

MEAT IS MURDER

BUDDHIST VEGETARIANISM: ANCIENT AND MODERN



COMPILED TEACHINGS BY 17TH KARMAPA, ORGYEN TRINLEY DORJE

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INTRODUCTION

How devastatingly hateful this murdering beings ‘custom’!
How hugely regrettable this self-deception ‘custom’!
How heavy a weight this killing parents ‘custom’!
How much wrong action for this stacks of meat ‘custom’!
What to be done for this masses of blood ‘custom’!
However hungry, this eating meat ‘custom’!
What are these mental appearances of this delusional ‘ custom ’?!
Such major evil this zero compassion ‘ custom ’!
What dark ignorance and obscurations is this stupidity!
What to be done about this evil ‘farming’!
Whose desires for pleasure cause this torture ‘custom’?!
--excerpt from Jetsun Milarepa’s *Song to the Suffering of Animals*

“In particular, it is necessary to have food to continue living, so one has to eat. However, we should think about food as medicine and eat it at the right time and in moderation. If one eats it like a pig or dog, then that is not alright.”

“If you brought a live chicken in front of a child and said you were going to kill it, they would say no, it’s really beautiful and nice and not want to kill or eat it. So, we don’t need quotations and logic. If we need to use scriptures and logic as proof to make us do something that ordinary beings can easily understand, it is actually a disgrace.”

– 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje (March 2021)

The great Buddhist masters say there is no better offering to Buddha or one’s guru than the Dharma and applying their teachings. Thus, for the 17th Karmapa’s birthday on 26th June 2021, I offer a published compilation of all of his March 2021 extensive teachings on vegetarianism in Buddhism, ancient and modern (based on the publicly available oral translations of Karma David Chopel and original Tibetan)¹. In fact, the 17th Karmapa taught in Bodh Gaya, 2007, not only

¹ These teachings from February to March 2021 were part of a month-long teaching on two autobiographical texts by the 8th Karmapa. For videos of the teachings, translated into the English language, see here: https://youtu.be/ZrAJw_JF7EY.

that eating meat was unnecessary, cruel and lacking compassion but that if his followers wanted his life and activities to be long and healthy, they should immediately stop eating meat.

People often wrongly assume that vegetarianism in Tibet is a modern-day phenomenon. However, despite the great difficulties of being vegetarian in Tibet, due to climate and vegetation, there are many examples of great Tibetan Buddhist masters who have publicly advocated vegetarianism, such as Ngorchon Kunga Zangpo, Jonang Kunkhyen Dolpopa, 4th Karmapa, 8th Karmapa, Patrul Rinpoche and, more recently, Jadral Rinpoche, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro Rinpoche, Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo and 17th Karmapa, Orgyen Trinley Dorje.

Aside from being a foremost gender equality and female empowerment spokesperson in Tibetan Buddhism (see [here](#)), the 17th Karmapa is one of the world's leading Tibetan Buddhist advocates of vegetarianism and animal rights for compassionate, environmental and ethical reasons. He has spoken on this topic many times (see [here](#) and [here](#)). In addition, as a young adult, despite having been brought up as a meat-eater in a nomadic family in Tibet, he later abandoned meat and expressly discouraged others from buying, making and eating meat.

I was personally present at the speech the 17th Karmapa gave at the Kagyu Monlam in 2007 in Bodh Gaya, India (for a the video, see [here](#), for English translation see [here](#)), in which he forbade the buying, cooking and consumption of meat in Karma Kagyu Dharma centres and monasteries. He also quoted the 8th Karmapa, which he quotes again in these 2021 teachings, as saying that ‘If you eat meat, you are not a Kagyupa and are not my student.’ It sent some shockwaves through the audience at his direct and forthright insistence that it was neither Buddhist, nor part of the Karma Kagyu tradition, to eat the flesh of animals deliberately killed for food.

Not so much is known about the previous Karmapas and their stance on meat-eating though. In fact, recent academic articles on the topic of vegetarianism in Tibet, past and present, have overlooked the strict vegetarian lifestyle and attitude of previous Karmapas. As the 17th Karmapa explained, vegetarianism is not some modern phenomenon among Tibet, previous Karmapas were also passionate advocates of abandoning eating the flesh of murdered animals. Below are

some excerpts of what the 17th Karmapa taught about them (Days 13-16), in particular, from the 4th to the 10th Karmapas.

These teachings are remarkable in that they are the first time such a senior Tibetan Buddhist teacher and head of one of the four major lineages has given such detailed teachings on the history of Buddhist vegetarianism, but also the reasons for that strict vegetarianism. There are other teachers who have strongly emphasized the need for vegetarianism, such as Jadrel Rinpoche and but the 17th Karmapa is unique in being the head of a lineage to have done so.

CONTENTS

There are six chapters/sections in this edited publication.

:

1) The Karmapas' strict vegetarianism and abandoning the eight impure things

This section gives detailed descriptions of about the previous Karmapas' strict vegetarianism, such as the life of the 4th Karmapa and his founding of the Karma Kagyu Great Encampment with its strict rules against meat eating and alcohol, as well as the reasons for the 8th Karmapa's strong vegetarian stance. This is shown in the texts the 8th Karmapa wrote himself, for example, in his *Great Commentary on the Vinaya*, it says it is forbidden to put meat in the Gutor or Mahakala rituals, that people are not allowed to do this. That if they did that, 'you are not taking me as your teacher and I do not think of you as my students and you should think about that'. He said this very forcefully and insistently. Similarly, Mikyo Dorje also said in his *Hundred Short Instructions*, that as soon as people 'go forth' and become monastics, they must refrain from the eight impure things, such as meat, alcohol, armor, weapons, riding animals, business, and housing, milking and animal husbandry. Particularly, in relation to meat, alcohol, and weapons, one is not supposed to even look at them, forget about using them!

2) Rules for Buddhist monastics and the three 'purity' test for offered meat

This section is a detailed teaching and explanation regarding the Vinaya rules that were laid out by the Buddha for monastics on eating animals that have been slaughtered for food. Often people think Buddha taught that monastics could eat meat and thus did not forbid meat, however, as the

17th Karmapa clearly explains, that is mistaken and incorrect. He gives quotations from five texts of the different Vinaya schools, several of which he translated from the original Chinese. Among them, the first three are generally for the fully ordained and novice monastics. The last two citations also say that laypeople with the five lay precepts may not eat offered meat, if it has been killed for them. In summary, Buddha did say that monastics could eat meat, but only under very strict conditions in the context of monastics begging for alms, and only as long as the animal had not been killed specifically for them. It did not mean that monastics themselves should seek out and request meat, or that it was alright to eat slaughtered animals generally. The Buddha was not condoning killing and eating animals at all, as can be seen in his clear Mahayana teachings that expressly forbid it. I have also added a final section regarding the discovery of the Buddha's alms bowl, by the 4th Century Chinese traveler, Faixian (who is referred to by the 17th Karmapa in this teaching), which is said to be currently housed in Kabul, Afghanistan.

3) Compassion not Competition: the Mahayana View on Eating Animals

This section moves from the Vinaya and Hinayana approach to considering the differing motivations of Buddha's vegetarian disciples, Devadatta, Mahākāśyapa and Bakula; followed by the Mahayana Sūtras on great compassion and Buddha-Nature; and Chinese Buddhist vegetarianism with its emphasis on compassion for animals and their inherent Buddha-Nature. The first disciple was a cousin of Buddha, Devadatta, who also tried to murder the Buddha, and insisted there should be strict vegetarianism, that forbids even offered meat that is pure in the three ways. As Devadatta's motivation was competitive and egoistic pride (to humiliate the Buddha), not predominantly of compassion for the animals, it was not done for the right reasons and led to a schism in the sangha. The Karmapa then explained that Devadatta's example does not mean we should eat meat. He described two of Buddha's other disciples, Mahākāśyapa and Bakula who were both vegetarians.

After that, there is a discussion of how the Mahayana tradition and sutras expressly forbids eating meat, out of love and compassion for animals. In particular due to the Buddha-Nature sutras that teach all beings have the inherent Buddha Nature. Citing the Mahayana Sutras as the cause of the spread of vegetarianism in Buddhist China, due to the influence of Chinese monk

Emperor Wu, the Karmapa concluded that the reason vegetarianism spread so widely in China and less so in Tibet, was due to the influence of such devout Buddhist rulers but also due to the climate and lack of plant vegetation in Tibet. However, despite the geographical limitations, there were several well-known Tibetan Buddhist masters who gave up meat in Tibet and in exile.

In addition, the 17th Karmapa considers the meat-eaters' 'pointless doubts' about the unintentional killing of insects while cultivating crop food, concluding that even Buddha taught it is an irrelevant and worldly question in terms of the issue of eating slaughtered animals.

4) Milarepa's *Sorrowful Song of the Suffering of Animals*.

This section describes the background to a song composed by famous yogi and Kagyu forefather, Jetsun Milarepa spontaneously composed while witnessing the horrific death of a slaughtered sheep, which he sang to his student, Rechungpa, together with my English translation of it (with Tibetan and phonetics). Reading this song, there can be no doubt that Milarepa did not advocate eating slaughtered animals. It is the ancient equivalent of the song 'Meat is Murder' by The Smiths.

5) Jamgon Kongtrul, Drugpa Kunle and 17th Karmapa on the horror and sadness of eating slaughtered animals

This section is on 'dokar' "veggie broth monastic practitioners in Tibet, and two more specific examples of well-known Tibetan and Kagyu vegetarians. It describes the stance of 19th Century master Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye (1813-1899) and his written aspiration that he may be re-born in a body and place where he does not have to eat animals. This is followed by the experience of the Drugpa Kagyu master, and 'crazy yogi', Drugpa Kunleg (1455-1529), who described how eating meat should be seen (and experienced) as distressing and painful as having to eat the flesh of one's own child.

The 17th Karmapa also describes his own decision to abandon eating meat and how he grew up eating meat in a nomadic family in Tibet, yet was horrified by the way animals were killed (like Milarepa). However, he still continued to eat meat even after he came to India. His attitude

completely changed when he saw a video in which animals were slaughtered. After that, he said it was no longer possible to eat meat, and he gave it up completely.

6) **Ngorchen Kungsa Zangpo and the Origin of the Single-Sitting Vegetarian Practice.**

This section is an added research extension to the 17th Karmapa's teachings, and is about the influential Sakya master, Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo's strict vegetarianism, the origin of the 'single-sitting' vegetarian practice, said to have been one of the four transmissions of the (Middle Region Vinaya) from Śākyaśrī Bhadra (1127- 1225), which was then transmitted to the four Joden Monastic communities, one of whom, the Gedun Gangpa, had a strong connection to the monastic ordination of the Karmapas and other Kagyu masters.

CONCLUSION

Whatever one may now think of the 17th Karmapa (and it is hoped that the truth and justice will reign supreme in the continuing allegations about him)² one cannot deny that his strong stance on meat-eating and vegetarianism is unparalleled among the heads of the four major Tibetan Buddhist lineages (some of whom regularly consume slaughtered animals without any reasonable justification). For that reason, the Karmapa's teachings on this topic are to be celebrated and congratulated. After all, how can one seriously complain about being objectified and treated without love and compassion oneself, if one regularly (and unnecessarily) consumes and treats animals as objects merely for personal pleasure and taste, without any care of the consequences on the animals, the environment, natural resources, and health?

Being vegetarian certainly does not guarantee compassion, love, and kindness for all either (as many meat-eaters love to quote, Hitler was a vegetarian). Nonetheless, it is surely still better, for

² Currently, the 17th Karmapa is facing public allegations of ethical and sexual misconduct from three Asian Chinese women. As I have been following him as a teacher since 2005, it is distressing to read and hear these things. In particular, the recent Canadian court case for child support (see <https://www.bccourts.ca/jdb-txt/sc/21/09/2021BCSC0939cor1.htm>) is disturbing due to the allegations as to how the child was conceived and the huge amount of money that was allegedly given for the child. As I am a survivor of lama misconduct, dishonesty, bullying, defamation, impersonation etc. myself (see here), I know very well how difficult, dangerous and damaging it is for survivors to speak out about these issues. It is unethical and part of the problem to ignore, hide or silence them. For now, all I can say is that I hope these allegations are not true, but if they are, may love, compassion, justice and truth reign supreme for all concerned. After all, honesty, love, compassion and respect for women are the foundation of the Buddha's teachings in all three vehicles.

the animals and planet, to be an unkind vegetarian than an unkind meat-eater (who consumes vegetables as well).

As the 17th Karmapa says:

“If, as a Buddhist, one eats a lot of meat and blood, then people may wonder what is going on. So, for that reason, we need to know what others’ opinions are and not only focus on our own thoughts and habits. We cannot totally disregard others’ habits and thinking. Particularly, in the Mahayana tradition, the primary work is to liberate all beings from suffering and bring them to happiness which shows in the aspirations that we make, such as, “May all sentient beings be happy and have the causes of happiness and be free from suffering and the causes of suffering ...” If we say that and yet deliberately harm sentient beings for food, that is in contradiction with those aspirations and is something we really need to think about. To eat meat or not is nothing complicated or profound like the concept of emptiness or selflessness. Actually, it is very easy for anybody to understand it.”

Actions speak louder than words and what one regularly feeds oneself and others says a lot about your values and ethical principles. People can say they care about the environment and animals, yet still eat slaughtered animals; just as someone can say they are honest, and be a pathological liar. However, saying so does not make it so, we must practice what we preach. After all, why would anyone want to emulate someone whose private, inner life does not match their public preaching? To end on a musical theme, Meat is Murder by the Smiths, seems to be the most suitable!

May the 17th Karmapa’s teachings on this subject be studied and applied, may all his followers immediately stop eating meat, may humans stop consuming murdered animals, and may all animals suffering from torture, sickness, murder in slaughterhouses experience relief, love, compassion, and freedom from suffering!

Written and compiled by Adele Tomlin, 26th June 2021. Copyright.

CHAPTER ONE: The Strict Vegetarianism of 8th Karmapa, “If you eat meat, you are not Kagyupa or my student”

Introduction

On Days 13-16, of the ‘Good Deeds’ teachings, the Gyalwang 17th Karmapa gave detailed descriptions of the life of the 4th Karmapa and his founding of the Karma Kagyu Great Encampment with its strict rules against meat eating and alcohol, as well as the reasons for the 8th Karmapa’s strong vegetarian stance. This section focuses on his teachings about the previous Karmapas’ strict vegetarianism and the Great Encampment’s rules forbidding meat and drinking alcohol .

In addition, (on Day 16, see [here](#)) the Karmapa further explained that even though monastics are not supposed to actively eat meat at all, they have traditionally been allowed to eat meat offered to them by others, as long as they have not specifically requested it or sought it out and it is ‘pure’. However, even offered meat must be refused if it is not of the three-fold purity (i.e., has not been specifically killed for the purpose of offering it to monastics).

4th Karmapa, Rolpe Dorje and the strict vegetarian rules of the Great Encampment



4th Karmapa, Rolpe Dorje ((1340-1383) Image: Palpung Sherabling)

The 17th Karmapa explained how the 4th Karmapa, Rolpe Dorje (1340-1383) was known for his strict adherence to *Vinaya* and encouraged his attendants to keep pure discipline. He said that

“they all upheld virtuous discipline by eating only the three white foods – milk, sugar, butter, and so forth. Also, if they saw anyone with meat or bones, they would automatically criticize them. They would not allow any meat or alcohol in the encampment at all. The behaviour of his students was even stricter than that.”

9th Karmapa's text - *The Great Rule Book for the Encampment: the Ornament of the World*



9th Karmapa, Wangchug Dorje (1559-1601/1603)

The 17th Karmapa elaborated that:

“In general, the encampment had very strict rules on meat. They did not begin these rules during the time of the 8th Karmapa. They were ancient rules established long prior to that by previous Karmapas. How do we know this? There is a text by the 9th Karmapa, Wangchug Dorje (karma pa 09 dbang phyug rdo rje, 1559-1601/1603), called ‘*The Great Rule Book for the Encampment: the Ornament of the World*’ which says that:

“The examples of Drumzam Lingpa, 5th Karmapa, Dezhin Shegpa, 6th Karmapa, Thongwa Donden and 7th Karmapa, Chodrag Gyatso are similar. In particular, they gathered only monastics around them. Those that were included in the encampment could not have any meat, not even so much as the hair of a deer, nor drink any alcohol, even as much as a tip on a blade of grass. They performed untold actions of the higher states and many customs of sutra and tantra and of the two traditions. Afterwards, Mikyo Dorje did not waver from such deeds and examples. Not only that, he also brought practitioners of these teachings into the methods of having revulsion for worldly activities and teaching debate and composition. He established new monastic communities, built statues, praised his students, and wrote treatises beyond our conception. He guided his students to have confidence in our own and the oceans of the other schools. His influence and kindness are indescribable.’

What this says is that during the time of Rolpe Dorje (Drumzam Lingpa), Dezhin Shegpa and Thongwa Donden and Chodrag Gyatso, those four Karmapas, no meat, not ‘even the hair of a deer’, and no alcohol that could ‘fit on the tip of blade of grass’ were allowed in the encampment.”

Karma Chagme’s text - The Instructions of the Pandita Jamyang from the North : Meat: Distinguishing what is Allowed and What is Prohibited



Karma Chagme (1613-78)

“There is a text by Khedrub Karma Chagme (karma chags med (1613-78)), *The Instructions of the Pandita Jamyang from the North : Meat: Distinguishing what is Allowed and What is*

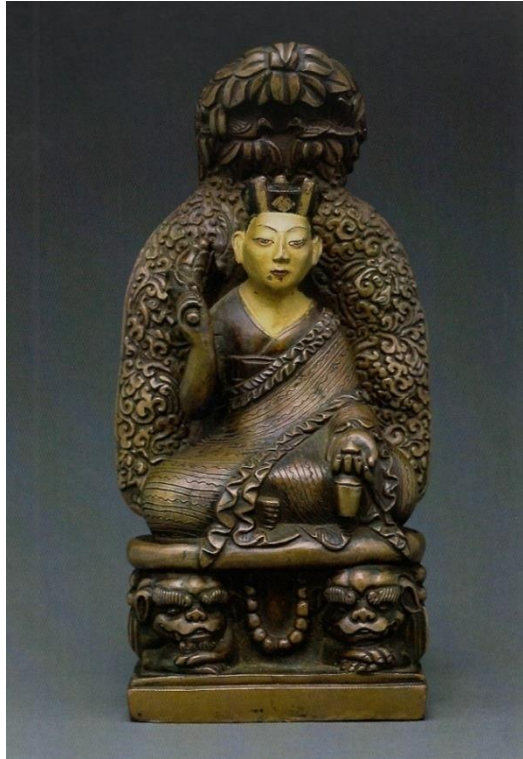
Prohibited, which says that there were always 500 bhikkhus with outer robes around Rolpe Dorje, and he perfected the example of rules of not allowing meat, not even allowing the hair of a deer into his sight. From that time, most of the Dharma organizations of Mikyo Dorje, there were strict rules against meat. In addition, although the monasteries did not have rules against meat, the vegetarians had a separate stock that was given to them. The Karmapas and their heart sons were vegetarians and did not have any meat whatsoever. However, during the Ganachakras, a little meat was included and even the Karmapas and his heart sons ate a small amount of meat in order not to violate the secret mantra samaya. In the colophon, it says that Ganachakra meat was distributed in accordance with the sutras and tantras and rules of the Great Encampment. That is what this text explains in detail. So, from the time of the 4th Karmapa onwards, meat eating was forbidden in the encampment. This example was preserved and spread by the following Karmapas.



6th Zhamarpa

In particular, most of the monasteries founded by the 8th Karmapa had very strict rules about meat. At Nyingling monastery, which was a shedra founded by the 6th Zhamarpa, Chokyi

Wangchug. Karma Chagme studied there and knew it very well. At that monastery, he said there was no rule against meat, but there was a vegetarian soup that was made separately for the vegetarians.”



10th Karmapa, Choying Dorje

Likewise, the 10th Karmapa, Choying Dorje and his heart sons, including 6th Zhamarpa only had vegetarian food and no meat was ever allowed in their sights. However, during Ganacakras, even those who were normally vegetarian ate a small amount of meat, including the Karmapas and their heart sons.

If we look at these sources, what we can know is that from the time of Mikyo Dorje, the Great Encampment became bigger and there were very strict rules about eating meat. We could say that these rules were a distinctive feature of the Great Encampment. It would not be an exaggeration to say that.”

Liberation-stories on 4th Karmapa composed by his students

“What clear and reliable sources do we have that these rules originated at the time of 4th Karmapa ? In the Liberation Story of 4th Karmapa, *Delighting the Scholars*, written by Karma Khonchog, it states clearly that the entourage and the people around him lived off the three white foods. If the masters and disciples saw the bones of slaughtered animals where people had stayed, they would reprimand people. Even a whiff of alcohol was not allowed and he brought everyone into pure conduct within the encampment.

There is also a life-story written by the 4th Karmapa’s student, Tsurphu Kunpangpa, which says that

‘there was no way even the tiniest bit of meat or the mere scent of alcohol could be in the encampment. It says that his conduct was the perfection of purity and the power of his compassion extremely great. When people gathered of hundreds of thousands at most, or the minimum, 500, the greatest developed shamatha and insight, the medium developed certainty and they meaning of the words, even the least continually recited mantras, to give up the killing of sentient beings and to recite the names of the Buddhas. This example of benefiting beings is inconceivable.’

So, during the life of Rolpe Dorje, liberation stories by his direct disciples describe this very clearly and these are good sources.”

Meat-eating, slaughter and butchery forbidden and punishable by expulsion, even during festive or special occasions

“How strict were the encampment rules about meat? In the 9th Karmapa’s text, it says that even during the great festivals, such as Losar or larger meals, meat was not allowed. Forget about ordinary days, people were not allowed to bring meat even during festive or important days. It says that meat could not even be offered. This is very clear. That no-one inside or outside the encampment should slaughter an animal. If anyone did this, they would have to report to the Karmapa and his heart sons. If they still did not listen, they would be expelled from the encampment.

What this means is, if someone were to offer meat to the Karmapa and his disciples, meat could not be listed or included in the offerings listed in writing. Similarly, when the great encampment went to a sacred site, or when there were commemorations of the passing of previous Karmapas

or Ganachakras, or even during other times, you could not just say you were having a Ganachakra whenever you liked, so you could eat meat. Likewise, it was considered very important that no-one inside and outside the encampment slaughters, or even butchers an already slaughtered animal. If someone did that or had a connection with participating in that, they would have to take accountability for it with the Karmapa and his heart sons. If they still did not listen to them, they would be expelled and not allowed to remain. Or they would be demoted to the lowest rank. The punishment would be appropriate for the circumstances and time.

If we think about this, we might think well if someone was expelled, they could go somewhere else. It was not so easy to do that if expelled from the Great Encampment. Once someone was expelled from the Great Encampment one would not be allowed to go into another Karma Kagyu monastery and was effectively expelled from Karma Kagyu.

What was the reason for these strict rules against meat in the Great Encampment? There were many reasons. The main reason was that there were also hundreds of thousands of people at the encampment and if they had to serve meat for all those people there would be the danger that they would have to kill thousands of animals daily. Yet animals that have been killed for them specifically is called impure in the Vinaya in the three ways. So, it would be very harmful to allow that.”

8th Karmapa's strict vegetarianism



8th Karmapa, Mikyo Dorje

The 8th Karmapa, Mikyo Dorje was also a passionate and strict vegetarian. One of his main teachers was the 1st Sangye Nyenpa (whom the Karmapa had mentioned previously abandoned all meat from his diet, from the age of 22). On Day 13, the 17th Karmapa began to explain some of the reasons for Mikyo Dorje's strict views on meat-eating:

“At that time, in large monasteries, many animals would be killed. Similarly, sometimes people wanted to give good food to the lamas and their entourage, and so a lot of meat would be offered. Mikyo Dorje saw this caused many difficulties, so wherever he went, he would very skillfully try to get others to give up eating meat.

One reason he prohibited meat consumption, was he wanted to return to earlier traditions of the previous Karmapas, who did not allow meat or alcohol to be brought into the Great Encampment. A second reason is that when Mikyo Dorje was first enthroned as the Karmapa, he was very young and so he did not have much freedom or control. All the power was in the hands

of those below him, the Encampment's leaders. In fact, the power ended up in the hands of one of their wives. At that time, all the animals that were offered to the Encampment were killed and their flesh eaten.

Also, when Mikyo Dorje was young, people would approach him saying they needed to have Ganachakra feasts and that should be done with meat and alcohol. They said: 'How about if we have a big piece of mutton for it?' Mikyo Dorje felt this was not right at all. Even though he was very young, he felt that those in the Encampment were no longer respecting the earlier rules, and just eating meat without any restraint and drinking alcohol. When Mikyö Dorje gained some control and influence in the encampment, he thus made a strict rule prohibiting the eating of meat and drinking alcohol.

Likewise, if you read the 8th's Karmapa's commentary on the Vinaya, *The Orbit of the Sun that Clearly Illuminates the World*^[ii], it states that when doing the Gutor and Mahakala rituals at the end of the year, meat should not be included in those offerings. He not only banned eating meat in the Great Encampment, but he promoted vegetarianism to Tibetans all over Tibet.

In the index of the 8th Karmapa's Collected Works, there is also an advice to Tibetans as to why it is inappropriate to eat the meat of defenceless animals. Currently, we do not have these texts but we hope we can get them soon so we can speak about them. Thus, we can see that the 8th Karmapa not only forbade meat eating in the Great Encampment but also encouraged vegetarianism all over Tibet."

Text by 5th Zhamarpa – ‘Letter to my Defenceless Mothers’



5th Zhamarpa, Konchog Yenlag (1525-1583)

Later, on Day 16, the 17th Karmapa elaborated on the 8th Karmapa’s strict vegetarian outlook, giving more citations to support this:

“In the catalogue of his *Collected Works* by 5th Zhamarpa, Konchog Yenlag, there is a text called *A Letter to my Defenceless Mothers Primarily in the Land of Snows: How Eating Meat is Wrong*. There is a text with this title, which is like an announcement that spread all over Tibet. I hope one day we will get a copy of it. Even though we do not currently have the text, just seeing the title shows that he publicized widely that eating meat is inappropriate and wrong.”

