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## ANIMALS AS AGENTS IN AHIMSA ACTION AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

There is ecology and there is deep ecology. Deep ecology is closely related to cosmo-ethics. Implicit cosmo-ethical attitudes are reflected in our present-day, wide-spread concern to include the animal kingdom as a whole in the realms of our ethical conduct, which sometimes even takes the shape of support for "animal rights." The concept of animal rights imply the presence of moral and spiritual capacities in animals, however hidden that may be from human eyes. The implicit thesis of this article is precisely that, animals too have moral and spiritual capacities, a fact deeply perceived by parts of the Indian tradition. In this sense, even animals are held to be capable of *ahimsā* as of other elements of *dharma*. To have such a perception is to go one step beyond merely stipulating that we humans ought to comport ourselves *ahimsā-wise* towards all members of the animal kingdom, although in actual fact it is intended to deepen the significance of such stipulation by suggesting through animal, mostly tales, no doubt essentially in the language of poetic narration and empathetic projection, that animals are not merely at the receiving end but also at the giving end of moral and spiritual conduct, especially when it comes to *ahimsā* and all that it implies as well as entails.

Even in India, however, there has prevailed the other, that is, the common notion about the animal kingdom as distinguished from the human. The notion has been the basis of general Indian tradition, which, while recognizing the obvious physical kinship between humans and animals – entirely in accord with the norms of the Evolution doctrine – distinguishes the one from the other on the basis of moral capacity – present in the humans and absent in animals, as illustrated by the *subhāṣita*, cited below to commence the discussion. The thesis maintained all the way through the discussion has a very powerful, implied corollary – not explicitly argued, however – i.e., that this Indian tradition

of animal spirituality is the reverse of the Evolution doctrine's orientation : instead of pulling the human species down to the level of mere animal biology and physiology, animals are elevated (perhaps only vicariously) to the level of human beings so that they keep company with them and comfort them in their moral and spiritual struggles, which in turn have not a little to do with the caring love of all species.

*āhāra-nidrā-bhaya maithunañ ca  
sāmānyam etat paśubhir nārāṇām |  
dharmo hi teṣām adhiko viśeṣo  
dharmeṇa hīnaḥ paśubhiḥ samānaḥ*<sup>1</sup>

("Men are the same as animals

As far as food, sleep, fear, and sex are concerned.

They are distinguished only because of *dharma* :

(A man who) lacks *dharma* is the same as the animals.")

Indeed, Indians believe that only the *dharma* – the moral conscience (consciousness) which allows the individual to distinguish the wholesome from the unwholesome – differentiates men from animals.

On the other hand, the treatment of animals in Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina fables belies this distinction between humans and animals made on moral grounds. Indeed, anyone familiar with Indian bestiaries like *Pañcatantra* or *Hitopadeśa* will be aware of the frequent references to the capacity of animals for morality and for spiritual development. Virtually everyone in India knows, for example, the feats accomplished by the monkey-god Hanumān, the exemplary servant of Lord Rāma, in engineering the release of Rāma's wife, Sītā, from the abode of the demon Rāvaṇa. Equally well known in India is the story of the bird Jaṭāyu, the giant vulture which sacrificed itself while attempting to prevent Rāvaṇa's abduction of Sītā: in this epic tale, Lord Rāma himself lauds the bird's devotion and performs a funeral rite for him equal to that performed for one's own departed father.<sup>2</sup>

Notably enough, the most celebrated story concerning an animal, however, that involves neither service nor sacrifice but instead total devotion to the Lord, is a late story, *Gaja mokṣa*, appearing in the late tenth-century work, the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. According to that, a certain elephant arrives

1. *Hitopadeśa*, verse no. 25. Harḍāsa Samskṛta Granthamālā, Varanasi 1946.

