



ShiningWorld Newsletter

August 2015

The view from our front room more or less reflects our state of mind these days. We feel so incredibly blessed. It seems our decision to curtail our travel and settle down here was the right one. Our energy is growing in leaps and bounds. Ramji actually went fishing for the first time this year; he is taking time off to smell the roses. He has been enjoying himself extending the deck with Don's help and also turning the garden into a beautiful park....

I have never seen him so happy and at peace. I have also made time to play in my studio and am working on a new sculpture. Life is grand!

We are still very busy with ShiningWorld duties but as we are more rested we have had time to work on our books and other scriptural writings. I have made good progress on my Lifestyle/Guna book and included some of the ideas covered in a section of my book in the article at the end this Newsletter, entitled Vedanta and Vegetarianism. It is a discussion on the politics and morality of food. This is a topic that often comes up as it affects us all to a greater or lesser extent. With reference to universal dharma we all need to work out how knowledge applies to us on the jiva level.



Ramji has been also been working on several projects along with preparing for seminars, editing texts and teaching. Here is an inspired Upanishad he wrote recently. Commit it to memory and speak it out loud with great confidence every day.

The Song of the Self

1. *I am limitless unassociated awareness, here and now. I am ever unchanging, eternal, actionless awareness, nondual, complete and full. My nature is unconditioned presence, pure awareness, pure existence, absolute peace and unlimited happiness.*
2. *The macrocosmos, the creator of the macrocosmos and the myriad laws and principles that make up the creation appear like a dream in me, limitless awareness.*
3. *The human form is a microcosmic projection within the macrocosmic projection.*
4. *This projection is not the same as me but it is not different from me either. Space in a room appears to be different from space outside the room but they are the same.*
5. *I am thought to be associated with a material human body and mind due to ignorance, although I am always free of it.*
6. *So it seems as if I am a mixture of awareness and matter, like twilight is a mixture of light and dark.*
7. *Because I seem to be a mixture I become confused and seek to find out who I am even though I am always present and known to myself alone.*
8. *In this strange condition it seems as if I am affected by ignorance but I am not. My form is in one order of reality and I am in another. When there is smoke in space, it seems as if space is smoky but it is never contaminated. I am never contaminated by the thoughts and feelings that appear in me. I am unaffected by the body superimposed on my radiance.*
9. *When I am apparently under the spell of ignorance I know that I exist but I do not know that I am existence itself.*
10. *When I am apparently under the spell of ignorance I know that I am conscious but I don't know that I am limitless consciousness. I think I am limited.*
11. *Confusing myself...awareness...with my body and mind causes suffering.*
12. *In spite of the confusion I am always unaffected by ignorance.*

13. Knowledge cancels ignorance just as alkali neutralizes the acid in an upset stomach. When I imagine that I am bound I need knowledge to set me free.

14. When I understand that I am limitless awareness my individuality disappears because I was only seemingly ignorant. If my ignorance was real it could not be removed by knowledge.

15. With or without my apparent individuality I am awareness free of knowledge and ignorance. I was never not awareness. I just thought I was a person.

16. Before my ignorance was removed by self knowledge I was only indirectly aware of myself as awareness, but now I am directly aware of myself as awareness.

17. It seems like I am two, limitless awareness and an apparently aware individual, but I am only one.

18. I use the apparent person that appears in me to transact business with the world.

19. The apparent person seems to be alive and independently aware but it is not. It seems so because I illumine and enliven it by my presence like a ventriloquist enlivens a puppet.

20. At the determined time, according to the momentum of its past action, the Gross Body body dies and the Subtle Body goes into a potential, unmanifest state, the Macrocosmic Causal Body.

21. I remain as limitless unassociated awareness. I am ever unchanging, eternal, actionless, one, complete and full. My nature is unconditioned presence, pure awareness, absolute peace.



The Berkeley Seminar was a big success thanks to the super work of Erin and Vance, a sophisticated crowd of Vedanta regulars and, of course, Ramji's careful and enthusiastic unfolding of Shankara's Vivekachoodamani, one of Vedanta's premier texts.



What's Up?



