

## **Vegetarianism - A Compassionate Approach to Life**

"Unseen they suffer, unheard they cry.  
In agony they linger, in silence they die.  
Is it nothing to you, all ye who pass by?"

-Anonymous

These lines express the pain and suffering of the animals that are being exploited and tortured for the need of the human greed.

It is a sad picture of the innocent, dumb and defenseless creatures that are subjected to cruel pain far from the human eyes. The thought itself makes one's heart bleed with anguish and grief. How can we as human beings sit quietly when our younger brothers and sisters are in terrible state? Is it not our duty to protect and help them? But how difficult it is to predict man for, "Man is an actor. He acts all manners of men, and each one is a lie. Only the animal in him is real," says William Saroyan. Probably he is right by saying that, for the bestiality in the man has created a violent and destructive world in which we live today.

There is so much suffering going on in this world behind the curtain that it is kept a highly guarded secret. How long shall we pretend that animals have no soul and so it feels no pain. Is it not the time to wake up from our slumber and find the truth and stop being violent and act to end the cruelty that is meted on the dumb and innocent creatures? For violence begets violence and love begets love.

The first thing to end violence is to see animals as living beings and not as things that are made for human beings to use and consume. For they are lives full of emotions that feel pain and pleasure as we do. As Dr. Albert Schweitzer the Nobel Peace Prize Recipient in 1952 said in his book "A Place for Revelation" that "wherever you see life - that is you. What is this recognition, this knowledge apprehended by the most learned and most childlike alike? It is 'Reverence for Life,' reverence for the impenetrable mystery that meets us in our universe, an existence different from ourselves in external appearance yet inwardly of the same character with us. Terribly similar, awesomely related. This dissimilarity, the strangeness between us and other creatures are here removed. Reverence before the infinity of life means the removal of the

strangeness, the restoration of shared experiences, and of compassion and sympathy.”

In this way when we learn to see the animals as ourselves we change our perception of them and become more compassionate towards them. When such an understanding dawns on us, the first change occurs in the food pattern. One then starts to observe what one puts into the body where the soul is housed. For we know that, we are what we eat. What we eat reflects in our thinking and our thinking reflects in our action. If we want a healthy body and a healthy mind, the body should be provided with healthy and wholesome food, pure and untainted by blood and negative vibrations. One is often not aware of the fact that when one eats meat, one takes in protein as well as the chemicals that are injected into the animals to fatten them up and to control diseases and viruses. One also forgets that in flesh, the negative vibrations of pain, fear and rejection do exist, and they permeate every cell of the human body creating there the feeling of fear, pain and rejection.

How does one hope to live with good feelings of health, happiness and sound mind when negative vibrations of pain blended with chemicals are working in the body? These are the causes that lead to the fatal diseases of the mind and the body. That is the reason why we see so many people suffering from psychological and physiological diseases.

Statistically, approximately two million Americans die each year of which 68% are victims of the three major chronic diseases in which diet is major contributory factor: heart disease, cancer and stroke. The foods that have been singled out for special concern in connection with these diseases are eggs, meat, poultry, sea- food, animal fat and many more. So, feeding the body with food that involves minimum of violence, environmental damage and ecological imbalance creates harmony within and harmony without.

It is good to know the statistics. It takes 273 liters of water to produce 450 grams of wheat, 1136.5 liters of water to produce 450 grams of rice and approximately 9092 to 27,276 liters of water to produce 450 grams of meat. A chicken processing plant uses 454 million liters per day – enough to supply the water needs of 25,000 humans. Livestock are

responsible for consuming 80% of the world's water supply (A liter is 4 ½ cups of liquid).

Methane from cattle accelerates the global warming and the ozone layer depletion. PETA's (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animal) research shows that 26 billion animals are killed for food in the U.S. alone each year (9 billion land based, 17 billion aquatic). In this way when man lives a life involving gross violence he becomes a threat to himself and to the entire planet.

But if one becomes a vegetarian he saves 2,400 animals in a lifetime thus becoming a blessing to oneself and a blessing to the Mother Earth.

Today people all over the world are slowly becoming aware of the animal abuse and torture and are becoming vegetarians. Some for religious purpose, some for ethical reason, some for ecological reason and some for health or environmental point of view. The awareness is gaining momentum day by day. If one can try this way of diet for few months one can find out for themselves if there is any change in their state of mind and the body.

