



The Udamwara lotus flower
protecting the life
of helpless beings

Statements from the **scriptures**
relating to **eating meat**

In honour of Guru Shakyamuni

With faith in the teacher, the conqueror, who truly
appeared,
directly perceived the ultimate mode of existence,
through meditation, exhausted the two obscurations
and turned the wheel of Dharma truthfully:
who am I to fathom or describe
your qualities of wisdom, love and power.
Yet if I were to express them in only four lines
it would be these:

Possessor of skilful means
who led even those full of hate like Angulimala,
those overcome by desire – the likes of Nanda,
and ignorant beings like Lamchung to arhatship.

Praise to His Holiness

Praise also to His Holiness, Tenzin Gyatso,
who in our times, just like a second Buddha,
performs enormous deeds of love and peace¹ -
to further your teachings and foster the roots of virtue²

¹ i.e. love, compassion and non-violence

² love, compassion and non-violence are those very roots of virtue

of all the world's beings - a life-protecting lord.

What the Buddha said about eating meat

I have written down here, with reference to my sources, what the Buddha said about eating meat. It will surely raise the interest of those who have trust in valid teachings and their **teacher. I intend to give** some explanations of how eating meat is presented in the lesser and greater vehicles including tantra.

The great Indian scholar Shantideva wrote:

"Even though they intend to give up suffering
they run into the arms of the causes of suffering.
Although they wish for happiness, out of ignorance,
they ruin their own happiness like a foe."

In full accordance with what is being expressed here, we clearly realise in our daily lives that all sentient beings from humans down to ants wish for happiness and try to avoid suffering. **As this attitude, the desire to seek happiness and avoid suffering**, is a quality of mind, it would seem evident that there are minds at work here. The continuum of all sentient beings is in fact endowed with a mind characterised by certain qualities. This mind constitutes the

true basis for transformation into the omniscient truth dharmakaya and the cessation of the two types of obscuration, including their imprints left on the consciousness. However, as we ourselves and other sentient beings are under the influence of obscurations due to confusion and ignorance, we do not know how to create the correct causes for the happiness we all desire. Likewise, we do not know how to get rid of the causes of the suffering we wish to avoid. We can even recognise the truth of this at the manifest level of our experience. Therefore, **it is imperative** to look for correct methods that will bring about happiness, as well as correct methods for giving up suffering. **In fact those methods consist in 1) learning about the two truths, 2) meditating on ultimate truth, thereby giving up the two obscurations, and, ultimately, 3) reaching buddhahood.**

However, this is not the place to discuss the possibility of finding and applying such faultless methods by examining the words of the Buddha through listening, thinking, and meditating and developing the corresponding three types of wisdom. The words the Buddha addressed to the three types of disciples³ due to his limitless capacity of love and compassion and which were laid down in 84000 heaps of teachings are vast and profound. They are the words of an authentic person who realized the ultimate nature

³ with the dispositions of hearers, solitary realisers and Buddhas

of phenomena as they are, meditated on the path according to that ultimate nature and managed to completely give up the two kinds of obscurations. All I can hope to achieve here is a clarification of one important aspect of those teachings: Shakyamuni Buddha rejected the consumption of meat both in the words of the lesser and the great vehicles - both in sutra and tantra. In each case he presented different reasons and types of rejection laying particular emphasis on the object of rejection i.e. meat. However, the rejection of meat procured by means of killing innocent creatures with the specific intention of eating them is stated equally clearly in the Hinayana and Mahayana sutras as well as in the scriptures of tantra. I will present the reasons and sources systematically.

In the seventh chapter of the *Angulimala Sutra*, a Mahayana sutra as rare as the Udamwara flower⁴, Manjushri asks:

"Is it true that the Buddhas do not eat meat due to Buddha nature?⁵'. The Buddha said: 'It is exactly like that, Manjushri. In the sequence of lives during our beginningless and endless coming and going in samsara there is no being that has not been our mother, that has not been our sister. Even dogs

⁴ a flower only found at the time a Buddha is born

⁵ **Manjushri is actually asking two questions that may be paraphrased in these terms: 1) Why don't you eat meat? 2) I think the reason may be that all sentient beings have Buddha nature – is that correct?**

have been our fathers before. The world of those lives is like a play⁶. Therefore, since our own flesh and that of others is the same flesh, the Buddhas do not eat meat⁷. Furthermore, Manjushri, the sphere of all beings is the dharmadhatu. As this would constitute eating flesh of the same sphere, the Buddhas do not eat meat."

I should like to give a brief explanation of this sutra passage. We find three reasons here why Buddhas do not eat meat. The first reason is expressed in terms of the Buddha's affirmative answer to Manjushri's questions as to whether this has to do with the fact that the Buddha nature⁸, characterised by the three natural features⁹, is present in the mental continuum of all beings. "It is exactly like that." The second reason is this: As there is no single being that has not been our mother or father in this process of beginningless and endless coming and going in samsara, and as we ourselves and

⁶ i.e. a play with changing parts. The main emphasis is on the impermanence and instability of life with its ever-changing relationships between sentient beings, not on the illusion-like nature of life.

⁷ The line of argument here is: 1) it is inappropriate to eat one's own flesh 2) one's own flesh and that of others is the same – therefore it is also inappropriate to eat the flesh of others.

⁸ All sentient beings have the potential to get rid of suffering. This is referred to as Buddha nature. It is the foundation for all good qualities such as compassion, love, and wisdom.

⁹ Buddha nature (tathagatagarbha) is attained by the power of reality. It stems from the mental continuum which goes on from one life to the next and constitutes the seed of unpolluted wisdom.

others are of the same flesh, the Buddhas do not eat meat¹⁰. And the third reason: the sphere of all beings is the dharmadhatu¹¹ and eating flesh of the same sphere is inappropriate. In this sutra eating meat is thus being rejected through reasoning.

However, eating meat is also rejected with reference to its disadvantages. Again in the *Angulimala Sutra* the Buddha says:

"Purna¹², beings that have previously been cats, constantly attached to eating meat, and beings that reject Buddha nature will all become rakshas¹³ resembling cats. In the future, too, beings that have taken the form of cat-like rakshas and find killing others and eating their meat irresistible, will be the same as beings that have turned away from Buddha nature."

Here eating meat is rejected with reference to disadvantages resulting from it. **Some humans, just like cats, love killing for food and eating meat. How does this desire come about? It is**

¹⁰ This second reason may be framed as a short dialogue: Q: Why don't you eat your own flesh? A: Because it hurts. Q: If so, is it not the case that it will hurt other sentient beings, if you eat *their* flesh? A: Yes, it would. Q: Then how can it be proper to eat someone else's flesh?

¹¹ The dharmadhatu is the ultimate nature of mind, which is purity. The minds of Buddhas and all sentient beings have this quality of natural purity. As all beings partake of this ultimate purity of mind, they all have the capacity to attain buddhahood.

¹² important monastic disciple of the Buddha, arhat of the abhidharma tradition

¹³ a kind of cannibal or blood-thirsty creature

the result of karmic imprints from previous lives where they did not acknowledge Buddha nature and act upon it. The karmic imprints bring about the desire to kill animals and eat their flesh in this life. If they fail to acknowledge Buddha nature yet again in the present life, they will accumulate more negative karma and thereby take unfortunate rebirths under conditions where they will experience more suffering. If you acknowledge Buddha nature, you will also respect the beings of all six realms and you will be incapable of eating their flesh. Otherwise you may kill and eat them and turn into a raksha in the future.

As **regards** the rejection of meat based on advantages, it says in the *Angulimala Sutra*:

"The Buddha said: 'Angulimala, in countless lives, out of respect for the millions of living beings, I have given up fish, meat, fat, in fact any food associated with killing and have also caused beings to do the same. Due to this my body has become the excellent body of a Buddha, characterised by the special marks. Angulimala, in countless lives I have caused millions of beings, gods and humans, to purify all the million

mental afflictions. Due to that my body has become a body free from elaborations¹⁴.¹⁴

In this sutra, eating meat is thus rejected with reference to the corresponding benefits.

Moreover, in the *Mahamegha Sutra (Great Cloud Sutra)* the rejection of meat and alcohol is presented in the context of qualities characterising the meditative concentration of bodhisattvas on the tenth level:

"The Bodhisattva Mahasattva Mahamegha (Essence of the Great Cloud) asked the Buddha: 'Lord, I ask for the 400 gates of meditative concentration to be explained in detail by the exalted Tathagata.' The Buddha replied: ' [...] Mahamegha, a bodhisattva mahasattva who has attained the concentration of the deep, calm ocean¹⁵ demonstrates the signs of obstacles in order for beings to renounce killing animals and eating their meat by appearing as a meat seller in places where pigs are sold. In order to bring beings to

¹⁴ i.e. a body which – unlike that of sentient beings - is not the result of afflictions and karma

¹⁵ The concentration of the deep, calm ocean is one of 400 concentrations described in that sutra. Someone who has attained this level of concentration is able to engage in activities curbing the consumption of

spiritual maturity he also appears as a beer drinker among beer sellers and in order to clearly show the disadvantages of drinking beer, he will even become chief among them and serve beer to beings without being attached to that activity."

