

Vedanta and Vegetarianism

Sundari (Isabella Viglietti)

2015-10-21

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/2292>

Vedanta and the Politics and Morality of Food

Sanskrit terminology and other terms defined:

Isvara: the field of existence, or creative force

*Gun*as: the three energies making up/running the field: *sattva/rajas/tamas*

Sattva: the energy of clarity, peace, happiness

Rajas: the energy of projection, action, desire

Tamas: the energy of introversion, dullness, matter (physical substance)

Jiva: person, or individual

Karma: action and its results (including thoughts/words)

Dharma: personal and universal laws

Vasanas: Inbuilt tendencies, or likes and dislikes

Self: awareness/consciousness

Apparent reality: the world/Creation

Question

Pamela: Yesterday, while listening to James talking, I had this experience of understanding that I, the self, am everything: the other humans, the animals, the trees, the water, the soil, the air, and from that vantage point I am everywhere and I am everything. With that understanding, I was laughing and crying because it was such a complete relief from old way of “seeing” as a person. I thought, “There is no difference between animals and plants, because I am everything.” It does not matter if I kill or my body is killed because it is me, the self. I do not care how I shed the body.

This is true, but I know that animals want to live and that I do not want to take their life away from them, therefore I am a fruit-eater. Who is thinking this thought now?? Me - self - or the person? Self sees her self in “other” because I am in everything, so is the person who feels sorry for animals. If everything comes from the field of existence, then it shouldn't matter or is this just a personal bias?

Sundari: We are often asked this question, so I have addressed it at length. Politics aside, what we eat is not only a health issue but also a moral/spiritual issue; it relates to lifestyle and is therefore relevant to self-inquiry. Self-knowledge is about awareness; the one who knows the body-mind is in the apparent reality and is always free of the person and the world. But for the person to be free of its identification with the body-mind and the apparent reality, it needs to understand the field of existence of which it is a part and how it functions. You will not find any mention on the topic of diet or lifestyle in general in Vedanta doctrine, but it is covered in the *karmic* section of the *Vedas* and the Yoga scriptures. However, to qualify for self-inquiry, lifestyle issues have to be addressed. Because peace of mind

is the main aim, knowledge-seekers are mature people who use discrimination to navigate in the apparent reality based upon the effects of diet and lifestyle on their state of mind. If your state of mind is extroverted and agitated (*rajasic*) or dull and depressed (*tamasic*) it is likely that you are violating some law or laws (*dharma*) governing the body. To exercise discrimination the mind needs to be clear and peaceful (*sattvic*).

There is no contradiction between the knowledge I present here and experience, because the knowledge is simply pointing out how things function in the apparent reality, which is duality. The body-mind and consciousness appear to be two different things, although they are actually one. If you feel this document is prescriptive, you are right and you are wrong. I do not tell you what to do, how to live or what to eat. I don't care what anyone eats or how they live, as there is no "one way" that is best for everyone. What I do lay out is how the laws of nature (*Isvara*/the field of existence) function, and they are proscriptive.

Considering the natural laws that run the field, Vedanta, which is the science of consciousness elucidating the logic of existence and how the individual relates to the big picture, does tell us how the person needs to live. The natural laws that run the field cannot be contravened without consequence. If this were not the case, life would be impossible, as complete chaos would reign. However, universal laws are open to interpretation by the person according to his or her understanding (and tendencies) at any given time. This discretion of the person is called *visesa dharma* (inborn nature, or conditioning). To live in harmony with the field of existence, personal *dharma* in all areas has to conform to universal *dharma* as closely as possible or the person runs afoul of the field of existence (*Isvara*) and suffers the consequences.

There Is No "Heavenly Perfect Diet"

When it comes to diet, there is no Garden of Eden where we once ate the perfect diet until someone brought in high-fructose corn syrup, which got us all thrown out of heaven! There is this persistent idea with regards to diet that is analogous to Freud's idea in his book *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, which is that we are all doing something wrong and life is a continuous battle between what the body really needs and the pressures of civilisation. But that is not the truth. The field of existence does run on some basic and immutable laws, but it also offers many different options. Humans evolved to be very adaptable and lots of dietary approaches work – and let's face it – none of us are going to get out of this alive. Death is built in to the system for the person, and immortality is not what we are after in human form. We know that we are already immortal as awareness – and we are not the body. Although the body arises in awareness and is made up of awareness, it is still an object known to awareness. You cannot be what you know. What is not built into the system for anyone is peace of mind. That we have to find – and if we do, we live well while we are in the body.

The Natural Laws Regarding Diet

When you get past all the ideas and prescriptions and proscriptions about diet that abound in the apparent reality, you get down to four basic laws that apply to everyone.

Law No. 1

There is really only one body appearing as many. The body arises from and is made of the same elements that everything in the environment is made of: earth, water, fire, air. It is basically made up of food. Food is made up of nutrients. The elements that make up the environment themselves arise from and are subject to the three forces in creation (the *gunas*).

These are: the energy of extroversion/projection/action (*rajas*); the energy of introversion/ dullness/matter (*tamas*); and the energy of revelation/clarity/intelligence (*sattva*). The needs of the body nutritionally correspond to these three energies. For instance, for activity and vitality we need *rajasic* nutrients; for building the body, endurance and maintenance we need *tamasic* nutrients; for a clear and peaceful mind we need *sattvic* nutrients. The right combination of these energies in the form of food for our particular body constitutes good health.

Law No. 2

With regards to lifestyle issues, personal *dharma* varies a great deal. When it comes to what we eat, all bodies are not created equal in that some are strong, some weak, and because of different *karma*, environments and conditioning (tendencies, or *vasanas*) all bodies have different requirements. The saying “you are what you eat” is not entirely correct. More correctly, the truth is you are what your body does with what you eat. Therefore the *gunas* will play out slightly differently for everyone; certain foods that are *sattvic* (calming) for one will be *rajasic* (agitating) for another; others that are *rajasic* will be *tamasic* (dulling) for another, and vice versa with all the *gunas*. The field of existence generously accommodates this by offering a wide variety of animal and plants foods which contain the nutrients necessary for the survival and health of the body.

Law No. 3

There are two classes of nutrients available:

1. Essential nutrients are those the body cannot make or synthesize on its own and must be obtained from the diet. They are:

21 essential amino acids (the building blocks for protein), nine of which the body cannot make and has to ingest:

- essential fatty acids – omegas (primarily, omega-3s)
- good fats, found in animal and plants
- fat-soluble vitamins;
- minerals
- water.

The bottom line: without the correct amount of these essential nutrients, the body gets sick or dies.

2. Non-essential nutrients are nutrients the body can make or synthesize. They are:

- carbohydrates.

Carbohydrates convert to glucose in the body, and the correct blood-glucose level is essential for good health. But, contrary to consensus medical theories and official food pyramids, it is not essential to ingest carbohydrates for long-term health, because the body can make glucose from protein. This process is called gluconeogenesis. It is common to hear that gluconeogenesis is a last-ditch process the body resorts to when glucose is not available from the diet, but this is absolutely untrue. Gluconeogenesis is a natural process going on all the time, which is why there is no need for dietary carbohydrates. There is no known biological limit to the restriction of carbohydrate intake. It is always emphasized that the brain needs glucose to run on, and we know that red blood cells only use glucose as fuel. There is also a concern that without carbohydrates protein stores, which the body protects because they are so important to the life of the body, will be depleted to make glucose. But what happens when no carbohydrates are ingested is the body not only makes glucose from protein, it converts fatty acids to ketones, which it can use as an alternative fuel to glucose.

The bottom line: there is no (yes, none) requirement for dietary carbohydrates.

So let's explain this somewhat shocking fact.

Carbohydrates and Metabolism

No discussion on carbohydrates can ignore metabolism, which is the study of the processing of food and the biochemical reactions that control life functions. Metabolism does not run on the amount of food eaten (or in scientific parlance, the amount of a particular compound required to drive its chemical reactivity) or even necessarily on what you eat. Metabolism runs on hormones and enzymes. Glucose is at the centre of metabolism, causing the stimulation of insulin secretion by the pancreas, which leads to protein synthesis, fat storage and maintenance of glycogen (glucose) stores.

The hormone insulin is the master controller of metabolism. As insulin is central to many different processes in biochemistry and is part of a complicated network of biochemical reactions, of all the hormones that the endocrine system produces, insulin stands out as a major point of regulation. The liver, which is the main command centre of metabolism – and muscle, the main consumer of glucose – are the sites of glycogen metabolism. Liver has the largest concentrations, but there is overall much more glucose in muscle where most glycogen is stored (for energy).

Two Main Fuels for the Body

The main theme in biochemistry is that there are two major fuels available for the body to run on: glucose (from carbohydrates and proteins) and acetyl-CoA (derived largely from fat). Two fuels provide two goals: energy and maintenance of blood glucose at a constant level. Too little blood glucose (hypoglycemia) is bad, because some tissues, particularly the brain and central nervous system, require glucose. Too much glucose (hyperglycemia) is also bad, because glucose is chemically reactive and interacts with body proteins, called glycation – which prevents or inhibits protein, so it may be cleared from the cell or from circulation, making it unavailable for absorption.

The science is this: when you constantly have too many sugar molecules in your system, they bombard the body's cells like a meteor shower – glomming onto fats and proteins in a process known as glycation. This forms advanced glycation end-products (commonly shortened appropriately to AGEs because they are known to cause aging), which cause protein fibres to become stiff and malformed. Much of what is known about glycation's ill effects comes from diabetes research: the connective tissue damage and chronic inflammation resulting from diabetics' sustained high blood sugar can lead to debilitating conditions, such as cataracts, Alzheimer's, CVD, cancer, vascular tightening, diseases of the pancreas and liver – not to mention ageing and weight gain.

The Feedback Loop

There is hardly a biological process that is not connected to what is aptly termed “the feedback loop,” meaning everything is connected to everything else in the field of existence – and so in the body. Nothing happens in isolation. This fundamental idea, although widely ignored, is nonetheless pervasive. For instance, if you reduce your intake of cholesterol, your body will respond by making more – because it needs cholesterol for so many vital functions. If you stop eating carbohydrates, your body makes them anyway and can also make use of other available fuels in addition, for the same reason: it requires glucose for many vital functions.

Important note: it is the additional glucose created in the body by excess dietary carbohydrates that causes so many health issues.

Two Good Examples

Two very disparate cultures that bear this out are the Inuit, who live almost entirely off fatty fish, whale and seal meat, and the Maasai of East Africa who live exclusively off cow's milk and blood. These two cultures could not be more different in their environments and social structures, yet they have one thing in common: they do not eat carbohydrates and they are healthy. The Maasai believe that plants are only for animals and do not eat them; in fact they disdain them. The Inuit of Iceland do not eat plants, as plants are not available in their environment. Yet both cultures show virtually no sign of the diseases of civilisation: cancer, heart disease and diabetes, to name a few.

This is not to say that anyone recommends that we do not eat carbohydrates, even if that were possible, which it is not. Even meat has small amounts of carbohydrates.

Two Kinds of Carbohydrates

There are two classes of carbohydrates: simple and complex. Simple carbs are starches found in refined grains, fruit, sugar cane, fructose and other refined sugars, and honey. Complex carb are starches found in beans, nuts, vegetables and whole grains.

