



Sri Chakra

The Source of the Cosmos

The Journal of the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, Rush, NY



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The Source of the Cosmos

OUR THOUGHTS

By Kamyā Ramaswamy

Dear Devotees,

I like cookies, pie and cake.

I rarely eat them, mostly because they're unhealthy, but partially because they make me feel spiritual guilt. Like most people, I like a lot of foods that are typically made with eggs in the western culture. It was something that never bothered me before last winter, because I offer all my food to Devi before eating, thus turning it into prasadam. Plus, it wasn't like I was eating a bacon-double cheeseburger—it was a cookie with traces of egg white.

But last winter, I found myself driving back to Canada from the temple with someone who didn't eat any egg-mixed foods and was making me feel a little bad for giving into my chocolate-chip cravings sometimes. The way I always figured, if I had the desire to eat something, I better eat it soon and get it over with, or I'll be doomed to come back and eat the thing in my next life.

But after being lectured by that one individual, I felt like an awful person and decided to give up every egg-mixed goodie I once ate to attain a higher level of spirituality. It was Christmas time too—the time of year when all the cookies and cakes come out to taunt me about my inability to eat them.

Within a week, I can safely say I became the most miserable person to be around. I found that suppressing my slight desire for an occasional snack just made the desire worse, and if anything, distracted me from Devi. The only thing I could think about now was cookies. I understood I was doing something wrong, so I asked my friends at the temple about their diets.

In a completely unscientific poll, three of the four people I talked to told me they still ate egg-mixed foods, and these are people who's japam has not taken a major hit for it.

I then understood that it's impossible (not to mention counter-productive) to force ourselves into a higher realm of spirituality. In the 11 months since my little fast, I've only eaten cookies two or three times. It was clear that once I gave into my harmless desire, Devi made it quickly disappear.

The issue of egg-mixed foods only scratches the surface of all the ways our diets affect our spirituality. Many of us might be avoiding eggs but actually harming our health. For example, Oreos are the only cookies that don't have eggs in them—however, they have the highest saturated fat content of any cookie on the market. I would rather eat an egg-mixed cookie than eat the heart-attack-in-a-box cookie.

Moreover, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada says that people of South Asian descent naturally have a higher risk than other races of developing heart disease or having a stroke. Much of it has to do with what we eat, as well as how much we eat.

It's true that there's no unhealthy substance in our bodies that japam can't burn off, but most of us just don't do the amount of japam needed to eliminate those toxins.

That's why The *Sri Chakra* staff devoted an issue to the spiritual and physical questions about food. In this issue, you'll find everything from arguments for vegetarianism to a nutritionist's perspective on how what we consume affects our very beings and attitudes.

As always, we welcome your questions and comments, and we ask you to please volunteer for future issues. We are always welcoming article ideas and new writers! Let us know your thoughts at sri_chakra_mag@shinyfeet.com. And remember—don't waste that prasadam!

The *Sri Chakra* staff

DECEMBER

NEWSLETTER

Past Month Events

Navarathri 2005

By Kamiya Ramaswamy

The Navarathri celebrations this year ran from Monday Oct. 3 to the final day of Kulurthi on Friday Oct. 14, and continued the tradition from 2004 of celebrating the Dasamahavidyas—one on each day of the festival. There were multiple kalasam sponsors every day, and all the silver kalasams were situated around Aiya's large clay kalasam in the centre of the yajnashala.

Aiya's kalasam was placed in the centre of a soil pit sowed with the navadhanya seeds (the nine grains belonging to each of the planets). On kulurthi day, the plants that had grown from the navadhanya grains were harvested and distributed to the devotees in the form of a bajji (a fried spicy Indian snack).

The kalasa pujas followed the patterns of Saturday puja each week with puja to Ganesha, the digdevatas and navagrahas, and Devi. The homams after kalasa pujas consisted of sahasranamam homams for each Dasamahavidya (1008 names offered), which each lasted about one hour.

