

The Lankavatara Sutra

Chapter Eight

As Translated for the first time from the original Sanskrit
by Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki ¹

At that time Mahamati the Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas asked the Blessed One in verse and again made a request, saying: Pray tell me, Blessed One, Tathagata, Arhat, Fully-Enlightened One, regarding the merit and vice of meat-eating; thereby I and other Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas of the present and future may teach the Dharma to make those beings abandon their greed for meat, who, under the influence of the habit-energy belonging to the carnivorous existence, strongly crave meat-food. These meat-eaters thus abandoning their desire for [its] taste will seek the Dharma for their food and enjoyment, and, regarding all beings with love as if they were an only child, will cherish great compassion towards them. Cherishing [great compassion], they will discipline themselves at the stages of Bodhisattvahood and will quickly be awakened in supreme enlightenment; or staying a while at the stage of Sravakahood and Pratyekabuddhahood, they will finally reach the highest stage of Tathagatahood.

Blessed One, even those philosophers who hold erroneous doctrines and are addicted to the views of the Lokayata such as the dualism of being and non-being, nihilism, and eternalism, will prohibit meat-eating and will themselves refrain from eating it. How much more, O World Leader, he who promotes one taste for merely and is the Fully-Enlightened One; why not prohibit in his teachings the eating of flesh not only by himself but by others? Indeed, let the Blessed One who at heart is filled with pity for the entire world, who regards all beings as his only child, and who possesses great compassion in compliance with his sympathetic feelings, teach us as to the merit and vice of meat-eating, so that I and other Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas may teach the Dharma.

Said the Blessed One: Then, Mahamati, listen well and reflect well within yourself; I will tell you.

Certainly, Blessed One: Then, Mahamati, listen well and reflect well within yourself; I will tell you.

Certainly, Blessed One; said Mahamati the Bodhisattva-Mahasattva and gave ear to the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said this to him: For innumerable reasons, Mahamati, the Bodhisattva, whose nature is compassion, is not to eat any meat; I will explain them: Mahamati, in this long course of transmigration here, there is not one living being that, having assumed the form of a living being, has not been your mother, or father, or brother, or sister, or son, or daughter, or the one or the other, in various degrees of kinship; and when acquiring another form of life may live as a beast, as a domestic animal, as a bird, or as a womb-born, or as

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See also *A Re-translation of the Eighth Chapter of the Lankavatara Sutra and Commentary* by William Bagley [[download in PDF - 300 KB](#)]

something standing in some relationship to you; [this being so] how can the Bodhisattva-Mahasattva who desires to approach all living beings as if they were himself and to practise the Buddha-truths, eat the flesh of any living being that is of the same nature as himself? Even, Mahamati, the Rakshasa, listening to the Tathagata's discourse on the highest essence of the Dharma, attained the notion of protecting [Buddhism], and, feeling pity, refrains from eating flesh; how much more those who love the Dharma! Thus, Mahamati, wherever there is the evolution of living beings, let people cherish the thought of kinship with them, and, thinking that all beings are [to be loved as if they were] an only child, let them refrain from eating meat. So with Bodhisattvas whose nature is compassion, [the eating of] meat is to be avoided by him. Even in exceptional cases, it is not [compassionate] of a Bodhisattva of good standing to eat meat. The flesh of a dog, an ass, a buffalo, a horse, a bull, or man, or any other [being], Mahamati, that is not generally eaten by people, is sold on the roadside as mutton for the sake of money; and therefore, Mahamati, the Bodhisattva should not eat meat.

For the sake of love of purity, Mahamati, the Bodhisattva should refrain from eating flesh which is born of semen, blood, etc. For fear of causing terror to living beings, Mahamati, let the Bodhisattva who is disciplining himself to attain compassion, refrain from eating flesh. To illustrate, Mahamati: When a dog sees, even from a distance, a hunter, a pariah, a fisherman, etc., whose desires are for meat-eating, he is terrified with fear, thinking, "They are death-dealers, they will even kill me." In the same way, Mahamati, even those minute animals that are living in the air, on earth, and in water, seeing meat-eaters at a distance, will perceive in them, by their keen sense of smell, the odour of the Rakshasa and will run away from such people as quickly as possible; for they are to them the threat of death. For this reason, Mahamati, let the bodhisattva, who is disciplining himself, to abide in great compassion, because of its terrifying living beings, refrain from eating meat. Mahamati, meat which is liked by unwise people is full of bad smell and its eating gives one a bad reputation which turns wise people away; let the Bodhisattva refrain from eating meat. The food of the wise, Mahamati, is what is eaten by the Rishis; it does not consist of meat and blood. Therefore, Mahamati, let the Bodhisattva refrain from eating meat.

