

Vegetarianism

I. Must We Kill in order to Live?

Vegetarianism, known in Sanskrit as Shakahara, was for thousands of years a principle of health and environmental ethics throughout India. Though Muslim and Christian colonization radically undermined and eroded this ideal, it remains to this day a cardinal ethic of Hindu thought and practice. A subtle sense of guilt persists among Hindus who eat meat, and there exists an ongoing controversy on this issue on which we hope this humble note will shed some light.

For India's ancient thinkers, life is seen as the very stuff of the Divine, an emanation of the Source and part of a cosmic continuum. They further hold that each life form, even water and trees, possesses consciousness and energy. Nonviolence, ahimsa, the primary basis of vegetarianism, has long been central to the religious traditions of India-especially Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Religion in India has consistently upheld the sanctity of life, whether human, animal or, in the case of the Jains, elemental.

The Sanskrit for vegetarianism is Shakahara, and one following a vegetarian diet is a shakahari. The term for meat-eating is mansahara, and the meat-eater is called mansahari. Ahara means "to consume, or eat," shaka means "vegetable," and mansa means "meat or flesh." The very word mansa, "meat," conveys a deep appreciation of life's sacredness and an understanding of the law of karma by which the consequence of each action returns to the doer. As explained in the 2,000-year-old Manu Dharma Shastra, 5.55, "The learned declare that the meaning of mansa (flesh) is, 'he (sa) will eat me (mam) in the other world whose flesh I eat here.' "

There developed early in India an unparalleled concern for harmony among life forms, and this led to a common ethos based on noninjuriousness and a minimal consumption of natural resources-in other words, to compassion and simplicity. If homo sapiens is to survive his present predicament, he will have to rediscover these two primary ethical virtues.

"Is vegetarianism integral to non injury?" In my book, *Dancing with Siva*, this question is addressed as follows: "Hindus teach vegetarianism as a way to live with a minimum of hurt to other beings, for to consume meat, fish, fowl or eggs is to participate indirectly in acts of cruelty and violence against the animal kingdom. The abhorrence of injury and killing of any kind leads quite naturally to a vegetarian diet, shakahara. The meat-eater's desire for meat drives another to kill and provide that meat. The act of the butcher begins with the desire of the consumer.

Meat-eating contributes to a mentality of violence, for with the chemically complex meat ingested, one absorbs the slaughtered creature's fear, pain and terror. These qualities are nourished within the meat-eater, perpetuating the cycle of cruelty and confusion. When the individual's consciousness lifts and expands, he will abhor violence and not be able to even digest the meat, fish, fowl and eggs he was formerly consuming.

India's greatest saints have confirmed that one cannot eat meat and live a peaceful, harmonious life. Man's appetite for meat inflicts devastating harm on the earth itself, stripping its precious forests to make way for pastures. The Tirukural candidly states, 'How can he practice true compassion who eats the flesh of an animal to fatten his own flesh? Greater than a thousand ghee offerings consumed in sacrificial fires is not to sacrifice and consume any living creature.' "

Amazingly, I have heard people define vegetarian as a diet which excludes the meat of animals but does permit fish and eggs. But what really is vegetarianism? Vegetarian foods include grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes and dairy products. Natural, fresh foods, locally grown without insecticides or chemical fertilizers are preferred. A vegetarian diet does not include meat, fish, fowl or eggs. For good health, even certain vegetarian foods are minimized: frozen and canned foods, highly processed foods, such as white rice, white sugar and white flour; and "junk" foods and beverages-those with abundant chemical additives, such as artificial sweeteners, colorings, flavorings and preservatives.

In my forty years of ministry it has become quite evident that vegetarian families have far fewer problems than those who are not vegetarian. If children are raised as vegetarians, every day they are exposed to nonviolence as a principle of peace and compassion. Every day they are growing up they are remembering and being reminded to not kill. They won't even kill another creature to eat, to feed themselves. And if they won't kill another creature to feed themselves, they will be much less likely to do acts of violence against people.

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II. Five Reasons to Be a Vegetarian

In the past fifty years millions of meat-eaters have made the personal decision to stop eating the flesh of other creatures. There are five major motivations for such a decision.

1) The Dharmic/Scriptural Reason

Ahimsa, the law of non injury, is the Hindu's first duty in fulfillment of his religious obligations to God and God's creation as defined by Vedic scriptures.

2) The Karmic Consequences Reason

All of our actions including our choice of food have karmic consequences. By involving oneself in the cycle of inflicting injury, pain and death, even indirectly by eating other creatures, one must in the future experience in equal measure the suffering caused.

