

Buddha-Nature / Tathāgatagarbha Sūtras on Not Eating Meat

Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, Chapter 7 (translated by Kosho Yamamoto)

Then Bodhisattva Kashyapa said to the Buddha: "O World-Honored One! To one who eats flesh, we should not give flesh. Why not? I see a great virtue arising out of abstention from eating flesh."

The Buddha praised Kashyapa and said: "Well said, well said! You now come to know my mind well. A Bodhisattva who protects Dharma should be thus. O good man! From now on, I do not permit my shravaka disciples to eat meat. When receiving from a danapati a pristine dana [gift] of faith, think that one is eating the flesh of one's own son." Bodhisattva Kashyapa said further to the Buddha: "O World-Honored One! Why is it that the Tathagata does not allow us to eat meat?" "O good man! "One who eats meat kills the seed of great compassion."

Kashyapa said again: "Why did you first allow the bhiksus to eat three kinds of pure meat?"

"O Kashyapa! These three kinds of pure meat were so instituted following the need of the occasion."

Bodhisattva Kashyapa said again to the Buddha: "O World-Honored One! In what circumstances do you not allow the ten impurities or the nine kinds of what is pure?"

The Buddha said to Kashyapa: "This also is permitted by gradual steps following the need of the occasion. This is what applies in the actual separation from eating meat." Bodhisattva Kashyapa said further to the Buddha: "Why is it that the flesh of fish is praised and called beautiful?"

"O good man! I do not say that the flesh of fish is a beautiful food. I say that sugar cane, non-glutinous rice, rock candy, black rock candy, all kinds of wheat, honey, milk, cream, and oil are beautiful foods. Various kinds of clothing material can be stocked, but what can be stocked is those whose color has faded. How could one greedily stick to [crave after] the flesh of fish?"

Kashyapa said again to the Buddha: "If the Tathagata means to prohibit the eating of meat, such things as the five kinds of flavors as milk, cream, fresh butter, clarified butter, and sarpirmanda [ghee], all kinds of clothing, silk cloth, horse-shoe shell, hide and leather, bowls of gold and silver should not be received."

"O good man! Do not muddle things up with what the Nirgranthas [Jains] say. Each of the prohibitions which the Tathagata lays down has a different meaning. By this, three pure meats are permitted standing on different grounds and the ten kinds of meat are prohibited by different standpoints. By different standpoints, all are prohibited, until the time of one's death. O Kashyapa! "I, from now on, tell my disciples to refrain from eating any kind of meat". O Kashyapa! When one eats meat, this gives out the smell of meat while one is walking, standing, sitting or reclining. People smell this and become fearful. This is as when one comes near a lion. One sees and smells the lion, and fear arises. O good man! When one eats garlic, the dirty smell is unbearable. Other people notice it. They smell the bad smell. They leave that person and go away. Even from far off, people hate to see such a person. They will not come near him. It is the same with one who eats meat. It is a similar situation with all people who, on smelling the meat, become afraid and entertain the thought of death. All living things in the water, on land and in the sky desert such a person and run away. They say that this person is their enemy. Hence the Bodhisattva does not eat meat. In order to save beings, he shows [pretends] that he eats meat. Though he [seems to] eat meat, in actual fact he does not. O good man! Such a Bodhisattva does not even take pure food. How could he eat meat?..."

Then Kashyapa said further to the Buddha: "O World-Honored One! The bhikshus, bhikshunis, upasakas and upasikas may have to live depending on people. At the time of the alms-round, one may be given food containing meat. How can one take it and yet be pure?" The Buddha said: "Use water, wash away the meat, and then eat it [the rest of the food]. The utensil may be defiled by meat. But if no taste of meat remains, this may be used. There will be no harm done. If one sees that there is a lot of meat, one should not accept such a meal. One must never eat the meat itself. One who eats it infringes the rule. I now set this rule of separating oneself from eating meat. If we go into detail, there will be no end of explanations. It is now time that I enter Nirvana. So I must dispense with explanations. This is "answering well what is enquired about."

Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra, Section 90 (translated by Red Pine)

Mahamati then asked in verse: 1. “Regarding bodhisattvas / whose minds are set on buddhahood / should they consume / wine or meat or onions?

2. Why do fools desire / the stench, the filth, the infamy? / why would anyone eat / the favorite food of wolves and tigers?

3. Does eating meat give rise to sin? / does not eating meat mean blessing? / please explain the sin and blessing / of eating meat or not.”