During the festival, Devi's was taken around the temple on each of the last nights of the 3-day periods of Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati. Wednesday the main kalasa was taken in procession proceeding the Chandi Homam, and the day continued with the chariot cirumambulating the temple. Thursday Oct.13 saw the offering of Bhairava bali outside, and Friday the 14th saw the abhishekam of the digdevata kalasams onto Devi during the

kulurthi.

While devotees chanted the pancha-suktas, Aiya and other volunteers poured 21 kalasams of water on Devi, followed by milk, curds, honey, haldi powder, viboothi and panchamritham. The puja concluded at 3 p.m. and devotees prepared for the Pradosham puja and the start of Kedara Gowri vratham that night.

Kedara Gowri 2005

By Abhi Somaskanda

The final day of Navarathri, Vijayadasami, witnessed the start of the annual 21-day festival, Kedara Gowri Vratham.

The story goes that Devi seperated herself from Siva in anger and said She would descend to Earth. Siva told Her She would have to work Her way as a human back to the Ardhanareeswara form that She divided herself from (that is why the puja at the temple is done to the Ardhanareeswara). She had to take on a human form with all the ego and attachments that come along with a human birth.

She searched and found a Guru, Gautamamuni, and he taught her how to do puja to Siva. This puja took place in India in the town of Kedareshwaram - hence the name Kedara Gowri puja.

On the final day, no expense or effort was spared. Preparations began early in the morning - from puja set up to the cooking of sweet and savory naivedyams, and 21 different kinds of palaharams.

A makeshift mandapam was created in front of the dvaja stambam for Her to sit in after

abhishekam.

After Her bath, Aiya spoke to the crowd of about 150 people while devotees adorned Ardhanareeswara with stunning jewelry and a half-sari, half-dhoti vastram.

She was then placed in front of the dvaja stambam. Surrounding Her, the flagpole, the bali peetam, Nandhi, and the Meru, were trays with 21 different varieties of fruits, and 21 trays set with a sari, turmeric root, a small silver vessel of kumkuma, and many other offerings. On either side of Her were two trays filled with the 21 palaharams.

Following the puja, the 21 saris were given away at random as a beautiful offering to suvasini's, with the notion that every lady was the Devi. It was hard to find a dry eye as each suvasini received the gift with a namasakaram from the sponsor.

The night concluded with a gift bag for all those who sponsored Kedara Gowri puja this year, and a delicious meal.

Skanda Shasti 2005

By Kamiya Ramaswamy

Skanda shasti puja commenced immediately following the conclusion of Kedara Gowri vratham, from Nov. 2 to Nov. 7. Like previous years, Muruga, Devayani and Valli were seated in the yajnashala facing west, and were worshipped every evening around 7 p.m. This year, the temple devotees worshipped each one of Subramaniam's heads on each of the six days.

Aiya began the puja each day

with a short puja to Kartikkeya, during which all three of the deities were seated in the steel abhishekam tub. After Aiya did his milk abhishekam, he prepared for Sharavanabhava's

Murugan, Valli, and Devayani after the wedding



sahasranamam homam while the other devotees performed their milk abhishekams.

Sahasranamam homam took place every day, during which Aiya and Vishwanathan uncle chanted the names together.

Different devotees were chosen to offer names into the fire each day.

Daily puja concluded by offering the bali for the evening puja inside the temple and blowing six short notes on the shankam as the final offering to Swaminathan.

The final day's puja saw the procession of the three deities, re-enacting Muruga's elopement with Valli. In the story, Devayani turns away from the Muruga and Valli vigrahams, after learning that her husband had married another woman. However, the three murthis are united together when Muruga tells Devayani that she and Valli are actually sisters and he had promised them both in a previous life that he would marry them.

Upcoming Events

Karthikai Deepam 2005

By Kamy Ramaswamy

Karthikai deepam will happen on the evening of Dec. 14. The puja celebrates the form of Shiva as He is in Thiruvanamalai. The story behind the festival is an argument between Brahma and Vishnu about who was the greater god. Suddenly, a giant deepam appeared, spanning from the sky to below the ground. A voice said

that if either of them could find the top or bottom of the deepam, he would be the greater deity.