This sutra rejects meat and alcohol noting the qualities that a bodhisattva attains in the context of the 400 gates of concentration, achieving the meditation of the deep, calm ocean.

In the Hinayana sutras we also find quotations relating to our subject like the following passage from the latter part of *Foundations of Medicine*, a text contained in the vinaya section of the Kangyur:

"The Buddha was dwelling in a multi-storey building by the monkey pond at Vaisali. In Vaisali there lived a captain called Sengge and whenever the people living nearby brought him meat, he ate it. One day he learnt from the Buddha what is true, and he did not eat meat any more. Nevertheless meat was still brought to him but it was given to the bhikshus, and in fact the bhikshus did eat it. Now the

meat and alcohol. For the benefit of beings they will send out emanations discouraging others from killing animals, eating meat and drinking.

tirthikas¹⁶ made remarks about this, made fun and clapped their hands: 'Knowledgeable ones, captain Sengge does not eat the meat that has been prepared for him, so it is given to the bhikshus of the son of the Shakyas. And the bhikshus of the son of the Shakyas eat the meat that was meant for captain Sengge.' When they heard this loose talk the bhikshus asked the Buddha and the Buddha replied: 'I have stated that meat which is not appropriate from the three points of view¹⁷ should not be eaten.'"

Thus the Hinayana sutra containing the vinaya text *Foundations of Medicine* also rejects meat, i.e. meat that is not appropriate for eating on three counts. Nowadays, **unfortunately**, some intelligent and not so intelligent commentators have made the presentation of purity according to the three aspects¹⁸, namely "not having seen, not having heard and not suspecting that a being has been killed for ones own consumption" into a rule which is as well-known as a famous quotations. As far as the presentation in the vinaya sutra *Foundations of Medicine* is concerned, there can be no doubt that it is inappropriate to eat meat that has been killed for oneself. However, the fact that the Buddha, referring to meat meant for

¹⁶ followers of certain non-Buddhist philosophies

¹⁷ in case one has seen or heard that the creature was killed to be eaten or if one suspects this to be the case

¹⁸ the opposite of the above three aspects

someone (i.e. captain Sengge) other than those who actually eat it (i.e. the "bhikshus of the son of the Shakyas"), states "that meat which is not appropriate from three points of view should not be eaten" shows very clearly that eating meat which has been killed for others is also not pure according to the three aspects or inappropriate for eating on the three counts. To good logicians this is clearly evident at closer examination.

The fact that the meat of an animal that has been slaughtered for oneself and the meat of an animal that has been slaughtered for others is equally impure according to the three aspects or equally inappropriate for eating on the three counts is thus made clear by the vinaya sutra *Foundations of Medicine*. Relying on this sutra we can therefore see that it is unnecessary and pointless to take the statement from the extensive commentary on the vinaya, "not having seen, not having heard and not suspecting" that a being "has been killed for ones own consumption" and make it suit our own interests in a narrow-minded fashion by drawing clever conclusions from it.

Similarly, the threefold rejection of meat as impure **set out** in the 14 major infractions and 25 rules of conduct of the Kalachakra system has to be applied to meat of animals that have been slaughtered for **either** oneself **or** others as impure according to those three aspects. The Kalachakra is a Dharma system

comprising all the points of sutra and tantra in their entirety and is therefore in agreement with statements from the vinaya.

Now, some sceptics may still be concerned about karmic consequences from eating any kind of meat, even for health reasons - for instance the meat of water buffaloes, sheep or goats that have died in accordance with the Dharma¹⁹. They may suggest that such meat should also be abandoned. The response to that would be that, from a Buddhist point of view, this position resembles Devadatta's understanding of what constitutes renouncing meat as presented in his Five Instructions²⁰. According to the Vinaya Sutra fully ordained monks are allowed to eat meat as medicine when ill. This meat has to originate from an animal that has died from natural causes. In autumn, many monks used to get ill, so Ananda asked the Buddha what to do about it. The Buddha replied that four substances, including meat and alcohol, were permissible as medicine. The monks had to find meat that was pure in the three above respects and feed it to their ill companions. In case

¹⁹ without harm to oneself or others, which - in this case - implies that the animal has not been killed to be eaten and that its meat has no deleterious effects (on one's health)

²⁰ Devadatta stipulated that 1) milk, 2) meat, and 3) salt should not be eaten, that 4) monastic robes should not be patched together from bits and pieces and that 5) monasteries should not be located in remote places but close to lay communities. Generally speaking, Buddhists do not accept these rules as valid.

they were not able to eat it, they were blindfolded and spices were used to cover up the unpleasant taste. This tradition strongly suggests that at the time of the Buddha, fully-ordained monks did not normally eat meat, for otherwise such special measures would not have been necessary.

Furthermore, in the context of shramana²¹ Dharma practice exemplified by one of the main disciples of the Buddha, the Sthavira Mahakasyapa, who did not eat meat and did not accumulate even the tiniest bit of worldly wealth, it says in the *Angulimala Sutra*:

"Angulimala said: 'Indra, you have strayed away from the teachings. In fact it is like this: he who abandoned jewels, pearls, lapis lazuli, gold, kunda stones and the like, 80000 vases filled with jewels, grains of gold and other precious things, cast away priceless clothes as if they were drops of spittle, renunciate of the shramana Dharma, Sthavira Mahakasyapa, main follower of the Tathagata who took up residence in the forest and also upheld the conduct of physical restraint in accordance with the twelve qualities of ascetic practice - why did the great Sthavira (Maha)Kasyapa not wear precious clothing, why did he renounce his

²¹ spiritual practitioner, especially one having taken monastic vows

households and uphold the conduct of physical restraint purely, giving up foods like nectar and meat dishes? He went from house to house and whenever the householders feigned stupidity and said: 'We have nothing at all to spare, neither in front nor at the back nor on either side' or berated him, he answered 'May you be happy' and returned with an easy mind. Likewise whenever they said 'we have something for you', the Sthavira answered without attachment 'May you be happy' and returned with an easy mind. Now if through each of (Maha)Kasyapa's own treasure vases future shramanas could have enjoyed food, drink and delicacies till the end of their lives, why did he not bequeath such enormous wealth to the sangha? Giving up the sense of 'mine' and letting it go, making it the inexhaustible treasure of hungry ghosts, of those in need, of miserable ones and of beggars that is the Dharma of shramanas, Indra. Accumulating wealth if only the size of a sesame seed is not the Dharma of shramanas.'"

Who would deny - with this sutra in mind - that it would be appropriate for us who have renounced household life and taken vows of ordination, to look up to Sthavira Mahakasyapa as an unequalled model to be emulated? Although he owned the full gamut of worldly possessions, he **gave up everything**, realising that even the tiniest possession viewed as 'one's own' is no

Dharma of shramanas and renounced food from dead animals, thereby upholding the pure conduct of vegetarian discipline in accordance with the twelve qualities of ascetic practice! **According to tradition, Kasyapa's body is still hidden in a mountain recess in India. In the future, Buddha Maitreya will reveal the exact location and point him out as a model bhikshu. May we then have the good fortune to be reborn in India and come face to face with the great Kasyapa.**

As far as the use of honey²², leather shoes, white conch shells (employed as ritual implements) and silk worms is concerned, we also have the telling response to a question by Manjushri. Since what matters within worldly things is a 'reality of methods', wearing leather shoes is appropriate if the buffalo whose skin was used to make them died in accordance with the Dharma²³ and inappropriate if the leather has come from an animal that was killed. The use of honey, conch shells and silk is also said to be appropriate if the material was derived from animals that died in accordance with the Dharma i.e. that were not killed especially. In the *Angulimala Sutra* it says with regard to this point:

²² although bees are only killed accidentally in the process of getting at their honey, honey is usually included in lists of unwholesome animal products as it is the result of stealing something very precious from animals

²³ i.e. not killed for the purpose of using its parts

"Manjushri asked: 'Are not honey and conch shells and shoes and silk worms like the meat of the same sphere?' The Buddha answered: 'Do not speak thus, Manjushri. Having given up all worldly bodies the Buddhas are not dependent on material things and therefore do not need any substances of attachment. The reality of the world is the use of material things. Materials pass from one to the other as they are used - you should not use whatever materials are at hand indiscriminately. That which has been passed on but did not originate from a killing hand is fit for use.' Manjushri asked: 'If a shoemaker in the market has made leather shoes and offers them to the Tathagata, Arhat, perfectly enlightened Buddha, will he accept that which has passed through several hands?' Manjushri went on to ask: 'If a buffalo has died in accordance with the Dharma and the owner has it skinned by a slaughterer, visits a shoemaker to have the leather fashioned into shoes and then gives them to someone following the rules of discipline would that be "something passed from one to the other"?. Thus he asked and the Buddha said: 'If the buffalo died in accordance with the Dharma, and the owner has shoes made and gives them to someone following the rules of discipline, then they should be accepted. Would it be fitting for a monk not to accept

them? This would show a lack of compassion and the rules of discipline would be harmed."