2. *The Vālmīki Rāmāyana: Critical Edition*, III, 64, 23-36, Baroda: Oriental Institute.

at the bank of a lake to quench his thirst only to be caught by a crocodile and dragged down into the mire. The elephant, realizing his utter hopelessness, suddenly recalled a hymn which he had learned in a previous life, and that he recited in the spirit of absolute surrender, begging Lord Viṣṇu to rescue him from his calamity.<sup>3</sup> The Lord appeared atop his mount, Garuḍa, killed the crocodile and saved the elephant. The narrator hastens to add that at that very moment, the elephant lost his animal body and assumed the form of four-armed Viṣṇu, implying thereby that he had attained a state of similitude (*sāmya*) with the Lord.<sup>4</sup> Although such a story is narrated in order to show both the extraordinary power accruing from devotion and the unlimited grace of the Lord, it is also probably intended to demonstrate the ability of animals to attain salvation. Given this ability, any distinction between animals of all species and humans is a mere convention and cannot be used to deny spiritual capacity in animals. One must not, however, take this story too literally as implying that animals are actually the equals of human beings. And as if he were anticipating serious questions about the ability of an animal to recollect a *stotra* learned lifetimes ago, the narrator adds that the elephant was the Pāṇḍya king Indradyumna in his previous life, who had improperly abandoned his royal duties and assumed the ascetic life without appropriate guidance. Because he thereby neglected to perform the duties incumbent on the householder, as proper to his *āśrama*, he was cursed by the sage Agastya and, as a result, was reborn as an elephant.<sup>5</sup> This disclaimer reduces the significance of the tale as referring to animals, and places the focus instead on the hidden human being in the elephant, temporarily enmeshed in animal destiny: this, in fact, is a common feature of animal stories in the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*. Therefore, the story does not allow us to universalize its claim that animals are capable of progressing towards salvation.

3. *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, VIII, 3. 1, Gorakhpur; Gita Press, 1950.

*evam vyevasthito buddhyā samādhaya mano hṛdi |  
 jejāpa paramam jāpyam prāgjanmany anuśikṣitam |*

4. *Ibid.*, VIII, 4. 6.

*gajendro bhāgavatsparśād vimukto jñānabandhanāt |  
 prapto bhāgavato rūpam pītavasā caturbhujah |*

5. *Ibid.*, VIII, 4. 7, 12.

*sa val purvam abhād rājā Pāṇḍyo Dravidasettamah |  
 Indradyumna iti khyāto Viṣṇuvrataparāyanah | | . . .  
 āpannahkunjariṃ yonim ātmasmṛtīvināśinim |  
 haryarcānānubhāvena yad gajatve 'py anusmytth | |*

There may not be any direct influence on this *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* story from the much earlier Buddhist *Jātakas*, but there are numerous points of convergence in the perspectives toward animals found in Buddhist texts and in this *Purāṇa*. This kind of spiritual capacity of animals is indicated by the fact that in almost all fables where the Bodhisattva appears as an animal-manifestation, he not only leads an exemplary life in practising the perfections of charity (*dāna*) and moral-discipline, but even preaches the *dharma* to human beings. The story of the hare in the *Sasa Jātaka*<sup>6</sup> exemplifies the perfection of charity. In this tale, the Bodhisattva-hare not only keeps the Uposatha, but even offers his flesh to Sakra, who appears in the guise of a brahman, by jumping into a burning pyre. The *Hasti-Jātaka* in the *Jātakamālā*<sup>7</sup> goes one step further, by presenting the "anonymous charity" (*guptadāna*) of an animal. In this story, the Bodhisattva-elephant attempts to save a thousand travellers who are lost and starving in the forest, by providing his own body for their sustenance. Fearful that they would be physically incapable of attacking him, the Bodhisattva resorts to a subterfuge in order to rescue them from dying of starvation. He tells them that an animal has fallen to its death from a nearby cliff, and they should go there and feed on its flesh; hurrying ahead, however, he beats them to the site and jumps down from the cliff, killing himself. Only later do the men realize that the animal was the same one that had approached them before, and so they praise the magnanimity of its deed. This leads the author of the *Jātakamālā* to remark: "Even though born as animals, there is seen the charitable activities of great beings, performed according to their capacities."<sup>8</sup>