3) The Spiritual Consciousness Reason

Food is the source of the body's chemistry, and what we ingest affects our consciousness, emotions and experiential patterns. If one wants to live in higher consciousness, in peace and happiness and love for all creatures, then he cannot eat meat, fish, shellfish, fowl or eggs. By ingesting the grosser chemistries of animal foods, one introduces into the body and mind anger, jealousy, fear, anxiety, suspicion and a terrible fear of death, all of which are locked into the flesh of butchered creatures. For these reasons, shakaharis live in higher consciousness and mansaharis abide in lower consciousness.

4) The Health Reason

Medical studies prove that a vegetarian diet is easier to digest, provides a wider range of nutrients and imposes fewer burdens and impurities on the body. Vegetarians are less susceptible to all the major diseases that afflict contemporary humanity, and thus live longer, healthier, more productive lives. They have fewer physical complaints, less frequent visits to the doctor, fewer dental problems and smaller medical bills. Their immune system is stronger, their bodies are purer, more refined and skin more beautiful.

5) The Ecological Reason

Planet earth is suffering. In large measure, the escalating loss of species, destruction of ancient rain forests to create pasture lands for livestock, loss of topsoils and the consequent increase of water impurities and air pollution have all been traced to the single fact of meat in the human diet. No single decision that we can make as individuals or as a race can have such a dramatic effect on the improvement of our planetary ecology as the decision to not eat meat. Many seeking to save the planet for future generations have made this decision for this reason and this reason alone.

III. How to Win an conversation with a Meat-Eater

While their numbers are rapidly growing, vegetarians are still a minority, and it is not unusual to be confronted with a meat-eater who not only protects his own right to eat flesh, but argues aggressively that vegetarians should join him in his carnivorous diet. Carnivores may regard non meat-eaters as a strange lot who munch on "rabbit food," and whose diet doesn't have the substance to make them strong, productive human beings.

The following presentation is designed to turn the tables on such discussions by showing the devastating effects of meat-eating both on individuals and on our planet. It is based on a richly informative poster entitled, "How to win an argument with a meat-eater," published by Earthsave, an organization based in Felton, California, giving facts from Pulitzer Prize nominee John Robbins' book Diet for a New America. Below are eight separate arguments against meat-eating and in favor of a vegetarian diet.

1. The Hunger Argument against meat-eating

Much of the world's massive hunger problems could be solved by the reduction or elimination of meat-eating. The reasons: 1) livestock pasture needs cut drastically into land which could otherwise be used to grow food; 2) vast quantities of food which could feed humans is fed to livestock raised to produce meat.

This year alone, twenty million people worldwide will die as a result of malnutrition. One child dies of malnutrition every 2.3 seconds. One hundred million people could be adequately fed using the land freed if Americans reduced their intake of meat by a mere 10%.

Twenty percent of the corn grown in the U.S. is eaten by people. Eighty percent of the corn and 95% of the oats grown in the U.S. is eaten by livestock. The percentage of protein wasted by cycling grain through livestock is calculated by experts as 90%.

One acre of land can produce 40,000 pounds of potatoes, or 250 pounds of beef. Fifty-six percent of all U.S. farmland is devoted to beef production, and to produce each pound of beef requires 16 pounds of edible grain and soybeans, which could be used to feed the hungry.

2. The Environmental Argument against meat-eating

Many of the world's massive environmental problems could be solved by the reduction or elimination of meat-eating, including global warming, loss of topsoil, loss of rain forests and species extinction.

The temperature of the earth is rising. This global warming, known as "the greenhouse effect," results primarily from carbon dioxide emissions from burning fossil fuels, such as oil and natural gas. Three times more fossil fuels must be burned to produce a meat-centered diet than for a meat-free diet. If people stopped eating meat, the threat of higher world temperatures would be vastly diminished.

Trees, and especially the old-growth forests, are essential to the survival of the planet. Their destruction is a major cause of global warming and top soil loss. Both of these effects lead to diminished food production. Meat-eating is the number one driving force for the destruction of these forests. Two-hundred and sixty million acres of U.S. forest land has been cleared for cropland to produce the meat-centered diet. Fifty-five square feet of tropical rain forest is consumed to produce every quarter-pound of rain forest beef. An alarming 75% of all U.S. topsoil has been lost to date. Eighty-five percent of this loss is directly related to livestock raising.

Another devastating result of deforestation is the loss of plant and animal species. Each year 1,000 species are eliminated due to destruction of tropical rain forests for meat grazing and other uses. The rate is growing yearly.

To keep up with U.S. consumption, 300 million pounds of meat are imported annually from Central and South America. This economic incentive impels these nations to cut down their forests to make more pasture land. The short-term gain ignores the long-term, irreparable harm to the earth's ecosystem. In effect these countries are being drained of their resources to put meat on the table of Americans while 75% of all Central American children under the age of five are undernourished.

3. The Cancer Argument against meat-eating

Those who eat flesh are far more likely to contract cancer than those following a vegetarian diet.