Many plants and fruits are an excellent source of nutrition, containing essential nutrients like protein, minerals and vitamins. However, carbohydrates can be a problem. It is not known the amount, if any, that's best for any particular person; as stated, there is no biological requirement for any dietary carbohydrate as there is for protein and fat. Nor do we know if the type of carbohydrate really matters. The

glycemic index, or “good” carbs versus “bad” carbs, are still weak ideas, although they are promoted as if they have a solid scientific basis.

Law No. 4

Although some bodies need more or less of these essential nutrients, the natural law operating in the field with regards to what we eat is simple: all bodies are created equal in that in order for the body to live we all need the essential nutrients, albeit it to a greater or lesser extent. If these nutrients are insufficient or not available in the diet or the wrong nutrients are over-abundant, like carbohydrates (especially from grains), sugar (same thing), trans fats and oxidized fats, hydrogenated fats, and chemicals from preservatives and pesticides, the *karma* that follows for the body varies from discomfort to ill health and death.

While we all may know someone who defies Law No. 4, like people who live on candy, cake and white bread all their lives or smoke and live relatively healthily into their nineties or beyond, generally speaking, most of us pay the price for contravening these laws.

A Contentious Topic

Natural laws aside, food is a contentious topic because it is so emotionally charged and individual, as are most issues in the apparent reality. If one is ready to face facts and examine the logic of an argument with dispassion and discrimination, it is possible to find the truth that stands regardless of any individual opinions. The truth is not always comforting or easy to accept, especially when it flies in the face of long-held beliefs. What is stated in this document is not based on my opinions, although it confirms them. It is a logical assessment of the nature of the field of existence based on facts. It does not matter if you agree or not. Facts are not repealed by our refusal to face them. If truth is what we are after, we have to accept the possibility that we might be ignorant or even wrong. We have to accept confusion and the risk of not knowing.

If the points raised here are upsetting, I apologise, as that is not the intention of this discussion. The intention of this document is to incite dispassionate inquiry into an important lifestyle issue because eating is something we all have to do and what we eat relates to peace of mind. One cannot ignore the body, however unreal it may be, “real” being defined as “that which is always present and never changes” – a definition that can only be applied to awareness and nothing else because everything in the apparent reality is in a constant state of change or flux. This is why we refer to the creation as apparently real, not actually real even though it is clear it exists because we experience it. If the body is ill or in poor health the mind is not peaceful (*sattvic*) and therefore cannot concentrate on self-inquiry (or anything else). The energy of pain, agitation, discomfort (*rajas*) and the energy of dullness, depression (*tamas*) will cloud the mind. This is observably true for everyone and has been our experience at some time or another.

There is essentially no right or wrong about life in the apparent reality; you have to decide for yourself the foodstyle and lifestyle that works best for you. The field of existence gives us a very wide choice of foods to eat, and whether we are vegan, vegetarian or carnivore, it is possible to gain the nutrients we need if we have the correct knowledge. Vedanta is not a big parent that tells you what to do. I have no

interest in entering into a debate or argument about what constitutes a good diet. That is for you to work out. Vedanta simply makes practical suggestions about how to live in such a way that your mind is prepared for inquiry and in harmony with the field of existence. All the same, if you make choices that are not in harmony with the natural laws, the results (*karma*) still come to the body. The field of existence and the natural laws that run it do not care what your spiritual, moral or political views are. If your nutrition is lacking or contravening natural laws, the body will suffer the results. As awareness this makes no difference to you as there is no *karma* for you; but as the person (*jiva*) who lives in the apparent reality unpleasant *karma* makes a big difference to the mind because the body depends on the mind.

Are You a Knowledge-Seeker?

This document makes the assumption that you and other people who read this are knowledge- or truth-seekers. If you do not accept the facts as they are presented here, then confirm them for yourself. Keep in mind the proviso that if you truly are a knowledge seeker whose main aim is freedom from ignorance, you are not invested in validating your own opinions. Self-inquiry asks us to look at all our beliefs and opinions in the light of self-knowledge first – and not the other way around. This requires that we look squarely at all the facts, not just the ones that corroborate our view. Genuine self-inquiry cannot take place without this qualification.

What Separates Knowledge from Opinion?

Knowledge only qualifies as knowledge if it stands independently of your views and opinions. Anything else is a personal and subjective belief or opinion that may or may not be true. If you feel strongly that what is stated here is too harsh or lacks compassion, do inquiry into why you are so emotionally invested in your point of view or identified with the body. Perhaps what you take to be the truth needs to be revised. If your identity is superimposed onto your beliefs, emotion will be running the intellect, making dispassionate discrimination impossible.

Health and nutrition, being such a highly complex and personal issue, makes it difficult to say categorically what is absolutely true for oneself or anyone else. All the same, if one strips away all emotion, subjectivity and blind belief in the contradictory, confusing and biased “scientific” research done under the aegis of big business and Big Pharma, one can come to impersonal, unbiased and truly scientific bedrock facts.

Even in the apparent reality, where confusion often reigns, it is possible to find knowledge that cannot be negated, knowledge that is true for everyone, all the time – and this knowledge will coincide with natural laws.

Two Basic Principles and Sub-Issues in this Document

1. Universal laws, or *dharmas* (*samanya dharma*), as they relate to the human body. These laws cannot be transgressed without result.
2. Personal laws, or *dharmas* (*visesa dharma*): the person with a particular nature, body type and conditioning (tendencies), and how it relates to its environment.

Two Sub-Issues:

1. Morality and politics: the article raises the issue of the morality and politics of food macrocosmically by looking at the big picture, the field of existence, *Isvara's* perspective. Looking at how things work out from this perspective, the morality issues about eating animal products can be negated because it cannot be substantiated. Killing to eat is built in to the system. The morality issue, however, definitely applies to how we treat the environment and the plants/animals we eat, which demand respect, gratitude and love.

2. Health: the health issue cannot be avoided or negated, because the body requires certain nutrients or it will not be healthy.

Of course it is everyone's prerogative to believe what they choose to believe. But that does not make the truth, which is independent of anyone's beliefs or opinions, any less true, nor does it make what you believe true. You are entitled to your own opinions, but not to your own facts. The truth of anything is usually not terribly convenient to the ego and is almost always counter-intuitive, radical and upsetting.

The Two Main Issues: Macrocosm and Microcosm

The Macrocosm: Universal *Dharma*

As far as food goes, universal *dharma* simply states that life is amazingly complex and inherently interdependent on a vast array of factors. Life's main prerogative is that it just wants to exist and does whatever it needs to do to achieve this objective. Although these factors are constantly changing and may seemingly play out differently for individuals who apparently have choice as to how they relate to them, in terms of the natural laws they play out the same way for everyone, as discussed with regards to nutrients necessary for health of the body. Another example is non-injury, which is a built into universal *dharma* because reality is non-dual. But what is non-injury? From the big picture point of view, it is not true that you do not injure animals by not eating them, because they are part of the "eat and be eaten system" put in place by the nature of creation, or the field of existence. If all carnivorous animals and all humans had to become vegetarians, all life would die.

Courtesy of Lierre Keith, who wrote the brilliant book *The Vegetarian Myth: Food, Justice, and Sustainability*, this is what would happen if we put a fence between the all carnivores and the herbivores on the planet: carnivores cannot survive on cellulose. They may on occasion eat grass, but they use it medicinally, usually as a purgative to clear their digestive tracts of parasites. Ruminants, on the other hand, have evolved to eat grass. They have a rumen (hence "ruminant"), the first in a series of multiple stomachs that acts as a fermentative vat. What's actually happening inside a cow or a wildebeest is that bacteria eat the grass and the animals digest the bacteria. Lions, hyenas and humans don't have a ruminant's digestive system. Literally, from our teeth to our rectums we are designed for meat. We have no mechanism to digest cellulose. So on the carnivore side of the fence, starvation will take every animal. Some will last longer than others, and will end their days as cannibals. The scavengers will have a Fat Tuesday party, but when the bones are picked clean they'll starve as well. The graveyard won't end there. Without grazers to eat the grass, the land will eventually turn to desert. Why? Because without grazers to literally level the playing field, the perennial plants mature and shade out the basal growth point at the plant's base. In a brittle

environment like the Serengeti, decay is mostly physical (weathering) and chemical (oxidative), not bacterial and biological as in a moist environment. In fact the ruminants take over most of the biological functions of soil by digesting the cellulose and returning the nutrients, once again available in the form of urine and feces. But without ruminants, the plant matter will pile up, reducing growth and begin killing the plants. The bare earth is now exposed to wind, sun and rain, the minerals leach away and the soil structure is destroyed. In our attempt to save animals, we've killed everything.

On the ruminant side of the fence, the wildebeests and friends will reproduce as effectively as ever. But without the check of predators, there will quickly be more grazers than grass. The animals will outstrip their food source, eat the plants down to the ground and then starve to death, leaving behind a seriously degraded landscape. The lesson here is obvious, though it is profound enough to inspire a religion: we need to be eaten as much as we need to eat. The grazers need their daily cellulose, but the grass also needs the animals. It needs the manure, with its nitrogen, minerals and bacteria; it needs the mechanical check of grazing activity and it needs the resources stored in animal bodies and freed up by degraders when animals die. The grass and the grazers need each other as much as predators and prey. These are not one-way relationships, nor are they arrangements of dominance and subordination, as much as they appear to be so.

We are serving and not exploiting each other by eating animals. We are only taking turns.

Secondly, it is also true that you cannot avoid injury to your own animal body by not eating animals, because certain nutrients essential to human life are only found in the bodies of other animals. There are plant substitutes for some of these nutrients, but they are vastly inferior to those found in animals. And for some, vitamin B12 is one good example, there are no good substitutes.

The Plant Kingdom and Its Defence Mechanisms

Many plants do not want to be eaten any more than animals do, but unlike animals, they cannot get away: they have no legs. So they have developed ingenious strategies for defending themselves. While our mothers were right in exhorting us to eat our vegetables, and a diet rich in plants is very good for us, plants have their downsides. Plants contain poisons; after all, many medicines are derived from them. As much as medicines can save lives, many also kill or have serious side effects. More than half of the world's population still relies entirely on plants for medicines, and plants supply the active ingredients of most traditional medical products. Apart from this, plants lack certain nutrients we need to sustain the body well.

Plant Seduction

Many plants know how to ensnare us, producing a perfect match with the pleasure centres in the human brain with substances called exorphins, which are opioids. These plant chemicals can be as addictive as opium, which is one of the reasons we are so hooked on those carbs! Yet many of these plants form the staple diet of vegans and vegetarians, namely beans (pulses) and legumes, rice, soy, wheat and maize. If we were meant to eat them, we would have four stomachs, like ruminant animals do. But, unfortunately, we only have one. These food sources can be made

palatable up to a point by fermentation and cooking methods, but not entirely.

The Main Problems with Plant Food Sources

Vitamin B12: although vitamin B12 is found in some plants, it is not in the form that the body can use or it requires certain other co-factors to be present in order to be useful to the body. You can end up blind or brain damaged without it. B12 deficiency also leads to infertility, miscarriage and maybe Alzheimer's. In the published research, the only plant food that has been tested for improving B12 status in humans, using the gold standard of lowering methylmalonic acid (MMA) levels, is nori, which contrary to what many want to believe, does not improve vitamin B12 status. A number of foods arguably warrant further attention, but unless these foods are shown consistently to correct B12 deficiency, vegans should not rely on them for vitamin B12. It cannot be emphasized enough that until a particular food, obtained from multiple regions, consistently improves vitamin B12 status (via lowering MMA levels), it should not be relied upon as a source of vitamin B12.

