



A Re-translation of the Eighth Chapter of the Lankavatara Sutra and Commentary

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Introduction

A re-translation is a revision of an earlier translation. It is sometimes made by comparing several translations and doing language studies on the meaning of key words and passages. Usually some poetic license occurs, in the sense that, rather than translate or interpret something for literal accuracy, the rendering attempts to convey the inner sense of the passage in more readable language. Sometimes, too, older sutras have parts that have been lost or obscured over time. They are usually included for the sake of historical accuracy and no one knows for sure what was originally meant, though many educated guesses can be made. A re-translation, focusing more on making the translation readable, flowing, and devotional, interprets and translates those passages in a way that makes sense to those reading it and in some sense sacrifices some accuracy. Quite often in Buddhist history such re-translations must have been made, because when various versions of the sutras are compared they are different enough so that only one can be the “true original”. There is some question if there even was a true original, since some sutras were oral traditions long before they were written down and the variations deviated from each other rather early. Unlike the prophetic traditions which have their scriptures claim to be the voice of an authoritarian god, Buddhism is a religion of seers. While prophets claim to speak for a god, seers report what their intuitive awareness picks up about reality. When the god is considered infallible, the scriptures are not deeply questioned in regards to their truth. But seers have human fallibility and occasionally certain views are further refined over time. This aspect of Buddhism has allowed it to evolve over the centuries.

I have relied much on the translation of the Lankavatara Sutra by D T Suzuki (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London and Hensley 1978). I have eliminated some but not all of the language redundancies in order to make the text more readable. I have made different choices in terms of how to translate certain key words. I have mainly used American words have become the usual translations for Buddhist technical terms. This will make it easier to link the themes discussed here with other Buddhist writings. I have streamlined much of the awkward English, breaking up many larger sentences into smaller ones. I have also occasionally eliminated some small phrases that did not add clarity to what was spoken about. I have also kept a few outdated passages because they give a clue to when the sutra was written. I have also, as much as possible, translated the passages in a gender balanced way.

The commentary illuminates some passages that show that the Lankavatara Sutra was a later Sutra. It mentions several other sutras and therefore must have come historically after those were created. It also mentions sutras and an issue mentioned in other sutras, and therefore comes from a time period when oral traditions were put down in writing. Many of issues Buddha responds to seem relevant to wandering yogis. There are some criticisms of other sutras and a disclaimer that the Buddha wrote them. This also dates the sutra. This particular chapter seems to be about setting the record straight about the issue of vegetarianism. Mahamati must have communicated to the Buddha in a visionary state or must have gone to

meet Buddha at Mount of the Holy Vulture to get information from the Buddha to make this issue clear.

Text and Commentary

1. Then the Bodhisattva-Mahasattva Mahamati asked the Blessed One in verse and made a request:
2. “Please tell me, Blessed One, Tathagata, Arhat, Completely Enlightened One regarding the merit or demerit of animal flesh eating so that I and other Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas of the present and the future may teach the Dharma to those under the influence of habit energy coming from previous existences as carnivores, who strongly crave to eat animal flesh, and thereby help them to abandon their craving to eat animal flesh.
3. These animal flesh eaters may then be able abandon their desire to experience the taste sensation of animal flesh and be able to have the Dharma become their food and enjoyment, and also learn to regard all sentient beings as if they were their only child and thereby cherish all sentient beings with great compassion.
4. Through cherishing them with great compassion, they will discipline themselves to move through all the Bodhisattva stages and quickly awaken to supreme perfect enlightenment.
5. By learning to cherish animals with great compassion, learning not to kill them and eat them, may even those presently on the path stages of Sravakas and Pretyakabuddhas can eventually become the most advanced Tathagatas.”

The verses of Mahamati are really a summary of all themes that the Buddha will speak about. There are some interesting subtleties of understanding expressed in these apparently simple and devotional words. One is that Mahamati does acknowledge previous existences of human beings as carnivores and gives this as the reason why humans crave animal flesh. Although he is referring to previous incarnations of individuals, there is also a sense that the evolutionary ancestors of humankind in general had a history of animal flesh eating and therefore still crave to eat animal flesh. It is considered “habit energy” to want to crave animal flesh. Whatever the reasons why this habit appeared, it is considered something worth abandoning in order to progress towards enlightenment.

In Mahayana Buddhism, the driving force of the enlightenment process is “mahakaruna” or “great compassion”. It is meant to be toward all sentient beings and animals are included within range of this compassion. Compassion cannot be limited to only the human species, or only to one human racial subgroup, or only to friends and family. In Buddhism, compassion even extends to hungry ghosts, demons, gods, and asuras.

Even though the path of the Sravakas and Pretyakabuddhas does not emphasize mahakaruna as much as the Mahayana Buddhist path, Mahamati is still concerned for them and has compassion for them. He does not want people on these paths to be karmaically hindered in their progress through animal flesh eating. By his concern, he implies that compassion for animals, not killing them, and not eating them, is an essential part of the motivating force that allows one to become completely enlightened.

Sravakas are pathwalkers who learn mainly through hearing the Dharma teachings and reach a degree of enlightenment through understanding the truth that has been realized by a teacher. A person reaches Sravaka enlightenment by listening to a Dharma teacher until something clicks inside, restlessness drops away, and you feel inner peace. This enlightenment tends to not be completely stable, because it is still dependant on words and therefore can get

challenged by alternate views which can create confusion. Through exploring such doubts, asking questions to Dharma teachers, and pondering the answers in his or her experience, this enlightenment can deepen.

Pretyakabuddhas are pathwalkers who learn mainly through solitary meditation practice. Their realization tends to be deeper than Sravakas, because the mental fluctuations are calmed more directly and the realization of the truth comes from the depths of their meditative experience. Yet Pretyakabuddhas are often shaken in their realization when they leave their solitary retreat to connect with people in the world. The harshness the faults of others can still disturb them and require them to recenter within themselves through more meditation.

The Mahayana Buddhist path emphasizes great compassion and therefore can stay within the world and not be disturbed by the negativity, greed, and delusions of the world. Through loving service to the evolution of humankind into complete enlightenment, great compassion can overlook the faults and violence of sentient beings and even use those woundings and irritations as a source of spiritual growth. Because the weaknesses and negativity of sentient beings challenges the inner peace of a world server, the Bodhisattva develops a deeper nonattachment and a more unshakable peace.

Mahamati calls the paths of Sravakas and Pretyakabuddhas to be “stages” meaning that he believes that they will eventually become Bodhisattvas who are pathwalkers on the Mahayana Buddhist path. Even Bodhisattvas can be seen as a stage prior to Vajrayana Buddhist path which uses special skillful means and advanced methods to accelerate the enlightenment process so that it might be completed in one lifetime.

By calling the main motivation for animal flesh eating to be “habit energy” (vashana), Mahamati points to animal flesh eating as being unnecessary for the further survival and evolution of the human species. As certain passages unfold, Buddha implies that one can have a body which may even be predisposed to eating animal flesh and that this kind of body can mutate through intention motivated by great compassion. This may be an important point to consider, since many diet teachers point to features like animal flesh eating enzymes and blood types related to carnivorous ancestors as an attempt to prove that we should be animal flesh eaters. But just as the intention to eat animal flesh can create enzymes to break down animal flesh and the action of eating animal flesh can create a historical pattern within a certain blood type, we can also depart from our past patterns, both individually and as a species, and not be bound to our previous patterns.

6. “Blessed One, even worldly philosophers and teachers from other spiritual traditions who are attached to the dualism of being and nonbeing, to nihilism, or to eternalism, will still prohibit animal flesh eating and will themselves refrain from eating animal flesh.
7. “How much more should the World Teacher, who cultivates the one taste of mercy and who is fully enlightened, prohibit the eating of animal flesh both for himself and for others?
8. “O Blessed One who has great compassion for the entire world, who regards all sentient beings as his only child, and who is sensitive to the sufferings of all sentient beings, please teach us about the merit and demerit of animal flesh eating so that I and other Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas may teach the Dharma to others.”

Mahamati goes on to point out that even many world philosophers and teachers from other spiritual traditions who are still attached to limited views still realize the ethical ideal of refraining from killing and eating animals and therefore he expects that the Buddha, who is a

world teacher and one who turns the wheel of the Dharma, should not teach anything less than what others have realized.

Mahamati uses an interesting phrase when he says, “the one taste of mercy”. It echoes a teaching of the Buddha where he says, “My entire Dharma is permeated by one taste and this taste is freedom”. Mahamati shares that the entire Dharma is also permeated by the one taste of great compassion. The “one taste” points to the metaphor of an ocean. No matter where you taste the ocean it is always salty. All the Buddhist ethical ideals are based on great compassion and are really applications of this enlightened sentiment to situations we find in the world. Because this sentiment is part of enlightenment, it suggests an integral connection between the highest enlightenment and the not eating of animal flesh.

9. Said the Blessed One, “I will share with you, Mahamati, listen well and reflect within yourself.”

10. “Certainly, Blessed One,” said Mahamati, the Bodhisattva-Mahasattva, and he gave ear to the Blessed One.

Although these passages seem like an introduction, it is not merely a literary lead in to the discourse of the Buddha. Many titles are given to the Buddha in the first ten verses. The term “Blessed One” is the most used and refers to a simple calm happiness which life seems to support with synchronicities and needs being met. He also has the role of a World Teacher and needs to set into motion the teachings and ideals that humans will find worth emulating so that spiritual evolution can continue. He is also called an Arhat or worthy one. This means that he worked to earn his blessed state and therefore can teach others how to do the same. He does not teach mere theory, but what has worked for him and what has been proven in his life. He is also called Completely Enlightened which suggests that there are degrees of enlightenment and that his has matured to completion and is therefore without defect. He is also called a Tathagata. This term is less clear what it means, but points to a “suchness” beyond what the intellect can grasp. It implies, too, that he is simply what he is, beyond all mental interpretations and judgments. Whatever the Buddha is, it is an actual mutation and not merely a person who behaves better or who has a different set of thoughts about life. Whatever Buddha is, it is sensed by such advanced souls as Mahamati and therefore they are inspired to learn from him. They feel a respect and devotion to the Buddha because of what he is. This devotion is a factor in their own enlightenment process.

The Buddha invites Mahamati to enter into deep listening and reflection. Mahamati agrees and intentionally directs his listening to the Buddha in this mode. This kind of deep listening comes from meditation practice and a mental silence that can feel what is said with a silent awareness. No analytical thought activity or mental commentary is reacting to what is said. The ordinary chattering mind which usually reacts to what is said with attachment, indifference, or resistance becomes silent. A deep desire to know, a willingness to be changed through listening, an innate curiosity which wants to know the truth, and an innocence which does not presume in advance what the truth is comes forward when there is deep listening. Part of this is intending to listen, conjuring this state, and focusing on being attentive to the Buddha. The other part is “reflection” and means that the listener is following what is said inside his or her own present experience, verifying what is said with intuitive feeling and direct seeing. This is different from merely memorizing the words and merely decoding what the words mean. The words are used as a mirror to feel what is true directly, immediately, and intuitively.

