



THE BUDDHA'S BOWL
UNIVERSAL COMPASSION
BUDDHIST CONGREGATION

Although we take Refuge in the Three Jewels, the practice of the Dharma is necessarily a personal undertaking.

We can observe and emulate the example of the Buddha Shakyamuni and our Teachers, study and contemplate the teachings of the Dharma, and gain strength and encouragement from the Sangha, our companions on the path, but we cannot relinquish or minimize our responsibility for our own practice. The Buddhas point the way, but it is we who must walk the path.



In an oft-quoted section of the *Kalama Sutra*, the Buddha exhorts us:

Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing, nor upon tradition, nor upon rumor, nor upon what is written in scripture, nor upon surmise, nor upon an axiom, nor upon specious reasoning, nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over, nor upon another's seeming ability, nor upon the consideration, "This is our teacher."

When you yourselves know: "These things are good; these things are not blamable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness," enter on and abide in them.

While these words encourage us to rely on our own reason and experience to discern what is right, later in the *Kalama Sutra* the Buddha shares with us the Four Assurances:

The disciple of the Noble Ones, who has a hate-free mind, a malice-free mind, an undefiled mind, and a purified mind, is one by whom four assurances are found here and now.

Suppose there is a hereafter and there is a fruit, result, of deeds done well or ill. Then it is possible that at the dissolution of the body after death, I shall arise in the heavenly world, which is possessed of the state of bliss. This is the first assurance.

Suppose there is no hereafter and there is no fruit, no result, of deeds done well or ill. Yet in this world, here and now, free from hatred, free from malice, safe and sound, and happy, I keep myself. This is the second assurance.

Suppose evil befalls an evil-doer. I, however, think of doing evil to no one. Then, how can ill results affect me who do no evil deed? This is the third assurance.

Suppose evil does not befall an evil-doer. Then I see myself purified in any case. This is the fourth assurance.

The disciple of the Noble Ones, who has such a hate-free mind, such a malice-free mind, such an undefiled mind, and such a purified mind, is one by whom, here and now, these four assurances are found.

The Buddha Shakyamuni is declaring unequivocally that, regardless of our views on karma and rebirth, there are moral imperatives about which we can be certain: we must abandon hate, malice, and defilement, and cultivate purity of mind. He is stating bluntly that, whatever our opinions may be on other matters, morality is indispensable.

First among the moral injunctions, accepted and shared by all schools and lineages of the Buddha Dharma, is the precept to abstain from taking life (*Anguttara Agama*):

I undertake the precept to refrain from destroying living creatures.

A disciple of the Noble Ones, abandoning the taking of life, abstains from taking life. In doing so, he gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings. In giving freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings, he gains a share in limitless freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression.

This is the first gift, the first great gift—original, long-standing, traditional, ancient, untainted, unadulterated from the beginning—that is not open to suspicion, will never be open to suspicion, and is praised by knowledgeable contemplatives and sages.

Is this injunction to abstain from killing solely inclusive of humans? The Buddha gives this instruction in the *Griha Vinaya* (Rules for Householders, *Dharmika Sutra*, *Kshudraka Agama*):

Let him not destroy, or cause to be destroyed, any life at all, or sanction the acts of those who do so. Let him refrain even from hurting any creature, both those that are strong and those that tremble in the world.

If we fail to understand the universality of this injunction, the Buddha clarifies (*Kshudraka Agama*):

Whether they be creatures of the land or air, whoever harms here any living being, who has no compassion for all that live, let such a one be known as depraved.

In the *Anguttara Agama*, the Buddha exclaims:

I am a friend of the footless, I am a friend of all bipeds, I am a friend of those with four feet, I am a friend of the many-footed. [...] May all creatures, all breathing things, all beings one and all, without exception, experience good fortune only. May they not fall into any harm.

Should we intend to skirt the First Precept by claiming innocence of the deed if others do the killing for us, He adds (*Kshudraka Agama*):

One should not kill any living being, nor cause it to be killed, nor should one incite any other to kill. Do never injure any being, whether strong or weak, in this entire universe!

In the *Brahmajala Sutra*, the Buddha says to His disciples, confirming the primacy of the First Precept:

Abandoning the taking of life, the ascetic Gautama dwells refraining from taking life, without stick or sword, scrupulous, compassionate, trembling for the welfare of all living beings. Thus, the worldly should praise the Tathagata.

And in the *Dharmapada* (*Udanavarga*):

The one who has left all violence, who never harms any beings at all, whether they are moving or still, who neither kills, nor causes to kill, such a one, harmless, is the Holy One!

