

Buddhism and Vegetarianism: Attitude and Practices

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Introduction

Once upon a time, while the Blessed One was staying at Jetavanavihara (Jeta Grove), Rajagir. Monk named Devadatta accompanied by four monks named Kokalika, Katamorakatissa, Khandadeviputta, Samuddadatta approached to the Lord Buddha, then asked for formulating five rules:

- (1) monks should stay only in the forest for whole period of life, not to stay in the village
- (2) monks should travel for alms for whole period of life, not to receive the invitation for food in the village
- (3) monks should search for the robe from dust heap(rag-robe) by themselves for whole period of life, not to receive the robe from householders
- (4) monks should stay under the tree for whole period of life
- (5) monks should not eat fish and meat.

Then the Lord Buddha denied;

O Devadatta, it should not be like that, the monks who desired to stay in wherever; forest or village, can do as they desired, the monks who desired to travel for alms, to receive an invitation for food by householders, to search for robe from dust heap, to receive robe offered by householders, could do as all of them desired. I allowed staying under the tree for

eight months (out of rainy season), I allowed fish and meat which are purified by three unconcernings of monks; (1)not seeing (2)not hearing (3)not suspecting; (somebody had prepared fish & meat specifically for those monks)¹

In this matter, there was another case in those days, one commander-in-chief named Siha was Jainist, one day he approached to the Lord Buddha, listened to His teaching and attained the first worthy-one-state (being Sotapanna or stream-enterer), then invited the Lord Buddha along with the group of monks to take food in his house. At that time Siha was accused by the Jainist priests; “Siha killed animals for the purpose of preparing food for monks, Samana the Gotama ate meat offered by him”. Having heard of Jainist’s accusation, Siha justified himself by saying that it was not true as Jainists’ accusation. The Lord Buddha also heard that news. The disciplinary rule, therefore, had been setup by the Lord Buddha prohibiting; “monks were not allowed to eat meat of animals killed for the purpose of preparing food specifically for them”. The monks who violated this rule, were sentenced to offense of wrong doing. In the meantime the fish and meat which were purified by monks’ attitudes mentioned above, were allowed by the Lord Buddha.²

Monks and Meat-eating: Is Meat-eating against Disciplinary Rules ?

From two cases mentioned in section of introduction, it can be concluded that the Lord Buddha has not prohibited monks to eat fish and meat. There may be somebody who is wondering if the Lord Buddha has allowed monks to eat meat. There are passages found in

¹ V. 1/409/442-443. (Thai-MCU Version)

² V.V/294/115-116. (Thai-MCU Version)

Vinaya Pitaka Mahavibhanga which can be brought to answer these wonderings;³

Once upon a time the group of six monks expressed their words, asking for nice food for their own sake and ate. The Lord Buddha heard of that news, He reprimanded those monks and regulated the following rule;⁴

The monks who expressed their words, asking for nice food; liquid butter, ghee, eatable oil, honey, sugar cain juice, fish, meat, fresh milk, yoghurt for their own sake and ate those, are sentenced to an offense of expiation.

Later on, one monk was sick, he needed some kind of nice food to be free from sickness but did not dare to express his word, asking for that food, he, therefore, had not been well. Having heard of this news, the Lord Buddha allowed that monk to do that, then regulated the following rule;

The monks who were not sick, expressed their words asking such a nice food as liquid butter, ghee, eatable oil, honey, sugar cain juice, fish, meat, fresh milk, yoghurt for their own sake and ate those, are sentenced to an offense of expiation.

What is meant by fish here ? the creatures wandering in water.

What is meant by meat here ? the eatable meat of land-creatures ie. the suitable meat. The monks who are not sick, express their words, asking for that for their own sake, are sentenced to an offense of wrong doing everytime they have done. Those monks receive that meat in intention to eat, but have not ate yet, are sentenced to an offense of wrong doing, they eat that meat, there is an offense of expiation every mouthful.