We are gearing up for Trout Lake which promises to be a great event. All are welcome. Ramji will teach Narada Bhakti Sutras, a Vedanta text on Bhakti, devotion. He will teach from a transcript of Swami Paramarthananda's talks. He intended to edit them but they were so beautifully rendered by Luma that he did not have to modify them at all. The document is on the website. Here is a link:

[Mount Adams-Trout Lake](#)

http://www.shiningworld.com/site/files/pdfs/publications/transcriptions/NBS_Vision_of_Vedanta_concise_version_8-7-15.pdf Those of you attending Trout Lake should copy it and bring it along. If he works through all the verses before the end, he will teach the Kena Upanishad.

http://www.shiningworld.com/site/files/pdfs/misc/Kena_Upanishad.pdf



Speaking of transcriptions there are now quite a few extensive transcripts of Ramji's talks on the website. In addition to Luma's concise (without Sanskrit) and comprehensive (with Sanskrit) transcripts of Narada Bhakti Sutras, there is a beautiful 400+ page transcript of Ramji's Vivekechoodamani transcribed by Myuri. Myuri also transcribed Ramji's excellent Westerwald Self Inquiry talks (338 pages). She is incredible! Incidentally the YouTube videos of those talks have garnered 70,000 hits. And for you Gita fans, Peggy...may *Ishvara* bless you in every way... also did a fabulous job transcribing Ramji's Spain 2013 Gita talks (338 pages). **You won't believe this:** there is also a 3000+ page transcript of Swami Paramartha talks transcribed by one of his students. *Check out this section.*

By the way, anyone who is interested in transcribing Swami Paramartha's talks or Ramji's talks should contact me at shiningworld.inquiries@gmail.com

Panchadasi Tiruvannamalai 2015

After much delay, the video recordings of the Panchadasi teachings at Tiruvannamalai in January 2015 are now ready for download from the ShiningWorld shop. Because there are so many...85 Gigabytes...we are experiencing difficulty getting them transferred to USB sticks so you cannot order them right now. It is only a matter of time until we get the technical issue sorted out so don't lose heart. They are quite fine!

Satsangs

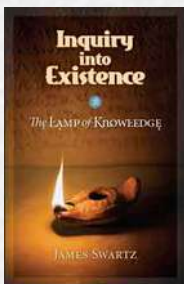
As you may have noticed Ramji and I have not posted satsangs for several months owing to too much ShiningWorld administrative work. Proof that the pressure is off can be seen in Ramji's recent upload of 40 excellent satsangs. His favorites are: Is it "Both/And" or is it "Either/Or", Out of the Body, and The Logic of Objects. I have also posted almost 40 satsangs; my favourite is Vedanta and Vegetarianism (which is added at the end of the Newsletter), Creation in a Nutshell and The Importance of Bhakti.

Dreams



Speaking of Satsangs, Ramji has a special interest in dreams and lately he has analyzed some in light of Vedanta, much to the delight of waker *jivas* who wrote in. Check out his commentaries of these two interesting dreams in the Satsang section of the website: “Love Evil” and “Three Black Ducks.” A particular kind of dream is *Isvara’s* way of communicating important existential information. *Isvara* speaks in strange symbols and Ramji, owing to

extensive dreamwork many years ago and his expertise in self inquiry, can really dig down into the Causal Body and come up with *Isvara’s* message to you, which may help you move forward. Somebody suggested that he offer a dream analysis service and after thinking about it, he decided to give it a try. However, since it is not strictly traditional Vedanta, (although Vedanta is *Isvara* and *Isvara* is the Big Dreamer so you can see the principles of Vedanta operating clearly in certain dreams). Ramji will interpret your dream in light of the Science of Non-Duality for an appropriate donation, let’s say \$25. But before you submit your dream you need to know that there are basically two kinds: *Jiva’s* neurotic dreams, which Swami Chinmaya used to call ‘the vomit of the mind’ and *Isvara’s* profound spiritual dreams which have a special radiance to them and involve the heart’s quest for meaning. So you need to discriminate. He is not a therapist so he will not interpret *Jiva’s* dreams about its psychological problems. When you submit your dream, please explain the life situation in which it occurs.



It’s Here ! You will be happy to know that Inquiry Into Existence in digital format has proven to be a big hit with inquirers worldwide. Now the much-anticipated paperback is available for sale from ShiningWorld. It is a beautiful book. If you prefer your Vedanta in an easy chair in natural light, this is for you. It costs \$20. Postage for the USA is \$5 and postage for Europe is \$15. Australia, South America and South Africa is \$20. It is worth every penny. To order go to the website and donate the appropriate amount. Then write an email to inquiries.shiningword@gmail.com with your address. We will mail it right away, although we will be teaching at Trout Lake from Wednesday, August 19 to Monday, August 31. If you order during this period expect your copy to arrive sometime in the first or second week of September. If you are a serious Vedanta student you really must read this book.

