

Why Hindus Don't Eat Meat

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Vegetarianism is the key to good health and happiness. The Hindu view is multi-dimensional, including the ecological, medical and spiritual, as is evident in the following excerpts from *Hinduism Today*:

Besides being an expression of compassion for animals, vegetarianism is followed for ecological and health rationales

Reasons

In the past fifty years, millions of meat-eaters -- Hindus and non-Hindus -- 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 Law Reason

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

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 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, anxiety, suspicion and a terrible fear of death, all of which are locked into the flesh of the butchered creatures. For these reasons, vegetarians live in higher consciousness and meat-eaters 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 rainforests to create pasture lands for live stock, loss of topsoil 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 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 not to eat meat.

History

The book *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 Sahib. 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 *Mahabharat*, for instance, the great warrior Bheesma explains to Yuddhishtira, eldest of the Paandav princes, that the meat of animals is like the flesh of one's own son. Similarly, the *Manusmriti* declares that one should 'refrain from eating all kinds of meat,' for such eating involves killing and leads to Karmic bondage (Bandh) [5.49]. Elsewhere in the Vedic literature, the last of the great Vedic kings, Maharaja Parikshit, is quoted as saying that 'only the animal-killer cannot relish the message of the Absolute Truth [*Shrimad Bhagvatam* 10.1.4]."

Scripture

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. *Mahabharat* 115.47

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. *Mahabharat* 18.115.8

The very name of cow is Aghnya ["not to be killed"], indicating that they should never be slaughtered. Who, then could slay them? Surely, one who kills a cow or a bull commits a heinous crime. *Mahabharat Shantiparv 262.47*

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. *Mahabharat Anu 115.40*

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 Geeta 13.27-28*

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. *Mahabharat 18.116.37-41*

What is the good way? It is the path that reflects on how it may avoid killing any creature. *Tirukural 324*

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

What is virtuous conduct? It is never destroying life, for killing leads to every other sin. *Tirukural 312, 321*

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

Hinduism & Food

Lacto-Vegetarians

Hindus believe that all living things contain a part of the divine spirit. Therefore, all life is sacred. If you take the life of even the smallest creature it is as if you harm part of Brahman. Most pious Hindus, especially Brahmins, are lacto-vegetarians. This means that the only animal foods that they eat are dairy foods. The pious do not eat eggs since they are the beginning of life. As vegetarianism is considered the most desired method of eating, non-vegetarians eat vegetarian meals on auspicious or religious occasions. Avoiding meat is thought to contribute to inner self-improvement and physical well-being. Even some vegetables are considered taboo by Orthodox Hindus who do not eat onion, garlic, turnips, or mushrooms.

Sacred Cow

All Hindus avoid eating beef since they venerate the cow. The cows appear to know that they are sacred. It is estimated that 40,000 cows wander the streets of New Delhi being patted by each person they meet. They amble slowly crossing highways or relax in the middle of the road if they feel so inclined. While all animals are considered sacred, the cow has been singled out as particularly sacred because they:

- o Have given years of faithful service in helping man till the soil and pull the carts.
- o Provide man with food, milk.
- o Provide man with fuel, in form of cow dung, to heat his home and cook his food.
- o In Hindu mythology the cow was created by Brahman on the same day as the Brahmins thus it is an animal venerated above all others.
- o Symbol of motherhood.

Foods Effects

Hindus believe that there is a connection between foods, moods, fitness and longevity. Foods are divided into three major categories depending upon how they are believed to effect the body.

o Sattvic foods are thought to contribute to making a person serene, enlightened, healthy, and long-lived. It is considered very complimentary to say that a person is sattvic. Sattvic foods include rice, wheat, ghee, most legumes, some other vegetables, milk and milk products (except cheeses made from rennet). Rennet comes from the stomach of animals; to obtain it, the animal would have to be slaughtered.

o Rajasic foods are believed to contribute to a person becoming aggressive, greedy, passionate and desiring of power. Warriors were encouraged to eat these foods. Rajasic foods are some meats, eggs, and foods that are very bitter, sour, salty, rich and/or spicy.

o Tamasic foods when used for pleasure and in excess can contribute to lust, malice, confusion, slothfulness, and dullness. These foods are garlic, pickled, preserved, stale, or rotten foods and alcohol or drugs.

Indian Medicine:

The classic system of Indian medicine called Ayurveda (the Code of Life and Longevity) involves the interaction of "humors" in the body and foods. If they are in balance the body will be healthy, out of balance the body will become ill.

o Kapha foods like white sugar, millet and buttermilk are thought to be heavy, dense, and mucus-producing. They should be avoided when one suffers from respiratory ailments.

o Vata or vayu are the "wind" or gas producing foods such as some legumes. They are thought to be "unpredictable" and should be avoided when the stomach is bloated.

o "Hot" or ushna foods include mungo bean, cowpea, ripe eggplant, and papaya. These foods are thought to promote digestion.

o "Cool" or seeta foods consist of the "typical" foods eaten by a lactovegetarian; many cereals, like rice, wheat, mung beans, kidney beans, most fruits and vegetables, milk from most animals except goats, butter and ghee. These foods are thought to impart strength and nourishment.

Obesity Disapproved

Even when one is eating proper foods, moderation is advocated since obesity is not approved. The laws of food consumption dictate that solid food should fill half the stomach, liquid one-fourth, and the remainder should be left empty for smooth digestion.

Fasting is practiced by many Hindus on days particular to the god that they worship. There is no "formula" for fasting as in other religions. It can be for one meal, part of the day, or for a few days, or can just involve eating a sparse diet or avoiding a particular food group. Fasting is thought to cleanse the body and uplift the spirit.

Sacred Kitchen

In the Hindu home the kitchen is considered sacred. Proper reference must be observed when preparing and consuming food. Those who prepare, and those who eat, must purify themselves first by ritual bathing of the entire body.

There are vast differences between North and South India, not only in culture, language, and climate, but also in cuisine.