³ V.II/257/410411(Thai-MCU Version)

⁴ V.II/258/411. (Thai-MCU Version)

In this matter, is there any exception that monks who have a conduct mentioned above, are not sentenced to an offense? There is an exception ie. there is no offense for the following nine cases;⁵

1. Sick monks
2. Sick monks express their words, asking for fish and meat, keep those and eat after becoming well
3. The monks who eat food left by sick monks
4. The monks express their words, asking for fish and meat from their own relatives
5. The monks express their words, asking for fish and meat from persons who promise to offer in advance
6. The monks express their words, asking for fish and meat for the benefits of other monks
7. The monks get fish and meat by spending their own money
8. The monks who have nervous disorder
9. The monks who are the first to commit this conduct

In case of nuns (Bhikkhuni), it is like that of monks, but there is different offense eg. the nuns who are no sick, express their words asking fish and meat and eat, there is an offense to be confessed (Patidesaniya), there is also an exception for sick nuns.

Attitudes toward Meat-Eating

Before discussion, the issues must be clearly differentiated that the monks who kill animals, are sentenced to strong or light offense depending upon wrong commit, serious or non-serious. The Layman who kill animals, are regarded as violator of the precepts “panatipata veramani sikkhapadam”, they are sinful and supposed to receive the bad effect in the near and far future. Therefore, what is meant by “meat” in the question; “are the monks who eat meat, sentenced to an

⁵ V.II/262/413. (Thai-MCU Version)

offense according to disciplinary rules ?” is the meat offered by other person (layman).

To the question; are the monks who eat meat, sentenced to an offense according to disciplinary rules ? the monks who eat meat, are sometime sentenced to an offense, sometime not. To clarify this matter, the discussion must be varied in the different following issues;

Issue 1: The Lord Buddha did not allow ten kinds of meat; (1)human’s meat (2)elephant’s meat (3)horse’s meat (4)dog’s meat (5)snake’s meat (6)lion’s meat (7)tiger’s meat (8)leopard’s meat (9)bear’s meat (10)jackal’s meat.

The monks who eat ten kinds of meat as said, are sentenced to strong or light offense depending upon cases such as the monks who eat human’s meat, are sentenced to an offense of serious transgression(Thullaccaya), the monks who eat elephant’s meat, are sentenced to an offense of wrong doing, the monks who eat tiger’s meat, are sentenced to an offense of wrong doing etc.⁶

Issue 2: Monks eat other meats than ten kinds of non-allowed meat, if those monks eat the meat of animals that are killed specifically for them, and those monks see, hear or suspect that those animals are killed to take the meat to be prepared the food only for them, there is an offense of wrong doing.

Issue 3: Monks also eat other meats than ten kinds of non-allowed meat, if they eat without consideration deliberately, there is an offense of wrong doing.

Issue 4: The monks who are not sick, expressed their words, asking such a nice food as liquid butter, ghee, eatable oil, honey, sugar cain juice, fish, meat, fresh milk, yoghurt for their own sake and ate those, are sentenced to an offense of expiation.

Issue 5: Monks eat other meats than ten kinds of non-allowed meat and those meats are purified by three conditions; (1)not seeing

⁶ V.V/280-281/80-87. (Thai-MCU Version)

(2)not hearing (3)not suspecting as well as they have considered and eat, there is no offense

That there is no offense must be under one of these cases; (1)monks is sick, express their words, asking for fish and meat from other persons and eat (2)monks eat fish and meat that they got by expressing their words, asking for from other persons when those monks are sick(3)monks eat fish and meat that they got by expressing their words, asking for from their own relatives (4)monks eat fish and meat that they got by expressing their words, asking for from householders who have promised to offer in advance (5)monks eat fish and meat that they got by buying.

The issue that should be analyzed is a connection between offense(Apatti) and sin(Papa). What is the connection between violation of disciplinary rules and committing sinful action ?

