

# BUDDHIST AND PLANT- BASED DIET



Talk by Eileen Weintraub,  
Founder, Help Animals India  
Seattle (WA), USA



## **Himalayan Vegan Festival**

17 Sep 2022 | 1200 to 1250 hrs

Chauthari Hall

Kathmandu, Nepal



Speakers (Left to Right) Eileen Weintraub (Founding Director, Help Animals India)  
Vikshu Angphuri Sherpa (Author, plant-based health advocate & monk)  
Monk Sumangalu (Thervada monk)

### **BUDDHIST AND PLANT- BASED DIET**

Buddhism is a religion that deeply preaches kindness and non-violence to all life. "Sabbe Satta Bhavantu Sukhitatta" is a script that is often chanted in Buddhism which loosely translates to "May all beings be well" which is somehow connected to the core principle of Veganism 'living a lifestyle that causes minimal suffering to any sentient beings. Find the path of spirituality through the act we do everyday 'eating'.





*Illustration by Lasha Mutual. Purchase a print of this illustration in the Lion's Roar online store.*

The earliest Buddhist texts are clear about the fact that avoiding eating the animals, who are our fellow sentient beings, is conducive to walking the Buddhist path. Later Mahayana sutras and tantras also strongly go against eating them!

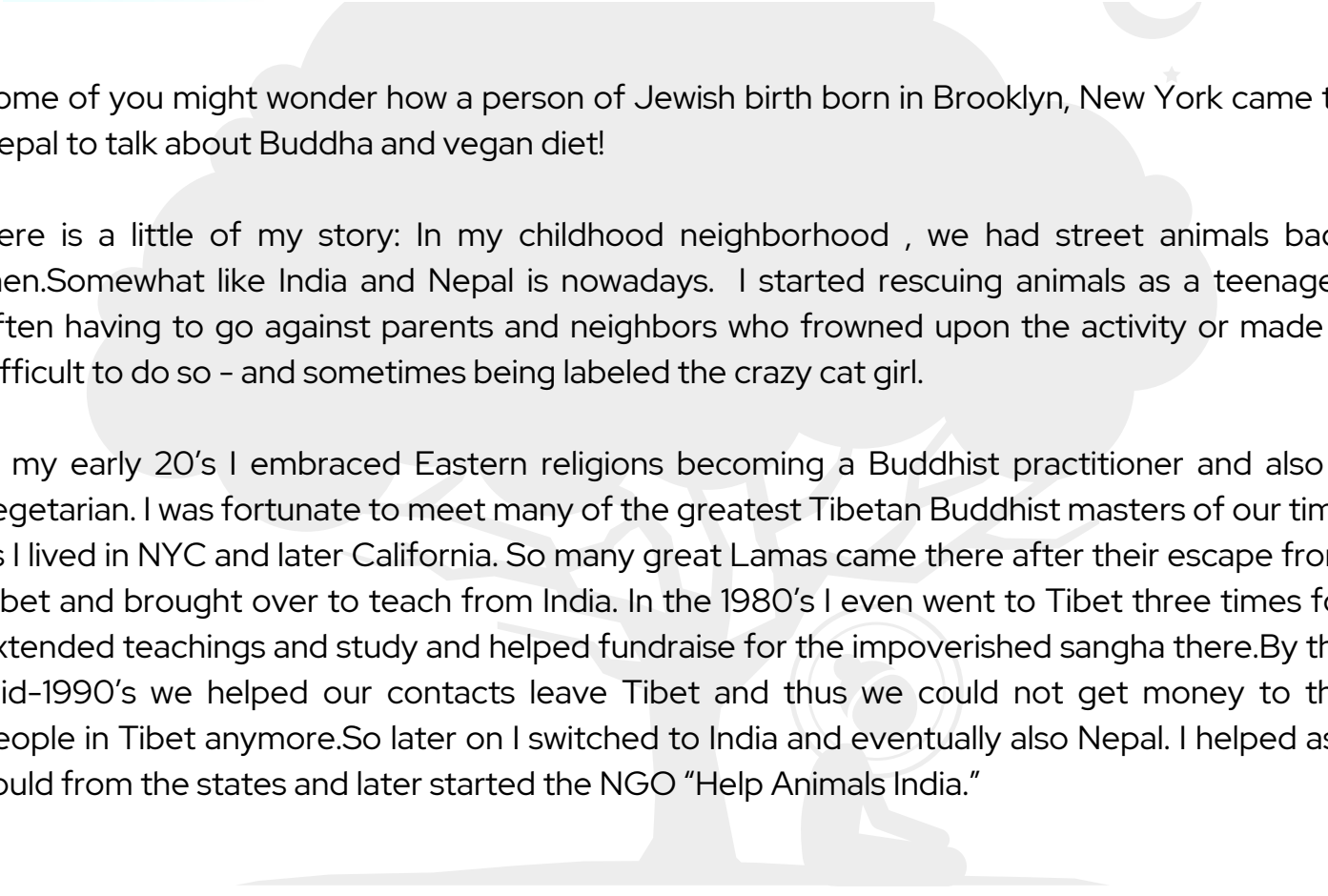

Greetings to everyone with very special thanks to the organizers of the conference. I am honored and grateful to be given the opportunity to speak at this very special event.





In whom there is no sympathy for living beings - know him as an outcast.

—The Buddha (Sutta Nipata)



Some of you might wonder how a person of Jewish birth born in Brooklyn, New York came to be a Buddhist and a vegan. I came to Nepal to talk about Buddha and vegan diet!

There is a little of my story: In my childhood neighborhood, we had street animals everywhere. Somewhat like India and Nepal is nowadays. I started rescuing animals as a teenager, often having to go against parents and neighbors who frowned upon the activity or made it difficult to do so - and sometimes being labeled the crazy cat girl.

