



Talk on Vegetarianism by **Orgyen Trinle Dorje, Karmapa XVII**

As Translated Simultaneously by Ringu Tulku Rinpoche
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Since I have about a half an hour, I wanted to talk about being vegetarian. It's not easy to talk too much about being vegetarian, to give up meat eating. I think it's very important to know how to think about eating meat and how to put it into practice. Now I should start to talk because this half hour is about to finish. To begin with we will say some prayers. [*Chanting*]

Generally regarding those who are ordained, if you ask if meat is allowed for the monks or not, some people say that it is not allowed because if there are people who are eating meat, then there will be people who will kill those animals, and if there is no one eating meat then there would be no one will make the meat. So therefore eating meat is very much related to killing and therefore the negative deed of killing is very much caused by eating meat. Now whether that is true or not is something different....If there are people who are using the pearls, then these people who use the pearls cause the killing of the shellfish. And also those people who wear certain kind of dresses, people who wear brocades – silk is also made by certain animals or certain insects – so anybody who is wearing these clothes or anything that is coming from animals [is also killing animals].

And also if there is nobody who eats meat, then because of eating things like grains and so forth, also this causes lots of insects under the earth to come up on the earth and then all those beings living on top of the earth go below and therefore cause a lot of beings to die.

Because there are sheep, there will be people who are killing the sheep. So therefore, being a sheep is also a problem, a kind of source of the negative deed. [Therefore] just being one cause cannot be the same as being the actual deed of negative things.

There was once a person in China who used to butcher pigs. Each day he used to kill a pig and he used to make his sword red. Sometimes he thought, “Why should I do this? Each day I'm killing a pig.” And he thought, “It's not because I want to kill the pig but because other people want to eat [it] and need the pig and therefore that's why I'm doing it,” and so he was consoling himself that it's not too bad.

There was a monastery nearby and in the monastery there was a big bell and every morning when the bell rang he got up and went to kill the pig. One morning, he overslept and woke up late and when he went late to kill his pig, the pig that he was supposed to kill already had 10 piglets. Then, because that morning there was no bell rung, he went to the temple and he asked the head monk why was it that this morning there was no bell. And the head monk told him that he had a dream last night and in the dream he met ten beings and they came and asked the monk, "Please save ten of us." And then the monk asked, "How do I save you piglets?" And the piglets said, "The only thing you need to do is not to ring the bell this morning and then you will save all of us." And then the monk said to the butcher, "Therefore, I didn't ring the bell." When the butcher heard this he was very moved and stopped killing any pigs from that time onward.

What I'm saying is that ringing a bell became a cause for killing the pigs, and so therefore, sometimes it may also happen that we should not ring a bell because someone might kill a pig. So only being one condition cannot become the real cause of the problem. That is not logical, but whether the Buddha allowed the monks to eat meat or not....in the Vinaya it is mentioned that that there are certain ways of being able to eat meat, and certain kinds of meat cannot be eaten and it is also mentioned that those kinds of meat that cannot usually be eaten, *can* be eaten in some circumstances: there are things like that.

But generally it is very important, I think, in the Mahayana, not to eat meat. In the Vinaya they talk about the three kinds of pure ways of making meat, that if it should be free from three kinds of [???? word is unclear], then it is allowed to be eaten. For instance, if it is not killed for yourself and things like that. But because you are so attached and have so much craving for the taste of meat, you [may not] know whether this meat is specially dedicated for you or not. Sometimes people are so attached to meat that they go and ask people, "Please give me some meat."

When I was young, I was also very attached. I liked meat very much. The meat finished very quickly. The labrang's meat finished very quickly but sometimes the monk's meat was still there because the monks were more careful. Then I went and asked them to send some meat from the monk's kitchen. Because I was eating meat, therefore I also influenced other people to eat meat. If I like meat, then people around me are influenced by me, because I give meat. I said, "I would like some momos; let's go and get some meat momos." And then other people eat meat momos.

So therefore the Buddha said that the Bodhisattvas should not eat any meat. Because we have such strong attachment and aptitude or tendency to eat meat, therefore, for the beginner Bodhisattvas it is very good not to eat meat. When you go to the restaurant and say, "Give me some chicken," then you don't know whether they already have some chicken prepared or they have to kill the chicken. Therefore it is said that a Bodhisattva should not eat meat. That's how it is said.

