey Barstow, who writes about animals in a Tibetan Buddhist context, notes that in the historical research on Buddhism and animals it seems to have been a trend to look for pan-Buddhist views on animals. Lately, more narrowed down, in-depth studies on this topic has surfaced. Some examples of this is James Stewart's work on animal

views among Buddhists in Sri Lanka, Pu Chengzhong who writes about animal ethics in early Chinese Buddhism and Holly Gayley, Lillian Tan, David Holler, Kabzung Gaerrang and Geoffrey Barstow who write about animal views in Tibet. These different studies show how differently Buddhist cultures can view animals and the moral status of animals. In this thesis I will primarily focus on the Tibetan Buddhist view on animals and animal liberation since this is the tradition the FPMT belongs to. I will add some excerpts from Theravada Buddhist texts as well as some research done in Theravada Buddhist areas such as Stewart's research in Sri Lanka on the spiritual status and abilities of animals. I chose to do this, because when it comes to animals' spiritual status and abilities to for instance reach enlightenment, not much research has been done in Tibetan Buddhism yet.⁹

I will in particular lean on the recent research done by Geoffrey Barstow, who published a book in 2017 that gives a historical as well as a contemporary overview of the history of vegetarianism among Tibetan Buddhists in Tibet.¹⁰ Barstow also writes a great deal about animal views among Tibetan Buddhists, historically and contemporary.

⁹ I believe more research on this topic will emerge in the near future. For instance, I partly got inspired to write about animals' spiritual abilities from reading Geoffrey Barstow's blog post "teaching animals to meditate". He also mentions animals spiritual abilities in his 2019 article "The Moral Standing of Animals in Tibetan Buddhism."

¹⁰ Geoffrey Barstow, *Food of Sinful Demons: Meat, Vegetarianism, and the Limits of Buddhism in Tibet*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.

2Method:

The methods I have applied for this thesis are mainly participatory observation at the ALS, as well as structured and semi-structured interviews. I worked as a volunteer and observed practices at the ALS for 20 days in July and August 2018. During this period I helped with de-worming the goats, giving out medicines and providing daily care for the animals. Some days I also assisted rituals when I was asked to do so. This got me close to the animals and to a certain degree made it possible to observe how much Buddhism was part of their daily lives. Since the main caretakers at the ALS shifted during this period¹¹ I got to observe different “groups” of caretakers. We were between three to five people working at the ALS every day during my research. I was part of the daily routines and I got the impression that the caretakers quickly forgot that I was observing and acted as they would otherwise.

I stayed at the Kopan monastery for a week which made it easier to find informants to interview among the local monks at Kopan. During my stay in Kathmandu, I also interviewed a Tibetan Buddhist that lives in Kathmandu and a Nepali animal activist that was not Buddhist.

In addition, I have to a great extent relied on the information on the FPMT websites, lamayeshe.com and fpmt.org. It is on these pages I have found the books *Liberating Animals from the Danger of Death*, *How to Make Charity of Food to the Creature Ants*, and *Protecting the Lives of Helpless Beings* that are published by the FPMT and exclusively deal with animals and animal liberation practices. In particular, I have looked at advice from the founder of Kopan, FPMT and the ALS; Lama Zopa Rinpoche, regarding animals and animal liberation practices.

Most scholars that study contemporary animal views and animal liberation practices among Buddhists, such as Barstow, Holler, Tan, Gayley and Stewart use field research as a method, and many use text-studies and study flyers and posters from their field¹². I chose to do field research because it seems to be necessary to get out in the field, and observe the animals and Buddhists, how they interact and talk to the Buddhists to really get an understanding of their view on animals.

2.1 Qualitative Method

All the methods I have used for this thesis fall under the greater category qualitative method. Qualitative method, unlike quantitative method, does not usually rely on numerical measurement.

¹¹ The main informant who is a veterinary nurse, left for Australia halfway during my field research, which meant the local caretakers and I managed the de-worming.

¹² Holly Gayley, “The Compassionate Treatment of Animals: A Contemporary Buddhist Approach in Eastern Tibet.” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 45.1 (2017): 29-57

Advocates of qualitative methods sometimes argue that certain things are not possible to measure in a numerical way. Advocates of quantitative methods, on the other hand, can at times criticize qualitative research for being too subjective and failing to live up to the standards set by quantitative methods.¹³ Research methods such as interviews, participant observation and ethnographic field research has been criticized for being too ungeneralizable considering that the research often is based on just one or a small number of cases. However, there is an overlap between these methods, and they are often used together in mixed-method research. Qualitative methods are often focused on “richness” such as open-ended questions, descriptions and flexibility. The selection of observation sites, the meaning that individuals and groups ascribe to human or social phenomena and a closer relationship to the subjects in the research is often emphasized. Qualitative methods also use less formalized techniques than quantitative methods do.¹⁴ Qualitative methods, such as interview and participant observation, are suitable when studying religious rituals which involves physical movement and interaction. Among the benefits of using qualitative methods, is seeing how a ritual is performed in real life and how it differs from what is written in books or other text-material.

When applying qualitative methods, the research questions are often changed during or after the field research. That is also the case for this thesis. I ended up doing a case study of the ALS and realized that my original goal; looking at views on animals in Nepal in general and comparing that to the view on animals among Tibetan Buddhists in Nepal was too wide. Even among Gelug Tibetan Buddhist monks in Nepal the view on animals differ widely. The sociologist Katrine Fangen argues that flexibility to change and adapt research questions, or research method during a research is an advantage of qualitative methods.¹⁵ I chose to do the field research in the beginning of the master, so my mind would be open to whatever data I collected before I decided more specifically what I would write about.

Field researchers often look at what people do. In the case of this thesis, I looked at what the humans and animals did. How did they interact? How did the Buddhists enact religion in the animals everyday lives? And how did the Buddhists enact religion for special occasions and rites of passage, such as when an animal died? Another theme field researchers explore is what do the religious participants understand, think, say or intend with their religious activities? In my case I was particularly interested in what the Buddhists thought about the religious status of the animals. Why do they circumambulate them? Why do they recite mantras for the animals? I was also

¹³ Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler, eds. *The Routledge handbook of research methods in the study of religion*. Routledge, 2013. 27, 37.

¹⁴ Stausberg and Engler, *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, 28.

¹⁵ Katrine Fangen, *Deltagende observasjon*. Fagbokforlaget, 2010, 44.

interested in the Buddhists motivation for performing the rituals with or for the animals.

2.2 Participant Observation.

I chose participant observation as my main method for this thesis. ‘Participant observation’ has become more or less synonymous with the term field research. Fangen describes the purpose of participatory observation as “to describe what people say and do in contexts that are not prepared by the researcher.”¹⁶ When applying participant observation as a method, researchers’ study the activities of the participants, considers who are present, and view the participants positions and profiles. In addition, the researcher usually has conversations with the participants and by talking with them learns more about their interpretations of events and rituals. The researcher participates and observes at the same time. Fangen describes it as being on a scale between purely observing and only participating. Toward the end of the scale that entails only participating, one can almost become one of the study-subjects or “go native”. At the other end of the spectrum, by only observing, the internal communications and social codes of the study-subject(s) might become hard to grasp.¹⁷ Additionally, by taking on the role as observant one might in certain cases stand out more and make the participants more self-conscious than they would have been if one participated. When I was at the ALS I was constantly participating, because much help was needed with the animals. In the end I felt I was more of a participant, keeping track of, measuring and giving out medicines to the animals. I felt that being so engaged gave me more credibility and got me closer to the caretakers. I had time alone in the evenings to write and reflect on my field notes. While researchers can at times blend in with the group they are studying, they are usually more attentive than they would be if they were actual members of the group. Or to put it in other words, they are “differently attentive”, considering scholarly questions even as they participate and observe. They try to understand what religious people take for granted or what they mean by what they do.¹⁸

2.3 Interviews

To get a better understanding of the intentions behind the animal liberation practices at Kopan, and to better understand how the Buddhists I met viewed animals I had to talk to my informants. At Kopan and the ALS conversations with the Buddhists developed naturally, but I also arranged interviews with monks at Kopan. All the interviews were semi-structured, I would prepare a list of questions I wanted to ask my informants, but would also let them speak freely and expand on topics where they had more to add. I also asked them if they wanted to add anything, they thought I should

¹⁶ Fangen, *Deltagende Observasjon*, 12.

¹⁷ Fangen, 13.

¹⁸ Stausberg and Engler, 270.

know at the end of the interviews. Sometimes surprising or new topics would surface during these interviews, for instance when I discovered the difference of opinions regarding sterilization of animals. Most of my interviews are “expert interviews” with specialists or leaders. I interviewed Geshe, educated monks, the director of ALS, and also a leader of an animal rights group in Kathmandu. Therefore, the data I have gathered in my material reflects an ideal way of how things should be and should not serve to bring light upon how all Tibetan Buddhists in Nepal view animals and their capabilities.

Most of my informants are men, but my main informant is a woman. All the interviews for this thesis were conducted in English.

In-depth interviews:

- Tania Duratovic, female, – my main informant during the whole stay. Australian ecologist and veterinary nurse and project director of the ALS (along with fellow Australian Phil Hunt). Several interviews, as well as daily talks for two weeks.
- Michael Lobsang Yeshe, a Buddhist monk of Greek origin, he was educated at Kopan, and his stepfamily is Nepali. He lived in Melbourne for many years, as well as Singapore and Malaysia. He grew up in Nepal so has plenty of knowledge of Nepali culture. He speaks Nepali and helped me ask the caretakers some questions. One semi-structured interview.
- Geshe Sherab – one of the main philosophy teachers at Kopan. Belongs to the philosophy division at Kopan. One structured interview.
- Geshe Thubten Jinpa – a Geshe at Kopan, prepares and performs many of the *pujas* for animals. Part of the tantric division of Kopan, the tantric division performs and knows more about rituals than the philosophy division. Geshe Thubten Jinpa made the documentary movie *108 yaks*, which shows him liberating (more than) 108 yaks. Two structured interviews.
- A male Nepali animal activist leader volunteer-based, he had another paid job. He was not religious, but “culturally Hindu”, with family background from India. One structured interview.
- A male educated Tibetan Buddhist from Kathmandu. A few informal talks.

2.4 Content Analysis

Content analysis is a popular method used for describing and explaining the characteristics of messages embedded in mass mediated and public texts. This method is defined as a ‘research

technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use.¹⁹ I have applied content analysis to review material from the FPMT in the form of their e-books, websites and social media. I will particularly look at what the spiritual leader and founder of FPMT and Kopan monastery, Lama Zopa Rinpoche gives as advice to his followers in regard to animals. By using content analysis of this material I will explore if a clearer picture of the role of animals in the FPMT Buddhist worldview will appear. The text material about animal liberation online is vast, as this is a topic that seems to be very important for Lama Zopa Rinpoche, since he so often talks about it and encourages all the FPMT centers around the world to prioritize animal liberation practices. Picking out parts of this material has at times been challenging due to its amount. It is however a luxury to have too much material rather than too little. The online material and the movie *108 yaks* show how the FPMT represent itself, which was interesting to compare to what I actually found during the field research. Also, the material from FPMT was not always coherent and at certain times revealed differing views on topics like sterilization and euthanasia.

The ALS website is called “Enlightenment for the Dear Animals”. This page is edited by Tania Duratovic. On the website there is a link to the page www.lamayeshe.com and also to the Enlightenment for the Dear Animals Facebook²⁰ page. The Facebook page “Enlightenment for the Dear Animals” is run from the FPMT main office in Portland, USA and cannot be used for funding due to US regulations. Funding for the ALS is therefore done through the Facebook page “Tree of Compassion” which Duratovic runs from Australia. Duratovic updates both these Facebook pages. Tree of Compassion deals with Australian and international issues related to animal welfare but also environmental issues. This page is not limited to the ALS or Buddhist animal practices. I will also review information from enlightenmentforanimals.org, fpmt.org and lamayeshe.com.²¹

The enlightenmentforanimals.org website gives practical advice on what one can do and refrain from doing to benefit animals. The website is a collection of short articles, varying in theme from vegetarian recipes, giving animals benign Dharma names to news about the sanctuary. This website’s design and content was updated in the end of 2018.

Lamayeshe.com is a page dedicated to “bringing you the teachings of Lama Yeshe & Lama Zopa Rinpoche” as the header says. It features books like *Protecting the lives of helpless beings*. It is a comprehensive website with lots of articles that deal with topics like animal welfare, benefiting animals, animal liberation and animal sacrifice in Nepal. The fpmt.org is the homepage of the FPMT and on its pages and online shop I found the books *Liberating Animals from the Danger of*

¹⁹ Stausberg and Engler, 145.

²⁰ 2716 followers on 04.05.19.

²¹ There are also many local FPMT Facebook pages, as well as homepages for centers across the world, but I will not include material from them in this thesis.

Death and How to make Charity of Food to the Creature Ants as well as animal liberation tools and stickers.

2.5 Triangulation

Triangulation means to use more than one method and/or more than one source (or type) of empirical materials in a study. I will combine my data from participatory observation, interviews, text-material from books published by the FPMT as well as their websites in order to get a clearer picture of how they view animals and the meaning of rituals done for animals. Often, I would observe something at the ALS and then ask one or more of my informants about this observation later. Or, I would get new information during an interview or talk, and then focus more on that when I was back observing at the ALS.

2.6 Reflexivity

All researchers should be aware of and reflect upon their own interests, as well as of the interests of one's study-subjects during a research. The sociologist Mary Jo Neitz writes that there are two main types of reflexivity, one of which she calls "epistemological reflexivity." By this she means that the researcher must critically examine her own pre-assumptions about the nature of the world and how she can come to know it. In addition to this the researcher also needs to employ "personal reflexivity" about how her own experiences and locations in the world inform her research. Understanding the research process as reflexive means seeing the researcher as part of the research process, not standing outside of it.²² This is already baked into a method like participant observation.

Some factors that are important to reflect upon are gender, nationality, religious and cultural background and how these might interfere with the information one can obtain. Reflexive scholars, in seeking to understand what religious people do, think, feel and say, reflect on both the data presented to them and on their own presence, responses, impressions, experiences and power. David Hufford defines 'reflexivity' as a metaphor from grammar indicating a relationship of identity between subject and object, meaning the inclusion of the actor (scholar, observer) in the account of the act and/or its outcomes. In this sense reflexivity reveals that all knowledge, including that of scholars, is 'subjective'.²³

Since the beginning of this master I have been forced to look at my own background and how it might influence this thesis. The last few years I have worked part-time in an animal welfare organization in Norway. I have been interested in animal rights and animal welfare for as long as I

²² Stausberg and Engler, 96.

²³ Stausberg and Engler, 272.

can remember. However, I do not consider myself an extreme animal activist by any means. I also have a personal interest in Buddhism beyond the academic. The personal interest has been a motivating factor for choosing the topic of this thesis. It also, I believe, has at certain times helped me get more information than I would if I was less personally engaged. During the field research for this thesis and also past field research²⁴ my Buddhist informants have emphasized or indicated that one needs to practice Buddhism to really understand or get in touch with what Buddhism is really about.

I was extremely positive to the ALS project from the beginning. After the field research, I took a short break before I started writing again due to personal reasons. This pause, hopefully, have helped me take a few steps back before analyzing the material from the field.

I did not get the impression I was treated differently because of my gender, but I certainly noticed that I was treated differently because of being Western. For instance, while working with the caretakers. I got much more information from the informants that were native English speaker or spoke English well.

Regarding the interest of my study-subjects or informants, they were extremely generous with information and putting time aside for me and my questions. I quickly realized that many of them wanted to promote the animal practices done at ALS. The video *108 yaks* is a good example of this promotion, which I will get back to in chapter six

2.7 Ethical Considerations

My observations were focused on how the Buddhists treated and viewed animals, and how they viewed the status of the animals in relation to the Dharma. When I interviewed people, my questions revolved around their relationships to animals and what they thought about animals and the Dharma. I have kept the identities of two informants anonymous since that was possible, and those I have named have been informed about their right to withdraw from the research at any time. The informants I have named such as Geshe Thubten Jinpa and Geshe Sherab are public figures. Unfortunately I have not met Lama Zopa Rinpoche personally, so advice and quotes by him I have referred to in this thesis is from the FPMT websites, videos and books. I have also named Tania Duratovic and Phil Hunt since they are officially featured on the Enlightenmentforanimals.org and the ALS' Facebook page. All my key informants have been given my contact info and information about the purpose of the project and what their participation will involve. The form is in compliance with the standard from The Norwegian Centre for Research Data.

²⁴ In the spring of 2018, I did a pilot field research among Tibetan Buddhists (Norwegian and Tibetan) in Oslo, Norway and their views on animals.

3 Context

This chapter expands on current animal issues in Nepal and attempts to present a picture of how animals are viewed in Nepal in order to understand the geographical context of the ALS. The historical background of the Kopan monastery and the FPMT organization will also be presented, as well as a short introduction of the founders of Kopan, FPMT and the ALS; Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

3.1 Buddhism in Nepal

Much has been written about changing views on animals and animal liberation practices among Tibetan Buddhists in contemporary Tibet, while less has been written about animal views among Tibetan Buddhists in Nepal. Nepal is different from Tibet in many ways. In Tibet 91%²⁵ of the population adheres to either Tibetan Buddhism or Bön religion,²⁶ while in Nepal that is officially a secular state 81.3% of the population is Hindu, and the Buddhist population is 9%.²⁷ In Nepal, Buddhism is the second largest religion, with about 2.9 million adherents according to a 2011 consensus. Buddhist believers are from various ethnic groups such as Tamnag, Magar, Gurung, Newar, Bhote, Chantel, Jirel, Lepcha, Yehlmo, Ghale and Sherpa.²⁸ According to the 2011 Nepal consensus, there were around 150 000 Sherpas in Nepal. Sherpas are predominantly followers of the Nyingma Tibetan Buddhist Tradition. In 2006 it was estimated to be around 20 000 Tibetans in Nepal.²⁹

Nepal is in itself a significant country for Buddhists, with many pilgrimage sites. Buddha is believed to have been born in Lumbini in southern Nepal. Nepal also hosts many other important Buddhist landmarks and world heritage sites such as the Boudhanath stūpa, the Swayambhu stūpa as well as Namu Buddha where the Buddha gave his own life to save a starving tigress and her cubs in one of his earlier incarnations according to a Jātaka story.

3.2 Animal issues in Nepal

There are currently several issues related to animal welfare in Nepal, and most of those issues are entangled with religious affairs. The national deity of Nepal is Lord Pashupati -which means “lord

²⁵ According to the 2012 “International Religious Freedom Report”, United States Department of State, In Tibet 78,5% of the population are Tibetan Buddhists, 12,5% are Bön

²⁶ Bön is a Tibetan traditional religion from before Buddhism was introduced in the 8th century.

²⁷ Government of Nepal, National Planning Commission Central Bureau of Statistics, “Statistical Year Book 2017”, Consulted 24.11.18.

²⁸ Government of Nepal, “Population Monograph of Nepal: Volume II (Social Demography)”, Consulted 03.05.19.

²⁹ Rajeev Chaturvedy and David M. Malone. 2012. “A Yam between Two Boulders: Nepal’s Maoist in a time of Peace” in *Nepal in transition: from people's war to fragile peace*, 307.

of the cows”. *Pashu* means cow and the cow is seen as the foremost of all animals.³⁰ The mythology hold that Lord Pashupati started living in Nepal in the form of a deer.³¹ At the Pashupatinath area in Kathmandu there is a *Gaushala*, a barn with cows that have been rescued by Hindus.

A Nepali animal welfare issue most of my Buddhist informants mentioned as disturbing is the animal sacrifices during the yearly *Dashain* festival, a momentous Hindu festival in Nepal. During this ten-day festival, huge amounts of animals are slaughtered/sacrificed and offered to the Hindu goddess *Durga*. Because so many animals are required for the sacrifices of this festival, many animals has to be transported over far distances, from India and Tibet to Nepal, for *Dashain*. Worry about the welfare of animals during transportation was an issue that often appeared in the interviews. *Durga* is a wrathful goddess, and for three days during *Dashain* animals are sacrificed/slaughtered according to size. The smallest animals like chickens are slaughtered the first day, then bigger animals like goats and sheep the next day, and on the third day, large animals like buffaloes are slaughtered. To appease *Durga*, Hindus smear blood “everywhere” for instance on their door-frames during *Dashain*.³²

Gadhimai is another festival in Nepal that includes animal sacrifice. Unlike *Dashain*, it only occurs every fifth year in the village Bariyarpur in southern Nepal. During the two days the *Gadhimai* last, more than 250,000 animals are slaughtered, including water buffaloes, pigs, goats, chicken, mice, and pigeons. These animals are slaughtered as a sacrifice to *Gadhimai*, a Hindu goddess of power. In 2014, as a response to animal rights protesters in Nepal, the *Gadhimai* temple’s high priest argued that the sacrifice should continue and that the world needed to respect the traditional culture.³³ Nonetheless, animal sacrifice was banned at the festival in July 2015, the last time it was supposed to take place.³⁴ The ban caused an abundance of newspaper controversies,

³⁰ Nanditha Krishna. *Sacred animals of India*. Penguin Books India, 2010. 75.

³¹ The Shiva Purana text tells the story about how lord Shiva was called Pashupatinath. Once Lord Shiva got exhausted living in the Kailash Parbat all the time, he vanished without telling anybody. Goddess Parvati, his wife, was very worried when Shiva did not show up for many days. Through her spiritual vision goddess Parvati saw that in a beautiful valley of Kathmandu in the place known as Mirgasthali there was a golden deer grazing along with other flock. Goddess Parvati knew it was Lord Shiva. She went as a disguise herself as deer too and went to Mirgasthali. Both Lord Shiva and goddess Parvati stayed there for long period of time enjoying their deer life. In the absence of Shiva and Parvati other deities started having trouble from devils and monsters. They also used their spiritual vision and found both lord Shiva and Parvati dwelling in the forest of Mirgasthali. In order to get hold of them lord Bhrama and Vishnu made a plan to catch the deer. Bhrahman and Vishnu tried to catch the deer Lord Brahman could only get hold of one of the horns. The horn soon broke into three pieces. One of the pieces dropped in Gokarna, second dropped in Sleshmantak forest and the main piece dropped and vanished in the place where present Shiva Lingam of Pashupatinath sits. Many years later a cow graze in the valley saw his cow showering milk at a particular place every day. Being curious he dug the place and found the three and half feet tall Shiva lingam with four faces. It is believed that the cow grazer could not survive the heat from the lingam and was burnt into ashes. From: We all Nepali “Pashupatinath”, Consulted 22.04.19.

³² Duratovic 31.07.18 2018. Interview by author.

³³ Robert C. Jones, “Animal rights is a social justice issue.” *Contemporary Justice Review* 18.4 (2015), 475.

³⁴ See for instance: Daily Mail “Nepal’s killing fields: FIVE THOUSAND buffalo lie slaughtered at the beginning of Hindu ceremony which sees up to 300,000 animals killed to bring worshippers good luck”, and

and the high priests of Nepal claimed they had never agreed to the ban.³⁵ The Dashain festival also often cause controversies and debates in the newspapers because of the animal sacrifices, and there has been organized boycotting of Dashain several years by various minority groups in Nepal.³⁶ Several of my informants were also concerned about a holy site named Dakshinkali, dedicated to the Hindu goddess *Kali* that is located just outside Kathmandu. At Dakshinkali animal sacrifice takes place all year, not only during festivals. Dakshinkali is situated very close to the Nepal Jonang Buddhist Institute.

The Buddha famously spoke against the immolation and sacrifice of animals that was part of the Vedic tradition at his time, and Buddhists generally distance themselves from animal offering. In 2009 Lama Zopa Rinpoche sent out a letter to his followers regarding the Gadhimai festival, asking them to do practices like reading the *Golden Light Sutra* 100 times, as well as reciting the *Padmasambhava prayer* “for removing obstacles and for quick success, for the sacrifice not to happen.” Lama Zopa Rinpoche also asked the Kopan monastery to send some monks to read this prayer at a stūpa and make strong prayers for the sacrifice not to happen, and dedicate the practice for world peace.³⁷In the letter, Lama Zopa Rinpoche is referring to a “Buddha Boy” who apparently had tried to stop the animal sacrifices by writing to organizations. The Buddha Boy was in 2009 a 19 year old ascetic meditator who some believed was the reincarnation of the Buddha. Lama Zopa Rinpoche did not think the Buddha boy would manage to stop the animal sacrifices because of the Gadhimai significance as a Hindu festival and since Hinduism in Nepal is a religion with millions of followers. Lama Zopa Rinpoche stated that one would need special powers to make people listen. He wrote that “Now it seems to have become a problem in Nepal like the problem with shoes and the Hindus in Pashupati.³⁸ Now probably no matter what the reality is they will think it is the Buddhists who are making problems.”³⁹ Lama Zopa Rinpoche apparently did not believe Buddhists had the ability to stop the Gadhimai festival, but he seemed to believe Western organizations might have these “special powers”: “Western organizations and people like Nobel Peace (laureates), maybe could help, but it would need many.”⁴⁰

Apart from the animal sacrifice, there are also other issues regarding animal welfare in

VICE; “Thousands of Animals Have Been Saved in Nepal as Mass Slaughter Is Cancelled” consulted: 30.03.19.

³⁵ BBC News, “Did Nepal Temple Ban Animal Sacrifices at the Gadhimai festival?”, consulted 04.05.19.

³⁶ See for instance: Hangen, Susan. “Boycotting Dasain: History, memory and ethnic politics in Nepal.” *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nepal*. Routledge, 2012. 139-162.

³⁷ Fpmt.org, “Practices to Stop the Animal sacrifice in Nepal”, consulted 18.04.19

³⁸ I am not sure what Lama Zopa Rinpoche refers to here, but shoes are not allowed inside some of the temples at Pashupatinath. Since this rule was not followed by tourists, they were not allowed to get access to this temple anymore. No fur is allowed, including leather.

³⁹ Fpmt.org, “Practices to Stop the Animal sacrifice in Nepal”, consulted 18.04.19

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Nepal. A big problem is the many male calves that are left on the streets in Kathmandu. These are “by-products” from the dairy industry. The calves are a couple of months when they are taken away from their mother, they get depressed when alone since they are herding animals, according to one of my informants.⁴¹ She said that sometimes these calves form groups that live together. A big problem is that they eat plastic, or get hit by traffic, and that they do not have much food available on the streets of Kathmandu. Several local animal activist work for new legislation regarding dumping of cows in Nepal, in particular Sneha’s Care.

Attempting to understand animal issues in Nepal from a different angle than the Tibetan Buddhist view, I arranged an interview with a Nepali leader for a local animal activist group in Kathmandu. Finding animal activists in Kathmandu was easy since there were many animal activist demonstrations happening in areas popular with tourists, like the Swayambhunath and Boudhanath *stūpas* as well as the Pashupatinath area while I stayed in Kathmandu. These demonstrations were held on Saturdays, since these are popular destinations for tourists as well as local Nepalis during the weekends. The demonstration style seemed very international. Five to ten demonstrators stood in a circle, in black clothes, wearing Guy Fawkes masks, holding laptops that was displaying a documentary about animal cruelty in English and addressed international animal welfare issues.⁴² I got in touch with the leader of this group through their Facebook page. I met him at a restaurant in Kathmandu, and he seemed to be in his thirties or forties. He is highly educated and speaks English well. He has a business in addition to volunteering as a leader for the animal rights organization. He seemed eager to recruit people and quickly asked me to join the demonstrations and said there were several other Europeans involved.⁴³ The animal activist leader told me he did not follow a religion, but that he had an Indian Hindu background. The reason he got into animal activism was that he could no longer deal with seeing animals suffering and being slaughtered out in the open on the streets and temples in Nepal. He said his animal activist group planned to have a drama or act to be performed just before Dashain. They were going to bring a real goat and perform a Dashain scene at Dakshinkali.⁴⁴ According to the animal activist, Nepalis are divided on the matter of animal sacrifice. When I ask him why he thinks the last Gadhimai was canceled, he says it was due to a government decision, not the people being against it. He said that the older and uneducated

⁴¹ Interview with Duratovic at Kopan by author, August 2018.

⁴² Particularly animal welfare issues in Australia it seemed. This focus on Australia puzzled me since there seemed to be more than enough animal welfare issues locally in Nepal but unfortunately I did not have the time to research it in this thesis. My main informant at the ALS, who is Australian said she had nothing to do with this group. As I will get back to, the style of the ALS and the style of the animal activist group are very different.

⁴³ I did not join these demonstrations because it was not relevant enough for my main topic of this thesis and I prioritized spending my time at the ALS. Also, I wanted to research the topic, not be an animal activist during my time in Nepal.

⁴⁴ But they would not sacrifice the goat!

population of Nepal believes in tradition and think if they do not behave in accord with tradition their gods or ancestors will get angry. When the younger Nepalis go against the culture of killing, they are often afraid they will get problems with their parents and family. The animal activist leader also said that many people in Nepal are now turning vegetarian. According to the animal activist leader, 30% of these [that are turning vegetarian] are the older generation and 70% younger generation.⁴⁵ The younger generation is more educated, and they use social media, where they get information about animal welfare problems. Most of the information about animal rights is in English. He also adds that the younger generation is easier to mold since “you can explain to them, the good and the bad.”⁴⁶ Most of the activists in his group are young students, in their late teens or twenties. The activist group was formed in September 2017. I ask him why they wear the Guy Fawkes masks during the demonstrations, and he answers that it is to attract people and make them wonder. It is not to be anonymous. The leader says that it is hard to get attention for animals in Nepal since animals are seen “as a product, not as humanity.”⁴⁷ As an example, he says people do not give food to a one-week old calf on the street, because people in Nepal are afraid that if they feed a calf on the street others will look at them as strange. People feed their own dogs but not calves. Therefore, his animal activist group started a “Feeding Campaign.” They met every Saturday morning, filled pick-up trucks with vegetables and went out to feed street cows. The goal of the campaign was to educate people, to get them to know what they are eating when they eat meat, which he sums up as “life, pain, motherhood.” He laments that one day a year, during the *Lakshmi Puja*,⁴⁸ Nepalis worship the cows and calves on the streets, while the other 364 days a year they do not care about these animals.

One of my Western informants claimed that poverty and lack of both financial and educational resources was among the main reasons Nepalis did not treat animals right, for instance in the example of not helping calves in pain on the streets. The Nepali animal activist accentuated tradition as the main problem. The older Nepalis were, according to him, afraid to upset the gods or ancestors or to be seen as strange by other Nepali people.

⁴⁵ I have not found any evidence of this claim. Despite thorough work has recently been published on vegetarianism in Tibet (Geoffrey Barstow, *Food of Sinful Demons*, 2018), the same research does not seem to have been done in Nepal (yet.) However, one of my informants who grew up in Nepal answered my question about how common it is to be vegetarian in Nepal like this: Nepalis consist of many groups. Within these groups there are more groups. Among the Hindus, the Brahmin caste will be strictly vegetarian while the other castes might eat meat from animal sacrifices. The Buddhist won't do the killing themselves. However, not all Buddhists are strictly vegetarian, many follow rule of three conditions: one should not have seen, heard or suspected the animal is killed for ones own sake Interview with Michael Lobsang Yeshe by author, 10.08.19.

⁴⁶ Interview with anonymous animal activist leader by author 13.08.18.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Lakshmi Puja, is a Hindu religious festival, considered as the main festive day of Diwali, the annual Hindu festival of lights.

When I asked the other informants if they had any particular concerns regarding animal welfare issues in Nepal Geshe Sherab mentioned Dashain and “wrathfully killing animals” first. He also mentioned meat coming from India⁴⁹ as another worry about, because the animals get transported so far. Geshe Sherab claimed this transportation is worse than being killed. In the trucks, the animals often break their legs. He said [this transportation of animals from India to Nepal] was like a scene from a horror movie.⁵⁰

Apart from the animal activist group my informant was the leader of, I discovered numerous local initiatives for animals, for instance the SPCA, Sneha’s care and Catmandu lovers which show local engagement for animals during my stay in Kathmandu.

3.3 Kopan Monastery, FPMT and the founders.

The Kopan monastery in the Kathmandu valley is a Tibetan Buddhist monastery in the Gelug lineage. The monastery was founded by Lama Zopa Rinpoche and Lama Yeshe, as well as their first dedicated Western disciple, a wealthy woman of Russian descent named Zina Rachevsky.⁵¹ They bought the property where the monastery now stands from Nepal’s royal astrologer and established the Kopan Monastery there in 1969.⁵² Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche then founded the FPMT in 1975. Since Lama Yeshe’s death in 1984, Lama Zopa Rinpoche has been the spiritual director of the FPMT and Kopan monastery.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche, is ethnically Sherpa and was born in 1945 in Khumbu, a mountainous area in northeastern Nepal. He was early recognized as the reincarnation of the celebrated Lawudo Lama from the same area. The oracle that confirmed that Lama Zopa Rinpoche was an incarnate lama, a *tülku*, said he should be kept very clean. In order to keep him clean he should abstain from “black foods” such as garlic, radish and raw onions as well as “red” foods which means meat. Chicken and fish were particularly problematic since they feed on worms and other small animals. Eating yaks and goats are considered better since these animals are vegetarians. Lama Zopa Rinpoche writes that he had problems with being a strict vegetarian since they ate food in the house of the benefactors who ate meat, but he abstained from meat on auspicious days such as the full

⁴⁹ India was by 2014 the world’s second largest exporter of beef, claiming 20 percent of the world market, and was being forecast to export 1.9 million tons by the end of 2014 according to The US department of agriculture, See http://apps.fas.usda.gov/psdonline/circulars/livestock_poultry.pdf, Consulted: 30.03.19.

