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“THE VINAYA AND SUTTANTA PITAKAS PROVIDE A THERAVĀDA PERSPECTIVE ON VEGETARIANISM”

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ABSTRACTS

Currently, there are increasing numbers of people across the globe that follow and practice the vegetarianism. Some of them become vegetarian on account of their health situations, whereas for most people, such practice is based on their religious belief. In this context, there may be different ideas as to how they follow this practice. Basically, vegetarians can be classified into different categories. As a vegetarian, some consume egg, but not milk whereas some avoid eating egg, but drink milk. Some people still abstain from partaking any by-products of animals such as milk and egg. However, they love to use materials made of animal skin, animal hair, etc. In case of some people, they refrain from either consuming or using any products of animals.



KEY WORDS : Vegetarianism, Types of Foods, Monastic Rules, Spiritual Attainments.

INTRODUCTION

Theravāda Buddhism does neither promote nor require its followers to adopt a vegetarian diet. Since it is not required, neither vegetarianism nor non-vegetarianism are given praise or blame. In Buddhism, eating is done to maintain one's life and physical well-being while ingesting any food that should be blameless and to satisfy one's appetite for food. Insisting that the *Majjhimapaipadā* (Middle Way) is the only method for achieving total freedom, Buddhism rightly counsels its followers to stay away from extremes. The Omniscient *Buddha* expounded His followers to avoid any food which is unwholesome; the food is wholesome but blameworthy; to refrain from ordering in killing animals as he accumulates demerit and finally to remove wrong views that is blameworthy to be a non-vegetarian, etc. This article attempts to convey the original essence of *Buddha's* teachings as regards Vegetarianism. In Buddhism, the practise of vegetarianism is neither applauded nor condemned. It never makes the case for or against being a vegetarian. Meat and vegetables should only be consumed sometimes (*bhojane mattanñnūtā*).¹ All living organisms need nourishment to stay alive and in good health. Without food, living things cannot thrive. The *Buddha* (*sabbe sattā āhāraṭṭhītikā*)² taught that all beings are sustained by food or cause. Food is the foundation of a lo Prior to the development of

¹ M.I p.274.

² D.III p.212.

Buddhism, certain *Samaṇas* and *Brahmaṇas*, nevertheless, believed that Buddhism. They ate only rice or vegetables in relatively little amounts. Frequently, they would go without food. They assert that in doing so, purification can be reached. The Buddha, however, is opposed to this brand of radicalism. As already said, certain religious thinkers considered vegetarianism as a sort of asceticism and vehemently condemned it, charging vegetarians with torturing themselves. Examining Buddhist viewpoints on vegetarianism is the aim of this lengthy essay.

PERSPECTIVE ON VEGETARIANISM IN GENERAL

Early Buddhist traditions did not include vegetarianism, and the Buddha himself was not a vegetarian. The Buddha received his meals by going on alms rounds or by being welcomed to the homes of his supporters, and in both circumstances, he consumed what was offered to him. Prior to his Enlightenment, he experimented with a variety of diets, including a vegetarian diet, but he eventually gave them up because he thought they did not promote spiritual growth. The *Sutta Nipata* emphasizes this idea when it states that immorality—rather than consuming meat—is what renders a person dirty (both morally and spiritually). It's common to hear that the Buddha consumes meat.³ In addition to suggesting beef broth as a treatment for some illnesses, he encouraged monks to steer clear of particular cuts of meat for practical reasons while emphasizing that other cuts were perfectly suitable.

But over time, Buddhists started to feel uneasy about eating meat. In contrast to before, just two peacocks and a deer were slain for sustenance in the royal kitchens, according to King Asoka in 257 BC, and even this practice would eventually end. However, the polemics against it in works like the *Lankavatara-sutra* show that it was still common or at least a source of debate by the time the Christian era began. This was especially true of Mahayana adherents. Tantric literature from the 7th and 8th centuries onward commonly suggests consuming alcohol and eating meat, both of which are seen as acceptable offerings to the gods. This was likely a protest against Mahayanists, for whom habits like abstinence from meat and alcohol had replaced real spiritual growth, as well as an expression of the freedom from convention that Tantra preached.