The risk of contracting breast cancer is 3.8 times greater for women who eat meat daily compared to less than once a week; 2.8 times greater for women who eat eggs daily compared to once a week; and 3.25 greater for women who eat butter and cheese 2 to 4 times a week as compared to once a week.

The risk of fatal ovarian cancer is three times greater for women who eat eggs 3 or more times a week as compared with less than once a week.

The risk of fatal prostate cancer is 3.6 times greater for men who consume meat, cheese, eggs and milk daily as compared with sparingly or not at all.

4. The Cholesterol Argument against meat-eating

Here are facts showing that: 1) U.S. physicians are not sufficiently trained in the importance of the relation of diet to health; 2) meat-eaters ingest excessive amounts of cholesterol, making them dangerously susceptible to heart attacks.

It is strange, but true that U.S. physicians are as a rule ill-educated in the single most important factor of health, namely diet and nutrition. Of the 125 medical schools in the U.S., only 30 require their students to take a course in nutrition. The average nutrition training received by the average U.S. physician during four years in school is only 2.5 hours. Thus doctors in the U.S. are ill-equipped to advise their patients in minimizing foods, such as meat, that contain excessive amounts of cholesterol and are known causes of heart attack.

Heart attack is the most common cause of death in the U.S., killing one person every 45 seconds. The male meat-eater's risk of death from heart attack is 50%. The risk to men who eat no meat is 15%. Reducing one's consumption of meat, dairy and eggs by 10% reduces the risk of heart attack by 10%. Completely eliminating these products from one's diet reduces the risk of heart attack by 90%.

The average cholesterol consumption of a meat-centered diet is 210 milligrams per day. The chance of dying from heart disease if you are male and your blood cholesterol is 210 milligrams daily is greater than 50%.

5. The Natural Resources Argument against meat-eating

The world's natural resources are being rapidly depleted as a result of meat-eating.

Raising livestock for their meat is a very inefficient way of generating food. Pound for pound, far more resources must be expended to produce meat than to produce grains, fruits and vegetables. For example, more than half of all water used for all purposes in the U.S. is consumed in livestock production. The amount of water used in production of the average cow is sufficient to float a destroyer (a large naval ship). While 25 gallons of water are needed to produce a pound of wheat, 5,000 gallons are needed to produce a pound of California beef. That same 5,000 gallons of water can produce 200 pounds of wheat. If this water cost were not subsidized by the government, the cheapest hamburger meat would cost more than \$35 per pound.

Meat-eating is devouring oil reserves at an alarming rate. It takes nearly 78 calories of fossil fuel (oil, natural gas, etc.) energy to produce one calorie of beef protein and only 2 calories of fossil fuel energy to produce one calorie of soybean. If every human ate a meat-centered diet, the world's known oil reserves would last a mere 13 years. They would last 260 years if humans stopped eating meat altogether. That is 20 times longer, giving humanity ample time to develop alternative energy sources.

Thirty-three percent of all raw materials (base products of farming, forestry and mining, including fossil fuels) consumed by the U.S. are devoted to the production of livestock, as compared with 2% to produce a complete vegetarian diet.

6. The Antibiotic Argument against meat-eating

Here are facts showing the dangers of eating meat because of the large amounts of antibiotics fed to livestock to control staphylococci (commonly called staph infections), which are becoming immune to these drugs at an alarming rate.

The animals that are being raised for meat in the United States are diseased. The livestock industry attempts to control this disease by feeding the animals antibiotics. Huge quantities of drugs go for this purpose. Of all antibiotics used in the U.S., 55% are fed to livestock.

But this is only partially effective because the bacteria that cause disease are becoming immune to the antibiotics. The percentage of staphylococci infections resistant to penicillin, for example, has grown from 13% in 1960 to 91% in 1988. These antibiotics and-or the bacteria they are intended to destroy reside in the meat that goes to market.

It is not healthy for humans to consume this meat. The response of the European Economic Community to the routine feeding of antibiotics to U.S. livestock was to ban the importation of U.S. meat. European buyers do not want to expose consumers to this serious health hazard. By comparison, U.S. meat and pharmaceutical industries gave their full and complete support to the routine feeding of antibiotics to livestock, turning a blind eye to the threat of disease to the consumer.

7. The Pesticide Argument against meat-eating

Unknown to most meat-eaters, U.S.-produced meat contains dangerously high quantities of deadly pesticides.

The common belief is that the U.S. Department of Agriculture protects consumers' health through regular and thorough meat inspection. In reality, fewer than one out of every 250,000 slaughtered animals is tested for toxic chemical residues.

That these chemicals are indeed ingested by the meat-eater is proven by the following facts:

A. Ninety-nine percent of U.S. mother's milk contains significant levels of DDT. In stark contrast, only 8% of U.S. vegetarian mother's milk containing significant levels of DDT. This shows that the primary source of DDT is the meat ingested by the mothers.

