

1: In the monasteries of Tibet people eat meat, which contradicts a bit with the rest of the Buddhist monasteries of other traditions that are vegetarian such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Taiwan and other Chinese Buddhists from Singapore, Indonesia , etc. . . . Could you explain the reason for this?

In the early Buddhist monasteries of the ninth century there arrived seven new monks, their teachers Shantarachita and Guru Padmasambhava who taught new Buddhists not to eat meat, but the Tibetans ate meat because it was the ancient tradition, a habit, and offerings were made of flesh and blood. Then Shantarachita and Padmasambhava said that if they kept eating meat and making offerings of blood, they would not teach and would return to India. The Tibetan king Chisong Dusenge apologized to Shantarachita and Padmasambhava, and promised a new law. He then made a pillar on which he wrote the law so that monks and nuns would not eat negative or black foods, such as meat or alcohol. Monks and nuns that remained in the monasteries could not eat meat. The next king, Lang Tarma, destroyed Buddhism. For 80 years there were no Buddhist monks or nuns. When Buddhism was restored, the old habit prevailed and many people ate meat. Then in the twelfth century Lama Atisha came and guided Buddhism so that people would not eat meat. In this sense his warning was not strongly worded enough, so not all Buddhists stopped eating meat.

A bit of genuine advice from the Hinayana teachings is that eating meat is not allowed, but if a person has health problems and needs to eat meat, then their assistants can find food from an animal that died of natural causes such as old age, having fallen etc. The meat is then cooked with turmeric, smelling good, and the monk or nun covers his eyes so as not to see the meat when eating it.

This is what I read in the texts and scriptures of the Buddha Kangyur. Thus, without attachment or desire; only for health reasons; and if nobody kills with the intention of feeding humans so the animal dies of natural causes or by fighting other animals, then eating this meat is permitted according to Buddhist Hinayana morality.

2: How can one reconcile the fundamental Mahayana motivation of bodhicitta (of aspiring to benefit all sentient beings) to eating meat?

In the Mahayana teaching, the Buddha forbade eating meat altogether. In many different sutras (the Lankarawatara sutra, the Great Sutra of Nirvana in the Angulimala Sutra, the Sutra on the Ability of the Elephant, in the Sutra of the Great Cloud), it is taught that if one is trying to live with great compassion, then eating meat is not allowed. This is because one has to see all sentient beings as our mother, brother, son, etc... Also in the Angulimala sutra, Manjushri asked the Buddha “Why do you not eat meat?” He replied that he saw all beings as having Buddha nature and that was his reason for not eating meat. Therefore, if you practice Mahayana and eat meat, it is a contradiction.

In the high Mahayana Yoga Tantra, they used five types of meat and 5 types of nectar. The five types of meat are: human, elephant, cow, dog and horse. The 5 types of nectar are feces, urine, menstrual blood, semen and marrow. People with high realizations transform these five dirty things into good nectar, and they see that dirty and pure things are the same. So, they need these types of meat which they get from animals that die of natural causes and nobody kills intentionally for feeding humans. Then, they do the tsok practice (guru puja). It is not allowed for ordinary Tantric practitioners without high realizations to offer the 5 meats and 5 nectars in tsok practice but instead they should offer fruit, juice, biscuits, or other foods without meat and egg. If you have high realization, and can transform everything, then you can even offer “caca” for tsog!

3: The Buddhist texts that say you should not eat meat from an animal that has been specially sacrificed for this purpose? Are there no more mentions in the scriptures in favour of not eating meat?

Yes, all traditions agree. Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana texts all are against eating meat. If you believe in karma, of course, you are not allowed to kill any being, including yourself, and you are not allowed to kill or have someone else, like a butcher, kill with the intention of eating meat. Another reason is that if you take refuge in the dharma, there is a commitment not to damage any living being directly or indirectly. Most particularly, the Mahayana tradition emphasizes great compassion and bodhicitta. Therefore, one is not allowed to eat meat. The

main reason is that if you believe all beings have Buddha nature, then you believe that all beings want to be happy and don't want suffering because these are characteristics of Buddha nature. Therefore you should not eat meat.

4: There were exceptions to this rule to eat meat in Tibet. Do you know of great teachers that were vegetarians?

The first teachers of the ninth and tenth centuries, Shantarachita, Guru Rinpoche and Master Kamalashila and Lama Atisha in the XII century led the monks and nuns to stop eating meat. Today, in the Sera Monastery which is home to more than 6,000 monks and nuns, none are allowed to eat meat by monastery law. If some monastery security monk sees that they are eating or buying meat, then they are immediately given a fine of 1,000 rupees. There are other monasteries such as Gyudmed Tantric College, with over 500 monks who are vegetarians. Also Drepung, Gaden, Ladakh, Nepal, and Butan and many other monasteries have laws against eating meat. Also Gampopa of the Kagyu lineage, and Pagmo Drugpa, Digun Chopa, Digan Chengawa, Taklung Tangpa, and Togme Sangpo are great vegetarian teachers and also many others of the Sakya, Nyingma and Gelug lineages.