And when we talk about Bodhisattvas here, we are not talking about the great Bodhisattvas like Chenrezig or Chana Dorje, and great kinds of Bodhisattvas who are in higher *bhumis*, but just ordinary Bodhisattvas like ourselves who can be called Bodhisattvas who wish to work for the benefit of sentient beings. According to the Bodhisattvayana, it is said that, even if [meat] is pure from the three ways as allowed in the Vinaya, even those kinds of meat, the Bodhisattvas or the beginner Bodhisattvas should not eat. Because of our having too much attachment to the taste, therefore, unknowingly we will kind of commit mistakes, thus it is not good to eat meat.

Therefore it has been prohibited to eat meat in the *Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. When you say this, it is not that because meat is allowed in the Vinaya: that doesn't mean that the Vinaya is not good. It's not like that. [Rather] we have to see every being as our own son or our own child, and therefore when we eat meat, it is like, just for our food we are giving up the sentient beings who are supposed to be dear to us, like our own child. So therefore, this way of using the meat for our food, is a little bit like, not only something that is prohibited or looked down upon from the Bodhisattva's point of view, but is also something that is regarded [as] not good from the

Shravakayana point of view.

Meat that you have either seen or heard or you are doubtful about whether or not the animal is killed for your consumption: that is not pure. Meat that is not killed for you, as we said before,--the three reasons--even if it is not killed for you and you either have not seen nor heard and have no doubt that it was not killed for you, even then it's not permitted to eat it from the *Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. But in Tibet of course, we usually eat the meat that's dedicated for us. In Tibet, if a big lama or some lama goes to a village, they [in the village] will immediately kill a sheep or kill a yak and then the Lama says some mantras and thinks that's okay. That is not good. Even if the Lama is very good and thinks that it's okay, it is not okay because the Buddha said that one should not eat any meat that has been specially dedicated for you or specially killed for the consumption of yourself.

There was once a lama in Amdo, a Jonang Lama, and one man came to bless the chang (chang means alcohol). This man came to the lama with some alcohol and asked him to bless it because he thought that if you bless it then you can drink it. The lama said, "I don't know how to do that. I don't know how to bless it." Then the lama said that if that is the case, you know in Tibet sometimes they kill the yak by suffocation, and he said if you suffocate the animal and then bless it, doesn't it die? So in the same way, he said, I cannot bless the alcohol in such a way that you can drink it without having any problem. And therefore, whether it's in Tibet, whether this lama or the person is very highly realized, even then one has to act according to the law or the precepts that have been prescribed by the Buddha.

There are many great masters and very great realized beings in India and there have been many great realized beings in Tibet also, but they are not saying, "I'm realized, therefore I can do anything; I can eat meat and drink alcohol." It's nothing like that. It should not be like that. According to the Kagyupa school, we have to see what the great masters of the past, the past lamas of Kagyupas, did and said about eating meat. The Drikung Shakpa [sp?] Rinpoche, master of Drikungpa, said like this, "My students, whomever are eating or using meat and calling it tsokhor or tsok, then these people are completely deserting me and going against the dharma." I can't explain each of these things, but he said that anybody that is using meat and saying it is something good, this is completely against the dharma and against me and they completely have nothing to do with dharma. He said it very, very strongly.

Other great masters also said this. And each of them said that if somebody eats meat and thinks that it's allowed, you can't even dream like that because it is something that is never right and never good. In some places it is said that if someone has a great method by which they can liberate the being whose meat he eats, only then might that person eat it, according to the Vajrayana. Otherwise, other than that, you cannot eat meat.

According to Karme Chakme Rinpoche, we talk about using the five meats and five amritas: if someone is completely realized, then only can one eat meat. And then if you say that many things are mentioned about this in the Vajrayana--in Vajrayana, lots of things are mentioned about the five meats and five amritas, what is this? He said that that is only for the most advanced people. For instance if you put some shit and some urine on the altar, it's very bad. We don't like it and we feel like vomiting.

Making offerings -- it's not for the fulfillment of the great masters, that they are hungry and thirsty and then we have to give [things to] them. It's not like that. Why we have to offer is in order to accumulate positive deeds for us.