11. The Blessed One shared this with him, “For innumerable reasons, Mahamati, the Bodhisattva, whose nature is compassion, is not to eat any animal flesh.

12. 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.

13. These sentient beings have been beasts, domestic animals, birds, and humans in different lifetimes and have often been related to us in some way.
14. 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 practising the Dharma eat the flesh of any sentient being whose nature is the same as himself or herself?"

Here Buddha goes further than Mahamati. Whereas Mahamati sees that the karmic demerit of animal flesh eating hinders the enlightenment process and that animal flesh eating does not develop the compassion of a Bodhisattva to the degree that we treat all sentient beings as if they were our only child, the Buddha points out that all sentient beings have actually been, in many lifetimes, closely related to us, and that we are literally eating friends and relatives that we have had in our past lifetimes. The Buddha also imbeds the "golden rule" to treat others as we want to be treated. Unlike Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, and many other religions, the golden rule is applied to all sentient beings, rather than only to human beings.

15. "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!
16. 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.
17. 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.
18. 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.
19. Nor should a Bodhisattva eat flesh sold by others for monetary profit."

The Buddha starts to develop the theme of great compassion and points out that even the Rakashasa, a race of flesh eating demons, when they heard the Dharma, were inspired to give up their habitual diet. Although this historical argument may sound strange to American ears, it shows how large the worldview of Mahayana Buddhism is. The Buddha is indirectly pointing out how attached some humans are to their animal flesh eating. He points to the irony that even flesh eating demons have realized the necessity to stop eating human and animal flesh before many humans have. And even the irony that they also see the connection of refraining from eating animal and human flesh with the Buddha Dharma. He also brings in the Rakashasa to bring in some relativity. We would not want our flesh to be eaten by these demons. Therefore in some sense we stand in the same relationship to these demons as animals stand in relationship to us.

Up to this point in the discourse, the Buddha and Mahamati have bundled killing and eating of

animals as one kind of karma. The Buddha is now emphasizing that there are no exceptions as to which animals should or should not be eaten, they are all meant to not be eaten. This is different, again, from many other religions which prohibit the eating of some animals but not others. The foundation for this nondistinction is the one taste of mercy which radiates compassion on all sentient beings. The Buddha goes further so say that if someone kills animals, cooks them, and sells their flesh as food for us, that we are still not meant to eat animal flesh. Even though we do not have the karma of killing an animal, we are rewarding someone for killing an animal so that he or she is encouraged to kill more animals for profit. This shows that the Buddha was sensitive to social injustice and did not want to encourage social institutions which supported the killing and eating of animals.

20. "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.
21. To illustrate, Mahamati: When a dog sees, even from a distance, a hunter, a sociopath, or a fisherperson, who desires to eat animal flesh, he or she is terrified with fear, thinking, "They are death dealers and will kill even me." In the same way, even small animals who live in the air, on earth, or in the water, seeing animal flesh eaters at a distance, will notice them, by their keen sense of smell, the odour of the Rakashasa and will run away from such people as quickly as possible, because they carry the threat of death.
22. For this reason, let the Bodhisattva abide in great compassion, and because of the odor that exudes from the skin of animal flesh eaters and because such an odor causes terror, a form of suffering, among sentient beings, he or she should refrain from eating animal flesh.
23. Mahamati, animal flesh which is liked by the unwise is full of bad smell and gives one a bad reputation which turns wise people away.
24. The food of the wise, which is eaten by Rishis, does not consist of animal flesh or blood. Therefore let the Bodhisattva refrain from eating animal flesh."

The Buddha further develops the vegetarian theme and touches upon some Hindu lore. According to one Hindu story, hinted in the above passage, humans learned to eat animal flesh from demons. When people do eat animal flesh, their sweat smells differently and this scent can be picked up by many animals. This is why many hunters and carnivores will stalk animals by approaching them from downwind so their scent does not give notice to the animals that they are near. The Buddha affirms that animals do think and feel similar to how we think and feel. They experience terror when they smell a killer come towards them and human hunters are killers to them. Since terror is a form of suffering and a life in terror is painful to live, encouraging animals to be afraid is very much against having compassion for animals and very much against the Bodhisattva ideal of ending sorrow and the causes of sorrow for all sentient beings.

The Buddha points to the chemical changes which are produced by animal flesh eating and how it causes terror in animals and bad odor that repels spiritually oriented people. The odour signals that such a person is a killer of animals even to spiritually sensitive people. The odour weakens the reputation of such a person among those spiritually sensitive people. The Rishis were ancient Hindu sages and represent spiritually sensitive people who, although not Buddhists, were respected by Buddhists. The Lankavatara Sutra seems to have a peaceful and accepting view of Hinduism implied in its message. The sutra seems to have a continuum of people at different stages of spiritual evolution. Vegetarian Rishis are considered wise people

and respected for their attainment. In several passages of other sutras, the Buddha indicates that some Hindus had attained enlightenment and that many were reborn in the heaven worlds.

The passages about the chemical changes which are produced by eating animal flesh is important for later themes, because the Buddha will suggest not eating animals which have been accidentally killed, parallel to the road kills that happen in modern times. This is because of these chemical changes are still produced and because of how one still terrorizes animals through smelling like a killer to them. There is also the implication that, because a person may develop the smell of a Rakashasa, he or she may become one, given enough persistence in the direction of animal flesh eating, and even going to the point where a person might even crave human flesh as well.

The theme that a Bodhisattva should refrain from eating animal flesh and therefore not produce an odour that through sweating that terrifies other animals is important because a Bodhisattva has made six vows. One is to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Two is to eradicate all personal karma completely. Three is to master all the Dharma teachings. Four is to transcend the duality of nirvana and samsara. Five is to have compassion on all sentient beings. Six is to dedicate oneself to the liberation of all sentient beings. Because these vows apply to all sentient beings, not killing animals, not eating them, and not terrifying them is a logical extension of those vows.

Compassionate ideals

25. "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.
26. 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 Rishis 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.
27. 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."

In the above passages, the Buddha develops a theme further by looking at the how the reputation of the Buddha Dharma suffers when practitioners do not live up to certain compassionate ideals. When people see people who are reputed to live holy lives not living up to certain compassionate ideals, then they will either feel critical of the Buddha Dharma and feel it is a lesser ideal than another religion or they will feel justified in following a lesser ideal and thus perpetuate the suffering of animals by killing them and eating them. Whatever reasons, for instance, the present Dalai Lama has for still eating animal flesh, even though he has demonstrated nobility, compassion, and idealism in many other areas of concern, he has also been used an example of an animal flesh eating Buddhist and has therefore allowed people to justify their own animal flesh eating habits rather than transcend them [In fairness, however, one needs to add that the Dalai Lama has frequently spoken out with great enthusiasm in favour of vegetarianism and does always advocate it when asked about this topic.].

The above passages refer specifically to how Hinduism would disrespect the Buddha Dharma because it would fall short of one of its time held ideals. Out of all the religions of the world, Hinduism has been the most consistently vegetarian. The above passages are an indirect argument against many Buddhists who believe that Buddha did eat animal flesh. If he had eaten animal flesh, then he would have been disrespected in India. As a result of his own consistency in this regard, many Hindus consider the Buddha to be an enlightened being, consider him to have been a vegetarian, and have been able to learn from the Buddha Dharma and to incorporate much of what he said into their teachings.

28. "Mahamati, there is a generally offensive odor to a corpse which feels unnatural, therefore let the Bodhisattva refrain from animal flesh eating. When flesh is burned, whether of a dead human, animal, or any sentient being, the odor is the same. When any flesh is burned, the odor smells foul. Therefore, the Bodhisattva who wishes to keep his or her discipline pure should refrain from eating animal flesh."

This passage again takes the previous themes and goes deeper. When people eat animal flesh, it does not merely cause them to have a smell that makes animals run away in terror and does not merely give Buddhism a bad reputation among the Hindus and the people of other religions. It also causes them to carry corpses inside their own bodies. People then carry the smell of death inside them. Here the word "pure" has the implication of pure in terms of consistency of discipline and also the implication that the body itself will feel purer inside if it does not carry the "smell of death" within itself. The Buddha will now go on to develop this theme even further, by illuminating the more spiritual and deep karmic results of having eaten animal flesh.

29. "Mahamati, when sons and daughters of good family, wishing to exercise themselves in various disciplines such as the attainment of a compassionate heart, reciting a magical formula, perfecting magical knowledge, or journeying deeper into Mahayana Buddhist teachings, should go to a cemetery, into a wilderness retreat, or travel near a place where demons visit, or when they sit to do meditation practice, they are hindered because of their eating of animal flesh, and are less able to gain magical powers, be healed of illnesses, or even attain liberation itself. The Bodhisattva, seeing how animal flesh eating weakens the ability to gain magical powers, 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."

The Buddha indirectly talks about the spiritual vibration of an animal flesh eater. It is implied in how one is carrying corpse energy within oneself. There is then a subtle weakening of the ability to perform magical rites and to attain magical powers. The vibration attracts demons to oneself on the principle of "like attracts like" and allows them to affect one more. Although this is a subtle point and harder to prove, one can experiment with diet and feel this vibrational change. Plants are considered to have physical and etheric bodies, while animals have a physical, etheric, and astral body. Because the third body is composed of emotional matter, the vibration of animal flesh carries the baser emotions of the animal world which are more survival oriented, territorial, and primitive. It also carries the vibration of the death of the animal which can have a lot of anger, rage, confusion, sorrow, and terror floating in its emotional energy and hormonal blood chemistry. It can pull the vibrations of humans downward when they are aspiring to rise to nobler sentiments, to have less fear, and to have greater compassion. Eating only plants is lighter food and nourishes the basic life force without having denser emotional energies permeating them. It is considered possible to spiritually evolve as an animal flesh eater, but it takes a little more work, since the animal flesh energy needs to be transmuted. When we are struggling with similar emotions from our own animal nature, such food tends to reinforce our weaknesses and slow us down. The Buddha will

develop this theme of “corpse energy” even further in this sutra.

30. “When even looking at outer forms stimulates a craving for tasting the delicious flavour of animal flesh, let the Bodhisattva, whose nature is sympathetic compassion and who regards all sentient beings as if they were his or her only child, totally refrain from eating animal flesh.”

The Lankavatara Sutra seems to repeat many themes but each repetition is somewhat different in sometimes subtle ways. Here “outer forms” means sense objects which combine with our sense organs to stimulate sense consciousness and thereby creates our sensory experience. This stimulation in turn activates our samskaras, our latent habitual tendencies, and brings up a craving to eat animal flesh. The above passage is about the sixth precept of the Noble Eightfold Path, which is “Right Application” or “Gentle Correction”, and the seventh precept of the Noble Eightfold Path, which is “Right Mindfulness”. There is also an application of analysing the Twelve Nidanas, the twelve critical and mutually influencing factors in the chain reaction of sorrow which is at root of our habit energy and our karma. The key word is “totally”. What this means is that we need to cut the craving for animal flesh right at the root. When we notice that a craving has arisen within us, we need to look at the entire pattern of activation with mindfulness, and not even mentally feed our attachments. The repetition and reminder that the Bodhisattva is compassionate and wishes to treat all sentient beings as if they were his or her only child is part of this “analytical contemplation”. We are meant to remember why we are choosing to let go of craving animal flesh.