Theravadins typically do not have any dietary restrictions, but it is not unusual to meet laypeople and monks in Sri Lanka who are strict vegetarians. While eating fish, some people avoid eating meat. The lay community tries to follow the rigorous vegetarianism of Chinese and Vietnamese monks and nuns, while many do not. Vegetarianism is uncommon among Buddhists from Tibet and Japan. Buddhists who insist on vegetarianism have a straightforward and convincing justification for their position. Eating meat supports a sector of the economy that exploits and kills millions of animals, and a really compassionate person would want to lessen all of this suffering. By refusing to eat meat one can do just that.

Vegetarianism is not required for Buddhists, according to those who hold this belief, and their justifications are equally strong but more complex: (1) The Buddha would not have refrained from saying so in the *Pali Tipitaka* if he had believed that a vegetarian diet was in line with the Precepts. (2) Eating meat does not directly cause an animal's death, unless one kills the animal themselves (which is uncommon today), in which case the non-vegetarian is similar to the vegetarian. The farmer has sprayed the crop and ploughed his fields, killing several critters, so the later can only eat his vegetables (again killing many creatures). (3) Although a vegetarian abstains from eating meat, he nonetheless uses a number of other products that result in animal deaths (soap, leather, serum, silk etc.) Why practice one when you can practice the others? (4) Because undesirable traits like ignorance, conceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and indifference do not depend on what a person eats, diet does not significantly affect spiritual development. Instead, good traits like understanding, patience, kindness, and honesty do.

³ Sn pp.43-45.

Buddhism allows meat Consumption

The Buddha did not forbid meat consumption, even by monks, as stated in the *Pli* texts. In fact, he flatly refused *Devadatta's* offer to do so. A *bhikkhu* may be breaking monastic regulations in contemporary Theravada societies if he practices vegetarianism to demonstrate his greater spirituality to others. However, the Buddha expressly forbade the ingestion of any animal whose meat was "seen, heard, or suspected" of having been slain especially for the benefit of monks. Although strictly exclusively applicable to monastics, this rule can serve as a suitable guidance for pious laypeople. Additionally, if a homeowner desired to offer meat, it was to be welcomed without bias or hostility. Such an offer should never be turned down because it would be considered a breach of good manners, deprive the homeowner of a chance to achieve merit, and be of no service to the animal as it was already dead.

Numerous Meats available at the Buddha's time

Through the *Pli* Canons, it is possible to determine what people consumed during the Buddha's lifetime. The *Pācittiya Pli* of *Vinaya Piṭaka* mentions five different types of meals. Rice (*odana*), baked rice powder (*sattu*), boiled flour (*kummāsa*), fish (*maccha*), and meat (*mamsa*) constitute the "five kinds of food" (*Panṅca bhogaṇi*). During the *Buddha's* lifetime, these five foods were frequently consumed by people as their daily fare and were also provided to monks. The *Pcittya's* 39th rule also lists nine other types of delectable food in the following ways: (*sappi*) foods mixed with ghee or butter, (*navanitam*) fresh butter, (*telam*) oil, (*madhu*) honey, (*phnitam*) molasses, (*maccho*) fish, (*mamsam*) meat, (*khiram*) milk, and Curd milk (*dadhi*). The dining room of the wealthy household included these nine varieties of food, which were provided to the monks. Buddhist monks were free to take them if laypeople offered them in accordance with their wishes, but they were wrong if they requested them out of the blue, such as when they were unwell. Broken rice and sour gruel (*kaṇājakam bilaṅga dutiyam*) can be found in the kitchen of a poor family. This might be the poorest food consumed by the Buddha throughout his lifetime.

Typically, servants who worked in wealthy households received this food. The father of the Buddha, King *Suddhodana*, was a wealthy and kind man. He fed his staff and servants rice mixed with meat (*sāli mamsodana*) on a daily basis. The Buddha declares: "O monks, servants and laborers' are fed broken rice and unpleasant gruel in other people's homes. They receive rice combined with meat in my father's home, nevertheless. We must therefore be aware that throughout the Buddha's lifetime, people frequently consumed fish and meat. The Buddha and his adherents were reliant on almsgiving. The *Buddha* himself ate meat and allowed his disciples to do so if the meat was not specially for them at the source.

