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**Eating Practices and Attitudes among American Buddhists**

An aspect of Buddhism and Ecology

Taylor Ralph

May 2, 2011

Advisors: Stephanie Kaza, PhD & Katherine Anderson, PhD

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the B.A. Degree in Environmental Studies  
at the University of Vermont

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this thesis is to illuminate the ways that Buddhism and ecology intersect, specifically as it pertains to food beliefs and attitudes. I examined contemporary American Buddhists, their perceptions of the natural world, and the ways in which their dietary prescriptions may reflect those perceptions.

Examining the historical and contemporarily relevant perspectives on food is vital in understanding Buddhism and Ecology, a field becoming more explored in the search for measures to solve the environmental crisis. This thesis functions to explore the ways that American Buddhist practitioners view the environment and as a result, their food practices and attitudes. Specifically, I examine the various motivations that guide the eating choices of American Buddhists through research on their environmental ethic (both historically and currently) and their behavior surrounding food procurement, cooking, and eating.

I found that while this is an interesting and worthy pursuit, it is impossible to generalize the eating motivations and behaviors within the diverse community of American Buddhists. I speculate that the most interesting potential Buddhism and ecology may have, rather than its theoretical connections, is the capacity it may have to spur ecological action and sensitivity among its adherents into the future.

Key words: Buddhist\*, ethic, food, agriculture, religion, America

*A list of relevant Buddhist vocabulary words can be found in Appendix A*

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"When steaming rice, treat the pot as one's own head;  
when rinsing the rice, know that the water is one's own lifeblood."

*-Tenzo Kyokun (Zen Chef)*



**Photograph 1: Bowl of rice at Vermont Zen Center**

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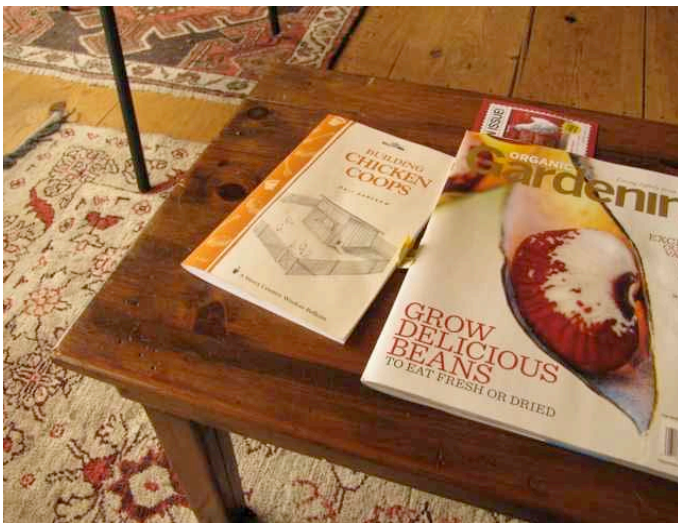
## INTRODUCTION

Buddhism and ecology has come to the forefront of the broader study of *Religion and Ecology*. Buddhism, with its classic philosophies of interconnection and compassion, has provided its followers with the ability to perceive the liberation of all sentient beings. This liberation is classically understood as freedom from karma and so, the cessation of all suffering. Ethics that have been the basis for this spiritual liberation have begun to interest scholars of sociology, morality, and the environment. Because concepts of interconnection and compassion echo the values understood in the environmental movement, academic interpretations have asserted that Buddhism, at its roots, is an ecological religion.

As a university student of both the environment and religion, the study of Buddhism and Ecology has particularly interested me. In order to understand this connection more profoundly, I wanted to speak with practicing Buddhists today on an ecological issue becoming very much discussed throughout the global community: food. Human connection to the land and food source is determined primarily by cultural, often religious, prescriptions. These connections change depending on varied and specific value systems; my goal was to research the connection of practicing Buddhists to their food and the implications of this connection on the weight of

their religiously prescribed guidelines. Resulting from the fact that the United States has pioneered some of the most damaging and industrial food systems, I wanted to specifically focus on Buddhists that are growing, cooking, and eating food within that context.

In order to understand the mechanization of the food system, I will briefly discuss some pivotal moments in the history of food production and the implications of that system today.



**Photograph 2: Growing guides at Anadaire**

The modest domestication of plants and animals on small plots was the earliest model of agriculture. Domestication provided human beings with the comfort of a more steady food source; it was this factor of reliability that gave rise to modern agriculture (Heiser, 1990).

Several factors contributed to the increased mechanization of our food supply over the years, most notably modern tools, improved storage techniques, tillage, and irrigation. Bursts of small-scale agriculture and abundant flora not only invited more food for human populations, but also eventually: “soil erosion, rusts, smuts, weeds, insects, rodents, and birds” (Heiser, 12). The earliest implications of agriculture were most evident in the deteriorating soil. Practices of irrigation without sufficient drainage techniques led to the accumulation of high levels of salts in the soil, intolerable by most plants; “deserts now occupy many of the areas where high civilizations once flourished...alteration of the environment, which began in a modest way 10,000 years ago, continues in the present on a scale never known before, and concern for the future of agriculture is warranted” (Heiser, 13) asserts Heiser in his book *Seed to Civilization: the Story of Food*.

More recently, modern technologies such as “tractors, bulldozers, gang plows, and other mechanical devices made it possible to clear and destroy land faster than any of the ancients ever dreamed possible” (Carter, 207). The Second World War, along with the need to feed an exponentially rising population, produced a pivotal process, the Haber-Bosche process: the fixing of nitrogen to produce ammonia. The resulting fertilizers had heavy implications for human health and the environment (Vasey, 1992). In his book *Omnivore’s Dilemma*, Michael Pollan asserts: “artificial manures [fertilizers] lead inevitably to artificial nutrition, artificial food, artificial animals, and finally to artificial men and women” (Pollan, 148). Not only are chemical fertilizers slowly yielding our healthy soil uncultivable, but also they are intoxicating our food, our water, our wildlife, and our bodies.

The Agricultural Water Conservation Clearinghouse (2010) alerts us to how much water is currently being used in the United States each day for the irrigation of crops. Their numbers remarkable:

Daily irrigation use is much larger than drinking water use (about four times)...It takes about 50 glasses of water just to grow enough oranges to produce one glass of orange juice...One estimate puts the total amount used for irrigation at 141 billion gallons a day, 66 % from surface water and 34 % from groundwater...Total industrial use, by comparison, is about 160 billion gallons per day.

The ecological impacts of modern agriculture are numbered: from high water use, deforestation, high-energy consumption, widespread chemical use and agriculture run-off, to habitat destruction and loss of biodiversity. Other adverse effects of the modern system include rural to

urban migration, loss of local knowledge, inequality, and most paradoxically, world hunger. In Michael Pollan's (10, 2006) words:

..the way we eat represents our most profound engagement with the natural world. Daily, our eating turns nature into culture, transforming the body of the world into our bodies and minds...Agriculture has done more to reshape the natural world than anything else we humans do, both its landscapes and the composition of its flora and fauna...Our eating also constitutes a relationship with dozens of other species--plants, animals, and fungi--with which we have coevolved to the point where our fates are deeply entwined.



**Photograph 3: Local eggs at Anadaire**

Because of this, there has been an urgent call for action among different groups of people urging us all to reconnect to our food, our land, and ultimately ourselves (Hassanein, 1999). Many of these movements have emerged out of religious groups that encourage their followers to subscribe to sustainable ethics found within their faith traditions. A recurring theme in my research showed that a personal and spiritual connection to the earth is what propels real

ecological change on a global scale. Because our primary connection to the earth is characterized by what food choices we make, it is important to examine the various dietary prescriptions defined by religious groups in the pursuit of tracing their potential environmental ethics.

There have been engaging studies on the way that faith traditions encourage sustainable behavior. First of all, religions provide ultimate significance in their followers; "religions provide norms of conduct for the familiar interpersonal settings of family, community, and world. Religions' moral teachings presuppose a spiritual foundation and are meant to root our everyday behavior in a spiritual truth about who we really are" (Gottlieb, 8). Religions guide ethos, behavior and worldviews, and are inextricably linked to our perspectives on the natural world. Gottlieb (2004, 9) states that religions have historically been both "agents of environmental domination" and "repositories of ecological wisdom." Religious beliefs have constructed nature in terms of both anthropocentric interests but also as the ultimate creator and life-giver to which we owe our ultimate gratitude; nature as both useful for humans and inherently valuable. Religions provide a context for humans to connect with their surrounding environments, they

“connect humans with a divine presence...they bond human communities and they assist in forging intimate relationships with the broader earth community” (Tucker, 399). *Explicit* responses from religious groups towards the state of the environment, however, are more recent phenomena.

That being said, scholars and practitioners have focused on “*reinterpret[ing]* old traditions...*extend[ing]* more familiar religious beliefs to non-human nature...*synthesiz[ing]* elements of different traditions...and *creat[ing]* new ideas, practices, and organizations” when using religion as a source of environmental guidance (Gottlieb, 11). By doing this, we can examine religious beliefs in an environmentally, culturally, and politically relevant framework. Religion, then, is a compelling medium to reconnect with the land. As Kaza (2008, x) says in her book *Mindfully Green: A Personal Spiritual Guide to Whole Earth Thinking*,

Lifestyle change[s are] only a part of the path to green living; we also need to spend some time *thinking* about our actions. What are the ethics and values behind our choices? How do we find the emotional and spiritual resolve to keep going under the multitude of challenges? Who can we turn to for green wisdom in these difficult times? What most needs our attention?

No matter the tradition, religions have historically been a powerful force in propelling change.

As Mary Evelyn Tucker (2006, 401), a leader in the scholarship surrounding Religion and Ecology, states, “a key component that has been missing in much environmental discourse is how to identify and tap into the cosmologies, symbols, rituals, and ethics that inspire changed of attitudes and actions for creating a sustainable future within this world.” Over the past few decades, this need has been recognized and the formation of various religious groups that have come together to provide a more sustainable ecological worldview. Scientists have also recognized a need for the collaboration of religions to propel sustainable change. In 1990, one of the first appeals was made in an article titled, *Preserving the Earth: An Appeal for Joint Commitment in Science and Religion* which importantly states:

The environmental crisis requires radical changes not only in public policy, but in individual behavior. The historical record makes clear that religious teaching, example, and leadership are powerfully able to influence personal conduct and commitment. As scientists, many of us have had profound experiences of awe and reverence before the universe. We understand that what is regarded as sacred is more likely to be treated with care and respect. Our planetary home should be so regarded. *Efforts to safeguard and cherish the environmental need to be infused with a vision of the sacred* (Tucker, 402-403).

In 1995, as a result of efforts from religious groups and scientists, the *Alliance of Religion and Conservation* was established. Other groups formed since the 1990's include: the *National Religious Partnership for the Environment*, the *Coalition on Environment and Jewish Life*,

*Interfaith Power and Light: a Religious Response to Global Warming*, the *Faith and Environment Network*, the *Evangelical Environmental Network*, the *Buddhist Peace Fellowship*, *Islam for the Environment*, the list is endless. Religious leaders and communities all over the world are working to protect the earth, the sacred pillar of all faiths (Tucker, 405).

Started by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grimm in 1996, the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology has been an important catalyst to the understanding of religion and ecology among intellectuals and students in the secular world (as well as mobilizing religious leaders to join forces). The Forum has been actively involved in organizing conferences, publishing efforts, film-making, creating class curriculums, online presentations, symposiums, and panels all over the world. In so doing, their efforts have created an entirely new scholarship surrounding Religion and Ecology that is reaching a wide audience.

This forum serves not only as a hub of information but as an organizational and motivational force, bringing faith traditions with various histories together on what some consider the most important issue of our time. Ancient traditions are being reinterpreted to address the ecological concerns we face today; “acknowledging the gap between ancient texts and traditions and modern environmental challenges,” the study of religion and ecology draws “on a broad method of retrieval, reevaluation, and reconstruction” (Tucker, 407). Although the causality is not always clear, religions have the ability to motivate an ethic based on fundamental worldviews that gives the relationship between religious ethos and an environmental ethic compelling force. Ways that religions observe *time*, ways that religions use *space*, ways that religions make use of *materials*, ways that religions use *transport*, ways that religions impact *population*, ways that religions prescribe *sacred spaces*, and ways that religions impart a *food ethic* are important ways in which religions guide their adherents behavior towards the environment (Mitchell and Tanner, 2002).

Integral to this study and practice of religion and ecology is the Buddhist faith tradition. Ethics embodied by the Buddha’s First Precept of non-violence, or *ahimsa* are critical to this view. Buddhism is an interesting religion to interpret, analyze and apply to the environmental crisis we face today. An important way that religions (particularly Buddhism) help us understand to our place in the cosmos is the recognition of the interdependence of all beings; as Joanna Macy states,

What every major religious has sought to offer [is] a shift in identification, a shift from the isolated “I” to a vaster sense of what we are. This is understandable not only as a spiritual experience, but also, in scientific terms, as an evolutionary development. As living forms evolve on this planet, we move not only in the direction of diversification, but towards integration as well. These two movements complement and enhance each other. Open systems self-organize and integrate by virtue of their differentiation, and they differentiate by virtue of their interactions. If we are all bodhisattvas [in Mahayana Buddhism, a bodhisattva is someone that delays enlightenment out of compassion in order to save all suffering beings], it is because of that thrust to connect, that capacity to integrate with and through each other is our true nature (Macy, 107).

So for me, understanding Buddhism within the context of the American food system is important in understanding the relationship between Buddhism and Ecology. Interconnection needs to be more properly understood when making decisions about food. Especially in American culture, daily interaction with food is less engaged than it once was; attitudes and behaviors surrounding food have become less concerned with nourishment than they have with taste, convenience and entertainment. That being said, I believe that the American food system has made eating choices a question of ethics. Modern American agriculture is degrading soil, displacing indigenous peoples and native species, depleting groundwater aquifers, polluting our land, our bodies and eroding the connection of the *homo sapien* to its food source. Because our conventional markets are providing unsafe and ecologically irresponsible food, knowing the source of our food and how it arrived at our plates is becoming an increasingly important question to consider.

In order to properly examine my topic: *Buddhist Foods and Attitudes in Contemporary America*, it is also important to review the history of the Buddhist presence in the United States. There has been a Buddhist presence in the United States since the first Asian immigrants came to our country in the 18th century. Initial interest in Buddhism among non-oriental American’s, though, was among the intellectuals,

“stimulated by the organization of the Theosophical Society in New York in 1875” and the “convening of the World’s parliament of Religions in Chicago” (Layman, 28) in 1893. Soon after this time, Japanese priests and missionaries became active on American soil, particularly in



**Photograph 4: American flag at Kagyu Thubten Choling**

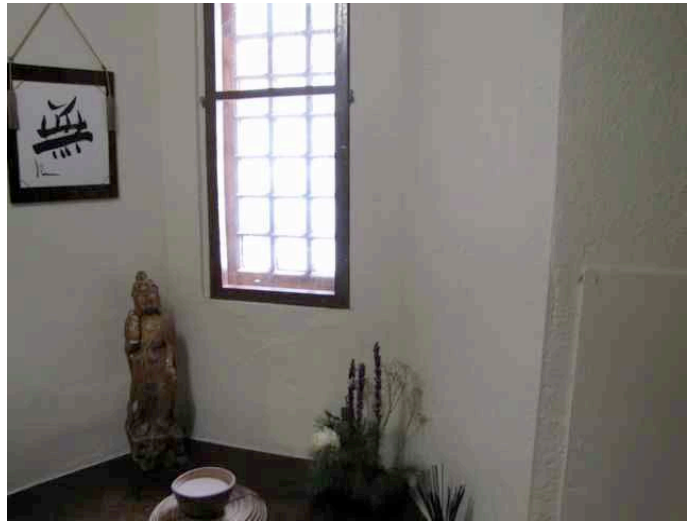


California. Especially after WWII, with many Americans in Japan, interest in Zen Buddhism increased. Other significant interests in Buddhism occurred both in the beat generation of the 1950's and the counter-culture movements of the 1970's. "The most recent Western wave of interest in Buddhism coincides almost exactly with the expansion of the environmental movement;" (Kaza, 161) "with its chief appeal to hippies, intellectuals and students," (Layman, 30) the Buddhist path became one of advocacy and intellect. Such was the climate within which Buddhist practice grew.

My assumption approaching research concerning contemporary Buddhists was that the immediate Buddhist-born proclivity would instill environmental sensitive food ethics: the non-harming, mindful and karmically concerned individual would choose the no-till, locally grown, and processed grain for the bread they make at home! Upon further investigation, I realized that this causality couldn't actually be traced so easily. My thesis began as the following statement:

As a result of the Buddhist doctrines of compassion, oneness (non-self), karma, ahimsa (non-violence), heightened awareness, and universal responsibility, it will naturally follow that their treatment of the earth is sustainable, and this treatment should follow for their dietary attitudes, beliefs and choices.

Through reading ancient Buddhist texts, books on Buddhist ethics, and in speaking with practicing Buddhists, I planned to defend the assertion that Buddhist ethics, environmental ethics and food ethics are one and the same. Through several conversations, thorough research, and critical approaches to this causality, though, I learned that the practicing Buddhists in this country have wildly different food ethics. While I was initially disappointed to see that even a Buddhist was subject to the financial and practical factors that concern our food choices, I was inspired to see the emerging movements within Buddhist communities that *did* support a Buddhist-inspired environmental ethic and outlook on the ritual growing, purchasing, cooking and eating of food. Edward Espe Brown, Zen cook and star of the film *How to Cook your Life* recalls a childhood thought after being served a *Wonderbread* sandwich:



**Photograph 5: Hallway at Zen Mountain Monastery**

What's happened in our culture? What went wrong? Chemically puffy, papery cardboardy bread! We've lost culture with marketing. We don't do anything anymore because there are machines to do everything. And it's supposed to be less labor intensive! We give away the capacity to do things with our hands and with our bodies that actually give us health and vitality. We're giving [our vitality] away! How are we going to feel alive? (Dorrie, 2007)

This is a preview to the narratives of American Buddhists on the topic of food.

Important to the creation of my own thesis was Kristin Steele's 1999 thesis: *An Examination of Food Choices, Dietary Habits, Eating Practices and Attitudes Toward Food Among Buddhists as an aspect of Buddhism and Ecology*. While I was unaware of this thesis when initially choosing my subject, its methods and structure were important to the creation and organization of my own research and writing.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Buddhist Ethics and the Environment

In one of the first works focused on Buddhism and Ecology, *Buddhism and Ecology* by Martine Batchelor and Kerry Brown (1992, viii), it is stated, “at its very essence, Buddhism can be described as an ecological religion.” There are several relevant theoretical beliefs within Buddhism that coincide with ecological ethics. Buddhist doctrines of karma, interconnection, compassion, ahimsa (non-violence), and universal responsibility are also essential elements of ecological thinking. In order to understand these connections more clearly, I have organized the following section by the particular worldviews within Buddhism that help to illuminate the connections between Buddhism and ecology: interdependence, the inherent value of all things, compassion and *ahimsa* (non-harm) as virtue, and reverence for nature.

#### *Interconnectedness*

A sense of interconnection among all things is fundamental to ecological thinking and is addressed by the Buddha on many levels. Many people owe the current ecological crisis to the denial that everything on this planet is deeply interrelated. In his introduction to *Dharma Gaia: a Harvest of Essays on Buddhism and Ecology*, A.H. Badiner (8, 1990) discusses the Buddhist view of interconnection; he says, “when nature is defiled, people ultimately suffer; when we abuse nature, we abuse ourselves.” According to Joanna Macy in her book *World as Lover, World as Self*, Buddhist wisdom regarding the interconnection of all things, illuminated by the tale of Indra’s Net, helps in the cultivation of an ecological ethic. Indra’s net is a Buddhist metaphor developed in the Mahayana tradition that portrays all things as interconnected in a web, every action affecting the other parts of the web. Macy quotes a poem written by the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh to help portray this interconnection:

Being rock, being gas, being mist, being Mind,  
Being the mesons traveling among galaxies at the speed of light,  
you have come here, my beloved...  
You have manifested yourself  
as trees, grass, butterflies, single-celled beings,  
and as chrysanthemums (Macy, 29).

A fundamental precept of Buddhism reflecting interdependence is called “dependent co-arising” or *paticca samuppada* (Kaza, 160). According to ancient texts, it was through understanding this

dependence that allowed the Buddha to perceive and attain liberation. The Buddha stated soon after attaining nirvana, as depicted in the *Mahapadana Sutta*:

I have penetrated this truth, deep, hard to perceive, hard to understand, calm, sublime, beyond logic, subtle, intelligible only to the wise. But this [samsara, cycle of death and rebirth, suffering] is a race devoting itself to the things to which it clings...and for such a race this were a matter hard to perceive, to wit, *that all co-arises interdependently* (Macy, 32 [my italics]).

This belief within Buddhism harbors an understanding of the environment; matter on this planet, whether it be air, gas, human, animal or plant, are inextricably linked to one another and exist in a dynamic balance.

The interconnection explained by Buddhist philosophy also supports a non-dualistic worldview. The famously Cartesian mind/body and self/non-self dualisms understood in Western philosophy are seen rather as fluid within Buddhist philosophy. Many people believe that these dualisms have contributed to the belief that human beings dominate nature and therefore provide a rationale for the destruction of the environment. This dualism elevates the mind and diminishes the body. As Macy states, “this separation engenders a fear of nature and a compulsion to control it” (Macy, 38). She goes on to state important ways that Buddhist philosophy can help regenerate a reverence for nature, an understanding of the interconnection of all things, and the courage to protect it:

The Dharma vision of a co-arising world, alive with consciousness, is a powerful inspiration for the healing of the Earth...It shows us how profoundly we’re entangled in the web of life, thus relieving us of our human arrogance and loneliness...It frees us from having to have it all figured out ahead of time, for the solutions arise as we walk the path and meet each other on the road (Macy, 41).

The Buddhist conception of dependent co-arising may theoretically help one to conceive of an environmental ethic opposed to the dominant worldview that sees nature as a fragmented set of various parts.

### *Inherent Value of all Things*

In addition to the belief that all beings are understood as deeply connected, there is also a belief within Buddhist philosophy that all beings are inherently valuable. In Buddhism, the value of something is not understood by way of its potential usefulness to humans, but rather an inherent value that it *is*. Like Sallie B. King states in her book *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, “in Buddhism, things are seen as having intrinsic value--that is, they have value in themselves, just as they are, with no reference to their usefulness for oneself and one’s group” (King, 119). The

understanding that all things are inherently valuable echoes environmentalist sentiment. This ideal provides an alternative to the modern view of nature as ‘natural resources’ that derive value from their usefulness to the human beings in the form of profit or comfort. An understanding of nature as valuable in and of itself perhaps will provide an alternative framework to conventional notions of consumption, energy use, and waste.

### *Compassion as Virtue*

Another important Buddhist belief that contributes to a theoretical connection with an ecological worldview is the idea of compassionate action as virtuous. In Buddhism, compassion is understood to apply to all beings, both sentient and non-sentient. A prayer in the *Metta sutta*, the Buddha’s discourse on loving-kindness, portrays this belief quite well:

Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, let him cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings. Let his thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world: above, below, and across without any obstruction, without any hatred, without any enmity.