This passage brings up an important Buddhist theme which is the interdependence of the five skandhas of consciousness, thought, emotion, sensation, and body. Our emotional experience of compassion can deepen through right mindfulness, right intention, and right thinking. Since even our bodies are involved in this kind of interdependence, we can eventually mutate our bodies to the point where the cravings completely end and also to the point where our digestive and energy systems can completely operate on plant food alone without feeling deprived in any way.

31. “Recognizing the mouth will produce a foul odour, even while living this life, let the Bodhisattva, whose nature is compassion, totally refrain from animal flesh eating. Those who eat animal flesh sleep uneasily and when they awaken in the morning are distressed. They dream of disturbing events that make their hair stand on end. They are left alone in empty huts. They live a solitary life. Their spirits are seized by demons. Frequently they are struck with terror. They tremble without knowing why. There is no order to their eating. They are never satisfied. Their diet is not attuned to what is appropriate in taste, digestion, and nourishment. Their intestines are filled with worms and other impure creatures. They harbour the causes of leprosy. They cease to believe that they can become free from all diseases and do not have a clear aversion towards all the causes of diseases.”

This passage talks about how it is compassionate towards oneself to not eat animal flesh. The passage goes into the many ill effects of animal flesh eating. The “foul odor” refers back to the smell of corpses. Because animals have an astral or emotional body, while plants only have physical and energy bodies, we actually eat the emotionality of the animals. Since animals, especially hunted ones, live in fear, we will sleep more uneasily and have more frightening dreams. We may not even know why we dream those dreams, because we took them in from the outside. Being “seized by demons” comes from our attunement and alignment with the hell realms where animal and human flesh is eaten. Unlike the Christian idea of hell, which is related to being sent somewhere because of the judgment of a personal authoritarian god, the Buddhist hell is related to karma, or causes and conditions which produce effects. According to Buddhist and Hindu legend, demons were the first to eat both human and animal flesh, and it

was they that taught humans how to do the same. When we copy characteristics of a realm, then we attune and align with its energy. We open ourselves up to be influenced by such realms. The hell realm is a place of perpetual warfare and conflict. It is a place where anger issues are processed. The intense burning up of adrenal hormones creates a stronger craving for proteins and therefore the temptation to eat animal flesh is increased. Because of such intense cravings, there is no sense of balance and appropriateness in the diet and cravings are never satisfied.

The passage goes into rather gory detail about what happens in the intestinal track. Although the passage may seem extreme, the observations are true and can be verified. If you place some uncooked animal flesh on a kitchen counter, in about twenty four hours it will be squirming with maggots. The creatures called “flies” are meant to lay eggs on corpses and use them for food, and animal flesh is corpse flesh. Plants have a different cellular structure and do not live and die like animals. They are not yet individual sentient beings and therefore they are not part of the transmigration of sentient beings through the six worlds. With many plants, the leaves are harvested and the plant can remain alive after harvesting. The action of artfully harvesting some plants can actually improve the health of a plant, particularly when the lower leaves are pruned first. A plant can also be cut into two and both sections can become full plants in their own right with proper care. With animals, they must be killed to be eaten and chopping off a limb does not help them.

Cooking animal flesh does at least partly sterilize the food and some of these concerns may be partly obsolete. But there is still the development of an acidic internal environment and the attraction of bacteria that thrives in this kind of environment and which is not beneficial to our health. In spite of cooking doing some sterilization, some bacteria are very immune to attempts to kill them off and survive anyway. Since animals and humans are very similar physiologically, many illnesses are transmitted from animals to humans and visa versa. Since conventional medicine assumes that animal flesh eating is normal and okay to do, there has not been extensive mapping of the cause and effect chains which link many diseases to animal flesh eating. Yet there are many individual reports which seem to add up to an extensive connection. Many animal flesh eating religious cultures have had prohibitions against the eating of certain animals. They may have linked these animals to specific diseases being transmitted to humans. Many healers within those religious traditions have defended the prohibitions against eating certain animals with this kind of reasoning.

Because we are eating corpses when we eat animal flesh, we will lose our clarity about what is healthy and what is not healthy. We will tend to eat many things, like too much sugar, that we know is not healthy for us. Energetically, there is a big difference between eating fresh plants, as in a salad, and eating cooked animal corpses. When we honor our own health more deeply, then we start getting attuned to what is healthy and what is unhealthy. We regain our healthy aversion towards all diseases and the causes of all diseases. When we eat animal flesh, we may have accepted illness and death more than we may realize. We have actually based our survival on the death of sentient beings.

32. “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 Rishis and was not meant to be appropriate food for any human being.”

The phrase “intoxicant” refers to the fifth subprecept of fourth precept of the Noble Eightfold

Path. In this passage, the Buddha links the Mahayana motivation of compassion (treating animals as if they were our only child) with the basics of the Hinayana path. The Buddha is showing that we are meant to keep to the basic precepts as we advance to higher and higher realizations. The exact precept in question reads thus, “Not to intoxicate the body, but to keep the mind calm and clear”. The passage is also clear that animal flesh eating is an addiction, since the fifth precept is traditionally about ending addictions to such things as drinking alcohol or taking any substance that hurts our mental clarity. Therefore animal flesh is being considered as addiction that is meant to be overcome. Like an addiction, we can get some level of good feeling from temporarily satisfying our craving, but the long term effects are unwholesome. The Buddha one time shared that all obstacles are overcome by “wisely contemplating them and wisely abandoning them”. This means that there is always a free choice element in each step along the path. We are meant to wisely contemplate what we are doing and wisely abandon what is unwholesome.

The basic points made so far can be summarized as follows:

1. Animals are sentient beings like humans, hungry ghosts, demons, asuras, and devas are therefore meant to be included in our “moral universe”.
2. The basic ethical precept within our compassion is to “treat others the way we wish to be treated” and therefore we do not eat animals.
3. Even for selfish reasons, there are ill effects of animal flesh eating.
4. Even for the animals that are not eaten, our odour changes so that we induce terror in them.
5. Animal flesh eating is an addiction or intoxicant that hurts our mental calm and clarity.

The Buddha adds another reason which is less general than the above. He wants those who take refuge in his teachings, his disciples, to refrain from animal flesh eating. The way he talks in the above passages makes artful links to various aspects of his general teachings. It is clear that he believes not eating animal flesh is part of following these teachings.

33. “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 Rishis. It comprises rice, barley, wheat, kidney beans, beans, lentils, clarified butter, oil, honey, molasses, treacle, sugar cane, coarse sugar, and similar foods. Food prepared with these ingredients is proper food.
34. Mahamati, there maybe irrational people, who under the influence of the habit energy of carnivorous races, who will strongly crave the taste of animal flesh. The above mentioned diet is not prescribed for these people.
35. Mahamati, above mentioned diet is prescribed for those Bodhisattvas-Mahasattvas, who have made offerings to the previous Buddhas, who have planted the roots of goodness, who are possessed of faith, who are devoid of prejudices, who are all males and females belonging to the Sakya family, who are sons and daughters of good families, who have no attachment to body, life, and property, who do not crave sweets, who choose to live a life without greed, who have the compassionate desire to cherish all sentient beings as much as themselves, and who loves all sentient beings as if they were his or her only child.”

The exact details of the diet recommended by the Buddha are not given and may be meant to be

refined through mindfulness. When we stop eating animal flesh and food cravings in general, then our bodies regain the sense of what is wholesome and appropriate for us, especially when we cut off the craving at its mental roots within us. There is a general recommendation of an Aryurvedic diet, a dietary system common to both Hinduism and Buddhism. The term “Ancient Rishis,” in this context, seems to refer to those who originally taught Aryurveda. What is part of this system is a sense of balance and proportion in what we eat. There are vegans in present time who have gone further to question the use of clarified butter and milk yogurt, which are still animal products and may sometimes be a subtle form of stealing. Some have even questioned the use of honey, the harvesting of which may cause sorrow for the bees and may also be stealing from them. In my own experience, I find that some clarified butter, honey, yoghurt and maybe even a few fresh unfertilized eggs from free range chickens (as opposed to those chickens who are kept in cages in factory farms and who are suffering nearly all the time) may be good as part of a transition away from animal flesh eating, later to be abandoned when our inner sensitivity guides us further. During this transition, however, a sense of balance and proportion is very important, since overconsumption of these foods can cause mucus congestion and result in ill health.

What is interesting in the above passages is that the Buddha does not prescribe the diet to anyone who is not part of the “Sakya family” and talks about “carnivorous races” whose addiction to eating animal flesh is so strong as to make them irrational. This teaching is wise in that those who understand the simplicity of what Buddha is sharing will make the shift to a vegetarian or vegan diet. But when people are under the influence of animal flesh craving, the teachings may not find a receptive place in them to hear what is said. The Buddha suggests that we are not meant to try to teach people who are too attached to animal flesh eating. This is wise advice in that our lives will be simpler and we will engage in fewer arguments with people. When there is a strong attachment affecting the mind, then such arguments are generally very unproductive. People may need to undergo a healing crisis or a change of heart before they are ready to take vegetarianism seriously. There are times when the influence is weaker on people, like when they realize that a pet is very sensitive to what is going on and cares for beings in ways similar to humans, or sometimes even better (as when a pet dog sacrifices its life to save its human caretaker). In times like these, sometimes a kind of fog lifts from the human conscience and there is a simple knowing that animals deserve to live and not suffer. These are moments when the compassion of Buddha nature shines through the veils of obscurity, even beyond reasonings for and against eating animals. When a person is present in those moments, they can understand what the Buddha is saying to them, because their own inner illumination is confirming this to them in their own feeling nature.

There is also the suggestion that we become sensitive to how our previous membership in the “carnivorous races” may make animal flesh eating feel more acceptable than it really is. When our bodies are used to a certain diet and we have inherited a long term karmic and biological tendency from our ancestors, we are more able to be complacent about what we are doing. It is a kind of unconsciousness that dulls us from feeling what we are doing when we are eating animal flesh and dulls us even from feeling what is happening inside us.

Another point implied in the theme about our previous membership in “carnivorous races” is that we do have a past history and tendency to crave for and eat animal flesh within our generational karma. There are some diet proponents in modern times who advocate that we should align with our past traditional diets or past evolutionary diets, to eat a certain way because of our blood type or gland type requires us to eat animal flesh. These diets are based on the logical fallacy that “what was should be” and assume that we cannot change our dietary orientation through compassion, skill, intention, sensitivity, and mindfulness.

