

*Dharma Discourses on Abandoning Killing, Harming and
Consuming the Meat of Innocent Sentient Beings, titled 'The
Melody of Willows Bending in the Wind'*

Geshe Thubten Soepa

Translated by Geshe Tenzin Namdak

Introduction

The late and most compassionate and kind Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche asked me to translate sections of Geshe Thubten Soepa's book on vegetarianism, called: *Dharma Discourses on Abandoning Killing, Harming and Consuming the Meat of Innocent Sentient Beings*, titled 'The Melody of Willows Bending in the Wind',¹ published by Sera Jey Library in 2018.² The book is primarily aimed at a monastic audience and includes various debates concerning Vinaya and Vajrayana scriptures. Rinpoche indicated that it was not necessary to translate the entire book; instead, the translation should focus on sections relevant to the general Buddhist community of lay people. Thus, the debate sections concerning Vinaya and the Vajrayana are omitted.

The Tibetan text does not provide all the necessary references and sources, which makes certain quotations and sections unclear regarding whether they are direct quotes or the author's own writing. Additionally, the Tibetan text is somewhat repetitive, whilst the translated version omits these repeated sections. The numbers in brackets refer to the page numbers of the Tibetan text.

This translation is very brief. More extensive and excellent research on vegetarianism and translations of Tibetan writings on vegetarianism in Tibetan Buddhism can be found in *Food of Sinful Demons: Meat, Vegetarianism, and the Limits of Buddhism in Tibet*³ and in *The Faults of Meat, Tibetan Writings on Vegetarianism*.⁴

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¹ *nyes med kyi sems can bsad pa'i sha zas gnang bkag la dpyad pa gzhan gnod spong ba'i chos gtam ljon shing rlung gis bskul ba las chos kyi bsdom bzhi ston pa'i sgra dbyangs lta bu shes bya ba bzhugs so* in Tibetan. Please note that the Tibetan title includes a name given to the aspects of the debates in Vinaya and the Vajrayana; this is omitted in the English title as these sections are not translated.

² Sera Jey Library, Sera Jey Monastery, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka State, India.

³ Geoffrey Barstow, Columbia University Press, 2017.

⁴ Geoffrey Barstow, Wisdom Publications, 2019.

Biography of Geshe Thubten Soepa⁵

Geshe Thubten Soepa was born in Zanskar, India in 1955. As a young child, he and his mother were advised by His Holiness Ling Rinpoche and His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche that it would be good if he ordained, and he soon followed their guidance. At the age of fourteen, Geshe Soepa began his Dharma education at Domo Geshe Rinpoche's monastery in Kalimpong, India, where he studied ritual for four years. He then transferred to Sera Je Monastery in Bylakuppe, India, where he would complete his geshe studies twenty-one years later, earning the highest honor of Geshe Lharampa, in 1993.

In his first three years serving as a geshe, he taught philosophy and Tibetan grammar at Sera Je and Dzongkar Chode monasteries. Geshe Thubten Soepa then received a request from Lama Zopa Rinpoche to teach in the West. Geshe Soepa agreed to Rinpoche's request and moved to Munich, Germany. For ten years he continuously taught at FPMT centers in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, while also travelling to other centers around Europe to offer teachings. After his time in Europe, the next decade of his life was mostly spent in North America, offering teachings at FPMT centers in Canada, Mexico and the United States.

Promoting Vegetarianism and Protecting Life

Geshe Thubten Soepa was deeply passionate about promoting vegetarianism, especially to those living a monastic life. He would go on to write a number of books and articles on the practice of not eating meat, relying on sources such as the *Lankavatara Sutra*, *Great Cloud Sutra*, *Great Nirvana Sutra*, and the *Angulimala Sutra*, to communicate the Buddha's teachings. His first book was titled *Protecting the Lives of Helpless Beings: The Udamwara Lotus Flower*, which is now available as an eBook through the [Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive](#). In 1996, while His Holiness the Dalai Lama was visiting Munich, Geshe Soepa was able to offer His Holiness a copy of his book. His Holiness told Geshe Soepa that he had read the whole book, was very pleased by the text, and encouraged Geshe Soepa to continue his efforts on the topic.