On this occasion, in the sutra, Manjushri asks the Buddha three questions: one about honey, conch shells, shoes and silk worms, one about a shoemaker offering shoes to the Buddha whose leather has passed through several hands so that the origin is not clear, and one about another person offering shoes made from the hide of a buffalo that died naturally. The first and the last questions are being answered, but not the middle one. There is no need for that, as the answer to the last question implies that it is inappropriate to accept the gift referred to in the middle question.

Some people **who fail to distinguish between intentional and unintentional actions** put forward the argument that if it is inappropriate to eat meat, it would be equally inappropriate to eat rice. However, this is not the same because to give up eating meat and reduce the number of animals being killed is an act that is well within the bounds of possibility. During the cultivation of rice and vegetables there is no intention to kill beings while planting the seedlings, irrigating the fields etc. However, since there is no way of preventing insects being killed unintentionally - as this is not currently within the bounds of possibility - it is still not the same as killing on purpose. The answer to a question posed by

Manjushri may serve to clear up any doubts on the part of those critics who, based on this kind of comparison, conclude that one would consequently have to do the impossible. In the *Arya Angulimala Sutra* Manjushri asks whether or not it is appropriate to dig up the soil and sand, till fields and cook one's food because of unclean water. The answer is as follows: Manjushri says:

"Digging and tilling is not appropriate. Food that has been cooked because the water was contaminated should not be accepted²⁴ – in this situation, monks have to act accordingly.' Thereupon the Buddha said: 'That is what is called the worldly view. If there are upasakas²⁵, stick to clean water and food. Wherever there are upasakas, there should be no digging and tilling. Where there are no upasakas, what should even Buddhas do there? There are also creatures in the grass, as well as in the water and in the air. If it were like this, would there not be negative karmic effects from altogether pure actions? The question as to how you purify something that cannot be completely pure while living in the world and without giving up the samsaric body is a futile question."

²⁴ According to the rules of monastic discipline bhikshus are not allowed to **cultivate crops**.

The main significance of this sutra passage is that if there is a chance of giving up harming other beings, you should always make use of it. On the other hand, actions committed where there is no such possibility are not altogether free from negative karmic consequences, but, due to the absence of harmful intent, those consequences are far weaker.

To further clarify this point: one may well wonder whether predators such as tigers, lions or crocodiles live on something free of negativity. In the above quotation the Buddha suggests that this question is purely speculative. As long as those animals have their predator bodies they cannot but eat meat. With such bodies it is impossible to avoid killing. As they cannot help eating meat, the question arises whether, in this context, eating meat is indeed a negative action. The answer is: yes. Whoever kills or harms other living beings commits a negative action.

However, there are varying degrees of negativity. The force of a negative action is determined by the motivation or intention and the awareness of the one committing it – whether that agent knows the action is bad. Lions and tigers are not aware that killing prey and eating meat is bad, so the degree of negativity is less.

²⁵ Buddhist householder without monastic vows

As they have a strong habit of killing and eating meat they cannot possibly rid themselves of negativities in their present lives. Due to their bodies, there is no way for them to overcome negativities in their present lives, however, they may overcome them in future lives. Likewise, we find it very difficult, at present, to perform any pure actions because of our bodies which are the result of karma and afflictions. So it becomes all the more evident that we need to strive for methods to attain the eighth bodhisattva level - to achieve the vajra body which exists uncontaminated by any harmful action.

In the *Lankavatara Sutra* meat is rejected from three points of view, i.e. 1) impurity, 2) the fact that the animals from whom the meat has been procured used to be our fathers and mothers in earlier lives, and 3) the fear that all living beings share of being killed:

"Since it used to be our dear ones
since it is mixed with what's base and impure -
a mess that has evolved from blood -
as everyone is scared by killing
yogis always give up meat [...²⁶]
and drinks²⁷ inducing inattention"

²⁶ what was left out concerns the avoidance of onions and garlic

The *Lankavatara Sutra* also denounces the disadvantages of excess and overstatement of the advantages of eating. It says:

"From eating inattention is born,
from inattention concepts are born,
from concepts desirous attachment is born,
desirous attachment dulls the mind,
Through dullness attachment to being is born -
and you will not break free from samsara."

In the same sutra, eating meat is also rejected with reference to unpleasant effects on future lives:

"Killing beings for profit's sake,
trading possessions to purchase meat -
those with the karma of these two evils
wail and lament as they fall after death.
There may be no sense of causing to kill -
still the meat is not pure in three ways,
as there's no action without a cause²⁸ -

²⁷ **The Tibetan sutra text reads "chang" which is barley beer, but also alcohol in general.**

²⁸ that is the meat does not go on sale without causes, i.e. without an animal being killed. That should be clear to the buyer.

that is why yogis give it up.

All the Buddha Bhagavans,
denounce it in all ten directions:
One devours the other, falling
among the predators after death,
always born among the lowly,
smelly ones and idiots,
frequently among the outlaws:
hunters, butchers, cannibals
and among ghosts in human form,
among the various eaters of meat: as
in the wombs of cat rakshasas.

In the Elephant and the Great Cloud,
in the Angulimala Sutra,
in the Lankavatara Sutra,
I've strongly rejected eating meat²⁹.
Buddhas, bodhisattvas and the
shravakas revile it all and
those who impudently eat meat
will always be reborn as fools³⁰.

Before I taught you to abandon
meat that was seen, heard or suspected...³¹
Thinkers failing to understand this
are born in places where meat is consumed³².

The arya path of liberation
is thus veiled through the fault of attachment.
Meat, alcohol, onions and garlic cause
obstacles on the arya path.
In the future proponents of ignorance,
mitigate eating meat and claim:
'As meat is appropriate, free **from** evil,
the Buddhas have permitted it'.

Food should be viewed like medicine: accordingly
yogis well versed in the Dharma eat
the gifts from their alms-round regretful as if
it were the meat of their own dear sons.

²⁹ **In other words: the Buddha rejected eating meat before in the *Elephant Sutra*, the *Great Cloud (Mahamegha) Sutra*, as well as the *Angulimala Sutra*. On this occasion in the *Lankavatara Sutra* he is rejecting it yet again.**

³⁰ **To be more precise: such a person accumulates the causes for being reborn as a fool in the future.**

³¹ to have been obtained **by means of** killing animals

³² **not only will they be reborn in a country where meat is consumed – they do not avoid eating meat and will therefore be reborn as beings eating meat**

Whoever is steeped in compassion feels
that sorrow - thus have I explained.

Others³³ will always dwell in the company
of wild beast such as tigers and wolves.

Whenever meat is eaten, beings are
terrified and that is why yogis,
out of compassion do not eat it.

Eating meat lacks compassion and wisdom³⁴,
it means turning³⁵ away from freedom,
it goes '**gainst the** aryas' victory banners³⁶,
Therefore eating meat is folly.

To be reborn in the houses of Brahmins,
or in places where yogis dwell,
in homes of families rich in wisdom -
those are results of abandoning meat."

This is written in the *Lankavatara Sutra*. Apparently, some people
have misinterpreted this sutra to the effect that it is only directed to
a certain assembly of raksha men and women and does not apply

³³ **other meat eaters**

³⁴ **i.e. eating meat causes compassion and wisdom to decrease or degenerate**

³⁵ **it means the path to liberation will take longer**

³⁶ what is meant are the robes of ordination

to the rest of us. However, this interpretation is quite untrustworthy. Any sensible person should be able to tell from the answers to Manjushri's questions in the *Angulimala Sutra* and similar quotations, whether or not such arbitrary statements and distortions of Buddha's valid words should be given credence.

Futhermore, everyone familiar with logic agrees that you would have to be someone like the great forerunners Nagarjuna and Asanga – foretold by the Buddha himself - to be able to tell definitive statements from interpretable ones by relying on the criteria of special intention, contextual necessity and contradiction with reality. It would take an expert authenticated by the Buddha himself to establish any intentions at variance with his literal statements, not some arbitrary sophist expounding all kinds of interpretations.

