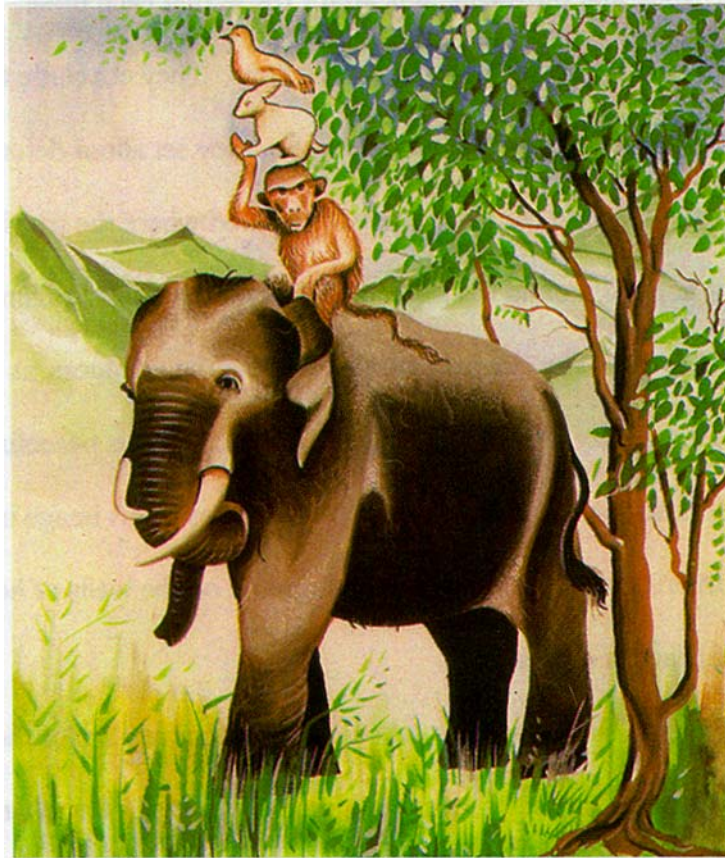


# **Nonviolence In Tibetan Culture**



**A Glimpse at How Tibetans View and  
Practice Nonviolence in Politics and Daily Life**

**By Zach Larson—CYN 2000**

# Explanation of Cover

**Title Page:** This image, called the “Four Harmonious Friends,” is taken from a very popular Tibetan folktale. An elephant, monkey, rabbit and bird congregate at a fruit tree in their valley. The valley has been quite turbulent lately; there has been a lot of fighting, the crops aren’t growing and the inhabitants aren’t respecting each other. These four animals gather for a meeting to decide what can be done. They conclude that a peaceful, harmonious society is one that respects its elders. So, they set about determining who among them is eldest. The bird claims it dropped the seed where the tree is now growing. The rabbit claims it hopped around the sapling. The monkey claims it climbed on the tree when it was still small. The elephant admits to being the youngest, as it has only known the tree at its maturity. From that moment on, the valley is peaceful as these “four harmonious friends” lead their society into prosperous times. This image is seen on a lot of Tibetan door curtains, monasteries, woodcarvings and on the walls of houses. It is the Tibetan symbol for peace and harmony.

**Chapter One Cover Page:** This picture was taken by the author at a major meat market in Boudha, Nepal, where most of the Tibetan community is located. Boudhanath lies in the background, considered one of the most sacred structures for Buddhists in all of South Asia. The “Buddha’s Eyes” look on with compassion.

**Part Two Cover Page:** This picture was taken by the author during the March 10<sup>th</sup> march in Dharamsala, following the Dalai Lama’s speech in commemoration of Tibetan Uprising Day. It is the major rejuvenation day for Tibetan political activists. The Dharamsala demonstration was peaceful, but in Kathmandu a riot broke out.

# Introduction

Tibet: a self-proclaimed “peace-loving nation” high in the Himalayan Mountains. Their spiritual and temporal leader, His Holiness the Dalai Lama is known throughout the world as a champion of nonviolence. Almost every Tibetan house you enter has a framed picture of the Dalai Lama behind his palace in Tibet, with sublime mountains and a rainbow behind him, with the message “Tibet—Zone of Peace” printed below. Composing this fieldwork project solely on the political aspects of how Tibetans view nonviolence seemed to me to be too susceptible to romanticization, to easily glossing over the Tibetan culture as an enlightened group of people who ride on rainbows and guide the rest of the world to the promised land of peace and harmony. No, I wanted this project to have grit and truth. To represent a broader picture of how Tibetans really view nonviolence and its applications in this world. That’s why I felt the need to include attitudes toward meat eating in my project. How they view killing and violence in terms of their own meat-eating. It is my hope that bringing this into the mix will provide a more complete picture of Tibetan Buddhist culture and how it interacts with and plays an important role in international politics.

# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Tribhuvan University for sponsoring the University of Wisconsin College Year in Nepal program; Professor Joseph Elder for his kindness and support; all of my fellow students for being open-minded and fun people to spend the year with; Tendar, who provided endless assistance after I was robbed on the train and in providing hospitality in Bylacopy for Losar; Tinley, who advised me and helped me immensely throughout the year, coming with me to Parphing, transcribing my tapes and being a good friend with the occasional funny joke; all of the people of the Bylacopy Refugee Camp who were patient with my Tibetan language skills, kind beyond imagination and enormously helpful in my research; Geshe Gopal who directed my research at Sera Monastery; Geshe Thupten Phelgye for your friendship and kindness while in Dharamsala and for the inspiration you give all animal rights activists with your hard work and compassionate heart; Chatal Rinpoche, the living Buddha, for your brilliant mind and spirit and the help and inspiration you have given me along my path; Manohari and Pam, for your sense of humor, your untiring willingness to help and for being great people; Guru Rinpoche, for protecting me, despite two thefts in India; my parents, friends and relatives for your support and e-mails; Ishwari, Baidai and Manbahadur for being patient and working hard to make the program work; Tsetan and Khamlung Rinpoche for helping me to learn the Tibetan language; my host families in Boudha, Solu Khumbu and Bylacopy, who were accommodating to my veganism and who were outstanding hosts; and to the cows of Nepal for making me laugh.

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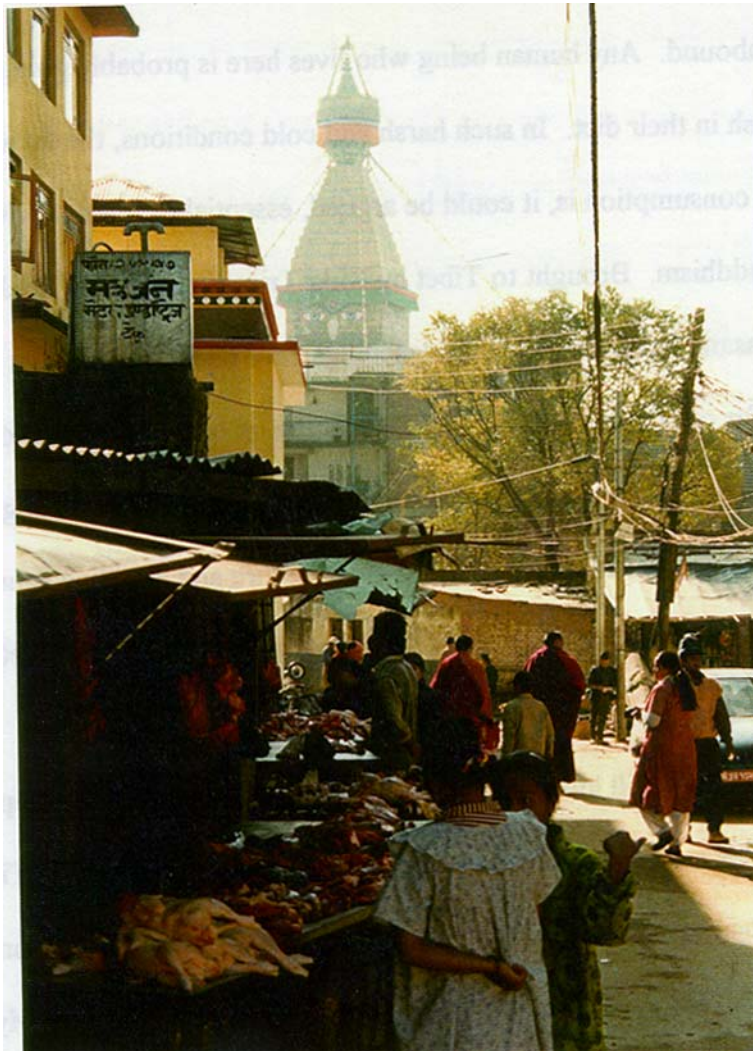
# Part One

## Nonviolence and Culture:



## Finding the Dharma in a Flesh-Based Diet

# Chapter One



## **The Continuing Tradition of Meat Consumption in Tibetan Culture**



# T

ibet: the “Last Frontier.” A frozen tundra where vegetables cannot grow and yaks abound. Any human being who lives here is probably going to have to include yak's flesh in their diet. In such harsh and cold conditions, the fat and warmth created by meat consumption is, it could be argued, essential to one's survival.