In the following years, he would write four texts on vegetarianism that were translated into five languages and distributed freely. In 2012, Geshe Soepa published a short text on the Hinayana Vinaya teachings on monastics refraining from eating meat. During the 2017 Kalachakra initiation offered by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Bodhgaya, India, Geshe Soepa was able to meet with Lama Zopa Rinpoche and offer Rinpoche this short text. Lama Zopa Rinpoche was also quite pleased by Geshe Soepa's writing. Geshe Soepa told Rinpoche that he was planning to write another text to clarify further points, and Rinpoche expressed that the text should be translated into English, in order to be easily translated into many languages later. Geshe Soepa would go on to publish another text in Tibetan in 2018 for monastics. [Sections of his last work are translated in this book.] Geshe Thubten Soepa passed away at a hospital in Mysore, India, on November 2, 2022, from a heart attack.

⁵ Taken from: [Rejoicing in the Life of Geshe Thubten Soepa: Protecting the Helpless - FPMT](#)

Dharma Discourses on Abandoning Killing, Harming and Consuming the Meat of Innocent Sentient Beings, titled 'The Melody of Willows Bending in the Wind'

Various Quotes on the Drawbacks of Consuming Meat

[4] If someone asks about the drawbacks of consuming meat, there are many to consider. The most significant issue for a Buddhist practitioner is that eating meat can hinder one's meditation practice and impede the development of loving-kindness, compassion and the concentration necessary for achieving the nondual state of calm abiding and special insight.

These points are explained in various Sutras and Sastras, such as the *Lankavatara Sutra*, which states:
When one eats meat, one cannot accomplish the achievements of the secret mantra and knowledge mantras [of the Kriya tantras], and the gods will ignore one.

[5] In the *Middle Stages of Meditation*, Kamalashila states that, in the context of Bodhicitta:
The practitioner who engages in meditation focused on calm abiding and special insight should avoid eating fish and meat. Additionally, one should be mindful of their food choices and prioritize consuming wholesome, nourishing foods.

[6] Jetsun Milarepa mentioned:
The disciplined practice of renouncing negative actions is essential for gaining experience and insights [on the path].

[8] Furthermore, when we call ourselves a follower of the Buddha, then we should also generate renunciation and abandon attachment [in order to achieve liberation].

Drontonpa stated:
Shouldn't we continuously be moved with regret when seeing the need for the repayment [of the karma] of killing, when consuming one's parents'⁶ meat and blood.

Khedrub Je mentions in his *Explanation of the Three Vows*:
When consuming meat, individuals often develop a strong attachment, driven by their own purposes. This attachment can lead to a decline in compassion, making it an obstacle that should be addressed. Whether one is a fully ordained monk, a novice, a king, a teacher, a town chief, or an ordinary layperson, it is advisable to avoid eating meat.

The Great Throne Holder Ratreng Dorje Chang stated:
Those who aspire to be great bodhisattvas should let go of their attachment to meat. Attachment to the taste of meat hinders the practice of compassion and can lead to the degeneration of one's compassion.

[10] Sakya Jetsun Dragpa Gyaltsen mentions:
When consuming alcohol, memory deteriorates, so it is best to abandon alcohol. When eating meat, compassion diminishes, so it is advisable to abandon meat consumption.

Shabkar stated:

⁶ Here referring to all sentient beings having been one's parents in previous lifetimes.

The root of samsara is the increase of strong cravings. The essence of the Dharma lies in compassion and the negativity of consuming the flesh and blood of one's parents interrupts the development of compassion; therefore, eating meat presents significant drawbacks.

And:

To gain meat, countless sentient beings in this world are killed every day, which harms the lives of these beings. Consuming other types of food does not inflict such harm.

And:

How would it be if someone cut off one's head, took the essence [of one's life] away and ate one's flesh? Looking at this example of one's own body being taken, one should not eat meat, which hurts others.

One should take this example of losing one's life to mind and truly think about it.

Furthermore, the *Lankavatara Sutra* states the following: [11]

Killing beings for profit and trading possessions to buy meat—those burdened by the karma of these two evils lament after death.

This emphasizes the profound consequences of actions that cause sentient beings to suffer, a critical perspective for practitioners devoted to the path of compassion and nonviolence.

Consuming Meat is also a Form of Stealing Others' Lives

[14] The great accomplished master Drukpa Kunley mentions three points in relation to eating meat: stealing, robbing, and killing. The *Angulimala Sutra* also mentions the following regarding these points:

Taking the meat of killed beings is akin to robbing and snatching the life and body of sentient beings. In addition to the act of killing, one also generates the negative karma associated with stealing [their life]. The true owner of the body of those sentient beings is solely that sentient being itself.