5: Can you, as a strong proponent of vegetarianism, tell us how you were led to it?

When I was young, yes, I ate meat, as my mother gave it to me. I had no other reason, so when I was young I ate a little meat. Then, when I was a teenager, I saw some butchers killing a yak. I saw how they opened it, and I also saw other butchers killing sheep. It was then I changed my mind and I realized that killing animals was negative and I stopped wanting to eat meat. Later, when I was in the 13th class of Buddhist philosophy, we had many debates with classmates and had access to authentic, original texts and scriptures of the Buddha Shakyamuni's sutras. I understood quite well what he was thinking and saying. So I wrote my first book, and I gave a copy to the Dalai Lama. His Holiness asked me to speak with him for about 40 minutes and said he enjoyed the book and congratulated me. He said my book was very necessary and useful, and I was to write more necessary and useful books.

Another reason is that I wear my clothes of Buddha [monk's robes], which means I'm a spiritual practitioner. Being part of the Sangha means being a good example. Therefore, I do not eat meat.

6: Can you quote the names of current Tibetan teachers who advocate not eating meat?

The teacher Nyingmapa Chatel Sange Dorje Rinpoche, who is 96 or 97 years old, does not eat meat or eggs and advised his Nyingmapa monks not to eat meat.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche does not eat meat and has many animal liberation projects.

The 17th Karmapa Urgent Rinpoche emphasizes vegetarianism and instructs students to not eat meat.

There are other Tibetan masters who do not eat meat, such as Sakya lama Pemaomgda of New York, Nyingma lama Pema Ongyel and the French monk Matthieu Ricard.

7: His Holiness the Dalai Lama admits that he has tried to stop eating meat, but that his doctors have advised him to keep eating it. How is this possible? This is a bit shocking because for example in India millions of people are vegetarian throughout their life ... Could you tell us your opinion?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama eats meat once a week for his health.

He gives a perfect explanation. He says you should not eat meat, but if you must, you can eat a little, not tons. Anyway, he says it's best not to eat meat. And he also says that if you do not eat any meat, you're the best.

When the fourteenth Dalai Lama became the leader of Tibet at 16, ministers gave a party with a lot of meat in the food. When he saw it, he decided that henceforth, the parties would be vegetarian. Since then, no meat is allowed at parties, which I think is fantastic. Also, when he gives some dharma teachings, everyone attending

them is asked to become vegetarians for the duration. He also asked this of area restaurants for the duration of teachings ; otherwise, they would be killing many animals and selling meat.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama says that humans are the worst murderers of the earth. If there were no humans, then fish, chickens, and all other animals would be free.

In my opinion, the case of the Dalai Lama and that of the ordinary people are completely different. Normal people want to eat meat through desire or bad habit. He is certainly a person with great realizations, but he eats meat not by desire or bad habit. People with high realization can eat meat for different reasons. For example Mahasiddha Tilopa was all day fishing and eating meat; that's what it says in his biography. He was a person of great realizations. That's my opinion, but please don't just believe my opinion. The real reason, I don't know.

8: Can you briefly explain the benefits of vegetarianism from a spiritual or health point of view?

From a spiritual point of view, it is in the Lankavatara Sutra. There, the Buddha says to stop eating meat, because otherwise complete results will not be achieved with the mantra practice. Furthermore, if you eat meat, gods will renounce you and will not come when you invite them. Therefore the Lankavatara Sutra says yogis don't eat meat. Moreover, if you eat meat, you cannot develop great compassion and wisdom. Pandit Kamalashila said that if you eat meat you cannot realise shamata.

From the point of view of health, many doctors and scientists have researched vegetarianism, and have found that people in poor countries who cannot eat meat and are vegetarians become less sick, less likely to have lung cancer, or other illnesses. And rich people who eat meat are more likely to get sick. Vegetarians have fewer blood pressure problems and heart problems, while meat eaters receive many oils in the meat that go to their bodies and cause their blood to thicken! If you eat meat, your digestion is very heavy and the liver is damaged. Also, eating meat is an obstacle in developing your mind and you feel angrier and less intelligent. Also, vegetarians age more slowly, live longer and have less sickness.

9: What advice would you give to a Western practitioner who eats meat and / or fish regularly?

If you're a monk or nun of the Sangha, and you continually eat meat, finding it difficult to control your habit, then it is better to do it in private and not show it to anyone, because you are an example. If you cannot stop eating meat completely, then try to eat less meat, as little as possible. Do not eat only for desire or taste. See meat as a medicine, not as a daily meal. If you wear the clothes of the Buddha and follow his compassion, then eating meat is a contradiction. Moreover, in Western countries you can find many things to eat to replace meat, so there is no need to eat it. You should control your desire to eat meat.