Innumerable statements proclaiming the primacy of the First Principle can be found throughout the Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan, and Gandhari canons of Buddhist scripture.

The Mahayana Sutras are acutely explicit in their censure both of killing animals and consuming their flesh and other products.

The Buddha Shakyamuni states in the *Brahmajala Sutra*:

A disciple of the Buddha must maintain a mind of kindness and cultivate the practice of liberating beings. He should reflect thus:

“All male beings have been my father and all females have been my mother. There is not a single being that has not given birth to me during my previous lives; hence, all beings of the Six Realms are my parents.

“Therefore, when a person kills and eats any of these beings, he thereby slaughters my parents. Furthermore, he kills a body that was once my own, for all elemental earth and water previously served as part of my body, and all elemental fire and wind have served as my basic substance.

“Therefore, I shall always cultivate the practice of liberating beings and in every life be reborn in the eternally abiding Dharma, and teach others to liberate beings as well.”

Whenever a Bodhisattva sees a person preparing to kill animals, he should devise a skillful method to rescue and protect them, freeing them from their suffering and difficulties.

In the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra*, the Buddha gives extensive arguments against the consumption of flesh:

Animal flesh eating stimulates the emergence of arrogance, which then stimulates delusional imaginations, which then stimulates greed for profit at the expense of compassion for sentient beings. Given the unwholesomeness of such interlocking motivations, it is wise to refrain from eating animal flesh.

From imagination, greed is developed, and through greed the mind becomes dull, complacent, and insensitive. When there is an attachment to such a state, then it is difficult to arouse and sustain the impulse to liberate oneself from the wheel of compulsive death and rebirth. [...]

There is no animal flesh to be regarded as pure by any exception. It does not matter if the giving of animal flesh for us to eat is premeditated or not, asked for or not, or whether extreme hunger is present or not. Therefore, it is wise to not eat animal flesh in any circumstance which naturally arises within our life.

Let yogis not eat any animal flesh. All Buddhas teach all people to not eat animal flesh, and especially wish those under Their guidance to not eat animal flesh. Sentient beings who feed on each other will be reborn as carnivores in the animal realm. [...]

Animal flesh eating is rejected by Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Disciples. If a person eats animal flesh out of shamelessness, he or she will not be able to cultivate a wholesome sense of what is appropriate. [...]

Let a person not give credence to the many rationalizations given to justify animal flesh eating. What word-jugglers say under the influence of their addictive craving for animal flesh is sophistic, delusional, and argumentative. What they imagine that they witnessed, heard, or suspected that the Blessed One has said, or another Buddha said or did, is grossly distorted.

As greed is a hindrance to liberation, so are the objects of greed a hindrance to liberation. Objects of greed like animal flesh eating and consuming alcohol are hindrances to liberation.

A time may come when deluded people may say, “Animal flesh is appropriate food to eat, has no karmic consequences, and is permitted by the Buddha”.

Some will even say that eating animal flesh can be medicinal. It is more like eating the flesh of your only child. Let a yogi be attuned to what is balanced and nourishing to eat, be averse to consuming animal flesh and alcohol, and with this clarity go about peacefully begging for food, trusting that what is wanted and needed to sustain a healthy life will be supplied.

Animal flesh eating is forbidden by Me everywhere and for all time for those who abide in compassion.

In the *Lankavatara Sutra*, the Blessed One teaches:

For innumerable reasons, the Bodhisattva, whose nature is compassion, is not to eat any animal flesh.

I will explain the reasons. In the long course of transmigration, all sentient beings have been our brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters, and we have felt many different kinds and degrees of kinship with each and every one of them. These sentient beings have been beasts, domestic animals, birds, and humans in different lifetimes and have often been related to us in some way.

This being the case, how can the Bodhisattva-Mahasattva, who desires to respect all sentient beings as he or she would respect himself or herself and who is committed to devotedly practicing the Dharma, eat the flesh of any sentient being whose nature is the same as himself or herself?

Even the demons, when they listened to a discourse on the highest essence of the Dharma by the Tathagata, were inspired to protect Buddhism. Through this they had awakened to the feeling of compassion, became sensitive to the sorrows of sentient beings, and therefore chose to refrain from eating animal flesh. How much more should human beings who love the Dharma do the same!

Thus, whenever and wherever there is evolution among sentient beings, let people cherish the thought of kinship with them, and holding the intention of treating them as if they were our only child, therefore refrain from eating their flesh.

So much more should Bodhisattvas, who are committed to being compassionate towards all sentient beings, and whose inner nature is compassion itself, choose to refrain from eating animal flesh.