A similar story can be found in the life of the Bodhisattva Siddhartha, who saved the life of a swan. When Devadatta shot an arrow at the swan, causing it to fall to the ground, the Bodhisattva intervened to save it. Devadatta argued, "The swan belongs to me; I shot it with my bow and arrow, and it fell to the ground." In response, the Bodhisattva Siddhartha said, "The swan is the true owner of itself; how can you claim ownership? You are the enemy of the swan because you shot it down."

In one of his public talks, His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama mentioned that while we have the right to seek happiness and enjoyment in life, we do not have the right to pursue our happiness by deceiving others, stealing, abusing others, or harming living beings.

The points mentioned above clearly demonstrate that no one has the right to take another being's life for the purpose of their own happiness. It is crucial to reflect on these ideas and consider whether taking the life of someone else can be viewed as appropriating or stealing their existence.

Refraining from Attachment and Developing Compassion

[16] The Buddhist teachings emphasize nonviolence and peace. A key practice within the Individual Liberation path is to let go of attachment to the temporary happiness found in cyclic existence and to

cultivate a sense of renunciation. As part of this practice, one should also refrain from craving meat consumption.

In the Bodhisattva Vehicle, the foundation of practice is rooted in great compassion—the desire to liberate others from suffering and to serve as a refuge for them. Additionally, practitioners engage in the compassion of special intention and the compassion embodied in the Four Immeasurables. It is important to recognize that compassion is the essence of the Dharma. Consuming the flesh of killed sentient beings contradicts these principles of compassion and serves as an obstacle to the development of loving-kindness.

Benefits of Avoiding Meat

Unlike animals, humans have the freedom to choose what food we consume. Certain animals, by virtue of being born in the wild, must hunt other beings for survival. In contrast, humans can maintain a healthy diet without meat and various scientific studies suggest that there may be unhealthy aspects associated with meat consumption.

[24] In the *Arya Angulimala Sutra* [the Buddha] mentions:

In many numberless, ten million lifetimes, I gave up eating fish, meat, and the fat of killed sentient beings, encouraging others to do so as well. This led to me obtaining a healthy body. Additionally, in many of those lifetimes, I inspired ten million sentient beings, including humans and gods, to purify countless afflictions, ultimately achieving a body without elaborations.⁷

In this Sutra, the Buddha explained that he gave up eating meat and encouraged others to do so. Through these kinds of vast activities, including assisting in eliminating the afflictions of others, the Buddha attained the Form and Truth Bodies of a Buddha.⁸ [Next to these benefits], the *Lankavatara Sutra* also mentions the following:

When one abandons meat, you, as brahmins and yogis will obtain wealth and wisdom.

In this Sutra, it is mentioned that by abandoning the consumption of blood and meat, an individual creates the ripening karma that leads to being reborn in higher castes, such as brahmins and yogis. This practice not only fosters wisdom but also brings about a fortune in wealth. When depending on pure food,⁹ one will be protected by wealth gods and protectors who assist those practicing virtue.¹⁰

[26] Some of the quotes mentioned above primarily relate to Buddhist practitioners, but even those who do not follow this path can recognize the suffering of animals that are killed. Many people, unable to bear witness to such suffering, choose to cultivate compassion and give up eating meat. Some adopt a meat-free lifestyle by reflecting on the negative karma associated with consuming meat, while others develop renunciation by acknowledging the faults of attachment to meat consumption. Additionally, some people give up eating meat out of compassion and loving-kindness, recognizing that all sentient beings in the six realms were once our parents or beings who were very close to us and who also seek happiness and the absence of suffering. These choices evidence success stories of nonviolent behavior and non-harmfulness.

⁷ Most likely referring to the dharmakaya that is without elaborations of inherent existence. The buddha does not have conceptions grasping at inherent existence and inherent existence does not appear to the Buddha's mind.

⁸ The form bodies are the enjoyment (Sambhogakaya) and emanation body (Nirmanakaya) and the truth bodies are the nature truth body (Svabhava Dharmakaya) and wisdom truth body (Jnana Dharmakaya).

⁹ Referring to 'dkar zas': a practice of avoiding foods including meat, eggs, raw onions and garlic.

¹⁰ Referring to 'dkar phyogs skyong'.

Buddhist Principles on Avoiding Meat

For the Buddhist practitioner, the main reason for relinquishing the consumption of meat is that compassion is the root of the Dharma. This compassion is centered on the desire to liberate sentient beings from their suffering, as one cannot bear to witness their pain.