After Mahamati had asked in verse, he once more addressed the Buddha, “Bhagavan, please explain for us the vice and virtue of eating and not eating meat. For when I and other bodhisattvas, both now and in the future, explain the Dharma to beings who enjoy eating meat, we will be trying to arouse their compassion toward others. For once their compassion is aroused, whatever stage they are at will be purer and clearer, and they will attain supreme enlightenment sooner. Even those resting in the stages of shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas will quickly attain supreme enlightenment.

“Followers of other paths who maintain mistaken doctrines and who are attached to mistaken views of annihilation and eternity have commandments that prohibit eating meat. Can those who would protect the true teaching of the tathagatas in the world do any better while eating meat?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Excellent, most excellent. Listen and ponder it well, and I will tell you.”

Mahamati said, “May we be so instructed.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “There are countless reasons why you should not eat meat. But I will summarize them for you. Because all beings have at some time been reborn as family members, out of your feelings for them, you shouldn’t eat meat. Because butchers indiscriminately sell the flesh of donkeys and camels, foxes and dogs, cattle and horses and humans along with that of other animals, you shouldn’t eat meat. And you shouldn’t eat meat because animals are raised on impurities. And you shouldn’t eat meat because beings become afraid when they smell its odor, like when a dog snarls in anger and fear at the sight of a chandala or domba [castes associated with the disposal and cremation of corpses].

“Also, you shouldn’t eat meat because it prevents practitioners from giving rise to compassionate thoughts. You shouldn’t eat meat because those fools who are fond of its stench, its filth, and its impurity are maligned. You shouldn’t eat meat because it makes spells and incantations ineffective. You shouldn’t eat meat because those who kill living creatures become so attached to its taste, they think about it whenever they see them. You shouldn’t eat meat because those who eat meat are abandoned by the gods. You shouldn’t eat meat because it makes your breath stink. You shouldn’t eat meat because it causes nightmares. You shouldn’t eat meat because the tigers and wolves in the forest and the wilderness can smell it. You shouldn’t eat meat because it results in a lack of restraint regarding food and drink. You shouldn’t eat meat because it keeps practitioners from giving rise to aversion. You shouldn’t eat meat because I have often said that when you eat or drink, you should imagine you are [either] consuming the flesh of your children or swallowing medicine. I would never approve the eating of meat.

“Further, Mahamati, in the past there was a king named Simhasaudasa who ate all kinds of meat. But when he started eating human flesh, his ministers and subjects would not accept it. They conspired to overthrow him, and they put an end to his reign. Such are the ills of eating meat. Hence, you should not eat meat.

“Further, Mahamati, those who kill do so for profit. They kill creatures and sell them in the marketplace, where ignorant meat-eating people use the net of money to catch their meat. Among those who take the lives of others, some use money, and some use hooks and nets to catch creatures that move through the air or in the water or across the land. They kill all sorts of creatures and sell them in the marketplace for profit. Mahamati, when it comes to fish or meat, there is no such thing as ‘not requesting, seeking, or thinking about it.’ For this reason, you should not eat meat.

“Mahamati, on some occasions I have proscribed eating five kinds of meat and at other times ten kinds. Today, in this sutra, I am getting rid of practices that allow certain kinds at certain times in favor of none

whatsoever. Mahamati, the Tathagata, the Arhat, the Fully Enlightened One has never eaten anything much less taught others to eat fish or meat. Because of my past acts of great compassion, I look on all beings as I would a child. And why would I approve eating the flesh of children?"

The Buddha than repeated this in verse:

1. "Because it was a family member / or because it is covered with filth / or it was raised on impurities / or its smell gives rise to fear
2. From meat and from onions / from leeks and from garlic / from indulging in alcohol / practitioners keep their distance
3. They also avoid sesame oil [used as an insecticide] / as well as beds of thorns / because there are tiny insects / cowering in fear inside
4. As food and drink promote indulgence / and indulgence stimulates feelings / and from feelings come desires / you should therefore eat no meat
5. As eating meat produces desires / and desires stupefy the mind / forever drunk on love and desire / from birth and death you won't escape
6. Killing creatures for profit / or catching your meat with money / both of these are evil paths / leading to the hell of lamentation
7. As for 'not requesting, seeking, or thinking about it' / there is no thrice-pure meat / this isn't free of karma / therefore you should eat no meat
8. Those who are practitioners / therefore keep their distance / buddhas of the ten directions / all voice their disapproval
9. Taking turns eating each other / reborn among wolves or tigers / amid detestable stench and filth / wherever they are born they are fools
10. Usually they're born as chandalas / as dombas or as hunters / or they're born among meat-eating demons / rakshasas or wild cats
11. In the *Hastikakshya* and the *Mahamegha* / in the *Angulimaliya* as well / and here in the *Lankavatara* / I proscribe all eating of meat
12. Buddhas and bodhisattvas / even shravakas denounce it / eating meat without shame / living life after life in ignorance
13. And those who admit their offense / who have already stopped eating meat / blinded by their projections / they are reborn in carnivorous worlds
14. Just as excessive desire / keeps you from getting free / alcohol, meat, onions, and garlic / block the path to buddhahood
15. Beings in some future age / might stupidly say about meat / 'it's pure and isn't wrong / the buddhas said we could eat it'
16. Imagine you're [either] swallowing medicine / or eating the flesh of a child / be content and practice aversion / beg for your food instead
17. Even those with compassionate hearts / I tell to practice aversion / such beasts as tigers or wolves / might yet become their companions
18. Those who eat blood-covered flesh / terrify other beings / therefore those who practice / out of compassion should not eat meat
19. It doesn't foster compassion or wisdom / it prevents your true liberation / it conflicts with the ways of the wise / therefore you should not eat meat
20. Rebirth as a Brahman / in a place of practice / in a wise or noble family / this comes from not eating meat."

Āṅgulimālika Sūtra, Fascicle 4 (translated by Rulu)

Mañjuśrī asked the Buddha, “World-Honored One, is it because [all sentient beings have] the Tathāgata store [tathāgatagarbha / buddha-nature] that Buddhas do not eat flesh?”

The Buddha said, “Indeed. Without a beginning, all sentient beings transmigrate through [their cycles of] birth and death. They have been parents, brothers, or sisters, just like an actor’s various roles. One’s flesh and others’ flesh are one flesh. Therefore, Buddhas do not eat flesh. Moreover, Mañjuśrī, one’s realm and the realms of all sentient beings are one realm, and all flesh is one flesh. Therefore, Buddhas do not eat flesh.”

Mañjuśrī asked the Buddha, “World-Honored One, are conch shells, beeswax, honey, leather, and soft silk not the flesh from some sentient beings’ realm?”

The Buddha told Mañjuśrī, “Do not say so. The Tathāgata stays away from worldly ways and does not eat flesh. It is not right to say that He stays close to worldly things. Using worldly things is a convenience. One can use anything that arrives through a chain of stations, but should not use it at its origin. One can touch anything that arrives through a chain of stations that do not involve killing.”

Brahmajāla Sūtra, Minor Precept Number 3 (translated by Charles Muller)

My disciples, you should not intentionally eat meat. The consumption of meat is entirely unacceptable, as doing so will cut you off from the seed-lineage of great compassion. Whenever sentient beings see you, they will avoid you. Therefore, all bodhisattvas cannot eat the flesh of sentient beings. To eat meat is to invite countless sins. In eating meat, one commits countless violations.

Śhūraṅgama Sūtra, Chapter 6 (Buddhist Text Translation Society)

"After my extinction, how can those who eat the flesh of beings be called the disciples of Shakya? You should know that, even if these meat-eaters may enter the heart-open state similar to Samadhi, they are all great Rakshas. When their retribution ends, they are bound to sink into the bitter sea of birth and death. They are not disciples of the Buddha. Such people as these kill and eat one another in a never-ending cycle. How can such people transcend the Triple Realm? "

"When you teach people of the world to cultivate Samadhi, they must also cease killing. This is the second clear and decisive instruction on purity given by the Tathagatas, the Buddhas of the Past, the Bhagavans. Therefore, Ananda, if cultivators of Dhyana Samadhi do not stop killing, they are like one who stops up his ears and calls out in a loud voice, thinking that no one hears him. He tries to cover up the sound, but only makes it greater. Pure Bhikshus and Bodhisattvas who practice purity will not even step on grass in the pathway; even less would they pull it up with their hands. How could anyone with great compassion consume the flesh and blood of beings? Bhikshus who do not wear silk, leather boots, furs, or down, whether imported or found locally, and who do not consume milk, cream, or butter, can truly transcend this world. When they have paid back their past debts, they will not have to re-enter the Triple Realm. Why not? When someone wears anything taken from a living creature, he creates relationships with the creature, just as when people ate the hundred grains, their feet could not leave the earth. Both physically and mentally one must avoid the bodies and the by-products of beings, by neither wearing them nor eating them. I say that such people have true liberation. What I have said here is the Buddhas' teaching. Any explanation counter to it is the teaching of Papiyan (demon king)."