Omega-3s: you can find them in some plants, but they have to be converted into the form we need and there is only a three to four per cent bio-availability. Not only that, in many plant sources the ratio between omega-3s and omega-6s is way out of proportion. In animal sources like fatty fish, omega-3s are 100% bio-available and in the perfect 1-to-1 proportion of omega-3s and omega-6s optimal for health. We now know that these essential fats are so important that good health is impossible without them, especially brain and heart health. What is as important is the proportion they are ingested, as excess omega-6s cause widespread inflammation in the body.

Vitamin A: plants contain provitamin A, which must be converted to vitamin A. Even healthy adults can't do this efficiently, and the young and the old may not be able to do it at all. Vitamin A is needed for "successful reproduction, normal cell division, vision, functioning of the immune system, bone remodelling, the formation of enamel on teeth during their development in childhood, and skin health."

Essential amino acids/proteins: the vegetarian myth that plant protein is superior to animal protein is untrue. How well a protein is absorbed is determined by its amino acid profile. Animal proteins are much more digestible than those of plant sources because animal-based proteins are more similar to our proteins than plant proteins and are thus assimilated more readily. Some animal proteins have around 90 to 99% digestibility, whereas plants have a digestibility range from 70 to 90%.

There are plants that contain most of the essential amino acids necessary to build complete proteins, notably spirulina, chlorella and quinoa, among others. For vegans and vegetarians to obtain the full complement of amino acids, they need to eat a great many different plants and combine them intelligently, which takes knowledge, diligence and effort.

Bad proteins: lectins, such as gluten, are plant proteins most abundant in legumes and grains, and most commonly found in the part of the seed that becomes the leaves when the plant sprouts (the cotyledon), but they are also on the seed coat. Lectins are resistant to human digestion and they enter the blood unchanged. They pass through the intestine, lodging in other organs, and cause inflammation. They bind to cell membranes. They are sugar-binding and become the "glyco" portion of glycoconjugates on the membranes. Lectins offer a way for molecules to stick

together, bypassing the immune system, which can influence inter-cell interaction, causing illness.

Lectins are also found in some vegetables, dairy products and most meat products. This makes sense because the animals eat the plants and we eat the animals. But lectins found in animals products are only a problem in animals farmed unnaturally and force-fed grains, which are as hard to digest for them as they are for us. The problem with these plant proteins is that they are a defence against microorganisms, pests and insects. They may also have evolved as a way for seeds to remain intact as they passed through animals' digestive systems for later dispersal.

While it is true that some people have developed the enzymes to digest lectins, many have not, and they cause a vast array of health problems and allergies.

Plant poisons: blocking enzymes are molecules that bind to enzymes, decreasing their activity; phytates and phytic acid bind to micronutrients in food, blocking absorption; goitrogens inhibit the body's ability to use iodine, affecting thyroid health.

Iron and calcium: vegans and vegetarians have to pay close attention to their diet to get enough iron. Heme iron is iron found in red meat, chicken and fish. Vegetarian sources contain non-heme form of iron. Heme iron is more efficiently absorbed than non-heme or vegetable iron. And as a vegan, if you aren't eating enough greens, getting enough calcium can be tricky.

Glycation and insulin resistance: glycation is basically the binding of protein by glucose molecules, making it unavailable for absorption. I have explained the dangers of glycation above and go into great detail about insulin resistance further on in this article.

Hyperglycemia: this is literally too much sugar in the blood, causing extreme tiredness, constant hunger, urinating and the thirst that "pure" vegans typically suffer, not to mention rampant inflammation and degenerative joint disease as a result of diets too reliant on carbohydrates.

The Microcosm: Personal *Dharma*

As stated, how we interpret universal *dharma* is up to us. With regards to health we can make adjustments for in a diet that excludes animal products up to a point by eating as balanced a diet as possible, including supplements to boost the unavailable nutrients we need in a solely vegetarian or vegan diet. We can put a great deal of effort and preparation into how we cook our food. It is possible to be healthy as a vegetarian or vegan if you have knowledge and are not fanatical about your diet. Whether we are vegan, vegetarian or omnivore, we can buy our food from organically-farmed sources. But if we do not have knowledge about how to eat for health, illness will ensue. The principle of non-injury applies to everything. Awareness has no feeling one way or the other about what you eat, and *karma* is impersonal too. One has to go with what brings peace of mind for you. Ram's *guru* Chinmayananda used to say that a meat-eater is a vegetarian once removed – and that is absolutely true.

Very often, for the majority of vegetarians/vegans, food is predominantly an emotional or ideological issue. Having little knowledge about what to eat and how to

properly prepare and balance food, the tendency is to take the easy route, putting blinkers on and believing only what conforms to a given view. Their diet all too often relies too heavily on bread, rice, cereals, packaged soy, grains, tinned beans and legumes – not to mention processed refined foods and hydrogenated vegetable oils full of trans fats, which are real killers!

The Lacto-Vegetarian Diet

If one is not lactose or casein intolerant (the sugar and protein found in cow's milk), it is possible to be healthy on a lacto-vegetarian diet, which includes dairy and eggs, although there is still typically a very high reliance on carbohydrates, like grains, legumes and pulses.

I was a lacto-vegetarian for a number of years, many years ago. I abandoned it when I gained enough knowledge to understand that it was not good for my health with its heavy reliance on carbohydrates, like beans (especially soy) and grains. I had a lot of knowledge as to how to eat correctly, but that still did not help me. Apart from the fact that all carbohydrates turn to glucose, the body does not digest grains well because of the lectins and other inhibitors in them.

All the same, like Lierre Keith, I too hear a plea in the ideals of vegetarians, a plea that borders on a prayer: "Let me live without harm to others. Let my life be possible without death." This prayer embodies both a fierce compassion and a passionate repulsion. It is love for all beings and horror for the sadism humans are inflicting on living beings, powering the prayer. I honour this prayer. Like Lierre and others who have faced the facts, what separates me from vegetarians isn't ethics, indifference or lack of commitment.

It is knowledge.

The important question for spiritual people is, does what you eat create peace of mind or not? If you really cannot abide the idea that an animal has to die in order for you to eat and doing so contravenes what is right for you (personal *dharma*), causing great agitation, then you need to live accordingly. But if you are going to cling to vegetarian or vegan beliefs, then at least make sure you are as informed as you can be. Do not fool yourself that eating that way is automatically healthier for you, because it most likely is not, especially if you are a vegan, unless you apply a great deal of knowledge to how you eat. Be courageous enough to gain knowledge that contradicts what you believe. Do honest research; if you are truly interested in the truth and not just in corroborating your own views, you will find it. I could offer a huge list of truly excellent books to read that offer a new, exciting and freeing paradigm with regards to health.

Here are just a few:

- *The Vegetarian Myth* by Lierre Keith
- *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and *In Defense of Food* by Michael Pollan
- *Nourishing Traditions* by Sally Fallon and Mary Enig (my personal favourite)
- *A World Turned Upside Down* by Richard David Feinman, PhD
- If you want to find out the truth about the influence of Big Pharma on our present medical establishment as well as on medical reporting, shock yourself and read *Doctoring Data* by Dr. Malcolm Kendrick
- To find out the truth behind statins, read *The Big Cholesterol Con*, also by Dr. Malcolm Kendrick

- Any book by Gary Taubes, in particular his *New York Times* article “What if It’s All Been a Big Fat Lie?”
- Chris Kresser (<https://chrisKresser.com/about/>) is a great resource for reliable, scientifically verifiable facts.

There are many bona fide websites where one can check the authenticity of research findings, assuming one knows how to read these reports correctly.

- One of my go to biomedical libraries is PubMed < [NCBI](#) >.
- Marion Nestle, PhD, MPH, who holds a master’s degree in public health from the University of California, Berkeley and a PhD in molecular biology, has written a number of books offering a fascinating exposé of the big business involved in food manufacture and revealing a wealth of information about it that is highly unlikely you are aware of. Two of the most prominent ones are: *Food Politics – How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health* and *Soda Politics: Taking on Big Soda (and Winning)*. In the latter book she reveals just how pervasive the soda industry influence really is.

Reliable, sane and disinterested sources whose only aim is to inform, voices of our time not out to manipulate for their own ends, do exist if you know where to find them. These wise voices herald a new paradigm which brings with it the knowledge we need for the optimal health of our bodies and to live in harmony with the field of existence, our home, the earth.

Food, Morality and the Big Picture

Vegetarians Do Not Command the Moral High Ground

Self-righteous vegetarians and vegans are James’ and my pet peeves. Non-injury (*ahimsa*) includes non-injury in “thought, word and deed,” so thinking negative thoughts or saying judgmental things is injurious to the mind, which is more important than the body insofar as the body depends on the mind. Vedanta is self-inquiry based on self-knowledge, and self-inquiry requires a clear mind.

It is unlikely that moral vegetarians, and more so fanatic vegans, will easily accept what is said in this document. The response will most likely be that this is my opinion or someone else’s opinion – another subjective viewpoint. Please note: I repeat, I am not invested in how anyone eats and am not prescribing, promoting or promulgating any particular diet.

Those of us who are impassioned about injustice and ignorance, especially with regards to how animals are treated, need a sane and informed approach. A fanatical and blinkered mindset as to what one eats does not help anyone. While no one can argue that non-injury is the highest moral and spiritual value, feeling morally superior because you have chosen a vegetarian/vegan lifestyle is plain and simply a lack of education.

A Narrow Ideological Imperative

There is no doubt that moral commitments must shape our response to exploitation and injury of any kind. High-minded *dharmic* types and activists typically become so enamoured of their moral positions that the cause is subsumed by the moral position itself. I am not suggesting that moral positions are wrong or mistaken or that they

should necessarily be more moderate – although fanaticism of any kind usually does not help anyone or further any cause. It gives rise to what is called totalizing (*tamasic*) identities, which only serve to limit instead of liberate or help, because they steadfastly ignore anything that does not conform to a limited and very narrow perspective. I am saying that to be helpful, activist principles need to co-inhere and relate to the world as it really is, not as it is idealized to be according to a narrow ideological imperative.

A new term developed in psychology for the obsession with eating the “right foods” is called orothorexia nervosa. It only happens in affluent cultures where neurotic and gratuitous likes and dislikes reign supreme. As knowledge-seekers we need to be prepared to reverse everything we are invested in and thought was true. What many of us need with regards to how the field of existence works is a basic education in the nature of life – how things really are – as opposed to how we want to believe they are or should be.

A Utopian World View

The idealists among us may long for an unravaged planet and some kind of utopian world where everyone and everything lives in harmony. But until we develop some understanding of the nature of nature and the essence of nature, which is awareness, ignorance reigns. Facing the truth about the insanity of food production as it is currently practised and its toll on the environment (and on us) is a profound experience for those of us who are brave enough to venture into this territory. Some people try to avoid this issue by saying, “Oh, well, if we are not in charge of the field, there is nothing to be done; we all have to die of something.” While there is truth in this, it borders on moral relativism because it is not God (by whatever name) who causes the wilful destruction of our environment and cruelty to animals. It is ignorance of God as the field of existence of which we are an integral part (not God as a father figure meting out reward for good behaviour and punishment for bad behaviour) that is the real cause of the cruel destruction of our environment and our health.