Enter Buddhism. Brought to Tibet by King Trisongdetsen and established and spread by Padmasambhava, the Buddha's teachings have been an important aspect of Tibetan culture for over a thousand years. Depending on one's interpretation, the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism which Tibet holds dear emphasize freeing all living beings from suffering, abstaining from killing any creature and avoiding causing others harm and unhappiness. To some, meat eating doesn't correspond with Tibetan Buddhist philosophy and ethics. To others, it works just fine.

In this chapter, I will look at how Tibetans view meat eating as compared to how Buddhist authorities and Buddhist texts view the topic. I will also look at Tibetan traditions and reflect upon what I experienced living in a Tibetan refugee community.

I started my research in the Bylacopy Tibetan Refugee Camp near Mysore, India on the last day of the year 2025, according to the Tibetan calendar. A full fifteen days of New Year celebration lie ahead. Without taking time to adjust, my research had begun. The questions started to fly as soon as I had been introduced to my new Tibetan family, relatives of UW language professor Tinley Dhondrup. The first thing I noticed as I sat down on their porch, besides the many palm trees around me, was the four huge sacks of fresh sheep and yak meat, which had been obtained from Tibet.

As relatives carried even more meat from their car to the porch, my Tibetan mother Sangye remarked “too much meat!”\* Mutton is as central a tradition to Losar (“New Year”) for Tibetans as turkey is to Thanksgiving in the United States. The sheep’s head also plays an important traditional role. The Bon religion, which predates Buddhism in Tibet by thousands of years, is responsible for the tradition of placing a sheep’s head on the altar at Losar.

On the first morning of Losar, Panden Lhamo—a Bon god incorporated into Tibetan Buddhism—comes to the altar of all Tibetan homes to receive the offering of a sheep head, and then gives blessings upon the family for the upcoming year. No sheep head, no blessings. Fortunately, Tibetans have become more creative in making their offerings, and now they make sheep heads out of barley cake. In Tibet, real sheep heads are still used, but most of the Tibetan community in exile has converted to the new sheep head cake tradition.

Tsepak Rigzin writes, “One of the more tragic requisites for the Losar celebration is the mass killing of animals—yaks, sheep and goats, for their flesh, heads, intestines and so on, to be consumed or displayed during Losar.”<sup>1</sup> The intestines are used to make elaborate offerings to wrathful deities, though I only saw this at Thupten Choling monastery in Solu Khumbu, Nepal. Meat also serves ceremonial purposes. A Swiss woman named Elsa, married to a Tibetan man whom I met in Bylacopy, told me,

“On the last day of the last Tibetan month of the year they eat a special soup with large chunks of pork that have special objects in them. The object you get when you bite into the pork tells what kind of person you had been the previous year. A hot pepper means you had been a short-tempered, feisty one, et cetera. At the monasteries they use huge chunks of pork to conceal the objects so no one knows what’s in them until they bite into the pork.”

\*All quotations in this chapter, unless otherwise stated, from a literary source, or from a non-Tibetan person are translated from Tibetan by myself.

Tibetans are considered to be some of the most faithful people in the world to their religion. Watching my Tibetan mother get up every morning at five in Bodhanath, Nepal to recite prayers, fill the water bowls on their altar, and walk around the stupa was evidence of this for me. The majority of Tibetans recite hundreds of mantras every day, most commonly of course “*om mani peme hum.*” Yet, as you might expect, the cultural Buddhism of Tibet differs quite a bit from the doctrinal version.

A great 19<sup>th</sup> century Tibetan yogi named Patrul Rinpoche writes,

“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. As the Bodhisattva Shantideva says, ‘Just as no pleasures can bring delight to someone whose body is ablaze with fire, nor can the great compassionate ones be pleased when harm is done to sentient beings.’”<sup>2</sup>



A Losar altar with elaborately decorated barley cake sheep head

The power of the Bon religion's cultural influence on the evolution of Tibetan Buddhism has created the tradition of the sheep head on the Losar altar. It is interesting to see this tradition evolve in closer correspondence with Buddhism with the emergence of the barley cake solution. I imagine certain monasteries are starting to use similar solutions with the "pork soup surprise" dilemma, and converting to a vegetarian alternative. The dynamic forces of cultural tradition and religious doctrine interacting with each other would be the subject of most of my observation and fascination in the coming months.