B. Contamination of breast milk due to chlorinated hydrocarbon pesticides in animal products found in meat-eating mothers versus non meat-eating mothers is 35 times higher.

C. The amount of the pesticide Dieldrin ingested by the average breast-fed American infant is 9 times the permissible level.

8. The Ethical Argument against meat-eating

Many of those who have adopted a vegetarian diet have done so because of the ethical argument, either from reading about or personally experiencing what goes on daily at any one of the thousands of slaughterhouses in the U.S. and other countries, where animals suffer the cruel process of forced confinement, manipulation and violent death. Their pain and terror is beyond calculation.

The slaughterhouse is the final stop for animals raised for their flesh. These ghastly places, while little known to most meat-eaters, process enormous numbers of animals each year. In the U.S. alone, 660,000 animals are killed for meat every hour. A surprising quantity of meat is consumed by the meat-eater. The average per capita consumption of meat in the U.S., Canada and Australia is 200 pounds per year! The average American consumes in a 72-year lifetime approximately 11 cattle, 3 lambs and sheep, 23 hogs, 45 turkeys, 1,100 chickens and 862 pounds of fish! Bon appetite!

People who come in contact with slaughterhouses cannot help but be affected by what they see and hear. Those living nearby must daily experience the screams of terror and anger of the animals led to slaughter. Those working inside must also see and participate in the crimes of mayhem and murder. Most who choose this line of work are not on the job for long. Of all occupations in the U.S., slaughterhouse worker has the highest turnover rate. It also has the highest rate of on-the-job injury.

IV. Humans Have neither Fangs nor Claws

A ninth and most compelling argument against meat-eating is that humans are physiologically not suited for a carnivorous diet. The book *Food for the Spirit, Vegetarianism in the World Religions*, summarizes this point of view as follows. "Many nutritionists, biologists and physiologists offer convincing evidence that humans are in fact not meant to eat flesh." Here are seven facts in support of this view:

"Physiologically, people are more akin to plant-eaters, foragers and grazers, such as monkeys, elephants and cows, than to carnivores such as dogs, tigers and leopards.

"For example, carnivores do not sweat through their skin; body heat is controlled by rapid breathing and extrusion of the tongue. Vegetarian animals, on the other hand, have sweat pores for heat control and the elimination of impurities.

"Carnivores have long teeth and claws for holding and killing prey; vegetarian animals have short teeth and no claws.

"The saliva of carnivores contains no ptyalin and cannot predigest starches; that of vegetarian animals contains ptyalin for the predigestion of starches.

"Flesh-eating animals secrete large quantities of hydrochloric acid to help dissolve bones; vegetarian animals secrete little hydrochloric acid.

"The jaws of carnivores only open in an up and down motion; those of vegetarian animals also move sideways for additional kinds of chewing.

"Carnivores must lap liquids (like a cat); vegetarian animals take liquids in by suction through the teeth.

"There are many such comparisons, and in each case humans fit the vegetarian physiognomy. From a strictly physiological perspective, then, there are strong arguments that humans are not suited to a fleshy diet."

V. The Health Benefits of Vegetarianism

It was only recently that smoking only recently became recognized as a health and environmental hazard. As a result of research and education on a habit once believed to be not only harmless but stylish, most major U.S. cities have banned smoking of cigarettes, cigars or pipes in all public places. Smoking has also been outlawed in government offices and completely eliminated from all domestic U.S. air flights. Now, another, even more devastating problem is under scrutiny. Its threat to health and the environment is being realized based on overwhelming evidence amassed by recognized authorities over the past fifty years.

Recently a group of eminent doctors called the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM), themselves members of the American Medical Association (AMA), have gathered to change the U.S. consciousness on human nutrition, particularly among the medical community. The PCRM is a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C., consisting of doctors and lay persons working together for compassionate and effective medical practice, research and health promotion. Founded in 1985, the PCRM is supported by over 3,000 physicians and 50,000 lay persons PCRM president Newal D. Barnard, M.D., is a popular speaker and the author of *The Power of Your Plate*.

As stated by the PCRM in their 1991 literature, "A vegetarian diet has been advocated by everyone from philosophers, such as Plato and Nietzsche, to political leaders, such as Benjamin Franklin and Gandhi, to modern pop icons such as Paul McCartney and Bob Marley. Science is also on the side of vegetarian foods. A multitude of studies have proven the health benefits of a vegetarian diet to be remarkable.

"Vegetarian is defined as avoiding all animal flesh, including fish and poultry. Vegetarians who avoid flesh, but do eat animal products such as cheese, milk and eggs are ovo-lacto-vegetarians (ovo = egg; lacto = milk, cheese, etc.). The ranks of those who eschew all animal products are rapidly growing; these people are referred to as pure vegetarians or vegans (vee'guns). Scientific research shows that ovo-lacto-vegetarians are healthier than meat-eaters, and vegans are healthier than ovo-lacto-vegetarians." It should be noted that the Indian Hindu tradition has always been lacto-vegetarian, permitting the consumption of milk products.