Brahma transformed into a bird and traveled up; Vishnu turned into a boar and dug down into the earth. After a long journey, Vishnu returned to the surface and admitted to the incorporal voice that he could not find the bottom of the deepam. Brahma, however, lied about finding the top of the deepam. The voice cursed him and said he would never be worshipped in a temple.

Both gods admitted that the deepam was greater than both of them. The deepam and the voice belonged to Lord Shiva, who then remained in Thiruvanamalai in the form of the great mountain there. Every year on Karthikai Deepam, the mountain is lit up with lamps to celebrate Shiva's form as eternal light.

The Rajarajeswari Peetam is similarly adorned with deepams all over the inner temple and yajnashala on this day each year.

Thiruvempavai 2006

By Kamy Ramaswamy

This festival celebrating Lord Nataraja will run from Wed. Jan. 4 to Fri. Jan. 13 2006. At the Rajarajeswari Peetam, the festival is celebrated every morning at 5 a.m., with a puja to the Nataraja moorthi that lasts about one-and-a-half hours.

The puja commences with the singing of songs designed to awaken each of the moorthis in the temple. These songs are called the *Thirupalliyellich*.

After this ritual, the devotees present for the puja do one pradakshanam of the temple and yajnashala area for every verse that is sung from the set of songs called the *Thiruvempavai*.

At the end of each verse and pradakshanam, pancha-upacharam puja is performed to Nataraja. The last day of the festival is Arudra Darshanam, which is one of the holiest days of the year for Shaiivites--this is the day in the temple when Nataraja receives abhishekam.



Kedara Gowri final day set up



The ratham and Devi in grand procession

In Two Months The next issue of the Sri Chakra Magazine

Devi willing, the next issue of the *Sri Chakra Magazine* will be up on the temple's website (www.srividya.org) at the beginning of February 2006. The next issue will focus on the topic of "Alcohol." Some of topics we will cover include how alcohol can be used within puja, and the Hindu stance on social drinking.

If you are interested in writing articles or taking pictures, please e-mail us at the address given in the front of the magazine (sri_chakra_mag@shinyfeet.com).

If you would like to contribute, the deadline for submissions (photographs and/or articles) is Saturday January 14. Please be a part of this effort. We look forward to seeing your contributions and suggestions to help make this magazine the best it can be!

Sri Gurubhyo Namah!

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FOOD FOR THE BODY,

To eat or not to eat, now that is the question! As an upasaka or just anyone interested in food and how it affects your spirituality or sadhana, prepare your tastebuds for a few fascinating facts about what you are ingesting. From a nutritionist's point of view, to a more traditional vedic perspective, you will get the idea that food is indeed not just for the body and culture, but for the soul.



FUEL FOR THE SOUL

HOW FOOD AFFECTS SPIRITUALITY



SADHANA AND

Article 1 of 2
by Navin Parthasarathy

The food we eat determines our mental state. Our mental state determines the intensity of our sadhana. To understand the 'why,' we should first understand the 'how.'

So how is food processed?

Food is the carrier of nutrients to the cells in the body. The cells use these nutrients to rejuvenate and rebuild our body. It takes seven years for the cells to recycle—in effect, every seven years we have a new body. This is the physical part of this process.

There is also a subtle process that is not seen, but only experienced, in the transport of 'prana' or life force to these cells. The quality of this prana is what determines the future state of the body.

Let's understand this at a physical level. The digestive juices digest the food and the resulting product is sent to the cells via the bloodstream. The cells absorb the nutrients and create the necessary energy, nutrients etc. and also manufacture more red blood cells. It is said that 100 drops of blood constitute one drop of vital fluid and 100 drops of vital fluids form the bone marrow. Bone marrow determines the basic future of the body. Since this process is so deep and affects us at such a deep level, it is important to have good food habits. This will ensure the body stays healthy in the long run.