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"It isn't a *momo* without meat," Sangye's daughter explained when I asked her if her family ever eats vegetarian Tibetan dumplings. "In Tibet it is very cold. Vegetable *momos* are only made special for vegetarians at restaurants. Everything has meat in it because Tibetans need the energy."

"We know that eating meat is bad and that Buddhists shouldn't eat meat," Sangye's husband Dorje explained, "but in Tibet there are no vegetables and it is very cold so we eat a lot of meat. Moving to India and Nepal didn't change this. It is a Tibetan custom to eat meat. The Dalai Lama tells us that eating meat is not good, but all Tibetans do it anyway."

My vegan diet was very hard for my family to understand. I told them that I don't eat food that comes from animals, so as to not harm sentient beings through my diet. Some thought it was bizarre and wondered how I could possibly survive on such a diet, some thought it was noble and praiseworthy. Sangye seemed most fascinated by it. "Milk comes from a cow, it is from animals, so he doesn't eat it" she said to her niece as

she pointed to her breast, explaining why I was drinking black coffee. Later on in the meal, as she reached for a lamb chop she said, “We are bad people (for eating meat).” A few minutes later she continued, “Meat is a Tibetan tradition. Our parents passed it on to us, and now we are passing it on to our children. But slowly, slowly we are eating less meat.” “Eating meat is a very bad sin so we are trying to stop,” her husband chimed in.

Patrul Rinpoche writes, “Especially nowadays most people crave meat and consume flesh and blood without a second thought, completely oblivious to all the diseases caused by old meat or harmful meat spirits.”<sup>3</sup> Sangye’s cousin responds,

“Tibetans think they need meat for health, to be strong. Many use the Dalai Lama as an example. He became vegetarian for a few years. In 1965 he was at a meal. There was chicken. Everyone else in the room was vegetarian. When he asked what the chicken was for, they said it was for him. At that moment, he pledged to stop eating meat. He became frail, got hepatitis, and his doctors prescribed he eat meat again. In Tibet, Buddhists believe that by killing the largest animal they minimize suffering by maximizing meat per animal. So they don’t eat chicken or fish as they view all beings as equal and these smaller animals have too little meat to justify their deaths.”

The notion that one needs to eat meat to be strong is very widespread among the Tibetan community, especially among men. Elsa’s Tibetan husband Kama recalled,

“I once hiked the Annapurna circuit with Elsa. The first few days weren’t so bad because I had some chicken and these things to eat. After that it was really bad because there was no meat. I never felt like I was eating with the *daal bhat*. It wasn’t real food. For me, growing up in Tibet, when my dad would go out to kill the pig it was like a sacred ritual—very special. I have warm feelings toward the tradition of meat in Tibet and I can’t live without it.”

Yet Tibetans seemed to perceive a growing number of vegetarians among their people. Pointing me to one I could talk to proved to be a harder task. “There are a lot of Tibetan vegetarians these days,” a young Tibetan boy told me. “Do you know any?” I asked. “Well, the Dalai Lama, of course, I guess that’s all I know,” he replied. The Dalai

Lama currently eats meat every other day of the week, I am told, yet it was interesting to hear that this boy thought he was a vegetarian.

I observed and was told frequently that meat is a Tibetan custom. I attended a wedding during Losar, where there was not a single vegetarian option on the table of thirty entries. Patrul Rinpoche writes on Tibetan brides,

“For every marriage, innumerable sheep are slaughtered at the time of sending the dowry and for the presentation of the bride to her in-laws. Afterwards, every time the young bride goes back to visit her own family, another animal is sure to be killed. Should her friends and relatives invite her out and serve her anything but meat, she affects a shocked loss of appetite and eats with a pretentious disdain as if she had forgotten how to chew. But kill a fat sheep and set down a big pile of breast meat and tripe before her, and the red-faced little monster sits down seriously, pulls out her little knife and gobbles it all down with much smacking of the lips. The next day she sets off loaded down with the bloody carcass, like a hunter returning home—but worse, for she never goes back empty-handed.”<sup>4</sup>