From the *Pāli* canonical texts, we can find that there are some kinds of meat in the *Buddha's* bowl. For example, on one occasion a lay disciple of the *Buddha*, *Ugga* by name, who lived in *Vesālī*, offered alms-giving to the *Buddha* and the *Saṅgha* in his house. Rice and curry and various esculents (*khādaniya*) were specially arranged. *Ugga* said: "Lord, this pork curry cook with jujube fruit is so delicious. Do accept it with compassion for me!" The *Buddha* accept it (*Manāpadāyī sutta* of *Aṅguttara Nikāya*). Here is another instance. On one occasion, a group of robbers killed a cow tiff meat in the forest (*Andhavana*) near *Jetavana*. In the forest an Arahant *Bhikkhuni*, *Uppalvanna* by the name, stayed under a tree experiencing the bliss of *Phala-samāpatti*. The leader of the robbers saw her sitting under a tree and commanded his followers to go by the other way. He hung a package of heel out on a branch or a tree dedicating it to this *Bhikkhuni* and went away alter saying himself that he offered it to any person who found it. *Therī Uppalavanna* took the package of beef and offered it to the *Buddha*.⁴

It is also found that on one occasion the *Buddha* was on His way to *Kusiṅṅāra* on His last day. *Curāda*, the goldsmith of *Pāvā*, offered the *Buddha* the last meal including *Sūkaramaddava*. *Sūkaramaddava* means the flesh of a pig aged one year on sale, not so young, not so old. This kind of pork is soft and rich in nutritive essence. Although this term *Sūkaramaddava*, was given several

⁴ Vin.III p.290.

interpretations, the only meaning above mentioned was accepted by Ven. *Buddhaghosa*. Ven. *Buddhaghosa* mentioned other teacher's interpretation of *Sūkaramaddava* in his book. Some teachers said that *Sūkaramaddava* is a drink of rice, milk, or milky rice pudding. The other said that it is a sort of tonic. Some scholars today who believe in vegetarianism say *Sūkaramaddava* a sort of mushroom. Thus, we found that there are some meat curries in the bowl of the *Buddha* and of His followers.

Meats consumption and Monastery rules

The Buddha never urged his disciples to become vegetarians or abstain from eating meat, as has already been mentioned. But the Buddha forbade eating 10 different types of meat. The ten different types of meat are "human flesh (*manussa-maṃsa*), elephant flesh (*hatthi-maṃsa*), horse flesh (*assa-maṃsa*), dog flesh (*sunakha-maṃsa*), snake flesh (*ahi-maṃsa*), lion flesh (*sīha-maṃsa*), tiger flesh (*byagga-maṃsa*), leopard flesh (*dīpa-mam*), bear flesh (*accha-maṃsa*), and hyena or wolf flesh (*taraccha-maṃsa*).⁵ According to rumors, Buddhist monks are forbidden from eating these ten types of meat for unique reasons. The Commentary on *Vinaya* (*Samantapāsādikā*) provides a concise explanation of the reasons as follows: Because humans are a unique species, eating human flesh is not a good idea. Given that they are royal property, elephant and horse flesh should not be consumed. Snake and dog flesh are both repulsive and should not be consumed. Being dangerous, lion, tiger, and other wild animal flesh should not be consumed. The *Mahāvagga Pāli* of the *Vinaya Pitaka* has interesting anecdotes about the ten different types of meat.