⁵⁰ Geshe Sherab, 22.08.18. Interview with author.

⁵¹ Kay, “The Emergence of the NKT in Britain”, *Tibetan and Zen Buddhism in Britain: Transplantation, Development and adaptation*, Routledge, 2007, 53.

⁵² Astrology is also important to Tibetan Buddhists. When the fifth Dalai Lama, was “threatened by inauspicious astrological signs” 100 yaks, 100 000 fish as well as prisoners were liberated in order to prolong his life. Also, the astrological Pig year is seen as problematic for the current Dalai Lama, therefore animals are liberated for him during these years. See Holler, “The Ritual of Freeing Lives”, 211, 214.

moon and the last day of the month.⁵³ Lama Zopa Rinpoche studied in Tibet in the 1950s, at Dungkar Monastery and the Domo Geshe's monastery. Lama Yeshe was born in Tibet in 1935 near Lhasa and entered the *Je* college of *Sera* monastic university at the age of 6, where he lived and studied. Both the lamas had to leave Tibet in 1959 because of the Chinese annexation, and they met at the settlement camp of Buxaduar.⁵⁴ Lama Zopa Rinpoche initially studied under Lama Yeshe, but they quickly developed a very close teacher-disciple relationship. Although Lama Zopa Rinpoche was recognized as the reincarnation of a Nepalese Nyingma lama, he later entered one of the Tibetan monasteries associated with the famous Tromo Geshe Rinpoche (1865–1937) and ordained as a *Gelug* monk.

In the late 1960s and 1970s Kathmandu was an essential stop on the so-called “hippie trail”, particularly for those westerners who sought exotic alternatives to their own cultural and religious background and looked for new spiritual experiences in the East.⁵⁵ At this time Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche started holding meditation courses at Kopan. These courses became very popular among westerners in the 1960s, and still are today. In 1974, fourteen Western monks and nuns received ordination at Kopan monastery. However, most Western students were not ordained and returned to their home countries. Many of these students soon realized the need for their own Western Dharma centers and started centers for meetings and meditation groups. Additionally, in 1974, the two lamas gave their first tour in the West, which boosted the development of their fledgling network. According to Lama Zopa Rinpoche's CV, the two lamas had twelve Western students in 1975.⁵⁶ Kopan monastery has remained the spiritual and organizational core of the movement, as well as being a place for Tibetan Geshe's to acclimatize to Western ways by teaching students and learning some English.⁵⁷ This international network, with the Kopan monastery at the core was the start of what turned into the FPMT in 1975. Now there are 160 FPMT centers spread all over the world. The FPMT is one of the longest-running international networks of Gelug Tibetan Buddhist centers in the world, and today it has its head office in Oregon, USA. FPMT's mission is to preserve and spread Mahāyāna Buddhism worldwide. On the FPMT website one can read that FPMT aims to “offer people what we have: the combined knowledge of Buddha's teachings and the modern way of life”.⁵⁸

⁵³ Jamyang Wangmo, *The Lawudo lama: stories of reincarnation from the Mount Everest region*. Simon and Schuster, 2013, 173. Lama Zopa Rinpoche says he later was a vegetarian, when he stayed in India.

⁵⁴ Kay, “The Emergence of the NKT in Britain”, 53.

⁵⁵ Kay, 54.

⁵⁶ Fpmt.org, “Curriculum Vitae of Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche”, Consulted: 18.04.19.

⁵⁷ Kay, 54.

⁵⁸ Lamayeshe.com, “The Origins of FPMT - Why the FPMT Organization was Established” Consulted 07.01.18.

3.3.1 FPMT's *Vast Visions*

FPMT's "Vast Visions" were written down in 2007, and these visions are based on ideas and wishes Lama Zopa Rinpoche has for the future of the FPMT.⁵⁹ The vast visions fall into four categories:

1. Offering Service to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama is the foremost spiritual leader of the Gelug Tibetan Buddhists
2. Holy Objects for World Peace. Lama Zopa Rinpoche wants the FPMT to build many holy objects everywhere, as many as possible. By doing that it is easier for sentient beings to purify their negative karma and easier to create merit.⁶⁰
3. Supporting Practice and Realizations. Including retirement programs, monasteries and nunneries, retreats and recitations.
4. Social Services. Benefiting animal's falls under the fourth vast vision along with healing programs, projects to help young people, parenting programs, providing substance abuse treatment program and centers hosting interfaith events. Under the "Benefiting Animals" category there is a quote by Lama Zopa Rinpoche:

As much as possible [I would like] for there to be animal blessing events when I visit the centers. The animal blessings can be in public places and children can come and other people who are interested, those who don't come to the center much. There needs to be one table that is piled high with holy objects, mantras recited and then blown on water, and then the blessed water can be sprinkled over the animals. There needs to be good advertising so more people come.⁶¹

According to the FPMT website, it is imperative for Lama Zopa Rinpoche to take care of *all* sentient beings, and this includes animals and insects. This is the reason why FPMT have animal projects like the ALS at Kopan and Maitri Charitable Trust in Bodhgaya. It is also noted that many FPMT centers host regular animal blessings in parks and public places. While preparing for my field research during the spring and summer of 2018 I contacted some FPMT centers in Sweden, England, and Denmark⁶² to ask if they were planning animal blessings. While they had no immediate plan to host animal blessings or animal liberation practice several said they wanted to host it as soon as possible since they were well aware it was a high priority for Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

The second category, "Holy Objects for World Peace" was also evident at the ALS. The holy objects

⁵⁹ Fpmt.org, "Lama Zopa Rinpoche's Vast Visions for FPMT" Consulted: 07.11.18

⁶⁰ Ibid. Consulted 18.04.19.

⁶¹ Fpmt.org, Lama Zopa Rinpoche's Vast Visions for FPMT, Consulted: 07.11.18

⁶² The Jamyang center in London, Tong-nyi Nying-je Ling center in Copenhagen, and Yeshe Nobu center in Stockholm. Currently there is no FPMT center in Norway.

such as the stūpa in the goats paddock, and the head-bopping bag used for blessings were very important and in focus. Also, the purpose of the animal liberation rituals are usually purifying the animals from accumulated bad karma so that they can achieve a better rebirth in the next life.

3.4 The Animal Liberation Sanctuary

Lama Zopa Rinpoche initiated the Animal Liberation Sanctuary in 2004 and it was officially started in 2006. The Kopan monastery already had a tradition for keeping a few cows for milk on the premise, but the ALS was created to house animals that are liberated from slaughter. Currently, the sanctuary is home to eight cows, 50 goats, one cat, one dog, and one sheep. The sanctuary was to a large extent financed by its Western project directors as well as international funding. I will write more extensively about the ALS in chapter six. I tried to understand why Lama Zopa Rinpoche is so concerned with the liberation and welfare of animals. I could not find any better reasons than that he is concerned about all sentient beings, as my informants told me.

4 The Position of Animals in a Tibetan Buddhist Worldview

4.1 Animals in Tibetan Buddhism – Research History

In the field of History of Religions, animals have usually been studied as symbols and ritual objects. Lately, many scholars have insisted that the subjective existence of animals should be taken into consideration, and scholars of religions should explore the religious meaning of *actual animal lives*.⁶³ The need for such insistence illustrates that scholars of religion and religions often regard animals in contexts that does not have much to do with the animals themselves. Paul Waldau, a leading scholar in the field of animals and religion, claims that to study animals and religion properly is to explore how religion engages the “nearby biological individuals outside human communities.”⁶⁴ Waldau and scholars with similar view on animals and religion insist that we need to be careful not to render the actual animals absent while studying animals and religion. The insistence on addressing “actual animals” reveals that the juxtaposition “animals and religion” is political in nature, when we consider that generations of scholarship on the theme only mentioned animals in passing or as a springboard to discuss something else.⁶⁵ Attending to animals helps us to see the living dialectical process by which we create the category “animals”, and how we attach meaning to the beings that are set within this label. This meaning again shape how actual animals are treated, and at the same time these actual animals, with their presence and behavior shape these religious investments.⁶⁶

The scholar David Holler noted in his 2002 article “The Ritual of Freeing Lives” how little had been written about the Buddhist practice of animal liberation, despite its widespread practice throughout Buddhist Asian countries such as Sri Lanka, Mongolia, China, Japan, Burma and Thailand.⁶⁷ The ecologists Henry Shiu and Leah Stokes has written about ecological issues related to Buddhist animal liberation practices in China. In their 2012 article “Buddhist Animal Release Practices”⁶⁸ they also pointed out how little had been written about Buddhist animal liberation practices by scholars. They hypothesized about whether the lack of research into animal liberation practices in Buddhism was due to it being so “obvious” and literal.

When I analyzed the data from the field, I discovered that what was going on at ALS could

⁶³ Aaron Gross, Oxford Handbooks Online, “Animals and Religion”, consulted 14.04.19.

⁶⁴ Paul Waldau, “Seeing the Terrain We Walk. Features of the Contemporary Landscape of ‘Religion and Animals’ ” Waldau and Patton (2006), 40.

⁶⁵ Gross, Oxford Handbooks Online, “Animals and Religion”, consulted 14.04.19.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ David Holler, “The Ritual of Freeing Lives”, 2002 *Tibet, Past and Present: Religious and secular culture in Tibet*. Brill: Leiden, 207.

⁶⁸ Henry Shiu and Leah Stokes. “Buddhist animal release practices: historic, environmental, public health and economic concerns.” *Contemporary Buddhism* 9.2 (2008): 181.

be described as “embodied religion”. The Buddhism in the lives of the animals is something physical, something they practice with their body. For instance, they move around holy objects or hear mantras, and as far as my understanding of animals goes the Buddhism in these animals’ lives is not of intellectual nature. My informants assumed that most animals do not understand aspects of Buddhism like philosophy, texts and meditation and therefore the practices at the ALS were adjusted so that the animals could have the best possibility to be benefited. The animals were taken around auspicious objects, head-bopped with blessed objects and recited for so they could hear the sound of holy mantras and the like. Tibetan Buddhism accentuates the mind over materiality and considers the physical world as impermanent and not a place to look for continuous joy, as well as something we can never truly see objectively unless we are enlightened. However, in the case of Buddhist rituals for animals, Buddhism seems to be “stripped down” to its more material aspects.

The anthropologist Laurel Kendall writes that “... religious materialism has (until recently) been an awkward category for religious studies, particularly the study of non-western religion.”⁶⁹ Many scholars have written about the rejection of material culture in religion and most view it as a trend that has continued in the West since the reformation. The Reformation led to a rejection of material aspects of religion and a belief that true religion was a return to sacred texts, to the “word”.⁷⁰ Putting it differently, the Reformation “textualized religion” and emphasized individual faith, while it also led to an increasing skepticism towards rituals and material aspects of religious practice.⁷¹ During and after the Reformation religion increasingly became an intellectual and personal pursuit. The Enlightenment enhanced this intellectual aspect and the material “stuff” of religion became something that was viewed by many as irrational and superstitious, as old-fashioned leftovers from the “Dark Ages”. In addition to this Descartes had popularized the mind-body dualism in western thought. This view roughly holds that the body, the whole material world including all non-human animals, were considered to be a purely physical machine that operated according to laws of nature. The mind on the other hand, was seen to have no material component and could function outside of physical/natural laws. Mind and body thus became binary opposites. The mind was no longer embodied and religion with its increased focus on belief, doctrines and texts over materiality fell into the dichotomies of mind/body, spiritual/material and transcendent/immanent.⁷²

In a similar manner, the spheres of religion as a belief versus religions material culture were viewed

⁶⁹ Laurel Kendall, “On the Problem of Material Religion and Its Prospects for the Study of Korean Religion.” *Journal of Korean Religions* 1.1 (2010): 94.

⁷⁰ Richard D. Mann, “Material Culture and the Study of Hinduism and Buddhism.” *Religion Compass* 8.8 (2014): 265.

⁷¹ Mann, “Material Culture and the Study of Hinduism and Buddhism”, 265.

⁷² Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online, “Animal Consciousness,” consulted 17.02.19.

more and more as polar opposites. The orientalist study of Indian religion and culture in the Victorian colonial period focused on philological studies of Indian languages like Sanskrit and Pali and the religious texts. Material culture was usually just taken into account if it could support text-studies. Buddhism was studied as a textualized religion by orientalists.⁷³ The texts were seen as the ‘real’ tradition, and Western scholars at that time were concerned with constructing a narrative of origin. In the colonial period Buddhism was perceived as having degenerated from a rational origin of ethical heights to a corrupt, superstitious and idolatrous tradition due to the emergence of Buddhist iconography, rituals and material culture.⁷⁴ The materiality of Buddhism was seen as an indication of a society that had de-evolved to superstition from sophistication. Tibetan Buddhism with its rich material culture, was unknown for European scholars for long, and it was initially called “Lamaism” and not seen as authentically Buddhist.⁷⁵

Most of the study of Buddhism from this period was so-called “armchair” scholarship, conducted far from the material and cultural legacy. This shifted in the 1980s and 1990s. Gregory Schopen, a scholar of Buddhism wrote a three-volume series where he demonstrates that many of the long held historical “truths” of Buddhism breaks down if one examines the archaeological records of what Indian Buddhist monastics and believers actually practiced.⁷⁶ While Buddhist texts do contain strong critique of the material world, there are significant gaps between the ideologies in textual sources and the world of material evidence. Schopen discovered that scholars often had ignored or undermined archeological records if they put claims of textual sources into question. Schopen repeatedly highlights a bias in the study of Indian Buddhism where ‘[t]extuality overrides actuality’.⁷⁷ Schopen’s work debunks the theories of previous generations of scholars of Buddhism who privileged text over material evidence, for instance their claim that the emergence of the cult of images in Buddhism was a lay development that the monastic community had little to do with it. Schopen demonstrates through inscriptional evidence, that the image cult was overwhelmingly a monastic concern and seemed to be a monastically initiated cult’.⁷⁸ Which was far from the established assumption held by scholars, who believed that representatives of the Buddhist intellectual and textual traditions did not delve into ‘idolatry’. Schopen’s work illustrates that divisions between monastic and lay, intellectual and folk traditions, or high and low traditions are simply not well justified when one examines the material record of a tradition. This focus on the

⁷³ Mann, 266.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Donald S. Jr. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-la: Tibetan Buddhism and the west*. University of Chicago Press, 1998, 161.

⁷⁶ Mann, 269.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

embodiment of religion in relation to material culture has led scholars to return to the work of the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty(1908–1961). Merleau-Ponty argued that perception was not separate from the world but an integral part of the world, which is similar to the Yogācāra view in Buddhism.⁷⁹ Merleau-Ponty was trying to overcome the problems inherent in Cartesian dualism; his work represents an attempt to form a phenomenology of the body that affirms the centrality of perception and embodiment. Merleau-Ponty’s arguments have become part of a broader project within the material culture of religion that seeks to ‘overcome disabling dichotomies’ such as subject/object, spirit/matter and transcendence/immanence. Through this phenomenological approach, scholars hope to negate the post-Enlightenment impulse to separate mind from matter or religion from materiality.⁸⁰

To my knowledge not much has been written about animal liberation practices and views on animals among followers of the Tibetan Buddhists tradition in Nepal. Therefore, I have leaned on the abundant and recent research that has been done in Tibet on the topic. In Tibet, the view on animals has changed over the last 30 years. There is a new generation of charismatic Buddhist leaders that has been particularly concerned with animal welfare since the 1990s. The increased concern for animals can be seen as a part of a more substantial Tibetan Buddhist moral reform that began in Tibet in the 1980s. This reform was, and still is, an attempt to revitalize the Tibetan and Buddhist culture in the post-Mao era.⁸¹ Part of this new reform is the ten new virtues (*dge bcu*) that originated at the most significant Buddhist institution on the Tibetan plateau, the Larung Gar Buddhist Academy.⁸² The ten new virtues were systematized between 2008 and 2010. Three of the virtues refers to animals; not selling livestock for slaughter, not hunting and not wearing animal fur.⁸³ These virtues have inspired the recent anti-slaughter movement in Tibet.⁸⁴ Holly Gayley argues that the new ten virtues might be a way of setting the Tibetan apart from the Chinese by building a stronger Tibetan Buddhist identity in contrast to the Chinese secular identity. According to Gayley, this is a way to turn the civilizing discourse, making the Chinese Han modernity the secular other

⁷⁹ See for instance: Dan Lusthaus “What is and isn’t Yogācāra.” *Yogacara Buddhism Research Association Online Articles*. (<http://www.acmuller.net/yogacara/articles/intro-uni.Htm>) (2004). for a good introduction to Yogācāra.

⁸⁰ Mann, 270.

⁸¹ Holly Gayley, , “Reimagining Buddhist ethics on the Tibetan plateau.” *Journal of Buddhist ethics* 20 (2013): 253.

⁸² Larung Buddhist Academy has been a leading advocate of ethical reforms in Tibetan Buddhism since it was founded by Khenpo Jigme Phüntsook in 1980. Larung Buddhist Academy has a considerable influence across the Tibetan plateau due to the fact that a lot of the monks and nuns that are educated there later return to their home villages across Tibet.

⁸³ Emily Yeh has written about the significance of the fur burning in Tibet: Emily T. Yeh, “Blazing pelts and burning passions: Nationalism, cultural politics, and spectacular de commodification in Tibet.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 72.2 (2013): 319-344.

⁸⁴ Kabzung Gaerrang has written an interesting article on the slaughter renunciation movement: Gaerrang. “Development as Entangled Knot: The Case of the Slaughter Renunciation Movement in Tibet, China.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* (2015): 927-951.

compared to a noble Tibetan tradition founded in Buddhist ethics.⁸⁵ The first of the ten vows “Not to sell for slaughter: One should not sell horses, cattle, sheep or dogs to be butchered”⁸⁶ has become representational for the new Buddhist ethical movement in Tibet. On the cover of the 2010 handbook, *The Code of Ten Virtues promulgated by Serta Larung* one can behold a picture of yaks grazing on the grassland. The yak has connotations with traditional and nomadic Tibetan life. One could imagine from this that the book suggests that adhering to Buddhist ethics and preserving the Tibetan culture is linked.⁸⁷ In 2000 Khenpo Jigme Phüntsook (1933-2004), the renowned founder of the Larung Gar, held a speech for several thousand Tibetans urging them to stop selling their yaks and sheep for slaughter. He had also held several speeches about this topic in the 1990s.⁸⁸

4.2 *Animals in the Buddhist Cosmology*

According to Buddhism, animals and humans alike are caught in the circle of *saṃsāra*. There is no creator god in Buddhism, and time and life is seen as beginningless. Each life state is interrelated and interchangeable and all life forms take a new birth after the death of each particular form.⁸⁹ Buddhists believe that beings are reborn in one of six realms or destinies (*gati*) of existence. These six realms consist of the god realm, the realm of demi-gods (*asuras*), the human realm, the animal realm, a realm of hungry ghosts (*preta*) and the hell realms (*nāraka*).⁹⁰ Notably, humans have a realm for themselves, while all other animals are in the animal *gati* together. Furthermore, the animal realm is considered to be inferior (*durgati*) to the human and god realms. The animal realm is considered among the unfortunate forms of reincarnation because the animal world is considered more miserable than the human and god realms (*surgati*). Animals are threatened by hunger, thirst, cold and heat and they are also believed to fall into promiscuity and incestuous relations easily.⁹¹ Another reason animals are considered to be below humans in Buddhist cosmology is that animals are not believed to be able to develop liberating insight and progress along the Buddhist Path.⁹² No sentient being is bound to a particular realm, and when for instance a hungry ghost, a human or an

⁸⁵ Gayley, “Reimagining Buddhist Ethics on the Tibetan Plateau”, 263.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 272.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 259.

⁸⁸ Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok published the book *Heart Advice to Tibetans for the 21st Century* in 1995.

⁸⁹ Christopher Chapple, *Nonviolence to animals, earth, and self in Asian traditions*. SUNY Press, 1993. 19.

⁹⁰ There are several hells in Buddhism. To read more on this, see for instance “The Buddhist Hell: An Early Instance of the Idea?”, Jens Braarvig, *Numen* 56, 2009.

⁹¹ Florin Deleanu, “ ‘Buddhist Ethology’ in the Pāli Canon: Between Symbol and Observation.” *The Eastern Buddhist* 32.2 (2000):85. Deleanu writes about how the misconception that animals are more prone to incest and promiscuous behavior than humans, is a widespread misconception. In reality these phenomena rarely happen since it is so biologically unfavorable, and different species have different strategies to avoid it from happening. Inbreeding becomes more frequent when human breeders do not take care to prevent it and limits the number of choices an animal can make, and the natural avoidance strategies are hindered. Inbreeding is not something natural or common among non-human animals, Deleanu states.

⁹² Deleanu, “Buddhist “Ethology” in the Pali Canon, 85. I will get back to this topic in chapter 7.

animal dies their consciousness will be reborn. The next life could be in the same *gati*, but it could also be as a god, human or any other form of sentient life. Then after that life ends, the consciousness will again be reborn, and die again and so on. Each individual consciousness will proceed and eventually experience all kinds of life forms, but the karma of the individual determines where it will be reborn.⁹³ *Karma* are the actions, habits and tendencies that an individual carry at the moment of their death.⁹⁴

While animals and humans live in distinctly different realms in the Buddhist cosmology, they are not considered fundamentally different kinds of beings. Furthermore, there is no fixed boundary between the realms. Someone who is a human in this life can be an animal in their next life and vice versa. In other words, being born as an animal is based on karma, not on a core identity. Buddhists have concluded that all individuals have lived as animals many times in the past.⁹⁵ Being a human or an animal is a temporary state, and the human/animal distinction is fluid. Building on this, one could say that in Buddhism all sentient beings share a community.

In Tibetan, no word corresponds perfectly to the English word “animal,” but several terms are used to describe non-human animals. The most common Tibetan word for all animals is *düdro*, which means “one who goes bent over.” In other words, animals are for the most part seen as those who walk on all fours.⁹⁶ There are also other words, such as *sokchak*, which means “one who has life.” Humans and animals alike are included in the category *semchen* which means “sentient being who possess a mind. Both *sokchak* and *semchen* refer to all animals, including humans. However, in the same way, as the English term “animal,” these terms are commonly used to refer to all sentient beings except for humans.⁹⁷ However, gods, hungry ghosts, humans and animals are all considered to be capable of thought. The presence of mind is the unifying factor among beings in the six realms. What is meant by *mind*, and what abilities the animal mind have, does not seem to be completely agreed upon among Buddhists. However, when Lama Zopa Rinpoche describes animals, he seem to emphasize that they have a mind capable of feeling:

⁹³ Notably, in Buddhism there is no “individual consciousness” such as a self or soul. For more on this topic, see for instance: William Waldron’s: *The Buddhist unconscious: The alaya-vijnana in the context of Indian Buddhist thought*. Routledge, 2003 or Dan Lusthaus’ : *Buddhist Phenomenology: A philosophical investigation of Yogacara Buddhism and the Ch’eng Wei-shih Lun*. Routledge, 2014.

⁹⁴ Greed, for instance, is believed to cause a rebirth as a hungry ghost (Barstow, “On the Moral Standing of Animals in Tibetan Buddhism”, 4.)

⁹⁵ Barstow, “On the Moral Standing of Animals in Tibetan Buddhism”, 4.

⁹⁶ Given its emphasis on four-legged movement, this term is sometimes used in a way that excludes non-quadruped animals such as birds (*bya*), fish (*nya*), and insects (*bu srin*). In practical usage, however, the term *düdro* often refers to all non-human animals, and is, therefore, arguably the closest Tibetan term to the common usage of the English word “animal”.

⁹⁷ Geoffrey Barstow, “On the moral standing of animals in Tibetan Buddhism.” *Études mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines* 50 (2019), 3.

Animals have feelings. They have the same mind as we have, and also want happiness, like we do. For example, if you suddenly touch them, they are immediately frightened. They get frightened if somebody beats or hits them with a stick. We also get frightened. If somebody throws cold water on our body, suddenly we feel a shock. It is the same for animals. They have the same mind, and it is very important what happens to them.⁹⁸

In the quote above, Lama Zopa Rinpoche focus on how animals and humans are similar in how they feel shock, fear, happiness and other feelings. This viewpoint seem to be a reason humans should care deeply about what happens to animals. This resembles the view on animals held by some important ethicists, such as the philosophers Peter Singer (1946-) and Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) who have argued that it is an animal's ability to suffer or experience happiness that gives them moral value, and that justifies their protection from harm.

4.3 Compassion for Animals in Tibetan Buddhism

Compassion (*karuṇā*) combined with wisdom (*prajñā*) is the basis of the Tibetan Buddhist teachings. According to the Buddhist cosmology we have all lived infinite number of lives before, and therefore any two beings have been related as mother and child in previous lifetimes. In order to develop compassion toward animals, Buddhists are sometimes asked to reflect on this and view an animal as no different than their present biological mother, or other close family member, worthy of gratitude and love. Lama Zopa Rinpoche states that it is important for humans to feel a connection with animals. He writes that we should not think that animals bodies have nothing to do with us, that they are permanent, truly existent and that animals' minds are completely different than our human minds. Also, we should not believe that our mind could not create such animal bodies in the future or that it has not created such a body in the past. Lama Zopa Rinpoche declares that:

Not only has each of these animals been your mother, they have been your father, brother, and sister numberless times. We are all the same; we are all one family – it's just that we have different bodies at the moment. We should feel as close to these animals as we do to our present family. We should hold them in our hearts.⁹⁹

To envision all living beings as ones past family members is a common practice to develop compassion in Tibetan Buddhism. The eighth Karmapa,¹⁰⁰ Mikyö Dorjé who lived in the sixteenth century even wrote it into the title of his anti-meat polemic *Letter on the Unsuitability of Eating the Meat of our Past Mothers*. This suggests that most Tibetan Buddhists were comfortable thinking about animals as their mothers, and thereby blurring the lines that separates humans and animals.¹⁰¹

The 19th century prominent Nyingma teacher Patrul Rinpoche follows this in this quote:

Animals experience unimaginable suffering. Therefore, whenever you see animal suffering, imagine that you are that animal and contemplate the suffering they are experiencing. Meditate with fierce compassion for all those born as animals. More specifically, if you have animals on your own, care for them with kindness and

⁹⁸ Lamayeshe.com, “The Karma of Killing Animals”, consulted 18.04.19.

⁹⁹ FPMT, *Liberating Animals from the Danger of Death*, 10.

¹⁰⁰ The Karmapa is the head of the Kagyu lineage in Tibetan Buddhism.

¹⁰¹ Barstow, “On the Moral Standing of Animals in Tibetan Buddhism”, 7.

compassion. There is not a single animal – not even the smallest insect – that does not experience pleasure and pain. Further, there is not one that has not been our mother or father. For these reasons, think of them all with love and compassion.¹⁰²

Here he asks his followers to feel with the animals, and imagine how they experience suffering and view these animals as our mother or father. The 9th century Tibetan Buddhist teacher Gampopa also gives an example of this practice of compassion:

Imagine if your own mother was before you, old and frail yet others enslaved her, beat her, cut her, killed her, and cooked her. If this happened, would you feel compassion? It is certain that all beings now born as animals were once your own mother, and that they suffer in just this way. How can you not feel compassion? Contemplate this and aspire for them to be free from suffering.¹⁰³

In this quote Gampopa underscores the similarity of human and animal experience. Animals' suffering is in fact so similar to the suffering of humans that they are interchangeable; one can imagine a human in the animal's position and vice versa. The contemporary Tibetan Buddhist teacher Tsultrim Lodro asks his Buddhist followers to simulate the experience of an ox being suffocated:

Whether the suffering is great or not, you can see for yourself by covering your mouth and nose with your hand. Without the breath coming in and out, it doesn't take much time. Just remain like that for a minute, and you understand what the experience is like. Even just by ourselves for a minute, deprived of breath, there is a lot of suffering and fear, panic and dread. For living creatures, minute by minute—from one to two, two to three, three to four, and farther and farther—the suffering greatly increases.¹⁰⁴

Here Tsultrim Lodro encourages his audience to take a moment to experience the panic that precedes actual suffocation. The rest is up to inference, imagining how the process goes from there up to the point when the veins burst, and the creature dies. Clearly, he articulates a continuum between animal and human experience, asking his audience to step into the place of livestock and empathetically imagine their suffering.¹⁰⁵

Barstow has pointed out that many Buddhist teachers have stressed the subjective experience of pain that animals feel and asked humans to empathize with it. For instance, in this passage from the 18th century Nyingma Buddhist teacher Jigmé Lingpa's autobiography the reader is asked to feel with the animal that is about to be slaughtered:

Having now become animals, your fathers, mothers, siblings and friends from previous lives tremble with fear in the butcher's sinful hands, tears streaming from their eyes, and panting for breath. In that state they wonder what to do. Alas, there is no refuge! There is nowhere to go! Thinking that, right now in this place, they may be killed, their urgent suffering is great. In such a state, like one approaching a terrifying pit of hell-fire, their body is turned upside down, their muzzle is tied up, and their eyes move wildly with lights shining forth. What they see is their stomach being opened up. With their feet perpendicular, they are set on the path to the next life without even a quiver.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Barstow, "On the Moral Standing of Animals in Tibetan Buddhism", 8.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 7.

¹⁰⁴ Holly Gayley, "The Compassionate Treatment of Animals: A Contemporary Buddhist Approach in Eastern Tibet." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 45.1 (2017): 39-40.

¹⁰⁵ Gayley, "The Compassionate Treatment of Animals – A Contemporary Buddhist Approach in Eastern Tibet", 40.

¹⁰⁶ Barstow, "On the Moral Standing of Animals in Tibetan Buddhism", 5.

Jigmé Lingpa sees animals as very self-aware and aware of what is happening and what is going to happen to it. The animal is also afraid of dying and “wonders what to do.” In this passage, the animal seem to reflect on what is happening to it, not just reacting out of instinct.¹⁰⁷

There is also an example of this in Patrul Rinpoche’s *Words of My Perfect Teacher* when he addresses the slaughter of lambs for their skins:

As soon as a lamb is born its senses are complete. It can feel comfort and discomfort. But it is immediately killed, just as it first begins to enjoy life. It may be only a stupid animal, but it is afraid of dying. It loves life, but experiences the pain of dying

Here he describes how a lamb when it is born it starts to enjoy life and fear death. Even if it is “only a stupid animal” it is self-aware and capable of understanding what is going on and if death is at hand for example. In another passage, Patrül asks readers to “Think of an individual animal, such as a sheep or a yak, that is about to be slaughtered. As it is taken from the flock, it experiences inconceivable terror” Following Jigme Lingpa, Patrül makes it clear that animals are self-aware and capable of understanding their situation. Animals love and enjoy their lives, are afraid of death, and understands when death is at hand.¹⁰⁸

Lama Zopa Rinpoche urges his followers to put themselves in the situation of the animal in a similar manner as Tsultrim Lodro did in the example above with the suffocating ox:

It is also good to ask yourself how it would be if somebody killed you with a knife. How would you feel in that situation? For example, if you put your finger in hot water, can you bear that? You can’t bear it. It’s the same when you kill animals. There is no good result from it. There is no question about that.¹⁰⁹

According to Lama Zopa Rinpoche this quote from the Buddha is related to having compassion for animals and insects.

“The thought of completed purification realization (the bodhicitta) and preserving Dharma, Practicing the holy Dharma and generating compassion from the heart, these four Dharmas have infinite qualities, the end of these is not spoken by Buddha”¹¹⁰

Lama Zopa Rinpoche writes that each time you follow these advices, if you visualize, preserve and practice the Dharma as well as develop your compassion, you create unbelievable good karma. This limitless good karma brings you to full enlightenment, but it also brings “so much happiness and peace to the insects and animals. This is making all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas most pleased and happy. This is the best meaning of your life.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Barstow, “On the moral standing of animals in Tibetan Buddhism”, 6.

¹⁰⁹ Lamayeshe.com, “The Karma of Killing Animals”, Consulted, 06.11.18.

¹¹⁰ From the *Sutra Requested by Lodro Gyatso*. <https://www.facebook.com/lamazoparinpoche/photos/snake-does-three-week-retreat/10154715863911241/> Consulted: 19.05.19.

¹¹¹ Fpmt.org, “Annual Review 2018, Live with Compassion”, Letter from Lama Zopa Rinpoche, August 2018.

4.4 The First Precept – *Ahiṃsā*

The first Buddhist precept “not to harm or injure living things” (*pranātipatadviratīh*) is part of the five moral precepts¹¹² lay Buddhists commit to follow. Buddhism prohibits intentionally injuring or killing another sentient being. The vow not to kill and not to encourage others to kill, is also the first precept in the Bodhisattva vows from the 5th century Brahmajāla sūtra.