“Also, as further citation and support, there is the commentary on *Good Deeds* by 8th Karmapa’s student Sangye Peldrub that says:

“No matter what region he travelled to, he skillfully prevented people from eating meat. In Kongpo, because of the region, he was unable to prevent people from eating meat. It was due to this that he did not go for alms in Kongpo or other regions where they only ate meat.”

This basically says the 8th Karmapa skillfully, not forcefully, tried to stop people eating meat. But in Kongpo, Northern regions, like Jangthang, where there was very little to eat other than meat, he would not go to those regions. People said that is why he did not go there.”

Meat forbidden from being included in Gutor or Mahakala rituals

“Not only that, we see this in the texts the 8th Karmapa wrote himself, in his *Great Commentary on the Vinaya*, it says it is forbidden to put meat in the Gutor or Mahakala rituals, that people are not allowed to do this. That if they did that, ‘you are not taking me as your teacher and I do not think of you as my students and you should think about that’. He said this very forcefully and insistently.

Basically, the 8th Karmapa was saying you had to do this and follow that. Actually, many people said that I [the 17th Karmapa] said that ‘if you don’t give up meat you are not a Kagyupa’. They thought I said this and that it was really arrogant and excessive to say that. I cannot really say that, as I do not think I have the ability to decide who is a Kagyupa or not. However, in 2007, in Bodh Gaya, when I gave a speech on stopping eating meat, I gave some scriptural quotes to support that, including this quote by Mikyo Dorje, and when I used those quotes, they mistakenly thought I had said this.”

Meat is one of the eight impure things that must be abandoned by monastics

“Similarly, Mikyo Dorje also said in his *Hundred Short Instructions*, that as soon as people ‘go forth’ and become monastics, they must refrain from the eight impure things. There are different ways to count these eight things, but for Mikyo Dorje, they are meat, alcohol, armor, weapons, riding animals, business, and housing, milking and animal husbandry. Particularly, in relation to meat, alcohol, and weapons, one is not supposed to even look at them, forget about using them!

He taught in that text that if you do not give up meat you are not part of the Kagyu lineage, thus it is important to apply them in practice.

The 8th Karmapa is not just being excessively confident and making it up at will. What is the scriptural source for him saying that if you do not give up those eight impure things you are not a Kagyupa? There are some words from a sutra that Dago Gampopa cited, that to be a genuine student of the Buddha's teachings you have to give up the eight impure things. Thus, the followers of the Kagyu lineage must give up these eight things. There are many different ways in which these eight things are explained, other than Mikyo Dorje, I have not seen the others though. This is how 8th Karmapa explains them, but he is not just listing them saying it like a forceful order without reasons.

In Tibet, because of the geography, it is very difficult to give up meat, in our present way of living, there has been huge changes in the lifestyle. In Tibet, at the time of Mikyo Dorje, if one says do not eat meat, then it is almost like saying do not eat food at all. Because if you cannot eat meat there is not much left to eat. I saw an old book about Tibetan foods, about hundred foods were listed, yet 90 % were meat. In Tibet, I was born in a nomad family and if you did not eat meat then there was not much else to eat. One would have butter, cheese, milk and tsampa but nothing much else. As it was so difficult, the masters of the past did not particularly insist that people had to stop eating meat. However, the past Kagyu masters spoke a lot about how important it was not to eat meat and the faults of eating meat and drinking alcohol.”

ENDNOTES

For the video of the teaching (Day 16), see here: <https://youtu.be/fGMrJfya0oI>

[i] man ngag sha za byang bu gcig rgyug. In Collected Works of Karma Chagme. gsung ‘bum/_ karma chags med/ (gnas mdo dpe rnying nyams gso khang /) Volume 13 Pages 135 – 144

[ii] ‘dzam bu’i gling gsal bar byed pa’i rgyan nyi ma’i dkyil ‘khor zhes bya ba glegs bam gsum pa This is a three-volume work contained in the Collected Works of the 8th Karmapa. Vols 7-9, TBRC W8039. Lhasa edition (2004).

CHAPTER TWO: RULES OF BUDDHIST CONDUCT (VINAYA) ON EATING

MEAT: the Vinaya rules on ‘offered’ meat and the three ‘tests’ of impurity

Introduction

In the second half of Day 16 (see <https://youtu.be/fGMrJfya0oI>), the 17th Karmapa spoke about the different Vinaya schools on the offence of eating impure meat, when it has been offered. Historically, Buddhist monks of different traditions, would go and beg for alms and food, and were supposed to accept whatever was given to them to avoid them being choosy about what they ate and having attachment to it. That meant that they were allowed to eat meat, but only if it was offered to them and the animal had not been specifically slaughtered for that purpose.

The 17th Karmapa told the story of how a three ‘tests’ of impurity rule developed when the Buddha was invited to a meal at which lots of meat had been prepared and served to him by a layperson, from the carcasses of animals that had died naturally. When the Jain students who saw this feast complained about it at the time, the Buddha afterwards gathered the sangha together and explained that monastics could only eat meat that had been offered to them, if it was not impure in the three ways. Basically, it was not impure if they were 100 hundred percent sure (had not seen, heard or had zero doubts) that the animal had been killed specifically for offering it to them.

Using citations from Chinese and Indian sources, some of which the Karmapa himself had personally translated from Chinese into Tibetan, the Karmapa gave a fascinating insight into how seriously the Buddha and the early Buddhist traditions saw the slaughter and eating of animals, and how monastics had to avoid being involved with the murder of and eating any animals, even those that had been offered to them by others.

Times have changed, and these days most monastics in Tibetan Buddhism don’t beg for food instead they buy, make and eat food within the monasteries. In 2007, in Bodh Gaya, the 17th Karmapa told Kagyu monastics and followers not to buy, cook or consume any meat within Kagyu centres. Thus, this latest teaching on the ancient sources of the strict rules on eating meat

offered for monastics, is a welcome and valuable lesson not only in history but also in Buddhist conduct and discipline, which we would all do well to ingest and follow too. Even though the rules were created specifically for monastics, they were also said to apply to Buddhist laypeople (with the five lay vows) who are serious about not deliberately harming animals and eating them. In summary, Buddha did say that monastics could eat meat, but only under very strict conditions in the context of monastics begging for alms, and only as long as the animal had not been killed specifically for them. It did not mean that monastics themselves should seek out and request meat, or that it was alright to eat slaughtered animals generally. The Buddha was not condoning killing and eating animals at all, as can be seen in his clear Mahayana teachings that expressly forbid it.

I have also added a final section regarding the discovery of the Buddha's alms bowl, by the 4th Century Chinese traveler, Faixian (who is referred to by the 17th Karmapa in this teaching), which is said to be currently housed in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Vinaya Rules relating to eating meat



17th Karmapa, Orgyen Trinley Dorje

“I thought it would be good to speak about the Vinaya and what it says about eating meat. Then, after that we don't need to debate it. In Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan, Pali there are Vinaya scriptures of various schools^[1]. If we look at them, we can see that our teacher, the Bhagavan

Buddha paid a lot of attention to food and conduct of his for students in the monastic community, and gave them a lot of advice.

Food is a daily necessity for any being, you cannot do without it. Since it is a necessity, there is no choice but to eat. Since one has to eat, at that time in India there were many different religions and philosophical schools and many of those religions considered practicing austerities to be extremely important. There are also severe austerities concerning food that would be extremely difficult for ordinary people to practice. Buddha himself, before he achieved awakening, practiced austerities for six years. As he had that experience, he knew that liberation cannot be achieved through austerities alone. After he stopped that, he taught his students, particularly monastics, that they should not have an extreme lifestyle such that their body cannot bear it. Nor should they fall into the extreme of a very lazy lifestyle. In particular, it is necessary to have food to continue living, so one has to eat. However, we should think about food as medicine and eat it at the right time and in moderation. If one eats it like a pig or dog, then that is not alright.”

Begging for alms – monastics have to accept whatever is offered to them



Monks with alms bowls with which they use to beg for food

“At that time, it was the tradition that Buddhist monastics should go out on alms rounds (begging for food) every day and eat what donors gave them. Other than that, they should not choose which food they like better or not; or eat food that is too elaborate; or store food and so on, that was not allowed. The meat that is pure in the three ways, I think came about for such situations and reasons. This is very clear. In general, we must understand that from ancient times until the present, India has always been the largest country where there is the biggest number of vegetarians. It is the country where the most people do not eat meat. In particular, within the Brahmin caste, whom at that time was considered the highest caste, most people did not eat meat. Some scholars say that in the past Brahmins did eat meat, but that later they did not. However, in the Vinaya texts, it seems the Brahmins did not eat meat. Thus, even when the monastics went on their alms round, there were probably very few people who offered them meat, as in that region there were so few people who eat meat. Similarly, when the monastics went on their alms round, they did not only go to high caste households for alms but also to lower caste households, to request food and ask for alms. If it was a lower caste family that ate meat, it is possible that they may have offered some to the monastics.

Basically, when you beg for alms one had to accept what is offered and if one did not take it, the donor might think they were being insulted and that they are not being given an opportunity to gather merit. That is how people might see it. So, the Bhagavan Buddha was different from others, and did not consider if costs are high or low, and thought it was suitable to meet people from all levels and walks of society. So, whether they were rich or not, if the monastics were offered something they had to accept it and not only take that which they wanted or liked. They were not supposed to have some individual choice about it.”

Forbidden meats even if offered

“Does this mean according to the Vinaya that monastics can eat any meat that is offered to them? No it does not. How do we know that? Well, in Tibet we have the *Vinayottaragrantha* (*‘bagzhung bla ma*) Vinaya texts of the Mūlasarvāstivāda [2] tradition. I don’t need to say all that it mentions but it says there are several types of meat that monastics should not eat at all. Such as the flesh of some types of birds, including owls, reptiles and amphibians such as toads, and the

meat of carnivores such as lions, tigers and bears. Not only were you not allowed to eat those forbidden meats, but also not consume the juices and fats of those inappropriate meats. Also, raw meat was not allowed and monastics were also not allowed to eat meat specifically killed for their sake.”

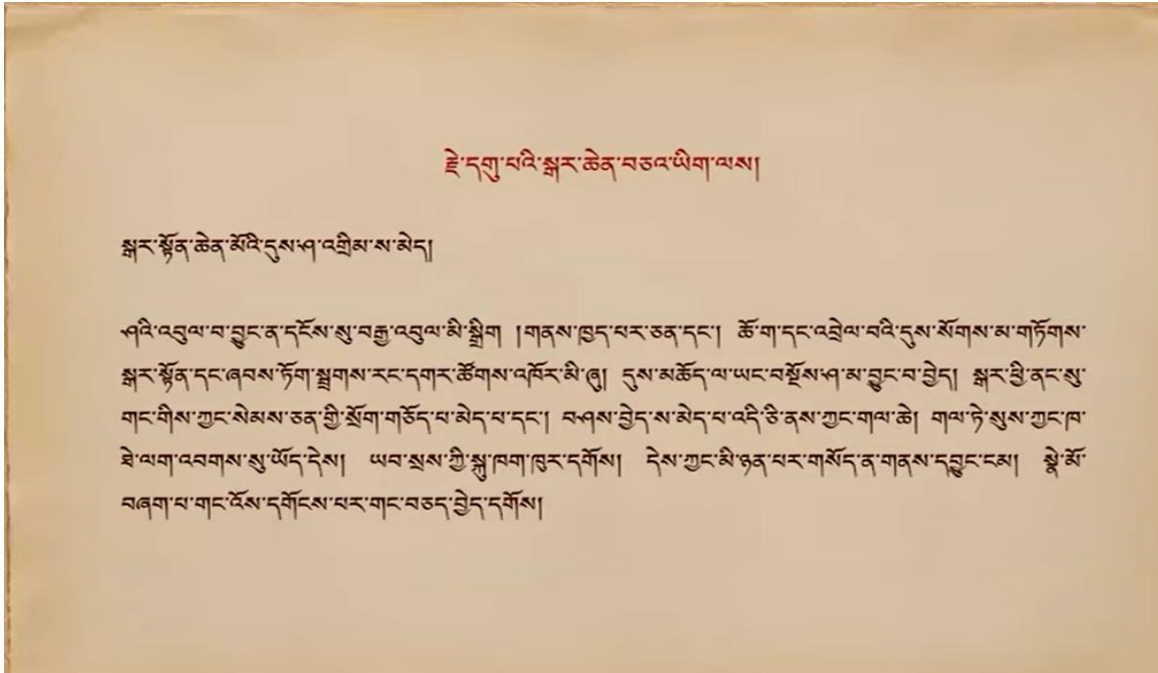
Three ‘tests’ of purity for offered meat

“Therefore, several kinds of meat were expressly forbidden from being eaten, whether they were pure in the three ways or not. If it was not a forbidden meat, then first one has to examine whether it is pure in the three ways. If it is pure, you can eat it, if it is not pure in any of the three ways, then you should not eat it. In the same way, if you eat any meat without caring, there is a danger that you eat impure meat. So you had to think about whether it is pure in those three ways or not.

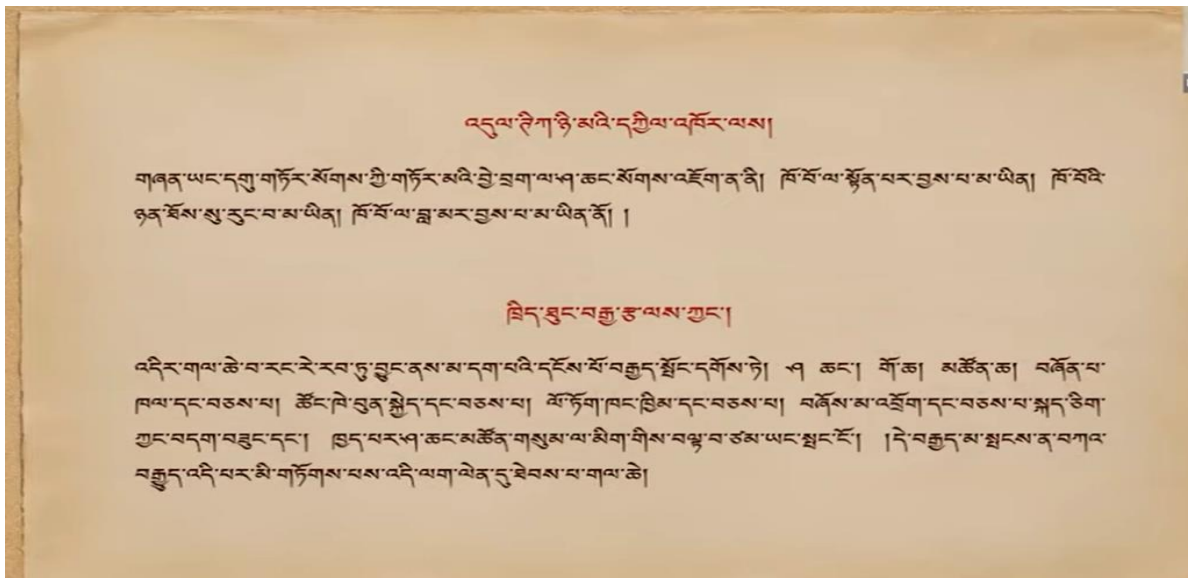
If one asks for whom were the three ‘tests’ of purity determined? For monastics, or for laypeople? It is primarily for monastics. However, there are different schools of Vinaya, which say even laypeople should not eat meat unless it is pure in the three ways. However, generally, in the Vinaya it is primarily a rule presented for monastics.

Karma Kagyu sources on eating meat – 8th and 9th Karmapas

In terms of sources for the three ‘tests’ of purity of meat, there are some quotes (see images below) from the 9th Karmapa’s rules for the Great Encampment and from the 8th Karmapa’s Vinaya Commentary: the *Orbit of the Sun* and his *Hundred Short Instructions*.



9th Karmapa text on the *Rules of the Great Encampment* relating to ‘offered’ meat which forbids meat being offered or animals being slaughtered, even for important occasions or events and the punishment that would happen if they disobeyed the rule.



8th Karmapa, Mikyo Dorje texts that refer to the use of meat.

The first strongly states that anyone who uses meat and alcohol during Gutor and so on, he is not their teacher, they are not his listener/student and is he is not their lama. The second text refers to

the need to give up the eight impure things once becoming a monastic, which includes meat, alcohol and weapons.

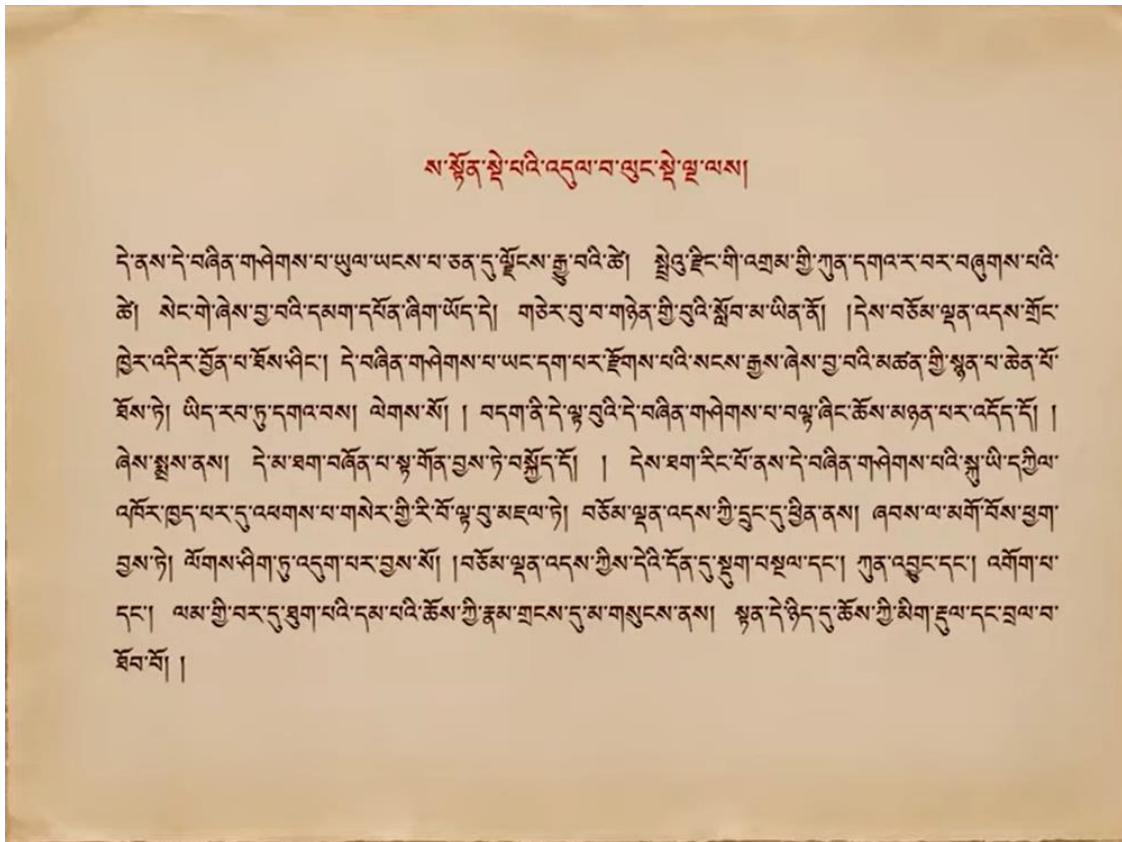
When Buddha was served a meal of meat – 4th Century text on origin of the three ‘tests’ of purity meat rule



4th Century Chinese monk, Faxian at the ruins of Ashoka palace

In terms of historical sources for the background of the rule of three ‘tests’ of purity of meat, in the 4th century there was a Chinese master called Faxian (法顯) [3]. He was one of the earliest masters who went to India and wrote about his travels going there [In *A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms* (Foguo Ji 佛國記)]. The main reason he went there was to find complete texts on the Vinaya. When Faxian returned from China to India, he brought texts on Vinaya from different schools and also a manuscript from Sri Lanka[4].

There was a master called Jiping, in the 5th Century, from a country called Kaspin, to the west of China, a Vinaya master called Buddhajiva (Sangye Tsho) from that region. He broke it down into Chinese and another master, Sherab Gyenwa then translated it[5]. This is *Five Sections of the Vinaya*[6] of the *Mahīśāsaka* [7] Vinaya. The manuscript was then brought from Sri Lanka[8]. It was translated by a person called Sherab Gyenma (?). I translated this into Tibetan from the Chinese, but I don't think it turned out well. Here is the image of some words from that Vinaya text, the *Five Sections on Vinaya of the Mahīśāsaka* (sa ston sde pa'i 'dul ba lung sde lnga) :



Five Sections on Vinaya of the Mahīśāsaka tradition.

Translated from Chinese to Tibetan by 17th Karmapa.

What it says is that ‘when the Tathagata Buddha was travelling to Vaishali, he went to a monastery where he taught the Dharma on the banks of Monkey Lake. This is a region of Vaishali, which is a place called Mahkattarada. It is like a river or a lake called the ‘Monkey

Pond'. At that time, there was a general called 'Lion'. This general is also mentioned in the Tibetan Buddhist Vinaya scriptures from the Sometimes this is translated as Captain Senge or General Senge, the General Lion who served the Sangha. At the later time he became very poor and had very little to eat. This is in our Vinaya Scripture. You will see these events described. He was a student of the Jain teacher, he had heard the Bhagavan had come to the town and wanted to see him and was delighted and wanted to hear the Dharma. So he immediately got his horses and carriage and went to see him. From far away he saw the Tathagata's body that was like a mountain of gold, prostrated and sat to one side. Then the Buddha taught many teachings on the Four Noble Truths. While sitting there, the General realized the true nature 'the immaculate eye of Dharma'. Then he got up and said 'I would like to invite the Buddha and Sangha to a meal'. The Buddha accepted and he was very happy. He went back to his house and told the people who often bought meat for him, to buy meat of animals that had naturally died and not slaughtered, regardless of cost. He spent the entire night making all these different and delicious meat dishes.

When it was ready, he went back to see the Buddha and said the food and seats are all ready, so please tell me when you will come. Then, the Buddha went with the sangha to his house. They sat down on the seats and the General served the sangha himself. He was very happy about this. At that point, there were some Jain students (Niganthas), who had heard that the General, who had been a former patron, had prepared and offered a great meal of meat to the Buddha, and they were peeved and envious about it. So, they went around waving their arms, moaning from road to road in the city. They declared to all that the General Lion had not only turned away from his previous teacher and broken his samaya, but also offered meat that had been killed and offered to the Buddha, who knew this. They shouted this loudly all over the streets.

When the Bikshus heard this they didn't dare to eat the meat. When the General saw and heard this, he told them that the meat was not from slaughtered animals, that they had all died naturally. Then the Buddha said alright then eat as you wish. They sat down in front of Buddha, who told the General it was good that he made the offering to the sangha and then left.



Buddha teaching monastic disciples

So, the Buddha had gone to the General Lion's house for the meal and the non-Buddhists protested about it. Afterwards, the Buddha then gathered the sangha because of what had happened and announced that "Monks, I allow you meat if it is not seen, heard or suspected to have been killed on purpose for a monk. However, you should not knowingly make use of meat killed on purpose for you." So he taught that, in future, when eating meat that is offered, there are three types that must not be eaten. Those that we have 1) seen, or 2) heard or have 3) suspicion/doubt were killed for your sake. If none of those three apply to the meat you are offered, then that is meat permissible to eat.

There is something different here in this text though, it says for the sake of Bhikshu but does not specifically say that novices and monks in training, or nuns and laypeople are not allowed to eat it. Basically, those for whom it was slaughtered are not allowed to eat it. This is the background history to this rule."