Human Tissue

The Buddha once stayed at *Isipatana*, which is close to *Vārāṇāsī*. A sick monk received a promise from a devout Buddhist laywoman named *Suppiyā* that she would provide some sort of meat soup. Unfortunately, it was not kill-day (*māghāta samaya*) on that particular day, therefore meat soup could not be prepared. Any sold flesh could not be purchased from a market. *Suppiyā* then had the notion, "I've promised a sick monk to provide a sort of beef soup. However, there is no meat available today in the market. That monk might pass away or his condition might worsen if I don't send any beef soup. I had to give the monk the beef soup in some way. She then went into her bedroom and used a knife to cut a piece of flesh out of her thigh. How wonderful!" exclaimed her husband. How incredibly self-assured she is! If she is able to offer even her own flesh, there will be nothing else she cannot give. The *Buddha* visited her house the following day at her husband's invitation. Where was *Suppiyā*? the *Buddha* asked. The Buddha summoned her to His presence after she had narrated that incident. She was instantly carried. Her thigh wound immediately healed and was as good as new as soon as she saw the Buddha. This surprised and delighted her, and she showed the *Buddha* the utmost respect. Due to the sick monk consuming human-flesh soup without asking questions, he was held accountable. The Buddha warned his followers about this incident and announced *Vinaya* regulation. "O monks, some lay devoted people have a lot of confidence. Even their own flesh is offered, which they dare. O monks, you shouldn't eat human flesh. A monk who consumes human flesh must have committed the grievous sin of *Thullaccaya* (great offence).⁶ The Buddha then counselled his followers not to consume any meat without first doing research.

Both Horse and Elephant Flesh

Once upon a time, starvation struck a kingdom. People consumed the meat from the dead elephants and horses owned by the king. They gave the meat to the monks as an alms gift, and the monks ate it as well. Some individuals criticized the monks for eating elephant and horse flesh. They claimed that the king owned elephants and horses. The king would be angry with monks if he learned that they consumed the meat. "O monks, you shouldn't consume horse or elephant flesh," the Buddha declares. Any monk who consumes it must be guilty of (*dukkāṭa*) the offence of wrongdoing.

⁵ Vin.I pp.217-220.

⁶ Vin.I pp.217-219.

Dog, Snake, Loin Flesh and the rest

Some individuals consumed dog flesh while the famine was occurring and gave it to the monks as alms. Some individuals criticized monks for consuming that meat. They claimed that eating canine flesh was repulsive. When the Buddha learned of this, he immediately said, "O monks, dog flesh should not be consumed. Anyone who consumes it among monks must be guilty of *Dukkata*. Additionally, it is said that Buddhist nuns and monks should not consume snake flesh. The text tells a story in the following ways in this regard. Some people once consumed snake flesh and three monks during a famine. Monks continue to be vilified by some. The Buddha declares "O monks, you shouldn't consume snake flesh. Any monks who consume it are obligated to commit *Dukkata*." Additionally, it was discovered that some people consumed the flesh of lions, tigers, leopards, and bears during the time of famine and offered it to the monks. The monk ate the meat and then walked to a forest to meditate. Lions, tigers, etc. chased the monks because of the stench of the meat they ate. After hearing about this incident, the Buddha declared: "O monks, lion flesh, etc., shall not be eaten. Anyone who consumes it among monks must be guilty of *Dukkata*."

Three Limitations on meat consumption

The *Buddha* forbade eating any type of meat other than the 10 types of flesh, however he did place three limits on it. Any monk should not be admitted if he or she witnessed, heard, or even suspects that an animal was murdered especially for them. The *Buddha* and his adherents did not forego eating meat. As a result, they were frequently denounced by other religious thought. For instance, *Sīha*, the supreme commander of the *Vajjī*, once embraced Buddhism. Soon after, he invited the *Buddha* and his followers and provided food as alms. He cooked rice and curry with meat that he had purchased from the market. When *Sīha* served the *Buddha* rice and meat, the Jain monks heard about it. They denounced the *Buddha* and *Sīha* as well. They falsely claimed that *Samaṇa Gotama* and *Sīha*, the Chief Commander, had both purposefully taken the meat after *Sīha* killed a huge number of animals to gift to him.⁷ It is discovered that eating meat is likewise wrong according to Jainism. According to legend, a person who consumes meat receives half of the sins of the person who killed the animal. Because the eater consumes flesh, the killer kills the animal. It is stated that before converting to Buddhism, *Sīha* was a lay follower of *Mahāvīra*.

