

Vegetarianism: Recommended in Vedic Scripture

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Many times there seems to be some confusion or lack of clarity on whether the Vedic path condones or condemns the eating of meat. Often times I hear Indians and followers of the Vedic path explain that meat eating is all right, that the Vedic shastras do not condemn it. Of course, in this day and age meat eating includes and supports the whole meat industry, which is the systematic slaughter of thousands of animals on a daily basis. But if we actually research the Vedic texts we will find that there are numerous references in the various portions of the Vedic literature which explain in no uncertain terms the karmic dangers of meat-eating and unnecessary animal slaughter. These indicate that meat eating should be given up for one's spiritual and even material progress. This means that the Vedic conclusions that some people present for meat-eating are not accurate, and that they have never studied their own religious books very thoroughly. This is something that is important to understand, so let us take a look.

VEDIC REFERENCES AGAINST MEAT-EATING AND ANIMAL

SLAUGHTER

To start with, the Manu-samhita clearly and logically recommends that, "Meat can never be obtained without injury to living creatures, and injury to sentient beings is detrimental to the attainment of heavenly bliss; let him therefore shun the use of meat. Having well considered the disgusting origin of flesh and the cruelty of fettering and slaying corporeal beings, let him entirely abstain from eating flesh." (Manu-samhita 5.48-49)

However, it is not simply the person who eats the meat that becomes implicated by eating the dead animal, but also those who assist in the process. "He who permits the slaughter of an animal, he who cuts it up, he who kills it, he who buys or sells meat, he who cooks it, he who serves it up, and he who eats it, must all be considered as the slayers of the animal. There is no greater sinner than that man who though not worshipping the gods or the ancestors, seeks to increase the bulk of his own flesh by the flesh of other beings." (Manu-samhita 5.51-52)

As we get further into the Manu-samhita, there are warnings that become increasingly more serious. For example, "If he has a strong desire (for meat) he may make an animal of clarified butter or one of flour (and eat that); but let him never seek to destroy an animal without a (lawful) reason. As many hairs as the slain beast has, so often indeed will he who killed it without a (lawful) reason suffer a violent death in future births." (Manu-samhita 5.37-38)

When there are plenty of grains, vegetables, fruits, etc., to eat, it is only mankind's lust and selfish desires that motivate one to kill other beings to satisfy one's tongue by tasting their blood and flesh, or to fatten one's wallet by making money from participating in the distribution or the cooking of meat. Such violent actions create opposite reactions. For this reason the warnings are given, "He who injures harmless creatures from a wish to give himself pleasure, never finds happiness in this life or the next." (Manu-samhita 5.45)

'Nonetheless, there are also benefits that are mentioned that a person can attain simply by not eating the bodies of other creatures: "By subsisting on pure fruits and roots, and by eating food fit for ascetics in the forest, one does not gain so great a reward as by entirely avoiding the use of flesh. Me he [mam sah] will devour in the next world, whose flesh I eat in this life; the wise declare this to be the real meaning of the word 'flesh' [mam sah]." (Manu-samhita 5.54-55)

"He who does not seek to cause the sufferings of bonds and death to living creatures, (but) desires the good

of all (beings), obtains endless bliss. He who does not injure any (creature) attains without an effort what he thinks of, what he undertakes, and what he fixes his mind on." (Manu-samhita 5.46-47)

'Also, "By not killing any living being, one becomes fit for salvation." (Manu-samhita 6.60)

'The earlier texts, such as the Rig-veda (10.87.16), also proclaim the need to give up the eating of slaughtered animals. "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."

"You must not use your God-given body for killing God's creatures, whether they are human, animal or whatever." (Yajur Veda 12.32.90)

'There are also references in the Mahabharat that forewarn the activity of eating flesh: "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 [next] birth." (Mahabharat, Anu.115.47)

"The purchaser of flesh performs violence by his wealth; he who eats flesh does so by enjoying its taste; the killer does violence 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 these are to be considered meat-eaters." (Mahabharat, Anu.115.40) All of these people will also incur the same karmic reactions for their participation in killing, distributing or eating the flesh of animals, as explained next.

"The sins generated by violence curtail the life of the perpetrator. Therefore, even those who are anxious for their own welfare should abstain from meat-eating." (Mahabharat, Anu.115.33)

"Those who are ignorant of real dharm 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." (Bhagavat Puraan 11.5.14)

The following verses are from the Tirukural:

How can he practice true compassion who eats the flesh of an animal to fatten his own flesh?

