

The yogic diet

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As you eat, so you become...

In these days we read and talk a lot about food, health and nutrition, and most people are becoming aware that it is not unimportant what you eat. In yoga we often say that "as you eat, so you become".

With this slogan the yogis try to say that what kind of food we choose to eat does in fact influence our body as well as our mind. The ancient yogis were practical people, hence the yogic diet is based exclusively on empirical studies. By observing the reactions in their body and mind, the yogis were able to organize the different kind of food in to three groups: satva, raja and tama, which in English can be translated to sentient, mutative and static.

Sentient or satvic food

The satvic force of the universe is what makes you feel happiness, harmony and self-awareness. If this force is dominant in your life, you will feel calm, relaxed and harmonic. Food which represents the satvic force is called sentient food and includes the following: vegetables, fruit, nuts, beans, legumes, grains, vegetable oil, herbs and milk products. A well balanced diet consisting of food from these categories will provide you with all the energy and nutrition you need.

Mutative or rajasic food

The rajasic force makes you feel restless, active and in need for a change. A moderate influence of the rajasic force is sometimes helpful and might even be necessary in some occasions. If it becomes dominant, however, the effect is that you will feel nervous, agitated and unable to relax and calm down. The food that is considered mutative includes coffeine drinks such as coffee, coca cola and tea, chocolate, carbonated beverages, white sugar and big amounts of spices. A small amount of mutative food can be taken in a yogic diet, but should never become dominant.

Static or tamasic food

The tamasic force is what makes you feel tired, depressed, lazy and without energy. Static food is dominated by the tamasic force and includes all kind of meat products, fish, onion, garlic, mushrooms, alcohol, tobacco and drugs. Food also becomes static if it is rotten or burned. This food has a negative effect on your body and mind, and should therefore be avoided completely in a yogic diet.

Why should yogis be vegetarians?

There are numbers of reasons why it is preferable for a person who is practising yoga to become a vegetarian. As described in the yogic diet, a sentient lifestyle is based on a vegetarian diet. Both the mind and the body will benefit from this diet. However, there are also other reasons why most yogis choose to be vegetarians. In fact, it is quite easy to find reasons why to become a vegetarian, but in my opinion much more difficult to find reasons for eating meat.

In the yogic philosophy you will find ethical norms referred to as yama and niyama. In yama, one important point is the principle of ahimsa which means "not to harm". According to ahimsa, you should never consciously harm anyone, and that includes also the animals. It is absolutely possible for human beings to survive without eating meat, and why should we then kill animals?

More and more people are also starting to realize that the environmental crisis of the planet can, among other things, be traced back to the enormous consumption of meat in the Western countries. The calculation is very simple: to produce 1 kg of meat, you need 10 kg of grains/vegetables. Hence eating the grains and vegetables instead of the meat is a much more efficient production and will give food to more people.

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