Veganism, the Ideology of the Affluent

Vegetarianism is a strongly-held belief within the Hindu culture because of the principle of non-injury. Most Hindus, however, do include dairy products in the diet. Since the sixties vegetarianism became a Western phenomenon and India was embraced as the spiritual fountainhead. Vegetarianism became a widespread belief in the spiritual arena particularly, with veganism developing as the ultimate “high road” to enlightenment and health. Veganism as an ideology is a moral food fad peculiar to the affluent. It is also the enforced subsistence diet of the very poor. Apart from its assumed moral high ground, veganism is a diet that, without knowledge of the body’s needs and how to eat well (and the inclusion of certain nutrients found only in animals), makes it impossible for the body to be healthy.

Food Choices and Vedanta

I have stated that veganism/vegetarianism or food in general does not arise as a topic of discussion within Vedanta, as it is not a prerequisite for self-inquiry or liberation from limitation. This topic arises in the *karma kanda* and *yoga* section of

the *Vedas*, which is for people who are identified with the body. Vedanta does not care what you eat, because it assumes that if you are looking for freedom from limitation your primary focus is not the body but freedom from identification with the body. All the same, many Indian *mahatmas* (liberated, great beings) and teachers within the Sanatana Dharma (Eternal Way) champion vegetarianism as a lifestyle choice and a way to cultivating the value of non-injury. For them, a vegetarian diet is *dharmic* because it is true to their cultural history. One cannot ignore or underestimate how the psycho-spiritual attitude affects the way the body reacts to food.

Nonetheless, because the body belongs to the field of existence (it is made up of the same elements as everything else) it is beyond culture. *Karma*, or the effects of action, still comes to the body regardless of spiritual beliefs. Of course, *mahatmas* are not necessarily concerned with their bodies, because they are not identified with them, although some are. This is not the case with modern Western spiritual or moral vegetarians and vegans, who for the most part are identified with their bodies and obsess over what they do and don't put in them. This discussion is not about identifying with the body or denying its existence; this inquiry is about peace of mind and what produces it. My premise, as previously stated, is that as much as one can categorically state that the body is not real in that it is always changing and not always present (as in deep sleep), it exists and will not go away. If the body is ill, the mind suffers, so lifestyle issues have to be addressed as an important part of self-inquiry.

Blood on Your Plate

It may be honourable to die of an illness that is the price of saving the lives of other creatures. It would be wonderful if it were possible to cause no injury or minimal injury to any living being. But sadly, no matter how much you want to believe the "do no harm" axiom, it is simply not possible to avoid injury. In the big picture, the big fish eats the little fish, like it or not. That is how the field of existence is set up. We all have blood on our plates, whether we face that fact or not. So we can take vegetarianism or veganism off the enlightenment's "must-do" list. "Isms" are invariably ignorance. The unavoidable truth is that life is not possible without death. No matter what you eat or what you do to get your hands on what you need to eat, someone or something has to die to feed you.

Ahimsa, or non-injury, is the fundamental principle of the field of existence, and those with non-dual vision see everything as the self, so one does not wilfully harm any part of life. However, one has to define "harm." It is undoubtedly true that the underlying principles that govern the choices vegetarians and vegans make with respect to non-injury, such as compassion, sustainability and justice, are highly commendable. These are the values that will create a "world of connection instead of domination – a world that has a chance of surviving the abuse called civilisation," says Lierre Keith. However, the moral superiority typically held by vegetarians and vegans is unjustified and grossly uninformed. Many vegetarians, and more so, vegans, are so identified with what they eat that their food choices seem to be based on a fanatical religious philosophy bordering on cult rather than an intelligent diet.

Is Eating Meat Murder?

It is easy for a vegetarian to believe that eating meat is murder. No one can argue that factory farming isn't indefensible and horrific. But what about monoculture crops that have taken over so much of our arable land globally, decimating all life forms that once thrived there? We drain rivers to irrigate land to grow crops not suited to the ecosystem to put organic (or "inorganic") rice, tofu, salad or artisan bread on our plates. One of the most urgent and serious environmental issues facing us is the global loss of topsoil and water sources due to bad farming practices. Without fail, industrial agricultural farming methods, no matter where they are practised, promote soil erosion, salinization, desertification and loss of soil fertility. The North American prairie has been reduced to two per cent of its original size and the topsoil, once twelve feet deep, can now only be measured in inches.

Agriculture: Blessing or Curse?

Agriculture, heralded as the saving grace of humankind and seen as the beginning of civilisation, is based on annual mono-crops which destroy topsoil, the precise opposite of perennial poly-cultures. Agriculture is more like a war, an all-out attack on the processes that make life possible. Daniel Hillel explains: "By its very nature, [agriculture] is an intrusion and hence a disruption of the environment, as it replaces a natural ecosystem with an artificial one. And agriculture isn't quite a war, because the forests and wetlands and prairies, the rain, the soil, the air, can't fight back. Agriculture is really more like ethnic cleansing: wiping out the indigenous dwellers so the invaders can take the land. It's biotic cleansing, biocide. In the history of civilisation... the ploughshare has been far more destructive than the sword. It is not non-violent. It is not sustainable. And every bite of its food is laden with death."

Or, as Richard Manning puts it, "Agriculture was not so much about food as it was about the accumulation of wealth. It benefitted some humans, and those people have been in charge ever since."

Agriculture Is Carnivorous

Ninety-eight per cent of the native tall-grass prairie is gone in the U.S., along with the topsoil. There were somewhere between 60 and 100 million bison in the United States in 1491. Now there are 350,000 bison, and only 12,000 to 15,000 of those are pure bison that were not crossbred with domestic cattle. The land held between 425,000 and a million wolves; only 10,000 now remain. Many species of ground-dwelling birds have been wiped out. There is no place left for the buffalo and very few for the wolf to roam. There's only corn, wheat and soy growing there now. The only animals that escaped the biotic cleansing of the agriculturalists are small animals like mice and rabbits, and billions of them are killed by harvesting equipment every year.

"You can look a cow in the eye," reads an ad for soy burgers. What about birds, insects, mice, rabbits - or a buffalo? Five per cent of a species is needed to ensure enough diversity for long-term survival, and less than one per cent of the buffalo are left. Soil, species and rivers are the death toll in our food. Agriculture is carnivorous; it eats ecosystems, swallowing them whole.

Resources and Animal Farming: Abuse of Water

We have established that much of the world's natural resources go towards animal

husbandry and industrial agriculture with all its horrific cruelty exerted upon animals through inhumane farming practices, not to mention the animals that lose their habitats as a result of farming high-yield cash crops. This is inexcusable and barbaric. The meat-eaters are accused of abusing resources because of the massive amounts of water that the animals they eat require. However, resources such as water and land are destroyed or polluted because of the way animals are fed and treated. And the same applies to the way plants are farmed. Farmed animals are sick and in need of medication, and therefore require huge amounts of water.

Mono-crops also need massive amounts of water, not to mention fertilizer, and are often genetically modified for mass production. In nature, when animals are allowed to feed on food that is natural to them they drink a fraction of the water that factory animals need to survive – and they return the water as much-needed nutrients in the form of urine to the grass. Grass-fed animals and plants farmed organically are healthy, resources are consumed in balance and the land is replenished, provided the animal numbers are kept in balance, i.e. by being eaten. Too many animals or the wrong kind of animals will degrade the land, sometimes to the point of desertification.

Domestication and Gene Pools

There is one last issue to consider which is a bit of challenge, I know. But it is a valid point. If we did not eat domesticated animals, such as chickens, cows, sheep and to some extent goats and pigs (they are much smarter), they would not exist on the planet in large numbers, because they would not survive in the wild without us. So who is using whom? We automatically think of domestication as something humans do to other species, but it makes just as much sense to think of it as something that certain plants and animals have done to us, a clever evolutionary strategy for advancing their own interests. While it is inexcusable that so many of these animals have terrible lives at our hands, these species have nonetheless proliferated and taken over the planet because we eat them, a big success story for their gene pool. While that may be an unacceptable reason to eat animals for the moral vegetarian, it is nonetheless true that life is pretty tenacious and it takes hold wherever it can, no matter the conditions.

Life Is Eternally Created, Sustained and Destroyed

An uncomfortable truth is that no matter what we eat, we are part of an interdependent cycle of producers, consumers and degraders. All life is created, sustained and destroyed. If we want a sustainable and kinder world, we have to first examine our values based on dispassionate, unbiased and irrefutable knowledge. Only from this platform can we question the principles behind the foundational myths of our culture in a way that serves us all. This is difficult for most people. The emotional struggle inherent in doing the “right” or virtuous thing is compounded by our dependence on civilisation, our individual feeling of helplessness to change it and our divided views as to how to go about it. One thing is certain: human nature is immensely resourceful and ingenious, and it needs to pay attention to its environment in order to come up with sustainable solutions to the problems human face globally.

Nature Is Not Cruel, It Is Dispassionate

The choices we need to make are more complicated than this: Is it our moral duty to give up eating anything with a heartbeat, a face and a mother? What we have to inquire into and ultimately face is the fact that nature, seen from an anthropomorphic point of view, is brutal. However, it is neither moral nor immoral. Nature is totally amoral. This is hard to face, but all the same, nature does not care what our beliefs and opinions are. In case this has escaped your attention, nature is another name for the field of existence (*Isvara*) – and it is totally dispassionate – but not cruel. Nature may appear to be cruel on the surface, but inquiry into how things really work in the creation overturns that view entirely. Maybe the question to ask is not are you harming an animal by eating it BUT can you eat anything without injuring something. The answer upon investigation is quite plainly an unqualified NO.

Urban Industrialists

Ignorant of the true nature of life, how the field of existence functions and how we relate to it, most of us have become urban industrialists. We are out of touch with the environment and the origins of the food we eat – and more importantly, the food we need to eat to be healthy. Never before in the history of this planet has there been as much moral and political confusion over what to eat when so many are dying of starvation. As much as most carnivores are oblivious to the way food is produced and the cost to the environment before it lands up on their plates, this is – for the most part – equally true of vegetarians/vegans.

The real issue is that we have lost our connection to the land. We have forgotten how to give thanks, how to respect and worship the environment. We have been seduced by the medical and scientific establishment into giving over sovereignty of our bodies and taking instruction from them as to what is good for us. Not to mention the manufactured consent big business elicits from us by mercilessly appealing to our weaknesses. We would do well to study the attitudes that older and wiser indigenous cultures have had toward the environment and how they honoured the cycle of life and their place in it. And it would be well to note that none of these cultures were or are vegetarian, and killing for food was and is seen as a sacred rite of thanks, a spiritual act inseparable from life.

Lisa Kemmerer (professor of philosophy and religions at Montana State University, Billings) writes in *Eating Earth: Dietary choice and Environmental Health, Animals and World Religions, Animals and the Environment: Advocacy, Activism and The Quest for Common Ground* explains: “The wildlife ethic of early immigrants, and the rituals and taboos surrounding that ethic such as fasting [and] prayer... reflects an understanding of spiritual responsibility connected with the ominous task of killing kin. Behaving respectfully toward wildlife (and plants) was thought critical to survival. Hunting, fishing, gathering and trapping were necessary, but they were restricted and controlled by a spiritually based ethic that forbid gratuitous killing. The spiritual power of wildlife, combined with the physical dependence of human beings, coloured the human-wildlife relationship.”

Cross-culturally we have strayed very far from this wisdom.