An understanding of a universal responsibility to practice compassion is also reflected by this discourse. When a sentient being is suffering, out of compassion, it is a moral duty to respond to the suffering. In a call for ecological support, His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama states:

A man is ethical only when life, as such, is sacred to him, that of plants and animals as that of his fellowmen, and when he devoted himself helpfully to all life that is in need of help. Only the universal ethic of the feeling of responsibility in an ever-widening sphere for all that lives--only that ethic can be founded in thought. The ethic of the relation of man to man is not something apart by itself: it is only a particular relation that results from the universal one (Puri, 87).

Ahimsa, or a term meaning to do no harm, is an integral part of the cultivation of compassion within Buddhism. In the Dalai Lama’s quote, ahimsa is not understood as only a passive abstention from causing pain but an active call to alleviate the suffering of all beings. In Mahayana Buddhism the bodhisattva ideal represents the ideal form of compassion. The bodhisattva ideal is the attempt to gain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings rather than oneself.

In the *Jataka Tales*, a Theravadan text describing the Buddha’s previous births (or jati’s), the Buddha “portrays himself as a rabbit, a swan, a fish, a quail, an ape, a woodpecker, an elephant, and a deer...animals are said to have contributed to his desire for nirvana” (Chapple, 22). Depending on an individual’s karmic retribution, an animal can be reborn as a human and a human can be reborn as an animal. It is understood in Buddhism that all life deserves

compassion. Theoretically, if one cultivates authentic compassion, they will also choose not to behave in a way that would damage the earth or the animals on it.

### *Reverence for Nature*

While the Jataka tales are important in conveying Buddha's biography and informing compassion in their readers, they also portray the importance of nature to an engaged spiritual life; appreciations of nature are woven through the narratives. According to Allen Badiner, historical Buddhist communities intentionally placed themselves close to nature; "the early Buddhist communities lived in the forest under large trees, in caves, and in mountainous areas. Directly dependent on nature, they cultivated great respect for the beauty and diversity of their natural surroundings" (Badiner, 9). Symbolically, Buddhists have a strong connection to trees; according to traditional accounts, the Buddha himself was born in a grove of sal trees and consequently gained enlightenment under a bodhi tree (Badiner, 1990). Evidenced by a poem by H.H. 14th Dalai Lama, trees hold a strong significance in historical Buddhist thought:

Under a tree was the great Sage Buddha born  
Under a tree, he overcame passion  
and attained enlightenment  
Under two trees did he pass in Nirvana  
Verily, the Buddha held trees in great esteem  
(from H.H. 14th Dalai Lamas "The Sheltering Tree of Interdependence: A Buddhist Monk's Reflections on Ecological Responsibility," as quoted on page 107 of Puri, 2006).

Buddhist tradition also mandates compassion for wild animals; "'Do not kill;' this precept is not merely a legalistic prohibition, but a realization of our affinity with all who share the gift of life...Those who make their living directly or indirectly from killing animals will experience the karmic consequences" (Badiner, 10). I will return to the Buddhist concept of animals while discussing Buddhist conceptions of food and vegetarianism later on in this section.

### *Synthesis of Buddhism and Ecology*

Buddhism views nature as dynamic and kinetic, therefore unable to be controlled (Kaza & Kraft, 2000). However, "though change is inherent in nature, Buddhism believes that natural processes are affected by the morals of man" (de Silva, 92). This relationship is depicted in the ancient Buddhist legend that states that the world physically degenerates in accordance with the morality of its inhabitants. According to Buddhism, in order to cultivate sustainability on the whole, we must first cultivate personal sustainability (Tucker & Williams, xxi).

## American Socially Engaged Buddhism and the Environmental Crisis

### *Definition*

*Socially Engaged Buddhism*, as a specified movement, is a relatively recent phenomenon. Socially engaged Buddhism is: “a contemporary form of Buddhism that engages actively yet nonviolently with the social, economic, political, social, and ecological problems of society” (King, 1). While Buddhism has always prescribed a moral ethic, the explicit application of this ethic to the social and environmental issues is what makes socially engaged Buddhism a different, modern phenomenon. While the concept of engaged Buddhism began in Vietnam, its influence has reached the West through several important figures and establishments whose ideologies are worth mentioning here. Thich Naht Hanh, Gary Snyder and Joanna Macy stand apart as being particularly noteworthy here. Advocacy groups, including the Zen Peacemakers based in Massachusetts and the Buddhist Peace Fellowship based in California, have also formed around the idea of socially engaged Buddhism and advocacy. The emergence of these figures and groups illustrate ways that Buddhist practice can contribute to a desire for social and ecological justice and provide moral imperative to act on those desires in meaningful ways.

### *Thich Nhat Hanh*

Between 1964 and 1968 Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk and the founding proponent of engaged Buddhism, began the Tiep Hen Order or “Order of Interbeing.” Within the Tiep Hen Order there are two important vows one must make:

1. “I vow to develop my compassion in order to love and protect the life of people, animals, plants, and minerals.”
2. “I vow to develop understanding in order to be able to love and live in harmony with people, animals, plants, and minerals” (Hanh, 89).

Following these vows are the fourteen mindfulness trainings that can be found in Appendix B. This order makes social and environmental harmony a priority. It was established as a response to global suffering regarding war, poverty, and ecological damage. Mainly, this order was created in resistance to the Vietnam War that was causing massive suffering and ecological degradation in the 1960’s. Thich Nhat Hanh witnessed the extreme suffering of his people and his landscape and realized that meditation and prayer were not a complete response to the suffering in his country; additionally, Thich Nhat Hanh believed that there was a need to *act*. For

Hanh, “engaged Buddhism is just Buddhism. If you practice Buddhism in your family, in society, it is engaged Buddhism” (Rothberg, 273). So, what “engaged” Buddhism means more broadly is the obligation of the practitioner to truly acknowledge the interpenetration of all beings and make explicit commitments to relieve suffering, both socially and ecologically. What is also implied by the designation of “engaged” Buddhism is to make the teachings of Buddhism more available to the lay community.

The historical context within which socially engaged Buddhism arose (the China/Tibet conflict, America’s counter-culture, boom of technological advance creating the depletion of ‘resources’ and the pollution of our food, air and water) created a platform on which a strong presence of resistance and spiritual strength was needed, and Thich Nhat Hanh created that imperative with his concept of engaged Buddhism.

#### *Gary Snyder*

In America, an early proponent of the socially engaged Buddhism movement was Gary Snyder, famous Zen Buddhist and beat poet of the 1950’s. During the period when engaged Buddhism was coming to the West, “Snyder was probably the most vocal in spelling out the links between Buddhist practice and ecological activism” (Kaza, 162). Snyder’s thoughts on nature spread rapidly through his poetry and through wilderness characters such as Japhy Ryder portrayed by Jack Kerouac in the book *Dharma Bums*, portraying a passionate Zen Buddhist with a desire to live simply in the woods. Gary Snyder’s “Smokey the Bear” sutra famously evidences his dedication to wildlife protection, deep ecology and infusion of Zen ethics. “Smokey” is depicted as a reincarnation of the Great Sun Buddha whose environmental concerns are communicated in the form of a Buddhist sutra. Gary Snyder was also a proponent of the Deep Ecology movement, a contemporary philosophy that urges people to consider their relationship to the earth.

#### *Joanna Macy*

Joanna Macy is a scholar, eco-philosopher, spiritual activist and engaged Buddhist that encourages the protection of the environment. In her book *World as lover, world as self: Courage for Global Justice and Ecological Renewal*, Macy points out the ways in which the human connection with the earth is undeniable and how that connection can inspire both spiritual growth and ecological renewal. Joanna Macy regards socially engaged Buddhism as the latest

“wheel” of Buddhism. So far, in Buddhist history, there have been three substantial “vehicles” of the Dharma: early Buddhism: *Hinayana* (or “narrow vehicle”), reform Buddhism: *Mahayana* (or “great vehicle”), and syncretic Buddhism: *Vajrayana* (or “diamond vehicle”) (Queen, 1). Joanna Macy and some others see socially engaged Buddhism as the *Navayana*, or “new vehicle” of Buddhism. She also describes this particular moment in history as the “Great Turning,” a much needed paradigm shift that will help alleviate ecological and social suffering. Macy recognizes the “Great Turning” as a transformational moment in human history similar in scope to the century-long Agricultural Revolution and the decade-long Industrial Revolution, both of which had enormous impacts on human society and the environment. She believes that this third great revolution, or “Great Turning,” must happen very fast in order for it to have as significant of an impact. For this to happen, Macy quotes Thich Nhat Hanh when he says, “we have to listen to the earth crying” (Macy, 95). Also, we must question our modern concept of the self:

The crisis that threatens our planet, whether seen in its military, ecological, or social aspect, derives from a dysfunctional and pathological notion of the self. It derives from a mistake about our place in the order of things. It is the delusion that the self is so separate and fragile that we must delineate and defend its boundaries; that it is so small and so needy that we must endlessly acquire and endlessly consume; and that as individuals, corporations, nation-states, or a species, we can be immune to what we do to other beings (Macy, 152).

For Macy, a move from the conventional notion of the self, with Buddhism as a guide, will propel an environmental ethic. Macy, in addition to her doctoral work on Buddhism and Systems Theory and her various published articles, also takes an active position in helping guide people out of despair and into a place of deeper connection; “working with John Seed, a Buddhist Australian



**Photograph 6: “Pennies for Plants” at Vermont Zen Center**

rainforest activist, they developed the ritual “Council of All Beings,” which helps give a voice to those without one, and other guided meditations to engage the attention and imagination on behalf of all beings” (Kaza, 164). Additionally, Macy holds several workshops and classes “leading people through their environmental despair by steadily reinforcing ways to work

together and build more functional and healing relationships with the natural world” (Kaza, 167). Her ethic is heavily influenced by Buddhist philosophy and practice.

#### *Other Leaders and their Contributions*

Other important leaders in American engaged Buddhism are John Daido Looi of the Mountains and Rivers Order, Robert Aitken Roshi of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, Bernie Glassman of the Zen Peacemakers, Roshi Philip Kapleau of the Rochester Zen Center in New York and Sunyana Graef of the Vermont Zen Center. Currently, there are online forums that help connect engaged Buddhists such as the Green Sangha: Inspiring Awakened Action ([greensanga.org](http://greensanga.org)). Not only do these people and communities garner strength for the movement, but their actions have made significant strides in environmental activism.

An example of important environmental Buddhist activism are the animal cruelty exposes done by Brad Miller and Vanya Palmers, students at the San Francisco Zen Center. As members of the *Buddhists Concerned for Animals*, they made efforts to expose the suffering of animals raised for slaughter in factory farms (Kaza, 2000). Brad Miller eventually went on to found the *Humane Farming Association* that currently has 190,000 members. Not only does this group defend the rights of animals, but also the rights of human beings and the environment; the association spreads awareness and works to block dangerous chemicals from entering the food stream and damaging human health and the environment. According to King, “their most successful program has been their Boycott Veal campaign, which has reduced the sales of veal by seventy percent in the United States” (King, 135).

In addition to these examples, American Buddhists have been actively engaged with nuclear disarmament and waste efforts, water and land conservation, recycling, the promotion of organic farming, and sustainable forestry movements (Kaza, 2000). It is evident from these various examples that an environmental ethic is not only theoretical but has found relevance with contemporary Buddhist advocacy today.



## Buddhist Perspectives on Food

“Food occupies a central place in Buddhist philosophy and is understood in a broader sense than merely the material” (Khare, 187). There are many specific Buddhist prescriptions directly related to dietary practices as well as Buddhist precepts that implicitly relate to diet. There are many ways that Buddhism has informed specific eating habits amongst its practitioners. The literature describes these ways as mainly consisting of the following: mindfulness approaches, the emphasis on a ‘middle way,’ attitudes towards animals vis-à-vis the concept of non-harm, and food justice.



**Photograph 7: Food offering at Kagyu Thubten Choling**

### *Mindfulness Approaches*

Susan Albers, Doctor of Psychology, outlines Buddhist connections to eating practices in her book *Eating Mindfully: How to End Mindless Eating and Enjoy a Balanced Relationship with Food*. This book is intended as a guide for healthy eating with the wisdom of Buddhism as its foundation. It is helpful as an introduction to Buddhist philosophies regarding food and, consequently, the environment. The book is split into four parts, all centered on the Buddhist precept of *mindfulness*. These parts include: Mindfulness of the Mind, Mindfulness of the Body, Mindfulness of Feelings, and Mindfulness of Thoughts. Albers states that simply by being mindful, healthy eating habits will naturally emerge; that is, healthy for your body as well as healthy for the earth.

Dr. Jan Chozen Bays, a physician and sensei, also has important insights that connect Buddhist practice and mindful eating and outlines these in her book (2009) *Mindful Eating: A Guide to Rediscovering a Healthy and Joyful Relationship with Food*. Bays points to seven main reasons that Americans overeat (eyes, mind, heart, etc.) and counters these with Buddhist doctrines that try and remove attachments and teach mindfulness.

In the *Satipatthana Sutta*, the Buddha outlined the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (Albers, 9). Mindfulness around eating means knowing when you are hungry and knowing when

you are full, having full awareness on the body. This awareness is compromised under the influence of drugs, caffeine and alcohol; they “reduce [one’s] ability to describe and observe [one’s] body sensations...they alter and skew the precision, clarity, and purity of sensation that is necessary for mindful eating” (Albers, 148). Meditation helps to cultivate this awareness.

Many of Albers’ insights are to help guide the readers towards a healthier, more balanced relationship with food. This balance can be seen as a “Middle Way” of eating: not too much, not too little.

Mindfulness practice, as a central practice in Buddhism, can also be transmitted and cultivated through the act of cooking. Zen master Dogen, a soto Japanese teacher alive in the 11th century, provides a manifesto on the practice of mindful cooking. The book *Nothing is Hidden: essays on Zen Master Dogen’s Instructions for the Cook*, written in 2001, provides contemporary commentary on master Dogen’s ancient teachings. Master Dogen considers the tenzo, the monastic cook, the most important person in the monastery. Such a belief is held because the health of the monastic community is dependent on the tenzo’s cooking (Fraser, 2009). Because the food is considered so important, cultivating mindful cooking practices is centrally importance.

Cooking can also serve as an important meditation on impermanence, interconnection and transformation. In an article in *Tricycle* magazine, Bernie Glassman says,

Our body is an ingredient. Our relationships are ingredients. Our thoughts, our emotions, and all of our actions are ingredients...With practice, our territory expands and all the objects of the world become our ingredients...As we see ourselves as the world, as we see the oneness of life, the whole world becomes available. Then the Zen cook knows that every aspect of life is an ingredient of the supreme meal...Our natural tendency is not to use ingredients we think might ruin our meal. We want to throw them away or maybe move them way back on the shelf, out of sight, behind everything else. But Dogen instructs us to take the ingredients we think are going to ruin our meal and figure out how to use them so that they improve it (Glassman, 2006).

This quotation draws attention to the metaphoric connections between Buddhist ethics of interconnectedness, optimism and cooking.

Another, more recent article in *Tricycle* magazine titled “The Joy of Mindful Cooking: practicing awareness in the Kitchen” by Laura Fraser discusses the ways in which she has learned to integrate cooking as a part of a meditative practice. In her narrative, Fraser spends a weekend with a Buddhist couple that studied at the Tassajara Zen Mountain Center, known for its recipes and practices surrounding food. These cooks (or “tenzos”) Fraser visits “don’t just practice cooking; they’ve made cooking a practice, one that benefits not only what is on their

plates and in their bellies but what is in their hearts” (Fraser, 64). Important aspects of their cooking involve attentive mindfulness practice and an emphasis on local and organic ingredients. Mindfulness in the kitchen, according to the Buddhist couple, is about

simply being present when you cook, fully engaged with the food and your relationship to it, from the earth it was grown in to the table. It’s being aware of the food with all your senses, and of how you transform it with your hands, knives, herbs, and heat--making it taste alive, nourishing yourself and those who eat your meals. This awareness can be in bringing the activity alive and giving it energy, vitality, and exuberance (Fraser, 2009).

Tenzos believe that in the act of cooking there are important energy transfers happening, from the food to your hands and from your hands to the food. Because of this, it is important to make sure that positive and vital energies are being transferred rather negative energies that may affect the food and its consumer. Fraser quotes Edward Espe Brown, American Zen teacher, tenzo and master bread-baker at the Tassajara Zen Center, as saying:

The real magic is that you grow kind, generous, and larger-hearted in the process of preparing food--because you give your heart to the activity. You are realizing yourself by realizing food. Instead of looking good, you are becoming you (Fraser, 116).

Edward Espe Brown was also the focus of a movie called *How to Cook your Life*. The movie is a inspiration for mindful, balanced cooking and eating using Buddhist wisdom as a guide. The beginning to his bread-baking career was at Tassajara, a Zen healing center and monastery in Carmel Valley, California and a subset of the San Francisco Zen Center. Brown discusses what it is like to be a part of a lineage of tenzos, describing the important spirits passed on from one to the next. He says, “we are cooking the food, but in terms of practice, the food is cooking us” (Dorrie, 2007). Here, the food is considered a vehicle of practice. Brown discusses important aspects of cooking in alignment with Zen ethics; this includes the importance of mindfulness, functional silence, leaving no trace, avoiding waste, and gratitude for the labors that brought you the food to begin with. He advises the viewer by saying:

If you are interested in actually taking care of food, of actually cooking food, of enjoying food, of enjoying food in the company of family and friends, getting together with others, nourishing yourself, nourishing others, consider where it comes from. It doesn’t come out of a package. That is convenient, but nourishing yourself and others does not come out of a package. It comes out of your heart; it comes out of connecting with food, connecting with others. It is important to consider: is food precious? Worth caring about? Are you? If you can take care of food as though it was your eyesight, you can take care of yourself. Find something precious and honor it, and respect it and take care of it. You can start with your food. Cooking brings your hands nourishment, it lets your hands do something. Our hands don’t get to do stuff anymore! If your hands are happy your body is happy. (Dorrie, 2007)

It is very clear from his testimony that the act of cooking and the Dharma are inextricably linked; that mindful cooking should be an important meditative practice.

### *Middle Way Approaches*

Another important Buddhist precept, the Middle Way, states that in order for spiritual growth to happen, one cannot practice stark asceticism nor vast consumption, a practice in between is the vehicle of liberation. The story of the Buddha's upbringing and early years of spiritual practice characterize this Middle Way. He was born into royalty and experienced abundant and rich foods, growing plump as a result. In search for enlightenment he practiced fasting, but soon realized that it only made him weak. As a result, "he learned that both too much and too little food are detrimental to health, well-being [and most importantly, spiritual growth]" (Albers, 7). While the consumption of food is necessary for spiritual growth, the Buddhist practitioner must avoid extremes of denial and indulgence. This direct connection between mindfulness in diet to spiritual growth makes food practices a vitally important part of the Buddhist prescription.

The Middle Way approach also applies to the flavor and temperature of food; excessively hot, cold, spicy, or bland things must be eaten in a balanced manner; "both excesses are harmful because they disturb the humeral balance of the body. Since food ideally must be healthy, it is necessary to avoid excessively hot or cold foods: or at least, an excess of one must be countered by an excess of the other...this echoes the theory of equilibrium found in the classical texts" (Khare, 186).

According to monastic guidelines, food should be consumed merely out of necessity, not for enjoyment. An important distinction is that Buddhist belief prescribes "a very high valuation of food as subsistence as well as an equally strong devaluation of food as having any significance beyond the purely subsistive...subsistence is understood as a necessary condition of proper contemplation and mental discipline which leads to enlightenment" (Khare, 188). To indulge in the craving for food or the pleasure of it would violate these Buddhist values.

An example of a Buddhist practice in eating that emphasizes the Middle Way in practice is the traditional meditative Zen practice of *Oryoki*, which literally means "just enough." The main focus of this ritual is mindfulness surrounding eating through a series of precise movements and the involvement of ritualized bowls, utensils and prayers. The *Oryoki* meal gatha used at the Zen Mountain Monastery in Mt. Tremper, NY can be found in Appendix C. In the 2003

Mountain Journal (the Mountains and Rivers Order's bi-annual journal) entitled "Dharma Food," a compilation of traditional meditations and contemporary reflections on food and Buddhist practice, there is a description of the Oryoki. In a *Dharma Talk*, Geoffery Shugen Arnold says:



**Photograph 8: Cookbooks at Anadaire**

Because the taking of food is both a deeply personal --indeed primal-- matter, appealing directly to the satisfaction of our desires, and because it serves as such a powerful metaphor for the way we each strive to be satisfied, we practice Oryoki (Arnold, 17).

The Oryoki ritual helps to cultivate compassion, gratitude, and knowledge of what is *just enough*. One important line of the Oryoki Meal Gatha says, "seventy-two labors brought us this food, we should know how it comes to us...As we receive this offering we should consider whether our virtue and practice deserve it." Implicit in these lines is a gratitude for the sun, soil, farmers, cooks, and servers involved in making meals possible as well as a deep consideration of one's individual role in it all. While the food served during Oryoki can vary, meals usually consist of modest servings of rice, soup and vegetables.

#### *Ahimsa or Non-Harm*

An important Buddhist value with direct relevance to diet is *ahimsa* or non-violence; "its most notable application comes in the form of vegetarianism" (Chapple, xiii). Roshi Philip Kapleau of Rochester Zen Center is known for his detailed discourses on the Buddhist prescription of vegetarianism. There are, however, several examples of meat-eating Buddhists, especially in the Tibetan lineage where the traditional climate could never support an all-vegetarian diet. India, though, the ancient home of Buddhism, has traditionally been a non-meat-eating culture. According to Chapple, "most schools of Buddhism uphold the notion that animal life must be protected, though the degree to which this is practiced varies widely from country to country" (Chapple, 22). A foundation for the precept of non-violence towards animals comes from the Buddhist belief in reincarnation and the wish to alleviate suffering.

The *Lankavatara Sutra*, an important Mahayana text, has a number of verses that advocate for vegetarianism:

-Meat is not agreeable to the wise; it has a nauseating odor, it causes a bad reputation, it is food for the carnivorous; I say this Mahamati: it is not to be eaten.

-[The meat-eater] is ill-smelling, contemptuous, and born deprived of intelligence, he will be born again and again among the families of the Candala, the Pukkasa, and the Domba.

-[Meat-eating] is forbidden by me everywhere and all the time for those who are abiding in compassion; [he who eats meat] will be born in the same palace as the lion, tiger, wolf, etc.

-Therefore, do not eat meat which will cause terror among people, because it hinders the truth of emancipation; [not to eat meat---] this is the mark of the wise (Chapple, 28).