The PCRM literature lists a host of health benefits of a vegetarian diet, including the following:

Preventing cancer: "Numerous epidemiological and clinical studies have shown that vegetarians are nearly 50% less likely to die from cancer than non vegetarians."

Preventing heart disease and lowering blood pressure.

Preventing and reversing diabetes.

Preventing and alleviating gallstones, kidney stones and osteoporosis.

Preventing and alleviating asthma.

VI. The Four New Food Groups

In 1991 the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine submitted a proposal to change the official "four food groups" which have been promoted by U.S. nutritionists in the U.S. for the past 35 years. Their proposal reflects the fact that the long-held belief in meat as an essential dietary element is being displaced with new findings on the harmful effects of a meat-centered diet. The PCRM Update, May-June 1991, explains, "On April 8, 1991, PCRM unveiled a proposal to replace the Four Basic Food Groups.

The Four Food Groups have been part of U.S. government recommendations since 1956, but promote dietary habits which are largely responsible for the epidemics of heart disease, cancer, stroke and other serious illnesses in this country.

The old four groups were meat, dairy, grains and fruits/vegetables. The 'New Four Food Groups' are grains, legumes, vegetables and fruits. Meat and dairy will lose their food group status [by this proposal]. The 'New Four Food Groups' represents a nutrition plan that is based on healthy, fiber-rich plant foods rather than the former emphasis on cholesterol-and-fat-laden foods.

'The meat and dairy groups were the principal sources of cholesterol and saturated fat, which is the biggest culprit in raising blood cholesterol,' says PCRM Nutritionist Virginia Messina, M.P.H., R.D. 'These foods are simply not necessary in the human diet.' " PCRM poster offers the following description of the four new food groups.

1. Whole grains includes breads, pastas, rice, corn and all other grains. Note the emphasis on whole grains rather than refined grains. Build each of your meals around a hearty grain dish—grains are rich in fiber and other complex carbohydrates, as well as protein, B vitamins and zinc.
2. Vegetables are packed with nutrients; they provide vitamin C, beta-carotene, riboflavin and other vitamins, iron, calcium and fiber. Dark green, leafy vegetables such as broccoli, collards, kale, mustard and turnip greens, chicory or bok choy are especially good sources of these important nutrients. Dark yellow and orange vegetables such as carrots, winter squash, sweet potatoes and pumpkin provide extra beta-carotene. Include generous portions of a variety of vegetables in your diet.
3. Legumes, which is another name for beans, peas and lentils, are all good sources of fiber, protein, iron, calcium, zinc and B vitamins. This group also includes chickpeas, baked and refried beans, soy milk, tofu, tempeh and texturized vegetable protein.
4. Fruits are rich in fiber, vitamin C and beta-carotene. Be sure to include at least one serving each day of fruits that are high in vitamin C—citrus fruits, melons and strawberries are all good choices. Choose whole fruit over fruit juices, which don't contain as much healthy fiber.

VII. Common Dietary Concerns

Those considering a vegetarian diet generally worry about getting enough nutrients, since the belief that meat is a necessary part of keeping strong and healthy is still extremely widespread. Armed with decades of nutritional research data, the PCRM addresses this issue head-on:

"The fact is, it is very easy to have a well-balanced diet with vegetarian foods. Vegetarian foods provide plenty of protein. Careful combining of foods is not necessary. Any normal variety of plant foods provides more than enough protein for the body's needs. Although there is somewhat less protein in a vegetarian diet than a meat-eater's diet, this actually an advantage. Excess protein has been linked to kidney stones, osteoporosis, and possibly heart disease and some cancers. A diet focused on beans, whole grains and vegetables contains adequate amounts of protein without the 'overdose' most meat-eaters get."

Other concerns are allayed as follows:

"Calcium is easy to find in a vegetarian diet. Many dark, green leafy vegetables and beans are loaded with calcium, and some orange juices and cereals are calcium-fortified. Iron is plentiful in whole grains, beans and fruits."

Vitamin B12: There is a misconception that without eating meat one cannot obtain sufficient v. B12, which is an essential nutrient. This simply not true. The PCRM advises: "Although cases of B12 deficiency are very uncommon, it is important to make sure that one has a reliable source of the vitamin. Good sources include all common multiple vitamins (including vegetarian vitamins), fortified cereals and fortified soy milk."

"During pregnancy one's nutritional needs increase. The American Dietetic Association has found vegan diets adequate for fulfilling nutritional needs during pregnancy, but pregnant women and nursing mothers should supplement their diets with vitamins B12 and D.

