

## Lemming Dharma

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The **lemming** (*Lemmus lemmus*) is perhaps the most maligned and misunderstood of mammals (other than humans). The behavior of lemmings is oddly very similar to humans who gather in massive crowds for anything as crowd-pulling as the sunny beaches, football matches, religious prayer gatherings or political rallies.

Unlike humans who commit mass mental suicide by believing what the crowd believes, the lemming is not suicidal by nature. It is true that they are often seen stampeding in huge numbers falling over the cliff into the ocean waters in the Arctic region where they inhabit. The fiction about them, however, is stranger than the truth.

### Faked suicide

The most influential and infamous depiction of lemmings involved is clearly the cinematically crafted documentary film entitled *White Wilderness*. In this 1958 Disney film, producers faked scenes of mass migration and threw lemmings off a cliff to their deaths to fake footage of a “mass suicide.” The movie won an Academy Award for Documentary Feature.

A Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, *Cruel Camera* (1982), found the lemmings used for “*White Wilderness*” were flown from Hudson Bay to Calgary, Alberta, Canada, where, far from “casting themselves bodily out into space” (as the film's narrator claims), they were, in fact, dumped off the cliff by the camera crew from a truck.

### Animal cruelty

Because of the limited number of lemmings at their disposal, which in any case were the wrong sub-species, the migration scenes were simulated using tight camera angles and a large, snow-covered turntable.

This was a time when **animal cruelty** was a familiar film feature, that is, the early-to-mid-20th century. Just to mention a few cases: nearly 100 horses were killed during the climactic chariot race in “*Ben-Hur*”; the horse fell to its death after a stuntman rode it over a 70-foot cliff in “*Jesse James*”; the lion was stabbed to death in “*Tarzan*.”

### Survival of the fittest

The fact is that lemming, in a sense, **knew** what they are doing: when their population become so huge, their crowd instinct simply drives them to seek new habitat. Since they are good swimmers, they are used to mass migrating over a body of water. Of course, some of them, for various reasons, do drown, such as in a vast stretch of water or strong currents.

However, the literary name-calling of someone who blindly follows the crowd as a **lemming**, although based on a myth, actually captures the dynamics of such migrating lemmings, especially when many perish in the waters. Of course, those who love lemmings but hate

expressive language would reject such a colourfully apt allusion. Anyway, they would probably be with the Covid-19 crowd, but we have to tell their story.

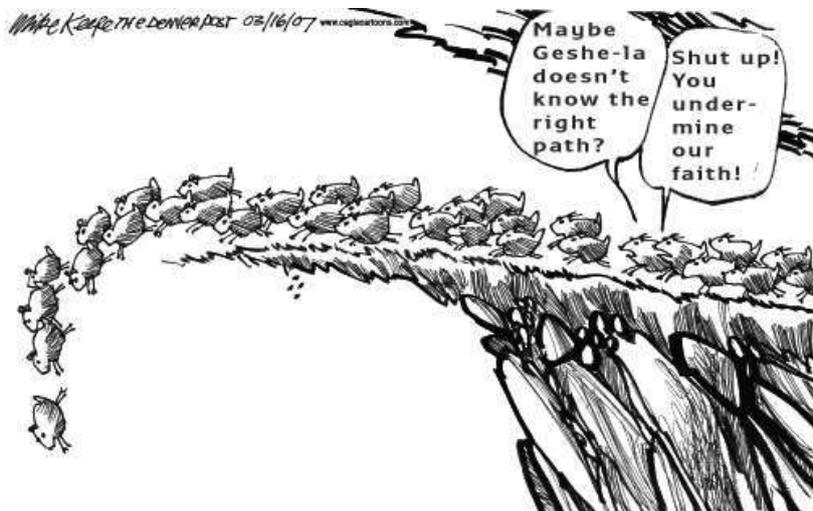
### Catching cartoons

Below are 2 very instructive cartoons. The first depicts the dangers of Guru Buddhism that plagued Western Buddhism, especially in the 1990s (remember Chogyam Rinpoche?). The plague is less visible now, but the virus is still very active in our system. Basically, the cartoon is a warning us not to put our remote in the hands of monks, priests, pastors, senseis, lamas, sifus, gurus, or anyone else, for that matter.

The second cartoon is a profoundly lovable one. Canadians are proverbially polite people, as they say, but they are far from being dense, cringing or crowd-minded like our locals when the first Portuguese man-of-war arrived in Malacca in 1511, or when the Guru comes to town today. Basically, the cartoon shows how Canadians are not easily goaded into lemming themselves.

I'm not sure if **lemming** as used here is a pun or antimeria, or a punny antimeria, or antimeric pun. Let me think about this before apologizing. After you! (O the length I go to just to fire you up to be self-reliant, and not be a Buddhist lemming!)

Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lemming>.



Source: <https://buddhism-controversy-blog.com/2011/01/07/experiences-with-the-new-kadampa-tradition-and-kelsang-gyatso/>



Source: <https://canadashadow.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/canadian-lemmings.jpg>

R705 Revising Buddhism 288

[an occasional re-look at the Buddha's Example and Teachings]

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