

THE BUDDHIST REVIEW

tricycle EDITORS' BLOG

[West Eats Meat](#) *November 16, 2006*

Posted by amerz in : [Who Are We Reading?](#) , [2 comments](#)

What is undoubtedly one of the premiere websites on Buddhism and vegetarianism launched this week. [Shabkar.org](#) is named after the Tibetan yogi Shabkar Tsodruk Rangdrol (1781-1851), who adopted vegetarianism far before it was an advisable practice in high-altitude, low-crop Tibet. His teachings on the subject are collected in *Food of Bodhisattvas: Buddhist Teachings on Abstaining from Meat* from Shambhala Publications. One of the first questions Western Buddhists seem to get (upon “outing”) is “are you a vegetarian?”, often accompanied by a smirk of varying degrees of smugness. Whatever the stereotype is here in the West, vegetarianism is by no means the norm in the Asian Buddhist world—no Buddhist lay population has ever been primarily vegetarian, and the monastic orders of a number of countries do indeed eat meat.

What the Buddha himself actually thought about it is the subject of much heated debate—the sutras just aren't straightforward about it. Does *ahimsa*, the general principle of non-harm, include killing for food? If so, why are certain animals specifically verboten according to the Vinaya monastic code?

“One must not eat the meat of a tiger, nor the flesh of elephants, horses, and snakes. One must not eat the meat of animals with undivided hooves, nor of foxes, monkeys, woodpeckers, crows, vultures, water birds, dogs, cats, hawks, owls and other carrion birds, gray ducks, bats, snow lizards, apes, and insects.”

Clearly, this means it's okay to eat penguins, llamas, bison, and turtles. And, um chicken. But definitely no vultures or crickets. Some argue that it's all about intent, why the animals are killed, and there's the oft-quoted “eat whatever is put in your begging bowl.” But for those of us today who aren't making alms rounds and have easy access to plenty of healthy vegetarian options, it is open to personal interpretation. Shabkar.org has a wealth of writings on the topic to help us decide for ourselves. Another valuable resource is [veggiedharma.org](#).

-Andrew Merz, associate editor