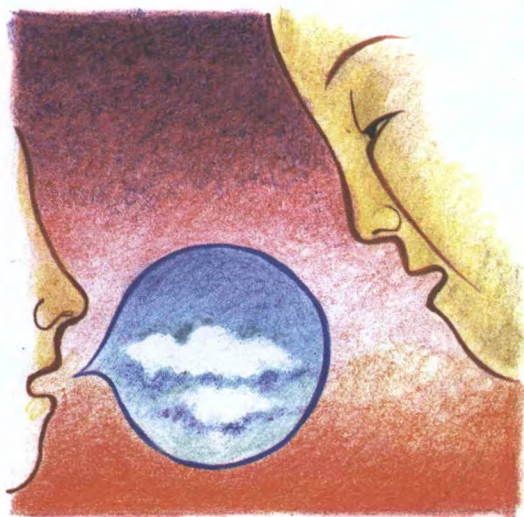


BY GEHLEK RIMPOCHE

# You Are Not A Buddhist Missionary!

## *Answers to Questions about Vegetarianism and Spouses*



**Q:** Does Buddhism advocate vegetarianism?

**A:** As Buddhism places a strong emphasis on compassion and caring, and so much value on life, on the whole it does advocate vegetarianism. However, not every Buddhist is a vegetarian, and most Tibetan Buddhist practitioners are not, because of a variety of circumstances. In today's society, the economy is demand-and-supply orientated; in old Tibet it was not, it was very different. In this society, when the demand increases, the supply increases (ie, when more people want to eat meat, the more meat is supplied, and the more animals are killed), and when the supply increases, that much killing increases. And as Buddhism definitely emphasizes non-killing, non-violence and not hurting other beings, so it is certainly against taking a life. To be vegetarian is the therefore the best.

We create a lot of negativities every minute, every day. So just like any other negativities, if we are a meat eater, we have to deal with it. There are many ways and means of doing this — if you are a Buddhist, or even a non-Buddhist. For example, you can save the life of an animal that is definitely going to be killed, and so extending a life

by a few years or a few days. You can also make giving love and compassion a guiding principle in your daily life. And if you are a practitioner, then by doing the Vajrasattva practice, with the application of the four opponent powers, you can purify all negativity.

**Q:** If you are Buddhist and your partner is not, and difficulties arise, how should you practice?

**A:** You may be a Buddhist practitioner, but you are not a Buddhist missionary! It is not your job to convert your spouse to Buddhism. But you have to get your spouse to understand your interest, how important it is to you, how important your practice is to you, and to make sure that your spouse adjusts to your needs. And you need to adjust to their needs. It is this adjustment that is the most important. So at certain times they will not disturb you when you practice, and your actions, too, will not go against your marriage. Gaining an understanding of your spouse's needs without giving up your principles, and making adjustments, is therefore very important. There are a lot of partnerships between Buddhists married to Catholics, Jews, atheists, etc., and they seem to work. Also, if the love between the couple is true, you really wish the other well, and if it is not, it becomes a control issue. So with true love you don't find much difficulty at all.

Remember we are not Buddhist missionaries — we are here to help and serve people to ease their pain. The principle, therefore, should be to ease the pain of others without sacrificing anyone. And in this, really pure true love will help a lot.

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Gehlek Rinpoche, an incarnate lama, is the author of "Good Life, Good Death: Tibetan Wisdom on Reincarnation" (Riverhead Books 2001). In the 70s, he was directed by Kyabje Ling and Trijang Rinpoche to begin teaching Western students. Now based in Ann Arbor, Michigan, he is founder of the Jewel Heart Dharma centers.

Do you have a question about your Buddhist path? Send it to: [editor@mandalamagazine.org](mailto:editor@mandalamagazine.org). Selected questions and answers will be published in future issues.