When talking of the precept of not killing although principally it refers to murder, you should also avoid killing animals as well. It is important for Buddhist practitioners to have this instinctive sense that whenever one sees another sentient being that we are all living beings.¹¹³

In the quote above the Dalai Lama explicitly asserts that the first precept of Buddhism, not to injure or take life (*ahiṃsā*), also refers to animals. He underlines that animals and humans are foremost similar, in that they are living beings. Famously, the Buddha spoke against the immolation and sacrifice of animals that was part of the Vedic tradition at his time. He also spoke out against trade in living beings and said this is one of the livelihoods to be avoided by Buddhist lay people.¹¹⁴

Ian Harris points out that even though the first precept applies to all forms of life, the Buddha’s position was that “if you can’t really see them, then you can’t be said to have caused intentional harm.”¹¹⁵ In this way, Buddhism is not as extreme as Jainism,¹¹⁶ but Buddhism does not encourage a lack of care either. Buddhism has since its inception regarded *intentional* killing as wrong since it is the intention that makes an action karmically productive.¹¹⁷ Intention is most important in Buddhism, and the historical Buddha emphasized that the goodness or badness of an act was not primarily a by-product of the sequence of actions done in the proper order and form as was the focus in the contemporary Brahmanical religion. Buddha ethicized the notion of karma, focusing on intention rather than slavish compliance in pursuit of ritual correctness. Following this, the *Vinayas*, the rules of the Buddhist monastics, restricts them from walking during the rainy season in order to avoid killing small creatures like insects.¹¹⁸ However, these rules are not binding

¹¹² The rest of which are, the second precept: not to steal, the third precept: no sexual misconduct, the fourth precept: no lying and the fifth conduct: not to get intoxicated.

¹¹³ The Dalai Lama, Lamayeshe.com, “The Spirit of Manjushri”, consulted 03.04.19.

¹¹⁴ Martin Southwold, Buddhism in Life, *The Anthropological Study of religion and the Sinhalese Practice of Buddhism*. When the anthropologist Martin Southwold asked Sinhalese villagers what Buddhism had taught them, they replied: “not to kill animals.”

¹¹⁵ Ian Harris, “A vast unsupervised recycling plant: Animals and the Buddhist Cosmos.” *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics* (2006). 209.

¹¹⁶ Jainism and Buddhism are both ancient Indian religions. Mahavira the founder of Jainism and the Buddha are generally accepted as contemporaries. Jainism and Buddhism share many features, terminology and ethical principles, but emphasize them differently. Both are *śramaṇa* ascetic traditions that believe it is possible to attain liberation from *samsāra* through spiritual and ethical disciplines. They differ in some core doctrines such as those on asceticism, Middle Way versus *Anekantavada*, and self versus no-self. For a good overview on the topic of Jainism and Buddhism’s similarities and differences when it comes to *ahiṃsā* see Christopher Chapple’s book: *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth and Self in Asian Traditions* (in bibliography)

¹¹⁷ Harris, “A Vast Unsupervised Recycling Plant”, 210. I will problematize this later in the paper.

¹¹⁸ Harris, 210.

for Buddhist lay people. It would be impossible for a Buddhist peasant to prevent all harm on worms and other small insects while plowing the field. While this seems to be contrary to *ahiṃsā* on which the first precept is founded the peasant is allowed to plow the field because he has no intention of killing creatures in the field, and also since cultivating food is essential for society and the *sangha* – the Buddhist monastic community. Monastics on the other hand, must do their utmost to avoid harming any animals or plants and can therefore not participate in agricultural labor.¹¹⁹

Paul Waldau claims that the first precept, goes far beyond what animal rights movements have accomplished in the West. This precept that concerns all beings one can be conscious of, is unique, since it takes into account all living sentient beings and not only humans or even humans and nonhuman animals that are emotionally close to or resembles humans.¹²⁰ Despite the emergence of committed individuals and organizations, to date no legal or national policy victories around the world has put in place animal protection measures that comes close to the absoluteness and the scope of the First Precept commitment, claims Waldau.¹²¹

The First Precept makes it clear that intentional killing of other sentient living beings of all forms is unethical. While the First Precept might lead many to think that Buddhists have to be vegetarians, this is not necessarily the case. Vegetarianism is common among Chinese Buddhists, but has until recently been viewed as an ethical but unhealthy diet by Tibetan Buddhists in the Himalayas. This is now changing due to increased knowledge. Additionally, vegetables are now widely accessible in a way that they have never been before in Tibet due to improved infrastructure. The Tibetan Buddhist master Khenrul Rinpoche recalls in 2013 that “[Until] about eighteen years ago, most of the people in my village didn’t even know that vegetables could be eaten by humans.”¹²² According to him the vegetables that were found were always given to animals. Lately, more and more Tibetans are going vegetarian and there is now a good selection of vegetarian restaurants even in remote areas in Tibet.¹²³ Vegetarianism has traditionally not been imposed on Buddhist lay people and rarely on clergy.¹²⁴ However, vegetarianism seems to be an ideal among most Buddhists. The great Mauryan emperor Ashoka (304-232 B.C.E) converted to Buddhism and

¹¹⁹ Ibid, from. Vinaya iv. 32-33

¹²⁰ Paul Waldau, “Buddhism and animal rights.” *The Oxford Handbook of Buddhist Ethics*. 2018. 652. Lama Zopa Rinpoche encourages his followers to care about all animals, not just those they feel attachment for which I will expand upon in chapter eight.

¹²¹ Waldau, “Buddhism and Animal Rights”, 661.

¹²² Barstow, *Food of Sinful Demons*, 117.

¹²³ Barstow, *Food of Sinful Demons*, 42. Barstow who mainly did field research in the Kham region in eastern Tibet, compared the vegetarian options he found in restaurants in Kham in 2007 and 2012 and found that the access to vegetarian food had increased significantly. He also writes that there are vibrant vegetarian communities in Central Tibet and the north-eastern region Amdo.

¹²⁴ Buffetrille, “A Controversy on Vegetarianism” 121. There are of course Tibetans who still are of the opinion that a vegetarian diet is unhealthy and feel that this diet is being forced upon them.

established several laws that required kind treatment of animals, including restricted meat consumption, curtailing hunting, and establishing hospitals and roadside water stations for animals.¹²⁵ King Ashoka also banned animal sacrifices in the capital city, present day Patna, during fifty-six yearly “no-slaughter days.” Buddhists believe that the ideal king rules by the Buddha’s teachings, and thus ensure the harmonious ordering of the entire natural order. The way the ruler does this is by protecting his people as well as animals.¹²⁶

To separate the ethically problematic practice of slaughtering from everyday life many Tibetan communities have special castes of butchers (*sheyba*) who resides outside the villages. These *sheybas* are the lowest in the social hierarchy.¹²⁷ Tibetan Buddhists, and particularly monastics, are supposed to follow the rule of Threefold Purity (*namsum dakpé sha*). This rule means that in order to eat meat one must not have *seen, heard* or *suspected* that the meat has been killed specifically for the consumer.¹²⁸ Buying meat from the butcher has traditionally not been seen as a moral transgression since, based on the rule of threefold purity, the buyer has no responsibility for the act of killing.¹²⁹ However not all Tibetan Buddhists agree that it is enough to follow the rule of Threefold Purity. The Dzogchen¹³⁰ master and yogi Chatral Rinpoche (1913-2015) who was known for his strict discipline, and seem to think the rule of Threefold Purity is more of an excuse:

if the animal being killed is unseen, then it is something like stealing something without being caught. That would also be deemed acceptable if you used this rationale. You could say something dirty without being heard - as if you need evidence to judge whether it is a sin or not. What they say is not right. Killing, stealing and other negative actions can never be gotten away with. Even if other people don’t see you do them, the deities, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas see you doing these things. There is a Tibetan saying that even if one does not get caught committing a sin, that the gods catch you every time. It is impossible to do anything without being seen- you’re always being watched by the deities. They see and understand what you did—they know that you helped to kill an animal by buying meat.¹³¹

4.5 Hells of Repetition

Among Buddhists, it is common to believe that killing or harming living beings gives you bad karma which again can lead to you being born in the lower realms. Also, some texts indicate that

¹²⁵ Chapple, *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth and Self in the Asian Traditions*, 24-25.

¹²⁶ Harris, “A Vast Unsupervised Recycling Plant”, 210. “the wild animals of the forest and birds (*migapakki*). .

¹²⁷ Geoff Childs, *Tibetan diary: from birth to death and beyond in a Himalayan valley of Nepal*. University of California Press, 2004. 127.

¹²⁸ Some Tibetans have invented creative ways to get around this rule. Geoff Childs did field research in a Tibetan community in Nepal where they lacked butchers.. The lack of butchers caused a moral dilemma since Tibetan Buddhists in general are very concerned about ethical and karmic consequences of killing but they also are quite dependent on and fond of meat. Childs often encountered men in the village who carried newly dead animals and claimed that the animals had “fell off a cliff”. Childs later discovered that “falling off a cliff” was a euphemism for dispatching an animal in a not so accidental way. Childs, *Tibetan Diary*, 127.

¹²⁹ Barstow, *Food of Sinful Demons*, 9.

¹³⁰ Dzogchen is the central teaching of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism.

¹³¹ Compassionate Action – The Teachings of Chatral Rinpoche, Chatral Rinpoche’s Steadfast Commitment to Ethics Chapter Two, Consulted 25.05.19.

you will be reborn as the being you killed,¹³² and you (in another incarnation) will be killed in the same way you have killed others in this life.¹³³ In Early Buddhism, one of the reasons Buddhists did not hurt or kill animals unless necessary, was because they thought the animals would take revenge on their killer in the “yonder-world.”¹³⁴ Lama Zopa Rinpoche claims that if one kills one animal one creates karma to be killed five hundred times by others and suffer in a very hot hell for one thousand eons.¹³⁵ In the *Vinayas* one can read that butchers, fletchers, hunters, fowlers and animal tamers are all destined to suffer a horrible death. The Buddha taught that butchers and abattoir workers would themselves be slaughtered in their next life in the same way that they have slaughtered animals in this life.¹³⁶ One of my informants told me of a pest-exterminator, who, when he was about to die, had the vision he was being eaten up by many ants. In the Chinese Buddhist text *Sutra of the Remembrance of the Good Law*, the eight levels of hells are described in great detail. In one of the hells, the hell of repetition, those who have killed birds and deer with no regret are forced to eat dung alive with flesh-eating worms as punishment for their misdeeds.¹³⁷

Gayley writes that she perceived an increased focus on compassion and empathy for animals among Tibetan Buddhists in Tibet. Before, one would often hear stories about how one would end up in one of the many hells of Buddhist cosmology if one killed an animal,¹³⁸ but now there seems to be an increased focus on having compassion with the individual animal who suffers. An example of this is when Tsultrim Lodro gave a harsh critique of the Tibetan custom of slaughtering animals through suffocation, a method that can take between eight to fifteen minutes. Tsultrim Lodro refers to suffocation as a “cruel way to kill” (*ngan gsod*) which is “extremely backward” (*ha cang rjes lus*) and even “barbaric” (*dmu rgod*). From this, it seems to be a tendency in Tibetan Buddhism to move from a narrative of punishment for treating animals badly, towards encouraging people to feel

¹³² Chapple, *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth and Self in Asian Traditions*, 22. An example of this can be found in this Jātaka tale: Once upon a time, a goat was led to a temple and was about to be sacrificed by the presiding Brahman. Suddenly, the goat let out a laugh and then uttered a moaning cry. The Brahman, startled by his odd behavior, asked the goat what was happening. The goat responded as follows: “Sir, I have just remembered the history of what has led up to this event. The reason I have laughed is that I realized that in the last of 500 births I have suffered as a goat: in my next life I will return again as a human. The reason I have cried is out of compassion for you. You see, 500 births ago I was a Brahman, leading a goat to the sacrifice. After killing the goat, I was condemned to 500 births as a goat. If you kill me, you will suffer the same fate.” The Brahman, visibly shaken, immediately freed the goat, who trotted away. A few minutes later, lightning struck the goat and he was freed to again become a human. The Brahman likewise was spared, due to the goat’s compassionate intervention.” Jātaka tale 18 retold from Francis and Thomas, *Jātaka Tales* (Cambridge University Press, 1916) 20-22.

¹³³ Lamayeshe.com, “Purifying past negative karma” and “Four Suffering Results”, consulted 14.04.19.

¹³⁴ Lambert Schmithausen, “Buddhism and the ethics of nature—Some remarks.” *The Eastern Buddhist* 32.2 (2000): 40.

¹³⁵ Lamayeshe.com, “The Karma of Killing Animals”, Consulted, 06.11.18.

¹³⁶ Bronwyn Finnigan, “Buddhism and animal ethics.” *Philosophy Compass* 12.7 (2017): 7.

¹³⁷ Harris, “A Vast Unsupervised Recycling Plant”, 210.

¹³⁸ At various times and places, a Buddhist concern for animal ethics has come to the fore in imperial restrictions on hunting (Chapple 1993; Kieschnick 2005), cautionary tales of the hellish torments awaiting those who kill animals (Chapple 1993; Stewart 2014),

empathy and compassion with animals. Yet, both of these views are still present in contemporary Tibetan Buddhism, kindness and concern for animals are usually combined with warnings about possible unfortunate karmic results from harming animals.

4.6 Animals in the Jātaka tales and other early Buddhist texts

The Jātaka literature is among the oldest Buddhist literature dating to the 4th century BCE. Much of the Jātaka literature predates Buddhism and is originally non-Buddhist, but considering its popularity within Buddhism it must have been considered morally compatible with the Buddhist doctrine. The Jātakas contain didactic tales about the Buddha's previous lives in the far past before he got enlightened and until he finally reached *parinirvāṇa*. Before the Buddha Shakyamuni became enlightened, he lived 500 lives as animals, and 500 lives as humans. Many of the Jātaka tales are stories about how Buddha acted while he was in an animal incarnation or how he helped animals. In the Jātakas animals are described as having a range of emotions and characteristics. They can even be susceptible to spiritual advice.¹³⁹ In the Jātaka literature the animals can speak, and while this might be symbolic way to transmit Buddhist doctrines, considering that the Jātaka tales deal with the Buddha's lives in a remote past, it could also possibly refer to the beginning of the evolution-eon (*vivarta-kalpa*) when all animals are believed to have spoken the sacred language Sanskrit. According to this belief the animals have lost their ability to speak Sanskrit due to the gradual moral corruption of living beings.¹⁴⁰

Among the Jātakas there is a famous story about one of the Buddha's previous incarnations, going to the forest with his brother and some friends. On this trip, he meets a starving tigress with her cubs. He decides to give her a part of his arm. He starts to cut but cannot decide how much he will give her. In the end, he cuts his throat and by doing that accomplish perfect ultimate compassion. Another famous Jātaka tells the tale about prince Vessantara. This prince releases all animals from servitude as a thank-offering.¹⁴¹

The Jātakas seem to accept captivity and instrumental use of animals like elephants, for instance being able to ride an elephant or horse is seen as a sign of high merit, and the training of an elephant is a common analogy to training the mind in mindfulness meditation. Yet, there are also examples where animal welfare is taken into account. Some of the stories acknowledge that elephants prefer freedom over captivity and describe how they might suffer while being in servitude for humans. There are also welfare notions in regard to farm animals. For instance, herders are

¹³⁹ Lambert Schmithausen, "The early Buddhist tradition and ecological ethics." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 4 (1997): 31.

¹⁴⁰ Deleanu, "Buddhist "Ethology" in the Pali Canon: Between Symbol and Observation", 82.

¹⁴¹ Jātaka 593.

cautioned against milking their cattle dry, and they are encouraged to tend well to their animals when they are injured or troubled by fly eggs.¹⁴² In the Jātaka tales, animals are often portrayed quite positively, they can be portrayed as having tender feelings for each other, they can perform acts of extreme altruism and live together in harmony. In these ways, animals act as examples for the proper conduct of humans. Nonetheless, these portrayals of animals are more anthropomorphic than “naturalistic.” Besides, the animals usually turn out to not be animals after all, instead they are the Buddha in a former life.¹⁴³ In early Buddhist literature, such as the Jātaka tales animals have a strong and diverse presence, but they are rarely “really” animals. Rather the animals usually function as symbols, metaphors or “zoemes.”¹⁴⁴ The FPMT often refers to Jātaka tales. My informants from Kopan would often refer to them, and I get over 130 hits when I search for Jātaka tales at the fpmt.org website.

4.7 Anthropocentrism and Speciesism in Tibetan Buddhism

There is an ongoing debate about whether Buddhism is speciesist and/or anthropocentric. To value humans higher than other animals is considered speciesism. The term was first used by the psychologist Richard Ryder in 1970.¹⁴⁵ He noted that there is no essential difference between humans and other animals from a biological perspective. Ryder wondered why we make such a big moral difference between humans and animals since the word «species» is as undefinable as «race». Ryder stated that using animals for humans’ purpose, for instance for meat, entertainment or

¹⁴² Harris, 208, 214. The fact that insect-eggs must be removed from larger animals is an ethical dilemma for Buddhists and it was a problem that also surfaced during the field research at the ALS. One of the oxens there, Christmas, had hooves that kept grooving, which meant he was lying down most of the days. This caused him to catch insect-egg infections Eggs on hooves. Duratovic told me that sometimes the insects bite him and he gets wounds. This leads to crows will attack the area around the anus which is naturally painful for Christmas. Therefore Duratovic and the other caretakers had to use insect repellent on these insect eggs. I watched her blessing the insect-eggs before she used insect repellent on them.

¹⁴³ Harris, 208.

¹⁴⁴ Deleau, 81. “Zoeme” is a term invented by the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss. It refers to giving animals semantic functions or use them as (cultural) symbols for something else.

¹⁴⁵ Ryder, “Speciesism”, 1. “Since Darwin, scientists have agreed that there is no ‘magical’ essential difference between human and other animals, biologically-speaking. Why then do we make an almost total distinction morally? If all organisms are on one physical continuum, then we should also be on the same moral continuum. The word ‘species’, like the word ‘race’, is not precisely definable..... Quite apart from the right to live, one clear moral criterion is suffering, the suffering of imprisonment, fear and boredom as well as physical pain. If we assume that suffering is a function of the nervous system then it is illogical to argue that other animals do not suffer in a similar way to ourselves – it is precisely because some other animals have nervous systems so like our own that they are so extensively studied. The only arguments in favor of painful experiments on animals are: 1) that the advancement of knowledge justifies all evils – well does it? 2) that possible benefits for our own species justify mistreatment of other species – this may be a fairly strong argument when it applies to experiments where the chances of suffering are minimal and the probability of aiding applied medicine is great, but even so it is still just ‘speciesism’, and as such it is a selfish emotional argument rather than a reasoned one. If we believe it is wrong to inflict suffering upon innocent human animals then it is only logical, phylogenically-speaking, to extend our concern about elementary rights to the nonhuman animals as well”

for testing cosmetics or medicine is speciesism. He held that if we do not want to cause innocent humans pain, we should also logically extend that concern to innocent animals. Around the same time, in 1975, the philosopher Peter Singer released a book called *Animal Liberation*.¹⁴⁶ In this book, Singer writes that those who oppose sexism and racism usually do so based on a principle of equality. If one takes equality seriously one needs to take everyone into account, no matter what gender or race they belong to or identify as. Considering that animals also have interests there is no reason not to also take them into account. Singer thinks the reason practices like animal testing and factory farming are accepted is because animals are different species than us, and thus this is an example of *speciesism*. Singer claims it is a contradiction to accept speciesism when we do not accept racism or sexism.

As we have seen, the general view in Buddhism is that a human incarnation is better than an animal incarnation, mostly because humans have better mental capabilities to understand and practice the Dharma and thereby become enlightened and thereby help others reach enlightenment. Throughout the early Buddhist scriptures there is a pronounced tendency to distinguish and elevate humans above nonhumans. Yet, Buddhism also entails awareness about continuity. All sentient beings, human and animals alike, are subject to birth, death, karma, and constant rebirth. Nonetheless, animals are placed below humans in the six *gatis* of existence. Despite the Buddhist belief that all animals and humans are fellow voyagers in *samsāra*, and there is no sharp line between animals and humans, there is plenty of evidence of a dismissive view of animal's existence in Buddhism, according to Paul Waldau.¹⁴⁷ Waldau lists what he finds to be key views on animals among Buddhist:

Buddhists hold a negative view of the very fact of birth as any kind of animal other than a human animal.

1. The product of bad conduct is existence as an animal.
2. The Buddhist scriptures feature the view that there is a kind of culpability in animality.
3. Any and all nonhuman animals are seen as 'simple and easily understood by humans' and therefore grouped together in ways that 'potentially limits adherents' ability to notice the de facto realities of the more complex nonhuman animals.
4. 'Other animals are pests or not rightfully in competition with elevated humans.' and even 'anti-human' 'inhuman', and low by human standards.'¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ *Animal Liberation* - sold over one million copies worldwide.

¹⁴⁷ Waldau, "Buddhism and Animal Rights", 671.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 670.

The ALS fits into the first view since it is explicitly stated that the practices at the ALS are done in order to enable the animals to get a human or higher incarnation in their next life. The fact that the animals need to be purified also indicates that there is something they need to be purified from, bad karma from present and past lives. However, humans also need to purify themselves from bad karma. In a book about animals published by the FPMT animals are referred to as “helpless beings.” As we shall look more into in chapter nine, the animals that are held highly by Buddhists and seen as Buddhist practitioners with the possibility to reach enlightenment, are not really animals at all, rather they are bodhisattvas. All of this seem to imply that animals are not very venerated by Buddhists. The third view, that animals are easily understood by humans, did not seem to be in accordance with how my informants viewed animals, at least not their spiritual abilities. However, those animals they viewed as complex, were those animals that were considered to be bodhisattvas in disguise.

Waldau writes that the hierarchical worldview of Buddhism and the life/death/rebirth cycle that is common throughout the Indian subcontinent is what sustained a speciesist view in Buddhism. He notes that ‘the realm comprised of all nonhuman animals is one of woe to the Buddhist mind.’¹⁴⁹ For the ancient Buddhists, membership in the human species is an important paradigm, and more importantly, only humans can liberate themselves from the suffering that necessarily is part of even the elevated human predicament.¹⁵⁰ The outcome of this worldview was that the Buddhist tradition never emphasized looking at animals in their own realities. Since the dominant claims about other animals tended to be ideological and biased in regard to other animals limited nature. Therefore, naturally the results were negative prejudgments about nonhuman animals’ possibilities. While the modern scientific era has led to great harms for animals it has also uncovered some animal’s intelligence, emotions and social abilities. These discoveries have helped humans to overcome the past of extravagant claims about their superiority over other species. Despite thinking that Buddhism is speciesist Waldau states that “In facing the complex, multifaceted challenges that arise regularly when a human desires not only to protect, but also to notice and take seriously, the living beings outside our own species, Buddhists have not solved these problems but they have clearly achieved much that demands respect and admiration”.¹⁵¹

Bronwyn Finnigan argues against the claim that Buddhism is speciesist based on the fact that animals are included in the first precept. She writes that “if speciesism is the view that only members of the human species have moral significance, however, then it does not follow from the

¹⁴⁹ Waldau, “Buddhism and Animal Rights”, 671.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 672.

above considerations. Animals are included within the scope of the first precept and so have moral significance in Buddhism”¹⁵²

If one holds an anthropocentric worldview, animals, nature and eco-systems are seen as valuable only if they are indispensable or enjoyable to humans. On the other hand, thinking that animals and nature has value for their *own* sake and in their *own* right gives them direct moral standing. Geoffrey Barstow argues that Tibetan Buddhists hold the latter view. Animals in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition are seen as having rich emotional and mental lives, and as being similar to humans in many ways. Since animals have the ability to suffer, this subjective experience of suffering needs to be taken into consideration, for the animals sake, not just because it is good for humans.¹⁵³ While Tibetan Buddhism as such might not mainly concern itself with worldly matters, subjective experience of pain is taken seriously in Tibetan Buddhism and it is what drives the bodhisattvas to help all living beings.

¹⁵² Finnigan, “Buddhism and Animal Ethics”, 7.

¹⁵³ Barstow, “On the Moral Standing of Animals in Tibetan Buddhism”, 8.

5 Animal Liberation in a Tibetan Buddhist context

In this chapter I will give some background information about what animal liberation means in a Tibetan Buddhist context.

5.1 Giving the Gift of Fearlessness

Barstow and Holler write about the Tibetan Buddhist practice called “Giving the gift of fearlessness” (Tib. *mi 'jigs pa spyin pa*, Skr. *abhaya dana*). This practice is meant to protect the poor, weak and helpless.¹⁵⁴ According to Holler, animal liberation has in later times been seen as an effective form of giving the gift of fearlessness.¹⁵⁵ In Tibet, this fearlessness is often given to animals by a wealthy person who sets aside some land and declares hunting and other forms of harassing animals forbidden in this area. Not only does this save the life of the animal, it also enables the animals to live without fear of human hunters, it is believed. In addition to animals having a mind and being capable of feeling the emotion of fear, Tibetan Buddhists see the animals as being capable of understanding that not only is there no hunter at the moment, there will be no hunters in the future either. The Tibetans that implemented this practice must have viewed animals as emotionally complex enough to be capable of rational thoughts about when it is appropriate to be afraid and not.¹⁵⁶ Even if this state of fearlessness came about as a result of conditioning the animals to be unafraid of humans, Barstow has found no evidence in Tibetan literature that is what was implied. However, the texts do not mention exactly how the fearlessness is achieved. There are several Tibetan Buddhist texts that mention examples of Buddhist masters giving animals the gift of fearlessness. For instance a text about the 12th century Lama Zhang who sealed off the city of Lhasa and its environs against brigades and hunters. As a result of this it is stated that “In that place, lay people, innumerable merchants, fish, wild animals, birds, and so on, horses, and cows all had peace and were cared for.”¹⁵⁷ There is also a story about Jigmé Lingpa buying an entire mountain in order to curtail the collection of honey and avoid harm being done to the bees living there.¹⁵⁸ The fearlessness that come out of this practice seem to have the same effect on humans and other animals. Animals are considered to suffer not only physically, but also mentally for instance when they fear for their lives. The practice of giving the gift of fearlessness, seem closely connected to animal liberation practices. When giving an animal fearlessness, however, the animal is freed from physical fears, but it does not seem to be any other spiritual rituals that tend to follow this initial gift

¹⁵⁴ Geshe Thubten Soepa, *Protecting the Lives of Helpless Beings – The Udamwara Lotus Flower*, lamayeshe.com, FPMT, 1995/2005

¹⁵⁵ Holler, “The Ritual of Freeing Lives”, 209.

¹⁵⁶ Barstow, “On the Moral Standing of Animals in Tibetan Buddhism”, 6.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 8.

of fearlessness.

5.2 *Animal Liberation in Buddhism*

Buddhists throughout Asia have a long tradition of performing animal liberation (tib. *tshe thar*), ‘animal release’ or ‘release of living beings.’ Animal liberation practices involve freeing animals from captivity into their “natural habitat”¹⁵⁹ or marking an animal like a yak with a red ribbon so people will know it cannot be slaughtered. Animal liberation practices are usually performed with the motivation to cultivate compassion (Skt: *karuṇā*, Tib.: *thugs rje*) as part of the Mahāyāna bodhicitta ideal. The practice also fit well into the Buddhist ideals of *ahiṃsā* and nonviolence. Still, the practice of animal liberation is not propagated in texts like the monastic *vinayas*, the lay vows or explicitly mentioned among the virtuous deeds. However, in the *vinayas* it is stated that if a Buddhist monk steals from another human, he must permanently be excluded from the order, but if he liberates an animal from a hunter’s trap based on compassion and not a desire to own the animal he is innocent of offense.¹⁶⁰ We can also find examples of animal liberation in the *Suvarṇaprabhasasūtra* (*Gser 'od dam pa*), for instance when the Buddha saves fishes and worms from a pond that is about to dry up. He does this by getting help from elephants to carry water to the pond, and thereby saving the lives of the worms and fish that lives there. On the FPMT websites, it is possible to find this text in many languages¹⁶¹ and also in a small Tibetan text version for wearing on the body for protection.¹⁶²

As Holler notes, nowhere in Buddhist texts can you find rituals that concern intentionally going to slaughterhouses and liberating animals. He writes that *thse thar* played a role when Buddhism was introduced to the non-Buddhist population of Tibet in the 7th to 9th century C.E. *Tshe thar* was initially introduced as a substitute (*tshab*) for animal sacrifices. The traditional bloody animal sacrifices (*dmar mchod*) were replaced with so called white offerings (*dkar mchod*) such as dough figures representing animals (*gtor ma, glud, ling ga*) and *tshe thar* – releasing animals and granting their lives. Holler thinks that since Tibetans knew that slaughtering, hunting and fishing was unavoidable in Tibet, and killing was considered the worst and most sinful of all actions, some rituals to counteract the potential bad consequence of slaughter or killing worms when plowing fields were needed. Animal liberation was considered particularly effective to make up for killing.¹⁶³ However, animal liberation practices was and are still done for a myriad of reasons. For instance, in

¹⁵⁹ Shiu and Stokes, 181.

¹⁶⁰ Harris, “A Vast Unsupervised Recycling Plant”, 210. *Vinaya* iv. 62

¹⁶¹ English, Chinese, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Nepali, Portuguese, Russian, Sanskrit, Spanish, Tibetan, Mongolian and Vietnamese. This reflects the FPMT’s international focus.

¹⁶² Fpmt.org, “Download the Sutra of Golden Light”, Consulted 14.09.18.

¹⁶³ Holler, 210.

Tibet, sometimes animals are liberated to become the companion animal for a small child who has picked that animal as their favorite.¹⁶⁴ Animals are also sometimes liberated as an act of appreciation for their long service of providing milk, calves and for ploughing the fields. *Tshe thar* can also be an act of spontaneous compassion, like when someone saves an insect that has fallen into a well.¹⁶⁵ Holler writes that while motivations for practicing animal liberation in Buddhism are manifold, a key reason is that the Buddha recommended and performed animal liberation in many of his incarnations. The karmic benefit of animal liberation also varies based on various factors. In a text¹⁶⁶ it is claimed that to liberate one sheep, frees the liberator from one rebirth in the lower realms, while liberating a goat frees him from seven rebirths.¹⁶⁷ Holler tried unsuccessfully to understand why it was more effective to liberate goats than sheep, when prices in Tibet for sheep were higher than the price for goats in the early 2000s when he did his research on the topic. According to another text, one single *tshe thar* can cleanse the defilement and transgression of killing 100 horses and 100 humans.¹⁶⁸ Also, freeing 13 animal lives for someone who is about to die, will prolong the dying person's life with three years if they were believed to live only for three more days. The dying who receives the merit, will eventually be reborn in a good human body without disease, in a good family, with beauty. They will have luck, strength, courage, fearlessness, a melodious voice, fame, a long life, being loved by animals, humans, and be protected by the gods. These are just some of the benefits to be gained through *tshe thar*; no wonder it is a popular practice! On the other hand, killing an animal that has been liberated, a *tshe thar*, is considered as bad as killing 100 humans. Considering that killing is considered the worst of all sins, *tshe thar* is the best of all virtues.¹⁶⁹

Animal liberation is often performed to bring long life, and improved health to the person performing the animal liberation ritual, or whomever this person dedicates the *merit* – the karmic benefit, of the animal liberation to. In the '*chi blsu* literature, that deals with rituals that prolong life and prevent death, the freeing of animals and humans that are about to be killed is mentioned as a means to enhance one's own lifespan.¹⁷⁰ Certain kinds of animal liberation practices like the *lha yag* performed in Eastern Tibet not only frees the animals from slaughter, but also from all the practicalities of domestic life like their wool/fur being cut, being herded, carrying loads or being milked.¹⁷¹ Sometimes animal liberation is performed for huge numbers of animals, an example of

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 214.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ The Lhasa *Phan yon* text. Holler, "The Ritual of Freeing Lives", 212.

¹⁶⁷ At the ALS Goats also outnumber all the other animals.

¹⁶⁸ Holler, 212.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 213.

¹⁷⁰ Holler, 209.

¹⁷¹ Gillian G. Tan, " 'Life' and 'freeing life' (*tshe thar*) among pastoralists of Kham: intersecting religion and

that is when Khenpo Ngakchung's disciples are said to have ransomed thirty-one thousand animals.¹⁷²

As mentioned, Animal Liberation is a practice that is performed to not only liberate the animal from death, but also from *samsāra*. By performing the beneficial practice of liberation for the animals the animals increase their chance at reaching a better reincarnation in the future.

5.3 Animal Liberation and Material Well-being

There are different kinds of animal liberation practices that are performed among Tibetan Buddhists. They are classified based on their intention, motivation and function. *Tshe thar* is the super concept of animal liberation and describes all practices of animal liberation, involving different motivations and includes the practice of releasing one's domestic animals that were supposed to be slaughtered. As mentioned above *Tshe thar* forever spares the liberated animals from slaughter and the ritual is usually performed in order to gain merit. The anthropologist Gillian Tan has written about a local version of *tshe thar* in Minyag in eastern Tibet called *lha yag*. In Minyag male yaks are the only animal that is liberated, and the animals are liberated in order to increase the wealth of the household.¹⁷³ Taking into consideration the importance of the yak in Tibetan nomadic societies one can imagine that the release of a yak as an offering (*mchod*) or gift (*sbyin*) to deities is highly regarded and gives the nomadic community a sense of increasing the well-being of their animals and also their own good fortune.¹⁷⁴ The number of *lha yag* is usually associated with the wealth of the household since the *lha yag* practice not only frees the animals from slaughter, but also from all the practicalities of the domestic life like being cut, herded, carrying loads or being milked.¹⁷⁵ The liberated animals can no longer be used or profited on by the herders and to liberate many animals and also feed them until they die a natural death is a costly affair. The liberated animals in Tibet are often beautifully adorned, and Tibetans who own many liberated animals are seen as pious, wealthy and prestigious in the eyes of other Buddhists.¹⁷⁶

5.4 Ecological Consequences of Animal Liberation Practices

Animal liberation has at times gotten a bad reputation for being ecologically damaging. At the enlightenmentforanimals.org page they have added a paragraph about this topic:

It is also very important to ensure that the animals have the best possible care after they have been 'saved' from death. Good animal liberation practice combines compassion (the wish to free beings from suffering) with

environment." *Études mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines* 47 (2016). 5.