From my early 20's I embraced Eastern religions becoming a Buddhist practitioner and also vegetarian. I was fortunate to meet many of the greatest Tibetan Buddhist masters of our time. I lived in NYC and later California. So many great Lamas came there after their escape from Tibet and brought over to teach from India. In the 1980's I even went to Tibet three times for extended teachings and study and helped fundraise for the impoverished sangha there. By the mid-1990's we helped our contacts leave Tibet and thus we could not get money to the people in Tibet anymore. So later on I switched to India and eventually also Nepal. I helped as much as I could from the states and later started the NGO "Help Animals India."













## HELP ANIMALS INDIA

Help Animals India channels your donation to both well-established and emerging Indian and Nepal animal protection groups who confront daunting obstacles every day in their mission to **rescue, shelter and fight for the rights of animals**. We work closely with these groups and vouch for their courage, compassion and determination. Our guidance helps them improve their missions and operations so they can maximize their effectiveness as advocates for and defenders of the animals.

Your kind donation will contribute to all this below:

- We accomplish much more to rescue animals of all types including those who would have gone for slaughter, working animals sadly abandoned to the street, and rescue wildlife including elephants and advocate for them too.
- We keep our partners afloat and feed existing shelter animals
- We have special spay/neuter projects for dogs and cats.
- We have all important education projects for learning kindness to all animals.
- We promote a vegan diet and have education projects for teaching kindness for all animals.

[www.helpanimalsindia.org](http://www.helpanimalsindia.org)