The Buddha taught that our life is composed of five interdependent, mutually influencing, and mutually modifying “skandhas” (consciousness, thought, emotion, sensation, and body). From the long historical vantage point of the Buddha, the body changed into an animal flesh eating one and therefore can also change into vegetarian one. The mechanism involved was how our skandhas help each other to change. When we have a craving inside us, then our bodies mutate to help us fulfil our cravings. Our bodies, to support animal flesh eating, will produce animal flesh specific enzymes to break down those tissues, increase the amount of acid produced in the stomach, and put more effort into eliminating the toxins produced by digesting animal flesh. Sometimes these changes are too much for the body to handle at any given time. Imbalances and illnesses can then happen. Sometimes a person may feel somewhat weaker when becoming a vegetarian, even though many good changes are happening to them, because the body is in shock and is not used to processing the new diet. This is why it may be wise to have some eggs and some dairy during the transition to a full vegan diet. These are ways of getting some animal protein without killing any animals. At some point the human body gains a “second wind” and finds it has transitioned to being fully able to utilize vegan food as its sole source of food.

Besides the body adapting itself directly to new foods, the body also makes subtle changes when our emotional life radiates compassion and our mental life cultivates contemplative wisdom. Our glands function differently when we are driven by our cravings and when we are motivated by altruistic compassion. When we contemplate being compassionate towards animals, understand its logic, uproot any obscuring thoughts to our clarity about the issue, and intentionally commit to being vegan, then this new thought energy also changes how our bodies function. Our skandhas are constantly influencing each other in this manner.

This way of looking at our bodies is more dynamic than assuming that the body is a substantial thing with immutable characteristics. The body is seen as an ever changing aspect of our total life which is influenced by other skandhas which are also changing. The skandhas are always influencing each other moment to moment, influencing its material environment and being influenced by its material environment, and unfolding within universal law depending upon what we think, say, and do. The body is more like a stream of sensory and motor states connected to a historical flow. Moment to moment the body can be seen to undergo many changes. It has been a zygote, a baby, a child, a teenager, a young adult, an aging adult, and a dying adult. It has been energetic, tired, healthy, sick, alert, dull, clear, dull, heavy, light, small, big, youthful, and decaying. Every mental and emotional state affects it and in turn it affects our mental and emotional states.

The understanding of “dependant origination”, how causes and conditions create us and how we create causes and conditions is deeply foundational to what Buddha taught. In some of the Theravadin sutras, the Buddha even implies that if anyone understood dependant origination from direct living experience, then they would understand his entire dharma. Feeling the web of interdependence we always live within is considered the basis for having compassion for all sentient beings. It allows us to feel our oneness and kinship with all of life. Because this compassion emerges naturally when we feel the truth of interdependence and since compassion for all sentient beings is the basis for being vegetarian, then not eating animal flesh is in some sense more natural to our bodies. Even though it has mutated into an animal flesh eating body, it has the capacity to return to being vegetarian again. It has a cell memory of its earlier and healthier state within its long evolutionary history.

Dependant origination allows us to understand how we can change into an eater of animal flesh and how we can change into a vegetarian. We do not have to be limited by our past social and

biological conditioning. The second precept of Eightfold path is about “right intention” or “right commitment”. We can, through thought intention supported by the other seven precepts, take responsibility for our lives, honor our conscience, change our karma, and become enlightened. We are not doomed to repeat the past. We always have enough free choice on the level of thought to introduce new influences into our karmic pattern and change our lives for the better. We do not have to assume that our blood type or our gland type determines how we must eat. It only shows how our ancestors ate in the past and what they were used to eating. In a similar manner, how we eat now will influence the kind of blood and glands that we pass on to our children. The long earlobes that the Buddha is seen to have had are a sign of many generations of vegetarian eating, just as very short earlobes are a sign of many generations of animal flesh eating.

The Long Life Empowerment in Tibetan Buddhism, involving invoking Amitayus Buddha, doing specific visualizations, chanting certain mantras, and doing certain rituals has been known to lengthen the life line in the palms. Some people have felt their palms tingle with a specific sensation as their life lines extend. In a similar manner, mental and emotional changes created through contemplation of compassion for animals and a commitment to not eat them can also shift how our bodies relate to our diets. We can accelerate our mutation into a fully functional and effective vegetarian diet through this kind of intentional inner focus.

There is a further point implied in these passages. The decision to stop eating animal flesh is not meant to be taken in isolation from “taking refuge in the Dharma” and even undergoing initiation into Mahayana Buddhist practice. The phrases “making offerings to the previous Buddhas” and “planting the roots of goodness” are a short hand for certain initiation processes. When compassion is generated through specific initiations and cultivation practices, then due to the interdependence of thought, emotion, and body, our bodies will more rapidly change so that animal flesh cravings will no longer exist and so that we can more effectively digest plant foods.

When we become members of the “Sakya family”, we are actually mutating our minds and bodies into a new race. We no longer belong to the “carnivorous races”. When the Lankavatara Sutra was written the theory of evolution and the science of biology did not exist. The Buddha could not explain the spiritual life in terms of biological and evolutionary mutation, even though many teachings seem to imply that the Buddha underwent a radical shift in his biology. He is said to have gained mastery over life span, had a completely balanced hormone system (as evidenced by the “32 marks” which are considered biological signs of his enlightenment and which show a balance of male testosterone and female estrogen and as well as possibly all hormonal and neurotransmitter chemical polarities), and had long earlobes (traditionally a sign of being a part of a family lineage of many generations of vegetarianism).

The “Dharma matrix” is meant to support the renouncing of eating animal flesh and the cultivation of a vegetarian diet. In many passages, there are applications of the basic teachings of the Buddha to this intention. From the passage being presently considered, it is clear that the Buddha considered his overall teachings to be a support for being vegetarian and the ideal of being vegetarian as part of his teaching. He further emphasizes that the practice of being vegetarian, although wise and possible in and of itself, is meant to be practiced within the framework of the Noble Eightfold Path and the Mahayana Buddhist vows. Part of this is very practical, because Buddha seemed to know that going beyond the craving for animal flesh has its challenges. He points out that the habit energy for craving animal flesh is within “the carnivorous races” (nearly all the races that form the human species) and therefore represents a biological karma that we inherit from our ancestors. Since it is an addiction that we are literally

born into when we incarnate into most human families and since all addictions are irrationally defended in countless ways, we will need to contemplate the habit energy at its depths within our subconscious mind and will need the support of the total Dharma to replace this motivation with a more altruistic compassion. This explains why many people who try vegetarianism often do not continue beyond a certain point.

36. "Long ago in the past, Mahamati, there lived a king whose number was Simhasaudasa. His excessive fondness for animal flesh, his greed to be served with it, stimulated his taste to its highest degree and then he even began to eat human flesh. In consequence, he was alienated from the company of friends, counsellors, kinsmen, relatives, and even townspeople and country folk. In consequence, he had to renounce his throne and rulership, and to suffer many painful events, all because of his craving for animal flesh."

Buddhist literature often presupposes a wider history and chooses examples from this history to illustrate points. Some of these events may be considered mythical and were probably part of popular folklore, while others may have come from inner sight looking back at the psychic traces of the past. While this passage may seem like a simple morality play to illustrate the basic philosophical points already made, there is really more here than that. Because both animals and humans are biologically very much the same, both being sentient beings and both having bodies of flesh, and both having eyes, hears, tongues, noses, muscles, hearts, brains, and intestines, the craving for animal flesh can reach such an intensity that cannibalism can happen. While most animal flesh eaters usually draw the line at eating only specified animals, under extreme situations or under extreme inner craving, the motivation to eat animal flesh can cross yet another line of sensibility and become cannibalism.

This passage underlines the lack of fundamental difference between animal flesh eating and cannibalism, and how the craving for one can become a craving for the other. In nature, lions and tigers usually do not eat human beings, but when, out of some seeming necessity, they kill a human and eat a human, they then acquire the taste for human flesh and sometimes start to attack human villages for food. This shows that animal flesh eating can extend to human flesh eating by acquiring a taste. The difference here, in the story, is that the animal flesh craving has reached its "highest degree" and has become cannibalism or the eating of members of your own species. This means that there is only a difference in degree, rather than quality, in what is being done when one goes cannibalistic. The main difference between animal flesh eating and cannibalism, outwardly, is that you lose the company of friends and human society in general. When animals are eaten, a similar kinship may be lost with the animal society. It may take more work to gain the trust of an animal. The smell of death coming from the sweat glands and breath becomes a barrier.

Another case of cannibalism which has happened in modern times are those stories where a plane will crash land in a remote area where food is scarce and the survivors will start eating the human flesh of their fellow passengers. While such a survival strategy may be ethically justified if the bodies died during the crash and were not killed for food, it would be interesting to explore what emotional changes happened to the people who ate human flesh and how they looked at their fellow humans after having crossed this line. In a previous passage, where Buddha suggests not even eating road kills, it may be that in this extreme survival situation that one might be better off just accepting the karmic fate of peacefully dying or trying another survival strategy, rather than eat human flesh. In one actual case, the ones that did not eat human flesh but immediately risked journeying the unknown landscape in hopes of finding help were the ones that did the best. What I have also learned from my diet studies is that, when you have been initiated into a raw food diet, you become more sensitized to what plant foods grow nearly everywhere and therefore may not see a need to choose between human

flesh eating and survival.

37. "Mahamati, even Indra, who attained rulership over gods and goddesses, had once was karmically compelled assume the form of a hawk because of the habit energy of hungering for animal flesh coming from an unresolved past lifetime. He chased Vishvakarma who had magically disguised himself as a pigeon in order rescue his friend. Vishvakarma let himself be captured and therefore sacrificed himself in this magically created form in order to save his friend. Vishvakarma offered himself through this sacrifice to King Shiva. The great king felt compassion for this pigeon for its sacrifice and its suffering for the sake of its friend, and therefore he used his siddhis to save them.
38. If even a sentient being who became the great god Indra, could be karmically compelled into lesser rebirths because of the habit energy of wishing to eat animal flesh, and therefore cause sorrow both for himself, his friend, and others, then how much more should those who are not Indra avoid craving for animal flesh and seek to uproot the craving from their subconscious minds."

This story is interesting because it shows how much the Buddha drew from Hindu folklore in order to illustrate his teaching points. In this story he shows the one of the mechanisms of karma. When we have addictive habit energy, then we will be karmically compelled to assume a form which allows us to fulfill our cravings. Even though gods and goddesses do not eat animal flesh or even generally crave animal flesh, the karmic trace or samskara for such a tendency can still exist within their subconscious mind and still cause them to have a lesser rebirth, or even a series of rebirths, into worlds with greater sorrow. Indra was fortunate that he had a friend who had altruistic compassion, skillful means, and magical powers to help save his friend. Even the powers and compassion of his friend were not enough. Vishvakarma had to invoke Shiva and arouse his compassion through his altruistic sacrifice in order to complete the rescue operation. In this story, Vishvakarma is a model for a Bodhisattva and King Shiva is a model for the power of the Buddha to rescue people from their karma. The difficulty Vishvakarma had in rescuing his friend hints at the challenges one may have in helping friends who still have animal flesh craving tendencies to free themselves from the karmic patterns. Such tendencies can remain dormant in the subconscious mind, until stimulated by sense experience in ordinary life or in the bardo, and therefore may need to play out in another lifetime. We can avoid this if meditate deeply enough to uproot these tendencies from within ourselves at their very source without our subconscious minds. The warning is that even very capable advanced beings need to be mindful of what is inside them and what they bringing with them from lifetime to lifetime. It is clear from this story and the previous story that the Buddha feels that craving for animal flesh tends to pull one down to a state of greater sorrow and therefore should be avoided. The story illustrates that a single karmic tendency can held in the subconscious mind. Such a single karmic tendency can still be present even in very advanced beings and cause them to fall to a lesser state when the conditions are ripe. This point relates to the Bodhisattva vow to eradicate all karmic traces from within him or her. It is an admonishment to not be complacent about this goal.