[27] For example, when one sees one's mother suffering, or when a mother sees her child in distress, it is difficult to bear; one wishes the other to be free from suffering and feels compelled to act upon this. Taking this into account, one should similarly reflect on the suffering of all sentient beings and wish to relieve them of their pain swiftly. One should think about how wonderful it would be if they were freed from suffering right now. Based on these intentions, one should cultivate strong compassion, seeking both a method and the wisdom to achieve these aspirations. Harnessing this compassion, one should refrain from killing and cherish others.

One should reflect on the implications of someone stealing their possessions and use that contemplation as a motivation to abandon stealing. Similarly, one should consider the other ten non-virtuous actions and strive to give them up as well. The stronger one's feelings of compassion, the more intense the desire to avoid killing others becomes. This principle applies to all ten non-virtuous actions when one understands the harm that they cause.

By renouncing these ten non-virtuous actions, a person can practice their opposites—such as protecting life as opposed to killing or practicing generosity instead of stealing. Additionally, to counter sexual misconduct, one can adopt lay vows or, for those ordained, commit to upholding the morality expected of them. To combat lying, one should cultivate respect and trust in speaking the truth. [28] Therefore, it is important to put effort into practicing the ten virtuous actions while opposing the ten non-virtuous actions.

The practices associated with the ten virtuous actions become effortless when one nurtures a genuine form of compassion. This compassion encompasses the Four Immeasurables, the desire to liberate others, and a longing to provide others with refuge and protection. When these types of compassion are cultivated, individuals develop a deep empathy that cannot tolerate the suffering of others, along with a special intention to take responsibility for alleviating that suffering.

With this compassionate mindset, one naturally abandons the ten non-virtuous actions that cause harm to others and joyfully engages in the ten virtuous actions aimed at benefiting them. Therefore, it is clear from these practices and reflections that compassion serves as the foundation of the Dharma—teaching us not to harm others and to accomplish their welfare.

[29] If one does not follow the above guidelines but chooses to eat or purchase the meat of sentient beings, then one's compassion is as insubstantial as the tip of a hair. For the sake of profit, millions of innocent sentient beings are killed every day, deprived of their lives. If we truly examine this situation, it is unbearable to witness their suffering. How can we feel comfortable eating meat when we understand the drawbacks of doing so, whether through reasoning or personal experience? How can we dismiss the negativity created by seeing others eat and buy meat, or by doing so ourselves?

The Sutras explain that 'every action has a result', and our practice should align with this truth, as well as with principles of loving-kindness, compassion, and bodhicitta. When we take refuge in the Dharma Jewel, we also commit to not harming sentient beings, and it is essential that we uphold this promise. [30] Those who have taken the vows of self-liberation practice the foundation of morality

through the seven abandonments,¹¹ which emphasize the importance of not harming others. Therefore, they should be particularly mindful of these principles.

Every sentient being has been our mother countless times and has shown us great kindness. This understanding is an essential part of cultivating bodhicitta, which involves cherishing others more than ourselves. We recognize that all beings seek happiness and wish to avoid suffering. When practicing bodhicitta, we prioritize the well-being of others over our own. Engaging in actions such as eating meat contradicts this practice. Furthermore, we acknowledge that all sentient beings have the same potential for enlightenment.¹² How can we keep eating meat?

[31] We may not directly kill innocent sentient beings, but we contribute indirectly to their deaths when we buy or eat meat, which also leads to their suffering. Countless kind-looking animals are killed for the purpose of providing us with meat; we do not have the right to take their lives by force. It is important to analyze whether it is true that we are indirectly contributing to the suffering and killing of animals by consuming their meat.

In the *Lankavatara Sutra*, the sixth chapter states:

If there are no people who buy and consume meat, then it is likely that there would be very few reasons for killing sentient beings.

[32] These aspects clearly relate to the concept of dependent origination. If there is no demand for meat, there will be fewer killings.

In addition to the negative karma associated with harming sentient beings, there is also a karmic debt incurred from taking the lives of others or eating their meat, which is unnecessary and should be avoided. This is illustrated in the well-known example of Arya Sariputra, who, through his clairvoyance, perceived the following:

He eats the meat of his father, hits his mother and holds his evil enemy in his lap. The wife chews the bones of her husband. The events in saṃsāra are sad.

