Why I am a Vegetarian
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YOUTH

# Why I am a Vegetarian

In May we sent out a call on our daily e-mail news service, Hindu Press International, inviting Hindu youth to send in a short essay covering the reasons why they personally chose to remain a vegetarian if so raised (or why they became one if not), how they have dealt with peer pressure to change, the value of more people becoming vegetarians and any other aspect of vegetarianism they wanted to share with Hinduism Today readers. Here we include a select representation of the very grown-up reasons they gave.

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Thuvaarahan Ravichandran, 7, Toronto: When I was small, I ate meat, and then when I was four someone told me that I was eating killed animals. I did not like that because I wanted animals to be alive and see the world. Also, I learned that real Hindus are vegetarians, so that is why I became a vegetarian. When people ask me to eat fish, I say that being a vegetarian is healthier than eating meat. I like to do pujas, and I think that people who eat meat are not supposed to do pujas. You can still eat delicious food when you are vegetarian.

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Medha Raj, 10, La Palma, California: I have often been told by others, "How can you live without meat!" It's not even a question, just a statement they make, which sounds very much like, "Oh, my God!" "Simple," I say, "I just do." If they really want to know, I ask them questions. Why not live with nature instead of destroying it? Why not start being healthy as a kid? By eating meat, you are killing animals. Extra fat also goes into your body. That's size XXXXXL! If I keep on being a vegetarian, it will help keep me fit and healthy for a long time to come. So, why not start

developing healthy tastes right now? I deal with other people by telling them that I am happy just the way I am, and how should I know what I'm missing out on because I've never tasted it and never wanted to bother trying.

For a long time, lunch recess was not something I looked forward to. I felt quite disgusted by the prospect of eating near others who were chewing dead animals in their mouths. Then I figured that I couldn't starve myself. So I told them to chew with their mouth shut, and they did. Over time, they have begun to understand me and respect my feelings. medha_raj@hotmail.com

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Kavita Nana, 15, Munster, Indiana: Personally, I consider eating animals unethical, because why should we kill animals for food when we can get through life as healthy human beings without hurting one animal? Many of my classmates in high school can't understand how I never am tempted to eat meat. But when your mom cooks highly nutritious vegetarian Indian meals every night, I am the one left wondering who would actually want to eat meat after a scrumptious Indian meal?

To many teenage girls, being a vegetarian means that they can cut the greasy meat products from their diet so that they can lose weight. Also being a vegetarian enables people to clear their minds and become more peaceful. I know it's changed me, because the devotion of God manifests in all of His creation, and within each individual and thing. So, why should we harm any of God's creatures? Life is composed of a cycle of rebirths, so whatever is done in this life will predict the outcome of the next life. donkeykong448@aol.com

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Abirami Ravichakaravarthy, 15, Toronto: I realized that innocent animals were being slaughtered so that I could have a "good" dinner, but how good could my dinner be if the food that I was eating had to endure pain? I also realized that as a Hindu, I would not become closer to the Lord unless I became a vegetarian.

There are also many scientific and ethical reasons that associate with

vegetarianism. For example, the human body was naturally structured to be herbivorous; this can be identified mainly by our jaw structure and teeth. They were prearranged to take in the same victuals as animals like the elephant, deer and rabbit. We were basically made to eat vegetables.

Although the sciences of being a vegetarian are considerable, the ethical conflicts are the most upsetting. Not only are the animals killed for the sake of someone's meal, but they must also endure pain before death. It was just the other day when a teacher told me that, when reading in the newspaper of the mad cow disease, she saw a picture of a cow on quarantine who was about to be slaughtered with a tear rolling down its cheek. If this is the emotion of a cow that must bear death because of a fatal disease, then we can only imagine the emotion of a cow that will be slaughtered for the enjoyment of eating beef.

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Nikita Shah, 16, Wisconsin: Most people know that Hinduism is made up of many different beliefs, and sometimes these beliefs may or may not be strictly followed. The belief in being a vegetarian is also not always strictly followed. But there are still some people that are strictly vegetarians, such as my parents. They have taught my sister, my brother and me that we should respect animals, because we, too, are animals. We would not want to be eaten or killed by them, so we should not eat or kill them either. Because of this belief in our household, we have never and will never find beef, pork or anything like that in our refrigerator.