Near the end of Losar, I was invited to a party put on by a neighbor family. As I arrived, I sat and watched people play cards for a while, and then the food was served. When I came to the serving line upon request, a woman told me “oh, all this food has meat in it (there were about 17 items). They are making your food in the kitchen.” Then they brought out a plate of fried rice for me and told me to sit in a chair in the most isolated place possible within the compound, right next to an abandoned room with a tub of eight bowling ball-sized spheres of raw ground meat. Then the hosts, an elderly couple, came right up to my face and stared at me. They were gawking at this strange creature who doesn't eat meat, and watching and laughing as I put the strange meatless food to my mouth with my spoon. Then the man said. "He is just like a girl (in his vegetarianism).” The woman replied, "He is a girl." Then they laughed and shook their heads at how any self-respecting male could not eat meat. Later, when the old woman went around with chunks of meat, a little boy said, “No thanks, I don't eat meat,” to

which the woman pointed to a sauce on top of his rice and said, "This is meat!" and left. The boy seemed to be embarrassed and feel a little bit guilty. The perils of vegetarianism.

While playing a traditional Tibetan dice game, and proceeding to win a hundred Indian rupees in prize money, I was exposed to another aspect of the Tibetan mentality. When the other players would shake the dice, hoping for an eight, they would cry out "Mutton!" or "Yak meat!" as they slammed down the dice. The games term for an "eight" was "sha" or "meat." I was later told that the full mantra for when people want an eight is "*We have killed many things and have a lot of meat. We have one full basket of cooked meat and another basket of raw meat yet to be cooked.*" It implies good luck and prosperity relating to the "eight" or "sha." When people want to get a "six" they say a mantra Dorje translated as, "*At the age of six, the sheep should be killed.*" And when they want a nine, they say, "*I may get sick or die, but I want to eat as much pork thukpa as I can.*"

Interestingly enough, there is a distinct consciousness related to insects and avoiding harming them. The scene in the film Seven Years in Tibet where Brad Pitt's Tibetan workers insist on removing all of the worms while the foundation for a movie house is being built appears to be accurate. Tendar, Dorje's brother, took great care to escort mosquitoes out of the house. He would never slap them. When I went onto the porch once, he warned me "Don't go over there, there are a lot of ants." He didn't want me to step on the ants. Several months later, back in Nepal, Chatal Rinpoche's wife took great care to remove worms and beetles while digging up a plant from their lawn.

Kammie Morrison, a student on the CYN program in 1989 who stayed with a Tibetan family, recalls,

“I had gotten lice on a crowded bus trip and my Tibetan sisters had discovered it in the kitchen one night. They offered to pick the little white blobs from my hair, and we settled ourselves. The tiny bugs were then gently extracted and dropped carefully into a dish. Images of popping lice between fingernails and suffocating lice in layers of chemical ‘*Lice-L*’ filled my imagination as I watched them take the bowl to the garden and empty the creatures into a flowerbed.”

Yet for the most part, the way I observed Tibetans treating animals did not invoke admiration. The family I stayed with in Bylacopy (Sangye’s nephew and his wife) had three adorable puppies. Most of the time they would tie them to a two foot rope and endure their all-day-long cries and yelps. I couldn’t stand this, and I would often untie them from their nooses. Once, after I had done this, the puppy was lying in the sun in the driveway. My Tibetan father (*pala*) threw a walnut-sized rock at the two-week old puppy, seemingly as some kind of amusement, hitting it in the stomach. The puppy squealed and hid in a bush. Pala picked up a stick and poked the puppy until it came out of the bush and ran terrified into the house where it hid.

At the hanging of new prayer flags at Losar for the village I stayed in, they did a lot of chanting, tied *kataks* (silk offering scarves) to the top of the flag pole, and burned incense. Every man wore his best *chuba*. During the ceremony, which included prayers to free all beings from suffering, there was a black dog that came into the semi-circle in which people had gathered. He went up to people and sniffed them, wanting to be petted. Instead one man kicked the dog in the head. Then as it laid down moping, he dragged it by the collar. The dog resisted arrest and kept all four legs limp and still. He dragged it, choking it with its collar, across the street and then kicked it and threatened to throw a big rock at it. As the dog laid down again, he motioned to throw the rock and the dog got up



and ran towards the group again and got kicked and hit a few times. The whole group watched how the man and the dog interacted, as the chant leader sang prayers. Later the dog laid down right next to the man who had first dragged it out, neither moving nor causing problems, at which point its stubbornness paid off and it was allowed to stay.