Drontonpa also stated:

When one gives up the non-attachment to [eating] meat and blood,
One will consume one's parents' meat and blood,
And create continuously a debt of killing,¹³
Should you not pursue generating regret?

[33] In the seventh chapter of the *Arya Angulimala Sutra*, Manjushri asks, 'Why does the Tathagata not eat meat?' The Buddha replies, 'Manjushri, the nature of all sentient beings is the dharmadhatu. Eating meat is akin to consuming the dharmadhatu itself. That is why the Tathagata does not eat meat.'

And:

Manjushri, the flesh of others is like one's own flesh.
Thus, the Tathagata does not eat meat.

And:

In the endless cycle of samsara, which has no beginning or end, all sentient beings have been one's mother and sister throughout all those lives.

¹¹ Refers to the three negativities of the body and the four of the speech.

¹² In Tibetan 'kham bde gzhegs pa snying po' which translates as Tathagatagarba or Buddha potential.

¹³ The Tibetan term 'srog lan' literally means a payment in return for killing.

And:

Because [all sentient beings possess] buddha potential, the Tathagata does not eat meat.

[34] If one accepts that there is no difference between the Buddha potential of sentient beings and that of the Buddha,¹⁴ it follows that eating meat is improper, as mentioned in the above Sutra. Moreover, there is not a single sentient being who has not been one's parent or someone who was close to oneself, therefore, it is inappropriate to consume their flesh. The flesh of others is fundamentally the same as one's own, making it improper to eat meat.

This understanding relates to how one values one's own life. When considering the pain of having one's flesh cut and consumed, it becomes evident that this causes unbearable suffering, leading one to realize it is wrong. Similarly, one should recognize that it is also improper to eat the flesh of others because they, too, cherish their lives and cannot tolerate such suffering.

Thus, one can see that these reasons are logical and demonstrate that consuming the meat of others is inappropriate. It is unjust to take another's life or partake in their flesh for one's own happiness, as this reflects a lack of compassion and affection. Killing others and consuming their meat resembles stealing, [35] it involves taking lives without any rightful claim to do so.

[36] The *Sutra Requested by Sagara Mati* states:

All Bodhisattvas share one Dharma: great compassion that is free from attachment to personal pleasures.

The text emphasizes the importance of cultivating great compassion and not being attached to one's own pleasures. It advises against having a mindset that only serves oneself. Bodhisattvas, who embody this ideal, relinquish self-interest and develop a desire to be a refuge for others, motivated by their inability to bear the suffering of others. They cultivate a profound compassion that naturally leads them to wish for others to be liberated from suffering.

To foster this kind of compassion, one must first develop a sense of renunciation towards the suffering of samsara. To clarify any doubts regarding the necessity of this step, the *Lankavatara Sutra* states:

Some kill for the sake of gaining money.
Some buy meat out of attachment.
Both act contrary to the way of compassion
and both create negative actions.

There are individuals who sell meat for personal gain and others who buy it due to attachment and craving. Both of these actions create negative karma and hinder the development of compassion.

In a similar vein, the accomplished master Pema Sambhava stated [37]:

If all afflictions are eliminated, then there is no longer a need for Dharma. If there is no compassion, then the Dharma is rotten at its core. Remember that one must experience the suffering of samsara repeatedly. Do not procrastinate in pursuing the Dharma, you disciples.

Furthermore, Arya Nagarjuna states in the *Commentary on Bodhicitta*,
With benefiting others, one creates the causes for happiness,
By harming others, one creates the causes for suffering.

¹⁴ Here referring to the Buddha potential that is the ultimate nature (emptiness) of the mind of sentient beings and of the Buddha. There is no difference between the two.

To achieve enlightenment, one needs to depend on sentient beings.

The esteemed master Shantideva states that those with faith should recognize that compassion is the foundation of the Dharma. In *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, he emphasizes the importance of valuing both the Jinas¹⁵ and sentient beings. He poses the question: 'if you respect the Jinas but do not extend that same respect to sentient beings, how can you hope to achieve anything within the Buddha Dharma?'

[38] The Buddha mentions in the *Lonaphala Sutra*,
Benefiting sentient beings is like making a supreme offering to me.
Harming sentient beings is like harming me heavily.

The View of Dependent Origination and Buddha Potential

[100] In Buddhist teachings, it is explained that all phenomena exist in a state of dependence, abiding in accordance with the principle of dependent origination. This perspective aligns with the law of cause and effect, or karma. Based on this understanding, we should strive to avoid causing harm to others; a Buddhist practitioner following the Bodhisattva ideal practices the ten perfections,¹⁶ embodying loving-kindness and compassion by cherishing others more than oneself.