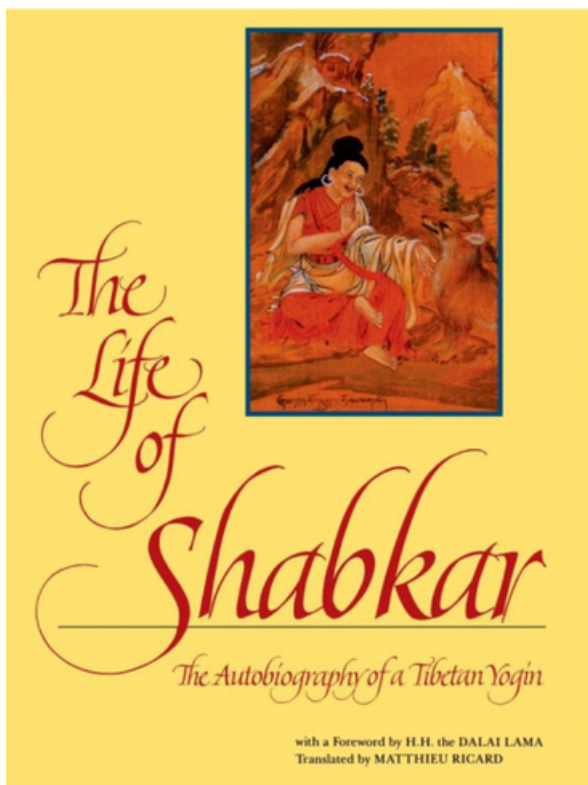
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You see, I particularly related to the animal advocates rescuing the suffering animals on the street as I knew what that was like!

I was a vegetarian and later a vegan but most Tibetan Buddhists were not and so began another one of my life's mission. I wrote an article in the 1990's entitled "Life as a Vegetarian Tibetan Buddhist Practitioner" and that is still available on the website [shabkar.org](http://shabkar.org). Since I wrote that article I have seen some great changes, but there still is a lot to be done.

If you are further interest in this subject you must go to this website spelled SHABKAR. Writings of all experts in this field are there in extensive listings. Shabkar himself, who lived in the 1800's, was a Great Tibetan Lama who wrote against meat eating. Shabkar was famous for his affection and concern for animals. His attitude was an expression not only of personal sympathy and aesthetic appreciation; it was rooted in his understanding of Buddhist teaching. There are resources on the website for all the Buddhist sects which promote veg diet.





## Shabkar

[Shabkar.org](http://Shabkar.org) is a non-sectarian website dedicated to vegetarianism as a way of life for Buddhists of all schools.

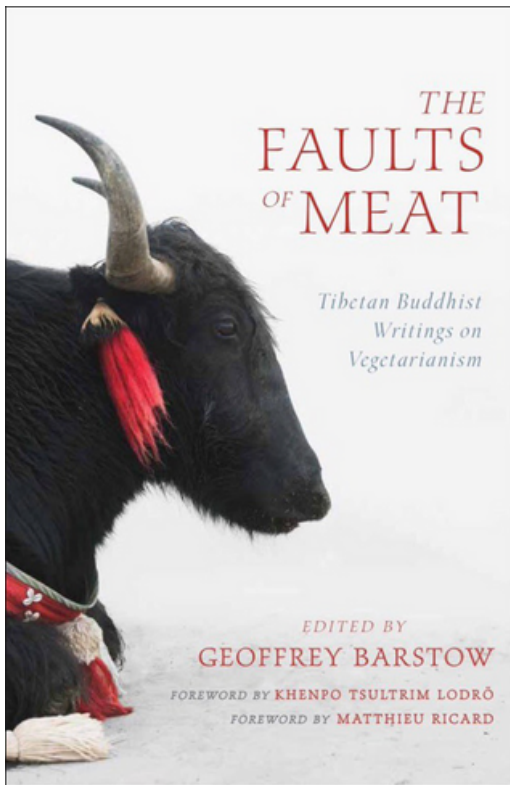
The site takes its name from Shabkar Tsodruk Rangdrol (1781-1851), the great Tibetan yogi who espoused the ideals of vegetarianism accompanied by bodhicitta.

Tibetan Buddhists believe that all of us incarnated so many times that all beings have at one time been our own parents! Buddhism teaches that all life is interconnected and that surely influences the effects that our eating habits have upon us, upon animals, and upon the environment. Humans have more intelligence than animals however Buddhism point of view it is therefore out of the question to use human intelligence for the purpose of exploiting other sentient beings.

Shabkar, wrote songs against meat . Shabkar described scenes of carnivorous monks, critiquing what he perceived to be their gluttonous behavior: "Amidst heaps of flesh and bones from beings who were once our mothers, / the monks, wielding knives, stuff their gaping mouths. / Alas! If Buddhists dare do this to beings, let's not speak of non-Buddhists!"

