

Christian point of view. To make them suffer for ones own pleasure is an exhibition of sadism which every moralist must denounce." This quote certainly shows that our actions of meat eating are certainly counterproductive to any peace and unity or spiritual progress we wish to make.

Beyond Vegetarianism

In the process of bhakti yoga, devotion goes beyond simple vegetarianism, and food becomes a means of spiritual progress. In the *Bhagavad-gita* 9.27, Lord Kṛṣṇa says, "All that you do, all that you eat, all that you offer and give away, and whatever austerities that you may perform, do that as an offering to Me." So offering what we eat to the Lord is an integral part of bhakti yoga as it spiritualizes the food and makes it blessed with spiritual potencies. Such food is then called *prashadam*, or the mercy of the Lord. The Lord also describes what He accepts as offerings: "If one offers Me with love and devotion a leaf, flower, fruit or water, I will accept it." - *Bhagavad-gita* 9.26. Thus we can see that the Lord accepts foods that are naturally available in abundance such as fruits, grains, etc., which do not require violence in order to obtain them. So on the spiritual path, eating food that is first offered to God is the ultimate perfection of a vegetarian diet. The Vedic literature explains that the purpose of human life is reawakening the soul's original relationship with God, and accepting *prashadam* is the way to help reach that goal.

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Why Vegetarianism?

There are several reasons why a person is recommended to be vegetarian. One primary reason is that we need to see the spiritual nature within all living beings including animals. Universal brotherhood means nonviolence to both humans and animals. It consists of understanding that animals also have souls. They are alive, sentient, and do feel pain. These are indications of the presence of consciousness, which is the symptom of the soul. Even the Bible (Genesis 1.21; 1.24; 1.30; 2.7) refers to both animals and people as *nefesh chayah*, living souls.

However, those who eat meat see animals as nothing more than a source of food for their stomach and gratification for their palate. The problem with this consciousness is that it is not easy to understand the spiritual nature of all beings. After all, if you know that all living entities are spiritual in essence, and that all living beings that are conscious show the symptoms of the soul within, then how can you kill them unnecessarily? Any living creature is also the same as we are in the respect that it is also a child of the same father, a part of the same Supreme Being. Thus, the killing of animals shows great lack of spiritual awareness.

The ancient Vedic literature describe how the Supreme Being is the maintainer of innumerable living entities, humans as well as the animals, and is present in the heart of every living being. Only those endowed with spiritual understanding can appreciate the presence of the Supreme Being within every living creature. To be kind and spiritual towards human beings, and yet be a killer or enemy of animals, is not balanced and exhibits one's spiritual ignorance.

The ancient Vedic text of the Manu-samhita (5.45-48) says, "He who injures innocent beings from a wish to give himself pleasure never finds happiness, neither living nor dead. He who does not seek to cause suffering and death to living creatures, but desires the good of all beings, obtains endless bliss...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." The Bible (Romans 14.21) says, "It is neither good to eat flesh, nor to drink wine." The Buddhist scripture (Sutta-Nipata 393) also advises: "Let him not destroy or cause to the destruction of any life at all, or sanction the acts of those who do so. Let him refrain from even hurting any creature, both those that are strong and those that tremble in the world." It is also said in the Buddhist scripture, the Mahaparinirvana Sutra, The eating of meat extinguishes the seed of great compassion."

In the New Testament, Jesus preferred mercy to sacrifice (Matthew 9.13; 12.7) and was opposed to the buying and selling of animals for

sacrifice (Matthew 21.12-14; Mark 11.15; John 2.14-15). One of the missions of Jesus was to do away with animal sacrifice and cruelty to animals (Hebrews 10.5-10). We especially find in Isaiah where Jesus scorns the slaughter and bloodshed of humans and animals. He declares (1.15) that God does not hear the prayers of animal killers: "But your iniquities have separated you and your God. And your sins have hid His face from you, so that He does not hear. For your hands are stained with blood...their feet run to evil and they hasten to shed innocent blood...they know not the ways of peace." Isaiah also laments that he saw, "Joy and merrymaking, slaughtering of cattle and killing of sheep, eating of meat, and drinking of wine, as you thought, "let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." (22.13). It is also establish in the Bible (Isaiah 66.3), "He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man." In this regard St. Basil (320-379 A.D) taught, "The steam of meat darkens the light of the spirit. One can hardly have virtue if one enjoys meat meals and feasts." Thus, we should find alternatives to killing animals in order to satisfy our appetites, especially when there are plenty of other healthy foods available. Otherwise, there must be reactions to such violence. We cannot expect peace in our world if we unnecessarily continue killing so many millions of animals for meat consumption or abuse.

One other factor for being a vegetarian is - *karma*. As Newton's third law of motion states: for every action, there must be an equal and opposite reaction. On the universal scale this is called the law of karma, meaning what

goes around comes around. This affects every individual, as well as communities and countries. As a nation sows, so shall it reap. In our attempt to bring peace, harmony, and unity into the world, how we treat other living beings that share this planet with us is important. If so much violence is produced by the killing of animals, where then does the reaction to this violence go? The reaction is transferred to human society. These reactions manifest themselves in the form of violence, crime, corruption, abuse of power not only locally but extending globally as world wars. Violence breeds violence. Therefore senseless suffering in human society will continue unless we become spiritually educated and choose to live a non-violent lifestyle.

Isaac Bashevis Singer, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature, asked, "How can we pray to God for mercy, if we ourselves have no mercy? How can we speak of rights and justice if we take an innocent creature and shed its blood?" He went on to say, "I personally believe that as long as human beings will go on shedding the blood of animals, there will never be any peace."

In conclusion, we can mention the March 10, 1966 issue of L'Osservatore Della Domenica, the Vatican weekly newspaper, in which Msgr. Ferdinando Lambruschini wrote: "Man's conduct with regard to animals should be regulated by right reason, which prohibits the infliction of purposeless pain and suffering on them. To ill-treat them, and make them suffer without reason, is an act of deplorable cruelty to be condemned from a