It is not up to us or biased scholars to settle how the Buddha's teachings should be interpreted. Otherwise one might arrive at the above conclusion that eating meat has been prohibited only for rakshas. Also, if anyone were able to interpret the Buddha's teachings correctly, there would have been no need for him to predict that Nagarjuna and Asanga in particular would elucidate his teachings correctly. The above prediction from the *Lankavatara Sutra* already anticipates this:

"In the future proponents of ignorance

mitigate eating meat and claim:
As meat is appropriate, free from evil,
the Buddhas have permitted it.' "

Although it is unlikely
that **Dharma talk** by fishermen³⁷ like myself
can bring about any benefit, nevertheless,
how could the words of the Tathagata
fail to bring about benefit?

- with these words of relief I **shall** sit back for a moment
now that the main body of this text is completed.

I would like to add a point His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, made at the Kalachakra initiation in Mundgod suggesting that in the past, at the time of the Great Dharma kings of Tibet, eating meat was also rejected. He said the old edicts of the Dharma kings were quite clear on this: "The monks shall learn the behaviour of the pundits and the great abbot (Shantarakshita): drinking alcohol, eating meat and the like are inappropriate." His Holiness the Dalai Lama also said: "None of the visitors coming to Bodhgaya from all over the world offer alcohol and meat, it is only the Tibetan pilgrims that spread out their pieces of meat and liquor saying 'we are doing our offering ceremony' - I do not think this is nice, I have often said that. I also do not like the fact that during the big assemblies at the major monasteries platters full of meat

³⁷ fishermen kill animals for a living and are not in a very good position to teach anyone about the holy Dharma – neither am I

are set up with the words 'we have performed an offering ceremony'. I have said again and again that it is better to set up substances like nectar pills, blessed water or black tea. And if some people claim that, according to anuttarayoga tantra, you have to take meat, the only reason that may be quoted in support of this claim is the statement about the acceptance of the five kinds of meat and the five kinds of nectar. There is no other reason. Quite apart from the fact that this refers to a very high level of realisation³⁸, if indeed you postulate the need for eating meat based on the statement about accepting the five kinds of meat and the five kinds of nectar, then you should be consistent and insist on the need for eating horse meat, dog meat as well as human flesh, drinking urine and eating faeces³⁹."

At the time I noted down the Dalai Lama's words precisely: Once we accept the statement about the five kinds of meat and nectar, the claim that we must eat meat would clearly and logically imply that we must eat dog meat and human flesh, too.

The main point of the sutras quoted here is to demonstrate that the Buddhist Dharma is a teaching of non-violence. As this fundamental principle, i.e. not to harm, constitutes the core and root of the Buddhist teachings, it is important to apply and

³⁸ **in fact the ability to transmute them**

³⁹ that is what the five kinds also refer to

implement it. It is good to rely on statements by the Buddha when it comes to deciding what is wholesome and what is unwholesome. Is the main point of the teaching of non-harmfulness not lost, if you try and substantiate your own desires with tortuous arguments, carelessly eating the meat of killed animals?

The Buddha drew a distinction between actions that are "unwholesome by nature" and actions that are "unwholesome because of vows". As far as the latter are concerned he made certain modifications taking differences in time and place into account. For instance, he rejected daily baths for monks in some countries, but permitted them in hot countries. Likewise, he generally prohibited touching women under the influence of attachment, making nevertheless clear that, under a number of circumstances, it would be correct and necessary to touch them - for instance when a woman is in danger of drowning and has to be pulled out of the water. While allowing for such modifications considering a given situation in the context of actions "unwholesome because of vows", there was no way a licence for actions "unwholesome by nature" such as killing and stealing could be given. **The latter are harmful actions regardless of time and space** and even a Buddha cannot change harmful karma into wholesome karma. The aspect of non-violence in the teachings of the Buddha is demonstrated by the unanimous rejection of harmful actions such as killing, stealing and the like in

all the Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana scriptures and therefore I rejoice in the fact that all the successors of the Buddha in the traditions of Hinayana and Mahayana, of Sakya, Gelug, Kagyu and Nyingma continue to explain and practice this teaching in accordance with the fundamental idea of non-harmfulness.

Thus I have scooped a jug of the nectar of Buddha's words from the Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana, from the *Angulimala Sutra* and other scriptures, on the issue of giving up and accepting meat, without exaggeration nor understatement, and I have embellished it with the fresh white lotus flower of statements by his Holiness the **Dalai Lama**. May this offering, too, become a cloud of offerings that pleases the Buddhas.

One's flesh and that of others are no different

But making a difference and eating it we have long roamed⁴⁰.

The Buddha taught: everyone's realm is the dharmadhatu one must not eat the meat of one's own realm.

⁴⁰ we have long been caught in samsara and failed to break free from it

Composed in the year 2620 after the Buddha's birth, the year 1995 according to the Western calendar, with the wish to benefit by Geshe Thubten Soepa.

Mangalam.

The above booklet about eating meat was read through, cover to cover, by His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso. He told me: "It is well written. It would be nice if more equally useful texts were written for people to read". I cannot express how pleased I was at these words. I would like to complement my composition by a few questions and answers concerning the topic.

Question and Answer Section

Question: Don't you need some meat for the sacrificial Tsog ceremony? What do you do about that?

Answer: In Dza Patrul Rimpoche's lamrim text it says: To that end it is appropriate to use meat from an animal that has not been slaughtered for eating. However, if you introduce meat that does not conform to this requirement into the mandala of offerings, all the deities and wisdom beings will vanish, that is what Gampopa said. In the autobiography of the siddha Kunleg you will find the statement: "Now, when you make offerings, you should bear in mind the following points concerning the recipient of the offerings, the offerings themselves and your motivation: Each of the three jewels (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha) is fit as a recipient for the offering. The object to be offered should not be associated with theft, violent appropriation or killing and the motivation should consist in the aspiration to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. Offerings made in a different manner with masses of meat and alcohol are found

among the earlier non-Buddhist religions, but not among Buddhists."

The Dalai Lama's statements regarding this point have already been presented above.

Question: What is the right approach to the so-called meat and blood tormas in protector rituals?

Answer: That is evident from Patrul Rinpoche's lamrim text. It describes the protest of Guru Rinpoche, Shantarakshita and all the pundits contemporary with the Dharma King Trisong Detsen, at the Tibetan practice of sacrificing meat and blood according to the Bonpo custom: 'If you continue this custom we shall go back to India', they said. They stopped partaking of food and refused to give any more teachings. It follows that these so-called meat and blood tormas should not be made up of real meat and blood. If you really make offerings of meat and blood, no deities and wisdom beings will come. You will only attract ghosts. As they feast on such offerings, they may become friendly and bring you short term benefits. If you then fail to continue giving them meat and blood, they will harm

you. However, if you go on making offerings of meat and blood, you will be reborn among such ghosts or you will find yourself among wolves and birds of prey. That is what Patrul Rimpoche said about this topic.

These so-called meat and blood tormas symbolize the ignorance, harmful intent, selfishness and self interest in one's own mind and that of others. These characteristics are meant to be visualised as tormas and offered in this form - not as external substances made up of real meat. The meaning of the secret mantra is not to be taken literally. It only opens up through an understanding of the six alternatives and four modes of explaining vajra expressions.

Question: How about offerings of the five kinds of meat and nectar mentioned in the texts of highest yoga tantra?

Answer: A yogi practising highest yoga tantra needs some kind of realisation substance for giving up dualistic concepts of pure and impure. As Patrul Rimpoche makes clear in his lamrim, this also requires meat from an animal that has died a natural death and rather than having been slaughtered. As a matter of fact this is not meant for people who carelessly indulge their craving

for meat, but exclusively for yogis who can transform the five kinds of meat such as dog meat and human flesh as well as the five substances like faeces and urine into nectar through the power of concentration. It is not meant for people like you and me.

Question: Are you suggesting that someone who has received empowerments for Highest Yoga Tantra should not offer meat and alcohol as part of a Tsog offering practice?

Answer: Many lamas do not really care and offer meat. However, some more considerate ones only offer meat of animals that have died from natural causes. During a teaching he gave in Bodhgaya, His Holiness stated that it is not nice if thousands of monks come together for Tsog practice offering huge amounts of meat. Instead they should offer tea, water, fruit juice, coca cola and the like. Furthermore, Lama Atisha, during his stay in Tibet, used to offer molasses or honey instead of meat and milk or yoghurt instead of alcohol. Apart from that I found a quotation to the effect that Go Lotsawa was extremely pleased that many other

masters i.e. Drigung Jigten Gonpo, Drigung Chenga Rimpoche, Taglung Tangpa, Pagmo Tugpa, Togme Sangpo⁴¹ used to substitute molasses or honey for meat and milk or molasses for alcohol.