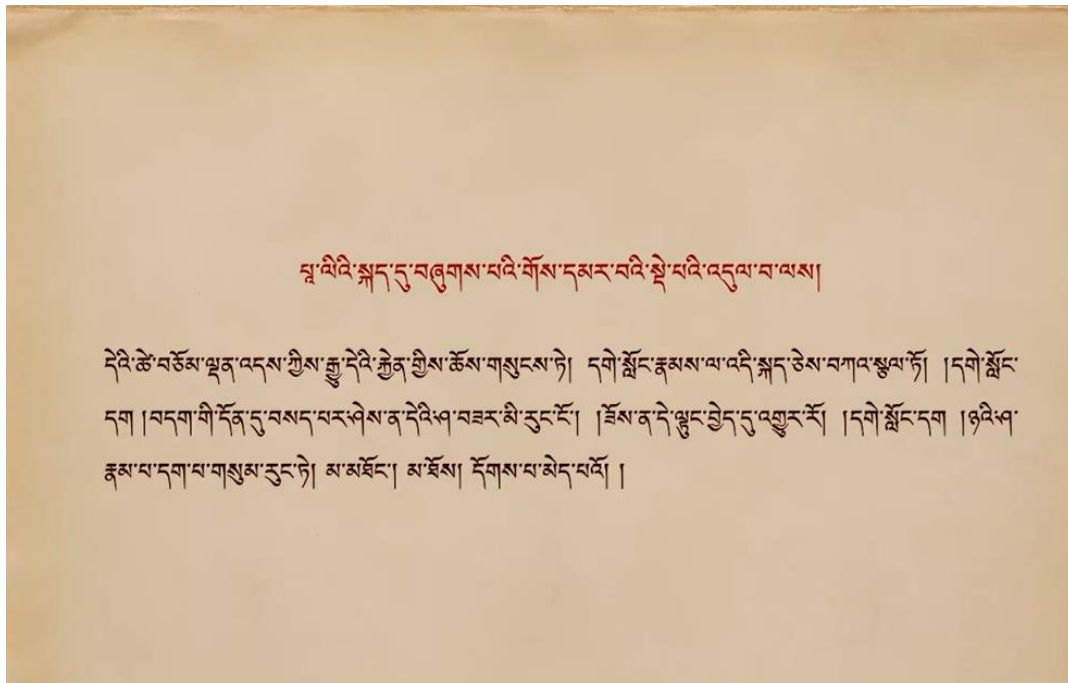
Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya

In the *Mūlasarvāstivāda* (根本說一切有部; ; *Gēnběn Shuō Yīqièyǒu Bù*) Vinaya text, the *The Great Treasury of Seeing All As Excellent (Samantapāsādikā)* (gos dmar ba'i sde ba'i 'dul ba thams cad legs par mthong ba'i mdzod chen po) used in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, there is a similar text which says that:

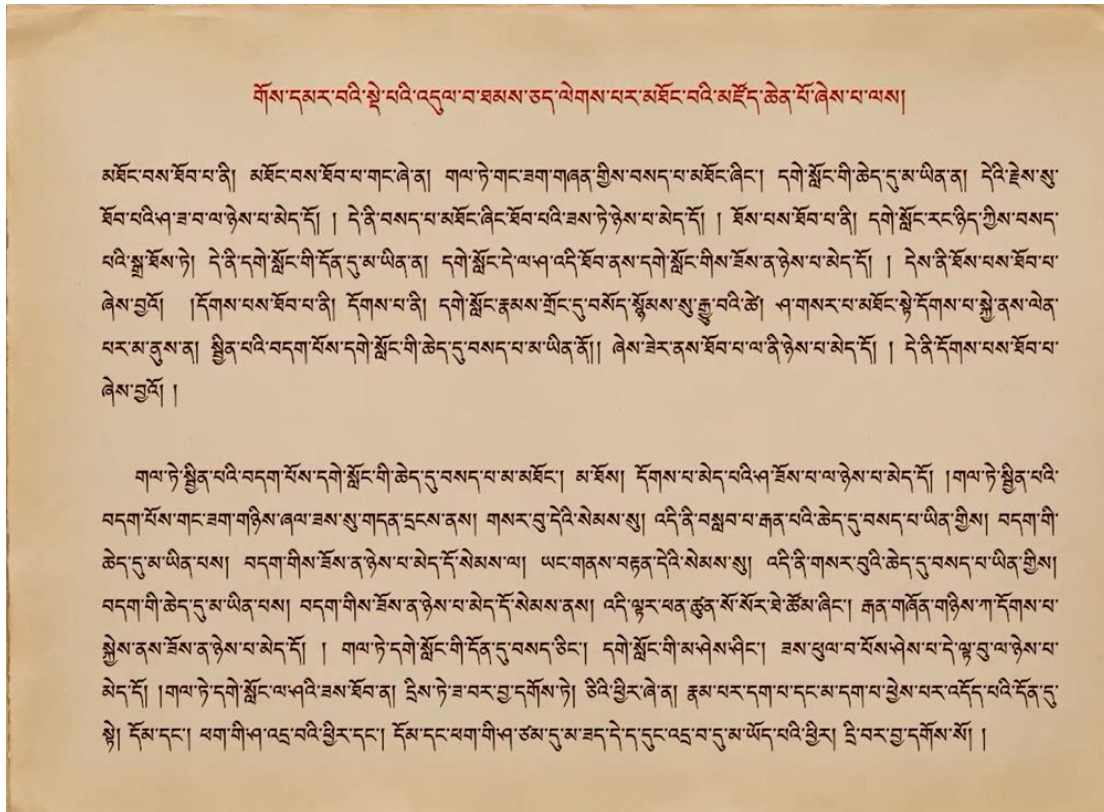
‘The Buddha was staying in a house near the Monkey Pond...’ and so on, but here it says ‘Captain’ Lion (you won’t find it with ‘General’ Lion). The words are slightly different but the meaning is the same. In any case, if you compare what is in the Tibetan scriptures with what is in the Chinese *Mahīśāsaka* Vinaya, the Chinese ones are clearer. In sum, in this text too, the Jain students protesting that General Lion had given meat to the Buddha and the sangha, is the event that led to the rules on the three ‘tests’ of impurity.

Tāmraśāṭṭiya Pali Vinaya

There is also a quotation from this text (see image below) from the Tāmraśāṭīya Vinaya school:



The Tāmraśāṭīya scriptures, were originally in Pali, I have translated them into Tibetan from Chinese translations. They offer a detailed description of the three-fold purity test. The Tāmraśāṭīya is one of the 18 original schools of Buddhism, developed mostly in Sri Lanka, and is considered to be part of the Theravada tradition. They also have a source in Pali *The Great Treasury of All Seen to Be Excellent (Samantapāsādikā)*:



The Great Treasury of All Seen to Be Excellent (Samantapāsādikā), a Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya text cited by 17th Karmapa

This text also says that if the animal was killed for the sake of a Bhikkhu monk, they are not allowed to eat it. The main point is in terms of ‘seeing’, it means if you see another individual slaughter the animal, but it is not for your sake, then later if you get offered the meat, it is not an offence to eat it because it was not killed for that monastic.

In terms of ‘hearing’, it means if the bhikkhu himself hears the sounds of the slaughter but it was not slaughtered for the bhikshu’s sake, if then later you get offered the meat, it is not an offence to eat it because you did not hear it was killed for that monastic.

In terms of ‘suspicion’, when bhikkhus go to town on their alms rounds and they see fresh meat they might think that it was killed for them. If the donor says it was not killed for them, then it is OK to eat it. Likewise, if they are offered meat to a senior or junior monk, then if the junior thinks it was killed for the senior one, so if I eat it, it is not an offence, and the senior monks

think like that and they have doubts about it. They don't really know who it was killed for. Or the butcher does not know if it was killed for them or not, then it is not an offence. However, then the monk has to ask questions, was this slaughtered for my sake?' If you do not ask, then you cannot know if it is or not. It is the same as if you don't know what the meat is. You have to ask 'Is it pig or bear meat?' You need to check it. It does not depend on the person getting it, but on the donor. The donor generally knows so one must ask the donor about the meat. That describes it very clearly."

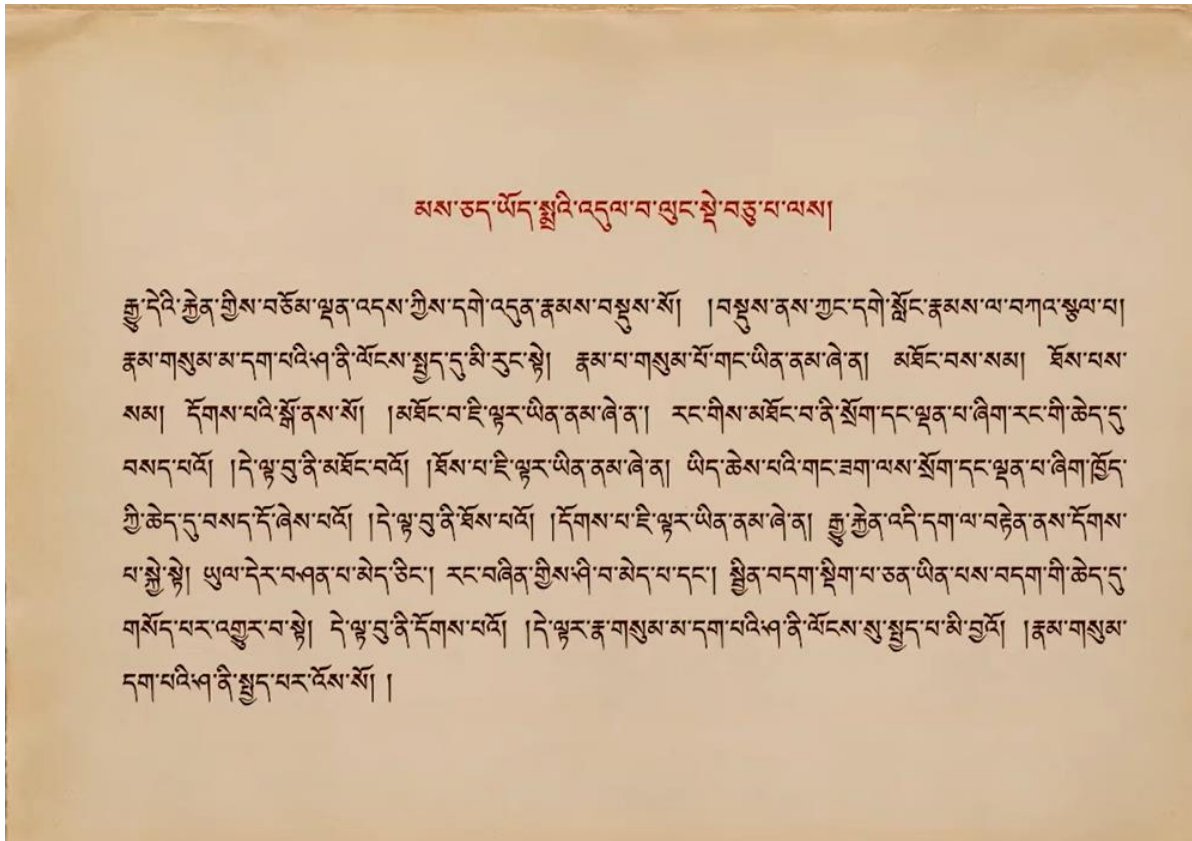
Sarvāstivāda Vinaya



Seated Buddha from the Sarvastivadin monastery of Tapa Shotor, 2nd century CE

Next, the 17th Karmapa gave a citation from the *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya* tradition (說一切有部; *Shuō Yīqièyǒu Bù*):

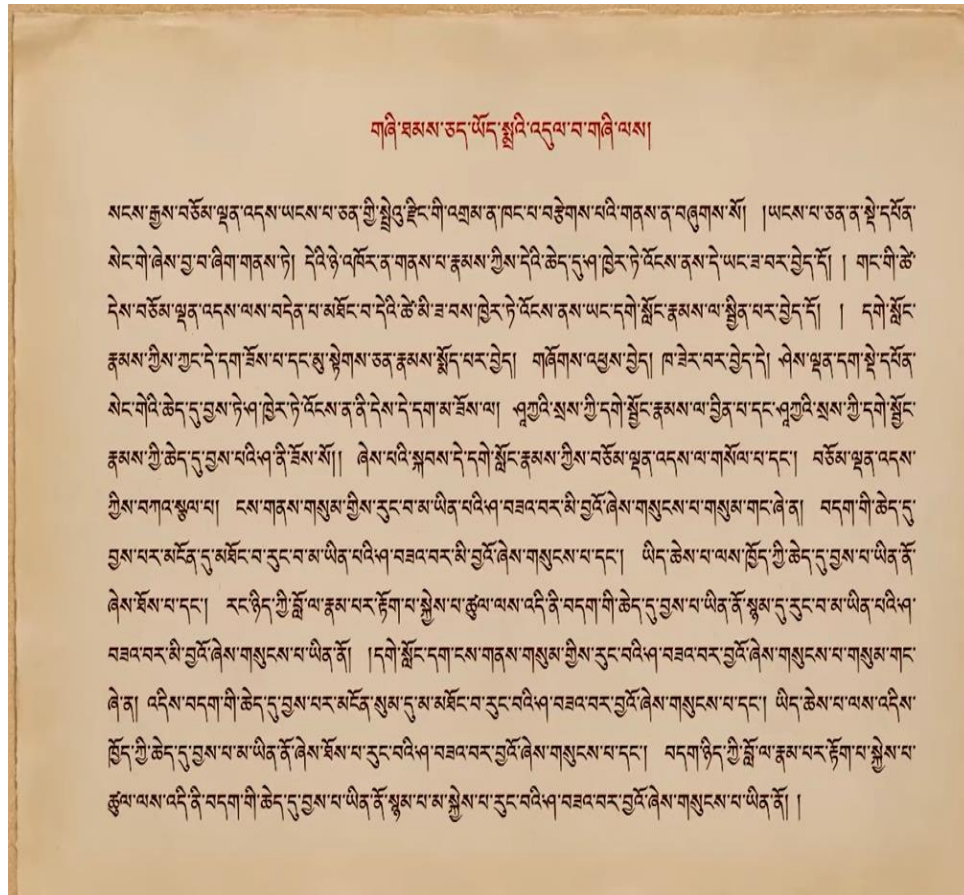
"I translated this section of text on the *Ten Sections of Vinaya in the Sarvāstivāda* tradition (mas cad yod smra'i 'dul ba lung sde bcu pa) but did not have time to proofread the spelling properly.



Ten Sections of Vinaya in the Sarvāstivāda tradition, cited by 17th Karmapa

If you look at this citation here it is similar to the previous quotation, which states when begging for food monastics have to ask and examine if the meat is pure in the three ways. If it was slaughtered for their purpose, or they have doubts about it, then it is impure meat and should not be eaten. What this means is that if the monks are not careful about eating meat, then there is a danger that many animals will be slaughtered for their sake, and that is why it is an offence.

Then there is another quotation from the *Ten Sections of the Vinaya: The Basis of All* [9] (gzhi thams cad yod smra'i 'dul ba lung sde bcu pa) from the Theravada Sarvāstivāda tradition [10] version.

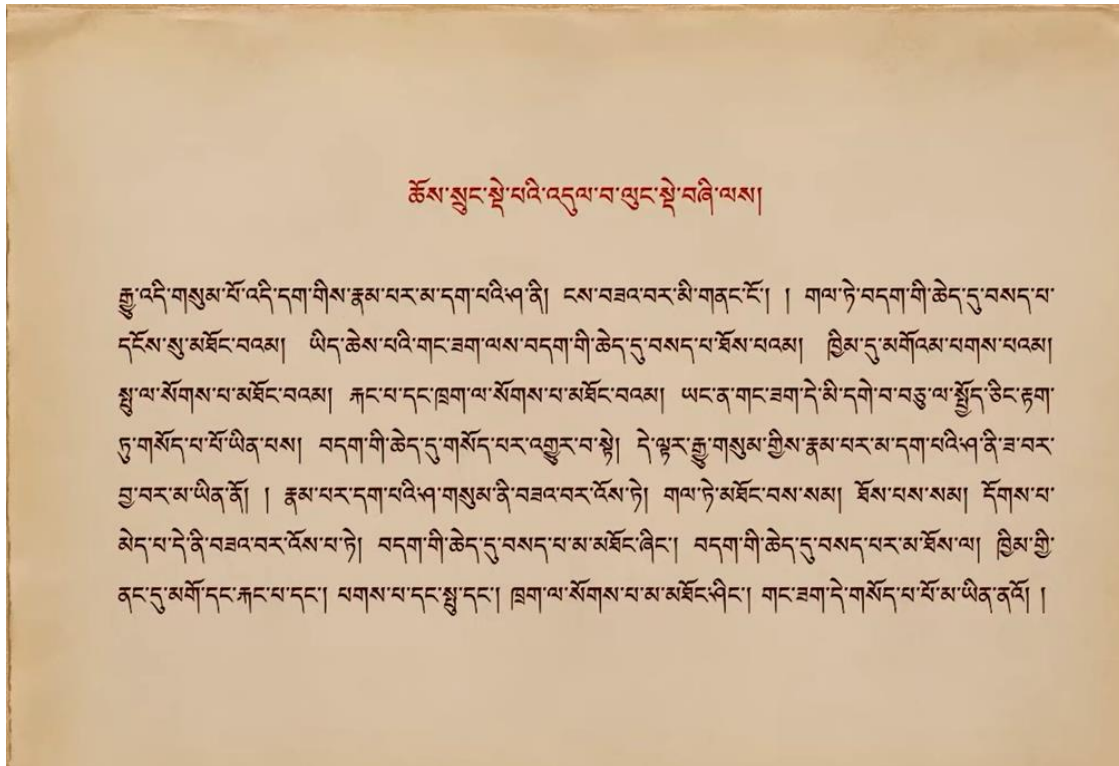


Ten Section of the Vinaya: The Basis of All (gzhi thams cad yod smra'i 'dul ba lung sde bcu pa)

This says that, the Bhagavan assembled the sangha and, as I mentioned before, there was the event with General Lion. So, the Buddha said you may not eat meat that is impure in the three ways. If you see, hear, or suspect that it was killed for you, that is impure. What does that mean? ‘Seeing’ means seeing it being killed with your own eyes. ‘Hearing’ means if a credible person says that the being was slaughtered for your sake then that type of meat should not be eaten. ‘Suspicion’ means you have some reason to doubt if it was slaughtered for you. For example, it may be there is no butcher in that region. So, the householder probably slaughtered it. Or there are no animals who died naturally in that region. Or maybe the householder also kills animals and may have killed it for your sake. So, if you have that suspicion, it is also impure.

Dharmaguptaka Vinaya

In Tibetan Buddhism, we practice the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition of Vinaya. In Chinese Buddhism, they mainly practice the Vinaya of Dharmaguptaka (法藏部; Fǎzàng bù) [11] tradition. Here is something I translated from a Chinese Dharmaguptaka text, *The Four Sections of Vinaya Scriptures, The section on Dharma Protectors* (chos srung sde pa'i 'dul ba lung sde bzhi): (see image):

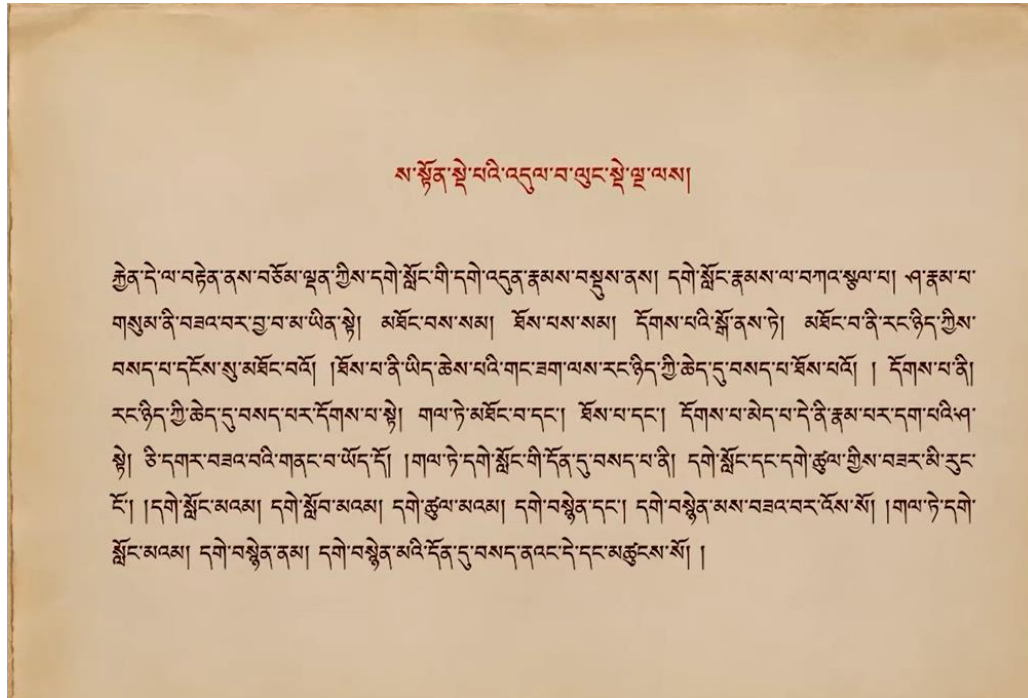


The Four Sections on the Vinaya (chos srung sde pa'i 'dul ba lung sde bzhi)

It says that ‘You are not allowed to eat meat that is impure because of these three reasons. If you see that and animal is slaughtered for your sake, or hear from a credible individual that it was killed for your sake. Seeing also means (uniquely in this text) if you go to that household and you see the animals’ head, hide or hair and so on, or if you see the feet and limbs, or blood, or if that individual or head of the household is someone who habitually commits the ten non-virtues or killing, then there is a danger it was killed for your sake. If you have that suspicion, then it is impure. If you do not have such seeing, hearing or doubts, then it may be eaten (if offered to you).”

Mahīśāsaka Vinaya

The *Five Sections of the Vinaya from the Mahīśāsaka* [12] school (sa ston sde pa'i 'dul ba lung lnga) is similar to what has been said before.

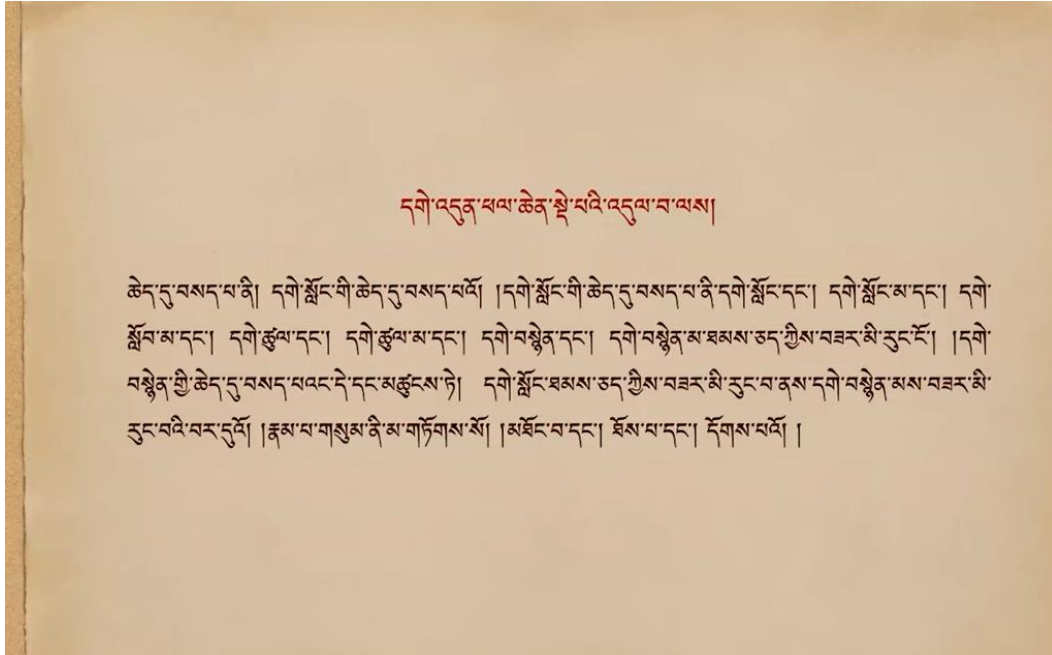


'Five Sections of the Vinaya from the Mahīśāsaka' school (sa ston sde pa'i 'dul ba lung lnga)

“Although here it is a little different too. It says if it is killed for a Bhikkhu (fully ordained monk) then neither fully ordained or novice (getsul) monks are allowed to eat it. However, female fully ordained and novice nuns, or male and female laypeople, are allowed to eat it. However, if it is killed for fully ordained or novice nuns, or male and female laypeople, it is as before [they are not allowed to eat it]. Basically, anyone for whose sake the animal is slaughtered is not allowed to eat the meat.”

Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya

The last citation is from the *Section on Ordinary Sangha Mahāsāṃghika* [13] Vinaya text (dge 'dun phal sde pa'i 'dul ba), which is probably only extant in Chinese.



As I mentioned previously, in the 4th Century, the Chinese monk Faixian went to India. In Central India, he got this text and brought it back to China. He translated it with the Indian master Buddhavijara. This text is very clearly saying that if an animal is slaughtered for a bhikshu, no-one, be they a monk or nun, fully ordained (gelong), novice (getsul) or layperson (genyen), male or female, may eat such meat if offered to them. Here, it says no monastic can eat it, regardless of what type of monastic it was killed for and it also applies to a layperson. If it was slaughtered for a layperson, it cannot then be eaten by monastic, if it is of the three impure types.

Summary of the Vinaya traditions

“I have given quotations from five texts of the different Vinaya schools, most of these I have translated from the Chinese. Among them, the first three are generally for the fully ordained and novice monastics. The last two citations also say that laypeople with the five lay precepts may not eat offered meat, if it is impure in the three ways.

Thus, in all the types of Vinaya, one can only eat meat that is offered, if it is not impure in those three ways. So, what does this really mean? Whether it is a chicken, pig, or ox, if you see it with your own eyes being killed and it is killed for your sake, it is impure. It is impure, if someone

else tells you it was slaughtered for you, and they have to be credible person. It is impure if you have a suspicion or doubt that it may have been slaughtered for you. Those are the three of being seen, heard, and suspicion.

This is not always so easy. The crux is this, in the *Sarvāstivāda* Vinaya and *Dharmaguptaka* Vinaya, where it says, if the householder is not a butcher, if the animal died naturally or the householder did not kill it for your sake. You need to know it is not killed for the monastic's sake. One must not buy meat that was killed for the sake of them, and then offer it to them. Also, it is necessary that you do not see all the animals' skin, hair and hide in their house, and they are not a butcher or someone who has given up killing, and you believe they would not do that.

Not only that, it is possible they may have asked a butcher to do it for them. So, they may not have killed it themselves, but have asked someone else to do it for them. Likewise, if we look at the *Ten Sections of Vinaya from the Sarvāstivāda*, at that time they had great rituals and gatherings and they would bring animals as offerings and slaughter the meat. The monks would not be allowed to go to such celebrations because if you were among the people there is a danger you would be included in that.

Likewise, in our *Great Encampment Rules* commentary by the 9th Karmapa, after an animal has been killed, if you skin, sell, cook the animal these are considered compatible with taking life. If we look at these two traditions in terms of the three-fold purity, they are narrower and stricter presentations.

If you talk about Chinese or Tibetan Buddhism, the main sources are from the *Sarvāstivāda* tradition. The way the eighteen Vinaya schools developed, and their different basis, one way is from the old texts from Sri Lanka. The other way is from the texts in the Chinese tradition. These are the main texts for the development of the eighteen different schools. Most scholars explain that the two original or root schools of the Vinaya are the *Theravada* and the *Mahāsāṃghika* school. From those, after they had some disagreements, different ones

branched off from them. The *Sarvāstivāda* tradition developed from the Theravada school. The Chinese tradition also comes from *Sarvāstivāda* and *Dharmaguptaka* Vinaya tradition. Their practice of the three-fold purity is stricter than other Vinaya schools.”