¹⁷² Barstow, "On the Moral Standing of Animals in Tibetan Buddhism", 8. (Khenpo Ngakchung, 2000, 164.)

¹⁷³ Tan, "' Life' and 'Freeing Life' (*tshe thar*) Among Pastoralists of Kham", 4.

¹⁷⁴ Tan, 4.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 5.

¹⁷⁶ Holler, 214.

wisdom (recognition of cause and effect and the interconnectedness of things). Releasing animals where they will immediately be under threat is not ideal, nor is releasing animals where they will cause harm to others, such as animals from a different ecological niche that become an environmental problem. It is therefore an important part of the animal liberation practice to look carefully at the suitability of liberating animals in your area.¹⁷⁷

Shiu and Stokes underlines how the Buddhist practice of *tshe thar* in a ceremonial ritual does not necessarily arise from the notion of *Ahimsā*. At times there is a big difference between refraining from killing and harming and the practice of releasing living beings.¹⁷⁸ An example of this is when the Chair of Hong Kong Bird-Watching Society asked the Chinese government to ban the release of birds to minimize danger of avian flu.¹⁷⁹

Saka Dawa, the fourth month of the Tibetan lunar calendar, is the holiest month of the year for Tibetan Buddhists since this is the month Buddha is said to have been born, enlightened and died. The most important days within the month of Saka Dawa is the Buddha's birthday as well as his Enlightenment and *parinirvāṇa*, which is known as Saka Dawa Düchen (*düchen* means great occasion). During this exceptional time, meritorious actions are believed to be multiplied 100,000 times, so positive actions are especially powerful. During Saka Dawa *tshe thar* occurs as a mass phenomenon in Tibet and Nepal. This month Chinese and Muslim traders sell fish, birds and other living creatures to Tibetans who buy them and then free them. Tibetan nomads usually liberate yaks, dri, sheep and goats and sometimes horses and dogs in pastoral areas. The animals that get liberated are usually marked with colored wool tassels or cloth in five colors that are put in a hole made in the animal's ear.¹⁸⁰ According to one of my Tibetan informants many Tibetans in Nepal liberate fish during Saka Dawa. Usually they do it by donating money in a village. People give what they want knowing how karmically beneficial it is to participate, and then one Tibetan buys the fish¹⁸¹ and liberate them in rivers or lakes, particularly in Pokhara. According to my Tibetan informant all Buddhists are vegetarian during Saka Dawa. He says some Tibetans go to Mustang and buy goats or sheep for about 5000-10000 Nepali rupees. He thinks it is more beneficial to liberate fish since one can buy many more individuals like 10 000 at a time. I asked him if this Saka Dawa mass fish liberation has ecological consequences and he says it does not.

While I was conducting field research at the ALS I interviewed a visiting monk. He had lived in Singapore in 2001 and 2003 and therefore we started talking about animal liberation practices done there. He told me that in Singapore they would do animal liberations very frequently and recite mantras specifically for the animals. The FPMT center in Singapore would buy one

¹⁷⁷ Enlightenmentforanimals.org, "What is Animal Liberation", Consulted: 28.02.19.

¹⁷⁸ Shiu and Stokes, 183.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 182.

¹⁸⁰ Holler, 208.

¹⁸¹ According to my informant, the fish was already planned to be sold, so as not to create a market for this purpose.

million shellfish and liberate them after having circumambulated them around *stūpas* and pictures of buddhas and bodhisattvas. There was a guy working at the FPMT center there who had a speedboat and he would help with this practice. My informant told me that it was after having spent time in Malaysia that he developed a personal interest in animal liberation. He says that many [Buddhists?] question whether the liberated animals will survive after the liberation, and it is hard to guarantee how long they will live but according to Lama Zopa Rinpoche what is most important is that the animals are making a connection with the Dharma. The animals make this connection through circumambulation and mantras. They are of course also saved from immediate death. Duratovic says that the liberation of shellfish has led to a marine reserve problem in Singapore, in some instances they were even releasing freshwater crabs in salt-water. Duratovic says that it is important that Buddhists do their best when liberating animals to make sure they can have as good life as possible after the liberation. She also highlights that Buddhists should not participate in trades that are specifically aimed at Buddhists, like liberating birds that are trapped and marketed for Buddhists specifically. Some Chinese Buddhist liberates sea eagles in the mountains and people get quite upset by this, since these eagles belongs close to the sea. It is a problem if one gets too enthusiastic about doing good things, my informant tells me since this can lead to an obsession with obtaining good merit, which might override thinking about long term consequences. He says that in Australia where he also lived for many years, they used to release worms and yabies. These were practical animals to liberate he says.

Duratovic tells me about ecological problems that often happen during mass animal liberation such as during Saka Dawa. The problems, when the focus is only on the liberation is that the animals die during or shortly after they get liberated, they get predated or prey on animals, or they get or bring diseases to the area they are liberated (in)to. This can lead to an ecological crisis. Also, she says, some Buddhists release birds, particularly sparrows. In these cases, the Buddhists usually buy the birds from people that catch them and in this way they support 'wrong livelihood.'¹⁸² The same goes for fish that is wild-caught. The Buddhists that buy them create a market for this morally problematic business. Animal liberation is a very popular and specific practice since it brings merit and longer life, but Duratovic emphasizes that one need to use compassion and wisdom.

However, Lama Zopa Rinpoche seem to imply that the benefit of the animal liberation practice often outweighs the possible death after: Generally, when birds are released in the forest, they get eaten by another being and, in the ocean, animals can be eaten at any time by another

¹⁸² This conflicts with following The Eightfold Path of Buddhism which consists of eight practices: right view, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right *samadhi* (meditation).

being. But by doing these different practices, after death there is a happy rebirth and all the advantages, up to enlightenment.¹⁸³

5.5 Focus on Individuals in Buddhism

The human-animal intersection raises ethical concerns of the highest order. What one can learn about other animals and their environment from Buddhism is limited since “Buddhism as such is not about this world.”¹⁸⁴ Traditionally the focus in Buddhism, is on the individual animal, human or plant, not on ecosystems or species. When Barstow looked into the Tibetan Buddhist fish liberation practices in China he found an example of this individual-focused view. In his blog, Barstow writes about a group of Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö’s Chinese disciples who released around half a million small fish each day for one hundred days into a lake just south of Chengdu in 2012. According to Barstow, this was done in line with traditional Tibetan *tshe thar* practices. Before releasing the fish, Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö and his disciples offered extensive prayers for the fish’s present and future well-being. The fish were then transported out into the lake and released slowly, so they were not harmed in the process. Beforehand, Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö and his disciples made sure that the fish were of a species native to the region, and in addition, each day they were released into a different part of the lake, so as to minimize the impact on specific areas. However, releasing such a huge amount of fish into a lake, even a large one, has to have an impact on the local ecosystem. Barstow writes that when he discussed these fish liberation episodes with Tibetans, they were overwhelmingly pleased with the number of fish being rescued. Barstow’s Western friends, on the other hand, tended to be horrified at the presumed damage being done to the lake’s ecosystem. Barstow claims he sees a pattern where Tibetans generally are primarily concerned with the individual animals while Westerners are usually more concerned with the wellbeing of the ecosystem. While Barstow is open for the possibility that Tibetans might be ignorant of the potential ecological problems, he did not get impression that was the case. He writes that several of the Tibetans he spoke to, including Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö, have understood that releasing fish into the lake impacts the lake overall, but have argued that the benefit to the fish being released outweighs this concern.¹⁸⁵ The Buddhist *ahimsā* ideal would probably prohibit Buddhist from killing certain animals that are artificially introduced into another continent despite the fact that the newly introduced animals cause disturbance in the ecosystem and threaten native species.¹⁸⁶ Also, since the

¹⁸³ Lamayeshe.com, “Animal Welfare”, Consulted: 06.11.18

¹⁸⁴ Waldau, “Buddhism and Animal Rights”, 664.

¹⁸⁵ Barstow, Thelostyak.com, “Fish Liberation”, consulted 21.04.19.

¹⁸⁶ Schmithausen, “The Early Buddhist Tradition and Ecological Ethics”, 21. In some cases Buddhist animal liberation practices have even been the reasons for ecological disturbances, see for instance: Liu, Xuan, Monica E. McGarrity, and Yiming Li. “The influence of traditional Buddhist wildlife release on biological invasions.” *Conservation*

focus in Buddhism is to liberate oneself and others from rebirth in *samsāra*, and in particular from rebirth in the lower realms such as the animal realm, the fact that wild animals are disappearing from the earth and the human population increasing, might not be considered a big problem in the Buddhist cosmological worldview. The unspoiled state is described as a kind of trans-natural, “ethereal” existence.¹⁸⁷ If a continued spiritual and moral progress occurs, nature and civilization will disappear. First animals disappear from the earth, then human beings, since they are all born in a “luminous heaven” based on the fact that they have practiced suitable meditation. In the end even plants and the entire earth vanishes.¹⁸⁸ Taking into account how negatively being born as an animal is viewed in Buddhism there does not seem to be any encouragement to perpetuate this kind of rebirths. Based on this view, the fact that the non-human animals are decreasing on the planet and the human population is increasing seem to imply that spiritual development is furthering. It would also be cruel and selfish to preserve species for humans spiritual progress and happiness, since the animal existence is inherently painful according to Buddhism.¹⁸⁹ However, this view is not completely in accord with the *karma* teachings, since the karma is just a seed, which need the right circumstances to bloom. Even if no one were born as animals since they were extinct, the potential for animal rebirth would still be there, unless all the karma that leads to such incarnations were exhausted. Until then, it seems logical that Buddhists should preserve the world in an agreeable condition as a moral duty, but also for humans and animals, since there is no way to know whether oneself or relative will be born into these spheres in the future and because all sentient beings that are not enlightened feel subjective pain.¹⁹⁰ Barstow also points out how the Buddhist tendency to prioritize individuals over ecosystems mirrors a debate in Western environmental ethics. As we have seen the philosophers Singer and Bentham have argued that it is an animal’s ability to suffer or experience happiness that gives them moral value, and justifies their protection. An ecosystem that lacks the ability to suffer in its own right is not inherently valuable in itself, but only in its ability to impact the lives of the animals that live in it. He writes that those holding this view wants to save ecosystems for the sake of the animals, not vice versa. A good example of this is when Lama Zopa Rinpoche blessed the Omak Lake in Washington, USA in 2016. When Lama Zopa Rinpoche was asked why he blesses bodies of water, he replied that it is to liberate all the fish and animals that live there. Lama Zopa Rinpoche did extensive prayers for the inhabitants of the lake, and also for its future inhabitants.¹⁹¹ While the fact that he explicitly said that he cared for the future inhabitants

Letters 5.2 (2012): 107-114.

¹⁸⁷ Schmithausen, “The Early Buddhist Tradition and Ecological Ethics”, 25.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ fpmt.org, “Blessing the Sentient Beings of Omak Lake”, consulted 27.04.19.

indicates that he care about the condition of the lake, this is based on beings living in the lake, not the lake in itself.

Deep-ecologists, see the primary moral value lying in the healthy functioning of an ecosystem as a whole. Individual animals are only a part of that system, and their individual suffering is secondary to the health of the ecosystem. Often, these two approaches line up well. After all, usually what is good for the ecosystem is good for the animals concerned as well. Yet every now and then conflict arises between these perspectives. A classic example is the culling of overpopulated animal populations, where a great deal of suffering is inflicted on a few individual animals so that the ecosystem as a whole can prosper. Releasing fifty million fish into a lake is perhaps another example. The fifty million individual animals avoid the suffering of getting cooked, but risk destabilizing an entire lake's ecosystem. Still, the deep ecologists have long invoked Buddhist notions of dependent origination (*give skt*) to support their theories of a deeply interdependent biosphere, and to underscore the importance of taking an ecosystem's health into account when making environmental decisions.¹⁹²

Schmithausen points out that even though Buddhists are not concerned with the preservation of species or ecology as such in classical Buddhist texts, these issues were not relevant at the time these texts were taught or written.¹⁹³ While many of my informants were concerned with ecology, and my main informant even is educated and works as an ecologist, the focus at the ALS is also on the individual level and on saving individual goats, rather than, for instance doing information campaigns such as the animal activists I encountered in Kathmandu. However, as we have seen the bodhisattva ideal requires Tibetan Buddhists to strive for all beings liberation and take on the suffering of all other beings if needed. Based on this it seems Buddhists must consider the impact of their actions on animals, also those that are suffering in indirect ways such as through ecological crisis.

When I interviewed the animal activist in Kathmandu I mentioned that I volunteered at the ALS, where individual animals are saved. The animal activist was not very impressed with the approach at the ALS and said that it does not make a big difference to save two out of 200 goats. He stressed that the awareness campaigns he runs with his group are much more effective. You could tell 200 people [about animal welfare issues] and then [the information] would multiply. He said it was important to show what is happening behind “closed doors”, even if, as the case often is in Nepal those “closed doors” might be right out on the street in broad daylight. Education about meat is what is needed he said, if you collect calves from the street you are just encouraging people to

¹⁹² Barstow, Thelostyak.com, “Fish Liberation”, consulted 21.04.19.

¹⁹³ Schmithausen, “The Early Buddhist Tradition and Ecological Ethics”, 20.

dump them there..¹⁹⁴ The animal activist did not seem to see the point in liberating animals individually. From a non-Buddhist animal welfare view, the Buddhist practices performed for the animals at the ALS probably did not make sense.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche address the worry that if he or other Buddhists buy many worms or other animals like goats regularly, in order to liberate them, people who breed them will produce more worms/goats or other animals. Lama Zopa Rinpoche is not worried about this since as he says, “it helps those people earn a living.”¹⁹⁵ When one buys the worms one gives them long lives by protecting them from fishermen and becoming bait. He says that they are not:

just growing from the earth as they probably think in the West. There are numberless sentient beings in the intermediate stage who have karma to be born as a worm. When the conditions are there, they are reborn; those numberless beings that have no karma to be born as any other being, only karma to be born as a worm. As that karma ripens, the conditions can happen. The conditions happen when the karma is strong, powerful¹⁹⁶

The most important thing for Buddhists seems to be to purify animals from their negative karma and defilements and help animals collect merit so that they can reach a higher rebirth and eventually liberation from saṃsāra. Lama Zopa Rinpoche says that even if people intentionally raise more worms or other animals, the reason anyone is born as animals or anything else is a result of past karma. It could not be any other way. One must, therefore, help animals get out of endless reincarnations in lower realms where they will continue to suffer.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with anonymous animal activist group leader by author August 2018.

¹⁹⁵ FPMT, *Liberating Animals from the Danger of Death*, Portland: FPMT Inc. 2005, 46.

¹⁹⁶ FPMT, *Liberating Animals from the Danger of Death*, 46.

6 Animal Liberation Practices at the ALS

In this chapter, I will write about Buddhist practices for animals that are conducted at the ALS. Initially, the documentary called *108 yaks* will be introduced and analysed. This documentary was made by one of my informants at Kopan, Geshe Thubten Jinpa. It gives an introduction to the animal liberation practices that are performed at the ALS. The documentary *108 yaks* is a promotional movie for animal liberation, a self-representation for FPMT. After discussing this movie, I will move on to my observations and experiences from the field research.

6.1 108 Yaks

The documentary *108 Yaks* was made by Geshe Thubten Jinpa in 2012. It starts with Geshe Thubten Jinpa declaring “animals are not vegetable, nor are they food products. They are alive. They share the same feelings as us, so we should at least respect their feelings”. Then the movie continues with horrendous video clips of chickens in chicken farms, cows being dragged off a truck to be slaughtered, cows being burnt in the mouth, horse-racing, bullfighting, fish being fished while swimming in bloody water, monkeys being experimented on and seals being pulled by humans on a hook while bleeding and/or being killed. Over these pictures a female narrator is saying:

Since the beginning of time, humans have exploited animals, killing them for food and clothing. Sacrificing them in religious rituals, working them to death, experimenting on them and enslaving them simply for entertainment. As a result, millions of animals suffer unbearably every day. Humans dominate every aspect of life on this planet, without regard for the interest and feelings of animals and their right to happiness. They have received little, if anything, in return.

After this a quote on the screen says “Fortunately, animals don’t just have enemies, but they also have friends who work solely for their cause as well.” and the music changes from serious and sad to cheerful flute music. We see pictures of Lama Zopa Rinpoche who the narrator says is a friend of animals. Pictures of Lama Zopa Rinpoche with different animals like a bird and a horse are then presented. The narrator tells us that Lama Zopa Rinpoche has spent his whole life working for the benefit of all beings. He is teaching others how to practice loving-kindness and compassion. He strongly emphasizes the shortcomings of cruelty and killing of animals and the benefits of vegetarianism and liberating animals.

Then the movie continues with Lama Zopa Rinpoche asking Geshe Thubten Jinpa to liberate 108 yaks that are about to be sold for their meat. He is especially worried because “yaks are big animals and suffer a lot when they are being killed due to their size.” Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s request leads Geshe Thubten Jinpa and several others, mostly Sherpas, to leave Kopan and go and buy these yaks before other traders can buy them. When Geshe Thubten Jinpa buys the yaks from

the herder, he takes out some ribbons Lama Zopa Rinpoche has sent with him. The ribbons have been blessed with mantras recited by Lama Zopa Rinpoche himself. Geshe Thubten Jinpa explains that by the power of the mantras all the animals' negativities can be purified with the ribbons simply touching their bodies. Geshe Thubten Jinpa goes around putting the ribbons around the yaks' necks while reciting mantras like "Om Mani Padme Hum." Geshe Thubten Jinpa explains that animal liberation is not only about saving the animals from immediate death. Saving animals from death is immensely beneficial, but the most important thing is that the animals' lives are "meaningful" after they have been saved. Geshe Thubten Jinpa says that the main thing the animals need is to purify their negativities that caused them to be born in a lower realm as animals. This purification can only happen through the power of various holy objects. Examples of this are hearing mantras and seeing holy images of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. When the animals hear the mantras and go around holy objects their negativities will be purified. Then, in the future, they will get a better life as a human and "even higher life," and eventually they get liberation from the oceans of suffering, *samsāra*.

During the trip, mantras are recited every day for the yaks through a megaphone. Geshe Thubten Jinpa says that through animal liberation, even the most incurable diseases like HIV and cancer can be cured. Accordingly, animal liberation is not only about helping animals but is also very beneficial for the human being performing the liberation.

The documentary covers the whole, dangerous trip to the Rolwaling valley where the group leads the yaks in the end. Here the yaks will be safe and happy, we are told by the narrator. According to Ngawang Lupsum Rinpoche, the head lama of Rolwaling monastery, the Rolwaling valley is a "hidden valley" a *Beyul*, that was blessed by Guru Rinpoche.¹⁹⁷ Guru Rinpoche, who was a great Indian Buddhist master prophesized that even the poorest people could live happily in Rolwaling. It is an extraordinarily holy place, with many holy sites in a very small area, but since it is so remote, it is not often visited. Killing animals and selling meat is not practiced in Rolwaling according to Ngawang Lupsum Rinpoche, and this has been a local custom since the early days.¹⁹⁸ Ngawang Lupsum Rinpoche says that the yaks will be benefited by being in such a holy place. Geshe Thubten Jinpa teaches the villagers in Rolwaling how they can attend to the yaks' spiritual wellbeing, by reciting prayers and mantras to them daily. A villager says that since Lama Zopa Rinpoche liberated the yaks, he will take care of them, even in the winter when it gets hard. Another woman in the village says that while caring for yaks is not easy, it is not impossible if one puts in the effort.

¹⁹⁷ Also called Padmasambhava, Guru Rinpoche was an 8th century Buddhist master. He is considered the founder of the Nyingma tradition in Tibetan Buddhism.

¹⁹⁸ Clearly vegetarianism is an ideal, despite that it has traditionally been hard to follow this diet in remote areas in the Himalayas.

As is common in Tibetan *tshé thar* practices, Geshe Thubten Jinpa and his crew marks the liberated yaks by piercing the yaks ears. According to David Holler, in some areas in Tibet, the custom is to cut off the tip of the animals ear and collect these ear-tips on a string. After gathering enough ear-tips they are offered to a high lama who then makes the dedication of merit. A tassel is fixed into the hole pierced in the ear. Usually these tassels are red. While most markers of *tshé thar* soon disappear, the ear hole remains to mark the animals as a *tshé thar*.¹⁹⁹

At the end of the movie there is a quote stating:

We have saved 108 yaks, but while this film is being viewed, millions of other animals have been brutally killed, suffocated or starved to death in slaughterhouses around the world. It is not possible to save them all but look around and let's see what we can do. For their pain is our pain...And it hurts.

This film is dedicated to all organizations and individuals who work for the welfare of animals and to those who become vegetarian out of love for all animals.

I interviewed Geshe Thubten Jinpa about this journey and documentary. I asked him about the number of yaks they rescued; 108 yaks. Geshe Thubten Jinpa answered that in fact, it was more than 108 yaks, but since 108 is an important number in Buddhism it was chosen for its symbolism.²⁰⁰ It is very beneficial to recite 108 mantras, circumambulations and so on.²⁰¹ Lama Zopa Rinpoche was sick from a stroke at the time they made this documentary, and at that time he encouraged his students all over the world to liberate animals. Geshe Thubten Jinpa tells me that Lama Zopa Rinpoche's method of saving animals is unique in the sense that the animals benefit for longer, and also in their lives to come. Lama Zopa Rinpoche advises his disciples to do practices regarding helping animals, and then offer this practice to the good health of Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

Geshe Thubten Jinpa says that another goal with the documentary was to spread the message about animal liberation around the world and show people how they can benefit animals. Knowing that yaks have been used as a cultural symbol for Tibet, I ask Geshe Thubten Jinpa why they liberated yaks in particular. He replies that yaks might seem unique and different since they are not so

¹⁹⁹ Holler, "The Ritual of Freeing Lives", 217.

²⁰⁰ 108 is an important number in Hinduism, Jainism and Sikhism as well. In Buddhism 108 becomes the main number of possible experiences based on this: there are the six consciousnesses (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, physical sensation and mental). These can be either pleasant, unpleasant or neutral so that makes 18 possibilities. There are the three times (past, present and future) in which these can occur, so that makes $3 \times 18 = 54$. Then they can be either virtuous or non-virtuous = 108. In Buddhism, this number is reached by multiplying the senses smell, touch, taste, hearing, sight, and consciousness by whether they are painful, pleasant or neutral, and then again by whether these are internally generated or externally occurring, and yet again by past, present and future, finally we get 108 feelings. $6 \times 3 \times 2 \times 3 = 108$. Tibetan Buddhist malas or rosaries are usually 108 beads; sometimes 111 including the guru bead(s), reflecting the words of the Buddha called in Tibetan the Kangyur in 108 volumes. Zen priests wear juzu (a ring of prayer beads) around their wrists, which consists of 108 beads. The Lankavatara Sutra has a section where the Bodhisattva Mahamati asks Buddha 108 questions and another section where Buddha lists 108 statements of negation in the form of "A statement concerning X is not a statement concerning X. In Japan, at the end of the year, a bell is chimed 108 times in Buddhist temples to finish the old year and welcome the new one. Each ring represents one of 108 earthly temptations (*Bonnō*) a person must overcome to achieve nirvāṇa.

²⁰¹ One of my informants at Kopan did 108 circumambulations when their pet died.

common in many countries around the world. Subsequently, they might be “more attractive.”²⁰²

Geshe Thubten Jinpa says that he directed and edited the movie, but many people supported the project financially,²⁰³ and they also needed manpower to handle the yaks.

I ask how the yaks are doing now, six years after the liberation. Geshe Thubten Jinpa is from the Rolwaling valley and goes there quite often he told me. He says the yaks are doing well and some have had calves. Unlike the animals at the ALS, these yaks were not sterilized. Some of the yaks, which were already old when they were brought to Rolwaling, have now died of old age. The people in Rolwaling do not use these yaks for transportation, wool and milk according to Geshe Thubten Jinpa. I ask if the liberation means that the animals cannot be used by humans for any purposes anymore, that they get liberated from all “work” which is often the case with liberated animals in Tibet. This is not the case with these yaks and this liberation Geshe Thubten Jinpa says, the reason they are mostly left alone is rather that people are no longer interested in profiting from yaks. Geshe Thubten Jinpa says some few people still keep one or two yaks and use their milk, wool and use them for transportation but it is a tradition that is dying out. Yaks are now usually kept out in the open without much interference by humans. Exceptions are when humans give them salt for energy, or in the case of heavy snow the yaks might be brought to lower levels with less snow.²⁰⁴ However, the yaks usually know what to do and do not need much help by humans in these matters, Geshe Thubten Jinpa says.

The (more than) 108 yaks are considered the property of Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Since these yaks were dedicated for his long life, they are taken well care of by the villagers according to Geshe Thubten Jinpa. As written above, the villagers did not seem very enthusiastic about taking care of the yaks, but they did it because they are Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s yaks. The villagers can use them for profit (milk, wool) if they wish, but they are simply not very interested in doing so.

The opening of *108 yaks* is similar to videos one would expect Western animal rights organizations like PETA²⁰⁵ to make, with shocking footage of animals being abused, except for the Buddhist parts. The documentary is also notably in English, with an English-speaking narrator and all the parts that are in Nepali or Tibetan have English subtitles.

I will now move over to the animal liberation practices performed at the ALS.

²⁰² Interview at Kopan August 2018.

²⁰³ Yaks are expensive animals in Nepal so in addition to all the cost of making the move, buying more than 108 must have been expensive.

²⁰⁴ As a few of the villagers mentioned, the work with yaks is in the wintertime.

²⁰⁵ People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.

6.2 The Animal Liberation Sanctuary at Kopan

The ALS was created to house animals that are liberated from slaughter. Currently, the sanctuary is home to eight cows, 50 goats, one cat, one dog, and one sheep. My main informant said that they are hoping also to host chickens at the ALS in the near future. All the animals are neutered, and none of the cows are kept for milk anymore. The goats are all male, since female goats are usually kept by their owners in Nepal as long as they provide their owners with goat-milk. Goats are one of the most common livestock in Nepal. The animals at the ALS are mostly bought from local butchers, and the idea is that, not only should they live out their lives in peace and without any exploitation by humans, they shall also continually be exposed to the Dharma for the rest of their lives. The animals are circumambulated around *stūpas*, the goats even have *stūpas* at their paddock and they are played and recited mantras for and “head-bopped” with holy objects. The goats used to have a player in their barn, but unfortunately they chewed over the cord. Now the caretakers play the mantras from their house, that is next to the goats’ barn. At the sanctuary, the caretakers also play and recite mantras and prayers when preparing and giving out food and medicine to the animals. The cows are kept behind a school building for young monks inside the Kopan Monastery area, and the monks sometimes come out and recite prayers for the cows. The cows are also “head bopped” and recited prayers for by the caretakers.

At a poster in the ALS, under the heading “Changing behaviour” I could read : “Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s vision is for saved animals to be looked after and be constantly in contact with BuddhaDharma. By keeping the animals in a sanctuary, it also challenges society’s ideas of what animals are ‘precious’ and worthy of long-term care.²⁰⁶ Geshe Thubten Jinpa told me that the ALS is a pilot project, with limited capability to keep animals. The goal is to inspire others around the world to build similar Buddhist animal sanctuaries. Now the sanctuary is visited by school groups, meditation groups from Kopan and individuals from Nepal and internationally. The ALS wish to expand the visitability of the ALS as well as its education role. While I was staying there a group of meditators from Kopan visited, and the local veterinary brought two students.

6.3 Who are Involved?

Tania Duratovic, my key informant, has been part of the FPMT for about 20 years. She has visited Tibet several times since 1994. These trips, and the focus in Buddhism on all living beings, was what got her interested in Buddhism in the first place. Duratovic and the other project coordinator of the ALS, Phil Hunt live in Australia, but every 3-4 months they take turns coming to Kopan and

²⁰⁶ See Appendix; illustration 6.

working at the ALS for a month to overlook the animals and take care of medical stuff. Sometimes they bring a veterinary from Australia in order to perform operations on the ALS animals. Duratovic is a veterinary nurse and has many years of experience from handling wild animals in Australia. Phil Hunt is also the project manager at the FPMT's MAITRI foundation in Bodhgaya, India.

The local caretakers at the ALS as of August 2018 is a young Nepali Hindu couple with three children living in a house close to the ALS goats, as well as one Nepali Buddhist who comes to work there nearly every day. The local caretakers get a salary, and the family gets to live in the house next to the goats and electricity for free. The caretakers view the work at ALS as a job. They would switch to a better-paid job if they could. One of them said that he would like to work in construction since it pays better. According to Duratovic, it is hard to find people that want to work as caretakers because "nobody wants to work with animals." According to her, it is considered a low-status dirty job. The caretakers see the caretaker job as a way to get another, better job. In other words, the local caretakers do not work at the sanctuary for religious or idealistic reasons. The Hindu caretakers do not mind reciting Buddhist mantras, "head-bopping" or circumambulating the animals.

6.4 Animal Liberation Practices Performed at the ALS

Animals lack motivation and the mind to practice Dharma according to the Buddhists I spoke with in Nepal. Hence, they need to be exposed to the Dharma by humans. Animals are usually not considered to be able to perform Buddhist practices like meditation, reflecting on the Buddhist philosophy and debating. However, the practices I will go through in this chapter are considered very good for animals as they leave a dharmic imprint on their minds. Mantras and prayers are particularly beneficial for animals as it purifies bad karma, which is believed to be the cause of their animal incarnation. Exposure to holy objects, as well as death pujas and prayers, helps the animals through the *Bardo*²⁰⁷ – the intermediate stage between death and rebirth.

6.5 A Day in the Life of an ALS Resident

One of my goals with the field research was to observe how much Buddhism was part of the daily lives of the animals. Based on my observations the goats were played mantras for most days. The caretakers would sometimes say "Om Mani Padme Hum" while feeding the goats or giving them medicine. Once or twice a week the goats would be taken around the stūpa on the grounds. This was done by leading them around with edible leaves on branches. Often the goats would only make it

²⁰⁷ While the term *Bardo* refers to various intermediate stages such as that of birth, of dream, of meditation, of the moment of death, of reality, and of becoming. In this thesis I will use the term *Bardo* only in relation to the events that occur during the 49-day period between death and rebirth.

one time around the stūpa before some of them would start to go the other direction and then the rest would follow. The circumambulation was either led by the caretakers at the Animal Liberation Sanctuary and their family, or by visiting groups.²⁰⁸ In other words, this is not a ritual that needs to be done by specialists; it can be done by anyone who wants to do it.

Most of the days mantras were played in the room where we prepared medicines, and sometimes for the goats in and outside their barn.

One day I was at the ALS, a monk came and did mantras for all the goats and the sheep and dog, one by one while “head-bopping” them with the blessed objects from Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

On a daily basis, practical matters like de-worming, hoof trimming and taking care of broken legs and vitamin deficiencies, often had to be prioritized over Buddhist practices.

6.6 Liberating Animals from the Butcher

It seems appropriate to start with the initial and possibly most literal animal liberation practice, when the animal is bought from the slaughter. A few days before I arrived at the ALS, Duratovic had bought two young goats from the local butcher in Kopan.

Duratovic told me that Lama Zopa Rinpoche wanted her to get two more goats this year for health and long life.²⁰⁹ Two goats had recently died at the ALS, so there was some space. Duratovic wanted to buy the new ALS goats from a local butcher, since those that have been transported [from further away] get too sick from the transport.²¹⁰ One afternoon, Duratovic and the Kopan monastery’s driver went to a butcher in the village and waited. At 7.30 in the evening, the butcher pulled up and brought out 24 goats. He asked Duratovic to choose from them, but she refused since it was too hard to decide in “this life and death matter.”²¹¹ and left it to the butcher to choose two goats. While the butcher picked them out, Duratovic recited mantras and head-bopped all the goats on the head with a bag filled with holy blessed objects from Lama Zopa Rinpoche. This way “at least they got some Dharma before they were killed,” she told me.²¹²

In Tibet and other places where *tshe thar* is performed the liberation from death, and some mantras and circumambulation is the whole *tshe thar* practice, the animals are not kept with the

²⁰⁸ When I was there was a visiting group of about 10 people, all westerners who had attended a summer meditation intro course at Kopan.

²⁰⁹ She did not specify who’s health.

²¹⁰ While it might seem odd that these weak animals were not liberated, I believe it has to do with the limited veterinary expertise at the ALS. Also, David Holler writes that in Tibetan *tshe thar* practices normally “healthy and strong animals, which otherwise would be slaughtered are selected. These are called *sha ra*, or meat goats. To read more about the selection of animals for *tshe thar*, see: Holler, “The Ritual of Freeing Lives”, 215.

²¹¹ Interview with Duratovic by author, August 2018.

²¹² Ibid.

Buddhists after the liberation practice. This is partly because the most common animals to liberate in Tibet are yaks, and they roam free and are not kept close to people, as Duratovic pointed out to me. Still, they will often get exposed to Tibetan Buddhist mantras by hearing them from herders and so forth in Tibet.