Question: Is it true that offering meat to a monk results in merit being accumulated and that there is a benefit for the dead animal?

Answer: Gelug Shamar Pandita, tutor of the 13th Dalai Lama, said in his lamrim text: some people of blind faith think it is beneficial to slaughter sheep and goats for the soup of monks or the food of gurus, however, in fact it is a grave harmful act due to confusion and wrong views and it is important to be clear about this. He goes on to say in his lamrim: "To Buddhas each and every living being is as valuable as if it were their own child and to all beings, life is the most important thing. You, who dare inflict unbearable pain on such beings out of greed for a mouthful of meat, you think of yourselves as followers of the Buddha and call

⁴¹ 'bri gung 'jig rten mgon po, 'bri gung spyang snga rin po che, stag lung thang pa, phag mo gru pa and thogs med bzang po

yourselves lamas and monks! Shame on you! You should judge yourselves harshly."

Question: Monks and nuns have to accept meat that benefactors give them, don't they? After all it says that you should eat whatever you are given when going on your alms round.

Answer: In Panchen Deleg Nyima's commentary on the vinaya it says: If a monk is offered meat dishes by a donor on his alms-round, he should ask whether or not the meat has been obtained through killing. And in the commentary on the vinaya called *Rays of the Sun*: "You have to ask whether or not the offering has been obtained through an action against the rules." Numerous vinaya scriptures point out that you should make sure the gift that is being offered does not contradict the rules of monastic discipline. They also mention 20 types of meat and other foods that must not be eaten at all, even though the creature may have died a natural death, for instance human flesh, the meat of monkeys or that of vultures. Therefore, if in doubt about the origin of meat, you should definitely ask and decline anything inappropriate. Even if the gift is

appropriate, it is important to ask whether eating or drinking it may have any drawbacks or deleterious effects on one's health, for instance, if you are diabetic, whether it contains any sugar etc.

Apart from that, offering food containing meat constitutes impure giving: In the *Sutra to Rishi Gyepa* Buddha Shakyamuni taught about how the 32 types of impure giving should be abandoned and how to perform correct giving. Impure giving is divided into four categories: impure with regard to the motivation, the object given, the recipient of the gift and the manner in which it is given. In this sutra, giving meat originating from killed animals, alcohol offered to the careless, as well as weapons, poison and the like are enumerated as cases of impure giving with regard to the object.

Question: In Buddhism eating meat is allowed as the Buddha himself ate meat: The cause of his death was eating poisoned pork that an evil-doer had given him.

Answer: This story circulates, however, looking at statements contained in the authentic scriptures it does not seem very plausible. As far as I know there is no reliable

source for it. On the other hand indications that the Buddha rejected meat can clearly be substantiated with the above passages from the *Lankavatara Sutra*, the sutra *Vinaya Foundations of Medicine* and the *Angulimala Sutra*. The reason why the Buddha could not easily be harmed by poison is that he did not manifest himself in an ordinary aspect. He appeared in the aspect of a Buddha, both in essence and in his individual characteristics, which is why poison could not have harmed him. In the Kangyur we find a story where the householder Pelbe, belonging to a different religious group, offered poisoned meat to the Buddha, thinking he was not clairvoyant as he ate it. However, as the poison did not have any effect on the Buddha he deeply regretted his deed and confessed it. Afterwards he became a monk and attained arhatship.

There are also accounts in the sutras about how Devadatta set a wild, maddened elephant on the Buddha in order to kill him, but did not manage to do so, about how he shot at him with a sling-shot, but could not do him any harm. If the Buddha had indeed been as easy to kill as a normal being, dying from swallowing poison, I think he would have hardly been able to manifest one of his 12 deeds, such as the

taming of Mara. Apart from that the Hinayana presentation of the Vaibhashika abhidharma also deals with the 18 extraordinary qualities - exclusive features of a Buddha's body, speech and mind - and the 43 additional ones shared with arhats and pratyekabuddhas which include the 10 powers as qualities of the mind. In this context, the term "power" implies that **whoever possesses it** cannot be harmed by anything and that, on the contrary, **such a person** will overcome **everything**. The Buddha could not be harmed by either mental afflictions or the four Maras and the like. As for his ability to overcome adversity, Vasubandhu makes clear in the seventh chapter of his *Treasury of Knowledge* that the Buddha's powers over the physical realm arise from his mental powers and correspond to them. Consequently, poison cannot do any harm to the body of a Buddha. Furthermore, in the Mahayana texts we find presentations regarding the attainment of the vajra body⁴² from the eighth bodhisattva ground and descriptions of the vajra body itself in the mantra system. The story about harm

⁴² The term "vajra body" is used both in the general Mahayana and in the Vajrayana, but with different meaning: In the Vajrayana it signifies the inseparability of body, speech and mind, a meaning that is not implied by the general Mahayana (sutra system).

through poison does not take all these qualities of a Buddha into account. In the Buddhist scriptures of sutra and tantra, eating meat of animals that have been killed especially is rejected. If you have eaten such meat, you should try to purify the harmful effect.

Question: Is food that contains meat suitable for offerings or not?

Answer: If it is the meat of slaughtered animals it is not. If you offer meat that has been obtained through killing, you will be hard put to give a reason for not calling this a "red sacrifice"⁴³. As we learn from both sutras⁴⁴ and commentaries, Buddhas, bodhisattvas and all those whose nature is compassion are filled with sorrow rather than joy at such sacrifices. Therefore, instead of reciting the offering prayer before eating food containing slaughtered meat, it would be better to recite the Akshobya mantra or other mantras such as om mani padme hum and blow on the meat, as this might bring about a little bit of benefit. And try to find methods for redressing the harm caused by eating meat. The best means of purifying it is to save the life

⁴³ blood sacrifice which involves the killing of animals - not accepted in Buddhism

of animals. We should strive to employ any available means to benefit beings, we should pray for that intention and do anything else we possibly can.

Two points should be considered over and over again: 1) the difficulty of redressing the negative action of taking the life and meat of others and 2) the fact that this is not a law that has been decreed by anyone, but a natural process of cause and effect. It really is of great benefit to realise this and reach a point where, moved by compassion, one gives up eating meat, liberates beings and saves their lives⁴⁵.

⁴⁴ i.e. the *Lankavatara* and *Angulimala* sutras

⁴⁵ Liberating beings is of the greatest benefit because it results in the purification of negativities due to eating meat and the accumulation of karma for a long life in good health.

*May the life of His Holiness, Tenzin Gyatso, be long. May this cause peace to spread on earth, the harmonious practice of all religions to be strengthened, the difficulties between Tibet and China to be resolved peacefully and the Buddhist teachings to bring universal benefit. May love and compassion grow. **May all masters and holy beings of Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana have a long life and see the fruition of all their endeavours. In particular, may Lama Zopa Rimpoche, spiritual director of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, live long and achieve all his goals, such as the successful completion of the Maitreya Project. May all sentient beings be freed from the suffering of being killed.***



Compassion is the root of the teachings

Namo Maha Karunikaya.

I bow to Great Compassion, the seed, the refuge which eliminates all suffering of the six kinds of beings and whence all happiness and benefit springs. For those who take joy in the exercise of compassion I shall express a few thoughts on **eating meat**.

Does eating meat go against the practice of compassion?

If one eats the meat of a creature that has died a natural death - for health reasons and without any desire – this **is not** a harmful action. On the other hand, if someone kills living beings for the sake of money or purchases and eats the meat out of a desire to indulge, this goes against the practice of compassion. Both these actions are harmful.

In the Kalachakra tantra and its elaborate commentary it says that if we consider the harmful actions committed by the butcher and the meat eater, those committed by the meat eater are worse. Some people hold that while the butcher acts harmfully, the meat eater does not. However, in the *Lankavatara Sutra* it says:

"He who murders beings for money's sake and
he who buys their meat for money - both
have the genuine link between doer and deed. -

If the buyer were without **vice**, then no merit would be accrued by the sponsor of stupas, scriptures or holy images either, as they are also produced by someone else."

A sponsor of stupas accumulates great merit, although he does not actually build them with his own hands. Likewise, a meat eater accumulates great negativity, although he does not normally slaughter the animals he eats. In fact, there are hardly any snuff sellers left in Europe, because hardly anyone takes snuff these days. Similarly, there would be no meat trade if there were no meat eaters.

With regard to Buddhist teachings, three principles are of utmost importance: 1) exploring reasons and reaching valid conclusions through correct logical analysis, 2) establishing the true nature of reality, and 3) making sure not to go against the practice of great compassion. These three principles are the corner stones of Buddhist theory and practice.

