

## LESSON 07

## JAIN FOOD HABITS

Every living being has to eat food for survival. So everybody has to eat something. When we look around either at schools, parties, restaurants we see different people eat different kind of foods. As Jain we eat vegetarian food so when we see others eat meat, fish, chicken, egg or other kind of flash we get a strange feelings. This is natural because we feel compassionate to those who got killed for food. As a Jain we follow or observe the principle of non-violence (Ahinsa) so not only in our daily activities but in our food habits too. We can not imagine someone eating flash. That is why when we go to the restaurants we will make it sure that food which we order is purely vegetarian and it does not have flash of any kind including things like chicken broth. Same way we will be careful when we are buying food from the store. We will check ingredients of whatever we buy to make sure it does not contain any meat or meat products. This is why our food will be full of vegetables, grains, fruits, nuts, etc. Some may argue how can you live or get strength without eating meat? To them we tell that we are participating in all activities that they are without any problem. We are also good in study, etc. Some may try to pursue us to eat meat to be like them but we should not be talked over by them. Being different is not wrong or something to look down particularly if it is going to compromise our principle of non-violence and compassion for the animals. Some may argue that even while eating vegetarian food you are killing plants. Well, they are right in some respect but for survival everybody needs to eat something but in selecting vegetarian food we are minimizing harm to living beings and definitely to more highly developed animals than vegetables. Therefore, Jains will eat the food which has come only from vegetable sources. Even in selecting vegetables Jains are very careful about which vegetables to eat and which one not to. This is explained here later on. Some of the common food items Jains eat are:

- Chapati,
- Rice,
- Dal,
- Black-eye peas,
- Okra,
- Beans all kinds,
- Peas,
- Tomatoes,
- Fruits,
- Green vegetables all kind,
- Lettuce, etc.

As mentioned earlier even as a vegetarian, Jains are more careful of what they eat from vegetable sources. For example, Jains will not eat underground vegetables, such as:

- Potatoes
- Onions,
- Garlic,
- Carrots and
- Beets, etc.

Do you know, why?

There are some simpler as well as complex reasons reason that why Jains do not eat underground root vegetables.

Let us first look the simpler reasons. They are:

- 1) We have to dig and disturb earth/ground to obtain potatoes or carrots, etc, and thus we hurt lots of earth beings and microbes in the earth.
- 2) Most of the time we have to pull out the whole plant to get to potatoes or carrots, etc, and thus we kill whole plant which itself has so many lives.

Now the complex reason is:

5) Jainism teaches that these root vegetables are abode (house) for of millions of individual living cells (beings) under one cover (skin) and all of these individual living cell have a potential to become a plant by itself. This has been proved by science through electron microscope and cellular culture. So when we eat or cook food like potato or carrot, onion, garlic, etc., what we are really doing is killing enumerable living cells (millions of living beings) that have a potential for life.

Let us understand this concept a little further with this explanation:

We will compare two different vegetables which we might eat with chapati, nan, or bread to help us to compare how vast the difference is in what we eat or not eat.

- 1) Let us say we would decide to eat chapati with black-eye beans. For that we will take a cupful of black-eye-peas. Now if we count the black-eye beans in one cup then they will come to about a few hundreds.
- 2) On the other hand for the same one cupful of potato there are over millions of individual living cells (innumerable beings).

So lives lost in one cupful of black-eye beans compare to one cupful of potato are very minimal. So back to the teachings of Jainism, we are told that we should not hurt anyone or when there is not much choice then keep it to the minimum even though it is wrong. So keeping away from root vegetables where there is tremendously more killing will be more reasonable things to do and that is why Jainism teaches us that do not eat underground roots.

In the same principle Jainism also tells us that when possible avoid vegetable fig, eggplant, tomatoes, etc which have too many seeds.

Jainism also proposes partial to total fasting as an austerity so that many a days in a month we may not even eat vegetable for food.

In any case, Jains will not eat meat, poultry and seafood like:

Hamburgers,  
Hot dogs,  
Chicken,  
Bacon,  
Steak,  
Eggs,

Fish etc.

Jains will also not drink alcohol because in the preparation process of alcohol millions of micro-organisms lose their lives.

## RAMESH IN THE RESTAURANT

**Ramesh:** Let's go to the hamburger restaurant.

**Anil:** Can we get vegetarian food there?

**Ramesh:** Yes, I think so.

(They went to a nearby hamburger restaurant.)

**Anil:** and Ramesh look at the menu.

**Raju:** the waiter came and asked, Are you ready to order?

**Anil:** (Pointing to the menu) Can we get veggie burgers?

**Raju:** Yes, we make veggie burgers.

**Anil:** We would like two veggie burgers.

**Raju:** (With surprise) Why don't you eat a meat burger?

**Anil:** We are Jains and Jains do not eat meat.

**Ramesh:** As Jains, we believe that animal life is as good as our own life.

**Anil:** Just as we don't like getting hurt or killed the animals, birds, and fish also don't like being hurt or killed.

**Raju:** Oh! That makes sense. I will get the vegetarian burgers for you.

While getting the veggie burger, Raju admires their love and care for all kinds of life.

Anil and Ramesh were happy with what they ate.

Jains are very careful of what they eat. They make sure that their food does not contain any meat products, animal fat, fish, seafood, chicken, or eggs, etc., in it.

## SEEMA GOES GROCERY SHOPPING

**MOTHER:** Let's go to the grocery store.

**Seema:** All right, mummy.

(Seema and her mother go to the grocery store.)

(Mother picks up vegetables, cookies, fruit and milk.)

**Seema:** Mamma, may I get ice cream, please?

(Without waiting for an answer she runs to the freezer and brings an ice cream).

**MOTHER:** Seema, did you check the label to see what is in the ice cream?

**Seema:** No, I did not. Should I?

**MOTHER:** Remember, we learned the other day that some ice creams have eggs in them. As Jains we don't eat any food that contains eggs, animal meat and fat.

**Seema:** Oh yeah, I forgot. Let me check the ingredients.

Sorry, mamma, it contains eggs. Let me put it back. Can I get another brand of the ice cream which does not have an egg?

**MOTHER:** Yes, Seema, but always be sure to read the label carefully to see what is in the ice cream.

**Seema:** Yes, mamma, I promise I will be more careful.

(Pause)

**Seema:** Mamma, does this mean that I should check the ingredients of bread, cookies, candies, canned foods and frozen foods also?

**MOTHER:** Yes, Seema, we should always check the ingredients of every food item we buy. Do not take anything granted.

Seema was happy that she learned something that would help her be a better Jain.