"vegetarian children also have high nutritional needs, but these, too, are met within a vegetarian diet. A vegetarian menu is 'life-extending.' As young children, vegetarians may grow more gradually, reach puberty somewhat later, and live substantially longer than do meat-eaters. Do be sure to include a reliable source of vitamin B12."

Besides the fortified cereals and soy milk mentioned above vitamin B12 sources that are widely available are multiple vitamins, brewers yeast and other potent dietary supplements.

VIII. Vegetarianism in Hinduism

Food for the Spirit, Vegetarianism and the World Religions, observes, "Despite popular knowledge of meat-eating's adverse effects, the non vegetarian diet became increasingly widespread among Hindus after the two major invasions by foreign powers, first the Muslims and later the British. With them came the desire to be 'civilized,' to eat as did the saheeb. Those actually trained in Vedic knowledge, however, never adopted a meat-oriented diet, and the pious Hindu still observes vegetarian principles as a matter of religious duty.

"That vegetarianism has always been widespread in India is clear from the earliest Vedic texts. This was observed by the ancient traveler Megasthenes and also by Fa-hsien, a Chinese Buddhist monk who, in the fifth century, traveled to India in order to obtain authentic copies of the scriptures.

"These scriptures unambiguously support the meatless way of life. In the Mahabharata, for instance, the great warrior Bhishma explains to Yudhishtira, eldest of the Pandava princes, that the meat of animals is like the flesh of one's own son, and that the foolish person who eats meat must be considered the vilest of human beings [Anu. 114.11]. The eating of 'dirty' food, it warns, is not as terrible as the eating of flesh [Shanti. 141.88] (it must be remembered that the brahmanas of ancient India exalted cleanliness to a divine principle).

"Similarly, the Manusmriti declares that one should 'refrain from eating all kinds of meat,' for such eating involves killing and leads to karmic bondage (bandha) [5.49]. Elsewhere in the Vedic literature, the last of the great Vedic kings, Maharajah Parikshit, is quoted as saying that 'only the animal-killer cannot relish the message of the Absolute Truth [Shrimad Bhagavatam 10.1.4].' "

IX. Scriptures Against Killing and Meat-Eating

Hindu scripture speaks clearly and forcefully on non killing and vegetarianism. In the ancient Rig Veda, we read: "O vegetable, be succulent, wholesome, strengthening; and thus, body, be fully grown." The Yajur Veda summarily dictates: "Do not injure the beings living on the earth, in the air and in the water." The beautiful Tirukural, a widely-read 2,000-year-old masterpiece of ethics, speaks of conscience: "When a man realizes that meat is the butchered flesh of another creature, he must abstain from eating it." The Manu Samhita advises: "Having well considered the origin of flesh and the cruelty of fettering and slaying of corporeal beings, let one entirely abstain from eating flesh."

In the yoga-infused verses of the Tirumantiram, warning is given of how meat-eating holds the mind in gross, adharmic states: "The ignoble ones who eat flesh, death's agents bind them fast and push them quick into the fiery jaws of hell (Naraka, lower consciousness)." The roots of non injury non killing and nonconsumption of meat are found in the Vedas, agamas, Upanishads, Dharma Shastras, Tirumurai, Yoga Sutras and dozens of other sacred texts of Hinduism. Here is a select collection.

Vedas and Agamas, Hinduism's Revealed Scriptures

Let your aims be common, and your hearts be of one accord, and all of you be of one mind, so you may live well together. Rig Veda Samhita 10.191

Protect both our species, two-legged and four-legged. Both food and water for their needs supply. May they with us increase in stature and strength. Save us from hurt all our days, O Powers! Rig Veda Samhita 10.37.11. VE, 319

One who partakes of human flesh, the flesh of a horse or of another animal, and deprives others of 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. Rig Veda Samhita, 10.87.16, FS 90

Peaceful be the earth, peaceful the ether, peaceful heaven, peaceful the waters, peaceful the herbs, peaceful the trees. May all Gods bring me peace. May there be peace through these invocations of peace. With these invocations of

peace which appease everything, I render peaceful whatever here is terrible, whatever here is cruel, whatever here is sinful. Let it become auspicious, let everything be beneficial to us. Atharva Veda Samhita 10. 191. 4

Those noble souls who practice meditation and other yogic ways, who are ever careful about all beings, who protect all animals, are the ones who are actually serious about spiritual practices. Atharva Veda Samhita 19.48.5. FS, 90

If we have injured space, the earth or heaven, or if we have offended mother or father, from that may Agni, fire of the house, absolve us and guide us safely to the world of goodness. Atharva Veda Samhita 6.120.1. VE, 636

You must not use your God-given body for killing God's creatures, whether they are human, animal or whatever. Yajur Veda Samhita 12.32. FS, 90

May all beings look at me with a friendly eye. May I do likewise, and may we all look on each other with the eyes of a friend. Yajur Veda 36.18.