In order to guard the minds of all people, Mahamati, let the Bodhisattva whose nature is holy and who is desirous of avoiding censure on the teaching of the Buddha, refrain from eating meat. For instance, Mahamati, there are some in the world who speak ill of the teaching of the Buddha; [they would say,] "Why are those who are living the life of a Sramana or a Brahmin reject such food as was enjoyed by the ancient Rishis, and like the carnivorous animals, living in the air, on earth, or in the water? Why do they go wandering about in the world thoroughly terrifying living beings, disregarding the life of a Sramana and destroying the vow of a Brahmin? There is no Dharma, no discipline in them." They are many such adverse-minded people who thus speak ill of the teaching of the Buddha. For this reason, Mahamati, in order to guard the minds of all people, let the Bodhisattva whose nature is full of pity and who is desirous of avoiding censure on the teaching of the Buddha, refrain from eating meat.

Mahamati, when sons or daughters of good family, wishing to exercise themselves in various disciplines such as the attainment of a compassionate heart, the holding a magical formula, or the perfecting of magical knowledge, or starting on a pilgrimage to the Mahayana, retire into a cemetery, or to a wilderness, or a forest, where demons gather or frequently approach; or when they attempt to sit on a couch or a seat for the exercise; they are hindered [because of their meat-eating] from gaining magical powers or from obtaining emancipation.

Mahamati, seeing that thus there are obstacles to the accomplishing of all the practices, let the Bodhisattva, who is desirous of benefiting himself as well as others, wholly refrain from eating meat.

As even the sight of objective forms gives rise to the desire for tasting their delicious flavour, let the Bodhisattva, whose nature is pity and who regards all beings as his only child, wholly refrain from eating meat. Recognising that his mouth smells most obnoxiously, even while living this life, let the Bodhisattva whose nature is pity, wholly refrain from eating meat.

[The meat-eater] sleeps uneasily and when awakened is distressed. He dreams of dreadful events, which makes his hair rise on end. He is left alone in an empty hut; he leads a solitary life; and his spirit is seized by demons. Frequently he is struck with terror, he trembles without knowing why; there is no regularity in his eating, he is never satisfied. In his eating he never knows what is meant by proper taste, digestion, and nourishment. His viscera's are filled with worms and other impure creatures and harbour the cause of leprosy. He ceases to entertain any thoughts of aversion towards all diseases. When I teach to regard food as if it were eating the flesh of one's own child, or taking a drug, how can I permit by disciples, Mahamati, to eat food consisting of flesh and blood, which is gratifying to the unwise but is abhorred by the wise, which brings many evils and keeps away many merits; and which was not offered to the Rishis and is altogether unsuitable?

Now, Mahamati, the food I have permitted [my disciples] to take] is gratifying to all wise people but is avoided by the unwise; it is productive of many merits, it keeps away; many evils; and it has been prescribed by the ancient Rishis. It comprises rice, barley, wheat, kidney beans, beans, lentils, etc., clarified butter, oil, honey, molasses, treacle, sugar cane, coarse sugar, etc.; food prepared with these is proper food. Mahamati, there may be some irrational people in the future who will discriminate and establish new rules of moral discipline, and who, under the influence of the habit-energy belonging to the carnivorous races, will greedily desire the taste [of meat] : it is not for these people that the above food is prescribed. Mahamati, this is the food I urge for the Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas who have made offerings to the previous Buddhas, who have planted roots of goodness, who are possessed of faith, devoid of discrimination, who are all men and women belonging to the Sakya family, who are sons and daughters of good family, who have no attachment to body, life, and property, who do not covet delicacies, are not at all greedy, who being compassionate desire to embrace all living beings as their own person, and who regard all beings with affection as if they were an only child.

Long ago in the past, Mahamati, there lived a king whose name was Simhasaudasa. His excessive fondness for meat, his greed to be served with it, stimulated his taste for it to the highest degree so that he [even] ate human flesh. In consequence of this he was alienated from the society of his friends, counsellors, kinsmen, relatives, not to speak of his townsmen and countrymen. In consequence he had to renounce his throne and dominion and to suffer great calamities because of his passion for meat.

Mahamati, even Indra who obtained sovereignty over the gods had once to assume the form of a hawk owing to his habit-energy of eating meat for food in a previous existence; he then chased Visvakarma appearing in the guise of a pigeon, who had thus to place himself on the scale. King Sivi feeling pity for the innocent [pigeon had to sacrifice himself to the hawk and thus] to suffer great pain. Even a god who became Indra the Powerful, after going through

many a birth, Mahamati, is liable to bring misfortune both upon himself and others; how much more those who are not Indra!