The three basic types of foods based on this pranic quality:

Satwic: Foods that are light, not salty or spicy, raw foods, fruits and vegetables. Mung beans, curd, ghee, dal and lightly cooked vegetable are good foods. Some good satwic preparations are Chaaru and Kichidi. These preparations are light, easy on the digestion and create pure prana in the body. Satwic foods make the mind steady and help in

meditation. They create calm and saintly prana.



Raw veggies are satwic foods

Rajasic: Foods that are spicy, salty etc. These foods excite the mind and make it restless. The mind is hyperactive and causes one to engage in angry debates. It increases anger, lust, greed etc. These foods create restless prana.



Spicy samosas are rajasic foods

Tamasic: Foods that are stale, meats, poultry and fish. These foods make the individual further into the gross matter. One gets involved in lethargic activities, oversleeping, laziness etc. These are foods that are found under the ground like onions, garlic, ginger are tamasic foods. They create gross, lethargic prana.



A veggie burger is tamasic

To summarize, if the food is Satwic, the person develops calmness, concentration, lightness of body and mind and a spiritual well being.

If the food taken is Rajasic the person gets agitated, is aggressive and violent and exhibits a lot of impatience.

If the food taken is Tamasic the person is lethargic and lazy, shows no enthusiasm and is a procrastinator.

These pranic qualities are transported through our bloodstream into our cells and to the life force that is stored in it. Imagine accumulating this life force everyday. Along with this prana comes the energy of the people who have handled the food, cooked the food and served the food. But these energies can be negated by the use of certain purification rituals before consuming the food.

For example let's take a "veggie burger" from a fast food restaurant. It is a tamasic food. In fact most fast foods are tamasic. It will have the intent of the people who made the veggie burger, giving off a pranic energy of the person serving the food. When you consume it, you imbibe these qualities.

Compare that to the foods prepared at home. Let's take a satwic food like kichidi, which spiritual practitioners prefer. Let's say you or someone in your home prepares it with love, chanting the moola mantras. That food is not only satwic, it imparts physical benefits and the mantras eliminate the energies that accompanied it due to the food handlers en route.

Too far-fetched? Give it a try. Try eating fast foods, and try eating satwic foods with the mantras and the simple rituals. You will see the difference in less than 30 days.

Article 2 of 2
by Navin Parthasarathy

PURIFYING FOOD FOR THE HUMAN BODY

Our bodies are composed of five elements: water, fire, earth, air and space. The Ayurvedic system further classifies our bodies into Vata, Pitta and Kapha types. Each are called a Dosha, which is a combination of these elements. Each person is a combination of these doshas. Every person should understand their dosha and partake only those foods that are friendly to their doshas. This is a subject of discussion in itself.

Another important factor is the five sheaths surrounding the body, which affect the different chakras in the body:

- Annamaya Kosha – The physical body
- Pranamaya Kosha— The etheric body that surrounds the physical. Modern science has seen this sheath through Kirlean photography
- Monomaya Kosha – The mental sheath
- Vignanamaya Kosha – Intelligence and ego
- Anandamaya Kosha – Causal body

Each of these sheaths relate to different state of our minds, and the foods that we eat influence these sheaths. Since the body is made up of these elements and since the food we consume is made up of these elements, what we eat determines the proportion of the elements that it gets nourished with. This affects us in the physical and meta-physical planes.

Having understood the basics of how food is processed, you will appreciate why certain rituals are performed to ensure that the foods that we consume are pure—not only in physical terms, but also in pranic terms.

All the food that is prepared is first offered to your deity,

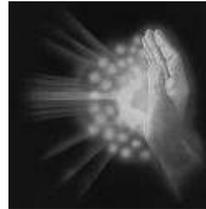
chanting the Gayatri mantra. Then you offer the food to the deity and do the mudras offering it to the five vayus in the body. These 5 vayus control different parts of the body and hence the movement of all nutrients and energy in the body. The mudras are in Aiyā's Sri Vidya book and available on the web.