Nonviolence is all the offerings. Renunciation is the priestly honorarium. The final purification is death. Thus all the Divinities are established in this body. Krishna Yajur Veda, Prana Upanishad 46-8. VE, 413-14

To the heavens be peace, to the sky and the earth; to the waters be peace, to plants and all trees; to the Gods be peace, to Brahman be peace, to all men be peace, again and again-peace also to me! O earthen vessel, strengthen me. May all beings regard me with friendly eyes! May I look upon all creatures with friendly eyes! With a friend's eye may we regard each other! Shukla Yajur Veda Samhita 36.17-18. VE, 306; 342

No pain should be caused to any created being or thing. Devikalottara Agama, JAV 69-79. RM, 116

The Mahabharata and Bhagavad Gita, Epic History

The very name of the cows is Aghnya, indicating that they should never be slaughtered. Who, then could slay them? Surely, one who kills a cow or a bull commits the most heinous crime. Mahabharata, Shantiparva 262.47. FS,pg. 94

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. Mahabharata, Anu. 115.40. FS, pg 90

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. Mahabharata, Anu. 115.47. FS, pg. 90

One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one's own self. This, in brief, is the rule of dharma. Yielding to desire and acting differently, one becomes guilty of adharma. Mahabharata 18.113.8.

Those high-souled persons who desire beauty, faultlessness of limbs, long life, understanding, mental and physical strength and memory should abstain from acts of injury. Mahabharata 18.115.8.

Ahimsa is the highest dharma. Ahimsa is the best tapas. Ahimsa is the greatest gift. Ahimsa is the highest self-control. Ahimsa is the highest sacrifice. Ahimsa is the highest power. Ahimsa is the highest friend. Ahimsa is the highest truth. Ahimsa is the highest teaching. Mahabharata 18.116.37-41.

He who sees that the Lord of all is ever the same in all that is-immortal in the field of mortality-he sees the truth. And when a man sees that the God in himself is the same God in all that is, he hurts not himself by hurting others. Then he goes, indeed, to the highest path. Bhagavad Gita 13. 27-28. BgM, pg. 101

Nonviolence, truth, freedom from anger, renunciation, serenity, aversion to fault-finding, sympathy for all beings, peace from greedy cravings, gentleness, modesty, steadiness, energy, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, a good will, freedom from pride-these belong to a man who is born for heaven. Bhagavad Gita 16.2-3. BGM, pg. 109

Tirumantiram and other Scriptures

Many are the lovely flowers of worship offered to the Guru, but none lovelier than non-killing. Respect for life is the highest worship, the bright lamp, the sweet garland and unwavering devotion. Tirumantiram 197

Spiritual merit and sin are our own making. The killer of other lives is an outcast. Match your words with your conduct. Steal not, kill not, indulge not in self-praise, condemn not others to their face. Lingayat Vachanas

Ahimsa is not causing pain to any living being at any time through the actions of one's mind, speech or body. Sandilya Upanishad When mind stuff is firmly based in waves of ahimsa, all living beings cease their enmity in the presence of such a person. Yoga Sutras 2.35. YP, pg. 205

Those who are ignorant of real dharma and, though wicked and haughty, account themselves virtuous, kill animals without any feeling of remorse or fear of punishment. Further, in their next lives, such sinful persons will be eaten by the same creatures they have killed in this world. Shrimad Bhagavatam 11.5.4. FS, pg, 90

The Tirukural, Preeminent Ethical Scripture

Perhaps nowhere is the principle of non meat-eating so fully and eloquently expressed as in the Tirukural, written in the Tamil language by a simple weaver saint in a village near Madras over 2,000 years ago. Considered the world's greatest ethical scripture, it is sworn on in South Indian courts of law.

It is the principle of the pure in heart never to injure others, even when they themselves have been hatefully injured. What is virtuous conduct? It is never destroying life, for killing leads to every other sin. 312; 321, TW

Harming others, even enemies who harmed you unprovoked, assures incessant sorrow. The supreme principle is this: never knowingly harm any one at any time in any way. 313; 317, TW

What is the good way? It is the path that reflects on how it may avoid killing any living creature. Refrain from taking precious life from any living being, even to save your own life. 324; 327, TW

How can he practice true compassion Who eats the flesh of an animal to fatten his own flesh? TK 251, TW

Riches cannot be found in the hands of the thriftless. Nor can compassion be found in the hearts of those who eat meat. TK 252, TW

Goodness is never one with the minds of these two: one who wields a weapon and one who feasts on a creature's flesh. TK 253, TW

If you ask, "What is kindness and what is unkind?" it is not killing and killing. Thus, eating flesh is never virtuous. TK 254, TW

Life is perpetuated by not eating meat. The clenched jaws of hell hold those who do. TK 255, TW

