

XC¹¹³

Mahamati then asked in verse:

1. "Regarding bodhisattvas / whose minds are set on buddhahood / should they consume / wine or meat or onions¹¹⁴
2. Why do fools desire / the stench, the filth, the infamy / why would anyone eat / the favorite food of wolves and tigers
3. Does eating meat give rise to sin / does not eating meat mean blessing / please explain the sin and blessing / of eating meat or not."

113. Section XC. This section on cultivating a vegetarian diet follows from the foregoing and is not a haphazard addition. It is important to know how to live in this world of illusions. And the practice of avoiding the eating of meat became part of the bodhisattva path advocated by Mahayana Buddhism. Thus, some commentators also view this section as a critique of the practices of Hinayana Buddhists, namely, the shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas, who excused their eating of meat by claiming it was not proscribed by the precepts. Bodhiruchi's translation of the prose part of this section is seven times as long, while Shikshananda's is three times as long, suggesting that this issue was of more than passing concern.

114. Wine and onions are not mentioned again in the prose section. I imagine this is because they were already listed among the things prohibited by the precepts that lay and monastic Buddhists agreed to abide by. Eating meat, however, was not prohibited—although killing was. The reason for the proscription regarding onions and their kin was that they were considered aphrodisiacs. To this first verse, Gunabhadra adds two lines: "May the Peerless One / pity us with an explanation." I've followed Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda, neither of whom includes this.

115. Most likely referring to the unburied corpses of the poor.

116. You never know when you're eating a human.

117. Chandalas were members of a despised caste associated with the disposal of corpses. Dombas were also outcasts and associated with the cremation of corpses.

After Mahamati had asked in verse, he once more addressed the Buddha, "Bhagavan, please explain for us the vice and virtue of eating and not eating meat. For when I and other bodhisattvas, both now and in the future, explain the Dharma to beings who enjoy eating meat, we will be trying to arouse their compassion toward others. For once their compassion is aroused, whatever stage they are at will be purer and clearer, and they will attain supreme enlightenment sooner. Even those resting in the stages of shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas will quickly attain supreme enlightenment.

"Followers of other paths who maintain mistaken doctrines and who are attached to mistaken views of annihilation and eternity have commandments that prohibit eating meat. Can those who would protect the true teaching of the tathagatas in the world do any better while eating meat?"

The Buddha told Mahamati, "Excellent, most excellent. Listen and ponder it well, and I will tell you."

Mahamati said, "May we be so instructed."

The Buddha told Mahamati, "There are countless reasons why you should not eat meat. But I will summarize them for you. Because all beings have at some time been reborn as family members, out of your feelings for them, you shouldn't eat meat. Because butchers indiscriminately sell the flesh of donkeys and camels, foxes and dogs, cattle and horses and humans¹¹⁵ along with that of other animals,¹¹⁶ you shouldn't eat meat. And you shouldn't eat meat because animals are raised on impurities. And you shouldn't eat meat because beings become afraid when they smell its odor, like when a dog snarls in anger and fear at the sight of a chandala or domba.¹¹⁷

"Also, you shouldn't eat meat because it prevents practitioners from giving rise to compassionate thoughts. You shouldn't eat meat because those fools who are fond of its stench, its filth, and its impurity are maligned. You shouldn't eat meat because it makes spells and incantations ineffective. You shouldn't eat meat because those who kill living creatures become so attached to its taste, they think about it whenever they see them. You shouldn't eat meat because those who eat meat are abandoned by the gods. You shouldn't eat meat because it makes your breath stink. You shouldn't eat meat because it causes nightmares. You shouldn't eat meat because the tigers and wolves in the forest and the wilderness can smell it. You shouldn't eat meat because it results in a lack of restraint regarding food and drink. You shouldn't eat meat because it keeps practitioners from giving rise to aversion. You shouldn't eat meat because I have often said that when you eat or

118. The Buddha encouraged such associations so that his followers would eat and drink as little as possible.

119. This story appears in a number of variants in early Indian texts. Saudasa was the son of Sudasa and a lioness. Hence, he was called Simha, "the Lion."

120. It was the contention of some shravakas that as long as they didn't request, seek, or think about meat, they could eat it.

121. Shikshananda's translation of the poems agrees with that of Gunabhadra, while that of Bodhiruchi sometimes does but often does not. The Sanskrit includes a number of verses that are not present in any of the Chinese versions.

122. The proscription in this case concerns the use of sesame oil as an insecticide.

123. Not only is self-mortification counterproductive to enlightenment, killing insects in the process cancels any merit gained from such a practice.

drink, you should imagine you are consuming the flesh of your children or swallowing medicine.¹¹⁸ I would never approve the eating of meat.

