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WORLD RELIGIONS AND THE VEGETARIAN DIET

**Going meatless is a cultural phenomenon
that appears in many major faith traditions
throughout history.**

Throughout history, many faith traditions have perceived a relationship between the physical and the spiritual nature of a human being. In their discussion of this relationship, these traditions have shown some curious similarities and striking differences in the various links between diet and religion.

Hinduism

The complex system of Hinduism has proved to be very resilient. It has absorbed elements of various other

religions over thousands of years and yet maintained its distinctive character. Hindus believe in many gods, reincarnation, and *karma* (understood as how one's actions in previous lives morally affect the current cycle of existence).

Regarding diet, Hinduism today differs from what is known of its oldest forms. During the Vedic pe-

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riod in India (after about 2000 B.C.), Hindus ate meat and sacrificed animals extensively. Conception of an afterlife included a "heaven," where those who had acquired enough merit through the presentation of sacrificial gifts were likely to go.

Vegetarianism emerged gradually in Hinduism. Around the seventh century B.C., some Hindu sages began to advocate a meatless diet, though they were probably a minority. A major upheaval around the sixth century B.C. in India deeply affected Hinduism. This led to the formation of the Buddhist and the Jain religions, both of which put increased emphasis on the sanctity of all life, including animal life.

In the third century B.C, the Indian King Asoka converted to Buddhism, and Buddhism became the official religion. Asoka himself gave up most, if not all, meat consumption. Eating flesh meat was almost entirely done away with at the royal court, and the killing of some kinds of animals was prohibited entirely. It is said that Asoka was converted to Buddhism after viewing the carnage that resulted from one of the great battles of the day.

Economic factors also affected meat consumption. It was becoming more and more expensive to produce meat because of the pressure that overgrazing and deforestation were placing on the land. Some of Asoka's decrees, such as restrictions

on forest-cutting, demonstrate an early sensitivity to the relationship between ecology and human life only now slowly emerging in modern Western thinking.

After about 1000 B.C., meat-eating apparently was widely restricted. The Upanishads of this period were the first Hindu scriptures to mention doctrines suggestive of reincarnation. And other selections of writings stated that one could eat meat only when the animal was sacrificed ritually.

Hindu vegetarianism received its strongest advance from the Krishna cult, from whom reverence for the sacred cow originated and persists to this day. The followers of Krishna, who began propagating their view in the first few centuries A.D., were strict vegetarians, and Hinduism came more and more under their influence.

From the third century A.D. onward, restrictions on the use of beef increased. In the fourth century, the Law of Manu again restricted meat-eating to sacrificial occasions. The life of Krishna was recorded in the Bhagwat Purana during the fifth century. Upper castes in India resisted the trend toward vegetarianism, and it seems that they continued to eat beef as late as the ninth or 10th century. After the translation of the Bhagwat Purana into Hindi (15th century A.D.), no orthodox Hindu would kill a cow or eat beef. Though the orthodox followers of Krishna's

Buddhism and Hinduism have many similarities.

Both originated in India and both believe in karma and reincarnation. Buddhists reject the idea of the self or soul, however, believing it to be an illusion brought about by one's attachment to worldly things. The Buddha taught that life is a stream of becoming, in which no permanent self endures. Individuals are composites of perception, feeling, volition, intelligence, and form, all subject to the law of karma.

teaching undoubtedly were vegetarian, not all Hindus practice this restriction.

Though many Hindus today and in the past have eaten meat, there is nevertheless a strong vegetarian tradition within Hinduism. Today it is generally motivated from issues connected with reincarnation.

Buddhism

Buddhism and Hinduism have many similarities. Both originated in India and both believe in *karma* and reincarnation. Buddhists reject the idea of the self or soul, however, believing it to be an illusion brought about by one's attachment to worldly things. The Buddha taught that life is a stream of becoming, in which no permanent self endures. Individuals are composites of perception, feeling, volition, intelligence, and form, all subject to the law of *karma*. Life is

essentially suffering, desire is the cause of suffering, and the path to Nirvana (or salvation) involves cessation of all desire. Non-attachment to food was practiced as one way to withdraw from desire. Recognition of the shared life of all creatures led to compassion for animals.

Of the two chief branches of Buddhism, Theravada, the older of the two, is present in Burma, Ceylon, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Tibet, and Malaya. The Mahayana tradition is found in China. Both occur in Vietnam, while Japan has yet another tangent originally brought from China.