Mahamati, there was another king ¹who was carried away by his horse into a forest. After wandering about in it, he committed evil deeds with a lioness out of fear for his life, and children were born to her. Because of their descending from the union with a lioness, the royal children were called the Spotted-Foot, etc. One account of their evil habit-energy; in the past when their food had been flesh, they ate meat even [after becoming] king, and, Mahamati, in this life they lived in a village called kutiraka (“seven huts”), and because they were excessively attached and devoted to meat-eating they gave birth to Dakas and Dakinis who were terrible eaters of human flesh. In the life of transmigration, Mahamati, such ones will fall into the wombs of such excessive flesh-devouring creatures as the lion, tiger, panther, wolf, hyena, wild-eat, jackal, owl, etc.; they will fall into the wombs of still more greedily flesh devouring and still more terrible Rakshasas. Falling into such, it will be with difficulty that they can ever obtain a human womb; how much more [difficult] attaining Nirvana!

Such as these, Mahamati, are the evils of meat-eating; how much more numerous [evil] qualities that are born of the perverted minds of those devoted to [meat-eating]. ²And, Mahamati, the ignorant and simple-minded are not aware of all this and other evils and merits [in connection with meat-eating] I tell you, Mahamati, that seeing these evils and merits the Bodhisattva whose nature is pity should eat no meat.

If, Mahamati, meat is not eaten by anybody for any reason, there will be no destroyer of life. Mahamati, in the majority of cases the slaughtering of innocent living beings is done for pride and very rarely for other causes. Though nothing special may be said of eating the flesh of living creatures such as animals and birds, alas, Mahamati, that one addicted to the love of [meat-] taste should eat human flesh! Mahamati, in most cases nets and other devices are prepared in various places by people who have lost their sense on account of their appetite for meat-taste, and thereby many innocent victims are destroyed for the sake of the price [they bring in]—such as birds, Kaurabhraka, kaivarta, etc., that are moving about in the air, on land, and in water. There are even some, Mahamati, who are like Rakshasas hard-hearted and used to practising cruelties, ³ who, being so devoid of compassion, would now and then look at living beings as meant for food and destruction—no compassion is awakened in them.

It is not true, Mahamati, that meat is proper food and permissible for the Sravaka when [the victim] was not killed by himself, when he did not order others to kill it, when it was not specially meant for him. Again, Mahamati, there may be some unwitting people in the future time, who, beginning to lead the homeless life according to my teaching, are acknowledged as sons of the Sakya, and carry the Kashaya robe about them as a badge, but who are in thought evilly affected by erroneous reasoning's. They may talk about various discriminations which they make in their moral discipline, being addicted to the view of a personal soul. Being under the influence of the thirst for [meat-] taste, they will string together in various ways some sophistic arguments to defend meat-eating. They think they

¹ The text has all this in the plural (note by Suzuki)

² Both T'ang and Wei have here a sentence to the following effect: “Those who do not eat meat acquire a large sum of merit.” (note by Suzuki)

³ According to T'ang (note by Suzuki)

are giving me an unprecedented calumny when they discriminate and talk about facts that are capable of various interpretations. Imagining that this fact allows this interpretation, [they conclude that] the Blessed One permits meat as proper food, and that it is mentioned among permitted foods and that probably the Tathagata himself partook of it. But, Mahamati, nowhere in the sutras is meat permitted as something enjoyable, nor it is referred to as proper among the foods prescribed [for the Buddha's followers].

If however, Mahamati, I had the mind to permit [meat-eating], or if I said it was proper for the Sravakas [to eat meat], I would not have forbidden, I would not forbid, all meat-eating for these Yogins, the sons and daughters of good family, who, wishing to cherish the idea that all beings are to them like an only child, are possessed of compassion, practise contemplation, mortification, and are on their way to the Mahayana. And Mahamati, the interdiction not to eat any kind of meat is here given to all sons and daughters of good family, whether they are cemetery-ascetics of forest ascetics, or Yogins who are practising the exercises, if they wish the Dharma and are on the way to the mastery of any vehicle, and being possessed of compassion, conceive the idea of regarding all beings as an only child, in order to accomplish the end of their discipline.