39. "Mahamati, another king was carried by his horse into a forest. After wandering in this forest, he committed evil deeds with a lioness out of fear for his life, and children were born from her. Because the children descended from a union between human and lion, the royal children were called Spotted Feet and other names representing their mixed heritage. On account of their unwholesome habit energy from their past in the forest, when their food had been animal flesh, they continued to eat animal flesh even after becoming royalty.
40. In this life they lived in a Kutiraka village, meaning "seven huts", and because they were excessively attached and devoted to animal flesh eating, they gave birth to Dakas and Dakinis

who were terrifying eaters of human flesh.

41. In the living journey through many transmigrations, Mahamati, those who are overly attached to animal flesh eating will experience a lesser rebirth in wombs of excessive flesh devouring creatures such as lions, tigers, panthers, wolves, hyenas, wild cats, jackals, owls, and other such carnivorous forms.
42. They may even fall into the wombs of still more greedy flesh devouring and terrifying Rakashasas. Falling into such body forms, they may find extreme difficulty ever regaining birth in a human womb and even more difficulty attaining enlightenment!"

The Buddha gives yet another story to deepen and expand on the points already made. The story has to do with karma and transmigration. Birth in human form is considered a positive karmic event and gives us the possibility of realizing enlightenment. While in theory any sentient being in any of the six realms of sorrow can strive for enlightenment, the lower realms do not have enough supportive conditions to make realization very easy. There is more sorrow in those realms and the beings are more preoccupied with their cravings, negativities, and delusions. The story is interesting because it shows how there is a conjunction of biologically inherited karma and individual past lifetime karma. It shows how the next generation carried the tendency even further and crossed over into human flesh eating and may eventually become Rakashasas. Because of free choice, we can turn our direction around at any time and follow the Dharma. We may have to struggle with our inherited tendencies. We can invoke the help of the Buddhas. But when an addiction to something is formed, we may experience some challenges trying to overcome it.

The story shows the logic of transmigration, reincarnation, habit energy, and karma. We will incarnate into a form and circumstance appropriate to our unsatisfied cravings. If a person is addicted to alcohol, he or she will tend to incarnate into a world where bars exist. But because addictions do not remain stationary, the craving can get stronger until we "cross threshold" and lose our ability to incarnate into human form. When this happens, the precious gift of a human birth and its support for becoming enlightened is lost. An unchecked and unremorseful tendency to eat animal flesh can lead to this. Perhaps this is why in Native American spirituality, after killing an animal, people did feel some remorse and did a ritual to appease the killed animal, and dedicated their own body to die and be eaten in the great circle of life. While this kind of ritual alone does not stop the karma from playing out, it does soften the habitual force of the karma and may stop the addiction from expanding further, and could even prevent rebirth into a more painful existence. Developing a conscience toward animals, feeling some remorse, stopping any killing of animals by oneself, and systematically reducing the amount of animal flesh that one eats, these can soften and eventually eradicate the craving for animal flesh and its attendant karmic consequences.

43. "Mahamati, if no one chose to eat animal flesh, then there would be no reason to kill animals. The slaughtering of animals is mostly done out of arrogance and only rarely for other causes. Few respond emotionally and sympathetically to animals when they hear about how pigs, cows, turkeys, chickens, fishes, horses, dogs, and ducks are eaten at regular meals. Yet many would get upset, revolted, or shocked if someone became addicted to human flesh and hunted humans for regular meals.
44. Those who crave the taste of cooked animal flesh in their mouths will devise all kinds of nets, weapons, and tools to hunt down animals and capture them for food. Many innocent sentient beings are thereby destroyed for the sake of others who also crave the taste of cooked animal flesh and who are willing to buy from those who kill the animals for them. They even buy from those who prepare animal flesh within very imaginative culinary dishes. Pigs, cows,

turkeys, chickens, fishes, horses, dogs, and ducks are bought for a price, slaughtered, and eaten. Animals are hunted down and killed on land, in the air, and in the water. Greed for the profit that comes from killing and preparing animals for food becomes another unwholesome motivation behind the killing and torture of innocent sentient beings.

45. Mahamati, many become as hard hearted as the Rakashasas. They become so used to practicing such cruelties towards animals that when they look upon animals that are being prepared for slaughter, often struggling for their life in terror and screaming for mercy, no feeling of compassion is aroused in them."

The Buddha moves from looking at the behaviours and consequences of killing animals and eating animal flesh to looking at the emotional nature of those who kill and eat animals. He points to the motivation of arrogance where we feel we are so much superior to animals that we are not upset when they are hunted and killed, but are very upset if someone hunted and killed humans, especially those humans that we care about. Here the Buddha makes a link between arrogance and prejudice. He applies this psychological theme to the double standard that is placed on human life versus animal life. But this insight could also be applied to racism, sexism, and any other form of bias where some non-essential trait is used to deprive a sentient being of the right to live, to not be harmed, and to be free.

The Buddha then looks at the socially sanctioned slaughter of animals and points to the collective karma and the collective arrogance behind it. He shows how people have hardened their hearts to the plight of animals in much the same way as slave owners in the South were desensitized to the humanity and rights of black slaves. He points out that arrogance is then fueled by greed so that people who crave to make a profit can find support from these unjust social institutions. Here Buddha may seem very modern in his insights and very much like a social activist. Even though there is a stereotype that the Eastern religions are passive and introspective, while the Western religions are into social change, the Buddha was both introspective and outwardly very much a social reformer. He severely criticized the caste system in India, was an active proponent of belief that women and slaves could become enlightened and have a right to pursue enlightenment, and very much promoted nonviolent ways of ending conflicts and wars. There were religions which believed that women were inferior to men, could not become enlightened, and even taught women how to become men in the next lifetime so that they could become enlightened in the next lifetime. While some small pockets of this kind of belief still exist in India to this day, the constant preaching against this social prejudice by the Buddha for over 40 years helped to shift the patriarchal attitudes of India immensely.

The Buddha has a social activist awareness integrated into his understanding of the spiritual path. It is somewhat different from modern social activism in that Buddha founded his activism on the law of karma and also advocated peaceful methods of social reform. He mainly encouraged a greater compassion and deeper understanding through teaching the Dharma. One advantage of the law of karma is that he can point to even self interested reasons for not killing and eating animals. The less karma we create, the less we suffer. While this is not the altruistic compassion of a Bodhisattva, it is nevertheless possible motivation to encourage people to change. It can encourage a kind of "altruistic selfishness". This can be further transcended in the level of enlightenment that transcends "self cherishing" and which completely abandons the fiction of a substantial personal self. This in turn prepares the ground for realizing the unity of our essential individuality with Buddha nature itself.

Having explored arrogance and greed in relation to killing and eating animals on a social level, he points to yet a third emotional characteristic of animal flesh eaters. When an injustice is

constantly present, pervades society deeply, and is sanctioned by social traditions, then people become complacent in their attitudes and hardened in their hearts. The natural compassion that humans are meant to have towards sentient beings is dulled to the point where an animal facing death in terror and screaming for mercy does not arouse any sympathetic response within us. This natural emotion is sometimes dulled by emotional repressive or emotionally numbing drugs. The Buddha points out, from his expanded worldview which includes a vaster array of sentient beings than most humans are aware of, that such humans are becoming like the Rakashasas. If the karmic accumulation continues beyond a certain point, it is possible to be reborn as one of these creatures and feel the fiery pains of their world. It is a harsher and crueler world that they live in and hence filled with more sorrow. Such beings even eat their own kind and hence there is less safety and more fear in their world. While such extreme karmic consequences I feel are rare, it is possible for this to happen. Even if such extreme karmic consequences do not happen, the less extreme karmic consequences are worth avoiding. How we treat other sentient beings tends to come back to us in some form. We may switch roles with them in some other lifetime so that we may experience what it is like from their own side, our aging process may get more accelerated, we may experience a wider range of illnesses, or our ability to heal ourselves through pranic breathing may then be limited.

The Buddha points to a way to burn away the depths of such karmic patterns in the above passage. Part of the way of liberation is through compassion. We are meant to become more sensitive and compassionate towards the sorrows of all sentient beings, not less. It is natural to experience some remorse, because of compassion, when we take part in the infliction of pain on any sentient being. This remorse can purify us from any karmic tendencies that are still within us. When we numb ourselves so fully that this remorse cannot be felt, then we are in danger of experiencing the most extreme karmic consequences of our actions. Our compassion filled conscience is therefore a protector and a guide for us. Our own illuminated conscience can inspire us to correct our thoughts, speech, and actions so that we create less sorrow for others and therefore experience less sorrow for ourselves. Such remorse is different from socially conditioned guilt. Remorse emerges from compassion and guides us to manifest the natural love that a Buddha has for all sentient beings. This kind of love is within all of us, because the seed of Buddha nature is within all of us. This is how vegetarianism links with enlightenment.

46. "Mahamati, it is not true that eating animal flesh is permitted and appropriate for a Sravaka when
 - (1) the sentient being was not killed by him or her,
 - (2) when he did not order others to kill it, and/or
 - (3) when it was not specially prepared for him or her.
47. I strongly emphasize this point, Mahamati, because there may be naïve people in the future, who are inspired to live the homeless life of a monk or nun, who become members of the Sakya family, and who wear the Kashaya robe as a emblem of their commitment, but who have not purified themselves of such unwholesome thoughts because they have heard and believed in erroneous teachings.
48. They may talk about such exceptions to their ethical discipline and may even hold a hidden attachment to the belief in a personal soul. Under the influence of their addiction to animal flesh, they may create many rationalizations and sophistic arguments to defend their addiction to animal flesh.
49. When seeming facts are used in such a manner and many arguments are made to contradict what I have clearly said, then my teaching has been slandered and misinterpreted by them.
50. Imagining that this seeming exception to not eating animal flesh supports the interpretations in

favor of their addiction , they wrongly conclude that animal flesh eating is either completely permissible or permissible under certain conditions, that the Blessed One permits animal flesh as appropriate food for humans, that animal flesh is listed among the foods permitted for those who follow the Dharma, and even go to such an extreme to even say that the Buddha himself had eaten animal flesh.

51. However, Mahamati, nowhere in the Sutras is animal flesh eating permitted as something to be enjoyed and nowhere is it listed as appropriate food for followers of the Dharma.”