A Simple Ethical Code

“Thou shalt not kill” – or the Buddhist version, “Abstain from killing” – is a fine moral guideline for human society. It would be nice if it were possible. Unfortunately, it is

nonsensical when applied to the natural world and our place in it as humans. Life is literally a process of one creature eating another, whether it is bacteria breaking down plants or animals, plants strangling each other, animals going for the throat or viruses attacking animals. "All of nature is a conjugation of the verb 'to eat,'" in the words of William Ralph Inge. The moral imperative that asks us to condemn death certainly provides a simple ethical code, one that in many ways is essential or we would all be packing guns and looking over our shoulders.

Taken out of context, this becomes the rally of the righteous – the black-and-white thinking of children. The tremendous moral certainty and righteousness that is the battle cry of the immature seems to demand such rules, but they are essentially slogans and ethical platitudes with no real substance, because they are based in ignorance – and they are the root of fundamentalism. Maturity and wisdom, adult knowledge, demands much more, starting with correct and irrefutable knowledge capable of looking at the big picture. It includes the ability to incorporate new knowledge, to revise as necessary the behaviours informed by our fiercely-held, but nonetheless misplaced, values.

Adults don't just absorb, assimilation means to learn and change. We can rant and cry all we want, we can pretend we can live without death, but "death-free" is not an option that the processes of life offer us. We can deny, we can dominate or we can participate, but there's no way out of the system. That's the bottom line because life requires death.

"Pure" Vegetarians and Vegans

If you are a morally "pure" vegetarian (no dairy or eggs), and more so, a fanatic vegan (no animal products of any kind, not even supplements), did you ever consider how many animals are killed harvesting the plants you eat? Or animals that have lost their habitat and died because of the plants you eat? Or rivers that have dried up to irrigate the food you eat? Or topsoil that has been forever lost because of the way food is "produced" to provide the food you eat? Maybe you have and have thus doomed yourself to eating purely fruit – which is a really good way to destroy your health. Apart from a few vitamins, minerals and fibre, a fruitarian diet consists almost entirely of sugar and carbs. If fruitarianism does not work and does not kill you, you could always try out breatharianism and die a noble death of starvation, the ultimate sacrifice to the ideal of non-injury. This may sound cynical, but there are people who actually do try this in an insane attempt not to harm life, regardless of the cost to their own bodies.

Where Do You Draw the Line?

If one's whole moral system and identity is built on the idea that your life does not require death, where do you draw the line? How many questions will you ignore and how many facts will you deny to preserve this ethical directive that you hold as absolute truth? Do the lives of nematodes and fungi matter? And plants? If not, why not? Because they were too small for you to see – or because you have decided they are not sentient enough to matter? You may never have thought about it, but soil is not an inanimate "thing." Nor are plants. Soil is millions of very much alive things. And the soil and plants want to eat animal products to be healthy. What you eat needs to eat too.

Plants are living beings and have feelings because they have rudimentary subtle bodies and they are sentient. If you doubt this, read *The Lost Language of Plants* by Stephen Harrod Buhner. Says Lierre Keith: "Stephen presents page after page detailing what plants do. They defend themselves. They protect each other. They communicate. They call out to other plant species, asking them to join in forming a resilient community. They sometimes sacrifice themselves for the good of all. They respond. They talk. They have meaning and they make meaning. They are capable of agency and courage and self-awareness. They make life possible. Any human who either breathes oxygen or eats food should read his book."

What the Tree Has in Mind

Fruitarians believe they are safe from harming life, not taking into account the harm that this diet does to the body. What fruitarians do not think about is the apple seed wants to become an apple. Eating an apple is okay to most moral vegetarians, since no death is involved. Or so it is believed. Says Lierre Keith: "The first problem is that humans don't plant those seeds. We discard them. We consciously remove the core to avoid the seeds and then throw them away - 'away' in industrial nations meaning sealed in a plastic bag that gets entombed in a landfill. Or, if we're extra eco-righteous, we throw the seeds on the compost heap, where time, heat and bacteria kill them. One goal of any good compost scheme, after all, is to kill any lingering seeds. None of this is what the tree had in mind. The tree isn't offering sweetness out of the goodness of its heartwood. It's striking a bargain, and even though we've shaken hands and collected, we aren't carrying through on our side of the deal. There's a glaring anthropocentrism in this argument, which is strange coming from people espousing the politics of animal liberation. 'The fruit tree gives me my food and I give back the seeds to nature so other trees can grow,' writes one vegetarian. Yes, but she isn't giving the seeds back to nature. Why are we humans allowed to take without giving back? Isn't that exploitation? Or at the very least, stealing? Fruit isn't, as it is fervently claimed, 'the only freely given food.' Fruit is like us; it wants to survive. The reason that the tree expends such tremendous resources accumulating fibres and sugars is to secure the best possible future for its offspring. And we take that offspring, in its swaddling of sweetness, and kill it."

Another unknown fact: there are no apples in nature like those we see in the supermarket. Our apples are domesticated, as are most of fruits we eat. Their progenitors are almost inedible by humans. Apples as we know them don't come from seeds. Fruit trees are grafted, not sprouted. If you only eat fruit believing you are not killing because fruit is meant to be eaten, you must believe that the tree has sentience and loves its life. So why not value the life of the sentient seeds, which after all are as much fruit as the fruit you eat?

And what do you think an apple tree, like all other plants and trees, wants to eat? Animals. Including us. They need our excrement - the nitrogen, the minerals, the microbes - and our flesh and bones. Here is a beautiful story that illustrates this fact, from *The Apple Grower* by Michael Phillips. He quotes a book called *The Apple Culturist* from 1871, recounting the story of an apple tree near the graves of Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island, and his wife Mary Sayles. The roots of the tree were found to have grown into the graves and assumed the shape of human skeletons while "the graves [were] emptied of every particle of human dust. Not a trace of anything was left." The tree ate the bodies.

Stop Sentimentalizing Nature

We need to stop sentimentalizing nature. Killing an animal, which is consciousness, ends its body, but it does not end consciousness. From the point of view of consciousness nothing is born or dies, because consciousness, our true nature, is eternal. From the point of view of the *jiva*, or person, the body dies – and if you are identified with being a person, “you” die. But actually, the universal *jiva*/person is eternal also because it is actually awareness, so it too cannot die. It just transmigrates into a seemingly different body, continuing the cosmic show, the illusion of a story which inevitably changes and seemingly ends. This applies to all living beings, from the most rudimentary single cell organisms to the complexity of the human being. While it may appear that we are all separate, unique and have an individual history which is impacted by and impacts on life around us, the truth is that microcosmically or macrocosmically all life on this planet is actually a single organism, feeding on itself.

Life is the self eating itself.

So we have no choice but to accept it. There is no escape from this cycle of apparent birth and death. If you want to live, killing is necessary. It is just a matter of whose turn it is. Life eats life because you cannot eat death or inanimate objects. And something will one day eat you, and in fact bacteria, without whose services you could not survive more than three days, are eating you every minute you are alive and will continue to eat you when the body dies. 80% of the biomass on the planet (including of your body) is bacterial. That is food for thought!

Beyond Denial and Ignorance: Appropriate Response

The answer is not to be found in denial or virtuous rage. Nor is it in adopting extreme diets that verge on zealous cultism that are meant to make us feel virtuous or to save the planet while damaging our health in the process. The planet does not need saving. It does not need us. If climate change does not get us, we could be destroyed with one really big seismic shrug. It does not take much thinking to conclude that it is only the human race that is in really bad shape. It could stand a bit of reflection as to how this came to pass. And the answer to this challenge is, as always, self-knowledge.

As the *jiva*/individual lives in the apparent reality, it behoves us to take notice and take a stand as to how we want to live. What can we do? Lierre Keith says: “Hidden in the shadows of our denial and ignorance is an informed evaluation of civilisation itself.” We may need to face the fact that our current world view (if we have one at all) is faulty at best. We may need to make an effort to face some uncomfortable facts and take a vote in making a change in an entire way of life – a global rearrangement of power and our attachment to it or denial of it. This is not a terribly convenient prospect for most people.

A good starting point is to examine what we eat – or, as importantly, what we don't eat. The fact of the matter is that we have a limited idea as to what plants, animals or soil eat and need to eat to be healthy. So we have no idea what we need to eat. It never occurs to us that we are not only what we eat, but what we eat eats. We don't understand the big picture and how we fit into it.

Face It: Vegans Are Not More Virtuous or Healthy

To conclude on the issue of food and morality: if you believe that strict veganism or vegetarianism automatically qualifies you as healthier, you are mistaken. Above all, don't fall into the trap of feeling better or more virtuous than meat-eaters. You are not. Remember, like it or not, vegetarianism/veganism does not make you more spiritual, more enlightened or more likely to get enlightened! Many vegetarians and vegans are illogically convinced to the point of ill health or death that their food choices determine how spiritual or virtuous they are, oblivious of the glaringly obvious identification with the body and their point of view. Many have little idea of what constitutes good nutrition.

Health: Macrocosm and Microcosm One

The Greening of the Planet: More Food and Less Nutrition

Soil and plants need nitrogen, they need minerals. We have to replace what we are taking out and our choices are fossil fuels or animal products. With the greening of the planet over 50 years ago, big business turned from making warfare to making fertilizer, resulting in massive soil degradation along with the ever-exploding population on the planet. Right now fossil fuel provides the nitrogen to grow crops the world over. Synthetic fertilizer has made possible a 250 per cent increase in crops. Besides the fact that nothing made from fossil fuels is sustainable – we can't grow fossil fuel and it doesn't reproduce itself – synthetic fertilizers eventually destroy the soil.

Since then, the natural cycles of nature and farming, wherein the elements – the sun, rain and earth, the environment, people, livestock and plants intertwine in a symbiotic inter-connectivity – has been replaced by the impersonal, political and profit-based interests of the industrial food chain, and right along with it, the pharmaceutical and biotech giants. This unholy alliance of conglomerates that set the rules of the biosphere is motivated by large-scale ignorance – *rajas* and *tamas* (greed and denial – in action. They use every means at their disposal to coerce our compliance, destroying our health, and of course getting very rich in the process.

The Soil Needs to Eat Healthy Too

The health of the soil in which our food is grown is intimately connected to our health, not to mention the environment as a whole. Considering data suggesting we may lose all commercial topsoil, globally, in the next 60 years if we keep going at the current rate, changes cannot move fast enough. Not only will regenerating our soils lead to improved food production, it also addresses a majority of resource concerns, such as water. When you add carbon back into the soil, either by adding mulch or cover crops, the carbon feeds mycorrhizal fungi that eventually produce glomalin, which may be even better than humic acid at retaining water, so that you limit irrigation needs and make your garden or fields more resilient during droughts.

There is only about four per cent of land that is suitable for agriculture on the entire planet. Most of it is too hot, too cold, too steep, too rocky or underwater. And in that four per cent of arable land, only certain crops are suited to the particular ecosystem. For now, the system as we have it produces plenty of food, but what it has also produced along with soil erosion is plenty of malnutrition. A diet based on grains and beans affords bulk calories, and a person's energy and dietary needs could be minimally met so that they do not starve. But this diet is never going to

provide enough protein, fat, fat-soluble vitamins or minerals for long-term maintenance and repair of the human body. This is actually a poverty diet, as half-starved people the world over can attest to with their small and arthritic skeletons, their exhaustion, their pellagra, their orange hair and their blind and retarded children.

It is just plain ignorance to believe that we can eliminate starvation and feed ourselves adequately, causing no injury by eating a diet based on mono-crops like grains and beans and excluding animal products entirely from our diet.