In the canonical texts here and there the process of discipline is developed in orderly sequence like a ladder going up step by step, and one joined to another in a regular and methodical manner; after explaining each point meat obtained in these specific circumstances is not interdicted. Further, a tenfold prohibition is given as regards the flesh of animals found dead by themselves. But in the present sutra all [meat-eating] in any form, in any manner, and in any place, is unconditionally and once for all, prohibited for all. Thus, Mahamati, meat-eating I have not permitted to anyone, I do not permit, I will not permit. Meat-eating, I tell you, Mahamati, is not proper for homeless monks. There may be some, Mahamati, who would say that meat was eaten by the Tathagata thinking this would calumniate him. Such unwitting people as these, Mahamati, will follow the evil course of their own karma-hindrance, and will fall into such regions where long nights are passed without profit and without happiness. Mahamati, the noble Sravakas do not eat the food taken properly by [ordinary] men, how much less the food of flesh and blood, which is altogether improper. Mahamati, the food for my Sravakas, Pratyekabuddhas, and Bodhisattvas is the Dharma and not flesh ¹food; How much more the Tathagata! The Tathagata is the Dharmakaya, Mahamati; he abides in the Dharma as food; his is not a body feeding on flesh; he does not abide in any flesh-food. He has ejected the habit-energy of thirst and desire which sustain all existence; he keeps away the habit-energy of all evil passions; he thoroughly emancipated in mind and knowledge; he is the All-knower; he is All-seer; he regards all beings impartially as an only child; he is a great compassionate heart. Mahamati, having the thought of an only child for all beings, how can I, such as I am, permit the Sravakas to eat the flesh of their own child? How much less my eating it! That I have permitted the Sravakas as well as myself to partake of [meat-eating], Mahamati, has no foundation whatever.

So it is said:

1. Liquor, meat, and onions are to be avoided, Mahamati, by the Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas and those who are Victor-heroes. 2. Meat is not agreeable to the wise: it has a nauseating odour, it causes a bad reputation, it is food for the carnivorous; I say ² this, Mahamati, it is

¹ *Amisra* (mixed) in T'ang (note by Suzuki)

² *Brumi*, instead of *bruhi* as in the text (note by Suzuki)

not to be eaten. 3. To those who eat [meat] there are detrimental effects, to those who do not, merits; Mahamati, you should know that meat-eaters bring detrimental effects upon themselves. 4. Let the Yogin refrain from eating flesh as it is born of himself,. As [the eating] involves transgression, as [flesh] is produced of semen and blood, and as [the killing of animals] causes terror to living beings. 5. Let the Yogin always refrain from meat, onions, various kinds of liquor, allium, and garlic. 6. Do not anoint the body with sesamum oil; do not sleep on a bed, perforated with spikes; for the living beings who find their shelter in the cavities and in places where there are no cavities may be terribly frightened. ¹⁷. From eating [meat] arrogance is born, from arrogance erroneous imaginations issue, and from imagination is born greed; and for this reason refrain from eating [meat]. 8. From imagination, greed is born, and by greed the mind is stupefied; there is attachment to stupefaction, and there is no emancipation from birth [and death]. 9. For profit sentient beings are destroyed, for flesh money is paid out, they are both evil-doers and [the deed] matures in the hells called Raurava (screaming), etc. 10. One who eats flesh, trespassing against the words of the Muni, is evil-minded; he is pointed out in the teachings of the Sakya as the destroyer of the welfare of the two worlds. 11. Those evil-doers go to the most horrifying hell; meat-eaters are matured in the terrific hells such as Raurava, etc. 12. There is no meat to be regarded as pure in three ways: not premeditated, not asked for, and not impelled; therefore, refrain from eating meat. 13. Let not the Yogin eat meat, it is forbidden by myself as well as by the Buddhas; those sentient beings who feed on one another will be reborn among the carnivorous animals. 14. [The meat-eater] is ill-smelling, contemptuous, and born deprived of intelligence; he will be born again and again among the families of the Candala, the Pukkasa, and the Domba. 15. From the womb of Dakini he will be born in the meat-eaters' family, and then into the womb of a Rakshasi and a cat; he belongs to the lowest class of men. 16. Meat-eating is rejected by me in such sutras as the *Hastikakshya*, the *Mahamegha*, the *Nirvana*, the *Anglimalika*, and the *Lankavatara*. 17. [Meat-eating] is *condemned* by the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Sravakas; if one devours [meat] out of shamelessness he will always be devoid of sense. 18. One who avoids meat, etc., will be born, because of this fact, in the family of the Brahmins or of the Yogins, endowed with knowledge and wealth. 19. Let one avoid all meat-eating [whatever they may say about] witnessing, hearing, and suspecting; these theorists born in a carnivorous family understand this not. 20. As greed is the hindrance to emancipation, so are meat-eating, liquor, etc., hindrances. 21. There may be in time to come people who make foolish remarks about meat-eating, saying, "Meat is proper to eat, unobjectionable, and permitted by the Buddha." 22. Meat-eating is a medicine; again, it is like a child's flesh; follow the proper measure and be averse [to meat, and thus] let the Yogin go about begging. 23. [Meat-eating] is forbidden by me everywhere and all the time for those who are abiding in compassion; [he who eats meat] will be born in the same place as the lion, tiger, wolf, etc. 24. Therefore, do not eat meat which will cause terror among people, because it hinders the truth of emancipation; [not to eat meat—] this is the mark of the wise.

Here Ends the Eighth Chapter, "On Meat-eating." From the *Lankavatara*, the Essence of the Teaching of all the Buddhas.

¹ Unintelligible as far as the translator can see (note by Suzuki)