Now, what are the characteristics of so-called great compassion?

It views its object - all the living beings of the six types, humans, gods, demi-gods, animals, ghosts and hell beings - without classifying them as friends, enemies or those to whom one is indifferent. Its particularity consists in seeing how they all suffer

and wishing to eliminate this suffering or protect them from it. **This special attitude, the persistent urge to eliminate suffering and protect others from it** is called "great compassion". The suffering to be eliminated is manifest suffering, the suffering of change as well as the suffering pervading all cyclic existence. Great compassion is what wishes to protect beings from these three kinds of suffering. **It is very important to be clear about those three kinds of suffering. Rather than repeating their names in a superficial manner, we should try and come to a thorough understanding of what they signify.**

From the Buddhist point of view we ourselves desire happiness and we do not want the least suffering. Incapable of patience in the face of adversity like pain, we accept as fact that others, whether human or animal are the same in that respect. Our own sensations of happiness and suffering are what we can understand directly. The happiness and suffering of other humans and animals may be known from signs. For example when other beings, humans or animals, undergo terrible suffering they squeal with pain, tremble and moan. From signs like these we can clearly know that they undergo unbearable suffering. As Buddhists we say: "this is the reality of the situation." That is something we can know from an analysis based on signs. For that reason we meditate on the fact that the wish for happiness is the same in ourselves and

others, whoever they may be. We also need to recognize and meditate on the fact that we ourselves and others, whoever they may be, are the same in not wanting the least suffering. We must realize that it is necessary and equally important to eliminate suffering, regardless of whose it may be, our own or that of others. This way of looking at things is fundamental for the development of great compassion. It is the perspective of a truthful path, an honest path. Nobody, be they gods or scholars or other humans will be able to demonstrate that this perspective is untrue or dishonest. It is necessary to develop great compassion by training the mind in this perspective.

However, it is not enough simply to meditate on great compassion. It is also necessary to put it into practice by actually applying it. It is of utmost benefit to see, hear and consider how cows, buffalos, goats, sheep, chicken, fish, yaks, horses and other animals undergo unbearable suffering while being slaughtered for human consumption and thereupon to avoid eating slaughtered meat out of compassion. As compassion is actually being applied, **this application is of the greatest** benefit for the purification of negativities accumulated previously. **This can be understood** from the story of Noble Asanga and other reports.

Compassion may also be **put into practice directly** by purchasing animals meant for slaughter and saving their lives. The effect of

this action will help extend one's own life span and increasingly bring about happiness as well as purify negativities. It is also taught that nursing the sick, giving medicine and the like, too, are actions resulting in a long life span.

Beautiful animals such as parrots and other birds are not killed but locked up in cages. You can observe that some will kill themselves trying to get out of their prisons. Therefore it is also an act of compassion to buy them and release them. Such an action will result in the attainment of lasting freedom and a happy life. Even as a human you thus accumulate the karma for miraculous powers such as flying and so forth. There are even reports of cases where miraculous powers were achieved in this very life.

Incidentally, castrating horses, cattle, goats, sheep, dogs or cats - cutting their male or female energy channels is also clearly presented as a negative action in Buddhist scriptures. If you **save the animals** out of compassion, the effect of that wholesome action may ripen in this life. In this regard the commentary on chapter four of the *Treasury of Knowledge* relates the following story from a sutra concerning a eunuch, the body guard of some King Kanika's spouse. At the time it was customary to pay eunuchs a big salary for guarding the queen while the king was away at war. This eunuch had thus grown rich guarding the queen

over many years. At some point his eye-sight deteriorated, he turned blind, could not guard the queen anymore and returned to his native town, a rich man. One day, when out walking he heard the loud lowing of a buffalo. "What are they doing to the buffalo?" he asked. His assistant told him that they were castrating it. The blind man felt such strong compassion imagining how the buffalo was now to undergo the same suffering he had undergone - for he obviously knew it from experience - that he bought some 500 buffalos to save them from this misfortune. This action undid his castration and also had the effect that he could see again with both eyes as before.- This story is quoted in the commentary on the *Treasury of Knowledge* to illustrate the accumulation of karma ripening in the same life. The action described in it is also a way of applying compassion.

To deprive beings of their male or female organs is a cruel negative action. Its effect ripens in the form of healthy energy channels, energies and body essences lacking in this life or a future one. **In one of the tantras, Buddha says:**

"As you yourself do not want to be harmed, likewise, others do not want to suffer harm. Therefore, don't harm others."

All sentient beings cherish life more than anything. They all consider their own limbs, vital organs, sense organs and, last not least, sexual organs most important. I am well

aware of Western arguments to the effect that animal populations need to be controlled, that there may be a shortage of food or space and that, therefore, it may be necessary to castrate animals. However, from a Buddhist point of view castrating animals is not good at all. I think this position also makes sense in the context of religions that hinge on a creator god and condemn as sins acts going against His creation. After all, the sexual organs would also be seen as God's creation allowing His creatures to multiply. In the context of religions teaching the law of karma castration is definitely not considered good.

Some people think that attachment and desire may be eliminated by removing the sexual organs. However, this is a misconception. Attachment cannot be overcome by destroying the objects of attachment or the organs associated with it. It takes practice in wisdom and concentration rather than a surgical intervention to overcome it. Attachment and desire, which are deluded states of mind, need to be eliminated by wisdom and concentration.

Apart from that, in Buddhist monasticism it is a requirement for obtaining monk's or nun's vows that one's male or female organs are healthy and intact. It is taught in the vinaya that

otherwise the vows cannot be effective. For the attainment of the concentration of calm abiding and special insight it is also necessary that the organs, energies and channels are fully functional. The reason for this is that the achievement of stability and clarity of mind is intimately linked with the energies, channels and (reproductive) organs. In the two texts *Treasury of Knowledge* and *Compendium of Abhidharma* it is set out that if someone has committed extremely negative actions such as killing his own mother and the like they will be unable to achieve meditative stability until the karmic obscuration is purified and that no meditative concentration arises in hermaphrodites and eunuchs due to their unstable minds and dominant mental afflictions. It is clear that healthy channels, energies and body essences are all the more indispensable for attainment of the completion stage in highest yoga tantra. After the loss of one's male or female organs it is impossible to overcome desirous attachment. In Buddhist texts it is explained clearly that for giving up desirous attachment it is necessary to develop the union of wisdom and meditative concentration as an antidote. Does that mean beings whose male or female organs have been removed, eunuchs and hermaphrodites cannot apply the teachings? Nobody should lose courage - there are lots of things one can do, e.g. train in love and compassion, generosity, patience and wisdom, observe the ten types of religious

activity⁴⁶ as **well as carrying** out fasting meditations (nyung ne). The question whether or not those whose male or female organs have been damaged can practice the completion stage is hard to settle. The teachings say: "For a human being to be definitely able to reach buddhahood within one life through the application of the paths of highest yoga tantra, he or she has to be endowed with the so-called six constituent elements of a being born from a womb. These six elements comprise the components of bone, marrow and reproductive substances obtained from the father and flesh, skin and blood obtained from the mother.

According to the presentation in the *Treasury of Knowledge*, the human beings of the first eon who descended from some kind of light gods, arose through supernatural birth like gods and are referred to as children of Manusha - i.e. the mind. Therefore they were not meat eaters by origin⁴⁷. The texts explain how their behaviour degenerated gradually. According to the scientific manner of explanation, humans have evolved gradually from apes. I believe that those early humans may not have been meat eaters. Anyway, there are many accounts of the origin of

⁴⁶ writing down the teachings, making offerings, practising generosity, hearing the teachings, retaining and understanding them, teaching others, reciting sacred texts, contemplating and meditating.

⁴⁷ the point being made here is that early humans were very much like the gods they descended from who only subsist on mental activity rather than impure physical food

humans, that of the *Treasury*, that of scientists, that of bön shamans etc.

However, what indications are there to suggest that it is not the inborn nature of humans to eat meat? The human body has neither teeth nor claws like lions or tigers. Just like monkeys it can be sustained on a diet of fruit and grains, which is well suited to its physical requirements. **I think this is easy to see, however, still we should examine it.**

In Western countries there are hundreds of thousands of people with a natural aversion to eating meat. There are numerous advantages resulting from not eating meat: it is beneficial for one's health and prevents negative actions. From the Buddhist point of view, however, the wholesome effect is stronger if eating meat is abandoned with the motivation that compassion for the painful experiences of the slaughtered animals has arisen.