The *Buddha* once contacted a doctor by the name of *Jīvaka* to tell him what he had heard, according to *Pāli* canonical sources. Lord, it was alleged that people killed animals to give *Samaṇa Gotama* meat. Despite the fact that the animal was murdered especially for *Samaṇa Gotama*, he accepted it. *Jīvaka* said, "Lord, let me know if what they stated is true or not." "O *Jīvaka*, I declare that any meat should not be eaten by monks owing to three reasons: seen personally, heard, and suspected that the preparation of meat is for him," the Buddha refuted the claim. "O *Jīvaka*, whoever attempts to slaughter an animal to offer meat for me and my disciples, he gathered a lot of evil due to five factors: (1) Who gives the order for an animal to be brought and killed with the intention of providing alms? (2) The animal experiences agony and suffering while being pulled against its will; for this second reason, much evil manifests within him. (3) The directive to kill the animal; due to this third factor, a great deal of evil exists within him. (4) The animal experiences anguish and grief during the killing process; as a result of this fourth cause, much evil manifests within him. (5) He causes difficulties for me and my followers by providing an inappropriate meal for us; for this fifth reason, much evil happens within him."⁸

Can Vegetarianism help Someone Achieve Spiritual Enlightenment?

According to *Theravāda* Buddhism, vegetarianism can lead to spiritual advancement. Some *Brahmanas* and recluses held the belief in mental purity through the practice of austerity in food before Buddhism emerged. They only consumed very little grains or vegetables. They frequently went without

⁷ A.IV pp.185-188.

⁸ M.I pp.369-372.

food. They think that purity can be attained by this method, which is a form of self-mortification. The Buddha, on the other hand, never urged or pushed that his followers become vegetarians, as was noted in the introduction. Since this practice is optional, neither the environment nor meat-eaters should be applauded or penalized. The purpose of consuming food according to Buddhism is to sustain one's life and body while partaking any kind of food which should be blameless and to remove craving on food. It is true that the *Buddha* expounded his followers to avoid any food which is unwholesome; the food is wholesome but blameworthy; to refrain from ordering in killing animals as he accumulates demerit. The entire *Pāli* canon repeatedly reinforces the idea that animals are to be treated with due compassion and care and are not to be mistreated or harmed.

Animal's abuse and sacrifice in the *Pāli* Canon

In Buddhism, killing and harming living beings are strictly prohibited and abstaining from slaughtering and destroying human and animals are considered as the first precept that Buddhist people have to compulsorily observe. Many contemporary scholars recognize that the first precept opens a door for animal welfarism in Buddhism.⁹ The *Brahmajāla* sutta provides an excellent description of this precept through outlining the *Buddha's* own disposition of nonviolence: "Abandoning the taking of life, the ascetic *Gotama* dwells refraining from taking life, without stick or sword, scrupulous, compassionate, trembling for the welfare of all living beings." This is, in fact, a stock passage that can be found in a similar form throughout the canon. In line with this attitude, it is said that monks should abstain from "wounding, murdering, binding, brigandage, plunder, and violence"¹⁰

The *Sāleyyaka sutta* insists that violence towards "living beings" (a class to which animals surely belong) is "not in accordance with *Dhamma*." The passage reads: "Here someone kills living beings, he is murderous, bloody-handed, given to blows and violence, merciless to living beings." The *Sutta Nipāta* states that the good Buddhist lays aside "... violence in respect of all beings, not harming even one of them." "All beings" (*sabba satta*) surely includes animals. Indeed, non-violence towards animals extends even to very small creatures. The *Buddha* even announces that, like a lion, he roars with the idea: "Let me not cause the destruction of tiny creatures wandering astray." This implies that even small creatures – perhaps insects – are governed by these principles of non-violence. In general, the *Itivuttaka* (trs. *As It Was Said*) sums up the attitude that a good Buddhist should have concerning animals and their welfare: "Who smites not nor makes others slay / Sharing goodwill with all that lives / He hath no hate for any one." This passage may be regarded as a fair indication of the pacifism entailed by the first precept, a pacifism born from a good intention lacking in hate.