People often wrongly assume that vegetarianism in Tibet is a modern-day phenomenon. However, despite the great difficulties of being vegetarian in Tibet, due to climate and vegetation, there are many examples of great Tibetan Buddhist masters who strongly advocated vegetarianism, such as the 4th Karmapa, 8th Karmapa, Patrul Rinpoche Jigme Lingpa, Shabkar, and, more recently, Chadrak Rinpoche and the 17th Karmapa.





## Buddhist Writing on Vegetarianism

Vegetarianism is a hotly debated topic within Buddhist circles. This book provides a valuable new contribution to the discussion with translations of thirteen Tibetan texts focused on the ethical problems associated with eating meat, coming from a wide variety of perspectives and lineages.

One book that explores the historic connections of Tibetan buddhist writings on Vegetarianism is *The Faults of Meat* by Geoffrey Barstow. This book samples writings from across centuries and distant regions to give us a sense of how Tibetan works on vegetarianism evolved. The oldest sect of Tibetan Buddhism is called Nyingmapa. That lineage includes the luminary Jigme Lingpa who lived in 1700's. He expressed profound concern for animal welfare in his works.

Jigme Lingpa wrote in his autobiography imaging the pain that animals must feel in the moments before they are butchered: "Having now become animals, your fathers, mothers, siblings, and friends from previous lives tremble with fear in the butcher's sinful hands, tears streaming from their eyes, and panting for breath. In that state they wonder what to do. Alas, there is no refuge! There is nowhere to go!"

This approach by Jigme Lingpa to vegetarian advocacy worked to persuade readers by appealing to their emotions rather than their knowledge of historical Buddhist literature.







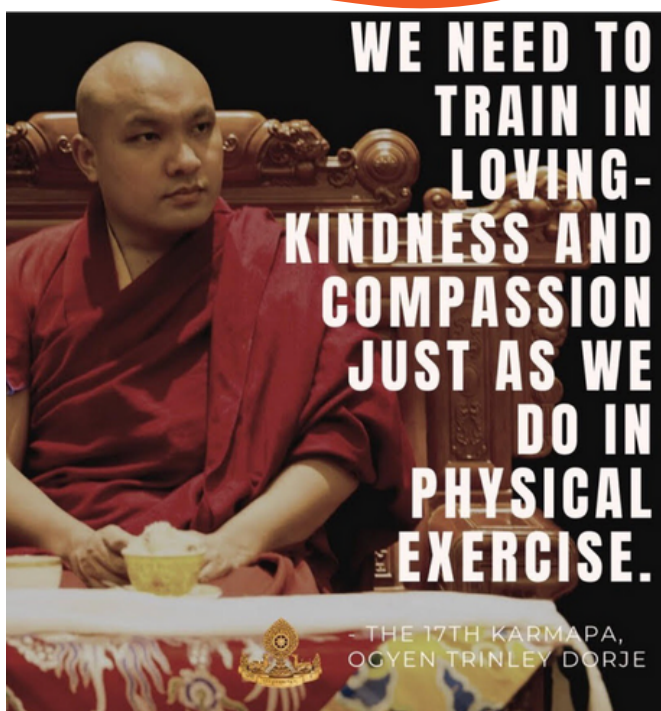
## His Holiness the 16th Karmapa

The sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje was the spiritual leader of the Karma Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Followers believed him to be part of the oldest line of reincarnate lamas in Vajrayana Buddhism, known as the Karmapas, whose coming was predicted by the Buddha in the Samadhiraja Sutra.

So where are we in now in 2022? Some of the recent changes involve the extraordinary effort of the 17th Karmapa Orygen Dorje Trinley. I had studied with his previous incarnation, the 16th Karmapa.

The 16th Karmapa was a great animal lover and had many birds that he cared for. When he visited us in New York I helped take care of his birds!





