

The Evolution of Diet and Modern Lifestyle

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When one begins to care for their body, it indicates that he or she has established a certain degree of discipline over their body. Exercising the body is important for many obvious reasons and the health benefits of exercise have been scientifically validated. Self-care is one of the cornerstones of ayurveda because healing can begin when one recognizes the body as a temple, as a sacred place to expand in awareness and consciousness. Unlike highly misinterpreted religious practices that have fallen to dogmatism and worshipping the Divine as something external, ayurveda and yoga bridge the relationship between spirit and nature and provide an integrated model for evolution that begins with the body as a replica of nature. How one regards their own body is reflected in their relationship with nature.

The ego's cleverness traps one into thinking that if one changes their body, the mind will change and cope better with the world. But this is not true. Similarly, changing the world or people is not a solution. Change must begin with one's own mental attitude, and then the entire world adapts to this as a projection of one's consciousness. Healing the body largely begins with diet, and ayurveda and yoga teach us that eating can be a sacred time for healing and introspection. Sadly, American culture has denigrated food to the level of sustenance only, and we live with the fast-food phenomenon that swept this country and many others. Many people around the world believe that partaking in fast food equals more time for everything else, everything that is more important than food.

The topic of diet in today's age is a very interesting one, especially if you live in the United States or any large major city in the world. The amount of variety found in most major cities is daunting, especially if you analyze the diet of most people. Most diets are comprised of a small handful of the same food types such as grains, fruits, dairy products, vegetables, and large amounts animal products. From these

categories, most people tend to eat the same things every single week repetitively, probably by choice, because it feels natural to do so. The three main points I try to get across when speaking to either a private counseling client or to a large audience at a conference are listed below.

1) Diet is the single most important factor that can influence positive evolution both individually and collectively, and one's dietary choices will naturally influence our global ecology.

2) Fixed formula-based diet programs do not work for all. They may work for some, while for others fixed diets can bring many complications. In some instances, the diet may work for a few weeks or months until various symptoms like skin issues or low energy begin to arise, to name just a few symptoms. The mind-body complex (prakriti) must be in reciprocity with nature, and we look at the diet to see whether foods are heating or cooling. This basically means that you are eating the foods that are in season and available respective to where you live. Ayurveda, as the science of life, teaches us that the body benefits from the habituation of foods, meaning that eating the same foods regularly is good for the body as it adapts to creating a relationship with those foods. Habituation, meaning not only habituation with the nutrients derives from foods, but more importantly, the energetic relationship the food harbors with the five elements¹. Let us remember that from the perspective of ayurveda's core philosophy, the human body is a miniature replica of this universe, therefore, there are billions of little universes living on earth and each one must find synchronicity with nature depending on their current longitude and latitude.

3) a plant-based diet promotes health of the body and influences mental wellness. The term "plant-based" is modern replacement for the age-old term "vegetarianism" which originally included eating dairy products such as milk, butter, and cheese. This shift from the word vegetarian to the word plant-based is an attempt to disassociate oneself from the inhuman and corrupt factory farming of animals, particularly over the last 50 years. The term "vegetarian" has begun to trigger an association to this industry because being a vegetarian most likely includes dairy products largely derived from farms where cows are treated unethically. After years of being commodities for the dairy industry, they are sent to slaughterhouses for the beef industry and their skin is sold for the still enormous leather industry. Thus, following a plant-based diet provides a stigma free identification for those who do not eat meat but may consume some dairy products in moderation. The term "plant-based" is considered, by many people, to be a more

¹ The five elements are earth, water, fire, air and ether and according to the esoteric yoga traditions represents the building blocks of every human being spiritual anatomy that lies within the astral or light body called chakras. The plant and animal kingdoms also contain these five elements, although what distinguishes mankind from them is the capacity to reason or intuit. Biology and instincts are structured and programmed while in humans it is learned or conditioned. The latter has free will while the former follows DNA.

conscious diet because it may include making responsible choices with regards to dairy products. To clarify and distinguish a plant-based diet from veganism is simple because a vegan diet does not include any food-product that is derived from any type of animal, while following a plant-based diet may include some dairy products. Obviously, the term “plant-based” is broader in scope and is also an easier place to begin, especially considering most individuals who are beginning to embrace such diets come from a severe background of eating animal foods.

The Role of Asian Dietary Ethics in Western Cultures

In Asian cultures, it is common to eat many foods with your hands for practical purposes and as a way to connect with the food, its aroma and texture. Eating with the hands also allows one to enjoy eating more slowly and take in food in smaller quantities which is very good for digestion and for managing body weight. In India, it is also a very common practice to pray before eating as food is considered a sacred aspect of our lives, recognizing food itself as Divine. Food is not only sacred but is medicine. Many ancient medical systems focus on diet, like ayurveda, Unani, Siddha, Japanese, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), and the Greek medical practices were largely inherited from the Babylonians and the Egyptians. The early roots of Western medicine began in Greece and much credit is given to Hippocrates, Aristotle and Herophilus. Greek medicine focused on three primary factors: diet, drugs, and surgery. Diet was analyzed based on geographical factors which were of primary importance when seeking to reduce the symptoms of diseases and prevent them from further spreading. Greek medicine was actually holistic and designed to treat the individual... sound familiar? Yes, it is probable that this Greek, and even Roman concept were influenced by ayurveda. However, unfortunately, many of these preventative practices were eventually ignored and even forgotten, replaced by practices such as drugs and surgery. Counseling and education are the most important factors missing from modern medicine today, and the dependency on drugs and surgery has destroyed the health of entire cultures throughout the world.

Sharing a meal is certainly one of the most intimate aspects of interpersonal communication and promotes positivity and intimacy in the mind. The common practice in India, and Asia in general, is to eat on the earth (floor) seated in front of one's food in a cross-legged position. From the ayurvedic perspective, this is very calming, as one is grounded by the vibration and proximity to the earth. This is especially the case when eating outside and sitting on the soil and being surrounded by plants. Also, the opening of the hips, as the knees are pointing away from each other, is another factor that has a very positive effect on digestion. This is because as the hips are more relaxed, the nerve plexuses, that bundle in the lower gastrointestinal tract, hips, and buttocks, are stretched, creating a sedative effect on the nerves. The

quality of the environment, with respect to noise and other elements related to modern lifestyle like cars, trains, tv's and music can counteract the sedative effect that sitting has on the nerves. Sitting on the sidewalk in the middle of a city will bring little benefit in this regard. Mealtimes in Asian culture always include warm fluids, such as soups or hot teas, both of which support healthy metabolism. Also, it is common to include positive atmospheric elements like flute music, candlelight, or a water fountain in order to create a soothing and sacred environment for digesting the medicine of food. All these practices can easily be integrated into our lives today, affording us great benefits towards health and creating more sanctity around food.

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