For a Bodhisattva to keep good integrity with the Dharma, he or she should not make any exceptions to the eating of animal flesh. He or she is not to eat the flesh of dogs, donkeys, buffaloes, horses, bulls, humans, or any other sentient being, whether or not such flesh is generally eaten by some humans in some country or society. Nor should a Bodhisattva eat flesh sold by others for monetary profit.

For the sake of the love of purity, the Bodhisattva should refrain from eating flesh which is born of semen and blood. For fear of causing terror to sentient beings, let the Bodhisattva discipline himself or herself to attain compassion and refrain from eating animal flesh. [...]

There are some who speak ill of the Buddha Dharma and say, ‘Why are those who are living the life of a mendicant or priest rejecting the diet of the ancient sages and choosing to live like carnivores who fly in the sky, live in the water, or move on the earth? Why do they wander the earth thoroughly terrifying sentient beings, disregarding the life of a mendicant and destroying the vows of a priest? There

is no Dharma and no discipline in them.’ There are many adverse minded people who speak ill of the Buddha Dharma in this manner.

For this reason, to guard the minds of all people, let the Bodhisattva, whose nature is full of compassion, who is sensitive to the sorrows of sentient beings, avoid unnecessary criticism of the Buddha Dharma and therefore refrain from animal flesh eating. [...]

When sons and daughters of good family, wishing to exercise themselves in various disciplines —such as the attainment of a compassionate heart, reciting mantras, perfecting knowledge, or journeying deeper into Mahayana teachings— go to a cemetery, into a wilderness retreat, or travel near a place where obstructers visit, or when they sit to do meditation practice, they are hindered because of their eating of animal flesh, and are unable to attain the excellences, be healed of illnesses, or attain liberation itself.

The Bodhisattva, seeing how animal flesh eating weakens the ability to attain the excellences, the ability to heal oneself and others, and even the ability to become liberated, and remembering his or her wish to help save sentient beings and heal himself or herself, should therefore refrain from eating animal flesh.

[...] When I teach to regard animal flesh eating as if it were the eating of an only child or as an intoxicant, how can I allow my disciples to eat food consisting of flesh and blood, which is gratifying to the unwise and which is shunned by the wise, which brings about much harm and keeps away many benefits? Animal flesh eating was not part of the wisdom of the ancient sages and was not meant to be appropriate food for any human being.

In the *Surangama Sutra*, the Buddha admonishes:

After my parinirvana in the last age, different kinds of ghosts will be encountered everywhere, deceiving people, and teaching that they can eat meat and still attain enlightenment. How can one who hopes to become a deliverer of others, himself be living on the flesh of other sentient beings?

How can you eat the flesh of living beings and yet pretend to be my disciple? You should know that those who eat meat, though their minds may open and realize a semblance of meditation, are but great fiends who, after this life, will sink back into the bitter ocean of samsara and cannot follow the Path. They will kill and devour one another ceaselessly; how then can they escape from the three worlds of existence? [...]



How can those who practice great compassion feed on the flesh and blood of living beings? If you do not wear garments made of silk, boots of leather, and furs, and refrain from consuming milk, cream, and butter, you can truly be liberated from all worldly concerns. After paying your former debts, you will not transmigrate in the three realms of existence. [...]

If you can control your body and mind and thereby refrain from eating animal flesh and using animal products, I say you will really be liberated. This teaching of mine is that of the Buddha, whereas any other is that of the unholy.

Mahayana Teachers Proclaim Universal Compassion

I entreat you to act toward animals, who are sorely troubled by suffering, with even greater compassion than you have for human beings. —Matriceta

In 1314, **Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltzen**, Great Lama of the Jonang (one of the five Buddhist lineages of Tibet) made a vow to never eat slaughtered animals. He later authored The Prohibition of Meat and Alcohol (sha chang bkag pa'I lung 'dren rnam). Observant Jonangpas follow His example and instruction to this day.

Jikten Gonpo and Taklung Tangpa, founders of the Drikung Kagyu and Taklung Kagyu in the 12th century, were lifelong vegetarians, as was Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo, 15th-century founder of the Ngor Sakya. To date, at least seven members of the Karmapa lineage have been vegetarian. The 19th-century master Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdrol, his contemporary Patrul Rinpoche, and the early 20th-century Bon master Shardza Tashi Gyaltzen were all steadfast vegetarians.