Here Buddha focuses on the future of rationalizations of a small exception that he may have once made to a follower of his. There was a devoted monk who was wandering in a town that did not know about the Buddhadharmā. It was late at night and the monk had knocked on the door of someone who gave him some food to eat. He was delighted to get some food and went out of town to be alone to meditate. Because it was dark, he did not realize until later on that he was accidentally given some cooked animal flesh to eat. Since he was famished, since he was now far from the town, since he would now have to wake up and disturb people in the town to beg for food, since they would need to understand vegetarianism in a very late night conversation, and since the animal had already been unwittingly killed and prepared for food and placed in his bowl, he decided to eat the animal flesh. Because he was a dutiful monk, he went to the Buddha and asked if he did what was appropriate. He came with a willingness to examine his attitude, to repent of any wrong doing he may have engaged in, and to uproot any karmic tendency he may have unwittingly planted in himself. The Buddha, who was very ethically precise and very compassionate, told the monk that he did not have to worry. The animal was not knowingly killed for his sake and he did not know enough of what he had been given to refuse it, since it was dark. He was starving and the animal was already dead, and the food would have been wasted if he would have thrown it away.

The Buddha clearly saw that the monk had the clear intention of being true to the vegetarian teachings of the Buddha but was in an unusual and extreme situation. Earlier on this in chapter, the Buddha even eliminates this kind of exception, because the craving for animal flesh could be strongly activated by the taste of animal flesh and would still create an odor through sweat that would still terrify sentient beings. But he allowed for such an exception for two reasons. One is that, it was after the fact, and the monk could, from this point on, be more careful to check what he is being given and more careful to not let himself be put in a situation where he would be starving so much. In short, it was a unusual situation which would be unlikely to happen again and the monk had the sincerity to not make it into an unwholesome habit. There was no need for the Buddha to belabor this point with a monk who had at least kept the spirit if not the letter of the precept. Two is that the Buddha was not into rigid views and was an exacting taskmaster. The event was innocent enough and could easily be forgiven.

Yet the Buddha was already seeing into the future and saw that such a provisional or situational teaching would cause people to rationalize their animal flesh eating. He decided that his final teaching must have no exceptions. The Eighth chapter of the Lankavatara Sutra is about setting the record straight.

There is some question whether or not this story about the monk who ate some animal flesh even happened. But even if it did happen, the story clearly affirms that the Buddha and the monk had already agreed on the general principle that animal flesh eating was not appropriate. They both wisely agreed to not let this unusual situation be a source of needless guilt, since it is clear that the monk had the strong intention to be consistent with the Dharma and even offered his situation to be examined by the Buddha to double check. Given what the Buddha has said in this Sutra, it is most likely that the Buddha told him both to not worry about it and to not do it

again.

The Buddha uses this story as an example of how addiction to eating animal flesh can latch on to a seeming fact, distort it, and expand it to include less exceptional and less extreme situations such as having a habitual and daily diet that includes a large amount of animal flesh eating. There is clearly no support from the story to expand this very small exception into the very large exception that many Buddhist sects have done over the centuries. The Buddha, seeing into the future and prophesying how the craving for animal flesh would lead to such rationalizations and distortions of his teachings, has been very accurate about how much an addiction can warp our thinking processes and even turn things around into their opposite.

There are apparently even some lamas who assert that they are helping the animals they eat by eating them, because they form a “karmic connection” with the animal that can be used to save them in another lifetime. Yet these lamas do not seem to eat humans to form a karmic connection with them so that they can save them in another lifetime nor did the Buddha himself seem to use this method. The usual way of forming a positive karmic connection to help someone is through kindness and generosity, through a giving and receiving, where energy is exchanged voluntarily between two beings. This is sometimes done ritualistically through common practice, mantra chanting, or a common vow. Even if it were true that eating animal flesh created a useful karmic connection, it seems that, given the many lifetimes where animals have already been killed, bought, sold, or eaten, there are enough connections with everyone already established. It seems, at best, that such negative karmic connection is being transmuted into a positive one through compassion. But then why not directly manifest compassion towards animals in immediate present interactions with them? In this case, the act of not killing, not eating, not selling, and not buying animal flesh from those who kill and sell animals, would also create a positive karmic connection with animals. This would be especially so when one has consciously and intentionally decided to do this out of compassion for animals and dedicated the merit of this action towards the liberation of all sentient beings. The Buddha, in this sutra, is emphasizing a positive karmic connection that we already have with all sentient beings. He is emphasizing that we have already been mother, father, sister, brother, son, daughter, nephew, niece, aunt, uncle, grandfather, and grandmother, in a very literal reincarnational sense, with all sentient beings.

There are other lamas that teach that you need animal flesh food so that your nerves are strong enough to sustain Tantric energy practices. Once again Guatama, many Buddhist Tantric saints, and Hindu Kriya Yoga practitioners have moved very powerful energies through themselves without the “support” of eating animal flesh. A healthy Aryurvedic vegetarian diet seems very good support for the body and nerves, whereas “corpse eating” seems to weaken energy movement. This is also why some “Kundalini crisis centers” in modern times will even stop kundalini energy movement by having a person eat an animal flesh burger and fried potatoes when someone is freaking out over a spontaneous kundalini awakening (this is, once again, why the entire Dharma matrix is an important support for spiritual energy practice, including getting your diet aligned with your practice). This is why, out of the three poisons of the mind (craving, negativity, and delusion) which must be conquered in order to become enlightened, addictive craving is considered the most central. It leads to negativity when verbally and angrily defended before others and it leads to delusional rationalizations when mentally defended.

The Buddha is right about animal flesh eating being eventually added to lists of food appropriate for Dharma practitioners. There are Tibetan medical texts that even prescribe animal flesh for various ailments, Zen masters who have blessed whaling ships and even

doctors who convinced the Dalai Lama to give up being vegetarian in order to get cured of an illness. There are some Theravadin Buddhists who believe that Buddha was not a vegetarian and even died of eating poisoned pork flesh. Such is the power of addiction and rationalization which many psychotherapists know from working with all kinds of addicts.

Concerning the story of his death, it seems that those who were addicted to eating animal flesh mistranslated the story of where Buddha ate some poisoned mushrooms called "Delight of Boar" and had assumed that the name of the mushroom was actually the name of an animal flesh dish. Yet I even question this story. The Buddha had the sensitivity to feel the vibrations of the mushrooms. He was eating his last meal with a friend who offered them. He was choosing to release his physical body which had already conquered aging and death within itself. Even if he ate poison, it would not have killed him. He was beyond this kind of karma. This is shown in the story where Devadatta tries to kill the Buddha by rolling a boulder towards him which magically splits into two so that both halves miss him. Buddhas, however, sometimes take on the karma of others in a process called "transfer of merit". According to Avagoshā, Buddha did this before he died in order to give strength to his followers. He took on the karmas that would have killed them so that they would have more time, good situations, and energy to practice. He then did phowa, consciousness transference, in order to eject his consciousness beyond his body as an example of his higher teachings. He had such mastery that when a late disciple came to him to ask some questions, he stops the process of phowa midstream, answers patiently answers the questions, and then returns back to his concentration to finish what he started.

The Buddha in these passages categorically denies the truth of many assertions made by many Buddhist teachers and Buddhist sects over the centuries. He asserts that these teachers are not yet free from addictive craving and are letting their addictions be rationalized and justified in their own minds, rather than working to overcome them. What is interesting is that he connects such addictions and rationalizations to attachment to a belief in a personal soul. This is a subtle point that the Buddha is making about addictive craving to animal flesh which links his vegetarian teachings with his teachings about the non-existence of a personal self. The Buddha one time said that if the illusion of a personal self was not seen through, then there would be no freedom from sorrow. Quite logically, then, animal flesh eating and the uncompassionate insensitivity to animal sorrow that it implies, must have some trace of a belief in a personal self. The craving for animal flesh must be coming from some kind of cherishing of a false sense of self and must be reinforcing it in some way. This implies, too, that becoming vegetarian and not eating animal flesh must help to weaken the false sense of self and thereby assist liberation. This links to previous passages as to why the Buddha did not want any exceptions to eating animal flesh, because even when it is a relatively clean choice on purely ethical grounds, like accidentally eating animal flesh without realizing it has slipped into your food or eating an animal that was accidentally run over by a car, there is still the vibration of eating animal flesh and the taste of animal flesh which can still activate and feed the addictive craving. If this process is watched carefully, one can feel a kind of strengthening of a certain kind of feeling of self.

Although this subject is perhaps too big for a commentary mainly focused on why Buddha felt vegetarianism is important, the above passages show how deeply interdependent the teachings of the Buddha were and still are. When our conscious presence is more established within us and we are able to watch thoughts, emotions, and sensation arise, abide, change, and pass away, we begin to see that what we thought was our self is really non-existent. It is like realizing that the movie you are watching is really flashes of still pictures on a screen. When looked at deeply, we find not find a self within us. We see transitory thoughts, emotions, and sensations. We are meant to let them flow without clinging, resistance, or unconsciously acting

them out.

If we are very sensitive to this flow, we will see that a feeling and belief in a self arises from these transitory patterns. It is mainly centred in the thought of "I, me, and mine" which is present in actual sentences that we are thinking as well as a subtle level of felt thought that clings to inner states, external relationships, and outer situations in order to build itself up and which feels hurt when its supports are diminished. Identifying with a craving and fulfilling a craving reinforces this illusion of self. It strengthens one set of inner conditions against another set of inner conditions. Craving strongly avoids some states which contradict the self and attaches to what affirms the self. This eventually becomes the arrogance that Buddha mentioned in some earlier passages. Arrogance is when we are so centred in this addiction based feeling of self that we do not consider others as even equal to ourselves, but instead consider them as things to build us up and as food to be eaten. This is how vegetarianism links to the very deepest teachings of the Buddha which relate to the realization of "no self" and the discovery of Buddha nature.

If we look into any craving we can uncover this feeling of self. If we sit in meditation long enough, we can see this phantom self arise, abide, and pass away. It is a transitory and ever changing complex of thoughts, emotions, and sensations, which is at least temporarily totally gone when we have moments of "bliss, clarity, and non-thought". Yet we often fall under the trance of feeling this self to be both substantial, real, and truly who we are, even though the thoughts it expresses to affirm itself are contradictory and therefore without true unity. The thoughts which whirl around in our heads and think "I" are very fleeting and do not add up to any kind of self. The thoughts are rarely grounded in presence. They come out of a ground a conditioning within the subconscious mind. Looking within, we see thoughts reacting to thoughts. We follow this conditioning and act out all our karmas. The precepts restrain this process, while meditation uproots the deeper causes. With any addiction, we can look into the depths and uproot the deepest traces of karma. At the most subtle level, there is an illusory feeling of self which energizes the cravings, negativities, and confusions that we have. Releasing this feeling of self, by hearing these words deeply, by introspective meditation, by living in accord with the precepts, by initiations, by taking vows, by chanting mantras, and by living from compassion, we can cut through all our addictions and become thoroughly liberated.

The Buddha implies that if we accept the precept to not eat animal flesh and if we look at our craving for animal flesh very deeply, in the moment that we feel it, then even the most subtle levels of our addiction can be exposed with the light of the highest teachings that the Buddha gave. Through this, we can liberate ourselves.

