

Observations & Views:

Vegetarianism On The Rise

An article posted on the web site of ABC News of August 29, 2007 states, “*About 8 million Americans consider themselves vegetarians, and an increasing number of them are young people -- often the children of vegetarians or kids who've decided to become one on their own. ... There are many reasons why teens choose a vegetarian lifestyle, including health concerns and love for animals. Whatever the reason, their numbers are surprisingly high, especially for girls. ... The American Dietetic Association estimates that a whopping 11 percent of girls, ages 13 to 17, have given up meat and meat products.*”

The article did raise the question: Is vegetarianism is a healthy diet for a growing child?

The article presents rational arguments along with the conclusion: A vegetarian diet can be one of the healthiest diets on the planet, but it has to be done correctly.

It should be pointed out that it is fairly easy to design a healthy Indian vegetarian diet.

Some Observations On Religion

The PBS program ‘Religion and Ethics’ of Saturday, October 20, 2007 presented portions of a recent debate at Georgetown University in Washington. As a preamble to the program, Bob Abernethy pointed out that in that debate, Christopher Hitchens (Journalist and Author, "God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything") “condemns religious belief as dangerous and juvenile”. Abernethy further added, “Hitchens took aim at the Christian belief that Jesus' death atoned for everyone else's sins.”

Mr. Hitchens remarked, "Is it moral to believe that your sins can be forgiven by the punishment of another person? Is it ethical to believe that? I would submit that the doctrine of vicarious redemption by human sacrifice is utterly immoral.

"The name for that in primitive Middle Eastern society was scapegoating. You pile all the sins of the tribe on a goat. You drive that goat into the desert to die of thirst and hunger, and you think you've taken away the sins of the tribe -- a positively immoral doctrine that abolishes the concept of personal responsibility on which all ethics and all morality must depend."

Mr. Hitchens continues, "On our integrity, our basic integrity, knowing right from wrong and being able to choose a right action over a wrong one, I think one must repudiate the claim that one doesn't have this moral discrimination innately -- that, no, it must come only from the agency of a celestial dictatorship, which one must love and simultaneously fear."

In the article, "Mahaveer On Individual And Social Responsibility", Dr. Kamal Chand Sogani has presented similar concepts.

Dr. Sogani has remarked, "The history of social thought reveals that with the advancement of knowledge social beliefs of a particular age are replaced by new beliefs. Many religious superstitions and other forms of follies and falsities are derogatory to individual progress."

He stated, "In order that an individual may acquire firm footing in life, Mahaveer advised the individual to be without any doubt in the various spheres of thought and in its multiple approaches. Doubt kills decision and without an act of decision individual does not muster courage to go forward. Now the question is: how to acquire the state of doubtlessness?"

The answer can be given by saying that either the individual should stop thinking and resort to a sort of mental slavery or he should employ himself in the task of vigorous thinking. Mental slavery is the path of blind faith, but vigorous thinking is the path of an awakened mind. To my mind Mahaveer subscribed to the latter view. In man many kinds of experiences find their place and reason should be freely allowed to play upon every aspect of experience, so as to arrive at rational decisions in every department of life.

“Mahaveer never threatened the critical faculty in man, in as much as he seems to be aware of the fact that by paralyzing the critical faculty in man, he will be cut at its roots.”

It is imperative that we Jains discard the irrational beliefs and practices that have entered the Jain system in the name of expediency with the excuses such that ‘every body does it’ and ‘otherwise, our religion will not flourish’.