I have friends that don't practice the same religion as I do and are always asking me why I am a vegetarian and why I won't convert to something else. I always end up explaining to them that I have been raised to be a vegetarian and I just can't let that go. They would think that it would be hard to live in a society where eating meat is a must. But for me it is not hard because another belief in my family is that there is no food like homemade food. We don't go to restaurants as much because we love the way our mom cooks Indian food. But others can't live without meat because they have always been raised to eat meat, so I don't bother arguing with them about it. desigurls23@hotmail.com

Narasimhachar Prativadi, 22, Getzville, New York: Vegetarianism gives us a deeper appreciation for all life forms. It allows us to see that every form of life has value. A meat eater's diet calls for the slaughter of several animals per day. Since the

slaughter is done so often, the meat eater no longer feels the value of the animal's life. These types of thoughts breed superiority of humans over other forms of life. It makes it okay for us to destroy life for our own comfort and lifestyle. A vegetarian diet makes us realize that Sri Rama (God) is in everything. Vegetarians eat plants because they lack central nervous systems. Eating plants causes less harm than eating animals. We should live our lives doing the least amount of harm to the planet and the beings around us.

Vegetarianism reduces the amount of negative karma we accumulate during a lifetime. Every time we slaughter an animal for meat, we are responsible for the suffering and pain that it went through. This type of karmic baggage makes it very difficult for us to progress on the spiritual path. If the spiritual path can be described as a huge mountain that you have to climb, eating meat is equivalent to carrying a heavy sack on your back as you climb the mountain. It is contrary to the path of spirituality.

In general, vegetarians live longer and are known to have fewer chronic illnesses. Health-care costs throughout the world have been growing exponentially. Vegetarian diets can help offset medical costs by reducing the amount of medical attention we need. simsosmooth@aol.com

Palak Malik, 16, New Delhi: Vegetarianism existed as a custom in the days of yore among certain Hindu and Buddhist sects. It is sattvic food advocated by the rishis and munis of the ancient times, whereas nonvegetarian food is a product of violence as the animal is killed and cooked for eating purposes. The animal at the time of death has feelings of anger, or may fear death, which on consuming them as food are transferred not only to the human body but the human mind and soul as well.

Our ancient scriptures say, "What you eat, so you become." Just by giving a thought to the quote one can realize what is going to be the fate of the vast majority of people who are eating nonvegetarian food just for taste when so many fresh fruits and vegetables are available in plenty.

By eating nonvegetarian food, people are becoming more and more violent and aggressive, and they pose a serious threat to the existence of a peaceful world. At

the same time they are inviting diseases like high blood pressure, tension and other psychological problems. rajivhtc@del3.vsnl.net.in

Tejal Shah, 19, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Drugs and alcohol have already exhibited extreme mental affects on individuals, leading some to depression, yet scientists have not researched adequately the effects of diet on mental health. Hinduism here is several steps ahead, as its philosophy stated in Hindu Rites and Rituals tells us, "Since Vedic times the rishis meditated and computed the effects of diet on man's thoughts, his higher consciousness and his spirit. They delved deep to fathom the mechanisms of his behavior with himself, with those around him, with his environment and the divine. Gleaning the empirical truths, they prescribed holistic injunctions of diet purity to edify his body, mind and spirit."

Hindu scripture places food into three categories: tamasic, rajasic and sattvic, in accordance with the kinds of effects it has on an individual's body, mind and spirit. The tamasic category includes meat and is attributed to a state of darkness, ignorance, lethargy and inactivity. The scripture elaborates, "A diet of animal flesh stimulates the senses, inciting the baser instincts in man. He is more prone to bursts of anger, hate and violence. The calming, sattvic temperament accruing from a vegetarian diet is reflected in animals. Herbivores are docile, whereas carnivores are aggressive and violent." At the same time, a nonvegetarian diet teaches no pity and care for animals, leading to their ill treatment, sometimes even when they are not being eaten. tejalshah84@hotmail.com