

## **On Vegetarianism**

*By Swami Chinmayananda*

Q. Why is vegetarian food considered better in India?

A. Eat we must. What we like to eat depends upon one's taste. There are only four things available – stones, plants, animals and humans. Unfortunately we cannot eat stones because our system is not geared to digest and assimilate them directly. And even though we sometimes destroy human beings with our cruelty, our progressive society does not allow eating them. That leaves us the vegetable and animal kingdom to choose from. No doubt, since prehistoric times, animals have been eaten, but we find that the very first progenitor of humanity, Adam himself, was eating only vegetables. It is only his second son who started this easy method of obtaining food because agriculture seemed to be too difficult for him, as it required a continuous process of putting forward effort to produce. Whereas sitting behind a stone, waiting for innocent animals to come along, and destroying and eating them seemed to be the easier way!

Q. How did the idea of vegetarianism develop in India?

A. We learned that vegetables can stay fresh up to forty-eight hours, but meat deteriorates and becomes harmful very quickly. Furthermore, within the human body, during the process of digestion, food remains in the digestive system for forty-eight hours. Fruit and vegetables digest much faster than meat. Whatever stays longer in the intestines starts to decay with the heat of the body system, which creates a lot of toxins.

Let me explain this idea of toxicity a little more. You must have noticed that generally man eats only those animals that don't eat other animals. It is very difficult for man to digest and assimilate carnivorous animals. This suggests that they must be highly toxic to his system. It also suggests that a certain amount of toxicity is present in the first round of eaten animals, because twice removed the meat of carnivorous animals becomes impossible to eat.

Q. So it means that what one eats is between the doctor and the person who wants to remain healthy. But in what way does vegetarian food help a person's mind? Did people discover that it affects the mental temperament?

A. The food that we take in and the thoughts and actions that spring forth from us have a distinct relationship. In the computer world, there is a well-known saying – garbage in, garbage out. This seems to be true of our bodies as well. If you put toxic food – garbage – into your system, in the long run the texture of your thoughts and actions have a tendency to become more un-reconciling, extremely selfish, less concerned for others, and lusty and therefore potentially dangerous to the social order.

Thus, we can see that toxins in the system bring about a lot of mental disturbances. The same principle applies to drinking alcohol. Since our culture is essentially geared for the life of meditation, the mind that is constantly agitated and wandering finds it difficult to plunge into meditation. To such an individual, the toxin is an obstacle in reaching his goal. Probably this must have been the reason why the rishis in the jungles ate only fruits, roots, leaves and water. Those who take non-vegetarian food may be very uncontrolled because of the toxins in their food. Watch a vegetarian and a non-vegetarian animal. All the herbaceous animals are available for eating; whereas the non-vegetarian or carnivorous animals are never eaten, even by hard core non-vegetarians. Why is this? Because carnivorous animals have got so much toxicity in them that it means almost death to eat them.

### **Take Care of the Body**

**Avoid overeating and select the food that agrees with you and is conducive to the harmony of the body. Many people think eating food is the greatest exercise for the stomach! That is not enough. Apart from eating healthy food, you must also have some exercise of all the limbs, especially some exercises of the stomach so that your digestion, assimilation and evacuation can be as good as possible.**

**These are the primary rules to be followed. Our ancient teachers said: "The first duty is to take care of the body, which is the means for the pursuit of spiritual life." Sometimes weak persons come to me and say, "I want to forget my body!" What kind of body do they have? They are just a mass of skin and bones! Develop the body properly. You can never forget the body if it is not in a healthy condition.**

***Swami Yatiswarananda***  
**Meditation and Spiritual Life**