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Deep down, Tibetans do have some kind of awareness that harming animals is sinful. Reading texts helps to remind them that seemingly commonplace actions can create a lot of suffering and subsequent karmic demerit. Patrul Rinpoche advises farmers,

“Reflect particularly on the sufferings and hardships of your own cattle, sheep, packhorses and other domestic animals. We inflict all sorts of barbarity to such creatures, comparable to the torments of hell. We pierce their noses, castrate them, pull out their hair and bleed them alive. Not even for a moment do we think that these animals might be suffering. Think about it carefully. Our attitude comes from not having cultivated compassion. If someone were to pull out a bit of your hair right now you would cry out in pain. You would not put up with it at all. Yet we twist out all the long belly hairs of our yaks, leaving a red weal of bare flesh behind, and from where each hair was growing a drop of blood begins to flow. Although the beast is grunting with pain, it never crosses our mind that it is suffering.

Think carefully about the suffering of these animals. Imagine that you yourself are undergoing that suffering and see what it is like. Cover your mouth with your hands and stop breathing. Stay like that for a while. Experience that pain and the panic.”<sup>5</sup>

Tendar, flipping through the 2026 Tibetan astrological calendar, reads to me the advice given to his sign (he was born in the year of the sheep), “We have to free animals in danger of being killed—like chickens and goats tied up at a butcher shop. If we save their lives, we will not face problems in the coming year.”

Tibetans are aware of the Buddhist texts that threaten periods in hell for those who eat meat, but are good at ignoring them. Patrul Rinpoche describes “The Crushing Hell,”

“Sometimes the mountains on both sides of the valley turn into the heads of stags, deer, goats, rams and other animals that the hell-beings have killed in their past lives. The beasts butt against each other with their horn-tips spewing fire and innumerable hell beings, drawn there by the power of their actions, are all crushed to death. Then once more as the mountains separate, they revive only to be crushed again.”<sup>6</sup>

Yet, there is one quote by the Buddha that Tibetans frequently use to nullify the sin of taking animals for food. In *The Descent into Lanka Sutra*, the Buddha is quoted as saying, “All meats known by seeing, by hearing, or by suspicion to have been killed for oneself must be fiercely depreciated. Knowing this as the recognition of what is impure, all ordained ones should avoid them.”<sup>7</sup> Acharya Bhavaviveka writes in his commentary, *Essence of the Middle View*, “If the meat is free from the three objections, taking it is not non-virtuous. It will increase your clarity of mind... If you don't accept it out of greed, it is like any other food offered by another.”<sup>7</sup> Most Tibetans, especially monks, take the “three condition rule” (meat not seen, heard or suspected to have been killed for you) as a green light to eat meat from the butcher.

The Venerable Lobsang Gyatso, Principal of the Buddhist School of Dialectics at Dharamsala, says “You should keep in mind that meat has the very same nature as such unsavory substances as blood, pus and mucous ... It is the vessel of excrement... Also it is similar to your own flesh and to that of a corpse. You should be mindful when eating that meat is impure by nature and as unsuitable for consumption as that of your friend or relative. (However) when these three practices are followed no fault arises from eating meat and to that of a corpse.”<sup>8</sup> So, even after saying that meat is unsuitable and

unsavory, he affirms the belief that the Buddha's Hinayana (school of Buddha's basic teachings) passage on the "three conditions" allows for all other forms of meat consumption.

He continues, "Some practitioners, when their feeling for Dharma is momentarily strong decry the purchase of meat even from meat vendors. They declare that because it has been killed for meat eaters generally, it has been killed for them personally. Later, when their pious mood has passed, these same people pounce on any meat that is offered like vultures upon a corpse. This is not more than the game of a child."<sup>9</sup> He is speaking of Westerners who criticize Tibetans for eating meat yet still eat meat on occasion.