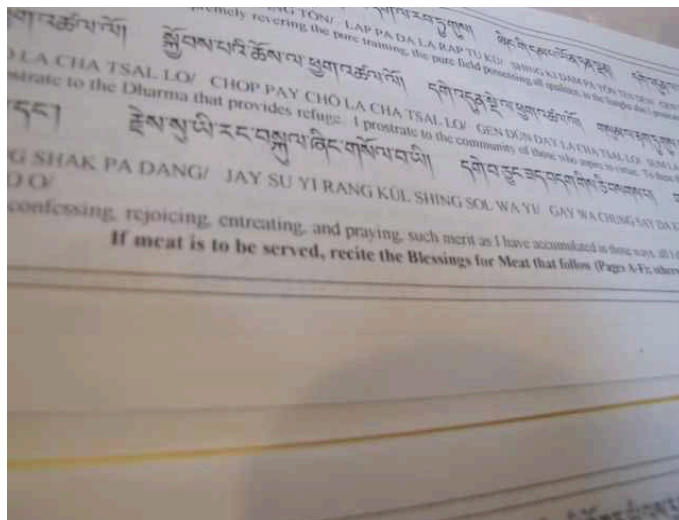
Although these texts are considered ancient, their prescriptions can be readily applied today at a time where animals are exploited for human consumption. Traditionally, in Buddhism, respectful treatment of animals and one another is of the utmost spiritual importance.

### Vegetarianism

The most extensive literature in regards to Buddhist dietary practice addresses the issue of meat eating. Most notably, there are four books that specifically advocate for vegetarianism

from a Buddhist point of view:

*Vegetarianism: A Buddhist View* by Bodhipaksa (2009); *Ahimsa: Buddhism and the Vegetarian Ideal* by Bodo Balsys (2004); and two books by Roshi Philip Kapleau entitled *To Cherish All Life: A Buddhist Case for Becoming Vegetarian* (1982) and *To Cherish All Life: A Buddhist View of Animal Slaughter and Meat Eating* (1981). While most of these books engage in an argument against meat eating as a result of karma and the undue suffering it



Photograph 9: Meat prayer at Kagyu Thubten Choling

causes, several also address the ecological implications of a meat eating diet. These are the two main frames within the Buddhist literature that depict vegetarianism as a part of a Buddhist ethic.

There have also been a number of interpretations to the exceptions of the non-meat eating rule. Depending on which text a practitioner follows (in this case specifically either the Pali

Canon of the Theravada tradition or the Mahayana Mahaparinirvana Sutta of the Mahayana tradition), there are different exceptions made for meat-eating occasions; it is thought that this distinction comes from the differences in each tradition's story of the Buddha's death (Kapleau, 1981). Scholars of the Theravada tradition (and thus according to the Pali Canon text) assert that the Buddha died from eating a poisonous mushroom while scholars of the Mahayana tradition (and thus according to the Mahayana sutras) assert that the Buddha died from eating a piece of pork (Kapleau, 1981). According to the Pali Canon, taken to be the literal word of the Buddha, when receiving small scraps of meat in the form of alms, its consumption is spiritually and morally acceptable;

In the statements of the Pali texts, which presume to be a record of the Buddha's words [and] are accepted at face value, the Buddha allowed the eating of animal flesh in all cases except when one has reason to believe that the animal one is about to eat was slaughtered expressly for one's dinner (Kapleau, 3).

According to the *Mahayana Nirvana Sutta* (a text also taken to be the literal word of the Buddha), eating meat is strictly forbidden (Phelps, 70). According to this text: "flesh eating is contrary to the spirit and intent of the first precept since it makes one an accessory to the slaying of animals and therefore contravenes the compassionate concern for all life that lies at the core of Buddhism" (Kapleau, 3). Depending on different cultural, political, and spatial contexts, these texts have had distinctively different interpretations throughout the years.

It is important to note that Buddhist dietary practices vary widely depending on whether you are a part of the monastic community or the lay community; this diversity applied historically and still does among contemporary American Buddhist practitioners. Buddhist monastics are held to a much higher standard in following Buddhist doctrine. As a Buddhist lay person, one would not necessarily be directed towards what or how to eat. Many Buddhists do not follow historical prescriptions regarding food.

Regardless, there has been in the past and there exists today a socially engaged Buddhism on behalf of the lives of animals; "this implies an end to the use of animals for human pleasure or benefit, the protection of the environment, the preservation of wilderness, and the sustainable use of natural resources" (Phelps, 164-5). Buddhism is inherently kind to animals based, broadly, on the following features:

1. Buddhist recognition of the continuity between humans and other animals
2. The prominence accorded the virtue of compassion as the primary ethical value
3. The existence of the moral guideline known as the First Precept [*ahimsa*]

4. The high profile of other animals in the tradition (Waldau, 138).

The attitude towards life forms other than human beings is critical in determining eating habits.

Not only do Buddhists often refrain from eating meat because of the violent and karmic implications, but also for reasons associated with the body and the environment. Many people in the Western world, not only Buddhists, abstain from eating meat because of the considerable amount of damage that has resulted from a conventional meat eating diet. The current meat industry in our country uses unnecessary amounts of water, causes devastating deforestation, produces toxic waste and pollution, and is the reason for excessive oil and energy consumption. One Buddhist author speaks to these acts of violence in his book *Ahimsa: Buddhism and the Vegetarian Ideal*:

The consequent freeing of land [clearing of forests for the grazing of livestock, etc.] could be increasingly used for more crops of local green produce to feed more people better food. It is saddening to think that one of the affects of this modern era to be kept is the farming for mass commercial carcass produce...a system which increases the residual toxins in the body, is far outdated by saner methods of natural farming, of biodynamics, organic farming and permaculture. Is it not so hard to see that the environmental we are living in affects us? Are we so childish to think that the environment is so huge as to be unaffected by our actions upon it? (Balsys, 102)

Bodhipaksa is a trained Veterinarian and practicing Buddhist from Scotland now living and teaching in New Hampshire. His book, *Vegetarianism: A Buddhist View* (2009), provides up-to-date statistics that expose the inefficiencies of a conventional meat-eating diet. He begins by explaining how wasteful the meat industry is of resources:

It has been estimated that to produce a kilogram of grain-fed beef needs at least 1,000,000 litres of water and four kilograms of grain...a kilogram of beef is responsible for the equivalent of the amount of carbon dioxide emitted by the average European car every 250 kilometres and burns enough energy to light a 100-watt bulb for nearly twenty days (Bodhipaksa, 52).

Crude oil, too, is exploited in the industrial meat industry: “an intensively-reared steer requires twenty-eight gallons of crude oil over its lifetime for the transportation of the animal themselves as well as the massive amounts of food they eat” (Bodhipaksa, 52). To some Buddhists, the relationship between meat-eating and environmental degradation maintains a moral obligation toward vegetarianism.

Another reason why Buddhists abstain from meat eating is the threat it poses to their health. High rates of cancers, low life expectancy, and high cholesterol are but a few of the health concerns for those who have a high meat diet (Kipleau, 1981). The amount of antibiotics and hormones conventionally fed to animals destined for slaughter have had adverse effects on



those consuming the animal such as birth defects, lower immune systems, and early thelarche and menarche in young girls, are associated with a high conventional meat diet (Bodhipaksa, 2009).

### *Food Justice*

Contemporary Buddhists are taking responsibility for their health, the welfare of animals, and the environment by making individual choices about food consumption; “many people are turning to vegetarianism and veganism as more compassionate choices for animals and ecosystems...others are committing to eat only organically grown food, in order to support pesticide-free soil and healthy farming” (Kaza, 173). As individuals and as members of the Buddhist community at large, practitioners are realigning their food consumption habits with a more Buddhist ethic as an effective way to help protect human health and the environment. Many monasteries and meditation centers have made food justice an important part of their mission statement.

A division of the San Francisco Zen Center, the Green Gulch Farm Zen Center in Muir Beach, California stands out in its effort to promote organic farming under the direction of a Buddhist ethic. In addition to acting as a traditional (Japanese Soto) Zen meditation and training center, the GGFZC provides classes and apprenticeships on organic farming. Through their farm, GGFZC offers environmental education to children and they also sell their produce at the local farmers market. At GGFZC, these activities are seen as a way to deepen and enliven their Buddhist practice. In addition, from their website: “the garden at Green Gulch offers us an opportunity to bring our meditation and work practice into relationship with the lively world of plants” (GGFZC, 2011). Other monasteries and Buddhist organizations are also making food a top priority.

### Synthesis

The literature shows that Buddhism can be used to illuminate a holistic and therefore ecological way of viewing the world; the modern and ancient Buddhist practices of oneness, karmic retribution, and non-violence (*ahimsa*) are helpful in understanding ecology and harmony in the natural world.

The relationship between cultural ethos, our earth, and our bodies can all be evaluated in the study of dietary prescriptions within Buddhism and the effect they have had on contemporary American practitioners.

Because there have been several interpretations of how Buddhism relates to ecology, food habits and attitudes, the purpose of my research is simply to explore the different environmental aspects of Buddhist philosophy and whether or not they are relevant in guiding environmental ethics in today's American practitioners. Methods of food production, procurement, cooking, eating and disposal served as the primary markers of environmental ethic in my study.



**Photograph 10: Prayer Flags and Stupa at Kagyu Thubten Choling**

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Objectives

My research entailed several objectives. Combining theoretical and field analysis, my goal was to understand several aspects of Buddhist philosophy and action in regards to ecology and food practices. First, it was important to understand the current food system, the history of it, and its environmental implications. Next, it was important to get a general idea of the connections between religion and ecology, and what religions today are doing in response to environmental degradation.

Focusing on Buddhism, there was a lot to explore within the theoretical and practical connections between its philosophy and the behavior of practicing Buddhists today. To narrow it down, I chose to focus on contemporary American Buddhism, knowing that the agricultural model in our country makes eating an ethical consideration. In the pursuit of understanding the ways in which practicing Buddhists in American connect with their environment and their food, I surveyed practicing Buddhists as well as interviewed them and performed site visits.

The main objectives of the field research were to speak with American Buddhist practitioners today (both lay and monk) and see if their food ethic reflects their absorption of Buddhist precepts. Another objective was to see if Buddhists have an inclination towards environmentally/ethically sound eating choices as a result of their Buddhist practice and understanding



**Photograph 11: Stupa and Chime at Zen Mountain Monastery**

### Hypothesis

As a result of Buddhist doctrine and prescription, there is a particular food ethic that exists among American Buddhist practitioners that is ecologically sound.

## Null Hypothesis

Theoretical Buddhist doctrine does not significantly affect a particular diet in American Buddhist practitioners, whether ecologically sound or not.

## Question

My question is anthropological in nature, in trying to understand what and how people in this country, during this particular historical-cultural epoch, who consider themselves Buddhist, think about food. What is the relationship between eco-consciousness and food choices among contemporary Buddhist practitioners in North America?

## Sub-question

Do the findings of Kristin Steele's 1999 thesis withstand the ten years that have passed since her study? What are the differences and similarities between her study and mine?

## Methods

How did I answer my questions?

- Literature Review
- Interviews: both within site visits and via e-mail/telephone
- Survey questionnaire

## Description of Methods

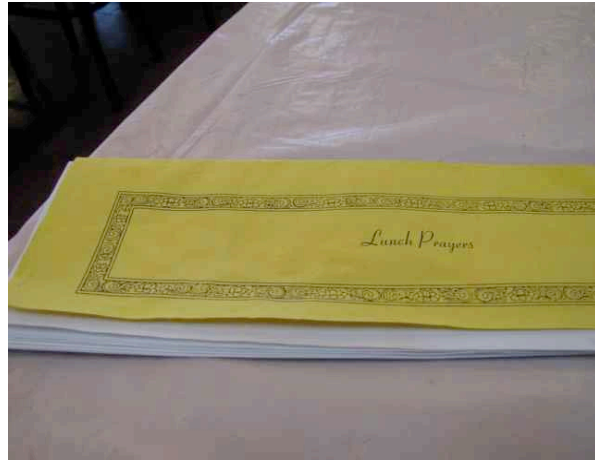
While exploring the dietary beliefs and attitudes among contemporary American Buddhists and how they might relate to an environmental ethic, I pursued both qualitative and quantitative data; a strategy known as "mixed-methods" (Denscombe, 2007). I researched existing data as well as created my own through interviews, site visits and a detailed survey questionnaire. This strategy

applies to research that combines alternative approaches within a single research project...it refers to a research strategy that crosses the boundaries of conventional paradigms of research by deliberately combining methods drawn from different traditions with different underlying assumptions" (Denscombe, 107).

I used mixed methods approach in the hopes of gleaning as much breadth and depth as I could.

In order to accurately reach my research objectives, though, I would have had to interview hundreds (even thousands) of practitioners throughout the United States of varying

ages, genders, socio-economic classes and geographical locations. Having so little time and such little resources, there were substantial limits to my research and ultimately to my thesis. So, to be as accurate as humanly possible, I engaged theoretical research, conducted interviews, visited Buddhist centers in the Northeast, and broadcasted a survey questionnaire as near and wide as I could. Also, it is important to note the significance of Kristin Steele's 1999 thesis as my primary frame. Using her thesis as a guide to both my methods and the organization of the final document were tremendously helpful.



**Photograph 12: Lunch Prayers at Kagyu Thubten Choling**

## Interviews

### *Site Visits*

Conducting interviews provided a voice to the practicing Buddhists that were really the central focus of my research. According to Martyn Denscombe (Denscombe, 2007), the benefit of interviews is that they allow for flexibility and provide answers to direct questions. The most thorough interviews I did were conducted in person during a site visit. Traveling to various sites in the Northeast was helpful as it provided a context in which the interviewees were eating, gave me the ability to engage in meals with them, as well as made it possible to take the photographs that supplement my thesis layout. The places that I visited were: Zen Mountain Monastery of Mt. Tremper, NY, Anadaire of Saxton's River, VT, Kagyu Thubten Choling of Wappinger's Falls, NY, and Vermont Zen Center of Shelburne, VT. As a result of the traveling, the interview experiences also doubled as field observation and participant observation. The case-study approach I used here emphasizes:

depth of study rather than breadth of study; the particular rather than the general; relationships/processes rather than outcomes and end-products; holistic views rather than isolated factors; natural settings rather than artificial situations; multiple sources rather than one research method (Denscombe, 37).

As Denscombe (Denscombe, 2007) illustrates, interviews have their own characteristic pros and cons. The pros listed in his book are the following: depth of information, personal insights, simple equipment, flexibility, high response rates and validity.

I knew from the beginning that my interview would be conducted in an open-ended format because I wanted the flexibility that provided. Also, I wanted to create a space that would allow the interviewee rather myself to guide the conversation. I went into each interview with a rough set of questions that can be found in Appendix D. I intentionally ordered my questions the way that a conversation would flow, starting with easier, more logistical questions and progressing into deeper more philosophical questions. Inadvertently, my first interview at the Zen Mountain Monastery acted as my pilot interview. Additional questions that were added to the following interviews included more introductory questions, doing more of the talking in the beginning, asking more questions about cooking and mindfulness, and making certain questions more sophisticated and deliberate (for example, using Buddhist terminology). These were aspects I learned from experience.

Going into the interviews, I certainly had a very basic guideline for questions, but most of the time our conversations flowed from one relevant topic to the next. Some of the time there were diversions from the relevant material, but as I was usually not constrained by time during the interviews, I was happy to discuss other subjects with the interviewees such as their personal history. This format is designated as the “semi-structured” interview, allowing the conversations to progress flexibly and giving me the ability to learn things that I would have otherwise known to ask about. Because food and people generally have such an intimate relationship, each individual that I interviewed not only had different answers to my structured questions, but different additional information that became essential to my research. According to Denscombe, the semi-structured interview has “more emphasis on the *interviewee* elaborating points of interest” (176 [my italics]).

Conveniently, the Northeast is home to a number of Buddhist monasteries, meditation centers and Buddhist institutes. I had originally planned to travel to at least five places. I sent requests to the following places:

- the Zen Mountain Monastery of Mt. Tremper, NY (Zen Buddhism)
- the Kagyu Monastery of Woodstock, NY (Tibetan Buddhism)
- the Karma Choling Shambhala Meditation Center in Barnet, VT (Tibetan Buddhism)
- the Zen Center of New York City in Brooklyn, NY (Zen Buddhism)
- Glen Ard Abbey of Saxton’s River, VT (American Celtic Buddhism)

These choices were made as a result of their location and the fact that they represented at least three Buddhist lineages. I found these places because of their proximity to my homes in upstate New York and Burlington, VT. Also, I had previous connections to them as a result of past projects and interests in North American Buddhism. Unfortunately, only two of these places answered my request. I found other places on the web and contacted them. While there were a multitude of unanswered e-mails and requests, eventually the following four places were receptive:

<u>Place</u>	<u>Person/s</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Date</u>
Zen Mountain Monastery	Konrad Ryushin Marchaj, Roshi	Abbott	January 5, 2011
Glen Ard Abbey/Anadaire	Venerable Seonaidh Perks & Sister Gryphon	Abbott Abbess	February 12, 2011
Kagyu Thubten Chöling Monastery and Retreat Center	Thubten Noel McKenna	Teacher and Tenzo for retreatants	February 25, 2011
Vermont Zen Center	Bonnie Coulter	Member and Tenzo	March 9, 2011

*Table 1: List of on-site interviews*

At each place I was able to speak with more than one person. It was in speaking with the actual practitioners themselves and being able to engage in meals with them that really exposed the reality of Buddhist food practices. From a face-to-face interview and a site visit I was able to see, hear, and feel the interviewee. In order to stay focused during the site visits, I approached them while looking for particular behaviors:

- Eating practices (ritual, prayer, offerings, cleanliness etc.)
- General attitudes (food as blessed, sacred, inconsequential, instrumental, ambrosia)
- Food choice (food items served: conventional, vegetarian, organic, locally grown)
- Overall environmental ethic at center (gardening, composting, emphasis on outdoors)

### *E-mail and Phone Interviews*

In addition to site visit interviews, I was also able to get in touch with various practitioners, teachers, and chefs via e-mail and telephone. These people were contacted as a result of informal conversations, explicit web research, and as replacements of what would have been face-to-face interviews. The purpose of these additional interviews was to further deepen my understanding and expand my breadth as much as possible within the limits I've discussed concerning time and budget. I was able to contact a range of people of varying positions in Vermont, Massachusetts, Wisconsin and Oregon. After countless e-mail correspondences, I was able to glean a wide range of information from these people. Some people were very interested in the topic while others only wrote a few sentences in response. Depending the person, I tailored each prompt to the individual that I was sending it to. Because of this, the questions to each person were slightly different; mainly, they focused on the individuals involvement in Buddhism, their relationship to the natural world, their personal food choices, the food policies within their community (where they get their food, if they have a garden, what percentage is organic versus conventional), and what other practices surround food in their lives (prayer, ritual, composting, community cooking, etc.) Eventually, I obtained information from the following five people via phone and e-mail:

<u>Person</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Date</u>
Lisa Harris	Karme Choling Shambhala Meditation Center, Vermont	Executive Chef	March 8, 2011
Dana Kojun Hull	Great Vow Zen Monastery, Oregon	Director of Training	March 8, 2011
Steve Hallquist	Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, Massachusetts	Kitchen Manager	March 3, 2011
Jim Dailey	Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, Massachusetts	Practitioner	February 18, 2011
Natalie Gummer	Beloit College, Wisconsin	Philosophy and Religious Studies Professor	February 16, 2011

*Table 2: List of online/telephone interviews*



## Survey Questionnaire

### *Function*

With a desire to glean further breadth, I also created a survey questionnaire. Denscombe lists the various pros and cons of survey-strategy research; the pros are as follows: real-world, empirical data, wide and inclusive coverage, often lend themselves to quantitative data subject to statistical analysis, and saves money and time

There are important and affective cons of such research too, though, that are important to note. Denscombe (2007) lists the cons as follows: a tendency to empiricism where the significance of the data can be neglected, the detail and depth of the data is lacking, honesty and accuracy of the responses cannot necessarily be trusted, and surveys can be easily ignored.

With an understanding of these factors, I designed my survey to lend itself to the pros and do everything that I could to avoid the cons. I was also aided by Alan Howard, UVM statistician, and Stephanie Kaza, Environmental Program director in the design of my survey to ensure a higher response rate and to formulate deliberate questions that would help most clearly answer my research objectives. I used the *LimeSurvey* program. The primary function of the questions asked in this survey was to solicit concrete evidence either supporting or confounding my hypothesis. I designed my questions with the general guideline of simplicity, directness, and scale. The survey began with simpler questions such as: “what lineage do you associate with?” and then increased the complexity as the survey went on, asking more open-ended questions such as: In what ways do you consider yourself a practicing Buddhist? The only pilot tests used in the honing of my survey were to Alan Howard (UVM Statistician) and Stephanie Kaza (director of the Environmental Program and practicing Buddhist). Mainly, corrections made after conversations with them had to do with format.

In the second draft of my survey, I numbered the questions for easier reference, I reorganized the order of my questions going from simpler to more complicated, I made the scales fairer, and I included logistical questions at the end such as gender, age, and how they individual found the survey. The full questionnaire can be found in Appendix E.

## *Implementation*

There were several approaches taken in order to broadcast the survey. Alan Howard termed my method “snowball sampling.” This means that I sent out the questionnaire to people that I knew from site visits and requested that they broadcast it further, hoping to reach people that I had never met nor contacted individually. Most significantly and surprisingly helpful in this effort was the use of Facebook. Sister Gryphon, whom I interviewed at Anadaire, posted my survey to her Facebook (not once but twice). It was directly after these posts that I noticed the highest concentrated response rate. I also contacted websites such as dharmanet.org, ecodharma.com, and greensangha.org in hopes that they too would broadcast my survey through their websites. Each place that I visited also posted my survey to their websites. Additionally, friends and family that knew Buddhists were happy to send along my survey link. I also went to greater lengths by joining Buddhist community blogs and requesting that other members of the blog take it if they have time and support what I’m doing. One afternoon I googled one Buddhist center or monastery from each state and sent a request to their contact information; I’m not sure how successful that attempt was, but it illustrates the various routes that I pursued in order to broadcast the questionnaire. The only eligibility needed to take part in my survey was being a practicing Buddhist in the United States. All of these factors contributed to the wide range of practitioners I reached throughout the country. There are a total of 20 questions in the questionnaire.

## Limitations

Due to various constraints, particularly time and money, there were limits to my methods.

## *Time*

I spent the fall of 2010 studying in India in a very integrated program that demanded full mental and emotional attention, making research abroad quite difficult. As a result, a large portion of my research, both theoretical and in the field, were limited to a few short months. I found myself constantly discovering new and relevant resources that made my literature review a constant work in progress; I decided at a certain point that it would benefit me to put a cap on reading. Fortunately, I found this project endlessly interesting. Because of this, though, there were several moments when I had to restrain myself from over-reading. Also, due to a busy schedule involving other challenging classes, discovering ways to manage my time and fitting in

research and travel, was a challenge. With constant networking, however, I did manage to do four site visits, five face-to-face interviews, and five interviews via phone or e-mail. Knowing how much I did fit into such a small window of time, however, definitely revealed how much more I could have accomplished if I'd been able to have an additional couple of months.