In India there are millions of vegetarians such as Mahatma Gandhi and meals without meat may be found everywhere - in thousands of vegetarian restaurants. This is one of the best signs for the fact that the Dharma exists in India. All these vegetarian restaurants are run by Hindus, **Jains and Sikhs**. All the Tibetan restaurants serve meat. All the Tibetans say: we are Buddhists. These restaurants with their meat cuisine go against the Buddhist teachings. They disregard the teachings on the link between actions and their

effects and are in stark opposition to taking refuge⁴⁸, **compassion, equanimity, and non-violence**, the Mahayana and Hinayana sutras as well as the four classes of tantra. Apparently, some of those restaurants are run by monasteries. They do damage to the Buddhist teachings. Obviously, this is not nice to look at **and undermines the devotion others have to Buddhism. In fact one may well ask why such restaurants serving meat exist in monasteries. Their existence** is being justified by saying that it generates a lot of money. "This so-called money sucks the blood from our bodies", said Mahatma Gandhi. To be bitten by money is worse than to be bitten by a snake, he goes on to say in his advice. This statement is certainly especially meaningful. To be sure your own life becomes a money making machine, if you are overcome by the disease of discontentment with regard to money. It is as though you had sold your human life for money. Examine that for yourself!

In the English language it is called "money". In Tibetan one word used is "gyu nor" - an ambiguous word, "gyu" meaning "cause" and "nor" signifying "wealth" but also "error". So you could also understand it in terms of causing rebirth in lower realms - those of hungry ghosts, animals and hell beings - rather than

⁴⁸ As you take refuge to the three jewels, one of the practice instructions you commit yourself to is to give up causing harm to any living beings. That

becoming a cause for higher existences such as birth in the human or divine realms and therefore it could be considered an "erroneous cause". If the **love of money** is too strong, a country will be lost, cultural and religious values deteriorate and individual human values and abilities degenerate. For instance when the Chinese communists first came to Tibet they distributed a lot of money among Tibetans and those Tibetans with a predilection for money sang songs with lyrics like: "Chinese communists are like benevolent parents, they cause a rain of coins to fall".- The Tibetans were cheated at the time, in any case they ended up losing their country to the Chinese and wholesome values, the precious Buddhist religion and culture deteriorated - an experience that Tibetans of future generations will not forget. If the desire for money is excessive, disadvantages will ensue. Even today a lot of people do not finish their education but rather chase after money. For the sake of earning money some do not even care whether they act harmfully. As a means to an end meals with the meat of countless chicken, cattle and sheep are sold every day in restaurants. When the people responsible for this die, in particular, they will have caused themselves serious problems: Someone with lots of money will be attached to it even on the threshold of death and die in a corresponding state of mind.

is why it would go against the practice of refuge to harm living beings.

Nowadays most people consider money to be the source of happiness and well-being. That is a misconception. One's well-being, a pleasant physique, a long life, health and a happy mind are the results of wholesome actions born from compassion and the desire to help in former lives. There is evidently no guarantee for people with lots of money to be happier. If we go on analyzing we can see that people with a lot of money often suffer all the more and that the situation in rich countries is often more difficult.

As regards the root of happiness and well-being it is therefore taught in the sutras that the various types of wholesome actions as causes give rise to the various types of happiness as effects. For example the act of saving animals meant for slaughter out of a compassionate motivation is a cause for living a long life, nursing the sick and giving them medicine for having a healthy body and mind, the development of patience for having a pleasant physique and being well liked by everyone, trying to save humans and animals from imprisonment for always enjoying freedom, giving up castrating animals for not being born as a hermaphrodite or becoming a eunuch, and compassion along with wholesome actions the root of happiness and well-being in general. The root of suffering is harmful action. In highest yoga tantra it is set out that the most harmful thing is to give up compassion for all beings.

From the Buddhist perspective India is a blessed country where many Buddhas, bodhisattvas and arhats have wandered and which the Buddha himself prophesied to be an important place where the Buddha Maitreya and some thousand other future Buddhas as well as many bodhisattvas and arhats would wander. Unfortunately, in some old religious rites it is still customary to make blood sacrifices on **special Indian and Nepalese** holidays. That goes against the practice of compassion **and non-violence**. **Those offering ceremonies do** more harm than good. Great gods such as **Shiva**, Vishnu, Brahma and **Sarasvati** - by virtue of being gods - do not accept blood sacrifices. Gods are not beings feeding on impure substances like meat and blood, but rather care for utmost purity. Foreigners also find these blood sacrifices repulsive and Buddhists do not take pleasure in them **at all**.

Sakya Pandita gives an account of the earlier Hindu sage Eta who rejected blood sacrifices. There are also stories about the Buddhist siddha Birvapa visiting many temples where these customs were practiced and putting an end to them. He did this by manifesting signs of his attainments and encouraging the devotees to sacrifice so-called white offerings.

The Dalai Lama put an end to meat offerings in 1973 on the occasion of the Kalachakra initiation in Bodhgaya telling his disciples from the Himalayas: "From now on abandon the custom of making red offerings. If the spirits accustomed to it cause you

trouble tell them: the Dalai Lama has told us to stop it and if you want to cause problems because of this you should turn to the Dalai Lama."

The great texts of the Buddhist tenet systems explain that in the Hindu system, Buddha Shakyamuni is revered as the ninth emanation of Vishnu. It is taught quite clearly that the development and attainment of calm abiding, special insight, the four levels of **worldly** meditative stabilization and the **worldly** concentrations of form and formless realms are practices shared by Hindus, Jains and Buddhists.

Specifically, Buddhist practices are associated with the four noble truths, the two truths, renunciation, great compassion, the attitude of conventional and ultimate bodhicitta and the practice of the ten perfections. The attainment of the five paths and the ten levels as well as the ability to achieve arhatship and buddhahood are their special effects. All of this is made clear in the great Buddhist texts. The eight great powers common to Hindu and Buddhist tantra such as **the** ability to **fly**, to move about at supernatural speed, to cause a rain of grain to fall, to be able to tell the future through prophecies, to display various miraculous powers and similar abilities are taught as worldly attainments.

Special attainments in Buddhism concern healing, extending life spans up to a thousand years, **increasing wisdom** and purifying

negativities and many other achievements brought about by the power of mantra recitation combined with Buddhist deity yoga - kriya, charya and yoga tantra - as well as the attainment of buddhahood in the same body **within a single lifetime** through developing the generation and completion stages of highest yoga tantra.

The root of all those methods is great compassion. All wholesome actions performed with the motivation of compassion can ripen as wholesome effects. If the motivation of compassion is lacking, even the highest practices will come under the influence of selfishness and thus their wholesome effect cannot ripen. The spiritual master Padmasambhava said:

"With kleshas⁴⁹ exhausted - no reason for Dharma practice.
Without compassion the root of Dharma rots.
Consider samsara's sufferings again and again!
Lord and subjects, do not postpone the Dharma!"

The protector Nagarjuna taught:

"The fact that nothing is ever born -
if it is deeply known by the mind,
compassion arises easily
towards those sunk in the bog of samsara."

The siddha Saraha said:

"Whoever engages in emptiness lacking compassion

⁴⁹ delusions, afflictions

will never discover the highest most excellent path."

However, the root of Buddhist teachings is unbiased great compassion. Thus the main rule of vows for laypeople, novices, monks and nuns in the vehicle of hearers consists in giving up harming anyone. This giving up of harmful action occurs motivated by compassion. If compassion is lacking, the ethical discipline of giving up harmful actions towards others does not come about. For those belonging to the Mahayana path compassion is even more important. In the Mahayana the main thing being taught is that over and above giving up harmful actions it is necessary to benefit others – **"perfect enlightenment is born from the attitude of benefiting others"**, as it says in the *37 Practices of a Bodhisattva*⁵⁰. In the *Commentary on Valid Cognition* it says:

"That which enables it⁵¹ is to develop compassion."

When applying the Buddhist teachings, from among faith and compassion, the latter is more important. *Engaging in Bodhisattva Behaviour* gives the reason:

"Between the Jinās⁵² and sentient beings
if you respect the Jinās, but not
sentient beings - how would you
accomplish something like Buddha Dharma?"

⁵⁰ by Togmey Sangpo

⁵¹ i.e. the attainment of Buddhahood

In his *Explanation of Bodhicitta* Nagarjuna also describes the connection: From benefiting beings happiness arises as a result. From causing harm to beings, suffering arises as a result. The state of buddhahood can also be attained only in dependence on living beings.

Geshe **Chenngawa**, a scholar of the Kadam tradition, said:

"In order to attain the state of buddhahood, one has to learn something that is unusual in the world. Among their own interests and the interests of others worldly beings put their own first and consider it more important to honour Buddhas than living beings. We have to do it the other way round."

Buddha Shakyamuni states in the *Stream of Mineral Nutriments Sutra*:

"To benefit sentient beings is the highest offering you can make me,
to harm sentient beings is the greatest harm you cause me."

