

## ABSTRACT

The *Śikṣāsamuccaya*'s Discourse on Bodies

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The *Śikṣāsamuccaya* makes the startling claim that bodhisattva bodies are good to eat. Specifically, the text claims that animals who eat the dead body (*ātmabhāva*) of a bodhisattva will attain a heavenly rebirth upon their deaths. Why should the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* make such a claim? The answer lies in a broader consideration of the significance of bodies to the text's conception of the bodhisattva ideal. The *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, which addresses itself primarily—although not exclusively—to a monastic audience, foregrounds the critical roles bodhisattva bodies play in the bodhisattva ideal of liberating others from the suffering of saṃsāric existence. Bodhisattvas are to use their bodies as much as their heartminds to benefit others. Thus the text exhorts its audience to cultivate bodies in present and future lifetimes whose very sight, sound, touch, and even taste will alter living beings for the better. This paper examines the centrality of bodies to the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*'s bodhisattva ideal. In doing so, it places the text's discourse on bodies in the context of larger Buddhist and South Asian discourse on the subject. The paper combines a close reading of the Sanskrit text with judicious use of contemporary body theory to argue for an embodied concept of the bodhisattva ideal.