Our 5 fingers represent the 5 elements:

The thumb represents Fire
The index represents Air
The middle finger represents Ether
The ring finger represents Earth
The little finger represents Water

That is why you eat with your hands. It invokes these elements and makes the food more digestible and better assimilated into your system.

Offer water on the food. This ritual will clear all the negative



vibrations from people who handled the food and their associated karmas.

Take some water in your hand and chant your moola mantra and pour the water around the leaf clockwise. Take some portion of each item of food and keep it aside on the left hand corner as an offering to the beings of the nether worlds. Then chant the following given here with meaning:

From Bhagavad Gita 4.24

**Brahmaarpanam Brahma Havir
Brahmaagnau Brahmanaa Hutam
Brahmaiva Tena Gantavyam
Brahma Karma Samaadhinaha**

“The act of offering is Brahman. The offering itself is Brahman. The offering is done by Brahman in the sacred fire which is Brahman. He alone attains Brahman who, in all actions, is fully absorbed in Brahman.”

As we chant this prayer we are offering the different types of food to Brahman.

From Bhagavad Gita 15.14

**Aham Vaishvaanaro Bhutva
Praaninaam Dehamaashritha
Praanaapaana Samaa Yuktaha
Pachaamyannam Chatur Vidam**

This sloka is a sort of acknowledgement and assurance to us from Brahman.

“I am Vaishnavara, existing as fire God in the bodies of living beings. Being associated with incoming (prana) and outgoing (apaana) life breaths, I will digest all the four different types of food (that which we bite and chew; that which we masticate with the tongue; those which we gulp; that which we swallow) and purify them.”

Now eat your food in silence, looking down and chanting your mantras. This creates great prana for your body, gives health and imbibes satwic qualities. Fill your stomach ½ with food, 1/4 with water and leave 1/4 free. This is the recommended yogic path.

This is the ideal way to eat food, but what are the bare essentials? At the bare minimum offer the food to your deity in your mind and then chant mantras while eating.

WHAT YOUR BODY NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT A VEGETARIAN DIET

by Sonia (Sandeep) Chadha



Vegetarian diets of Sri Lanka and India natives the diets are fairly healthy although there are certain aspects that are important to be aware of.

Amino acids are the building blocks of protein.

Our body needs essential amino acids (amino acids the body cannot make) and nonessential (amino acids the body can make), which are needed for making hormones, antibodies, enzymes and many other important functions in the body. We can get all of our essential amino acids from combining foods such as rice and legumes (beans & lentils). Proteins from animal food sources are better because they contain all essential amino acids in the proportions our body needs and is more easily used and absorbed by the body. Animal foods such as milk and yogurt are important to incorporate into vegetarian diets. They are high in protein, calcium, and certain B vitamins. Three glasses of milk a day will provide you with half the protein you need, all the calcium, riboflavin, and phosphorus. It also provides you with other various vitamins and minerals in moderate amounts. Calcium is particularly important for females to help prevent osteoporosis. The calcium you receive from milk is better absorbed than any calcium supplement you can take. Calcium supplements usually only provide you with 40% of what their labels state. It is

important for women under 30 to have 1000 mg of calcium which is equal to 3 glasses of milk a day. After the age of 30 the bones absorption of calcium starts to decrease.

Carbohydrates are our source of energy from food. We mainly get carbohydrates from rice, wheat, fruits, vegetables, beans and lentils. Vegetarian diets tend to be high in carbohydrates. It is therefore important to have the appropriate kinds of carbohydrates such as whole grains (avoiding refined grains such as white bread). Brown rice, whole wheat and multigrain breads are superior because they are higher in certain vitamins, minerals and fiber. Be aware that wheat bread is actually colored white bread; real whole wheat bread will be labeled "100% whole wheat bread". Look for "high fructose corn syrup" in the labels of your foods under ingredients. High fructose corn syrup is usually found in soda, and certain processed foods and has been linked to weight gain, obesity and diabetes. There are some healthy foods that contain high fructose corn syrup which should not be avoided such as yogurt with fruit added.

