

## Dharma Mitrā Yoga and Diet



I began a vegetarian diet in 1987. From that time until 2003, when I began the practice of yoga, I didn't spend much time thinking about what I ate. Occasionally I would eat fish, and I ate dairy and egg products frequently. Beer isn't meat, and so I thought nothing about having one most evenings.

As I began to practice – first only asana, but later beginning to meditate and read spiritual works as well – I began to notice the effects of what I ate on my health and general sense of being. Too much milk made me congested, alcohol made me sluggish, highly processed foods, even those that were vegetarian, left me feeling heavy and with cravings for more food. Fried food left me feeling, as Dharma says, “fried”. But as my yoga practice developed and I began to experience its benefits, the improvements in my diet were for purely selfish reasons (they made me feel better physically). I didn't feel particularly connected to the world through what I ate. I didn't think much about the consequences my diet had on other sentient beings. And so there were those occasions where I just couldn't pass up sushi.

Before I came to Dharma Yoga Center for teacher training I had come to a few of the noon classes. In every class Dharma said things that reminded me of the need to have a vegetarian diet: “Be nice to everyone, including the animals.” “To be a true yogi you must be a vegetarian.” “The mozzarella is okay, but no meat.” I went home from these classes with a renewed commitment not to eat meat or fish, to be a vegetarian, but it wasn't until the teacher training began that I really began to understand why we need to practice vegetarianism, and why we should try to eat as many living foods as we can.

Dharma, Andre, Chandra and the other teachers spoke frequently to us about the importance of diet. We learned from Dharma that we are, literally, what we eat. And if we kill and cause suffering in the pursuit of feeding ourselves, not only are the karmic traces of that suffering and violence being incorporated into the bodies that we have in this lifetime, but we will have to work through that karma in this or in other lives. If we want enlightenment, if we want spiritual bliss, we can't do it in a body or with a spirit that is saddled with the karma of causing unnecessary suffering and harm to others.

It is a good thing to stop eating meat. It is good to be a vegetarian. But one can do more. What we eat should connect us to the earth and to each other. It should revitalize each of the koshas or sheaths. In order to nourish the more subtle body, the food we eat needs to contain prana, and this only comes from living foods: fruits, uncooked vegetables, raw nuts, etc.

I won't pretend that my diet is perfect. I have much work still to do. But thanks to Dharma I no longer have any desire for sushi or eggs; I am eating a great deal more living food. As a result I feel healthier than ever before, I have more energy, and I feel more connected to my surroundings, more grounded.

Thank you, Dharma, and everyone at the Center, for this teaching.