6.7 Circumambulation – Practicing Buddhism with the Body

I asked for a stupa to be built at my house in California (Kachoe Dechen Ling) because we got a dog who was in danger of being put down. Our dog is called Om Mani Padme Hum. I thought that if we had a dog, then we needed a stupa so that the dog could circumambulate it every day. Now, there is an extremely beautiful stupa there, covered with *tsa-tsas* and filled with the four Dharmakaya Relic mantras. These mantras are the most powerful for purification and for collecting merit. Now that we have a stupa, we perform animal liberation practices several times a month, on the 8th, 15th and 30th of the Tibetan calendar and on all Wheel Turning days. We buy worms and insects and circumambulate them around the stupa as many times as possible. We chant mantras and blow on water, which we then sprinkle on them. Then we liberate them: those from the water into water, those from the ground into the ground.²¹³

As already mentioned, circumambulation around stūpas is one of the main rituals performed with and for the animals at ALS. In the quote above it seems Lama Zopa Rinpoche got a *stūpa* built *because* he got a dog, and needed to circumambulate it. In an information video about animal liberation made by the FPMT, it is stated that “The best benefit for the animals is to take them around holy statues, stūpas and scriptures.”²¹⁴ The goats at the ALS also have a stūpa in their paddock, the cows are kept close to the Kopan stūpas. Animals can gain merit from circumambulation. Two of the main Buddhist sites in Kathmandu are also *stūpas*; Swayambhu and Boudhanath. According to Lama Zopa Rinpoche the best thing a human can do for an animal or insect is to circumambulate them around a *stūpa*:

The animal realm has terrible suffering, and the best thing is to think of something that benefits them. The best thing one can do to benefit animals is to circumambulate them around a stūpa or statue as many times as possible. This means they have a chance to purify negative karma and have a cause for enlightenment and liberation from saṃsāra. That is what they need. If you circumambulate 100 holy objects, you create 100 causes for liberation and happiness. If there are 10,000 holy objects present, then you create 10,000 causes for happiness and so on. Each insect, worm, frog, shell, fish, or ant creates 10,000 causes for enlightenment.²¹⁵

Considering how vital intention usually is in Buddhism, for instance in the interpretation of the First Precept, one might be surprised that when practicing *kora* or circumambulating a holy object like a *stūpa* the intention is not the most crucial aspect. Actually, a sentient being does not seem to need to have a Buddhist intention at all to gain benefit from circumambulation.²¹⁶ At the ALS they circumambulate the animals for merit. A being can gain merit even if they only circumambulate a

²¹³ Advice from Lama Zopa Rinpoche, lamayeshe.com, “Leading Insects to Enlightenment”, consulted 05.04.19.

²¹⁴ “Lama Zopa Rinpoche blessing animals”, Youtube video, consulted 22.05.19.

²¹⁵ Lamayeshe.com, “Benefits of Liberating Animals”, Consulted 06.11.18.

²¹⁶ In an advice Lama Zopa Rinpoche says that one can even take friends or other people who are non-believers around a table with a stupa (and other holy objects) while you are having a conversation with them. In this way even if your speech is non-virtuous, you can still collect unbelievable virtue with your body. And the non-believers also create the cause of enlightenment. There is great purification, and also one is able to collect merits. Fpmt.org, “How to Use a Stupa to Bring You to Enlightenment”, consulted 03.04.19.

holy object by coincidence, which was the case for a fly according to a Buddhist story. A fly accumulated merit by accidentally flying around a stūpa following the smell of cow dung. Because of this one circumambulation, much later and in another life, as an 80-year-old man, the incarnation that previously had been this fly allegedly became a monk.²¹⁷ Because of its powerful ability to purify bad karma, particularly for those who cannot practice Buddhism in many other ways, circumambulation is one of the primary practices performed at the ALS. Ideally, the animals are circumambulated as much as possible, but at least twice a week Duratovic told me.



Illustration 1: The goats at the ALS are taken around the stūpa in their area

I asked a monk who was visiting ALS if the animals get benefits even if making it only half the way around, or a quarter around the stūpa, and he replied “why not, it is not all or nothing.”²¹⁸ It can be quite challenging to get the goats to circumambulate and often the goats will go in the opposite direction of what is “the right” clockwise direction around the stūpa. However, some tantric practitioners also reverse the circumambulation practice in that way. Tibetan Buddhism is not an “only one way to the goal (*nirvāṇa*)” kind of religion as one of my informants pointed out.

Geshe Sherab, a philosophy teacher at Kopan, explained how the animals get spiritual benefits without having that as their motivation. He said that certain places have special powers and that:

[if] the motivation is very strong a place can be turned into a blessed or sacred place. Through visualization, it is possible to turn the ordinary into something sacred/perfect ... certain lands and objects have power. These are sacred lands. These do not need to be blessed by someone. In certain places you go to feel very happy.

²¹⁷ Lamayeshe.com, “Healing Course (audio and Unedited Transcripts) “Fly and stūpa Story; Karma””, Consulted: 26.10.18.

²¹⁸ Interview with Michael Geshe Lobsang, by author at the ALS August 2018.

These places naturally have the power to stabilize an unstable mind (at least 80%). Being around these objects or lands creates merit even if the animals do not have the intention of creating merit. So the power of the object gives blessing even if animals do not have motivation” (to be blessed).²¹⁹

James Stewart writes about how animals can gain unintended spiritual development by being close to *stūpas* and Buddhist monasteries and found that holy Buddhist sites are believed to radiate the Dharma and therefore they can purify the heart and mind.²²⁰ This is similar to Geshe Sherab’s explanation.

Every day after leaving the Kopan monastery Duratovic and I had to walk through a very jungly area for 10 minutes every morning and afternoon to get to the ALS. Almost every day Duratovic would find some wounded insect on the way. She would usually pick it up and circumambulate it around her necklace, that functions as a mini-*stūpa*. Insects can also be taken around larger *stūpas* if possible, she explained to me.



Illustration 2: Duratovic circumambulates a worm. A small replica of a stūpa is often used as a reliquary.

The anthropologist Gong Shao has written about circumambulation and the importance of walking for Tibetans. As we have already seen the most common Tibetan word for animals are *düdro* - “one who goes bent over” someone who walks on all fours. Shao writes that in the Tibetan language, ‘going’ *adro* is an important concept and the root of many words. In Tibetan, the concept of being is linked with going: birds are *pur adro* (“flying goer”); frogs are *chong adro* (“jumping goer”); fish are *kyel adro* (“swimming goer”); worm are *nyel adro* (“lying-down goer”) and snakes are *to adro* (“belly goer”). The *dākinīs* of the sky, the Tibetans learned about from the Hindus, are

²¹⁹ Interview Geshe Sherab, Kopan 22.08.18.

²²⁰ James Stewart, “Dharma Dogs: Can Animals Understand the Dharma? Textual and Ethnographic Considerations.” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 24 (2017). 42.

not characterized as living in the sky but as *kh adro ma* (“sky-going females.”)²²¹ Perhaps this is why circumambulation is so popular among Tibetan Buddhists and it is also the only religious observance in which Tibetan Buddhist can bring their valued livestock as participants.²²²

6.8 Head-bopping

The animals at the ALS were “head-bopped” with a collection of objects gathered in a bag that have been blessed by Lama Zopa Rinpoche.. Head-bopping is a word my key informant used to refer to the practice of holding a blessed object like the one on the picture below (bag) on top of a sentient beings head while reciting a beneficial mantra. As mentioned above, Duratovic also head-bopped the goats in the line at the butcher.



Illustration 3: Head-bopping bag, the blessed box inside the bag and Norbu being head-bopped by Michael Lobsang Yeshe.

²²¹ Gong Shao. “Endless Circles: Circumambulation in Tibet.” (2014).8.

²²² Shao, “Endless Circles: Circumambulation in Tibet”, 12.



Illustration 4: Lama Zopa Rinpoche blesses a cat by head-bopping, Moscow Russia. May 2017. Photo by Ven. Lobsang Sherab

6.9 Dharma Names

All the animals at ALS are given Dharma names like *Bodhi* (enlightened), *Norbu* (Jewel), *Phüntso* (excellent/most perfect qualities) *Sunyata* (emptiness).²²³ On the ALS website one of Lama Zopa Rinpoche's advice for naming a pet is giving it a Dharma name rather than a "useless name". That way, the animal will get familiar with the sound of the Dharma name. By doing this, it is believed that a seed is planted in the animals' mind and this will make it easier for the animal to get in contact with the Dharma in the future. Furthermore, if you give the animal a Dharma name, it will be beneficial for the animal every time you call for it since hearing the dharmic name will leave a positive imprint on the animal's mind.²²⁴ Lama Zopa Rinpoche has named his own dog "Om Mani Padme Hum". He says that since Mani means "method" and Padme means "wisdom". Thus, the whole path to liberation is contained in this phrase. He writes that:

Each time Om Mani Padme Hum hears her name it plants the seed for the whole path to enlightenment; it leaves a positive imprint on her mind. Also, it creates the cause for her to understand all the 84,000 teachings of Buddha because they are contained in OM MANI PADME HUM: the two truths, the path of method and wisdom, and the goal, dharmakaya and rupakaya. Each time we call her name it leaves a positive imprint for her to be able to hear the whole sutra and tantra, the complete extensive teachings of Buddha. This is incredible. Definitely, each time she hears her name it brings her closer to enlightenment, to achieve the limitless skies of qualities of Buddha's holy body, holy speech, and holy mind. This is such an easy way to benefit animals and to bring them closer to enlightenment, so we must do it. We must attempt every single way

²²³ Except for two: Poppy the dog, and the ox Christmas that was born on Christmas day.

²²⁴ Enlightenmentforanimals, "Giving Dharma Names to Animals, Consulted: 28.02.19.

to benefit them. We must do it for others, to quickly liberate them from saṃsāra, which is only in the nature of suffering and which has no beginning, which is continuous. Understanding the incredible benefits just of naming your pets, it is very silly and foolish if you don't do even this. It's such an easy way to benefit them, even if you don't do bigger things like building a stupa to benefit the sentient beings living with you. What you can easily do is take them around holy objects, chant mantras, read lam-rim prayers that contain the whole path: the Heart Sutra, Diamond Cutter Sutra, Sutra of Golden Light, Arya Sanghata-sutra – and chant powerful mantras as much as possible. There are so many practices you can recite next to them as well as many other things you can do, but if you can't do these then an easy one is giving them a Dharma name that will benefit them very much.²²⁵

In short we should do whatever we can to benefit animals, and giving them a Dharma name is the least we can do to help them on their way to enlightenment, according to Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

6.10 Mantras and Prayers – Hearing the Dharma

“10 malas a day...keep the lower realms away!”²²⁶ is a statement that is formulated on the ALS website. Reciting mantras is unbelievably beneficial, according to Lama Zopa Rinpoche. I would often hear the caretakers and Duratovic reciting mantras to the goats. The most common mantra was “Om Mani Padme Hum,”²²⁷ and I was asked to say it too while helping out with feeding or giving medicine to the goats. In *108 yaks*, Geshe Thubten Jinpa remarks that saving animals from being killed and feeding them is not enough, they need to hear mantras daily too. In Tibet, the liberated yaks might hear mantras while grazing, but they are not continually exposed to mantras in the way that the domesticated animals at the ALS are. When animals are exposed to the Dharma through mantras their minds are benefited in addition to their bodies it is believed. While we mixed medicine a recording by Lama Zopa Rinpoche was playing. It included the following mantras, the *Namgyalma Mantra* - Lama Zopa Rinpoche says that the Nangyalma mantra is unbelievably powerful and has incredible benefits: if one hears it becomes impossible to be reborn in the lower realms, and in all the lifetimes you meet Buddha's and bodhisattvas and always have a pure life, from life to life.²²⁸ *The Medicine Buddha Mantra*; according to Lama Zopa Rinpoche hearing this mantra ensures that the animals will not be reborn in the lower realms.²²⁹ Additionally, *the Manjushri Mantra, the Shakyamuni Buddha Mantra, the Tara Mantra and the Heart Sutra Mantra* were played.

²²⁵ FPMT, *Liberating Animals from the Danger of Death*, 76-77.

²²⁶ Enlightenmentforanimals, “10 malas a day”, Consulted 27.04.19.

²²⁷ The chief mantra associated with the salvific compassion of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, who is especially venerated in Tibet. The literal meaning of the mantra is often given as ‘Praise (*Om*) to the jewel in the lotus, hail (*hūm*)!’ , the lotus symbolizing the ordinary human mind with its inherent jewel-like potentiality for enlightenment (*bodhi*). However, such a reading presents grammatical problems. An alternative reading is to take the mantra as an invocation to a female deity by the name of Mañipadmi (‘Praise to the goddess Mañipadmi, hail!’), but no such deity is known. Many further speculative explanations of the significance of the mantra are found in Tibetan Buddhism. Most commonly, each of the six syllables of the mantra is associated with one of the six realms of rebirth in saṃsāra. When searching for “Om Manu Padme Hum” on the FPMT pages one gets a long list of articles about the benefits of Om Mani Padme Hum

²²⁸ Lamayeshe.com, “Mantras to Benefit Animals”, Consulted 06.11.18.

²²⁹ Ibid.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche encourages practitioners to recite beneficial mantras loudly, especially for animals that “don’t pay attention” like frogs, fish and so forth.²³⁰ He does not explain why these animals do not “pay attention.” To recite loudly is also particularly important when dealing with dying animals.

you can recite mantras in the animal’s ear, not in a soft way, but loudly so the animal can hear. Make sure the animal can hear the mantras. Reciting quietly may still be helpful, but I think reciting louder is better, so the animal can really hear. That is the most important thing. It’s the same for human beings, even for those who are in a coma; reciting mantras very loudly so they can hear is very important.²³¹

When the animals hear the mantras and prayers, they are believed to develop the ability to recognize these mantras and thus be drawn to the Dharma in their next, or one of their next, incarnation(s). “Hearing prayers and powerful mantras definitely bring the animals to enlightenment. This is the deepest benefit. This means they do not have to suffer in saṃsāra forever. It is the way to bring them from happiness to happiness to enlightenment.”²³² Lama Zopa Rinpoche states. There are several stories in Buddhism, about animals hearing the dharma in their animal incarnation, and how this leaves a beneficial imprints on their minds. FPMT refers to several of them:

When the Buddha gave teachings to 500 swans in a field, in their next life they were born as human beings. They became monks and all became *arya* beings, able to achieve the cessation of suffering and the true path. So the result is unbelievable, just by hearing Dharma words. Vasubandhu (Lopön Yigñyen) was reciting one text called the *Abhidharmakosha* and a pigeon on the roof heard this every day. When the pigeon died, Lopön Yigñyen checked to see where the pigeon had been reborn. It was in a family who lived down below in the valley. He went down and saw the child ... The child became a monk named Lopön Loden. He became an expert on the text which he had heard when he was a pigeon ... Therefore, it’s extremely important to recite lam-rim prayers and mantras to animals.²³³

Hearing the chanting of sacred texts is considered very spiritually beneficial in Buddhism. The Pali canon speaks about the virtues of hearing Buddha’s teaching. Hearing is considered a condition for progress on the Buddhist path. In some Buddhist communities, the name *savaka* which translates to “hearer” is the name for Buddhist devotees. This refers to those “who love to hear the Dharma”²³⁴ Simply hearing the Dharma passively is considered a good way to collect merit. It seems like listening to the Dharma subconsciously creates good thoughts and feelings in the hearer. There is difference between hearing (*sunati*) and understanding (*vijanati*) and between the beings “with little dust in their eyes” who are falling away because they do not hear the Dharma and those who will understand the Dharma. Stewart writes that this refers to the fact that while some might be able to understand the Dharma, they might not get in touch with it or have the opportunity to hear it. The “little dust in their eyes” refers to the capacity to see the truth and have a good understanding of the

²³⁰ FPMT; *Liberating Animals from the Danger of Death*, 50.

²³¹ Lamayeshe.com, “Animal Euthanasia and Health Care”, consulted 06.11.18.

²³² Lamayeshe.com, “Animal Welfare”, Consulted 06.11.18.

²³³ Fpmt.org, “Blessing the Sentient Beings of Omak Lake”, consulted 27.04.19.

²³⁴ Stewart, “Dharma Dogs: Can Animals Understand the Dharma? Textual and Ethnographic Considerations.” 43.

Dharma. In early Indian Buddhism, a trustworthy person is a person who has directly observed the truth of the Dharma. Hearing is the first step and necessary condition for getting to know the Dharma, but it is only witnessing it firsthand that leads to true belief. To build on this one could conclude that although animals can hear the Dharma they cannot substantially benefit from the Dharma since they lack the ability to understand it. Those who are eager to hear the Dharma gain more benefit than those who do not want to hear the Dharma, and thus are inferior. Since the animals might be unmoved by the Dharma, it is unsure whether they can benefit since a leap of faith is also required.

To sum it up, to truly be benefited by the Dharma one needs to hear it, understand it and be receptive to the meaning of it. While understanding is necessary for real progress, there might be some minimal benefits of just hearing the Dharma. It seems that if an animal hears the Dharma, it starts its journey on the pathway to the correct practice of Dharma, at least in a future life. However, according to Lama Zopa Rinpoche some mantras have incredible power, such as the Nangyalma mantra which one only need to hear once it seem in order to avoid being reborn in the lower realms, and meet Buddhas and bodhisattvas in all lifetimes and additionally always have a pure life. Hearing *The Medicine Buddha Mantra*; also ensures that the animals will not be reborn in the lower realms, without any belief or understanding of the Dharma being necessary.

6.11 Death and Dying, Funeral Pujas

Lama Zopa Rinpoche gives many instructions regarding what to do when an animal or human has died or is in the process of dying. For Buddhists, the time of death, and the time before death is very important. The state of mind at the time of death has a huge impact on where a sentient being will end up in its next life. It is essential to be calm, have good thoughts, think of buddhas and bodhisattvas and hear the Dharma at this important time.²³⁵

At the ALS the animals are never euthanized, they live until they die of natural causes.²³⁶ They are given sedation if they are in pain or being treated for illness or fractures. I asked what they did if an animal dies at the ALS. Duratovic answered that the tantric monks give the deceased animal a *puja*. The monks and the caretakers recite special prayers and put mandala sand and other holy objects like small prayers on the body. A Geshe finds the right *puja* to do. The animal is not cremated but buried on the monastery grounds.

According to Duratovic, it is imperative to chant mantras for the deceased the first seven

²³⁵ Interview T. Duratovic 31.07.18 by author.

²³⁶ Except for gastrointestinal worms, and insect-eggs on the cows.

days and then every seventh day until 49 days has passed since the death occurred. In the *Animal Liberation* book, there are various prayers and mantras that are particularly recommended to recite for the deceased the first week after death occurred, as well as at the time of death. One of the most important mantras is the Medicine Buddha mantra. Rinchen Tsogars verse for the dead and dying is good to recite in order to prevent the deceased from going to lower realms. It is important to touch the crown of the head of the deceased before touching any other places on their bodies. The consciousness should ideally leave from there.²³⁷ Duratovic said that unfortunately many veterinarians touch animals' feet during and after euthanasia and this is an unfortunate place for the consciousness to leave, leading the deceased to the lower realms. After death, it is best not to move the body the first few days since the consciousness might hang around confused for a few days. Ideally, one would do prayers for the dead all day during the first days, but if one can at least do the most important prayers during the first week, and then pray every seventh day after that that is very good. The reason to recite the prayers again every seventh day is that if the consciousness has not taken on another body, it goes through another *bardo* experience every seven days for up to 49 days. In the *bardo* all sentient beings turn into *bardo*-beings according to Duratovic, so the process is the same no matter if you do it for an animal or a human. Duratovic says that animals probably take rebirth quickly since they assumably are not advanced in Buddhist practices like meditation. It is doubtful that an animal would stay 49 days in the *bardo*.

If a person has a strong connection with an animal, this makes the prayers for the deceased animal stronger. When someone dies the traditional practices are liberating animals, light offerings and donating to causes. On the posters for the ALS at Kopan²³⁸ it says that the merit of donating to the ALS equals the merit of liberating an animal. It is also more “practical” since there is not really space for more liberated animals at the ALS.²³⁹ These are good practices to do just after someone dies, then one can dedicate the merit to the deceased higher rebirth in the next life. One should put a blessing cord on the dying, give them *mani* pills²⁴⁰ to swallow before they die, spray blessed water on them, use a prayer wheel and put mandala sand on them. Doing 108 circumambulations for the recently dead are also very good. The FPMT has plenty of educational material on what to do just before, during and after someone has died. It is the same practices for humans and animals. Many

²³⁷ This practice is called *Phowa* - a Tibetan word meaning “transferring.” *Phowa* is a popular technique in Tibetan Buddhism of transferring one’s consciousness through the top of the head at death to the Pure Lands. *Phowa* can also be applied at other times by advanced practitioners.

²³⁸ Appendix, illustration 7.

²³⁹ Sometimes local monks and nuns bring animals to the ALS that they have liberated.

²⁴⁰ Mani pills are, according to fpmt.org “little herbal pills which are made by the monks of His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s personal monastery, Namgyel Monastery, in McLeod Ganj, India. You can take one or two pills and just suck them as a means to find reassurance, and to increase the power of your own compassion. You can also take these when ill as a blessed substance to help your mind and body to recover balance.” <https://fpmt.org/inc/pfd/explanation.htm> Consulted 19.05.19.

Buddhists ask monks to do *pujas* and prayers rather than performing these rituals and practices themselves.

In *Liberating Animals from the Danger of Death*, Lama Zopa Rinpoche advises his followers to recite the Medicine Buddha mantra and visualize the Seven Medicine Buddhas on the crown of the dying animal. He also suggest to do the Thirty-five Confession Buddhas practice, envisioning nectar coming and purifying the negative karma of the animal, while taking strong refuge in the Thirty-five Confession Buddhas to protect and guide the animal. He also recommends putting a mantra paper on the body of the deceased animal to further purify. This mantra is written especially to be put right on the body, and should be put right on the skin, on the forehead or the chest of the animal. When the animal is in the process of dying or even after the breath has stopped, one can mix sand from a Kālachakra²⁴¹ sand mandala with butter and put it on the crown. Each sand grain has numberless buddhas abiding in it. It is especially beneficial if it has been blessed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Then the the practitioner should burn the body. If there is a good practitioner or a lama available to do *Jangwa* puja, then this puja should be performed while the body is being burned. After the body is burned, one should keep some pieces of bones and if possible, perform *Jangwa* again on the bones. After doing that, one can crush the bones and make powder. If one mixes this powder with other materials one can make one or several *stūpas*. Lama Zopa Rinpoche recommends putting the *stūpa* in a garden if one has one, and then flowers can be offered to the *stūpa*. This flowers should be dedicated for the good rebirth and enlightenment of the animal.²⁴²

Duratovic notes that death rituals also serve another purpose aside from benefitting the deceased being; these rituals give the grieving something to do besides sitting around crying. The crying is not good for the deceased since it can disturb their mind. It is pivotal to keep the environment around the dying/deceased calm and quiet, and it is particularly important to avoid arguing.

6.12 Benefitting Insects

A reaction I have sometimes gotten when showing the picture of Duratovic circumambulating the worm around her stūpa-necklace, or talking about the insect practices at the ALS is “what do you think the insects feel about this?” Naturally, I cannot answer for the insects, but my main informant

²⁴¹ Kālachakra is one of many tantric teachings and esoteric practices in Tibetan Buddhism. Kālacakra refers both to a patron tantric deity or yidam, of Vajrayana Buddhism and to the philosophies and meditation practices contained within the *Kālachakra Tantra* and its many commentaries. The Kālacakra tradition revolves around the concept of time (*kāla*) and cycles (*chakra*): from the cycles of the planets, to the cycles of human breathing, it teaches the practice of working with the most subtle energies within one's body on the path to enlightenment.

²⁴² FPMT, *Liberating Animals From the Danger of Death*, 105-106.

was concerned with the welfare of insects as well as other animals. For instance, sometimes a few ants would crawl into the medicine bowls we fed the goats with. Duratovic was very concerned we put the ants back where they came from so that they did not get attacked and killed by other ant-tribes in other areas of the ALS. Since it was the rainy season in Nepal there were plenty of leeches in the grass which would often take bites of us when we walked through the muddy grass, if we stood more than a few seconds in the same place and did not pay careful attention. They would often climb into our rubber boots that we had left outside the medicine room, and I sometimes found my socks and feet all bloody when I took off my rubber boots in the afternoon. I found it incredibly hard to be compassionate and patient with the bloodsucking leeches while removing them from my legs or feet, but Duratovic encouraged me to try to release them gently back into the grass. This was a very difficult task since the leeches also wanted a bite of our hands.

Duratovic told me that if she finds dead or dying insects she circumambulate them, and leave them on her (home) altar to die. She tells me that this can take up to ten days, but if it takes long she gives them honey water. She also spray blessed mantra water on insects. Also, if Duratovic sees a beetle in a spider nest she tries to rescue it, although it is an ethical dilemma here since this means taking the spiders food away. She told me about the torturous way the spider paralyze their victims and then eats them alive. To get the beetle or fly out of the spider web Duratovic uses olive oil which she also use to free flies trapped on sticky flypaper.²⁴³

Lama Zopa Rinpoche does not neglect insects either, and he even has a book called *How to make charity of Food to the Creature Ants*. This book deals with beneficial practices to do for ants as the title indicates. The FPMT shop sells “animal liberation tools” and amongst these one can find a box covered in mantras with which one can “catch small insects and remove them compassionately from your house.”²⁴⁴ Lama Zopa Rinpoche designed the boxes, one with the word “Wisdom” and the other with the word “Compassion” written on them. They are particularly recommended for children and can be printed out on hard paper and folded. On the one with the word “Wisdom” it is written “This sentient being says: ‘I am the one who gives you enlightenment’ Answer: ‘Wow!’ You are the most precious one in my life!”. The other has the word “Compassion” written on it, and says “This being says: I am the one who gives you all the happiness ‘Answer: Oh, wow! I must cherish you.’ ” The FPMT website claims that the mantras on the boxes benefit the bugs, while the quotes benefit the humans. The boxes give the impression that the bugs and humans are in this together, that they mutually benefit each other. Besides making sense ecologically, this echoes how the human(s) who circumambulates animals are benefited by the circumambulation too,

²⁴³ Interview T. Duratovic 31.07.18 by author.

²⁴⁴ Fpmt.org, FPMT Shop: “Animal Liberation Tools” Consulted: 01.05.19

and they form a bond with the animals while walking around the holy object(s) together. Animals and humans do share a bond in Buddhism, by being sentient beings trapped in saṃsāra and many of the animal liberation practices seem to highlight this Buddhist belief. It is not clear who brings who enlightenment, or who must cherish who, it seems to go both ways.

6.13 Stickers, Boats, Cars, Shoes and Hats, :

Since objects like cars, boats, and shoes can injure or kill sentient beings, they need auspicious mantras to decrease the harm and increase the potential benefit of any beings getting in contact with them. There are several stickers in the fpmt.org shop which contains auspicious mantras. The *Namgyälma mantra wheel* is particularly recommended. Lama Zopa Rinpoche explains the benefits of using this mantra sticker:

The Namgyälma mantra is very powerful for purifying negative karma. Anyone who sees or touches this Namgyälma mantra sticker will have their negative karma purified. Even if someone is touched by the shadow of the car or house that has this sticker on it, their negative karma is purified. If you have it in the house or on your car, then all the animals and people who come into contact with your house or car are blessed. If you have the Namgyälma mantra above your house, for example on a banner prayer flag at the very top, then the negative karma of anyone who enters the house will be purified and they won't be born in the lower realms. If this mantra is in your car, then the negative karma of any animal that touches the car – that is killed in an accident or run over, including extremely tiny ones that you can't see – is completely purified. If this mantra is written on cloth or paper and placed on a mountain top or roof where the wind can blow it, whoever is touched by the wind receives blessings and their negative karma is purified. Circumambulating a stūpa that contains this mantra purifies all the karma to be reborn in the hot hells. It is also excellent to put on the body of a person who is dying. This is one way that their negative karma can be purified.²⁴⁵

From this, one gets the impression that the mantra in itself can remove bad karma and potential unfortunate incarnations.

In *Liberating Animals from the Danger of Death* there is one mantra that is especially recommended to say for one's shoes, car, tires or boat: "Om Khrecha Raghana Hum Hri Svaha". Lama Zopa Rinpoche claims that if one recites this mantra seven times and then spit on the bottom of ones feet or the soles of ones shoes, any insect that is then crushed underfoot is born in the deva realm of the Gods of the Thirty-three due to the blessings of this mantra. The same goes for car tires, one should recite the mantra seven times and then blow or spit all around each tire where the rubber hits the road. When Duratovic held a guided tour for visitors at Kopan to the ALS one day she encouraged everyone to say the mantra three times and then blow under our shoes before we went to the sanctuary. She told me she does that every time she puts on shoes and goes out.

The FPMT shop also sells a "Precious Mantra Hat". This hat was designed by Lama Zopa Rinpoche and has mantras embroidered in it. Lama Zopa Rinpoche says that:

Just by wearing this hat when you go out in public, not only when you play golf but anywhere, in the street, on

²⁴⁵ Fpmt.org, "Namgyälma Mantra Decal Sticker", Consulted: 07.11.18

the beach, in the market, where many people are shopping—anywhere that animals or people can see you—you are liberating others. If any flies or other insects go under or around your hat (with mantras on), or maybe a person walks around you on the way to another shop, all the time you are liberating so many sentient beings who are suffering.²⁴⁶

By wearing this hat, it seems one almost becomes a stūpa oneself. The FPMT asks people to treat these hats with the respect one would have for holy texts, and not sit on them or put them on the floor, since the hats have mantras on them.

6.14 Mantra Water

As mentioned above Duratovic uses blessed mantra water for several animal liberation practices. She told me that one can have a bowl of water and every time one says a mantra one can blow into this bowl. Then one can pour this water into another container and spray it on insects and animals. If one need to get rid of the water, one should pour it somewhere that one will not walk like a flowerbed or a pond.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche describes how to create and use mantra water:

Start by reciting mantras over some water, which blesses the water, which you then pour or sprinkle on the animals. Then you can say prayers and take them around the holy objects. They get so many benefits from the blessed water. Not all animals can listen to your prayers, but birds and frogs can hear you chanting the mantras when they look at you with their big eyes and stop making a noise. By reciting prayers and chanting powerful mantras for animals, they attain a higher rebirth and liberation. You can perform Refuge Practice, Thirty-five Buddhas, and Vajrasattva practice. This purifies so much suffering and can definitely help them. If you have strong compassion, bodhicitta, and a realization of emptiness, when you blow on the water to bless it, it has greater power, and karma can be purified.²⁴⁷

By blessing the water with powerful mantras, the negative karma that would otherwise ripen as suffering in the lower realms is purified.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ FPMT shop, fpmt.org, “Precious Mantra Hat”, Consulted 19.05.19.

²⁴⁷ Lamayeshe.com, “Benefits of liberating animals,” Consulted 06.11.18.

²⁴⁸ Lamayeshe.com, “Animal Welfare” October 2009, consulted: 06.11.18.

7 Ideal versus Real

While my informants for the most part held an idealist view of how animals should be liberated, and the vision for the ALS certainly is an example of an ideal way to deal with animals according to Lama Zopa Rinpoche, practical issues often had to be prioritized before idealism at the ALS. In this chapter I will give some examples of such compromises.

7.1 Sterilization/Neutering

After some interviews, I realized that the practice of sterilizing the animals at the ALS, that I had more or less taken for granted to be practiced at a place where animal welfare was a priority,²⁴⁹ was by no means a given among the local Buddhists I interviewed. According to Duratovic, many Buddhists consider neutering to be harmful to the animal. Nevertheless, on the FPMT's websites there are articles about spaying/neutering animals at the sanctuary.²⁵⁰

Geshe Sherab, told me that from a Buddhist point of view sterilization is considered harming the animal and is not encouraged for this reason. I asked if he meant that the operation in itself was harmful. That was not the case, as he replied that he would not suggest sterilization since it goes against the natural and therefore it is not encouraged.

In *Protecting the Lives of Helpless Beings*, a book about animals published by lamayeshe.com, the Indian FPMT teacher Geshe Thubten Soepa states that cutting the male or female energy channel of a being is considered a negative action according to Buddhist scriptures. Furthermore, to deprive a being their male or female organs is a cruel negative action since all sentient beings consider their limbs, vital organs and sexual organs most important. The negative karma from this action might ripen in this lifetime or in a future life as the lack of healthy “energy channels” or “body essences.”²⁵¹ The text mainly focuses on “removing” sexual organs and cutting female or male energy channels. It is unclear if sterilization practices where the sexual organ is not removed is considered equally bad. However, it is also stated in the book that Buddhist monastics, monks and nuns alike, are required to keep their male or female organs healthy and intact. According to Geshe Soepa the *Vinaya* teaches that if the male or female organs are not healthy, the vows of the monks and nuns cannot be effective:

For the attainment of the concentration of calm abiding and special insight it is also necessary that the organs, energies and channels are fully functional. The reason for this is that the achievement of stability and clarity of

²⁴⁹ Why did I take it for granted? I believe because Western (Norwegian) animal protection organizations always advocate sterilization of pets and livestock not used for breeding.

²⁵⁰ Fpmt.org, “Treating Animals at Animal Liberation Sanctuary”, consulted: 27.03.19. The fpmt.org is run from the US, so perhaps that is why it is online.

