

# Why Should We Be Vegetarians?

There are a number of reasons for becoming a vegetarian. Apart from the religious and ethical reasons, ecological and health are two very important reasons for us to seriously consider becoming vegetarians.

## 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.



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. Since the European settlement in Australia, 13 per cent of the land has been cleared of native vegetation, mostly for grazing animals. 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.

Much of the world's massive hunger problems could be solved by the reduction or elimination of meat-eating.

The reasons:

- livestock pasture needs cut drastically into land which could otherwise be used to grow food;
- 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.

### **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.

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.

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%.

### **Hindu classification of food**

All foods can be roughly grouped into one of three categories, *sattvic*, *rajasic* and *tamasic*. These are three basic qualities by which in the ancient Hindu science of Ayurveda all things are classified. Simply stated, the *sattvic* tendency is ascending, superconscious, and connotes orderliness and sublimity. The *rajasic* tendency is expanding, intellectual, and connotes activity and restlessness. The *tamasic* tendency is descending, instinctive, and connotes inertia and stagnation. *Tamasic* foods, such as meat, fermented or stale foods and overripe fruits, imbue the astral and physical body with heaviness and inertia and arouse the instinctive nature. Overeating is also *tamasic*.

*Rajasic* foods, such as hot or spicy foods, strong herbs, onions, garlic, coffee and tea, fish, eggs and salt, invigorate the heat of the physical and astral bodies. Too much *rajasic* food will over-stimulate the body and excite the passions, making the mind restless and uncontrollable. Eating in a hurry also creates a *rajasic* vibration in the body and mind. *Sattvic* foods, such as natural fruits and vegetables, help refine the astral and physical bodies, allowing the superconscious forces to flow and permeate and invigorate the entire being.

Extracted from an article by (Late) Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami of **Himalayan Academy**.