

their natural feelings of empathy and protectiveness—a process that is essential in a herding culture in which boys will be routinely required as men to dominate and kill animals for food. Hard, tough men, disconnected from their inner wellsprings of intelligence and compassion, are a frightening and devastating force on this earth, and in a herding culture like ours, they are often the role models that boys naturally emulate.

The disconnectedness responsible for our loss of intelligence and compassion afflicts highly paid scientists, doctors, politicians, and clergy just as deeply as it afflicts working-class farmers and laborers. In all cases, it narrows vision, causes a preoccupation with personal and national self-interest, and creates an enormous reservoir of guilt and violence that feeds the fires of war, disease, oppression, and indifference to the suffering of others. What goes around comes around. If we sow seeds of domination and exclusion, we lose intelligence and compassion, and life becomes a burdensome and confused struggle.

As We Sow, So Shall We Reap

The most universal spiritual teaching, found cross-culturally in virtually all the world's religious traditions, is based on the truth of our interconnectedness. It is presented both positively, in what we refer to as the Golden Rule (to do unto others as we would have them do unto us), and more neutrally as the law of cause and effect (that whatever we do unto others will rebound to us). Simply stated, we can never expect to be happy if we cause suffering to others, to be free if we confine others, to be healthy if we cause sickness in others, to be prosperous if we steal from others, or to have peace if we are violent to others and cause them to be afraid. As the Buddhists say, whatever seeds we plant and nurture through the actions of our body, speech, and mind will grow, and we will experience their fruits in our lives as abundance, joy, love, and inner peace, or anger, misery, pain, and lack. “Blessed are the merciful,” as the New Testament says, “for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7). As we free others, we become free; as we love others, we are loved; as we encourage others, we are encouraged; as we bless others, we are blessed; as we bring joy and healing to others, we find joy and healing in our lives.

This timeless wisdom is the foundation of intelligence and compas-

sion, because it is firmly based on the truth of interconnectedness. In its light we can see how our mistreatment of animals has painful repercussions for us. The irony is breathtaking. For example, animals in the wild are never fat, but animals raised for food are severely confined, fed special diets, and given drugs and hormones in order to make them unnaturally fat (they're sold by the pound, after all). Obesity is a serious problem among human omnivores, with sixty percent of Americans overweight and twenty-six percent obese.¹⁰ The medical costs of this are estimated in the billions, and the psychological costs, while unquantifiable, are enormous. We sow obesity in billions of chickens, turkeys, pigs, and cows, and we reap it in ourselves. Butterball turkeys are bred, fed, and confined to be so fat they can no longer engage in sexual intercourse, something that may for that matter be happening to an increasing number of people.

In the wild, the animals we eat for food live in families and have complex, vital, and enriching social relationships with others in their herds, flocks, schools, and communities. In animal agriculture, all family ties are destroyed, babies are quickly removed from their mothers, and each animal is seen as a separate unit of production. This is what we sow, and what we reap in human culture we can see everywhere: the breakdown of the family. What we do to the animals, we do to ourselves. More than ever, families are breaking up, parents are separating, children are abandoned or leave, and people feel the alienation of being lone "units of production" in a heartless and competitive economic system.

Female animals raised for food are pushed into unnaturally early pregnancies by administration of hormones, especially in egg, dairy, and pig operations, because it's cheaper than having to feed them until they naturally reach sexual maturity. They are only youngsters when they are forcibly impregnated on factory farms. This practice supplies an unnatural load of estrogen and other hormones in the cheese, milk, and other dairy products eaten by our children—pushing them, especially girls, into unnaturally early sexual development and pregnancy. This is a basic driving force behind the trauma of teen pregnancies and abortions, but we rarely hear it discussed.

Another fascinating example of doing unto ourselves what we do to

animals is our sexual mutilation of human infants. The young male animals born into our food production system are virtually all castrated without anesthesia to be more easily controllable before being fattened and killed. While we obviously don't castrate all our baby boys, it is quite telling that the most common surgical procedure in the U.S. today is the circumcision of helpless male infants. As Ronald Goldman shows in *Circumcision: The Hidden Trauma*, it's still done as a matter of course, even though it's been proven to be damaging and serves no useful purpose.¹¹ Like the female circumcision perpetrated by some herding cultures, the male circumcision practiced by our culture reduces the sensitivity of the sexual organ. The foreskin of the penis is a membrane similar to our eyelids that keeps the head of the penis protected and moist and, when the penis is erect, allows for greater skin contact in the sexual act. By cutting away the foreskin in infants, the sensitive head is perpetually exposed, and gradually builds extra layers of cells that protect it and reduce its sensitivity. The skin of a circumcised penis when erect is also unnaturally tight. Most men in our culture have actually been physically mutilated without their consent in a way that reduces their capacity to experience sexual sensations. It's difficult to know what the effects of this have been on relationships, sexual dysfunctionality, and the sexual experience of women, but it's certainly all connected.