²⁵¹ Geshe Thubten Soepa, *Protecting the Lives of Helpless Beings*, 25-26

mind is intimately linked with the energies, channels and [reproductive] organs.²⁵²

It is evident in the FPMT material that animals are considered to have “mind.” The mind, according to Buddhism, is where the Buddhist practice leave a beneficial mark. Dharma imprints from hearing Dharma names, mantras and so on is believed to be stored in the animals’ mind.²⁵³ Still, it is unclear whether the animals are believed to have the ability to achieve “stability and clarity of mind” such as the ability to meditate, which I will get back to in chapter nine. Animals are, as of now, not allowed to enter the *sangha*. If Buddhists don’t believe that animals have the capacity to practice Buddhism, in the form of meditation, is it still important for animals to keep their male/female energy channels and sexual organs intact? As we shall see in chapter nine sometimes animals are not what they seem, they are bodhisattvas who have taken on an animal shape.

7.2 De-worming and Removing Insect-eggs

A problematic aspect of keeping goats permanently at Kopan is that they need to get de-wormed quite often, particularly during the monsoon season. As we have seen Buddhist monks and nuns in particular, but also lay Buddhist who have taken the vow to follow the five moral precepts are not allowed to kill based on the First Precept. However, the gastrointestinal worms at the ALS will kill the goats if they are not removed.

Christmas, one of the oxens at the ALS had a hoof-disorder that led to a limited ability to walk. Because of this he would often get insect-eggs on different areas of his body. Duratovic told me that sometimes the insects would bite Christmas and then he would get wounds. These wounds attracted crows that would attack the area around his anus, which was very painful for Christmas. Therefore Duratovic and the other caretakers had to use insect repellent on these insect eggs. Duratovic would bless the insect-eggs with mantras and her *stūpa* necklace, before she sprayed insect repellent on them.

Two of the caretakers who were Buddhist would participate in the de-worming, but we needed to head-bop and circumambulate the worms who were dying inside the goats during the five-day deworming process. Because the worms were dying, it was especially important that they were given the Dharma. The worms are considered sentient beings in the Buddhist worldview, and they also need to be exposed to the Dharma before they died. At the end of the de-worming, we would again head-bop the goats and/or circumambulate them, but this was also because it benefited the goats and ourselves as humans too.

²⁵² FPMT/Geshe Thubten Soepa , *Protecting the Lives of Helpless Beings*, 26. Geshe Thubten Soepa writes more about what hermaphrodites and eunuchs can do to apply the teaching despite their organs being “damaged”, 26-27.

²⁵³ See for instance Waldron’s: *The Buddhist unconscious: The alaya-vijnana in the context of Indian Buddhist thought* or Lusthaus’ : *Buddhist Phenomenology: A philosophical investigation of Yogacara Buddhism and the Ch’eng Wei-shih Lun*.

7.3 Euthanasia

Most of my informants at Kopan said that euthanasia was not allowed in Buddhism and that Lama Zopa Rinpoche would say “blank no” to it. Duratovic told me that to put down an animal is considered killing in Buddhism and should not be taken lightly at all. Motivation is the most critical aspect of karma; Buddhists need to really look into *why* they are doing something. One cannot know for sure that one is helping a suffering animal by putting it down. For instance, one might cut off an animal’s life deliberately because one does not want to see the suffering and thus it comes from a selfish motivation. Many Western Buddhists do this, Duratovic said, and in doing so they often mistake their compassion as Great Compassion. She told me that “many [Western Buddhists] think they have Great or Ultimate Compassion but very few do.”²⁵⁴

After doing some research on the FPMT and lamayeshe websites I found various answers to the ethical dilemma of euthanasia. When Lama Zopa Rinpoche spoke about the topic during a lecture in 2013 he said that it is impossible to know where the animal is headed in its next life, unless we are enlightened. The animal could be destined to a hell realm for all we know, and if that is the case, the physical suffering the animal has in its present incarnation might be much easier to deal with than the suffering it will experience in the hell realm. Yet, if one knows that the animal will be reborn in a higher realm it is ok [to euthanize] for the sake of the animal.²⁵⁵ In another case, in 2004, a veterinary nurse asked Lama Zopa Rinpoche how she should respond when she was asked to perform euthanasia on sick and suffering animals. Lama Zopa Rinpoche told the veterinary nurse that:

Bodhisattvas have incredibly powerful bodhicitta and strong compassion deeply ingrained in their hearts. With such, they are willing to be born in the hell realms for the sake of another sentient being – that is, to sacrifice themselves in that way for another being. Therefore, when one kills with a true bodhicitta intention, with a heart filled with Dharma wisdom and compassion, the act actually becomes one in which it is “beneficial to kill.”²⁵⁶

The pure motivation and altruistic decision to end other beings suffering, despite the possibility that one might be reborn in a hell realm, paradoxically makes the action beneficial. Buddhists have to take the vow not to kill, but Lama Zopa Rinpoche explains that this refers to killing associated with ignorance and negative attachment. This kind of killing creates bad karma, while killing with a motivation that is “totally pure” becomes a virtue.²⁵⁷ He stresses that euthanasia can only be done if one has done everything possible to prevent reaching such a “compromising” decision, and made completely sure there are no alternative treatments or methods available. Even then, it is a very

²⁵⁴ I will elaborate on the levels of compassion in Buddhism in chapter 8. Interview at Kopan August 2018.

²⁵⁵ Lamayeshe.com, “Animal Euthanasia and Health Care”, consulted: 06.11.18.

²⁵⁶ Fpmt.org, “Euthanasia with a Good Heart”, consulted: 08.03.19.

²⁵⁷ FPMT, *Liberating Animals from the Danger of Death*, 106-107.

difficult decision to make.²⁵⁸ While Lama Zopa Rinpoche said he “was confident that it is concordant with the views of His Holiness the Dalai Lama at this time”²⁵⁹ he also underlined several times during the lecture that his advice may be different from other lamas’ advice. As Duratovic, Lama Zopa Rinpoche says that the decision should ideally be made by someone who is clairvoyant about the animals’ next rebirth to make sure it ends up in a better situation after it dies. The person that is deciding or performing the euthanasia is jeopardizing their karma and therefore should be very sure that it is worthwhile and not making both themselves and the animal end up in lower realms with “incomparable, unfathomable pain and severity of torture.”²⁶⁰

Lama Zopa Rinpoche recommends a practice for those who are in the difficult situation where they need to decide whether or not to euthanize an animal, but lack clairvoyance.²⁶¹ In that situation he advises his followers praying to the Green Tara,²⁶² and recite both the short and long

²⁵⁸ Ibid,107.

²⁵⁹ Fpmt.org, “Euthanasia with a Good Heart”, consulted: 08.03.19.

²⁶⁰ FPMT, *Liberating Animals from the Danger of Death*, 107

²⁶¹ From the FPMT websites it seems clairvoyance is something one can develop through Buddhist *shamatha* practice and circumambulation. Clairvoyance is beneficial both spiritually and in daily worldly affairs such as medicine and politics: “by having circumambulated the stūpa then you will achieve six clairvoyance, six types of clairvoyance... The sixth one is clairvoyance without delusion, that’s only, that’s a special one from... only practicing Buddhadharma, by attaining the path, by achieving arya path, I think. Then, I don’t remember clearly now, so clairvoyance to see past and future lives, yours and others. Clairvoyance to see very distant, like from here you can see Tibet or other countries, from far you can see things. Then, the clairvoyance, why you suffer like this is because in the past you have created such-and-such karma, why you have success like this, because in the past you have done such-and-such. Clairvoyance like that...So, in order to be able benefit for sentient beings, then if you have clairvoyance then much easier to benefit for sentient beings because then you can see what benefits to them, what doesn’t benefit to them, what fits, so you have all this, you can see all these things so it’s, so much less mistake you make so things are more beneficial to others. So, for example, even in business you need clairvoyance so you can, by seeing the future, near future, the profit and loss, whatever, economically whatever happens, you can see all those things, even in business life you need clairvoyance, so then there’s a lot of protection, you know what’s going to happen so you have a lot of protection... Even the doctor, there’s need clairvoyance so that you don’t make mistakes when you diagnose sickness. There are many sicknesses that you’re not aware, that that’s not explained from the book and there’s many sicknesses these days don’t follow the book, ...yeah, so diagnosis such a degenerated time, even in Tibetan texts...So Padmasambhava explained this in degenerated time the people who are sick, their diagnosis they change. So then they asked what to do, then Padmasambhava explained do this...explained the methods how to achieve clairvoyance, that to be able to help sick people, to do, such as, there may be many other things but such as Medicine Buddha retreat and then, so when you see the, either the clairvoyance understanding of the, what sickness the person has comes within you or, this is without learning at all, without even doing study, the normal procedure, study, so you get understanding in your heart when you see the patient...So anyway, to not make mistakes and to really benefit, so also even the doctors need clairvoyance. So even, yeah, I guess, even in the life of relationship, you need clairvoyance. So that you don’t suffer. I guess, I think in every aspect of life I think you need clairvoyance, because you don’t see the future then you get in trouble. Even in the political life you need, there definitely you need clairvoyance, otherwise you make big mistakes, so even politically, so yeah, this everywhere you need. So anyway, no question, then no question about, of course if there’s clairvoyance also one make less mistakes, even [pause] less mistakes in spreading Dharma if one has. So the best quality clairvoyance is that, after having achieved *shamatha*... then achieve clairvoyance and so then you’re able to do better work for sentient beings. So I asked Kyabje Chöden Rinpoche about it, so Rinpoche said, You think of that object again and again, whatever you have to discover, so you think of that object again and again, then you see, able to see. So, that, so I guess, Rinpoche’s talking from his own experience, that’s how he’s able to see things, the clairvoyance.” <https://www.lamayeshe.com/article/chapter/day-four-benefits-circumambulation-part-b> Consulted 19.05.19.

²⁶² Tara is a meditation deity worshiped by practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism to develop certain inner qualities and to understand outer, inner and secret teachings such as *karuṇā*, *mettā* and *shunyata* (emptiness).

versions of the Green Tara mantras. This mantra is, according to Lama Zopa Rinpoche, very strong and beneficial for the happiness of the animal. He also says that “if you, the practitioner, do not have clairvoyance, as I don’t, you must rely on and make requests to a higher being to help you through *their* clairvoyance.”²⁶³ Lama Zopa Rinpoche recommends asking Green Tara to help with reaching the right decision by performing this ritual:

First one should cut out small pieces of paper, all the exact same size. On each of these pieces of paper one should write an option for the situation, for instance other possible treatments for the animal. Lama Zopa Rinpoche says to make sure all possibilities are included so that the outcome will be most accurate. Then, tightly roll up each piece of paper (long-ways and filament-like) into a ball. Again, one needs to make sure the paper balls are identical in shape and size. One can surround each ball of paper in dough or plasticine, and then hold these paper balls in a cupped hand, while making a strong request to the Green Tara for a prediction of the best outcome that ensures the most happiness for the sick animal. One should visualize light emanating from the Green Tara out to all the paper balls, and it is imperative to have full faith in the practice and one’s own ability. While making a strong wish, one should circle the hand that holds the paper balls clockwise, accompanied with light shaking, and tossing movements back and forth as the arm moves the hand around in a circle. One should act in the way described on whatever option or treatment is written on the first ball of paper that fall out of the hand.²⁶⁴ After this one should recite the *Sutra for Entering the City of Vaishali*²⁶⁵ and if possible continue with the mantras *Maitreya Buddha mantra*, *Medicine Buddha mantra*, as well as the five powerful purifying mantras; *Kunrig*, *Buddha Mitrugpa*, *Namgyälma*, *Stainless Pinnacle* and *Lotus Pinnacle of Amogapasha*. These recommended mantras provides great benefit to the sick animal, according to Lama Zopa Rinpoche. They purify negative karma, keep the animal from being reborn in a lower realm, help them obtaining a rebirth in a higher realm, and enables them to encounter the Dharma in future lives. These mantras are starting them off on the path to enlightenment. However, there is no need to do all these mantras, Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, and one may choose the shorter or longer versions. Lama Zopa Rinpoche recommends that, before one administer the euthanasia injection and just after the animal dies one should visualize the Medicine Buddha and the deity Chenrezig²⁶⁶ in one’s heart, and while touching the animal send the healing light and envision to purify the animal. Then one should chant the Chenrezig mantra and the Medicine mantra into the ear of the animal. This purifies any “spirit harm”²⁶⁷ and negative karma

²⁶³ FPMT, *Liberating Animals from the Danger of Death*, 107

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 107-108.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 148-159.

²⁶⁶ Chenrezig is an embodiment of all the Buddhas compassion. He is also known as Avalokiteśvara and can be portrayed in both male and female form.

²⁶⁷ FPMT, *Liberating Animals from the Danger of Death*, 109.

the animal has accumulated. After this, one should picture Chenrezig, hovering just above the animal's body and visualize light emanating out to purify the surroundings while blowing over the animals' body. In the end one should make a strong prayer for the animal to be reborn in one of the four pure lands and to receive a perfect human body. All of these practices purify the karma of the animal and leads it to a good rebirth. Lama Zopa Rinpoche says this is "the most incredible gift!"²⁶⁸ The veterinary nurse who asked Lama Zopa Rinpoche for advice on euthanasia got a follow up postscript from him reminding her to "not to forget the mantras to recite in the ears of animals... any animal you come across...just loudly enough so they can hear... Rinpoche thanks all who do this!"²⁶⁹ Whether or not it is ever justifiable to euthanize an animal is undoubtedly a complex ethical question for Tibetan Buddhists.

²⁶⁸ FPMT, *Liberating Animals from the Danger of Death*, 109.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

8 Why are the Animals Liberated at the ALS?

As we have seen, many rituals are, at least ideally, performed for the animals at the ALS and much effort is put into their liberation. While I have mentioned some of the reasons why the practitioners perform these rituals, in this chapter I will delve into various motivations to liberate animals, in particular at the ALS. I have found several motivating factors that I will elaborate in the following paragraphs.

8.1 The Bodhisattva Ideal and Responsibility to Alleviate Animal Suffering

The purpose of my life is to free the numberless sentient beings from the oceans of samsaric sufferings; the oceans of humans' sufferings, the oceans of suras' and asuras' sufferings, the oceans of hell beings' sufferings, the oceans of hungry ghosts' sufferings, the oceans of animals' sufferings—to completely liberate them from all these sufferings of saṃsāra, including the cause, karma and delusion, and bring them to full enlightenment. That is the real goal of my life. That is why I am born this time as human being, why I have taken this precious human body this time—to benefit others, to offer this service. For the success of that, I must first myself achieve the omniscient mind.²⁷⁰

This quote from Lama Zopa Rinpoche is an apt description of what being a bodhisattva is about. To see the suffering of all beings, and based on this develop the compassion to free all sentient beings from suffering. Considering that animal suffering is acknowledged by Tibetan Buddhists and Tibetan Buddhists are following the Mahāyāna path, one would think they are obliged to alleviate the suffering of animals. Jamgön Kongtrül, the 17th century Buddhist scholar and *tertön*,²⁷¹ stated that one should “have the superior intention, the fortitude to shoulder the great responsibility of the welfare of all sentient beings solely by oneself.”²⁷² In other words, one should take on the suffering of all other beings, and this is for many Tibetans the foundation of the Buddhist path.

Besides from animal liberation practices there are also examples in Tibetan Buddhist literature of individuals seeking to help animals. For instance, there is a story about the 16th century yogi Shabkar Tsokdrük Rangdröl spending an entire day rescuing insects from a grassfire.²⁷³ Animals generally seem to carry enough moral standing for Tibetan Buddhists to require humans to change their behavior and actively address animal suffering.²⁷⁴ Even if animals might not be morally equivalent to humans in Tibetan Buddhism, humans should act as though they were.

8.2 Karma Purification and Compassion

During the field research I noticed that most of the rituals done for, and with, the animals were

²⁷⁰ Lamayeshe.com, “Kopan Course No. 33. (2000)”, consulted 03.04.19.

²⁷¹ A *tertön* is a treasure-finder in Nyingma Tibetan Buddhism. The tertöns find hidden treasures, like holy texts (*terma*) that have not yet been revealed, in Tibetan Buddhism.

²⁷² Barstow, “On the Moral Standing of Animals in Tibetan Buddhism”, 8.

²⁷³ Barstow, “On the Moral Standing of Animals in Tibetan Buddhism”, 9.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

meant to improve the animals' *karma*, and purify the animals from past negative deeds. While liberating animals, Buddhists are supposed to dedicate the *merit* they gain from this action, to further purify their teachers, relatives or others in need of good fortune. On the FPMT websites there is a large number of references to purification rituals and methods. The animals are, as we know, according to the Buddhist worldview, born in a *durgati* – an unfortunate and miserable realm. Therefore, they need help getting out and moving up the ladder in the Buddhist cosmology. The ALS and Lama Zopa Rinpoche are very concerned about the animals “helpless” situation and are working to “repair” the animals’ bad *karma*. Rather than seeing the animals’ just as “animals” they are seen as individuals who need our help. Lama Zopa Rinpoche writes that it is important to purify in order to end suffering and reach the ultimate happiness:

we have to purify those negative actions, what was collected in the past—not only in this life, but in past lives—so we can purify, and by purifying in a perfect way we don't have to experience the suffering result. Only then is there the ultimate answer, which is to cease the cause of the suffering by actualizing renunciation to saṃsāra and realizing emptiness only, *shunyata*, the ultimate reality of the I and aggregates and so forth. Then we cease the cause of suffering—delusion and karma, the seed of delusion and karma—and we are free from the oceans of samsaric suffering forever. That is the ultimate happiness.²⁷⁵

In Vajrayana²⁷⁶ texts, the spiritual path is often described as a progressive purification process (Skt.: *visuddhi*, Tib.: *rnam dag*) of the body and the mind.²⁷⁷ Some texts focus mainly on the description of initiatory and liturgic ceremonies and insist on the elimination or transformation of impurity, which is considered an obstacle. From this point of view, the concept of purification implies the disappearance of a maculation (*mala*) and the attainment of a pre-existent state of purity. This pre-existent state is often described in positive terms as *tathātā* (suchness). The purification process indicates a type of implosion that “negative” energies undergo in order to reveal themselves in their true nature, and this process is linked to the manifestation of a particular kind of knowledge (*jñāna*).²⁷⁸ This knowledge constitutes the purifying element *par excellence* and represents the very nature of reality.²⁷⁹ The purification theme has a particularly important role in the texts of Vajrayana, which is evident from the fact that we find *visuddhipatalas*- that is, “chapters on purification” in many well known tantric texts.²⁸⁰ The purification theme is split into two different contexts: one ritual and one speculative. In relation to rituals that have to be performed, the term “purification” usually signifies “elimination.” In purification rituals the aim is to remove the impurities present in the body and the mind of the practitioner or the animal. The purification can occur through concrete

²⁷⁵ Lamayeshe.com, “Purifying Past Negative Karma”, consulted 06.04.19.

²⁷⁶ A late Indian term used to designate the path (*yāna*) of tantric Buddhism.

²⁷⁷ Francesco Sferra, “The concept of purification in some texts of late Indian Buddhism.” *Journal of Indian philosophy* 27.1 (1999): 83.

²⁷⁸ Sometimes referred to as: Great Knowledge (*mahajñāna*) or Buddha’s Knowledge (*buddhajñāna*),

²⁷⁹ Sferra, “The concept of purification in some texts of late Indian Buddhism,” 84.

²⁸⁰ For instance in the *Hevajra*, the *Candamaharosana* (XV), and the *Buddhakapala*.

actions such as muttering of specific mantras²⁸¹ or circumambulating. These are the kinds of purification practices that are performed at the ALS. The term “purification” can be used in two different ways. On the one hand it indicates “purity,” the Buddha nature itself, the ever shining and pure condition that is always present in all sentient beings. In Buddhism the mind (*citta*) is conceived as being naturally pure and shining but it can get stained. According to Tibetan Buddhism worldly realities are, perceived by the mind and it is even the mind, in a certain sense, that brings these realities into existence, allows them to appear and to be the object of knowledge. There is an ancient expression that recurs in these texts, which leaves no doubt on the matter: “objects are creations of mind.”²⁸² Note that purification depends on mind. The mind is by nature pure but can get stained. The goal of purification practices is, as mentioned above, to return to the original state of mind. Animals are not believed to be able to read philosophical texts or reach advanced meditation stages, but they can still start on the path toward enlightenment, and begin purifying by hearing mantras and being taken around *stūpas*.

While there are many methods of purification, Lama Zopa Rinpoche recommends generating compassion towards one, or ideally all sentient beings. The stronger the compassion is, the stronger the purification becomes. *Maitri*, which means loving-kindness, is the first of the four divine-abidings (*brahmavihara*) along with *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (empathetic joy) and *upekṣā* (equanimity). These meditative exercises are supposed to help Buddhist practitioners reach enlightenment. *Maitri* emphasizes the development of loving-kindness toward oneself, based on the thought that one “who loves himself will never harm another”. After sending love to oneself, the circle of *maitri* is extended to teachers, friends, someone one feels neutral about, a dead person, then an enemy and so on. While expanding this circle of love, one should keep the motivation

May all beings be happy and secure, may they be content. Whatever living beings there are – feeble or strong, long, stout or medium, short, small or large, seen or unseen, those dwelling far or near, those who are born or those who await rebirth – may all beings without exception, be happy-minded²⁸³

This practice is very common in Tibetan Buddhism and most Buddhists know about it. This method is, according to Lama Zopa Rinpoche, a quick way to accomplish all the realizations and fulfill all the wishes for happiness, both now and in the future. Furthermore, this is the path to achieving the “omniscient mind”, or full enlightenment.²⁸⁴

Lama Zopa Rinpoche proclaims that very compassionate people have more positive imprints in their minds than those people who have less compassion. Compassion, however, is a skill that can be developed, and developing compassion is what many Buddhist practices are comprised of.

²⁸¹ Or cleaning the land for a ritual, fasting or bathing.

²⁸² Sferra, 87.

²⁸³ Harris, “A Vast Unsupervised Recycling Plant”, 211.

²⁸⁴ Lamayeshe.com, “Purifying Past Negative Karma”, consulted 06.04.19.

Compassion in Buddhism is not just about caring for other living beings or objects, a Tibetan informant told me. Compassion should ideally be without an object (*dmigs med snying rje*). When I asked some Tibetan Buddhists about Buddhism and vegetarianism and animal liberation practices they seemed to think that my questions were a bit superficial. They told me that it is important to look at the different levels of Buddhism.²⁸⁵ As far as I have understood this refers to compassion for beings and objects on the one hand, and “objectless, conceptless” compassion on the other hand. Objectless compassion, is considered the highest level of compassion. It is believed that in order to develop perfect compassion one must see beyond the illusion of self. This seemed to be in accord with what several of my informants and Lama Zopa Rinpoche said was needed to make the right choice, for instance in regards to euthanasia. However, Great Compassion is a very rare ability.

During an interview Geshe Thubten Jinpa explained that there are 3 levels of compassion in Buddhism:

1. Just (conventional) compassion: thinking “this animal is desiring happiness, but it is now suffering. It would be wonderful if it could be free from suffering.”
2. The next level is more reflected. Here one is thinking about *why* the animal is facing suffering. Sentient beings are trapped in suffering because they do not understand impermanence, or has a limited understanding of impermanence.²⁸⁶ They are trapped in the self-cherishing mind and therefore keep creating karma, Geshe Thupten Jinpa tells me. He sums the second level of compassion up in this way: This animal is suffering because it holds a view of “self-permanence.”
3. The top level of compassion is “ultimate truth compassion.” At this level, one understands that there is no inherent existence in the being who is suffering, and neither in the experience of pain, nor in the cause of pain. We create reasons to suffer due to our limited understanding of reality and emptiness. We create projections from our own mind and believe that “I exist” and that this self-existence does not depend on anything else, that it is solid. Because of this we keep hallucinating projections and dualisms like hate-love, like-

²⁸⁵ I was referred to this video of a teaching given by the Nyingma teacher Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, by my Tibetan Buddhist informant on the topic of objectless compassion: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KfqLB7wa61U&feature=share> Consulted: 19.05.19.

²⁸⁶ Impermanence, characterize all conditioned phenomena. Impermanence refers to the arising, passing away, changing, and disappearance of things that have arisen, and is a process that takes place from moment to moment. Because of impermanence, Buddhism teaches there can be no eternal self or soul and there can be no permanent happiness in samsāra, because situations constantly change and in time all things decay. Oxford Reference Online, Keown, *Oxford Reference Online*, “*A Dictionary of Buddhism*” Last accessed: 25.05.19.

dislike, he tells me.

The top level of compassion relates to the teaching of no-self (*anatman*) which is essential in Buddhism. If we can generate compassion out of a real understanding of no-self, that is ultimate compassion. Ultimate compassion is based on the right view or correct understanding of reality. This is the best kind of compassion according to Geshe Thupten Rinpoche because there is less chance that it is polluted with expectations of “own benefit” which in some cases seem to override the concern for animals during animal liberation practices.

8.3 *Animal Liberation and Material Well-being at the ALS.*

The ritual of animal liberation is closely connected to a long life and good health for Tibetan Buddhists. At the ALS new goats are usually added to bring long life and better health to lamas like Lama Zopa Rinpoche. When the Dalai Lama developed a chest infection in april 2019, the FPMT and Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive Facebook pages asked followers to liberate animals for Dalai Lama’s good health.²⁸⁷ A Tibetan I spoke to in Kathmandu told me that animal liberation is very effective for long life, and said that the current Dalai Lama will live until he is 113 years old since he liberated many animals during his childhood in Lhasa. And in *108 yaks* Geshe Thubten Jinpa states that liberating animals is good for long life and can cure diseases like HIV and cancer. For the most part, the merit of the animal liberation is dedicated to a person or animal who is suffering from a deadly disease, but apparently it can also benefit those who have infections or psychological issues. At the lamayeshe.com page there are several examples of Lama Zopa Rinpoche advising people with serious illnesses like cancer to perform animal liberation.²⁸⁸ Lama Zopa Rinpoche also recommends animal liberation for those who suffer from suicidal thoughts, depression and PTSD.²⁸⁹ A suggested dedication in the book *Liberating Animals from the Danger of Death* has several paragraphs of who one could dedicate the benefits of animal liberation to, such as the long life and wish-fulfilment of the Dalai Lama, or to the long healthy lives of all other beings, who work for the happiness of living beings.²⁹⁰

When I interviewed the Western project director of the ALS about the human health aspect to Animal Liberation, she said that she thinks it is true, since Lama Zopa Rinpoche says so, but this is not her motivation for helping the animals. She said she initially had a problem with this way of thinking, since she thought it came from thinking that «I want a long life...» and not from a real concern for the animal. Now, she has come more to terms with this aspect, acknowledging that one

²⁸⁷ “Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive”, Facebook post on 10.04.19, consulted 11.04.19.

²⁸⁸ Lamayeshe.com, “Liver Cancer” and “Aggressive Breast Cancer”,_consulted 06.11.18.

²⁸⁹ Lamayeshe.com, “Suicidal Thoughts, Depression, PTSD and Self Harm”, consulted: 06.11.18.

²⁹⁰ FPMT, *Liberating Animals From the Danger of Death*, 36.

need good merit to get out of saṃsāra. I asked her and some of the monks at Kopan what they thought of people who were motivated by curing themselves or someone they knew of illness rather than purely focusing on benefiting the animal during animal liberation practices, since it did not seem to be in accord with the ideal of ultimate compassion. Geshe Thubten Jinpa said that helping a sentient being causes good karma. This good karma can be dedicated to anyone such as a family member, teacher, or another being who might need the benefit. One could also dedicate the merit for one's own long life/good health. He said that as long as the animal is being helped, that is good. However, if the motivation is only on oneself, then the *merit* is limited. Thus, the intention does play in as to how much merit is gained. If the focus is only on compassion for the animal with no expectation of long life/health for oneself or one's own family, but rather for the happiness of all sentient beings, that creates much more merit and better results, according to Geshe Thubten Jinpa. The best motivation is pure/true compassion, not compassion "to get this or that" in return.

Geshe Sherab told me that when Buddhists do good things for others they directly or indirectly get good effects.

If you liberate an animal you have to consider what your motivation for doing so is. Is it pity? Or Bodhicitta? People that are sick and liberate animals will attain on that level. The Buddhist ideal is to not have motivation for one self, but rather just to relieve the animal from suffering. If you liberate animals for the longevity of your own life that is selfish, and Buddhism does not encourage this motivation. The essential question is why you want to liberate the animal. Ideally one should first have equilibrium in the mind in order to have a pure intention.²⁹¹

8.4 Animal Liberation and Quantity? Size or Numbers?

For many Tibetan Buddhists it seems numbers are important when liberating animals. I spoke to a Tibetan Buddhist who said that if one were to liberate goats or cows one could only liberate maybe one or two, whereas if one liberates fish one could liberate thousands of fish. This is particularly effective during the special month Saka Dawa, when karma is increased by 1000.

Several places on the lamayeshe page one can read similar calculations of merit:

If you circumambulate 100 holy objects, you create 100 causes for liberation and happiness. If there are 10,000 holy objects present, then you create 10,000 causes for happiness and so on. Each insect, worm, frog, shell, fish, or ant creates 10,000 causes for enlightenment.²⁹²

Lama Zopa Rinpoche states that if one has one hundred holy objects like *stūpas* or statues on an altar, and one is circumambulating insects around it one is giving each of the insects that is carried around one hundred enlightenments, as many as there are holy objects on the altar. "The more holy objects, the more enlightenments."²⁹³ Here it seems, even the number of enlightenments are multiplied. It never became clear to me what Lama Zopa Rinpoche meant with that.

²⁹¹ Interview with Geshe Sherab at Kopan by author. 22.08.19.

²⁹² Lamayeshe.com, "Benefits of Liberating Animals", consulted: 06.11.18.

²⁹³ FPMT, *Liberating Animals from the Danger of Death*, 50.

While Lama Zopa Rinpoche seems to encourage liberating as many animals as possible, he is also very worried about the way big animals are killed. For instance in the documentary *108 yaks*, he says that “Because yaks have big bodies, they suffer more when they are killed.” It is not stated which method Lama Zopa Rinpoche is talking about in the documentary, but the traditional Tibetan method for slaughtering yaks is by suffocation. This method entails covering the animal’s mouth and nose until they die. If the suffocation is relatively quick, it still takes eight to nine minutes, and if it goes slowly, it can take up to fifteen.²⁹⁴In *Liberating Animals from the Dangers of Death*, Lama Zopa Rinpoche states that “Big ones [animals] suffer more when killed.”²⁹⁵According to Schmithausen, the early Buddhist concept of *ahimsā* grades the seriousness of the suffering that is caused by killing or hurting different animals, based on the intensity of suffering as well as the amount of effort and aggressiveness the perpetrator needs to invest.²⁹⁶ Size does seem to matter when it comes to determining the magnitude of a crime towards animals. Many Buddhists view killing an elephant as a worse offense than killing, based on the thought that killing a large animal such as an elephant requires a huge amount of effort and hence also the intention is believed to be greater (*papanacudani*). Building on this, one could deduct that killing an elephant has worse consequences than killing a smaller animal like an insect.²⁹⁷ This seems to be the case at the ALS. When forced to make a choice, larger animals like goats, cows, dogs and cats are chosen over gastrointestinal worms or insect-eggs for instance. However, I do not know if this is a general pattern at the ALS or just examples I came across during my field research there.

8.5 Taking Care of Animals for their Sake and on their Terms

Whenever I asked my informants why they thought Lama Zopa Rinpoche was so concerned about animals they would usually reply that it was not the case that Lama Zopa Rinpoche was particularly concerned with animals. Rather, they would emphasize that he has compassion with *all* sentient beings and does not discriminate. Lama Zopa Rinpoche has warned his followers not to be biased and get too attached when it comes to caring for and about animals:

Some people take care of animals because they are attached to one type of animal. It’s not that they have compassion for all animals, it’s not that; they just have a lot of attachment to one particular type. Then because of that attachment they help those animals with something which is needed, like giving food to help them and so forth. However, the most important thing is to take care of them with compassion, loving kindness and unconditional love, not with attachment. I hope you are doing that and if so, in that case, I appreciate it very much. You have to take care of them according to how they need to be taken care of; sometimes people don’t know how to take care of them. For example, in the West to keep the dog small, so it won’t grow too big, some people give food only one time each day. Of course the dog gets used to it, but I don’t think it’s right. This is

²⁹⁴ Gayley, “The Compassionate Treatment of Animals”, 40.

²⁹⁵ FPMT, *Liberating Animals from the Danger of Death*, 46.

²⁹⁶ Schmithausen, “The Early Buddhist Tradition and Ecological Ethics”, 21. (from the Vinayapitaka I 225.)

²⁹⁷ Harris, “A Vast Unsupervised Recycling Plant”, 209.

what people like to do, but it's not comfortable for the dog, it's not what the dog needs. In my view, at least give them food twice a day. I didn't think it was right when I heard that dogs are not fed in order to keep their size small. Then it is like it's forced; it's not for the dog's comfort. Some people love to take care of a certain type of animal, and they have some kind of attachment to that type of animal. This means when they take care of those animals, it is from their own attachment, to fulfill their desire, attachment. This means they are actually working for themselves and the main aim is not the happiness of the animal.²⁹⁸

Here we can see that the intention of helping animals and bringing them happiness, no matter what kind of animals they are, is emphasized. Without actually saying it, this quote seem to imply that Lama Zopa Rinpoche would not approve of unhealthy breeding of dogs and cats. Lama Zopa Rinpoche gets personal and states that “he hopes his followers treat animals with compassion, loving kindness and unconditional love and if they do so, he appreciate it very much. Lama Zopa Rinpoche even goes into the role of all the animals that are being helped by saying “I am representing all those animals and thanking you for taking care of us.”.²⁹⁹ Associates with animals to the degree of becoming one with them seems a good idea if he wants his followers to really care for animals and take them into account. Considering that the villagers at the end of *108 yaks* said that taking care of yaks is hard, but they did it because Lama Zopa Rinpoche told them to, and because it was his yaks.