In this matter, we should analyzed two technical terms; lokavajja (worldly fault) and pannattivajja (formulated fault). Lokavajja is offense to which monks are sentenced on the basis of unwholesome intention, it means that both monks and layman who committed these actions such as killing animals, drinking intoxicants, telling lie, are sentenced to an offense. Pannattivajja is offense to which monks are sentenced without unwholesome intention, it means that only monks who committed these actions such as touching ladies, swimming, holding over a fire, taking hard food during 12.30 pm upto about 05.30 am(or upto dawn of the next day: untimely eating) are sentenced to an offense, not layman. Lokavajja offense is related to sin directly, because it is on the basis of unwholesome intention ie. whenever monks are sentenced to this kind of offense, those are supposed to receive sinful result also. While those hold status as a monk, they are subjected to two bad results; offense and sin, whenever they disrobed, the offense is over, but the sin has still been with them forever. Whereas pannattivajja is related to sin indirectly ie. While those hold status as a monk, they have an offense, whenever they disrobed, only remnant of sin has still been

with them. Householders' violation of five precepts is related to sin because it is completely on the basis of unwholesome intention.

Once upon a time the Lord Buddha was staying at Bamboo Grove Monastery, Nun Upalavanna (Bhikkhuni Upalavanna) was staying in Savatthi (Sarvasti), she traveled for alms in Savatthi. After coming back from traveling for alms, she went to take rest in Andhavana (dark forest), at that time the thieves stole cows from village, killed, chopped, barbecued and selected only good pieces of meat, then wrapped it with leaf, intending to offer Nun Upalavanna that meat. The nun foresaw intention of those thieves, so she took the wrap of meat and went to Bamboo Grove Monastery, asked Monk Udayi to bring and offer that meat to the Lord Buddha. This category of meat has already been the wrong one from the beginning ie. thieves robbed cows from others, this is a violation of the precept "Adinnadana Veramani Sikkhapadam (training rule refraining from taking belongings which are are not given by others)". Those thieves killed cows, this is a violation of the precept "Panatipata Veramani Sikkhapadam (training rule refraining from killing living beings)". Those thieves chopped cows, roasted and gave meat to nun (Bhikkhuni Upalavanna), that meat is not purified for that nun because she knows the background of that meat, so she requests monk Udayi to bring meat and give to the Lord Buddha. In this matter, that meat is regarded as purified for the Lord Buddha or any other monk. There is no offense of wrong doing from eating that meat.

Is Meat-Eating against precept "Panatipataveramani Sikkhapadam" ?

There are five criterions to judge whether violating or non-violating of the precept of Panatipataveramani Sikkhapadam; (1)living beings (2)knowing that living beings (3)killing mind (4)effort to kill (5)animals' death through that killing-effort.

The violation of this precept has completely been committed only when these five factors mentioned above come together, if not so, there is no violation, eg. In case of factors 1-4 coming together, it is only the pierce, spot and freckle of this precept. So to the question; “is meat-eating against this precept?”, the answers can be divided into two aspects: (1)the persons who kill by themselves and eat, are sentenced to be wrong because of violation of this precept (2)the persons who eat meat of animals killed by others, are not sentenced to violation of this precept, but is it appropriate or not? it has to be discussed further.

Before discussion, we should have a look at worldly law a little bit. What worldly law said about is the conspiracy and participation in committing illegal action. The persons who eat meat of animals killed by others by buying it from market, ordering in advance and going to buy etc. or others have killed animals, take meat and give. In these cases, there is no fault for householders, no fault come from conspiracy and participation, but according to Sangha’s tradition, there may be fault.

Is Meat-Eating Proper ?

(1) General Issue

The terms “right” and “proper” convey meanings differently from each other. The “right” means that it is in concordance with disciplinary rules, or moral rule, it mentions to religious uprightness such as threefold physical uprightness, fourfold verbal uprightness, threefold mental uprightness according to Buddhist doctrine. Talking specifically about threefold physical uprightness, it is divided into three; (1)refraining from killing animals (2)refraining from stealing (3)refraining from misconduct in sexual intercourse, it is clear that one of three physical uprightnesses is refraining from killing animals.