## His Holiness the 17th Karmapa

Ogyen Trinley Dorje, also written as Urgyen Trinley Dorje is a claimant to the title of 17th Karmapa. The Karmapa is head of the Karma Kagyu school, one of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Ogyen Trinley Dorje and Thaye Dorje are the persisting claimants to that office and title

A few years after he passed away in 1981 his reincarnation the 17th Karmapa was recognized in Tibet. The 17th had a dangerous and miraculous escape from Tibet to India in the year 2000 when he was 14 years old. Political fallout still continues as the Chinese government was very upset that he left Tibet! Later on in India when he was older the Karmapa embraced vegetarianism at the age of 22.

The Karmapa speaks 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 practiced 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.

In 2007 initially the Karmapa said that people could not consider themselves his disciple if they continued to eat meat. He later softened it to say that they had to at the very minimum reduce their meat eating, and eat only a very little if at all. However, all his monasteries and nunneries were made vegetarian and His Holiness himself became a vegan.





I had to campaign to get some tofu to eat at the Karmapa monastery in Woodstock , NY where I lived in the late 70's. When I heard the edict came down for all meals to be vegetarian it was like a miracle!

A close source says she is uncertain if the Karmapa is still a full vegan, as attendants and close disciples were concerned about his health and were entreating him to at least eat some eggs. I don't know if he did or not.

Nowadays in my home in Seattle, USA we are so spoiled with delicious egg substitutes made out of mung bean and cook up just like eggs but satisfying substitutes like chick pea omelets can be made anywhere.

His Holiness main reasons for becoming veg were for the humane reasons, protecting all sentient beings. In Tibet it was almost necessary to eat meat as few crops grew, but now for the Tibetans in India this is no longer necessary. There is no excuse for eating meat. Karmapa often speaks that eating meat is the same as eating the flesh of your own mother and father . He will tell long stories about this point.

The Karmapa is also an environmentalist and in one of his more recent talks to his monks and nuns, gave a long talk including many of the statistics about the harm of meat production on the environment and quoted from the film 'Cowspiracy' as well as other sources.





## A Documentary That Opened Eyes



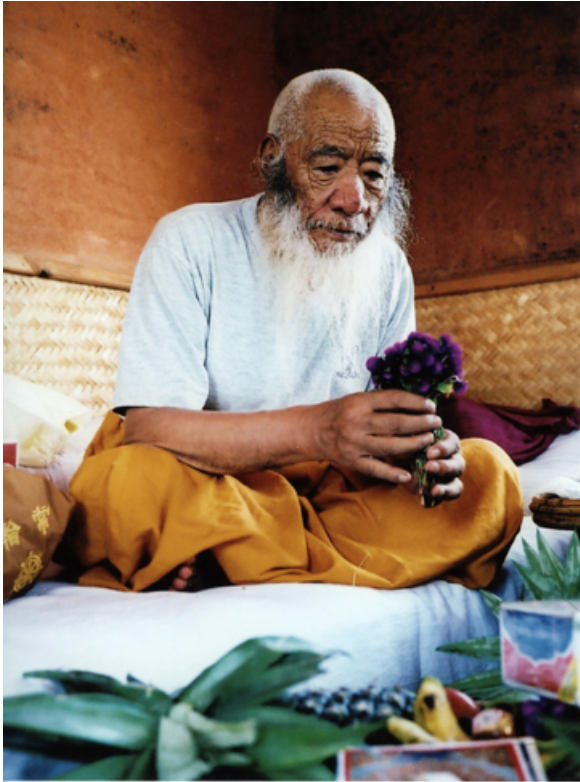
A shocking, yet humorous, journey of an aspiring environmentalist, as he daringly seeks to find the real solution to the most pressing environmental issues and true path to sustainability.

It is important for the Karmapa to educate his young Himalayan monks and nuns about not eating flesh, not harming animals, as well as training them to help the environment in such ways as having regular clean up campaigns in the villages nearby their monasteries...teaching by example the importance of cleanliness.

The Karmapa also began an animal welfare camp associated with his annual Kagyu Monlam prayer festival in Bodhgaya India which is in now in it's 9th year. He arranges for a veterinary team to come down to the plains of India from Sikkim, where his monastery in exile is located. He has also blessed and encouraged our Help Animals India project to help the dogs in Sarnath India where I will be visiting with Ani Jangchub Zangmo here in the audience, after the Nepal conference.