Riches cannot be found in the hands of the thriftless, nor can compassion be found in the hearts of those who eat meat.

He who feasts on a creature's flesh is like he who wields a weapon. Goodness is never one with the minds of these two.

If you ask, "What is kindness and what is unkindness?" It is not-killing and killing. Thus, eating flesh is never virtuous.

Life is perpetuated by not eating meat. The jaws of Hell close on those who do.

If the world did not purchase and consume meat, no one would slaughter and offer meat for sale.

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

Insightful souls who have abandoned the passion to hurt others will not feed on flesh that life has abandoned.

Greater than a thousand ghee offerings consumed in sacrificial fires is to not sacrifice and consume any living

creature.

All life will press palms together in prayerful adoration of those who refuse to slaughter or savor meat.

-From these verses there should be no doubt that the Vedic shastra recommends that such selfish meat-eating must be given up if one has any concern for other living beings, or one's own future existence, or for attaining any spiritual merit.

'In Bhagavad-gita, however, we also find similar verses on what is recommended for human consumption. Lord Krshn says, "If one offers Me with love and devotion a leaf, a flower, fruit or water, I will accept it." (Bg.9.26) This means that not only should one be a vegetarian and eat only fruits, water, grains, vegetables, etc., but such items should be made as an offering to God with love. The reason is that, "The devotees of the Lord are released from all kinds of sins because they eat food which is offered first for sacrifice. Others, who prepare food for personal sense enjoyment, verily eat only sin." (Bg.3.13) So what is offered are only those things that Krshn accepts. That becomes prasada, or remnants of foods offered to the Lord.

'As further elaborated in Bhagavad-gita by Lord Shri Krshn: "O son of Kunti, all that you do, all that you eat, all that you offer and give away, as well as all austerities that you may perform, should be done as an offering unto Me. In this way you will be freed from all reactions to good and evil deeds, and by this principle of renunciation you will be liberated and come to Me." (Bg.9.27)

'Herein we can see that the process of preparing and eating food is also a part of the Vedic system for making spiritual advancement. As the Vedic literature explains, what we eat is an important factor in the process of purifying ourselves and remaining free from accumulating bad karm. It actually is not so difficult to be vegetarian, and it gives one a much higher taste in eating and in one's spiritual realizations. The level of our consciousness is also determined not only by what we think and do, but also by the vibrational level of what we put into our bodies as food. The more natural and peaceful the food, the more healthy and peaceful will be our consciousness. If it is further blessed and offered to the Lord, then it becomes especially powerful and spiritualized. This vibration goes into our own bodies and is assimilated by our consciousness to assist us in our spiritual upliftment. However, if we eat foods that are the remnants of animals that were petrified with fear before being slaughtered, or were tortured during the slaughter process, that fear, aggression and suffering will also become a part of our own consciousness, which is reflected back on our own life and the people with whom we come in contact. And people wonder why there is not more peace in the world.

THE QUESTION OF WHETHER LORD RAAM ATE MEAT IN THE

RAMAYAAN

"Sometimes the idea comes up that the Ramayan indicates that Lord Raam ate meat, especially while He was in exile in the woods. However, there is no verse in Valmiki's Ramayan that establishes that Lord Raam, Lakshman or Sita ate meat while in or even out of exile. In fact, it seems to show that He very much disliked the notion of eating meat. The evidence for this is as follows: "The verse that comes in question in this regard in the Valmiki Ramayan, Sundarakand, Skand 36, Shloke 41, says: "Na mamsam Raghava bhunkte, na chaiva madhu sevate, Vanyam suvhitam nityam bhaktamsnati panchamam."

"The literal translation of this verse is: "Shri Raam does not take meat or honey. He partakes everyday of wild fruits and boiled (wild) rice fully sanctioned (for an ascetic) in the evening."

"Faulty English translations have put it as something like this: Hanuman to Sita, "When you were away, Shri Raam did not even take deer meat." This incorrectly implies that Raam normally may have ate meat but did not do so while Sita was away from Him.

