

Thanksgiving Teaching

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November 26th, 2014

How many turkeys are killed for Thanksgiving? Many millions? Whoever's idea it was that everyone must eat turkey on Thanksgiving, that person really has created the causes for eons and eons of suffering in the hells. Then everyone who holds that tradition, who follows that idea--that is also connecting to that negativity. When you eat the turkey, at least pray. At least recite OM MANI PEME HUNG and focus on that person and on all the birds and their killers. Of course include all sentient beings with them. If you have focus and pray for them, I think the merit you create is of benefit. It is not only in this country or on this day that animals are slaughtered by the millions for people to eat. In Tibet and China, how many sheep, yaks, and so on are killed? Billions of pigs, chickens, and fish, too. But our share is this time, these birds. The butchers and the ones who perpetuate this tradition, they are really accumulating heavy negativity. Think of them as you pray, and generate heartfelt compassion toward them and all ignorant beings who destroy their happiness by pursuing it without any understanding. Pray to Chenrezig that his blessing might relieve the suffering and negativity of these birds, those who kill them, and those who eat them, along with all beings, all together. Give rise to faith in the Three Jewels and Chenrezig himself, recalling their infinite kindness and compassion toward us all, and their boundless qualities of enlightened body, speech, and mind.

Instead of only focusing on how delicious everything is, for one minute stop before you eat and create a bit of virtue through sincere supplication to Chenrezig and recitation of his mantra as you think of those beings with compassion. For us to be heedlessly caught up in how everything tastes without any thought of these beings is sort of dangerous--such a gathering of negativity we are participating in, inconceivable negativity that is the cause for limitless experiences in the lower realms. It is not only on this day or just in the eating of meat that we participate in negativity, either--look at how many insects we kill beneath the tires of our cars and on our windshields every time we drive. We always need to remember beings with compassion and pray for all of those that we harm. But for us, this time and this day is our focus, because everyone makes such a big deal. So take a minute to think of all beings with compassion and recite the MANI mantra with all your heart, which will certainly be of benefit, and dedicate the merit. Dedicate the merit to all sentient beings, not just the turkeys--all beings that exist, big or small. Join your aspiration to the great, compassionate wisdom aspiration of Chenrezig. I think this will be beneficial, rather than just chowing down mindlessly.

Actually, in general, if we are Buddhists it means we have gone for refuge in the Three Jewels, right? Then what are we supposed to do? Benefit ourselves and others! That is why we dedicate the merit of our virtues, great or small, to all sentient beings. It is not because it is this particular day or because we are praying for these particular turkeys. Whenever we create any virtue, we should have pure compassion; whenever we dedicate our merit, it should be without favoritism or bias. It's time to drop thinking you are something special because you are a Nyingma practitioner, or a Gelug, or Sakya, or Kagyu. You are a follower of Buddha Shakyamuni and one who has taken refuge in the Three Jewels--that's the important thing! Do not fall into the great negativity of abandoning the dharma through sectarian thinking. Instead, take your opportunities to remember sentient beings with compassion and the Three Jewels with devotion. You don't need to be a great scholar or a renowned practitioner. Just have the excellent mind of sincere compassion. "If the mind is excellent, the stages and the paths will be excellent; if the mind is bad, the stages and paths will be bad." If we can go Chenrezig's way a little bit, for a few seconds, following his example of compassion, that will be very good for making the mind more excellent.

Okay, everybody try!

Tashi delek!

-Gyatral

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