52. "Mahamati, if I had the intention to permit animal flesh eating for followers of the Dharma, I would not have forbidden the eating of animal flesh for yogis, by sons and daughters of good family, all who wish to cherish the idea of that all sentient beings are worthy to be loved like their only child, all who already directly feel this compassion within them in fullness, and those who practice contemplation, renunciation, and who will eventually mature into Mahayana Buddhists ideals.
53. Mahamati, the precept to not eat animal flesh of any kind is given by me to all sons and daughters of good family, whether they are ascetics who wander cemeteries and forests, yogis who practice many kinds of spiritual exercises, and followers of any of the vehicles of the Dharma, especially those who feel great compassion within them, cherish the idea of loving all sentient beings as if they were their only child, and who have the intention of achieving the final enlightenment that is the end result of their life of discipline."

Here the Buddha first illuminates a contradiction behind the Buddhists who rationalize eating animal flesh. He points out that if he did allow animal flesh eating for his followers that he would be teaching the same for those who were not his followers! He advocates that vegetarianism is generally good for everyone. Therefore those who follow him should be more, not less, committed to vegetarianism, since they would naturally believe in at least the basic teachings he left behind. In all his forty years of teaching in India, there is no record of him praising Hindus for eating animal flesh or condemning those who were vegetarian. Instead he lived a vegetarian life. He was social activist enough to make vegetarianism an issue if he were against it. But in every way, it was clear that he thought it was part of basic compassion to not kill and eat animals, and therefore even more important for Bodhisattvas who are learning to release the compassion of their Buddha nature and cherish all sentient beings as their only child or even as their very self. In fact, the Bodhisattvas, the followers of the Buddha, have vowed to do so. This theme was explored in another context earlier, but here it is brought up again within the context of how delusional our thinking becomes when we are influenced by an addiction.

In the next verse, Buddha, in his role as a world teacher, affirms that the precept about not eating animal flesh is a general and universal one that is meant to all sentient beings and not just his followers. This is because, having shown how karmically unwholesome animal flesh eating is, everyone would benefit from this precept, even if they were not committed to a life of meditation, compassion, and nonattachment. The Buddha, however, further suggests that those who are more sensitive and more compassionate, those who are feeling the altruistic compassion of Mahayana Buddhism within themselves, or who at least mentally cherish such an ideal and feel its truth, need to keep this precept even more consistently than worldly humans or members of other religions. This is because the killing and eating of animals hurts the development of their compassionate nature and without this compassion they cannot become fully enlightened.

The Buddha introduces a new theme here as well. He teaches that his path is largely a path of discipline. There is a natural discipline within compassion and wisdom which grows on the path that the Buddha laid out. Enlightenment is attained through this kind of discipline. By introducing this theme in this chapter, he is linking discipline with altruistic compassion, with purification, with enlightenment, and even with peaceful social reform. Discipline, as purification, and as ethical idealism in practice, is part of Sila Parmita, the fourth parmita of the six parmitas at the heart of the Mahayana Buddhist path. It is the power that organizes our life. Once more Buddha links vegetarianism with his core teachings and shows how much it is interconnected with all the teachings which form the “dharma matrix”.

54. “In canonical texts in some Buddhist sects, the disciplines involved in the path are considered to evolve step by step like climbing up a ladder. In these same texts, there is the assertion saying that at certain stages on the path that animal flesh eating is permitted, while on certain stages it is not. In some texts, there is a tenfold prohibition concerning the eating of animals that are found in nature already dead.
55. But in this present Sutra, all animal flesh eating in any form, in any manner, and in any place, in unconditionally and for all time, prohibited for all.
56. Thus, Mahamati, animal flesh eating I have not permitted to anyone. I do not permit animal flesh eating. I will not permit animal flesh eating.
57. Animal flesh eating, I tell you, is not appropriate for homeless monks and nuns.

58. There may be some who would say that animal flesh was eaten by the Tathagata, thinking that this would slander him and undermine the words shared in this Sutra.
59. Such unconscious people will follow their own karmic tendencies and may fall into places where long nights are passed without benefits and without happiness.
60. Mahamati, noble Sravakas do not eat what worldly people normally eat, much less the flesh and blood of animals, which is altogether inappropriate to their path.
61. The food for my Sravakas, Pretyakabuddhas, and Bodhisattvas is the Dharma and not flesh food, how much more so is such true for the Tathagata!
62. The Tathagata is the Dharmakaya, Mahamati. He abides in the Dharma as his food. He is not a flesh body feeding on flesh. He does not abide in any flesh food. He had rejected the habitual cravings which drive all of existence. He keeps away the habit energy of the afflicted passions. He is completely free from obscuring thoughts and clear in his knowledge. He is omniscient and all seeing. He treats all being impartially and compassionately as if they were his only child. How can I permit Sravakas to eat the flesh of their only child? How much more must I set an example for them by being consistent with what I teach and by not eating animal flesh!
63. That I have permitted Sravakas or myself to eat animal flesh, Mahamati, has not foundation whatsoever."

It seems that the Buddha is belabouring points already made, but he is actually reviewing them some in order to go even deeper with his teachings. The first verse mentioned above talks about "canonical texts" which shows that this Sutra is from a period of time when the Buddhist teachings were finally committed to writing. It suggests that whoever Mahamati is must have had a vision of the Buddha giving him these teachings. Part of the reason for these revealed teachings is to set the record clear about what the Buddha had taught about vegetarianism. It deals with issues and distortions regarding the ideal of vegetarianism which have already happened and which will happen more in the future. He is mainly concerned with dealing with these issues among his past, present, and future followers, but also in a more general way affirming that the idea of vegetarianism is worthy for all people to emulate and serves their happiness.

He further negates several versions of Buddhist teaching that are still present in many sects. Some affirm that animal flesh is prohibited in the early stages but not in the advanced stages of discipline. Some affirm that animal flesh is prohibited in the later stages, but is okay in the early stages. Others affirm that it is okay at any stage, but is not okay under certain conditions. The Buddha lumps all these complex teachings together and affirms that he did not teach any of those distinctions. He affirms that his disciples are not meant to eat any animal flesh at any stage and under any condition. He also affirms that even people who are not his followers are meant to embrace this simple and general ethical sentiment towards animals. This is clear from how the Buddha has developed his themes over this entire chapter. He is applying the logical conclusions from his themes to specific distortions of his teachings within many Buddhist sects.

He further emphasizes the importance of doing this, because without at least illuminating how strong an influence craving animal flesh is and prohibiting the eating of animal flesh, these karmic tendencies will become activated, operate without the discipline of wise restraint weakening them, then grow stronger over time, and cause sorrow for sentient beings who eat sentient beings and cause sorrow for those sentient beings who are eaten by sentient beings. By teaching as he does here, he can set in motion a Dharma influence which can eventually weaken and eradicate animal flesh eating and thereby serve the evolution and liberation of human beings and sentient beings in general.

He affirms that even the Sravaka disciples are meant to have dietary disciplines different than worldly people who indulge in food only because it tastes pleasant and do not generally care about the ethical consequences of eating animal flesh. All the disciples of the Buddha and followers of any wholesome path are meant to eat in such a manner to truly nourish themselves, heal themselves of illnesses, and give themselves the strength they need to meditate for long periods of time.

He further teaches that an enlightened being does not really live on food anymore, but gets nourishment from the Dharmakaya. By abiding in the Dharmakaya, the living body of truth that pervades the universe, we are freed from all compulsive desires and needs. We no longer abide in a karma created flesh body, but instead have a Dharma created light body. To crave to eat flesh in order to survive as a flesh body is a lesser state. It is more advanced to nourish oneself only on plant food and even more advanced to not need any food at all. He talks about the distinction between “abiding in flesh food” and “abiding in the Dharmakaya”. He talks about abandoning one for the sake of the other. In this sense, the idea of the Dharmakaya being food is meant to be literal and not a metaphor, just as eating animal flesh is also literal and not a metaphor. Although the stage where no food is needed except “abiding in the Dharmakaya” is a very advanced stage on the path, we can at least eat only vegetarian food until we reach this stage. We can also abide in meditation practice until it matures into abiding in the Dharmakaya in the fullest sense of the phrase and eventually find our need for food has lessened or dropped away. The Buddha further points out that, having attained this deep abiding in the Dharmakaya to the point where he does not need to eat any food (he may still eat vegetarian food out of freedom, as an example for his students, and just to blend into humanity), there is no temptation to eat animal flesh left and it would cause unnecessary pain for animals to do so. There is a clear suggestion that at his level of attainment that it would serve no purpose to eat animal flesh and not even be tempting in the least. This is why this set of passages closes with the idea that the Buddha taught or permitted animal flesh eating “has no foundation whatsoever”.

64. And so it has been said: Here the Buddha signals he has completed what he has chosen to share about animal flesh eating.

What follows is a summary of the main points. The style is like a review a good counsellor gives after an interview is over. It is done to show what has been worked through and what has been accomplished.

(1) Alcohol, animal flesh, and onions are meant to be avoided by Bodhisattvas, Mahasattvas, and Vajrasattvas.

This inclusion of onions, and, by reference to the passages it summarizes earlier, the allium family of vegetables, has puzzled some of my friends. They have wondered if it is an old obsolete tradition. The consensus has been to avoid using onions, garlic, and other members of the allium family except for medicinal reasons. However, when I was studying some of the Hindu Tantras, there was another reason mentioned. There are certain devas, a class of advanced spiritual beings, who are very sensitive to smells and who actually feed on perfumes or essential oil fragrances. These beneficial beings are repelled by the odor of carnivores, the odors of the allium family, and similar odors. Tastes and smells of food, in Aryurvedic medicine, need to be balanced and form a complete nutritional set. I have found that it is easier to not eat animal flesh if you also do not eat alliums and do not consume alcohol. I have observed that many of my near vegetarian friends will occasionally crave animal flesh near the

time when they have consumed some alcohol. The Buddha, probably having been schooled in Hindu Aryurvedic thought, is sensitive to these kinds of connections.

(2) Animal flesh eating is not favoured by wise people of many religions and philosophical schools. The odor is unpleasant. It causes one to be respected less by those spiritual beings who do have compassion for animals.

(3) Animal flesh eating causes unwholesome karmic consequences, whereas abstaining from eating animal flesh causes wholesome karmic consequences.

(4) Those involved in devoted spiritual practice should refrain from animal flesh eating, because we also have flesh bodies and do not want to be eaten as others have been eaten. Our flesh and the flesh of all animals are equally produced from semen and blood. The sweat gland odour of an animal flesh eater terrifies animals whose sense of smell is keener than most humans.

In Buddhist understanding, human and animal births are womb births, where male white blood (semen) combines with female red blood (ovum). This is not quite modern science, but came from the observation that the sexual fluids of males is white and the fluids of women during their period is red. Even though science has advanced even in the East to see that zygote formation as the union of sperm and ovum, the belief that two liquid essences combine to produce an animal or human birth is still talked about, because of energetic and spiritual alchemical reasons. These sensitivities are part of the Tumo energy yogas of Tibet. The metaphors of white and red essences link with many visualization practices which have produced objectively measurable increases in external heat. It has been raised at times by 30 degrees or more. It may be the case of two valid perspectives related to two different contexts. There is some slightly new information in this passage that is not in the longer part of the teaching.