Fat is an important part of our diets, it provides energy storage, insulation in cold temperatures, and helps the body use carbohydrates and proteins. There are three types



of fats: saturated, polyunsaturated and monounsaturated. As far as using vegetable cooking oils it is best to use those that are higher in monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats and lower in saturated fats. Diets high in saturated fats are directly associated with heart disease. Keep in mind that the vegetable cooking oils higher in polyunsaturated fats such as safflower, sunflower, corn, soybean and cottonseed oil have a shorter shelf life. Cooking oils such as Olive and canola oil are higher in monounsaturated fats have a longer shelf life. Essential fatty acids we need are polyunsaturated omega -6 and omega -3 fats. You can find these fats in vegetable oils, nuts, and seeds. Keep your intake of trans-fats to the absolute lowest. Trans fats are found in some snack chips, cakes, cookies, crackers and margarine. Be sure to look at your food labels for trans fats.

Vegetarian diets lack in certain nutrients so it's important to take a multivitamin at least every other day. You don't need to buy a name brand multivitamin, read the label and see if the multivitamin fulfills the needed RDA for each mineral or vitamin. South Asians tend develop anemia so if necessary take an additional iron supplement. Start reading food labels and become familiar with what you're putting into your body. Please feel free to e-mail me any questions or if you see me ask me any questions. skchadha@gmail.com

THE BENEFITS OF A VEGETARIAN DIET

by Sudha Priya Kearney

“Strictly speaking, no activity and no industry is possible without a certain amount of violence, no matter how little. Even the very process of living is impossible without a certain amount of violence. What we have to do is to minimize it to the greatest extent possible.” - Mahatma Gandhi

I was raised on a vegetarian diet by my parents who were taught to choose a vegetarian diet by their parents. At least four or five generations in our family were vegetarian. So it has been easy for me and my siblings to remain vegetarian even after moving to the USA 27 years ago. We did not find it at all difficult.

Most of my co-workers were curious about my choice of diet and when I explained the reason (religion and non-violence), they were very respectful about it. No one has ridiculed me or made fun of me for my choice of diet so I am surprised that some immigrants who were raised vegetarian have started eating meat after coming to the USA or Canada.

Is it because they want to “fit in” and not be different? Are they embarrassed to tell their colleagues or classmates that they don’t eat meat? Some people personally are vegetarian but their children born in this country are not. I wonder why they make this choice. Do they not think about the karmic consequences?

I did ask a few people and their response was that the rishis ate meat. As well, Rama and Krishna in our scriptures hunted and ate meat, and it was okay for them too. My angle is that the rishis also did intense penance for thousands of years—why not choose to emulate that? By the power of their tapas, the rishis gained the ability to give moksha (liberation) to the animals they killed.

Most people think eggs are vegetarian and I too believed that for quite a long time, since I liked to eat cakes, cookies, ice cream and other products containing eggs. That was until my husband, Michael, told me about a show he saw on TV about how much violence and cruelty was involved in the production of eggs. I did not see the show but to hear about it was enough to make me give up eggs altogether. It makes you wonder

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- ALBERT EINSTEIN**

why some animals are pets and others are dinner.

Michael was raised on the traditional American diet, but chose to become a vegetarian about 17 years ago. With minimal exposure to the current eastern philosophies and the current popular trends towards yoga, Mike chose a vegetarian diet for health, environment and ethical reasons. After meeting Aiyia 12 years ago and having practiced Sri Vidya, he has added spiritual sadhana as a reason to be vegetarian.

My stepson, Ryan, has been raised on a vegetarian diet from birth. When he was five years old, his regular day care provider was out and the substitute teacher who not aware of his diet gave him a ham sandwich for lunch. Ryan refused to eat it and said he was vegetarian. So the teacher opened the sandwich and took the ham off and gave it

back to him saying she took the meat off so he can eat it.