Let us see what vegetarianism means in today's world.

The term Vegetarian is derived from the Latin word vegetus meaning "whole, lively, sound, fresh." Thus a vegetarian is one who does not eat any meat, fish, fowl or eggs. There are those who consider themselves to be vegetarians even though they eat eggs. So the vegetarians are divided into three categories:

Lacto-ovo-vegetarians	Vegetarians diet includes milk, dairy products, and eggs
Lacto-vegetarians	Vegetarian diet includes milk, dairy products but no eggs
Vegans	Vegetarian diet does not include any animal products like milk, cheese, yogurt (curd), butter or

	eggs (most even eschew honey)
--	-------------------------------

A vegetarian thus can easily sustain on foods like grains, legumes, beans, nuts, seeds, vegetables and fruits that are good sources of protein, vitamins, minerals and other nutrients.

We just saw the ethical, ecological and the health point of view of vegetarianism. Now let us address the philosophical aspect of the issue.

Since time immemorial scriptural studies and research have revealed one thing that is common to all living beings and that is the desire to live and to be happy. It says that no one wants to be unhappy or in pain. But man in his pursuit of pleasure and happiness goes to the extent of using everything and everyone for his greed and satisfy his yearning by engaging in violent acts like hunting, killing, confining, or taking the life of freely roving innocent creatures. In this way, not only does he abuse the living creatures, but in turn abuses himself. For he too is a living creature and cannot remove him self from the universal law of vibrations of the living which is, what you throw out comes about.

To kill someone you have to be callous and then kill that life. When one acts in unawareness one kills the goodness in one's self and reaches a point of hating the self. If one does not have reverence for one's own self, how can one have reverence for other living beings? In this way violence perpetuates and the vicious circle of hate and violence continues.

One never stops to think that eating meat for taste involves much pain and torture to a life! A life that cannot be created in the laboratory! A very precious life with a strong will to live! A life that needs time to unfold its own destiny on earth, for a premature death breaks the cycle of natural expression of life. The philosopher Plutarch said, "But for the sake of some little mouthful of flesh, we deprive a soul of the life and time it had been born into the world to enjoy."

Very often people ask the question, "Why then, kill vegetables if not animals?" The Jain school of thought answers this question precisely. Basically this universe is made up two substances, i.e., "living" and "non-living." Living substance means human beings, animals, birds, insects,

smaller organisms, vegetation, air, water and earth. Non-living substances are tables, chairs, buildings, trains, cars, machines, etc. Wherever there is life, there is consciousness, there is the feeling of pain, a response to stimuli.

According to Jain philosophy, all life is divided into five categories according to the number of the senses they possess, such as one-sense beings to five-sense beings having the sense of touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing. The more the number of senses the more evolved the life is. Vegetables are one-sense beings having the sense of touch and animals are five-sense beings having all the five senses. Life has to go through a laborious and strenuous process to evolve from one sense beings to five-sense beings. By slaughtering an animal one destroys completely the evolutionary progress of that life, which it has attained through suffering and pain. The vegetable kingdom has not yet reached the blood "consciousness" which the animals and humans have. So the degree of pain is less. Where there is blood, there are more feelings, more emotions and possibility to feel deep pain. So one agrees that for living violence is inevitable, but one has the choice to minimize violence.

Two thousand and six hundred years ago, Mahavir, the great exponent of non-violence and compassion emphasized that thoughts that govern our actions are the products of the food we eat. The food that feeds the system has a definite influence on the person physically as well emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. Healthy, whole and harmless foods give rise to healthy whole and harmless thoughts. Once the thoughts are harmless and healthy, the actions also reflect the same qualities. Weakness in character always develops in those who are in poor health, mentally or physically.

Science has discovered in recent years that character and personality are attributes of the inner workings of the body and have a great bearing upon our success in life and in our happiness. The personality reveals and expresses itself through the physical body. The expression of the face, the smile, which is the manifestation of joy, happiness and compassion, reveal the personality within. Without a healthy body, these manifestations are not possible.

Thus vegetarianism is one of the many ways of expressing our reverence for all life forms including ourselves- from the minutest micro-beings to the macro- beings, from the lowest developed consciousness to the highest developed consciousness.