

While these words encourage us to rely on our own reason and experience to discern what is right, later in the same Kalama Sutra the Buddha shares with us the Four Assurances:



The disciple of the Noble Ones, Kalamas, who has a hate-free mind, a malice-free mind, an undefiled mind, and a purified mind, is one by whom four assurances are found here and now.

Suppose there is a hereafter and there is a fruit, result, of deeds done well or ill. Then it is possible that at the dissolution of the body after death, I shall arise in the heavenly world, which is possessed of the state of bliss. This is the first assurance.

Suppose there is no hereafter and there is no fruit, no result, of deeds done well or ill. Yet in this world, here and now, free from hatred, free from malice, safe and sound, and happy, I keep myself. This is the second assurance.

Suppose evil befalls an evil-doer. I, however, think of doing evil to no one. Then, how can ill results affect me who do no evil deed? This is the third assurance.

Suppose evil does not befall an evil-doer. Then I see myself purified in any case. This is the fourth assurance.

The disciple of the Noble Ones, Kalamas, who has such a hate-free mind, such a malice-free mind, such an undefiled mind, and such a purified mind, is one by whom, here and now, these four assurances are found.

Here, Buddha Shakyamuni is asserting unequivocally that, regardless of our views on karma and rebirth, there are moral imperatives about which we can be certain: we must abandon hate, malice, and defilement, and cultivate purity of mind. He is stating bluntly that – whatever our opinions may be on other matters, however essential – morality is indispensable.

First among the moral injunctions, accepted and shared by all schools and lineages of the Buddha Dharma, is the precept to abstain from taking life (Anguttara Nikaya 8.39):

panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

I undertake the precept to refrain from destroying living creatures.

A disciple of the noble ones, abandoning the taking of life, abstains from taking life. In doing so, he gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings. In giving freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings, he gains a share in limitless freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression. This is the first gift, the first great gift – original, long-standing, traditional, ancient, untainted, unadulterated from the beginning – that is not open to suspicion, will never be open to suspicion, and is praised by knowledgeable contemplatives and sages.

Is this injunction to abstain from killing solely inclusive of humans? The Buddha says in the Dhammika Sutta:

*Let him not destroy, or cause to be destroyed,
any life at all, or sanction the acts of those who do so.
Let him refrain even from hurting any creature,
both those that are strong and those that tremble in the world.*

If we fail to understand the universality of this injunction, the Buddha clarifies (Sutta Nipata):

*Whether they be creatures of the land or air,
whoever harms here any living being,
who has no compassion for all that live,
let such a one be known as depraved.*

And in Anguttara Nikaya:



*I am a friend of the footless,
I am a friend of all bipeds,
I am a friend of those with four feet,
I am a friend of the many-footed.*

...

*May all creatures, all breathing things,
all beings one and all, without exception,
experience good fortune only.
May they not fall into any harm.*

Should we intend to skirt the First Precept by claiming innocence of the deed if others do the killing for us, He adds (Sutta Nipāta):

*One should not kill any living being,
nor cause it to be killed,
nor should one incite any other to kill.
Do never injure any being,
whether strong or weak, in this entire universe!*

Thus, in the Brahmajala Sutra, the Buddha says to His disciples, confirming the primacy of the First Precept:

*Abandoning the taking of life,
the ascetic Gautama dwells refraining from taking life,
without stick or sword, scrupulous, compassionate,
trembling for the welfare of all living beings.
Thus the worldling should praise the Tathagata.*

And in the Dhammapada:

*The one who has left all violence,
who never harms any being at all,
whether they are moving or still,
who neither kills, nor causes to kill,
such one, harmless, is the Holy One!*

Innumerable statements proclaiming the primacy of the First Principle can be found throughout the Theravada and Mahayana canons of Buddhist scripture.

The Mahayana sutras in particular are unequivocal in their censure both of killing animals and consuming their flesh and other products.

A disciple of the Buddha must maintain a mind of kindness and cultivate the practice of liberating beings. He should reflect thus:



“All male beings have been my father and all females have been my mother. There is not a single being who has not given birth to me during my previous lives, hence all beings of the Six Realms are my parents.