Another story that is appropriate in this connection is the *Nigrodhamiga-Jātaka*, which speaks of a deer-king who magnanimously offers to exchange his own life with that of another deer. In brief, the tale relates that the king of Banaras was especially fond of venison and had built two corals in a park outside the city for two herds of five-hundred deer. One herd was headed by the Bodhisattva-buck, Nigrodhamiga, the other by a buck named Sākha. In view of the majestic appearance of the two leading bucks, the king ordered them

6. See J III. 51-56.

7. See *Jātakamālā* (No. 30). (Tr. by J.S. Speyer) *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, I, pp. 37-46, London, 1895.

8. *The Jātakamālā of Āryaśūra*. ed. Dwivedi & Bhatt, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1966, p. 19, *tiryagatānām api śatām mahatmanām śaktyanurūpa dānaprevṛttir dṛṣṭā*.

protected; and the herds worked out an arrangement whereby members of alternate groups would offer themselves for slaughter. One day, the turn of a pregnant doe in Sākha's herd arrived, and she begged her leader to postpone her death until after her fawn's birth. But Sākha contemptuously rejected her appeal, proclaiming that never had there been anyone who wished to die a day too early. Distraught, the doe approached the Bodhisattva, who consented to take her place and offered himself to the royal butchers. When the king learned of his self-sacrifice, he was deeply moved: "Oh sir," he said, "even among men, I have never seen one like you, so endowed with forbearance, friendliness and kindness."<sup>9</sup> He then offered to extend his protection to the doe also, but the Bodhisattva appealed to the king to extend his compassion and obtained from him assurance of protection for the deer in that park, and ultimately for all animals, fish and fowl in the realm. The narrator concludes the story by relating that the buck then preached the *dharma* to the king and established him in the five precepts. His instruction resonates with the words of the Aśokan inscriptions: "Oh great king: Live righteously according to the conduct appropriate towards your parents, and toward brahmins, householders, and town and city dwellers. Thus living justly, after your death you will attain rebirth in heaven."<sup>10</sup> It is no wonder that buck was immortalized by ancient Buddhists, who depicted the story of the noble deer in the stone beside the *Dhammacakkappavattana* images at Sarnath.

These stories are indeed magnificent. But they do not refer to the fate of animals as such but speak only of the bodhisattva appearing in the guise of an animal, somewhat like the Brahmanical story presented previously. There are, however, numerous other tales scattered throughout the Buddhist scriptures which tell us how birds and beasts exhibit nobility and friendship comparable to that of human beings. The first major type involves tales in which an animal serves the Buddha. This would be like the horse, Kanthaka, whom the Buddha rode at the time of his Great Renunciation: according to tradition the devoted

9. J I. 151. *rājā āha: sāmī suvaṇṇavaṇṇamigarāja, mayā, tādiso khantimettanuddaya-sampanno manussesu pi na dīttapubbo, tena te pasanno 'smi . . .*

10. *Ibid.*, I. 152. *evam mahāsato rājanam sabbasattānam abhyam yācitva uttḥaya rājanam pancasūlesu patitthapetva "dhammam cara mahārāja maitapitūsu puttadhitasu brahmanagahapati kesu negamajanapadesu dhammam caranto samam caranto kayassa bheda sugatim saggam lokam gamissasi ti" ranno buddhalīhaya dhammam desetva . . . araṇṇam pāvīsi.*