Attitudes toward meat consumption are noticeably different within the two main traditions. In Theravada Buddhism, meat-eating has come to be largely condoned, while in Mahayana Buddhism, meat consumption is frowned upon. These differences are very apparent in some of their rituals.

In reincarnation, an animal may have to go through eons of existences before finally accumulating enough good karma to be reborn as a human. However, animals can eventually achieve salvation. In fact, there are many stories of the prior existences of the Buddha, often as an animal.

Theravada Buddhist monks beg for food and are to accept what they are given. To receive some foods but to reject others signifies an attachment to the world, a trait that monks are supposed to suppress. Certain principles regarding flesh foods are also operant. No monk can kill an animal or accept meat specially slaughtered for him. Moreover, certain kinds of meat cannot be eaten under any circumstance. The Buddha forbade eating the meat of elephants, horses, dogs, serpents, lions, tigers, bears, hyenas, and panthers, even if they had died natural deaths. The Buddha also clearly enjoined monks to abstain from killing animals, so that all creatures of whatever kind could live. In most Theravada countries today, though, lay Buddhists regularly eat meat.

In the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, the monks do not beg for food at all. They prepare their own food, which they buy, grow, or collect as rent. The Mahayana monks in China were strict vegetarians in ancient times and remain so today. In China,

all animal foods, onions, and alcohol were either forbidden or customarily avoided. This included the use of animal products in dress with a prohibition on the use of silk or leather (not observed in Theravada Buddhism). However, dietary abstinence from meat was an ancient Chinese tradition that apparently predated the arrival of Buddhism.

Not only are Mahayana Buddhist monks vegetarian, but so are many Buddhist lay believers in China. People other than monks take a lay Buddhist ordination of from one to five vows. Almost everyone takes the first vow, which prohibits killing any sentient creature. This is usually interpreted to mean or imply vegetarianism. However, there is disagreement on this point. Some argue that the injunction against taking the life of sentient creatures means only that one should not personally slaughter animals or eat an animal expressly killed for personal benefit.

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good *karma* to be reborn as a human. However, animals can eventually achieve salvation. In fact, there are many stories of the prior existences of the Buddha, often as an animal.

Even though it is meritorious to abstain from meat, not all Buddhists refrain. Yet there is a very strong tradition of vegetarianism in Buddhism, since the Buddha commanded his followers not to kill animals. The violence of slaughtering animals for food and the restless craving for flesh meats reveal modes in which humans enslave themselves to suffering. The ethical doctrine of *ahimsa*, or non-injury to living beings, shared by both Hindu and Buddhist religious traditions, derives from the conviction that violence to creatures, whose forms and identities through reincarnation are fluid, has consequences for *karma*. Motivation for the meatless diet does not seem to emerge from ecological issues or concern for the physical health of the Buddhist. Mahayana affirmation of spiritual potential in all sentient life, coupled with the Theravadin emphasis on compassion and *karma*, gave rise to the centrality of the meatless diet in Buddhist thinking.

Jainism

The Jain religion came into existence around the sixth century B.C., about the same time as Buddhism. Jainism shares several beliefs with Hinduism and Buddhism, including

reincarnation, *karma*, and nonviolence.

According to the Jains, the entire universe is alive. One should abstain, as much as is possible, from violence toward any living creature. Everything, including rocks and stones as well as plants and animals, is in some sense alive. The idea of *ahimsa*, or nonviolence, is heavily stressed by the Jains, having far-reaching implications for them.

There are five types of beings in the Jain universe, each having one through five senses. These are grouped accordingly, ranging from the five-sensed beings (human beings, infernal beings [inhabitants of hell, or the lower regions], and some animals) down to the one-sensed beings, or *nigodas* (vegetable bodies, earth bodies, water bodies, fire bodies, and wind bodies), possessing only the sense of touch.

Though it is worse to cause harm to a higher being than to a lower being, the Jains carry the doctrine of *ahimsa* to its ultimate. Ideally, one should not harm any kind of being. This can be accomplished only by the Jain monks, who do as little as possible and are supported in this by the lay community. The path to salvation involves purifying the soul of its contaminations with matter. As long as the soul is enmeshed in matter, violence is inevitable, as countless *nigodas* would be destroyed even in the simple act of taking a walk.