The [8th] Karmapa Mikyo Dorje also said, that if you offer meat during the *guktor* and things like that, for the Mahakala puja [if] you put some meat or you put some alcohol or things like that--he very strictly prohibited that. He said if you do that, I'm not your lama. You are not my disciples, or my followers, completely not. In all the monasteries, the Kamtsang, the Karmapa said, you don't

have to make any offerings of meat and alcohol. Maybe you can put some fruits. I've heard that in Sikkim, during the guktor or Mahakala puja, you must put some meat. If Mahakala himself comes, maybe he will eat some meat; maybe that's okay. But if we do that for Mahakala, put [or eat?] an offering of meat or alcohol, that's completely useless. That's not good.

Again, Mikyo Dorje said, in Tuton Gyatsa [sp?], that there are eight things to be given up by the monks, like meat, alcohol, weapons and things like that – I can't remember all of them – because this is what has been described in Do Palmo Che. Most important about this is the meat, alcohol and weapons. These you can't even look at, he said. If you don't give up these eight things, then you don't belong to Kagyupa, he said. Then you [should] just go away, or sit somewhere else, that's how it is said. If you eat meat you aren't not included in Kagyupa. So we don't know if we are Kagyupas or not.

Jamgon Kongtrul, before he died, said again and again, that he is always praying that he will be reborn as someone who would not eat meat anymore. There are lots of things to read. There are lots of quotations. We should put it into action. How to put it into action: [name of the first sutra mentioned is unclear], Do Lanka Shepa, Na Nyen Le Depa Do, in all of these sutras, eating meat has been clearly prohibited. And even those places when eating meat was just merely allowed, it was not that it was encouraged to eat meat. Nobody said that eating meat is good or that eating meat was no problem. It was just said that those people who have too many difficulties to not eat meat, then eating meat was kind of merely allowed. It was said like that.

Then in Tibet, [among the] Kagyu, Nyingma, Sakya, Gelung, and Jonang – I haven't read too much about Bonpo – [in] all these places, eating meat was strongly prohibited.

There is something that I want to tell about myself personally. When I was young, about 11 or 12, someone who did palmistry looked at my palm [and said], "When you are 23 or 24 there will be a big obstacle." But I was young and I did not think about it. I forgot about it. Then I came to India. It's been about five or six years it happened after [sic]. Then I had a dream. A lama [in my dream] said that someone in palmistry also "told you that there is an obstacle. Don't you remember?" I said, "I remember." Then he said, "There is an obstacle for your life." Usually, I'm not very afraid of death. I'm a Khampa so I pretend to be a little bit brave. In that dream I was very scared. When I woke up my heart was beating very fast. That was a dream, [however] I feel also that there is some obstacle.

Also people like me, if I live long, I don't know if it is much use or not, but from eight years of age until now, I have been raised by the monasteries and the dharma and my only intention is to be able to serve, a little bit, the dharma and the sangha and the monasteries. All of my intentions and actions have not been too negative so far. If everything goes well I aspire to serve the dharma and the beings. To get rid of this obstacle I feel that the most important thing is to save lives and therefore not to eat meat. So I feel that is the most important thing.

Whether you look at it from the general point of view or the specific point of view, it is very important not to eat meat. And also, this year or next year, the obstacle year of His Holiness the Dalai Lama is happening. Especially last year he completely prohibited wearing the skins of wild animals and things like that. Now it's very important to do these things.

I have some proposals: First, breathe out strongly. If you are Kamtsang, whether you are a nun or monk or layperson, you should not do business in meat, through buying animals and killing them and selling the meat. So never use selling of the meat as a business. That's one thing; that's very important. That's not only those who are in India, there are lots of people in Tibet who are doing this. I have heard that some even tulkus in Tibet are doing this kind of business.

In Tsurphu monastery, everything kind of got destroyed but the slaughterhouse is still there; that still remains. There should not be a slaughterhouse. We should make every effort that there is no slaughterhouse wherever there is a Kamtsang monastery. I usually think about the whole Kagyu

but first thing we have to talk about is Kamtsang. So there should not be a slaughterhouse in the compound or which is belonging to the monastery. That should not be. That is not only for the monks and nuns but anybody who is claiming to follow the Kamtsang tradition, everyone should take this into mind.