The debate as to whether or not meat bought from a butcher is acceptable for a Buddhist to eat was the topic of many more discussions, some of which will be included in the interviews of the next chapter. Tsepa Rinzin, after hearing Gyatso's views, explains,

"The Venerable Gyatso's refutation of this view that he labels 'No consumer, no killer' is that the meat sold in the butcher shop has been completely separated from the animal. Whatever actions such as cutting and frying that come later cannot harm the animal itself. He notes, in classical debating style, that to condemn the purchase of meat for general sale would lead to the expanded absurdity of saying that leather products or such things as pearls and peacock feathers could not be virtuously bought, yet this extension probably would not dismay an ardent vegetarian."<sup>10</sup>

Being an "ardent vegetarian" myself, I am dismayed that cow skin, clam mucous and the feathers of a bird being forcibly removed would be separated from the suffering of the animal itself by a Buddhist lama. Even a layperson with no Buddhist education knows that the Buddha doesn't consider harming animals "virtuous."

Many Buddhist practitioners claim to be an authority on the matter of meat eating, as if they were the Buddha himself. K. Sri Dhammapada writes,

“People who criticize Buddhists who eat meat do not understand the Buddhist attitude toward food. A human being should supply his body with the food it needs to keep him healthy and give him energy to work. If one eats meat without greed and without directly being involved in the act of killing but merely to sustain the physical body, he is practicing self-restraint.”<sup>11</sup>

In further pondering on the Buddhist relationship to animals, Dhammapada writes,

“One thought stands out in a world where man clubs man for gain or sheer gore. There is hardly time to ponder over his morals in relation to animals. Buddhism is supreme in that it teaches us to show equal care and compassion for each and every creature in the universe. The destruction of any creature represents a disturbance of the Universal Order. Man’s cruelty toward animals is another expression of his uncontrolled greed.”<sup>12</sup>

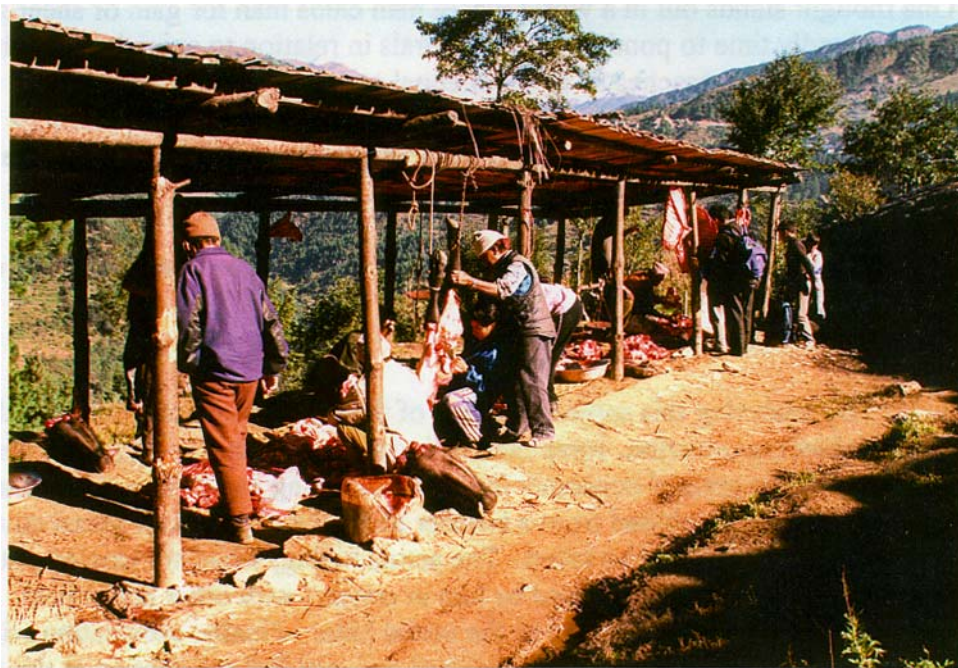
Tsepak Rinzin offers a Buddhologist’s analysis of the karmic consequences of purchasing meat from a butcher,

“By analyzing this subject in terms of the four factors of a completed karma—object, motivation, completed action and satisfaction—at least a partial complicity by the general consumer in the act of killing can be argued. Assuming a quantity of beef purchased from a butcher shop, the object is an actual cow. The motivation—that the cow be killed. The actual killing, while not carried out by the consumer, still is partly caused by him in concert with other consumers because of the payment provided to the actual killer. Finally, satisfaction with the result is certainly present. The kind-hearted may not feel satisfaction at the death of an animal *per se*, but they do feel satisfaction with the fact that now it is dead, the meat is available. The fact that the animal is dead is the result of killing. Thus, as all four factors of the karma of killing are completely or partially present, it can be posited that a negative result must follow. Whether this is strong or weak and whether a negative action can be transformed into something positive by the power of a truly virtuous motivation when eating meat is another question.”<sup>13</sup>

Patrul Rinpoche offers a more visual break down, from a farmer’s perspective.

