



Instructions On Not Eating Meat From His Holiness 17th Karmapa, Orgyen Trinle Dorje

By Vin Harris

Bodhgaya - Full moon day 3rd January 2007 was the last day of the 24th Kagyu Monlam. In the shade of the Bodhi Tree, seat of Enlightenment of One Thousand Buddhas, Orgyen Trinle Dorje the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa * gave this teaching on the benefits of not eating meat. Over 6,000 people were present. The teaching was heard by Lineage Holders, Rinpoches, Lamas, Ordained Sangha and lay practitioners who had travelled from many countries including Tibet, Nepal, India, Taiwan, Korea, Burma, USA, Canada, Russia and all parts of Europe.

The teaching was translated into various languages simultaneously and transmitted by FM radio. In this way it was possible to hear the meaning and at the same time to connect with the clarity and passion of the Karmapa's roaring voice. The English translation was made available by Ringu Tulku.

I made no notes at the time and perhaps at a later date the full transcription will be made available. However, on a few occasions during the Monlam teachings, His Holiness said that as the Kagyu family we should not be over concerned with precise details at the expense of the meaning of His message. For all practical purposes I am confident that this is a true account of what was said and offer it now with a sense of urgency.

Towards the end of the teaching His Holiness specifically asked those present to make it available to others since he considers the subject to be of such importance. He joked that the Tibetans should translate it for those from Amdo in case they claimed not to have understood His dialect.

Throughout the Kagyu Monlam, His Holiness spoke often of his childhood as a poor nomad in Tibet. It was the practice of nomads at a particular time of year to gather together the animals that were to be slaughtered. At these times he was completely distraught with concern for the suffering of the animals. Whatever his family tried they could not contain his sorrow. Since then he said that he has studied so much of the Dharma and practised so diligently and yet in all of the study and practice he has never found anything that could be created that was more precious than this naturally arising kindness towards other beings. He urged us all to connect with that innate goodness in ourselves.

On one occasion whilst living in Tibet someone had interpreted the lines on the hands of His Holiness and indicated that there are potential obstacles to his life in his 23rd and 24th years. Since leaving Tibet His Holiness himself had a dream regarding the same issue. He said that whilst he is not normally afraid of death, he woke from the dream deeply concerned. It was in response to this that he has concluded that the best remedy to the obstacles to both His life and the life of the Dalai Lama will be for his followers to preserve life and specifically to have less involvement with the killing of animals and the suffering that results from eating meat.

It was very clear that the Karmapa was not making a polite request. As head of the Lineage, he was investigating faults, making a diagnosis of obstacles and prescribing a remedy that must be followed.

With immediate effect:

- ◆ No meat is to be prepared in the kitchen of any Kagyu Monastery or Centre.
- ◆ No one is to be involved in the business of buying and selling meat – for all of his students this practice must stop.
- ◆ There is to be no killing of animals on Kagyu premises – the slaughterhouse at Turphu must be closed.
- ◆ Karmapa is aware of monks in robes going to buy meat and does not want to see this ever again.

His Holiness said that he knows that lamas and practitioners have always justified eating meat by saying that they make prayers for the beings that they are eating. This is not good enough. He asked how many of them can truly liberate beings in this way? Now we really do have a Karmapa and he is starting to make himself heard.

The use of alcohol and meat for Tsok offerings is also not acceptable. His Holiness quoted spiritual masters from the past who had condemned the practice of using Tsok as an excuse for eating meat and drinking alcohol. Leaving absolutely no room for interpretation, Karmapa said that anyone who uses meat and alcohol as Tsok is not part of Karmapa's lineage. If the practice is at the level where Mahakala really comes and actually drinks the alcohol and eats the meat then it may be justified but otherwise we should use fruit!

Throughout the Kagyu Monlam, many people took the Sojong vows at 6am each day. This took place beneath the Bodhi tree, presided over by either His Holiness or other masters. Early in the Monlam, His Holiness had explained the meaning and purpose of the Sojong precepts and at that point indicated that eating meat was a big subject and would be dealt with later. Apparently Karmapa had originally intended giving people a week to consider before making their commitment. As events worked out Karmapa gave us the time during tea break to decide what we felt able to promise. He said that sometimes it is better to be spontaneous.

Several options were made available and we were asked to raise our hands to indicate our choice of commitment and to witness each others' decisions. His wish for each of us to make an individual vow was clear and decisive. It applied just as much to the Tibetans who historically had little else available to eat. His Holiness said that now "thanks to the kindness of the Chinese" (this is an exact quote) the Tibetans have vegetables and other food available.

The choices offered were:

- ◆ Eating no meat one day per week

- ◆ Eating no meat one day per month
- ◆ Eating no meat on special days such as moon days, Guru Rinpoche and Tara days
- ◆ Eating meat for only one meal per day
- ◆ Give up eating meat for ever
- ◆ Give up eating meat for a specified period of time such as one, two or three years.
- ◆ Reduce eating meat with a view to giving up completely.

Throughout the speech it was obvious that His Holiness wanted everyone connected with his lineage to make some commitment for two main reasons:

- ◆ The teachings of Lord Buddha require that we act with kindness and preserve all life.
- ◆ Because of our connection to His Holiness, by improving our conduct we can reduce obstacles to his life.

When we consider the unshakable Bodhisattva activity of the Karmapas, how can we not be pleased that for once we have been given a simple and practical opportunity to help?

Vin Harris

9th January 2007

Eskdalemuir

P.S. The MP3 recording of the above mentioned teaching (translated simultaneously by Ringu Tulku Rinpoche) as well as the transcription are on-line available [[download MP3 - 12 MB](#) | [download PDF - 130 KB](#), © 2007 [KagyMonlam.Org](#)].

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](#).