If the world did not purchase and consume meat, there would be none to slaughter and offer meat for sale. TK 256, TW

When a man realizes that meat is the butchered flesh of another creature, he must abstain from eating it. TK 257, TW

Perceptive souls who have abandoned passion will not feed on flesh abandoned by life. TK 258, TW

Greater than a thousand ghee offerings consumed in sacrificial fires is to not sacrifice and consume any living creature. TK 259, TW

All that lives will press palms together in prayerful adoration of those who refuse to slaughter and savor meat. TK 260, TW

X. Hindu Religious Leaders on Non Injury

The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be measured by the way in which its animals are treated. Mahatma Gandhi

As long as human society continues to allow cows and other animals to be regularly killed in slaughterhouses, there cannot be any question of peace and prosperity. A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

Refrain from killing knowingly even the trifling insects like a louse, a bug or a mosquito. Use no violence even to gain possession of a woman, wealth or kingdom. Never kill any animals even for the purpose of sacrifice. Non-violence is the greatest of all religions. Swami Sahajanand

O lover of meditation, become pure and clean. Observe nonviolence in mind, speech and body. Never break another's heart. Avoid wounding another's feelings. Harm no one. Help all. Neither be afraid nor frighten others. Swami Muktananda

Someone who believes in violence and continues causing injury to others can never be peaceful himself. Swami Satchidananda

To be free from violence is the duty of every man. No thought of revenge, hatred or ill will should arise in our minds. Injuring others gives rise to hatred. Swami Sivananda

By ahimsa, Patanjali meant the removal of the desire to kill. All forms of life have an equal right to the air of maya. The saint who uncovers the secret of creation will be in harmony with Nature's countless bewildering expressions. All men may understand this truth by overcoming the passion for destruction. Sri Yukteswar to Paramahansa Yogananda

If you plant eggplant, you can pluck eggplants. If you sow goodness, you can reap goodness. If you sow evil, you will reap evil. Do good to all. God is there, within you. Don't kill. Don't harbor anger. Sage Yogaswami

We are all of the same race and religion. We are holy beings established in Divinity itself. This truth can be understood only by those who have grasped it through the magical charm of a life of dharma-not by other means. Because of that, sages have emphatically proclaimed again and again that it is necessary to love all existing lives as one's own. Sage Yogaswami

The test of ahimsa is the absence of jealousy. The man whose heart never cherishes even the thought of injury to anyone, who rejoices at the prosperity of even his greatest enemy, that man is the bhakta, he is the yogi, he is the guru of all. Swami Vivekananda

Strictly speaking, no activity and no industry is possible without a certain amount of violence, no matter how little. Even the very process of living is impossible without a certain amount of violence. What we have to do is to minimize it to the greatest extent possible. Mahatma Gandhi, My Socialism, 34-35.

You do not like to suffer yourself. How can you inflict suffering on others? Every killing is a suicide. The eternal, blissful and natural state has been smothered by this life of ignorance. In this way the present life is due to the killing of the eternal, pristine Being. Is it not a case of suicide? Ramana Maharshi, June 1935

Exploring Non-Injury as a Way to Achieve Harmony with Our Environment, Peace Between Peoples and Compassion Within Ourselves.

Many are the sources of Hindu thought which inspire men and women to live the ideals of compassion and nonviolence. The Rishis who revealed the principles of dharma or divine law in Hindu scripture knew full well the potential for human suffering and the path which could avert it. To them a one spiritual power flowed in and through all things in this universe, animate and inanimate, conferring existence by its presence. To them life was a coherent process leading all souls without exception to enlightenment, and no violence could be carried to the higher reaches of that ascent.

These Rishis were mystics whose revelation disclosed a cosmos in which all beings exist in interlaced dependence. The whole was contained in the part, and the part in the whole. Based on this cognition, they taught a philosophy of non-difference of self and other, asserting that in the final analysis we are not separate from the world and its manifest forms nor from the Divine which shines forth in all things and all peoples. From this understanding of oneness arose the philosophical basis for the practice of non injury and Hinduism's ancient commitment to it.

We all know that Hindus, who are one-sixth of the human race today, believe in the existence of God everywhere, as an all-pervasive, self-effulgent energy and consciousness. This basic belief creates the attitude of sublime tolerance and acceptance toward others. Even tolerance is insufficient to describe the compassion and reverence the Hindu holds for the intrinsic sacredness within all things. Therefore, the actions of all Hindus are rendered benign or ahimsa. One would not want to hurt something which one revered.

On the other hand, when the fundamentalists of any religion teach an unrelenting duality based on good and evil, man and nature or God and Devil, this creates friends and enemies. This belief is a sacrilege to Hindus because they know that the attitudes which are the by-product are totally dualistic, and for good to triumph over that which is alien or evil, it must kill out that which is considered to be evil.