²⁹⁸ Lamayeshe.com, “Take care of Animals with Compassion”, Consulted 03.04.19.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

9 Animals, Passive Receivers of Buddhism or Ethical Agents?

I have touched upon the theme of animals and their perceived religiosity in the previous chapters. In this chapter I will further investigate animals' perceived ability to practice Buddhism and reach enlightenment. I noticed that in all the rituals at the ALS the animals seemed to be *receivers* of religion. They were *taken* around the stūpa, *told* mantras, and performed pujas or other rituals *for*. Oftentimes animals are part of religious rituals by acting as symbols, totems or a helper for the human performing the ritual. At ALS the rituals are performed *for* the animals. At the same time, the animals are often liberated to bring good health to the person who liberates, or whomever this person decides to dedicate the merit to.

I asked Duratovic if she thought animals could be Buddhists. She did not give a clear answer, but said religion is just a label. She mentioned that animals can do good actions, for humans and for other animals. Animals can be altruistic and kind, and pets often bring joy to their owners. Animals do not plot and scheme to get a bigger car, she said. Humans on the other hand can plot wars. Duratovic compared animals with poor people in the sense that animals are usually concerned with survival, focusing on obtaining food, finding or building shelter and taking care of their babies. Duratovic said that there can be friendship among animal of the same or different species, and mentioned a story about a lioness taking care of a baby deer. Many people said it was the lioness instinct and she wanted a cub, but Duratovic said: “what do we know of her intentions?”³⁰⁰ She also mention another story about a young deer that is nursed by a dog. The deer went back into the wild when she grew up, but came back every six months to visit the dog. Animals form friendships and love as we do. Monkeys, gorillas and chimpanzees are even more similar to us and can even use tools, she pointed out.³⁰¹

The monk Michael Lobsang Yeshe told me that it seems certain animals have a strong karmic connection with some Buddhist masters. These pets sit on their laps and spend their whole life hearing mantras and prayers. However, animals cannot be Buddhist in the sense that they cannot take refuge³⁰² or understand what it means to take refuge, he said. In modern times many lamas keep pet dogs or cats. Many monks at Kopan are fond of dogs, but they are not really allowed to keep dogs since they are supposed to not be attached to anyone. Yet, there has been an exception made for one monk who has a dog. Another problem with monks keeping pets is that the monks will need to de-worm and clean these pet dogs and thereby break vows. Also, sterilizing is a

³⁰⁰ Duratovic, Interview with author at Kopan, August 2018.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² In order to formally become a lay Buddhist, you have to “Take Refuge” in Three Jewels or Triple Gem: the Dharma, Sangha and Buddha.

problematic matter, since it is considered to be hurting the animal.

James Stewart, who conducted ethnographic studies among monks in Sri Lanka and how they viewed animals' ability to be Buddhist or spiritual, found that the monks seemed to agree that animals lack the ability to understand the Dharma and therefore also the ability to practice Buddhism.³⁰³

In some Buddhist stories from Sikkim animals and nature take on a more active role, often as messengers of ethics. The scholar Kalzang Dorjee Bhutia has picked out a common story from Sikkim to illustrate this. The story deals with a beautiful white bull (*tsolang*) that would emerge from the sacred lake Kecheopalri on holy days and impregnate the local cows. The locals eventually got fed up with this, and one of the local men killed the bull. When he sliced the bull open it was full of milk instead of blood, and after some time, as a result of this action, the man's family lineage died out. The Kecheopalri Lake also dried up and shifted to another location.³⁰⁴ Bhutia refer to several similar Sikkimese stories and claims that these stories seem to have clear ethical messages to humans. They warn humans to be careful in their interactions with animals, since they cannot know for sure what the animal is. This topic came up in most of my interviews as well. Animals could in certain cases be Buddhist and ethical agents, but that almost always meant they were something more or else than animals: Another message from these stories seems to be about the connection between actions of humans and their effect on the environment. In the story, the man who killed the *tsolang* had his lineage dying out and the lake dried up and moved from the area. In these tales, the lake, in represented by the white bull, is in itself presented as an agent who can pass down punishment and even physically move to another location if offended.

According to David Holler, the *tshe thar* practices are indicative of a syncretism of Buddhist animal liberation based on compassion and a Tibetan belief in sacred animals.³⁰⁵ In Tibet, before the 1950s, most families kept special animals that were hosts for their protection deities. These animals differed widely in kind and appearance, but they served as a medium (*'bab rten*) or base for the gods during rituals. These animals had the role as medium permanently and were not slaughtered. When they got old their status was transferred to a younger animal, and after the transfer the older animal could be slaughtered.³⁰⁶ The animals that were associated with gods were prohibited to kill. Gods could exist in the form of animals for instance the *Gnyan chen thang lha*, who existed as a white yak which sounds similar to the *lobsang* in the Sikkim story. Animals as well as trees, lakes,

³⁰³ Asking the monks about the animals – problem with interviewing the animals themselves.

³⁰⁴ Kalzang Dorjee Bhutia . “Foxes, Yetis, and Bulls as Lamas: Human-Animal Interactions as a Resource for Exploring Buddhist Ethics in Sikkim.” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 25 (2018): 58-60.

³⁰⁵ Holler, 220.

³⁰⁶ Holler, 221.

mountains and turquoises could be *bla gnas kyi sems can* (soul or life spirit animals) and function as soul depositories for persons or tribes. In these cases the life of these animals were strongly connected with the wellbeing of persons and therefore well protected.³⁰⁷

9.1 Teaching Animals to Meditate

Most Tibetan Buddhists assume that animals are less intelligent than humans. Animals are usually considered too unintelligent to be able to practice Buddhism. According to the *Vinayas*, animals possess the faculty of thought,³⁰⁸ but they have a limited ability to develop insight into the true nature of things.³⁰⁹ Since animals live in a state of continuous insecurity, they have difficulty obtaining and maintaining calm mental states. The *Vinayas*³¹⁰ state that it is forbidden to ordain animals to the *Sangha* (the monastic order), and even reciting the monastic rules in the presence of an animal is considered an offense. In the *Vinayas* we find a story about a snake (*nāga*) who takes the form of a young man and thereby gains admission to the sangha. When his real form is exposed, he is expelled from the order by the Buddha who says “You *nāgas* are not capable of spiritual growth in this doctrine or discipline. However, observe the fast on the fourteenth, fifteenth, and eight day of the half-month. Thus, you will be released from being an *nāga* and quickly attain human form.”³¹¹ Here the *nāga* need to obtain a human incarnation before joining the sangha. The *nāga* can practice fasting, but is not considered to be capable of spiritual growth before it has incarnated as a human. The *Vinayas* also state that monks are prohibited from imitating the behavior of animals. Based on this, and on the title of the FPMT book *Protecting the Lives of Helpless Beings*, it seems Buddhists find it highly unlikely that animals can reach advanced meditative stages of on their own.

Animals are so “stupid” according to the 20th century lama Longchen Yeshé Dorjé “so they do not know how to recite even a single *mani* [mantra].”³¹² Lama Zopa Rinpoche seem to hold the same belief about animal’s spiritual capabilities, at least in regards to ants:

The ants cannot practice lam-rim; there is no way for them to learn. You can explain to them for a billion eons – day and night without break for even a second – that the cause of happiness is virtue, but there is no way that they can learn that. You could explain to them for a billion eons – day and night without break for even a second – that virtue is the action that results in happiness, motivated by non-ignorance, non-anger, and non-attachment; no way can they understand. But we human beings, if someone correctly explains to us for even a

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ According to the scholar Lambert Schmithausen animals having a view of self is not an uncommon conception in Buddhism. In the *Yogacarabhūmi* there are passages about an innate, spontaneous view of Self (*sahaja satkayadrstih*) that occurs in animals and humans and this view of Self is considered morally neutral (*avyakṛta*) in contrast to the speculative *pari/vi-kalpita*) view of Self that is unwholesome (*akusala*). (Lambert Schmithausen, *Alayavijñāna: On the Origin and the Early Development of a Central Concept of Yogacara Philosophy*, 1987.

³⁰⁹ Harris, “A Vast Unsupervised Recycling Plant”, 208.

³¹⁰ Vinaya V 222, Vinaya I 86.

³¹¹ Harris, “A Vast Unsupervised Recycling Plant”, 214.

³¹² Barstow, “On the Moral Standing of Animals in Tibetan Buddhism”, 9.

few seconds, we can understand. This means we are most, most, most unbelievably fortunate; we can't imagine how fortunate.³¹³

While humans can practice Buddhism and thereby alleviate their and others existential suffering and physical and mental suffering, animals are not believed to possess this capability. Lama Zopa Rinpoche emphasizes the ants' spiritual incapacities in order to make humans feel fortunate and motivated to practice Buddhism. Existential suffering is believed to only be alleviated through practicing Buddhism. Therefore, a human's ability to alleviate animals' suffering is limited to relieving them of physical pain and mental pain such as fear. Nonetheless, without the ability to teach an animal about Buddhist practices one cannot grant them the permanent end of suffering that is enlightenment. Yet, this is what the ALS has as their explicit goal. Being born as an animal is seen as inferior to being born as a human, and the moral standing of an animal is lower than that of a human largely because humans have the ability to make progress toward the permanent elimination of suffering. Furthermore, humans can also use Buddhist practice to enhance their ability to help alleviate the suffering of others. These factors make a human life more valuable than an animal life. Even Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdrol, who was a strong advocate for vegetarianism, made it clear that eating meat was allowed if a human life was at stake.³¹⁴ In short, human superiority in Buddhism is linked to the ability to practice religion and benefit others in a spiritual way. Animals, unable to practice Buddhism, are trapped in the ongoing cycle of birth and death. Tibetan thinkers consistently side with humans when choosing between saving a human or an animal life.³¹⁵

Teaching animals to meditate is not an objective at ALS, according to Duratovic. To teach an animal to meditate one must be very advanced on the Buddhist path she stated, and one must be able to see the karma of the animal. Duratovic says she is not so advanced, and they do not attempt to teach the animals at the ALS to meditate as far as she knows.

There are a few examples in Buddhist texts of animals learning to meditate. It is fairly common in Tibetan autobiographies to find claims that a particular teacher had the ability to pacify animals by teaching the Dharma. A famous example is in Tsangnyon Heruka's *Collected Songs of Milarepa*. Milarepa was a 12th century hermit and is one of the most famous religious figures in Tibetan history. There is an episode, where Milarepa is meditating in a forest when a scared deer runs in front of him. Milarepa chants a Dharma song and this calms the deer down. Then a large angry dog appears. Milarepa again chants the Dharma and calms the dog. Then a hunter appears. The hunter gets upset that both his dog and his quarry are sitting calmly listening to Milarepa. Then

³¹³ Lama Zopa Rinpoche, *How to Make Charity to the Creature, Ants*, 6.

³¹⁴ Barstow, "On the Moral Standing of Animals in Tibetan Buddhism", 10.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

Milarepa calms the hunter with a Dharma song and this song is so powerful that the hunter renounces hunting and becomes one of Milarepa's most dedicated disciples.³¹⁶ According to this text, animals respond positively when hearing the Dharma, and there are also similarities in how the dog, deer and human responded to the Dharma. The 19th century teacher Jamgön Miphan claims, in his treatise *Guidance for Kings* that “those who are given the scriptures that increase wisdom, but do not make use of them really are animals, aren't they?”³¹⁷ Here the idea is that animals are animals because they do not practice the Dharma. This belief is also held by the FPMT it seems. In the introduction to *Liberating Animals from the Danger of Death* one is encouraged to reflect upon that all creatures have been human beings, but “because they did not practice Dharma and subdue their minds, they have been reborn as animals. Their present suffering bodies are the result of their unsubdued minds.”³¹⁸ Humans that are introduced to the Dharma and yet do not practice are sometimes considered the same status as animals who, by definition, are those that do not practice religion. Jamgön Miphan actually claims that humans that do not make use of religious resources *are* animals, not that they are *like* animals. Building on this, it seems the difference in status between humans and animals are not in body, but rather a matter of “spiritual intelligence”. Humans are only humans if they make use of their intelligence for spiritual purposes.³¹⁹ Lama Zopa Rinpoche seems to hold the belief that humans that do not practice Buddhism have the attitude of animals:

While I have this great opportunity, such potential and opportunity to practice the holy Dharma, especially the Mahayana path, if I seek only happiness for myself, ever-release from saṃsāra, then it is no different from the animal's attitude.³²⁰

In the Milarepa story the animals are calmed by the Dharma, but unlike the hunter, there is no mention of the animals becoming disciples capable of religious practice. Nonetheless, a few Buddhist stories mentions animals practicing Buddhism. In the book *the All-Pervading Melodious Drumbeat* we can read about Ra Lotsawa,³²¹ an 11th century Buddhist teacher who opposed violence against animals. A paragraph describes how he taught various animals meditation:

Likewise, Ralo established many dogs and mice in meditation, and did the same also for the flocks of sheep that belonged to all the landowners in the area. He established in meditation about six hundred young female and male sheep... Then a religious scholar names Geshe Yönten Drakpa approached Ralo to dispute him. He said, “To be established in meditation you first have to obtain a body as support with human freedoms and advantages. Animals are in a miserable state, and so it's impossible to establish them in meditation. Saying you've done so is a lie!” The Great Lama Ra responded, “Yes, generally, I admit that's true, but in some particular cases nothing is certain. ...”³²²

³¹⁶ Barstow, “On the Moral Standing of Animals”, 11.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ FPMT, *Liberating Animals from the Danger of Death*, 9.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Lamayeshe.com, “Kopan Course No. 14 (1981)”, Consulted 03.04.19.

³²¹ Barstow, “Teaching Animals to Meditate”, “The Lost Yak” (Blog). Constulted: 21.04.19.

³²² Bryan Cuevas, Ra Yeshe Senge, *The All-Pervading Melodious Drumbeat – The life of Ra Lotsawa*, New York:

Considering that animals are seen as incapable of practicing Buddhism, Geshe Yönten Drakpa says that Ra Lotsawa must be a liar. Ralo concurs to this but says that this is an exception due to his miraculous abilities as a teacher. While this accentuates that animals are too stupid to practice meditation and need someone with miraculous abilities to help them, this passage opens up the possibility that animals could, under the right circumstances, and with a sufficiently skilled teacher learn to actively practice Buddhism. That possibility represents a striking anomaly in Tibetan narratives about animals. Barstow claims that this is a point worth considering, as science continues to reveal that animals are, in fact, much more intelligent and emotionally complex than we have often assumed.³²³ Another question this brings up is, if those who do not practice Buddhism are by definition animals, what would animals that had the capability to intentionally practice Buddhism be seen as?

9.2 The Karmic Mobility of Animals

I wanted to look into how the Buddhists viewed the animals responsibility for their actions. It seems animals can go directly from their animal reincarnation to a hell realm or god realm,³²⁴ based on the animals' actions. In many cases the incarnation can be improved by the benevolence of, or the animals' closeness to, a Buddha or bodhisattva. The moment of death is most important, and if the animal think about the Buddha or Buddhist virtues at the time of death their ability to be reborn in a fortunate realm is very likely. Based on this it seems that the animals mind in Buddhism not only relates to the animal's abilities to feel but also to reflect and to be receptive to the teachings of the Buddha. If an animal engages in an extremely defiled action it can end up in a hell realm. Does this imply that animals responsible for their acts? And does this even apply to, for instance predators who are killing out of instinct? I asked some of my informants about whether we should protect animals' from creating bad karma for themselves if we could. Geshe Thubten Jinpa replied that we should indeed try to do this and it is very important. He said that animal liberation is about giving the animal a good life and a good environment but it is important to make sure the animals no longer create bad karma, like killing or stealing. Animals cannot change their mind on their own he said, and if we can inhibit them from killing that is good. Animals are less capable mentally than humans. Their mind do not understand what is positive or negative. They have been born as animals due to negative forces. The animal body remain in a state of ignorance and therefore they keep doing negative things with their body, speech and mind. In other words, they create more bad karma for themselves if they are so inclined. Their mind is very self-cherishing/self-attached, Geshe

Penguin Classics, 2015. 108.

³²³ Barstow, thelostyak.com, "Teaching Animals to Meditate", consulted 21.04.19.

³²⁴ Chapple, *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth and Self in Asian Traditions*, 23.

Thubten Jinpa told me. By behaving in negative ways the animals are constantly creating more negatives. Therefore we must find ways to decrease their negative imprints. We can do this by saying prayers for them, taking them around holy objects, Buddhist relics, and Buddhist images. In other words, performing the Buddhist activities that are done at the ALS. These actions purify their negative imprints. By doing this we can make their life safer in the future. The idea is to avoid negative imprints and purify negative imprints.

Geshe Sherab told me that whether we should keep animals' from creating more bad karma, depends on our motivation for doing so. We have to make sure it is not out of our own egotism.

Duratovic said she lets her cats at home in Australia out, but only in the daytime, and not at night because it is not encouraged in Australia due to wildlife being threatened by cats. If the cats catch birds, which only happens very rarely, she circumambulate the birds and recite mantras for them. That way they would at least get some Dharma before they die. While my responses did indeed confirm that animals actions create karma, it still seems that animal incarnation are looked at as very unfortunate, and animals for the most part are seen as quite helpless, and in need of human or divine help to change their habitual tendencies.

9.3 Can Animals reach Enlightenment from their Animal Incarnation?

The name of the website and Facebook page for the ALS is “Enlightenment for the Dear Animals”. That spurred me to research whether my Buddhist informants thought that animals can reach enlightenment from their present incarnation in animal bodies, despite their low place in Buddhist cosmology.

The scholar of Buddhist studies Lambert Schmithausen, writes that in the early Buddhist tradition animals were viewed as intellectually inferior to humans. They were believed to have some capacity for thinking (*manasikara*) but lacking the faculty of insight (*prajna*).³²⁵ Based on this belief, animals could not understand the Buddhist doctrine, and not attain liberation. The only way to attain liberation would be to be reborn as a human in a later existence. It was regarded as unlikely but possible for animals to obtain a human rebirth. Subsequently, despite the fact that animals are regarded as autonomous entities, possessing both consciousness and devotional capabilities, animals are more challenged than humans when it comes to the possibility of liberation. The lack of insight into the true nature of reality impacts animal's moral status.³²⁶

When I asked my informants if they thought it could be possible for animals to reach

³²⁵ Schmithausen, “The early Buddhist tradition and ecological ethics.” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 4 (1997): 27.

³²⁶ Harris, “A Vast Unsupervised Recycling Plant”, 208.

enlightenment from their animal incarnation without incarnating as humans first, I would mostly get negative answers. Geshe Thubten Jinpa said that it is technically not possible for animals to reach enlightenment directly, because before one gets enlightened there are different stages one needs to go through and reach. For instance, it is necessary to understand the ultimate truth (Skt: *paramārtha-satya*, Tib: *dondan dempa*). When one has seen the ultimate truth, meaning one has had a direct perception of it, one is considered an *arhat*. An *arhat* ceases to reincarnate in the lower realms like the animal realm. Thus, animals are not *arhats* and they cannot reach enlightenment.

Geshe Sherab on the other hand, answered that it was possible that animals could reach enlightenment from their animal bodies. According to him, every sentient being has the possibility to attain enlightenment. The most common answer to this question was however that some special kinds of animals could become, or already be, enlightened.

9.4 Bodhisattvas as Animals

Several of my informants in Nepal said that bodhisattvas can take on whatever form is most beneficial to help other not-enlightened sentient beings. The shape a bodhisattva chooses can be any kind of sentient being and even helpful objects like bridges. If one does not have the ultimate wisdom (Tib: *Yeshe*, Sanskrit: *jñāna*) to see an animal's karma one cannot know for sure if it might be a bodhisattva. My main informant told me that a few years ago Lama Zopa Rinpoche had recognized a dog called Lhamo (Tib: goddess) in a monastery in India as a bodhisattva and told the people there to change her name to Bodhisattva.

In an advice from Lama Zopa Rinpoche regarding insects, the insects seem to be presented as bodhisattvas:

...if you find worms, insects, or flies in the house, or ants on your body—basically any insect that you find—you can catch them and put them in a plastic bag or the insect catchers [boxes above for instance] then take them around the stupa a few times, and then release them in a safe place. Or if you have a thousand ants or crickets in a plastic bag, then you can take them all around the stupa. This plants the seed of enlightenment in all their hearts, and there is great purification of heavy negative karma that has been collected from beginningless rebirths. Also, they collect extensive merits. This is the best present from your side that you can offer them, as they are the cause of all your happiness from beginningless rebirths until now and also in the future. Every single happiness you receive from them. Beside that, they have been kind to you from beginningless rebirths. They have created so much negative karma in order to take care of you. they have suffered unbelievably, unbelievably, unbelievably for you and will do so again in the future, until you are free from saṃsāra.³²⁷

This advice gives an interesting twist to the usual hierarchy in Buddhism where the human realm is put above the animal realm. The insects seem to have had such great compassion they took on others bad karma in order to benefit others, and therefore they are presently in an insect incarnation. When Lama Zopa Rinpoche says “they are the cause of all your happiness from beginningless

³²⁷ Fpmt.org, “How to use a Stupa to Bring You to Enlightenment”, Consulted 05.04.19.

rebirths until now and also in the future” it also makes sense ecologically, although it does not seem to be what he implies, at least not explicitly.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche says that the insects:

have been our mother numberless times, and because of their kindness we have been able to practice Dharma. As our mothers, they protected our lives from hardships and dangers every day and bore so many hardships for us. These insects are the source of all our present happiness, as well as all our previous and future happiness, and all the realizations of the path up to enlightenment.³²⁸

However, a bodhisattva does not really count as an animal. In the case of a bodhisattva taking on an animal shape, what would appear to not enlightened beings as an animal, “would be in the animal realm, but it would not really be an animal” as one of my informants said. It is strictly speaking a bodhisattva and not really an animal.³²⁹ Geshe Sherab told me that “certain animals can be [Buddhist]”. He continued saying that many bodhisattvas are born as animals. These are special animals and different from those animals that are born as animals due to karmic reasons. Those (the karmic) animals are normal animals. The bodhisattva animals are Buddhists, while normal animals do not have religion at all according to Geshe Sherab. When I ask him if these animals really are animals he replied that in the world they are animals, we see them as normal animals. They are emanations.³³⁰

When the Dalai Lama was asked whether a buddha or bodhisattva could be a regular/ordinary person and not necessarily an individual that has been recognized as a lama or a monk or nun, The Dalai Lama replied: “the external forms of the manifestations of the buddhas and bodhisattvas can be of many different kinds, in fact including animals as well, so the external appearances are not fixed.”³³¹

As already mentioned, there are plenty of Jātaka stories about the Buddha in animal forms in his earlier reincarnations. Many of these stories are about animals practicing compassion, and in some instances, they are even practicing *maitri* (loving-kindness) for wicked human beings.

The scholar Padmanabh Jaini notes that when a bodhisattva appears as an animal-manifestation in Buddhist fables such as the Jātaka tales, the bodhisattva not only leads an exemplary life in the animal shape, perfecting the practices of charity(*dana*) and moral discipline. Additionally, the bodhisattva that has taken on an animal form even preaches the Dharma to human beings.³³²

³²⁸ Lamayeshe.com, “Leading Insects to Enlightenment”, consulted 06.04.19.

³²⁹ Interview with Geshe Thubten Jinpa, 20.08.18, and interview with Michael Lobsang Yeshe, August 2018.

³³⁰ Interview with Geshe Sherab at Kopan by Author, 22.08.18.

³³¹ Lamayeshe.com, “Teachings on Lamrim Chenmo”, consulted 03.04.19.

³³² Padmanabh S. Jaini, ed. *Collected papers on Jaina studies*. Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 2000. 257.

9.5 Nothing is certain

From all of this we can summarize that there is no common shared view on the status and religious capabilities of animals among Tibetan Buddhists. The consensus seems to be that animals are mentally less capable of practicing the Dharma than humans and need our help, or preferably the help of great Buddhist masters so that they can practice and hopefully be reincarnated as humans or better in a future life. However, animals are not always what they seem; they can be Buddhist masters in “disguise” - bodhisattvas who have taken on an animal body to be of help for other living beings.

The ending of Ralo’s quote above seems to sum up the animal view among my informants: “nothing is certain”. We can assume much about animals and their mental capabilities, but (as long as we are not enlightened) we can never truly know who they are or what they are capable of.

10 Summary

The impetus for this thesis emerged from my curiosity about how Tibetan Buddhists view animals. While working on this thesis, I have attempted to gather as much data as possible from the Animal Liberation Sanctuary and the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition to give examples of their worldview and how animals fit into it.

My research questions were, how much and what kind of Dharma is part of the life of the animals at the Animal Liberation Sanctuary at the Kopan monastery in Nepal, and why are these animal liberation practices done for the animals at the ALS. What was the Buddhist's motivation to liberate animals? And how does practical necessities such as medical measures clash with idealism at the ALS. I also wanted to explore the spiritual status of the animals, in the eyes of my informants and the initiator of the ALS, Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

To gather information I conducted a field research at the ALS for one month, in July/August 2018, during which I participated and observed in the rituals that were performed for the animals. I also had daily dialogues with the project director for two weeks. I interviewed a monk and two Geshes at the Kopan monastery to collect material to answer these questions. To get a broader view on the context I also interviewed a Nepali animal activist in Kathmandu and a Tibetan Buddhist that lives and works in Kathmandu. Additionally, I leaned on the extensive information about animals and animal liberation practices that is available on the FPMT's websites; Lamayeshe.com, enlightenmentforanimals.org and fpmt.org .

I discovered that the animals at the ALS are circumambulated around the *stūpa* in their area weekly, and recited mantras for as often as possible. I got the impression that the project director is most dedicated to the animals dharmic exposure, but the local caretakers also perform play mantras in the medicine room and circumambulates the animals since it is part of their job. Considering that the animals are kept at the ALS permanently, and until they reach old age, the animals need to be taken care of physically as well as spiritually. I noticed that medical treatments often had to be prioritized over religious rituals. However, medicine and spiritual benefit can be combined, such as when Lama Zopa Rinpoche's recording of "Recitations for Animals" were played while we were mixing and giving the goats medicine. As noted in the introduction, I only got a brief glimpse of the animal's routines, by staying at the ALS for one month only, and these routines may change with the different seasons in Nepal.

While the goal at the ALS is very idealistic, certain measures is required in order to keep cows and goats healthy in Nepal. One of these is the fortnightly de-worming practice that needs to

be carried out throughout the monsoon season. De-worming causes the gastrointestinal worms to die inside the cows, goats, dog and cat at the ALS. Since intentional killing is never accepted in Buddhism, this posed an ethical dilemma. The same goes for using insect-repellent on insect infections some of the animals had. To at least expose these worms and insects to the Dharma, my informants would circumambulate the goats during the de-worming, head-bop the dog, cows and goats with holy objects, and recite mantras for all the animals during these processes. Another controversial theme was sterilization. Some local informants regarded it as harming the animal, and cutting of life energy, while the Western project director did not seem to view at sterilization as a problem at all. I also explored how these Buddhists viewed animal euthanasia. While I was initially told that euthanasia was never allowed in Buddhism, I discovered several advices from Lama Zopa Rinpoche about practices one can do if one is considering such a “compromising” decision on behalf of an animal. In short, euthanasia is never recommended, an certainly never an easy decision to make, and should ideally only be made by someone who is clairvoyant about the animals’ next incarnation according to Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

When I looked into why the Buddhist informants were liberating animals, I found many and varied reasons. Human health appears to be an important motivating factor. Most of my local Nepali informants seemed to tie animal liberation very close to human health. The fact that new goats are brought to the ALS for the health of Lama Zopa Rinpoche also underlined this. The belief is that liberating an animal from death can cure someone from various diseases, for instance HIV or cancer or various psychological problems. The merit from animal liberation practice is something one dedicates to whomever one wish, often someone who are sick. Oftentimes, the merit is dedicated to Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Some of my informants did not seem very concerned with the health benefiting aspect of animal liberation, and seemed more genuinely interested in helping animals for their own sake. In Tibetan Buddhism the ideal is to liberate all sentient beings from suffering, out of compassion, and this naturally includes animals. Animals are also born in an unfortunate realm according to Buddhist belief, so they need extra help getting out of misery and onto the path towards enlightenment. According to my informants, there should be a concern for the animals in themselves and not just the merit that is accumulated by the human performing the liberation.

My last research question was how the Buddhists view animals. Did the Buddhist informants believe animals can get enlightened as the name of the websites of the ALS “Enlightenment for the Dear Animals” indicate? For the most part I would get a negative reply to this question. According to one of my informants, animals are technically not able to reach enlightenment. However, all my informants seemed to agree that we cannot know what we really see when we think we look at an animal. It could be a bodhisattva in disguise. Yet, a bodhisattva is

not really an animal, as my informants would point out. So again, it seems the answer is no to whether “regular” animals can get enlightened. The only animals that could be considered Buddhists, are those that are in fact bodhisattvas in disguise. However, in these cases they are not really animals as one of my informants pointed out. Some of my informants said they just didn’t know how spiritual or Buddhist animals are, since they were not enlightened and therefore did not have the capacity to perceive the abilities of other beings. All my informants seemed to agree that animals are not always what they seem, they can be bodhisattvas in disguise, or they can be our family members from past lives according to Buddhist teachings.

In many ways the FPMT certainly follows a Buddhist tendency to see animals as lower than humans. The reason for this is that in a human incarnation one is able to understand the Buddhist teachings and practice the Dharma, and thus liberate oneself and others from suffering. Animals are seen as in need of help to purify themselves of past bad deeds that made them incarnate as animals. An interesting twist to this view was when Lama Zopa Rinpoche suggested the possibility that some insects had incarnated as insects as a consequence of burdening themselves with much negative karma for us, out of compassion. The insects were portrayed as bodhisattvas, based on their immense capacity for compassion. Thus, these insects are in a way spiritually above us, even though they are born in an unfortunate realm according to the Buddhist cosmology. Lama Zopa Rinpoche also do not really discriminate based on species when being compassionate, and he instructs his followers not to do so either, by for instance being kinder to favorite kinds of animals than to other animals.

The belief at the ALS is that animals get liberated in many ways. The most obvious way is that they get liberated from being killed. Despite the fact that Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s book concerning animal liberation practices is called “Liberating Animals from the Danger of Death,” liberating the animals from death is not the ultimate nor main goal of these Buddhists. The goal is to give them *merit*, so they can get started on their path to enlightenment by getting out of their unfortunate realm *durgati* and eventually be liberated from *samsāra* and reach enlightenment to end their own and everyone else’s suffering. While the animals might or might not be able to get enlightened in their present or next incarnation, the aim is to help them get started on their path to enlightenment.

11 *Postscript - Circles of Humans and Animals*

In the act of marking off a space through physically walking its circumference, (humans) create a boundary between the sacred and the profane or mundane aspects of their world. In the course of the journey of circumscribing a space, the person or group exists in sacred time.³³³

Gong Shao pointed out that the circular movement around a stūpa is compatible with the Buddhist philosophy of saṃsāra, which considers life to be the cycle of death and rebirth, in which beings are reborn into six different realms depending on their karma from previous lives. Circumambulation symbolizes this outlook on life, endless circles without a beginning or an end. Buddhists believe that all unenlightened beings are trapped in the circle of saṃsāra, karmically doomed to reincarnate until they reach enlightenment.

It seems likely that consciously or unconsciously the human is also influenced when helping an animal obtaining merit through animal liberation practices. The human receives the merit from helping the animal getting closer to the Dharma, but additionally, when a human circumambulates an animal and recites mantras, she will also get the benefit of these practices. Additionally, the human needs to spend time with and around the animal(s), in some cases even moving together to perform these Buddhist rituals. Through these practices a closer bond might be created between human and animal. I could not find any such motif of building rapport between humans and other animals stated explicitly by my informants nor on the FPMT websites, yet this seems to be a likely side effect of the animal liberation practices. I suspect these rituals bring the individual animal and human closer together. Compassionately removing an insect from one's home is good for that particular insect, but also function as a symbolic action and enables the practitioner to become more aware of their surrounding and surrounding creatures. After staying at the ALS, I would sometimes try to do some of the practices I had observed at the ALS for recently deceased animals came across, such as squirrels and pigeons. While trying to find the right mantra to recite, then reciting the mantra and touching the animals' crown, I noticed that these practices made me stop and reflect upon the dead animal. The practice becomes a contemplation the importance of all sentient beings, and how we are all connected in death.

Joanna Macy, an American Buddhist, writes that the original teaching of the Buddha is a theory on the universal interconnectedness and radical interdependence of all phenomena. In Buddhist practice and philosophy there is a focus on dismantling the ego, the separate continuous self and how this leads to identification and responsibility for the whole world; humans as well as

³³³ Paul Larson, 2010. "entry: circumambulation." in *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*, edited by David A. Leeming, Kathy Maden and Stanton Marlan, pp. 153. New York: Springer.

all other sentient beings.³³⁴ The practices done for animals at the ALS seem to incorporate this theory of interconnectedness in their exertion, as well as the Buddhist teaching of compassion.