Circumcision may persist partly because fathers tend to do to their sons whatever was done to them, and partly because the medical establishment often recommends it. Every surgical procedure means more revenue for the doctors and hospitals, and what happens to all those pieces of foreskin cut off of human penises? They're not just thrown away! They fetch quite a high price when sold to the pharmaceutical companies that use them in their products. It's a poignant reflection of the old practice of slaughterhouses selling their pig pancreases to the same pharmaceutical industry to produce insulin. Vulnerable animal infants are restrained and attacked so their body parts can be sold, and vulnerable human infants are likewise restrained and attacked so their body parts can be sold. Circumcision is by far the most painful surgical procedure done in hospitals without anesthesia, as Paul M. Fleiss, M.D., points out:

In fact, babies feel pain more acutely than adults, and the younger the baby, the more acutely the pain is felt. If an adult needed to be circumcised, he would be given anesthesia and postoperative pain relief. Doctors almost never give babies either of these. The only reason doctors get away with circumcising babies without anesthesia is because the baby is defenseless and cannot protect himself. His screams of pain, terror, and agony are ignored.¹²

Infants are helpless and cannot retaliate, so their fear and pain—*our* fear and pain—like the fear and pain of piglets and other food animals, are simply ignored.

Castrating millions of young male animals has another consequence for human males as well, for by eating the flesh and secretions of these castrated animals, men often gradually lose their sexual ability. Saturated animal fat and cholesterol residues inexorably clog the veins and arteries of their sexual organ, and eventually not enough blood can get through to maintain an erection. On top of this humiliating and poetic consequence of macho brutality, eating animal foods has been positively linked with prostate cancer¹³ and with lowered sperm counts.¹⁴ Eating cruelty and death may fit a man into the culturally accepted model of tough masculinity, but this absurdity is revealed in his limp, impotent organ.

The same principle plays out again and again in a striking variety of ways. We pump huge quantities of drugs into billions of defenseless animals. We experience drug addiction, drug abuse, drug dependence, and all the horrors and traumas of side effects, numbing, and the perils of living in a society increasingly drugged with both medical prescriptions and illicit substances. We force farmed animals to live in extremely polluted and toxic environments, to breathe air made noxious by the concentrated ammonia excrement of thousands of enclosed and overcrowded animals, to live in their own waste and eat contaminated feed. We find ourselves living increasingly in our own waste as our air becomes more polluted and our water and food are increasingly contaminated.

We force animals to live in extremely stressful conditions. We find we are living in increasingly stressful conditions. We confine and

imprison animals. We find ourselves feeling more confined as social and economic pressures increase, and we see our prison population exploding.¹⁵ We push animals unremittingly to produce, and find we're constantly pushed to produce. We force ill health on animals raised for food by cramming them into toxic, stressful, and hopeless situations, and we find our disease rates increasing. We force millions of factory-farmed animals into insanity through the complete frustration and thwarting of their natural yearnings and drives, and we find human mental illness escalating.

We terrorize millions of vulnerable and defenseless animals daily with painful shockings, beatings, brandings, debeakings, dehornings, castrations, ear notchings, nose bashing, and by forcing them to watch the killing of other animals before they are killed. As we terrorize, so we increasingly fear the shadow of terrorism, and we pour billions of dollars into campaigns to "prevent terrorism." We steal from and deceive animals on a massive scale: we steal their babies, their bodies, their milk, their eggs, their honey, and their lives, and we deceive them with baited hooks, lures, nets, and slaughterhouse tunnels. We find that we live in a society increasingly rife with deception and theft, where predatory capitalism and sophisticated advertising work together to create a climate that legitimizes deceit in the name of profit, and fraudulent cunning in the name of return on investment.

We force food animals into cages, and we find more and more of us living in gated communities, behind bars and locks. We overcrowd them and we're increasingly overcrowded. We torture them by the millions and Amnesty International reports that human torture of other humans is at an all-time high.¹⁶ In fact, one of the most widespread techniques of human torture, preferred because it causes severe pain while leaving little physical scarring, is electroshocking. According to Amnesty International, this technology was pioneered by U.S. corporations in the 1970s for use on animals, and there are now over 120 companies in the world (70 in the U.S.) making electroshock devices that are used on both animals and humans.¹⁷

Animals raised for food are often purposefully starved—sometimes it's female chickens being starved as part of a "forced molt," to shock

their bodies to begin another cycle of egg laying, and sometimes it's to save money on feed, or just negligence. We find our culture rife with anorexia nervosa as people, mostly women, starve themselves, sometimes to death. And, even with an overabundance of grain being grown—but fed to livestock for consumption by the wealthy—many thousands of poor people, mostly children, die every day of starvation.