“An example is the slaughter of a sheep raised for meat by its owner. First the master of the house tells his servant or a butcher to slaughter a sheep. The *basis* is that he knows that there is a sentient creature involved—a sheep. The *intention*, the idea of killing it, is present as soon as he decided to have this or that sheep slaughtered. The *execution* of the actual act of killing takes place when the slaughterer seizes his noose and suddenly catches the sheep that he is going to kill, throws it on its back, lashes its legs together with leather thongs and binds a rope around its muzzle until it suffocates. In the violent agony of death, the

animal ceases to breathe and its staring eyes turn bluish and clod over, streaming tears. Its body is dragged off to the house and the final phase, the ending of its life, reaches *completion*. In no time at all the animal is being skinned with a knife, its flesh still quivering because the 'all pervading energy' has not yet had time to leave the body; it is as if the body were still alive. Immediately it is roasted over a fire or cooked on the stove, and then eaten. When you think about it, such animals are practically eaten alive, and we humans are no different from beasts of prey.”<sup>14</sup>



Tibetan's near Chelsa in the Solu Khumbu region of northern Nepal purchasing buffalo meat.

The Buddha's teachings on meat differ, depending on his audience. For example, In the *Descent into Lanka Sutra*, he tells his disciples, "He who eats flesh in transgression of the words of the Sage, that man of evil mind after being dedicated under the gospel of Sakya... (will) burn in terrible hells like Raurava for the duration of the destruction of two worlds. Flesh free from the Three Objections does not exist. Therefore one should not eat flesh...If one eats it he will always be born shameless and mad.”<sup>15</sup> And again, “As passion is an obstacle to deliverance so are such things as flesh or intoxicants. In

future times the eaters of flesh, speakers of delusion, will say that flesh is proper, blameless and praised by the Buddhas. But the pious man should take his morsel in moderation, indifferently, like a useful physic, as though it were the flesh of his own son. Oh wise ones, since I regard each and every sentient being as I would my only son, how could I permit my disciples to eat his body? And how would I dare take meat if I did not permit my disciple to consume it? To do so would be very illogical.”<sup>15</sup>

Gyatso comments,

“Many people, relying on the Buddha's teaching in the *Descent into Lanka Sutra* concerning the faults of eating meat, assert that meat is a completely unsuitable food. People who observe this for such reasons are truly admirable; there is nothing wrong with their action. Yet they see only one side of the teachings, that of faults. They do not see the other side of the teachings, where certain meats, or certain conditions for meat-eating are permitted. In other sutras given to different audiences, the Buddha discussed the question of eating meat with different emphases. In the *Wisdom Chapter Sutra* the eating of flesh is described as harmless if it is useful for a great end. In the Mahayana Sutra known as ‘For the Wise Ones’ the Buddha states, ‘In order to fulfill the Great purpose, to consume meat brings no faults.’”<sup>15</sup>

Gyatso continues,

“Although meat may be free from the three objections, a Bodhisattva on the initial level of practice, who may have a strong instinctive craving for meat, may not thoroughly examine whether it is proper for consumption or may not be mindful of its demerits. Due to his craving he may indirectly encourage the slaughter of the animal or even generate the thought of killing it himself. Therefore these teachings in the *Descent into Lanka Sutra* were given in order that such a Bodhisattva should avoid taking meat.”<sup>15</sup>

Gyatso concludes,

“It is excellent if ordained persons can completely abandon meat because of the faults described in the *Descent into Lanka Sutra*. But if they cannot, they should be careful to follow the prohibitions given in the Hinayana teachings. Still, this limited permission should not be taken too freely, one should know one's real stage of development, as the mother who cares for her sick and cherished only child must be very clear about what the doctor has prescribed and what he has forbidden... To misuse the permission on the excuse that the Buddha gave it is like a mouse who drowns himself in the honey pot.”<sup>15</sup>

Both meat eating monks and the two animal rights lamas I met used quotations of the Buddha to support their arguments, much like the Christian Bible is manipulated to support conflicting issues. So, even the highest textual references Buddhism has to offer do not clearly settle the conflict. This leaves the issue up to personal opinion, which is the subject of the next chapter.