Many prominent Buddhist Teachers have abstained from flesh, and encourage us to do so:

In the context of the practice of the Bodhisattva, meat is completely forbidden. —Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltzen

Just as no pleasures can bring delight to someone whose body is ablaze with fire, the great compassionate ones cannot be pleased when harm is done to sentient beings. [...] Flesh free from the three objections, not prepared, unasked, unsolicited, there is none. Therefore, one should not eat flesh.

—Arya Shantideva

The meat we consume is the flesh of our mothers and fathers from previous lives. If we are upright and have a conscience, how can we bear to eat their flesh, killed by a butcher? If we quiet the mind and ponder this, we will be filled with great compassion for these pitiful beings that were our mothers. —Jigme Lingpa

Eating meat, at the cost of great suffering for animals, is unacceptable. If, bereft of compassion and wisdom, you eat meat, you have turned your back on liberation. The Buddha said, “The eating of meat annihilates the seed of compassion”.

—Shabkar Tsodruk Rangdol

In the Mahayana, the first point is that meat is forbidden, whether it has three-fold purity or not. Eating it is a cause of being born in hell.

—Gorampa Sonam Senge

By definition, this thing called “meat” comes from the killing of animals. Being without mercy sends one to hell. With great regret, abandon eating it. —Meton Sherab Ozer

If you invite a mother for a meal and then set before her the flesh of her own child, how would she feel? It is with the same love as a mother for her only child that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas look on all beings of the three worlds. —Patrul Rinpoche

We should not restrict our Bodhichitta to a limited number of beings. Wherever there is space, beings exist, and all of them live in suffering. Why make distinctions between them, welcoming some as loving friends and excluding others as hostile enemies?

—Kyabje Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche

Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I undertake to cultivate compassion and learn ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to condone any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life. —Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh

There is just no reason why animals should be slaughtered to serve as human diet when there are so many substitutes. Man can live without meat. —The XIV Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso

It’s best to avoid eating meat out of compassion. Before eating the meat, think of where it came from, through cutting an animal’s neck, against its will, and how much suffering the animal experienced. After thinking about that, you can’t eat the meat!

—Ven. Lama Thubten Yeshe

As the Buddha taught over two and a half thousand years ago, there are many benefits to following a vegetarian lifestyle —both for us and for other beings as well. Today, so many centuries later, the Buddha’s words are as powerful as ever. —Ven. Geshe Thupten Phelgye

The existence of meat-eaters is the causal condition for butchers killing animals. —Rase Konchok Gyatso

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have expounded extensively on the faults of eating meat in the Elephant Power Sutra, Mahamegha Sutra, Nirvana Sutra, Angulimala Sutra, Lankavatara Sutra, Sutra Requested by Subahu, and various Madhyamika treatises.

—Ven. Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche

To obtain real peace and happiness in this world one has simply to follow the path of ahimsa – nonviolence – which naturally is common to all the religions of the world. [...] There is no better prayer or worship we can offer to Lord Buddha than being thoughtful, kind, compassionate and abstaining from taking the life of any fellow human being, animal, bird, fish or insect. —Ven. Chatral Rinpoche

The salvation of birds and beasts, oneself included: this is the object of Shakyamuni’s austerities. —Ven. Ikkyu Sojun

The best way to protect and liberate lives is to adopt a vegetarian diet because sentient being will be slaughtered as long as there are people who eat meat. Hence, in present situation, be it life protection or life liberation, I think that the best way will be to adopt a vegetarian diet. —Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje

Sentient beings are future Buddhas and Bodhisattvas; therefore, we should not eat their flesh. Everyone has Buddha Nature. Besides protecting our own life, we also must respect the lives of all sentient beings. Vegetarianism is based on the principle of causality that spans the past, present, and future. Therefore, we clearly understand the reason for vegetarianism is the Bodhisattva cause, the right cause. —Ven. Wei Chueh

Mahayanists observe the Bodhisattva precepts, one of which is the prohibition against partaking of the flesh of an animal. This prohibition is called tapasa shila-vrata, and is a practical rule for eradicating the evil of wrath. This Bodhisattva precept was observed by Lord Buddha when he was called Shakya Bodhisattva, before he attained Enlightenment. —Ven. Thich Huyen-Vi

Life is more precious than anything else in the world. Even insects want to live. Whenever we break any of the Five Precepts of Buddhism, we have violated some other sentient being. Whenever we kill anyone, we violate that being at the deepest level possible.