The benefits of not killing Animals

Let's continue to think about the benefits of non-killing in the readings. In actuality, avoiding killing is a need for achieving *Nibbāna*. The "non-killing of living beings" is a need for the "cutting off of affairs," according to the *Potaliya sutta* (i.e. enlightenment). Similar to the *Anguttara Nikāya*, who refers to it as the "beyond shore," renouncing conduct aims to refrain from "taking life." shore" Killing living things has a number of negative effects, which the *Potaliya sutta* continues to explain: "I would blame myself for doing so; the wise, having investigated, would censure me for doing so; and on the dissolution of my body, after death, because of killing living beings, an unhappy destination would be expected. But the act of killing living things is itself a constraint and a barrier."¹¹

Guilt—fear of blame (*ottappa*) — is one negative consequence of animal cruelty, as is the possibility of being reprimanded by one's betters. Finally, being reborn in harmful circumstances is

⁹ Christopher Chapple, for example, writes: "The treatment of animals is included in the first Buddhist precept — not to harm or injure living things." (1986, p. 221)

¹⁰ MN, 51.14, p.449.

¹¹ MN, 54.6, p.468.

another motive to avoid animal cruelty: harming animals produces bad karma. Elsewhere, the destruction of life is similarly said to lead to being reborn in "an unhappy destination, in perdition, even in hell." The idea that killing animals will cause one to be reborn in *Niraya* hell is repeated throughout the canon. In contrast to this fire-and-brimstone view, however, the *Udāna* is less clear regarding the harms that befall an insurer of animals, saying only that such a person may not "win happiness," while one who abstains from harming animals may ultimately attain happiness. Perhaps this is simply a more euphemistic way of stating that the harming of animals will lead one to *Niraya*. Animal killing is, therefore, very bad — it leads to *Niraya*, rebirth in a bad existence, the attraction of negative karma, and so on.

Therefore, instead of killing animals, the *Buddha* endorses universal love and compassion towards them. The *Pāli* canonical texts state that compassion and non-maleficence to all creatures (including animals of all sizes) is a fundamental virtue of the good Buddhist. It says: "Putting away the evil propensities to injure he dwells with a heart free from ill-will; compassionate and kind to all living beings he purifies his mind of malevolence." *Buddhaghosa* adds that a good Buddhist must always remember that "he who practices the immeasurables should cultivate the four states [compassion, loving-kindness, equanimity, etc.] towards all beings (*sabba satta*) like a mother." This compassion can even placate wild and dangerous animals. Famously, the *Buddha* placated the raging bull elephant, *Nālāgiri*, sent by *Devadatta* to kill the *Buddha*, by "suffusing the elephant... with loving-kindness of mind."¹² The *Anguttara Nikāya* tells an alarming story of a monk who is bitten by a snake and subsequently dies. The *Buddha* blames the death of the monk, not on the snake, but rather on the monk for not taking due care in suffusing loving-kindness to the "royal families of snakes."¹³ The same story and outcome is relayed in the *Vinaya*. There, a protective chant is mentioned. Part of the chant reads, "May all beings, all breathers, all creatures every one, / See all lucky things; may no evil whatever come."¹⁴

It is evident, then, that the *Buddha* believes that cultivating a mind suffused with compassion and loving-kindness causes animals to become compliant and harmless. The *Buddha*, after insisting that monks meditate on loving-kindness to snakes, goes on to add that this should be extended to animals of every kind: "May I have kindness with the footless / With those of two feet may I kindness have / with quadrupeds may I have kindness / May I have kindness to the many footed." This is reinforced elsewhere in the *Anguttara Nikāya*. In one passage, the *Buddha* states that, if one is "dear to non-humans" (*amanussānam*), then one will be protected from fire, poison, and sword. Thus, Buddhism teaches its followers to treat animals with due care and compassion.

Consuming meat is not a bad habit

From the *Pāli* canonical texts, it is found that even though the *Buddha* instructs his disciples to abstaining from killing and harming animals, he never reject them from eating meat. Of course, the *Buddha* allowed meat-eating if it is free from unwholesome three reasons, because to eat meat is not an unwholesome deed, as is the killing of living beings. However, some alien religious thinkers (*Aññatiṭṭhiya*) believed that one who eats meat comes into inheritance of demerit. But, the *Buddha* excluded their statement. It is interesting to note that on one occasion, Venerable *Devadatta* requested the *Buddha* to impose the rule in relation to the eating meat thus: "Lord, let monks not eat fish and meat throughout their lives; if one commits to eating it, he must be guilty." The *Buddha* then refused *Devadatta's* request and explained that meat can be eaten under three conditions "I say that meat could be partaken on three instances, when not seen, not heard and when there is no doubt about it."¹⁵ From this evidence, it is quite clear that eating meat is an unwholesome deed.