At the time when the Karmapa authorized these ABC (or animal birth camps) it was extremely controversial as in the old scriptures sterilization is viewed as a sin. That was probably because there was no anesthesia back then and neutering the bull was done without that. So Karmapa often speaks of the need to take old beliefs and apply them to the modern world. So he is very much into applying Buddhist principles in a realistic way in the 21st century.





## Chatral Rinpoche



Eileen Weintraub and Ani Jangchub Drolma visiting Chatral Rinpoche's family hermitage in Pharping, Nepal in 2017

One of the greatest of Tibetan yogis is Nepal's very own Chatral Sangye Dorje Rinpoche who passed away in 2015 at the age of 102. A strong vegetarian during his life Chatral Rinpoche was one of the most vocal opponents of meat eating in Tibetan Buddhism. In 1960, Chatral Sangye Dorje visited some of the Buddhist pilgrimage sites in India.[7][14] While visiting the Mahabodhi Temple, Chatral Sangye Dorje made a firm commitment to give up meat and alcohol, saying:

"If you take meat, it goes against the vows one takes in seeking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Because when you take meat you have to take a being's life. So I gave it up".

One of the famous Buddhist practices is one of life release called "Tsethar" and Rinpoche also released large amounts of fish from the Calcutta fish markets every year, saving animal lives from slaughter and blessings each animal as it is done



## Chatral Rinpoche's Lessons

Chatral Rinpoche, the quintessential "hidden yogi," has been a legend in the Himalayan region for the past seventy years. Although he has never traveled to the West, his amazing story and teachings have gradually been infiltrating the Western Buddhist consciousness since Father Thomas Merton first met him in 1968 and famously remarked that he was "the greatest man I ever met."

This is the first English-language book of this living legend; it includes his biography and autobiography, six of his essays, five prayers he composed, an exclusive interview, and sixteen pages of photos from throughout his life

In the book "Compassionate Action" Chatral states:

*Meat, the sinful food, is not permitted according to the three vows: the vows of individual liberation, the Bodhisattva vows and the tantric vows. Thus Buddha stated: "I have never approved, do not approve, and will never approve of a meat diet." He declared: "my followers must never eat meat."*





## Tibetan Volunteers for Animals (TVA)



Giant balloon sponsored by Tibetan Volunteers for Animals!



Tee Shirt Stall by Tibetan Volunteers for Animals!



Tee Shirt Stall by Tibetan Volunteers for Animals!

Many other Tibetan spiritual leaders have come to the same spiritual point. At the Dalai Lama's World Peace Ceremonies, the Vegetarian Kalachakra starting from the one in Amravati in 2006 in Andhra Pradesh, India only vegetarian food was served. As a Tibetan Buddhist Practitioner I was thrilled to attend and meet the group "Tibetan Volunteers for Animals" or TVA when I attended. TVA not only actively campaigns for vegan diet but rescues animals as well. Help Animals India has been able to support them from USA for many years as we can.





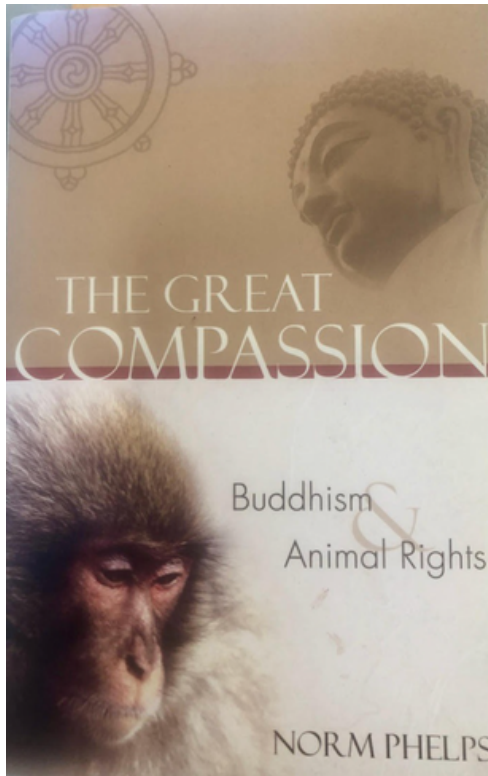
## Vegetarian Kalachakra

At the Vegetarian Kalachakra many Tibetans came down to South India from Tibet and because of this campaign and the Dalai Lama asking this, all the Tibetans who were visiting from Tibet went back to Tibet and encouraged people to burn their furs and not buy fur again