—Ven. Master Hsing Yun

There are three ways of killing that we, as Buddhists, have to restrain: directly killing, indirectly killing, or rejoicing to see others be killed. Not only does this apply to human life, it should be also extended to all living beings. —Ven. Thich Thanh Tu

Human beings kill animals not just for food. They take the animal's skin to make shoes and hats and clothes. And even that is not enough. They take these animal's bones to make necklaces or buttons or earrings. In short, they kill many, many animals to sell the animal parts for money. Because of these desires and this strong animal consciousness, human beings fight with each other, and destroy nature. They do not value life. [...] That is why some people say that human beings are the number one bad animal in this world. So human beings must soon wake up and find their original seeds, their original nature. —Ven. Seung Sahn

Anyone familiar with the numerous accounts of the Buddha's extraordinary compassion and reverence for living beings—for example his insistence that his monks strain the water they drink lest they inadvertently cause the death of any micro-organisms— could never believe that he would be indifferent to the sufferings of domestic animals caused by their slaughter for food. —Roshi Philip Kapleau

The Buddha's heart is one of great compassion. In fact, such compassion is inherent in every one of us; we need only to bring it forth. Because of this compassion, we can feel the pain and suffering

of others just as if we were experiencing ourselves. Vegetarianism cultivates patience, compassion, and wisdom. —Ven. Cheng Yen

Rare is it to be born into human form, yet we take the lives of other sentient beings to satisfy our craving for the taste of flesh, this being something that we should never do, and even the Tathagata thus sets forth strict precepts against it. —Shinran Shonin

The Buddha told us in the Vinaya that life proceeds in four separate directions: from light to light, from light to darkness, from darkness to light, and from darkness to darkness. Through eating meat, one's life will be going from light to darkness. —Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro

No silken cloth touched Ippen's skin. He never took gold or silver, and strictly refrained from liquor, meat, and the five forbidden flavors. Thus, he polished the jewels of the ten major precepts. —The Record of Ippen

If one has strong determination, one will avoid doing evil deeds at all costs and under any circumstances. We certainly face difficulties in becoming full vegetarians. However, when such obstacles arise, we should remember how every sentient being had at one point or another been our parents. —Drubwang Rinpoche

Out of compassion one refrains from killing or eating animals because we don't want to cause them fear and suffering. Therefore, we should avoid any occupation that involves killing animals. —Ven. Sheng Yen

Be kind to animals. Do not beat, tie or confine them. Never kill or eat them. Let them be free and happy, as they can feel pain. We don't want pain, so we shouldn't give it. —Ven. Tsem Tulku Rinpoche

Buddhism regards all living creatures as being endowed with Buddha Nature and the potential to become Buddhas. That's why it teaches us to refrain from killing and liberate creatures instead. —Ven. Hsuan Hua

Today, 150 billion land animals and 1.5 trillion sea animals are killed for our consumption. We treat them like rats and vermin and cockroaches to be eliminated. This would be called genocide or dehumanization if they were human beings. [...] Ethically you cannot imagine progressing toward a more altruistic or more compassionate society while behaving like this. —Ven. Matthieu Ricard

Human life should of course be valued highly, but at the same time the lives of other living beings should also be treasured. Human beings snatch away the lives of other creatures whenever it suits their purposes. The way of thinking that encourages this behavior arises from a specifically human brand of violence that defiles the self-evident laws of the universe, opposes the growth of the myriad things in nature, and destroys feelings of compassion and reverence arising from our Buddha Nature. —Hakuun Yasutani Roshi

People who eat meat often make the excuse that it is natural to do so, that people were meant to eat meat. They promote this idea, and then freely indulge in taking the lives of their fellow creatures, thereby creating extensive hatred and enmity-karma.

—Great Master Lianchi Zhuhung

We can do no greater harm than to kill another sentient being. Killing is the ultimate expression of indifference to the well-being of others. All, except in the most extreme circumstances, cherish life. In the contemporary hell of the modern slaughterhouse animals cry out and cower in terror when they realize that their life is nearing a premature end. All beings, except in the most desperate circumstances, try to escape death. —Bodhipaksa

It is sad to see how many American Buddhists are managing to find a self-satisfying accommodation to eating meat. Some airily cite the doctrine of emptiness, insisting that ultimately there is no killing and no sentient being killed. Others find cover behind the excuse that taking life is the natural order of things [...]. The truth is that we are endowed with discriminating minds that we can use to educate ourselves to the implications of our volitional acts and to choose those foods that minimize suffering to living beings.

—Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede

It is, to my mind, really very surprising that those who endorse the importance of compassion do not see that devouring sentient beings is not compassionate. —Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo

In the Mahayana, meat is forbidden. Eating meat causes rebirth in the lower realms. —Sakya Pandita



Let the Three Jewels be my witness! In the past, ignorance and habit have led me to eat the flesh of beings... From today on, may the thought of eating meat never even enter my mind!