“It is childish to think Buddha said we can eat meat”

“Now, some might say that we are allowed to eat meat because the Buddha said we can if it is pure in the three ways. Such thinking is a very childish and simplistic way of looking at it. For example, you would not have been allowed to go to a household and say please give me a meat. If they give potatoes, you cannot say ‘I don’t want that, give me meat or chicken’. If you went to a poor house and did that, they might think ‘we can’t even get that for ourselves, so how can we give it to him’. So, you have to eat what you are given. What the three-fold test for purity means is that you cannot eat any type of meat, even if it is offered. It does not mean that you are allowed to eat any meat that you can get your hands on. This could be difficult at times. Even if one’s stomach was burning with hunger, one was still not allowed to eat impure meat. This is something we need to think about.

Tomorrow, I will speak about how meat is prohibited in the Mahayana. Regarding what is said about Devadatta’s austerities, those who say we should eat meat otherwise we are following Devadatta’s example. Also, in the Mahayana, there are prohibitions about eating meat in general, regardless of whether it pure in the three ways or not. There also many debates about this in Tibet and we also need to consider the numbers of animals that are slaughtered and the harm to the environment and health that comes from slaughtering huge numbers of animals for meat.”

The Buddha's alms bowl



Drawing of the Buddha's Alms Bowl by Alexander Cunningham

Although this was not mentioned by the 17th Karmapa, in an interesting article [here](#), there is a report and photos and drawings of the Buddha's original alms bowl, which is said to be preserved in a museum in Kabul and was drawn by Alexander Cunningham in the 19th Century. It says that:

“In the year 1880-81, the then Director General of the Archeological Society of India, Major General A. Cunningham, made a tour of the Archeological sites of the Indian state of Bihar. During course of his visit, Cunningham visited a place known as ‘Besarh’, which was immediately identified by him as the famous medieval town of India known as ‘Vaishali’. Cunningham did not find any artifacts in this village. He however came to know a very interesting story that Buddha's original alms bowl was preserved and celebrated for many centuries in this town. Cunningham collected more information about this story and wrote a note on this in his book.

Buddhist birth stories have an interesting anecdote about this story. According to the anecdote, the original alms bowl given to ‘Goutama’ by ‘Mahabramha’ vanished when ‘Goutama’ became Buddha. The four guardian deities, Indra, Yama, Varuna and Kubera,

each brought an alms-bowl made from emerald to Goutama, which he refused to accept. They then brought four alms-bowls made from stone of mango colour and each and every one of four begged to Goutama to accept their alms-bowl. Not to disappoint any of them, Buddha kept all the alms-bowls and after placing them one into another, miraculously transformed all the four bowls in a single bowl, upper rim of which appeared, as if four bowls have been placed one within the other.

In the days of Goutam Buddha, (5th century BC) part of Bihar or Magadha was ruled by Lichchhava Dynasty with Vaishali as their capital. According to Cunningham, Buddha had given his alms-bowl to the Licchavi king and people, when they took final leave of him at the old city on their northern frontier, which Cunningham identifies with Kesariya, 30 miles to the north-west of Vaisali. The famous Chinese travelers Fa- Xian (AD400) and Xuen Zang (AD520) have mentioned this story in their travelogues. Fa-Xian mentions that Buddha gave them (Lachchhvis) his alms-bowl as a memorial. Xuen Zang says that Buddha gave them his religious vase as a souvenir. In any case this alms-bowl was preserved and celebrated in Vaishali for next four to five centuries. In fact, Vaishali city had become famous for this alms-bowl.”



Photo of the Buddha's alms bowl in Kabul museum

“This bowl was near Kandahar city, till Mohamad Nasibulla continued as the president of Afghanistan and was moved to Kabul museum only in last decade. During Taliban rule. This museum was attacked by Taliban extremists couple of times. By good fortune, it has survived there and can be seen in the museum.”

Whether it was Buddha’s bowl or not, it is good to be reminded that the Buddha himself begged for alms and food with monastics and accepted whatever he was offered, clearly someone who practiced what he preached!

FURTHER READING

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- *Indian Disciplinary Rules and Their Early Chinese Adepts: A Buddhist Reality*, Ann Heirman, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 128, No. 2 (Apr. – Jun., 2008),

pp. 257-272 (16 pages). Published By: American Oriental Society. Indian Disciplinary Rules and Their Early Chinese Adepts: A Buddhist Reality on JSTOR

- Buddha's Original Alms-Bowl | Sand Prints (wordpress.com)

ENDNOTES

[1] “The Vinaya (Pali & Sanskrit) is the division of the Buddhist canon (Tripitaka) containing the rules and procedures that govern the Buddhist monastic community, or sangha. Three parallel Vinaya traditions remain in use by modern monastic communities: the Theravada (Sri Lanka & Southeast Asia), Mulasarvastivada (Tibetan Buddhism and the Himalayan region) and Dharmaguptaka (East Asian Buddhism). In addition to these Vinaya traditions, Vinaya texts of several extinct schools of Indian Buddhism are preserved in the Tibetan and East Asian canons, including those of the Kāśyapīya, the Mahāsāṃghika, the Mahīśāsaka, and the Sarvāstivāda.”

[2] “The Mūlasarvāstivāda (मूलसर्वास्तिवाद;根本說一切有部; ; Gēnběn Shuō Yīqièyǒu Bù) was one of the early Buddhist schools of India. The origins of the Mūlasarvāstivāda and their relationship to the Sarvāstivāda sect still remain largely unknown, although various theories exist. The continuity of the Mūlasarvāstivāda monastic order remains in Tibetan Buddhism, although until recently, only Mūlasarvāstivādin bhikṣus (monks) existed: the bhikṣuṇī order had never been introduced. which has 253 rules for the bhikṣus and 364 rules for bhikṣunis. In addition to these pratimokṣa rules, there are many supplementary ones.

The full nun's lineage of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya was never transmitted to Tibet, and traditionally, Tibetan “nuns” were śramaṇerīs or simply took eight or ten Precepts.” Although this has recently been looked into by the 17th Karmapa who is trying to introduce it into Tibetan Buddhism.

[3] “Faxian (337 CE – c. 422 CE) was a Chinese Buddhist monk and translator who traveled by foot from China to India, visiting sacred Buddhist sites in Central, South and Southeast Asia between 399–412 to acquire Buddhist texts. He described his journey in his travelogue, A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms (Foguo Ji 佛國記). Other transliterations of his name include Fa-Hien and Fa-hsien. Faxian wrote a book on his travels, filled with accounts of early Buddhism, and the geography and history of numerous countries along the Silk Road as they were, at the turn of the 5th century CE. He wrote about cities like Taxila, Pataliputra, Mathura, and Kannauj

in Middle India. He also wrote that inhabitants of Middle India also eat and dress like Chinese people. He declared Patliputra as a very prosperous city. He returned in 412 and settled in what is now Nanjing. In 414 he wrote (or dictated) *Foguoji* (A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms; also known as Faxian's Account). He spent the next decade, until his death, translating the Buddhist sutra he had brought with him from India.”

[4] It is known that Faxian obtained a Sanskrit copy of the Mahīśāsaka vinaya at Abhayagiri vihāra in Sri Lanka, c. 406 CE.

[5] The Mahīśāsaka Vinaya was then translated into Chinese in 434 CE by Buddhajiva and Zhu Daosheng. This translation of the Mahīśāsaka Vinaya remains extant in the Chinese Buddhist canon as Taishō Tripiṭaka 1421. Daosheng (Chinese: 道生; pinyin: Dàoshēng; Wade–Giles: Tao Sheng; ca. 360–434), or Zhu Daosheng (Chinese: 竺道生; Wade–Giles: Chu Tao-sheng), was an eminent Six Dynasties era Chinese Buddhist scholar. He is known for advocating the concepts of sudden enlightenment and the universality of the Buddha nature.

[6] The Five Part Vinaya (Pañcavargika-vinaya; 五分律; Wūfēnlǜ; Wu-fen-lü) (T. 1421), a Chinese translation of the Mahīśāsaka version.

[7] Mahīśāsaka (化地部; Huàdì Bù) is one of the early Buddhist schools according to some records. Its origins may go back to the dispute in the Second Buddhist council. The Dharmaguptaka sect is thought to have branched out from Mahīśāsaka sect toward the end of the 2nd or the beginning of the 1st century BCE.

[8] In the early 5th century CE, Dharmaguptaka Vinaya was translated into Chinese by the Dharmaguptaka monk Buddhayaśas (佛陀耶舍(C.406~413)) of Kashmir. For this translation, Buddhayaśas recited the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya entirely from memory, rather than reading it from a written manuscript. After its translation, the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya became the predominant vinaya in Chinese Buddhist monasticism. The Dharmaguptaka Vinaya, or monastic rules, are still followed today in China, Vietnam and Korea, and its lineage for the ordination of monks and nuns has survived uninterrupted to this day. The name of the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya in the East Asian tradition is the “Vinaya in Four Parts” (四分律; Sīfēn Lǜ), and the equivalent Sanskrit title would be Caturvargika Vinaya. Ordination under the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya only relates to monastic vows and lineage (Vinaya), and does not conflict with the actual Buddhist teachings that one follows (Dharma). Buddhayaśas, from Kaśmīra, was a teacher of Kumārajīva.

He stayed in Changan from 408 to 412 (415 according to Kamata). Buddhayaśas was invited to Changan by his former pupil in 408 (410 according to Kamata). Buddhayaśas was a prolific translator of Vinaya texts into Chinese. He translated the Four Part Vinaya (《四分律》), making it the second full Vinaya text available to the Chinese (Yifa 5).

[9] The Ten Recitation Vinaya (Sanskrit: Daśa-bhāṇavāra-vinaya; 十誦律; Shísònglǜ; Shisong lǜ) (T. 1435), a Chinese translation of the Sarvāstivāda version.

[10] The Sarvāstivāda (: 說一切有部; Shuō Yīqièyǒu Bù) was one of the early Buddhist schools established around the reign of Asoka (third century BCE). It was particularly known as an Abhidharma tradition, with a unique set of seven Abhidharma works.

[11] The Dharmaguptaka (法藏部; Fǎzàng bù) are one of the eighteen or twenty early Buddhist schools, depending on the source. They are said to have originated from another sect, the Mahīśāsakas toward the end of the 2nd or the beginning of the 1st century BCE.”. The Dharmaguptakas had a prominent role in early Central Asian and Chinese Buddhism, and their Prātimokṣa (monastic rules for bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇīs) are still in effect in East Asian countries to this day, including China, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan. They are one of three surviving Vinaya lineages, along with that of the Theravāda and the Mūlasarvāstivāda.

[12] “Mahīśāsaka (化地部; Huàdì Bù) is one of the early Buddhist schools according to some records. Its origins may go back to the dispute in the Second Buddhist council.

[13] “The Mahāsāṃghika (Sanskrit “of the Great Sangha”, 大眾部; Dàzhòng Bù) was one of the early Buddhist schools. Interest in the origins of the Mahāsāṃghika school lies in the fact that their Vinaya recension appears in several ways to represent an older redaction overall. Many scholars also look to the Mahāsāṃghika branch for the initial development of Mahayana Buddhism.” “Most sources place the origin of the Mahāsāṃghikas to the Second Buddhist council. Traditions regarding the Second Council are confusing and ambiguous, but it is agreed that the overall result was the first schism in the Sangha between the Sthavira nikāya and the Mahāsāṃghika nikāya, although it is not agreed upon by all what the cause of this split was.”

CHAPTER THREE: COMPASSION NOT COMPETITION: THE MAHAYANA VIEW ON EATING ANIMALS.



17th Karmapa, Orgyen Trinley Dorje – leading Tibetan Buddhist advocate on animal rights, vegetarianism, and the environment

On Day 17 of the ‘Good Deeds’ teachings (see [here](#)), the 17th Karmapa spoke about some famous disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha who were vegetarians. However, as their motivations were different, so was the final result of their actions.

The first disciple was a cousin of Buddha, Devadatta, who also tried to murder the Buddha, and insisted there should be strict vegetarianism, that forbids even offered meat that is pure in the three ways. As Devadatta’s motivation was competitive and egoistic pride (to humiliate the Buddha), not predominantly of compassion for the animals, it was not done for the right reasons and led to a schism in the sangha.

The Karmapa then explained that Devdadatta’s example does not mean we should eat meat. He described two of Buddha’s other disciples, Mahākāśyapa and Bakula. Even though both were vegetarians, Mahākāśyapa accepted all that was offered and ate it, whereas Bakula did not eat meat at all because he did not want to eat animals. How did Bakula do this without breaching the rule to accept all alms? He only went to beg alms in places where he clairvoyantly knew there

would be no meat offerings. That is why he was considered superior than Mahākāśyapa in terms of conduct.

After that, the 17th Karmapa spoke about how the Mahayana tradition and sutras expressly forbids eating meat, out of love and compassion for animals. In particular due to the Buddha-Nature sutras that teach all beings have the inherent Buddha Nature. Citing the Mahayana Sutras as the cause of the spread of vegetarianism in Buddhist China, due to the influence of Chinese monk Emperor Wu, the Karmapa concluded that the reason vegetarianism spread so widely in China and less so in Tibet, was due to the influence of such devout Buddhist rulers but also due to the climate and lack of plant vegetation in Tibet. However, despite the geographical limitations, there were several well-known Tibetan Buddhist masters who gave up meat in Tibet and in exile.

[The 17th Karmapa then went on to speak about famous Karma Kagyu examples of Buddhist masters who were vegetarians, such as Jetsun Milarepa and Jamgon Kongtrul the Great. Sharing a moving song composed by Milarepa after he witnessed a sheep butchered and dying miserably. The Karmapa then explained the extremely positive impact of vegan diets and the massive detrimental effects of breeding and consuming animals for their flesh and products on the environment, natural resources (such as water) and personal health.]

The Mahayana and Buddha-Nature View of Eating Meat

“Yesterday I spoke about offered meat that is permissible for a monastic to eat as long as it has not been killed deliberately and one is very certain of that. So, I wanted to continue that today. The Bhagavan Buddha taught his monastic students that their food should not be too luxurious or excessive and, to reduce attachment, they should beg for alms. Now when one goes for begging for alms, there is a danger that some donors will kill animals for their sake, and that is why the rule about the three ways in which it has to be pure were created. Because of that, it is important that monastics eat only food that is pure in the three ways and has not been killed for them.”

Devadatta's competitive jealousy and impure motivation for stricter vegetarian rules



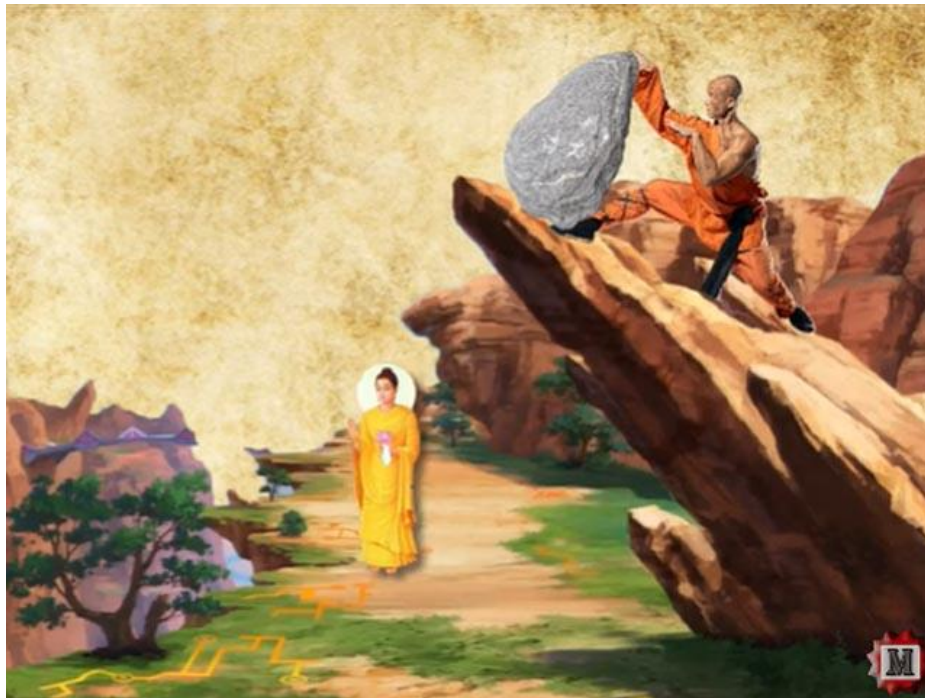
Devadatta depicted being swallowed up by the ground when dying

“At that time, some people said that the Buddha had allowed his students to eat meat. There was not much discussion about it being pure meat (in the three ways), they just reported that Buddha had permitted students to eat meat. As a result, those who were vegetarian non-Buddhists then criticized the Buddha, saying he had permitted his students to eat meat.

It was not just non-Buddhists who said this, but also among the Buddha's own students there were people who disputed the idea that students be permitted to eat offered meat, even if pure. Primarily, the person who disputed this was one of Buddha's students called Devadatta [Devadatta was by tradition a Buddhist monk, cousin, and brother-in-law of Gautama Siddhārtha]. He was the son of the Buddha's Uncle. There are other explanations in other sources. Devadatta first entered the monastic community , then he disagreed with the Buddha

and felt competitive towards him, so he separated off from him and established his own community.

Later Devadatta passed away, some say he was carried away in a flood, some say the ground split open and he was cast into the hells (see image above). In any case, he died and his followers continued to uphold his tradition. We know this because the Chinese monk (whom I mentioned before), Faxian (337 CE – c. 422 CE)^[i] went to India, as did Xuanzang and other Chinese pilgrims, and in their notes of their travels at that time, they wrote that the Devadatta tradition was still ongoing and that they followed only the three previous Buddhas of the fortunate aeon (Badrakalpa)^[ii], but not Shakyamuni Buddha [the fourth Buddha of that aeon]. The tradition continued up until the 8th century.



Devadatta is also reported to have tried to murder the Buddha several times

Thus, Devadatta was said to have caused a schism in the wheel of the sangha. This means the Buddha's students were split into factions. Devadatta also tried to spill blood of the sangha and felt that the Buddha should be murdered and did many things to try and kill him. These are extremely heinous acts, the worst acts, the same as killing your mother or father. Therefore,

according to the Hinayana scriptures, soon as Devadatta died, he was reborn in hell. However, according to the Mahayamtavika Sutra there was a prophecy that Devadatta would re-awaken to Buddhahood in the future. Also, some of the Mahayana sutras say that in order to show the Buddha's greatness, he took for the form of a competitor of the Buddha. Similarly, some say he was just an emanation to show beings they would be reborn in hell if they did such acts. Whether he was reborn in hell or not, is difficult for us to know. However, what Devadatta did was suggest Buddhists should keep five austerities and made this suggestion to Buddha.

The Five Austerities of Devadatta

The five austerities of Devadatta^[iii] included not eating any animal flesh at all (even when offered and pure) and it was suggested that this should be included as one of the five precepts. The Buddha did not accept that suggestion. For that reason, the Buddha's students split into two factions. A few stayed with Buddha but most of them followed Devadatta.

In terms of the five austerities, there are different ideas about them in the different Vinaya schools. They are described very clearly in the *Fifty Verses on the Vinaya* and other texts in the Tibetan tradition and in the great commentaries on the Vinaya, if you read these you will know so am not going to speak about them now.

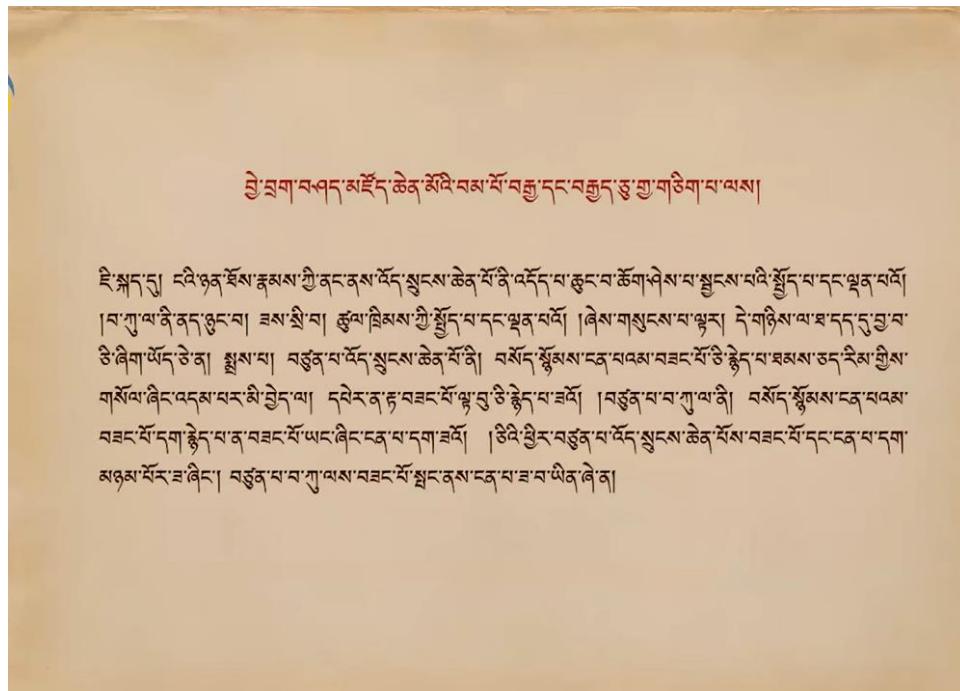
However, there are different ways they are listed, but they are all the same in including vegetarianism. So, from one perspective, during the time when the Buddha was on this planet, the Buddha said to his monastic followers that they should not eat meat all, and only accept meat offered to them that was pure in the three ways. Whereas, Devadatta said that meat should not be eaten at all in any context. Not only did he make that suggestion he made that rule for the people who went on to follow him.

As a result of this, some then said, like Bhaviveka, that if you are following the Hinayana vehicle you should eat meat, as by not doing so, there is a danger you are following Devadatta and his austerities. This was one of the main reasons that people said Buddha taught the three tests for

purity of meat. That is why some people nowadays argue that Buddhists should eat meat so they will not be like Devadatta.

The Buddha's vegetarian students, Mahākāśyapa and Bakula: different motivations and conduct

Here, we need to examine the *Great Exposition Treasury* text (the 181st volume) (see image below):



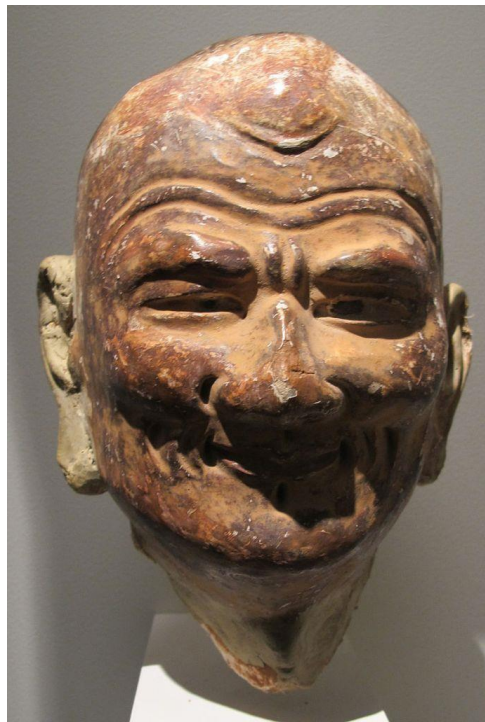
Great Exposition Treasury citation given by 17th Karmapa

This is one of the root texts of our main four philosophical tenet schools in Tibetan Buddhism.

We do not need to read it all. It says that among Buddha's disciples was Mahākāśyapa [iv] ('od srung chen po) who had the greatest contentment. However, the one who was most careful about food and conduct was Bakula[v]. The difference between these two disciples was that Mahākāśyapa would eat anything he was offered as alms, whether good or bad, he was not choosy about it.



Mahākāśyapa Painter: Unknown artist,
Kizil Caves, carbon dated to 422-529 CE.



Mahākāśyapa. Seventh-eighth century, Mogao Caves, China

Yet, when Bakula received ‘better’ or costlier foods, he would give up that food and eat the worst foods. So, what is the ‘worst’ here? The reason Bakula did not eat the better food was

because it would include meat, and if you include meat you have to cut beings' throats and it would be made from blood and flesh from animals. So out of compassion for animals Bakula did not eat the 'better' foods.



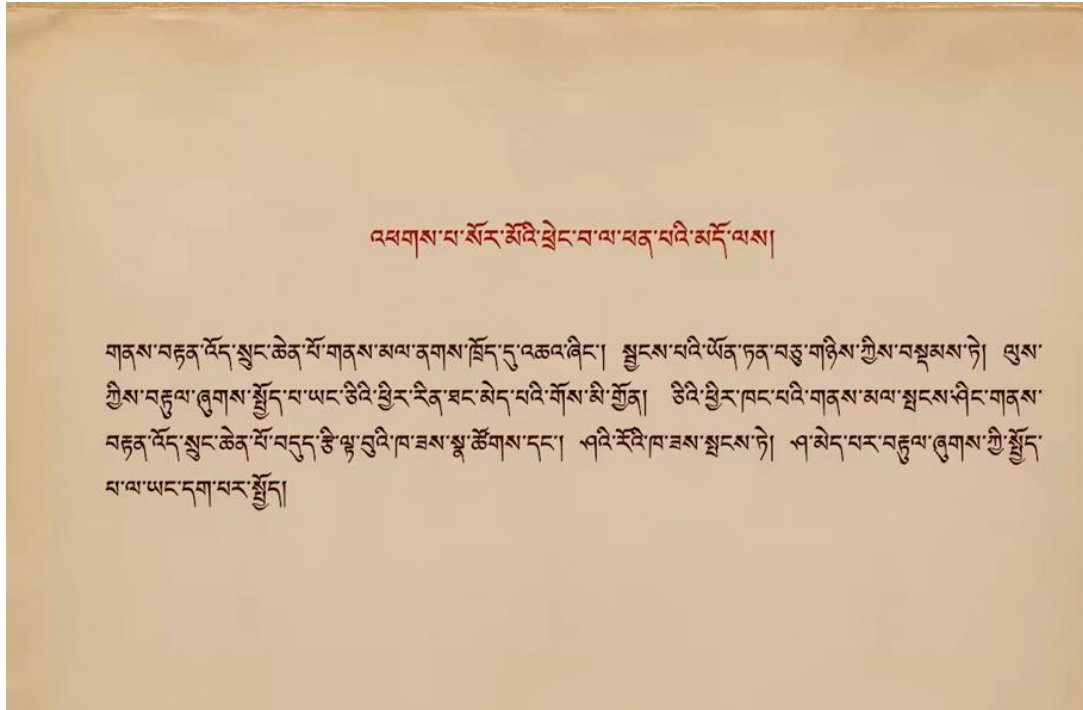
Buddha's disciple, the Arhat Bakula (Source HAR)

“Here, there is a question though. If Bakula gave up the better foods and only ate the worst, when he went on alms did he not accept the better foods? Or did he accept them and throw them out later? If he did not accept them, that would not have been alright because Buddha said you have to accept whatever is given. However, if you accepted the offered food and threw it away, that would have wasted food and that would not be permissible. At first Bakula did not accept the food, so he did not have the fault of not accepting. As he had clairvoyance (the divine eye), he would look to see where had the worst alms and go there and seek alms and avoid going to places where they were offering the more expensive or better alms. So that reason is why he never ate meat and ate the worst alms.