(5) Let devoted spiritual practitioners refrain from consuming animal flesh, alcoholic beverages, allium, and garlic.

(6) Do not anoint the body with sesame oil. Do not sleep on a bed with spikes. Be sensitive to wear you sleep so that you do not terrify small beings that dwell in nearby holes or in a more open vulnerable space.

In this passage, the Buddha is giving advice to wandering ascetics about where and how to sleep. It seems that sesame oil may attract certain small animals that might be crushed if you roll around in your sleep. He also admonishes ascetics to not be extreme in their austerities by sleeping on beds designed to mortify the flesh. He cautions ascetics to be sensitive to when and where you set up your sleeping space so that they do not harm, kill, or terrify the small animals that may be dwelling nearby. Since modern culture has very few ascetics, this advice seems strange to us. Yet there are parallel practices that we can do. We can keep our sleeping space clear of small animals. We can make sure we get a comfortable regenerative sleep, rather than doing something less in service of our sleep needs. We can also design our dwellings so that animals are less likely to invade our space and cause us to be in conflict with them. This passage gives an idea who Mahamati may have been and the kind of lifestyle he may have had when he got his vision. If he was a wandering yogi, familiar with both Hindu and Buddhist systems of development, many of the passages and the issues raised therein would be relevant.

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

(8) 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.

These two passages are summarizations of something within the longer discourse that the Buddha previously gave, but there is much which is also new here. The chains of cause and effect are mapped out in a more visible way. The Buddhist teaching of dependant origination implies that there is no single line of causation. In these passages, the Buddha shows how animal flesh eating causes arrogance and greed to appear, while in the previous passages, the Buddha shows how arrogance and greed lead to animal flesh eating. These passages are not contradictory, but show these factors arise in mutual dependence upon each other and strengthen the existence of each other. Weaken one and you weaken the other. Strengthen one and it is more difficult to free oneself from the others. This is why the Buddha recommended the eightfold path which undermines the basis of sorrow from several angles all at the same time. In these passages, the Buddha emphasizes how animal flesh eating is one of the factors which if attached to makes all the factors more difficult to transcend and how if animal flesh is not eaten, it helps all the factors be transcended more easily. Once again, the Buddha links the not eating of animal flesh with helping us liberate ourselves from the wheel of karmic death and rebirth.

(9) Animals are killed and sold for profit. Animal flesh is bought to satisfy the craving for flesh food. Both the killer who sells and the eater who buys create unwholesome karma. Such deeds ripen into possible rebirth in the screaming hells and other places of intense sorrow.

(10) A person who eats animal flesh does not heed the words of the Muni. He or she cultivates an unwholesome and impure mind. Such a person is described in the teachings of the Sakya as one who destroys blessings in this world and the next world.

(11) The person who transgresses the precept about not killing and eating animals is destined to go to the most terrifying hells. Animal flesh eaters go into terrible hells such as the Raurava hell.

The Buddha revisits the theme of karmic consequences. He talks about how those who buy animal flesh participate in the karma of killing the animal. He talks about how not heeding the precepts of Buddhist teaching is ignoring something that can stop karma from ripening and how the consequences are both in this life and the next life. The Buddha does affirm that there are hell worlds that one can fall into. Hell worlds are usually related to very heavy karmas like murdering someone and because, animals are sentient beings, killing an animal is ethically equivalent to murder. The screaming hells are really echoes of the screaming animals do when they struggle for their life. The law of karma is like the golden rule. The core ethical principle is to treat all sentient beings the way that we wish to be treated. The karmic principle is that how we treat other sentient beings returns to us as something we experience. This is partly why one lama has said, "The happiness of other sentient beings is my happiness".

Usually when karma is described in a Sutra, only a single line of causation is analyzed. Such karmic destinies can be softened by many factors. Every kind thought, good deed, and loving emotional expression softens unwholesome karma. Our meditation practice, doing guru yoga, chanting for the blessings of higher beings, our study and teaching of Sutras, and any ritual empowerments that we receive also helps. There are other factors that also mitigate karma, like feeling remorse, seeing how we were in unconscious ignorance of what we were doing, and repenting so deeply about what we did that we completely burn away the karmic traces within us. Our karmic destiny is like a river formed by many influences and which creates our life

moment to moment. Even if we enter a literal hell realm because of karma, our time in this realm is also determined by many factors. There was a story where a person fell into a hell realm and was tormented with the full awareness that it was how he treated others coming back to him. Then suddenly the movement of this karma ended and he was taken to heaven world. He was so surprised that he asked why. It was said to him that when Buddha walked through his village that he offered a single flower to the Buddha from the depths of his heart. This single act opened him up to receive enough blessing energy from the Buddha to have his karma softened and finally ended. The grisly details of the hell worlds may have been painted to emotionally impress and inspire people to do good deeds. But in modern times, what is important is to feel that the law of karma is precise, dependant on multiple converging causes mixing with each other, entirely fair, and supremely merciful when we change our heart about something we did.

(12) 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 (a) premeditated or not, (b) asked for or not, or (c) 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.

(13) 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.

(14) The animal flesh eater will sweat an unpleasant odor which terrifies many animals, will be argumentative, and will dull their natural sensitivity and intelligence. He or she will be reborn into the families of the Candala, the Pukkasa, and the Domba.

(15) From the womb of a flesh eating Dakini, he or she will be reborn into an animal flesh eating family, into a womb of a Rakashasa, and then into a cat, and if fortunate into a lower vibration human family.

In this summary, the Buddha continues the theme of karmic consequences and the kinds of rebirth which are possible. The information is somewhat contradictory. In that sometimes the rebirth is into a hell world, sometimes into an animal world, and sometimes into a lower vibrational human life. This supports what was shared in the previous commentary passages that the factors that determine rebirth blend into each other and can have different outcomes. The details of how karma unfolds can be rather complex, but the general principles are simple enough to discern.

(16) Animal flesh eating is rejected in such Sutras as the Hastikashya, the Mahamegha, the Nirvana, the Anglimalika, and the Lankavatara.

(17) Animal flesh eating is rejected by Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Sravakas. 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.

(18) A person, who abstains from animal flesh eating, heeds the admonishments of the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Sravakas, will be reborn into a family of Brahmins or Yogis and be blessed with knowledge and wealth.

(19) Let a person not give power to the many rationalizations given to justify animal flesh eating. What theorizers say under the influence of addictive craving for animal flesh can be very sophistic, delusional, and argumentative. What they imagine that they witnessed, heard, or suspected that the Sutras said or a Buddha said or did can be very distorted.

(20) 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 the liberation.

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

(22) Some will even say that eating animal flesh can even be a medicine. 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 eating animal flesh and alcohol, and with this clarity go about peacefully begging for food, trusting the universe will supply what is wanted and needed to sustain a healthy life.

(23) Animal flesh eating is forbidden by me everywhere and all the time for those who are abiding in compassion. A person who eats animal flesh will be reborn as a lion, tiger, wolf or another kind of carnivore.

(24) Therefore, do not eat animal flesh. It will cause terror among people. It will hinder one from learning how to liberate oneself. When a person learns to not eat animal flesh, he or she will have one of the marks of being wise.

Here Buddha rejects the many seemingly Buddhist teachings that have rationalized and distorted the simple truth about vegetarianism. He affirms that the teaching about being vegetarian is found in many Sutras that he has expounded and not just one or two of them. He asserts that many rationalizations have been made by spiritually oriented people who are still under the influence of their addictions and admonishes people not to listen to them. He makes a prophecy that even later Buddhist sects will rationalize his teaching and even imagine that he ate animal flesh. What I find interesting is that the text uses the word "may" when predicting the future. Many Buddha's have had the power of prophecy and clearly what the Buddha predicts in this Sutra has come to pass. But the word "may" seems to acknowledge free choice and some chance to change the outcome of a prophecy. Our present actions can change the predicted outcomes of Buddha's even when they are accurate, since the future is also transitory, based on dependant origination, and subject to modification.

The sense of shame described above is about feeling our conscience. There is "toxic shame" which reinforces social conditioning and "organic shame" which inspires us to change our lives for the better. Heeding the Buddha's, feeling ashamed when we lose our inner sense of direction, allows us to self correct and to mature on the path. When we ignore the teachings of the Buddha's, do not contemplate them to see what their teachings could mean for us, or ignore the sensitivities that they wish to illuminate within us that we already have from our own compassion, then we disconnect from something within that can guide us away from unwholesome karmic conditions in this lifetime and inferior rebirths in the next lifetime. This compassionate conscience is a form of intelligence which must necessarily be dulled when people ignore how they feel and continue to eat animal flesh.

65. Here ends the Eighth Chapter, "On Eating Animal Flesh", from the Lankavatara Sutra, the Essence of the Teaching of All the Buddhas.

Here the Buddha ends his Sutra recitation. He adds one final theme which is that what he is sharing is not unique, but is something taught by all Buddhas in all worlds. All sentient beings are meant to live their own life, not be subject to harm from being killed and eaten, and are destined to eventually become enlightened. All sentient beings includes animals as well as humans, hungry ghosts, demons, asuras, and devas. We have probably been all these life forms at one time or another and those who are friends and family now were probably all these life forms as well. When we have eaten animal flesh we may have literally eaten our past or future

family or friends. When we accord all sentient beings equal value, and therefore not kill and eat them, then what Buddha is sharing is that we merely follow the golden rule of treating others in the way we want to be treated. The karmic consequences for not doing so are then merely us experiencing what we have done to others. The main difference, then, of how the Buddha sees the universe is that his compassion is wide enough to include all sentient beings, including animals, in his moral universe. Animal flesh eating humans usually only include other humans. Some even just include their own race or family. Still others include just themselves. Some may dimly acknowledge that their animal pets or certain animals that they have affection for deserve to be treated compassionately and therefore have an inner sentiment that can be logically extended to all other animals.

May this re-translation of the sutra communicate the meaning of what the Buddha wished to share regarding the eating of animal flesh.

I dedicate the merit of retranslating this chapter to the liberation of all sentient beings.

Om Namo Amida Buddha Hreeh. Namaste.

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About William Bagley

Born in 1956 to a Chinese mother and an American father in Peru, Bagley was exposed to Mandarin, Kantonese, Spanish, and English early in his life. Apart from having an undergraduate degree in Philosophy and English from Texas Tech University, Lubbock USA, Bagley is a self taught man. Bagley told Shakar.Org that he is fascinated by language and the challenges of translating text. He chose to re-translate the Eighth chapter of the Lankavatara Sutra, because he considered several versions omit this

section: "Vegetarianism is an integral part of the original Dharma which has been downplayed or lost. This particular chapter is about setting the record straight and gives reasons for why it is important." William Bagley is a practitioner for more than 25 years. He does Process Oriented Hypnotherapy, Tantra Reiki energy healing, Rebirthing Breathwork, and Neurosomatic Bodywork for his livelihood.