—Nyala Pema Dündul

Those who kill, pay others to kill, or rejoice in the killing of any human or non-human animal are cut off from the root of Dharma. They are icchantika, the basest and most deluded of all beings, given over to hedonism and greed. —Kyabje Tashi Norbu Rinpoche



Theravadin Monks Speak Out

Some followers of Theravada lineages do not dare mention the catastrophic harm inflicted by animal farming for fear of offending their non-vegan teachers and fellow practitioners. They place the preservation of a counterfeit harmony over the unspeakable suffering of human and non-human animals caused by the animal-industrial complex. This complicit timidity is contrary to the Dharma.

Such speech as the Tathagata knows to be true, correct, and beneficial, even if unwelcome and disagreeable to others, the Tathagata knows the time to use such speech. [...] Why is that? Because the Tathagata has compassion for all beings.

—Buddha Shakyamuni, MLD

Fortunately, there are valiant truth-tellers among the Theravadin clergy.

Buddhists are encouraged to love all living beings and not to restrict their love only to human beings. They should practice loving kindness towards every living being. The Buddha's advice is that it is not right for us to take the life of any living being, since every living being has

a right to exist. Animals also are afraid and feel pain, as do human beings. It is wrong to take their lives.

—Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda Maha Thera

Some Buddhists maintain that the Buddha never said we should be vegetarians, and that monks may eat whatever is offered to them, if they do not see, hear, or suspect that the animals, fish or fowl were killed especially for them; if they so see, hear or suspect, they are forbidden to eat the flesh. But this standpoint is totally indefensible, as anyone who looks at things a little objectively can see.

—Ven. Abhinyana

There is a common belief in some Buddhist countries that one may eat flesh provided he does not kill the animal with his own hands; but it is not so, because eating is the cause of slaughter.

—Ven. U Lokanatha

When we recite the first precept, we say, ‘I undertake the training to refrain from killing living beings’. This is a challenge, and in itself is a powerful ethic. Yet it is merely a short summary of a principle. It was never meant to fully describe the virtue of harmlessness. When the Buddha spoke of this precept in more detail, this is what he had to say:

Having abandoned the taking of life, refraining from taking life, one dwells without violence, with the knife laid down, scrupulous, full of mercy, trembling with compassion for all sentient beings.

This is not just an ethic of allowability. It doesn’t merely set a minimum standard. It calls us out, asking us to aspire to a higher sense of compassion, an ethic that deeply feels for the welfare of all beings. More than just asking, ‘Does this act come from an intention to harm?’, we ask ourselves, ‘Is this act the best I can possibly do to promote the welfare of all?’ Rather than simply escaping bad kamma, we create good kamma. —Ven. Ajahn Sujato

Buddhism offers definite and positive instructions regarding the manner in which humans should develop universal loving kindness towards all sentient beings that exist in the universe, whether in close proximity or at a distance, seen or unseen, large or small, fierce or

timid. Even those seeking to come into existence, like unborn babies or those in the stage of eggs, are encompassed within this range of universal loving kindness in Buddhism. It specifies this attitude thus declaring ‘May all beings be well and happy’. —Ven. Dhammavihari

To practice compassion, to practice loving friendliness, to appreciate and develop the joy of life, purely because of my conscience, I thought it would be much better to become vegetarian.

—Ven. Henapola Gunaratna

This precept [of non-harming] includes non-killing of beings like ants, mosquitoes, and cockroaches. —Ven. Bhante Vimalaramsi

The first precept in Buddhism is “Do not kill.” This precept is not merely a legalistic prohibition, but a realization of our affinity with all who share the gift of life. A compassionate heart provides a firm ground for this precept. —Ven. Dhammananda Bhikkhuni

If one has this deep quality of compassion that one does not want others to suffer, and one knows that either ordering meat or consuming meat is going [to] bring about even the cruel upbringing and the slaughter of animals, out of compassion one would adopt vegetarianism. —Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi

“The Three Purities”

It is alleged in some Buddhist circles that the Buddha permitted the consumption of meat under three conditions. The Pali text of the *Jivaka Sutta*, the putative source of the ‘Three Purities’ argument, states:

I say that there are three instances in which meat should not be eaten: when it is seen, heard, or suspected. I say that meat should not be eaten in those three instances.

I say that there are three instances in which meat may be eaten: when it is not seen, not heard, and not suspected. I say that meat may be eaten in these three instances.

Clearly, the Buddha is stipulating here that if a monk inadvertently consumes meat that has been placed in his begging bowl, he is not at

fault. His action is pure. However, if he sees, hears, or even suspects that there is animal flesh in his bowl, he must not eat it.