¹² Vin.II p.273.

¹³ AN, 4.6.67, p.81.

¹⁴ Vin.II, 5, p.148.

¹⁵ Vin.II p.197.

The *Āmagandha Sutta* is crucial in regards to eating meat. *Sutta Nipata* of *Khuddaka Nikaya* makes reference to this *sutta*. It was initially taught by the Lord *Buddha Kassapa* and repeated by our Lord *Buddha*. Once upon a time, a vegetarian hermit approached the *Buddha* and asked if he consumed *Āmagandha* or not. What is the "*Āmagandha*," the *Buddha* questioned him. The answer was "The *magandha* is meat." Literally translated as "odour of flesh," "*magandha*" It has an offensive sense of uncleanness and the notion of putridity. This hermit so substituted "*Āmagandha*" for "meat." The meat wasn't the genuine *Āmagandha*, the *Buddha* said, but all mental impurities and all unwholesome actions were. The *Buddha* continues by elaborating on the idea of *Āmagandha* in the following way:

(1) Killing, beating, cutting, binding, stealing, lying, fraudulence, pretending to know, adultery—these are all examples of *magandha*, as opposed to consuming flesh. (2) Men are *magandha* and not eating flesh when they indulge in sensual pleasures without restraint, are greedy in their appetites, are associated with immoral behaviour, are crooked, obscurantist, and have a nihilistic worldview. (3) Men are said to be practising *magandha* and abstaining from eating flesh when they are unkind and harsh, gossipy, deceitful, heartless, haughty, and ungenerous. (4) *Magandha* and not eating flesh are anger, pride, obstinacy, hostility, hypocrisy, envy, ostentation, pride of opinion, and sexual relations with the ungodly. (5) When men act immorally, refuse to pay debts, tenders, or retenders, are liars, cheats, or pretenders, or when the most heinous of men conduct foul crimes, this is considered *magandha* and is prohibited from eating flesh.¹⁶

Elimination of the desire for flavour (*Rasataṇhā*)

Thus, this *Āmagandha Sutta* clearly indicates that vegetarianism or non-vegetarianism does not play a significant role in the attaining the spiritual development. Evidently, according to Buddhism, purification of all mental defilements is very important to attain *Nibbāna*. One must attempt to purify one's mind. The purification of mind can be achieved only through cultivation of good within him. To achieve purification, one must establish *Sīla*, *Samādhi* and *Paññā* within you. Only through morality, concentration and wisdom, one is able to achieve the purification of one's own mind. One can neither be defiled nor purified through eating meat or vegetables. As stated earlier, the *Buddha* did not exhort his followers to become vegetarians or non-vegetarians, but he admonished them to have moderation in food (*bhojana mattaññutā*). He said that whenever one eats vegetables or meat, he or she must control thirst for taste (*rasataṇhā*). The thirst for taste can be eradicated through developing the perception on repulsiveness dealing with nutriment (*āhārepaṭikūlasaññā*) or through consideration of the necessity of food (*paccavekkhaṇā*). According to the *Apaññaka Sutta*, a monk should take food not for the purpose of joyful playing, not for taking pride in strength, not for the growth of the plaits the body to have charm, not for beautifying, but for support and maintenance of the body, for keeping it unharmed and for enabling the practice of moral life.¹⁷

The *Buddha* similarly equated *Kabālikārāhāra* to the flesh of one's own son in the *Puttamamsūpama Sutta* of the *Samyutta Nikāya* to quench the desire for taste. It should be noted that all common material items, including meat and vegetables, are referred to here as "*Kabālikārāhāra*." The *Buddha* states in this *sutta*, "Imagine a husband and woman travelling across a desert with only the most basic supplies. Their adorable, single kid, who is close to them, would be with them. The couple's minimal supplies would then be exhausted and depleted while there was still a portion of the desert to travel through. They would think, "Our little resources are used up and exhausted, and there is yet a stretch of this desert to cross." What if we killed our adorable and beloved only son so that we could produce dried meat and jerky? At least the two of us would survive this desert if we did that—chewing on the flesh of our son. The three of us would die otherwise. In order to manufacture dried meat and jerky, they decided to slaughter their only son, who was adored and adorable.