Dietary restraints are thus very prominent for the Jains. Meat, alcohol, honey, or any of the five kinds of figs are forbidden. The single-sensed *nigodas* are especially present wherever sweetness or fermentation is involved. Thus, consuming honey or alcohol brings untold millions of these *nigodas* to an untimely and violent death. However, since this is does not involve violence against higher beings, Jains may on occasion consume medicine with honey or wine in it, but they may never consume meat. Even meat from an animal that has died a natural death contains innumerable *nigodas* and must be absolutely avoided.

Jains are decidedly ascetic. Their vegetarianism arises from the necessity of purifying the soul of its attachments to and contamination from matter. The ultimate objective is denial of the body and purification of the soul, as a necessary step to win the soul's release from matter.

Islam

Originating in the divine revelation to Muhammad in early seventh-century Arabia, the Koran speaks of a single God who is creator and sustainer of the universe. To Him belongs all that exists on earth and in heaven. Islamic theology traditionally has focused on religious questions regarding God's nature, His relationship to His creation, human destiny, and the laws that

govern community life. Issues involving the relationship of humans to other forms of life, such as animals and the natural world, are treated indirectly for the most part.

Yet God is clearly implied as ruling all of creation, not just human beings. Non-injury to life-forms and compassion for all living things are rarely explicitly mentioned. However, a sense of the generous beauty and abundance of the Earth pervades Islamic texts. All things belong to God and should be treated accordingly. Sacred places in which humans are forbidden to slay animals except in self-defense play a pre-eminent role in Muslim culture. The existence of these sacred sites where slaughter is forbidden suggests a spiritual aversion to the violence inherent in killing animals, even when its occasional necessity is recognized.

For Muslims, meat that is acceptable to eat is called *chahal*, the flesh of "clean" animals that have been properly slaughtered. Scavenger animals, for example, are forbidden as food. It is also taught that animal sacrifice indebts humans to those creatures whose suffering transfigures their own. That an animal could be surrogate for another implies Islam's conception of the commonality of all creaturehood.

Judaism

Among present-day Jews, only a minority eat no meat. It is recog-

For Muslims, meat that is acceptable to eat is called halal, the flesh of “clean” animals that have been properly slaughtered. Scavenger animals, for example, are forbidden as food. It is also taught that animal sacrifice indebts humans to those creatures whose suffering transfigures their own. That an animal could be surrogate for another implies Islam’s conception of the commonality of all creaturehood.

nized, however, that the Hebrew Bible records in Genesis that the first diet of humankind was vegetarian. Even the animals did not eat meat: “God said, ‘See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food’; and it was so. Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (Gen. 1:29-31, NKJV).

Jewish writers have noted that immediately after giving these dietary laws, God saw that everything He had made was “very good” (Gen. 1:31, NKJV), implying inclusion of even the vegetarian diet. After the Flood, however, meat consumption was permitted: “Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. But you must not eat

meat that has its lifeblood still in it” (9:3, 4, NIV).

Some vegetarians have argued that this passage actually supports vegetarianism, since it is impossible to drain the blood entirely from the animal. Others have quoted only the phrase “You must not eat the flesh” out of context. Both the Ebionites in the first century A.D., and the Society of Bible Christians in the 19th century, argued that blood could never be entirely drained from the animal.

Parallel passages in Deuteronomy (12:23, 24, 27, 28) imply that the injunction against eating blood is fulfilled if a person pours the blood “out on the ground like water” (vs. 16, NIV). Talmudic commentators agree that Adam was not permitted to eat flesh. But after the Flood, eating meat was permitted.

Upon their settlement in Canaan, the Israelites were also permitted the use of animal food, but under careful restrictions, which

Jewish writers describe the considerable evidence in the Hebrew Bible that God's ultimate hope is for a world in which no animals are killed, even by other animals. This portrays a world that, in respect to diet, is like the Garden of Eden. Through the prophets God promises a world where even the now-carnivorous animals will again be vegetarian.

tended to lessen the evil results. The use of swine's flesh and other unclean animals was prohibited. Of the clean meats permitted, the eating of the fat and the blood was strictly forbidden. Only healthy animals could be used for food. No creature that had died of itself, or from which the blood had not been carefully drained, could be eaten.

Some Jewish writers argue that the original meat-free diet was the one God intended for all humankind. Permission to eat meat was granted by God only after it became apparent that humans were going to go their own way regardless of what God told them. One Jewish author observes: "Only after man proved unfit for the high moral standard set at the beginning was meat made part of the humans' diet."¹ Accordingly, while it would not be a violation of the law to eat meat, it would be morally superior to abstain.