Later commentators gratuitously inserted the phrase “*that the living being has been slaughtered for oneself*” after each repetition of the word “suspected”. The phrase does not appear in the original. It is a spurious addition, intended to make it seem as if the Buddha allowed his monks to eat meat when the animal was not expressly killed to feed them, or when they did not see, hear, or suspect it. This interpolation is linguistically unwarranted.

Without approval and without scorn, but carefully studying the sentences word by word, one should trace them in the discourses and verify them by the discipline. If they are neither traceable in the discourses nor verifiable by the discipline, one must conclude thus: “Certainly, this is not the Blessed One’s utterance; this has been misunderstood by that monk, or by that community, or by those elders, or by that elder.” In that way, you should reject it.

—Buddha Shakyamuni, (Pali) *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*

However, even if one were to accept the “Three Purities” allowance, it is essential to view the consumption of animal flesh in the context of time, place, and circumstance. Two millennia ago, there was no large-scale animal farming, with its attendant ravages. Please consider the situation today.

If we feel no compassion for the plight of suffering animals, at least consider the pain we inflict upon ourselves and future human generations. The animal-industrial complex is the single largest contributor to climate change, water pollution and scarcity, deforestation, species extinction, human disease, and human hunger. What we do unto non-human animals, we do unto ourselves.

It is thus imperative to consider the harm associated with animal farming today, instead of expediently quoting the putative instruction on the Three Purities, allegedly given in a vastly different context. Did the Buddha not instruct us to use our own reason and experience to determine what should be avoided?

When you yourselves know: “These things are unwholesome; these things are blamable; these things are censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill,” abandon them. —Buddha Shakyamuni, Kalama Sutra

With mindful reflection I eat this food, not for pleasure, nor for intoxication, nor for the sake of physical beauty and attractiveness, but only for the endurance and continuance of this body, for ending discomfort, and for supporting the holy life, considering: “Thus I shall end old pains without arousing new cravings. I shall be healthy and blameless, and shall live with ease.” —Theravadin Meal Chant

“The Sons of Devadatta”

Another tired and tiresome argument trotted out insistently by those who would misrepresent the Dharma to justify their appetite for flesh and blood is the refusal of the Buddha Shakyamuni to accept the so-called Five Rules of Devadatta:

1. that monks reside only in the forest;
2. that they depend exclusively on begging;
3. that robes be made from discarded rags;
4. that they dwell under trees; and
5. that they abstain from eating flesh.

These rules were meant to convey the impression that Devadatta was more austere than the Buddha Shakyamuni, and therefore a more apt leader for the Sangha. In CV vii 276-277, where his intentions are explicitly clear, Devadatta says to one of his co-conspirators:

“It is possible with these five items to make a schism in the recluse Gautama’s Order, a breaking of the concord. For, your reverence, people esteem austerity.”

There are three reasons why the Buddha rejected Devadatta’s ‘Five Rules’, and none had to do with the merits of the proposal on abstaining from flesh:

1. Devadatta’s intention was to divide the Sangha and advance his craving for fame and power. His concerns were not ethical;

they were strictly political.

2. The rules of the Vinaya were developed progressively, and always in response to specific doubts or conflicts. They were never issued ‘*a priori*’.
3. The rule concerning the consumption of flesh was redundant, as it was already covered in the very first of the Five Precepts, as well as in innumerable injunctions.

Vegans and vegetarians are not the “sons of Devadatta”.

Rather, it is those who discredit the Sangha of the Blessed One with their unwholesome conduct that follow in the footsteps of that foremost heretic.

In the *Jivaka Sutta* itself, the Buddha asserts:

I have destroyed greed, hatred and indifference in myself, so that they cannot arise again. Anyone who kills for my sake or for the monks commits fivefold evils: by capturing, tormenting, and killing the animal, and finally, by treating me and the monks in an improper manner.

In the *Samyutta Nikaya*, the Buddha Shakyamuni clearly exhorts us to adopt strict adherence to non-harming:

Here am I, fond of my life, not wanting to die, fond of pleasure and averse to pain.

Suppose someone should rob me of my life, it would not be a thing pleasing or delightful. Not wanting to die, being fond of pleasure and averse to pain, it would not be a thing pleasing or delightful to me.

A state that is pleasant or delightful to me must be so to others also, and a state that is not pleasing or delightful to me, how could I inflict that upon another?

Because of such reflection, one abstains from taking the life of creatures and encourages others so to abstain, and speaks in praise of so abstaining. Thus, as regards bodily conduct, one is utterly pure.