“Therefore, when a person kills and eats any of these beings, he thereby slaughters my parents. Furthermore, he kills a body that was once my own, for all elemental earth and water previously served as part of my body and all elemental fire and wind have served as my basic substance.

“Therefore, I shall always cultivate the practice of liberating beings and in every life be reborn in the eternally abiding Dharma, and teach others to liberate beings as well.”

Whenever a Bodhisattva sees a person preparing to kill animals, he should devise a skilful method to rescue and protect them, freeing them from their suffering and difficulties. —Buddha Shakyamuni, Brahmajala Sutra

In the Mahaparinirvana Sutra, the Buddha gives extensive arguments against the consumption of flesh:

Animal flesh eating stimulates the emergence of arrogance, which then stimulates delusional imaginations, which then stimulates greed for profit at the expense of compassion for sentient beings. Given the unwholesomeness of such interlocking motivations, it is wise to refrain from eating animal flesh.

From imagination, greed is developed, and through greed the mind becomes dull, complacent, and insensitive. When there is an attachment to such state, then it is difficult to arouse and sustain the impulse to liberate oneself from the wheel of compulsive death and rebirth.

...

There is no animal flesh to be regarded as pure by any exception. It does not matter if the giving of animal flesh for us to eat is premeditated or not, asked for or not, or whether extreme hunger is present or not. Therefore it is wise to not eat animal flesh in any circumstance which naturally arises within our life.

Let yogis not eat any animal flesh. All Buddhas teach all people to not eat animal flesh, and especially wish those under their guidance to not eat animal flesh. Sentient beings who feed on each other will be reborn as carnivores in the animal realm.

...

I rejected animal flesh eating in the teachings known as Hastikashya, Mahamegha, Nirvana, Angulimalika, and Lankavatara.

Animal flesh eating is rejected by Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Disciples. If a person eats animal flesh out of shamelessness, he or she will not be able to cultivate a wholesome sense of what is appropriate.

...

Let a person not give power to the many rationalizations given to justify animal flesh eating. What logicians say under the influence of their addictive craving for animal flesh is sophistic, delusional, and argumentative. What they imagine that they witnessed, heard, or suspected that the Blessed One has said, or another Buddha said or did, is grossly distorted.

As greed is a hindrance to liberation, so are the objects of greed a hindrance to liberation. Objects of greed like animal flesh eating and consuming alcohol are hindrances to liberation.

A time may come when deluded people may say, "Animal flesh is appropriate food to eat, has no karmic consequences, and is permitted by the Buddha".

Some will even say that eating animal flesh can be medicinal. It is more like eating the flesh of your only child. Let a yogi be attuned to what is balanced and nourishing to eat, be adverse to consuming animal flesh and alcohol, and with this clarity go about peacefully begging for food, trusting that what is wanted and needed to sustain a healthy life will be supplied.

Animal flesh eating is forbidden by Me everywhere and for all time for those who abide in compassion.

And in the Lankavatara Sutra, the Blessed One taught:

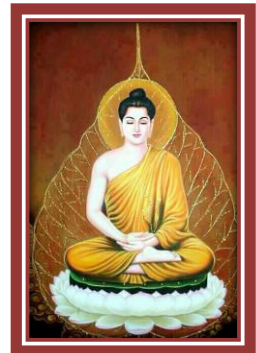
For innumerable reasons, Mahamati, the Bodhisattva, whose nature is compassion, is not to eat any animal flesh.

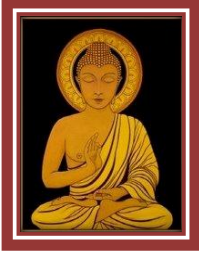
I will explain the reasons. Mahamati, in the long course of transmigration, all sentient beings have been our brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters, and we have felt many different kinds and degrees of kinship with each and every one of them.

These sentient beings have been beasts, domestic animals, birds, and humans in different lifetimes and have often been related to us in some way.

This being the case, how can the Bodhisattva-Mahasattva who desires to respect all sentient beings as he or she would respect himself or herself and who is committed to devotedly practicing the Dharma eat the flesh of any sentient being whose nature is the same as himself or herself?