Note to Donors. We want to thank those whose generous donations made the paperback possible. I have mailed out the complimentary copies to the donors recently. If you have not received your copy by the end of the month please write and we will mail it after Trout Lake.



Speaking of donations, as some of you may know, Ramji and Tom went to a lot of trouble and expense to make a **film on Bhakti** (devotion) in India early this year. It promises to be unique, in so far as it unfolds the inner meaning of many of India's devotional practices and symbols. This is **an appeal for \$1200** to cover the cost of editing. Donors will receive a complimentary DVD.

Share your knowledge! One of Vedanta's most important spiritual practices is satsang, which literally means 'keeping the company of the wise.' The ShiningWorld family of wise people is growing leaps and bounds so **take advantage of the forum,** <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/forums/>, to share what you know and help each other.

Kindle Readers will be happy to know that **Essence of Enlightenment is on Kindle** now. http://www.amazon.com/Essence-Enlightenment-Vedanta-Science-Consciousness/dp/1591812771/ref=sr_1_1?s=instant-video&ie=UTF8&qid=1439931715&sr=8-1&keywords=essence+of+enlightenment



Brazil, here we come! We have been invited to teach in Brazil 22-29 of May next year. Keep your eye on the events page for details.



Vedanta and Vegetarianism

A Discussion on the Politics and Morality of Food

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 Jiva. 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 Jiva? Self sees her Self in other, because I am in everything, so is it Jiva who feels sorry for animals. If everything comes from Ishvara, then it shouldn't matter or is this just Jiva's bias?

Sundari: We are often asked this question, so I have addressed it at length. Politics aside, what we eat is a not only a moral but also a health issue; it relates to lifestyle and is therefore relevant to self inquiry. Vedanta is about awareness, the knower of the apparent reality, but moksa is for the jiva because the self is already free. For the jiva to be free of its identification with the apparent reality, it needs to understand the field of existence of which it is a part, and

how it functions. If you feel this document is prescriptive, you are right and you are wrong. It does not tell you what to do, but it does lay out how the laws of nature function, and they are prescriptive. Vedanta does tell us how the jiva needs to live and respond to the universal dharma that is the field and runs the field. The dharmafield is a web of natural laws that cannot be contravened without consequence. However universal dharma is open to interpretation by the jiva according to its understanding at any given time. This discretion of the jiva is called *visesa* dharma. But personal dharma has to conform to universal dharma as closely as possible or the jiva runs afoul of Isvara.

A Contentious Topic

Food is a contentious topic to address 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 jiva's opinions. But truth is not always comforting and not easy to accept. I have gone into a fair amount of detail in my response below to this inquiry, although volumes more could be written on this topic. What is stated here is not based on my opinions, although it confirms them. It is a logical assessment of the nature of the field of existence, how life works in the apparent reality, based on facts. It does not matter if we like it or not, if you agree or not. Facts are not repealed by our refusal to face them. To pursue the truth, we have to leave room for the possibility that we might be ignorant, or even wrong. We have to accept confusion and accept the risk of not knowing.

If the points raised here are upsetting, I apologize 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 how we eat relates to peace

of mind. One cannot ignore the body however unreal it may be. When the body is in ill or in poor health the mind cannot concentrate on self inquiry because rajas (pain, agitation, discomfort) and tamas (dullness, denial) cloud the mind.

There is essentially no right or wrong about life in samsara; you have to decide for yourself the foodstyle and lifestyle that works best for you. Vedanta is not a big parent that tells you what to do. It simply makes practical suggestions about how to live in such a way that your mind is prepared for inquiry and in harmony with Isvara. All the same, if you make choices that are not in harmony with the natural laws, the results still come to you. This document makes the assumption that you and other people who read this are knowledge 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 samsara, you are not invested in validating your own opinions. You will look squarely at all the facts, not just the ones that corroborate your view. Genuine self inquiry cannot take place without this qualification. Knowledge only qualifies as knowledge if it stands independently of your views and opinions. If you feel that what is stated is in this document is too harsh or lacks compassion, do inquiry into why you are so emotionally invested in your point of view.

Vegetarians Should Not Command the Moral High Ground

Those of us who are impassioned by 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 spiritual value, feeling morally superior because you have chosen a vegetarian/vegan lifestyle is plain and simply a lack of education. Health, particularly nutrition, is highly complex and

personal so it is difficult to say what is absolutely true for one's self or anyone else. All the same, if one strips away all emotion, subjectivity, and blind belief in the biased 'scientific' research 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 it is possible to find knowledge that cannot be negated; knowledge that is true for everyone, all the time. It is unlikely that dedicated vegetarians, and more so moral 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. 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. Objective and impersonal truth does not care whether you believe in it or not. 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.