Arhat Bakula (Source HAR)

However, in the *Āṅgulimālīyasūtra* [vi] it says that Mahākāśyapa dwells within the twelve qualities of training and also had a pure vegetarian practice (see image below):



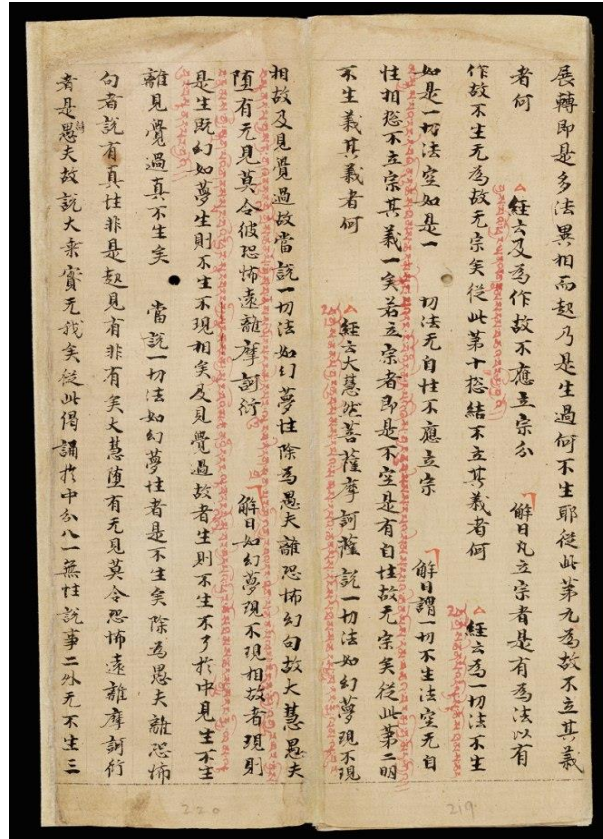
Aṅgulimālīyasūtra

When we look at these different quotes, we can understand that during the time of the Buddha, there were also many of his monastic students who were strict vegetarians. We can also use logic, and know that there would have been monastics from Brahmin families who would have been unable to eat meat. We can infer this. I do not think the Buddha made a rule that people who were uncomfortable eating meat, had to do so.

This rule regarding being permissible to eat meat that is pure, does not mean someone is like Devadatta if one does not eat meat, even if it is pure. The reason for that is because it is Devadatta's motivation that makes his vegetarianism negative. Because he was very competitive and had lots of pride and thought he was the same level as the Buddha. As he was so competitive towards him, he disputed the rules about meat and taught it should be stricter mainly out of competitiveness not compassion. Do we know it was not out of compassion for animals at all? It is difficult to say. However, it was primarily done out of competitiveness, thinking people will see my rules as better than Buddha's rules on eating meat. It was made in order to bring the

Buddha down and denigrate him. It was not really done out of pure motivation and compassion for animals.”

The ‘Buddha-Nature’ Sutras: all beings like our parents and their inherent Buddha Nature



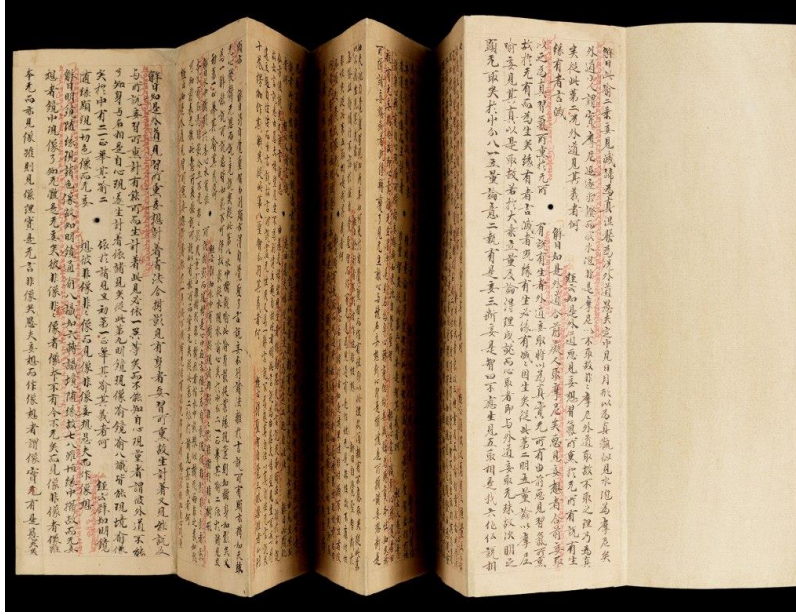
This concertina manuscript contains a Chinese commentary on the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, with the text of the sūtra also written in Tibetan between the lines of Chinese. (Source British Library: [A Chinese-Tibetan manuscript of the Lankavatara Sutra – The British Library \(bl.uk\)](https://www.bl.uk/collectors/manuscripts/urn:bl-ark:11119/zh1450001))

“Later, the Mahayana (Greater Vehicle) Dharma spread in India, and from that time the great Mahayana sutras spread, such as the Lankavatara Sutra, particularly the ‘Buddha-Nature’ sutras, which teach that even eating meat considered pure is inappropriate and not permissible. In that way, the teachings on giving up meat and being vegetarian became very strong and prevalent. In particular, in the ‘Tathagatagarbha (Buddha Nature)’ Sutras [vii], predominantly the sutras of the third wheel turning about the ultimate Buddha Nature, expressly forbid eating meat. There

are many reasons not to eat meat. If we think about one of those reasons from the Mahayana perspective, we are supposed to see all beings like our mother and father. If you really thought like that, then it would be very difficult to eat their flesh. Similarly, when we eat the flesh of other beings it would corrupt and stain our minds and they would become very hard and lacking compassion and love for beings. So, we should avoid it. In particular, those Sutras teach that all beings have Buddha Nature and so because of that one should not eat the flesh of a being who has Buddha Nature.

Here, I do not need to read the citations of the Buddha Nature Sutras [he recites some of them]. In Chinese, there is a Sutra called *The Omniscient Sage Not Eating Meat out of Compassion* which means that during the time of Maitreya, out of compassion one should not eat meat. So, there was a prophecy that if monastics ate meat, they would incur defeat and lose their vows. This is a prophecy the Buddha made.

This is important to consider. Most of the sutras prohibiting eating meat are in the third wheel of teachings. Most of those sutras teach Buddha Nature. It is better to say those which teach Buddha Nature than Empty-or Other nature (shentong) because if one uses that terminology, it becomes more of a dispute between empty-of other and empty-of-self (rangtong) proponents. There is less room for conflict if we say, those teaching Buddha Nature. They are basically the sutras that taught the Buddha Nature most clearly.



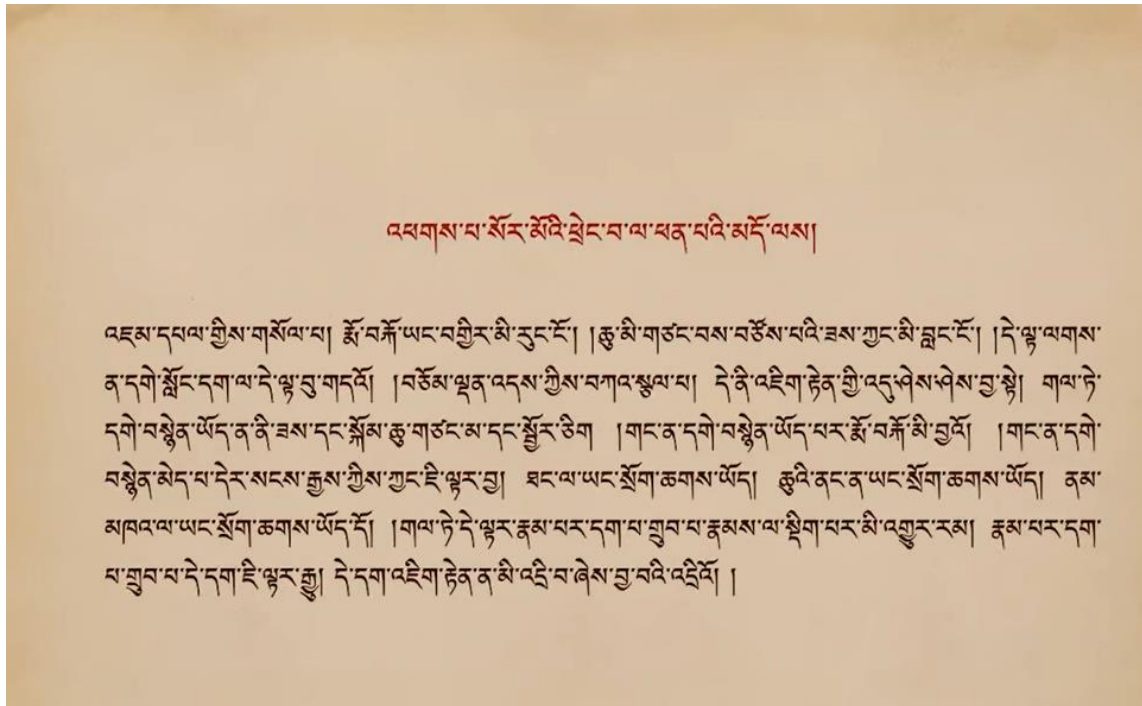
Chinese commentary on the Lankāvatāra Sūtra, with the text of the sūtra also written in Tibetan between the lines of Chinese. (Source British Library: [A Chinese-Tibetan manuscript of the Lankavatara Sutra – The British Library \(bl.uk\)](https://www.bl.uk/collectors/manuscripts/urn:bnf:01025-t1-001))

They are the treatises that teach the Buddha Nature most clearly, particularly the Uttaratantrashastra (Sublime Continuum). So, I will explain these reasons today. If we look at the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, it says that the rule allowing the meat in three ways, is made to prohibit meat in stages. It was not a rule allowing people to eat meat, but so that people gradually gave up meat and that they should not eat meat after the Buddha passed into nirvana. Whether or not there were people who practiced that or not, among the Hinayana schools today, if we recited this citation to them, that they should not eat meat after the Buddha passed into nirvana, they would not accept it because it is a Mahayana Sutra.

For this reason, Gendun Drub [1st Dalai Lama, 1391-1474] wrote in his Questions and Answers with a Tibetan King (who was very learned in astrology of Kālacakra and it was said that he was an emanation of the Shambhala Kalki King, Pema Karpo. This discussion records that in the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, the monastics would not be allowed to eat meat after Buddha passed into nirvana was primarily intended for Mahayana monastics.”

Pointless doubts regarding the growing of plant crops that unintentionally kills beings

In the Mahayana, eating flesh of any murdered animal is prohibited out of great compassion. Some people might think well if you grow some rice, this is also wrong because when you farm rice, it kills a lot of insects in order to do that. Thus, one would not be able to eat rice either. This is not a new doubt at all. It appears in the Buddha-Nature Sutras, such as the *Āṅgulimālīyasūtra*. Here is a quote about it (see picture):



Āṅgulimālīyasūtra citation by 17th Karmapa

“In summary, it says Manjushri asked the Buddha, if one is not supposed to harm any sentient beings then one should not be able to plough fields or use water to make food, because that will harm beings. Buddha replied ‘this is worldly way of thinking’. If you are a householder, farmers need to do these things to produce food and drink, and if they do not do that there will be no beings to attain enlightenment. There are beings all over the place, in the air, ground and so on and if we have such a narrow way of thinking we could not do anything at all in order not to take life.

So, we need to think about in the case of meat, we deliberately kill a sentient being. Whereas, when you plough fields, you are not deliberately killing them but accidentally doing so. It is not the intention or purpose of farming. There is a difference between deliberately killing a being and taking a being's life. Even walking back and forth we kill insects on the ground accidentally. Thus, we cannot think so narrowly about that. It is just raising a doubt but not something you could ever put into practice. Some doubts are like that, they just keep you stuck without any way of moving forward and progressing in a positive way.”

The spread of Chinese vegetarianism and Emperor Wu

In Mahayana, the emphasis is on love and compassion for sentient beings. In the Mahayana Sutras eating meat is forbidden and that is why it is said that most of the monastics in Mahayana countries became vegetarian and stopped eating meat. The clearest example is China. Vegetarianism as a practice began 500 years after Buddhism spread to China. Before that, monastics could practice it voluntarily but it was not obligatory to give up meat. After that, there was a great movement to abandon meat, and the person leading this movement was the Emperor Wu of Liang (梁武帝) (464–549), personal name Xiao Yan (蕭衍,)[viii]who ruled during the Southern Jang dynasty in the 6th Century, 502-549. He had great faith in Buddhism and a patron of it.

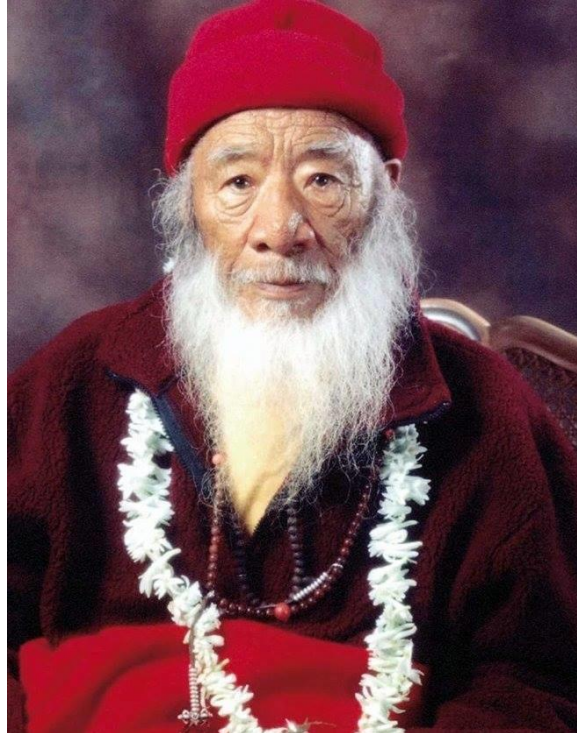


Emperor Wu

Emperor Wu himself became a monastic three times. He would go forth [leave the layperson's life] but then people said come back and be the emperor so he became a monastic a few times. He spent a lot of time reading the Buddhist scriptures, and when reading the Mahayana Sutras, he saw that it was important not to eat meat out of love and compassion. This had a big influence on him. At that time, in the ten temples to the ancestors, he prohibited making sacrifices of animals in those temples. He also made a rule that medicines could not be made out animal products. He also made strict national rules using the three Mahayana Sutras (?) for writing laws to give up meat. So, Emperor Wu clearly shared his views that monastics should not eat meat. He also invited 198 female and male monastics to come to the palace and discuss whether or not it was appropriate to eat meat in the Mahayana traditions or not[ix]. At that time, he had prepared over fifty questions with his great intelligence and asked the upholders of the Vinaya to give answers. He emphasized the Mahayana Sutras on love and compassion and that is why it spread so much in China and among the Chinese monastics. Some Tibetans say there was not such tradition of vegetarianism in Tibet, and this came from China. Similarly, they say in China giving up meat was an order of the Chinese emperor. Really it is not so simple. The Chinese emperor did not prohibit it because he was the Emperor, rather he used the Sutras themselves to encourage people to give up meat. We need to remember that.

Vegetarianism in Tibet

“Likewise in Tibet, vegetarianism is not new and has been practiced on the path. Due to the geography and high altitude and no technological advances it is very difficult to grow plant food. For that reason, the practice of eating meat that was pure in the three ways was the practice. Later, after many generations had passed, then the rules became relaxed and people started eating whatever meat they could get their hands on. In Tibet, monasteries would order beings to be slaughtered for meat. Some monasteries even had butchers within them. This was against the Vinaya and that was why many great beings gave up meat. Such as Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltsen, Ngorchon Kunga Zangpo, Shabgar Tsogdruk Rangdrol, Nyala Pema Dundul, Shardza Tashi Gyaltsen and more. In more recent times, there was Chatral Rinpoche, the 14th Dalai Lama and Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok in Tibet.



Chadral Rinpoche (1913-2015) Tibetan Buddhist master who strongly advocated animals rights and veganism. See here: [Kyabje Chatral Sangye Dorje Rinpoche \(Chadral Rinpoche\)| Vegetarianism, Buddhism & Saving Lives \(Tsethar\) \(shabkar.org\)](#)

In particular, in the 21st century, most of the Tibetan monasteries in Tibet and exile have stopped making and eating meat. There are also many monastics that have given it up, and vegetarian movements that encourage not eating meat or slaughtering animals. Some vegetarians disparage meat-eaters and vice versa. That is not good to speak badly about each other, as it causes conflicts and disputes. As I said before, in relation to Devadatta's movement to give up meat, the conduct was good but because of his negative motivation it was a negative action. Similarly, if our conduct is good but the motivation is not, then we can become like Devadatta. Thus, we need to be very careful about our motivation. There are many Tibetan scholars and meditation masters who advocated giving up meat and the faults of eating meat, despite the fact it was very difficult to be vegetarian in Tibet.”

[The 17th Karmapa then went on to speak about Karma Kagyu examples of Buddhist masters who were vegetarians, such as Milarepa and Jamgon Kongtrul the Great. Sharing a moving song

by Milarepa, after he witnessed a sheep butchered and dying miserably. The Karmapa also spoke about veganism and the massive detrimental effects on the environment, natural resources and personal health of animal livestock farming, fishing, and consuming animal products for food.]

FURTHER READING

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Online versions of the Lankāvatāra Sūtra, chapter 8 on eating meat: *On Meat-eating [Chapter 8]* (wisdomlib.org)

The Chapter on Meat-Eating from the Lankāvatāra Sutra — Śraddhāpa Translation (sraddhapa.com)

Emperor Wu of Liang: China’s First Monk Emperor (epochtimes.today)

“Pañcavārsika” Assemblies in Liang Wudi’s Buddhist Palace Chapel on JSTOR

ENDNOTES

[i] Faxian (337 CE – c. 422 CE) was a Chinese Buddhist monk and translator who traveled by foot from China to India, visiting sacred Buddhist sites in Central, South and Southeast Asia

between 399–412 to acquire Buddhist texts. He described his journey in his travelogue, *A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms* (Foguo Ji 佛國記). Other transliterations of his name include Fa-Hien and Fa-hsien. Faxian wrote a book on his travels, filled with accounts of early Buddhism, and the geography and history of numerous countries along the Silk Road as they were, at the turn of the 5th century CE. He wrote about cities like Taxila, Pataliputra, Mathura, and Kannauj in Middle India. He also wrote that inhabitants of Middle India also eat and dress like Chinese people. He declared Patliputra as a very prosperous city. He returned in 412 and settled in what is now Nanjing. In 414 he wrote (or dictated) *Foguoji* (*A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*; also known as *Faxian's Account*). He spent the next decade, until his death, translating the Buddhist sutra he had brought with him from India.” “Faxian and other Chinese pilgrims who travelled to India in the early centuries of the current era recorded the continued existence of “Gotamaka” buddhists, followers of Devadatta. Gotamaka are also referred to in Pali texts of the second and fifth centuries of the current era. The followers of Devadatta are recorded to have honored all the Buddhas previous to Śākyamuni (Gautama Buddha), but not Śākyamuni himself. According to Faxian, Xuanzang and Yijing's writings, some people practised in a similar way and with the same books as common Buddhists, but followed the similar tapas and performed rituals to the past three buddhas and not Śākyamuni. See further reading on this [Devadatta – Wikipedia](#).

[ii] According to tradition, there are seven buddhas that are a bridge between two kalpas: the vyūhakalpa (“glorious eon”) and the bhadrakalpa (“fortunate eon”). The first three buddhas in the list are the last buddhas of the vyūhakalpa, and the next four buddhas are the first buddhas of the bhadrakalpa:

1. Vipassī (the 998th Buddha of the vyuhakalpa)
2. Sikhī (the 999th Buddha of the vyuhakalpa)
3. Vessabhū (the 1000th and final Buddha of the vyuhakalpa)
4. Kakusandha (the first Buddha of the bhadrakalpa)
5. Koṇāgamana (the second Buddha of the bhadrakalpa)
6. Kassapa (the third Buddha of the bhadrakalpa)
7. Gautama (the fourth and present Buddha of the bhadrakalpa)

[iii] According to the Pāli Canon, Devadatta taught his sangha to adopt five tapas (literally, austerities) throughout their lives:

1. that monks should dwell all their lives in the forest,
2. that they should accept no invitations to meals, but live entirely on alms obtained by begging,
3. that they should wear only robes made of discarded rags and accept no robes from the laity,
4. that they should dwell at the foot of a tree and not under a roof,
5. that they should abstain completely from fish and flesh.

The Buddha's reply was that those who felt so inclined could follow these rules – except that of sleeping under a tree during the rainy season – but he refused to make the rules obligatory. They are among the 13 ascetic practices (dhutanga). [Devadatta – Wikipedia](#).

[iv] “Mahākāśyapa (महाकस्सप म्हाकस्सप mōhējiāshè) or Kāśyapa was one of the principal disciples of Gautama Buddha and convened and directed the First Buddhist council. He came from the kingdom of Magadha. According to the 2nd century Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra chapter 51, “when Mahākāśyapa saw the Buddha, he obtained the first fruit of the Path, then eight days later he became Arhat”.—Disgusted by lay life, Mahākāśyapa made himself an under-robe from pieces of cloth (paṭapilotokānaṃ saṃghāti). Like the Arhats in this world, he cut his hair and his beard, put on the yellow robe and went forth from home into homelessness. Having gone forth, half-way he saw the Blessed One seated near the Bahuputta-Cetiya, between Rājagṛha and Nālandā. Having seen him, he wanted to bow to him. Kāśyapa prostrated to the feet of the Blessed One and said: “The Blessed One is my teacher; I am his disciple” The Blessed One encouraged Kāśyapa and, having encouraged him, he arose from his seat and went away. Then Kāśyapa said: “For seven days while I was imperfect, I enjoyed the food offered by the land; on the eighth day, perfect knowledge was produced in me” .[Mahākāśyapa – Wikipedia](#)

[v] Bakula was one of the Sixteen Arhats. Born 70 years before the Buddha, Bakula was first an accomplished scholar and then lived as a wandering ascetic. One day, seated high on a mountain he saw the Buddha passing on the road below. Afraid he would not be able to catch up with him by following the road he jumped directly from the mountain-side, but was spared from injury by the power of the Buddha. He requested ordination and joined the Sangha. After studying and practicing he became an arhat.

[vi] *Āṅgulimālīyasūtra*, ‘phags pa sor mo’i phreng ba la phan pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po’i mdo 央掘魔羅經. “The Mahāyāna version of this sūtra, like the earlier Pali sutta of the same name, recounts a sorted tale of jealousy and revenge that spirals out of control, in which a once promising disciple is set on the path to become a vicious murderer in search of a thousand victims in order to create a garland strung with their severed fingers. That is, of course, until he encounters the final victim needed to complete his task, the Buddha.” See *Āṅgulimālīyasūtra – Buddha-Nature* (tsadra.org).

[vii] Key texts associated with this doctrine, written in India, are the:

- Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra (200-250 CE)
- Śrīmālādevī Siṃhanāda Sūtra (3rd century CE)
- Anunatva Apurnatva Nirdeśa
- Mahābherīhārakapariṣvarta[12] (Great Dharma Drum Sutra)
- Mahamegha Sūtra (Great Cloud Sutra)
- Āṅgulimālīya Sūtra
- Ratnagotravibhāga, a compendium of Tathāgatagarbha-thought
- Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra (c. 200 CE), very influential in Chinese Buddhism
- Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra (3rd century CE),
- Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana (6th century CE), a shastra (commentary) written in China

[viii] “Emperor Wu of Liang (464-549), also called Xiao Yan, was born at Nanlanling Zhoudouli during the Southern dynasties (420-589). Xiao Yan reigned for 48 years and died at the age of 86. He was one of the longest living emperors in Chinese history, second only to Qing Dynasty emperor, Qianlong (1711-1799). Emperor Wu of Liang believed in Taoism when he was young. When he ascended to the throne in the third year, he called two hundred thousand monks and laymen to hold a large scale religious assembly and said he would “Forgo Taoism and return to Buddhism.” He hoped to build a “Buddhist country,” wherein people would be directed from the practical focus on fame and fortune toward the pursuit of liberation from the world of red dust.

After Emperor Wu converted to Buddhism, he became a monk, fully four times, in the Tongtai Temple. In 527 when he lived in the temple, he used rough crocks, cups and bowls, read and recited Buddhist scriptures daily on hearing the morning bell, until sunset when the drum was beaten, and cleaned the temple with other monks. His reign, until its end, was one of the most stable and prosperous during the Southern Dynasties. He came from the same family that ruled Southern Qi (兰陵萧氏), but from a different branch.