Now for the monks and nuns....also [do not] cook meat in a big way....I was looking at a western magazine and I saw about ten monks cutting meat. And it looks as if they are making so much meat and cooking so much meat. Sometimes you have to do a little bit, but to cook a lot of meat for big gatherings, especially wearing the robes, this should not be done. That doesn't look good also. Usually we say that there is no being who has not been our father or mother....And then, [regarding] going to the slaughterhouse wearing the robes to buy meat – when you go to slaughterhouse, the only reason is to buy meat. We should lessen going to slaughterhouse.

If you really, really need to buy some meat you should ask some other people to buy it. For monks going to the slaughterhouse and buying meat looks very bad. And then we should lessen the eating of meat. Generally we eat three times a day and so we should eat meat only once a day and not all the meals, or something like that. Or we should say that “I will eat meat only once a month,” or something like that. Tibetans usually think that kind of special days are very important like the full moon day or new moon day or Chotrul Dawa or Saka Dawa. There are people who don't eat meat on those days.

Some people give up meat altogether, but some people cannot. But at least, one should reduce it. Because in the society, if everybody is eating meat then it is very difficult to give up meat, but if there is a society and the whole environment is not eating meat then it's easy not to eat meat. But if everyone is eating meat then it is not easy to stop eating meat. In the next session I will ask you, how many of you will eat meat for only one meal and not in the two other meals. So those who will do that, should raise you hands. I don't have to see all of them but you must make the promise to yourselves. Then [I'll ask] how many of you would like to give up meat on special days and how many of you would give up meat for all the time. So you have to think. [However], there's nothing much to think about. You just have to decide. Thinking too much is not really useful; you just have to decide.

Another thing I've forgotten is that any monastery that belongs to Kamtsang Kagyu, the monastery kitchen cannot and should not make any food with meat. And if you bring meat and cook it in the monastery kitchen then that means that you are not taking me as your teacher, you are not belonging to Karma Kagyu. And there is nothing to discuss about that. That's finished. That is very important.

Especially in Tibet, before it was very, very difficult, but now because of the kindness of the Chinese it's not so difficult. It's not that there is only meat you can eat, there are some other things also, there are vegetables and things like that. You have to think, eating meat is not good, eating meat is dirty and bad for your health – this kind of way of looking has to be cultivated. It's good for the long life of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and also for Apo Gaga. You can use my name also. If you want Apo Gaga to live longer, it's useful not to eat meat. And your own Root Guru and all the great beings, if you want them to live long, the best method to do is to reduce meat or not eat it.

In the next session, once you make the commitment you should really keep it. If you make the first commitment very clearly and very strongly, then the second commitment will be good and the third also good, so the first commitment should be very strong and you should not make the commitment unless you can really do it and have the mind to do it.



* Editor's note: This is a transcript of a talk that the XVII Karmapa gave. Caution: There are some inevitable omissions and/or mistakes contained within, inherent with simultaneous translation into multiple languages over a FM channel. Because this is such an important talk, Kagyu Monlam International, through Lama Chodrak, is requesting a thorough retranslation which may be published as soon as it become available.

The MP3 recording of the above text is on-line available [[download 12 MB](#)]

Note by [Shabkar.Org](#)

For the record: there are currently two Karmapa's XVII. Traditionally the Karmapa is head of the Karma Kagyu lineage within Tibetan Buddhism. In 1981 the sixteenth Karmapa died. Due to political issues within the Tibetan Buddhist community instead of the usual one Karmapa, two young Karmapas were appointed as his incarnation: the above quoted [H.H. Orgyen Trinle Dorje](#) and [H.H. Trinley Thaye Dorje](#). Only the latter is recognized by the [Sharmapa](#), who traditionally leads the Karma Kagyu lineage in concert with the Karmapa, while only the first is recognized by the [Tai Situpa](#), who traditionally is charged with safeguarding the Karma Kagyu lineage as well. Personally both young Karmapas seem willing to solve the issue created by elders in their community, but this takes time. The official standpoint of H.H. Trinley Thaye Rinpoche regarding eating or dealing with fish, meat and eggs in general, or tsok made from meat, is yet unknown to Shabkar.Org.