horse died, heartbroken, after the epochal ride and was immediately reborn in the Tāvatiṃśa heaven.<sup>11</sup> A similar story is told concerning a monkey which offered a honeycomb to the Buddha and was so overcome by Gautama's acceptance of his gift that he fell from the tree and died; at the time of his death, however, he was so moved with joy that he too was reborn in the Tāvatiṃśa heaven.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the most memorable of such stories is the tale of the elephant, Pārileyyaka, who once served as attendant to the Buddha. During the Lord's voluntary retirement to the Pārileyyaka forest as a result of a bitter sectarian squabble which racked the Kosambi Saṅgha, this elephant had taken it upon himself to wait on the Lord by fetching him water and fruit and by warding off all intruders. After the Rains Retreat, when the monks had finally made peace, the Buddha consented to their pleas to return to Savatthi. The elephant wished to follow and continue in his role, but the Buddha bade him remain in the forest with the words: "Oh elephant; there is no possibility of you, an animal, attaining the knowledge, insight, or the fruits of the supramundane path."<sup>13</sup> The elephant obeyed the Lord but died soon afterwards of a broken heart and was reborn in the Tāvatiṃśa heaven. In all these three stories, it is made clear the animals are as capable as human, lay followers (*upāsaka*) of great service and devotion to the Buddha and that such devotion, when accompanied by appropriate action, would lead even animals to heaven.

The second major type of animal story gives us deeper insight into the specific features of the "religious" behaviour that was considered well within the purview of animals. We may take up two contrasting stories to illustrate this variety. First is the story of a cow named Bahalā

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11. *Ibid.*, I. 65, Kanthako pana . . . bodhisattassa vacanam sunanto thatvā "n" atth idāni mayham puna sāmīno dassanan" ti . . . sokam adhivāsetum asakkonto hadayena phalītena kālam katvā Tavatimsabhavane Kanthako nama devaputto hutvā nibbatti.
  12. *Dhp* A I. 59, ath'eko makkato . . . madhupaṭalam satthusantakam āharitva . . . adāsi. Satthā ganhi so tuṭṭhamānaso tam tam sakhā gahetvā nēccanto aṭṭhāsi. ath'ssa gahitasakhā pi akkantasakhā pi bhijjimsu. so tasmim khāne khānumatthake pativā . . . satthari pasannen' eva cittena kālam katvā Tavatimsabhavane . . . nibbatti.
  13. *Ibid.*, I. 63. Parileyyaka idam pana mama anibbattagamanam. tava iminā attabhāvena jhānam vā vipassanam vā maggaphalam vā n'atthi, tiṭṭha tvan ti aha. so rodamano thatva satthari cakkhupatham vijāhante hadayena phalītena kālam katva satthari pasādena Tāvatisabhavane . . . nibbatti. See E.W. Burlingame: *Buddhist Legends* Pt. I. pp. 179-183 Harvard, 1921.

who is accosted in a forest by a tiger.<sup>14</sup> Before the predator could attack her, however, the cow pleaded with him to let her first go to the village to feed her young calf, who happened to be the Bodhisattva; she promised to come back to the forest and offer herself to the tiger later that evening. When the tiger asks for some guarantee that she would return, the cow declared that her cultivation of truthfulness (*satya*) obliged her to keep her word; succumbing to her sincerity, the tiger allows her to leave. When she told her calf of her fate, however, the Bodhisattva is also so moved that he follows his mother and offers himself to the tiger in exchange for her life. Finally overcome by the mother's truthfulness and the calf's filial devotion, the tiger spares them both. These events were so extraordinary that they shook the seat of Indra, lord of gods, and he appeared on earth to personally witness the miracle. Later, he took them all to heaven for a few days as guests of the palace before returning them to earth. Eventually all three animals were reborn in heaven as a result of their exemplary behaviour. While neither the Buddhists nor the Jainas regard any animal—even the Cow – as sacred, this cow Bahala may, on account of her truthfulness, be certainly considered worthy of such honour.