Meanwhile the “proper” means that it is justice, accepted by all parties, or ending point of problems. Meat-eating in some cases may be right, but it is certainly not proper ie. not justice, because it is destruction of living beings.

(2) Specific Issue

2.1 Laypeople’s meat-eating without killing any animal is not against any moral law.

2.2 Monks who eat ten kinds of non-allowed meats such as human’s meat, are regarded as violator of disciplinary rules, or it is even other meats than those non-allowed meats, if it is not purified by three conditions; (1)not seeing (2)not hearing (3)not suspecting; (somebody had prepared fish & meat specifically for those monks), those monks are also regarded as violator of disciplinary rules.

To give answers for the question “is meat-eating proper?”, there are three words to be discussed; (1)morality, or disciplinary rule, or law (2)uprightness (3)justice. The first one is legal principle. In case of legal principle, wrong is wrong, there is clear-cut fault fixed for each wrong doing. The fault from doing against moral law or disciplinary rule is spiritual and social, meanwhile the fault from doing against country’s law is civil or criminal. The issue of uprightness or non-uprightness is right or wrong story according to religious doctrine, meanwhile the issue of justice or injustice is proper or non-proper story and can be divided into parts;

1. **factual:** in case of claiming rights, whenever one person gains, another person loses. To gain whatever desired thing is justice for gainers. The question is; “is it justice for losers?”. In case of meat-eating, killing animals mostly comes from meat-eating, life of many animals is destroyed. This is the fact. (some meat-eaters may think that animals are born to be human’s food, it is human’s rights to eat whatever which is useful for their body, this is selfish thinking.)

2. **feeling**: in case of promotion of organizations' personnels, sometimes the personnels who hold the same level of position, are promoted differently from each other, in this matter the injustice feeling happens. Such as Mr. A has done jobs very well, he is effective and his works produces good effect, he therefore is promoted more, he feels justice for himself who works hard for the whole year, meanwhile Mr. B is in opposite direction of Mr. A, the injustice feeling certainly happens to Mr.B

In brief, the laypeople who eat meat of animals killed by other persons, are regarded as non-violator of moral rule, his action is uprightous, but injustice because they eat meat which causes killing other animals, the animals loving happiness and hating suffering as all the world-creatures do. The monks who eat meat without violating any disciplinary rule, are regarded as as non-violator of any rule, his action is uprightous, but injustice. Why is it injustice ?

We all have a common sense that all the world-creatures love happiness, hate suffering, love their own life and dread of death. Meat-eating causes killing animals directly and indirectly. There may be contending that even though we ourselves do not eat meat, other peoples still eat and sometimes animals eat meat of each other, world-creatures still get killed. This contending is not reasonable. There are many other issues to be considered eg.

1. can human maintain their life by eating other foods than animals' meat ?

2. even though someone eats meat without killing, it arouses killing just like the government of any country spend budget in buying potato, even though the government does not plant potato, this policy arouses planting potato, is it true ?

3. drinking coffee may cause bad effect to health, but many peoples still drink coffee, drinking coffee arouses producing coffee, is it true ?

Conclusion: Buddhism's conclusion on vegetarian

Buddhism's attitude is emphasized on value of world-creatures' life in all kinds of birth, in the meantime two levels of truth are accepted by Buddhism; (1) mundane (2)supramundane.

In mundane level, life consists of many faults from the origin. There is one passage always spoken by monks and novices in the period of the Lord Buddha when some faults happen inevitably; "it is not your fault, it is not my fault, it is the fault of birth-cycle". This passage means that to take birth again and again is conducive to fault. Soon after getting an enlightenment, the Lord Buddha said;

I was in search of the craftsman who maid the house, having not found him, so wandering from wheel of birth to wheel of birth, taking birth was suffered again and again; here I had found the craftsman who maid the house, O craftsman you could no longer make a house(my life), your skeleton was destroyed, house's top(ignorance) was dismantled, my mind had reached to emancipation (Nibbana) without conditioning, I had reached to an end of defilements.