USDA Now Prioritizes Soil Health

Fortunately, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), which is part of the USDA and the major agency that works with private landowners, farmers and ranchers, has become very committed to understanding and teaching about soil health.

The hard truth is that land – the soil and all its millions of microorganisms from which plants grow – needs healthy animals to be healthy. It cannot survive long-term if it is force-fed a diet of chemicals. The soil needs to eat healthy too. Animals eat the plants, return nutrients to the land through urine and feces, and we eat the animals. The only way to preserve topsoil and create healthy soil is to have animals eating and excreting on the land. Along with us, all animals are raw materials in a life-affirming feast as we ingest, excrete, die and feed plants in an intricate interconnectivity called the carbon cycle.

This cycle is destroyed by modern farming systems, which require wholesale destruction of entire ecosystems. While it is true that animals don't want to die, they have no concept of death and as long as they have what they need to live well, they are happy. It is not cruel, inhumane or unnatural to eat healthy and happy animals when they are slaughtered with kindness and humility. It is unconscionably cruel and unnatural to treat animals the way we do with industrial farming methods.

“Predation is not a matter of morality or of politics; it, too, is a matter of symbiosis... Predation is deeply woven into the fabric of nature, and that fabric would quickly unravel if it somehow ended, if humans managed to “do something about it.” ~ Michael Pollan, *Omnivore's Dilemma*

The sad thing is we have done plenty to disrupt the natural cycles of nature. This was highlighted so perfectly by the re-introduction of wolves to Yellowstone Park in recent years. Their presence literally affected everything from trees that grew back to the way the rivers ran because wolves kept the grazers, whose numbers had swelled unnaturally, in check. The same can be seen with the deer numbers in many part of the U.S., who are decimating the environment and their own health by degrading the land with overgrazing because they are no longer being culled.

Hunter-Gatherers Are Healthier

There has been much hype of late sweeping the nutritional world about the Palaeolithic diet. While it is not absolutely clear exactly what Stone Age man ate, it is certain that he was an opportunist, eating whatever he could get his hands on: animals, insects, plants, seeds, berries and, some say, even grains. Palaeolithic man was nomadic and not agrarian; he did not grow food, but ate a little bit of

everything. Certainly he was not vegetarian or vegan unless he was forced to be by the unavailability of insects or animals. If he ate grains they were not the genetically modified grain we eat today, and most likely he ate very little grain proportionally to the rest of the diet. We know that it is only since Palaeolithic man's diet relied consistently on meat that the brain evolved to the size it is today.

If eating a diet rich in carbohydrates, like grains and beans, was that much healthier for us, surely we would find evidence corroborating this in the bones of Palaeolithic man? It is taught in schools that it is human overpopulation that forced Stone Age man to become agriculturists. It would make sense, if only it were true. If overpopulation is the key factor, then archaeologists would find the brittle, shrunken and degenerated skeletons of the malnourished before evidence of agriculture, but this is not the case. They find instead the long, strong, disease-free bones and teeth typical of hunter-gatherers. Medical anthropologists and palaeontologists can look at a bone and tell at a glance whether the subject lived in a hunter-gatherer or an agricultural society. The hunters are healthy. The farmers show clear evidence of being disease-ridden.

It has become almost an article of faith that our ancestors lived short, brutal lives, the consensus view being anything between 25 and 40 years long. But the life expectancy statistics that are bandied about are more often than not misrepresented. The main reason the life expectancy was so low for Palaeolithic man, according to the standard view, is that infant mortality is not taken into account in most statistics. Because of primitive housing, wild animals and lack of medical care, infant mortality was very high. In fact even beyond Palaeolithic man in some cultures the newborn baby was not seen as truly living until it had reached an age of two, the chances of it not surviving to that age were so high. Another factor influencing primitive man's lifespan is that a relatively benign accident or illness by today's standards – a broken arm, a rolled ankle or a minor infection – could have prematurely ended life. If one factors in child mortality, Palaeolithic man lived on average as long if not longer than we do today: 70+ years. And this is taking into account that the main reason we live that long or longer is in general not because we are that much healthier, it is because medical science prolongs life, but not necessarily the quality of life. It keeps unhealthy people alive to continue living unhealthy lives for longer.

Nutrition, Medicine and Science: How Did We Go So Wrong?

Quote from Richard Feinman, biochemist: “Doctors don't study nutrition. Nutritionists don't study medicine. Neither studies much science. It's a stereotype.”

Nutrition has never been highly thought of in the scientific or medical world. The field derives from the practical job of making menus. The advances of physiology and biochemistry meant that nutrition increasingly overlapped with more solid science, but the field was and is very slow to change. Nutritionists have attempted to put on the mantle of professionalism. They are currently trying to establish the newly renamed Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND) with the legal right to be the sole voice on nutrition – and to legally repress anybody else. For all the nutritional “expertise” that has developed in the last few decades, people have become decidedly less healthy. Unless the paradigm changes the only thing that legalizing “scientific” nutritional advice will guarantee is the perpetuation of more ignorance.

Nutrition in essence is the story of biochemistry and metabolism, how you process the food you eat. It is an interesting story of the application of science to your daily life. If you know a little bit about chemistry, you can appreciate how evolution (the field of existence) reached into the mixing pot of chemical reactions to obtain energy from the environment (the field of existence = feedback system). Even if you don't know chemistry, you can see the beauty in the life machine as it interacts with itself. Sadly, nutritional "science" for the most part has been and still is a discouraging tale of the limitations of human behaviour in facing truth and preventing harm. It is an almost unbelievable story of very poor and irresponsible science from the medical community, the most highly-respected part of our society, the greedy agendas of big business and irresponsible reporting by the media.

How is it possible that in this most scientific period in history our society runs on incorrect medical "scientific" information? Good science is about sophisticated and impartial mathematical measurement, but most importantly, good science is about honesty and common sense. It doesn't matter how many statistical tests are done; if the results violate common sense, it's unlikely to be science. Modern medicine explicitly accepts the obligation to logic and honesty in all its endeavours. At risk is not only the corruption of science but harm to the patient.

Take, for instance, metabolic syndrome, which is the idea that superficially different physiologic states like obesity, high blood pressure, atherogenic dyslipidemia (markers assumed to contribute to cardiovascular disease) and many others are all tied together in combination to indicate and exponentially increase the risk of disease and death. At the root of it all as the common effector is the hormone insulin. Diabetes is a disease of carbohydrate intolerance. Still, as much clinical and anecdotal evidence there is that a low-carb diet is the most effective and intuitive remedy for diabetes, the American Diabetes Association (ADA) refuses to endorse it. Many "diabetes educators" still recommend reducing fat rather than carbohydrates, a testament to the triumph of politics over science, not to mention simple common sense!

The resistance of the medical establishment to restrict dietary carbohydrate while promoting a low-fat diet is incomprehensible. It is particularly hard to explain because the esteem in which medicine is held is based on real accomplishment and expertise. So why would medicine go so wrong in the field of nutrition – and not just a little wrong, but totally off the mark?

The Low-Carb Diet

Jeff Volek, one of the major researchers in carbohydrate restrictions, has this to say: "Nutrition research is very difficult. Too many things change and it's easy to come up with nothing or at best flawed results. But when the study involves putting research subjects on a low-carb diet, you get real data." Without fail, in comparison clinical trials with low-fat diets, low-carb diets always win, hands down. There is no clinical data to date to show a contradiction.

Research: Biased and Flawed Medical Reporting

"I pull in resolution and begin to doubt th' equivocation of the fiend that lies like truth." ~ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

Doctors get their information from researchers. Researchers can only do research

when they can get grant funding. These days, grants come from industry, particularly from pharmaceutical companies or special interest groups. They almost invariably support either the use of expensive medications and technology or the demand for more medical coverage from one of many special interest groups. All research has to fall into one of these two categories to be funded. Researchers hold fast to the idea that their primary directive is improving human health. But it soon becomes clear that the more immediate goal, by virtue of the realities of economics, is the acquisition of grant funds, necessitating never-ending compromises between the exigencies of financing and the integrity of the science, not to mention the influence of huge money to be made by Big Pharma from the indiscriminate promotion of drugs, which are more often than you would like to know improperly or falsely tested.

Part of the manipulation strategy of those invested in our ill health is to flood the media with so many conflicting “scientific” research results that most of us feel overwhelmed and totally confused as to what the truth is. Without the scientific know-how to accurately read results from clinical trials, it is very likely we will be easily led astray. There is a conspiracy of medical journalists whose main aim is to excite the public with their reporting of research results. Errors, inappropriate use of statistics and misleading representations are ubiquitous in medical literature. Be warned, if you take everything you hear and read as gospel truth, even in prestigious publications like *The New York Times*, to name but one.

Many of these medical journalists are on the payroll of Big Agra and Big Pharma. Their aim is to take real data and starve or force-feed the data to support the bias of the interested party, conflating correlation with causation under the guise of incontrovertible scientific “proof.”

If we want unbiased truth, one has to know where to look to find it using discrimination and dispassion. Truth (*sattva*) is always available, but often hidden and hard to find. The problem is most people are lazy and do not want to work too hard or think for themselves (*tamas*). What most of us don't know is that nearly all publishing of scientific information is dominated by just a handful of companies and is homogenized and shaped for maximum conformity rather than intellectual diversity. By far, the majority of science journals only allow scientific papers to be published that conform to the financial interests of their corporate sponsors (such as biotech firms and pharmaceutical companies of course). The poor research published by prestigious people and supposedly impartial regulatory institutions (like the FDA, ADA and USDA) means the nature of science itself has to be investigated.

While it is also true that science is doing its best to come up with believable research, much of it has been based on incomplete and flawed assumptions and methodologies. Many of the agencies charged with monitoring and regulating the industry for the benefit and protection of all are run by the very people who have vested interest in many biotech and pharmaceutical companies and are on their board of directors!

As Michael Pollan says, there is definitely “a paradox in the whole Western framework through which we intellectualize the value of food.” With all the conflicting research and information that is available, it is becoming increasingly clear that anyone could promote almost any view. Unfortunately, this is how it works in the apparent reality because when duality is operating, polarization is inevitable when it comes to knowledge of objects. For every hypothesis that nutritional science

constructs an alternative or opposite theory can also be construed.

The Internet

Google is not quite as reliable and unbiased as many people would like to believe. The internet is controlled by a few key gatekeepers who dominate the channelling of information to end-users. Those gatekeepers are Google, Facebook, Wikipedia and others. All of these information gatekeepers have sold out to corporate interests and now deliberately restrict access to information that would empower the people of the world with the ability to read and learn a diverse collection of knowledge.

What James and I Eat

A small fraction of our diet, maybe 15%, is organically-farmed animal products, including fish, dairy and eggs. We include good animal and plants fats every day as well as organic seeds, nuts, lots of raw salads and lightly-cooked vegetables. We get most of our carbs from vegetable sources, eating little fruit. We incorporate fermented foods and organic bone broths. We hardly ever eat bread, no longer eat cereals, but do sometimes eat properly soaked and cooked selective grains and beans on occasion. We avoid root vegetables like potatoes, but as we enjoy them and they are a good source of vitamins and minerals, we eat them on occasion too. For our breakfast I make delicious and nutritious muffins made entirely from nut flours, seeds, and berries containing no sugar. This recipe and many others like it with similar ingredients puts paid to the idea that in giving up reliance on grains we give up all delicious comfort food.