The second story is of quite a different bent. Here a wild buffalo was terrorizing the people of an outlying village and the residents begged the Buddha to appease the beast. The Lord approached the animal and, touched by the Buddha's loving-kindness, the buffalo was subdued. Noticing in the buffalo the seeds of previous learning, the Buddha preached to him about impermanence, lack of substance, and peaceful *nirvāṇa*.<sup>15</sup> He also reminded him of his past births in which he had been a teacher of *dharma* himself. Overcome with remorse, the buffalo died and was reborn in the Devaloka. That even this subtle and profound dogma could be preached to an animal, proves that the Buddhists consider animals capable of insights that normally would be considered possible only for human beings.

Another story, rather similar, is found in the tale of a cobra which had amassed substantial wealth as a greedy merchant in a previous

14. *Paññasa-Jātaka (Bahaleputtajātaka)*, II, pp. 384–390 (ed.) P.S. Jaini, London: Pali Text Society, 1983.

15. *Avadānasatakam*, (ed.) P.L. Vaidya, *Darbhangā*, 1958, p. 148. Bhagavatā tanmayyā gatyā tanmayya yonyāś tribhiḥ padair dharmo desitāḥ: iti hi bhādrakukha-sarvasamskāra anityaḥ-sarvadharmā anātmanāḥ śāntam nirvāṇam iti.

life, now reborn as a snake. He was guarding the buried cache, frightening away anyone who might come near. The Buddha finally pacified him and had him recall his previous life, warning that if he persisted in his hostility, he would be reborn in hell.<sup>16</sup> The cobra repented and grieved over his past, but the Buddha consoled him with the verse:

What shall I do now for you who has fallen into an animal birth?

Why do you cry, you who have come in the "wrong" time (for salvation)?

It is good for you now to project your mind towards the Jina with delight.

Thereby, you will overcome your animal rebirth and be reborn in heaven.<sup>17</sup>

Accordingly, the snake like the buffalo in the previous story died thinking of the Buddha and was reborn in the Trāyastriṃśa heaven.

The Buddha's warning to the cobra that by persisting in his greed and hostility he would be destined to be reborn in hell directly implies that it was possible for an animal to be reborn into the hellish abodes directly from the animal realm. Of course, by setting the cobra on the right path, the Buddha saved him from such a fate. It might come as something of a surprise that, like human beings, an animal could in fact engage in such harshly defined volitional actions that hell would be the result. However, if we bear in mind that examples abound of animals being reborn in heaven, which require similarly extreme wholesome actions, then this eventuality does not seem so unusual. Thus while animals may retain some measure of moral consciousness, it this seemingly coexists with a certain amount of instinctive violence.

This conclusion is clarified by an extraordinary Jaina story concerning a tiny fish who was called Sālisiktha<sup>18</sup> (rice grain) after his small size.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 129, bhādrāmukha tvayaivaitad dravyam uparjitam yena tvam āgīvisagatim upapādītaḥ sādhu mamāntike cittam prasādyā, asmāc ca nidhanāc cittam virāgaya ma haiva itaḥ kālam kṛtvā narakesūpapatsyasīti.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 129.  
idānim kim karisyāmi tiryagyonigatasya te /  
akṣaṇapratipannasya kim rodisi nirarthakam //  
sādhu prasādyatam cittam mahākāruṇike jine /  
tiryagyonim virāgyeḥa tataḥ svargam gamisyasi //

18. *Byhat-Kathakośa of Harisena. (Sālisiktha-Kathanakam)*, ed. An N. Upadhye, Singh, Jain Granthamala, No. XVII, Bombay, 1943, p. 341.