Moksa and vegetarianism

Although vegetarianism is a strongly held belief within the Hindu culture, it does not arise as a topic of discussion within Vedanta, as it is not a prerequisite for moksa. All the same, many Indian Mahatmas champion vegetarianism as a lifestyle choice and a way to cultivating the value of non-injury. For them, a vegan diet is dharmic because it is true to their cultural history. No doubt they believe without question that this diet is healthy and righteous, and for them it is. One cannot ignore or underestimate how the psycho-spiritual affects the way the body reacts to food. Nonetheless, because the body belongs to Isvara it is beyond culture—karma still comes to it regardless of your spiritual beliefs. Of course, Mahatmas are not concerned with their bodies because they are not identified with them. This discussion is not about identifying with the body or making it real; the inquiry is about peace of mind and what produces

it. My premise here is that as much as one can categorically state that the body is not real, it exists and will not go away. Lifestyle issues have to be addressed as an important part of self inquiry.

It may be honorable to die of an illness that is the price of saving the lives of other creatures by not eating them. 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 Isvara set up the dharmafield. So, we can take vegetarianism or veganism off the spiritual “must do” list for enlightenment. ‘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 dharma field and those with non-dual vision see everything as the self, so one does not willfully 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 only values that will create a “world of connection instead of domination—a world that has a chance of surviving the abuse called civilization” says Lierre Keith in her brilliant book “The Vegetarian Myth: Food, Justice, and Sustainability”. However, the moral superiority typically held by vegetarians and vegans is unjustified and grossly uninformed. Many vegetarians are so identified with what they eat that vegetarianism seems to be a fanatical religious philosophy bordering on cult rather than a diet. 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. Fanaticism of any kind 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. 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 dharmafield 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.

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 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 practiced, promote soil erosion, salinization, desertification and loss of soil fertility. The North American prairie has been reduced to 2 percent of its original size and the topsoil, once twelve feet deep, can now only be measured in inches.

Agriculture, seen as the beginning of civilization, is based on annual monocrops, the precise opposite of perennial polycultures; and it does the opposite of what nature does: it destroys topsoil. Agriculture is more like a war than anything else, 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 civilization ... the plowshare 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 benefited some humans, and those people have been in charge ever since.”

98 percent of the native tall grass prairie is gone in the US, 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 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 were 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. 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 percent of a species is needed to ensure enough diversity for long-term survival, and less than 1 percent 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.

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 percent 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

It is a fact that if industrial agricultural farming on the scale it is being practiced today continues as it is, it will destroy the planet because it is simply not sustainable. For now, the system produces plenty of food, but what it has also produced along with soil erosion is plenty of malnutrition too. Eating grains and beans (and maybe eggs if you are not vegan or truly poor) affords bulk calories and a person's energy and dietary needs could be met. 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 mainly plants.

The hard truth is that land—the soil and all its millions of micro organisms 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. Alone 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 eco systems. 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. It is unconscionably cruel and unnatural to treat animals the way we do with industrial farming.

“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’.

An uncomfortable truth is no matter what we eat, we are part of an inter-dependent cycle of producers, consumers and degraders. All life is created, sustained and destroyed, that is how this apparent reality works. 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 virtuous thing is compounded by our dependence on civilization, our individual feeling of helplessness to change it and our divided views as to how to go about it.

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 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. It is neither moral nor immoral. It 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 Isvara—and it is totally dispassionate—but not cruel or destructive. It may appear to be on the surface, but inquiry into how things really work in Isvara's 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".

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 (awareness), ignorance reigns. Facing the truth about the insanity of food production as it is currently practiced 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 it's all Isvara and we are not in charge of the field, who is doing this anyway, 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 who causes the willful destruction of our environment and cruelty to animals. It is ignorance of God that causes us to cruelly destroy our environment and our health.

Ignorant of the true nature of Life, how the field functions and who we really are, 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.** 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 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, *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, colored the human-wildlife relationship.”

Cross culturally we have strayed very far from this wisdom.

“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. But taken out of context this becomes the rally of the righteous. It is 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 which is capable of looking at the big picture. It includes the ability to incorporate new knowledge, to revise as necessary the behaviors 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.