Even, Mahamati, the Rakashasa, when they listened to a discourse on the highest essence of the Dharma by the Tathagata, were inspired to protect Buddhism. Through this they had awakened to the feeling of compassion, became sensitive to the sorrows of sentient beings, and therefore chose to refrain from eating animal flesh. How much more should human beings who love the Dharma do the same!





Thus, Mahamati, whenever and wherever there is evolution among sentient beings, let people cherish the thought of kinship with them, and holding the thought intention of treating them as if they were our only child, and therefore refrain from eating their flesh.

So much for more should Bodhisattvas, who are committed to being compassionate towards all sentient beings, and whose inner nature is compassion itself, choose to refrain from eating animal flesh.

For a Bodhisattva to keep good integrity with the Dharma, he or she should not make any exceptions to the eating of animal flesh. He or she is not to eat the flesh of dogs, donkeys, buffaloes, horses, bulls, humans, or any other sentient being, whether or not such flesh is generally eaten by some humans in some culture or society.

Nor should a Bodhisattva eat flesh sold by others for monetary profit.

For the sake of the love of purity, Mahamati, the Bodhisattva should refrain from eating flesh which is born of semen and blood. For fear of causing terror to sentient beings, let the Bodhisattva discipline himself or herself to attain compassion and refrain from eating animal flesh.

...

The food of the wise, which is eaten by Sages, does not consist of animal flesh or blood. Therefore let the Bodhisattva refrain from eating animal flesh.

In order to guard the minds of all people, Mahamati, let the Bodhisattva whose nature is holy and who wishes to avoid unnecessary criticism of the Buddha Dharma, refrain from eating animal flesh.

For instance, Mahamati, there are some who speak ill of the Buddha Dharma and say, 'Why are those who are living the life of Sramana or Brahmin reject the diet of the ancient Sages and choose to live like carnivores who fly in the sky, live in the water, or move on the earth? Why do they wander the Earth thoroughly terrifying sentient beings, disregarding the life of a Sramana and destroying the vows of a Brahmin? There is no Dharma and no discipline in them.' There are many adverse minded people who speak ill of the Buddha Dharma in this manner.

For this reason, Mahamati, in order to guard the minds of all people, let the Bodhisattva, whose nature is full of compassion, who is sensitive to the sorrows of sentient beings, avoid unnecessary criticism of the Buddha Dharma and therefore refrain from animal flesh eating.

...

Mahamati, when sons and daughters of good family, wishing the exercise themselves in various disciplines such as the attainment of a compassionate heart, reciting a mantra, perfecting knowledge, or journeying deeper into Mahayana Buddhist teachings, should go to a cemetery, into a wilderness retreat, or travel near a place where obstructers visit, or when they sit to do meditation practice, they are hindered because of their eating of animal flesh, and are less able to attain the excellences, be healed of illnesses, or even attain liberation itself. The Bodhisattva, seeing how animal flesh eating weakens the ability to attain the excellences, the ability to heal oneself and others, and even the ability to become liberated, and also remembering his or her wish to help save sentient beings and heal himself or herself, should therefore refrain from eating animal flesh.

...



When I teach to regard animal flesh eating as if it were the eating of an only child or as an intoxicant, how can I allow my disciples to eat food consisting of flesh and blood, which is gratifying to the unwise and which is shunned by the wise, which brings about much harm and keeps away many benefits? Animal flesh eating was not part of the wisdom of the ancient sages and was not meant to be appropriate food for any human being.

Now, Mahamati, the diet I have allowed for my disciples to take is satisfying to all wise people, but is avoided by the unwise. This diet produces many merits, keeps away many harmful effects, and was prescribed by the ancient sages. It comprises rice, barley, wheat, kidney beans, beans, lentils, oil, honey, molasses, treacle, sugar cane, coarse sugar, and similar foods. Food prepared with these ingredients is proper food.

