

CLARITY

VEGANISM IN VIEW

By Aneeta Sundararaj

(First published in CLARITY February 2020)

Recently, a friend and I visited a restaurant that we hadn't been to in a long while. Once there, neither of us looked at the menu and simply placed our orders. My friend chose grilled lamb and I, Spaghetti Bolognese. No other restaurant was able to make this dish the way I liked it – the spaghetti was neither too hard, nor too soft; the meat sauce had the right proportion of minced meat, diced carrots and sliced onions that melted in the mouth. My friend's order of grilled lamb would be presented on a bed of silky-soft mashed potatoes, grilled beans and julienned carrots.

We didn't have to wait for long. When the plate of Spaghetti Bolognese was placed in front of me, something unexpected happened. I stared at my food. Meanwhile, my friend was ready with fork and knife in hand long before the waiter placed her plate on the table. In no time at all, and oblivious to my growing discomfort, she sliced off small pieces of meat and relished every mouthful. A while later, she looked up, noticed my untouched meal and said, "Why? Not eating?"

"Ya!" I replied and quickly picked up the fork and spoon. The cheese had melted into the steaming sauce. Still, it was too much. I couldn't. It was impossible to think about putting all that meat into my mouth. What if my stomach was no longer able to digest this? What if...

The questions continued until, finally, I accepted that I would never be able to eat this meal. I put the cutlery down and called for the waiter. "I am so sorry. I can't eat this. I need to change it to something vegetarian. Maybe Aglio Olio?" It was only when I agreed to pay for a new meal that he relented and changed my dish. Soon, the larger circle of our friends got wind of what had happened. Let's just say that there was very little sympathy for my predicament. All their responses were condensed into one simple sentence that an exasperated friend practically spat out – "Don't you become one of those vegetarian / vegan freaks!"

Those words haunted me. When had I stopped wanting to eat meat? I certainly wasn't an 'official' vegetarian. However, I had to admit that now, more than ever, I chose more fruit and vegetables.

CLARITY

KARMIC CONSEQUENCES OF EATING MEAT

As I pondered these thoughts, I flicked through the pages of HH SwamiGuru's bestselling book, *Making Miracles for the Self*. On page 116, I came across this passage:

'In Indian philosophy, there is a belief that food consumed acts as an energy transformer that converts and supplies the body with cosmic energy (prana). It is, therefore, very important that we consume food that gives us energy and has positive vibrations. Since I started on the spiritual path, I have gradually become a complete vegetarian. Apart from the fact that meat is detrimental to our health, the karmic consequences of eating meat are also serious.'

I decided to further investigate this concept of vegetarianism and its possible benefits. I wanted to know whether there was a huge community of vegetarians in Malaysia, was it easy to become one and how far could one go? Were there any pitfalls that I should be aware of? To answer all these questions, I turned to Davina Goh. Managing her own blog, davinadavegan.com, she is a vegan and passionate about maintaining her health and well-being.

By her own admission, Davina says that she didn't expect to go fully vegan. "I followed my heart, which was always telling me to follow the path of compassion. When I stopped eating meat, lamb and mutton at the age of 16, my parents forbade me to go vegetarian because they believed that a healthy diet absolutely needed meat. That was a blessing in disguise, because that gave me the time to do all the research about the whys, hows and whats of vegetarianism. I continued to cut meats off my diet one by one. By the time I did my vegetarian transition 12 years later, the only thing I needed to eliminate was seafood."

Davina made the transition to being vegan 4 years later. By this time, the only thing she needed to eliminate was egg and honey. She is grateful for the relatively long time she took to make these transitions as she says, "Had I jumped straight into vegetarianism without those 12 years of learning, I would have most likely ruined my health and my will to try again."

Echoing HH SwamiGuru's words, she adds, "I have a strong belief that everyone wants to be the best version of themselves, and that version includes being happy, healthy, and generous in spirit and

CLARITY

love. Plant-based living ticks all those boxes for me. My life being transformed for the better is something I wish to support other people in experiencing too. Not only does it reduce animal suffering, it is better for our bodies and the planet we live on - and we only have one of each!"

MYTHS ABOUT VEGETARIANISM

Cautioning those who would like to adopt a vegetarian lifestyle, Davina lists some of the myths that ought to be dispelled immediately, namely:

1. That it is difficult to 'bulk up' or pursue an active lifestyle just by eating plants.
Referencing her best-selling documentary, 'The Game Changers' she says, "I can also personally attest through my own achievements as a runner and open water swimmer, that one can be successful in fitness on a plant-based diet."
2. Vegetarianism is by default a healthy diet.
"You can be a very unhealthy vegetarian if you just eat chocolate and cheese! The key to making it work for your health is by avoiding foods that are refined and/or processed, and largely focusing on a diet that is Whole Foods Plant-Based (WFPB)."
3. That going vegetarian is a restrictive diet.
"This is a matter of mindset. If one dives into a plant-based diet only thinking about the 'sacrifices' they will have to make, that person won't last very long on it. For me, going vegetarian and eventually vegan has given me a lot more gains than losses." The gains Davina speaks of includes being healthier, more alert, clearer skin and becoming calmer.

In the aftermath of speaking with Davina, I realised that there was a lot of thinking to do. I needed time to comprehend all these changes. In particular, I wanted to know if Davina was correct – If I chose to become a vegetarian and, effectively, 'restrictive' my diet, would it in fact set me free from bad food, bad health, and a poor sense of personal worth? Only time will tell.

Aneeta Sundararaj is re-reading HH SwamiGuru's best-selling book, *Making Miracles: Happiness to Life*. She finds much comfort in this guide which she takes along with her wherever she goes.

Page 3 of 3

CLARITY FEBRUARY 2020