Life Requires Death

If you are a vegetarian 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. If fruitarianism does not work, 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. 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? 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.

What most people do not know or want to know about plants is that they have feelings. Plants are living beings; they are jivas too because they have rudimentary subtle bodies and they are sentient, just not like we are. 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

Fruitarianism believe they are safe from harming life. But what about the apple seed that 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 fibers 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 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.

We need to stop sentimentalizing nature. Killing an animal, which is consciousness, ends its body but it does not end the self... 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 jiva’s, 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.

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 behooves 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 civilization itself”. We may need to face the fact that our current world view (if we have one at all) is faulty at best. 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.

Two Factors Involved

Two factors are involved: One is universal dharma (Isvara) and the other is personal dharma, the jiva. 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 be 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, they play out the same way for everyone. For instance, non injury is a built in 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 Isvara. If all carnivorous animals and all humans had to become vegetarians, all life would die.

Courtesy of Lierre Keith, here 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 eat the bacteria. Lions and 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, not arrangements of dominance and subordination.

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 essential 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 B 12 is one good example, there are NO substitutes. You can end up blind or brain-damaged without it. B12 deficiency also leads to infertility, miscarriage, and maybe Alzheimer's. There are also no plant sources of 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 remodeling, the formation of enamel on teeth during their development in childhood, and skin health."

And then there is tryptophan, an essential amino acid which the body cannot make or obtain from plants—and is responsible for the production of so many things, serotonin especially. Without it, the brain just does not function and depression, anxiety and rage (rajas and tamas) run riot. Many claim that there are plants with a full

amino acid complement, but tryptophan is not on that list and if it is, it is vastly inferior to the tryptophan from animals. On top of that, all the tryptophan in the world won't do you any good without saturated fat, which is necessary to make your neurotransmitters transmit. Then there is the inevitable hypoglycemia that vegetarians suffer, the result of a high sugar (carb) diet, rampant inflammation and degenerative joint disease.

Nonetheless, from the point of view of personal dharma, how we interpret universal dharma is up to us. We can make adjustments for these facts up to a point by trying to eat a balanced diet as possible, including supplements to boost the unavailable nutrients we need in a solely vegetarian diet. We can buy our food from reliable and humane sources, whether we are vegetarian or omnivorous. We can put a great deal of effort and preparation into how we cook our food. But if we do not have knowledge about how to eat for health, we will cause illness. The principle of non injury applies to everything. The self has no feeling one way or the other about what you eat and the 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.

I was a vegetarian for a number of years, many years ago. I abandoned it when I gained enough knowledge to understand that I was harming my health. 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, powering the prayer. I honour this prayer. Like Lierre and others who have faced the facts, what separates me from vegetarians isn't ethics or commitment. **It is knowledge.**

For James and me, self righteous vegetarians are, in a manner of speaking one of our pet hates ☺. 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 in so far as the body depends on it. Vedanta is self-inquiry and self-inquiry requires a clear mind. 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 your personal dharma and causes 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 healthier for you because it most likely is not, **especially if you are a vegan**. Be courageous enough to gain knowledge that contradicts what you believe. Do honest research; read books like ‘The Vegetarian Myth’ by Lierre Keith, The Omnivore’s Dilemma by Michael Pollan and my personal favourite, Sally Fallon and ‘Nourishing Traditions’. There are many other reliable sources like these—people who are disinterested voices of our time; they are not out to manipulate you for their own ends. Their only aim is to inform. 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.

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 convinced to the point of ill health or death that their food choices determine how spiritual they are. Many have little idea of what constitutes good nutrition.

What we eat...

A small fraction of our diet is organically farmed animal products and good fats every day but most of our diet consists of organic seeds,

nuts, raw salads and lightly cooked vegetables. We no longer eat cereals but do eat selective grains on occasion. We no longer eat soy of any kind, knowing the truth about soy as we do. 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 “Soy: The Dark Side of America’s Favorite ‘Health’ Food” Daniel, Kaayla T. Also: <http://www.westonaprice.org/soy/darkside.html> and “Tragedy & Hype: The Third International Soy Symposium.” <http://www.westonaprice.org/soy/tragedy.html>.