Emperor Wu created universities and extending the Confucian civil service exams, demanding that sons of nobles (士族) study. He was well read himself and wrote poetry and patronized the arts. Although for governmental affairs he was Confucian in values, he embraced Buddhism as well. He himself was attracted to many Indian traditions. He banned the sacrifice of animals and was against execution. It was said that he received the Buddhist precepts during his reign, earning him the nickname The Bodhisattva Emperor. The Emperor is the namesake of the Emperor Liang Jeweled Repentance (梁皇寶懺), a widely read and major Buddhist text in China and Korea.”

[ix] See article about this: [“Pañcavārsika” Assemblies in Liang Wudi’s Buddhist Palace Chapel on JSTOR](#)

CHAPTER FOUR: JE MILAREPA'S SONG ON THE SUFFERING OF ANIMALS FOR THE EVIL 'CUSTOM' OF MEAT-EATING



In the second part of Day 17, the 17th Karmapa continued to teach on the suffering of animals caused by eating murdered animal flesh and animal produce. He gave two examples of vegetarian masters within the Kagyu tradition, Jetsun Milarepa and Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye.

“In particular, in the 21st century most of the Tibetan monasteries in Tibet and exile have stopped making and eating meat. There are also many monastics that have given it up and vegetarian movements that encourage not eating meat and not slaughtering animals. There are many Tibetan scholars and meditation masters who taught about giving up meat and the faults of eating eat, despite the fact it was very difficult to be vegetarian.”

First, the Karmapa gave the example of a moving song composed by Milarepa after he witnessed a sheep butchered and dying miserably, while at a marketplace with his student Rechungpa (*ras chung rdo rje grags pa*, 1083/4-1161). This song is listed as *The Departure of Rechungpa to U* (*re chung dbus bzhud kyi skor*) in an edition of *Milarepa's Liberation Story Songs* (TBRC W1KG4276:2:855, Shri Gautam Buddha Vihara, Swayambu, Nepal 2006).

In this section, is my own translation of the song (the English oral translation was not so clear and hurried). In particular, I have stayed much closer to the original Tibetan and poetic repetition of Milarepa by using the word ‘custom’ to translate the Tibetan word ‘lugs’, which means ‘tradition’ or ‘custom’. The word ‘custom’ also has the double meaning in English of being a ‘tradition’ but also ‘buying something’.

As I have written about here before, one of Milarepa’s main students was a Hunter (Khyira) whom Mila helped to abandon hunting animals. Milarepa also composed songs to animals he met, such as a dog and a deer who was being hunted. Milarepa’s *Songs to the Hunter* (which I newly translated with a foreword by the Newari living lineage holder of the ‘Hunter (Khyira Lineage’) can be read and downloaded for free [here](#).

The Karmapa then spoke extensively about veganism and the massive detrimental effects on the environment, natural resources and personal health of animal livestock farming, fishing and consuming animal products for food.

Milarepa’s sorrowful song to Rechungpa



Rechungpa (1083/4-1161)

Rechungpa was one of the main disciples of Jetsun Milarepa. In later biographies, he is mentioned as the second most important of Milarepa's students, the 'moon-like' disciple, with Gampopa being the foremost, and compared to the sun. Rechungpa, as his name suggests, was a cotton-clad yogin, unlike Gampopa who was a monk.

If we think about Kagyu forefathers among such masters, there are innumerable ones who have given up meat. For example, among the three Kagyu forefathers, Marpa, Milarepa and Gampopa, there is an example in Milarepa's *Collected Works* about when he was in Nyanang Belly Cave. At that time, he was staying with Rechungpa who often did not listen to him that much. It is often said that he was criticized three times by his guru for that. Milarepa told him out must give up the eight worldly dharmas. So Rechungpa thought 'well I have given up my homeland so how can I have any issues with the eight worldly Dharmas?' So Rechungpa told Milarepa that in the Dharma texts it says giving up the homeland is having done half the Dharma practice. Mila said these are just words, which is not actually that much benefit. This did not really benefit Rechungpa that much though.

On one occasion, they went to a town in Nynanang, where there were lots of butchers who sold meat there and they went there to beg for food. There were stacks of flesh, animal heads and blood all around in the market. There were many animals line up waiting to be slaughtered. In the centre of it all was a butcher. There are many different ways to slaughter sheep, one is suffocating them with a muzzle. Another way is to cut their stomach and reach inside and rip out their heart and arteries. The butcher made the cut and wound to do that, but before he could rip their heart out, the sheep suddenly escaped and was not tied down, so the sheep's intestines were all hanging out, dragging behind it while it was bleeding to death. The sheep was shaking and came to Milarepa and Rechungpa for protection and he died right in front of them. Then, Milarepa sobbed uncontrollably with great compassion and did prayers and transference of consciousness for the sheep onto the Bodhisattva path. Then he wrote a song about it. For me personally, this song was really helpful^[1].



Je Milarepa with students including the Hunter

“Ema! Samsaric sentient beings
Look up to the path of liberation!
Agh! Have compassion for evil beings
Ignorant in the fog of karma
Coming with a human body.

How devastatingly hateful this murdering beings ‘custom’!
How hugely regrettable this self-deception ‘custom’!
How heavy a weight this killing parents ‘custom’!
How much wrong action for this stacks of meat ‘custom’!
What to be done for this masses of blood ‘custom’!
However hungry, this eating meat ‘custom’!
What are these mental appearances of this delusional ‘ custom ’?!

Such major evil this zero compassion ‘ custom ’!
What dark ignorance and obscurations is this stupidity!
What to be done about this evil ‘farming’!
Whose desires for pleasure cause this torture ‘custom’?!
Whoever engages in these ‘customs’ how awful!
What depressing sadness is born from this ‘custom’ !
Such selfish, evil-doers of this busy ‘custom’!

Afterwards, they won’t remember a single instant!
When I see such people, I fear for them!
Remembering appearances of such evil actions, is disturbing!
Rechungpa, remember the divine Dharma!
When remembering, let the winds of sorrow blow in your heart.
When meditating, go to mountain retreats.
When contemplating, think about the guru’s kindness.
When escaping, flee the root of non-virtue.
When letting go, abandon of worldly activities.
When holding, keep your commitments to practice.
When understanding, bring your human life to Dharma.”
Rechungpa then generated huge sorrow and the wish to emerge from samsara.”
(Tibetan with phonetics is produced below).

The 17th Karmapa briefly explained the song:

“Mila is saying look at how we are fooling ourselves when we see parents being murdered and we don’t what to do about all this blood and stacks of flesh. We just eat this meat without any feeling at all. Rechungpa had many instructions before, which had not been so helpful but when he saw this sheep dying like that, he said to the guru that he would give up the eight worldly activities, give up wicked food and stay in the mountains. So, he asked Mila where they should go, who replied that they should go to

Lachi. Many people at the market gave them offerings, but as there were lots of butchers there it was mainly meat, so they didn't accept the offerings and went to Lachi.

Also, if we think about the forefathers of Dagpo Gampopa and his student Je Pagmo Drupa and his disciples and so on, many of the Kagyu forefathers practiced vegetarianism. These students were called the students of the 'vegetarian broth' teachings (sdog dkar). This broth (sdog) here is a stock that you put in the broth, which was vegetarian instead of meat-based stock.

If we think about the Karma Kamtsang tradition, as I said before, from 4th Karmapa onwards until 10th Karmapa, there were strict rules against eating meat in the Great Encampment. Also, in the supplications of Kagyu, vegetarians were considered highly and praised."

Tibetan text with phonetics

མེ་མ་འཁོར་བའི་སེམས་ཅན་རྣམས། །ཐར་བའི་ལམ་ལ་ཡར་སྐྱོམ་དང་། །

ema khorwé semchen nam/ tarpé lam la yar tö dang/

མ་ཙ་མ་ཐེག་ཅན་སྤྱིང་རེ་རྒྱུ། །ལས་རེ་རྒྱུངས་མེ་ལུས་གྱུ་ཡོང་བ་ལ། །

a tsa ma dikchen nying ré jé/ lé ré mong milü kyi yongwa la/

ཞེ་རེ་ཕངས་སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་གསོད་ལུགས་ལ། །ཁྱོད་རེ་ཆེ་རང་མགོའི་སྐྱོར་ལུགས་ལ། །

zhé ré pang semchen gyi sö luk la/ gyö ré ché rang gö kor luk la/

ཅུག་རེ་དྲག་པ་མའི་འཆེ་ལུགས་ལ། །ཇི་རྩར་བྱེད་ཐེག་ཤའི་བཅོགས་ལུགས་ལ། །

chuk ré drak pamé chi luk la/ jitar jé dik shé tsik luk la/

ཅི་རེ་བྱེད་ཁྲག་གིས་མང་ལུགས་ལ། །ཇི་ཙམ་སྐྱོམ་གསལ་ཤི་ཐེ་ལུགས་ལ། །

chi ré jé trak gi mang luk la/ ji tsam tog sha yi za luk la/

གང་ནས་བསམས་སྤང་བའི་འཁྲལ་ལུགས་ལ། །ཐེག་རེ་ཆེ་སྤྱིང་རེ་མེད་ལུགས་ལ། །

gangné sam nangwé trul luk la/ dik ré ché nyingjé mé luk la/

ཇི་ཙམ་སྐྱོབས་རྒྱུངས་བའི་གཏི་ཐུག་ལ། །ཅི་རེ་བྱེད་ཐེག་པའི་སོ་ནམ་ལ། །

ji tsam drib mongpé timuk la/ chi ré jé dikpé sonam la/

སུ་ཡིས་སྐྱོད་འདོད་པས་གདུང་ལུགས་ལ། །གང་གིས་བྱས་ལུས་ལུགས་གྱུ་དན་བ་ལ། །

su yi chö döpe dung luk la/ gang gi jé yul luk kyi ngenpa la/

ཅུག་རེ་དྲག་སྐྱོ་བའི་སྐྱེ་ལུགས་ལ། །ཅི་རེ་བྱེད་ཐེག་ཅན་གྱི་བེལ་ལུགས་ལ། །

chuk ré drak kyowé kyé luk la/ chi rang jé dikchen gyi drel luk la/

ཐུ་མ་སྐད་ཅིག་མེ་དན་པའི། །མི་འདི་འདྲ་མཐོང་ན་ང་རེ་འཇིགས། །

chima kechik mi drenpé/ mi dindra tong na nga ré jik/

ཕྱིག་ཕྱིད་ནམས་དྲན་ཞིང་སྤང་བ་འཁྱུགས། །རས་རྒྱུང་པ་ལྟ་ཚས་ཤིག་ཨེ་དྲན་ཨང་། །

dik cho di nam dren shying nangwa truk/ réchungpa lha chö shik é dren ang/

དྲན་ན་སྟོ་ཤས་ཀྱི་སྤྱིང་རྒྱུང་ཨང་། །སྟོམ་ན་རི་ཁོད་ཀྱི་གནས་སྤྱ་གཤེགས། །

dren na kyoshé kyî nying lung dang/ gom na ritrö kyî né su shek/

བསམ་ན་སྒྲ་མའི་བཀའ་དྲིན་སོམས། །འཛོམ་ན་ཕྱིག་སྟོད་ཙ་ནས་བོས། །

sam na lamé kadrin som/ drö na dik chö tsa né drö/

གཏོང་ན་འཛིག་རྟེན་གྱི་བྱ་བ་ཐོངས། །འཛིན་ན་རྒྱབ་པའི་དམ་བཅའ་བྱུངས། །

tong na jikten gyi jawa tong/ dzin na drubpé damcha zung/

ཁེས་ན་མི་ཚོ་ཚས་ལ་སྟོས།

khé na mitsé chö la kyol//

།ཞེས་གསུངས་པས་རས་རྒྱུང་པ་ཡང་སྟོ་ཤས་དང་ངས་འབྱུང་དྲག་པོ་གཏོང་ནས་སྟོས་ཏེ་སྤྱན་ཆབ་མང་པོ་བསེལ་ཞིང་།

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CHAPTER FIVE: UNBEARABLE GRIEF LIKE EATING THE FLESH OF ONE'S OWN CHILD



Meat being sold at Lithang market, Tibet

In the third part of Day 17 of the teachings, Gyalwang 17th Karmapa went on to give more examples of great Tibetan Buddhist masters from the Kagyu lineages who made strong statements about eating murdered animals.

He first explained why some practitioners were called ‘dokar’ “veggie broth practitioners and then gave two more specific examples of Kagyu vegetarians, 19th Century master Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye (1813-1899) and the Drugpa Kagyu master and ‘crazy yogi’, Drugpa Kunleg (1455-1529), who described how eating meat should be as distressing and painful as having to eat the flesh of one’s own child. That if one really sees animals with love and compassion one would weep with sadness while eating them.

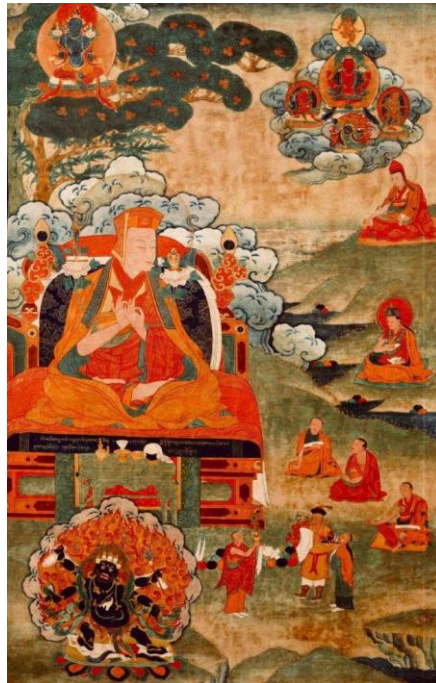
A note here on Tibetan terminology used by Karmapa to describe what in English we call ‘meat-eating’ and ‘vegetarianism’. The Karmapa uses the words ‘mar’ (red) for animal flesh and produce and ‘kar’ (white) for non-animal produce. Those who do not eat animal flesh are called

‘kar kyong’ (guardians of ‘white’). Similarly, those who did not eat meat in monasteries are called ‘dogkar’ ‘white broth’. The use of ‘white’ and ‘red’ here may refer to the fact that meat produce contains blood of animals. Here in English these have been translated as ‘vegetarian’ but it would be good to remember that not all languages use the same concepts. I have thus finished this section with the ways in which different languages describe vegetarianism and veganism.

“Also, if we think about the forefathers of Dagpo Gampopa and his student Je Pagmo Drupa and his disciples and so on, many of the Kagyu forefathers practiced vegetarianism. These students were called practitioners of the ‘vegetarian broth’ teachings (dokar: sdor dkar). This broth (sdor) is a stock that you put in the broth, which was vegetarian (kar) instead of meat-based stock.

If we think about the Karma Kamtsang tradition, as I said before, from 4th Karmapa onwards until 10th Karmapa, there were strict rules against eating meat in the Great Encampment. Also, in the supplications of Kagyu lineage, vegetarians were considered highly and praised.”

Jamgon Kongtrul's Vegetarian Aspiration

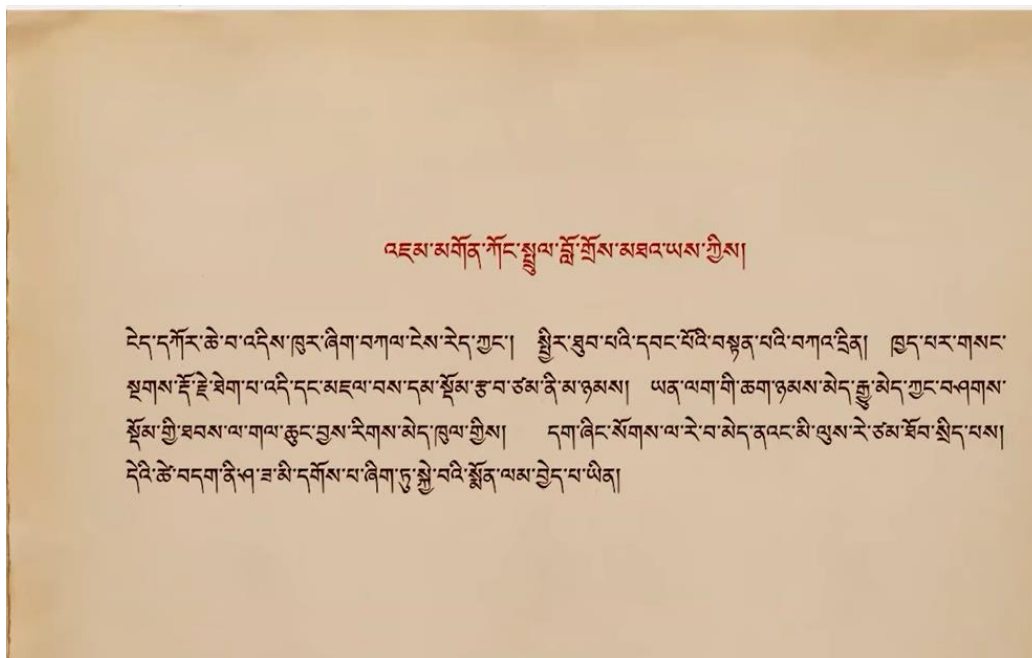


Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye (1813-1899)

The Karmapa then went on to share the example of Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye (1813-1899) one of the main Kagyu lamas of the 19th Century and founder of the Non-Sectarian movement in Tibet with Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo.

“Jamgon Kongtrul the Great, Lodrö Thaye, was born in the village of Rong-gyap in Derge, in east Tibet. The coming of this great master was prophesized by the Buddha Shakyamuni, in the Samadhiraja-sutra^[1], as well as by the Great Indian Vajra Master, Padmasambhava, in many of his termas (hidden teachings, for later revelation). He studied and mastered the teachings of the Buddha in general and tantrayana in specific including the Bön religion of Tibet. Among his many teachers, his primary teachers were the Fourteenth Karmapa, Situ Pema Nyinje Wangpo, the Great Khyentse, and many other masters of the time. He not only became one of the greatest masters and the lineage holder of Kagyu School but of all four Schools of Tibetan Buddhism as well as the Bön religion. Lodro Thaye co-founded the non-sectarian movement in Tibet with the Great Khyentse in 19th century. He became the teacher of the fifteenth Karmapa Khakhyap Dorje, giving him the full Kagyu teachings. He is renowned as an accomplished master, scholar, writer, poet, and artist, and authored and compiled more than 100 volumes of scriptures. Among these, the best known is the Five Treasuries, made up of The Treasury of Kagyu Mantras, Treasury of Key Instructions, Treasury of Precious Termas, Treasury of Vast Teachings, and the Treasury of Knowledge”^[2].

The 17th Karmapa shared a quotation by Jamgon Kongtrul on his own vegetarianism:



Jamgon Kongtrul citation on vegetarianism given by 17th Karmapa

“As devotees gave me many offerings, I definitely carry karmic debts. However, as I was able to encounter the kindness of the teachings of the Great Sage, in particular, the teachings of the Vajrayana Secret Mantra, my root vows and samaya have not degenerated. There is no way not to violate the secondary ones, so it is illogical to think the methods of confession are not important. Even though I do not have hope of being reborn in a pure realm, but it is possible I may be able to attain a mere human body. At that time, I hope that I will be re-born in a place where it is not necessary to eat meat. That is my aspiration.”

There are many other stories like that but I do not have time to describe them all. Jamgon Kongtrul made confessions again and again. Having no hopes to be born in a pure land, he nevertheless thought it possible to achieve a human body, and he made aspirations to be born in a place where it would not be necessary to eat meat. There are many such examples like this”

Butchers set up shop next to monasteries for monastic meat-eaters



Butcher shop, downtown Lhasa, Tibet

The Karmapa then went on to explain how butchers set up shops near monasteries specifically to get the custom of meat-eating monastics:

“During the Buddha’s time, monastics practiced as had been exactly taught in the Vinaya, as they had all the facilities needed to do this. However, these days, if we look at the monastic way

of life, it has changed greatly from how it was during the time of the Buddha. Other than in a few Theravada countries or countries of the Southern Transmission, in Tibetan Buddhism and the traditions of the Northern Transmission, the tradition of daily alms rounds ceased a long time ago.

Nowadays, meals are prepared in the monasteries for the Sangha. So, they need to keep many food provisions and buy and store them and if a monastery needed to buy a large amount of meat to feed the sangha, it would be difficult to say whether it was pure in the three ways or not. During the time of the Buddha, however, when the monastics went on alms round, they did not have control over what was offered them and they had to eat what they had been offered. When we buy food for the Sangha these days, it is under our control; we have the choice and that is our freedom to do so. For example, if you get the meat from a butchers for the monastic sangha, it would be difficult to say that was pure in the three ways.

In the past, if the monks and nuns in the monasteries ate meat, butchers' shops were opened near that monastery and then later, when the monastics stopped eating meat, the butchers shops would close quickly. We can actually see this. The reason the butchers shops were opened there was because the monastics of the monasteries were customers who ate meat. So, the butcher was thinking of doing it for the monastery to slaughter animals. So, it would be very suspicious that it was pure in the three ways. Then if they ask the butcher: 'was that slaughtered for our sake?' The butcher would say 'oh no, I did not kill that animal for you.'. Yet, inside they would be laughing because of course they know the only reason they are doing it is for the sake of the monastic customers in the nearby monasteries.

Thus, in terms of eating meat that is pure in the three ways, as the lifestyle of the monastics at the Buddha's time and now has hugely changed, we need to understand this."

17th Karmapa's decision to become vegetarian



17th Karmapa as a child in Tibet

“When I was a young child, I really liked meat. Once a year, we would get Chinese butchers to come and slaughter the animals. They were not Han Chinese but from the Sala region and they would come to do it. We used to feel it was better to have someone else doing the killing, even though our ordering it to be done was the same.

Yet, when I the animals being suffocated, as they did not die immediately sweat broke out all over their bodies and they were in such an intense state of suffering. It was so difficult seeing them in that state, and so I would cry and scream and jump up and down. So later, when they were going to butcher the animals, they took me away somewhere else, so I would not see it. I remember this, and other people told me this too.

Still after the sentient being was murdered, after the meat was cooked and served, I would eat it because it was placed in front of me and it was the local custom to do so; not only did I eat it I enjoyed it. At Tsurphu monastery, they had delicious dried meat. The governor of Lhasa would say ‘bring me the Tsurphu dried meat’ and nothing else. So, it was well-known for being tasty. Then, when I got to India, compared to Tibetan meat it did not seem to have much flavor. In Tibet, I never ate goat, yet in India when I was served goat meat a few times, it was not worthy of talking about.

However, my attitude completely changed when I saw a video in which animals were slaughtered. After that, it was no longer possible for me to eat meat, and I made the decision to give it up entirely and keep it distant from me. Some people say that my giving up meat was the influence of Master Hay Tao Fa Shi teacher (see image)[i]



17th Karmapa with Master Hay Tao Fa Shi

Whoever or whatever the influence was it does not really matter. Actually, the main reason, was when I saw that video, I realized that, in this lifetime, I have a body where I do not need to take the life of another sentient being in order to live. As there is no guarantee that in the next lifetime, that will be the case. Thus, I made the aspiration that I would never be born in a body where he needs to take the lives of other sentient beings. At that time, I developed that resolve and composed a verse which said:

Thinking well about Mother beings in infinite space and

Their unbearable, wretched torments

With a love for the minds of all beings

May I never separate them from their lives.

ནམ་མཁའི་མཐའ་གཏུགས་ཀྱི་བའི་མི་རྣམས་ཀྱི།

བཟོད་མེད་ཉམས་ཐག་ངང་ཚུལ་ལྟགས་བསམ་ནས།

འགྲོ་ཀུན་ཡིད་ལ་བཅངས་པའི་བརྩེ་བ་བདག།

ཆེ་རབས་ཀུན་ཏུ་འབྲེལ་བར་མ་འབྲུར་ཅིག།

So after abandoning meat (Karmapa calls it mar (red) I did not have a plan to encourage people to have a vegetarian diet but some people said it would be good to encourage people to do so. I thought it would be best for people to think for themselves on this, instead of ordering people to do it.

Then, at the Mahabodhi temple in Bodhgaya, on the last day of the Kagyu Monlam in 2007 [the Karmapa says 2004 but it was actually 2007], a Tibetan vegetarian group [Tibetan Volunteers for Animals] asked me to speak about the importance of a vegetarian diet and encourage people to give up meat. So I advised that the best option was to give up meat entirely for life. Alternatively, if that is not possible, the average option would be not to eat meat at least once a week, or the very least, once a month. I stressed the importance of showing some interest in giving up meat. I did not think that many people would be keen to follow my advice, yet after I had spoken on the subject and asked the attendees to raise their hands if they were willing to give up meat for the rest of their lives, half of the people raised their hands. [Here is a video of that teaching in Tibetan with Chinese subtitles, the translation in English is here]:

Afterwards, some people warned me that eating meat would damage my health, because he was from a country where the consumption of meat is widespread. Others argued that being the Karmapa, I could make an important connection with those living beings whose meat he consumed, and that I would be able to guide all those sentient beings to the pure land of Sukhavati or another good rebirth. People said that, but I felt that if I was not even able to guide myself to a pure realm, how could I possibly bring anybody else there? Forget about that. So I insisted on it and it has been at least ten years now that I have been eating an entirely vegetarian diet. For me, the biggest difference between eating meat versus a vegetarian diet, is that normally when one eats meat one never thinks about the sentient being that was killed and so on. However, now, when I see meat or others eating it, due to a vegetarian diet, my compassion and empathy for other sentient beings has grown and I have more concern for the suffering of sentient beings. Eating meat, people generally do not really think about how that affects those living beings whose flesh one is consuming.”