### *Weather*

Another important factor that limited the scope of my research was weather. Resulting from such inclement weather this winter, there were trips that needed to be canceled because of the danger posed by driving such long distances. I had an opportunity to travel to Karne Choling Shambhala Meditation Center, a trip that I was very much looking forward to, but it was eventually canceled due to dangerous driving conditions. I was also in very good contact with a man named Glenn from the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies over the course of the semester and had a plan to visit not only BCBS but also the Insight Meditation Society down the road. We had planned to meet originally on February 19th, the weekend of a storm. We rescheduled to meet on March 11th, the date of another large storm. At that time, we decided to forego the visits entirely and set up a Q/A via e-mail, which gave me much less information than I would have otherwise been able to get. Fortunately, though, this provided an opportunity to go down to the Vermont Zen Center in Shelburne, VT instead.

Another weather-related drawback was the season itself. Because all of the sites that I visited were blanketed in snow, I was unable to see certain natural elements of their properties such as vegetable and flower gardens. Because the majority of the places I visited did have gardens, it was unfortunate not to be able to see them and possibly eat some fresh vegetables! Another reason visits during the spring, summer or fall would have benefitted my thesis are the photographs I could have taken.

### *Budget*

Another inevitable drawback was financial. In addition to the lack of time I had, gas prices made access to certain sites and information difficult.

### *Experience*

Because there were not many opportunities for pilot testing my interview or survey questionnaire, there were various things I wish I could have changed that I would only have

known to from prior experience. As my first experience in the field, I wasn't aware of exactly the things I should look for. For example, at the ZMM I didn't ask to look in the kitchen or speak with the chefs. I realized over time that people were very willing to give me small tours around their kitchen facilities, and that chefs were very interested in speaking about their work. This limited the scope of my understanding at ZMM and also limited the number of relevant pictures I could have taken. Also, because ZMM was the most relevant establishment to my research (in terms of its engagement with socially engaged Buddhism and its dedication to environmental stewardship and local food movements), I wish that I had been able to do my site visit there after having learned from the experiences of interviewing elsewhere.

Another element of my methods that could have been improved with more experience was the development of my survey. Also, there are cons inherent to the survey method that caused drawbacks but also were relatively inevitable: one large element was the difficulty in establishing a random survey that made its way to the more diverse areas of the country. A large portion of the people who took my survey represented the Zen lineage. Also, good portion of them were part of already ecologically-minded establishments, thus creating a bias in my data. Question number eight, a question that inquired whether or not their dietary association (vegetarian, vegan, omnivore, etc.) was made before or after becoming a Buddhist, I wished I'd asked for a more detailed answer, being that that question is central to understanding what the moods and motivations surround the food choices among Buddhists, and also to delineate whether it is actually the Buddhism that drives them to make their choices.

## RESULTS

### Site Visits/Interviews

#### *Kagyü Thubten Choling*

Kagyü Thubten Choling, a Tibetan Monastery and retreat center, was the third site that I visited. Based on the tradition of Kyabje Dorje Chang Kalu Rinpoche, Lama Norlha Rinpoche founded the community in 1978 in Wappinger's Falls, New York. The focus of this community is on maintaining traditional Tibetan Buddhist teaching and monastic life as well as offering intensive three-year retreats for serious students of Buddhism.

Noel Thubten McKenna is one of the main teachers and monks at the center. He caretakes for the current three-year male retreat and is also one of the main cooks for the monastery. Additionally, Thubten is a mentor in a correspondence course called the "Dharma Path." Thubten has always related his Buddhist practice to an intense and limitless relationship with the natural world. The moment I asked Thubten about his connection with nature, a smile came across his face:

One of the main thoughts in Buddhism is impermanence, and being able to recognize it. I use looking at the natural world as a support for contemplating impermanence because it is always changing. I love watching how it changes. I love the seasons. All the seasons. I love being able to bear witness to the dynamic nature of things that we usually miss; it is missing that that leads us into suffering. Just noticing how dynamic everything is, is just really precious, and the natural world has helped me realize that.

For him, spiritual practice is connected with everything. In this way, nature is practice and practice is nature.

As a monk and cook, Noel had a lot to say on the links between Buddhism, environmental ethics, and food beliefs and attitudes. Like many communities, Thubten emphasized the frugality of his:

When I am at the grocery store, for example, because I am the cook and kitchen manager, well, we operate on a budget, so though I might prefer to buy organic, locally grown food, I cannot always do that. I have to buy what is on sale. I certainly think about these things, but just *how we survive, paying our bills*, those take precedence sometimes.

Despite the financial limitations, Thubten's food choices are highly influenced by his practice of Buddhism.

In Tibetan Buddhism, the physical body is believed to have different levels of subtlety: there is the gross physical body (bones muscles, blood) in addition to a more subtle body that is made up of energy channels called *lung*. When practicing intensely, or not practicing enough, this lung is thrown off. When the lung is thrown off,



**Photograph 13: Monks in the kitchen at Kagyu Thubten Choling**

it is important to eat food that is both grounding and strong, Thubten tells me. Classically, in Tibetan Buddhism, this means *red meat*. This is something that is prescribed historically and traditionally in Tibetan practice and medicine. Other important foods that ground the lung include root vegetables, fats, and grains, but meat is the classic choice. In this way, Thubten appreciates the importance of maintaining a healthy body for spiritual purposes; eating the right way is the most direct route to a healthy body. So, for Thubten, eating meat (in addition to vegetables, fruits, and grains) is supportive of spiritual growth. As the head chef for the retreatants, who engage in intense practice for long hours and often days at a time, he knows that it is important to offer the men whatever it is that they want, and if that means chocolate cake or macaroni and cheese, then that is what they get.

At Kagyu Thubten Choling, there are various rituals that surround mealtime, some of which I was able to witness. Before a meal is served, two portions are set aside as offerings to the Buddha. After these portions have been ceremoniously offered, there are five to ten minutes of chanting. There are two long lineage prayers, symbolic of offering food to all the lamas and enlightened beings of the lineage. Also, a long sutra is invoked with thanks to the Three Jewels (the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha). After the meal, a ritual called *changbu* occurs. In this ritual, each individual is given a small piece of bread to squeeze and give back in an offering to the *hungry ghosts*, those that suffer from intense hunger and thirst as a result of past karma. These chants are meant primarily to give thanks and to develop compassion.

A photograph of a dining table in a hotel room, set for breakfast. The table is covered with a light-colored, patterned tablecloth. On the table, there is a white electric kettle, a white thermos, a bowl of yellow food (possibly scrambled eggs or cereal), a small bowl of fruit, a glass of orange juice, a small cup of coffee, and a decorative ceramic mug. A white napkin holder and a small container of sugar are also visible. In the foreground, a white plate with a spoon and a glass of orange juice are placed on a dark brown placemat. The background shows a window with sheer curtains and a dark wooden headboard.

In the past, the monastery has had shares in CSA's, has had gardens producing vegetables and has belonged to a co-op, but because the community and budget is always changing, these things continue to change as well. One woman is in control of getting the food for the monastery. According to Thubten, she is very interested in getting more locally grown and organic foods.

and liturgy. Before the meal was laid out, a bowl was filled with an offering to the Buddha, eventually to be placed outside. The meal itself consisted of various pizzas made by Thubten, soup and a fruit plate. We lined up buffet style to collect our portions, each individual with their own personal set of bowls, plates and utensils. Before eating, we bowed our heads and chanted a long chant of about five minutes, led by Lama Norlha Rinpoche. In the middle of the meal, I was guided to accept a fruit offering from Lama Norlha, bowing my head in thanks. Close to the end of the meal, we gave our offerings to the hungry ghosts. Bread was passed out to us all, we squeezed it in our hands, and then offered it back on a platter. Closing the meal was another long prayer. Lama Norlha left early to take rest, while the rest of us helped to clean the dining room and kitchen.

The Vermont Zen Center, located on sixty acres of conserved land along the LaPlatte River and led by Sensei Sunyana Graef, is a place for Zen priests and retreatants to stay and deepen their practice. Sunyana Graef is the Dharma heir of Roshi Philip Kapleau, known to me as the author of *Cherishing All Life: A Buddhist case for Vegetarianism* but also known as one of

the leaders in bringing Zen to the West. Graef has also written on the connections between Buddhism and ecology. Sunyana Graef established the Vermont Zen Center in 1988 in Shelburne, Vermont. The center offers zazen and sesshin (periods of intense meditation), garden practice, personal retreat, training practice and courses on things ranging from Indian cooking to



**Photograph 15: Buddha in Zendo at Vermont Zen Center**

flower arrangement, to *Lovingkindness* to Zen drawing and T'ang poetry. I was welcomed into the community by priest novice, head of the kitchen and assistant chef Bonnie Coulter, who has been a sangha member since 2004 and a practicing Buddhist since 1989.

Bonnie's practice of Zen began as an approach to meditating. She and her husband used meditating as an outlet while volunteering with the Peace Corps in Ghana and continued to use meditation as a way to relieve stress. As time went on and her commitment deepened, she considered Buddhism a central practice in her life and wanted to dedicate her life to it. As head of the kitchen and assistant head chef, Bonnie is aware of the way her Buddhist practice has informed her attitude surrounding food; one of the first life-changing decisions she made as a Buddhist was to stop eating meat of any kind. The Vermont Zen Center does not provide meat in meals, and people are encouraged not to bring meat or fish as food offerings to the Buddha or for the famine relief programs. Although she believes that her choice to stop eating meat or fish was very much influenced by the deepening of her Buddhist practice and a new understanding and commitment to her precepts, Bonnie prefers to refer to her choice as simply a "preference that makes her more comfortable" and "not a Buddhist thing." Mainly, this is because she chooses to refrain from judgment of those that do choose to eat meat. She doesn't believe that her vegetarianism must be adopted by those that surround her (for that, too, would be breaking her precepts) and that rather it is a decision that has encouraged her *personally* to deepen her practice. As her practice evolved, she says, "I realized that eating animals wasn't what I wanted to be doing. I began to look at them differently. I didn't look at them as something to be eaten. If you look at oneness," she told me, "and you don't separate yourself from things, why would you



want to [eat yourself]?” Although a similar logic might be applied to plants, she emphasized this only regarding her vegetarianism. Bonnie also described an aversion to purchasing her eggs from anywhere except the local and free-range producers; she says that it extends beyond her comfort level to purchase eggs that she knows come from “chickens that have been caged and abused.”

In the same way that her relationship to animals has changed throughout her Buddhist practice, Bonnie described a different approach to her environment, “I have developed a new compassion for living things, the natural world and my immediate environment...our teacher has really impressed upon us *attention and care*. That is why our place is so neat!” she chuckled, “we have beautiful gardens...we have planted many trees. It is these practices that help to deepen and sharpen our sense of attention.” In the spring, the center offers “work sesshins” where the entire day is spent working the land. Bonnie remarks, “it’s not just putting the gardens in but it’s working in the gardens *every day* that is truly rewarding.” Although the Vermont Zen Center does not grow vegetables in their gardens, they are there to beautify the grounds and help provide the community with a medium to interact with the natural world. Bonnie told me that perhaps in the future, if the center acquires a staff, they will grow vegetables and make their own bread. At this point in time, all work on-site is done by the community.

Although most primary decisions made in the kitchen are left to Head Chef, Cheryl Betz, Bonnie is closely involved with what food is brought to the center. Typically, Bonnie and Cheryl will come up with a menu and their teacher will approve of the meal, mainly after nutritional and practical considerations. Generally,



**Photograph 16: Eating leftovers at Vermont Zen Center**

meals are fairly simple, although menus are elaborated for special occasions. While Bonnie has a good working relationship with local farmers, and especially in the summer makes efforts to buy mainly local and organic food, they “haven’t made a commitment to buying all local or organic. We also do buy our things at Costco. We don’t have a hard and fast policy especially because of financial constraints, so there is an important balance there that we have to consider.” Very

important to their practice at the center, something that they *do* have a strong commitment to, is the prevention of food waste. From the beginning of an individual's involvement in the community, not wasting food is very much emphasized. This practice is informed by a Buddhist ethic, "it takes a lot of attention to take the time to *really* only take what you need and finish what you take," Bonnie says. "We look at that kind of waste as feeding into our ego and greed." Whatever is not eaten is thrown into the active compost, turned into rich soil, and used on-site to fertilize their flower gardens.

In addition to avoidance of waste and the practice of composting, an important ritual at the center, similarly to Kagyu Thubten Choling, is offering to the hungry ghosts. The Zen lineage also recognizes the realm of the hungry ghost, where people suffer from endless hunger.

It is said that when in that world, what you drink turns to fire and what you eat turns to poison; but if someone *offers* you food then neither of those things happen. This is why at every meal at Vermont Zen Center, two bowls are set aside (one for solid foods, another for liquids) and an offering is made to the hungry ghosts to be placed outside. This ritual provides an opportunity for reflection, gratitude and compassion.

Cooking also helps Bonnie to hone her Buddhist practice, "cooking is *so* helpful to my practice! The nature of preparing a meal helps me to let things go when I fuss up and to pay attention and be mindful."

I was able to take part in a meal at the Vermont Zen Center one snowy afternoon. Although it was a relatively informal meal, there was still a hungry ghost bowl and a clear observation of thanks. Unlike when in sesshin when meals are all taken silently, the meal was full of conversation. We ate mainly leftovers and made hummus and vegetable sandwiches. Lunch was made in their beautiful kitchen and eaten in the newly renovated dining room, which was immaculately clean. It was a small group of us and we took time to enjoy our meal, commenting on the food and thanking those that helped to provide it. We all contributed to clean



**Photograph 17: Kitchen shrine at Vermont Zen Center**

up. As one of the sangha members, Hope, said, “it’s time to go earn my meal,” as she got up to wash dishes and return the kitchen back to its original state.

### *Zen Mountain Monastery*

A site that very much illuminates a connection between Buddhism and ecology is the Zen Mountain Monastery. The Zen Mountain Monastery is a monastic training center located within a nature preserve in the Catskill Mountains of upstate New York. The Zen Mountain Monastery is also home of the Zen Environmental Studies Institute. The institute provides environmental training to Zen students and community members.

Since its construction in the 1930’s, the building and grounds of the Zen Mountain Monastery have been used for spiritual purposes. With its beginnings as a Catholic church, the building has gone through several reincarnations including a Lutheran alternative school and a communist camp. Today, the building remains as a place for training and meditation in a distinctly Western Buddhist tradition.



**Photograph 18: Buddha at Zen Mountain Monastery**

The community spent years fighting to protect the acreage surrounding the site and eventually succeeded by establishing a nature preserve in opposition to housing developments; the effort to protect wilderness remains today; “Upon incorporation, Zen Mountain Monastery as its first order of business wrote into its bylaws that 80 percent of its 250-acre site would remain forever wild--not managed, manicured, or developed” (King, 133). Sallie B. King (2009) further describes the Zen Mountain Monastery as a place that “expresses itself through its full program, which integrates science and spirituality and engages in environmental activism, environmental monitoring, research on pollution, and the maintenance of a nature sanctuary” (King, 133-134).

The original Abbott of the Zen Mountain Monastery is the founder of the Mountains and Rivers Order lineage, John Daido Looi Roshi. The name of the lineage is derived from the “Mountains and Rivers Sutra” written by Zen Master Dogen. One of the original intentions of

John Daido Loori in the founding of the ZMM was to be the home of this lineage and a sanctuary for nature photography and art therapy. Nature photography of his still adorns the walls of the main house. Daido Loori is famous for having written the book “Teachings of the Insentient: Zen and the Environment” wherein he documents the causality of Zen teachings and an environmental ethic. His care for the environment is clear in the setting of Zen Mountain Monastery. The site, surrounded by forest, mountain, and estuary is beautifully wild and preserved. There are hermitages tucked away in the forest, a beautiful teahouse, a forest cemetery, large solar panels and a vegetable and flower gardens.

When I arrived at Zen Mountain Monastery I was quickly invited to make myself a cup of tea in their large and beautiful dining area; lunch would be served soon. I was directed toward an old, gnarled and hand-made cabinet stacked with Yogi and Herbal Medicinal teas. I sat down to drink, flipping through some of John Daido Loori’s photography. Slowly and quietly the rest of the community filtered into the dining hall, making tea and quietly speaking with one another. A gong was ceremonially sounded to mark the beginning of the meal. I was handed a piece of paper that outlined the chant that was to follow (this can be found in Appendix C). *Oryoki*, a Zen meal ritual, literally translated, means “just enough.” Essentially, the meal is a liturgical service. The monastery performs *Oryoki* in great detail.

The chant recited before lunch when I visited is actually part of that meal. As Ryushin says, it is “extracted because [those at ZMM] find it to be so important, if you listen to the words they are actually an expression of our relationship to the food via the appreciation of interdependence.” The purpose of the incantation is to be silent and appreciative of the context of the meal. The receiving of the food happens in a very orchestrated way, paying attention to being mindful of what is going on in terms of eating. After the chant, which gives thanks to the Three Jewels, we followed a buffet line to receive a mesclun salad and root vegetable casserole. I sat down to talk with the current Abbott, Konrad Ryushin Marchaj. The meal was in season (although not entirely local) and organic.

The monastery has a sizeable vegetable garden that has grown incrementally over the past couple of years, originally started by one inspired monk who had previously run a CSA elsewhere. According to Ryushin, he was an “earth person.” The garden has increased 150% over the past year and continues to grow every season. In addition to the vegetable garden, the monastery has two heated greenhouses that provide a small percentage of Zen Mountain

Monastery's vegetables year round. According to Ryushin, although the produce is not significant in terms of the *percentage of food* it provides to the monastery, "it is very significant in the effect it has on people... both in terms of the fact that the people working in the garden are the people eating it. It's actually food that's touched by their own hands." The monastery does not hire external staff to work with the garden, "we do it all by ourselves and we teach ourselves. It has been very clearly rewarding our community." As a result of this one man's effort, Zen Mountain Monastery has become very much a gardening community; there are exciting plans for an orchard and other projects such as shiitake mushroom farming. Because all of the garden work is left to the community, however, the garden has not been able to expand as much as they'd like. This means that much of the monastery's food is sourced off-site.



**Photograph 19: Garden, Greenhouse, Solar Panels and nature trails at Zen Mountain Monastery**

Generally, their food is sourced from three different places: a local/high-end small market in town, a bigger health food store called Mother Earth's, and the local Hannaford's. Additionally, they acquire food from their garden and from local farmers. There is one person at the monastery that is in charge of managing their food sources. According to Ryushin, she is an aggressive researcher that makes sure she knows exactly where their food is coming from and that they get the best food that they can within their budget. In this effort, she has created a website to get feedback from the community about where they'd like to get their food. This directive is a part of a larger movement within the Mountains and Rivers Order called the "Green Dragon Earth Initiative" which involves looking at different ways that the MRO can nurture their relationship to the earth. These ways are outlined on their website:

- Clarifying our understanding of the nature of the self and its relationship to the Earth through traditional study of Buddhist teachings, practice and training
- Reducing the ecological footprints of Zen Mountain Monastery and the Zen Center of New York City
- Examining and adjusting individual life choices to improve our impact on our planet
- Community action



- Policy making (at the local, state, national, and global levels)
  - Identifying global systems and their interdependence
  - Education about relevant issues
  - Challenging cultural assumptions that undermine sustainability
- (Mountains and Rivers Order, 2011)

The website directive at Zen Mountain Monastery People invites members to give personal testimony of their connection to specific food sources. They interview farmers, take photographs, and then put personal Buddhist reflections online. Ryushin admits to learning about local resources for cheese, milk, and eggs through this initiative. Ryushin also mentions a “soul shift” that happened as a result of this heightened awareness surrounding food.

In terms of the diet that is maintained at the Monastery, they are 100% vegetarian. When Daido Loori was the head abbot, meat was served at least once a week and provided up to 30% of the food calories at the monastery. Now, as a result of demand, cost and general ethic, they serve almost entirely vegetarian cuisine. Because the standard around meat at ZMM now upholds organic, pasture-raised and mainly local sourcing, the price of having meat as a regular component to the diet is too expensive. “The only reason we would serve meat is if the cook, Hojin, hears from people that they need some extra protein, in which case we’ll get some fish or some chicken. If we *do* do that then we have a local market that we purchase from; this can be done only because it is requested too rarely.” Ryushin went on to describe the \$500 they spent on their five Thanksgiving turkeys, finding it outrageous. He acknowledges that the way the meat industry is set up in this country makes it impossible for the average citizen to buy healthy, happy meat on a regular basis (if at all). As an ideal, the monastery will provide all of its own food into the future.

Ryushin, born in Poland, received direct dharma transmission from Daido Loori and was ordained in 2009 after having been in residency for almost twenty years. Before becoming a part of the lineage, he worked in the medical field as a pediatrician and psychiatrist. As a result of this, his understanding of human health and the environment was ingrained before the practice of Buddhism became his primary focus. When I asked if there was anything directly mentioned about food and eating in the Zen tradition, he responded by recognizing the subtlety in Zen teaching: “Zen teachings are very basic. They really go to the heart of things and try to get the individual to notice something about the *fundamental* nature of things. After these basic precepts

are understood, the individual is then encouraged to adapt them or to see their significances to the circumstances that you are interested passionately about.”

Instead of specific instructions about how and what to eat, Zen encourages the practitioner to look deeply into the nature of what he or she is engaging in while eating. Because of this, Ryushin says that he has adopted mindfulness practices while he eats. Zen literature is “the most esoteric philosophy. It does not look at nutritional value... instead it is looking at the nature of what eating is as an act of identification with the food that’s consuming YOU.” These types of meditations, however, have had a very real affect on Ryushin’s relationship with food. He describes one important effect of his Zen practice as a general resistance to clinging to his food. This comes from contemplation of impermanence; food is fleeting. Also, practice provides a basis upon which to respect and revere ones food. He doesn’t owe his food ethic to broad Buddhist tenets of interconnection (for example), but rather an inner dialogue that has been happening for the past twenty years through his Zen practice that is constantly challenging his concept of the nature of reality and impermanence.

After my interview, I explored the grounds of the monastery. Although they were blanketed in snow, it was easy to see the vitality lying beneath it. The garden was large, about a half of an acre; there were cover crops protecting the soil, beautiful dead sunflowers, and an active heated greenhouse at one end. Next to the garden, and almost double the size of it, there was a large array of solar panels. In the future, Ryushin hopes that the panels will be able to support the energy costs of the entire monastery, although at this point they only support about 30%. Walking up the mountain behind the panels I tromped through trails that led me past small hermitages, a graveyard and stupa, and an outdoor shrine to the Buddha. In talking with guests and practitioners at the Zen Mountain Monastery I came to understand that the forest and flora was essential to their Buddhist practice, helped to center their attention, and provide a place for peaceful respite.

### *Anadaire*

Very different from the other monasteries that I visited is Glen Ard Abbey, or “Anadaire,” a small home of Celtic Buddhists in Southern Vermont. Celtic Buddhism is derived mainly from Tibetan Buddhism and Celtic traditions in addition to the collaboration of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche and Venerable Seonaidh John Perks. Until 1989, “Celtic Buddhism” was not an organized lineage. Built in Southern Vermont, Seonaidh created a home for Celtic

Buddhism, a small house called Anadaire. There are now a number of Celtic Buddhist abbeys in Vermont, Maine and the U.K. and they are all run differently.