From the viewpoint of reality, the Buddhist practitioner accepts the concepts of emptiness and no-self. Additionally, one does not believe in an independent, permanent creator of the world or sentient beings. The notion of a permanent self or a self that is distinctly different from the aggregates is also rejected. Similarly, the idea of a self-sufficient, substantially existing self that is unrelated to other phenomena is considered non-existent.

The subtle aspects of a self that seem to exist independently, by way of their own characteristics and inherently, are ultimately accepted as non-existent. [101] This is because these aspects of phenomena appear incorrectly to our minds. When they appear in this way, we tend to apprehend and grasp at them as if they truly exist in this way. However, in reality, they are empty of any inherent self. Valid cognition can recognize this emptiness and lack of true existence.

All phenomena mistakenly appear to our conceptual consciousness as if they are inherently established. However, valid cognition—the wisdom that understands subtle emptiness—reveals that things do not exist as they appear to. When this realization deepens into a pure non-duality through the focused concentration of calm abiding, the object: emptiness, becomes clearly evident through meditation. Ultimately, a direct perception of emptiness can arise, capable of eliminating both afflictive and cognitive obscurations in stages.

As a person develops through the stages of the spiritual path, they progress towards liberation and enlightenment. The potential for these achievements is clearly described in the scriptures and supported by sound reasoning. Detailed in the Buddha's last turning of the wheel of Dharma, it is explained that all sentient beings possess Tathagata Garba, or Buddha potential. This is a seed present in all six types of sentient beings and is fundamentally the same across all of them.

[102] The foundation of the Buddhist perspective lies in the concept of dependent origination, which underpins the principle of nonviolence that practitioners adopt. This practice is essential because all beings possess the potential for Buddhahood, with their minds inherently embodying clarity and a

¹⁵ Referring to the Buddhas.

¹⁶ The ten perfections are: generosity, morality, patience, effort, concentration, wisdom, method, prayer, power, and exalted wisdom.

pure light that is timeless and unending, never degenerating. However, beings are temporarily clouded by afflictive and cognitive obscurations, such as anger and obsessive desire. These afflictions are associated with the truth of the origin of suffering. The removal of these afflictions represents the truth of cessation, while the path to achieve this is known as the truth of the path. Through meditation on these true paths, one can ultimately reach enlightenment, benefiting both oneself and others. [The above-mentioned aspects are indicated in the various scriptures as seen below.]

The Glorious Protector Arya Nagarjuna wrote in his *Praise of the Dharmadhātu*,
I pay homage to the dharmadhātu,
Which resides in every sentient being.
If they fail to realize it,
They remain circling in the three realms

The *Sublime Continuum* mentions,
The dharmakāya is pervasive and
Suchness is undifferentiable,
And because of having the lineage,
All sentient beings always have the buddha essence.

[103] The *Ornament of the Sutras* states,
All suchness
Have no difference and are pure
Therefore, all beings have this essence
Of this suchness.

And the *Nirvana Sutra* explains,
The milk [we drank] comes from the pervading mothers,
Tathagata Garba pervades also all sentient beings.

In the same Sutra and the *Arya Angulimala Sutra*, it is mentioned that,
When one recognizes the existence of the Tathagata Garba in all beings, it purifies negative deeds and brings benefits such as obtaining a long life and more.

Benefits of Liberating Others from Suffering¹⁷

[140] The Great All-Knowing Tsongkhapa stated in his *Great Exposition on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* the importance of achieving a precious human rebirth with various commendable qualities. One of the causes for attaining such a sublime existence is the practice of animal liberation, as well as the generosity involved in providing medical care, serving the sick and offering medicine. Additionally, by refraining from harming living beings, one can cultivate a long life for oneself.

[148] In the *Sūtra on the Four Close Placements of Mindfulness*, it is mentioned that:

The foundation of all Dharma is life.
Protecting this life represents the generosity of happiness.
This is the highest form of generosity.
It stems from a habitual intention to give life.

¹⁷ The Tibetan “tshe thar btang ba”, literally means liberating life and is often translated as animal liberation but it refers to protecting the lives of sentient beings in general or liberating others from suffering.

Among all types of morality, it is the supreme one that establishes higher rebirths: the morality of life's generosity.