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 over-eating. We also have extensive knowledge about the nutrient value of different plants, so we eat those that want to be eaten. Perhaps you do not know that many plants do not want to be eaten anymore than animals do, but unlike animals, they cannot get away; they have no legs. So they have developed ingenious strategies for defending themselves with very toxic plant poisons (**phytochemicals**) such as lectins, goitrogens, phyto-estrogens and phytates, among others. Plants produce millions of chemicals to attract, repel, immobilize, or kill animals in order to reproduce and fight back. They also know how to ensnare us, producing a perfect match with the pleasure centers 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 vegetarians, namely beans (pulses) and legumes, rice, soy, wheat, maize among many others. If we were meant to eat them, we would have 4 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. Some bodies have evolved to

digest them better than others; many people get very sick and some even die from related health issues as a result of eating them. Many more live with reduced health and energy never knowing why. Most vegetarians have very little knowledge about what they eat and how to properly prepare and balance their food because food is purely an emotional issue for them. The tendency is to take the easy route, to put blinkers on and believe only what conforms to their views. Most vegetarians and especially vegans rely too heavily on bread, rice, cereals, packaged soy, grains, tinned beans and legumes—not to mention processed refined foods and vegetable oils full of **transfats**, which are real killers!

The Infamous Lipid Hypothesis

Additionally diets that are too high in carbohydrates (**most vegetarians I have met have a big sugar vasana**) result in insulin and leptin resistance causing widespread inflammation, which is the root cause of almost all diseases: obesity, metabolic syndrome, diabetes, cancer, heart disease and rampant and growing ill health on a catastrophic world scale. 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. 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 (coronary heart disease) 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 Keys 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 cross-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.

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. 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.

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 the medical establishment, which is in the pocket of big business, encourages us to eat are hydrogenated fats (vegetable oils and trans fats - think margarine) and oxidized or overheated fats. These are real killers, yet we are told they are safe by those supposedly ‘in the know’, our doctors and the media.

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 civilization.” 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 civilization.”

India, one of the few cultures that voluntarily incorporate veganism (even in India there are rural indigenous people who do eat meat) as central to its cultural and spiritual identity, is the diabetes capitol of the world. Indians have the shortest life spans of any culture.

Overweight children and kids with diabetes are now a demographic in the US, much like minors addicted to drugs. With one difference: their parents are usually their suppliers. It is true that everyone is different and metabolizes food differently, however all bodies need certain raw materials to function properly. What is needed for good health are less 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. One of the most famous of all studies was conducted over a hundred years ago by Dr Weston Price. Price was a dentist who practiced in Cleveland, Ohio. He entered the medical field just prior to the glut of industrial food at the end of the 19th century. Over the course of the next thirty years, he watched children'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 behavioral problems.

His hypothesis was that these deformities and deteriorations were caused by nutritional deficits. To test his hypothesis, he and his wife, Florence, a nurse, traveled the globe looking for cultures that achieved perfect health in their members. In the 1930s, such cultures still existed. He also found people who had abandoned their traditional foods for “the displacing foods of our modern civilization” with the same results everywhere. The brilliance of Dr. Price was that he was able to recognize the pattern. He wasn't distracted by the variations in macronutrients or by differences in basic foodstuffs. 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, butter. Liver was especially valued, often eaten raw, and sometimes considered sacred. Foods from one or more of six different groups were absolutely essential” writes Ron Schmid, *Native Nutrition: 'Eating According to Ancestral Wisdom'*. The essential groups were: Seafood: fish and shellfish, fish organs, fish liver oils and fish eggs.

Confirmation Bias

The famous China Study that touted Vegetarianism as the healthiest diet was firmly and irrevocably debunked as flawed, along with most other such studies proclaiming vegetarianism the healthier option. This is invariably because most research undertaken in this study is done with confirmation bias, i.e. like many similar studies 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. Lierre Keith in her ground breaking book “The Vegetarian Myth” that tells how she destroyed her health by 20 years of veganism, received hate mail and death threats 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 natural 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.

Animal Farming: Abuse of Water

We have established that much of the world’s natural resources go towards animal husbandry and industrial agriculture. It certainly is true that horrific cruelty is 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 need.

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 huge amounts of water. Monocrops 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, providing 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

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 who? 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, the 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.

In closing....

If eating plants was that much healthier for us, surely we would find evidence of this in the bones of Paleolithic man? It is taught in schools that it is human over population that forced stone 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 paleontologists can look at a bone and tell in 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.

And finally, I would like to end this discussion with an argument in favor of humane and organic farming of animals and plants i.e. respect for the interdependence and value of all life. Most importantly, I say honor the environment by giving thanks for the abundance that Isvara gives; bring back simple rituals that demonstrate your gratitude and love of Isvara. 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 and deadly refined food facsimiles.

Much love,
Sundari