Seonaidh found it important that people not put money into building a temple or church. If a big program is done, big tents are put up for retreatants. Like Seonaidh says, “its much more family-oriented kind of practice that way.” Instead, places of explicit worship are the basement at Anadaire and the surrounding outdoors. The property sits along Saxton’s River on eleven acres. On the property there is only one built structure that is home to Venerable Seonaidh Perks, his wife Julia Perks, their pug Effie and anyone interested in the lineage (I was invited to stay).

As an evolving lineage, there is a large ambiguity among the different the traditions that have emerged from it. In this particular example, the lineage is called the “Crazy Heart” lineage. The tradition is an interesting synthesis of Tibetan Buddhism and Celtic Christianity that is set on Northeastern American soil. The lineage has adopted its key structure from traditional Tibetan Buddhism but has also incorporated concepts from the particularly nature-based Celtic religion.



**Photograph 20: Spread of local cheeses at Anadaire**

Because Anadaire is such a small community, about 3 or 4 people depending on the time, decisions about food are made only for the few that live there. As Buddhists and self-identified environmentalists, the counters of the kitchen at Anadaire are lined with spirulina tablets, local eggs, coconut oil, gluten-free pug formula, and a small-scale composting operation. Seonaidh believes that his Buddhist practice has informed an environmental ethic, but also that his environmental ethic has informed his Buddhist practice. Seonaidh considers the Saxton’s River property to be not only important to his practice, but necessary. “There is a shrine there,” he points to the thangka in the corner of the room;



“one focuses on the shrine in Buddhism... but further on down the road one realizes *it’s all shrine*, so there’s no difference between that (points to thangka, a Tibetan Buddhist silk painting) and that (points to tree outside the window). The shrine is not *one* special thing, but it becomes 100,000,000 special things.”

What he means by this is that everything can be seen as a shrine. This appreciation for the environment has led him to an ethic around food and the production of it.

Seonaidh explained that the second they bought their land they had to start a garden, “[they] had to eat somehow!” Seonaidh does it all, from vegetable gardens to wild foraging, fruit orchards, mushroom farming, honey bees, canning, pickling, medicinal and culinary herb gardening and tincture making, chutney making to even making their own wine. The community at Anadaire uses only natural growing techniques, no synthetics and no gas-fueled farming machinery. During retreats, his retreatants stay in tents and work the land with scythes. Seonaidh considers spending time in nature as essential to his Buddhist practice.

The land at Anadaire produces so much food that they often times have to give it away. When the land cannot provide all of the food for a balanced diet, however, they purchase only from the local co-op or farmers markets. Also, Seonaidh trades for food. For example, there is a farmer up the road that provides meat in exchange for firewood. Seonaidh does not consider vegetarianism to be an ethical must through the lens of a Buddhist ethic. He does, however, abide by the precept that the individual cannot perform the actual killing of the animal to eat. In this respect, Seonaidh has eaten road kill before. He says,

We don’t eat a lot of meat... and if we do, we also know what the life of the animal was. If you’re going to eat meat then the animal that it comes from should have some kind of life...some kind of happy life. Knowing where your food comes from and how it was treated is very important... I mean just treated from an ethical point of view. Does this animal have a decent life?”

Born in England in 1934, Seonaidh recalls growing up without a fridge. For him, there was always the butcher, the grocer, the baker, and the farmer. He was brought up in an environment where everything was local, not necessarily by choice. This upbringing defined his broader environmental ethic, certainly as it pertains to food. It seems as though his efforts toward homesteading are growing every day; he hopes to build cold frames and a chicken coop this spring. The coop would house laying hens only, and would become a “chicken retirement home once they were done laying eggs; a place where they can retire, laze around and have their nails done.” He links his inability to kill them directly to his Buddhist ethic of non-harming.

Also, he has a passion for eating seasonally,

In the summer and fall we eat a lot of salads and a lot of vegetables. In the winter we eat more meat. In the spring we do cleansing and so we eat nettles foraged from the forest and put them in soup. We pick a lot of stuff out of the woods, a lot of mushrooms; we have all those kinds of things. We especially like the Chicken of the Wood [a type of edible mushroom] and dandelions.

When I went to Anadaire, I was there to witness the initiation of a woman (now known by her Celtic Buddhist name, “Fursa”) into the Celtic Buddhist tradition. For the reception we received a display of local Vermont cheeses and canned red peppers.

In addition to Seonaidh, I had a chance to interview Sister Gryphon, a student of his. Sister Gryphon, originally ordained in the Zen tradition (at the Zen Mountain Monastery), is now Abbess at Glen Ard Abbey/Anadaire. Sister Gryphon has a history of environmental activism. Gryphon grew up on a dairy farm in Western New York in the heyday of post-war pesticides and fertilizers. Growing up, the spreading of DDT on her Father’s farm led her to an awareness of the environmental movement and a desire to work in its defense. She spent her college years as a pre-veterinarian, campaigning for animal rights and working with marine mammals. It was precisely the environmental ethic within Buddhism that attracted her to it. She says,

I was very drawn to Buddhism in college. Having said that, though, and having been a monk for eight years now, Buddhism has again redefined and re-informed my environmental ethic. I have an entirely different relationship with plants than I did before my Buddhist practice. Buddhism has opened me up to ALL of life. The trees, the rocks, the magic of *that* is what I have gained.”

Now, she sees that her Buddhist ethic has informed her environmental ethic.

Sister Gryphon developed a healthier relationship with food during this time in her life. While she had been a committed vegetarian since college, she now has a different attitude towards the vegetarian designation. She recalls that before becoming a Buddhist, she encouraged vegetarianism to those around her; she felt strongly about pushing her ‘right’ views onto people with other beliefs. She realizes now that that kind of dogmatic attitude not only doesn’t change people’s minds, but involves judgment and attachment as well. As a monk, she has a different approach to her food choices and attitudes. For example, she says,



**Photograph 21: Seonaidh in prayer room at Anadaire**

if she were to be offered meat as a gift, she would happily accept. Also, like Seonaidh, she states that if she were to see road kill, she would eat it in order to transmit dignity to its life.

For Sister Gryphon, another important aspect of food is the ritual and behavior surrounding the creation of a meal. At Zen Mountain Monastery, she was head chef and currently works at Marlboro College as a chef. She perceives her designation as a cook as an important method of imparting wisdom,

...Everything we touch, we impart energy to. We have the ability to impart a good energy to the people for whom we cook so that it will nourish them. Not only nourish them but help them to see the beauty in all things, about each other, the food, and the environment...and help them to care about everybody, the environment, the food. I have a deep respect for the food I eat, we have this saying 'an enlightened cook is one that can hold up a leaf of lettuce and see the eight foot golden body of the Buddha.

Sister Gryphon perceives this attention to imparting good energy as a part of her bodhisattva vow to help liberate all beings. In terms of eating, I asked Gryphon if her relationship with food was one of restraint and practicality or if there is ever hedonism involved. She responded by citing the “middle way” approach, saying that she makes an effort to balance between hedonism and restraint. And it is this middle way, gleaned from an understanding of Buddhist practice, which has helped her cultivate a meaningful but steady attitude regarding food.

The Zen practice of Oryoki that Sister Gryphon learned at the Zen Mountain Monastery has played an important role in cultivating this meaningful relationship with food. Sister Gryphon explains the tea ritual experience within Oryoki:

In the very beginning, a little piece of food is brought in on a special tray and is taken up to the altar as an offering. When the officiant then brings the food around to the practitioners, a drum starts out slow like a heartbeat and gets faster and faster and it builds up to this giant crescendo that fills your whole body with this energy, and then it is offered and to me on an emotional-feel level.

The officiant gives you a high responsibility to know when and what is just enough food. This choice really makes you look at the transition of feeling deprived at first and then what you come to realize is that over time, after many Oryoki ceremonies, you don't need to ask for more food. You realize how needy we feel so much of the time, through Oryoki and as a monk... you develop an understanding of only taking what is given to you (Anadaire, 2011).

It is clear from this testimony that Oryoki is a transformative ritual that helps Sister Gryphon cultivate an important appreciation of what is *just enough* as well as a respect for the food and drink as ambrosia.

Another important aspect of Gryphon's practice is engagement with the natural world through cultivating food. Between her time at Zen Mountain Monastery and Anadaire, she

retreated to Maine to live on a farm and work pro bono for animals as a method of deepening her practice. Her goal on the farm was to develop a certain level of self-sufficiency; this not only meant that she wanted to be able to meet her needs on-site, but that the crops she grew and the animals she raised would have no external input. She reminisces: “it was great, the chickens and the goats kept each other warm in the winter, the chickens ate what the goats didn’t, and then the rest went onto the farm in the form of manure. It was a good system.” Ultimately, she wants to open a women’s monastery and be able to homestead there.

## E-mail and Phone Interviews

*Lisa Harris*

*Executive Chef*

*Karme Choling in Barnet, VT*

As a chef, Lisa Harris had a lot to say about gardening, cooking, and the importance of the two in a Buddhist community center. About the food that is used in the cooking at Karme Choling, Lisa says:

We cook meals and snacks from scratch, using some organic, and some conventional foods. We source whatever local food we can; all meats are from Vermont or New Hampshire, except the bacon and sausages, fish and some beef...We are not a vegetarian retreat center, so we serve meals to omnivores, vegans, vegetarians, and provide food for special diets as we are able.

I asked her to tell me about the various requests she gets as a cook, in order to get a better understanding of the food attitudes and beliefs of the retreatants and practitioners at Karme Choling. She told me that they get just about every request one could imagine, things such as gluten free, dairy free, soy free, nightshade free, grain free, sugar free, bean free, garlic free and onion free. I also asked her to describe a typical meal at the center; she described the following:

We typically serve a modest breakfast of hot cereals, cold cereals, bread for toast, cut fruit and house-made yogurt. We intersperse that with bacon, sausage, pancakes, French toast, bagels and cream cheese, muffins, eggs, etc. lunch is our big meal of the day: we serve a protein, a starch, and a vegetable with a limited salad bar and bread.

Dinner typically is a soup with an extended salad bar and bread.

I also asked about the various rituals surrounding meals in a spiritual or religious setting. She said that there are no rituals while preparing meals, but the kitchen is a shrine room and so people are encouraged to act accordingly and bow upon entering and exiting.

Karme Choling also has a garden that is about one acre in size. "The garden is wonderful...We get a lot of fresh, organic produce and some fruit throughout the season. We have a great relationship with the garden and with all of that we seem to provide a great source of energy to staff and participants."

From further browsing of their website, I was able to see the various initiatives that exist in and around their garden. Jan Enthoven, their Master Gardener, offers internships to interested students and farmers. He says of the internship:

There are many good and wonderful places where one can learn the various methods for organic gardening. The garden internship I offer at Karmê Chöling focuses on the methods and techniques of organic gardening, but also emphasizes strengthening our mind-body through meditation, nature walks, and an opportunity to study Shambhala Buddhism.

Similar to meditation, gardening success begins with fully accepting our garden site and deepening our relationship with *dralas*, or living patterns of energy, in our garden soil, the sun, rain, wind, rocks, weeds and all animals...In a world where we are moving and changing at an ever-faster pace, where many people choose "sound bites" over depth of understanding, and efficiency over quality of life, cultivating a small garden may form a welcome refuge that allows us to become responsive to the rhythms of the natural world and unveil a world of ordinary magic and penetrating brilliance.

The internship offers a variety of teachings including: soil fertility, composting, water and irrigation, starting from seed, pest and disease management and garden design and planning. Not only does the Karme Choling garden provide produce for the center's kitchen, but they also have CSA shares available to the wider community. Additionally, Karme Choling has begun a children's garden to get young people involved in a hands on way while providing environmental education to youth.

*Dana Kojun Hull*

*Director of Training*

*Great Vow Zen Monastery in Clatskanie, OR*

Kojun, director of Training at Zen Center in Oregon, has been a practicing Buddhist for over twelve years; from a young age she knew that Buddhism was the lifestyle she wanted to live. Before becoming a resident at the Great Vow Zen Monastery, Kojun lived at a Buddhist center in Anchorage, Alaska. Although she isn't an abbot at the monastery, Kojun is one of the most senior members in the community; she lives at the monastery and has had full-time training. The monastery itself, led by Jan Chozen Bays, Roshi, and Hogen Bays, hosts retreats, provides workshops, and engages in full-time Zen training. Jan Chozen is a pediatrician and author of *Mindful Eating: A Guide to Rediscovering a Healthy and Joyful Relationship with Food*, published in 2009.

I was able to be in touch with Kojun for a brief over-the-phone interview. She told me about the daily diet, the sources of their food, and their beautiful vegetable and flower garden. The monastery itself is vegetarian, although every person that lives there does not need to make a pledge to be vegetarian. In addition to their abstention from meat, they also avoid the use of garlic and raw onion. This avoidance of garlic and raw onions carries on from a Chinese

tradition. In this tradition, people are not meant to eat garlic because it is an aphrodisiac; raw onions simply cause bad breath. She told me an average breakfast, lunch and dinner: breakfast is served Oryoki style, cereal, yogurt, fruit and tea, lunch is served buffet style (no Oryoki), usually a protein, starch, and vegetable, and dinner is served Oryoki style, usually soup and bread. For every meal, there is an offering both to the Buddha and to the hungry ghosts. For Kojun, the practice of Oryoki contributes to heightened awareness while eating. Also, she says it helps her to appreciate what she has been given; she says that it helps her to reflect on the efforts that brought her the food and to think about all of the labors that made it possible for her to eat it.

The monastery gets most of its food from the West coast supermarket chain “Cash and Carry,” a large food service provider that sells discounted food. She admits that although they try and do some organic, it is hard to balance those values with their budget. She says, “we do care about carbon footprints and how we effect other people with our choices, but then we have a budget to consider” (Kojun, 2011). They do, however, have various deals with local farmers from who they purchase mainly eggs and potatoes. She tells me, “I feel very satisfied that we are now able to purchase our eggs locally and from an ethical source, no more slave chickens!” She also admits a new understanding of the exploitative coffee industry and the monastery makes an effort to buy fair trade and organic coffee.

In addition to these food sources, the Great Vow Zen Monastery has a large garden and two 100-foot long greenhouses; “we do *a lot* of work out there,” she says. There is no hired staff to take care of the gardens, and the community members do all of the work, Kojun said that Jan Chozen Bays is especially passionate about gardening. They grow a variety of produce and flowers. In the past they had an apple orchard, but it suffered from blight. Still, they make applesauce and eat it throughout the winter months as their primary fruit source.

The kitchen at Zen center has a head tenzo and is otherwise supported by a rotational crew consisting of community members. To mark the beginning of work periods in the kitchen, ritual chanting is performed. A standard of cleanliness and avoidance of waste are marked highly by the tenzo. The kitchen composts its food scraps. The only time kitchen work is done in silence is when they are in retreat, when the entire retreat is done in silence. For Kojun, cooking is a meditation. She says, “when working with food, I find it so easy to be engaged. I feel directly engaged in what I am preparing and that, to be honest, doesn’t take much effort.” What’s most important about cooking is that it helps to settle the “thinking mind;” cooking (and work in

general) helps to cultivate the “awareness mind.” These two minds cannot exist simultaneously; “both have their place, but human beings tend to use their thinking mind too much, more than is helpful. Too much engagement with the thinking mind blocks the ability to cultivate an awareness mind.” For the Great Vow Zen Monastery, cultivating a mind of awareness is heavily emphasized.

When I asked if her Buddhist ethic has informed an environmental ethic, she responded, “my awareness of interconnection informs my every decision, how could it not? Although I’m not someone who is *fully* aware of how interpenetrated all life is, sure I am very informed by this.”

*Steve Hallquist*

*Kitchen Manager*

*Barre Center for Buddhist Studies in Barre, MA*

While Steve does practice some elements of Buddhism, he does not consider himself a Buddhist. He says, “the Buddha didn’t call it Buddhism, he was opening people’s eyes to the truth as he saw it.” Regardless, he says that he believes in and follows many aspects of Buddhist philosophy, “especially the mindfulness and non-harming qualities.” He chose to work in the kitchen and has been working in Buddhist retreat style kitchens for the past fifteen years; this kind of work is something he is dedicated to and enjoys. While he says that kitchen work doesn’t necessarily inspire Buddhist practice, there is a practice of non-harming in his kitchen. He says that whenever they find ants, mosquitoes or flies in the kitchen he “finds a way to either accept their presence or get them out with out harming them.”

As an informally practicing Buddhist, the main way he combines a Buddhist ethic with a food ethic is to go down the “middle path;” In Buddhism, the middle way is the way in which the Buddha attained liberation. The middle path describes a method that is not too acetic nor too indulgent. Steve says of his cooking:

Not too spicy, not too bland, not too gourmet, not too simple, not too rich, not too many beans. It is a path I find in myself. Also, I try to be fair to all people, but not follow any one or two people’s suggestions around food. If we always followed what people wanted, it would be impossible. It would keep changing depending on what group was here. So, the middle path is big for me.



I also use the middle path when ordering food. We don't have an unlimited budget, so it is up to me to decide what should be organic or not. This is a constant theme for me in the kitchen, that is, trying to keep things on what my version of the middle path is. I will listen to people's suggestions, but then I decide what course to take. There are a lot of opinions around food, most of which come from the staff here at BCBS. For the most part the retreatants are grateful and happy to have someone cook for them.

Steve also speaks to the way cooking for retreatants makes him feel:

There is an element of generosity that comes through when I cook for retreatants. They are coming to learn more about Buddhism and my job is to feed them. Mostly I feel very happy and willing to cook for them. To make the food look and taste appealing and give them a feeling of being supported during their course.

Although Steve doesn't officially consider himself a Buddhist, his choice to be in the kitchen in a position of offering to those on a Buddhist path is certainly relevant to my study. It seems as though Jim has a sincere desire to aid people in their journey towards liberation by way of providing nutritious food, cooked with lovingkindness or *metta*.

*Jim Dailey*

*Zen Practitioner*

*Barre Center for Buddhist Studies in Barre, MA*

Also from the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies is Jim Dailey, a Zen practitioner. He has been attending classes, workshops, retreats, and programs at the Center for the past three or four years. After having volunteered at the center several times, he now has a place to stay without having to go back and forth from home. He also helps in the kitchen. He says, "having access to the kitchen as a helper I became aware of how many, and how few, of the food products being served are organic and this led to my requests for increased attention to this issue to the BCBS management."

Jim also shared his sentiment interconnectedness as a Buddhist: "my world, and my place in it, is as one of multitudinous billions of creatures all of which are part of *nature*." In this way, he understands that as a part of this cosmic community, he has an obligation to be kind, non-harming, considerate, and understanding of all the other parts of the web. His daily behavior is highly influenced by his Buddhist understanding and he considers it his role to live each moment of each day in a kind and compassionate way. These Buddhist philosophies have also influenced his environmental ethic, "Buddhist practice has served to strengthen my commitment to living in an environmentally sensitive way, which is to say, I endeavored to live this way

before my Buddhist practice took hold, and, yes, I do feel obligated to live in this way.” This has also affected what he puts in his body (food, personal health products, plastics, etc.), he says,

I think the practice has served to validate my decisions in regard to care of the body. Care for the environment (the world) has been a primary focus of attention for me for several decades. My Buddhist practice was intermittent throughout these decades (though it has been integral to my life for the past fifteen years or thereabout) so I've tried to be careful of what I put in, and on, my body for many years. Hence, I try to eat organic, natural foods, use natural product skin creams, etc, and, as far as I am aware, have not ingested plastics - but its hard to know for certain. I don't recall intentionally consuming petroleum products and/or dozens of unfamiliar chemicals but the more I investigate the food industry, the more likely it is that I have.

He has been a vegetarian for forty years. While he realized that fruits, nuts and vegetables are also a part of a living system, he maintains that simply avoiding meat is the least harmful practical way to go. He notes that

One can't step on the Earth without killing bacteria, if not insects, etc., and our bodies themselves do away with bacteria. So, living organisms die from others' lives. Intention to harm is much more reprehensible than is unintentional harm. Also, sentient beings are a bit higher on the harmlessness chain.

He eats dairy foods and tries to eat organic and local. Additionally, he spoke to the fact that there was no simple solution when trying to eat ecologically, noting that even the shipping of organic foods pollutes the air.

While he states that his food ethic and attention to sustainable farming came before his involvement in Buddhism, he also says that “the Buddhist ethic of non-harming is clearly stated by the Buddha and of utmost importance to all practitioners, hence, the reason why I believe more emphasis on its application may be brought to the attention of Buddhist retreat and study centers.”

Although he doesn't farm much anymore due to his age, he has a history of farming. He volunteered at a community supported agriculture farm in Massachusetts for many years.

*Natalie Gummer*

*Philosophy and Religious Studies Professor  
Beloit College in Beloit, WI*

Although my correspondence with Natalie was quite brief, her existence as well as her area of study certainly showed me the ways in which the scholarship surrounding Buddhism and Ecology have grown, specifically in the realm of Buddhism and food. I heard of her from someone at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies who informed me that at the upcoming 2011 American Academy for Religion meeting there is going to be a panel concerning Buddhism and

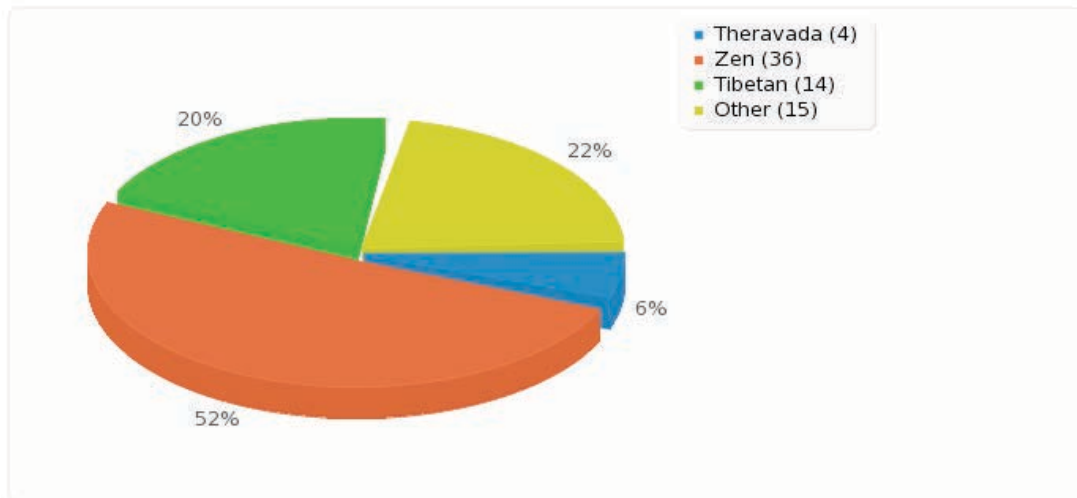
food. Her interests lie in a more scholarly sector of this field though, in her words: “I am exploring the source and function of food and cooking metaphors in certain Mahāyāna sūtras (so no "real" food!) After having posted an inquiry to a list-serv (“H-Buddhism;” a Buddhist list-serv for interested scholars and practitioners) to see whether or not other people would be interested in contributing to her panel, Natalie reported to have received several interested responses. This shows that there is a rising interest in the scholarship surrounding Buddhism and food ethics and prescriptions.