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Bible that God's ultimate hope is for a world in which no animals are killed, even by other animals. This portrays a world that, in respect to diet, is like the Garden of Eden. Through the prophets God promises a world where even the now-carnivorous animals will again be vegetarian: "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord" (Isa. 11:9, NKJV). This prophecy is repeated in Isaiah 65:25.

Many Jewish materials also note that animals are regularly included in God's solicitude in the Hebrew Bible:

1. In Exodus, animals, as well as humans, are included in the observance of the Sabbath (20:10; 23:12). The Sabbath commandment in the Decalogue (20:8-10) along with Exodus 23:12 and Deuteronomy 5:12-14 are used by some to reason that animals must be free to roam on the Sabbath day and enjoy the beauties of nature. The fact that animals

are even mentioned in the Decalogue expresses the importance of compassion for animals in Judaism.

2. God's covenants include animals. A striking example of this is in Hosea: "I will also make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds of the sky, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and will make them lie down in safety" (2:18, NASB).

This is not the first reference to God's covenants with animals.

The much-earlier Noahic covenant made after the Flood did the same: "I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth. Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood" (Gen. 9:9-11, NKJV). And when speaking to Jonah, God also included animals in His description of His mercy toward the city of Nineveh (Jonah 4:11).

3. Humans also have an obligation to relieve the suffering of animals. "A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal" (Prov. 12:10, NIV). Deuteronomy 22:4 enjoins a

person to assist a fellow-countryman's ass or ox lying in the road. In Exodus 23:5, this obligation is extended to the ass or ox of even an enemy.

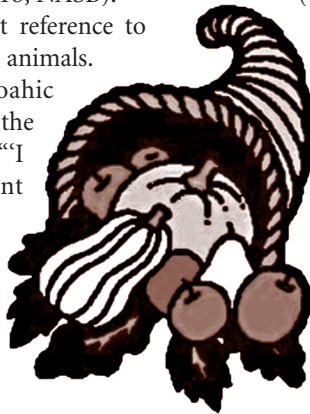
4. Exodus 21:28-32 expresses the idea that animals, along with humans, are held responsible for their actions.

5. The Psalmist writes of God's "compassion on all he has made" (145:9, NIV) and that God provides food for both humans and animals (104:24-30).

6. In Proverbs, the ant is praised for its industriousness (6:6-8). Rock-badgers, locusts, ants, and lizards are said to be "extremely wise" (30:28, NIV).

7. Human beings and animals suffer a common fate. "Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return" (Eccl. 3:19, 20, NIV).

Several Talmudic commentators conclude that one can infer from these and other passages that relieving the suffering of an animal is a biblical law. It is apparent that ani-



imals are entitled to consideration, even if they are to be used for farm work or to be slaughtered. Even the process of slaughter itself is carefully regulated. The procedures are dealt with in the Talmud.

Presently, Jewish vegetarians argue that the compassion for all living things mandated by a reverence for God's creation is most obviously expressed in *kashrut* (kosher) dietary laws. Many commentators claim that kosher prohibition against killing all but certain kinds of animals, and even then only in a humane manner, is a codification of the divine concession to humankind's bloodlust. It is a systematized attempt to wean the appetite until one attains the spiritual maturity to forgo flesh foods entirely.

But *kashrut* is not only a remnant of the original divine intention. It is also one obvious way to integrate the holy into the basic human act of eating. It has been suggested that God provided many laws and regulations related to the consumption of meat as a reprimand, and also as a reminder that animals' lives are being destroyed—in the hope that this would eventually lead people back to vegetarianism in the messianic period.

In light of these claims, present Jewish vegetarian writers argue that a meatless diet is a logical extension of the Judaic spiritual tradition. Rabbi Kook, the first chief rabbi of

the newly formed nation of Israel, even argued that returning to a non-violent diet is one of the necessary conditions for the Messiah's coming. He maintained that if this is so, as the prophet Isaiah said (11:6, 7), then a diet that approximates the ideal of peaceful harmony among all creatures does indeed make straight the way for the Lord.