"Now in this verse, the Sanskrit word bhunkte is a verb that means strong desire for eating. It comes from the Sanskrit bhaksha, which means voracious eating. When you say Na bhunkte, as we see in the line that says "Na mamsam Raghava bhunkte", it gives a complete negative connotation, meaning that Lord Raam abhorred meat-eating. On the other hand, if the words were "Na mamsam Raghavo khadate", it could then mean that Raghava may have engaged in meat eating before, but had stopped it at this point. However, this is not what is said, but is where some English translations present a similar confusion, or are simply unclear about this issue. Nonetheless, by analyzing the correct view of the proper translation, it indicates clearly that the Valmiki Ramayan shows how Lord Raam not only did not eat meat, but greatly disliked it.

THE PRINCIPLE OF BEING MERCIFUL

'Meat-eating and animal slaughter also disrupts and disregards the doctrine of ahinsa, or non-violence. It is not possible to kill animals for the pleasure of the tongue without violence. The Padma Puraan (1.31.27) simply says that, "Ahinsa is the highest duty." Therefore, one must honestly ask themselves if they intend to truly follow the Vedic tenets or not, at least if they call themselves a Hindu, follower of Vedanta, or a Sanatana-dharmist. If they are, then they must adopt the ways of ahinsa.

'Ahinsa is more directly explained in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras (2.30) wherein it is said: "Having no ill feeling for any living being, in all manners possible and for all times, is called ahinsa, and it should be the desired goal of all seekers."

'It is also said in the Buddhist scripture, the Mahaparinirvana Sutra, "The eating of meat extinguishes the seed of great compassion."

'One of the principles that one must follow in the endeavor to be free from acquiring bad karm and for spiritual advancement is being merciful, based on ahinsa. Mercy means more than just being nice. Mercy means being kind to all living entities, not just to humans, but also to animals, birds, insects, etc. This is because the living entity, depending on its consciousness, can take a material body in any one of the 8,400,000 species of life. Therefore, to develop and maintain the quality of mercy, one must follow the principle of no meat eating. This includes no eating of meat, fish, eggs, or insects. In this way, those who are serious about a spiritual path remain free from so many unnecessary karmic reactions. Karm means that for every action there is an opposite and equal reaction. Killing an animal to eat is certainly an act of violence that creates a negative reaction in the atmosphere which returns as more violence. This comes back to us as reversals in life which we must endure in the future.

'It is bluntly stated that meat eating is actually the grossest form of spiritual ignorance. To kill other living entities for the pleasure of the tongue is a cruel and selfish activity that requires one to be almost completely blind to the spiritual reality of the living being, that within the body is a soul like you, a part and parcel of the Supreme Soul. It also causes one to remain hard-hearted and less sensitive to the concern for the wellbeing and feelings of others.

'As previously explained, according to the law of karm, whatever pain we cause for others we will have to suffer in the future. Therefore, a wise man does not even want to harm an insect if possible, what to speak of slaughtering an animal in order to taste its flesh and blood. As explained in the Manu-samhita, the sinful reaction for animal slaughter is received by six kinds of participants, which include, (1) the killer of the animal, (2) one who advocates or advertises meat-eating, (3) one who transports the meat, (4) one who handles or packages the meat, (5) one who prepares or cooks the meat, and (6) one who eats it.

The sinful reaction shared by these six participants in animal slaughter is serious. In fact, the Bible compares the killing of cows to murdering a man: "He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man." (Isaiah 66.3) It is also explained in the Shri Caitanya-caritamrita (Adi-lila, Chapter 17, verse 166): "Cow killers are condemned to rot in hellish life for as many thousands of years as there are hairs on the body of the cow," which is also referenced in the Manu-samhita. So an intelligent person will try to avoid this fate.

'Some readers may say, however, that the sacrifices in the early Vedic literature prescribed animal slaughter, so for that reason it is all right to kill animals. But such activities in this day and age are refuted by Shri Caitanya Mahaprabhu in the Caitanya-caritamrita (Adi-lila, Chapter 17, verses 159-165) which He explains to the Chand Kazi who was a Muslim:

"The Vedas clearly enjoin that cows should not be killed. Therefore any Hindu, whoever he may be, does not indulge in cow killing. In the Vedas and Puranas there are injunctions declaring that if one can revive a living being, he can kill it for experimental purposes [in the ritual]. Therefore the great sages sometimes killed old animals, and by chanting Vedic hymns they again brought them to life for protection. The killing and rejuvenation of such old and invalid animals was not truly killing but an act of great benefit. Formerly there were great powerful brahmanas who could make such experiments using Vedic hymns, but now, because of Kali-yuga, brahmanas are not so powerful. Therefore the killing of cows and bulls for rejuvenation is forbidden. 'In this age of Kali, five acts are forbidden: the offering of a horse in sacrifice, the offering of a cow in sacrifice, the acceptance of the [renounced] order of sannyasa, the offering of oblations of flesh to the forefathers, and a man's begetting children in his brother's wife.' Since you Mohammedans [and others] cannot bring killed animals back to life, you are responsible for killing them. Therefore you are going to hell; there is no way for your deliverance."