We no longer eat soy of any kind, knowing the truth about soy as we do, although fermented soy like tempeh and miso is not as bad as most tofu and soy milk. The sheer volume of excellent and unbiased research available on soy makes it beyond the scope of this document to fully explore this topic. I highly recommend reading what Lierre Keith has to say about it, along with Sally Fallon in *Nourishing Traditions*. One of the best books on the topic is *The Whole Soy Story: The Dark Side of America's Favorite Health Food* by Kaayla T. Daniel.

We are well-informed and in excellent health, with tons of energy. We say prayers, giving thanks over every bite of food we eat, never wasting or overeating. We also have extensive knowledge about the nutrient value of different plants, so we eat mostly those plants that want to be eaten, avoiding grains wherever possible without being fanatical about it. Because we eat so well and the body is properly nourished, the desire to eat badly does not arise. This does not mean that we cannot sin intelligently if we so choose. I like what Alfred Adler always advised: "Do the wrong thing or feel guilty, but never do both."

The Old and New Paradigms

Old Paradigm: The Infamous Lipid Hypothesis

Six hundred million years of evolution and a lifetime of behavioural conditioning tell us to eat anything that tastes good. Fats taste very good indeed, but for years we have been indoctrinated to believe that fats were bad for us, especially animal fats. The powers that be (doctors, researchers, pharmaceutical and biotech companies, along with the agencies who are meant to monitor them all, like the American Heart

Association and the USDA) concocted the lipid hypothesis, led by its main proponent, Ancel Keys. The lipid hypothesis in brief states that eating good fats found in animals and plants dangerously raised cholesterol levels, putting us at great risk of all illness, in particular CHD (coronary heart disease). Yet a meta-analysis of one hundred sixty-seven – yes, that’s 167 – cholesterol-feeding experiments found that raising dietary cholesterol had a negligible effect on blood cholesterol, and NO link to CHD risk.

The whole point of an experiment is to test a hypothesis. You do that by eliminating as many variables as possible. With epidemiological evidence, like the famous Keys seven-country study, it’s impossible. Epidemiological studies can only prove correlation. They cannot prove causality. They may suggest intriguing areas for exploration, but until all the variables are controlled and the results are reproducible, no conclusions can be drawn. The seven-country comparison that Keys did “involves comparing apples with oranges – that is, countries with widely varying cultural, social, political and physical environments.” With such an infinite number of variables, a finding of definitive causation would be ridiculous.

My cynical view is that the powers that be, which include of course Big Pharma and Big Agra, conspired to move public opinion away from expensive calories to produce, animals and vegetables, and move public consumption instead to cheap, easy-to-produce, high-yield calories in mono-crops, such as soy, wheat, maize and sugar cane. I share this view with many other disinterested parties.

The Vampire Myth

After 40 years or more of bona fide, peer-reviewed clinical trials trying to prove that fats are the cause of all major diseases, this research has still not presented a single shred of evidence confirming their hypothesis. In fact all the research has only served to prove the opposite, i.e. without good fats in the diet good health is just not possible. As stated, instead the real data is often starved or force-fed to support the bias of the researcher who conflates correlation with causation under the guise of incontrovertible scientific “proof.” Nonetheless, the hypothesis still dominates consensus medical and layman thought on the topic. It is probably the worst, not to mention most tenacious, advice in the history of medicine and has caused more ill health and death than any other theory. But it will not die. As it is more myth than fact, it is called by many the “vampire myth” because it sucks your blood and will not go away.

Cancer Research

As far back as 1967, Howard Temin, a Nobel prize-winning cancer researcher, found that without the presence of insulin, cancerous cells didn’t grow. Please note: excess carbs cause insulin-leptin resistance. In 1956 other doctors noted the concurrence of diabetes and breast cancer. And yet we’ve been told repeatedly to eat that high-carb diet, with its requisite insulin overload. We now know that it is not healthy fats that cause obesity, cardiac disease, high blood pressure and every other disease you can think of, but sugar. Fats are especially necessary for brain health. The only bad fats – which, please note – the medical establishment, which is in the pocket of big business, developed in order to encourage us to not to eat good fats, are hydrogenated fats (vegetable oils and trans fats – think margarine) found in all manufactured and processed food. These are real killers, yet we are told they are

safe by those supposedly “in the know”: our doctors, researchers and the media. The other source of really bad fats are oxidized or overheated fats, such as any food cooked in oils at very high temperatures, when even good fats like olive oil break down. The much-maligned egg is nature’s perfect food, as it contains almost everything we need nutritionally. Even the fat (cholesterol) it contains in the egg yolk is healthy fat – it is only when eggs are fried or overcooked that the fat breaks down and produces oxidized cholesterol, which is the only cholesterol that is bad for us to eat.

The Truth out at Last!

New Paradigm: The Carbohydrate Hypothesis

There has been another hypothesis to explain “heart disease, diabetes, colorectal and breast cancer, tooth decay and half-dozen or so other chronic diseases.” Gary Taubes names it the carbohydrate hypothesis. This hypothesis began with years of observations by British doctors and missionaries who, tagging along with the imperialists, found the same thing that Weston Price would discover: that indigenous people eating their traditional foods were free from the chronic illnesses that came to be known as the “diseases of civilisation.” This term was developed in the nineteenth century by a French doctor, Stanislaus Tanchou. His original research was on cancer, specifically its pattern of concentration and proliferation. His research showed that cancer was an urban phenomenon, not a rural one, and that it was spreading across Europe. He corresponded with doctors in Africa who witnessed the increase in cancer in populations that had been cancer-free, concomitant with their exposure to European foods. A great quote by Tanchou: “Cancer, like insanity, seems to increase with the progress of civilisation.”

In February the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC) submitted its *2015 Scientific Report* to the US Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Services (HHS). This report serves as the foundation for the development of US dietary guidelines. In a surprise twist the DGAC not only suggested eliminating warnings about dietary cholesterol, it also reversed nearly four decades of nutrition policy by concluding that dietary fats have no impact on cardiovascular disease risk. Unfortunately, the DGAC didn’t set the record straight with regards to saturated fats, as it makes no firm distinction between healthy saturated fats and decidedly unhealthy trans fats. For decades healthy fat and cholesterol have been wrongfully blamed for causing heart disease, but over 70 published studies overwhelmingly dispute this.

The anti-fat campaign has been one of the most bizarre phenomena in the history of medical science. All the many expensive tests conducted fail, but they keep doing them in the hope that something will happen, some unexpected change in the way the universe works which will make saturated fat bad – because they so want to be proved right. It’s just got to be true! Wherever this idea came from, it was wrong. Just take a look at the obesity epidemic (not to mention declining health) worldwide as a result of people reducing fats and increasing consumption of carbs.

Carbohydrates: The Real Culprit

Many people believe that as carbohydrates are available and so ubiquitous they must be necessary for health. This is taken as an immutable truth by the medical

establishment and sold to us as such. As we established, the body does need glucose; the brain and blood use it and we need it for fast, intense activity. In fact we now know that the preferred fuel for the brain is fat in the form of ketones, not glucose. And unless you are faced with outrunning a man-eating animal or training for the Olympics, you do not need to take in many carbs, especially those found in grains and simple sugars. Only if we have unusual needs for stamina do we need extra carbohydrates other than those gained from vegetables, nuts and fruit.

A cup of rice, whether organic or not, is roughly equivalent to a cup of sugar, as all carbs are broken down to glucose once eaten. Unrefined organic grains are better, in that they slow down the absorption of sugar and contain fibre and more nutrients, but they still contain a lot of phytochemicals just like refined grains do, in fact even more so because the grains are unrefined.

The Sugar *Vasana*

The *vasana* for sugar is established as babies drinking their mothers' breast milk, if they were lucky enough to have been breastfed as babies. If we were not breastfed we did not escape this early introduction to sugar, as it is present in all baby formulas. Lactose is the primary carbohydrate found in human milk. It accounts for approximately 40% of the total calories provided by breast milk. It has a function unique to babies in that it not only provides nutrition suitable to babies, it also helps kill harmful bacteria present in the lining of the infant stomach. What most people do not know is that babies do not have enough amylase, which is the enzyme required to digest the glucose made from carbohydrates.

And yet most pediatricians, nurses, doctors and nutritionists insist that carbohydrates such grains found in baby cereals are the best foods to introduce the baby to solid foods! And most baby milk formulas are loaded with carbohydrates and worst of all, soy. It is no wonder many babies suffer so badly from colic, developing allergies and all kinds of health issues as a result.

We cannot be blamed for having this sugar *vasana*, or "sweet tooth"; it seems to come with the territory of being human! As hunter-gatherers, we discovered that plants with sweet fruit were seldom poisonous, so they were safer to eat. And plants obliged us by satisfying our pleasure centres with their opioid-like substances. We became addicted and associate carbohydrates with comfort food and pleasure. In addition to the rapid sugar rush a grain like wheat provides, it also produces specific compounds that bind to morphine receptors in the brain. In addition to subtle euphoria, these opiates cause a repetitive cycle of cravings – for more grains!

Have you ever known anyone to binge on steak and nutritious vegetables? No. When we need comfort food we turn to carbohydrates, preferably loaded with fats. *Isvara* gave us sugar primarily for pleasure, it would seem. But sugar, like sex and other bodily pleasures, has a steep downside to it.

What Is Insulin-Leptin Resistance?

Diets too high in carbohydrates (most vegetarians I have met have a big sugar *vasana*) result in insulin and leptin resistance. Insulin resistance happens when the body is no longer able to metabolize the amount of sugar that is ingested, so it goes into insulin overdrive. If this pattern continues, the body becomes resistant to insulin, which is the first stage of diabetes. The basic defect in all patients with

diabetes is the decreased ability of insulin to induce cells of the body to remove glucose (sugar) molecules from the blood. Whether this decreased insulin activity is due to a decreased amount of insulin produced (type 1 diabetes) or from the insensitivity of the cells to a normal amount of insulin (type 2 diabetes), the results are the same: blood glucose levels which are too high. This is termed “hyperglycemia,” which means “high glucose in the blood.” This triggers a cascade of inflammation and increases your risk for cancer, Alzheimer’s, fatty liver, heart disease, metabolic syndrome, rampant and growing ill health on a catastrophic world scale, not to mention obesity.

Along with insulin resistance is leptin resistance. Leptin is the hormone that tells us when we have eaten enough. When the body is subjected to a diet of mainly carbohydrates and no good animal protein or fat, hyperglycemia sets in and the body is always hungry – it is actually starving because it is not getting the nutrients it needs, so no matter how much you eat you are not sated or nourished, and people tend to overeat. The signal that the body gets from leptin is so constantly overridden that we do not register it anymore.

Reducing consumption of grains, sugars and other simple carbohydrates in favour of healthier plants and animals brings levels of insulin and glucagon into an ideal balance, enabling the utilization of fatty acids (from both food intake and stored fat) as the preferred fuel source. This helps regulate daily energy levels, even if meals are skipped. In contrast, excess insulin production from a sugar-burner diet requires that you eat every few hours to bump up blood glucose levels that have crashed.

The Diseases of Civilisation

India incorporates vegetarianism as central to its cultural and spiritual identity, even though there are rural indigenous people who do eat meat. It is the diabetes capital of the world, and Indians have the shortest lifespans of any culture. Diabetes is on a fast march forwards in the U.S. Overweight children with diabetes are now a demographic in the U.S., much like minors addicted to drugs, with one difference: their parents are usually their suppliers because of the food they eat. It is true that everyone is different and metabolizes food differently; however, as stated, all bodies have a non-negotiable need for certain raw materials to function properly. What is needed for good health is minimal carbs, abstaining from refined and processed foods, certain essential animal nutrients and good fats. Apart from India there has never been an indigenous culture that voluntarily chose vegetarianism unless forced to. Study after study show clearly that the healthiest cultures in the world, going back thousands of years, ate from all food groups.