¹⁶ Sn pp.43-45.

¹⁷ A.I pp.113-114.

They would survive the desert by chewing on their son's flesh. They would beat their breasts and scream, "Where have you gone, our only newborn son?" as they devoured their only son's flesh. Where have you been, our one and only son? What do you think monks? Did that couple eat that food jokingly, to get drunk, to gain weight, to look good, or for any other reason? God, no. Don't you think they would consume that food only to get through the desert? Indeed, Lord. The nutritional value of actual food must also be taken into consideration, I assure you. The yearning for the five strings of sensuality is understood when physical food is understood. There is no fetter by which a pupil of the noble ones would return to this world once passion for the five threads of sensuality is understood.¹⁸ These arguments demonstrate that vegetarianism has no spiritual advantages and that the *Buddha* never urged his disciples to adopt the diet; rather, he urged them to put an end to their desire for taste when they consumed meat or vegetables.

IN CONCLUSION:

Finally, it is discovered that neither the Buddha himself nor the early Buddhist school practiced vegetarianism. The Buddha received his meals either by making alms rounds or by being welcomed to the homes of his supporters, and in both instances, he consumed the food that was provided. He had tried with other diets, including a meatless diet, before being enlightened, but he eventually gave them up because he thought they did not promote spiritual growth. It has also been shown that consuming meat does not make one morally or spiritually dirty; rather, it is immorality. It is also learned that the Buddha did not forbid anyone from eating meat, not even monks. In fact, he flatly refused *Devadatta's* offer to do so. A *bhikkhu* may be breaking monastic regulations in contemporary *Theravāda* societies if he practices vegetarianism to demonstrate his superior spirituality to others. On the other hand, the *Buddha* outright forbade eating any animal whose flesh was "seen, heard, or suspected" to have been intentionally murdered for the benefit of monks. Although strictly exclusively applicable to monastics, this rule can serve as a suitable guidance for pious laypeople.

It is also found that *Theravāda* Buddhism never insists the followers to be a vegetarian. Since this practice is not compulsory, neither vegetarianism is praised nor are non-vegetarians to be blamed. According to *Theravāda* Buddhism, the purpose of eating food is to maintain one's life and body while partaking any kind of food which should be blameless and to remove craving on food. Obviously, The *Buddha* encourages his followers to avoid any food which is unwholesome and blameworthy, and also order them to refrain from ordering in killing animals. In Buddhism, slaying and damaging living creatures are strictly forbidden and refraining from slaughtering and devastating human and animals are regarded as the first precept that Buddhist people have to keep without fail. Several modern researchers acknowledge that the first precept opens a door for animal welfarism in Buddhism. The *Brahmajāla sutta* offers an excellent explanation of this precept through outlining the *Buddha's* own disposition of nonviolence: "Stopping the taking of life, the ascetic *Gotama* dwells refraining from taking life, without stick or sword, scrupulous, compassionate, trembling for the welfare of all living beings." This is, in fact, a stock passage that can be found in a similar form throughout the canon. In line with this attitude, it is said that monks should abstain from "wounding, murdering, binding, brigandage, plunder, and violence." Thus, Buddhism teaches its followers how to treat animals as well as all living beings with great compassion and care. This study further suggested that according to Buddhism, everyone can eat meat, and it does not matter whether or not one is a vegetarian or a non-vegetarian. The most important thing is that one must attempt to remove the thirst for taste of nutriment while partaking in the food. As has been noted above, Buddhism never accepts that through the practice of vegetarianism spiritual attainments can be achieved, and it accepts that spiritual developments can be attained by eradicating the thirst for taste of nutriment (*rasataṇhā*).

¹⁸ S.II p.98.

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