The story relates that there was a giant whale inhabiting the outer ocean-ring encircling the world who fed itself by keeping its jaws open for six months straight, devouring anything that entered. At the end of this feeding period, he would then shut his jaws and hibernate for the remainder of the year. Śālisiktha, who had taken up residence in the whale's ear, was prone to extreme gluttony and became distressed at the sight of the whale allowing large numbers of small fish to escape through the spaces between his teeth. "Alas"! he thought, "How foolish and stupid this whale is! How can he so ignore what is good for him that he allows these beings to escape? If my body or mouth were as large as his, not a single fish would be able to escape from my mouth". Soon afterwards, both of the animals died, and the whale was born in the lowest of the seven hells for having killed so many beings during his lifetime. But the narrator tells us that this tiny fish also was reborn in the lowest hell for having committed such brutal killings in his mind (*pariṇāmadhena*).<sup>19</sup> That seemingly innocuous thoughts were met with such severe punishment might appear inappropriate to most Buddhists and many Jainas. Nevertheless, it confirms the Jaina belief that animals were on a par with human beings in being subject to the retribution accruing from evil actions. We might note parenthetically that according to Jaina doctrine, few beings indeed are capable of performing such heinous deeds as to merit rebirth in the seventh hell. The Jainas believe, for example, that birds can be born no lower than the third hell, quadrupeds not below the fourth, and lions not below the fifth; only fish (and human males) are capable of being born in the seventh hell.<sup>20</sup> While the texts do not tell us which animals other than fish can fall as far as the sixth hell the Jaina tradition is unanimous in declaring that human females are

19. *Ibid.*,

ṣarīram me mukham vāpi yadi tungam bhaved idam /  
tato naiko 'pi niriyati man mukhaddhi jhasādikāḥ //  
evam cintayatas tasya Śālisikthavisarīṇaḥ /  
mahato 'pi ca minasya yati kālo sanaiḥ sanaiḥ //  
nānāḥ vavadham kṛtvā bṛhanmino mṛtim gataḥ /  
trayastrimśat samudrāyuh saptame narake 'bhavat //  
Śālisiktho 'pi matsyo yam mṛtim kṛtvā sa duṣṭādhiḥ /  
pariṇāmadhenaḥpi saptamam narakam yayau //

20. *Tattvārthasūtra-Rājavārttikatīkā*, p. 118 (quoted in *Nyāya-Kumudacandra*, ed., Mahendrakumar Jain, Bombay (Manikachandra Digambara Jain Granthamala), 1941, p. 867, no. 2), prathamāyam asamjñina utpādyante, prathamadvitīyāyāḥ sarisṛpāḥ, tīraṇau pakṣiṇaḥ, cetasṛsūgḥaḥ, pañcasu simhāḥ saṣṭsu striyāḥ saptasū matsyamaṇṣyāḥ.

incapable of falling any lower than this penultimate destiny.<sup>21</sup> As to how and why the fish were equal to human males in being able to fall to the lowest hell – an exclusive Jaina belief – remains a mystery. At any rate, by declaring that animals are capable of such a fate, the Jainas are proclaiming that animals do have the capacity for willful volitional actions, of both wholesome and unwholesome kinds. However, compared to the tales of animals being reborn in the heavens for their skillful deeds, the stories of animals going to hell are rare indeed. In fact, the story narrated above was probably intended as much to warn human beings about the serious consequences of one's thoughts as to detail the possible destinies of animals.

The Jaina narrative literature, however, is replete with stories which discuss the wholesome aspirations of animals and their subsequent rebirth as humans, snakes and mongooses attending together a sermon of the Jina in perfect harmony. One such story concerns a frog who, while on his way to participate in Mahāvīra's holy assembly, was trampled by a royal elephant. The frog was immediately reborn in heaven because he had died with intense devotion in his heart to the Jina.<sup>22</sup> In this way, the frog story balances the fish story by demonstrating that animals, like humans, were also capable of wholesome rebirths.