For young female animals born into our food production system, the sexual abuse of repeated raping is a defining experience. It is euphemized as “artificial insemination,” but it is forcible rape, and young female pigs, cows, sheep, goats, turkeys, chickens, ducks and other animals are all repeatedly raped by men to produce offspring before being killed. For these defenseless females, men are serial rapists and killers. Young female turkeys, for example, are raped an average of twice a week for twelve to sixteen months until they're slaughtered for turkey soup and baby food.¹⁸ Besides the systematic sexual abuse of insemination, many animals, particularly pigs, are the victims of sexual abuse by workers on factory farms, as has been documented by undercover workers. Rape is a central metaphor of our culture and an enormously serious problem, with a woman or girl being raped or sexually assaulted in the U.S. an average of every two minutes.¹⁹ As in animal agriculture, where the female and the maternal are brutally dominated and exploited for profit, in our human society feminine and maternal values are suppressed and women are denied equal status with men. This ongoing, invisible domination of the feminine and of female animals in particular has enormous consequences and goes a long way toward explaining the lower status of women in our culture. Viewing animals merely as meat and objects to be consumed, we find that women, like animals, are also often viewed merely as meat to be used sexually. As Carol J. Adams points out, animals and women are linked in our culture through pornography, advertising, and the popular media, with “food” animals being seen as sexualized females who want to be eaten, and women linked with animals as sexual objects that want to be used.

As we inflict disease on animals through the bizarre conditions we force upon them in factory farms, we find new and deadly diseases

haunting and stalking us, like SARS, AIDS, mad cow disease, and a variety of aggressive influenzas, as well as drug-resistant strains of tuberculosis, strep, E. coli, and other debilitating pathogen-related ailments. By severely crowding animals in ways that would never occur in the wild, breaking social structures, compelling them to eat the feces, blood, flesh, and organs of animals they would normally never feed upon, and forcing them into routine cannibalistic behavior by feeding them foods “enriched” with the body parts of members of their own species, we make factory farm operations the breeding grounds of deadly viruses, bacteria, parasites, and proteins that would never have any chance of developing in nature. These pathogens, like the prion responsible for mad cow disease, are passed into us when we ingest foods or drugs sourced from the bodies of these tortured creatures. As Michael Greger, M.D., has pointed out, aggressive new influenzas are easily tracked to overcrowded food animal confinement and slaughterhouse operations,²⁰ as is the prevalence of diseases caused by salmonella, E. coli, listeria, campylobacter, and other pathogens. The intensive confinement of animals for food causes high levels of stress, disease, and pathogen infestation in the animals we eat, which the industry combats by administering large quantities of drugs and antibiotics so the animals can survive until slaughter weight is attained. This only compounds the problem for human health, because the antibiotics and other drugs encourage the evolution of ever hardier and more drug-resistant strains of bacteria and viruses. It’s well known that this practice leads to new and deadlier strains of pathogens, such as the tubercule bacillus that is so resistant to drugs that the suffering caused by the massive amounts of toxic pharmaceuticals used to combat the disease is considered worse than the disease itself. This is not difficult to understand, but new diseases and ever-larger intensive confinement factory farm operations both continue to proliferate with little public questioning because both are highly profitable, and the public cannot bear to look at its food habits. Sowing disease in defenseless animals, we can only reap the same for ourselves.

In countless ways, the chickens come home to roost. Forcing horror on animals, we find horror in the mass media and in popular entertainment increasing. As we kill young animals for food, we find child and

teen suicide skyrocketing. As we purposefully enrage animals, as in rodeos, we find our own rage increasing. As we purposefully induce fear in them, as in laboratory experiments on fear, we find our own chronic fear increasing. As we force osteoporosis on them by pushing them to overproduce milk and eggs, we find ourselves suffering an epidemimic of osteoporosis. As we intentionally overfeed them to create the swollen and diseased duck and goose livers we eat as foie gras, we find ourselves chronically over-eating foods with toxic residues and thereby damaging our livers and other internal organs. As we force animals to be fat, diseased, overcrowded, anxious, and stressed, we become the same. As we feed them unnaturally processed, chemical-laden foods, we find our grocery stores filled with similarly toxic products posing as food. As we confine them to little boxes, we find ourselves confined in office cubicles of our own making. As we ignore animal suffering, we ignore each other's suffering. As we deny animals their dignity and privacy, we deny our own dignity and find our privacy being increasingly eroded. As we enforce powerlessness on them, we feel increasingly powerless. As we reduce them to mere commodities, we become mere commodities ourselves. As we destroy their ability to fulfill their purpose, we lose track of our purpose. As we deny them rights, we lose our own rights. As we enslave them, we become slaves ourselves. As we break their spirits, our own spirits are broken. As we sow, we reap.

The cardiac units of metropolitan hospitals have become assembly lines for heart bypass surgeries. Scores of people go through every day, one after another, to have these expensive and radical operations performed. They are typically people who have eaten many animals. Meanwhile, animals are lined up in slaughterhouse disassembly lines and stabbed, one after the other. People eat them and line up in hospitals to be stabbed, one after the other. As we stab, so shall we be stabbed.

Scientists are hard at work now breeding food animals who will be as dull, insensitive, and controllable as possible, in order to better survive the unimaginable pain and stress they are forced to endure on factory farms. They want to create animals with minimal feelings and awareness, animals born with broken spirits, with no zest for life and

with no purpose other than to serve the ends of their dominators. That would be good for business. As we cause others to be, so we become—and, in this case, perhaps, are already well on our way to becoming.

May we ponder deeply the wisdom of the Golden Rule before it's too late, and begin to actually live it with respect to the animals who are at our mercy. Otherwise, our future may be horribly grim: all that we force others to experience, we will eventually end up experiencing ourselves.