It is a cause for great joy that currently many monasteries in India and Nepal have done such great, positive things as giving up meat and cooking vegetarian food instead.

Now in the Buddhist sutras, there is some controversy about whether the Buddha allowed meat if it came into a monk's begging bowl as long as they didn't kill the animal or know that the animal was killed for them. Buddha taught the "middle way" and was against the strict Brahmin culture of his day. While Brahmins were vegetarian as I understand it it was mainly because they taught that meat was impure. Somewhat like the caste system which Buddha was against. The Buddha was a revolutionary and broke new ground in society. That is why to this day many of India's so called "untouchable" class became Buddhists.





## Buddhism and Animal Rights

Buddhism ought to be an animal rights religion par excellence. It has long held that all life forms are sacred and considers kindness and compassion the highest virtues. Moreover, Buddhism explicitly includes animals in its moral universe. Buddhist rules of conduct—including the first precept, **“Do not kill”**—apply to our treatment of animals as well as to our treatment of other human beings.

However, through the path of Vajrayana, some modern day Buddhists felt that it is your state of mind that matters and not to be too rigid in your preferences. In certain Tibetan Buddhist circles that developed particularly in the west, meat-eating—and some other more controversial habits like sex habits with loose morals—were promoted as part of the so-called Tantric lifestyle. “Tantric” in this case meant not getting hung up on conventional morals or concepts of purity. In other words, to embrace life fully was to consume it literally and not to discriminate between pure and impure. However, mostly those who went down that path clearly abused the methods and indulged in negative behavior. Hopefully that has now continued to change for the better.

The founder of Tibetan Buddhism, Padmasambhava or Guru Rinpoche said “My realization is as vast as the sky, but my behavior is finer than grains of flour”

One contemporary author and colleague of mine was the wonderful man the late Norm Phelps. His book I have here is entitled “Buddhism and Animal Rights” and states very plainly that endless discussion is just an excuse. He says “It's not about us, it's about the animals.” Some people use arguments like it is the karma of the animal to be eaten, etc. is particularly heinous. It is vital to take the focus off the practitioner and put it onto the animals who suffer and die in the process.







Other lamas acknowledged that it was meritorious to stop eating meat, if one could manage it. Yet there was more important work to be done, like taming the mind and praying for the benefit of all sentient beings.

According to Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, humans and animals are the only visible realms of the six classes of beings. Plants are non-sentient and do not inherently contain Buddha nature (which is the seed of enlightenment within all sentient beings). Although it has been said there may be nature spirits, which protect the plants, their lives are not taken when we harvest vegetables. Others argued that many insects are killed in the harvesting of grains and vegetables. But so many more of them are killed in the feed used to feed the animals!

Buddhists are admonished constantly to work to save all sentient beings yet little thought may be given to sitting down to consume even a whole being for lunch! The harvesting of beings for their flesh could be seen as the supreme form of exploitation.