The story of a pair of cobras, named Dharanendra and Padmāvati,<sup>23</sup> also indicates this same capacity. The story takes place in Varanasi (Banaras) during the time of Pārśvanātha, the immediate predecessor of Māhāvīra. There, Pārśva, the would-be Jina, is said to have saved from death a pair of cobras who were hiding within firewood being kindled by non-Jaina ascetics for their ritual practices. Pārśva put out the fire and had the firewood split open to free the two snakes, but it was too late to save them. While they died, Pārśva administered to them the holy Jina litany, the *Pañcanamaskāra-mantra*.<sup>24</sup> As a

21. *Strīnirvāṇa-Kevalibhukti prakaraṇe*, p. 15. Jain Atamanand Sabha, Bhavanagar, 1974. (see P.S. Jaini, *Jaina Debates on the Salvation of Women* (forthcoming); 'asan-nirvāṇā striyaḥ, asaptamaḥthivigamanatvāti . . . ya evamvidhā na te nirvānti, yatha sammūrchimadayaḥ, tathāvidhaśca striyaḥ' iti.

22. *Jñātādhermakathāṅga (Nayadhamma-kāhāo)*, I, ch. 13 (ed., Medhukara Muni) Agama Prakashana Samiti Beawar.

23. *Trisaṣṭisalākāpuruṣacarita* Vol. V., p. 393 (tr. Helen M. Johnson). Gaekwad Oriental Series No. 139, Baroda, 1962.

24. On this Jaina litany see P. S. Jaini: *The Jaina Path of Purification*, University of California Press, 1979. p. 162.

consequence of hearing this *mantra*, they were reborn in the abode of the yaksas and since then have been worshipped by the Jaina community as the guardian dieties of their religion.

There is another Jaina story, which, however, concerns an elephant who, in his very next rebirth, was born as Prince Megha and became an eminent Jaina monk under Mahāvira. The story of this elephant compares favourably with earlier stories we have noted above from Vaiṣṇava and Buddhist texts. It tells us that this elephant was the leader of a large herd which was caught in huge forest fire. All the animals of the forest ran from their haunts and gathered around a lake so that the entire area was jammed with beings large and small. After standing thus for a considerable time, the elephant lifted his leg to scratch himself, and immediately a small hare ran to occupy the spot vacated by his raised foot. However, rather trampling on the helpless animal the elephant's mind was filled with great compassion for the plight of his fellow-creature; indeed, his concern for the hare's welfare was so great that he is said to have been released for ever from animal fate in future.<sup>25</sup> The elephant stood with one leg raised for more than three days until the fire abated and the hare was able to leave. By then, however, the elephant's whole leg had become numb and, unable to set down his foot, he toppled over. While maintaining his purity of mind, he finally died and was reborn as Prince Megha, the son of King Śreṇika, the ruler of Magadha. This story is a perfect example of the choice that an animal may make in undertaking a good or evil act. The elephant had the option of simply trampling the hare, but refused to do so, acting as a morally-inclined human would. Thus he deserved not only to be reborn in his next life as a human, but also to proceed along the path to salvation by becoming a monk.

But the most remarkable Jaina tale must be that of Mahāvira's own life as a lion and his awakening to enlightenment. We saw earlier in the Buddhist stories that hares could keep the Uposatha and offer charity. But the story of Mahāvira as a lion goes one step further. According to this story, once when Mahāvira's soul was reborn as

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25. *Jñātdharmakathāṅga (Nayadharmakathāo)*, Ch. I, 1983: tae nam tumam Meha ! gayam kaṇḍuitta panaravi pāyam paḍinikkhamissami tti kaṭṭu tam sasayam anupavittham pāsasi pāsitta paṇānukampaye . . . se paṇānukampayae . . . se paeam-tara ceva samādhariye no ceva nam nikkhitte. tae nam tumam Meha ! tae paṇānukampayae . . . samsare parittikāe, manussave nibaddhe.