Ryan’s response at age five was, “the bread has touched the meat so I will not eat it.” She made him a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. I feel if we teach our children by example, they will not be shy or embarrassed to be assertive about their choice of diet. Ryan is a teenager now and still a vegetarian. He has occasionally tasted some meat products at his friends’ homes and decided for himself that he prefers a vegetarian diet. When his classmates or teachers question him about his diet he explains that he feels it is not good for his health to eat dead animals. He has also done his own research into the health benefits of a vegetarian diet, and loves to try and convince his friends to switch to vegetarian and organic dairy products.

The fruits, vegetables and grains we eat also have life. Vedic texts have explained that plants have less consciousness than animals, fish or fowl so when we eat grains and vegetables the pain we cause them is far less than the pain and despair that animals, fish and fowl feel when they are killed. Accordingly, the karmic burden for eating vegetables is lesser than if we eat meat.

Some argue it’s different for Sri Vidya upasakas—technically, we can burn up the negative effects of anything we eat through mantra japam. But would you want to expend all the shakti you generate from your sadhana for digesting animals or would you rather use it for spiritual progress?

It’s your choice. For more information, see the following websites and articles:

<http://www.himalayaninstitute.org/ArticleRead.aspx?code=1>
<http://www.happycow.net/>
<http://www.peta.org/>
<http://www.vegsoc.org>

Kids Opinion Piece

WHY ARE KIDS SHY ABOUT TAKING OUR TRADITIONAL LUNCHES TO SCHOOL? ARE THEY ASHAMED? OR IS THERE ANOTHER REASON?

by Lukshmi Jeyakumar

I think that most kids are ashamed or just don't want the trouble of answering questions from their peers. I used to take traditional lunches to school and a lot of people would ask me what I was eating, why it looked like it did, etc. I would always tell them what they wanted to know, and they would either make remarks or they never remember what I said.

For example, one day I took pittu to school and someone asked me what I was eating and I said that it was made of flour and they made the remark, "ewwww, Lukshmi is eating flour." Eventually I stopped taking traditional lunches because I was tired of the remarks and tired of answering the questions, but that wasn't the only reason.

I was also tired of taking the same food to school—I wanted to try something different. I started to take sandwiches, spaghetti etc., and eventually I realized that it was easier for me to take sandwiches and spaghetti. My bag wasn't always as heavy as it was when I took the traditional lunches. Maybe other children have different reasons—maybe they don't want to be the only person eating that food, maybe they want to be like everyone else. But that's just my opinion.

If you want to take some easy lunches to school here are some suggestions; you could make a vegetable sandwich, or if you want to take traditional lunches, mixed string-hoppers is pretty easy to make and to take to school.

5 REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD BECOME A VEGETARIAN:

Excerpts from an article in Hinduism Today by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami
(Read the complete article at <http://www.himalayanacademy.com/resource/pamphlets/WinMeatEaterArgument.html>)

The Dharmic/Scriptural Law reason

Ahimsa, the law of non injury, is the Hindu's first duty in fulfillment of his religious obligations to God and God's creations as defined by Vedic Scripture.

The Karmic Consequences reason

All of our actions including our choice of food have karmic consequences. By involving oneself in the cycle of inflicting injury, pain and death, even indirectly by eating other creatures, one must experience the same level of suffering in the future.

The Spiritual Consciousness reason

By ingesting the grosser chemistries of animal foods, one introduces into the body and mind anger, jealousy, fear, anxiety, suspicion and a terrible fear of death, all of which are locked into the flesh of butchered creatures. Right from the rearing of hens to the hatching of eggs, there is cruelty and violence.

Chickens are kept in painfully uncomfortable spaces and even their beaks are cut off to prevent them from pecking each other, which they will from being confined to inhumanely small spaces where they are unable to

move. So when their beaks are cut off they are not even able to drink water and they literally starve for three to four days because of the pain. Do you really want to eat anything that has so much pain and violence in it's production? Think of the karmic consequences to yourself.

The 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.

