

Why should you be a Vegetarian?

by Satyanarayana Dasa

Twenty five years ago, while living in America, I once visited a friend for a few days. His son, who was about 11 years old, had a pet parrot. The boy kept the parrot in a nice cage, took good care of it and was affectionate toward it. One day when the boy came home from school, he found his parrot had bled to death after becoming stuck on a hook. At the sight of this, the boy became disturbed and started crying. He refused to eat lunch and sat in front of the cage where the parrot lay dead. I asked him, "Why do you weep for your parrot?"

He replied, "My parrot must have suffered a lot before dying." I said, "So what? You eat meat and fish. Don't you think that the animals and fish whose meat you eat also have to meet their end in a cruel manner?"

The boy asked me in a surprised tone, "Are you sure?"

I replied, "Yes, of course," to which he exclaimed, "Then I will never eat meat again. I do not want poor animals to suffer for my sake."

From that day onward, he became a vegetarian. Like this boy, many non-vegetarians have never witnessed the cruelty an animal experiences before it reaches their plates and palates. Most animals bred for the meat industry spend their entire life in cages barely big enough to accommodate them. If we had to witness the conditions they are kept in and every act of killing of animals we eat, most of us would refrain from eating meat.

Some people, due to estrangement from nature and because of a mechanical lifestyle, believe that animals are just like machines that can be used for our convenience. But anyone who has ever lived with a dog, care, bird, or any other animal, knows animals have feelings that are very real.

Food is a basic need for all living beings. Of all living beings, humans are the only species who abuse their own health through their eating habits. Yet ironically, humans have the greatest intellectual capacity. Instead of choosing food for its nutritional value, we usually opt for food that gratifies the palate despite detrimental health effects. The sun raising in the morning and creating darkness would be an equally surprising and contradictory occurrence.

Dr. Kenneth Walker says that half of the food we consume fills our stomachs, the other half fills the stomachs of our doctors. According to Ayurveda, most ailments come from inappropriate intake of food and drink. To a large degree, doctors are kept in demand by our inappropriate eating habits. It has been proven that a vegetarian diet is healthier than a non-vegetarian diet.

Even though vegetarianism has always existed, many people are not aware of its true character. The most common reasons for being vegetarian are concerns regarding one's health, ecological and economical welfare, compassion for animals, belief in non-violence, and religious and philosophical considerations.

Whatever be your reason, vegetarianism helps us become conscious of our spiritual identity and bring about peace in the society.