a lion, two Jaina monks happened to see him. They realized immediately through their super-knowledge, that this was a soul who could benefit from religious discourse. They approached him and instructed him in the value of kindness and admonished him to refrain from killing. According to the story, the lion was deeply moved by their discourse and, receiving their words with great devotion, was immediately awakened to the true nature of his own self. He resolved then and there to take the minor vows (*anuvrata*) and desist from injuring other beings in any way. Thus refraining from all food, he died and, as a consequence of the virtue accruing from his fast, was reborn in heaven. This story is of great importance because, not only is the animal said to have been capable of understanding a discourse on the nature of the soul, but was also able to exercise his will to assume religious vows.<sup>26</sup> In this belief, animals were brought on a par with Jaina laymen, who advance on a spiritual course leading to mendicancy by adhering to such vows as non-violence and non-possession. Of course, animals could not assume the precepts in the same way that humans do when they repeat verbally the vows of renunciation. It is, however, a commonly observed phenomenon that animals often refrain from food for some time before their deaths; this might have given support to the belief that such a fast was deliberate and motivated by spiritual impulses.

Even if we discount the tales in which animals were the theriomorphoses of *bodhisattvas* or advanced sages, the above stories still include several illustrations of the capacity of animals to lead a spiritual life. In such Buddhist tales as that of the wild buffalo, for instance, an animal displayed an almost human-like capacity for understanding such profound expressions of *dharma* as *anitya* (impermanence) *anātman* (non-soul) and *śāntatā* (quiescence). In the Jaina stories the sacred litany was muttered to a pair of serpents, thereby enabling them to achieve a superior rebirth. While in these stories, the intervention of a great human being was necessary to catalyze understanding, this was not the case for all. The elephant, Parileybaka, for example, served the Buddha out of his own love and devotion, and the elephant in the Jaina story of Prince Megha

26. Uttarapurāna Ch. lxxxvi, 207-208, ed. Pannalal Jain, Varanasi: Bharatiya Jnanapitha, 1954:

vahāya hṛdi yogindrayagmam bhaktibharāhitāḥ //  
 muhuḥ pradakṣiṅkṛtya prapranamya mṛgādhipaḥ /  
 tattvaśradhdhānam āsādyā sadyaḥ kalādilabdhitāḥ /  
 praṇidhāya manāḥ śṛavakavratāni samādadhē //

refused to trample upon the hare because of his own inherent kindness.

The element innate in animals which permits such spiritual aspirations to develop is the subtle seed of liberation, termed variantly *sūkṣma-kuśala-dharm-abījā*<sup>27</sup> by the Buddhists and *nityodghāṭita-jñāna*<sup>28</sup> by the Jains. This catalyst is clearly at work in such cases as the cow Bahalā's truthfulness or the elephant Megha's compassion. This belief in an innate capacity for salvation accords well with the Jaina belief that humans have close affinities with animals. Animals and humans share the same cosmological region, the *madhyaloka* and a being can move into the inferior hells or the superior heavens only from that realm; no movement between the different hells and heavens or directly from heaven to hell (or vice versa) is possible. While the denizens of hell, the gods, and humans are each only a single species, however, animals number some 840,000 individual species<sup>29</sup> and would thus be expected to continue passing interminably between different animal destinies before achieving rebirth elsewhere. Despite the overwhelming variety of animals, what most clearly distinguishes them from the denizens of hell and the gods is the fact that, like humans they are able to assume religious vows, as is exemplified in the Jaina story of the lion-Mahāvira. This similarity with humans may partly explain the penchant of Indians – and particularly Jains – to consider all life as inviolable. However, there is a minor difference between the Hindu attitude and the Jaina attitude. The Jains do not exalt some particular animals as sacred, as the Hindus do in practice, say in the way they view the cow, but regard all forms of life as sacred. But this difference does not affect our thesis.

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27. See P.S. Jaini, "The Sautrāntika theory of *bīja*," in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, Vol. XXII, pt. 2, pp. 236-249, 1959.

28. See P.S. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification*, pp. 135 ff.

29. On the significance of this number see P.S. Jaini, "Karma and the problem of rebirth in Jainism," in *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions*, ed., W.D. O'Flaherty, University of California Press, 1980, pp. 228.