

HUMANS, ANIMALS: The Only Difference Is the Shape

By Lama Zopa Rinpoche

There is very little difference in the lives of any being who is ruled by the thought of the eight worldly dharmas. To a beggar, a businessman looks rich, but even though they lead different lives on the surface, they are the same. Both are still only working for the happiness of this life. Both ways of living are negative; both are worldly work. There is no real difference.

In some ways a beggar's work is preferable. A businessman takes care of his life by cheating others, and cheating others means cheating himself because to do that takes cunning, treachery and telling lies. A beggar's work doesn't involve cheating and so is not so negative.

A student is no better. He studies so hard, from childhood to a top degree at university, but it's just to take care of this life. He might think that he is working for the country, or for peace in the world, but in the depths of his heart his main goal is only to gain comfort in this life. For that reason, even if he spends thirty, forty or fifty years to

In that way, the student is no different from an animal. A cow stays near her home, eating grass and sleeping. She can't talk and knows nothing the student knows – she hasn't even studied the ABC! She certainly hasn't gained a degree. Her whole life of thirty or forty years is working to find out where the best grass and water is. From birth until death, her whole life has been working for the comfort of this life, exactly the same as the student.

We can easily see that everything animals do is with the motivation of attachment, clinging to this life. Going out to the fields, coming back, eating, drinking – everything they do – is with the thought of the eight worldly dharmas. I haven't heard whether they watch television or whether they go to the movies, but it's possible.

I heard they have animal schools in the United States, training them how to live in the house – where to sleep, where to eat, which chairs to sit on, where not to make smells. In the East, people teach dogs to make prostrations

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receive his degree, it's all only done in the service of the eight worldly dharmas.

When he finds a job after graduating, he is still only taking care of the comfort of this life, working for the thought of the eight worldly dharmas. And maybe he dies three or four years after graduation. From studying so much and working so hard, what does he have left to carry with him? Nothing! The money that he has earned that sits in his bank account can't be carried with him after death. Since he was born until death, his entire life was spent working for the thought of the worldly dharmas and so everything becomes a negative action, the cause of samsara, the cause of suffering. He has worked all his life to create the cause of suffering, and his life finished in that way. If we really check up, this is the huge tragedy of life.

but that doesn't make their minds understand Dharma; it is only a physical action. They make prostrations when there is meat, when they are hungry. At night, when it's time to sleep, they go to bed with no virtuous thought or pure motivation.

If we analyze the student and the cow, they are basically living the same life. Just as the cow's life is negative, so is the student's. The cow's life is not higher than the student's; the student's life is not higher than the cow's. At death time, the student dies without having done any higher work than the cow's, even though he was born as a human being.

However smart he is, however great his reputation, whether he goes under the Pacific or to the moon, since his life's work is done for the thought that is attached to the comfort of this life, it is all negative, all the cause of

suffering. His way of looking for happiness might seem a little bit different from the cow's, but it's certainly no higher. Everything both of them do keeps them trapped in the samsaric prison.

They are exactly the same sort of actions done for exactly the same motivation, for comfort in this life, and both are motivated by the impure thoughts of greed, hatred and ignorance. Despite the fact that animals have no possessions whereas humans might have houses, cars, clothes, riches – everything they could ever want – really there is no difference. There is nothing that humans do that is in any way higher or better than what dumb animals do.

The only difference is the shape. If the being has one shape, we call it a human; if it has another, we call it an animal. The actions are basically the same; the mind is the same. We might think with pride that we are so much more competent than animals and that animals are so low and uneducated, but if we really check whether our life is in any way more meaningful than that of an animal, I think we might have a shock.

How many animals are there in this world? How many people? Check up on the numbers and think about how every one of them is creating the causes of suffering in this way.

First of all, think about all the billions of creatures in the ocean, and what their minds are doing. All those different types of fish, all those different creatures, so busy swimming back and forth, round and round, and in the depth of their hearts, seeking only the pleasure of this life. They keep themselves so busy, swimming back and forth, seeking food, seeking a safe, comfortable place.

All the other creatures, too, the birds flying around in the air, the animals on the ground, the creatures crawling on the ground – what they have in the very depths of their hearts is exactly the same thing, only the comfort of this life.

Now think about human beings. Take one city, like New York, and observe. Watch every person in that city; watch their minds. With the exception of only a few, almost all of them are doing the same thing with the same motivation as the creatures that fly and walk and crawl. They are only concerned with the comfort of this life. Those who are flying in spaceships, in airplanes, traveling in cars, going on the water, they are all doing the same thing. They all have the same way of thinking. Their only concern is the comfort of this life, the pleasures of this life. Look closely at all the people and all the creatures and you won't find any difference. Everybody is so busy with attachment, seeking only the pleasures of this life.



Look at the people shopping, the people driving their cars, up and down, back and forth, always busy, day and night, day and night. What is everyone doing? Why are they all working so hard? What is in all their hearts? It's all the same thing, trying to obtain the pleasures of this life.

Observe them. Everybody everywhere, so busy doing worldly work, being under the control of attachment, seeking the pleasures this life. They are too busy to think about Dharma, but never too busy to do all this non-virtuous work. Such an incredible number of suffering transmigratory beings!

We worldly people look down on animals, thinking they are stupid and low, but to someone who understands Dharma and knows about karma, we are no different from animals. To the meditator, we seem totally tied up in worldly concerns and so whatever we do is suffering. We live in complete darkness, obscured from Dharma wisdom, completely unconscious of our actions.

We would probably argue that we aren't unconscious, we're very conscious of what we are doing. We know where to eat good food, we know how to make lots of money, we know how to work, how to make business, how to make profit, how to bargain, what the best consumer items are. Many people, who pride themselves on their intelligence, even think that animals don't have a mind! To the meditator, however, human or animal, we lead our lives stumbling unconsciously into suffering, controlled by delusions. Seeing this, we worldly beings become the objects of the meditator's compassion. ☸

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