³³⁴ Schmithausen, "The Early Buddhist Tradition and Ecological Ethics", 4.

12 Bibliography

12.1 Primary Sources

21zaro, “Lama Zopa Rinpoche blessing Animals”, Video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=19&v=bY4lgj-FvZE Youtube, Posted 04.09.2017. Last accessed 22.05.19.

Enlightenment for the dear animals, <http://www.enlightenmentforanimals.org>

“10 malas a day”, <https://enlightenmentforanimals.org/10-malas-a-day/> Last accessed: 27.04.19.

“Giving Dharma Names to The Animals” <https://enlightenmentforanimals.org/naming-animals/> Last accessed: 27.04.19.

“What is Animal Liberation” <https://enlightenmentforanimals.org/what-is-animal-liberation/> Last accessed: 22.05.19.

Enlightenment for the Dear Animals”, <https://www.facebook.com/Enlightenment-for-the-Dear-Animals-122395807825063>, Facebook page, last accessed: 03.04.19.

Geshe Thubten Soepa, *Protecting the Lives of Helpless Beings – The Udamwara Lotus Flower*, lamayeshe.com, FPMT, 1995/2005

FPMT, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, “Recitations for animals – MP3 Download”. Lama Zopa Rinpoche, 2005. Mp3.

FPMT: <https://fpmt.org> (Portland, USA):

“Animal Liberation Sanctuary“, <https://fpmt.org/projects/other/alp/> Last accessed: 13.04.19.

“Animal Liberation Tools” Fpmt.org, FPMT Shop: https://shop.fpmt.org/Animal-Liberation-Tools-PDF_p_3166.html Last accessed: 01.05.19

“Blessing the Sentient Beings of Omak Lake”, Posted 09.11.16, <https://fpmt.org/lama-zopa-rinpoche-news-and-advice/lama-zopa-rinpoche-news/blessing-the-sentient-beings-of-omak-lake/>, Last accessed: 27.04.19.

“Curriculum Vitae of Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche,” https://fpmt.org/wp-content/uploads/teachers/zopa/CV_of_Lama_Thubten_Zopa_Rinpoche.pdf, Last accessed: 18.04.19.

“Download the Sutra of Golden Light” <https://fpmt.org/education/teachings/sutras/golden-light-sutra/download/#wearable> Last accessed: 05.05.19.

“Euthanasia with a Good Heart”, Posted: October/November 2004.

<https://fpmt.org/mandala/archives/mandala-issues-for-2004/october/euthanasia-with-a-good-heart/> fpmt.org, Last accessed 08.03.19.

“FPMT Annual Review 2018 – Live With Compassion, August 2018, <https://fpmt.org/wp-content/uploads/fpmt/annual-review/FPMT-AR-2018.pdf> Last accessed: 04.05.19.

“His Holiness the Dalai Lama speaks on Aging and Death”, July-September 2013, <https://fpmt.org/mandala/archives/mandala-for-2013/july/his-holiness-the-dalai-lamas-visit-to-switzerland/> Fpmt.org, Last Accessed: 08.03.19.

“How to Use a Stupa to Bring You to Enlightenment”, Posted: 01.04.2019. <https://fpmt.org/lama-zopa-rinpoche-news-and-advice/advice-from-lama-zopa-rinpoche/how-to-use-a-stupa-to-bring-you-to-enlightenment/> Last accessed: 03.04.19.

“The Origins of FPMT - Why the FPMT was Started”, <https://fpmt.org/fpmt/vision/> Last accessed:

04.05.19.

“Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s Vast Visions for FPMT” <https://fpmt.org/fpmt/vast-vision/> Last accessed: 04.05.19.

“Namgyalma Mantra Decal Sticker”, https://shop.fpmt.org/Namgyalma-Mantra-Decal-Sticker_p_668.html fpmt.org, Last accessed: 04.05.19.

“Practices to Stop the Animal sacrifice in Nepal”, Posted: November 2009, https://fpmt.org/wp-content/uploads/teachers/zopa/advice/pdf/Practices%20to%20stop%20animal%20sacrifice%20in%20Nepal_English.pdf Last accessed: 18.04.19

“Precious Mantra Hat”, FPMT shop, https://shop.fpmt.org/Precious-Mantra-Hat-_p_606.html Last Accessed: 19.05.19.

“Stop Animal Sacrifice”, Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s letter regarding Gadhimai from 2009, https://fpmt.org/wp-content/uploads/teachers/zopa/advice/pdf/Practices%20to%20stop%20animal%20sacrifice%20in%20Nepal_English.pdf, Last accessed 03.04.19.

“Treating Animals at Animal Liberation Sanctuary”, Posted 05.09.14., <https://fpmt.org/fpmt-community-news/news-around-the-world/treating-animals-at-animal-liberation-sanctuary/> Last accessed: 04.05.19.

FPMT: Geshe Thubten Jinpa, *108 yaks*, 2012. Film. Produced by the FPMT.

FPMT, *Liberating Animals from the Danger of Death*, Portland: FPMT Inc. 2005.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche, *How to make charity of Food to the creature Ants*, Portland: FPMT Inc. 2010.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Facebook Page, “Snake Does Three-Week Retreat with Lama Zopa Rinpoche” Posted: 21. November 2016.

<https://www.facebook.com/lamazoparinpoche/photos/snake-does-three-week-retreat/10154715863911241/> Last Accessed: 19.05.19.

Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, <https://www.lamayashe.com> (run by FPMT):

“Aggressive Breast Cancer”, Advice given: January 2014/Posted online august 2017, <https://www.lamayashe.com/advice/aggressive-breast-cancer> Last accessed: 04.05.19.

“Animal Euthanasia and Health Care”, Date of advice September 2013, Posted November 2014, <https://www.lamayashe.com/advice/animal-euthanasia-and-health-care> Last accessed: 06.11.18.

“Animal Welfare”, October 2009, <https://www.lamayashe.com/advice/animal-welfare>, Last accessed: 04.05.19.

“Benefits of Liberating Animals”, October 2005, <https://www.lamayashe.com/advice/animal-liberation>, Last accessed: 06.11.18.

“Day Four: Benefits of Circumambulation Part B” Teaching from Bodhgaya India 2006, <https://www.lamayashe.com/article/chapter/day-four-benefits-circumambulation-part-b> Last accessed: 19.05.19.

«Four Suffering Results» ,<https://www.lamayashe.com/article/chapter/four-suffering-results> Last accessed: 14.04.19.

“Healing Course (Audio and Unedited Transcripts) “Fly and stūpa Story; Karma” Lama Zopa Rinpoche <https://www.lamayashe.com/article/chapter/fly-and-stupa-story-karma> lamayashe.com, Melbourne, Australia, 1991 (Archive #874) Last accessed: 18.04.19.

“Lama Zopa Rinpoche CV”, <https://fpmt.org/wp-content/uploads/teachers/zopa/LZR-CV.pdf> , Last accessed : 18.04.19.

“Leading Insects to Enlightenment”, Advice from Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Posted October 2009,

<https://www.lamayeshe.com/advice/saving-insects-lives>, Last accessed: 04.05.19.

“Liver Cancer”, Posted: August 2009, [https://www.lamayeshe.com/advice/liver-cancer %C2%A0%C2%A0](https://www.lamayeshe.com/advice/liver-cancer-%C2%A0%C2%A0), Last accessed: 04.05.19.

“Mantras to Benefit Animals, Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche, <https://www.lamayeshe.com/article/mantras-benefit-animals> Last accessed: 22.05.19.

“The Karma of Killing Animals”, Posted November 2005, <https://www.lamayeshe.com/advice/karma-killing-animals> lamayeshe.com, Last accessed: 18.04.19.

Kopan Course No. 14 (1981), <https://www.lamayeshe.com/article/chapter/section-four-lectures-14-17>), Last accessed: 03.04.19.

“Kopan Course No. 33. (2000)”, <https://www.lamayeshe.com/article/chapter/lecture-two>, Last accessed: 03.04.19.

“Purifying Past Negative Karma”, advice given by Lama Zopa Rinpoche November 2013, posted online January 2014. <https://www.lamayeshe.com/advice/purifying-past-negative-karma> , Last accessed: 06.04.19.

“The Spirit of Manjushri”, The Dalai Lama 1998, <https://www.lamayeshe.com/article/chapter/session-four-manjushri-blessing-and-conversation-ven-master-sheng-yen>, Last accessed: 03.04.19.

“Suicidal Thoughts, Depression, PTSD and Self Harm”, Date of Advice May 2014, Posted online May 2015, <https://www.lamayeshe.com/advice/suicidal-thoughts-depression-ptsd-and-self-harm> 2014/2015, Last accessed: 06.11.18.

“Take Care of Animals with Compassion”, Advice from January 2016, Posted online December 2017, <https://www.lamayeshe.com/advice/take-care-animals-compassion>, Last accessed: 03.04.19.

“Teachings on Lamrim Chenmo”, 2008, Dalai Lama in Tibetan translated by Thupten Jinpa. <https://www.lamayeshe.com/article/chapter/day-three-afternoon-session-july-12-2008> Last accessed: 03.04.19

“Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive”, Facebook Page. <https://www.facebook.com/LamaYesheWisdomArchive/> Last accessed: 04.05.19.

Maitri Charitable Trust, <http://www.maitri-bodhgaya.org/home/animal-care/> last accessed: 04.05.19.

Maitri Charitable Trust” Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/Maitri-Charitable-Trust-237420572996205/> , Last accessed: 04.05.19.

Siddharta’s Intent, “A teaching on Compassion.” Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, Video. Auckland, New Zealand, July 29, 2017. Last accessed: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KfqLB7wa61U&feature=share> YouTube, Last accessed: 19.05.19.

Tree of Compassion, Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/TreeOfCompassion>, Last accessed: 04.05.19.

12.2 Secondary Sources

- Barstow, Geoffrey, "Fish Liberation", The Lost Yak (blog), Posted: 07.01.2012.
<https://thelostyak.com/2016/08/22/teaching-animals-to-meditate>. Last accessed: 01.04.19.
- "Teaching Animals to Meditate", The Lost Yak (blog), Posted 22.08.2016.
<https://thelostyak.com/2016/08/22/teaching-animals-to-meditate>. Last accessed: 01.04.19.
- . *Food of Sinful Demons: Meat, Vegetarianism, and the Limits of Buddhism in Tibet*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.
- ."On the moral standing of animals in Tibetan Buddhism." *Études mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines* 50 (2019).
- BBC News, "Did Nepal Temple Ban Animal Sacrifices at the Gadhimai festival?", Anna Jones, Surendra Phuyal and Geeta Pandey, 31.07.15, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-33699136> Last accessed: 24.05.19.
- Bhutia, Kalzang Dorjee. "Foxes, Yetis, and Bulls as Lamas: Human-Animal Interactions as a Resource for Exploring Buddhist Ethics in Sikkim." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 25 (2018): 45-70.
- Buffetrille, Katia. "A Controversy on Vegetarianism." *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 31 (2014): 113-127.
- Chapple, Christopher. *Nonviolence to animals, earth, and self in Asian traditions*. New York: SUNY Press, 1993.
- Chaturvedy, Rajeev Ranjan, and David M. Malone. "A Yam between Two Boulders: Nepal's Foreign Policy Caught between India and China?." *Nepal in Transition: From People's War to Fragile Peace*, Cambridge University Press, New York (2012): 287-312.
- Childs, Geoff, *Tibetan Diary*, London: University of California Press, 2004.
- Compassionate Action – The Teachings of Chatral Rinpoche, Chatral Rinpoche's Steadfast Commitment to Ethics Chapter Two,
<https://www.compassionateaction.info/ChapterTwo.pdf> Last accessed: 25.05.19.
- Cuevas, Bryan, Ra Yeshe Senge, *The All-Pervading Melodious Drumbeat – The life of Ra Lotsawa*, New York: Penguin Classics, 2015.
- The Daily Mail, "Nepal's Killing Fields: FIVE THOUSAND Buffalo lie Slaughtered at the beginning of Hindu Ceremony Which sees up to 300,000 Animals Killed to Bring Worshippers Good Luck", Sara Malm, 28.11. 2014.
<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2852739/Nepal-devotees-sacrifice-thousands-animals-Hindu-ritual.html> Last accessed:
- Deleanu, Florin. "Buddhist 'Ethology' in the Pāli Canon: Between Symbol and Observation." *The Eastern Buddhist* 32.2 (2000): 79-127.
- Fangen, Katrine. *Deltagende observasjon*. Oslo: Fagbokforlaget, 2010.

- Finnigan, Bronwyn. "Buddhism and Animal Ethics." *Philosophy Compass* 12.7 (2017).
- Gayley, Holly. "Reimagining Buddhist Ethics on the Tibetan Plateau." *Journal of Buddhist ethics* 20 (2013): 247-286.
- . "The Compassionate Treatment of Animals: A Contemporary Buddhist Approach in Eastern Tibet." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 45.1 (2017): 29-57
- Government of Nepal, "Population Monograph of Nepal: Volume II (Social Demography)" <https://nepal.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Population%20Monograph%20V02.pdf> 2014. Last accessed: 03.05.19
- Government of Nepal, National Planning Commission, Central Bureau of Statistics, "Statistical Year Book 2017", <http://cbs.gov.np/image/data/2018/Statistical%20Year%20Book%202017.pdf> Last accessed: 07.05.19.
- Gross, Aaron, "Animals and Religion" in Oxford Handbooks Online, Published: February 2017, Last accessed: 14.04.19. <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935420.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199935420-e-10#oxfordhb-9780199935420-e-10-note-29>
- Hamilton, Lindsay, and Nik Taylor. *Animals at work: Identity, Politics and Culture in Work with Animals*. 2013.
- . *Ethnography after Humanism: Power, Politics and Method in Multi-species Research*. London: Springer, 2017.
- Hangen, Susan. "Boycotting Dasain: History, Memory and Ethnic Politics in Nepal." *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nepal*. Routledge, 2012. 139-162.
- Harris, I, "A Vast Unsupervised Recycling Plant", In *A Communion of Subjects – Animals in Religion, Science and Ethics*, edited by Paul Waldau and Kimberley Patton, 207-217. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.
- Holler, David. "The ritual of freeing lives." *Religion and Secular Culture in Tibet. Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, edited by Henk Blezer, Leiden: Brill, 2002.
- Jaini, Padmanabh S., *Collected papers on Jaina studies*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 2000.
- Jones, Robert C. "Animal Rights is a Social Justice Issue." *Contemporary Justice Review* 18.4 (2015): 467-482.
- Kabzung, Gaerrang, "Development as Entangled Knot: The Case of the Slaughter Renunciation Movement in Tibet, China." *The Journal of Asian Studies* (2015): 927-951.
- Kay, David N. "The Emergence of the NKT in Britain" *Tibetan and Zen Buddhism in Britain: Transplantation, development and adaptation*. 53- 80, Routledge, 2007.
- Kendall, Laurel. "On the Problem of Material Religion and Its Prospects for the Study of Korean Religion." *Journal of Korean Religions* 1.1 (2010): 93-116.

- Keown, Damien, 2004, Oxford Reference, “A Dictionary of Buddhism,
<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198605607.001.0001/acref-9780198605607> Last accessed: 25.05.19.
- Krishna, Nanditha. *Sacred animals of India*. Penguin Books India, 2010.
- Larson, Paul, 2010. “Entry: Circumambulation.” in *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*, edited by David A. Leeming, Kathryn Maden and Stanton Marlan, pp. 153. New York: Springer.
- Lusthaus, Dan. *Buddhist Phenomenology: A philosophical investigation of Yogacara Buddhism and the Ch'eng Wei-shih Lun*. Routledge, 2014.
- Lopez, Donald S., *Prisoners of Shangri-La – Tibetan Buddhism and the West*, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Mann, Richard. D. (2014). “Material Culture and the Study of Hinduism and Buddhism” *Religion Compass*, 8(8), 264-273.
- Macy, Joanna. “The Dharma of Natural Systems, Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory.” (1991).
- Purja, Radha, and Mahendra Maharjan.”*Gastro-intestinal Parasites in Goat (Capra hircus) of Puranchaur VDC*”, Pokhara. Diss. Tribhuvan University, 2015.
- Ryder, Richard D. “Speciesism again: The original leaflet.” *Critical Society* 2 (2010): 1-2.
- Schaefer, Donovan O. “Do Animals Have Religion? Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Religion and Embodiment.” *Anthrozoös* 25.sup1 (2012): 173-189.
- Schmithausen, Lambert. “The early Buddhist tradition and ecological ethics.” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 4 (1997): 1-74.
- . “Buddhism and the Ethics of Nature—Some Remarks.” *The Eastern Buddhist* 32.2 (2000): 26-78.
- Shiu, Henry, and Leah Stokes. “Buddhist Animal Release Practices: Historic, Environmental, Public Health and Economic Concerns.” *Contemporary Buddhism* 9.2 (2008): 181-196.
- Shao, Gong. “Endless Circles: Circumambulation in Tibet” (Doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta), 2014.
- Sferra, Francesco., “The Concept of Purification in some Texts of Late Indian Buddhism.” *Journal of Indian philosophy* 27.1 (1999): 83-103.
- Singer, Peter., *Animal liberation*. Random House, 1995.
- Southwold, Martin. *Buddhism in Life: The Anthropological Study of Religion and the Sinhalese Practice of Buddhism*. Manchester University Press, 1983.
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Animal Consciousness”,

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consciousness-animal/> Last accessed: 03.04.19.

Stausberg, Michael, and Steven Engler, eds. *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, New York: Routledge, 2013.

Stewart, James. "Violence and Nonviolence in Buddhist Animal Ethics." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 21 (2014): 623-656.

– . "Dharma dogs: Can Animals understand the Dharma? Textual and Ethnographic Considerations." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 24 (2017): 39-63.

Tan, Gillian G. "'Life' and 'Freeing life' (tshe thar) among Pastoralists of Kham: Intersecting Religion and Environment." *Études mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines* 47 (2016).

United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor "International Religious Freedom Report for 2012"
<https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/208434.pdf> Last accessed 12.04.19.

VICE; 2015. "Thousands of Animals Have Been Saved in Nepal as Mass Slaughter Is Cancelled", Charlotte Meredith Jul 29, 2015. https://news.vice.com/en_us/article/pa4bpb/thousands-of-animals-have-been-saved-in-nepal-as-mass-slaughter-is-cancelled, Last accessed: 03.04.19.

Waldau, P., Patton, K. *A Communion of Subjects – Animals in Religion, Science and Ethics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.

Waldau, Paul. "Seeing the Terrain We Walk. Features of the Contemporary Landscape of 'Religion and Animals' " *Waldau and Patton (2006): 40-61.*

–. "Buddhism and animal rights.", *In The Oxford Handbook of Buddhist Ethics*, Edited by Daniel Konzort and James Marks Shields, 650-673, 2018.

Waldron, William S. *The Buddhist unconscious: The alaya-vijnana in the context of Indian Buddhist thought*. Routledge, 2003.

Wangmo, Jamyang. *The Lawudo lama: stories of reincarnation from the Mount Everest region*. Simon and Schuster, 2013.

We All Nepali, "Pashupatinath" Posted 02.06.13. <http://www.weallnepali.com/about-nepal/historic-places/pashupatinath>, Last accessed: 22.04.19.

Yeh, E. T., Blazing Pelts and Burning Passions: Nationalism, Cultural Politics, and Spectacular Decommodification in Tibet. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 72 (2), 319-344.(2013).

13 Appendix

13.1 Glossary

The glossary is for the most part based on the 2004 Oxford Reference, “A Dictionary of Buddhism by Damien Keown.

Tib. = Tibetan

Skt. = Sanskrit

Ahiṃsā – (Skt.) “Non-harming” or “nonviolence”. Moral principle of non-violence and respect for life found in many strands of Indian religion but particularly emphasized in Jainism and Buddhism. It was on the basis of *ahiṃsā* that the heterodox schools opposed the practice of animal sacrifice central to Brahmanical Hinduism. The principle is pre-Buddhist. It finds expression in Buddhist ethics in many moral codes, but particularly as the first of the Five Precepts which prohibits ‘onslaught on living creatures’ (*pāṇātipāta*). The principle is not simply a negative one but also enjoins sentiments of benevolence, love or compassion (*karuṇā*) towards living things

Anātman – (Skt.) Non-self, the absence of self (*ātman*); the key Buddhist doctrine that both the individual and objects are devoid of any unchanging, eternal, or autonomous substratum.

Arhat – (Skt.) “worthy one”. One who has attained the goal of enlightenment or awakening (*bodhi*). The difference between an Arhat and a Buddha is that the Buddha attained enlightenment by himself, whereas the Arhat does it by following the teachings of another.

Bardo/bar-do - (Tib.) A term which denotes a juncture or phase between two states. Six of these are described; the intermediate states of birth, of dream, of meditation, of the moment of death, of reality, and of becoming. The first three occur periodically during the present lifetime, while the remaining three concern the events that occur during the 49-day period that elapses between death and rebirth. These latter three form the subject matter of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead (Bar-do thos-grol)* since they present an opportunity for liberation from *samsāra* if correctly understood.

Beyul – (Tib). According to the beliefs of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism, *Beyul* are hidden valleys often encompassing hundreds of square kilometers. *Tertöns* may reveal them from *terma* at specific and appropriate times.

Bodhicitta – (Skt.) “the will to enlightenment”, the state of mind (*citta*) of a bodhisattva.

Bodhisattva - (Skt.) Literally means “enlightenment being” or a being who is directed towards enlightenment. A Bodhisattva vows to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all beings.

Citta – (Skt.)”Mind”. *Citta* is defined as the cognitive ground underlying the dynamic system of psychological operations (*caitta*). According to many schools, the mind in its natural state is intrinsically luminous (*citta-prakṛti-prabhāsvara*), free from all attachments and conceptualizing, and thus is empty in nature (*śūnya*). Some Mahāyāna authorities understand *citta* as equivalent to *bodhicitta*, and hold that when the natural state of mind is obscured by the false split into a perceiving subject and perceived objects, the everyday mind, which is a fragmentation of its natural state, arises.

Dākinī – (Skt.) In tantric Buddhism a *ḍākinī* is an accomplished yogini or other female deity, who acts as a guiding intermediary for practitioners and assists in the actualization of *siddhis* (extraordinary attainments).
Dharma – (Skt.) Has several meanings in Buddhism. In this thesis I have used the term to refer to the totality of the teachings of the Buddha that help Buddhists reach enlightenment. This is the second aspect of the Triple Gem (the Buddha, the Dharma and the sangha) that Buddhists take refuge to. Dharma can also refer to the natural order or universal law that underpins the operation of the universe in both the physical and moral spheres. Or in the Abhidharma system of taxonomy dharma refers to the individual elements that collectively constitute the empirical world.

Gati – (Skt.) Name for the various destinies or realms of rebirth, of which there are generally held to be six: the gods (*deva*) and envious gods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts (*pretas*) and hells (*nāraka*). The first three are regarded as good destinies (*sugati*) and the last three as woeful (*durgati*).

Gelug(pa) - (Tib.) the newest and largest of the four main orders of Tibetan Buddhism, and that to which the Dalai Lamas belong. Founded by Tsongkhapa in the 14th century.

Geshe – (Tib.) A Tibetan title given to Gelug scholars, especially those in the tradition of the three great Gelug monasteries around Lhasa. The term is an abbreviation of *dge-ba'i bshes-gyen*, meaning a spiritual benefactor. This title is usually available only to monks and involving 1-3 decades of study entailing memorization of texts and rigorous debate.

Jainism- A non-orthodox Indian religious movement similar in some respects to Buddhism but differing on important matters of doctrine, of which the belief in an eternal soul (*jīva*) is one of the most fundamental. Jain monks follow a strict moral code and apply the principle of non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) scrupulously, even respecting the lives of insects.

Jñāna – (Skt.) “knowledge”, particularly in the context of the understanding of doctrines.

Kalpa – (Skt.) meaning an aeon, a relatively long period of time.

Karma – (Skt.) literally means action. Notion that intentional actions have corresponding moral consequences. Karma determines in which of the six realms of rebirth one is reborn and affects the nature and quality of individual circumstances (for example physical appearance, health, and prosperity).

Karuṇā – (Skt.) Compassion, a virtue which is of importance in all schools of Buddhism, but which is particularly emphasized by the Mahāyāna. In early Buddhism, *karuṇā* figures as the second of the four *Brahma-vihāras* or ‘Divine Abidings’. These qualities are cultivated especially through the practice of meditation and are directed towards other beings without restriction. In the Mahāyāna, *karuṇā* is emphasized as the necessary complement to insight (*prajñā*) and as an essential ingredient in the perfection of the fully enlightened. In Mahāyāna sources, insight and compassion are compared to two wings with which one flies to the island of enlightenment.

Kora – (Tib.) circumambulation around a holy object, like a stūpa. A *Kora* is performed by the practitioner making a circumambulation around a sacred site or object, typically as a constituent part of a pilgrimage, ceremony, celebration or ritual.

Lama - (Tib.) spiritual teacher (*guru*); title used for esteemed monks

Mani – (Skt.) another word for mantra.

Mantra - (Skt.) verbal formula with sacred powers that is used, inter alia, to invoke a tantric deity.

Merit - (Skt: *puṇya*) is a concept considered fundamental to Buddhist ethics. It is a beneficial and protective force which accumulates as a result of good deeds, acts, or thoughts. Merit-making is important to Buddhist practice: merit brings good and agreeable results, determines the quality of the next life and contributes to a person’s growth towards enlightenment. In addition, merit is also shared with a deceased loved one, in order to help the deceased in their new existence

Mahāyāna – (Skt.) “the great vehicle” A major movement in the history of Buddhism embracing many schools in a reinterpretation of religious ideals, beliefs and values. Great emphasis is placed on the twin values of compassion (*karuṇā*) and insight (*prajñā*). The bodhisattva who devotes himself to the service of others becomes the new paradigm for religious practice, as opposed to the Arhat who is criticised for leading a cloistered life devoted to the self-interested pursuit of liberation. The philosophical teachings of the Mahāyāna are adumbrated in a new body of literature known as the Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtras or ‘Perfection of Insight’ texts. Here the doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) comes to prominence. In due

course new teachings and schools arose under the umbrella of the Mahāyāna such as the Mādhyamaka, the Yogācāra, the Pure Land tradition, and the Vajrayāna. The Mahāyāna form of Buddhism is predominant in north Asia. It spread from India to Nepal, Tibet, and central Asia, China, Korea, and Japan. Under the influence of these cultures it has taken many forms: the Buddhism of Nepal and Tibet has been influenced by tantric practices and the shamanism of central Asia, while in China the influence of Taoism and Confucianism have left their mark. The interaction between Buddhism and Taoism gave rise to the Ch'an school of contemplative quietism which developed into Japanese zen.

Maitrī – (Skt.) Kindness, benevolence, or goodwill, as in the disposition of a friend (Skt: *mitra*). An important Buddhist virtue, *maitrī* is to be cultivated towards all in a spirit of generosity which is free of attachment or thoughts of self-interest. As the first of the four Divine Abidings (*Brahma-vihāra*), *maitrī* is practiced as a meditational exercise by being directed first of all to oneself, then those close to one (such as friends and family), and then extended by stages to embrace all living beings.

Nāga – (Skt.) A class of serpent-like beings in Hindu and Buddhist mythology. They are said to live in the underworld and inhabit a watery environment. Frequently considered to be benevolent, they are also believed to act as guardians of hidden Mahāyāna texts.

Nāraka – (Skt.) The term used to refer to the Buddhist hells. In Buddhism hell is not seen a place of eternal punishment, it is closer to the Western notion of purgatory. The accumulation of bad karma can lead to rebirth in one of a number of hells, often vividly depicted in popular art and folklore. There are said to be both hot hells and cold hells, each with numerous subdivisions where evil-doers are tormented by demons until their bad karma has run its course and they are reborn in a better state.

Nirvāṇa – (Skt.) The attainment of nirvāṇa marks the end of cyclic existence in saṃsāra, the condition to which it forms the antithesis. Saṃsāra is thus the problem to which nirvāṇa is the solution. For bodhisattvas nirvāṇa is a collective rather than an individual goal.

Nyingmapa – (Tib.) one of the four main Tibetan Buddhist orders.

Paramārtha-satya- (Skt. Tib: *Dondan Dempa*.) Absolute truth or absolute reality. The ultimate level of truth or reality which denotes direct experience devoid of an overlay of conceptualization, and stands in contrast to 'relative truth' (*saṃvṛti-satya*).

Parinirvāṇa – (Skt.) The 'final' or 'highest' nirvāṇa, usually denoting the state of nirvāṇa that is entered at death, in contrast to that attained during life.

Phowa – (Tib.) "transferring". A technique popular in Tibetan Buddhism of transferring one's consciousness (*vijñāna*) at the time of death directly to one of the Pure Lands.

Preta – (Skt.) meaning ‘Hungry ghosts’, one of the miserable modes of existence in *samsāra*.

Various kinds of these spirits exist, but all are subject to suffering in the form of insatiable and unsatisfiable appetites as a punishment for greed in previous lives.

Pūjā - (Skt.) A ritual of worship, offering or reverence. *Pūjās* are merit-making practices; offerings are made, and sacred texts chanted.

Pure Land - The term ‘Pure Land’ is a Chinese invention, but it refers to a concept long known in Buddhism under other names such as Buddha-land or Buddha-field. The idea arose in India with the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism, among whose innovations was the teaching that beings do not simply go into extinction upon the attainment of Buddhahood but remain in the world to help others. Since they continue to exist, they must exist in a place, and since they are completely purified, their dwelling must also be completely pure. In some scriptures, such as the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*, this did not imply the existence of a separate realm distinct from that in which unenlightened beings dwelt but was this very world of suffering. Its purity derived from the fact that the Buddhas saw its true nature, which was pure, whereas other beings saw it through the lens of their delusion, which rendered it impure.

Rinpoche – (Tib.) “Precious guru”- A Tibetan title of respect.

Sangha – (Skt.) “Assembly” The Buddhist community.

Samsāra - (Skt.) “Flowing on”. The cycle of repeated birth and death that individuals undergo until they attain *nirvāṇa*. The cycle, like the universe, is believed to have no beginning or end and individuals transmigrate from one existence to the next in accordance with their karma or moral conduct

Stūpa – (Skt.) Buddhist reliquary, ranging from thumb-size to “Great stūpas” that are several storeys high. Stūpas were built originally to commemorate a Buddha or other enlightened person. As well as relics, stūpas often contain sacred objects, such as texts. A small replica of a stūpa is often used as a reliquary.

Tārā - a meditation deity worshiped by practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism to develop certain inner qualities and to understand outer, inner and secret teachings such as *karuṇā*, *mettā* and *śhunyata* (emptiness). Tārā may more properly be understood as different aspects of the same quality, as bodhisattvas are often considered metaphors for Buddhist virtues.

Tathātā – (Skt.) “suchness”, denoting the way things are in truth or actuality, and used especially to denote the essential nature of reality and the true mode of being of phenomena which is beyond the range of conceptual thought (*vikalpa*).

Tsa-tsa - (Tib.) small plaster or ceramic statue or stūpa, sometimes containing cremation ashes.

Alternative spellings “sa-tsa” or “tsha-tsha”

Tertön – (Tib.) a revealer of spiritual treasures (*terma*) hidden by Guru Rinpoche and Yeshe Tsogyal for the benefit of future generations.

Tshe Thar – (Tib.) Ritual of freeing animals or “life”. Liberating animals occurs throughout Buddhist Asia. No equivalent term seem to exist in Sanskrit, the Chinese word for the practice is *Fang Sheng*.

Tülku – (Tib.) means ‘Emanation Body’, This term is describes some teachers in Tibet who are believed to reincarnate over a number of generations. Though known in principle in India, the tülku system was first formally developed and adopted in Tibet by members of the kagyü lineage and then spread to the other schools of Buddhism.

Upekṣā – (Skt). Equanimity, or impartiality. The emotionally detached state of one who witnesses without becoming emotionally involved. It is a virtue, and an attitude to be cultivated as opposed to simple indifference or lack of interest.

Vajrayāna – (Skt.) “Diamond vehicle”. A late Indian term used to designate the path (*yāna*) of tantric Buddhism. The name is derived from the image of the thunderbolt (*vajra*) which was used to symbolize the imperishable nature of enlightenment (*bodhi*), the indivisibility of appearances and emptiness (*śūnyatā*) or of compassion (*karuṇā*) and insight (*prajñā*).

13.2 Posters at the ALS and Kopan Monastery



Illustration 5: Poster in the ALS medicine room.

Animal Liberation Sanctuary



- The sanctuary is to house animals **Kyabje Thubten Zopa Rinpoche** has rescued himself or on his request.
- There are currently **51 goats, 1 sheep and 9 cattle**.
- There is no facility for animals rescued by the public.
- Access is restricted but group visits may be arranged.
- The costs of caring for the animals is increasing.

Any contribution to the project is considered to be the equivalent of doing animal liberation yourself. As the late **Khensur Rinpoche Lama Lhundrup** explained, without ongoing protection, shelter, food and medical care the animals would die. Donate at the **Kopan Office** and online (and **remember to dedicate**, particularly to anyone with life obstacles or sicknesses).

Other things you can do:

- Make strong prayers for the success of the project.
- Recite the *Golden Light Sutra* for the project.

Thank you for your support!

Tania Duratovic and Phil Hunt - Project Coordinators
tania@enlightenmentforanimals.org

Illustration 6: Poster for the ALS at the Kopan dining hall August 2018.