Dr. Weston Price

No discussion on food can ignore one of the most famous of all studies conducted over a hundred years ago by Dr. Weston Price. Price was a dentist who practised in Cleveland, Ohio. He entered the medical field just prior to the industrial revolution at the end of the nineteenth century. Over the course of the next thirty years, he watched children and adult’s dentition – and indeed their overall health – deteriorate. There were suddenly children whose teeth didn’t fit inside their mouths, children with foreshortened jaws, children with lots of cavities. Not only were their dental arches too small, but he noticed their nasal passages were also too narrow, and they had poor health overall: asthma, allergies and behavioural problems. The

adults too were suffering from cavities in their teeth and all manner of diseases.

His hypothesis was that these deformities and deteriorations were caused by nutritional deficiencies. To test his hypothesis, he and his wife Florence, a nurse, travelled the globe looking for cultures that achieved perfect health in their members, which in the 1930s such cultures still existed. He also found people who had abandoned their traditional foods for “the displacing foods of our modern civilisation” with the same results everywhere: those that had remained true to their cultural diet all showed signs of perfect teeth, perfect facial and general bone structure, perfect health. Those who had fallen prey to the allure of the “Western diet” were prone to all the diseases of civilisation, including bad teeth, deformed or malformed facial structures and weak bones. He even deduced a correlation between physical beauty or attractiveness and this dietary imbalance due to the malformation of bones in members who had abandoned their cultural diets for the “Western diet.”

The brilliance of Dr. Price was that he was able to recognise the pattern. He wasn't distracted by the variations in macronutrients or by differences in basic foodstuffs, apart from the obvious correlation of ill health to the Western diet. He was able to identify the dietary principles that granted perfect immunity to chronic and degenerative diseases. Price gave us overwhelming evidence of natural laws concerning dietary needs, laws that operate in human beings everywhere to regulate immunity, reproduction and virtually every other aspect of health. What “immune” people universally valued were nutrient-dense animal fats: organ meats, bone marrow, fish oils and roe, egg yolks, lard and butter. Liver was especially valued, often eaten raw, and sometimes considered sacred.

The Western Diet: Nutritionism Replaces Nutrition

The term “nutritionism” was coined by Australian sociologist Gyorgi Scrinis. A result of the industrialisation of food, this term is based on the idea that food is made of essential nutrients, which if combined correctly, would constitute food. This reductive analysis of food into nutrient components is a flawed paradigm because it only takes into account present evidence and ignores absent evidence. The absent evidence is that food, like everything else is a synergy, a dynamic and intricate exchange between the environment, the nutrients in the food and our bodies. This exchange is much more subtle and mysterious than the belief that the whole is no more than a sum total of the parts.

People don't eat nutrients. They eat food. Foods behave very differently from the nutrients they contain. The scientific process of studying a list of nutrients instead of whole food misses the most important part: vitalism, what Vedanta calls *shakti*, or energy. This is the intelligence and the nature of The Field. It is the mystery of the Creator which no one can replicate, as much as science likes to think it can play God.

What is important to understand is that the term “nutritionism” is not scientific; it is an ideology. Like most ideologies, it is a way of formulating the bigger picture into a set of common (and convenient) assumptions – which is why most ideologies are faulty. In the case of nutritionism the unexamined assumption is that the key to understanding food is by studying the nutrient in isolation. Since nutrients are mysterious and cannot be seen, it falls to the scientists (and the media who the scientist relies on to reach you and me) to explain the hidden reality of food. As

Michael Pollan says, this has given rise to a quasi-religious scientific paradigm, implying the need for a priesthood to help you find your way to salvation: good health. And who is this priesthood? It is comprised of those in charge of our health: the scientist, the politician and the businessman – the diet *gurus*. What a scary thought!

Fortunately, there is a growing awareness that food choices are politically-charged and profit-based, affecting everyone from rural cultures to international oil cartels, and global climate changes. Some consumers are trying earnestly to get off the petroleum-driven industrial food wagon. Many schools and homes are run by responsible, well-intentioned people who are doing their best to avoid fast food, unpronounceable additives and food-like substances. The problem is that this approach produces a negative, fear-based attitude to food instead of a positive food culture.

Food Products Replace Culture

To quote Barbara Kingsolver, “Culture is not something that gets sold to people. It arises out of a place, a soil, a climate, a history, a temperament, a collective sense of belonging.” Fad “diets” convulse bookstores with one “best seller” after another. But fad diets will not save us, because what they do not offer is any sense of national and biological integrity, meaning culture, which arises from a collective wisdom about plants and animals that grow in a place – and the safe, complex and tasty ways one can make them edible.

Strong food cultures eat real food, not food-like substances. These cultures are aesthetic, practical and functional, keeping the quality and quantity of foods consumed relatively consistent from one generation to the next. Many European cultures still hold to rules about taste and civility, and respond appropriately, knowing how much is enough – refraining from gluttony even in the presence of glut. The famous “French paradox” is no paradox; the French, like the Italians, Greeks, Japanese and others, for the most part adhere to a culture where real food is eaten and a little of everything is enough.

In the U.S., farmers now produce 3,900 calories per person, per day, twice what is needed for good health. The sad truth is that commodity farmers can only survive by producing their maximum yield, so they do. The worst of it is, as these farmers produce to excess, the food industry rubs its hands in glee, figuring out ways to make people eat much more than they need. Of course no one admits to this Machiavellian scheme, and it flies safely under the banner of capitalism. Children are targeted especially – and overweight kids, just like kids with diabetes, are now a demographic in the U.S., much like minors addicted to drugs, and here too their parents are their suppliers.

“No one holds a gun to the head making us eat this stuff!” is the refrain of the industrialists and marketers. Unfortunately, humans have a built-in weakness for fats and sugar, having evolved in lean environments where it was often necessary to gorge on whatever we could get our hands on, whenever we found it. These unscrupulous marketers understand our biology only too well; they found our weakness and exploited it without mercy. Obesity is generally viewed as a failure in personal control and the overweight consumer gets blamed for the violation, creating the perfect crime.

Confirmation Bias and Clinical Studies

There have been so many studies claiming that a shift to a purely plant-based diet is the answer to all ills. For some, it may well be. I am not denying that it is possible to be healthy on a plant-based diet if you know what you are doing and include the missing essential nutrients found only in animals. The most famous of all the studies claiming that plant-based diets are the answer to all ills is *The China Study* by Colin Campbell, the *guru* for vegans and vegetarians. While Campbell makes some very good points, much of his research has been debunked as flawed, along with many other such studies on this topic. This is invariably because much of the research undertaken in this study (and others like it) is done with confirmation bias, i.e. it includes only data that corroborates what it sets out to prove and ignores any and all data that contradicts it – of which there is plenty. These studies also have a tendency to rely on epidemiological evidence conflating correlation/association with causation under the guise of incontrovertible scientific “proof.”

Lierre Keith, in her groundbreaking book *The Vegetarian Myth* that explains in detail how she destroyed her health by twenty years of veganism, received hate mail after her book was released. In the twenty years of increasingly failing health, not one of the many doctors she consulted asked her what she ate, until finally when she was almost crippled and in despair a Chinese naturopathic practitioner broke through her denial and set her on a course to better health, although her fanatic veganism did permanent and irreparable damage to her health. Ignorance knows no bounds! It is human nature to believe what we want to believe.

WOE Is Me

If you are unhealthy, overweight or ill, the chances are very good it is a WOE – way of eating – that is the underlying problem.

The Answer?

Many peer-reviewed clinical trial tests bear this out as the answer to good health overall:

Eat good protein sources, whether plant or animal. Avoid soy. All fats other than hydrogenated vegetable oils (transfats) and oxidised (overheated or rancid) fats are good. Reduce carb consumption (minimal root vegetables, minimal grains, minimal beans and pulses). Eat lots of raw, fresh vegetables and learn to cook them properly. If you are not allergic to dairy, eat only products from grass-fed animals. The same applies to all meat products. If you can afford it, buy only organic products. If you are not allergic, nuts are good, so are seeds. Free-range eggs are good, avocados are very good, ditto for coconuts. Eat minimal fruit, although berries are good. If you have to have cake and pudding, eat the ones made with healthy sugar substitutes like stevia and nut flours. Cut out all sodas, sweets and fruit juice. Avoid tinned foods. Shun processed food-like substances like the plague they are. If you are vegan – take the vitamin B12 supplements, along with vitamin A and omega-3s; fish oil is the best by far. Make sure you eat a wide variety of plants high in protein. If you have to eat grains, make sure you soak them first and cook them properly.

Don't Be a Lipophobe!

A lipophobe is a somewhat pejorative term for someone who is afraid of fat. You need good fat in the diet, it is an essential nutrient. And contrary to what we have been brainwashed into believing, fat does not make you fat – unless you eat the bad fats or fats with carbohydrates. And it is not the fat that makes you fat, it is the excess glucose from the carbs. In fact if you seriously restrict carbs and increase the amount of fat you eat, not only will you be healthier, you will lose weight.

It's Not About Calorie-Counting!

If you have to overeat as a way to deal with your emotions, don't eat carbs. Fat has more calories than carbs, but calories are about processes – not substances. Different processes (oxidation in the calorimeter versus metabolism) make different use of the calories. And putting on weight is not so much about how many calories you ingest, it is the type of calories you eat and what you eat them with – as well as at what time of the day. Carbs can be converted to fat, but fat cannot be converted to glucose.

If you follow this advice, you will feel better and it will give you the freedom from the sense of fighting a war against fat and dis-ease that you will never win by trying to eat a low-fat/high-carb diet. You will almost never gain weight (unless you go back to eating too many carbs) and you will escape that overbearing feeling that every meal is a battle. The real threat is not weight, it is health, not to mention the feeling of loss of control that dogs bad eating habits.

Three Simple Rules

If the advice above is still too vague for you, I offer three very basic rules to sum up:

1. If you are healthy, of normal weight for your body type (meaning not over- or underweight) with lots of stamina, great digestion and elimination, stick to whatever you are doing because it's right for you.
2. If you are overweight and need to lose a few pounds, drastically reduce carb consumption. Increase good protein and fat sources instead, including lots of fresh vegetables. Avoid all processed foods and sodas. If you are underweight, feel weak and listless, the same applies.
3. If you are unhealthy, sick with metabolic syndrome, diabetes, cancer, heart disease, etc. strict carb restriction is the default approach, i.e. what you do first. This means no carbs other than those found in non-root vegetables and nuts. Include good protein and fats sources. Avoid at all costs all processed and sweetened foods.

In Closing...

And finally, I would like to end this discussion with an argument in favour of humane and organic farming of animals and plants, i.e. respect for the interdependence and value of all life. Most importantly, I say honour the environment by giving thanks for the abundance that The Field of Existence gives; bring back simple rituals that demonstrate your gratitude and love for the Creator and creation. It is time to end mindless, gratuitous consumerism and take stock of indulgent likes and dislikes. We need to take only what we need, give back enthusiastically and responsibly take care of our waste. I argue for a return to a culture of real food and to say no! to the

ubiquitous culture of fast food, sweetened drinks and deadly refined-food facsimiles.

~ Much love, Sundari, October 2015