Those who eat flesh are far more likely to contract cancer than those following a vegetarian diet.

Reducing one's consumption of meat, dairy and eggs by 10 per cent reduces the risk of heart attack by 10 per cent. Completely eliminating these products from one's diet reduces the risk of heart attack by 90 per cent.

The Ecological reason

Planet earth is suffering. In large measure, the escalating loss of species; the destruction of ancient rain forests to create pasture lands for livestock; the rise in water and air impurities have all been traced to meat in the human diet. Much of the world's massive hunger problem could be solved by the elimination of meat-eating. One acre of land can produce 40,000 pounds of potatoes, or 250 pounds of beef.

Fifty-six percent of all US 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. While 25 gallons of water are needed to produce a pound of wheat, 5000 gallons are needed to produce a pound of beef. That same 5000 gallons of water can produce 200 pounds of wheat.

HERE'S SOME FAMOUS QUOTES AND SUMPTUOUS INDIAN RECIPES FROM SUDHA PRIYA KEARNY!

Baingan Bharta (Spice Eggplant)

Ingredients:

1 large eggplant
 2 large onions
 1 6oz. can tomato paste
 ½ tsp. black mustard seeds
 1 tsp. salt
 ½ tsp. turmeric
 ½ tsp. fenugreek powder
 ½ tsp. cayenne pepper powder
 1 tsp. fennel powder
 1 tsp. coriander seeds (Dhania) powder
 1 inch of freshly grated ginger
 1 cup whole milk (Optional)
 ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro for garnish

Also optional: 1 cup green peas, boiled till done. Add with the baked eggplant to the onion and tomato gravy.

-Wash and pierce the eggplant with sharp knife. Wrap well in foil and bake for 1½ hours in the oven at 350°F

While Eggplant is baking:

-Chop 2 large onions
 -at medium heat, in a non-stick pan, put 3 tbsp. olive oil and add the chopped onions and ½ tsp. black mustard seeds
 -Cook onions uncovered till brown.
 -Add tomato paste
 -Stir well and add the rest of the spices--cover and lower heat
 -Cook for about 5 minutes and set aside
 -When eggplant is done, remove from foil and place eggplant in mixing bowl. Trim the stem and mash eggplant
 -Add mashed eggplant to the onion paste and mix well
 -Stir in 1 cup whole milk and cook on low for a few minutes
 -Garnish with cilantro (optional) and serve with rice or bread



A delicious bowl of Baingan Bharta

“GREATER THAN A THOUSAND GHEE OFFERINGS CONSUMED IN SACRIFICIAL FIRES IS TO NOT SACRIFICE AND CONSUME ANY LIVING CREATURE.” (TIRUKURAL 259)

“IF THE WORLD DID NOT PURCHASE AND CONSUME MEAT, THERE WOULD BE NONE TO SLAUGHTER AND OFFER MEAT FOR SALE.” (TIRUKURAL 256)

“HOW CAN HE PRACTICE TRUE COMPASSION WHO EATS THE FLESH OF AN ANIMAL TO FATTEN HIS OWN FLESH?” (TIRUKURAL 251)

Channa Masala (Chole) or Chick Peas

Ingredients:

1 can chick peas, rinsed and drained
 1 large onion--chopped into small pieces
 ½ 6oz. can tomato paste
 ¼ tsp. turmeric
 Pinch of Asafoetida (optional)
 1 clove crushed garlic
 1 tbsp. garam masala
 3 tbsp. olive oil
 ½ tsp. dry mango powder
 *do not add salt!

-Heat the oil in a non-stick pan on medium heat and add the pinch of Asafoetida

-Fry onions until brown
 -Add the tomato paste, stir well and cook for 2 minutes
 -Add garam masala, stir well and cover
 -Cook for 5 minutes, add 1 cup water and rest of ingredients
 -Cover and cook on low heat for another 7 to 10 minutes
 -Serve with rice or olive bread



A savory bowl of channa masala



Sri Gurubhagavanamah