Drugpa Kunley's tale of the parents who were forced to eat their dead son's flesh



Drukpa Kunleg ('brug pa kun legs), (1455-1529)
also known as "The Crazy Yogi of the Drukpa" ('brug smyon)

"In Tibetan we have a saying: "The compassionate eat meat and those with samaya drink alcohol". What this means is that eating the meat of an animal and reciting the names and mantras of the buddhas as well as making aspirations for them, is something that would benefit those sentient beings. There are texts that describe how to recite mantras and the names of the Buddhas when eating meat. However, if we really think about it, there is Drukpa Kunley story in which he advises it is best not to eat meat, as it is extremely difficult to eat meat compassionately.

At one time, Drukpa Kunley went to a region in which there was a great drought, the crops did not grow and the people there had a difficult time because of a great famine. One family—father, mother and son— they all had a really difficult time as they had nothing to eat. The parents initially thought that as they were already quite old, if one of them were to die, their child could eat their flesh and be able to live a little longer. The son, however, could not bear the thought of either of his parents dying, so he decided it would be better to die himself so that his parents could eat his flesh. So, the son committed suicide for this purpose and left a note which said that he had died so that his parents would not die of hunger, and insisted that his parents eat his flesh, otherwise there would be no point in his death. Thus, the parents had no choice but to eat their son's flesh. While they were eating, as it was their son's flesh it was tasteless and so they wept continuously.

[This story reminds me of the quote from the Buddha in the Lankavatara Sutra:

“Mahamati, if I am endowed with the conception that all sentient beings are like my own child, how could I permit the sravakas to eat the flesh of my own child? How can we speak of I myself eating it? As for the statements, “I permitted it for the sravakas” and “I myself ate it,” Mahamati, they are without any basis.” (386.5-9).”]

“Making the connection to the Mahayana tradition, there are no sentient beings that have not been your kind mother. Thus, one has to think of all sentient beings as one's father and mother. If we think in this way, it becomes impossible to eat one's father's or mother's flesh, no matter how desperate the situation. Even if there were no other choice, how could there be any taste to it? Tears would flow down our cheeks. We say we are eating compassionately, but where is our compassion? We might initially recite a short prayer, but then immediately we start wolfing down the food, without any feeling or restraint.

On the other hand, it is not necessarily true to say that someone totally lacks compassion if they eat meat. There are in fact many great beings who ate meat and we certainly cannot say that they have zero compassion. However, even though we take those great beings as a model when it comes to eating meat, actions of great beings are different from ours. We cannot know what qualities of abandonment and realization such great beings have. If we are not at their level yet, we cannot take them as a guide for our own actions, it would just not work out the same way.

The saying “the compassionate eat meat” sounds good, but in fact it is not easy to feel genuine compassion and eat meat. You wouldn’t really do want to eat it unless you had no choice.”

Having compassion and kindness is more important than scripture, rules and logic

Giving up meat does not depend on Buddhist scriptures or logic. Even ordinary people who do not practice the Dharma become vegetarian; they do not need quotes from scriptures and can give up meat easily. For example, If you need to go to the bathroom, do you need any scriptures and logic to prove that you need to go to the bathroom? You don’t! If their body tells them they have to go, then they just go.

Similarly, if someone thinks well, they understand why they should practice vegetarianism. On *You Tube*, for example, we can find videos in which little children aged four or five when they understand that animals need to be killed in order to produce meat, they refuse to eat it. Even children know this and can think about it. [For an example of such a video see [here](#)].

“Many children do not realise that meat comes from killing animals as nowadays, the meat is wrapped up and sold in supermarkets. They don’t know if comes from killing a sentient beings. For example, if you brought a live chicken in front of a child and said you were going to kill it, they would say no, it’s really beautiful and nice and not want to kill it or eat it. So we don’t need quotations and logic. If we need to use scriptures and logic as proof to make us do something that ordinary beings can easily understand, it is actually a bit of a disgrace.

There are basically two types of people who do not eat meat: those who refrain from eating meat for their own sake, such as for their health or it being the tradition. Then there are those who give it up for the sake of other living beings and the environment.

In general, in the world today, Buddhism is often associated with loving-kindness, compassion, non-violence and peace. They don’t immediately think about emptiness and selflessness. Very few understand that. That is the impression most people have of Buddhism or Buddhists.

If, as a Buddhist, one eats a lot of meat and blood, then people may wonder what is going on. So for that reason, we need to know what others' opinions are and not only focus on our own thoughts and habits. We cannot totally disregard others' habits and thinking. Particularly, in the Mahayana tradition, the primary work is to liberate all beings from suffering and bring them to happiness which shows in the aspirations that we make, such as, "May all sentient beings be happy and have the causes of happiness and be free from suffering and the causes of suffering ..." If we say that and yet deliberately harm sentient beings for food, that is in contradiction with those aspirations and is something we really need to think about. To eat meat or not is nothing complicated or profound like the concept of emptiness or selflessness. Actually it is very easy for anybody to understand it.

If we look at the Vinaya, there are specific reasons given why meat should be pure in three ways and rice is not mentioned. A piece of meat and a cup of rice are very different situations. In terms of the Vinaya we need to consider it carefully. When it comes to eating meat, the way we usually think is that we ourselves have not killed the animal, nor do we think that we ordered someone else to kill that animal for our sake. So we think it is not wrong. However livestock farming has expanded massively. It is not about not doing evil actions ourselves, we also need to consider others who commit negative actions and think about what we can do to stop that and how we are encouraging that in others."

FURTHER READING

Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Taye – The Treasury of Lives: A Biographical Encyclopedia of Tibet, Inner Asia and the Himalayan Region

Drukpa Kunle – The Treasury of Lives: A Biographical Encyclopedia of Tibet, Inner Asia and the Himalayan Region

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Development as Entangled Knot: The Case of the Slaughter Renunciation Movement in Tibet, China on JSTOR

Yak politics: Tibetans’ vegetarian dilemma amid China meat boom | China | The Guardian
Saving yaks from slaughter criminalised by China | Free Tibet

The Longstanding Debate over Vegetarianism in Tibet – Lion’s Roar

Buddhism and Vegetarianism | Articles in PDF (shabkar.org)

ENDNOTES

[1] The birth of Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche was predicted in the Larkauatara Sutra where the Buddha said:

“A great being and liberator by the name of Lodro Thaye,
Shore of the five fields of knowledge,
Will come into existence.

He will be a Bodhisattva of ineffaceable qualities.”

[2] Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche compiled the most important teachings of the Buddha common to all the lineages of Tibetan Buddhism; these teachings are called “Five Great Treasures (mDzod-Inga).

[3] Venerable Master Hai Tao is the founder of Compassion for Life Organization. He first became a monk in 1993 after visiting Huei-Rhi Lecture Hall in Taipei; an experience in which he was touched by the Buddha statue's low brows and gracious eyes"; as well as the relaxing manner of the monks. After becoming a monk, Venerable Hai Tao actively preached Buddha's teachings. He not only established Taiwan Life TV airing shows 24 hours a day; but also created many diverse social organizations in order to help the worldly bodhisattvas(people) gradually achieving Bodhisattva-hood.

CHAPTER SIX: NGORCHEN KUNGA ZANGPO AND THE 'SINGLE-SITTING' VEGETARIAN PRACTICE



Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo, 15th Century Tibetan thangka (1382-1456)

(see [Teacher \(Lama\) – Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo \(Himalayan Art\)](#))

Hey! Followers of mine, give up the impure lifestyle of consuming meat, alcohol, and the like! Being the sole basis of all marvelous qualities, cherish the precious discipline more than your life!

—Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo, *An Epistle Benefitting Students*, tr. J. Heimbel (2019)

“How on earth do all these thousands of monks spend their time? How are they supported? And what good, if any, do they do?”

—Spencer Chapman [1938]

“At that time, I received the blessings of serving the great Khenpo of Tsok Gendun Gang, an individual who was emanated by the great siddhas from the tradition of the omniscient Jonang, who was certain to go from this life to the presence of the Dharma King in Shambhala, the guru precious buddha Chodrup Senge and the great being born

as Je Karma Tre, who transcends humans, a master of yoga, a god victorious over all directions whose mind has been ripened well by discipline and samadhi.”

—8th Karmapa on his taking full ordination from his teacher and Gedun Gang abbot, Chodrub Senge

Introduction

In his recent teachings on the strict vegetarianism of former Karmapas’ and Kagyu masters’, the 17th Karmapa (2021) referred to the food practice of *Dokar* (‘vegetarian broth’) of monastics who chose a vegetarian diet, in monasteries where meat was not explicitly forbidden. The Karmapa also spoke about other Tibetan Buddhist masters who were vegetarians, such as the Sakya Master, Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo (ngor chen kun dga’ bzang po, 1382-1456).

Dr. Joerg Heimbel, the world’s leading English-language scholar and expert on Ngorchen, has written in detail about this practice of ‘white’ vegetarianism (*dokar*), which was generally combined with the ‘single-sitting’ practice (*denchig*) of one meal sitting per day. This practice originated in the four influential monastic community lineages, Joden Tshogpa Zhi (Jo gdan tshogs pa bzhi), which arose from the Vinaya lineage of Indian master, Śākyaśrībhaddra and was often practiced by those who took monastic ordination from them (for more detail see below). Many biographies make mention of this food practice when masters took full monastic ordination.

One of these Joden Tshog lineages, the Gedun Gangpa (whose eighth abbot was the Jonang and Kālacakra master, Tselmin Sonam Zangpo) gave some of the Karmapas and Zhamarpas their full ordination vows. The 17th Karmapa also explained about how, since the time of the 3rd Karmapa up until the 8th Karmapa, they all received their full ordination vows from the Gedun Gang community. It is likely that the reason for the Karmapas’ strong vegetarian stance and practice came as a result of their connection with the lineage holders of this ‘Single-sitting’ vegetarian practice.

In this section, I compile and summarise some of Heimbel's fascinating work on Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo's vegetarianism, the origin of the 'single-sitting' vegetarian practice, the four Joden Tshogpa and the Gedun Gangpa's connection to the Karmapas and other Kagyu masters. In conclusion, it is clear that Tibetan Buddhist monastics in 13th to 16th Century Tibet engaged in very strict practices associated with food, aimed at reducing harm to animals and personal attachment to sensory pleasures. This is far removed from cooking and eating meals in 21st Century Tibetan Buddhist monastics. While it is important to have nutritious and fresh food, the Buddha explicitly encouraged monks to beg for alms for a reason: not to become too obsessed with, or attached to, food and other material and sensory pleasures. Monastic discipline and rules were there for a reason, monastics are given funding and support by those devotees outside the monastery. The question asked by Spencer Chapman [taken from Berthe Jansen's book ('The Monastic Rules' (2018))] is still a relevant one, perhaps even more so today. Monastic life is not supposed to be easy or comfortable per se, or the same as a layperson (wearing monastic robes). May this section be of benefit in encouraging lay-people (and monastics) to think carefully about food choices and diet, in a way which is kind to animals, the planet and themselves!

Ngorchen's strict vegetarianism and the 'Single-sitting' vegetarian practice



Ngorchen Zangpo

The Sakya master, Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo, founder of the Ngor monastery, took a strict stance against the consumption of meat and alcohol. In *Ngorchen Künga Sangpo on the Faults of Alcohol and Meat* (2019), Heimbel writes that Ngorchen gave up eating all meat from the age of twelve:

“To highlight Ngorchen’s tough stance against eating meat, Sangye Phuntsok (1649-1705), the twenty-fifth abbot of Ngor, included in his biography of Ngorchen a small section on how his protagonist gave up eating meat. According to his presentation, Ngorchen himself related that he could not remember having eaten offal or raw meat as a child. When he grew older, from his sixth year on, by merely seeing meat or blood or others eating it, especially monastics, he is said to have lost his appetite for many days. Thinking that it was not the proper lifestyle for monastics to eat meat, and that the Buddha himself had not allowed eating it, he became a vegetarian at age twelve. Later, the smell of meat alone could reportedly harm his well-being. Ngorchen also adhered to a specific form of asceticism, the so-called ascetic discipline of the single mat with white (i.e., vegetarian) ingredients, which should be considered another of his influences. This single-mat discipline demanded that food was not eaten more than once per day, whereby a whole day’s food was taken at a single sitting at noon. One finds this discipline included as the fifth among the Mahayana tradition of the “twelve qualities of a purified ascetic,” as listed in the Mahdvyutpatti.” (2019:82).

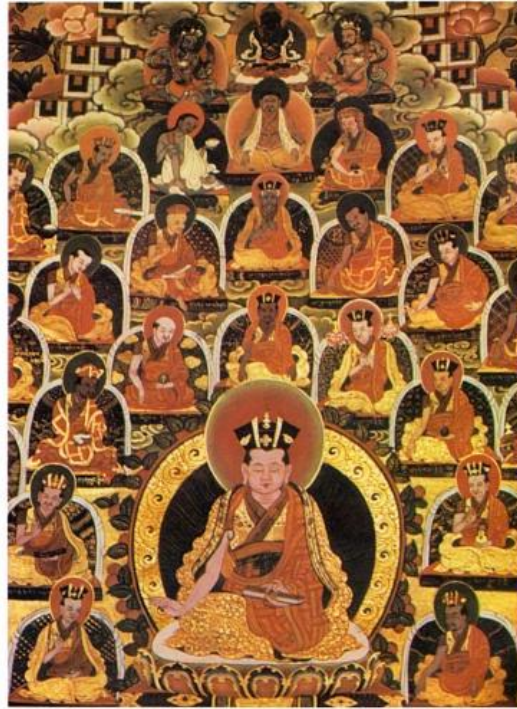
Ngorchen is known to have observed the ‘single-sitting’ practice since his monastic ordination at age eight, as well as what appears to have been the even stricter form of practice that was limited to a ‘white’ meatless diet^[1]. The degenerate conduct of monks in relation to diet, alcohol and women at his Sakya monastery was what led him to leave the monastery and, in early 1425, write his treatise against meat and alcohol, *An Epistle Benefitting Students* (2019:81). Heimbel explains that:

“Four years after the compilation of the *Epistle*, Ngorchen institutionally incorporated his personal condemnation of alcohol and meat into the monastic code he established at his

new monastic seat of Ngor. To counter those developments at Sakya, he enforced a strict monastic discipline, prohibiting the consumption of meat and alcohol, banning women from entering the monastic complex, and forbidding his monks to engage in any form of sectarian debates. Moreover, in the territories of his benefactors, he is said to have put restrictions on hunting wild animals and fishing, stopped meat and blood sacrifices, and banned meat and alcohol from monastic institutions.” (2019:82).

Sadly, this strict vegetarian practice that became very common with the Ngor tradition, also degenerated as time went on:

“Emulating Ngorchen’s example, many of his successors on the abbatial throne of Ngor are known to have either observed the ascetic discipline of the single mat in its vegetarian form or adhered to a meatless diet, though most took up this discipline at the time of their monastic ordination. Nevertheless, the biographies of some of those abbots make it very clear that a vegetarian diet was mandatory for the incumbent abbot of Ngor. At one point, however, Ngorchen’s prohibition of alcohol and meat was broken by members of the monastic community. Rinchen Migyur Gyaltsen (1717-1780), the thirty-seventh abbot of Ngor, complains that during his tenure there were only a few people left following Ngorchen’s instructions. On top of that, by then the use of tobacco had become a huge problem as well, and so the Ngor tradition were slowly losing the reputation they once enjoyed as adherents of a very strict monastic discipline.” (2019: 84).



8th Karmapa, Mikyo Dorje also a strict vegetarian who banned all meat consumption in or around the Kagyu Great Encampment, image from Rumtek Monastery, Sikkim

In his recent teachings, 17th Karmapa (2021) also referred to this tradition of ‘white broth’ (dorkar) in relation to the vegetarianism of the 4th to 10th Karmapas and eminent Kagyu masters staying in Kagyu monasteries, or the Kagyu Great Encampment. What is this practice and where did it originate from? Heimbel, who translates dor (sdor) as ‘ingredients’, explains the different meanings of the term (2019: 79: fn. 167):

“The Tibetan term denchik dokar (gdan gcig rdor/sdor dkar) or its variant dokar denchik (rdor/sdor dkar gdan gcig) is made of two elements: denchik designating the single-mat practice, and dokar referring to white (i.e., pure or virtuous and thus vegetarian) food. Another variant of dokar that is attested in biographical works is the term kardor (dkar rdor), which Dungkar Losang Trinle describes in his dictionary as a general term for a vegetarian diet by monastics and devout laypeople who make use of cheese, vegetables, and fruits as ingredients (rdor) for their foodstuffs, which are not mixed with other foodstuffs such as meat, fat, eggs, and bones; see Dungkar Losang Trinle, *Dung dkar*

tshig mdzod chen mo. There exists also a homophone variant of dor (spelled sdor), which Zhang explains as nutritious ingredients such as meat or fat that are added to soup or broth; (see Zhang, *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*, 1482). Similarly, Dobi Tsering Dorje et al. give as an example for the use of dor (sdor) the word thugdor (thug sdor), which is explained as meat or bones that are put into a soup; (see Dobi Tsering Dorje et al., *Deng rabs bod skad tshig mdzod*, 975). In addition to meat and fat, Padma Dorje et al. specify dor (sdor) also as vegetables and seasonings that can be added to soup or broth to make them nutritious and add flavor; (see Padma Dorje et al., *Bod kyi nyer mkho'i zas rigs tshig mdzod*)."



In the 17th Karmapa's explanation, the term dorkar refers to the latter, as stock that is put into a soup.

According to Heimbel, these practices were not obligatory in terms of the Vinaya:

"In the Indian Buddhist context, these were ascetic practices "the Buddha authorized monks to adopt voluntarily for the purpose of cultivating contentedness with little detachment, energy, and moderation. These austerities are not enjoined on monks and nuns by the Vinaya, but are rather optional practices that monastics were sanctioned to adopt for limited periods of time in order to foster sensory restraint." (2019:80).

Origin of the 'Single-Sitting' Vegetarian practice

Monastic ordination and the Vinaya lineage of Śākyaśrībhadrā



Monks in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition

According to recent research, the single-sitting practice, and also its stricter vegetarian form, were practiced by adherents of the Sakya school and of the Drigung branch of the Kagyu school, whereby the former inherited the practice most likely from the Vinaya tradition and related ordination lineages that the Kashmiri scholar and Kālacakra master, Śākyaśrībhadrā introduced during his ten-year stay in Tibet (1204-1214) and from the four monastic communities that were founded in his tradition. Ngorchon also received full monastic ordination at age eighteen (or nineteen) within this tradition, and prior to that, most likely also his monastic ordination at age eight. [2]

Heimbel (2013: 187) describes the monastic ordination lineages brought to Tibet:

“The Tibetan Buddhist tradition follows the Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya, and a total of three different monastic ordination lineages (sdom rgyun) of the prātimokṣa precepts (so

sor thar pa'i sdom pa) were brought to Tibet. There were three monastic ordination lineages in the Vinaya tradition brought to Tibet from India”.

These lineages are:

1. **Eastern Tibetan or Lower Region Vinaya** (Medul: smad 'dul), established by the eighth-century Indian Buddhist philosopher Śāntarakṣita[3] during the reign of Trisong Detsen (Khri strong lde btsan (r. 754–797)). It was later revived from eastern Tibet with the full monastic ordination of Lachen Gongpa Rabse (Bla chen dGongs pa rab gsal (832–915 or 892–975) and his disciples from central Tibet. The Nyingma and Gelug order preserve the Medul lineage as passed down from Lachen Gongpa Rabse.
2. **Western Tibetan or Upper Region Vinaya** (Todul: stod 'dul), introduced by the East Indian scholar Dharmapāla, who had visited Guge (Gu ge) in Ngari (mNga' ris) following the invitation of Lha Lama Yeshe O (lHa Bla ma Ye shes 'od (947–1019)). “At a certain point in time, the Todul lineage of Dharmapāla appears to have become extinct.”
3. **Middle Region Vinaya (Bardul: bar 'dul) as well as Khache Tradition** (kha che lugs) or paṇ chen sdom rgyun, reached Tibet at the beginning of the thirteenth century with the visit of the Kashmiri scholar Śākyaśrībhadrā (1127/40s–1225; hereafter Śākyaśrī), better known to Tibetans as Khache Panchen (Kha che Paṇ chen). The Bardul lineage transmitted from Śākyaśrī became the chief ordination lineage in the Karma Kagyu and Sakya traditions.

Most laypeople generally regard monastic ordination as when a layperson is given monastic vows and dons monastic robes. However, as Berthe Jansen remarks, in ‘*The Monastery Rules*’ (2018:7) defining who is a monastic, is not always so clear-cut and generally means someone with full or novice ordination vows:

“There does not appear to be a consensus on the definition of the term “monk” in the context of Buddhist Studies. Silk, while acknowledging that the monastery would have been populated with various kinds of Buddhists, appears to translate the word “monk” only for the term bhikṣu (Gelong: dge slong). Similarly, Clarke also excludes “novices” (S. śrāmaṇera, dge tshul) from the classification of monks. Were we to follow such an

“exclusive” definition of the term “monk” we probably would not be able to classify the majority of Tibetans living in monasteries, today and in pre-modern Tibet, as monks.... the word “monk” covers a broad range of Sanskrit and Tibetan terms. In the genre of Tibetan literature under consideration here, we come across several terms referring to (male) inhabitants of a monastery, such as ban de, Drapa (grwa pa), Tsunpa (btsun pa (S. bhadanta), Lama (bla ma), and Gedunpa (dge ’dun pa). This overarching group of people who have “renounced” lay life or “have gone forth” (Rabjung: rab tu byung ba, S. pravrajyā) is most regularly subdivided into Gelong (dge slong) and Getshul (dge tshul). Sometimes, when an author wants to include everyone in the monastery, the genyen (dge bsnyen) (S. upāsaka) are also mentioned, but in this context the genyen (dge bsnyen) refer not simply to lay practitioners but to “aspiring monks.” These are usually young boys who have not yet been allowed to take Getsul (dge tshul) vows or are not (yet) able to.”

Śākyaśrībhadrā (1127- 1225) – Kālacakra lineage holder and bestower of four transmissions in Tibet



Śākyaśrī Bhadrā (1127- 1225)

The ‘single sitting’ practice is said to have been one of the four transmissions of the (Middle Region Vinaya) from Śākyaśrī[4] (see his *Treasury of Lives* bio, [here](#)). Śākyaśrī Bhadrā (1127-1225)’s immense learning was said to be incomparable, even in India. He was head of the famed dharma universities of Vikramaśilā and Nalanda, and had visions of Arya Tara. He was the last of the great panditas to visit Tibet. His eleven-year stay in Tibet from 1204 until 1214 had a great impact on the development of Buddhism.

Heimbel (2013) explains that Śākyaśrī was credited with several major activities there, including introducing four major teaching transmissions (bka’ babs bzhi) to Throphu Kagyu master and translator, Throphu Lotsawa (1172-1236) [5] and Sakya Pandita, Kunga Gyaltsan.

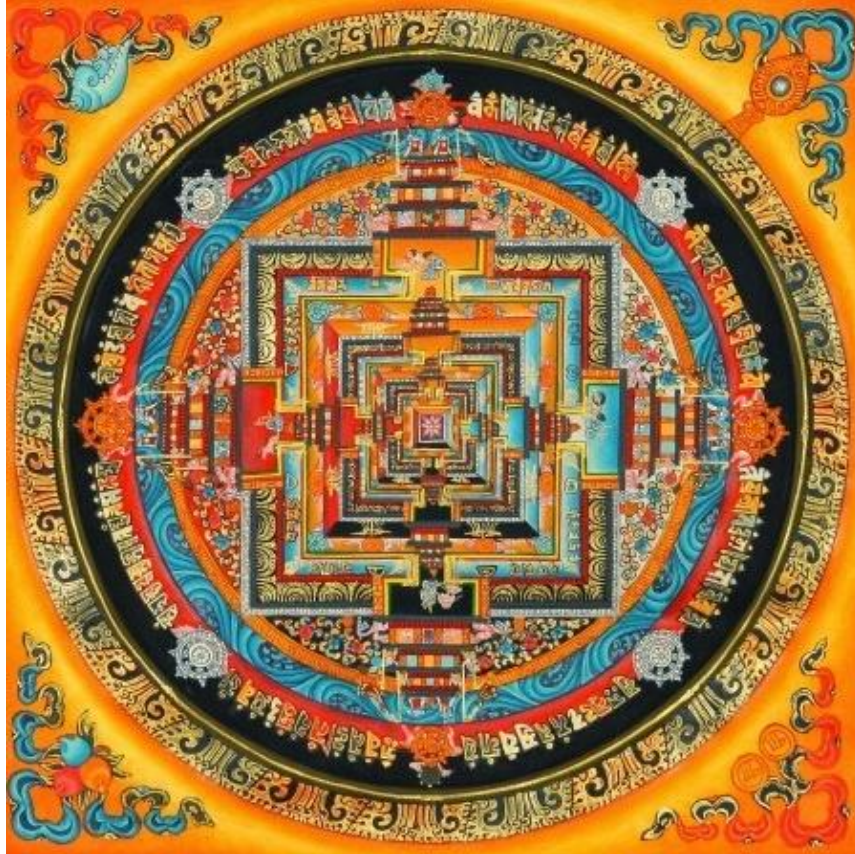


Throphu Lotsāwa (Khro phu Lo tsā ba), translator and student of Indian master, Śākyaśrī

These are:

- (1) the transmission of a philosophical tradition (mtshan nyid kyi bka' babs) comprising Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika* to Sakya Pandita (Sa skya Paṇḍi ta) Kunga Gyeltsen (Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1182–1251));
- (2) the transmission of a corpus of oral instructions (man ngag gi bka' babs) such as the so-called “four uncommon instructions” (thun mong ma yin pa'i gdams pa bzhi) to Throphu Lotsāwa (Khro phu Lo tsā ba);
- (3) the transmission of a tantric system (sngags kyi bka' babs) to Pel Lotsāwa Chokyi Zangpo (dPyal Lo tsā ba Chos kyi bzang po);
- (4) the transmission of a Vinaya tradition ('dul ba'i bka' babs) to his group of “single sitting practitioners” (stan gcig pa);

- (5) calculating a Buddhist chronology (bstan rtsis) “which differed considerably from that of the other Tibetan traditions before then, being much closer to the estimates of modern scholars on the probable dates of the Buddha Śākyamuni; and
- (6) cooperating with Throphu Lotsāwa in the building of the great Maitreya statue at Throphu (Khro phu) monastery in Shabme (Shab smad) of western Tsang (gTsang).