...
Mahamati, the above mentioned diet is prescribed for those Bodhisattvas-Mahasattvas who have made offerings to the previous Buddhas, have planted the roots of goodness, are possessed of faith, are devoid of prejudices, are all males and females belonging to the Sakya family, are sons and daughters of good families, have no attachment to body, life, and property, do not crave sweets, choose to live a life without greed, have the compassionate desire to cherish all sentient beings as much as themselves, and love all sentient beings as if they were their only child.

And in the Surangama Sutra, the Buddha admonishes:

The reason for practicing meditation and seeking to attain samadhi is to escape from the suffering of life. But in seeking to escape from suffering ourselves, why should we inflict it upon others? Unless you can control your minds, so that even the thought of brutal unkindness and killing is abhorrent, you will never be able to escape from bondage of world's life.

After my parinirvana in the last kalpa, different kinds of ghosts will be encountered everywhere, deceiving people, and teaching that they can eat meat and still attain enlightenment. How can one who hopes to become a deliverer of others, himself be living on the flesh of other sentient beings?

Past and present Mahayana Buddhist teachers have spoken eloquently as well.



Eating meat, at the cost of great suffering for animals, is unacceptable. If, bereft of compassion and wisdom, you eat meat, you have turned your back on liberation. The Buddha said, "The eating of meat annihilates the seed of compassion". —Shabkar Tsodruk Rangdol

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have already expounded extensively on the faults of eating meat in the Elephant Power Sutra, Mahamegha Sutra, Nirvana Sutra, Angulimala Sutra, Lankavatara Sutra, Sutra Requested by Subahu, and various Madhyamika treatises. —Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche





As the noble Katyayana observed when on alms round, the meat we consume in our life is the flesh of our mothers and fathers from previous lives. If we are upright and have a conscience, how can we bear to eat the flesh of our parents killed by a butcher? If we quiet the mind and ponder this, we will definitely be filled with great compassion for these pitiful beings that were our mothers.

—Jigme Lingpa

Just as no pleasures can bring delight to someone whose body is ablaze with fire, the great compassionate ones cannot be pleased when harm is done to sentient beings.

...

Flesh free from the three objections, not prepared, unasked, unsolicited, there is none. Therefore one should not eat flesh.

—Arya Shantideva



The beings with unfortunate karma that we are supposed to be protecting are instead being killed without the slightest compassion, and their boiled flesh and blood are being presented to us and we —their protectors, the Bodhisattvas— then gobble it all up gleefully, smacking our lips. What could be worse than that?

It is said that offering to the wisdom deities the flesh and blood of a slaughtered animal is like offering to a mother her murdered child. If you invite a mother for a meal and then set before her the flesh of her own child, how would she feel? It is with the same love as a mother for her only child that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas look on all beings of the three worlds. —Patrul Rinpoche



The reason for being a vegetarian is not so that we can live a long time, but because of the mind of compassion and equality. First, sentient beings are future Buddhas and Bodhisattvas; therefore, we should not eat their flesh. Second, everyone has Buddha nature. Besides protecting our own life, we also must respect the lives of all sentient beings. Third, vegetarianism is based on the principle of causality that spans the past, present, and future. Therefore, we clearly understand the reason for vegetarianism is the Bodhisattva cause, the right cause.

—Grand Master Wei Chueh

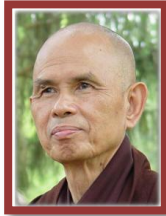
Mahayanists observe the Bodhisattva precepts, one of which is the prohibition against partaking of the flesh of an animal. This prohibition is called tapasa shila-vrata, and is a practical rule for eradicating the evil of wrath. This Bodhisattva precept was observed by Lord Buddha when he was called Shakyas Bodhisattva, before he attained Enlightenment. —Ven. Thich Huyen-Vi



The salvation of birds and beasts, oneself included: this is the object of Shakyamuni's religious austerities.

—Zen Master Ikkyu

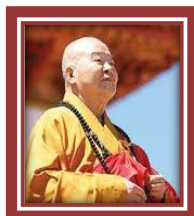
We should not restrict our Bodhichitta to a limited number of beings. Wherever there is a space, beings exist, and all of them live in suffering. Why make distinctions between them, welcoming some as loving friends and excluding others as hostile enemies? –Kyabje Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche



Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I undertake to cultivate compassion and learn ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals.