'This quotation makes it perfectly clear how anyone who participates in killing other living beings is responsible for such acts which cause one to attain a hellish future, or at the least, causes stifling of their spiritual progress. We mentioned the karmic reactions for killing the cow, but there are karmic results that one acquires from killing other entities as well, which is to suffer a similar pain or die in a similar way. Whatever you do unto others will later return to you, either in this life or in a future life. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. That is the law of karm.

'We can now begin to understand how dark the future is for someone who owns or manages something like a hamburger or fried chicken stand. Not only is he responsible for the animals that are killed, cooked, and then sold by his business, but he is also responsible for those he hires to help with it, and those who buy and eat the dead animals. We can also begin to get an idea of the dark collective karm of the population of a country whose food habits are centered around the meat industry. The violence that is generated by such a society certainly cannot help but create adverse affects in the world.

THE BENEFIT FROM COWS

'The cow and bull are the prime targets of the meat industry. However, cows and bulls are very important to human civilization. Until the recent invention of the tractor, the bull was used for helping to cultivate fields for producing food, and the cow has always supplied milk. A moderate supply of milk in our diet provides the proper nutrients for developing a good brain for understanding spiritual topics. Some sadhus in India do not eat, but take only milk. From milk one can make many other foods that are used in thousands of recipes that we all appreciate, such as cheese or curd, yogurt, kefir, butter, ghee, and so on. (However, this is not to approve of the cruel and questionable practices of the dairy industry as found in western countries.) This means that, according to the Vedas, the cow is one of our mothers and the bull is like a father for the benefit they have done for society. To do outright harm to such creatures is considered extremely serious. 'I have heard Western people criticize India for not slaughtering its cows, and talk about how there would be no more starving children if they would just eat the cows. That is not the cure. I have traveled all over India and have seen hungry people there as well as in American cities, which is more able to hide such problems. Homeless and hungry people are found in every country. For another thing, cows are one of India's greatest resources. They produce food, fuel and power. Bullocks do as much as two-thirds of the work on the average farm. They help plow the fields, haul produce, and turn the presses. For India to convert to machinery to do these tasks, especially in villages, would cost as much as 20 to 30 billion dollars. For a country like India, that is out of the question and a waste of time and money.

'The cows also supply manure and fuel.

Cow dung gives a slow even heat, good

for cooking. Using coal for cooking would cost 1.5 billion dollars a year. And besides, believe it or not, cow dung kills bacteria and is antiseptic. And keeping cows is cheap since they eat things like wheat stubble, husks, and rice straw, which people cannot use.

'So why raise cattle for meat consumption when it takes seven times more acreage for a pound of beef than a pound of milk? Only four to sixteen pounds of flesh food is produced for every hundred pounds of food eaten by cattle. Ten to twenty tons of nutritive vegetable food can be produced from the same amount of land that can produce only one ton of beef. In one year, you can get much more protein from a cow in the form of milk, cheese, etc., than in the several years it takes for a cow to mature enough to produce meat. To produce one pound of wheat takes 25 gallons of water, whereas one pound of beef requires 2500 gallons. And water is not always a plentiful resource in countries like India. Obviously, using agricultural resources for meat production is nothing but wasteful.

'Furthermore, if we are so concerned about the starving people in the world and the environment we live in, then let us consider the fact that 60 million more people in the world could be fed if Americans reduced their meat consumption by only 10%. Plus, thousands of acres of rainforest are lost every day in various countries, and it is said that 50% of that is directly linked to raising cattle for meat production. And though 76% of Americans consider themselves concerned about the environment, only 2.8% are vegetarians (at the time of this writing). Many Americans may say they love animals, but they still eat them on a regular basis. Obviously, they need to raise their consciousness about this. In any case, there are many books on the market that present this type of environmental information much more thoroughly.

"For those of you who would like to learn more about what a vegetarian diet can do for you and how to cook vegetarian meals easily, there are plenty of books available to help you get started. Or check here on my website for additional information and resources to get started.

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