Jewish writings point out that the Old Testament often implies a meatless diet. In the Song of Songs, the divine bounty is mentioned in terms of fruits, vegetables, vines, and nuts. The Book of Deuteronomy also contains descriptions typical of the Torah's positive depiction of the non-meat diet: "For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing. . . . I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil" (Deut. 8:7-9; 11:14)

The Essenes, a prominent group within Judaism during Jesus' time, connected sacrifices and meat-eating. Josephus states that the Essenes made no animal sacrifices and adds that they lived in the same way that the Pythagoreans did among the Greeks, being vegetarian. Philo

The Essenes, a prominent group within Judaism during Jesus' time, connected sacrifices and meat-eating. Josephus states that the Essenes made no animal sacrifices and adds that they lived in the same way that the Pythagoreans did among the Greeks, being vegetarian. Philo states that they did not kill animals for food. Porphyry also writes that meat was forbidden for the Essenes.

states that they did not kill animals for food. Porphyry also writes that meat was forbidden for the Essenes. Clement of Alexandria, an early leader of the church and a noteworthy vegetarian, also wrote that meat-eating and animal sacrifice were interconnected.

The destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70 by the Romans made it impossible for Jews to offer sacrifices there, rendering the relationship of meat-eating to sacrifices problematic. After the destruction of the Temple, apparently many Jews gave up meat-eating altogether, and in fact, meat consumption nearly died out at the time.

Josephus described the basic principle of all Judaic laws as mercy, even to animals: "Ill-treatment even of a brute beast is with us a capital crime."²

The modern Jewish vegetarian movement arose in the 19th century with the publication of Aaron

Frankel's book *Thou Shalt Not Kill, or the Torah of Vegetarianism*. Rabbi M. Kosowsky, who was not a vegetarian, stated that vegetarianism was "the highest pinnacle of ethical achievement."³

Christianity

The Christian tradition is linked with and informed by the many concepts of Judaism on diet, due to the inclusion of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament into the Christian canon. The religion of both the Old and New Testaments is not a religion of asceticism, such as in Buddhism and Hinduism, where by refusing to eat and drink one avoids being contaminated by matter and thus can draw closer to God. "The God of the Bible defines Himself as the God of life. And in fact, eating and drinking are often linked with worship. The Bible also prescribes, both explicitly and implicitly, a special diet in tune with the God of creation, the God of life."⁴

Some Christian writers cite Peter's vision as evidence that the Old Testament stipulations between clean and unclean meats are now superseded, yet Peter clearly understood that the meaning of the vision had nothing to do with diet, but was instructing him in cultural issues. God's response to Peter is crucial. God never asks Peter to eat the unclean animals, but to stop calling the clean animals koinos, defiled by their association with the unclean.

In the history of the Christian Church, though the meatless diet has never been demanded of its adherents, many have chosen it:

- James the Just, the brother of Jesus and first head of the church in Jerusalem after the death and ascension of Jesus, was a vegetarian. Both Hegisuppus and Augustine testify that James was even raised as a vegetarian.⁵

- Both Athanasius and his opponent Arius were strict vegetarians. In fact, many early church fathers were vegetarian, including Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, Heironymus, Boniface, and John Chrysostom.

- Basilus the Great, in the fourth century, was a vegetarian who discussed the morality of eating meat.

- Many monasteries, both ancient and modern, have practiced vegetarianism. Boniface (672-754) wrote to Pope Zacharias that he had begun a

monastery that followed the rules of strict abstinence, whose monks do not eat meat or enjoy wine or other intoxicating drinks.

- In the modern era, John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, extolled the virtues of the meatless diet: "Thanks be to God: since I gave up flesh and wine, I have been delivered from all physical ills."⁶

Some of history's greatest humanitarians were vegetarians and/or strongly in favor of vegetarianism, including Plutarch, Leonardo da Vinci, Sir Isaac Newton, Jean Jacques Rousseau, General William Booth, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Harvey Kellogg, Horace Greeley, Susan B. Anthony, Leo Tolstoy, Upton Sinclair, H. G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw, Albert Schweitzer, and Mahatma Gandhi. Jewish humanitarian vegetarians include Isaac Bashevis Singer, Shmuel Yosef Agnon, Franz Kafka,

and Isaac Leib Peretz.

Issues of continuity/discontinuity with Judaism are regularly discussed in the Christian tradition. Some argue that the Jewish distinctions between clean and unclean meat are no longer binding today in the Christian era.

It is important to note that with regard to diet, however, Israel's dietary stipulations were God-ordained: "The food laws are seen in the Pentateuch as a product of God's revelation and not as an invention of a priestly school or other special group of people in Israel."⁷

The distinction between clean and unclean meats is plainly evident in the early chapters of Genesis—long before the Jewish nation was in existence. And later, when the clean/unclean principle is again highlighted in Leviticus 11, at the end of the discussion there is the keyword "holy" (*kodesh*).

