

[Let's Talk About Veggies!](#)

Category : [February 1993](#)

Published by Anonymous on Feb. 01, 1993

Let's Talk About Veggies!

Subramuniaswami, Sivaya

Meat-eating. It's an issue in many Hindu homes and families, especially if some members are vegetarians and others are not. Like many of the old ways, vegetarianism went out of vogue for a while, mostly when India lived under its conquerors. But it's now finding a new popularity. This is partly due to all the medical studies that have changed doctors' views on nutrition, especially meat. They used to say to eat it, now they say it's bad for you.

Of course, being a vegetarian is not required to be a good Hindu. Many of the most wonderful Hindus eat meat. But it is an ideal we should preserve and strive for. Here is a story that shows how we are divided about eating meat. I was on a plane flying from Madras to Hawaii. A Hindu family - husband and wife and son - sitting in the row ahead of me had ordered steaks, chicken and fish. When they noticed I was seated behind them dressed in orange, they became conscience-struck and, after talking among themselves, called the stewardess. The husband held out for meat. The wife settled for a salad with dessert instead, and the son, I don't know what he ate. The point is, they know. They know.

This microcosmic experience shows the divided state of consciousness of the Hindu who openly states he doesn't know much about Hinduism, is a nonvegetarian, thinks this is OK, but in his heart knows enough about Hinduism to know it's not OK at all. If eating meat is OK, why not eat meat in front of the swamis? If eating meat is OK, why not take the best cooked animal cuisine to the temple and offer it as prasada? Hamburgers and potatoes, a sizzling sirloin, rice with mutton curry or Tandoori-style chicken. It's unthinkable. And it should be just as unthinkable to feed our own divine body with these dishes.

Then there are the borderline vegetarians. Some have told me, "I can eat eggs, because they are just like milk." But I answer, "An egg can produce a chicken, but milk cannot produce a cow." An egg, fertilized or not, is a form of life, whereas milk's very purpose is to be a food.

People tell me there are social reasons for eating meat. "It's very hard to live a normal business life and refuse to eat meat," they say. Not so. Some of the most successful businessmen and women in the world are vegetarians. They take pride in it, as they should. It is a statement of their relationship with the planet and its inhabitants. It is not a minus at all, but a plus, for it proves their sense of compassion and justice for others. It defines them as having strong values and the courage to stand up for them.

Times have changed. We need to stand up for our Hinduness. Being a vegetarian is one way to do it. They, the kids, will only follow our example. Let's face it. In Western nations today there are hundreds of Hindu temples, satsang groups and societies, and non-Hindus are the greatest admirers of our Eastern faith. They are also the greatest adherents of the vegetarian diet. There are hundreds of societies and groups and books advocating vegetarianism for health for wealth, for longevity and, most importantly, ecological balance - for far too many humans are eating far too many birds, fish, animals and eggs. Bold new books tackle the protein myth. There is more protein in fruits, vegetables and grains than you ever need. In eating fruits, vegetables, legumes and grains, you are eating peace, prosperity, security and longevity. By eating meat, fish, fowl and eggs, you are eating the emotions of those creatures - anger, jealousy, fear, which together create indecision, slothfulness and feelings of despair.

Speaking of books, a very nice one just came to us by mail the other day that attracted my attention. It is called Food for the Spirit. The name does not adequately describe this work. The subtitle does, however: Vegetarianism and the World Religions. The author is Steven Rosen, who for the past 15 years has been a renaissance advocate of the vegetarian ideal. It is dedicated to his Hindu guru, His Divine Grace Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, who, he said, taught him "to see God in every living creature."

Apart from an extensive section on Hinduism packed with scriptural quotes, the other world's religions are documented as to what they have to say about the veggie diet. The Christian viewpoint, that of Judaism and Islam and the Sufi

tradition are explained, along with Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism - each with quotes from scripture advocating "go easy on the animals." The hook makes it clear that all religions teach compassion and that not eating meat is much more than just a healthy way to eat. It is the basis of a profound spiritual life.

In the chapter on Hinduism there are discussions about animal sacrifices, cow protection, vegetarianism, nonviolence, animals and spirituality. Beginning at the beginning - the world's oldest scripture admonishes the Maharaja with instructions: Rig Veda, 10.87.16: "One who partakes of human flesh, the flesh of a horse or of another animal, and deprives others milk by slaughtering cows, O King, if such a fiend does not desist by other means, then you should not hesitate to cut off his head." The Yajur Veda, 12.32, also makes it clear: "You must not use your God-given body for killing God's creatures, whether they are human, animal or whatever."

The Mahabharata verse 115:40 explains in more detail: "The purchaser of flesh performs himsa (violence) by his wealth; he who eats flesh does so by enjoying its taste; the killer does himsa by actually tying and killing the animal. Thus, there are three forms of killing. He who brings flesh or sends for it, he who cuts off the limbs of an animal, and he who purchases, sells or cooks flesh and eats it - all of these are to be considered meat-eaters." And in verse 115.47: "He who desires to augment his own flesh by eating the flesh of other creatures lives in misery in whatever species he may take his birth." This reminds me to mention that a vegetarian in Sanskrit is called shakaharin and a nonvegetarian is a mansaharin.

Food for human life and survival has changed from a heavy-meat recommended diet to a more healthy one. The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine found meat actually causes human disease. They published a "New Four Foods Group" in which meat and dairy products were removed and the revised list is: 1. fruits; 2. grains; 3. vegetables and 4. legumes. This is a significant development for Hindu families who have been wrongly influenced by Western medicine to eat meats and feed them to their children. That myth and that excuse are now gone forever.

Food for the Spirit ends with a wonderful compliment to Hinduism: "Here, then is a religious tradition that emphasizes not only vegetarianism but also the spiritual equality of all living beings...Vegetarianism is nothing less than the confirmation of this awareness that all living beings are spiritually equal." It sells for \$8 plus

shipping and is available at Bala Books, Inc., 74 Old Westbury Road, Old Westbury, NY 11568, USA.

Hindus eat far too much meat. They have been seriously misled, misinformed, and it has become a habit that is not easy to break. When elderly mother insists that "in order to grow up properly" the children have to be fed the flesh of animals, fowl, fish and must eat eggs, what is the younger generation under her to do but reluctantly follow along? When pundits and elders insist, "There is nothing in scripture denying us meat," or wrongly say a vegetarian diet is only for yogis anyway, what are young people going to do?

We are now in the centenary Year of Swami Vivekananda who urged, "Awake! Arise!" Let's not have the rest of the world - who are becoming daily more and more aware of the harmful effects of eating dead flesh of any kind - pass the modern Hindus by. Awake, arise and listen to the words of the above scriptures which have been preserved for eons of time. Think about your own family's eating habits and do what's right. We have prepared a small pamphlet called "Hindu Scriptures Speak on Vegetarianism." I will be happy to send you a free copy. Just send \$1 for postage and handling to Publisher's Desk, P.O. Box 157, Hanamaulu, Hawaii 96715. Remember, animals have a consciousness, too.

Article copyright Himalayan Academy.