In this Sūtra, it clearly states that the morality of abandoning killing is the supreme cause for creating the karma to attain higher rebirths. Similarly, in the *Mahayana Sūtra of the Ten Turnings of Kshitigarba*, it mentions:

The abandonment of killing,
Is the generosity of fearlessness of all sentient beings in samsara,
And one will be praised in this life.
One will have a good complexion and clear faculties.
One will have a long life and be protected by gods,
And one will [obtain] higher rebirths as [149] those of the gods.
Furthermore, son [or daughter] of the lineage, great bodhisattvas who completely abandon killing for the rest of their lives are [practicing] the generosity of fearlessness of all sentient beings and acquire bodies of gods and humans that appear pleasing to all. One should not doubt this. They will enjoy long and happy lives, and wherever they are born, they will not experience sickness, they will possess an attractive appearance, enjoy a pleasant life, and will [again] abandon killing.

The aforementioned Sūtra outlines numerous advantages associated with the cessation of killing. It posits that individuals seeking happiness should prioritize the protection of life.

The Sūtra Distinguishing Karma mentions various aspects of accumulating karma for a long life and so forth:

There is karma that causes one to have a long life,
That karma is the [action] of abandoning killing,
Praising the abandonment of killing and encouraging [others] not to kill.
One should [practice the] generosity of fearlessness towards sentient beings in danger, such as protecting the lives of humans, cows, goats, sheep, fish, pigs, chickens, deer, and so forth. One [should practice the] generosity of fearlessness for sentient beings in peril, generate compassion for those who are without protection [150], generate loving-kindness for those who are sick, children, and the elderly, and one should provide them with food and medicine. One should also generate loving-kindness for those who are [in need] and asking for assistance and [try to] stop wars and so forth.

In this Sūtra, it refers to the killing of humans as well; in the various scriptures of the Buddhist teachings, it mentions that killing a human creates heavy negative karma. In general, all sentient beings—all migrators of the six realms—have Buddha nature, a seed, essence, or potential to attain the state of enlightenment. This applies to all sentient beings, including humans, animals, and so forth, but killing a human is considered heavier because human life is a supreme form of existence [151] in which a person can practice, meditate, develop the mind and even attain the state of enlightenment. This is not possible when born in the animal realm. Furthermore, with human life, one can eliminate afflictions and achieve the state of liberation (Arhatship). When one puts an end to such a precious human life, filled with freedoms and endowments that are difficult to attain, one creates heavy negative karma. Conversely, saving human life has many benefits. It states in the Sūtra:
Saving the lives of humans accumulates karma for a longer life for oneself and the supreme karma for a higher rebirth.

In the scriptures of Hindu philosophy, similar statements about the benefits of preserving human life, such as achieving higher rebirths, can be found. [152] Similarly, Christianity explains the negativity associated with killing another human being.

In a similar way, there are significant benefits to relieving the suffering of others, such as freeing someone who has been wrongly imprisoned. [153] For instance, the practice of liberating sentient beings—whether human or animal—who are unjustly confined can yield great rewards. The Buddha emphasized this in many Sūtras, stating, “Taking one’s own body as an example, do not harm others.”

When someone else rescues us from imprisonment, we feel immense gratitude, joy and the positive effects of freedom. Similarly, when we liberate another individual who has not committed any offense, that person also experiences happiness and appreciation. This example illustrates the profound benefits of alleviating the suffering of others.

The quote from the *Mahayana Sūtra of the Ten Turnings of Kshitigarba* above mentions various beneficial results from engaging in liberating others from suffering, abandoning killing, stopping wars and so forth. For example, one will obtain a long life, a healthy body and mind, happiness, pacification of sickness, a good complexion, one will be praised by others and have clear faculties. In the various Sūtras, the Buddha explained these benefits on many occasions and that one should engage in the supreme practice that is the morality of abandoning killing to create the karma of the happiness of higher rebirths.

When we practice liberating others from suffering and danger to life, we purify the negative karma associated with killing and consuming meat. [154] For instance, when we want to help those who are sick, we can engage in animal liberation practices. Additionally, if our parents or loved ones pass away, we can perform animal liberation in their honor, accumulating virtuous activities and dedicating the merits to them. We can also undertake similar animal liberation practices during times of our own illness or suffering. This should complement our mind training practices and any necessary medication.

May the virtues born from this composition shine brightly, guiding us toward the pathways of peace and the alleviation of suffering.