In his *Essence of Good Explanations on the Interpretable and Ultimate Meaning* the great spiritual master Tsongkhapa describes how the three types of striving - regarding compassion for beings, faith in the Buddha and the wish that his teachings may last for a long time - reinforce each other.

Dromtonpa said:

"Compassion is the root of a helpful attitude. All the characteristics of bodhicitta come about in dependence on compassion".

⁵² "victors" – designation of the Buddhas

And the spiritual master Atisha:

"If you feel unbearable compassion for living beings, you'll abandon everything and undertake anything that is of benefit to beings."

In the *Sutra Requested by Sagaramati* it says:

"The one teaching for Bodhisattvas is this: great compassion that does not crave for one's own happiness."

The Sakya master Jetsun Draggyen said:

"Abandon alcohol because, if you drink alcohol, your presence of mind will deteriorate.

Meat should be abandoned because, if you eat meat, your compassion will deteriorate."

In his *Explanation on the Three Types of Vows* Kedrub Je, a great pundit of the Gelug tradition, writes:

"We certainly do not say that the rules of ordination permit eating meat under the power of attachment to the taste of meat. We would not even dream of saying that something like that isn't a fault."

Jangkya Rimpoche, a great Gelug master, also said:

"Into piles of flesh, blood, bones of beings
you dig your knives and drool in a rush to devour them -
as if about to subdue hostile troops and foes

compassionate beings behold this sham of a sangha!⁵³"

I should like to turn to the members of the sangha, persons training in the asceticism of pure conduct, with a little remark. How come people capable of resisting the temptation of what seems like the greatest happiness to the conventional worldly mistaken consciousness - the happiness of being with a woman - are incapable of resisting the enjoyment of eating meat from murdered animals? I wonder. But how could I possibly capture everyone's interest making statements about the harmful effects of eating meat ? Even if one said that meat is poison – the persistent habit of indifference would continue to exist **and they would go on eating meat.**

The teaching that it is harmful to eat meat does not apply to monks only. It was given to laypeople and monks equally. The ten negative actions like killing, stealing, sexual misconduct etc. as well as negative actions relevant here - eating meat and the like - are not harmful for monks only, but for all the beings of the six realms as well. The rules that apply specifically to monks are those they have vowed to abide by before the sangha represented by their abbot and master: not to enter into intimate relations with women, not to drink alcohol, not to eat in the evenings, not to

⁵³ **In other words: "Monks, rather than taking delight in killing and eating animals, please think about what you are doing and develop compassion!"**

hoard possessions and many other particularities. **If they transgress any of those rules**, this constitutes a negative action in the sense of a breach of the promise they have made as monks. These kind of negative actions do not exist for laypeople.

In the edicts of the Tibetan king Trisong Detsen it says:

"In line with the rules of the ordination masters act as explained in the three collections of teachings: Drink tea and what is proper for sangha members, for food take grains, molasses and creamy cheese, for clothing wear plain saffron-coloured robes, for lodging live together in a temple.

Do not indulge in drink, meat, **rotten** food."

People wishing to make offerings are not allowed to offer the ordained meat nor alcohol - such offerings are also mentioned explicitly in the sutras among the 32 impure offerings. Venerable Milarepa said:

"This way of eating meat food - famished, without thinking of future lives for even a second... When I see these people I get frightened. Rechungpa, are you mindful of the holy Dharma?⁵⁴"

⁵⁴ The question might be paraphrased in these terms: "Rechungpa, do you keep thinking of death, impermanence and your future lives while others fail to do so?"

If you do not just pay lip service to the existence of future lives and karmic causes and effects but rather consider, from the bottom of your heart, how these hold together, you may develop enthusiasm about giving up meat. If you are not convinced that future lives exist, it will be even more difficult to gain conviction about the karmic effects of actions. However, if you examine whether or not there are former and future lives the reasons in favour weigh more heavily and there is only little negative evidence. Not only Buddhists accept the **reality** of former and future lives. Hindu yogis who have attained the concentration of calm abiding and thereby achieved supernormal cognitive powers also accept them.

In addition to that the Hindu tenet systems posit a permanent self, holding that this self exists in all former and future lives. They also accept cyclic existence and liberation as well as wholesome and unwholesome actions. We must not disparage the Hindu religion saying: this is a non-Buddhist system. In the tantra *Vairochana's Perfect Enlightenment* it says:

"Do not disparage the tirthikas⁵⁵.

If you disparage the tirthikas,

you'll distance yourself from Vairochana.^{56"}

⁵⁵ tirthika (Tib. "mu stegs can") literally means "one belonging to a tirtha or holy place", i.e. a worthy and holy man, a Brahmana. However, the word came to take on a pejorative meaning and was used by Buddhists, Jainas etc. to signify a "heretical" adherent of a religion or philosophy other than one's own.

With this in mind a famous scholar from Arig⁵⁷ said: "I have faith in non-Buddhists⁵⁸, too."

However, Buddhists do not accept a permanent self but rather an uninterrupted impermanent continuum of self. Although the self accepted by Buddhists is an uninterrupted impermanent continuum, there is no true self such as it is conceived by our inborn grasping for an "I": the Buddhist view is that it does not exist by its own nature.

Among those who are convinced that there are former and future lives, again, there are various attitudes. For example some feel undivided compassion for all living beings. They may be fully committed to finding ways and means to eliminate their own and others' difficulties in this life.

Others who do not accept former and previous lives have a biased kind of love and compassion. They may benefit a lot of beings while also harming many. **One example for this would be a person taking pity on a hungry dog and feeding it a fish killed**

⁵⁶ i.e. along the path, you will find yourself further removed from the goal of becoming Vairocana

⁵⁷ area in North-Eastern Tibet

⁵⁸ the Tibetan reads "phyi rol pa" – apparently, what he meant are followers of other religions who nevertheless share certain essential tenets with Buddhists

for that purpose. The action may be motivated by compassion for one animal, but it causes great harm to another one.

Yet others are not convinced about former and future lives nor about the fact that happiness is the result of wholesome actions and that suffering is the effect of harmful actions. These kind of people who are very self-centred and unfamiliar with love and compassion may well be endowed with worldly knowledge and skills. If they obtain power and high positions they can do great damage to world peace - please check for yourselves!

The Buddhist teachings explain **rebirth, i.e. the reality of former and future lives and the fact that** wholesome actions bring about happiness and harmful actions bring about suffering. As all beings are the same in wanting happiness rather than suffering there are the teachings on great compassion - the desire to protect all the beings of the six realms from the temporary suffering of this life and ultimately from all the suffering of cyclic existence - as well as the teachings on the six perfections, patience etc., and the view of emptiness as an antidote to ignorance, attachment, anger, wrong views, concepts and misconceptions. Through study involving listening and contemplating as well as the development of this wisdom realizing the view of emptiness combined with great compassion, through combining the concentration of calm abiding and special insight into one union,

through recognizing the ignorance associated with mental afflictions, concepts and misconceptions will decrease more and more, and the nature of mind will gradually become clearer and clearer. The mind will achieve liberation and the state of buddhahood. The profound and vast path leading there is taught in authentic scriptures.

*Author of this text is the ordained Geshe Thubten Soepa of Sera monastery. He composed this advocacy of animal rights in Germany after about 2550 years had passed since the birth of Buddha Shakyamuni and about 648 years after the birth of Lama Tsongkhapa in the year 2005 according to the Western calendar. May this text be like a cloud of offerings gladdening the Buddhas, **bodhisattvas and all those possessed of compassion**. May it also further the wishes for health and a long life of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso so that his wholesome activities **for the benefit of living beings** may continue for hundreds of eons. Also, may all masters of the **Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana** have a long life. May all their wishes come true. May the holy masters of religions believing in a creator god and religions with faith in the law of karma interact in harmony and continue to develop mutually beneficial relations now that this is of vital importance. May all their shared practices of non-violence, compassion and love be allowed to increase and deepen more and more.*

Sarva mangalam.

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Q= Peking edition of the Tibetan Kangyur

Acknowledgements

The Tibetan original of this book was initially translated into German by Conni Krause. The first English version by Philip Quarcoo was based on her German text. For a second English version Philip retranslated - from Tibetan - my poems as well as the versified quotations I had used, and made various changes that proof-readers had suggested.

I discussed this second version with my current interpreter, Karina Reitbauer, who made numerous insightful comments causing me to add various explanations, clarifications and notes. They have now resulted in this third version by Philip and Karina.

I would hereby like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Conni, Philip and Karina and all the other people who have contributed to the translation and publication of these texts as translators, proof-readers, sponsors or in any other capacity.

Udamwara (Tibetan version)

Mahakarunika (Tibetan version)