

LESSON 05

JAINS ARE VEGETARIANS

What is a vegetarian? A vegetarian eats food which comes from vegetables source and take milk and milk products since milk is secretion of milk producing (mammary) glands. Vegetarian does not eat animal flesh of any living creatures. So he/she does not eat any flesh coming from animals, birds, fish, reptiles and chicken, eggs, poultry products, and even bugs or insects, etc., because to obtain flesh we have to either kill or hurt them. Jains are vegetarian because we do not want to be part of any of this killing or hurting someone. The vegetarian diet is balanced and based on natural plant food, including whole grains, legumes, vegetables, fruits, nuts, and seeds, etc. The vegetarian food might include milk or honey. Word vegetarian has gone through modification and now true vegetarian may have to know this because under the name of vegetarian food they may be offered food containing eggs which they do not take. Newer classifications of vegetarian food:

1. **Lacto-vegetarian:** In this food will not include any meat or eggs or poultry products, but would include milk and honey.
2. **Ovo-vegetarian:** In this food will not include any meat, milk or honey but will include eggs.
3. **Ovo-lacto vegetarian:** In this food will not include any meat but will include eggs, milk and honey.
4. **Vegan diet. Vegans** avoid any foods products derived from animals, including meat, eggs, and dairy products and cheese.

Jains will usually fall in either lacto-vegetarian or Vegan group depending upon how far they follow their practice. Nowadays it is sad to say that many of Jains do not adhere to these practices. In Jainism there is no force applied to anyone to how they carry out in their life but they are made aware that though freedom is available to them results of their deed will reflect in the kind of the karma they accumulate and time it may take or number of births it may take to be liberated. If there is a conviction or faith in Jain philosophy or religion or way of life then no prudent person will put oneself in disadvantaged situation.

Most numbers of the vegetarians of the world are found in India and Indian continents. But now we hear more and more becoming vegetarians all over the world. Why the people of India are vegetarians compared to people of other parts of the world and particularly Western world? The reason is a basic simple principle of Ahinsa. The people of India followed the principle of Ahinsa very close to their heart. This principle is taught in all three religions of India, Jainism, Buddhism and Vaishnava. The people from other parts of world do not believe in the principle of Ahinsa. In case if they talk about Ahinsa they do in very limited sense and do not extend beyond human beings.

People are or become vegetarian for various reasons like; health, ecology or environment, compassion towards animals, can not stand meat, economics or spiritual, etc. Why are Jains vegetarian? Most of us would have an answer that we do not want to hurt any animal, fish, birds, chicken, etc., because of compassion towards animals plus for spiritual reasons. And that is true answer because Jains do not believe in harming anyone. We believe that by harming animals, birds, fish, etc., not only we are harming them but we

are also harming our soul by accumulating maximum karmas by such deeds. Well, people may raise question that vegetables also have a life and then why are you harming them?

Why we, Jains do not eat meat? Let us look into this. Jinas taught us that in our life we should avoid harm to anyone. In case there is not much choice then look for alternatives and minimize the harm to anyone. Keeping this in mind he taught us how to live with other animals and living creatures of the world. Jina taught us that the living beings are grouped into five categories depending upon their physical and spiritual level of development. They are: 1) five sensed beings, 2) Four sensed beings, 3) three sensed beings, 4) two sensed beings, and 5) one sensed beings. As we all know we, humans and animals, birds and fish, etc., have five senses and brain. We, humans are the most developed and the next are animals, birds, fish, etc. Even though they may not look developed as much we should not forget that they have a brain through which they can do so many good things. All five sensed-beings have 10 vital capacities. As senses decrease these vital capacities also decrease. So one sensed plants only have four vital capacities. Difference is much wider. So Jinas taught us that to survive one might have to eat it then consume vegetables and its products but do not even look at two, three, four or five sensed creatures at all as a food. This will keep harm to your soul to the minimal. That is why Jains are vegetarians. Even some Jains avoid root vegetables like potatoes, onion, garlic, carrots, beats, etc., and even highly seeded vegetables like brinjals, okras, fig, etc. Jains even avoid green vegetables during some days of month. This all is done to minimize harm rather than satisfying our taste buds.

Everything Jains may do has spiritual background. In being vegetarian it is said there will less of a spiritual loss and progress towards liberation of the soul will be faster compared to those of non-vegetarian. If everybody turns vegetarian then it can stop the slaughter houses and millions and millions of animals, birds, etc., would not have to born just to die. On other side there are some religions in the world which preach that animals and other creatures are meant for them to consume and any harm to them is not hinsa (violence). Therefore they say they can eat them as their food. This is a major difference in concept of life between Jains and others.

VEGETARIAN MOVEMENTS

Many westerners like Christopher Columbus and Vasco-Da-Gama came to India and show that Indians though being vegetarian were healthier and strong people. When they went back and told this to local westerners they might have been surprised but liked the idea of being vegetarian and probably from that around 1809 in Manchester, England a vegetarian movement was started. Some members of the Bible Christian Church took a promise not to eat flesh and stay away from alcohol. That was how first group of westerners adopted vegetarianism. In 1847 word vegetarian was introduced and an independent vegetarian society was formed by them. This movement caught up in other parts of Europe and United States. Around 1850, vegetarian societies were founded in the United States. Vegetarian societies were also formed in Germany around 1867 and around 1899 in France. Around 1944, a small group of vegetarian purists out of compassion to animals and on ethical ground established the vegan society, who believe that no animals should be killed for food and therefore no animal products should be part

of food and food should consist solely of fruits, nuts, grains and vegetables. The word vegetarianism was derived from the vegetarian diet.

Many Westerners now have turned vegetarians. That is true and we admire that. They do this out of compassion to animals, fish and birds etc., and caring for their health. On the other side we hear that many Indians have started eating meat under the pretend of taste as well to show off that they are advanced. They should realize that not only it is not good for their health but also for spiritual development. Our land, India and Indian culture are the land of spirituality and peace seekers. We should remember our heritage and stay within that structure. We do not have to impress anyone because by not being vegetarian we are given up important belief and principles of life. We must realize that just as we do not like to get hurt or killed how can we hurt someone or kill someone. We get equally good nutrition from our food and we all are living examples of that.

In short Jains do not eat any of the animal products like meat, animal fat, fish, chicken, eggs, reptiles, etc., for more than health purpose, i.e. spiritual purpose.