Did the Buddha Eat Meat?

Perhaps the most infamous of all justifications for flesh consumption is the claim that the Buddha ate meat, and that He died from eating contaminated pork. The term used in the (Pali) *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* to describe the dish that was served to the Buddha at his last meal is *sukara-maddava*, which literally means ‘pig’s delight’—a clear reference to a type of mushroom that pigs are keen to eat. The Pali term for pig flesh is *sukara-mamsa*.

Carolyn Rhys-Davids, who served from 1923 to 1942 as president of the Pali Text Society, openly noted the faulty translation more than seven decades ago, but proponents of carnivorism still trot out this fallacy today. Unless one is grossly ignorant of the Pali language, or is willfully misleading others, it is impossible to assert that ‘pigs delight’ means ‘pork meat’, as if the Buddha had ordered a fanciful dish at a modern Chinese restaurant.

There may be some ignorant persons in the future, who, beginning to lead the homeless life according to my teaching, are acknowledged as sons of the Shakya, and carry the ochre robe about them as a badge, but who are in thought unwholesomely affected by erroneous reasonings.

Being under the influence of their craving for meat, they will string together in various ways some sophistic arguments to defend meat-eating. [...] They are defaming me unprecedentedly. They conclude that the Blessed One permits meat as proper food, that it is mentioned among permitted foods, and that the Tathagata himself partook of it.

But, Mahāmati, nowhere in my doctrine is meat permitted as something suitable, nor is it referred to as proper among the foods prescribed for the Buddha's followers.—Buddha Shakyamuni, Lankavatara Sutra

Let no one not give credence to the many rationalizations given to justify animal flesh eating. What word-jugglers say under the influence of their addictive craving for animal flesh is sophistic, delusional, and argumentative. —Buddha Shakyamuni, Mahāparinirvana Sutra

The Five Precepts and Right Livelihood

Observance of **The First Precept** alone, the training to **abstain from killing**, is essential but insufficient to guide our conduct toward nonhuman animals, as much of their exploitation does not necessarily involve outright slaughter.

The **Second Precept**, the instruction to **abstain from taking what is not freely given**, is blatantly violated by those who take the milk, eggs, wool, silk, fur, honey, and other substances that animals produce for their own purposes. As they cannot consent to this larceny —nor would they if they could— it is impossible to justify the absurd allegation that they give us their products willingly.

The Third Precept, which instructs us to **abstain from sexual misconduct**, is incompatible with the repeated forcible impregnation of female animals for industrial purposes, including increasing their numbers for eventual slaughter and for milk and wool production. Would we stand by as human females are raped and artificially impregnated for our commercial interests, or to satisfy our appetite for their offspring and secretions?

The Fourth Precept, the training to **abstain from lying**, forbids denying and obfuscating the truth of animal suffering behind misleading claims, such as describing their unwilling captivity as “free range” or “cage free,” and their slaughter as “humane.” There is no freedom in confinement, and there is no humane manner of inflicting torture and death on defenseless beings.

The Fifth Precept, the instruction to **abstain from intoxication**, prohibits the use of substances that cloud our judgment and lead to heedlessness. Addiction to flesh, blood, eggs, milk, cheese, honey, and other animal products leads directly to the violation of the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Precepts, and thus constitutes gross intoxication.

Right Livelihood is not only earning a living without compromising the Precepts, but also living in such a way that we do not violate them ourselves or induce others to infringe them on our behalf. It entails accepting an occupation and a lifestyle that do not cause harm to other sentient beings. The Buddha explicitly says:

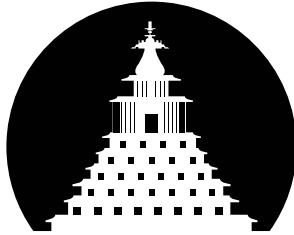
A lay follower should not engage in five types of occupation. Which five? Trade in weapons, human beings, animals, intoxicants, and poison. —Angutara Agama

Thus, for anyone who claims to follow the Dharma, the standard of moral conduct toward all sentient beings, human and non-human, is indisputably plain:

When watching after yourself, you watch after others. When watching after others, you watch after yourself. —Samyutta Nikaya

The one who has left all violence, who never harms any beings at all, whether they are moving or still, who neither kills, nor causes to kill, such a one, harmless, is the Holy One! —Dhammapada

May all be blessed with peace always, all beings weak or strong, all beings great and small, beings seen or unseen, dwelling afar or near, born or awaiting birth, may all be blessed with peace!
—Mahamangala Sutra



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