These Buddha's words point out a conclusive fact that to be born as a human or any other creature in mundane world is accompanied by many problems. Some of world creatures are born as a food of other creatures such as pig, fish, chicken. Human likes to eat other creatures' meat and in the meantime some creatures like to eat human's meat. This is cycle of life of world-creature.

Fisherman live their life by fishery, daily killing many fishes, those do not commit illegal action, but their action is against uprightous doctrine, violating the precept "panatipata veramani sikkhapadam(training refraining from killing living being)", their way of life is injustice for fishes, even though they can be a good man and maintain their life by fishery. Agriculturists feed fowls and pigs

are alike. They have to maintain their life by killing other creatures inevitably. This is the fault of birth-cycle.

The way of life in supramundane level is free from these faults. Right livelihood which is one of Noble Eightfold Path means right living without persecuting life of world-creature such as buying & selling business pertaining to weapons, manpowers, poisons, intoxicants. These businesses are legal but unjust for life of world-creature.

In case of vegetarian also, vegetarian or non-vegetarian is upto an individual, the point is not to kill animals. Once Bhikkhu Devatdatta requested the Lord Buddha to lay down five rules. The Blessed One said “do not, O Devadatta, be pleased with this, the monks who desired to, could dwell in the forest etc.” for the first four rule, but for the last one rule concerning with eating fish and meat the Blessed One said “I allowed fish and meat which were purified by three conditions; (1)not seeing (2)not hearing (3)not suspecting(that there is killing animals to prepare meat for us-monks). It can be seen that the Lord Buddha did not use the words “the monks who desired to, could eat fish and meat”. These Buddha’s words consist of important significance. What is the significance ?”

The words “I allowed fish and meat which were purified by three conditions...” points out not fixing any rule, laying down in the middle without saying “the monks who dedsired to, can do...”. The issue, therefore, which is not fixed by the Lord Buddha like this, may be whether proper or non-proper, right or wrong. In practical way, monks must take the great two authorities(2 Mahapadesa of 4) laid down by the Buddha to judge the case:

1. Whatever has not been objected to as not allowable, if it fits in with what is not allowable and goes against what is allowable, that is not allowable.

2. Whatever has not been objected to as not allowable, if it fits in with what is allowable and goes against what is not allowable, that is allowable.

Having judged the case by the great authorities, there is a little possibility to do against disciplinary rule. But as said above, the way of life in mundane level consists of many faults such as in case of meat-eating, even though it is allowed meat, before eating monks have to consider deliberately, otherwise it is against rule. The consideration deliberately before eating is very needed because both monks and layman have to keep in mind every time they eat meat “meat-eating even without killing by oneself is regarded as conducive to killing, is it better not to eat?”. Meanwhile the way of life in supramundane level is free from unwholesome intention. Buddhism’s clear-cut conclusion is that killing animals is against moral and disciplinary rules, some cases are against country’s law as well. Meat-eating is not against any rule for layman, but for monks if it is not in accordance with Vinaya surrounding conditions mentioned above, it is against disciplinary rule, if it is in accordance with Vinaya surrounding conditions mentioned above, it is not.

Finally, the last issue should be kept in mind that meat-eating even without doing against rules is conducive to bad effects for the persons who eat and for neighbours. We are the world-creature, we have passed several times of death and rebirth, here on earth nobody have never been born as father, mother, brother, sister of each other. While, therefore, we are eating meat, we may be chewing meat of the persons who had been our father, mother, brother or sister in the past. Apart from this, there are many bad effects of meat-eating such as animals are afraid of those who eat meat, the body of those smells bad, the bad reputation of those is spread all over directions.