**Think you can be  
a meat-eating  
environmentalist?**

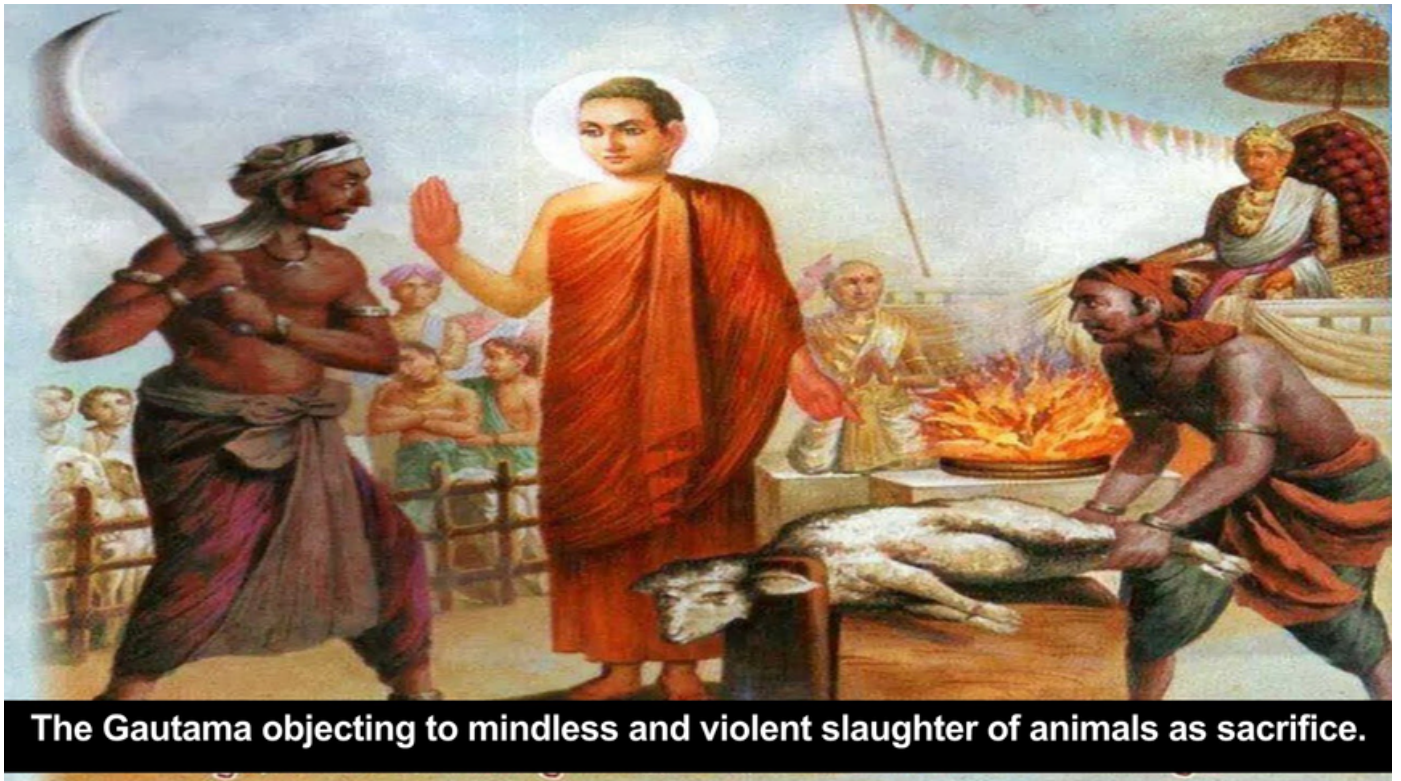


**Think again!**

**Food for thought?**

I see vegetarianism and veganism as a boycott of all that abuse. Even making a partial effort is commendable. If not eaten solely as a necessity to sustain life, I believe that flesh eating as a culinary preference will be considered barbaric in the future. If concerns arise regarding the karmic consequences of eating flesh, to whom should we give the benefit of the doubt? The living beings who were raised in obscene conditions and who died in terror in slaughterhouses, or our own habitual patterns and taste addictions? Even if health benefits are thought to be obtained by eating meat, this should be considered very carefully. With our abundant food choices, satisfying alternatives can always be found.





The power of each human being becoming vegetarian releases the most intense suffering of the animal realm—the agony of animals raised for slaughter. This profound action can help slow the grinding wheels of samsara, bringing to a halt the cycles of suffering of the entire animal realm and influencing their eventual liberation. When animals are not just looked upon as creatures to fill our stomachs, they can be seen as they really are—beings who have the same Buddha nature as we all do.







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