*I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to condone any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life.
–Thich Nhat Hanh*

*It's best to avoid eating meat out of compassion. Before eating the meat, think of where it came from, through cutting an animal's neck, against its will, and how much suffering the animal experienced. After thinking about that, you can't eat the meat!–
Lama Thubten Yeshe*



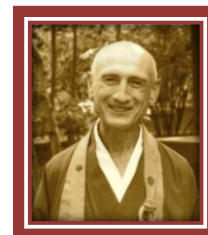
Life is more precious than anything else in the world. Even insects want to live. Whenever we break any of the Five Precepts of Buddhism, we have violated some other sentient being. Whenever we kill anyone, we violate that being at the deepest level possible. [...] Meat-eating should be avoided if possible, or at least kept to a minimum. –Ven. Master Hsing Yun

As the Buddha taught over two and a half thousand years ago, there are many benefits to following a vegetarian lifestyle –both for us and for other beings as well. Today, so many centuries later, the Buddha's words are as powerful as ever. –Geshe Thupten Phelgye



*The best way to protect and liberate lives is to adopt a vegetarian diet because sentient being will be slaughtered as long as there are people who eat meat. Hence, in present situation, be it life protection or life liberation, I think that the best way will be to adopt a vegetarian diet.
– Ogyen Trinley Dorje, the XVII Gyalwang Karmapa*

*Anyone familiar with the numerous accounts of the Buddha's extraordinary compassion and reverence for living beings –for example his insistence that his monks strain the water they drink lest they inadvertently cause the death of any micro-organisms– could never believe that he would be indifferent to the sufferings of domestic animals caused by their slaughter for food.
–Roshi Philip Kapleau*

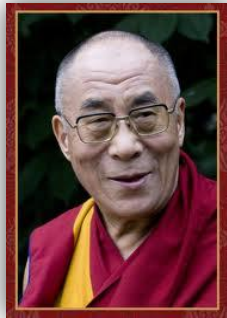


*Vegetarianism cultivates patience, compassion, and wisdom.
–Dharma Master Cheng Yen*



If one has strong determination, one will avoid doing evil deeds at all costs and under any circumstances. We certainly face difficulties in becoming full vegetarians. However, when such obstacles arise, we should remember how every sentient being had at one point or another been our parents. —Drubwang Rinpoche

Knowing all the faults of meat and alcohol, I have made a commitment to give up meat and alcohol. I have also declared this moral to all my monasteries. Therefore, anyone who listens to me is requested not to break this Dharmic moral. —Chatral Rinpoche



There is just no reason why animals should be slaughtered to serve as human diet when there are so many substitutes. Man can live without meat.

...
*People think of animals as if they were vegetables, and that is not right. We have to change the way people think about animals. I encourage the Tibetan people and all people to move toward a vegetarian diet that doesn't cause suffering.
—HH Tenzin Gyatso, the XIV Dalai Lama*

Notwithstanding popular opinion to the contrary, and in spite of harsh climatic conditions that hinder the cultivation of grains, pulses, fruits, and vegetables in the Himalayan regions, many prominent ancient and contemporary Tibetan Buddhist Masters have also abstained from eating flesh:

Arjia Rinpoche
Atisha Dipamkara
Ayang Rinpoche
Chatral Rinpoche
Choeje Ayang Rinpoche
Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltzen

Dromton Gyalwe Jungney
Drubwang Konchock Norbu
Drukpa Kunleg
Geshe Thupten Phelgye
Gotsang Natsog Rangdrol
Gyalwang Drukpa XII

Jamyang Gyamtso
Jetsun Drakpa Gyeltsen
Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo
Jigme Khyentse Rinpoche
Tenzin Gyatso, XIV Dalai Lama

***May all be blessed with peace always; all creatures weak or strong;
all creatures great and small; creatures unseen or seen;
dwelling afar or near; born or awaiting birth
—may all be blessed with peace!***

***As with her own life a mother shields from hurt her only child,
let all-embracing thoughts for all that lives be yours,
an all-embracing love for all the universe.***

—Buddha Shakyamuni, Sutta-Nipata