	Lineage	State	Meat?	Veg. Garden?	Compost?	Ritual?
BCBS	Many schools	MA	Y	N	N	N
Karme Choling	Tibetan	VT	Y	Y	Y	N
Anadaire	Celtic	VT	Y	Y	Y	Y
Great Vow Zen Monastery	Zen	OR	N	Y	Y	Y
Vermont Zen Center	Zen	VT	N	N	Y	Y
Zen Mountain Monastery	Zen	NY	N	Y	Y	Y
Kagyu Thubten Choling	Tibetan	NY	Y	N	N	Y

*Table 3: Comparative Site Charts*

## Survey

The survey results were fairly consistent with the information I'd gleaned from the interviews and Literature review. 72 two people took the survey. The main lineages represented in the survey were Zen and Tibetan.



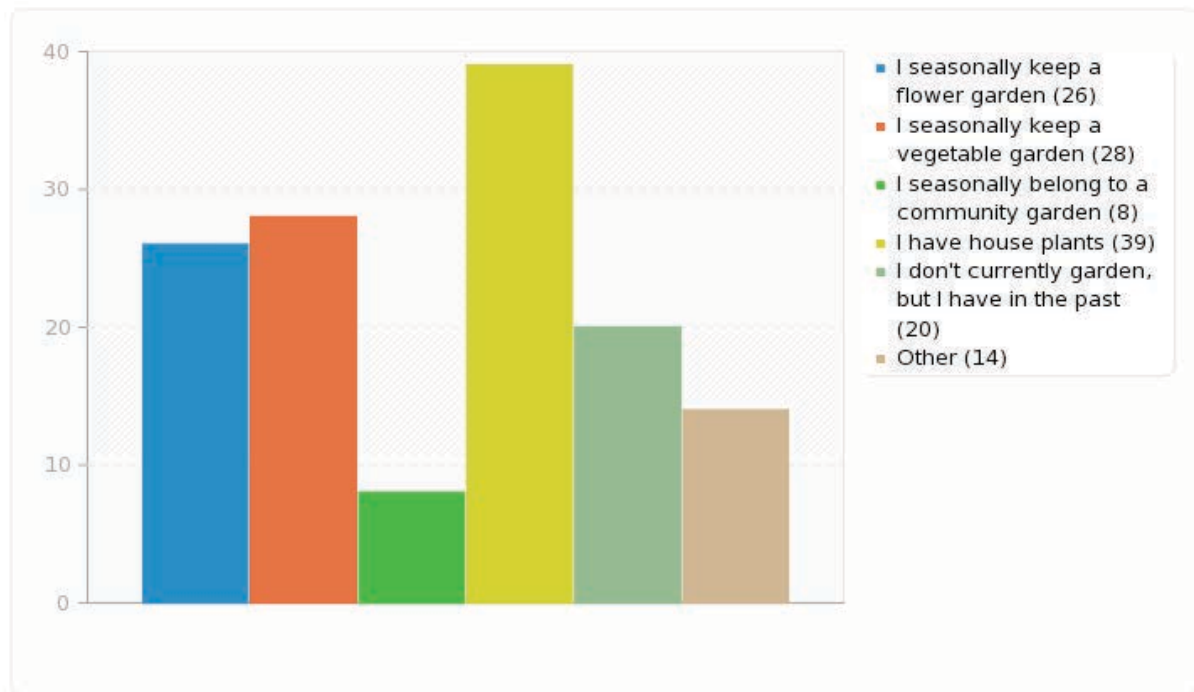
*Figure 1: Lineages represented by the survey*

Generally, the survey takers were middle aged (mainly between the ages of fifty and seventy) and from the Northeast United States, mainly Vermont (16) and New York (18) but also Massachusetts, Maine, Rhode Island, New Jersey and New Hampshire. Two Canadians took the survey and one person from Costa Rica (who studies under Sunyana Graef of the Vermont Zen Center). Various other states were represented including: Oregon, Hawaii, New Mexico, Florida, Ohio, Colorado, Montana, Iowa, California, Pennsylvania and Washington. 55.5% of the survey takers were women and about 44.5% of the survey takers were men.

Towards the end of my survey I asked the respondents to describe the ways in which they considered themselves practicing Buddhists. People had very different ways of answering this question, ranging from an in depth description of their practice: “I have a regular meditation practice, I am a formal student of my Zen teacher, I am an active member of a Buddhist community, I have formally taken the Buddhist precepts on many occasions, I regularly attend traditional Zen retreats (sesshin), and I was married in a Buddhist ceremony” to less specific accounts: “Breathing in and breathing out, I am a Buddhist,” or “I believe that the Buddha was not lying and was not mistaken when he said that all living beings are whole and complete, lacking absolutely nothing, but because of our deluded thinking, we fail to perceive this.” Others

said they didn't quite understand the question, either by explicitly stating it or with comments such as the following: "what an odd question...either you practice some sort of Buddhist liturgy or meditation or not. I practice," or, "if I consider myself to be a practicing Buddhist, then I am putting myself in a Box which I don't feel I need to do, but for some reason you want me to be in. In the same manner, every question asked in this questionnaire tries to place me in some box that I don't belong to either." Many people mentioned the rituals that they perform and the vows that they have taken. People cite their recognition of Buddhist precepts such as loving-kindness, compassion, and mindfulness and the effort to integrate them into their life; some consider themselves Buddhists only in respects to their efforts towards being a better person; some responded more philosophically by saying they practice Buddhism in "all ways and no ways." Many people had a very informal way of responding to this question: "I am mindful and reflective about myself and human psychology," or, "what a huge question. I sit every morning, strive to do no harm, engage without attaching, practice kindness and compassion, understand, observe, and be mindful..." "I am learning to intuitively understand the nature of my experience and thus relieve suffering," and even "....."

My survey addressed similar questions to my interviews: types of eating practices and associations, relationship of eating practices to the environment, relationship of eating to Buddhist guidelines, and relationship of Buddhism and ecology as a whole. When asked if the survey taker engaged in either gardening or farming, the answers were all across the board, from owning a farm to no interaction whatsoever. Here is a specific chart displaying gardening practices:



*Figure 2: Gardening practices of survey respondents*

“Other” answers range among the following:

- I want a garden but have no space!
- I grow herbs inside and outside
- I buy from farmer's markets
- We grow raspberries
- Primarily my wife's efforts, but yes

Three people in the “other” category said they belonged to a community garden (one of the options provided). The most common answer people had in common was their growing of houseplants. Of the survey takers, 90% enjoy cooking.

When asked if the respondents restricted their dieting habits “with laws prescribed by Buddhism” (as phrased in the survey), most answers were neutral, and they agree and disagree to similar degrees. When asked whether or not their food choices reflected the values of their Buddhist practices 67% agreed and about 26% were neutral while only about 7% disagreed. When asked if their eating choices reflect their knowledge and understanding of the environment 82% agreed and only 4% disagreed and 14% felt neutral. Similar statistics corresponded with the question about whether or not they felt as though their eating choices reflected a concern for the environment and its resources.

The next set of questions addressed specific practices surrounding food. Regarding food blessings, the answers were basically evenly distributed:

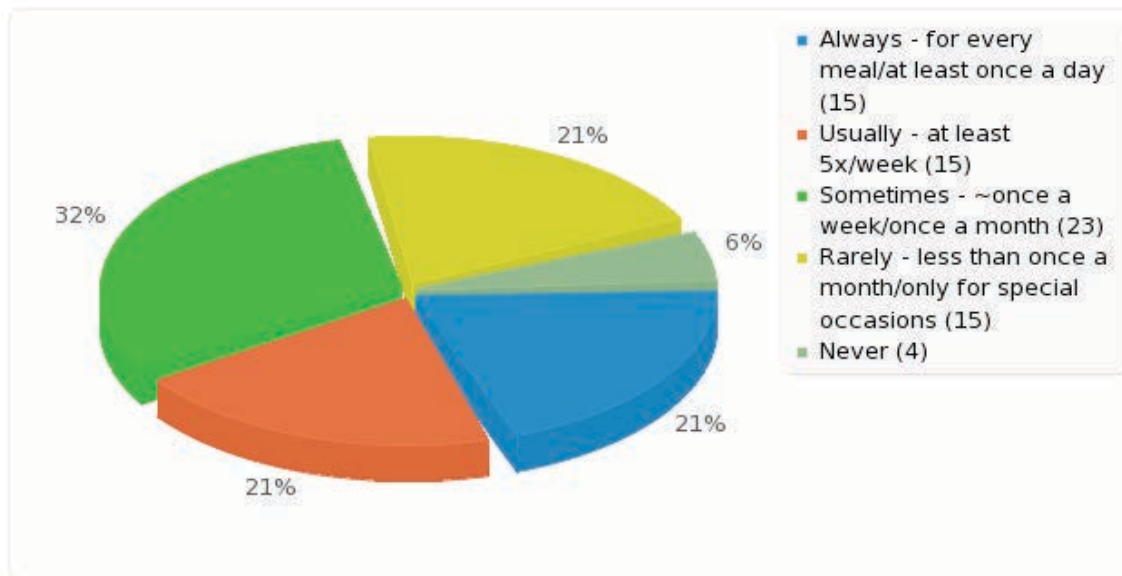


Figure 3: Responses to the question regarding eating ritual

The majority of respondents answered rarely or never when asked how often they made food offerings at a shrine, brought food offerings to a temple, or ate in special retreat bowls. When asked about composting frequency, the answers displayed that the respondents either do or do not compost all of the time.

The next set of questions concerned the respondents eating associations. While many of the respondents consider themselves vegetarian, responses to this question ranged widely:

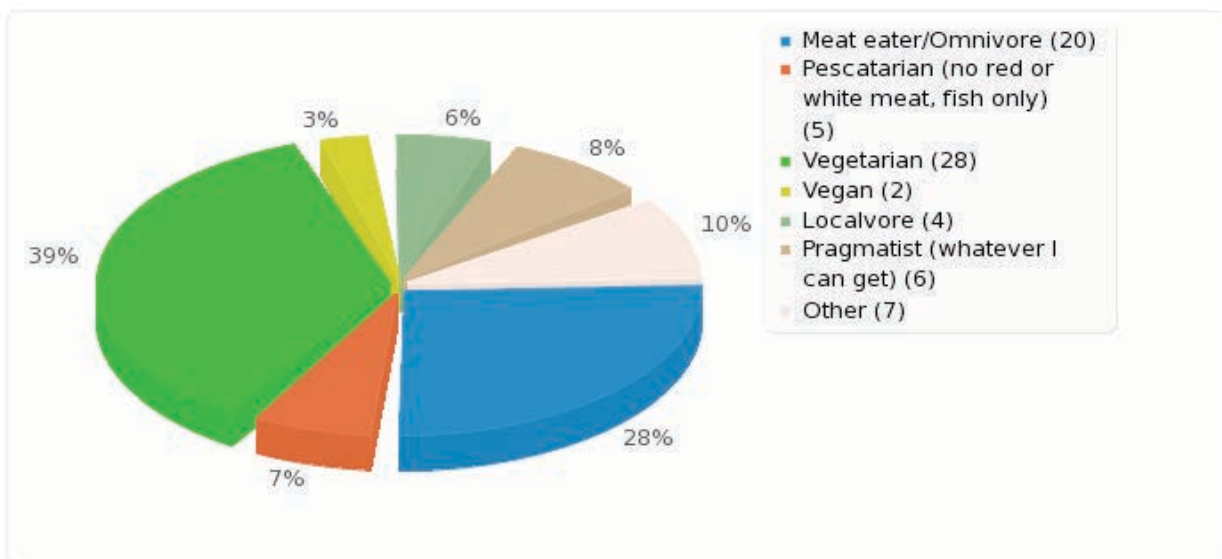
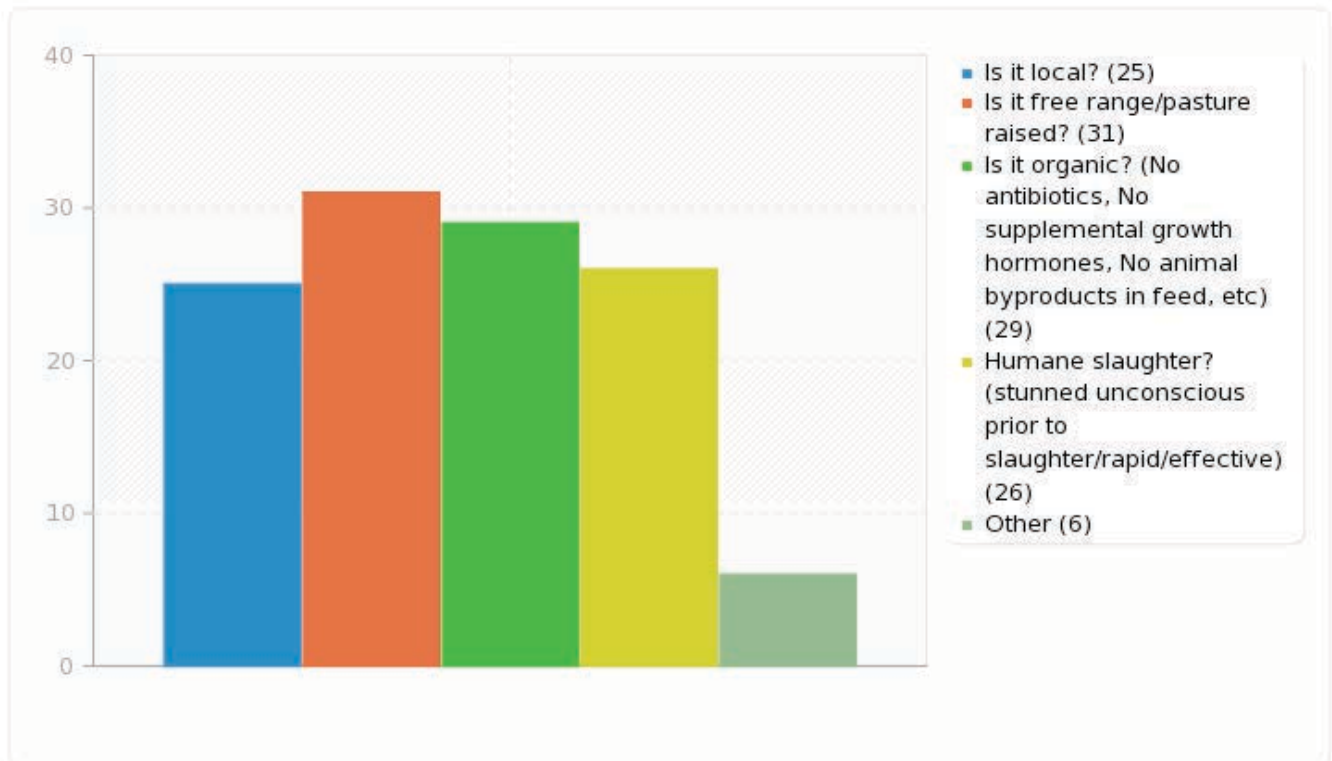


Figure 4: Self identification of survey respondents

The “other” responses almost evenly fell between vegetarian and pragmatist in nature. When I asked if this choice was made before or after becoming a Buddhist, 58% said before and 42% said after. Most people that eat meat say it is a normal part of their diet. Of those that eat meat, only six responded that they do not consider where the meat comes from/how it was procured.

Of those that eat meat, 91.77% consider where the meat is coming from and how it reached their plate. Questions that they consider are the following:



*Figure 5: Questions survey respondents consider when purchasing meat*



One person says that if they are eating beef, they make sure all the meat was taken from one cow. Out of the respondents, none eat red meat on a daily basis and only seven said they “usually” eat it. Almost half never eat red meat. As far as poultry goes, either the respondents eat it usually or sometimes or they never do.

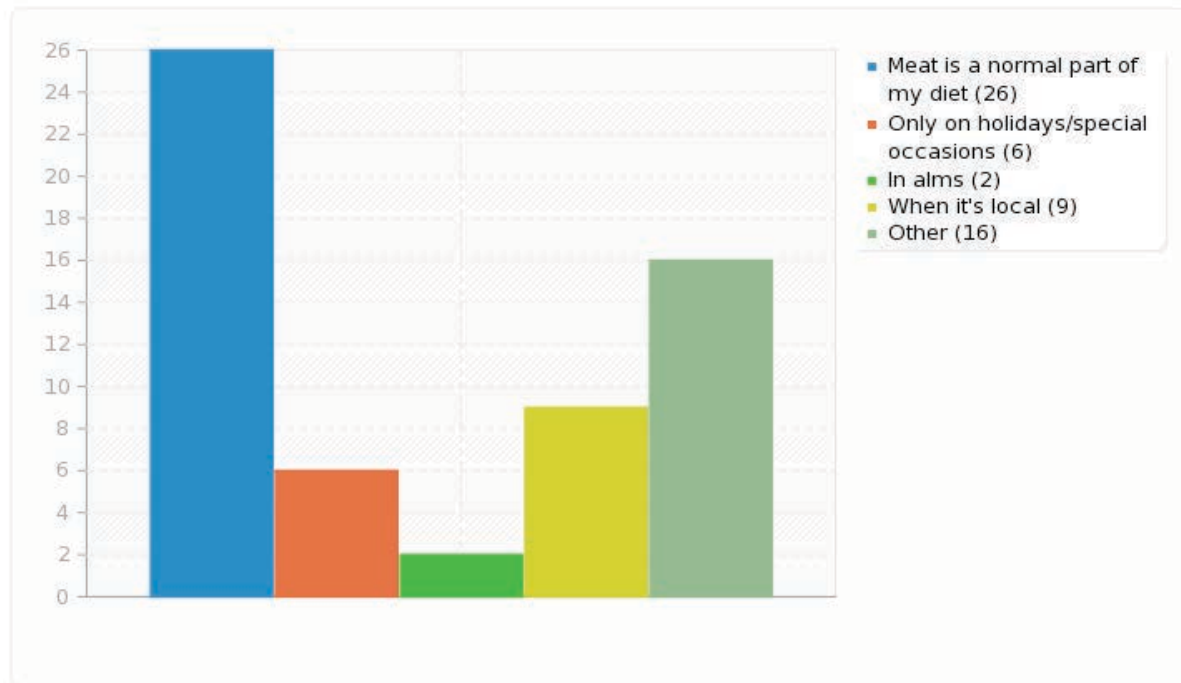


Figure 6: When meat-eaters eat meat

People primarily eat fish either “sometimes” or never. With regards to eggs, most people eat them either usually or sometimes. When asked about processed and packaged foods, the majority replied either usually or sometimes - this type of food is hard to avoid in the typical American diet. The majority of the respondents choose to eat organic, seasonal and locally grown food most of the time:

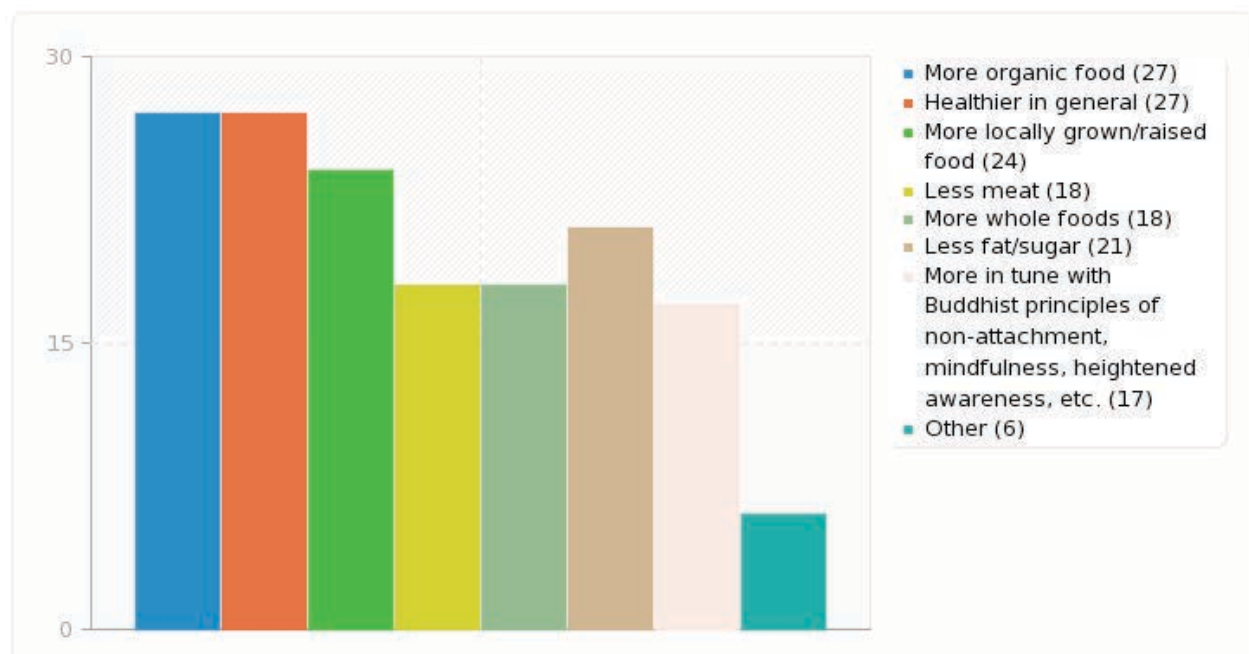
	Always/for every meal/at least once a day	Usually/at least 5x/week	Sometimes/once a week/month	Rarely/less than once a month/special occasions	Never
<b>Organic</b>	26%	40%	28%	6%	0%
<b>Local</b>	14%	50%	28%	6%	3%
<b>Seasonal</b>	13%	60%	21%	7%	0%

Table 4: Comparative charts: frequency of organic, local, and seasonal choices

94% of the respondents check the labels on food packaging for chemical additives; of those that do check, 97% choose to reconsider buying it or eating it if there are harmful ingredients.

The next question asked respondents to rank their prevailing reasons for their dietary choices out of the following options: Buddhist (ahimsa, non-attachment, simplicity, interconnectedness), health, environmental and financial. The highest-ranking prevailing reason for dietary choices was health, but Buddhism was a close second. Typically, the second highest ranking for dietary choices was environmental. The majority (58%) of respondents ranked ‘financial’ as their least prevailing reason for dietary choices.

I also asked whether the respondents would like to make changes in their dietary choices. Of those that *do* want to make changes in their diet (58%), the following chart summarizes the types of changes they’d like to make:



*Figure 7: Changes that survey respondents would like to make in their diet*

Of the “other” responses, most had to do with specific health-related changes. Additionally, people wished to cook more food from scratch, to eat “less boring” food, to “eat less” all together and to “determine food sensitivities and eliminate them” from their diet.