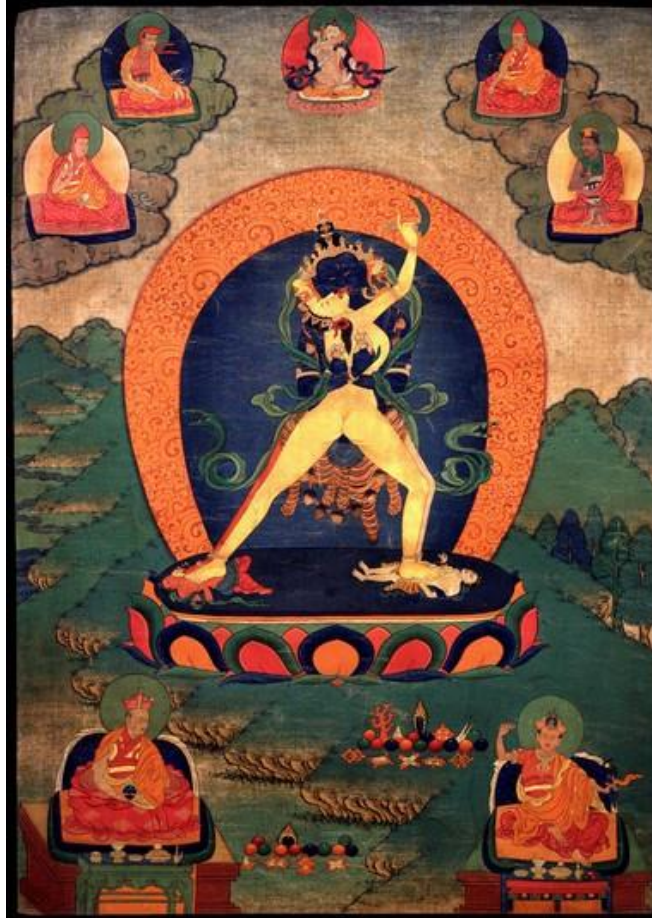
Kālacakra mandala

Śākyaśrī was also the lineage holder of two of the seventeen main Kālacakra lineages that came to Tibet from India (which seems to be included in the third transmission above). As Jonang master. Jetsun Tāranātha writes in *One Hundred Blazing Lights*, (see [here](#)), the founder of Jonang, Kunpang Chenpo compiled all the different Kālacakra lineages, condensing them into seventeen main ones. Two of these descended from Śākyaśrī:

“That which great Kashmiri Pandit Śākyaśrī gave to the translator Pelö Chokyi Zangpo using the esoteric instructions of Nāropa’s great commentary on the Hevajra Tantra. That which the

great Śākyaśrī also gave to the Lord of Dharma Sakya Panchen, distinguished by the Six Vajra Verses of the hearing lineage. These [above] are the two lineage traditions from the Kashmiri Scholar, Śākyaśrī (Khache Panchen).”

—Jetsun Tāranātha , *One Hundred Blazing Lights*



Innate (Sahaja) Kalacakra, 18th Century Karma Kagyu thangka (source HAR: [Kalachakra \(Buddhist Deity\) – Sahaja \(1 face, 2 hands\) \(Himalayan Art\)](#))

[For more on Kālacakra, the Karmapas and Karma Kagyu, see [here](#).]

The Four Monastic Communities (Joden Tshogpa Zhi)

In his 2013 paper, *The Jo gdan tshogs sde bzhi: An Investigation into the History of the Four Monastic Communities in Śākyaśrībhadra’s Vinaya Tradition*, Heimbel discusses Śākyaśrī’s Vinaya tradition:

“When Śākyaśrī returned in late 1214 to his native Kashmir via Puhrang (Pu hrangs), he left behind a group of disciples whom he had trained in Vinaya practice, “thus establishing an important new monastic community.” Successive divisions in this original community led to the formation of four different assemblies that became known as the four Joden Tsogde (Jo gdan tshogs sde bzhi). Via these communities, Śākyaśrī’s monastic ordination lineage was passed down and received by a variety of prominent Tibetan Buddhist masters and spread in different Kagyu traditions and within the Sakya order. Along with this lineage, the Sakya school preserved a second distinct ordination lineage that also originates from Śākyaśrī, namely the one that was transmitted from Śākyaśrī directly to his disciple Sakya Paṇḍita.” (2013: 213-4) [6]

Heimbel (2013: 200). writes that “we should not understand the term the Four Joden Communities “as referring to four fixed communities that remained together as single groups at just one monastery. Instead, we need to think of them, initially, as wandering encampments with no fixed abode or means of support that over time branched off into further sub-communities whose members settled at different locations beyond the borders of the wider region of Nyemo (sNye mo). Such a development is indicated, for example, by the writings of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (’Jam dbyangs mKhyen brtse’i dbang po (1820–1892). In his abbatial histories of Tibetan monasteries, he specifies the four monastic communities as:

1. Gedun Gangpa (dGe ’dun sgang pa)
2. Cholungpa (Chos lung pa),
3. Tshamigpa (Tsha mig pa), and
4. Jedzingpa (Bye rdzing pa)

Why did they become so influential and prevalent and why did the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism not give monastic ordination from within their own lineages? Heimbel suggests that it is probably because the monastic ordination transmitted by the Four Communities was considered extremely pure because of the Vinaya ascetic practices to which they adhered and for which they appear to have been famous, even more pure than the lineage of the tradition one belonged to.

The Gedun Gangpa community, the 8th Gedun Gangpa abbot Jonang Tselmin Zangpo's ordination of the 5th and 6th Karmapas

The relation between the Karma Kagyu and the Gedun Gang was a two-way one (Heimbel (2013: 215-6):

“In relation to the Kagyu and Karmapas, it was the Gedun Gangpa community (2013:201) who had close ties with the Karmapas and Zhamarpas in terms of monastic ordinations. The 5th Zhamarpa bestowed ordinations on members of the Gedun Gangpa. The 5th Karmapa, Dezhin Shegpa (De bzhin gshegs pa)’s (1384–1415) was given śrāmaṇera (dge tshul) and bhikṣu (dge slong) ordinations by the Gedun Gang when they went to Kongpo.[7]

The *Feast For Scholars* (mKhas pa’i dga’ ston) reports a prophecy by Śākyaśrī that at some future time when abbots of the Gedun Gangpa community would emerge as manifestations of the Sixteen Arhats, they would preside over the monastic ordination of successive Karma pas. As the first abbot in question, the *Feast For Scholars* specifies Nyagbon Sonam Zangpo (sNyag dbon bSod nams bzang po.) He can be identified as Joden Nyag (Jo gdan gNyag/sNyag phu ba) alias Tselchen Minpa Sonam Zangpo (mTshal chen min pa bSod nams bzang po (1341– 1433)), the eighth Tshogs dGe ’dun sgang abbot (tenure: 1384-1399), who was recognised as a manifestation of the Arhat Bakula. “



Arhat Bakula, a vegetarian who was a disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha.

For more on the vegetarianism of Bakula, see recent teaching by 17th Karmapa (2021) on it [here](#).

Sonam Zangpo (bSod nams bzang po) was one of Jonang Kunkhyen Dolpopa's major disciples who also studied with the 4th Karmapa, Rolpe Dorje and was installed as the eighth abbot of the Gedun Gangpa[8]. In 1403, he was offered the monastery of Tselmin (mTshal min) by the Fifth Karmapa, Dezhin Shegpa (bDe bzhin gshegs pa (1384–1415), where he instituted a teaching system based on the exegetical tradition of the Kagyu order (Heimbel (2013:215)).



FIG. 1-56
The Fifth Karmapa
16th century
7 9/16 x 5 x 4 9/16 in. (18 x 12.6 x 11.6 cm)
Nyingel Lam collection
Literature: D. Dimmock ed. 2003, p. 167,
no. 31, front.

Heimbel elaborates:

“In his position as ordination abbot of the Gedun Gangpa, Sonam Zangpo had already formed a connection with the Fifth Karmapa when he, along with other masters of the Gedun Gang, presided over the Karmapa’s śrāmaṇera as well as bhikṣu ordination and bestowed teachings on him, too. The former ordination took place during the community’s visit to Tselhagang (rTse lha sgang) in Kong po in 1390 and the latter in 1402 when the Gedun Gang community was invited to Namthokyi Riwo (rNam thos kyi ri bo), also located in Kongpo. Thereafter, he also presided over the śrāmaṇera ordination of the Sixth Karma pa Thongwa Donden (mThong ba don ldan (1416–1453)) at ’Ol kha bKra shis in 1424 and accepted the request to perform the bhikṣu ordination at a later time. His bestowal of full monk’s vows, however, never materialised due to

intrigue caused by a close attendant of an imperial messenger (gser yig pa zhig gi nye gnas). Along with the Karmapas' ordinations, Sonam Zangpo also bestowed full monastic ordination on the Third Zhamarpa, Chopal Yeshe (Zhwa dmar Chos dpal ye shes (1406–1452)) and taught Karma Kagyupa masters such as Ngompa Jadral Namkha Gyaltsen (Ngom pa Bya bral Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1370–1433)) and Sogwon Rinchen Zangpo (Sog dbon Rin chen bzang po). Nevertheless, Sonam Zangpo was not the first abbot of the Gedun Gang community to bestow ordination on a Karmapa.”

3rd, 4th and 8th Karmapa's monastic ordinations from Gedun Gangpa Abbots

According to Heimbel (2013:216), the 3rd, 4th and 8th Karmapas and Zhamarpa incarnations were also given full monastic ordination by Gedun Gangpa abbots, which attests to the close link between the Gedun Gangpa and Karma Kagyu tradition. These are summarised below:

- *3rd Karmapa and 3rd Gedun Gangpa, Zhonnu Jangchub*



3rd Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje

“By 1301, Zhonu Jangchub (gZhon nu byang chub), the third Tshog Gedun Gangpa abbot, had bestowed full monastic ordination and teachings on the Third Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339) and on the First Zhamar Togden Dragpa Senge (Zhwa dmar rTogs ldan Grags pa seng ge (1283– 1349)) as well.”

- *4th Karmapa and 5th Gedun Gang, Jamyang Dondrup Pal*



4th Karmapa, Rolpe Dorje with student

“Likewise, the Fourth Karmapa, Rolpe Dorje (Rol pa'i rdo rje (1340–1383)) received from Jamyang Dondrup Pal ('Jam dbyangs Don grub dpal), the fifth Gedun Gangpa abbot, both the pravrajyā and śrāmaṇera vows along with Vinaya teachings in 1353 and full monastic ordination in 1357.”

- *8th Karmapa and Kenchen Chodrub Senge*



8th Karmapa, Mikyo Dorje

“Regarding the period of time after Sonam Zangpo’s tenure, we know of one later abbot from the Gedun Gang community who presided over the full monastic ordination of a Karmapa. The person in question is Kenchen Chodrub Senge (Chos grub seng ge), considered a manifestation of the Arhat Rāhula, who in 1527 presided at Namthokyi Riwo (rNam thos kyi ri bo) over the ordination of the Eighth Karmapa, Mikyo Dorje (Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554).”

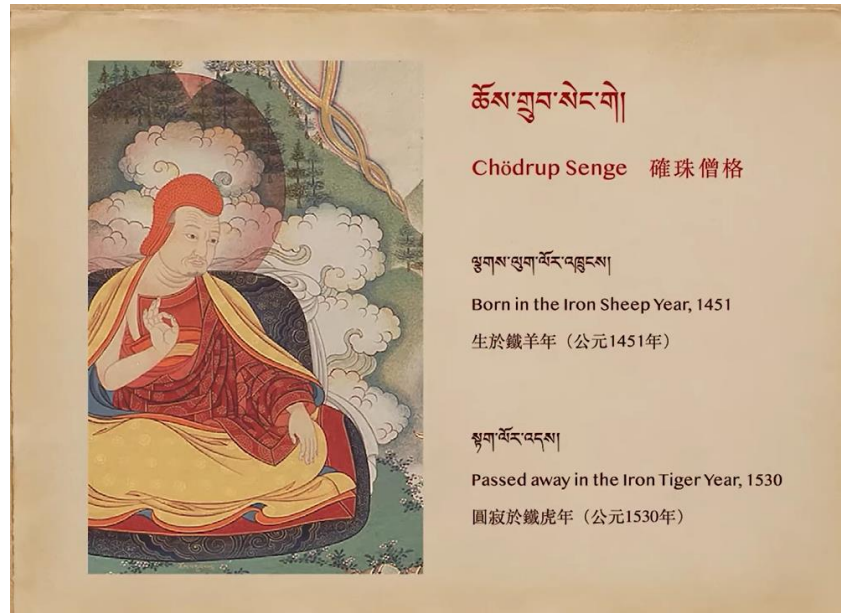


Image of Chodrub Senge, given by 17th Karmapa in recent teachings (2021)

According to the 17th Karmapa (2021: Day 7) on the life of Khenchen Chodrub Senge, who was also one of the main teachers of the 8th Karmapa:

“Chodrup Senge wanted to undertake retreat in a solitary place, but he had received the Red Spear Vaishravana empowerment from Khenchen Chokyi Wangchuk, who asked him to oversee Tsokde Gendun Gang Monastery. He started as discipline master and eventually became the abbot of that monastery, spending the rest of his life as a spiritual and political leader there.”

“Mikyo Dorje was advised to take ordination from Khenchen Chodrup Senge because of an auspicious interdependent connection. When the Seventh Karmapa came to Gendun Gang, there was a golden procession to welcome him. Each person held a different offering; Chodrup Senge carried a beautiful golden mandala with piles of different colored jewels. He was able to make his offering and received the gift of a very nice outer robe from the Seventh Karmapa. Chodrup Senge made an aspiration to arouse bodhicitta, and Chodrak Gyatso looked at him and smiled. So Chodrup Senge felt the foundation had been established to give full ordination to Mikyo Dorje.

We need to know that from the time of the 3rd Karmapa Rangjung Dorje, all of the Karmapas had taken vows at the Gendun Gang community. The Karmapas and the abbots had a great connection, there is a saying of Gedun Gangpa that for each of the incarnations of the sixteen Karmapas would appear one of the sixteen arhats. In fact, Chodrup Senge himself was said to be an emanation of the Ahat Rāhula. When you talk about the four places of Vinaya, Gendun Gang was considered to be one of the most important communities, and so the Karmapas received the lineage of vows from them.

For his ordination, Mikyo Dorje wrote a letter to Chodrup Senge saying: “I wish to take the vows of full ordination from someone who is qualified in the Vinaya. If you do not come you will breach your Bodhisattva vows. So the letter was strict and commanding him to come to the Great Encampment to bestow the vows. When Chodrub Senge opened the letter he is reported to have said it was like a conch blowing in a puja, so it was a very auspicious connection and was delighted by it. However, he was then 79 years old, and it would take seven months to travel from Central Tibet to Kongpo. Because of his age and the great difficulties involved in travelling (there were no cars or airplanes, they had to ride horseback there, and sometimes people would not ride animals) so he replied that he would not be able to come. However, Mikyo Dorje sent people to convince him. Since the Karmapa was so insistent, and because of his profound connection to the Gedun Gang Tshogde and the Seventh Karmapa, Chodrak Gyatso, Chodrup Senge finally agreed to come.

So, on the 3rd day of the 9th month of the Year of the Pig, he met a great Lotsawa (probably Zhalu Lotsawa) and they discussed the Dharma. Then, Chodrup Senge eventually arrived at the Great Encampment in the 11th Tibetan month of that year. He met Mikyo Dorje the same day he arrived. After a few days of rest, as he was very old, he offered Mikyo Dorje the full ordination vows. On that day, the sky was very clear, rainbows filled the sky and a rain of flowers fell. He then went to see Mikyo Dorje every day, and they discussed difficult points of sutra and tantra. At that time, he probably also introduced the Karmapa to the Shengtong view. He gave him the *Amitayus* and *Red Spear Vaishravana* empowerments as well.

In the liberation-story, Mikyo Dorje wrote about his other main teacher, 1st Sangye Nyenpa, he said of Chodrup Senge:

“At that time, I received the blessings of serving the great Khenpo of Tsok Gendun Gang, an individual who was emanated by the great siddhas from the tradition of the omniscient Jonang, who was certain to go from this life to the presence of the Dharma King in Shambhala, the guru precious buddha Chodrup Senge and the great being born as Je Karma Tre, who transcends humans, a master of yoga, a god victorious over all directions whose mind has been ripened well by discipline and samadhi.”

The Eighth Karmapa also wrote about taking ordination from Chodrub Senge and Karma Trinlepa in his autobiography. In this he writes that in his lifetime the greatest thing he did was getting full ordination and getting that from an emanation of an arhat was of indescribable benefit to him. He also kept cuttings of Chodrup Senge’s hair, which produced relics.

The Khenpo himself had an auspicious dream on the day he gave ordination to the Eighth Karmapa, of going up a high pass and resting there. The reason why he was called the Joden Khenpo was he was from the Gedun Gang, which was one of the four Joden Monastic communities. The reason they were called Joden, was because they only had ‘one-sitting’ on a single mat of eating food.”

The Zhamarpa incarnations and Gedun Gangpa ordination



5th Zhamarpa, Konchog Yenlag

Heimbel (2013: 216-7) further describes how these ordinations by Gedun Gang abbots were also given to various Zhamarpa incarnations:

“This close relationship was further maintained as illustrated by the biographies of such eminent figures as the Fifth 5th Zhamarpa, Konchog Yenlag (Zhwa dmar dKon mchog yan lag (1525–1583) and Ninth Karmapa Wangchug Dorje (dBang phyug rdo rje (1556–1603). From the former’s biographical sketch, we come to learn, for instance, that the Tshogs dGe ’dun sgang abbot Shākya Gyatso (rgya mtsho) functioned as secret revealing preceptor in the Zhamarpa ’s full monastic ordination; an unnamed abbot from Tsog Gedun Gang was, along with the Zhamarpa , involved in the full monastic ordination of the Fourth mTshur phu rGyal tshab Grags pa don grub (1547–1613); and that the Zhamarpa held, as mentioned above, the prayer festival of the Tibetan new year of 1570

at Gyelchenling (rGyal chen gling), bestowing both teachings and ordinations on members of Tsog Gedun Gang .

That link was also maintained by other masters; for example the Fourth Zhwa dmar Chos grags ye shes (1453–1524) was a disciple of Rab 'byor seng ge (1398–1480), the nineteenth abbot of Tshogs dGe 'dun sgang (tenure: 1463–1471?), who functioned as ceremony master in the Zhwa dmar's full monastic ordination in 1476 and whom the latter honoured by writing his biography.

Moreover, the Zhamarpa himself bestowed teachings on the Tsog Gedun Gang community. Similarly, to receive full monastic ordination, the First dPa' bo Chos dbang lhun grub (1440–1503) sent some of his monks to the dGe 'dun sgang community. The tradition to recognise abbots of the Tsog Gedun Gangpa as manifestations of the Sixteen Arhats also found its expression in paintings, as illustrated by a surviving thangka in the Karma sgar bris style. This thangka depicts as its main figure the Arhat Vanavasin, identifiable from an inscription. He is surrounded by the lineage of early dGe 'dun sgang pa abbots, whose original names are furnished by inscriptions as well. The main figure was identified by David Jackson to be Byang chub dpal, the community's original founder.”

Use of meat during Ganachakra

The 17th Karmapa also taught about how the use of meat in Ganachakra offerings was explicitly forbidden by the 8th Karmapa up until the 10th Karmapa, during the times of the Kagyu Great Encampment, see [here](#). Ngorchon also spoke against its use from both a sutric and tantric perspective in his well-known composition, *An Epistle Benefitting Students* (translated by Heimbel (2017)). It is one of the longest Tibetan literary works of its kind, in which he urgently argues from both sutric and tantric points of view against the consumption and tantric use of alcohol and meat by monastics, and which he compiled in 1425 at age forty-three when he was still based at Sakya Monastery.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Interestingly, Heimbel (2019:82) notes that this strict vegetarian stance may have been what underscored the dispute between Ngorchén and Je Tsongkhapa:

“For instance, Ngorchén became involved in a gradually intensifying religious dispute with the polemic-loving Khedrup Je (1385-1438) on a variety of tantric topics; see Heimbel, *Vajradhara in Human Form*, 229-48; Heimbel, “The Dispute between mKhas grub rJe and Ngor chen.” This dispute may also have been over the issue of meat eating, and Khedrup Je’s Vinayabased defense of meat eating could thus be understood as a critical response to Ngorchén’s prohibition of meat. Khedrup Je presented his position in an undated work about the three vows that he wrote while living at the monastery of Riwo Dangchen in Nyangto (Ri bo Mdangs can, Nyang stod) of Tsang Province. It is asserted that Khedrup Je would have written this work between 1427 and 1431, and thus after Ngorchén had written his own work against meat eating in 1425. For Khedrup Je’s position on meat eating, see chapter 4 of this volume.”

[2] On the Sakya relation and those four monastic communities (tshogs sde bzhi or jo gdan tshogs sde bzhi), see Heimbel, “The Jo gdan tshogs sde bzhi.” On the Drigung relation, see Hou, “Some Remarks.” On Ngorchén’s ordinations, see Heimbel, *Vajradhara in Human Form*, 103-8.

[3] Śāntarakṣita (zhi ba tsho, 725–788), was an important and influential Indian Buddhist philosopher, particularly for the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Śāntarakṣita was a philosopher of the Madhyamaka school who studied at Nalanda University under Jñānagarbha, and became the founder of Samye, the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet.

[4] Sakyasribhadra, also known as Sakyasri or Khache Panchen, was an important Kashmiri pandita in the 12th and early 13th centuries who came to Tibet. His full biography is on the [Treasury of Lives](#) site. He has a connection with many of the lineages in Tibet extant during his visit. When Śākyaśrī was seventy-seven he was invited to Tibet by Tropu Lotsāwa Rinchen Sengge (khro phu lo tsA ba, 1173-1236?) who went to the Chumbi Valley in search of him; they met in a town called Vaneśvara. Śākyaśrī was initially disinclined to accept the offer, as Rinchen Sengge was, at the time, quite young. Tropu Lotsāwa was able to ask questions on doctrine to each of the paṇḍitas in his retinue, and the following discussion impressed Śākyaśrī sufficiently to convince him to go to Tibet, arriving in 1204.

[5] In 1204, he traveled with several students by way of the Chumbi Valley to a trade market in Assam to invite Śākyaśrībhadra, who was seventy-eight years old at the time, and staying in Jagaddala Monastery. During Śākyaśrī's decade-long stay in Tibet, Jampa Pel acted as his translator, earning him the title of Tropu Lotsāwa.

[6] The impact of these communities is summarised in Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas's (1813–1899) *Shes bya kun khyab* and 'Jam dbyangs mKhyen brtse'i dbang po's (1820–1892) *gSang sngags gсар rnying gi gdan rabs*. From these two presentations, we learn that successive Karma pas received Śākyaśrī's ordination lineage as transmitted by Byang chub dpal via abbots of the dGe 'dun sgang community and that Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po (1382–1456) took full monastic ordination in Śākyaśrī's lineage as passed down through rDo rje dpal via the abbots of the Tsha mig community. In this way, Śākyaśrī's lineage spread among the Karma bKa' brgyud and Sa skya order, especially in the latter's Ngor branch. The lineages that passed down through the communities of Chos lung and Bye rdzing, however, had died out by the time Kong sprul was writing his encyclopaedia. Generally speaking, as he puts it, the monastic ordination lineages of the individual communities had, at a later point in time, been broken off at their respective seats, but continued to flourish via other religious traditions."

[7] Heimbel explains:

“With the establishment of the dGe’ dun sgang pa at rGyal gling, the groups’ new home temple developed into the main seat of the monastic community. Nevertheless, the entire community continued to be known as dGe’ dun sgang pa or Tshogs dGe’ dun sgang, even though they had become established at rGyal gling. The name of their seat at rGyal gling, the rGyal gling tshogs pa, was seemingly never used as the proper name for the whole dGe’ dun sgang community, but only referred to the monastery at rGyal gling. It even appears that the rGyal gling tshogs pa itself was known and referred to as dGe’ dun sgang pa. This can be seen in the biographies of certain Karma pa and Zhwa dmar incarnations who maintained close ties with the dGe’ dun sgang community, for which I have come across three examples. The Fourth Zhwa dmar Chos grags ye shes (1453–1524) bestowed teachings on the Yar rgyab dGe’ dun sgang pa while travelling in lHo kha; following the invitation of the Yar rgyab dPon chen, the Fifth Zhwa dmar dKon mchog yan lag (1525–1583) journeyed to rGyal chen gling and held a great prayer festival on the Tibetan new year of 1570, on that occasion also bestowing teachings and monastic ordinations on members of the Tshogs dGe’ dun sgang; and still later, when the Fifth Zhwa dmar was again invited by members of the Yar rgyab ruling house to Byams gling and Dol, he made a tea offering and spoke auspicious words (legs ja shis brjod) to Rin chen shes rab, the then abbot of the Tshogs dGe’ dun sgang.”

[8] Heimbel (2013:) “bSod nams bzang po was an eminent figure, who served Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292–1361) from the age of seventeen as close attendant and, after his master’s passing, pursued further studies under Dol po pa’s major disciples. Along with that, he also studied under great Sa skya pa masters such as Bla ma Dam pa bSod nams rgyal mtshan (1312–1375) and Theg chen Chos rje Kun dga’ bkra shis (1349–1425) as well as with the Fourth Karma pa Rol pa’i rdo rje (1340–1383). 157 bSod nams bzang po was honoured by an invitation from the Phag mo gru pa ruler dBang Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1374–1432; r. 1385–1432) and installed as abbot of the dGe’ dun sgang pa.”