The scope of the dietary laws is not only the human body, but the whole human personality as an inseparable entity. This is in complete accord with the fundamental conception of Judaism, which always strives at a unity of matter and mind, body, and soul.

In the New Testament, Jesus Himself calls for the same complete commitment to God of mind, soul, and strength (Mark 12:33).

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Some modern versions have mistakenly translated the word *koinos* as "unclean" in several New Testament passages, but it simply does not mean "unclean." For example, in Romans 14:14, 20, Paul does not say that no foods are unclean. He says that no food is *koinos*, "common," defiled by association with the unclean. Paul is rejecting the current Judaic principle of defilement by association, and not the law of clean and unclean foods. To be faithful to the apostle Peter's understanding of his vision, it cannot be used to argue against the divine stipulations of clean/unclean meat.

Perhaps the largest and most significant group of Christian vegetarians today is found within the Seventh-day Adventist tradition. This Protestant denomination recommends vegetarianism to their members, of whom nearly one-half do not eat meat. Those who do choose to eat meat are careful to observe the clean/unclean distinction. Because

of their dietary practices, Seventh-day Adventists have frequently been the object of scientific studies involving the relationship of diet to health. Published results have consistently found that Adventists live longer and enjoy better health than the rest of the population in the United States.

Ellen White, one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, wrote expansively on the importance of diet. She speaks of the significance of the diet given by God in the Garden of Eden and discusses many issues involved in eating meat:

“Not an ounce of flesh meat should enter our stomachs. The eating of flesh is unnatural. We are to return to God’s original purpose in the creation of man.

“Is it not time that all should aim to dispense with flesh foods? How can those who are seeking to become pure, refined, and holy, that they may have the companionship of heavenly angels, continue to use as food anything that has so harmful an effect on soul and body? How can they take the life of God’s creatures that they may consume the flesh as a luxury? Let them, rather, return to the wholesome and delicious food given to man in the beginning, and themselves practice, and teach their children to practice, mercy toward the dumb creatures that God has made and has placed under our dominion.”⁸

White was also sensitive to the

grave problem of diseased animals:

“Flesh was never the best food; but its use is now doubly objectionable, since disease in animals is so rapidly increasing. . . . Could you know just the nature of the meat you eat, could you see the animals when living from which the flesh is taken when dead, you would turn with loathing from your flesh meats. The very animals whose flesh you eat, are frequently so diseased that, if left alone, they would die of themselves; but while the breath of life is in them, they are killed and brought to market. You take directly into your system . . . poison of the worst kind, and yet you realize it not.”⁹

The treatment of animals raised for slaughter also concerned White:

“Think of the cruelty to animals that meat-eating involves, and its effect on those who inflict and those who behold it. How it destroys the tenderness with which we should regard these creatures of God!”¹⁰

“Those who use flesh foods little know what they are eating. Often if they could see the animals when living and know the quality of the meat they eat, they would turn from it with loathing.”¹¹

White viewed diet wholistically, discussing how the physical and the spiritual natures are affected by what is eaten. She observed that diet is linked not only to health, but also to holiness, recalling the Old Testament principle: “The intellectual, the

moral, and the physical powers are depreciated by the habitual use of flesh meats. Meat eating deranges the system, beclouds the intellect, and blunts the moral sensibilities. . . . Your safest course is to let meat alone. . . . The mortality caused by meat eating is not discerned; if it were, we would hear no more arguments and excuses in favor of the indulgence of the appetite for dead flesh. We have plenty of good things to satisfy hunger without bringing corpses upon our table to compose our bill of fare.”¹²

“The moral evils of a flesh diet are not less marked than are the physical ills. Flesh food is injurious to health, and whatever affects the body has a corresponding effect on the mind and the soul.”¹³

White exhorts the development of healthful eating habits motivated by the desire to glorify God in our bodies and to preserve physical and spiritual health. The major world religions manifest dietary concerns, but the diet proposed in the Judeo-Christian tradition is the most wholistic, involving ethical, ecological, eschatological, and spiritual issues. Vegetarianism, based on the

scriptural principles found also within Judaism, markedly yields even present benefits. □

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⁸ *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 380.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 384, 385.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 388.

¹² *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 391.

¹³ *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 315.