The last set of questions asked respondents to state the degree to which they agree or disagree with the following statements:

- I see the general connection between Buddhism and Ecology as a whole
- My understanding of the connection between Buddhism and Ecology has informed an environmental ethic

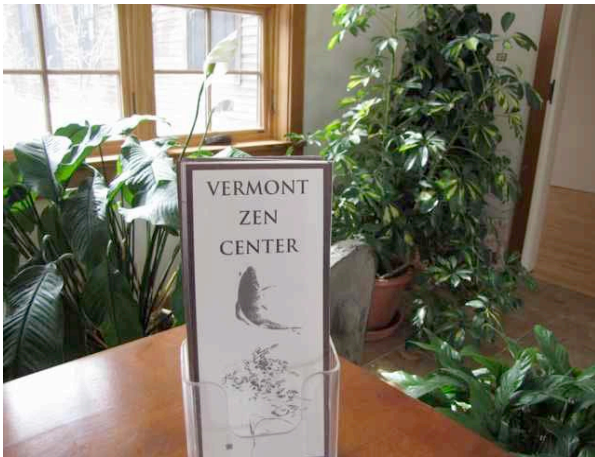
- I see a clear connection between Buddhist precepts and making environmentally sound eating choices
- My Buddhist practice informs mindfulness when eating/preparing a meal

The majority of respondents either “strongly agreed” or “tended to agree” with these statements.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### General Demographics of the People Researched in this Study

The people whose beliefs and attitudes were rendered by my survey and interviews represent a very similar demographic. The vast majority whom I interviewed and surveyed were white, middle-aged adults, associated with the Zen lineage and from the coastal regions of the United States; this demographic is typical of the Buddhist practitioners in this country. As Layman says in his book *Buddhism in America*, the first wave of Buddhism in the West



**Photograph 22: Entrance to Vermont Zen Center**

consisted mainly of oriental practitioners from Japan and subsequently Zen missionaries; the first non-oriental practitioners of Buddhism in the United States were practicing Zen. Of those who responded to my survey, 52% were associated with the Zen tradition; of the site visits, half were Zen centers; of the interviewees, half are either currently associated with Zen Buddhism or have been in the past.

Zen happens to also be the tradition primarily connected with the practice of Socially Engaged Buddhism; the man who coined the term, Thich Nhat Hanh, was a Vietnamese Zen monk. Of those that have been involved in the spreading and teaching of socially engaged Buddhism in the United States, the majority have been from the Zen lineage: Roshi Bernie Glassman of the Zen Peacemakers, Roshi John Daido Loori of Zen Mountain Monastery, Roshi Philip Kapleau of Rochester Zen Institute, Gary Snyder and Stephanie Kaza, just to name a few.

Rather than posit a particular causality between traditional Zen Buddhism and an environmental ethic, it is simply interesting to note the frequency of Zen practitioners in my study that are involved in this kind of work.

### Comparison with Kristin Steele Study

As a follow-up of an exploration done in the past, it is important to compare the findings of my study to those of Steele's obtained a decade ago: how are they alike and how do they

differ? Steele employed similar methods in her study: engaging in site-visits, interviews, and broadcasting a survey questionnaire. Her hypothesis, too, was similar to mine: that Buddhist ethics will influence particular food choices in practitioners. We also shared a similar sub-hypothesis proposing that Buddhist practitioners may have a particular environmental consciousness surrounding their food choices and attitudes resulting from traditional Buddhist ethics. An element of her theoretical and field research that I did not study was the comparison of eating ethics across lineages. This was one of the important study questions of Kristen Steele's 1999 thesis. The way that the *LimeSurvey* software interpreted my data did not include cross-comparisons between the lineages represented, of which were primarily Zen. Also, while my study focused on American Buddhists in particular, Steele's study focused on Western Buddhists (including studies from Europe) more generally.

From the reading of her thesis, general themes within the study of contemporary Western Buddhists and their food choices remain today. One important theme is the difficulty in making generalizations about the behavior of these practitioners resulting from their extensive diversity. Another theme that seemed to be discovered in both Steele's study and within my own, is the emphasis on *mindful engagement* in the growing, procurement, cooking and eating of food as an important aspect of the individuals behavior surrounding food as it relates to their Buddhist practice.

The diversity of American Buddhists today results mainly from the ability of the modern North American individual to choose their own beliefs. Also, there is an opportunity to mix different traditions together in our culture. Historically, these kinds of decisions were not left up to the individual; rather, family history and lineage were chiefly recognized as governing an individuals belief system. In her thesis, Steele notes, "13% of the respondents indicated that they were affiliated with more than one tradition...this includes Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist traditions. To my understanding, this sort of combining of traditions was not historically feasible." (Steele, 105) A conclusion consistent with her thesis that I have also made is that this ability to have a wide array of practices to choose from is perhaps a fundamental aspect of contemporary Western Buddhism. New temporal contexts, cultural influences, and globalization in general have created an entirely new face of Buddhism, as expressed by practitioners in the West.

Steele also noted that although there seemed to be an increasing awareness surrounding the practice of engaged Buddhism among the practitioners in her study, there was also a general desire to improve their commitment to embodying the Buddhist ideals and precepts in their daily behavior. She discusses that while people had an understanding of socially engaged Buddhism's existence as a movement, there was still not a large amount of evidence illuminating the ways this was occurring within the individuals themselves. Practitioners in her survey sample noted that they would like to better embody environmental ethics as a way of embodying Buddhist ethics. In terms of food ethics, both the survey respondents and the people that I interviewed had a desire to make choices that would better embody the fundamental precept of non-harm. In general, it is the financial boundaries are the most limiting factors in allowing North American Buddhists to embody ecological Buddhist principles.

Since 1999, when her thesis was written, there has been an evolving environmental movement more generally occurring in the United States. I would argue that people in this country have been developing a significant awareness of environmental issues over the past decade. There have been substantial public statements made over the past decade of national and environmental importance, notably Al Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth" and the subsequent Nobel Prize won by him in conjunction with the IPCC (International Panel on Climate Change). Despite its debated criticism, its existence introduced the environmental movement to popular culture. Another important actor in the movement of ecological awareness in the United States is Michael Pollan, author, journalist and activist surrounding issues of the American food system. Outbreaks of Mad Cow Disease and *E. coli* have also stirred the news, alerting the public to the various inefficiencies and dangers of our food system. Since 1999 there has been a renewed focus on local action in terms of economics, agriculture and education in the United States, particularly noted by author Bill McKibben. Additionally, there have been various natural disasters that have encouraged people to question their frequency as being a symptom of human-induced climate change. These recent societal factors within the past decade have made environmental awareness more accessible to the citizens of the United States.

Since Steele's 1999 study, this evolution is marked primarily by the different ways that Buddhists perceive an ecologically sound diet. While the most important questions of Steele's thesis concerned vegetarian and organic choices as the primary indicators of ecologically sound eating choices, my study went further to address issues of seasonal and locally grown foods. Due

to its integrative nature, “buying local” has become an important contemporary movement. Not only does buying local provide the consumer with an understanding of where food comes from, but it also stimulates local economies in sustainable ways. The emphasis on local was highlighted in my study in comparison to Steele’s. 6% of the survey respondents in my survey called themselves “localvores,” and 73% of them choose to eat local foods either usually or always. In terms of my site visits, whether or not local foods were always included in the diet, an emphasis on local food as a marker of an ecologically sound diet was emphasized by the conversations that I had. Venerable Seonaidh Perks and his Celtic Buddhist establishment in Saxton’s River had an especially strong emphasis on local eating, stating that when he cannot procure his own food, he trades with local farmers or shops at the local co-op. Bonnie from the Vermont Zen Center spoke about the importance of their relationship with local farmers, specifically citing the Vermont Zen Center’s relationship with a local berry farmer from whom they get all of their berries in summer. She says, “when we can, we buy local.” The people from the Zen Mountain Monastery also stated that ideally all of their food would come either from their garden or from the local farmers and locally-owned health food stores. Knowing the repercussions of a conventional meat eating diet, the Zen Mountain Monastery kitchen managers choose local and ecologically sound choices when they choose to serve meat. Even Kagyu Thubten Monastery, an establishment that serves 50% conventional food and has a regular diet of meat, would procure food from more locally grown and ecologically sound sources if they had the means. Again, rather than a theoretical conflict or general unawareness, budgets seem to be what set the limit on the locality and environmental sensitivity of the foods that Buddhists choose to eat.

Along the lines of both socially engaged Buddhism and efforts at local consumption, attention to the importance of gardening and cooking were more emphasized in my study than in Steele’s. Not only did people discuss gardening and cooking more frequently as fundamental to the relationship with the food they are eating, but the importance of mindfulness in these endeavors was also stressed. Both gardening and cooking are considered important mindfulness practices that not only deepen gratitude and appreciation for food but also deepen the practitioner’s capacity to practice *Buddhism*. I didn’t include a question in my survey concerning this connection because it was a concept that emerged from the interview process and unplanned literature that I was exposed to after the creation and distribution of my survey. 90% of my

survey respondents, however, do *enjoy* cooking. 75% of the survey respondents cited their keeping of a vegetable or flower garden. While these two practices were certainly mentioned in Steele's 1999 study, they were not emphasized as mindfulness practices. One paragraph in Steele's conclusions addresses the importance that Buddhists place on mindful eating. She discusses one nun's reflections:

One must be thankful and mindful of the food that one eats. The best way to do this, she said while grinning, is to chew. While chewing each bit the recommended thirty to fifty times, she sees all that went into the food: the love and hard work of the farmer, the person who brought it to market and everything in between. In this way the act of eating becomes an appreciation of our connection with everyone and everything else" (Steele, 1999).

In my study, attention to gardening and cooking as Buddhist mindfulness practices were expressed by the Buddhists that I surveyed and interviewed but also in writings by Edward Espe Brown, American Zen teacher and tenzo. His work illuminates the importance of mindfulness in growing food, cooking food *and* eating food to a fully engaged Buddhist practice. Each one of my interviewees mentioned how important mindfulness was in their relationship with food and also how mindfulness reflected the ecological soundness of their diet.

In terms of how respondents self-identified their eating practices, Steele and I had similar results. The respondents were primarily vegetarians, slightly less were meat eaters/omnivores, and a small percentage considered themselves vegans. I included three additional options to this multiple choice question compared to Steele's; I found them to be particularly important: "pescatarian" (no red or white meat, fish only), "localvore," and "pragmatist/whatever I can get." Although only 6% of my respondents consider themselves "localvores," I thought it was an important category to include considering the increasing awareness around the term and its relevance towards an ecological diet. I also realized that people, whether or not they have the ethics theoretically, are not always able to maintain a specific dieting label. Also, I combined the label "meat-eater" with "omnivore" rather than simply labeling people as "meat-eaters." Around 10% of the respondents considered themselves to be "pragmatists" (including the "other" responses such as "indiginetarian... whatever people around me eat.") Similar to those that responded to Steele's inquiry, of those that did identify as meat-eaters, meat is consumed rarely or on special occasions. Similarly, congruent responses occurred for the frequency of eggs, poultry, fish, and packaged food consumption of the survey respondents of both Steele's study and my own.



	Vegetarian	Meat-eaters/ omnivores	Vegans	Pescatarian	Localvore	Pragmatist	Other
<b>My Study</b>	39%	28%	3%	7%	6%	8%	10%
<b>Steele's Study</b>	43%	35%	7%	n/a	n/a	n/a	15%

*Table 5: Self-identification comparison with Steele's study*

Steele similarly asked whether or not the respondent would like to make changes to their diet. While the vast majority of Steele's respondents said yes they would, only a slight majority of mine did. Among the kinds of changes that practitioners would like to make, Steele's respondents had an emphasis on organic and healthy choices as well as "towards vegetarianism/veganism." The respondents from my survey, however, while also having an emphasis on healthier organic food, emphasized that they would like to make changes in *all* sectors, fairly evenly (including an important emphasis on locally grown and raised food). This may illuminate how conceptions of ethical eating choices have expanded over the past decade.

Contrary to Steele, I did not approach my research with the assumption that vegetarianism was the primary indicator of an ecologically sound diet. Also, I was aware from previous conversations with practicing Buddhists that vegetarianism was not necessarily an axiomatic practice of all Buddhists (especially in America where the practice is such a hybrid). Another movement that has coincided with the last decade is an effort to raise stock animals in humane, environmentally sensitive ways only available for local consumption. This effort is evidenced among Buddhist practitioners in their effort to eat meat only when sourced locally. What I considered a progressive statistic, about 13% of the respondents who eat meat choose to eat meat *only* when sourced locally. As Fajrlie (2010) argues in his compelling book, meat production is a "crucial part of a sustainable, small-scale, holistic farming system" (back cover). This is another important shift in beliefs that has occurred since 1999. Rather than vegetarianism as the sole marker of an ecologically sound diet, an emphasis on small-scale, organic, and local foods is becoming the primary indicator.

In general, Steele's conclusions are similar to mine, that Buddhists show a sensitivity to ecologically sound choices and a desire to continue to embody Buddhist philosophy in those choices. Contexts will continue to change with time though, and the future of Buddhist eating practices will likely continue to evolve.

## Study in Context of the Literature

Underlying most of my research and conclusions come from a general comparison of Buddhism and Ecology. As many scholars on Buddhism and Ecology have noted, theoretical comparisons between Buddhist philosophy and contemporary ecological theory illuminate the ways in which, hypothetically, an environmental ethic should stem from a practice of Buddhism. However, through my experience researching in the field, I have come to understand that rather than a strict adherence to specific Buddhist doctrines and laws as the primary guiding factor of environmental ethics, there are other compelling forces at work in American Buddhist ethics. Also, strict adherence to vegetarianism is no longer considered a necessary aspect of American Buddhism, per se. Traditionally, there were specific laws and guidelines that were prescribed by a teacher and carried out by the follower. Roshi Philip Kapleau states that depending on what canonical texts an individual follows, there are different dietary prescriptions; notably the eating of meat or the abstention from eating meat (either the *Pali Canon* of the Theravada tradition where in certain instances such as alms, the ingestion of meat is morally acceptable or the *Mahaparinirvana Sutta* or *Lanakavatara Sutta* of the Mahayana tradition where meat is strictly forbidden because of Buddhist principle). Contemporarily, and in America, there is much more of a leniency concerning the individual's eating practices. In every case of my field research, the type of food one eats is a choice left entirely up to the individuals, not necessarily traditional texts or spiritual teachers. While some monasteries and centers only provide vegetarian meals, the choice of what the individual consumes elsewhere is entirely up to that person. This evolution of Buddhist practice is an important aspect of the current behaviors surrounding eating. Also to my surprise, many of the Buddhists I spoke with consumed alcohol on a regular basis. A community member at the Zen Mountain Monastery said that people often relax over a beer on weekends. At Anadaire, Irish whiskey is regularly offered to the Buddha. This example illuminates an explicit departure from the precepts. The fifth precept prohibits the consumption of alcohol. Susan Albers, a contemporary author who relates Buddhist practice to a healthy relationship with food, discusses the way alcohol affects a healthy lifestyle, it “reduces [one's] ability to describe and observe [one's] body sensations...they alter and skew the precision, clarity, and purity of sensation that is necessary for mindful eating” (Albers, 148) It is clear here that practitioners today have developed new ways of relating to and practicing the Dharma that are very much synthetic in nature.

Another prescribed practice surrounding food that I found less prevalent in contemporary American communities is a strict observance of mindful silence during meals. Although silence is a practice that is still maintained during retreats, I did not observe this prescription at all during my experience eating and visiting Buddhist centers and monasteries. Silence seemed to be a practice reserved for special occasions, during periods of intense meditation



**Photograph 23: Tibetan beer at Kagyu Thubten Choling**

but certainly not on a daily basis. Another difference that arose between the theoretical and field research was the observance of alms. Of those whom I interviewed and surveyed, most were not in a position to receive alms. It is stated in certain Buddhist canonical texts that when receiving food in the form of alms, anything provided should be taken with gratitude. Generally, in the contemporary American context, alms come mainly in the form of donations to the larger community that is then funneled into purchasing things like food for the community. In this way, I see a relationship between historical prescriptions and contemporary practice. There was certainly a theme within the survey responses and throughout my interviews in choosing to consume any food when offered as a gift. Sister Gryphon, abbess of the Celtic Buddhist monastery, expressed this when she said that while she used to refuse meat of any kind, she now accepts it as a method of Buddhist-informed gratitude. This behavior of accepting gifts was particularly noted in my survey: when asked whether or not the practitioner ate meat; answers include the following: “I will, very occasionally eat meat that is served to me to prevent it from being wasted, but I never buy it or eat it on purpose.” Or, “I eat meat only if it would otherwise be in a position to be wasted.” This concept was revisited by both Venerable Seonaidh Perks and Sister Gryphon of the Celtic Buddhist lineage, citing that they would eat meat if it was offered to them or if they saw it on the road as “road kill.” From this example, we might see this road kill as a contemporary form of “alms.” These evolved forms are interesting to note.

A Buddhist philosophy that I found prevalent among the practitioners that I interviewed was an emphasis on the Middle Way. In Albers’ book *Eating Mindfully: How to End Mindless Eating and Enjoy a balanced relationship with Food*, she cites the Middle Way as guidance for a

healthy relationship with food. The Middle Way, an abstention from both asceticism and indulgence, is fundamental the Buddha's teachings. In fact, it was this Middle Way that allowed him to perceive and attain liberation. I found the Middle Way to be cited in both cooking practices and eating choices among the people that I spoke with. Steve Hallquist, kitchen manager at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, says that he observes this philosophy in the kitchen; his food is "not too spicy, not too hot, not too bland nor too flavorful." Sister Gryphon echoed an emphasis on a middle path by not indulging too much in eating, but also choosing not to starve herself; for her, maintaining a healthy relationship with food means delighting in the flavor of delicious foods, but not allowing that flavor to distract her practice.

The field research aspect of my thesis revealed that there is not always consistent causality that connects Buddhist practice, environmental ethics, eating habits and attitudes. Originally, my idea was that after reviewing the literature describing the philosophies of Buddhism, I would be able to legitimately hypothesize the kinds of behaviors that a practicing Buddhist might employ. After having read literature connecting Buddhist ethics theoretically with environmentally sensitive behavior, I assumed that anyone following basic Buddhist precepts would consequently practice a committed and engaged environmental ethic. However, what I found was that a substantial number of the Buddhists I researched already *had* an engaged ethic, and that Buddhism complemented that, not created it. Celtic Buddhist Sister Gryphon says that Buddhist environmental beliefs were what initially attracted her to Buddhism, and that that practice re-shaped and re-informed a pre-existing ethic. Others, such as Celtic Buddhist Venerable Seonaidh Perks, also already had a deep understanding of his responsibility as a steward of the earth before starting his Buddhist practice. Raised in the U.K. in the 1930's, environmentally sensitive behavior was implicit in his lifestyle. Buddhism happened to complement that.

Other people that I interviewed didn't necessarily connect their environmental ethic and eating practices with their Buddhist practice, such as Zen practitioner Dana Kojun Hull of the Great Vow Zen Monastery: "Food choices are not on my mind a lot. I can't think of any environmental epiphany that occurred to me in regards to my food choices since having become a Buddhist." This statement illuminates the complexity in drawing a distinct conclusion between Buddhism and a resulting environmentally sensitive food ethic. Scott Perry, former director of the Burlington Shambhala Center had this to say:

I understand Buddhism to be a method of overcoming internal confusion and liberating self-existing intelligence through the practice of sitting meditation, which is basically learning how to wake yourself up. *While food is obviously essential to life, I have no reason to believe that food choices bear any relationship at all to a practitioner's development through sitting meditation and meditation in action as well.*

It is helpful to hear from someone like Scott who puts less emphasis on food and eating in relation to his practice. This data elucidates the ambiguity and diverse perspectives among American Buddhist practitioners.

Others respect the environment and would eat in environmentally ethical ways if they could, but state that these choices are simply not within their budget. Tibetan monk, Thubten McKenna, admits that in most cases paying the bills takes precedence over buying entirely organic food for their kitchen.

Still others believe that it would be impossible for their Buddhist practice *not* to inform an environmental ethic, such as Zen Abbot Ryushin from Zen Mountain Monastery who says, “it is as a basis of liturgy and invocation that by deliberately shaping your mind with words, with questions, with attitudes, you’re shifting your perspective. So yes, [my eating has] been affected by practice, even in surprising ways.” In addition to the liturgical Zen practice of Oryoki, Ryushin has developed an entirely Zen-born mindfulness surrounding his eating practices and conceptions of the environment; examples of such mindfulness include a focus on limiting his emotional attachment to food. Mu Seong of the Barre Center for Buddhist studies echoes this sentiment:

the core idea [of Buddhism] is that if one does practice Buddha's teaching seriously, it should change one's way of perceiving the self and the world; "change" here means that one begins to create narratives from one's own experience rather than regurgitate one's inherited conceptual frameworks.

Another very important thing to remember here, too, is that depending on one’s status as either monk or lay Buddhist, one’s commitment to following the precepts may vary; more commitment to Buddhist ideals on behalf of the monk than the lay practitioner. In my field research, however, this line was not so clear. Attitudes towards food among the monks versus the practitioners did not substantially vary. This shows a departure from traditional practice, wherein monks have vows to keep that practitioners do not.

So important questions remain, here, about the causality between ethics and practice. Is it a practice of Buddhism that affects environmental behavior? Is it environmental behavior that affects one's involvement in Buddhism? Is it an environmental ethic that necessarily affects

eating choices and attitudes? Are beliefs always reflected in action? As Kristen Steele deduced in her 1999 thesis,

It appears that no matter where the chain of effect begins, ends, or circles back on itself, the connection of Buddhism and ecology is one that is widely supported in the reviewed literature and also in the survey sample. It is also a connection that has within it a space for a discussion of food eating. Perhaps this then is one catalyst for a daily, active integration of the Buddhism and ecology connection (Steele, 111).

In the American context, a strict adherence to doctrine has been replaced by individual choice. Another interesting aspect to note is that whether an environmental ethic is expressed explicitly by the practitioners or not, its evidence is clear from the beautiful landscapes of most Buddhist centers. Also, there are several examples of Buddhist centers conserving the land that they inhabit. This illuminates ways in which Buddhism encourages and appreciates natural beauty.

#### American Buddhist eating in context of larger trends

A reoccurring theme that became apparent throughout my research is that the practice of Buddhists in America is essentially incomparable to those of traditional Buddhist cultures. This contrast is a result of temporal context and related ethics but also because of *culture*. Of the Buddhists that I surveyed, the influence of American culture appears equally as powerful as the influence of traditional Buddhist prescriptions in their reflections on the environment, and their rituals around eating food. Two fundamental American notions are the *freedom to choose* and the secular belief in a *separation between church and state*. These two strong belief systems have created an interesting platform on which Buddhism in America stands. Americans have the freedom to choose which belief systems they want to adopt as well as the prerogative to change their minds because they are *individuals*. Accordingly, canonical Buddhist doctrine is being interpreted in new ways in American Buddhism. Traditional texts are being applied to altogether modern contexts. Eating, as one example, has taken on new forms in this country that Asian canonical texts were not prepared to reflect or respond to.