"Further, Mahamati, in the past there was a king named Simhasaudasa who ate all kinds of meat.¹¹⁹ But when he started eating human flesh, his ministers and subjects would not accept it. They conspired to overthrow him, and they put an end to his reign. Such are the ills of eating meat. Hence, you should not eat meat.

"Further, Mahamati, those who kill do so for profit. They kill creatures and sell them in the marketplace, where ignorant meat-eating people use the net of money to catch their meat. Among those who take the lives of others, some use money, and some use hooks and nets to catch creatures that move through the air or in the water or across the land. They kill all sorts of creatures and sell them in the marketplace for profit. Mahamati, when it comes to fish or meat, there is no such thing as 'not requesting, seeking, or thinking about it.'¹²⁰ For this reason, you should not eat meat.

"Mahamati, on some occasions I have proscribed eating five kinds of meat and at other times ten kinds. Today, in this sutra, I am getting rid of practices that allow certain kinds at certain times in favor of none whatsoever. Mahamati, the Tathagata, the Arhat, the Fully Enlightened One has never eaten anything much less taught others to eat fish or meat. Because of my past acts of great compassion, I look on all beings as I would a child. And why would I approve eating the flesh of children?"

The Buddha then repeated this in verse:¹²¹

1. "Because it was a family member / or because it is covered with filth / or it was raised on impurities / or its smell gives rise to fear
2. From meat and from onions / from leeks and from garlic / from indulging in alcohol / practitioners keep their distance
3. They also avoid sesame oil¹²² / as well as beds of thorns¹²³ / because there are tiny insects / cowering in fear inside
4. As food and drink promote indulgence / and indulgence stimulates feelings / and from feelings come desires / you should therefore eat no meat
5. As eating meat produces desires / and desires stupefy the mind / forever drunk on love and desire / from birth and death you won't escape

124. This is one of the eight hot hells. The Sanskrit is *raurava*, meaning to "lament" or "scream."

125. This terminology, which also appears in the penultimate paragraph of the prose section, refers to the series of excuses some shravakas used for eating meat.

126. Chandalas were one of many despised castes in India. Among their professions was the disposal of corpses. Dombas were another despised caste whose professions included the cremation of corpses.

127. The appearance of rakshasas here is ironic, considering they were the inhabitants of Lanka. Gunabhadra spreads this out over six lines.

128. The *Angulimaliya Sutra* was translated into Chinese by Gunabhadra, the translator of this sutra, around A.D. 440. Not to be confused with the *Angulimala Sutta* of the Pali Canon, the focus of this Mahayana text is on the tathagata-garbha, or true self.

129. The wording here refers to the practice of reporting violations of the precepts as to what one has seen, heard, or suspected regarding others and oneself. The Buddha's point is that such people are attached to their projection of their newfound purity.

6. Killing creatures for profit / or catching your meat with money / both of these are evil paths / leading to the hell of lamentation¹²⁴
7. As for 'not requesting, seeking, or thinking about it'¹²⁵ / there is no thrice-pure meat / this isn't free of karma / therefore you should eat no meat
8. Those who are practitioners / therefore keep their distance / buddhas of the ten directions / all voice their disapproval
9. Taking turns eating each other / reborn among wolves or tigers / amid detestable stench and filth / wherever they are born they are fools
10. Usually they're born as chandalas¹²⁶ / as dombas or as hunters / or they're born among meat-eating demons / rakshasas or wild cats¹²⁷
11. In the *Hastikakshya* and the *Mahamegha* / in the *Angulimaliya* as well¹²⁸ / and here in the *Lankavatara* / I proscribe all eating of meat
12. Buddhas and bodhisattvas / even shravakas denounce it / eating meat without shame / living life after life in ignorance
13. And those who admit their offense¹²⁹ / who have already stopped eating meat / blinded by their projections / they are reborn in carnivorous worlds
14. Just as excessive desire / keeps you from getting free / alcohol, meat, onions, and garlic / block the path to buddhahood
15. Beings in some future age / might stupidly say about meat / 'it's pure and isn't wrong / the buddhas said we could eat it'
16. Imagine you're swallowing medicine / or eating the flesh of a child / be content and practice aversion / beg for your food instead
17. Even those with compassionate hearts / I tell to practice aversion / such beasts as tigers or wolves / might yet become their companions
18. Those who eat blood-covered flesh / terrify other beings / therefore those who practice / out of compassion should not eat meat
19. It doesn't foster compassion or wisdom / it prevents your true liberation / it conflicts with the ways of the wise / therefore you should not eat meat
20. Rebirth as a Brahman / in a place of practice / in a wise or noble family / this comes from not eating meat."