Also contingent upon American forms of Buddhism and this idea of choice, are the different ways that the respondents classify themselves as Buddhists. The survey respondents had unique ways of seeing themselves that didn't necessarily align with traditional Buddhist categories (such as Buddha, monk, or lay person). The variety of responses listed in the results illustrates the diverse ways of being a Buddhist in American culture. These differences are important to note when discussing the relationship between "Buddhists" and their respective

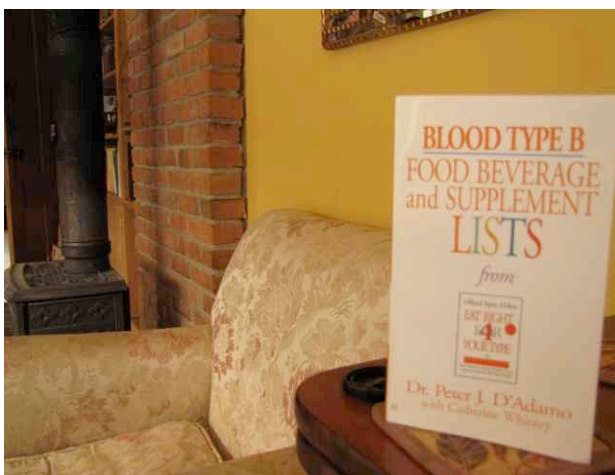
ethics. Depending on how seriously one takes their practice, the individual's code of ethics is more or less aligned. In this way, one can see that the nature of Buddhism, especially in the West, takes on pluralist forms; one can choose to *fully* engage in Buddhism, to only consider it while making important decisions, in an attempt at being a better person, or in complete synthesis with another

traditionally Western religion, such as Catholicism. Many of the survey respondents have officially taken vows or have been ordained, while others practice Buddhism solely to cultivate more compassion in their lives. Because of this, strict adherence to Buddhist guidelines does not always occur.

In America, where such a synthetic and diverse culture exists, choices about food are made according to other important guiding factors apart from Buddhist ethics, such as health and accessibility. Health was the number one cited motivation towards food choices in my survey. Health was a common theme throughout the interview process as well. Health has historically been a primary motivator for eating choices, but what other influences have affected the American Buddhist?



**Photograph 24: Virgin Mary at Zen Mountain Monastery Cemetery**



**Photograph 25: Eating for your blood type at Anadaire**

An aspect of American eating culture that Michael Pollan speaks directly to in his book *Omnivore's Dilemma*, is that as a result of such a monopolized agricultural sector and a movement away from the land, people have lost the instinct to discern the types of food that nourish them and those that do not, hence the appearance of various diet fads and the incidence of obesity. Because of this, we have been encouraged to look to external guiding ethics to make suitable, healthy and ethical choices about food. When I asked Lisa Harris,

executive chef at Tibetan Center Karme Choling, about the food requests she gets, she listed some that really surprised me; this list speaks to the differences among food choices among American practitioners. She said:

Some programs request special items or diets, including, a purification diet of whole foods minus garlic and onions and spices, high protein and energy diets with no beans, and two full meals rather than soup for dinner...We prepare various cultural flavors including Asian, Southwestern, Mexican, Italian, American, Czech, southern and others.

Requests here certainly speak to dietary beliefs, taste preference, and to allergy. Steve Hallquist, Kitchen Manager at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, has this to say of the requests that he receives: “we do get requests from the retreatants, usually around special diets they have (gluten or dairy free). We have a fairly set answer to most requests which is that we provide simple alternatives and if that is not good enough they need to bring some of their own food.” This brings further light to the array of choices made by Buddhist practitioners in this country.

Conclusively, however, Buddhism does appear to significantly influence people’s behaviors surrounding food, especially in terms of their mindfulness. According to practitioners that I interviewed, eating as a practice seems to be an important aspect of spiritual well being. Important mindfulness practices that surfaced throughout my research occurred in the garden and in the kitchen. Not only does mindfulness help the practitioner to reflect on gratitude for the food, but also as a practice of Buddhism in and of itself. For Kojun, Zen practitioner from Oregon, “mindfulness during meals also helps me to reflect on impermanence, we feel how good [food] can taste and then also can see how it is completely gone only a few seconds later...if I am really present while I eat, then the act itself really presents all of the deep truths of Buddhism.” The truths she mentioned include: interconnectedness, karma, impermanence, and compassion. Chef Lisa Harris says, “we often have participants come into the kitchen for volunteer prep shifts and we consider that to be a great way to help them with their practice.” She adds, “the kitchen is a great environment: all of the cooks love to cook, love food, and are nurturers and a great team. We often talk about our practice and incorporate it into our daily work here - especially since we are hosting practitioners and witness much of their experience in the kitchen.”

Jan Enthoven, the Master Gardener at Karme Choling, has this to say about gardening and Buddhist practice:



What I get out of [gardening] seems to be connected with how much heart I put into it. It is also clear to me that the practicality of growing vegetables for the Karmê Chöling community has to be connected with the inspiration and motivation to dismantle the illusion of reality. Ultimately, just growing and eating organic food is not going to liberate us from our neurotic clinging to self and other. We need a greater vision, and this vision needs a discipline. For me this discipline is gardening in both good and bad weather (Karme Choling Shambhala Meditation Center, 2011).

This short narrative helps us to understand the relevance of gardening to the spiritual practice.

The kitchen manager at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, Steve Hallquist, also practices a mindful awareness in the kitchen; “I do try and be mindful in the kitchen, remembering to connect with the body, staying present with my thoughts (especially with knives and hot things!)” About 92% of my survey respondents agreed when asked whether or not their Buddhist practice informed mindfulness while preparing or eating a meal.

Important to note, too, is that some Buddhist practitioners are still very engaged with the current American agricultural system. By this I mean big box stores and fast food. One Pure Land/Cha’n Buddhist from Ohio states that she only eats meat when she is “trying to get to evening service on time and the McDonald’s line is shorter than the Subway line.” Not only does this imply a regular consumption of fast foods, but a potential unawareness of the consequences of her food choices. Dana Kojun Hull, from the Great Vow Monastery in Oregon, says that while the monastery has an extensive garden that is very active in the summertime, the majority of their food comes from *Cash and Carry*, a large warehouse-like discount chain along the West coast. These are unavoidable realities of our country’s food system.

### Conclusion

The study of Buddhists, ecology, and food choice is still, even ten years after Kristen Steele’s 1999 study, a fertile area for exploration. While there has been much research around the understanding of these three important topics as they relate to each other, practitioners and scholars alike are just beginning to scratch the surface. The complexity involved in researching the connection between ancient Buddhist teachings and the environmental ethic of the contemporary American Buddhist is a continuing evolution that will take generations of study and practice.

Food, in a more general sense, also continues to be a hotly debated issue in this country. As the primary and daily connection that almost every individual on this planet has with the earth, it is important to continue researching the implications that our eating choices have on the

health of the earth, the health of our bodies, and the spiritual evolution of all sentient beings and to discover ways to make sure these connections remain nourishing and sustainable.

While the theoretical connections do exist between religion and ecology, specifically Buddhism and ecology, the actual practice of age-old ethics is still something that will continue to evolve. While the relationship between religion and ecology is important in its ideology and provides us with an understanding of their connection, I find that the study of religion and ecology's true ecological force is in its ability to mobilize and create change in its constituents into the future. The socially engaged Buddhism I have reviewed in this thesis is a compelling way to propel what Joanna Macy calls "The Great Turning," the "Navayana" of Buddhism, and the possible shift in consciousness of the entire world. Stephanie Kaza mentions in her book, *Mindfully Green: A personal and Spiritual Guide to Whole Earth Thinking*, that the impact of environmental ethic springing up from the individual is going to be the true impetus of sustainable and ecological behavioral shifts. Rather than governmental policy and top-down approaches to environmental change, a sustainable and long lasting ethic towards the environment has to come from the bottom up. Buddhists in this country are showing that that effort is not only possible, but occurring with compelling force.

#### Limitations on the study and its Implications



**Photograph 26: American flag in dining hall of Kagyu Thubten Choling**

Limitations of distance, time, and accessibility definitely affected my ability to synthesize an entirely inclusive research effort. However, the range of respondents and interviewees that were eventually contacted made relatively wide and inclusive coverage for the scope of my study possible. Like any demographic, American Buddhist practitioners are incredibly diverse in their practices, belief systems, ethics, moods and motivations. It is difficult to generalize about such

a demographic, and the above limitations made it even more difficult to represent that diversity. This important aspect, though, underscores the difficulty of any research project, and helps us to understand and celebrate the diversity and complexity of our modern era.

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## APPENDICES

### A: Vocabulary and Definitions

Information gleaned from Mitchell, 2002 glossary

*Bodhisattva:*

person who seeks the wisdom and liberation of a Buddha; in Mahayana, one who seeks Buddhahood in order to deliver others from suffering.

*Buddha:*

“awakened one;” can mean the historical Buddha (Shakyamuni) or the Buddha nature—the ideal or highest spiritual potential that exists within all beings

*Dharma:*

the teachings of the Buddha; ultimate truth taught by the Buddha; law that governs things; essence or nature of phenomena; ultimate mental and physical constituents of existence.

*Roshi:*

Zen master

*Sangha:*

“community;” orders of men and women monastics; all Buddhist persons, lay and monastic

*Sesshin:*

intensive zen retreat; literally "touching the heart-mind"

*Tenzo:*

a title given to the chef at a Buddhist monastery. The literal translation is 'Heavenly Monk'.

*Three Jewels:*

three things that Buddhists take refuge in, and look toward for guidance, in the process known as taking refuge: Buddha, dharma, sangha

*Zazen:*

seated meditation in Zen Buddhism; at the heart of most Zen practice

*Zendo:*

Zen meditation hall

## B: The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings of the Order of Interbeing

### **The First Mindfulness Training: Openness**

Aware of the suffering created by fanaticism and intolerance, I am determined not to be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory or ideology, even Buddhist ones. Buddhist teachings are guiding means to help me learn to look deeply and to develop my understanding and compassion. They are not doctrines to fight, kill or die for.

### **The Second Mindfulness Training: Non-attachment to Views**

Aware of suffering created by attachment to views and wrong perceptions, I am determined to avoid being narrow-minded and bound to present views. I will learn and practise non-attachment from views in order to be open to others' insights and experiences. I am aware that the knowledge I presently possess is not changeless, absolute truth. Truth is found in life and I will observe life within and around me in every moment, ready to learn throughout my life.

### **The Third Mindfulness Training: Freedom of Thought**

Aware of the suffering brought about when I impose my views on others, I am committed not to force others, even my children, by any means whatsoever – such as authority, threat, money, propaganda or indoctrination – to adopt my views. I will respect the right of others to be different and to choose what to believe and how to decide. I will, however, help others renounce fanaticism and narrowness through compassionate dialogue.

### **The Fourth Mindfulness Training: Awareness of Suffering**

Aware that looking deeply at the nature of suffering can help me develop compassion and find ways out of suffering, I am determined not to avoid or close my eyes before suffering. I am committed to finding ways, including personal contact, images and sounds, to be with those who suffer, so I can understand their situation deeply and help them transform their suffering into compassion, peace and joy.

### **The Fifth Mindfulness Training: Simple, Healthy Living**

Aware that true happiness is rooted in peace, solidity, freedom and compassion, and not in wealth or fame, I am determined not to take as the aim of my life fame, profit, wealth or sensual pleasure, nor to accumulate wealth while millions are hungry and dying. I am committed to living simply and sharing my time, energy and material resources with those in real need. I will practise mindful consuming, not using alcohol, drugs or any other products that bring toxins into my own and the collective body and consciousness.

### **The Sixth Mindfulness Training: Dealing with Anger**

Aware that anger blocks communication and creates suffering, I am determined to take care of the energy of anger when it arises and to recognise and transform the seeds of anger that lie deep in my consciousness. When anger comes up, I am determined not to do or say anything, but to



practise mindful breathing or mindful walking and acknowledge, embrace and look deeply into my anger. I will learn to look with the eyes of compassion on those I think are the cause of my anger.

### **The Seventh Mindfulness Training: Dwelling Happily in the Present Moment**

Aware that life is available only in the present moment and that it is possible to live happily in the here and now, I am committed to training myself to live deeply each moment of daily life. I will try not to lose myself in dispersion or be carried away by regrets about the past, worries about the future, or craving, anger or jealousy in the present. I will practise mindful breathing to come back to what is happening in the present moment. I am determined to learn the art of mindful living by touching the wondrous, refreshing and healing elements that are inside and around me, and by nourishing seeds of joy, peace, love and understanding in myself, thus facilitating the work of transformation and healing in my consciousness.

### **The Eighth Mindfulness Training: Community and Communication**

Aware that lack of communication always brings separation and suffering, I am committed to training myself in the practice of compassionate listening and loving speech. I will learn to listen deeply without judging or reacting and refrain from uttering words that can create discord or cause the community to break. I will make every effort to keep communications open and to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

### **The Ninth Mindfulness Training: Truthful and Loving Speech**

Aware that words can create suffering or happiness, I am committed to learning to speak truthfully and constructively, using only words that inspire hope and confidence. I am determined not to say untruthful things for the sake of personal interest or to impress people, nor to utter words that might cause division or hatred. I will not spread news that I do not know to be certain nor criticise or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will do my best to speak out about situations of injustice, even when doing so may threaten my safety.

### **The Tenth Mindfulness Training: Protecting the Sangha**

Aware that the essence and aim of a Sangha is the practise of understanding and compassion, I am determined not to use the Buddhist community for personal gain or profit or transform our community into a political instrument. A spiritual community should, however, take a clear stand against oppression and injustice and should strive to change the situation without engaging in partisan conflicts.

### **The Eleventh Mindfulness Training: Right Livelihood**

Aware that great violence and injustice have been done to the environment and society, I am committed not to live with a vocation that is harmful to humans and nature. I will do my best to select a livelihood that helps realize my ideal of understanding and compassion. Aware of global economic, political and social realities, I will behave responsibly as a consumer and as a citizen, not investing in companies that deprive others of their chance to live.

### **The Twelfth Mindfulness Training: Reverence for Life**

Aware that much suffering is caused by war and conflict, I am determined to cultivate non-violence, understanding and compassion in my daily life, to promote peace education, mindful mediation and reconciliation, within families, communities, nations and in the world. I am determined not to kill and not to let others kill. I will diligently practice deep looking with my Sangha to discover better ways to protect life and prevent war.

### **The Thirteenth Mindfulness Training: Generosity**

Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing and oppression, I am committed to cultivating loving kindness and learning ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, plants and minerals. I will practice generosity by sharing my time, energy and material resources with those who are in need. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others. I will respect the property of others, but will try to prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other beings.

### **The Fourteenth Mindfulness Training: Right Conduct**

For lay members: Aware that sexual relations motivated by craving cannot dissipate the feeling of loneliness, but will create more suffering, frustration and isolation, I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without mutual understanding, love and a long-term commitment. In sexual relations, I must be aware of future suffering that may be caused. I know that to preserve the happiness of myself and others, I must respect the rights and commitments of myself and others. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to protect couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct. I will treat my body with respect and preserve my vital energies (sexual, breath, spirit) for the realization of my bodhisattva ideal. I will be fully aware of the responsibility for bringing new lives in the world, and will meditate on the world into which we are bringing new beings.

For monastic members: Aware that the aspiration of a monk or a nun can only be realized when he or she wholly leaves behind the bonds of worldly love, we are committed to practicing chastity and to helping others protect themselves. We are aware that loneliness and suffering cannot be alleviated by the coming together of two bodies in a sexual relationship, but by the practice of true understanding and compassion. We know that a sexual relationship will destroy our life as a monk or a nun, will prevent us from realizing our ideal of serving living beings, and will harm others. We are determined not to suppress or mistreat our body or to look upon our body as only an instrument, but to learn to handle our body with respect. We are determined to preserve vital energies (sexual, breath, spirit) for the realization of our bodhisattva ideal.

C: Oryoki Meal Gatha from Zen Mountain Monastery

*All:*

Buddha was born at Kapilavastu,  
enlightened at Magadha,  
taught at Varanasi,  
entered Nirvana at Kusinagara  
Now I open Buddha Tathagata's eating bowls;  
May we be relieved from self-clinging with all sentient beings.

*Liturgist:*

*In the midst of the Three Treasures,  
with all sentient beings,  
lets us recite the names of Buddha:*

*All:*

Pure Dharmakaya Vairochana Buddha;  
Complete Sambhogakaya Vairochana Buddha;  
Numerous Nirmanakaya Shakyamuni Buddhas;  
Future Maitreya Buddha;  
All Buddhas throughout space and time;  
Mahayana  
Saddharma Pundarika Sutra;  
Great Manjushri  
Bodhisattva;  
Mahayana  
Samantabhadra Bodhisattva;  
Great Compassionate  
Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva;  
All Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas  
Maha Prajna Paramita

*Liturgist (breakfast):*

*This food comes from the efforts of all sentient beings, past and present, and its ten advantaged  
give us physical and spiritual well-being and promote pure practice.*

*Liturgist (lunch):*

*We offer this meal of three virtues and six tastes to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and to all  
the life of the Dharma Worlds.*

*All:*

First, seventy-two labors brought us this food;  
We should know how it comes to us.  
Second, as we receive this offering,

we should consider whether our virtue and practice deserve it.  
Third, as we desire the natural order of mind to be free from clinging we must be free from greed.

Fourth, to support our life we take this food.

Fifth, to attain our way we take this food.

lunch only:

All those of the spiritual worlds,  
now I give you this offering,  
This food will pervade everywhere

First, this food is for the Three Treasures.

Second, it is for our teachers, parents, nation, and all sentient beings.

Third, it is for all beings in the six worlds.

Thus, we eat this food with everyone.

We eat to stop all evil,  
to practice good,  
to save all sentient beings,  
and to accomplish our Buddha Way.

The water with which I wash these bowls tastes like ambrosia.

I offer it to the various spirits to satisfy them.

Om Makurasai Svaha!

*Liturgist:*

*May we exist in muddy water with purity like a lotus;*

*Thus, we bow to Buddha.*

#### D: Rough Interview Questions

1. How long have you been practicing?
2. What drew you to this lineage?
3. Do you find that our food choices are influenced by your practice? In what ways?
4. Has your view of the natural world significantly changed since the start of your practice?
5. Has this view of the natural world affected your eating choices? How?
6. Who chooses the kinds of food that are provided to the monasteries?
7. Where does the food here come from?
8. Is there any practice of gardening?
9. Under what circumstances, if any, does a Buddhist eat meat? And does it matter how the meat was procured?
10. What is in an average meal?
11. What rituals surround the food you eat and what do they mean to you?
12. Organic choices? Local choices? Gardening? Vegetarian? Vegan? Raw?

## E: Survey Questionnaire

### “Buddhist Food Beliefs and Attitudes”

#### Survey Questions:

1. What tradition do you associate with?

Please choose only one of the following:

Theravada

Zen

Tibetan

Other

2. Do you garden?

Please choose all that apply:

I seasonally keep a flower garden

I seasonally keep a vegetable garden

I seasonally belong to a community garden

I have house plants

I don't currently garden, but I have in the past

Other:

3. Have you farmed before?

Please choose all that apply:

I have worked as a field hand

I have raised/helped to raise stock animals

I have cultivated land for the purpose of growing food

Other:

4. Do you enjoy cooking?

Please choose only one of the following:

Yes

No

5. To what degree do you agree or disagree with these statements:

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

I restrict my dieting habits with laws prescribed by Buddhism.

My eating choices reflect the values of my Buddhist practice.

My eating choices reflect my knowledge and understanding of the environment.

My eating choices reflect a concern for the environment and its resources.

6. How often do you practice any of these food and Buddhism related rituals/habits?

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

Always - for every meal/at least once a day   Usually - at least 5x/week   Sometimes - ~once a week/once a month   Rarely - less than once a month/only for special occasions   Never

Starting a meal with food blessing

Making food offering on shrine

Bringing food offerings to a temple

Eating in special retreat bowls

Compost food scraps

7. Do you consider yourself a:

Please choose only one of the following:

Meat eater/Omnivore

Pescatarian (no red or white meat, fish only)

Vegetarian

Vegan

Localvore

Pragmatist (whatever I can get)

Other

8. Was this choice made before or after becoming a Buddhist?

Please choose only one of the following:

Before

After

9. If you eat meat, specify circumstances:

Please choose all that apply:

Meat is a normal part of my diet

Only on holidays/special occasions

In alms

When it's local

Other:

10. Does it matter to you where your meat comes from/how the meat was procured?

Please choose only one of the following:

Yes

No

10a. If yes, what questions do you consider?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

° Answer was 'Yes' at question '10 [procure]' (10. Does it matter to you where your meat comes from/how the meat was procured? )

Please choose all that apply:

Is it local?

Is it free range/pasture raised?

Is it organic? (No antibiotics, No supplemental growth hormones, No animal byproducts in feed, etc)

Humane slaughter? (stunned unconscious prior to slaughter/rapid/effective)

Other:

11. How often do you eat:

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

Always - for every meal/at least once a day   Usually- at least 5x/week   Sometimes - ~once a week/once a month   Rarely - less than once a month/only for special occasions   Never

Red Meat

Poultry

Fish

Eggs

Processed/Packaged foods

Organically Grown food

Locally Grown food

Seasonal food

Food from your garden

Free-Range products

Hydrogenated Oils

12. Do you check the labels on food packaging for chemical additives?

Please choose only one of the following:

Yes

No

12a. If yes, do you reconsider (buying it/eating it)?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

° Answer was 'Yes' at question '13 [labels]' (12. Do you check the labels on food packaging for chemical additives?)

Please choose only one of the following:

Yes

No

13. What are the prevailing reasons for your dietary choices?

Please number each box in order of preference from 1 to 4

Buddhist (ahimsa, non-attachment, simplicity, interconnectedness etc.)

Health

Environmental

Financial

14. Would you like to make changes in your diet?

Please choose only one of the following:

Yes

No

14a. If yes, what kinds of changes?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

° Answer was 'Yes' at question '16 [changes]' (14. Would you like to make changes in your diet?)



Please choose all that apply:

More organic food

Healthier in general

More locally grown/raised food

Less meat

More whole foods

Less fat/sugar

More in tune with Buddhist principles of non-attachment, mindfulness, heightened awareness, etc.

Other:

15. To what degree do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

Strongly agree      Tend to agree      Neither agree nor disagree      Tend to disagree

Strongly disagree      Not applicable

-I see the similarity between Buddhist principles of interconnection and the intimate interconnections of an ecosystem

-I relate my understanding of 'ahimsa' to a kindness to and compassion for any 'other,' be it human, animal, or vegetable

-I see the general connection between Buddhism and Ecology as a whole

-My understanding of the connection between Buddhism and Ecology has informed an environmental ethic

-I see a clear connection between Buddhist precepts and making environmentally sound eating choices

-My Buddhist practice informs mindfulness when eating/preparing a meal

16. In what ways do you consider yourself a practicing Buddhist? \*

Please write your answer here:

17. Gender

Please choose only one of the following:

Female

Male

Other

18. Age group:

Please choose only one of the following:

Under 30

30-50

50-70

Over 70

19. In what state do you reside?

Please write your answer here:

20. How did you find this survey?

Please choose all that apply:

From a friend

From my Buddhist community

From an e-/newsletter

Other: